

**BOOK I**  
**THE ICE-GODS**

**CHAPTER 3**

**WI SEEKS A SIGN**

Wi, being already endowed with a spiritual sense, was praying to such gods as he knew, the Ice-gods that his tribe had always worshipped. He did not know for how long it had worshipped them, any more than he knew the beginnings of that tribe, save for a legend that once its forefathers had come here from behind the mountains, driven sunward and southward by the cold. These gods of theirs lived in the blue-black ice of the mightiest of the glaciers which moved down from the crests of the high snow mountains. The breast of this glacier was in the central valley, but most of the ice moved down smaller valleys to the east and west and so came to the sea, where in springtime the children of the Ice-gods that had been begotten in the heart of the snowy hills were born, coming forth in great bergs from the dark wombs of the valleys and sailing away southward. Thus it was that the vast central glacier, the house of the gods, moved but little.

Urk the Aged-One, who had seen the birth of all who lived in the tribe, said that his grandfather had told him, when he was little, that in his youth the face of this glacier was perhaps a spear's cast higher up the valley than it stood to-day, no more. It was a mighty threatening face of the height of a score of tall forest pines set one upon the other, sloping backward to its crest. For the most part, it was of clear black ice which sometimes when the gods within were talking, cracked and groaned, and when they were angry, heaved itself forward by an arm's length, shaving off the rocks of the valley which stood in its path and driving them in front of it. Who or what these gods might be, Wi did not know. All he knew was that they were terrible powers to be feared, in whom he believed as his forefathers had done, and that in their hands lay the fate of the tribe.

In the autumn nights, when the mists rose, some had seen them: vast, shadowy figures moving about before the face of the glacier, and even at times advancing toward the beach beneath, where the people dwelt. They had heard them laughing also, and their priest, N'gae the Magician, and Taren the Witch-Who-Hid-Herself, who only came out at night and who was the lover of N'gae, said that they had spoken to them, making revelations. But to Wi they had never spoken, although he had sat face to face with them at night, which none others dared to do. So silent were they that, at times, when he was well fed and happy hearted and his hunting had prospered, he began to doubt this tale of the gods and to set down the noises that were called their voices to breakings in the ice caused by frosts and thaws.

Yet there was something which he could not doubt. Deep in the face of the ice, the length of three paces away, only to be seen in certain lights, was one of the gods who for generations had been known to the tribe as the Sleeper because he never moved. Wi could not make out much about him, save that he seemed to have a long nose as thick as a tree at its root and growing smaller toward the end. On each side of this nose projected a huge curling tusk that came out of a vast head, black in colour and covered with red hair, behind which swelled an enormous body, large as that of a whale, whereof the end could not be seen.

Here indeed was a god—not even Wi could doubt it—for none had ever heard of or seen its like—though for what reason it chose to sleep forever in the bosom of the ice he could not guess. Had such a monster been known alive, he would have thought this one dead, not sleeping. But it was not known and therefore it must be a god. So it came about that, for his divinity, like the rest of the tribe, Wi took a gigantic elephant of the early world caught in the ice of a glacial period that had happened some hundreds of thousands of years before his day, and slowly borne forward in the frozen stream from the far-off spot where it had perished, doubtless to find its ultimate sepulchre in the sea. A strange god enough, but not stranger than many have chosen and still bow before to-day.

Wi, after debate with his wife Aaka, the proud and fair, had climbed to the glacier while it was still dark to take counsel of the gods and learn their will as to a certain matter. It was this: The greatest man of the tribe, who by his strength ruled it, was Henga, a terrible man born ten springs before Wi, huge in bulk and ferocious. This was the law of the tribe, that the mightiest was its master, and so remained until one mightier than he came to the opening of the cave in which he lived, challenged him to single combat, and killed him. Thus Henga had killed his own father who ruled before him.

Now he oppressed the tribe; doing no work himself, he seized the food of others or the skin garments that they made. Moreover, although there were few and all men fought for them, he took the women from their parents or husbands, kept them for a while, then cast them out, or perhaps killed them, and took others. Nor might they resist him, because he was sacred and could do what he pleased. Only, as has been said, any man might challenge him to single combat, for to slay him otherwise was forbidden and would have caused the slayer to be driven out to starve as one accursed. Then, if the challenger prevailed, he took the cave of this sacred one, with the women and all that was his, and became chief in his place, until in his turn he was slain in like fashion. Thus it came about that no chief of the tribe lived to be old, for as soon as years began to rob him of his might, he was killed by someone younger and stronger who hated him. For this reason also none desired to be chief, knowing that, if he were, sooner or later he would die in blood, and it was better to suffer oppression than to die.

Yet Wi desired it because of the cruelties of Henga and his misrule of the tribe which he was bringing to misery. Also he knew that, if he did not kill Henga, Henga would kill him from jealousy. Long ago he, Wi, would have been murdered had he not been beloved by the tribe as their great hunter who won them much of their meat food, and

therefore a man whose death would cause the slayer to be hated. Yet, fearing to attack him openly, already Henga had tried to do away with him secretly; and a little while before, when Wi was visiting his pit traps on the edge of the forest, a spear whizzed past him, thrown from a ledge of overhanging rock which he could not climb. He picked up the spear and ran away. It was one which he knew belonged to Henga; moreover, its flint point had been soaked in poison made from a kind of cuttlefish that had rotted, mixed with the juice of a certain herb, as Wi could tell, for sometimes he used this poison to kill game. He kept the spear and, save to his wife Aaka, said nothing of the matter.

Then followed a worse thing. Besides his son Foh, a lad of ten years whom he loved better than any thing on earth, he had a little daughter one year younger, named Fo-a. This was all his family, for children were scarce among the tribe, and most of those who were born died quite young of cold, lack of proper food, and various sicknesses. Moreover, if girls, many of them were cast out at birth to starve or be devoured by wild beasts.

One evening, Fo-a was missing, and it was thought that wood wolves had taken her, or perhaps the bears that lived in the forest. Aaka wept, and Wi, when there was no one to see, wept also as he searched for Fo-a, whom he loved. Two mornings afterward, when he came out of his hut, near to the door place he found something wrapped in a skin, and, on unwinding it, saw that it was the body of little Fo-a with her neck broken and the marks of a great hand upon her throat. He knew well that Henga had done this thing, as did everybody else, since among the tribe none murdered except the chief, though sometimes men killed each other fighting for women, of whom there were so few, or when they were angry. Yet, when he showed the body to the people, they only shook their heads and were silent, for had not Henga the right to take the life of any among them?

Then it was that Wi's blood boiled within him and he talked with Aaka, saying that it was in his heart to challenge Henga to fight.

"That is what he wishes you to do," answered Aaka, "for being a fool, he thinks himself the stronger and that thus he will kill you without reproach, who otherwise, when he is older, will kill him. Also I have wished it for long who am sure that you can conquer Henga, but you will not listen to me in this matter."

Then she rolled herself up in her skin rug and pretended to go to sleep, saying no more.

In the morning she spoke again and said:

"Hearken, Wi. Counsel has come to me in my sleep. It seemed to me that Fo- a our daughter who is dead stood before me, saying:

"Let Wi my father go up at night to make prayer to the Ice-gods and seek a sign from them. If a stone fall from the crest of the glacier at the dawn, it shall be a token to him that he must fight Henga and avenge my blood upon him and take his chieftainship; but if no stone falls, then, should he fight, Henga will kill him. Also, afterward, he will kill Foh my brother, and take you, my mother, to be one of his wives."

"Now, Wi, I say that you will do well to obey the voice of our child who is dead and to go up to make prayer to the Ice-gods and await their omen."

Wi looked at her doubtfully, putting little faith in this tale, and answered:

"Such a dream is a thin stick on which to lean. I know well, Wife, that for a long while you have desired that I should fight Henga, although he is a terrible man. Yet, if I do, he may kill me and then what would happen to you and Foh?"

"That which is fated to happen to us and nothing else, Husband. Shall it be said in the tribe that Wi was afraid to avenge the blood of his daughter upon Henga?"

"I know not, Wife, but I know also that, if such words are whispered, they will not be true. It is of you and Foh that I think, not of myself."

"Then go and seek an omen from the Ice-gods, Husband."

"I will go, Aaka, but do not blame me afterward if things happen awry."

"They will not happen awry," answered Aaka, smiling for the first time since Fo-a died.

For she was sure that Wi would conquer Henga, if only he could be brought to fight him, and thus avenge Fo-a and become chief in his place. Also she smiled because, for reasons of which she did not speak, she was sure also that a stone would fall from the crest of the glacier at dawn when the sun struck upon the ice.

Thus it came about that, on the following night, Wi the Hunter slipped from the village of the tribe and, walking round the foot of the hill that ran down to the beach on the east, scaled the cleft between the mountains until he came to the base of the great glacier. The wolves that were prowling round the place, still winter-hungry because the spring was so late, scented him and surrounded him with glaring eyes. But he, the Hunter, was not afraid of the wolves; moreover, woe had made his heart fierce. So with a yell he charged at the biggest of them, the leader of the pack, and drove his flint spear into its throat, then, while it writhed upon the spear, gnashing its red jaws, he dashed out its brains with his stone axe, muttering:

"Thus shall Henga die! Thus shall Henga die!"

The wolves knew their master and sped away, all save their leader that lay dead. Wi dragged its carcase to the top of a rock and left it there where the rest could not reach it, purposing to skin it in the morning.

This done, he went on up the cold valley where no beasts came, because here there was nothing to eat, till he reached the face of the glacier, a mighty wall of backward sloping ice that gleamed faintly in the moonlight and filled the cleft from side to side, four hundred paces or more in width. When last he was here, twelve moons gone, he had driven a stake of driftwood between two rocks and another stake five paces lower down, because of late it had seemed to him that the glacier was marching forward.

So it was indeed, for the first stake was buried, and the cruel, crawling lip of the glacier had nearly reached the second. The gods were awake! The gods were marching toward the sea!

Wi shivered, not because of the cold, to which he was accustomed, but from fear—for this place was terrible to him. It was the house of the gods who dwelt there in the ice, the gods in whom he believed, and who were always angry, and now he remembered that he had brought no offering to propitiate them. He went back to the place where he had killed the wolf, and with difficulty, by aid of his sharp flint spear and stone axe, hacked off its head. Returning with this head, he set the grisly thing upon a rock at the foot of the glacier, muttering:

“It bleeds and the gods love blood. Now I swear that, if I kill Henga, I will give them his carcass, which is better than the head of a wolf.”

Then he knelt down, as men have ever done before that which they fear and worship, and began to pray after his rude fashion:

“O Mighty Ones,” he said, “who have lived here since the beginning, and O Sleeper with a shape such as no man has ever seen, Wi throws out his spirit to you; hear ye the prayer of Wi and give him a sign. Henga the fierce and hideous, who kills his own children lest in a day to come they should slay him as he slew his father, rules the people and does evilly. The people groan, but according to the old law may not rebel, and to speak they are afraid. Henga would kill me, and my little daughter Fo-a he has killed, and her mother weeps. I, Wi, would fight Henga as I may do under the law, but he is strong as the wild bull of the forest, and if he prevails, not only will he kill me, he will also take Aaka, whom he covets, and will murder our son Foh and perhaps devour him. Therefore, I am afraid to fight, for their sakes. Yet I would be revenged upon Henga and slay him, and live in the cave and rule the People better, not devouring their food, but storing it up for them; not taking the women, but leaving them to be the wives of those who have none. I have brought you an offering, O Gods, the head of a wolf fresh slain, which bleeds, the best thing I have to give you, and if I kill Henga, I will bring you a richer one, that of his dead body, because our fathers have always said that you love blood.”

Wi paused, for he could think of nothing more to say; then, remembering that as yet he had made no request, went on:

“Show me what I must do, O Gods. Shall I challenge Henga in the old way and fight him openly for the rule of the tribe? or, since if I fear to do this I cannot stay here among the people, shall I fly away with Aaka and Foh and, perhaps, Pag, the wise dwarf, the Wolf-man who loves me, to seek another home beyond the woods, if we live to win through them? Accept my offering and tell me, O Gods. If I must fight Henga, let a stone fall from the crest of the glacier, and if I must fly to save the lives of Aaka and Foh, let no stone fall. Here, now, I will wait till an hour after sunrise. Then, if a stone falls, I shall go down to challenge Henga, and if it does not fall, I shall give it out that I am about to challenge him, and in the night I shall slip away with Aaka and Foh, and Pag if he chooses; whereby you will lose worshippers, O Gods.”

Pleased with this master argument, which had come as an inspiration, since he had never thought of it before, and sure that it would appeal to gods whose followers were few and who therefore could not afford to lose any of them, Wi ceased praying, a terrible exercise which tired him more than a whole day's hunting or fishing, and, remaining on his knees, stared at the face of ice in front of him. He knew nothing of the laws of nature, but he did know that heavy bodies, if once set in motion, moved very fast down a hill, going quicker and quicker as they came near to its foot. Indeed, once he had killed a bear by rolling a stone down on it, which overtook the running beast with wonderful swiftness.

This being so, he began to marvel what would happen if all that mighty mass of ice should move in good earnest instead of at the rate of only a few handbreadths a year. Well, he knew something of that also. For once, when he was in the woods, he had seen an ice child born, a vast mass large as a mountain which suddenly rushed down one of the western valleys into the sea, sending foam flying as high as heaven. That had hurt no one, except, perhaps, some of the seal people which were basking in the bay, because there was no one to hurt. But if it had been the great central glacier that thus moved and gave birth, together with the other smaller glaciers of the west, what would chance to the tribe upon the beach beneath? They would be killed, every one, and there would be no people left in the world.

He did not call it the world, of course, since he knew nothing of the world, but rather by some word that meant “the place,” that is, the few miles of beach and wood and mountain over which he wandered. From a great height he had seen other beaches and woods, also mountains beyond a rocky, barren plain, but to him these were but a dreamland. At least, no men and women lived in them, because they had never heard their voices or seen the smoke of their fires, such as the tribe made to warm themselves by and for the cooking of their food. It was true that there were stories that such people existed and Pag, the cunning dwarf, thought so. However, Wi, being a man who dealt with

facts, paid no heed to these tales. There below him lived the only people in the world, and if they were crushed, all would be finished.

Well, if so, it would not matter very much, except in the case of Aaka, and, above all, of Foh his son, for of other women he thought little, while the creatures that furnished food, the seals and the birds and the fish, especially the salmon that came up the stream in spring, and the speckled trout, would be happier if they were gone.

These speculations also tired him, a man of action who was only beginning to learn how to think. So he gave them up, as he had given up praying, and stared with his big, thoughtful eyes at the ice in front of him. The light was gathering now, very soon the sun should rise and he should see into the ice. Look! There were faces, grotesque faces, some of them vast, some tiny, that seemed to shift and change with the changes of the light and the play of the shadows. Doubtless, these were those of the lesser gods of whom probably there were a great number, all of them bad and cruel, and they were peering and mocking at him.

Moreover, beyond them, a dim outline, was the great Sleeper, as he had always been, a mountain of a god with huge tusks and the curling nose much longer than the body of a man, and a head like a rock, and ears as big as the sides of a hut, and a small, cold eye that seemed to be fixed upon him, and behind all this, vanishing into the depths of the ice, an enormous body the height of three men standing on each other's heads, perhaps. There was a god indeed, and, looking at him, Wi wondered whether one day he would awake and break out of the ice and come rushing down the mountain. That he might see him better, Wi rose from his knees and crept timidly to the face of the glacier to peer down a certain crevice in the ice. While he was thus engaged, the sun rose in a clear sky over the shoulder of the mountain and shone with some warmth upon the glacier for the first time that spring—or rather early summer. Its rays penetrated the cleft in the ice so that Wi saw more of the Sleeper than he had ever done.

Truly, he was enormous, and look, behind him was something like the figure of a man of which he had often heard but never before seen so clearly. Or was it a shadow? Wi could not be sure, for just then a cloud floated over the face of the sun and the figure vanished. He waited for the cloud to pass away, and well was it for him that he did so, for just then a great rock which lay, doubtless, upon the extreme lip of the glacier, loosened from its last hold by the warmth of the sun, came thundering down the slope of the ice and, leaping over Wi, fell upon the spot where he had just been standing, making a hole in the frozen ground and crushing the wolf's head to a pulp, after which, with mighty bounds, it vanished towards the beach.

"The Sleeper has protected me," said Wi to himself, as he turned to look after the vanishing rock. "Had I stayed where I was, I should have been as that wolf's head."

Then, suddenly, he remembered that this stone had fallen in answer to his prayer; that it was the sign he had sought, and removed himself swiftly, lest another that he had not sought should follow after it.

When he had run a few paces down the frozen slope, he came to a little bay hollowed in the mountainside, and sat down, knowing that there he was safe from falling stones. Confusedly, he began to think. What had he asked the gods? Was it that he must fight Henga if the stone fell, or that he must not fight him? Oh! now he remembered. It was that he must fight as Aaka wished him to do, and a cold trembling shook his limbs. To talk of fighting that raging giant was easy enough, but to do it was another matter. Yet the gods had spoken, and he dared not disobey the counsel that he had sought. Moreover, by sparing his life from the falling stone, surely they meant that he would conquer Henga. Or perhaps they only meant that they wished to see Henga tear him to pieces for their sport, for the gods loved blood, and the gods were cruel. Moreover, being evil themselves, would it not, perhaps, please them to give victory to the evil man?

As he could not answer these questions, Wi rose and walked slowly toward the beach, reflecting that probably he had seen his last of the glacier and the Ice-gods who dwelt therein, he who was about to challenge Henga to fight to the death. Presently he drew near to the place where he had killed the wolf, and, looking up, was astonished to see that someone was skinning the beast. Indeed, his fingers tightened upon the haft of his spear, for this was a crime against the hunter's law—that one should steal what another had slain. Then the head of the skinner appeared, and Wi smiled and loosened his grip of the spear. For this was no thief, this was Pag, his slave who loved him.

A strange-looking man was Pag, a large-headed, one-eyed dwarf, great-chested, long-armed, powerful, but with thick little legs, no longer than those of a child of eight years; a monstrous, flat-nosed, big-mouthed creature, who yet always wore upon his scarred countenance a smiling, humorous air. It was told of Pag that, when he was born, a long while before—for his youth had passed—he was so ugly that his mother had thrown him out into the woods, fearing that his father, who was absent killing seals farther up the beach, would be angry with her for bearing such a son and purposing to tell him that the child had been stillborn.

As it chanced, when the father came back, he went to search for the infant's bones, but in place of them found the babe still living, but with one eye dashed out against a stone and its face much scarred. Still, this being his first-born, and because he was a man with a merciful heart, he brought it home into the hut, and forced the mother to nurse it. This she did, like one who is frightened, though why she was frightened she would not say, nor would his father ever tell where and how he had found Pag. Thus it came about that Pag did not die, but lived, and because of what his mother had done to him, always was a hater of women; one, too, who lived much in the forest, for which reason, or some other, he was named "wolf-man." Moreover, he grew up the cleverest of the tribe, for nature, which had made

him ugly and deformed, gave him more wits than the rest of them, and a sharp tongue that he used to gibe with at the women.

Therefore they hated him also and made a plot against him, and when there came a time of scarcity, persuaded the chief of the tribe of that day, the father of Henga, that Pag was the cause of ill-fortune. So that chief drove out Pag to starve. But when Pag was dying for lack of food, Wi found him and brought him to his hut, where, although like the rest of her sex Aaka loved him little, he remained as a slave; for this was the law, that, if any saved a life, that life belonged to him. In truth, however, Pag was more than a slave, because, from the hour that Wi, braving the wrath of the women, who thought that they were rid of Pag and his gibes, and perchance the anger of the chief, had rescued him when he was starving in a season of bitter frost, Pag loved him more than a woman loves her first-born, or a young man his one-day bride.

Thenceforward he was Wi's shadow, ready to suffer all things for him, and even to refrain from sharp words and jests about Aaka or any other woman upon whom Wi looked with favour, though to do so he must bite a hole in his tongue. So Pag loved Wi and Wi loved Pag, for which reason Aaka, who was jealous-hearted, came to hate him more than she had done at first.

There was trouble about this business of the saving of the life of Pag by Wi after he had been driven out to starve as an evil-eyed and scurrilous fellow, but the chief, Henga's father, a kindly natured man, when the matter came before him, said that, since twice Pag had been thrown out and brought back again, it was evident that the gods meant him to die in some other fashion. Only now that Wi had taken him, Wi must feed him and see that he hurt none. If he chose to keep a one-eyed wolf, it was his own business and that of no one else.

Shortly after this, Henga killed his father and became chief in place, and the matter of Pag was forgotten. So Pag stayed on with Wi and was beloved of him and by Wi's children, but hated of Aaka.

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## CHAPTER 4

### THE TRIBE

"A good pelt," said Pag, pointing to the wolf with his red knife, "for, the spring being so late, this beast had not begun to shoot its hair. When I have brayed it as I know how, it will make a cloak for Foh. He needs one that is warm, even in the summer, for lately he has been coughing and spitting."

"Yes," answered Wi anxiously. "It has come upon him ever since he hid in the cold water because the black bear with the great teeth was after him, knowing that the beast hates water, for which," he added viciously, "I swear that I will kill that bear. Also he grieves for his sister, Fo-a."

"Aye, Wi," snarled Pag, his one eye flashing with hate. "Foh grieves, Aaka grieves, you grieve, and I, Pag the Wolf-man, grieve, too. Oh, why did you make me come hunting with you that day when my heart was against it and, smelling evil, I wished to stop with Fo-a, whom Aaka let run off by herself just because I told her that she should keep the girl at home?"

"It was the will of the gods, Pag," muttered Wi, turning his head away.

"The gods! What gods? I say it was the will of a brute with two legs —nay, of the great-toothed tiger himself of which our forefather told, living in a man's skin, yes, of Henga, helped by Aaka's temper. Kill that man tiger, Wi, and never mind the great black bear. Or, if you cannot, let me. I know a woman who hates him because he has put her away and made her serve another who has her place, and I can make good poison, very good poison - "

"Nay, it is not lawful," said Wi, "and would bring a curse upon us. But it is lawful that I should kill him, and I will. I have been talking to the gods about it."

"Oh! that is where the wolf's head has gone—an offering, I see. And what did the gods say to you, Wi?"

"They gave me a sign. A stone fell from the brow of the ice, as Aaka said that it would if I was to fight Henga. It nearly hit me, but I had moved closer to the ice to look at the Sleeper, the greatest of the gods."

"I don't believe it is a god, Wi. I believe it is a beast of a sort we do not know, dead and frozen, and that the shadow behind it is a man that was hunting the beast when they both fell into the snow that turned to ice."

Wi stared at him, for this indeed was a new idea.

"How can that be, Pag, seeing that the Sleeper and the Shadow have always been there, for our grandfathers knew them, and there is no such beast known? Also, except us, there are no other men."

"Are you sure, Wi? The place is big. If you go to the top of that hill, you see other hills behind as far as the eye can look, and between them plains and woods; also, there is the sea, and there may be beaches beyond the sea. Why, then, should there not be other men? Did the gods make us alone? Would they not make more to play with and to kill?"

Wi shook his head at these revolutionary arguments, and Pag went on:

"As for the falling of the stone, it often happens when the heat of the sun melts the edge of the ice or makes it swell. And as for the groans and callings of the gods, does not ice crack when the frost is sharp, or when there is no frost at all and it begins to move of its own weight?"

"Cease, Pag, cease," said Wi, stuffing his fingers into his ears. "No longer will I listen to such mad words. If the gods hear them, they will kill us."

"If the people hear them, they may kill us because they walk in fear of what they cannot see and would save themselves at the cost of others. But for the gods—that!" and Pag snapped his fingers in the direction of the glacier, which, after all, is a very ancient gesture of contempt.

Wi was so overcome that he sat down upon a stone, unable to answer, and, that first of sceptics, Pag, went on:

"If I must have a god, who have found men quite bad enough to deal with, without one above them more evil than they, I would choose the sun. The sun gives life; when the sun shines, everything grows, and the creatures mate and the birds lay eggs and the seals come to bear their young and the flowers bloom. When there is no sun only frost and snow, then all these die or go away, and it is hard to live, and the wolves and bears raven and eat men, if they can catch them. Yes, the sun shall be my good god and the black frost my evil god."

Thus did Pag propound a new religion, which since then has been very popular in the world. Next, changing the subject rapidly, as do children and savages, he asked:

"What of Henga, Wi? Are you going to challenge him to fight?"

"Yes," said Wi fiercely, "this very day."

"May you be victorious! May you kill him, thus and thus and thus," and Pag jabbed his flint knife into the stomach of the dead wolf. "Yet," he added reflectively, "it is a big business. There has been no such man as Henga among our people that I have heard of. Although N'gae, who calls himself a magician, is without doubt a cheat and a liar, I think he is right when he says that Henga's mother made a mistake. She meant to have twins but they got mixed up together and Henga came instead. Otherwise, why is he double-jointed, why has he two rows of teeth, one behind the other, and why is he twice the size of any other man and more than twice as wicked? Still, without doubt he is a man and not what

you call a god, since he grows fat and heavy and his hair is beginning to turn gray. Therefore, he can be killed if anyone is strong enough to break in that thick skull of his. I should like to try poison on him, but you say that I must not. Well, I will think the matter over, and we will talk again before you fight. Meanwhile, as there may be no chance afterward when chattering women are about, give me your commands, Wi, as to what is to be done if Henga kills you. I suppose that you do not wish him to take Aaka as he desires to do, or Foh that he may make a nothing of him and keep him as a slave."

"I do not," said Wi.

"Then please direct me to kill them, or to see that they kill themselves, never mind how."

"I do so direct you, Pag."

"Good, and what are your wishes as regards myself?"

"I don't know," answered Wi wearily. "Do what you will. I thank you and wish you well."

"You are not kind to me, Wi. Although I am called the Twice-thrown-out, and the Wolf-man, and the Hideous, and the Barbed-tongued, still I have served you well. Now, when I ask you what I must do after you are dead and I have killed your family, you do not say: 'Why, follow me, of course, and look for me in the darkness, and if you find nothing it will be because there is nothing to find,' as you would have done did you love me. No, you say, 'Do as you will. What is it to me?' Still, I shall come with Foh and Aaka, although, of course, I must be a little behind them, because it will take time to fulfil your orders, and afterward to do what is necessary to myself. Still, wait for me an hour, even if Aaka is angry, as she will be."

"So you think you would find me somewhere, you who do not believe in the gods," said Wi, staring at him with his big, melancholy eyes.

"Yes, Wi, I think that, though I don't know why I think it. I think that the lover always finds the beloved, and that therefore you will find Fo-a and I shall find you. Also, I think that, if I am wrong, it doesn't matter, for I shall never know that I was wrong. But as for those gods who dwell in the ice, *piff!*" and again Pag snapped his fingers in the direction of the glacier and went on with the skinning of the wolf.

Presently this was finished and he threw the gory hide, flesh side down, over his broad shoulders to keep it stretched, as he said, for a little blood did not trouble him. Then, without more talk, the pair walked down to the beach, the squat misshapen Pag waddling on his short legs after the burly, swift-moving Wi.

Here, straggling over a great extent of shore, were a number of rough shelters not unlike the Indian wigwams of our own age, or those rude huts that are built by the Australian savages. Round these huts wandered or squatted some sharp-nosed, surly-looking, long-coated creatures, very powerful of build, that a modern man would have taken for wolves rather than dogs. Wolves their progenitors had been, though how long before it was impossible to say. Now, however, they were tamed, more or less, and the most valued possession of the tribe, which by their aid kept at bay the true wild wolves and the other savage beasts that haunted the beach and the woods.

When these animals caught sight of Wi and Pag, they rushed at them, open-mouthed and growling fiercely till, getting their wind, of a sudden they became gentle and, for the most part, returned to the huts whence they had come. Two or three of them, however, which were his especial property and lived in his hut, leapt up at Wi, wagging their tails and striving to lick his hand or face. He patted one upon the head, the great hound Yow whom he loved, and who was his guard and companion when out hunting, whereon the other two, in their fierce jealousy, instantly flew at its throat, nor did Pag find it easy to separate them.

The noise of the worrying attracted the tribe, many of whom appeared from out of the huts or elsewhere to discover its cause. They were wild-looking people, all dark-haired like Wi, though he was taller and bigger than most of them, very like each other in countenance, moreover, as a result of inbreeding for an unknown number of generations. Indeed, a stranger would have found difficulty in distinguishing them apart except by their ages, but as no stranger ever came to the home of the beach people, this did not matter.

The most of them also were coarse-faced and crushed-looking as though they were well-acquainted with the extremities of cruelty and hardship—which was indeed the case; like Wi, however, some of them had fine eyes, though even these were furtive and terror-stricken. Of children there were not many, for reasons that have been told, and these hung together in a little group, perhaps to keep out of the way of blows when their elders appeared, or in some instances wandered round the fires of driftwood on which food was cooking, bits of seal meat, for the most part, toasting upon sticks—for the tribe were not advanced enough in the domestic arts to possess cooking vessels—as though, like the dogs, they hoped to snatch a mouthful when no one saw them. Only a few of the smaller of these children sat about upon the sand playing with sticks or shells, which they used as toys. Many of the women seemed even more depressed than the men, which was not strange, as, like slaves, it was their lot to do the hard work and to wait hand and foot on their masters, those who had taken them as wives, either by capture or in exchange for other women, or for such goods as this people possessed and valued—bone fish hooks, flint weapons, fibre rope, and dressed skins.

Through this collection of primitive humanity—our forebears be it remembered—Wi, preceded by Pag, marched toward his own hut, a large one more neatly constructed than most, of fir poles from the wood tied together at the top,

tent-shaped and covered with untanned skins laid over a roof of dried ferns and seaweed, arranged so as to keep out the cold. Obviously, he was a person held in respect, as the men made way for him, though some of the short little women stood staring at him with sympathy in their eyes, for they remembered that a few days ago Henga had stolen and killed his daughter. One of these mentioned this to another, but this one, who was elderly and cynical, replied as soon as he was out of hearing:

"What does it matter? It will be a mouth less to feed next winter, and who can wish to bring up daughters to be what we are?"

Some of the younger females—there did not seem to be any girls, they were all either children or women—clustered about Pag and, unable to retain their curiosity, questioned him as to the wolfskin on his shoulders. Living up to his reputation, he replied by telling them to mind their own business and get to their work, instead of standing idle; whereon they jeered at him, giving him ugly names, and calling attention to his deformity, or making faces, until he set one of the dogs at them, whereon they ran away.

They came to Wi's hut. As they approached, the hide curtain which hung over the front opening was thrust aside and out rushed a lad of some ten years of age, a handsome boy though rather thin, with a bright, vivacious face, very different in appearance to others of the tribe of the same age. Foh, for it was he, flung himself into his father's arms, saying:

"My mother made me eat in the hut because the wind is so cold and I still cough, but I heard your step, also that of Pag, who lumbers along like a seal on its flippers. Where have you been, Father? When I woke up this morning I could not find you."

"Near to the God's House, Son," answered Wi, nodding toward the glacier, as he kissed him back.

At this moment, Foh's quick glance fell upon the wolfskin which hung from Pag's shoulders to the ground and still dripped blood.

"Where did you get that?" he cried. "What a beautiful skin! A wolf indeed, a father of wolves. Did you kill it, Pag?"

"No, Foh, I flayed it. Learn to take note. Look at your father's spear. Is it not red?"

"So is your knife, Pag, and so are you, down to the heels. How was I to know which of you slew this great beast when both are so brave? What are you going to do with the skin?"

"Bray it into a cloak for you, Foh; very cunningly with the claws left on the pads, but polished so that they will shine in front when you tie it about you."

"Good. Cure it quickly, Pag, for it will be warm and these winds are cold. Come into the hut, Father, where your food is waiting, and tell us how you killed the wolf," and seizing Wi by the hand, the boy dragged him between the skin curtains while Pag and the dogs retreated to some shelter behind, which the dwarf had constructed for himself.

The place within was quite spacious, sixteen feet long, perhaps, by about twelve in breadth.

In the centre of it, on a hearth of clay, burned a wood fire, the smoke of which escaped through a hole in the roof, though, the morning being still, much hung about, making the air thick and pungent, but this Wi, being accustomed to it, did not notice.

On the farther side of the fire, attending to the grilling of strips of flesh set upon pointed sticks, stood Aaka, Wi's wife, clothed in a kirtle of sealskins fastened beneath her breast, for here, the place being warm, she wore no cloak. She was a finely built woman of about thirty years of age, with masses of black hair that hung to her middle, clean and well-kept hair arranged in four tresses, each of which was tied at the end with fibres of grass or sinew. Her skin was whiter than that of most of her race; indeed, quite white, except where it was tanned by exposure to the weather; her face, though rather broad, was handsome and fine-featured, if somewhat querulous, and, like the rest of her people, she had large and melancholy dark eyes.

As Wi entered, she threw a curious, searching glance at him, as though to read his mind, then smiled in rather a forced fashion and drew forward a block of wood. Indeed, there was nothing else for him to sit on, for furniture, even in its simplest forms, was not known in the tribe. Sometimes a thick, flat stone was used as a table, or a divided stick for a fork, but beyond such expedients the tribe had not advanced. Thus their beds consisted of piles of dried seaweed thrown upon the floor of the hut and covered with skins of one sort or another, and their lamps were made of large shells filled with seal oil in which floated a wick of moss.

Wi sat down on the log, and Aaka, taking one of the sticks on which was spitted a great lump of frizzling seal meat, not too well cooked and somewhat blackened by the smoke, handed it to him and stood by dutifully while he devoured it in a fashion which we should not have considered elegant. Then it was that Foh, rather shyly, draw out from some hiding place a little parcel wrapped in a leaf, which he opened and set upon the ground. It contained desiccated and somewhat sandy brine, or rather its deposit, that the lad with much care had scraped off the rocks of a pool from which the sea water had evaporated. Once Wi by accident had mingled some of this dried brine with his food and found that thereby its taste was enormously improved. Thus he became the discoverer of salt among the People, the rest of whom, however, looked on it as a luxurious innovation which it was scarcely right to use. But Wi, being more advanced, did use it, and it was Foh's business to collect the stuff, as it had been that of his sister, Fo-a. Indeed, it was while she was thus engaged, far away and alone, that Henga the chief had kidnapped the poor child.

Remembering this, Wi thrust aside the leaf, then, noting the pained expression of the boy's face at the refusal of his gift, drew it back again and dipped the meat into its contents. When Wi had consumed all he wanted of the flesh, he signed to Aaka and Foh to eat the rest, which they did hungrily, having touched nothing since yesterday, for it was not lawful that the family should eat until its head had taken his fill. Lastly, by way of dessert, Wi chewed a lump of sun-dried stockfish upon which no modern teeth could have made a mark for it was as hard as stone, and by way of a savoury a handful or so of prawns that Foh had caught among the rocks and Aaka had cooked in the ashes.

The feast finished, Wi bid Foh bear the remnants to Pag in his shelter without, and stay with him till he was called. Then he drank a quantity of spring water, which Aaka kept stored in big shells and in a stone, her most valued possession, hollowed to the shape of a pot by the action of ice, or the constant grinding of other stones at the bottom of the sea. This he did because there was nothing else, though at certain times of the year Aaka made a kind of tea by boiling an herb she knew of in a shell, a potion that all of them loved for both its warmth and its stimulating properties. This herb, however, grew only in the autumn and it had never occurred to them to store it and use it dry. Therefore, their use of the first intoxicant was limited of necessity, which was perhaps as well.

Having drunk, he closed the skins that hung over the hut entrance, pinning them together with a bone that passed through loops in the hide, and sat down again upon his log.

"What said the gods?" asked Aaka quickly. "Did they answer your prayer?"

"Woman, they did. At sunrise a rock fell from the crest of the ice field and crushed my offering so that the ice took it to itself."

"What offering?"

"The head of a wolf that I slew as I went up the valley."

Aaka brooded awhile, then said:

"My heart tells me that the omen is good. Henga is that wolf, and as you slew the wolf, so shall you slay Henga. Did I hear that its hide is to be a cloak for Foh? If so, the omen is good also, since one day the rule of Henga shall descend to Foh. At least, if you kill Henga, Foh shall live and not die as Fo-a died."

An expression of joy spread over Wi's face as he listened.

"Your words give me strength," he said, "and now I go out to summon the People and to tell them that I am about to challenge Henga to fight to the death."

"Go," she said, "and hear me, my man. Fight you without fear, for if my rede be wrong and Henga the Mighty should kill you, what of it? Soon we die, all of us, for the most part slowly by hunger or otherwise, but death at the hands of Henga will be swift. And if you die, then we shall die soon, very soon. Pag will see to it, and so we shall be together again."

"Together again! Together where, Wife?" he asked, staring at her curiously.

A kind of veil seemed to fall over Aaka's face, that is, her expression changed entirely, for it grew blank and wooden, secret also, like to the faces of all her sisters of the tribe.

"I don't know," she answered roughly. "Together in the light or together in the dark, or together with the Ice-gods—who can tell? At least together somewhere. You shake your head. You have been talking to that hater of the gods and changeling, Pag, who really is a wolf, not a man, and hunts with the wolves at night, which is why he is always so fat in winter when others starve."

Here Wi laughed incredulously, saying:

"If so, he is a wolf that loves us; I would that we had more such wolves."

"Oh! you mock, as all men do. But we women see further, and we are sure that Pag is a wolf by night, if a dwarf by day. For, if any try to injure him, are they not taken by wolves? Did not wolves eat his father, and were not the leaders of those women who caused him to be driven forth to starve when there was such scarcity that even the wolves fled far away, afterward taken by wolves, they or their children?"

Then, as though she thought she had said too much, Aaka added:

"Yet all this may be but a tale spread from mouth to mouth, because we women hate Pag who mocks us. At least he believes in naught, and would teach you to do the same, and already you begin to walk in his footsteps. Yet, if you hold that we live no more after our breath leaves us, tell me one thing. Why, when you buried Fo-a yonder, did you set with her in the hole her necklace of shells and the stone ball that she played with and the tame bird she had, after you killed it, and her winter cloak, and the doll you made for her of pinewood last year? Of what good would these things be to her bones? Was it not because you thought that they and the little stone axe might be of use to her elsewhere, as the dried fish and the water might serve to feed her?"

Here she ceased, and stared at him.

"Sorrow makes you mad," said Wi, very gently, for he was moved by her words, "as it makes me mad, but in another fashion. For the rest, I do not know why I did thus; perhaps it was because I wished to see those things no more, perhaps because it is a custom to bury with the dead what they loved when they were alive."

Then he turned and left the hut. Aaka watched him go, muttering to herself:

"He is right. I am mad with grief for Fo-a and with fear for Foh; for it is the children that we women love, yes, more than the man who begat them; and if I thought that I should never find her again, then I would die at once and have done. Meanwhile, I live on to see Wi dash out the brains of Henga, or, if he is killed, to help Pag poison him. They say that Pag is a wolf, but, though I hate him of whom Wi thinks too much, what care I whether he be wolf or monster? At least he loves Wi and our children and will help me to be revenged on Henga."

Presently she heard the wild-bull horn that served the tribe as a trumpet being blown, and knew that Wini-wini, he who was called the Shudderer because he shook like a jellyfish even if not frightened, which was seldom, was summoning the people that they might talk together or hear news. Guessing what that news would be, Aaka threw her skin cloak about her and followed the sound of the horn to the place of assembly.

Here, on a flat piece of ground at a distance from the huts that lay about two hundred paces from a cliff-like spur of the mountain, all the people, men, women, and children, except a few who were in childbed or too sick or old to move, were gathering together. As they walked or ran, they chattered excitedly, delighted that something was happening to break the terrible sadness of their lives, now and again pointing toward the mouth of the great cave that appeared in the stone cliff opposite to the meeting place. In this cave dwelt Henga, for by right, from time immemorial, it was the home of the chiefs of the tribe, which none might enter save by permission, a sacred place like to the palaces of modern times.

Aaka walked on, feeling that she was being watched by the others but taking no heed, for she knew the reason. She was Wi's woman, and the rumour had run round that Wi the Strong, Wi the Great Hunter, Wi whose little daughter had been murdered, was about to do something strange, though what it might be none was sure. All of them longed to ask Aaka, but there was something in her eye which forbade them, for she was cold and stately and they feared her a little. So she went on unmolested, looking for Foh, of whom presently she caught sight walking in the company of Pag, who still had the reeking wolfskin on his shoulders, of which, as he was short, the tail dragged along the ground. She noted that, as he advanced, the people made way for him, not from reverence or love, but because they feared him and his evil eye.

"Look," said one woman to another in hearing, "there goes he who hates us, the spear-tongued dwarf."

"Aye," answered the other. "He is in such haste that he has forgotten to take off the wolf's hide he hunted in last night. Have you heard that Buk's wife has lost her little child of three? It is said that the bears took it, but perhaps yonder wolf-man knows better."

"Yet Foh does not fear him. Look, he holds his hand and laughs."

"No, because—" Here suddenly the woman caught sight of Aaka and was silent.

"I wonder," reflected Aaka, "whether we women hate Pag because he is ugly and hates us, or because he is cleverer than we are and pierces us with his tongue. I wonder also why they all think he is half a wolf. I suppose it is because he hunts with Wi, for how can he be both a man and a wolf? At least, I too believe that report speaks truth and that he and the wolves have dealings together. Or perhaps he puts the tale about that all may fear him."

She came to the meeting ground and took her stand near to Foh and Pag among the crowd which stood or sat in a ring about an open space of empty ground where sometimes the tribe danced when they had plenty of food and the weather was warm, or took counsel, or watched the young men fight and wrestle for the prize of a girl they coveted.

At the head of the ring, which was oblong in shape rather than round, standing about Wini-wini the Shudderer, who from time to time still blew blasts upon his horn, were some of the leaders of the tribe, among them old Turi the Avaricious, the hoarder of food who was always fat, whoever grew thin; and Pitokiti the Unlucky with whom everything went wrong, whose fish always turned rotten, whose women deserted him, whose children died, and whose net was sure to break, so that he must be supported by others for fear lest he should die and pass on his ill-luck to them who neglected him; and Whaka the Bird-of-Ill- Omen, the lean-faced one who was always howling of misfortunes to come; and Hou the Unstable, a feather blown by the wind, who was never of the same mind two days together and Rahi the Rich, who traded in stone axes and fish hooks and thus lived well without work; and Hotoa, the great-bellied and slow-speeched, who never gave his word as to a matter until he knew how it was settled, and then shouted it loudly and looked wise; and Taren, She-Who-hid, with N'gae the priest of the Ice-gods and the magician who told fortunes with shells, and only came out when there was evil in the wind.

Lastly there was Moananga, Wi's younger brother, the brave, the great fighter who had fought six men to win and keep Tana, the sweet and loving, the fairest woman of the tribe, and killed two of them who strove to steal her by force. He was a round-eyed man with a laughing face, quick to anger but good-tempered, and after Wi the Hunter, he who stood first among the people. Moreover, he loved Wi and clung to him, so that the two were as one, for which reason Henga the chief hated them both and thought that they were too strong for him.

All these were talking with their heads close together, till presently appeared Wi, straight, strong, and stern, at whose coming they grew silent. He looked round at them, then said:

"I have words."

"We are listening," replied Moananga.

"Hearken," went on Wi. "Is there not a law that any man of the tribe may challenge the chief of the tribe to fight, and if he can kill him, may take his place?"

"There is such a law," said Urk, the old wizard, he who made charms for women and brewed love potions, and in winter told stories of what had happened long ago before his grandfather's grandfather was born, very strange stories, some of them. "Twice it has chanced in my day, the second time when Henga challenged and killed his own father and took the cave."

"Yes," added Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, "but if he who challenges is defeated, not only is he killed, his family is killed also"—here he glanced at Aaka and Foh—"and perhaps his friend or brother"—here he looked at Moananga. "Yes, without doubt that is the law. The cave only belongs to the chief while he can defend it with his hands. If another rises who is stronger than he, he may take the cave, and the women, also the children if there are any, and kill them or make them slaves, until his strength begins to fail him and he in turn is killed by some mightier man."

"I know it," said Wi. "Hearken again. Henga has done me wrong; he stole and murdered my daughter Fo-a. Therefore I would kill him. Also he rules the tribe cruelly. No man's wife or daughter or robe or food is safe from him. His wickedness makes the gods angry. Why is it that the summers have turned cold and the spring does not come? I say it is because of the wickedness of Henga. Therefore, I would kill him and take the cave, and rule well and gently so that every man may have plenty of food in his hut and sleep safe at night. What say you?"

Now Wini-wini the Shudderer spoke, shaking in all his limbs:

"We say that you must do what you will, Wi, but that we will not mix with the matter. If we mix, when you are killed, as you will be—for Henga is mightier than you—yes, he is the tiger, he is the bull of the woods, he is the roaring bear—then he will kill us also. Do what you will, but do it alone. We turn our backs on you, we put our hands before our eyes and see nothing."

Pag spat upon the ground and said in his low, growling voice that seemed to come out of his stomach:

"I think that you will see something one night when the stars are shining. I think, Wini-wini, that one night you will meet that which will make you shudder yourself to pieces."

"It is the wolf-man," exclaimed Wini-wini. "Protect me! Why should the wolf-man threaten me when we are gathered to talk?"

Nobody answered, because if some were afraid of Pag, all, down to the most miserable slave-woman, despised Wini-wini.

"Take no heed of his words, Brother," said Moananga the Happy-faced. "I will go up with you to the cave-mouth when you challenge Henga, and so I think will many others to be witnesses of the challenge, according to the custom of our fathers. Let those stop behind who will. You will know what to think of them when you are chief and sit in the cave."

"It is well," said Wi. "Let us go at once."

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## THE AXE THAT PAG MADE

This matter being settled, there followed a jabber of argument as to the method of conveying the challenge of Wi to Henga the chief. Urk the Aged was consulted as to precedents and made a long speech in which he contradicted himself several times. Hou the Unstable sprang up at length and said that he was not afraid and would be the leader. Suddenly, however, he changed his mind, declaring he remembered that this office by right belonged to Wini-wini the Horn-Blower, who must sound three blasts at the mouth of the cave to summon the chief. To this all assented with a shout, perhaps because there was a sense of humour even in their primitive minds, and protest as he would, Wini-wini was thrust forward with his horn.

Then the procession started, Wini-wini going first, followed close behind by Pag in the bleeding wolfskin, who, from time to time, pricked him in the back with his sharp flint knife to keep him straight. Next came Wi himself with his brother Moananga, and after these the elders and the rest of the people.

At least, they started thus to cover the three hundred paces or so which lay between them and the cliff, but before they reached the cave, most of them lagged behind so that they were dotted in a long line reaching from the meeting place to its entrance.

Indeed, here remained only Wini-wini, who could not escape from Pag, Wi, Moananga, and, at a little distance behind, Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, prophesying evil in a ceaseless stream of words. At his side, too, was Aaka, walking boldly and looking down at his withered shape with scorn. Of the remainder, the bravest, drawn by curiosity, kept within hearing, but the rest stayed at a distance or hid themselves.

"Blow!" growled Pag to Wini-wini and, as he still hesitated, pricked him in the back with his knife.

Then Wini-wini blew a quavering blast.

"Blow again louder," said Pag.

Wini-wini set the horn to his lips, but before a sound came out of it, a large stone hurled from the cave struck him in the middle and down he went, writhing and gasping.

"Now you have something to shake for," said Pag, as he waddled to one side lest another stone should follow.

None came, but out of the cave with a roar rushed a huge, hairy, black-browed fellow waving a great wooden club—Henga himself. He was a mighty, thick limbed man of about forty years of age, with a chest like a bull's, a big head from which long black hair fell upon his shoulders, and a wide, thick-lipped mouth whence projected yellow tusk-like teeth. From his shoulders, in token of his rank, hung the hide of a cave tiger and round his neck was a collar made from its claws and teeth.

"Who sends that dog to waken me from my rest?" he shouted in his bellowing voice, and pointed with the club to Wini-wini, twisting on the ground.

"I do," answered Wi, "I and all the people. I, Wi, whose child you murdered, come to challenge you, the chief, to fight me for the rule of the tribe, as you must do according to the law, in the presence of the tribe."

Henga ceased from his shouting and glared at him.

"Is it so?" he asked in a quiet voice that had in it a hiss of hate. "Know that I hoped that you would come on this errand and that is why I killed your brat to give you courage, as I will kill the other that remains to you," and he glanced at the boy Foh who stood at a distance. "You have troubled me for long, Wi, with your talk and threats against me, of which I am hungry to make an end. Now, tell me, when does it please the people to see me break your bones?"

"When the sun is within an hour of its setting, Henga, for I have a fancy to sleep in the cave to-night as chief of the people," answered Wi quietly.

Henga glowered at him, gnawing at his lip, then said:

"So be it, dog. I shall be ready at the meeting place an hour before the sun sets. For the rest, it is Aaka who will sleep in the cave to-night, not you who I think will sleep in the bellies of the wolves. Now begone, for a salmon has been sent to me, the first of the year, and I who love salmon would cook and eat it."

Then Aaka spoke, saying:

"Eat well, devil-man who murders children, for I, the mother, tell you that it shall be your last meal."

Laughing hoarsely, Henga went back into the cave, and Wi and all the others slipped away.

"Who gave Henga the salmon?" asked Moananga idly, as one who would say something.

"I did," answered Pag, who was walking beside him but out of earshot of Wi. "I caught it last night in a net and sent it to him, or rather caused it to be laid on a stone by the mouth of the cave."

"What for?" asked Moananga.

"Because Henga is greedy over salmon, especially the first of the year. He will eat the whole fish and be heavy when it comes to fighting."

"That is clever; I should never have thought of that," said Moananga. "But how did you know that Wi was going to challenge Henga?"

"I did not know, nor did Wi. Yet I guessed it because Aaka sent him to consult the gods. When a woman sends a man to seek a sign from the gods, that sign will always be the one she wishes. So at least she will tell him, and he will believe."

"That is cleverer still," said Moananga, staring at the dwarf with his round eyes. "But why does Aaka wish Wi to fight Henga?"

"For two reasons. First, because she would revenge the killing of her child, and, second, because she thinks that Wi is the better man, and that presently she will be the wife of the chief of the tribe. Still, she is not sure about this, because she has made a plan, should Wi be defeated, that I must kill her and Foh at once, which I shall do before I kill myself. Or perhaps I shall not kill myself, at any rate, until I have tried to kill Henga."

"Would you then be chief of the tribe, Wolf-man?" asked Moananga, astonished.

"Perhaps, for a little while; for do not those who have been spat upon and reviled always wish to rule the spitters and the revilers? Yet I will tell who are Wi's brother and love him that, if he dies, I, who love him better and love no one else, save perhaps Foh, because he is his son, shall not live long after him. No, then I should pass on the chieftainship to you, Moananga, and be seen no more, though perhaps in the after years you might hear me at night howling round the huts in winter—with the wolves, Moananga, to which fools say I belong."

Moananga stared again at this sinister dwarf whose talk frightened him. Then, that he might talk of something else, asked him:

"Which of these two do you think will conquer, Pag?"

Pag stopped and pointed to the sea. At some distance from the shore a mighty struggle was in progress between a thrasher shark and a whale. The terrible shark had driven the whale into shallow water, where it floundered, unable to escape by sounding. Now the sea wolf, as it is called, was leaping high into the air, and each time as it fell it smote the whale upon the head with its awful sword-like tail, blow upon blow that echoed far and wide. The whale rolled in agony, beating the water to a foam with its giant flukes, but for all its size and bulk could do nothing. Presently, it began to gasp and opened its great mouth, whereon the thrasher, darting between its jaws, seized its tongue and tore it out. Then the whale rolled over and began to bleed to death.

"Look," said Pag. "There is Henga the huge and mighty and there is Wi the nimble, and Wi wins the day and will feed his fill upon whale's flesh, he and his friends. That is my answer, and the omen is very good. Now I go to make Wi ready for this battle."

When Pag reached the hut, he sent Aaka and Foh out of it, leaving himself alone with Wi. Then, causing Wi to strip off his cloak, he made him lie down and rubbed him all over with seal oil. Also, with a sharp flint and a shell ground to a fine edge, slowly and painfully he cut his hair short, so short that it could give no hold to Henga's hand, and, this done, greased what remained of it with the seal oil. Next he bade Wi sleep awhile and left the hut, taking with him Wi's stone axe, also his spear, that with which he had killed the wolf, and his flint knife that was hafted with two flat pieces of ivory rubbed down from a walrus tusk and lashed onto the end of the flint.

Outside the hut, he met Aaka, who was wandering to and fro in an ill-humour. She made as though she would pass him, setting her face toward the hut.

"Nay," said Pag, "you do not enter."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because Wi rests and must not be disturbed."

"So a misshapen monster, a wolf-man hated of all, who lives on bounty, may enter my husband's hut, when I, the wife, may not," she said furiously.

"Yes, for presently he goes upon a man's business, namely, to kill his enemy or be killed of him, and it is best that no woman should come near to him till the thing is ended."

"You say that because you hate women, who will not look on you, Pag."

"I say it because women take away the strength of men and suck out their courage and disturb them with weak words."

She leapt to one side as though to rush past him, but Pag leapt also, lifting the spear in his hand, whereon she stopped, for she feared the dwarf.

"Listen," he said. "You do ill to reproach me, Aaka, who am your best friend. Still, I do not blame you overmuch for I know the reason of your hate. You are jealous of me because Wi loves me more than he does you, as does Foh, in another fashion."

"Loves you, you abortion, you hideous one!" she gasped.

"Yes, Aaka, who, it seems, do not know that there are different sorts of love, that of the man for the woman which comes and goes, and that of man for man which changes not. I say that you are jealous. Only this day I told Wi that, if he had not taken me with him hunting but had left me to watch Fo-a, she would not have been stolen and killed by

yonder cave dweller. It was a lie. I could have refused to go hunting with Wi and he would have let me be, who knows that always I have a reason for what I do. I went with him because of words which you had spoken which you will remember well. I told you that Fo-a was in danger from Henga the cave-dweller and that I had best watch her, and you said that no girl child of yours should be watched by a wolf's cub and that you would take care of her yourself, which you did not do. Therefore, because you goaded me, I went hunting and Fo-a was taken and killed."

Now Aaka hung her head, answering nothing, for she knew that his words were true.

"Let that be," went on Pag. "The dead are dead, and well dead, perchance. Now, although I speak wisely to you, you would thwart me again and go in to awaken Wi, even when I tell you that to do so may turn the fight against him and bring about your death, and Foh's as well."

"Does Wi sleep?" asked Aaka, weakening a little.

"I think he sleeps because I bade him, and in such matters he obeys me. Also, last night he slept little. But the road is open and I have said my say. Go and look for yourself. Go wake him up and ask if he is asleep and wear him out with your woman's talk, and tell him what dreams have come to you about Fo- a and the gods, and thus make him ready to fight the devil giant, Henga."

"I go not," she said, stamping her foot, "lest, if Wi fall, your poisoned tongue should put it about that I was the cause of his death. But know, misshapen, outcast wolf-man, that, should he conquer and live, he must choose between you and me, for if he takes you to dwell with him in the cave, then I stay here in the hut."

Pag laughed deep down in his throat after his fashion and answered:

"That would be peace indeed, were it not, as I remember, that, if Henga dies, he leaves behind him sundry fair women who also live in the cave and doubtless will be hard to dislodge. Still, in this matter, as in all others, do what you will. Only I tell you, Aaka, that you do ill to revile me, whom you may need presently to help you out of the world."

Then, ceasing from his mockery and the rolling of his great head from side to side, as was his habit when he mocked, he looked her in the face with his one bright eye with which folk said he could see in the dark like a wild- cat, and said quietly:

"Why do you reproach me because I am hideous? Did I make my own shape or was it the gift of a woman? Did I throw away my right eye or did a woman dash it out against a stone? Afterward, did I leave the camp to starve in the winter, or did women drive me out because I told them the truth? Why are you angry with me because I love Wi who saved me from the cruelty of women, and your son Foh whom Wi caused to be? Why will you not understand that, although I be misshapen, yet I have more wisdom than all the rest of you and a larger heart, and that the wisdom and the heart are the servants of Wi and those with whom he has to do? Why should you be jealous of me?"

"Would you know, Pag? Because you speak truth. Because you are more to Wi than I am—yes, and to Foh also. When one comes whom Wi loves better than he does you, then we may be friends again, but not before."

"That may happen," said Pag reflectively. "Now trouble me no more, who go to make ready Wi's weapons for this fight and who have no time to waste. Go now to the hut; as I have said, the way is open, and tell your own tale to Wi."

Aaka hesitated, then she said:

"Nay, I come to help you with the weapons, for my fingers are defter than yours. Let there be peace between us for an hour, or gibe on if you will, and I will not answer."

Again Pag laughed his great laugh, saying:

"Women are strange, so strange that even I cannot weigh or measure them. Come on! Come on! The edges of the spear and axe need rubbing, and the lashings are worn."

For a while did Pag and Aaka, with the lad Foh to help them, fetching and carrying or holding hide strips, labour at the simple weapons of Wi, pointing the spear and grinding the edge of the axe. When this axe was as sharp as they could make it, Pag weighed the thing in his hand and cast it down with a curse.

"It is too light," he said. "What chance has this toy against the club of Henga?"

Then he rose and ran to his hovel at the back of the hut whence he returned bearing in his hand a glittering lump fashioned to the shape of an axe.

"See here," he said. "This is not much larger, yet it has thrice the weight. I found it on the mountainside, one of many shattered fragments, and last winter, working by the light of seal oil, I fashioned it."

Aaka took it in her hand, which it bore to the ground, so heavy was it. Then she felt its edge, which was sharper than that of new-flaked flint, and asked what it was.

"I don't know," answered Pag. "Outside it looks like stone that has been in hot fire, but see, within it shines. Also, it is so hard that I could only work it with another piece of the same stone, hammering it after it had lain in fire until it turned red, and polishing it with fine sand and water."

Here it may be stated that, although he knew it not, this substance was meteoric iron that had fallen from heaven, and that Pag, by the light of nature, had become one of the first of blacksmiths. When, finding that he could not touch it otherwise because of its hardness, he thrust that lump into a hot fire till it turned red and beat it upon a stone with another lump, he learned the use of iron and took one of mankind's first and greatest steps forward.

"It will not break?" said Aaka doubtfully.

"No," answered Pag. "I have tried. The blow that shatters the best stone axe leaves it unmarked. It will not break. But that which it hits will break. I made it for myself, but Wi shall have it. Now help me."

Then he produced the handle that, like the blade, was of a new sort, being fashioned with infinite patience and labour from the solid lower leg bone of a gigantic deer that he had found blackened and half fossilized when digging in a bog by the banks of a stream to make a waterhole, doubtless that of the noble creature that is now known as *cervus giganteus* or the Irish deer, which once roamed the woods of the early world. Having cut off a suitable length of this bone, he had made a deep slot, dividing the end in two to receive the neck of the axe, which it exactly fitted, projecting two inches or so above this neck. Now, with wonderful skill, helped by the others, he set to work, and with sinews and strips of damp hide cut from the skins of reindeer, he lashed haft and blade together, knotting the ends of the strips again and again. Then, having heated fossil gum, or amber of which there was plenty to be found on the shore, in a shell till it melted, he poured the resin over and between the hide strips, and as it cooled, rubbed it smooth with a piece of stone. This done, he plunged the finished axe into ice-cold water for a while, till the resin was quite solid, after which he held it in the smoke of the fire that burned near by to dry and shrink the hide strips by heat. Lastly, in case the first should have cracked, he poured on more resin, cooled it with a handful of snow, dried it in the smoke, and polished it.

At length all was finished, and with pride swelling in his heart, Pag held up the weapon, saying:

"Behold the finest axe the tribe has ever seen!"

"The bone will not shatter?" asked Aaka the doubtful.

"Nay," he answered as he rubbed the smoke-dulled resin, "I have tested it as I tested the blade. No man and no shock can break it. Moreover, see, to make sure I have lashed it about with hide at every thumb's length. Now let me go and wake Wi and arm him."

Still polishing the axe and its handle with a piece of skin as he went, Pag entered the hut very quietly, leaving Aaka without. Wi slept on like a child. Pag laid the axe upon the skin covering of his bed, and going to the head of the hut, hid himself in the shadow. Then he scraped with his foot on the floor, and Wi woke. The first thing his eyes fell on was this axe. He sat up, lifted the axe and began to examine it with eager eyes. When he had noted all its wonder—for to him it was a most marvellous thing made of a glittering stone such as he had never seen, that was thrice heavier than any stone, hafted with black bone as hard as walrus ivory with a knob at the end of it fashioned by rubbing down the knuckle joint, to save it from slipping through the hand, lashed about here and there with neatly finished strips of hide, double-edged and sharper than a flint flake, balancing in the grasp also—oh! surely he dreamed and this was such a weapon as the gods must use when they fought together in the bowels of the ice!

Pag waddled forward out of the shadow, saying:

"Time to arise, Wi. But tell me first, how do you like your new axe?"

"Surely the gods made it," gasped Wi. "With it I could kill a white bear single-handed."

"Yes, the gods made it; it is a gift to you from the gods. How they sent it, I will tell you afterward—that with it you may kill, not the white brute that prowls in the darkness, but a fiercer beast who ravens by day as well as by night. I tell you Wi, that this is the Axe of Victory; holding it, you cannot be conquered. Harken to me, Wi. Henga will rush at you with his great club. Leap to one side and smite with all your strength at his hands. If the blow from this axe falls upon them, or upon the handle of the club where he grasps it, they or it will be shorn through. Then, if his hands remain, he will rush at you again, striving to seize you and crush you in his grip, or to break your back or neck. If you have time, smite at his leg or knee, cutting the tendons or crippling him. Should he still get a hold of you, do your best to slip from his grasp, as being greased perhaps you may, and before he can catch you again, hew at his neck, or head, or backbone, as chance may offer, for this axe will not only bruise; it will sink in, and slay him. Above all, do not lose hold of the axe—see, there is a thong tied to its handle, twist it doubly round your wrist thus and it will not come off. Nay, to make sure, I will tie it there with a deer's sinew; hold out your hand."

Wi obeyed and, while very deftly Pag made the thong fast with the sinew, answered:

"I understand, though whether I shall be able to do all or any of these things, I do not know. Still it is a wondrous axe and I will try to use it well."

Then Pag rubbed more oil all over Wi, looked once more at the axe to make sure that the damp thongs had dried and shrunk tight upon the haft in the warmth of the fire, and that the amber resin had set hard, and, having given Wi a piece of dried fish soaked in seal oil to eat and a little drink of water, threw a skin cloak over his shoulders and led him from the hut.

Aaka was waiting outside, and with her Wi's brother, Moananga. She stared at Wi and asked:

"Who has cut off my man's hair?"

"I have," answered Pag, "for a good reason."

She stamped her foot, saying coldly:

"How dare you touch his hair which I loved to see him wear long? I hate you for it."

"Since you are minded to pick a quarrel with me, why not hate me for this as well as for anything else? Yet, Aaka, you may have cause to thank me for it in the end, though if so, it will only make you hate me more."

"That cannot be," said Aaka, and they went on toward the meeting place.

Here all the tribe was gathered in a ring, standing silent because they were too moved for speech. On the issue of this fight hung their fate. Henga they feared and hated, because he used them cruelly and brought any who murmured to their death, while Wi they liked well. Yet they dared say nothing who knew not how the fight would go and thought that no man could stand against the strength of the giant Henga or save himself from being crushed beneath his mighty club.

Still, they stared wonderingly at the new axe which Wi bore, and pointed to it, nudging each other. Also they marvelled because his hair had been cut off, for what reason they did not know, though they thought it must be as an offering to the gods.

The time came. Although because of the cold mist that hung over sea and shore the sun could not be seen, all knew that it was within an hour of its setting and grew more silent than before. Presently the voice of one who watched on the outskirts of the crowd called:

"He comes! Henga comes!" whereon, taking their eyes from Wi, they turned and stared toward the cave. Emerging from the shadow of the cliff, the giant appeared, walking toward them with a heavy tread but unconcernedly. Wi stooped down and kissed Foh his son, beckoning to Aaka to take charge of him. Then, followed by Moananga his brother and by Pag, he walked to the centre of the open space where Urk the Aged, the wizard, whose duty it was to recite the conditions of the duel in the ancient form, stood waiting. As he went, Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen called to him:

"Farewell, Wi, whom we shall see no more. We shall miss you very much, for I know not where we shall find so good a hunter or one who brings in so much meat."

Pag turned, glowering at him, and said:

"Me at least you shall see again, croaking raven!"

Taking no note, Wi walked on. As he went, it came into his mind that, while he lay asleep in the hut, he had dreamed a beautiful dream. He could not remember much of it, but its substance was that he was seated in a rich and lovely land where the sun shone and water rippled and birds sang, where the air was soft and warm and the wild creatures wandered round him unafraid and there was plenty of fragrant food to eat. Then, in that sweet place, came his daughter Fo-a, grown very fair and with a face that shone as moonlight shines upon the sea, and set a garland of white flowers about his neck.

This was all he could recall of the dream, nor, indeed, did he search for more of it, for this vision of Fo-a, the cruelly slain, brought tears of rage to his eyes. Yet of a sudden his strength seemed to double and he swore that he would kill Henga, even though afterward he must enter that happy land of peace in which she seemed to wander.

The chief appeared before him wearing his cloak of tigerskin and holding the great club in his left hand.

"It is well," muttered Pag to Wi. "Look, he is swollen; he has eaten all the salmon!"

Henga, who was followed by two servants or slaves, stopped at a little distance.

"What," he growled, "have I to fight this manikin's friends as well as himself?"

"Not yet, Henga," answered Moananga boldly. "First kill the manikin; afterward you can fight his friends."

"That will be easy," sneered Henga.

Then Urk advanced, waving a wand, and with a proud air called for silence.

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## THE DEATH OF HENGA

First, at great length, as master of the ancient customs of the tribe, Urk set out the law of such combats as that of Wi and Henga. He told how the chief only held his office and enjoyed his privileges by virtue of the strength of his body, as does the bull of a herd. When a younger and stronger than he arose, he might kill the chief, if he could, and take his place. Only, according to the law, he must do so in fair and open fight before the people, each combatant being armed with a single weapon. Then, if he conquered, the cave was his with those who dwelt there, and all would acknowledge him as chief; whereas, if he were conquered, his body would be thrown to the wolves, such being the fate of those that failed.

In short, though Urk knew it not, he was setting out the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, and the rights of the strong over the weak, as Nature preaches them in all her workings.

At this point, Henga showed signs of wishing to have done with Urk's oratory, being, for reasons of his own, quite certain of a speedy victory over an enemy whom he despised, and anxious to return to the cave to receive the praises of the womenfolk and to sleep off the salmon, which, as Pag guessed, he had devoured almost to the tail. But Urk would not be silenced. Here he was master as keeper of the oral records; head official and voice of the ceremonies of the tribe, who naturally regarded any departure from established customs as one of the worst of crimes.

Everything must be set out, Urk declared in a high and indignant voice, otherwise how would he earn his fee of the robe and weapons of the defeated?—here he cast covetous looks at Wi's strange axe, the like of which he had never seen before, although his withered arm could scarcely have found strength to lift it for a blow. He announced loudly that once before in his youth he had assisted his father, who was the First Wizard before him, to go through this ceremony, and the garment he still wore—here he touched the shiny, hairless, and tattered hide upon his shoulders—had been taken from the body of the conquered. If he were interrupted now, he added, as Wizard he would pronounce his most formidable curse upon the violator of tradition and privilege, and what that meant probably both of them would understand.

Wi listened and said nothing, but Henga growled out:

"Be swift then, old fool, for I grow cold, and soon there will not be enough light for me to see so to smash up this fellow, that even his dog would not know him again."

Then Urk set out the reasons that caused Wi to challenge, which, being angered by Henga's description of him as "old fool," he did with point and acidity. He told how Wi alleged that Henga oppressed the people, and gave startling instances of that oppression, all of them quite true. He told of the kidnapping and murder of Wi's daughter Fo-a, which Wi lay at the door of Henga, and of how the gods were wroth at such a crime. Warming to his work, indeed, he began to advance other grievances, not strictly connected with Wi; whereon Henga, able to bear no more, rushed at Urk and sent his frail old body flying with a kick of his huge foot.

As Urk picked himself up and hobbled off, calling down on Henga's head his widest if somewhat confused wizard's curse, Henga threw off his tigerskin cloak which a slave removed. As Wi did likewise, Pag, who took the garment, whispered to him:

"Beware! He has something hidden in his right hand. He plays a trick."

Then he hobbled off with the cloak, leaving the giant and the hunter facing each other at a distance of five paces.

Even as Pag went, Henga lifted his arm and with fearful force hurled at Wi a flint knife set in a whale's tooth for handle, which he had hidden in his great paw. But Wi, being warned, was watching, and as a shout of "Ill done!" went up from the crowd, dropped to the ground so that the knife whizzed over him. Next instant, he was up again, charging at Henga, who now grasped the club with both hands and swung it aloft to crush him.

Before it could fall, Wi, remembering Pag's counsel, smote with all his strength. Henga sloped the club sideways to protect his head. Wi's axe fell on it halfway up the handle, and the sharp steel, forged in heaven's furnace, shored through the tough wood, so that the thick part of the club fell to the ground, a sight that caused the people to shout with wonder.

Henga threw the handle at Wi, striking him on the head and, as he staggered back, picked up the thick end of the club. Wi paused to wipe the blood out of his eyes, for the broken stick had grazed his skin. Then again he charged at Henga, and keeping out of reach of the shortened club, strove to smite him on the knee, once more following the counsel of Pag. But the giant's arms were very long and the handle of Wi's axe was short, so that the task was difficult. At length, however, a blow went home and although no sinew was severed, cut into Henga's flesh above the knee so deeply that he roared aloud.

Maddened with rage and pain, the giant changed his plan. Dropping the club, as Wi straightened himself after the blow, he leapt at him and gripped him in his huge arms, purposing to break his bones or hug him to death as a bear does. They struggled together.

"All is over," said Whaka. "That man whom Henga embraces is dead."

Pag, who was standing beside him, smote him on the mouth, saying:

"Is it so? Look, raven, look!"

As he spoke, Wi slipped from the grasp of Henga as an eel slips from a child's hand. Again Henga caught him by the head, but Wi's hair having been cut and his scalp greased, he could not hold him. Then the giant smote at him with his great fist, a mighty blow that caught Wi upon the forehead and felled him to the ground. Before he could rise, Henga hurled himself onto him and the two struggled there upon the sand.

Never before had the tribe seen a fight like this, nor did tradition tell of such a one. They writhed, they twisted, they rolled over, now this one uppermost, and now that one. Henga tried to get Wi by the throat, but his hands would not hold on the oiled skin, and always the hunter escaped from that deadly grasp, and twice or thrice found opportunity to pound Henga's face with his fist.

Presently they were seen to rise together, the giant's arms still about Wi, whom he dared not loose because he was weaponless, while the axe still hung to the hunter's wrist. They wrestled, staggering to and fro, covered with blood and sand and sweat. The watchers shook their heads, for how, thought they, could any man stand against the weight and strength of Henga? But Pag, noting everything with his quick eye, whispered to Aaka, who forgetting her hate in her trouble and fear, had drawn near to him:

"Keep courage, woman. The salmon does its work. Henga tires."

It was true. The grip of the giant loosened, his breath came in short gasps, moreover, that leg into which the axe of Wi had cut began to fail and he dared not put all his weight upon it. Still, gathering up his strength, with a mighty effort he cast Wi from him with such force that the hunter fell to the ground and lay there a moment, as though he were stunned or the breath had been shaken out of him.

Now Moananga groaned aloud, waiting to see Henga spring upon his foe's prostrate form and stamp him to death. But some change came over the man. It was as though a sudden terror had taken him. Or perhaps he thought that Wi was dead. If so he did not wait to look, but turning, ran toward the cave. Wi, recovering his wits or his breath, or both, sat up and saw. Then, with a shout, he leapt to his feet and sped after Henga, followed by all the people; yes, even by Urk the Aged, who hobbled along leaning on his wand of office.

Henga had a long start, but at every step his hurt leg grew weaker, and Wi sped after him like a deer. At the very mouth of the cave, he overtook him, and those who followed saw the flash of a falling axe and heard the thud of its blow upon the back of Henga, who staggered forward. Then the pair of them vanished into the shadow of the cave, while the people halted without awaiting the issue, whatever it might be.

A little while later, there was a stir in the shadows; out of them a man appeared. It was Wi, who bore something in his hands, Wi with the red axe still hanging from his right arm. He staggered forward; a ray from the setting sun pierced the mists and struck full upon him and that which he carried. Lo! it was the huge head of Henga.

For a moment Wi stood still like one bemused, while the tribe shouted their welcome to him as chief by right of conquest. Then he swooned and fell forward into the arms of Pag who, seeing that he was about to fall, thrust himself past Aaka and caught him.

Because it was nigh at hand, Wi was carried into the cave, whence, now that he was fallen the body of the giant Henga was dragged as though it had been that of a dog and afterward, by the command of Wi, borne to the foot of the glacier and as he had vowed, laid there as an offering to the Ice-gods. Only some of those whom he had wronged and who hated him took his head and, climbing a dead pine that stood near by of which the top had been twisted out by the wind, stuck it upon the jagged point of the broken tree, where it remained, its long locks floating on the wind, grinning with empty eyes at the huts below.

When they entered it, this cave, which was very great, was found to be full of women who, although he was still senseless, hastened to do reverence to Wi as their future lord, and hung about him till, with the help of Moananga and others, Pag drove them all out, saying that if the chief Wi wanted any of them back again, he could send for them. He added that he did not think this probable because they were all so ugly, which was not true. So they went away, seeking shelter where they could, and were very angry with Pag, more because he had said that they were ugly than because he had driven them out, which they guessed he had done because he did not trust them and feared lest they, Henga's wives, should do Wi a mischief by poison or otherwise.

Wi, being laid upon Henga's bed in a side cave near to a brightly burning fire, soon recovered from his swoon and, having drunk some water that one of the slaves of the place gave to him, for these were not driven out with the women, asked first for Foh, whom he embraced, and next for Pag, whom he bade to find Aaka. But Aaka, learning that he was recovered and little hurt, had gone, saying that she must attend to the fire in her hut, lest it should go out, but would return in the morning.

So Pag and Moananga fed Wi with food they found in the place, among it a piece of that salmon which Henga had left to eat after the fight. Having swallowed this, Wi turned over and went to sleep, being utterly outworn, so that he could not even speak. Foh crept onto the bed by his side, for he would not leave his father, and did likewise.

Wi slept all night and woke in the morning to find himself alone, for Foh had gone. He was very stiff and bruised, with a lump on the back of his head where he had fallen when Henga threw him to the ground. Also, he was sore all

over from the grip of the giant's hands, and there was a deep cut on his forehead where the handle of the club had struck him, and his skin was scratched by Henga's claw-like nails. Still, he felt within himself that no bone was broken and that his body was sound and whole. Thankfulness filled his heart that this should be so, when he might well have been as Henga was to-day.

To whom did he owe this safety—the Ice-gods? Perhaps, and if so, he thanked them, he who did not desire to die and felt that he had work to do for the people. Yet the Ice-gods seemed very cold and far away, and although the stone had fallen, it might have been by chance, so that he wondered whether they troubled themselves about him and his fate. Pag thought that there were no gods, and perhaps he was right. At least this was clear, that, if it had not been for Pag, the gods would not have saved him yesterday from Henga the giant, the mightiest man that was told of in the tale of the tribe even by Urk and others, who made up stories and sang them by the fire on winter nights, Henga who once had caught a wild bull by the horns and twisted its neck with his hands.

Pag it was who had oiled him all over and cut off his hair so that Henga could not hold him. Pag it was who had made and given to him the wonderful axe that lay on the bed beside him, its thong still about his wrist, without which he never could have smitten Henga down as he gained the safety of his cave, or dealt him that deep cut upon the leg which caused him to give up the fight and run even when he, Wi, lay prostrate on the ground; caused him, too, to limp and stumble in his flight so that he could be overtaken. Pag it was, too, who had put a great heart into him, telling him not to be afraid for he would conquer on that day, words which he remembered even when all seemed finished. And now Henga was dead, for after he fell, smitten on the back, two blows of the wonderful axe had hewed right through his thick neck as no other weapon could have done, Fo-a was avenged, Foh and Aaka were saved, and he, Wi, was lord of the cave and chief of the people. Therefore he, Wi, swore this, that Pag, though a dwarf deformed, whom all hated and named wolf-man, should be next to him among them and his counsellor. Yes, he swore it, although he knew that it would please Aaka little because of her jealous heart.

Whilst he lay and thought thus, by the light that crept into the cave Wi noticed that three of the women, the youngest and fairest among them, had returned to the place and were standing together at a distance, talking and looking toward him. Presently they came to a decision, for they advanced very quietly, which caused Wi to grip his axe. Seeing that his eyes were open, they knelt down and touched the ground with their foreheads, calling him lord and master, saying that they wished to stay with him who was so great and strong that he had killed Henga, and swearing to be faithful to him.

Wi listened astonished, not knowing what to answer. Least of all did he wish to take these women into his household, if for no other reason because anyone whom Henga had touched was hateful to him, yet, being kind-hearted, he did not desire to tell them this roughly. While he was seeking for soft words, one of the women crept forward, still upon her knees, and seizing his hand, pressed it against her forehead and kissed it. It was at this moment that Aaka appeared and followed by Pag. The women sprang up and, running a few paces, huddled themselves together, while Pag laughed hoarsely, and Aaka, drawing herself to her full height, said:

"It seems that you soon make yourself at home in your new house, Husband, since already I find Henga's cast-offs kissing you in love."

"Love!" answered Wi. "Am I in a state for love? The women came—I did not seek them."

"Oh! yes, without doubt they came, knowing where they would be welcome, Husband; indeed, perhaps, they never went away. Of a truth, I perceive that there will be no room for me in this chief's cave. Well, I am glad of it, who love my own hut better than such a darksome hole."

"Yet often, Wife, I have heard you say when the wind whistled through the hut in winter, that you wished you lay safe and warm in this cave."

"Did I? Well, I have changed my mind, who had never seen the place, not having been one of Henga's family."

"Peace, Woman," said Pag, "and let us see how the chief Wi fares. As for those slaves, I have hunted them out once and presently will do so again. Chief, we bring you food. Can you eat?"

"I think so," answered Wi, "if Aaka will hold me up."

Aaka looked wrathfully at the women and still more wrathfully at Pag, so that Wi thought that she was about to refuse. If so, she changed her mind and supported Wi, who was too stiff to stand up alone, while Foh, who had now returned, fed him with pieces of food, chattering all the while about the fight.

"Were you not afraid for your father?" asked Wi at length, "who must fight a giant twice his size?"

"Oh, no," said Foh cheerfully. "Pag told me that you would win in the end and that therefore I must never be afraid, and Pag is always right. Still," he added, shaking his head, "when I saw you lying on the ground and not moving and believed that Henga was about to jump on you, then I began to think that for once Pag might be wrong."

Wi laughed and, lifting his hand with difficulty, patted Foh's curling hair. Pag in the background growled:

"Never think that I am wrong again, for the god lives on the faith of his worshippers"—words that Foh did not in the least understand. Nor did Aaka quite, but guessing that Pag was comparing himself to a god, she hated him more than ever and frowned. Although she believed in them after her fashion, because her forefathers had done so before her, she was not a spiritual woman and did not like his talk of gods, who, if, in fact, they existed at all, were, she was

sure, beings to be feared. It was true that she had sent Wi to worship the Ice-gods in which he put faith and to watch for the sign of the falling stone. But that was because she had made up her mind that the time had come for him to fight Henga and avenge the death of Fo-a, if he could, taking the risk of being killed, and knew that at this time of year at sunrise a stone was almost certain to fall from the crest of the glacier which was strewn with hundreds of them, and that without some sign he would not move. Indeed, she had made sure that one or more of those stones would fall upon that very morning. Also, she had some gift of foresight with which women are often endowed, especially among Northern people, that told her Wi would conquer Henga. She said that something of this had been revealed to her, and it was true enough that she had dreamed that Fo-a had appeared and told her that Wi would work vengeance upon Henga, because the thirst for vengeance and desire for the death of Henga were always present to her mind.

Therefore she frowned and told Foh sharply that it was foolish to believe sayings because they came out of the mouth of Pag.

"Yet, Mother," answered Foh, "what Pag said was true. Moreover, he made the wonderful, sharp axe, and he oiled Father's skin and cut off his hair, which none of us thought of doing."

Now Pag, wishing to stop this talk, broke in:

"These things are nothing, Foh, and if I did them, it is only because a hideous deformed one such as I am, who was born different from others, must think and protect himself and those he loves by wisdom, as do the wolves and other wild beasts. People who are handsome like your father and mother do not need to think, for they protect themselves in different ways."

"Yet perhaps they think as much as you do, dwarf," said Aaka angrily.

"Yes, Aaka, doubtless they think, only to less purpose. The difference is that such as I think right and they think wrong."

Without waiting for an answer, Pag waddled off very swiftly on some business of his own. Aaka watched him go with a puzzled look in her fine eyes, then asked:

"Is Pag going to live with you in this cave, Husband?"

"Yes, Wife. Now that I am chief, he to whom I owe so much, he the Wise and the Axe-Giver, will be my counsellor."

"Then I shall live in my hut," she answered, "where you can visit me when it pleases you. I hate this place, it smells of Henga and his slave women, bah!"

Then she went away, to return later, it is true. Yet, as to sleeping in the cave, she kept her word—that is, until winter came.

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## THE OATH OF WI

Being very strong and healthy, Wi soon recovered from this great fight, although for a time he suffered from festering sores where he had been scratched by Henga, whose nails, it would seem, were poisonous as are a wolf's teeth. Indeed, on the following day, he came out of the cave and was received by all the people who were waiting without to give him welcome as the new chief. This they did very heartily, and next, through the mouth of Urk the Aged, went on to set out their grievances, of which they had prepared a long list. These they suggested, he, the present ruler, should redress.

First they complained of the climate, which of late years had grown so strangely cold and sunless. As to this, he answered that they must make prayer to the Ice-gods, whereon someone cried out that, if they did, these gods would only send them more ice, of which they had enough already, an argument that Wi could not combat. He said, however, that perhaps the weather had changed because of the evil doings of Henga, and now that he had gone it might change again.

Next they went on to speak of a delicate and domestic matter. Women, they pointed out, were very scarce among them, so much so that some men, although they were prepared to marry the ugliest or the most evil-tempered, could find no wives and make no homes. Yet certain of the strongest and richest took as many as three or four into their households, while the late chief, by virtue of his rank and power, had swallowed up from fifteen to twenty of the youngest and best-looking, whom they supposed Wi intended to keep for himself.

On this point Wi replied that he intended nothing of the sort, as he would make clear in due season, and for the rest, that women were few because of their habit of exposing female children at birth, rather than be at the pains of rearing and feeding them.

Then they went on to other matters, such as the pressure of taxation, or its primeval equivalent. The chief took too much, they said, and gave too little. He did not work himself and produced nothing, yet he and all his great household expected to be supported in luxury and with the best. Moreover, he seized their wives and daughters, raided their stores of food or skins, and occasionally committed murder.

Lastly, he favoured certain rich men among them—here Urk looked hard at Turi the Food-Hoarder, the Avaricious, and at Rahi the Rich, the trader in fish hooks, skins, and flint instruments, which he caused to be manufactured by forced labour, only paying the makers with a little food in times of want. These rich men, they alleged, were protected in their evil-doing by the chief, to whom they paid a heavy tithe of their ill-gotten goods, in return for which he promoted them to positions of honour and gave them fine names such as Counsellor, ordering that others should bow down to them.

Wi said that he would look into these practices and try to put a stop to them.

Finally, they called attention to the breaking of their ancient customs, as when he who had killed an animal, or trapped it in a pit, or found it dead, or caught it fishing, and proposed to lay it up for the winter, was robbed of it by a horde of hungry idlers who wished to live on the industrious without toiling for themselves.

Into this matter also Wi said that he would inquire.

Then he announced that he summoned the whole tribe to a gathering on the day of the next full moon, when he would announce the results of his deliberations and submit new laws to be approved by the tribe.

During the time which elapsed between this meeting and that of the full moon, namely, seventeen days, Wi thought a great deal. For hours he would walk upon the shore, accompanied only by Pag, whom Aaka contemptuously named his "shadow," with whom he consulted deeply. Toward the end of the time, also, he called in Urk the Aged, Moananga his brother, and two or three other men, none of the latter of much prominence, but whom he knew to be honest and industrious.

The rest of the tribe, devoured by curiosity, tried to wring from these men what it might be that the chief talked of with them. They would say nothing. Then they set the women on to them, who, being even more curious, did their best by means of many wiles to find out what all wanted to know. Even Tana, Moananga's wife, the sweet and gentle, played a part in this game, saying that she would not speak to him or even look at him until he told her. But he would not, nor would the others, whereupon it was decided that Wi, or Pag, or both of them, must have some great magic, since it sufficed to bridle the tongues of men even when women tempted them.

Now a strange thing happened. From the day that Wi became chief, the weather mended. At length the cold, snowy-looking clouds rolled away; at length the piercing wind ceased to blow out of the north and east; at length, though very late, the spring, or rather the summer, came, for that year there was no spring. Seals appeared, though not in their usual quantity, the salmon, which seemed to have been icebound, ran up the river in shoals, while eider and other ducks arrived and nested.

"Late come, soon gone," said Pag, as he noted these things; "still, better than nothing."

Thus it came about that, on the appointed day, the tribe, full of food and in high good humour, met its chief, whom it felt to be an auspicious person. Even Aaka was good-humoured, and when Tana, who was her relation both by

blood and because she was the wife of Wi's brother, asked her what was about to happen, she answered, laughing:

"I don't know. But no doubt we shall be told some nonsense which Wi and that wolf-man make up together—empty words like the cackling of wild geese, which makes a great noise and is soon forgot."

"At any rate," said Tana inconsequently, "Wi is behaving very well to you, for I know that he has sent away all those women slaves of Henga."

"Oh! yes, he is behaving well enough, but how long will it last? Is it to be expected, now that he has become chief, that he will be different from other chiefs, seeing that one man is like the rest? They are all the same. Moreover," she added acidly, "if he has sent away the women, he has kept Pag."

"What can that matter to you?" asked Tana, opening her big eyes.

"Much more than all the rest, Tana. If you could understand it, which you cannot, it is of Wi's mind that I am jealous, not of anything else about him, and this dwarf has his mind."

"Indeed!" said Tana, staring at her. "There is a strange fancy. For my part, anyone is welcome to Moananga's mind. It is of him that I am jealous, and with very good reason, not of his mind."

"No," said Aaka sharply, "because he has not got one. With Wi it is otherwise; his mind is more than his body, and that is why I would keep it for myself."

"Then you should learn to be as clever as Pag," answered Tana, with gentle irritation as she turned to talk to someone else.

The people were gathered at the Talking-place in front of the cave, the same spot where Wi had conquered Henga. There they stood or sat in a semicircle, those of the more consequence in front and the rest behind. Presently, Wini-wini blew a blast on his horn, a strong and steady blast, for this time he feared no evil from rocks or otherwise to announce the appearance of the chief. Then Wi, clad in the tigerskin cloak that Henga used to wear, which, as Aaka remarked, was too big for him and much frayed, advanced followed by Moananga, Urk, Pag, and the others, and sat down upon a stool made from two joints of the backbone of a whale lashed together, which had been placed there in readiness for him.

"Is all the tribe gathered here?" asked Wini-wini the Herald, to which spokesmen answered that it was, except a few who would not come.

"Then hearken to the chief Wi the Great Hunter, a mighty man, the conqueror of Henga the Evil, that is, unless anyone wishes first to fight him for his place," and he paused.

As nobody answered—for who in his senses wished to face the wonderful axe that had chopped off the great head of Henga, whereof the hollow eyes still stared at them from the broken trunk of a neighbouring tree?—Wi rose and began his address, saying:

"O people of the tribe, we believe that there are no others like us anywhere—at least, we have seen none upon the beach or in the woods around, though it is true that, in the ice yonder, behind the mighty Sleeper, is something that looks like a man. If so, he died long ago, unless indeed he is a god. Perhaps he was a forefather of the tribe who went into the ice to be buried there. Being therefore the only men, and, though it is true that in some ways they are stronger than we are, much greater than the beast people, for we can think and talk and build huts, and do things that the beasts cannot do, it is right that we should show how much better we are than they by our conduct to each other." As it had never occurred to the people to compare themselves relatively to the animals around them, these lofty sentiments were received in silence. Indeed, if they thought about the matter at all, most of them, comparing men and the beasts, would have been inclined to give the palm to the latter.

Could any man, they would have said, and in fact did say in private argument afterward, match the strength of the aurochs, the wild bull of the woods, or of the whale of the waters. Could any man swim like a seal or fly like a bird, or be as swift and savage as the striped tiger that dwelt or used to dwell in caves, or hunt in packs like the fierce ravening wolves, or build such houses as the birds did, or fly through the air, or do many other things with the perfection of the creatures which lived and moved in the seas and sky or upon the earth? While, as for the other side of the matter, were not these creatures in their own way as clever as man was? Also, although their language was not to be understood, did they not talk together as men did and worship their own gods? Who could doubt it that had heard the wolves and dogs howling at the moon? But of all this at that time they said nothing.

Having laid down this general rule, Wi went on to say that, as things were thus, he had given ear to the complaints of the people, and after consulting with sundry of the wisest among them, had determined that the time had come to make new laws which all must bind themselves to obey. Or if all would not, then those who refused must give way to the majority who consented to them, or if they rebelled, must be treated as evildoers and punished. If they agreed to this, let them say so with one voice.

This they did, first because they were tired of sitting still and it gave them an opportunity of shouting, and second because they had not heard the laws. Only one or two of the most cunning exclaimed that they would like to hear the laws first, but these were overruled by the cries of general approbation.

"To begin with," continued Wi, "there was the matter of scarcity of women, which could only be remedied to some extent by every man in future binding himself to be content with a single wife, as he, Wi, was prepared to do, swearing

by the gods that he would keep to his oath and calling down on his own head and on the head of the people of which he was the chief the anger and the vengeance of the gods should he break it and should they allow him to do so."

Now, in the silence which followed this amazing announcement, Tana whispered to Aaka delightedly:

"Do you hear, Sister? What do you think of this law?"

"I think that it amounts to nothing at all," answered Aaka contemptuously. "Wi and the other men will obey it until they see someone who makes them wish to break it; moreover, many of the women will find it hateful. When they grow old, will they wish to have to do all the work of the household and to cook the food for the whole family? That for this law, which is foolish, like all new things!" Here she snapped her fingers. "Still, let it go on, seeing that it will give us a stick with which to beat our husbands when they forget it, as doubtless Wi himself will find out before all is done, the silly dreamer who thinks that he can change the nature of men with a few words. Unless, indeed, it was Pag who put it into his head, Pag who is neither man nor woman, but just a dwarf and a wolfhound."

"Wolfhounds are very useful sometimes, Aaka," said Tana reflectively, then turned to listen to the voices about her.

These, as it happened, were many, for as soon as the meaning of Wi's startling proposal had come home to the minds of his audience, great tumult arose. All the men who had no wives, or wished for those of others, shouted for joy, as did many of the women who were members of large households and therefore much neglected. On the other hand, some of the lords of those households protested with vigour, whereas others acquiesced with a shrug and a smile.

Long and loud was the debate, but at length it ended in a compromise, the polygamists agreeing to the proposal provided that they were allowed to keep that wife whom they liked best; also, to change her when they wished, by mutual consent of all concerned. As public opinion among the tribe, an easy-going folk, was tolerant on such matters, ultimately his solution was accepted by all except by Wi himself. He, with the new-born enthusiasm of the reformer, and as one who wished to set an example, rose and exempted himself solemnly from the arrangement.

"Others may do what they will," he said, "but it is known that I, the chief, will never change my wife while she lives, no, not even if she desires me to do so, which can scarcely happen. Hearken, O People, once more I swear by the gods to lay their curse upon me if I break this, my oath. Moreover, lest at any time I should grow weak and foolish and be tempted so to do, I pray the gods, if that chances, to lay their curse upon the people also, all of them, from the oldest to the youngest."

Here some of his audience grew uneasy and a voice shouted out:

"For what reason?"

"Because," answered Wi, in his burning zeal, "knowing the evil that my ill-doing would bring upon your heads, never would I yield to folly, I who am your chief and your protector. Also, if I went mad and did such a thing, you could kill me."

Silence followed this remarkable declaration, in the midst of which Hotoa the Slow-speeched at last got out a question.

"How would killing you help us, Wi, if the curse for which you have been asking had already fallen upon our heads? Moreover, who is likely to kill you while you have that wonderful axe with which you chopped Henga in two?" he asked.

Before Wi could think of a suitable answer, for the question was shrewd and the point one which he had not considered, the general argument broke out again, many women taking part in it at the top of their voices, so that he lost his opportunity. At length three men were thrust forward, a somewhat ominous trio as it happened, Pitokititi the Unlucky, Hou the Unstable, and Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, of whom Whaka was the spokesman.

"Chief Wi," he said, "the people have heard your proposals as to marriage. Many of us do not like them because they overthrow old customs. Still, we acknowledge that something must be done lest the people should come to an end, for those who have many wives bring up no more children than those who have but one. Also, the unmarried turn into murderers and thieves both of women and of other property. Therefore, we accept the new law for a period of five summers, which will give us time to see how it works. Also, we note your oath that you will take no other wife while Aaka lives and that you call down the curse of the gods upon yourself if you do so. We do not think that you will keep that oath, for, being a chief, who can do what he likes, why should you? But when you break it, we shall wait to see if the curse falls upon you. As for the rest, that you call it down on the people also, with that we will have nothing to do, nor do we believe it. For why should the people suffer because you break an oath? If there are gods, they will be avenged upon him who does the wrong, not on others who are innocent. Therefore, speaking on behalf of the people, I say that we accept your law, though for myself I add that I am sure no good can ever come of the changing of ancient customs. Indeed, I daresay that the curse will fall upon you and that soon you will be dead."

Thus spoke Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, fulfilling his repute, and retired with his companions.

By now it was growing dark, for all this debate had taken a long time; moreover, many of the people had slipped away to try to make new arrangements in view of this sudden and unexpected revolution in their matrimonial law. Therefore, Wi adjourned the discussion of the next rule of his new code, that which dealt with the exposure of unwanted female infants, till the morrow, and the tribal conference broke up.

That night, he slept in the hut where he lived before he became chief, and at the evening meal tried to open a discussion with Aaka on his great new law. She listened for a minute, then remarked that she had heard enough of it that afternoon, and if he wanted to talk more of the matter instead of eating his food and discussing what was of real importance, namely, how she should lay up her winter stores now that he had become chief, he had better do so with his counsellor Pag.

This retort angered Wi, who said:

"Do you not understand that this law makes women taller by a head than they have been, for now they are the equals of men, who give up much?"

"If so," answered Aaka, "you should first have asked us whether we wished to grow taller. Had you done so, you would have found, I think, that the most of us were content to remain the same size, seeing that we do not desire more work and more children. Still, it matters little, for your law is all nonsense, one made by fools, of whom I should hold you the biggest, did I not know that you speak with the mouth of Pag the woman-hater and the cutter down of old trees." (By this she meant the destroyer of old customs.) "Man is man and woman is woman, and what they have done from the beginning they will continue to do. Nor will you change them by talking, Wi, although you think yourself so clever. Yet, I am glad to learn that I shall have no pert girls thrust into my household, or so you swore, calling down curses on your own head in the presence of many witnesses, like a fool, for when you break the oath you will find them troublesome to deal with."

Then, with a sigh, Wi grew silent. He had thought to please Aaka, whom he loved and had suffered much to win, and who, he knew, loved him in her fashion, although often she treated him so roughly. Still, he noted that it was her purpose to take advantage of this law, so far as she was concerned, and to keep him for herself alone. Why, then, he wondered, did she belittle that of which she meant to take advantage, a thing which no man would do? Then he shrugged his shoulders and began to talk of the winter food and of the plans which he and Pag had made whereby all would be assured of plenty.

That night, toward dawn, they were awakened by a great tumult. Women shrieked and men shouted. The boy Foh, who slept on the other side of the hut behind a skin curtain, crept out to see what was the matter, thinking, perhaps, that the wolves had carried off someone. Presently he returned and reported that there was fighting going on, but he did not know what about.

Now Wi wished to rise, and look into the matter, but Aaka bade him lie still, saying:

"Keep quiet. It is your new law at work, that is all."

When morning came, this proved to be true enough. Some wives of old husbands had run away from them to young lovers, and some men who had no wives had captured or tried to capture them by force, with the result that there was much fighting, in which one old man had been killed and others, male and female, injured.

Aaka laughed at Wi about this business, but he was so sad that he did not try to answer her, only he said:

"You treat me hardly, Wife, of late, who am trying to do my best and who love you, as I proved long ago when I fought a man who wished to take you against your will and killed him, which brought much anger and trouble on me. Then you thanked me and we came together and for years lived happily. At last Henga, who hated me and had always desired to take you into the cave, caught our daughter Fo-a and killed her, and from that time you who loved Fo-a more than you do Foh, have changed toward me, although that this happened was no fault of mine."

"It was your fault," she answered, "for you should have stayed to watch Fo-a instead of going out to hunt to please yourself."

"I did not hunt to please myself, I hunted to get meat. Moreover, if you had asked me, I would have left Pag to watch the girl."

"So the dwarf has been telling you that tale, has he? Then know the truth. He did offer to stay with Fo-a, but I would not have that hideous beast guarding my daughter."

"Pag has told me no tale, though it is true that, doubtless to shield you, he reproached me for having taken him out hunting when there was danger from Henga. Wife, you have done ill, for, if you hate Pag, yet he loves me and mine, and had you allowed him to bide with Fo-a, she would have been alive to-day. But let that matter be—the dead are dead and we shall see them no more. Afterward, I prayed to the gods, as you wished, and challenged Henga, and killed him, taking vengeance on him, as you also wished, Pag helping me with his wisdom and by the gift of the axe. And now I have driven away all the chief's women, who were mine by right of custom, and have made a law that henceforth a man shall have but one wife; and, that I might set an example as chief, have called down curses on my head; and, that I might never weaken in this matter, on the tribe, too, if I myself should break that law. And yet you are still bitter against me. Have you then ceased to love me?"

"Would you know the truth, Wi?" she answered, looking him in the eyes. "Then I will tell you. I have not, I who never had a thought toward another man. I love you as well as I did on the day when you killed Rongi for my sake. But hearken—I love not Pag, who is your chosen friend, and it is to Pag that you turn, not to me. Pag is your counsellor—not I. It is true that since Fo-a was killed all water is bitter to my taste and all meat is sprinkled with sand, and in place of my heart a stone beats in my breast, so that I care for nothing and am as ready to die as to live, which I thought I

must do when the huge cave dweller hurled you down. Yet I say this to you—drive out Pag, as you can do, being chief, and, so far as I am able, I will be to you what I was before, not only your wife, but your counsellor. Choose then between me and Pag.”

Now Wi bit his lip, as was his fashion when perplexed, and looked at her sadly, saying:

“Women are strange; also they know not the thing that is just. Once I saved Pag’s life, and because of that he loves me; also, because he is very wise, the wisest, I think, of all the people, I listen to his words. Further, by his craft and counsel, and with the help of the gift he gave me,” and he looked at the axe hanging from his wrist, “I slew Henga, who without these should now myself be dead. Also, Foh, our son loves him, and he loves Foh, and with his help I have fashioned new laws which shall make life good for all the tribe. Yet you say to me, ‘Drive out Pag, my friend and helper,’ knowing that, if he ceased to sit in my shadow, the women, who are his enemies, would kill him, or he must wander away and live like a wild beast in the woods. Wife, if I did this, I should be a treacherous dog, not a man, and much less a chief whose duty it is to do justice to all. Why, because you are jealous of him, do you ask such a thing of me?”

“For my own reasons, Wi, which are enough. Well, I ask, and you do not grant, so go your road and I will go mine, though among the people it need not be known that we have quarrelled. As for these new laws, I tell you that they will bring you trouble and nothing else. You seek to cut down an old tree and to plant a better in its place, but, if it ever grows at all, you will be dead before it keeps a drop of rain from off you. You are vain and foolish, and it is Pag who has made you so.”

Thus they parted, Wi going away full of sadness, for now he was sure that nothing he could say or do would change Aaka’s heart. Had he been as were the others of the people, he would have rid himself of her and taken another wife, leaving her to take another husband, if she chose. But Wi was not like the rest of the tribe; he was one born out of his time, a forerunner, one with imagination who could understand others and see with their eyes. He understood that Aaka was jealous by nature, jealous of everyone, not only of other women. That which she had she wanted to keep for herself alone; she would rather that Wi should lack guidance and help than that he should find these in the dwarf Pag or in other men. She was even jealous of her son Foh, because he loved him, his father, better than he did her.

Now, with Fo-a it had been otherwise, for, although he had loved her so much, she had taken little note of her father and had clung close to her mother. So, when Fo-a was killed, Aaka had lost everything; moreover, she knew that she herself was to blame, for when Wi went hunting, as he must, she would not suffer Pag to protect the child, both because she hated him and because Fo-a liked Pag. Therefore, through her own folly, she had lost her daughter, and knew that this was so, and yet blamed, not herself, but Wi, because Pag was his friend—which caused her to hate Pag so much that she would not suffer him to guard Fo-a. From that moment, as she had said, water had become bitter to her, and all meat full of sand; she was soured and different from what she had been—indeed, another woman.

In the old days, with a kind of trembling joy she had thought how one day Wi might become chief of the tribe; now she did not care whether he were chief or not; even to have become the first woman in the tribe gave her no pleasure. For the blow of the death of Fo-a, although she knew it not, had fallen on her brain and disturbed her reason—the more so because she was sure that she would bear no other children. Yet, deep in her heart, she loved Wi better than she had ever done and suffered more than she could have told because she feared lest some other woman should appear to whom he might turn for the fellowship and comfort she would no longer give.

Now, all these things Wi knew better than did Aaka herself, because by nature he was a man with an understanding heart, although but a poor savage who as yet had no pot in which to boil his food. Therefore, he was very sad and yet determined to be patient, hoping that Aaka’s mind would right itself and that she would change her face toward him.

When Wi reached the cave, he found Pag waiting for him with food, which Foh, who had gone before him at the break of day, served with much stir and mystery. Eating of this food—it was a small salmon new run from the sea—Wi noted, oddly enough, that it was cooked in a new fashion and made savoury with salt, shellfish, and certain herbs.

“I have never tasted the like of this before,” he said. “How is it prepared?”

Then, with triumph, Foh pointed out to him a vessel hollowed from a block of wood which stood by the fire, and showed him that in this vessel water boiled.

“How is it done?” asked Wi. “If wood is placed upon fire, it burns.”

Next Foh raked away some ashes, revealing in the heart of the fire a number of red-hot stones.

“It is done thus, Father,” he said; “for days I have been hollowing out that block of black wood which comes from the swamp where it lay buried, by burning it, and when it was charred, cutting it away with a piece of that same bright stone of which your axe is made. Then, when it was finished and washed, I filled it with water and dropped red-hot stones into it till the water boiled. After this, I put in the cleaned fish with the oysters and the herbs, and kept on dropping in red-hot stones till the fish was cooked. That’s how it is done, Father—and is the fish nice?” and he laughed and clapped his hands.

“It is very nice, Son,” said Wi, “and I would that I had more stomach to eat it. But who thought of this plan, which is clever?”

“Oh! Pag thought of it, Father, but I did nearly all the work.”

“Well, Son, take away the rest of the fish and eat it, and then go wash out your pot lest it should stink. I tell you that you and Pag have done more than you know and that soon you will be famous in the tribe.”

Then Foh departed rejoicing, and afterward even took the pot to his mother to show her all, expecting that she would praise him. But in this he was disappointed, for when she learned that Pag had hit upon this plan, she said that, for her part, she was content with food cooked as her forefathers had cooked it from the beginning, and that she was sure that seethed flesh would make those who ate of it very sick.

But it did not make them sick, and soon this new fashion spread and the whole tribe might be seen burning hollows in blocks of wood, cutting away the char that was left with their chipped flints, and when the pots were finished, making water boil with the red-hot stones and placing in it meat that was tough from having been stored in the ice, or fish or eggs, or whatever they needed to cook. Thus, those who were old and toothless could now eat again and grew fat; moreover, the health of the tribe improved much, especially that of the children, who ceased to suffer from dysentery brought on by the devouring of lumps of flesh charred in the fire.

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## CHAPTER 8

### PAG TRAPS THE WOLVES

On the afternoon of this day of his quarrel with Aaka and of the boiling of the salmon, Wi and his counsellors again met the tribe in front of the cave to declare to them more of his new laws. This time, however, not so many attended because, as a fruit of the first law, a number of them were laid by hurt, while others were engaged quarrelling over the women, or, if they belonged to the unmarried, in building huts large enough to hold a wife.

At once, before the talk began, many complaints were laid as to the violence worked upon the previous night, and demands made for compensation for injuries received. Also, there were knotty points to be decided as to the allotment of women when, for example, three or four men wished to marry one girl, which of them was to take her.

This, Wi decided, must be settled by the girl choosing which of them she would, an announcement that caused wonder and dismay, since never before had a woman been allowed to make choice in such a matter, which had been settled by her father, if he were known, or, more frequently, by her mother, or sometimes, if there were none to protect her, by her being dragged off by the hair of her head by the strongest of her suitors after he had killed or beaten the others.

Soon, however, Moananga and Pag pointed out to him that, if he stopped to hear and give judgment on all these causes, no more new laws would be declared for many days. Therefore, he adjourned them till some future time, and set out the second law, which declared that, in future, no female child should be cast forth to be taken by the wolves or to perish of cold, unless it were deformed. This announcement caused much grumbling, because, said the grumblers, the child belonged to the parents and especially to the mother, and they had a right to do with their own as they wished.

Then an inspiration seized Wi and he uttered a great saying which afterward was to be accepted by most of the world.

"The child comes from heaven and belongs to the gods, whose gift it is and who will require account of it from those to whom it has been lent," he said.

These words, so amazing to the people, who had never even dreamed their like, were received in astonished silence. Urk the Aged, sitting at Wi's side, muttered that he had never heard anything of the sort from his grandfather, while Pag the Sceptic, behind him, asked:

"To what gods?"

Again an inspiration came to Wi, and he answered aloud:

"That we shall learn when we are dead, for then the hidden gods will become visible."

Next, he went on hastily to declare the punishment for the breaking of this law. It was terrible: namely, that the casters-forth should themselves be cast forth to suffer the same fate and that none should succour them.

"But if we had no food for the children?" cried a voice.

"Then, if that is proved to be so, I, the chief, will receive them and care for them as though they were my own, or give them to others who are barren."

"Surely soon we shall have a large family," Aaka remarked to Tana.

"Yes," said Tana. "Still, Wi has a great heart, and Wi is right."

At this point, as though by general consent, the meeting broke up, for all felt that they could not swallow more than one law a day.

On the following afternoon, they came together again, but in still fewer numbers, and Wi continued to give out laws, very excellent laws, which did not interest his audience much, either because, as one of them said, they were "full to the throat with wisdom," or for the reason that, like other savages, they could not keep their attention fixed for long on such matters.

The end of it was that no one came at all to listen, and that the laws must be proclaimed throughout the tribe by Wini-wini with his horn. For days he might be seen going from hut to hut blowing his horn and shouting out the laws into the doorways, till at last the women grew angry and set on the children to pelt him with eggshells and dried cods' heads. Indeed, by the time he had finished, those in the first huts, where he began, had quite forgotten of what he was talking. Still, the laws, having been duly proclaimed without any refusal of them, were held to be in force, nor was ignorance of them allowed to be pleaded as excuse for their breaking, every man, woman, and child being presumed to know the laws, even if they did not obey them.

Yet Wi discovered that it is much easier to make laws than to force people to keep them, with the result that, soon, to his office of lawgiver, he must add that of chief magistrate. Nearly every day was he obliged to sit in front of the cave, or in it when the weather was bad, to try cases and award punishments which were mostly inflicted by certain sturdy fellows who wielded whips of whalebone. In this fashion, a knowledge of the code and of what happened to those who broke it grew by degrees. Thus, when Turi the Food-Hoarder managed to secure more than his share of the spread of

stockfish by arriving earlier than the others, his hoard was raided and most of it distributed among the poor, after which he was more careful in the hiding of his ill-gotten gains.

Again, when Rahi, the rich trader, was proved to have supplied bad bone- fish hooks, broken at the point or weak in the shank, in exchange for skins which had been received by him in advance, Moananga went with some men, and digging beneath the floor of his hut, found scores of hooks wrapped up in hide, which they took and distributed amongst those of the tripe who had none. Great was the outcry of Rahi, but in this case few joined in it, for all loved to see who batted on the poor in the hour of their necessity forced to disgorge some of his gain.

Moreover, although he offended many who murdered and plotted against him on the whole, Wi gained great credit for these good laws of his. For now the people knew that he who dwelt in the cave was no murderer or robber, as Henga and other chiefs had been, but a man who, taking from them as little as might be, was honest, and although often, as they thought, foolish, one who strove for the good of all. Therefore, by degrees, they came to obey his laws — some more and some less—and, although they abused him openly, in private they spoke well of him and hoped that his rule would continue.

Yet at last trouble came. It chanced that a certain sour-natured woman named Ejji bore a female child, and, not wishing to be troubled with it, forced her husband to lay it on a stone at the edge of the forest where the wolves came every night, that it might be devoured by them. But this woman was watched by other women—set about the business by Pag, who knew her heart and suspected her—as was her husband, who was seized when he had laid the child upon the stone at nightfall even as he told his wife Ejji what he had done and received her thanks.

Next morning, both of them were brought before Wi, who sat dealing out justice at the mouth of the cave. He asked them what had become of the girl child that was born to them within a moon. Ejji answered boldly that it had died and its body had been cast away according to custom. Thereon Wi made a sign and a foster mother was led from the cave bearing the child in her arms, for thither it had been taken, as Wi had promised should be done in such cases. The woman Ejji denied that it was her child, but the husband, taking it in his arms, said otherwise and, on being pressed, admitted that what he had done was against his will and for the sake of peace in his home.

Then, when the finding of the child had been proved, Wi, after reciting the law, ordered that these two, who were rich and not driven by need, should be taken at sunset and tied to trees by that stone upon which they had exposed the child, that the wolves might devour them. At this stern sentence there was much trouble among the tribe, most of whom had thrown out female infants in their time, and threats were made against Wi.

Yet he would not change his judgment, and at nightfall, amidst lamentations from their relatives and friends, the pair were taken out and tied to the trees, whereon they were abandoned by all as evildoers who had been unlucky enough to be found out.

During the night, growlings and cries were heard rising from the direction of the trees, which told the tribe that Ejji and her husband had been devoured by the wolves which always wandered there at a distance from the huts where, unless they were very hungry, they dared not come, because of the fires and the pitfalls. The death of these two made the people very angry, so much so that many of them ran up to the cave to revile Wi by whose order it had been brought about, shouting out that the killing of men and women because they wished to be rid of a useless brat was not to be borne. Greatly were they astonished when, there in the mouth of the cave, they saw three dead wolves, and standing behind them, bound hand and foot, Ejji and her husband.

Then waddled forth Pag, holding a red spear in his hand, who said:

“Listen! This pair were justly condemned to die by the death that they would have given to their child. Yet went forth Wi the chief, and Moananga his brother, and I, Pag, with some dogs and waited in the night close by but where they could not see us. Came the wolves, six or eight of them, and flew at these two. Then we loosed the dogs and, at risk to ourselves, attacked the brutes, killing three and wounding others so that they ran away. Afterward we unbound Ejji and her husband and carried them here, for they were so frightened that they could scarcely walk. Now, by the command of Wi, I set them free to tell all that, if another girl is cast forth, those who do the deed will be left to die and none will come to save them.”

So Ejji and her husband were loosed and crept away, covered with shame; but for his dealings in this matter Wi gained great honour, as Moananga and even Pag did also.

After this, no more girl children were thrown out to die or to be devoured, but, on the other hand, several were brought to Wi because their parents said they could not support them. These infants, as he had promised he would do, he took into the cave, setting aside a part of it near to the light and fires for their use, which, as the place was large, could be done easily. Here the mothers must come to feed them till they were old enough to be given into the charge of certain women whom he chose to nurse them.

Now, all these changes caused much talk in the tribe, so that two parties were formed, one of which was in favour of them and one against them. However, as yet no one quarrelled with Wi, whom all knew to be better and wiser than any chief told of in their tradition. Moreover, the people had other things to think of, since now, in the summer months, was the time when food must be stored for the long winter.

At this business Wi and his Council made everyone work according to his strength, even the children being used to collect the eggs of seabirds and to spread out the cod and other fishes, after cleaning them, to dry in the sun in a place,

watched day and night, where the wolves and foxes could not come to steal them. A tithe of all this food went to the chief for his support and for that of those dependent on him. Then half of what remained was stored against days of want, either in the cave or, to keep it fresh, buried deep in ice at the foot of the glaciers with great stones piled upon the top to make it safe from the wolves and other beasts of prey.

Thus did Wi work from dawn to dark, with Pag to help him, directing all things, till often he was so tired that he fell asleep before he could lie down; he who hitherto had spent most of his days hunting in the open air. At night he would sometimes rest in Aaka's hut, for she kept her word and would not come into the cave while Pag was there. Thus they lived in seeming agreement and talked together of small matters of daily life, but no more of those over which they had quarrelled.

The boy Foh, however, although he slept in his mother's hut at night as he was commanded to do, lived more and more with his father because there he was so welcome. For Aaka was jealous even of Foh, and this the lad knew— or felt.

The winter came on very early indeed that year; there was little autumn. Of a sudden, on one calm day when a sun without heat shone, Wi, who was walking on the shore with Urk the Aged, Moananga, and Pag, for he was so busy that thus he was forced to take counsel with them, heard a sound like thunder and saw the eiderduck rise in thousands, wheel round, and fly off toward the south.

"What frightened them?" he asked, and Urk answered:

"Nothing, I think, but when I was a boy, over seventy summers gone, I remember that they did just the same thing at about this time, after which came the harshest and longest winter that had been known, when it was so cold that many of the people died. Still, it may happen that the fowl were frightened by something, such as a shaking of the earth when the ice stirs farther north at the end of summer. If so, they will return, but if not, we shall see them no more till next spring."

The duck did not return, although they left so hurriedly that hundreds of flappers which could scarcely fly remained behind and were hunted down by the children of the tribe and stored in the ice for food. Also the breeding seals that came up from the south and other creatures went away with their young, as did most of the fish.

Next night there was a sharp frost, warned by which Wi set the tribe to drag in firewood from the edge of the forest, where firs blown down by storms lay in plenty. This was a slow and toilsome task, because they had no saws with which to cut up the trees or rid them of the branches, and could only hack them to pieces slowly with flint axes. From long experience, they counted on a month of open weather for this wood harvest before the snow began to fall, burying the dead trees so that they could not come at them, for this fuel-dragging was their last task ere winter set in.

That year, however, snow fell on the sixth day, although not thickly, and the heavy sky showed that there was more to come. Noting this, Wi set the whole tribe to work and, neglecting everything else, went out with them to make sure that all did their share. Thus it came about that, in fourteen more days, they had piled up a greater store of wood than Urk had ever seen in all his life, and with it much moss for the camp wicks and many heaps of seaweed left by the high tides, which, if kept dry under earth, burned even better than did the wood.

The people grumbled at this incessant toil, carried on in sleet or lightly falling snow. But Wi would not listen to their complaints, for he was frightened of he knew not what, and made them work through all the hours of the daylight, and even by that of the moon. Well was it that he did so, for scarcely were the last trunks dragged home, the boughs brought in and piled up by the boys and girls, and all the heaps of seaweed earthed up, when a great snow began to fall which continued for many days, burying the land several feet deep, so that it would have been impossible to come to the fallen trees or to collect the moss and seaweed. Then, after the snow, came frosts, great frosts that continued for months.

Never had such a winter been known as that which began with this snowfall, especially as the daylight seemed to be shorter than in the past, though this they held was because of the continual snow clouds. Before it was done, indeed, even the greatest grumbler in the tribe blessed Wi, who had laid up such vast stores of food and fuel, without which they must have perished. As it was, many who were old or weakly died, as did some of the children; and because it was impossible to bury them in the frozen earth, they were taken away and covered with snow, whence presently the wolves dug them up.

As the months went on, these wolves became very terrible, for, being unable to find food, they ravened boldly round the village, and even rushed into the huts at night, dragging out some of their inmates, while in the daytime they lay in wait to catch children. Then Wi caused steep snow banks to be made as a protection, and at certain places kept fires burning, doing all he could to scare the beasts. Great white bears from the sea-borne ice appeared also, roaming round and terrifying them, though these creatures seemed to be afraid of man and did not kill any people. Drawn by its smell, however, they dug up some of the buried stores of food and devoured them, which was a great loss to the tribe.

At length the attacks of these wolves and other wild beasts grew so fierce and constant that Wi, after consulting with Moananga and Pag, determined that war must be waged against them before more people were devoured. Now in the ice-topped hills behind the beach where the huts stood was a certain high- cliffed hole from which there was no escape and which could only be entered by a narrow gorge. This was the plan of Wi, the cunning hunter—to drive all the wolves into that great rock-surrounded hole, and to build a wall across its mouth over which they could not climb

and thus to be rid of them. First, however, he must accustom them to enter that place, lest they should break back. This he proposed to do in the following fashion.

At the beginning of the winter, a dying whale of which the tongue was torn out by thresher sharks, had drifted ashore, or rather into shallow water, and the tribe was set to work to cut it up when it was dead for the sake of its blubber and meat. This they did, piling up great lumps of flesh and blubber upon certain rocks that rose out of the water, which they purposed to drag away after the ice had formed. Whilst they were still engaged upon this task, there came terrible snowstorms and gales, so that they must abandon it, and after these a thaw, with more gales, had prevented them from coming to the rocks.

When at last the weather abated, they went there to find that the whale's flesh had become rotten during the thaw so that it was useless and must be left where it lay. Now, when everything was frozen, Wi determined to fetch this flesh, or as much of it as they could carry, and place it in the great rock hollow, whither the wolves would certainly be drawn by its smell. Having planned all this, he called the chief men of the tribe together and told them what must be done.

They listened very doubtfully, especially a party of them led by Pitokiti the Unlucky and Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, who said that wolves attacked men, but never had they heard such a thing as that men should attack the host of the wolves in the dead of winter when these were fierce and terrible.

"Listen," said Wi. "Will you rather kill the wolves, or be killed by them with your women and children? For know that it has come to this, the brutes being mad with hunger."

Then they wrangled for a long time, so that the matter could not be settled that day and must be put off till the morrow.

As it chanced, that very night, the wolves made a great attack upon the huts, a hundred or more of them, scrambling over the snow banks and rushing past the fires, so that before they could be driven off, a woman and two children were torn to pieces, while others were bitten. After this, the elders accepted the plan of Wi because they could see no other.

So, first of all, the strongest men were sent to the mouth of the gorge, where they dragged together loose stones of which there were hundreds lying about though many of these they could not move because the frost held them fast. These stones they built into a wall with a broad bottom and twice the height of a man, filling in the cracks with snow, which soon froze solid, but leaving a gap in the middle through which the wolves might enter, also other piled-up stones wherewith it could be closed very swiftly. Then they went down to the seashore and, crossing the ice or, if it was broken, wading through the shallow water, came to those rocks on which the whale's flesh was stored, and scraped the deep snow off the heaps.

Now, however, they found themselves beaten, for, notwithstanding the covering snow, the frost had frozen the outer lumps of flesh and blubber so hard that they could not move them; therefore, their labour lost, they returned home, Whaka announcing loudly that he knew all the while that this would be so.

That night Wi and Pag talked long and earnestly, but, though they were wise, they could find no plan to overcome this trouble. Wi thought of lighting fires upon the heaps to thaw them, but Pag pointed out that, if they did this, the blubber would catch fire and all be burned. So at last they ceased talking and Wi went to Aaka, who now had changed her mind and slept in the cave because of the cold and the wolves, and asked her counsel.

"So when Pag fails you, you come to me for wisdom," she said. "Well, I have none to give. Seek it of your gods, for they alone can help you."

As it came about, the gods, or chance, did help, and in a strange fashion. In the darkness toward dawn a great noise was heard out in the sea, grunts and growlings, and when at last light came, Wi saw a whole troop of great white bears crawling away through the snow mists. When they had all gone, calling Pag and some others, he made his way over the ice to the rocks where the whale's flesh was piled up, and found that with their sharp claws and giant strength the bears, scenting food now that the snow had been removed, had torn the heaps open and scattered them so that the centres, which were not frozen so hard because of the protection of the snow, lay exposed. Much they had eaten, of course, but more remained.

Then Wi said to Pag:

"I thought that we must leave the pit unbaited and try to drive the wolves into it as best we could, but it is not so, for the gods have been good to us."

"Yes," said Pag, "the bears have been very good to us, and for aught I know the gods may be bears, or the bears gods."

Then he sent to summon all the men of the tribe before the exposed flesh turned to solid ice. They came—scores of them, many with hide ropes which they made fast to great lumps of meat, and others with rough reed-woven baskets. Setting to work, before night fell they had carried tons of the flesh into the rock pit, which was round and may have measured a hundred paces from side to side, where they left it to freeze so that the wolves could not drag it away, or eat it easily.

That night, watching by the moonlight, they saw and heard many wolves gathered at the mouth of the pit and walking to and fro, filled with doubt and fear of raps. At last some entered—though only a very few of them—and were

suffered to go away unhindered when they had gorged themselves. Next night more entered, and next night more, though now they could make small play with the flesh because the frost had turned it into stone. On the fourth day, Wi called up the tribe and, before sunset, sent all the younger man, led by Moananga, into the woods, making a great half-circle round those places where they knew the wolves had their lairs, ordering them to hide there, several together, so that they might not be attacked, and not to stir till they saw a fire burn upon a certain rock. Then, with shoutings, they were to advance, driving all the wolves before them toward the mouth of the gorge.

So the men went, for now they knew that either they must conquer the wolves or the wolves would conquer them.

Then it was that Pag behaved very strangely, for after these men had started, he said:

"This plan is of no use, Wi, for when the wolves hear the shoutings they will not run toward the gorge, but will break and scatter by ones and twos, this way and that, slipping through the drivers or round the ends of the line before it closes."

"If you think that, why did you not say so before?" asked Wi angrily.

"For my own reasons. Hearken, Wi. All the women call me a wolf-man, do they not, one who changes into a wolf and hunts with the wolves. Well, that is a lie, and yet there is truth mixed up with this lie. You know that, soon after I was born, my mother cast, or caused me to be cast, out into the forest where she was sure the wolves would eat me, but afterward my father found me and brought me back. What you do not know is that this was ten days from the time when I was cast out. Now, how did I live during those days? I cannot tell you who have no memory, but I hold that some wolf suckled me, since otherwise I must have died."

"I have heard of such things," said Wi doubtfully, "but always set them down as winter-fire tales. But why do you think this one to be true? Perchance your father found you the day that you were cast out."

"I think it to be true because, in after time, when she was dying, my mother whispered this tale into my ears. She said my father, who himself was killed by wolves not long afterward, told her secretly—for he dared not speak of the matter openly—that when he came upon me in the forest whither he had gone to seek my bones and, if any of them could be found, bury them, he discovered me in such a nest as wolves make when they bear their young, and saw a great gray wolf standing over me with her teat in my mouth, one that had lost her cubs, mayhap. She growled at him but ran away, and seizing me, he also ran and bore me home. This my mother swore to me."

"A dying woman's fancy," said Wi.

"I think not," answered Pag, "and for this reason. When for the second time I was driven out by the women, or rather by Henga's father, whom they persuaded that I was a bewitcher and unlucky, having nowhere else to go and all hands being against me, I wandered into the woods that there the wolves might kill me and make an end. The day began to die, and presently wolves gathered round me, for I saw them moving between the tree trunks, waiting till night fell to spring upon me. I watched them idly, caring nothing, since I had come there to be their meat. They drew near when suddenly a great gray she-wolf ran up as though to seize me, then stopped and sniffed at me.

"Thrice she smelt, then licked me with her tongue, and leaping round, rushed at those other wolves, snarling and open-jawed, her fur starting up from her back. The dog-wolves ran away from her, but two of the she-wolves stood, being hungry. With these she fought, tearing the throat out of one and mauling the other so that it limped off howling. Then she, too, went away, leaving me amazed till I remembered my mother's story, after which I wondered no more, being sure that this old wolf was she that had suckled me and knew me again."

"Did you see more of her, Pag?"

"Aye. Twice she returned, once after five days, and once after six more days, and each time she brought me meat and laid it at my feet. It was filthy carrion torn from some dead deer that she had dug up from beneath the snow, but doubtless the best she could find. Moreover, although she was thin with hunger and this was her portion, still she brought it to me."

"And did you eat it?" asked Wi, astonished.

"Nay, why should I who had crept into that hole to die? Moreover, my stomach turned at the sight of it. Then you found me and carried me into your hut, and I have met that foster mother of mine no more. Yet she still lives, for more than once I have seen her; yes, this very winter I have seen her who now is the leader of all the wolf people."

"A strange story," said Wi, staring at him. "Surely if you have not dreamed it, you who slay many of them should be more tender toward wolves."

"Not so, for did they not kill my father, and would they not have killed me? Yet to this wolf I am tender, as I shall show you, for in payment of what I would do, I ask her life."

"And what would you do?" asked Wi.

"This. Now, before the fire is lighted, I will go down into the forest and find that wolf, for she will know me again and come to me. Then, when the shouting begins and the brutes grow frightened, she will follow me and the all the other wolves will follow her, and I shall lead them thither into the trap. Only her I will save from the trap, for that is my bargain."

"You are mad," said Wi.

"If I come back no more, then call me mad, or if my plan fail. But if I live and it succeeds, then call me wise," answered Pag with a low guttural laugh. "There is yet an hour before the lighting of the fire when the edge of the moon covers yonder star. Give me that hour and you shall learn."

Then, without waiting for more words, Pag slipped down the rock on which they were standing and vanished into the gloom.

"Without doubt he is mad," said Wi to himself, "and without doubt this is the end of our fellowship."

Presently, waiting there in the cold frost and watching his breath steam upon the still air, Wi's mind went back to this matter of Pag. Now that he came to think of it, it was very strange that all the people believed Pag to be a companion of wolves. What was accepted by all, he had noted, was generally true. If one person smelt a fox, he might be mistaken, but if everybody smelt it, surely there was a fox. It was certain also that Pag never had any fear of wolves and would go down into the forest when they were howling all around as quietly as another would walk into his hut and take no harm; whereas from bears or other wild beasts he would run like the rest.

Further, now Wi remembered having heard the tale told in his youth that, when Pag was cast out by his mother shortly after birth, for some reason that he forgot, fifteen days went by before his father went to seek his bones to bury them. Yet he found him living and strong, because of which—so ran the tale—the people held Pag to be not human but a monster sprung from one of those evil spirits that might be heard howling round the huts at the dead of night.

So perhaps what Pag said was true. Perhaps his father had found him in a wolf's den and seen her suckling him. Perhaps, too, since these beasts were known to live many years, especially if the spirit of a dead man were in them, as Urk and other aged ones declared happened from time to time both in the case of wolves and of other creatures, such as the great toothed tiger, food had been brought to him by that same wolf when he was cast out for the second time.

Well, he would learn presently; meanwhile, the moment drew near when he must light the signal fire.

A while later, Wi looked at the moon and saw that the star was vanishing in the light of its edge. Then he whispered to Foh who now had come to him and crouched at his side, watching all things eagerly as a boy does. Foh nodded and slipped away, to return presently with a smouldering brand that he had brought from a little fire which was burning out of sight farther down the hillside.

Wi took it and went to the pile of dried wood that had been prepared upon the rock, where he blew it to a flame and set it among some powdered seaweed at the base of the pile. The seaweed caught readily, as this sort does when dry, giving out a blue light, and presently the pile was aflame. Then Wi bade Foh go home to the cave, which he pretended to do but did not, for, desiring above all things to see this great wolf hunt, he hid himself away behind a rock.

Thinking that Foh had departed, Wi crept down to where the old men, to the number of fifty or more under the command of Hotoa the Slow-speeched, lay hidden among the stones, down wind so that the wolves might not smell them, and near to the mouth of the gully that, save for a gap in the middle, was built up with a wall of snow-covered boulders, as has been told. These men he bade be ready, and when the wolves had gone through the gap and they heard his command, but not before, to rush forward, each of them carrying a large stone, and fill up the gap so that the wolves could not come out again. Meanwhile, they must keep stirring the stones lest the frost should fasten them to the ground.

These men, many of whom were shivering with cold or fear, or both, listened dully. Whaka said that his heart told him that no good would come of this business; Hou the Unstable asked if they could not change their plan and go home; N'gae the Magician announced that he had sought an omen from the Ice-gods, whose priest he was, and had dreamed a very evil dream in which he had seen Pitokiti sleeping in the belly of a wolf, signifying, no doubt, that they were all about to be killed and eaten, news at which Pitokiti moaned and wrung his hands. Urk the Aged shook his head and declared that no such plan as this had ever been made from the beginning; at least, his grandfather had never told him of it, and what had not been done before could not be done now. Only Hotoa, a man of good heart, though stupid, answered at length that the stones were ready and that, for his part, he would build them up if and when the wolves were in the pit, even if he had to do so alone.

Now Wi grew angry.

"Hearken!" he said. "The moon is very clear and I can see all. If one man runs, be sure I shall note him and shall dash out his brains now or later. Yes, the first man who runs shall die," and he lifted his axe and looked at Hou and Whaka.

After this, all grew silent, for they knew that what Wi said, that he would do.

Presently the wolves began to appear, looking like shadows on the snow, and by twos or threes loped past with lolling tongues and vanished through the cleft into the pit beyond.

"Stir not," whispered Wi. "These are not driven, they come to eat the whale's flesh as they have done before."

This was true enough, for soon, from within the pit, the watchers heard the sound of growls and of the teeth of the starved beasts grating on the frozen flesh.

Then, from far away arose the sound of shouts, and they knew that the drivers had seen the fire on the high rock and were at their work. A long time went by. Then—oh! then those watchers saw a terrible sight, for behold! the snow

slope beneath them grew black with wolves, more wolves than they had ever counted—hundreds of them there seemed to be, all coming on in silence, slowly, doggedly, like a marshalled host. And lo! in front of them trotted a huge, gaunt, gray she-wolf, and either running at her side, holding to her hair, or mounted on her back, which they could not be sure because of the shadows, was Pag the Dwarf, Pag the Wolf-man!

The watchers gasped with fear, and some of them hid their eyes with their hands, for they were terrified. Even Wi gasped, for now he knew that Pag had spoken truth and that wolf's milk ran in his blood as the wolf's craftiness lived in his brain.

Into the shadow of the cleft passed the great, gray mother wolf; Wi could see her glowing eyes and her worn yellow fangs as she trotted beneath him, and with her went Pag. Lo! they entered the gap in the stone snow-covered wall, and as they entered, the she-wolf raised her head and howled aloud, whereon all the multitude which followed her that for a moment had seemed to hesitate raised their heads and howled also, making such a sound as the people had never heard, so terrible a sound that some of them fell upon the earth, swooning. For this was the cry of the mother wolf to the pack, the call that they must obey. Then the multitude pressed on after her, scrambling upon each other's backs to be first into the pit.

All were in—not one of the hundreds remained outside, and the time had come to close the breach. Wi opened his lips to utter the command, then hesitated, for Pag was there in the pit, and when the wolves found that they were trapped, certainly they would tear him to pieces and the mother wolf also which had led them to their death. He must speak, and yet Pag was in the pit! How could he command the death of Pag? Oh! Pag was but one man and the people were many, and if once those wolves broke out again, mad with rage, none would be left living.

"To the wall!" he said hoarsely, and himself lifting a large stone, sprang forward.

Then it was that back through the cleft came the great mother wolf and with her Pag, unharmed. He bent down, he whispered into the ear of the she-wolf, and it seemed to them, the watchers, that she listened and licked his face. Then, suddenly, like an arrow, she sped away.

In her path was Pitokiti the Unlucky, who turned to fly. With a growl she nipped him, tearing a great hole in his side, fled on—and was no more seen.

"Build up!" cried Wi. "Build up!"

"Aye, build you up," echoed Pag, "and swiftly, if you would see the sun. I go, my work is finished," and he shambled through them who even then shrank away from him.

Wi rushed to the cleft and flung down his stone, as did others. A wolf's head appeared above the rising pile; he brained it with his axe so that it fell backward dead, and there was a sound of its being torn to pieces and devoured by those within. This gave them a breath of time. The stones rose higher, but now at them came all the weight of the wolves. Some were killed or driven back, for even the most timid fought desperately with their stone spears, clubs, and axes, knowing that if once the imprisoned pack climbed or broke through the wall, it would have the mastery of them. So some built and others fought, while yet others brought baskets filled with damp grit or snow taken from deep holes, which they poured on to the stones where immediately it ran down into the cracks and froze, turning them to a fortress wall.

Yet some of the wolves got over by climbing on to each other's backs and leaping thence to the crest of the wall before it reached its full height. The most of these fled away to be the parents of other packs in years to come, but certain of the fiercest fought with the men beyond and mangled them so that one old fellow died of his wounds.

In all this noise and confusion, suddenly Wi heard a cry for help which caused him to turn round, for he thought he knew the voice. He looked, and by the bright moonlight shining on the snow, saw Foh his son fighting a great wolf. With a snarl, the brute sprang. Foh bent himself and received the weight of it upon the point of his flint-headed spear. Down went the lad with the wolf on top of him. Wi bounded forward, thinking to find him with his throat torn out. He reached the place too late, for both Foh and the wolf lay still. Putting out his strength, he dragged the brute away. Beneath it lay Foh covered with blood. Thinking him dead, in an agony Wi lifted him, for he loved this boy better than anyone on the earth. Then, suddenly, Foh slipped from his arms, stood upon his feet, and gasped as his breath returned to him:

"See! Father, I killed the beast. My spear broke—but see! the point of it sticks out of his back. His teeth were on my throat when all at once his mouth opened and he died."

"Get you home," said Wi roughly, but in his heart he thanked the Ice-gods because his only son had been saved alive.

Then he rushed back to the wall, nor did he leave it until it had been built so high that it could not be leapt over by any wolf in the world. Nor could it be scaled, for the topmost stones were set so that they curved toward the great pit within. There then Wi waited till the damp sand and the snow froze hard, and he knew that, before the spring came, nothing could stir them. At length the work was done and in the east broke the dawn of the short winter day. Then Wi climbed to the top of the wall and looked into the pit beyond. It was still full of darkness, for the moon had sunk behind the hills, but in the darkness he could see hundreds of fierce eyes moving while the mountains echoed with the howlings of the imprisoned beasts. So they howled for days, the stronger devouring those that grew weak, till at length there was silence in that darksome place, for all were dead.

## WI MEETS THE TIGER

Two days had gone by, for the most of which time Wi had slept. Indeed, after this great battle with the wolves, he was weary almost to death, not with the work or the fighting, but through amazement at the sight of Pag keeping awful fellowship with the great she-wolf, and agony of mind because of what he had suffered when he thought that the throat of Foh was torn out; also when he believed that the whole host of the wood-dwellers would break through or over the wall and tear him and his companions to pieces.

When at times he woke up from that sleep, Aaka was kind to him, more so than she had been since Henga had murdered Fo-a. Also, she was proud of his deeds and fame that were in every mouth, and now that he had risen from his bed she brought him food and spoke to him softly, which pleased Wi, who loved Aaka, the wife of his youth, although of late her face seemed to have turned away from him. Now, while he ate, Aaka giving him his food piece by piece as was the fashion of wives among the tribe, Moananga joined them and began to talk in his light manner of that night of fear.

"All the good of it was with you, Brother," he said, "for we tramped through the forest cutting our feet and breaking our skins against trunks of trees and boughs half buried in the snow, for no purpose at all."

"Did you not see any wolves?" asked Wi.

"Not one though we heard them howling in the distance. It seems that they had all gone on before, led by a certain friend of ours who can charm wolves, if what I hear is true," and he shrugged his shoulders. "Yet we saw something else."

"What was that?" asked Wi.

"We saw the great striped beast of which we have learned from our fathers; the tiger with teeth like spearheads, a like beast to that whose skin, or what remains of it, is your cloak to-day, which has been worn by the chief of the tribe since the beginning."

Now this was true, since for generations those who dwelt in the cave, one after another, wore that cloak, though none knew how it had come to the first of them. Moreover, although tradition told of this great tiger beast, which was once the terror of the tribe, hitherto none living had seen it, so that, although they still talked of it, men thought that its race was dead or had left their land.

"What did it do?" said Wi, much stirred, as a hunter would be.

"It appeared from between the trees, and walking forward boldly, leapt onto a rock and stood there staring at us and lashing its tail, a mighty brute, tall as a deer and longer. We shouted, thinking to scare it away, but it took no heed, only stood and purred like a wildcat of the woods, watching us with its glowing eyes. Now, in front of it, with others, was the man named Finn, he whom Henga hated and swore to kill so that he must hide himself in the woods whence he only came out again after you had slain Henga. Suddenly, the tiger ceased purring and fixed his eyes on Finn. Finn saw it and turned to run. Then the tiger leapt, such a leap as has never been seen. Right over the heads of the others he leapt, landing onto the back of Finn, who fell down. Next instant the tiger had him in his jaws and bounded away with him, as the wildcat bounds with a bird which it has seized. That was the last we saw of it and of Finn."

"Strange that the tiger should have chosen him who was hated of Henga the Tiger-man," said Wi.

"Yes, Wi, so strange that all the people hold that the spirit of Henga has entered into this tiger."

Now, Wi did not laugh at this saying, because it was the belief of his folk that the ghost of an evil man often passed into the shape of some terrible beast that could not be killed, and in that form took vengeance upon those whom that man had hated in life, or on his children. Therefore he only said,

"If it be so, it seems that I must guard myself, seeing that, if Henga hated Finn, he hated me ten times more, and with good reason, as perhaps he knows to-day. Well, I slew Henga and I swear that I will slay this tiger also, if he troubles us more, though whence the beast came I cannot guess."

At this moment Pag appeared, whereon Aaka, who had been listening to the tale of the death of Finn, turned and went away, saying over her shoulder:

"Here comes one who perchance can show you how to lead the tiger into a trap. For what is a tiger but a big striped wolf?"

Others, too, shrank to one side as Pag advanced, because, although they were grateful to him for what he had done, they who had always feared Pag, now feared him ten times more. Yes, even Moananga shrank and made a place for him.

"Fear not," said Pag mockingly. "The gray wolf mother has fled afar and no more of her kin follow after me and her. Indeed, I come from watching them. They fight and devour each other there in the pit and ere long, I think, all will be dead, for that wall they cannot climb or tunnel through."

"Tell us, Pag," said Moananga boldly, after his fashion, "what are you, a man, or a wolf fashioned to the shape of a dwarf?"

"You knew my father and my mother, Moananga, and therefore should be able to answer your own questions. Yet in all men there is something of the wolf and, for certain reasons that Wi has heard, in me perhaps more than in most."

"So the people think, Pag."

"Do they, Moananga? If so, tell them from me that I am not a wolf that can be caught in any trap; also that, if they will leave me alone, I will leave them alone. But if they will not, then they may feel my fangs."

"How did you lead the wolves, Pag?"

"Why should you ask secrets, Moananga? Yet if you would know, I will tell you that you may tell it to others. The mother of them all is my friend. I went into the wood and called and she came to me. Then I bade her follow me as a dog does. She followed and the rest followed her—that is all."

Moananga looked at Pag doubtfully and answered:

"I hold that there is more behind, Pag."

"Aye, Moananga, there is always more behind everything, for those who can find it. We cannot see far and know very little, Moananga—not even what we were before we were born, or what we shall be after we are dead."

Now there was something so grim about Pag's talk that, although he was curious, Moananga asked him no more questions; only he said:

"If there be something of a wolf in man, there may be something of man in a tiger," and he repeated to him that tale which he had told to Wi.

Pag listened eagerly and answered:

"When one cloud passes, another comes; the wolves have gone, the tiger follows. Whether Henga dwells in this beast I do not know. But if so, the sooner it is slain the better," and he glanced at Wi and at Foh, who now was standing by his father, his arm thrown about him. Then he went to fetch his food, for he was hungry.

Now, from that day forward, the tiger became as great an ill to the tribe as the wolves had been, although it was but one and these had been many. It lurked around the village in the dark of night, and when light came and people crept out of their huts, it rushed in, seizing now one and now another, and bounding away with its prey in its mouth. No fence could keep it out, nor would it tread on any pitfall, while so swift were its movements that none could hit it with a spear. It was noted, moreover, that all those who were taken had been men whom Henga hated, or their children, or perchance women who had been his and now were married to others. Therefore, the people grew sure that in this tiger dwelt the spirit of Henga. Also, N'gae the Priest and Taren his wife, having taken counsel with the Ice-gods, returned from the glacier and declared that this was so.

Pondering these things, Wi was much afraid, though more for Foh than for himself. Certainly, soon or late, the lad would be seized, or perchance his own turn would come first. The people lived in terror also, and now none of them would come out of his hut till it was full day, much less walk beyond the village unless there were many of them together.

Very slowly and very late, at length the spring came; the snows melted and the horned deer appeared in the woods. Now Wi hoped the huge tiger with the flashing teeth would cease from killing men and fill himself with venison, or perhaps go away altogether whence he came, wherever that might be, to seek a mate there. Yet the tiger did none of these things. Almost it seemed that it was the last of its race who could not mate because none was left living on the earth. At least, it stayed in the great woods that bordered the beach, living now in one place and now in another; moreover, it continued to find victims, for between the spring and the first month of summer three of the tribe were dragged away, so that the end of it was that they dared not go out to seek food, never being sure but that the striped beast might spring upon them from some lair where it lay hid, for it seemed to watch all their movements and to know where they would come.

The end of it was that the people gathered at the meeting-place and sent Wini-wini the Shudderer to pray Wi to speak with them. He came accompanied by Pag. Then, by the mouth of Urk the Aged, they addressed him, saying:

"This tiger with the great teeth, whom we believe to be Henga in the shape of a beast, kills us. We demand that you who slew Henga and turned him into a tiger, you who are a mighty hunter and our chief by right of conquest, should slay the tiger as you slew Henga."

"And if I cannot or will not, what then?" asked Wi.

"Then, if we are strong enough, we will kill you and Pag and choose another chief," they replied through Wini-wini the Mouth. "Or if we cannot, at least we will obey you and your laws no more, but will go away from this place where we have lived since the beginning and seek another home far from the tiger."

"Mayhap the tiger will go with you," said Pag darkly, a grin upon his ugly face, which saying did not please them, for they had not thought of such a thing. Before any of them could answer, however, Wi spoke in a slow, sad voice.

"It seems that among you I have many enemies," he said, "nor do I wonder at this, for in sundry ways the past winter has been most evil, with fiercer cold and longer snows than were ever known, whence have come much death and sickness. Also a number of us have been killed, first by the wolves, which are now destroyed, and afterward by this tiger; nor, although we have made offerings, do the gods who live in the ice yonder help us at all. Now you tell me that I

must kill the tiger or that you will kill me if you can, which by the ancient custom you have a right to do, and find another chief. Or, if you cannot, that you will leave me and go hence to seek a new home far from where you were born.

"Hearken, people of the tribe. I say to you it is not needful that you should wander away perhaps to find worse dangers than those which you have left. Soon I go out to seek this tiger and match myself against it, as I did against Henga, whose spirit you believe lives in its skin. Perhaps I shall kill it, or more probably it will kill me, in which case, you must fight with the beast as best you can, or if it should please you better, fly away. In any case, it is not needful that you should try to kill me, for learn that I am weary of this chieftainship. A while ago I rid you of a tyrant who murdered many of you, as he did my own daughter, and since then, labouring day and night, I have worked for the good of all and done my best to serve you. Now, as you hold that I have failed and I am of the same mind, for otherwise you would love me better, it is my wish to lay down my chieftainship, or if the custom will not allow of this, to stand here unarmed while he whom you may choose to succeed me puts an end to my life with his club and spear.

"Therefore, choose the man that I may submit myself to you. Yet if you will take my last counsel as your chief, when you have done so, command him to spare me a little while that I may go forth to kill the tiger if I can. Then, having done this, if perchance it does not kill me, I will return and you can deal with me as you will, either by suffering me to live on as one of you, such as I was before I became your chief, or by putting an end to me."

When the people heard these words and understood their nobleness, they were ashamed. Also they were confused, for they knew not whom to choose as chief, if indeed there was anyone who would take that office. Moreover, Pag did not comfort them by announcing loudly that this new chief would find one to challenge him, and that within an hour, namely, Pag himself. Indeed, at this saying, they looked aside, or rather those among them who had cast eyes of longing on the cave did so, for, although Pag was a dwarf, his strength was terrible. Moreover, he was a wolf-man who could doubtless summon powers to help him from the earth or air, perhaps the gray wolf mother, or ghosts that howl in the night. Still, one voice did call out the name of Moananga, whereon he answered:

"Not so, fool. I stand with my brother Wi and tell you that, if you thrust him out, it will be because the gods have made you mad, for where can you find one who is braver or wiser and more honest? Why do you not go up yourselves against the tiger and kill it? Is it perchance that you are afraid?"

None answered. For a while they murmured together confusedly, and then, as though with one voice, cried out:

"Wi is our chief. We will have no other chief but Wi."

So that trouble ended.

That night Wi and Pag took counsel together as to how they might make an end of the tiger. Earnestly they debated, but for a long while could see no light. Everything had been tried. The brute would not walk over their most cunning pitfalls; it would not eat the meat poisoned with the juices of a certain fish that, when rotten, was deadly; it feared no fires, and could not be driven away. Twice men in numbers had gone out to attack it, but once it hid itself, and the next time it charged them, smote down a man with its great paw, and vanished; after which they would go no more.

"You and I must fight it alone," said Wi, but Pag shook his head.

"Our strength is not enough," he answered. "Before you could smite a blow with your axe, it would have killed us both. Or perchance if the ghost of Henga dwells in it, as all the people think, it would not face that axe again, but would hide itself."

Then he walked to the mouth of the cave and idly enough stared up at that broken tree where, as the moonlight showed, the blackened head of Henga still was fixed, its long locks waving in the wind. He returned and said:

"That tiger must be very lonely, having none of its kind with which to talk or mate. Will you lend me your chief's cloak, Wi? If it is lost I will promise you a better."

"What for?" asked Wi.

"That I will tell you afterward. Will you lend me the cloak and the necklace of tiger claws?"

"Take them if you wish," said Wi wearily, knowing that it was useless to dig for secrets in the dark heart of Pag. "Take them and the chieftainship also, if it pleases you, for of all these I have had enough who would that once again I were a hunter and no more."

"A hunter you shall be," said Pag, "the greatest of hunters. Now talk no more to me of tigers for a while, lest I should smell them in my sleep."

After this, for several days Pag was missing for hours at a time, and when he returned at night always seemed to be very weary. Also, Wi noticed that other things were missing, namely, his tigerskin cloak with the necklace and the head of Henga from the broken tree outside the cave, that now was nothing but skin and bone. Aaka asked him why he did not wear his cloak. He answered:

"Because winter passes and it grows too warm."

"I do not find it warm," said Aaka. "And why do you not wear the necklace?"

"Because in spring the skin is tender and it scratches me."

"Surely Pag is a good master to you," said Aaka. "Himself he could not have answered with a smoother tongue. But where does Pag go so secretly?"

"I do not know, Wife. I was about to ask you, who watch him well, if you could tell me."

"That I think I can, Wi. Without doubt he goes to hunt with the old mother wolf, as he must do when she calls him, which is why he comes home so tired. I hear that certain of our dead have been dug out of the snow lately and eaten."

"That has not been reported to me," said Wi.

"Even a chief is not told everything, especially of those he loves," answered Aaka, and walked away laughing.

Two nights later Pag went to the mouth of the cave and, by wetting his finger and holding it in the wind, tested its direction very carefully. Then he came to Wi and whispered:

"Will you rise an hour before dawn and come with me to kill the tiger?"

"Had we not better take others also?" asked Wi, hesitating.

"Nay. Only fools share their meat with strangers; let the glory be ours alone. Now, ask me no more in this place where there are many ears."

"Good," said Wi, "I will come with you—to kill the tiger or be killed by it."

So, a little more than an hour before dawn, the two of them might have been seen slipping from the cave like shadows. But before he went, Wi kissed Foh, who lay fast asleep at his side, because he did not think to see him again. Also, he looked at the place where Aaka slept, and sighed sadly. He was fully armed with his heavy axe of bright stone, two flint-headed spears, and a knife also of flint. Pag likewise carried two spears and a knife.

When they were clear of the huts and picking their way toward the wood by the light of the moon, now near her death, and of the stars, Pag said that the gale which had been raging for days seemed to have blown itself away, and the stars shone so brightly that he prophesied fair weather. Then Wi grew angry, exclaiming:

"Have done with your talk of the weather and the stars, and tell me whither we go and to what end. Am I a child that you should keep me thus in the dark?"

"Yes," answered Pag, "I think that you are something of a child, out of whom women can suck secrets, which cannot be said of me."

"I return home," said Wi, stopping.

"Yet," went on Pag quietly, "if you would hear the tale, it is short. Only do not stand there like a girl looking after her lover, but come on, for our time is also short."

"That I can well believe," muttered Wi, as he walked forward.

"Listen," said Pag. "You know the two rocks yonder near the edge of the forest that people call Man and Wife because they are so close together and yet divided."

"Yes, I know them. Once we thought of digging a pit there, but did not do so because the bases of the rocks slope inward and doubtless meet just under the ground."

"Those who would know must first look to see," said Pag. "I heard that talk about the pit, heard also Urk declare that his grandfather had tried to dig one there but could not because the rocks met. Then, because I knew that Urk's grandfather must have been a great liar—or perhaps it is Urk who is the liar, I went to try for myself with a sharpened stake and found that the rocks do not meet. I found another thing also—that the tiger used this path. So to scare him away for a while I hung up cast-off skin garments with a man's scent on them. Then I set to work and dug my pitfall, a very nice pitfall, narrow like a grave, and placed sharp stakes in it, and lit a fire at the bottom of it to take away the smell of man, and laid pine boughs over it which smell of themselves, and covered it with fine sand like to that around, that I carried there in a skin filled with a shell so that my hand never touched a grain of it, and did all other things that might deceive a tiger."

"This tiger cannot be deceived," said Wi gloomily, "for is it not as cunning as a man? How many pitfalls have we made, and has it not walked round every one of them?"

"Yes, Wi, that tiger is cunning, but it is also lonely, and when it sees that another tiger has crossed the pit and is waiting for it on the farther side, then perhaps it will follow—at least, I hope so."

"Another tiger! What do you mean?"

"That you shall learn presently. And now, Wi, I pray you to forget that you are a good chief and to remember that you are a better hunter, and be silent, for then there is naught to fear, because the wind blows straight down the cleft and the tiger cannot smell us."

Presently they came to the pit where there was a gap in a rocky ridge at the height of a tall pine, which gap was wider at the top than at the bottom, worn so by ice or water, perhaps. Indeed, at its foot it did not measure more than two paces across. To one side of this cleft lay some stones, large stones, and among these Pag told Wi to hide, whispering:

"Be swift and lie close, for the dawn is near, and if, as I hope, the tiger comes, it will be soon. Have your axe ready too."

"What are you going to do?" asked Wi.

"That you shall learn. Be not astonished at anything you may see, and do not stir unless you are attacked or I call to you."

Then Pag slipped away into the darkness, and, kneeling on the ground, Wi watched between a crack in the stones. By such light as there was, having been a hunter from his youth and therefore accustomed to see in the gloom, as wild beasts can, he perceived that, on the snow-sprinkled bottom of the cleft, for here in this shaded place the snow had not melted, appeared footmarks, such as were made by the tiger's pads, of which the claws cut lines in the snow, and thought to himself that Pag was too late, for the brute had already passed here. Then he remembered that this could not be, because, if it had, it would have fallen into the pit which was dug beneath.

Whence, then, came the footprints? he wondered. Soon he wondered much more, for almost beneath him in the shadow of the rock and on the hither side of the pitfall appeared the tiger. Yet how could the tiger be there, seeing that they had just come to the place across open land where there were no trees, such as grew in plenty on the farther side of the cleft, and must have seen it. Yet it was the tiger, for he could distinguish its striped hide, or some of it. Moreover, it growled as do beasts of prey, and appeared to be tearing with its jaws at something that lay before it on the snow just where the pitfall should end.

Now, thought Wi to himself, if I spring down suddenly and hit it with all my strength, perhaps I may break this brute's neck or dash out its brains with a blow of my axe before it turns upon me.

Then he remembered that Pag had said he must not stir except to defend himself, unless he, Pag, called to him, also that Pag boasted that he never spoke without a reason. So Wi stayed where he was and watched.

The first gray light of dawn began to gather, and though the tiger was still hid in the shade, it fell upon that which it seemed to be devouring, something black and round from which hung hair.

By the gods! it was the head of Henga. Now Wi understood everything. Pag was the tiger! Yes, inside that skin, fashioned from the chief's cloak set out to a tiger's shape upon a framework of twigs covered with dried grass or seaweed, was Pag, in front of whom lay the dried head of Henga which he pretended to devour. And to think of it! A few moments ago he had proposed to smite this sham with his axe, thereby killing Pag. The blood of Wi ran cold at the thought; then he forgot it and all else. For, on the farther side of the cleft, creeping up slowly, belly to ground, with waving tail, flashing fangs, and bristling hair, appeared the monstrous creature they had come out to seek. There it stood, for now it had risen to its full height which seemed to be that of a deer; doubtfully it stood, glaring in front of it with glowing eyes.

The other tiger beneath, or rather Pag in its skin, growled more fiercely, tearing at the head of Henga. The monster pricked its ears and growled back, but in a friendly fashion. Then suddenly it seemed to smell the head of Henga and glared down at it. It stepped forward, arched its back, and leapt as a wolf cub or a puppy leaps to seize that which it desires for its play. The tiger rose into the air and, with gathered paws, landed onto the covering of the pit, which broke beneath its weight. Down into the pit it went, and after it rolled the head of Henga. Roar upon roar rent the air as the sharp stakes which Pag had set at the bottom of the pit sank deeper into the beast beneath the pressure of its bulk.

Wi leapt forward from his hiding place and ran forward to Pag, who, having cast off the stuffed-out tiger skin, stood staring into the pit, a spear in his hand. Wi looked down and saw the huge tiger, its eyes glowing like lamps, twisting on the stakes. Suddenly, it ceased its awful roarings, and for one moment they thought that it was dead. The next Pag cried:

"Beware! The brute comes."

As he spoke, the tiger's claws appeared over the edge of the grave-like pit, followed by its great flat head. For it had freed itself from the stakes and with all its mighty strength was drawing itself from the hole. Pag drove at it with his spear, wounding it in the throat. It caught the handle with its teeth and bit it in two.

"Smite!" he said, and Wi brought down the axe upon its head, crushing its skull—a great blow.

Yet even this did not kill the tiger. Wi struck again and shattered one foreleg. It heaved itself upward and now it was out of the pit. It reared up and smote at him with its uninjured paw. Wi ran back, bending so that the blow went over his head, and Pag slipped to one side. The tiger followed Wi, towering above him on his hind feet, for because of its hurts it seemed that it could not spring. Wi struck again with the axe which he wielded in both hands, and the sharp blade sank into the beast below the breast. He strove to withdraw the axe, which was firmly fixed in the tough hide, but, before he could do so, the brute fell on him and down he went beneath it, and lay there covered by its carcass.

Pag ran up and drove his remaining spear into its side, behind the forearm. Yes, again and again he pushed with all his weight upon the spear. Then the tiger, which had opened its mouth to seize the head of Wi and crush it, uttered a moaning noise; its jaws closed, its head fell down on to the face of Wi, its claws contracted, scattering the sand, a shiver ran through its whole length, and it lay still.

Again Pag thrust at the spear, driving it in yet deeper, until he knew that it must have pierced the beast's heart. Then he seized one forepaw and, putting out all his great strength, dragged at it till the dead tiger rolled over upon its back, revealing Wi beneath, painted red with blood.

Pag, who thought that he was dead, uttered a low cry of grief, and as he did so Wi sat up, gasping, for the breath was pressed out of him.

"Are you torn?" asked Pag.

"I think not," grunted Wi. "I think the claws missed me."

"Perhaps after all there are some gods," said Pag.

"At least there are devils," answered Wi, looking down at the dead monster.

"You will have a fine new cloak, a cloak of glory," said Pag.

"Then it should cover your shoulders," answered Wi.

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## THE BOAT AND ITS BURDEN

Wi and Pag, leaning on each other, for, though neither was hurt, now, after all was over, both felt very tired, walked back to the cave, for with the carcass of the huge tiger they could do nothing by themselves. But first Pag shook the seaweed and withies with which it had been stuffed out of the chief's cloak wherein he had played the part of a tiger, and since Wi could not wear it because he was too filthy with blood and dirt, threw it over his shoulder. But the head of Henga he left where it lay. It had served its turn, also Pag swore that never again did he wish to have it so close to his nose and teeth.

When they reached the huts, it was still so near to the dawn that no one was about, for since the people learned that the great tiger attacked at this hour, they had become late risers. Therefore, they came to the mouth of the cave unnoticed.

Here, however, they found some waiting for them, as Aaka, having been awakened early by Foh who came to tell her that his father was gone from their bed, rose to look for him. For in this matter Aaka was strange; although so sharp with Wi when he was present, she kept a watch on all his movements and grew disturbed when she could not see him and did not know where he might be or why he had gone away. This mood was strong on her that morning because she was sure in herself that danger was near to him, especially when she learned that Pag was also missing from the cave. Therefore, although the tiger might be on the prowl, she bade Foh run swiftly to the hut of his uncle Moananga and bring him to her.

So Moananga came, and with him Tana who would not be left alone in the hut; also others whom he summoned, for, because of the tiger, if people stirred at this hour when it was known to be abroad, a company of them always went together. They reached the cave, and Moananga asked what was the trouble. Aaka answered that she desired to know if they had seen Wi, whom she could not find, or Pag, who doubtless was with him, or if they knew where he had gone.

Moananga answered no, and spoke calm words to her, for she was much disturbed, saying that Wi had many duties to attend of which he told no one, and doubtless one of these had called him away. Or perhaps, he added, he had gone to the glacier to make prayer to the Ice-gods or to seek some sign of them.

While he was speaking thus, Foh pointed with his finger, and behold! out of the morning mists appeared Wi, painted from head to heel with blood and leaning upon the shoulder of Pag the dwarf, as a lame man leans upon a stick.

"Not for nothing was I troubled," said Aaka. "See, Wi is wounded, and sorely."

"Yet he walks well and his axe is as red as his skin," answered Moananga.

Then Wi came up to them and Aaka asked:

"Whose blood is that which covers you, Husband? Your own or another man's?"

"Neither, Wife," answered Wi. "It is the blood of the great toothed tiger which Pag and I have been fighting."

"Yet Pag's skin is white and yours is red, which is strange. But what of the tiger, Husband?"

"The tiger is dead, Wife."

Now they stared at him, then Aaka asked:

"Did you slay it?"

"Nay," he answered, "I fought it, but I think Pag was its slayer. He made the plan; he dug the trap; he set the bait, and it was his spear that reached the brute's heart at last ere my head was bitten off."

"Go look at the tiger's skull," said Pag, "and see whether Wi's axe fits into the hole there. Look at its forearm also and judge what weapon shattered it."

"Pag! Always Pag! Is there nothing that you can do without Pag, Husband?"

"Oh, yes," answered Wi bitterly. "Perchance I might kiss a woman, if I could find one who was fair and gentle-hearted."

"Why don't you?" mocked Aaka.

Then he went past her into the cave and called for water to wash himself, while Pag sat down in front of it and told the tale of how Wi had slain the tiger to all who would listen to him, but of his part in that play saying nothing at all.

Led by Moananga, men went out, a score of them or more, and carried in the beast, which they laid down in a place where it could be seen by everyone. That day all who could stand upon their feet from the oldest to the youngest of the tribe, came to stare at the dead monster which had worked them so much mischief, while Pag sat by grinning, and pointed out how the axe of Wi had shattered its skull and well-nigh hewn off its great forepaw.

"But who gave the wound that pierced its heart?" asked one.

"Oh! Wi did that, too," answered Pag. "When the beast charged him with its last strength he leapt aside and thrust his spear through its heart, after which it fell on top of him and tried to bite off his head."

"And what did you do all this time?" asked Tana, the wife of Moananga.

"I? Oh! I looked on. No, I forgot. I knelt down and prayed to the gods that Wi might conquer."

"You lie, Wolf-man," said Tana, "for both your spears are buried in the beast."

"Perhaps," answered Pag. "If so, it is an art I have learned from women. If you have never lied, Tana, for good ends or bad, then reproach me; but if you have, leave me alone."

Then Tana was silent, for although she was sweet and loving, it was well known that she did not always tell the truth.

After this, when he was recovered from his weariness and shaking and his crushed ribs ceased to ache, all the people came up and worshipped Wi who had rid them of the tiger, as he had rid them of the wolves, declaring that he was one of the gods who had come out of the ice to save them.

"So you say when things go well and danger passes. But when they go ill and it hangs over your heads, then you tell another tale about me," answered Wi, smiling sadly. "Moreover, you give praise where it is not due while you withhold it where it is due."

Then, to be rid of all this clamour, he slipped away from them and went out quite alone to walk upon the beach, while Pag stayed behind to skin the tiger and to dress its hide. For now that the wolves were dead and the tiger was dead, and Henga the murderer was dead, all slain by Wi, man or woman or child might walk the beach in safety and alone, especially as the bears seemed to have gone away, though whether this was from fear of the tiger, or lack of food none knew.

The great gale from the south, which that spring had raged for very many days, almost up to the night when Wi went out to fight the tiger, had now quite blown itself out, leaving behind it a clear gray sky, though of sun that spring there seemed to be even less than during the year that was gone. Indeed, the air remained very cold, feeling as it does when snow is about to fall, though this was not the time for snow; the flowers which should have been making the woodlands and the hillsides bright had not yet bloomed, nor had the seals and the birds come in their wonted numbers. But though the wind was gone, there was still a great swell upon the sea, and big waves upon which floated blocks of ice broke sullenly upon the beach.

Wi walked toward the east. Presently he came to the mouth of the glacier cleft, and though he had not purposed to go up to the face of the ice or to look upon the shape of the Sleeper, something seemed to lead him there; indeed, he felt as if an invisible cord was drawing him toward this gloomy yet to him sacred spot, because in it dwelt the only gods he knew. Moreover, he remembered that, during the mighty frosts of the past winter, and especially at the time of the big gale, great noises had been heard in the ice, which caused the people to believe the gods were stirring.

He reached the head of the cleft, and there, poor savage that he was, covered his eyes with his hands and, kneeling down, prayed after his fashion. He thanked the gods because they had delivered him and the people in his charge from great peril, giving him strength to kill the evil Henga and, by the help of Pag, to do away with the most of the wolves and with the awful tiger that the tribe believed contained the spirit of Henga still lingering upon earth. He prayed also that the laws which he had made might prosper; that there might be plenty of food; that Foh his son might grow and be strong, ceasing to cough; that Aaka might be gentle toward him who felt so lonely and companionless and who by the law that he had made was forbidden to seek any other wife. Lastly, he prayed that the sun might shine and the weather become warm.

Then, as had happened to him before in this spot, something seemed to speak in his heart, reminding him that he had brought no offering, also that it was too late to find one, especially now that the wolves were gone and he could not slay a beast as he had done before and set its head upon a stone that the gods might smell blood.

Well, if so, what did it matter? How could the blood of wolves be of any service to gods, and if it were so, was it good to worship beings who rejoiced in blood and suffering? If they lived and had power, must they not desire a very different sacrifice? What sacrifice? A thought came to him. Surely that of the heart, that of repentance for past evil, that of promise to do better. A gust of passion seized him. He flung himself upon his face, muttering:

"O Gods, let me be the sacrifice. Give me strength to see and understand, to bring blessing upon the heads of all, to protect and nurture all, if only for a little while, and then, if you will, take my life in payment for your gifts."

Thus prayed poor Wi, and for a moment thought that he was better than those among whom he lived, since he knew that not in the heart of one of them would this prayer have been born, except perhaps in that of Pag, if Pag had believed in anything, which he did not. For even then Wi understood that he who does not believe cannot pray. A boy, so long as he thinks he sees something or smells it, or hears it move, will throw stones in the hope that he may hit it; but when he is certain that there is nothing beneath the water or in the tree, for how long will he go on throwing the stones? Now this was the difference between them; although he could not see it, Wi thought that there was something beneath the water or in the tree, and therefore continued to throw his stones of prayer; whereas Pag was sure that there was nothing at all, and therefore kept his stones and saved his strength.

Then Wi remembered that, after all, he had no cause to boast himself. He prayed for the people. But why did he do so? Oh! the answer was plain: it was not for the people and their woes that he was sorry, but for his own, in which he saw theirs reflected by the mirror of his heart, as images are seen in clear water. His little daughter had been taken from him in a cruel fashion. He had avenged her death upon the murderer, thinking thus to satisfy his soul. Yet it was

not satisfied, for he had learned that there is no comfort in vengeance. What he needed was his daughter, not the blood of her butcher. Therefore he hoped that some land unseen lay beyond that of life, where he might find her and others whom he had loved, which was why he prayed to the gods. He was sorry for others who had lost their children, because he could measure something of their suffering by his own, but at bottom he was most sorry for himself. So it was with everything. By his own unhappiness he measured that of others, and when he feared for them, really he feared for himself and those he loved, feeling for all with the ache of his own heart and seeing all by the light of his own eyes.

These thoughts crushed Wi, who by help of them now understood that even the sacrifice which he offered for others was full of selfishness, because he desired to escape from trouble and at the same time to earn merit and to leave a hallowed name behind him, he who did not know that than this no higher measure is given to man, for if it were he would cease to be man and become a god.

Of a sudden Wi abandoned prayer. He had thrown the spear of his mind at the skies, and lo! it stood there fixed in the ground before his feet. Since he could never get away from himself, what was the use of praying? Let him do those things that lay to his hand as best he might and bear his burdens as far as he could and cease from importuning help from he knew not whence. He who in this bitter moment of understanding for a while became sure that man could not hunt the gods, since it was they who hunted him, paying no more heed to his petitions than he, Wi, did to the groanings of any seal that he pursued as it strove impotently to struggle to the sea where it would be safe.

He rose from the ground to look at the face of the glacier and discover how far it had moved forward during the fierce winter that was gone. He stared at it and started back, for there in hideous imagery stood his own thought portrayed. In that clear ice he had been accustomed to see the dim form of the Sleeper and behind it, rather to one side, a yet dimmer form, thought to be that of a man who pursued the Sleeper, or perchance of one of the gods taking his rest with it. Now, behold! all this was changed. There stood the Sleeper as before, but by magic, or perhaps by some convulsion of the ice, the figure that had been behind was now in front. Yes, there it stood, with not more than once pace length of ice between Wi himself and it, a weird and awful thing.

It was a man, of that there could be no doubt, but such a man as Wi had never seen, for his limbs were covered with hair, his forehead sloped backwards, and his great jaw stood out beyond the line of his flat nose. His arms were very long, his legs were bowed, and in one of his hands he held a short, rough staff of wood. For the rest, his sunk but open eyes seemed to be small and his teeth large and prominent, while his head was covered with coarse and matted hair and from his shoulder hung a cloak, the skin of some animal of which the forepaws were knotted about his neck.

On this strange and hideous creature's face there was stamped a look of the wildest terror, telling Wi that he had died suddenly and that, when he died, he was very much afraid. Of what had he been afraid? Wi wondered. Not of the Sleeper, he thought, because until some movement of the glacier had thrust him forward during the past winter, he had been behind the Sleeper, as though he were pursuing it. No, it was something else that he feared.

Suddenly Wi guessed what it was. Long, long ago this forefather of the tribe, for knowing no other men, Wi thought that so he must be, thousands of winters ago perhaps, this man had been flying from the ice and snow, when in an instant they rushed down and swallowed him up, so that there he choked and died. He was no god, but just a poor man, if indeed he were altogether a man, whom death had taken in this fashion and whom the ice had preserved with his story written on his hideous face and fleeing form.

Then, was the Sleeper a god, or was he some huge wild beast that lived when the man lived and perished when the man perished, and in like fashion roaring open-mouthed to the heavens for help? So much for the gods! If they dwelt there in the glacier, as perhaps they dwelt everywhere, it was not in the shapes of this enormous brute, or of the man who also looked like a brute, for, as Wi had never seen an ape, he did not know that this was what he really resembled.

Whatever their end may have been, as he stared at them a fancy, or a vision, came to Wi. That man was himself—or all men, and the huge brute behind was Death who pursued, and the ice around was Doom which swallowed up both Life and Death. Vague thoughts of all this mystery got hold of his untutored mind and overcame it, so that presently he turned to creep shivering and terror-struck from these relics and emblems of a tragedy he could not comprehend.

Coming to the beach again, Wi continued to walk eastward past the smaller hills and ice-filled valleys, for he desired to visit a certain bay beyond them, where the seals were wont to gather when they arrived, hoping that he would see the first of them coming up from the south to breed. Like the rest of the people, Wi thought more of seals than he did of anything else, because these furnished the most of their winter food and of the other things that they needed. On he went till, turning a spur of cliff which here ran down to the sea to the east of the glacier field, he came to the bay that was bordered by a wide stretch of white sand and backed by a barren, rocky plain. Ceasing to ponder upon the Sleeper and the man and the deeper things that the sight of them had awakened in his heart, Wi searched the shore with his keen hunter's eyes, and the water of the bay and the ridge of rock whereby at low tide it was almost enclosed, that ran at some four spear-casts from the shore, but not one seal could he see.

"They are even later this spring than they were last year," he muttered to himself, and was about to make his way homeward when, on the farther side of the ridge, where the waves broke, he caught sight of some strange object that was stranded among the surf, a long thing which seemed to be pointed at both ends. At first he thought that it might be a dead animal of a sort new to him, washed up by the sea, and was turning to go when the surf lifted the object and he saw that it seemed to be hollow and that there lay in it what looked to him like a human form.

Now Wi's curiosity was awakened, and he wished that he could come nearer. This, however, was impossible, for at each end of the ridge of rocks was open water through which the tide raced swiftly. Or rather it was not possible except by swimming out from the shore of the bay. It is true that Wi was a great swimmer but the water was bitterly cold, for in it still floated many lumps of drift ice, so cold that there was much danger to a swimmer, who might, moreover, be cut or bruised by the sharp edges of the ice. Also, the swim would be long, for the ridge was far away. So again he thought that he would go home and not give himself up to more fancies about someone who lay in that hollow thing which was strange to him, for Wi had never seen a boat. Indeed, he turned to do so and walked a few paces.

Then for a second time that day it seemed to him as though a rope were drawing him, this time not to the glacier face but to the ridge of rock and that which lay upon its farther side. Supposing that there was a man— or woman— yonder? It seemed impossible because no other men or women lived except those upon the beach of whom he was chief. What he saw was some drift log splintered white by rolling upon stones, or perhaps a great fish dead and rotten. And yet how could he say that there were no other men and women, he who had just looked upon the corpse of a man who must have lived thousands of years ago when the ancient ice that wrapped him round was born in the womb of the distant mountains whence it had flowed? How could he be sure that he and his people were the only two-legged creatures on the earth, which perhaps was bigger than they knew?

Oh! he would go to look, for if he did not he would be sorry all his life. Should he be cramped in the cold water and drowned, or should the pack ice strike him so that he sank, after all it would not matter very much. Then, doubtless, Pag would become chief, or perhaps he would make Moananga chief, which would please the people better, and be the whisperer in his ear. Either of them would look after Foh, or if they did not, Aaka would, especially when he was gone and she could no more be jealous because the boy loved him better than he did her. Probably, too, there at the bottom of the sea was peace without fears or hopes, questionings, or disappointments. Also fate was always behind them as the huge Sleeper was behind that wild, hairy creature that was once a man.

So thought WI, and as he thought he threw off his cloak and laid it on a rock, hiding the axe beneath it so that, if he returned no more, Pag and the others might learn that the sea had taken him. Then he plunged into the water very swiftly, lest his courage should desert him, and struck out for the reef. At first that water was bitterly cold but, as he swam with great strokes, stopping now and again to push aside the blocks of floating ice or to feel them with his hand beneath the surface lest on them should be sharp points that would cut him, he grew warmer.

Also, the joy of the quest, the hope of adventure, caused his blood to flow more quickly than it had done there upon the beach, where he was filled with so many sad thoughts and haunted by the memory of the strange and hideous man with whom he had come face to face in the ice of the glacier. Now he felt as he had done when as a boy he had climbed the mountain crag on which none had ever dared to set foot, to rob the great eagle's nest, and had brought down its young one in a basket on his back, while the parent eagles screamed round him striking at this head and tearing him, which young one he had pinioned and kept for years, till at last the dogs killed it. Yes, once more he was a fearless boy, untroubled by memories of yesterday or fears for to-morrow, and seeking only what the hour might bring him.

At length Wi reached the reef, uncramped and unhurt. Crawling onto it, he shook himself as a dog does, then very cautiously picked his way among its stones and peered down at the spot, where from the height of the shore he had seen that strange, sharp-pointed thing in which a figure seemed to be lying. It was gone! No, there it was right beneath him, lifted up toward him by the send of the surf. It was something made by man to float upon the water, much larger than he had thought, for five or six people could have sat in it, hollowed it would seem from a great tree, thicker than any that he knew, for there were axe marks in the red-hued wood. Moreover, his eyes had not deceived him, for, behold! within this shaped log lay a figure covered with a cloak or blanket of white fur which hid it all, even the head that rested at the raised end of the log. No, not quite all, for outside of the cloak lay a tress of hair, long hair, yellow as the marsh flowers that came in spring, also a white arm and hand, which hand grasped a wooden implement, that from its shape, he guessed, must be used to drive the hollowed log through the water.

Wi stared and stared, and while he stared became aware that this hand was not that of a dead woman, for from its delicate shape he knew it to be a woman's, because, although blue with cold, presently the little finger moved, bending itself inward. Noting this, he pondered for a moment. What could he do? To swim to the beach bearing a senseless woman was impossible; moreover, she would die in the icy water. If she might be brought there at all, it must be in that in which she lay. Yet to drag that heavy log across the reef was behind his strength. Therefore there was but one thing to be done. It had come ashore but a little distance from the western channel, by which the sea flowed in and out of the bay. The tide had turned, he noted it as he swam, and was now running shoreward. If he pushed the log to the channel, it would float to the beach. He leapt into the surf and thrust it forward; being light, it moved easily, and as it drew but very little water, not more than four handbreadths, it would seem, he could guide it through the surf and shallows out of reach of the breaking waves.

Pushing it in front of him, presently he came to the lip of the race down which the tide began to run strongly shoreward. Here he paused a moment, proposing to take to the water once more and swim behind the hollow tree, guiding it with his hand. Then he remembered that the water was dreadfully cold—that the way was long and that, before he covered it, cramp might seize him so that he would sink and go to find out the truth about the gods and many other matters.

Perhaps this might be well for him, but if he were drowned, what would happen to her who lay there? Without doubt, she, who must already be near to death, would die also, for except to kill seals, of which as yet there were not any, no one came to this lonely far-off bay, or if perchance some did and saw a strange woman lying in a hollow tree, they would run away, thinking that she was a witch of the sea, such as was told of in legends. Or perhaps they would kill her lest she should be the bearer of a curse.

Then he thought to himself, why should he not get into the log and guide it ashore with that which lay in the stranger's hand? Often when the sea was calm and the weather warm he, like others of the tribe, would bestride a piece of wood and paddle it by the help of a bough to a certain sand bank that swarmed with fish, there to catch them on a line. Therefore, he could guess the use of what she held and knew how it should be handled.

Taking the paddle very gently from her hand, Wi entered the canoe, for such it was, and seating himself at the woman's feet, pushed it off into the centre of the race. Here the tide took it and bore it forward, so that all he need do, at any rate at first, was to keep the bark straight and after they were out of the race and in the bay, with gentle strokes of the paddle that he dipped into the water first on one side and then on the other, as he was accustomed to do when out fishing on a log, to drive it shoreward, avoiding the lumps of floating ice.

Thus this naked savage man and the shrouded woman upon whose face he had not yet dared to look, partly because he was naked and partly because he feared what he might behold beneath that cloak—a sea-witch, perhaps, who would drag him into the deep water—came safely to the shore. When a while before Wi had looked upon the sleeper in the ice and the hairy one who seemed to flee in front of it, in his heart he had compared these two to man being hunted of Fate in a most fearful form. He did not know that Fate has many shapes and that some of them are very fair. He did not guess that there stretched senseless before him, lay his fate, a fate as deadly as the monstrous Sleeper would have been to the hairy man who had lived and died thousands of years ago.

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## LALEELA

Wi leapt to the beach, and seizing the canoe by a hide rope which was attached to its prow, dragged it over the hard, wet sand, as, being very strong, he could do easily enough, till it was well above high-water mark. Then he ran to the rock and clothed himself swiftly in his girdle of dressed seal fur and his hooded cloak of gray wolfskin which he wore when out hunting, slipping his hand through the loop of the axe, for, after all, who knew what might lie beneath that covering? Also, about his shoulders he hung the bag in which when he went abroad he kept food for a day or two and his tools for making fire. Then he returned to the canoe and, with a beating heart, for like all savages he was frightened of the unknown, drew off the fur wrapping from her who lay senseless, and stared down.

Next instant he staggered back, for never had he seen and never had he dreamed of a woman so beautiful as this that the sea had brought to him. Tall she was, and shapely. Young, too, and all about her hung the matted masses of her yellow hair. Though somewhat blue with cold and reddened where the weather had caught it, her skin was of the whiteness of snow; her face was oval and her features were fine and well cut. Her eyes he could not see because they were shut, at which he rejoiced, for had they been open he would have known that she was dead; but he noted the long curling eyelashes which lay upon her cheek, also that they were not yellow like her hair, but dark, indeed, almost black in hue.

She was clothed, but in a fashion that was strange to him, for beneath her breast, supported by straps across her shoulders, was a long garment blue in colour made of he knew not what, that was tied in at the waist with a girdle of fur to which were sewn polished stones and beautiful little shells that glittered. Also about her neck was a string of amber rounded into beads and pierced, while on her feet were sandals made fast with brodered thongs. Lastly from her shoulders hung a long cloak, also deep blue in colour and of the same soft unknown stuff as was her gown, and with this a bag worked like the sandals.

Yes, Wi staggered back, muttering:

"The Sea-witch! The Sea-witch herself. She who brings curses, no woman. Now what says the tale—that such should be thrust back into the sea, taking their curse with them. I will thrust her back into the sea."

He drew near again and touched her cheek with his finger tip, as though expecting to find it vapour, which he did not, for he asked himself,

"This one has flesh like women. Have sea-witches flesh like a woman's?"

Just then the Sea-witch shivered and made a little moaning noise.

"And can they shiver?" went on Wi, "they who are said to live upon the ice? Surely first I should warm her who can suffer and bring her back to life. I can always kill her afterward if I find that she is a witch and not a woman. That is, unless she kills me."

He looked about him. At the back of the beach was a sloping cliff of soft stone, and in it a little cave hollowed out by water; indeed a spring of pure water bubbled beside it, of which Wi had often drunk when he sheltered in this cave, weary with the hunting of seals. Now he bethought him of this place and stooping down, encircled the Sea-witch's shape with his strong arms, lifted her, and although she was heavy, if somewhat wasted, perhaps with want and cold, carried her past the beach to the cave, where he laid her down upon a bed of dried seaweed which he himself had used at the last seal hunting. Then he began to rub her hands and arms, and as still she did not wake, he lifted her again and held her against his breast that she might gather warmth from him.

Still she swooned on, although he clasped her fast, so once more he laid her down and, covering her with his cloak and her own, bethought him of another plan. In this cave amongst other things used by the hunters, was a store of driftwood for making fires on which to cook seal meat. Wi took from his bag his fire sticks and, setting one between his feet and on it a pinch of dry touchwood powder from his pouch, twirled the sharp-pointed hardwood rod between the palms of his hands more quickly, perhaps, than ever he did before. The spark appeared, the touchwood lighted. Wi blew on it and on little pieces of crumbled seaweed that he added till there was a tiny flame, on which he placed more dried seaweed and more and more. Then he set the burning seaweed beneath the wood that he had built up ready, leaving a hollow in its centre, and presently there was a great blaze.

He paused, admiring his own work after his simple fashion, and wondering dimly why two pieces of wood rubbed together produced fire which, if it were allowed to grow and spread, would burn a forest, as every day he wondered about many things that he could not understand. Then, bringing his mind back to the matter with which he had to deal, he lifted the Sea-witch and laid her down upon her fur rug quite close to the fire, being careful first to arrange the masses of her tumbled hair so that no spark could fall among them. Thus she lay a while, the heat beating on her and her beautiful face illumined in the strong light of the flames, while Wi watched her entranced, wondering whether she would live or die. He hoped that she would live, and yet he felt that if she died perhaps it would be better for him, for then he would be left with the company of a marvellous memory, yet without fear of trouble to be borne.

"Which way will you have it?" asked Wi of Fate, and sat still by the fire awaiting the answer.

Presently it came, for the Sea-witch was strong and did not mean to die. She needed nothing but warmth to call her back to life and, on his breast and by his fire, Wi had given her warmth. She opened her eyes and with a little catching of the breath Wi noted that they were large and dark—not black but of the hue of those woodland flowers that we call violets, and very tender. Next she sat up, resting her weight upon one hand, and stared at the fire, muttering something in a soft voice and holding her other hand toward it. Thus she remained a while, drinking in its glorious warmth, then began to look about her, first out toward the sea, then round the little cave.

So her eyes fell upon Wi, a dark, massive figure; a perfect shape of developed manhood who now was on his knees bending toward her with his hands outstretched a little, silent, motionless, like to the statue of one who is lost in prayer. She started, then began to study him with those great eyes of hers. Slowly her glance travelled up and down him, resting for a long while upon his face. Then it fell upon the shining axe on his wrist and for a moment grew fearful. Back from this axe it flew to his face and, reading there that she had nothing of which to be afraid, for it was a most earnest, kindly face, wild enough but not ill-looking after its fashion, she shook her head and smiled, whereon in a slow and doubtful fashion he smiled back at her.

Next she touched her lips and her throat with her long fingers. For a moment Wi was puzzled. Then he understood. Leaping up he ran from the cave and at once returned with his joined hands full of water, for these were his only cup. She smiled again, nodding, then bent her head and drank the water till all was gone, and by a little sign asked for more. Thrice he went and thrice returned, till at last her thirst was satisfied.

Again she lifted her fingers, this time laying them upon her teeth, and again Wi understood. Seizing his bag, he drew from it a handful of dried codfish, and, to show that it was good, took a little piece, chewed, and swallowed it. She considered this food doubtfully, showing him that it was one to which she had not been accustomed. Then, overcome by hunger, accepted a fragment and made trial. Apparently, she liked it well enough, for she asked for more and more till she had eaten a good meal, after which she signed to him to bring her another drink of water.

By the time this strange feast was done, the light began to fail. She noted it and pointed to the sky, then spoke, asking some question, but what she said he could not understand, nor could she understand what he said to her. Now Wi was much perplexed. Night fell and the village was far away, nor was it safe to try to walk thither in the darkness because of wild beasts and other dangers.

Moreover, this Sea-witch must be very tired and need rest, if witches ever rested. So he signed to her to lie down to sleep, and made a bed for her of dry seaweed, near to the fire. Also, taking more seaweed, he piled it up outside the mouth of the cave, and by pointing first to himself and then to it, showed her that he would sleep there. She nodded to tell him that she understood, whereon Wi left her for a while and by the light of the dying day, walked some distance round the spur of the cliff which almost encircled the bay, and beyond it to discover if perchance Pag had followed him, tracking his footsteps as sometimes he did.

But Pag, who was working on the skin of the tiger and thought that Wi would return at nightfall, had not done so. Therefore, finding neither Pag nor anyone else, Wi walked back again. Coming to the mouth of the cave, he peeped in and saw that the Sea-witch had lain down and was asleep, or at any rate that her eyes were closed. He went away and covering himself with seaweed, lay down also, but sleep he could not for it was cold there outside the cave, and he was hungry, who would not touch the dried fish because the Sea-witch might need more of it at any moment, and the supply was small. Indeed, that he might not fall into temptation he had left the bag in which it was carried at her side.

Yet perhaps cold and hunger would not have kept him awake, who was hardy and like all savages accustomed to privations. Perhaps it was the thought of the strange adventure that had befallen him and of the wonderful beauty of the woman creature whom he had saved from death—that is, if she were a woman and could die; also of all that these things might mean to him, which caused him to toss from side to side with open eyes.

Already he knew that, whatever chanced, even if she were taken away as swiftly and as strangely as she had come, he would never be able to forget this witch of the sea who even now seemed to draw his heart toward her. And if she were not taken away, what then? With what eyes would the people look on her, and how would Aaka receive her, and where was she to live? In the old days, before the making of the new law, it would have been simple, for if she were willing, then there was nothing to prevent him, the chief, or indeed any other man from taking a second wife, and even if she were not willing she might pass as such and have the shelter of the cave. But there was the new law, and he had sworn an oath that might not be broken, for if it were, shame, mockery, and disaster would come upon him, and perhaps to others.

Thus mused Wi from hour to hour, striving to climb his slippery mount of doubt and fear first from this side and then from that, and always failing, until his head swam and he gave up the quest. Twice he rose and crept into the cave to replenish the fire lest that fair sleeper should grow cold. This he did with his eyes turned from her because, according to the customs of the people, it was not seemly that he should look upon a maiden while she lay asleep. Yet, although he did not look at her, he was sure that she looked at him, for he could feel, or thought that he could feel, her eyes upon him.

After his second visit to the cave, he did at length sink into a troubled sleep, only to be awakened suddenly. Glancing upward but without stirring he saw what had awakened him. It was the Sea-witch who stood there, tall and stately, considering him with earnest eyes. He lay quite still, feigning slumber, till at length, having as, he thought,

made up her mind that really he was asleep, she moved a little way and looked upward, searching the skies. Presently she found what she sought, for between a rift in the clouds appeared the faint shape of the waning moon. Thrice she bowed to it, then, kneeling down, with an uplifted hand spoke aloud, making some sweet-voiced prayer.

"Evidently she is a witch," thought Wi, "for she worships the moon, which no one does among the people. And yet, is it more witch-like to pray to the moon that gives light than to kneel and make offerings before the Ice-gods and him who sleeps in the ice? Perhaps, if she saw me do that, she would say that I was a wizard."

She rose, again bowed thrice, turned, and glanced at Wi as though in farewell, and glided away across the beach.

"She is going back into the sea, as a witch would. Well, let her go, for perhaps it is better," thought Wi again.

She came to the canoe and stood by it, thinking; then she bent herself and pushed at it, but by now it had sunk into the wet sand, and being water-logged, was too heavy for her to move.

"I will help her," said Wi, and rising, he followed her.

She looked at him without astonishment and apparently without fear; it was as though she knew already that he would never harm her. By signs he made it clear that if she desired it, he would bale out the canoe and push it into the water for her, which seemed to surprise her a little. Most earnestly she studied his face, noting, perhaps, that it was very sad and that what he offered to do was not because he wished to be rid of her. Then, muttering some words and waving her arms, she looked upward again at the dying moon like one who seeks a sign. Presently she came to a decision, for suddenly she shook her head, smiled a little, and, taking him very gently by the hand, led him back toward the cave, which she entered, leaving him without.

"So the Witch means to stay," thought Wi. "If so, it is her own choice, for I have done my best to help her back to the sea."

Day came at last, gray and dull as all the days seemed to be that year, but without snow or rain. The Witch appeared at the mouth of the cave and beckoned to Wi, who sat shivering without. For a little while he hesitated, then entered to find that she had heaped wood upon the fire, which burned gloriously. In front of it she sat upon the seaweed of her bed that she had gathered to a pile, changed indeed from what she had been when first he saw her lying at the bottom of the hollowed log.

Looking at her, he thought that she must have washed herself at the spring before he saw her praying to the moon, for there was no longer any brine upon her face or arms, also her blue cloak and other garments were dry and, to his sight, who had never seen such robes, splendid. Moreover, she was drawing through the masses of her yellow hair something with many sharp points made of horn or bone, which doubtless she had taken from her bag, a new thing to Wi, for combs were unknown amongst the people, though now, when he looked upon it and saw its use, he wondered that they had not thought of them before.

While she was still engaged upon this task and the long yellow waving hair that had been so matted and tangled separated itself till it hung about her glittering in the firelight, a garment in itself that hid her to the waist, Wi stood before her awkwardly, for he was amazed. Then he bethought him that by now she must be hungry again, and lifting his bag that lay near by, he poured out more of the shredded codfish and offered it to her. She began to eat heartily enough, till some thought seemed to strike her, and she pointed first to the codfish, then to Wi's mouth, also lower down, saying as plainly as signs could do, that he, too, must be hungry.

He shook his head, pretending that this was not so, but she would not be deceived, and held out a piece of the fish toward him, refusing to eat any more until it was swallowed. The end of it was that together they finished all remaining in the bag, eating alternately.

It was just as Wi was offering the last fragment to the Sea-witch, that Pag appeared at the mouth of the cave and stood staring at them outlined against the bright background of the fire, as though he believed them to be ghosts.

The Sea-witch, glancing up, perceived this squat, bow-legged form, great head, and ugly, one-eyed face, and for the first time was frightened. At least, she grasped Wi's arm and looked at him in inquiry, whereon, not knowing what else to do, he smiled, patted her hand, and spoke to Pag in a commanding voice, of which she understood the tones, if not the words.

"What are you doing here?" Wi asked.

"I wonder," answered Pag reflectively, "for in this cave there seems to be no place for me. Still, if you would know, I followed your footprints hither, fearing lest harm had befallen you—as I think it has," he added still more reflectively, fixing his one bright eye upon the Sea-witch.

"Have you brought any food with you?" asked Wi, who to tell the truth desired to fend off explanations for a while. "If so, give it to me, for this maiden," and he nodded at the Sea-witch, "has fasted long and is still hungry."

"How do you know that she is not married and that she has fasted long?" asked Pag inconsequently, adding, "Can you talk her language?"

"No," answered Wi, seizing upon the last part of the question and ignoring the rest. "I found her floating in a hollow log which lies yonder on the beach and brought her back to life."

"Then you found something that was worth finding, Wi, for she is very beautiful," said Pag, "though what Aaka will say about her, I do not know."

"Nor do I," answered Wi, rubbing his brow, "or the people either."

"Perhaps she is a witch whom you would do well to kill. Urk and N'gae tell of such, Wi."

"Perhaps, Pag, but, witch or woman, I do not mean to kill her."

"I understand that, Wi, for who could kill anything so lovely? Look at her face and shape and hair, and those great eyes."

"I have looked at them already," replied Wi with irritation. "Cease your foolish talk and tell me what I am to do."

Pag pondered a while and replied:

"I think that you had better marry her and tell the people that the Ice- gods, or the Sea-gods, or any other gods, gave her to you, which indeed they seem to have done."

"Fool! how do I know that she would marry me who am so far beneath her? Also there is the new law."

"Ah!" said Pag, "I always misdoubted me of that law, and now I understand why I did so. Well, if you will not kill her and will not marry her, you must bring her to the village, and since she cannot live with Aaka or in the cave, or in any place where there is another woman, you must set her in a hut by herself. There is a very fine one empty quite near the mouth of the cave, so that you could look at her whenever you liked."

Wi, who was thinking of other things, asked in an absent-minded way what hut was empty.

"That of Rahi the Miser who, you remember, died last week, as some said from fear of the tiger, but as I believe of grief because you ordered him to divide up his fish hooks and flint knives with those who had none."

"Yes, I remember," said Wi, "and, by the way, have you got the fish hooks?"

"Not yet, Wi, but I shall have them soon, for I am sure that old woman who lived with Rahi and who has run away from the hut buried them in his grave, as he ordered her to do. Presently, I will catch her and find out. Meanwhile, there is the hut all ready."

"Yes," said Wi, "the women who nurse the children in the cave can look after this Sea-witch."

Pag shook his head doubtfully and remarked he did not think that any woman would look after her, as the young ones would be jealous and the old ones afraid.

"Especially," he added, "as you say that she is a witch."

"I say no such words," exclaimed Wi angrily, "Sea-witch I named her because she came out of the sea and I know no other."

"Or because she is a witch," suggested Pag. "Still, let us try to learn how she calls herself."

"Yes," said Wi, "it is well to do that, for if the women refuse her I shall give her into your care."

"I have known worse tasks," answered Pag. Then he turned to the Sea-witch who all this while watched them steadily, guessing that they were talking of her, and clapped his hands as though to awake her, which was not needful. Next he tapped Wi upon the breast and said, "Wi." Then he tapped his own breast and said, "Pag." Several times he did this, then tapped her arm and, pointing his finger at her, looked a question.

At first she seemed puzzled, but after the third repetition of the tappings and the names she understood, for she smiled, a quick, bright smile, then, pointing at each of them, repeated, "Wi-i, Pa-ag." Lastly, she set her finger on her breast and added, "La-lee-la."

They nodded and exclaimed together, "La-lee-la," whereon she nodded back, and smiling again, repeated, "Laleela." Then they talked about the canoe, and, taking her to it, showed her by signs that they proposed to hide it in the cave, to which she seemed to assent.

So, having emptied the water out of it, they dragged the canoe to the cave and, after Pag had examined it with much interest, for in this strange and useful thing he saw a great discovery, they hid it beneath piles of seaweed, burying the paddles, of which they found two, beneath the sand of the cave. This done, Wi took her by the hand and as best he could, showed her that she must accompany them. At first she seemed afraid and hung back, but presently shrugged her shoulders, sighed, looked imploringly at Wi as though to ask him to protect her, and walked forward between them.

An hour or more later, Aaka, Moananga, Tana, and Foh, who were watching on the outskirts of the village, being frightened because Wi had not returned, caught sight of the three of them walking toward them.

"Look!" cried Foh, as they came into view from round the spur of the glacier mountain. "There are Father and Pag and a Beautiful One."

"Beautiful she is indeed," said Moananga, while his wife stared open-eyed. But Aaka only exclaimed:

"You call her beautiful, and so she is, but I say that she is a witch come to bring evil upon our heads."

Tana watched this tall stranger advancing with a gliding step across the sands; noted her blue cloak and amber necklace, her yellow tresses and, when she came nearer, her great dark eyes set in a face that was pink as the lining of a

shell. Then she said:

"You are right, Aaka—here comes a witch, if not of the sort you mean, such a witch as you and I wish that we could be."

"Your meaning?" asked Aaka.

"I mean that this one will draw the hearts of all men after her and earn the hate of all women, which is what everyone of us would do if she could."

"So you say," said Aaka, "but I hold otherwise."

"Yet you will walk the same road as the rest of us, although you hold your head sideways and pretend that it is different, you who tell us that Wi is nothing to you and who treat him so badly, and yet always watch him out of the corners of your eyes," said Tana, who had never loved Aaka overmuch and was very fond of Wi.

Now Aaka would have answered sharply enough, but at this moment the three came up to her. Foh dashed forward and threw his arms about his father, who bent down and kissed him. Moananga uttered some word of welcome, for he, who loved his brother, was glad to see him safe, and Tana smiled doubtfully, her eyes fixed upon the stranger's marvellous robe and necklace. Wi offered some greeting to Aaka, who answered:

"Welcome, Husband. We feared for you, and are glad to see you safe, and your shadow with you"—here she glanced at Pag. "But who is this third in a strange robe? Is it a tall boy whom you have found, or perhaps a woman?"

"A woman, I think," answered Wi. "Study her and you will see for yourself, Wife."

"It is needless, for doubtless you know, Husband. But if so, where did you find her?"

"The story is long, Wife, but the heart of it is that I saw her floating in a hollow log yesterday and, swimming out, brought her to shore in the Bay of Seals."

"Is it so? Then where did you sleep last night? For know that we feared for you."

"In the cavern at the Bay of Seals. At least the woman Laleela slept there after I had brought her back to life."

"Indeed, and how did you learn her name?"

"Ask Pag," said Wi shortly. "He learned it, not I."

"So Pag's hand is in the business as in every other. Well, I hope that this witch whom he has brought to you is not one of his gray wolves turned to the shape of woman."

"I have said that I found her myself and carried her to the cave, where Pag came to us this morning. Laugh if you will, but it is true, as Pag can tell you."

"Doubtless Pag will tell me anything that you wish, Husband. Yet—"

Here Wi grew angry and exclaimed:

"Have done. I need food and rest, as does this stranger Laleela."

Then he walked forward with Laleela and Pag, who grinned as he went, followed by the others, except Tana, who had run on ahead to tell the people what had happened.

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## THE MOTHER OF THE CAST-OUTS

The news spread fast—so fast that, when they reached the village, even from the huts that were farthest off, folk were rushing to look on this Witch-from-the-Sea whom Wi had found, for a witch they knew she must be, because they of the tribe were the only people who lived, or ever had lived, in the world. Of course, there was the Dead One who stood in the ice with the Sleeper, but if he were a man, of which they were not sure, doubtless he was one of their forefathers. Therefore this was no woman whom Wi and Pag brought with them, but a ghost or a spirit.

When they beheld her walking between the pair in such a calm and stately fashion, like a stag indeed, as one of them said, and noted her long yellow hair and the whiteness of her skin, her height, taller by a head than any of them except Aaka, and her wonderful blue cloak and other garments, the brodered sandals on her feet, the amber necklace on her breast and everything else about her, not forgetting her large, dark eyes, liquid and soft as a deer's yet somewhat scornful, then, of course, they knew that they were right and that this was in truth a witch, for no woman could look like that. They stared, they gaped, they pointed; some of the children ran away—here was proof of the worst—so did certain of the dogs that bounded forward barking, but on seeing and smelling that at which they barked, had turned tail and fled, as it was their custom to do from ghosts who pelted them with invisible stones. So, a dirty, unkempt, half-clothed crowd, they stared on while, guarded on either side like a captive by Wi and Pag, Laleela glided through them, glancing now to right and now to left with unchanging face and saying nothing.

At first they were silent; then, when she had passed and with her the fear that she would shoot a curse at them with a glance of those dark eyes, whispered debate broke out among them as, huddled together, they followed on her footsteps.

"She is a very ugly witch," said one woman, "who has hair the colour of sunlight and such long arms."

"I wish you were as ugly," answered her husband rudely, and thus the argument began to rage, all the women and some of the old men holding that she was vile to look on, while the young men, also the children as soon as they grew used to the sight of her, thought her beautiful.

"Where will Wi take her?" asked one.

"Nowhere," answered Urk the Aged, "because she will vanish away," and as the point was disputed, hastily invented a tale.

His grandfather, he said, had been told by *his* grandfather that such a witch as this, probably the same witch, since witches never grew old, had visited the tribe, coming to the shore standing upon an ice floe that was pushed by white bears with their noses. Knowing her for what she was, the people had tried to kill her with stones, but when they threw the stones, these fell back upon their heads and killed them; also the bears attacked them. So she came ashore and sat in the cave for six days singing, till the chief's son, a bold and dissolute youth, fell in love with her and tried to kiss her, whereon she turned him into a bear and, mounting on his back, went out into the sea again and was no more seen.

Now some believed this tale and some did not, yet it worked well for Laleela, since all made up their minds that they would be on the safe side and neither try to stone nor to kiss this witch, lest they also should be turned into bears or otherwise come to harm.

When they drew near to the cave, Aaka and Moananga overtook them, also Tana, who, having spread the news, had rejoined her husband, very breathless.

"What are you going to do with the witch, Husband?" Aaka asked, looking at her sideways.

"I am not sure," he answered, then added in a hesitating voice, "Perhaps you, Wife, would take her into our old hut, seeing that now you sleep in the cave and are only there during the day."

"Not so," answered Aaka firmly. "Have I not enough troubles that I should add a witch to them? Also, now that the winter is gone, I, who hate that cave and the crying of the children, intend to sleep in the hut again."

Wi bit his lip and stood thinking.

"Brother," broke in Moananga, "we have two huts side by side and in the second one only keep our food. This sea-woman might live in it and—"

He got no further for Tana cut him short:

"What are you saying, Husband?" she asked. "That hut is needed for the dried fish, the firewood, and the nets, also by me for the cooking of our food."

Then Wi walked on, leaving Moananga and Tana disputing. At the mouth of the cave stood those women who tended the girl children that would have been cast out to perish but were saved under Wi's new law. Some of these were young and nursed the children at the breast, while others were old and widows, who watched them when the nurses were not there. Addressing them, Wi bade them choose one of their number to wait upon and cook for this stranger from the sea. They heard, they looked at the stranger, and then they ran away, into the cave or elsewhere, so that Wi saw no more of them. Now Wi turned to Pag and said:

"All things have happened as you told me, and the women refuse her from the sea who is named Laleela and comes we know not whence. What is to be done?"

Pag spat upon the ground; Pag stared upward with his one eye, Pag looked at Laleela and at Wi. Then he answered:

"When a cord is knotted and cannot be unravelled, the best thing is to cut it through and knit up the ends afresh. Take the witch into the cave and look after her yourself, Wi, as Aaka and the others will not receive her and she cannot be left to starve. Or if this does not please you, kill her, if she can be killed."

"Neither of these things will I do," answered Wi. "Into the cave she cannot come because of my oath. Starve she shall not, for who could refuse food even to a dog that creeps hungry to the hut door? Kill her I will not; it would be murder and bring the sky onto our heads."

"Yes, Wi; though if she were old and hideous the sky might remain where it is, since, perhaps, for an ancient hag it would not fall. But as all these things are so, what next?"

"This, Pag. Take her to the hut of Rahi who is dead. Command some of my servants, men, not women, to make it ready for her, to light fire and to furnish food from my store. Then go you and dwell in the outhouse against the hut which was Rahi's workshop where he shaped flints and the place where he kept his goods and traded in them, and by day and night be the guard of this beautiful one whom the gods have sent to us."

"So I am to become a witch's nurse. Well, I thought that would be the end of the story," said Pag.

Thus it came about that Laleela the Beautiful One, who had risen from the sea, went to dwell in the hut of Rahi, the dead miser, and there was tended by Pag the dwarf, the hater of women. Without a word she went, patiently submitting to all things as one who feels herself to be swept along by the stream of Fate, and waits for it to bear her whither it will, caring little how that journey might end. Pag, too, went patiently to fulfil his strange and unaccustomed task of guard and servant to one whom all the tribe held to be a witch, providing for her needs, teaching her the customs of the people, and protecting her from every harm. All these things he did, not only to please Wi, but for a certain reason of his own. He, who saw farther than the rest, except perhaps Wi himself, understood from the first that this woman was no witch, but one of some people unknown to them. He saw also that this unknown people had many arts which were strange to him, and he desired to learn these arts, also where they lived and everything else about them. Of what was the blue cloak made? How came it that the stranger woman travelled across the sea in a hollowed log, and how was that log made fit to bear her? What knowledge was hid in her which she could not utter because her tongue was different? All these things and many others Pag, who was athirst for wisdom, desired to learn. Therefore, when Wi commanded him to be the guide and companion of Laleela, the Risen-from-the-Sea, he obeyed without a word.

Strange was the life of Laleela. There she sat in the hut and cooked the food that Pag brought to her after new fashions that were unknown to him. Or sometimes she walked abroad, followed and guarded by Pag, taking note of the ways of the people, and after she had learned these, up and down upon the beach with her eyes ever fixed upon the sea, looking southward.

Or when the weather was bad, by signs she caused Pag to give her dressed skins and sinews, also splinters of ivory from the tusks of the walrus. These splinters she fashioned into needles, boring an eye in the head of them with a sharp and heated flint, and threading the sinews through them, began to sew in a fashion such as Pag had never seen. Of this sewing he told the women of the tribe who, gathering in front of the hut, watched her with amazement and later prayed Pag to ask of the witch to make them needles like her own, which she did, smiling, till there was no more ivory.

Then Pag, since he could not understand hers, began to teach her his own language, which she learned readily enough, especially after Wi came to join in the lessons. Within two moons, indeed, she could ask for what she wanted and understand what was said to her, and within four, being quick and clever, could talk the tongue of the people well enough, if but slowly.

Thus, at last it came about that Wi and Pag learned as much of her history as she chose to tell them which was but little. She said that she was the daughter of a Great One, the ruler of a tribe that could not be counted, who lived far away to the south. This tribe for the most part dwelt in houses that were built upon tree-trunks sunk into the mud in the waters of a lake, though some of them made their homes upon the shores of the lake. Fish and game were their food; also they cultivated certain herbs the seeds of which they gathered and ate, after grinding them between stones and making them into a paste that they cooked in clay heated with fire. They had implements also, and weapons of war beautifully fashioned from flint, ivory, and the horns of deer, and they wove cloth such as that of her garments from the wool of tame beasts and dyed it with the juices of herbs, different from those that bore the seeds which they ate.

Moreover, where they lived, although much rain fell, the sun shone more brightly and the air was warmer than here in the home of the tribe.

To all of these tales, gathered painfully word by word, Wi and Pag listened with wonder, then at last Wi asked:

"How comes it, O Woman Laleela, that you left a land where you were so great and where you lived in such plenty and comfort?"

"I left it because of one I hated and because of a dream," they understood her to answer.

"Why did you hate this one and what was the dream?" asked Wi.

She paused a while as though to master his question, which she seemed to be translating in her mind, then answered:

"The one I hated was my father's brother. My father was going away" (by this she meant dying), "the brother wished to marry me and become king. I hate him. Taking boat with much food, I row down river to the sea at night."

Wi nodded to show that he understood, and asked again:

"But what of the dream?"

"The dream told me to go north," she replied, "a great wind blow me north for days and days, till I fall asleep and you find me."

"Why did the dream tell you to go north?" asked Wi, with the help of Pag.

She shook her head and answered with a set face:

"Ask of the dream, O Wi." Nor would she say any more.

From this time forward, Laleela began to learn the language of the tribe very fast, so that soon she could speak it quite well, for she was quick and clever, and Pag, who was also clever, taught her continually. In the evenings, when his work was done, Wi would come to her hut and, sitting there with Pag, he asked her many things about her people and her country. In answer, she told him that it was much warmer than his own, though there was a great deal of rain if little snow; also that it lay a long way off, for she had been days and nights in the boat driven by the gale before she fell asleep.

"Could you find your way home?" asked Wi.

"I think so," she answered, "because all the time I was seldom out of the sight of the shore, and I marked the headlands and know the mountains between which the river runs that leads to my country. I mean that I should know all this if once I were out of the ice that floats upon your sea. For it was after I passed the last headland and came across open water into the ice, that I fell asleep."

"Then that headland cannot be so very far away," said Wi, "for if it were, the cold would have been your death before I found you."

So this talk ended, but Wi thought much of it afterward, and often he and Pag spoke together of the matter.

A little while later Laleela began to grow restless and to say that she lacked work, she who had been a big woman among her people with much to do.

Pag thought over her words for a while, then, one day when Wi was out upon some business, he took her to the cave and showed her the little girl infants which were nurtured there, telling her their story: how they had been cast out to perish, or rather how they would have been cast out had it not been for Wi's new law.

"Your mothers are very cruel," she said. "In my country, she who did this would herself be cast out."

Then she took up some of the infants and, after looking them all over, said that they were ill-tended as though by hirelings, and that two of them were like to die.

"Several have died," said Pag.

Now, although they did not see him, Wi, having returned to the cave, stood in the shadow watching them and listening to their talk. Presently he stepped forward and said:

"You are right, Laleela, these babes need more care. After the first few weeks their mothers neglect them, I think to show that they were fated to die and that for this reason they wished to cast them out; nor do the other women nurse them as they should. Yet I am helpless who lack time to see to the business, and when I complain, find all the women leagued against me. Will you help me with these children, Laleela?"

"Yes, Wi," she answered, "though if I do so the women of your tribe will become even more bitter against me than they are now. Why does not your wife, Aaka, see to the matter?"

"If I walk one way, Aaka walks another," answered Wi sadly. "See now," he added, "I make you, Laleela, the Stranger-from-the-Sea, head nurse of these babes, with authority to do what you will for their welfare. This I will proclaim and with it my word that any who disobey you in your duty shall be punished."

So Laleela, the Witch-from-the-Sea, became the mother of the cast-outs, with other women set under her, and filled that office well. There she would sit by the fire among these little creatures, feeding them with such food as was known to this people, and in a low, sweet voice singing songs of her own country that were very pleasant to hear. At least, Wi thought them pleasant, for often he would come into the cave and, seated in the shadows, would watch and listen to her, thinking that she did not know he was there, though all the while she knew this well enough. At length, finding out that she knew, he came forward from the shadows, and, seated on a log of wood, would talk to her, who by now understood his language.

Thus he learned much for, though she would not speak about herself, in broken words she told him of her country and of how around it lived many other peoples with whom they made war or peace, which astonished him who had believed that the tribe were the only men upon the earth. Also, she told him and Pag of such simple arts as they

practised, whereof these heard with wonder. But of why she fled from these folk of hers, trusting herself to the sea in an open boat to be driven wherever the winds would take her, she would or could tell him little. Moreover, when he asked her whether she wished to return to her own country, she answered that she did not know.

Then, after a while, Wi began to talk to her as a friend and to tell her of his own troubles, though of Aaka he said nothing at all. She listened, and at length answered that his sickness had no cure.

"You belong to this people, Chief," she said, "but are not of them. You should have been born of my people."

"In every company one walks quicker than the rest," answered Wi.

"Then he finds himself alone," said Laleela.

"Not so, because he must return to guide the others."

"Then, before the hilltop is gained, night will overtake them all," said Laleela.

"If a man gain that hilltop, what can he do by himself?"

"Look at the plains below and die. At least it is something to have been the first to see new things, and some day those who follow in his footsteps will find his bones."

From the time that Wi heard Laleela speak thus, he began to love her with his heart, and not only for her beauty's sake, as he had always done since first he looked upon her in the boat.

Soon Aaka noted all this and laughed at him.

"Why do you not take the witch to yourself, as it is lawful that you should do?" she asked, "for whoever heard of a chief with only one wife, I shall not be jealous of her, and you have but a single child left."

"Because she is far above me," he answered. "Moreover, I have sworn an oath upon this matter."

"That for your oath!" said Aaka, snapping her fingers.

Yet, when she spoke thus, Aaka did not tell all the truth. As a wife she was not jealous of Wi because of the customs of her people. Yet in other ways she was very jealous, because in old times she and no other had been his counsellor. Then she became bitter toward him because he set their children before her, and left him to go his own way. Thereon he turned to Pag and made a friend of him and hearkened to his words, and for this reason she hated Pag. Now the Witch-from-the-Sea had come with her new wisdom which he drank up as thirsty sand drinks up water, and, behold! she hated her even more than she had done Pag, not because she was fair but because she was clever.

Moreover, although he had liked Laleela well enough at first and guarded her as her friend, Pag began to hate her also, and for the same reason. The truth was that, notwithstanding his faults, which were many, Wi was one of those men who is beloved by all who are near to him, even when they do not understand him, so much so that those who love him grow jealous of each other. But this Wi himself never knew, any more than Pag did, that it was because he entered into the hearts of all, reading them and their joys and sorrows, that he drew the hearts of all after him.

So Wi made a friend of Laleela, telling her his troubles, and the closer he drew to her, the farther away moved Aaka and Pag. Laleela listened and advised and comforted, and being a woman, in her heart wondered why he did not come still nearer, though whether or not she would have been glad if he had, she did not know. At least, she would have wondered, had not Wi told her of the new law that he had made, under which, because women were so few among the tribe, no man might take more than one wife; and of the oath that he had sworn that this law he would keep himself, calling down upon his head the curse of the Ice-gods whom he worshipped, should he break it, and not on his own only, but also upon those of the people.

Now, Laleela did not believe in the Ice-gods because she was a Moon-worshipper. Yet she did believe that a curse invoked in the name of one god was just as terrible as that invoked in the name of another. In fact, she put more faith in the curse than she did in the gods, because, if the gods were invisible, always evil could be seen. Therefore, she was not angry because Wi, who was so near to her in mind, still remained as far away from her as though he were her brother, or her father; nor did she try to draw him closer as, had she wished, she knew well enough that she could do.

Meanwhile, it is to be told that this year all things went ill with the tribe. There was no spring, and when the time of summer came the weather remained so cold and sunless that always it felt as though snow were about to fall, while the wind from the east was so bitter that but little could grow. Moreover, only a few seals appeared from the south to breed, not enough to furnish the food of the people or their garments for the winter. With the ducks and other wild fowl, and the fish, especially the salmon, the story was the same, so that had it not been for the chance that four whales of the smaller sort, coming in with a high tide, were left stranded in the bay, which whales they cut up, preserving their flesh as best they could by smoking it, and otherwise, there would have been little for them to eat until the spring of another year.

At the cutting up of these whales, also at the collection of all food that could be found, Wi worked very hard. Yet the people who had been accustomed to plenty in the summer season, however tight they must draw their belts in winter, murmured and walked about with sullen, downcast faces, grumbling and asking each other why such trouble should come upon them, the like of which even Urk the Aged could not remember. Then a whisper began to run from ear to ear among them, that it was because the beautiful Witch-from-the-Sea had brought evil on them out of the sea,

changing the face of heaven and driving away the seals and the fowls and the fish that would not come where no sun shone.

If she were gone, said the whisperers, the sun would shine again and the beasts and birds would return and their stomachs would be full and they could look up to the ridgepoles of their huts and see them bending beneath the weight of the winter food, as they used to do in the old days. Why could she not go back into the sea in her hollow log, or if she would not, why could she not be cast out thither living, or if need be—dead? Thus they said one to another by signs, or speaking in hints, but as yet, whatever he might guess, Wi knew nothing of their talk.

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## THE LESSON OF THE WOLF MOTHER

On a certain day Aaka saw Pag shambling past her hut, his eyes fixed upon the ground.

"The wolf-man is sad," she said to herself, "and I know why he is sad. It is because Wi up there at the cave is taking counsel with that yellow-haired Laleela about big matters and asking no help from him."

Thus she thought, then called to Pag to come to her and offered him a dish of food, mussels cooked in a shell. Pag, who was hungry, looked at it, then said:

"Is it poisoned, Aaka?"

"Why do you ask that, Pag?" she answered.

"For two very good reasons," said Pag. "First, because I never remember the day that you offered food to me out of kindness; and secondly, because you hate me, Aaka."

"Both those things are true, Pag. Because I hate you I have never offered you food. Yet one hate may be driven out by a larger hate. Eat the mussels, Pag. They are fresh and good, for Foh brought them to me this morning, though not so fat as they used to be in past years."

So Pag sat down and devoured that dish to the last mussel, smacking his thick lips, for he was a large eater and food had been scarce of late, because by Wi's command all that could be spared was being saved for the coming winter.

Aaka, handsome, solemn, black-browed, deep-eyed, watched him as he ate, and when he had finished, said:

"Let us talk."

"I wish there were some more mussels," said Pag, licking the shell, "but if they are finished, then, if you have anything to say about Laleela, talk on, for I am sure it is of her that you wish to speak."

"Now, as always, you are clever, Pag."

"Yes, I am clever; if I were not I should have been dead long ago. Well, what of Laleela the Beautiful?"

"Oh! nothing much, except"—here she leant forward and whispered in his ear—"that I wish you would kill her, Pag, or bring it about that she is killed. This, being a man, or something like one, you can do; whereas for us women it is impossible because it would be set down to jealous hate."

"I understand," said Pag. "And yet, why should I kill Laleela whom I like very much, and who knows more than all the rest of us put together?"

"Because she has brought a curse upon the tribe," began Aaka, whereon Pag stopped her with a wave of his big hand.

"You may think that, Aaka, or choose to say that you think it, but why waste breath in telling such a tale to me, who know it to be a lie? It is the skies and the season that have brought a curse upon the tribe, not this fair woman from the sea, as the people believe."

"What the people believe is always true," said Aaka sullenly. "Or at least they think that it is true, which is the same thing. Hearken. If this witch is not killed, or driven away to die, or put in her hollow log and sent out to sea so that we look on her no more, the people will kill Wi."

"Worse things might happen to him, Aaka. For instance, he might live on, hated, to see all his plans fail and all his friends turn against him, as it seems some have done already," and he looked at her hard, adding, "Come, speak your mind, or let me go."

"You know it," said Aaka, staring at the ground with her fine eyes.

"I think I know it," answered Pag. "I think that you are so jealous of Laleela that you would like to be rid of her. Yet why are you jealous, seeing that Wi by his new law has built a wall between himself and her?"

"Talk not to me of Wi's foolish laws, for I hate them and all new things," interrupted Aaka impatiently. "If Wi wishes more wives, let him take them. That I could understand, for it is our custom. What I do not understand is that, seated with her by the fire, he should make a friend and counsellor of this witch, leaving me, his wife, standing outside the hut in the cold while she is warm within; me—and you also, Pag," she added slowly.

"I understand it well enough," said Pag. "Wi, being wise and in trouble, seeks wisdom to help him out of his trouble. Finding a lamp to his hand, he holds it up to search the darkness."

"Yes, and while he stares at this new light, his feet will fall into a pit. Listen, Pag. Once I was Wi's counsellor. Then you, the wolf-man and outcast whom he had saved, came and took him from me. Now another has come and taken him from both of us. Therefore, we who were foes should be friends and rid ourselves of that other."

"To find ourselves enemies again afterward. Well, there is something in what you say, Aaka, for, if you can be jealous, so can I. Now what you want me to do is to bring about the death of Laleela, either by causing her to be killed or by driving her into the sea, which is the same thing. Is that so?"

"Yes, Pag."

"You wish me to do this, not with my own hand, because you know that I would never strike down with an axe or a stone one whom I have been set to watch and who has always been kind to me, but by stirring up the people against her."

"Perhaps that might be the better plan," said Aaka uneasily, "since it is the people upon whom she brings the curse."

"Are you sure of that, Aaka? Are you sure that, if you leave her alone, she will not bring a blessing on the people in the end, seeing that wisdom is always strong, and that she has more of it than the rest of us put together?"

"I am sure that she would be best out of our path," answered Aaka, scowling, "and so would you be if you had a husband whom you loved and who was being led aside."

"How should a wife show love to her husband, Aaka? I ask you because I do not know. Is it by being always rough to him and finding fault with all he does, and turning her back on him and hating all his friends? Or is it by being kindly and loving and trying to help him in his troubles, as such a one as Laleela would do? Well, who am I to talk of such matters, of which as a wolf- man I can know nothing? Friendship and its duties I understand, since even a dog may care for its master, but love and its ways have never been mine to know. Still it is true that, like you, I am jealous of this Laleela and should not be sorry to see her back on the sea. Therefore I will think over all that you have said, and afterward we will talk again. And now I will be going—that is, if you have no more mussels, Aaka."

So, as there were no more mussels, Pag went, leaving Aaka wondering, for she was not sure what he would do. She knew that he was jealous of Laleela, who had taken his place in Wi's counsel, and therefore surely he must wish to be rid of her, as she did. And yet Pag was very strange and who could be certain? He was only a twisted dwarf, wolf-suckled, they said, and yet he seemed to have the mind of a man, and how could men be counted on, especially where a woman was concerned? She might have bewitched him also. Notwithstanding his wrongs, he might turn round and take her side. Now she almost wished she had not paid so much heed to Pag's grumbings and opened her secret heart to him; for, after all, Pag was a man, and how was it possible to trust men, mad people, most of them, who thought quite differently from women, and could be turned from their ends and advantage by all sorts of silly reasons?

Pag went away, far away into the woods, for he knew that Wi was taking counsel with Laleela and would not want him. At a certain place in the woods, a secret place where the trees were very thick and, save himself, no man had ever come, he cast himself down upon his face and lay thinking. It had come to this that he hated Laleela, of whom he used to be so fond, almost as much as Aaka did, and for the same reason—because she had robbed him of the heart of Wi. If he caused her to be killed, as Aaka had suggested, which he could do well enough by stirring up the people against her, who thought that she had brought a curse upon them, then he would be rid of her and Wi's heart would come back to him, because his nature was such that he must have someone to trust and to care for him, and the boy Foh was not yet old enough for him to lean upon. Only, if ever he learned that he, Pag, had loosed the stone that crushed Laleela, what then? He would kill him. Nay, that was not Wi's way. He would look over his head and would never see him more, even when he sat on the other side of the fire or stared him in the face. Yes, Wi would despise him and in his heart call him—dog.

Pag thought till he could think no more, for his mind went up and down, first this way and then that, like a stick balanced on a stone and shaken by the wind. At last a kind of savagery entered into him, who grew weary of these reasonings, and wished that he were as the beasts are who obey their desires and question not. He set his hand to his big mouth and uttered a low howling cry. Thrice he uttered it, and presently, far, far away in the distance, it was answered. Then Pag sat silent and waited, and while he waited the sun went down and twilight came.

There was a patter of feet stirring the dried pine needles. Then between the trunks of two trees appeared the head of a gray wolf glaring about it suspiciously. Pag howled again in a lower note, but still the wolf seemed doubtful. It moved away till such wind as there was blew from Pag to it, then sniffed thrice and leaped forward, and after it ran a cub. It came to Pag, a great, gaunt creature, and, rearing itself up, set its forepaws upon his shoulders and licked his face, for it knew him again. Pag patted it upon the head, whereon the old she-wolf sat herself down beside him as a dog might do; then with low growls called to the young one to come near as though to make it known to Pag, which it would not do, for man was strange to it. So Pag and the wolf sat there together, and Pag talked to the wolf that many years ago once had suckled him, while she sat still as though she understood him, which she did not. All she understood was that by her was one whom she had suckled.

"I have killed your kin, Gray Mother," said Pag to the she-wolf or rather to himself, "if not all of them, for it seems that somewhere you have found one to mate with you," and he looked toward the cub lurking at a distance. "Yet you can forgive me and come at my call, as of old, you that are a brute beast while I am a man. Then, if you, the beast, can forgive, why should not I, the man, also forgive one who has done me far smaller wrong? Why should I kill this Witch-from-the-Sea, this Laleela, because for a while she has stolen the mind of one whom I loved, being wiser than I am, and knowing more; being a very fair woman also, and therefore armed with a net which I cannot cast. Oh! old mother wolf, if you, the savage beast, can forgive and come at my call because once you gave me of your milk, why cannot I forgive who am a man?"

Then the great, gaunt she-wolf that understood nothing, save that he, her fosterling, was troubled, licked his face again and leaned against him who had planned the murder of all her kin and used her love to decoy them to their

doom.

"I will not kill Laleela or cause her to be killed," said Pag at length, aloud. "I will forgive as this gray wolf mother of mine forgives. If it is in Aaka's mind to kill her, let her work her own evil, against which I will warn Laleela; yes, and Wi also. I thank you for your lesson, Gray Mother, and now get you back to your cub and your hunting."

So the old she-wolf went away, and presently Pag went also.

Next morning Pag sat at the mouth of the cave, watching Laleela at her work among the cast-out female babes, going from one to another, tending them, soothing them, talking to those who nursed them; bravely, sweetly, gently; lovely to look on and in all her ways.

At length her tasks were finished and she came to Pag, sat herself down beside him, glanced at the gray, cold sky, drew her robe closer about her shoulders, and shivered.

"Why do you stop in this cold place, Laleela?" asked Pag, "you who, I understand, come from a country where the sun shines and it is warm."

"Because I must, or so it would seem, Pag."

"Then would you go away if you could, Laleela?"

"I do not know, I am not sure, Pag. The great sea is a lonely place."

"Then why did you cross it to come hither, Laleela, you who tell us that you are a chieftainess in your own land?"

"Because no woman can rule alone; always there must be one who rules her, Pag, and I hate him who would have ruled me. Therefore I became a death-seeker, but instead of finding death I found this place of ice and cold and you who dwell here."

"And here once more you have become a chieftainess, Laleela, seeing that you rule him who rules us. Where is Wi?"

"I think he has gone out to quell some trouble among the people, Pag. There is always trouble among your people."

"Yes, Laleela; empty bellies and cold feet make bad tempers, especially when men and women are afraid."

"Afraid of what, Pag?"

"Of the sunless skies, of lack of food, and of the cold, black winter that draws on; also of the curse that has fallen upon the tribe."

"What curse, Pag?"

"The curse of the Witch-from-the-Sea, the curse of a fair woman called Laleela."

"Why am I a curse-bearer, Pag?" she asked, staring at him open-eyed and turning pale.

"I don't know, Laleela, seeing that, from the look of you, blessings should come in your basket, not curses, you whose eyes are kind and who do kind deeds with your hands. Yet the people hold differently, because they believe that they are the only men and women on the earth and think that therefore you must be a witch born of the sea. Also, since you came, there has been nothing but misfortune: the sun has hidden itself, those beasts and birds and fishes on which we feed have kept away, and even the berries do not grow upon the bushes in the wood, while now, in the early autumn, we hear winter marching toward us, for on the mountain-tops already rain turns to ice, as it does in the dark of the year. Yes, winter is always with us. Listen! There is one of his footsteps," and he held up his hand while from the hills behind them came the terrible rending sound of mighty masses of ice being thrust forward by other new-formed masses that had gathered above them.

"Can I command the sun?" asked Laleela sadly. "Is it my fault if the season is cold and the seals and the fowls do not come, and it snows on the mountain-tops when it ought to rain, and the rest?"

"The people think so," answered Pag, nodding his great head, "especially since you have become Wi's chosen counsellor, which was once my office."

"Pag, you are jealous of me," said Laleela.

"Yes, that is true: I am jealous of you, and yet I would have you believe that I try to judge justly. I have been urged to kill you or to bring about your death, which would be easy. But this I do not wish to do because I like you too well, who are fairer and wiser than any of us, and have shown us how to sew skins together, with other arts, also because it would be wicked to put a stranger to death who has come among us by chance, for well I know that you are no witch, but just a stranger."

"To kill me! You have been urged to kill me?" she exclaimed, staring at him with big, fearful eyes, as a seal does when it sees the club above its head.

"I have said it, also that I will have no hand in this business, but others may be found who think differently. Therefore, if you will listen I will give you counsel to take or to leave."

"When the fox told the raven how to draw the bolt of its cage, the raven listened, so says the tale of my country, but it forgot that the hungry fox was waiting outside," answered Laleela, casting a doubtful look at Pag. "Still, speak on."

"Have no fear," said Pag grimly, "since perhaps the counsel that I shall give you, if taken, would leave this fox hungrier than he is to-day. Hearken! You are in danger. Yet there is one way in which you can save yourself. Become the wife of Wi which, although he hangs round you with his eyes fixed upon your face, it is well known you are not. None dare to touch Wi, who, if he is grumbled against, is still beloved because it is known that all day and all night he thinks of others, not of himself, and because he killed Henga and the great toothed tiger and is mighty. Nor would any dare to touch one who was folded in his cloak, though, while she is outside his cloak, it is otherwise. Therefore, become his wife and be safe. Yes, I say this, although I know that, when it happens, I, Pag, who love Wi better than you do, if indeed you love him at all, shall be driven far from the cave and mayhap shall go to live in the woods, where I can still find friends of a sort, who will not turn on me even when they are mating, or, at any rate, one friend."

"Marry Wi!" exclaimed Laleela. "I do not know that I wish to marry Wi; I have never thought of it. Also, Wi is married already to Aaka. Also, never has he sought to marry me. Had such been his desire, surely he would have told me, who speaks to me of no such matters."

"Men do not always talk of what they desire, or women either, Laleela. Has not Wi told you about his new laws?"

"Yes, often."

"And do you not remember that, because women are so few among us, the first of these was that no man should have more than one wife?"

"Yes," said Laleela, dropping her eyes and colouring.

"Also, perhaps, he has told you that he called down a curse upon his head and on all the tribe, if he broke that law."

"Yes," she said again in a low voice.

"Then perhaps it is because of this oath that Wi, although he is always so close to you and sees no one else when you are near, has never spoken to you of coming closer, Laleela."

"Nor would he, having sworn that oath, Pag."

Now Pag laughed hoarsely, saying:

"There are oaths and oaths. Some are made to be kept and some made to be broken."

"Yes, but this one is coupled with a curse."

"Aye," said Pag, "and there comes the trouble. Choose now. Will you make Wi marry you, as, being so beautiful and clever, doubtless you can do if you wish, and take the chance of the curse that follows broken oaths falling upon his head and yours and on the tribe, and be happy until it falls or does not fall? Or will you not marry him and continue as his counsellor with your hand in his but never round his neck, until the wrath of the tribe strikes you, stirred up by your enemies, of whom perhaps I am the worst—" here Laleela smiled—"and you are killed or driven out to die? Or will you, perhaps, be pleased to return to your own people, as doubtless you can do in that magical boat of yours, or so declares Urk the Aged, who says that he knew a great-grandmother of yours who was exactly like you."

Laleela listened, wrinkling her fair broad brow in thought. Then she answered:

"I must think. I do not know which of these things I shall do, because I do not know which of them will be the best for Wi and all the people. Meanwhile, Pag, I thank you for your kindness to me, since the moon led me here—you know I am a moon-worshipper, do you not, like all my forefathers before me? If we should not talk again, I pray you to remember that Laleela who came out of the sea thanks you for all your kindness to her, a poor wanderer, and that, if she continues to live upon the earth, often she thinks of you, and that if the moon takes her and she has memory in the houses of the moon, that thence she looks down and still thanks and blesses you."

"What for?" asked Pag gruffly. "Is it because I hate you who have robbed me of the company and the trust of Wi, whom alone I love upon the earth? Or is it because with one ear I have listened to Aaka, who urges me to make an end of you? Do you thank me for these things?"

"No, Pag," she answered in her quiet fashion. "How can I thank you for that which is not? I know that Aaka hates me, as it is natural that she should, and therefore I do not blame her. But I know also that you do not hate me; nay, rather that you love me in your own fashion, even if I seem to have come between you and Wi, which, if you knew all, in truth I have not done. You may have listened to Aaka with one ear, Pag, but your finger was pressed hard upon the other; for you know well that you never meant to kill me or to cause me to be killed, you who in your goodness have come to warn me against dangers."

Now, hearing these gentle words, Pag stood up and stared at the kind and beautiful face of her who spoke them. Then, seizing Laleela's little hand, he lifted it to his thick lips and kissed it. Next he wiped his one eye with the back of his hairy paw, spat upon the ground, muttering something that might have been a blessing or an oath, and shambled away, while Laleela watched him go, still smiling sweetly.

But when he had gone and she knew that she was alone, she smiled no longer. Nay, she sat down, covered her lovely eyes with her hands, and wept.

That evening, when Wi returned, she made her report to him as to the babes whom he had set in her care, speaking particularly of two who were ailing that she thought needed watching and chosen food.

“What of it,” asked Wi in his pleasant fashion, “seeing that you watch them and give them their food, Laleela?”

“Oh! nothing,” she answered, “except it is well that everything should be known to two, since always one might be ill or forget. And that puts me in mind of Pag.”

“Why?” asked Wi, astonished.

“I do not know, and yet it does—oh! it was the thought about two. You and Pag were one, and now you have become two, or so he thinks. You should be kinder to Pag, Wi, and talk more to him, as it seems you used to do. Hark! That sick baby is crying; I must go to it. Good-night, Wi, good-night!”

Then she went, leaving him wondering, for there was something about her manner and her words which he did not understand.

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## THE RED-BEARDS

Next morning, Laleela was missing. When Wi noticed this, as he was quick to do, and inquired of her whereabouts, one of the women who helped her in the care of the cast-out babes answered that the "Sun-Haired-White-One," as she called her, after she had prepared their food that morning, had told her that she needed rest and fresh air. She added, said the woman, that she was going to spend that day in the woods and that therefore none must trouble about or search for her, as she would be back at nightfall.

"Did she say anything else?" asked Wi anxiously.

"Yes," answered the woman. "She spoke to me of what food should be given to those two sick babes and at what hours, in case she should make up her mind to spend the night in the woods, which, however, she was almost sure she would not do. That was all."

Then Wi went away to attend his business, of which he had much in hand, asking no more questions, perhaps because Aaka had come into the cave and must have overheard them. Yet that day passed slowly for him, and at nightfall he hurried home to the cave, thinking to find Laleela there and to speak to her sharply, because she had troubled him by going out thus without warning him so that he could cause her to be guarded against dangers.

But when he came to the cave, as the day died, there was no Laleela.

He waited a while, pretending to eat his food, which he could not touch. Then he sent for Pag. Presently Pag shambled into the cave, and looking at Wi, asked:

"Why does the chief send for me, which he has not done for a long while? It was but just in time, for, as I am never wanted nowadays, I was about to start for the woods."

"So you, too, desire to wander in the woods," said Wi suspiciously, and was silent.

"What is it?" asked Pag.

Then Wi told him all.

Now, as Pag listened, he remembered his talk with Laleela and was disturbed in his heart. Still, of that talk he said nothing, but answered only:

"There is no cause for fear. This Laleela of the sea is, as you know, a moon-worshipper. Doubtless she has gone out to worship the moon and to make offering and prayer to it, according to the rites of her own people."

"It may be so," said Wi, "but I am not sure."

"If you are afraid," went on Pag, "I will go out to search for her."

Wi studied the face of Pag with his quick eyes, then answered:

"It comes into my mind that you, Pag, are more afraid than I am, and perhaps with better reason. But whether this be so or not, nobody can search for Laleela to-night because the moon is covered with thick clouds and rain falls, and who can find a woman in the dark?"

Pag went to the mouth of the cave and looked at the sky, then came back and answered:

"It is as you said. The sky is black; rain falls heavily. No man can see where to set his foot. Doubtless Laleela is hid in some hole or beneath thick trees, and will return at dawn."

"I think that she has been murdered, or has gone away, and that you, Pag, or Aaka or both of you, know where and why she has gone," said Wi in a muttering, wrathful voice, and glaring at him.

"I know nothing," answered Pag. "Perhaps she is at the hut of Moananga. I will go to see."

He went, and a long while afterward returned with the rain water running off him, to say that she was not in Moananga's hut, or in any other that he could find, and that none had seen her that day.

All that night Wi and Pag sat on either side of the fire, or lay down pretending to sleep, saying nothing but with their eyes fixed upon the mouth of the cave. At length dawn came, a wretched dawn, gray and very cold, although the rain had ceased. At the first sign of it, Pag slipped from the cave, saying no word to anyone. Presently Wi followed, thinking to find him outside, but he had vanished, nor did any know where he had gone. Then Wi sent out messengers and inquired for Laleela. These returned in due course but without tidings. After this, he dispatched people to search for her, yes, and went himself, although Aaka, who had come up to the cave, asked him why he should be so disturbed because a witch-woman had vanished, seeing that it was well known that this was the fashion of witch-women when they had done all the ill they could.

"This one did good, not ill, Wife," said Wi, looking at the foundling babes.

Then he went out to the woods, taking Moananga with him.

All that day he searched, as did others, but found nothing, and at nightfall returned, weary and very sad, for it seemed to him as though Laleela had torn out his heart and taken it with her. Also, that night, one of the sick babes which she had been nursing died, for it would not take its food from any hand but hers. Wi asked for Pag, but no one had seen him; he, too, had vanished.

"Doubtless he has gone with Laleela, for they were great friends, although he pretended otherwise," said Aaka.

Wi made no answer, but to himself he thought that perhaps Pag had gone to bury her.

A second dawn came, and shortly after it Pag crept back to the cave, looking very thin and hungry, like a toad when it crawls out of its hole after winter is past.

"Where is Laleela?" asked Wi.

"I don't know," answered Pag, "but her hollow log has gone. She must have dragged it down to the sea out of the seal cave at high tide, which is a great deed for a woman."

"What have you been saying to her?" asked Wi.

"Who can remember what he said days ago?" answered Pag. "Give me food, for I am as empty as a whelkshell upon the midden."

While Pag ate, Wi went down to the seashore. He did not know for what reason he went, unless it was because the sea had taken Laleela from him, as once it gave her to him, and therefore he wished to look upon it. So there he stood, staring at the gray and quiet sea, till presently, far away upon the edge of the mist that covered it, he saw something moving.

A fish, he thought to himself, but I don't know what kind of fish, since it stays upon the top of the water, which only whales do, and this fish is too small to be a whale.

There he stood staring idly and caring nothing what sort of fish it might be, till presently he noted, although it was still so far away and so hidden by mist wreaths, that the thing was not a fish at all. Yet it reminded him of something. Of what did it remind him? Ah! he knew—of that hollow log in which Laleela had drifted to this shore. But it was not drifting now; it was being pushed beachward by one who paddled, one who paddled swiftly.

The gathering light fell on this paddler's hair, and he saw that it glinted yellow. Then Wi knew that Laleela was the paddler and ran out into the sea up to his middle. On she came, not seeing him until he hailed her. Then she paused breathless and the canoe glided up to him.

"Where have you been?" he asked angrily. "Know that I have been much troubled about you."

"Is it so?" she gasped, looking at him in an odd fashion. "Well, we will talk of that afterward. Meanwhile, learn, Wi, that many people descend on you, coming in boats like this, only larger. I have fled away from them to warn you."

"Many people!" said Wi. "How can that be? There are not other people, unless they be yours that you have brought upon us."

"Nay, nay," she answered, "these are quite different; moreover, they come from the north, not from the south. To shore now, and quickly, for I think that they are very fierce."

Then she paddled on beachward, Wi wading alongside of her.

They reached the shore, where some who had seen the canoe had gathered, among them Moananga and Pag. It was dragged upon the sand, and Laleela climbed out of it stiffly, helped by Wi. Indeed, she sank down upon the sand as though she were very tired.

"Tell us your story," said Wi, his eyes fixed upon her as though he feared lest she should vanish away again.

"It is short, Chief," she answered. "Being weary of the land, I thought that I would float upon the sea for a while. Therefore I took my boat and paddled out to sea for my pleasure."

"You lie, Laleela," said Wi rudely. "Still, go on."

"So I paddled far, the weather being calm, toward the end of the great point of rocks which lies out yonder, though perhaps you have never seen it," she continued, smiling faintly.

"There, last evening at the sundown, suddenly I saw a great number of boats coming from the north and rounding the point of rock as though they were following the shore line. They were big boats, each of them holding many men, hideous-looking and hairy men. They caught sight of me and yelled at me with harsh voices in a talk I did not understand. I turned and fled before them. They followed after, but the night came down and saved me. Sometimes, however, the moon shone out between the clouds and they caught sight of me again. Then at last her face was covered up and I paddled on through the mist and darkness, having seen the outline of these hills and knowing which way to row. I think that they are not far off. I think that they will attack you and that you must make ready at once. That is all I have to say to you."

"What do they come for?" asked Wi, amazed.

"I do not know," answered Laleela, "but they looked thin and hungry. Perhaps they seek food."

"What must we do?" asked Wi again.

"Fight them, I suppose," said Laleela; "fight them and drive them off."

Now Wi looked bemused, for this thought of folk fighting against each other was strange to him. He had never heard of such a thing, because the tribe, until Laleela came, believed themselves to be alone in the world and therefore had no need of defence against other men. Then Pag spoke, saying:

"Chief, you have fought wild beasts and killed them; you fought Henga and killed him. Well, it seems that this is what you and all of us must do against this people who attack us. If Laleela is right, either they will kill us, or we must kill them."

"Yes, yes, it is so," said Wi, still bemused, then added, "Let Wini-wini summon all the tribe and bid them bring their weapons with them. Yes, and let others go with him, that they may hear more quickly."

So certain of those who had gathered there on the beach departed, running their hardest. When they had gone, Wi turned to Pag and asked:

"What shall we do, Pag?"

"Do you seek counsel of me while Laleela stands there?" answered Pag bitterly.

"Laleela, a woman, has played her part," said Wi. "Now men must play theirs."

"It always comes to that in the end," said Pag.

"What can we do?" asked Wi.

"I don't know," answered Pag. "Yet low tide draws on, and at low tide there is but one entrance to this bay, through the gap in the rocks yonder. These strangers will not know this, and if they come on presently, their boats will be stranded, or only a few of them will get through the gap. These we must fight, also any who remain upon the reef. But what do I know of fighting, who am but a dwarf? There is Moananga your brother, one who is strong and tall and brave. Let him be captain and manage the fighting, but do you, Wi, keep behind it to look after the people, who will want you; or, if need be, to fight any of these strangers who get on shore."

"Let it be so," said Wi. "Moananga, I make you captain. Do your best and I will do my best behind you."

"I obey you," said Moananga simply. "If I am killed and you live, look after Tana and see that she does not starve."

Just then, summoned by the furious trumpeting of Wini-wini and by rumours that flew from mouth to mouth, the people began to run up, each of them armed in a fashion, some with stone axes, some with flint-headed spears and knives, some with stakes hardened in the fire, or with slings.

Wi addressed them, telling them that devils who came from the north floating on the sea, were about to attack them, and that they must fight them unless they wished to be killed with their wives and children; also that Moananga would direct them. Then there arose a great noise, for the women who had run up with the men began to wail and cling to them, till in the end these were driven away. After this Hou the Unstable began to argue loudly, saying that Laleela was a liar; that there were no men in boats and that therefore there was no need for all this making ready. Also Whaka, the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, declared that, if there were such men, there was no use trying to fight against them, because, if they did, they would all be killed, since men in boats must be very strong and clever. So the only thing to do was to run away at once and hide in the woods.

This counsel seemed to move many; indeed, some departed at once. Noting this, Wi went up to Whaka and knocked him down with a blow of his fist. Also he strove to serve Hou in the same way, but seeing him come, Hou escaped. After this, he called out that the next man who ran he would catch and brain with his axe, whereon all the rest stayed where they were. Still Hou went on talking from a distance, till presently there was a shout—for there on the misty surface of the sea appeared a great number of large canoes, manned, some of them, by as many as eight or ten paddlers. These canoes rowed on toward the bay, knowing nothing of the falling tide or of the reef of rocks. So it happened that presently six or eight of them struck these rocks upon which waves broke, and then overturned, throwing the men in them into the water, where some were drowned. But the most of them reached the rocks to the right and stood upon them, jabbering in loud voices to their companions in the other boats outside the reef, who jabbered back to them.

At length these men paddled forward gently, which, the sea being calm, they could do well enough, not to the gap where those boats that went first had been overturned, but to the rocks upon its right side, on which many of them landed, leaving some in each canoe to hold on to the seaweed that grew upon the rocks. When they had gathered there to the number of a hundred or more, they began to talk, waving their long arms and pointing to the shore with the spears they carried that seemed to be tipped with walrus ivory or white stone.

Wi, watching them from the beach, said to Pag at his side:

"Surely these strangers are terrible. See how tall and strong they are, and behold their skins covered with fur and their red hair and beards. I think that they are not men but devils. Only devils could look like that and travel about without women or children."

"If so," answered Pag, "they are very hungry devils, for that big fellow who seems to be their chief, opens his mouth and points down it, also at his stomach, and then waves his hand toward the shore, telling the others thus that there they will find food. Likewise, they are devils who can drown," and he nodded toward the corpses of one or two of them who had been in those canoes that were upset, which corpses now were rolling to and fro in the shallow water. "For the rest," he added after a pause, "wives can always be stolen," and he glanced toward the women of the tribe, who were gathered in little companies behind them, all talking together at once, or screaming and beating their breasts, while the children clung to them terrified.

"Yes," said Wi. Then he thought for a moment and called certain men to him.

"Go," he said, "to Urk the Aged, and bid him lead the women, the children, and the old people to the woods and hide them there, for how this business will end, I do not know, and they will be better far away."

The men went, and there followed much screaming and confusion. Some of the women began to run toward the woods; others would not move; while others threw their arms about their husbands and tried to drag these away with them.

"Unless this wailing stops, soon the hearts of the men will melt like blubber over a fire," said Pag. "Look. Some of them are creeping away to the women."

"Go you and drive them to the woods," said Wi.

"Nay," answered Pag, "I who never liked the company of women overmuch stay where I am."

Now Wi took another counsel. Seeing Aaka standing at a distance between the women and the men, or most of them, whom Moananga was marshalling as best he might, he called to her. She heard and came to him, for Aaka did not lack courage.

"Wife," he said, "those red devils are going to attack us, and we must kill them or be killed."

"That I know," answered Aaka calmly.

"It is best," went on Wi, looking down and speaking in a rapid voice, "that the women should not see the fighting. I ask you, therefore, to lead them all to the woods and hide them away, together with the old people and children and those who have run there already. Afterward you can return."

"What is the use of returning to find our men dead? It is better that we should stay here and die with them."

"You would not die, Aaka. Those Red Wanderers may want wives. At least, you would not die at once, though in the end they might kill and eat you. Therefore I command you to go."

"Surely the Witch-from-the-Sea who guided the Wanderers to attack us should go also before she works more treachery," answered Aaka.

"She did not guide them; she fled before them," exclaimed Wi angrily. "Still, take her with you if you will, and Foh also. Only drive back any men. Go now, I command you."

"I obey," said Aaka, "but know, Husband, that, although we have grown away from each other, if you die, I die also, because once we were close together."

"I thank you," answered Wi. "Yet, if that should happen, I say—live on, rule the tribe, and build it up afresh."

"Of what use are women without men?" replied Aaka, shrugging her shoulders.

Then she turned to walk away, and as she went, Wi saw her wipe her eyes with the back of her hand. She reached the women and cried out something to them in a fierce voice, repeating it again and again, till presently they began to move away with the aged, dragging the children by the hand or carrying them, so that at last the tumult died and the sad company vanished among the first of the trees.

All this while the Red-Beards had been jabbering together, making their plans. At last these seemed to be settled, for by the help of their boats a number of them crossed the mouth of the bay and gathered upon the line of rocks to the left that now, at low tide, also stood bare above the water. Others, too, in some of the boats set themselves in order between these jaws of rock, as though preparing to paddle toward the shore.

Pag noted this and cried out exultingly:

"That they cannot do, for their boats will overset upon the reefs that lie beneath the waves, and they will be drowned in the deep holes between, like those fellows," and he pointed to the bodies rolling about in the surf.

But such was not the purpose of the red-haired men, as presently he was to learn.

As he spoke Wi heard the crunching of little shells in the sand behind him and looked round to see who came. Behold, it was Laleela, clad in her blue cloak and holding a spear in her hand.

"Why are you here?" he asked angrily. "Why have you not gone to the woods with the other women?"

"Your orders were to the tribe," she replied in a quiet voice. "I am not of the tribe, so I hid in a hut till all were gone. Be not wrath, Chief," she went on, in a gentle voice, "for I, who have seen other tribes and their fightings, may be able to give good counsel."

Now he began to speak angry words to her and bid her begone, of which, standing at his side, she took no heed but only stared out at the sea. Then, suddenly, with a cry of "I thought it!" she leapt in front of Wi, whose face was shoreward, and next instant staggered back, falling into his arms as he turned. He stared at her, as did Pag, and lo! they saw that in her cloak stood a little spear with feathers on it which had struck her just above the breast.

"Pull it out, Pag," she said, recovering her feet. "It is an arrow, which other peoples use, and well was it for me that this cloak is so good and thick."

"Had you not sprung in front of me, that little spear would have pierced me," exclaimed Wi, staring at her.

"It was by a chance," answered Laleela with a smile.

"You lie," said Wi, at which she only smiled again and drew the cloak more closely about her. Aye, while Pag pulled she still smiled, though he noted that her lips turned pale and twitched. At length the arrow came out, and he noted something else: namely, that on its bone barb there was blood and a little piece of flesh, though, being wise, of this he said nothing.

"Lie down, Chief," said Laleela, "there, behind that rock; and you also, Pag, for so you will be safer. I also will lie down," and she did so. "Now hearken to me," she went on. "Those Red-Beards, or some of them, have bows and arrows, as we have just learned, and their plan is to shoot at you from the boats until the tide is quite low, and then to climb along both lines of rock and attack you."

At this moment Moananga came up and was also made to lie down.

"Perhaps," said Wi, "and if so, we had better draw out of the reach of the little spears."

"That is what they want you to do," answered Laleela, "for then they will climb along the lines of rock quietly and without hurt. I have another counsel, if it pleases you to hear it."

"What is it?" said Wi and Moananga together.

"This, Chief: You and all the people know those rocks and where the deep water holes are between them, since from childhood you have gathered shellfish there. Now, divide your men into two companies, and do you command one while Moananga commands the other. Clamber along those rocks to the right and left with the companies and attack the Red-Beards on them, for, when they see you coming so boldly, some of them will get into the boats. The others you must fight and kill; nor will those in the boats who have bows and arrows be able to shoot much at you, for fear lest they should hit their own people. Do this, and swiftly."

"Those are good words," said Wi. "Moananga, do you take the left line of rocks with half the men, and I will take the right with the rest. And, Laleela, I bid you remain here, or fly."

"Yes, I will remain here," said Laleela, rather faintly and turning on her face, so that none should see the stain of blood soaking through her blue robe. Yet, as they went, she cried after them:

"Bid your people take stones, Wi and Moananga, that they may cast them into the boats and break their bottoms."

Coming to the men of the tribe who stood there in knots looking very wretched and afraid, most of them, as they stared at the hairy Red-Beards upon the rocks and in their boats, Wi addressed them in a few hard words, saying:

"Yonder Red-Beards come from I know not whence. They are starving, which will make them very brave, and they mean to kill us, every one, and to take first our food and then our women, if they can find them; also perhaps to eat the children. Now, we count as many heads as they do, perhaps more, and it will be a great shame to us if we allow ourselves to be conquered, our old people butchered, our women taken, and our children eaten by these Red Wanderers. Is it not so?"

To this question the crowd answered that it was, yet without eagerness, for the eyes of most of them were turned toward the woods, whither the women had gone. Then Moananga said:

"I am chief in this matter. If any man runs away, I will kill him at once if I can. And if not I will kill him afterward."

"And I," added Pag, "who have a good memory, will keep my eye fixed on all and remember what every man does, which afterward I will report to the women."

Then the force was divided into two companies, of whom the bravest were put in the rear to prevent the others from running away. This done, they began to scramble along the two horns of rock that enclosed the little bay, wading round the pools that lay between the rocks, for they knew where the water was deep and where it was shallow.

When the Red-Beards saw them coming, they made a howling noise, wagging their heads so that their long beards shook, and beating their breasts with their left hands. Moreover, waving their spears they did not wait to be attacked, but clambered forward down the rocks, while those of them in the boats shot arrows, a few of which hit men of the tribe and wounded them.

Now, at the sight of blood flowing from their brothers whom the arrows had struck, the tribe went mad. In an instant they seemed to forget all their fears; it was as though something of which neither they nor their fathers had thought for hundreds of years came back to their hearts. They waved their stone axes and flint-pointed spears, they shouted, making a sound like to that of wolves or other wild beasts; they gnashed their teeth and leapt into the air, and began to rush forward. Yet, moved by the same thought, Wi and Moananga made them stay where they were for a while, for they knew what would happen to the Red-Beards.

This happened: These Red-Beards, also leaping forward, slipped upon the seaweed-covered rocks and fell into the pools between them. Or, if they did not fall, they tried to wade these pools, not knowing which were deep and which were shallow, so that many of them went under water and came up again spluttering. Then Wi and Moananga screamed to the tribe to charge.

On they went, bounding from rock to rock, as they could do readily enough who from boyhood had known every one of these stones and where to set their feet upon them. Then, coming to the pools into which the Red-Beards had fallen, they attacked them as they tried to climb out, breaking their skulls with axes and stones and thus killing a number without loss to themselves.

Now, the Red-Beards scrambled back to the ends of the two horns of rock, purposing to make a stand there, and here the tribe attacked them, led by Wi and Moananga. That fight was very hard, for the Red-Beards were strong and fierce, and drove their big, ivory-pointed spears through the bodies of a number of the tribe. Indeed, it looked ill for the tribe, until Wi, with his bright axe that Pag had made, that with which he slew Henga, killed a great fellow who seemed to be the chief of the Red-Beards, cutting his head in two so that he fell down into the water. Seeing this, the Red-Beards wailed aloud and, seized by a sudden panic, rushed for the boats into which they began to scramble as best they could. Then Wi and Moananga remembered the counsel of Laleela and gave commands to the tribe to throw the heaviest stones they could lift into the boats. This they did, breaking the bottoms of most of them, so that water flowed in and they sank.

The men in the boats swam about till they drowned or tried to come to the shore, where they were met with spears or stones, so that they died— every one of them. The end of it was that but five boatloads got away, and these rowed out to sea and were never seen again. That night, a wind blew in which they may have foundered; or, perhaps, being so hungry, they starved upon the sea. At least the tribe saw no more of them. They came none knew whence, and they went none knew whither. Only the most of them remained behind in the pools of the rocks or sunk in the deep sea beyond the rocks.

Thus ended the fight, the first that the tribe had ever known.

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## WI KISSES LALEELA

When all was over, Wi and Moananga, having come together on the shore, bearing the hurt with them, counted their losses. They found that in all twelve men had been killed and twenty-one wounded, among whom was Moananga, who was hit in the side with an arrow, though not badly. Of the Red-Beards, however, more than sixty had died, most of them by drowning; at least, this was the number that they found after the next high tide had washed up the bodies. There may have been more that were taken out to sea.

"It is a great victory," said Moananga, as Wi washed the wound in his side with salt water, "and the tribe fought well."

"Yes," answered Wi, "the tribe fought very well."

"Yet," interrupted Pag, "it was the Witch-from-the-Sea who won the fight by her counsel, for I think that, had we waited for the Red-Beards to attack us on the beach, it would have ended otherwise. Also it was she who taught us to throw stones into the boats."

"That is true," said Wi. "Let us go to thank her."

So they went, all three of them, and found Laleela lying where they had left her behind the rock, but face downward.

"She has fallen asleep, who must be very weary," said Moananga.

"Yes," said Wi. "Yet it is strange to sleep when death is so near," and he looked at her doubtfully.

Pag said nothing, only, kneeling down, he thrust his long arms underneath Laleela and turned her over onto her back. Then they saw that the sand beneath her was red with blood and that her blue robe was also red. Now Wi cried aloud and would have fallen had not Moananga caught him by the arm.

"Laleela is dead!" he said in a hollow voice. "Laleela, who saved us, is dead."

"Then I know one who will be glad," muttered Pag. "Still, be not so sure."

Then he opened her robe, and they saw the wound beneath her breast, which still bled a little. Pag, who was skilled in the treating of hurts, bent down and examined it, and while he did so, Moananga said to Wi:

"Do you understand, Brother, that the little spear gave her this wound while she was talking to us, and that she hid it so that none of us knew she had been pierced?"

Wi nodded like one who will not trust himself to speak.

"I knew well enough," growled Pag, "I who drew out the arrow."

"Then why did you not tell us?" asked Moananga.

"Because if Wi had known that this Witch-from-the-Sea was smitten in the breast, the heart would have gone out of him and his knees would have become feeble. Better that she should die than that the heart of our chief should have turned to water while the Red Wanderers gathered to kill us."

"What of the wound?" asked Wi, paying no heed to this talk.

"Be comforted," answered Pag. "Although she has bled much, I do not think that it is deep, because this thick cloak of hers almost stopped the little spear. Therefore, unless the point was poisoned, I believe that she will live. Stay now and watch her."

Then he shambled off toward certain bushes and sea herbs that grew upon the beach, and searched among them till he found one that he sought. From this he plucked a number of leaves which he put into his mouth and chewed between his great teeth. He returned and, taking the green pulp from his mouth, thrust some of it into Laleela's wound and the rest into that of Moananga.

"It burns," said Moananga, wincing.

"Aye, it burns out poison and staunches blood," answered Pag as he covered Laleela with her cloak.

Then Wi seemed to awake from the deep thoughts into which he had fallen, for, stooping down, he lifted Laleela in his arms as though she were a child and strode away with her toward the cave, followed by Pag and Moananga, also by certain of the tribe who waved their spears and shouted. By this time the women were returning from the woods, for some of the younger and more active of them had climbed tall trees and, watching all, though from far away, had made report to those below, who, learning that the Red Wanderers had fled or been killed, trooped back to the huts, leaving the aged and the children to follow after.

The first of all came Foh, running like a deer.

"Father!" he cried in an angry voice as he met Wi, "am I a child that I should be dragged off to woods by women when you are fighting?"

"Hush!" said Wi, nodding his head at the burden in his arms, "hush, my son. We will talk of these matters afterward."

Then appeared Aaka, calm-faced and stately, although, if the truth were known, she had run also and with much swiftness.

"Welcome, Husband," she said. "They tell me that you have conquered those Red-Beards. Is it true?"

"It seems so, Wife—at least they have been conquered. Afterward I will tell you the tale."

As he spoke, he strove to pass her by, but she stepped in front of him and asked again:

"If that Witch-from-the-Sea has been killed for her treachery, why do you carry her in your arms?"

Wi gave no answer, for anger made him speechless. But Pag laughed hoarsely and said:

"In throwing stones at the kite you have hit the dove, Aaka. The Witch- from-the-Sea whom Wi clasps upon his breast has not died for treachery. If she be dead, death came upon her in saving Wi's life, since she leapt in front of him and received into her bosom that which would have pierced him through, and this not by chance."

"Such things might have been looked for from her, who is ever where she should not be. What did she among the men—she who ought to have accompanied the women?" asked Aaka.

"I don't know," answered Pag. "I only know that she saved Wi's life by offering up her own."

"Is it so, Pag? Then it is his turn to save hers, if he can; or to bury her if he cannot. Now I go to tend the wounded of our own people. Come with me, Tana, for I see that Moananga's hurt has been dressed and that we are not wanted here," and tossing her head, she walked away slowly.

But Tana did not follow her, being curious to learn the tale of Laleela; also to make sure that Moananga had taken no harm.

Wi bore Laleela into the cave and laid her down upon the bed where she slept near to the cast-out children. Tana took Moananga away, and Pag went to make broth to pour down Laleela's throat, so that Wi and Laleela seemed to be left alone, though they were not, for the women who nursed the cast-outs watched them from dark places in the cave. Wi threw fur wrappings over her, and taking her hand, rubbed it between his own. In the warmth of the cave, where fire still burned, Laleela woke up and began to talk like one who dreams.

"Just in time! Just in time," she said, "for I saw the arrow coming, though they did not, and leapt into its path. It would have killed him. If I saved him, all is well, for what matters the life of a stranger wanted of none, not even of him?"

Then she opened her eyes and, looking upward, by the light of the fire saw the eyes of Wi gazing down upon her.

"Do I live," she murmured, "and do you live, Wi?"

Wi made no answer; only he bent his head and kissed her on the lips, and although she was so weak, she kissed him back, then turned away her head and seemed to go to sleep. But asleep or awake, Wi went on kissing her, till Pag came with the broth, and after him the women with the cast-out children appeared from their hiding places, chattering like starlings before they flight in autumn.

Presently Wi looked up from his task of watching Laleela who, having swallowed the broth, seemed to have fallen asleep, and saw Aaka standing by the fire and gazing at them both.

"So the Witch lives," she said in a low voice, "and has found a nurse. When are you going to marry her, Wi?"

Wi rose and came to her, then asked:

"Who told you that I was going to marry her? Have I not sworn an oath upon this matter?"

"Your eyes told me, I think, Wi. What are oaths against such service as she has done you?—though it is strange that I should live to learn that Wi made use of a woman's breast as a shield in battle."

"You know the truth of that," he answered.

"I only know what I see who pay no heed to words; also what my heart tells me."

"And what does your heart tell you, Wife?"

"It tells me that the curse which this witch has brought upon us has but begun its work. She goes out to sea in her hollow log and returns leading a host of Red Wanderers. You fight these Wanderers and drive them away, for a time. Yet many of the tribe are dead and wounded. What she will do next I do not know, but I am sure she has worse gifts in her bag. For I tell you that she is a witch who has been staring at the moon and talking with spirits in the air, and that you would have done well to leave this darling of yours to die upon the beach, if die she can."

"Some wives might have held that these are hard words to use of one who has just saved their man from death," said Wi. "Yet if you think so ill of her, kill her, Aaka, for she is helpless."

"And bring her curse upon my head! Nay, Wi, she is safe from me."

Then, able to bear no more, Wi turned and left the cave.

Outside on the gathering ground he found much tumult for here the bodies of the dead had been carried and everybody was come together. Women and children who had lost their husbands or fathers wailed, making a great noise after the fashion of the tribe; men who had been wounded but could still walk moved about, showing their hurts

and seeking praise or comfort, while others, who had come through unscathed, boasted loudly of their deeds in the great fight with the Red-Beards, the devils who came out of the sea.

Here and there were groups, and in the centre of each group a speaker. In one of them Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen was telling his hearers that these Red-Beards whom they had fought and conquered were but the forerunners of a great host which would descend upon them presently. At a little distance, Hou the Unstable, while rejoicing in the victory of the tribe, declared that such fortune was not to be trusted and that therefore the best thing to do would be that they should all run away into the woods before it turned against them. Meanwhile, Wini-wini the Shudderer went from corpse to corpse followed by the mourners, blowing his horn over each and pointing out its wounds, whereon all the mourners wailed aloud in chorus.

The most of the people, however, were collected round Urk the Aged, who, his white beard wagging upon his chin, mumbled to them through his toothless jaws that now he remembered what he had long forgotten, namely that his great-grandfather had told him, that is Urk's, grandfather, that his, Urk's great-grandfather's great-grandfather, had heard from his remote ancestors that once just such Red-Beards had descended on the tribe after the appearance among them of a Witch-from-the-Sea very much like to the lady Laleela who was beloved of Wi their chief, as was known of all, for had not he, Wi, been seen kissing her?

"And what happened then?" asked a voice.

"I cannot quite remember," answered Urk, "but I think that the Witch was sacrificed to the Ice-gods, after which no more Red-Beards came."

"Do you mean that Laleela the White Witch should also be sacrificed to the Ice-gods?" asked the voice.

Confronted with this problem, Urk wagged his long beard, then answered that he was not sure, but he thought that, on the whole, it might be wise to sacrifice her, if the consent of Wi could be obtained.

"For what reason?" asked the voice again, "seeing that she warned us of the coming of the Red-Beards, and afterward took into her own breast the little spear that was aimed at Wi?"

"Because," answered Urk, "after a great event, such as has happened, the gods always seek a sacrifice, and, as none of the Red-Beards has been taken alive, it would be better to offer up to them the Witch-from-the-Sea, who is a stranger, rather than any one of our own people."

Now Moananga, who was among those that heard this speech, limped up to Urk, for the wound in his side made him walk stiffly, and seizing his beard with one hand, slapped him in the face with the other.

"Hearken, old vile one who call yourself a wizard," he said. "If any should be sacrificed, I think that it is you, because you are a liar who feed the people upon false tales of what has never been. Well you know that this Laleela whom you urge us to kill is the noblest of women, and that, had it not been for her, Wi, my brother and our chief, would now be dead; indeed, that we should all be dead, since she warned us of the coming of the Red Wanderers. She it was, too, who, after the little spear had found her breast, the spear she bade Pag drag out with her flesh upon it, saying no word, as I who was present know, gave us counsel that told us how to master the Red-Beards by attacking them and throwing stones into their boats, which afterward we did, thus killing the most of them. Yet now you would egg on the people to sacrifice her to the Ice-gods, dog that you are."

Then Moananga once more smote Urk upon the face, tumbling him over onto the sand, and limped away, while all who heard shouted applause of the words, as just before they had done of those of Urk, for such is the fashion of crowds.

Just then Wi himself appeared, whereon Urk rose from the sand and began to praise him, saying that there had been no such chief of the tribe since the days of his great-grandfather's great-grandfather. Then all the people ran together and took up that song of praise; yes, even those of the wounded who could walk, for in their hearts they knew, every one of them, that it was Wi who had saved them from death and their women from even worse things. Yes, however much they might grumble and find fault, they knew that it was Wi who had saved them, as they knew also that it was Laleela, the Witch-from-the-Sea, who had saved Wi by springing in front of him and receiving the little spear into her own breast and who, after she was stricken, yet had given good counsel to him, to Pag and to Moananga.

Wi heard all their praises but answered nothing to them. Nay, he pushed aside those who crowded round him and the women who strove to kiss his hand, forcing a way through them to where the dead lay, upon whom he looked long and earnestly. Then, having given orders for their burial, he went on to visit those who had deep wounds, still saying nothing. For the heart of Wi was heavy in him, and the words of Aaka had pierced him like a spear. Remembering his oath, he knew not what he should do, and even now, in the hour of his victory, he wondered what Fate had in store for him and for Laleela, who had saved his life, which he wished that she had not done.

So, from that time forward, day by day, Wi went about his tasks very silently, saying little to anyone, because his heart was sore and he feared lest, should he open his lips, its bitterness would escape from them. Therefore, he kept apart from others and walked much alone, or accompanied by Foh only, for this son of his seemed all that was left to him. Also, he went out hunting as he used to do before he killed Henga and became the chief, letting it be known that sitting so much in the cave took away his health and spirits; also that, meat being needed, he held it his duty as the best

hunter of the tribe to kill deer, if he could, though this was not often, since, because of the bad season, the most of the deer seemed to have left the woods.

One day, Wi followed a doe far into the forest, and having lost her there, turned homeward. His road led him past a little pocket in the hillside where the fir trees grew thickly. This cleft or pocket was not more than thirty paces deep by perhaps as many wide. All round it were steep walls of rock, and its mouth was narrow, perhaps three paces across, no more. Outside of it was a patch of rain-washed rock of the size of a large hut, which rock ended in a little cliff about four spear lengths high. Below this cliff lay a patch of marsh, such as were common in a forest, a kind of hole filled with sticky red slime in the centre of which a spring bubbled up that could be seen beneath the growth of marsh briars that grew on the red mud, which mud spread out for many paces every way and at its edge was ringed round with fir trees.

As Wi drew near to this pocket, he heard a snorting sound that caused him to stand still and take shelter behind the bole of a big tree, for he did not know what beast made that noise.

Whilst he stood thus, out of the narrow entrance of the cleft there stalked a huge aurochs bull, so great a beast that a tall man standing by its side could not have seen over its shoulder. It stood still upon the patch of rock, looking about it and sniffing the air, which caused Wi to fear that it had smelt him, and to crouch close behind the tree.

But this was not so, for the wind blew from the bull to him. Now, Wi stared at the aurochs as he had never stared at anything, except at Laleela when first he saw her in her hollow log. For, although such beasts were told of among the tribe, they were very rare, being quite different from the wild cattle, and he had never seen but one of them before, a half-grown cow. It was a mighty creature with thick curved horns, and its body was covered with black hair, while down its spine ran a long gray streak of other lighter-coloured hair. Its eyes were fierce and prominent, its legs were short so that its dewlap hung nearly to the ground, and it had big cleft hoofs.

A great desire took hold of Wi to attack that beast, but he restrained himself because he knew that he could not prevail against it, for certainly it would toss and trample him to death. Whilst he watched it, the bull turned and went away from him down the ledge of rock and presently he heard it crashing a path through the forest, doubtless to seek its feeding ground.

When it had gone Wi crept to the mouth of the cleft and looked in, searching the place with his eyes. Then, as he could neither see nor hear anything, with a beating heart he entered the cleft, keeping close to the left-hand wall of rock, and worked his way round it, slipping from tree to tree. It was empty, but at its end grew some large firs, and beneath them, bracken, and here, from many signs, Wi learned that the aurochs bull had its lair. Thus the trunks of the trees were polished by its hide as it rubbed itself against them, which showed him that this was its home; also the ground was trodden hard with its feet, and in certain places where it was soft, torn by its horns which it had thrust deep into the sandy soil to clean and sharpen them.

Wi came out of the cleft and stood still, thinking. He turned and looked over the edge of the little cliff at the morass beneath. Then he climbed down the cliff and, by the help of a fallen tree, some few feet out upon the morass where he tested the depth of the mud with his spear.

It was deep for he must drive in the spear to its full length, and the arm that held it to the elbow, before he touched the rock or hard ground that formed its bottom. Scrambling along the fallen tree, he did this thrice, and always found the bottom at the same depth. Then he climbed the cliff again, and, standing before the mouth of the cleft, Wi, the brave and cunning hunter, thought to himself thus:

"That mighty bull rests in the daytime in yonder hole. But when evening draws in, it comes out to feed. Now, if, when it came out, or when it returned in the morning, it found a man standing in front of it, what would it do? Certainly it would charge him. And if the man leapt aside, what would happen? It would fall over the cliff and be bogged, and there the man might go down and fight it."

Thus thought Wi, and his nostrils spread themselves out and his eyes flashed as he thought of that great fight which might be between a hunter and this bull of bulls wallowing together there in the slime. Then he thought again, thus:

"The odds are great. The bull might catch the man with a sweep of its horns and be too cunning to rush over the cliff which it knows well. Or being so mighty, when they were at it in the mud, it might break out and come on to him, and there would be an end. Yes, there would be death."

A third time Wi thought:

"Am I so happy that I should fear to face death? Have I not wondered many a time of late whether it would not be well to stumble among the rough roots of the trees and to fall by chance upon the point of my spear? And were it not for Foh, should I not have stumbled thus—by chance—and been found pierced with the spear, for when the spear had done its work might there not be peace for one who has tried and failed and knows not which road to take? What better end could there be for a hunter than to die covered with glory fighting this mighty beast of the forest which no man of his people has ever yet dared to do? Would not the tribe make songs about me which they would tell on winter nights by the fire in the days to come, yes, they and their children after them for more generations than Urk can remember? And would not Aaka, the wife of my youth, then learn to think of me tenderly?"

Thus said Wi to himself and hastened homeward through the twilight. Indeed, as the way was far and the path difficult, the darkness had fallen ere ever he came to the cave.

Entering silently from the shadows, he saw Aaka standing by the fire, and noted that her face was troubled, for she was staring into the darkness at the mouth of the cave. By the fire also sat Pag polishing a spear head, and near to him Foh, who was whispering into his ear. At a distance, by the other fire, Laleela, now recovered from her wound but still somewhat pale, went about among the cast-out babes, seeing that their skin rugs were wrapped round them so that they might not grow cold in the night. With her was Moananga. He whispered into her ear and she smiled and seemed to answer aimlessly, for her eyes, too, were fixed upon the darkness at the mouth of the cave.

Wi came forward into the firelight. Aaka saw him and instantly her face changed, for on it seemed to fall its usual mask of haughtiness.

"You are late, Husband," she said, "which, as you were alone"—here she glanced first at Laleela and next at Pag, the two of whom she was so jealous—"is strange and caused me to fear, who thought that perhaps you might have met more Red Wanderers."

"No, Wife," he answered simply. "I think that we shall see no more wanderers on this shore. I wounded a doe with my spear which stuck in its side, and followed it far, but it escaped me, who have no fortune nowadays, even at the only craft I understand," he added with a sigh. "Now I am tired and hungry."

"Did the deer carry away the spear, Father?" asked Foh.

"Yes, Son," he replied absently.

"Then how comes it that it is in your hand, Father, for when you sent me back this morning you had only one spear?"

"It fell from the doe's side and I found it again amongst the rocks, Son."

"Then, if it fell among rocks, why is the shaft covered with mud, Father?" asked Foh, but Wi made no answer. Only Pag, who had been watching him with his one bright eye, rose and, taking the spear, began to clean it, noting as he did so that there was no dry blood upon its point.

Before she went away to her hut where the fancy had taken her to sleep again for a while, because she said that the crying of the cast-out children disturbed her, Aaka brought Wi his food. This she did because she feared that otherwise Laleela might take her place and serve him with his meat.

On the following day, Wi stopped at home and did those things that lay to the hand of the chief. There was much trouble in the tribe. The time of autumn had come and the weather remained cold and cheerless, as it had done during that of summer. Food was scanty, and the most of what could be won by the order of Wi was being saved up against the coming winter. Even here there was trouble, because many of such fish as could be caught, being laid out on the banks in the usual way for curing, went bad owing to the lack of sun to dry them, so that much labour was wasted. Moreover, those women whose husbands or sons had been killed in the fight with the Red-Beards, forgetting the perils from which they and all the tribe had been saved, began to grumble much, as did those whose men had been wounded and were not recovered of their hurts. This was their cry:

That Laleela, the fair white Witch-from-the-Sea, she who was the love of Wi, had brought all these ills upon them, she who had led the Red-Beards to their shores, and that therefore she ought to be killed or driven away. Yet none of them dared to lift a finger against her, first because, as they supposed, she was the lover of Wi whom every one of them feared and honoured; and secondly, because all did not think as they did. Thus many of the men clung to Laleela, some for the reason that she was sweet and beautiful, and others because they knew that she had saved Wi from death, offering up her own life for his.

Also there were women who sided with her. For instance, the mothers of the cast-out children whom she tended night and day, for although they had cast them out, the most of those mothers still loved their children and came to nurture them, in their hearts blessing Wi, who had saved them from death, and her who tended them in their helplessness. Moreover, although this was strange, however much she may have plotted against her and desired her death in the past, and however much in a fashion she hated her through jealousy, in secret Laleela's greatest friend and protector was Aaka.

For, although she would never say so, Aaka knew that, had it not been for this woman whom she called "Witch-from-the-Sea," there would have been no Wi left living. Also she honoured Laleela, knowing, too, that if she who was so sweet and beautiful chose to stretch out her hand and to look on him with the eyes of love, she could cause Wi to forget his oath and to take her to himself, which she did not do. Therefore, although she spoke rough words of her openly and turned her back upon her and mocked at Wi about her, still in secret she was Laleela's friend.

Further, Laleela had another friend in Moananga who, after Wi, was the most beloved and honoured of any in the tribe, especially since he had borne himself so bravely against the Red-Beards. For, from the moment that Moananga had seen Laleela leap in front of Wi to receive the arrow in her breast, he had fallen in love with her, although it was not in front of him that she had leapt.

This folly of his made trouble in his house, because, although his wife Tana, like Aaka, was jealous natured, if in a gentler fashion, still he loved Laleela, and what is more, said so openly.

Indeed, he tried to win her, announcing that he was bound by no laws which Wi had made. But in this matter he failed, for, although Laleela answered him very sweetly, she would have none of him, about which, when she came to learn of it, Tana mocked him much. Yet so kindly did Laleela push him away from her that he remained the dearest and closest of her friends, mayhap because he knew that it was Wi who stood between them, Wi his brother, whom he loved more than he did any woman. Still, he found Tana's mockery hard to bear, though, the more she mocked, the closer he clung to Laleela, as did Tana, because she held that Laleela had taught Moananga a lesson that he needed.

Taking heed of none of these things which meant naught to them, the common people of the tribe grumbled and moaned in their distress, and because they could find no other at whose door to lay their troubles, they bound them on to the back of Laleela, saying that she had brought them with her out of the sea and that their home was on her shoulders. For being but simple folk they did not understand that, like the rain or the snow, evil falls upon the heads of men from heaven above.

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## THE AUROCHS AND THE STAR

On the second morning Wi, who had made all things ready to his hand, rose while it was still dark, kissed Foh, who lay fast asleep at his side, and slipped from the cave, taking with him three spears and the bone-hafted axe of iron that Pag had made and fashioned, the same with which he had slain Henga. As he went by the flickering light of the fire, he saw Laleela sleeping among the babes, looking most beautiful with her long, bright hair lying in masses about her. Sweet was her face as she lay thus asleep, and yet, as he thought, sad and troubled. He stood still looking at her, then sighed and went on, thinking that she had not seen him, for Wi did not know that after he had passed, Laleela sat up and watched him till he was lost in the shadows.

Outside the cave, tied to a stake beneath a rough shelter of stones, was his dog, Yow, a fierce, wolf-like beast that loved him only, which often he took with him when he went a-hunting, for it was trained to drive game toward him. Loosing Yow, who whimpered with joy at the smell of him, Wi struck him on the head with his hand, thus telling the beast that he must be silent. Then he started, pausing a little while by the hut in which Aaka slept. Indeed, almost he entered it, but in the end did not because he knew that she would question him closely, for the night was too far gone for him to come to sleep with her in the hut as he did sometimes, while it was too early for him to be stirring in the dark when all were asleep and she would guess that he planned some adventure and try to wring out of him what it might be.

Wi thought to himself that if only Aaka was as she had been in past years, he would not now be starting to fight the aurochs single-handed, and so thinking, for the second time that morning he sighed. Yet he was not angry with her, for well he knew what had caused this change. It was the death of her child Fo-a, murdered by the brute man Henga, that had turned her heart sour and made of her another woman. For he knew also that secretly she blamed him and laid Fo-a's death upon his shoulders, as Pag had always laid it upon her own.

Always Aaka, for a long time before he did so, had desired that he should challenge Henga, and this not only because she wished that he should become chief of the tribe. Nay, there was a deeper reason. Something within her had warned her that, if Henga continued to live, he would bring calamity upon her and her house. Therefore, knowing Wi's strength and skill and being sure in herself that, however mighty Henga might be Wi could conquer him, again and again she had urged Wi to give him battle, though she had hidden from him the true reason for her urging. But he would not do so, not because he had been afraid, but because he had shrunk from thrusting himself forward and causing all to talk of him, being a man of very modest mind; also because he had feared lest Henga should overcome him, being so terrible a giant, in which case not only would he have been killed, a matter of no great moment, but Aaka and his children would have been at the mercy of the tyrant, and unless they had slain themselves must have borne his vengeance.

Therefore, not until Fo-a had been butchered through Aaka's own fault and jealousy of Pag, whom she hated because Wi loved him so much, had he consented to stir in this business that he might avenge his child's blood upon Henga, if so he could. Even then he had not stirred until she had sent him to take counsel with the Ice-gods and watch for the omen of the falling stone, for secretly she had climbed to the crest of the glacier on the day before he went and thrust sundry of the loose stones to its very lip when she had known that one or other of them would fall on the following morning when the rays of the risen sun struck upon the ice. Or if, perchance, none had fallen, then she would have made some other plan to bring about that which she desired, for always, be it remembered, she was sure in herself that Wi, whom she looked upon as greater and stronger than any who lived, as half a god indeed, would deal out death to Henga if once he could be brought to face him, and after Fo-a had been murdered, she had had but one aim in life—to see Henga dead ere he killed Wi and Foh also.

Much of all this Wi knew, and more he guessed, though some things were hid from him, such as the placing of the stones upon the lip of the glacier. Oh! all had gone awry between Aaka and himself, and now Laleela had come clothed in beauty, wisdom, and sweetness to tie the threads of their lives to a knot that he knew not how to loosen. Surely he would be better dead, leaving Moananga to become chief after him. At least, so he held, and if the gods had decreed otherwise, then let them give him the strength to conquer the bull of bulls.

Thus did he take these matters out of the rackings of his troubled mind and lay them in the hands of Fate, that Fate might decide them as it would. If he killed the aurochs or could not find it again, then he would know it was a sign from the gods who decreed that he must live on, and if otherwise, then his troubles would be done. So he departed from the hut thinking that Aaka would never learn how he had stood there in the darkness filled with such musings and memories, and presently was on the seashore and clear of the village.

Here he stayed a while until the sky turned gray and there was light sufficient to enable him to thread his way through the forest.

This he did slowly at first, but afterward more quickly, following a different road to that which he had taken after he had first seen the aurochs, one which ran along the edge of the beach where in places blown sand still lay among the fir trees. This he did because he feared lest the bull should have scented him after he left its lair two days before, and be watching and waiting on his track. At length he struck up hill, for, although he had never walked that path, the hunter's

sense within him told him where to turn, and striking the foot of the little marsh, skirted round it, till he came near the bottom of the low cliff, along the top of which ran the rocky path that bordered the den of the aurochs. Here he rested a while, hiding himself in the brambly undergrowth, because he did not know at what hour the bull returned to its lair after its nightly feed, and feared lest he might meet it on the rocky path.

He had sat still thus for perhaps the half of an hour or more, idly watching certain birds that had gathered together on the branches of a dead fir near by, preparing to fly south long before their accustomed time. Presently, after much twittering, the birds rose in a cloud and flew away to warmer climes, though, as Wi knew nothing of any other country, he wondered why they went and whither. Next a rabbit ran past him, screaming as it ran, and as though bewildered, took shelter behind a stone, where it crouched. Presently he saw why it had screamed, for after it, running on its scent, swift, thin, terrible, silent, came a weasel. The weasel also vanished behind the stone where the rabbit had crouched. There was a sound of scuffling and of more thin screams, then the weasel and the rabbit rolled out together from behind the stone, the weasel with its sharp teeth fixed in the rabbit's neck.

"Behold death hunting all things," thought Wi to himself. "Behold the gods hunting man, who flies and screams, filled with terror of he knows not what, till they have him by the throat!"

Suddenly the dog Yow, who had taken no heed of the rabbit, being too well trained, half rose from where he crouched hidden in the thick bushes at his master's side, lifted his fierce head, sniffed the wind which blew toward them from the direction of the aurochs' den, and, looking upward, uttered a growl so low that it could scarce be heard.

Wi also looked upward and saw what it was at which Yow growled.

For there, but a few paces above him, with the morning light glancing from its wide, polished horns, came the huge aurochs, returning, full-fed, to its lair. Wi shivered when he saw it, for viewed thus from beneath, with its shadow, magnified by the low light, showing enormous on the rocky wall beyond, the beast was terrifying as it marched past him majestically, shaking its great head and lashing its flanks with its bushy tail; so terrifying, indeed, that Wi bethought him that it would be wise to fly while there was yet time.

Oh! could any man prevail against such a brute as this, Wi wondered, and turned to go.

Then he remembered all the purpose that had brought him thither; also how great would be his future glory if he could kill that bull, and how noble his end if the bull killed him. So he sat down again and waited awhile, another half-hour, perhaps, to give the aurochs some time to settle itself in its lair and forget its vigilance, so that, if it were disturbed, it might come out confused by sleep. Also Wi waited till the sun, which as it chanced shone that morning, should reach a certain height, when he hoped that its rays, striking full in the beast's eyes, would confuse it, as it issued forth.

At length the moment was at hand when he must either dare the deed, or leave it undared and return home ashamed, making pretence that he had gone forth to hunt deer which he had not found, and perhaps to be laughed at for his lack of skill by Pag, whom of late he had forbidden to follow him because he wished to be alone, or to be asked by Aaka for the venison which she knew he had not brought.

Remembering these things, Wi rose up, stretched his arms, straightened himself, and climbed the little cliff to give battle to the aurochs.

Stripping himself of his skin robe, he laid it on one side, hanging it to the bough of a tree, so that now he was clothed only in an undergarment of fawn's hide which came down to above his knees. Then, having thrust his left wrist through the loop of his axe, he took one of the short, heavy spears in his right hand, holding the other two in his left. Next he peered into the cleft, but could see nothing of his game, which doubtless was lying down under the trees at the farther end. The hound Yow smelt it there indeed, for he began to slaver at the mouth and his hair stood up upon his back. Wi patted him upon the head and made a motion with his arm. Yow understood and leapt into the cleft like a stone from a sling. Before Wi could count ten, there arose a sound of wrathful bellowing and of crashing boughs, telling him that the bull was up and charging at Yow.

Nearer came the bellowing and the crashings, and now he saw the great brute. Yow was leaping to and fro in front of it, silently, after his fashion, keeping out of the reach of its horns, while the aurochs charged again and again, tearing up the ground and stamping with its feet, but never touching Yow who thus led it forward as he had been trained to do. At length, when it was quite close to the mouth of the cleft, Yow sprang and, seizing it by the nose, hung there.

Out they came, the pair of them, the aurochs tossing its head and trying to shake off Yow who would not leave go, rearing up also as it swung the dog from side to side and striking at it with its fore feet—but without avail. Now it was alongside of Wi, who stood waiting with raised spear, like to a man of stone. It dropped its head, hoping to rub Yow on the ground and free itself. Wi saw his chance. Quickly as a swooping hawk, he sprang at it and drove the flint spear through the bull's right eye, then thrust upon it with all his strength. The spear had vanished in the bony socket of the eye; with a roar of rage and pain, the aurochs tossed up its head so mightily that the spear shaft broke close to the pierced eye, and Yow was hurled far away, torn from his hold upon the nose, though never had the brave hound unlocked his jaws. The bull smelt the man and charged at him along the narrow path. Wi flattened himself against the rock, for it could not see him with its blinded eye and rushed past him, though the great horn touched his chest. It wheeled round, Wi saw and scrambled up the face of the rock to twice the height of a man, where he stood upon a little ledge, steadying himself with his left elbow against the root of a fir.

Now the aurochs caught sight of him and, rearing itself up on its hind legs, strove to reach him with its horns. Wi took a second spear in his right hand, letting fall the third, and with his left, that was now free, gripped the root of the fir. The great mouth of the aurochs appeared over the edge of the ledge, but because of this ledge it could not touch him with its horns. It opened its mouth, roaring in its mad rage. Wi, bending forward, thrust the second spear down that cavern of a mouth and deep into the throat beyond. It was wrenched from his grip. Blood running from its muzzle, the aurochs drove furiously at the ledge on which Wi stood. Its horn caught underneath the ledge, and so great was its strength that it broke a length of the soft rock away from the cliff face, that length on which Wi stood, leaving him hanging to the root.

Now he became aware that Yow had reappeared, for he heard his low growls. Then the growlings ceased and he knew that he must have fixed his fangs into the hind parts of the bull. Down went the aurochs, seeking to kill the hound, leaping along the path and kicking, and down went Wi also, for his root broke. He landed on his feet, turned, and saw the bull a few paces to the left, almost doubled into a ball in its efforts to be rid of Yow, who clung to his flank or belly. Wi picked up his last spear, which lay upon the path. The bull came round, and as it came, saw him with its unharmed eye. It charged, dragging Yow with it; Wi hurled his last spear, which struck it in the neck and there remained fixed. Again Wi leapt aside, but this time to the right, because he must, for the bull rushed along close to the bank from which he had fallen. The brute saw, and wheeling, came at him. Wi caught it by the horns with both hands and hung there, being swung to and fro in the air over the swamp beneath. The rotten ground gave, and down went Wi, the aurochs, and Yow into the mud below!

A little while after Wi had left the cave, Pag was wakened by someone who shook him by the shoulder. He looked up and, in the low light of the fire, saw that it was Laleela, her blue eyes wide open, her face distraught as though with fear.

"Awake, Pag," she said. "I have dreamed a very evil dream. I dreamed that I saw Wi fighting for his life, though with what he fought I do not know. Listen! Before it was day, I woke up suddenly, and by the light of the fire, I saw Wi leave the cave carrying spears, and presently heard Yow whimper as he loosed him from his kennel. Then I went to sleep again and dreamed the evil dream."

Pag sprang up, seizing his spear and his axe.

"Come with me," he said, and shambled from the cave to the place where Yow was tied up at night.

"The dog is gone," he said. "Doubtless Wi has taken it with him to hunt in the woods. Let us search for him, for perhaps you who are wise dream truly."

They sped away, heading for the woods. As they passed Moananga's hut, he came out of it, just awakened, to look at the promise of the dawn.

"Bring axe and spear and follow," called Pag. "Swift, swift! Stay not to talk."

Moananga rushed into his hut, seized his weapons, and raced after them. As the three of them went, Pag told the story.

"A fool's dream," said Moananga. "With what would Wi be fighting? The tiger and the wolves are dead, and wild cattle have left the woods."

"Have you never heard of the great bull of the forest before which no man dare stand? It is about, as I know, for I have seen its signs and where it lies, and although I hid it from him, perhaps Wi knew it also," answered Pag in a low voice, to save his breath. Then in the gathering light he pointed to the ground, saying:

"Wi's footmark and the track of Yow walking at his side, not an hour old," and putting down his big head, he fixed his one eye upon the ground and followed the trail, while after him came the others.

Swiftly they ran, for the light was good and the trail across the sand clear to Pag the Wolf-man, who, it was said, could run by scent alone. Following the footprints, at length they came to the foot of the marsh that lay beneath the little cliff. Still running on the track they turned to skirt it, as Wi had done. Suddenly, Laleela uttered a cry and pointed with her hand.

Lo! there in the mud of the swamp, wallowing feebly, was the terrible bull; there athwart its neck sat Wi, holding to its horn with one hand, and with the other still smiting weakly at its head with his axe, while crushed beneath appeared the hindquarters of the dead dog.

As they looked, the aurochs made a last effort. It reared itself up, tearing its shoulder from the sticky mud; it turned over, bearing Wi with it. Wi vanished beneath the mud; the bull moaned and lay still; its flesh quivered, its eyes shut.

Pag and Moananga rushed round the marsh till they came to the foot of the cliff near to which Wi and the bull were bogged. They leapt on to the body of the aurochs. Pag, whose strength was great, dragged the huge head aside. Beneath it lay Wi. Laleela came. She and Moananga, standing up to their middles in the mud where they found a footing, tugged at him; mightily they strove, till at last he was free. They dragged him to the edge of the swamp, they laid him on his face and waited, staring at each other. Lo! he moved. Lo! he coughed, red mud was pouring from his mouth. They were in time— Wi lived!

The tribe was in a tumult. These three, Laleela, Pag, and Moananga, had brought Wi back to the village, half supporting, half carrying him. Then the tribe, learning what had happened, had rushed out to the swamp beneath the little cliff, and thence by main force had dragged the aurochs and the dog Yow, which in death still clung to it with locked jaws. They washed the mud off the beast with water and saw the spears of Wi, one fixed deep in its eye socket and one in its throat at the root of the tongue. They noted how Wi had hacked at the beast's head with his axe, striving to sever its neck bone, which he could not do because of the thickness of the mane and hide, but at length battering it till it died. They marvelled at its mighty horns one of which it had splintered when it tore the ridge of rock upon which Wi stood. They measured its bulk with wands and reported it to Urk the Aged, who was too old to go so far but said that in the days of his grandfather's grandfather a still bigger bull had been killed by his great-uncle's great-uncle, who threw over it a net of withies and pounded it to death with rocks while it struggled to be free. Someone asked him how he knew this, whereon he answered that his great-great-grandmother, when she was a hundred winters old, had told it to his grandmother, who had told it to him when he was a little lad.

So the bull was skinned, the meat on it divided up, and the hide brought home to be a mat for the cave. Also the head was brought, carried upon poles by four men and tied to that tree upon which had been hung the head of Henga until Pag used it as a bait for the great toothed tiger. Yes, it was brought with one of Wi's spears fixed in the eye socket, and another, whereof the shaft was champed to pieces, fast in its throat. There it hung and the people came up and stared at it. Wi also, when he had vomited out all the red mud and rested himself, sat in the mouth of the cave and stared at the great head hanging on the tree, wondering how he had found strength to fight that beast while it lived.

There Aaka spoke with him.

"You are a mighty man, Husband," she said, "so mighty that long ago you might have made an end of Henga if it had pleased you, and thus saved our daughter from death. I am proud to have borne the children of such a man. And yet, tell me, how came it that Pag and Moananga were there to drag you from the mud when the bull rolled over on to you?"

"I don't know, Wife," Wi answered, "but I hear that Laleela had something to do with the business. She dreamed something, I know not what, which she told to Pag and Moananga, and they ran out to seek me. Ask her whom I have not seen since I woke up."

"I have sought her, Husband, but she cannot be found. Yet I do not doubt that, being a witch, her witchcraft was at work here, as always."

"If so, in this case you should not grumble, Wife."

"I do not grumble, I thank her who has preserved alive the greatest man that is told of among the people. I say more. I think that you should marry her, Wi, for she has earned no less. Only first you must find her."

"As to this matter of marriage, I have made a new law," answered Wi. "Shall the maker of laws be also the breaker of laws?"

"Why not?" said Aaka, laughing, "seeing that he who makes can also break. Moreover, who will find fault with the man that single-handed could slay this bull of bulls? Not I for one, Wi."

"Two of us slew it," answered Wi, looking down. "The hound Yow and I slew it together. Without Yow, I should have been slain."

"Aye, and therefore glory be to Yow. If I were a lawmaker like you, Wi, I should choose Yow to be a god among us."

Then she smiled in her dark fashion and went away to talk with Pag and Moananga, for Aaka desired to learn the truth of all this matter.

Wi sat in the mouth of the cave eating his food and telling the tale of the fight to Foh, his son, who listened with open mouth and staring eyes. Then he sent Foh to help peg out the skin of the bull, and when he was gone, slipped from the cave to seek for Laleela, who could not be found.

Not knowing where to look, he walked, very stiffly at first, along the shore by the mouth of the great glacier and round the headland beyond, past the hills and smaller glaciers, toward the seal bay. There, if anywhere, he thought that he might find Laleela, since thither, after the fight with the Red Wanderers, her boat had been brought back and hidden in the little cave at the head of the bay! Late in the afternoon, he reached the place and there, seated at the mouth of the small cave, he found Laleela as though she were waiting for the sun to set or for the moon to rise. She started, looking down but saying nothing.

"Why are you here?" he asked sternly.

"I came to be alone to give thanks to the moon that I worship, because of a certain dream which was sent to me, and to make my prayer to the moon when she appears."

"Is it so, Laleela? Are you sure that you did not come for another purpose also?" and he looked toward the cave where her boat was housed.

"I am not sure, Wi. All hangs upon the answer that is sent to my prayer."

"Hearken, Laleela," he said in a voice that was thick with rage. "Unless you swear to me that you will not fly away for a second time, I will drive my axe through the bottom of that boat of yours or burn it with fire."

"To what purpose, Wi? Cannot the seekers of Death travel to him by many roads? If one be blocked a hundred others still remain."

"Why should you seek death?" he asked passionately. "Are you then so unhappy here? Do you hate me so much that you wish to die?"

Now Laleela bent her head and shook her long hair about her face as though to hide her face and spoke to him through the meshes of her hair, saying very softly:

"You know that I do not hate you, Wi, but rather that I hold you too dear. Yet, hear me. Among my own folk I am named a prophetess, one believed to have gifts that are not given to all, and in truth sometimes I think that I have such gifts. Thus, when I left my own people, I was sure that I must do so that I might find one who would be more to me than all others, and did I not find him? Yet now that gift is upon me again, and it tells me that I should do well to go away, because, if I bide here, I shall bring evil upon the head of one who is more to me than all others."

"Then stay, Laleela, and together let us face this evil that your heart foretells."

"Wi, we may face nothing quite together. Have you not sworn an oath, and would you break that oath? I think not. Yet, if you should be weak, must I therefore cease from being strong? Nay, draw not near to me lest madness take you, for here and now I swear that oath for you afresh. Never will I live to see you mocked of Aaka and of your people, as a man who has broken his oath for a woman's sake. Nay, rather would I die twice over."

"Then it is finished," said Wi with a groan.

Laleela lifted her head and looked upward. In the sky appeared the evening star, and on this star she fixed her eyes, then answered:

"By what right do you say that it is finished between us, or indeed that anything is ever finished? Listen, Wi. Among my folk are wise men and women who hold that death is not the end of all; indeed, that it is but the beginning, and that yonder, beyond that star, the life we lay down here will spring afresh, and that in this new life all which we have lost will be found again. I am of that company, I who am called a prophetess; and so I believe, who hold therefore that this world is of small account and that if once we find thereon that which we were sent forth to seek, for us it has served its purpose and may be well forgot."

Wi stared at her, then asked:

"Do you mean that somewhere beyond death there is a home where we shall find those whom we have lost, where I shall find Fo-a my child and the mother who suckled me, and—and others, and there be in joy and peace with them?"

"Yes," answered Laleela, looking him in the face, and her eyes were bold and happy.

"At times," said Wi, "aye, not often, but now and again, such hope has come to me, only to fade away. If I could but be sure that I who am but what you see, a beast that thinks and talks—Oh! tell me of this faith, Laleela."

So, speaking low and earnestly, she set it out to him, a simple faith indeed, such as has been held by chosen ones throughout the earth in all the generations, yet a pure and a comfortable one, while he drank in her words and his heart burned with a new fire.

"Now I understand why you were sent to me, Laleela," he said at length. "Tell me no more to-night. I must think, I must think."

She smiled at him very happily, and as they rose to go, said this:

"Wi, there was more in that dream that came to me this morning than I told to Pag or any. That dream said to me that you went out secretly in the darkness almost hoping that you would not return in the light."

"Perhaps," he answered briefly, "for I was unhappy."

"Who now are happy again, Wi. See, I have promised you that no more will I flee from you back into the water whence I came, but, through good and ill, will stand at your side till the end which is the beginning, though not hand in hand. Do you promise me as much, Wi?"

"I do, Laleela."

"Then all is well, Wi, and we can laugh at troubles."

"Yes, Laleela. But there is one thing. You know that I love Foh, my only child, and always I am afraid for Foh. I am afraid lest the brother should follow the sister, Laleela."

"Cease to be afraid, Wi. I think that one day Foh will be a great chief over a great tribe."

"How do you know that?" he asked eagerly.

"Have I not told you that I am named a prophetess, or a Witch-from-the- Sea, as your people call me?" she answered, and smiled at him again.

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## WI DEFIES THE GODS

This great talk of theirs, the "light-bringing" talk, as Wi named it, was the first of many such between him and Laleela. From the cup of her wisdom he drank deeply till his heart was as full of it as is a hiving bee with honey. Soon what she believed he believed, so that their souls were one. Yet never did he break the oath that he had sworn to the people, and never did she tempt him so to do by look or touch or word.

Wi changed. He who had been gloomy and full of care, always looking over his shoulder to see the evil behind him, became happy-faced and full of cheerful, pleasant words. Aaka stared at him amazed, who no longer even fretted or troubled her about the health and safety of their son Foh, but said outright that he had no fear for him any more—that he knew all would be well with him. At first Aaka was sure that, while keeping his oath to the outward eye, in secret he had taken Laleela to wife, but when she found that certainly this was not so, she felt bewildered. At length, she could bear no more and questioned Wi in such fashion that he must answer.

"All things go ill," she said; "there is little food, and the cold, even now at the beginning of winter, is such as has not been known. Yet you, Wi, are as happy as a boy who fishes on a rock in the sunshine and catches fishes many and great. How does this come about, Wi?"

"Would you know, Wife? Then I will tell you. I have discovered a great truth, namely that we live on after death, and that not for nothing did I bury her toys with Fo-a, for when all is finished I shall find her playing with them elsewhere."

"Are you mad?" asked Aaka. "Do the Ice-gods promise us any such thing? Do Urk and the ancients teach any such thing?"

"No, Wife. Yet what I tell you is true, and if you would be happy, you will do well to learn the same lesson."

"Who is to teach it to me, Wi?"

"I, Wife, if you will listen."

"Or rather, to begin at the beginning," she went on, "who taught it to you? Was it Laleela?"

Now, Wi, who found that he could no longer lie as perhaps he would have done in the old days, answered simply:

"Who else, Wife? I have learned the wisdom of her people. Believe me, I am not mad, and that hers is a true wisdom, which has made me happy who was wretched, which has made me brave who was full of terrors."

For a while, Aaka was silent, for words choked in her throat. Then she said coldly:

"Now I understand. That Witch-from-the-Sea has made a wizard of you. She has not been content to take you as a fair woman might have done with little blame. No, she has poisoned your heart. She has turned you from our ancient gods. Little wonder that they are wroth and bring misfortune upon us, when the chief of the people and a witch from the sea join together to mock and reject them and to turn to I know not what. Tell me, what is it that you two worship when you stand staring at the skies at night, as I know you do?"

"That which dwells in the skies, Wife; that which waits to receive us in the skies."

Now the cold and stately Aaka trembled with wrath.

"Shall I bandy words with a wizard, one who spits upon our father's gods?" she asked, and turning, left him.

From that hour began the great trouble. The winter was terrible; none had known such a winter; even Urk the Aged declared that weather so fierce had not been told of since the day of his grandfather's great-grandfather. The winds howled continually from the north and east, and whenever they sank a little, snow fell till it was piled up in great drifts out of which in places only the tops of the firs appeared, drifts that almost swallowed up the huts, so that men must throw aside the snow from day to day to come to each other. The sea, too, was more frozen than ever it had been before, and through the pack ice moved great bergs like mountains, crashing their road southward, on which bergs might be seen numbers of terrible white bears that scrambled from them to the shore, seeking what they might devour. For if any of the seals on which they lived were left, these were hidden beneath the ice where the bears could not come at them.

From month to month, the people lived upon such food as Wi in his wisdom had stored up for them, though now and again, led by him and Moananga, they must go out against the bears that, made mad by hunger, even strove to tear a way through the sides and roofs of the huts. In these fights a number of them perished, being mauled by the bears, or dying of the cold while they waited for them. Also, many of the old people and young children died of this same cold, especially in those huts where, notwithstanding Wi's orders, enough wood and dried seaweed had not been stored. For now no seaweed could be got, and because of the snowdrifts and the blizzards, it was impossible to go to the forest and thence to bring more wood.

During all this time of suffering and of terror, Wi went to and fro with a smiling face, doing the best he could to help even the humblest, sheltering them in the cave, sharing the chief's food with them, and even the fuel of which he had gathered so great a store. Laleela, too, cherished the outcast babes and wept as one by one they died of the bitter frosts that poured into the open mouth of the cave and struck them through their wrappings.

At last the black winter months passed away, giving place to those of spring. Yet no spring came. The snow, it is true, ceased to fall, and the pack ice off the shore grew thinner, also the rivers began to run turbidly, filled with brine rather than water, and the trees of the woods appeared again out of their white beds, blackened and dead, for the most part. But there was no green where there should have been grass, no spring flowers bloomed, the fir buds did not burst, no seals or birds appeared, while the cold remained like to that of a winter when Wi was a lad.

Great murmuring went up from the tribe. Tales had gone from mouth to mouth.

"The curse has come upon us," said these tales; "a curse brought by the fair Witch-of-the-Sea."

Moreover, there spread a rumour that Wi, their chief, had deserted the Ice-gods whom all had worshipped since the days of Urk's grandfather's great-grandfather, and perhaps even earlier; that now he bent to the knee to some other god, that of the Witch-of-the-Sea. As Aaka would say nothing—although perchance already she had said too much—and as they dared not ask the truth of Wi, he who had slain Henga and the great toothed tiger and the bull of bulls and was therefore more than a man, chosen ones from among the people waylaid Pag, who was Wi's chief counsellor, and questioned him. He listened grimly, wrapped up in his skin rugs, and watching them with his one eye, then answered:

"I know nothing of this matter of gods, I who put no faith in any gods. All I know is that the weather has changed for the worse; also that, as for the oath which Wi swore, he has kept it well, seeing that although a very fair one lay to his hand, he has taken no other wife—which he might have done—for she whom he has does not treat him kindly. For the rest, if you are not content to die quietly, as it seems that we must do, and would find out what is the will of the gods, go and ask it of those who dwell in the ice yonder. Aye, let all those who complain gather themselves together, and let Wi and those who cling to him, of whom I am one, gather themselves together also. Then let us go up and stand before the Ice-gods in whom you put faith and make sacrifice to them, if there be anything left to offer, and ask them for an oracle."

Thus spoke Pag in his bitterness and mockery, never guessing that those poor tortured and bewildered folk would pay heed to his words. Yet this they did, for these seemed to them a tree to cling to as they were swept away by the flood of misery. Surely the gods to whom their fathers had bent the knee from the beginning must exist; surely they would listen if the people appeared before them and offered them sacrifice, and would cause the ice to melt and the spring to come.

The people took counsel together, and at last sent some of their number to the mouth of the cave to speak with Wi, N'gae, he who made charms, the Priest of the Ice-gods, and Pitokiti and Hou and Whaka, among them. So they went up to the cave, having chosen Hotoa the Slow-speeched, and Urk the Ancient as their spokesmen, and at the mouth of the cave Wini-wini the Shudderer blew three blasts upon his horn according to the old custom when the people desired to talk with the chief.

Wi came forth wearing his robe that was made of the hide of the long-toothed tiger which he had killed, and saw the spokesmen standing before him, shame-faced and with downcast eyes, while behind them gathered upon the meeting place where he had fought Henga, the mass of the people, or those who were left of them, were huddled together miserably.

"What would you with me?" he asked.

"Chief," mumbled Urk, "we are sent to say that the people can no longer bear the curse which has fallen upon them. We hear that the Witch-from-the-Sea, who brought the curse, has changed your heart, so that you have ceased to worship the ancient gods who dwell in the ice, and have set up some other god in your heart, wherefore the Ice-dwellers are angry. We ask you if this be true."

"It is true," answered Wi steadfastly. "No longer do I worship the Ice-gods, because there are no such gods. Those that dwell in the ice are but a great beast and a man, both of whom have been dead from the beginning."

Now the messengers looked at each other and shivered, for to them these words were horrible, while N'gae the priest waved his hands and muttered prayers or spells. Then Urk went on:

"We feared that this was so. Hearken, Chief. It has been handed down to me from my forefathers that once, when the people were starving because of bad seasons, the chief offered up his son as a sacrifice to the Ice-gods. Yes, he killed his son before them; whereon the gods were appeased, the seasons changed, the seals and the fish returned in plenty, and all was well."

"Do you demand that I should sacrifice my son?" asked Wi.

"Chief, N'gae the priest of the Ice-gods like his father before him, the weaver of spells, and Taren his wife, the seeress, have made divination and wisdom has come upon them. Yes, a Voice has spoken to them from the roof of their hut in the dead of night."

"And what said the Voice?" asked Wi, leaning on his axe and looking at N'gae. "Tell me, you to whom it spoke."

Then the lank, evil-faced N'gae piped an answer in his thin voice.

"Chief, the voice said that the Ice-gods must have their sacrifice and that this sacrifice must walk upon two legs."

"Did it name the sacrifice, N'gae?"

"Nay. Yet it said that it must be chosen by the chief from the chief's household, and thereafter be offered with his own hand, yonder in the holy place before the face of the gods."

"Name my household," said Wi.

"Chief, there are but three of them. Aaka your wife, Foh your son, and the Witch-from-the-Sea who is your second wife."

"I have no second wife," answered Wi. "In that matter, as in all others, I have kept the oath which I made to the people."

"We hold that she is your second wife; also that she has brought the curse upon us, as she brought the Red Wanderers," replied N'gae stubbornly, while the others nodded their heads in assent. "We demand," he went on, "that you choose one of these three to be offered to the Ice-dwellers at sunset on the night of full moon, which is the appointed hour of sacrifice when the sun and the moon look at each other across the sky."

"And if I refuse?" said Wi quietly.

Now N'gae looked at Urk, and Urk answered:

"If you refuse, Chief, this is the decree of the people—this is their message to you: They will kill all these three, Aaka your wife, Foh your son, and the Witch-from-the-Sea, your second wife, so that they may be sure that the one dies who should have been chosen. This they will do, however, whenever and wherever they can catch them, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, walking or eating, and having slain them, they will take their bodies and lay them as an offering on the threshold of the Dwellers in the Ice."

"Why not kill me?" asked Wi.

"Chief—because you are the Chief, who may only be slain by one who is stronger than he, as you slew Henga, and who is there that is stronger than you are or who dare stand before you?"

"So, like wolves, you would kill the weak and let the mighty be," said Wi with scorn. "Well, Messengers, well, Voices of the People, go back to them and say that Wi the Chief will take counsel with himself as to this matter which you have brought before him. To-morrow, at this same hour of midday, return to me and I shall speak my heart to you and to the people, so that to-morrow night, at the setting of the sun, the sacrifice, if sacrifice there must be, may be accomplished, when the sun and the full moon look at each other across the skies."

Then they went, shrinking before his eyes, which seemed to burn them like fire.

Now of this talk Wi said nothing to any—no, not even to Aaka or Pag or Laleela, though perchance they all knew it, for when they met him they looked upon him strangely, as did even Foh his son, or so it seemed to him. That afternoon, going to the mouth of the cave, he saw that a large fire had been lit down among the huts and that round it many were gathered as though at a feast.

"Perhaps they have found a dead seal and cook it," said Wi to himself.

As he stood there wondering, Pag and Moananga came up, and he noted that Moananga was bruised as though he had been fighting.

"What passes yonder?" asked Wi.

"This, Brother," answered Moananga, and there was horror in his voice. "Those of the people who have eaten all their store and to whom by your orders no more may be given till after the night of the full moon, and who are therefore starving, have slaughtered two girl children and cook and devour them. I tried to stay them but they felled me with clubs, for they are fierce as wolves and more savage."

"Is it so?" said Wi in a low voice, for his heart was sick in him.

"Shall we gather men and fall on them and kill them?" asked Moananga.

"Of what use to shed more blood?" answered Wi. "They are starving brutes, and such will fill themselves. Hearken. I go out to think. Let none follow me, for I would be alone. Fear not, I shall return. Yet, keep watch over the other children, for there are many famished yonder."

So Wi went along the base of the hills that this spring were covered with thick ice, such as had never been seen upon them before. This ice, indeed, had crept down from the glaciers above almost to the seashore, and he noted that where it ended its thickness was that of the height of three spears tied one to another, and wondered what it might be in the clefts farther up the slope of the hills. Wi came to the valley that was called the Home of the Ice-gods and went up to it.

Lo! the great glacier had moved forward, for the last wand that he had set to measure its advance was covered and the rocks that the ice had pushed in front of it were piled into a heap or ridge that separated the valley into two parts, a larger part to the left as he faced the glacier in front of the Sleeper and a smaller part to the right where the ice was not so steep. Wi looked at the Sleeper and the man. It seemed to him that they were nearer than ever they had been before, for he could see them both more clearly, although they were also higher up in the ice.

"These gods travel," he said to himself. Then he crossed the ridge of piled-up stones and sat himself down upon a rock to think, as more than once he had done before. Then he had come thither because the place was holy to him. Now it was no longer holy, but he sought it because he knew that he would be alone, for none dared enter it at

nightfall. Wi watched the edge of the sun sinking toward the west and the edge of the moon rising in the east, and began to pray.

"O That which Laleela worships and has taught me to worship, hear me," he prayed. "Behold! I am helpless. Those poor, starving folk seek to kill the ones I love and say to me, 'Choose the victim,' and if I choose not they will kill them. They say that the Ice-gods demand a human sacrifice and that this sacrifice must be given to them. O That which Laleela worships, tell me what I must do!"

Thus he prayed in rough and simple words, with his heart rather than with his lips, and having prayed, fell into thought, communing with his own soul.

The place was very silent. The frozen air hung heavily; on either side rose the black rock walls of the gulf; in front was the blue ice full of reflected lights, and above to the left of him were the grim figures of the dead man of long ago being hunted from age to age by the enormous, shadowy, unknown beast. In this dread house of the gods of his people, Wi bowed his head and communed with his soul, and not only with his own soul, but, as it seemed to him, with the souls of all who had begotten him. For he sought not his own wisdom only, but that of his race.

What now should he do? The tribe believed in the Ice-gods, as their forefathers had done, back and back forever, and though he had come to reject those gods as gods, still he also believed in them as devils, the bearers of misery. The tribe believed that, if the sacrifice in which ran the blood of man were made to the gods, these would cease from tormenting them and that once more they would have plenty and live as their ancestors had lived.

It might be so. It might be that devils could only be made kind by blood offerings, and that the devils were near while the real gods were far away. At least, so held the people, who were starving and desperate, and whose soothsayers had declared that one of his own household must be offered up to these, their gods from generation to generation, as legend told had been done in the past by chiefs who ruled before him. Moreover, if that offering were not made, they would make it for themselves by murder. Therefore, an offering must be made, and on him was laid the burden of this dreadful choice.

Who, then, should he give up to be butchered? Aaka, the wife of his youth, whom he still loved, although she treated him so unkindly? Never! The very thought of such a deed made him burn with shame, even in that cold. Laleela, the sweet one from the south, whose beauty was that of a star and whose breath was as the balm from fir trees, she whose wisdom had given him peace, she who had offered her life for his? Never! Then who remained? Only Foh his son, the one child that was left to him, the bright, brave lad of promise who, as Laleela had prophesied, might live on to become a better and more famous man than he had been, and to beget children to succeed him. Should he stand by and see the throat of Foh cut before the Ice-gods that the smoke of his blood might rise to their nostrils and give them pleasure? Never!

Who then remained of his household to satisfy the hunger of the gods and to take away the fear of the people? One only. He, Wi himself, whom they dared not touch because he was chief and too strong for them.

A while ago, in his wretchedness, he had gone up to fight the great bull in the woods, half hoping that the bull would prevail against him, who had no more desire to live. Afterward Laleela had taught him certain lessons, amongst others, that it was wrong to die thus to please himself, and to cast the burdens from his back upon the backs of those who came after him. But Laleela had never taught him that it was wrong to die for others; indeed, she herself had shown that she was ready to do this very thing when she leapt in the path of the little spear, and when she rowed out to sea to perish there in her hollow log, that he might be no more reproached or mocked. Perchance, if he died, the devils whom once he thought to be gods would be appeased and the sun would shine again as it used to do, and the snows and ice would melt, and the beasts and the birds would return and give the people food. Was it not well that one should die for the sake of many? Should he hold back his own life, if by the giving of it many might be helped, or even believe that they would be helped? Surely this must be given, nor should he grieve overmuch to whom Laleela had taught certain lessons, except that, for a little while, he would be called upon to leave Foh and her behind him.

Such were the lessons that the soul of Wi taught to Wi there in the icy silence of the glacier.

Wi rose up and laughed aloud. He stood upon the pile of ice-borne stones, a tiny form in that tremendous place, and shook his axe at the Sleeper, and at him whom the Sleeper hunted, and at the shadowy shapes that seemed to crowd about these in the moonlight, the towering, changeful shapes that the people held to be those of gods.

"I defy you," he cried, his voice echoing strangely from the mighty ice cliffs and the wall of rock. "Ye shall have your sacrifice. My blood shall steam before you. Ye shall feed on death. Then, being full, ye and those that worship you, those from whom ye draw your strength, shall come face to face with That which is greater than ye are. Yes, ye, the Demanders of sacrifice, shall yourselves be sacrificed to That which is greater than ye are!"

Thus cried Wi in his madness, scarce knowing what it was he said, or why such words broke from him.

But from the Ice-gods there came no answer; still the hunter and the hunted stared at him; still the frost bit and the deep silence reigned, and the moon shone on above, as he, a defeated, desperate man, crept, half-frozen, back to whence he came.

When Wi reached the cave, he saw crouched in front of it a single figure wrapped up in furs. It was Pag who awaited him.

“What counsel from the Ice-dwellers?” asked Pag, eyeing him strangely.

“Out of nothing comes nothing,” answered Wi. “What do you here?”

“There are three within whom I watch,” said Pag. “Hearken, I know all as do the others, and if the Ice-dwellers are dumb, I have counsel. It is that we three—you, Moananga, and I—fall upon certain ones whom you know, those who spoke with you to-day, now in the night, and slay them. Then, lacking leaders, the rest will scatter and hide their heads, for they are cowards.”

“I will shed no blood,” said Wi, “not even that of those who hate me, for misery makes them mad.”

“Then other blood will be shed, that of those who love you.”

“I think not,” said Wi. “Still, watch them well who walk in the midst of hungry wolves.” Then he entered the cave and laid himself down between Foh and Aaka. For he had sent command to Aaka that she must no more sleep alone in her hut.

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## THE SACRIFICE

Next day at the hour of noon Wini-wini came and, as before, blew three blasts upon his horn. Wi went to the mouth of the cave, and there without stood old Urk and the messengers; they who spoke as the tongue of the people.

"What of the sacrifice?" asked Urk. "Chief, we await your word."

"It seems that one has been offered, yonder among the huts, and that the bellies of some of you are full of strange meat," answered Wi sternly.

They cowered before him and muttered together. Then Hotoa the Slow- speeched spoke, and the words fell from his lips heavily, like stones thrown into water one by one.

"Chief, we starve and must have food. The old gods, whom you deny, starve also and must have blood. Name the sacrifice from among the chosen three, or we will kill them all and thus be sure that the appointed one has died."

"Am I not also of the household of the chief, Hotoa?" asked Wi. "And if you would make sure, should I not be killed with them? See, I am but one while you are many. Come, kill me that your gods may have their sacrifice."

One leapt out of the darkness of the cave and stood at his side. It was Aaka.

"Kill me also," said Aaka, "for I would go with my man. Shall we who have slept together for so many years lie in different beds at last?"

The messengers shrank back before him. Indeed, Hou and Whaka ran away, for they were cowards.

"Hearken, Dogs, who like dogs devour the flesh of men," said Wi in a great voice. "Get you back to the people and say to them that, since they will have it so, I will meet them at sunset in the Home of the gods. There we will stand together before your gods; I and my household upon the one side and you and the people upon the other. There, too, perchance shall the sacrifice be named and made. Till then I am silent. Dogs, begone!"

For a moment they stood staring at him and he stared back at them, with flashing eyes. A mighty man he was in his robe of tigerskin and gripping the heavy axe—so mighty that their hearts turned to water and their knees shook. Then they slunk away like foxes before a wolf.

Aaka looked at him, and there was pride in her face.

"Tell me, Wi," she said, "are you born of the same blood as these two- legged beasts, or did some god beget you? Tell me also, what is your plan?"

"I tell you nothing, Wife," he answered sternly.

"Is it so, Wi? Then perchance the Sea-witch has your counsel?—for, as we all know, she is wiser than I am?"

"Upon this matter, I take no counsel from Laleela, Wife."

"Then perchance it is Pag who whispers in your ear, Pag the Wolf-man, who is my enemy and your friend, who teaches to your heart the craft of wolves?"

"That stone was ill aimed," said Pag who stood by. "Last night I whispered such counsel as I think would have pleased you, but Wi would have none of it, Aaka."

"What counsel?" she asked.

"The counsel of axe and spear; the counsel of dogs left dead before their own doors as a warning to the pack. Wolf's counsel, Aaka."

"Here is wisdom where I little thought to find it," she said. Then, before Pag could answer, Wi stamped his foot, crying:

"Have done! Before the moon rides high to-night all shall learn who is wise and who is foolish. Till then, give me peace."

Wi went into the cave and ate, talking with Foh as he ate and telling him tales of wild beasts and how he had slain them, such as the lad loved to hear. But to Aaka and Laleela he spoke no word, nor to Pag either, for, spear in hand, Pag kept guard at the mouth of the cave, and Moananga with him. Yet Laleela, watching him from far off, wondered what his soul had said to Wi yonder in the Home of the gods. Or perhaps she did not wonder. Perhaps his soul had told her soul and she knew.

After he had eaten, Wi lay down and slept awhile. When it drew toward sunset, he rose and called to Aaka and Laleela, to Foh and to Pag; also to Moananga and his wife Tana, to cover themselves with their fur cloaks, for the air was cold, and to accompany him to the Home of the gods. Then he wrapped himself in his tigerskin robe, took his axe, Pag's gift, and two spears, and led the way past the white hills that rose above the beach, to the gulf in the mountain where the blue ice shone and the Sleeper slept. As he passed from the cave, he noted that the most of those who were left of the people were come together on the Gathering-ground where he had fought Henga, and watched him, a strange and silent company. Presently, looking back, he saw that they were following him, still silent, much as a pack of hungry wolves follows a little herd of deer. Yes, that was what they looked like upon the white snow which this season would not melt, a pack of wolves creeping after a little herd of deer.

Wi came to the glacier gulf and climbed up it, followed by his household, till he reached the foot of the ice. Then he bade them stand on the right of the little ridge of stones that the ice had pushed before it, where there was a narrow strip or bay of ground between these stones and the rock wall of the cleft which was not overhung by the ice. For here the rocky gulf bulged outward, so that on it no ice could lie, the mighty glacier being to the west on the left of the stones.

"This is a strait place, Husband," said Aaka, "which gives us but little standing room."

"We are few, Wife," he answered, "and those who come are many. Moreover, standing here where the rock slopes outward, we can be seen and heard of all who gather before the face of the ice."

Led by the elders the people came, and as they came, Wi pointed with his spear, showing them that they should take their place to the left of the stones where the valley was broad and in summer a stream ran from the ice, which stream was now frozen. So there they gathered on the bed of that stream, family by family, for all the tribe that could walk had come to see this sacrifice to the ancient gods.

At length, all were there and stood still. Wi climbed upon a rock in the little bay of the eastern cliff over against them, and stood there, a figure of fire, for the light from the sinking sun struck full upon him, while the great company of the people were in shadow.

"I, Wi the Chief, am here, and my household with me," he cried, and in that great cold silence his voice echoed from the walls of ice and rock. "Now tell me, O People—what is your will with me and mine?"

Then out of the shadows answered the piping voice of N'gae the Diviner, the Priest, the Weaver of spells, saying:

"This is our will, Chief: That you choose for sacrifice one of your household that the gods of our fathers may smell the blood and lift from off us the curse that has been brought upon us by Laleela, the Witch-from-the-Sea, whom against your oath you have taken to wife."

"On that matter I have answered you already," cried Wi across the gulf, "but let it be. Now do you, O People, put up your prayer to your gods, and when that prayer is finished, if to it no answer comes, I will name the sacrifice."

Then N'gae in his thin, piping voice began to pray to the gods out of the shadows:

"O Ice-dwellers," he said, "ye whom our fathers have worshipped from of old, hearken to our tale. A while ago, he who is our chief made new laws, and because the women among us were very few, decreed that no man should take more than one wife. Also he swore that he himself would keep his own law, and should he break it, he called down your curse upon his head and upon those of all the tribe.

"O ye ancient gods, there rose out of the sea a very fair witch whom this chief of ours has taken to wife, breaking his oath. Therefore the curse that he created in your names is fallen upon us; therefore the seasons have changed, the seals and the fish do not come, there are no fowl and no deer in the woods, and where there should be grass and flowers, there is naught but ice and snow. Therefore, too, we starve and die and must fill ourselves with the flesh of our own children because you, O gods, are wroth with us.

"Now hearken, O ye gods. It has come to us from the former days, father telling the tale to son through many generations, that in the far past such evils have happened to those who begat us, and are now forgotten. For then, too, you were wroth with us because of the wickedness of those who ruled over us, turning their backs on you, ye gods. Yet afterward that wrath of yours was appeased by a sacrifice chosen from among the household of the chief, and thus the curse was lifted from us, and again we were full of food. But never did any chief of ours sin so greatly against you as does this Wi who rules over us to-day and who is so mighty a man that none of us may stand against him to fight and kill him. Thus has he sinned, O ye gods from of old. Not only has he broken his oath, but, led of the Witch-from-the-Sea, he has rejected you and reviled you, saying that ye are no gods, but devils, and that he worships another power without a name, to whose feet he has been led by the magic of the Witch-from-the-Sea. Therefore we, your servants from the beginning, have made known and declared to him that no common sacrifice will satisfy his sin, but that the blood to be shed must be that of one of his own family, aye, the blood of a wife, or that of his son. Such is the case that we lay before ye, O ye gods, we, your servants of old. Now let Wi the mighty man, our chief who rejects you, make answer to it if he is able. And then let the sacrifice be offered that your curse may be lifted from off us, and that we who perish with cold and hunger, may live again."

The piping voice of N'gae died and for a while there was silence. Then, standing on a rock, Wi made answer:

"O ye Ice-dwellers whom once I worshipped as good gods, but whom now I know to be devils and bearers of evil, hear my words. Your priest said that I have sworn an oath, and it is so. Yet he is a liar, for that oath I have not broken. True it is that a curse has fallen upon us because the seasons have changed their course, yet that curse began to fall ere ever the woman whom they name Witch-from-the-Sea set foot upon our shore. Now the tribe demands a sacrifice of blood to be named by me from among my household, believing that, by virtue of this shed blood, the curse will be lifted from them and spring and summer will return as aforetime, bringing plenty.

"O ye Ice-dwellers, that sacrifice is ready to be offered. *I, Wi, am that sacrifice!* I, Wi, name myself as the victim whose blood must flow. Yet first, ere I fall upon my spear, or stretch out my throat to the Priest, I make prayer to that which is above both you and me. Hear me now, O Power without a name, O Power in whom I have learned to trust, is it your will that I should die as an offering to these devils, the Dwellers in the ice? Answer, for I am ready. The people are

in misery; they are mad. I blame them not, I into whose hand they were given to feed and guide. If by the shedding of my blood their woes can be washed away, then let it be outpoured. Judge then, O Power, between me and the people, for whom I have laboured vainly, and the evil gods they worship who rejoice in misery and desire death. Judge, O Power without a name. Turn the hearts of these men, if they can be turned, and break the bonds that bind them. But if this may not be, if, having heard me, still the people desire sacrifice, or by my blood their miseries can be washed away, then let me die for them."

Thus prayed Wi to the Strength that dwelt above and to the folk whom he had cherished here upon the earth, asking for no sign nor for any vengeance, putting up no plea for pity, yet hoping that this Strength might find a way to turn them from their bloody purpose, so that no longer in the name of their gods they should demand the life of him or his. As he prayed, the light of the dying sun faded from him standing there in the bay of the cliff, so that his last words were spoken out of the deep gloom, while the light of the rising moon grew and gathered upon the glacier's face and upon the savage horde beneath who stared up toward him upon the rock.

He ceased, and for a while there was a great silence, and through that silence there came home to the heart of Wi the Hunter, Wi the wild man, knowledge that he played his part in a war of gods, yes, in the eternal fight between the Evil and the Good. Suddenly he knew that those Ice-dwellers whom the people worshipped, as once he had done, were naught but the evil in their own hearts given form and name, and that the Unknown One whom now he worshipped was the Good in their hearts, and his heart of which Laleela had opened the doors so that it might enter there, the Good which now he saw and felt but which as yet they did not understand. Which, then, would prevail, he wondered to himself—yes, wondered calmly, even coldly, as though he judged another's case, and in that great wonder all fear left him, and with it the thought of the agony of death and of the loves that he must leave behind.

He looked down upon the people and, by the shimmering moonlight, watched their faces. They were disturbed; they began to whisper one to another, they grew sad-eyed and some of the women wept. He caught snatches of their talk.

"He has been kind to us," they said; "he has done all that man can do; he is not the Lord of the seasons, he does not cause the birds to fly or the seals to swim. Why should he not take another wife if it pleases him? Can the gods demand his blood or that of his wives or son? Why should he be sacrificed, leaving us leaderless?"

Such were the words that they murmured one to another.

"The Good conquers, the Ill goes down," thought Wi, still judging of the case as though it were not his own.

But N'gae, the Weaver of Spells, who hated him, also saw and heard. He ran out from among them, he stood facing them with his back to the ice slope; he cried in his thin, piercing voice:

"Hear me, the priest of the Ice-gods, as were my fathers before me; hear me, ye people. Wi, the oath-breaker, Wi through whom the curse has fallen on you, pleads with you for his life. If he is afraid to die, then let him give another to the gods. Let him give Aaka the proud, or the white Witch-from-the-Sea, or Foh his son. Did we ask for his blood? Would we kill him, the chief? Not so. If he dies, it is by his own choice and of his own will. Therefore, let not your hearts be softened by his pleadings. Remember what he is. Out of his own mouth he has declared himself a reviler of the gods. He has set up another god and in their very presence makes prayer to it, naming them devils. Surely for this he is worthy of death. Surely because of this blasphemy the gods will be avenged. Yet we seek not his life. Let him give to us one of the others; let him give to us that white Witch-from-the-Sea that we may bind her and cause her to die, here and now. I tell you, People, I who am the priest and to whom the gods talk, that if you go hence having robbed them of their sacrifice, you shall starve. Yes, you shall die as many of us have died already, of sickness and want and cold. More, you shall eat one another and kill one another till at last none is left. Will you starve? Will you see your children devoured? Look!" and he turned, pointing behind him at the shadows which the moonlight caused to appear in the deep clear ice, "The gods are moving; they gather, waiting for their feast. Will you dare to rob them of their feast? Do so and you shall become, every one of you, like that dead one who lies before the Sleeper. Do you not see them moving?"

Now a groaning cry went up from the people.

"We see them! We see them!"

"And will you rob them of their feast?" asked the fierce-faced N'gae again.

"Nay," they shouted, taking fire. "Let the sacrifice be sacrificed. Let us see the red blood flow! Let the Ice-gods whom our fathers worshipped smell the red blood!"

"Wi, you have your answer," piped N'gae, as the shouting died. "Now come hither and die if you dare. Or, if you dare not, then send us one of your household."

Aaka, holding Foh by the hand, Laleela, Pag, Moananga and his wife clustered together as though to take counsel. Wi prepared to descend from his rock, perchance to fall upon his spear, perchance to give himself up to be butchered by the people and their priest.

Then it was that something, at first none knew what, began to happen that caused all to stand silent, each in his place, like men that had been smitten to stone. From high up in the air, although no wind blew, there came a moaning sound, as if out of sight countless great-winged birds were flying. The air seemed to change; it grew more icy cold,

men's breath froze upon it. The shadows in the ice shrank and grew in the wavering moonbeams. They advanced; they flitted back quickly and departed, only to appear again here and there, high above where they had been.

The hairy man who stood before the Sleeper seemed to move a little. Surely they saw him move!

The earth trembled as though it were filled with dread, and deeper and deeper grew the silence, till, suddenly, it was broken by an awful crack like to that of the fiercest thunder. As its echoes died away, out of the bowels of the ice rushed the Sleeper and he whom it appeared to hunt. Yea, the white-tusked Sleeper rushed like a charging bull; it sped forward like a stone from a sling. The frozen man was thrown far and vanished, but the mighty Sleeper fell full on N'gae the priest who still stood staring upward, crushing him to powder, and passing on, ploughed a red path through the folk beyond.

Again for a moment there was silence, and in that silence Wi said, speaking out of the darkness as one who dreams:

"It would seem that the Ice-gods have taken their sacrifice!"

As the words died upon his lips, with an awful rending sound, companioned by whirlwinds, the great glacier moved forward in a slow and deadly march. It advanced down the valley, thrusting rocks in front of it, heaving itself into waves like a tumultuous sea, digging up the solid ground while before it great boulders leapt and danced. The boulders danced through the people, and ice flowed over them. Yes, as they turned to fly, it flowed over them, so that presently, where they had been, there was nothing but a deep sea of tumbled, heaving ice that travelled toward the beach.

Wi leapt from his rock. With those of his house, he huddled further back into the little bay of the mountain side, and there, protected by the walls of the cliff, watched the river of ice grind and thunder past them. How long did they watch? None ever knew. They saw it flow. They saw it creep into the sea and there break off in sharp-topped hills of ice. Then, as suddenly as it had begun to move, it stopped and the night was as the night had been, only now the valley of the gods was a valley of ice, and where the glacier had been were slopes and walls of smooth black rock.

When all was over, Wi spoke to the little company who clung to him, saying:

"The Ice-gods have given birth. The old devil-gods have taken a great sacrifice of all who served them, but that which I and another worship has heard our prayer and preserved us alive. Let us go back to the cave."

So, Wi leading them, they climbed out of the bay in the mountain side up on to the steep cliff of tumbled ice that had flowed down the valley, filling it from side to side, purposing to return to the village. But when they reached its crest and looked toward where the beach should be and the huts of the people, they sank down, amazed and terrified. For, behold! no beach was left. Behold! the ice gathered upon the smaller hills behind the village also had flowed down over it into the sea, so that where the dwelling places of the people had been now there was nothing but a rough slope of tumbled ice washed up by the waves of the troubled sea. The tribe that had dwelt upon this beach for ages was gone, and with it its habitations, that now lay buried forever, swept from the face of the world.

Aaka, leaning upon Wi, studied all things in the cold moonlight. Then she said:

"The curse brought by that fair witch of yours has worked well, Husband; so well that I wonder what remains for her to do."

"After all that has passed, Wife, such words seem to me to be evil," answered Wi. "The people who called upon the Ice-dwellers, where are they? Surely they have become dwellers in the ice. Yet I who learned another lesson from her whom you reproach, I who thought by this time to be a sacrifice, remain alive, and with me all my House. Is this, then, a time for bitter words, Wife?"

Then Pag spoke, saying:

"As you well know, Wi, never did I put faith in the Ice-gods because our people have made sacrifice to them and have danced before them for a thousand years, and now I believe in them less than ever, seeing that those who worshipped them are swept away, and those who rejected them live on. The People have gone; not one of them remains alive except this little company, a handful out of hundreds. They have gone; they lie buried in the ice, as thousands of years ago the great Sleeper that fell on N'gae and crushed him, and he who hunted it or by it was hunted, were buried. There they lie who perchance in their turn will become gods in a day to come, and be worshipped by the fools that follow after us. Yet we still breathe, and all the rest being dead, how shall we save ourselves? The children who were born of the marriage of those Ice-gods have eaten up our homes; the beach is no more. Nothing remains. Whither then shall we go who, if we stay here upon the ice, very soon must perish?"

Wi covered his eyes with his hands and made no answer, for he was broken-hearted.

Then, for the first time, spoke Laleela, who hitherto had been silent, saying nothing at all, even when Wi offered himself as the sacrifice:

"Be pleased to hear me," she said. "As the moonlight shows you, the ice has flowed down over the beach and the huts and the woods beyond. Yet, on the farther side of the ridge that bounds the valley of the gods and the little hills beyond, it has not flowed; for there the ice sheet is flat beneath the snow and cannot stir of its own weight. Yonder to the east there is a little cave, that in which the boat lies that brought me to this land, and there I have hidden food. If it pleases you, let us go to that cave and shelter there."

“Aye, let us go to the cave, for if we stay here upon the ice we shall perish,” said Pag.

So climbing round the foot of the mountain and the hills beyond they came at length to the open beach where lay some snow but no ice, and walked by the edge of the sea to the little cave.

Pag and Moananga, going first, reached it before the others. Pag, peering in, started back, for he saw large eyes looking at him out of its darkness.

“Have a care,” he called to Moananga. “Here are bears or wolves.”

The sound of his voice frightened the beasts in the cave, and moving slowly, these came out on to the beach, whereon they saw that they were not bears or wolves, but two seals, a large cow and her half-grown cub, that had refuged there perhaps because they were frightened by the sound of the glaciers rushing into the sea. They leapt upon the clumsy beasts and before these could escape, killed them with their axes.

“Here at least is meat enough to last us for a long while,” said Pag, when the seals were dead. “Now let us skin them before they freeze.”

So, helped by Foh, they set to the task and well-nigh finished it by moonlight before Wi came up with the women. For Tana was so frightened by the horrors she had seen that Aaka and Laleela must support her, and thus they could only walk slowly through the snow.

Then, having searched the cave and made sure that now it was empty, they entered it and lit a fire round which they crouched to warm themselves, silent and full of terrors.

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## WHICH?

Before the coming of the dawn, Wi left the cave and climbed a little hill behind it that was built up of ancient ice-borne rocks and drift in which this hollowed cavern lay. This he did because he wished to look at the land and the sea when the light came; also to be alone and think. Yet he found that he was not alone, for kneeling behind one of the rocks was Laleela, praying, with her face turned toward the sinking moon. When she saw who it was that came, she did not stir but went on praying, and kneeling at her side he prayed with her, for now they had one worship, though neither of them altogether understood who or what they worshipped.

Their prayers finished, they spoke together.

"Strange things have happened, Laleela," said Wi, "and my heart is pierced because of the people who are dead. I would have offered myself as a sacrifice, if they sought it, knowing they believed that thereby a curse would have been taken from them and that what is believed often comes to pass. Yet I live on and they are slain—every one of them—and I say that my heart is broken," and for the first time since Fo-a was murdered, Wi bowed his head and wept.

Laleela took his hand and comforted him, wiping away his tears with her hair. Then she said in her gentle voice:

"Things have come about as they were decreed, and those who sought blood have died in blood, crushed to powder by the gods they worshipped, whether by chance or by the will of That which dwells yonder, I do not know or seek to learn. Only, Wi, you do ill to wish to slay yourself or suffer yourself to be slain, and," she added with a thrill of fear in her voice, "who can be sure that what has been offered to Heaven, Heaven will not take at its own time?"

"Not I," answered Wi. "Yet, Laleela, what would you have had me do? If I had refused any sacrifice to those mad folk, they would have done what they swore and murdered Aaka and Foh and you, all three. Therefore, a blood offering must be furnished out of my household and would you have had me name one of you and myself remain alive?"

"I brought the trouble, Wi; surely I should have paid its price. Indeed, I would have given myself up to them who hated me and sought my blood, not yours, had not a voice speaking in my breast told me that in some way you would be spared. Also, at the last, I felt that a terror was at hand, though what it might be I did not know."

"So, I think, did all of us, Laleela, for last night the air was big with death. But you do not answer. What would you have thought of me when the spear was at your throat, had I said, 'Take yonder Laleela whom you declare a witch. Offer her to your gods and be content!'"

"I should have thought you a wiser man than you are, Wi," she said, smiling sadly. "Yet, believe me, I thank you who are noble, nor, should I live ten thousand years, shall I forget. No, never, never shall I forget."

"If you live ten thousand years, Laleela, perhaps I shall also— where there is less trouble."

"I am sure that it will be so," she replied simply.

The dawn came, and, standing side by side in silence, they watched it come. It was a strange and splendid dawn, full of red light which shone upon the little clouds that floated in the quiet sky and turned them to shapes of glory. Yes, it was as though Nature, having done her worst, now lay resting in perfect peace. But, oh! what a sight was revealed to them. Where the village had been was ice piled so high that they could see its tumbled mass and pinnacles over the shoulder of the hill between. The great woods also, where Wi had killed the aurochs bull, that swelled upward from the beach westward, had vanished beneath the flood of ice which flowed down upon them from the mountains that lay behind, which now showed black, robbed of their white cloak. In front, too, far as the eye could reach, the sea was covered with a sheet of solid ice, so pressed together by the weight of the glaciers that had plunged into it from the hills and the valley of the gods, that it seemed quite smooth and immovable as rock, being held in place by the headland round which the Red Wanderers had come in their canoes. All the white world was a desolation and a waste.

"What has chanced?" said Wi, staring about him. "Is the world about to end?"

"I think not," answered Laleela. "I think that the ice is moving south, that is all, and that where men lived, there they can live no more— neither they nor the beasts."

"Then we must perish, Laleela."

"Why so? My boat remains and a store of food, and I think it will hold us all."

"Your boat cannot float upon ice, Laleela."

"Nay, but being hollowed from one tree it is very thick and strong, so that we can push it before us until at length we come to open water, over which we can row away."

"Where to, Laleela?"

"Down yonder to the south, across a stretch of sea that lies beyond that headland, is the home of my people, Wi. It lies in a very pleasant land, full of woods and rivers where I think the ice will not reach, because that sea which borders it, even in winter, is always warm. Indeed, sometimes ice mountains from the north float into it, for I have seen them from far away, but there at once they melt. My people are not as your people, Wi, for they have tamed creatures like to the bull you slew, and others, from which they draw milk and on whose flesh they feed. Also they are a peaceful folk who, for a long while past, have waged no war and live quietly till death takes them."

"Yet you fled away from these people, Laleela."

"Yes, Wi, and now I understand why I fled, but let that be. Also, although I fled, I think that, should I return, they would welcome me who am a great woman among them, and any whom I brought with me. Still, the way is far, and yonder ice is rough and cold, and who knows? Perchance it would be better to bide here."

"That we cannot do," answered Wi. "Look, all the shore is ice, and all the woods are ice, and all the sea whence we won the most of our food is ice, while behind us is nothing but a wilderness of black rock upon which nothing grows, as I am sure who in past days have hunted the reindeer across it. Also to the east yonder is a wall of mountains that we cannot climb, for they are steep and on them the snow lies thick. Still, let us talk with the others."

So they descended the hillock of piled-up stones, and at the mouth of the little cave found Aaka standing there like one who waits.

"Are your prayers to the new god finished, Wi?" she asked. "If so, I would learn whether its priestess gives us leave to eat of the food which she has stored here, while so many who now are dead were starving."

Hearing these words, Wi bit upon his lip, but Laleela answered:

"Aaka, all in this place is yours, not mine. Yet of that food, know that I saved it out of what was served out to me, for a certain purpose; namely, to store in my boat when I fled away from where I was not welcome."

Now, Pag, who was standing by, grinned, but Wi said only:

"Have done and let us eat."

So they ate who had tasted nothing since noon on the yesterday, and when they had filled themselves after a fashion, Wi spoke to them, saying:

"The home of our forefathers is destroyed, and with it all the people, of whom we alone are left. Yes, the ice that has piled itself above us for many years has broken its bounds and, rushing to the sea, has buried them, as I for one who marked its course from winter to winter, always thought that it would do one day. Now what is left to us? We cannot stay here; there is no food. Moreover, doubtless, driven by the ice, wolves and great bears will come down from the north and devour us. Therefore, this is my word: That we fly south over the ice, dragging the boat of Laleela with us till we reach open water, and then travel across that water to find some warmer land where the ice has not come."

"You are our master," said Aaka, "and when you command, we must obey. Yet I hold that the journey we make in Laleela's boat will end in evil, for us if not for her."

Then Pag spoke, saying:

"Nothing can be worse than the worst. Here certainly we die. Yonder we may live who in the end cannot do more than die."

"Pag's words are mine," said Moananga when Wi looked toward him, but Tana was silent because fear had robbed her of all spirit; and Laleela also held her peace. Only, while they still stared at the ground, the boy Foh cried out:

"The Chief my father has spoken. Is it for us to weigh his words?"

No one answered, so they rose up and laded the canoe with the food that Laleela had stored, and the cut-up flesh of the two seals which now was frozen stiff. The skins of the seals they used, although these were undressed, for coverings, lashing them over the food with the paddles and some wood of which others might be made. Lastly, at Laleela's bidding, they took a young fir tree that lay in the cave over which in former days the seal pelts had been hung to dry, that it might serve to make them a mast, though, except Laleela, none of them knew anything of the use of masts. Also upon their backs they bound loads of dry wood and seaweed for the making of fire, wrapped up in such hides as lay in the cave.

These things done, they dragged the boat over the snow to the ice that covered the sea and away out on to the ice southward, Laleela walking ahead to guide them and carrying a pole in her hand with which she tested the ice.

Thus then did Wi and the others bid farewell to the home of their fathers, which they were never to see again.

For some hours they dragged the boat thus, making but little progress, for the face of the packed ice was much rougher than it seemed to be when looked at from the shore, then rested a while and ate some of their food. When they rose to try to go forward, though by now most of them thought the task hopeless, Foh cried out:

"Father, this ice moves. When we stopped, those rocks on the headland were over against us, and now look, they are behind."

"It seems that it is so, but I am not sure," said Wi.

While they discussed the matter, Pag wandered back upon their track. Presently he returned and said:

"Certainly it moves. The ice sheet has broken behind us and there is water filled with hummocks that grind against each other between us and the shore, to which now we cannot return."

Then they knew that a current was bearing them southward, and some of them were frightened. But Wi said:

"Let us rather be thankful, for so shall we travel faster."

Still they continued to push and drag the boat over the rough ice, though this they did chiefly that they might keep themselves warm, who feared that they would freeze if they remained still for too long. So they toiled all day till,

toward nightfall, they came to ice upon which snow had fallen and lay deep. Moreover, it began to fall again, so that they must stop and make themselves a kind of hut of snow blocks, as they knew well how to do, in which hut they crouched all night to protect themselves from cold.

Next morning they found that the snow had ceased; also that now they were out of sight of the mountains that stood at the back of the beach which was their home, though they could still see snow-covered peaks on the headland to the east of them, very far away. Leaving the hut, they dragged the boat forward over the surface of the snow which had frozen, so that now it was easy to travel, and thus made good progress. All that day, resting from time to time, they went on thus, till, late in the afternoon, the snow began to grow soft and it was difficult to draw the boat through it. Therefore they stopped, being tired, and built themselves another snow hut outside which they lit a fire. On that fire they cooked some of the seal flesh and ate it thankfully, and then went into the hut and slept, for they were very weary.

Next morning they found that the snow was still soft and that, if they tried to walk on it, they sank in to their ankles, so that it was no longer possible to drag the boat forward.

"We cannot go forward and we cannot go back," said Wi. "There is but one thing to do—to stay here, though where that may be I do not know, for the mountains on the headland have vanished."

Now Tana broke into weeping and Moananga looked sad, but Aaka said:

"Yes, we stay here till we die; indeed, what other end could be looked for on such a journey, unless we have a witch among us who can teach us to fly like the swans?" and she glanced at Laleela.

"That I cannot do," answered Laleela, "and the journey was one that must be tried, or so we all thought. Nor need we die for a long while, seeing that here we have shelter in the snow hut and enough seal's flesh to last for many days if we are sparing, and snow that we can melt to drink. Also I hope that always the ice is bearing us forward, and it seems to me that the air grows somewhat warmer."

"Those are wise words," said Pag. "Now let us make the hut bigger, and since we can do nothing more for ourselves, trust to the Ice-gods, or to those that Laleela and Wi worship, or to any others that there may be."

So they did these things; also, while their fuel lasted they cooked the most of the seal flesh after a fashion and set it aside to eat cold together with the fat, which they swallowed raw.

That day Pag and Moananga spoke much with Laleela, questioning her as to her journey northward and how long it had taken; about her own land also, and where it lay—to which she answered as best she could. But Wi and Laleela talked little together, for whenever they did so Aaka watched them coldly, which seemed to tie their tongues.

Four more days and nights passed thus, and during this weary night there was no change, save one, namely, that always the air grew warmer, by which they knew they were being borne southward, so that at last the snow began to melt and the walls of their hut to drip. On the fourth day also they saw behind them, but somewhat to the west, a mountain of ice that they had not noted before. This mountain seemed to grow bigger and nearer, as though it were heading toward them, or they toward it, which told them that all the ice still travelled though they could not see or feel it move. During that night they heard terrible rending sounds and felt the ice shake beneath them but, although it was melting, they did not dare go out of the snow hut to look whence the sounds came, for a strong wind had begun to blow from the north, bringing with it clouds that covered the moon.

Toward dawn the wind fell, and presently the sun rose, shining brightly in a clear sky. Thrusting aside the block of snow that sealed the entrance hole of the hut, Pag crept out. Presently he returned and, finding Wi's hand, without speaking, drew him from the hut, pushing back the snow block after him.

"Look," he said as they rose from their knees, and pointed to the north.

Wi looked and would have fallen, had not Pag caught him. For there, not more than a hundred paces away, wedged into the thick floes whereon they floated, was that great ice mountain which they had seen before they slept, a tall pinnacle ending in a slope of rough ice. And lo! there, halfway up the slope, held up between blocks of ice and stone, stood the great Sleeper!

Oh! there could be no doubt, for the light of the rising sun struck full upon it. There stood the Sleeper as Wi had seen it for all his life through the veil of ice, only now its left foreleg was broken off below the knee. Moreover, this was not all, for among the stones and ice lay strange, silent shapes shrouded in a powder of snow.

"Here be old friends," said Pag, "if it pleases you to go to look upon them, Wi, N'gae—no, not N'gae, for of him on whom the Sleeper fell little would be left; but Urk the Aged and Pitokiti and Hotoa and Whaka, though no longer will he croak of evil like a raven, and many others."

"It does not please me," said Wi. Then he heard a voice behind him, that of Aaka, who said:

"You thought you had left the old gods behind, but see, they have followed after you, Husband, which I think means no good to Pag and you, who were the first to look upon them whom both of you have rejected."

"I do not know what it means, Wife," said Wi, "nor do I ask. Still, the sight is strange."

Then the others came. Moananga was silent, Tana lifted her hands and screamed, but Laleela said:

"The evil gods may follow, but we go before them, and never shall they come up with us."

"That remains to be learned," said Pag.

As he spoke, the ice peak on which they were looking, whereof the base had been melted by the warmer waters into which it had floated, began to tremble and to bow toward them. Thrice it bowed thus, then, with a slow and noble motion, it turned over. Bearing the Sleeper and its company with it, it vanished into the sea, and where its head had been appeared its foot, spotted all about with great rocks that it had brought with it from the land.

"Farewell to the Ice-gods!" said Laleela with a smile, but Wi cried:

"Back! Back! The wave comes!" and seizing Aaka by the hand he dragged her away.

They fled, all of them, and not too soon for after them followed a mingled flood of ice and water, cast up by the overturning of the berg. Near to their snow hut it stopped and began to recede. Yet the platform upon which that hut stood rocked and trembled.

In his fear and haste to escape, the lad Foh ran past the hut out on to the snow plain, whence presently he returned, crying:

"The ice has broken, and far away I see land. Come, Father, and look upon the land."

They ran after him, wading through the snow for some two hundred paces, till before them they beheld a channel of water wide as the mouth of a great river, down which the current ran furiously, bearing with it great blocks of ice. This channel wended its way between two shores of ice, as a river winds between its banks, and seemed to end at last in a blue and open sea where there was no ice. Far away, at the edge of that sea, appeared the land of which Foh had spoken, green hills between which a large river ran into the sea, and valleys with woods on either side of them that grew upward from the plains lying at the foot of the hills, clothing their rounded sides. For a few minutes only they saw this green and pleasant land. Then a mist that seemed to arise from where the ice mountain had overturned drove down wind and hid it.

"Yonder is the shore of my country. I know that river and those hills," said Laleela.

"Then, the sooner we come there, the better," answered Pag, "for this ice which has borne us so far is breaking up beneath us."

Breaking up it was indeed, having drifted into those warmer waters, of which once Laleela had spoken as bathing the coasts of her land. Rapidly it melted beneath their feet. Cracks appeared in it. One opened beneath the snow hut, which fell to a shapeless heap.

"To the boat!" cried Wi.

They ran back; they took hold of the canoe and dragged it forward toward the edge of the ice, that here and there began to yawn. They came to the edge, the women and Foh were thrust in, Moananga followed, and Pag also by the command of Wi, who held the stern of the boat to keep its bow straight in the stream, while Laleela and Moananga got out the paddles. Wi looked at it and saw that it was very heavy laden; saw that the water almost ran over the edge of the great hollowed log whereof it was fashioned, saw, too, that if another man entered into it and the wind blew a little harder, or if it were struck by one of the blocks of ice that floated past on the swift current, it would fill and overset so that all would be drowned.

"Come swiftly, Wi," cried Aaka, and the others also cried, "Come!" for they found it hard to keep the boat steady.

"I come, I come," answered Wi, and with all his strength thrust at the stern so that the boat darted out into the midst of the channel and there being seized by the fierce current, turned and sped away.

Wi went back a few paces and sat himself down upon a floe that was bedded in the sheet ice watching. As he went, he heard a splash and, turning, saw Pag swimming toward the ice. Being very strong, he reached it and by the help of Wi climbed on to its edge.

"Why do you come?" asked Wi.

"That hollow log is very full," answered Pag, "and there are too many women in it, their chatter troubles me."

Now Wi looked at Pag, and Pag looked at Wi, but neither of them said anything. They sat upon the floe watching the canoe being borne down the race between the shores of ice, its head pointing first this way and then that as though the paddlers were trying to turn it round but could not. The mist grew thick about it. Then, just before it was swallowed up in that mist, they saw a tall woman's shape stand up in the boat and plunge from it into the water.

"Which of them was it?" asked Wi of Pag in a hollow groaning voice.

"That we may learn presently," answered Pag.

Then he threw himself down on the ice and shut his eyes like one who wishes to sleep.

Thus the vision ended.

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**BOOK II**  
**THE ANCIENT**  
**01**  
**THROUGH THE GATES**

I, please remember always that I knew it was I, Allan, and no one else, that is, the same personality or whatever it may be which makes each man different from any other man, saw myself in a chariot drawn by two horses with arched necks and driven by a charioteer who sat on a little seat in front. It was a highly ornamented, springless vehicle of wood and gilded, something like a packing-case with a pole, or as we should call it in South Africa, a disselboom, to which the horses were harnessed. In this cart I stood arrayed in flowing robes fastened round my middle by a studded belt, with strips of coloured cloth wound round my legs and sandals on my feet. To my mind the general effect of the attire was distinctly feminine and I did not like it at all.

I was glad to observe, however, that the I of those days was anything but feminine. Indeed I could never have believed that once I was so good-looking, even over two thousand years ago. I was not very tall but extremely stalwart, burly almost, with an arm that as I could observe, since it projected from the sleeve of my lady's gown, would have done no discredit to a prize-fighter, and a chest like a bull.

The face also I admired very much. The brow was broad; the black eyes were full and proud-looking, the features somewhat massive but well-cut and highly intelligent; the mouth firm and shapely, with lips that were perhaps a trifle too thick; the hair—well, there was rather a failure in the hair, at least according to modern ideas, for it curled so beautifully as to suggest that one of my ancestors might have fallen in love with a person of negroid origin. However there was lots of it, hanging down almost to the shoulders and bound about the brow by a very neat fillet of blue cloth with silver studs. The colour of my skin, I was glad to note, was by no means black, only a light and pleasing brown such as might have been produced by sunburn. My age, I might add, was anywhere between five and twenty and five and thirty, perhaps nearer the latter than the former, at any rate, the very prime of life.

For the rest, I held in my left hand a very stout, long bow of black wood which seemed to have seen much service, with a string of what looked like catgut, on which was set a broad-feathered, barbed arrow. This I kept in place with the fingers of my right hand, on one of which I observed a handsome gold ring with strange characters carved upon the bezel.

Now for the charioteer.

He was black as night, black as a Sunday hat, with yellow rolling eyes set in a countenance of extraordinary ugliness and I may add, extraordinary humour. His big, wide mouth with thick lips ran up the left side of his face towards an ear that was also big and projecting. His hair, that had a feather stuck in it, was real nigger wool covering a skull like a cannon ball and I should imagine as

hard. This head, by the way, was set plumb upon the shoulders, as though it had been driven down between them by a pile hammer. They were very broad shoulders suggesting enormous strength, but the gaily-clad body beneath, which was supported by two bowed legs and large, flat feet, was that of a dwarf who by the proportions of his limbs Nature first intended for a giant; yes, an Ethiopian dwarf.

Looking through this remarkable exterior, as it were, I recognized that inside of it was the soul, or animating principle, of—whom do you think? None other than my beloved old servant and companion, the Hottentot Hans whose loss I had mourned for years! Hans himself who died for me, slaying the great elephant, Jana, in Kendah Land, the elephant I could not hit, and thereby saving my life. Oh! although I had been obliged to go back to the days of I knew not what ancient empire to do so in my trance, or whatever it was, I could have wept with joy at finding him again, especially as I knew by instinct that as he loved the Allan Quatermain of to-day, so he loved this Egyptian in a wheeled packing-case, for I may as well say at once that such was my nationality in the dream.

Now I looked about me and perceived that my chariot was the second of a cavalcade. Immediately in front of it was one infinitely more gorgeous in which stood a person who even if I had not known it, I should have guessed to be a king, and who, as a matter of fact, was none other than the King of kings, at that time the absolute master of most of the known world, though what his name may have been, I have no notion. He wore a long flowing robe of purple silk embroidered with gold and bound in at the waist by a jewelled girdle from which hung the private, sacred seal; the little “White Seal” that, as I learned afterwards, was famous throughout the earth.

On his head was a stiff cloth cap, also purple in colour, round which was fastened a fillet of light blue stuff spotted with white. The best idea that I can give of its general appearance is to liken it to a tall hat of fashionable shape, without a brim, slightly squashed in so that it bulged at the top, and surrounded by a rather sporting necktie. Really, however, it was the *kitaris* or headdress of these monarchs worn by them alone. If anyone else had put on that hat, even by mistake in the dark, well, his head would have come off with it, that is all.

This king held a bow in his hand with an arrow set upon its string, just as I did, for we were out hunting, and as I shall have to narrate presently, lions are no respecters of persons. By his side, leaning against the back of the chariot, was a tall, sharp-pointed wand of cedar wood with a knob of some green precious stone, probably an emerald, fashioned to the likeness of an apple. This was the royal sceptre. Immediately behind the chariot walked several great nobles. One of them carried a golden footstool, another a parasol, furred at the moment; another a spare bow and a quiver of arrows, and another a jewelled fly-whisk made of palm fibre.

The king, I should add, was young, handsome with a curled beard and clear-cut, high-bred looking features; his face, however, was bad, cruel and stamped with an air of weariness, or rather, satiety, which was emphasized by the black circles beneath his fine dark eyes. Moreover pride seemed to emanate from him and yet there was something in his bearing and glances which suggested fear. He was a god who knows that he is mortal and is therefore afraid lest at any moment he may be called upon to lose his godship in his mortality.

Not that he dreaded the perils of the chase; he was too much of a man for that. But how could he tell lest among all that crowd of crawling nobles, there was not one who had a dagger ready for his back, or a phial of poison to mix with his wine or water? He with all the world in the hollow of his hand, was filled with secret terrors which as I learned since first I seemed to see him thus, fulfilled themselves at the appointed time. For this man of blood was destined to die in blood, though not by murder.

The cavalcade halted. Presently a fat eunuch glittering in his gold-wrought garments like some bronzed beetle in the sunlight, came waddling back towards me. He was odious and I knew that we hated each other.

“Greeting, Egyptian,” he said, mopping his brow with his sleeve for the sun was hot. “An honour for you! A great honour! The King of kings commands your presence. Yes, he would speak with you with his own lips, and with that abortion of a servant of yours also. Come! Come swiftly!”

“Swift as an arrow, Houman,” I answered laughing, “seeing that for three moons I, like an arrow, have rested upon the string and flown no nearer to his Majesty.”

“Three moons!” screeched the eunuch. “Why, many wait three years and many go to the grave still waiting; bigger men than you, Egyptian, though I hear you do claim to be of royal blood yonder on the Nile. But talk not of arrows flying towards the most High, for surely it is ill-omened and might earn you another honour, that of the string,” and he made a motion suggestive of a cord encircling his throat. “Man, leave your bow behind! Would you appear before the King armed? Yes, and your dagger also.”

“Perchance a lion might appear before the King and he does not leave his claws and teeth behind,” I answered drily as I divested myself of my weapons.

Then we started, the three of us, leaving the chariot in charge of a soldier.

“Draw your sleeves over your hands,” said the eunuch. “None must appear before the King showing his hands, and, dwarf, since you have no sleeves, thrust yours into your robe.”

“What am I to do with my feet?” he answered in a thick, guttural voice. “Will it offend the King of kings to see my feet, most noble eunuch?”

“Certainly, certainly,” answered Houman, “since they are ugly enough to offend even me. Hide them as much as possible. Now we are near, down on your faces and crawl forward slowly on your knees and elbows, as I do. Down, I say!”

So down I went, though with anger in my heart, for he remembered that I, the modern Allan Quatermain, knew every thought and feeling that passed through the mind of my prototype.

It was as though I were a spectator at a play, with this difference. I could read the motives and reflections of this former *ego* as well as observe his actions. Also I could rejoice when he rejoiced, weep when he wept and generally feel all that he felt, though at the same time I retained the power of studying him from my own modern standpoint and with my own existing intelligence. Being two we still were one, or being one we still were two, whichever way you like to put it. Lastly I lacked these powers with reference to the other actors in the piece. Of these I knew just as much, or as little as my former self knew, that is if he ever really existed. There was nothing unnatural in my faculties where they were concerned. I had no insight into their souls any more than I have into those of the people about me to-day. Now I hope that I have made clear my somewhat uncommon position with reference to these pages from the Book of the Past.

Well, preceded by the eunuch and followed by the dwarf, I crawled though the sand in which grew some thorny plants that pricked my knees and fingers, towards the person of the Monarch of the World. He had descended from his chariot by help of a footstool, and was engaged in drinking from a golden cup, while his attendants stood around in various attitudes of adoration, he who had handed him the cup being upon his knees. Presently he looked up and saw us.

"Who are these?" he asked in a high voice that yet was not unmusical, "and why do you bring them into my presence?"

"May it please the King," answered our guide, knocking his head upon the ground in a very agony of humiliation, "may it please the King——"

"It would please me better, dog, if you answered my question. Who are they?"

"May it please the King, this is the Egyptian hunter and noble, Shabaka."

"I hear," said his Majesty with a gleam of interest in his tired eyes, "and what does this Egyptian here?"

"May it please the King, the King bade me bring him to the presence, but now when the chariots halted."

"I forgot; you are forgiven. But who is that with him? Is it a man or an ape?"

Here I screwed my head round and saw that my slave in his efforts to obey the eunuch's instructions and hide his feet, had made himself into a kind of ball, much as a hedgehog does, except that his big head appeared in front of the ball.

"O King, that I understand is the Egyptian's servant and charioteer."

Again he looked interested, and exclaimed,

"Is it so? Then Egypt must be a stranger country than I thought if such ape-men live there. Stand up, Egyptian, and bid your ape stand up also, for I cannot hear men who speak with their mouths in the dust."

So I rose and saluted by lifting both my hands and bowing as I had observed others do, trying, however, to keep them covered by my sleeves. The King looked me up and down, then said briefly,

"Set out your name and the business that brought you to my city."

"May the King live for ever," I replied. "As this lord said," and I pointed to the eunuch——

"He is not a lord but a dog," interrupted the Monarch, "who wears the robe of women. But continue."

"As this dog who wears the robe of women said"—here the King laughed, but the eunuch, Houman, turned green with rage and glowered at me—"my name is Shabaka. I am a descendant of the Ethiopian king of Egypt of that same name."

"It seems from all I hear that there are too many descendants of kings in Egypt. When I visit that land which perhaps soon I must do with an army at my back," here he stared at me coldly, "it may be well to lessen their number. There is a certain Peroa for instance."

He paused, but I made no answer, since Peroa was my father's cousin and of the fallen Royal House; also the protector of my youth.

"Well, Shabaka," he went on, "in Persia royal blood is common also, though some of us think it looks best when it is shed. What else are you?"

"A slayer of royal beasts, O King of kings, a hunter of lions and of elephants," (this statement interested me, Allan Quatermain, intensely, showing me as it did that our tastes are very persistent); "also when I am at home, a breeder of cattle and a grower of grain."

"Good trades, all of them, Shabaka. But why came you here?"

"Idernes the satrap of Egypt, servant of the King of kings, sought for one who would travel to the East because the King of kings desired to hear of the hunting of lions in the lands that lie to the south of Egypt towards the beginnings of the great river. Then I, who desired to see new countries, said, 'Here am I. Send me.' So I came and for three moons have dwelt in the royal city, but till this hour have scarcely so much as seen the face of the great King, although by many messengers I have announced my presence, showing them the letters of Idernes giving me safe-conduct. Therefore I propose to-morrow or the next day to return to Egypt."

The King said a word and a scribe appeared whom he commanded to take note of my words and let the matter be inquired of, since some should suffer for this neglect, a saying at which I saw Houman and certain of the nobles turn pale and whisper to each other.

"Now I remember," he exclaimed, "that I did desire Idernes to send me an Egyptian hunter. Well, you are here and we are about to hunt the lion of which there are many in yonder reeds, hungry and fierce beasts, since for three days they have been herded in so that they can kill no food. How many lions have you slain, Shabaka?"

"Fifty and three in all, O King, not counting the cubs."

He stared at me, answering with a sneer,

"You Egyptians have large mouths. I have always heard it of you. Well, to-day we will see whether you can kill a fifty-fourth. In an hour when the sun begins to sink, the hounds will be loosed in yonder reeds and since the water is behind them, the lions will come out, and then we shall see."

Now I saw that the King thought me to be a liar and the blood rose to my head.

"Why wait till the sun begins to sink, O King of kings?" I said. "Why not enter the reeds, as is our fashion in the Land of Kush, and rouse the lions from sleep in their own lair?"

Now the King laughed outright and called in a loud voice to his courtiers,

"Do ye hear this boasting Egyptian, who talks of entering the reeds and facing the lions in their lair, a thing that no man dare do where none can see to shoot? What say ye now? Shall we ask him to prove his words?"

Some great lord stepped forward, one who was a hunter though he looked little like it, for the scent on his hair reached me from four paces away and there was paint upon his face.

"Yes, O King," he said in a mincing voice, "let him enter and kill a lion. But if he fail, then let a lion kill him. There are some hungry in the palace den and it is not fit that the King's ears should be filled with empty words by foreigners from Egypt."

“So be it,” said the King. “Egyptian, you have brought it on your own head. Prove that you can do what you say and I will give you great honour. Fail, and to the lions with him who lies of lions. Still,” he added, “it is not right that you should go alone. Choose therefore one of these lords to keep you company; he who would put you to the test, if you will.”

Now I looked at the scented noble who turned pale beneath his paint. Then I looked at the fat eunuch, Houman, who opened his mouth and gasped like a fish, and when I had looked, I shook my head and said as though to myself,

“Not so, no woman and no eunuch shall be my companion on this quest,” whereat the King and all the rest laughed out loud. “The dwarf and I will go alone.”

“The dwarf!” said the King. “Can he hunt lions also?”

“No, O King, but perchance he can smell them, for otherwise how shall I find them in that thicket within an hour?”

“Perchance they can smell him. How is the ape-man named?” asked the King.

“Bes, O King, after the god of the Egyptians whom he resembles.”

“Dare you accompany your master on this hunt, O Bes?” inquired the King.

Then Bes looked up, rolling his yellow eyes, and answered in his thick and guttural voice,

“I am my master’s slave and dare I refuse to accompany him? If I did he might kill me, as the King of kings kills his slaves. It is better to die with honour by the teeth of a lion, than with dishonour beneath the whip of a master. So at least we think in Ethiopia.”

“Well spoken, dwarf Bes!” exclaimed the King. “So would I have all men think throughout the East. Let the words of this Ethiop be written down and copies of them sent to the satraps of all the provinces that they may be read to the peoples of the earth. I the King have decreed it.”

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WAGER

While the scribes were at their work I bowed before the King and prayed his leave that I and the dwarf Bes might get to ours.

"Go," he said, "and return here within an hour. If you do not return tidings of your death shall be sent to the satrap of Egypt to be told to your wives."

"I thank the King, but it is needless, for I have no wives, which are ill company for a hunter."

"Strange," he said, "since many women would be glad to name such a man their husband, at least here among us Easterns."

Walking backwards and bowing as we went, Bes and I returned to our chariot. There we stripped off our outer garments till Bes was naked save for his waistcloth and I was clad only in a jerkin. Then I took my bow, my arrows and my knife, and Bes took two spears, one light for throwing and the other short, broad and heavy for stabbing. Thus armed we passed back before the Easterns who stared at us, and advanced to the edge of the thicket of tall reeds that was full of lions.

Here Bes took dust and threw it into the air that we might learn from which quarter the light wind blew.

"We will go against the breeze, Lord," he said, "that I may smell the lions before they smell us."

I nodded, and answered,

"Hearken, Bes. Well may it be that we kill no lions in this place where it is hard to shoot. Yet I would not return to be thrown to wild beasts by yonder evil king. Therefore if we fail in this or in any other way, do you kill me, if you still live."

He rolled his eyes and grinned.

"Not so, Master. Then we will win through the reeds and lie hid in their edge till darkness comes, for in them those half-men will never dare to seek for us. Afterwards we will swim the water and disguise ourselves as jugglers and try to reach the coast, and so back to Egypt, having learned much. Never stretch out your hand to Death till he stretches out his to you, which he will do soon enough, Master."

Again I nodded and said,

"And if a lion should kill me, Bes, what then?"

"Then, Master, I will kill that lion if I can and go report the matter to the King."

"And if he should wish to throw you to the beasts, Bes, what then?"

"Then, first I will drag him down to the greatest of all beasts, he who waits to devour evil-doers in the Under-world, be they kings or slaves," and he stretched out his long arms and made a motion as of clutching a man by the throat. "Oh! have no fear, Master, I can break him like a stick, and afterwards we will talk the matter over among the dead, for I shall swallow my tongue and die also. It is a good trick, Master, which I wish you would learn."

Then he took my hand and kissed it and we entered the reeds, I, who was a hunter, feeling more happy than I had done since we set foot in the East.

Yet the quest was desperate for the reeds were tall and often I could not see more than a bow's length in front of me. Presently, however, we found a path made perchance by game coming down to drink, or by crocodiles coming up to sleep, and followed it, I with an arrow on my string and Bes with the throwing spear in his right hand and the stabbing spear in his left, half a pace ahead of me. On we crept, Bes drawing in the air through his great nostrils as a hound might do, till suddenly he stopped and sniffed towards the north.

"I smell lion near," he whispered, searching among the reed stems with his eyes. "I see lion," he whispered again, and pointed, but I could see nothing save the stems of the reeds.

"Rouse him," I whispered back, "and I will shoot as he bounds."

Then Bes poised the spear, shook it till it quivered, and threw. There was a roar and a lioness appeared with the spear fast in her flank. I loosed the arrow but it cut into the thick reeds and stuck there.

"Forward!" whispered Bes, "for where woman is, there look for man. The lion will be near."

We crept on, Bes stopping to cut the arrow from a reed and set it back in the quiver, for it was a good arrow made by himself. But now he shifted the broad spear to his right hand and in his left held his knife. We heard the wounded lioness roar not far away.

"She calls her man to help her," whispered Bes, and as the words left his lips the reeds down wind began to sway, for we were smelt.

They swayed, they parted and, half seen, half hid between their stems, appeared the head of a great, black-maned lion. I drew the string and shot, this time not in vain, for I heard the arrow thud upon his hide. Then before I could set another he was on us, reared upon his hind legs and roaring. As I drew my dagger he struck at me, but I bent down and his paw went over my head. Then his weight came against me and I fell beneath him, stabbing him in the belly as I fell. I saw his mighty jaws open to crush my head. Then they shut again and through them burst a whine like that of a hurt dog.

Bes had driven his spear into the lion's breast, so deep that the point of it came out through the back. Still he was not dead, only now it was Bes he sought. The dwarf ran at him as he reared up again, and casting his great arms about the brute's body, wrestled with him as man with man.

Then it was, for the first time I think, that I learned all the Ethiopian's strength. For he, a dwarf, threw that lion on its back and thrusting his big head beneath the jaws, struggled with it madly. I was up, the knife still in my hand, and oh! I too was strong. Into the throat I drove it, dragging it this way and that, and lo! the lion moaned and died and his blood gushed out over both of us. Then Bes sat up and laughed, and I too laughed, since neither of us had more than scratches and we had done what men could scarcely do.

"Do you remember, Master," said Bes when he had finished laughing, as he wiped his brow with some damp moss, "how, once far away up the Nile you charged a mad elephant with a spear and saved me who had fallen, from being trampled to death?"

I, Shabaka, answered that I did. (And I, Allan Quatermain, observing all these things in my psychic trance in the museum of Ragnall Castle, reflected that I also remembered how a certain Hans had saved me from a certain mad elephant, to wit, Jana, not so long before, which just shows how things come round.)

"Yes," went on Bes, "you saved me from that elephant, though it seemed death to you. And, Master, I will tell you something now. That very morning I had tried to poison you, only you would not wait to eat because the elephants were near."

"Did you?" I asked idly. "Why?"

"Because two years before you captured me in battle with some of my people, and as I was misshapen, or for pity's sake, spared my life and made me your slave. Well, I who had been a chief, a very great chief, Master, did not wish to remain a slave and did wish to avenge my people's blood. Therefore I tried to poison you, and that very day you saved my life, offering for it your own."

"I think it was because I wanted the tusks of the elephant, Bes."

"Perhaps, Master, only you will remember that this elephant was a young cow and had no tusks worth anything. Still had it carried tusks, it might have been so, since one white tusk is worth many black dwarfs. Well, to-day I have paid you back. I say it lest you should forget that had it not been for me, that lion would have eaten you."

"Yes, Bes, you have paid me back and I thank you."

"Master, hitherto I always thought you one who worshipped Maat, goddess of Truth. Now I see that you worship the god of Lies, whoever he may be, that god who dwells in the breasts of women and most men, but has no name. For, Master, it was *you* who saved *me* from the lion and not I you, since you cut its throat at the last. So that debt of mine is still to pay and by the great Grasshopper which we worship in my country, who is much better than all the gods of the Egyptians put together, I swear that I will pay it soon, or mayhap ten thousand years hence. At the last it shall be paid."

"Why do you worship a grasshopper and why is he better than the gods of the Egyptians?" I asked carelessly, for I was tired and his talk amused me while we rested.

"We worship the Grasshopper, Master, because he jumps with men's spirits from one life to another, or from this world to the next, yes, right through the blue sky. And he is better than your Egyptian gods because they leave you to find your own way there, and then eat you alive, that is if you have tried to poison people, as of course we have all done. But, Master, we are fresh again now, so let us be going, for the hour will soon be finished. Also when she has eaten the spear handle, that lioness may return."

"Yes," I said; "let us go and report to the King of kings that we have killed a lion."

"Master, it is not enough. Even common kings believe little that they do not see, wherefore it is certain that a King of kings will believe nothing and still more certain that he will not come here to look. So as we cannot carry the lion, we must take a bit of it," and straightway he cut off the end of the brute's tail.

Following the crocodile path, presently we reached the edge of the reeds opposite to the camp where the King now sat in state beneath a purple pavilion that had been reared, eating a meal, with his courtiers standing at a distance and looking very hungry.

Out of the reeds bounded Bes, naked and bloody, waving the lion's tail and singing some wild Ethiopian chant, while I, also bloody and half naked, for the lion's claws had torn my jerkin off me, followed with bow unstrung.

The King looked up and saw us.

"What! Do you live, Egyptian?" he asked. "Of a surety I thought that by now you would be dead."

"It was the lion that died, O King," I answered, pointing to Bes who, having ceased from his song, was jumping about carrying the beast's tail in his mouth as a dog carries a bone.

"It seems that this Egyptian has killed a lion," said the King to one of his lords, him of the painted face and scented hair.

"May it please the King," he answered, bowing, "a tail is not the whole beast and may have been taken thither, or cut from a lion lying dead already. The King knows that the Egyptians are great liars."

So he spoke because he was jealous of the deed.

"These men look as though they had met a live one, not one that is dead," said the King, scanning our blood-stained shapes. "Still, as you doubt it, you will wish to put the matter to the proof. Therefore, Cousin, take six men with you, enter the reeds and search. In that soft ground it will be easy to follow their footmarks."

"It is dangerous, O King," began the prince, for such he was, no less.

"And therefore the task will be the more to your taste, Cousin. Go now, and be swift."

So six hunters were called and the prince went, cursing me beneath his breath as he passed us. For he was terribly afraid, and with reason. Suddenly Bes ceased from his antics and prostrating himself, cried,

"A boon, O King. This noble lord throws doubt upon my master's word. Suffer that I may lead him to where the lion lies dead, since otherwise wandering in those reeds the great King's cousin might come to harm and the great King be grieved."

"I have many cousins," said the King. "Still go if you wish, Dwarf."

So Bes ran after the prince and catching him up, tapped him on the shoulder with the lion's tail to point out the way. Then they vanished into the reeds and I went to the chariot to wash off the blood from my body and clothes. As I fastened my robe I heard a sound of roaring, then one scream, after which all grew still. Now I drew near to the reeds and stood between them and the King's camp.

Presently on their edge appeared Bes dancing and singing as before, but this time he held a lion's tail in either hand. After him came the six hunters dragging between them the body of the lion we had killed. They staggered with it towards the King, and I followed.

"I see the dwarf," he said. "I see the dead lion and I see the hunters. But where is my cousin? Make report, O Bes."

"O King of kings," replied Bes, "the mighty prince your cousin lies flat yonder beneath the body of that lion's wife. She sprang upon him and killed him, and I sprang upon her and killed her with my spear. Here is her tail, O King of kings."

"Is this true?" he asked of the hunters.

"It is true, O King," answered their captain. "The lioness, which was wounded, leapt upon the prince, choosing him although he was behind us all. Then this dwarf leapt upon the lioness, being behind the prince and nearest to him, and drove his spear through her shoulders to her heart. So we brought the first lion as the King commanded us, since we could carry no more."

The face of the King grew red with rage.

"Seven of my people and one black dwarf!" he exclaimed. "Yet the lioness kills my cousin and the dwarf kills the lioness. Such is the tale that will go to Egypt concerning the hunters of the King of the world. Seize those men, Guards, and let them be fed to the wild beasts in the palace dens."

At once the unfortunates were seized and led away. Then the King called Bes to him, and taking the gold chain he wore about his neck, threw it over his head, thereby, though I knew nothing of it at the time, conferring upon him some noble rank. Next he called to me and said,

"It would seem that you are skilled in the use of the bow and in the hunting of lions, Egyptian. Therefore I will honour you, for this afternoon your chariot shall drive with my chariot, and we will hunt side by side. Moreover, I will lay you a wager as to which of us will kill the most lions, for know, Shabaka, that I also am skilled in the use of the bow, more skilled than any among the millions of my subjects."

"Then, O King, it is of little use for me to match myself against you, seeing that I have met men who can shoot better than I do, or, since in the East all must speak nothing but the truth, not being liars as the dead prince said we Egyptians are, one man."

"Who was that man, Shabaka?"

"The Prince Peroa, O King."

The King frowned as though the name displeased him, then answered,

"Am I not greater than this Peroa and cannot I therefore shoot better?"

"Doubtless, O King of kings, and therefore how can I who shoot worse than Peroa, match myself against you?"

"For which reason I will give you odds, Shabaka. Behold this rope of rose-hued pearls I wear. They are unequalled in the whole world, for twenty years the merchants sought them in the days of my father; half of them would buy a satrapy. I wager them"—here the listening nobles gasped and the fat eunuch, Houman, held up his hands in horror.

"Against what, O King?"

"Your slave Bes, to whom I have taken a fancy."

Now I trembled and Bes rolled his yellow eyes.

"Your pardon, O King of kings," I said, "but it is not enough. I am a hunter and to such, priceless pearls are of little use. But to me that dwarf is of much use in my hunting."

"So be it, Shabaka, then I will add to the wager. If you win, together with the pearls I will give you the dwarf's weight in solid gold."

"The King is bountiful," I answered, "but it is not enough, for even if I win against one who can shoot better than Peroa, which is impossible, what should I do with so much gold? Surely for the sake of it I should be murdered or ever I saw the coasts of Egypt."

"What shall I add then?" asked the King. "The most beautiful maiden in the House of Women?"

I shook my head. "Not so, O King, for then I must marry who would remain single."

"There is no need, you might sell her to your friend, Peroa. A satrapy?"

"Not so, O King, for then I must govern it, which would keep me from my hunting, until it pleased the King to take my head."

"By the name of the holy ones I worship what then do you ask added to the pearls and the pure gold?"

Now I tried to bethink me of something that the King could not grant, since I had no wish for this match which my heart warned me would end in trouble. As no thought came to me I looked at Bes and saw that he was rolling his eyes towards the six doomed hunters who were being led away, also in pretence of driving off a fly, pointing to them with one of the lion tails. Then I remembered that a decree once uttered by the King of the East could not be altered, and saw a road of escape.

"O King," I said, "together with the pearls and the gold I ask that the lives of those six hunters be added to the wager, to be spared if by chance I should win."

"Why?" asked the King amazed.

"Because they are brave men, O King, and I would not see the bones of such cracked by tame beasts in a cage."

"Is my judgment registered?" asked the King.

"Not yet, O King," answered the head scribe.

"Then it has no weight and can be suspended without the breaking of the law. Shabaka, thus stands our wager. If I kill more lions than you do this day, or, should but two be slain, I kill the first, or should none be slain, I plant more arrows in their bodies, I take your slave, Bes the dwarf, to be my slave. But should you have the better of me in any of these ways, then I give to you this girdle of rose pearls and the weight of the dwarf Bes in gold and the six hunters free of harm, to do with what you will. Let it be recorded, and to the hunt."

Soon Bes and I were in our chariot which by command took place in line with that of the King, but at a distance of some thirty steps. Bending over the dwarf who drove, I spoke with him, saying,

"Our luck is ill to-day, Bes, seeing that before the end of it we may well be parted."

"Not so, Master, our luck is good to-day seeing that before the end of it you will be the richer by the finest pearls in the whole world, by my weight in pure gold (and Master, I am twice as heavy as the king thought and will stuff myself with twenty pounds of meat before the weighing, if I have the chance, or at least with water, though in this hot place that will not last for long), and by six picked huntsmen, brave men as you thought, who will serve to escort us and our treasure to the coast."

"First I must win the match, Bes."

"Which you could do with one eye blinded, Master, and a sore finger. Kings think that they can shoot because all the worms that crawl about them and are named men, dare not show themselves their betters. Oh! I have heard tales in yonder city. There have been days when this Lord of the world has missed six lions with as many arrows, and they seated smiling in his face, being but tamed brutes brought from far in cages of wood, yes, smiling like cats in the sun. Look you, Master, he drinks too much wine and sits up too late in his Women's house—there are three hundred of them there, Master—to shoot as you and I can. If you doubt it, look at his eyes and hands. Oh! the pearls and the gold and the men are yours, and that painted prince who mocked us is where he ought to be—dead in the mud."

"Did I tell you how I managed that, Master? As you know better than I do, lions hate those that have on them the smell of their own blood. Therefore, while I pointed out the way to him, I touched the painted prince with the bleeding tail of that which we killed, pretending that it was by chance, for which he cursed me, as well he might. So when we came to the dead lion and, as I had expected, met there the lioness you had wounded, she charged through the hunters at him who smelt of her husband, and bit his head off."

"But, Bes, you smelt of him also, and worse."

"Yes, Master, but that painted cousin of the King came first. I kept well behind him, pretending to be afraid," and he chuckled quietly, adding, "I expect that he is now telling an angry tale about me to Osiris, or to the Grasshopper that takes him there, as it may happen."

"These Easterns worship neither Osiris, nor your Grasshopper, Bes, but a flame of fire."

"Then he is telling the tale to the fire, and I hope that it will get tired and burn him."

So we talked merrily enough because we had done great deeds and thought that we had outwitted the Easterns and the King, not knowing all their craft. For none had told us that that man who hunted with the King and yet dared to draw arrow upon the quarry before the King should be put to death as one who had done insult to his Majesty. This that royal fox remembered and therefore was sure that he would win the wager.

Now the chariots turned and passing down a path came to an open space that was cleared of reeds. Here they halted, that of the King and my own side by side with ten paces between them, and those of the court behind. Meanwhile huntsmen with dogs entered the great brake far away to the right and left of us, also in front, so that the lions might be driven backwards and forwards across the open space.

Soon we heard the hounds baying on all sides. Then Bes made a sucking noise with his great lips and pointed to the edge of the reeds in front of us some sixty paces away. Looking, I saw a yellow shape creeping along between their dark stems, and although the shot was far, forgetting all things save I was a hunter and there was my game, I drew the arrow to my ear, aimed and loosed, making allowance for its fall and for the wind.

Oh! that shot was good. It struck the lion in the body and pierced him through. Out he came, roaring, rolling, and tearing at the ground. But by now I had another arrow on the string, and although the King lifted his bow, I loosed first. Again it struck, this time in the throat, and that lion groaned and died.

The King looked at me angrily, and from the court behind rose a murmur of wonder mingled with wrath, wonder at my marksmanship, and wrath because I had dared to shoot before the King.

"The wager looks well for us," muttered Bes, but I bade him be silent, for more lions were stirring.

Now one leapt across the open space, passing in front of the King and within thirty paces of us. He shot and missed it, sending his shaft two spans above its back. Then I shot and drove the arrow through it just where the head joins the neck, cutting the spine, so that it died at once.

Again that murmur went up and the King struck the charioteer on the head with his clenched fist, crying out that he had suffered the horses to move and should be scourged for causing his hand to shake.

This charioteer, although he was a lord—since in the East men of high rank waited on the King like slaves and even clipped his nails and beard—craved pardon humbly, admitting his fault.

"It is a lie," whispered Bes. "The horses never stirred. How could they with those grooms holding their heads? Nevertheless, Master, the pearls are as good as round your neck."

"Silence," I answered. "As we have heard, in the East all men speak the truth; it is only Egyptians who lie. Also in the East men's necks are encircled with bowstrings as well as pearls, and ears are long."

The hounds continued to bay, drawing nearer to us. A lioness bounded out of the reeds, ran towards the King's chariot and as though amazed, sat down like a dog, so near that a man might have hit it with a stone. The King shot short, striking it in the fore-paw only, whereon it shook out the arrow and rushed back into the reeds, while the court behind cried,

"May the King live for ever! The beast is dead."

"We shall see if it is dead presently," said Bes, and I nodded.

Another lion appeared to the right of the King. Again he shot and missed it, whereon he began to curse and to swear in his own royal oaths, and the charioteer trembled. Then came the end.

One of the hounds drew quite close and roused the lioness that had been pricked in the foot. She turned and killed it with a blow of her paw, then, being mad, charged straight at the King's chariot. The horses reared, lifting the grooms off their feet. The King shot wildly and fell backwards out of the chariot, as even Kings of the world must do when they have nothing left to stand on. The lioness saw that he was down and leapt at him, straight over the chariot. As she leapt I shot at her in the air and pierced her through the loins, paralysing her, so that although she fell down near the King, she could not come at him to kill him.

I sprang from my chariot, but before I could reach the lioness hunters had run up with spears and stabbed her, which was easy as she could not move.

The King rose from the ground, for he was unharmed, and said in a loud voice,

"Had not that shaft of mine gone home, I think that the East would have bowed to another lord to-night."

Now, forgetting that I was speaking to the King of the earth, forgetting the wager and all besides, I exclaimed,

"Nay, your shaft missed; mine went home," whereon one of the courtiers cried,

"This Egyptian is a liar, and calls the King one!"

"A liar?" I said astonished. "Look at the arrow and see from whose quiver it came," and I drew one from my own of the Egyptian make and marked with my mark.

Then a tumult broke out, all the courtiers and eunuchs talking at once, yet all bowing to the mud-stained person of the King, like ears of wheat to a tree in a storm. Not wishing to urge my claims further, for my part I returned to the chariot and the hunting being done, as I supposed, unstrung my bow which I prized above all things, and set it in its case.

While I was thus employed the eunuch Houman approached me with a sickly smile, saying,

"The King commands your presence, Egyptian, that you may receive your reward."

I nodded, saying that I would come, and he returned.

"Bes," I said when he was out of hearing, "my heart sinks. I do not trust that King who I think means mischief."

"So do I, Master. Oh! we have been great fools. When a god and a man climb a tree together, the man should allow the god to come first to the top, and thence tell the world that he is a god."

"Yes," I answered, "but who ever sees Wisdom until she is flying away? Now perhaps, the god being the stronger, will cast down the man."

Then both together we advanced towards the King, leaving the chariot in charge of soldiers. He was seated on a gilded chair which served him as a throne, and behind him were his officers, eunuchs and attendants, though not all of them, since at a little distance some of them were engaged in beating the lord who had served as his charioteer upon the feet with rods. We prostrated ourselves before him and waited till he spoke. At length he said,

"Shabaka the Egyptian, we made a wager with you, of which you will remember the terms. It seems that you have won the wager, since you slew two lions, whereas we, the King, slew but one, that which leapt upon us in the chariot."

Here Bes groaned at my side and I looked up.

"Fear nothing," he went on, "it shall be paid." Here he snatched off the girdle of priceless, rose-hued pearls and threw it in my face.

"At the palace too," he went on, "the dwarf shall be set in the scales and his full weight in pure gold shall be given to you. Moreover, the lives of the six hunters are yours, and with them the men themselves."

"May the King live for ever!" I exclaimed, feeling that I must say something.

"I hope so," he answered cruelly, "but, Egyptian, you shall not, who have broken the laws of the land."

"In what way, O King?" I asked.

"By shooting at the lions before the King had time to draw his bow, and by telling the King that he lied to his face, for both of which things the punishment is death."

Now my heart swelled till I thought it would burst with rage. Then of a sudden, a certain spirit entered into me and I rose to my feet and said,

"O King, you have declared that I must die and as this is so, I will kneel to you no more who soon shall sup at the table of Osiris, and there be far greater than any king, going before him with clean hands. Is it not your law that he who is condemned to die has first the right to set out his case for the honour of his name?"

"It is," said the King, I think because he was curious to hear what I had to say. "Speak on."

"O King, although my blood is as high as your own, of that I say nothing, for at the wish of your satrap I came to the East from Egypt as a hunter, to show you how we of Egypt kill lions and other beasts. For three months I have waited in the royal city seeking admission to the presence of the King, and in vain. At length I was bidden to this hunt when I was about to depart to my own land, and being taunted by your servants, entered the reeds with my slave, and there slew a lion. Then it pleased you to thrust a wager upon me which I did not wish to take, as to which of us would shoot the most lions; a wager as I now understand you did not mean that I should win, whatever might be my skill, since you thought I knew that I must shoot at nothing till you had first shot and killed the beasts or scared them away.

"So I matched myself against you, as hunter against hunter, for in the field, as before the gods, all are equal, not as a slave against a king who is determined to avenge defeat by death. We were posted and the lions came. I shot at those which appeared opposite to me, or upon my side, leaving those that appeared opposite to you, or on your side unshot at, as is the custom of hunters. My skill, or my fortune, was better than yours and I killed, whereas you missed or only wounded. In the end a lioness sprang at you and I shot it lest it should kill you; as could easily be proved by the arrow in its body. Now you say that I must die because I have broken some laws of yours which men should be ashamed to make, and to save your honour, pay me what I have won, knowing that pearls and gold and slaves are of no value to a dying man and can be taken back again. That is all the story.

"Yet I would add one word. You Easterns have two sayings which you teach to your children; that they should learn to shoot with the bow, and to tell the truth. O King, they are my last lessons to you. Learn to shoot with the bow—which you cannot do, and to tell the truth which you have not done. Now I have spoken and am ready to die and I thank you for the patience with which you have heard my words, that, as the King does *not* live for ever, I hope one day to repeat to you more fully beyond the grave."

Now at this bold speech of mine all those nobles and attendants gasped, for never had they heard such words addressed to his Majesty. The King turned red as though with shame, but made no answer, only he asked of those about him. "What fate for this man?"

"Death, O King!" they cried with one voice.

"What death?" he asked again.

Then his Councillors consulted together and one of them answered, "*The slowest known to our law, death by the boat.*"

Hearing this and not knowing what was meant, it came into my mind that I was to be turned adrift in a boat and there left to starve. "Behold the reward of good hunting!" I mocked in my rage. "O King, because of this deed of shame I call upon you the curse of all the gods and peoples. Henceforth may your sleep be ever haunted by evil dreams of what shall follow the last sleep and in the end may you also die in blood." The King opened his mouth as though to answer, but from it came nothing but a low cry of fear. Then guards rushed up and seized me.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DOOM OF THE BOAT

The guards led me to my chariot and thrust me into it, and with me Bes. I asked them if they would murder him also, to which the eunuch, Houman, answered No, since he had committed no crime, but that he must go with me to be weighed. Then soldiers took the horses by the bridles and led them, while others, having first snatched away my bow and all our other weapons, surrounded the chariot lest we should escape. So Bes and I were able to talk together in a Libyan tongue that none of them understood, even if they heard our words.

"Your life is spared," I said to him, "that the King may take you as a slave."

"Then he will take an ill slave, Master, since I swear by the Grasshopper that within a moon I will find means to kill him, and afterwards come to join you in a land where men hunt fair."

I smiled and Bes went on,

"Now I wish I had time to teach you that trick of swallowing your own tongue, since perhaps you will need it in this boat of which they talk."

"Did you not say to me an hour or two ago, Bes, that we are fools to stretch out our hands to Death until he stretches out his to us? I will not die until I must—now."

"Why 'now,' Master, seeing that only this afternoon you bade me kill you rather than let you be thrown to the wild beasts?" he asked peering at me curiously.

"Do you remember the old hermit, the holy Tanofir, who dwells in a cell over the sepulchre of the Apis bulls in the burial ground of the desert near to Memphis, Bes?"

"The magician and prophet who is the brother of your grandfather, Master, and the son of a king; he who brought you up before he became a hermit? Yes, I know him well, though I have seldom been very near to him because his eyes frighten me, as they frightened Cambyses the Persian when Tanofir cursed him and foretold his doom after he had stabbed the holy Apis, saying that by a wound from that same sword in his own body he should die himself, which thing came to pass. As they have frightened many another man also."

"Well, Bes, when yonder king told me that I must die, fear filled me who did not wish to die thus, and after the fear came a blackness in my mind. Then of a sudden in that blackness I saw a picture of Tanofir, my great uncle, seated in a sepulchre looking towards the East. Moreover I heard him speak, and to me, saying, 'Shabaka, my foster-son, fear nothing. You are in great danger but it will pass. Speak to the great King all that rises in your heart, for the gods of Vengeance make use of your tongue and whatever you prophesy to him shall be fulfilled.' So I spoke the words you heard and I feared nothing."

"Is it so, Master? Then I think that the holy Tanofir must have entered my heart also. Know that I was minded to leap upon that king and break his neck, so that all three of us might end together. But of a sudden something seemed to tell me to leave him alone and let things go as they are fated. But how can the holy Tanofir who grows blind with age, see so far?"

"I do not know, Bes, save that he is not as are other men, for in him is gathered all the ancient wisdom of Egypt. Moreover he lives with the gods while still upon earth, and like the gods can send his *Ka*, as we Egyptians call the spirit, or invisible self which companions all from the cradle to the grave and afterwards, whither he will. So doubtless to-day he sent it hither to me whom he loves more than anything on earth. Also I remember that before I entered on this journey he told me that I should return safe and sound. Therefore, Bes, I say I fear nothing."

"Nor do I, Master. Yet if you see me do strange things, or hear me speak strange words, take no note of them, since I shall be but playing a part as I think wisest."

After this we talked of that day's adventure with the lions, and of others that we had shared together, laughing merrily all the while, till the soldiers stared at us as though we were mad. Also the fat eunuch, Houman, who was mounted on an ass, rode up and said,

"What, Egyptian who dared to twist the beard of the Great King, you laugh, do you? Well, you will sing a different song in the boat to that which you sing in the chariot. Think of my words on the eighth day from this."

"I will think of them, Eunuch," I answered, looking at him fiercely in the eyes, "but who knows what kind of a song you will be singing before the eighth day from this?"

"What I do is done under the authority of the ancient and holy Seal of Seals," he answered in a quavering voice, touching the little cylinder of white shell which I had noted upon the person of the King, but that now hung from a gold chain about the eunuch's neck.

Then he made the sign which Easterns use to avert evil and rode off again, looking very frightened.

So we came to the royal city and went up to a wonderful palace. Here we were taken from the chariot and led into a room where food and drink in plenty were given to me as though I were an honoured guest, which caused me to wonder. Bes also, seated on the ground at a distance, ate and drank, for his own reasons filling himself to the throat as though he were a wineskin, until the serving slaves mocked at him for a glutton.

When we had finished eating, slaves appeared bearing a wooden framework from which hung a great pair of scales. Also there appeared officers of the King's Treasury, carrying leather bags which they opened, breaking the seals to show that the contents were pure gold coin. They set a number of these bags on one of the scales, and then ordered Bes to seat himself in the other. So much heavier did he prove than they expected him to be, that they were obliged to send back to the Treasury to fetch more bags of gold, for

although Bes was so short in height, his weight was that of a large man. One of the treasurers grumbled, saying he should have been weighed before he had eaten and drunk. But the officer to whom he spoke grinned and answered that it mattered little, since the King was heir to criminals and that these bags would soon return to the Treasury, only they would need washing first, a remark that made me wonder.

At length, when the scales were even, the six hunters whose lives I had won and who had been given to me as slaves, were brought in and ordered to shoulder the bags of gold. I too was seized and my hands were bound behind me. Then I was led out in charge of the eunuch Houman, who informed me with a leer that it would be his duty to attend to my comfort till the end. With him were four black men all dressed in the same way. These, he said, were the executioners. Lastly came Bes watched by three of the king's guards armed with spears, lest he should attempt to rescue me or to do anyone a mischief.

Now my heart began to sink and I asked Houman what was to happen to me.

"This, O Egyptian slayer of lions. You will be laid upon a bed in a little boat upon the river and another boat will be placed over you, for these boats are called the Twins, Egyptian, in such a fashion that your head and your hands will project at one end and your feet at the other. There you will be left, comfortable as a baby in its cradle, and twice every day the best of food and drink will be brought to you. Should your appetite fail, moreover, it will be my duty to revive it by pricking your eyes with the point of a knife until it returns. Also after each meal I shall wash your face, your hands and your feet with milk and honey, lest the flies that buzz about them should suffer hunger, and to preserve your skin from burning by the sun. Thus slowly you will grow weaker and at length fall asleep. The last one who went into the boat—he, unlucky man, had by accident wandered into the court of the House of Women and seen some of the ladies there unveiled—only lived for twelve days, but you, being so strong, may hope to last for eighteen. Is there anything more that I can tell you? If so, ask it quickly for we draw near to the river."

Now when I heard this and understood all the horror of my fate, I forgot the vision of my great uncle, the holy Tanofir, and his comfortable prophecies, and my heart failed me altogether, so that I stood stock still.

"What, Lion-hunter and Bearder of kings, do you think it is too early to go to bed?" mocked this devilish eunuch. "On with you!" and he began to beat me about the face with the handle of his fly-whisk.

Then my manhood came back to me.

"When did the King tell you to touch me, you fatted swine?" I roared, and turning, since I could not reach him with my bound hands, kicked him in the body with all my strength, so that he fell down, writhing and screaming with agony. Indeed, had not the executioners leapt upon me, I would have trampled the life out of him where he lay. But they held me fast and presently, after he had been sick, Houman recovered enough to come forward leaning on the shoulders of two guards. Only now he mocked me no more.

We reached a quay just as the sun was setting. There in charge of a one-eyed black slave, a little square-ended boat floated at the river's edge, while on the quay itself lay a similar but somewhat shorter boat, bottom uppermost. Now the hunters whom I had won in the wager, with many glances of compassion, for they were brave men and knew that it was I who had saved their lives, placed the bags of gold in the bottom of the floating boat, and on the top of these a mattress stuffed with straw. Then the girdle of rose-hued pearls was made fast about my middle, my hands were untied, I was seized by the executioners and laid on my back on the mattress, and my wrists and ankles were fixed by cords to iron rings that were screwed to the thwarts of the boat. After this the other, shorter boat was laid over me in such a manner that it did not touch me, leaving my head, my hands and my feet exposed as the eunuch had said.

While this wicked work was going forward Bes sat on the quay, watching, till presently, after I had been made fast and covered up, he burst into shouts of laughter, clapped his hands and began to dance about as though with joy, till the eunuch, who had now recovered somewhat from my kick, grew curious and asked him why he behaved thus.

"O noble Eunuch," he answered, "once I was free and that man made me a slave, so that for many years I have been obliged to toil for him whom I hate. Moreover, often he has beaten me and starved me, which was why you saw me eat so much not long ago, and threatened to kill me, and now at last I have my revenge upon him who is about to die miserably. That is why I laugh and sing and dance and clap my hands, O most noble Eunuch, I who shall become the follower and servant of the glorious King of all the earth, and perhaps your friend, too, O Eunuch of eunuchs, whose sacred person my brutal master dared to kick."

"I understand," said Houman smiling, though with a twisted face, "and will make report of all you say to the King, and ask him to grant that you shall sometimes prick this Egyptian in the eye. Now go spit in his face and tell him what you think of him."

So Bes waded into the water which was quite shallow here, and spat into my face, or pretended to, while amid a torrent of vile language, he interpolated certain names in the Libyan tongue, which meant,

"O my most beloved father, mother, and other relatives, have no fear. Though things look very black, remember the vision of the holy Tanofir, who doubtless allows these things to happen to you to try your faith by direct order of the gods. Be sure that I will not leave you to perish, or if there should be no escape, that I will find a way to put you out of your misery and to avenge you. Yes, yes, I will yet see that accursed swine, Houman, take your place in this boat. Now I go to the Court to which it seems that this gold chain gives me a right of entry, or so the eunuch says, but soon I will be back again."

Then followed another stream of most horrible abuse and more spitting, after which he waded back to land and embraced Houman, calling him his best friend.

They went, leaving me alone in the boat save for the guard upon the quay who, now that darkness had come, soon grew silent. It was lonely, very lonely, lying there staring at the empty sky with only the stinging gnats for company, and soon my limbs began to ache. I thought of the poor wretches who had suffered in this same boat and wondered if their lot would be my lot.

Bes was faithful and clever, but what could a single dwarf do among all these black-hearted fiends? And if he could do nothing, oh! if he could do nothing!

The seconds seemed minutes, the minutes seemed hours, and the hours seemed years. What then would the days be, passed in torture and agony while waiting for a filthy death? Where now were the gods I had worshipped and—was there any god? Or was man but a self-deceiver who created gods instead of the gods creating him, because he did not love to think of an eternal blackness in which he would soon be swallowed up and lost? Well, at least that would mean sleep, and sleep is better than torment of mind or body.

It came to me, I think, who was so weary. At any rate I opened my eyes to see that the low moon had vanished and that some of the stars which I knew as a hunter who had often steered his way by them, had moved a little. While I was wondering idly why they

moved, I heard the tramp of soldiers on the quay and the voice of an officer giving a command. Then I felt the boat being drawn in by the cord with which it was attached to the quay. Next the other boat that lay over me was lifted off, the ropes that bound me were undone and I was set upon my feet, for already I was so stiff that I could scarcely stand. A voice which I recognised as that of the eunuch Houman, addressed me in respectful tones, which made me think I must be dreaming.

"Noble Shabaka," said the voice, "the Great King commands your presence at his feast."

"Is it so?" I answered in my dream. "Then my absence from their feast will vex the gnats of the river," a saying at which Houman and others with him laughed obsequiously.

Next I heard the bags of gold being removed from the boat, after which we walked away, guards supporting me by either elbow until I found my strength again, and Houman following just behind, perhaps because he feared my foot if he went in front.

"What has chanced, Eunuch," I asked presently, "that I am disturbed from the bed where I was sleeping so well?"

"I do not know, Lord," he answered. "I only know that the King of kings has suddenly commanded that you should be brought before him as a guest clothed in a robe of honour, even if to do so, you must be awakened from your rest, yes, to his own royal table, for he holds a feast this night. Lord," he went on in a whining voice, "if perchance fortune should have changed her face to you, I pray you bear no malice to those who, when she frowned, were forced, yes, under the private Seal of Seals, against their will to carry out the commands of the King. Be just, O Lord Shabaka."

"Say no more. I will try to be just," I answered. "But what is justice in the East? I only know of it in Egypt."

Now we reached one of the doors of the palace and I was taken to a chamber where slaves who were waiting, washed and anointed me with scents, after which they clad me in a beautiful robe of silk, setting the girdle of rose-hued pearls about me.

When they had finished, preceded by Houman I was led to a great pillared hall closed in with silk hangings, where many feasted. Through them I went to a dais at the head of the hall where between half-drawn curtains surrounded by cup-bearers and other officers, the King sat in all his glory upon a cushioned golden throne. He had a glittering wine-cup in his hand and at a glance I saw that he was drunk, as it is the fashion for these Easterns to be at their great feasts, for he looked happy and human which he did not do when he was sober. Or perchance, as sometimes I thought afterwards, he only pretended to be drunk. Also I saw something else, namely, Bes, wondrously attired with the gold chain about his neck and wearing a red headdress. He was seated on the carpet before the throne, and saying things that made the King laugh and even caused the grave officers behind to smile.

I came to the dais and at a little sign from Bes who yet did not seem to see me, such a sign as he often made when he caught sight of game before I did, I prostrated myself. The King looked at me, then asked,

"Who is this?" adding, "Oh, I remember, the Egyptian whose arrows do not miss, the wonderful hunter whom Idernes sent to me from Memphis, which I hope to visit ere long. We quarrelled, did we not, Egyptian, something about a lion?"

"Not so, King," I answered. "The King was angry and with justice, because I could not kill a lion before it frightened his horses."

This I said because my hours in the boat had made me humble, also because the words came to my lips.

"Yes, yes, something like that, or at least you lie well. Whatever it may have been, it is done with now, a mere hunters' difference," and taking from his side his long sceptre that was headed with the great emerald, he stretched it out for me to touch in token of pardon.

Then I knew that I was safe for he to whom the King has extended his sceptre is forgiven all crimes, yes, even if he had attempted the royal life. The Court knew it also, for every man who saw bowed towards me, yes, even the officers behind the King. One of the cup-bearers too brought me a goblet of the King's own wine, which I drank thankfully, calling down health on the King.

"That was a wonderful shot of yours, Egyptian," he said, "when you sent an arrow through the lioness that dared to attack my Majesty. Yes, the King owes his life to you and he is grateful as you shall learn. This slave of yours," and he pointed to Bes in his gaudy attire, "has brought the whole matter to my mind whence it had fallen, and, Shabaka," here he hiccupped, "you may have noted how differently things look to the naked eye and when seen through a wine goblet. He has told me a wonderful story—what was the story, Dwarf?"

"May it please the great King," answered Bes, rolling his big eyes, "only a little tale of another king of my own country whom I used to think great until I came to the East and learned what kings could be. That king had a servant with whom he used to hunt, indeed he was my own father. One day they were out together seeking a certain elephant whose tusks were bigger than those of any other. Then the elephant charged the king and my father, at the risk of his life, killed it and claimed the tusks, as is the custom among the Ethiopians. But the king who greatly desired those tusks, caused my father to be poisoned that he might take them as his heir. Only before he died, my father, who could talk the elephant language, told all the other elephants of this wickedness, at which they were very angry, because they knew well that from the beginning of time their tusks have belonged to him who killed them, and the elephants are a people who do not like ancient laws to be altered. So the elephants made a league together and when the king next went out hunting, taking heed of nothing else they rushed at the king and tore him into pieces no bigger than a finger, and then killed the prince his son, who was behind him. That is the tale of the elephants who love Law, O King."

"Yes, yes," said his Majesty, waking up from a little doze, "but what became of the great tusks? I should like to have them."

"I inherited them as my father's son, O King, and gave them to my master, who doubtless will send them to you when he gets back to Egypt."

"A strange tale," said the King. "A very strange tale which seems to remind me of something that happened not long ago. What was it? Well, it does not matter. Egyptian, do you seek any reward for that shot of yours at the lioness? If so, it shall be given to you. Have you a grudge against anyone, for instance?"

"O King," I answered, "I do seek justice against a certain man. This evening I was led to the bank of the river in charge of the eunuch Houman, who desired to take me for a row in a boat. On the road, for no offence he struck me on the head with the handle of his fly-whip. See, here are the marks of it, O King. Unless the King commanded him to strike me which I do not remember, I seek justice against this eunuch."

Now the King grew very angry and cried,

"What! Did the dog dare to strike a freeborn noble Egyptian?"

Here Houman threw himself upon his face in terror and began to babble out I know not what about the punishment of the boat, which was unlucky for him, for it put the matter into the King's mind.

"The boat!" he cried. "Ah! yes, the boat; being so fat you will fit it well, Eunuch. To the boat with him, and before he enters it a hundred blows upon the feet with the rods," and he pointed at him with his sceptre.

Then guards sprang upon Houman and dragged him away. As he went he clutched at Bes, but hissing something into his ear, the dwarf bit him through the hand till he let go. So Houman departed and the King's guests laughed at the sight, for he had worked mischief to many.

When he had gone the King stared at me and asked,

"But why did I disturb you from your sleep, Egyptian? Oh! I remember. This dwarf says that he has seen the fairest woman in the whole world, and the most learned, some lady of Egypt, but that he does not know her name, that you alone know her name. I disturbed you that you might tell it to me but if you have forgotten it, you can go back to your bed and rest there till it returns to you. There are plenty of boats in the river, Egyptian."

"The fairest and most learned woman in the world?" I said astonished. "Who can that be, unless he means the lady Amada?" and I paused, wishing I had bitten out my tongue before I spoke, for I smelt a trap.

"Yes, Master," said Bes in a clear voice. "That was the name, the lady Amada."

"Who is this lady Amada?" asked the King, seeming to grow suddenly sober. "And what is she like?"

"I can tell you that, O King," said Bes. "She is like a willow shaken in the wind for slenderness and grace. She has eyes like those of a buck at gaze; she has lips like rosebuds; she has hair black as the night and soft as silk, the odour of which floats round her like that of flowers. She has a voice that whispers like the evening wind, and yet is rich as honey. Oh! she is beautiful as a goddess and when men see her their hearts melt like wax in the sun and for a long while they can look upon no other woman, not till the next day indeed if they meet her in the evening," and Bes smacked his thick lips and gazed upwards.

"By the holy Fire," laughed the King, "I feel my heart melting already. Say, Shabaka, what do you know of this Amada? Is she married or a maiden?"

Now I answered because I must, for after all that boat was not far away, nor did I dare to lie.

"She is married, O King of kings, to the goddess Isis whom she loves alone."

"A woman married to a woman, or rather to the Queen of women," he answered laughing, "well, that matters little."

"Nay, O King, it matters much since she is under the protection of Isis and inviolate."

"That remains to be seen, Shabaka. I think that I would dare the wrath of every false goddess in heaven to win such a prize. Learned also, you say, Shabaka."

"Aye, O King, full of learning to the finger tips, a prophetess also, one in whom the divine fire burns like a lamp in a vase of alabaster, one to whom visions come and who can read the future and the past."

"Still better," said the King. "One, then, who would be a fitting consort for the King of kings, who wearies of fat, round-eyed, sweetmeat-sucking fools whereof there are hundreds yonder," and he pointed towards the House of Women. "Who is this maid's father?"

"He is dead but she is the niece of the Prince Peroa, and by birth the Royal Lady of Egypt, O King."

"Good, then she is well born also. Harken, O Shabaka, to-morrow you start back to Egypt, bearing letters from me to my vassal Peroa, and to my Satrap Idernes, bidding Peroa to hand over this lady Amada to Idernes and bidding Idernes to send her to the East with all honour and without delay, that she may enter my household as one of my wives."

Now I was filled with rage and horror, and about to refuse this mission when Bes broke in swiftly,

"Will the King of kings be pleased to give command as to my master's safe and honourable escort to Egypt?"

"It is commanded with all things necessary for Shabaka the Egyptian and the dwarf his servant, with the gold and gems and slaves he won from me in a wager, and everything else that is his. Let it be recorded."

Scribes sprang forward and wrote the King's words down, while like one in a dream I thought to myself that they could not now be altered. The King watched them sleepily for a while, then seemed to wake up and grow clear-minded again. At least he said to me,

"Fortune has shown you smiles and frowns to-day, Egyptian, and the smiles last. Yet remember that she has teeth behind her lips wherewith to tear out the throat of the faithless. Man, if you play me false or fail in your mission, be sure that you shall die and in such a fashion that will make you think of yonder boat as a pleasant bed, and with you this woman Amada and her uncle Peroa, and all your kin and hers; yes," he added with a burst of shrewdness, "and even that abortion of a dwarf to whom I have listened because he amused me, but who perhaps is more cunning than he seems."

"O King of kings," I said, "I will not be false." But I did not add to whom I would be true.

"Good. Ere long I shall visit Egypt, as I have told you, and there I shall pass judgment on you and others. Till then, farewell. Fear nothing, for you have my safe-conduct. Begone, both of you, for you weary me. But first drink and keep the cup, and in exchange, give me that bow of yours which shoots so far and straight."

"It is the King's," I answered as I pledged him in the golden, jewelled cup which a butler had handed to me.

Then the curtain fell in front of the throne and chamberlains came forward to lead me and Bes back to our lodging, one of whom took the cup and bore it in front of us. Down the hall we went between the feasting nobles who all bowed to one to whom the Great King had shown favour, and so out of the palace through the quiet night back to the house where I had dwelt while waiting audience of the King. Here the chamberlains bade me farewell, giving the cup to Bes to carry, and saying that on the morrow early my gold should be brought to me together with all that was needed for my journey, also one who would receive the bow I had promised to the King, which had already been returned to my lodgings with everything that was ours. Then they bowed and went.

We entered the house, climbing a stair to an upper chamber. Here Bes barred the door and the shutters, making sure that none could see or hear us.

Then he turned, threw his arms about me, kissed my hand and burst into tears.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BES STEALS THE SIGNET

"Oh! my Master," gulped Bes, "I weep because I am tired, so take no notice. The day was long and during it twice at least there has been but the twinkling of an eyelid, but the thickness of a finger nail, but the weight of a hair between you and death."

"Yes," I said, "and you were the eyelid, the finger nail and the hair."

"No, Master, not I, but something beyond me. The tool carves the statue and the hand holds the tool but the spirit guides the hand. Not once only since the sun rose has my mind been empty as a drum. Then something struck on it, perhaps the holy Tanofir, perhaps another, and it knew what note to sound. So it was when I cursed you in the boat. So it was when I walked back with the eunuch, meaning to kill him on the road, and then remembered that the death of one vile eunuch would not help you at all, whereas alive he could bring me to the presence of the King, if I paid him, as I did out of the gold in your purse which I carried. Moreover he earned his hire, for when the King grew dull, wine not yet having taken a hold on him, it was he who brought me to his mind as one who might amuse him, being so ugly and different from others, if only for a few minutes, after the women dancers had failed to do so."

"And what happened then, Bes?"

"Then I was fetched and did my juggling tricks with that snake I caught and tamed, which is in my pouch now. You should not hate it any more, Master, for it played your game well. After this the King began to talk to me and I saw that his mind was ill at ease about you whom he knew that he had wronged. So I told him that story of an elephant that my father killed to save a king—it grew up in my mind like a toadstool in the night, Master, did this story of an ungrateful king and what befell him. Then the King became still more unquiet in his heart about you and asked the eunuch, Houman, where you were, to which he answered that by his order you were sleeping in a boat and might not be disturbed. So that arrow of mine missed its mark because the King did not like to eat his own words and cause you to be brought from out the boat, whither he had sent you. Now when everything seemed lost, some god, or perhaps the holy Tanofir who is ever present with me to see that I have not forgotten him, put it into the King's mouth to begin to talk about women and to ask me if I had ever seen any fairer than those dancers whom I met going out as I came in. I answered that I had not noticed them much because they were so ugly, as indeed all women had seemed to me since once upon the banks of Nile I had looked upon one who was as Hathor herself for beauty. The King asked me who this might be and I answered that I did not know since I had never dared to ask the name of one whom even my master held to be as a goddess, although as boy and girl they had been brought up together."

"Then the King saw his opportunity to ease his conscience and inquired of an old councillor if there were not a law which gave the king power to alter his decree if thereby he could satisfy his soul and acquire knowledge. The councillor answered that there was such a law and began to give examples of its working, till the King cut him short and said that by virtue of it he commanded that you should be brought out of your bed in the boat and led before him to answer a question."

"So you were sent for, Master, but I did not go with the messengers, fearing lest if I did the King would forget all about the matter before you came. Therefore I stayed and amused him with tales of hunting, till I could not think of any more, for you were long in coming. Indeed I began to fear lest he should declare the feast at an end. But at the last, just as he was yawning and spoke to one of his councillors, bidding him send to the House of Women that they might make ready to receive him there, you came, and the rest you know."

Now I looked at Bes and said,

"May the blessing of all the gods of all the lands be on your head, since had it not been for you I should now lie in torment in that boat. Harken, friend: If ever we reach Egypt again, you will set foot on it, not as a slave but as a free man. You will be rich also, Bes, that is, if we can take the gold I won with us, since half of it is yours."

Bes squatted down upon the floor and looked up at me with a strange smile on his ugly face.

"You have given me three things, Master," he said. "Gold, which I do not want at present; freedom, which I do not want at present and mayhap, never shall while you live and love me; and the title of friend. This I do want, though why I should care to hear it from your lips I am not sure, seeing that for a long while I have known that it was spoken in your heart. Since you have said it, however, I will tell you something which hitherto I have hid even from you. I have a right to that name, for if your blood is high, O Shabaka, so is mine. Know that this poor dwarf whom you took captive and saved long years ago was more than the petty chief which he declared himself to be. He was and is by right the King of the Ethiopians and that throne with all its wealth and power he could claim tomorrow if he would."

"The King of the Ethiopians!" I said. "Oh! friend Bes, I pray you to remember that we no longer stand in yonder court lying for our lives."

"I speak no lie, O Shabaka, I before you am King of the Ethiopians. Moreover, I laid that kingship down of my own will and should I so desire, can take it up again when I will, since the Ethiopians are faithful to their kings."

"Why?" I asked, astonished.

"Master, for so I will still call you who am not yet upon the land of Egypt where you have promised me freedom, do you remember anything strange about the people of that tribe from among whom you and the Egyptian soldiers captured me by surprise, because they wished to drive you and your following from their country?"

Now I thought and answered,

"Yes, one thing. I saw no women in their camp, nor any sign of children. This I know because I gave orders that such were to be spared and it was reported to me that there were none, so I supposed that they had fled away."

"There were none to fly, Master. That tribe was a brotherhood which had abjured women. Look on me now. I am misshapen, hideous, am I not? Born thus, it is said, because before my birth my mother was frightened by a dwarf. Yet the law of the Ethiopians is that their kings must marry within a year of their crowning. Therefore I chose a woman to be the queen whom I had long desired in secret. She scorned me, vowing that not for all the thrones of all the world would she be mated to a monster, and that if it were done by force she would kill herself, a saying that went abroad throughout the land. I said that she had spoken well and sent her in safety from the country, after which I too laid down my crown and departed with some who loved me, to form a brotherhood of women-haters further down the Nile, beyond the borders of Ethiopia. There the Egyptian force of which you were in command, attacked us unprepared, and you made me your slave. That is all."

"But why did you do this, Bes, seeing that maidens are many and all would not have thought thus?"

"Because I wished for that one only, Master; also I feared lest I should become the father of a breed of twisted dwarfs. So I who was a king am now a slave, and yet, who knows which way the Grasshopper will jump? One day from a slave I may again grow into a king. And now let us seek that wherein kings are as slaves and slaves as kings—sleep."

So we lay down and slept, I thanking the gods that my bed was not yonder in the boat upon the great river.

When I woke refreshed, though after all I had gone through on the yesterday my brain still swam a little, the light was pouring through the carved work of the shuttered windows. By it I saw Bes seated on the floor engaged in doing something to his bow, which, as I have said, had been restored to us with our other weapons, and asked him sleepily what it was.

"Master," he said, "yonder King demanded your bow and therefore a bow must be sent to him. But there is no need for it to be that with which you shot the lions, which, too, you value above anything you have, seeing that it came down to you from your forefather who was a Pharaoh of Egypt, and has been your companion from boyhood ever since you were strong enough to draw it. As you may remember I copied that bow out of a somewhat lighter wood, which I could bend with ease, and it is the copy that we will give to the King. Only first I must set your string upon it, for that may have been noted; also make one or two marks that are on your bow which I am finishing now, having begun the task with the dawn."

"You are clever," I said laughing, "and I am glad. The holy Tanofir, looking on my bow, once had a vision. It was that an arrow loosed from it would drink the blood of a great king and save Egypt. But what king and when, he did not see."

The dwarf nodded and answered,

"I have heard that tale and so have others. Therefore I play this trick since it is better that yonder palace dweller should get the arrow than the bow. There, it is finished to the last scratch, and none, save you and I, would know them apart. Till we are clear of this cursed land your bow is mine, Master, and you must find you another of the Eastern make."

"Master," I repeated after him. "Say, Bes, did I dream or did you in truth tell me last night that you are by birth and right the king of a great country?"

"I told you that, Master and it is true, no dream, since joy and suffering mixed unseal the lips and from them comes that at times which the heart would hide. Now I ask a favour of you, that you will speak no more of this matter either to me or to any other, man or woman, unless I should speak of it first. Let it be as though it were indeed a dream."

"It is granted," I said as I rose and clothed myself, not in my own garments which had been taken from me in the palace, but in the splendid silken robes that had been set upon me after I was loosed from the boat. When this was done and I had washed and combed my long, curling hair, we descended to a lower chamber and called for the woman of the house to bring us food, of which I ate heartily. As we finished our meal we heard shouts in the street outside of, "Make way for the servants of the King!" and looking through the window-place, saw a great cavalcade approaching, headed by two princes on horseback.

"Now I pray that yonder Tyrant has not changed his mind and that these do not come to take me back to the boat," I said in a low voice.

"Have no fear, Master," answered Bes, "seeing that you have touched his sceptre and drunk from his cup which he gave to you. After these things no harm can happen to you in any land he rules. Therefore be at ease and deal with these fellows proudly."

A minute later two princes entered followed by slaves who bore many things, among them those hide bags filled with gold that had been set beneath me in the boat. The elder of them bowed, greeting me with the title of "Lord," and I bowed back to him. Then he handed me certain rolls tied up with silk and sealed, which he said I was to deliver as the King had commanded to the King's Satrap in Egypt, and to the Prince Peroa. Also he gave me other letters addressed to the King's servants on the road and written on tablets of clay in a writing I could not read, with all of which I touched my forehead in the Eastern fashion.

After this he told me that by noon all would be ready for my journey which I should make with the rank of the King's Envoy, duly provisioned and escorted by his servants, with liberty to use the royal horses from post to post. Then he ordered the slaves to bring in the gifts which the King sent to me, and these were many, including even suits of flexible armour that would turn any sword-thrust or arrow.

I thanked him, saying that I would be ready to start by noon, and asked whether the King wished to see me before I rode. He replied that he had so wished, but that as he was suffering in his head from the effects of the sun, he could not. He bade me, however, remember all that he had said to me and to be sure that the beauteous lady Amada, of whom I had spoken, was sent to him without delay. In that case my reward should be great; but if I failed to fulfil his commands, then his wrath would be greater and I should perish miserably as he had promised.

I bowed and made no answer, after which he and his companions opened the bags of gold to show me that it was there, offering to weigh it again against my servant, the dwarf, so that I could see that nothing had been taken away.

I replied that the King's word was truer than any scale, whereon the bags were tied up again and sealed. Then I produced the bow, or rather its counterfeit, and having shown it to the princes, wrapped it and six of my own arrows in a linen cloth, to be taken to the King, with a message that though hard to draw it was the deadliest weapon in the world. The elder of them took it, bowed and bade me farewell, saying that perhaps we should meet again ere long in Egypt, if my gods gave me a safe journey. So we parted and I was glad to see the last of them.

Scarcely had they gone when the six hunters whom I had won in the wager and thereby saved from death, entered the chamber and fell upon their knees before me, asking for orders as to making ready my gear for the journey. I inquired of them if they were coming

also, to which their spokesman replied that they were my slaves to do what I commanded.

"Do you desire to come?" I inquired.

"O Lord Shabaka," answered their spokesman, "we do, though some of us must leave wives and children behind us."

"Why?" I asked.

"For two reasons, Lord. Here we are men disgraced, though through no fault of our own and if you were to leave us in this land, soon the anger of the King would find us out and we should lose not only our wives and children, but with them our lives. Whereas in another land we may get other wives and more children, but never shall we get another life. Therefore we would leave those dear ones to our friends, knowing that soon the women will forget and find other husbands, and that the children will grow up to whatever fate is appointed them, thinking of us, their fathers, as dead. Secondly we are hunters by trade, and we have seen that you are a great hunter, one whom we shall always be proud to serve in the chase or in war, one, too, who went out of his path to save our lives, because he saw that we had been unjustly doomed to a cruel death. Therefore we desire nothing better than to be your slaves, hoping that perchance we may earn our liberty from you in days to come by our good service."

"Is that the wish of all of you?" I asked.

Speaking one by one, they said that it was, though tears rose in the eyes of some of them who were married at the thought of parting from their women and their little ones, who, it seemed might not be brought with them because they were the people of the King and had not been named in the bet. Moreover, horses could not be found for so many, nor could they travel fast.

"Come then," I said, "and know that while you are faithful to me, I will be good to you, men of my own trade, and perhaps in the end set you free in a land where brave fellows are not given to be torn to pieces by wild beasts at the word of any king. But if you fail me or betray me, then either I will kill you, or sell you to those who deal in slaves, to work at the oar, or in the mines till you die."

"Henceforth we have no lord but you, O Shabaka," they said, and one after another took my hand and pressed it to their foreheads, vowing to be true to me in all things while we lived.

So I bade them begone to bid farewell to those they loved and return again within half an hour of noon, never expecting, to tell the truth, that they would come. Indeed I did this to give them the opportunity of escaping if they saw fit, and hiding themselves where they would. But as I have often noted, the trade of hunting breeds honesty in the blood and at the hour appointed all of these men appeared, one of them with a woman who carried a child in her arms, clinging to him and weeping bitterly. When her veil slipped aside I saw that she was young and very fair to look on.

So at noon we left the city of the Great King in the charge of two of his officers who brought me his thanks for the bow I had sent him, which he said he should treasure above everything he possessed, a saying at which Bes rolled his yellow eyes and grinned. We were mounted on splendid stallions from the royal stables and clad in the shirts of mail that had been presented to us, though when we were clear of the city we took these off because of the heat, also because that which Bes wore chafed him, being too long for his squat shape. Our goods together with the bags of gold were laden on sumpter horses which were led by my six hunter slaves. Four picked soldiers brought up the rear, mighty men from the King's own bodyguard, and two of the royal postmen who served us as guides. Also there were cooks and grooms with spare horses.

Thus we started in state and a great crowd watched us go. Our road ran by the river which we must cross in barges lower down, so that in a few minutes we came to that quay whither I had been led on the previous night to die. Yes, there were the watching guards, and there floated the hateful double boat, at the prow of which appeared the tortured face of the eunuch Houman, who rolled his head from side to side to rid himself of the torment of the flies. He caught sight of us and began to scream for pity and forgiveness, whereat Bes smiled. The officers halted our cavalcade and one of them approaching me said,

"It is the King's command, O Lord Shabaka, that you should look upon this villain who traduced you to the King and afterwards dared to strike you. If you will, enter the water and blind him, that your face may be the last thing he sees before he passes into darkness."

I shook my head, but Bes into whose mind some thought had come, whispered to me,

"I wish to speak with yonder eunuch, so give me leave and fear nothing. I will do him no hurt, only good, if I find the chance."

Then I said to the officer,

"It is not for great lords to avenge themselves upon the fallen. Yet my slave here was also wronged and would say a word to yonder Houman."

"So be it," said the officer, "only let him be careful not to hurt him too sorely, lest he should die before the time and escape his punishment."

Then Bes tucked up his robes and waded into the river, flourishing a great knife, while seeing him come, Houman began to scream with fear. He reached the boat and bent over the eunuch, talking to him in a low voice. What he did there I could not see because his cloak was spread out on either side of the man's head. Presently, however, I caught sight of the flash of a knife and heard yells of agony followed by groans, whereat I called to him to return and let the fellow be. For when I remembered that his fate was near to being my own, those sounds made me sick at heart and I grew angry with Bes, though the cruel Easterns only laughed.

At length he came back grinning and washing the blade of his knife in the water. I spoke fiercely to him in my own language, and still he grinned on, making no answer. When we were mounted again and riding away from that horrible boat with its groaning prisoner, watching Bes whose behaviour and silence I could not understand, I saw him sweep his hand across his great mouth and thrust it swiftly into his bosom. After this he spoke readily enough, though in a low voice lest someone who understood Egyptian should overhear him.

"You are a fool, Master," he said, "to think that I should wish to waste time in torturing that fat knave."

"Then why did you torture him?" I asked.

"Because my god, the Grasshopper, when he fashioned me a dwarf, gave me a big mouth and good teeth," he answered, whereon I stared at him, thinking that he had gone mad.

"Listen, Master. I did not hurt Houman. All I did was to cut his cords nearly through from the under side, so that when night comes he can break them and escape, if he has the wit. Now, Master, you may not have noticed, but I did, that before the King doomed you

to death by the boat yesterday, he took a certain round, white seal, a cylinder with gods and signs cut on it, which hung by a gold chain from his girdle, and gave it to Houman to be his warrant for all he did. This seal Houman showed to the Treasurer whereon they produced the gold that was weighed in the scales against me, and to others when he ordered the boat to be prepared for you to lie in. Moreover he forgot to return it, for when he himself was dragged off to the boat by direct command of the King, I caught sight of the chain beneath his robe. Can you guess the rest?"

"Not quite," I answered, for I wished to hear the tale in his own words.

"Well, Master, when I was walking with Houman after he had put you in the boat, I asked him about this seal. He showed it to me and said that he who bore it was for the time the king of all the Empire of the East. It seems that there is but one such seal which has descended from ancient days from king to king, and that of it every officer, great or small, has an impress in all lands. If the seal is produced to him, he compares it with the impress and should the two agree, he obeys the order that is brought as though the King had given it in person. When we reached the Court doubtless Houman would have returned the seal, but seeing that the King was, or feigned to be drunk, waited for fear lest it should be lost, and with it his life. Then he was seized as you saw, and in his terror forgot all about the seal, as did the King and his officers."

"But, surely, Bes, those who took Houman to the boat would have removed it."

"Master, even the most clear-sighted do not see well at night. At any rate my hope was that they had not done so, and that is why I waded out to prick the eyes of Houman. Moreover, as I had hoped, so it was; there beneath his robe I saw the chain. Then I spoke to him, saying,

"I am come to put out your eyes, as you deserve, seeing how you have treated my master. Still I will spare you at a price. Give me the King's ancient white seal that opens all doors, and I will only make a pretence of blinding you. Moreover I will cut your cords nearly through, so that when the night comes you can break them, roll into the river and escape."

"Take it if you can," he said, "and use it to injure or destroy that accursed one."

"So you took it, Bes."

"Yes, Master, but not easily. Remember, it was on a chain about the man's neck, and I could not draw it over his head, for, like his hands, his throat was tied by a cord, as you remember yours was."

"I remember very well," I said, "for my throat is still sore from the rope that ran to the same staples to which my hands were fastened."

"Yes, Master, and therefore if I drew the chain off his neck, it would still have been on the ropes. I thought of trying to cut it with the knife, but this was not easy because it is thick, and if I had dragged it up on the blade of the knife it would have been seen, for many eyes were watching me, Master. Then I took another counsel. While I pretended to be putting out the eyes of Houman, I bent down and getting the chain between my teeth I bit it through. One tooth broke—see, but the next finished the business. I ate through the soft gold, Master, and then sucked up the chain and the round white seal into my mouth, and that is why I could not answer you just now, because my cheeks were full of chain. So we have the King's seal that all the subject countries know and obey. It may be useful, yonder in Egypt, and at least the gold is of value."

"Clever!" I exclaimed, "very clever. But you have forgotten something, Bes. When that knave escapes, he will tell the whole story and the King will send after us and kill us who have stolen his royal seal."

"I don't think so, Master. First, it is not likely that Houman will escape. He is very fat and soft and already suffers much. After a day in the sun also he will be weak. Moreover I do not think that he can swim, for eunuchs hate the water. So if he gets out of the boat it is probable that he will drown in the river, since he dare not wade to the quay where the guards will be waiting. But if he does escape by swimming across the river, he will hide for his life's sake and never be seen again, and if by chance he is caught, he will say that the seal fell into the water when he was taken to the boat, or that one of the guards had stolen it. What he will not say is that he had bargained it away with someone who in return, cut his cords, since for that crime he must die by worse tortures than those of the boat. Lastly we shall ride so fast that with six hours' start none will catch us. Or if they do I can throw away the chain and swallow the seal."

As Bes said, so it happened. The fate of Houman I never learned, and of the theft of the seal I heard no more until a proclamation was issued to all the kingdoms that a new one was in use. But this was not until long afterwards when it had served my turn and that of Egypt.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LADY AMADA

Now day by day, hour by hour and minute by minute every detail of that journey appeared before me, but to set it all down is needless. As I, Allan Quatermain, write the record of my vision, still I seem to hear the thunder of our horses' hoofs while we rushed forward at full gallop over the plains, over the mountain passes and by the banks of rivers. The speed at which we travelled was wonderful, for at intervals of about forty miles were post-houses and at these, whatever might be the hour of day or night, we found fresh horses from the King's stud awaiting us. Moreover, the postmasters knew that we were coming, which astonished me until we discovered that they had been warned of our arrival by two King's messengers who travelled ahead of us.

These men, it would seem, although our officers and guides professed ignorance of the matter, must have left the King's palace at dawn on the day of our departure, whereas we did not mount in the city till a little after noon. Therefore they had six hours' good start of us, and what is more, travelled lighter than we did, having no sumpter beasts with them, and no cooks or servants. Moreover, always they had the pick of the horses and chose the three swiftest beasts, leading the third in case one of their own should founder or meet with accident. Thus it came about that we never caught them up although we covered quite a hundred miles a day. Only once did I see them, far off upon the skyline of a mountain range which we had to climb, but by the time we had reached its crest they were gone.

At length we came to the desert without accident and crossed it, though more slowly. But even here the King had his posts which were in charge of Arabs who lived in tents by wells of water, or sometimes where there was none save what was brought to them. So still we galloped on, parched by the burning sand beneath and the burning sand above, and reached the borders of Egypt.

Here, upon the very boundary line, the two officers halted the cavalcade saying that their orders were to return thence and make report to the King. There then we parted, Bes and I with the six hunters who still chose to cling to me, going forward and the officers of the King with the guides and servants going back. The good horses that we rode from the last post they gave to us by the King's command, together with the sumpter beasts, since horses broken to the saddle were hard to come by in Egypt where they were trained to draw chariots. These we took, sending back my thanks to the King, and started on once more, Bes leading that beast which bore the gold and the hunters serving as a guard.

Indeed I was glad to see the last of those Easterns although they had brought us safely and treated us well, for all the while I was never sure but that they had some orders to lead us into a trap, or perhaps to make away with us in our sleep and take back the gold and the priceless, rose-hued pearls, any two of which were worth it all. But such was not their command nor did they dare to steal them on their own account, since then, even if they escaped the vengeance of the King, their wives and all their families would have paid the price.

Now we entered Egypt near the Salt Lakes that are not far from the head of the Gulf, crossing the canal that the old Pharaohs had dug, which proved easy for it was silted up. Before we reached it we found some peasant folk labouring in their gardens and I heard one of them call to another,

"Here come more of the Easterns. What is toward, think you, neighbour?"

"I do not know," answered the other, "but when I passed down the canal this morning, I saw a body of the Great King's guards gathering from the fort. Doubtless it is to meet these men of whose coming the other two who went by fifty hours ago, have warned the officers."

"Now what does that mean?" I asked of Bes.

"Neither more nor less than we have heard, Master. The two King's messengers who have gone ahead of us all the way from the city, have told the officer of the frontier fort that we are coming, so he has advanced to the ford to meet us, for what purpose I do not know."

"Nor do I," I said, "but I wish we could take another road, if there were one."

"There is none, Master, for above and below the canal is full of water and the banks are too steep for horses to climb. Also we must show no doubt or fear."

He thought a while, then added,

"Take the royal seal, Master. It may be useful."

He gave it to me, and I examined it more closely than I had done before. It was a cylinder of plain white shell hung on a gold chain, that which Bes had bitten through, but now mended again by taking out the broken link. On this cylinder were cut figures; as I think of a priest presenting a noble to a god, over whom was the crescent of the moon, while behind the god stood a man or demon with a tall spear. Also between the figures were mystic signs, meaning I know not what. The workmanship of the carving was grown shallow with time and use for the cylinder seemed to be very ancient, a sacred thing that had descended from generation to generation and was threaded through with a bar of silver on which it turned.

I put the seal which was like no other that I had seen, being the work of an early and simpler age, round my neck beneath my mail and we went on.

Descending the steep bank of the canal we came to the ford where the sand that had silted in was covered by not more than a foot of water. As we entered it, on the top of the further bank appeared a body of about thirty armed and mounted men, one of whom

carried the Great King's banner, on which I noted was blazoned the very figures that were cut upon the cylinder. Now it was too late to retreat, so we rode through the water and met the soldiers. Their officer advanced, crying,

"In the name of the Great King, greeting, my lord Shabaka!

"In the name of the Great King, greeting!" I answered. "What would you with Shabaka, Officer of the King?"

"Only to do him honour. The word of the King has reached us and we come to escort you to the Court of Idernes, the Satrap of the King and Governor of Egypt who sits at Sais."

"That is not my road, Officer. I travel to Memphis to deliver the commands of the King to my cousin, Peroa, the ruler of Egypt under the King. Afterwards, perchance, I shall visit the high Idernes."

"To whom our commands are to take you now, my lord Shabaka, not afterwards," said the officer sternly, glancing round at his armed escort.

"I come to give commands, not to receive them, Captain of the King."

"Seize Shabaka and his servants," said the officer briefly, whereon the soldiers rode forward to surround us.

I waited till they were near at hand. Then suddenly I plunged my hand beneath my robe and drew out the small, white seal which I held before the eyes of the officer, saying,

"Who is it that dares to lay a finger upon the holder of the King's White Seal? Surely that man is ready for death."

The officer stared at it, then leapt from his horse and flung himself face downwards on the ground, crying,

"It is the ancient signet of the Kings of the East, given to their first forefather by Samas the Sungod, on which hangs the fortunes of the Great House! Pardon, my lord Shabaka."

"It is granted," I answered, "because what you did you did in ignorance. Now go to the Satrap Idernes and say to him that if he would have speech with the bearer of the King's seal which all must obey, he will find him at Memphis. Farewell," and with Bes and the six hunters I rode through the guards, none striving to hinder me.

"That was well done, Master," said Bes.

"Yes," I said. "Those two messengers who went ahead of us brought orders to the frontier guard of Idernes that I should be taken to him as a prisoner. I do not know why, but I think because things are passing in Egypt of which we know nothing and the King did not desire that I should see the Prince Peroa and give him news that I might have gathered. Mayhap we have been outwitted, Bes, and the business of the lady Amada is but a pretext to pick a quarrel suddenly before Peroa can strike the first blow."

"Perhaps, Master, for these Easterns are very crafty. But, Master, what happens to those who make a false use of the King's ancient, sacred signet? I think they have cut the ropes which tie them to earth," and he looked upwards to the sky rolling his yellow eyes.

"They must find new ropes, Bes, and quickly, before they are caught. Harken. You have sat upon a throne and I can speak out to you. Think you that my cousin, the Prince Peroa, loves to be the servant of this distant, Eastern king, he who by right is Pharaoh of Egypt? Peroa must strike or lose his niece and perchance his life. Forward, that we may warn him."

"And if he will not strike, Master, knowing the King's might and being somewhat slow to move?"

"Then, Bes, I think that you and I had best go hunting far away in those lands you know, where even the Great King cannot follow us."

"And where, if only I can find a woman who does not make me ill to look on, and whom I do not make ill, I too can once more be a king, Master, and the lord of many thousand brave armed men. I must speak of that matter to the holy Tanofir."

"Who doubtless will know what to advise you, Bes; or, if he does not, I shall."

For a while we rode on in silence, each thinking his own thoughts. Then Bes said,

"Master, before so very long we shall reach the Nile, and having with us gold in plenty can buy boats and hire crews. It comes into my mind that we should do well for our own safety and comfort to start at once on a hunting journey far from Egypt; in the land of the Ethiopians, Master. There perchance I could gather together some of the wise men in whose hands I left the rule of my kingdom, and submit to them this question of a woman to marry me. The Ethiopians are a faithful people, Master, and will not reject me because I have spent some years seeing the world afar, that I might learn how to rule them better."

"I have remembered that it cannot be, Bes," I said.

"Why not, Master?"

"For this reason. You left your country because of a woman? I cannot leave mine again because of a woman."

Bes rolled his eyes around as though he thought to see that woman in the desert. Not discovering her, he stared upwards and there found light.

"Is she perchance named the lady Amada, Master?"

I nodded.

"So. The lady Amada who you told the Great King is the most beautiful one in the whole world, causing the fire of Love to burn up in his royal heart, and with it many other things of which we do not know at present."

"You told him, Bes," I said angrily.

"I told him of a beautiful one; I did not tell him her name, Master, and although I never thought of it at the time, perhaps she will be angry with him who told her name."

Now fear took hold of me, and Bes saw it in my face.

"Do not be afraid, Master. If there is trouble I will swear that I told the Great King that lady's name."

"Yes, Bes, but how would that fit in with the story, seeing that I was brought out of the boat for this very purpose?"

"Quite easily, Master, since I will say that you were led from the boat to confirm my tale. Oh! she will be angry with me, no doubt, but in Egypt even a dwarf cannot be killed because he has declared a certain lady to be the most beautiful in the world. But, Master, tell me, when did you learn to love her?"

"When we were boy and girl, Bes. We used to play together, being cousins, and I used to hold her hand. Then suddenly she refused to let me hold her hand any more, and I being quite grown up then, though she was younger, understood that I had better go away."

"I should have stopped where I was, Master."

"No, Bes. She was studying to be a priestess and my great uncle, the holy Tanofir, told me that I had better go away. So I went down south hunting and fighting in command of the troops, and met you, Bes."

"Which perhaps was better for you, Master, than to stop to watch the lady Amada acquire learning. Still, I wonder whether the holy Tanofir is *always* right. You see, Master, he thinks a great deal of priests and priestesses, and is so very old that he has forgotten all about love and that without it there never would have been a holy Tanofir."

"The holy Tanofir thinks of souls, not of bodies, Bes."

"Yes, Master. Still, oil is of no use without a lamp, or a soul without a body, at least here underneath the sun, or so we were taught who worship the Grasshopper. But, Master, when you came back from all your hunting, what happened then?"

"Then I found, Bes, that the lady Amada, having acquired all the learning possible, had taken her first vows to Isis, which she said she would not break for any man on earth although she might have done so without crime. Therefore, although I was dear to her, as a brother would have been had she had one, and she swore that she had never even thought of another man, she refused so much as to think of marrying who dreamed only of the heavenly perfections of the lady Isis."

"Ump!" said Bes. "We Ethiopians have Priestesses of the Grasshopper, or the Grasshopper's wife, but they do not think of her like that. I hope that one day something stronger than herself will not cause the lady Amada to break her vows to the heavenly Isis. Only then, perhaps, it may be for the sake of another man who did not go off to the East on account of such fool's talk. But here is a village and the horses are spent. Let us stop and eat, as I suppose even the lady Amada does sometimes."

On the following afternoon we crossed the Nile, and towards sunset entered the vast and ancient city of Memphis. On its white walls floated the banners of the Great King which Bes pointed out to me, saying that wherever we went in the whole world, it seemed that we could never be free from those accursed symbols.

"May I live to spit upon them and cast them into the moat," I answered savagely, for as I drew near to Amada they grew ten times more hateful to me than they had been before.

In truth I was nearer to Amada than I thought, for after we had passed the enclosure of the temple of Ptah, the most wonderful and the mightiest in the whole world, we came to the temple of Isis. There near to the pylon gate we met a procession of her priests and priestesses advancing to offer the evening sacrifice of song and flowers, clad, all of them, in robes of purest white. It was a day of festival, so singers went with them. After the singers came a band of priestesses bearing flowers, in front of whom walked another priestess shaking a *sistrum* that made a little tinkling music.

Even at a distance there was something about the tall and slender shape of this priestess that stirred me. When we came nearer I saw why, for it was Amada herself. Through the thin veil she wore I could see her dark and tender eyes set beneath the broad brow that was so full of thought, and the sweet, curved mouth that was like no other woman's. Moreover there could be no doubt since the veil parting above her breast showed the birth-mark for which she was famous, the mark of the young moon, the sign of Isis.

I sprang from my horse and ran towards her. She looked up and saw me. At first she frowned, then her face grew wondering, then tender, and I thought that her red lips shaped my name. Moreover in her confusion she let the *sistrum* fall.

I muttered "Amada!" and stepped forward, but priests ran between us and thrust me away. Next moment she had recovered the *sistrum* and passed on with her head bowed. Nor did she lift her eyes to look back.

"Begone, man!" cried a priest, "Begone, whoever you may be. Because you wear Eastern armour do you think that you can dare the curse of Isis?"

Then I fell back, the holy image of the goddess passed and the procession vanished through the pylon gate. I, Shabaka the Egyptian, stood by my horse and watched it depart. I was happy because the lady Amada was alive, well, and more beautiful than ever; also because she had shown signs of joy and confusion at seeing me again. Yet I was unhappy because I met her still filling a holy office which built a wall between us, also because it seemed to me an evil omen that I should have been repelled from her by a priest of Isis who talked of the curse of the goddess. Moreover the sacred statue, I suppose by accident, turned towards me as it passed and perhaps by the chance of light, seemed to frown upon me.

Thus I thought as Shabaka hundreds of years before the Christian era, but as Allan Quatermain the modern man, to whom it was given so marvellously to behold all these things and who in beholding them, yet never quite lost the sense of his own identity of to-day, I was amazed. For I knew that this lady Amada was the same being though clad in different flesh, as that other lady with whom I had breathed the magical *Taduki* fumes which had power to rend the curtain of the past, or, perhaps, only to breed dreams of what it might have been.

To the outward eye, indeed she was different, as I was different, taller, more slender, larger-eyed, with longer and slimmer hands than those of any Western woman, and on the whole even more beautiful and alluring. Moreover that mysterious look which from time to time I had seen on Lady Ragnall's face, was more constant on that of the lady Amada. It brooded in the deep eyes and settled in a curious smile about the curves of the lips, a smile that was not altogether human, such a smile as one might wear who had looked on hidden things and heard voices that spoke beyond the limits of the world.

Somehow neither then nor at any other time during all my dream, could I imagine this Amada, this daughter of a hundred kings, whose blood might be traced back through dynasty on dynasty, as nothing but a woman who nurses children upon her breast. It was as though something of our common nature had been bred out of her and something of another nature whereof we have no ken, had entered to fill its place. And yet these two women were the same, that I *knew*, or at any rate, much of them was the same, for who can say what part of us we leave behind as we flit from life to life, to find it again elsewhere in the abysses of Time and Change? One thing too was quite identical—the birthmark of the new moon above the breast which the priests of the Kendah had declared was always the seal that marked their prophetess, the guardian of the Holy Child.

When the procession had quite departed and I could no longer hear the sound of singing, I remounted and rode on to my house, or rather to that of my mother, the great lady Tiu, which was situated beneath the wall of the old palace facing towards the Nile. Indeed my heart was full of this mother of mine whom I loved and who loved me, for I was her only child, and my father had been long dead; so long that I could not remember him. Eight months had gone by since I saw her face and in eight months who knew what might have happened? The thought made me cold for she, who was aged and not too strong, perhaps had been gathered to Osiris. Oh! if that were so!

I shook my tired horse to a canter, Bes riding ahead of me to clear a road through the crowded street in which, at this hour of sundown, all the idlers of Memphis seemed to have gathered. They stared at me because it was not common to see men riding in Memphis, and with little love, since from my dress and escort they took me to be some envoy from their hated master, the Great King of the East. Some even threatened to bar the way; but we thrust through and presently turned into a thoroughfare of private houses standing in their own gardens. Ours was the third of these. At its gate I leapt from my horse, pushed open the closed door and hastened in to seek and learn.

I had not far to go for, there in the courtyard, standing at the head of our modest household and dressed in her festal robes, was my mother, the stately and white-haired lady Tiu, as one stands who awaits the coming of an honoured guest. I ran to her and kneeling, kissed her hand, saying,

"My mother! My mother, I have come safe home and greet you."

"I greet you also, my son," she answered, bending down and kissing me on the brow, "who have been in far lands and passed so many dangers. I greet you and thank the guardian gods who have brought you safe home again. Rise, my son."

I rose and kissed her on the face, then looked at the servants who were bowing their welcome to me, and said,

"How comes it, Lady of the House, that all are gathered here? Did you await some guest?"

"We awaited you, my son. For an hour have we stood here listening for the sound of your feet."

"Me!" I exclaimed. "That is strange, seeing that I have ridden fast and hard from the East, tarrying only a few minutes, and those since I entered Memphis, when I met——" and I stopped.

"Met whom, Shabaka?"

"The lady Amada walking in the procession of Isis."

"Ah! the lady Amada. The mother waits that the son may stop to greet the lady Amada!"

"But *why* did you wait, my mother? Who but a spirit or a bird of the air could have told you that I was coming, seeing that I sent no messenger before me?"

"You must have done so, Shabaka, since yesterday one came from the holy Tanofir, our relative who dwells in the desert in the burial-ground of Sekera. He bore a message from Tanofir to me, telling me to make ready since before sundown to-night you, my son, would be with me, having escaped great dangers, accompanied by the dwarf Bes, your servant, and six strange Eastern men. So I made ready and waited; also I prepared lodging for the six strange men in the outbuildings behind the house and sent a thank offering to the temple. For know, my son, I have suffered much fear for you."

"And not without cause, as you will say when I tell you all," I answered laughing. "But how Tanofir knew that I was coming is more than I can guess. Come, my mother, greet Bes here, for had it not been for him, never should I have lived to hold your hand again."

So she greeted him and thanked him, whereon Bes rolled his eyes and muttered something about the holy Tanofir, after which we entered the house. Thence I despatched a messenger to the Prince Peroa saying that if it were his pleasure I would wait on him at once, seeing that I had much to tell him. This done I bathed and caused my hair and beard to be trimmed and, discarding the Eastern garments, clothed myself in those of Egypt, and so felt that I was my own man again. Then I came out refreshed and drank a cup of Syrian wine and the night having fallen, sat down by my mother in the chamber with a lamp between us, and, holding her hand, told her something of my story, showing her the sacks of gold that had come with me safely from the East, and the chain of priceless, rose-hued pearls that I had won in the Great King.

Now when she learned how Bes by his wit had saved me from a death of torment in the boat, my mother clapped her hands to summon a servant and sent for Bes, and said to him,

"Bes, hitherto I have looked on you as a slave taken by my son, the noble Shabaka, in one of his far journeys that it pleases him to make to fight and to hunt. But henceforth I look upon you as a friend and give you a seat at my table. Moreover it comes into my mind that although so strangely shaped by some evil god, perhaps you are more than you seem to be."

Now Bes looked at me to see if I had told my mother anything, and when I shook my head answered,

"I thank you, O Lady of the House, who have but done my duty to my master. Still it is true that as a goatskin often holds good wine, so a dwarf should not always be judged by what can be seen of him."

Then he went away.

"It seems that we are rich again, Son, who have been somewhat poor of late years," said my mother, looking at the bags of gold. "Also, there are the pearls which doubtless are worth more than the gold. What are you going to do with them, Shabaka?"

"I thought of offering them as a gift to the lady Amada," I replied hesitatingly, "that is unless you——"

"I? No, I am too old for such gems. Yet, Son, it might be well to keep them for a time, seeing that while they are your own they may give you more weight in the eyes of the Prince Peroa and others. Whereas if you gave them to the lady Amada and she took them, perchance it might only be to see them return to the East, whither you tell me she is summoned by one whose orders may not be disobeyed."

Now I turned white with rage and answered,

"While I live, Mother, Amada shall never go to the East to be the woman of yonder King."

"While you live, Son. But those who cross the will of a great king, are apt to die. Also this is a matter which her uncle, the Prince Peroa, must decide as policy dictates. Now as ever the woman is but a pawn in the game. Oh! my son," she went on, "do not pin all your heart to the robe of this Amada. She is very fair and very learned, but is she one who will love? Moreover, if so she is a priestess and it would be difficult for her to wed who is sworn to Isis. Lastly, remember this: If Egypt were free, she would be its heiress, not

her uncle, Peroa. For hers is the true blood, not his. Would he, therefore, be willing to give her to any man who, according to the ancient custom, through her would acquire the right to rule?"

"I do not seek to rule, Mother; I only seek to wed Amada whom I love."

"Amada whom you love and whose name you, or rather your servant Bes, which is the same thing since it will be held that he did it by your order, gave to the King of the East, or so I understand. Here is a pretty tangle, Shabaka, and rather would I be without all that gold and those priceless pearls than have the task of its unravelling."

Before I could answer and explain all the truth to her, the curtain was swung aside and through it came a messenger from the Prince Peroa, who bade me come to eat with him at once at the palace, since he must see me this night.

So my mother having set the rope of rose-hued pearls in a double chain about my neck, I kissed her and went, with Bes who was also bidden. Outside a chariot was waiting into which we entered.

"Now, Master," said Bes to me as we drove to the palace, "I almost wish that we were back in another chariot hunting lions in the East."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because then, although we had much to fear, there was no woman in the story. Now the woman has entered it and I think that our real troubles are about to begin. Oh! to-morrow I go to seek counsel of the holy Tanofir."

"And I come with you," I answered, "for I think it will be needed."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MESSENGERS

We descended at the great gate of the palace and were led through empty halls that were no longer used now when there was no king in Egypt, to the wing of the building in which dwelt the Prince Peroa. Here we were received by a chamberlain, for the Prince of Egypt still kept some state although it was but small, and had about him men who bore the old, high-sounding titles of the "Officers of Pharaoh."

The chamberlain led me and Bes to an ante-chamber of the banquetting hall and left us, saying that he would summon the Prince who wished to see me before he ate. This, however, was not necessary since while he spoke Peroa, who as I guessed had been waiting for me, entered by another door. He was a majestic-looking man of middle age, for grey showed in his hair and beard, clad in white garments with a purple hem and wearing on his brow a golden circlet, from the front of which rose the *uraeus* in the shape of a hooded snake that might be worn by those of royal blood alone. His face was full of thought and his black and piercing eyes looked heavy as though with sleeplessness. Indeed I could see that he was troubled. His gaze fell upon us and his features changed to a pleasant smile.

"Greeting, Cousin Shabaka," he said. "I am glad that you have returned safe from the East, and burn to hear your tidings. I pray that they may be good, for never was good news more needed in Egypt."

"Greeting, Prince," I answered, bowing my knee. "I and my servant here are returned safe, but as for our tidings, well, judge of them for yourself," and drawing the letter of the Great King from my robe, I touched my forehead with the roll and handed it to him.

"I see that you have acquired the Eastern customs, Shabaka," he said as he took it. "But here in my own house which once was the palace of our forefathers, the Pharaohs of Egypt, by your leave I will omit them. Amen be my witness," he added bitterly, "I cannot bear to lay the letter of a foreign king against my brow in token of my country's vassalage."

Then he broke the silk of the seals and read, and as he read his face grew black with rage.

"What!" he cried, casting down the roll and stamping on it. "What! Does this dog of an Eastern king bid me send my niece, by birth the Royal Princess of Egypt, to be his toy until he wearies of her? First I will choke her with my own hands. How comes it, Shabaka, that you care to bring me such a message? Were I Pharaoh now I think your life would pay the price."

"As it would certainly have paid the price, had I not done so. Prince, I brought the letter because I must. Also a copy of it has gone, I believe, to Idernes the Satrap at Sais. It is better to face the truth, Prince, and I think that I may be of more service to you alive than dead. If you do not wish to send the lady Amada to the King, marry her to someone else, after which he will seek her no more."

He looked at me shrewdly and said,

"To whom then? I cannot marry her, being her uncle and already married. Do you mean to yourself, Shabaka?"

"I have loved the lady Amada from a child, Prince," I answered boldly. "Also I have high blood in me and having brought much gold from the East, am rich again and one accustomed to war."

"So you have brought gold from the East! How? Well, you can tell me afterwards. But you fly high. You, a Count of Egypt, wish to marry the Royal Lady of Egypt, for such she is by birth and rank, which, if ever Egypt were free again, would give you a title to the throne."

"I ask no throne, Prince. If there were one to fill I should be content to leave that to you and your heirs."

"So you say, no doubt honestly. But would the children of Amada say the same? Would you even say it if you were her husband, and would she say it? Moreover she is a priestess, sworn not to wed, though perhaps that trouble might be overcome, if she wishes to wed, which I doubt. Mayhap you might discover. Well, you are hungry and worn with long travelling. Come, let us eat, and afterwards you can tell your story. Amada and the others will be glad to hear it, as I shall. Follow me, Count Shabaka."

So we went to the lesser banquetting-hall, I filled with joy because I should see Amada, and yet, much afraid because of that story which I must tell. Gathered there, waiting for the Prince, we found the Princess his wife, a large and kindly woman, also his two eldest daughters and his young son, a lad of about sixteen. Moreover, there were certain officers, while at the tables of the lower hall sat others of the household, men of smaller rank, and their wives, since Peroa still maintained some kind of a shadow of the Court of old Egypt.

The Princess and the others greeted me, and Bes also who had always been a favourite with them, before he went to take his seat at the lowest table, and I greeted them, looking all the while for Amada whom I did not see. Presently, however, as we took our places on the couches, she entered dressed, not as a priestess, but in the beautiful robes of a great lady of Egypt and wearing on her head the *uraeus* circlet that signified her royal blood. As it chanced the only seat left vacant was that next to myself, which she took before she recognized me, for she was engaged in asking pardon for her lateness of the Prince and Princess, saying that she had been detained by the ceremonies at the temple. Seeing suddenly that I was her neighbour, she made as though she would change her place, then altered her mind and stayed where she was.

"Greeting, Cousin Shabaka," she said, "though not for the first time to-day. Oh! my heart was glad when looking up, outside the temple, I caught sight of you clad in that strange Eastern armour, and knew that you had returned safe from your long wanderings. Yet afterwards I must do penance for it by saying two added prayers, since at such a time my thoughts should have been with the goddess only."

"Greeting, Cousin Amada," I answered, "but she must be a jealous goddess who grudges a thought to a relative—and friend—at such a time."

"She is jealous, Shabaka, as being the Queen of women she must be who demands to reign alone in the hearts of her votaries. But tell me of your travels in the East and how you came by that rope of wondrous pearls, if indeed there can be pearls so large and beautiful."

This at the time I had little chance of doing, however, since the young Princess on the other side of her began to talk to Amada about some forthcoming festival, and the Prince's son next to me who was fond of hunting, to question me about sport in the East and when, unhappily, I said that I had shot lions there, gave me no peace for the rest of that feast. Also the Princess opposite was anxious to learn what food noble people ate in the East, and how it was cooked and how they sat at table, and what was the furniture of their rooms and did women attend feasts as in Egypt, and so forth. So it came about that what between these things and eating and drinking, which, being well-nigh starved, I was obliged to do, for, save a cup of wine, I had taken nothing in my mother's house, I found little chance of talking with the lovely Amada, although I knew that all the while she was studying me out of the corners of her large eyes. Or perhaps it was the rose-hued pearls she studied, I was not sure.

Only one thing did she say to me when there was a little pause while the cup went round, and she pledged me according to custom and passed it on. It was,

"You look well, Shabaka, though somewhat tired, but sadder than you used, I think."

"Perhaps because I have seen things to sadden me, Amada. But you too look well but somewhat lovelier than you used, I think, if that be possible."

She smiled and blushed as she replied,

"The Eastern ladies have taught you how to say pretty things. But you should not waste them upon me who have done with women's vanities and have given myself to learning and—religion."

"Have learning and religion no vanities of their own?" I began, when suddenly the Prince gave a signal to end the feast.

Thereon all the lower part of the hall went away and the little tables at which we ate were removed by servants, leaving us only wine-cups in our hands which a butler filled from time to time, mixing the wine with water. This reminded me of something, and having asked leave, I beckoned to Bes, who still lingered near the door, and took from him that splendid, golden goblet which the Great King had given me, that by my command he had brought wrapped up in linen and hidden beneath his robe. Having undone the wrappings I bowed and offered it to the Prince Peroa.

"What is this wondrous thing?" asked the Prince, when all had finished admiring its workmanship. "Is it a gift that you bring me from the King of the East, Shabaka?"

"It is a gift from myself, O Prince, if you will be pleased to accept it," I answered, adding, "Yet it is true that it comes from the King of the East, since it was his own drinking-cup that he gave me in exchange for a certain bow, though not the one he sought, after he had pledged me."

"You seem to have found much favour in the eyes of this king, Shabaka, which is more than most of us Egyptians do," he exclaimed, then went on hastily, "Still, I thank you for your splendid gift, and however you came by it, shall value it much."

"Perhaps my cousin Shabaka will tell us his story," broke in Amada, her eyes still fixed upon the rose-hued pearls, "and of how he came to win all the beauteous things that dazzle our eyes to-night."

Now I thought of offering her the pearls, but remembering my mother's words, also that the Princess might not like to see another woman bear off such a prize, did not do so. So I began to tell my story instead, Bes seated on the ground near to me by the Prince's wish, that he might tell his.

The tale was long for in it was much that went before the day when I saw myself in the chariot hunting lions with the King of kings, which I, the modern man who set down all this vision, now learned for the first time. It told of the details of my journey to the East, of my coming to the royal city and the rest, all of which it is needless to repeat. Then I came to the lion hunt, to my winning of the wager, and all that happened to me; of my being condemned to death, of the weighing of Bes against the gold, and of how I was laid in the boat of torment, a story at which I noticed Amada turn pale and tremble.

Here I ceased, saying that Bes knew better than I what had chanced at the Court while I was pinned in the boat, whereon all present cried out to Bes to take up the tale. This he did, and much better than I could have done, bringing out many little things which made the scene appear before them, as Ethiopians have the art of doing. At last he came to the place in his story where the king asked him if he had ever seen a woman fairer than the dancers, and went on thus:

"O Prince, I told the Great King that I had; that there dwelt in Egypt a lady of royal blood with eyes like stars, with hair like silk and long as an unbridled horse's tail, with a shape like to that of a goddess, with breath like flowers, with skin like milk, with a voice like honey, with learning like to that of the god Thoth, with wit like a razor's edge, with teeth like pearls, with majesty of bearing like to that of the king himself, with fingers like rosebuds set in pink seashells, with motion like that of an antelope, with grace like that of a swan floating upon water, and—I don't remember the rest, O Prince."

"Perhaps it is as well," exclaimed Peroa. "But what did the King say then?"

"He asked her name, O Prince."

"And what name did you give to this wondrous lady who surpasses all the goddesses in loveliness and charm, O dwarf Bes?" inquired Amada much amused.

"What name, O High-born One? Is it needful to ask? Why, what name could I give but your own, for is there any other in the world of whom a man whose heart is filled with truth could speak such things?"

Now hearing this I gasped, but before I could speak Amada leapt up, crying,

"Wretch! You dared to speak my name to this king! Surely you should be scourged till your bones are bare."

"And why not, Lady? Would you have had me sit still and hear those fat trollops of the East exalted above you? Would you have had me so disloyal to your royal loveliness?"

"You should be scourged," repeated Amada stamping her foot. "My Uncle, I pray you cause this knave to be scourged."

"Nay, nay," said Peroa moodily. "Poor simple man, he knew no better and thought only to sing your praises in a far land. Be not angry with the dwarf, Niece. Had it been Shabaka who gave your name, the thing would be different. What happened next, Bes?"

"Only this, Prince," said Bes, looking upwards and rolling his eyes, as was his fashion when unloading some great lie from his heart. "The King sent his servants to bring my master from the boat, that he might inquire of him whether he had always found me truthful. For, Prince, those Easterns set much store by truth which here in Egypt is worshipped as a goddess. There they do not worship her because she lives in the heart of every man, and some women."

Now all stared at Bes who continued to stare at the ceiling, and I rose to say something, I know not what, when suddenly the doors opened and through them appeared heralds, crying,

"Hearken, Peroa, Prince of Egypt by grace of the Great King. A message from the Great King. Read and obey, O Peroa, Prince of Egypt by grace of the Great King!"

As they cried thus from between them emerged a man whose long Eastern robes were stained with the dust of travel. Advancing without salute he drew out a roll, touched his forehead with it, bowing deeply, and handed it to the prince, saying,

"Kiss the Word. Read the Word. Obey the Word, O servant of our Master, the King of kings, beneath whose feet we are all but dust."

Peroa took the roll, made a semblance of lifting it to his forehead, opened and read it. As he did so I saw the veins swell upon his neck and his eyes flash, but he only said,

"O Messenger, to-night I feast, to-morrow an answer shall be given to you to convey to the Satrap Idernes. My servants will find you food and lodging. You are dismissed."

"Let the answer be given early lest you also should be dismissed, O Peroa," said the man with insolence.

Then he turned his back upon the prince, as one does on an inferior, and walked away, accompanied by the herald.

When they were gone and the doors had been shut, Peroa spoke in a voice that was thick with fury, saying,

"Hearken, all of you, to the words of the writing."

Then he read it.

"From the King of kings, the Ruler of all the earth, to Peroa, one of his servants in the Satrapy of Egypt,

"Deliver over to my servant Idernes without delay, the person of Amada, a lady of the blood of the old Pharaohs of Egypt, who is your relative and in your guardianship, that she may be numbered among the women of my house."

Now all present looked at each other, while Amada stood as though she had been frozen into stone. Before she could speak, Peroa went on,

"See how the King seeks a quarrel against me that he may destroy me and bray Egypt in his mortar, and tan it like a hide to wrap about his feet. Nay, hold your peace, Amada. Have no fear. You shall not be sent to the East; first will I kill you with my own hands. But what answer shall we give, for the matter is urgent and on it hang all our lives? Bethink you, Idernes has a great force yonder at Sais, and if I refuse outright, he will attack us, which indeed is what the King means him to do before we can make preparation. Say then, shall we fight, or shall we fly to Upper Egypt, abandoning Memphis, and there make our stand?"

Now the Councillors present seemed to find no answer, for they did not know what to say. But Bes whispered in my ear,

"Remember, Master, that you hold the King's seal. Let an answer be sent to Idernes under the White Seal, bidding him wait on you."

Then I rose and spoke.

"O Peroa," I said, "as it chances I am the bearer of the private signet of the Great King, which all men must obey in the north and in the south, in the east and in the west, wherever the sun shines over the dominions of the King. Look on it," and taking the ancient White Seal from about my neck, I handed it to him.

He looked and the Councillors looked. Then they said almost with one voice,

"It is the White Seal, the very signet of the Great Kings of the East," and they bowed before the dreadful thing.

"How you came by this we do not know, Shabaka," said Peroa. "That can be inquired of afterwards. Yet in truth it seems to be the old Signet of signets, that which has come down from father to son for countless generations, that which the King of kings carries on his person and affixes to his private orders and to the greatest documents of State, which afterwards can never be recalled, that of which a copy is emblazoned on his banner."

"It is," I answered, "and from the King's person it came to me for a while. If any doubt, let the impress be brought, that is furnished to all the officers throughout the Empire, and let the seal be set in the impress."

Now one of the officers rose and went to bring the impress which was in his keeping, but Peroa continued,

"If this be the true seal, how would you use it, Shabaka, to help us in our present trouble?"

"Thus, Prince," I answered. "I would send a command under the seal to Idernes to wait upon the holder of the seal here in Memphis. He will suspect a trap and will not come until he has gathered a great army. Then he will come, but meanwhile, you, Prince, can also collect an army."

"That needs gold, Shabaka, and I have little. The King of kings takes all in tribute."

"I have some, Prince, to the weight of a heavy man, and it is at the service of Egypt."

"I thank you, Shabaka. Believe me, such generosity shall not go unrewarded," and he glanced at Amada who dropped her eyes. "But if we can collect the army, what then?"

"Then you can put Memphis into a state of defence. Then too when Idernes comes I will meet him and, as the bearer of the seal, command him under the seal to retreat and disperse his army."

"But if he does, Shabaka, it will only be until he has received fresh orders from the Great King, whereon he will advance again."

"No, Prince, *he* will not advance, or that army either. For when they are in retreat we will fall on them and destroy them, and declare you, O Prince, Pharaoh of Egypt, though what will happen afterwards I do not know."

When they heard this all gasped. Only Amada whispered,

"Well said!" and Bes clapped his big hands softly in the Ethiopian fashion.

"A bold counsel," said Peroa, "and one on which I must have the night to think. Return here, Shabaka, an hour after sunrise tomorrow, by which time I can gather all the wisest men in Memphis, and we will discuss this matter. Ah! here is the impress. Now let the seal be tried."

A box was brought and opened. In it was a slab of wood on which was an impress of the King's seal in wax, surrounded by those of other seals certifying that it was genuine. Also there was a writing describing the appearance of the seal. I handed the signet to Peroa who, having compared it with the description in the writing, fitted it to the impress on the wax.

"It is the same," he said. "See, all of you."

They looked and nodded. Then he would have given it back to me but I refused to take it, saying,

"It is not well that this mighty symbol should hang about the neck of a private man whence it might be stolen or lost."

"Or who might be murdered for its sake," interrupted Peroa.

"Yes, Prince. Therefore take it and hide it in the safest and most secret place in the palace, and with it these pearls that are too priceless to be flaunted about the streets of Memphis at night, unless indeed——" and I turned to look for Amada, but she was gone.

So the seal and the pearls were taken and locked in the box with the impress and borne away. Nor was I sorry to see the last of them, wisely as it happened. Then I bade the Prince and his company good night, and presently was driving homeward with Bes in the chariot.

Our way led us past some large houses once occupied by officers of the Court of Pharaoh, but now that there was no Court, fallen into ruins. Suddenly from out of these houses sprang a band of men disguised as common robbers, whose faces were hidden by cloths with eye-holes cut in them. They seized the horses by the bridles, and before we could do anything, leapt upon us and held us fast. Then a tall man speaking with a foreign accent, said,

"Search that officer and the dwarf. Take from them the seal upon a gold chain and a rope of rose-hued pearls which they have stolen. But do them no harm."

So they searched us, the tall man himself helping and, aided by others, holding Bes who struggled with them, and searched the chariot also, by the light of the moon, but found nothing. The tall man muttered that I must be the wrong officer, and at a sign they left us and ran away.

"That was a wise thought of mine, Bes, which caused me to leave certain ornaments in the palace," I said. "As it is they have taken nothing."

"Yes, Master," he answered, "though I have taken something from them," a saying that I did not understand at the time. "Those Easterns whom we met by the canal told Idernes about the seal, and he ordered this to be done. That tall man was one of the messengers who came to-night to the palace."

"Then why did they not kill us, Bes?"

"Because murder, especially of one who holds the seal, is an ugly business, that is easily tracked down, whereas thieves are many in Memphis and who troubles about them when they have failed? Oh! the Grasshopper, or Amen, or both, have been with us to-night."

So I thought although I said nothing, for since we had come off scatheless, what did it matter? Well, this. It showed me that the signet of the Great King was indeed to be dreaded and coveted, even here in Egypt. If Idernes could get it into his possession, what might he not do with it? Cause himself to be proclaimed Pharaoh perhaps and become the forefather of an independent dynasty. Why not, when the Empire of the East was taxed with a great war elsewhere? And if this was so why should not Peroa do the same, he who had behind him all Old Egypt, maddened with its wrongs and foreign rule?

That same night before I slept, but after Bes and I had hidden away the bags of gold by burying them beneath the clay floor, I laid the whole matter before my mother who was a very wise woman. She heard me out, answering little, then said,

"The business is very dangerous, and of its end I will not speak until I have heard the counsel of your great-uncle, the holy Tanofir. Still, things having gone so far, it seems to me that boldness may be the best course, since the great King has his Grecian wars to deal with, and whatever he may say, cannot attack Egypt yet awhile. Therefore if Peroa is able to overcome Idernes and his army he may cause himself to be proclaimed Pharaoh and make Egypt free if only for a time."

"Such is my mind, Mother."

"Not all your mind, Son, I think," she answered smiling, "for you think more of the lovely Amada than of these high policies, at any rate to-night. Well, marry your Amada if you can, though I misdoubt me somewhat of a woman who is so lost in learning and thinks so much about her soul. At least if you marry her and Egypt should become free, as it was for thousands of years, you will be the next heir to the throne as husband of the Great Royal Lady."

"How can that be, Mother, seeing that Peroa has a son?"

"A vain youth with no more in him than a child's rattle. If once Amada ceases to think about her soul she will begin to think about her throne, especially if she has children. But all this is far away and for the present I am glad that neither she nor the thieves have got those pearls, though perhaps they might be safer here than where they are. And now, my son, go rest for you need it, and dream of nothing, not even Amada, who for her part will dream of Isis, if at all. I will wake you before the dawn."

So I went, being too tired to talk more, and slept like a crocodile in the sun, till, as it seemed to me, but a few minutes later I saw my mother standing over me with a lamp, saying that it was time to rise. I rose, unwillingly enough, but refreshed, washed and dressed myself, by which time the sun had begun to appear. Then I ate some food and, calling Bes, made ready to start for the palace.

"My son," said my mother, the lady Tiu, before we parted, "while you have been sleeping I have been thinking, as is the way of the old. Peroa, your cousin, will be glad enough to make use of you, but he does not love you over much because he is jealous of you and fears lest you should become his rival in the future. Still he is an honest man and will keep a bargain which he once has made. Now it seems that above everything on earth you desire Amada on whom you have set your heart since boyhood, but who has always played with you and spoken to you with her arm stretched out. Also life is short and may come to an end any day, as you should know better

than most men who have lived among dangers, and therefore it is well that a man should take what he desires, even if he finds afterwards that the rose he crushes to his breast has thorns. For then at least he will have smelt the rose, not only have looked on and longed to smell it. Therefore, before you hand over your gold, and place your wit and strength at the service of Peroa, make your bargain with him; namely, that if thereby you save Amada from the King's House of Women and help to set Peroa on the throne, he shall promise her to you free of any priestly curse, you giving her as dowry the priceless rose-hued pearls that are worth a kingdom. So you will get your rose till it withers, and if the thorns prick, do not blame me, and one day you may become a king—or a slave, Amen knows which."

Now I laughed and said that I would take her counsel who desired Amada and nothing else. As for all her talk about thorns, I paid no heed to it, knowing that she loved me very much and was jealous of Amada who she thought would take her place with me.

## CHAPTER X.

### SHABAKA PLIGHTS HIS TROTH

Bes and I went armed to the palace, walking in the middle of the road, but now that the sun was up we met no more robbers. At the gate a messenger summoned me alone to the presence of Peroa, who, he said, wished to talk with me before the sitting of the Council. I went and found him by himself.

"I hear that you were attacked last night," he said after greeting me.

I answered that I was and told him the story, adding that it was fortunate I had left the White Seal and the pearls in safe keeping, since without doubt the would-be thieves were Easterns who desired to recover them.

"Ah! the pearls," he said. "One of those who handled them, who was once a dealer in gems, says that they are without price, unmatched in the whole world, and that never in all his life has he seen any to equal the smallest of them."

I replied that I believed this was so. Then he asked me of the value of the gold of which I had spoken. I told him and it was a great sum, for gold was scarce in Egypt. His eyes gleamed for he needed wealth to pay soldiers.

"And all this you are ready to hand over to me, Shabaka?"

Now I bethought me of my mother's words, and answered,

"Yes, Prince, at a price."

"What price, Shabaka?"

"The price of the hand of the Royal Lady, Amada, freed from her vows. Moreover, I will give her the pearls as a marriage dowry and place at your service my sword and all the knowledge I have gained in the East, swearing to stand or fall with you."

"I thought it, Shabaka. Well, in this world nothing is given for nothing and the offer is a fair one. You are well born, too, as well as myself, and a brave and clever man. Further, Amada has not taken her final vows and therefore the high priests can absolve her from her marriage to the goddess, or to her son Horus, whichever it may be, for I do not understand these mysteries. But, Shabaka, if Fortune should chance to go with us and I should become the first Pharaoh of a new dynasty in Egypt, he who was married to the Royal Princess of the true blood might become a danger to my throne and family."

"I shall not be that man, Prince, who am content with my own station, and to be your servant."

"And my son's, Shabaka? You know that I have but one lawful son."

"And your son's, Prince."

"You are honest, Shabaka, and I believe you. But how about your sons, if you have any, and how about Amada herself? Well, in great businesses something must be risked, and I need the gold and the rest which I cannot take for nothing, for you won them by your skill and courage and they are yours. But how you won the seal you have not told us, nor is there time for you to do so now."

He thought a little, walking up and down the chamber, then went on,

"I accept your offer, Shabaka, so far as I can."

"So far as you can, Prince?"

"Yes; I can give you Amada in marriage and make that marriage easy, but only if Amada herself consents. The will of a Royal Princess of Egypt of full age cannot be forced, save by her father if he reigns as Pharaoh, and I am not her father, but only her guardian. Therefore it stands thus. Are you willing to fulfil your part of the bargain, save only as regards the pearls, if she does not marry you, and to take your chance of winning Amada as a man wins a woman, I on my part promising to do all in my power to help your suit?"

Now it was my turn to think for a moment. What did I risk? The gold and perhaps the pearls, no more, for in any case I should fight for Peroa against the Eastern king whom I hated, and through him for Egypt. Well, these came to me by chance, and if they went by chance what of it? Also I was not one who desired to wed a woman, however much I worshipped her, if she desired to turn her back on me. If I could win her in fair love—well. If not, it was my misfortune, and I wanted her in no other way. Lastly, I had reason to think that she looked on me more favourably than she had ever done on any other man, and that if it had not been for what my mother called her soul and its longings, she would have given herself to me before I journeyed to the East. Indeed, once she had said as much, and there was something in her eyes last night which told me that in her heart she loved me, though with what passion at the time I did not know. So very swiftly I made up my mind and answered,

"I understand and I accept. The gold shall be delivered to you to-day, Prince. The pearls are already in your keeping to await the end."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Then let the matter be reduced to writing and at once, that afterwards neither of us may have cause to complain of the other."

So he sent for his secret scribe and dictated to him, briefly but clearly, the substance of our bargain, nothing being added, and nothing taken away. This roll written on papyrus was afterwards copied twice, Peroa taking one copy, I another, and a third being deposited according to custom, in the library of the temple of Ptah.

When all was done and Peroa and I had touched each other's breasts and given our word in the name of Amen, we went to the hall in which we had dined, where those whom the Prince had summoned were assembled. Altogether there were about thirty of them,

great citizens of Memphis, or landowners from without who had been called together in the night. Some of these men were very old and could remember when Egypt had a Pharaoh of its own before the East set its heel upon her neck, of noble blood also.

Others were merchants who dealt with all the cities of Egypt; others hereditary generals, or captains of fleets of ships; others Grecians, officers of mercenaries who were supposed to be in the pay of the King of kings, but hated him, as did all the Greeks. Then there were the high priests of Ptah, of Amen, of Osiris and others who were still the most powerful men in the land, since there was no village between Thebes and the mouths of the Nile in which they had not those who were sworn to the service of their gods.

Such was the company representing all that remained or could be gathered there of the greatness of Egypt the ancient and the fallen.

To these when the doors had been closed and barred and trusty watchmen set to guard them, Peroa expounded the case in a low and earnest voice. He showed them that the King of the East sought a new quarrel against Egypt that he might grind her to powder beneath his heel, and that he did this by demanding the person of Amada, his own niece and the Royal Lady of Egypt, to be included in his household like any common woman. If she were refused then he would send a great army under pretext of taking her, and lay the land waste as far as Thebes. And if she were granted some new quarrel would be picked and in the person of the royal Amada all of them be for ever shamed.

Next he showed the seal, telling them that I—who was known to many of them, at least by repute—had brought it from the East, and repeating to them the plan that I had proposed upon the previous night. After this he asked their counsel, saying that before noon he must send an answer to Idernes, the King's Satrap at Sais.

Then I was called upon to speak and, in answer to questions, answered frankly that I had stolen the ancient White Seal from the King's servant who carried it as a warrant for the King's private vengeance on one who had bested him. How I did not mention. I told them also of the state of the Great King's empire and that I had heard that he was about to enter upon a war with the Greeks which would need all its strength, and that therefore if they wished to strike for liberty the time was at hand.

Then the talk began and lasted for two hours, each man giving his judgment according to precedence, some one way and some another. When all had done and it became clear that there were differences of opinion, some being content to live on in slavery with what remained to them and others desiring to strike for freedom, among whom were the high priests who feared lest the Eastern heretics should utterly destroy their worship, Peroa spoke once more.

"Elders of Egypt," he said briefly, "certain of you think one way, and certain another, but of this be sure, such talk as we have held together cannot be hid. It will come to the ears of spies and through them to those of the Great King, and then all of us alike are doomed. If you refuse to stir, this very day I with my family and household and the Royal Lady Amada, and all who cling to me, fly to Upper Egypt and perhaps beyond it to Ethiopia, leaving you to deal with the Great King, as you will, or to follow me into exile. That he will attack us there is no doubt, either over the pretext of Amada or some other, since Shabaka has heard as much from his own lips. Now choose."

Then, after a little whispering together, every man of them voted for rebellion, though some of them I could see with heavy hearts, and bound themselves by a great oath to cling together to the last.

The matter being thus settled such a letter was written to Idernes as I had suggested on the night before, and sealed with the Signet of signets. Of the yielding up of Amada it said nothing, but commanded Idernes, under the private White Seal that none dared disobey, to wait upon the Prince Peroa at Memphis forthwith, and there learn from him, the Holder of the Seal, what was the will of the Great King. Then the Council was adjourned till one hour after noon, and most of them departed to send messengers bearing secret word to the various cities and nomes of Egypt.

Before they went, however, I was directed to wait upon my relative, the holy Tanofir, whom all acknowledged to be the greatest magician in Egypt, and to ask of him to seek wisdom and an oracle from his Spirit as to the future and whether in it we should fare well or ill. This I promised to do.

When most of the Council were gone the messengers of Idernes were summoned, and came proudly, and with them, or rather before them, Bes for whom I had sent as he was not present at the Council.

"Master," he whispered to me, "the tallest of those messengers is the man who captained the robbers last night. Wait and I will prove it."

Peroa gave the roll to the head messenger, bidding him bear it to the Satrap in answer to the letter which he had delivered to him. The man took it insolently and thrust it into his robe, as he did so revealing a silver chain that had been broken and knotted together, and asked whether there were words to bear besides those written in the roll. Before Peroa could answer Bes sprang up saying,

"O Prince, a boon, the boon of justice on this man. Last night he and others with him attacked my master and myself, seeking to rob us, but finding nothing let us go."

"You lie, Abortion!" said the Eastern.

"Oh! I lie, do I?" mocked Bes. "Well, let us see," and shooting out his long arm, he grasped the chain about the messenger's neck and broke it with a jerk. "Look, O Prince," he said, "you may have noted last night, when that man entered the hall, that there hung about his neck this chain to which was tied a silver key."

"I noted it," said Peroa.

"Then ask him, O Prince, where is the key now."

"What is that to you, Dwarf?" broke in the man. "The key is my mark of office as chief butler to the High Satrap. Must I always bear it for your pleasure?"

"Not when it has been taken from you, Butler," answered Bes. "See, here it is," and from his sleeve he produced the key hanging to a piece of the chain. "Listen, O Prince," he said. "I struggled with this man and the key was in my left hand though he did not know it at the time, and with it some of the chain. Compare them and judge. Also his mask slipped and I saw his face and knew him again."

Peroa laid the pieces of the chain together and observed the workmanship which was Eastern and rare. Then he clapped his hands, at which sign armed men of his household entered from behind him.

"It is the same," he said. "Butler of Idernes, you are a common thief."

The man strove to answer, but could not for the deed was proved against him.

"Then, O Prince," asked Bes, "what is the punishment of those thieves who attack passers-by with violence in the streets of Memphis, for such I demand on him?"

"The cutting off of the right hand and scourging," answered Peroa, at which words the butler turned to fly. But Bes leapt on him like an ape upon a bird, and held him fast.

"Seize that thief," said Peroa to his servants, "and let him receive fifty blows with the rods. His hand I spare because he must travel."

They laid the man down and the rods having been fetched, gave him the blows until at the thirtieth he howled for mercy, crying out that it was true and that it was he who had captained the robbers, words which Peroa caused to be written down. Then he asked him why he, a messenger from the Satrap, had robbed in the streets of Memphis, and as he refused to answer, commanded the officer of justice to lay on. After three more blows the man said,

"O Prince, this was no common robbery for gain. I did what I was commanded to do, because yonder noble had about him the ancient White Seal of the Great King which he showed to certain of the Satrap's servants by the banks of the canal. That seal is a holy token, O Prince, which, it is said, has descended for twice a thousand years in the family of the Great King, and as the Satrap did not know how it had come into the hands of the noble Shabaka, he ordered me to obtain it if I could."

"And the pearls too, Butler?"

"Yes, O Prince, since those gems are a great possession with which any Satrap could buy a larger satrapy."

"Let him go," said Peroa, and the man rose, rubbing himself and weeping in his pain.

"Now, Butler," he went on, "return to your master with a grateful heart, since you have been spared much that you deserve. Say to him that he cannot steal the Signet, but that if he is wise he will obey it, since otherwise his fate may be worse than yours, and to all his servants say the same. Foolish man, how can you, or your master, guess what is in the mind of the Great King, or for what purpose the Signet of signets is here in Egypt? Beware lest you fall into a pit, all of you together, and let Idernes beware lest he find himself at the very bottom of that pit."

"O Prince, I will beware," said the humbled butler, "and whatever is written over the seal, that I will obey, like many others."

"You are wise," answered Peroa; "I pray for his own sake that the Satrap Idernes may be as wise. Now begone, thanking whatever god you worship that your life is whole in you and that your right hand remains upon your wrist."

So the butler and those with him prostrated themselves before Peroa and bowed humbly to me and even to Bes because in their hearts now they believed that we were clothed by the Great King with terrible powers that might destroy them all, if so we chose. Then they went, the butler limping a little and with no pride left in him.

"That was good work," said Peroa to me afterwards when we were alone, "for now yonder knave is frightened and will frighten his master."

"Yes," I answered, "you played that pipe well, Prince. Still, there is no time to lose, since before another moon this will all be reported in the East, whence a new light may arise and perchance a new signet."

"You say you stole the White Seal?" he asked.

"Nay, Prince, the truth is that Bes bought it—in a certain fashion—and I used it. Perhaps it is well that you should know no more at present."

"Perhaps," he answered, and we parted, for he had much to do.

That afternoon the Council met again. At it I gave over the gold and by help of it all was arranged. Within a week ten thousand armed men would be in Memphis and a hundred ships with their crews upon the Nile; also a great army would be gathering in Upper Egypt, officered for the most part by Greeks skilled in war. The Greek cities too at the mouths of the Nile would be ready to revolt, or so some of their citizens declared, for they hated the Great King bitterly and longed to cast off his yoke.

For my part, I received the command of the bodyguard of Peroa in which were many Greeks, and a generalship in the army; while to Bes, at my prayer, was given the freedom of the land which he accepted with a smile, he who was a king in his own country.

At length all was finished and I went out into the palace garden to rest myself before I rode into the desert to see my great uncle, the holy Tanofir. I was alone, for Bes had gone to bring our horses on which we were to ride, and sat myself down beneath a palm-tree, thinking of the great adventure on which we had entered with a merry heart, for I loved adventures.

Next I thought of Amada and was less merry. Then I looked up and lo! she stood before me, unaccompanied and wearing the dress, not of a priestess, but of an Egyptian lady with the little circlet of her rank upon her hair. I rose and bowed to her and we began to walk together beneath the palms, my heart beating hard within me, for I knew that my hour had come to speak.

Yet it was she who spoke the first, saying,

"I hear that you have been playing a high part, Shabaka, and doing great things for Egypt."

"For Egypt and for you who are Egypt," I answered.

"So I should have been called in the old days, Cousin, because of my blood and the rank it gives, though now I am but as any other lady of the land."

"And so you shall be called in days to come, Amada, if my sword and wit can win their way."

"How so, Cousin, seeing that you have promised certain things to my uncle Peroa and his son?"

"I have promised those things, Amada, and I will abide by my promise; but the gods are above all, and who knows what they may decree?"

"Yes, Cousin, the gods are above all, and in their hands we will let these matters rest, provoking them in no manner and least of all by treachery to our oaths."

We walked for a little way in silence. Then I spoke.

"Amada, there are more things than thrones in the world."

"Yes, Cousin, there is that in which all thrones end—death, which it seems we court."

"And, Amada, there is that in which all thrones begin—love, which I court from you."

"I have known it long," she said, considering me gravely, "and been grateful to you who are more to me than any man has been or ever will be. But, Shabaka, I am a priestess bound to set the holy One I serve above a mortal."

"That holy One was wed and bore a child, Amada, who avenged his father, as I trust that we shall avenge Egypt. Therefore she looks with a kind eye upon wives and mothers. Also you have not taken your final vows and can be absolved."

"Yes," she said softly.

"Then, Amada, will you give yourself into my keeping?"

"I think so, Shabaka, though it has been in my mind for long, as you know well, to give myself only to learning and the service of the heavenly Lady. My heart calls me to you, it is true, day and night it calls, how loudly I will not tell; yet I would not yield myself to that alone. But Egypt calls me also, since I have been shown in a dream while I watched in the sanctuary, that you are the only man who can free her, and I think that this dream came from on high. Therefore I will give myself, but not yet."

"Not yet," I said dismayed. "When?"

"When I have been absolved from my vows, which must be done on the night of the next new moon, which is twenty-seven days from this. Then, if nothing comes between us during those twenty-seven days, it shall be announced that the Royal Lady of Egypt is to wed the noble Shabaka."

"Twenty-seven days! In such times much may happen in them, Amada. Still, except death, what can come between us?"

"I know of nothing, Shabaka, whose past is shadowless as the noon."

"Or I either," I replied.

Now we were standing in the clear sunlight, but as I said the words a wind stirred the palm-trees and the shadow from one of them fell full upon me, and she who was very quick, noted it.

"Some might take that for an omen," she said with a little laugh, pointing to the line of the shadow. "Oh! Shabaka, if you have aught to confess, say it now and I will forgive it. But do not leave me to discover it afterwards when I may not forgive. Perchance during your journeyings in the East——"

"Nothing, nothing," I exclaimed joyfully, who during all that time had scarcely spoken to a youthful woman.

"I am glad that nothing happened in the East that could separate us, Shabaka, though in truth my thought was not your own, for there are more things than women in the world. Only it seems strange to me that you should return to Egypt laden with such priceless gifts from him who is Egypt's greatest enemy."

"Have I not told you that I put my country before myself? Those gifts were won fairly in a wager, Amada, whereof you heard the story but last night. Moreover you know the purpose to which they are to be put," I replied indignantly.

"Yes, I know and now I am sure. Be not angry, Shabaka, with her who loves you truly and hopes ere long to call you husband. But till that day take it not amiss if I keep somewhat aloof from you, who must break with the past and learn to face a future of which I did not dream."

For the rest she stretched out her hand and I kissed it, for while she was still a priestess her lips she would not suffer me to touch. Another moment and smiling happily, she had glided away, leaving me alone in the garden.

Then it was for the first time that I bethought me of the warnings of Bes and remembered that it was I, not he, who had told the Great King the name of the most beautiful woman in Egypt, although in all innocence. Yes, I remembered, and felt as if all the shadows on the earth had wrapped me round. I thought of finding her, but she had gone whither I knew not in that great palace. So I determined that the next time we were alone I would tell her of the matter, explaining all, and with this thought I comforted myself who did not know that until many days were past we should be alone no more.

After this I went home and told my mother all my joy, for in truth there was no happier man in Egypt. She listened, then answered, smiling a little.

"When your father wished to take me to wife, Shabaka, it was not my hand that I gave him to kiss, and as you know, I too have the blood of kings in me. But then I was not a priestess of Isis, so doubtless all is well. Only in twenty-seven days much may happen, as you said to Amada. Now I wonder why did she——? Well, no matter, since priestesses are not like other women who only think of the man they have won and of naught before or after. The blessing of the gods and mine be on you both, my son," and she went away to attend to her household matters.

As we rode to Sekera to find the holy Tanofir I told Bes also, adding that I had forgotten to reveal that it was I who had spoken Amada's name to the king, but that I intended to do so ere long.

Bes rolled his eyes and answered,

"If I were you, Master, as I had forgotten, I should continue to forget, for what is welcome in one hour is not always welcome in another. Why speak of the matter at all, which is one hard to explain to a woman, however wise and royal? I have already said that I spoke the name to the King and that you were brought from the boat to say whether I was noted for my truthfulness. Is not that enough?"

While I considered, Bes went on,

"You may remember, Master, that when I told, well—the truth about this story, the lady Amada asked earnestly that I should be scourged, even to the bones. Now if you should tell another truth which will make mine dull as tarnished silver, she will not leave me even my bones, for I shall be proved a liar, and what will happen to you I am sure I do not know. And, Master, as I am no longer a slave here in Egypt, to say nothing of what I may be elsewhere, I have no fancy for scourgings, who may not kiss the hand that smites me as you can."

"But, Bes," I said, "what is, is and may always be learned in this way or in that."

"Master, if what is were always learned, I think the world would fall to pieces, or at least there would be no men left on it. Why should this matter be learned? It is known to you and me alone, leaving out the Great King who probably has forgotten as he was drunk at the time. Oh! Master, when you have neither bow nor spear at hand, it is not wise to kick a sleeping lion in the stomach, for then he will remember its emptiness and sup off you. Beside, when first I told you that tale I made a mistake. I did tell the Great King, as I now remember quite clearly, that the beautiful lady was named Amada, and he only sent for you to ask if I spoke the truth."

"Bes," I exclaimed, "you worshippers of the Grasshopper wear virtue easily."

"Easily as an old sandal, Master or rather not at all since the Grasshopper has need of none. For ages they've studied the ways of those who worship the gods of Egypt, and from them have learned——"

"What?"

"Amongst other things, Master, that woman, being modest, is shocked at the sight of the naked Truth."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE HOLY TANOFIR

We entered the City of Graves that is called Sekera. In the centre towered pyramids that hid the bones of ancient and forgotten kings, and everywhere around upon the desert sands was street upon street of monuments, but save for a priest or two hurrying to patter his paid office in the funeral chapels of the departed, never a living man. Bes looked about him and sniffed with his wide nostrils.

"Is there not death enough in the world, Master," he asked, "that the living should wish to proclaim it in this fashion, rolling it on their tongues like a morsel they are loth to swallow, because it tastes so good? Oh! what a waste is here. All these have had their day and yet they need houses and pyramids and painted chambers in which to sleep, whereas if they believed the faith they practised, they would have been content to give their bones to feed the earth they fed on, and fill heaven with their souls."

"Do your people thus, Bes?"

"For the most part, Master. Our dead kings and great ones we enclose in pillars of crystal, but we do this that they may serve a double purpose. One is that the pillars may support the roof of their successors, and the other, that those who inherit their goods may please themselves by reflecting how much handsomer they are than those who went before them. For no mummy looks really nice, Master, at least with its wrappings off, and our kings are put naked into the crystal."

"And what becomes of the rest, Bes?"

"Their bodies go to the earth or the water and the Grasshopper carries off their souls to—where, Master?"

"I do not know, Bes."

"No, Master, no one knows, except the lady Amada and perhaps the holy Tanofir. Here I think is the entrance to his hole," and he pulled up his beast with a jerk at what looked like the doorway of a tomb.

Apparently we were expected, for a tall and proud-looking girl clad in white and with extraordinarily dark eyes, appeared in the doorway and asked in a soft voice if we were the noble Shabaka and Bes, his slave.

"I am Shabaka," I answered, "and this is Bes, who is not my slave but a free citizen of Egypt."

The girl contemplated the dwarf with her big eyes, then said,

"And other things, I think."

"What things?" inquired Bes with interest, as he stared at this beautiful lady.

"A very brave and clever man and one perhaps who is more than he seems to be."

"Who has been telling you about me?" exclaimed Bes anxiously.

"No one, O Bes, at least not that I can remember."

"Not that you can remember! Then who and what are you who learn things you know not how?"

"I am named Karema and desert-bred, and my office is that of Cup to the holy Tanofir."

"If hermits drink from such a cup I shall turn hermit," said Bes, laughing. "But how can a woman be a man's cup and what kind of a wine does he drink from her?"

"The wine of wisdom, O Bes," she replied colouring a little, for like many Arabs of high blood she was very fair in hue.

"Wine of wisdom," said Bes. "From such cups most drink the wine of folly, or sometimes of madness."

"The holy Tanofir awaits you," she interrupted, and turning, entered the doorway.

A little way down the passage was a niche in which stood three lamps ready lighted. One of these she took and gave the others to us. Then we followed her down a steep incline of many steps, till at length we found ourselves in a hot and enormous hall hewn from the living rock and filled with blackness.

"What is this place?" said Bes, who looked frightened, and although he spoke in a low whisper, our guide overheard him and turning, answered,

"This is the burial place of the Apis bulls. See, here lies the last, not yet closed in," and holding up her lamp she revealed a mighty sarcophagus of black granite set in a niche of the mausoleum.

"So they make mummies of bulls as well as of men," groaned Bes. "Oh! what a land. But when I have seen the holy Tanofir it was in a brick cell beneath the sky."

"Doubtless that was at night, O Bes," answered Karema, "for in such a house he sleeps, spending his days in the Apis tomb, because of all the evil that is worked beneath the sun."

"Hump," said Bes, "I should have thought that more was worked beneath the moon, but doubtless the holy Tanofir knows better, or being asleep does not mind."

Now in front of each of the walled-up niches was a little chapel, and at the fourth of these whence a light came, the maiden stopped, saying,

"Enter. Here dwells the holy Tanofir. He tended this god during its life-days in his youth, and now that the god is dead he prays above its bones."

"Prays to the bones of a dead bull in the dark! Well, give me a live grasshopper in the light; he is more cheerful," muttered Bes.

"O Dwarf," cried a deep and resounding voice from within the chapel, "talk no more of things you do not understand. I do not pray to the bones of a dead bull, as you in your ignorance suppose. I pray to the spirit whereof this sacred beast was but one of the fleshly symbols, which in this haunted place you will do well not to offend."

Then for once I saw Bes grow afraid, for his great jaw dropped and he trembled.

"Master," he said to me, "when next you visit tombs where maidens look into your heart and hermits hear your very thoughts, I pray you leave me behind. The holy Tanofir I love, if from afar, but I like not his house, or his——" Here he looked at Karema who was regarding him with a sweet smile over the lamp flame, and added, "There is something the matter with me, Master; I cannot even lie."

"Cease from talking follies, O Shabaka and Bes, and enter," said the tremendous voice from within.

So we entered and saw a strange sight. Against the back wall of the chapel which was lit with lamps, stood a life-sized statue of Maat, goddess of Law and Truth, fashioned of alabaster. On her head was a tall feather, her hair was covered with a wig, on her neck lay a collar of blue stones; on her arms and wrists were bracelets of gold. A tight robe draped her body. In her right hand that hung down by her side, she held the looped Cross of Life, and in her left which was advanced, a long, lotus-headed sceptre, while her painted eyes stared fixedly at the darkness. Crouched upon the ground, at the feet of the statue, scribe fashion, sat my great-uncle Tanofir, a very aged man with sightless eyes and long hands, so thin that one might see through them against the lamp-flame. His head was shaven, his beard was long and white; white too was his robe. In front of him was a low altar, on which stood a shallow silver vessel filled with pure water, and on either side of it a burning lamp.

We knelt down before him, or rather I knelt, for Bes threw himself flat upon his face.

"Am I the King of kings whom you have so lately visited, that you should prostrate yourselves before me?" said Tanofir in his great voice, which, coming from so frail and aged a man seemed most unnatural. "Or is it to the goddess of Truth beyond that you bow yourselves? If so, that is well, since one, if not both of you, greatly needs her pardon and her help. Or is it to the sleeping god beyond who holds the whole world on his horns? Or is it to the darkness of this hallowed place which causes you to remember the nearness of the awaiting tomb?"

"Nay, my Uncle," I said, "we would greet you, no more, who are so worthy of our veneration, seeing we believe, both of us, that you saved us yonder in the East, from that tomb of which you speak, or rather from the jaws of lions or a cruel death by torments."

"Perchance I did, I or the gods of which I am the instrument. At least I remember that I sent you certain messages in answer to a prayer for help that reached me, here in my darkness. For know that since we parted I have gone quite blind so that I must use this maiden's eyes to read what is written in yonder divining-cup. Well, it makes the darkness of this sepulchre easier to bear and prepares me for my own. 'Tis full a hundred and twenty years since first I looked upon the light, and now the time of sleep draws near. Come hither, my nephew, and kiss me on the brow, remembering in your strength that a day will dawn when as I am, so shall you be, if the gods spare you so long."

So I kissed him, not without fear, for the old man was unearthly. Then he sent Karema from the place and bade me tell him my story, which I did. Why he did this I cannot say, since he seemed to know it already and once or twice corrected me in certain matters that I had forgotten, for instance as to the exact words that I had used to the Great King in my rage and as to the fashion in which I was tied in the boat. When I had done, he said,

"So you gave the name of Amada to the Great King, did you? Well, you could have done nothing else if you wished to go on living, and therefore cannot be blamed. Yet before all is finished I think it will bring you into trouble, Shabaka, since among many gifts, the gods did not give that of reason to women. If so, bear it, since it is better to have trouble and be alive than to have none and be dead, that is, for those whose work is still to do in the world. And you, or rather Bes, stole the White Signet of signets of which, although it is so simple and ancient, there is not the like for power in the whole world. That was well done since it will be useful for a while. And now Peroa has determined to rebel against the King, which also is well done. Oh! trouble not to tell me of that business for I know all. But what would you learn of me, Shabaka?"

"I am instructed to learn from you the end of these great matters, my Uncle."

"Are you mad, Shabaka, that you should think me a god who can read the future?"

"Not at all, my Uncle, who know that you can if you will."

"Call the maiden," he said.

So Bes went out and brought her in.

"Be seated, Karema, there in front of the altar, and look into my eyes."

She obeyed and presently seemed to go to sleep for her head nodded. Then he said,

"Wake, woman, look into the water in the bowl upon the altar and tell me what you see."

She appeared to wake, though I perceived that this was not really so, for she seemed a different woman with a fixed face that frightened me, and wide and frozen eyes. She stared into the silver bowl, then spoke in a new voice, as though some spirit used her tongue.

"I see myself crowned a queen in a land I hate," she said coldly, a saying at which I gasped. "I am seated on a throne beside yonder dwarf," a saying at which Bes gasped. "Although so hideous, this dwarf is a great man with a good heart, a cunning mind and the courage of a lion. Also his blood is royal."

Here Bes rolled his eyes and smiled, but Tanofir did not seem in the least astonished, and said,

"Much of this is known to me and the rest can be guessed. Pass on to what will happen in Egypt, before the spirit leaves you."

"There will be war in Egypt," she answered. "I see fightings; Shabaka and others lead the Egyptians. The Easterns are driven away or slain. Peroa rules as Pharaoh. I see him on his throne. Shabaka is driven away in his turn, I see him travelling south with the dwarf and with myself, looking very sad. Time passes. I see the moons float by; I see messengers reach Shabaka, sent by Peroa and you O holy Tanofir; they tell of trouble in Egypt. I see Shabaka and the dwarf coming north at the head of a great army of black men armed with bows. With them I come rejoicing, for my heart seems to shine. He reaches a temple on the Nile about which is camped another great army, a countless army of Easterns under the command of the King of kings. Shabaka and the dwarf give battle to that army and the fray is desperate. They destroy it, they drive it into the Nile; the Nile runs red with blood. The Great King falls, an arrow from

the bow of Shabaka is in his heart. He enters the temple, a conqueror, and there lies Peroa, dying or dead. A veiled priestess is there before an image, I cannot see her face. Shabaka looks on her. She stretches out her arms to him, her eyes burn with woman's love, her breast heaves, and above the image frowns and threatens. All is done, for Tanofir, Master of spirits, you die, yonder in the temple on the Nile, and therefore I can see no more. The power that comes through you, has left me."

Then once more she became as a woman asleep.

"You have heard, Shabaka and Bes," said Tanofir quietly and stroking his long white beard, "and what that maiden seemed to read in the water you may believe or disbelieve as you will."

"What do you believe, O holy Tanofir?" I asked.

"The only part of the story whereof I am sure," he replied, evading a direct answer, "is that which said that I shall die, and that when I am dead I shall no longer be able to cause the maiden Karema to see visions. For the rest I do not know. These things may happen or they may not. But," he added with a note of warning in his voice, "whether they happen or not, my counsel to you both is that you say nothing of them beforehand."

"What then shall we report to those who bid me seek the oracle of your wisdom, O Tanofir?"

"You can tell them that my wisdom declared that the omens were mixed with good and evil, but that time would show the truth. Hush now, the maiden is about to awake and must not be frightened. Also it is time for me to be led from this sepulchre to where I sleep, for I think that Ra has set and I am weary. Oh! Shabaka, why do you seek to peer into the future, which from day to day will unroll itself as does a scroll? Be content with the present, man, and take what Fate gives you of good or ill, not seeking to learn what offerings he hides beneath his robe in the days and the years and the centuries to come."

"Yet you have sought to learn those things, O Tanofir, and not in vain."

"Aye and what have they made of me? A blind old hermit weighed down with the weight of years and holding in my fingers but some few threads that with pain and grief I have plucked from the fringe of Wisdom's robe. Be warned by me, Nephew. While you are a man, live the life of a man, and when you become a spirit, live the life of a spirit. But do not seek to mix the two together like oil and wine, and thus spoil both. I am glad to learn, O Bes, that you are going to make a king's, or a slave's wife, whichever it may be, of this maiden, seeing that I love her well and hold this trade unwholesome for her. She will be better bearing babes than reading visions in a diviner's cup, and I will pray the gods that they may not be dwarfs as you are, but take on the likeness of their mother, who tells me that she is fair. Hush! she stirs."

"Karema, are you awake? Good. Then lead me from the sepulchre, that I may make my evening prayer beneath the stars. Go, Shabaka and Bes, you are brave men, both of you, and I am glad to have the one for nephew and the other for pupil. My greetings to your mother, Tiu. She is a good woman and a true, one to whom you will do well to hearken. To the lady Amada also, and bid her study her beauteous face in a mirror and not be holy overmuch, since too great holiness often thwarts itself and ends in trouble for the unholy flesh. Still she loves pearls like other women, does she not, and even the statue of Isis likes to be adorned. As for you, Bes, though I think that is not your name, do not lie except when you are obliged, for jugglers who play with too many knives are apt to cut their fingers. Also give no more evil counsel to your Master on matters that have to do with woman. Now farewell. Let me hear how fortune favours you from time to time, Shabaka, for you take part in a great game, such as I loved in my youth before I became a holy hermit. Oh! if they had listened to me, things would have been different in Egypt to-day. But it was written otherwise, and as ever, women were the scribes. Good night, good night, good night! I am glad that my thought reached you yonder in the East, and taught you what to say and do. It is well to be wise sometimes, for others' sake, but not for our own, oh! not for our own."

"Master," said Bes as we ambled homewards beneath the stars, "the holy Tanofir is a man for thought to feed on, since having climbed to the topmost peak of holiness, he does not seem to like its cold air and warns off those who would follow in his footsteps."

"Then he might have spared himself the pains in your case, Bes, or in my own for that matter, since we shall never come so high."

"No, Master, and I am glad to have his leave to stay lower down, since that hot place of dead bulls is not one which I wish to inhabit in my age, making use of a maiden to stare into a pot of water, and there read marvels, which I could invent better for myself after a jug or two of wine. Oh! the holy Tanofir is quite right. If these things are going to happen let them happen, for we cannot change them by knowing of them beforehand. Who wishes to know, Master, if his throat will be cut?"

"Or that he will be married," I suggested.

"Just so, Master, seeing that such prophecies end in becoming truths because we make them true, feeling that we must. Thus, now I must marry yonder Karema if she will marry me for fear lest I should prove the holy Tanofir to be what he called me—a liar."

I laughed and then asked Bes if he had taken note of what the seeress said of our flight south and our return thence with a great army of black men armed with bows.

"Yes, Master," he answered gravely, "and I think this army can be none other than that of the Ethiopians of whom by right I am the King. This very night I send messengers to tell those who rule in my place that I still live and am changing my mind on the matter of marriage. Also that if I do change it I may return to them, the wisest man who ever wore the crown of Ethiopia, having journeyed all about the world and collected much knowledge."

"Perhaps, Bes, those who rule in your place may not wish to give it up to you. Perhaps they will kill you."

"Have no fear, Master; as I have told you, the Ethiopians are a faithful people. Moreover they know that such a deed would bring the curse of the Grasshopper on them, since then the locusts would appear and eat up all their land, and when they were starving their enemies would attack them. Lastly they are a very tall folk and simple-minded and would not wish to miss the chance of being ruled over by the wisest dwarf in all the world, if only because it would be something new to them, Master."

Again I laughed thinking that Bes was jesting according to his fashion. But when that night, chancing to go round the corner of the house, I came upon him with a circlet of feathers round his head and his big bow in his hand, addressing three great black men who knelt before him as though he were a god, I changed my mind. As I withdrew he caught sight of me and said,

"I pray you, my lord Shabaka, stay one moment." Then he spoke to the three men in his own language, translating sentence by sentence to me what he said to them. Briefly it was this:—

"Say to the Lords and Councillors of the Ancient Kingdom that I, the Karoon" (for such it seemed was his title) "have a friend named the lord Shabaka, he whom you see before you, who again and again has saved my life, nursing me in his arms as a mother

nurses her babe, and who is, after me, the bravest and the wisest man in all the world. Say to them that if indeed I double myself by marriage and return having fulfilled the law, I will beg this mighty prince to accompany me, and that if he consents that will be the most joyful day which the Ethiopians have seen for a thousand years, since he will teach them wisdom and lead their armies in great and glorious battles. Let the priests of the Grasshopper pray therefore that he may consent to do so. Now salute the mighty lord Shabaka who can send one arrow through all three of you and two more behind, and depart, tarrying not day or night till you reach the land of Ethiopia. Then when you have delivered the message of Karoon to the Captains and the Councillors, return, or let others return and seek me out wherever I may be, bringing of the gold of Ethiopia and other gifts, together with their answer, seeing that I and the lord Shabaka who have the world beneath our feet, will not come to a land where we are not welcome."

So these great men saluted me as though I were the King of kings himself, after which they rubbed their foreheads in the dust before Bes, said something which I did not understand, leapt to their feet, crying "Karoon" and sprang away into the night.

"It is good to have been a slave, Master," said Bes when they had gone, "since it teaches one that it is even better to be a king, at least sometimes."

Here I may add that during the days which followed Bes was often absent. When I asked him where he had gone, he would answer, to drink in the wisdom of the holy Tanofir by help of a certain silver vessel that the maiden Karema held to his lips. From all of which I gathered that he was wooing the lady who had called herself the Cup of Tanofir, and wondered how the business went, though as he said no more I did not ask him.

Indeed I had little time to talk with Bes about such light matters, since things moved apace in Memphis. Within six days all the great lords left in Upper Egypt were sworn to the revolt under the leadership of Peroa, and hour by hour their vassals or hired mercenaries flowed into the city. These it was my duty to weld into an army, and at this task I toiled without cease, separating them into regiments and drilling them, also arranging for the arming and victualling of the boats of war. Then news came that Idernes was advancing from Sais with a great force of Easterns, all the garrison of Lower Egypt indeed, as his messengers said, to answer the summons conveyed to him under the private Seal of seals.

Of Amada during this time I saw little, only meeting her now and again at the table of Peroa, or elsewhere in public. For the rest it pleased her to keep away from me. Once or twice I tried to find her alone, only to discover that she was engaged in the service of the goddess. Once, too, as she left Peroa's table, I whispered into her ear that I wished to speak with her. But she shook her head, saying,

"After the new moon, Shabaka. Then you shall speak with me as much as you wish."

Thus it came about that never could I find opportunity to tell her of that matter of what had happened at the court of the Great King. Still every morning she sent me some token, flowers or trifling gifts, and once a ring that must have belonged to her forefathers, since on its bezel was engraved the royal *uraeus*, together with the signs of long life and health, which ring I wore hung about my neck but not upon my finger, fearing lest that emblem of royalty might offend Peroa or some of his House, if they chanced to see it. So in answer I also sent her flowers and other gifts, and for the rest was content to wait.

All of which things my mother noted with a smile, saying that the lady Amada showed a wonderful discretion, such as any man would value in a wife of so much beauty, which also must be most pleasing to her mistress, the goddess Isis. To this I answered that I valued it less as a lover than I might do as a husband. My mother smiled again and spoke of something else.

Thus things went on while the storm-clouds gathered over Egypt.

One night I could not sleep. It was that of the new moon and I knew that during those hours of darkness, before the solemn conclave of the high priests, with pomp and ceremony in the sanctuary of the temple, Amada had undergone absolution of her vows to Isis and been given liberty to wed as other women do. Indeed my mother, in virtue of her rank as a Singer of Amen, had been present at the rite, and returning, told me all that happened.

She described how Amada had appeared, clad as a priestess, how she had put up her prayer to the four high priests seated in state, demanding to be loosed from her vow "for the sake of her heart and of Egypt."

Then one of the high priests, he of Amen, I think, as the chief of them all, had advanced to the statue of the goddess Isis and whispered the prayer to it, whereon after a pause the goddess nodded thrice in the sight of all present, thereby signifying her assent. This done the high priest returned and proclaimed the absolution in the ancient words "for the sake of the suppliant's heart and of Egypt" and with it the blessing of the goddess on her union, adding, however, the formula, "at thy prayer, daughter and spouse, I, the goddess Isis, cut the rope that binds thee to me on earth. Yet if thou should'st tie it again, know that it may never more be severed, for if thou strivest so to do, it shall strangle thee in whatever shape thou livest on the earth throughout the generations, and with thee the man thou choosetest and those who give thee to him. Thus saith Isis the Queen of Heaven."

"What does that mean?" I asked my mother.

"It means, my son, that if, having broken her vows to Isis, a woman should repeat them and once more enter the service of the goddess, and then for the second time seek to break them, she and the man for whom she did this thing would be like flies in a spider's web, and that not only in this life, but in any other that may be given to them in the world."

"It seems that Isis has a long arm," I said.

"Without doubt a very long arm, my son, since Isis, by whatever name she is called, is a power that does not die or forget."

"Well, Mother, in this case she can have no reason to remember, since never again will Amada be her priestess."

"I think not, Shabaka. Yet who can be sure of what a woman will or will not do, now or hereafter? For my part I am glad that I have served Amen and not Isis, and that after I was wed."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SLAYING OF IDERNES

Whilst I was still talking to my mother I received an urgent summons to the palace. I went and in a little ante-chamber met Amada alone, who, I could see, was waiting there for me. She was arrayed in her secular dress and wore the insignia of royalty, looking exceedingly beautiful. Moreover, her whole aspect had changed, for now she was no longer a priestess sworn to mysteries, but just a lovely and a loving woman.

"It is done, Shabaka," she whispered, "and thou art mine and I am thine."

Then I opened my arms and she sank upon my breast and for the first time I kissed her on the lips, kissed her many times and oh! my heart almost burst with joy. But all too fleeting was that sweet moment of love's first fruits, whereon I had sown the seed so many years ago, for while we yet clung together, whispering sweet things into each other's ears, I heard a voice calling me and was forced to go away before I had even time to ask when we might be wed.

Within the Council was gathered. The news before it was that the Satrap Idernes lay camped upon the Nile with some ten thousand men, not far from the great pyramids, that is, within striking distance of Memphis. Moreover his messengers announced that he purposed to visit the Prince Peroa that day with a small guard only, to inquire into this matter of the Signet, for which visit he demanded a safe-conduct sworn in the name of the Great King and in those of the gods of Egypt and the East. Failing this he would at once attack Memphis notwithstanding any commands that might be given him under the Signet, which, until he beheld it with his own eyes, he believed to be a forgery.

The question was—what answer should be sent to him? The debate that followed proved long and earnest. Some were in favour of attacking Idernes at once although his camp was reported to be strongly entrenched and flanked on one side by the Nile and on the other by the rising ground whereon stood the great sphinx and the pyramids. Others, among whom I was numbered, thought otherwise, for I hold that some evil god led me to give counsel that day which, if it were good for Egypt was most ill for my own fortunes. Perchance this god was Isis, angry at the loss of her votary.

I pointed out that by receiving Idernes Peroa would gain time which would enable a body of three thousand men, if not more, who were advancing down the Nile, to join us before they were perhaps cut off from the city, and thus give us a force as large as his, or larger. Also I showed that having summoned Idernes under the Signet, we should put ourselves in the wrong if we refused to receive him and instead attacked him at once.

A third party was in favour of allowing him to enter Memphis with his guard and then making him prisoner or killing him. As to this I pointed out again that not only would it involve the breaking of a solemn oath, which might bring the curse of the gods upon our cause and proclaim us traitors to the world, but it would also be foolish since Idernes was not the only general of the Easterns and if we cut off him and his escort, it would avail us little for then the rest of the Easterns would fight in a just cause.

So in the end it was agreed that the safe-conduct should be sent and that Peroa should receive Idernes that very day at a great feast given in his honour. Accordingly it was sent in the ancient form, the oaths being taken before the messengers that neither he nor those with him who must not number more than twenty men, would be harmed in Memphis and that he would be guarded on the road back until he reached the outposts of his own camp.

This done, I was despatched up the Nile bank in a chariot accompanied only by Bes, to hurry on the march of those troops of which I have spoken, so that they might reach Memphis by sundown. Before I went, however, I had some words alone with Peroa. He told me that my immediate marriage with the lady Amada would be announced at the feast that night. Thereon I prayed him to deliver to Amada the rope of priceless rose-hued pearls which was in his keeping, as my betrothal gift, with the prayer that she would wear them at the feast for my sake. There was no time for more.

The journey up Nile proved long for the road was bad being covered with drifted sand in some places and deep in mud from the inundation waters in others. At length I found the troops just starting forward after their rest, and rejoiced to see that there were more of them than I had thought. I told the case to their captains, who promised to make a forced march and to be in Memphis two hours before midnight.

As we drove back Bes said to me suddenly,

"Do you know why you could not find me this morning?"

I answered that I did not.

"Because a good slave should always run a pace ahead of his master, to clear the road and tell him of its pitfalls. I was being married. The Cup of the holy Tanofir is now by law and right Queen of the Ethiopians. So when you meet her again you must treat her with great respect, as I do already."

"Indeed, Bes," I said laughing, "and how did you manage that business? You must have wooed her well during these days which have been so full for both of us."

"I did not woo her over much, Master; indeed, the time was lacking. I wooed the holy Tanofir, which was more important."

"The holy Tanofir, Bes?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Master. You see this beautiful Cup of his is after all—his beautiful Cup. Her mind is the shadow of his mind and from her he pours out his wisdom. So I told him all the case. At first he was angry, for, notwithstanding the words he spoke to you and me, when it came to a point the holy Tanofir, being after all much like other men, did not wish to lose his Cup. Indeed had he been a few

score of years younger I am not sure but that he would have forgotten some of his holiness because of her. Still he came to see matters in the true light at last—for your sake, Master, not for mine, since his wisdom told him it was needful that I should become King of the Ethiopians again, to do which I must be married. At any rate he worked upon the mind of that Cup of his—having first settled that she should procure a younger sister of her own to fill her place—in such fashion that when at length I spoke to her on the matter, she did not say no.”

“No doubt because she was fond of you for yourself, Bes. A woman would not marry even to please the holy Tanofir.”

“Oh! Master,” he replied in a new voice, a very sad voice, “I would that I could think so. But look at me, a misshapen dwarf, accursed from birth. Could a fair lady like this Karema wed such a one for his own sake?”

“Well, Bes, there might be other reasons besides the holy Tanofir,” I said hurriedly.

“Master, there were no other reasons, unless the Cup, when it is awake, remembers what it has held in trance, which I do not believe. I wooed her as I was, not telling her that I am also King of the Ethiopians, or any more than I seem to be. Moreover the holy Tanofir told her nothing, for he swore as much to me and he does not lie.”

“And what did she say to you, Bes?” I asked, for I was curious.

“She lied fast enough, Master. She said—well, what she said when first we met her, that there was more in me than the eye saw and that she who had lived so much with spirits looked to the spirit rather than to the flesh, and that dwarf or no she loved me and desired nothing better than to marry me and be my true and faithful wife and helpmeet. She lied so well that once or twice almost I believed her. At any rate I took her at her word, not altogether for myself, believe me, Master, but because without doubt what the holy Tanofir has shown us will come to pass, and it is necessary to you that I should be married.”

“You married her to help me, Bes?”

“That is so, Master—after all, but a little thing, seeing that she is beautiful, well born and very pleasant, and I am fond of her. Also I do her no wrong for she has bought more than she bargained for, and if she has any that are not dwarfs, her children may be kings. I do not think,” he added reflectively, “that even the faithful Ethiopians could accept a second dwarf as their king. One is very well for a change, but not two or three. The stomach of a tall people would turn against them.”

I took Bes’s hand and pressed it, understanding the depth of his love and sacrifice. Also some spirit—doubtless it came from the holy Tanofir—moved me to say,

“Be comforted, Bes, for I am sure of this. Your children will be strong and straight and tall, more so than any of their forefathers that went before them.”

This indeed proved to be the case, for their father’s deformity was but an accident, not born in his blood.

“Those are good-omened words, Master, for which I thank you, though the holy Tanofir said the like when he wed us with the sacred words this morning and gave us his blessing, endowing my wife with certain gifts of secret wisdom which he said would be of use to her and me.”

“Where is she now, Bes?”

“With the holy Tanofir, Master, until I fetch her, training her younger sister to be a diviner’s worthy Cup. Only perhaps I shall never send, seeing that I think there will be fighting soon.”

“Yes, Bes, but being newly married you will do well to leave it to others.”

“No, no, Master. Battle is better than wives. Moreover, could you think that I would leave you to stand alone in the fray? Why if I did and harm came to you I should die of shame or hang myself and then Karema would never be a queen. So both her trades would be gone, since after marriage she cannot be a Cup, and her heart would break. But here are the gates of Memphis, so we will forget love and think of war.”

An hour later I and my mother, the lady Tiu, stood in the banqueting hall of the palace with many others, and learned that the Satrap Idernes and his escort had reached Memphis and would be present at the feast. A while later trumpets blew and a glittering procession entered the hall. At the head of it was Peroa who led Idernes by the hand. This Eastern was a big, strong man with tired and anxious eyes, such as I had noted were common among the servants of the Great King who from day to day never knew whether they would fill a Satrapy or a grave. He was clad in gorgeous silks and wore a cap upon his head in which shone a jewel, but beneath his robes I caught the glint of mail.

As he came into the hall and noted the number and quality of the guests and the stir and the expectant look upon their faces, he started as though he were afraid, but recovering himself, murmured some courteous words to his host and advanced towards the seat of honour which was pointed out to him upon the Prince’s right. After these two followed the wife of Peroa with her son and daughters. Then, walking alone in token of her high rank, appeared Amada, the Royal Lady of Egypt, wonderfully arrayed. Now, however, she wore no emblems of royalty, either because it was not thought wise that these should be shown in the presence of the Satrap, or because she was about to be given in marriage to one who was not royal. Indeed, as I noted with joy, her only ornament was the rope of rose-hued pearls which were arranged in a double row upon her breast.

She searched me out with her eyes, smiled, touching the pearls with her finger, and passed on to her place next to the daughters of Peroa, at one end of the head table which was shaped like a horse’s hoof.

After her came the nobles who had accompanied Idernes, grave Eastern men. One of these, a tall captain with eyes like a hawk, seemed familiar to me. Nor was I mistaken, for Bes, who stood behind me and whose business it would be to wait on me at the feast, whispered in my ear,

“Note that man. He was present when you were brought before the Great King from the boat and saw and heard all that passed.”

“Then I wish he were absent now,” I whispered back, for at the words a sudden fear shot through me, of what I could not say.

By degrees all were seated in their appointed places. Mine was by that of my mother at a long table that stood as it were across the ends of the high table but at a little distance from them, so that I was almost opposite to Peroa and Idernes and could see Amada, although she was too far away for me to be able to speak to her.

The feast began and at first was somewhat heavy and silent, since, save for the talk of courtesy, none spoke much. At length wine, whereof I noted that Idernes drank a good deal, as did his escort, but Peroa and the Egyptians little, loosened men’s tongues and they

grew merrier. For it was the custom of the people of the Great King to discuss both private and public business when full of strong drink, but of the Egyptians when they were quite sober. This was well known to Peroa and many of us, especially to myself who had been among them, which was one of the reasons why Idernes had been asked to meet us at a feast, where we might have the advantage of him in debate.

Presently the Satrap noted the splendid cup from which he drank and asked some question concerning it of the hawk-eyed noble of whom I have spoken. When it had been answered he said in a voice loud enough for me to overhear,

"Tell me, O Prince Peroa, was this cup ever that of the Great King which it so much resembles?"

"So I understand, O Idernes," answered Peroa. "That is, until it became mine by gift from the lord Shabaka, who received it from the Great King."

An expression of horror appeared upon the face of the Satrap and upon those of his nobles.

"Surely," he answered, "this Shabaka must hold the King's favours lightly if he passes them on thus to the first-comer. At the least, let not the vessel which has been hallowed by the lips of the King of kings be dishonoured by the humblest of his servants. I pray you, O Prince, that I may be given another cup."

So a new goblet was brought to him, Peroa trying to pass the matter off as a jest by appealing to me to tell the story of the cup. Then I said while all listened,

"O Prince, the most high Satrap is mistaken. The King of kings did not give me the cup, I bought it from him in exchange for a certain famous bow, and therefore held it not wrong to pass it on to you, my lord."

Idernes made no answer and seemed to forget the matter.

A while later, however, his eye fell upon Amada and the rose-hued pearls she wore, and again he asked a question of the hawk-eyed captain, then said,

"Think me not discourteous, O Prince, if I seem to look upon yonder lovely lady which in our country, where women do not appear in public, we should think it an insult to do. But on her fair breast I see certain pearls like to some that are known throughout the world, which for many years have been worn by those who sit upon the throne of the East. I would ask if they are the same, or others?"

"I do not know, O Idernes," answered Peroa; "I only know that the lord Shabaka brought them from the East. Inquire of him, if it be your pleasure."

"Shabaka again——" began Idernes, but I cut him short, saying,

"Yes, O Satrap, Shabaka again. I won those pearls in a bet from the Great King, and with them a certain weight of gold. This I think you knew before, since your messenger of a while ago was whipped for trying to steal them, which under the rods he said he did by command, O Satrap."

To this bold speech Idernes made no answer. Only his captains frowned and many of the Egyptians murmured approval.

After this the feast went on without further incident for a while, the Easterns always drinking more wine, till at length the tables were cleared and all of the meaner sort departed from the hall, save the butlers and the personal servants such as Bes, who stood behind the seats of their masters. There came a silence such as precedes the bursting of a storm, and in the midst of it Idernes spoke, somewhat thickly.

"I did not come here, O Peroa," he said, "from the seat of government at Sais to eat your meats and drink your wine. I came to speak of high matters with you."

"It is so, O Satrap," answered Peroa. "And now what may be your will? Would you retire to discuss them with me and my Councillors?"

"Where is the need, O Peroa, seeing that I have naught to say which may not be heard by all?"

"As it pleases you. Speak on, O Satrap."

"I have been summoned here, Prince Peroa, by a writing under what seems to be the Signet of signets—the ancient White Seal that for generations unknown has been worn by the forefathers of the King of kings. Where is this Signet?"

"Here," said the Prince, opening his robe. "Look on it, Satrap, and let your lords look, but let none of you dare to touch it."

Idernes looked long and earnestly, and so did some of his people, especially the lord with the hawk eyes. Then they stared at each other bewildered and whispered together.

"It seems to be the very Seal—the White Seal itself!" exclaimed Idernes at length. "Tell me now, Peroa. How came this sacred thing that dwells in the East hither into Egypt?"

"The lord Shabaka brought it to me with certain letters from the Great King, O Satrap."

"Shabaka for the third time, by the holy Fire!" cried Idernes. "He brought the cup; he brought the famous pearls; he brought the gold, and he brought the Signet of signets. What is there then that he did not bring? Perchance he has the person of the King of kings himself in his keeping!"

"Not that, O Satrap, only the commands of the King of kings which are prepared ready to deliver to you under the White Seal that you acknowledge."

"And what may they be, Egyptian?"

"This, O Satrap: That you and all the army which you have brought with you retire to Sais and thence out of Egypt as quickly as you may, or pay for disobedience with your lives."

Now Idernes and his captains gasped.

"Why this is rebellion!" he said.

"No, O Satrap, only the command of the Great King given under the White Seal," and drawing a roll from his breast, Peroa laid it on his brow and cast it down before Idernes, adding,

"Obey the writing and the Signet, or by virtue of my commission, as soon as you are returned to your army and your safe-conduct is expired, I fall upon you and destroy you."

Idernes looked about him like a wolf in a trap, then asked,

"Do you mean to murder me here?"

"Not so," answered Peroa, "for you have our safe-conduct and Egyptians are honourable men. But you are dismissed your office and ordered to leave Egypt."

Idernes thought a little while, then said,

"If I leave Egypt, there is at least one whom I am commanded to take with me under orders and writings that you will not dispute, a maiden named Amada whom the Great King would number among his women. I am told it is she who sits yonder—a jewel indeed, fair as the pearls upon her breast which thus will return into the King's keeping. Let her be handed over, for she rides with me at once."

Now in the midst of an intense silence Peroa answered,

"Amada, the Royal Lady of Egypt, cannot be sent to dwell in the House of Women of the Great King without the consent of the lord Shabaka, whose she is."

"Shabaka for the fourth time!" said Idernes, glaring at me. "Then let Shabaka come too. Or his head in a basket will suffice, since that will save trouble afterwards, also some pain to Shabaka. Why, now I remember. It was this very Shabaka whom the Great King condemned to death by the boat for a crime against his Majesty, and who bought his life by promising to deliver to him the fairest and most learned woman in the world—the lady Amada of Egypt. And thus does the knave keep his oath!"

Now I leapt to my feet, as did most of those present. Only Amada kept her seat and looked at me.

"You lie!" I cried, "and were it not for your safe-conduct I would kill you for the lie."

"I lie, do I?" sneered Idernes. "Speak then, you who were present, and tell this noble company whether I lie," and he pointed to the hawk-eyed lord.

"He does not lie," said the Captain. "I was in the Court of the Great King and heard yonder Shabaka purchase pardon by promising to hand over his cousin, the lady Amada, to the King. The pearls were entrusted to him as a gift to her and I see she wears them. The gold also of which mention has been made was to provide for her journey in state to the East, or so I heard. The cup was his guerdon, also a sum for his own purse."

"It is false," I shouted. "The name of Amada slipped my lips by chance—no more."

"So it slipped your lips by chance, did it?" sneered Idernes. "Now, if you are wise, you will suffer the lady Amada to slip your hand, and not by chance. But let us have done with this cunning knave. Prince, will you hand over yonder fair woman, or will you not?"

"Satrap, I will not," answered Peroa. "The demand is an insult put forward to force us to rebellion, since there is no man in Egypt who will not be ready to die in defence of the Royal Lady of Egypt."

This statement was received with a shout of applause by every Egyptian in the hall. Idernes waited until it had died away, then said,

"Prince Peroa and Egyptians, you have conveyed to me certain commands sealed with the Signet of signets, which I think was stolen by yonder Shabaka. Now hearken; until this matter is made clear I will obey those commands thus far. I will return with my army to Sais and there wait until I have received the orders of the Great King, after report made to him. If so much as an arrow is shot at us on our march, it will be open rebellion, as the price of which Egypt shall be crushed as she was never crushed before, and every one of you here present shall lose his head, save only the lady Amada who is the property of the Great King. Now I thank you for your hospitality and demand that you escort me and those with me back to my camp, since it seems that here we are in the midst of enemies."

"Before you go, Idernes," I shouted, "know that you and your lying captain shall pay with your lives for your slander on me."

"Many will pay with their lives for this night's work, O thief of pearls and seals," answered the Satrap, and turning, left the hall with his company.

Now I searched for Amada, but she also had gone with the ladies of Peroa's household who feared lest the feast should end in blows and bloodshed, also lest she should be snatched away. Indeed of all the women in the hall, only my mother remained.

"Search out the lady Amada," I said to her, "and tell her the truth."

"Yes, my son," she answered thoughtfully; "but what is the truth? I understood it was Bes who first gave the name of the lady Amada to the Great King. Now we learn from your own lips that it was you. Wise would you have been, my son, if you had bitten out your tongue before you said it, since this is a matter that any woman may well misunderstand."

"Her name was surprised out of me, Mother. It was Bes who spoke to the King of the beauty of a certain lady of Egypt."

"And I think, my son, it was Bes who told Peroa and his guests that he and not you had given the King her name, which you do not seem to have denied. Well, doubtless both of you are to blame for foolishness, no more, since well I know that you would have died ten times over rather than buy your life at the price of the honour of the Lady of Egypt. This I will say to her as soon as I may, praying that it may not be too late, and afterwards you shall tell me everything, which you would have done well to do at first, if Bes, as I think, had not been over cunning after the fashion of black people, and counselled you otherwise. See, Peroa calls you and I must go, for there are greater matters afoot than that of who let slip the name of the lady Amada to the King of kings."

So she went and there followed a swift council of war, the question being whether we were to strike at the Satrap's army or to allow it to retreat to Sais. In my turn I was asked for my judgment of the issue, and answered,

"Strike and at once, since we cannot hope to storm Sais, which is far away. Moreover such strength as we have is now gathered and if it is idle and perhaps unpaid, will disperse again. But if we can destroy Idernes and his army, it will be long before the King of kings, who is sending all his multitudes against the Greeks, can gather another, and during this time Egypt may again become a nation and able to protect herself under Peroa her own Pharaoh."

In the end I, and those who thought like me, prevailed, so that before the dawn I was sailing down the Nile with the fleet, having two thousand men under my command. Also I took with me the six hunters whom I had won from the Great King, since I knew them to be faithful, and thought that their knowledge of the Easterns and their ways might be of service. Our orders were to hold a certain neck of land between the river and the hills where the army of Idernes must pass, until Peroa and all his strength could attack him from behind.

Four hours later, the wind being very favourable to us, we reached that place and there took up our station and having made all as ready as we could, rested.

In the early afternoon Bes awakened me from the heavy sleep into which I had fallen, and pointed to the south. I looked and through the desert haze saw the chariots of Idernes advancing in ordered ranks, and after them the masses of his footmen.

Now we had no chariots, only archers, and two regiments armed with long spears and swords. Also the sailors on the boats had their slings and throwing javelins. Lastly the ground was in our favour since it sloped upwards and the space between the river and the hills was narrow, somewhat boggy too after the inundation of the Nile, which meant that the chariots must advance in a column and could not gather sufficient speed to sweep over us.

Idernes and his captains noted all this also, and halted. Then they sent a herald forward to ask who we were and to command us in the name of the Great King to make way for the army of the Great King.

I answered that we were Egyptians, ordered by Peroa to hold the road against the Satrap who had done affront to Egypt by demanding that its Royal Lady should be given over to him to be sent to the East as a woman-slave, and that if the Satrap wished to clear a road, he could come and do so. Or if it pleased him he could go back towards Memphis, or stay where he was, since we did not wish to strike the first blow. I added this,

"I who speak on behalf of the Prince Peroa, am the lord Shabaka, that same man whom but last night the Satrap and a certain captain of his named a liar. Now the Easterns are brave men and we of Egypt have always heard that among them none is braver than Idernes who gained his advancement through courage and skill in war. Let him therefore come out together with the lord who named me a liar, armed with swords only, and I, who being a liar must also be a coward, together with my servant, a black dwarf, will meet them man to man in the sight of both the armies, and fight them to the death. Or if it pleases Idernes better, let him not come and I will seek him and kill him in the battle, or by him be killed."

The herald, having taken stock of me and of Bes at whom he laughed, returned with the message.

"Will he come, think you, Master?" asked Bes.

"Mayhap," I answered, "since it is a shame for an Eastern to refuse a challenge from any man whom he calls barbarian, and if he did so it might cost him his life afterwards at the hands of the Great King. Also if he should fall there are others to take his command, but none who can wipe away the stain upon his honour."

"Yes," said Bes; "also they will think me a dwarf of no account, which makes the task of killing you easy. Well, they shall see."

Now when I sent this challenge I had more in my mind than a desire to avenge myself upon Idernes and his captain for the public shame they had put upon me. I wished to delay the attack of their host upon our little band and give time for the army of Peroa to come up behind. Moreover, if I felt it did not greatly matter, except as an omen, seeing that I had good officers under me who knew all my plans.

We saw the herald reach the Satrap's army and after a while return towards us again, which made us think my challenge had been refused, especially as with him was an officer who, I took it, was sent to spy out our strength. But this was not so, for the man said,

"The Satrap Idernes has sworn by the Great King to kill the thief of the Signet and send his head to the Great King, and fears that if he waits to meet him in battle, he may slip away. Therefore he is minded to accept your challenge, O Shabaka, and put an end to you, and indeed under the laws of the East he may not refuse. But a noble of the Great King may not fight against a black slave save with a whip, so how can that noble accept the challenge of the dwarf Bes?"

"Quite well," answered Bes, "seeing that I am no slave but a free citizen of Egypt. Moreover, in my own country of Ethiopia I am of royal blood. Lastly, tell the man this, that if he does not come and afterwards falls into my hands or into those of the lord Shabaka, he who talks of whips shall be scourged with them till his life creeps out from between his bare bones."

Thus spoke Bes, rolling his great eyes and looking so terrible that the herald and the officer fell back a step or two. Then I told them that if my offer did not please them, I myself would fight, first Idernes and then the noble. So they returned.

The end of it was that we saw Idernes and his captain advancing, followed by a guard of ten men. Then after I had explained all things to my officers, I also advanced with Bes, followed by a guard of ten picked men. We met between the armies on a little sandy plain at the foot of the rise and there followed talk between the captains of our guards as to arms and so forth, but we four said nothing to each other, since the time for words was past. Only Bes and I sat down upon the sand and spoke a little together of Amada and Karema and of how they would receive the news of our victory or deaths.

"It does not much matter, Master," said Bes at last, "seeing that if we die we shall never know, and if we live we shall learn for ourselves."

At length all was arranged and we stood up to face each other, the four of us being armed in the same way. For as did Idernes and the hawk-eyed lord, Bes and I wore shirts of mail and helms, those that we had brought with us from the East. For weapons we had short and heavy swords, small shields and knives at our girdles.

"Look your last upon the sun, Thieves," mocked Idernes, "for when you see it again, it shall be with blind eyes from the points of spears fastened to the gateway pillars of the Great King's palace."

"Liars you have lived and liars you shall die," shouted Bes, but I said nothing.

Now the agreement was that when the word had been given Idernes and I, and the noble and Bes, should fight together, but if they killed one of us, or we killed one of them, the two who survived might fall together on the remaining man. Remembering this, as he told me afterwards, at the signal Bes leapt forward like a flash with working face and foam upon his lips, and before ever I could come to Idernes, how I know not, had received the blow of the Eastern lord upon his shield and without striking back, had gripped him in his long arms and wrapped him round with his bowed legs. In an instant they were on the ground, Bes uppermost, and I heard the sound of blow upon blow struck with knife or sword, I knew not which, upon the Eastern's mail, followed by a shout of victory from the Egyptians which told me that Bes had slain him.

Now Idernes and I were smiting at each other. He was a taller and a bigger man than myself, but older and one who had lived too well. Therefore I thought it wise to keep him at a distance and tire him, which I did by retreating and catching his sword-cuts on my shield, only smiting back now and again.

"He runs! He runs!" shouted the Easterns. "O Idernes, beware the dwarf!"

"Stand away, Bes," I called; "this is my game," and he obeyed, as often he had done when we were hunting together.

Now a shrewd blow from Idernes cut through my helm and staggered me, and another before I could recover myself, shore the shield from my hand, whereat the Easterns shouted more loudly than before. Then fear of defeat entered into me and made me mad, for this Satrap was a great fighter. With a shout of "Egypt!" I went at him like a wounded lion and soon it was his turn to stagger back. But alas! I struck too hard, for my sword snapped upon his mail.

"The knife!" screamed Bes; "the knife!"

I hurled the sword hilt in the Satrap's face and drew the dagger from my belt. Then I ran in beneath his guard and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed. He gripped me and we went down side by side, rolling over each other. The gods know how it ended, for things were growing dim to me when some thrust of mine found a rent in his mail made when the sword broke and he became weak. His spirit weakened also, for he gasped,

"Spare my life, Egyptian, and my treasure is yours. I swear it by the Fire."

"Not for all the treasure in the world, Slanderer," I panted back and drove the dagger home to the hilt thrice, until he died. Then I staggered to my feet, and when the armies saw that it was I who rose while Idernes lay still a roar of triumph went up from the Egyptians, answered by a roar of rage from the Easterns.

With a cry of "Well done, Master!" Bes leapt upon the dead man and hewed his head from him, as already he had served the hawk-eyed noble. Then gripping one head in each hand he held them up for the Easterns to see.

"Men of the Great King," I said, "bear us witness that we have fought fairly, man to man, when we need not have done so."

The ten of the Satrap's guard stood silent, but my own shouted,

"Back, Shabaka! The Easterns charge!"

I looked and saw them coming like waves of steel, then supported by my men and preceded by Bes who danced in front shaking the severed heads, I ran back to my own ranks where one gave me wine to drink and threw water over my hurts which were but slight. Scarcely was it done when the battle closed in and soon in it I forgot the deaths of Idernes and the Eastern liar.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AMADA RETURNS TO ISIS

We fought a very terrible fight that evening there by the banks of Nile. Our position was good, but we were outnumbered by four or five to one, and the Easterns and their mercenaries were mad at the death of the Satrap by my hand. Time upon time they came on furiously, charging up the slope like wild bulls. For the most part we relied upon our archers to drive them back, since our half-trained troops could scarcely hope to stand against the onset of veterans disciplined in war. So taking cover behind the rocks we rained arrows on them, shooting the horses in the chariots, and when these were down, pouring our shafts upon the footmen behind. Myself I took my great black bow and drew it thrice, and each time I saw a noble fall, for no mail could withstand the arrows which it sent, and of that art I was a master. None in Egypt could shoot so far or so straight as I did, save perhaps Peroa himself. I had no time to do more since always I must be moving up and down the line encouraging my men.

Three times we drove them back, after which they grew cunning. Ceasing from a direct onslaught and keeping what remained of their chariots in reserve, they sent one body of men to climb along the slope of the hill where the rocks gave them cover from our arrows, and another to creep through the reeds and growing crops upon the bank of the river where we could not see to shoot them well, although the slingers in the ships did them some damage.

Thus they attacked us on either flank, and while we were thus engaged their centre made a charge. Then came the bitterest of the fighting for now the bows were useless, and it was sword against sword and spear against spear. Once we broke and I thought that they were through. But I led a charge against them and drove them back a little way. Still the issue was doubtful till I saw Bes rush past me grinning and leaping, and with him a small body of Greeks whom we held in reserve, and I think that the sight of the terrible dwarf whom they thought a devil, frightened the Easterns more than did the Greeks.

At any rate, shouting out something about an evil spirit whom the Egyptians worshipped, by which I suppose they meant that god after whom Bes was named, they retreated, leaving many dead but taking their wounded with them, for they were unbroken.

At the foot of the slope they reformed and took counsel, then sat down out of bowshot as though to rest. Now I guessed their plan. It was to wait till night closed in, which would be soon for the sun was sinking, and then, when we could not see to shoot, either rush through us by the weight of numbers, or march back to where the cliffs were lower and climb them, thus passing us on the higher open land.

Now we also took counsel, though little came of it, since we did not know what to do. We were too few to attack so great an army, nor if we climbed the cliffs could we hope to withstand them in the desert sands, or to hold our own against them if they charged in the dark. If this happened it seemed that all we could do would be to fight as long as we could, after which the survivors of us must take refuge on our boats. So it came to this, that we should lose the battle and the greater part of the Easterns would win back to Sais, unless indeed the main army under Peroa came to our aid.

Whilst we talked I caused the wounded to be carried to the ships before it grew too dark to move them. Bes went with them. Presently he returned, running swiftly.

"Master," he said, "the evening wind is blowing strong and stirs the sand, but from a mast-head through it I caught sight of Peroa's banners. The army comes round the bend of the river not four furlongs away. Now charge and those Easterns will be caught between the hammer and the stone, for while they are meeting us they will not look behind."

So I went down the lines of our little force telling them the good news and showing them my plan. They listened and understood. We formed up, those who were left of us, not more than a thousand men perhaps, and advanced. The Easterns laughed when they saw us coming down the slope, for they thought that we were mad and that they would kill us every one, believing as they did that Peroa had no other army. When we were within bowshot we began to shoot, though sparingly, for but few arrows were left. Galled by our archery they marshalled their ranks to charge us again. With a shout we leapt forward to meet them, for now from the higher ground I saw the chariots of Peroa rushing to our rescue.

We met, we fought. Surely there had been no such fighting since the days of Thotmes and Rameses the Great. Still they drove us back till unseen and unsuspected the chariots and the footmen of Peroa broke on them from behind, broke on them like a desert storm. They gave, they fled this way and that, some to the banks of the Nile, some to the hills. By the light of the setting sun we finished it and ere the darkness closed in the Great King's army was destroyed, save for the fugitives whom we hunted down next day.

Yes, in that battle perished ten thousand of the Easterns and their mercenaries, and upon its field at dawn we crowned Peroa Pharaoh of Egypt, and he named me the chief general of his army. There, too, fell over a thousand of my men and among them those six hunters whom I had won in the wager with the Great King and brought with me from the East. Throughout the fray they served me as a bodyguard, fighting furiously, who knew that they could hope for no mercy from their own people. One by one they were slain, the last two of them in the charge at sunset. Well, they were brave and faithful to me, so peace be on their spirits. Better to die thus than in the den of lions.

In triumph we returned to Memphis, I bringing in the rear-guard and the spoils. Before Pharaoh and I parted a messenger brought me more good news. Sure tidings had come that the King of kings had been driven by revolt in his dominions to embark upon a mighty war with Syria, Greece and Cyprus and other half-conquered countries, in which, doubtless by agreement, the fires of insurrection had suddenly burned up. Also already Peroa's messengers had departed to tell them of what was passing on the Nile.

"If this be true," said Peroa when he had heard all, "the Great King will have no new army to spare for Egypt."

"It is so, Pharaoh," I answered. "Yet I think he will conquer in this great war and that within two years you must be prepared to meet him face to face."

"Two years are long, Shabaka, and in them, by your help, much may be done."

But as it chanced he was destined to be robbed of that help, and this by the work of Woman the destroyer.

It happened thus. Amidst great rejoicings Pharaoh reached Memphis and in the vast temple of Amen laid down our spoils in the presence of the god, thousands of right hands hewn from the fallen, thousands of swords and other weapons and tens of chariots, together with much treasure of which a portion was given to the god. The high priests blessed us in the name of Amen and of the other gods; the people blessed us and threw flowers in our path; all the land rejoiced because once more it was free.

There too that day in the temple with ancient form and ceremonial Peroa was crowned Pharaoh of Egypt. Sceptres and jewels that had been hid for generations were brought out by those who knew the secret of their hiding-places; the crowns that had been worn by old Pharaohs, were set upon his head; yes, the double crown of the Upper and the Lower Land. Thus in a Memphis mad with joy at the casting off of the foreign yoke, he was anointed the first of a new dynasty, and with him his queen.

I too received honours, for the story of the slaying of Idernes at my hands and of how I held the pass had gone abroad, so that next to Pharaoh, I was looked upon as the greatest man in Egypt. Nor was Bes forgotten, since many of the common people thought that he was a spirit in the form of a dwarf whom the gods had sent to aid us with his strength and cunning. Indeed at the close of the ceremony voices cried out in the multitude of watchers, demanding that I who was to marry the Royal Lady of Egypt should be named next in succession to the throne.

The Pharaoh heard and glanced first at his son and then at me, doubtfully, whereon, covered with confusion, I slipped away.

The portico of the temple was deserted, since all, even the guards, had crowded into the vast court to watch the coronation. Only in the shadow, seated against the pedestal of one of the two colossal statues in front of the outer pylon gate and looking very small beneath its greatness, was a man wrapped in a dark cloak whom noting vaguely I took to be a beggar. As I passed him, he plucked at my robe, and I stopped to search for something to give to him but could find naught.

"I have nothing, Father," I said laughing, "except the gold hilt of my sword."

"Do not part with that, Son," answered a deep voice, "for I think you will need it before all is over."

Then while I stared at him he threw back his hood and I saw that beneath was the ancient withered face and the long white beard of my great-uncle, the holy Tanofir, the hermit and magician.

"Great things happen yonder, Shabaka. So great that I have come from my sepulchre to see, or rather, being blind, to listen, who thrice in my life days have known the like before," and he pointed to the glittering throng in the court within. "Yes," he went on, "I have seen Pharaohs crowned and Pharaohs die—one of them at the hand of a conqueror. What will happen to this Pharaoh, think you, Shabaka?"

"You should be better able to answer that question than I, who am no prophet, my Uncle."

"How, my Nephew, seeing that your dwarf has borne away my magic Cup? I do not grudge her to him for he is a brave dwarf and clever, who may yet prove a good prop to you, as he has done before, and to Egypt also. But she has gone and the new vessel is not yet shaped to my liking. So how can I answer?"

"Out of the store of wisdom gathered in your breast."

"So! my Nephew. Well, my store of wisdom tells me that feasts are sometimes followed by want and rejoicings by sorrow and victories by defeat, and splendid sins by repentance and slow climbing back to good again. Also that you will soon take a long journey. Where is the Royal Lady Amada? I did not hear her step among those who passed in to the Crowning. But even my hearing has grown somewhat weak of late, except in the silence of the night, Shabaka."

"I do not know, my Uncle, who have only been in Memphis one hour. But what do you mean? Doubtless she prepares herself for the feast where I shall meet her."

"Doubtless. Tell me, what passes at the temple of Isis? As I crept past the pylon feeling my way with my beggar's staff, I thought—but how can you know who have only been in Memphis an hour? Yet surely I heard voices just now calling out that you, Shabaka, should be named as the next successor to the throne of Egypt. Was it so?"

"Yes, holy Tanofir. That is why I have left who was vexed and am sworn to seek no such honour, which indeed I do not desire."

"Just so, Nephew. Yet gifts have a way of coming to those who do not desire them and the last vision that I saw before my Cup left me, or rather that she saw, was of you wearing the Double Crown. She said that you looked very well in it, Shabaka. But now begone, for hark, here comes the procession with the new-anointed Pharaoh whose royal robe you won for him yonder in the pass, when you smote down Idernes and held his legions. Oh! it was well done and my new Cup, though faulty, was good enough to show me all. I felt proud of you, Shabaka, but begone, begone! 'A gift for the poor old beggar! A gift, my lords, for the poor blind beggar who has had none since the last Pharaoh was crowned in Egypt and finds it hard to live on memories!'"

At our house I found my mother just returned from the Coronation, but Bes I did not find and guessed that he had slipped away to meet his new-made wife, Karema. My mother embraced me and blessed me, making much of me and my deeds in the battle; also she doctored such small hurts as I had. I put the matter by as shortly as I could and asked her if she had seen aught of Amada. She answered that she had neither seen nor heard of her which I was sure she thought strange, as she began to talk quickly of other things. I said to her what I had said to the holy Tanofir, that doubtless she was making ready for the feast since I could not find her at the Crowning.

"Or saying good-bye to the goddess," answered my mother nodding, "since there are some who find it even harder to fall from heaven to earth than to climb from earth to heaven, and after all you are but a man, my son."

Then she slipped away to attire herself, leaving me wondering, because my mother was shrewd and never spoke at random.

There was the holy Tanofir, too, with his talk about the temple of Isis, and he also did not speak at random. Oh! now I felt as I had done when the shadow of the palm-tree fell on me yonder in the palace garden.

The mood passed for my blood still tingled with the glory of that great fight, and my heart shut its doors to sadness, knowing as I did, that I was the most praised man in Memphis that day. Indeed had I not, I should have learned it when with my mother I entered

the great banqueting-hall of the palace somewhat late, for she was long in making ready.

The first thing I saw there was Bes gorgeously arrayed in Eastern silks that he had plundered from the Satrap's tent, standing on a table so that all might see and hear him, and holding aloft in one hand the grisly head of Idernes and in the other that of the hawk-eyed noble whom he had slain, while in his thick, guttural voice he told the tale of that great fray. Catching sight of me, he called aloud,

"See! Here comes the man! Here comes the hero to whom Egypt owes its liberty and Pharaoh his crown."

Thereon all the company and the soldiers and servants who were gathered about the door began to shout and acclaim me, till I wished that I could vanish away as the holy Tanofir was said to be able to do. Since this was impossible I rushed at Bes who leapt from the table like a monkey and, still waving the heads and talking, slipped from the hall, I know not how, followed by the loud laughter of the guests.

Then heralds announced the coming of Pharaoh and all grew silent. He and his company entered with pomp and we, his subjects, prostrated ourselves in the ancient fashion.

"Rise, my guests," he cried. "Rise, my people. Above all do you rise, Shabaka, my beloved cousin, to whom Egypt and I owe so much."

So we rose and I took my seat in a place of honour having my mother at my side, and looked about me for Amada, but in vain. There was the carved chair upon which she should have been among those of the princesses, but it was empty. At first I thought that she was late, but when time went by and she did not appear, I asked if she were ill, a question that none seemed able to answer.

The feast went on with all the ancient ceremonies that attended the crowning of a Pharaoh of Egypt, since there were old men who remembered these, also the scribes and priests had them written in their books.

I took no heed of them and will not set them down. At length Pharaoh pledged his subjects, and his subjects pledged Pharaoh. Then the doors were opened and through them came a company of white-robed, shaven priests bearing on a bier the body of a dead man wrapped in his mummy-cloths. At first some laughed for this rite had not been performed in Egypt since she passed into the hands of the Great Kings of the East and therefore was strange to them. Then they grew silent since after all it was solemn to see those death-bearing priests flitting in and out between the great columns, now seen and now lost in the shadows, and to listen to their funeral chants.

In the hush my mother whispered to me that this body was that of the last Pharaoh of Egypt brought from his tomb, but whether this were so I cannot say for certain. At length they brought the mummy which was crowned with a snake-headed circlet of the royal *uraeus* and still draped with withered funeral wreaths, and stood it on its feet opposite to Peroa just behind and between my mother and me in such a fashion that it cut off the light from us.

The faint and heavy smell of the embalmer's spices struck upon my nostrils, a dead flower from the chaplets fell upon my head and, glancing over my shoulder, I saw the painted or enamelled eyes in the gilded mask staring at me. The thing filled me with fear, I knew not of what. Not of death, surely, for that I had faced a score of times of late and thought nothing of it. Indeed I am not sure that it was fear I felt, but rather a deep sense of the vanity of all things. It seemed to come home to me—Shabaka or Allan Quatermain, for in my dream the inspiration or whatever it might be, struck through the spirit that animated both of us—as it had never done before, that everything is *nothing*, that victory and love and even life itself have no meaning; that naught really exists save the soul of man and God, of whom perchance that soul is a part sent forth for a while to do His work through good and ill. The thought lifted me up and yet crushed me, since for a moment all that makes a man passed away, and I felt myself standing in utter loneliness, naked before the glory of God, watched only by the flaming stars that light his throne. Yes, and at that moment suddenly I learned that all the gods are but one God, having many shapes and called by many names.

Then I heard the priests saying,

"Pharaoh the Osiris greets Pharaoh the living on the Earth and sends to him this message—'As I am, so shalt thou be, and where I am, there thou shalt dwell through all the ages of Eternity.'"

Then Pharaoh the living rose and bowed to Pharaoh the dead and Pharaoh the dead was taken away back to his Eternal House and I wondered whether his *Ka* or his spirit, or whatever is the part of him that lives on, were watching us and remembering the feasts whereof he had partaken in his pomp in this pillared hall, as his forefathers had done before him for hundreds or thousands of years.

Not until the mummy had gone and the last sound of the chanting of the priests had died, did the hearts of the feasters grow light again. But soon they forgot, as men alive always forget death and those whom Time has devoured, for the wine was good and strong and the eyes of the women were bright and victory had crowned our spears, and for a while Egypt was once more free.

So it went on till Pharaoh rose and departed, the great gold earrings in his ears jingling as he walked, and the trumpets sounding before and after him. I too rose to go with my mother when a messenger came and bade me wait upon Pharaoh, and with me the dwarf Bes. So we went, leaving an officer to conduct my mother to our home. As I passed her she caught me by the sleeve and whispered in my ear,

"My son, whatever chances to you, be brave and remember that the world holds more than women."

"Yes," I answered, "it holds death and God, or they hold it," though what put the words into my mind I do not know, since I did not understand and had no time to ask her meaning.

The messenger led us to the door of Peroa's private chamber, the same in which I had seen him on my return from the East. Here he bade me enter, and Bes to wait without. I went in and found two men and a woman in the chamber, all standing very silent. The men were Pharaoh who still wore his glorious robe and Double Crown, and the high priest of Isis clothed in white; the other was the lady Amada also clothed in the snowy robes of Isis.

At the sight of her thus arrayed my heart stopped and I stood silent because I could not speak. She too stood silent and I saw that beneath her thin veil her beautiful face was set and pale as that of an alabaster statue. Indeed she might have been not a lovely living woman, but the goddess Isis herself whose symbols she bore about her.

"Shabaka," said Pharaoh at length, "the Royal Lady of Egypt, Amada, priestess of Isis, has somewhat to say to you."

"Let the Royal Lady of Egypt speak on to her servant and affianced husband," I answered.

"Count Shabaka, General of the armies," she began in a cold clear voice like to that of one who repeats a lesson, "learn that you are no more my affianced husband and that I who am gathered again to Isis the divine, am no more your affianced wife."

"I do not understand. Will it please you to be more plain?" I said faintly.

"I will be more plain, Count Shabaka, more plain than you have been with me. Since we speak together for the last time it is well that I should be plain. Hear me. When first you returned from the East, in yonder hall you told us of certain things that happened to you there. Then the dwarf your servant took up the tale. He said that he gave my name to the Great King. I was wroth as well I might be, but even when I prayed that he should be scourged, you did not deny that it was he who gave my name to the King, although Pharaoh yonder said that if you had spoken the name it would have been another matter."

"I had no time," I answered, "for just then the messengers came from Idernes and afterwards when I sought you you were gone."

"Had you then no time," she asked coldly, "beneath the palms in the garden of the palace when we were affianced? Oh! there was time in plenty but it did not please you to tell me that you had bought safety and great gifts at the price of the honour of the Lady of Egypt whose love you stole."

"You do not understand!" I exclaimed wildly.

"Forgive me, Shabaka, but I understand very well indeed, since from your own words I learned at the feast given to Idernes that 'the name of Amada' slipped your lips by chance and thus came to the ears of the Great King."

"The tale that Idernes and his captain told was false, Lady, and for it Bes and I took their lives with our own hands."

"It had perhaps been better, Shabaka, if you had kept them living that they might confess that it was false. But doubtless you thought them safer dead, since dead men cannot speak, and for this reason challenged them to single combat."

I gasped and could not answer for my mind seemed to leave me, and she went on in a gentler voice,

"I do not wish to speak angrily to you, my cousin Shabaka, especially when you have just wrought such great deeds for Egypt. Moreover by the law I serve I may speak angrily to no man. Know then that on learning the truth, since I could love none but you according to the flesh and therefore can never give myself in marriage to another, I sought refuge in the arms of the goddess whom for your sake I had deserted. She was pleased to receive me, forgetting my treason. On this very day for the second time I took the oaths which may no more be broken, and that I may dwell where I shall never see you more, Pharaoh here has been pleased, at my request to name me high priestess and prophetess of Isis and to appoint me as a dwelling-place her temple at Amada where I was born far away in Upper Egypt. Now all is said and done, so farewell."

"All is not said and done," I broke out in fury. "Pharaoh, I ask your leave to tell the full story of this business of the naming of the lady Amada to the King of kings, and that in the presence of the dwarf Bes. Even a slave is allowed to set out his tale before judgment is passed upon him."

Peroa glanced at Amada who made no sign, then said,

"It is granted, General Shabaka."

So Bes was called into the chamber and having looked about him curiously, seated himself upon the ground.

"Bes," I said, "you have heard nothing of what has passed." (Here I was mistaken, for as he told me afterwards he had heard everything through the door which was not quite closed.) "It is needful, Bes, that you should repeat truly all that happened at the court of the King of kings before and after I was brought from the boat."

Bes obeyed, telling the tale very well, so well that all listened earnestly, without error moreover. When he had finished I also told my story and how, shaken by all I had gone through and already weak from the torment of the boat, the name of Amada was surprised from me who never dreamed that the King would at once make demand of her, and who would have perished a thousand times rather than such a thing should happen. I added what I had learned afterwards from our escort, that this name was already well known to the Great King who meant to make use of it as a cause of quarrel with Egypt. Further, that he had let me escape from a death by horrible torments because of some dream that he had dreamed while he rested before the banquet, in which a god appeared and told him that it was an evil thing to slay a man because that man had bested him at a hunting match and one of which heaven would keep an account. Still because of the law of his land he must find a public pretext for loosing one whom he had once condemned, and therefore chose this matter of the lady Amada whom he pretended to send me to bring to him.

When I had finished, as Amada still remained silent, Pharaoh asked of Bes how it came about that he told one story on the night of our return and another on this night.

"Because, O Pharaoh," answered Bes rolling his eyes, "for the first time in my life I have been just a little too clever and shot my arrow just a little too far. Hearken, Pharaoh, and Royal Lady, and High Priest. I knew that my master loves the lady Amada and knew also that she is quick of tongue and temper, one who readily takes offence even if thereby she breaks her own heart and so brings her life to ruin, and with it perchance her country. Therefore, knowing women whom I have studied in my own land, I saw in this matter just such a cause of offence as she would lay hold of, and counselled my master to keep silent as to the story of the naming of her before the King. Some evil spirit made him listen to this bad counsel, so far at least, that when I lied as to what had chanced, for which lie the lady Amada prayed that I might be scourged till my bones broke through the skin, he did not at once tell all the truth. Nor did he do so afterwards because he feared that if he did I should in fact be scourged, for my master and I love each other. Neither of us wishes to see the other scourged, though such is my lot to-night," and he glanced at Amada. "I have said."

Then at last Amada spoke.

"Had I known all this story from the first, perhaps I should not have done what I have done to-day and perhaps I should have forgiven and forgotten, for in truth even if the dwarf still lies, I believe your word, O Shabaka, and understand how all came about. But now it is too late to change. Say, O Priest of the Mother, is it not too late?"

"It is too late," said the priest solemnly, "seeing that if such vows as yours are broken for the second time, O Prophetess, the curse of the goddess will pursue you and him for whom they were broken, yes, through this life and all other lives that perchance may be given to you upon the earth or elsewhere."

"Pharaoh," I cried in despair, "I made a bond with you. It is recorded in writing and sealed. I have kept my part of the bond; my treasure you have spent; your enemies I have slain; your army I have commanded not so ill. Will you not keep yours and bid the priests release this lady from her vow and give her to me to whom she was promised? Or must I believe that you refuse, not because of goddesses and vows, but because yonder is the Royal Lady of Egypt, the true heiress to the throne who might perchance bear children, which as prophetess of Isis she can never do. Yes, because of this and because of certain cries that came to your ears in the hour of your crowning before Amen-ra and all the gods?"

Peroa flushed as he heard me and answered,

"You speak roughly, Cousin, and were you any other man I might be tempted to answer roughly. But I know that you suffer and therefore I forgive. Nay, you must believe no such things. Rather must you remember that in this bond of which you speak, it was set down that I only promised you the lady Amada with her own consent, and this she has withdrawn."

"Then, Pharaoh, hearken! To-morrow I leave Egypt for another land, giving you back your generalship and sheathing the sword that I had hoped to wield in its defence and yours when the last great day of trial by battle comes, as come it will. I tell you that I go to return no more, unless the lady Amada yonder shall summon me back to fight for her and you, promising herself to me in guerdon."

"That can never be," said Amada.

Then I became aware of another presence in the room, though how and when it appeared I do not know, but I suppose that it had crept in while we were lost in talk. At least between me and Pharaoh, crouched upon the ground, was the figure of a man wrapped in a beggar's cloak. It threw back the hood and there appeared the ashen face and snowy beard of the holy Tanofir.

"You know me, Pharaoh," he said in his deep, solemn voice. "I am Tanofir, the King's son; Tanofir the hermit, Tanofir the seer. I have heard all that passes, it matters not how and I come to you with a message, I who read men's hearts. Of vows and goddesses and women I say nothing. But this I say to you, that if you break the spirit of your bond and suffer yonder Shabaka to go hence with a bitter heart, trouble shall come on you. All the Great King's armies did not die yonder by the banks of Nile, and mayhap one day he will journey to bury the bones of those who fell, and with them *yours*, O Pharaoh. I do not think that you will listen to me to-night, and I am sure that yonder lady, full of the new-fanned flame of the jealous goddess, will not listen. Still let her take counsel and remember my words: In the hour of desperate danger let her send to Shabaka and demand his help, promising in return what he has asked and remembering that if Isis loves her, that goddess was born upon the Nile and loves Egypt more."

"Too late, too late, *too late!*" wailed Amada.

Then she burst into tears and turning fled away with the high priest. Pharaoh went also leaving me and Bes alone. I looked for the holy Tanofir to speak with him, but he too was gone.

"It is time to sleep, Master," said Bes, "for all this talk is more wearisome than any battle. Why! what is this that has your name upon it?" and he picked a silk-wrapped package from the floor and opened it.

Within were the priceless rose-hued pearls!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SHABAKA FIGHTS THE CROCODILE

"Where to?" I said to Bes when we were outside the palace, for I was so broken with grief that I scarcely knew what I did.

"To the house of the lady Tiu, I think, Master, since there you must make preparations for your start on the morrow, also bid her farewell. Oh!" he went on in a kind of rapture which afterwards I knew was feigned though at the time I did not think about it, "Oh! how happy should you be who now are free from all this woman-coil, with life new and fresh before you. Reflect, Master, on the hunting we will have yonder in Ethiopia. No more cares, no more plannings for the welfare of Egypt, no more persuading of the doubtful to take up arms, no more desperate battle-ventures with your country's honour on your sword-point. And if you must see women—well, there are plenty in Ethiopia who come and go lightly as an evening breeze laden with the odour of flowers, and never trouble in the morning."

"At any rate *you* are not free from such coils, Bes," I said and in the moonlight I saw his great face fall in.

"No, Master, I am tying them about my throat. See, such is the way of the world, or of the gods that rule the world, I know not which. For years I have been happy and free, I have enjoyed adventures and visited strange countries and have gathered learning, till I think I am the wisest man upon the Nile, at the side of one whom I loved and holding nothing at risk, except my own life which mattered no more than that of a gnat dancing in the sun. Now all is changed. I have a wife whom I love also, more than I can tell you," and he sighed, "but who still must be looked after and obeyed—yes, obeyed. Further, soon I shall have a people and a crown to wear, and councillors and affairs of state, and an ancient religion to support and the Grasshopper itself knows what besides. The burden has rolled from your back to mine, Master, making my heart which was so light, heavy, and oh! I wish it had stopped where it was."

Even then I laughed, sad as I was, for truth lived in the philosophy of Bes.

"Master," he went on in a changed voice, "I have been a fool and my folly has worked you ill. Forgive me since I acted for the best, only until the end no one ever knows what is the best. Now here is the house and I go to meet my wife and to make certain arrangements. By dawn perhaps you will be ready to start to Ethiopia."

"Do you really desire that I should accompany you there, Bes?"

"Certainly, Master. That is unless you should desire that I accompany you somewhere else instead, by sea southward for instance. If so, I do not know that I would refuse, since Ethiopia will not run away and there is much of the world that I should still like to visit. Only then there is Karema to be thought about, who expects, or, when she learns all, soon will expect, to be a queen," he added doubtfully.

"No, Bes, I am too tired to make new plans, so let us go to Ethiopia and not disappoint Karema, who after holding a cup so long naturally would like to try a sceptre."

"I think that is wisest, Master; at any rate the holy Tanofir thinks it wisest, and he is the voice of Fate. Oh! why do we trouble who after all, every one of us, are nothing but pieces upon the board of Fate."

Then he turned and left me and I entered the house where I found my mother sitting, still in her festal robes, like one who waits. She looked at my face, then asked what troubled me. I sat down on a stool at her feet and told her everything.

"Much as I thought," she said when I had finished. "These over-learned women are strange fish to catch and hold, and too much soul is like too much sail upon a boat when the desert wind begins to blow across the Nile. Well, do not let us blame her or Bes, or Peroa who is already anxious for his dynasty and would rather that Amada were a priestess than your wife, or even the goddess Isis, who no doubt is anxious for her votaries. Let us rather blame the Power that is behind the veil, or to it bow our heads, seeing that we know nothing of the end for which it works. So Egypt shuts her doors on you, my Son, and whither away? Not to the East again, I trust, for there you would soon grow shorter by a head."

"I go to Ethiopia, my Mother, where it seems that Bes is a great man and can shelter me."

"So we go to Ethiopia, do we? Well, it is a long journey for an old woman, but I weary of Memphis where I have lived for so many years and doubtless the sands of the south make good burial grounds."

"We!" I exclaimed. "We?"

"Surely, my Son, since in losing a wife you have again found a mother and until I die we part no more."

When I heard this my eyes filled with tears. My conscience smote me also because of late, and indeed for years past, I had thought so much of Amada and so little of my mother. And now it was Amada who had cast me out, unjustly, without waiting to learn the truth, because at the worst I, who worshipped her, had saved myself from death in slow torment by speaking her name, while my mother, forgetting all, took me to her bosom again as she had done when I was a babe. I knew not what to say, but remembering the pearls, I drew them out and placed them round my mother's neck.

She looked at the wonderful things and smiled, then said,

"Such gems as these become white locks and withered breasts but ill. Yet, my Son, I will keep them for you till you find a wife, if not Amada, then another."

"If not Amada, I shall never find a wife," I said bitterly, whereat she smiled.

Then she left me to make ready before she slept a while.

Work as we would noon had passed two hours, on the following day, before we were prepared to start, for there was much to do. Thus the house must be placed in charge of friends and the means of travel collected. Also a messenger came from Pharaoh praying me for his and Egypt's sake to think again before I left them, and an answer sent that go I must, whither the holy Tanofir would know if at any time Pharaoh desired to learn. In reply to this came another messenger who brought me parting gifts from Pharaoh, a chain of honour, a title of higher nobility, a commission as his envoy to whatever land I wandered, and so forth, which I must acknowledge. Lastly as we were leaving the house to seek the boat which Bes had made ready on the Nile, there came yet another messenger at the sight of whom my heart leapt, for he was priest of Isis.

He bowed and handed me a roll. I opened it with a trembling hand and read:

"From the Prophetess of Isis whose house is at Amada, aforetime Royal Lady of Egypt, to the Count Shabaka,

"I learn, O my Cousin, that you depart from Egypt and knowing the reason my heart is sore. Believe me, my Cousin, I love you well, better than any who lives upon the earth, nor will that love ever change, since the goddess who holds my future in her hands, knows of what we are made and is not jealous of the past. Therefore she will not be wroth at the earthly love of one who is gathered to her heavenly arms. Her blessing and mine be on you and if we see each other no more face to face in the world, may we meet again in the halls of Osiris. Farewell, beloved Shabaka. Oh! why did you suffer that black master of lies, the dwarf Bes, to persuade you to hide the truth from me?"

So the writing ended and below it were two stains still wet, which I knew were caused by tears. Moreover, wrapped in a piece of silk and fastened to the scroll was a little gold ring graven with the royal *uraeus* that Amada had always worn from childhood. Only on the previous night I had noted it on the first finger of her right hand.

I took my stylus and my waxen tablets and wrote on one of them:

"Had you been a man, Amada, and not a woman, I think you would have judged me differently but, learned priestess and prophetess as you are, a woman you remain. Perchance a time may come when once more you will turn to me in the hour of your need; if so and I am living, I will come. Yea, if I am dead I think that I still shall come, since nothing can really part us. Meanwhile by day and by night I wear your ring and whenever I look on it I think of Amada the woman whose lips have pressed my own, and forget Amada the priestess who for her soul's sake has been pleased to break the heart of the man who loved her and whom she misjudged so sorely in her pride and anger."

This tablet I wrapped up and sealed, using clay and her own ring to make the seal, and gave it for delivery to the priest.

At length we drew near to the river and here, gathered on the open land, I found the most of those who had fought with me in the battle against the Easterns, and with them a great concourse of others from the city. These collected round me, some of them wounded and hobbling upon crutches, praying me not to go, as did the others who foresaw sorrow to Egypt from my loss. But I broke away from them almost in tears and with my mother hid myself beneath the canopy of the boat. Here Bes was waiting, also his beautiful wife who, although she seemed sad at leaving Egypt, smiled a greeting to us while the steersmen and rowers of the boat, tall Ethiopians every one of them, rose and gave me a General's salute. Then, as the wind served, we hoisted the sail and glided away up Nile, till presently the temples and palm-groves of Memphis were lost to sight.

Of that long, long journey there is no need to tell. Up the Nile we travelled slowly, dragging the boat past the cataracts till Egypt was far behind us. In the end, many days after we had passed the mouth of another river that was blue in colour which flowed from the northern mountain lands down into the Nile, we came to a place where the rapids were so long and steep that we must leave the boat and travel overland. Drawing near to it at sunset I saw a multitude of people gathered on the sand and beyond them a camp in which were set many beautiful pavilions that seemed to be brodered with silk and gold, as were the banners that floated above them whereon appeared the effigy of a grasshopper, also done in gold with silver legs.

"It seems that my messengers travelled in safety," said Bes to me, "for know, that yonder are some of my subjects who have come here to meet us. Now, Master, I must no longer call you master since I fear I am once more a king. And you must no longer call me Bes, but Karoon. Moreover, forgive me, but when you come into my presence you must bow, which I shall like less than you do, but it is the custom of the Ethiopians. Oh! I would that you were the king and that I were your friend, for henceforth good-bye to ease and jollity."

I laughed, but Bes did not laugh at all, only turned to his wife who already ruled him as though he were indeed a slave, and said, "Lady Karema, make yourself as beautiful as you can and forget that you have ever been a Cup or anything useful, since henceforth you must be a queen, that is if you please my people."

"And what happens if I do not please them, Husband?" asked Karema opening her fine eyes.

"I do not quite know, Wife. Perhaps they may refuse to accept me, at which I shall not weep. Or perhaps they may refuse to accept you, at which of course I should weep very much, for you see you are so very white and, heretofore, all the queens of the Ethiopians have been black."

"And if they refuse to accept me because I am white, or rather brown, instead of black like oiled marble, what then, O Husband?"

"Then—oh! then I cannot say, O Wife. Perhaps they will send you back to your own country. Or perhaps they will separate us and place you in a temple where you will live alone in all honour. I remember that once they did that to a white woman, making a goddess of her until she died of weariness. Or perhaps—well, I do not know."

Then Karema grew angry.

"Now I wish I had remained a Cup," she said, "and the servant of the holy Tanofir who at least taught me many secret things, instead of coming to dwell among black barbarians in the company of a dwarf who, even if he be a king, it seems has no power to

protect the wife whom he has chosen."

"Why will women always grow wroth before there is need?" asked Bes humbly. "Surely it would be time to rate me when any of these things had happened."

"If any of them do happen, Husband, I shall say much worse things than that," she replied, but the talk went no further, for at this moment our boat grounded and singing a wild song, many of those who waited rushed into the water to drag it to the bank.

Then Bes stood up on the prow, waving his bow and there arose a mighty shout of, "*Karoon! Karoon!* It is he, it is he returned after many years!"

Twice they shouted thus and then, every one of them, threw themselves face downwards in the sand.

"Yes, my people," cried Bes, "it is I, Karoon, who having been miraculously preserved from many dangers in far lands by the help of the Grasshopper in heaven, and, as my messengers will have told you, of my beloved friend, lord Shabaka the Egyptian, who has deigned to come to dwell with us for a while, have at length returned to Ethiopia that I may shed my wisdom on you like the sun and pour it on your heads like melted honey. Moreover, mindful of our laws which aforetime I defied and therefore left you, I have searched the whole world through till I found the most beautiful woman that it contained, and made her my wife. She too has deigned to come to this far country to be your queen. Advance, fair Karema, and show yourself to these my Ethiopians."

So Karema stepped forward and stood on the prow of the boat by the side of Bes, and a strange couple they looked. The Ethiopians who had risen, considered her gravely, then one of them said,

"Karoon called her beautiful, but in truth she is almost white and very ugly."

"At least she is a woman," said another, "for her shape is female."

"Yes, and he has married her," remarked a third, "and even a king may choose his own wife sometimes. For in such matters who can judge another's taste?"

"Cease," said Bes in a lordly way. "If you do not think her beautiful to-night, you will to-morrow. And now let us land and rest."

So we landed and while I did so I took note of these Ethiopians. They were great men, black as charcoal with thick lips, white teeth and flat noses. Their eyes were large and the whites of them somewhat yellow, their hair curled like wool, their beards were short and on their faces they wore a continual smile. Of dress most of them had little, but their elders or leaders wore lion and leopard skins and some were clad in a kind of silken tunic belted about the middle. All were armed for war with long bows, short swords and small shields round in shape and made from the hide of the hippopotamus or of the unicorn. Gold was plentiful amongst them since even the humblest wore bracelets of that metal, while about the necks of the chieftains it was wound in great torques, also sometimes on their ankles. They wore sandals on their feet and some of them had ostrich feathers stuck in their hair, a few also had grasshoppers fashioned of gold bound on the top of their heads, and these I took to be the priests. There were no women in their number.

As the sun was sinking we were led at once to a very beautiful tent made of woven flax and ornamented as I have described, where we found food made ready for us in plenty, milk in bowls and the flesh of sheep and oxen boiled and roasted. Bes, however, was taken to a place apart, which made Karema even more angry than she was before.

Scarcely had we finished eating when a herald rushed into the tent crying, "Prostrate yourselves! Yea, be prostrated, the Grasshopper comes! Karoon comes."

Here I must say that I found that the title of Karoon meant "Great Grasshopper," but Karema who did not know this, asked indignantly why she should prostrate herself to a grasshopper. Indeed she refused to do so even when Bes entered the pavilion wonderfully attired in a gorgeous-coloured robe of which the train was held by two huge men. So absurd did he look that my mother and I must bow very deeply to hide our laughter while Karema said,

"It would be better, Husband, if you found children to carry your robe instead of two giants. Moreover, if it is meant to copy the colours of a grasshopper, 'tis badly done, since grasshoppers are green and you are gold and scarlet. Also they do not wear feathers set awry upon their heads."

Bes rolled his eyes as though in agony, then turning, bade his attendants be gone. They obeyed, though doubtfully as though they did not like to leave him alone with us, whereon he let down the flap of the pavilion, threw off his gorgeous coverings and said,

"You must learn to understand, Wife, that our customs are different from those of Egypt. There I was happy as a slave and you were held to be beautiful as the Cup of the holy Tanofir, also learned. Here I am wretched as a king and you are held to be ugly, also ignorant as a stranger. Oh! do not answer, I pray you, but learn that all goes well. For the time you are accepted as my wife, subject to the decision of a council of matrons, aged relatives of my family, who will decide when we reach the City of the Grasshopper whether or not you shall be acknowledged as the Queen of the Ethiopians. No, no, I pray you say nothing since I must go away at once, as according to the law of the Ethiopians the time has come for the Grasshopper to sleep, alone, Karema, as you are not yet acknowledged as my wife. You also can sleep with the lady Tiu and for Shabaka a tent is provided. Rest sweetly, Wife. Hark! They fetch me."

"Now, if I had my way," said Karema, "I would rest in that boat going back to Egypt. What say you, lord Shabaka?"

But I made no answer who followed Bes out of the tent, leaving her to talk the matter over with my mother. Here I found a crowd of his people waiting to convey him to sleep and watching, saw them place him in another tent round which they ranged themselves, playing upon musical instruments. After this someone came and led me to my own place where was a good bed in which I lay down to sleep. This however I could not do for a long while because of my own laughter and the noise of the drums and horns that were soothing Bes to his rest. For now I understood why he had preferred to be a slave in Egypt rather than a king in Ethiopia.

In the morning I rose before the dawn and went out to the river-bank to bathe. While I was making ready to wash myself, who should appear but Bes, followed, but at a distance, by a number of his people.

"Never have I spent such a night, Master," he said, "at least not since you took me prisoner years ago, since by law I may not stop those horns and musical instruments. Now, however, also according to the law of the Ethiopians, I am my own lord until the sun rises. So I have come here to gather some of those blue lilies which she loves as a present for Karema, because I fear that she is angry and must be appeased."

"Certainly she is very angry," I said, "or at least was so when I left her last night. Oh! Bes, why did you let your people tell her that she was ugly?"

"How can I help it, Master? Have you not always heard that the Ethiopians are chiefly famous for one thing, namely that they speak nothing but the truth. To them she, being different, seems to be ugly. Therefore when they say that she is ugly, they speak the truth."

"If so, it is a truth that she does not like, Bes, as I have no doubt she will tell you by and by. Do they think me ugly also?"

"Yes, they do, Master; but they think also that you look like a man who can draw a bow and use a sword, and that goes far with the Ethiopians. Of your mother they say nothing because she is old and they venerate the aged whom the Grasshopper is waiting to carry away."

Now I began to laugh again and went with Bes to gather the lilies. These grew at the end of a mass of reeds woven together by the pressure of the current and floating on the water. Bes lay down upon his stomach while his people watched from a distance on the bank amazed into silence, and stretched out his long arms to reach the blue lotus flowers. Suddenly the reeds gave way beneath him just as he had grasped two of the flowers and was dragging at them, so that he fell into the river.

Next instant I saw a swirl in the brown water and perceived a huge crocodile. It rushed at Bes open-mouthed. Being a good swimmer he twisted his body in order to avoid it, but I heard the great teeth close with a snap on the short leathern garment which he wore about his middle.

"The devil has me! Farewell!" he cried and vanished beneath the water.

Now, as I have said, I was almost stripped for bathing, but had not yet taken off my short sword which was girded round me by a belt. In an instant I drew it and amidst the yells of horror of the Ethiopians who had seen all from the bank, I plunged into the river. There are few able to swim as I could and I had the art of diving with my eyes open and remaining long beneath the surface without drawing breath, for this I had practised from a child.

Immediately I saw the great reptile sinking to the mud and dragging Bes with him to drown him there. But here the river was very deep and with a few swift strokes I was able to get under the crocodile. Then with all my strength I stabbed upwards, driving the sword far into the soft part of the throat. Feeling the pain of the sharp iron the beast let go of Bes and turned on me. How it happened I do not know but presently I found myself upon its back and was striking at its eyes. One thrust at least went home, for the blinded brute rose to the surface, bearing me with him, and oh! the sweetness of the air as I breathed again.

Thus we appeared, I riding the crocodile like a horse and stabbing furiously, while close by was Bes rolling his yellow eyes but helpless, for he had no weapon. Still the devil was not dead although blood streamed from him, only mad with pain and rage. Nor could the shouting Ethiopians help me since they had only bows and dared not shoot lest their shafts should pierce me. The crocodile began to sink again, snapping furiously at my legs. Then I bethought me of a trick I had seen practised by natives on the Nile.

Waiting till its huge jaws were open I thrust my arm between them, grasping the short sword in such fashion that the hilt rested on its tongue and the point against the roof of its mouth. It tried to close its jaws and lo! the good iron was fixed between them, holding them wide open. Then I withdrew my hand and floated upwards with nothing worse than a cut upon the wrist from one of its sharp fangs. I appeared upon the surface and after me the crocodile spouting blood and wallowing in its death agonies. I remembered no more till I found myself lying on the bank surrounded by a multitude with Bes standing over me. Also in the shallow water was the crocodile dead, my sword still fixed between its jaws.

"Are you harmed, Master" cried Bes in a voice of agony.

"Very little I think," I answered, sitting up with the blood pouring from my arm.

Bes thrust aside Karema who had come lightly clothed from her tent, saying,

"All is well, Wife. I will bring you the lilies presently."

Then he flung his arms about me, kissed my hands and my brow and turning to the crowd, shouted,

"Last night you were disputing as to whether this Egyptian lord should be allowed to dwell with me in the land of Ethiopia. Which of you disputes it now?"

"No one!" they answered with a roar. "He is not a man but a god. No man could have done such a deed."

"So it seems," answered Bes quietly. "At least none of you even tried to do it. Yet he is not a god but only that kind of man who is called a hero. Also he is my brother, and while I reign in Ethiopia either he shall reign at my side, or I go away with him."

"It shall be so, Karoon!" they shouted with one voice. And after this I was carried back to the tent.

In front of it my mother waited and kissed me proudly before them all, whereat they shouted again.

So ended this adventure of the crocodile, except that presently Bes went back and recovered the two lilies for Karema, this time from a boat, which caused the Ethiopians to call out that he must love her very much, though not as much as he did me.

That afternoon, borne in litters, we set out for the City of the Grasshopper, which we reached on the fourth day. As we drew near the place regiments of men to the number of twelve thousand or more, came out to meet us, so that at last we arrived escorted by an army who sang their songs of triumph and played upon their musical instruments until my head ached with the noise.

This city was a great place whereof the houses were built of mud and thatched with reeds. It stood upon a wide plain and in its centre rose a natural, rocky hill upon the crest of which, fashioned of blocks of gleaming marble and roofed with a metal that shone as gold, was the temple of the Grasshopper, a columned building very like to those of Egypt. Round it also were other public buildings, among them the palace of the Karoon, the whole being surrounded by triple marble walls as a protection from attack by foes. Never had I seen anything so beautiful as that hill with its edifices of shining white roofed with gold or copper and gleaming in the sun.

Descending from my litter I walked to those of my mother and Karema, for Bes in his majesty might not be approached, and said as much to them.

"Yes, Son," answered my mother, "it is worth while to have travelled so far to see such a sight. I shall have a fine sepulchre, Son."

"I have seen it all before," broke in Karema.

"When?" I asked.

"I do not know. I suppose it must have been when I was the Cup of the holy Tanofir. At least it is familiar to me. Already I weary of it, for who can care for a land or a city where they think white people hideous and scarcely allow a wife to go near her husband, save between midnight and dawn when they cease from their horrible music?"

"It will be your part to change these customs, Karema."

"Yes," she exclaimed, "certainly that will be my part," after which I went back to my litter.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE SUMMONS

Now at the gates of the City of the Grasshopper we were royally received. The priests came out to meet us, pushing a colossal image of their god before them on a kind of flat chariot, and I remember wondering what would be the value of that huge golden locust, if it were melted down. Also the Council came, very ancient men all of them, since the Ethiopians for the most part lived more than a hundred years. Perhaps that is why they were so glad to welcome Bes since they were too old to care about retaining power in their own hands as they had done during his long absence. For save Bes there was no other man living of the true royal blood who could take the throne.

Then there were thousands of women, broad-faced and smiling whose black skins shone with scented oils, for they wore little except a girdle about their waists and many ornaments of gold. Thus their earrings were sometimes a palm in breadth and many of them had great gold rings through their noses, such as in Egypt are put in those of bulls. My mother laughed at them, but Karema said that she thought them hideous and hateful.

They were a strange people, these Ethiopians, like children, most of them, being merry and kind and never thinking of one thing for more than a minute. Thus one would see them weep and laugh almost in the same breath. But among them was an upper class who had great learning and much ancient knowledge. These men made their laws wherein there was always sense under what seemed to be folly, designed the temples, managed the mines of gold and other metals and followed the arts. They were the real masters of the land, the rest were but slaves content to live in plenty, for in that fertile soil want never came near them, and to do as they were bid.

Thus they passed from the cradle to the grave amidst song and flowers, carrying out their light, allotted tasks, and for the rest, living as they would and loving those they would, especially their children, of whom they had many. By nature and tradition the men were warriors and hunters, being skilled in the use of the bow and always at war when they could find anyone to fight. Indeed when we came among them their trouble was that they had no enemies left, and at once they implored Bes to lead them out to battle since they were weary of herding kine and tilling fields.

All of these things I found out by degrees, also that they were a great people who could send out an army of seventy thousand men and yet leave enough behind them to defend their land. Of the world beyond their borders the most of them knew little, but the learned men of whom I have spoken, a great deal, since they travelled to Egypt and elsewhere to study the customs of other countries. For the rest their only god was the Grasshopper and like that insect they skipped and chirruped through life and when the winter of death came sprang away to another of which they knew nothing, leaving their young behind them to bask in the sun of unborn summers. Such were the Ethiopians.

Now of all the ceremonies of the reception of Bes and his re-crowning as Karoon, I knew little, for the reason that the tooth of the crocodile poisoned my blood and made me very ill, so that I remained for a moon or more lying in a fine room in the palace where gold seemed to be as plentiful as earthen pots are in Egypt, and all the vessels were of crystal. Had it not been for the skill of the Ethiopian leeches and above all for the nursing of my mother, I think that I must have died. She it was who withstood them when they wished to cut off my arm, and wisely, for it recovered and was as strong as it had ever been. In the end I grew well again and from the platform in front of the temple was presented to the people by Bes as his saviour and the next greatest to him in the kingdom, nor shall I ever forget the shoutings with which I was received.

Karema also was presented as his wife, having passed the Ordeal of the Matrons, but only, I think, because it was found that she was in the way to give an heir to the throne. For to them her beauty was ugliness, nor could they understand how it came about that their king, who contrary to the general customs of the land, was only allowed one wife lest the children should quarrel, could have chosen a lady who was not black. So they received her in silence with many whisperings which made Karema very angry.

When in due course, however, the child came and proved to be a son black as the best of them and of perfect shape, they relented towards her and after the birth of a second, grew to love her. But she never forgave and loved them not at all. Nor was she over-fond of these children of hers because they were so black which, she said, showed how poisonous was the blood of the Ethiopians. And indeed this is so, for often I have noticed that if an Ethiopian weds with one of another colour, their offspring is black down to the third or fourth generation. Therefore Karema longed for Egypt notwithstanding the splendour in which she dwelt.

So greatly did she long that she had recourse to the magic lore which she had learned from the holy Tanofir, and would sit for hours gazing into water in a crystal bowl, or sometimes into a ball of crystal without the water, trying to see visions therein that had to do with what passed in Egypt. Moreover in time much of her gift returned to her and she did see many things which she repeated to me, for she would tell no one else of them, not even her husband.

Thus she saw Amada kneeling in a shrine before the statue of Isis and weeping; a picture that made me sad. Also she saw the holy Tanofir brooding in the darkness of the Cave of the Bulls, and read in his mind that he was thinking of us, though what he thought she could not read. Again she saw Eastern messengers delivering letters to Pharaoh and knew from his face that he was disturbed and that Egypt was threatened with calamities. And so forth.

Soon the news of her powers of divination spread abroad, so that all the Ethiopians grew to fear her as a seeress and thenceforth, whatever they may have thought, none of them dared to say that she was ugly. Further, her gift was real, since if she told me of a certain thing such as that messengers were approaching, in due course they would arrive and make clear much that she had not been able to understand in her visions.

Now from the time that I grew strong again and as soon as Bes was firmly seated on his throne, he and I set to work to train and drill the army of the Ethiopians, which hitherto had been little more than a mob of men carrying bows and swords. We divided it into phalanxes after the Greek fashion, and armed these bodies with long lances, swords, and large shields in the place of the small ones they had carried before. Also we trained the archers, teaching them to advance in open order and shoot from cover, and lastly chose the best soldiers to be captains and generals. So it came about that at the end of the two years that I spent in Ethiopia there was a force of sixty thousand men or more whom I should not have been afraid to match against any troops in the world, since they were of great strength and courage, and, as I have said, by nature lovers of war. Also their bows being longer and more powerful, they could shoot arrows farther than the Easterns or the Egyptians.

The Ethiopian lords wondered why their King and I did these things, since they saw no enemy against which so great an army could be led to battle. On that matter Bes and I kept our own counsel, telling them only that it was good for the men to be trained to war, since, hearing of their wealth, one day the King of kings might attempt to invade their country. So month by month I laboured at this task, leading armies into distant regions to accustom them to travelling far afield, carrying with them what was necessary for their sustenance.

So it went on until a sad thing happened, since on returning from one of these forays in which I had punished a tribe that had murdered some Ethiopian hunters and we had taken many thousands of their cattle, I found my mother dying. She had been smitten by a fever which was common at that season of the year, and being old and weak had no strength to throw it off.

As medicine did not help her, the priests of the Grasshopper prayed day and night in their temple for her recovery. Yes, there they prayed to a golden locust standing on an altar in a sanctuary that was surrounded by crystal coffins wherein rested the flesh of former kings of the land. To me the sight was pitiful, but Bes asked me what was the difference between praying to a locust and praying to images with the heads of beasts, or to a dwarf shaped as he was like we did in Egypt, and I could not answer him.

"The truth is, Brother," he said, for so he called me now, "that all peoples in the world do not offer petitions to what they see and have been taught to revere, but to something beyond of which to them it is a sign. But why the Ethiopians should have chosen a grasshopper as a symbol of God who is everywhere, is more than I can tell. Still they have done so for thousands of years."

When I came to my mother's bedside she was wandering and I saw that she could not live long. In a little while, however, her mind cleared so that she knew me and tears of joy ran down her pale cheeks because I had returned before she died. She reminded me that she had always said that she would find a grave in Ethiopia, and asked to be buried and not kept above ground in crystal, as was the custom there. Then she said that she had been dreaming of my father and of me; also that she did not think that I need fret myself overmuch about Amada, since she was sure that before long I should kiss her on the lips.

I asked if she meant that I should marry her and that we should be happy and fortunate. She replied that she supposed that I should marry her, but of the rest would say nothing. Indeed her face grew troubled, as though some thought hurt her, and leaving the matter of Amada she bade Karema bring me the rose-hued pearls, blessed me, prayed for our reunion in the halls of Osiris, and straightway died.

So I caused her to be embalmed after the Egyptian fashion and enclosed in a coffin of crystal with a scarab on her heart that Karema had discovered somewhere in the city, for always she was searching for things that reminded her of Egypt, whereof many were to be found brought from time to time by travellers or strangers. Then with such ceremony as we could without the services of the priests of Osiris, Karema and I buried her in a tomb that Bes had caused to be made near to the steps of the temple of the Grasshopper, while Bes and his nobles watched from a distance.

And so farewell to my beloved mother, the lady Tiu.

After she was gone I grew very sad and lonely. While she lived I had a home, but now I was an exile, a stranger in a strange land with no one of my own people to talk to except Karema, with whom, as there were gossips even in Ethiopia, I thought it well not to talk too much. There was Bes it was true, but now he was a great king and the time of kings is not their own. Moreover Bes was Bes and an Ethiopian and I was I and an Egyptian, and therefore notwithstanding our love and brotherhood, we could never be like men of the same blood and country.

I grew weary of Ethiopia with its useless gold and damp eternal green and heat, and longed for the sand and the keen desert air. Bes noted it and offered me wives, but I shrank from these black women however buxom and kindly, and wished for no offspring of their race whom afterwards I could never leave. To Egypt I had sworn not to return unless one voice called me and it remained silent. What then was I to do, being no longer content to discipline and command an army that I might not lead into battle?

At length I made up my mind. By nature I was a hunter as much as a soldier; I would beg from Bes a band of brave men whom I knew, lovers of adventure who sought new things, and with them strike down south, following the path of the elephants to wherever the gods might lead us. Doubtless in the end it would be to death, but what matter when there is nothing for which one cares to live?

While I was brooding over these plans Karema read my mind, perhaps because it was her own, perhaps by help of her strange arts, which I do not know. At least one day when I was sitting alone looking at the city beneath from one of the palace window-places, she came to me looking very beautiful and very mystic in the white robes she always loved to wear, and said,

"My lord Shabaka, you tire of this land of honey and sweetness and soft airs and flowers and gold and crystal and black people who grin and chatter and are not pleasant to be near, is it not so?"

"Yes, Queen," I answered.

"Do not call me queen, my lord Shabaka, for I weary of that name, as we both do of the rest. Call me Karema the Arab, or Karema the Cup, which you will, but by the name of Thoth, god of learning, do *not* call me queen."

"Karema then," I said. "Well, how do you know that I tire of all this, Karema?"

"How could you do otherwise who are not a barbarian and who have Egypt in your heart, and Egypt's fate and——" here she looked me straight in the eyes, "Egypt's Lady. Besides, I measure you by myself."

"You at least should be happy, Karema, who are great and rich and beloved, and the wife of a King who is one of the best of men, and the mother of children."

"Yes, Shabaka, I should be but I am not, for who can live on sweetmeats only, especially when they like what is sour? See now how strangely we are made. When I was a girl, the daughter of an Arab chief, well bred and well taught as it chanced, I tired of the hard

life of the desert and the narrow minds about me, I who longed for wisdom and to know great men. Then I became the Cup of the holy Tanofir and wisdom was all about me, strange wisdom from another world, rough, sharp wisdom from Tanofir, and the quiet wisdom of the dead among whom I dwelt. I wearied of that also, Shabaka. I was beautiful and knew it and I longed to shine in a Court, to be admired among men, to be envied of women, to rule. My husband came my way. He was clever with a great heart. He was your friend and therefore I was sure that he must be loyal and true. He was, or might be, a king, as I knew, though he thought that I did not. I married him and the holy Tanofir laughed but he did not say me nay, and I became a queen. And now I wish sometimes that I were dead, or back holding the cup of the holy Tanofir with the wisdom of the heavens flowing round me and the soft darkness of the tombs about me. It seems that in this world we never can be content, Shabaka."

"No, Karema, we only think that we should be if things were otherwise than they are. But how can I help you, Karema?"

"Least of all by going away and leaving me alone," she answered with the tears starting to her eyes.

Looking at her, I began to think that the best thing I could do would be to go away and at once, but as ever she read my thought, shook her head and laughed.

"No, no, I have put on my yoke and will carry it to the end. Have I not two black children and a husband who is a hero, a wit and a mountebank in one, and a throne and more gold and crystal than I ever wish to see again even in a dream, and shall I not cling to these good things? If you went I should only be a little more unhappy than before, that is all. Not for my sake do I ask you to stay, but for your own."

"How for my own, Karema? I have done all that I can do here. I have built the army afresh from cook-boys to generals. Bes needs me no longer who has you, his children and his country, and I die of weariness."

"You can stop to make use of that army you have built afresh, Shabaka."

"Against whom? There are none to fight."

"Against the Great King of the East. Listen. My gift of vision has grown strong and clear of late. Only to-day I have seen a meeting between Pharaoh, the holy Tanofir and the lady Amada. They were all disturbed, I know not at what, and the end of it was that Amada wrote in a roll and gave the writing to messengers, who I think even now are speeding southward—to you, Shabaka. Nay, do not look doubtfully on me, it is true."

"Then you did well to tell me, Karema, for within a moon of this day I should have been where perhaps no messengers would have found me. Now I will wait and let it be your part to prepare the mind of Bes. Do you think that he would give me an army to lead to Egypt, if there were need?"

She nodded and answered,

"He would do so for three reasons. The first is because he loves you, the second because he too wearies of Ethiopia and this rich, fat life of peace, and the third, because I shall tell him that he must."

"Then why trouble to speak of the other two?" I said laughing.

So I stayed on in the City of the Grasshopper, and busied myself with the questions of how to transport and feed a great army that must hold the field for six months or a year; also with the setting of hundreds of skilled men to the making of bows, arrows, swords and shields. Nor did Bes say me no in these matters. Indeed he helped them forward by issuing the orders as his own, wherein I saw the hand of Karema.

Three months went by and I began to think that Karema's power had been at fault, or that her vision was one that came from her lips and not from her heart, to keep me in Ethiopia. But again she read my mind and smiled.

"Not so, Shabaka," she said. "Those messengers have come to trouble and are detained by a petty tribe beyond our borders over some matter of a woman. Ten days ago the frontier guards marched to set them free."

So again I waited and at length the messengers came, three of them Egyptians and three men of Ethiopia who dwelt in Egypt to learn its wisdom, reporting that as Karema had said, through the foolishness of a servant they had been held prisoner by an Arab chief and thus delayed. Then they delivered the writings which they had kept safe. One was from Pharaoh to the Karoon of Ethiopia; one from the holy Tanofir to Karema; and one from the lady Amada to myself.

With a trembling hand I broke the silk and seals and read. It ran thus:

"Shabaka, my Cousin,

"You departed from Egypt saying that never would you return unless I, Amada the priestess, called you, and I told you that I should never call. You said, moreover, that if you came at my call you would demand me in guerdon, and I told you that never would I give myself to you who was doubly sworn to Isis. Yet now I call and now I say that if you come and conquer and I yet live, then, if you still will it, I am yours. Thus stands the case: The Great King advances upon Egypt with an army countless as the sands, nor can Egypt hope to battle against him unaided and alone. He comes to make of her a slave, to kill her children, to burn her temples, to sack her cities and to defile her gods with blasphemies. Moreover he comes to seize me and to drag me away to shame in his House of Women.

"Therefore for the sake of the gods, for Egypt's sake and for my own, I pray you come and save us. Moreover I still love you, Shabaka, yes, more a thousand times, than ever I did, though whether you still love me I know not. For that love's sake, therefore, I am ready to break my vows to Isis and to dare her vengeance, if she should desire to be avenged upon me who would save her and her worship, praying that it may fall on my head and not on yours. This will I do by the counsel of the holy Tanofir, by command of Pharaoh, and with the consent of the high priests of Egypt.

"Now I, Amada, have written. Choose, Shabaka, beloved of my heart."

Such was the letter that caused my head to swim and set my soul on fire. Still I said nothing, but thrust it into my robe and waited. Presently Bes, who had been reading in his roll, looked up and spoke, saying,

"Are you minded to see arrows fly and swords shine in war, Brother? If so, here is opportunity. Pharaoh writes to me above his own seal, seeking an alliance between Egypt and Ethiopia. He says that the King of kings invades him and that if he conquers Egypt he has sworn to travel on and conquer Ethiopia also, since he learns that it is now ruled by a certain dwarf who once stole his White Signet, and by a certain Egyptian who once killed his Satrap, Idernes."

"What says the Karoon?" I asked.

Bes rolled his eyes and turning to Karema, asked,

"What says the Karoon's wife?"

Karema laid down the roll she had been studying and answered,

"She says that she has received a command from her master the holy Tanofir to wait upon him forthwith, for reasons that he will explain when she arrives, or to brave his curse upon her, her children, her country and her husband, and not only his but that of the spirits who serve him."

"The curse of the holy Tanofir is not a thing to mock at," said Bes, "as I who revere him, know as well as any man."

"No, Husband, and therefore I leave for Egypt as soon as may be. It seems that my sister is dead, this year past, and the holy Tanofir has no one to hold his cup."

"And what shall I do?" asked Bes.

"That is for you to say, Husband. But if you will, you can stay here and guard our children, giving the command of your army to the lord Shabaka."

Now, for we were alone, Bes twisted himself about, rolling his eyes and laughing as he used to do before he became Karoon of Ethiopia.

"O-ho-ho! Wife," he said, "so you are to go to Egypt, leaving me to play the nurse to babes, and my brother here is to command my armies, leaving me to look after the old men and the women. Nay, I think otherwise. I think that I shall come also, that is if my brother wishes it. Did he not save my life and is it not his and with it all I have? Oh! have done. Once more we will stand side by side in the battle, Brother, and afterwards let Fate do as it will with us. Tell me now, what is the tale of archers and of swordsmen with which we can march against the Great King with whom, like you, I have a score to settle?"

"Seventy and five thousand," I answered.

"Good! On the fifth day from now the army marches for Egypt."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### TANOFIR FINDS HIS BROKEN CUP

March we did, but on the fifteenth day, not the fifth, since there was much to make ready. First the Council of the Ethiopians must be consulted and through them the people. In the beginning there was trouble over the matter, since many were against a distant war, and this even after Bes had urged that it was better to attack than wait to be attacked. For they answered, and justly, that here in Ethiopia distance and the desert were their shields, since the King of kings, however great his strength, would be weary and famished before he set foot within their borders.

In the end the knot was cut with a sword, for when the army came to learn of the dispute, from the generals down to the common soldiers, every man clamoured to be led to war, since, as I have said, these Ethiopians were fighters all of them, and near at hand there were none left with whom they could fight. So when the Council came to see that they must choose between war abroad and revolt at home, they gave way, bargaining only that the children of the Karoon should not leave the land so that if aught befell him, there would be some of the true blood left to succeed.

Also the Grasshopper was consulted by the priests who found the omens favourable. Indeed I was told that this great golden locust sat up upon its hind legs upon the altar and waved its feelers in the air, which only happened when wonderful fortune was about to bless the land. The tale reminded me of the nodding of the statues of our own gods in Egypt when a new Pharaoh was presented to them, and of that of Isis when Amada put up her prayer to the divine Mother. To tell the truth, I suspected Karema of having some hand in the business. However, so it happened.

At length we set forth, a mighty host, Bes commanding the swordsmen and I, under him, the archers, of whom there were more than thirty thousand men, and glad was I when all the farewells were said and we were free of the weeping crowds of women. At first Bes and Karema were somewhat sad at parting from their children, but in a little while they grew gay again since the one longed for battle and the other for the sands of Egypt.

Now of our advance I need say little, except that it was slow, though none dared to bar the road of so mighty an array. Since we must go on foot, we were not able to cover more than five leagues a day, for even after we reached the river boats could not be found for so many, though Karema travelled in one with her ladies. Also cattle and corn must always be sent forward for food. Still we crept on to Egypt without sickness, accident, or revolt.

When we drew near to its frontiers messengers met us from Pharaoh bearing letters in answer to those which we had sent with the tidings of our coming. These contained little but ill news. It seemed that the Great King with a countless host had taken all the cities of the Delta and, after a long siege, had captured Memphis and put it to the sack, and that the army of Egypt, fighting desperately by land and upon the Nile was being driven southwards towards Thebes. Pharaoh added that he proposed to make his last stand at the strong city of Amada, since he doubted whether the troops from Lower Egypt would not rather surrender to the Easterns than retreat further up the Nile. He thanked and blessed us for our promised aid and prayed that it might come in time to save Egypt from slavery and himself from death.

Also there was a letter for me from Amada in which she said,

“Oh! come quickly. Come quickly, beloved Shabaka, lest of me you should find but bones for never will I fall living into the hands of the Great King. We are sore pressed and although Amada has been made very strong, it can stand but a little while against such a countless multitude armed with all the engines of war.”

For Karema, too, there were messages from the holy Tanofir of the same meaning, saying that unless we appeared within a moon of their receipt, all was lost.

We read and took counsel. Then we pressed forward by double marches, sending swift runners forward to bid Pharaoh and his army hold on to the last spear and arrow.

On the twenty-fifth day from the receipt of this news we came to the great frontier city which we found in tumult for its citizens were mad with fear. Here we rested one night and ate of the food that was gathered there in plenty. Then leaving a small rear-guard of five thousand men who were tired out, to hold the place, we pressed onwards, for Amada was still four days' march away. On the morning of the fourth day we were told that it was falling, or had fallen, and when at length we came in sight of the place we saw that it was beleaguered by an innumerable host of Easterns, while on the Nile was a great fleet of Grecian and Cyprian mercenaries. Moreover, heralds from the King of kings reached us, saying:

“Surrender, Barbarians, or before the second day dawns you shall sleep sound, every one of you.”

To these we answered that we would take counsel on the matter and that perhaps on the morrow we would surrender, since when we had marched from Ethiopia, we did not know how great was the King's strength, having been deceived as to it by the letters of the Pharaoh. Meanwhile that the King of kings would do well to let us alone, since we were brave men and meant to die hard, and it would be better for him to leave us to march back to Ethiopia, rather than lose an army in trying to kill us.

With these words which were spoken by Bes himself, the messengers departed. One of them however, who seemed to be a great lord, called in a loud voice to his companions, saying it was hard that nobles should have to do the errands, not of a man but of an ape who would look better hanging to a pole. Bes made no answer, only rolled his yellow eyes and said when the lord was out of hearing,

"Now by the Grasshopper and all the gods of Egypt I swear that in payment for this insult I will choke the Nile with the army of the Great King, and hang that knave to a pole from the prow of the royal ship." Which last thing I hope he did.

When the embassy had gone Bes gave orders that the whole army should eat and lie down to sleep.

"I am sure," said he, "that the Great King will not attack us at once, since he will hope that we shall flee away during the night, having seen his strength."

So the Ethiopians filled themselves and then lay down to sleep, which these people can do at any time, even if not tired as they were. But while they rested Bes and I and Karema, with some of the generals consulted together long and earnestly. For in truth we knew not what to do. But a league away lay the town of Amada beset by hundreds of thousands of the Easterns so that none could come in or out, and within its walls were the remains of Pharaoh's army, not more than twenty thousand men, all told, if what we heard were true. On the Nile also was the great Grecian and Cyprian fleet, two hundred vessels and more, though as we could see by the light of the setting sun the most of these were made fast to the western bank where the Egyptians could not come at them.

For the rest our position was good, being on high desert beyond the cultivated land which bordered the eastern bank. But in front of us, separating us from the southern army of the King, stretched a swamp hard to cross, so that we could not hope to make an attack by night as there was no moon. Lastly, the main Eastern strength, to the number of two hundred thousand or more, lay to the north beyond Amada.

All these things we considered, talking low and earnestly there in the tent, till it grew so dark that we could not see each other's faces while behind us slumbered our army that now numbered some seventy thousand men.

"We are in a trap," said Bes at length. "If we await attack they will weigh us down with numbers. If we flee they have camels and horses and will overtake us; also ships of which we have none. If we attack it must be without cover through swamp where we shall be bogged.

"Meanwhile Pharaoh is perishing within yonder walls of Amada which the engines batter down. By the Grasshopper! I know not what to do. It seems that our journey is vain and that few of us will see Ethiopia more; also that Egypt is sped."

I made no answer, for here my generalship failed me and I had nothing to say. The captains, too, were silent, only woman-like, Karema wept a little, and I too went near to weeping who thought of Amada penned in yonder temple like a lamb that awaits the butcher's knife.

Suddenly, coming from the door of the tent which I thought was closed, I heard a deep voice say,

"I have ever noted that those of Ethiopian blood are melancholy after sundown, though of Egyptians I had thought better things."

Now about this voice there was something familiar to me, still I said nothing, nor did the others, for to speak the truth, all of us were frightened and thought that we must dream. For how could any thing that breathed approach this tent through a triple line of sentries? So we sat still, staring at the darkness, till presently in that darkness appeared a glow of light, such as comes from the fire-flies of Ethiopia. It grew and grew while we gasped with fear, till presently it took shape, and the shape it took was that of the ancient withered face, the sightless eyes, and the white beard of the holy Tanofir. Yes, there not two feet from the ground seemed to float the head of the holy Tanofir, limned in faint flame, which I suppose must have been reflected on to it from the light of some camp-fire without.

"O my beloved master!" cried Karema, and threw herself towards him.

"O my beloved Cup!" answered Tanofir. "Glad am I to know you well and unshattered."

Then a torch was lit and lo! there before us, wrapped in his dark cloak sat the holy Tanofir.

"Whence come you, my Great-uncle?" I asked amazed.

"From less far than you do, Nephew," he answered. "Namely out of Amada yonder. Oh! ask me not how. It is easy if you are a blind old beggar who knows the path. And by the way, if you have aught to eat I should be glad of a bite and a sup, since in Amada food has been scarce for this last month, and to-night there is little left."

Karema sped from the tent and presently returned with bread and wine of which Tanofir partook almost greedily.

"This is the first strong drink that I have tasted for many a year," he said as he drained the goblet; "but better a broken vow than broken wits when one has much to plan and do. At least I hope the gods will think so when I meet them presently. There—I am strong again. Now, say, what is your force?"

We told him.

"Good. And what is your plan?"

We shook our heads, having none.

"Bes," he said sternly, "I think you grow dull since you became a king—or perhaps it is marriage that makes you so. Why, in bygone years schemes would have come so fast that they would have choked each other between those thick lips of yours. And Shabaka, tell me, have you lost all your generalship whereof once you had plenty, in the soft air of Ethiopia? Or is it that even the shadow of marriage makes *you* dull? Well, I must turn to the woman, for that is always the lot of man. Your plan, Karema, and quickly for there is no time to lose."

Now the face of Karema grew fixed and her eyes dreamy as she spoke in a slow, measured voice like one who knows not what she says.

"My plan is to destroy the armies of the Great King and to relieve the city of Amada."

"A very good plan," said holy Tanofir, "but the question is, how?"

"I think," went on Karema, "that about a league above this place there is a spot where at this season the Nile can be forded by tall men without the wetting of their shoulders. First then, I would send five thousand swordsmen across that ford and let them creep down on the navy of the Great King where the sailors revel in safety, or sleep sound, and fire the ships. The wind blows strongly from the south and the flames will leap fast from one of them to the other. Most of their crews will be burned and the rest can be slain by our five thousand."

"Good, very good," said the holy Tanofir, "but not enough, seeing that on the eastern bank is gathered the host of over two hundred thousand men. Now how will you deal with *them*, Karema?"

"I seem to see a road yonder beyond the swamp. It runs on the edge of the desert but behind the sand-hills. I would send the archers of whom there are more than thirty thousand, under the command of Shabaka along that road which leads them past Amada. On its farther side are low hills strewn with rocks. Here I would let the archers take cover and wait for the breaking of the dawn. Then beneath them they will see the most of the Eastern host and with such bows as ours they can sweep the plain from the hills almost to the Nile, and having a hundred arrows to a man, should slaughter the Easterns by the ten thousand, for when these turn to charge a shaft should pierce through two together."

"Good again," said Tanofir. "But what of the army of the Great King which lies upon this side of Amada?"

"I think that before the dawn, believing us so few, it will advance and with the first light begin to thread the swamp, and therefore we must keep five thousand archers to gall it as it comes. Still it will win through, though with loss, and find us waiting for it here shoulder to shoulder, rank upon rank with locked shields, against which horse and foot shall break in vain, for who shall drive a wedge through the Ethiopian squares that Shabaka has trained and that Bes, the Karoon, commands? I say that they shall roll back like waves from a cliff; yes, again and again, growing ever fewer till the clamour of battle and the shouts of fear and agony reach their ears from beyond Amada where Shabaka and the archers do their work and the sight of the burning ships strikes terror in them and they fly."

"Good again," said the holy Tanofir. "But still many on both fronts will be left, for this army of Easterns is very vast. And how will you deal with these, O Karema?"

"On these I would have Pharaoh with all his remaining strength pour from the northern and the southern gates of Amada, for so shall they be caught like wounded lions between two wild bulls and torn and trampled and utterly destroyed. Only I know not how to tell Pharaoh what he must do, and when."

"Good again," said the holy Tanofir, "very good. And as for the telling of Pharaoh, well, I shall see him presently. It is strange, my chipped Cup which I had almost thrown away as useless, that although broken, you still hold so much wisdom. For know, wonderful though it may seem, that just such plans as you have spoken have grown up in my own mind, only I wished to learn if you thought them wise."

Then he laughed a little and Karema stretched her arms as one does who awakes from sleep, rubbed her eyes and asked if he would not eat more food.

In an instant Tanofir was speaking again in a quick, clear voice.

"Bes, or King," he said, "doubtless you will do your wife's will. Therefore let the host be aroused and stand to its arms. As it chanced I have four men without who can be trusted. Two of these will guide the five thousand to the ford and across it; also down upon the ships. The other two will guide Shabaka and the archers along the road which Karema remembers so well; perhaps she trod it as a child. For my part I return to Amada to make sure that Pharaoh does his share and at the right time. For mark, unless all this is carried through to-night Amada will fall to-morrow, a certain priestess will die, and you, Bes, and your soldiers will never look on Ethiopia again. Is it agreed?"

I nodded who did not wish to waste time in words, and Bes rolled his eyes and answered,

"When one can think of nothing, it is best to follow the counsel of those who can think of something; also to hunt rather than to be hunted. Especially is this so if that something comes from the holy Tanofir or his broken Cup. Generals, you have heard. Rouse the host and bid them stand to their arms company by company!"

The generals leapt away into the darkness like arrows from a bow, and presently we heard the noise of gathering men.

"Where are these guides of yours, holy Tanofir?" asked Bes.

Tanofir beckoned over his shoulder, and out of the gloom, one by one, four men stole into the tent. They were strange, quiet men, but I can say no more of them since their faces were veiled, nor as it chanced, did I ever see any of them after the battle, in which I suppose that they were killed. Or perhaps they appeared after—well, never mind!

"You have heard," said Tanofir, whereupon all four of them bowed their mysterious veiled heads.

"Now, my Brother," whispered Bes into my ear, "tell me, I pray you, how did four men who were not in the tent, hear what was said in this tent, and how did they come through the guards who have orders to kill anyone who does not know the countersign, especially men whose faces are wrapped in napkins?"

"I do not know," I answered, whereon Bes groaned, only Karema smiled a little as though to herself.

"Then, having heard, obey," said the holy Tanofir, whereon the four veiled ones bowed again.

"Will you not give them their orders, O most Venerable?" inquired Bes doubtfully.

"I think it is needless," said Tanofir in a dry voice. "Why try to teach those who know?"

"Will you not offer them something to eat, since they also must be hungry?" I asked of Karema.

"Fool, be silent," she replied, looking on me with contempt. "Do the—friends—of Tanofir need to eat?"

"I should have thought so after being beleaguered for a month in a starving town. If the master wants to eat, why should not his men?" I murmured.

Then a thought struck me and I was silent.

A general returned and reported that the orders had been executed and that all the army was afoot.

"Good," said Bes. "Then start forthwith with five thousand men, and burn those ships, according to the plan laid down by the Queen Karema, which you heard her speak but now," and he named certain regiments that he should take with him, those of the general's own command, adding: "Save some of the ships if you can, and afterwards cross the Nile in them with your men, and join yourself either to my force or to that of the lord Shabaka, according to what you see. May the Grasshopper give you victory and wisdom."

The general saluted and asked,

"Who guides us to and across the ford of the great river?"

Two of the veiled men stepped forward whereon the general muttered into my ear,

"I like not the look of them. I pray the Grasshopper they do not guide us across the River of Death."

"Have no fear, General," said the holy Tanofir from the other end of the tent. "If you and your men play their parts as well as the guides will play theirs, the ships are already burned together with their companies. Only take fire with you."

So that general departed with the two guides, looking somewhat frightened, and soon was marching up Nile at the head of five thousand swordsmen.

Now Bes looked at me and said,

"It seems that you had better be gone also, my Brother, with the archers. Perchance the holy Tanofir will show you whither."

"No, no," answered Tanofir, "my guides will show him. Look not so doubtful, Shabaka. Did I fail you when you were in the grip of the King of kings in the East, and only your own life and that of Bes were at stake?"

"I do not know," I answered.

"You do not know, but I know, as I think do Bes and Karema, since the one received the messages which the other sent. Well, if I did not fail you then, shall I fail you now when Egypt is at stake? Follow these guides I give you, and——" here he took hold of the quiver of arrows that lay beside me on the ground, and as certainly as though he could see it with his blind eyes, touched one of them, on the shaft of which were two black and a white feather, "remember my words after you have loosed this arrow from your great black bow and noted where it strikes."

Then I turned to Bes and asked,

"Where do we meet again?"

"I cannot say, Brother," he answered. "In Amada if that may be. If not, at the Table of Osiris, or in the fields of the Grasshopper, or in the blackness which swallows all, gods and men together."

"Does Karema come with me or bide with you?" I asked again.

"She does neither," interrupted Tanofir, "she accompanies me to Amada, where I have need of her and she will be more safe. Oh! fear nothing, for every hermit however poor, still carries his staff and his cup, even if it be cracked."

Then I shook Bes by the hand and went my way, wondering if I were awake or dreaming, and the last thing I saw in that tent was the beautiful face of Karema smiling at me. This I took to be a good omen, since I knew that it was the heart of the holy Tanofir which smiled, and that her eyes were but its mirror.

Already my thirty thousand archers were marshalling, and having made sure that there was ample store of arrows and that all their gourds were filled with water, I set myself at their head while in front of me walked the two veiled guides. I looked upon them doubtfully, since it seemed dangerous to trust an army to unknown men who for aught I knew, might lead us into the midst of our foes. Then I remembered that they were vouched for by the holy Tanofir, my own great-uncle whom I trusted above any man on earth, and took heart again.

How had he come into our tent, I wondered, and how, blind as he was, would he get back into Amada with Karema, if he took her? Well, who could account for the goings or the comings of the holy Tanofir, who was more of a spirit than a man? Perhaps it was not really he whom we had seen, but what we Egyptians called his *Ka* or Double which can pass to and fro at will. Only do *Kas* eat? Of this matter I knew only that offerings of food and drink are made to them in tombs. So leaving the holy Tanofir to guard himself, I turned my mind to our own business, which was to surprise the army of the Great King.

Skirting the swamp we came to rough and higher ground and though I could see little in that darkness, I knew that we were walking up a hill. Presently we crossed its crest and descending for three bowshots or so, I felt that my feet were on a road. Now the guides turned to the left and after them in a long line came my army of thirty thousand archers. In utter silence we went since we had no beasts with us and our sandalled feet made little noise; moreover orders had been passed down the line that the man who made a sound should die.

For two hours or more we marched thus, then bore to the left again and climbed a slope, by which time I judged we must be well past the town of Amada. Here suddenly the guides halted and we after them at whispered words of command. One of them took me by the cloak, led me forward a little way to the crest of the ridge, and pointed with his white-sleeved arm. I looked and there beneath me, well within bowshot, were thousands of the watchfires of the King's army, flaring, some of them, in the strong wind. For a full league those fires burned and we were opposite to the midmost of them.

"See now, General Shabaka," said the guide, speaking for the first time in a curious hissing whisper such as might come from a man who had no lips, "beneath you sleeps the Eastern host, which being so great, has not thought it needful to guard this ridge. Now marshal your archers in a fourfold line in such fashion that at the first break of dawn they can take cover behind the rocks and shoot, every man of them without piercing his fellow. Do you bide here with the centre where your standard can be seen by all to north and south. I and my companion will lead your vanguard farther on to where the ridge draws nearer to the Nile, so that with their arrows they can hold back and slay any who strive to escape down stream. The rest is in your hands, for we are guides, not generals. Summon your captains and issue your commands."

So we went back again and I called the officers together and told them what they were to do, then despatched them to their regiments.

Presently the vanguard of ten thousand men drew away and vanished, and with them the white-robed guides on whom I never looked again. Then I marshalled my centre as well as I could in the gloom, and bade them lie down to rest and sleep if they were able; also, within thirty minutes of the sunrise, to eat and drink a little of the food they carried, to see that every bow was ready and that the arrows were loosened in every quiver. This done, with a few whom I trusted to serve me as messengers and guard, I crept up to the brow of the hill or slope, and there we laid us down and watched.

## XVII

# THE BATTLE

Two hours went by and I knew by the stars that the dawn could not be far away. My eyes were fixed upon the Nile and on the lights that hung to the prows of the Great King's ships. Where were those who had been sent to fire them, I wondered, for of them I saw nothing. Well, their journey would be long as they must wade the river. Perhaps they had not yet arrived, or perhaps they had miscarried. At least the fleet seemed very quiet. None were alarmed there and no sentry challenged.

At length it grew near to dawn and behind me I heard the gentle stir of the Ethiopians arising and eating as they had been bidden, whereon I too ate and drank a little, though never had I less wished for food. The East brightened and far up the Nile of a sudden there appeared what at first I took to be a meteor or a lantern waving in the wind that now was blowing its strongest, as it does at this season of the year just at the time of dawn. Yet that lantern seemed to travel fast and lo! now I saw that it was fire running up the rigging of a ship.

It leapt from rope to rope and from sail to sail till they blazed fiercely, and in other ships also nearer to us, flame appeared that grew to a great red sheet. Our men had not failed; the navy of the King of kings was burning! Oh! how it burned fanned by the breath of that strong wind. From vessel to vessel leapt the fire like a thing alive, for all of them were drawn up on the bank with prows fastened in such fashion that they could not readily be made loose. Some broke away indeed, but they were aflame and only served to spread the fire more quickly. Before the rim of the sun appeared for a league or more there was nothing but blazing ships from which rose a hideous crying, and still more and more took fire lower down the line.

I had no time to watch for now I must be up and doing. The sky grew grey, there was light enough to see though faintly. I cast my eyes about me and perceived that no place in the world could have been better for archery. In front the hill was steep for a hundred paces or more and scattered over with thousands of large stones behind which bowmen might take shelter. Then came a gentle slope of loose sand up which attackers would find it hard to climb. Then the long flat plain whereon the Easterns were camped, and beyond it, scarce two furlongs away, the banks of Nile.

Indeed the place was ill-chosen for so great an army, nor could it have held them all, had not the camping ground been a full league in length, and even so they were crowded. Out of the mist their tents appeared, thousands of them, farther than my eye could reach, and almost opposite to me, near to the banks of the river, was a great pavilion of silk and gold that I guessed must shelter the majesty of the King of kings. Indeed this was certain since now I saw that over it floated his royal banner which I knew so well, I who had stolen the little White Signet of signets from which it was taken. Truly the holy Tanofir, or his Cup, Karema, or his messengers, or the spirits with whom he dwelt, I know not which, had a general's eye and knew how to plan an ambushade.

So thought I to myself as I ran back to my army to meet the gathered captains and set all things in order. It was soon done for they were ready, as were the fierce Ethiopians fresh from their rest and food, and stringing their bows, every one of them, or loosening the arrows in their quivers. As I came they lifted their hands in salute, for speak they dared not and I sent a whisper down their ranks, that this day they must fight and conquer, or fall for the glory of Ethiopia and their king. Then I gave my orders and before the sun rose and revealed them they crept forward in a fourfold line and took shelter behind the stones, lying there invisible on their bellies until the moment came.

The red rim of Ra appeared glorious in the East, and I, from behind the rocks that I had chosen, sat down and watched. Oh! truly Tanofir or the gods of Egypt were ordering things aright for us. The huge camp was awake now and aware of what was happening on the Nile. They could not see well because of the tall reeds upon the river's rim and therefore, without order or discipline, by the thousand and the ten thousand, for their numbers were countless, some with arms and some without, they ran to the slope of sand beneath our station and began to climb it to have a better view of the burning ships.

The sun leapt up swiftly as it does in Egypt. His glowing edge appeared over the crest of the hill though the hollows beneath were still filled with shadow. The moment was at hand. I waited till I had counted ten, glancing to the right and left of me to see that all were ready and to suffer the crowd to thicken on the slope, but not to reach the lowest rocks, whither they were climbing. Then I gave the double signal that had been agreed.

Behind me the banner of the golden Grasshopper was raised upon a tall pole and broke upon the breeze. That was the first signal whereat every man rose to his knees and set shaft on string. Next I lifted my bow, the black bow, the ancient bow that few save I could bend, and drew it to my ear.

Far away, out of arrow-reach as most would have said, floated the Great King's standard over his pavilion. At this I aimed, making allowance for the wind, and shot. The shaft leapt forward, seen in the sunlight, lost in the shadow, seen in the sunlight again and lastly seen once more, pinning that golden standard against its pole!

At the sight of the omen a roar went up that rolled to right and left of us, a roar from thirty thousand throats. Now it was lost in a sound like to the hissing of thunder rain in Ethiopia, the sound of thirty thousand arrows rushing through the wind. Oh! they were well aimed, those arrows for I had not taught the Ethiopians archery in vain.

How many went down before them? The gods of Egypt know alone. I do not. All I know is that the long slope of sand which had been crowded with standing men, was now thick with fallen men, many of whom lay as though they were asleep. For what mail could resist the iron-pointed shafts driven by the strong bows of the Ethiopians?

And this was but a beginning, for, flight after flight, those arrows sped till the air grew dark with them. Soon there were no more to shoot at on the slope, for these were down, and the order went to lift the bows and draw upon the camp, and especially upon the parks

of baggage beasts. Presently these were down also, or rushing maddened to and fro.

At last the Eastern generals saw and understood. Orders were shouted and in a mad confusion the scores of thousands who were unharmed, rushed back towards the banks of Nile where our shafts could not reach them. Here they formed up in their companies and took counsel. It was soon ended, for all the vast mass of them, preceded by a cloud of archers, began to advance upon the hill.

Now I passed a command to the Ethiopians, of whom so far not one had fallen, to lie low and wait. On came the glittering multitude of Easterns, gay with purple and gold, their mail and swords shining in the risen sun. On they came by squadron and by company, more than the eye could number. They reached the sand slope thick with their own dead and wounded and paused a little because they could see no man, since the black bodies of the Ethiopians were hid behind the black stones and the black bows did not catch the light.

Then from a gorgeous group that I guessed hid the person of the Great King surrounded by his regiment of guards, ten thousand of them who were called Immortals, messengers sprang forth screaming the order to charge. The host began to climb the slippery sand slope but still I held my hand till their endless lines were within fifty paces of us and their arrows rattled harmlessly against our stones. Then I caused the banner of the Grasshopper that had been lowered, to be lifted thrice, and at the third lifting once more thirty thousand arrows rushed forth to kill.

They went down, they went down in lines and heaps, riddled through and through. But still others came on for they fought under the eye of the Great King, and to fly meant death with shame and torture. We could not kill them all, they were too many. We could not kill the half of them. Now their foremost were within ten paces of us and since we must stand up to shoot, our men began to fall, also pierced with arrows. I caused the blast of retreat to be sounded on the ivory horn and step by step we drew back to the crest of the ridge, shooting as we went. On the crest we re-formed rapidly in a double line standing as close as we could together and my example was followed all down the ranks to right and left. Then I bethought me of a plan that I had taught these archers again and again in Ethiopia.

With the flag I signalled a command to stop shooting and also passed the word down the line, so that presently no more arrows flew. The Easterns hesitated, wondering whether this were a trap, or if we lacked shafts, and meanwhile I sent messengers with certain orders to the vanguard, who sped away at speed behind the hill, running as they never ran before. Presently I heard a voice below cry out,

"The Great King commands that the barbarians be destroyed. Let the barbarians be destroyed!"

Now with a roar they came on like a flood. I waited till they were within twenty paces of us, and shouted, "Shoot and fall!"

The first line shot and oh! fearful was its work, for not a shaft missed those crowded hosts and many pinned two together. My archers shot and fell down, setting new arrows to the string as they fell, whereon the second line also shot over them. Then up we sprang and loosed again, and again fell down, whereon the second line once more poured in its deadly hail.

Now the Easterns stayed their advance, for their front ranks lay prone, and those behind must climb over them if they could. Yes, standing there in glittering groups they rocked and hesitated although their officers struck them with swords and lances to drive them forward. Once more our front rank rose and loosed, and once more we dropped and let the shafts of the second speed over us. It was too much, flesh and blood could not bear more of those arrows. Thousands upon thousands were down and the rest began to flee in confusion.

Then at my command the ivory horns sounded the charge. Every man slung his bow upon his back and drew his short sword.

"On to them!" I cried and leapt forward.

Like a black torrent we rushed down the hill, leaping over the dead and wounded. The retreat became a rout since before these ebon, great-eyed warriors the soft Easterns did not care to stand. They fled screaming,

"These are devils! These are devils!"

We were among them now, hacking and stabbing with the short swords upon their heads and backs. There was no need to aim the blow, they were so many. Like a huddled mob of cattle they turned and fled down Nile. But my orders had reached the vanguard and these, hidden in the growing crops on the narrow neck of swampy land between the hills and the Nile, met them with arrows as they came, also raked them from the steep cliff side. Their chariot wheels sank into the mud till the horses were slain; their footmen were piled in heaps about them, till soon there was a mighty wall of dead and dying. And our centre and rearguard came up behind. Oh! we slew and slew, till before the sun was an hour high over half the army of the Great King was no more. Then we re-formed, having suffered but little loss, and drank of the water of the Nile.

"All is not done," I cried.

For the Immortals still remained behind us, gathered in massed ranks about their king. Also there were many thousands of others between these and the walls of Amada, and to the south of the city yet a second army, that with which Bes had been left to deal, with what success I knew not.

"Ethiopians," I shouted, "cease crying Victory, since the battle is about to begin. Strike, and at once before the Easterns find their heart again."

So we advanced upon the Immortals, all of us, for now the vanguard had joined our strength.

In long lines we advanced over that blood-soaked plain, and as we came the Great King loosed his remaining chariots against us. It availed him nothing, since the horses could not face our arrows whereof, thanks be to the gods! I had prepared so ample a store, carried in bundles by lads. Scarce a chariot reached our lines, and those that did were destroyed, leaving us unbroken.

The chariots were done with and their drivers dead, but there still frowned the squares of the Immortals. We shot at them till nearly all our shafts were spent, and, galled to madness, they charged. We did not wait for the points of those long spears, but ran in beneath them striking with our short swords, and oh! grim and desperate was that battle, since the Easterns were clad in mail and the Ethiopians had but short jerkins of bull's hide.

Fight as we would we were driven back. The fray turned against us and we fell by hundreds. I bethought me of flight to the hills, since now we were outnumbered and very weary. But behold! when all seemed lost a great shouting rose from Amada and through her opened gates poured forth all that remained of the army of Pharaoh, perhaps eighteen or twenty thousand men. I saw, and my heart rose again.

"Stand firm!" I cried. "Stand firm!" and lo! we stood.

The Egyptians were on them now and in their midst I saw Pharaoh's banner. By degrees the battle swayed towards the banks of Nile, we to the north, the Egyptians to the south and the Easterns between us. They were trying to turn our flank; yes, and would have done it, had there not suddenly appeared upon the Nile a fleet of ships. At first I thought that we were lost, for these ships were from Greece and Cyprus, till I saw the banner of the Grasshopper wave from a prow, and knew that they were manned by our five thousand who had gone out to burn the fleet, and had saved these vessels. They beached and from their crowded holds poured the five thousand, or those that were left of them, and ranging themselves upon the bank, raised their war-shout and attacked the ends of the Easterns' lines.

Now we charged for the last time and the Egyptians charged from the south. Ha-ha! the ranks of the Immortals were broken at length. We were among them. I saw Pharaoh, his *uraeus* circlet on his helm. He was wounded and sore beset. A tall Immortal rushed at him with a spear and drove it home.

Pharaoh fell.

I leapt over him and killed that Eastern with a blow upon the neck, but my sword shattered on his armour. The tide of battle rolled up and swept us apart and I saw Pharaoh being carried away. Look! yonder was the Great King himself standing in a golden chariot, the Great King in all his glory whom last I had seen far away in the East. He knew me and shot at me with a bow, the bow he thought my own, shouting, "Die, dog of an Egyptian!"

His arrow pierced my helm but missed my head. I strove to come at him but could not.

The real rout began. The Immortals were broken like an earthen jar. They retreated in groups fighting desperately and of these the thickest was around the Great King. He whom I hated was about to escape me. He still had horses; he would fly down Nile, gain his reserves and so away back to the East, where he would gather new and yet larger armies, since men in millions were at his command. Then he would return and destroy Egypt when perchance there were no Ethiopians to help her, and perhaps after all drag Amada to his House of Women. See, they were breaking through and already I was far away with a wound in my breast, a hurt leg and a shattered sword.

What could I do? My arrows were spent and the bearers had none left to give me. No, there was one still in the quiver. I drew it out. On its shaft were two black feathers and one white. Who had spoken of that arrow? I remembered, Tanofir. I was to think of certain things that he had said when I noted what it pierced. I unslung my bow, strung it and set that arrow on the string.

By now the Great King was far away, out of reach for most archers. His chariot forging ahead amidst the remnant of his guards and the nobles who attended on his sacred person, travelled over a little rise where doubtless once there had been a village, long since rotted down to its parent clay. The sunlight glinted on his shining armour and silken robe, whereof the back was toward me.

I aimed, I drew, I loosed! Swift and far the shaft sped forward. By Osiris! it struck him full between the shoulders, and lo! the King of kings, the Monarch of the World, lurched forward, fell on to the rail of his chariot, and rolled to the ground. Next instant there arose a roar of, "The King is dead! The Great King is dead! *Fly, fly, fly!*"

So they fled and after them thundered the pursuers slaying and slaying till they could lift their arms no more. Oh! yes, some escaped though the men of Thebes and country folk murdered many of them and but a few ever won back to the East to tell the tale of the blotting out of the mighty army of the King of kings and of the doom dealt to him by the great black bow of Shabaka the Egyptian.

I stood there gasping, when suddenly I heard a voice at my side. It said,

"You seem to have done very well, Brother, even better than we did yonder on the other side of the town, though some might think that fray a thing whereof to make a song. Also that last shot of yours was worthy of a good archer, for I marked it, I marked it. A great lord was laid low thereby. Let us go and see who it was."

I threw my arm round the bull neck of Bes and leaning on him, advanced to where the King lay alone save for the fallen about him.

"This man is not yet sped," said Bes. "Let us look upon his face," and he turned him over, and stretched him there upon the sand with the arrow standing two spans beyond his corselet.

"Why," said Bes, "this is a certain High one with whom we had dealings in the East!" and he laughed thickly.

Then the Great King opened his eyes and knew us and on his dying features came a look of hate.

"So you have conquered, Egyptian," he said. "Oh! if only I had you again in the East, whence in my folly I let you go——"

"You would set me in your boat, would you not, whence by the wisdom of Bes I escaped."

"More than that," he gasped.

"I shall not serve you so," I went on. "I shall leave you to die as a warrior should upon a fair fought field. But learn, tyrant and murderer, that the shaft which overthrew you came from the black bow you coveted and thought you had received, and that this hand loosed it—not at hazard."

"I guessed it," he whispered.

"Know, too, King, that the lady Amada whom you also coveted, waits to be my wife; that your mighty army is destroyed, and that Egypt is free by the hands of Shabaka the Egyptian and Bes the dwarf."

"Shabaka the Egyptian," he muttered, "whom I held and let go because of a dream and for policy. So, Shabaka, you will wed Amada whom I desired because I could not take her, and doubtless you will rule in Egypt, for Pharaoh, I think, is as I am to-day. O Shabaka, you are strong and a great warrior, but there is something stronger than you in the world—that which men call Fate. Such success as yours offends the gods. Look on me, Shabaka, look on the King of kings, the Ruler of the earth, lying shamed in the dust before you, and, accursed Shabaka! do not call yourself happy until you see death as near as I do now."

Then he threw his arms wide and died.

We called to soldiers to bear his body and having set the pursuit, with that royal clay entered into Amada in triumph. It was not a very great town and the temple was its finest building and thither we wended. In the outer court we found Pharaoh lying at the point of death, for from many wounds his life drained out with his flowing blood, nor could the leeches help him.

"Greeting, Shabaka," he said, "you and the Ethiopians have saved Egypt. My son is slain in the battle and I too am slain, and who remains to rule her save you, you and Amada? Would that you had married her at once, and never left my side. But she was foolish

and headstrong and I—was jealous of you, Shabaka. Forgive me, and farewell.”

He spoke no more although he lived a little while.

Karema came from the inner court. She greeted her husband, then turned and said,

“Lord Shabaka, one waits to welcome you.”

I rested myself upon her shoulder, for I could not walk alone.

“What happened to the army of the Karoon?” I asked as we went slowly.

“That happened, Lord, which the holy Tanofir foretold. The Easterns attacked across the swamp, thinking to bear us down by numbers. But the paths were too narrow and their columns were bogged in the mud. Still they struggled on against the arrows to its edge and there the Ethiopians fell on them and being lighter-footed and without armour, had the mastery of them, who were encumbered by their very multitude. Oh! I saw it all from the temple top. Bes did well and I am proud of him, as I am proud of you.”

“It is of the Ethiopians that you should be proud, Karema, since with one to five they have won a great battle.”

We came to the end of the second court where was a sanctuary.

“Enter,” said Karema and fell back.

I did so and though the cedar door was left a little ajar, at first could see nothing because of the gloom of the place. By degrees my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness and I perceived an alabaster statue of the goddess Isis of the size of life, who held in her arms an ivory child, also lifesize. Then I heard a sigh and, looking down, saw a woman clad in white kneeling at the feet of the statue, lost in prayer. Suddenly she rose and turned and the ray of light from the door ajar fell upon her. It was Amada draped only in the transparent robe of a priestess, and oh! she was beautiful beyond imagining, so beautiful that my heart stood still.

She saw me in my battered mail and the blood flowed up to her breast and brow and in her eyes there came a light such as I had never known in them before, the light that is lit only by the torch of woman’s love. Yes, no longer were hers the eyes of a priestess; they were the eyes of a woman who burns with mortal passion.

“Amada,” I whispered, “Amada found at last.”

“Shabaka,” she whispered back, “returned at last, to me, your home,” and she stretched out her arms toward me.

But before I could take her into mine, she uttered a little cry and shrank away.

“Oh! not here,” she said, “not here in the presence of this Holy One who watches all that passes in heaven and earth.”

“Then perchance, Amada, she has watched the freeing of Egypt on yonder field to-day, and knows for whose sake it was done.”

“Hearken, Shabaka. I am your guerdon. Moreover as a woman I am yours. There is naught I desire so much as to feel your kiss upon me. For it and it alone I am ready to risk my spirit’s death and torment. But for you I fear. Twice have I sworn myself to this goddess and she is very jealous of those who rob her of her votaries. I fear that her curse will fall not only on me, but on you also, and not only for this life but for all lives that may be given to us. For your own sake, I pray you leave me. I hear that Pharaoh my uncle is dead or dying, and doubtless they will offer you the throne. Take it, Shabaka, for in it I ask no share. Take it and leave me to serve the goddess till my death.”

“I too serve a goddess,” I answered hoarsely, “and she is named Love, and you are her priestess. Little I care for Isis who serve the goddess Love. Come, kiss me here and now, ere perchance I die. Kiss me who have waited long enough, and so let us be wed.”

One moment she paused, swaying in the wind of passion, like a tall reed on the banks of Nile, and then, ah! then she sank upon my breast and pressed her lips against my own.

**BOOK III**  
**THE DAUGHTER OF WISDOM**  
**01**  
**THE HALLS OF HEAVEN**

I, Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, not yet of the flesh, but above and beyond the flesh inhabited the halls of that great goddess of the earth, a minister of That which rules all the earth (Nature's self as now I know), who in Egypt was named Isis, Mother of Mysteries. *Child*, she named me, and *Messenger*; and in that dream or parable, as a child was I to her, for I drank of the cup of her wisdom and something of her greatness was in my soul.

The goddess sat brooding in her sanctuary where Spirits came and went bearing tidings from all lands or emptying at her feet the cups of offered prayer. About her fell her robes, blue as the sky, and over the robes hung down her hair dusky as the night, and beneath her bent brows shone her eyes like stars of the night. In her hand was the rod of power and the footstool at her feet was shaped like the round world. There, canopied with light, she sat upon an ebon seat and brooded while round her beat music like sea waves upon the shore, such music as is not known upon the earth.

I appeared. I stood before her, I abased myself, I bowed till my forehead lay upon the ground and my hair swept the dust of the ground. She touched me with her sceptre, bidding me arise.

"Speak, Child," she said. "What message dost thou bring from the shores of Nile? How goes my worship in the temples of Isis and are my servants faithful to my law?"

Then I made answer.

"O Mother divine, I have accomplished my embassy. Unseen, a spirit, I have wandered through the Land of Egypt. I have visited thy temples, I have hearkened to the councils of thy priests, I have watched thy worshippers and read their hearts. This is my report. Thy holy temples are empty; thy priests neglect thine altars; save a remnant who remain faithful, thy worshippers bow themselves before the shrines of another goddess."

"How is this goddess named, O Child of my love and wisdom?"

"She is named Aphrodite of the Greeks, a people who have flowed into Egypt, also other folk know her as Ashtoreth and Venus. Her sanctuary of sanctuaries is at Paphos in Cyprus, an island of the sea over against Egypt. She is the Queen of earthly love and love is the ritual of her worship, and she makes a mock of thee, O Mother, and of all the ancient gods, thy brothers and sisters, swearing that thy day and theirs is done and that she has risen from the sea to rule the world, and will rule it to the end. Here and there she reveals herself and conquers by her beauty, making all men to worship her and teaching all women to follow in her steps and beguile as she does, so that thy very priests turn to her and thy priestesses break from their vows and wanton with them."

"All of this I have learned, O Child, and more; yet it was my desire to hear it from thy lips that cannot lie, since in thee dwells my spirit. Harken now! I am minded to be avenged upon these false Egyptians, and thou shalt be the sword of vengeance wherewith I will smite them, bringing their ancient glory to the dust and for ever setting the yoke of bondage on their necks. Aye, I am so minded and it shall be done, how, I will teach thee afterward. But first, as I have the power to do, I who under the Strength above me am regent of the ball of earth, will summon this Aphrodite to my presence here and now, and bid her speak out her heart to me.

"Hear me, Aphrodite, wherever thou art in earth or heaven. Aphrodite, I bid thee appear."

Then in my vision the Mother rose from her throne. Standing before it, terrible to see, she beckoned with her sceptre, north and south and east and west, uttering the secret words of power. Thrice she beckoned and thrice she spoke the secret words, and waited.

There was a stir at the end of the great hall and a sound of singing. Behold! floating between the long lines of the flame-clad guardians of that hall, attended by her subject gods, her maenads and her maidens, a shape of naked loveliness, came Aphrodite of the Greeks. Veiled in her curling locks and roped about with gleaming pearls for necklace and for girdle, she stood before the throne and bowed to the Majesty it bore, then asked in a laughing voice of music,

"I have heard thy summons, Mother of Mysteries, and I am here. What wouldst thou of me, Isis, Queen of the World? How can the Sea-born whose name is Beauty and whose gift is Love, serve thee, Isis, Queen of the World?"

"Thus, thou who art shameless, thou born of the new gods and fashioned from the evil that is in the race of men—by lifting thy spell from off my worshippers. I know thy works. Drunken with desires they flock to thee in troops and for reward thou givest them the wages of their sin. Thou layest waste their homes; thou defilest their maidens, thou turnest men to beasts and makest a mock of them. Thy flowers fade; thy joys fill the mouth with ashes and those who drink of thy cup suck up poison in their souls. Thy fair flesh is a rottenness and thy perfumes are a stench and the incense of thine altars is the reek of hell. Therefore I command thee, go back to whence thou camest and leave the world in peace."

"Whither, then, should I go, Mother?" answered Aphrodite with her silvery laugh, "save into thy bosom, whence indeed I sprang, seeing that thou art Nature's self and I am thy child. Stern is thy law and sweet, yet without me thou wouldst have none over whom to

rule. Aye, without me would no child be born and not even a flower would blow. Without me thou wouldst rule a wilderness with but the wisdom of which thou boastest to keep thee company. Harken! We are at war and in that war I shall be conqueror, for I am eternal and all life is my slave, because my name is Life. Get thee to thy heaven, Isis, and rule there with Osiris, Lord of Death, but leave me the living. Soon their day is done and they pass beyond my spells into thy dominion. There treat them as thou wilt and be content, for then I have no more need of them, nor they of me. Why of a sudden art thou so wrath with me, whom thou hast known from the beginning? Is it because I take new names and set up my altars in thine own Egypt, altars wreathed with flowers, leaving all desolate thine where prayers are mumbled from starved hearts and cold hands make the offering of denial? Come now, Mother Isis, let us play a game and let Egypt be the stake. Thou hast the vantage there, seeing that for æons it has bowed to thy laws and thy yoke has been upon its neck."

"What, then, O Aphrodite, dost thou promise Egypt to which I and those who rule with me have given greatness, wisdom, and hope beyond the grave?"

"None of these high things, Mother. My gifts are love and joy; sweet love and joy in which for a little while all fears are forgot. Small gains thou mayest think, looking backward to the past and onward to the future, thou whose eyes are upon eternity. Yet they shall prevail. Isis, in Egypt thy day is done; there, as elsewhere, thy sceptre falls."

"If so, Wanton, with it falls Egypt that henceforth shall be the world's slave. When conqueror after conqueror sets his foot upon her neck, then let her think on Isis whom she has forsaken, and wailing, fill her soul with thy swine's food. Lo! I depart, leaving my curse on Egypt. Have thy little day till before the Judgment seat we settle our account. No more will I listen to thy falsehoods and thy blasphemies. Till then, Wanton, look on my majesty no more."

So in that vision spoke the Mother and was gone. With her, flashing like lightnings, went the flame-clad guardians that attend the goddess, leaving the great place empty save for Aphrodite and her throng, and for the soul of me, Ayesha, who watched and hearkened, wondering. The Paphian looked around and laughed, then glided to the vacant throne and seating herself thereon, laughed again, till the music of her mockery echoing from pillar to pillar, filled all the temple's halls.

"It is an omen," she cried. "What Isis leaves I take; henceforth her seat and power are mine. See now my ministers, I queen it here, though I wear no vulture cap or symbols of the moon, whose brow is better graced by these abundant locks and whose sceptre is a flower whereof the odours make men mad. Yes, I queen it here as everywhere, though in this solemn melancholy fane I lack a subject."

She glanced about her till her glorious, roving eyes fell upon that spirit which was I.

"Come hither, thou," she said, "and do me homage."

Now in my dream I, that spirit who in the world am named Ayesha, came and stood before her, saying,

"Nay, I am the child of Isis and to her I bow alone."

"Thinkest thou so?" she answered, smiling and looking me up and down. "Well, I have another mind. It seems to me that soon thou wilt descend from this sad realm to the joyous fields of earth, that there thou mayest fulfil a certain purpose, for such is the fate decreed for thee. Now, I, Aphrodite, add to that fate and lighten it. Look behind thee, Spirit that shall be woman!"

I turned and looked, there to behold a shape of beauty that I knew for Man. So beautiful was he that my breast rose and the life in me stood still. He smiled at me and I smiled back at him. Then he was gone, leaving his picture stamped upon my soul.

"This is what I add to that tragic fate of thine, O Spirit that shall be woman. Take him, the man appointed to thee, who from the beginning was always thine, and as perchance thou hast done before, in his kiss forget thy Mother Isis and thy crown of woes."

Thus this vision ends, and though now I, Ayesha, have learned that Isis, as we knew and named her in the ancient time, is but a symbol of that eternal holiness which is set above all heavens and all earths, I say again that, as I believe, in its parable is hid something of the changeless truth.

## CHAPTER II

### NOOT THE PROPHET COMES TO OZAL

SUCH is the vision, such the dream that has haunted me through the centuries, and brooding over it from age to age, I, Ayesha, doubt not that in its substance it is true, though its trappings may be fancy-wrought. At least this I know, that my spirit is the child of immortal Wisdom, such as once men believed that Isis held, as my undying shape is born of the beauty that is fabled Aphrodite's gift. At least it is certain that even before I dipped me in the Fire of Life, the most of learning and all human loveliness were mine. I know also that it was my mission to bring Egypt to the dust, and did I not bring it to the dust, smiting to its heart through proud Sidon, and Cyprus, Aphrodite's home? And have I not for these deeds borne Aphrodite's curse, as, because of Aphrodite's yoke laid upon my helpless neck, I have borne and bear the curse of Isis, I whose destiny it is thus at once to be the instrument and sport of rival powers whose battle-ground is the heart of every one of us.

Alas! were my tale known, the world in its haste might judge me hardly and think that I, who by burning its Phœnician props overturned an ancient empire, am cruel-natured, or that because I sought the love of a certain man and in my anger slew him when he turned from me, which in truth I did not desire to do, that I am wanton and ungoverned. Yet these things are not so, seeing that it was Fate, not I, that gave Egypt to the Persian dog (whom in his turn I overthrew) and made of its people slaves, and my flesh, not I, which after I had tasted of the Fire that is Nature's Soul, cursed me with passion and its fruits, perchance because I hated it and would never bow myself to it wholly, I who followed after purity, desiring not man's love but Wisdom's gifts and a crown of spiritual gold.

Moreover, I had earthly and righteous warrant to bring about Sidon's fall and through it that of Egypt, seeing that their kings would have put me to utter shame and robbed my father of his life, as shall be told. So, too, I had the warrant of a woman's heart to worship the man I sought and for the death I brought upon him in my jealous madness my soul has paid full measure in remorse and tears. Still, since justice is hard to come by here on the earth, or even in the heaven above, I know that some would judge me harshly and must bear it with the rest. Even Holly, and at times my Lord Leo who once was named Kallikrates, have cherished such thoughts, though their lips dare not utter them, for I read it in their minds which to me are as an open book. Therefore never shall Holly, nor my lord either, look upon this written truth, lest therefrom they might distil some poison of mistrustful doubt, for it is sure that all men stain the whiteness of pure verity to the colour of their twisted minds. Therefore, too, I write it in tongues and symbols that they do not understand, which yet shall be deciphered in their season.

As I taught Holly long ago in the caves of Kôr, and truly, though afterward for some forgotten reason of my own or to give him food for thought, I may perhaps have changed my tale, puzzling him with stories of great Alexander and the rest, by my mortal birth I am an Arabian of the purest and most noble blood, born in Yaman the Happy and in the sweet city of Ozal. My father was named Yarab after the great ancestor of our race, and I, his only child, was named Ayesha after my highborn mother. Of her, whom I never knew, for she was gathered to the bosom of whatever god she worshipped but one moon from my birth, this is said.

At first she would not look on me, being angered because I was not a son, but at length at my father's pleading she was prevailed upon to command that I should be brought to her. When she saw how fair a babe Heaven had given her, such a babe as had not been known or told of among our people, she was amazed and put up a prayer that she might die. This, those who knew her declared, she did for two reasons:—first because, foreseeing my greatness, she desired that I alone should hold my father's heart and that of all our tribe, and secondly because she feared lest, should she live, she might bear other children whom she would hate when she compared them to my perfectness.

So it came about as, amongst others, my father told me often, that her prayer was granted and having kissed and blessed me, for a while she entered into rest.

This is the true story of her end, not the other, which those who envied me put about in after days, that owing to certain revelations which came to her at the time of my birth, as to the deeds which I was doomed to do and the loves and hates which I was doomed to earn, my mother thought it better to ask death from her gods rather than to continue in a life which she must live out at my side. This tale, my father often swore to me when I asked him of it, was as false as the changeful pictures which are seen at sunset on the desert, and sometimes at noonday also.

For the rest this beloved father of mine took no other wife while I was yet a child, fearing lest for her own sake, or her children's, she should be jealous and maltreat me, and afterward when I became a maiden, because I would not suffer that another woman should share the rule of his household with me. As I showed to him, he had servants in plenty and these should be enough, to which he bowed his head and answered that without doubt my will was that of God.

Thus it came about that I grew up with my noble father, his adviser and his strength, and through him, or rather with him, ruled all his great tribe, who always worshipped me. Be it admitted that from the first, or at least from the time that I came to womanhood, I brought him trouble as well as blessing, though through no fault of my own, but because of the beauty with which, as in those days I believed, Isis, or Aphrodite, or both of them, had endowed me for their own divine purposes. Very soon this beauty of mine, also my wit and knowledge, were noised abroad through all Arabia, so that princes came from far to court me, and afterward quarrelled and fought, for, being gentle-hearted, I said a kind word to everyone of them and left them to reason out which was the kindest.

This, for the most part, they did with spears and arrows after the fashion of violent and insensate men, so that there was much fighting on my account, which made my father some enemies, because the people of certain of the princes who were killed swore that I had promised myself in marriage to them. This, however, I had never done, who desired to marry no man that I might become a slave, cooped up in a fortress to bear children that I did not desire with some jealous tyrant for their father. Nay, being higher-hearted than any of my time, already I sought to rule the world, and if I must have any lover, to choose one whom I wished, and, when I wished, to have done with him.

But at that time I asked no lover who myself was in love—with wisdom. Knowledge, I saw, was strength, and if I would rule, first I must learn. Therefore I studied deeply, taking for masters all the wisest in Arabia who were proud to teach Ayesha the

Beautiful, daughter and heiress of Yarab the great chief who could call ten thousand spears to his standards, all of his own tribe; and ten thousand more sworn to us but not of our blood.

I learned of the stars, a deep learning this that taught my soul its littleness, though it is true that while I studied I wondered, as still I wonder now, in which of them I was destined to rule when my day on earth was done. For always from the beginning I knew that wherever I am, there I must be the first and reign.

Perchance I had learned this aforetime in the halls of Isis who then to me had seemed so great, though afterward contemplating those stars in the silence of the desert night, I came to understand that even the Universal Mother, as men named her in those far days, was herself but small, one who must fight for sovereignty with Aphrodite and other gods.

Holly has told me much of what the astronomers in these latter years have won of Nature's secrets: of how they number and weigh the stars, and measure to a mile their infinite distance from the earth, and how assuredly that each of them, even the farthest, is a sun as great or greater than our own, round which revolve worlds unseen. He has been astonished also, and affected to disbelieve, when I answered him, that we of Arabia guessed all these things over two thousand years ago, and indeed knew some of them. Yet, so it was.

Thus communing with greatness, my soul grew ever greater.

Moreover, I sought other and deeper lore. There wandered a certain strange man to our town, Ozal, where my father kept his court, if so it may be called, that is when we were not camping with our great herds in the desert, as we did at certain seasons of the year after the rains had caused the wilderness to throw up herbage. This man, named Noot, was always aged and white-haired, ugly to look on, with a curious wrinkled face of the colour of parchment, much such a face as that of Holly will be should he attain to his years. Indeed in this and other ways he was so like to Holly that often I think that in him dwells something of Noot's spirit now returned again to earth, as that of Kallikrates has returned as Leo.

Now this Noot, who came to Egypt none knew whence, for by birth he was not Egyptian, had been the high-priest of Isis and *Kherheb* or Chief Magician in Egypt, one who had much power on earth and still more beyond the earth, since he was in touch with things divine. Moreover, he was an honest magician and told the truth even to kings, as the gods and his wisdom showed it to him, and this was the cause of his downfall, for woe betide those who tell the truth to kings or to any who wield the sceptre of their might. On a certain day Nectanebes, the first of that name, the Pharaoh of Egypt whom others called *Nekht-nebf*, after a victory he had gained over the Persians, was filled with pride and took counsel with Noot, his Chief Magician, bidding Noot search out the future and tell him of glories to come to Egypt and to the Royal House, after he had been gathered to Osiris, that thereon he might feed his soul.

Noot answered that it was wiser to leave the future to care for itself and to satisfy his heart with the present and its joys and greatness.

Then the Pharaoh grew wrath and bade him fulfil his command.

So Noot bowed and went, and alone in some tomb or sanctuary drew the circles, uttered the words of power, and called upon the gods he served to show him such things as should befall to Egypt and to Pharaoh's House.

The magic sleep fell upon him and in it appeared the Spirit of Truth and spoke to him dreadful words of fate and doom. These she bade him deliver to Pharaoh, but when they were spoken to fly for his life's sake from Egypt and seek out a maiden called Ayesha, the daughter of Yarab, the Sheik of Ozal, and with her take refuge since she was an appointed instrument of Heaven. Moreover, this spirit commanded him to consult the maiden Ayesha in everything and impart to her all his gathered learning and the very secrets of the gods that had been revealed to him, that to any other it would be death to speak.

Now in the morning Noot went into the presence of Pharaoh who rejoiced to see him, and cried,

"Be welcome, *Kherheb*, the first of all magicians, you that men say were born beyond the earth, you in whom lives the spirit of Maat, goddess of Truth. Tell me now what the gods have revealed to you as to the glories they prepare for the ancient land of Egypt, and the House of me the Pharaoh who have made her great again, driving out the dogs of Persians."

"Life! Blood! Strength! O Pharaoh!" answered Noot, saluting in the ancient form. "I have heard the word of Pharaoh who commanded me against my counsel to make divination and to seek to learn of the future from the gods. Behold! the gods hearkened. Behold! by the mouth of Maat, Lady of Truth, the goddess of the land where I was born, they spoke to me in the silence of the night. Thus they spoke. 'Say to Nectanebes who impiously dares to lift the veil of Time, that because he has fought for Egypt against the Barbarians who worship other gods, it is granted to him to die in his bed which shall chance ere long. Say that after him shall come a usurper whom the Barbarians shall defeat, so that he dies a slave in the land of Persia. Say that after him the son of Pharaoh shall wear the Double Crown and be called by the name of Pharaoh, the last of the true Blood of Egypt who shall ever sit upon its throne. Say that this son of his is accursed because he is in league with evil spirits and has worked apostasy, putting about his neck the chain of Aphrodite of the Greeks and the chains of Baal and of Moloch which never can be broken. Therefore, though he make many false offerings, yet is he accursed and the Barbarians shall overcome him, so that he flees away, nor shall all his magic be a shield to him. Because of him Egypt shall fall and her cities shall be burned and her children slaughtered and her temples desecrated, and never more shall one of her pure and ancient blood hold her sceptre.' Such is the oracle that the gods have commanded me to speak, O Pharaoh."

Now when Nectanebes heard these awful decrees of Fate upon him and upon his son, he trembled and rent his robes. Then rage took him and he reviled Noot the Prophet, calling him a liar and a traitor, and saying that he would make an end of him and his prophecies together. But because they were alone together within a chamber, before he could summon guards to kill him, Noot, helped of Heaven, fled away out of the palace and as darkness was falling, mingled with the throng and could not be found by the soldiers who sought him.

Ere daylight he was far from the city and, disguised, escaped from Egypt, bringing with him only his *Kherheb's* staff of power, also the ancient sacred books of spells or words of strength that were hidden in his robes. With these he brought, moreover, a little ancient image of Isis which he made use of in his divinations and prayed before by day and night.

Thus it came about awhile later, one eve when I, the young maiden Ayesha, stood alone in the desert communing with my soul and drawing wisdom from the stars, that there appeared before me a withered, ancient man who, when he saw me, knelt down and

bowed to me. I looked on him and asked,

"Why, aged One, do you kneel to me who am but a mortal?"

"Are you indeed a mortal?" he asked. "Methought that I who am the head-priest of Isis saw in you the goddess come to earth, and indeed, Lady, I seem to see the holy blood of Isis coursing in your veins."

"It is true, Priest, that of this goddess whom my mother worshipped I have dreams and memories and that sometimes she seems to speak with me in sleep, yet I tell you that I am but a mortal, the daughter of Yarab the far-famed," I answered to him.

"Then you are that maiden whom I am commanded to seek, she who is named Ayesha. Know, Lady, that great is your destiny, greater than that of any king, and that it is revealed to me that you will become immortal."

"All who believe on the gods trust to find the pearl, Immortality, beneath Death's waters, O Priest."

"Yes, Lady, but the immortality that is foretold for you is different and begins upon the earth, and I confess that I understand it not, though perhaps it may be an immortality of fame."

"Nor I, Priest. But meanwhile, what would you of me?"

"Shelter and food, Lady."

"And what can you offer for these, Priest?"

"Learning, Lady."

"That I think I have already."

"Nay, Lady Ayesha, not such learning as I can give; the knowledge of the secrets of the gods; spells that will sway the hearts of kings, magic that will show things afar and call ghosts from the grave, power that will set him who wields it upon the pinnacle of worship——"

"Stay!" I broke in. "You are old and ugly! you are tired, your foot bleeds, you seek protection, and it seems to me that you need food. How comes it that one who can command so much lore and power is in want of such things as these that the humblest peasant does not lack, and must seek to purchase them with flatteries?"

When he heard these words, of a sudden the aspect of that old man changed. To me his shrunken body seemed to swell, his face grew fierce and set, and a strange light shone in his deep eyes.

"Maiden," he said in another voice, "I perceive that you are in truth in need of such a teacher as I am. Had you the inner wisdom, you would not judge by the outward appearance and you would know that oftentimes the gods bring misfortunes upon those they love in order that thereby they may work their ends. Beauty is yours, wit is yours, and a great destiny awaits you, though with it, as I think, great sorrow. Yet one thing is lacking to you—humility—and that you must learn beneath the rods of destiny. But of these matters we will talk afterward. Meanwhile, as you say, I need food and shelter, which are necessary to all while still they labour in the flesh. Lead me to your father!"

Without more talk though not without fear, I guided this strange wanderer to our tents, for at the time we were camping in the desert, and into the presence of my father, Yarab, who gave him hospitality after the Arab fashion, but save for the common words of courtesy, held no converse with him that night.

On the following morning before we struck our camp, however, they had much speech together, and at the end of it I was summoned to the great tent.

"Daughter," said my father, pointing to the wanderer who was seated cross-legged on a carpet before him after the fashion of an Egyptian scribe, "I have questioned this learned man, our guest. I discover from him that he is the First Magician of Egypt, the head-priest also of the greatest goddess of that land, she whom your mother worshipped. At least, he says he was these things—but now, having quarrelled with Pharaoh, that he is nothing but a beggar, which is a strange state for a magician. Also, according to his tale, Pharaoh seeks his life, as he declares, because of certain prophecies that he made to him concerning the fate of Egypt and of Pharaoh's House. It seems that he desires to abide here with us and to impart his wisdom to you, which wisdom, it is evident, has brought him to an evil case. Now I ask you, as one gifted with discretion beyond your years, what answer shall I return to him? If I keep this Noot here, for that he tells me, in his name, though of his race and country he will say nothing, perchance Pharaoh, whose arm is long, will come to seek him and bring war upon us, and if I send him away, perchance I turn my back upon a messenger from the gods. What then shall I do?"

"Ask him, my Father; seeing that one who prophesies evil to the Pharaoh to his own ruin must be a truthful man."

Then my father stroked his long beard, being perplexed, and inquired of the wanderer whether he should keep him or send him away.

Noot replied that he thought that my father would do well to send him away, but better to keep him. He said that he had no revelation on the matter, though if it were wished he would seek one, but he believed that although his presence might bring trouble, from his dismissal would come yet worse trouble. He added that in a vision he had been commanded by the goddess Isis to find out a certain Lady Ayesha and become her instructor in mysteries that the purposes of Heaven might be fulfilled, and that it was ill to flout goddesses whose arms were even longer than those of Pharaoh.

Now for the second time my father who did nothing great or small without my counsel, asked my judgment on this matter after I had heard the words of Noot. I pondered, remembering what the wanderer had promised to me in the desert, namely, knowledge and the secrets of the gods, also spells that would sway the hearts of kings, with the gifts of magic and of power. At length I answered,

"To what end is all this empty talk, my Father? Has not this stranger eaten of your bread and salt and is it the custom of our people to drive away from their doors for no fault those to whom they have given hospitality?"

"True," said my father. "If he were to be sent hence, it should have been done at once. Abide in my shadow, Noot, and pray your gods to bring a blessing on me."

So Noot, the priest and prophet, remained with us and from the first day of his coming, opened out to my eager eyes all the scrolls of his secret lore. Still it is true that he brought to my father, not blessing but death, as shall be told, though this did not come for many moons.

Meanwhile he taught and I learned, for his knowledge flowed into my soul like a river into the desert and filled its thirsty sand with life. Of all that I learned from him, because of the oaths I swore, even now it is not lawful that I should write, but it is true that in those years of study I grew near to the gods and wrested many a secret from the clenched hands of Nature.

Moreover, though as yet I did not take the vows, I became a votary of Isis, as Noot, her high-priest, had authority to make me, and one of the inner circle. Yes, I determined even then that I would forswear marriage and all fleshly joys and make to Isis the offering of my life, while she through her priest vowed to me in return such power and wisdom as had scarce been given to any woman before me.

Thus the time went by till at length fell the blow and I—for all my wisdom—never heard Aphrodite laughing behind her veil. Nor indeed did Noot, but then he was an old man who, as I drew out of him, save those of his mother, had not once touched a woman's lips. All learning was his, but it seemed that in his search for it there were some things he had passed by. At least so I believed, or rather half-believed, at this time, but as I learned afterward, there are matters upon which even the most holy think it no shame to lie, since in the end Noot confessed to me that in his youth he had been as are other men. Also I think that he heard the laughter of Aphrodite, though I did not. However these things may be, as I was to discover afterward, Mother Isis is a stern mistress to whoever looks the other way.

Also, although Noot told me much, he hid more. Not for many a year was I to learn that he was a citizen of the ancient, ruined land of Kôr and the only one who knew the fearful mystery it hid, which in a far day to come he was commanded to reveal to me, Ayesha, and to no other man or woman. Nor did he tell me that it was the purpose of Heaven that under her other shape and name of Truth I should again establish the worship of Isis in that land and once more make of it a queen of the world. Yet these things were so and therefore was he sent to me and for no other reason. Therefore was he commanded to reveal the doom of Egypt to Nectanebes, that this Pharaoh in his wrath might drive him, a wanderer, to our tents at Oza there to dwell for years and instruct me, the chosen, in all things that I must learn, so that when at last the appointed hour dawned, I might be fitted for my mighty task.

But all this while Aphrodite laughed on behind her veil!

### CHAPTER III

#### THE BATTLE AND THE FLIGHT

IN THE end trouble came upon us thus. As I have said already, my beauty was the talk of men throughout Arabia, and of women also, who were jealous of it, since those who travelled in caravans bore its fame from tribe to tribe and those who sailed upon the sea took up the report and carried it to distant shores. But now to this tale was added another, namely that the wearer of so much loveliness was also a vessel into which the gods had poured all their wisdom, so that there were few marvels which she could not work and little or nothing that she did not know. It was added, truly enough, that the channel through which this wisdom flowed into her heart was a certain Noot who aforetime had been *Kherheb* in Egypt and high-priest of Isis.

Presently this tale, carried by the mariners, came to the ears of the Pharaoh Nectanebes in his city of Sais, who knew well enough that Noot was the prophet whom he had driven from the land and whom by now he desired to have back again, for his inspired counsel's sake.

The end of it was that the Pharaoh sent an embassy to my father, Yarab, demanding that I should be given to him or to his son, the young Nectanebes, I know not which, in marriage, and that Noot should return to Egypt as my guardian, and there be reinstated in all his offices.

My father answered, speaking with my voice, that least of anything did I desire to become one of the women of Pharaoh, a man already near the grave, or even of Pharaoh's son, I who was a free-born Arabian, and that as for Noot, his head felt safer on his shoulders in Ozal where he was an honoured guest, than it would at Pharaoh's court.

These words Nectanebes took ill, so ill indeed that, for this and other reasons of policy, he sent an army to invade Yaman the Happy, and to capture me and kill Noot, or drag him away to Egypt in chains. Of all these plans we had warnings, partly through the priests of Isis in Egypt who still acknowledged Noot as their head, although another had been raised up in his place and filled his office, and partly through dreams and revelations that came to him from Heaven. Therefore we made ready and gathered in great strength to fight against Pharaoh.

At length his hosts came, borne for the most part in ships of Cyprus and of Sidon whereof at that time the kings were his allies, or rather vassals.

They landed upon a plain by the seashore and watching from our hills beyond, we suffered them to land. But that night, or rather just before the following dawn when their camp was still unfortified, we poured down upon them from our hills. Great was the fray! for they fought well. I led the horsemen of our tribe in this, my first battle, and by the light of the rising sun charged again and yet again into the heart of the hosts of Pharaoh, having no fear since I knew well that none could harm me.

There was a certain company of Greeks, two thousand of them perhaps, who served Pharaoh, and in the centre of them was his general, which company stood firm when the others fled. Thrice we attacked it with the horsemen and thrice were beaten back. Then my father came to my aid with his picked kinsmen mounted upon camels. Again we charged and this time broke through. Those about Pharaoh's general saw me and strove to make me captive, hoping to carry me back to him, whatever happened to the host. They surrounded me, one caught the bridle of my horse. Him I slew with a javelin, but others snatched at me. Then I cried to Isis and I think that she clothed me in some garment of her majesty, since foes fell away in front of me, calling out—

"This is a goddess, not a woman!"

Yet I was cut off, ringed round by them, for all my companions were slain or driven back.

They pressed in on me to take me living, till I was hedged in with a ring of swords. My father appeared mounted on his swift white dromedary that was called Desert Wind, followed by others. They broke through the ring and there was a fierce fight. My father fell, pierced by the spear of the general of the Egyptians. I saw it and, filled with madness, I charged at that general and drove my javelin through his throat, so that he fell also. Then a cry went up and the host of Pharaoh melted away, flying for the ships. Some gained them, but the most remained dead upon the shore or were taken captive.

Thus ended that battle and such was the answer that we of Ozal sent to Pharaoh Nectanebes. Therefore it was also that because of the death of my beloved father at their hands I hated Egypt, and not only Egypt but Cyprus and Sidon in whose ships her hosts had been borne to attack us, yes, and swore to be avenged upon them all, which oath I kept to the full.

Now my father being dead, I, the daughter of Yarab, became ruler of our tribe in his place with Noot for my counsellor. For certain years I ruled it well. Yet troubles arose—in this fashion. By now the fame of my glory and loveliness had spread through all the earth, so that, more even than before, I was beset with demands for my hand from chiefs and kings who went well-nigh mad when I refused them. In the end, being brothers in their grief because I would have none of them, I whom they called by the names of Hathor and Aphrodite and other goddesses famed for beauty according to their separate worship, they made a great conspiracy together and sent envoys bearing a message. This was the message:—

That unless my people would give me up so that my husband might be chosen from among their number by the casting of lots, they would join their armies together and fall upon us and kill out our tribe so that not one remained to look upon the sun, save myself alone, who should then be the reward of him who could take me.

Now when I heard this I was filled with rage and having caused those messengers to be scourged before me, sent them back to their masters bearing my defiance. But when they were gone, the elders of the tribe came to me and said through their spokesman,

"O Daughter of Yarab, O Ayesha the Wise and Lovely, we adore you as one beyond price. Yet it is true that we love our wives and children and desire to live, not to die. How can we who are but few stand against so many kings? We pray you, therefore, Ayesha, to choose one of them to be your husband, for then because of jealousy doubtless they will destroy each other and we, your servants, shall be left in peace. Or if you will not marry, then we pray you to hide your beauty elsewhere for a while, so that the kings do not come to seek it here."

I hearkened and was angry because of the cowardice of this people who set their own welfare above my will and refused to fight with those who threatened me. Still, being politic, I hid my mind and said that I would consider and give them an answer on the third

day. Then I took counsel of Noot and together we made divinations and prayed to the gods, but most of all to Isis.

The end of it was that before the dawn on the second day a small caravan of five camels might have been seen, had there been any to watch, leaving the city of Ozal and heading for the sea.

On the first of those camels sat an old merchant. On the second his wife or his daughter, or his woman, heavily veiled. On the three others was his merchandise. Woven carpets it seemed to be, though if opened, those carpets would have proved to be filled with a very great treasure in gold and pearls and sapphires and other gems, which for generations had been gathered together by my father, Yarab, and those who went before him out of the profits of their trade and of their flocks and herds, and hid away against the time of need.

That merchant was Noot the priest and prophet, and that woman was I—Ayesha. That treasure was mine and the camels were led by certain men who had served my father and now served me, being sworn to me by secret oaths that might not be broken.

We gained the sea and took ship to Egypt in a vessel that I had caused to be prepared. Yes, before we were missed the coast of Arabia was behind us, since I had given it out that I had gone to a secret place to consider of my answer to the elders of the people. As I heard afterward, when it was known that I had turned my back on them, there were woe and lamentations in every household of the tribe. Understanding what they had lost the men among them beat their breasts and wept, though it is said that some of the women rejoiced, because I outshone them all and they were jealous of me.

Afterward the kings and chiefs of whom I have spoken descended upon them to seek me, whereupon my people swore that I had been changed into a goddess and gone up into heaven. Some believed this, declaring that they had always held me to be more than mortal, but others of a coarser, common mind declared that I had been hidden away, and falling on the tribe, dispersed it, seizing many and selling them into slavery.

Thus then did the children of Yarab pay the price of their treachery to me, though I have heard that afterward once more they became a people under the rule of some baseborn grandson of my father, and worshipped me as a guardian goddess from generation to generation, having come to believe that I was not a woman, but a spirit whom the gods sent to dwell with them for a while.

So Noot and I came safely to Naukratis, a Grecian city upon the Canopic mouth of the Nile, and there abode disguised as a merchant and his daughter trading in precious stones and other costly wares, and thus adding to my wealth, though of this there was little need, since already it was great.

It was here that for the first time I went veiled in the Eastern fashion, in order to hide my beauty from the eyes of men.

Under cover of this trade I and Noot lived for two years or more while I studied the lore and language of the Egyptians, learning to read their picture-writing which the Greeks called hieroglyphs, and mastering their history. Also I perfected myself in the Grecian tongue and read the works of their great writers as well as those of the Romans. Moreover, I learned other things, since at the beginning of the second year Nectanebes, the Pharaoh who had sought me in marriage, being now dead, and Egypt for a while in the hands of the usurper Zehir, who some say was his son born of a concubine, we travelled up the Nile disguised and came to the ancient city of Thebes. This we did slowly, stopping at every great town, where we received the hospitality of the head priests of the various gods, Ammon, Ptah, and the rest, since to these priests Noot by secret signs revealed himself. Indeed the news of our coming was passed on before us so that always we found some waiting to welcome us who, once within the temple walls, were treated like the greatest, although we were garbed as humble travellers. All of these priests we found full of rage, both because the gods of the Greeks, and even of the Persians and Sidonians, were being set above their own, and still more for the reason that their revenues were seized and used to pay Grecian mercenaries, so that they who had been very rich were now poor and the gods lacked their offerings, nor could their holy temples be repaired.

Of all these things I took note whose heart was set upon one thing only,—to bring about the fall of the Egyptians and their allies that had slain my father whom I loved, as indeed I was fated to do. Therefore by a word here and a word there I blew the anger that smouldered in them to flame, hinting of rebellion and the setting up of a new dynasty in Egypt, of which at that time I thought to be the first, a priestess-queen, Isis-come-to-Earth. Of this plan I hinted also through the mouth of Noot, nor was it ill received, since already those priests to whom he had told my history and the revelations that had come to him concerning me, looked on me as something more than woman. Could a mortal maid, they asked, have so much beauty and so much learning; was I not in truth a goddess clothed in woman's flesh?

Only on the road I purposed to tread there was this stumbling block, that each of those high-priests desired that he himself, or at least one who worshipped *his* god, were it Ammon or Osiris or Ptah, or Khonsu, should be the Pharaoh of that new dynasty. For they were jealous each of the other and could not agree together, as is common among rival priests.

We passed on to Thebes where I saw the wonders of the mighty temples which stood there reared by a hundred kings, which Holly tells me now are but ruins, though the great hall of columns among which I used to wander still stands in part. Also I crossed the Nile and visited the tombs of the Pharaohs.

Standing beneath the moon in that desolate Valley of Dead Kings, for the first time, I think I came to know all the littleness of Life and of the vanities of earth. Life, I saw, was but a dream; its ambitions and its joys were naught but dust. Those kings and those queens, some of them had been very great in their day; the people worshipped them as gods and when they stretched out their sceptres, the world trembled. And now what were they? But names, if so much as a name remained of them.

I saw a great queen whose tomb some while before had been broken into by robbers, Persians or Greeks I was told. They had unrolled her mummy and stripped her of her royal ornaments and there she lay, she in whom had centred all the world's pomp, a little black and withered thing, grinning at us from the dust, like a dead ape, a sight so strange and unhuman that the priest who guided us, a coarse fellow, broke into laughter. I remembered that laugh and afterward paid him back for it, though he never knew whence his misfortune came.

I, Ayesha, have many sins to my count and at that time was full of faults, as perchance still I am to-day. Thus I was proud of my beauty and my genius which were given to me above any other woman; passionate and revengeful, too, and led on by ambitions. Yet this I swear by all the gods of all the heavens, that ever in my secret self I have set the spirit above the flesh and desired to attain to another glory than that of earth. From the flesh came my sins, because it was begotten of other flesh and the flesh is sin incarnate. Yet

my soul sins not, because it comes from that which is sinless and, its tasks accomplished here, laden with knowledge and purified by suffering, to this holy fount at last it shall return again. At the least such are my faith and hope.

So it came about that there in the Valley of Dead Kings I swore myself to the worship of God (since all the gods are one God) and to use the world as a ladder whereby I might climb nearer to His throne.

Thus I swore with old Noot for witness, noting that he shook his wise head and smiled a little at the oath. For if I forgot Aphrodite and the flesh, he remembered them, or perchance he to whom the Future spoke already guessed something of my fate which it was not lawful that he should tell. Also at that time I knew nothing of that everlasting King of Fire who dwells in majesty beneath the rocks of Kôr, nor of his evil gifts. Least of all did I know that Noot himself was by inheritance and appointment the guardian of the Fire.

From Thebes we passed up Nile to Philæ on the Isle of Elephantine, where Mother Isis had her holy sanctuary, and Nectanebes, the first of that name, he who had sought me as a wife and now was not long dead, had begun to build a temple of surpassing beauty to the goddess, which temple was completed in my time by his son, the second Nectanebes, he with whom I had to do and brought to nothingness.

Here I abode a year making final preparations utterly to vow myself to the goddess. I kept the fasts, I purified my heart, I passed the trials and at length alone I seemed to die and descended into the gulf of death and fled through the Halls of Death pursued by terrors, till I saw, or dreamed I saw, the goddess in her glory and fell swooning at her feet. More I may not say, even now that over two thousand years have passed since that holy hour of fears and victory, save this one thing which indeed has come to pass. When I arose from that swoon certain words were written on my mind, though whether the goddess whom I seemed to see or some spirit spoke them to me I do not know. These were the words:—

“Far to the south in this land of Libya beyond the region of Punt, is an ancient city, whence my worship came ere Egypt had a people. Thither, Daughter of Isis, shalt thou bear it back and there shalt thou blow upon it with thy breath and keep alive the holy spark that at last is doomed to die upon the earth amidst those snows which as yet no southern foot has trod. There, Daughter, in that fallen and deserted land, my prophet Noot shall welcome thee. There shall he guard the Door of Life which of mortal women thou alone shalt pass. There shalt thou stain thy hands with blood, and there in solitude amidst the tombs, with tears from thy repentant eyes, shalt thou wash thy sin away. Yet of the seed that thou sowest in fire in the womb of the world, thou shalt reap the harvest upon the mountain tops amidst the snows.”

Such were the words branded upon my memory when I awoke from the swoon after the night of trial. Later I repeated them to Noot, my Master, praying him to read their meaning, which either he could not or would not do. He said, however, it was true that far to the south there stood a great city, now a ruin sparsely peopled, whence came the first forefathers of the Egyptians thousands of years before the pyramids were built. He said also that he knew the road to that city by sea and by land, though how he knew it he would not tell. Nor would he interpret the rest of those dream words. Yet, when I harassed him with questions he said carelessly, as one who hazards a guess, that perchance the goddess meant that it would be my lot after its fall or corruption in Egypt, to bear back her worship to this its earlier home and there establish a great nation of her servants. As to the “Door of Life” that I alone could pass, of which he was named the Guardian, and the “northern snows,” he declared that he knew not what was meant by them, but doubtless these things would be made clear in their season.

So he spoke somewhat lightly, like one who humours a frightened child, as though he would make me think that I had but dreamed a dream. This indeed I came to believe, as is the fashion of mankind concerning things that they cannot see or handle, however real those things may appear in the hour of their experience. For these in the end always we write down as dreams, such as haunt us by the thousand in our sleep.

Yet now that two thousand years have gone by, I know that this dream was true. For is there not a city called Kôr and was I not there doomed to find the Door of Life whereof Noot was guardian? And did I not sin there and from generation to generation wash the shed blood from off my hands with tears of bitterest repentance, and afterward expiate that sin in loss and shame and agony? And lastly do I not reap that harvest of tears upon the mountain tops amidst the northern snows whither the spirit bore me, still holding in those hands the embers of the worship of that regnant Good who to us of the ancient world was known as the Universal Mother to whom I swore myself in Philæ’s temples?

But enough of these things now; let them be spoken of in their season.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE KISS OF FATE

THERE came a man to Philæ. Watching from a pylon top whither I had gone to pray alone, I saw him land upon the island and from far off noted that he was a godlike man, clad in armour such as the Grecians used, over which was thrown a common cloak, hooded as though to disguise him; one who had the air of a warrior. At a distance from the temple gate he halted and looked upward as though something drew his glance to me standing high above him upon the pylon top. I could not see his face because of the shadow thrown by the great walls behind which the sun was sinking, but doubtless he could see me well enough, whose shape was outlined against the veil of golden light that must have touched me with its glory, though, as that light was behind me, my face also would be hidden from him. At least he stood a little while as though amazed, staring upward steadily, then bowed his head and passed into the temple, followed by men bearing burdens.

Some pilgrim to the shrine, I thought to myself, then turned my mind to other matters, remembering that with men I had no more to do. Thus for the first time here in the body, all unknowing, I looked upon Kallikrates and he looked on me, but often afterward I have thought that there was a veiled lesson or a parable in the fashion of this meeting.

For did I not stand far above him, clothed in the glory of heaven's gold, and did he not stand far beneath in the gloom of the shadows that lay upon the lowly earth, so that between us there was space unclimbable? And has it not been ever thus throughout the centuries, for am I not still upon the pylon top clad in the splendour of the spirit, and is he not still far beneath me wrapped with the shadows of the flesh? And since as yet the secret of the pylon stair is hidden from him, must I not descend to earth if we would meet, leaving the light and my pride of place that I may walk humbly with him in the shadow? And is it not often so between those that love, that one is set far above the other, though still this rope of love draws them together, uplifting the one, or dragging down the other?

The man passed into the temple and that night I heard he was a Grecian captain of high blood, one who though young had seen much service in the wars and done great deeds, Kallikrates by name, who had come to seek the counsel of the goddess, bringing precious gifts of gold and Eastern silks, the spoil of battles in which he had fought.

I asked why such an one sought the wisdom of Isis, and was told that it was because his heart was troubled. It seemed that he had been dwelling at Pharaoh's court as a captain of the Grecian guard, and that there he had quarrelled with and slain one who was as a brother to him, if indeed he were not his very brother. This ill deed, it was said, preyed upon his soul and drove him into the arms of Mother Isis, seeking for pardon and that comfort which he could not find at the hand of any of the gods of the Greeks.

Again I asked idly enough why this Kallikrates had killed his familiar friend or his brother, whichever it might be. The answer was—because of some highly placed maiden whom both of them loved, so that they fought from jealousy, after the fashion of men. For this reason the life of Kallikrates was held to be forfeit according to the stern military law of the Grecian soldiers, and he must fly. Also the deed had tarnished that great lady's name; also his heart was broken with remorse and hither he came to pray Isis to mend it of her mercy, he who had forsaken the world.

The tale moved me a little, but again I cast it from my mind, for are not such things common among men? Always the story is the same: two men and a woman, or two women and a man, and bloodshed and remorse and memories which will not die and the cry for pardon that is so hard to find.

Yes, I cast it from my mind, saying lightly—oh! those evil-omened words—that doubtless his own blood in a day to come would pay for that which he had spilt.

For a while, some months indeed, this Grecian Kallikrates vanished from my sight and even from my thoughts, save when, from time to time, I heard of him as studying the Mysteries among the priests, having, it was said, determined to renounce the world and be sworn to the service of the goddess. Noot told me that he was very earnest in this design and made great progress in the faith, which pleased the priests who desired above all things to convert those that served Grecian gods with whom the deities of Egypt, and above all Isis, were at war. Therefore they hastened his preparation so that as soon as might be he should be bound to the Heavenly Queen by bonds that could not be loosed.

At length his fasts and instruction were completed; his trials had been passed and the hour came when he must make his last confession to the goddess and swear the awful oaths to her very self.

Now since Isis did not descend to earth to stand face to face with every neophyte, it was needful in this great ceremony that one filled with her spirit should take her place and as may be guessed, that one was I, Ayesha the Arab. To speak truth, in all Egypt, because of my beauty, my learning, and the grace that was given to me, there was none so fitting to wear her mantle as myself. Indeed afterward this was acknowledged when, with a single voice, the Colleges of her servants throughout the land, men and women together, promoted me to be her high-priestess, and gave me, who aforetime among them was known by the title of Wisdom's Daughter, the new name of *Isis-come-to-earth*, or in shorter words, *The Isis*. For my own name of Ayesha I kept hid lest it should be discovered that I was that chieftainess, the child of Yarab, who had defeated the army of Nectanebes.

Therefore at a certain hour of the night, draped in the holy robes, wearing on my brow the vulture cap and the bent symbol of the moon, holding in my hand the *sistrum* and the cross of Life, I was conducted to the pillared sanctuary and seated alone upon the throne of blackest marble, with the round symbol of the world for my footstool.

Thus, having learned my part and the ancient hallowed words that I must say, I sat awhile wondering in my heart whether Isis herself could be more glorious or more fair. So indeed did the priests and priestesses who saw me thus arrayed and bent the knee to me as though I were the very goddess, which in truth many of the humbler among them half believed.

Thus I sat in the moonlight that flowed from the unroofed hall beyond, while the carved gods watched me with their quiet eyes.

At length I heard the sound of footsteps whereon there came a priestess and flung over me the white veil of innocence sewn with golden stars that until the appointed moment must hide Isis from her worshipper. The priestess withdrew and, wrapped in the dark,

hooded robe that signified the stained flesh about to be cast away, which hid all of him so that his face could not be seen, came that tall neophyte led by two priests who held his right hand and his left. I noted those hands because they were so white against the blackness of the robe, and even by the moonlight saw that they were beautiful, long and thin and shapely, though the palm of one, the right, was somewhat broadened as though by long handling of the tools of war.

The priests led him to the entrance of the shrine and in hushed whispers bade him kneel upon a footstool and make his sacrifice and confession to the goddess as he had been taught to do. Then they departed leaving us alone.

There followed silence which at length I broke, whispering,

"Who is this that comes to visit the Mother in her earthly shrine and what is his prayer to the Queen of Heaven and Earth?"

Though I spoke so gently and so low, perhaps because of their very sweetness, my words seemed to frighten him, or perhaps he believed that he stood in the very presence of the goddess; at least he answered in a voice that trembled,

"O holy Queen adored, in the world I was named Kallikrates the comely. But the priests, O Queen, have given me a new name, and it is, *Lover-of-Isis*."

"And what have you to say to Isis, O Lover-of-Isis?"

"O Queen eternal, I have to tell my sins and ask her pardon for them, I who have passed the Trials and am accepted by her servants. If it is granted, then to her I must make the oath, binding myself eternally to love and serve her, her and no other in heaven or on earth."

"Set out those sins, O Lover-of-Isis, that my Majesty may judge of them, whether they can be forgiven or are beyond forgiveness," I answered in the words of the appointed ritual.

Then he began and told a tale that made me redden behind my veil, for all of it had to do with women, and never before had I learned what wantons those Greeks could be. Also he told of men whom he had slain in war, one of them in the battle against my tribe, in which strangely enough it seemed he had fought as a lad, for this man was a great warrior. Of these killings, however, I took no account, because they had been of those who were the enemies of himself or of his cause.

In stern silence I listened, noting that save for these matters of light love and fightings, the man seemed innocent enough, for in his story there was naught of baseness or of betrayal. Moreover, it seemed that he was one in whom the spirit had striven against the flesh, and who, however much his feet were tangled in the poisonous snares of earth, from time to time had set his eyes on Heaven.

At length he paused and I asked of him,

"Is the black count finished? Tell now the truth and dare to hold nothing back from the goddess who notes all."

"Nay, O Queen," he answered, "the worst is yet to come. I came to Egypt as a captain of the Grecian guard that watches the House of Pharaoh at Sais. With me came another man, my half-brother, for our father was the same, with whom I was brought up and loved as never I loved any other man, and who loved me. He was a glorious warrior, though some held that I was more handsome in my person, Tisisthenes by name, that in my Grecian tongue in which I speak means the Avenger. Thus was he called because my father, whose first-born he was, desired that he might grow up to work vengeance upon the Persians who slew his father named like myself, Kallikrates, the most beautiful Spartan that was ever born. Foully they slew him before the battle of Plataea, whilst he was aiding the great Pausanias to make sacrifice to the gods. This Tisisthenes my brother I killed with my own hand."

"For what cause did you kill him?"

"There was a royal maiden at that court, one fairer than any woman has been, is, or will be—ask not her name, O Mother, though doubtless it is known to you already. This lady both of us saw at the same time and by the decree of Aphrodite both of us loved. As it chanced it was I who won her favour, not my brother. We were spied upon; the tale was told; trouble fell upon that royal maiden who, when she should be old enough, was sworn in marriage to a distant king. To save her name she made denial, as she must do. She swore there was naught between her and me, and to prove it turned her face from me and toward my brother. I came upon them together in a garden. She had plucked a flower which she gave to him and he kissed the hand that held the flower. She saw me and fled away. I, maddened with jealousy, smote my beloved brother in the face and forced him to fight with me. We fought. He guarded himself but ill, as though he cared nothing of the end of that fray. I cut him down. He lay before me dying, but ere he died, he spoke:

"'This is a very evil business,' he said. 'Know, Kallikrates, my most beloved brother, that what you saw in the garden between that royal maid and myself was but a plot to save you both, since thereby I purposed to take on to my own head the weight of your transgression against the law of this land, because she prayed it and it was my wish. This I have done, and for this reason I suffered you to slay me, though during that fight twice I could have pierced you, because you were blinded with rage and forgot your swordsmanship. Now it will be said that you found me pursuing this royal maiden and rightly slew me according to your duty and that it was I who loved her and not you, as has been commonly reported. Yet in truth I love her well and am glad to die because it was to you that her heart turned and not to me; also because thereby I save both her and you. Yet, Kallikrates, my brother, the gods give me wisdom and foresight in this the hour of my death, and I say that you will do well to have done with this lady and all women, and to seek rest in the bosom of the gods, since, if you do not, great trouble will come upon you, and through this same curse of jealousy such a death as mine shall be yours also. Now let us who are the victims of Fate kiss each other on the brow as we used to do when we were children, playing together in the happy fields of Greece, from whom death was yet a long way off, forgiving each other all and hoping that we may meet once more in the region of the Shades.'

"So we embraced, and my brother Tisisthenes gave up his spirit in my arms and looking on him I wished that I were dead in his place. Then as I turned to go the soldiers of our company found me and seeing that I had slain my brother, would have brought me to trial, not because we had fought together, but because he was my superior in rank and therefore I who, being under his command, drew sword on him, by the law of the Greeks, must die. Yet before I could be put upon my trial, some of those who loved me and guessed the truth of the business thrust me out of our camp disguised, with all the treasure that I had won in war, bidding me hide myself awhile till the matter was forgotten. O Queen, I did not desire to go; nay, I desired to stay and to pay the price of my sin. But they would not have it so. I think indeed that there were others behind, great ones of Egypt, moving in this matter; at least I was thrust forth, all being made easy for me, and all eyes growing blind."

Again he paused, and I, Ayesha, clothed as the goddess, asked,

"And what did you then, you who could slay your brother for the sake of woman?"

"Then, Divine One, I fled up Nile where, because of the trouble that was in the land, Pharaoh's arm could not reach me, nor the arm of the commander of the Greeks. Tarrying not and without speech with that high maiden who was the cause of my sin, I fled up Nile."

"Why did you fly up Nile and not back to your own people, O most sinful man?"

"Because my heart is broken, Queen, and I desired to seek the mercy of Isis whose law I had learned already and to become her priest. I knew that those who bow themselves to her may look no more on woman, but thenceforth must live virgin to the death, and it was my will to look no more on woman, since woman had stained my hands with a brother's blood, and therefore I hated her."

Now I, Ayesha, asked,

"What gods did you worship before your heart was turned to Isis, Queen of Heaven?"

"I worshipped the gods of Greece and first among them Aphrodite, Lady of Love."

"Who has paid you well for your service, making of you a murderer of one of your own blood who, before she blinded your eyes, was more to you than any on the earth. Do you then renounce this wanton Aphrodite?"

"Aye, Queen, I renounce her for ever. Never more will I offer at her altars or look on woman in the way of love. If I may have pardon for my sins, here and now I vow myself to Isis as her faithful priest and servant. Here and now I blot the name of Aphrodite from my heart; yea, I reject her gifts and tread down all her memories beneath my aspiring feet that at last shall bear my soul to peace."

Thus the man spoke in a quivering and earnest voice, and was silent. Yes, deep silence reigned in that holy place, whilst I, Ayesha, although it is true that as a woman I misdoubted me of such rash oaths, as the minister of the goddess, prepared myself to grant pardon to this seeker in the hallowed, immemorial words, and to open to his troubled heart the doors of purity and rest eternal.

Then suddenly in that silence clearly I heard the sound of silvern laughter, soft, sweet laughter that seemed to come from the skies above and though it was so low to fill the shrine and all the hall beyond. I looked about me but could see naught. It would seem, too, that the Greek heard also, for he turned his head and looked behind him, then once more let it fall upon his hands.

Whence came that sound? Could it be that she of Paphos—? Nay, it was impossible, and not thus would I be turned from my office, I who was clothed with the robe and for that hour wielded the might of Isis.

"Hearken, O man, in the world named Kallikrates," I said. "On behalf of Isis, the All-Mother, goddess of virtue and of wisdom, speaking with her voice, hearing with her ears, and filled with her soul, I wash you clean of all your sins and accept you as her priest, promising to you light burdens on the earth and beyond the earth great rewards for ever. First swear the oath that may not be broken, and then draw near that I may kiss you on the brow, accepting you as the slave and lover of Isis, from this day until the moon, her heavenly throne, shall crumble into nothingness."

Having spoken thus, letting the words fall one by one, slowly as the tears of the penitent fell upon the ground, I uttered the oath, the form of which even now I must not write.

It was a dreadful oath covering all things, and binding him who took it to Isis alone, an oath that if it were forgot wrought upon the traitor the age-long doom of death in this world and woe in the worlds to come, till by slow steps, with pierced heart and bleeding feet, the holy height from which he had fallen should be climbed again.

At length it was finished and he said faintly,

"I swear! With fear and trembling still I swear!"

Then I beckoned to him with the *sistrum* of which the little shaken bells made a faint compelling music that already he had learned to follow, and he came and kneeled before me. There I laid the Cross of Life upon his head and gave him blessing, laid it upon his lips and gave him wisdom, laid it upon his heart and gave him existence for thousands upon thousands of years. All these things I did in the name and with the strength of Isis the Mother.

Came the last rite, the greeting of the Mother to her child new-born in spirit, the rite of the Kiss of welcome. At that moment supreme a light fell on me from above: perchance it came from Heaven, perchance it was an art of the watching priests; I do not know. At least it fell upon me illumining my glittering robes and jewelled headdress with a soft splendour in the darkness of that shrine. At that moment, too, at a touch my veil fell down, so that the moonlight struck full upon my face making it mystical and lovely in the frame of my flowing hair.

The priest new-ordained lifted his bent head that I might consecrate his brow with the Kiss of welcome, and his hood fell back. The moonlight shone on his face also, his beautiful face like to that of a sculptured Grecian god, shapely, fine-featured, large-eyed, and crowned with little golden curls—for as yet he was unshorn; yes, a face more beautiful than that which I had seen on any man, set above a warrior's tall and sinewy form.

By Isis! I knew this face; it was that which had haunted me from childhood, that which often I had seen in a dream of halls beyond the earth, that of a man who in this dream had been sworn to me to complete my womanhood. Oh! I could not doubt, it was the same, the very same, and looking on it, the curse of Aphrodite fell upon me and for the first time I knew the madness of our mortal flesh. Yea, my being was rent and shattered like a cedar beneath the lightning stroke; I was smitten through and through. I, the priestess of Isis, proud and pure, was as lost as any village maid within her lover's arms.

The man, too! He saw me and his aspect changed; the holy fervour went out of his eyes and into them entered something more human, something more fateful. It was as though he, too, remembered—I know not what.

With a mighty effort of the will, aware that the eyes of the goddess and perchance of her priests also were upon me, I conquered myself and with beating heart and heaving breast bent down to touch his brow with the Kiss of ceremony. Yet, I know not how—I know not if the fault were his or mine or perchance of both of us—it was his *lips* I touched, not his brow, just touched them and no more.

It was nothing, or at any rate but a little thing, in one instant come and gone, and yet to me it was all. For in that touch I broke my holy vows, and he, new-sworn to the worship of the goddess, broke his, yes, in the very act of sacrifice. What drove us to it? I do not know, but once again I thought I heard that low, triumphant laughter, and it came into my mind that we were the sport of an indomitable power greater than ourselves and all the oaths that mortals swear to gods or men. I waved my sceptre. The new-made priest arose, bowed and withdrew, I wondering of whom he was the priest—of Isis or of Aphrodite. The singing of a distant choir broke out upon the silence, the hierophants came and led him away to be of their company till his death: the ceremony was ended. My attendants, arrayed as the goddesses Hathor and Nut, conducted me from the shrine. I was unrobed of my sacred panoplies and once more from a goddess became a woman, and as a woman I sought my couch and wept and wept. For had I not at the first temptation in my heart broken the law and betrayed the trust of her who, as then I believed, is and was and shall be; her whose veil no mortal man had lifted, the Mother of the sun and all its stars?

## CHAPTER V

### THE SUMMONS

NONE knew my fault. Yet I knew, and what is known to one soul is known to all souls, since one is all and all are one. Moreover, it was known to That which begets souls, That from which they come and to which they return again, again to come, as Plato, the great philosopher, who died before my day, has taught us in his writings. Also it was known to that accursed priest who was the cause and partner of my crime. I was overcome; I was eaten up with shame, I who thought myself purer than the mountain snows, as indeed I was and, in the flesh, to this hour have remained.

Soon I could no longer bear my torment. To Noot I went, Noot the high-priest, my counsellor and master, and in a secret place kneeling on my knees, there I told him all.

He hearkened with a little smile upon his withered face, then answered,

“Daughter, in your honesty you do but reveal that which I knew—how I knew it matters not. And now take comfort, since the blame is not altogether yours, or even that of this new-made priest, whose foot was caught in the same snare. You worship Isis, as I do, but what is Isis whom we portray on earth as a woman glorious above all women? Is she not Nature’s self, the universal Mother, the Supreme in whom all gods and goddesses have a part? She wars on Aphrodite, it is true, yet does not that mean that in verity she wars upon herself? And are we not as Isis is, not one but many poured into a single mould, for do we not all war upon ourselves? Believe me, Daughter, the human heart is a great battleground where the higher and the lower parts of us fight with spiritual spears and arrows, till one side or the other wins victory and hoists the banner of good or evil, of Isis or of Set. Only out of struggle comes perfectness; that which has never struggled is a dead creature from whom little may be hoped. The ore must be melted in the fire and lo! the most of it is dross, refuse to be thrown away. Had it never known the fire, there could be no pure gold to adorn the brows of Heaven, nor even copper and iron to shape the swords of men. Rejoice, then, that you have felt the hurt of fire.”

“Master,” I answered, “Lord of Wisdom to whom alone Ayesha bows the knee, your words are true and comfortable, yet bethink you, and if it is permitted, interpret me this riddle. I dreamed a dream of the time before my earthly days—you know it well for I have told it to you. I dreamed of a place in Heaven and of two goddesses matched against each other and of a command that was laid upon me to bring woe upon those who had deserted the one and turned to the other. Now if they were parts of a single whole, why should this command be laid upon me?”

“Daughter, in your dream you were ordained to be a Sword of Vengeance, not because the Egyptians turned from one part of the holy Unity to another part of that Unity, but because they have become corrupt and faithless, worshipping no gods save themselves and following after that which is low, not that which is high. Such is my answer, yet of the truth or the falsehood of that dream I say nothing. Perchance it was but a dream.”

“Perchance, Master. Yet in that dream, true or false, I saw a face, and lo! a few nights gone I, draped as Isis in the shrine, I saw that face again and knew it; knew also that with it my fate is intertwined. What of this?”

“Daughter, who are we that we should read the mysteries of Fate, we who know not whence we come nor whither we go, nor what we have been, nor why we are? It may be that you have some mission toward the spirit that is clothed in the flesh of yonder man. It may be that you are destined to uplift that spirit, and in so doing yourself to be trodden down. If so, I say that in the end you shall rise again and bear him upward with you.”

He paused, and I knelt silent, pondering the prophecy, for such I knew it well to be. Then again he spoke,

“You heard a laughter in the shrine, yet there was no laughter save that of the evil in your own heart, mocking and triumphant. Such laughter mayhap you will often hear, but while you can hear it and repent, be not dismayed. When the ears of the soul grow deaf then utter loss is near; while they are open, hope remains. Those who still strive can never wholly fall. Fate rules us every one, yet within the circle of that Fate power is given to us to work out our redemption. I have finished. Ask me no more.”

“What punishment, Master?” I asked.

“Daughter, this. For a while look no more upon that man. I say for a while, since with you I hold that his destiny and yours are intertwined. I have a command for you: that presently you accompany me hence to lands beyond the seas. Now, go rest, and in rest find forgetfulness.”

So I went, wondering yet comforted, though I knew well that Noot the Holy had not told me all, no, nor yet the half of what he knew. For often those to whom the gods give vision are forbid to speak it, lest, as in the old Hebrew parable, men should eat of the tree of knowledge and grow like to them. Or perchance they cannot speak it, since it comes to them in a tongue which may not be rendered in the words that the passer-by would understand. So indeed it is with me to-day.

Thus it came about that soon I and my master, Noot, left Philæ and as before travelled the Nile disguised. Never since then have my eyes looked upon that island and its holy fane which Holly, who has visited it, tells me is now a ruin with stark, Hathor-headed columns standing here and there amongst the tumbled stones. He says, moreover, that his people who rule the land to-day purpose to sink it beneath the Nile that the lands below may be enriched and multiplied. Herein I see an allegory; the temples of Isis are drowned and the learning they held is lost in order that more food may grow to feed the common and the ignorant. Yet to what end, seeing that if there is more food, more men will come to eat it, all of them common and ignorant, while Isis and her wisdom are swallowed in the slime. Thus has it ever been in Egypt, and doubtless elsewhere, for such is Nature’s law. Food breeds multitudes and where carrion is, there are flies, while in the deserts both are lacking. Yet I think that the deserts and the few that wander on them beneath the sun and stars are nearer far to God.

Once more disguised as merchants, I and Noot, my master, took ship and visited far lands to see their state and gather wisdom. We visited Rome, then breaking her shackles and rising to her greatness. They were a great people, those Romans that Noot out of his foresight told me would one day rule the world. Or perhaps it was I who told Noot, judging them by their qualities; I am not sure.

At least I loved them not, because of their rude natures, their lack of arts and their love of power and gain. Therefore when I had studied their language and their politics I passed on.

We came to Greece and tarried there awhile, studying philosophies and other things. The Greeks I did love, because they were beautiful and called forth beauty from all they touched. Also they were brave who defied the Persian might and had they but stood together, might have queneed it on the earth. But they would not, for ever State tore out the throat of State, so that in the end all were undone and overwhelmed by a multitude of commoner folk who held Greece before them, for such was their destiny. Moreover, they worshipped gods made like themselves, with all the faults of men grown greater and more vile, and told fables concerning them fit to please children, which I thought strange in a people that could produce such philosophers and poets. Yet those gods had come down to them from their fathers, and it is hard to shake off the yoke of gods until some greater god appears and breaks it with the hammer of war.

Here in Greece it was that I posed to its most famous sculptor for a statue of Aphrodite, or rather it was as a mould of perfect Womanhood that I posed, desiring that this sculptor, who pleased me, should have one flawless model to copy in his future work, for which he blessed me, naming that statue "Beauty's Self." Yet when I visited him a while afterward I found that he had changed this name to Aphrodite.

I was angered who did not desire that my loveliness should be accredited to mine enemy and that of Isis whom I served, and asked him why this had been done.

He answered, humbly enough, because of a dream in which the Paphian had appeared to him and threatened him with blindness unless he gave her own name to so divine a face and form. Moreover, being in the thrall of superstition he prayed me, even with tears, that thus it might remain, since otherwise he must break that statue and as he thought, be blinded as well. So out of pity I let him have his way and even gave him my hand to kiss in token of forgiveness.

Thus it comes about that Aphrodite unashamed throughout the ages has taken the tribute of a million eyes, clothed in a borrowed loveliness. So be it, since what she has stolen is but a fraction of the truth. No sculptor, however great, can mould the perfect out of frozen stone.

From Greece, still disguised as a merchant and his daughter, we wandered to Jerusalem, feigning to trade in pearls and gems, since there I would study the religion of the Jews whereof I had heard so much. The "City of Peace" it was called among the Egyptians of old times, or so they interpreted its name, but never found I one in which there was less of peace. Fierce-faced were those Jews and quarrelsome; revengeful too and ever waging war, public and private, upon one another. A peculiar people, as they name themselves, full of hate, particularly of the stranger within their gates. To trade with them was scarcely possible, because he who sold them wares was always left the loser, though for this I who sought their philosophy, not their gold, cared nothing.

So I turned myself to the study of their faith, and found that God, as they interpreted Him, was well-nigh as fierce as were his worshippers. Yet this I will say, that He was one God, not many, and a true God also, since otherwise how could his prophets have written so gloriously concerning Him? Moreover, it was their belief that He would come to earth and lead them to the conquest of the world. This, Holly tells me, has chanced though not in the shape they hoped, since the King who came would have led them but to the conquest of the evil that is in the hearts of men and to the knowledge of a life to be, in which they had small faith. Therefore they persecuted and slew Him as a malefactor after their cruel fashion, and what is now accepted by millions, so says Holly, they still reject.

I preached to them, for my heart burned in me at the sight of their sacrifices. Yes, I preached to them against the shedding of blood, telling them of a higher philosophy of gentleness and mercy. For a while they listened, then took up stones and stoned me, so that had I and Noot not been protected by Heaven, we should have been slain. After this affront I turned my back upon Jerusalem and its hook-nosed, fierce-eyed people, and went to Cyprus where I debated with the lewd priests of Aphrodite at Paphos. Thence I got me back to Egypt whence I had been absent many years.

At Naukratis priests of Isis who knew of our coming, how I cannot tell, perchance Noot had told them by messenger, or in a dream as he could do, met us and conducted us up the Nile to the temple of Isis at Memphis. Here we were received in state in the great hall of the temple and lo! at the head of those who welcomed us was the Greek Kallikrates, now by his holiness and zeal risen high in the service of the goddess.

When I saw him, beauteous as of old, my heart stood still and the blood rushed to my brow.

Yet I gave no sign, treating him as a stranger on whom my eyes had never fallen until that hour. He for his part stared at me with a puzzled air, then shook his head as one does who sees a face that he believes he has met in dream and yet is doubtful. For be it remembered, this man had looked on me but once, when robed as Isis I received him into the company of her priests at Philæ, and then but for a moment in the light of the moon. Perchance he still thought that it was the goddess herself whom he saw thus and not a mortal. At the least he did not know that I, the beauteous prophetess who came to Memphis after wandering through the world, was the same as she who had sat upon the throne of Isis at Philæ and whom by chance he had kissed upon the lips. Mayhap even he did not remember the kiss, or if he remembered, set it down as part of the ceremonial. Thus, if I knew him but too well, to him I was a stranger.

I bethought me of flight, knowing in my heart that to me this man was as the fabled sword that hung above the head of Damocles, though what harm I had to fear from him, I did not know.

Again I sought the counsel of Noot who smiled and answered,

"Have I not told you, Daughter, that perils must be faced since those from which we flee will be swift to overtake us? If Destiny has brought you and this man together, be certain that it is for its own purposes. Surely you have learned your lesson and steeled your soul against all fleshly vanities."

"Yes, my Father," I answered proudly, "I have learned my lesson and steeled my soul. Moreover, your thought is my thought, nor will I turn my back on any man. Here I bide, defying woman's weakness and all the wiles of evil gods."

"Well spoken," answered Noot, and blessed me in the ancient words. Yet as he did so I noted that he sighed and shook his head.

For many a moon, I know not how many who, having all time at my command, seem to have lost its petty count, I remained there in the temple at Memphis of which soon I became the prophetess and the head of the priestesses. Ere long the fame of my

divinations spread far and wide, so that from all the land those who sought wisdom or knowledge of the future would come to consult me, bringing great gifts to the goddess, though not one gem or piece of gold did Noot or I keep for ourselves, who indeed had no need of such common dross.

So I sat in a carved chair in the sanctuary, my diviner's bowl at my side, and uttered dark sayings like to those of the famous oracles of the Greeks at Delphi, many of which fulfilled themselves. For in truth, I think that there was a spirit in me—whether it came from the Heavens or elsewhere I do not know—which enabled me to read much that was passing upon the earth and even sometimes that which had not yet happened upon the earth. So the renown of the Lady Isis spread till I became a power in the land. Moreover, thus I learned many things, for those who consult an oracle, like those who seek the help of a physician, lay bare their souls, keeping no secret back.

Now at this time Egypt and all the countries round seethed with war like a pot boiling on the flames. For years Egypt had beaten off the attacks of the Persians, but now the Pharaoh Nectanebes, the second of that name who then sat upon the throne, the last native king who reigned upon the Nile, was threatened by Artaxerxes, that one of this accursed race who was named Ochus. This Persian Ochus had gathered a mighty force to subdue Egypt, hundreds of thousands of men, tens of thousands of horsemen, hundreds of triremes and of transport ships.

The last act of the tragedy had begun of which the end was to be the crushing of Egypt who never more should know a Pharaoh of her own blood and choosing. Of all these things I learned through those who came to consult the oracle of Isis, and much did I talk of them with Noot.

Now of myself during these long years of quiet and preparation for great events, I will say that ever my spirit grew in purity and strength. I put the things of earth behind me, I grew nearer to the Divine, and in the night time I communed with my soul which seemed to have become a part of that which is above the world. The Greek, Kallikrates, I saw continually, but no word passed between us save such as had to do with matters of our faith and of the worship of Isis in whose service he now stood high. Never did we interchange a touch or a look of love. He was apart from me and I from him. And yet always in my heart I feared this man, this beautiful man, the warrior who had become a priest, for some prescience told me that he would bring disaster on my head, or I should bring it upon his, I knew not which.

So there we sat in the sanctuary, Noot the wise and aged, who yet never seemed to change, Kallikrates the priest, and I, and alone or together gave counsel to kings and captains, or uttered oracles. Clear seemed our sky and free from trouble, yet on the far horizon in my spirit I discerned the tempest clouds arising, the terrible clouds in which the lightnings played like the swords of Destiny that in a day to come were doomed to overwhelm and pierce us through.

Nectanebes the second, the Pharaoh, came to his palace at Memphis to gather troops from Upper Egypt and made great offerings to the gods, seeking their favour in the coming war. Now I saw him for the first time, a gray-haired, fat, heavy-jowled man, bald-headed, large-nosed, with great eyes like to those of an ox. Such was Nectanebes, the magician, the consorter with familiar spirits, named the Destroyer, a title which the gods who hated him must have given him in irony since himself he was doomed to be destroyed. But one good thing can I say of this Nectanebes, that he was a lover of the arts and raised glorious buildings to the gods. Learning that I, the high-priestess, had dwelt at Philae, he came to consult me as to the beautiful temple with the Hathor-headed columns which he built there and through my counsel it was made perfect, for I drew its plans, or at least those of its adornments. Holly tells me that even as a ruin, although so small, there is no lovelier building in all Egypt.

Now this Pharaoh thought me a Greek and did not know that I was Arab and the daughter of him of Ozal in Yaman, whom his father, the first Nectanebes, had brought to his death because once long ago I had been refused as a wife to himself or to this son of his who now had succeeded him. Of these things doubtless he remembered little or nothing, since that was one of the smallest of Egypt's wars. But I, I remembered and swore that in payment for my father's blood I would bring his accursed House to ruin. Always also I received him veiled since I did not desire that he should look upon my beauty and inquire concerning my history; therefore, as a prophetess had a right to do, I received the Pharaoh veiled.

Often he came to visit me because he had learned that I was a mistress of Magic and he who practised magic much hoped that I would teach him secrets he did not know, and show him how to lay spells upon his enemies. This indeed I did, but the secrets that I taught him were evil and the spells were spears that when he threw them would fall back upon his head.

So the scene was set, and at length came the summons to begin the play with the watching world for audience.

A writing sealed with Pharaoh's seal was brought to the temple of Isis, commanding Noot the high-priest, and me, Ayesha, who now was named *Oracle-of-Isis*, and the Greek Kallikrates, Chief of the Ceremonies, whose office it was to assist me in my divinations, to attend the court of Pharaoh and there declare to him the future of the war as it should be revealed to us by the great goddess whom we served. At first we refused to go, whereon there came another message which said that if we continued to refuse, we should be brought. The Pharaoh wished to offer no affront to Isis, the messenger declared, but the matter was urgent, as great things hung upon the revelations which we alone could make, and some of the kings and generals who were gathered in the temple as allies of Nectanebes, being the worshippers of other gods, could not set foot in the holy shrine of Isis.

Then, there being no help for it, we answered that we would come that very night at the rising of the moon.

Hastily consulting together we planned the words of an oracle, double-edged words that yet prophesied good to Nectanebes and encouraged him to war; for thus we believed we should most quickly bring about his downfall.

Yet as those words were never spoken I will not write them down.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DIVINATION

ACCOMPANIED by the priests and priestesses of Isis clad in their robes and chanting the holy songs, I was borne veiled to the palace of the Pharaoh in a litter, with its curtains drawn. On my right hand walked Noot the high-priest, white-bearded, venerable; and on my left the Greek Kallikrates, Master of the Rites.

Thus we came to the palace of which the outer courts were filled with Grecian soldiers of the guard, some of whom in past years Kallikrates had once commanded, although as a shaven priest of Isis, disguised in his white robes, they knew him no more. These men stared at us, ready to mock and yet afraid, as did Phœnicians, Sidonians, men of Cyprus, and others who were gathered in the courts as though awaiting some great event.

In an outer hall a captain of the guard bade our escort of priests and priestesses to await our return, but we three, that is I, Ayesha, Noot, and Kallikrates, were summoned to the small banquetting chamber where Nectanebes with a few of the most highly placed of his guests sat at their feast. Among these were the King of Sidon, two more kings from Cyprus, three Grecian generals, some great nobles of Egypt, and others. Also certain royal ladies were present, and among them one who instantly drew my eyes to her. She was younger than I—perchance there may have been ten years between us, tall, slender, and lovely in her dark fashion, with a strong, quiet face and large brooding eyes, soft as a deer's and rather blue than black in colour.

Suddenly as we entered I, who note all, saw these eyes grow frightened like to those of one who sees some spirit returned from the halls of Death; saw also the rich-hued face turn pale, then grow red again as the blood flowed back; saw the breast heave beneath the jewelled robes, so sharply that a flower fell from them, and the lips of coral part as though to utter some remembered name.

Wondering what had thus disturbed this beauteous royalty since I, being veiled, it could not have been the vision of myself, I glanced round and perceived that Kallikrates, who was on my left, but a little behind me, had become pale as a dead man and stood like one frozen into stone.

"Who is that royal woman?" I whispered to Noot through my veil, for royal I knew her to be by the Uræus circlet she wore upon her raven hair.

"Pharaoh's daughter, Amenartas," he whispered back, "whom the Greeks call *The Maiden* because she will take no man in marriage."

Then I remembered a certain confession that once I had heard sitting on the throne of the goddess Isis at Philæ, of how the penitent had loved a girl of the royal House of Egypt, and for her sake killed his own dear brother; remembered also that this penitent was none other than the priest Kallikrates. Now I understood all, and though Kallikrates was naught to me save a fellow servant of the goddess, I hated that Amenartas and became aware that between her and me there was war unending, though how and why I knew not.

Next I looked at a man clad in kingly robes who sat on Pharaoh's right. He was a large man of about five and forty years of age with dark, handsome face and shifting eyes; one with a jovial aspect which yet I felt to be but a mask covering a heart full of evil schemes. From his purple robe sewn with pearls and the style of his attire and headdress I guessed that this must be Tenes the Phœnician, King of the city of Sidon that was reported the wealthiest in the world, which city, having revolted, had joined Egypt in its war against the Persians. Instantly I weighed that man in the balance of my mind and wrote him down as an ambitious rogue who was also a coward and, as I judged from the many charms he wore, full of superstition.

The others I had no time to study for at once the Pharaoh began to speak.

"Greeting, Prophetess," he said, rising from his chair and bowing to us, or rather to me, "Greeting, High-priest of Isis, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World; greeting also, Priest, Master of the Rites of Isis. Pharaoh thanks you all for thus promptly answering to his summons, since this night Egypt needs your wisdom more perchance than ever before in all the ages of its history."

"Be pleased, O Pharaoh, to set out what you desire of us, the servants of the eternal goddess," said Noot.

"This, High-priest: that you should declare the future to us. Harken! As you know, the great war has begun. The mighty Tenes here, King of Sidon, my ally, by the help of the Greeks I sent him, has defeated the Persians and against these Cyprus also is in revolt. But now Artaxerxes Ochus has seized the throne of Persia, having murdered all who stood between it and him, with the help of Bagoas the eunuch, his counsellor and general. He has raised a countless host and is pouring down upon Sidon and upon Egypt. Therefore we would learn how the war shall go and to what gods we must sacrifice to secure the victory."

"O Pharaoh," answered Noot, "in bygone years when your father sat upon the throne and I was the *Kherheb*, yes, the first magician of Egypt, he asked me such questions as these, and having prayed to my goddess, I answered him in the words that she commanded. None heard those words save your father himself, for he and I were alone together. Yet there was that in them which made him wroth so that he sought to kill me, and to save my life I fled out of Egypt, going whither the goddess led me. Afterward I was called back to Egypt where once more I am high-priest of Isis though the office of *Kherheb* is filled by another. How know I, Pharaoh, if I obey you as I obeyed your father, and again the goddess should utter prophecies which are not pleasing to the ears of kings, that once more my life may not be sought in payment?"

"I swear, High-priest," answered Nectanebes eagerly, "that whatever may be revealed by the goddess, you shall take no harm. I swear it by the name and throne of the holy Isis, to whom I will make great gifts, and all this company are witnesses of the oath. If it be broken, may the curse of Isis and of all the gods of Egypt fall upon the head of me and mine. Draw nigh now that I may touch you with my sceptre, thereby forgiving all that you have said or shall say against me or my House, and restoring to you your office of *Kherheb* of Egypt, whereof my father, who to-day is gathered in Osiris, robbed you."

So Noot drew near and Pharaoh touched him with his sceptre, a cedar wand surmounted with a little golden image of Horus, which he always carried because of his throne-name which signified "*Horus-of-Gold*." Moreover, he re-created him *Kherheb* and in token of it set upon his shoulders the gold chain from his own neck, and swore to him his place and power for life and the gift of an alabaster coffin wherein to lie after life was done. This sarcophagus, however, Noot refused, saying darkly that it was fated that he

should sleep his last sleep far away from Egypt. Then he, Noot, drew back and as he went I saw Pharaoh's daughter rise and whisper awhile in her father's ear. He listened and nodded. Then he said,

"Come hither, priest who is named 'Lover-of-Isis' and Master of her rites, the royal Lady of Egypt says to me that in bygone days when she was scarce a woman, she thinks that before you were a priest, you held some command amongst the Greeks of my guard, as from your stature and bearing I can well believe. She says also that if her memory serves her, you slew some man in a quarrel and for this reason fled away and sought refuge with Isis. If such things happened I have forgotten them, nor do I ask concerning them. Let them lie. Yet, lest you should be afraid that old tales may be told against you or vengeance wrought upon you, come hither also and receive pardon for the past, and protection and advancement for the future and with these a gift from Pharaoh."

Now I marvelled at this lady's foresight and cunning which showed her how to take advantage of Pharaoh's mood and safeguard one who once had loved her, all of which told me that she must be a wise woman as well as beautiful. Also it told me that the worship of this man had been pleasing to her. Then Kallikrates drew near and was touched with the sceptre. Moreover, Pharaoh spoke to him in like words that he had spoken to Noot, pardoning him all and promising him much. Moreover, in token of his favour he gave him a gold cup of Grecian workmanship having two handles, that was chased about with the story of the loves of Aphrodite and Adonis, and bordered with a wreath of those anemones which were fabled to have sprung from his blood. This glorious, flower-like cup from which the guests, when we entered, were pledging themselves in wine of Cyprus, Pharaoh lifted from the board and sent to Kallikrates, a great gift which made it clear to me how deeply he desired to propitiate the goddess in the persons of her servants.

Lastly the private scribe was commanded to write down these decrees that he had spoken, which he did forthwith, sealing them with Pharaoh's seal and giving one copy to Noot whilst keeping the other to be filed among the records.

Thus Noot and Kallikrates were protected from all things, but to me, the Prophetess, nothing was said, as I thought for two reasons, first because I was known to Pharaoh, who as I have told, had often consulted me upon matters of magic, and secondly because as the "voice of the goddess" I was holy and above reward or punishment at the hands of man. Thus I thought, with how much truth shall be seen.

The gifts were received, the papyrus had been hidden away in the robe of Noot, and there was silence in the chamber. To me, Ayesha, this heavy silence was full of omen. My soul, made keen and fine with ceaseless contemplation of things that are above the earth, in that silence seemed to hear the breath of the watching gods of Egypt. To me it was as though they had gathered there to listen to the fate of this their ancient home on earth. Yes, I felt them about me; or at the least I felt a spirit stirring.

The company at the table drank no more wine and ceased from speech. They sat still staring in front of them and notwithstanding the glitter of the ornaments that proclaimed their royalty or rule, to me they were as dead men in a tomb. Only the Princess of Egypt, Amenartas, seemed to be alive and outside the circle of this doom, for I noted that her splendid eyes sought the face, the perfect, carved face of the priest Kallikrates and that though he stood with folded arms and gaze fixed upon the ground, he knew it, for now and again covertly he glanced back at her.

At length one of those guests could bear no more, and spoke. He was a close-lipped, war-worn Grecian general who afterward I learned was named Kleinios of Cos, the commander of Pharaoh's mercenary forces.

"By Zeus!" he cried, "are we men or are we stones, or are we shades in Hades? Let these diviners divine and have done, for I would get me to my wine again."

"Aye," broke in Tenes, King of Sidon. "Bid them divine, Pharaoh, since we have much to agree upon ere I sail at dawn."

Then all the company cried, "*Divine! Divine!*" save Amenartas only, who searched the face of Kallikrates with her eyes, as though she would learn what lay behind its cold and priestly mask.

"So be it," said Noot, "but first I pray Pharaoh to bid all mean men depart."

Pharaoh waved his sceptre and the butlers and attendants bowed and went. Then Noot motioned to Kallikrates, who thereon shook the *sistrum* that he bore and, in his rich, low voice, uttered a chant to the goddess, that which was used to summon her presence.

He ended his chant and Noot began to pray.

"Hear me, thy prophet, O thou who wast and art and shalt be, thou in whose bosom is locked all the wisdom of heaven and earth," he prayed. "These kings and great ones desire knowledge, declare it unto them according to thy will. They desire truth—let them learn the truth in such fashion as thou shalt decree."

Then he was silent. None spoke, yet it seemed that a command came to the three of us, for suddenly Noot looked at the priest Kallikrates, a very strange look. Next the priest Kallikrates, rising from his knees, laid down the *sistrum* and taking the beautiful cup that Pharaoh had given him, went to the table and washed it with pure water from a silver ewer, then filled it to the brim from the ewer and brought it to me, Ayesha. Now I knew that I was commanded to gaze into that cup and to say what things I saw.

So I set it on the ground in front of me and kneeling, threw my veil over it and gazed into the water in the shallow golden cup.

For a little while I saw nothing, till presently a face formed in the water, the face of the royal lady, Amenartas, which stared at me out of the cup. Yes, it stared hard and seemed to threaten me, for in its eyes were hate and vengeance. Then another face came and covered it, the face of Kallikrates the priest, and in its eyes were trouble and desire.

Now I knew that the goddess Isis, or perchance another, she of the Greeks, spoke to me of matters that had to do with myself and not with the fate of Egypt. In my heart I prayed to the Queen of Heaven to rid me of these visions, though to give me others I did not pray her, since it was my design to speak certain politic words which we had prepared.

Yet other visions came unsought, for some spirit possessed me, a spirit of truth and destiny. They were many and all of them terrible. I saw battlefields; I saw men fall in thousands, I saw cities in flames. I saw that false-eyed king, Tenes, dead. I saw the General, Kleinios of Cos, also dead, lying on a heap of Grecian slain. I saw the Pharaoh Nectanebes flying up Nile upon a boat—I knew it was up Nile because the current rippled against the prow of his ship, I saw him seized by black savages and throttled with a rope till his tongue hung out and the great round eyes started from his head. I saw the temples of Egypt burning and a fierce-faced, drunken king hacking at the statues of the gods with a Persian sword and butchering the priests upon the altar. Then I saw no more but a voice called in my ears,

"Death to Egypt! Death and desolation! Death to her king, death to her priests, death to her gods! Finished, finished, all is finished!"

I cast the bowl from me. It overset but lo! there flowed from it not water but blood, or dark-hued wine, staining the white marble of the pavement. I stared at it! All stared at this god-sent horror!

"A trick!" cried the Princess Amenartas. "She has coloured the water behind the shelter of her veil."

The others too, especially the Greeks, took up the cry, echoing,

"A trick, a brazen trick!"

Only I noted that Pharaoh was silent, Pharaoh who knew that Ayesha, named *Isis-come-to-Earth*, did not deal in tricks; Pharaoh who himself practised magic and had seen such omens sent by Set. Lo! Pharaoh looked afraid and spoke no word, only glared with his great eyes at the stain upon the marble.

"What answer did the goddess give to your prayer, Prophetess," asked Amenartas, sneering at me.

"This answer, royal Lady of Egypt," and I pointed to the marble, "the answer of blood."

"Blood! Whose blood? That of the Persians?"

"Nay, Lady, that of many who sit at this feast and who ere long shall sit at the table of Osiris, and of thousands who cling to them. Yet be comforted, Lady, not your blood. I think that you have much mischief to work ere you sit also at the table of Osiris, or mayhap at that of Set," I added, giving thrust for thrust.

"Declare then their names, Seeress."

"Nay, I declare them not. Go, seek them for yourself, Lady, or let Pharaoh your father seek, for is he not a magician? though what god gives him vision I do not know. You name me cheat, or rather you name the goddess cheat. Therefore the goddess is dumb and her prophetess is dumb."

"Aye, I name you cheat," she cried, who in her heart was mad with fear, "and cheat you are. Now let this temple hag who hides her hideousness behind a silken screen unveil that we may see her as she is, and let her be searched and the vase of dye be taken from her bosom or her robes."

"Aye, let her be searched," shouted the guests who were also afraid.

"No need to search, high lords," I said in a quavering voice, as though I too were overcome with fear. "I will obey the Princess. I will unveil, yet I beseech you all, make not a mock of me when you see me as I am. Once I was perchance as fair as that royal Lady who commands, but years of abstinence and the sleepless search for wisdom mar the features and wither the frame. Moreover, time touches the locks, such of them as remain to me, since these too grow thin with age. Yet I will unveil and the vase of precious dye shall be the prize of him who first can snatch it from my bosom or my robe."

"Aye," said one of them, it was the king Tenes, "and in payment for her trick we will make her drink what remains of it to give colour to her poor old carcase."

"Aye," I answered, "and I will drink what remains of it for I think the stuff is harmless. Oh! be not angry because a poor conjurer plays her tricks."

Now Noot stared at me as though he were about to speak. Then his face changed like to that of a man who of a sudden receives a command that others cannot hear. He let fall his eyes, remaining silent, and I, watching, knew that it was the will of the goddess, or at least Noot's will, that I should unveil.

I glanced at the priest Kallikrates but he stood still, looking like Apollo's self frozen into stone.

During this play I had loosened the fastenings of my veil and hood and now of a sudden I cast them from me, revealing myself clad as Isis, that is in little save a transparent, clinging robe fastened about my middle. On my breast, hanging from a chain of pearls, were her holy symbols carved in gems and gold, and on my head her vulture cap beneath which my tresses hung almost to my feet, having the golden feathers of the cap adorned with sapphires and with rubies and the uræus rising from it fashioned of glittering diamonds.

Aye, I unveiled and stood before them, my arms folded upon the jewelled girdle beneath my breast.

"Behold! Kings and Lords," I said, "the temple hag stands before you in such poor shape as it has pleased the gods to fashion her. Now let him who can see it, come, take the vase that hides this unveiled trickster's dye."

For a moment there was silence while those brutal men devoured my white loveliness with their eyes, taking count of every beauty of my perfect face and form. Amenartas stared at me and her ruddy cheeks went pale; yes, even the coral faded from her rich lips. Then from between those lips there burst these words:

"This is not a woman! This is the very goddess. Beware of her, ye men, for she is terrible."

"Nay, nay," I answered humbly, "I am but a poor mortal, not even royal like to yourself, Lady—but a poor mortal with some wits and wisdom, though perchance Isis for a while to your sight has touched me with her splendour. Come, take the vase ere I veil myself again."

Then those men went mad, all save Pharaoh, who sat brooding.

"Goddess or woman," they cried, "give her to us who henceforward can never look upon the beauty of another."

King Tenes rose, his coarse face afire and his shifting eyes fixed upon me greedily.

"By Baal and by Ashtoreth!" he cried, "goddess or woman, never have I seen such an one as this prophetess of Isis. Harken, Pharaoh, before the feast we disputed together concerning a great sum of gold and in the end it was confessed by you that it was due to me in aid of my costs of war although, so you said, it could not be found in Egypt save by raiding the rich treasury of Isis. Perchance the goddess learned of this design of yours and by way of answer sent us an evil oracle. I know not, but this I do know, that she sent you also a means to pay the debt without cost to yourself or the robbing of her sacred treasury. Give me this fair priestess to comfort me with her wisdom and otherwise"—here the company laughed coarsely—"and I will talk no more of the matter of that gold."

Pharaoh listened without raising his head, then looked on me with rolling eyes and answered:

"Which would anger the goddess most, King Tenes—to lose her gold or her prophetess?"

"The former as I think, Pharaoh, seeing that gold is scarce, and prophetesses—true or false—are many. Give her to me, I say."

"I cannot for my oath's sake, King Tenes."

"You swore an oath to yonder high-priest and to yonder man, who looks like a Grecian god clad in a priest's robe and is called Master-of-the-Rites, but to this lady you swore none."

"I swore the oath to Isis, King Tenes, and if I break it doubtless she will be avenged upon me. Go your way; the gold shall follow you to the last ounce, but the prophetess is not mine to give."

Now Tenes stared at me again and I, who hated him with all my soul, gave him back his stare with interest, though this did but seem to inflame him the more. Then he turned on Pharaoh furiously and answered in a cold voice,

"Hear me, Pharaoh. It is but a small matter, yet my mind is set upon this woman who knows the heart of the gods and can pour their wisdom into my ears. Therefore make your choice:

"In Sidon there are two factions of almost equal strength. One of them says 'Make an alliance with Egypt and fight the Persian Ochus whom already you have defeated once.' The other says 'Make an alliance with Ochus and as reward in a day to come sit on Pharaoh's throne!' I have taken the first counsel as you know. Yet it is not too late to change that counsel for a second which perchance would prove the wiser, if there be aught in yonder divination," and he pointed to the blood-stain upon the marble floor. Then he went on:

"Moreover, I have my captains about me at this board and those that serve me wait without with all my fleet, and therefore should it be changed I need not fear to tell you so and to your face. So I say to you that if you will not please me in this small matter, presently my ambassadors go forth to Susa with a message for the ear of Ochus to which it would rejoice you to listen, seeing that without the strong aid of Sidon and her fleets Egypt cannot conquer in this war."

Thus Tenes spoke and laid his hand upon the pommel of his short Phœnician sword.

Now the face of Pharaoh, bearded thus in his own city and at his own board, grew red with rage and I saw that he was about to answer this outland king, defying him as many of the great monarchs who filled his throne before him would have done. But ere he could speak his royal daughter Amenartas whispered in his ear and although I could not hear her words, I read their purport in her face. They were—"Tenes speaks truth. Without Sidon you cannot stand against the Persians and Egypt is lost. Let the woman go. Isis, understanding, will forgive, who otherwise must see the Persian Holy Fire burning on her altars."

Pharaoh heard and the anger written in his eyes was changed to trouble. Rolling them in his fashion he looked on Noot and said to him as one who asks a question,

"I swore an oath to you, *Kherheb*, and to yonder priest, but to the prophetess I swore no oath and perchance Egypt's fate hangs upon this business."

The old high-priest paused awhile like a man who awaits a message. If so, it seemed to come, for presently he answered in a quiet voice,

"Pharaoh is right; Egypt's fate hangs upon this business; also Pharaoh's fate; also that of King Tenes and many others. The only fate which is not touched, whether it be finished in this way or in that, is the fate of yonder seeress who is named *Isis-come-to-Earth*, since the goddess will protect her own. Settle the matter as you will, Pharaoh. Only settle it swiftly, because under our rule it is time that I and my company who wait without should return to the temple to make our nightly prayer and offerings to the goddess, the Queen of all the earth, the Queen of Pharaoh and of Egypt; the Queen of the King of Sidon, and in the end the Queen also of Artaxerxes Ochus, the Persian, as one day surely he shall learn."

Thus spoke Noot unconcernedly and hearing him, I laughed, for now I was sure that I had nothing to fear from Tenes or from any other man upon the earth. Therefore I laughed, which that company thought strange in one who was about to be borne away a slave, and bade Kallikrates give me my veil and hood, also the cloak that I had thrown off when I entered the banqueting hall.

He obeyed, and while he was assisting me to cover up my beauty in the folds of that veil, I noted that alone among all the men here present, this beauty did not seem to stir him at all. Had he been clothing a marble or an ivory image of the goddess, as every day it was his duty to do at sunrise, anointing it with perfumes and garlanding it with flowers, he could not have been less moved. Or perhaps so truly had the priest in him overcome the man that he had learned to cloak all the feelings of a man. Or perhaps it was because that royal Amenartas watched his every movement with her eyes. I know not, but this I do know, that his calm angered me and it came into my mind that were I not the head-priestess of Isis and sworn to her, there should be a different tale to tell. Yes, even in that moment of destiny this came into my mind, which shows that in my soul I had not forgotten the meeting of our lips in yonder shrine at Philæ. At least I have often thought so since, I, who have had much time for thought.

"Priestess, you are mine," cried King Tenes in triumph. "Make ready to sail with me for Sidon within an hour."

"Do you think that I am yours, King Tenes?" I asked in a musing voice as I fastened the folds of my veil and arranged the hood. "If so, I hold otherwise. I hold that I, Ayesha, a free-born lady of the ancient Arab blood, am not the slave of any Phœnician who for a little while chances to be a king, but of her who is the Queen of kings, Isis the Mother. Nay, Tenes, I am more, I am Isis herself, *Isis-come-to-Earth*. It seems that go with you I must, since such is the will of the goddess, but, Phœnician, take heed. Should you dare to befool me even with a touch, I tell you that I have strength at my command and that ere long Sidon shall lack a king and Set shall gain a subject. For your own sake therefore and for that of Sidon, think again and let me be!"

Now the great jaws of Tenes fell and he stared at me open-mouthed.

"Yet you shall go with me," he muttered thickly, "and for the rest Ashtoreth rules in Sidon, not Isis, for know that there are two Queens of Heaven."

"Aye, Tenes, a false queen and a true, and let the false beware of the true."

Then I turned to Nectanebes and said,

"Is it still your command, O Pharaoh, that I accompany this ally of yours to Sidon? Bethink you ere you answer, since much hangs upon your words."

"Yea, Priestess, it must be so. I have spoken and my decree is recorded. The fate of Egypt is more than that of any priestess and doubtless King Tenes will treat you well. If not, you say that you have strength to defend yourself against him."

Now as I answered, I laughed lightly and the sound of my laughter was like the tinkle of falling silver.

"So be it, Pharaoh. To me it is nothing; indeed I would see Sidon, the glorious city, while she still is Sidon, home of merchants, mistress of the seas. Still ere I go, shall I tell you something, Pharaoh, of what was shewn to me in yonder bowl before its water was turned to blood—by dye from that vase which none of you has found? If I remember right, for as you who practise magic, know,

Pharaoh, such visions fade quickly like dreams at dawn—I say that if I remember right, it had to do with the fate of a great king. Have you ever seen a king, O Pharaoh, when in place of the chain of royalty a collar of rope is set about his throat and drawn hard till the tongue is thrust from the royal mouth and the royal eyes start from their sockets? Nay? Then shall I draw his picture? Perchance in days to come you would know it again?”

“Witch, accursed witch!” shouted Pharaoh. “Take her, Tenes, and begone, though sooner would I nurture a viper in my bosom,” and rising from the board, he turned and fled away.

Again I laughed as I answered,

“I must go, but it seems that Pharaoh has gone first. Royal Amenartas, watch the good god, your father, for I think that he is too superstitious and that which men believe fulfils itself upon them.”

Then I went to Noot and spoke with him—few words for already the guards were advancing upon me.

“Fear nothing, Daughter,” he said, “you are safe.”

“I know that I am safe, Master, yet be ready to come to my aid when I call, as my spirit tells me that call I shall.”

He bent his head and the guards came up. As I went I glanced at the priest Kallikrates, who taking no note of me or of my fate, still stood staring at the royal Amenartas like a statue cut in stone, while she stared back at him.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE QUELLING OF THE STORM

THEY set me on board a great ship, on the prow of which were images of certain gods of the Phœnicians, called by the Greeks *Pataeci*, not unlike to that which the Egyptians worshipped by the name of Bes, before which images burned fire. There was a royal cabin in that ship which was given to me, and with it splendid robes and furnishings of gold for my table.

At dawn we cast off from the quay of the white-walled city while thousands of the worshippers of Isis who learned that I was being taken from them, stood upon the quay and wailed, crying that the *Mouth-of-Isis* was sent away to slavery and that where her "Mouth" went, there the goddess would follow, leaving vengeance to fall upon their heads. For that the head-priestess of Isis should be given into the hands of barbarians and their foreign gods was such a crime as had not been known in Egypt.

Therefore they wailed, prophesying evil, and I stood upon the stern alone in my white robes, veiled, and hearkened to them, for none dared to come near to me. Yes, I hearkened and blessed them with my hands, whereat they knelt and wailed the more.

When at last we had passed down the Nile and were out upon the great sea, sailing swiftly for Sidon over quiet waters, I, Ayesha, having taken counsel of the goddess and of my woman's craft, sent for King Tenes, who was also on board the ship, and received him in his own cabin that had been given up to me.

For my heart was black with rage against him, and against Nectanebes, Pharaoh of Egypt, who had betrayed me, and in my heart I swore that I would destroy them both. Yes, there I, the captive, sat and received the captor king in his own cabin, purposing his doom, though how this was to be accomplished as yet I did not know.

"O King," I said, "I, your slave who, when not a slave, was high-priestess of Isis in Egypt and her seeress, into whose breast the goddess poured her wisdom and her secrets, as indeed still she does, would speak with you, and since I could not come to you among so many men, have prayed your Majesty to come to me. What would you do with me, King Tenes, since it has pleased you to force Pharaoh to give me into your keeping? Is it an oracle that you desire concerning your fate or that of your country in the war? If so, I will——"

"Nay, Priestess," he broke in hurriedly, "of your oracles I and others have had enough. They are bitter bread for daily food. Keep them, I pray you, to nurture your own soul."

"What would you of me then, King Tenes, that you have been at such pains to steal me away from Egypt, even threatening Pharaoh to break your solemn pact with him if he did not give me into your hands, me, the snared bird, who by chance was left out of his oath to the high-priest and Isis's officer, the Greek."

"Lady Ayesha," blurted out Tenes, "that I have learned to be by birth, daughter of Yarab, once ruler of Ozal, upon whom, with the Egyptians, I made war in the past and brought to his death, because of *you*, Lady, tell me, you who are wise, what would any man of you who had beheld your beauty as I saw it some nights gone?"

"Man, being man, that is, a ravening beast fashioned like a god in shape but not in soul, would make me his prey, Tenes. Such at least was the desire of the first Nectanebes whom you aided with the ships of Sidon to destroy my father, and of many since his time."

"Good. Well, I who am a man and something more, being not a god indeed, but a great king, would make you my prey, as you say, for to tell truth, having once looked on you I seek no other woman in the whole world."

Now I threw back my veil and studied him with my eyes.

"So you would take me for your queen, Tenes? Indeed I guessed as much. But what would your other queen, for doubtless you have one, say to this, O King?"

"My queen!" he said in an astonished voice, "my queen?"

"Surely, Tenes, you would scarcely dare to proffer less than queenship to such a one as I?"

"May be not. Well, let us say that I would make you my queen, since in Sidon it is not difficult to be rid of others of whom one may be weary; that is, it is not difficult to a king who also is high-priest of Baal and of Ashtoreth. Yes, yes, I am sure that I would make you my queen. I will offer it to you in writing if you desire."

"Aye, I do desire it, King, and that there may be no faults or traps in it, I myself will draw up the writing for you to sign. Only I doubt much whether I shall accept the offer if it is made."

"Why not, Lady? Is it a small thing to be Queen of Sidon?"

"For Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, high-priestess and prophetess of Isis, the wisest and most beauteous woman in the world, one who has never turned to look on man, it is a very small thing indeed, King Tenes. It is so small a thing that I will not deign to accept that proffered crown of yours, unless——"

"Unless what, Lady?"

"Unless it is made larger, King, so large and wide that she who wears it holds rule over all the earth."

"By Baal, Ashtoreth, and Moloch, all three of them, what mean you, Woman?"

"What I say, Man. I mean that when you are monarch, not of Sidon only, but of Egypt, Cyprus, Persia, and all the East, then perchance I will marry you, unless my fancy changes, as it may do, but certainly not before."

"Surely you are mad," he gasped. "How can I gather all these diadems upon a single brow? It is impossible."

"Aye, for you it is impossible, King Tenes, but for me it is possible. I can gather them and set them on your brow and on my own, I who have within me all the wisdom of the earth and much of the strength of Heaven. Understand that if I desire it and you follow my counsel, I can crown you emperor of the world, no less, but the question is, do I desire it and will you follow my counsel?"

"Lady, I swear that you are mad, unless in truth you are a goddess as they say in Egypt."

"Perchance I am somewhat of a goddess, and being so, marvel whether for any reward that can be given I shall debase myself by taking such a one as you to husband, King Tenes. Now, first, look on me well and answer whether you do indeed desire me and are ready to win me through toil and danger, or whether you will let me be. For know, Tenes, that though I seem to be your captive, you

cannot snare me or do me violence. Lay but a finger on me against my will, and it shall be your death, since I have those to aid me whom you cannot see. Now look—and answer.”

He looked, devouring me with his greedy eyes, then said,

“Of a truth I desire you more than anything on the earth, and since I may not do so otherwise, for I perceive that you are too strong for me, will take you at your own price. Yea, even if I must wait for years, still I will take you. Now tell me, most beauteous and most wise, what I must do, and swear to me that when I am king of all things you will wed me.”

“Aye, Tenes, I swear that when you are king of all things I will wed you,” I answered gently, laughing in my heart as I remembered that the first and last of all things, the greatest of all things, is—Death. “Hearken. You shall bring me to Sidon, not as a captive but as a strange goddess who has come to aid you and your people, and with honour shall you receive me in Sidon, causing your priests and priestesses to offer me worship and incense.”

“And if so, what then?”

“Then, when I have studied your people and your preparations for war, we will take counsel together and I will show you how you may prevail. Tell me, Tenes, do you love Pharaoh Nectanebes?”

“Nay, Lady, I hate him who asks too much and gives too little, as I hated his father before him. Still we sleep in the same bed and prop up the same wall, and if one of us ceases to support the wall, the Persians will push it down on both.”

“I understand. Yet even so it comes into my mind that perchance you would have been safer had you been pushing at the wall with the Persian Ochus and not holding it up with the Egyptian Nectanebes.”

He glanced at me with his shifting eyes and answered,

“I have had that thought, as you know well, but having rebelled against Ochus, defeated his satraps, and slain thousands of his soldiers, or rather those of his father, if I climb the wall I might find spears waiting for me on the farther side. Lady, it is too late.”

“Yes, King Tenes, perhaps it is too late; I will consider of the matter in your interest and my own. But first send me papyrus and writing tools that I may set down our pact. When you have approved and signed it, then I will consider of this and other matters and not before. For the while, farewell.”

He rose and went unwillingly enough and when I was alone in the cabin I laughed in my heart. This fish had been easy to hook, but he was a large fish and strong, and I must beware lest he pull me into the deep sea where both might drown together. Moreover, the man was hateful to me, more so even than that ox-eyed, heavy-jowled Pharaoh, and his presence seemed to poison the air I breathed. Yet if I entered into this pact with him doubtless I must breathe it often, which vexed me who shrank from men and their desires, and above all from this man. Yet he had done me wrong and insult; he had helped the Egyptians to make war upon my people and he had taken me as a slave, me, Ayesha, thinking to make of me his woman, and cost what it might, I would pay him back as I would pay back Nectanebes who sold me.

The papyrus was brought to me by a slave and on it I wrote such a contract as I think was never signed by a king before. It was brief and ran thus:—

“Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, high-priestess of Isis, prophetess of Isis, known in Heaven and among her servants as *Isis-come-to-Earth*, and *Child of Wisdom*, to Tenes, King of Sidon.

“When you, Tenes, are king not only of Sidon but of Egypt, Cyprus, Persia, and the East, as I can make you, if you obey me in all things, then I, Ayesha, vow myself to you as your sole wife and queen. But if, ere this dignity is mine and yours, you dare even to touch my robe, then in the name of Isis and speaking with the voice of Isis, I, Ayesha, vow to you shame and death in the world and after it all the torments of hell and the jaws of the Devourer that await the judgment of Thoth on perjured souls beyond the Sun.

“Accepted and sealed by Ayesha, daughter of Yarab and by Tenes, King of Sidon.”

Having copied this writing, I sent it to Tenes by the slave that he might study it. Awhile later he asked audience of me, and entering, said in a thick voice that only a madman would set his seal to such words.

I looked at him and answered that it was nothing to me whether he sealed or did not seal them; indeed that considering all, I should be better pleased if he let the bargain be.

He stared at me and rage took hold of him who was inflamed with wine.

“Who are you,” he said, “that dare to talk thus to Tenes the King? You are but a woman clad in the robes of a priestess who pretend to powers you have not. Why should I not take you and have done?”

Now I mocked him, answering,

“Because I think you love to sit upon a throne better than to lie in a grave, Tenes, even in a king’s coffin. Still, as you desire to know more particularly, I will put your question to the goddess, who is not far from me even on this ship, and to-morrow when the sun is up I will pass on her words to you—that is, if you live to look upon to-morrow’s sun, King Tenes,” I added, staring him in the eyes.

These words seemed to sober him, for he turned pale and left the cabin, making a sign to avert the evil eye, but as I noted, taking the writing with him. Yet me he left perplexed and afraid, for my heart was not so bold as my mouth!

Now that night, whether by chance or by the will of Heaven, a great tempest sprang up suddenly. The captain of the trireme, a Greek or a half-Greek of Naukratis, Philo by name, whom now upon this ship I met for the first time, came himself to warn me, and to make sure that all was fast in my cabin. He was a quick-brained man, very active in his body and pleasant-faced, with a brown, pointed beard, who had seen some five and thirty years upon the earth. I had made inquiries concerning him from a certain slave who attended me, and was told that although he pretended to timidity, this Philo was in truth a great warrior and one of the best handlers of a bow upon the mouths of Nile, since that which he aimed at he always hit, even if it were a fowl in flight. Moreover, he was a very good seaman and, it was said, faithful to those he served and a worshipper of the gods.

“If so,” I answered to that old slave, “how comes it that this Philo, instead of a humble captain, is not the first general or admiral among the Greeks, as a man of such quality should be?”

“Because, divine Lady, of certain faults,” answered the slave, “such faults as have made of me what I am instead of the Count of a Nome upon the Nile as I should have been. This Philo has always thought more of the welfare of others than of his own, which is a very evil weakness; also he has loved women too much, which is a worse.”

"Vile sins indeed," I said, "more particularly the second. The wise always think of themselves first, and the holy never love more than one woman, and her not too much, which perhaps is why the wise and the holy are so hateful and so dull. Bring this Philo to me; he is one whom I should wish to know."

In the end Philo came, though whether because my message had reached him, or because of the advancing storm, I am not certain. At least he came, and as he bowed before me, made a certain secret sign whereby I knew that he was a worshipper of Isis and one of high degree, though not of the highest, since when I tried him with that sign he could not answer. Still his rank in our great company was enough, and thenceforward we spoke to each other under the seal of the goddess, or as our phrase went in those days "within the shadow of her wings," as brother and sister might, or rather as mother and son.

That is, we did this after I had proved him further and brought to his mind the fate of those who betray the goddess and her ministers upon earth.

This Philo told me in few words, that although the trireme was Egyptian and named *Hapi* after the god of Nile, for this voyage she was under charter to Tenes and for the most part manned with Sidonians, also with low fellows from Cyprus and the coast-ports. These like the Phoenician guards of Tenes, of whom there were fifty on the vessel, worshipped other gods than those of Egypt, that is, such of them as worshipped any gods at all.

Many of these men, Philo said warningly, murmured because a priestess of Isis was on board their ship, which they thought would anger the Phoenician gods of whom the images had been set upon the prow, as might lawfully be done when a vessel was hired by Tyre or Sidon.

I answered laughing that as he and I knew, Isis could hold her own against Baal, Astarte, and all their company. Then, changing my mien, I asked him suddenly what he meant.

"Only this, Holy one," he answered: "That if by chance the ship came into danger—and I like not the signs of the sky and the moaning of the black north wind with rocks not two leagues away upon our lee, then I say if this ship came into danger, as might chance this very night, for here gales grow suddenly—well, Holy one, you might be in danger also. In such cases, Holy one, sometimes the Phoenicians demand a sacrifice to the *Cabiri*, the great gods of the sea whom we do not worship."

"Is it so?" I answered coldly. "Then tell them that those who demand sacrifices often furnish the victims. Have no fear, my brother-in-the-goddess. But if trouble comes, call to me to help you."

Then I stretched out to him the *sistrum* that was part of my ornaments of office in which I had been brought aboard that ship, and he kissed it with his lips and went about his business.

Scarce had he gone when the black north wind began to blow. It blew fearfully, rising hour by hour and even minute by minute, till the gale was terrible. The rowers could no longer row, for the great seas broke their oars, of which the handles struck them, hurling them backward from the benches, and the sail they tried to hoist upon the mast was torn away and went flapping down the wind like a wounded gull. Thus continually the *Hapi* was driven in toward the coast of Syria where, still some miles away, the moonlight when it broke out between the clouds showed the white surf of breakers foaming on the iron rocks of Carmel.

Toward midnight the tall mast snapped in two like a rotten stick and went overboard, carrying with it certain men and crushing others. Then terror took hold of all the company upon this ship, so that they began to cry aloud who believed that black death was on them.

Now one shouted,

"We are bewitched! At this season there should be no such gale, it is against nature."

Another answered,

"Little wonder that we are bewitched who carry with us a sorceress of Egypt, one who hates our gods, wherefore they are angry."

This they said because they had heard the tale of the water turned to blood, also of the oracles I was wont to utter in the temple at Memphis. For in that city dwelt many Phoenicians who were great talkers and lovers of strange tales, though now, Holly tells me all their race is silent for ever and the only tales they hear are those of Gehenna.

Then arose another shout from many throats,

"Sacrifice the witch to the gods of the Sea. Throw her into the sea that they may take her and we may live to look upon to-morrow's sun!"

Next there was a rush toward the afterpart of the trireme where I was in the cabin. In the waist of the ship appeared the captain, Philo, as I saw watching from between the curtains, and with him a number of the crew who were Egyptians and faithful to him, perhaps six in all, not more. In his hands Philo held a bow, and a drawn short-sword was thrust through his belt.

He shouted to the mob of madmen to stand back, but they would not, and led by one of the guards of Tenes, crept forward. Philo knelt, resting his back against a water-cask, waiting till the ship steadied herself a little on the crest of a wave. Then he drew the bow and shot. Very well and straight did he shoot, for the arrow pierced that leader of the guard of Tenes from breast to back, so that he fell down dead. Seeing this, the others grew afraid and stayed where they were, clinging to the bulwarks of the ship or whatever they could grasp with their hands.

Tenes appeared among them. They shouted to him and he shouted back to them, but what they said I could not hear because of the howling of the wind.

Philo crept into the cabin and his face was very heavy.

"Holy one," he said, "make ready to join Isis in the heavens. Fearing for his own life, that dog of a Sidonian king has consented to your sacrifice and I am come to die with you."

"The goddess thanks you, O great-hearted man, and I, her servant, thank you also," I said, smiling at him. "Yet have no fear, since my spirit tells me that neither I nor you shall die this night. Help me now and let us go forth and talk with these hissing snakes of Sidon."

"But what will you say to them, Holy one?"

"The goddess will teach me what to say," I answered, who in truth did not know what I should say. All I knew was that some spirit moved me to go forth and to talk with them.

So we went, I leaning upon Philo as it was hard to stand upon my feet, and came to the stump of the broken mast in the midst of the hollow ship, all the mob of the crew drawing back before me. Here with one arm I clung to the mast, and beckoned to them with the other in which I held the *sistrum* of our worship. They drew near, Tenes among them, his face covered by a cloak.

"Hearken!" I cried. "I learn that you would offer me, the Prophetess of Isis, as a sacrifice to your gods. Fools! Is not Isis greater than your gods? O Queen of Heaven! send a sign to show that thou art greater than these foreign gods!"

So I spoke and stared upward at the moon, for the wind had torn away my veil, and waited.

A great billow came and struck the forepart of the ship, burying it deep in green water. As she rose I saw two dark forms fly from her high-tossed prow and a voice cried,

"The guardian images have gone and the sacred fire is quenched!"

"Aye," I answered, "they are gone where you shall go, every one of you, if you dare to touch me. Know that I do not fear for my own life which cannot be taken from me, but for your lives I fear, and for Sidon, which presently shall lack a king—if you dare to touch me. Be silent now and though you deserve it not, I will pray Isis to save you."

Then gaping on me standing there like one inspired, as indeed I think I was, they were struck to silence and through the roaring gale and flying foam I prayed to Heaven to preserve that ship and those she bore from the grinding rocks on which the surf beat not a mile away.

A marvel happened, whether because the tempest had grown weary of its raging, or because That which hears the prayers of men had accepted my prayer for its own purposes, to this hour I know not. At least the marvel happened, for although the sea still beat and rushed, wave following wave, like white-maned, countless charging steeds, of a sudden the gale died down and there was calm between sky and sea.

"It has pleased the great goddess to hearken to me and to save your lives, yes, even the lives of you who would have murdered her priestess," I said in a quiet voice. "Now get you to your oars and row as never you rowed before, if you would hold the ship off yonder rocks."

They gasped. They stared with open mouths! One said,

"*Thou* art the goddess; *thou* art the very goddess! Pardon us, pardon us, thy slaves, O Queen of Heaven!"

Then they rushed to their oars and with toil and danger drew the *Hapi* past the promontory of Carmel where the water boiled upon the rocks, and out into the deep sea beyond.

"What did I say to you, Philo?" I said, as he led me back to the cabin.

He made no answer, only lifting the hem of my garment, he pressed it to his brow.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE KING OF SIDON

NEXT morning the sun came up in a sky of perfect blue and the *Hapi*, driven forward by the oars, since her mast was gone, passed northward over a quiet sea. Not a league away upon our right, gleaming like gold, were the roofs of the glorious city of Tyre, set like a queen upon her island throne, Tyre that as yet did not dream of evil days when her marble palaces should melt in flame and her merchant princes and citizens lie butchered by the thousand in her streets; Tyre the wanton, the beauteous, the wealthy, who sucked riches from all the lands.

Seeing our shattered state, a boat manned by red-capped seamen came out from the Egyptian harbour to learn if we needed help. But Philo shouted back to its officer that, save for the loss of a mast and some men, we had taken no harm in the gale and hoped ere night to be safe in Sidon.

So the boat returned and we rowed on.

By midday we caught sight of the towers of Sidon and within three more hours, the sea being calm, had dropped anchor in the southern harbour.

Now after we left Tyre Tenes the King came to visit me in my cabin. At the sight of him my gorge rose for I remembered that this dog of a Sidonian had consented to the demand of the sailors that I should be hurled into the deep as a sacrifice to his gods. Yet I restrained my soul and received him smiling and unveiled.

"Hail, King Tenes," I said, "Isis has been very merciful to you in answer to my prayer; for know that never again did I think to look upon you living."

"You are great, Lady," he answered, staring at me with frightened yet devouring eyes. "I think that you are as great as that Isis whom you serve, if indeed you are not that Isis come to earth, as they name you in Egypt. Isis I know not who worship Ashtoreth, she who is also styled Tanith and Baaltis, and like your Isis, is an acknowledged Queen of Heaven, but you I know, and your power, for did you not cause the terrible tempest to cease last night and save us all from death upon the rocks of Carmel?"

"Aye, I did this, Tenes, having strength given to me, whence it matters not. It is strange to think, is it not?"—here I bent forward and stared him in the eyes—"that on board this ship there are men so cowardly and so evil that they took counsel to cast me to the deep as a sacrifice to their gods, and that had they done so, though me, had they known it, they could not harm, they themselves, every one of them, would have been that sacrifice."

Now he writhed and turned colour beneath my glance, but answered,

"Is it so, Lady? Name me those men and they shall be slain."

"Aye, King Tenes, without doubt they shall be slain, every one of them, since Isis does not forget a threat of murder against her priestess. Yet I name them not. Where is the need when already those names are written on the tablets of Heaven? Let them be till Fate finds them, since I would not have you in your rage stain your hands with their vile blood. But what would you with me, King?"

"You know well," he answered thickly. "I worship you. I am mad with love of you. When I saw you standing by the broken mast and making prayer, even then upon the edge of doom, my heart melted for you. I say that there is a raging fire in my breast that only you can quench," and he made as though he would fall upon his knees before me.

I motioned to him to remain seated, and answered,

"I remember, King, that you spoke in this same fashion before the storm and that, half in jest, I wrote certain terms upon which I would become your queen, namely, when you could give me rule over all the earth. Wisely, perhaps, to these terms you would not set your seal; indeed you asked me why you should not take me to be your toy, and to that question an answer came to you last night when the ship wallowed water-logged and on her lee you saw the billows spouting on the rocks of Carmel. Also the goddess has told me more of what would chance to you should you dare to lift a hand against her priestess. I tell you that it is horrible, so horrible that I spare you, since if you heard it, you would tremble. What need to talk of such a crime when such a judgment would follow hard upon its heels? So have done, Tenes, and learn that it is my pleasure to return to Egypt in this ship."

"Nay, nay!" he cried, "I cannot part with you; sooner would I lose my crown. I tell you that if I lost sight of you and hope of you, I should go mad——"

"Which perchance you may do yet, Tenes," I replied laughing, "if indeed you are not already mad after the fashion of tyrants who for the first time are robbed of that which they desire. You have my commands, so have done. I would speak with Philo the captain as to when he can be ready to sail for Nile."

"Hearken, Lady, hearken!" he said thickly. "I have the writing here. I will sign it in your presence if you swear to abide by it."

"Is it so? Well, Tenes, I do not change my word. When you can crown me Queen of Phoenicia, Egypt, Persia, and the rest, as I can show you how to do, then I will take you for husband and reign as your sole wife. But until then never shall you dare so much as to touch me. Now I am weary, who last night slept so ill. Do you wish to seal the writing, for if so it shall be done before a witness whose life and welfare henceforth shall be as sacred to you as my own."

"Aye, aye, I will seal, I will seal," he said.

Then I clapped my hands and the slave who waited without appeared. I bade him summon Philo, the captain of the ship, and to bring wax. Presently Philo came and I told him what was needed of him. More, demanding the papyrus from Tenes, I read it to both of them, Philo listening with a stony stare of amazement. Then the wax was spread upon the papyrus and Tenes sealed it with his seal, which was a cylinder of lapis lazuli having images of gods upon it after the old Babylonian fashion. Also, beneath my own, he wrote his name in Phœnician letters which I could not read. Then Philo as witness wrote his, for being half a Greek, he knew this art, and sealed it with his seal, a scarab cut in cornelian by no mean artist, doubtless a Grecian, which scarab, he said, he had taken many years before from the finger of one whom he killed in battle. When I looked at what it left upon the wax, I laughed, for behold the device was that of a Diana, or perchance a nymph, shooting with an arrow a brute-faced faun that had surprised her at the bath. To

my mind the face of that faun or satyr was very like to the face of Tenes, and Philo thought it also for I saw him glance from one to the other, and heard him mutter, "An omen! An omen!" beneath his breath in the Egyptian tongue which Tenes did not understand.

When the roll was signed Tenes would have taken it, but I answered,

"Nay, on that day when its conditions are fulfilled it shall be yours. But till then it is mine."

Still I promised to give him a copy of the writing, and with this he was, or feigned to be, content.

When Philo had gone Tenes asked me how he was to become ruler of the world and thus to win me.

I answered that I would tell him later in Sidon after I had thought and prayed. But one thing he must swear, namely, to listen to no counsels save my own, since otherwise he might lose me and with me all. He did so by his gods, being at that time so bemused that he would have sworn anything if thereby he might keep near to me. Moreover, he told me that it was his purpose to set me in a palace near his own, or perchance in a part of his own, that there he might visit me daily and learn my counsels.

I bowed my head and said, the more often the better, so long as he came for counsel and no more. Then I dismissed him and he went like any slave.

When he had gone once more I summoned Philo and, "under the wings of the goddess," that is, under an oath of secrecy to break which is death, I told him, my brother-in-Isis, the meaning of this play, namely that I would be avenged upon Tenes who had affronted me and the goddess, who also, in his cowardice, had proposed to sacrifice me in the deep, an offering to his false divinities. Moreover, I gave him that copy of the writing which I had made and, his charter being fulfilled, bade him get back to Egypt as soon as might be and deliver it to Noot, the high-priest of Isis, and with it all this story.

There at Memphis I bade him bide, having a great ship, this one or another, ready, manned with brave men, all of them followers of Isis, with whom Noot would furnish him, also with the moneys needful to hire or buy that ship. There he was to wait till my word came. How it would come I did not know as yet. Perchance this would be by messenger, or perchance I should talk with the spirit of Noot, by means at the command of those initiated in the highest mysteries of the goddess. At least when my word came he must sail at once and come to me at Sidon.

These things he swore to do. Moreover, I wrote a letter which afterward I gave to him to deliver to Noot.

We cast anchor in the harbour, hoisting the royal standard of Tenes as best we could on a tall pole at the prow. At once gilded barges, on board of which were generals and priests, put off from the quay, and watching from my cabin, I saw Tenes talk earnestly with these notables who from time to time glanced toward where I was hidden. Then a messenger came to pray me to be pleased to abide on board the ship till preparation had been made to receive me, a matter to which the king departed to attend. So I stayed there and spoke with Philo about many things, learning from him much concerning the Sidonians, their wealth and their strength in war.

Two hours later a barge arrived, the royal barge, I think, for it was glorious with silks and gold and the rowers wore blazoned uniforms. On board this barge was Tenes himself and with him, among others, priests who wore tall caps, also some priestesses. The king came and bowing, led me to a carpeted ladder by which I descended into the barge. As I went down its steps I said with a laugh,

"If some had won their way last night, O King, I should have left this ship in a very different fashion. Well, I forgive them, poor fools and cowards, but whether the goddess whom I serve will forgive them is another matter"—words at which I saw him wince.

Before I went also I stepped aside and again spoke to Philo who stood near the head of the ladder, cap in hand. That speech was short yet sufficient, being of but two words,

"Remember everything."

"To the death! Child of Wisdom," he answered.

"What says the mariner?" asked Tenes suspiciously.

"Naught, O King. That is, he only prays me to intercede with the goddess lest the fate of those who would have harmed me on this ship should overtake him also who is its captain."

Again Tenes winced and again I smiled.

We were rowed ashore, and there upon the quay waited a chariot drawn by milk-white horses in which chariot I was seated, splendidly apparelled men leading the horses. In front of me went the king in another chariot and behind followed an escort of guards.

Thus we proceeded through the glorious streets of Sidon and being moved thereto, I lifted my veil and stood up in the chariot as though I would see these better. Already the fame of my coming had spread abroad, so that those streets and the flat roofs of the houses were crowded with thousands of the people. These, when they saw my beauty, gasped with wonder and cried in their own tongue,

"No woman! No woman! A goddess indeed!"

Yet I thought that I heard others answer,

"Aye, a false goddess sent to Sidon to be her ruin."

True words indeed, though, as I think, inspired by hate and jealousy rather than from on high.

We came to a great and noble square, the Holy Place it was called, round which stood statues of those whom the Sidonians worshipped, Baal, Ashtoreth, and the rest of their dæmons. Moreover, with its back to a temple stood a huge and hideous god of brass, who in front of him, upon great hands which seemed to be discoloured with fire, held a curved tray whereof the inner edge rested on an opening in the belly of the figure. I asked of one who walked by the chariot what was the name of this god. He answered,

"Dagon whom some call Moloch, to whom the firstborn are sacrificed by fire. See, the priests are storing the hollow place beneath with wood. Soon, doubtless, there will be a great offering."

Thenceforward I hated this people, for what could one born in Arabia and a servant of Isis, the holy and gentle, think of a race that offered sacrifice of those born of them to a dæmon? Yes, I looked on their faces, keen, handsome, and cruel, and hated them, one and all.

We came to the door of the palace where slaves ran forward, assisting me from the chariot. By it stood Tenes surrounded with glittering nobles and white-robed priests who stared at me doubtfully.

"Be pleased to enter my house, Lady, fearing nothing, for there you shall be well lodged and given of the best that Sidon has to offer," said Tenes.

"I thank you," I answered, bowing and letting fall my veil, "and I doubt it not, for what less than her best could Sidon give to the Daughter of Isis, the Queen of Heaven?"

Yes, thus I answered proudly, I who played a great game and staked all upon a throw.

"Here we have another Queen of Heaven and she is not named Isis," I heard one of the dark-browed priests mutter to a companion, thinking that I did not understand his words.

They led me into a glorious dwelling wherein were chambers more splendid than any that I had seen in my journeys through the Eastern world. Gold and gems were everywhere and on the walls hung priceless trappings dyed with the Tyrian purple of that costly sort to use which is the prerogative of kings. The very carpets on the floors shone like silk and were woven to things of beauty, while the lamps seemed to be hollowed from great gems.

"Who lodges in this place?" I asked of a slave when I was alone.

"Who but the Queen Beltis, divine one," answered the slave, bowing low before me.

"Where then is the Queen Beltis? I see her not."

"Nay, divine one, she visits her father at Jerusalem, whence she should return shortly. Indeed, the King has issued orders that other chambers should be prepared for her against her coming."

"Is it so?" I replied indifferently, but within my heart I wondered what this queen would say when she came to find her palace inhabited by a stranger and a rival.

Then to the sound of sweet music I ate from services of gold and drank out of jewelled cups, and afterward, being weary, who had rested little on that ship and was tempest-tossed, laid me down to sleep in a soft and scented bed guarded by women and by eunuchs.

"Easy enough," thought I to myself, "would it be for these to murder me, one unfriended and alone in a strange land," and because of this for a little felt afraid who at that time was but as other mortals are. On the ship I had feared nothing, for there was Philo, a brother of my faith, and with him some others who could be trusted. But here I was but as a lamb ringed round with wolves. Moreover, besides the wolves there was a lion, the king-brute Tenes, who sought to snare me, and whom I knew for a liar, not to be trusted whatever he might swear.

Yes, for a little while, perhaps for the first time in my life, and certainly for the last, that is, where my body was at stake, I felt somewhat afraid, so much so that I went to a window-place to watch the rising of the moon and to make my prayer to Isis of whom it was the symbol, that she would be pleased to protect me in this city whither by her will I had wandered.

This window looked out upon that flame-lit square which was called the Holy Place. There I noted that thousands of those of Sidon were gathered, some of them staring up at the palace to which it was known I had been taken, pointing and talking. The most of them, however, wandered round the great brazen statue, that hideous, devil-faced thing whereof I have written, and when they could, caught one of the priests by the arm and put questions to him.

Among these, I noticed, were many women, some of whom from their mien seemed to be noble, whose faces were strange to see. Defiant they were, yet in a way proud, as might be the faces of those about to do some great deed. Moreover, many of these women led or carried children, which little ones they showed to the priests who smiled horribly and nodded approval, patting the children on the arm and even kissing them.

One lady, after her son had received such a kiss, wailed aloud and, clasping him to her breast, turned and fled away, whereon the priest cursed her and the other women shouted "Shame!" then strove to cover up the misery that peeped out of their eyes by singing some fierce song in honour of their gods.

Studying this scene, presently the meaning of it came home to me. Those children were doomed to be sacrificed to the brazen Dagon or Moloch whereof I remembered having heard in Jerusalem as a devil to whom the firstborn were passed through the fire. Yes, and these the mothers had brought them there that they might look upon the god and grow accustomed to the sight of him.

Oh! it was horrible, and my heart chilled at the thought of such iniquity. What reward from Heaven, I marvelled, for a people who practised such a faith?

As I marvelled an answer seemed to come to me. The sun had sunk but there were heavy clouds in the sky above upon which struck its departing rays. Thence they were reflected on to the city and chiefly upon this Holy Place, as it was called, and the brazen image that sat there before the temple. Yes, from those clouds came red light that filled the air and the city beneath and the Holy Place, as it were with a mist of blood. It was as though everything were dyed with blood, and in the midst, ringed round with torches, glowed Moloch, a god of blood!

Then I knew that Sidon was doomed to be drowned in blood; that such was the decree of Heaven and that I, Ayesha, was the instrument appointed to loose this spear of death upon her beauteous, sinful breast. I shivered at the thought, I who love not cruelty or to spend the lives of men, though it was true that I would kill Tenes. Yet what was I but the lightning in the hands of Fate, and can the lightning choose where it will strike? Must it not fall whither it is drawn? To this end had I been sent to earth, namely that I might bring woe upon false Egypt and the peoples who clung to her.

Such was the burden of that dream by which my sleep was haunted, such too the command of Heaven which again and again Noot the prophet had whispered in my ear. I must destroy Egypt, or rather her apostate priests and rulers, and afterward once more build up the worship of Isis in some far land that should be revealed to me. Such was my mission, whereof it was decreed that I should fulfil the first part and because of my sin leave the rest undone.

Holly the learned tells me that the new faith he follows, to which I will not listen who am weary of religions and their changeful march toward a changeless end, writes it down that free will is given to man, that he is able to choose this path and reject the other; that he is the master of his own soul which he can guide here or there as the horseman guides his steed or Philo steered his ship.

And yet he read to me from the writings of one of the great apostles of that faith, a certain holy one named Paulus, words which declared that man is predestined ere he was born to eternal life or eternal death, to the glory of the light or the unfathomed dark. To me these doctrines seem to war one upon the other, though for aught I know both may be true, seeing that within the circle of the starry spheres and the vast soul of That which made them, there is room for a multitude of truths whereof the shadows falling upon the gross earth take a thousand shapes of error.

Moreover, I hold that whatever is, is true because it is, and that men do but tangle themselves in seeming differences that are only varying lights darting from the eternal eyes of Truth. On all hearts shine those eyes, but none beholds them as his brother does, for to each they burn as a separate torch of different-coloured flame. Therefore it is that men worship many gods not knowing that these are the same God whose hands hold all things.

Thus I sum up the matter. At least through the millions of the ages and the multitudes of lives man may attain to freedom if his face be set that way of his own desire. Yet in his little hour on the earth, that falsely he believes his all, looking from birth to death and the blackness that bounds them both, he is not free but a part of Strengths that are greater than his own. Have I, Ayesha, been free, I who chose the holy path and fell from it into Nature's gulfs? Did I desire to fall? Did I not desire to climb that steep road to the heights of Heaven and sit enthroned upon the topmost snows of purity and peace? And yet another Might hurled me thence and now it is my fate to climb again; by slow and painful steps to climb eternally.

But of these things I will speak in their season, telling what is the price those pay who seek to overleap the bounds that hem us in and to match their pettiness against divine decrees.

These in the midst of the red light that filled Sidon like a bowl with blood and shone on me and all; on me, the priestess, on the brazen Dagon towering up against me, on fantastic, lamp-lit temples and palaces, on the great place about which they stood and the fierce-faced multitude that wandered on its marble pavements, there in the window-opening I knelt me down and prayed, lifting my face to the pure heavens above. To Isis did I pray, as an idolater prays to an image in a cave, because Isis was my symbol, or rather to That which is as far above Isis as Isis was above me. For I prayed to the Soul of that Universe whereof my eyes could see a part in the arching skies, and of this Soul what was Isis but as one golden thread in a glittering garment that wraps the majesty of God? And what then was I and what were those fierce-faced worshippers of Dagon?

Oh! in that hour of dedication, for such I felt it to be, these truths came home to my heart as never they had done before. And this was the sum of them, that I and all I could see and know were but as impalpable grains of dust, not sufficient to cause the delicately hung balance wherein the wilfulness of the world is poised against the decrees of the immortal Law to vary by a hair's breadth. Still I prayed and because that which is small yet ever contains that which is smaller, and the smaller finds a god in the small, as the small does in the great, from that prayer I won comfort.

My prayer finished I laid me down to rest in the golden bed of Beltis, the queen into whose place I had been thrust, bethinking me how many and near were the dangers by which I was surrounded. That brute king desired me for a prey and here in his palace I lay in the hollow of his hand. He had the key to all my doors; the servants who stood about them were his creatures whom at a nod he could send to death. I was a stranger in a strange land, utterly unfriended, for Philo was far off upon his ship; there was nothing between me and him save the impalpable veil of fear which I had woven between us by the strength of my spirit. I was a prize to be taken, unarmoured, without javelin or arrow to protect me, with nothing, nothing save that veil of fear. If he chose to break through it, daring my curse and that of my goddess, he could do so. Then the curse would fall indeed, but it would be too late to save me, and I the proud and pure, must pass hence defiled, as pass I would. Still trusting to the goddess, or rather to the part of her which dwelt in me, or to That which was above us both, I laid me down and slept.

At midnight I awoke. The light of the moon flowing through the window-places flooded the splendid chamber, catching on the cornices of gold, the polished mirrors and the silver vessels. The door opened and through it wrapped in a dark cloak came Tenes. Though his face was hidden I knew him by his heavy shape and shambling step. He crept toward me like a wolf upon a sleeping lamb. There I lay in the golden bed illumined by the moon, and watched through the web of my outstretched hair, my hand upon the dagger that was buckled to my girdle. He drew near, he bent over me breathing heavily, and his eyes devoured my beauty. Still I feigned sleep and watched him, while my fingers closed upon the handle of the dagger. He unbuckled his cloak, revealing his hook-nosed visage, and a draught of wind seemed to catch it, for it flapped and fell from his shoulders, though I felt no wind. He stooped as though to lift it, and it would seem came face to face with I know not what. Perchance it was the goddess invisible to me. Perchance it was some picture of his own death to come. I cannot say. At least his shifting eyes sank in till they seemed to vanish beneath the hairy brows, and his fat cheeks grew pallid as though the blood were draining from them by a mortal wound. Words came hissing from his thick lips and they were,

"Horrible! Horrible! She is indeed divine, for gods and ghosts protect her! Horrible! Death walks the air!"

Then he reeled from the room dragging the cloak after him, and knowing that I had no more to fear, I returned thanks to the guardian spirits and slept sweetly. The danger that I dreaded had drawn near and passed—to return no more.

## CHAPTER IX

### DAGON TAKES HIS SACRIFICE

THE sun arose on Sidon and drove away the terrors of the dark. I too arose and was led to the bath by slaves. Then those slaves clothed me in the silks of Cyprus, over which I threw a new veil bordered with the purple of Tyre. More, they brought me gifts from the King, priceless jewels, pearls with rubies and sapphires set in gold. Those I laid aside who would not wear his gems. Then, in another chamber, I ate as before of meats delicately served by bowing maidens. Scarce had I finished my meal of fish from the sea and fruit and snow-cooled water drunk from a crystal cup, when a eunuch came saying the King Tenes craved audience of me.

"Let him enter," I answered.

Presently he stood before me, making salutation, and asked me with feigned carelessness whether I had rested well.

"Aye, great King," I answered, "well enough, save for a single, very vivid dream. I dreamed that Set, the god of Evil, rose out of the darkness of hell wearing the shape of a man whose face I could not see, and that this fiend would have seized me and dragged me down into the pit of hell. I was afraid, and while I lay as one in a net, there came to me a vision of the divine Isis who said,

"Where is thy faith, Daughter? If I saved thee on the ship, giving thee the lives of all her company, cannot I save thee now and always? Fiends shall not harm thee, nor men; swords shall not pierce thee nor fires burn, and if any would lay hands on thee, on them I give thee power to call down my vengeance and to cast them to the jaws of the Devourer who, awaiting evil-doers, watches ever in the black depth of death."

"Then in my dreams the Mother whispered into the ears of that fiend shaped like a man, and passing her hand before his eyes, showed him certain visions, though what these were I know not. At the least they caused him to wail aloud with terror, also to my sight to fall as from a precipice and, like some foul vulture pierced by an archer's shaft, go whirling down, down, and down, into gulfs that had no bottom. It was a very evil dream, King Tenes, and yet sweet, because it told me that though I should journey to the ends of the earth, still I shall not pass out of the shelter of the circling arms of Isis."

"Evil indeed, Lady," he said hoarsely, biting his lips to still the quaver in his voice. "Yet it ended well, so what of dreams?"

"Very well, O King—for me. And as for dreams, I, who by gifts and training am skilled in their interpretations, hold that for the most part they are a shadow of the Truth. I know that certainly no harm can come to me in your palace over which one day I must rule, or in your city where I am a guest. Yet doubtless some peril of the spirit did threaten me last night, and by the help of Heaven was brought to nothing."

"Doubtless, doubtless! though of such matters I know nothing, who deal with the things of earth, not with those of Heaven. But, Lady, I came to tell you that this day there is a great sacrifice on the Holy Place yonder, and that from these windows you will be able to watch it well. It is to propitiate our gods that they may give us victory in the war against the Persians."

"Is it so, King? But where are the victims? I see no kine, nor sheep, nor doves, such as are offered in Rome and in Jerusalem, or even flowers and fruit such as in Egypt we lay upon our gentler altars."

"Nay, Lady; here we make more costly offerings, tithing our own blood. Yes, here Moloch claims the fruit of our bodies, taking them to his purifying fires so that their innocent breath may rise as a sweet savour to the nostrils of the devouring and protecting gods."

"Do you, perchance, mean children, King?"

"Aye, Lady, children, many children, and among these to-day one of my own, the son of a certain Beltis who is of my household. He is a child of promise, yet I grudge him not to the god if thereby my people may be benefited."

"And does this Beltis not grudge him, King?"

"I know not," he answered sullenly. "She is a woman of the royal House of Israel and is absent on a journey. Therefore I know not, and when she returns the boy will have joined the gods and it will be too late for her to make trouble concerning him, should she be so minded."

Now horror took hold of me, Ayesha, and my soul sickened.

"King Tenes," I said, "bethink you of that mother's heart and, I pray you, spare this child."

"How can I, Lady? Must not the king bear that yoke which is laid upon the necks of his people? If I spare him, would not the mothers of Sidon whose young have passed into the fire spit at me and curse me—aye, and tear me to pieces if they might? Nay, he must die with the rest. The priests have so decreed."

"On your head be it, King," I said and choked in my loathing of him. Then a thought took me, and I cried to those who were gathered about the door of the chamber, captains of the guard, eunuchs, slaves, scribes, and a priest or two,

"Come hither, ye of Sidon, and hearken to the words of her who in Egypt is named *Oracle-of-Isis*."

They came, drawn by wonder, or perchance because my strength compelled them.

"Take note of my words and record them," I said, while they stared on me. "Take note and forget it not, that I, the daughter of Isis, have made prayer to King Tenes of Sidon, that he will spare the life of his son and the son of a lady named Beltis, and that he has refused my prayer. Ye have heard me. It is enough. Go!"

They went, looking at each other, the scribes, as I saw, writing down what I had said upon their tablets. Tenes also stared at me curiously.

"You are an Arab by birth, born of an Egyptian mother, and wholly Egyptian in your faith and mind, though the Arab courage still strikes through these qualities," he said. "Therefore I forgive you who do not understand our customs. Yet, know, Lady, that those of Sidon whom it pleases you to call as witnesses will think you mad."

"Doubtless, Tenes, before all is done, those of Sidon will think many things of me, as you will also. But what will this lady Beltis think?"

"I neither know nor care who weary of Beltis and her moods," he answered, scowling. "Beauteous one, I sent you jewels. Why do you not wear them?"

"The daughter of Isis wears no jewels save those the goddess gives her, King. Yet yours shall go to enrich her shrines when I return to Egypt, and in her name I thank you for them, bounteous King."

"Aye, when you return to Egypt. But how can you return if you bide here as my wife?"

"If I bide here as your wife, then I shall bide as the Queen of Egypt as is written in our bond, and from time to time the Queen of Egypt must visit her dominions, King, and give thanks to the goddess for her advancement. Do you understand?"

"I understand that you are a very strange woman, so strange that I would I had never set eyes on you and your accursed beauty," he answered in a rage.

"What! So soon?" I said, laughing. "That this should be so in the beginning makes me wonder what you will wish in the end. Why not take your eyes off me and have done, King Tenes?"

"Because I cannot. Because I am bewitched," he answered furiously, and rising left me, while I laughed and laughed.

He departed and I went to the window-place to breathe air free from the poison of his presence. There I saw that the Holy Place beneath was already filled with tens of thousands of the Sidonians. I saw, moreover, that priests were engaged in lighting fire at the foot of the great brazen image of Dagon, which fire seemed to burn within the image, since smoke poured out far above from an opening in his head. Moreover, by degrees the copper plates of which its vast and hideous bulk was built up grew red with heat, so that the upper part of it became one glowing furnace.

White-robed priests, gathered in troops, began to offer prayers and celebrate rites of which I did not know the meaning. They bowed themselves to the image, they gashed their arms with knives and catching the blood that fell from them in shallow shells of the sea, cast it into the fire. Orators made speeches, prophets uttered prophecies. Bands of fair women appeared naked to the middle and having their breasts gilded, who danced wildly before the god.

Then suddenly there was a great silence and from the mouth of some gateway that I could not see, because it lay almost beneath the balconies of the palace, appeared the King Tenes clad in gorgeous, sacerdotal robes, those, I think, of the high-priest of Baal. With him was a woman who led by the hand a little boy who perhaps had seen three summers, dressed in white with a garland of flowers about his neck. Tenes bowed to the glowing image and cried in a loud voice,

"People of Sidon, I the King make sacrifice of my son to Dagon the great god, that Dagon may be propitiated and Sidon may conquer in this war. O Dagon, take my son that his spirit may pass through the flames and be gathered to thy spirit and that thine appetite may feed upon his blood."

At these words a great and joyous shout went up from the tens of thousands of people, and in the midst of the shout Tenes bent down and kissed his son, which was the only kindly, human thing that ever I saw him do. The child, affrighted, clung to his robes, but the woman at his side snatched the boy away and ran with him, struggling, to a priest who stood by the foot of a little iron ladder of which the top rested against the outstretched giant hands of the glowing image.

The priest took the child from the woman, holding him aloft that the multitude might see him and know him for the very son of the king. Oh! never shall I forget the look upon that child's face as he was thus held aloft in the hands of the brutal priest who stood upon the lower rungs of the ladder. He had ceased to scream, but his ruddy cheeks were blanched, his black eyes seemed to start from his head, and his little hands grasped emptily at the air or were lifted up to heaven, which indeed was near to him, as though in supplication for deliverance from the cruelty of man.

The priest climbed the ladder, bearing the child, and I noted a kind of metal covering upon his breast and head, set there to shield him from the heat of the fiery idol.

He reached the platform of the outstretched hands. The child's fingers clung to his garments, but he tore them free and with a cry of triumph let fall the little body into the hollow of the hot hands. Then, to drown the victim's cries, priests standing below began to play upon instruments of music, as they played, singing some hymn to the god. I saw the little arms tossed aloft above the edge of the hollow of the brazen hands. Then I saw those arms lift themselves, feebly for the last time, and that poor, tortured, innocent babe rolled slowly into the red abyss beneath, while the savage multitude screamed its delight to heaven.

This royal sacrifice was accomplished, yet it was but the first of many, for woman after woman brought her child, or sometimes it was a man who brought it, and babe after babe was thrown upon the red-hot hands and rolled thence into the flames beneath. All the while the priests played upon their instruments and sang their songs while the shameless priestesses, and others, those with the gilded breasts, danced lewdly, tossing up their white arms, and the thousands of the people of Sidon, filled with the lust of blood, roared aloud in their drunken joy, and the poor mothers, now that the deed was done, crept thence, laughing and crying both together, back to their desolated homes, there to stare at the cots emptied into "the bosom of the god."

At length I could bear no more of this scene of hell, and departing to my sleeping-chamber, caused women to draw curtains over the window-places and having dismissed them, sat myself down and thought.

A great rage filled me, Ayesha, who have ever loved children—will a day come when I shall nurse one upon my breast, I wonder, and if so in what star will it be born?—and a mighty hate of those accursed Sidonians. All pity left my heart, even for the young who would grow up to be as were those who begat them. These sharks and tigers loved blood. Good. They should be filled with blood, their own blood. All of them were guilty, all, all were murderers. Harken to their horrible rejoicings! Old men and maidens, young men and matrons, the toothless crone and the budding girl, the great lords and ladies, the toilers on the deep and the traders of the city, the bond and the free, from the king down to the meanest slave, all of them screamed with hideous rejoicing as babe after babe was swallowed by the glowing gorge of the daemon they named a god. Therefore I vowed by Isis that all of them should pay the price of this innocent blood and go down to find their god in hell. Yes, I swore it by the Mother and by my own outraged soul!

The next day Beltis came. The King Tenes was in my outer chamber fawning on me and watching me out of his crafty eyes, as I saw through the veil that I had let fall over my face, and my flesh crept at the sight of him. Trained though I was and wise though I was, who knew well that the hour had not come to strike, scarce could I bear him near me who longed to drive my dagger through his lying throat. Yet I sat still and listened to his flattery and answered him with double-edged and mocking words of which he could not read the meaning. He told me that already the great sacrifice had borne good fruit, since tidings had come of a new victory over the vanguard of the Persians, in which five thousand of the men of Ochus had perished.

I answered that I doubted not it would bear yet better fruit, then asked him how many of his folk dwelt in Sidon.

He answered, some sixty thousand.

"Then, O King," I said, "I who am filled with the spirit of the Mother, make a prophecy to you. I prophesy that in reward of the piety of this people of yours who do not grudge their own children to the gods, the gods will take sixty thousand lives from among the wicked of the earth who worship fire—as I am told these Persians do."

"That is a good saying, Lady," he said, rubbing his fat hands, "though it is true that some might say that we Sidonians also worship fire, or rather Moloch whose belly is filled with flame as we saw yesterday."

Now while we were speaking and this brute bemused was talking thus almost at hazard, for his mind was set on me only, I noted that those who attended him slipped from the place, taking with them the waiting women and closing the carven doors behind them, so that he and I were now alone. Guessing that this was done by order, I knew that I must prepare for some outburst of the man's passion and took counsel with myself. What it was does not matter because of that which followed.

Already he had begun, for the words, "O most beauteous!" had passed his lips when the door burst open and through it came a noble-looking woman. She was tall, dark, and handsome with swift-glancing, tragic eyes, as I knew at once, a Jewess, since I had seen others like her in Jerusalem. She glanced at me as though wondering what my veil hid, and advancing, stood before Tenes. He had not heard her come or seen her, his mind being full of other matters and his back toward the doorway. At the sound of her feet he turned and, coming face to face with her, stepped backward three paces with a frightened face and uttering some Phœnician curse.

"Have you returned so soon, Beltis?" he asked. "What has brought you here before the appointed time?"

"My heart, O Tenes, king and husband. Yonder in Jerusalem a prophet of Jehovah said words to me that caused me to return and swiftly. Tell me, Tenes, where is our son? On my path to this chamber I passed through those where he should be and found him not. All I found was his nurse weeping; aye, so choked with tears that she could not answer my question. Where is our son, Tenes?"

Now he cast his eyes about him like one who finds himself in a snare, and answered thickly,

"Alas! Lady, the gods have taken our son."

She gasped and clasped her hands upon her heart, saying, or rather moaning,

"How did they take him, Husband?"

He looked through the window-place at the hideous brazen image dulled with heat and blackened by smoke; he looked at the lady with the white face and the terrible eyes. Then he strove to speak, but as it seemed, could not, for the mumbled words choked each other in his throat.

"Answer!" she said coldly, but he could not, or would not answer.

Then my spirit moving me, I played a part in this ineffable tragedy. Yes, I, Ayesha, threw back my veil, saying,

"Queen, if it pleases you to listen I will tell you how your son died."

She looked at me wondering, and asked like one who dreams,

"Is this a woman or a goddess, or perchance a spirit? Speak on, woman, or goddess, or spirit."

"Queen," I said, "look through the window-place and tell me what you see."

"I see the image of Dagon, the brazen image towering to the housetops, blackened with fire and staring at me with empty eyes, and beyond it the temple and above it Heaven."

"Queen, yesterday I looked from this window-place and saw that image of Dagon, only then from those empty eyes came flame. Also I saw King Tenes lead out a beauteous, black-eyed boy of three summers or so, which boy he declared to be his son. This boy he gave to a woman, although the child clung wailing to his robe. The woman gave him to a priest. The priest climbed a ladder—look, there it stands—and laid him upon the red-hot hands of the idol whence he rolled amidst the plaudits of the people into a womb of fire, to be perchance reborn in Heaven."

Beltis heard, and as she heard her face seemed to freeze into a mask of ice. Then she stared at Tenes and asked almost in a whisper,

"Are these things so, O dog of a Sidonian, that like a dog can devour your own flesh?"

"The god claimed him," he mumbled, "and like others I must give when the god claims, that victory may crown our arms. Who can deny the god? Rejoice, O mother, that he has been pleased to accept that which was born of you."

So he mumbled on as priests patter to their idols, till at length in that cold silence his voice died away.

Then Beltis the Queen began to hiss a curse at him, such a curse as, save once only, I have never heard come from the lips of woman. In the Name of Jehovah, God of the Jews, she cursed him, calling down woe and desolation upon his head, consigning him to a death in blood and appointing Gehenna, as she named hell, as a resting-place for his soul, where devils fashioned as children should tear him eternally with hooks of flame. Yes, she cursed him living and dead, but always in that low, whispering voice, that inhuman voice which did not seem to come from the throat of woman, such a voice as the gods or spirits use when from time to time they speak to their servants in the inmost sanctuaries.

He cowered before her. Once even he sank to his knees, holding his hands above his head as though to ward off her words of evil omen. Then, as she would not cease, he sprang up, shouting,

"You also shall be a sacrifice, you worshipper of the God of the Jews. Dagon is greater than the God of the Jews. Be you a sacrifice to him, O Sorceress of Israel!"

He drew the sword at his side and shook it. She did not stir, only with her hands she tore upon the robes upon her breast, saying,

"Smite on, dog of a Sidonian, and complete the circle of your crimes. Where the son went, there let the mother follow!"

Now in madness, or in rage, or in terror, he lifted the sword and was about to do the deed, when I stepped between him and her. Loosing the veil I wore I threw it over her head, and turning, said to Tenes,

"Now, King, touch her who is hid in the veil of Isis if you dare. Of Isis I think you have learned something on a certain ship when the breakers called for you off Carmel, yes, of Isis and her prophetess. Know then that she who could save can also slay, and give you over to such dreams as came to you, Tenes, at midnight by a bed in yonder room. Aye, she can slay, and swiftly. Strike then through the Veil of Isis and learn whether her prophetess speaks truth."

He looked at me; he looked at Beltis standing still and ghostlike beneath the veil. Then he cast down the sword and fled.

When he had gone I went to the door and shot its bolt. I returned, I lifted the veil from about that queen.

"Who and what are you?" she asked, "that can brave Tenes in his palace and save one whom he would slay, though for that I thank you not. So little do I thank you that——" And she stooped to grasp the sword.

Moving swiftly as a swallow flies, I flitted between her and it. Before her fingers could touch it, I had snatched it away who understood her purpose.

"Be seated, Lady, and listen," I said.

She sank into a chair and, resting her head upon her hand, regarded me with a cold and curious look.

"Queen," I went on, "I am one whom Heaven has sent to this land to destroy Tenes and the Sidonians."

"Then I welcome you, Stranger. Speak on."

So briefly I told her all my tale, and in proof of it read to her the writing in which I promised myself to Tenes when he could crown me queen of the world.

"So you desire my place and this man?"

"Aye," I answered, "as much, or as little, as life desires death. Study the conditions. Can he crown me queen of all the earth, and under them until he does so, can he take me? Do you not understand that I would lead the fool on to his ruin?"

She nodded her head.

"Then will you not help me?"

"Aye, Lady, but how?"

"I will show you how," and bending forward, I whispered in her ear.

"It is good," she said when I had finished. "By Jehovah my God, and by the blood of my son, with you I stand or fall, and when all is done take Tenes if you will."

## CHAPTER X

### THE VENGEANCE OF BELTIS

So it came about that this queen, whose name I learned was Elisheba among her own people, the Hebrews, Beltis being a title given to her in Sidon, and I dwelt together in the palace of Tenes. Leave me she dared not, nor would I suffer it who knew that then certainly she would be murdered, while with me she was safe because Tenes dared not touch one whom I sheltered, being afraid of me; one, moreover, over whom I had placed the veil of Isis. For the rest she was glad to stay with me whom soon she learned to love, especially after she had heard how I pleaded for her son's life.

I, too, was glad that she should do so, both because she was a companion to my loneliness and a protection, since Tenes could not persecute me with his passion in her presence, and because she had those who loved her in Sidon, certain Hebrews through whom we learned much. Yet we were in a strange case, the queen who reigned and the queen to whom her place was promised, dwelling together like sisters, and both sworn to destroy him who was her husband and who desired to be mine.

For we made a pact together, she swearing by Jehovah and I by Isis, that we would neither rest nor stay till we saw Tenes dead and his Sidonians with him. Oh! if I hated him and these, she, the robbed mother, hated them worse, so deeply indeed that if only she might come by vengeance she cared nothing for her life. She was a fierce-natured woman, such as those of the Hebrews often are, and all her heart's love had been given to this boy, her only child, whom Tenes butchered at the bidding of the priests and because of his superstitions.

From the beginning this Beltis or Elisheba had hated the Sidonians and Tenes, to whom she was given in a marriage of policy by the rulers of Jerusalem because of her beauty and her royal blood, and now to her they were but as wild beasts and snakes to be destroyed. Yet she was clever also and played her part well, feigning sorrow for the wild words she spoke in the hour of her agony and with it obedience to the wishes of the King. She even told him in my presence that when the time came she would be willing that I should take her crown and she but a second place, or if it pleased him better, that she would return to her own people. This, however, he did not desire, since he feared lest the disgrace of so great a lady should bring the wrath of Jerusalem upon him, or even cause the Hebrews to join his enemies.

So well did she play that part, indeed, making it appear that her spirit was crushed and that she was one from whom there was nothing to fear, that soon Tenes came to believe that this was so, and in order to please me he suffered her to dwell on there in peace.

Now I have to tell of the war and of the end of Sidon. First I should say, however, that before he sailed for Egypt, after the *Hapi* had been fitted with a new mast of cedar, I caused Philo to be summoned to the palace by the help of those Jews who were the friends of Beltis. He was brought to my presence with two merchants, disguised as one of their company, and, while Beltis made pretence to chaffer with them for their costly goods, I spoke with him apart.

I told him to get him to Memphis as quickly as he might, and there make all ready as we had agreed, awaiting my message. How this would reach him, or Noot, or both of them, I did not know. It might be by writing, or by messenger who would bear certain tokens, or it might be otherwise. At least when it came he must sail at once, and arriving off the port of Sidon, every night after the setting of the sun and before its rising, must light a flare of green fire at his masthead, causing it to burn for the fourth part of an hour, so that I might be sure that the ship which signalled was his and no other. Then in this way or in that I would find means to come aboard that vessel, and the rest was in the hands of the gods.

These things he vowed to do and departed safely with the merchants, nor did Tenes ever learn that Philo had visited the palace.

Meanwhile Tenes was making mighty preparations for the war. He dug a triple ditch about Sidon and heightened its walls. He hired ten thousand Grecian mercenaries and armed the citizens. By help of the Greeks he drove the Persian vanguard out of Phœnicia, and for a while all went well for him and Egypt. At length came the news that the vast army of Ochus was rolling down on Sidon, together with three hundred triremes and five hundred transports; such an army as Phœnicia had never seen.

One morning Tenes came to my chamber and told of the march of Ochus, Beltis withdrawing herself. He was in a very evil case, for he trembled and even forgot to say sweet words or to devour me with his eyes after his fashion. I asked him why his hand shook and his lips were pale, he, who as a warrior king, should be rejoicing at the prospect of battle. He answered because of a dream he had dreamed, in which he seemed to see himself defeated by the Persians and cast down living from the wall of the city. Then he added these words:

"You, Lady, promised to show me how to conquer the world. Do so, I pray you, for I say that my heart is afraid and I know not how I shall stand against Ochus."

Now I laughed at him and answered,

"So at last you come to me for counsel, Tenes, who for days have been wondering for how long you would be content to take that of Mentor of Rhodes and of the King of Cyprus. Well, what would you learn?"

"I would learn how I may defeat the Persians, Lady, the Persians who pour upon us like a flood through a broken wall."

"I do not know, Tenes. To me it seems impossible. I think that dream of yours is coming true, Tenes, that is——" And I ceased.

"What, then, must I do, Lady? What is your meaning?"

"I mean that you are mad to fight Ochus."

"But I am fighting Ochus."

"Those who have been enemies may become friends, King Tenes. Have I not told you that you would be safer as the ally of Ochus than as his foe? What is Egypt to you that you should destroy yourself to save Nectanebes?"

"Egypt may be little, Lady, but Sidon is much. The Sidonians are pledged to this war and the hand of Ochus might be heavy on them."

Again I laughed and answered,

"Which is dearer to a man, his own life or those of others? Fight and die if you will, O King; or make peace and perchance let others die if you will, O King. They say that Ochus is generous and knows how to reward those who serve him."

"Do you mean that I should make a pact with him and betray my people?" he asked hoarsely.

"Aye, my words may be so read. Harken. You have great ambitions. You would win the world—and me. My wisdom tells me that only thus can you win the world—and me. Continue this war, and very soon you will lose me and all that you will command of Earth shall be such small part of it as hides your bones. Now make your choice and trouble me no more, who in truth find little joy in timid hearts that fear to take hold of opportunity. Therefore, follow your counsel or my own, I care not which who would be gone back to Egypt to seek a higher destiny than that of consort to a conquered slave."

"Whatever I may lose, you I cannot lose," he said slowly. "Also your mind is mine. This Persian is too strong for me, and on Egypt I cannot lean too hard lest it break beneath me. These Sidonians, also, are rebellious and murmur against me. I think that they would kill me if they dared, who now call me Child-murderer because I gave my son in sacrifice to please the priests."

"Mayhap, King," I answered carelessly, "since mobs are fickle. I repeat that the wise man and he who would be great does not think of others but of himself."

"I will consult with my General, Mentor the Greek, for he is far-sighted," he said, and left me.

"The poison works," I thought to myself as I watched him go. Then I called Beltis and told her all that had passed between her lord and me. She listened and asked,

"Why do you lead Tenes down this road, Ayesha?"

"Because of the pit at the end of it," I answered. "Have not your spies told us that this Ochus is implacable? He will make a pact with Tenes and then he will destroy him. Such at least is the counsel that comes to me from Heaven, which he has angered, as I think."

"Then I pray that Tenes may follow it, Ayesha, so long as it hurls him down to hell, and the Sidonians with him."

As it chanced he did, for it was of a sort that his false heart loved. The rest may be told in few words. Tenes sent his minister, Thessalion, another crafty fellow, to make a treaty with Ochus. These were the terms of this treaty: That he, Tenes, should surrender Sidon and in payment receive the royalty of Egypt after it had been conquered, and of all Phoenicia also, and with it that of Cyprus. Ochus swore these gifts to him and continued his advance. When he reached a certain spot, he halted. Then Tenes, as he had undertaken to do, led out a hundred of the chief citizens of Sidon to a Council of the States of Phoenicia, or so he said.

Howbeit, presently they found themselves in the camp of Ochus who butchered them to the last man, all save Tenes himself, who returned to Sidon with a tale of an ambush from which he had escaped.

Then it was I saw that the end drew near, and in a ship, which not Tenes, but the captains of the Sidonians sent to Nectanebes at Memphis to pray for more aid, I caused a faithful Jew to sail, one sworn to the service of Beltis, who carried with him hidden in the hollow sole of his sandal a letter addressed to Noot and to Philo, praying that Philo would sail at once and do all those things that had been agreed upon between us. Also night by night I sent out my spirit, or rather my thought, to seek the spirit of Noot, as he had taught me to do, and it seemed to me that answers came from Noot telling me that he read my thought and would do those things which I desired.

The chief men of the Sidonians held a council in the great hall of the palace. Hidden behind curtains in a gallery of the hall, Beltis and I saw and heard all that passed at this council, over which Tenes presided as King. Bitter was the talk of those lords, for doubts were abroad. They thought it very strange that Tenes alone should have escaped from that ambush. Yet like the liar that he was, he cozened them with false tales, showing them also that the gods of the Sidonians had preserved his life, that he in his turn might preserve theirs. Yes, he said this and other things, he the knave and traitor, who already plotted to destroy them all.

At this council the Sidonians took a desperate road. Day by day many were escaping from the city by sea and otherwise. Already nigh a third of the people had gone, and among them some thousands of the best soldiers, so that the captains saw that soon the great city would be left with few to defend her. Therefore they came to this resolve—to burn all their ships so that no more could flee upon them, and to set watches at the gates and round the walls with orders to slay any who might attempt flight by land.

Fearing for his life, Tenes consented to these deeds, swearing that he desired but one thing, to conquer or to die with the citizens of Sidon.

So it came about that soon the darkness was made as light as day by the flames which sprang from over a hundred vessels of war besides a multitude of smaller ships, while the Sidonians, watching them burn from the roofs of their houses, beat their breasts and moaned. For now they knew they were cut off and must conquer or perish.

The ships of Ochus watched the port of Sidon, though somewhat carelessly because it was known to him that its harbours were empty, and the vast army of Ochus rolled down in countless hosts upon its walls.

Hour by hour spies came in with terrible reports, causing the hearts of the Sidonians to melt with fear. For now they understood that all hope of victory was gone and that they were doomed, though as yet they did not know that it was their king who had betrayed them.

Another council was held, at which Beltis and I watched as before, and there it was agreed that the city should throw itself upon the mercy of Ochus. Tenes affected to protest and at last to allow himself to be overruled, as I, to whom he came day by day for guidance, put it into his black heart to do. Heralds were sent to the camp of Ochus, offering to surrender upon honourable terms, and while they were absent bloody sacrifices of children and others were made to Dagon and his company in the Holy Place before the temple, till its pavements ran red with blood. For thus these cruel folk hoped to propitiate Heaven and to win mercy from Ochus.

The heralds returned bearing the word of Ochus. He said that if five hundred of the chief citizens came out unarmed and made submission to him, he would grant their prayer and spare Sidon; but if they did not, that he would pull it stone from stone and slaughter all who lived within its walls. Also one of the Persian ambassadors who accompanied them brought a secret letter for Tenes. This letter Tenes, who by now did nothing without my counsel, read to me.

It was brief. This was its substance:

If he would put Sidon into his hands, Ochus swore to Tenes by his most solemn Persian oaths advancement greater than he had ever dreamed; and to Mentor the Rhodian and the general of the Grecian and Egyptian Mercenaries, he swore a vast sum in gold and one of the first commands in the Persian army. If Tenes would not do this, then Ochus proposed to make peace with Sidon for a

while but afterward to destroy it. To Tenes himself, however, he promised death at the hands of the Sidonians themselves, to whom all his treachery should be revealed. Lastly an answer was demanded without delay.

"What shall I say to Ochus, Lady?" asked Tenes of me.

"I know not," I answered. "Honour would seem to demand that you should lay down your life and save Sidon and her citizens, if only for a while. Yet, O King, what is honour? How will honour help you when you have been torn to pieces by the maddened mob upon yonder Holy Place, and your spirit has gone to Baal, or wherever the spirits of those sacrificed to Moloch may go. Will this empty honour give you that great advancement of which the Persian speaks, which doubtless will carry with it the rule of Phoenicia and of Egypt, and perchance also that of the East? For Ochus being mortal, Tenes, once you have brought him to his death, as I can show you how to do, who is fitter than yourself to fill his throne? Lastly, will death with honour bring me whom you desire to your side, King Tenes? I have spoken, now judge," and lifting my veil, I sat and smiled at him.

"It is not safe," he said. "All hangs on Mentor and the Greeks. Unless they join in the plot the Sidonians will fight to the last with their aid, and when they discover my traffic with Ochus they will slay me. And if I fly to Ochus and the Sidonians fight, then mayhap he will slay me as one who has helped him nothing. But if Mentor joins us, then we can open the gates to the Persians and ourselves go out safe to reap our reward."

"There speaks a great man," I said, "one who is fore-sighted, one not tied by petty scruples; there speaks such a one as I would take to be my lord. Aye, there speaks a man fit to rule the world, to whom the great advancement the Persian promises is but the first rung in the ladder of glorious triumph—that ladder which reaches to the very stars. Already these Sidonians hate you, Tenes. I saw them mutter when you passed among them yesterday; aye, and one laid his hand upon his dagger, but another checked him, having a look in his eyes that seemed to say—'Not yet.' If once they learn the truth, Tenes, perchance soon you also will lie on the altar of sacrifice and be cast living into the fiery jaws of Dagon, where your son went before you, Tenes. Why do you not send for Mentor and search his mind?"

So Mentor was sent for, and meanwhile I gave Tenes my hand to kiss. Yes, I even suffered this that I might fix him the more firmly on my hook.

Mentor came. He was a burly Greek, a great soldier with a keen brain behind his laughing eyes; one who loved gold and wine and women, and for these and high place and generalship was ready to sell his sword to whoever bid the most.

Tenes set out the matter to him very craftily and showed him the writing of Ochus. He listened, then asked,

"And what does this veiled Daughter of Isis think? I remember hearing in Egypt where she was held the first of Oracles and named Child of Wisdom, that her prophecies never fail to fulfil themselves."

"The Daughter of Isis thinks that among the Persians Mentor will grow tall, but that here among the Sidonians he will be felled like a forest tree and go to feed a mighty fire, such a fire as consumed the fleets of Sidon awhile ago."

Thus I answered, and when Mentor heard my words, he laughed and said that he was of the same mind, which without doubt was true, for afterward I learned that already he had been in treaty with Ochus.

So he and Tenes struck hands upon their bargain, the most infamous perhaps that was ever made by men, since it gave to slaughter forty thousand or more who trusted to them.

Thus was signed the doom of an accursed people, that doom which I was destined to bring upon their heads, and thus was Tenes sent down the road to hell. Only Mentor prospered greatly for a while in the service of the Persians, and what was the end of him I do not know. After all, he was but one of many who flit from master to master as advantage leads them. Doubtless long ago the world has forgotten him, his Grecian cunning, his generalship, and his treachery.

The five hundred went out to the Persian camp to plead with Ochus, bearing palm branches in their hands; yea, they went with light hearts, for Tenes had told them that certainly their prayer would be granted and that he knew this from the lips of Ochus himself. Led by the priesthoods of the various gods—oh! how it rejoiced me to see those vile and cruel priests in that company!—they went, but not one of them returned again, for Ochus received them with mockeries and reviling, and to make sport for himself and his soldiers, told them to run back to Sidon. Then he loosed his horsemen on them and slew them with swords and javelins and set their heads on stakes around the walls.

When the Sidonians knew and saw, they went mad with rage and terror. They gathered themselves by thousands in the Holy Place and had it not been for Mentor and his Greeks, would have stormed the palace, for now they were sure that Tenes had betrayed them. Indeed Beltis had made the truth of this treachery known through the Hebrews who served her. Also they clamoured that I, Ayesha, should be led forth and sacrificed, saying that it was the presence of a priestess of Isis in the city which had caused their gods to desert them. For a little while I was afraid, who remembered what had chanced upon the ship *Hapi* when Tenes would have suffered me to be thrown to the deep to satisfy the superstitions of the sailors. Therefore thinking it best to be bold, I sent for Tenes and said to him,

"If by evil chance I should be slain, O King, then know that I have it from the goddess whom I serve that you with whose lot mine is intertwined will die within an hour. I, Tenes, am the bright star of your fortunes, and if I set, farewell to them and you."

"I know it," he answered, "as I know that without you I can never rise to be king of the world. Therefore I will defend you to the last; also, beauteous one, I desire you for my wife. Yet," he added, "some might think that this star of your wisdom has hitherto led my feet into dark and evil places," and he looked at me doubtfully.

"Fear nothing," I answered. "'Tis ever darkest before the dawn and out of evil arises good. Great glory awaits you, Tenes, or rather great glory awaits both of us. History will embalm your name, Tenes." But to myself I thought that it was the Persians who would embalm his body, unless indeed they cast it to the dogs!

Now every evening after sundown it was my custom to walk upon the flat roof of the palace and look out over the ocean which, also for reasons my own, rising early, I did before the dawn. That night while I walked I put up my prayers to Heaven, for though I played so bold a game, its odds seemed to be gathering against me. Doubtless, as it deserved, this hateful Sidon would fall, but when its walls were crashing down, with what should I protect my head? I did not know. Yet it is true that never did I lose faith. Always I knew that I was the instrument of that Strength which directs the fate of men and nations, that what I did was because I was driven and commanded so to do for reasons that were dark to me; moreover, that I was not an instrument to be broken and thrown aside. Nay, however strait the path and however great the perils that beset it, I was sure that I should walk it with safety, because it was fated

that I should do so, though whither it would lead me I could not tell in those days when I was but as other women are. Still I put up my prayer to Heaven and scanned the horizon with my eyes.

Lo! far away beyond the lights of the watching triremes of Ochus, so far that it seemed almost set upon the surface of the sea, burned a faint green fire. For the fourth part of an hour it burned, and went out. Then I knew that my words had reached Egypt, whether in the writing or by the swift path of the spirit, and that Noot or Philo had come to save me.

Before the dawn once more I climbed to the roof of the palace, and behold! far away again the green fire burned upon the bosom of the deep, telling me that out yonder the great trireme waited for my coming. Aye, but how was I to come?

Tenes the vile and Mentor the venal played their parts well. They opened the gates of the outmost wall which the Greeks held, and let in the Persians whom these Greeks greeted as brothers, having at times served under them in the past. The Sidonians saw and knew that the dice had fallen against them; knew too that they were loaded dice.

They gathered in the Holy Place and raved for the blood of Tenes who cowered behind a curtain and hearkened to them. Beltis and I, playing our parts, came to comfort him.

"Be brave!" I said gently. "The road to the kingship of the world is steep and difficult. Yet when the peak is gained, how glorious, O Conqueror, will be the prospect spread out before your eyes."

"It is steep and difficult indeed," he muttered, wiping his brow with the fringe of his brodered robe.

Had he but seen the look which Beltis cast upon him, standing behind him with folded arms and humble air, perchance he would have thought it steeper still.

"Let us talk," I said, "for the end draws near. What is your plan? How will you and we, your queens, escape from this city?"

"All is prepared," he answered. "At the King's wharf, to which a covered way runs from the palace, in the house where the royal boats are moored, is my own barge that, being thus secured, escaped burning with the ships. In this barge, which is manned with Greeks to whom a great reward is promised and who wait in the boathouse day and night, we will row from the harbour for a hidden bay three leagues down the coast where we will land and be escorted thence to the encampment of the Great King. Yet perchance it may be wiser that I should be with Mentor to welcome Ochus when he enters to take peaceful possession of the city. If so, Daughter of Isis, you will do well to leave it by yourself, or with the lady Beltis if she wishes to accompany you, and to meet me in the camp of Ochus."

"Perhaps that would be better," I answered, "since it might not be thought seemly that the great King Tenes should slip away to his ally by night. Nay, let him rather march out as a monarch should. Only then we must have authority to act as occasion may direct."

"Aye, Lady, take this ring," and slipping the royal signet from his finger he gave it to me. "It will be obeyed by all who see it; moreover, I will issue certain orders. So long as we meet again at last, we whose fates are intertwined, it matters not by what separate roads we travel."

"It matters not at all, my lord Tenes," I answered as swiftly I hid away the signet.

It was just then, at the hour of sunset, that Mentor entered the chamber. No longer was he gay and light-hearted; indeed his brows were bent and his eyes full of trouble.

"By Zeus!" he said, "a dreadful thing has happened. In their despair these Sidonians of yours, King Tenes, have taken counsel together. They have determined that rather than fall into the hands of Ochus, they will burn the city and with it themselves and their wives and children. Yes, uttering the curse of all the gods upon you, thus they have determined. Look, the fires begin!"

We went to the window-places and gazing from them, saw desperate men rushing to and fro with lighted torches of cedar wood in their hands, while other men drove mobs of screaming women and children into the houses, yes, and into the temples, and shut the doors upon them. Here and there, too, from the roofs of these houses rose wisps of smoke that soon were mingled with flame. East and west and north and south, through the great city of Sidon arose that smoke and flame. Everywhere also mobs of the people whose courage failed them and who did not desire to die thus were rushing toward the gates and into the camp of the Greeks. In this fashion, I believe, that from ten to twenty thousand of the inhabitants of Sidon escaped, though afterward Ochus the cruel slew many of them and enslaved the rest.

I looked, I saw, and my heart melted within me. Hateful as were these insolent, bloodstained folk, I grieved that I should have had any hand in bringing their reward upon them. After all, they were brave and would have fought to the end, who now made expiation by a great self-sacrifice, which was also brave. Oh! if I could I would have lifted that doom from off them. Then I remembered that it was not I who did these things, but Fate which made of me its instrument; remembered also that only thus could I escape the foul hands of Tenes.

I turned to look upon that traitor. He trembled, and trembling tried to seem brave; he laughed, and in the midst of his laughter burst into tears.

"Behold the fate of those who would have slain their king! Truly the gods are just," he said. "Now let us fly to the great Ochus and receive from him his royal welcome and reward. Truly the gods are just!"

He turned about seeking for Mentor, but Mentor had gone. There remained in that chamber only Beltis the Queen, he, and I, Ayesha. Beltis glided to the door and made it fast. Then she came to Tenes and before he guessed her purpose, snatched the gold-hilted sword from his belt. She stood before him with fierce white face and blazing eyes.

"Truly the gods are just," she repeated in a low and terrible voice. "Fool, do you not know what welcome Ochus will give you yonder and what rewards? Harken! That false Greek, Mentor, told me of these but now, or pitying my lot, he offered me his love and to take me to safety. After I had refused him, he went his way while you stared from the window-place."

"What words are these, Woman?" gasped Tenes. "Ochus is my ally; Ochus will greet me well who have served him well. Let us be going."

"Ochus will greet you thus, O Tenes; I have it from the mouth of Mentor who has it from Ochus himself. Slowly he will cause you, a king, to be beaten to death with rods, which is the fate the Persians give to slaves and traitors. Then he will stuff your body with spices and tie it to the masthead of his ship, that when presently he sails for Egypt it may be a warning to Nectanebes the Pharaoh whom also you have betrayed."

"It is a lie, it is a lie!" shouted Tenes. "Daughter of Isis, tell this mad woman that it is a lie."

I stood still, answering nothing, and Beltis went on,

"Tenes, Fate is upon you. Will you meet it less bravely than the meanest of the thousands of this people whom you have given to doom? Take my last counsel and leap from yonder window, that you who have lived a coward and a traitor may at least die a man."

He gnashed his teeth, he stared about him. He even went to the window-place and looked out as though he would brave the deed.

"I dare not," he muttered, "I dare not. The gods are just; they will save me who sacrificed my son to them."

Then he knelt down in the window-place and began to pray to Moloch whose brazen image showed redly in the gathering gloom.

"Take your sword, Tenes, if you dare not leap, and make an end," said the cold voice of the fierce-faced Hebrew lady who stood behind him, whilst I, Ayesha, watched all this play as a spirit might that is afar from the affairs of earth, wondering how it would end.

But Tenes only answered,

"Nay, sharp steel is worse than steep air. I would live, not die. The gods are just, the gods are just!"

Then he went on praying to Moloch.

Queen Beltis grasped the handle of the short sword with both her hands and with all her strength drove it down between the broad shoulders of Tenes.

"Aye, dog of a Sidonian," she cried, "the gods are very just, or at the least my God is just, and here—child-slayer—is the justice!"

Tenes screamed aloud, then struggled to his feet and stood striking at the air, the short sword still fixed in his back, a dreadful sight to behold.

"Would you murder me, Jewess?" he babbled, and staggered after her, still beating at the air with his clenched fist.

"Nay," she answered, ever retreating before him, "I would but give you your due, or some of it. Go, garner the rest in Gehenna's deep, O butcher of children and traitor blacker than the world has ever seen. Die, hound! Die, lurking jackal who would have mumbled the bones of greatness left by the full-fed Persian lion. Die, slaughterer of the son that sprang from us, and go meet his spirit in the world below, telling him that Elisheba his mother, a woman of the royal house of Israel, the Queen whom you had rejected, sent you thither. Die, while the city, the great City of the Seas, burns with the fires that your treachery has lighted and the cries of its tortured citizens ring in your ears. Pass with them to Gehenna and there strike your account, having their fire-shrivalled souls for witnesses and Moloch and Baal and Ashtoreth for judges and for company. Die, dog, die! and while your brain darkens, remember to the last that it was Elisheba, the robbed mother, who gave you to drink of the cup of death."

So she reviled, ever flitting before him, while he staggered slowly after her round the great chamber. At length he could no more and fell at my feet, grasping my robe,

"Daughter of Isis," he babbled, "whom I desired and would have made my queen, save me! Is this the great advancement that you swore to me?"

"Aye, mighty Tenes," I answered, "since death is the greatest of all advancements. In death be king of Phœnicia, of Egypt and of the East, since surely there you will stand above all thrones, powers, and dominions. In death all things will be yours, O traitor Tenes, who would have done violence to the daughter of Isis, everything save Ayesha's self, who here bids you farewell, vile Tenes."

Then, wailing and moaning, he died, and thus robbed Ochus of his vengeance upon a tool of which he had no further need.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ESCAPE FROM SIDON

ALL was over and done. Within that royal chamber was silence, though without the flames roared and the cries of the Sidonians went up to Heaven. I, Ayesha, and Beltis the Queen, faced each other in the gloom and between us lay the body of Tenes, on whose white, distorted face flickered the light of the fires that burned without.

"What now, Queen?" I said.

"Death, I think," she answered in a quiet voice, for all her rage seemed to have left her. "Why cheat his jaws of their richest morsel?"

"I have still work to do, my hour has not yet come, Queen."

"Aye, I forgot. Follow me, Daughter of Isis; Beltis does not forsake those who have served her. Look your last upon this carrion that hoped to call you wife, and follow me."

As we passed from that chamber I glanced through the window and saw that, although darkness now had fallen, the Holy Place beneath was bright as noon with the flames of the burning temple, and that in them the vast graven image of Moloch glowed as it had done upon the day of sacrifice when the child of Beltis was swallowed in its red-hot jaws. There it sat hideous; grinning as though in unholy triumph over this greatest of all sacrifices.

Then suddenly a pinnacle from the temple fell upon it, grinding it to powder. This was the end of Moloch, since, although Sidon, as I have learned, was rebuilt in the after years, never more was sacrifice made to that devil within its walls. This at least I, Ayesha, brought to pass—the end of the worship of Moloch at Sidon.

We passed through my sleeping-chamber, and as we went I seized the cabinet of priceless gems that Tenes from time to time had heaped upon me, since these were sworn to Isis and no goddess loves to be robbed of her offerings. At the back of the chamber was a passage leading to a door by which a lighted lamp had been set in readiness. At this door stood a man whom I knew for one of the Jewish servants sworn to the service of Beltis.

"You are late, royal Lady," he exclaimed. "So late that I was about to flee, for look, the palace burns beneath us," and he pointed to little wreaths of smoke that forced themselves up between the boards of the flooring of the bedchamber that we had passed.

"Late, but not too late," she answered. "The King detained us and has gone another way. You have his orders and here is his ring," and she pointed to the royal signet upon my hand. "Obey it and lead on."

The man held up the lantern and glanced at the ring. Then he bowed and beckoned to us to follow him.

We went down passages, long passages with many turnings, and at length came to another door which he opened with a key. Passing it, we found ourselves in a vaulted place beneath which was water, where floated the royal barge, the same in which I had been rowed to the shore of Sidon. Oarsmen sat waiting within this barge, and guarding it were two Grecian soldiers, who commanded us to halt.

"This boat awaits King Tenes," said one of them, "and none else may enter it."

"I am the Queen," answered Beltis.

"With whom I hear the King has quarrelled," broke in the Greek with a sneer. "Queen or no, Lady, you cannot enter that boat without the King, or an order under his signet."

Then I held up my hand, saying,

"Here is the signet itself. Let us pass."

He stared at it by the light of the lamp, then said something to the other Greek and very doubtfully they obeyed. It was certain that these guards standing in that vaulted place did not know what was passing in the city. Moreover, I think it had come into their minds to rob us, or worse. At the least this is sure, that unless we could have killed those two Greeks, without the signet never should we have won to the boat.

We went on twelve paces or so and reached the barge, which was manned with sailors who wore the uniform of the King's bodyguard, men who knew the Queen and saluted her by raising their oars. Beltis motioned first to me and afterward to the Jew who had been our guide from the palace, to enter the barge, then suddenly she said to the steersman who commanded the sailors,

"Go now whither this lady shall direct you, and know that if harm comes to her your lives shall pay the price of it, for she is no woman, but a goddess whom Death obeys."

Now I stared at her and asked,

"Do you not come also, Queen Beltis?"

"Nay," she whispered. "I choose another road to safety. Fear not for me, I will tell you all when we meet again. For a while farewell, Child of Wisdom and my friend. May the gods with whom you commune be your shield upon earth and receive you when you leave the earth, you who strove to save a certain one and cast your mantle over Beltis when a sword that now is set in another's heart was at her own. Give way, sailors," she cried, "and if you would look once more upon the sun, obey."

Then with her own hands she thrust at the stern of the boat, causing it to move into the channel. Next moment Beltis had shrunk back into the darkness and was gone.

Now I would have returned to seek for her, but the Jew at my side called out,

"Give way! Give way and question not the word of the Queen who doubtless has work elsewhere. Be swift; doom is behind you."

For a moment they hesitated, then bent them to their oars while I wondered what might be the meaning of the part that Beltis played. Did she perchance plan some trap for me? I did not know, but this I knew, that behind was the burning city, whereas in front lay the open sea. Whatever its perils I would face the sea, trusting to destiny to be my guide. As for Beltis, doubtless she took some other road to freedom. Mayhap after all she would shelter with Mentor, or Ochus had promised her deliverance in payment for the blood of Tenes.

So I sat silent, and presently the channel took a turn; the swinging water-gates that hid its mouth were thrust open with an oar by a man who stood at the barge's prow, and we passed into the southern harbour.

Yes, out of the darkness we passed into a blaze of light, and out of the silence into a hideous tumult of sound. For all around us the city burned furiously and from it rose one horrible wail of woe.

The rowers saw and understood who until now had known nothing in the silence of the secret harbour cave. They hung upon their oars. Then they brought round the barge's prow seeking to return into the cave, but could not because those doors had swung to behind them and, having locked themselves by some device, could only be opened from within. Nor indeed could I tell where these were since they seemed to form part of the harbour wall.

The helmsman looked back and from side to side at the hell of fire which raged behind and around him. He looked at the jutting pier upon our right and noted that already its timbers were ablaze. Then he looked in front and cried,

"Now I see why the Queen left us! Well, there is but one chance. Onward to the open sea."

"Aye," I echoed, "onward to the open sea. Here you must die; there I will lead you to safety. I swear it by the Queen of Heaven."

"Tis well to talk," said one, "but how shall we gain the sea? Look, the Persians are barring the harbour mouth and slaying those who strive to escape."

It was true. Many of the miserable inhabitants of Sidon had found boats of this sort or of that, or even were swimming upon logs or barrels. For these the Persians or those in their pay waited at the mouth of the harbour and with mocking words and laughter butchered them as they came. Yes, from their smaller ships they slew them with spears and arrows or by throwing stones that drove out the bottoms of the boats.

"Keep in the shadow of the jetty," I said, "where the wind-driven smoke hangs thick and near which the triremes dare not come because of the rocks whereon it is built, and row, row fast."

They heard and obeyed. On we went beneath an arching canopy of smoke laced with bursts of flame from the kindling timbers, till at length we reached the head of the jetty on which stood a wooden tower where a light burned at night to be a guide to mariners entering the harbour. Here we waited a while, clinging to one of the piers, for although the wind was rising, in this sheltered place the sea remained calm.

Rowing across the head of the jetty was a Persian trireme, and until she had gone by we dared not attempt the sea. At length she passed, leisurely, and our chance came. At a muttered word the oarsmen gave way with all their strength and we shot clear of the mole into the open deep. As we did so, I looked back and perceived behind and above me a sight that after more than two thousand years still haunts me in my sleep.

Upon the end of this timber-crested mole, as I have said, there was a wooden tower from which in times of peace a beacon burned. Now this tower was blazing like the pierway behind it and no beacon shone there. Only where it should be stood a woman on whose face the strong light beat, since the wind swept away the smoke and revealed her like a statue on a column that rises above mist. I looked at this shape and this face and saw that they were those of Beltis the Queen of Sidon. How she had come there, I do not know, but I think that she had run along the burning mole before it was too late, being well acquainted with the path, and had climbed the stairway of the tower, that from its crest she might look her last upon Sidon and on life.

There at least she stood, royal-looking, silent, with her arms crossed upon her breast, while the purple cloak that marked her rank floated behind her like a banner on the breeze.

She saw the barge that bore us shoot out of the gloom and reek into the deep sea. I know that she saw because she stretched out her arm as though to bless us. Then she turned and lifted her hands toward the burning city as though to curse it. Lastly, once more she folded her arms upon her breast and stood motionless, her white face raised to the heavens.

Thus she remained while one might count an hundred, till suddenly the timbers of the tower, gnawed through by the flames, fell in and she vanished in a roaring gulf of fire.

Such was the end of that great and ill-fated woman, the royal Beltis, Queen of Sidon, whom, mayhap in expiation of sin done in another star, the gods gave to the arms of perchance the vilest man that ever lived upon the earth. Greatly she died, a sacrifice, as her son had been a sacrifice, but not before she had wrought a fitting vengeance upon the murderer of her child and the betrayer of his people. Moloch, god of fire, took her as he took them all, but now she was beyond the reach of Moloch, Moloch who was but molten metal, an offering to himself.

In the great flame of the fallen tower the trireme that bore the banner of Ochus saw our boat escaping out to sea and put about to pursue it.

"Row on!" I cried, "row into the darkness," and knowing that their lives hung on the issue, since, as we had already seen, the Persians spared none whom they overtook in the boats but drove the triremes over them, shooting any who swam with arrows, those sailors rowed sturdily. Yet our progress was but slow and that of the three-banked ship behind us fast; moreover, the fires of burning Sidon lit up the sea for miles.

Could we reach the darkness before we were overtaken? We came to its edge with the great trireme not a hundred paces from our stern—so near indeed that the soldiers on board of her began to shoot at us, though in the gathering gloom and because of the rolling platform on which they stood, their shafts went wide. She was right upon us; her hull had vanished in the shadows but the light from the fires still gleamed upon her gilded masthead, while her great oars beat the sea with a sound like thunder.

"Put about," I cried, "or she will sink us."

Very skilfully the steersman obeyed so that we doubled like a hunted hare and the Persian shot past us. Then once more we turned and rowed on into the night. When it wrapped us round, the sailors, exhausted, rested on their oars. Again we heard the thunder of the great slave-manned sweeps, and again the brazen prow of the tall ship, cruel, enormous, hung almost over us. Only by an ell or two did the broad blades of the oars miss us, the eddies that they made causing our little craft to rock dangerously. But this time that huge sea-hound was blinded by the darkness and not seeing us, nor hearing anything, for we sat silent as the grave, she rushed upon her way, and for a time we saw her no more.

All was quiet upon the breast of ocean. Far off burned Sidon like a gigantic beacon fire, but there came to us no whisper of her agony. Yes, all was quiet, save for the sighing of the night wind that, to my strange fancy, seemed like to such a sound as might be

made by the rush of ten thousand spirits passing from the cruel earth upward to the peace above. Slowly the wearied oarsmen drove the boat still farther out to sea; then their captain said,

"Whither away, Lady? It is in my mind to change our course and run for the coast northward, where perchance there are no Persians."

"Nay," I answered, "we stay where we are, I search for a ship."

"Mayhap we shall find one," he said with a hoarse laugh, "a ship of the fleet of Ochus."

They began to dispute as to what course they should take.

"Obey me," I said, "or obey me not, as you will. Only then I, who have the counsel of the gods, tell you that save I only, by sunrise to-morrow everyone of you will be dead."

They whispered together, for my words frightened them. At length the captain spoke, saying,

"The great Queen Beltis who is gone told us that this woman is a goddess and that what she commanded, that we must do. Let us remember the words of the great Queen Beltis who is dead and doubtless watches us from the sky."

So this danger passed also, and all that night we floated, keeping the boat's stern to burning Sidon while the most of the oarsmen slept in their places. So weary were they that not even the horror behind them and the loss of their kinsfolk, or even their own fears, could hold them back from sleep.

But I, Ayesha, did not sleep; nay, I watched and thought. If Philo had fled away, or if his ship had been sunk, what then? Then all was finished. Nay, not so, since it could not be that I should die with but half my task accomplished. I was friendless among strange men, yet in my breast there dwelt the greatest of friends, that spirit whose name is Fate. I threw out my soul to my master Noot the Seer, and lo! it seemed to me that his soul answered, saying,

"Fear nothing, Daughter of Isis, for the wings of Isis shadow thee."

It drew near to the dawn; I knew it by the stars which I was wont to watch and by the smell of the air. I rose in my seat and stared into the darkness. Behold! not four furlongs from our prow suddenly there sprang into life a fire of green flame.

"Awake," I cried, "and row on swiftly, for if you would live you must reach the ship upon which yonder fire burns before the breaking of dawn."

They obeyed, wondering, who knew not what this fire might mean. We sped forward, and as the first light gleamed saw almost above us the bulk of the great trireme named *Hapi*.

"Hail her!" I cried, and the captain did so. One appeared by her bulwark rail, holding a lantern. Its light shone upon his face and I saw that it was that of Philo the Greek.

"Ye are saved," I said quietly, "for yonder is the vessel that awaits me."

"Of a truth this is a goddess!" muttered the captain of the barge.

Now Philo saw us in the growing light, and cried to us to come swiftly, pointing to something which he could discover but we could not. We were alongside, eager hands dragged us from the boat. We were aboard, I still carrying the casket of jewels though at the time I did not know I held it fast. Philo bowed the knee to me as to one divine, at which our oarsmen stared. Then he shouted a command and again pointed behind us.

Lo! there, scarce two bowshots away, was the great Persian ship which we had escaped in the gloom of the night.

Our oars struck the water, we leapt forward like an unleashed hound, and after us came the trireme like a lion springing on the hound. Trireme have I called her? Nay, as we saw now, she was a quinquereme, one of the new five-banked ships built by Ochus, a mighty monster. For a little while she hesitated as though wondering whether to attack or let us be. Then as the light strengthened the eyes of her watchmen caught sight of our abandoned boat and by its gilding and emblems knew it for the royal barge of Tenes.

A great shout arose, a shout of

"The King escapes. The King and Queen Beltis escape. After them!"

Then the quinquereme leapt forward in pursuit. Because of her bulk she was slow in gathering speed and we who had the start of her drew away quickly, especially after a shift of wind which seemed to miss the *Holy Fire*, for so Philo, who knew her, said the Persian was named, filled our great sail.

Seeing this and hoping that our danger was past, I went to that same cabin which had been mine when as the captive of Tenes I sailed upon this ship, which seemed to be just as I had left it. This I did without speech to Philo, save a word to commend to his care the Jew and those others who had been my companions upon the barge.

For now that all was over, it seemed to me as though I must rest or die; moreover, I was foul with travel and needed food. This indeed I found ready upon a table which caused me to wonder, though dully, which I did even more when I saw clean woman's garments such as I was accustomed to use spread out upon the cabin couch. So I cleansed and clothed myself and ate a little, drinking some wine, which I did rarely, then lay down upon the couch and for a space, an hour perhaps, slept as though I were dead.

I woke, I knew not why who could have slumbered on for hours, yet feeling as though the most of my weariness had rolled off me. The place was very dim for the curtained door was shut and at first I could see nothing. Presently, however, I became aware that I was not alone in the cabin. For as my eyes grew accustomed to such light as reached it, I discovered the shape of a man, an old, white-bearded man, kneeling at its far end as though in prayer, and wondered whether I dreamed, for what could such a one be doing there? Soon indeed I was sure that I dreamed, since this shape was that of the high-priest Noot, my Master, whom I supposed to be far away in Egypt. Or perchance Noot was dead and this was his spirit that visited me in my sleep. Spirit or dream or man, words came from the lips of that vision spoken in the very voice of Noot; such words as these,

"O Mother Isis, and Thou without a name whom Isis and all the gods serve and obey, I thank ye that ye have been pleased to bring this maiden in safety through her appointed tasks, throwing over her the shield of a strength divine. I thank ye that ye have led her back to me, her father in the spirit, that defilement has not touched her, that fire has not burned her, that water has not drowned her, and that the foeman's spears have not pierced her heart. I pray ye, O Mother Isis and O Thou without a name in the hollow of whose hand lie the world and all that live thereon, that as has been the beginning, so may be the end, and that this chosen woman may return safe to whence she came, there to accomplish those tasks that she was created to fulfil."

Thus that voice prayed on, the holy, well-remembered voice, till at length I brought its supplications to an end, saying,

"Tell me, Noot my father, why do you still fear in this hour of deliverance?"

He rose, he came to me, and drawing aside a curtain on a little window-place, scanned me with kind and gentle eyes. Then he took my outstretched hand, kissed it, and answered,

"Alas! there is still much to fear, O my daughter, but of that you shall learn presently. First tell me the story of what has chanced to you since we parted."

Briefly, omitting much, I told him that tale.

"It is as my spirit showed me," he said when I had finished. "Heaven has not deceived its servant. Your messenger reached us, Daughter, but had he died upon the road it would have mattered little, since long ere he had set foot in Egypt my soul had heard your soul and made all things ready. Yet last night, when Sidon burned, I confess that my faith failed me and this soul of mine shook with fear. Indeed an hour after sunset I thought that your ghost passed me, crying that all was done."

"Perchance it was the ghost of Beltis that passed. But of these things we will talk afterward. I see fear in your eyes. Of what are you afraid?"

"Rise and look through that window-place, Daughter."

I did so and behold! but a little distance away the great quinquereme named the *Holy Fire* sped upon our track, so fast that her five banks of oars lashed the sea to foam.

"Father divine," said a voice without, a voice that I seemed to know, "I have words to say."

"Enter and speak," answered Noot.

The door was opened and the curtain drawn, admitting a rush of sunlight. Lo! there before me stood a warrior clad in such armour as the Greeks wear and, thus attired, the most beautiful and glorious-looking man that ever my eyes beheld.

It was *Kallikrates*, *Kallikrates himself*, only now in place of the priest's robe his great form was clad in bronze; in place of a chaplet a helm was on his head and in place of the *sistrum* his hand gripped a sword hilt. Yes, it was Kallikrates, he whose lips in past days had met mine in the holy shrine, but as he had been before he had vowed himself to Isis because of a certain crime. For now again he was a man and a captain of men, not one who with bent brows and humble mien from hour to hour mutters prayers to an unseen divinity.

Oh! I will tell truth. When I saw him thus I liked him well. Yes, though for long he had been nothing to me save a fellow servant of the goddess, once more I was thrilled with a cup of that same wine which I had seemed to drink when our lips met far away in Egypt; once again that fire which I had stamped to ashes beneath my feet sprang to life and scorched my heart.

Mayhap it was his beauty, as great perhaps as that of any man who ever lived, or mayhap it was the light of battle that shone in his gray eyes which thus stirred the woman in me. At least I who had sickened at the sight of Tenes and all other men, I who had given myself to higher things and, rejecting the flesh, followed the spirit only, was stirred like any common maid who finds her lover at the moonrise. Moreover, Noot, who could read hearts and above all my heart, noted it for I saw him smile and heard him sigh.

Perchance Kallikrates also noted something, for the colour came to his brow—I saw it redden beneath the plumed helm of bronze, and he dropped those bold and beautiful eyes. More, he sank upon his knee, saluting me with the secret sign and saying,

"Pardon, Child of Wisdom, High-priestess of the Queen of Heaven, that once again, if only for a little while, I have put on the harness which I used to wear. It is done to save you, Child of Wisdom. It is done by command."

"Aye," said Noot, "it is the command of Her we serve that this priest should lift sword on behalf of Her and us, her slaves."

I bowed my head, but answered—naught.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SEA BATTLE

THE great Persian ship was on us. Strive as we would, we could not escape her. She raced upon our beam not a spear's cast away. I stood upon the high poop of the *Hapi* and saw it all, for the old Arab blood was on fire in me, as it had been when I charged in the battle where my father fell, and I would play no woman's part. Moreover, my spirit told me that I had not escaped from the hands of Tenes and out of the burning hell of Sidon, to die there upon the sea.

Standing thus upon the poop by the side of Philo the cunning captain, I noted this strange thing, that no arrow was shot and no spear thrown from the Persian's decks. She raced alongside of us, that was all. I looked at Philo, a question in my eyes, and he answered the question briefly between his set lips.

"They think the King and Queen are aboard and would take us living. Hark! They shout to us to surrender."

Again I looked at him, wondering what he would do.

He issued an order and presently our speed slackened so that we fell a little behind the Persian. He issued another order and we leapt forward again under a changed helm. Now I saw that he was minded to ram the *Holy Fire*. The Persian saw it also and sheered off. We ran alongside of her, shipping our oars as we came on that side which was nearest to her. But the Persian had no time to ship hers. Our sharp prow caught her fivefold line of sweeps, smashing the most of them as though they were but twigs, and casting the rowers in a broken, tumbled heap within her deep hold.

"That was worthy of Philo," I said, but he, ever a humble man, as are all masters of their trade, shook his head and answered,

"Nay, Lady, I missed my mark and now we must pay for it. Ah! I thought so."

As he spoke, from sundry places on the *Holy Fire* grapnels flew out which caught in the rails, ropes and rowing benches of the *Hapi*, binding the two ships together.

"They are about to board us," said Philo. "Now, Lady, pray to Mother Isis to give us aid."

Then he blew two blasts upon his whistle. Instantly rose up upon our deck a band of men, nigh a hundred of them, perhaps, clad in armour and captained by the Greek, Kallikrates. Also behind these I saw the crew of the royal barge, armed with such weapons as they could find, and the sailors of the *Hapi*.

The Persians thrust out boards or ladders from one ship to the other, across which their boarders, most of them Greeks, came on in swarms. The fighting began and it was very fierce. Our men cut down many of the foe and drowned others by casting off the boards and ladders, so that those on them fell into the sea. Still a great number of them won on board of us, and oh! fierce was that fray. Always in the thickest of it I saw Kallikrates towering a head above the others, and who now would have dreamed that he was a priest of Isis? For he smote and smote and man after man went down before him, while as his sword rose and fell he shouted out some old Greek battle cry, such as once his fathers used.

On a space of deck ringed round with dead and dying, he came face to face with the captain of the boarders, a great and burly man, also, as I think, a Greek. They fought terribly, whilst others paused to watch that fray which Homer might have sung. Kallikrates was down and my heart stood still. Nay, he was up again but his bronze sword had broken on the foemen's mail.

That foeman had an axe; he swung it up to make an end. Kallikrates, rushing beneath it, seized him in his arms and they wrestled there upon the slippery deck. The ship lurched; together they staggered to the bulwarks. The foeman loosed one arm and drew a dagger; with it he smote Kallikrates again and again. Kallikrates bent, and with his freed hand seized the man beneath the knee. By a mighty effort he lifted him to the bulwark's edge and there they clung awhile. Then Kallikrates with that same freed hand smote the other on the brow. Thrice he smote and his blows were as those of a hammer falling on an anvil.

The grip of the captain of the boarders loosened and his head hung back. Once more Kallikrates smote and behold! his foe rolled down and was crushed to powder between the swelling sides of the two great ships as they ground one against the other, while the servants of Isis cheered and the sullen Persian hordes gave back.

I caught sight of Philo thrusting his way along the bulwarks. He held an axe in his hand but he was not fighting. Nay, he avoided those who fought. Once indeed he stood still and gave an order, noting, as I had done, that of a sudden the wind had begun to blow. Certain sailors who heard this order ran to the mast and I saw the great sail rising slowly.

Meanwhile Philo slipped along those bulwarks, taking cover beneath them like a jackal beneath a wall. But whenever he came to one of the grapnels he stopped and smote with his axe, severing the rope that held it. Three of them did he sever thus, so that the prows of the vessels swung apart.

Now the great sail was up and filled. The *Hapi* forged ahead, dragging round the stern of the *Holy Fire* by those grapnels that remained. The Persians understood and grew frightened. Those who were still alive upon our decks rushed to the planks and ladders, but few gained them, for Kallikrates and the men of Isis were on their heels. They were cut down; they fell from the sliding planks and ladders, or they leapt into the sea and for the most part drowned there. Very soon not one of them was left upon our deck.

The grapnels were torn away, or the ropes broke. We were free. Yet the Persian was not beaten, for she was full of men of whom those who had been killed were but a tithe.

She, too, hoisted her sail and thrust out fresh sweeps to continue the pursuit. Her captain, standing on her prow, roared out,

"Dogs of Egyptians, I'll hang you yet."

Philo heard and took up his bow. Now we were sweeping across the bow of the *Holy Fire*; mayhap it was a hundred paces away. Philo aimed and shot. So truly did he shoot that his arrow struck the Persian captain beneath his helm and down he went.

His fall seemed to bewilder the crew of the *Holy Fire*. They hung upon their oars shouting at each other, as though they knew not what to do. Then their sail began to rise and I saw that they were putting about.

Philo at my side laughed, a hard little laugh.

"Mother Isis is good to us," he said. "See, the hunter has become the hunted!"

Then he gave orders and we came round so that our great sail taken aback flapped against the mast.

"Down with the sail and row," he shouted, "row as never ye rowed before!"

Those at the sweeps obeyed. Oh! it was splendid to see them bending their broad backs and tugging at the oars till these also bent like bows in the water. Here was no slave work, for they were servants of Isis and free men, every one of them. Philo rushed to the steering gear and with the aid of another man took charge of it himself. We leapt forward like a panther on its prey. The *Holy Fire* saw and strove to escape. Too late, too late! For presently the sharp prow of the *Hapi* crashed into her side with such a shock that all who stood upon the deck were thrown down, I among them. I struggled to my feet again and heard Philo screaming,

"Back water! Back! lest she take us with her."

We backed. Slowly the prow appeared again from where it was buried three paces deep in the foeman's flank.

The *Holy Fire* reeled over; the water rushed in through the gap. Crippled and helpless she wallowed; aye, she began to sink. From her swarming decks went up a yell of terror and dismay. Still the water rushed in with an ever-gathering flood and still she sank and sank. Men threw up their arms, praying for mercy; men sprang into the sea. Then suddenly the *Holy Fire* reared her glittering prow into the air and stern foremost vanished into the deep. It was finished!

The Persians swam about us, or clung to wreckage, praying to be taken aboard. But we rowed on coming to the wind again. I know not how it is in the world to-day, but then in time of war there was little mercy. Egypt alone was merciful because age had mellowed her and because of her gentle worship of her gentle gods. But now Egypt was fighting for her life against the Persian. So we rowed on, and those barbarians were abandoned to drown and in the world below seek the warmth of the Fire they worshipped.

Philo left the helm and came to where I stood. I noted that he was white and shaken and called to one to bring him wine. He drank of it thankfully, not forgetting first to pour a libation at my feet, or rather at those of the goddess to whom I was so near.

"Bravely done!" I said. "You understand your trade, Philo."

"Not so ill, Lady, though it might have been better. Had I been at the helm we should have rammed that swarming hulk before the boarding and saved some lives. Well, Set has her now and Ochus lacks his finest ship."

"It might have been far otherwise," I said.

"Aye, Lady. Had I commanded the *Holy Fire* it would have been otherwise, for she had two oars and three men to our one, but her captain was wanting in sea-craft, and when my arrow found him, there was none to take his place. They should have swept us with their boarders, but that tall Greek captain called Kallikrates, who they tell me was once a priest, handled his soldiers well. He is a gallant man and I grieve that we are like to lose him."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh! because in his fight with a fellow whom he flung over the bulwarks, he took a knife-thrust in the vitals, which they think will be mortal. See, they are bearing him to my cabin," and he pointed to Kallikrates being carried forward by four men—a sight that stirred my heart.

Then Philo was summoned away, for it seemed that when the *Hapi* rammed, she sprang a leak and the carpenters called Philo to consult with them as to how it might be stopped.

When they had gone I followed after Kallikrates and found him laid in Philo's cabin. They had taken off his armour and the leech, an Egyptian, was cleaning a cut in his thigh whence the blood ran down his ivory skin.

"Is it mortal?" I asked.

"I know not, Lady," answered the leech, "I cannot tell the depth of the thrust. Pray Isis for him, for he has lost much blood."

Now I who was skilled in medicine and in the treatment of wounds which I had learned from a great master in my youth among the Arabs, helped that physician as best I might, staunching the blood flow and stitching up the cut with silk before we bandaged it.

Moreover, taking from my hand a charmed and ancient amulet that gave health and had the power, so it was said, to cause the sick or wounded to recover, I set it on the finger of Kallikrates that it might cure him. This amulet was a ring of brown stone on which were graven certain hieroglyphics that meant *Royal Son of the Sun*. He who gave it to me told me that it had been worn by that greatest of all healers and magicians, Khæmuas, the eldest son of the mighty Rameses. Once only did I see this ring again as shall be told. Then of it I lost sight and knowledge till, after more than two thousand years, I beheld it on the hand of Holly in the caves of Kôr.

As I worked thus the pain of the needle awoke Kallikrates from his swoon. He opened his eyes, looked up and saw me, then muttered in Greek so low that only I who was bending over him heard his words. They were:

"I thank thee, Beloved. I thank thee and the gods who have granted that like my forefathers I should die no priest, but a soldier and a man. Yea, I thank thee, *O royal and beautiful Amenartas*."

Then he swooned again and I left him quickly, having learned that it was of the Egyptian he dreamed, and doubtless that it was for the sake of this same Egyptian that he had changed his sacred robe for mail, yes, the Egyptian Amenartas for whom he had mistaken me, Ayesha, in the wanderings of his weakness.

Well, why not? What had I to do with him or any man? Yet of a sudden I grew weary of the world and almost wished that the *Holy Fire* had rammed the *Hapi* and not the *Hapi* the *Holy Fire*.

Yonder behind us a thousand men were now at peace beneath the sea. Being overwrought with all that I had endured and seen, almost I could have wished that I, too, was at peace beneath the sea, sleeping for ever, or perchance to wake again nursed in the holy arms of Isis.

In the cabin sat my master, the prophet Noot, staring through the open doorway at the infinite blue of heaven above, as I knew that he had done during all that fearsome fight.

He smiled when he saw me and asked,

"Whence come you, Daughter, and why do your eyes shine like stars?"

"I come from the sight of the death of men, my Father, and my eyes shine with the light of battle."

"With other lights also, I think, Daughter. O Ayesha, beauty is yours, wisdom is yours, and you are filled with spirit like a cup with wine. But what of the cup? What of the cup? I fear me that those fair feet of yours have far to travel before they reach their home."

"What is their home, Father?"

"Do you not know it after these many years of learning? Hearken. I will tell you. Your home is God, not this god or that god called by a hundred names, but the God beyond the gods. Doubtless you will love and you will hate, as you have loved and hated. And doubtless you are destined to draw up what you love and to come to peace with what you hate. Yet know that above all mortal loves there is another love in which they must be both lost and found. God is the end of man, O Ayesha, God or—death. All sin, all stumble on the path, but only those who continue on that path or who, having lost it, with tears and broken hearts seek it again and, like the Sisyphus of fable, thrust before them their frozen load of fleshly error, till at length it melts in the light that shines above; only those, I say, attain to the eternal peace."

So solemnly did he speak, uttering the slow words one by one, and so deep and holy was the lesson that they hid, that I, Ayesha, grew afraid.

"What have you seen and what do you know, my Father?" I asked humbly.

"Daughter, I have seen you yonder in Sidon rejoicing in vengeance for vengeance's sake; aye, glad when the vile hound who would have gripped you, gasped out his life before your eyes. You did not slay him, Ayesha, but it was your counsel that gave cunning to the thought that planned and strength to the arm that dealt the blow."

"It was so fated, O my father, and otherwise——"

"Yes, it was so fated; yet you should not have rejoiced in the hour of your triumph. Nay, you should have sorrowed as the gods sorrow when they fulfil the decrees of Destiny. Again I have seen you burning with the flame of battle, your heart filled with songs of victory when Philo's skill and the Grecian courage of Kallikrates sent those mad brutes of Persians to their account. And lastly unless I dream—— What did you but now in Philo's cabin, Daughter?"

"I tended a wounded man, my Father, as I have the skill to do. Also I gave him an amulet which it is said has virtue to heal the sick."

"Aye, that was right and kind and the just reward of courage. Did he thank you, Daughter? I thought that in the quiet I heard thanks come from his lips."

"Nay," I answered sullenly, "his mind wandered and he thanked——another woman who was not there."

Again Noot smiled a little, and answered,

"Was it so? Then let her name be. Yet remember that from such wanderings of a mind distraught oftentimes springs the truth, like water from a shattered rock. Oh! Daughter, Daughter, if this man forgets his vows, must you do the same? For him there is excuse who is a soldier——can we doubt it who have looked upon his deeds to-day? He became a priest for love's sake and the shed blood which it brought. But for you there is none——at least none upon the earth," he added hastily. "I pray you, therefore, let this man be, for if you do not, my gift of wisdom tells me that you will bring much trouble on your head and his. Why will you seek after vanity? Is it because in the pride of your beauty you cannot bear that another should be preferred before you and that a fruit which it is not lawful for you to pluck, should fall into some other woman's lap? I say to you, Daughter, that this beauty is your curse, because to it you demand obedience night and day, although of it you should think nothing, remembering its end. You are too proud, you are too puffed up. Look upon the stars and learn to be humble, lest you should be humbled by that which is stronger."

"I am still a woman, Father, a woman whose mission it is to love and to bear babes."

"Then learn to love that which is above and let the babes you bear be those of wisdom and good works. Is it your part to suckle sinners like any hedge-side troll, you to whom the heavens stretch out their hands? Is it for you in whose breast springs the tree of life to root it up and in its place to sow the seed of a woman's common arts, that by their aid you may snatch her lover from a rival? Because he sins, if sin he does, should you cease from being holy? Where is your greatness? Where are your purity and pride? I pray to you, beloved daughter of my spirit, swear to me by Heaven which we serve, that with this man you will have no more to do. Twice have you sinned——once in the sanctuary yonder at Philæ when his kiss met yours, and now again not an hour gone upon this ship, when your heart was torn with jealous rage because the name of another woman escaped from lips that you thought were about to shape your own. Twice have you sinned and twice has the goddess turned her head and shut her eyes. But if for a third time you should walk into this pit dug of your own hands, then know that escape will be hard indeed. I tell you"——here his face and his low voice hardened——"I tell you that from age to age shall you strive unceasingly to wash the stain of blood from off those hands and that all your breath shall become a sigh and your every heart-beat shall be an agony. Swear then, swear!"

I looked at his eyes and saw that they were alight and unearthly, yes, that some spirit shining from within caused them to glow like alabaster lamps. I looked at the thin hand which he stretched out toward me and saw that it trembled in his passion.

I looked and was moved to obey. Yet ere I did so I asked,

"Were *you* ever young, my Father? Did *you* ever suffer from this eternal curse which Nature lays on men and women because she would not die? Did *you* ever take the bribe of sweet madness with which she baits her hook? Or, as once I think you told me in bygone years, were you always holy and apart?"

He covered his eyes with those thin hands, then answered,

"I was young. I suffered from that curse. Whatever I may have said to you in the past when you were but a child, I gorged that bait, not once but many times, and I have paid the price. Because I have paid it to my ruin, I pray you whom I love not to empty your heart of its purest virgin gold and fill the void with pain and penitence. Easy is it to fall, Daughter, but hard, very hard to rise again. Will you not swear?"

"Aye," I answered, "I swear by Isis and by your spirit, O Purified."

"You swear," he said, whispering, "but will you keep the oath? I wonder, aye, I wonder greatly, will you keep that oath, O high-hearted woman whose blood runs with so red and strong a stream?"

Then bending forward he kissed me on the brow, and rising left me.

Kallikrates did not die. Under the care of that cunning leech or of something above the leech, Death was cheated of him, since it seemed that the knife-thrust had not reached his vitals, or at least had not pierced them beyond repair. Still he was sick for a long while, for his whole body was drained of blood, so that had he been older, or less vigorous, Osiris would have taken him. Or perchance not in vain had I set upon his finger that scarab-talisman once charmed by Khæmuas. I visited him no more, and thus it was not until we were passing up the Nile and drew near to Memphis that I saw him again. Then, very pale and wasted, yet to my

fancy more pleasing than he had been, since now his face had grown spiritual and his eyes were those of one that had looked close into those of Death, he was carried in a bed on to the deck. There I spoke with him, thanking him in the name of our goddess for the great deeds that he had done. He smiled and his white face took a little tinge of red as he answered,

"I fear me, O Mouth-of-Isis, that it was not of the goddess that I thought in that fray, but rather of the joy of battle which I, a priest, had never hoped to feel again. Nay, nor was it for the goddess that I smote as best I could, since in the extremities of war the gates of heaven, which are then in truth so near, seem very far away, but rather that after all which you had passed, you, with the rest of us, might not fall into the hands of the heathen fire-worshippers."

Now I smiled back, for the words, if false, were courteous, and replied that doubtless also he, who was still young, desired to go on living.

"Nay," he answered earnestly, "I think that I desire to die rather than to live, and to pass hence as often my forefathers have done, sword in hand and helm on head. Life is no boon to a shaven priest, Lady, one who by his vows is cut off from all its joys."

"What is a man's joy in life?" I asked.

"Look at yourself in a mirror, Lady, and you will learn," he answered, and there was that in his voice which caused me to wonder whether it was possible after all that the wrong name came from his lips in the wanderings of his mind.

For then I did not know that a man may love two women and at the same time; one with his spirit and the other with his flesh, since through all things runs this war between the spirit and the flesh. The spirit of Kallikrates was always mine, having been given to me from the beginning, but with his flesh it was otherwise, and perchance while he is in the flesh it will so remain.

Before we reached Memphis a signal was made for us to anchor. Then a barge, flying the standard of Pharaoh, came off to us from the shore. On board of it was Nectanebes himself and with him his daughter, the Princess of Egypt, the lady Amenartas; also certain councillors and Grecian captains in his service.

The Pharaoh and the others came aboard to learn tidings of what had chanced at Sidon, and were received by Philo and by Noot. Presently they demanded to be led to me and I met them on the deck outside my cabin, noting that the eyes of Nectanebes were troubled and that his fat cheeks had fallen in.

"So you are returned to us, Oracle-of-Isis," he said in a hesitating voice, scanning my form, for my face he could not see because it was veiled.

"I am returned, O Pharaoh," I answered, bowing before his Majesty. "It has pleased Her whom I serve to deliver me out of the hands of King Tenes of Sidon, to whom Pharaoh offered me as a gift."

"Aye, I remember. It was at that feast when the water in the cup you held turned to blood. Well, if all I hear is true, there has been blood enough out yonder."

"Yes, Pharaoh, the Sidonian seas run red with it. Tenes, Egypt's ally, surrendered the city to Ochus the Persian, thinking to find great advancement, which he won by death, whereon the Sidonians burned themselves in their houses with their wives and children. So it comes about that all Phœnicia is in the hands of Ochus who advances upon Egypt with a mighty host."

"The gods have deserted me!" moaned Nectanebes, waving his arms.

"Aye, Pharaoh," I answered in a cold voice, "for the gods are very jealous and seldom forgive those who forsake them and betray their servants into the hands of enemies that hate them."

He understood and answered in a low, babbling voice,

"Be not angry with me, Oracle-of-Isis, for what else could I do? That Sidonian dog, whom may Set devour eternally, was mad for you. Always I mistrusted him and I was sure that if I refused you to him, he would make his peace with Ochus and bite me in the back, as indeed he threatened at the feast. Also I knew well that Mother Isis would protect you from all harm at his hands, which it seems that she has done."

Now when I heard these words rage filled me and I answered,

"Aye, Pharaoh, Mother Isis has done this and more. Have you heard how your poison worked? Nay? Then I will tell you. Having sacrificed her only son to Dagon, Tenes would have put away Beltis, his queen, to give her place to me. Mad with hate, Beltis led him into the arms of the Persian and afterward when his treachery was accomplished, slew him with her own hand, for I saw the deed. And now, Pharaoh, Sidon has fallen and with it all Phœnicia, and soon, Pharaoh, Egypt will follow Sidon. Aye, I, the Oracle, tell you that because you were pleased to throw the high-priestess of Isis into the arms of Tenes as though she were some singing woman of whom you had wearied, these things have come about. Therefore too soon there will no longer be a Pharaoh in Egypt and the Persian will take the Land of Nile and defile the altars of its gods."

He heard. He trembled. He had naught to say. But there was another who heard also. As I had noted, the Princess Amenartas, when she came on to the ship, went straight to where Kallikrates lay upon a couch beneath an awning on the deck, and there talked with him earnestly. What they said I could not hear for they spoke together beneath their breath. But their faces I could see, and watching them I grew sure that the Greek had made no error of a mind distraught when he spoke this royal lady's name as I tended his wounds. For those faces were the faces of lovers who met after long separation and the passing of great dangers.

Leaving Kallikrates this Amenartas had returned to her father and stood at his side listening to our talk. Now she broke in fiercely,

"Surely, Priestess, you were ever a bird of evil omen croaking of disaster. You fly to Sidon and lo! Sidon burns, yet you escape with wings unscorched. Now you flit back to Egypt and again wail of woe like a night owl of the desert. How is it, O Isis-come-to-Earth, as it pleases you to call yourself, that you alone escape from Sidon and return here to curdle the blood of men with prophecies such as those you uttered at the feast when by a trick you turned the water into blood? Have you perchance made friends with Ochus?"

"Ask it of Philo the captain of this ship, Lady," I answered in a quiet voice. "Or stay. Ask it of yonder priest which perchance will please you better, the Grecian who in the world was named Kallikrates. Ask them how I showed friendship to Ochus by so working through the strength of Isis and their skill and valour that the Persian's finest ship of war with a multitude of his sailors and fighting men lies to-day at the bottom of the deep."

"Perchance because a captain was skilled and a certain priest, or soldier, was brave, that ship is sunk with all she bore, but not, I think, through you or your prayers, O Oracle. I say to you, Pharaoh, my father, that if I held your sceptre I would send this *Isis-come-*

*to-Earth* to seek Isis in Heaven ere she bring more sorrows on us and Egypt.”

“Nay, nay,” muttered Nectanebes, rolling his big eyes, “speak not so madly, Daughter, lest the Mother should hear and once more smite me. Hearken. Last night I, who have skill, consulted my spirit, the Dæmon who obeys me. He came, he spoke. I heard him with my ears. Yes, he spoke of this prophetess. He said that she drew near to Memphis on a ship. He said that she was great, almost a goddess, that she must be cherished, that to you and me she would be a shelter from the storm, that in her is the power of One who sits above. O Oracle, O Isis-come-to-Earth, O Wisdom’s Daughter, forgive the wild words of this royal child of mine who is distraught with fear, and know that, to the last, Pharaoh is your friend and your protector.”

“As mayhap, if this Dæmon of yours speaks truth, before all is done I shall be the protector of Pharaoh and of the Princess of Egypt whom it pleases to revile me,” I replied.

Then bowing to him I turned and sought my cabin.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SHAME OF PHARAOH

WHEN Pharaoh and his daughter had gone, though I did not see them go, I bade farewell to Philo, thanking him much and, in reward for all he had done, calling down on him the blessing of the goddess which he received upon his bended knees. Moreover, when he had risen from them he swore himself to my service, saying that while he lived he would come even from the ends of the earth to do my will. Also he showed me how I might call him by certain secret ways.

So we bade farewell for a while, nor did I let him go empty-handed, since from those jewels that Tenes had heaped upon me, which almost by accident I had preserved in my flight, I took certain of great value and gave them to him as a gift from the goddess. Thus we parted though, as both of us were sure, not for the last time.

So soon as our coming was known the priests and priestesses of Isis flocked to the quay in solemn procession to receive Noot, their high-priest, and me their high-priestess, which they did with sacred ceremony and holy chants. By them we were escorted through the streets of Memphis to the temple of Isis accompanied by many of the crew of the *Hapi* that were of our brotherhood. Among them I missed one.

"Where is the priest Kallikrates?" I asked of Noot.

He smiled and answered,

"I think that he has been taken to the palace of Pharaoh to be nursed until he recovers from his wounds. Perchance for a while he is minded, or it is decreed that he should continue to play a warrior's part. Yet fear not, Daughter; those upon whose brow Isis has laid her hands, in life or death must return to her at last. They are hawks upon a string which, though it stretches, cannot be broken."

"Aye," I answered, "in life or death," and asked no more of this Kallikrates.

In the midst of the rejoicings of the city at our safe return, we came to the temple and made sacrifice. There it was that I set the jewels of Tenes, all save those that I had given to Philo, upon the alabaster statue of the goddess in her inmost shrine that only I and Noot might enter, and there too by signs and wonders she signified to me her acceptance of the offering. For here while we stood alone before the effigy of the goddess in that holy place, a trance fell upon Noot and in his trance he spoke to me with the voice of Isis and out of her infinite heart. This was the divine message that came to me through the lips of Noot:

"Daughter, I, thy mother, know of all that thou hast passed and of all that thou must pass. Though the barbarian come and the gods of Egypt are thrown down and ruin smites the land and thou seemest to be left alone, abide thou here till my word bids thee to depart. By myself and That of which under the name of Isis I am a minister, I swear that no harm shall befall thee or that place where thou art, or those of my servants who remain with thee. Therefore await my commands with patience, doing such things as I inspire thee to do, that thou mayest bring the vengeance of the gods upon those dogs who desecrate their shrines."

Thus spoke Noot in his trance, not knowing what he had said until I told him afterward. He listened earnestly and bade me obey.

"Even if I be taken from you for a while, as it comes to me will happen—perchance I learned it in my swoon, Daughter—and you are left unfriended and alone, still I pray you to obey. If so, think not that I am dead, who do but return to my own place and land, but wait until my message comes. Then obey that also though I know not what it will be."

Thus he spoke solemnly and I bowed my head and hid his words within my heart—

The war began, Egypt's last war for life. Nectanebes the Pharaoh, inspired by his evil Dæmon, thrust aside his captains and declared himself General in Chief of his armies, he who had scarce the wit or the courage to command the guard of a harem. At first that Dæmon served him well, since at Barathra, as the gulfs are named which make the Sirbonian bog, the Persians were trapped and lost many thousands of their men who sank through the sand into the marshes and there were drowned or speared. But their numbers were uncountable and the rest came on. Pelusium was besieged and for a while held its own against the giant Nicostratus of Argos, a man as strong as Hercules who, like Hercules, clothed himself in a lion's skin and for a weapon bore a great club. The Grecian captain, Kleinios of Cos, he who had been present at the feast when I was given over to Tenes and whom in my vision at that feast I had seen dead, lying upon a heap of slain, attacked Nicostratus and after a mighty fight was defeated, Kleinios and five thousand men of those who were with him being slain. Thus was my vision fulfilled.

Then his Dæmon departed from Nectanebes taking his heart with him, for of a sudden Pharaoh ceased to be a man and, becoming a coward, fled back to Memphis, leaving his fleet, his cities, and their garrisons to their fate.

Rumour ran fast; it told of the fall of city after city, some stormed, some bribed to surrender; it told that Ochus had sworn to burn Memphis and after it Thebes; also to seize Nectanebes and roast him living upon the altar in the great temple of Ptah here at Memphis, or otherwise to make him fight with the bull Apis after the beast had been driven mad by fiery darts. It told that the Egyptians, enraged at the desertion of their armies by Pharaoh, would themselves seize him and give him up to Ochus as a peace-offering. Crowds gathered and rushed through the streets of Memphis calling imprecations on his name, or clustered like bees round the altars of the gods, praying for help in their despair, yes, round the neglected altars of the gods of Egypt.

Then of a sudden came Amenartas, flying to the temple of Isis for sanctuary, since it was reported that Ochus had said that the shrines of Isis he would spare alone, because she was the Mother of all things and her throne was in the moon and her husband was Osiris-Ra who was the Father of fire which he worshipped; also because a certain priestess of the goddess had done him great service in the war, words that caused me to wonder.

So this royal princess came and put on the veil of a novice that it might protect her should Ochus take the city. But though this veil changed her face and form to the eyes of men, her heart it did not change.

A little later came Kallikrates from the war in the Delta where I learned he had done great things, fighting bravely. Indeed he told me himself that he had fought the giant Nicostratus in single combat and wounded him, though the matter was not pressed to an end, since others rushed up and separated them. He said that he was a very terrible man and that when that huge club of his wavered

above him, for the first time in his life he felt afraid. Notwithstanding he ran in beneath the club and stabbed Nicostratus in the shoulder.

Thus it happened that all being lost in war and his service at an end, Kallikrates the captain once more became Kallikrates the priest and again put on the robes of Isis. Therefore in that temple, serving together before its altars were Amenartas, Princess of Egypt, and Kallikrates, priest of Isis.

Often I, Ayesha, seated in my chair of state as first of that holy company, save the aged Noot alone, watched them from beneath my veil while they anointed the statue of the goddess or joined in the sacred chants and hymns of praise. As I watched I noted this—that always they drew near together as though some strength compelled them; that always their glances thrown from the corners of their eyes, met and turned away and met again, and that always, if occasion served, the robe of the one brushed the robe of the other, or the hand of the one touched the hand of the other. These things I noted in silence, wondering what judgment the goddess would call down upon this beauteous pair who dared thus to violate her sanctuary with their earthly passion. Oh! much I wondered, though little did I guess what it would be and by whose hand it was destined to fall upon them.

Lastly came Nectanebes himself, his great eyes full of terror and his fat frame wasted with woe and sleeplessness. He sought audience of me.

“O Prophetess,” he said, “all is lost! Ochus Artaxerxes has his foot upon my neck. I fly, seeking shelter beneath the wings of Isis, seeking shelter from you, O Isis-come-to-earth. Help me, Daughter divine, for my Dæmon has deserted me, or if he comes at all it is but to jibber and to mock.”

“Strange words from Pharaoh,” I answered in a voice of scorn, “very strange words from Pharaoh who gave this same prophetess to be the woman of a vile, Baal-serving king; from Pharaoh who has deserted his army, his country, and his gods, and now seeks only to save his treasure and his life.”

“Reproach me not,” he moaned, “Fate has been too strong for me, as perchance one day it may be too strong for you also. At first all went well. In the bygone years I conquered the Persian; I built temples to the gods. Then of a sudden Fortune hid her face and now—and now!”

“Aye, O fallen Pharaoh,” I answered, “and why did Fortune hide her face? I will tell it, to whom it has been revealed. It was because although you built temples to the gods, you were false to the gods. In secret, following the counsel of that Dæmon of yours, you made bloody sacrifice to devils, to Baal, to Ashtoreth, and to Aphrodite of the Greeks. Nay, do not start and deny, for I know all. Lastly, to crown your crimes, you gave me, the high-prophetess of Isis, to the base, red-handed Tenes, one who offered his own son to idols. What has chanced to Tenes who took me, and say, what shall chance to him who sold me, O Nectanebes no more a Pharaoh?”

Now I thought that surely he would kill me and cared not if he did. For my heart was sore—oh! because of many things my heart was sore. But like a beaten cur he only cowered at my feet, praying me to pardon him, praying me to cease from beating him with my tongue, praying me to counsel him. I listened and pity took hold of me, who was ever tender-minded though a lover of justice and a hater of traitors.

“Hearken,” I said at last. “If Ochus finds you here, O fallen Pharaoh, first he will make a mock of you and then he will torture you to death. I have heard what he will do. He will bring you to his judgment seat and lay you bound upon your back and grind his sandals upon your face. Then he will force you to sacrifice to the fire that he worships and one by one to spit upon the effigies of the gods of Egypt. Lastly, either he will cause the holy bull Apis to gore you to death, or he will bind you upon the altar in the temple of Ptah and there slowly with torments bring you to your end.”

Now when Nectanebes heard these things, he wept and I thought that he would swoon away.

“Hearken,” I said again, “I will show you a road whereby although defeated and disgraced you may yet win glory that shall be told of from age to age. Summon the people while there is yet time. Go to the temple of Ammon, King of the gods of Egypt. Stand before the shrine of Ammon and make confession of your sins in the ears of all. Then, there in the sight of all, slay yourself, praying Ammon and all the gods to accept your life as an offering and to spare Egypt and the people upon whose head you, the hated of the gods, have brought all these woes. So can you cause the Persian and the world to marvel and say that though accursed, still you were great, and so perchance you shall turn away the wrath of heaven from apostate Egypt.”

A flash of pride shone in his eyes that had been empty of light and filled with tears. He lifted his head stiffly as though still it felt the weight of the great earrings of state, the golden uræus, and the double crown. For a moment he looked as once he had done at Sais reviewing his triumphant army after his first victory over the Persians and drinking in the incense of its shouts, yes, he looked as great Thotmes and the proud Rameses might have done in their day, a Pharaoh, the king of all the world he knew.

“It would be well to die thus,” he murmured, “it would be very well, and then, perhaps, the gods I have betrayed would forgive me, the old, old gods to whom thirty dynasties of recorded kings have bowed the knee, and those who went before them for unnumbered generations. Yes, then perhaps that great company of Pharaohs would not turn their backs on me or spit at me when I join them at the table of Osiris. But, Prophetess”—here his face fell in again and his crab-like eyes projected and rolled, while his voice sank to a whisper, “Prophetess, *I dare not.*”

“Why, Nectanebes?”

“Because—oh! because years ago I struck a bargain with a certain Power of the Under-world, a dæmon if you will, at least some spirit of evil that comes I know not whence and dwells I know not where, which became manifest to me. It promised me glory and success if I would sacrifice to it—nay, I will not tell what I sacrificed, but once I had a son, yes, like Tenes I had a son——”

Here I, Ayesha, shivered, then motioned to him to speak on.

“This was the bargain, that though to please the people I might build temples to the gods, by certain means I must defile them in their shrines. Aye, and I did defile them, and when the priest dressed me, the Pharaoh, in the trappings of those gods according to custom, by thought and word and deed I blasphemed them. Yet one divinity remained outside the pact because my Dæmon warned me that she was too strong for him and must not be offended,” and he paused.

“Was she perchance named Isis?” I asked.

“Aye, Prophetess, she was named Isis and therefore I never polluted her shrine and therefore to her alone in my heart I offered prayer. So all went well and I gathered great armies and vast wealth, I hired Greeks by thousands to fight for me, I made alliances with many kings and was sure that again I should defeat the Persians and be the master of the world. Then came the evil hour of that

accursed feast at which you, the Mouth of Isis, were summoned to prophesy and, moved by some madness, you unveiled your beauty before Tenes, and I, forgetting whose minister you were, gave you to Tenes, thereby outraging Isis in your person."

"Did I not warn you, Nectanebes, and did not the holy Noot warn you?"

"Aye, you warned me, but in my need I took the risk, or I forgot. From that moment all went ill and ruin, like a giant before whom none may stand, has hunted me by night and day."

"Yes, Nectanebes, and Isis is the name of that giant."

"I made error upon error," he went on. "I trusted to Tenes and Tenes betrayed me. My Dæmon counselled me to thrust aside the Grecian generals and take command of the armies, and at first there was victory, then came defeat. It might have been retrieved, but of a sudden my courage failed me. It fell like a temple of which the foundations have been washed out by hidden waters. It crashed down; in a moment its proud pylons, its tall columns, its massive, honourable walls blazoned with the records of glorious deeds, fell to a shapeless heap hidden in the dust of shame. I am undone. I am what you see, a loathsome worm, a wounded worm wriggling in the black slime of despair, I who was Pharaoh."

Again pity touched me, Ayesha, and I answered,

"There still remains the road that I have pointed out. While we live, however black our record, repentance is always possible, since otherwise there would be no hope for man the sinner. Moreover, repentance, if it be true, brings amendment in its train, and this god-born pair struggling upward, hand in hand, over cruel rocks, through swamps and streams, through brakes and briars, blinded with tears and the gross darkness of despair, at length see the sweet shape of Forgiveness shining before them like a holy dawn such as never gleams upon this world. Harken, therefore, to one who speaks not with her own voice, or out of the foolishness of her own weak flesh, but as she is commanded of a spirit that is within her. Go to the temple of Ammon and there in the presence of the people make confession of your sins and fall, a sacrifice, upon your sword. Self-murder is a sin, but occasions come when to live on is a greater sin, since it is better to die for others than to cherish breath that poisons them."

"To die! There you speak it, Prophetess. I say again that I dare not die. When I die I pass to the Dæmon. This was the pact: that for my life he should give me success and glory and that in return after death, I should surrender him my soul."

"Is it so?" I answered. "Well, the bargain is ancient, as old as the world, I think; one also that every human being in his degree seals or refuses to seal in this way or in that. Still my counsel holds. This Dæmon of yours has broken his oath, for where now are the success and glory, Nectanebes? Therefore he cannot claim the fulfilment of your own."

"Nay, Prophetess," he answered in a wailing voice, "he has *not* broken it. From the first he told me that I must work no harm to Isis the Mother, since the Queen of Heaven was more powerful than all the denizens of hell, and that if once it were spoken, her Word of Strength would pierce and shrivel him like a red-hot sword and cutting his web of spells, would bring his oaths to nothingness and me with them. And now the web is cut, and I the painted insect that it meshed, fall from it to where the hell-born spider sits in his hole. Prophetess, I have seen him with these eyes, I have seen his orbs of fire, I have seen his snout and fangs like to those of a crocodile, I have seen his great hairy arms and the searching talons stretched out to grip me, and I tell you that I dare not die to be cast into the jaws of the Devourer and burn eternally in his belly of flames. Show me how to save my life, so that I may continue to look upon the sun. Oh! because you are a tender woman and charitable, though I have sinned against you, show me how to save my life."

Now hearing this creature plead with me thus, this coward who at the last did not dare go face the indignant gods like a man, saying, as a great soul should, "I have deeply erred, O ye Gods; I repent, pardon me of your nobility, or slay my soul and make an end," my pity left me and its place was filled with scorn and loathing.

"Those who would live when the Persian dogs are on their heels, must fly fast and far, Nectanebes; they must fly like the deer of the desert on whom the hunters close. The road up Nile is empty, Nectanebes; as yet there are no Persians there. As you would not die, take it and live."

"Aye," he said as the thought went home, "why not? I have still a vast treasure; for many years I have hoarded against misfortune, for who can put all his trust in any Dæmon? With it I can buy friends in the south; with it I may found another empire among the Ethiopians or those of Punt. Why should I not fly, Prophetess?"

"I know not," I answered, "save that Death is always fast and untiring and in the end wears down the swiftest runner."

This I said darkly for at that moment there came into my mind a vision that once I had seen of a certain servile slave, aforetime a Pharaoh, that same royal slave who grovelled before me; yea, a vision of him throttling in a rope while black men mocked him. Yet of that I said nothing, only added,

"If it should please you to go south, Nectanebes, would it please you also to take with you that royal and beautiful lady, Amenartas your daughter, aforetime Princess of Egypt?"

"Nay," he answered sharply, "since hour by hour she scourges me with her tongue because I am fallen. Let her abide here under the veil of Isis. Yet why do you ask this, Prophetess?"

"Because of Isis. Because, as I think, this lady of the royal blood makes play with a certain priest who is sworn to Isis, and the goddess does not love that her vowed servitors should desert her for the sake of mortal woman."

"What priest?" he asked dully.

"A Greek who is named Kallikrates."

"I know him, Prophetess. A very beauteous man, like to their own Apollo; a brave one too who did good service yonder in the marshes, fighting the giant general whom he wounded. Also I remember that in the past he was a captain of my guard before he became a priest and that there was trouble concerning him, though what trouble I forget, save that Amenartas pleaded for him. Well, if he has offended you, there are still those who do my will. Send for him, and if it pleases you, he shall be killed. I give you his life. Yes, his blood shall flow at your feet. Indeed I will command it at once, since you tell me he has shamed the goddess or angered you, her priestess," and he opened his hands to clap them, summoning the messengers of death.

I saw, I thrust my arm between so that they struck not upon each other, but upon my soft flesh, making no sound.

"Nay," I said, "this warrior-priest is a good servant of the Queen Isis, one, moreover, who fought for me, her prophetess, upon the seas. He shall not die for so small a matter. Yet I pray you, Nectanebes, take with you the royal princess Amenartas, when you fly south with your treasure."

"Aye," he answered wearily, "as it is your desire I'll take her if she will come, though if so there will be small rest for me."

Then he went, bowing to me humbly, and this was my farewell to Nectanebes, the last Pharaoh of Egypt. I watched him go and wondered whether I had done well in forbidding him to kill Kallikrates. It came into my mind that the death of this man would save me much trouble. Why should he not die as others did who had sinned against the goddess? An answer rose within me. It was that he had sinned, not only against the goddess, but also against me—and this by preferring another woman before me.

Was I then so feeble that I could not hold my own against another woman should I choose to do so? Nay. Yet my trouble was that I did not choose.

Now I saw the truth. My rebellious flesh desired that which my spirit rejected. My spirit was far from this man, yet my flesh would have him near. Aye, my flesh said: "Let him be slain rather than another should take him," while my spirit answered, "What has he to do with one whose soul is set upon things above? Let him go his way, and go you yours. Above all, be not stained with his blood."

So I let him go, not knowing that it was written in the books of Fate that I *must* be stained with his blood, steeped in it to the eyes. Aye, I saved him from the sword of Nectanebes and let him go, determining to think of him no more.

Yet as it chanced Fate played me an evil trick in this matter. On the morrow, or the next day, I sat in the gloom of the outer sanctuary praying to the goddess to ease me of my sore heart, for alas! strive as I would to hide it, that heart was sore. There came a white-robed priest, Kallikrates himself, but changed indeed from that glorious Grecian warrior who had beat back the boarders on the *Hapi*, or who had fought in single combat with the giant Nicostratus. For now the little golden curls were shaven from his head and he was pale with the thin diet of the fruits of the earth and pure water which alone might pass the lips of those who were sworn to Isis, enough indeed for me who touched no other food, or such a one as the aged Noot, but not for a great-framed man bred to the trade of arms. Moreover, his face was troubled as though with some struggle of the soul.

He passed me unseen and going to the statue of the goddess, knelt down before it and prayed earnestly, perhaps for help and blessing. Rising at length, once more he passed me and I saw that his gray eyes were full of tears and longed to comfort him. Also I saw that still he carried on his hand that ring talisman which I had set there upon the ship *Hapi*, that it might perchance defend him from the evil influences which desire and compass the death of men.

He went out across the pillared court toward the cloister at its end. From this cloister appeared a woman, the dark and beauteous Amenartas herself. This was easy to see since, I know not why, she had put off the veil of Isis and was gloriously attired in the robes of a princess—scanty enough I thought them, for they left bare much of her loveliness—while on her dark and abundant hair shone a golden circlet from which rose the royal uræus, and on her arms and bosom sparkled jewels and necklaces.

They meet by plan, thought I to myself. But it was not so, for seeing her, Kallikrates started and turned to fly; also he covered his eyes with his hand as though to hide her beauty from him. She lifted her face like one who pleads, yes, and when he would not hearken, caught him by the hand and drew him into the shadow of the cloister.

There they remained a long while, for at this hour the place was deserted by all. At length they appeared again on the edge of the shadow and I saw that her arms were about him and that her head rested on his breast. They separated. She vanished into the shadows and went her way, while he walked to and fro across the court, muttering to himself like a man who knows not what he does.

I came from my place and met him, saying,

"Surely you are troubled, Priest. Can it be that the goddess refuses your prayers? Or is it perchance that you weary of them and would still play the part of a warrior of warriors as you did on the galley *Hapi*, or but the other day yonder in the northern marshes? If so, it is too late, Priest, for Egypt is fallen and all is lost. That is, unless, like Mentor and many of your race, you would sell your sword to Ochus Artaxerxes."

"Aye, Prophetess," he answered, "Egypt is lost which, being a Greek, should not trouble me over much, and I too am lost, I, the driven of an evil fate."

"Speak on if it pleases you. Or be silent if it pleases you, O Priest. What the prophetess hears, she tells only to the Mother."

Then I turned and went back into the shadow of the shrine where I leaned against a pillar—I remember that on it was sculptured the scene of Thoth weighing hearts before Osiris. Here I waited, wondering whether he would follow me or go his ways.

For a while he stood hesitating, but at length he followed me.

"Prophetess," he said hoarsely, "I speak under the veil of Isis, knowing that such confessions cannot be revealed. Yet it is hard to speak, since the matter has to do with woman, aye, and with yourself, most holy Prophetess."

"In Isis I have no self," I answered.

"Prophetess, in bygone years, as I think you know, I learned to love a royal maiden, one set far above me, and it seems that she loved me. That passion brought a brother's blood upon my hands, as you also know. I fled to the goddess, seeking peace and forgiveness. For in me I think there are two selves, the self of my body and the self of my soul."

"As in most that breathe beneath the sun," I answered, sighing.

"I was bred a soldier, one who came from a race of soldiers, men of high blood and good to look upon, as once I was, though in this garb few would guess it."

"I have seen you wearing war-harness and can guess," I answered, smiling a little.

"That soldier-self, Prophetess, was as are others of the breed. I drank and I revelled, I bowed the knee to Aphrodite, loving women and for an hour being loved. I fought, not without honour. Then seeking advancement, with my brother I entered the service of Pharaoh, and of that story doubtless you know the rest."

I bowed my head and he went on,

"I came to Philæ, I made confession, I took the first vows. At night and alone I was led to the sanctuary, there to see the vision of the goddess. I saw that vision glowing in the darkened shrine, and oh! it was glorious."

Here I started and watched him narrowly, wondering how much he knew or guessed.

"Something took hold of me, Prophetess, for now I beheld her whom all my soul adored, her with whom it would be united. It was as though a memory came to me from afar, a memory and a promise. That Power which took hold of me caused me to bend my head as though to kiss the vision and thereby pledge my soul to the divine. The vision also bent its head and our lips met, and lo! hers were like to those of mortal woman, yet sweeter far."

"The Mother is mistress of all shapes, Priest. Yet think not that she forgets the pledge that thus it pleased her to accept. From that moment you were sworn to her, and doubtless in a day to come, in this form or in that, she will claim you—should you remain true to her, O Priest."

"The years passed," he went on, "and true I remained. Fate brought me here to Memphis and in this temple I saw you, holy Prophetess, and learned to worship you from afar, not with the body, but with the spirit; since to me you were and are what the vulgar call you, *Isis-come-to-Earth*, and the sight of you ever put me in mind, as it does to-day, of that divine vision whose lips met mine in the shrine at Philæ. Perchance you never knew it, but thus with my spirit I worshipped you."

Now I, Ayesha, remained silent, leaning against the pillar, for weakness took hold of me who felt as though I were about to fall. Yet—and let the vengeful gods write this to my honour—yet I made him no sign that I was she who had played the part of Isis in the sanctuary.

"It is well," I said presently, "and doubtless at the appointed hour the goddess will thank you. But what then is your trouble, Priest? To love a goddess with the spirit is no crime."

"Aye, Prophetess. But what if he who loves the goddess with his spirit and is sworn to her alone for ever in a vow of perpetual chastity, should love a woman with his flesh and thus betray both heaven and his own soul?"

"Then, Priest," I answered, speaking very low, "I fear that he is one whose hope of forgiveness is but small. Yet for those who repent and deny, there is pardon. Only they must deny, they must deny while there is still time."

"Easy to say and hard to do," he answered, "at least for him who has to deal with one that will not be denied; with one who holds his heart in the hollow of her hand and crushes it; with one whose eyes are like star-beacons to which the wanderer must fly; with one whose breath is as roses and whose lips are as honey; with one who can drive the desires of man as a racer drives his chariot; with one to whom oaths also have been sworn, such oaths as the youth swears to the maid in the first madness of the flesh, decreed by those who made it. Goddesses are far away, but woman is near; moreover, among men there is a law which even a prophetess may understand, which says that oaths vowed with the lips may not be broken to benefit the vower's soul."

"These are ancient arguments," I answered; "from age to age they echo from the roofs of the temples of Aphrodite and of Ashtoreth, but Isis knows them not. The flesh is given to mankind that its wearers may learn to scorn and trample it; the spirit is given to mankind that its holders may learn to rise upon its wings. Woe to those who choose the flesh and reject the spirit. Repentance is still possible, and after it comes amendment and after amendment, forgiveness."

He brooded awhile, then said,

"Prophetess, I repent who above all things desire at the end—that end which again and again I have sought in battle wherever it has passed me by—to be united with the goddess, shaped like the divine one whom I saw in the shrine at Philæ. Yes, with her and with no other. But how can I amend who am a lion in a net, a net woven of woman's hair?"

Now I searched him with my eyes and learned that although so sore beset, this man spoke nothing but the truth. Then I answered,

"The wise bird flies the snare which it sees spread in its sight. To-morrow at the dawn Noot the Holy sails north to meet certain ambassadors of the Persians and if he can make terms, to ransom the temples of Isis from the rage of Ochus. Will you go with him, breathing no word of his purpose or of yours? If so, perchance thus at last you shall find that goddess whose lips met yours at Philæ, here—or elsewhere."

He thought awhile, then muttered,

"It is hard, very hard, yet I will go; I who would satisfy my soul and not my flesh."

As he spoke a tall priestess flitted past us, passing from shadow into shadow, but thinking that she was one of those whose duty it was to watch the inner shrine at this hour, I took no note of her. Nor did Kallikrates, lost in his own thoughts, so much as see her.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE BEGUILING OF BAGOAS

THAT night Noot my master came to bid farewell to me.

"I go north as I have been commanded—as to how the command came, let that be—hoping thereby to preserve the temples of our worship and those who serve in them. I know not if I shall return, or when, and therefore, Daughter of my spirit, it grieves me to part from you in these troublous times. Yet the command said that you must not accompany me but bide here. For your comfort, learn two things: first, that no harm shall come to you, as I have told you before; and secondly, though that hour be far away, even in the flesh we shall meet again. Wait then till my word comes to you."

I bowed my head in obedience and asked whether he was unattended.

"Nay, Daughter," he answered. "I take with me certain of our fellowship, and among them that Greek Kallikrates who has asked leave to accompany me. Being a man of war, as you have seen, he may perchance prove of service upon such a mission. How he learned that I was going I cannot say," he added, looking at me curiously.

"I told him. Ask no more, Master."

"There is little need, I think," he answered, smiling. "It may please you to learn," he added bitterly, "that the traitor who was Pharaoh, flies up Nile to-morrow ere the dawn. Already they lade his ship with the chests of Egypt's treasure, many of them, that should have gone to pay his soldiers and strengthen his allies."

"May the counting of them comfort him in his honourable exile among the Ethiopians! Yet, my Master, I think that he will need to count quickly, unless it pleased the gods to send a false vision to me when I prophesied in the palace yonder, ere this shameless Nectanebes gave the Daughter of Isis to Tenes the Sidonian."

"If so, Ayesha, the gods sent a false vision to me also. How will he face them, I wonder, with the blood of Egypt on his hands, and with what voice will he tell them of their desecrated shrines?"

"I know not, Master, yet it was written that because of her apostasies and sins Egypt must fall. Can the gods, then, be wroth with their own instrument?"

Noot pondered awhile, shaking his head, then answered,

"Go ask that question of the Sphinx who sits yonder in the sand by the pyramids of the ancient kings brooding, as the legend says, over the secrets of earth and heaven. Or," he added slowly, "when your own days are done, Ayesha, ask it of your soul. Perchance then some god will make clear the riddle of the world below, but here on earth it cannot be answered, since he who could read it would know all things and be himself a god. Sin must come, and to sin, sinners are necessary. But to what sin is necessary, I do not know, unless it be that from it good is born at last. At least the sinner can plead that he is but an arrow on the bow of Destiny and that the arrow must fly where the shooter aims, even though it drinks innocent blood, widows women, and makes children fatherless."

"Mayhap, my Master, it will be answered to this arrow that it fashioned itself to deal out death; that it grew the wood and forged the barb and bound upon its shaft the feathers of desire; which wood, had it chosen otherwise, here or elsewhere might have flourished—a tree bearing fruits—or as seasoned wood, shaped itself to be a staff to lean upon or a rod of justice in the hands of kings."

"You are wise, Ayesha, nor have I instructed you in vain," he replied with a gentle smile. "Yet I repeat, when for the last time you watch the sun sink and your soul prepares to follow it over the edge of the world, then again propound to it this riddle and hear the answer of that invisible Sphinx which broods in the heaven above, on the earth below, and in the breast of every child it bears."

Thus he spoke and waved his hand, making an end of that debate. Nor have I ever forgotten it, or his words, and now when sometimes I feel or hope soon I, even I, the half-immortal, may see the sun sink for the last time, once more, as Noot commanded, I ask this riddle of the Sphinx that broods within my instructed spirit, and wait its answer. For alas and alas! how am I better than Nectanebes? He betrayed the gods. Have I not betrayed the gods who were nearer to me than ever they came to his coarse and gluttonous soul? He shed blood to satisfy his rage and lust. Have I not shed blood and shall I not perchance shed more of it before all is done, when my unconquerable appetites are on me and there is a dear prize that I would win? He fled with the treasures of Egypt to waste them in the desert sand. Have I not fled with the treasures that were given me—with the jewelled crowns of my wisdom, with the golden talents of my heaped-up learning, with the alabaster vessel of my beauty, with the perfumes of my power and my eloquence—that drilled, ordered, and massed together, and added to the greatest gift of all, my length of undying days, might have reformed the world and led it into peace?

Have I, Ayesha, not fled with all these countless splendours clasped upon my breast, and buried them in the wilderness, as did Nectanebes with Egypt's wealth, before the barbarians slew him? Have I not done these things because of a great desire and because, robbed of that desire, the world I should have guided was gall to my tongue and gravel to my teeth? Yet was I to blame? Was not that blind man I loved to blame who could not see with his darkened, fleshly eyes the glory that lay within his grasp and thus stirred my soul to madness? Was not the woman to blame also who darkened those eyes of his by arts the evil gods had given her?

Oh! I know not. Perchance they too can put up a tale before the Judgment Seat which I shall find it hard to answer, for they too are as they were made, or as they made themselves, shaping their own arrows from the wood of circumstance that grew I know not where. And now my desire has drawn near to me again; it gleams, a glittering fruit, upon the Tree of Life, and I stretch out my hand to pluck it. Yes, I stand on tiptoe and almost reach it with my finger-tips. Yet what if it prove a corruption? What if it crumble into dust, rotted by the great sun of my spirit, withered at the fingering of my undying hand?

Oh! my lord hunts upon the mountain after the fashion of men, and Atene, once named Amenartas, sits in her dark beauty in the City of the Plains and, as aforetime, plots my ruin and her fleshly theft. Who knows the end? But there within my soul broods the Sphinx smiling its immortal smile and to it soon or late I must put that question to which Noot, the holy and half divine, could give no answer—or would not if he could.

"What of the royal Princess, Amenartas?" I asked. "Know, Master, that I grow weary of this woman."

"Aye, Daughter, these temple courts are wide, but not wide enough for both of you. Take comfort, she sails to-morrow."

"North?" I asked.

"Nay, south with her father, Nectanebes. Or so she tells me, saying that his fortune shall be her own and that together they will reign or fall."

"It is well," I answered.

Then we talked of humble matters that had to do with the shrine of the goddess and of the hiding away of her treasures lest the Persians should take them. When all was finished, Noot rose, blessed me, calling on the Powers above to protect me, and went his ways in the ship *Hapi* which he had purchased to bring it to my aid at Sidon, nor did I guess that for years I should see him no more. Yet I think he knew it well.

Like a mighty river in its flood the Persian hosts poured down on Memphis. As such a torrent sweeps away the village and the humble homestead, drowns the cattle, twists out the palm trees by their roots, covers the corn with slime, floods cities, palaces, and temples, chokes the breath from their inhabitants and strews the kind earth with the corpses of those that tilled it, so did Ochus and his barbarians to Egypt. Rapine and massacre, flames of fire and misery marked their path. Men were butchered by the thousand, the aged and women who were no longer fair were driven into the desert to starve. Yes, it was the sport of those Persians to drive them like game to where there was no water, and then watch them die of thirst beneath the burning sun. Only the young women were spared to be concubines or slaves, and the flower of the children to be put to vile purposes. The cities and the temples were pillaged, their citizens tortured to drag from them the secret of the hiding-places of treasure, the priests were forced to sacrifice to the god of fire and to spit upon their own or die, the priestesses were burned or defiled, or both.

So pitiful was the case of Egypt that although I knew that by her sins and faithlessness she had brought these woes upon herself, I who by my work at Sidon had become one of the appointed ministers of her destruction, my heart wept for her and I prayed the avenging gods to hold their hands. Also I prayed them to give Ochus to drink of his own cup and to make of me the butler who mixed his wine. Nor did I pray in vain.

Thus the red Ochus came at length to Memphis, the white-walled city, the ancient, the holy, and filled its streets with horror, till they were spread thick with dead and one wail of woe went up to heaven. Yet he did not burn the place, perchance because our prayers availed and the gods relented, perchance because he wished to keep it to be the seat of his majesty. Only here as elsewhere he sacked the temples and wrought sacrilege.

From the pylon top of the temple of Isis that overlooked the courts of that of Ptah and the gilded stable of the bull Apis, with my own eyes I saw the Persians, for in this business the Greeks would have no hand, drag out the sacred beast whom they held to be a god of the Egyptians, though in truth he was but the emblem of the god, or rather of the generating power that is in Nature, and butcher it with jeers and mockery. More, their scullions came and cooked the sacred flesh after which, at tables spread in the inner court, Ochus and his captains ate it, forcing the priests of Ptah to "taste of their own god" and to drink of the liquor in which it had been seethed. They were cowards, those priests, or surely they would have found means to mix the broth with poison.

After the feast, when all the revellers were drunk with wine, a great jackass was brought and, the statue of the god having been thrown out of it, was stabled in the sanctuary.

Such were some of the things that were done in Memphis and indeed throughout Egypt, for as Apis was served, so was the holy ram of Mendes. Moreover, other things were done too shameful to record.

Now all this while I sat in the temple of Isis awaiting what might befall. I will not say that I was unafraid, because I was afraid. Yet within me was that proud spirit which forbade me to show my fear. Moreover, within me also burned a certain fire of faith whereof the light was my guide in the darkness of despair. The holy Noot, my Master, had told me that I and those with me should take no harm, and I would not doubt my Master. Moreover, when I prayed at night, a voice from heaven speaking in my heart seemed to command me to be brave, since there fought for me and mine those whom I could not see.

So there I sat quite alone with none to counsel me and none to help me, giving courage as best I could to those poor priests and priestesses, my fellow servants of the goddess. The worship of the temple went on as before, each morn the statue of the Mother was decked and dressed, the perfumes were poured, the offerings were made, the processions wound round the courts preceded by the singers and the shakers of the *sistrum*, while at night the holy hymns were chanted to the stars.

The Persians came to know of these things and gathered at the gates, amazed.

"Who are these," they asked, "who have no fear?"

But we answered nothing though death stared us in the face.

The matter reached the ears of Ochus and stirred his wonder, so that in the end he came in person to visit the temple. I received him in the great hall, veiled and seated in a chair of state that was set at the foot of a statue of the goddess. With him were sundry of his great lords dressed in silks and perfumed, also the general Mentor whom I had known at Sidon where he played traitor, deserting with his Greeks to the Persians. Further there was present Bagoas the eunuch and first councillor of the King of kings, who commanded his army also; like all these unfortunates, a fat, shrill-voiced man with a smooth and furtive manner, who waved his long hands to and fro when he spoke.

Now this Bagoas was by birth Egyptian; so I had heard, and my first sight of him confirmed the tale. Yes, without doubt by birth he was an Egyptian of the small-boned, large-eyed, round-headed type that had descended from the ancient blood, as I knew by the statues of many that I have seen taken from the earliest tombs before it became the custom to embalm the dead. I noted this, and at once a thought came to me.

Would an Egyptian desire to see the sanctuary of Isis and her priests desecrated and destroyed? Perchance he did not worship Ptah or Apis, or other of the gods, but all born upon the Nile venerated Mother Isis, the Queen of Heaven, and bowed to her sovereignty. That was a faith which where'er they wandered and upon whatever altars they burned incense, they never could forget, because through a hundred generations it came down to them with their blood. Yet who knew? This Bagoas, it was said, was a

cunning fellow steeped in murder, who from his crimes had reaped a rich reward, and such an one, looking only to his day of glory, might forget even Isis and the wrath to come.

Ochus, loose-lipped, cruel-faced, and weary-eyed, wearing a look of pride that yet was full of haunting terrors, such as are ever the companions of murderers who know that in a day unborn surely themselves they will be murdered, stood before me. I, rising from my chair, made obeisance to the King of kings—and had he but known it, cast the curse of Isis at him from beneath my veil.

“What is this?” he asked, speaking in Greek, in the thick voice of one who has drunk well at the feast, and pointing at me with his sceptre. “Is it one of those wrapped bodies that we drag from the tombs, such as we used for the cooking of the god Apis, broiling him with his own worshippers? Nay, for it moves and talks and seems to have the shape of woman. Bagoas, strip that veiled thing naked, that we may see whether it be a woman, and if so, of what favour.”

Now when I, Ayesha, heard this, at once all my courage came back to me, as ever it does when peril gets me by the throat. At once I laid my plan, which was short and simple.

If that eunuch so much as advanced to lay a finger on me, I would draw the knife that hung to my girdle, the curved, razor-edged Arab knife that had been my father’s, and thrusting him aside, I would spring past him and strike it through the heart of yonder King of kings, sending him to sum up his account with Isis. Then if there were time, I would serve Bagoas in the same way, and afterward, if must be, use the knife upon myself. Better thus than that I should be shamed before these barbarians.

I spoke no word and my face was hid, yet I think that out of my soul sprang something which warned these two of their danger. Or perchance it was my guardian spirit that warned them. At the least Bagoas went down upon his knees and bowed till his forehead touched the ground.

“O King of kings,” he said, “I pray thee command not thy slave to do this deed. Yonder lady is the prophetess of Isis, Queen of all gods, Queen of Heaven and Earth, and to touch her with an unhallowed hand is a sacrilege that brings death in this world and in that to come everlasting torment.”

Now Ochus laughed brutally, then turned and asked,

“What do you say, Mentor, who are a Greek and know no more of the gods of Egypt than I do? Is there any reason why we should not strip this veiled priestess and discover what she is like beneath those wrappings?”

Now Mentor rubbed his brow and answered,

“Since I am asked, O King of kings, one does come into my mind. Do you remember Tenes, King of the Sidonians? He took this same prophetess as a gift from Nectanebes, and also wished to strip her in his fashion. Well, Tenes came to a very bad end, and so did Nectanebes who gave her to him, or is in the way of it. Therefore, O King of kings, were I in your place, I should advise that she remain veiled, who perhaps after all is but an ugly old woman. I have known little of Isis, still she is a goddess with a great name and perchance it is scarcely worth while to risk her wrath to look at the wrinkled flesh of an ugly old woman. One never knows, O King of kings, and I have seen so much of it of late that I come to learn that death, with the curse of Heaven thrown in, is a bad business.”

Thus spoke Mentor in his bluff, rambling, soldier talk, that yet was so full of Grecian cunning, and Ochus, appearing suddenly to grow sober, listened to him.

“I seem to remember,” Ochus said, “that this same priestess served me well yonder at Sidon, giving the Phœnician dog, Tenes, counsel that led him down to ruin. So at least the tale runs. Therefore, not because of the Egyptian goddess whom I despise,” and he spat on the statue of Isis, an act at which I saw Bagoas shiver, “or for the reasons that you fools give, but because by design or chance, I know not which, she served me well at Sidon, let her continue to wear her veil. I command also that this temple, which is beautiful in its fashion, shall not be burned or harmed, and that those who serve it may continue to dwell there and carry on their mad worship as it pleases them, provided that they stay within its walls and do not attempt to stir up the people by pageantry in the streets. In token thereof I stretch out my sceptre,” and he held the ivory-headed wand he carried toward me.

Bagoas whispered to me that I must touch it, so I thrust my arm between the folds of my veil and did so, though next instant I remembered that it would have been wiser to grasp the wand from beneath the veil.

At once Ochus noted the beauty of that arm and exclaimed with a laugh,

“By the holy fire! yonder hand and wrist are not those of an ugly old woman, such as was spoken of by you slaves, but rather those of one who is still young and fair. Had I seen them but a moment gone, surely she should have been stripped. Indeed——”

“I have touched the sceptre of the Great King,” I broke in coldly. “Once the sceptre has been touched the decree of the Great King may not be altered.”

“Wise also,” said Ochus, “for she knows our Persian laws. Well, she is right. The sceptre has been touched and what has been said cannot be changed. See now, all of you who are ignorant, how good a shield is wisdom. Come, Mentor, let us be going to make sport with those young priestesses of Ammon who, not being wise, but only pretty, await us in the palace. It will be a merry night. Bagoas, bide you here, lest you should be shocked,” and he laughed brutally, “also to inquire whether this heavenly harlot called Isis decks herself with jewels, for if so, as to them I swore no oath. Farewell, Priestess. Continue to be wise and to wear a veil, because if the rest of you is as shapely as your hand, who knows but that some night when wine has drowned all promises, I, or others, might cause you to be stripped at last.”

Then he turned and went, followed by his foul company. Only Bagoas remained behind as he had been bidden.

When the doors had closed and by the shouts from without the walls I knew that the Persians were gone, I said to Bagoas, who was alone with me in the place,

“Tell me, Egyptian, cradled beneath the wings of Isis, are you not afraid?” and I turned my head, glancing at the vile stain upon the alabaster statue.

“Aye, Prophetess,” he answered, “I am afraid, as much afraid as you were but now.”

“Fool!” I mocked back at him, “I was not afraid. Ere ever a hand had been laid upon me by you, you would have been dead, and that king whom you serve would have been dead also—ask me not how—and by now your souls would be writhing beneath the hooks of the Tormentors of the Under-world. Have you not heard of the curse of Isis, Eunuch, and do you think that your pomp and power can protect you from her swift sword? Now, *now*, should I but breathe one prayer to her, she can slay you if she wills.”

He quaked, he fell upon his knees; yes, this murderer of kings fell upon his knees before me, one veiled woman in a shrine, imploring me to spare him and to protect him from the wrath of Heaven. For in his soul Bagoas was still Egyptian, and the blood of his forefathers who had worshipped Isis for a thousand years still ran strong in him. Moreover, he feared me, the priestess whose fame he knew, as he knew the fate of those who had offended me.

"Forgiveness! Protection! Methinks these must be most dearly bought, Bagoas. Are you one of those who have eaten the flesh of Apis and dragged the virgins of Ammon from their sanctuary? Are you one of those who have stabled an ass in the temple of Ptah, have burned the ancient fanes and have butchered the priests upon their altars?"

"Alas! I am," he said, beating his breast, "but not of my own will. What I did I must do, or die."

"It may be so. Make your own peace with those gods if you can. I have little to do with them who serve the Supreme Mother. But for her what atonement?" and again I glanced at the foul stain upon the alabaster of the image.

"That is what I need to be told. What atonement, Prophetess? I will swear that there are no jewels here; that the Mother is decked only with flowers and with perfumes. I will guard this shrine so that never again a Persian sets foot within its walls. I will cause any who offend you, Prophetess, to die secretly and at once. Is it enough?"

"Nay, nor by a hundredth part. You would spare the ceremonial trappings of the Mother, but where is vengeance upon him who defiled her with his spittle? You would protect the priestess, but where is vengeance upon him who would have stripped her stark to be his sport and that of his barbarians? If that is all you have to offer, Bagoas, take the Mother's curse and that of her Oracle, and get you down to hell." Here Bagoas lifted his hand as though to protect his head and began to protest, but without heeding him I went on,

"Hurry not, linger as long as you will upon the road. Deck yourself like a woman with brodered robes, perfume yourself with scents; set chains about your neck and jewels upon your fingers. Pander to the lusts you cannot share and take your pay in gold and provinces. Poison those you hate and from pure children wring out their lives, because these stand between you and the fruit of some new phantasy. Glut yourself with the swine's food of earth, swell yourself out with the marsh-gas of power, and then, Bagoas, die! die! one year, ten years, fifty years hence, and get you down to hell and look upon the awful eyes of the goddess you have shamed, of her whom your forefathers worshipped from the beginning, and wait the coming of her priestess, that with every merciless particular she may lay the count against you from the pavement of the Judgment Hall."

"What, then, shall I do? What shall I do to save my soul? Know, Priestess, that I who am maimed in my body would save my soul, and that all these gauds you count are but gall and ashes to me; for having nought else to gain—being robbed of wives and children I needs must seek them and thus drug the spirit that is within me. Oh! it is something—being what I am, that I should feel the necks of all these great ones writhing beneath my foot. Yes," here his voice dropped to a whisper, "even that of the King of kings himself, who forgets that there were other Kings of kings before him. Tell me—what must I do?"

Secretly I drew the curved knife at my girdle; secretly and unwinning, unseen of him, I gashed my arm—oh! I cut deep, for I can see the mark to-day, though this fair flesh of mine once seemed to perish in the immortal fire, but to re-arise elsewhere. The blood from a severed vein leaped forth and stained my veil, a little mark at first which grew and grew, till it cried of murder. The man's eyes fastened themselves upon the prodigy, for so he thought it; then he asked,

"Blood! *Whose* blood?"

"Perchance that of the wounded goddess. Perchance that of a shamed priestess. What does it matter, Bagoas?"

"Blood," he went on, "for what does the blood ask?"

"Perchance it cries to Heaven for vengeance; perchance it demands to be washed away with other blood, Bagoas. Who am I that I should interpret parables?"

Now he understood, and struggling from his knees, bent forward whispering in my ear. Yes, the priceless jewels that hung from his pointed golden cap jingled against my ear.

"I understand," he said, "and be sure it shall be done. But not yet. It cannot be yet. Still I swear that it shall be done when the hour is ripe. I hate him! I say that I hate him who while he showers gifts upon me with his hands, mocks me with his tongue, and who, when by my wit I win victories for him, jeers at the soldiers who are led by one who is neither man nor woman. Yes, I hate him who, knowing that I am of Egypt and in my heart a worshipper of the gods of Egypt, forces me to desecrate their shrines and to butcher those who serve them. Oh! I swear that it shall be done in its season."

"By what, O Bagoas?"

"By this, Prophetess," and seizing the dripping veil he rubbed that which stained it upon his lips and brow, "I swear by the blood of Isis, or of her Priestess and Oracle in whom Isis is, that I will neither rest nor stay till I bring Ochus Artaxerxes to his doom. Years may go by, but still I will bring him to his doom—at a price."

"What price?" I asked.

"That of absolution, Priestess, which is yours to give."

"Aye, it is mine to give or to withhold. Yet I give it not until Ochus lies dead, and by your hand. Then I call it down from Heaven—not before."

"At least protect me till that hour, O Daughter of the Queen of Heaven."

From the necklace I wore beneath my veil I loosed a certain charm of power, the secret symbol of the Queen herself, worked cunningly in jasper, and known only to the initiate. This I breathed upon and blessed.

"Take it," I said, "and wear it on your heart. It shall protect you from all ills while your heart is true. But if once that heart turns from its purpose; aye! even if it fail to accomplish its purpose, then this holy token shall bring all ills upon you, here and hereafter, Bagoas. For then upon your doomed head shall fall the curse of the goddess that even now hangs suspended over it, as in the Grecian fable the sword of Damocles hangs by its single hair. Take it and be gone, to return no more till you come to tell me that Ochus Artaxerxes treads that same road upon which he has set so many feet."

Bagoas took the talisman and pressed it on his brow, as though it had been the very signet of the King of kings, and hid it away about him. Then he prostrated himself before me, who sat upon a greater throne, that of the Queen of queens, prostrated himself till his forehead touched the ground beneath my feet. Then rising, without another word, Bagoas withdrew himself with humble obeisances till he reached the doors where he vanished from my sight. When the man had gone I, Ayesha, laughed aloud, I who had played a great game and won it. Yes, I laughed aloud; then, having purified the statue of the goddess and burnt incense before it, I went upon my knees and returned my humble thanks to that just Heaven of which I was the minister.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PLOT AND THE VOICE

THE weary years went by. Ochus returned to Persia, bearing his spoils with him and leaving one Sabaco, a brutal fellow, to rule Egypt and wring tribute from her.

All this while I, Ayesha, sat alone, quite alone, in the temple of Isis at Memphis whose walls I never left, for the command of Ochus was obeyed and whatever happened to those of other gods, the shrine of Isis was left inviolate. Here, then, surrounded by a dwindling company of priests and priestesses, I remained, as Noot, my Master, had commanded me to do, awaiting a word that never came, and carrying on the ceremonies of the temple in such humble fashion as our poverty allowed.

What did I through all that slow and heavy time? I dreamed, I communed with Heaven above, I studied the ancient lore of Egypt and of other lands, growing ever wiser and as full of knowledge as a new-filled jar with perfume or with wine. Yet of what use was this knowledge to me? As it seemed, of none. Yet it was not so, since my heart fed on it like a bee upon its winter store of honey, and without it I should have died, as the bee must die. Moreover, now I understand that this space of waiting was a preparation for those long centuries which afterward I was doomed to pass in the tombs of Kôr. It was a training and a discipline of the soul.

Thus forgotten of the world I brooded and endured, I who had thought to rule the world.

So moon added itself to moon, and, still filled with a divine patience, I abode within those temple walls till the appointed hour, which I knew would dawn at last. Of Nectanebes I heard nothing; he had vanished away—I doubted not to the doom which I had foreseen. Of Amenartas, his daughter, I heard nothing, she also had vanished away, as I supposed with him. Of Kallikrates, the soldier priest, I heard nothing. Doubtless he was dead and that beauty of his had turned to evil-odoured dust as my own must do, a thought from which I shrank.

Much I wondered why this man alone upon the earth should have stirred my soul and awakened the longings of my woman's flesh. I knew not, unless it was agreed that when the gates were passed I should meet him in a world that lies beyond, if such there were. For from the beginning I was sure that it had been laid upon me to lift up his spirit to the level of my own, perchance because in some far-off star or state I had sinned against it and him and dragged them down.

Indeed is not this the common lot of the great, that with toil and tears and bitter disappointment they must strive to draw the spirits of others to that high peak upon which themselves they stand? And amongst all the sins of our vile condition, is there one blacker than to cast back some soul that struggles toward the pure and good into the seething depths of ill?

Thus in those days I thought of that lost Kallikrates whose lips alone had touched my own. I thought, too, with a sad wonderment, how strange it was that I to whose feet men had crept by scores, I the most beautiful of women and the most learned, had been rejected, or at the least turned from by this man, the favourer of another, who although she was fair and bold of heart, still shone with a smaller light, as does the pale moon when compared with the glory of the sun.

Indeed, now that all was over and done, as I believed, and that nought remained of these fires of folly save a pinch of burnt-out ash, I smiled to myself as I remembered them. Yet to tell truth, I smiled sadly, who here alone at the dear feast of love which, to a woman, means more than all other feasts, had been served with the cups of defeat and shame by the grinning varlet, Destiny. Yet I was well served, for what had I, Wisdom's Daughter, the vowed to eternal glory, to do with such matters of our common flesh?

Oh! I was glad to have done with the gray-eyed Kallikrates, who could wield a sword so manly-well in battle, and yet, when remorse took hold of him, could pray with the best of priests. Now at least once more I was the mistress of my own soul with leisure to shape it to the likeness of the gods and, in those days of holy contemplation, truly its wings beat against their bars, struggling to be free. Would that they had burst them, but Fate had built that cage too strong.

At length news came to me, for Isis still had eyes and ears in Egypt and all that these saw or heard I learned, news that Ochus, grown timid or weary in his Persian palace, had determined once more to drink the waters of the Nile, or perchance to check the accounts of his satrap Sabaco whose sum of tribute had fallen off of late.

So he came with all his Eastern pomp and at last took up his abode in the palace of Memphis within two bowshots of the temple where I dwelt. The people received him with rejoicings; it was pitiful to see them decking themselves and the streets with flowers, spreading branches of palm for him to tread on, and flying banners from the lofty tops of the fire-scorched pylons—slaves welcoming their torturer and tyrant and grinning to hide the terror in their hearts. He came, and there was festival throughout the great town as though Osiris had returned to earth, accompanied by all the lesser gods.

Only in the temple of Isis there was none. No palm leaves decked its stark and ancient walls, no bonfires burned within its courts, and no lanterns hung in its window-places. Not thus would I, Ayesha, bow the knee to Baal or sacrifice to Moloch, though it is true that some of my servants looked askance when I forbade it and asked who would protect us from the wrath of the King of kings because of this neglect of his command.

"The goddess will protect us," I answered, "or if she does not, I will," and sent them to their tasks.

On the second night after the coming of Ochus, Bagoas waited on me and I commanded that he should enter, but alone. So his Eastern rabble of gorgeous servitors was turned back from the gates and he came in unattended, splendid in gold-embroidered silk and jewels. Where he had left me, there I received him, seated veiled in the chair of state before the alabaster statue of the goddess, at the entrance to the outer sanctuary that overlooked the great hall.

"Hail! Bagoas," I said, "how goes it with you? Has that amulet of power which I gave to you protected you from harm?"

"Prophetess," he answered, bowing, "it has protected me. It has lifted me up so that now, save for the King of kings, my master most august," he added with a sneer in every word, "I am now the greatest one in the whole world. I give life, I decree death. I lift up, I cast down; satraps and councillors crawl about my feet; generals beg my favour; gold is showered upon me. Yea, I might build my house of gold. There is nought left for me to desire beneath the sun."

"Except certain things to which, thanks to the cruelty of the King of kings, or those who went before him, you cannot attain? For example, children to inherit all this glory and all this gold, Bagoas, although you live among so many of those who might be mothers."

He heard, and his face, that I noted had grown thinner and more fierce since last I saw him, became like to that of the devil.

"Prophetess," he hissed, "surely you are one who knows how to pour acid into an open wound."

"That thereby it may be cleansed, Bagoas."

"Yet your words are true," he went on, unheeding. "All this splendour, all this wealth and power I would give, and gladly, to be as my fathers were before me, gently bred but humbly owners of a patch of land between Thebes and Philæ. There they sat for a score of generations with their women and their children. But where, thanks to the Persians, are *my* women and *my* children? In the western cliff yonder there is a sepulchre. In the chapel of that sepulchre above the coffins of those who lie beneath is an image of him who dug it. He lived some fourteen hundred years ago in the days of Aahmes, he who won back Egypt from the Hyksos kings, the invaders who held it as the Persians do to-day. For he was one of the captains of the troops of Aahmes who, when he conquered, gave him that patch of land in guerdon for his service."

Here Bagoas paused like to one overwhelmed by unhappy memories, then continued,

"From age to age, Prophetess, it has been the custom for the children of this soldier upon a certain day to make offerings to that statue, wherein, as we hold, dwells the *Ka* of him whose face and form it pictures; to set a golden crown, that of Osiris, upon its head, to wind a golden chain about its neck; to give it food, to give it flowers. Such is the sacred duty, from generation to generation, of the descendants of that captain who served Aahmes and helped to free Egypt from the barbarian foe. Myself I have fulfilled that duty, aye, when Ochus the Destroyer first came to Memphis, I travelled up Nile and placed the crown upon the head and wound the chain about the neck, and offered the flowers and the food. But, Prophetess, of this blood I am the last, for because of my beauty as a child the Persian seized me and made of me a dry tree, so that never again will there be one to make offering in the tomb of my forefather, the captain of Aahmes, or to read the story of his deeds that fourteen hundred years ago, while yet living, he caused to be recorded upon his funeral tablet."

I heard and laughed.

"A common tale," I said, "a very common tale in Egypt to-day, the Egypt of the Persians, as doubtless it was long ago in the Egypt of the Hyksos. But this ancestor of yours was a man who smote, or helped to smite, the Hyksos and lived to write his glorious deeds on stone to be an example to those who came after him. Well, the story is finished, is it not? Indeed I wonder that the glorious Bagoas, slave of the Persian, Bagoas with his pomp and pleasures, thinks fit to waste time upon the tale of a forgotten warrior who in his hour struck for freedom. What are the flowers and the humble scents which for more than a thousand years have been offered to the spirit of that warrior, but now can never be offered again since there are none of his blood left to bring them, compared to the priceless balms, the jewels and the gold, that daily are poured upon the feet of Bagoas, the Chief Eunuch and Counsellor of the King of kings, who, did he know of those holy ones that sleep in the tomb of the race of Bagoas, doubtless would drag them out and cause Bagoas, the last of its blood, to fire them, that he might see a merry blaze? That would be a good sport for the King of kings, to force the great Bagoas to burn his ancestors and on their bones to cook a royal meal, as he forced the priests of Ptah to broil Apis for his feast."

The mighty Bagoas heard and understood me, as I could see well, for at every word he winced like a high-bred steed beneath the whip.

"Cease," he said hoarsely, "cease! I can bear no more. Why do you rub sand into my eyes, Prophetess?"

"To clear away their rheum that they may see the better, Bagoas. But let us be done with the tale of that honourable, long-lost ancestor of yours to whose spirit no more offerings will be made, and tell me of the wonders of the great estate of you in whom runs his blood, the last drops of it, that soon will be sucked up in the sands of Death. Seal that sepulchre, Bagoas, but first set it in another writing, graven on a tablet of emerald or gold, telling how he who hallowed it was by the gods given the glory of being the far forefather of Bagoas, Chief Eunuch of the King of kings, Ochus, who burned the shrines of that forefather's gods."

"Cease, cease!" he moaned. "The hour is at hand."

"What hour, Bagoas?"

"The hour of vengeance which I swore to Isis."

"Does the Egyptian worshipper of the Persian holy Fire remember his vows to Isis? Be plain, Bagoas."

"Hearken, Prophetess. During all these years I have been seeking opportunity. Now of a sudden I see it to my hand. A thought came to me whilst you talked of the captain of Aahmes to whom no more of his blood can make offerings."

"Speak it, then, Bagoas."

"Prophetess, the King of kings is wrath with you, because alone of all the great places in Memphis, on the temple of Isis no welcoming banners hang to greet him at his royal coming and because no priest or priestess of Isis spread flowers before his conquering feet. So wrath is he that, were it not for his oath, which he fears to break, he would pull this sanctuary stone from stone, slaughter its priests, and give its priestesses to the soldiers."

"Is it so?" I asked indifferently.

"Aye, Prophetess. But by that oath you are saved, for ever I keep it before his mind and warn him of the fate of those who do violence to the Queen of Heaven. Only this morning I did this while he stood staring at these unbannered walls and muttered vengeance."

"And what said he then, Bagoas?"

"He laughed and answered that he would do the goddess not violence, but honour, thus. On the third night from this, the night of full moon, he will make a great feast in the inner court of this temple. At that feast the King of kings and his women will sit upon a platform laid over the coffins of the royalties of Egypt dragged from their sepulchres, so that its kings and queens may be beneath his feet. This platform will be supported by the statues of the gods of Egypt which once they worshipped. In front of it will burn the holy Fire of Persia and that fire will be fed with the mortal remnants of priests and priestesses of those Egyptian gods. Ochus the king will be clad in the robes of Osiris, and at the end of the feast from behind her consecrated statue, that before which we sit, the goddess

herself, dressed in the robes of Isis and wearing the holy emblems upon her head, will appear veiled, led by priestesses or by royal Persian women. *You will be that goddess, Prophetess.*"

"And then?" I asked.

"Then you will be brought up on to the platform and there this new Osiris will unveil you, embracing you as his wife in welcome before all that company. This he will do to make a mock of you because he believes you to be an ancient woman who goes veiled to hide her baldness and her wrinkles, for so the rumour runs among the Persians."

Now when I, Ayesha, heard these horrible words and my heart understood the height and depth of the sacrilege which this mad king would dare and all that it might mean to me, I trembled; yes, the bones seemed to melt within me so that almost I fell from the throne whereon I sat. Yet gathering up my strength I asked,

"Is this all, Bagoas?"

"Nay. At that feast, Prophetess, I myself as Vizier and the head of the world under him, must serve Ochus as his cup-bearer. While the priests of Osiris and the priestesses of Isis sing the ancient chants of the awakening of Osiris from the tomb and of his reunion with Isis the Wife Divine, it will be my part to hand the jewelled goblet filled with the holy wine to Osiris-Ochus, King of Heaven and Earth. From it he will drink the marriage draught, and having drunk, will pour the dregs of the goblet upon your feet, or for aught I know will cast them in your face. Nay, I forgot. First the Persian women of the royal household will strip the coverings from you that Osiris may see his long-lost bride and the company may have sport, jeering at her withered age."

"And if she should prove to remain unwithered, if even she should chance to be passing fair, what then, Bagoas?"

"Then perchance, Prophetess, it is in the mind of Ochus to add Isis to the number of his queens, thinking thus to gain the favour of the Egyptians, if not of their gods. Oh! Prophetess, you are very wise, as all know, yet once your foot slipped—or rather your hand slipped, when in bygone days you stretched it out to touch the sceptre of the King of kings. Ochus has often spoken of the beauty of that hand and arm, and of how, more than all things, he desired to see the face above them and the form of which they are a part. Perchance, Prophetess, that is why he plans all this mummerly."

"And if I refuse to act this play, what then, Bagoas?"

"Then since the command is lawful and designed to honour the goddess, the Great King's oath is at an end. Then the temple of Isis will be sacked and burned like others, then her priests will be murdered unless they make offerings to the holy Fire, and her priestesses be enslaved or find a home in the soldiers' tents or Persian households."

"Bagoas," I said, rising and standing over him, "know that the Curse of Isis hovers about your head. Show me a path out of this trouble or you die—not to-morrow or next year, but at once. How, it matters not, still you die; and for the rest, are the Sidonians the only ones who can fire their temples and perish in them?"

He cringed before me after the fashion of his unhappy kind, then answered,

"I waited for such words, Prophetess, and had I not been prepared against them, never would I have entered these gates alone. Did I not tell you that at this feast I shall be the King's cup-bearer? Now," he went on in a whisper, "I add that his own physician, who is in my pay, will mix the marriage wine, that his life is in the hollow of my hand; that the guards and captains are my servants; that the great lords are sworn to me, and that the hour for which I have waited through long years has come at last. Lady, you are not the only one who desires vengeance upon Ochus."

"Fine words," I said. "But how know I that they will be fulfilled? In Egypt Bagoas is called the King's Liar."

"I swear it by Isis, and if I fail you, may the Devourer take my soul."

"And I, who am her Mouth and Oracle, swear by Isis that if you fail me I will take your blood. Aye, though I die, a thousand will live on to avenge me, and the dagger or the shaft of one of them shall reach your heart at last. Or if they miss their aim then the goddess herself will smite."

"I know it, Prophetess, and I will not fail. After drinking of that cup sleep will fall upon the King of kings; yes, the new Osiris will return to his tomb and sleep sound, but *not in the arms of Isis.*"

Then for a while there was silence between us, till at length I motioned to him to begone.

The night of the feast came and all was prepared. I did not trust Bagoas and therefore I made a plan, a splendid and terrible plan. I determined to offer all those feasters, yes, the King of kings with his women, his generals, his chamberlains, his councillors, and his company, as one vast sacrifice to the outraged gods of Egypt, and with them if need were, myself and my servants, to guide them upon the road to hell.

Beneath that hall of the temple which Ochus had appointed for the feast was a vast vault for the storage of oil and fuel against times of want or tumult. This vault, as it chanced, was full to the roof, since in those troublous days I never knew from moon to moon when the place might be besieged. Also in it was much prepared papyrus with many written rolls that for centuries had been hidden there, great weight of bitumen such as the embalmers use, a stack of coffins prepared by the living to receive their bodies at the end; and lastly hundreds of bundles of dried reeds that served to strew the courts. What more was needed, save to open the air shafts to the hall above that the flames might find full play, and to set in the vault one who could be trusted with a lamp of which the light was hidden, commanded at a certain signal to cast it among the oil-soaked reeds and fly?

As it chanced such an instrument was to my hand, an old, fierce-hearted woman in whom ran royal blood, that for hard on seventy years had served as priestess of this temple.

That very night I summoned the priests and priestesses who remained and in the sanctuary under the wings of Isis, I told them all: told them how I purposed to sweep this human dirt of Persians with the red besom of destruction out of the company of the living over the edge of the world into the Avenger's everlasting jaws.

This band of the faithful hearkened and bowed their cowed heads. Then the first of them, an old priest, asked,

"Is it decreed that we must eat fire with these swine? If so, we are ready."

"Nay," I answered, "the secret passage that runs from the back of the sanctuary of the ruined temple of Osiris will be unbarred, that passage by which in the old days the holy effigy of Osiris was brought at the great festival of the Resurrection to be laid upon the breast of Isis. By this passage at the first sign of fire, you must flee, as I will if I may. But if I come not you will know that the goddess has called me. At the water-steps of the temple of Osiris boats will be waiting manned by brothers of our faith. In the darkness and

the tumult, those boats will pass down Nile to the secret shrine that is called *Isis-among-the-Reeds*, where once, the legend tells, the goddess found the heart of Osiris hidden there by Typhon, the shrine upon the isle that none dare visit, no, not even the Persians, because it is guarded by the ghosts of the dead, or by spirits sent from the Under-world fashioned like flames of fire. Thither fly and there lie hid until the word of Isis comes to you, as come it will."

Again they bowed their cowed heads in the gloomy sanctuary lit by a single lamp. Then the old priest said,

"Great is the deed that we shall do, and worthy. Surely the song of it shall echo through all the courts of Heaven and the gods themselves shall crown our brows with splendour. Yet ere it is decreed, O Prophetess inspired, let us seek a sign from the Queen immortal that such is her command."

"Aye," I answered, "let us seek a sign."

So there in the half darkness we chanted the mystic ritual, hand in hand before the goddess we chanted it, bowing and swaying, weeping and praying, demanding that a sign be given to us who were prepared to die that her splendour might shine forth as a star.

Yet no sign came.

"O Oracle inspired," said the old priest, "it is not enough. Yet in your heart are locked the unutterable Words, the Words of Power, the Words of the Opening of the Mouth Divine, that may not be spoken save at the last extreme. Are not these words known to you, the Oracle inspired?"

"They are known to me," I answered. "From Noot I had them under the Seven Oaths when I was ordained prophetess; yea, under the Seven Curses if those words should be used unworthily, the seven dreadful curses, deer-footed, snake-headed, lion-maned with red fire, that shall hunt the betrayer's soul from star to star, till the black vault of space falls in and buries Time. Kneel now and bow your heads and stop your ears till they be spoken. Then open your ears and hearken."

They knelt in a double row and I, I the Oracle, clothed in the might of my Queen, I dared to draw near to her holy effigy gleaming white above us in the darkness of the shrine. Yes, this I dared, not knowing what would chance. I took the jewelled *sistrum* of my office; I laid it upon the lips of the goddess, I shook it till it chimed before her face, I clasped her feet and kissed them.

Then I rose and into her ear I whispered the dreadful Words of Power, which even now, after so many ages, I dare not so much as shape in the halls of memory. I whispered them and returning to my company of kneeling worshippers, I motioned to them to unstop their ears and folding my arms upon my breast, I waited with downcast eyes.

Presently there was a stir in that sanctuary as of beating wings; a cold air blew upon us; then a voice spoke, the very voice of Noot my Master, Noot, the holy priest of priests. Said the voice:

"*Fulfil! It is decreed. Fulfil and fear not!*"

"Ye have heard," I said.

"We have heard," they answered.

"Whose voice did ye hear?" I asked.

"The voice of Noot, the holy priest of priests who has gone from us," they answered.

"Is it enough?" I asked.

"It is enough," they answered.

Then I departed rejoicing, who knew by this sign that Noot, who spoke with his human voice, still lived upon the earth, and that through him it had pleased Heaven to utter its decree.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FEAST OF THE KING OF KINGS

It was the night of the great feast. All day long artificers by scores had toiled in the court of the temple. Adown its length tables had been set up and by them couches and benches upon which hundreds of the feasters would lie or sit according to their degree. Near to the head of the court a platform had been built, of which the foundation beams were supported by the statues of gods dragged from a score of temples where they had stood in solemn peace for ages. Yes, there were Ptah, Ammon, Osiris, Mut, Khonsu, Hathor, Maat, Thoth, Ra, Horus, and the rest, bearing on their sacred brows and headdresses the eating-table of a heathen horde. But they bore more than this, since around and between them and the platform upon which stood this table were laid the coffins of long-dead kings or queens, and other great ones, torn, it was said, from the pyramids or their surrounding tombs. Dark with the dust of ages there they lay, some of them uncovered, so as to reveal the grim shapes that slept within.

Above these again was placed the wide platform carpeted with purple cloth of Tyre, and on it stood the board and gilded furniture of the feast. Here, too, was a golden throne at the back of which was a peacock fan of jewels, while to its front was set a table fashioned of black wood inlaid with ivory, and around it other smaller thrones and tables. These were the seats of the King of kings and some of his favoured women.

Nor was this all, for in an outer court but within the pylon gates, cooks and scullions had built fires whereon they dressed meats, and butlers set out their store of wines. Never before within the memory of man had so strange and rich a feast been seen in Egypt as that which was now preparing in the courts of Isis, to defile which with the smell of flesh was a sacrilege and the eating of it there an abomination.

When the sun had turned toward the west came Bagoas with other eunuchs and chamberlains, and being admitted to the inner courts, summoned our company and issued his commands as to the ceremonial that we must keep. We hearkened meekly, saying that we were the slaves of the King of kings, we and our goddess together, and in all things would obey his words.

Then they went away, but as he passed me, affecting to stumble, he whispered in my ear,

“Be not afraid, Prophetess. All is well and the end shall be good.”

“I am not afraid, Eunuch,” I answered, “who know that all is well and that the end will be good.”

The night fell; great flares of light set upon stands of bronze were lit adown the hall, and with them countless lamps placed at intervals along the tables. The feasters gathered; they came by scores and hundreds; Persian lords in their rich robes, generals and captains in their armour, merchants of many lands, Egyptian apostates, and I know not who besides, men, all of them, whom it pleased the King of kings to honour. They were marshalled in their appointed places by the stewards and butlers, and there waited in silence, or speaking only in low voices.

From behind the curtains of the outer sanctuary I and my company watched it all. These were clad in their festal garments of white, garlanded with flowers. But I, according to command, wore the glorious robes of Isis beneath my veil, and on my head the vulture cap of Isis, the golden Uræus, the earrings and the crescent of the moon. Moreover, about my bosom were hung the sacred necklaces and the other jewelled emblems of the goddess, while in my hands I held the *sistrum* and the Cross of Life.

Trumpets blew announcing the advent of the King of kings. Up the long hall he marched, clad in the mummy wrappings of Osiris, somewhat widened at the feet so that he might walk in them, wearing on his head the tall feathered crown and holding in his hands the Crook of Dominion and the Scourge of Rule. His chamberlains and great officers led him by a stairway to the platform that was built above the bodies of ancient kings, where was set a tiny altar upon which burned the Holy Persian Fire. There for a while he stood in pride, waving the scourge with which he flogged the world, while all that company fell upon their faces and adored him as a god, after which they lay still as corpses in the grave.

It was strange to see them lying on their faces like dead men, who indeed soon were to be dead, every one of them, and adoring this human image, this dressed-up doll, fashioned in their own likeness, to be the plaything of the gods and about to be broken by them and cast upon the rubbish heap of time.

I, Ayesha, watching through the veil and alive with that spirit which in the hour of great events comes to such as I am, thought it very strange; so strange that I could have laughed. For there in this mime, this puppet king upon the platform, with the tame tiger, Bagoas, that was about to tear out his throat, crouching at his feet, I saw the very type of all grandeur that is built of clay and not of spirit, since assuredly there is one grandeur of the earth and another of the spirit. Whether by the poison of Bagoas or by the fire of Isis, yonder man who stood triumphing over the mighty monarchs that lay coffined beneath his feet, like a wind-filled toad upon a consecrated altar, was about to die and then what of his triumph and what of his pomp?

His cup of blood was full, and when the blast of doom overturned it into the sands of Death, what tongues would it take, I wondered, in which to urge a million accusations against his trembling soul? Lastly, what mocking devil had persuaded him to don the robes of Osiris, that in them he might do insult to Isis who, what'er she may not be, at least under her royal name of Nature is the mighty vassal of the Most High, forgetting that Osiris is the god of Death and that Isis-Nature ever avenges herself upon those who violate her laws? Little wonder then that I who laughed but seldom in those days did so in my heart, while my eyes took their fill of the tinselled panoply of this lost madman.

Ochus-Osiris waved his sceptre, and the seeming dead who lay around him, as they had been drilled to do by those who planned this play, came to life in a grim mockery of ghosts called from the grave. They rose up and each, according to his degree, took his place at this Table of Osiris brought to earth.

The feast went on; they ate much; they drank more, till their brains were bemused with wine and scarce could they stand upon their feet. At length the climax came; the coping-stone was set upon this black pyramid of mortal sin against the spirit of Divinity.

Ochus rose, waving the Crook of Dominion.

"Osiris is risen again in Egypt!" he cried. "Let his wife, the divine Isis, be brought forth that he may drink with her the cup of marriage and embrace her as her husband."

Thereon that ribald company shouted,

"Yea, the god Osiris is risen again in Egypt. Bring out Queen Isis. Bring her out, that we may see her drink with him and be kissed!"

Guards summoned us. We came forth from the curtained sanctuary, white-robed in simple state. Singing the ancient hymn of Reunion to the music of harps and of shaken *sistra*, our company came forth into the great hall, I at the head of them. We walked into the hall, a solemn troop at whom the drunken feasters forgot to mock; indeed some of them bowed their heads as though in awe. We came to the dais that was supported by the statues of the gods of Egypt and platformed with her ancient royalties, and here we halted. Guards led me up a stairway so that I stood upon the platform, facing Ochus-Osiris. He spoke, saying, mockingly,

"Hail! Queen of Heaven. Behold Osiris re-arisen on the Nile has found you at last. Unveil, Queen of Heaven, that he may look upon your glory, for as goddesses do not grow old, doubtless you are glorious."

At these words of insult the company broke into coarse laughter. I waited till it had died away, then answered,

"O King wrapped in the robes of a greater king, yea, in the robes of Death, have you not heard that it is very dangerous to draw the veil of Isis, that none, indeed, has drawn it and lived? You think me but a woman, but know that here in the shrine of Isis, aye, here in her holy House which you desecrate with revellings and with the flesh of butchered beasts, I, her Prophetess and Oracle, am the very goddess and clothed with her divinity. I pray you, therefore, think again ere you bid me to draw my veil."

For a moment he seemed to grow afraid, as did that company, for they were silent. Then rage took hold of him who was full of wine and pride.

"What?" he shouted. "Am I, the King of the world, to be defied and threatened by an old hag who calls herself a priestess, or a goddess, or both? Woman, once before I listened to your prayer and left you wrapped in that rag, but now when I come both as your king and as your god, why I claim the privilege of the god. Off with that veil or I will bid my women strip you stark."

Again the silence fell, and for a little while I looked about me. I looked at the feasters illumined by the strong flares of the essence of bitumen; I looked at the blue heaven above in which the great moon floated royally; I turned and looked at the white statue of the goddess showing faint and pure between the curtains in the darkness of the distant shrine beyond. Then I lifted my head and prayed aloud, saying,

"O Thou, that from thy moon-throne watchest all things passing on the earth, O Thou, great Spirit of the world whom men name Isis, Thou that canst spare; Thou that canst avenge; Thou that knowest both life and death; Thou that rulest hearts and destinies; Thou to whose equal sight the king is as the slave, since both kings and slaves are but dust beneath thine immortal feet, hear me, thy priestess and thine Oracle. Thou knowest my strait and that of these thy servants over whom I rule beneath thee. Protect me and them, if thou wilt, or if thou wilt not, then take us to thyself. I ask nothing of thee; I seek not to turn the chariot wheels of Fate; judge thou of my cause who with thy judgment am content. In thine hands hang the scales of doom and the great worlds are thy weights. Who then am I that I should seek to press upon thy balances? Judge now between me, O Mother Isis, and this death-attired king who mocks thee, the Queen of Heaven, in mocking me, thy servitor on earth."

"Have done, woman!" mocked Ochus. "Cease your whimperings to a goddess sitting in the moon, for she is far away from you—and unveil. Bagoas, give me the Marriage Cup, that I may drink to this new wife of mine, who thinks herself divine."

Bagoas beckoned and a dark-faced, black-bearded man whom I knew for the king's physician came forward with a golden goblet on which were vile carvings of the loves of satyrs. This he tasted, or affected to taste, with much ceremony, and as he did so, though save I none noted it, let fall the poison into the wine. Then with humble steps, lifting the cup thrice, lowering it again thrice, doubtless to mix the venom with the wine, he came to the Presence and kneeling, presented the goblet to his master, the King of kings, the King of the world.

"Now," said the drink-besotted Ochus as he grasped the goblet, "now, Priestess, will you unveil or must I call the women?"

"It is not needful," I answered. "Yet, O most glorious monarch, yet, O conqueror of all things, first I would add one word. Even a king so great that he dares to clothe himself in the raiment of the Lord of Death perchance may err from time to time. Thus, Mighty One, do you err when you say that Isis is far from me, for Isis is here and *I am Isis*."

Then at a word two priestesses sprang to my side and loosed me of my veil. It fell to the ground and there I stood before them clad in all the splendid pomp of Isis, beautiful as Isis, with the terrible eyes of Isis, and holding in my hands the emblems of Isis and the sceptre with which Isis ruled the world.

They saw, and from that crowded hall there went up a sigh of wonder—or was it of fear? Ochus saw also; his eyes started, his mouth opened.

"By the holy Fire!" he muttered, "here is one worth wedding, be she goddess or woman."

"Then drink the cup, O Ochus-Osiris, and take her, be she goddess or woman," I answered, pointing at him with the Cross of Life.

He drank, he drank deep, and forgetting to offer the wine to me, loosed the goblet from his hand so that it fell upon the little altar where burned the holy Fire, extinguishing it, and thence rolled from the platform to the ground. I glanced at Bagoas and read in his eyes such a look as I had never seen upon the face of man. Oh! it was cruel, that look—cruel yet triumphant, this cold stare of the victim who had become a conqueror. All hell was in that look.

The feasters murmured at the omen of the death of the Fire, but that draught seemed to sober Ochus, who took no heed of it. The wildness left his eyes; they grew cunning as those of a merchant. Merchant-like he appraised my loveliness seen through the gauzy wrappings such as are used to deck the painted effigy of the goddess.

"I look before I take," he said. "Twas good to win Egypt; it will be better to win you, O Divine in flesh if not in spirit. Now I understand why in the past you would not suffer me to draw your veil."

Thus he spoke slowly, savouring the words upon his tongue as his greedy eyes savoured my beauty. Then he rose to pass the small altar and advance upon me.

In that fierce moment of time I considered all. It came into my mind that Bagoas had tricked me; that his cup lacked poison, or at least that the plan had failed, and that if I was to be saved it must be by myself. Yet I paused ere I did that which would cause the

death of hundreds.

"Stay!" I said to him. "Lay no finger on me lest you shall call the curse of Isis upon your head."

"Nay," he answered, "it is the blessing of Isis that I am about to call upon my lips, O most Beautiful, O Loveliness incarnate!"

He came on. He was past the marble altar. His fierce, bestial face glared into mine and he gripped me; his hot arm was about me, he dragged me to his embrace, while all the beasts of his company shouted in vile joy.

I let fall the *sistrum* that I held. The moment of mercy had gone by. That shout had sealed the doom of all those dogs and satyrs. It was the signal!

By the arts known to us instantly the command was passed on to her who waited below. Instantly this fierce-souled destroyer was at her work with lamp and torch. Never did lover run so swiftly to her lover's side as she did from pile to pile, firing the oil, firing the reeds.

Now that brute-king had me! He pressed his hot kisses upon my breast, upon my lips. I stood still. I struggled not. I stood like the statue of the goddess. This cold calm of mine seemed to frighten him.

"Are you woman?" he asked, hesitating.

"Nay," I hissed back, "I am Isis. Woe to them who lay hands upon Isis!"

He unloosed. He stood staring at me, and as he stared I saw his face change.

"What is in your eyes?" he asked. "All the devils in Egypt are looking out of your eyes."

"Nay," I answered, "all the devils of hell look out of my eyes. Isis commands the devils of hell and unchains them, O death-clothed king."

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" he asked.

"That you will learn presently—in hell. Therefore bid farewell to the world, O Corpse of a king!"

He glowered at me. He swayed to and fro. Then suddenly down he went like one pierced through the heart with an arrow. There he lay upon his back across the altar staring up at the moon.

"Isis is in the moon!" he cried. "She threatens me from the moon. Persians, be afraid of Isis the Moon-dweller. Bagoas! Physician! Physician! Bagoas! protect me from Isis. She is wringing my heart with her hands. Witch! Witch! loose my heart from your hands."

Thus he wailed in a horrible voice and these were his last words, for having spoken them he lifted his head, glaring about him with a twisted mouth, then let it fall heavily, rolled to the platform, and was still.

Bagoas and the physician ran to him.

"The Curse of Isis has fallen upon the King of kings," cried Bagoas.

"He who bestrode the world is dead, smitten by Isis of the Egyptians!" cried the physician.

From the royal women and all that company there went up a wail of:

"Ochus is dead! Artaxerxes is dead! The King of kings is dead!"

Bagoas and the physician, helped by the wailing women of Ochus, lifted the body. They carried it from the platform, they bore it down the hall, they vanished with it into the darkness, and presently in the utter silence I heard the gates of the courts and the outer gates of the pylon clang behind them and the clashing of the bolts as they were shot by the guards of the gates.

Still for awhile the silence held, for all were like dead men with terror. Then a voice cried,

"The witch has killed the king with her kiss! Slay her. Tear her to pieces. Slay her and her company!"

The spell-bound mob began to stir; I heard swords rattling in their scabbards. They rose like waves on a quiet sea, and like a wave began to flow toward the platform on which I now stood alone. I stooped down, lifted the *sistrum* from the platform, and held it toward them.

"Be warned!" I cried. "Stay still lest the Curse of Isis fall on you also."

"Witch! Witch! Witch!" they screamed, hesitating awhile, and again swayed forward.

I waved my arm, and as though in answer to it from the grating of stone beyond the platform suddenly arose dense smoke followed by bursts of flame. I waved it a second time, and from the gratings at the end of the hall arose smoke followed by bursts of flame. They looked, they saw, they understood.

"The Curse of Isis!" they screamed. "The Curse of Isis is upon us! Fire rises from hell."

"Nay," I answered, "fire falls from Heaven sent by the outraged gods!"

Now between me and them flared a fence of flame which the boldest dared not face. They paused, one hurled a sword at me which passed above my head. Then they turned, flying for the gateways of the hall, and there were met by another fence of flame. Some of the boldest leapt through it only to find that the gates were shut and that the terror-stricken guards had fled. They rushed back, burning, yea, their silken robes and their oil-anointed hair turned them, yet living, into torches. Now they took another counsel. They dragged the tables together, piling them each on each and striving thus to climb the walls of the hall. This, perhaps, they might have done, some of them, had not every man pulled down his neighbour, so that they fell in tumbled heaps upon the stone flooring where the life was trampled out of them.

I turned and behind the veil of smoke fled from the platform, none seeing me, back behind the hangings that hid the outer sanctuary, where all the company of Isis was gathered, save only that fierce old priestess who yet with lamp and torch lit fire upon fire in the vaults beneath and, at last, doubtless, passed to Heaven on the chariot wheels of flame.

Here my servants stripped off my sacred trappings, wrapping me in dark garments and a hooded cloak. While they did so I looked back. The hall was filled with spouts of fire. The platform upon which Ochus had feasted was burning and the royal dead beneath blazed merrily. Only the stone gods by whom it was upborne still stared silent and dreadful through the vesture of smoke and fire, emblems of vengeance and eternal doom.

I could see no more but above the roaring flames I heard the mad screams of those trapped feasters who had come to see their king make a mock of Isis and her priestess, and these were terrible to hear. Then the floor gave way and down they went into the furnace pit beneath. Yes, they who worshipped fire were devoured of their own god. Thus did I, Ayesha, Child-of-Wisdom, daughter of Yarab according to the flesh, work the vengeance of Heaven upon the Persians and their King of kings. By fire I wrought it, I whose path ever was and ever shall be marked by fire; I, Ayesha, who grew undying in the breath of fire and who, in the caverns of Kôr, clasped it to my breast and was wedded to its secret Soul.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE FLIGHT AND THE SUMMONS

WE GAINED the hidden passage, bearing with us the treasures and the holy books of the Sanctuary that to this day lie buried in the caves of Kôr. We came safely to the ruined temple of Osiris that the Persians had destroyed, and through it to the water-gate where the boats waited. None noting us, we embarked upon the boats and glided away down Nile. If any saw us pass, they thought us countryfolk, or perchance Egyptians who fled from the Persians in Memphis. But I think that none did see us, since all eyes were bent upon the flaming temple of Isis and all ears were filled with the rumours that flew from mouth to mouth, telling that the goddess had descended in fire and made an end of the tyrant Ochus, his generals, his councillors, and his court.

Thus did I bid farewell to white-walled Memphis which never again my eyes should see, though often my spirit shows it to me in visions of the night, and often I seem to hear the last wild agony of those upon whom I executed the decree of Heaven.

What happened afterward? Of that I know little, though rumours which Philo brought in the later years told me that Bagoas and the physician let fall or flung away the corpse of Ochus. These rumours said that it was found devoured by cats and jackals, so that had it not been for the rent Osiris wrappings, none would have known that here lay all that was left of the King of kings who desolated Egypt and made her as a widow. They told also that Bagoas set Arses, the son of Ochus, upon the throne of Persia, and later poisoned him and all his children save one. Then it seems that he made Darius king, and this Darius Codomannus, knowing that Bagoas would poison him also, smote the first, forcing him to drink of the drugged cup that he had given to so many.

Such, it appears, was the end of Bagoas whom I used as the artist uses a tool, harnessing him to the chariot of my wrath and, like the *Erinnyes* of the Greeks, making of him a sword wherewith I, or Heaven working through me, stabbed Persia to the heart, as through Tenes I had stabbed Sidon and through Sidon, Egypt. For such were the dooms that I was commanded to bring about. Thus Bagoas walked the road down which, aforetime, he drove his victims, and save for an evil name that echoes through the ages, this was the end of him and all his crimes.

Ere dawn our company came to the great reed-bed and through it by channels known only to our pilots, reached the secret shrine named *Isis-among-the-Reeds*, where all had been made ready for our coming by the priests who watched there. Worn out, as well I might be, I laid me down and slept in a tiny cell, fearing no harm, since I knew surely that none would come to me or to those with me. Why I knew it I cannot say, but it was so. I knew further that I had done with Egypt; my work there was finished; henceforth we were divorced.

All that day I slept and through most of the night which followed, lulled by the whispering of the tall, surrounding reeds. I suppose that it must have been during those night hours that I dreamed a strange dream. In it I stood upon the desert, a vast waste of sand bordered in the distance by the Nile. I was alone in this desert save for the sun that sank in the west and the moon that rose in the east, and between them, shone upon by sun and moon, by Ra and by Isis, crouched a mighty Sphinx of stone with a woman's breasts and head, which Sphinx I knew was Egypt. There she sat, immemorial, unchanging, stern, beautiful, and stared with brooding eyes toward the east whence morn by morn arose the sun.

Appeared before her, one by one, each adorned with its own sacred emblems, all the gods of Egypt, a grim, fantastic crowd such as a brain distraught might fashion in its madness. Beast-headed and human-shaped, human-headed and beast-shaped; dogs and hawks, crocodiles and owls; swamp-birds, bulls, rams, and swollen-bellied dwarfs, came this rout of gods and bowed before the stern and beauteous Sphinx that wore a woman's head.

The Sphinx opened its mouth and spoke.

"What would ye of me who have sheltered you for long?" it asked.

One shaped like a man but from whose shoulders rose the beaked head of an ibis crowned with a crescent moon on which stood a feather, and holding in his hand the palette of a scribe; he whom the Egyptians named Thoth the Measurer, the Recorder, stood forward and made answer.

"We would bid thee farewell, Mother Egypt, our shelterer for thousands upon thousands of years. Out of thy mud we were created, into thy mud we return again."

"Is it so?" answered the Sphinx. "Well, what of it? Your short day is done. Yet tell me, who gave you these monstrous shapes and who named you gods?"

"The priests gave them to us and the priests named us gods," answered the ibis-headed man. "Now the priests are slain and we perish with the priests, because we are but gods made of thy mud, O Egypt."

"Then get you gone back into the mud, ye gods of mud. But first tell me, where is my Spirit that in the beginning, when the world was young, I sent forth that it might be a Soul divine to rule Egypt and the world?"

"We know not," answered Thoth the Recorder. "Ask it of the priests who made us. Perchance they have hidden it away. Farewell, O Egypt, farewell, O Sphinx, farewell, farewell!"

"Farewell!" echoed all that monstrous throng and then faded miserably away.

There was silence and with it solitude; the Sphinx stared at Nothingness and Nothingness stared at the Sphinx, and I, the watcher, watched. At length out of the nothingness arose something, and its shape was the shape of woman. It stood before the Sphinx and said,

"Behold me! I am thy lost spirit, but thou, O Egypt, didst not create me, for I created thee by a divine command. I am she whom men know as Isis here upon the Nile, but whom all the world, and all the worlds beyond the world know as Nature, the visible garment of the Almighty God. Gone are those phantasies, man-nurtured and priest-conceived. Yet I remain and thou remainest, aye, and though we be called by many names in the infinite days to come as we have been called in the infinite days that are gone, ever shall we remain until this little floating globe of earth ceases from its journeyings and melts back into that from which it came, the infinite arms of the infinite God."

Then the human-headed Sphinx rose from the rock whereon it had lain from the beginning. It reared its giant bulk, it went upon its knees and bowed to the woman-shape, the tiny woman-shape that was Isis, that was Nature, that was the Executrix of God. Thrice it bowed—and vanished.

The Spirit was left and I, Ayesha, was left. The Spirit turned and looked on me and lo! to my sight it was shaped as I am shaped. Sadly it looked, with grieving eyes, but never a word it spoke.

“Mother. My mother,” I called, “speak to me, my mother!”

But never a word it answered, only it pointed to the skies and suddenly was gone. Then I, Ayesha, I stood alone in the immeasurable desert looking at the setting sun, looking at the rising moon, looking at the evening star that shone between, and wept and wept and wept because of my loneliness. For what company is there for a human soul in sun and moon and evening star when the spirit that formed it and them has departed, leaving them to gaze one upon the other, voiceless in the void?

Such was my dream upon which I have pondered from year to year, asking an answer to its riddle from sun and moon and evening star, and finding none. Only the spirit can interpret its own problems, and to me, because of my sins, because, like the gods of Egypt I am fashioned of mud that veils my soul’s dim lamp within, as yet that spirit is choked and dumb. Still, one day the Nile of death that I have dammed from me for so long will burst its barriers and wash away the mud. Then the lamp will shine out again; then the spirit will come and refresh it with its holy oil and breathe upon it with its breath, and in that breath perchance I shall understand my dream and learn the answer to its riddle.

Indeed already Time lays its foundations bare, for does not Holly tell me that for nigh upon two thousand years her gods have been dead in Egypt? For awhile they lingered on beneath the Greeks and Romans, changed masks of what once they were; for awhile their effigies were still painted upon the coffins of her people. Then the star of a new Faith rose, a bright and holy star, and in its beams they withered and crumbled into dust. Only the old Sphinx remains staring at the Nile and mayhap in the silence of the night holds commune with Isis the Mother, telling of dead kings and wars forgot, for being Nature’s self, Isis alone can never die although from age to age her vestments change.

Yea, when I, Ayesha, fired the hall and burned those foul Persian feasters, with them I slew the gods of Egypt, and their sad and solemn statues stared a farewell to me through that wavering wall of flame. Nay, it was not I who did it, nor was it I who brought its doom on Sidon and his death on Ochus, but Destiny that used me as its sword, as I used Bagoas, me, Fate’s doom-driven daughter.

When I awoke it was still dark save for the light of the sinking moon, and in the night-wind, with a faint continual voice, the tall reeds whispered their prayer to Heaven. For though we know it not, all that has life must pray or die. From the great star rushing through space on its eternal journey to the humblest flower nestling beneath a stone, everything must pray, for prayer is the blood of the spirit that is in them and if that blood freezes, then they are resolved to matter that cannot grow and, knowing neither hope nor fear, is lost in the blind gulf of darkness.

I hearkened to those whispering reeds telling of the mysteries below to the mysteries above, and on the wings of their sweet petitions, sent up my own to Heaven.

For in truth I was troubled and knew not what to do. Here I could not bide for long, since surely, soon or late the Persians would seek me out and surely Bagoas, to cover his own crimes, would slay me as the destroyer of his king. This did not affright me who was weary of the world with all its horrors and in a mood to walk the gate of death, hoping that beyond it I might find a better. But there were those with me, my fellow servants to whom I had sworn safety and who put their faith in me, as though in truth I were the goddess herself, and if I died, certainly they would die also.

Therefore I must save them if I could. Yet how? I had no ship in which to flee from Egypt, and if it were to hand, whither should I fly now that all the earth was Persian? Oh! that Noot were here to counsel me. That he lived somewhere I was sure, since had not his voice spoken in the shrine and this by no priestly trick, for when I put up that prayer for guidance, I knew not how it would be answered or by whom, or if indeed it would but fall upon the deaf ears of the winds, and like a dead leaf, in their breath be blown away and lost.

Yes, he still lived, yet how could I know that it was here he lived? Mayhap he spoke from far beyond this stormy air of earth. Even so he who had counselled me once might counsel me again.

“O whispering reeds,” I cried in my heart, “with all your million tongues, pray east and west and north and south, that Ayesha in her need may be helped of the wisdom of the holy Noot.”

Yes, thus I prayed like a little, bewildered child who sees God in a cloud and thinks that flowers open for her joy and that the great Pleiades look down from the sky and love her. Yes, toil and grief and terror had made me like a little child.

Well, it is to such, rather than to the proud and learned, the rulers of the earth and the challengers of Heaven, that answers oftenest come and with them knowledge of the truth. At least to me, emptied of strength and wisdom and in that weak hour, forgetful even of my beauty, my great deeds, and the lore that I had won, swiftly there came an answer.

Of a sudden, at the first blush of dawn upon night’s pale cheek, a priestess stood by my pallet,

“Awake, O Isis-come-to-Earth,” she said, bowing. “A man stands without who would have speech with you. He came here in a boat and when he was challenged answered with all the signs, aye, and even spoke the secret words known to few, those words that open the sanctuary’s door. The priests questioned him of his business. He answered that he could tell it only to her who bore the jewelled *sistrum*, to her who veiled her head with cloud like a mountain-top, to that Prophetess who in all shrines is known as Child-of-Wisdom, but who among men was named Ayesha, Daughter of Yarab.”

Doubting me of this man and scenting treachery, I caused that instructed priestess to repeat one by one the mystical words that he had spoken. At last she uttered a certain syllable of which even she did not know the meaning. But I knew it and knew also who had its custody.

Filled with a great hope I rose and wrapped myself in a dark garment.

“Lead me to this man,” I said, “but first make sure that three priests stand round him with drawn swords.”

She went and presently returned again, saying that the man awaited me in the fore-court of the little temple, guarded as I had bidden. To this court I followed her. It was but a small place, like to a large room. I entered it from the sanctuary to the west. Through

the eastern door poured the first rays of the rising sun, that struck upon a man who stood waiting in the centre of the court, guarded by three priests with lifted swords.

I could not see his face, though perhaps even beneath my cowl he could see mine upon which those rays also struck. At least I saw him start, then fall to his knees, raising his hand in salute with a quick and curious motion. It was enough. I knew him at once. This man was Philo and no other. With a word I bade the armed priests leave us and the priestess who had accompanied me bide in the shadow. Then I went forward, saying,

"Rise, Philo, for whom I have looked so long that I began to think you were no more to be found beneath the sun. Whence come you, Philo, and for what purpose?"

"O Prophetess, O adored, O Lady divine," he answered in a voice of joy, "I, your slave in the flesh and your fellow servant in the goddess, greet you whom never I hoped to see again after all that has passed in Egypt. Suffer that I may kiss your hand and thereby learn that you are still a woman and not a ghost."

I stretched out my hand and reverently he touched it with his lips.

"Now tell your tale, friend Philo," I said. "Whence come you, most welcome Philo, and by what magic do you find me here?"

"I come from far to the south, Prophetess, out of an ancient land of which you shall learn afterward. For three moons have I struggled over difficult seas driven by contrary winds, to reach the mouths of Nile and to find you, if still you lived."

"And who sent you, friend Philo?"

"A certain Master who is known to both of us, he sent me."

"Is he perchance named Noot?" I asked in a low voice, "and if so, did you sail hither over mortal seas, or over those through which Ra travels in the Under-world?"

This I said wondering, for it came into my mind that he who knelt before me might perchance be not a man but a shadow sent to summon me to the halls of Osiris.

"Mortal seas I sailed; those of the Under-world still await my prow, O Wisdom's Daughter. Here is the proof of it," and drawing a roll from his bosom, with it he touched his brow in token of reverence, then gave it to me.

I broke the seals, I opened that roll, and by the light of the rising sun I read. It ran thus:

"From Noot, the son of Noot, the high-priest, the guardian of Secrets, to Ayesha, Child of Isis, Wisdom's Daughter, the Instructed, the Oracle: Thus saith Noot.

"I live, I do not sleep in my eternal house. My spirit shows me that which passes upon the Nile. I know that you have obeyed my commands which I gave to you before we parted in the bygone years, O my begotten in the goddess. I know that you have waited patiently in faith through many tribulations. I know also that this writing will find you in an hour of great peril when for the second time you have escaped from fire, leaving behind you the ashes of your foes. Come to me now and at once, Philo the beloved brother and the consecrated *sistrum* that is the sceptre of your office being your guides. Philo shall lead you; through all dangers the *sistrum* shall be your shield. I write no more.

"Obey, Mouth of Isis, bringing with you those that are left to the service of the goddess. Read the seal of Noot, high-priest and prophet, and tarry not."

I read and hid away the roll. Then I asked,

"Upon what wings do we fly to Noot who is so far from us, friend Philo?"

"Upon those of a ship that is known to you, Prophetess, the ship named *Hapi*, upon which already you have passed many perils. She lies yonder fully manned in the outer fringe of this sea of reeds."

"How did you find those reeds, and how did you know that I was hidden among them?" I asked curiously.

"Noot marked them on a chart he gave me and told me that in them, where, as the story runs, Isis discovered the heart of Osiris, there I should find the child of Isis. Prophetess, inquire no more."

I heard and returned thanks in my heart. Truly what I whispered to the whispering reeds had been borne to the ears of Heaven.

The trireme *Hapi*, with her mast struck, lay hidden in shallow water midst beds of tall bulrushes and papyrus plants, into which Philo had worked her by the moonlight. All that day we laboured lading her with the treasures of the temple of Isis and those of the secret shrine, which were many, for during these times of trouble much gold and priceless furnishing of precious metals had been hidden here among the reeds. Also with them were some of the most ancient and hallowed statues of the goddess fashioned in gold and ivory and alabaster stone.

All of these together with my own great wealth of jewels and other gear were borne in boats to the *Hapi* and stored within her hold where they lay hid beneath much merchandise that Philo had purchased at the ports of Nile. Hither he had come disguised as a merchant from the south, having his ship laden with the produce of Punt such as ivory and rare woods. These he sold at the ports where he gathered tidings of all that passed in Egypt, and having purchased other goods in place of them, passed unsuspected up the Nile to the secret Isle of Reeds where Noot had bidden him make inquiry for me at the time of full moon in this very month. It was not difficult for him to find this isle as it seemed that, being an initiate of Isis, once in bygone days he had visited it on the business of the goddess.

While we were at this work we saw boats full of Persian soldiers pass down Nile, as though they searched for someone, and toward the evening saw them return up Nile again, heading for Memphis. I knew for whom they sought and noted that they did so very idly, since all believed that I and my company had perished with the Persians in the burning temple.

At nightfall I gathered the priests and priestesses, in all they were thirty and three in number, and spoke to them, saying,

"Here in Egypt we who are the servants of the goddess can stay no more. The gods of Khem are fallen, their shrines are desolate, and death by sword and fire, or by the torturer's hooks, is the lot of those that worship them. Noot, the high-priest, the Master, the Prophet, summons us from afar, bidding us bear the worship of the goddess to new lands that lie I know not where. Philo, our brother, is his messenger and here is the message written in this roll; read it if you will. I, the Oracle and Prophetess, obey the summons; this very night I sail setting my course for seas unknown, and trusting to the goddess to be my guide, mayhap into the gates of death. Noot the high-priest bids you to accompany me. Yet I give you choice. Bide on here if you will and live out your lives disguised as scribes or peasants, for in the temples you can no longer find a home. Mayhap thus you shall escape the vengeance of the Persians. Or come with me if you will, knowing that I promise you nothing. Let each speak as the Spirit directs the heart within."

They consulted together; then one by one they said that it was their mind to be of my company since they held it better to die with me and pass pure to the arms of the goddess rather than to live on defiled, or perchance to perish miserably beneath the stripes of the executioners, having first been forced to do sacrifice to the Persian god of Fire. So man by man and woman by woman they swore the oath that might not be broken by those who would escape the jaws of the Devourer, and in token kissed the holy *sistrum* that I held to the lips of each. Then for the last time we celebrated the rites of Isis in a temple of Isis on the Nile and with weeping and with woe sang the psalm of farewell, such as is chanted over the dead of our fellowship.

This done we went to the boats and were rowed on board the *Hapi*.

When the moon was bright the mariners, fierce, foreign men most of them, such as I had never seen before, who wore great earrings of gold and had rings thrust through their noses, poled the vessel out from among the reeds into the deep waters of the Nile. Here they hoisted the mast and set the sails which presently filled before the strong wind blowing from the upper land, and bore us forward swiftly.

Passing out of the Nile by a little-used mouth, as we could do now that the river was in flood, we entered the canal that joins the seas, which canal the old Pharaohs dug and the Persians had caused to be cleared of drifting sand. By it, though not easily, for in places it was both narrow and shallow, at length we came safely into the Red Sea and bade farewell to Egypt. None hindered us on this journey, and, having crossed the lakes, only once did we stay at a little unravaged town at the far mouth of the canal, to buy bread, fresh fish, and meat wherewith to stock our ship.

This town we found to be full of rumours, for the news of the death of Ochus had reached it and many tales were told of the manner of his end. That which these coast-dwellers favoured was that Set the god had appeared in person at a feast, and seizing Ochus, had set him upon a winged Apis, that very Apis bull which he had sacrificed and eaten, and borne him away to hell. At this fable I smiled, though indeed in it there was a seed of truth, since without doubt, if there be a hell, the blood-soaked Ochus was its inhabitant that day.

Now of all that journey I, who grow weary of writing, will omit the story. Most marvellously it prospered, so much so that I think, unseen by us, spirits from the Under-world must have stood upon our prow. From day to day a strong and steady wind blowing from the north drove us forward swiftly. No storm smote us nor did we strike upon any rock, and when we made land for water, either it was uninhabited, or the folk who dwelt there, strange barbarous folk, were friendly.

So the time went by creeping from moon to moon and ever we sailed on southward. Nor was the time unhappy, since there I sat in that same cabin which had been mine when Pharaoh gave me as a bribe to Tenes and that therefore was familiar to me, having something of the aspect of a home. Indeed with a certain taste of acid pleasure, from time to time I recalled all that had happened to me upon this ship and in that very cabin. For instance where I had wrung the writing from the passion-maddened Tenes; where he had stood and knelt; where his shadow had struck upon the cedar walls. There, too, in the wood was an arrow hole, which arrow should have drunk my life.

Then in the waist of the ship was the place where the boarders from the *Holy Fire* had won aboard, whence Kallikrates, the Grecian captain turned hierophant, had beat them back so gallantly. Aft, also, was the shelter where I had visited him and dressed his wounds that were almost to the death. Here I placed upon his finger the charmed scarab ring of Khæmuas, the Magician, whereon were cut symbols with a secret meaning, though they seemed to read only as "Son of Ra," that this ring might raise him from the darkness of death, as Osiris rose and as Ra rises from the Under-world.

Here, too, it was that I heard him mistake me for another woman and to that woman give his thanks, thus opening my eyes to all the folly of my heart. Years ago these things had chanced to me, and now when they were dead things, I say that I could dream of them with that soft grief which is like to the tenderness of eve after the promise of the morning and the burning noonday heat have become but memories buried beneath the dust of time. Yet it is true that now and again those memories renewed their life, especially within the shrines of sleep.

Oh! it was all so long ago. Had not Philo's beard, that I remembered brown and rich, since then grown gray, and were not his curling locks thinned upon his temples? And I who then was young, had I not grown to middle-age, though still I remained more lovely than any other woman in the world, and was not my soul burdened with much learning, and had not the sorrows I had passed pierced it with a thousand spears? Now, too, doubtless Kallikrates was dead, and all the dreams to which he alone among men had given birth within me had gone wherever dreams may go, perchance to be lost in the vast unknown, or perchance after the change called death, there to be found again?

Yet I, I wandered forward on my path, Fate-driven as of old, to what end I knew not and did not greatly care to know. For now it seemed my part was played; the world and its stirrings were left behind me and the last shreds of my web must be spun of poor stuff in petty, unknown places, where I should patter prayers beneath an alien sky till it pleased death to enfold me in its wings and bear me to the depths of its enormous habitations.

Well, so let it be, since, as I have said, I was weary of the world; its toils, its bloody issues, and its perpetual strivings to grasp that which man or woman may not hold—except in dreams.

With Philo I talked much, but always of the past; of those things which we had experienced together, or of other events of his earlier, adventurous life, or of my own. A most pleasant companion was this Philo, of a shrewd wit and some learning also, a brave citizen of the world who had seen much, and yet one who revered the gods, whatever the gods might be, and had thoughts of that which lies beyond the world, whatever this may be. But of the present or of what had happened to him since he sailed away with Noot, my Master, when Ochus invaded Egypt, and least of all of the future and whither we went or why, I did not talk at all.

For when these matters came to my lips, as they did even before we were clear of Nile, Philo made a certain sign to me which being interpreted meant that he was under an oath, a very solemn oath, not to speak of any of them, which oath I respected, as indeed I was bound to do. Therefore I asked no more and sailed on careless as a child that recks not of what is to come and from whom death is still very far away.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE TALE OF PHILO

ONCE more it was a night of full moon. As we had done for many days we were sailing before that steady wind along the coast of Libya, having this upon our right hand, and upon our left, at a distance, a line of rocky reef upon which breakers fell continually.

It was a very splendid moon that turned the sea to silver and lit up the palm-grown shore almost as brightly as does the sun. I sat upon the deck near to my cabin and by me stood Philo watching that shore intently.

"For what do you seek, Philo? Are you in fear of sunken rocks?"

"Nay, Child of Isis, yet it is true that I seek a certain rock which by my reckoning should now be in sight. Ah!"

Then suddenly he ran forward and shouted an order. Men leapt up and sprang to the ropes while the rowers began to get out the sweeps. As they did this the *Hapi* came round so that her bow pointed to the shore and the great sail sank to the deck. Then the long oars bit into the water and drove us shoreward.

Philo returned.

"Look, Lady," he said. "Now that the moon has risen higher you can see well," and he pointed to a headland in front of us.

Following his outstretched hand with my eyes I perceived a great rock many cubits in height and carved on the crest of it a head far larger than that of the huge Sphinx of Egypt. Or perchance it was not carved; perchance Nature had fashioned it thus. At least there it stood and will stand, a terrible and hideous thing, having the likeness of an Ethiopian's head gazing eternally across the sea.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Lady, it is the Guardian of the Gate of the land whither we go. Legend tells that it is shaped to the likeness of the first king of that land who lived thousands upon thousands of years before the pyramids were built; also that his bones lie in it, or at least, that it is haunted by his spirit. For this reason none dare to touch and much less to climb yonder monstrous rock."

Then he left me to see to the matters of the ship, because, as he said in going, the entrance to the place was strait and dangerous. But I sat on alone upon the deck watching this strange new sight.

Within an hour, rowing carefully, we entered the mouth of a river, having the rock shaped like to a negro's head upon our right. Then it was that I saw something which put me in mind of Philo's tale about an ancient king. For there, unless I dreamed, upon the very point of the skull of the effigy, of a sudden I perceived a tall form clad in armour which shone silvery bright in the moon's rays. It leaned upon a great spear, and when we were opposite to it, straightened itself and bent forward as though to stare at our ship beneath. Next, thrice it lifted the spear in salutation; thrice it bowed, as I thought in obeisance to me, and having done so, threw its arms wide and was gone.

Afterward I asked Philo if he also had seen this thing.

"Nay," he answered in a doubtful voice as though the matter were one of which he did not wish to talk, adding,

"It is not the custom of mariners to study that head in the moonlight, because the story goes that if they do and chance to see some such ghost as that you tell of, it casts a spear toward them, who then are doomed to die within the year. Yet at you, Child of Isis, he cast no spear, only bowed and gave the salute of kings, or so you tell me. Therefore doubtless neither you nor any of us, your companions, are marked for death."

I smiled and said that I whose soul was in touch with Heaven feared not the wraith of any ancient king, nor did we speak more of this matter. Yet in the after ages it came into my mind that there was truth in the story and that this long-dead king appeared thus to give greeting to her who was destined to rule his land through many generations; also that perchance he was not dead at all, but, having drunk of a certain Cup of Life of which I was to learn, lived eternally there upon the rock.

I laid me down and slept, and when I woke in the bright morning it was to find that we had passed from that river into a canal dug by man which, though deep, was too narrow for the sweeps to work. Therefore the *Hapi* must be pushed along with poles and towed by ropes dragged at by the mariners from a path that ran upon the bank.

For three days we travelled thus making but slow progress, since the toil of dragging so large a ship was great, and at night we tied up to the bank, as boats do upon the Nile. All this while we saw no habitation though certain ruins we did see. Indeed that country was very desolate and full of great swamps that were tenanted by wild beasts, the haunt of owls and bitterns, where lions roared and serpents crept, great serpents such as I had never seen.

At length at noon on the fourth day we came to a lake where the canal ended, which lake once had been a harbour, for we saw stone quays where still were tied some boats that seemed to be little used. Here Philo said that we must disembark and travel on by land. So we left the *Hapi*, sadly enough for my part, because those were happy, quiet days that I had spent on board of her, veritable oases in the storm-swept desert of my life.

Scarcely had we set foot upon the land when appeared, I knew not whence, a company of men, handsome, hook-nosed, sombre men, such as I had seen among the crew upon the *Hapi*. These men, though so fierce in appearance, were not barbarians, for they wore linen garments that gave to them the aspect of priests. Moreover, their leaders could speak Arabic in its most ancient form, which, having studied it, as it chanced, I knew. With this army, who bore bows and spears, came a multitude of folk of a baser sort that carried litters, or burdens, also a guard of great fellows that Philo told me were my especial escort. Now my patience failed so that I turned upon Philo saying,

"Hitherto, Friend, I have trusted myself to you, because it seemed decreed that I should do so. Now tell me, I pray you, what means this journey over countless leagues of sea into a land untrod, and whither go I in the fellowship of these barbarians? Because you brought me a certain writing in an acceptable hour, I gave myself into your keeping, nor did I even ask any revelation from the goddess or seek to solve the mystery by spells. Yet, now I ask and, as the Prophetess of Isis, demand the truth of you, her humbler servant."

"Lady divine," answered Philo, bowing himself before me, "what I have withheld is by command, the command of a very great one, of none less than Noot the aged and holy. You go to an old land that is yet new to find Noot, your master and mine."

"In the flesh or in the spirit?" I asked.

"In the flesh, Prophetess, if still he lives, as these men say, and see, I accompany you, I whom in the past you have found faithful. If I fail you, let my life pay forfeit, and for the rest, ask it of the holy Noot."

"It is enough," I said. "Lead on."

We entered the litters; we laded the bearers with the treasures of Isis and with my own peculiar wealth, and having placed the ship *Hapi* under guard, marched into the unknown like to some great caravan of merchants. For days we marched, following a broad road that was broken down in places, over plains and through vast swamps, and at night sleeping in caves or covered by tents which we brought with us.

This was a strange journey that I made surrounded by that host of hook-nosed, silent, ghost-like men, who, as I noted, loved the night better than they did the day. Almost might I have thought that they had been sent from Hades to conduct us to those gates from which for mortals there is no return. My fellowship of the priests and priestesses grew afraid and clustered round me at night, praying to be led back to familiar lands and faces.

I answered them that what I dared they must dare also, and that the goddess was as near to us here as she had been in Egypt, nor could death be closer to us than it was in Egypt. Yea, I bade them have faith, since without faith we could not be at peace one hour who, lacking it, must be overwhelmed with terrors, even within the walls of citadels.

They hearkened, bowing their heads and saying that whatever else they might doubt, they trusted themselves to me.

So we went on, passing through a country where more of these half-savage men that I learned were called *Amahagger* dwelt in villages surrounded by their cattle, or by colonies in caves. At last there arose before us a mighty mountain whose towering cliffs had the appearance of a wall so vast that the eye could not compass it. By a gorge we penetrated that mountain and found within it an enormous, fertile plain, and on the plain a city larger than Memphis or than Thebes, but a city half in ruins.

Passing over a great bridge spanning a wide moat once filled with water that now here and there was dry, we entered the walls of that city and by a street broader than any I had ever seen, bordered by many noble, broken houses, though some of these seemed still to be inhabited, came to a glorious temple like to those of Egypt, only greater, and with taller columns. Across its grass-grown courts, that were set one within another, we were carried to some inner sanctuary. Here we descended from the litters and were led to sculptured chambers that seemed to have been made ready to receive us, where we cleansed ourselves of the dust of travel and ate. Then came Philo, who conducted me to a little lamp-lit hall, for now the night had fallen, where was a chair of state such as high-priests used, in which at his bidding I sat myself.

I think that being weary with travel, I must have slept in that chair, since I dreamed or seemed to dream that I received worship such as is given to a queen, or even to a goddess. Heralds hailed me, voices sang to me, even spirits appeared in troops to talk to me, the spirits of those who thousands of years before had departed from the earth. They told me strange stories of the past and of the future; tales of a fallen people, of a worship and a glory that had gone by and been swallowed in the gulfs of Time. Then gathering in a multitude they seemed to hail me, crying,

"Welcome, appointed Queen! Build thou up that which has fallen. Discover thou that which is lost. Thine is the strength, thine the opportunity, yet beware of the temptations, beware of the flesh, lest the flesh should overcome the spirit and by its fall add ruin unto ruin, the ruin of the soul to the ruin of the body."

I awoke from my vision and saw Philo standing before me.

"Hearken, Philo," I said. "Of these mysteries I can bear no more. The time has come when you must speak, or face my wrath. Why have I been brought hither to this strange and distant land where it seems that I must dwell in a place of ruins?"

"Because the holy Noot so commanded, O Child of Wisdom," he answered. "Was it not set down in the writing I gave you at the Isle of Reeds upon the Nile?"

"Where then is the holy Noot?" I asked. "Here I see him not. Is he dead?"

"I do not think that he is dead, Lady. Yet to the world he is dead. He has become a hermit, one who dwells in a cave in a perilous place not very far from this city. To-morrow I will bring you to him, if that be your will. So only can you see him who now for years has never left that cave, or so I think, save to fetch the food which is prepared for him."

"A strange tale, Philo, though that Noot should become a hermit does not amaze me, since such was ever his desire. Now tell me how he came hither, and you with him?"

"Lady, you will remember that in the bygone years when Nectanebes, he who was Pharaoh, fled up Nile, the holy Noot embarked upon my ship, the *Hapi*, to sail to the northern cities, that there he might treat with the Persians for the ransom of those temples of Egypt that remained unravished."

"I remember, Philo. What chanced to you upon that journey?"

"This, Lady: that we were very nearly slain, every one of us, for whom the Persians had set a trap, thinking to snare Noot and his company and torture him till he revealed where the treasures of the temples of Isis were hid away. Nevertheless, because I am a good sailor and because that warrior priest, Kallikrates, was brave, we escaped into the canal which is called the *Road of Rameses* and so at last out to sea, for to return up Nile was impossible. Then Noot commanded that I should sail on southerly upon a course he seemed to know well enough; or perchance the goddess taught it to him; I cannot say. At least I obeyed, so that in the end we reached that harbour which is guarded by a rock carved to the likeness of an Ethiopian's head, and thence travelled to this place, still guided by the wisdom of Noot who knew the road."

"And Kallikrates? What became of Kallikrates—who it seems was with you?" I asked in an indifferent voice, though my heart burned to hear his answer.

"Lady, so far as it is known to me this is the story of Kallikrates and the Princess Amenartas."

"The Princess Amenartas! By all the gods, what is your meaning, Philo? She went up Nile with Nectanebes her father, he who was Pharaoh."

"Nay, Lady, she went down Nile with Kallikrates, or perhaps with Noot, or perhaps with herself alone. I do not know with whom she hid since I never saw her, nor learned that she was aboard my ship until we were two days' journey out to sea and the coasts of Egypt were far behind us."

"Is it so?" I said coldly, though I was filled with bitter anger. "And what did the holy Noot when he found that this woman was aboard his vessel?"

"Lady, he did nothing except look on her somewhat doubtfully."

"And what did the priest Kallikrates? Did he strive to be rid of her?"

"Nay, Lady, and indeed that would have been impossible, unless he had thrown her overboard. He did nothing except talk with her—that is, so far as I saw."

"Well, then, Philo, where is she now, and where is Kallikrates? I do not see him in this place."

"Lady, I cannot tell you, but I think it probable that they are dead and in the fellowship of Osiris. When we had been some weeks at sea we were driven by storm to an island off the coast under the lee of which we took shelter, a very fertile and beautiful island, peopled by a kindly folk. After we had sailed again from that island it was discovered that the priest Kallikrates and the Royal Princess Amenartas were missing from the ship, nor because of the strong wind that blew us forward was it possible for us to return to seek for them. I made inquiry of the matter and the sailors told me that they had been fishing together and that a shark which took their bait pulled them both into the sea; in which case doubtless they were drowned."

"And did you believe that story, Philo?"

"Nay, Lady. I understood at once that it was one which the sailors had been bribed to tell. Myself I think that they went to the island in one of the boats of the people who dwell there; perhaps because they could no longer bear the cold eyes of Noot fixed upon them, or perhaps to gather fruit, for which those who have been long upon water often conceive a great desire. But," he added simply, "I do not know why they should have done this seeing that the island-dwellers brought us plenty of fruits in their boats."

"Doubtless they preferred to pluck them fresh with their own hands, Philo."

"Perhaps, Lady, or perhaps they wished to stay awhile upon that island. At least I noted that the Princess took her garments and her jewels with her, which she could scarcely have done if the shark had dragged her into the sea."

"Are you so sure, Philo, that she did not leave some of those jewels behind—in *your* keeping, Philo? It is very strange to me that the Princess Amenartas could have come aboard your ship and have left your ship, and you know nothing."

Now Philo looked up innocently and said,

"Surely it is lawful for a captain to receive faring money from his passengers, and that I admit I did. But I do not understand why the Child of Wisdom is so wrath because a Greek and a great lady were by chance left together upon an island where, for aught I know, one or other of them may have had friends."

"Am I not the guardian of the honour of the goddess?" I answered. "And do you not know that under our law Kallikrates was sworn to her alone?"

"If so, Prophetess, doubtless that captain, or that priest, remembers his oaths and deals with this princess as though she were his sister or his mother. At the least the goddess can guard her own honour, so why should you fret your soul concerning it, Prophetess? Lastly, it is probable that by now both of them are dead and have made all things clear to Isis in the heavenly halls."

Thus he prattled on, adding lie to lie as only a Greek can do. I listened until I could bear no more. Then I said but one word. It was "Begone!"

He went humbly, yet as I thought, smiling.

Oh! now I saw it all. Noot had made a plot to remove Kallikrates far from me, so that I might never look upon him again. Philo knew of this plot, and through him Amenartas knew it also. Unknown to Noot she bribed Philo to hide her upon his ship till they were far from land, though whether the plan was known to Kallikrates I could not say, nor did it greatly matter. Then the rest followed. Amenartas appeared upon the ship and cast her net about Kallikrates who had sworn to have done with her, and the end can be guessed. Noot was wrath with them, so wrath that when the chance came they fled away, purposing to stay upon that island until they could find a ship to take them back to Egypt or elsewhere. Thus, I was sure, ran the story, and, as it proved afterward, I was right.

Well, they were gone and as I hoped, dead, since only death could cover up such sin, and for my part I was glad that I had done with Kallikrates and his light-of-love. And yet there, seated on the couch of state, I wept—because of the outrage done to Isis whom I served. Or was it for myself that I wept? I cannot say, I only know that my tears were bitter. Also I was very lonely in this strange and desolate place. Why had I been brought here, I wondered. Because Noot had commanded it, sending for me from afar, and what he commanded, that I must obey. Where, then, was Noot, who, Philo swore, still lived? Why had he not appeared to greet me? I covered my eyes with my hands and threw out my soul to Noot, saying,

"Come to me, O Noot. Come to me, my beloved Master."

Lo! a voice, a well-remembered voice answered,

"Daughter, I am here."

I let fall my hand. I gazed with my tear-stained eyes, and behold! before me, white-robed, gold-filleted, snowy-bearded, grown very ancient and ethereal, stood the prophet and high-priest, my Master. For a moment I thought that it was his spirit which I saw. Then he moved, and I heard his white robes rustle, and knew that there stood Noot himself whom I had travelled so many thousand leagues to find.

I rose; I ran to him; I seized his thin hand and kissed it, while he, murmuring, "My Daughter, at last, at last!" leaned forward and with his lips touched me on the brow.

"Far away your summons reached me in an hour of peril," I said. "Behold! I obeyed, I came. In faith I came, asking no questions, and I am here in safety, for I think the goddess herself was with me on that journey. Tell me all, O Noot. What is this place? How were you brought to it and why have you called me to you?"

"Hearken, Daughter," he said, seating himself beside me on the throne-like couch. "This city is named Kôr. Once she was queen of the world, as after her, Babylon, Thebes, Tyre, and Athens are, or have been queens. From Kôr thousands of years ago in the black, lost ages Egypt was peopled, as were other lands. In those dim days by another title her citizens worshipped Isis, Queen of Heaven, only they named her *Truth* whom in Egypt you know as Maat. Then apostasy arose and many of this great people, abandoning the pure and gentle worship of Isis wrapped in the veil of Truth, under the name of Rezu, a fierce sun-dæmon, set up another god to whom they made human sacrifices, as the Sidonians did to Moloch. Yea, they sacrificed men, women, and children by

thousands, and even learned to eat their flesh, first as a sacred rite, and afterward to satisfy their appetites. Heaven saw and grew wrath; Heaven smote the people with a mighty pestilence, so that they perished and perished till few were left. Thus Kôr fell by the sword of God as, for like cause, fell Sidon."

"Of all this afterward," I answered impatiently. "Tell me first, how came you here? Long years ago you sailed down Nile to treat with the Persians for the ransom of the temples of Egypt, a mission in which it seems you failed, my Father."

"Aye, Ayesha, I failed. It was but a trap, since those false-hearted Fire-worshippers thought to take me captive and hold my life in gage against all the treasures of Isis. By the cunning and seamanship of Philo and the courage of a priest named Kallikrates, whom you may still remember after all these years," here he glanced at me sharply, "I escaped when a gang of them disguised as envoys strove to snare me. But the road up Nile being barred, we were forced to fly south, and down Pharaoh's Great Ditch, till at length, after many wanderings and adventures, we came to this land, as it was fated that I should do. You will remember, Daughter, that I told you I believed that we were parting for a long while, although I believed also that we should meet again in the flesh."

"I remember well," I answered, "also that I swore to come to you at the appointed hour."

"I came to this land," went on Noot, "but Kallikrates, the Greek captain who was a priest of Isis, never reached it. He was lost on the way."

"With another, my Father. But now I have heard that story from Philo."

"With another who caused him to break his vows. Be sure, Daughter, that I knew nothing of her plot or that she was hidden aboard the ship, though perchance Philo knew. The goddess hid it from me, doubtless for her own purposes."

"Are this pair dead, or do they still live, my Father?"

"I cannot say; that also is hidden from me. Better for them if they are dead, since soon or late for such sacrilege vengeance will fall upon the head of one, if not of both of them. Peace be to them. May they be forgiven! At least as I think they loved each other much and, since love is very strong, all who have ever loved where they ought not should have pity on them," and again his questioning eyes played upon my face.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE HERMITAGE OF NOOT

"TELL me of what has passed in Egypt since Ochus conquered and Nectanebes fled away. Does Ochus still live, Daughter?" asked Noot after a pause during which both of us had sat staring at the ground.

"Nay, Father, Ochus is dead and by my hand, or through it," and I told him all that story of the burning of the temple of Isis at my command and of the Persians who defiled it.

"A great deed such as you alone could have planned," he muttered, "but terrible, terrible!"

"Then your soul must bear its burden, Prophet, since it was your voice that we heard in the sanctuary, when in our extreme we prayed for guidance, and it told us to go forward. There are those with me who can bear witness that they heard your very voice, as I do."

"Mayhap, Daughter. It is true that on a certain day not so many moons ago, I seemed to hear you calling to heaven in great trouble and danger, also that by direction which came I know not whence, I answered in my spirit that you must 'fulfil and fear not.' What you were to fulfil I did not know, though it came to my mind that the business had something to do with the burning of a temple."

"As it had indeed. Well, I fulfilled, as Ochus Artaxerxes and some hundreds of his Persian ravagers can testify before all the gods until the end of time, for those dogs at least have ceased to pollute the earth and to-day are enriching hell. There let them lie with Tenes and Nectanebes also, if in truth he has joined them, and many another false priest and king. Afterward we will talk of them and all their deeds of shame. But first tell me why I am here. For what end did you summon me from Egypt? Was it to save me from death?"

"Nay, Ayesha, from more than that. Why should I wish to hold you back from the great boon of death in which so soon I must have joined you? I summoned you because I was commanded so to do, that now when Isis has passed from Egypt, you should cause her worship to re-arise at Kôr which was her ancient home. It is willed that here you should abide and once more build up this people and make it great by the help of the Queen of Heaven who then will lead it on to triumph and to glory."

"That is a mighty task, Prophet. Still perchance with your aid it may be done if the gods give me life and wisdom."

He shook his head and answered,

"Look not to my aid, for at length my day is finished. Has not Philo told you that I mix no more with matters of the world, I who for years past have dwelt a hermit in a terrible place, sheltered only by a cave and lost in the contemplation of holy things?"

"No, Father, he has told me little or nothing—by your will, or so he said," I replied, amazed.

"Yet it is so; moreover, presently I must return to that prison whence I came, there to await the change called death. I have played my part, but your work still remains to do; Philo will aid you in it."

"Why do you live in that place, Father, leaving me without the guidance of your wisdom?"

"Because there I guard a great secret, that was revealed to me long ago, it matters not how, the greatest secret in the whole world—that of how men may escape from death and live on eternally upon the earth."

Now I stared at him, thinking that age and abstinence had made him mad. Then, to test the matter, I asked,

"If it be so great a secret, why do you tell it to me, Master?"

"Because I must. Because I know well that if I do not, you would discover it for yourself, and being unwarned, would fall into the trap, and still living beneath the sun, dare to clothe yourself with this garment of immortality. It was for this reason that until twice the command had come to me, I would not summon you to Kôr."

Now a new thought thrilled my soul. If this strange tale were true; if indeed here on earth there could be found such a door leading to the divine, why should I not pass it and become as are the gods? Only I did not believe that it was true.

"Surely you have dreamed in your loneliness, my Father," I said. "But know that if you did not dream, if it were true, I, Ayesha, should be minded to wear that robe of life eternal. Why not, O Prophet?"

"Because, Ayesha, the man or woman who dared to eat of this fruit forbidden to their race here on earth, where death is decreed for all, would be a man or woman who dared to enter into hell."

"I think otherwise, Prophet Noot, I think that this man or woman would enter into glory and become the ruler of the world," I answered, and as I spoke the words my eyes flashed and my breast heaved.

"Not so, Ayesha, since from that fatal peak of pride Heaven will beat back all human feet. Oh, hearken to me and purge your soul of the madness of this desire by which I see already it is possessed. It was laid upon me to reveal this secret to you, which I think was given me for that very purpose, so that you might show your greatness by rejecting it, the deadliest bribe that the god of Ill ever offered to mortal woman."

"Or perchance by accepting it, Master!"

"Nay, nay! Bethink you. Is the world a fit place for the undying? Moreover, this secret that I guard is but the world's spirit, not that of immortality; the hidden force from which our earth draws its strength, but which will perish with the earth, as it must do upon a day still hidden in the depths of time. The drinker of that cup therefore would become, not eternal, but long-lived only, destined to perish at last with this passing star. For him death would not be destroyed, it would only be delayed, waiting ever to snare him in the end. Meanwhile he must endure desolate and alone, watching the generations pass one by one to their appointed rest; while, filled perchance with fearful appetites which he must know eternally and yet remain unsatisfied, he stands but as a frozen rock upon the plain, wearing a human shape, yet alien to mortality, though still torn by its ambitions, its loves, its hates, its hopes, its fears, and waiting terrified for that predestined moment when this globe shall crumble and death shall devour it and him."

"I am old, I am feeble, my hour is well nigh done, I pass to my repose in Heaven. Ayesha, I have no strength to stay your feet, if you elect to drink this cup my weak hand cannot dash it from your lips. Yet as one who has taught and loved you, as one to whom the gods have given wisdom, I pray you to thrust aside this great temptation. As our faith teaches truly, already your spirit is immortal

and has its home prepared above. Desire not, therefore, to perpetuate your flesh, since if you do, Ayesha, I tell you that you will become but as a painted mummy in a tomb, simulating life, yet dead and cold within. Swear to me, Daughter, that you will lock this knowledge in your heart and thrust the poison from your lips."

"You speak wisely," I answered, "aye, as one inspired by the truth, and though I take no oaths, it is my purpose to do your will. Yet, Father, what is this secret? Having told me so much, tell all, lest I should go to discover it for myself."

"Daughter, near to this ancient city, amid the mountain cliffs, deep in the bowels of the rocks burns a travelling fire which is the very soul of the world, the flaming heart that gives it life. Yet this fire is no fire, but rather the essence of existence, and he who bathes in it will be filled with that essence and endure while it endures."

"Perchance such a one might be destroyed by that fire," I answered doubtfully.

"Daughter, I would that I could leave you thinking thus, for then a great fear would pass from me. But we who are the chief servants of Isis dare not hide the truth one from another, since to do so is to break our oaths. Moreover, in this matter I do not speak with my own voice, but with that of a Strength which is greater than I, to whom now I stand so near that almost it and I are one. Therefore to your eyes I must withdraw all veils, showing you what is, as it is, and not as I would have it be. Yonder fire will not destroy the mortal who finds the courage to stand in its raging path; it will give him life, and with it such strength, such beauty, and such wisdom as have never been the lot of man born of woman. Also it will give him such passions, such despairs, such unending woes as hitherto no mortal heart has known.

"There is the truth. Ask me not how it comes into my keeping and what that voice may be which is speaking it through my lips. A minute gone this truth was mine alone, or perchance mine and one other's. Now it is yours also, and being yours, I pray to that Divine from which we come and whither we return again, that it may give you strength and the true wisdom, knowing all, to reject all, and turning aside from this glittering guerdon of enduring life, patiently to walk your human path to the end appointed to our human feet."

"Will you show me this fire, Prophet?"

"Aye, if you will, for so I am commanded," he answered faintly; "yet why look upon that which must excite desire?"

Then weariness overcame him and he sank down swooning, so that had I not caught him, he would have fallen.

Noot abode three days at Kôr and talked with me of many things, but at that time of the wonderful Secret of Life he spoke no more. As though by consent both of us let that matter lie awhile. For the rest there was much to say. I told him everything that had passed in Egypt and the outer world since long years before he had left me to sail down Nile, never to return. I told him how I had obeyed his last commands to the letter, and surrounded though I was by foes, had preserved the worship of Isis in her temple from season to season, celebrating her festivals in their appointed course, though I never dared to leave its walls.

"So, Ayesha," he said when I had done, "while I have been a hermit here at Kôr, you have been a hermit at Memphis. Well, each of us has served the goddess as best might be, so may she reward us both according to our deserts, which doubtless are but small. And now my task is finished, but yours lies before you, seeing that you still have strength, even if your youth has gone."

"Yes," I answered somewhat bitterly, "mid-age has overtaken me, my youth has passed in the service of Heaven, and what has Heaven given to me after all my wars and strivings? Just this—that in a savage, desolate land among ruins and barbarians I must begin anew. I must restore a faith decayed, collect those barbarians into armies and order them, enact laws and cause them to be obeyed, fight battles, till lands, build ships and carry on commerce, collect revenues and spend them wisely, labour without cease day by day, finding but little rest at night because of the troubles that await the morrow. I must be at once a high-priestess, an oracle, a general, a law-giver, a judge, an architect, a land-tiller and a queen beneath an alien sky; without counsel, without friends, without love, without children to tend me in my age or to pile the earth upon my bones. Such is the lot that the goddess has given to her priestess Ayesha in payment of all her strivings."

Thus I spoke bitterly enough, but Noot answered with a gentle smile,

"At least, Daughter, it might have been more evil. You have a planning and a thoughtful mind and here you can shape all things afresh to your desire. You love power and here you will be absolute, a very queen, you who cannot brook denial. Here there will be none to say you nay. You hate rivals who would rule alone. Here they will be lacking. You desire to remain celibate who are wed to the spirit. Here no more kings or others will come to trouble you, plotting to win your beauty. It has ever been your wish to commune with Nature and that Divine from which it springs; here in this deserted place is Nature's very home and in solitude the Divine draws near to empty souls.

"Truly you should be thankful, therefore, whose prayers have been fulfilled, who have attained to all you sought, whose ambitions are satisfied and who in the holy calm and the healthful weariness that follows upon long-continued labours, at last when your task is done, will sink gently to the grave to seek their reward elsewhere. Soon, very soon, you will be as I am and when that day comes there will be an empty hermitage yonder where in darkness and in contemplation you can patiently await the end and those new endeavours which, after it, may be appointed to you elsewhere. For be sure of this, Ayesha—all existence is a ladder up which painfully and with many slips we must climb step by step."

"And when we reach the top, what then, Master?"

"I do not know, Daughter, but I do know that if we fall to the bottom, all those steps must be climbed again, only this time the rungs of the ladder will be wreathed with thorns."

"It seems that yonder hermitage of yours is no home of joy, my Father."

"Nay, Daughter. It is a home of grief and of repentance. The joy lies beyond. Such are the philosophy of life and the teachings of all religion. Be sorrowful and afterward you will rejoice. Rejoice and afterward you will be sorrowful."

"A sad philosophy, Prophet, and such lessons as slaves learn beneath the whip."

"Aye, Ayesha, but one that must be endured, as, if they could speak, Tenes and Ochus and Nectanebes would tell you to-day."

So he droned on who grew weak and senile, having become but the dry shell of a man, whence the sap had withered, like to a sterile nut indeed, from which, if it were sown, no shoot would spring. At length wearying of his melancholy talk, I fell to the thought of that Fire of Life raging in its eternal vigour beneath his hermitage, which, as he swore, would give unending beauty, youth, glory, and dominion to him who could find faith and courage to dare its terrors.

On the following day I accompanied Noot back to his hermitage for the quiet of which he seemed to yearn, so much so indeed that even for my sake whom he loved more than anything on earth and in whose fellowship he delighted, he would not be separated from it for another hour.

It was a rough journey that we made borne in litters to the foot of the great precipice which surrounds the plain of Kôr like to a measureless wall chiselled by Titans at the shaping of the world. We climbed up a cleft in that wall and entered a hidden fold of rock, invisible from below. Following this fold we came to the mouth of a cave. Here I noted that food was set in plenty by the dwellers in this land who revered Noot as a prophet and thus supplied him with his sustenance. Here also were torches which were lit by those who accompanied us to give us light upon our journey through the cave that was long and rough. At length we came to its end to find before us a terrible chasm. Thousands of feet above us was a line of blue sky and beneath lay a gulf of darkness. Out into this chasm down which winds raved and howled, ran a giant spur of rock of which the end was lost in darkness. I looked at it doubtfully and said,

"Where then is your habitation, Noot, and by what road is it reached?"

"It lies yonder in the darkness, Daughter," he answered, smiling, "and this is the road that those who would visit me must travel," and he pointed to the spur of rock that trembled in the roaring gale, adding, "To my feet it is familiar; moreover, I know that on it as elsewhere I am protected from harm. But if you fear to walk such a path, turn back while there is still time. Perhaps it would be better that you should turn back."

Now I looked at the trembling rock and then I looked at Noot, my Master.

"What," thought I to myself, "shall I, Ayesha, who dread neither man nor devil, be afraid to follow where this frail old priest can lead? Never will I blench from peril though in it lies my death."

So I stared him in the face and answered,

"To the task, Father, and swiftly, for here the wind blows chill. I go first; Philo, follow me close."

Now Philo, who was my companion upon this adventure, glanced at me with questioning eyes, but being a brave man and one who as a sailor was accustomed to perilous heights, said nothing.

For a moment Noot paused, looking upward, perchance to pray or perchance for other reasons. Then having asked Philo how long it was to the time of sunset and been answered it lacked between the half and the fourth part of an hour before Ra sank behind the western cliff, he started, walking boldly down the spur. I followed next, and last came Philo.

Very terrible was that journey in the uncertain light which as we progressed into the gulf grew ever fainter, till at last we were wrapped about with gloom. Moreover, always the spur of rock narrowed, and the raving gusts of wind which blew about that hideous gorge buffeted us more fiercely.

Still we went on leaning our weight against them, and as we went a kind of exaltation seized me, as it does always in moments of great danger, so that my heart grew bold and feared no more. I would match myself against these elemental strengths as I had matched myself against those of hostile and desiring kings, and conquer them. Or perchance it was the breath from the divine fire that burned below that already had entered into me. I cannot say, but this I remember, that before I had reached the point of that fearful rock I was filled with a wild joy and could laugh at Philo crawling after me with hesitating steps and breathing prayers now to Isis and now to the Grecian gods that he had worshipped as a child.

At length we came to the end of that long needle which thrust itself thus into the dark stuff of space, and as we did so all light went out of the sky above, leaving us plunged in blackness. I seated myself upon the throbbing point of rock, clinging to Philo who had done likewise, and cried into the ear of Noot, kneeling at our side,

"What now? Show us and be swift, lest we should be thrown from this place like stones from a sling."

"Hold fast and wait," answered Noot.

We did so, grasping the roughness of the rock with our hands. Then suddenly a marvel happened, since from somewhere, I know not whence and have never learned, a fierce red ray of light, cast doubtless by the setting sun, struck us through some hole in the opposing cliffs. Aye, it struck like a blazing sword, showing all things that could be seen. They were these: ourselves crouched upon that point of rock; infinite space beneath us, infinite space above reaching up to a single star that shone upon the sky, and we three hemmed in by two black precipices. Moreover, they showed, not four paces from the point, a huge trembling stone that was joined to that fearsome spar by a little bridge of wood laid from the one to the other by the hand of man, which bridge rose and fell and rocked as the great stone trembled on its farther side.

"Follow me swiftly before the light dies," cried Noot as he stepped across this bridge and, reaching the crest of the trembling stone, stood there like a ghost illumined with fire; like also to that figure which I had seen watching from the brow of the Ethiopian's head when we entered the harbour from the sea.

I obeyed and joined him, and after me came Philo.

By the last rays of that fleeting light we descended a rough stairway cut on the farther side of the Trembling Stone and of a sudden found ourselves in shelter. Light sprang up and I saw that it was held in the hand of a dwarf, a curious, solemn dwarf. Whence this creature came and who he was I do not know, but I think that he must have been a spirit, some gnome from the Under-world appointed by the Powers which ruled in that dark place to attend to the wants of the holy Noot, their Master and mine.

This I noted at least, and so did Philo, that we could never see this creature's face. Even when he moved about us, always it seemed to be hidden either by shadows or something that hung in front of it like a veil. Yet man, or gnome, or ghost, he was a good servant, since in that hermit's cave, or rather caves, for there were several of them, joined one to the other, all things were made ready. Thus a fire burned, food was prepared upon a table, and in the inner caves beds were spread, each in a little separate chamber.

The outer cave also was furnished in a fashion and I noted that in a niche stood the small statue of Isis which I remembered well, since wherever Noot my Master went in the past years when we journeyed together, that statue went with him and now still it was his companion. Indeed the tale was that it could speak and gave him counsel in all hours of doubt and trouble, and that from this enchanted thing he gathered his great wisdom. Whether or no this tale were true, I do not know, since I never heard it utter words, nor would Noot tell me when I asked him. Yet it is true that it was his custom to pray to it; also that it was very ancient and valued by him more than all the gold and jewels on the earth. Now it stood here as it had done in my Father's house at Ozal, as it had done at

Philæ in his chamber, at Memphis, on the ship *Hapi* and elsewhere when we journeyed together throughout the world, and it was strange to me to behold its familiar face again in this dreadful habitation.

"Eat," said Noot, "then sleep, for you are weary."

Philo and I did as he commanded. We ate, we laid ourselves down upon the beds in the inner caves, and slept. The last thing that my eyes saw before slumber closed them was Noot my Master, now become more of a spirit than a man, kneeling in solemn prayer before the hallowed effigy of Isis.

I know not for how long we slept, but it must have been many hours, for when we woke it was to see that dwarf whose face was always hidden, setting another meal upon the table in the outer cave. There, too, by the lamplight, I perceived Noot still praying to the statue of Isis as though he had never risen from his knees, which perchance he had not done who no longer was as are other men. It was a strange sight in that dread place and one that affrighted Philo, as he told me, and left me not unmoved, who felt that here we stood upon the edge of mortal things.

I went to him, and seeing me come, he rose from his knees to greet me, asking me whether I had rested well.

"Neither well nor ill," I answered. "I slept, yet my sleep was full of dreams, very strange dreams that boded I know not what. They told me both of the past and of the future, and the burden of them was that I seemed to see myself living alone from generation to generation in caves as you do to-day."

"May the gods defend you from such a fate, Daughter," he answered as though the thought disturbed him.

"They have not defended you, Father. Oh! how can you bear to dwell in the darkness of this dreadful place round which the winds howl eternally, companioned only by your thoughts and a dwarf who never speaks? How did you find it, how came you here, and what put into your mind the thought of choosing this burrow for a hermitage? Tell me truly, who as yet, I think, have hidden half the truth even from me, for I am devoured with wonder and would understand."

"Hearken, Ayesha. When first we met in Arabia I was already very old, was I not, I who now long have passed the tale of man's allotted days? Before that time for many years I had been a head-priest and prophet of Isis in Egypt, also the chief Magician of that land. Yet I was not born an Egyptian nor did my eyes so much as look upon the Nile until I had counted over sixty summers."

"Where then were you born, Father?"

"Here in Kôr. I am the last descendant of the king-priests who ruled in Kôr before the great apostasy and the falling of the Sword of God. To the holy men who were my fathers had descended their knowledge of that secret of secrets whereof I have spoken to you, and ever it was their custom when age took a hold of them to withdraw into this living sepulchre and there as guardians of the Fire, to await the end. Also under many oaths each of them passed on to his descendants the knowledge of the secret.

"Thus, Daughter, it came into my keeping, for my grandsire told my father, and my father whispered it to me. Then, while my grandsire still lived, the goddess for her own ends of which now I think I see the purpose, called me from this desolate land away to Egypt, there to serve her as I have done. Again she called me to Arabia that there you might be given into my keeping, as you were for certain years. A third time she called me back to Kôr, whither I came with Philo. Here I found my grandsire dead and his son, my father, dead after him, leaving the hermitage of the Watcher of the Fire untenanted. Therefore setting Philo to command the savage tribes who dwell around the ruins of haunted Kôr, hither I came, as for generations my forbears have done, to fill the office that they filled, and—to die."

"Forgetting me upon whose head you left a heavy burden, my Father in Isis," I said bitterly.

"Nay, Ayesha, I forgot you not, who knew well that at the appointed time we should meet once more, as met we have. Always in my prayers I have watched over you and many of your troubles and dangers have been made known to me in dreams. It was in a dream that I heard you calling for guidance, and sent the answer that was commanded. Aye, and before that already I had despatched Philo to Egypt to bring you to me, as also I was commanded. And now you stand here before me in my hermitage and I tell you all these things because last night I learned, while I prayed and you were lost in sleep, that we shall speak no more together. My hour is at hand and since I have no child of my body, to you, my child in the Spirit, I pass on the great secret as to you already I have passed on my high office and my wisdom. When the breath has left me, Ayesha, then to you will descend the guardianship of the Fire, and here, doubtless, when age has overtaken you, you also will end your days."

"Is it so?" I asked, dismayed, staring around me at the rocky walls and listening to the tempest that raged eternally without.

"Aye, Ayesha, it is so, since that is the high duty laid upon your soul, whereby it shall find wings to fly to Heaven. Know that no Guardian of the Fire enters into the Fire. He watches it—no more—and if it is threatened he seals it for ever from the sight of man. Listen, I will tell you how," and leaning forward he whispered certain words into my ear and showed me certain hidden things.

I heard, I saw, I bowed my head. Then I asked,

"And if the Guardian of the Fire entered into the Fire, what then, Watcher of the Fire?"

"Daughter, I know not," he answered, horror-struck. "But then I think the Fire would become *his* guardian, a terrible guardian that at the last would also be the destroyer of its false servant. More I cannot tell, because though some have breathed its essence, none of them has dared this deed."

"Two nights ago you told me, O Noot, that this fire gives youth and beauty and uncounted days to those who bathe therein. If none has ever entered it, how know you this?"

"Because it is so, Ayesha. Moreover, I did not say that none had ever entered it. Perchance there are beings now known to the world as gods or dæmons, who, by accident rather than design, have tasted of this cup. Perchance that shape you saw standing on the Ethiopian's head, in some bygone age stood for an instant in its path. At least I repeat that it is so. Believe or disbelieve as you will, but ask me no more, and above all do not venture to solve the mystery in your mortal flesh."

"At least, Prophet, let me look upon that which I must guard," I said.

"Aye, you shall look," he answered. "It is for that reason that I have brought you here, Priestess and Daughter of Wisdom, for having looked, I do not think that you will desire to bathe in that red flame. Eat now and make ready."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE COMING OF KALLIKRATES

AWHILE later we left the cave, Noot, Philo, and I, each of us bearing a lighted lamp. Clad in a dark cloak Noot led the way, his lamp in one hand and in the other a long staff such as herdsmen use upon the mountain side. Strange enough he seemed thus arrayed, with his thin, transparent face, his eyes grown large and luminous from staring at the darkness, and his long white beard showing like snow against the black texture of the cloak; more of a spirit than a man indeed, or like Charon leading shadows of the dead to that boat in which all—aye, even I, Ayesha—must embark at last. Never shall I forget his aspect as he searched for and found the stair that led to the rock-strewn slope which stretched downward for a furlong or more to the narrow passage at its end, through which presently we travelled into the infernal halls beyond.

Great were those halls or caverns; so great that we light-bearers were but as ants creeping through their vastness, so great that we could see neither their walls nor roof.

We passed through two of them, our footfalls echoing in their fearful silence, and came to a passage.

“Bide here,” said Noot to Philo, “and await us, since it is not lawful for you to look upon that which lies beyond. If perchance we should not return within three hours so nearly as you can measure them, which may happen since we go to where there is danger for mankind, win your way back to the world and say that the gods have taken Noot the Prophet and Ayesha the High-Priestess to be of their company.”

So Philo, out of whose eyes all the Grecian joyousness had fled, sat himself down upon a rock to wait, as I could see unwillingly enough, for he loved this adventure little and was troubled for the safety of me whom he loved much.

“Fear not,” I whispered to him, “the hour is still far in which Ayesha must fall a ripe fruit from the Tree of Life.”

“I pray so, Child of Isis,” he answered, “since surely we have entered into Hades where I would not be left without so much as a fellow shade to comfort me. Yet beware! for I know not whither that old ghost is leading you,” and he glanced at the tall shape of Noot striding into the tunnel in which this cave ended, the lamp held above his head.

I followed after him, also holding my lamp aloft, though presently it became needless since now the darkness of that hole grew alive with rosy light. On like a swift shadow glided Noot, and I followed him into the heart of the light, into a place, too, where thunder was imprisoned, like winds in the bag of Æolus, aye, a place filled with glories and with roarings, though whence these came I could not guess.

We entered yet another cavern, not so very large in size and carpeted with fine white sand.

It was empty save for one thing. On the sand lay a withered shape, a hideous little shape that once had been man or woman. Whose it was and how it came there I never learned, since in the marvel of all that followed and afterward I forgot to ask it of Noot, if indeed he could have told me. Perchance some seeker of the Fire who lived a thousand or ten thousand years before had perished of terror at the sight of it, or perchance for his or her impiety that seeker had been sacrificed by gods or men. Yet even then I thought it dreadful and ominous that the first sight my eyes beheld in this terrible place should be this shrivelled, long-haired lump of death lying there in eternal solitude, while in front of and around it played the fierce essences of Life eternal.

This cavern was filled with a light like to that of some tempestuous Libyan dawn. Also it was filled with a muttering, thunderous sound, such sound as is caused by the iron wheels of a thousand chariots rushing to battle adown a rocky way. The light multiplied and was stabbed through as though by many coloured levins flashing hither and thither; the thunders gathered to an awful roar; those unearthly chariots were rolling down upon us.

“To your knees,” cried Noot in my ear. “The Fire comes, the god is passing by!”

I knelt; my hand rested by chance upon that little shrivelled form, and lo! at my touch it crumbled into dust. It had been, it was not; the grinning twisted face was gone; nothing of it remained save a lock or two of curling hair—surely it must have been a woman’s hair. Then the marvel happened. Before me appeared a turning column of glorious, many-coloured brightness, that roared and bellowed like a million maddened bulls. To my eyes it seemed to take the shape of a mighty man, and in its glowing crest I saw green eyes of emerald like to those of tigers, which eyes fixed themselves upon me. Arms it had also, blood-red, splendid arms that stretched themselves toward me as though to clasp me to that burning breast. It was terrible and yet it was most beauteous. Never until I saw it had I known beauty, no not even in the dawn or in the sunset, or in the sight of the wild shock of battle.

This mighty god of Life seemed to call to the life within me, like a king to his subject, like a master to his slave; I longed to lose myself in that embrace of fire. Half I rose from my knees. Noot caught me by the arm.

“Enter not!” he cried sternly, and again I sank down and hid my face upon the sand.

How long I lay there I do not know, for exaltation seized me and made my senses drunk, so that I could take no count of time. It may have been for a minute or an hour; I say I do not know. When I looked up again, the Fire had gone by, the god was hidden in his secret sanctuary, though still the cavern glowed with rosy light.

Noot drew me from that place. Without we found Philo pale-lipped and trembling, and together, slowly and with labour, we climbed our upward course back to the hermitage beneath the swaying stone. Here we rested in silence until at last Noot drew me aside and spoke.

“Ayesha,” he said, “you have seen as it was decreed that you must see. In that burning presence temptation took hold of you, so sharp a hold that had I not been there, perchance you would have yielded, forgetting my warnings and my prayers. Now I beseech you, guard the Fire in the days to come, but look on it no more for ever, since although in other matters you are so strong, in this I feel you frail. While I live indeed never again shall you behold it with your eyes, since first I will call upon the goddess to cut your thread of life and take you to herself.”

I bowed my head but made no answer, nor did he ask for any.

What happened then? Oh! I remember that we ate of food that was made ready doubtless by the gnome-like dwarf whom I saw no more. After this Noot looked from the door of his hermitage and called to us to come swiftly, since the moment of sunset that brought with it the falling ray was at hand and the bridge must be crossed and the narrowest of the stone spur travelled ere it departed. Holding lighted lanterns in our hands, he led us to the crest of the Trembling Stone whereon the timbers of the bridge creaked and swayed. Here he clasped me in his arms, blessing me and bidding me farewell, and though he said it not, I was certain that in his mind, as at the moment I did in mine, he believed that our spirits parted for ever upon this earth; yes, believed it so surely that tears coursed down his pale cheeks.

Then suddenly the sword-like ray of fire stabbed the darkness and by it I and Philo crossed the bridge and while it endured clambered swiftly along the spur of which, I know not why, all fear had left me.

As that ray began to fade I turned my head to look my last on Noot. There in the heart of it he stood, clothed as it were with fire, as our faith tells are the messengers of Isis, Queen of Heaven. Yes, there he stood with clasped hands and uplifted eyes like to one lost in prayer. Then the ray went out like a blown lamp and the darkness fell and swallowed him.

We gained the plain in safety and through the night were borne back to Kôr. The litter swayed; the slaves whose shoulders bent beneath the pole sang their low, weird chant inviting to sleep, but its messengers would not touch my eyelids with their rod of slumber. I could not sleep whose soul burned with a fierce wakefulness. Oh! what was this wonder that I had seen? The very fount of Life that, hidden from mankind, burns in the womb of the world! But if it were this, why did Noot speak of it as though it were a fount of Death? Why did he forbid me to taste its cup? Perhaps because not Life but Death inhabited that flame, as the little withered thing which had crumbled at my touch, that once had been man or woman—woman, as I think—hinted to the mind.

I knew not, but what I did know was that henceforth I was pledged to this god of Fire and that in some day to come I must feel his burning marriage kiss upon my brow.

When we came to Kôr at the sunrise I beckoned Philo to me and made to him the sign of silence, which being initiated, he knew well, so that neither then nor at any other time should any word concerning these mysteries pass his lips. Nor indeed could it do so as he had not looked upon the greatest of them and only from afar had listened to the thunder of the wheeling flame.

Then with a new energy, as though inspired by the breath of that fiery god, I got me to my common daily task of rebuilding a perished faith and people. Let that business be. Why should I speak of it, since Destiny decreed that I must shape my work of water or of drifting sand, not of rock or fired clay. Oh! Fate, why didst thou fool me thus? Oh, Love the Destroyer, why didst thou make of me thy tool, and with me thus bring Isis and her worship to the dust?

How long afterward was it that Kallikrates came? But a little while, I think, though to one who has lived over two thousand years Time loses its measure and significance.

I had sent Philo to the coast, purposing to prepare for the opening up of trade and converse with the outer world. For in this rich place, when its wild people were brought beneath my yoke, who already looked upon me as one half divine, as the spirit of their ancient goddess indeed, sent back to them from Heaven, I knew that we could produce much that the teeming tribes of Libya would seek and buy. One night he returned and was at once admitted to my presence. He told me of all that he had done, or failed to do, and I praised him, then made the signal of dismissal. He hesitated a while, then said,

“Child of Isis, be pleased to learn that I have not returned alone.”

“That I know already, Philo, since there were many in your company.”

“Be it understood, Child of Isis, that I have brought back with me some with whom I did not set forth.”

“Doubtless envoys from the peoples of the coast,” I answered indifferently.

“Nay,” he replied, “travellers who have wandered long among those peoples and whom I found shipwrecked and in a desperate state. Travellers from Egypt.”

“From Egypt! How many, Philo?”

“Nine in all, Prophetess, though the most of them are servants.”

“Good, Philo. It will please me who must dwell so much alone to talk with strangers from Egypt. They may have news of what passes on the Nile. Give them hospitality such as we can command, and all they need, and to-morrow, after the morning ceremonies, bring them to me. To-night it is too late and doubtless they are weary.”

Again he hesitated, then bowed, and went, leaving me wondering, for there was that in his manner which I thought strange. Still, having spoken my commands, I would not alter them. Yet as I laid me down to sleep terror took hold of me; yes, a terror of I knew not what. I felt that evil overshadowed me with its black wings; that I was about to look upon something or someone I did not desire to see; that a doom unknown had meshed me so that I lay helpless like a gladiator over whom the net-thrower has cast his web and who lies struggling vainly, the trident at his throat. Thus often does advancing peril cast its cold shadow upon our mortal hearts which shiver at the touch of that they feel but cannot discern.

I thought that perchance I was about to die, that already Death gripped me with his clasp of ice; that in the dark recesses of the chamber where I lay already some murderer fingered the dagger which should pierce my breast, as well might happen in this wild land among man-eating savages upon whose necks I had set my heel. Again I thought that the spirits of the ancient dead whose place I occupied, were hunting me, demanding that I should give them back their own, the rule I had usurped.

Next I remembered Tenes transfixed by the sword of vengeance and knowing now that mine was the hand that drove it, and Ochus Artaxerxes when the poison began to burn his vitals as presently the fire would burn his company, guessing at the last that I, the outraged priestess, had brewed the cup and lit the fire. Yea, all these memories gathered round me, rising like black clouds upon my sky of life and threatening its eclipse, I who was terrified of I knew not what.

Lastly there came into my mind this tale of Philo's of shipwrecked strangers whom he had rescued and led hither to be comforted. Who were these strangers, I wondered? Assassins perchance, hid under a disguise of want and desolation, men who sought to kill me and free my spirit with their dagger-points, that it might no longer watch them here on earth. Yet, and this was marvellous, showing how blind are the eyes of our mortal flesh, never did the thought come to me that those strangers might be Kallikrates the Greek and Amenartas, aforesaid Royal Princess of Egypt, she whom her desire and hate had made my foe.

I slept at last, though feverishly, only to wake when the high sun was flooding the temple court with its fierce summer rays. I rose, and since the day was one of ceremony and festival, was arrayed by my women in the queenly garments of the high-priestess of Isis and hung about with the sacred jewels and emblems of my rank.

Thus splendidly attired, I was led to my seat of state that I had caused to be placed in the inmost pillared court before a wondrous veiled statue of Truth standing on the world, which some god-gifted artist of old Kôr had fashioned in the forgotten days. Here we celebrated our service with pomp and ritual, as once we were wont to do in Egypt, though alas! the hierophants and the singers were few in number. So was the outer congregation of half-converted worshippers creeping back from the blackness of their barbarous rites to the holy fellowship of the goddess.

The office was ended, the ringing of the *sistrum* had ceased, the blessing was given and with it the absolution of offences.

The worshippers had dispersed, save here and there one who remained to pray. I too was about to depart when Philo came, saying, humbly and hastily like one who desires to be done with an unwelcome task, that those wanderers of whom he had spoken waited upon my pleasure.

"Admit them," I answered, wondering within myself upon whom I was about to look. Malefactors perchance, I thought, who had fled from justice into far lands, or merchants driven southward by the gales, or humble seamen escaped from some sunk ship.

They came, a little knot of them, winding in and out between the great columns of the ruined temple, advancing through the shadows. Idly I noted, as they passed an open space where fell a stronger light, that the two who walked first had a noble air, different from that of those who followed after them. Then once more the shadows veiled them, whence presently they emerged before me, seated beneath the statue, and stood there, the sun's rays pouring down upon them.

I glanced at them and saw that they were man and woman, perfect man and very beauteous woman. Then I lifted my head and looked them fully in the face, only to sink back terrified, amazed, overwhelmed! Did I dream? Had some mocking spirit tricked my eyes, or were these that stood before me Kallikrates, the Grecian warrior-priest, and Amenartas, the Royal Princess of Egypt?

Lifting my hand to hide my face, I studied them beneath its shade. Oh! who could be mistaken? There before me, splendid in beauty as of old, stood the god-like Kallikrates and at his side, dark, magnificent and as yet untouched by time, or perchance protected from its ravages by arts she learned from her sire, Nectanebes the sorcerer, was the imperial Amenartas. For a moment I kept silence, gathering up my strength, ordering my spirit. Then still holding my hand before my face, I spoke coldly as though without concern, saying,

"Whence come you, noble strangers? What are your names and why do you seek the hospitality of the Queen of this ruined land of Kôr?"

Bold as ever, it was Amenartas who answered me, not Kallikrates, who stood staring about him as men do when they are uneasy in their minds or wearied with ceremonies.

"We are wanderers, Priestess, in station neither mean nor great; traders, to tell the truth, from the far north, who having suffered shipwreck and many other things at length were rescued of this servant of yours who led us here," and she pointed to Philo standing near by with a stupid smile upon his face.

"By race we are Phœnicians called——" and she gave some name that I forget. "As to the rest, being in extremity, for those over whom we ruled rebelled against us and cast us out, we ask shelter from you until Fortune smiles upon us again, who of late has dealt us naught but frowns."

"It is granted, Lady. But tell me, what are you to each other? Brother and sister, perchance?"

"Aye, Priestess, brother and sister, as you have rightly guessed, seeing that our names are one name."

"That is strange, Lady; indeed I think that you throw mud upon your father or your mother, or both, since how could these have begotten one dark, a high-born daughter of the Nile, and another fair as Apollo and having Grecian Apollo's face and mien? Again, how comes it that the sister of a Phœnician merchant binds up her locks with the circlet of Egyptian royalty?" And I pointed to the uræus-twisted band of gold upon her brow.

"Blood plays strange tricks, Priestess, searching out now the likeness of one ancestor, and now of another, so that oftentimes one child is born dark and the other fair. As for the ornament, I bought it in trade from an Arab merchant, not knowing whence it came or its significance," she began to answer unabashed, when of a sudden Kallikrates checked her, muttering,

"Have done!" Then addressing me, he said,

"O Queen and Priestess, take no heed of this lady's words, since of late, because of our misfortunes, we have been forced to tell many strange tales according to the conditions of the hour. We are not Phœnicians born of one House; we are by blood Greek and Egyptian, and by relation not brother and sister, but man and wife."

Now when I heard these words my heart stood still who hoped that Isis and their oaths might have held this pair apart. Yet I answered calmly,

"Is it so, Wanderer? Tell me then, of what faith are you twain and by whom were you wed? Did some minister of Zeus join your hands, or did you stand together before Hathor's altars?"

Then while he searched for some answer that he could not find, I went on, laughing a little,

"Perchance, O noble pair, you were not wed at all. Perchance you are not husband and wife but only lover and lover mated after Nature's fashion!"

He hung his head, confused, and even the bold eyes of Amenartas were troubled.

Now I could bear no more.

"O Grecian Kallikrates," I said, "aforetime captain of Pharaoh's guard, aforetime priest of Isis, and O Amenartas, daughter of Nectanebes, by birth Royal Princess of Egypt, why do you waste words, hoping to fool one who cannot be deceived? Doubtless you have bribed yonder Philo to hide the truth, as once you bribed him to hide a certain lady upon his ship and to set the two of you ashore upon a certain island."

"If so, he has betrayed us," stammered Kallikrates, the red blood rising to his brow.

"Nay, he has not betrayed you, being one who ever keeps faith with those who pay him well. Is it not so, Philo my servant?"

I waited for an answer, but none came, for Philo had gone. Then I continued,

"Nay, Philo did not betray you, nor was it needed. Royal Amenartas, whence had you that scarab ring upon your hand?"

"It was my lord's gift to me," she answered.

"Then tell me, Kallikrates, whence had you the ring, also if there be graven on its bezel in the Egyptian writing, signs that mean 'Royal Son of the Sun'?"

"Those signs are cut upon the ring, O Queen, which in bygone years was given to me as a talisman by a certain divine priestess whom I saved in battle, that its virtues might recover me of wounds which I received in the battle. This, as I was told afterward, it had the power to do because that ring was blessed, having been fashioned like to one which Isis the Mother set as her love gift upon the hand of dead Osiris ere she breathed his soul into him again. Or perchance it was the very same that Osiris left upon the earth when he passed to Heaven; I know not."

Thus he spoke, stumbling at the words like an ill-bred mule upon a stony path till, wearying of the tale, I broke in,

"Therefore, O Kallikrates, you in your turn gave the enchanted ancient amulet to a woman you desired, or who desired you, hoping that its virtues might consecrate your unhallowed union. O priest forsworn, how did you dare this sacrilege—to set upon your lover's hand the ring, the very ring of Isis that once great Khæmuas wore, given to you by the Prophetess of Isis to lift you from the gates of death."

Then bending forward so that the shadow of the statue behind no longer hid me, I uncovered my face and looked him in the eyes.

"I thought it!" he said, "though who could have dreamed that here in this ruin——? It is the Oracle and the Prophetess. It is the Child of Isis, the Daughter of Wisdom herself whose voice I knew again through all her feigning," and he fell to the ground so that his brow was pressed upon its stones, muttering,

"Slay me, Queen, and have done, but spare this lady and send her back to her own land, since the sin is mine, not hers, who was no priestess."

Now Amenartas stared at me with her bold eyes, then cried with a hard laugh,

"Be not so sure, my Lord, for this is scarcely possible. Well do I remember looking upon her who was called *Isis-come-to-Earth* in the bygone days, especially at a certain feast that Pharaoh gave when she unveiled to show herself to Tenes, King of Sidon, who afterward took her as his slave. But that seeress was a very fair woman, although perchance even then somewhat faded, or so I who but a little while before had bade farewell to childhood, judged of her. Therefore this ruler of ruins can scarcely be the same, seeing that none could name her fair. Look, she is old and withered, her neck has fallen in, her shape is flattened.

"The seeress I remember had a lovely mouth of coral, but this lady's lips are thin and pale; also she had large and beauteous eyes, but those of this lady are small and almost colourless. Moreover, they are ringed beneath with lines of black, such as are common to aged virgin priestesses who have never known the love of man, though of it, perchance, their holy souls still dream even in the midst of their customary, bead-checked prayers, while, like those of slaves, their knees harden upon the stones.

"Nay, my Lord, although time works strange changes in those who have passed the meridian of their days, this priestess who hides her gray hairs beneath the vulture cap of her persuasion can scarcely be the same as that glowing pythoness upon whom once we looked in Pharaoh's halls and who, as I recall, then looked much on you."

Now I listened to this vulgar venom, the common outpouring of a small-natured, jealous heart, and smiled. Yet it is true, for in these lines I write nothing which is not the truth, that some of those poisoned shafts went home. I knew well that all the beauty that once I had was no longer mine; that the passing of the years, that care and abstinence and the turning of my heart from things mortal to those divine, added to the weight of rule and wisdom and avengement which Destiny had laid upon my brow, had robbed me of my bloom and that imperial loveliness which once enthralled the world. Also it was true that Amenartas was still a child when I was a woman grown and therefore had Nature's vantage of me, which indeed must increase from moon to moon.

Still I smiled, and as I smiled a great thought smote me, sowing a seed of daring in the kind soil of my breast where thenceforth it was doomed to grow, to blossom, and in an unborn hour of fulfilment to bear its fearful fruit. Oh! if I have sinned against high Heaven and the commands of its minister, my guide, the holy Noot, let the recording gods remember that it was the whip of this woman's bitter tongue which drove me to the deed.

Now very gently I spoke, saying,

"Rise, Kallikrates, such words as you have heard spoken of one who once was set above you in her office can scarcely be pleasing to your ears, nor will I answer them. I know well that in them there is something of the truth and I am proud that it has been granted to me to make sacrifice to the Queen of Heaven whom I adore of such small gifts of the flesh and comeliness as once were mine. It is but another offering which I heap upon her altar, one of many.

"Yet, Kallikrates, though as I think you can no longer bow the knee before that Majesty as once you did, I pray you, if you can, to hold this lady's lips from pouring scorn upon her, as she does upon me, her priestess. I pray you to bring it to her memory that once, clad in her veil of Isis, she also worshipped at that shrine, aye, that in a time of peril, often there, she and you and I have sent up our pure petitions, though not in the 'customary bead-checked prayers' of which she speaks. Yes, bring it to her memory that though the temple of Memphis has been given to the flames, Mother Isis hears and watches not in Egypt, but in Heaven, and that though she be slow to wrath, yet she still can smite. Now, Kallikrates, go rest you, taking your love with you, and afterward we will talk alone since, although I can forgive, I am not minded to be stoned with such words as angry women of the people throw at their rivals in the marketplace."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE TRUTH AND THE TEMPTATION

Nor that day but on the morrow Kallikrates asked audience of me. Learning that he was alone, I received him in my private chamber and bade him be seated. He obeyed, and for awhile I watched him, the light from the window-place falling upon his golden head and upon his shining armour, battered with storm and war. For now he was clad in his soldier's garb, perchance the very same that years ago he had worn on board the *Hapi*, and thus attired looked like a king of men.

"The lady Amenartas is somewhat sick after all our journeyings," he said, "I think that the disorder which is common on the coast lands has fallen upon her, since her face is flushed and her hands are hot. Therefore she cannot wait upon you, Prophetess. Yet she bids me thank you for your hospitality, and say that she asks your pardon for any bitter words she may have spoken yesterday, since these sprang, not from her heart, but from a fever burning in her blood."

"It is granted. I know this sickness though myself I have been protected from it, and will send her medicine and with it a skilled woman to wait upon her. Bid her not to fear; it is seldom dangerous. Now, my guest Kallikrates, if it pleases you, let me hear your story; you must have much to tell since we parted in the sanctuary at Memphis. Then, you will remember, your purpose was to accompany the holy Noot upon his mission, because you thought it best for reasons of your own to depart from Memphis for awhile. Yet I think it was in your mind to go alone, not accompanied by that royal lady who is your companion."

"This is true, Prophetess," he answered heavily, "nor did I know that the lady of whom you speak was aboard the *Hapi* until, to escape capture at the hands of the Persians, we had fled from the Nile out toward the open sea."

"I understand, Kallikrates, nor can it be denied that Fate dealt hardly, or perchance I should say kindly, with you when it caused the lady Amenartas to embark in error upon the ship *Hapi*, which sailed down Nile, instead of that of her father, Nectanebes, which set its course for Thebes and Ethiopia."

"Mock me not, Child of Wisdom. As the lady Amenartas would tell you to your face, she knew well enough upon what ship she sailed, though I knew nothing who believed that I had said farewell to her for ever. Aye, abandoning her hope of royalty and all else, and taking every risk, she embarked upon the *Hapi*, setting some other woman tricked out to her likeness to fill her place awhile among the company of Nectanebes."

"That at least was bold, and I love courage, Kallikrates. Yet—what was her purpose?"

"Is that a question that you should ask me, Lady, who know well that great-hearted women will dare much for love?"

"Whether I should ask or not, at least I have the answer to my question, Kallikrates. Of a truth, you should love and honour one who for your sake abandoned all to win what she thought more than all, even at the cost of her own shame and the ruin of your soul."

"I do love and honour her," he answered hoarsely. "When she was still a child I loved her and because of that love I slew my brother, believing that on reaching womanhood she had come to favour him, which, it seems, she did only to draw me closer to her."

"It would appear, Kallikrates, that this lady brings no good fortune to your race, since first she works the death of one of you, making a murderer of his own brother, and then of that brother fashions an apostate to his faith, yea, a traitor accursed of God and man."

"It is so," he said humbly. "Yet she loves me much, so much that whether I will it or not, I must love her, since if the woman loves enough what can the man do but follow on the path she leads? Tell me, Prophetess, you who are wise, had you been a man and sat in my place there upon the ship *Hapi*, which is a narrow prison, what would you have done, being a man I say—as I am?"

"Perhaps just what you did, Kallikrates, and therefore have become accursed, as you are, Kallikrates, seeing that the lady was sweet and loving, and that man must remain man however great the oaths he has sworn to goddesses who do not throw their arms about him or kiss him on the lips."

"Once I thought that a goddess did kiss me on the lips, Oracle of Isis, and the memory of that kiss is sweet and holy."

"Is it so?" I answered. "Well, since you are no more of our communion, I may tell you now that in the shrine at Philæ I played the part of the goddess and gave that ceremonial kiss."

Now he stared at me, reddening, then muttered,

"Always I guessed it who could not quite believe that a goddess would kiss so sweetly," and again he started like one who would ask a question that his lips do not dare to frame.

I remained silent, watching him, till presently he broke out,

"You tell me that I am accursed, Priestess. Tell me also why Isis is so wrath with me?"

"Did you not swear yourself to her alone and break your oath, Kallikrates? Do you not know that if women can be jealous, goddesses who are set far above them can be more greatly so of those who are bound to them in the mystic marriage? Have you not heard that to turn from them to a daughter of man is to offer them the most terrible of insults?"

"Isis herself was wed to Osiris, Prophetess, and I have heard of priests and priestesses who served her who were also wed."

"Perchance, Kallikrates, after absolution given by one upon whom authority is conferred to strain vows for some high end. But who gave you authority to marry, you, who indeed are not married but only a woman's lover? Did you mayhap seek it from the holy Noot upon the ship *Hapi*?"

"Nay," he answered, "that thought never came to me. Or if it came I believed that he would but heap curses upon me, or mayhap call down the vengeance of Isis upon another. You have heard, Prophetess, of what fate sometimes awaits those who tempt the feet of priests or priestesses from the strait path of their vows."

"Aye, Kallikrates, they die by fire, or they starve, or they perish shut up in some narrow, airless hole; each worship works its own vengeance for that unmeasured crime. Yet you were foolish not to make your prayer of Noot, by whom alone it could be granted, since who knows what he would have answered."

"Is it too late?" he asked eagerly. "For every sin there is forgiveness, why not for mine? Only who could grant it; since now I know not where to look for Noot, if indeed he lives."

"For every sin there is forgiveness, Kallikrates, but only at a price. First the sin itself must be laid upon the altar as a sacrifice. For dead sins there may be forgiveness; for those that live and are continued there is none, but only stripe added to stripe and remorse piled upon remorse. As for Noot it chances that he does live and not so far away. Would you lay your case before him and hear his judgment?"

"I do not know," he answered slowly. "Hearken, Child of Wisdom. I am in a strange strait. I love this lady with my body and am bound to her, but it is not so with my spirit. Our souls, I think, are far apart. Oh! bear me witness that my heart is set on higher things; it would sail into far seas unvisited of man, but always there is this anchor of the flesh chaining it to its native shore. Amenartas does not think thus, she loves to lie bound in life's pleasant harbour, or to wander to its green banks, wafted thither by the fitful breath of common things, there to deck her brow with the wreaths of passion.

"Let Heaven be!" she says, 'here is the happy earth beneath our feet, and round us murmur the waters of delight and I am very beautiful and I love you well. If there be gods and they are vengeful, at least their hour is not yet. This moment is ours to enjoy and to our lips it holds a glorious cup. If all the wine be drunk and the cup is shattered, at least there will remain with us their memories. What are these gods whom you seek so madly? What do they give to man save many curses—deaths and separations, sicknesses and sorrows, adding to these promises of woe to follow when they have worked their worst on earth? Are there any gods save those that man fashions from his own terrors? man who will not be content with Nature's food, but needs must sour it with an alien poison, and even when the sun shines round him, shivers in some cold shadow that superstition casts upon his heart.'

"Thus she reasons, and such ever were her arguments."

"Tell me, Kallikrates, has any child been born to you?"

"Aye, one, a very lovely child; he died of hardships that caused his mother's milk to fail."

"And when the royal Amenartas looked upon him dead, did she still reason in this fashion, saying that there are no gods and for man there is no hope beyond the grave?"

"Not altogether, since she cursed the gods, and who curse that in which they do not believe? Also I remember that she wept and prayed those gods to give him back to her while his little heart still beat, and like a moth new-crept from its chrysalis, he yet hung to the edge of the world, drying his soul's crinkled wings in the dawning lights of Heaven. But afterward she forgot and made sacrifice to her familiar Spirit, asking it to send her another child, which prayer she tells me is in the way of fulfilment."

"So Amenartas practices magic like her father Nectanebes?"

"Aye, Lady, and it would seem not without avail, though of this matter of dealing with dæmons I neither know nor want to know anything. I think it comes to her with her Egyptian blood, also that the Pharaoh taught her these arts in her childhood, and what is learnt then is never quite forgotten. At least I know that when we have been in trouble or in danger during our long wanderings, with secret rites upon which I do not pry, she calls upon some Familiar and that thereafter, in this way or in that, our pathway has been straightened. Indeed she did this just before Philo found us starving."

"As the path of your babe was straightened from this world to the next, Kallikrates; as the devious path of Pharaoh Nectanebes was straightened to a road which led from the throne of Egypt—but pray the lady Amenartas to ask of her dæmon whither it led, since here my wisdom fails me and I am not sure. Well, we have spoken long and so stands the case, one that might puzzle Thoth himself. Is it your pleasure, Kallikrates, to visit the divine Noot and take his counsel upon all these matters? I think that he alone upon the earth can give you guidance in them. Yet do as you will."

Kallikrates thought a while brooding, then he answered,

"Yes, it is my pleasure. When Amenartas is recovered of her sickness, we will go."

"The holy Noot is very ancient and the royal Amenartas may be sick for a long while. Therefore might it be wise to go at once, Kallikrates."

"Nay, Prophetess, I cannot. Amenartas has strange fancies and will not be left alone; she thinks that she may be poisoned; indeed that already she has tasted poison."

"Then let her make richer sacrifices to her dæmon and pray him to protect her. Certainly they will not be without avail since I can swear that here in Kôr no poison shall pass her lips, nor any harm come to her—save perchance from those gods whom she denies. Farewell, Kallikrates."

He bowed to me humbly and turned to go, then after a step or two came back and said,

"The gods! The gods! who for you and me in their sum are one god, Isis, Queen of Heaven. Tell me now, I pray you that are named Wisdom's Daughter, who and what is Isis?"

I thought a while since the question was a great one, a problem that as yet I had never tried to solve in words. Then I answered,

"By my soul I do not know. East and west and north and south, men in their millions worship this god or that. Yet is there one among them who save in dreams or ecstasies has ever seen his god, or if he tries to fashion him out before his mortal eyes, can do more than carve some effigy of wood or stone?"

Then I pointed to the veiled statue of Truth behind me, saying,

"Lo! there is Isis, a beauteous thing with a hidden face ruling o'er the world. She is one of Divinity's thousand forms. Aye, she is its essence, frozen to the shape we know in this world's icy air, and having a countenance chiselled differently from age to age by the changeful thought of man. She lives in every soul, yet in no two souls is she the same. She is not, yet eternally she is. Invisible, intangible; ever pursued and ever fleeing; never seen and never handled, yet she answers prayer and her throne is not in the high heavens but in the heart of every creature that draws the breath of life. One day we shall behold her and not know her. Yet she will know us. Such is Isis: formless, yet in every form; dead, yet living in all that breathes; a priest-bred phantasy, yet the one great truth."

"If Isis be thus, what of the world's other gods?"

"They all are Isis and Isis is them all. The thousand gods men worship are but one god wearing many faces. Or rather they are two gods, the god of good and the god of evil; Horus and Typhon who war continually for the souls of things created by that Divine, unseen, unknown yet eternally existent, who reigns beyond the stars alone in fearful glory and from his nameless habitation looks down both on gods and men, the puppets of his hands; on the rolling worlds that bear them, on the seas of space between and on the infusing spirit whose operation is the breath of life. So it was in the beginning, is now and shall be eternally. At least, Kallikrates, thus I have been taught by the wisdom of Noot my Master, and following his path, thus my searching soul has learned. Again farewell."

He looked at me muttering,

"Child of Isis, oh! well-named Child of Isis, and Wisdom's Daughter!" and there was awe in his eyes and voice.

Now as ever he is afraid of me, I thought to myself, and how can a man come to love that of which he is afraid, since love and fear are opposites and there is no bridge between them. Oh! why did I speak to him of these high things which as yet his spirit can scarce weigh or understand? Perhaps because I am so lonely and having naught into which I can pour my mind, no vase of gold and alabaster, my deep o'erflowing thought must fill the first coarse cup of clay that chance offers to my hand, like to the storing of priceless wine in some tarry bottle which it will burst.

Surely I should learn a lesson from yonder Amenartas who knows well how to deal with such a one as he; one who still stands at thought's beginnings, looking dismayed at the steep upward path studded with sharp stones, wreathed in cruel thorns, strewn with quicksands and with pitfalls, and bordered by precipices from whose gulfs there is no return, that path which his feet long to tread yet dare not, lacking any guide.

She leads him by a different road, the road of mortal passion, bidding him to cease from staring at the stars; bidding him weave crowns of its heavy-scented flowers to set upon her brow and his. She prattles to him of daily doings, of the joy of yesterday and the promise of to-morrow, aye, even of the food he eats. And all the time she twists the spells her father taught her to strong ropes of charm, purposing by these to tie him to her everlastingly. Aye, like a gilded spider, that black-browed, bounteous-breasted witch meshes him in her magic web, binding him fast and yet more fast, till at length he lies there staring at her stirless as a mummy in its wrappings.

Thus I mused, clothing my musings finely yet knowing in my heart that what prompted them was the vilest of all causes and the most common, naught indeed but the jealousy of one woman of another. For now I knew the truth, it could no more be hidden, no longer could I blind my eyes, for it had come home to me while he told me his sad story. I loved this man; yes, and had always loved him since first I looked upon him far away at Philæ, or certainly since, veiled in the wrappings of the goddess, I had yielded to Nature's promptings and kissed him upon the lips.

Oh! I had beaten down that truth, I had buried it deep, but now it arose like a ghost from the grave and frightened me with its stern, immortal eyes. I loved this man and must always love him and no other, and he—he feared yet adored me, as some high spirit is adored at its appearing—but love me he did not who was set so far above him.

Yes, I was jealous, if the great can be truly jealous of that which is small, for though we were wide apart as continent from continent, yet we both were women desirous of one man. With my spirit I was not jealous, for that I knew must conquer in the end, being so strong, so armoured against all the shafts of mortal change. Yet with my flesh I was jealous. He told me Amenartas had borne a son to him; that she hoped to bear another son, and—I too yearned to be the mother of his son. For is it not true that by a fixed unchanging law, whereas the man loves the woman for herself, the woman loves the man most of all because he may become the father of her child, and thus by the marvel of creation, even in the dust preserve her from perpetual death?

So, so, let me think. I loved this man and would take him for myself and would lift him up and would make him my equal, if that could ever be, and would teach him glorious things, and would show him the secret light that burned within my heart, and would guide him onward by the rays of my own peculiar star. How could it be brought about? Yonder woman, wrapped round with the twice-dipped Tyrian purple of kings, which purple, be it admitted, she wore well although now she lacked a throne whereon to drape it, thought in her folly that I had poisoned or would poison her. Yes, she knew Ayesha so little that she believed that like a Persian eunuch she would stoop to call deadly venom to her aid and thereby rid her of a rival. Never! If I could not win by my own strength in a fair fight for favour, then let me fail, who deserved defeat. Were her life so utterly in my hands that I could destroy it with a wish, that wish would never form itself within my mind, and certainly never shape itself to deeds.

What then could be done? She was right. I began to grow old; Time's acid was gnawing at me so that my beauty was no more what it had been. Aye, I grew spare and old, while on her still shone the full glory of her womanhood. *If I would conquer I must cease from growing old!*

The Fire of Life! Ah! that Fire of Life which gave, it was said, the gift of undying days and of perfect youth and loveliness such as Aphrodite herself might envy. Who said so? Noot the Master who knew all things. Yet Noot had never entered into that fire, therefore how did he know, unless it were by revelation? At least he had forbidden me to taste its cup, perhaps because he was sure that it would slay me whom he desired to be his successor and to establish here a great kingdom whereof the people should accept Isis as their god.

Still the story might be true, for otherwise why did Noot sit in that melancholy hermitage watching the pathway to the Fire? There had been other tales of the same sort told in the world. Thus the old Chaldean legend spoke of a Tree of Life that grew in a certain garden whence the parents of mankind were driven lest they should eat of it and become immortal, which legend was expounded to me more fully by the Jewish rabbis in Jerusalem, and afterward by Holly the learned man. Therefore it seemed that there was a Tree of Life, or a Fire of Life, jealously guarded of the gods lest the children of men should become their equals. And I, I knew where that Tree grew, or rather where that Fire burned. Yet Noot forbade it to me, and could I disobey Noot my Master, Noot the half divine? Well, Noot was very old and near his end, and when he died, I, by his own appointment, should be the guardian of the Fire, and may not a guardian taste of that he guards?

The gods decreed otherwise, he said. Mayhap, but what if in this matter where I had so much to gain, I chose to match myself against the gods? If the gods give knowledge, can they be wrath with those who use it? Yet if they are wrath—well, let them be wrath and set their worst against my best. Sometimes I grew weary of the gods and all the fantastical decrees which they—or their priests—heaped upon the heads of the sufferers of this earth. Were not life's curse and death's doom enough to satisfy their appetites, that they must load the toilsome days between with so much of the lead of misery, denying this, denying that; strowing the path of men with spikes and crowning their heads with thorns?

If Noot's tale were true, what then? I should enter the Fire, I should emerge ever-glorious, beauteous beyond imagining, and ever young, having left death far behind me. I should need but to wait a while until Amenartas died, and when she was dead, or having grown weary of dull life in an ancient place, had departed to seek some other. Nay, for then in the first case Kallikrates also would be dead or ancient, and in the second, certainly she would take him with her.

Ah! now I had it; if I entered the Fire and came forth unharmed, Kallikrates must enter it after me, for then we should be fitly mated, even if we must wait until a little pinch of the sand of time had run out from between our fingers. Yet supposing that Amenartas chose to enter it also, as being so fond of magic and so determined to cling to that which she had won, perchance she might do, would my case be bettered? The play would be set upon a larger stage, that is all. Well, should I not be the Guardian of the Fire and would it not be in my hand to determine who should taste or who should be denied its glories? Let that matter decide itself when the hour came, since the decision would be such as I and not as Amenartas willed.

Here then was my plan. And yet—one thought more. What if the Fire slew? If so, had I found life so sweet that I should be afraid to die, as in any case within some few years die I must? Let me take my chance of death who was ready to fade away into a land where Kallikrates and Amenartas and all earthly miseries and all baulked desires and ambitions, and all hopes and fears and sufferings must be forgot. Only would they be forgot? Perchance there they might be remembered and pierce the soul eternally with an even keener edge. Noot believed that we were made of an immortal stuff, and so at heart did I. It must be risked. What is life but a long risk, and why should we fear to add to its tremendous count? I at least did not fear.

So all was summed up and balanced. Yet from my reckoning I left out the largest charge, that which Fate makes against those who play at dice with the Unknown. The gods may smile at courage and pass a venture by, but who can tell how blind Fate will avenge the forcing of his rule decreed and the rape of knowledge from his secret store?

This problem I forgot, I who was doomed to learn its answer.

## CHAPTER XXII

### BEWARE!

THE days went by and it was not long before Amenartas recovered from her sickness, long at least before she would appear out of the lodging, the best at our command, which had been given to her. It was an ancient, ruined house near to the temple, that doubtless once had been a splendid place inhabited by forgotten nobles of old Kôr. There were gardens round it, or rather what had been gardens, for now these were much overgrown, and in their shelter Amenartas hid herself and wandered, never leaving them to visit me.

Yet Kallikrates came often, though being unshriven and thrust out of our community by his own act, he did not share in the worship of the goddess. Often I would see him as our procession wound in and out of the columns of the great unroofed temple hall, standing afar off and gazing at it wistfully. Aye, and once when it passed near to him, I saw too, that there were tears upon his face, noting which my heart sorrowed for him who was outcast for a woman's sake.

When these ceremonies were ended he would visit me in my chambers where we talked long and of many things. I asked him why the Princess Amenartas, who it seemed was recovered of her fever since now she could wander in her garden ground, laid no offering on the altar of the goddess. He answered,

"Because she will have naught to do with the gods of Egypt who, she says, if they are at all, have ever been the enemies of her House and have dragged her father, the Pharaoh Nectanebes, from his throne and hurled him forth, a discrowned fugitive, to perish amidst strangers."

"Upon those who follow after spells and affront the gods, the gods will be avenged, Kallikrates. For every sin there is forgiveness, save for that of the denial of Divinity, and of the setting of Evil in its place to be propitiated by the arts of sorcerers. Moreover, did not this Nectanebes offer deadly insult to the Queen of Heaven when he gave me, her servant and seeress, to be a slave to Tenes, the worshipper of her worst of foes, Baal and Ashtoreth and Moloch, that Tenes from whose grip you helped to save me, Kallikrates?"

"It is so," he answered sadly.

"And now," I went on, "the daughter follows in the father's steps. Oh! I am sure that yonder she spells out her charms, aiming her enchantments at my heart, whence they fall back harmless, as the bone-tipped arrows of wild men fall from a shield of Syrian bronze."

He hung his head who knew well that my words were true, and muttered,

"Alas! she loves you not, Lady, who from the first hour that she set her eyes upon you, as often she has told me, feared and hated you, because, she says, her spirit warns and has ever warned her that you will bring disaster upon her head and call up Death to keep her company."

"At least he would be a better guest, Kallikrates, than the dæmon that, like her father, she harbours in her breast. Oh! unhappy man, my heart bleeds for you, who are linked to this poisoned loveliness that divorces you from hope and charity; to this royal infidel who in the end will bind your spirit's wings and drag you down into her own darkness. For your soul's sake I pray you, Kallikrates, seek out the holy Noot, confess your sins and hear his counsel, since this matter is beyond my strength and I have none to give. Seek him soon, nay, at once, ere perchance it be too late, for I learn that he grows feeble."

"That is my great desire, Priestess, yet how can I, who know not where to find him?"

"I will be your guide, Kallikrates. When the sun rises on the second day from now we will march to visit Noot in his secret dwelling."

"I will be ready," he answered and left me.

On the morrow he came again and we spoke together of the state of Kôr and of my plans for bettering it; also of certain savages who threatened us from without, man-eating tribes that it seemed were descended from the apostates who rejecting the worship of Truth or Lulala, as Isis was named by them in those times, had adopted that of a devil that, as they declared, inhabited the sun or some ill-omened star.

Kallikrates listened, he who at bottom was ever a soldier, for the tale awoke all his general's craft and courage. As a great captain does, he balanced the reasons for or against defence, for or against attack. He questioned me as to the numbers of my people and of their foes, as to their arms, and many other matters that have to do with war. Then having learned all that I could tell him, he set out the plan which he judged to be the best in our conditions, talking of it long and eagerly, he who for a while had forgot his woes. I listened to him, watching his bright and splendid face which seemed as that of the Sun-god of the Greeks. Speaking a word here and a word there, I listened, thinking to myself the while that if only he and I, he with his skill and courage and I with my wisdom, could guide the destinies of Kôr, before our day was done we would drive them like the chariots of a conquering king from Egypt's borders to these of the uttermost southern seas, setting nation after nation beneath our feet, and building up such an empire as Libya had never known.

What had I dreamed? To Egypt's borders? Why should we stop at her borders? Why should we not hurl forth the foul Persian swarms and be crowned monarchs of the world at Susa and at Thebes? Yet it would take time, and life is short, and yonder, not so far away, burned the Fire of Immortality, and I, I held the key to its prison house, or soon should hold it when Noot had sought his rest. Almost these burning thoughts, these high ambitions, in whose fulfilment lay the seeds of peace attained through war and the promise of the welfare of the earth, burst from my lips in a torrent of hot words which I knew well would set his soul aflame. But I, Ayesha, refrained myself from myself, I wrapped myself in silence, I said to myself, "Wait, wait, the ripe hour has not dawned."

He rose to depart, then turned and said,

"At the sunrise I will be here, or rather," he added doubtfully, "we will be here, since Amenartas desires to accompany us upon this journey to visit the holy Noot."

"By whom I trust she will be well received, seeing the manner in which she parted from him upon the ship *Hapi*. Well, so be it; I rejoice to learn that the royal Amenartas again finds herself prepared to travel. Yet remind her, Kallikrates, that the road we go is rough and dangerous."

"She shall be told, yet it will serve little, since who can turn Amenartas from her ends? Not I, be sure; nor could her father before me, nor any living man."

"Nay, nor any god, Kallikrates, since the ends she follows are those of neither man nor god, but of something that stands beyond them both, as was the case of Pharaoh Nectanebes who begot her. Each of us shoots at his chosen mark, Kallikrates, you at yours, I at mine, and Amenartas at her own; therefore what right have we to judge of one another's archery? Let her come to visit Noot and I pray that she may return the happier."

Next morning ere the dawn I stood at the temple porch awaiting Philo and the litters. Came Amenartas cloaked heavily, for the air was cold, yet splendid even in those wrappings.

"Greeting, Wisdom's Child," she said, bowing in her courtlike fashion. "I learn that you and my husband would make some strange journey, and therefore, as a wife should, I accompany him."

"That is so, royal Lady, though I knew not that you were wed to the lord Kallikrates."

"What is marriage?" she asked. "Is it certain words mumbled before an altar and a priest, a thing of witnessed ceremony, or is it the union of the heart and flesh according to Nature's custom and decree? But let that pass. Where my lord goes, there I accompany him."

"None forbids you, O Lady of Egypt."

"True, Prophetess. Yet my own heart forbids me. Know that but last night I was haunted by a very evil dream. It seemed to me that my father Nectanebes stood before me in a sable robe that was shot through with threads of fire. He spoke to me saying: 'Daughter, beware of that witch who goes on a dreadful quest, taking with her one who is dear to you. At the end of that quest lies Doom for her, for him, for you, though each of these dooms be different!'"

"It may be so, Princess," I answered coldly. "Then accompany me not and keep Kallikrates at your side."

"That I cannot do," she said in a sullen voice, "since now for the first time he will not listen to my pleading and crosses my will. You have laid your charm upon him as on others in the past, and where you lead, he follows."

"Mayhap as a slave follows one who can show him where he may loose his chains! But let us not bandy words, royal Amenartas. I depart. Follow if you will, or bide behind, one or both of you. See, here comes Kallikrates; agree together as it pleases you."

She turned and met him in the ruins of the ancient pylon, where they debated together in words I could not hear. Once she seemed to conquer, for both of them walked a little way toward their own home. Then Kallikrates swung round upon his heel and came back to me who stood by the litters. She hesitated awhile, ah! what mighty issues hung upon this trembling of the balance of her mind, but in the end she followed him.

After this, without more speech we entered the litters and began our journey.

As we went across the misty plain it came home to me, as many a time it has done during the long centuries that followed, how often the great depends upon the little. Another bitter word from Amenartas, a trifle less of courage in Kallikrates, and how differently would Fate have fashioned the destinies of every one of us. For be it remembered that the choice lay with these two; I did naught save wait upon their wills. Had they so desired, never need they have entered those litters. Alone I should have departed; alone I should have looked upon the Fire and drunk of that Cup of Life, or perchance, as is probable, I should have left it untasted and gone down my way to death after the common fashion of mankind. But it was not so decreed; of their own desire they took the path to doom, though perchance that desire was shaped by some Strength above their own.

We reached the precipice and climbed it, Amenartas, Kallikrates, Philo, and I. We passed the cave by the light of lanterns, and we came to the trembling spur of rock that reaches out like a great needle thrust through the robe of darkness. When they looked upon it, Kallikrates and Amenartas shivered and drew back, seeing which I rejoiced, for it is true that at the moment I found no more heart for this adventure.

"Stay where you are," I cried, "and wait. I go to visit the holy Noot. I will return again, and if I return not within a round of the sun, then make your way back to Kôr and there abide. Or if it pleases you, seek the coast-land and the harbour of the Ethiopian's Head and depart with the help of Philo, if still he lives, or if not, otherwise. Farewell! I go."

"Nay," cried Kallikrates, "whither you lead, Prophetess, thither I follow."

"If so," said Amenartas, laughing in her royal fashion, "you will not follow alone. What! Shall I not dare that which my lord can dare? Is this the first peril in which we twain have stood side by side? If it be the last, what of it?"

So we started down the spur, Philo coming at the end of our line, and though with many hazards, for once the brain of Amenartas swam so that almost she fell, reached its point in safety. Here we waited crouched upon the rough rock and clinging to it with our hands, lest its quick throbbing should hurl us into the gulf, or the fierce gusts should sweep us away like autumn leaves.

At length at the appointed moment the sword-like sunset ray appeared, striking full upon us and showing that the frail bridge of boards was still in the place, for it swayed and moved like the deck of a ship at sea.

"Be bold and follow," I cried, "since he who hesitates is doomed," and instantly I stepped across that perilous plank and took my stand upon the swaying stone beyond.

For a moment Kallikrates stood doubtful, as well he might, but Amenartas pushed past him and with a laugh crossed it as though she would teach me that I was not the only one to whom the gods had given courage. I caught her by the hand. Then Kallikrates followed because he must, and she caught him by the hand and after him Philo, the seaman, calmly enough, so that now all four of us stood together on the stone.

"Glad enough am I to be here, Prophetess," cried Kallikrates, though in that wailing wind his voice reached me only as a whisper. "Yet, I know not why, it comes into my mind that I go upon my last journey."

I made no answer because his fateful words chilled my heart and choked my voice; only I looked at his face and noted that it was white as ice even in the red light of the ray and that his large eyes shone as though with the fires of fever.

Taking Kallikrates by the hand and motioning to Philo to do likewise with Amenartas, I led him to the little rough-hewn stair. By this stair we descended into the sheltered place that was in front of the hermitage of Noot and rejoiced was I to find myself and the others out of the reach of those raging winds and to see that lights burned within the cave beyond.

"Bide here, all of you," I said. "I will enter the cave and prepare the holy Noot for your coming."

I entered the place thinking to find that strange dwarf who was Noot's servant, but nowhere could he be seen. Yet I was sure that he must be near, since on the rough rock table were set food and wooden platters, four platters as though awaiting four guests. I thought to myself that doubtless the Master had seen us creeping down the spur, or perchance his spirit had warned him of our coming—who could say?

I gazed about me to find Noot, and at length in the deep shadow, out of reach of the lamp's rays, I perceived him kneeling before that image of Isis whereof I have told, and wrapt in earnest prayer. I drew near and waited a while who did not dare to break in upon his orisons. Still he did not stir or look up. So quiet was he that he might have been carved in ivory. I bent forward, examining his face. Lo! his eyes were fixed and open and his jaw had fallen.

Noot was *dead*!

"My Master, my most beloved Master! Too late, too late!" I moaned, and bending down kissed him on his brow of ice.

Then I began to think and swiftly. Had he not warned me when I bade him farewell a while before that we spoke together for the last time? Where was my faith who had forgotten that the prophecies of Noot were always true? So he had gone to his rest in the bosom of Osiris, and on me had fallen his mantle. I, Ayesha, was the guardian of the Fire of Life whereof alone I knew the secrets and held the key! The knowledge struck me like a blow; I trembled and sank to the ground. I think that for a little while I swooned and in that swoon strange dreams took hold of me, half-remembered dreams, dreams not to be written.

Presently I rose and going to the doorway summoned the others, who stood there huddled together like sheep before a storm.

"Enter," I said, and they obeyed. "Now be seated and eat," I went on, pointing to the table on which the food was ready.

"Where is the master of the feast, Prophetess? Where is the holy Noot whom we have walked this fearful road to see?" asked Kallikrates, staring about him.

"Yonder," I answered, pointing to the depths of the shadow, "yonder—dead and cold. You tarried too long at Kôr, Kallikrates. Now you must seek his counsel and his absolution at another table—that of Osiris."

Thus I spoke, for something inspired the words, yet ere they had left my lips I could have bitten out the tongue that shaped them. Was *this* the place to talk of the Table of Osiris to the man I loved?

They went to that dark nook where the little sacred statue looked down upon its quiet worshipper. They stared in silence; they returned, Philo muttering prayers, Kallikrates wringing his hands, for he had loved and honoured Noot above any man that lived. Also—I read the question in his mind—to whom now should he confess his sins? Who now could loose their burden?

Only Amenartas pondered a space; then she spoke with a slow and meaning smile, saying,

"Perchance, my lord, it is as well that this old high-priest has gone to discover whether he dreamed true dreams for so many years upon the earth. I know not what you would have said to him, yet I can guess that it boded but little good to me, your wife, for so I am, whatever yonder priestess may tell you, who also bodes little good either to me or to you, my lord Kallikrates. Well, he is dead and even Wisdom's Daughter there cannot bring him back to life. So let us rest a while and eat, and then return by that dread road which we have trodden, ere our strength and spirit fail us."

"That you may not do, Princess Amenartas, until the sunset comes again and once more the red ray shows us where to set our feet, for to attempt it sooner is to die," I answered, and went on:

"Hearken. By the death of this holy man, or half-god, I have become the keeper of a certain treasure over which he watched. It is hidden deep in the bowels of the earth beneath us. I must go to visit it and see that it is safe. This I shall do presently. Bide you here, if you will, till I return, and if I return not, wait till the ray strikes upon the point of rock, cross the bridge, climb the spur, and flee whither ye will. Philo can guide you."

"Not so, Child of Isis," said Philo. "My oath and duty are to you, not to this pair. Whither you go, I follow to the end."

"I follow also," said Kallikrates, "who would not be left in this darksome place companied by death."

"Yet it might be wiser, Kallikrates," I answered, "since who can escape that company of death of which you speak?" for again dreadful and ominous words rushed unbidden from my heart.

"I care not. I go," he said almost sullenly.

"Then I go also," broke in Amenartas. "This Prophetess doubtless is wise and holy, yet I may be pardoned if I choose to share her fellowship with you upon a road unknown. Perchance it has another gate elsewhere that I might never find," she added in bitter jest.

Oh! had this fool but known that her coarse stabs at me did but harden the heart which she sought to pierce, and drive it whither she did not desire.

"As you will," I answered. "Now eat and rest till the hour of departure comes and I summon you."

So they ate, if not much, though for my part I touched no food, and laid them down in the inner cave as best they might, and there slept, or did not sleep. But I, I watched the hours away by the dead shell of the holy Noot, striving to commune with his spirit which I knew to be near to me. Yet it gave no answer to all my questions. Or at least there came one only which again and again seemed to shape itself to a single word,

"*Beware!*"

Strange, thought I to myself, that the prophet Noot my Master, who loved me better than any other living upon the earth, and knew the most of my lonely, wayward heart, now that he was justified and made perfect, as doubtless he must be, if such a lot can be attained by man, should find no more to say to me than this one word, which indeed while in the flesh often he had said before. Therefore it seemed that in the flesh and out of it his counsel was the same; one certainly that I should take.

What did it mean? That I should look no more upon the Fire; that I should rise up and get me back to Kôr and there play such parts as I could compass, and wither and grow old and die, nurturing perchance the children of Kallikrates and Amenartas, should

they seek the Shades before me; or, growing weary of barbarians and ruins, flee away from Kôr to find the fellowship of instructed men.

That is what this counsel meant. Well, what did that of my own heart promise me? Perhaps a swift death and after it punishment in some dim land beyond, because I had disobeyed the shadowy cautionings of the holy Noot and dared to make trial of a new Strength, against which as yet no man had matched himself. Or perhaps a glory greater than any man had ever dreamed, and a power far above that of emperors and a life longer than that of mountains. Also more—more, the love that I desired, to me a greater guerdon than all these boons added together and multiplied by the snowflakes upon Lebanon or the sands of the seashore. Surely, come what might of it, I would take my own counsel and let the other be.

The hour came; although I saw it not, I knew that it was that of dawn in the world without. I arose, I summoned the others; we departed down that darksome path of which I have written, climbing from rock to rock in the bowels of the earth by the dim light of the lanterns which we bore.

We came to the outer cavern; we passed the passage and reached the second cavern, halting at the mouth of another passage through which at intervals shot flickerings of light, and from time to time sounds as of muttering thunder reached our ears.

“The treasure on which I would look lies yonder. Bide ye here,” I said.

“Nay,” answered Kallikrates, “now as before I follow.”

“Where my lord goes there go I also,” said Amenartas.

Only Philo, the cautious Greek, bowed his head and answered,

“I obey. I bide here. If I am needed, summon me, O Child of Isis.”

“Good,” I cried, who at that moment thought little of Philo and his fate, though it is true that, cunning as he might be, I loved him well.

Then I went on and with me went Kallikrates and Amenartas.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DOOM OF THE FIRE

WE stood in the third cave that was carpeted with white sand and alive with rosy light. Making a dark stain upon that snowy sand was a black patch of dust. I knew it again; when last I had seen it, it bore the withered shape of one long dead. The rolling many-coloured fire approached from afar; its muttering grew to a roar, its roar grew to such a thunder as shakes the mountain peaks and splits the walls of citadels. It appeared, blazing with a thousand lights; for a while it hovered, twisting like a spun top. Then it departed upon its eternal round in the unknown entrails of the earth, and the tumult sank to silence.

Kallikrates, terrified, flung himself upon his face; even the proud Amenartas fell to her knees, covering her eyes with her hands: only I stood erect and laughed, I who knew that I was betrothed to that fire and that it ill became the bride-to-be to shrink from her promised lord.

Kallikrates rose, asking,

"Where is the treasure which you seek, Prophetess? If it be hidden here, in this awful house of a living god, look on it swiftly, and let us begone. I, a mortal man, am terrified."

"As well you may be," broke in Amenartas, "since such wizardries as these have not been told of in the earth. I say it, who know something of wizardries, and like my father have stood face to face with spirits summoned from the Under-world, giving them word for word of power."

"My treasure lies in the red heart of yonder raging flame, and presently I go to pluck it thence," I answered in a quiet voice. "Whether I shall return I do not know. Perchance I shall abide in the fire and be borne away upon its wings. Stay if you will, or if you will, while there is yet time, depart, but trouble me no more with words, who must steel my soul to its last trial."

They stared at me, both of them, and remained silent.

For a space I stood still pondering. It seemed to me that I was the plaything of two great Strengths that dragged me forward, that dragged me back. The spirit of the Fire cried,

"Come, O Divine! Come, be made perfect, and queen it in this red heart of mine. Come, drink of that full cup of mysteries which no mortal lips have drained. Come, see those things that are hidden from mortal eyes. Come, taste of joys wherewith no mortal heart has ever throbbled. Haste, haste to the fiery bridal and in the glory of my kiss learn what delight can be. Oh! doubt no more but take Faith by the hand and let her lead thee home. Doubt no more! Be brave, lay down mortality: put on the spirit and as a spirit sit enthroned beyond the touch of time and with immortal eyes, robed in eternal majesty, watch the generations pass, marching with sad feet from darkness into darkness. Behold there he stands who is appointed to thee, who was thine from the beginning, who shall be thine until the end of ends. Thy new-born loveliness shall chain him fast and he shall grow drunken in the breath of thy perfumed sighs who for ever and for ever and for ever shall be thy very own, turning the winter of thy widowed heart to summer of perpetual joy."

Thus spake the spirit of the Flame, but to it there answered another spirit that wore the shape of Noot, yea, of Noot grown stern and terrible.

"Turn back, O Wisdom's Daughter, ere thou art wrapped in the robe of madness and repentance comes too late," it seemed to say. "Always the tempter tempts and when bribe after bribe is scorned, at last he pours his richest jewels at the feet of her whom he would win. Woe, woe to her who, charmed of their false glitter, clasps them upon brow and breast, for there they shall change to scorpions and through the living flesh gnaw to the brain and heart within. Departing, have I not set thee to watch the Fire and wilt thou steal the Fire, therewith to make thyself a god? Do so and this I swear to thee: that the godhead which thou shalt put on will be that of hell. Thy love shall be snatched away; undying, through all the earth, through all the stars, thou shalt follow after him and never find, or, if thou findest, it will be but to lose again. Dost thou dare to wrest thy destiny out of the hand of Fate and fashion it to thy desire with the instrument of thy blind and petty will? Do so, and daemons shall possess it that from age to age shall drive thee on, torn by the furies of remorse, choked with bitter, unavailing tears, frozen by the icy blasts of sorrow; desolate, alone, unfriended, till at last thou standest before the Judgment-seat hearkening with bowed head to a doom that can never be undone. Daughter of Wisdom, art thou sunk so low that thou wilt forget thine oaths and break thy trust to rob another woman of her lover?"

Those visions passed and I grasped denial's robes. I would not do this thing. I would live out my life upon the earth, I would die—oh! might it be soon—to pass to whatever place had been prepared for me, or to sink into the deep abysm of that rich and boundless sleep which no dreams haunt.

Aye! renouncing joy and renounced of hope, already I turned to go and climb my upward path back to the bitter world.

Then, from far, far away came the faint music of the chant of the advancing god of Fire. Low and sweet it sang at first, soft as a mother's lullaby, and lo! I dreamed of happy childhood's day. It swelled and grew and now I had entered into womanhood and strange, uncomprehended longings companioned me. It took a fiercer note and I bethought me of the beating of the hoofs of horses as, mounted on my crested stallion, I rushed across the desert like the wind. Louder yet, and behold! once more I was in the battle at my father's side; behind me the wild tribesmen surged and shouted; in front of me my foes were beaten down to death. Ah! bright flashed my javelin, ah! free flowed my hair among the flapping pennons. "The Daughter of Yarab! Follow the daughter of Yarab!" cried the thousands of my kin, and on we went, like sun-loosed snows down mountains, on upon the marshalled host beneath. We broke them, for who could stand before the Daughter of Yarab and her kin? We trampled them, Egyptian and Syrian and Mede and the men from Chittim's Isle; down they went before that wild charge, and see! my bright spear was red.

Deeper yet and more solemn grew that mighty music. Now I was alone in the wilderness beneath the stars, and from the stars knowledge and beauty fell upon my heart like dew. Now I was a ruler of men, and kings who would be my lovers bent at my feet and were the puppets of my hands. I cast them down and broke them; I saw Sidon go up in flames and filled my soul with vengeance. Hark! It is the footstep of the goddess, the Queen of Heaven sets her kiss upon my brow; she names me Daughter, her Appointed. Knowledge is mine, out of my lips flow prophecies, a spirit guides my feet. I, I hold my own against the Persian, when all else have

fled I cast him from his throne. I give his pomp to the tongues of Fire. Oh! how they cry, those mockers of Egypt's gods, as I watch them scorch and perish.

I am lonely. Where is my love? I wend toward the grave and none are born of me. I seek my love. "There stands thy love—not far away, but at thy side. Take him, take him, take him!" Thus said the Fire.

Now its voice is the voice of trumpets that blare and echo around the hills. They call, those trumpets call: "Where is the captain of our hosts? Where is our Queen? Come forth, O Queen, crowned with wisdom, diademed with power, holding in thine hand the gift of days. No longer would we be left leaderless, we who would march to victory and hold the world in thrall."

The King of Fire is at hand. He opens the gateways of the dark. Behind him march the legions: he comes with splendour, he comes with glory, he comes to take his bride. "Unrobe, unrobe! Prepare thyself, O Bride! The King of Fire calls!"

I unloosed my garments, I unbound my hair that covered me like to a sable robe.

"Art mad?" cried the Greek, Kallikrates, wringing his hands.

"Art mad?" echoed the royal Amenartas with a slow smile as she waited to see mine end.

"Nay, I am wise," I answered back, "I who weary of tame days and common things, I who seek death or triumph."

I ran. I stood in the pathway of the Fire. It saw; it stretched out its arms to me. Lo! it wrapped me round and in my ears I heard the shoutings of the stars.

Oh! what was this? I did not burn. The blood of the gods flowed through my veins. The soul within me became as a lighted torch. The Fire possessed me, I was the Fire's and in a dread communion the Fire was mine. By that lit torch of my heart I saw many visions; veils rolled up before my eyes revealing glory after glory, glories that cannot be told. Death shrank away from before my feet; pain and ashamed he shrank away. Pain departed, weakness was done. I stood the Queen of all things human.

Lo! mirrored in that Fire as in water I saw myself, a shape of loveliness celestial. Could this form be the form of woman? Could those orbs divine be a woman's eyes?

Then a great silence and in the silence a silvery tinkling sound that I knew well—the sound of the laughter of Aphrodite!

The pillar of flame had rolled away, its thousand blinding lights had ceased to shine, and there I stood triumphant, conquering, never to be conquered. I came forth speaking with a voice of music, knowing that I had inherited another soul. What now to me was Isis or any other goddess, to me who stood victorious, the equal of them all? Oh! I saw now that Isis was but Nature and henceforth Nature was my slave. I thought no more of sin or of repentance, I who from this day forth would fashion my own laws and be to myself a judge. That which I desired, that I would take. That which was hateful to me that would I cast away. Yea! I was Nature's very self. I felt all her springs stirring in my blood; it glowed with the heats of all her summers. I was kind with the kindness of her fruitful autumns; I was terrible with her winter wrath.

Look! There stood the man whom I desired. Somewhat coarse and poor he seemed to me; I smelt death upon him. To be my mate he must be my equal; he too must taste of the Fire; then we would talk of love. As he was, my love was not for him, nay, it would destroy him as the lightning blasts.

"Look on me, Kallikrates," I cried, "and tell me, in all your days have you seen aught so fair?"

"Fair, yes, fair!" he gasped, "but terrible in beauty. No woman, no woman! A very spirit. Oh! let me shut mine eyes. Let me flee!"

"Be still and wait," I answered, "for soon I shall show you how they may be opened. Look on me, Daughter of Pharaoh, and tell me, has that stamp of age of which you spoke to me not long ago departed from my face and form, or is it yet apparent?"

"I look," she answered, still bold, "and I see before me no child of man, but a very witch. Away from us, accursed witch! Clothe yourself, shameless one, and begone, or let us begone, leaving you to commune with your witch's fire."

I cast my robes around me and oh! they hung royally. Then once more I turned to Kallikrates, considering him. As I looked I became aware that a great change had fallen upon me. I was no longer the Ayesha of old days. That Ayesha had been spirit-driven; her soul had aspired to the heavens; it glistened with the dews of purity. True, I had loved this man, little at the first, and more a hundred times after Noot had suffered me to look upon the Fire, since with the sight and the sound and the odours of it the great change began.

That Ayesha was one who dreamed of heavenly things; one with whom prayer was a constant habit of the mind; yes, all her thoughts were mixed with the heaven of prayer, so that the humblest deed and the most common of imaginings were by it sanctified! She knew that here was not her home, but that far away and out of sight, beyond the seas and mountains of the world, her everlasting house rose white and stately and that with her earthly toil and sufferings she built it stone by stone, filling its halls and porticoes with ivory statues of the gods, making it pure with clouds of incense that their perfected souls brooding on her soul drew from it, as at dawn the sun draws mist from rivers.

With grief and toil, with bleeding feet; buffeted by the winds of circumstance, wet with the rain of tears, washed by the waters of repentance, she climbed the stony upward path that led to the Peak of Peace. She believed in she knew not what, for always to her those gods were man-shaped symbols. Still day and night she struggled on, lit by the rays of the lamp of faith, sure that in the end the veils would be withdrawn and that she would look upon the Face Divine and hear its voice of welcome. She was obedient to the Law; she knew that time was not her own and that of every moment she must give account. Aye, she was in the way of holiness and before her shone the golden guerdons of redemption.

But now. What was Ayesha now when she had known the embrace of the Spirit of Fire, when she had dared the deed and wrung the secret from his burning heart? Aye, when on the earth she had attained to immortality, since even then a voice cried in her ears:

"Behold! thou shalt not die. Behold while the world lives, with it thou shalt live also, because thou hast drunk of the wine of Earth's primeval Soul that cannot be spilled until its mighty fabric is dissolved into the nothingness whence it sprang!"

What was she now? She was that very Earth. She was that Soul poured into the white vase of a woman's form; aye, she was its essence. Its lightnings and its hurricanes lay chained within her, ready to leap out when she was wrath, and who could abide before their strength? She knew all Earth's glory as alone it swung through space, kissed of the light of the Sun its father, or dreaming in the arms of darkness. The planets were her sisters, the bright, blazing stars acknowledged her as kin. Aye; with this mother-world she symbolled she was numbered among the multitude of that hierarchy of heaven.

Nor was this all, for in her reigned and glowed every power and passion of the Earth. Thenceforth all things were at her command, but, like that Earth, *she was alone and could no more speak with Heaven!*

In a flash, in a twinkling, all this mighty truth came home to me, and with it other truths. I did not doubt, I did not dream, I knew, I knew, I *knew!*

There stood the man and I would take him. He was wed according to Nature's law, and now I owned no other. But what of that? The wine that I desired I would drink. I would mate me as the wild things mated, by strength and capture, since I was very strong and who could stand against my might? I, the reborn Ayesha, had commanded. It should be done.

"Kallikrates," I said in my new voice of honeyed sweetness, "behold your spouse, one of whom you need not be ashamed. Make ready, Kallikrates. Go stand in the path of the Fire when it returns, and then let us hence to reign eternally."

"What, Witch," cried Amenartas, "would you rob me of my lord? It shall not be. If you are mighty, so am I, although I remain a woman. Kallikrates, look on me, your wife, she who has borne your child, that lost child who binds us yet with bonds that may not be broken. Have done with this fair dæmon ere she enchant you. Away! Away from this haunted, mocking hell."

"I come. Surely I come," said Kallikrates, glancing at me fearfully. "I am afraid of her, and of that fire I will have none. Surely it is Set himself wrapped about with flames."

"Nay, you go not, Kallikrates. Let Amenartas go if she desires. Here you abide with me until all is accomplished. I command, and when I command, you must obey."

He wheeled about; he flung himself into the arms of Amenartas. They closed around him and held him fast. Then I threw out my will. Saying nothing I laid my strength upon him, so that he was dragged from out those arms and with slow steps drew near to me, as the bird draws near to the snake that charms it with its baleful eyes. Amenartas leapt between us and from her lips flowed words in torrents.

All she said I do not know; it is forgot; but very sore she pleaded and very bitterly she wept. Yet my heart, new steeled in yonder fire, felt no pity for her. An hour past I should have bade him go his way and to look upon my face no more, but now it was otherwise. I was cruel, cruel as Death, King of the world. The wild beast does not spare its rival, neither would I.

Still I drew him with my strength; still Amenartas clung and pleaded, till at last madness took hold of that tormented man. He raved, he cursed us both, he cursed himself who had left the quiet halls of Isis, who had spurned the love divine to seek the arms of woman. He prayed to Isis to be pitiful, to forgive, to receive his soul and shrive it.

Then suddenly from his belt he snatched his short Grecian sword and stabbed at his own heart.

Swift as a snake that strikes, or a falcon stooping at its prey, I sprang. I seized his arm, I dragged it back, and such might was there in my grasp, aye, the might of Hercules himself, that the sword flew far, and the strong man who held it reeled round and round and fell.

We stood aghast, thinking that he was sped. Yet he rose, the red blood running from his breast, and in a quiet voice, a little laugh upon his lips, said to Amenartas, not to me,

"Fear nothing, Wife. Alas! it is but a cut—skin deep, no more."

"Then let the fire heal it, O Kallikrates. Make ready to enter the fire that must soon retravel its circling path," I answered.

"Nay, nay, Husband," cried Amenartas. "By that blood of yours, the blood that flowed in our dead son and flows in that of the child to be, I adjure you turn from this witch and temptress and break her enchanted bonds."

"By our dead son," he repeated after her in a strange and heavy voice. "With what holier words could you conjure, O my wife? With that name of power I am new-armoured. Daughter of Wisdom, I reject your proffered gifts, nor will I enter your charmed fire though it should give to me eternal strength and gloriousness, and with these your shining beauty and your love. Child of the gods, farewell! I go to seek peace and pardon if it may be found. Yes, pardon for you and me, and for Amenartas, the mother of my child. Daughter of Wisdom, fare you well for ever!"

I heard, and it seemed to me that I stood alone in the midst of a great silence while those cruel words, divorcing me from hope, fell one by one upon me like ice-drops from the sky, cutting to brain and heart and freezing me to stone. Then of a sudden rage possessed me, such rage as Nature knows in her fiercest moods, and I spoke as it gave me words, saying,

"I call down death upon thee, Kallikrates the Greek. Death be thy portion and the grave thy home. Because thou hast rejected me, because thou hast offered me insult to my face, it is my will that thou mayest die; it is my desire that thy name be blotted out from the roll of Life. Die, then, Kallikrates, that thine eyes may torment me no more and that I may learn to mock thy memory."

Thus I spoke those words of doom in my madness, though what conceived them in my heart I do not know. There they sprang up suddenly at the touch of the wand of Evil, such evil as until now I had never dreamed. Lo! in a moment they fulfilled themselves. There before my eyes the man *died*, smitten of the dominion over Death that was the Fire's fatal gift to me, as now, all unprepared, instantly I learned. Yes, the first service that I made of my dread majesty was to hurl that awful doom at the heart of the man I loved.

He died! Kallikrates died there before our eyes. Yet being dead, still he stood upon his feet and spoke, though even then I knew that it was not he who spoke, but some spirit possessing his perished flesh. His lips did not move, his eyes were glassed, his voice was not the voice of Kallikrates, nay, nor the voice of mortal man. Yet he spoke, or seemed to speak, and these were the words he said,

"Woman, known on earth as Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, but in the Under-world by many another name, hearken to thy fate. Here, where thou hast betrayed thy trust, here where thou didst slay the man of thy desire, here through long ages shalt thou abide undying, until in the fulness of time he returns to thee, O Ayesha, in lonely bitterness shalt thou abide; tears shall be thy drink and remorse thy bread. The power that thou didst crave shall be but a blunted, unused sword within thine hand. Thy kingdom shall be a desolation, thy subjects barbarians, and from century to century thy companions shall be the dead."

The voice ceased and I answered it, asking,

"And when the returning tide of Time bears this man back to me, what then, O Spirit? Is all hope passed from me, O Spirit?"

No answer came, but that which had been Kallikrates sank in a huddled heap upon the sand.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE COUNSEL OF PHILO

ROARING like a whirlwind, shouting triumphantly, once more the wheel of fire rolled on its tremendous course. I watched it come, I watched it go, while in it I thought I saw grinning, elf-like faces that gibbered at me and thrust out tongues of derision. It departed on its secret journey through the bowels of the world. Its thunder sank to mutterings, its mutterings to silence, while I said to my heart that could I be sure that it would slay, I would cast myself beneath its chariot wheels.

To what purpose? Since then, as I believed in those days, in the flames I should find but added life—I who could not die.

It was gone. Naught remained save the cave carpeted with white sand and the rosy light playing on the body of the dead Kallikrates. Nay, Amenartas remained also, and I became aware that she was cursing me by all her gods, or rather by those who had been her gods before she turned her face from them, seeking the counsel of familiar spirits.

Bravely she cursed and long, calling down upon my head every evil that can be found in heaven above or earth beneath; she who did not know that this was needless, for already the winged Furies had made it their resting-place and before they could be uttered all her imprecations were fulfilled.

"Have done!" I said when at length she grew weak and weary, "and let us summon Philo to help us bear this noble clay to some fitting sepulchre."

"Nay, Witch," she answered, "use your magic on me also, if you can. Slay the wife as you have slain the husband, and here let us rest eternally. What tomb can be better for both of us than that which saw our murder."

"Have done!" I repeated. "You know well that I have no desire to kill you and that it was my madness, not my will, that brought doom on Kallikrates, whom we loved; I who had not learned that henceforth my spirit is a bow winged with deadly shafts."

I went down the cave and through the passage that lay beyond and from its mouth called to Philo to follow me.

He came, and perceiving my new loveliness as I stood awaiting him in the rosy light, fell to the ground, kissing my feet and the hem of my robe, and muttering,

"O Isis-come-to-Earth! O Queen divine!"

"Rise up and follow me," I said, and led him to where lay Kallikrates, by whom knelt the widowed Amenartas weeping bitterly.

"Overwhelmed with the sight of glory, alas! this lord has slain himself," I said, and pointed to the wound in the dead man's breast whence still the blood oozed drop by drop.

"Nay, this witch slew him," moaned Amenartas, but if Philo heard her words, he took no heed of them.

Then at my command the three of us lifted Kallikrates and bore him thence up the difficult ways, which never could we have done had I not discovered that now in my woman's shape that seemed so frail and weak was hid unmeasured strength.

So through the caves and up the winding slopes and stairs we bore the dead Kallikrates, bringing him back to the hermitage of Noot but a little before the hour of sunset. Here I commanded Amenartas and Philo to eat and drink, though myself I needed neither food nor wine. While they did so, aided of this new strength of mine, I lifted the body of Noot from where it knelt and laid it down, crossing the hands upon the breast, and having covered it with a robe, left him to his last sleep.

These things finished, we carried Kallikrates to the crest of the Swaying Stone, and waited the coming of the ray. Suddenly it shone out, and in its fierce light we dared the shifting bridge. Beneath a weight which it was ill designed to bear, the frail thing broke just as Amenartas and Philo, bearing the feet of the dead man, had found footing upon the point of the spur beyond. It seemed that I should have fallen, yet I fell not, who, I know not how, found myself at their side still supporting Kallikrates in my arms.

Then it was that first I learned that as I was protected from the gnawings of the tooth of Time so also I was armoured against all the strokes of chance. This indeed became very clear to me in the after days. Thus once when the roof of a cave fell upon me and others they were slain but I remained unbruised, and again, when a deadly snake bit me, its poison harmed me not at all. But what of these things which are not worthy to be chronicled, seeing that if I could die, in the passing of two thousand years and more, what men call mishap must long since have brought me to my end.

We bore Kallikrates down the spur and through the cavern whence it springs, till at length we found the litters waiting for us, and in one of these we laid his quiet form.

Thus at length we came back to Kôr at the hour of the dawn.

Again we lifted up the corpse of Kallikrates and carried it to the chamber where I slept. A thought came to me.

"Philo," I said, "did you not tell me that among those who serve us in this temple are certain aged medicine-men who declare that knowledge of the arts whereby the people of old Kôr preserved their dead from corruption has come down to them, which arts they still practise from time to time?"

"It is so, O Queen," for so he named me now. "There are three of them."

"Good. Summon them, Philo, and bid them bring with them their instruments and spices."

Awile later the three appeared, very aged, cunning-looking men who had upon their hook-nosed faces the stamp of high and ancient blood. I pointed to the body of Kallikrates and asked,

"Are ye able to hold back this holy flesh from the foul fingers of decay?"

"If he be not more than forty hours dead," answered one of them, "we can do so in such fashion that when five thousand years have passed it will seem as it does at this hour, O Queen."

"Then to your office, Slaves, and know that if ye do as ye have promised ye shall receive great reward. But if ye lie to me, ye die."

"We do not lie, O Queen," he said.

Forthwith they lit a fire outside the chamber and thereon set a large earthen pot. In this pot, mixed with water, they placed dried leaves of a certain shrub, in shape long and narrow, and boiled them to a broth, whereof the pungent odour seemed to fill all the air about. While the pot was boiling they took the corpse of Kallikrates, and, having washed it, brushed it everywhere with some secret

stuff that gave to it the aspect of white and shining marble. Then they brought a funnel of clay with a curved point, and having opened the great artery of the throat, inserted the point into the artery.

This done, they stood the stiff corpse on its feet and while two of them held it thus, the third brought the pot into which they poured stuff that looked like glass when it is molten, mixing all together with a rod of stone. Then he set a ladder, perhaps four paces in length, against the wall, and carrying the pot, climbed to the top of it, whence slowly he poured the brew into the funnel beneath so that its weight forced it through all the dead man's veins. When the most of it was gone he descended and the three of them finished their work in some way that I did not stay to watch, for the sight of this grim preparation for the tomb and the scent of these spicy drugs overcame me.

At length they summoned me and showed me Kallikrates lying like to one in a deep sleep, calm and beautiful as he had been in life.

"O Queen," said their spokesman, "by to-morrow at the sunrise the flesh of this man will be as marble, and so everlastingly remain. Then bear him where you will, but till then let him rest untouched."

I bade that they should be rewarded, and they went their ways. But first I asked them where the inhabitants of old Kôr were wont to lay their royal dead. They answered that it was in the great caves at a little distance across the plain, and I commanded that on the morrow they should guide me thither, bearing the body of Kallikrates.

Philo came and said that the priests and priestesses of Isis would have speech with me and that they were gathered in the inmost court of the great temple before the veiled statue of the goddess Truth. I bade him lead on, but he wavered a little and said,

"O Queen, there is trouble. The royal lady, Amenartas, has told a tale in the ears of those priests and priestesses. She has sworn to them that you are not a woman but a daemon; aye, a witch risen from the Under-world, and that you murdered the lord Kallikrates because he would not give himself to you. Also she swore that you strove to murder her who, being protected by the magic which her father Nectanebes, the great wizard, taught her, was too strong for you and therefore escaped alive."

"As to the last, she lies," I answered carelessly.

We came to the inmost court. It was the hour of sunset and the place was filled with glowing light. I took my seat upon the throne-like chair beneath the statue and the light beat full upon me, a glory on a glory.

The priests and priestesses who were standing still with folded arms and bowed heads looked up and saw me. A murmur of astonishment rose from them and I heard one say to the other,

"The Princess has told us truth."

At first I did not understand; then I remembered that I was no longer as mortal women are, but rather, as my mirror told me, an incarnate splendour, a very goddess to the sight.

"Speak," I said, and they shook at the new rich note of power in my voice, as leaves vibrate at the sudden swell of music.

The first of the priests, a large man of middle age, Rames by name, stood forward and fixing his round eyes upon my face, said,

"O Prophetess, O Daughter of Wisdom, O Isis-come-to-Earth, we know not what to say, since we have heard that you have changed your shape, now as is evident to us. Prophetess, you are not the same high-priestess who ruled over us in the temple at Memphis and whom we followed to this desolate land. Some magic has been at work with you."

"If so," I answered, "is it an evil magic? Tell me, Rames, am I changed for better or for worse?"

"You are beautiful," he answered, "so beautiful that madness must take all men who look on you. But, Prophetess, your loveliness is not such as mortal woman wears. Nay, it is such as Typhon might give to one who had sold her soul to him. Also, there is more. We learn that you murdered that Grecian, Kallikrates, who once was of our fellowship, because he refused his love to you; yes, that you, the high-priestess of Isis, murdered a man because he turned from your arms to those of his wife, the royal Amenartas, and that if you could, you would have murdered her also."

"Who tells this tale?" I asked slowly.

"The Princess herself," Rames answered. "See, she is here. Let her speak."

Amenartas appeared from among the throng, and cried,

"It is true, it is most true. Here before the statue of Truth herself, I swear it in the face of Heaven and to all the listening earth. There is a wound on the breast of my dead lord, Kallikrates. Ask yonder witch how that wound came there. Clothed only in her hair, she entered into a fire, a fire of hell. She came forth beautiful with a beauty that is not human. She called my lord to embrace her. Yes, this shameless one, she named herself his spouse. This she did before the eyes of his own wife and in the hearing of her ears. She bade him enter the Fire of Hell, and when he would not, when he turned to seek refuge in my arms, she sent him down the path of death by her words of power. She said:

"I call down death upon thee, Kallikrates. Death be thy portion and the grave thine home. Die, Kallikrates, that thy face may torment me no more and that I may learn to mock thy memory."

"These were her very words. Let her deny them if she can. I say, moreover, that always she has desired to lead astray the lord Kallikrates, and that when she could not do so of her woman's strength, then she made a pact with Typhon and strove to mesh him in her magic, but strove in vain. Therefore she slew him in her rage."

When the priests and priestesses heard these words they turned pale and trembled. Then they called to me to answer. But I said,

"I answer not. Who are you that I should render account to you of what I have or have not done? Think what you will and do what you will. I answer not, save this, that what has chanced, has chanced by the decree of Fate who sits above all gods and goddesses, throned beyond heaven's remotest star."

They drew apart, they talked together. Then Rames came forward and, still staring at me, said:

"Whether you yet serve Isis, O Ayesha, daughter of Yarab, we do not know. But we who are her children, sworn to her obedience for which we have suffered many things, reject you from your place of rule in which you were set above us by the holy Noot, whom we learn has passed to the keeping of Osiris. No more are you our high-priestess, Ayesha, or Evil Spirit, and no longer shall you stand with us before the altars of the Queen of Heaven."

"Be it as you will," I answered. "Go and leave me to make mine own peace with Isis, who now and henceforward am her equal, I who have learned what Isis is, and been clothed with that same majesty. I see that you believe me to blaspheme; the horror upon your

faces tells me so. Yet I do not; here in the shadow of Truth—if it were but known, the only goddess—I speak with the voice of Truth. Farewell. I wish you good fortune, and in all things will aid you if I can. Tell me, Philo, do you desert me like these others?”

“Nay, O Queen,” he answered, “we are old comrades, you and I, who have gone through too much together to separate at last. I am a Greek who entered into the company of Isis chiefly after I met you, fair Daughter of Wisdom, and noted the deeds you did upon the ship *Hapi*, and to be short—whatever road you take is a good road for me. I know not whether you slew this Kallikrates, or whether he slew himself with his own sword, of which I noted the mark upon him, but if you offered him your love and he refused it then I hold that he deserved to die.

“For the rest, I am a merchant who take my gain where I can find it, and I know that you pay well. Therefore I follow your banner to the end, whether it lead me to the Heaven of Isis or to the Hades of my forefathers, where doubtless I shall meet Achilles and Hector and Odysseus and many another gallant seafaring warrior of whom our Homer sings. That place whither you wend is home enough for me, for in your palace I shall always find a chamber, and on your ship of state I shall always stand upon the poop, however far the voyage.”

Thus spoke that gay and cunning Greek, hiding the loyalty of his heart beneath his jesting words, and truly in that hour of deserted loneliness my gratitude went out toward him, as still it does to-day and will do for evermore. For though Philo would take a bribe where he could find it, as is the way of those who serve Fortune and must earn bread, still he was ever loyal to those he loved, and he loved me in that high fashion which is born of long service and of fellowship. When at length I come into my great inheritance, and rule elsewhere—as rule I shall—my first care shall be to reward Philo as he deserves, although once or more he did fill his pouch with the gold of Amenartas, or so I believe.

Yet at this time I only smiled at him and asked,

“These things being done, what of the Princess of Egypt? Let her speak her desire that I may fulfil it, if I can.”

“It is simple,” answered Amenartas, “that I may be rid of you, no less and no more. I would go hence to bear my child and to rear him to wreak vengeance on you for his father’s blood, O Witch of the Under-world, and until I die, to work and pray that the Furies may be your bedfellows, O murderess and thief of love.”

“Let these things befall as they are fated,” I answered very quietly. “The stage of doom is set and on it throughout the ages until the play ends at last, we, the puppets of Destiny, must act our appointed parts to a consummation that we cannot foresee. But how will it end, Lady Amenartas? You know not; nor do I, though already some master’s hand has writ the last scene upon his roll. Philo, it is my command that you lead Pharaoh’s child to the coast, or wherever she would go, that thence she may find her way to Greece or Egypt as Fortune may direct her. That done, return and make report to me. Farewell, Amenartas.”

“Fare ill, Witch,” she cried. “We part, but as I think, to meet again elsewhere, seeing that between you and me there is a score to settle.”

“Aye,” I answered gently enough. “Yet boast not, Amenartas, and be not too sure of anything, since when at length that sum is added up, who knows on which side the balance will be struck.”

“At least I know that the count will be long and that murder is a heavy weight in any scale,” she answered.

Then she went; they all went and left me alone brooding there upon the chair of state, in which I sat for the last time. The darkness closed about me, then came the twilight of the rising moon in whose soft rays I saw the figure of a man creeping toward me as a thief creeps.

“Who comes?” I asked.

“Beauteous Queen,” answered a thick voice, “it is I, Rames, the priest.”

“Speak on, Rames.”

“O most fair among women, if indeed you may be named woman, hear me. Those fools of priests and priestesses have thrown you from your place.”

“So you told me but now, Rames, nor can they be blamed.”

“So I told you because I must, not of my own will, and that which is done, cannot be undone. You are cast out and here in Kôr the worship of Isis is at an end, since who is there that can fill your throne? Yet, hearken, hearken! I cling to you, I worship you. I desire you to be my wife, O most lovely. Here together we will rule in Kôr and you shall be its Queen and goddess, and I will be its Captain. It is most wise that you should consent, O Lady divine.”

“Why is it wise, Rames?”

“Because, Lady, I can protect you. You know the sentence that goes out against those who break the rule of Isis. I say that it is already uttered against you. I say that those bigots seek to murder you. But if you take me as husband, then we will be beforehand with them and kill or drive them away. Yea, now that you are lonely and deserted, I shall be your sure shield.”

I heard and laughed aloud, and I think that this madman interpreted that laugh in a strange fashion. At least he threw himself upon me. He seized my hand and lifted it toward his lips, though by those lips it was never touched. For now rage took hold of me, such rage as had possessed my soul in the cave of the Fire of Life; rage and the desire of destruction, that with other evil gifts had come to me in the breath of the Fire.

“Accursed one!” I cried, “vile and insolent thief! Do you dare to touch me with your hand? Away with you to Set! Let the world know you no more!”

As the words passed my lips it seemed to me that from some strength within a withering flame leapt out of me and smote that man as the lightning smites. At the least he lifted his hands to his head; he reeled back, he fell, he groaned—he died.

Looking at him lying there in the moonlight, still and bereft of life, at the last I came to know full surely that henceforward I could slay with a thought, that I was the Lady of Death, and that such wrath as others express in words went forth from me with all the might of Heaven; moreover, that now this wrath rose suddenly and swiftly in me, easy to unchain, hard to hold. Yea, I was both a fury and a terror whom no man might cross or vex if he would continue to look upon the sun.

Philo came. He stared at me and at the dead Rames, then questioned me with his eyes.

“He would have laid hands on me, Philo, and I slew him,” I said.

“Then what he has earned, he has been paid,” answered Philo. “Yet, Queen, how did you slay him? I see no bruise or wound.”

“By a power that has come to me, Philo. I desired him dead and he died. That is all the tale.”

"A strange and a terrible power, Queen. Often when we are angry we wish that this one or that were dead—yet that they should forthwith die—! Henceforth you must watch your moods well, Daughter of Wisdom, since otherwise I think that you and I will soon be parted for, as I know, at times you are angry with me, and when next that chances I shall be sped."

"Aye, Philo, so I have learned. I must watch my moods very well. Yet fear nothing, since never could I wish you dead."

"Are you sure, Ayesha? Harken. What was the crime of this poor wretch? Was it not that he, who hitherto had been a virtuous man, a good and earnest priest who never turned to look at woman, of a sudden went mad for love of you, and in his madness urged his suit—well, as men do when they have lost hold of the reins of reason, whereon you slew him? Now if men must die for such a crime, who is there that would live to grow old? I think that all of them would soon be driven to dwell in such a hermitage as that wherein the holy Noot sleeps to-night. Is it not true? I ask you who know the world."

"It is true," I answered.

"If so, Lady, I would ask another question. What was it that sent this man mad? Was it not the sight of such beauty as has never yet been known upon the earth? Which beauty, Ayesha, if I look upon it much longer, I think will send me mad also, or any other man. Daughter of Wisdom, such loveliness as you wear to-day is the greatest curse that the gods can grant to woman, because being above Nature, all Nature must obey its might. Daughter of Wisdom, henceforward you must veil your face from the eyes of men, or become the murderess of more ill-fated ones."

"It seems that this is so," I answered heavily. "I have desired beauty and beauty has come to me, but however great, all gifts are not good."

"So I have heard philosophers preach in Greece, Lady, yet never did I know one of them to turn his back on any gift. Ayesha, hide those eyes of yours, hide them swiftly. While Rames lies there dead, love is frightened, but once his clay is gone, who knows? But I forgot, I came to warn you that a certain decree has been uttered against you, the same, Queen, that you have uttered against Rames, also to protect you, if I can."

Now I laughed outright.

"Foolish man," I said, "do you not yet understand that I cannot be killed or even harmed?"

"Ye Gods!" said Philo, holding up his hands in amazement. Then he was silent.

That night I slept by the cold shape of Kallikrates and oh! it was the most fearful of all nights that ever I had passed upon the earth. Evil, very evil were the dreams that came to me, if dreams they were. In them it seemed that Noot spoke with me. Nay, not Noot, but a flickering tongue of fire which I knew to be the spirit of Noot. Naught could I see save that burning tongue, and from it came terrible words.

"Daughter," it said, "you have cast my counsels to the winds, you have betrayed your trust, you have broken my commands that I gave to you out of the wisdom that was given to me. You have entered the Fire that you were set to watch. You have been embraced by the Fire and received its gifts. Behold the first fruits of them. The man whom you would have taken lies dead at your side, and yonder in the temple court another lies dead also, who was good until your hell-granted beauty made him evil. The worship of Isis is destroyed in this land that now nevermore will become a nation great and strong and pure. The heart of Amenartas is broken, yet she will live on to beget avengers, one of whom will overtake you at the appointed time. In loneliness, in remorse, in utter desolation you must endure till the Fire dies that cannot die while the world is; seeking yet never finding, or finding but to lose again. Henceforth you are an alien to the kindly race of men, a beauteous terror that all must desire and yet all fear and hate. Ever that which you seek will flit before you like a wandering star which you may never overtake, and in following it you will bring death to thousands. Daughter, you are accursed."

"Is there then no redemption?" I asked of Noot in my dream.

"Aye, Ayesha, when the world is redeemed, then perchance you may find your part in that great forgiveness. Harken. There is a vision which throughout your life has haunted you. In that vision Aphrodite and the evil gods, those gods that she had led into Egypt to destroy its higher faith, were summoned before the throne of Isis. In it also a fate and a command were laid upon you—that you should war against those gods and bring its punishment on Egypt that received and welcomed them."

"It is but a fantasy," I answered. "Now I know that there are no evil gods; there lives no Aphrodite; even no Isis."

"Daughter, you err. True, there is no Isis who was shaped only by the faith of earth and in the dreams of men. Yet there is that which they name Isis, as the highest that they know and can fashion in their thought. There is the eternal Good and that Good is God. Throughout the countless ages man, warring against Nature, has lifted up his heart till almost he seems to look upon the face of that almighty, regnant Good. Thus it was with you, Daughter, and now whither have you wended? You have fled down the backward path. You have undone all, you have gone back to Nature. Henceforth you are Nature's self, shining with her false and passing beauty, inspired with her law of death, you who once drew near to the new law of Life that awaited you beyond the grave, which now you may not seek."

"Whate'er I did, I did for Love and Love shall save me," I seemed to answer in my agony.

"Aye, Ayesha, doubtless in the end Love will save you, as it saves all things that without its grace must perish everlastingly. Yet for you that salvation is now far away, and ere it can be found, one by one you must conquer those passions that found you in the Fire. You who sought undying beauty, must see your fair body more hideous and more horrible than the leper of the streets. You who are filled with rage and strength must grow gentle as a dove and weak as a little child. By suffering you must learn to soothe the sufferings of others. By expiation you must atone your crimes, by faith once more you must lift up your soul. By the knowledge you shall win you must come to understand your own blind pettiness through time untold. Ayesha, this is your doom."

Such was the substance of that dream and when I awoke from it, oh! how bitterly I wept. For now I understood. I was fallen—fallen! All that I had gathered through the long years of prayer and abstinence and service had been reft from me, and I who stood near to joy had sunk into a hell of unending sorrow. There was no Isis, so I had dreamed Noot to say, and so my new knowledge told me. Yet there was the eternal Good which in Egypt men knew as Isis, and in other lands by many a different name, and from that Good I was excommunicate.

Now like my savage ancestors of a million years before, I was but a part of Nature as we see her upon the earth and feel her in our blood and—this was the most dreadful of my punishments—my wisdom and my lost faith had become rules by which I could

mete out the measure of my fall, for ignorance can smile at that which to knowledge is a hell. All Nature's gifts were mine; all her beauty, all her desires, all her fierceness, all her hates, and one by one, through countless time I must weed her every evil growth from the garden of my poisoned soul. The curse with which she was accursed had smitten me also, and in the end her death would be my death. Such was the doom that I had brought upon my head when I had listened to the calling of that god of Fire.

Oh! looking upon the cold corpse of Kallikrates and feeling the primeval passions surging in my breast, little wonder that I, the rejected of Heaven, wept as still I weep to-day.

For such is the lot of those who trample on all good as they run to seize the glittering gauds that the tempter spreads before their lusting eyes. Perchance Noot never broke his holy rest to speak to me in dreams; perchance it was the strength in my own soul that spoke to my heart, as that strength, of which now I knew the power, in the old days wrought marvels that then I believed to be done by the invisible hand of Isis. At least the lesson taught is true.

## CHAPTER XXV

### IN UNDYING LONELINESS

ERE the dawn, guided by those old embalmers and bearing with me the dead Kallikrates, I departed from that hateful Kôr. As I think, none saw me go, for, forgetful of their promised vengeance, the priests and priestesses were gathered trembling about the corpse of Rames in the inmost court of the Temple of Truth, though it is true that I felt the baleful eyes of Amenartas watching me. Or perhaps it was her pursuing hate I felt, and not her eyes.

Veiled so that no man might look upon my deadly beauty, I crossed the plain and came to the vast cave-sepulchres. Here those old embalmers lit lamps and showed me a deep and empty tomb. It had two shelves or niches, on one of which I laid my dead, choosing the other to be my couch. Thus then I took up my abode in the Sepulchres of Kôr that for some two thousand years were to be my home.

At my command Philo led the royal Amenartas from the haunted land of Kôr, and returning three moons later, told me, truly or not, that she had passed the swamps and departed on a wandering ship, sailing north, whither he knew not. I asked him no more who did not desire to learn of her words and curses, though as it chanced this I must do after long ages had gone by. Some of the priests and priestesses went with her. Others remained in Kôr and, if they were young enough, took wives or husbands and ruled there. Indeed, the last of their descendants whom I could trace before their blood was utterly swallowed up in that of the barbarians, died after five hundred years or more had passed away.

Philo, too, lived on at Kôr, making trading journeys to the coast and along it in his ship and grew rich and, after a fashion, great. For Philo would never leave me whom he loved, though no more would he look upon my unveiled face. At length, very old, he died in my arms, he who would have none of the Fire and its gifts. When his breath left him, for the first time since that night at Kôr, I wept. For now I was quite alone.

While he lay dying he prayed me to unveil, saying that now, when no harm could come of it, he would look upon my face once more. I did so and he studied me long and earnestly with his hollow eyes.

"You are wondrous beautiful," he said, "nor during these past forty years or more, since last I beheld you unveiled in the sanctuary of the Temple of Truth, has your loveliness lessened by one wit. Indeed, I think that it has gathered. What is the meaning of this, fair Daughter of Wisdom?"

"It means what I have told you before, Philo, that I do not die until the world dies, although I may change and seem to pass away."

"Yet I die. Do we then part for ever?" he asked.

"Nay, I think not, Philo, for at last Death overtakes everything and in its halls we may meet again. Moreover, the world lives long and to it, ere its end, you may return once, or often, and if so, perchance you will be drawn to me."

"I trust so, O Wisdom's Daughter. They call you witch, and doubtless such you are, who can slay with a glance, whom age does not touch, and whom Death scorns. Yet, witch or woman, or both, there lives none, no, not even wife or child, whom I so desire to meet hereafter."

So Philo died, and since those medicine-men who had embalmed Kallikrates now were dead also, leaving behind them none who had knowledge of their art, I buried him unpreserved in the great sepulchres.

Awhile ago the fancy took me to go to look upon him, but alas! after the passing of some sixteen hundred years, save for the skull, his naked bones had crumbled into dust.

What more is there to tell? All died and came again in their children: generation after generation of them did I watch arise, flourish in their wild fashion, and go their ways down the path of Death. I ruled those barbarians, if rule it can be called. They were my slaves who feared me as a spirit, and I was kind to them, but if they angered me, then I slew them, for thus only could they be held in a due subjection even to one that they believed to be an ancient goddess whom their forefathers worshipped, Lulala by name, whose throne was in the moon.

For these Amahagger were a terrible people, barbarians who loved the night because their deeds were evil, and who, if strangers wandered among them, slew them by the setting of red-hot pots upon their heads, and afterward ate their flesh. Yet among them were some of a nobler sort, descended, as I think, either from the unmixed blood of the ancients of old Kôr, or perchance from those priests and priestesses of Isis who had been my companions. Such a one was a certain Billali whom my lord Leo and Holly knew. But for the most part they were hook-nosed, treacherous, dark-haunting savages, and as such they must be handled.

In the course of those long ages, to divert myself in my loneliness and for the purposes of study, I reared certain of these savages up to this and that. I stunted them to dwarfs, I bred them to giants. Musicians of a kind I made of some of them, though to do so took ten of their generations. Then I grew weary of the game and all these variants died back into the common stock; that fundamental type to which, if left alone, every species that springs on earth returns in time, and this more quickly than might be thought. The last breed that I created, or caused to create itself, was one of mutes evolved from a faithful strain who had served me well, since I found these mutes more docile and less wearisome than the rest.

But enough of that people with which I have done for ever.

What did I do through all those awful ages? At first, as I found I had the power, I threw my watching eyes across the world, and learned all that happened there. Thus I saw the battles of Alexander, his conquests and his death, and the rise of the Ptolemies in Egypt; also many other things in the countries with which I have had to do. But soon I tired of it all.

Men arose of whom I knew nothing. Peoples changed, and ever the play repeated itself afresh, though with new actors. I had naught in common with them and their petty aims and passions, I who watched as a god might watch those that served him not, or as an idle child watches the labours of colony after colony of ants. Yea, I tired of them and took no more heed of what they did or did

not do upon their short journey to that forgetfulness wherewith the dust of Time would bury them. I was dead to the world, and the world was dead to me.

In the ages that followed I sent out my soul to seek kindred souls and found some with whom I communed, though they never knew who it was that talked to them. With wise men throughout the earth I held this converse, and from them gathered knowledge, giving them in return something of my wisdom, which doubtless they presented to the generations as their own. If so, the world was the gainer, and if Truth comes, what matters it whence it comes?

I did more. I sought out the dead in their habitations beyond the stars, aye, and found not a few of them. Always they were eager to learn of the world and in return paid me with the coin of their unearthly lore. They told me of those other worlds and I made acquaintance with their princes and their rulers: I gathered up the broken fragments from the feasts that were spread upon these alien tables and drank of the dregs of their new wine. But, and here was the mystery, here was the grief: never once could I grasp the robe of any whom I had known upon the earth. I found not my father, I found not Noot, I found not Kallikrates, I found not Philo, I found not Beltis or Amenartas. In all that countless multitude I discovered no single soul to whom my mortal lips had spoken in its little day. Of friend or foe I found not one. Perchance all of them were still asleep and resting in their sleep.

I looked into the secrets of Nature and they opened themselves to me like flowers beneath the sun. I inhaled their perfume, I admired their beauty, so that at length little was hid from me. I learned how to turn clay to gold and how to harness the lightning to my service, aye, and many another thing. Yet what was the use of all of it to me, the dweller in a tomb?

Knowledge, the lord, is a barren grant unless it can also be a servant; aye, a slave at command to work good for man.

For the rest, what did I do? Without the caves I sowed the seed of trees. I watched them spring, I watched them grow to saplings and, in the slow progression of the centuries, swell to great timbers with far-stretching arms beneath whose shade I rested. Thus they stood for many a hundred years. Then for many another hundred they decayed, grew hollow, rotted to dust and fell, their long day done at last. And I, I sowed me others.

To mark the passage of those years lest I should lose count of them, in a certain cavern I laid me stones, a stone for every one as from the hand of Time it fell ripe into the bosom of Eternity. As on their rosaries, here and there, priests set larger beads to mark the tale of their completed prayers, so when ten years had gone I set a larger stone, and when a hundred had passed by, one larger yet and white in colour, while the thousandth year I marked with a little pyramid, two of which now stand in the Caves of Kôr. It was a good plan whereby I could reckon easily, only some of the softer stones that lay near to the mouth of that cavern where sun and rain could reach them at length crumbled into sand.

Why did I stay at Kôr? Why did I not wander forth through the world? Because I *could not*, because of the curse that had been laid upon me, that here I must wait until Kallikrates came again, as come I knew he would. Therefore no captive ever was more chained and fettered in his dungeon than I, Ayesha, by that compelling curse in the Sepulchres of Kôr, where night by night I laid me down to rest in the cold company of the dead. From time to time, once in a generation mayhap, I would lift the cloths that covered him and look upon his pale beauty (for those old embalmers did not lie), and kiss his brow of ice and weep and weep. Then once more I laid the shroud, or a new shroud, upon him and went my weary way.

Oh! it is terrible in this world where all is change, where even the stones grow and die to re-form again, to be the one thing that changeth not for ever. Yet, that was my lot, such was the gift of the Fire-lord whom I had wedded and embraced. There I sat in my eternal beauty which I was doomed to hide, lest brute men should be maddened at the sight of it, so that I must slay them with the lightning of my will. There I brooded, gathering to my breast all that wisdom of Mother Nature of whom now I was a part, all the useless wisdom whose weight at length clogged my sense and cramped my soul. There I sat, eaten of desire for one dead and burning with jealous hate of that woman who had borne his child and who, as I knew well, wandered with him, greater than I perhaps and still more fair, in some Elysium that even my spirit could not reach, taking the place that I might fill, if only I could attain to the boon of death which is everlastingly denied to me, until the old world itself shall die. There, I say, I sat while the slow fire of the torturer Time, burning in my breast, ate its path through all my being, till the hot soul within me turned to the bitter ash of hopelessness.

Oh! why did he not come? Why did he not come? Surely the circle must be complete and the time fulfilled. Surely he must weary of those unknown heavenly fields and of the coarse love of Egypt's Lady. Surely he would come and soon. Only then, what if here, as there, she still companioned him?

At length one came, and when I learned of it my heart flamed up with hope as a torch flames in these dark caves. Alas! it was not he. So soon as my eyes fell on him afar, I knew it, yonder in the temple of Kôr whither I had gone upon the matters of some petty savage trouble, such as had arisen thrice since the days of Philo. I saw and grew sick with hope destroyed, so sick that had he but known it, this little, wizened wanderer at that moment stood near to the world's edge. Yet afterward I came to like him well, perchance because he reminded me so much of Philo that once or twice almost I thought—— But let this matter be.

He was a strange man, that wanderer; very shrewd, but one who believed nothing which he could not see or touch or handle. Thus when I told him tales concerning myself and my length of days and why I sat at Kôr in beauty, yet like one who is dead in a desert, openly he mocked at them, which angered me. Not all of these were true, be it admitted, because, being a part of Nature as I am, how can I always speak the truth?

Nature shows many faces to those who court her; Nature has desert-phantasies wherewith the traveller is oft deceived, thinking he sees that which he does not see, though in some shape or form of a surety it exists elsewhere. Nature also keeps her secrets close and ever instructs in parables that yet hold the seed of perfect verity.

So, being a part of Nature's self, did I with that wanderer, as indeed I do to this day with Holly the learned, who followed after him. Yet here the example has its flaw, for this man who was called Watcher-in-the-Night, a name that fitted him well enough, did not court me, as her watchers court Nature the beautiful. Nay, he turned his back upon me saying he was not one who loved, moth-like, to singe his wings in a flame, however bright; I think because often he had singed them already.

Still, I found this so strange that almost I began to wonder whether once more my beauty was on the wane and whether it needed longer to be hidden beneath a veil, or whether perchance men had grown wiser than they used to be. Therefore, once for a little moment I put out my strength and brought him to his knees and having taught him certain lessons, I laughed at him and let him go. Yet be it said that I held and hold him dear, and look onward to the day when we shall meet again, as perchance we had met in those

that are long past. So enough of this brave and honest man, gently born also, and instructed in his fashion. Doubtless he died many years ago.

I tire of this long, sad task; let the end of my tale be short.

At last, at last, came Kallikrates reborn, lacking memories, changed in spirit, and yet in face and form the very same. Holly brought him hither, or he brought Holly, because of an ancient, lying screeed that Amenartas wrote upon a sherd, which from age to age had passed down in his race, urging some descendant of her blood to find me out and slay me, for this Egyptian fool thought that I could be slain.

He came, and by Heaven! I knew not that he was here until the crabbed Holly led me to the couch whereon he lay fever-stricken and at the very point of death. By my arts I dragged him back from between those doors of doom, that almost once again had closed behind him, and afterward, revealing to him my beauty and my burning love, caused him to worship me. Yet, mark! He came not alone; as I feared would chance, something of Amenartas prisoned in a savage woman's breast came with him, and already he was her lover.

I slew that woman who was obstinate and would not leave him; though the deed grieved me, I slew her because I must. It mattered little, for soon she was forgot, and I held him fast.

Of the rest little need be said, for Holly knows it all and tells me that he has written it in a book. Because I might not wed with mortal man I led Kallikrates, he who now was known as Leo, down the perilous ways to that hid cavern where ever the bright Spirit of Life, clad in flame and thunder, marches on his endless round. Behold! as it had been over two thousand years before, so it was now. Again Kallikrates feared to enter the flames and, putting on majesty, to become undying king of all the world. Aye, even though the prize of my glory lay to his hand, his flesh shrank from the Fire.

Therefore that he might learn courage, once more I gave myself to the embrace of the god, and lo! this time he slew me. Yes, in utter shame and hideousness before my lover's eyes, there I died, or rather seemed to die; an ancient, shrivelled, ape-like thing. Yet dying, my unconquerable spirit gave me strength to mutter in his ear that I should come again and once more be beautiful.

Nay, I did not die. Far away again I became incarnate in this distant Asian land, which after all is my own, since in a part of it first I saw the light. Here in this cavern-monastery where still lingers some shadow of the worship of the moon and of the great Principle that in the old days was named Isis, Queen of Heaven, once more I was clothed with mortal flesh.

The years went by, but two or three of them, and I found the power to search out Kallikrates, or Leo Vincey, still living on the earth, and in a vision showed him the mountains that I inhabit. He was faithful. Yes, like Holly he was faithful, and together they followed that vision. For twice ten years they searched, and then at last they found me. They passed the perils and the tests; Kallikrates, or Leo Vincey, escaped the web spun by the Queen Atene, she in whom Amenartas once more shows herself upon the earth. They endured the appointed trials. Aye, when I unveiled before him on the mountain peak, my Love, my eternal Love, my doom and my desire, found strength and faith to kiss my hideous, withered brow. Then was that faith rewarded. Then before his very eyes I changed into the flower of all beauty, into the glory of all power, and he worshipped, worshipped, worshipped!

Now soon we shall be wed. Now soon the curse shall fall from us, like to a severed chain. Now soon my sin will be forgiven, and side by side we shall tread the endless path of splendour, no longer two but one, that path which leads through perfect joy—oh! whither does it lead? Even to-day I know not.

But this cannot be yet awhile. First he must bathe him in the Fire, since mortal man may not mix with my immortality and live as man. For while this world endures—have I not said it?—I who have drunk of the very Cup of its Spirit, aye, twice drunk deep, must also endure, and I think the world is still far away from the gates of Death. Aye, though I change a thousand times, still I shall be the same in other shapes, and though I seem to vanish, yet I must appear again.

Where I go, also, thither Kallikrates must follow me, or I must follow him, since he and I are one, and on me is laid the burden of the uplifting of the soul of him whose body once I slew.

And yet, and yet—oh! he is still human and death dogs the heels of man. As I write a horror seizes me. Aye, my hand trembles on the scroll and my spirit quakes. What if some chance, some sickness, some fate should strike him down, leaving me once more desolate and divorced, so that elsewhere all this dark tragedy must be played afresh?

Away with that hell-born thought! There are no gods and, Fate, I defy thee who am myself a Fate and thine equal. I will conquer thee, O Fate; thou shalt not conquer me. There is naught but that eternal Good whereof the fiery tongue which was the soul of Noot spoke, or seemed to speak, to me in my haunted sleep at Kôr, and to that Good I, Ayesha, make my prayer.

Lo! I have suffered. Lo! I have paid the count to its last coin. Lo! I have endured. Through the long ages I have sown in tears, and my hour of harvest is at hand; aye, the night of sorrow dies, and already on the peak of heavenly Peace shines the dawn of joy. ... My lord hunts upon the mountain after the fashion of men, and I brood within the caves after the fashion of women. ...

"... Holly, Holly! Awake! Look yonder! What is this? I seem to see my lord struggling on the snow and the spotted beast has him by the throat— ..."

## BOOK IV NADA THE LILY PREFACE

The writer of this romance has been encouraged to his task by a purpose somewhat beyond that of setting out a wild tale of savage life. When he was yet a lad,—now some seventeen years ago,—fortune took him to South Africa. There he was thrown in with men who, for thirty or forty years, had been intimately acquainted with the Zulu people, with their history, their heroes, and their customs. From these he heard many tales and traditions, some of which, perhaps, are rarely told nowadays, and in time to come may cease to be told altogether. Then the Zulus were still a nation; now that nation has been destroyed, and the chief aim of its white rulers is to root out the warlike spirit for which it was remarkable, and to replace it by a spirit of peaceful progress. The Zulu military organisation, perhaps the most wonderful that the world has seen, is already a thing of the past; it perished at Ulundi. It was Chaka who invented that organisation, building it up from the smallest beginnings. When he appeared at the commencement of this century, it was as the ruler of a single small tribe; when he fell, in the year 1828, beneath the assegais of his brothers, Umhlangana and Dingaan, and of his servant, Mopo or Umbopo, as he is called also, all south-eastern Africa was at his feet, and in his march to power he had slaughtered more than a million human beings. An attempt has been made in these pages to set out the true character of this colossal genius and most evil man,—a Napoleon and a Tiberius in one,—and also that of his brother and successor, Dingaan, so no more need be said of them here. The author's aim, moreover, has been to convey, in a narrative form, some idea of the remarkable spirit which animated these kings and their subjects, and to make accessible, in a popular shape, incidents of history which are now, for the most part, only to be found in a few scarce works of reference, rarely consulted, except by students. It will be obvious that such a task has presented difficulties, since he who undertakes it must for a time forget his civilisation, and think with the mind and speak with the voice of a Zulu of the old regime. All the horrors perpetrated by the Zulu tyrants cannot be published in this polite age of melanite and torpedoes; their details have, therefore, been suppressed. Still much remains, and those who think it wrong that massacre and fighting should be written of,—except by special correspondents,—or that the sufferings of mankind beneath one of the world's most cruel tyrannies should form the groundwork of romance, may be invited to leave this book unread. Most, indeed nearly all, of the historical incidents here recorded are substantially true. Thus, it is said that Chaka did actually kill his mother, Unandi, for the reason given, and destroy an entire tribe in the Tatiyana cleft, and that he prophesied of the coming of the white man after receiving his death wounds. Of the incident of the Missionary and the furnace of logs, it is impossible to speak so certainly. It came to the writer from the lips of an old traveller in "the Zulu"; but he cannot discover any confirmation of it. Still, these kings undoubtedly put their soldiers to many tests of equal severity. Umbopo, or Mopo, as he is named in this tale, actually lived. After he had stabbed Chaka, he rose to great eminence. Then he disappears from the scene, but it is not accurately known whether he also went "the way of the assegai," or perhaps, as is here suggested, came to live near Stanger under the name of Zweete. The fate of the two lovers at the mouth of the cave is a true Zulu tale, which has been considerably varied to suit the purposes of this romance. The late Mr. Leslie, who died in 1874, tells it in his book "Among the Zulus and Amatongas." "I heard a story the other day," he says, "which, if the power of writing fiction were possessed by me, I might have worked up into a first-class sensational novel." It is the story that has been woven into the plot of this book. To him also the writer is indebted for the artifice by which Umslopogaas obtained admission to the Swazi stronghold; it was told to Mr. Leslie by the Zulu who performed the feat and thereby won a wife. Also the writer's thanks are due to his friends, Mr. F. B. Fynney,<sup>[1]</sup> late Zulu border agent, for much information given to him in bygone years by word of mouth, and more recently through his pamphlet "Zululand and the Zulus," and to Mr. John Bird, formerly treasurer to the Government of Natal, whose compilation, "The Annals of Natal," is invaluable to all who would study the early history of that colony and of Zululand.

[1] I grieve to state that I must now say the late Mr. F. B. Fynney.

As for the wilder and more romantic incidents of this story, such as the hunting of Umslopogaas and Galazi with the wolves, or rather with the hyaenas,—for there are no true wolves in Zululand,—the author can only say that they seem to him of a sort that might well have been mythically connected with the names of those heroes. Similar beliefs and traditions are common in the records of primitive peoples. The club "Watcher of the Fords," or, to give its Zulu name, U-nothlola-mazibuko, is an historical weapon, chronicled by Bishop Callaway. It was once owned by a certain Undhlebekazizwa. He was an arbitrary person, for "no matter what was discussed in our village, he would bring it to a conclusion with a stick." But he made a good end; for when the Zulu soldiers attacked him, he killed no less than twenty of them with the Watcher, and the spears stuck in him "as thick as reeds in a morass." This man's strength was so great that he could kill a leopard "like a fly," with his hands only, much as Umslopogaas slew the traitor in this story.

Perhaps it may be allowable to add a few words about the Zulu mysticism, magic, and superstition, to which there is some allusion in this romance. It has been little if at all exaggerated. Thus the writer well remembers hearing a legend how the Guardian Spirit of the Ama-Zulu was seen riding down the storm. Here is what Mr. Fynney says of her in the pamphlet to which reference has been made: "The natives have a spirit which they call Nomkubulwana, or the Inkosazana-ye-Zulu (the Princess of Heaven). She is said to be robed in white, and to take the form of a young maiden, in fact an angel. She is said to appear to some chosen person, to whom she imparts some revelation; but, whatever that revelation may be, it is kept a profound secret from outsiders. I remember that, just before the Zulu war, Nomkubulwana appeared, revealing something or other which had a great effect throughout the land, and I know that the Zulus were quite impressed that some calamity was about to befall them. One of the ominous signs was that fire is said to have descended from heaven, and ignited the grass over the graves of the former kings of Zululand. ... On another occasion Nomkubulwana appeared to some one in Zululand, the result of that visit being, that the native women buried their young children up to their heads in sand, deserting them for the time being, going away weeping, but returning at nightfall to unearth the little ones again."

For this divine personage there is, therefore, authority, and the same may be said of most of the supernatural matters spoken of in these pages. The exact spiritual position held in the Zulu mind by the Umkulunkulu,—the Old—Old,—the Great—Great,—the Lord of Heavens,—is a more vexed question, and for its proper consideration the reader must be referred to Bishop Callaway's work, the "Religious System of the Amazulu." Briefly, Umkulunkulu's character seems to vary from the idea of an ancestral spirit, or the spirit of an ancestor, to that of a god. In the case of an able and highly intelligent person like the Mopo of this story, the ideal would probably not be a low one; therefore he is made to speak of Umkulunkulu as the Great Spirit, or God.

It only remains to the writer to express his regret that this story is not more varied in its hue. It would have been desirable to introduce some gayer and more happy incidents. But it has not been possible. It is believed that the picture given of the times is a faithful one, though it may be open to correction in some of its details. At the least, the aged man who tells the tale of his wrongs and vengeance could not be expected to treat his subject in an optimistic or even in a cheerful vein.

## INTRODUCTION

Some years since—it was during the winter before the Zulu War—a White Man was travelling through Natal. His name does not matter, for he plays no part in this story. With him were two wagons laden with goods, which he was transporting to Pretoria. The weather was cold and there was little or no grass for the oxen, which made the journey difficult; but he had been tempted to it by the high rates of transport that prevailed at that season of the year, which would remunerate him for any probable loss he might suffer in cattle. So he pushed along on his journey, and all went well until he had passed the little town of Stanger, once the site of Duguza, the kraal of Chaka, the first Zulu king and the uncle of Cetuyayo. The night after he left Stanger the air turned bitterly cold, heavy grey clouds filled the sky, and hid the light of the stars.

“Now if I were not in Natal, I should say that there was a heavy fall of snow coming,” said the White Man to himself. “I have often seen the sky look like that in Scotland before snow.” Then he reflected that there had been no deep snow in Natal for years, and, having drunk a “tot” of squareface and smoked his pipe, he went to bed beneath the after-tent of his larger wagon.

During the night he was awakened by a sense of bitter cold and the low moaning of the oxen that were tied to the trek-tow, every ox in its place. He thrust his head through the curtain of the tent and looked out. The earth was white with snow, and the air was full of it, swept along by a cutting wind.

Now he sprang up, huddling on his clothes and as he did so calling to the Kaffirs who slept beneath the wagons. Presently they awoke from the stupor which already was beginning to overcome them, and crept out, shivering with cold and wrapped from head to foot in blankets.

“Quick! you boys,” he said to them in Zulu; “quick! Would you see the cattle die of the snow and wind? Loose the oxen from the trek-tows and drive them in between the wagons; they will give them some shelter.” And lighting a lantern he sprang out into the snow.

At last it was done—no easy task, for the numbed hands of the Kaffirs could scarcely loosen the frozen reins. The wagons were outspanned side by side with a space between them, and into this space the mob of thirty-six oxen was driven and there secured by reins tied crosswise from the front and hind wheels of the wagons. Then the White Man crept back to his bed, and the shivering natives, fortified with gin, or squareface, as it is called locally, took refuge on the second wagon, drawing a tent-sail over them.

For awhile there was silence, save for the moaning of the huddled and restless cattle.

“If the snow goes on I shall lose my oxen,” he said to himself; “they can never bear this cold.”

Hardly had the words passed his lips when the wagon shook; there was a sound of breaking reins and trampling hoofs. Once more he looked out. The oxen had “skrecked” in a mob. There they were, running away into the night and the snow, seeking to find shelter from the cold. In a minute they had vanished utterly. There was nothing to be done, except wait for the morning.

At last it came, revealing a landscape blind with snow. Such search as could be made told them nothing. The oxen had gone, and their spoor was obliterated by the fresh-fallen flakes. The White Man called a council of his Kaffir servants. “What was to be done?” he asked.

One said this thing, one that, but all agreed that they must wait to act until the snow melted.

“Or till we freeze, you whose mothers were fools!” said the White Man, who was in the worst of tempers, for had he not lost four hundred pounds’ worth of oxen?

Then a Zulu spoke, who hitherto had remained silent. He was the driver of the first wagon.

“My father,” he said to the White Man, “this is my word. The oxen are lost in the snow. No man knows whither they have gone, or whether they live or are now but hides and bones. Yet at the kraal yonder,” and he pointed to some huts about two miles away on the hillside, “lives a witch doctor named Zweete. He is old—very old—but he has wisdom, and he can tell you where the oxen are if any man may, my father.”

“Stuff!” answered the White Man. “Still, as the kraal cannot be colder than this wagon, we will go and ask Zweete. Bring a bottle of squareface and some snuff with you for presents.”

An hour later he stood in the hut of Zweete. Before him was a very ancient man, a mere bag of bones, with sightless eyes, and one hand—his left—white and shrivelled.

“What do you seek of Zweete, my white father?” asked the old man in a thin voice. “You do not believe in me and my wisdom; why should I help you? Yet I will do it, though it is against your law, and you do wrong to ask me,—yes, to show you that there is truth in us Zulu doctors, I will help you. My father, I know what you seek. You seek to know where your oxen have run for shelter from the cold! Is it not so?”

“It is so, Doctor,” answered the White Man. “You have long ears.”

“Yes, my white father, I have long ears, though they say that I grow deaf. I have keen eyes also, and yet I cannot see your face. Let me hearken! Let me look!”

For awhile he was silent, rocking himself to and fro, then he spoke: “You have a farm, White Man, down near Pine Town, is it not? Ah! I thought so—and an hour’s ride from your farm lives a Boer with four fingers only on his right hand. There is a kloof on the Boer’s farm where mimosa-trees grow. There, in the kloof, you shall find your oxen—yes, five days’ journey from here you will find them all. I say all, my father, except three only—the big black Africander ox, the little red Zulu ox with one horn, and the speckled ox. You shall not find these, for they have died in the snow. Send, and you will find the others. No, no! I ask no fee! I do not work wonders for reward. Why should I? I am rich.”

Now the White Man scoffed. But in the end, so great is the power of superstition, he sent. And here it may be stated that on the eleventh day of his sojourn at the kraal of Zweete, those whom he sent returned with the oxen, except the three only. After that he scoffed no more. Those eleven days he spent in a hut of the old man's kraal, and every afternoon he came and talked with him, sitting far into the night.

On the third day he asked Zweete how it was that his left hand was white and shrivelled, and who were Umslopogaas and Nada, of whom he had let fall some words. Then the old man told him the tale that is set out here. Day by day he told some of it till it was finished. It is not all written in these pages, for portions may have been forgotten, or put aside as irrelevant. Neither has it been possible for the writer of it to render the full force of the Zulu idiom nor to convey a picture of the teller. For, in truth, he acted rather than told his story. Was the death of a warrior in question, he stabbed with his stick, showing how the blow fell and where; did the story grow sorrowful, he groaned, or even wept. Moreover, he had many voices, one for each of the actors in his tale. This man, ancient and withered, seemed to live again in the far past. It was the past that spoke to his listener, telling of deeds long forgotten, of deeds that are no more known.

Yet as he best may, the White Man has set down the substance of the story of Zweete in the spirit in which Zweete told it. And because the history of Nada the Lily and of those with whom her life was intertwined moved him strangely, and in many ways, he has done more, he has printed it that others may judge of it.

And now his part is played. Let him who was named Zweete, but who had another name, take up the story.

# CHAPTER I.

## THE BOY CHAKA PROPHECIES

You ask me, my father, to tell you the tale of the youth of Umslopogaas, holder of the iron Chieftainess, the axe Groan-maker, who was named Bulalio the Slaughterer, and of his love for Nada, the most beautiful of Zulu women. It is long; but you are here for many nights, and, if I live to tell it, it shall be told. Strengthen your heart, my father, for I have much to say that is sorrowful, and even now, when I think of Nada the tears creep through the horn that shuts out my old eyes from light.

Do you know who I am, my father? You do not know. You think that I am an old, old witch-doctor named Zweete. So men have thought for many years, but that is not my name. Few have known it, for I have kept it locked in my breast, lest, though I live now under the law of the White Man, and the Great Queen is my chieftainess, an assegai still might find this heart did any know my name.

Look at this hand, my father—no, not that which is withered with fire; look on this right hand of mine. You see it, though I who am blind cannot. But still, within me, I see it as it was once. Ay! I see it red and strong—red with the blood of two kings. Listen, my father; bend your ear to me and listen. I am Mopo—ah! I felt you start; you start as the regiment of the Bees started when Mopo walked before their ranks, and from the assegai in his hand the blood of Chaka<sup>[1]</sup> dropped slowly to the earth. I am Mopo who slew Chaka the king. I killed him with Dingaan and Umhlangana the princes; but the wound was mine that his life crept out of, and but for me he would never have been slain. I killed him with the princes, but Dingaan, I and one other slew alone.

[1] The Zulu Napoleon, one of the greatest geniuses and most wicked men who ever lived. He was killed in the year 1828, having slaughtered more than a million human beings.—ED.

What do you say? “Dingaan died by the Tongola.”

Yes, yes, he died, but not there; he died on the Ghost Mountain; he lies in the breast of the old Stone Witch who sits aloft forever waiting for the world to perish. But I also was on the Ghost Mountain. In those days my feet still could travel fast, and vengeance would not let me sleep. I travelled by day, and by night I found him. I and another, we killed him—ah! ah!

Why do I tell you this? What has it to do with the loves of Umslopogaas and Nada the Lily? I will tell you. I stabbed Chaka for the sake of my sister, Baleka, the mother of Umslopogaas, and because he had murdered my wives and children. I and Umslopogaas slew Dingaan for the sake of Nada, who was my daughter.

There are great names in the story, my father. Yes, many have heard the names: when the Impis roared them out as they charged in battle, I have felt the mountains shake and seen the waters quiver in their sound. But where are they now? Silence has them, and the white men write them down in books. I opened the gates of distance for the holders of the names. They passed through and they are gone beyond. I cut the strings that tied them to the world. They fell off. Ha! ha! They fell off! Perhaps they are falling still, perhaps they creep about their desolate kraals in the skins of snakes. I wish I knew the snakes that I might crush them with my heel. Yonder, beneath us, at the burying-place of kings, there is a hole. In that hole lie the bones of Chaka, the king who died for Baleka. Far away in Zululand there is a cleft upon the Ghost Mountain. At the foot of that cleft lie the bones of Dingaan, the king who died for Nada. It was far to fall and he was heavy; those bones of his are broken into little pieces. I went to see them when the vultures and the jackals had done their work. And then I laughed three times and came here to die.

All that is long ago, and I have not died; though I wish to die and follow the road that Nada trod. Perhaps I have lived to tell you this tale, my father, that you may repeat it to the white men if you will. How old am I? Nay, I do not know. Very, very old. Had Chaka lived he would have been as old as I.<sup>[2]</sup> None are living whom I knew when I was a boy. I am so old that I must hasten. The grass withers, and the winter comes. Yes, while I speak the winter nips my heart. Well, I am ready to sleep in the cold, and perhaps I shall awake again in the spring.

[2] This would have made him nearly a hundred years old, an age rarely attained by a native. The writer remembers talking to an aged Zulu woman, however, who told him that she was married when Chaka was king.—ED.

Before the Zulus were a people—for I will begin at the beginning—I was born of the Langeni tribe. We were not a large tribe; afterwards, all our able-bodied men numbered one full regiment in Chaka's army, perhaps there were between two and three thousand of them, but they were brave. Now they are all dead, and their women and children with them,—that people is no more. It is gone like last month's moon; how it went I will tell you by-and-bye.

Our tribe lived in a beautiful open country; the Boers, whom we call the Amaboona, are there now, they tell me. My father, Makedama, was chief of the tribe, and his kraal was built on the crest of a hill, but I was not the son of his head wife. One evening, when I was still little, standing as high as a man's elbow only, I went out with my mother below the cattle kraal to see the cows driven in. My mother was very fond of these cows, and there was one with a white face that would follow her about. She carried my little sister Baleka riding on her hip; Baleka was a baby then. We walked till we met the lads driving in the cows. My mother called the white-faced cow and gave it mealie leaves which she had brought with her. Then the boys went on with the cattle, but the white-faced cow stopped by my mother. She said that she would bring it to the kraal when she came home. My mother sat down on the grass and nursed her baby, while I played round her, and the cow grazed. Presently we saw a woman walking towards us across the plain. She walked like one who is tired. On her back was a bundle of mats, and she led by the hand a boy of about my own age, but bigger and stronger than I was. We waited a long while, till at last the woman came up to us and sank down on the veldt, for she was very weary. We saw by the way her hair was dressed that she was not of our tribe.

"Greeting to you!" said the woman.

"Good-morrow!" answered my mother. "What do you seek?"

"Food, and a hut to sleep in," said the woman. "I have travelled far."

"How are you named?—and what is your people?" asked my mother.

"My name is Unandi: I am the wife of Senzangacona, of the Zulu tribe," said the stranger.

Now there had been war between our people and the Zulu people, and Senzangacona had killed some of our warriors and taken many of our cattle. So, when my mother heard the speech of Unandi she sprang up in anger.

"You dare to come here and ask me for food and shelter, wife of a dog of a Zulu!" she cried; "begone, or I will call the girls to whip you out of our country."

The woman, who was very handsome, waited till my mother had finished her angry words; then she looked up and spoke slowly, "There is a cow by you with milk dropping from its udder; will you not even give me and my boy a gourd of milk?" And she took a gourd from her bundle and held it towards us.

"I will not," said my mother.

"We are thirsty with long travel; will you not, then, give us a cup of water? We have found none for many hours."

"I will not, wife of a dog; go and seek water for yourself."

The woman's eyes filled with tears, but the boy folded his arms on his breast and scowled. He was a very handsome boy, with bright black eyes, but when he scowled his eyes were like the sky before a thunderstorm.

"Mother," he said, "we are not wanted here any more than we were wanted yonder," and he nodded towards the country where the Zulu people lived. "Let us be going to Dingiswayo; the Umtetwa people will protect us."

"Yes, let us be going, my son," answered Unandi; "but the path is long, we are weary and shall fall by the way."

I heard, and something pulled at my heart; I was sorry for the woman and her boy, they looked so tired. Then, without saying anything to my mother, I snatched the gourd and ran with it to a little donga that was hard by, for I knew that there was a spring. Presently I came back with the gourd full of water. My mother wanted to catch me, for she was very angry, but I ran past her and gave the gourd to the boy. Then my mother ceased trying to interfere, only she beat the woman with her tongue all the while, saying that evil had come to our kraals from her husband, and she felt in her heart that more evil would come upon us from her son. Her *Ehloso*<sup>[3]</sup> told her so. Ah! my father, her *Ehloso* told her true. If the woman Unandi and her child had died that day on the veldt, the gardens of my people would not now be a wilderness, and their bones would not lie in the great gulley that is near U'Cetywayo's kraal.

[3] Guardian spirit.—ED.

While my mother talked I and the cow with the white face stood still and watched, and the baby Baleka cried aloud. The boy, Unandi's son, having taken the gourd, did not offer the water to his mother. He drank two-thirds of it himself; I think that he would have drunk it all had not his thirst been slaked; but when he had done he gave what was left to his mother, and she finished it. Then he took the gourd again, and came forward, holding it in one hand; in the other he carried a short stick.

"What is your name, boy?" he said to me as a big rich man speaks to one who is little and poor.

"Mopo is my name," I answered.

"And what is the name of your people?"

I told him the name of my tribe, the Langeni tribe.

"Very well, Mopo; now I will tell you my name. My name is Chaka, son of Senzangacona, and my people are called the Amazulu. And I will tell you something more. I am little to-day, and my people are a small people. But I shall grow big, so big that my head will be lost in the clouds; you will look up and you shall not see it. My face will blind you; it will be bright like the sun; and my people will grow great with me; they shall eat up the whole world. And when I am big and my people are big, and we have stamped the earth flat as far as men can travel, then I will remember your tribe—the tribe of the Langeni, who would not give me and my mother a cup of milk when we were weary. You see this gourd; for every drop it can hold the blood of a man shall flow—the blood of one of your men. But because you gave me the water I will spare you, Mopo, and you only, and make you great under me. You shall grow fat in my shadow. You alone I will never harm, however you sin against me; this I swear. But for that woman," and he pointed to my mother, "let her make haste and die, so that I do not need to teach her what a long time death can take to come. I have spoken." And he ground his teeth and shook his stick towards us.

My mother stood silent awhile. Then she gasped out: "The little liar! He speaks like a man, does he? The calf lows like a bull. I will teach him another note—the brat of an evil prophet!" And putting down Baleka, she ran at the boy.

Chaka stood quite still till she was near; then suddenly he lifted the stick in his hand, and hit her so hard on the head that she fell down. After that he laughed, turned, and went away with his mother Unandi.

These, my father, were the first words I heard Chaka speak, and they were words of prophecy, and they came true. The last words I heard him speak were words of prophecy also, and I think that they will come true. Even now they are coming true. In the one he told how the Zulu people should rise. And say, have they not risen? In the other he told how they should fall; and they did fall. Do not the white men gather themselves together even now against U'Cetywayo, as vultures gather round a dying ox? The Zulus are not what they were to stand against them. Yes, yes, they will come true, and mine is the song of a people that is doomed.

But of these other words I will speak in their place.

I went to my mother. Presently she raised herself from the ground and sat up with her hands over her face. The blood from the wound the stick had made ran down her face on to her breast, and I wiped it away with grass. She sat for a long while thus, while the child cried, the cow lowed to be milked, and I wiped up the blood with the grass. At last she took her hands away and spoke to me.

"Mopo, my son," she said, "I have dreamed a dream. I dreamed that I saw the boy Chaka who struck me: he was grown like a giant. He stalked across the mountains and the veldt, his eyes blazed like the lightning, and in his hand he shook a little assegai that was red with blood. He caught up people after people in his hands and tore them, he stamped their kraals flat with his feet. Before him was the green of summer, behind him the land was black as when the fires have eaten the grass. I saw our people, Mopo; they

were many and fat, their hearts laughed, the men were brave, the girls were fair; I counted their children by the hundreds. I saw them again, Mopo. They were bones, white bones, thousands of bones tumbled together in a rocky place, and he, Chaka, stood over the bones and laughed till the earth shook. Then, Mopo, in my dream, I saw you grown a man. You alone were left of our people. You crept up behind the giant Chaka, and with you came others, great men of a royal look. You stabbed him with a little spear, and he fell down and grew small again; he fell down and cursed you. But you cried in his ear a name—the name of Baleka, your sister—and he died. Let us go home, Mopo, let us go home; the darkness falls.”

So we rose and went home. But I held my peace, for I was afraid, very much afraid.

## CHAPTER II.

### MOPO IS IN TROUBLE

Now, I must tell how my mother did what the boy Chaka had told her, and died quickly. For where his stick had struck her on the forehead there came a sore that would not be healed, and in the sore grew an abscess, and the abscess ate inwards till it came to the brain. Then my mother fell down and died, and I cried very much, for I loved her, and it was dreadful to see her cold and stiff, with not a word to say however loudly I called to her. Well, they buried my mother, and she was soon forgotten. I only remembered her, nobody else did—not even Baleka, for she was too little—and as for my father he took another young wife and was content. After that I was unhappy, for my brothers did not love me, because I was much cleverer than they, and had greater skill with the assegai, and was swifter in running; so they poisoned the mind of my father against me and he treated me badly. But Baleka and I loved each other, for we were both lonely, and she clung to me like a creeper to the only tree in a plain, and though I was young, I learned this: that to be wise is to be strong, for though he who holds the assegai kills, yet he whose mind directs the battle is greater than he who kills. Now I saw that the witch-finders and the medicine-men were feared in the land, and that everybody looked up to them, so that, even when they had only a stick in their hands, ten men armed with spears would fly before them. Therefore I determined that I should be a witch-doctor, for they alone can kill those whom they hate with a word. So I learned the arts of the medicine-men. I made sacrifices, I fasted in the veldt alone, I did all those things of which you have heard, and I learned much; for there is wisdom in our magic as well as lies—and you know it, my father, else you had not come here to ask me about your lost oxen.

So things went on till I was twenty years of age—a man full grown. By now I had mastered all I could learn by myself, so I joined myself on to the chief medicine-man of our tribe, who was named Noma. He was old, had one eye only, and was very clever. Of him I learned some tricks and more wisdom, but at last he grew jealous of me and set a trap to catch me. As it chanced, a rich man of a neighbouring tribe had lost some cattle, and came with gifts to Noma praying him to smell them out. Noma tried and could not find them; his vision failed him. Then the headman grew angry and demanded back his gifts; but Noma would not give up that which he once had held, and hot words passed. The headman said that he would kill Noma; Noma said that he would bewitch the headman.

“Peace,” I said, for I feared that blood would be shed. “Peace, and let me see if my snake will tell me where the cattle are.”

“You are nothing but a boy,” answered the headman. “Can a boy have wisdom?”

“That shall soon be known,” I said, taking the bones in my hand.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] The Kafir witch-doctors use the knuckle-bones of animals in their magic rites, throwing them something as we throw dice.—ED.

“Leave the bones alone!” screamed Noma. “We will ask nothing more of our snakes for the good of this son of a dog.”

“He shall throw the bones,” answered the headman. “If you try to stop him, I will let sunshine through you with my assegai.” And he lifted his spear.

Then I made haste to begin; I threw the bones. The headman sat on the ground before me and answered my questions. You know of these matters, my father—how sometimes the witch-doctor has knowledge of where the lost things are, for our ears are long, and sometimes his *Ehlosé* tells him, as but the other day it told me of your oxen. Well, in this case, my snake stood up. I knew nothing of the man's cattle, but my Spirit was with me and soon I saw them all, and told them to him one by one, their colour, their age—everything. I told him, too, where they were, and how one of them had fallen into a stream and lay there on its back drowned, with its forefoot caught in a forked root. As my *Ehlosé* told me so I told the headman.

Now, the man was pleased, and said that if my sight was good, and he found the cattle, the gifts should be taken from Noma and given to me; and he asked the people who were sitting round, and there were many, if this was not just. “Yes, yes,” they said, it was just, and they would see that it was done. But Noma sat still and looked at me evilly. He knew that I had made a true divination, and he was very angry. It was a big matter: the herd of cattle were many, and, if they were found where I had said, then all men would think me the greater wizard. Now it was late, and the moon had not yet risen, therefore the headman said that he would sleep that night in our kraal, and at the first light would go with me to the spot where I said the cattle were. After that he went away.

I too went into my hut and lay down to sleep. Suddenly I awoke, feeling a weight upon my breast. I tried to start up, but something cold pricked my throat. I fell back again and looked. The door of the hut was open, the moon lay low on the sky like a ball of fire far away. I could see it through the door, and its light crept into the hut. It fell upon the face of Noma the witch-doctor. He was seated across me, glaring at me with his one eye, and in his hand was a knife. It was that which I had felt prick my throat.

“You whelp whom I have bred up to tear me!” he hissed into my ear, “you dared to divine where I failed, did you? Very well, now I will show you how I serve such puppies. First, I will pierce through the root of your tongue, so that you cannot squeal, then I will cut you to pieces slowly, bit by bit, and in the morning I will tell the people that the spirits did it because you lied. Next, I will take off your arms and legs. Yes, yes, I will make you like a stick! Then I will!”—and he began driving in the knife under my chin.

“Mercy, my uncle,” I said, for I was frightened and the knife hurt. “Have mercy, and I will do whatever you wish!”

“Will you do this?” he asked, still pricking me with the knife. “Will you get up, go to find the dog's cattle and drive them to a certain place, and hide them there?” And he named a secret valley that was known to very few. “If you do that, I will spare you and give you three of the cows. If you refuse or play me false, then, by my father's spirit, I will find a way to kill you!”

“Certainly I will do it, my uncle,” I answered. “Why did you not trust me before? Had I known that you wanted to keep the cattle, I would never have smelt them out. I only did so fearing lest you should lose the presents.”

“You are not so wicked as I thought,” he growled. “Get up, then, and do my bidding. You can be back here two hours after dawn.”

So I got up, thinking all the while whether I should try to spring on him. But I was without arms, and he had the knife; also if, by chance, I prevailed and killed him, it would have been thought that I had murdered him, and I should have tasted the assegai. So I made another plan. I would go and find the cattle in the valley where I had smelt them out, but I would not bring them to the secret hiding-place. No; I would drive them straight to the kraal, and denounce Noma before the chief, my father, and all the people. But I was young in those days, and did not know the heart of Noma. He had not been a witch-doctor till he grew old for nothing. Oh! he was evil!—he was cunning as a jackal, and fierce like a lion. He had planted me by him like a tree, but he meant to keep me clipped like a bush. Now I had grown tall and overshadowed him; therefore he would root me up.

I went to the corner of my hut, Noma watching me all the while, and took a kerrie and my small shield. Then I started through the moonlight. Till I was past the kraal I glided along quietly as a shadow. After that, I began to run, singing to myself as I went, to frighten away the ghosts, my father.

For an hour I travelled swiftly over the plain, till I came to the hillside where the bush began. Here it was very dark under the shade of the trees, and I sang louder than ever. At last I found the little buffalo path I sought, and turned along it. Presently I came to an open place, where the moonlight crept in between the trees. I knelt down and looked. Yes! my snake had not lied to me; there was the spoor of the cattle. Then I went on gladly till I reached a dell through which the water ran softly, sometimes whispering and sometimes talking out loud. Here the trail of the cattle was broad: they had broken down the ferns with their feet and trampled the grass. Presently I came to a pool. I knew it—it was the pool my snake had shown me. And there at the edge of the pool floated the drowned ox, its foot caught in a forked root. All was just as I had seen it in my heart.

I stepped forward and looked round. My eye caught something; it was the faint grey light of the dawn glinted on the cattle's horns. As I looked, one of them snorted, rose and shook the dew from his hide. He seemed big as an elephant in the mist and twilight.

Then I collected them all—there were seventeen—and drove them before me down the narrow path back towards the kraal. Now the daylight came quickly, and the sun had been up an hour when I reached the spot where I must turn if I wished to hide the cattle in the secret place, as Noma had bid me. But I would not do this. No, I would go on to the kraal with them, and tell all men that Noma was a thief. Still, I sat down and rested awhile, for I was tired. As I sat, I heard a noise, and looked up. There, over the slope of the rise, came a crowd of men, and leading them was Noma, and by his side the headman who owned the cattle. I rose and stood still, wondering; but as I stood, they ran towards me shouting and waving sticks and spears.

"There he is!" screamed Noma. "There he is!—the clever boy whom I have brought up to bring shame on me. What did I tell you? Did I not tell you that he was a thief? Yes—yes! I know your tricks, Mopo, my child! See! he is stealing the cattle! He knew where they were all the time, and now he is taking them away to hide them. They would be useful to buy a wife with, would they not, my clever boy?" And he made a rush at me, with his stick lifted, and after him came the headman, grunting with rage.

I understood now, my father. My heart went mad in me, everything began to swim round, a red cloth seemed to lift itself up and down before my eyes. I have always seen it thus when I was forced to fight. I screamed out one word only, "Liar!" and ran to meet him. On came Noma. He struck at me with his stick, but I caught the blow upon my little shield, and hit back. Wow! I did hit! The skull of Noma met my kerrie, and down he fell dead at my feet. I yelled again, and rushed on at the headman. He threw an assegai, but it missed me, and next second I hit him too. He got up his shield, but I knocked it down upon his head, and over he rolled senseless. Whether he lived or died I do not know, my father; but his head being of the thickest, I think it likely that he lived. Then, while the people stood astonished, I turned and fled like the wind. They turned too, and ran after me, throwing spears at me and trying to cut me off. But none of them could catch me—no, not one. I went like the wind; I went like a buck when the dogs wake it from sleep; and presently the sound of their chase grew fainter and fainter, till at last I was out of sight and alone.

## CHAPTER III.

### MOPO VENTURES HOME

I threw myself down on the grass and panted till my breath came back; then I went and hid in a patch of reeds down by a swamp. All day long I lay there thinking. What was I to do? Now I was a jackal without a hole. If I went back to my people, certainly they would kill me, whom they thought a thief. My blood would be given for Noma's, and that I did not wish, though my heart was sad. Then there came into my mind the thought of Chaka, the boy to whom I had given the cup of water long ago. I had heard of him: his name was known in the land; already the air was big with it; the very trees and grass spoke it. The words he had said and the vision that my mother had seen were beginning to come true. By the help of the Umtetwas he had taken the place of his father Senzangaona; he had driven out the tribe of the Amaquabe; now he made war on Zweete, chief of the Endwande, and he had sworn that he would stamp the Endwande flat, so that nobody could find them any more. Now I remembered how this Chaka promised that he would make me great, and that I should grow fat in his shadow; and I thought to myself that I would arise and go to him. Perhaps he would kill me; well, what did it matter? Certainly I should be killed if I stayed here. Yes, I would go. But now my heart pulled another way. There was but one whom I loved in the world—it was my sister Baleka. My father had betrothed her to the chief of a neighbouring tribe, but I knew that this marriage was against her wish. Perhaps my sister would run away with me if I could get near her to tell her that I was going. I would try—yes, I would try.

I waited till the darkness came down, then I rose from my bed of weeds and crept like a jackal towards the kraal. In the mealie gardens I stopped awhile, for I was very hungry, and filled myself with the half-ripe mealies. Then I went on till I came to the kraal. Some of my people were seated outside of a hut, talking together over a fire. I crept near, silently as a snake, and hid behind a little bush. I knew that they could not see me outside the ring of the firelight, and I wanted to hear what they said. As I guessed, they were talking of me and called me many names. They said that I should bring ill-luck on the tribe by having killed so great a witch-doctor as Noma; also that the people of the headman would demand payment for the assault on him. I learned, moreover, that my father had ordered out all the men of the tribe to hunt for me on the morrow and to kill me wherever they found me. "Ah!" I thought, "you may hunt, but you will bring nothing home to the pot." Just then a dog that was lying by the fire got up and began to sniff the air. I could not see what dog it was—indeed, I had forgotten all about the dogs when I drew near the kraal; that is what comes of want of experience, my father. The dog sniffed and sniffed, then he began to growl, looking always my way, and I grew afraid.

"What is the dog growling at?" said one man to another. "Go and see." But the other man was taking snuff and did not like to move. "Let the dog go and see for himself," he answered, sneezing, "what is the good of keeping a dog if you have to catch the thief?"

"Go on, then," said the first man to the dog. And he ran forward, barking. Then I saw him: it was my own dog, Koos, a very good dog. Presently, as I lay not knowing what to do, he smelt my smell, stopped barking, and running round the bush he found me and began to lick my face. "Be quiet, Koos!" I whispered to him. And he lay down by my side.

"Where has that dog gone now?" said the first man. "Is he bewitched, that he stops barking suddenly and does not come back?"

"We will see," said the other, rising, a spear in his hand.

Now once more I was terribly afraid, for I thought that they would catch me, or I must run for my life again. But as I sprang up to run, a big black snake glided between the men and went off towards the huts. They jumped aside in a great fright, then all of them turned to follow the snake, saying that this was what the dog was barking at. That was my good *Ehlosé*, my father, which without any doubt took the shape of a snake to save my life.

When they had gone I crept off the other way, and Koos followed me. At first I thought that I would kill him, lest he should betray me; but when I called to him to knock him on the head with my kerrie, he sat down upon the ground wagging his tail, and seemed to smile in my face, and I could not do it. So I thought that I would take my chance, and we went on together. This was my purpose: first to creep into my own hut and get my assegais and a skin blanket, then to gain speech with Baleka. My hut, I thought, would be empty, for nobody sleeps there except myself, and the huts of Noma were some paces away to the right. I came to the reed fence that surrounded the huts. Nobody was to be seen at the gate, which was not shut with thorns as usual. It was my duty to close it, and I had not been there to do so. Then, bidding the dog lie down outside, I stepped through boldly, reached the door of my hut, and listened. It was empty; there was not even a breath to be heard. So I crept in and began to search for my assegais, my water-gourd, and my wood pillow, which was so nicely carved that I did not like to leave it. Soon I found them. Then I felt about for my skin rug, and as I did so my hand touched something cold. I started, and felt again. It was a man's face—the face of a dead man, of Noma, whom I had killed and who had been laid in my hut to await burial. Oh! then I was frightened, for Noma dead and in the dark was worse than Noma alive. I made ready to fly, when suddenly I heard the voices of women talking outside the door of the hut. I knew the voices; they were those of Noma's two wives, and one of them said she was coming in to watch by her husband's body. Now I was in a trap indeed, for before I could do anything I saw the light go out of a hole in the hut, and knew by the sound of a fat woman puffing as she bent herself up that Noma's first wife was coming through it. Presently she was in, and, squatting by the side of the corpse in such a fashion that I could not get to the door, she began to make lamentations and to call down curses on me. Ah! she did not know that I was listening. I too squatted by Noma's head, and grew quick-witted in my fear. Now that the woman was there I was not so much afraid of the dead man, and I remembered, too, that he had been a great cheat; so I thought I would make him cheat for the last time. I placed my hands beneath his shoulders and pushed him up so that he sat upon the ground. The woman heard the noise and made a sound in her throat.

"Will you not be quiet, you old hag?" I said in Noma's voice. "Can you not let me be at peace, even now when I am dead?"

She heard, and, falling backwards in fear, drew in her breath to shriek aloud.

"What! will you also dare to shriek?" I said again in Noma's voice; "then I must teach you silence." And I tumbled him over on to the top of her.

Then her senses left her, and whether she ever found them again I do not know. At least she grew quiet for that time. For me, I snatched up the rug—afterwards I found it was Noma's best kaross, made by Basutos of chosen cat-skins, and worth three oxen—and I fled, followed by Koos.

Now the kraal of the chief, my father, Makedama, was two hundred paces away, and I must go thither, for there Baleka slept. Also I dared not enter by the gate, because a man was always on guard there. So I cut my way through the reed fence with my assegai and crept to the hut where Baleka was with some of her half-sisters. I knew on which side of the hut it was her custom to lie, and where her head would be. So I lay down on my side and gently, very gently, began to bore a hole in the grass covering of the hut. It took a long while, for the thatch was thick, but at last I was nearly through it. Then I stopped, for it came into my mind that Baleka might have changed her place, and that I might wake the wrong girl. I almost gave it over, thinking that I would fly alone, when suddenly I heard a girl wake and begin to cry on the other side of the thatch. "Ah," I thought, "that is Baleka, who weeps for her brother!" So I put my lips where the thatch was thinnest and whispered:—

"Baleka, my sister! Baleka, do not weep! I, Mopo, am here. Say not a word, but rise. Come out of the hut, bringing your skin blanket."

Now Baleka was very clever: she did not shriek, as most girls would have done. No; she understood, and, after waiting awhile, she rose and crept from the hut, her blanket in her hand.

"Why are you here, Mopo?" she whispered, as we met. "Surely you will be killed!"

"Hush!" I said. And then I told her of the plan which I had made. "Will you come with me?" I said, when I had done, "or will you creep back into the hut and bid me farewell?"

She thought awhile, then she said, "No, my brother, I will come, for I love you alone among our people, though I believe that this will be the end of it—that you will lead me to my death."

I did not think much of her words at the time, but afterwards they came back to me. So we slipped away together, followed by the dog Koos, and soon we were running over the veldt with our faces set towards the country of the Zulu tribe.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FLIGHT OF MOPO AND BALEKA

All the rest of that night we journeyed, till even the dog was tired. Then we hid in a mealie field for the day, as we were afraid of being seen. Towards the afternoon we heard voices, and, looking through the stems of the mealies, we saw a party of my father's men pass searching for us. They went on to a neighbouring kraal to ask if we had been seen, and after that we saw them no more for awhile. At night we travelled again; but, as fate would have it, we were met by an old woman, who looked oddly at us but said nothing. After that we pushed on day and night, for we knew that the old woman would tell the pursuers if she met them; and so indeed it came about. On the third evening we reached some mealie gardens, and saw that they had been trampled down. Among the broken mealies we found the body of a very old man, as full of assegai wounds as a porcupine with quills. We wondered at this, and went on a little way. Then we saw that the kraal to which the gardens belonged was burnt down. We crept up to it, and—ah! it was a sad sight for us to see! Afterwards we became used to such sights. All about us lay the bodies of dead people, scores of them—old men, young men, women, children, little babies at the breast—there they lay among the burnt huts, pierced with assegai wounds. Red was the earth with their blood, and red they looked in the red light of the setting sun. It was as though all the land had been smeared with the bloody hand of the Great Spirit, of the Umkulunkulu. Baleka saw it and began to cry; she was weary, poor girl, and we had found little to eat, only grass and green corn.

"An enemy has been here," I said, and as I spoke I thought that I heard a groan from the other side of a broken reed hedge. I went and looked. There lay a young woman: she was badly wounded, but still alive, my father. A little way from her lay a man dead, and before him several other men of another tribe: he had died fighting. In front of the woman were the bodies of three children; another, a little one, lay on her body. I looked at the woman, and, as I looked, she groaned again, opened her eyes and saw me, and that I had a spear in my hand.

"Kill me quickly!" she said. "Have you not tortured me enough?"

I said that I was a stranger and did not want to kill her.

"Then bring me water," she said; "there is a spring there behind the kraal."

I called to Baleka to come to the woman, and went with my gourd to the spring. There were bodies in it, but I dragged them out, and when the water had cleared a little I filled the gourd and brought it back to the woman. She drank deep, and her strength came back a little—the water gave her life.

"How did you come to this?" I asked.

"It was an impi of Chaka, Chief of the Zulus, that ate us up," she answered. "They burst upon us at dawn this morning while we were asleep in our huts. Yes, I woke up to hear the sound of killing. I was sleeping by my husband, with him who lies there, and the children. We all ran out. My husband had a spear and shield. He was a brave man. See! he died bravely: he killed three of the Zulu devils before he himself was dead. Then they caught me, and killed my children, and stabbed me till they thought that I was dead. Afterwards, they went away. I don't know why they came, but I think it was because our chief would not send men to help Chaka against Zweete."

She stopped, gave a great cry, and died.

My sister wept at the sight, and I too was stirred by it. "Ah!" I thought to myself, "the Great Spirit must be evil. If he is not evil such things would not happen." That is how I thought then, my father; now I think differently. I know that we had not found out the path of the Great Spirit, that is all. I was a chicken in those days, my father; afterwards I got used to such sights. They did not stir me any more, not one whit. But then in the days of Chaka the rivers ran blood—yes, we had to look at the water to see if it was clean before we drank. People learned how to die then and not make a noise about it. What does it matter? They would have been dead now anyway. It does not matter; nothing matters, except being born. That is a mistake, my father.

We stopped at the kraal that night, but we could not sleep, for we heard the *Itongo*, the ghosts of the dead people, moving about and calling to each other. It was natural that they should do so; men were looking for their wives, and mothers for their children. But we were afraid that they might be angry with us for being there, so we clung together and trembled in each other's arms. Koos also trembled, and from time to time he howled loudly. But they did not seem to see us, and towards morning their cries grew fainter.

When the first light came we rose and picked our way through the dead down to the plain. Now we had an easy road to follow to Chaka's kraal, for there was the spoor of the impi and of the cattle which they had stolen, and sometimes we came to the body of a warrior who had been killed because his wounds prevented him from marching farther. But now I was doubtful whether it was wise for us to go to Chaka, for after what we had seen I grew afraid lest he should kill us. Still, we had nowhere to turn, so I said that we would walk along till something happened. Now we grew faint with hunger and weariness, and Baleka said that we had better sit down and die, for then there would be no more trouble. So we sat down by a spring. But I did not wish to die yet, though Baleka was right, and it would have been well to do so. As we sat, the dog Koos went to a bush that was near, and presently I heard him spring at something and the sound of struggling. I ran to the bush—he had caught hold of a duiker buck, as big as himself, that was asleep in it. Then I drove my spear into the buck and shouted for joy, for here was food. When the buck was dead I skinned him, and we took bits of the flesh, washed them in the water, and ate them, for we had no fire to cook them with. It is not nice to eat uncooked flesh, but we were so hungry that we did not mind, and the food refreshed us. When we had eaten what we could, we rose and washed ourselves at the spring; but, as we washed, Baleka looked up and gave a cry of fear. For there, on the crest of the hill, about ten spear-throwers away, was a party of six armed men, people of my own tribe—children of my father Makedama—who still pursued us to take us or kill us. They saw us—they raised a shout, and began to run. We too sprang up and ran—ran like bucks, for fear had touched our feet.

Now the land lay thus. Before us the ground was open and sloped down to the banks of the White Umfolozi, which twisted through the plain like a great and shining snake. On the other side the ground rose again, and we did not know what was beyond, but we thought that in this direction lay the kraal of Chaka. We ran for the river—where else were we to run? And after us came the warriors. They gained on us; they were strong, and they were angry because they had come so far. Run as we would, still they gained. Now we neared the banks of the river; it was full and wide. Above us the waters ran angrily, breaking into swirls of white where they passed over sunken rocks; below was a rapid, in which none might live; between the two a deep pool, where the water was quiet but the stream strong.

“Ah! my brother, what shall we do?” gasped Baleka.

“There is this to choose,” I answered; “perish on the spears of our people or try the river.”

“Easier to die by water than on iron,” she answered.

“Good!” I said. “Now may our snakes look towards us and the spirits of our fathers be with us! At the least we can swim.” And I led her to the head of the pool. We threw away our blankets—everything except an assegai, which I held in my teeth—and we plunged in, wading as far as we could. Now we were up to our breasts; now we had lost the earth and were swimming towards the middle of the river, the dog Koos leading the way.

Then it was that the soldiers appeared upon the bank. “Ah! little people,” one cried, “you swim, do you? Well, you will drown; and if you do not drown we know a ford, and we will catch you and kill you—yes! if we must run over the edge of the world after you we will catch you.” And he hurled an assegai after us, which fell between us like a flash of light.

While he spoke we swam hard, and now we were in the current. It swept us downwards, but still we made way, for we could swim well. It was just this: if we could reach the bank before we were swept into the rapids we were safe; if not, then—good-night! Now we were near the other side, but, alas! we were also near the lip of the foaming water. We strained, we struggled. Baleka was a brave girl, and she swam bravely; but the water pushed her down below me, and I could do nothing to help her. I got my foot upon the rock and looked round. There she was, and eight paces from her the broken water boiled. I could not go back. I was too weak, and it seemed that she must perish. But the dog Koos saw. He swam towards her, barking, then turned round, heading for the shore. She grasped him by the tail with her right hand. Then he put out his strength—he was very strong. She too struck out with her feet and left hand, and slowly—very slowly—drew near. Then I stretched out the handle of my assegai towards her. She caught it with her left hand. Already her feet were over the brink of the rapids, but I pulled and Koos pulled, and we brought her safe into the shallows, and from the shallows to the bank, and there she fell gasping.

Now when the soldiers on the other bank saw that we had crossed, they shouted threats at us, then ran away down the bank.

“Arise, Baleka!” I said: “they have gone to see a ford.”

“Ah, let me die!” she answered.

But I forced her to rise, and after awhile she got her breath again, and we walked on as fast as we could up the long rise. For two hours we walked, or more, till at last we came to the crest of the rise, and there, far away, we saw a large kraal.

“Keep heart,” I said. “See, there is the kraal of Chaka.”

“Yes, brother,” she answered, “but what waits us there? Death is behind us and before us—we are in the middle of death.”

Presently we came to a path that ran to the kraal from the ford of the Umfolozi. It was by it that the Impi had travelled. We followed the path till at last we were but half an hour’s journey from the kraal. Then we looked back, and lo! there behind us were the pursuers—five of them—one had drowned in crossing the river.

Again we ran, but now we were weak, and they gained upon us. Then once more I thought of the dog. He was fierce and would tear any one on whom I set him. I called him and told him what to do, though I knew that it would be his death. He understood, and flew towards the soldiers growling, his hair standing up on his spine. They tried to kill him with spears and kerries, but he jumped round them, biting at them, and kept them back. At last a man hit him, and he sprang up and seized the man by the throat. There he clung, man and dog rolling over and over together, till the end of it was that they both died. Ah! he was a dog! We do not see such dogs nowadays. His father was a Boer hound, the first that came into the country. That dog once killed a leopard all by himself. Well, this was the end of Koos!

Meanwhile, we had been running. Now we were but three hundred paces from the gate of the kraal, and there was something going on inside it; that we could see from the noise and the dust. The four soldiers, leaving the dead dog and the dying man, came after us swiftly. I saw that they must catch us before we reached the gate, for now Baleka could go but slowly. Then a thought came into my head. I had brought her here, I would save her life if I could. Should she reach the kraal without me, Chaka would not kill a girl who was so young and fair.

“Run on, Baleka! run on!” I said, dropping behind. Now she was almost blind with weariness and terror, and, not seeing my purpose, staggered towards the gate of the kraal. But I sat down on the veldt to get my breath again, for I was about to fight four men till I was killed. My heart beat and the blood drummed in my ears, but when they drew near and I rose—the assegai in my hand—once more the red cloth seemed to go up and down before my eyes, and all fear left me.

The men were running, two and two, with the length of a spear throw between them. But of the first pair one was five or six paces in front of the other. This man shouted out loud and charged me, shield and spear up. Now I had no shield—nothing but the assegai; but I was crafty and he was overbold. On he came. I stood waiting for him till he drew back the spear to stab me. Then suddenly I dropped to my knees and thrust upward with all my strength, beneath the rim of his shield, and he also thrust, but over me, his spear only cutting the flesh of my shoulder—see! here is its scar; yes, to this day. And my assegai? Ah! it went home; it ran through and through his middle. He rolled over and over on the plain. The dust hid him; only I was now weaponless, for the haft of my spear—it was but a light throwing assegai—broke in two, leaving nothing but a little bit of stick in my hand. And the other one was upon me. Then in the darkness I saw a light. I fell on to my hands and knees and flung myself over sideways. My body struck the legs of the man who was about to stab me, lifting his feet from beneath him. Down he came heavily. Before he had touched the ground I was off it. His spear had fallen from his hand. I stooped, seized it, and as he rose I stabbed him through the back. It was all done in the shake of a leaf, my father; in the shake of a leaf he also was dead. Then I ran, for I had no stomach for the other two; my valour was gone.

About a hundred paces from me Baleka was staggering along with her arms out like one who has drunk too much beer. By the time I caught her she was some forty paces from the gate of the kraal. But then her strength left her altogether. Yes! there she fell senseless, and I stood by her. And there, too, I should have been killed, had not this chanced, since the other two men, having stayed

one instant by their dead fellows, came on against me mad with rage. For at that moment the gate of the kraal opened, and through it ran a party of soldiers dragging a prisoner by the arms. After them walked a great man, who wore a leopard skin on his shoulders, and was laughing, and with him were five or six ringed councillors, and after them again came a company of warriors.

The soldiers saw that killing was going on, and ran up just as the slayers reached us.

"Who are you?" they cried, "who dare to kill at the gate of the Elephant's kraal? Here the Elephant kills alone."

"We are of the children of Makedama," they answered, "and we follow these evildoers who have done wickedness and murder in our kraal. See! but now two of us are dead at their hands, and others lie dead along the road. Suffer that we slay them."

"Ask that of the Elephant," said the soldiers; "ask too that he suffer you should not be slain."

Just then the tall chief saw blood and heard words. He stalked up; and he was a great man to look at, though still quite young in years. For he was taller by a head than any round him, and his chest was big as the chests of two; his face was fierce and beautiful, and when he grew angry his eye flashed like a smitten brand.

"Who are these that dare to stir up dust at the gates of my kraal?" he asked, frowning.

"O Chaka, O Elephant!" answered the captain of the soldiers, bending himself double before him, "the men say that these are evildoers and that they pursue them to kill them."

"Good!" he answered. "Let them slay the evildoers."

"O great chief! thanks be to thee, great chief!" said those men of my people who sought to kill us.

"I hear you," he answered, then spoke once more to the captain. "And when they have slain the evildoers, let themselves be blinded and turned loose to seek their way home, because they have dared to lift a spear within the Zulu gates. Now praise on, my children!" And he laughed, while the soldiers murmured, "*Ou!* he is wise, he is great, his justice is bright and terrible like the sun!"

But the two men of my people cried out in fear, for they did not seek such justice as this.

"Cut out their tongues also," said Chaka. "What? shall the land of the Zulus suffer such a noise? Never! lest the cattle miscarry. To it, ye black ones! There lies the girl. She is asleep and helpless. Kill her! What? you hesitate? Nay, then, if you will have time for thought, I give it. Take these men, smear them with honey, and pin them over ant-heaps; by to-morrow's sun they will know their own minds. But first kill these two hunted jackals," and he pointed to Baleka and myself. "They seem tired and doubtless they long for sleep."

Then for the first time I spoke, for the soldiers drew near to slay us.

"O Chaka," I cried, "I am Mopo, and this is my sister Baleka."

I stopped, and a great shout of laughter went up from all who stood round.

"Very well, Mopo and thy sister Baleka," said Chaka, grimly. "Good-morning to you, Mopo and Baleka—also, good-night!"

"O Chaka," I broke in, "I am Mopo, son of Makedama of the Langeni tribe. It was I who gave thee a gourd of water many years ago, when we were both little. Then thou badest me come to thee when thou hadst grown great, vowing that thou wouldst protect me and never do me harm. So I have come, bringing my sister with me; and now, I pray thee, do not eat up the words of long ago."

As I spoke, Chaka's face changed, and he listened earnestly, as a man who holds his hand behind his ear. "Those are no liars," he said. "Welcome, Mopo! Thou shalt be a dog in my hut, and feed from my hand. But of thy sister I said nothing. Why, then, should she not be slain when I swore vengeance against all thy tribe, save thee alone?"

"Because she is too fair to slay, O Chief!" I answered, boldly; "also because I love her, and ask her life as a boon!"

"Turn the girl over," said Chaka. And they did so, showing her face.

"Again thou speakest no lie, son of Makedama," said the chief. "I grant thee the boon. She also shall lie in my hut, and be of the number of my 'sisters.' Now tell me thy tale, speaking only the truth."

So I sat down and told him all. Nor did he grow weary of listening. But, when I had done, he said but one thing—that he would that the dog Koos had not been killed; since, if he had still been alive, he would have set him on the hut of my father Makedama, and made him chief over the Langeni.

Then he spoke to the captain of the soldiers. "I take back my words," he said. "Let not these men of the Langeni be mutilated. One shall die and the other shall go free. Here," and he pointed to the man whom we had seen led out of the kraal-gate, "here, Mopo, we have a man who has proved himself a coward. Yesterday a kraal of wizards yonder was eaten up by my order—perhaps you two saw it as you travelled. This man and three others attacked a soldier of that kraal who defended his wife and children. The man fought well—he slew three of my people. Then this dog was afraid to meet him face to face. He killed him with a throwing assegai, and afterwards he stabbed the woman. That is nothing; but he should have fought the husband hand to hand. Now I will do him honour. He shall fight to the death with one of these pigs from thy sty," and he pointed with his spear to the men of my father's kraal, "and the one who survives shall be run down as they tried to run you down. I will send back the other pig to the sty with a message. Choose, children of Makedama, which of you will live."

Now the two men of my tribe were brothers, and loved one another, and each of them was willing to die that the other might go free. Therefore, both of them stepped forward, saying that they would fight the Zulu.

"What, is there honour among pigs?" said Chaka. "Then I will settle it. See this assegai? I throw it into the air; if the blade falls uppermost the tall man shall go free; if the shaft falls uppermost, then life is to the short one, so!" And he sent the little spear whirling round and round in the air. Every eye watched it as it wheeled and fell. The haft struck the ground first.

"Come hither, thou," said Chaka to the tall brother. "Hasten back to the kraal of Makedama, and say to him, Thus says Chaka, the Lion of the Zulu-ka-Malandela, 'Years ago thy tribe refused me milk. To-day the dog of thy son Mopo howls upon the roof of thy hut.' Begone!"<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Among the Zulus it is a very bad omen for a dog to climb the roof of a hut. The saying conveyed a threat to be appreciated by every Zulu.—ED.

The man turned, shook his brother by the hand, and went, bearing the words of evil omen.

Then Chaka called to the Zulu and the last of those who had followed us to kill us, bidding them fight. So, when they had praised the prince they fought fiercely, and the end of it was that the man of my people conquered the Zulu. But as soon as he had found his breath again he was set to run for his life, and after him ran five chosen men. Still, it came about that he outran them, doubling like a hare, and got away safely. Nor was Chaka angry at this; for I think that he bade the men who hunted him to make speed slowly. There was only one good thing in the cruel heart of Chaka, that he would always save the life of a brave man if he could do so without making his word nothing. And for my part, I was glad to think that the man of my people had conquered him who murdered the children of the dying woman that we found at the kraal beyond the river.

## CHAPTER V.

### MOPO BECOMES THE KING'S DOCTOR

These, then, my father, were the events that ended in the coming of me, Mopo, and of my sister Baleka to the kraal of Chaka, the Lion of the Zulu. Now you may ask why have I kept you so long with this tale, which is as are other tales of our people. But that shall be seen, for from these matters, as a tree from a seed, grew the birth of Umslopogaas Bulalio, Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, and Nada the Beautiful, of whose love my story has to tell. For Nada was my daughter, and Umslopogaas, though few knew it, was none other than the son of Chaka, born of my sister Baleka.

Now when Baleka recovered from the weariness of our flight, and had her beauty again, Chaka took her to wife, numbering her among his women, whom he named his "sisters." And me Chaka took to be one of his doctors, of his *izinyanga* of medicine, and he was so well pleased with my medicine that in the end I became his head doctor. Now this was a great post, in which, during the course of years, I grew fat in cattle and in wives; but also it was one of much danger. For when I rose strong and well in the morning, I could never know but that at night I should sleep stiff and red. Many were the doctors whom Chaka slew; doctored they never so well, they were killed at last. For a day would surely come when the king felt ill in his body or heavy in his mind, and then to the assegai or the torment with the wizard who had doctored him! Yet I escaped, because of the power of my medicine, and also because of that oath which Chaka had sworn to me as a child. So it came about that where the king went there I went with him. I slept near his hut, I sat behind him at council, in the battle I was ever at his side.

Ah! the battle! the battle! In those days we knew how to fight, my father! In those days the vultures would follow our impi by thousands, the hyenas would steal along our path in packs, and none went empty away. Never may I forget the first fight I stood in at the side of Chaka. It was just after the king had built his great kraal on the south bank of the Umhlatuze. Then it was that the chief Zwide attacked his rival Chaka for the third time and Chaka moved out to meet him with ten full regiments,<sup>[1]</sup> now for the first time armed with the short stabbing-spear.

[1] About 30,000 men.—ED.

The ground lay thus: On a long, low hill in front of our impi were massed the regiments of Zwide; there were seventeen of them; the earth was black with their number; their plumes filled the air like snow. We, too, were on a hill, and between us lay a valley down which there ran a little stream. All night our fires shone out across the valley; all night the songs of soldiers echoed down the hills. Then the grey dawning came, the oxen lowed to the light, the regiments arose from their bed of spears; they sprang up and shook the dew from hair and shield—yes! they arose! the glad to die! The impi assumed its array regiment by regiment. There was the breast of spears, there were the horns of spears, they were numberless as the stars, and like the stars they shone. The morning breeze came up and fanned them, their plumes bent in the breeze; like a plain of seeding grass they bent, the plumes of the soldiers ripe for the assegai. Up over the shoulder of the hill came the sun of Slaughter; it glowed red upon the red shields, red grew the place of killing; the white plumes of the chiefs were dipped in the blood of heaven. They knew it; they saw the omen of death, and, ah! they laughed in the joy of the waking of battle. What was death? Was it not well to die on the spear? What was death? Was it not well to die for the king? Death was the arms of Victory. Victory would be their bride that night, and oh! her breast is fair.

Hark! the war-song, the Ingomo, the music of which has the power to drive men mad, rose far away to the left, and was thrown along from regiment to regiment—a rolling ball of sound—

We are the king's kine, bred to be butchered,  
You, too, are one of us!  
We are the Zulu, children of the Lion,  
What! did you tremble?

Suddenly Chaka was seen stalking through the ranks, followed by his captains, his indunas, and by me. He walked along like a great buck; death was in his eyes, and like a buck he sniffed the air, scenting the air of slaughter. He lifted his assegai, and a silence fell; only the sound of chanting still rolled along the hills.

"Where are the children of Zwide?" he shouted, and his voice was like the voice of a bull.

"Yonder, father," answered the regiments. And every spear pointed across the valley.

"They do not come," he shouted again. "Shall we then sit here till we grow old?"

"No, father," they answered. "Begin! begin!"

"Let the Umkandhlu regiment come forward!" he shouted a third time, and as he spoke the black shields of the Umkandhlu leaped from the ranks of the impi.

"Go, my children!" cried Chaka. "There is the foe. Go and return no more!"

"We hear you, father!" they answered with one voice, and moved down the slope like a countless herd of game with horns of steel.

Now they crossed the stream, and now Zwide awoke. A murmur went through his companies; lines of light played above his spears.

*Ou!* they are coming! *Ou!* they have met! Harken to the thunder of the shields! Harken to the song of battle!

To and fro they swing. The Umkandhlu gives way—it flies! They pour back across the stream—half of them; the rest are dead. A howl of rage goes up from the host, only Chaka smiles.

"Open up! open up!" he cries. "Make room for the Umkandhlu *girls!*" And with hanging heads they pass us.

Now he whispers a word to the indunas. The indunas run; they whisper to Menziwa the general and to the captains; then two regiments rush down the hill, two more run to the right, and yet another two to the left. But Chaka stays on the hill with the three that are left. Again comes the roar of the meeting shields. Ah! these are men: they fight, they do not run. Regiment after regiment pours upon them, but still they stand. They fall by hundreds and by thousands, but no man shows his back, and on each man there lie two dead. *Wow!* my father, of those two regiments not one escaped. They were but boys, but they were the children of Chaka. Menziwa was buried beneath the heaps of his warriors. Now there are no such men.

They are all dead and quiet. Chaka still holds his hand! He looks to the north and to the south. See! spears are shining among the trees. Now the horns of our host close upon the flanks of the foe. They slay and are slain, but the men of Zwide are many and brave, and the battle turns against us.

Then again Chaka speaks a word. The captains hear, the soldiers stretch out their necks to listen.

It has come at last. "*Charge! Children of the Zulu!*"

There is a roar, a thunder of feet, a flashing of spears, a bending of plumes, and, like a river that has burst its banks, like storm-clouds before the gale, we sweep down upon friend and foe. They form up to meet us; the stream is passed; our wounded rise upon their haunches and wave us on. We trample them down. What matter? They can fight no more. Then we meet Zwide rushing to greet us, as bull meets bull. *Ou!* my father, I know no more. Everything grows red. That fight! that fight! We swept them away. When it was done there was nothing to be seen, but the hillside was black and red. Few fled; few were left to fly. We passed over them like fire; we ate them up. Presently we paused, looking for the foe. All were dead. The host of Zwide was no more. Then we mustered. Ten regiments had looked upon the morning sun; three regiments saw the sun sink; the rest had gone where no suns shine.

Such were our battles in the days of Chaka!

You ask of the Umkandhlu regiment which fled. I will tell you. When we reached our kraal once more, Chaka summoned that regiment and mustered it. He spoke to them gently, gently. He thanked them for their service. He said it was natural that "*girls*" should faint at the sight of blood and turn to seek their kraals. Yet he had bid them come back no more and they had come back! What then was there now left for him to do? And he covered his face with his blanket. Then the soldiers killed them all, nearly two thousand of them—killed them with taunts and jeers.

That is how we dealt with cowards in those days, my father. After that, one Zulu was a match for five of any other tribe. If ten came against him, still he did not turn his back. "Fight and fall, but fly not," that was our watchword. Never again while Chaka lived did a conquered force pass the gates of the king's kraal.

That fight was but one war out of many. With every moon a fresh impi started to wash its spears, and came back few and thin, but with victory and countless cattle. Tribe after tribe went down before us. Those of them who escaped the assegai were enrolled into fresh regiments, and thus, though men died by thousands every month, yet the army grew. Soon there were no other chiefs left. Umsuduka fell, and after him Mancengeza. Umzilikazi was driven north; Matiwane was stamped flat. Then we poured into this land of Natal. When we entered, its people could not be numbered. When we left, here and there a man might be found in a hole in the earth—that was all. Men, women, and children, we wiped them out; the land was clean of them. Next came the turn of U'Faku, chief of the Amapondos. Ah! where is U'Faku now?

And so it went on and on, till even the Zulus were weary of war and the sharpest assegais grew blunt.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BIRTH OF UMSLOPOGAAS

This was the rule of the life of Chaka, that he would have no children, though he had many wives. Every child born to him by his "sisters" was put away at once.

"What, Mopo," he said to me, "shall I rear up children to put me to the assegai when they grow great? They call me tyrant. Say, how do those chiefs die whom men name tyrants? They die at the hands of those whom they have bred. Nay, Mopo, I will rule for my life, and when I join the spirits of my fathers let the strongest take my power and my place!"

Now it chanced that shortly after Chaka had spoken thus, my sister Baleka, the king's wife, fell in labour; and on that same day my wife Macropha was brought to bed of twins, and this but eight days after my second wife, Anadi, had given birth to a son. You ask, my father, how I came to be married, seeing that Chaka forbade marriage to all his soldiers till they were in middle life and had put the man's ring upon their heads. It was a boon he granted me as *inyanga* of medicine, saying it was well that a doctor should know the sicknesses of women and learn how to cure their evil tempers. As though, my father, that were possible!

When the king heard that Baleka was sick he did not kill her outright, because he loved her a little, but he sent for me, commanding me to attend her, and when the child was born to cause its body to be brought to him, according to custom, so that he might be sure that it was dead. I bent to the earth before him, and went to do his bidding with a heavy heart, for was not Baleka my sister? and would not her child be of my own blood? Still, it must be so, for Chaka's whisper was as the shout of other kings, and, if we dared to disobey, then our lives and the lives of all in our kraals would answer for it. Better that an infant should die than that we should become food for jackals. Presently I came to the *Emposeni*, the place of the king's wives, and declared the king's word to the soldiers on guard. They lowered their assegais and let me pass, and I entered the hut of Baleka. In it were others of the king's wives, but when they saw me they rose and went away, for it was not lawful that they should stay where I was. Thus I was left alone with my sister.

For awhile she lay silent, and I did not speak, though I saw by the heaving of her breast that she was weeping.

"Hush, little one!" I said at length; "your sorrow will soon be done."

"Nay," she answered, lifting her head, "it will be but begun. Oh, cruel man! I know the reason of your coming. You come to murder the babe that shall be born of me."

"It is the king's word, woman."

"It is the king's word, and what is the king's word? Have I, then, naught to say in this matter?"

"It is the king's child, woman."

"It is the king's child, and it is not also my child? Must my babe be dragged from my breast and be strangled, and by you, Mopo? Have I not loved you, Mopo? Did I not flee with you from our people and the vengeance of our father? Do you know that not two moons gone the king was wroth with you because he fell sick, and would have caused you to be slain had I not pleaded for you and called his oath to mind? And thus you pay me: you come to kill my child, my first-born child!"

"It is the king's word, woman," I answered sternly; but my heart was split in two within me.

Then Baleka said no more, but, turning her face to the wall of the hut, she wept and groaned bitterly.

Now, as she wept I heard a stir without the hut, and the light in the doorway was darkened. A woman entered alone. I looked round to see who it was, then fell upon the ground in salutation, for before me was Unandi, mother of the king, who was named "Mother of the Heavens," that same lady to whom my mother had refused the milk.

"Hail, Mother of the Heavens!" I said.

"Greeting, Mopo," she answered. "Say, why does Baleka weep? Is it because the sorrow of women is upon her?"

"Ask of her, great chieftainess," I said.

Then Baleka spoke: "I weep, mother of a king, because this man, who is my brother, has come from him who is my lord and thy son, to murder that which shall be born of me. O thou whose breasts have given suck, plead for me! Thy son was not slain at birth."

"Perhaps it were well if he had been so slain, Baleka," said Unandi; "then had many another man lived to look upon the sun who is now dead."

"At the least, as an infant he was good and gentle, and thou mightest love him, Mother of the Zulu."

"Never, Baleka! As a babe he bit my breast and tore my hair; as the man is so was the babe."

"Yet may his child be otherwise, Mother of the Heavens! Think, thou hast no grandson to comfort thee in thy age. Wilt thou, then, see all thy stock wither? The king, our lord, lives in war. He too may die, and what then?"

"Then the root of Senzangaona is still green. Has the king no brothers?"

"They are not of thy flesh, mother. What? thou dost not hearken! Then as a woman to woman I plead with thee. Save my child or slay me with my child!"

Now the heart of Unandi grew gentle, and she was moved to tears.

"How may this be done, Mopo?" she said. "The king must see the dead infant, and if he suspect, and even reeds have ears, you know the heart of Chaka and where we shall lie to-morrow."

"Are there then no other new-born babes in Zululand?" said Baleka, sitting up and speaking in a whisper like the hiss of a snake. "Listen, Mopo! Is not your wife also in labour? Now hear me, Mother of the Heavens, and, my brother, hear me also. Do not think to play with me in this matter. I will save my child or you twain will perish with it. For I will tell the king that you came to me, the two of you, and whispered plots into my ear—plots to save the child and kill the king. Now choose, and swiftly!"

She sank back, there was silence, and we looked one upon another. Then Unandi spoke.

"Give me your hand, Mopo, and swear that you will be faithful to me in this secret, as I swear to you. A day may come when this child who has not seen the light rules as king in Zululand, and then in reward you shall be the greatest of the people, the king's voice, whisperer in the king's ear. But if you break your oath, then beware, for I shall not die alone!"

"I swear, Mother of the Heavens," I answered.

"It is well, son of Makedama."

"It is well, my brother," said Baleka. "Now go and do that which must be done swiftly, for my sorrow is upon me. Go, knowing that if you fail I will be pitiless, for I will bring you to your death, yes, even if my own death is the price!"

So I went. "Whither do you go?" asked the guard at the gate.

"I go to bring my medicines, men of the king," I answered.

So I said; but, oh! my heart was heavy, and this was my plan—to fly far from Zululand. I could not, and I dared not do this thing. What? should I kill my own child that its life might be given for the life of the babe of Baleka? And should I lift up my will against the will of the king, saving the child to look upon the sun which he had doomed to darkness? Nay, I would fly, leaving all, and seek out some far tribe where I might begin to live again. Here I could not live; here in the shadow of Chaka was nothing but death.

I reached my own huts, there to find that my wife Macropha was delivered of twins. I sent away all in the hut except my other wife, Anadi, she who eight days gone had borne me a son. The second of the twins was born; it was a boy, born dead. The first was a girl, she who lived to be Nada the Beautiful, Nada the Lily. Then a thought came into my heart. Here was a path to run on.

"Give me the boy," I said to Anadi. "He is not dead. Give him to me that I may take him outside the kraal and wake him to life by my medicine."

"It is of no use—the child is dead," said Anadi.

"Give him to me, woman!" I said fiercely. And she gave me the body.

Then I took him and wrapped him up in my bundle of medicines, and outside of all I rolled a mat of plaited grass.

"Suffer none to enter the hut till I return," I said; "and speak no word of the child that seems to be dead. If you allow any to enter, or if you speak a word, then my medicine will not work and the babe will be dead indeed."

So I went, leaving the women wondering, for it is not our custom to save both when twins are born; but I ran swiftly to the gates of the *Emposeni*.

"I bring the medicines, men of the king!" I said to the guards.

"Pass in," they answered.

I passed through the gates and into the hut of Baleka. Unandi was alone in the hut with my sister.

"The child is born," said the mother of the king. "Look at him, Mopo, son of Makedama!"

I looked. He was a great child with large black eyes like the eyes of Chaka the king; and Unandi, too, looked at me. "Where is it?" she whispered.

I loosed the mat and drew the dead child from the medicines, glancing round fearfully as I did so.

"Give me the living babe," I whispered back.

They gave it to me and I took of a drug that I knew and rubbed it on the tongue of the child. Now this drug has the power to make the tongue it touches dumb for awhile. Then I wrapped up the child in my medicines and again bound the mat about the bundle. But round the throat of the still-born babe I tied a string of fibre as though I had strangled it, and wrapped it loosely in a piece of matting.

Now for the first time I spoke to Baleka: "Woman," I said, "and thou also, Mother of the Heavens, I have done your wish, but know that before all is finished this deed shall bring about the death of many. Be secret as the grave, for the grave yawns for you both."

I went again, bearing the mat containing the dead child in my right hand. But the bundle of medicines that held the living one I fastened across my shoulders. I passed out of the *Emposeni*, and, as I went, I held up the bundle in my right hand to the guards, showing them that which was in it, but saying nothing.

"It is good," they said, nodding.

But now ill-fortune found me, for just outside the *Emposeni* I met three of the king's messengers.

"Greeting, son of Makedama!" they said. "The king summons you to the *Intunkulu*"—that is the royal house, my father.

"Good!" I answered. "I will come now; but first I would run to my own place to see how it goes with Macropha, my wife. Here is that which the king seeks," and I showed them the dead child. "Take it to him if you will."

"That is not the king's command, Mopo," they answered. "His word is that you should stand before him at once."

Now my heart turned to water in my breast. Kings have many ears. Could he have heard? And how dared I go before the Lion bearing his living child hidden on my back? Yet to waver was to be lost, to show fear was to be lost, to disobey was to be lost.

"Good! I come," I answered. And we walked to the gate of the *Intunkulu*.

It was sundown. Chaka was sitting in the little courtyard in front of his hut. I went down on my knees before him and gave the royal salute, *Bayéte*, and so I stayed.

"Rise, son of Makedama!" he said.

"I cannot rise, Lion of the Zulu," I answered, "I cannot rise, having royal blood on my hands, till the king has pardoned me."

"Where is it?" he asked.

I pointed to the mat in my hand.

"Let me look at it."

Then I undid the mat, and he looked on the child, and laughed aloud.

"He might have been a king," he said, as he bade a councillor take it away. "Mopo, thou hast slain one who might have been a king. Art thou not afraid?"

"No, Black One," I answered, "the child is killed by order of one who is a king."

"Sit down, and let us talk," said Chaka, for his mood was idle. "To-morrow thou shalt have five oxen for this deed; thou shalt choose them from the royal herd."

"The king is good; he sees that my belt is drawn tight; he satisfies my hunger. Will the king suffer that I go? My wife is in labour and I would visit her."

"Nay, stay awhile; say how it is with Baleka, my sister and thine?"

"It is well."

"Did she weep when you took the babe from her?"

"Nay, she wept not. She said, 'My lord's will is my will.'"

"Good! Had she wept she had been slain also. Who was with her?"

"The Mother of the Heavens."

The brow of Chaka darkened. "Unandi, my mother, what did she there? By myself I swear, though she is my mother—if I thought"—and he ceased.

There was a silence, then he spoke again. "Say, what is in that mat?" and he pointed with his little assegai at the bundle on my shoulders.

"Medicine, king."

"Thou dost carry enough to doctor an impi. Undo the mat and let me look at it."

"Now, my father, I tell you that the marrow melted in my bones with terror, for if I undid the mat I feared he must see the child and then—"

"It is *tagati*, it is bewitched, O king. It is not wise to look on medicine."

"Open!" he answered angrily. "What? may I not look at that which I am forced to swallow—I, who am the first of doctors?"

"Death is the king's medicine," I answered, lifting the bundle, and laying it as far from him in the shadow of the fence as I dared. Then I bent over it, slowly undoing the rimpis with which it was tied, while the sweat of terror ran down my face blinding me like tears. What would I do if he saw the child? What if the child awoke and cried? I would snatch the assegai from his hand and stab him! Yes, I would kill the king and then kill myself! Now the mat was unrolled. Inside were the brown leaves and roots of medicine; beneath them was the senseless babe wrapped in dead moss.

"Ugly stuff," said the king, taking snuff. "Now see, Mopo, what a good aim I have! This for thy medicine!" And he lifted his assegai to throw it through the bundle. But as he threw, my snake put it into the king's heart to sneeze, and thus it came to pass that the assegai only pierced the outer leaves of the medicine, and did not touch the child.

"May the heavens bless the king!" I said, according to custom.

"Thanks to thee, Mopo, it is a good omen," he answered. "And now, begone! Take my advice: kill thy children, as I kill mine, lest they live to worry thee. The whelps of lions are best drowned."

I did up the bundle fast—fast, though my hands trembled. Oh! what if the child should wake and cry. It was done; I rose and saluted the king. Then I doubled myself up and passed from before him. Scarcely was I outside the gates of the *Intunkulu* when the infant began to squeak in the bundle. If it had been one minute before!

"What," said a soldier, as I passed, "have you got a puppy hidden under your moocha,<sup>[1]</sup> Mopo?"

[1] Girdle composed of skin and tails of oxen.-ED.

I made no answer, but hurried on till I came to my huts. I entered; there were my two wives alone.

"I have recovered the child, women," I said, as I undid the bundle.

Anadi took him and looked at him.

"The boy seems bigger than he was," she said.

"The breath of life has come into him and puffed him out," I answered.

"His eyes are not as his eyes were," she said again. "Now they are big and black, like the eyes of the king."

"My spirit looked upon his eyes and made them beautiful," I answered.

"This child has a birth-mark on his thigh," she said a third time. "That which I gave you had no mark."

"I laid my medicine there," I answered.

"It is not the same child," she said sullenly. "It is a changeling who will lay ill-luck at our doors."

Then I rose up in my rage and cursed her heavily, for I saw that if she was not stopped this woman's tongue would bring us all to ruin.

"Peace, witch!" I cried. "How dare you to speak thus from a lying heart? Do you wish to draw down a curse upon our roof? Would you make us all food for the king's spear? Say such words again, and you shall sit within the circle—the *Ingomboco* shall know you for a witch!"

So I stormed on, threatening to bring her to death, till at length she grew fearful, and fell at my feet praying for mercy and forgiveness. But I was much afraid because of this woman's tongue, and not without reason.

## CHAPTER VII.

### UMSLOPOGAAS ANSWERS THE KING

Now the years went on, and this matter slept. Nothing more was heard of it, but still it only slept; and, my father, I feared greatly for the hour when it should awake. For the secret was known by two women—Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, and Baleka, my sister, wife of the king; and by two more—Macropha and Anadi, my wives—it was guessed at. How, then, should it remain a secret forever? Moreover, it came about that Unandi and Baleka could not restrain their fondness for this child who was called my son and named Umslopogaas, but who was the son of Chaka, the king, and of Baleka, and the grandson of Unandi. So it happened that very often one or the other of them would come into my hut, making pretence to visit my wives, and take the boy upon her lap and fondle it. In vain did I pray them to forbear. Love pulled at their heart-strings more heavily than my words, and still they came. This was the end of it—that Chaka saw the child sitting on the knee of Unandi, his mother.

“What does my mother with that brat of thine, Mopo?” he asked of me. “Cannot she kiss me, if she will find a child to kiss?” And he laughed like a wolf.

I said that I did not know, and the matter passed over for awhile. But after that Chaka caused his mother to be watched. Now the boy Umslopogaas grew great and strong; there was no such lad of his years for a day’s journey round. But from a babe he was somewhat surly, of few words, and like his father, Chaka, afraid of nothing. In all the world there were but two people whom he loved—these were I, Mopo, who was called his father, and Nada, she who was said to be his twin sister.

Now it must be told of Nada that as the boy Umslopogaas was the strongest and bravest of children, so the girl Nada was the gentlest and most fair. Of a truth, my father, I believe that her blood was not all Zulu, though this I cannot say for certain. At the least, her eyes were softer and larger than those of our people, her hair longer and less tightly curled, and her skin was lighter—more of the colour of pure copper. These things she had from her mother, Macropha; though she was fairer than Macropha—fairer, indeed, than any woman of my people whom I have seen. Her mother, Macropha, my wife, was of Swazi blood, and was brought to the king’s kraal with other captives after a raid, and given to me as a wife by the king. It was said that she was the daughter of a Swazi headman of the tribe of the Halakazi, and that she was born of his wife is true, but whether he was her father I do not know; for I have heard from the lips of Macropha herself, that before she was born there was a white man staying at her father’s kraal. He was a Portuguese from the coast, a handsome man, and skilled in the working of iron. This white man loved the mother of my wife, Macropha, and some held that Macropha was his daughter, and not that of the Swazi headman. At least I know this, that before my wife’s birth the Swazi killed the white man. But none can tell the truth of these matters, and I only speak of them because the beauty of Nada was rather as is the beauty of the white people than of ours, and this might well happen if her grandfather chanced to be a white man.

Now Umslopogaas and Nada were always together. Together they ate, together they slept and wandered; they thought one thought and spoke with one tongue. *Ou!* it was pretty to see them! Twice while they were still children did Umslopogaas save the life of Nada.

The first time it came about thus. The two children had wandered far from the kraal, seeking certain berries that little ones love. On they wandered and on, singing as they went, till at length they found the berries, and ate heartily. Then it was near sundown, and when they had eaten they fell asleep. In the night they woke to find a great wind blowing and a cold rain falling on them, for it was the beginning of winter, when fruits are ripe.

“Up, Nada!” said Umslopogaas, “we must seek the kraal or the cold will kill us.”

So Nada rose, frightened, and hand in hand they stumbled through the darkness. But in the wind and the night they lost their path, and when at length the dawn came they were in a forest that was strange to them. They rested awhile, and finding berries ate them, then walked again. All that day they wandered, till at last the night came down, and they plucked branches of trees and piled the branches over them for warmth, and they were so weary that they fell asleep in each other’s arms. At dawn they rose, but now they were very tired and berries were few, so that by midday they were spent. Then they lay down on the side of a steep hill, and Nada laid her head upon the breast of Umslopogaas.

“Here let us die, my brother,” she said.

But even then the boy had a great spirit, and he answered, “Time to die, sister, when Death chooses us. See, now! Do you rest here, and I will climb the hill and look across the forest.”

So he left her and climbed the hill, and on its side he found many berries and a root that is good for food, and filled himself with them. At length he came to the crest of the hill and looked out across the sea of green. Lo! there, far away to the east, he saw a line of white that lay like smoke against the black surface of a cliff, and knew it for the waterfall beyond the royal town. Then he came down the hill, shouting for joy and bearing roots and berries in his hand. But when he reached the spot where Nada was, he found that her senses had left her through hunger, cold, and weariness. She lay upon the ground like one asleep, and over her stood a jackal that fled as he drew nigh. Now it would seem that there were but two shoots to the stick of Umslopogaas. One was to save himself, and the other to lie down and die by Nada. Yet he found a third, for, undoing the strips of his moocha, he made ropes of them, and with the ropes he bound Nada on his back and started for the king’s kraal. He could never have reached it, for the way was long, yet at evening some messengers running through the forest came upon a naked lad with a girl bound to his back and a staff in his hand, who staggered along slowly with starting eyes and foam upon his lips. He could not speak, he was so weary, and the ropes had cut through the skin of his shoulders; yet one of the messengers knew him for Umslopogaas, the son of Mopo, and they bore him to the kraal. They would have left the girl Nada, thinking her dead, but he pointed to her breast, and, feeling it, they found that her heart still beat, so they brought her also; and the end of it was that both recovered and loved each other more than ever before.

Now after this, I, Mopo, bade Umslopogaas stay at home within the kraal, and not lead his sister to the wilds. But the boy loved roaming like a fox, and where he went there Nada followed. So it came about that one day they slipped from the kraal when the gates were open, and sought out a certain deep glen which had an evil name, for it was said that spirits haunted it and put those to death who entered there. Whether this was true I do not know, but I know that in the glen dwelt a certain woman of the woods, who had her habitation in a cave and lived upon what she could kill or steal or dig up with her hands. Now this woman was mad. For it had chanced that her husband had been "smelt out" by the witch-doctors as a worker of magic against the king, and slain. Then Chaka, according to custom, despatched the slayers to eat up his kraal, and they came to the kraal and killed his people. Last of all they killed his children, three young girls, and would have assegaied their mother, when suddenly a spirit entered into her at the sight, and she went mad, so that they let her go, being afraid to touch her afterwards. So she fled and took up her abode in the haunted glen; and this was the nature of her madness, that whenever she saw children, and more especially girl children, a longing came upon her to kill them as her own had been killed. This, indeed, she did often, for when the moon was full and her madness at its highest, she would travel far to find children, snatching them away from the kraals like a hyena. Still, none would touch her because of the spirit in her, not even those whose children she had murdered.

So Umslopogaas and Nada came to the glen where the child-slayer lived, and sat down by a pool of water not far from the mouth of her cave, weaving flowers into a garland. Presently Umslopogaas left Nada, to search for rock lilies which she loved. As he went he called back to her, and his voice awoke the woman who was sleeping in her cave, for she came out by night only, like a jackal. Then the woman stepped forth, smelling blood and having a spear in her hand. Presently she saw Nada seated upon the grass weaving flowers, and crept towards her to kill her. Now as she came—so the child told me—suddenly a cold wind seemed to breathe upon Nada, and fear took hold of her, though she did not see the woman who would murder her. She let fall the flowers, and looked before her into the pool, and there, mirrored in the pool, she saw the greedy face of the child-slayer, who crept down upon her from above, her hair hanging about her brow and her eyes shining like the eyes of a lion.

Then with a cry Nada sprang up and fled along the path which Umslopogaas had taken, and after her leapt and ran the mad woman. Umslopogaas heard her cry. He turned and rushed back over the brow of the hill, and, lo! there before him was the murderess. Already she had grasped Nada by the hair, already her spear was lifted to pierce her. Umslopogaas had no spear, he had nothing but a little stick without a knob; yet with it he rushed at the mad woman and struck her so smartly on the arm that she let go of the girl and turned on him with a yell. Then, lifting her spear, she struck at him, but he leapt aside. Again she struck; but he sprang into the air, and the spear passed beneath him. A third time the woman struck, and, though he fell to earth to avoid the blow, yet the assegai pierced his shoulder. But the weight of his body as he fell twisted it from her hand, and before she could grasp him he was up, and beyond her reach, the spear still fast in his shoulder.

Then the woman turned, screaming with rage and madness, and ran at Nada to kill her with her hands. But Umslopogaas set his teeth, and, drawing the spear from his wound, charged her, shouting. She lifted a great stone and hurled it at him—so hard that it flew into fragments against another stone which it struck; yet he charged on, and smote at her so truly that he drove the spear through her, and she fell down dead. After that Nada bound up his wound, which was deep, and with much pain he reached the king's kraal and told me this story.

Now there were some who cried that the boy must be put to death, because he had killed one possessed with a spirit. But I said no, he should not be touched. He had killed the woman in defence of his own life and the life of his sister; and every one had a right to slay in self-defence, except as against the king or those who did the king's bidding. Moreover, I said, if the woman had a spirit, it was an evil one, for no good spirit would ask the lives of children, but rather those of cattle, for it is against our custom to sacrifice human beings to the *Amatonga* even in war, though the Basuta dogs do so. Still, the tumult grew, for the witch-doctors were set upon the boy's death, saying that evil would come of it if he was allowed to live, having killed one inspired, and at last the matter came to the ears of the king. Then Chaka summoned me and the boy before him, and he also summoned the witch-doctors.

First, the witch-doctors set out their case, demanding the death of Umslopogaas. Chaka asked them what would happen if the boy was not killed. They answered that the spirit of the dead woman would lead him to bring evil on the royal house. Chaka asked if he would bring evil on him, the king. They in turn asked the spirits, and answered no, not on him, but on one of the royal house who should be after him. Chaka said that he cared nothing what happened to those who came after him, or whether good or evil befell them. Then he spoke to Umslopogaas, who looked him boldly in the face, as an equal looks at an equal.

"Boy," he said, "what hast thou to say as to why thou shouldst not be killed as these men demand?"

"This, Black One," answered Umslopogaas; "that I stabbed the woman in defence of my own life."

"That is nothing," said Chaka. "If I, the king, wished to kill thee, mightest thou therefore kill me or those whom I sent? The *Itongo* in the woman was a Spirit King and ordered her to kill thee; thou shouldst then have let thyself be killed. Hast thou no other reason?"

"This, Elephant," answered Umslopogaas; "the woman would have murdered my sister, whom I love better than my life."

"That is nothing," said Chaka. "If I ordered thee to be killed for any cause, should I not also order all within thy gates to be killed with thee? May not, then, a Spirit King do likewise? If thou hast nothing more to say thou must die."

Now I grew afraid, for I feared lest Chaka should slay him who was called my son because of the word of the doctors. But the boy Umslopogaas looked up and answered boldly, not as one who pleads for his life, but as one who demands a right:—

"I have this to say, Eater-up of Enemies, and if it is not enough, let us stop talking, and let me be killed. Thou, O king, didst command that this woman should be slain. Those whom thou didst send to destroy her spared her, because they thought her mad. I have carried out the commandment of the king; I have slain her, mad or sane, whom the king commanded should be killed, and I have earned not death, but a reward."

"Well said, Umslopogaas!" answered Chaka. "Let ten head of cattle be given to this boy with the heart of a man; his father shall guard them for him. Art thou satisfied now, Umslopogaas?"

"I take that which is due to me, and I thank the king because he need not pay unless he will," Umslopogaas answered.

Chaka stared awhile, began to grow angry, then burst out laughing.

"Why, this calf is such another one as was dropped long ago in the kraal of Senzangacona!" he said. "As I was, so is this boy. Go on, lad, in that path, and thou mayst find those who shall cry the royal salute of Bayéte to thee at the end of it. Only keep out of my way for 2 of a kind might not agree. Now begone!" So we went out, but as we passed them I saw the doctors muttering together, for they were ill-pleased and foreboded evil. Also they were jealous of me, and wished to smite me through the heart of him who was called my son.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GREAT INGOMBOCO

After this there was quiet until the Feast of the First-fruits was ended. But few people were killed at this feast, though there was a great *Ingomboco*, or witch-hunt, and many were smelt out by the witch-doctors as working magic against the king. Now things had come to this pass in Zululand—that the whole people cowered before the witch-doctors. No man might sleep safe, for none knew but that on the morrow he would be touched by the wand of an *Isanusi*, as we name a finder of witches, and led away to his death. For awhile Chaka said nothing, and so long as the doctors smelt out those only whom he wished to get rid of—and they were many—he was well pleased. But when they began to work for their own ends, and to do those to death whom he did not desire to kill, he grew angry. Yet the custom of the land was that he whom the witch-doctor touched must die, he and all his house; therefore the king was in a cleft stick, for he scarcely dared to save even those whom he loved. One night I came to doctor him, for he was sick in his mind. On that very day there had been an *Ingomboco*, and five of the bravest captains of the army had been smelt out by the *Abangoma*, the witch-finders, together with many others. All had been destroyed, and men had been sent to kill the wives and children of the dead. Now Chaka was very angry at this slaying, and opened his heart to me.

“The witch-doctors rule in Zululand, and not I, Mopo, son of Makedama,” he said to me. “Where, then, is it to end? Shall I myself be smelt out and slain? These *Isanusi* are too strong for me; they lie upon the land like the shadow of night. Tell me, how may I be free of them?”

“Those who walk the Bridge of Spears, O king, fall off into Nowhere,” I answered darkly; “even witch-doctors cannot keep a footing on that bridge. Has not a witch-doctor a heart that can cease to beat? Has he not blood that can be made to flow?”

Chaka looked at me strangely. “Thou art a bold man who darest to speak thus to me, Mopo,” he said. “Dost thou not know that it is sacrilege to touch an *Isanusi*?”

“I speak that which is in the king’s mind,” I answered. “Hearken, O king! It is indeed sacrilege to touch a true *Isanusi*, but what if the *Isanusi* be a liar? What if he smelt out falsely, bringing those to death who are innocent of evil? Is it then sacrilege to bring him to that end which he has given to many another? Say, O king!”

“Good words!” answered Chaka. “Now tell me, son of Makedama, how may this matter be put to proof?”

Then I leaned forward, whispering into the ear of the Black One, and he nodded heavily.

Thus I spoke then, because I, too, saw the evil of the *Isanusi*, I who knew their secrets. Also, I feared for my own life and for the lives of all those who were dear to me. For they hated me as one instructed in their magic, one who had the seeing eye and the hearing ear.

One morning thereafter a new thing came to pass in the royal kraal, for the king himself ran out, crying aloud to all people to come and see the evil that had been worked upon him by a wizard. They came together and saw this. On the door-posts of the gateway of the *Intunkulu*, the house of the king, were great smears of blood. The knees of men strong in the battle trembled when they saw it; women wailed aloud as they wail over the dead; they wailed because of the horror of the omen.

“Who has done this thing?” cried Chaka in a terrible voice. “Who has dared to bewitch the king and to strike blood upon his house?”

There was no answer, and Chaka spoke again. “This is no little matter,” he said, “to be washed away with the blood of one or two and be forgotten. The man who wrought it shall not die alone or travel with a few to the world of spirits. All his tribe shall go with him, down to the baby in his hut and cattle in his kraal! Let messengers go out east and west, and north and south, and summon the witch-doctors from every quarter! Let them summon the captains from every regiment and the headmen from every kraal! On the tenth day from now the circle of the *Ingomboco* must be set, and there shall be such a smelling out of wizards and of witches as has not been known in Zululand!”

So the messengers went out to do the bidding of the king, taking the names of those who should be summoned from the lips of the indunas, and day by day people flocked up to the gates of the royal kraal, and, creeping on their knees before the majesty of the king, praised him aloud. But he vouchsafed an answer to none. One noble only he caused to be killed, because he carried in his hand a stick of the royal red wood, which Chaka himself had given him in bygone years.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] This beautiful wood is known in Natal as “red ivory.”—ED.

On the last night before the forming of the *Ingomboco*, the witch-doctors, male and female, entered the kraal. There were a hundred and a half of them, and they were made hideous and terrible with the white bones of men, with bladders of fish and of oxen, with fat of wizards, and with skins of snakes. They walked in silence till they came in front of the *Intunkulu*, the royal house; then they stopped and sang this song for the king to hear:—

We have come, O king, we have come from the caves and the rocks and the swamps,  
To wash in the blood of the slain;  
We have gathered our host from the air as vultures are gathered in war  
When they scent the blood of the slain.

We come not alone, O king: with each Wise One there passes a ghost,  
Who hisses the name of the doomed.  
We come not alone, for we are the sons and Indunas of Death,

And he guides our feet to the doomed.

Red rises the moon o'er the plain, red sinks the sun in the west,  
Look, wizards, and bid them farewell!  
We count you by hundreds, you who cried for a curse on the king.  
Ha! soon shall we bid *you* farewell!

Then they were silent, and went in silence to the place appointed for them, there to pass the night in mutterings and magic. But those who were gathered together shivered with fear when they heard their words, for they knew well that many a man would be switched with the gnu's tail before the sun sank once more. And I, too, trembled, for my heart was full of fear. Ah! my father, those were evil days to live in when Chaka ruled, and death met us at every turn! Then no man might call his life his own, or that of his wife or child, or anything. All were the king's, and what war spared that the witch-doctors took.

The morning dawned heavily, and before it was well light the heralds were out summoning all to the king's *Ingomboco*. Men came by hundreds, carrying short sticks only—for to be seen armed was death—and seated themselves in the great circle before the gates of the royal house. Oh! their looks were sad, and they had little stomach for eating that morning, they who were food for death. They seated themselves; then round them on the outside of the circle gathered knots of warriors, chosen men, great and fierce, armed with kerries only. These were the slayers.

When all was ready, the king came out, followed by his indunas and by me. As he appeared, wrapped in the kaross of tiger-skins and towering a head higher than any man there, all the multitude—and it was many as the game on the hills—cast themselves to earth, and from every lip sharp and sudden went up the royal salute of *Bayéte*. But Chaka took no note; his brow was cloudy as a mountain-top. He cast one glance at the people and one at the slayers, and wherever his eye fell men turned grey with fear. Then he stalked on, and sat himself upon a stool to the north of the great ring looking toward the open space.

For awhile there was silence; then from the gates of the women's quarters came a band of maidens arrayed in their beaded dancing-dresses, and carrying green branches in their hands. As they came, they clapped their hands and sang softly:—

We are the heralds of the king's feast. Ai! Ai!  
Vultures shall eat it. Ah! Ah!  
It is good—it is good to die for the king!

They ceased, and ranged themselves in a body behind us. Then Chaka held up his hand, and there was a patter of running feet. Presently from behind the royal huts appeared the great company of the *Abangoma*, the witch-doctors—men to the right and women to the left. In the left hand of each was the tail of a vilderbeeste, in the right a bundle of assegais and a little shield. They were awful to see, and the bones about them rattled as they ran, the bladders and the snake-skins floated in the air behind them, their faces shone with the fat of anointing, their eyes started like the eyes of fishes, and their lips twitched hungrily as they glared round the death-ring. Ha! ha! little did those evil children guess who should be the slayers and who should be the slain before that sun sank!

On they came, like a grey company of the dead. On they came in silence broken only by the patter of their feet and the dry rattling of their bony necklets, till they stood in long ranks before the Black One. Awhile they stood thus, then suddenly every one of them thrust forward the little shield in his hand, and with a single voice they cried, "Hail, Father!"

"Hail, my children!" answered Chaka.

"What seekest thou, Father?" they cried again. "Blood?"

"The blood of the guilty," he answered.

They turned and spoke each to each; the company of the men spoke to the company of the women.

"The Lion of the Zulu seeks blood."

"He shall be fed!" screamed the women.

"The Lion of the Zulu smells blood."

"He shall see it!" screamed the women.

"His eyes search out the wizards."

"He shall count their dead!" screamed the women.

"Peace!" cried Chaka. "Waste not the hours in talk, but to the work. Harken! Wizards have bewitched me! Wizards have dared to smite blood upon the gateways of the king. Dig in the burrows of the earth and find them, ye rats! Fly through the paths of the air and find them, ye vultures! Smell at the gates of the people and name them, ye jackals! ye hunters in the night! Drag them from the caves if they be hidden, from the distance if they be fled, from the graves if they be dead. To the work! to the work! Show them to me truly, and your gifts shall be great; and for them, if they be a nation, they shall be slain. Now begin. Begin by companies of ten, for you are many, and all must be finished ere the sun sink."

"It shall be finished, Father," they answered.

Then ten of the women stood forward, and at their head was the most famous witch-doctress of that day—an aged woman named Nobela, a woman to whose eyes the darkness was no evil, whose scent was keen as a dog's, who heard the voices of the dead as they cried in the night, and spoke truly of what she heard. All the other *Isanuisis*, male and female, sat down in a half-moon facing the king, but this woman drew forward, and with her came nine of her sisterhood. They turned east and west, north and south, searching the heavens; they turned east and west, north and south, searching the earth; they turned east and west, north and south, searching the hearts of men. Then they crept round and round the great ring like cats; then they threw themselves upon the earth and smelt it. And all the time there was silence, silence deep as midnight, and in it men hearkened to the beating of their hearts; only now and again the vultures shrieked in the trees.

At length Nobela spoke:—

"Do you smell him, sisters?"

"We smell him," they answered.

"Does he sit in the east, sisters?"

"He sits in the east," they answered.

"Is he the son of a stranger, sisters?"

"He is the son of a stranger."

Then they crept nearer, crept on their hands and knees, till they were within ten paces of where I sat among the indunas near to the king. The indunas looked on each other and grew grey with fear; and for me, my father, my knees were loosened and my marrow turned to water in my bones. For I knew well who was that son of a stranger of whom they spoke. It was I, my father, I who was about to be smelt out; and if I was smelt out I should be killed with all my house, for the king's oath would scarcely avail me against the witch-doctors. I looked at the fierce faces of the *Isanusi* before me, as they crept, crept like snakes. I glanced behind and saw the slayers grasping their kerries for the deed of death, and I say I felt like one for whom the bitterness is overpast. Then I remembered the words which the king and I had whispered together of the cause for which this *Ingomboco* was set, and hope crept back to me like the first gleam of the dawn upon a stormy night. Still I did not hope overmuch, for it well might happen that the king had but set a trap to catch me.

Now they were quite near and halted.

"Have we dreamed falsely, sisters?" asked Nobela, the aged.

"What we dreamed in the night we see in the day," they answered.

"Shall I whisper his name in your ears, sisters?"

They lifted their heads from the ground like snakes and nodded, and as they nodded the necklets of bones rattled on their skinny necks. Then they drew their heads to a circle, and Nobela thrust hers into the centre of the circle and said a word.

"Ha! ha!" they laughed, "we hear you! His is the name. Let him be named by it in the face of Heaven, him and all his house; then let him hear no other name forever!"

And suddenly they sprang up and rushed towards me, Nobela, the aged *Isanusi*, at their head. They leaped at me, pointing to me with the tails of the vilderbeestes in their hands. Then Nobela switched me in the face with the tail of the beast, and cried aloud:—

"Greeting, Mopo, son of Makedama! Thou art the man who smotest blood on the door-posts of the king to bewitch the king. Let thy house be stamped flat!"

I saw her come, I felt the blow on my face as a man feels in a dream. I heard the feet of the slayers as they bounded forward to hale me to the dreadful death, but my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth—I could not say a word. I glanced at the king, and, as I did so, I thought that I heard him mutter: "Near the mark, not in it."

Then he held up his spear, and all was silence. The slayers stopped in their stride, the witch-doctors stood with outstretched arms, the world of men was as though it had been frozen into sleep.

"Hold!" he said. "Stand aside, son of Makedama, who art named an evildoer! Stand aside, thou, Nobela, and those with thee who have named him evildoer! What? Shall I be satisfied with the life of one dog? Smell on, ye vultures, company by company, smell on! For the day the labour, at night the feast!"

So I rose, astonished, and stood on one side. The witch-doctresses also stood on one side, wonderstruck, since no such smelling out as this had been seen in the land. For till this hour, when a man was swept with the gnu's tail of the *Isanusi* that was the instant of his death. Why, then, men asked in their hearts, was the death delayed? The witch-doctors asked it also, and looked to the king for light, as men look to a thunder-cloud for the flash. But from the Black One there came no word.

So we stood on one side, and a second party of the *Isanusi* women began their rites. As the others had done, so they did, and yet they worked otherwise, for this is the fashion of the *Isanusi*, that no two of them smelt out in the same way. And this party swept the faces of certain of the king's councillors, naming them guilty of the witch-work.

"Stand ye on one side!" said the king to those who had been smelt out; "and ye who have hunted out their wickedness, stand ye with those who named Mopo, son of Makedama. It well may be that all are guilty."

So these stood on one side also, and a third party took up the tale. And they named certain of the great generals, and were in turn bidden to stand on one side together with those whom they had named.

So it went on through all the day. Company by company the women doomed their victims, till there were no more left in their number, and were commanded to stand aside together with those whom they had doomed. Then the male *Isanusi* began, and I could see well that by this time their hearts were fearful, for they smelt a snare. Yet the king's bidding must be done, and though their magic failed them here, victims must be found. So they smelt out this man and that man till we were a great company of the doomed, who sat in silence on the ground looking at each other with sad eyes and watching the sun, which we deemed our last, climb slowly down the sky. And ever as the day waned those who were left untried of the witch-doctors grew madder and more fierce. They leaped into the air, they ground their teeth, and rolled upon the ground. They drew forth snakes and devoured them alive, they shrieked out to the spirits and called upon the names of ancient kings.

At length it drew on to evening, and the last company of the witch-doctors did their work, smelling out some of the keepers of the *Emposeni*, the house of the women. But there was one man of their company, a young man and a tall, who held back and took no share in the work, but stood by himself in the centre of the great circle, fixing his eyes on the heavens.

And when this company had been ordered to stand aside also together with those whom they had smelt out, the king called aloud to the last of the witch-doctors, asking him of his name and tribe, and why he alone did not do his office.

"My name is Indabazimbi, the son of Arpi, O king," he answered, "and I am of the tribe of the Maquilisini. Does the king bid me to smelt out him of whom the spirits have spoken to me as the worker of this deed?"

"I bid thee," said the king.

Then the young man Indabazimbi stepped straight forward across the ring, making no cries or gestures, but as one who walks from his gate to the cattle kraal, and suddenly he struck the king in the face with the tail in his hand, saying, "I smell out the *Heavens above me!*"<sup>[2]</sup>

[2] A Zulu title for the king.—ED.

Now a great gasp of wonder went up from the multitude, and all looked to see this fool killed by torture. But Chaka rose and laughed aloud.

"Thou hast said it," he cried, "and thou alone! Listen, ye people! *I* did the deed! *I* smote blood upon the gateways of my kraal; with my own hand *I* smote it, that *I* might learn who were the true doctors and who were the false! Now it seems that in the land of the Zulu there is one true doctor—this young man—and of the false, look at them and count them, they are like the leaves. See! there they stand, and by them stand those whom they have doomed—the innocent whom, with their wives and children, they have doomed to the death of the dog. Now *I* ask you, my people, what reward shall be given to them?"

Then a great roar went up from all the multitude, "Let them die, O king!"

"Ay!" he answered. "Let them die as liars should!"

Now the *Isanusi*s, men and women, screamed aloud in fear, and cried for mercy, tearing themselves with their nails, for least of all things did they desire to taste of their own medicine of death. But the king only laughed the more.

"Hearken ye!" he said, pointing to the crowd of us who had been smelt out. "Ye were doomed to death by these false prophets. Now glut yourselves upon them. Slay them, my children! slay them all! wipe them away! stamp them out!—all! all, save this young man!"

Then we bounded from the ground, for our hearts were fierce with hate and with longing to avenge the terrors we had borne. The doomed slew the doomers, while from the circle of the *Ingomboco* a great roar of laughter went up, for men rejoiced because the burden of the witch-doctors had fallen from them.

At last it was done, and we drew back from the heap of the dead. Nothing was heard there now—no more cries or prayers or curses. The witch-finders travelled the path on which they had set the feet of many. The king drew near to look. He came alone, and all who had done his bidding bent their heads and crept past him, praising him as they went. Only *I* stood still, covered, as *I* was with mire and filth, for *I* did not fear to stand in the presence of the king. Chaka drew near, and looked at the piled-up heaps of the slain and the cloud of dust that yet hung over them.

"There they lie, Mopo," he said. "There lie those who dared to prophesy falsely to the king! That was a good word of thine, Mopo, which taught me to set the snare for them; yet methought *I* saw thee start when Nobela, queen of the witch-doctresses, switched death on thee. Well, they are dead, and the land breathes more freely; and for the evil which they have done, it is as yonder dust, that shall soon sink again to earth and there be lost."

Thus he spoke, then ceased—for lo! something moved beneath the cloud of dust, something broke a way through the heap of the dead. Slowly it forced its path, pushing the slain this way and that, till at length it stood upon its feet and tottered towards us—a thing dreadful to look on. The shape was the shape of an aged woman, and even through the blood and mire *I* knew her. It was Nobela, she who had doomed me, she whom but now *I* had smitten to earth, but who had come back from the dead to curse me!

On she tottered, her apparel hanging round her in red rags, a hundred wounds upon her face and form. *I* saw that she was dying, but life still flickered in her, and the fire of hate burned in her snaky eyes.

"Hail, king!" she screamed.

"Peace, liar!" he answered; "thou art dead!"

"Not yet, king. *I* heard thy voice and the voice of yonder dog, whom *I* would have given to the jackals, and *I* will not die till *I* have spoken. *I* smelt him out this morning when *I* was alive; now that *I* am as one already dead, *I* smell him out again. He shall bewitch thee with blood indeed, Chaka—he and Unandi, thy mother, and Baleka, thy wife. Think of my words when the assegai reddens before thee for the last time, king! Farewell!" And she uttered a great cry and rolled upon the ground dead.

"The witch lies hard and dies hard," said the king carelessly, and turned upon his heel. But those words of dead Nobela remained fixed in his memory, or so much of them as had been spoken of Unandi and Baleka. There they remained like seeds in the earth, there they grew to bring forth fruit in their season.

And thus ended the great *Ingomboco* of Chaka, the greatest *Ingomboco* that ever was held in Zululand.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LOSS OF UMSLOPOGAAS

Now, after the smelling out of the witch-doctors, Chaka caused a watch to be kept upon his mother Unandi, and his wife Baleka, my sister, and report was brought to him by those who watched, that the two women came to my huts by stealth, and there kissed and nursed a boy—one of my children. Then Chaka remembered the prophecy of Nobela, the dead *Isanusi*, and his heart grew dark with doubt. But to me he said nothing of the matter, for then, as always, his eyes looked over my head. He did not fear me or believe that I plotted against him, I who was his dog. Still, he did this, though whether by chance or design I do not know: he bade me go on a journey to a distant tribe that lived near the borders of the Amaswazi, there to take count of certain of the king's cattle which were in the charge of that tribe, and to bring him account of the tale of their increase. So I bowed before the king, and said that I would run like a dog to do his bidding, and he gave me men to go with me.

Then I returned to my huts to bid farewell to my wives and children, and there I found that my wife, Anadi, the mother of Moosa, my son, had fallen sick with a wandering sickness, for strange things came into her mind, and what came into her mind that she said, being, as I did not doubt, bewitched by some enemy of my house.

Still, I must go upon the king's business, and I told this to my wife Macropha, the mother of Nada, and, as it was thought, of Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka. But when I spoke to Macropha of the matter she burst into tears and clung to me. I asked her why she wept thus, and she answered that the shadow of evil lay upon her heart, for she was sure that if I left her at the king's kraal, when I returned again I should find neither her nor Nada, my child, nor Umslopogaas, who was named my son, and whom I loved as a son, still in the land of life. Then I tried to calm her; but the more I strove the more she wept, saying that she knew well that these things would be so.

Now I asked her what could be done, for I was stirred by her tears, and the dread of evil crept from her to me as shadows creep from the valley to the mountain.

She answered, "Take me with you, my husband, that I may leave this evil land, where the very skies rain blood, and let me rest awhile in the place of my own people till the terror of Chaka has gone by."

"How can I do this?" I said. "None may leave the king's kraal without the king's pass."

"A man may put away his wife," she replied. "The king does not stand between a man and his wife. Say, my husband, that you love me no longer, that I bear you no more children, and that therefore you send me back whence I came. By-and-bye we will come together again if we are left among the living."

"So be it," I answered. "Leave the kraal with Nada and Umslopogaas this night, and to-morrow morning meet me at the river bank, and we shall go on together, and for the rest may the spirits of our fathers hold us safe."

So we kissed each other, and Macropha went on secretly with the children.

Now at the dawning on the morrow I summoned the men whom the king had given me, and we started upon our journey. When the sun was well up we came to the banks of the river, and there I found my wife Macropha, and with her the two children. They rose as I came, but I frowned at my wife and she gave me no greeting. Those with me looked at her askance.

"I have divorced this woman," I said to them. "She is a withered tree, a worn out old hag, and now I take her with me to send her to the country of the Swazis, whence she came. Cease weeping," I added to Macropha, "it is my last word."

"What says the king?" asked the men.

"I will answer to the king," I said. And we went on.

Now I must tell how we lost Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, who was then a great lad drawing on to manhood, fierce in temper, well grown and broad for his years.

We had journeyed seven days, for the way was long, and on the night of the seventh day we came to a mountainous country in which there were few kraals, for Chaka had eaten them all up years before. Perhaps you know the place, my father. In it is a great and strange mountain. It is haunted also, and named the Ghost Mountain, and on the top of it is a grey peak rudely shaped like the head of an aged woman. Here in this wild place we must sleep, for darkness drew on. Now we soon learned that there were many lions in the rocks around, for we heard their roaring and were much afraid, all except Umslopogaas, who feared nothing. So we made a circle of thorn-bushes and sat in it, holding our assegais ready. Presently the moon came up—it was a full-grown moon and very bright, so bright that we could see everything for a long way round. Now some six spear-throws from where we sat was a cliff, and at the top of the cliff was a cave, and in this cave lived two lions and their young. When the moon grew bright we saw the lions come out and stand upon the edge of the cliff, and with them were two little ones that played about like kittens, so that had we not been frightened it would have been beautiful to see them.

"Oh! Umslopogaas," said Nada, "I wish that I had one of the little lions for a dog."

The boy laughed, saying, "Then, shall I fetch you one, sister?"

"Peace, boy," I said. "No man may take young lions from their lair and live."

"Such things have been done, my father," he answered, laughing. And no more was said of the matter.

Now when the cubs had played awhile, we saw the lioness take up the cubs in her mouth and carry them into the cave. Then she came out again, and went away with her mate to seek food, and soon we heard them roaring in the distance. Now we stacked up the fire and went to sleep in our enclosure of thorns without fear, for we knew that the lions were far away eating game. But Umslopogaas did not sleep, for he had determined that he would fetch the cub which Nada had desired, and, being young and foolhardy, he did not think of the danger which he would bring upon himself and all of us. He knew no fear, and now, as ever, if Nada spoke a word, nay, even if she thought of a thing to desire it, he would not rest till it was won for her. So while we slept Umslopogaas crept like a snake from the fence of thorns, and, taking an assegai in his hand, he slipped away to the foot of the cliff where the lions had their den. Then he climbed the cliff, and, coming to the cave, entered there and groped his way into it. The cubs heard him, and, thinking that it was their mother who returned, began to whine and purr for food. Guided by the light of their yellow eyes, he crept over the bones, of which there were many in the cave, and came to where they lay. Then he put out his hands and seized one of the cubs, killing the other with his assegai, because he could not carry both of them. Now he made haste thence before the lions returned, and came back to the thorn fence where we lay just as dawn was breaking.

I awoke at the coming of the dawn, and, standing up, I looked out. Lo! there, on the farther side of the thorn fence, looking large in the grey mist, stood the lad Umslopogaas, laughing. In his teeth he held the assegai, yet dripping with blood, and in his hands the lion cub that, despite its whines and struggles, he grasped by the skin of the neck and the hind legs.

"Awake, my sister!" he cried; "here is the dog you seek. Ah! he bites now, but he will soon grow tame."

Nada awoke, and rising, cried out with joy at the sight of the cub, but for a moment I stood astonished.

"Fool!" I cried at last, "let the cub go before the lions come to rend us!"

"I will not let it go, my father," he answered sullenly. "Are there not five of us with spears, and can we not fight two cats? I was not afraid to go alone into their den. Are you all afraid to meet them in the open?"

"You are mad," I said; "let the cub go!" And I ran towards Umslopogaas to take it from him. But he sprang aside and avoided me.

"I will never let that go of which I have got hold," he said, "at least not living!" And suddenly he seized the head of the cub and twisted its neck; then threw it on to the ground, and added, "See, now I have done your bidding, my father!"

As he spoke we heard a great sound of roaring from the cave in the cliff. The lions had returned and found one cub dead and the other gone.

"Into the fence!—back into the fence!" I cried, and we sprang over the thorn-bushes where those with us were making ready their spears, trembling as they handled them with fear and the cold of the morning. We looked up. There, down the side of the cliff, came the lions, bounding on the scent of him who had robbed them of their young. The lion ran first, and as he came he roared; then followed the lioness, but she did not roar, for in her mouth was the cub that Umslopogaas had assailed in the cave. Now they drew near, mad with fury, their manes bristling, and lashing their flanks with their long tails.

"Curse you for a fool, son of Mopo," said one of the men with me to Umslopogaas; "presently I will beat you till the blood comes for this trick."

"First beat the lions, then beat me if you can," answered the lad, "and wait to curse till you have done both."

Now the lions were close to us; they came to the body of the second cub, that lay outside the fence of thorns. The lion stopped and sniffed it. Then he roared—ah! he roared till the earth shook. As for the lioness, she dropped the dead cub which she was carrying, and took the other into her mouth, for she could not carry both.

"Get behind me, Nada," cried Umslopogaas, brandishing his spear, "the lion is about to spring."

As the words left his mouth the great brute crouched to the ground. Then suddenly he sprang from it like a bird, and like a bird he travelled through the air towards us.

"Catch him on the spears!" cried Umslopogaas, and by nature, as it were, we did the boy's bidding; for huddling ourselves together, we held out the assegais so that the lion fell upon them as he sprang, and their blades sank far into him. But the weight of his charge carried us to the ground, and he fell on to us, striking at us and at the spears, and roaring with pain and fury as he struck. Presently he was on his legs biting at the spears in his breast. Then Umslopogaas, who alone did not wait his onslaught, but had stepped aside for his own ends, uttered a loud cry and drove his assegai into the lion behind the shoulder, so that with a groan the brute rolled over dead.

Meanwhile, the lioness stood without the fence, the second dead cub in her mouth, for she could not bring herself to leave either of them. But when she heard her mate's last groan she dropped the cub and gathered herself together to spring. Umslopogaas alone stood up to face her, for he only had withdrawn his assegai from the carcase of the lion. She swept on towards the lad, who stood like a stone to meet her. Now she met his spear, it sunk in, it snapped, and down fell Umslopogaas dead or senseless beneath the mass of the lioness. She sprang up, the broken spear standing in her breast, sniffed at Umslopogaas, then, as though she knew that it was he who had robbed her, she seized him by the loins and moocha, and sprang with him over the fence.

"Oh, save him!" cried the girl Nada in bitter woe. And we rushed after the lioness shouting.

For a moment she stood over her dead cubs, Umslopogaas hanging from her mouth, and looked at them as though she wondered; and we hoped that she might let him fall. Then, hearing our cries, she turned and bounded away towards the bush, bearing Umslopogaas in her mouth. We seized our spears and followed; but the ground grew stony, and, search as we would, we could find no trace of Umslopogaas or of the lioness. They had vanished like a cloud. So we came back, and, ah! my heart was sore, for I loved the lad as though he had indeed been my son. But I knew that he was dead, and there was an end.

"Where is my brother?" cried Nada when we came back.

"Lost," I answered. "Lost, never to be found again."

Then the girl gave a great and bitter cry, and fell to the earth saying, "I would that I were dead with my brother!"

"Let us be going," said Macropha, my wife.

"Have you no tears to weep for your son?" asked a man of our company.

"What is the use of weeping over the dead? Does it, then, bring them back?" she answered. "Let us be going!"

The man thought these words strange, but he did not know that Umslopogaas was not born of Macropha.

Still, we waited in that place a day, thinking that, perhaps, the lioness would return to her den and that, at least, we might kill her. But she came back no more. So on the next morning we rolled up our blankets and started forward on our journey, sad at heart. In truth, Nada was so weak from grief that she could hardly travel, but I never heard the name of Umslopogaas pass her lips again during that journey. She buried him in her heart and said nothing. And I too said nothing, but I wondered why it had been brought about that I should save the life of Umslopogaas from the jaws of the Lion of Zulu, that the lioness of the rocks might devour him.

And so the time went on till we reached the kraal where the king's business must be done, and where I and my wife should part.

On the morning after we came to the kraal, having kissed in secret, though in public we looked sullenly on one another, we parted as those part who meet no more, for it was in our thoughts, that we should never see each other's face again, nor, indeed, did we do so. And I drew Nada aside and spoke to her thus: "We part, my daughter; nor do I know when we shall meet again, for the times are troubled and it is for your safety and that of your mother that I rob my eyes of the sight of you. Nada, you will soon be a woman, and you will be fairer than any woman among our people, and it may come about that many great men will seek you in marriage, and, perhaps, that I, your father, shall not be there to choose for you whom you shall wed, according to the custom of our land. But I charge you, as far as may be possible for you to do so, take only a man whom you can love, and be faithful to him alone, for thus shall a woman find happiness."

Here I stopped, for the girl took hold of my hand and looked into my face. "Peace, my father," she said, "do not speak to me of marriage, for I will wed no man, now that Umslopogaas is dead because of my foolishness. I will live and die alone, and, oh! may I die quickly, that I may go to seek him whom I love only!"

"Nay, Nada," I said, "Umslopogaas was your brother, and it is not fitting that you should speak of him thus, even though he is dead."

"I know nothing of such matters, my father," she said. "I speak what my heart tells me, and it tells me that I loved Umslopogaas living, and, though he is dead, I shall love him alone to the end. Ah! you think me but a child, yet my heart is large, and it does not lie to me."

Now I upbraided the girl no more, because I knew that Umslopogaas was not her brother, but one whom she might have married. Only I marvelled that the voice of nature should speak so truly in her, telling her that which was lawful, even when it seemed to be most unlawful.

"Speak no more of Umslopogaas," I said, "for surely he is dead, and though you cannot forget him, yet speak of him no more, and I pray of you, my daughter, that if we do not meet again, yet you should keep me in your memory, and the love I bear you, and the words which from time to time I have said to you. The world is a thorny wilderness, my daughter, and its thorns are watered with a rain of blood, and we wander in our wretchedness like lost travellers in a mist; nor do I know why our feet are set on this wandering. But at last there comes an end, and we die and go hence, none know where, but perhaps where we go the evil may change to the good, and those who were dear to each other on the earth may become yet dearer in the heavens; for I believe that man is not born to perish altogether, but is rather gathered again to the Umkulunkulu who sent him on his journeyings. Therefore keep hope, my daughter, for if these things are not so, at least sleep remains, and sleep is soft, and so farewell."

Then we kissed and parted, and I watched Macropha, my wife, and Nada, my daughter, till they melted into the sky, as they walked upon their journey to Swaziland, and was very sad, because, having lost Umslopogaas, he who in after days was named the Slaughterer and the Woodpecker, I must lose them also.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TRIAL OF MOPO

Now I sat four days in the huts of the tribe whither I had been sent, and did the king's business. And on the fifth morning I rose up, together with those with me, and we turned our faces towards the king's kraal. But when we had journeyed a little way we met a party of soldiers, who commanded us to stand.

"What is it, king's men?" I asked boldly.

"This, son of Makedama," answered their spokesman: "give over to us your wife Macropha and your children Umslopogaas and Nada, that we may do with them as the king commands."

"Umslopogaas," I answered, "has gone where the king's arm cannot stretch, for he is dead; and for my wife Macropha and my daughter Nada, they are by now in the caves of the Swazis, and the king must seek them there with an army if he will find them. To Macropha he is welcome, for I hate her, and have divorced her; and as for the girl, well, there are many girls, and it is no great matter if she lives or dies, yet I pray him to spare her."

Thus I spoke carelessly, for I knew well that my wife and child were beyond the reach of Chaka.

"You do well to ask the girl's life," said the soldier, laughing, "for all those born to you are dead, by order of the king."

"Is it indeed so?" I answered calmly, though my knees shook and my tongue clove to my lips. "The will of the king be done. A cut stick puts out new leaves; I can have more children."

"Ay, Mopo; but first you must get new wives, for yours are dead also, all five of them."

"Is it indeed so?" I answered. "The king's will be done. I wearied of those brawling women."

"So, Mopo," said the soldier; "but to get other wives and have more children born to you, you must live yourself, for no children are born to the dead, and I think that Chaka has an assegai which you shall kiss."

"Is it so?" I answered. "The king's will be done. The sun is hot, and I tire of the road. He who kisses the assegai sleeps sound."

Thus I spoke, my father, and, indeed, in that hour I desired to die. The world was empty for me. Macropha and Nada were gone, Umslopogaas was dead, and my other wives and children were murdered. I had no heart to begin to build up a new house, none were left for me to love, and it seemed well that I should die also.

The soldiers asked those with me if that tale was true which I told of the death of Umslopogaas and of the going of Macropha and Nada into Swaziland. They said, Yes, it was true. Then the soldiers said that they would lead me back to the king, and I wondered at this, for I thought that they would kill me where I stood. So we went on, and piece by piece I learned what had happened at the king's kraal.

On the day after I left, it came to the ears of Chaka, by the mouth of his spies, that my second wife—Anadi—was sick and spoke strange words in her sickness. Then, taking three soldiers with him, he went to my kraal at the death of the day. He left the three soldiers by the gates of the kraal, bidding them to suffer none to come in or go out, but Chaka himself entered the large hut where Anadi lay sick, having his toy assegai, with the shaft of the royal red wood, in his hand. Now, as it chanced, in the hut were Unandi, the mother of Chaka, and Baleka, my sister, the wife of Chaka, for, not knowing that I had taken away Umslopogaas, the son of Baleka, according to their custom, these two foolish women had come to kiss and fondle the lad. But when they entered the hut they found it full of my other wives and children. These they sent away, all except Moosa, the son of Anadi—that boy who was born eight days before Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka. But they kept Moosa in the hut, and kissed him, giving him imphi<sup>[1]</sup> to eat, fearing lest it should seem strange to the women, my wives, if, Umslopogaas being gone, they refused to take notice of any other child.

[1] A variety of sugar-cane.—ED.

Now as they sat thus, presently the doorway was darkened, and, behold! the king himself crept through it, and saw them fondling the child Moosa. When they knew who it was that entered, the women flung themselves upon the ground before him and praised him. But he smiled grimly, and bade them be seated. Then he spoke to them, saying, "You wonder, Unandi, my mother, and Baleka, my wife, why it is that I am come here into the hut of Mopo, son of Makedama. I will tell you: it is because he is away upon my business, and I hear that his wife Anadi is sick—it is she who lies there, is it not? Therefore, as the first doctor in the land, I am come to cure her, Unandi, my mother, and Baleka, my sister."

Thus he spoke, eyeing them as he did so, and taking snuff from the blade of his little assegai, and though his words were gentle they shook with fear, for when Chaka spoke thus gently he meant death to many. But Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, answered, saying that it was well that the king had come, since his medicine would bring rest and peace to her who lay sick.

"Yes," he answered; "it is well. It is pleasant, moreover, my mother and sister, to see you kissing yonder child. Surely, were he of your own blood you could not love him more."

Now they trembled again, and prayed in their hearts that Anadi, the sick woman, who lay asleep, might not wake and utter foolish words in her wandering. But the prayer was answered from below and not from above, for Anadi woke, and, hearing the voice of the king, her sick mind flew to him whom she believed to be the king's child.

"Ah!" she said, sitting upon the ground and pointing to her own son, Moosa, who squatted frightened against the wall of the hut. "Kiss him, Mother of the Heavens, kiss him! Whom do they call him, the young cub who brings ill-fortune to our doors? They call him the son of Mopo and Macropha!" And she laughed wildly, stopped speaking, and sank back upon the bed of skins.

"They call him the son of Mopo and Macropha," said the king in a low voice. "Whose son is he, then, woman?"

"Oh, ask her not, O king," cried his mother and his wife, casting themselves upon the ground before him, for they were mad with fear. "Ask her not; she has strange fancies such as are not meet for your ears to hear. She is bewitched, and has dreams and fancies."

"Peace!" he answered. "I will listen to this woman's wanderings. Perhaps some star of truth shines in her darkness, and I would see light. Who, then, is he, woman?"

"Who is he?" she answered. "Are you a fool that ask who he is? He is—hush!—put your ear close—let me speak low lest the reeds of the hut speak it to the king. He is—do you listen? He is—the son of Chaka and Baleka, the sister of Mopo, the changeling whom Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, palmed off upon this house to bring a curse on it, and whom she would lead out before the people when the land is weary of the wickedness of the king, her son, to take the place of the king."

"It is false, O king!" cried the two women. "Do not listen to her; it is false. The boy is her own son, Moosa, whom she does not know in her sickness."

But Chaka stood up in the hut and laughed terribly. "Truly, Nobela prophesied well," he cried, "and I did ill to slay her. So this is the trick thou hast played upon me, my mother. Thou wouldst give a son to me who will have no son: thou wouldst give me a son to kill me. Good! Mother of the Heavens, take thou the doom of the Heavens! Thou wouldst give me a son to slay me and rule in my place; now, in turn, I, thy son, will rob me of a mother. Die, Unandi!—die at the hand thou didst bring forth!" And he lifted the little assegai and smote it through her.

For a moment Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, wife of Senzangacona, stood uttering no cry. Then she put up her hand, and drew the assegai from her side.

"So shalt thou die also, Chaka the Evil!" she cried, and fell down dead there in the hut.

Thus, then, did Chaka murder his mother Unandi.

Now when Baleka saw what had been done, she turned and fled from the hut into the *Emposeni*, and so swiftly that the guards at the gates could not stop her. But when she reached her own hut Baleka's strength failed her, and she fell senseless on the ground. But the boy Moosa, my son, being overcome with terror, stayed where he was, and Chaka, believing him to be his son, murdered him also, and with his own hand.

Then he stalked out of the hut, and leaving the three guards at the gate, commanded a company of soldiers to surround the kraal and fire it. This they did, and as the people rushed out they killed them, and those who did not run out were burned in the fire. Thus, then, perished all my wives, my children, my servants, and those who were within the gates in their company. The tree was burned, and the bees in it, and I alone was left living—I and Macropha and Nada, who were far away.

Nor was Chaka yet satisfied with blood, for, as has been told, he sent messengers bidding them kill Macropha, my wife, and Nada, my daughter, and him who was named my son. But he commanded the messengers that they should not slay me, but bring me living before him.

Now when the soldiers did not kill me I took counsel with myself, for it was my belief that I was saved alive only that I might die later, and in a more cruel fashion. Therefore for awhile I thought that it would be well if I did that for myself which another purposed to do for me. Why should I, who was already doomed, wait to meet my doom? What had I left to keep me in the place of life, seeing that all whom I loved were dead or gone? To die would be easy, for I knew the ways of death. In my girdle I carried a secret medicine; he who eats of it, my father, will see the sun's shadow move no more, and will never look upon the stars again. But I was minded to know the assegai or the kerrie; nor would I perish more slowly beneath the knives of the tormentors, nor be parched by the pangs of thirst, or wander eyeless to my end. Therefore it was that, since I had sat in the doom ring looking hour after hour into the face of death, I had borne this medicine with me by night and by day. Surely now was the time to use it.

So I thought as I sat through the watches of the night, ay! and drew out the bitter drug and laid it on my tongue. But as I did so I remembered my daughter Nada, who was left to me, though she sojourned in a far country, and my wife Macropha and my sister Baleka, who still lived, so said the soldiers, though how it came about that the king had not killed her I did not know then. Also another thought was born in my heart. While life remained to me, I might be revenged upon him who had wrought me this woe; but can the dead strike? Alas! the dead are strengthless, and if they still have hearts to suffer, they have no hands to give back blow for blow. Nay, I would live on. Time to die when death could no more be put away. Time to die when the voice of Chaka spoke my doom. Death chooses for himself and answers no questions; he is a guest to whom none need open the door of his hut, for when he wills he can pass through the thatch like air. Not yet would I taste of that medicine of mine.

So I lived on, my father, and the soldiers led me back to the kraal of Chaka. Now when we came to the kraal it was night, for the sun had sunk as we passed through the gates. Still, as he had been commanded, the captain of those who watched me went in before the king and told him that I lay without in bonds. And the king said, "Let him be brought before me, who was my physician, that I may tell him how I have doctored those of his house."

So they took me and led me to the royal house, and pushed me through the doorway of the great hut.

Now a fire burned in the hut, for the night was cold, and Chaka sat on the further side of the fire, looking towards the opening of the hut, and the smoke from the fire wreathed him round, and its light shone upon his face and flickered in his terrible eyes.

At the door of the hut certain councillors seized me by the arms and dragged me towards the fire. But I broke from them, and prostrating myself, for my arms were free, I praised the king and called him by his royal names. The councillors sprang towards me to seize me again, but Chaka said, "Let him be; I would talk with my servant." Then the councillors bowed themselves on either side, and laid their hands on their sticks, their foreheads touching the ground. But I sat down on the floor of the hut over against the king, and we talked through the fire.

"Tell me of the cattle that I sent thee to number, Mopo, son of Makedama," said Chaka. "Have my servants dealt honestly with my cattle?"

"They have dealt honestly, O king," I answered.

"Tell me, then, of the number of the cattle and of their markings, Mopo, forgetting none."

So I sat and told him, ox by ox, cow by cow, and heifer by heifer, forgetting none; and Chaka listened silently as one who is asleep. But I knew that he did not sleep, for all the while the firelight flickered in his fierce eyes. Also I knew that he did but torment me, or that, perhaps, he would learn of the cattle before he killed me. At length all the tale was told.

"So," said the king, "it goes well. There are yet honest men left in the land. Knowest thou, Mopo, that sorrow has come upon thy house while thou wast about my business."

"I have heard it, O king!" I answered, as one who speaks of a small matter.

"Yes, Mopo, sorrow has come upon thy house, the curse of Heaven has fallen upon thy kraal. They tell me, Mopo, that the fire from above ran briskly through thy huts."

"I have heard it, O king!"

"They tell me, Mopo, that those within thy gates grew mad at the sight of the fire, and dreaming there was no escape, that they stabbed themselves with assegais or leaped into the flames."

"I have heard it, O king! What of it? Any river is deep enough to drown a fool!"

"Thou hast heard these things, Mopo, but thou hast not yet heard all. Knowest thou, Mopo, that among those who died in thy kraal was she who bore me, she who was named Mother of the Heavens?"

Then, my father, I, Mopo, acted wisely, because of the thought which my good spirit gave me, for I cast myself upon the ground, and wailed aloud as though in utter grief.

"Spare my ears, Black One!" I wailed. "Tell me not that she who bore thee is dead, O Lion of the Zulu. For the others, what is it? It is a breath of wind, it is a drop of water; but this trouble is as the gale or as the sea."

"Cease, my servant, cease!" said the mocking voice of Chaka; "but know this, thou hast done well to grieve aloud, because the Mother of the Heavens is no more, and ill wouldst thou have done to grieve because the fire from above has kissed thy gates. For hadst thou done this last thing or left the first undone, I should have known that thy heart was wicked, and by now thou wouldst have wept indeed—tears of blood, Mopo. It is well for thee, then, that thou hast read my riddle aright."

Now I saw the depths of the pit that Chaka had dug for me, and blessed my *Ehlosé* who had put into my heart those words which I should answer. I hoped also that Chaka would now let me go; but it was not to be, for this was but the beginning of my trial.

"Knowest thou, Mopo," said the king, "that as my mother died yonder in the flames of thy kraal she cried out strange and terrible words which came to my ears through the singing of the fire. These were her words: that thou, Mopo, and thy sister Baleka, and thy wives, had conspired together to give a child to me who would be childless. These were her words, the words that came to me through the singing of the fire. Tell me now, Mopo, where are those children that thou ledest from thy kraal, the boy with the lion eyes who is named Umslopogaas, and the girl who is named Nada?"

"Umslopogaas is dead by the lion's mouth, O king!" I answered, "and Nada sits in the Swazi caves." And I told him of the death of Umslopogaas and of how I had divorced Macropha, my wife.

"The boy with the lion eyes to the lion's mouth!" said Chaka. "Enough of him; he is gone. Nada may yet be sought for with the assegai in the Swazi caves; enough of her. Let us speak of this song that my mother—who, alas! is dead, Mopo—this song she sang through the singing of the flames. Tell me, Mopo, tell me now, was it a true tale?"

"Nay, O king! surely the Mother of the Heavens was maddened by the Heavens when she sang that song," I answered. "I know nothing of it, O king."

"Thou knowest naught of it, Mopo?" said the king. And again he looked at me terribly through the reek of the fire. "Thou knowest naught of it, Mopo? Surely thou art a-cold; thy hands shake with cold. Nay, man, fear not—warm them, warm them, Mopo. See, now, plunge that hand of thine into the heart of the flame!" And he pointed with his little assegai, the assegai handled with the royal wood, to where the fire glowed reddest—ay, he pointed and laughed.

Then, my father, I grew cold indeed—yes, I grew cold who soon should be hot, for I saw the purpose of Chaka. He would put me to the trial by fire.

For a moment I sat silent, thinking. Then the king spoke again in a great voice: "Nay, Mopo, be not so backward; shall I sit warm and see thee suffer cold? What, my councillors, rise, take the hand of Mopo, and hold it to the flame, that his heart may rejoice in the warmth of the flame while we speak together of this matter of the child that was, so my mother sang, born to Baleka, my wife, the sister of Mopo, my servant."

"There is little need for that, O king," I answered, being made bold by fear, for I saw that if I did nothing death would swiftly end my doubts. Once, indeed, I bethought me of the poison that I bore, and was minded to swallow it and make an end, but the desire to live is great, and keen is the thirst for vengeance, so I said to my heart, "Not yet awhile; I will endure this also; afterwards, if need be, I can die."

"I thank the king for his graciousness, and I will warm me at the fire. Speak on, O king, while I warm myself, and thou shalt hear true words," I said boldly.

Then, my father, I stretched out my left hand and plunged it into the fire—not into the hottest of the fire, but where the smoke leapt from the flame. Now my flesh was wet with the sweat of fear, and for a little moment the flames curled round it and did not burn me. But I knew that the torment was to come.

For a short while Chaka watched me, smiling. Then he spoke slowly, that the fire might find time to do its work.

"Say, then, Mopo, thou knowest nothing of this matter of the birth of a son to thy sister Baleka?"

"I know this only, O king!" I answered, "that a son was born in past years to thy wife Baleka, that I killed the child in obedience to thy word, and laid its body before thee."

Now, my father, the steam from my flesh had been drawn from my hand by the heat, and the flame got hold of me and ate into my flesh, and its torment was great. But of this I showed no sign upon my face, for I knew well that if I showed sign or uttered cry, then, having failed in the trial, death would be my portion.

Then the king spoke again, "Dost thou swear by my head, Mopo, that no son of mine was suckled in thy kraals?"

"I swear it, O king! I swear it by thy head," I answered.

And now, my father, the agony of the fire was such as may not be told. I felt my eyes start forward in their sockets, my blood seemed to boil within me, it rushed into my head, and down my face there ran two tears of blood. But yet I held my hand in the fire and made no sign, while the king and his councillors watched me curiously. Still, for a moment Chaka said nothing, and that moment seemed to me as all the years of my life.

"Ah!" he said at length, "I see that thou growest warm, Mopo! Withdraw thy hand from the flame. I am answered; thou hast passed the trial; thy heart is clean; for had there been lies in it the fire had given them tongue, and thou hadst cried aloud, making thy last music, Mopo!"

Now I took my hand from the flame, and for awhile the torment left me.

"It is well, O king," I said calmly. "Fire has no power of hurt on those whose heart is pure."

But as I spoke I looked at my left hand. It was black, my father—black as a charred stick, and the nails were gone from the twisted fingers. Look at it now, my father; you can see, though my eyes are blind. The hand is white, like yours—it is white and dead and shrivelled. These are the marks of the fire in Chaka's hut—the fire that kissed me many, many years ago; I have had but little use of that hand since this night of torment. But my right arm yet remained to me, my father, and, ah! I used it.

"It seems that Nobela, the doctress, who is dead, lied when she prophesied evil on me from thee, Mopo," said Chaka again. "It seems that thou art innocent of this offence, and that Baleka, thy sister, is innocent, and that the song which the Mother of the Heavens sang through the singing flames was no true song. It is well for thee, Mopo, for in such a matter my oath had not helped thee. But my mother is dead—dead in the flames with thy wives and children, Mopo, and in this there is witchcraft. We will have a mourning, Mopo, thou and I, such a mourning as has not been seen in Zululand, for all the people on the earth shall weep at it. And there shall be a 'smelling out' at this mourning, Mopo. But we will summon no witch-doctors, thou and I will be witch-doctors, and ourselves shall smell out those who have brought these woes upon us. What! shall my mother die unavenged, she who bore me and has perished by witchcraft, and shall thy wives and children die unavenged—thou being innocent? Go forth, Mopo, my faithful servant, whom I have honoured with the warmth of my fire, go forth!" And once again he stared at me through the reek of the flame, and pointed with his assegai to the door of the hut.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE COUNSEL OF BALEKA

I rose, I praised the king with a loud voice, and I went from the *Intunkulu*, the house of the king. I walked slowly through the gates, but when I was without the gates the anguish that took me because of my burnt hand was more than I could bear. I ran to and fro groaning till I came to the hut of one whom I knew. There I found fat, and having plunged my hand in the fat, I wrapped it round with a skin and passed out again, for I could not stay still. I went to and fro, till at length I reached the spot where my huts had been. The outer fence of the huts still stood; the fire had not caught it. I passed through the fence; there within were the ashes of the burnt huts—they lay ankle-deep. I walked in among the ashes; my feet struck upon things that were sharp. The moon was bright, and I looked; they were the blackened bones of my wives and children. I flung myself down in the ashes in bitterness of heart; I covered myself over with the ashes of my kraal and with the bones of my wives and children. Yes, my father, there I lay, and on me were the ashes, and among the ashes were the bones. Thus, then, did I lie for the last time in my kraal, and was sheltered from the frost of the night by the dust of those to whom I had given life. Such were the things that befell us in the days of Chaka, my father; yes, not to me alone, but to many another also.

I lay among the ashes and groaned with the pain of my burn, and groaned also from the desolation of my heart. Why had I not tasted the poison, there in the hut of Chaka, and before the eyes of Chaka? Why did I not taste it now and make an end? Nay, I had endured the agony; I would not give him this last triumph over me. Now, having passed the fire, once more I should be great in the land, and I would become great. Yes, I would bear my sorrows, and become great, that in a day to be I might wreak vengeance on the king. Ah! my father, there, as I rolled among the ashes, I prayed to the *Amatongo*, to the ghosts of my ancestors. I prayed to my *Ehlosé*, to the spirit that watches me—ay, and I even dared to pray to the Umkulunkulu, the great soul of the world, who moves through the heavens and the earth unseen and unheard. And thus I prayed, that I might yet live to kill Chaka as he had killed those who were dear to me. And while I prayed I slept, or, if I did not sleep, the light of thought went out of me, and I became as one dead. Then there came a vision to me, a vision that was sent in answer to my prayer, or, perchance, it was a madness born of my sorrows. For, my father, it seemed to me that I stood upon the bank of a great and wide river. It was gloomy there, the light lay low upon the face of the river, but far away on the farther side was a glow like the glow of a stormy dawn, and in the glow I saw a mighty bed of reeds that swayed about in the breath of dawn, and out of the reeds came men and women and children, by hundreds and thousands, and plunged into the waters of the river and were buffeted about by them. Now, my father, all the people that I saw in the water were black people, and all those who were torn out of the reeds were black—they were none of them white like your people, my father, for this vision was a vision of the Zulu race, who alone are “torn out of the reeds.” Now, I saw that of those who swam in the river some passed over very quickly and some stood still, as it were, still in the water—as in life, my father, some die soon and some live for many years. And I saw the countless faces of those in the water, among them were many that I knew. There, my father, I saw the face of Chaka, and near him was my own face; there, too, I saw the face of Dingaan, the prince, his brother, and the face of the boy Umslopogaas and the face of Nada, my daughter, and then for the first time I knew that Umslopogaas was not dead, but only lost.

Now I turned in my vision, and looked at that bank of the river on which I stood. Then I saw that behind the bank was a cliff, mighty and black, and in the cliff were doors of ivory, and through them came light and the sound of laughter; there were other doors also, black as though fashioned of coal, and through them came darkness and the sounds of groans. I saw also that in front of the doors was set a seat, and on the seat was the figure of a glorious woman. She was tall, and she alone was white, and clad in robes of white, and her hair was like gold which is molten in the fire, and her face shone like the midday sun. Then I saw that those who came up out of the river stood before the woman, the water yet running from them, and cried aloud to her.

“Hail, *Inkosazana-y-Zulu!* Hail, Queen of the Heavens!”

Now the figure of the glorious woman held a rod in either hand, and the rod in her right hand was white and of ivory, and the rod in her left hand was black and of ebony. And as those who came up before her throne greeted her, so she pointed now with the wand of ivory in her right hand, and now with the wand of ebony in her left hand. And with the wand of ivory she pointed to the gates of ivory, through which came light and laughter, and with the wand of ebony she pointed to the gates of coal, through which came blackness and groans. And as she pointed, so those who greeted her turned, and went, some through the gates of light and some through the gates of blackness.

Presently, as I stood, a handful of people came up from the bank of the river. I looked on them and knew them. There was Unandi, the mother of Chaka, there was Anadi, my wife, and Moosa, my son, and all my other wives and children, and those who had perished with them.

They stood before the figure of the woman, the Princess of the Heavens, to whom the Umkulunkulu has given it to watch over the people of the Zulu, and cried aloud, “Hail, *Inkosazana-y-Zulu!* Hail!”

Then she, the Inkosazana, pointed with the rod of ivory to the gates of ivory; but still they stood before her, not moving. Now the woman spoke for the first time, in a low voice that was sad and awful to hear.

“Pass in, children of my people, pass in to the judgment. Why tarry ye? Pass in through the gates of light.”

But still they tarried, and in my vision Unandi spoke: “We tarry, Queen of the Heavens—we tarry to pray for justice on him who murdered us. I, who on earth was named Mother of the Heavens, on behalf of all this company, pray to thee, Queen of the Heavens, for justice on him who murdered us.”

“How is he named?” asked the voice that was low and awful.

“Chaka, king of the Zulus,” answered the voice of Unandi. “Chaka, my son.”

"Many have come to ask for vengeance on that head," said the voice of the Queen of the Heavens, "and many more shall come. Fear not, Unandi, it shall fall. Fear not, Anadi and ye wives and children of Mopo, it shall fall, I say. With the spear that pierced thy breast, Unandi, shall the breast of Chaka be also pierced, and, ye wives and children of Mopo, the hand that pierces shall be the hand of Mopo. As I guide him so shall he go. Ay, I will teach him to wreak my vengeance on the earth! Pass in, children of my people—pass in to the judgment, for the doom of Chaka is written."

Thus I dreamed, my father. Ay, this was the vision that was sent me as I lay in pain and misery among the bones of my dead in the ashes of my kraal. Thus it was given me to see the Inkosazana of the Heavens as she is in her own place. Twice more I saw her, as you shall hear, but that was on the earth and with my waking eyes. Yes, thrice has it been given to me in all to look upon that face that I shall now see no more till I am dead, for no man may look four times on the Inkosazana and live. Or am I mad, my father, and did I weave these visions from the woof of my madness? I do not know, but it is true that I seemed to see them.

I woke when the sky was grey with the morning light; it was the pain of my burnt hand that aroused me from my sleep or from my stupor. I rose shaking the ashes from me, and went without the kraal to wash away their defilement. Then I returned, and sat outside the gates of the *Emposeni*, waiting till the king's women, whom he named his sisters, should come to draw water according to their custom. At last they came, and, sitting with my kaross thrown over my face to hide it, looked for the passing of Baleka. Presently I saw her; she was sad-faced, and walked slowly, her pitcher on her head. I whispered her name, and she drew aside behind an aloe bush, and, making pretence that her foot was pierced with a thorn, she lingered till the other women had gone by. Then she came up to me, and we greeted one another, gazing heavily into each other's eyes.

"In an ill day did I hearken to you, Baleka," I said, "to you and to the Mother of the Heavens, and save your child alive. See now what has sprung from this seed! Dead are all my house, dead is the Mother of the Heavens—all are dead—and I myself have been put to the torment by fire," and I held out my withered hand towards her.

"Ay, Mopo, my brother," she answered, "but flesh is nearest to flesh, and I should think little of it were not my son Umslopogaas also dead, as I have heard but now."

"You speak like a woman, Baleka. Is it, then, nothing to you that I, your brother, have lost—all I love?"

"Fresh seed can yet be raised up to you, my brother, but for me there is no hope, for the king looks on me no more. I grieve for you, but I had this one alone, and flesh is nearest to flesh. Think you that I shall escape? I tell you nay. I am but spared for a little, then I go where the others have gone. Chaka has marked me for the grave; for a little while I may be left, then I die: he does but play with me as a leopard plays with a wounded buck. I care not, I am weary, but I grieve for the boy; there was no such boy in the land. Would that I might die swiftly and go to seek him."

"And if the boy is not dead, Baleka, what then?"

"What is that you said?" she answered, turning on me with wild eyes. "Oh, say it again—again, Mopo! I would gladly die a hundred deaths to know that Umslopogaas still lives."

"Nay, Baleka, I know nothing. But last night I dreamed a dream," and I told her all my dream, and also of that which had gone before the dream.

She listened as one listens to the words of a king when he passes judgement for life or for death.

"I think that there is wisdom in your dreams, Mopo," she said at length. "You were ever a strange man, to whom the gates of distance are no bar. Now it is borne in upon my heart that Umslopogaas still lives, and now I shall die happy. Yes, gainsay me not; I shall die, I know it. I read it in the king's eyes. But what is it? It is nothing, if only the prince Umslopogaas yet lives."

"Your love is great, woman," I said; "and this love of yours has brought many woes upon us, and it may well happen that in the end it shall all be for nothing, for there is an evil fate upon us. Say now, what shall I do? Shall I fly, or shall I abide here, taking the chance of things?"

"You must stay here, Mopo. See, now! This is in the king's mind. He fears because of the death of his mother at his own hand—yes, even he; he is afraid lest the people should turn upon him who killed his own mother. Therefore he will give it out that he did not kill her, but that she perished in the fire which was called down upon your kraals by witchcraft; and, though all men know the lie, yet none shall dare to gainsay him. As he said to you, there will be a smelling out, but a smelling out of a new sort, for he and you shall be the witch-finders, and at that smelling out he will give to death all those whom he fears, all those whom he knows hate him for his wickedness and because with his own hand he slew his mother. For this cause, then, he will save you alive, Mopo—yes, and make you great in the land, for if, indeed, his mother Unandi died through witchcraft, as he shall say, are you not also wronged by him, and did not your wives and children also perish by witchcraft? Therefore, do not fly; abide here and become great—become great to the great end of vengeance, Mopo, my brother. You have much wrong to wreak; soon you will have more, for I, too, shall be gone, and my blood also shall cry for vengeance to you. Hearken, Mopo. Are there not other princes in the land? What of Dingaan, what of Umhlangana, what of Umpanda, brothers to the king? Do not these also desire to be kings? Do they not day by day rise from sleep feeling their limbs to know if they yet live, do they not night by night lie down to sleep not knowing if it shall be their wives that they shall kiss ere dawn or the red assegai of the king? Draw near to them, my brother; creep into their hearts and learn their counsel or teach them yours; so in the end shall Chaka be brought to that gate through which your wives have passed, and where I also am about to tread."

Thus Baleka spoke and she was gone, leaving me pondering, for her words were heavy with wisdom. I knew well that the brothers of the king went heavily and in fear of death, for his shadow was on them. With Panda, indeed, little could be done, for he lived softly, speaking always as one whose wits are few. But Dingaan and Umhlangana were of another wood, and from them might be fashioned a kerrie that should scatter the brains of Chaka to the birds. But the time to speak was not now; not yet was the cup of Chaka full.

Then, having finished my thought, I rose, and, going to the kraal of my friend, I doctored my burnt hand, that pained me, and as I was doctoring it there came a messenger to me summoning me before the king.

I went in before the king, and prostrated myself, calling him by his royal names; but he took me by the hand and raised me up, speaking softly.

"Rise, Mopo, my servant!" he said. "Thou hast suffered much woe because of the witchcraft of thine enemies. I, I have lost my mother, and thou, thou hast lost thy wives and children. Weep, my councillors, weep, because I have lost my mother, and Mopo, my servant, has lost his wives and children, by the witchcraft of our foes!"

Then all the councillors wept aloud, while Chaka glared at them.

“Hearken, Mopo!” said the king, when the weeping was done. “None can give me back my mother; but I can give thee more wives, and thou shalt find children. Go in among the damsels who are reserved to the king, and choose thee six; go in among the cattle of the king, and choose thee ten times ten of the best; call upon the servants of the king that they build up thy kraal greater and fairer than it was before! These things I give thee freely; but thou shalt have more, Mopo—yes! thou shalt have vengeance! On the first day of the new moon I summon a great meeting, a *bandhla* of all the Zulu people: yes, thine own tribe, the Langeni, shall be there also. Then we will mourn together over our woes; then, too, we will learn who brought these woes upon us. Go now, Mopo, go! And go ye also, my councillors, leaving me to weep alone because my mother is dead!”

Thus, then, my father, did the words of Baleka come true, and thus, because of the crafty policy of Chaka, I grew greater in the land than ever I had been before. I chose the cattle, they were fat; I chose the wives, they were fair; but I took no pleasure in them, nor were any more children born to me. For my heart was like a withered stick; the sap and strength had gone from my heart—it was drawn out in the fire of Chaka’s hut, and lost in my sorrow for those whom I had loved.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TALE OF GALAZI THE WOLF

Now, my father, I will go back a little, for my tale is long and winds in and out like a river in a plain, and tell of the fate of Umslopogaas when the lion had taken him, as he told it to me in the after years.

The lioness bounded away, and in her mouth was Umslopogaas. Once he struggled, but she bit him hard, so he lay quiet in her mouth, and looking back he saw the face of Nada as she ran from the fence of thorns, crying "Save him!" He saw her face, he heard her words, then he saw and heard little more, for the world grew dark to him and he passed, as it were, into a deep sleep. Presently Umslopogaas awoke again, feeling pain in his thigh, where the lioness had bitten him, and heard a sound of shouting. He looked up; near to him stood the lioness that had loosed him from her jaws. She was snorting with rage, and in front of her was a lad long and strong, with a grim face, and a wolf's hide, black and grey, bound about his shoulders in such fashion that the upper jaw and teeth of the wolf rested on his head. He stood before the lioness, shouting, and in one hand he held a large war-shield, and in the other he grasped a heavy club shod with iron.

Now the lioness crouched herself to spring, growling terribly, but the lad with the club did not wait for her onset. He ran in upon her and struck her on the head with the club. He smote hard and well, but this did not kill her, for she reared herself upon her hind legs and struck at him heavily. He caught the blow upon his shield, but the shield was driven against his breast so strongly that he fell backwards beneath it, and lay there howling like a wolf in pain. Then the lioness sprang upon him and worried him. Still, because of the shield, as yet she could not come at him to slay him; but Umslopogaas saw that this might not endure, for presently the shield would be torn aside and the stranger must be killed. Now in the breast of the lioness still stood the half of Umslopogaas's broken spear, and its blade was a span deep in her breast. Then this thought came into the mind of Umslopogaas, that he would drive the spear home or die. So he rose swiftly, for strength came back to him in his need, and ran to where the lioness worried at him who lay beneath the shield. She did not heed him, so he flung himself upon his knees before her, and, seizing the haft of the broken spear, drove it deep into her and wrenched it round. Now she saw Umslopogaas and turned roaring, and clawed at him, tearing his breast and arms. Then, as he lay, he heard a mighty howling, and, behold! grey wolves and black leaped upon the lioness and rent and worried her till she fell and was torn to pieces by them. After this the senses of Umslopogaas left him again, and the light went out of his eyes so that he was as one dead.

At length his mind came back to him, and with it his memory, and he remembered the lioness and looked up to find her. But he did not find her, and he saw that he lay in a cave upon a bed of grass, while all about him were the skins of beasts, and at his side was a pot filled with water. He put out his hand and, taking the pot, drank of the water, and then he saw that his arm was wasted as with sickness, and that his breast was thick with scars scarcely skinned over.

Now while he lay and wondered, the mouth of the cave was darkened, and through it entered that same lad who had done battle with the lioness and been overthrown by her, bearing a dead buck upon his shoulders. He put down the buck upon the ground, and, walking to where Umslopogaas lay, looked at him.

"*Out!*" he said, "your eyes are open—do you, then, live, stranger?"

"I live," answered Umslopogaas, "and I am hungry."

"It is time," said the other, "since with toil I bore you here through the forest, for twelve days you have lain without sense, drinking water only. So deeply had the lion clawed you that I thought of you as dead. Twice I was near to killing you, that you might cease to suffer and I to be troubled; but I held my hand, because of a word which came to me from one who is dead. Now eat, that your strength may return to you. Afterwards, we will talk."

So Umslopogaas ate, and little by little his health returned to him—every day a little. And afterwards, as they sat at night by the fire in the cave they spoke together.

"How are you named?" asked Umslopogaas of the other.

"I am named Galazi the Wolf," he answered, "and I am of Zulu blood—ay, of the blood of Chaka the king; for the father of Sensangacona, the father of Chaka, was my great-grandfather."

"Whence came you, Galazi?"

"I came from Swaziland—from the tribe of the Halakazi, which I should rule. This is the story: Siguyana, my grandfather, was a younger brother of Sensangacona, the father of Chaka. But he quarrelled with Sensangacona, and became a wanderer. With certain of the people of the Umtetwa he wandered into Swaziland, and sojourned with the Halakazi tribe in their great caves; and the end of it was that he killed the chief of the tribe and took his place. After he was dead, my father ruled in his place; but there was a great party in the tribe that hated his rule because he was of the Zulu race, and it would have set up a chief of the old Swazi blood in his place. Still, they could not do this, for my father's hand was heavy on the people. Now I was the only son of my father by his head wife, and born to be chief after him, and therefore those of the Swazi party, and they were many and great, hated me also. So matters stood till last year in the winter, and then my father set his heart on killing twenty of the headmen, with their wives and children, because he knew that they plotted against him. But the headmen learned what was to come, and they prevailed upon a wife of my father, a woman of their own blood, to poison him. So she poisoned him in the night and in the morning it was told me that my father lay sick and summoned me, and I went to him. In his hut I found him, and he was writhing with pain.

"What is it, my father?" I said. "Who has done this evil?"

"It is this, my son," he gasped, "that I am poisoned, and she stands yonder who has done the deed." And he pointed to the woman, who stood at the side of the hut near the door, her chin upon her breast, trembling as she looked upon the fruit of her wickedness.

"Now the girl was young and fair, and we had been friends, yet I say that I did not pause, for my heart was mad within me. I did not pause, but, seizing my spear, I ran at her, and, though she cried for mercy, I killed her with the spear.

"That was well done, Galazi!" said my father. "But when I am gone, look to yourself, my son, for these Swazi dogs will drive you out and rob you of your place! But if they drive you out and you still live, swear this to me—that you will not rest till you have avenged me."

"I swear it, my father," I answered. "I swear that I will stamp out the men of the tribe of Halakazi, every one of them, except those of my own blood, and bring their women to slavery and their children to bonds!"

"Big words for a young mouth," said my father. "Yet shall you live to bring these things about, Galazi. This I know of you now in my hour of death: you shall be a wanderer for a few years of your life, child of Siguyana, and wandering in another land you shall die a man's death, and not such a death as yonder witch has given to me." Then, having spoken thus, he lifted up his head, looked at me, and with a great groan he died.

"Now I passed out of the hut dragging the body of the dead girl after me. In front of the hut were gathered many headmen waiting for the end, and I saw that their looks were sullen.

"The chief, my father, is dead!" I cried in a loud voice, "and I, Galazi, who am the chief, have slain her who murdered him!" And I rolled the body of the girl over on to her back so that they might look upon her face.

"Now the father of the girl was among those who stood before me, he who had persuaded her to the deed, and he was maddened at the sight.

"What, my brothers?" he cried. "Shall we suffer that this young Zulu dog, this murderer of a girl, be chief over us? Never! The old lion is dead, now for the cub!" And he ran at me with spear aloft.

"Never!" shouted the others, and they, too, ran towards me, shaking their spears.

"I waited, I did not hasten, for I knew well that I should not die then, I knew it from my father's last words. I waited till the man was near me; he thrust, I sprang aside and drove my spear through him, and on the daughter's body the father fell dead. Then I shouted aloud and rushed through them. None touched me; none could catch me; the man does not live who can overtake me when my feet are on the ground and I am away."

"Yet I might try," said Umslopogaas, smiling, "for of all lads among the Zulus he was the swiftest of foot.

"First walk again, then run," answered Galazi.

"Take up the tale," quoth Umslopogaas; "it is a merry one."

"Something is left to tell, stranger. I fled from the country of the Halakazi, nor did I linger at all in the land of the Swazis, but came on swiftly into the Zulu. Now, it was in my mind to go to Chaka and tell him of my wrongs, asking that he would send an impi to make an end of the Halakazi. But while I journeyed, finding food and shelter as I might, I came one night to the kraal of an old man who knew Chaka, and had known Siguyana, my grandfather, and to him, when I had stayed there two days, I told my tale. But the old man counselled me against my plan, saying that Chaka, the king, did not love to welcome new shoots sprung from the royal stock, and would kill me; moreover, the man offered me a place in his kraal. Now, I held that there was wisdom in his words, and thought no more of standing before the king to cry for justice, for he who cries to kings for justice sometimes finds death. Still, I would not stay in the kraal of the old man, for he had sons to come after him who looked on me with no liking; moreover, I wished to be a chief myself, even if I lived alone. So I left the kraal by night and walked on, not knowing where I should go.

"Now, on the third night, I came to a little kraal that stands on the farther side of the river at the foot of the mountain. In front of the kraal sat a very old woman basking in the rays of the setting sun. She saw me, and spoke to me, saying, 'Young man, you are tall and strong and swift of foot. Would you earn a famous weapon, a club, that destroys all who stand before it?'

"I said that I wished to have such a club, and asked what I should do to win it.

"You shall do this," said the old woman: "to-morrow morning, at the first light, you shall go up to yonder mountain," and she pointed to the mountain where you are now, stranger, on which the stone Witch sits forever waiting for the world to die. "Two-thirds of the way up the mountain you will come to a path that is difficult to climb. You shall climb the path and enter a gloomy forest. It is very dark in the forest, but you must push through it till you come to an open place with a wall of rock behind it. In the wall of rock is a cave, and in the cave you will find the bones of a man. Bring down the bones in a bag, and I will give you the club!"

"While she spoke thus people came out of the kraal and listened.

"Do not heed her, young man," they said, "unless you are weary of life. Do not heed her: she is crazy. The mountain is haunted; it is a place of ghosts. Look at the stone Witch who sits upon it! Evil spirits live in that forest, and no man has walked there for many years. This woman's son was foolish: he went to wander in the forest, saying that he cared nothing for ghosts, and the *Amatongo*, the ghost-folk, killed him. That was many years ago, and none have dared to seek his bones. Ever she sits here and asks of the passers by that they should bring him to her, offering the great club for a reward; but they dare not!"

"They lie!" said the old woman. "There are no ghosts there. The ghosts live only in their cowardly hearts; there are but wolves. I know that the bones of my son lie in the cave, for I have seen them in a dream; but, alas! my old limbs are too weak to carry me up the mountain path, and all these are cowards; there is no man among them since the Zulus killed my husband, covering him with wounds!"

"Now, I listened, answering nothing; but when all had done, I asked to see the club which should be given to him who dared to face the *Amatongo*, the spirits who lived in the forest upon the Ghost Mountain. Then the old woman rose, and creeping on her hands went into the hut. Presently she returned again, dragging the great club after her.

"Look at it, stranger! look at it! Was there ever such a club?" And Galazi held it up before the eyes of Umslopogaas.

In truth, my father, that was a club, for I, Mopo, saw it in after days. It was great and knotty, black as iron that had been smoked in the fire, and shod with metal that was worn smooth with smiting.

"I looked at it," went on Galazi, "and I tell you, stranger, a great desire came into my heart to possess it.

"How is this club named?" I asked of the old woman.

"It is named Watcher of the Fords," she answered, "and it has not watched in vain. Five men have held that club in war and a hundred-and-seventy-three have given up their lives beneath its strokes. He who held it last slew twenty before he was slain himself, for this fortune goes with the club—that he who owns it shall die holding it, but in a noble fashion. There is but one other weapon to match with it in Zululand, and that is the great axe of Jikiza, the chief of the People of the Axe, who dwells in the kraal yonder; the ancient horn-hafted *Imbubuzi*, the Groan-Maker, that brings victory. Were axe, Groan-Maker, and club, Watcher of the Fords, side by side, there are no thirty men in Zululand who could stand before them. I have said. Choose!" And the aged woman watched me cunningly through her horny eyes.

"She speaks truly now," said one of those who stood near. "Let the club be, young man: he who owns it smites great blows indeed, but in the end he dies by the assegai. None dare own the Watcher of the Fords."

"A good death and a swift!" I answered. And pondered a time, while still the old woman watched me through her horny eyes. At length she rose, "La!, la!" she said, "the Watcher is not for this one. This is but a child, I must seek me a man, I must seek me a man!"

"Not so fast, old wife," I said. "Will you lend me this club to hold in my hand while I go to find the bones of your son and to snatch them from the people of the ghosts?"

"Lend you the Watcher, boy? Nay, nay! I should see little of you again or of the good club either."

"I am no thief," I answered. "If the ghosts kill me, you will see me no more, or the club either; but if I live I will bring you back the bones, or, if I do not find them, I will render the Watcher into your hands again. At the least I say that if you will not lend me the club, then I will not go into the haunted place."

"Boy, your eyes are honest," she said, still peering at me. "Take the Watcher, go seek the bones. If you die, let the club be lost with you; if you fail, bring it back to me; but if you win the bones, then it is yours, and it shall bring you glory and you shall die a man's death at last holding him aloft among the dead."

"So on the morrow at dawn I took the club Watcher in my hand and a little dancing shield, and made ready to start. The old woman blessed me and bade me farewell, but the other people of the kraal mocked, saying: 'A little man for so big a club! Beware, little man, lest the ghosts use the club on you!' So they spoke, but one girl in the kraal—she is a granddaughter of the old woman—led me aside, praying me not to go, for the forest on the Ghost Mountain had an evil name: none dared walk there, since it was certainly full of spirits, who howled like wolves. I thanked the girl, but to the others I said nothing, only I asked of the path to the Ghost Mountain."

"Now stranger, if you have strength, come to the mouth of the cave and look out, for the moon is bright."

So Umslopogaas rose and crept through the narrow mouth of the cave. There, above him, a great grey peak towered high into the air, shaped like a seated woman, her chin resting upon her breast, the place where the cave was being, as it were, on the lap of the woman. Below this place the rock sloped sharply, and was clothed with little bushes. Lower down yet was a forest, great and dense, that stretched to the top of a cliff, and at the foot of the cliff, beyond the waters of the river, lay the wide plains of Zululand.

"Yonder, stranger," said Galazi, pointing with the club Watcher of the Fords far away to the plain beneath; "yonder is the kraal where the aged woman dwelt. There is a cliff rising from the plain, up which I must climb; there is the forest where dwell the *Amatongo*, the people of the ghosts; there, on the hither side of the forest, runs the path to the cave, and here is the cave itself. See this stone lying at the mouth of the cave, it turns thus, shutting up the entrance hole—it turns gently; though it is so large, a child may move it, for it rests upon a sharp point of rock. Only mark this, the stone must not be pushed too far; for, look! if it came to here," and he pointed to a mark in the mouth of the cave, "then that man need be strong who can draw it back again, though I have done it myself, who am not a man full grown. But if it pass beyond this mark, then, see, it will roll down the neck of the cave like a pebble down the neck of a gourd, and I think that two men, one striving from within and one dragging from without, scarcely could avail to push it clear. Look now, I close the stone, as is my custom of a night, so,"—and he grasped the rock and swung it round upon its pivot, on which it turned as a door turns. "Thus I leave it, and though, except those to whom the secret is known, none would guess that a cave was here, yet it can be rolled back again with a push of the hand. But enough of the stone. Enter again, wanderer, and I will go forward with my tale, for it is long and strange."

"I started from the kraal of the old woman, and the people of the kraal followed me to the brink of the river. It was in flood, and few had dared to cross it."

"Ha! ha!" they cried, "now your journey is done, little man; watch by the ford you who would win the Watcher of the Ford! Beat the water with the club, perhaps so it shall grow gentle that your feet may pass it!"

"I answered nothing to their mocking, only I bound the shield upon my shoulders with a string, and the bag that I had brought I made fast about my middle, and I held the great club in my teeth by the thong. Then I plunged into the river and swam. Twice, stranger, the current bore me under, and those on the bank shouted that I was lost; but I rose again, and in the end I won the farther shore."

"Now those on the bank mocked no more; they stood still wondering, and I walked on till I came to the foot of the cliff. That cliff is hard to climb, stranger; when you are strong upon your feet, I will show you the path. Yet I found a way up it, and by midday I came to the forest. Here, on the edge of the forest, I rested awhile, and ate a little food that I had brought with me in the bag, for now I must gather up my strength to meet the ghosts, if ghosts there were. Then I rose and plunged into the forest. The trees were great that grow there, stranger, and their leaves are so thick that in certain places the light is as that of night when the moon is young. Still, I wended on, often losing my path. But from time to time between the tops of the trees I saw the figure of the grey stone woman who sits on the top of Ghost Mountain, and shaped my course towards her knees. My heart beat as I travelled through the forest in dark and loneliness like that of the night, and ever I looked round searching for the eyes of the *Amatongo*. But I saw no spirits, though at times great spotted snakes crept from before my feet, and perhaps these were the *Amatongo*. At times, also, I caught glimpses of some grey wolf as he slunk from tree to tree watching me, and always high above my head the wind sighed in the great boughs with a sound like the sighing of women."

"Still, I went on, singing to myself as I went, that my heart might not be faint with fear, and at length, towards the end of the second hour, the trees grew fewer, the ground sloped upwards, and the light poured down from the heavens again. But, stranger, you are weary, and the night wears on; sleep now, and to-morrow I will end the tale. Say, first, how are you named?"

"I am named Umslopogaas, son of Mopo," he answered, "and my tale shall be told when yours is done; let us sleep!"

Now when Galazi heard this name he started and was troubled, but said nothing. So they laid them down to sleep, and Galazi wrapped Umslopogaas with the skins of bucks. But Galazi the Wolf was so hardy that he lay on the bare ground and had no covering. So they slept, and without the door of the cave the wolves howled, scenting the blood of men.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### GALAZI BECOMES KING OF THE WOLVES

On the morrow Umslopogaas awoke, and knew that strength was growing on him fast. Still, all that day he rested in the cave, while Galazi went out to hunt. In the evening he returned, bearing a buck upon his shoulders, and they skinned the buck and ate of it as they sat by the fire. And when the sun was down Galazi took up his tale.

"Now Umslopogaas, son of Mopo, hear! I had passed the forest, and had come, as it were, to the legs of the old stone Witch who sits up aloft there forever waiting for the world to die. Here the sun shone merrily, here lizards ran and birds flew to and fro, and though it grew towards the evening—for I had wandered long in the forest—I was afraid no more. So I climbed up the steep rock, where little bushes grow like hair on the arms of a man, till at last I came to the knees of the stone Witch, which are the space before the cave. I lifted my head over the brink of the rock and looked, and I tell you, Umslopogaas, my blood ran cold and my heart turned to water, for there, before the cave, rolled wolves, many and great. Some slept and growled in their sleep, some gnawed at the skulls of dead game, some sat up like dogs and their tongues hung from their grinning jaws. I looked, I saw, and beyond I discovered the mouth of the cave, where the bones of the boy should be. But I had no wish to come there, being afraid of the wolves, for now I knew that these were the ghosts who live upon the mountain. So I bethought me that I would fly, and turned to go. And, Umslopogaas, even as I turned, the great club Watcher of the Fords swung round and smote me on the back with such a blow as a man smites upon a coward. Now whether this was by chance or whether the Watcher would shame him who bore it, say you, for I do not know. At the least, shame entered into me. Should I go back to be mocked by the people of the kraal and by the old woman? And if I wished to go, should I not be killed by the ghosts at night in the forest? Nay, it was better to die in the jaws of the wolves, and at once.

"Thus I thought in my heart; then, tarrying not, lest fear should come upon me again, I swung up the Watcher, and crying aloud the war-cry of the Halakazi, I sprang over the brink of the rock and rushed upon the wolves. They, too, sprang up and stood howling, with bristling hides and fiery eyes, and the smell of them came into my nostrils. Yet when they saw it was a man that rushed upon them, they were seized with sudden fear and fled this way and that, leaping by great bounds from the place of rock, which is the knees of the stone Witch, so that presently I stood alone in front of the cave. Now, having conquered the wolf ghosts and no blow struck, my heart swelled within me, and I walked to the mouth of the cave proudly, as a cock walks upon a roof, and looked in through the opening. As it chanced, the sinking sun shone at this hour full into the cave, so that all its darkness was made red with light. Then, once more, Umslopogaas, I grew afraid indeed, for I could see the end of the cave.

"Look now! There is a hole in the wall of the cave, where the firelight falls below the shadow of the roof, twice the height of a man from the floor. It is a narrow hole and a high, is it not?—as though one had cut it with iron, and a man might sit in it, his legs hanging towards the floor of the cave. Ay, Umslopogaas, a man might sit in it, might he not? And there a man sat, or that which had been a man. There sat the bones of a man, and the black skin had withered on his bones, holding them together, and making him awful to see. His hands were open beside him, he leaned upon them, and in the right hand was a piece of hide from his moocha. It was half eaten, Umslopogaas; he had eaten it before he died. His eyes also were bound round with a band of leather, as though to hide something from their gaze, one foot was gone, one hung over the edge of the niche towards the floor, and beneath it on the floor, red with rust, lay the blade of a broken spear.

"Now come hither, Umslopogaas, place your hand upon the wall of the cave, just here; it is smooth, is it not?—smooth as the stones on which women grind their corn. 'What made it so smooth?' you ask. I will tell you.

"When I peered through the door of the cave I saw this: on the floor of the cave lay a she-wolf panting, as though she had galloped many a mile; she was great and fierce. Near to her was another wolf—he was a dog—old and black, bigger than any I have seen, a very father of wolves, and all his head and flanks were streaked with grey. But this wolf was on his feet. As I watched he drew back nearly to the mouth of the cave, then of a sudden he ran forward and bounded high into the air towards the withered foot of that which hung from the cleft of the rock. His pads struck upon the rock here where it is smooth, and there for a second he seemed to cling, while his great jaws closed with a clash but a spear's breadth beneath the dead man's foot. Then he fell back with a howl of rage, and drew slowly down the cave. Again he ran and leaped, again the great jaws closed, again he fell down howling. Then the she-wolf rose, and they sprang together, striving to pull down him who sat above. But it was all in vain; they could never come nearer than within a spear's breadth of the dead man's foot. And now, Umslopogaas, you know why the rock is smooth and shines. From month to month and year to year the wolves had ravened there, seeking to devour the bones of him who sat above. Night upon night they had leaped thus against the wall of the cave, but never might their clashing jaws close upon his foot. One foot they had, indeed, but the other they could not come by.

"Now as I watched, filled with fear and wonder, the she-wolf, her tongue lolling from her jaws, made so mighty a bound that she almost reached the hanging foot, and yet not quite. She fell back, and then I saw that the leap was her last for that time, for she had oversprung herself, and lay there howling, the black blood flowing from her mouth. The wolf saw also: he drew near, sniffed at her, then, knowing that she was hurt, seized her by the throat and worried her. Now all the place was filled with groans and choking howls, as the wolves rolled over and over beneath him who sat above, and in the blood-red light of the dying sun the sight and sounds were so horrid that I trembled like a child. The she-wolf grew faint, for the fangs of her mate were buried in her throat. Then I saw that now was the time to smite him, lest when he had killed her he should kill me also. So I lifted the Watcher and sprang into the cave, having it in my mind to slay the wolf before he lifted up his head. But he heard my footsteps, or perhaps my shadow fell upon him. Loosing his grip, he looked up, this father of wolves; then, making no sound, he sprang straight at my throat.

"I saw him, and whirling the Watcher aloft, I smote with all my strength. The blow met him in mid-air; it fell full on his chest and struck him backwards to the earth. But there he would not stay, for, rising before I could smite again, once more he sprang at me.

This time I leaped aside and struck downwards, and the blow fell upon his right leg and broke it, so that he could spring no more. Yet he ran at me on three feet, and, though the club fell on his side, he seized me with his teeth, biting through that leather bag, which was wound about my middle, into the flesh behind. Then I yelled with pain and rage, and lifting the Watcher endways, drove it down with both hands, as a man drives a stake into the earth, and that with so great a stroke that the skull of the wolf was shattered like a pot, and he fell dead, dragging me with him. Presently I sat up on the ground, and, placing the handle of the Watcher between his jaws, I forced them open, freeing my flesh from the grip of his teeth. Then I looked at my wounds; they were not deep, for the leather bag had saved me, yet I feel them to this hour, for there is poison in the mouth of a wolf. Presently I glanced up, and saw that the she-wolf had found her feet again, and stood as though unhurt; for this is the nature of these ghosts, Umslopogaas, that, though they fight continually, they cannot destroy each other. They may be killed by man alone, and that hardly. There she stood, and yet she did not look at me or on her dead mate, but at him who sat above. I saw, and crept softly behind her, then, lifting the Watcher, I dashed him down with all my strength. The blow fell on her neck and broke it, so that she rolled over and at once was dead.

"Now I rested awhile, then went to the mouth of the cave and looked out. The sun was sinking: all the depth of the forest was black, but the light still shone on the face of the stone woman who sits forever on the mountain. Here, then, I must bide this night, for, though the moon shone white and full in the sky, I dared not wend towards the plains alone with the wolves and the ghosts. And if I dared not go alone, how much less should I dare to go bearing with me him who sat in the cleft of the rock! Nay, here I must bide, so I went out of the cave to the spring which flows from the rock on the right yonder and washed my wounds and drank. Then I came back and sat in the mouth of the cave, and watched the light die away from the face of the world. While it was dying there was silence, but when it was dead the forest awoke. A wind sprang up and tossed it till the green of its boughs waved like troubled water on which the moon shines faintly. From the heart of it, too, came howlings of ghosts and wolves, that were answered by howls from the rocks above—hearken, Umslopogaas, such howlings as we hear to-night!

"It was awful here in the mouth of the cave, for I had not yet learned the secret of the stone, and if I had known it, should I have dared to close it, leaving myself alone with the dead wolves and him whom the wolves had struggled to tear down? I walked out yonder on to the platform and looked up. The moon shone full upon the face of the stone Witch who sits aloft forever. She seemed to grin at me, and, oh! I grew afraid, for now I knew that this was a place of dead men, a place where spirits perch like vultures in a tree, as they sweep round and round the world. I went back to the cave, and feeling that I must do something lest I should go mad, I drew to me the carcase of the great dog-wolf which I had killed, and, taking my knife of iron, I began to skin it by the light of the moon. For an hour or more I skinned, singing to myself as I worked, and striving to forget him who sat in the cleft above and the howlings which ran about the mountains. But ever the moonlight shone more clearly into the cave: now by it I could see his shape of bone and skin, ay, and even the bandage about his eyes. Why had he tied it there? I wondered—perhaps to hide the faces of the fierce wolves as they sprang upwards to grip him. And always the howlings drew nearer; now I could see grey forms creeping to and fro in the shadows of the rocky place before me. Ah! there before me glared two red eyes: a sharp snout sniffed at the carcase which I skinned. With a yell, I lifted the Watcher and smote. There came a scream of pain, and something galloped away into the shadows.

"Now the skin was off. I cast it behind me, and seizing the carcase dragged it to the edge of the rock and left it. Presently the sound of howlings drew near again, and I saw the grey shapes creep up one by one. Now they gathered round the carcase, now they fell upon it and rent it, fighting horribly till all was finished. Then, licking their red chops, they slunk back to the forest.

"Did I sleep or did I wake? Nay, I cannot tell. But I know this, that of a sudden I seemed to look up and see. I saw a light—perchance, Umslopogaas, it was the light of the moon, shining upon him that sat aloft at the end of the cave. It was a red light, and he glowed in it as glows a thing that is rotten. I looked, or seemed to look, and then I thought that the hanging jaw moved, and from it came a voice that was harsh and hollow as of one who speaks from an empty belly, through a withered throat.

"Hail, Galazi, child of Siguyana!" said the voice, 'Galazi the Wolf! Say, what dost thou here in the Ghost Mountain, where the stone Witch sits forever, waiting for the world to die?'

"Then, Umslopogaas, I answered, or seemed to answer, and my voice, too, sounded strange and hollow:—

"Hail, Dead One, who sittest like a vulture on a rock! I do this on the Ghost Mountain. I come to seek thy bones and bear them to thy mother for burial.'

"Many and many a year have I sat aloft, Galazi,' answered the voice, 'watching the ghost-wolves leap and leap to drag me down, till the rock grew smooth beneath the wearing of their feet. So I sat seven days and nights, being yet alive, the hungry wolves below, and hunger gnawing at my heart. So I have sat many and many a year, being dead in the heart of the old stone Witch, watching the moon and the sun and the stars, hearkening to the howls of the ghost-wolves as they ravened beneath me, and learning the wisdom of the old witch who sits above in everlasting stone. Yet my mother was young and fair when I trod the haunted forest and climbed the knees of stone. How seems she now, Galazi?'

"She is white and wrinkled and very aged,' I answered. 'They call her mad, yet at her bidding I came to seek thee, Dead One, bearing the Watcher that was thy father's and shall be mine.'

"It shall be thine, Galazi,' said the voice, 'for thou alone hast dared the ghosts to give me sleep and burial. Hearken, thine also shall be the wisdom of the old witch who sits aloft forever, frozen into everlasting stone—thine and one other's. These are not wolves that thou hast seen, that is no wolf which thou hast slain; nay, they are ghosts—evil ghosts of men who lived in ages gone, and who must now live till they be slain by men. And knowest thou how they lived, Galazi, and what was the food they ate? When the light comes again, Galazi, climb to the breasts of the stone Witch, and look in the cleft which is between her breasts. There shalt thou see how these men lived. And now this doom is on them: they must wander gaunt and hungry in the shape of wolves, haunting that Ghost Mountain where they once fed, till they are led forth to die at the hands of men. Because of their devouring hunger they have leapt from year to year, striving to reach my bones; and he whom thou hast slain was the king of them, and she at his side was their queen.

"Now, Galazi the Wolf, this is the wisdom that I give thee: thou shalt be king of the ghost-wolves, thou and another, whom a lion shall bring thee. Gird the black skin upon thy shoulders, and the wolves shall follow thee; all the three hundred and sixty and three of them that are left, and let him who shall be brought to thee gird on the skin of grey. Where ye twain lead them, there shall they raven, bringing you victory till all are dead. But know this, that there only may they raven where in life they ravened, seeking for their food. Yet, that was an ill gift thou tookest from my mother—the gift of the Watcher, for though without the Watcher thou hadst never slain the king of the ghost-wolves, yet, bearing the Watcher, thou shalt thyself be slain. Now, on the morrow carry me back to my mother, so that I may sleep where the ghost-wolves leap no more. I have spoken, Galazi.'

"Now the Dead One's voice seemed to grow ever fainter and more hollow as he spoke, till at the last I could scarcely hear his words, yet I answered him, asking him this:—

“Who is it, then, that the lion shall bring to me to rule with me over the ghost-wolves, and how is he named?”

“Then the Dead One spoke once more very faintly, yet in the silence of the place I heard his words:—

“He is named Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, son of Chaka, Lion of the Zulu.”

Now Umslopogaas started up from his place by the fire.

“I am named Umslopogaas,” he said, “but the Slaughterer I am not named, and I am the son of Mopo, and not the son of Chaka, Lion of the Zulu; you have dreamed a dream, Galazi, or, if it was no dream, then the Dead One lied to you.”

“Perchance this was so, Umslopogaas,” answered Galazi the Wolf. “Perhaps I dreamed, or perhaps the Dead One lied; nevertheless, if he lied in this matter, in other matters he did not lie, as you shall hear.

“After I had heard these words, or had dreamed that I heard them, I slept indeed, and when I woke the forest beneath was like the clouds of mist, but the grey light glinted upon the face of her who sits in stone above. Now I remembered the dream that I had dreamed, and I would see if it were all a dream. So I rose, and leaving the cave, found a place where I might climb up to the breasts and head of the stone Witch. I climbed, and as I went the rays of the sun lit upon her face, and I rejoiced to see them. But, when I drew near, the likeness to the face of a woman faded away, and I saw nothing before me but rugged heaps of piled-up rock. For this, Umslopogaas, is the way of witches, be they of stone or flesh—when you draw near to them they change their shape.

“Now I was on the breast of the mountain, and wandered to and fro awhile between the great heaps of stone. At length I found, as it were, a crack in the stone thrice as wide as a man can jump, and in length half a spear’s throw, and near this crack stood great stones blackened by fire, and beneath them broken pots and a knife of flint. I looked down into the crack—it was very deep, and green with moss, and tall ferns grew about in it, for the damp gathered there. There was nothing else. I had dreamed a lying dream. I turned to go, then found another mind, and climbed down into the cleft, pushing aside the ferns. Beneath the ferns was moss; I scraped it away with the Watcher. Presently the iron of the club struck on something that was yellow and round like a stone, and from the yellow thing came a hollow sound. I lifted it, Umslopogaas; it was the skull of a child.

“I dug deeper and scraped away more moss, till presently I saw. Beneath the moss was nothing but the bones of men—old bones that had lain there many years; the little ones had rotted, the larger ones remained—some were yellow, some black, and others still white. They were not broken, as are those that hyenas and wolves have worried, yet on some of them I could see the marks of teeth. Then, Umslopogaas, I went back to the cave, never looking behind me.

“Now when I was come to the cave I did this: I skinned the she-wolf also. When I had finished the sun was up, and I knew that it was time to go. But I could not go alone—he who sat aloft in the cleft of the cave must go with me. I greatly feared to touch him—this Dead One, who had spoken to me in a dream; yet I must do it. So I brought stones and piled them up till I could reach him; then I lifted him down, for he was very light, being but skin and bones. When he was down, I bound the hides of the wolves about me, then leaving the leather bag, into which he could not enter, I took the Dead One and placed him on my shoulders as a man might carry a child, for his legs were fixed somewhat apart, and holding him by the foot which was left on him, I set out for the kraal. Down the slope I went as swiftly as I could, for now I knew the way, seeing and hearing nothing, except once, when there came a rush of wings, and a great eagle swept down at that which sat upon my shoulders. I shouted, and the eagle flew away, then I entered the dark of the forest. Here I must walk softly, lest the head of him I carried should strike against the boughs and be smitten from him.

“For awhile I went on thus, till I drew near to the heart of the forest. Then I heard a wolf howl on my right, and from the left came answering howls, and these, again, were answered by others in front of and behind me. I walked on boldly, for I dared not stay, guiding myself by the sun, which from time to time shone down on me redly through the boughs of the great trees. Now I could see forms grey and black slinking near my path, sniffing at the air as they went, and now I came to a little open place, and, behold! all the wolves in the world were gathered together there. My heart melted, my legs trembled beneath me. On every side were the brutes, great and hungry. And I stood still, with club aloft, and slowly they crept up, muttering and growling as they came, till they formed a deep circle round me. Yet they did not spring on me, only drew nearer and ever nearer. Presently one sprang, indeed, but not at me; he sprang at that which sat upon my shoulders. I moved aside, and he missed his aim, and, coming to the ground again, stood there growling and whining like a beast afraid. Then I remembered the words of my dream, if dream it were, how that the Dead One had given me wisdom that I should be king of the ghost-wolves—I and another whom a lion should bear to me. Was it not so? If it was not so, how came it that the wolves did not devour me?

“For a moment I stood thinking, then I lifted up my voice and howled like a wolf, and lo! Umslopogaas, all the wolves howled in answer with a mighty howling. I stretched out my hand and called to them. They ran to me, gathering round me as though to devour me. But they did not harm me; they licked my legs with their red tongues, and fighting to come near me, pressed themselves against me as does a cat. One, indeed, snatched at him who sat on my shoulder, but I struck him with the Watcher and he slunk back like a whipped hound; moreover, the others bit him so that he yelled. Now I knew that I had no more to fear, for I was king of the ghost-wolves, so I walked on, and with me came all the great pack of them. I walked on and on, and they trotted beside me silently, and the fallen leaves crackled beneath their feet, and the dust rose up about them, till at length I reached the edge of the forest.

“Now I remembered that I must not be seen thus by men, lest they should think me a wizard and kill me. Therefore, at the edge of the forest I halted and made signs to the wolves to go back. At this they howled piteously, as though in grief, but I called to them that I would come again and be their king, and it seemed as though their brute hearts understood my words. Then they all went, still howling, till presently I was alone.

“And now, Umslopogaas, it is time to sleep; to-morrow night I will end my tale.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE WOLF-BRETHREN

Now, my father, on the morrow night, once again Umslopogaas and Galazi the wolf sat by the fire in the mouth of their cave, as we sit to-night, my father, and Galazi took up his tale.

"I passed on till I came to the river; it was still full, but the water had run down a little, so that my feet found foothold. I waded into the river, using the Watcher as a staff, and the stream reached to my elbows, but no higher. Now one on the farther bank of the river saw that which sat upon my shoulders, and saw also the wolf's skin on my head, and ran to the kraal crying, 'Here comes one who walks the waters on the back of a wolf.'

"So it came about that when I drew towards the kraal all the people of the kraal were gathered together to meet me, except the old woman, who could not walk so far. But when they saw me coming up the slope of the hill, and when they knew what it was that sat upon my shoulders, they were smitten with fear. Yet they did not run, because of their great wonder, only they walked backward before me, clinging each to each and saying nothing. I too came on silently, till at length I reached the kraal, and before its gates sat the old woman basking in the sun of the afternoon. Presently she looked up and cried:—

"What ails you, people of my house, that you walk backwards like men bewitched, and who is that tall and deathly man who comes toward you?"

"But still they drew on backward, saying no word, the little children clinging to the women, the women clinging to the men, till they had passed the old wife and ranged themselves behind her like a regiment of soldiers. Then they halted against the fence of the kraal. But I came on to the old woman, and lifted him who sat upon my shoulders, and placed him on the ground before her, saying, 'Woman, here is your son; I have snatched him with much toil from the jaws of the ghosts—and they are many up yonder—all save one foot, which I could not find. Take him now and bury him, for I weary of his fellowship.'

"She looked upon that which sat before her. She put out her withered hand and drew the bandage from his sunken eyes. Then she screamed aloud a shrill scream, and, flinging her arms about the neck of the Dead One, she cried: 'It is my son whom I bore—my very son, whom for twice ten years and half a ten I have not looked upon. Greeting, my son, greeting! Now shalt thou find burial, and I with thee—ay, I with thee!'

"And once more she cried aloud, standing upon her feet with arms outstretched. Then of a sudden foam burst from her lips, and she fell forward upon the body of her son, and was dead.

"Now silence came upon the place again, for all were fearful. At last one cried: 'How is this man named who has won the body from the ghosts?'

"I am named Galazi,' I answered.

"Nay,' said he. 'The Wolf you are named. Look at the wolf's red hide upon his head!'

"I am named Galazi, and the Wolf you have named me,' I said again. 'So be it: I am named Galazi the Wolf.'

"Methinks he is a wolf,' said he. 'Look, now, at his teeth, how they grin! This is no man, my brothers, but a wolf.'

"No wolf and no man,' said another, 'but a wizard. None but a wizard could have passed the forest and won the lap of her who sits in stone forever.'

"Yes, yes! he is a wolf—he is a wizard!' they screamed. 'Kill him! Kill the wolf-wizard before he brings the ghosts upon us!' And they ran towards me with uplifted spears.

"I am a wolf indeed,' I cried, 'and I am a wizard indeed, and I will bring wolves and ghosts upon you ere all is done.' And I turned and fled so swiftly that soon they were left behind me. Now as I ran I met a girl; a basket of mealies was on her head, and she bore a dead kid in her hand. I rushed at her howling like a wolf, and I snatched the mealies from her head and the kid from her hand. Then I fled on, and coming to the river, I crossed it, and for that night I hid myself in the rocks beyond, eating the mealies and the flesh of the kid.

"On the morrow at dawn I rose and shook the dew from the wolf-hide. Then I went on into the forest and howled like a wolf. They knew my voice, the ghost-wolves, and howled in answer from far and near. Then I heard the pattering of their feet, and they came round me by tens and by twenties, and fawned upon me. I counted their number; they numbered three hundred and sixty and three.

"Afterwards, I went on to the cave, and I have lived there in the cave, Umslopogaas, for nigh upon twelve moons, and I have become a wolf-man. For with the wolves I hunt and raven, and they know me, and what I bid them that they do. Stay, Umslopogaas, now you are strong again, and, if your courage does not fail you, you shall see this very night. Come now, have you the heart, Umslopogaas?"

Then Umslopogaas rose and laughed aloud. "I am young in years," he cried, "and scarcely come to the full strength of men; yet hitherto I have not turned my back on lion or witch, on wolf or man. Now let us see this impi of yours—this impi black and grey, that runs on four legs with fangs for spears!"

"You must first bind on the she-wolf's hide, Umslopogaas," quoth Galazi, "else, before a man could count his fingers twice there would be little enough left of you. Bind it about the neck and beneath the arms, and see that the fastenings do not burst, lest it be the worse for you."

So Umslopogaas took the grey wolf's hide and bound it on with thongs of leather, and its teeth gleamed upon his head, and he took a spear in his hand. Galazi also bound on the hide of the king of the wolves, and they went out on to the space before the cave. Galazi

stood there awhile, and the moonlight fell upon him, and Umslopogaas saw that his face grew wild and beastlike, that his eyes shone, and his teeth grinned beneath his curling lips. He lifted up his head and howled out upon the night. Thrice Galazi lifted his head and thrice he howled loudly, and yet more loud. But before ever the echoes had died in the air, from the heights of the rocks above and the depths of the forest beneath, there came howlings in answer. Nearer they grew and nearer; now there was a sound of feet, and a wolf, great and grey, bounded towards them, and after him many another. They came to Galazi, they sprang upon him, fawning round him, but he beat them down with the Watcher. Then of a sudden they saw Umslopogaas, and rushed at him open-mouthed.

"Stand and do not move!" cried Galazi. "Be not afraid!"

"I have always fondled dogs," answered Umslopogaas, "shall I learn to fear them now?"

Yet though he spoke boldly, in his heart he was afraid, for this was the most terrible of all sights. The wolves rushed on him open-mouthed, from before and from behind, so that in a breath he was well-nigh hidden by their forms. Yet no fang pierced him, for as they leapt they smelt the smell of the skin upon him. Then Umslopogaas saw that the wolves leapt at him no more, but the she-wolves gathered round him who wore the she-wolf's skin. They were great and gaunt and hungry, all were full-grown, there were no little ones, and their number was so many that he could not count them in the moonlight. Umslopogaas, looking into their red eyes, felt his heart become as the heart of a wolf, and he, too, lifted up his head and howled, and the she-wolves howled in answer.

"The pack is gathered; now for the hunt!" cried Galazi. "Make your feet swift, my brother, for we shall journey far to-night. Ho, Blackfang! ho, Greysnout! Ho, my people black and grey, away! away!"

He spoke and bounded forward, and with him went Umslopogaas, and after him streamed the ghost-wolves. They fled down the mountain sides, leaping from boulder to boulder like bucks. Presently they stood by a kloof that was thick with trees. Galazi stopped, holding up the Watcher, and the wolves stopped with him.

"I smell a quarry," he cried; "in, my people, in!"

Then the wolves plunged silently into the great kloof, but Galazi and Umslopogaas drew to the foot of it and waited. Presently there came a sound of breaking boughs, and lo! before them stood a buffalo, a bull who lowed fiercely and sniffed the air.

"This one will give us a good chase, my brother; see, he is gaunt and thin! Ah! that meat is tender which my people have hunted to the death!"

As Galazi spoke, the first of the wolves drew from the covert and saw the buffalo; then, giving tongue, they sprang towards it. The bull saw also, and dashed down the hill, and after him came Galazi and Umslopogaas, and with them all their company, and the rocks shook with the music of their hunting. They rushed down the mountain side, and it came into the heart of Umslopogaas, that he, too, was a wolf. They rushed madly, yet his feet were swift as the swiftest; no wolf could outstrip him, and in him was but one desire—the desire of prey. Now they neared the borders of the forest, and Galazi shouted. He shouted to Greysnout and to Blackfang, to Blood and to Deathgrip, and these four leaped forward from the pack, running so swiftly that their bellies seemed to touch the ground. They passed about the bull, turning him from the forest and setting his head up the slope of the mountain. Then the chase wheeled, the bull leaped and bounded up the mountain side, and on one flank lay Greysnout and Deathgrip and on the other lay Blood and Blackfang, while behind came the Wolf-Brethren, and after them the wolves with lolling tongues. Up the hill they sped, but the feet of Umslopogaas never wearied, his breath did not fail him. Once more they drew near the lap of the Grey Witch where the cave was. On rushed the bull, mad with fear. He ran so swiftly that the wolves were left behind, since here for a space the ground was level to his feet. Galazi looked on Umslopogaas at his side, and grinned.

"You do not run so ill, my brother, who have been sick of late. See now if you can outrun me! Who shall touch the quarry first?"

Now the bull was ahead by two spear-throws. Umslopogaas looked and grinned back at Galazi. "Good!" he cried, "away!"

They sped forward with a bound, and for awhile it seemed to Umslopogaas as though they stood side by side, only the bull grew nearer and nearer. Then he put out his strength and the swiftness of his feet, and lo! when he looked again he was alone, and the bull was very near. Never were feet so swift as those of Umslopogaas. Now he reached the bull as he laboured on. Umslopogaas placed his hands upon the back of the bull and leaped; he was on him, he sat him as you white men sit a horse. Then he lifted the spear in his hand, and drove it down between the shoulders to the spine, and of a sudden the great buffalo staggered, stopped, and fell dead.

Galazi came up. "Who now is the swiftest, Galazi?" cried Umslopogaas, "I, or you, or your wolf host?"

"You are the swiftest, Umslopogaas," said Galazi, gasping for his breath. "Never did a man run as you run, nor ever shall again."

Now the wolves streamed up, and would have torn the carcass, but Galazi beat them back, and they rested awhile. Then Galazi said, "Let us cut meat from the bull with a spear."

So they cut meat from the bull, and when they had finished Galazi motioned to the wolves, and they fell upon the carcass, fighting furiously. In a little while nothing was left except the larger bones, and yet each wolf had but a little.

Then they went back to the cave and slept.

Afterwards Umslopogaas told Galazi all his tale, and Galazi asked him if he would abide with him and be his brother, and rule with him over the wolf-kind, or seek his father Mopo at the kraal of Chaka.

Umslopogaas said that it was rather in his mind to seek his sister Nada, for he was weary of the kraal of Chaka, but he thought of Nada day and night.

"Where, then, is Nada, your sister?" asked Galazi.

"She sleeps in the caves of your people, Galazi; she tarries with the Halakazi."

"Stay awhile, Umslopogaas," cried Galazi; "stay till we are men indeed. Then we will seek this sister of yours and snatch her from the caves of the Halakazi."

Now the desire of this wolf-life had entered into the heart of Umslopogaas, and he said that it should be so, and on the morrow they made them blood-brethren, to be one till death, before all the company of ghost-wolves, and the wolves howled when they smelt the blood of men. In all things thenceforth these two were equal, and the ghost-wolves hearkened to the voice of both of them. And on many a moonlight night they and the wolves hunted together, winning their food. At times they crossed the river, hunting in the plains, for game was scarce on the mountain, and the people of the kraal would come out, hearing the mighty howling, and watch the

pack sweep across the veldt, and with them a man or men. Then they would say that the ghosts were abroad and creep into their huts shivering with fear. But as yet the Wolf-Brethren and their pack killed no men, but game only, or, at times, elephants and lions.

Now when Umslopogaas had abode some moons in the Witch Mountain, on a night he dreamed of Nada, and awakening soft at heart, bethought himself that he would learn tidings concerning me, his father, Mopo, and what had befallen me and her whom he deemed his mother, and Nada, his sister, and his other brethren. So he clothed himself, hiding his nakedness, and, leaving Galazi, descended to that kraal where the old woman had dwelt, and there gave it out that he was a young man, a chief's son from a far place, who sought a wife. The people of the kraal listened to him, though they held that his look was fierce and wild, and one asked if this were Galazi the Wolf, Galazi the Wizard. But another answered that this was not Galazi, for their eyes had seen him. Umslopogaas said that he knew nothing of Galazi, and little of wolves, and lo! while he spoke there came an impi of fifty men and entered the kraal. Umslopogaas looked at the leaders of the impi and knew them for captains of Chaka. At first he would have spoken to them, but his *Ehlosé* bade him hold his peace. So he sat in a corner of the big hut and listened. Presently the headman of the kraal, who trembled with fear, for he believed that the impi had been sent to destroy him and all that were his, asked the captain what was his will.

"A little matter, and a vain," said the captain. "We are sent by the king to search for a certain youth, Umslopogaas, the son of Mopo, the king's doctor. Mopo gave it out that the youth was killed by a lion near these mountains, and Chaka would learn if this is true."

"We know nothing of the youth," said the headman. "But what would ye with him?"

"Only this," answered the captain, "to kill him."

"That is yet to do," thought Umslopogaas.

"Who is this Mopo?" asked the headman.

"An evildoer, whose house the king has eaten up—man, woman, and child," answered the captain.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DEATH OF THE KING'S SLAYERS

When Umslopogaas heard these words his heart was heavy, and a great anger burned in his breast, for he thought that I, Mopo, was dead with the rest of his house, and he loved me. But he said nothing; only, watching till none were looking, he slipped past the backs of the captains and won the door of the hut. Soon he was clear of the kraal, and, running swiftly, crossed the river and came to the Ghost Mountain. Meanwhile, the captain asked the headman of the kraal if he knew anything of such a youth as him for whom they sought. The headman told the captain of Galazi the Wolf, but the captain said that this could not be the lad, for Galazi had dwelt many moons upon the Ghost Mountain.

"There is another youth," said the headman; "a stranger, fierce, strong and tall, with eyes that shine like spears. He is in the hut now; he sits yonder in the shadow."

The captain rose and looked into the shadow, but Umslopogaas was gone.

"Now this youth is fled," said the headman, "and yet none saw him fly! Perhaps he also is a wizard! Indeed, I have heard that now there are two of them upon the Ghost Mountain, and that they hunt there at night with the ghost-wolves, but I do not know if it is true."

"Now I am minded to kill you," said the captain in wrath, "because you have suffered this youth to escape me. Without doubt it is Umslopogaas, son of Mopo."

"It is no fault of mine," said the headman. "These young men are wizards, who can pass hither and thither at will. But I say this to you, captain of the king, if you will go on the Ghost Mountain, you must go there alone with your soldiers, for none in these parts dare to tread upon that mountain."

"Yet I shall dare to-morrow," said the captain. "We grow brave at the kraal of Chaka. There men do not fear spears or ghosts or wild beasts or magic, but they fear the king's word alone. The sun sets—give us food. To-morrow we will search the mountain."

Thus, my father, did this captain speak in his folly,—he who should never see another sun.

Now Umslopogaas reached the mountain, and when he had passed the forest—of which he had learned every secret way—the darkness gathered, and the wolves awoke in the darkness and drew near howling. Umslopogaas howled in answer, and presently that great wolf Deathgrip came to him. Umslopogaas saw him and called him by his name; but, behold! the brute did not know him, and flew at him, growling. Then Umslopogaas remembered that the she-wolf's skin was not bound about his shoulders, and therefore it was that the wolf Deathgrip knew him not. For though in the daytime, when the wolves slept, he might pass to and fro without the skin, at night it was not so. He had not brought the skin, because he dared not wear it in the sight of the men of the kraal, lest they should know him for one of the Wolf-Brethren, and it had not been his plan to seek the mountain again that night, but rather on the morrow. Now Umslopogaas knew that his danger was great indeed. He beat back Deathgrip with his kerrie, but others were behind him, for the wolves gathered fast. Then he bounded away towards the cave, for he was so swift of foot that the wolves could not catch him, though they pressed him hard, and once the teeth of one of them tore his moocha. Never before did he run so fast, and in the end he reached the cave and rolled the rock to, and as he did so the wolves dashed themselves against it. Then he clad himself in the hide of the she-wolf, and, pushing aside the stone, came out. And, lo! the eyes of the wolves were opened, and they knew him for one of the brethren who ruled over them, and slunk away at his bidding.

Now Umslopogaas sat himself down at the mouth of the cave waiting for Galazi, and he thought. Presently Galazi came, and in few words Umslopogaas told him all his tale.

"You have run a great risk, my brother," said Galazi. "What now?"

"This," said Umslopogaas: "these people of ours are hungry for the flesh of men; let us feed them full on the soldiers of Chaka, who sit yonder at the kraal seeking my life. I would take vengeance for Mopo, my father, and all my brethren who are dead, and for my mothers, the wives of Mopo. What say you?"

Galazi laughed aloud. "That will be merry, my brother," he said. "I weary of hunting beasts, let us hunt men to-night."

"Ay, to-night," said Umslopogaas, nodding. "I long to look upon that captain as a maid longs for her lover's kiss. But first let us rest and eat, for the night is young; then, Galazi, summon our impi."

So they rested and ate, and afterwards went out armed, and Galazi howled to the wolves, and they came in tens and twenties till all were gathered together. Galazi moved among them, shaking the Watcher, as they sat upon their haunches, and followed him with their fiery eyes.

"We do not hunt game to-night, little people," he cried, "but men, and you love the flesh of men."

Now all the wolves howled as though they understood. Then the pack divided itself as was its custom, the she-wolves following Umslopogaas, the dog-wolves following Galazi, and in silence they moved swiftly down towards the plain. They came to the river and swam it, and there, eight spear throws away, on the farther side of the river stood the kraal. Now the Wolf-Brethren took counsel together, and Galazi, with the dog-wolves, went to the north gate, and Umslopogaas with the she-wolves to the south gate. They reached them safely and in silence, for at the bidding of the brethren the wolves ceased from their howlings. The gates were stopped with thorns, but the brethren pulled out the thorns and made a passage. As they did this it chanced that certain dogs in the kraal heard the sound of the stirred boughs, and awakening, caught the smell of the wolves that were with Umslopogaas, for the wind blew from that quarter. These dogs ran out barking, and presently they came to the south gate of the kraal, and flew at Umslopogaas, who pulled

away the thorns. Now when the wolves saw the dogs they could be restrained no longer, but sprang on them and tore them to fragments, and the sound of their worrying came to the ears of the soldiers of Chaka and of the dwellers in the kraal, so that they sprang from sleep, snatching their arms. And as they came out of the huts they saw in the moonlight a man wearing a wolf's hide rushing across the empty cattle kraal, for the grass was long and the cattle were out at graze, and with him countless wolves, black and grey. Then they cried aloud in terror, saying that the ghosts were on them, and turned to flee to the north gate of the kraal. But, behold! here also they met a man clad in a wolf's skin only, and with him countless wolves, black and grey.

Now, some flung themselves to earth screaming in their fear, and some strove to run away, but the greater part of the soldiers, and with them many of the men of the kraal, came together in knots, being minded to die like men at teeth of the ghosts, and that though they shook with fear. Then Umslopogaas howled aloud, and howled Galazi, and they flung themselves upon the soldiers and the people of the kraal, and with them came the wolves. Then a crying and a baying rose up to heaven as the grey wolves leaped and bit and tore. Little they heeded the spears and kerries of the soldiers. Some were killed, but the rest did not stay. Presently the knots of men broke up, and to each man wolves hung by twos and threes, dragging him to earth. Some few fled, indeed, but the wolves hunted them by gaze and scent, and pulled them down before they passed the gates of the kraal.

The Wolf-Brethren also ravened with the rest. Busy was the Watcher, and many bowed beneath him, and often the spear of Umslopogaas flashed in the moonlight. It was finished; none were left living in that kraal, and the wolves growled sullenly as they took their fill, they who had been hungry for many days. Now the brethren met, and laughed in their wolf joy, because they had slaughtered those who were sent out to slaughter. They called to the wolves, bidding them search the huts, and the wolves entered the huts as dogs enter a thicket, and killed those who lurked there, or drove them forth to be slain without. Presently a man, great and tall, sprang from the last of the huts, where he had hidden himself, and the wolves outside rushed on him to drag him down. But Umslopogaas beat them back, for he had seen the face of the man: it was that captain whom Chaka had sent out to kill him. He beat them back, and stalked up to the captain, saying: "Greeting to you, captain of the king! Now tell us what is your errand here, beneath the shadow of her who sits in stone?" And he pointed with his spear to the Grey Witch on the Ghost Mountain, on which the moon shone bright.

Now the captain had a great heart, though he had hidden from the wolves, and answered boldly:—

"What is that to you, wizard? Your ghost wolves had made an end of my errand. Let them make an end of me also."

"Be not in haste, captain," said Umslopogaas. "Say, did you not seek a certain youth, the son of Mopo?"

"That is so," answered the captain. "I sought one youth, and I have found many evil spirits." And he looked at the wolves tearing their prey, and shuddered.

"Say, captain," quoth Umslopogaas, drawing back his hood of wolf's hide so that the moonlight fell upon his face, "is this the face of that youth whom you sought?"

"It is the face," answered the captain, astonished.

"Ay," laughed Umslopogaas, "it is the face. Fool! I knew your errand and heard your words, and thus have I answered them." And he pointed to the dead. "Now choose, and swiftly. Will you run for your life against my wolves? Will you do battle for your life against these four?" And he pointed to Greysnout and to Blackfang, to Blood and to Deathgrip, who watched him with slaving lips; "or will you stand face to face with me, and if I am slain, with him who bears the club, and with whom I rule this people black and grey?"

"I fear ghosts, but of men I have no fear, though they be wizards," answered the captain.

"Good!" cried Umslopogaas, shaking his spear.

Then they rushed together, and that fray was fierce. For presently the spear of Umslopogaas was broken in the shield of the captain and he was left weaponless. Now Umslopogaas turned and fled swiftly, bounding over the dead and the wolves who preyed upon them, and the captain followed with uplifted spear, and mocked him as he came. Galazi also wondered that Umslopogaas should fly from a single man. Hither and thither fled Umslopogaas, and always his eyes were on the earth. Of a sudden, Galazi, who watched, saw him sweep forward like a bird and stoop to the ground. Then he wheeled round, and lo! there was an axe in his hand. The captain rushed at him, and Umslopogaas smote as he rushed, and the blade of the great spear that was lifted to pierce him fell to the ground hewn from its haft. Again Umslopogaas smote: the moon-shaped axe sank through the stout shield deep into the breast beyond. Then the captain threw up his arms and fell to the earth.

"Ah!" cried Umslopogaas, "you sought a youth to slay him, and have found an axe to be slain by it! Sleep softly, captain of Chaka."

Then Umslopogaas spoke to Galazi, saying: "My brother, I will fight no more with the spear, but with the axe alone; it was to seek an axe that I ran to and fro like a coward. But this is a poor thing! See, the haft is split because of the greatness of my stroke! Now this is my desire—to win that great axe of Jikiza, which is called Groan-Maker, of which we have heard tell, so that axe and club may stand together in the fray."

"That must be for another night," said Galazi. "We have not done so ill for once. Now let us search for pots and corn, of which we stand in need, and then to the mountain before dawn finds us."

Thus, then, did the Wolf-Brethren bring death on the impi of Chaka, and this was but the first of many deaths that they wrought with the help of the wolves. For ever they ravened through the land at night, and, falling on those they hated, they ate them up, till their name and the name of the ghost-wolves became terrible in the ears of men, and the land was swept clean. But they found that the wolves would not go abroad to worry everywhere. Thus, on a certain night, they set out to fall upon the kraals of the People of the Axe, where dwelt the chief Jikiza, who was named the Unconquered, and owned the axe Groan-Maker, but when they neared the kraal the wolves turned back and fled. Then Galazi remembered the dream that he had dreamed, in which the Dead One in the cave had seemed to speak, telling him that there only where the men-eaters had hunted in the past might the wolves hunt to-day. So they returned home, but Umslopogaas set himself to find a plan to win the axe.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### UMSLOPOGAAS VENTURES OUT TO WIN THE AXE

Now many moons had gone by since Umslopogaas became a king of the wolves, and he was a man full grown, a man fierce and tall and keen; a slayer of men, fleet of foot and of valour unequalled, seeing by night as well as by day. But he was not yet named the Slaughterer, and not yet did he hold that iron chieftainess, the axe Groan-Maker. Still, the desire to win the axe was foremost in his mind, for no woman had entered there, who when she enters drives out all other desire—ay, my father, even that of good weapons. At times, indeed, Umslopogaas would lurk in the reeds by the river looking at the kraal of Jikiza the Unconquered, and would watch the gates of his kraal, and once as he lurked he saw a man great, broad and hairy, who bore upon his shoulder a shining axe, hafted with the horn of a rhinoceros. After that his greed for this axe entered into Umslopogaas more and more, till at length he scarcely could sleep for thinking of it, and to Galazi he spoke of little else, wearying him much with his talk, for Galazi loved silence. But for all his longing he could find no means to win it.

Now it befell that as Umslopogaas hid one evening in the reeds, watching the kraal of Jikiza, he saw a maiden straight and fair, whose skin shone like the copper anklets on her limbs. She walked slowly towards the reeds where he lay hidden. Nor did she stop at the brink of the reeds; she entered them and sat herself down within a spear's length of where Umslopogaas was seated, and at once began to weep, speaking to herself as she wept.

"Would that the ghost-wolves might fall on him and all that is his," she sobbed, "ay, and on Masilo also! I would hound them on, even if I myself must next know their fangs. Better to die by the teeth of the wolves than to be sold to this fat pig of a Masilo. Oh! if I must wed him, I will give him a knife for the bride's kiss. Oh! that I were a lady of the ghost-wolves, there should be a picking of bones in the kraal of Jikiza before the moon grows young again."

Umslopogaas heard, and of a sudden reared himself up before the maid, and he was great and wild to look on, and the she-wolf's fangs shone upon his brow.

"The ghost-wolves are at hand, damsel," he said. "They are ever at hand for those who need them."

Now the maid saw him and screamed faintly, then grew silent, wondering at the greatness and the fierce eyes of the man who spoke to her.

"Who are you?" she asked. "I fear you not, whoever you are."

"There you are wrong, damsel, for all men fear me, and they have cause to fear. I am one of the Wolf-Brethren, whose names have been told of; I am a wizard of the Ghost Mountain. Take heed, now, lest I kill you. It will be of little avail to call upon your people, for my feet are fleetier than theirs."

"I have no wish to call upon my people, Wolf-Man," she answered. "And for the rest, I am too young to kill."

"That is so, maiden," answered Umslopogaas, looking at her beauty. "What were the words upon your lips as to Jikiza and a certain Masilo? Were they not fierce words, such as my heart likes well?"

"It seems that you heard them," answered the girl. "What need to waste breath in speaking them again?"

"No need, maiden. Now tell me your story; perhaps I may find a way to help you."

"There is little to tell," she answered. "It is a small tale and a common. My name is Zinita, and Jikiza the Unconquered is my stepfather. He married my mother, who is dead, but none of his blood is in me. Now he would give me in marriage to a certain Masilo, a fat man and an old, whom I hate, because Masilo offers many cattle for me."

"Is there, then, another whom you would wed, maiden?" asked Umslopogaas.

"There is none," answered Zinita, looking him in the eyes.

"And is there no path by which you may escape from Masilo?"

"There is only one path, Wolf-Man—by death. If I die, I shall escape; if Masilo dies, I shall escape; but to little end, for I shall be given to another; but if Jikiza dies, then it will be well. What of that wolf-people of yours, are they not hungry, Wolf-Man?"

"I cannot bring them here," answered Umslopogaas. "Is there no other way?"

"There is another way," said Zinita, "if one can be found to try it." And again she looked at him strangely, causing the blood to beat within him. "Hearken! do you not know how our people are governed? They are governed by him who holds the axe Groan-Maker. He that can win the axe in war from the hand of him who holds it, shall be our chief. But if he who holds the axe dies unconquered, then his son takes his place and with it the axe. It has been thus, indeed, for four generations, since he who held Groan-Maker has always been unconquerable. But I have heard that the great-grandfather of Jikiza won the axe from him who held it in his day; he won it by fraud. For when the axe had fallen on him but lightly, he fell over, feigning death. Then the owner of the axe laughed, and turned to walk away. But the forefather of Jikiza sprang up behind him and pierced him through with a spear, and thus he became chief of the People of the Axe. Therefore, it is the custom of Jikiza to hew off the heads of those whom he kills with the axe."

"Does he, then, slay many?" asked Umslopogaas.

"Of late years, few indeed," she said, "for none dare stand against him—no, not with all to win. For, holding the axe Groan-Maker, he is unconquerable, and to fight with him is sure death. Fifty-and-one have tried in all, and before the hut of Jikiza there are piled

fifty-and-one white skulls. And know this, the axe must be won in fight; if it is stolen or found, it has no virtue—nay, it brings shame and death to him who holds it.”

“How, then, may a man give battle to Jikiza?” he asked again.

“Thus: Once in every year, on the first day of the new moon of the summer season, Jikiza holds a meeting of the headmen. Then he must rise and challenge all or any to come forward and do battle with him to win the axe and become chief in his place. Now if one comes forward, they go into the cattle kraal, and there the matter is ended. Afterwards, when the head is hewn from his foe, Jikiza goes back to the meeting of the headmen, and they talk as before. All are free to come to the meeting, and Jikiza must fight with them if they wish it, whoever they be.”

“Perhaps I shall be there,” said Umslopogaas.

“After this meeting at the new moon, I am to be given in marriage to Masilo,” said the maid. “But should one conquer Jikiza, then he will be chief, and can give me in marriage to whom he will.”

Now Umslopogaas understood her meaning, and knew that he had found favour in her sight; and the thought moved him a little, for women were strange to him as yet.

“If perchance I should be there,” he said, “and if perchance I should win the iron chieftainess, the axe Groan-Maker, and rule over the People of the Axe, you should not live far from the shadow of the axe thenceforward, maid Zinita.”

“It is well, Wolf-Man, though some might not wish to dwell in that shadow; but first you must win the axe. Many have tried, and all have failed.”

“Yet one must succeed at last,” he said, “and so, farewell!” and he leaped into the torrent of the river, and swam it with great strokes.

Now the maid Zinita watched him till he was gone, and love of him entered into her heart—a love that was fierce and jealous and strong. But as he wended to the Ghost Mountain Umslopogaas thought rather of axe Groan-Maker than of Maid Zinita; for ever, at the bottom, Umslopogaas loved war more than women, though this has been his fate, that women have brought sorrow on his head.

Fifteen days must pass before the day of the new moon, and during this time Umslopogaas thought much and said little. Still, he told Galazi something of the tale, and that he was determined to do battle with Jikiza the Unconquered for the axe Groan-Maker. Galazi said that he would do well to let it be, and that it was better to stay with the wolves than to go out seeking strange weapons. He said also that even if he won the axe, the matter might not stay there, for he must take the girl also, and his heart boded no good of women. It had been a girl who poisoned his father in the kraals of the Halakazi. To all of which Umslopogaas answered nothing, for his heart was set both on the axe and the girl, but more on the first than the last.

So the time wore on, and at length came the day of the new moon. At the dawn of that day Umslopogaas arose and clad himself in a moocha, binding the she-wolf's skin round his middle beneath the moocha. In his hand he took a stout fighting-shield, which he had made of buffalo hide, and that same light moon-shaped axe with which he had slain the captain of Chaka.

“A poor weapon with which to kill Jikiza the Unconquerable,” said Galazi, eyeing it askance.

“It shall serve my turn,” answered Umslopogaas.

Now Umslopogaas ate, and then they moved together slowly down the mountain and crossed the river by a ford, for he wished to save his strength. On the farther side of the river Galazi hid himself in the reeds, because his face was known, and there Umslopogaas bade him farewell, not knowing if he should look upon him again. Afterwards he walked up to the Great Place of Jikiza. Now when he reached the gates of the kraal, he saw that many people were streaming through them, and mingled with the people. Presently they came to the open space in front of the huts of Jikiza, and there the headmen were gathered together. In the centre of them, and before a heap of the skulls of men which were piled up against his door-posts, sat Jikiza, a huge man, a hairy and a proud, who glared about him rolling his eyes. Fastened to his arm by a thong of leather was the great axe Groan-Maker, and each man as he came up saluted the axe, calling it “*Inkosikaas*,” or chieftainess, but he did not salute Jikiza. Umslopogaas sat down with the people in front of the councillors, and few took any notice of him, except Zinita, who moved sullenly to and fro bearing gourds of beer to the councillors. Near to Jikiza, on his right hand, sat a fat man with small and twinkling eyes, who watched the maid Zinita greedily.

“Yon man,” thought Umslopogaas, “is Masilo. The better for blood-letting will you be, Masilo.”

Presently Jikiza spoke, rolling his eyes: “This is the matter before you, councillors. I have settled it in my mind to give my step-daughter Zinita in marriage to Masilo, but the marriage gift is not yet agreed on. I demand a hundred head of cattle from Masilo, for the maid is fair and straight, a proper maid, and, moreover, my daughter, though not of my blood. But Masilo offers fifty head only, therefore I ask you to settle it.”

“We hear you, Lord of the Axe,” answered one of the councillors, “but first, O Unconquered, you must on this day of the year, according to ancient custom, give public challenge to any man to fight you for the Groan-Maker and for your place as chief of the People of the Axe.”

“This is a wearisome thing,” grumbled Jikiza. “Can I never have done in it? Fifty-and-three have I slain in my youth without a wound, and now for many years I have challenged, like a cock on a dunghill, and none crow in answer.”

“Ho, now! Is there any man who will come forward and do battle with me, Jikiza, for the great axe Groan-Maker? To him who can win it, it shall be, and with it the chieftainship of the People of the Axe.”

Thus he spoke very fast, as a man gabbles a prayer to a spirit in whom he has little faith, then turned once more to talk of the cattle of Masilo and of the maid Zinita. But suddenly Umslopogaas stood up, looking at him over the top of his war shield, and crying, “Here is one, O Jikiza, who will do battle with you for the axe Groan-Maker and for the chieftainship that is to him who holds the axe.”

Now, all the people laughed, and Jikiza glared at him.

“Come forth from behind that big shield of yours,” he said. “Come out and tell me your name and lineage—you who would do battle with the Unconquered for the ancient axe.”

Then Umslopogaas came forward, and he looked so fierce, though he was but young, that the people laughed no more.

“What is my name and lineage to you, Jikiza?” he said. “Let it be, and hasten to do me battle, as you must by the custom, for I am eager to handle the Groan-Maker and to sit in your seat and settle this matter of the cattle of Masilo the Pig. When I have killed you I will take a name who now have none.”

Now once more the people laughed, but Jikiza grew mad with wrath, and sprang up gasping.

“What!” he said, “you dare to speak thus to me, you babe unweaned, to me the Unconquered, the holder of the axe! Never did I think to live to hear such talk from a long-legged pup. On to the cattle kraal, to the cattle kraal, People of the Axe, that I may hew this braggart’s head from his shoulders. He would stand in my place, would he?—the place that I and my fathers have held for four generations by virtue of the axe. I tell you all, that presently I will stand upon his head, and then we will settle the matter of Masilo.”

“Babble not so fast, man,” quoth Umslopogaas, “or if you must babble, speak those words which you would say ere you bid the sun farewell.”

Now, Jikiza choked with rage, and foam came from his lips so that he could not speak, but the people found this sport—all except Masilo, who looked askance at the stranger, tall and fierce, and Zinita, who looked at Masilo, and with no love. So they moved down to the cattle kraal, and Galazi, seeing it from afar, could keep away no longer, but drew near and mingled with the crowd.

## CHAPTER XVII.

# UMSLOPOGAAS BECOMES CHIEF OF THE PEOPLE OF THE AXE

Now, when Umslopogaas and Jikiza the Unconquered had come to the cattle kraal, they were set in its centre and there were ten paces between them. Umslopogaas was armed with the great shield and the light moon-shaped axe, Jikiza carried the Groan-Maker and a small dancing shield, and, looking at the weapons of the two, people thought that the stranger would furnish no sport to the holder of the axe.

"He is ill-armed," said an old man, "it should be otherwise—large axe, small shield. Jikiza is unconquerable, and the big shield will not help this long-legged stranger when Groan-Maker rattles on the buffalo hide." The old man spoke thus in the hearing of Galazi the Wolf, and Galazi thought that he spoke wisely, and sorrowed for the fate of his brother.

Now, the word was given, and Jikiza rushed on Umslopogaas, roaring, for his rage was great. But Umslopogaas did not stir till his foe was about to strike, then suddenly he leaped aside, and as Jikiza passed he smote him hard upon the back with the flat of his axe, making a great sound, for it was not his plan to try and kill Jikiza with this axe. Now, a shout of laughter went up from the hundreds of the people, and the heart of Jikiza nearly burst with rage because of the shame of that blow. Round he came like a bull that is mad, and once more rushed at Umslopogaas, who lifted his shield to meet him. Then, of a sudden, just when the great axe leapt on high, Umslopogaas uttered a cry as of fear, and, turning, fled before the face of Jikiza. Now once more the shout of laughter went up, while Umslopogaas fled swiftly, and after him rushed Jikiza, blind with fury. Round and about the kraal sped Umslopogaas, scarcely a spear's length ahead of Jikiza, and he ran keeping his back to the sun as much as might be, that he might watch the shadow of Jikiza. A second time he sped round, while the people cheered the chase as hunters cheer a dog which pursues a buck. So cunningly did Umslopogaas run, that, though he seemed to reel with weakness in such fashion that men thought his breath was gone, yet he went ever faster and faster, drawing Jikiza after him.

Now, when Umslopogaas knew by the breathing of his foe and by the staggering of his shadow that his strength was spent, suddenly he made as though he were about to fall himself, and stumbled out of the path far to the right, and as he stumbled he let drop his great shield full in the way of Jikiza's feet. Then it came about that Jikiza, rushing on blindly, caught his feet in the shield and fell headlong to earth. Umslopogaas saw, and swooped on him like an eagle to a dove. Before men could so much as think, he had seized the axe Groan-Maker, and with a blow of the steel he held had severed the thong of leather which bound it to the wrist of Jikiza, and sprung back, holding the great axe aloft, and casting down his own weapon upon the ground. Now, the watchers saw all the cunning of his fight, and those of them who hated Jikiza shouted aloud. But others were silent.

Slowly Jikiza gathered himself from the ground, wondering if he were still alive, and as he rose he grasped the little axe of Umslopogaas, and, looking at it, he wept. But Umslopogaas held up the great Groan-Maker, the iron chieftainess, and examined its curved points of blue steel, the gouge that stands behind it, and the beauty of its haft, bound about with wire of brass, and ending in a knob like the knob of a stick, as a lover looks upon the beauty of his bride. Then before all men he kissed the broad blade and cried aloud:—

"Greeting to thee, my Chieftainess, greeting to thee, Wife of my youth, whom I have won in war. Never shall we part, thou and I, and together will we die, thou and I, for I am not minded that others should handle thee when I am gone."

Thus he cried in the hearing of men, then turned to Jikiza, who stood weeping, because he had lost all.

"Where now is your pride, O Unconquered?" laughed Umslopogaas. "Fight on. You are as well armed as I was a while ago, when I did not fear to stand before you."

Jikiza looked at him for a moment, then with a curse he hurled the little axe at him, and, turning, fled swiftly towards the gates of the cattle kraal.

Umslopogaas stooped, and the little axe sped over him. Then he stood for a while watching, and the people thought that he meant to let Jikiza go. But that was not his desire; he waited, indeed, until Jikiza had covered nearly half the space between him and the gate, then with a roar he leaped forward, as light leaps from a cloud, and so fast did his feet fly that the watchers could scarce see them move. Jikiza fled fast also, yet he seemed but as one who stands still. Now he reached the gate of the kraal, now there was rush, a light of downward falling steel, and something swept past him. Then, behold! Jikiza fell in the gateway of the cattle kraal, and all saw that he was dead, smitten to death by that mighty axe Groan-Maker, which he and his fathers had held for many years.

A great shout went up from the crowd of watchers when they knew that Jikiza the Unconquered was killed at last, and there were many who hailed Umslopogaas, naming him Chief and Lord of the People of the Axe. But the sons of Jikiza to the number of ten, great men and brave, rushed on Umslopogaas to kill him. Umslopogaas ran backwards, lifting up the Groan-Maker, when certain councillors of the people flung themselves in between them, crying, "Hold!"

"Is not this your law, ye councillors," said Umslopogaas, "that, having conquered the chief of the People of the Axe, I myself am chief?"

"That is our law indeed, stranger," answered an aged councillor, "but this also is our law: that now you must do battle, one by one, with all who come against you. So it was in my father's time, when the grandfather of him who now lies dead won the axe, and so it must be again to-day."

"I have nothing to say against the rule," said Umslopogaas. "Now who is there who will come up against me to do battle for the axe Groan-Maker and the chieftainship of the People of the Axe?"

Then all the ten sons of Jikiza stepped forward as one man, for their hearts were mad with wrath because of the death of their father and because the chieftainship had gone from their race, so that in truth they cared little if they lived or died. But there were none besides these, for all men feared to stand before Umslopogaas and the Groan-Maker.

Umslopogaas counted them. "There are ten, by the head of Chaka!" he cried. "Now if I must fight all these one by one, no time will be left to me this day to talk of the matter of Masilo and of the maid Zinita. Hearken! What say you, sons of Jikiza the Conquered? If I find one other to stand beside me in the fray, and all of you come on at once against us twain, ten against two, to slay us or be slain, will that be to your minds?"

The brethren consulted together, and held that so they should be in better case than if they went up one by one.

"So be it," they said, and the councillors assented.

Now, as he fled round and round, Umslopogaas had seen the face of Galazi, his brother, in the throng, and knew that he hungered to share the fight. So he called aloud that he whom he should choose, and who would stand back to back with him in the fray, if victory were theirs, should be the first after him among the People of the Axe, and as he called, he walked slowly down the line scanning the faces of all, till he came to where Galazi stood leaning on the Watcher.

"Here is a great fellow who bears a great club," said Umslopogaas. "How are you named, fellow?"

"I am named Wolf," answered Galazi.

"Say, now, Wolf, are you willing to stand back to back with me in this fray of two against ten? If victory is ours, you shall be next to me amongst this people."

"Better I love the wild woods and the mountain's breast than the kraals of men and the kiss of wives, Axebearer," answered Galazi. "Yet, because you have shown yourself a warrior of might, and to taste again of the joy of battle, I will stand back to back with you, Axebearer, and see this matter ended."

"A bargain, Wolf!" cried Umslopogaas. And they walked side by side—a mighty pair!—till they came to the centre of the cattle kraal. All there looked on them wondering, and it came into the thoughts of some of them that these were none other than the Wolf-Brethren who dwelt upon the Ghost Mountain.

"Now axe Groan-maker and club Watcher are come together, Galazi," said Umslopogaas as they walked, "and I think that few can stand before them."

"Some shall find it so," answered Galazi. "At the least, the fray will be merry, and what matter how frays end?"

"Ah," said Umslopogaas, "victory is good, but death ends all and is best of all."

Then they spoke of the fashion in which they would fight, and Umslopogaas looked curiously at the axe he carried, and at the point on its hammer, balancing it in his hand. When he had looked long, the pair took their stand back to back in the centre of the kraal, and people saw that Umslopogaas held the axe in a new fashion, its curved blade being inwards towards his breast, and the hollow point turned towards the foe. The ten brethren gathered themselves together, shaking their assegais; five of them stood before Umslopogaas and five before Galazi the Wolf. They were all great men, made fierce with rage and shame.

"Now nothing except witchcraft can save these two," said a councillor to one who stood by him.

"Yet there is virtue in the axe," answered the other, "and for the club, it seems that I know it: I think it is named Watcher of the Fords, and woe to those who stand before the Watcher. I myself have seen him aloft when I was young; moreover, these are no cravens who hold the axe and the club. They are but lads, indeed, yet they have drunk wolf's milk."

Meanwhile, an aged man drew near to speak the word of onset; it was that same man who had set out the law to Umslopogaas. He must give the signal by throwing up a spear, and when it struck the ground, then the fight would begin. The old man took the spear and threw it, but his hand was weak, and he cast so clumsily that it fell among the sons of Jikiza, who stood before Umslopogaas, causing them to open up to let it pass between them, and drawing the eyes of all ten of them to it, but Umslopogaas watched for the touching of the spear only, being careless where it touched. As the point of it kissed the earth, he said a word, and lo! Umslopogaas and Galazi, not waiting for the onslaught of the ten, as men had thought they must, sprang forward, each at the line of foes who were before him. While the ten still stood confused, for it had been their plan to attack, the Wolf-Brethren were upon them. Groan-Maker was up, but as for no great stroke. He did but peck, as a bird pecks with his bill, and yet a man dropped dead. The Watcher also was up, but he fell like a falling tree, and was the death of one. Through the lines of the ten passed the Wolf-Brethren in the gaps that each had made. Then they turned swiftly and charged towards each other again; again Groan-Maker pecked, again the Watcher thundered, and lo! once more Umslopogaas and Galazi stood back to back unhurt, but before them lay four men dead.

The onslaught and the return were so swift, that men scarcely understood what had been done; even those of the sons of Jikiza who were left stared at each other wondering. Then they knew that they were but six, for four of them were dead. With a shout of rage they rushed upon the pair from both sides, but in either case one was the most eager, and outstepped the other two, and thus it came about that time was given the Wolf-Brethren to strike at him alone, before his fellows were at his side. He who came at Umslopogaas drove at him with his spear, but he was not to be caught thus, for he bent his middle sideways, so that the spear only cut his skin, and as he bent tapped with the point of the axe at the head of the smiter, dealing death on him.

"Yonder Woodpecker has a bill of steel, and he can use it well," said the councillor to him who stood by him.

"This is a Slaughterer indeed," the man answered, and the people heard the names. Thenceforth they knew Umslopogaas as the Woodpecker, and as *Bulalio*, or the Slaughterer, and by no other names. Now, he who came at Galazi the Wolf rushed on wildly, holding his spear short. But Galazi was cunning in war. He took one step forward to meet him, then, swinging the Watcher backward, he let him fall at the full length of arms and club. The child of Jikiza lifted his shield to catch the blow, but the shield was to the Watcher what a leaf is to the wind. Full on its hide the huge club fell, making a loud sound; the war-shield doubled up like a raw skin, and he who bore it fell crushed to the earth.

Now for a moment, the four who were left of the sons of Jikiza hovered round the pair, feinting at them from afar, but never coming within reach of axe or club. One threw a spear indeed, and though Umslopogaas leaped aside, and as it sped towards him smote the haft in two with the blade of Groan-Maker, yet its head flew on, wounding Galazi in the flank. Then he who had thrown the

spear turned to fly, for his hands were empty, and the others followed swiftly, for the heart was out of them, and they dared to do battle with these two no more.

Thus the fight was ended, and from its beginning till the finish was not longer than the time in which men might count a hundred slowly.

"It seems that none are left for us to kill, Galazi," said Umslopogaas, laughing aloud. "Ah, that was a cunning fight! Ho! you sons of the Unconquered, who run so fast, stay your feet. I give you peace; you shall live to sweep my huts and to plough my fields with the other women of my kraal. Now, councillors, the fighting is done, so let us to the chief's hut, where Masilo waits us," and he turned and went with Galazi, and after him followed all the people, wondering and in silence.

When he reached the hut Umslopogaas sat himself down in the place where Jikiza had sat that morning, and the maid Zinita came to him with a wet cloth and washed the wound that the spear had made. He thanked her; then she would have washed Galazi's wound also, and this was deeper, but Galazi bade her to let him be roughly, as he would have no woman meddling with his wounds. For neither then nor at any other time did Galazi turn to women, but he hated Zinita most of them all.

Then Umslopogaas spoke to Masilo the Pig, who sat before him with a frightened face, saying, "It seems, O Masilo, that you have sought this maid Zinita in marriage, and against her will, persecuting her. Now I had intended to kill you as an offering to her anger, but there has been enough blood-letting to-day. Yet you shall have a marriage gift to this girl, whom I myself will take in marriage: you shall give a hundred head of cattle. Then get you gone from among the People of the Axe, lest a worse thing befall you, Masilo the Pig."

So Masilo rose up and went, and his face was green with fear, but he paid the hundred head of cattle and fled towards the kraal of Chaka. Zinita watched him go, and she was glad of it, and because the Slaughterer had named her for his wife.

"I am well rid of Masilo," she said aloud, in the hearing of Galazi, "but I had been better pleased to see him dead before me."

"This woman has a fierce heart," thought Galazi, "and she will bring no good to Umslopogaas, my brother."

Now the councillors and the captains of the People of the Axe *konzaed* to him whom they named the Slaughterer, doing homage to him as chief and holder of the axe, and also they did homage to the axe itself. So Umslopogaas became chief over this people, and their number was many, and he grew great and fat in cattle and wives, and none dared to gainsay him. From time to time, indeed, a man ventured to stand up before him in fight, but none could conquer him, and in a little while no one sought to face Groan-Maker when he lifted himself to peck.

Galazi also was great among the people, but dwelt with them little, for best he loved the wild woods and the mountain's breast, and often, as of old, he swept at night across the forest and the plains, and the howling of the ghost-wolves went with him.

But henceforth Umslopogaas the Slaughterer hunted very rarely with the wolves at night; he slept at the side of Zinita, and she loved him much and bore him children.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE CURSE OF BALEKA

Now, my father, my story winds back again as the river bends towards its source, and I tell of those events which happened at the king's kraal of Gibamaxegu, which you white people name Gibbeclack, the kraal that is called "Pick-out-the-old-men," for it was there that Chaka murdered all the aged who were unfit for war.

After I, Mopo, had stood before the king, and he had given me new wives and fat cattle and a kraal to dwell in, the bones of Unandi, the Great Mother Elephant, Mother of the Heavens, were gathered together from the ashes of my huts, and because all could not be found, some of the bones of my wives were collected also to make up the number. But Chaka never knew this. When all were brought together, a great pit was dug and the bones were set out in order in the pit and buried; but not alone, for round them were placed twelve maidens of the servants of Unandi, and these maidens were covered over with the earth, and left to die in the pit by the bones of Unandi, their mistress. Moreover, all those who were present at the burial were made into a regiment and commanded that they should dwell by the grave for the space of a year. They were many, my father, but I was not one of them. Also Chaka gave orders that no crops should be sown that year, that the milk of the cows should be spilled upon the ground, and that no woman should give birth to a child for a full year, and that if any should dare to bear children, then that they should be slain and their husbands with them. And for a space of some months these things were done, my father, and great sorrow came upon the land.

Then for a little while there was quiet, and Chaka went about heavily, and he wept often, and we who waited on him wept also as we walked, till at length it came about by use that we could weep without ceasing for many hours. No angry woman can weep as we wept in those days; it was an art, my father, for the teaching of which I received many cattle, for woe to him who had no tears in those days. Then it was also that Chaka sent out the captain and fifty soldiers to search for Umslopogaas, for, though he said nothing more to me of this matter, he did not believe all the tale that I had told him of the death of Umslopogaas in the jaws of a lion and the tale of those who were with me. How that company fared at the hands of Umslopogaas and of Galazi the Wolf, and at the fangs of the people black and grey, I have told you, my father. None of them ever came back again. In after days it was reported to the king that these soldiers were missing, never having returned, but he only laughed, saying that the lion which ate Umslopogaas, son of Mopo, was a fierce one, and had eaten them also.

At last came the night of the new moon, that dreadful night to be followed by a more dreadful morrow. I sat in the kraal of Chaka, and he put his arm about my neck and groaned and wept for his mother, whom he had murdered, and I groaned also, but I did not weep, because it was dark, and on the morrow I must weep much in the sight of king and men. Therefore, I spared my tears, lest they should fail me in my need.

All night long the people drew on from every side towards the kraal, and, as they came in thousands and tens of thousands, they filled the night with their cries, till it seemed as though the whole world were mourning, and loudly. None might cease their crying, and none dared to drink so much as a cup of water. The daylight came, and Chaka rose, saying, "Come, let us go forth, Mopo, and look on those who mourn with us." So we went out, and after us came men armed with clubs to do the bidding of the king.

Outside the kraal the people were gathered, and their number was countless as the leaves upon the trees. On every side the land was black with them, as at times the veldt is black with game. When they saw the king they ceased from their howling and sang the war-song, then once again they howled, and Chaka walked among them weeping. Now, my father, the sight became dreadful, for, as the sun rose higher the day grew hot, and utter weariness came upon the people, who were packed together like herds of cattle, and, though oxen slain in sacrifice lay around, they might neither eat nor drink. Some fell to the ground, and were trampled to death, others took too much snuff to make them weep, others stained their eyes with saliva, others walked to and fro, their tongues hanging from their jaws, while groans broke from their parched throats.

"Now, Mopo, we shall learn who are the wizards that have brought these ills upon us," said the king, "and who are the true-hearted men."

As we spoke we came upon a man, a chief of renown. He was named Zwaumbana, chief of the Amabovus, and with him were his wives and followers. This man could weep no more; he gasped with thirst and heat. The king looked at him.

"See, Mopo," he said, "see that brute who has no tears for my mother who is dead! Oh, the monster without a heart! Shall such as he live to look upon the sun, while I and thou must weep, Mopo? Never! never! Take him away, and all those who are with him! Take them away, the people without hearts, who do not weep because my mother is dead by witchcraft!"

And Chaka walked on weeping, and I followed also weeping, but the chief Zwaumbana and those with him were all slain by those who do the bidding of the king, and the slayers also must weep as they slew. Presently we came upon another man, who, seeing the king, took snuff secretly to bring tears to his eyes. But the glance of Chaka was quick, and he noted it.

"Look at him, Mopo," he said, "look at the wizard who has no tears, though my mother is dead by witchcraft. See, he takes snuff to bring tears to his eyes that are dry with wickedness. Take him away, the heartless brute! Oh, take him away!"

So this one also was killed, and these were but the first of thousands, for presently Chaka grew mad with wickedness, with fury, and with the lust of blood. He walked to and fro, weeping, going now and again into his hut to drink beer, and I with him, for he said that we who sorrowed must have food. And ever as he walked he would wave his arm or his assegai, saying, "Take them away, the heartless brutes, who do not weep because my mother is dead," and those who chanced to stand before his arm were killed, till at length the slayers could slay no more, and themselves were slain, because their strength had failed them, and they had no more tears. And I also, I must slay, lest if I slew not I should myself be slain.

And now, at length, the people also went mad with their thirst and the fury of their fear. They fell upon each other, killing each other; every man who had a foe sought him out and killed him. None were spared, the place was but a shambles; there on that day died full seven thousand men, and still Chaka walked weeping among them, saying, "Take them away, the heartless brutes, take them away!" Yet, my father, there was cunning in his cruelty, for though he destroyed many for sport alone, also he slew on this day all those whom he hated or whom he feared.

At length the night came down, the sun sank red that day, all the sky was like blood, and blood was all the earth beneath. Then the killing ceased, because none had now the strength to kill, and the people lay panting in heaps upon the ground, the living and the dead together. I looked at them, and saw that if they were not allowed to eat and drink, before day dawned again the most of them would be dead, and I spoke to the king, for I cared little in that hour if I lived or died; even my hope of vengeance was forgotten in the sickness of my heart.

"A mourning indeed, O King," I said, "a merry mourning for true-hearted men, but for wizards a mourning such as they do not love. I think that thy sorrows are avenged, O King, thy sorrows and mine also."

"Not so, Mopo," answered the king, "this is but the beginning; our mourning was merry to-day, it shall be merrier to-morrow."

"To-morrow, O King, few will be left to mourn; for the land will be swept of men."

"Why, Mopo, son of Makedama? But a few have perished of all the thousands who are gathered together. Number the people and they will not be missed."

"But a few have died beneath the assegai and the kerrie, O King. Yet hunger and thirst shall finish the spear's work. The people have neither eaten nor drunk for a day and a night, and for a day and a night they have wailed and moaned. Look without, Black One, there they lie in heaps with the dead. By to-morrow's light they also will be dead or dying."

Now, Chaka thought awhile, and he saw that the work would go too far, leaving him but a small people over whom to rule.

"It is hard, Mopo," he said, "that thou and I must mourn alone over our woes while these dogs feast and make merry. Yet, because of the gentleness of my heart, I will deal gently with them. Go out, son of Makedama, and bid my children eat and drink if they have the heart, for this mourning is ended. Scarcely will Unandi, my mother, sleep well, seeing that so little blood has been shed on her grave—surely her spirit will haunt my dreams. Yet, because of the gentleness of my heart, I declare this mourning ended. Let my children eat and drink, if, indeed, they have the heart."

"Happy are the people over whom such a king is set," I said in answer. Then I went out and told the words of Chaka to the chiefs and captains, and those of them who had the voice left to them praised the goodness of the king. But the most gave over sucking the dew from their sticks, and rushed to the water like cattle that have wandered five days in the desert, and drank their fill. Some of them were trampled to death in the water.

Afterwards I slept as I might best; it was not well, my father, for I knew that Chaka was not yet gutted with slaughter.

On the morrow many of the people went back to their homes, having sought leave from the king, others drew away the dead to the place of bones, and yet others were sent out in impis to kill such as had not come to the mourning of the king. When midday was past, Chaka said that he would walk, and ordered me and other of his indunas and servants to walk with him. We went on in silence, the king leaning on my shoulder as on a stick. "What of thy people, Mopo," he said at length, "what of the Langeni tribe? Were they at my mourning? I did not see them."

Then I answered that I did not know, they had been summoned, but the way was long and the time short for so many to march so far.

"Dogs should run swiftly when their master calls, Mopo, my servant," said Chaka, and the dreadful light came into his eyes that never shone in the eyes of any other man. Then I grew sick at heart, my father—ay, though I loved my people little, and they had driven me away, I grew sick at heart. Now we had come to a spot where there is a great rift of black rock, and the name of that rift is U'Donga-lu-ka-Tatiyana. On either side of this donga the ground slopes steeply down towards its yawning lips, and from its end a man may see the open country. Here Chaka sat down at the end of the rift, pondering. Presently he looked up and saw a vast multitude of men, women, and children, who wound like a snake across the plain beneath towards the kraal Gibamaxegu.

"I think, Mopo," said the king, "that by the colour of their shields, yonder should be the Langeni tribe—thine own people, Mopo."

"It is my people, O King," I answered.

Then Chaka sent messengers, running swiftly, and bade them summon the Langeni people to him where he sat. Other messengers he sent also to the kraal, whispering in their ears, but what he said I did not know then.

Now, for a while, Chaka watched the long black snake of men winding towards him across the plain till the messengers met them and the snake began to climb the slope of the hill.

"How many are these people of thine, Mopo?" asked the king.

"I know not, O Elephant," I answered, "who have not seen them for many years. Perhaps they number three full regiments."

"Nay, more," said the king; "what thinkest thou, Mopo, would this people of thine fill the rift behind us?" and he nodded at the gulf of stone.

Now, my father, I trembled in all my flesh, seeing the purpose of Chaka; but I could find no words to say, for my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth.

"The people are many," said Chaka, "yet, Mopo, I bet thee fifty head of cattle that they will not fill the donga."

"The king is pleased to jest," I said.

"Yea, Mopo, I jest; yet as a jest take thou the bet."

"As the king wills," I murmured—who could not refuse. Now the people of my tribe drew near: at their head was an old man, with white hair and beard, and, looking at him, I knew him for my father, Makedama. When he came within earshot of the king, he gave him the royal salute of *Bayéte*, and fell upon his hands and knees, crawling towards him, and *konzaed* to the king, praising him as he came. All the thousands of the people also fell on their hands and knees, and praised the king aloud, and the sound of their praising was like the sound of a great thunder.

At length Makedama, my father, writhing on his breast like a snake, lay before the majesty of the king. Chaka bade him rise, and greeted him kindly; but all the thousands of the people yet lay upon their breasts beating the dust with their heads.

"Rise, Makedama, my child, father of the people of the Langeni," said Chaka, "and tell me why art thou late in coming to my mourning?"

"The way was far, O King," answered Makedama, my father, who did not know me. "The way was far and the time short. Moreover, the women and the children grew weary and footsore, and they are weary in this hour."

"Speak not of it, Makedama, my child," said the king. "Surely thy heart mourned and that of thy people, and soon they shall rest from their weariness. Say, are they here every one?"

"Every one, O Elephant!—none are wanting. My kraals are desolate, the cattle wander untended on the hills, birds pick at the unguarded crops."

"It is well, Makedama, thou faithful servant! Yet thou wouldst mourn with me an hour—is it not so? Now, hearken! Bid thy people pass to the right and to the left of me, and stand in all their numbers upon the slopes of the grass that run down to the lips of the rift."

So Makedama, my father, bade the people do the bidding of the king, for neither he nor the indunas saw his purpose, but I, who knew his wicked heart, I saw it. Then the people filed past to the right and to the left by hundreds and by thousands, and presently the grass of the slopes could be seen no more, because of their number. When all had passed, Chaka spoke again to Makedama, my father, bidding him climb down to the bottom of the donga, and thence lift up his voice in mourning. The old man obeyed the king. Slowly, and with much pain, he clambered to the bottom of the rift and stood there. It was so deep and narrow that the light scarcely seemed to reach to where he stood, for I could only see the white of his hair gleaming far down in the shadows.

Then, standing far beneath, he lifted up his voice, and it reached the thousands of those who clustered upon the slopes. It seemed still and small, yet it came to them faintly like the voice of one speaking from a mountain-top in a time of snow:—

*"Mourn, children of Makedama!"*

And all the thousands of the people—men, women, and children—echoed his words in a thunder of sound, crying:—

*"Mourn, children of Makedama!"*

Again he cried:—

*"Mourn, people of the Langeni, mourn with the whole world!"*

And the thousands answered:—

*"Mourn, people of the Langeni, mourn with the whole world!"*

A third time came his voice:—

*"Mourn, children of Makedama, mourn, people of the Langeni, mourn with the whole world!"*

*"Howl, ye warriors; weep, ye women; beat your breasts, ye maidens; sob, ye little children!"*

*"Drink of the water of tears, cover yourselves with the dust of affliction."*

*"Mourn, O tribe of the Langeni, because the Mother of the Heavens is no more."*

*"Mourn, children of Makedama, because the Spirit of Fruitfulness is no more."*

*"Mourn, O ye people, because the Lion of the Zulu is left so desolate."*

*"Let your tears fall as the rain falls, let your cries be as the cries of women who bring forth."*

*"For sorrow is fallen like the rain, the world has conceived and brought forth death."*

*"Great darkness is upon us, darkness and the shadow of death."*

*"The Lion of the Zulu wanders and wanders in desolation, because the Mother of the Heavens is no more."*

*"Who shall bring him comfort? There is comfort in the crying of his children."*

*"Mourn, people of the Langeni; let the voice of your mourning beat against the skies and rend them."*

*"Ou-ai! Ou-ai! Ou-ai!"*

Thus sang the old man, my father Makedama, far down in the deeps of the cleft. He sang it in a still, small voice, but, line after line, his song was caught up by the thousands who stood on the slopes above, and thundered to the heavens till the mountains shook with its sound. Moreover, the noise of their crying opened the bosom of a heavy rain-cloud that had gathered as they mourned, and the rain fell in great slow drops, as though the sky also wept, and with the rain came lightning and the roll of thunder.

Chaka listened, and large tears coursed down his cheeks, whose heart was easily stirred by the sound of song. Now the rain hissed fiercely, making as it were a curtain about the thousands of the people; but still their cry went up through the rain, and the roll of the thunder was lost in it. Presently there came a hush, and I looked to the right. There, above the heads of the people, coming over the brow of the hill, were the plumes of warriors, and in their hands gleamed a hedge of spears. I looked to the left; there also I saw the plumes of warriors dimly through the falling rain, and in their hands a hedge of spears. I looked before me, towards the end of the cleft; there also loomed the plumes of warriors, and in their hands was a hedge of spears.

Then, from all the people there arose another cry, a cry of terror and of agony.

"Ah! now they mourn indeed, Mopo," said Chaka in my ear; "now thy people mourn from the heart and not with the lips alone."

As he spoke the multitude of the people on either side of the rift surged forward like a wave, surged back again, once more surged forward, then, with a dreadful crying, driven on by the merciless spears of the soldiers, they began to fall in a torrent of men, women, and children, far into the black depths below.

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My father, forgive me the tears that fall from these blind eyes of mine; I am very aged, I am but as a little child, and as a little child I weep. I cannot tell it. At last it was done, and all grew still.

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Thus was Makedama buried beneath the bodies of his people; thus was ended the tribe of the Langeni; as my mother had dreamed, so it came about; and thus did Chaka take vengeance for that cup of milk which was refused to him many a year before.

"Thou hast not won thy bet, Mopo," said the king presently. "See there is a little space where one more may find room to sleep. Full to the brim is this corn-chamber with the ears of death, in which no living grain is left. Yet there is one little space, and is there not one to fill it? Are all the tribe of the Langeni dead indeed?"

"There is one, O King!" I answered. "I am of the tribe of the Langeni, let my carcase fill the place."

"Nay, Mopo, nay! Who then should take the bet? Moreover, I slay thee not, for it is against my oath. Also, do we not mourn together, thou and I?"

"There is no other left living of the tribe of the Langeni, O King! The bet is lost; it shall be paid."

"I think that there is another," said Chaka. "There is a sister to thee and me, Mopo. Ah, see, she comes!"

I looked up, my father, and I saw this: I saw Baleka, my sister, walking towards us, and on her shoulders was a kaross of wild-cat skins, and behind her were two soldiers. She walked proudly, holding her head high, and her step was like the step of a queen. Now she saw the sight of death, for the dead lay before her like black water in a sunless pool. A moment she stood shivering, having guessed all, then walked on and stood before Chaka.

"What is thy will with me, O King?" she said.

"Thou art come in a good hour, sister," said Chaka, turning his eyes from hers. "It is thus: Mopo, my servant and thy brother, made a bet with me, a bet of cattle. It was a little matter that we wagered on—as to whether the people of the Langeni tribe—thine own tribe, Baleka, my sister—would fill yonder place, U'Donga-lu-ka-Tatiyana. When they heard of the bet, my sister, the people of the Langeni hurled themselves into the rift by thousands, being eager to put the matter to the proof. And now it seems that thy brother has lost the bet, for there is yet place for one yonder ere the donga is full. Then, my sister, thy brother Mopo brought it to my mind that there was still one of the Langeni tribe left upon the earth, who, should she sleep in that place, would turn the bet in his favour, and prayed me to send for her. So, my sister, as I would not take that which I have not won, I have done so, and now do thou go apart and talk with Mopo, thy brother, alone upon this matter, *as once before thou didst talk when a child was born to thee, my sister!*"

Now Baleka took no heed of the words of Chaka which he spoke of me, for she knew his meaning well. Only she looked him in the eyes and said:—

"Ill shalt thou sleep from this night forth, Chaka, till thou comest to a land where no sleep is. I have spoken."

Chaka saw and heard, and of a sudden he quailed, growing afraid in his heart, and turned his head away.

"Mopo, my brother," said Baleka, "let us speak together for the last time; it is the king's word."

So I drew apart with Baleka, my sister, and a spear was in my hand. We stood together alone by the people of the dead and Baleka threw the corner of the kaross about her brows and spoke to me swiftly from beneath its shadow.

"What did I say to you a while ago, Mopo? It has come to pass. Swear to me that you will live on and that this same hand of yours shall take vengeance for me."

"I swear it, my sister."

"Swear to me that when the vengeance is done you will seek out my son Umslopogaas if he still lives, and bless him in my name."

"I swear it, my sister."

"Fare you well, Mopo! We have always loved each other much, and now all fades, and it seems to me that once more we are little children playing about the kraals of the Langeni. So may we play again in another land! Now, Mopo"—and she looked at me steadily, and with great eyes—"I am weary. I would join the spirits of my people. I hear them calling in my ears. It is finished."

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For the rest, I will not tell it to you, my father.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MASILO COMES TO THE KRAAL DUGUZA

That night the curse of Baleka fell upon Chaka, and he slept ill. So ill did he sleep that he summoned me to him, bidding me walk abroad with him. I went, and we walked alone and in silence, Chaka leading the way and I following after him. Now I saw that his feet led him towards the U'Donga-lu-ka-Tatiyana, that place where all my people lay dead, and with them Baleka, my sister. We climbed the slope of the hill slowly, and came to the mouth of the cleft, to that same spot where Chaka had stood when the people fell over the lips of the rock like water. Then there had been noise and crying, now there was silence, for the night was very still. The moon was full also, and lighted up the dead who lay near to us, so that I could see them all; yes, I could see even the face of Baleka, my sister—they had thrown her into the midst of the dead. Never had it looked so beautiful as in this hour, and yet as I gazed I grew afraid. Only the far end of the donga was hid in shadow.

"Thou wouldst not have won thy bet now, Mopo, my servant," said Chaka. "See, they have sunk together! The donga is not full by the length of a stabbing-spear."

I did not answer, but at the sound of the king's voice jackals stirred and slunk away.

Presently he spoke again, laughing loudly as he spoke: "Thou shouldst sleep well this night, my mother, for I have sent many to hush thee to rest. Ah, people of the Langeni tribe, you forgot, but I remembered! You forgot how a woman and a boy came to you seeking food and shelter, and you would give them none—no, not a gourd of milk. What did I promise you on that day, people of the Langeni tribe? Did I not promise you that for every drop the gourd I craved would hold I would take the life of a man? And have I not kept my promise? Do not men lie here more in number than the drops of water in a gourd, and with them women and children countless as the leaves? O people of the Langeni tribe, who refused me milk when I was little, having grown great, I am avenged upon you! Having grown great! Ah! who is there so great as I? The earth shakes beneath my feet; when I speak the people tremble, when I frown they die—they die in thousands. I have grown great, and great I shall remain! The land is mine, far as the feet of man can travel the land is mine, and mine are those who dwell in it. And I shall grow greater yet—greater, ever greater. Is it thy face, Baleka, that stares upon me from among the faces of the thousands whom I have slain? Thou didst promise me that I should sleep ill henceforth. Baleka, I fear thee not—at the least, thou sleepest sound. Tell me, Baleka—rise from thy sleep and tell me whom there is that I should fear!"—and suddenly he ceased the ravings of his pride.

Now, my father, while Chaka the king spoke thus, it came into my mind to make an end of things and kill him, for my heart was mad with rage and the thirst of vengeance. Already I stood behind him, already the stick in my hand was lifted to strike out his brains, when I stopped also, for I saw something. There, in the midst of the dead, I saw an arm stir. It stirred, it lifted itself, it beckoned towards the shadow which hid the head of the cleft and the piled-up corpses that lay there, and it seemed to me that the arm was the arm of Baleka. Perchance it was not her arm, perchance it was but the arm of one who yet lived among the thousands of the dead, say you, my father! At the least, the arm rose at her side, and was ringed with such bracelets as Baleka wore, and it beckoned from her side, though her cold face changed not at all. Thrice the arm rose, thrice it stood awhile in air, thrice it beckoned with crooked finger, as though it summoned something from the depths of the shadow, and from the multitudes of the dead. Then it fell down, and in the utter silence I heard its fall and a clank of brazen bracelets. And as it fell there rose from the shadow a sound of singing, of singing wild and sweet, such as I had never heard. The words of that song came to me then, my father; but afterwards they passed from me, and I remember them no more. Only I know this, that the song was of the making of Things, and of the beginning and the end of Peoples. It told of how the black folk grew, and of how the white folk should eat them up, and wherefore they were and wherefore they should cease to be. It told of Evil and of Good, of Woman and of Man, and of how these war against each other, and why it is that they war, and what are the ends of the struggle. It told also of the people of the Zulu, and it spoke of a place of a Little Hand where they should conquer, and of a place where a White Hand should prevail against them, and how they shall melt away beneath the shadow of the White Hand and be forgotten, passing to a land where things do not die, but live on forever, the Good with the Good, the Evil with the Evil. It told of Life and of Death, of Joy and of Sorrow, of Time and of that sea in which Time is but a floating leaf, and of why all these things are. Many names also came into the song, and I knew but a few of them, yet my own was there, and the name of Baleka and the name of Umslopogaas, and the name of Chaka the Lion. But a little while did the voice sing, yet all this was in the song—ay, and much more; but the meaning of the song is gone from me, though I knew it once, and shall know it again when all is done. The voice in the shadow sang on till the whole place was full of the sound of its singing, and even the dead seemed to listen. Chaka heard it and shook with fear, but his ears were deaf to its burden, though mine were open.

The voice came nearer, and now in the shadow there was a faint glow of light, like the glow that gathers on the six-days' dead. Slowly it drew nearer, through the shadow, and as it came I saw that the shape of the light was the shape of a woman. Now I could see it well, and I knew the face of glory. My father, it was the face of the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, the Queen of Heaven! She came towards us very slowly, gliding down the gulf that was full of dead, and the path she trod was paved with the dead; and as she came it seemed to me that shadows rose from the dead, following her, the Queen of the Dead—thousands upon thousands of them. And, ah! her glory, my father—the glory of her hair of molten gold—of her eyes, that were as the noonday sky—the flash of her arms and breast, that were like the driven snow, when it glows in the sunset. Her beauty was awful to look on, but I am glad to have lived to see it as it shone and changed in the shifting robe of light which was her garment.

Now she drew near to us, and Chaka sank upon the earth, huddled up in fear, hiding his face in his hands; but I was not afraid, my father—only the wicked need fear to look on the Queen of Heaven. Nay, I was not afraid: I stood upright and gazed upon her glory face to face. In her hand she held a little spear hafted with the royal wood: it was the shadow of the spear that Chaka held in his hand, the same with which he had slain his mother and wherewith he should himself be slain. Now she ceased her singing, and stood before

the crouching king and before me, who was behind the king, so that the light of her glory shone upon us. She lifted the little spear, and with it touched Chaka, son of Senzangacona, on the brow, giving him to doom. Then she spoke; but, though Chaka felt the touch, he did not hear the words, that were for my ears alone.

"Mopo, son of Makedama," said the low voice, "stay thy hand, the cup of Chaka is not full. When, for the third time, thou seest me riding down the storm, then *smite*, Mopo, my child."

Thus she spoke, and a cloud swept over the face of the moon. When it passed she was gone, and once more I was alone with Chaka, with the night and the dead.

Chaka looked up, and his face was grey with the sweat of fear.

"Who was this, Mopo?" he said in a hollow voice.

"This was the Inkosazana of the Heavens, she who watches ever over the people of our race, O King, and who from time to time is seen of men ere great things shall befall."

"I have heard speak of this queen," said Chaka. "Wherefore came she now, what was the song she sang, and why did she touch me with a spear?"

"She came, O King, because the dead hand of Baleka summoned her, as thou sawest. The song she sang was of things too high for me; and why she touched thee on the forehead with the spear I do not know, O King! Perchance it was to crown thee chief of a yet greater realm."

"Yea, perchance to crown me chief of a realm of death."

"That thou art already, Black One," I answered, glancing at the silent multitude before us and the cold shape of Baleka.

Again Chaka shuddered. "Come, let us be going, Mopo," he said; "now I have learnt what it is to be afraid."

"Early or late, Fear is a guest that all must feast, even kings, O Earth-Shaker!" I answered; and we turned and went homewards in silence.

Now after this night Chaka gave it out that the kraal of Gibamaxegu was bewitched, and bewitched was the land of the Zulus, because he might sleep no more in peace, but woke ever crying out with fear, and muttering the name of Baleka. Therefore, in the end he moved his kraal far away, and built the great town of Duguza here in Natal.

Look now, my father! There on the plain far away is a place of the white men—it is called Stanger. There, where is the white man's town, stood the great kraal Duguza. I cannot see, for my eyes are dark; but you can see. Where the gate of the kraal was built there is a house; it is the place where the white man gives out justice; that is the place of the gate of the kraal, through which Justice never walked. Behind is another house, where the white men who have sinned against Him pray to the King of Heaven for forgiveness; there on that spot have I seen many a one who had done no wrong pray to a king of men for mercy, but I have never seen but one who found it. *Out!* the words of Chaka have come true: I will tell them to you presently, my father. The white man holds the land, he goes to and fro about his business of peace where impis ran forth to kill; his children laugh and gather flowers where men died in blood by hundreds; they bathe in the waters of the Imbozamo, where once the crocodiles were fed daily with human flesh; his young men woo the maidens where other maids have kissed the assegai. It is changed, nothing is the same, and of Chaka are left only a grave yonder and a name of fear.

Now, after Chaka had come to the Duguza kraal, for a while he sat quiet, then the old thirst of blood came on him, and he sent his impis against the people of the Pondos, and they destroyed that people, and brought back their cattle. But the warriors might not rest; again they were doctored for war, and sent out by tens of thousands to conquer Sotyangana, chief of the people who live north of the Limpopo. They went singing, after the king had looked upon them and bidden them return victorious or not at all. Their number was so great that from the hour of dawn till the sun was high in the heavens they passed the gates of the kraal like countless herds of cattle—they the unconquered. Little did they know that victory smiled on them no more; that they must die by thousands of hunger and fever in the marshes of the Limpopo, and that those of them who returned should come with their shields in their bellies, having devoured their shields because of their ravenous hunger! But what of them? They were nothing. *Dust* was the name of one of the great regiments that went out against Sotyangana, and dust they were—dust to be driven to death by the breath of Chaka, Lion of the Zulu.

Now few men remained in the kraal Duguza, for nearly all had gone with the impi, and only women and aged people were left. Dingaan and Umhlangana, brothers of the king, were there, for Chaka would not suffer them to depart, fearing lest they should plot against him, and he looked on them always with an angry eye, so that they trembled for their lives, though they dared not show their fear lest fate should follow fear. But I guessed it, and like a snake I wound myself into their secrets, and we talked together darkly and in hints. But of that presently, my father, for I must tell of the coming of Masilo, he who would have wed Zinita, and whom Umslopogaas the Slaughterer had driven out from the kraals of the People of the Axe.

It was on the day after the impi had left that Masilo came to the kraal Duguza, craving leave to speak with the king. Chaka sat before his hut, and with him were Dingaan and Umhlangana, his royal brothers. I was there also, and certain of the indunas, councillors of the king. Chaka was weary that morning, for he had slept badly, as now he always did. Therefore, when one told him that a certain wanderer named Masilo would speak with him, he did not command that the man should be killed, but bade them bring him before him. Presently there was a sound of praising, and I saw a fat man, much worn with travel, who crawled through the dust towards us giving the *sibonga*, that is, naming the king by his royal names. Chaka bade him cease from praising and tell his business. Then the man sat up and told all that tale which you have heard, my father, of how a young man, great and strong, came to the place of the People of the Axe and conquered Jikiza, the holder of the axe, and became chief of that people, and of how he had taken the cattle of Masilo and driven him away. Now Chaka knew nothing of this People of the Axe, for the land was great in those days, my father, and there were many little tribes in it, living far away, of whom the king had not even heard; so he questioned Masilo about them, and of the number of their fighting-men, of their wealth in cattle, of the name of the young man who ruled them, and especially as to the tribute which they paid to the king.

Masilo answered, saying that the number of their fighting-men was perhaps the half of a full regiment, that their cattle were many, for they were rich, that they paid no tribute, and that the name of the young man was Bulalio the Slaughterer—at the least, he was

known by that name, and he had heard no other.

Then the king grew wroth. "Arise, Masilo," he said, "and run to this people, and speak in the ear of the people, and of him who is named the Slaughterer, saying: 'There is another Slaughterer, who sits in a kraal that is named Duguza, and this is his word to you, O People of the Axe, and to thee, thou who holdest the axe. Rise up with all the people, and with all the cattle of your people, and come before him who sits in the kraal Duguza, and lay in his hands the great axe Groan-Maker. Rise up swiftly and do this bidding, lest ye sit down shortly and for the last time of all.'"<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> The Zulu are buried sitting.—ED.

Masilo heard, and said that it should be so, though the way was far, and he feared greatly to appear before him who was called the Slaughterer, and who sat twenty days' journey to the north, beneath the shadow of the Witch Mountain.

"Begone," said the king, "and stand before me on the thirtieth day from now with the answer of this boy with an axe! If thou standest not before me, then some shall come to seek thee and the boy with an axe also."

So Masilo turned and fled swiftly to do the bidding of the king, and Chaka spoke no more of that matter. But I wondered in my heart who this young man with an axe might be; for I thought that he had dealt with Jikiza and with the sons of Jikiza as Umslopogaas would have dealt with them had he come to the years of his manhood. But I also said nothing of the matter.

Now on this day also there came to me news that my wife Macropha and my daughter Nada were dead among their people in Swaziland. It was said that the men of the chief of the Halakazi tribe had fallen on their kraal and put all in it to the assegai, and among them Macropha and Nada. I heard the news, but I wept no tear, for, my father, I was so lost in sorrows that nothing could move me any more.

## CHAPTER XX.

### MOPO BARGAINS WITH THE PRINCES

Eight-and-twenty days went by, my father, and on the nine-and-twentieth it befell that Chaka, having dreamed a dream in his troubled sleep, summoned before him certain women of the kraal, to the number of a hundred or more. Some of these were his women, whom he named his "sisters," and some were maidens not yet given in marriage; but all were young and fair. Now what this dream of Chaka may have been I do not know, or have forgotten, for in those days he dreamed many dreams, and all his dreams led to one end, the death of men. He sat in front of his hut scowling, and I was with him. To the left of him were gathered the girls and women, and their knees were weak with fear. One by one they were led before him, and stood before him with bowed heads. Then he would bid them be of good cheer, and speak softly to them, and in the end would ask them this question: "Hast thou, my sister, a cat in thy hut?"

Now, some would say that they had a cat, and some would say that they had none, and some would stand still and make no answer, being dumb with fear. But, whatever they said, the end was the same, for the king would sigh gently and say: "Fare thee well, my sister; it is unfortunate for thee that there is a cat in thy hut," or "that there is no cat in thy hut," or "that thou canst not tell me whether there be a cat in thy hut or no."

Then the woman would be taken by the slayers, dragged without the kraal, and their end was swift. So it went on for the most part of that day, till sixty-and-two women and girls had been slaughtered. But at last a maiden was brought before the king, and to this one her snake had given a ready wit; for when Chaka asked her whether or no there was a cat in her hut, she answered, saying that she did not know, "but that there was a half a cat upon her," and she pointed to a cat's-skin which was bound about her loins.

Then the king laughed, and clapped his hands, saying that at length his dream was answered; and he killed no more that day nor ever again—save once only.

That evening my heart was heavy within me, and I cried in my heart, "How long?"—nor might I rest. So I wandered out from the kraal that was named Duguza to the great cleft in the mountains yonder, and sat down upon a rock high up in the cleft, so that I could see the wide lands rolling to the north and the south, to my right and to my left. Now, the day was drawing towards the night, and the air was very still, for the heat was great and a tempest was gathering, as I, who am a Heaven-Herd, knew well. The sun sank redly, flooding the land with blood; it was as though all the blood that Chaka had shed flowed about the land which Chaka ruled. Then from the womb of the night great shapes of cloud rose up and stood before the sun, and he crowned them with his glory, and in their hearts the lightning quivered like a blood of fire. The shadow of their wings fell upon the mountain and the plains, and beneath their wings was silence. Slowly the sun sank, and the shapes of cloud gathered together like a host at the word of its captain, and the flicker of the lightning was as the flash of the spears of a host. I looked, and my heart grew afraid. The lightning died away, the silence deepened and deepened till I could hear it, no leaf moved, no bird called, the world seemed dead—I alone lived in the dead world.

Now, of a sudden, my father, a bright star fell from the height of heaven and lit upon the crest of the storm, and as it lit the storm burst. The grey air shivered, a moan ran about the rocks and died away, then an icy breath burst from the lips of the tempest and rushed across the earth. It caught the falling star and drove it on towards me, a rushing globe of fire, and as it came the star grew and took shape, and the shape it took was the shape of a woman. I knew her now, my father; while she was yet far off I knew her—the Inkosazana who came as she had promised, riding down the storm. On she swept, borne forward by the blast, and oh! she was terrible to see, for her garment was the lightning, lightnings shone from her wide eyes and lightnings were in her streaming hair, while in her hand was a spear of fire, and she shook it as she came. Now she was at the mouth of the pass; before her was stillness, behind her beat the wings of the storm, the thunder roared, the rain hissed like snakes; she rushed on past me, and as she passed she turned her awful eyes upon me, withering me. She was there! she was gone! but she spoke no word, only shook her flaming spear. Yet it seemed to me that the storm spoke, that the rocks cried aloud, that the rain hissed out a word in my ear, and the word was:—

*"Smite, Mopo!"*

I heard it in my heart, or with my ears, what does it matter? Then I turned to look; through the rush of the tempest and the reek of the rain, still I could see her sweeping forward high in air. Now the kraal Duguza was beneath her feet, and the flaming spear fell from her hand upon the kraal and fire leaped up in answer.

Then she passed on over the edge of the world, seeking her own place. Thus, my father, for the third and last time did my eyes see the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, or mayhap my heart dreamed that I saw her. Soon I shall see her again, but it will not be here.

For a while I sat there in the cleft, then I rose and fought my way through the fury of the storm back to the kraal Duguza. As I drew near the kraal I heard cries of fear coming through the roaring of the wind and the hiss of the rain. I entered and asked one of the matter, and it was told me that fire from above had fallen on the hut of the king as he lay sleeping, and all the roof of the hut was burned away, but that the rain had put out the fire.

Then I went on till I came to the front of the great hut, and I saw by the light of the moon, which now shone out in the heavens, that there before it stood Chaka, shaking with fear, and the water of the rain was running down him, while he stared at the great hut, of which all the thatch was burned.

I saluted the king, asking him what evil thing had happened. Seeing me, he seized me by the arm, and clung to me as, when the slayers are at hand, a child clings to his father, drawing me after him into a small hut that was near.

"What evil thing has befallen, O King?" I said again, when light had been made.

"Little have I known of fear, Mopo," said Chaka, "yet I am afraid now; ay, as much afraid as when once on a bygone night the dead hand of Baleka summoned something that walked upon the faces of the dead."

"And what fearest thou, O King, who art the lord of all the earth?"

Now Chaka leaned forward and whispered to me: "Hearken, Mopo, I have dreamed a dream. When the judgment of those witches was done with, I went and laid me down to sleep while it was yet light, for I can scarcely sleep at all when darkness has swallowed up the world. My sleep has gone from me—that sister of thine, Baleka, took my sleep with her to the place of death. I laid me down and I slept, but a dream arose and sat by me with a hooded face, and showed me a picture. It seemed to me that the wall of my hut fell down, and I saw an open place, and in the centre of the place I lay dead, covered with many wounds, while round my corpse my brothers Dingaan and Umhlangana stalked in pride like lions. On the shoulders of Umhlangana was my royal kaross, and there was blood on the kaross; and in the hand of Dingaan was my royal spear, and there was blood upon the spear. Then, in the vision of my dream, Mopo, thou didst draw near, and, lifting thy hand, didst give the royal salute of *Bayéte* to these brothers of mine, and with thy foot didst spurn the carcass of me, thy king. Then the hooded Dream pointed upwards and was gone, and I awoke, and lo! fire burned in the roof of my hut. Thus I dreamed, Mopo, and now, my servant, say thou, wherefore should I not slay thee, thou who wouldst serve other kings than I, thou who wouldst give my royal salute to the princes, my brothers?" and he glared upon me fiercely.

"As thou wilt, O King!" I answered gently. "Doubtless thy dream was evil, and yet more evil was the omen of the fire that fell upon thy hut. And yet—" and I ceased.

"And yet—Mopo, thou faithless servant?"

"And yet, O King, it seems to me in my folly that it were well to strike the head of the snake and not its tail, for without the tail the head may live, but not the tail without the head."

"Thou wouldst say, Mopo, that if these princes die never canst thou or any other man give them the royal names. Do I hear aright, Mopo?"

"Who am I that I should lift up my voice asking for the blood of princes?" I answered. "Judge thou, O King!"

Now, Chaka brooded awhile, then he spoke: "Say, Mopo, can it be done this night?"

"There are but few men in the kraal, O King. All are gone out to war; and of those few many are the servants of the princes, and perhaps they might give blow for blow."

"How then, Mopo?"

"Nay, I know not, O King; yet at the great kraal beyond the river sits that regiment which is named the Slayers. By midday to-morrow they might be here, and then—"

"Thou speakest wisely, my child Mopo; it shall be for to-morrow. Go summon the regiment of the Slayers, and, Mopo, see that thou fail me not."

"If I fail thee, O King, then I fail myself, for it seems that my life hangs on this matter."

"If all the words that ever passed thy lips are lies, yet is that word true, Mopo," said Chaka: "moreover, know this, my servant: if aught miscarries thou shalt die no common death. Begone!"

"I hear the king," I answered, and went out.

Now, my father, I knew well that Chaka had doomed me to die, though first he would use me to destroy the princes. But I feared nothing, for I knew this also, that the hour of Chaka was come at last.

For a while I sat in my hut pondering, then when all men slept I arose and crept like a snake by many paths to the hut of Dingaan the prince, who awaited me on that night. Following the shadow of the hut, I came to the door and scratched upon it after a certain fashion. Presently it was opened, and I crawled in, and the door was shut again. Now there was a little light in the hut, and by its flame I saw the two princes sitting side by side, wrapped about with blankets which hung before their brows.

"Who is this that comes?" said the Prince Dingaan.

Then I lifted the blanket from my head so that they might see my face, and they also drew the blankets from their brows. I spoke, saying: "Hail to you, Princes, who to-morrow shall be dust! Hail to you, sons of Senzangacona, who to-morrow shall be spirits!" and I pointed towards them with my withered hand.

Now the princes were troubled, and shook with fear.

"What meanest thou, thou dog, that thou dost speak to us words of such ill-omen?" said the Prince Dingaan in a low voice.

"Where dost thou point at us with that white and withered hand of thine, Wizard?" hissed the Prince Umhlangana.

"Have I not told you, O ye Princes!" I whispered, "that ye must strike or die, and has not your heart failed you? Now hearken! Chaka has dreamed another dream; now it is Chaka who strikes, and ye are already dead, ye children of Senzangacona."

"If the slayers of the king be without the gates, at least thou shalt die first, thou who hast betrayed us!" quoth the Prince Dingaan, and drew an assegai from under his kaross.

"First hear the king's dream, O Prince," I said; "then, if thou wilt, kill me, and die. Chaka the king slept and dreamed that he lay dead, and that one of you, the princes, wore his royal kaross."

"Who wore the royal kaross?" asked Dingaan, eagerly; and both looked up, waiting on my words.

"The Prince Umhlangana wore it—in the dream of Chaka—O Dingaan, shoot of a royal stock!" I answered slowly, taking snuff as I spoke, and watching the two of them over the edge of my snuff-spoon.

Now Dingaan scowled heavily at Umhlangana; but the face of Umhlangana was as the morning sky.

"Chaka dreamed this also," I went on: "that one of you, the princes, held his royal spear."

"Who held the royal spear?" asked Umhlangana.

"The Prince Dingaan held it—in the dream of Chaka—O Umhlangana, sprung from the root of kings!—and it dripped blood."

Now the face of Umhlangana grew dark as night, but that of Dingaan brightened like the dawn.

"Chaka dreamed this also: that I, Mopo, your dog, who am not worthy to be mentioned with such names, came up and gave the royal salute, even the *Bayéte*."

"To whom didst thou give the *Bayéte*, O Mopo, son of Makedama?" asked both of the princes as with one breath, waiting on my words.

"I gave it to both of you, O twin stars of the morning, princes of the Zulu—in the dream of Chaka I gave it to both of you."

Now the princes looked this way and that, and were silent, not knowing what to say, for these princes hated each other, though adversity and fear had brought them to one bed.

"But what avails it to talk thus, ye lords of the land," I went on, "seeing that, both of you, ye are already as dead men, and that vultures which are hungry to-night to-morrow shall be filled with meat of the best? Chaka the king is now a Doctor of Dreams, and to clear away such a dream as this he has a purging medicine."

Now the brows of these brothers grew black indeed, for they saw that their fate was on them.

"These are the words of Chaka the king, O ye bulls who lead the herd! All are doomed, ye twain and I, and many another man who loves us. In the great kraal beyond the river there sits a regiment: it is summoned—and then—good-night! Have ye any words to say to those yet left upon the earth? Perhaps it will be given to me to live a little while after ye are gone, and I may bring them to their ears."

"Can we not rise up now and fall upon Chaka?" asked Dingaan.

"It is not possible," I said; "the king is guarded."

"Hast thou no plan, Mopo?" groaned Umhlangana. "Methinks thou hast a plan to save us."

"And if I have a plan, ye Princes, what shall be my reward? It must be great, for I am weary of life, and I will not use my wisdom for a little thing."

Now both the princes offered me good things, each of them promising more than the other, as two young men who are rivals promise to the father of a girl whom both would wed. I listened, saying always that it was not enough, till in the end both of them swore by their heads, and by the bones of Senzangacona, their father, and by many other things, that I should be the first man in the land, after them, its kings, and should command the impis of the land, if I would but show them a way to kill Chaka and become kings. Then, when they had done swearing, I spoke, weighing my words:—

"In the great kraal beyond the river, O ye Princes, there sit, not one regiment but two. One is named the Slayers and loves Chaka the king, who has done well by them, giving them cattle and wives. The other is named the Bees, and that regiment is hungry and longs for cattle and girls; moreover, of that regiment the Prince Umhlangana is the general, and it loves him. Now this is my plan—to summon the Bees in the name of Umhlangana, not the Slayers in the name of Chaka. Bend forward, O Princes, that I may whisper in your ears."

So they bent forward, and I whispered awhile of the death of a king, and the sons of Senzangacona nodded their heads as one man in answer. Then I rose up, and crept from the hut as I had entered it, and rousing certain trusty messengers, I dispatched them, running swiftly through the night.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE DEATH OF CHAKA

Now, on the morrow, two hours before midday, Chaka came from the hut where he had sat through the night, and moved to a little kraal surrounded by a fence that was some fifty paces distant from the hut. For it was my duty, day by day, to choose that place where the king should sit to hear the counsel of his indunas, and give judgment on those whom he would kill, and to-day I had chosen this place. Chaka went alone from his hut to the kraal, and, for my own reasons, I accompanied him, walking after him. As we went the king glanced back at me over his shoulder, and said in a low voice:—

“Is all prepared, Mopo?”

“All is prepared, Black One,” I answered. “The regiment of the Slayers will be here by noon.”

“Where are the princes, Mopo?” asked the king again.

“The princes sit with their wives in the houses of their women, O King,” I answered; “they drink beer and sleep in the laps of their wives.”

Chaka smiled grimly, “For the last time, Mopo!”

“For the last time, O King.”

We came to the kraal, and Chaka sat down in the shade of the reed fence, upon an ox-hide that was brayed soft. Near to him stood a girl holding a gourd of beer; there were also present the old chief Inguazonca, brother of Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, and the chief Umxamama, whom Chaka loved. When we had sat a little while in the kraal, certain men came in bearing cranes’ feathers, which the king had sent them to gather a month’s journey from the kraal Duguza, and they were admitted before the king. These men had been away long upon their errand, and Chaka was angry with them. Now the leader of the men was an old captain of Chaka’s, who had fought under him in many battles, but whose service was done, because his right hand had been shorn away by the blow of an axe. He was a great man and very brave.

Chaka asked the man why he had been so long in finding the feathers, and he answered that the birds had flown from that part of the country whither he was sent, and he must wait there till they returned, that he might snare them.

“Thou shouldst have followed the cranes, yes, if they flew through the sunset, thou disobedient dog!” said the king. “Let him be taken away, and all those who were with him.”

Now some of the men prayed a little for mercy, but the captain did but salute the king, calling him “Father,” and craving a boon before he died.

“What wouldst thou?” asked Chaka.

“My father,” said the man, “I would ask thee two things. I have fought many times at thy side in battle while we both were young; nor did I ever turn my back upon the foe. The blow that shore the hand from off this arm was aimed at thy head, O King; I stayed it with my naked arm. It is nothing; at thy will I live, and at thy will I die. Who am I that I should question the word of the king? Yet I would ask this, that thou wilt withdraw the kaross from about thee, O King, that for the last time my eyes may feast themselves upon the body of him whom, above all men, I love.”

“Thou art long-winded,” said the king, “what more?”

“This, my father, that I may bid farewell to my son; he is a little child, so high, O King,” and he held his hand above his knee.

“Thy first boon is granted,” said the king, slipping the kaross from his shoulders and showing the great breast beneath. “For the second it shall be granted also, for I will not willingly divide the father and the son. Bring the boy here; thou shalt bid him farewell, then thou shalt slay him with thine own hand ere thou thyself art slain; it will be good sport to see.”

Now the man turned grey beneath the blackness of his skin, and trembled a little as he murmured, “The king’s will is the will of his servant; let the child be brought.”

But I looked at Chaka and saw that the tears were running down his face, and that he only spoke thus to try the captain who loved him to the last.

“Let the man go,” said the king, “him and those with him.”

So they went glad at heart, and praising the king.

I have told you this, my father, though it has not to do with my story, because then, and then only, did I ever see Chaka show mercy to one whom he had doomed to die.

As the captain and his people left the gate of the kraal, it was spoken in the ear of the king that a man sought audience with him. He was admitted crawling on his knees. I looked and saw that this was that Masilo whom Chaka had charged with a message to him who was named Bulalio, or the Slaughterer, and who ruled over the People of the Axe. It was Masilo indeed, but he was no longer fat, for much travel had made him thin; moreover, on his back were the marks of rods, as yet scarcely healed over.

“Who art thou?” said Chaka.

“I am Masilo, of the People of the Axe, to whom command was given to run with a message to Bulalio the Slaughterer, their chief, and to return on the thirtieth day. Behold, O King, I have returned, though in a sorry plight!”

"It seems so!" said the king, laughing aloud. "I remember now: speak on, Masilo the Thin, who wast Masilo the Fat; what of this Slaughterer? Does he come with his people to lay the axe Groan-Maker in my hands?"

"Nay, O King, he comes not. He met me with scorn, and with scorn he drove me from his kraal. Moreover, as I went I was seized by the servants of Zinita, she whom I wooed, but who is now the wife of the Slaughterer, and laid on my face upon the ground and beaten cruelly while Zinita numbered the strokes."

"Hah!" said the king. "And what were the words of this puppy?"

"These were his words, O King: 'Bulalio the Slaughterer, who sits beneath the shadow of the Witch Mountain, to Bulalio the Slaughterer who sits in the kraal Duguza—To thee I pay no tribute; if thou wouldst have the axe Groan-Maker, come to the Ghost Mountain and take it. This I promise thee: thou shalt look on a face thou knowest, for there is one there who would be avenged for the blood of a certain Mopo.'"

Now, while Masilo told this tale I had seen two things—first, that a little piece of stick was thrust through the straw of the fence, and, secondly, that the regiment of the Bees was swarming on the slope opposite to the kraal in obedience to the summons I had sent them in the name of Umhlangana. The stick told me that the princes were hidden behind the fence waiting the signal, and the coming of the regiment that it was time to do the deed.

When Masilo had spoken Chaka sprang up in fury. His eyes rolled, his face worked, foam flew from his lips, for such words as these had never offended his ears since he was king, and Masilo knew him little, else he had not dared to utter them.

For a while he gasped, shaking his small spear, for at first he could not speak. At length he found words:—

"The dog," he hissed, "the dog who dares thus to spit in my face! Hearken all! As with my last breath I command that this Slaughterer be torn limb from limb, he and all his tribe! And thou, thou darrest to bring me this talk from a skunk of the mountains. And thou, too, Mopo, thy name is named in it. Well, of thee presently. Ho! Umxamama, my servant, slay me this slave of a messenger, beat out his brains with thy stick. Swift! swift!"

Now, the old chief Umxamama sprang up to do the king's bidding, but he was feeble with age, and the end of it was that Masilo, being mad with fear, killed Umxamama, not Umxamama Masilo. Then Inguazonca, brother of Unandi, Mother of the Heavens, fell upon Masilo and ended him, but was hurt himself in so doing. Now I looked at Chaka, who stood shaking the little red spear, and thought swiftly, for the hour had come.

"Help!" I cried, "one is slaying the King!"

As I spoke the reed fence burst asunder, and through it plunged the princes Umhlangana and Dingaan, as bulls plunge through a brake.

Then I pointed to Chaka with my withered hand, saying, "Behold your king!"

Now, from beneath the shelter of his kaross, each Prince drew out a short stabbing spear, and plunged it into the body of Chaka the king. Umhlangana smote him on the left shoulder, Dingaan struck him in the right side. Chaka dropped the little spear handled with the red wood and looked round, and so royally that the princes, his brothers, grew afraid and shrank away from him.

Twice he looked on each; then he spoke, saying: "What! do you slay me, my brothers—dogs of mine own house, whom I have fed? Do you slay me, thinking to possess the land and to rule it? I tell you it shall not be for long. I hear a sound of running feet—the feet of a great white people. They shall stamp you flat, children of my father! They shall rule the land that I have won, and you and your people shall be their slaves!"

Thus Chaka spoke while the blood ran down him to the ground, and again he looked on them royally, like a buck at gaze.

"Make an end, O ye who would be kings!" I cried; but their hearts had turned to water and they could not. Then I, Mopo, sprang forward and picked from the ground that little assegai handled with the royal wood—the same assegai with which Chaka had murdered Unandi, his mother, and Moosa, my son, and lifted it on high, and while I lifted it, my father, once more, as when I was young, a red veil seemed to wave before my eyes.

"Wherefore wouldst thou kill me, Mopo?" said the king.

"For the sake of Baleka, my sister, to whom I swore the deed, and of all my kin," I cried, and plunged the spear through him. He sank down upon the tanned ox-hide, and lay there dying. Once more he spoke, and once only, saying: "Would now that I had hearkened to the voice of Nobela, who warned me against thee, thou dog!"

Then he was silent for ever. But I knelt over him and called in his ear the names of all those of my blood who had died at his hands—the names of Makedama, my father, of my mother, of Anadi my wife, of Moosa my son, and all my other wives and children, and of Baleka my sister. His eyes and ears were open, and I think, my father, that he saw and understood; I think also that the hate upon my face as I shook my withered hand before him was more fearful to him than the pain of death. At the least, he turned his head aside, shut his eyes, and groaned. Presently they opened again, and he was dead.

Thus then, my father, did Chaka the King, the greatest man who has ever lived in Zululand, and the most evil, pass by my hand to those kraals of the Inkosazana where no sleep is. In blood he died as he had lived in blood, for the climber at last falls with the tree, and in the end the swimmer is borne away by the stream. Now he trod that path which had been beaten flat for him by the feet of people whom he had slaughtered, many as the blades of grass upon a mountain-side; but it is a lie to say, as some do, that he died a coward, praying for mercy. Chaka died, as he had lived, a brave man. *Ou!* my father, I know it, for these eyes saw it and this hand let out his life.

Now he was dead and the regiment of the Bees drew near, nor could I know how they would take this matter, for, though the Prince Umhlangana was their general, yet all the soldiers loved the king, because he had no equal in battle, and when he gave he gave with an open hand. I looked round; the princes stood like men amazed; the girl had fled; the chief Umxamama was dead at the hands of dead Masilo; and the old chief Inguazonca, who had killed Masilo, stood by, hurt and wondering; there were no others in the kraal.

"Awake, ye kings," I cried to the brothers, "the impi is at the gates! Swift, now stab that man!"—and I pointed to the old chief—"and leave the matter to my wit."

Then Dingaan roused himself, and springing upon Inguazonca, the brother of Unandi, smote him a great blow with his spear, so that he sank down dead without a word. Then again the princes stood silent and amazed.

"This one will tell no tales," I cried, pointing at the fallen chief.

Now a rumour of the slaying had got abroad among the women, who had heard cries and seen the flashing of spears above the fence, and from the women it had come to the regiment of the Bees, who advanced to the gates of the kraal singing. Then of a sudden they ceased their singing and rushed towards the hut in front of which we stood.

Then I ran to meet them, uttering cries of woe, holding in my hand the little assegai of the king red with the king's blood, and spoke with the captains in the gate, saying:—

"Lament, ye captains and ye soldiers, weep and lament, for your father is no more! He who nursed you is no more! The king is dead! now earth and heaven will come together, for the king is dead!"

"How so, Mopo?" cried the leader of the Bees. "How is our father dead?"

"He is dead by the hand of a wicked wanderer named Masilo, who, when he was doomed to die by the king, snatched this assegai from the king's hand and stabbed him; and afterwards, before he could be cut down himself by us three, the princes and myself, he killed the chiefs Inguazonca and Umxamama also. Draw near and look on him who was the king; it is the command of Dingaan and Umhlangana, the kings, that you draw near and look on him who was the king, that his death at the hand of Masilo may be told through all the land."

"You are better at making of kings, Mopo, than at the saving of one who was your king from the stroke of a wanderer," said the leader of the Bees, looking at me doubtfully.

But his words passed unheeded, for some of the captains went forward to look on the Great One who was dead, and some, together with most of the soldiers, ran this way and that, crying in their fear that now the heaven and earth would come together, and the race of man would cease to be, because Chaka, the king, was dead.

Now, my father, how shall I, whose days are few, tell you of all the matters that happened after the death of Chaka? Were I to speak of them all they would fill many books of the white men, and, perhaps, some of them are written down there. For this reason it is, that I may be brief, I have only spoken of a few of those events which befell in the reign of Chaka; for my tale is not of the reign of Chaka, but of the lives of a handful of people who lived in those days, and of whom I and Umslopogaas alone are left alive—if, indeed, Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, is still living on the earth. Therefore, in a few words I will pass over all that came about after the fall of Chaka and till I was sent down by Dingaan, the king, to summon him to surrender to the king who was called the Slaughterer and who ruled the People of the Axe. Ah! would that I had known for certain that this was none other than Umslopogaas, for then had Dingaan gone the way that Chaka went and which Umhlangana followed, and Umslopogaas ruled the people of the Zulus as their king. But, alas! my wisdom failed me. I paid no heed to the voice of my heart which told me that this was Umslopogaas who sent the message to Chaka threatening vengeance for one Mopo, and I knew nothing till too late; surely, I thought, the man spoke of some other Mopo. For thus, my father, does destiny make fools of us men. We think that we can shape our fate, but it is fate that shapes us, and nothing befalls except fate will it. All things are a great pattern, my father, drawn by the hand of the Umkulunkulu upon the cup whence he drinks the water of his wisdom; and our lives, and what we do, and what we do not do, are but a little bit of the pattern, which is so big that only the eyes of Him who is above, the Umkulunkulu, can see it all. Even Chaka, the slayer of men, and all those he slew, are but as a tiny grain of dust in the greatness of that pattern. How, then, can we be wise, my father, who are but the tools of wisdom? how can we build who are but pebbles in a wall? how can we give life who are babes in the womb of fate? or how can we slay who are but spears in the hands of the slayer?

This came about, my father. Matters were made straight in the land after the death of Chaka. At first people said that Masilo, the stranger, had stabbed the king; then it was known that Mopo, the wise man, the doctor and the body-servant of the king, had slain the king, and that the two great bulls, his brothers Umhlangana and Dingaan, children of Senzangacona, had also lifted spears against him. But he was dead, and earth and heaven had not come together, so what did it matter? Moreover, the two new kings promised to deal gently with the people, and to lighten the heavy yoke of Chaka, and men in a bad case are always ready to hope for a better. So it came about that the only enemies the princes found were each other and Engwade, the son of Unandi, Chaka's half-brother. But I, Mopo, who was now the first man in the land after the kings, ceasing to be a doctor and becoming a general, went up against Engwade with the regiment of the Bees and the regiment of the Slayers and smote him in his kraals. It was a hard fight, but in the end I destroyed him and all his people: Engwade killed eight men with his own hand before I slew him. Then I came back to the kraal with the few that were left alive of the two regiments.

After that the two kings quarrelled more and more, and I weighed them both in my balance, for I would know which was the most favourable to me. In the end I found that both feared me, but that Umhlangana would certainly put me to death if he gained the upper hand, whereas this was not yet in the mind of Dingaan. So I pressed down the balance of Umhlangana and raised that of Dingaan, sending the fears of Umhlangana to sleep till I could cause his hut to be surrounded. Then Umhlangana followed upon the road of Chaka his brother, the road of the assegai; and Dingaan ruled alone for awhile. Such are the things that befall princes of this earth, my father. See, I am but a little man, and my lot is humble at the last, yet I have brought about the death of three of them, and of these two died by my hand.

It was fourteen days after the passing away of the Prince Umhlangana that the great army came back in a sorry plight from the marshes of the Limpopo, for half of them were left dead of fever and the might of the foe, and the rest were starving. It was well for them who yet lived that Chaka was no more, else they had joined their brethren who were dead on the way; since never before for many years had a Zulu impi returned unvictorious and without a single head of cattle. Thus it came about that they were glad enough to welcome a king who spared their lives, and thenceforth, till his fate found him, Dingaan reigned unquestioned.

Now, Dingaan was a prince of the blood of Chaka indeed; for, like Chaka, he was great in presence and cruel at heart, but he had not the might and the mind of Chaka. Moreover, he was treacherous and a liar, and these Chaka was not. Also, he loved women much, and spent with them the time that he should have given to matters of the State. Yet he reigned awhile in the land. I must tell this also; that Dingaan would have killed Panda, his half-brother, so that the house of Senzangacona, his father, might be swept out clean. Now Panda was a man of gentle heart, who did not love war, and therefore it was thought that he was half-witted; and, because I loved Panda, when the question of his slaying came on, I and the chief Mapita spoke against it, and pleaded for him, saying that there was nothing to be feared at his hands who was a fool. So in the end Dingaan gave way, saying, "Well, you ask me to spare this dog, and I will spare him, but one day he will bite me." So Panda was made governor of the king's cattle. Yet in the end the words of Dingaan came true, for it was the grip of Panda's teeth that pulled him from the throne; only, if Panda was the dog that bit, I, Mopo, was the man who set him on the hunt.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MOPO GOES TO SEEK THE SLAUGHTERER

Now Dingaan, deserting the kraal Duguza, moved back to Zululand, and built a great kraal by the Mahlabatine, which he named "Umgugundhlovu"—that is, "the rumbling of the elephant." Also, he caused all the fairest girls in the land to be sought out as his wives, and though many were found yet he craved for more. And at this time a rumour came to the ears of the King Dingaan that there lived in Swaziland among the Halakazi tribe a girl of the most wonderful beauty, who was named the Lily, and whose skin was whiter than are the skins of our people, and he desired greatly to have this girl to wife. So Dingaan sent an embassy to the chief of the Halakazi, demanding that the girl should be given to him. At the end of a month the embassy returned again, and told the king that they had found nothing but hard words at the kraal of the Halakazi, and had been driven thence with scorn and blows.

This was the message of the chief of the Halakazi to Dingaan, king of the Zulus: That the maid who was named the Lily, was, indeed, the wonder of the earth, and as yet unwed; for she had found no man upon whom she looked with favour, and she was held in such love by this people that it was not their wish to force any husband on her. Moreover, the chief said that he and his people defied Dingaan and the Zulus, as their fathers had defied Chaka before him, and spat upon his name, and that no maid of theirs should go to be the wife of a Zulu dog.

Then the chief of the Halakazi caused the maid who was named the Lily to be led before the messengers of Dingaan, and they found her wonderfully fair, for so they said: she was tall as a reed, and her grace was the grace of a reed that is shaken in the wind. Moreover, her hair curled, and hung upon her shoulders, her eyes were large and brown, and soft as a buck's, her colour was the colour of rich cream, her smile was like a ripple on the waters, and when she spoke her voice was low and sweeter than the sound of an instrument of music. They said also that the girl wished to speak with them, but the chief forbade it, and caused her to be led thence with all honour.

Now, when Dingaan heard this message he grew mad as a lion in a net, for he desired this maid above everything, and yet he who had all things could not win the maid. This was his command, that a great impi should be gathered and sent to Swaziland against the Halakazi tribe, to destroy them and seize the maid. But when the matter came on to be discussed with the indunas in the presence of the king, at the *Amapakati* or council, I, as chief of the indunas, spoke against it, saying that the tribe of the Halakazi were great and strong, and that war with them would mean war with the Swazis also; moreover, they had their dwelling in caves which were hard to win. Also, I said, that this was no time to send impis to seek a single girl, for few years had gone by since the Black One fell; and foes were many, and the soldiers of the land had waxed few with slaughter, half of them having perished in the marshes of the Limpopo. Now, time must be given them to grow up again, for to-day they were as a little child, or like a man wasted with hunger. Maids were many, let the king take them and satisfy his heart, but let him make no war for this one.

Thus I spoke boldly in the face of the king, as none had dared to speak before Chaka; and courage passed from me to the hearts of the other indunas and generals, and they echoed my words, for they knew that, of all follies, to begin a new war with the Swazi people would be the greatest.

Dingaan listened, and his brow grew dark, yet he was not so firmly seated on the throne that he dared put away our words, for still there were many in the land who loved the memory of Chaka, and remembered that Dingaan had murdered him and Umhlangana also. For now that Chaka was dead, people forgot how evilly he had dealt with them, and remembered only that he was a great man, who had made the Zulu people out of nothing, as a smith fashions a bright spear from a lump of iron. Also, though they had changed masters, yet their burden was not lessened, for, as Chaka slew, so Dingaan slew also, and as Chaka oppressed, so did Dingaan oppress. Therefore Dingaan yielded to the voice of his indunas and no impi was sent against the Halakazi to seek the maid that was named the Lily. But still he hankered for her in his heart, and from that hour he hated me because I had crossed his will and robbed him of his desire.

Now, my father, there is this to be told: though I did not know it then, the maid who was named the Lily was no other than my daughter Nada. The thought, indeed, came into my mind, that none but Nada could be so fair. Yet I knew for certain that Nada and her mother Macropha were dead, for he who brought me the news of their death had seen their bodies locked in each other's arms, killed, as it were, by the same spear. Yet, as it chanced, he was wrong; for though Macropha indeed was killed, it was another maid who lay in blood beside her; for the people whither I had sent Macropha and Nada were tributary to the Halakazi tribe, and that chief of the Halakazi who sat in the place of Galazi the Wolf had quarrelled with them, and fallen on them by night and eaten them up.

As I learned afterwards, the cause of their destruction, as in later days it was the cause of the slaying of the Halakazi, was the beauty of Nada and nothing else, for the fame of her loveliness had gone about the land, and the old chief of the Halakazi had commanded that the girl should be sent to his kraal to live there, that her beauty might shine upon his place like the sun, and that, if so she willed, she should choose a husband from the great men of the Halakazi. But the headmen of the kraal refused, for none who had looked on her would suffer their eyes to lose sight of Nada the Lily, though there was this fate about the maid that none strove to wed her against her will. Many, indeed, asked her in marriage, both there and among the Halakazi people, but ever she shook her head and said, "Nay, I would wed no man," and it was enough.

For it was the saying among men, that it was better that she should remain unmarried, and all should look on her, than that she should pass from their sight into the house of a husband; since they held that her beauty was given to be a joy to all, like the beauty of the dawn and of the evening. Yet this beauty of Nada's was a dreadful thing, and the mother of much death, as shall be told; and because of her beauty and the great love she bore, she, the Lily herself, must wither, and the cup of my sorrows must be filled to overflowing, and the heart of Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, son of Chaka the king, must become desolate as the black plain when fire

has swept it. So it was ordained, my father, and so it befell, seeing that thus all men, white and black, seek that which is beautiful, and when at last they find it, then it passes swiftly away, or, perchance, it is their death. For great joy and great beauty are winged, nor will they sojourn long upon the earth. They come down like eagles out of the sky, and into the sky they return again swiftly.

Thus then it came about, my father, that I, Mopo, believing my daughter Nada to be dead, little guessed that it was she who was named the Lily in the kraals of the Halakazi, and whom Dingaan the king desired for a wife.

Now after I had thwarted him in this matter of the sending of an impi to pluck the Lily from the gardens of the Halakazi, Dingaan learned to hate me. Also I was in his secrets, and with me he had killed his brother Chaka and his brother Umhlangana, and it was I who held him back from the slaying of his brother Panda also; and, therefore, he hated me, as is the fashion of small-hearted men with those who have lifted them up. Yet he did not dare to do away with me, for my voice was loud in the land, and when I spoke the people listened. Therefore, in the end, he cast about for some way to be rid of me for a while, till he should grow strong enough to kill me.

"Mopo," said the king to me one day as I sat before him in council with others of the indunas and generals, "mindest thou of the last words of the Great Elephant, who is dead?" This he said meaning Chaka his brother, only he did not name him, for now the name of Chaka was *hlonipa* in the land, as is the custom with the names of dead kings—that is, my father, it was not lawful that it should pass the lips.

"I remember the words, O King," I answered. "They were ominous words, for this was their burden: that you and your house should not sit long in the throne of kings, but that the white men should take away your royalty and divide your territories. Such was the prophecy of the Lion of the Zulu, why speak of it? Once before I heard him prophesy, and his words were fulfilled. May the omen be an egg without meat; may it never become fledged; may that bird never perch upon your roof, O King!"

Now Dingaan trembled with fear, for the words of Chaka were in his mind by night and by day; then he grew angry and bit his lip, saying:—

"Thou fool, Mopo! canst thou not hear a raven croak at the gates of a kraal but thou must needs go tell those who dwell within that he waits to pick their eyes? Such criers of ill to come may well find ill at hand, Mopo." He ceased, looked on me threateningly awhile, and went on: "I did not speak of those words rolling by chance from a tongue half loosed by death, but of others that told of a certain Bulalio, of a Slaughterer who rules the People of the Axe and dwells beneath the shadow of the Ghost Mountain far away to the north yonder. Surely I heard them all as I sat beneath the shade of the reed-fence before ever I came to save him who was my brother from the spear of Masilo, the murderer, whose spear stole away the life of a king?"

"I remember those words also, O King!" I said. "Is it the will of the king that an impi should be gathered to eat up this upstart? Such was the command of the one who is gone, given, as it were, with his last breath."

"Nay, Mopo, that is not my will. If no impi can be found by thee to wipe away the Halakazi and bring one whom I desire to delight my eyes, then surely none can be found to eat up this Slaughterer and his people. Moreover, Bulalio, chief of the People of the Axe, has not offended against me, but against an elephant whose trumpetings are done. Now this is my will, Mopo, my servant: that thou shouldst take with thee a few men only and go gently to this Bulalio, and say to him: 'A greater Elephant stalks through the land than he who has gone to sleep, and it has come to his ears—that thou, Chief of the People of the Axe, dost pay no tribute, and hast said that, because of the death of a certain Mopo, thou wilt have nothing to do with him whose shadow lies upon the land. Now one Mopo is sent to thee, Slaughterer, to know if this tale is true, for, if it be true, then shalt thou learn the weight of the hoof of that Elephant who trumpets in the kraal of Umgugundhlovu. Think, then, and weigh thy words before thou dost answer, Slaughterer.'"

Now I, Mopo, heard the commands of the king and pondered them in my mind, for I knew well that it was the design of Dingaan to be rid of me for a space that he might find time to plot my overthrow, and that he cared little for this matter of a petty chief, who, living far away, had dared to defy Chaka. Yet I wished to go, for there had arisen in me a great desire to see this Bulalio, who spoke of vengeance to be taken for one Mopo, and whose deeds were such as the deeds of Umslopogaas would have been, had Umslopogaas lived to look upon the light. Therefore I answered:—

"I hear the king. The king's word shall be done, though, O King, thou sendest a big man upon a little errand."

"Not so, Mopo," answered Dingaan. "My heart tells me that this chicken of a Slaughterer will grow to a great cock if his comb is not cut presently; and thou, Mopo, art versed in cutting combs, even of the tallest."

"I hear the king," I answered again.

So, my father, it came about that on the morrow, taking with me but ten chosen men, I, Mopo, started on my journey towards the Ghost Mountain, and as I journeyed I thought much of how I had trod that path in bygone days. Then, Macropha, my wife, and Nada, my daughter, and Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, who was thought to be my son, walked at my side. Now, as I imagined, all were dead and I walked alone; doubtless I also should soon be dead. Well, people lived few days and evil in those times, and what did it matter? At the least I had wreaked vengeance on Chaka and satisfied my heart.

At length I came one night to that lonely spot where we had camped in the evil hour when Umslopogaas was borne away by the lioness, and once more I looked upon the cave whence he had dragged the cub, and upon the awful face of the stone Witch who sits aloft upon the Ghost Mountain forever and forever. I could sleep little that night, because of the sorrow at my heart, but sat awake looking, in the brightness of the moon, upon the grey face of the stone Witch, and on the depths of the forest that grew about her knees, wondering the while if the bones of Umslopogaas lay broken in that forest. Now as I journeyed, many tales had been told to me of this Ghost Mountain, which all swore was haunted, so said some, by men in the shape of wolves; and so said some, by the *Esemkofu*—that is, by men who have died and who have been brought back again by magic. They have no tongues, the *Esemkofu*, for had they tongues they would cry aloud to mortals the awful secrets of the dead, therefore, they can but utter a wailing like that of a babe. Surely one may hear them in the forests at night as they wail "*Ai!—ah! Ai—ah!*" among the silent trees!

You laugh, my father, but I did not laugh as I thought of these tales; for, if men have spirits, where do the spirits go when the body is dead? They must go somewhere, and would it be strange that they should return to look upon the lands where they were born? Yet I never thought much of such matters, though I am a doctor, and know something of the ways of the *Amatongo*, the people of the ghosts. To speak truth, my father, I have had so much to do with the loosing of the spirits of men that I never troubled myself overmuch with them after they were loosed; there will be time to do this when I myself am of their number.

So I sat and gazed on the mountain and the forest that grew over it like hair on the head of a woman, and as I gazed I heard a sound that came from far away, out of the heart of the forest as it seemed. At first it was faint and far off, a distant thing like the cry of children in a kraal across a valley; then it grew louder, but still I could not say what it might be; now it swelled and swelled, and I knew it—it was the sound of wild beats at chase. Nearer came the music, the rocks rang with it, and its voice set the blood beating but to hearken to it. That pack was great which ran a-hunting through the silent night; and now it was night, on the other side of the slope only, and the sound swelled so loud that those who were with me awoke also and looked forth. Now of a sudden a great koodoo bull appeared for an instant standing out against the sky on the crest of the ridge, then vanished in the shadow. He was running towards us; presently we saw him again speeding on his path with great bounds. We saw this also—forms grey and gaunt and galloping, in number countless, that leaped along his path, appearing on the crest of the rise, disappearing into the shadow, seen again on the slope, lost in the valley; and with them two other shapes, the shapes of men.

Now the big buck bounded past us not half a spear's throw away, and behind him streamed the countless wolves, and from the throats of the wolves went up that awful music. And who were these two that came with the wolves, shapes of men great and strong? They ran silently and swift, wolves' teeth gleamed upon their heads, wolves' hides hung about their shoulders. In the hands of one was an axe—the moonlight shone upon it—in the hand of the other a heavy club. Neck and neck they ran; never before had we seen men travel so fast. See! they sped down the slope towards us; the wolves were left behind, all except four of them; we heard the beating of their feet; they came, they passed, they were gone, and with them their unnumbered company. The music grew faint, it died, it was dead; the hunt was far away, and the night was still again!

"Now, my brethren," I asked of those who were with me, "what is this that we have seen?"

Then one answered, "We have seen the Ghosts who live in the lap of the old Witch, and those men are the Wolf-Brethren, the wizards who are kings of the Ghosts."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MOPO REVEALS HIMSELF TO THE SLAUGHTERER

All that night we watched, but we neither saw nor heard any more of the wolves, nor of the men who hunted with them. On the morrow, at dawn, I sent a runner to Bulalio, chief of the People of the Axe, saying that a messenger came to him from Dingaan, the king, who desired to speak with him in peace within the gates of his kraal. I charged the messenger, however, that he should not tell my name, but should say only that it was "Mouth of Dingaan." Then I and those with me followed slowly on the path of the man whom I sent forward, for the way was still far, and I had bidden him return and meet me bearing the words of the Slaughterer, Holder of the Axe.

All that day till the sun grew low we walked round the base of the great Ghost Mountain, following the line of the river. We met no one, but once we came to the ruins of a kraal, and in it lay the broken bones of many men, and with the bones rusty assegais and the remains of ox-hide shields, black and white in colour. Now I examined the shields, and knew from their colour that they had been carried in the hands of those soldiers who, years ago, were sent out by Chaka to seek for Umslopogaas, but who had returned no more.

"Now," I said, "it has fared ill with those soldiers of the Black One who is gone, for I think that these are the shields they bore, and that their eyes once looked upon the world through the holes in yonder skulls."

"These are the shields they bore, and those are the skulls they wore," answered one. "See, Mopo, son of Makedama, this is no man's work that has brought them to their death. Men do not break the bones of their foes in pieces as these bones are broken. *Wow!* men do not break them, but wolves do, and last night we saw wolves a-hunting; nor did they hunt alone, Mopo. *Wow!* this is a haunted land!"

Then we went on in silence, and all the way the stone face of the Witch who sits aloft forever stared down on us from the mountain top. At length, an hour before sundown, we came to the open lands, and there, on the crest of a rise beyond the river, we saw the kraal of the People of the Axe. It was a great kraal and well built, and their cattle were spread about the plains like to herds of game for number. We went to the river and passed it by the ford, then sat down and waited, till presently I saw the man whom I had sent forward returning towards us. He came and saluted me, and I asked him for news.

"This is my news, Mopo," he said: "I have seen him who is named Bulalio, and he is a great man—long and lean, with a fierce face, and carrying a mighty axe, such an axe as he bore last night who hunted with the wolves. When I had been led before the chief I saluted him and spoke to him—the words you laid upon my tongue I told to him. He listened, then laughed aloud, and said: 'Tell him who sent you that the mouth of Dingaan shall be welcome, and shall speak the words of Dingaan in peace; yet I would that it were the head of Dingaan that came and not his mouth only, for then Axe Groan-Maker would join in our talk—ay, because of one Mopo, whom his brother Chaka murdered, it would also speak with Dingaan. Still, the mouth is not the head, so the mouth may come in peace.'"

Now I started when for the second time I heard talk of one Mopo, whose name had been on the lips of Bulalio the Slaughterer. Who was there that would thus have loved Mopo except one who was long dead? And yet, perhaps the chief spoke of some other Mopo, for the name was not my own only—in truth, Chaka had killed a chief of that name at the great mourning, because he said that two Mopos in the land were one too many, and that though this Mopo wept sorely when the tears of others were dry. So I said only that this Bulalio had a high stomach, and we went on to the gates of the kraal.

There were none to meet us at the gates, and none stood by the doors of the huts within them, but beyond, from the cattle kraal that was in the centre of the huts, rose a dust and a din as of men gathering for war. Now some of those with me were afraid, and would have turned back, fearing treachery, and they were yet more afraid when, on coming to the inner entrance of the cattle kraal, we saw some five hundred soldiers being mustered there company by company, by two great men, who ran up and down the ranks shouting.

But I cried, "Nay! nay! Turn not back! Bold looks melt the hearts of foes. Moreover, if this Bulalio would have murdered us, there was no need for him to call up so many of his warriors. He is a proud chief, and would show his might, not knowing that the king we serve can muster a company for every man he has. Let us go on boldly."

So we walked forward towards the impi that was gathered on the further side of the kraal. Now the two great men who were marshalling the soldiers saw us, and came to meet us, one following the other. He who came first bore the axe upon his shoulder, and he who followed swung a huge club. I looked upon the foremost of them, and ah! my father, my heart grew faint with joy, for I knew him across the years. It was Umslopogaas! my fosterling, Umslopogaas! and none other, now grown into manhood—ay, into such a man as was not to be found beside him in Zululand. He was great and fierce, somewhat spare in frame, but wide shouldered and shallow flanked. His arms were long and not over big, but the muscles stood out on them like knots in a rope; his legs were long also, and very thick beneath the knee. His eye was like an eagle's, his nose somewhat hooked, and he held his head a little forward, as a man who searches continually for a hidden foe. He seemed to walk slowly, and yet he came swiftly, but with a gliding movement like that of a wolf or a lion, and always his fingers played round the horn handle of the axe Groan-Maker. As for him who followed, he was great also, shorter than Umslopogaas by the half of a head, but of a sturdier build. His eyes were small, and twinkled unceasingly like little stars, and his look was very wild, for now and again he grinned, showing his white teeth.

When I saw Umslopogaas, my father, my bowels melted within me, and I longed to run to him and throw myself upon his neck. Yet I took council with myself and did not—nay, I dropped the corner of the kaross I wore over my eyes, hiding my face lest he should know me. Presently he stood before me, searching me out with his keen eyes, for I drew forward to greet him.

"Greeting, Mouth of Dingaan!" he said in a loud voice. "You are a little man to be the mouth of so big a chief."

"The mouth is a little member, even of the body of a great king, O Chief Bulalio, ruler of the People of the Axe, wizard of the wolves that are upon the Ghost Mountain, who aforetime was named Umslopogaas, son of Mopo, son of Makedama."

Now when Umslopogaas heard these words he started like a child at a rustling in the dark and stared hard at me.

"You are well instructed," he said.

"The ears of the king are large, if his mouth be small, O Chief Bulalio," I answered, "and I, who am but the mouth, speak what the ears have heard."

"How know you that I have dwelt with the wolves upon the Ghost Mountain, O Mouth?" he asked.

"The eyes of the king see far, O Chief Bulalio. Thus last night they saw a great chase and a merry. It seems that they saw a koodoo bull running at speed, and after him countless wolves making their music, and with the wolves two men clad in wolves' skins, such men as you, Bulalio, and he with the club who follows you."

Now Umslopogaas lifted the axe Groan-Maker as though he would cut me down, then let it fall again, while Galazi the Wolf glared at me with wide-opened eyes.

"How know you that once I was named Umslopogaas, who have lost that name these many days? Speak, O Mouth, lest I kill you."

"Slay if you will, Umslopogaas," I answered, "but know that when the brains are scattered the mouth is dumb. He who scatters brains loses wisdom."

"Answer!" he said.

"I answer not. Who are you that I should answer you? I know; it is enough. To my business."

Now Umslopogaas ground his teeth in anger. "I am not wont to be thwarted here in my own kraal," he said; "but do your business. Speak it, little Mouth."

"This is my business, little Chief. When the Black One who is gone yet lived, you sent him a message by one Masilo—such a message as his ears had never heard, and that had been your death, O fool puffed up with pride, but death came first upon the Black One, and his hand was stayed. Now Dingaan, whose shadow lies upon the land, the king whom I serve, and who sits in the place of the Black One who is gone, speaks to you by me, his mouth. He would know this: if it is true that you refuse to own his sovereignty, to pay tribute to him in men and maids and cattle, and to serve him in his wars? Answer, you little headman!—answer in few words and short!"

Now Umslopogaas gasped for breath in his rage, and again he fingered the great axe. "It is well for you, O Mouth," he said, "that I swore safe conduct to you, else you had not gone hence—else you had been served as I served certain soldiers who in bygone years were sent to search out one Umslopogaas. Yet I answer you in few words and short. Look on those spears—they are but a fourth part of the number I can muster: that is my answer. Look now on yonder mountain, the mountain of ghosts and wolves—unknown, impassable, save to me and one other: that is my answer. Spears and mountains shall come together—the mountain shall be alive with spears and with the fangs of beasts. Let Dingaan seek his tribute there! I have spoken!"

Now I laughed shrilly, desiring to try the heart of Umslopogaas, my fosterling, yet further.

"Fool!" I said. "Boy with the brain of a monkey, for every spear you have Dingaan, whom I serve, can send a hundred, and your mountain shall be stamped flat; and for your ghosts and wolves, see, with the mouth of Dingaan I spit upon them!" and I spat upon the ground.

Now Umslopogaas shook in his rage, and the great axe glimmered as he shook. He turned to the captain who was behind him, and said: "Say, Galazi the Wolf, shall we kill this man and those with him?"

"Nay," answered the Wolf, grinning, "do not kill them; you have given them safe conduct. Moreover, let them go back to their dog of a king, that he may send out his puppies to do battle with our wolves. It will be a pretty fight."

"Get you gone, O Mouth," said Umslopogaas; "get you gone swiftly, lest mischief befall you! Without my gates you shall find food to satisfy your hunger. Eat of it and begone, for if to-morrow at the noon you are found within a spear's throw of this kraal, you and those with you shall bide there forever, O Mouth of Dingaan the king!"

Now I made as though I would depart, then, turning suddenly, I spoke once more, saying:—

"There were words in your message to the Black One who is dead of a certain man—nay, how was he named?—of a certain Mopo."

Now Umslopogaas started as one starts who is wounded by a spear, and stared at me.

"Mopo! What of Mopo, O Mouth, whose eyes are veiled? Mopo is dead, whose son I was!"

"Ah!" I said, "yes, Mopo is dead—that is, the Black One who is gone killed a certain Mopo. How came it, O Bulalio, that you were his son?"

"Mopo is dead," quoth Umslopogaas again; "he is dead with all his house, his kraal is stamped flat, and that is why I hated the Black One, and therefore I hate Dingaan, his brother, and will be as are Mopo and the house of Mopo before I pay him tribute of a single ox."

All this while I had spoken to Umslopogaas in a feigned voice, my father, but now I spoke again and in my own voice, saying:—

"So! Now you speak from your heart, young man, and by digging I have reached the root of the matter. It is because of this dead dog of a Mopo that you defy the king."

Umslopogaas heard the voice, and trembled no more with anger, but rather with fear and wonder. He looked at me hard, answering nothing.

"Have you a hut near by, O Chief Bulalio, foe of Dingaan the king, where I, the mouth of the king, may speak with you a while apart, for I would learn your message word by word that I may deliver it without fault. Fear not, Slaughterer, to sit alone with me in an empty hut! I am unarmed and old, and there is that in your hand which I should fear," and I pointed to the axe.

Now Umslopogaas, still shaking in his limbs, answered "Follow me, O Mouth, and you, Galazi, stay with these men."

So I followed Umslopogaas, and presently we came to a large hut. He pointed to the doorway, and I crept through it and he followed after me. Now for a while it seemed dark in the hut, for the sun was sinking without and the place was full of shadow; so I

waited while a man might count fifty, till our eyes could search the darkness. Then of a sudden I threw the blanket from my face and looked into the eyes of Umslopogaas.

"Look on me now, O Chief Bulalio, O Slaughterer, who once was named Umslopogaas—look on me and say who am I?" Then he looked at me and his jaw fell.

"Either you are Mopo my father grown old—Mopo, who is dead, or the Ghost of Mopo," he answered in a low voice.

"I am Mopo, your father, Umslopogaas," I said. "You have been long in knowing me, who knew you from the first."

Then Umslopogaas cried aloud, but yet softly, and letting fall the axe Groan-Maker, he flung himself upon my breast and wept there. And I wept also.

"Oh! my father," he said, "I thought that you were dead with the others, and now you have come back to me, and I, I would have lifted the axe against you in my folly. Oh, it is well that I have lived, and not died, since once more I look upon your face—the face that I thought dead, but which yet lives, though it be sorely changed, as though by grief and years."

"Peace, Umslopogaas, my son," I said. "I also deemed you dead in the lion's mouth, though in truth it seemed strange to me that any other man than Umslopogaas could have wrought the deeds which I have heard of as done by Bulalio, Chief of the People of the Axe—ay, and thrown defiance in the teeth of Chaka. But you are not dead, and I, I am not dead. It was another Mopo whom Chaka killed; I slew Chaka, Chaka did not slay me."

"And of Nada, what of Nada, my sister?" he said.

"Macropha, your mother, and Nada, your sister, are dead, Umslopogaas. They are dead at the hands of the people of the Halakazi, who dwell in Swaziland."

"I have heard of that people," he answered presently, "and so has Galazi the Wolf, yonder. He has a hate to satisfy against them—they murdered his father; now I have two, for they have murdered my mother and my sister. Ah, Nada, my sister! Nada, my sister!" and the great man covered his face with his hands, and rocked himself to and fro in his grief.

Now, my father, it came into my thoughts to make the truth plain to Umslopogaas, and tell him that Nada was no sister of his, and that he was no son of mine, but rather of that Chaka whom my hand had finished. And yet I did not, though now I would that I had done so. For I saw well how great was the pride and how high was the heart of Umslopogaas, and I saw also that if once he should learn that the throne of Zululand was his by right, nothing could hold him back, for he would swiftly break into open rebellion against Dingaan the king, and in my judgment the time was not ripe for that. Had I known, indeed, but one short year before that Umslopogaas still lived, he had sat where Dingaan sat this day; but I did not know it, and the chance had gone by for a while. Now Dingaan was king and mustered many regiments about him, for I had held him back from war, as in the case of the raid that he wished to make upon the Swazis. The chance had gone by, but it would come again, and till it came I must say nothing. I would do this rather, I would bring Dingaan and Umslopogaas together, that Umslopogaas might become known in the land as a great chief and the first of warriors. Then I would cause him to be advanced to be an induna, and a general ready to lead the impis of the king, for he who leads the impi is already half a king.

So I held my peace upon this matter, but till the dawn was grey Umslopogaas and I sat together and talked, each telling the tale of those years that had gone since he was borne from me in the lion's mouth. I told him how all my wives and children had been killed, how I had been put to the torment, and showed him my white and withered hand. I told him also of the death of Baleka, my sister, and of all my people of the Langeni, and of how I had revenged my wrongs upon Chaka, and made Dingaan to be king in his place, and was now the first man in the land under the king, though the king feared me much and loved me little. But I did not tell him that Baleka, my sister, was his own mother.

When I had done my tale, Umslopogaas told me his: how Galazi had rescued him from the lioness; how he became one of the Wolf-Brethren; how he had conquered Jikiza and the sons of Jikiza, and become chief of the People of the Axe, and taken Zinita to wife, and grown great in the land.

I asked him how it came about that he still hunted with the wolves as he had done last night. He answered that now he was great and there was nothing more to win, and at times a weariness of life came upon him, and then he must up, and together with Galazi hunt and harry with the wolves, for thus only could he find rest.

I said that I would show him better game to hunt before all was done, and asked him further if he loved his wife, Zinita. Umslopogaas answered that he would love her better if she loved him not so much, for she was jealous and quick to anger, and that was a sorrow to him. Then, when he had slept awhile, he led me from the hut, and I and my people were feasted with the best, and I spoke with Zinita and with Galazi the Wolf. For the last, I liked him well. This was a good man to have at one's back in battle; but my heart spoke to me against Zinita. She was handsome and tall, but with fierce eyes which always watched Umslopogaas, my fosterling; and I noted that he who was fearless of all other things yet seemed to fear Zinita. Neither did she love me, for when she saw how the Slaughterer clung to me, as it were, instantly she grew jealous—as already she was jealous of Galazi—and would have been rid of me if she might. Thus it came about that my heart spoke against Zinita; nor did it tell me worse things of her than those which she was to do.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE SLAYING OF THE BOERS

On the morrow I led Umslopogaas apart, and spoke to him thus:—“My son, yesterday, when you did not know me except as the Mouth of Dingaan, you charged me with a certain message for Dingaan the king, that, had it been delivered into the ears of the king, had surely brought death upon you and all your people. The tree that stands by itself on a plain, Umslopogaas, thinks itself tall and that there is no shade to equal its shade. Yet are there other and bigger trees. You are such a solitary tree, Umslopogaas, but the topmost branches of him whom I serve are thicker than your trunk, and beneath his shadow live many woodcutters, who go out to lop those that would grow too high. You are no match for Dingaan, though, dwelling here alone in an empty land, you have grown great in your own eyes and in the eyes of those about you. Moreover, Umslopogaas, know this: Dingaan already hates you because of the words which in bygone years you sent by Masilo the fool to the Black One who is dead, for he heard those words, and it is his will to eat you up. He has sent me hither for one reason only, to be rid of me awhile, and, whatever the words I bring back to him, the end will be the same—that night shall come when you will find an impi at your gates.”

“Then what need to talk more of the matter, my father?” asked Umslopogaas. “That will come which must come. Let me wait here for the impi of Dingaan, and fight till I die.”

“Not so, Umslopogaas, my son; there are more ways of killing a man than by the assegai, and a crooked stick can still be bent straight in the stream. It is my desire, Umslopogaas, that instead of hate Dingaan should give you love; instead of death, advancement; and that you shall grow great in his shadow. Listen! Dingaan is not what Chaka was, though, like Chaka, he is cruel. This Dingaan is a fool, and it may well come about that a man can be found who, growing up in his shadow, in the end shall overshadow him. I might do it—I myself; but I am old, and, being worn with sorrow, have no longing to rule. But you are young, Umslopogaas, and there is no man like you in the land. Moreover, there are other matters of which it is not well to speak, that shall serve you as a raft whereon to swim to power.”

Now Umslopogaas glanced up sharply, for in those days he was ambitious, and desired to be first among the people. Indeed, having the blood of Chaka in his veins, how could it be otherwise?

“What is your plan, my father?” he asked. “Say how can this be brought about?”

“This and thus, Umslopogaas. Among the tribe of the Halakazi in Swaziland there dwells a maid who is named the Lily. She is a girl of the most wonderful beauty, and Dingaan is afire with longing to have her to wife. Now, awhile since Dingaan dispatched an embassy to the chief of the Halakazi asking the Lily in marriage, and the chief of the Halakazi sent back insolent words, saying that the Beauty of the Earth should be given to no Zulu dog as a wife. Then Dingaan was angry, and he would have gathered his impis and sent them against the Halakazi to destroy them, and bring him the maid, but I held him back from it, saying that now was no time to begin a new war; and it is for this cause that Dingaan hates me, he is so set upon the plucking of the Swazi Lily. Do you understand now, Umslopogaas?”

“Something,” he answered. “But speak clearly.”

“Wow, Umslopogaas! Half words are better than whole ones in this land of ours. Listen, then! This is my plan: that you should fall upon the Halakazi tribe, destroy it, and bring back the maid as a peace-offering to Dingaan.”

“That is a good plan, my father,” he answered. “At the least, maid or no maid, there will be fighting in it, and cattle to divide when the fighting is done.”

“First conquer, then reckon up the spoils, Umslopogaas.”

Now he thought awhile, then said, “Suffer that I summon Galazi the Wolf, my captain. Do not fear, he is trusty and a man of few words.”

Presently Galazi came and sat down before us. Then I put the matter to him thus: that Umslopogaas would fall upon the Halakazi and bring to Dingaan the maid he longed for as a peace-offering, but that I wished to hold him back from the venture because the Halakazi people were great and strong. I spoke in this sense so that I might have a door to creep out should Galazi betray the plot; and Umslopogaas read my purpose, though my craft was needless, for Galazi was a true man.

Galazi the Wolf listened in silence till I had finished, then he answered quietly, but it seemed to me that a fire shone in his eyes as he spoke:—

“I am chief by right of the Halakazi, O Mouth of Dingaan, and know them well. They are a strong people, and can put two full regiments under arms, whereas Bulalio here can muster but one regiment, and that a small one. Moreover, they have watchmen out by night and day, and spies scattered through the land, so that it will be hard to take them unawares; also their stronghold is a vast cave open to the sky in the middle, and none have won that stronghold yet, nor could it be found except by those who know its secret. They are few, yet I am one of them, for my father showed it to me when I was a lad. Therefore, Mouth of Dingaan, you will know that this is no easy task which Bulalio would set himself and us—to conquer the Halakazi. That is the face of the matter so far as it concerns Bulalio, but for me, O Mouth, it has another face. Know that, long years ago, I swore to my father as he lay dying by the poison of a witch of this people that I would not rest till I had avenged him—ay, till I had stamped out the Halakazi, and slain their men, and brought their women to the houses of strangers, and their children to bonds! Year by year and month by month, and night by night, as I have lain alone upon the Ghost Mountain yonder, I have wondered how I might bring my oath to pass, and found no way. Now it seems that there is a way, and I am glad. Yet this is a great adventure, and perhaps before it is done with the People of the Axe will be no more.” And he ceased and took snuff, watching our faces over the spoon.

"Galazi the Wolf," said Umslopogaas, "for me also the matter has another face. You have lost your father at the hands of these Halakazi dogs, and, though till last night I did not know it, I have lost my mother by their spears, and with her one whom I loved above all in the world, my sister Nada, who loved me also. Both are dead and the Halakazi have killed them. This man, the mouth of Dingaan," and he pointed to me, Mopo, "this man says that if I can stamp out the Halakazi and make captive of the Lily maid, I shall win the heart of Dingaan. Little do I care for Dingaan, I who would go my way alone, and live while I may live, and die when I must, by the hands of Dingaan as by those of another—what does it matter? Yet, for this reason, because of the death of Macropha, my mother, and Nada, the sister who was dear to me, I will make war upon these Halakazi and conquer them, or be conquered by them. Perhaps, O Mouth of Dingaan, you will see me soon at the king's kraal on the Mahlabatine, and with me the Lily maid and the cattle of the Halakazi; or perhaps you shall not see me, and then you will know that I am dead, and the Warriors of the Axe are no more."

So Umslopogaas spoke to me before Galazi the Wolf, but afterwards he embraced me and bade me farewell, for he had no great hope that we should meet again. And I also doubted it; for, as Galazi said, the adventure was great; yet, as I had seen many times, it is the bold thrower who oftenest wins. So we parted—I to return to Dingaan and tell him that Bulalio, Chief of the People of the Axe, had gone up against the Halakazi to win the Lily maid and bring her to him in atonement; while Umslopogaas remained to make ready his impi for war.

I went swiftly from the Ghost Mountain back to the kraal Umgugundhlovu, and presented myself before Dingaan, who at first looked on me coldly. But when I told him my message, and how that the Chief Bulalio the Slaughterer had taken the war-path to win him the Lily, his manner changed. He took me by the hand and said that I had done well, and he had been foolish to doubt me when I lifted up my voice to persuade him from sending an impi against the Halakazi. Now he saw that it was my purpose to rake this Halakazi fire with another hand than his, and to save his hand from the burning, and he thanked me.

Moreover, he said, that if this Chief of the People of the Axe brought him the maid his heart desired, not only would he forgive him the words he had spoken by the mouth of Masilo the Black One who was dead, but also all the cattle of the Halakazi should be his, and he would make him great in the land. I answered that all this was as the king willed. I had but done my duty by the king and worked so that, whatever befell, a proud chief should be weakened and a foe should be attacked at no cost to the king, in such fashion also that perhaps it might come about that the king would shortly have the Lily at his side.

Then I sat down to wait what might befall.

Now it is, my father, that the white men come into my story, whom we named the Amaboona, but you call the Boers. *Ou!* I think ill of those Amaboona, though it was I who gave them the victory over Dingaan—I and Umslopogaas.

Before this time, indeed, a few white men had come to and fro to the kraals of Chaka and Dingaan, but these came to pray and not to fight. Now the Boers both fight and pray, also they steal, or used to steal, which I do not understand, for the prayers of you white men say that these things should not be done.

Well, when I had been back from the Ghost Mountain something less than a moon, the Boers came, sixty of them commanded by a captain named Retief, a big man, and armed with *roers*—the long guns they had in those days—or, perhaps they numbered a hundred in all, counting their servants and after-riders. This was their purpose: to get a grant of the land in Natal that lies between the Tugela and the Umzimobu rivers. But, by my counsel and that of other indunas, Dingaan bargained with the Boers that first they should attack a certain chief named Sigomyela, who had stolen some of the king's cattle, and who lived near the Quathlamba Mountains, and bring back those cattle. This the Boers agreed to, and went to attack the chief, and in a little while they came back again, having destroyed the people of Sigomyela, and driving his cattle before them as well as those which had been stolen from the king.

The face of Dingaan shone when he saw the cattle, and that night he called us, the council of the *Amapakati*, together, and asked us as to the granting of the country. I spoke the first, and said that it mattered little if he granted it, seeing that the Black One who was dead had already given it to the English, the People of George, and the end of the matter would be that the Amaboona and the People of George would fight for the land. Yet the words of the Black One were coming to pass, for already it seemed we could hear the sound of the running of a white folk who should eat up the kingdom.

Now when I had spoken thus the heart of Dingaan grew heavy and his face dark, for my words stuck in his breast like a barbed spear. Still, he made no answer, but dismissed the council.

On the morrow the king promised to sign the paper giving the lands they asked for to the Boers, and all was smooth as water when there is no wind. Before the paper was signed the king gave a great dance, for there were many regiments gathered at the kraal, and for three days this dance went on, but on the third day he dismissed the regiments, all except one, an impi of lads, who were commanded to stay. Now all this while I wondered what was in the mind of Dingaan and was afraid for the Amaboona. But he was secret, and told nothing except to the captains of the regiment alone—no, not even to one of his council. Yet I knew that he planned evil, and was half inclined to warn the Captain Retief, but did not, fearing to make myself foolish. Ah! my father, if I had spoken, how many would have lived who were soon dead! But what does it matter? In any case most of them would have been dead by now.

On the fourth morning, early, Dingaan sent a messenger to the Boers, bidding them meet him in the cattle kraal, for there he would mark the paper. So they came, stacking their guns at the gate of the kraal, for it was death for any man, white or black, to come armed before the presence of the king. Now, my father, the kraal Umgugundhlovu was built in a great circle, after the fashion of royal kraals. First came the high outer fence, then the thousands of huts that ran three parts round between the great fence and the inner one. Within this inner fence was the large open space, big enough to hold five regiments, and at the top of it—opposite the entrance—stood the cattle kraal itself, that cut off a piece of the open space by another fence bent like a bow. Behind this again were the *Emposeni*, the place of the king's women, the guard-house, the labyrinth, and the *Intunkulu*, the house of the king. Dingaan came out on that day and sat on a stool in front of the cattle kraal, and by him stood a man holding a shield over his head to keep the sun from him. Also we of the *Amapakati*, the council, were there, and ranged round the fence of the space, armed with short sticks only—not with kerries, my father—was that regiment of young men which Dingaan had not sent away, the captain of the regiment being stationed near to the king, on the right.

Presently the Boers came in on foot and walked up to the king in a body, and Dingaan greeted them kindly and shook hands with Retief, their captain. Then Retief drew the paper from a leather pouch, which set out the boundaries of the grant of land, and it was translated to the king by an interpreter. Dingaan said that it was good, and put his mark upon it, and Retief and all the Boers were pleased, and smiled across their faces. Now they would have said farewell, but Dingaan forbade them, saying that they must not go

yet: first they must eat and see the soldiers dance a little, and he commanded dishes of boiled flesh which had been made ready and bowls of milk to be brought to them. The Boers said that they had already eaten; still, they drank the milk, passing the bowls from hand to hand.

Now the regiment began to dance, singing the *Ingomo*, that is the war chant of us Zulus, my father, and the Boers drew back towards the centre of the space to give the soldiers room to dance in. It was at this moment that I heard Dingaan give an order to a messenger to run swiftly to the white Doctor of Prayers, who was staying without the kraal, telling him not to be afraid, and I wondered what this might mean; for why should the Prayer Doctor fear a dance such as he had often seen before? Presently Dingaan rose, and, followed by all, walked through the press to where the Captain Retief stood, and bade him good-bye, shaking him by the hand and bidding him *hambla gachle*, to go in peace. Then he turned and walked back again towards the gateway which led to his royal house, and I saw that near this entrance stood the captain of the regiments, as one stands by who waits for orders.

Now, of a sudden, my father, Dingaan stopped and cried with a loud voice, "*Bulalani Abatakati!*" (slay the wizards), and having cried it, he covered his face with the corner of his blanket, and passed behind the fence.

We, the councillors, stood astounded, like men who had become stone; but before we could speak or act the captain of the regiment had also cried aloud, "*Bulalani Abatakati!*" and the signal was caught up from every side. Then, my father, came a yell and a rush of thousands of feet, and through the clouds of dust we saw the soldiers hurl themselves upon the Amaboona, and above the shouting we heard the sound of falling sticks. The Amaboona drew their knives and fought bravely, but before a man could count a hundred twice it was done, and they were being dragged, some few dead, but the most yet living, towards the gates of the kraal and out on to the Hill of Slaughter, and there, on the Hill of Slaughter, they were massacred, every one of them. How? Ah! I will not tell you—they were massacred and piled in a heap, and that was the end of their story, my father.

Now I and the other councillors turned away and walked silently towards the house of the king. We found him standing before his great hut, and, lifting our hands, we saluted him silently, saying no word. It was Dingaan who spoke, laughing a little as he spoke, like a man who is uneasy in his mind.

"Ah, my captains," he said, "when the vultures plumed themselves this morning, and shrieked to the sky for blood, they did not look for such a feast as I have given them. And you, my captains, you little guessed how great a king the Heavens have set to rule over you, nor how deep is the mind of the king that watches ever over his people's welfare. Now the land is free from the White Wizards of whose footsteps the Black One croaked as he gave up his life, or soon shall be, for this is but a beginning. Ho! Messengers!" and he turned to some men who stood behind him, "away swiftly to the regiments that are gathered behind the mountains, away to them, bearing the king's words to the captains. This is the king's word: that the impi shall run to the land of Natal and slay the Boers there, wiping them out, man, woman, and child. Away!"

Now the messengers cried out the royal salute of *Bayéte*, and, leaping forward like spears from the hand of the thrower, were gone at once. But we, the councillors, the members of the *Amapakati*, still stood silent.

Then Dingaan spoke again, addressing me:—

"Is thy heart at rest now, Mopo, son of Makedama? Ever hast thou bleated in my ear of this white people and of the deeds that they shall do, and lo! I have blown upon them with my breath and they are gone. Say, Mopo, are the Amaboona wizards yonder all dead? If any be left alive, I desire to speak with one of them."

Then I looked Dingaan in the face and spoke.

"They are all dead, and thou, O King, thou also art dead."

"It were well for thee, thou dog," said Dingaan, "that thou shouldst make thy meaning plain."

"Let the king pardon me," I answered; "this is my meaning. Thou canst not kill this white men, for they are not of one race, but of many races, and the sea is their home; they rise out of the black water. Destroy those that are here, and others shall come to avenge them, more and more and more! Now thou hast smitten in thy hour; in theirs they shall smite in turn. Now *they* lie low in blood at thy hand; in a day to come, O King, *thou* shalt lie low in blood at theirs. Madness has taken hold of thee, O King, that thou hast done this thing, and the fruit of thy madness shall be thy death. I have spoken, I, who am the king's servant. Let the will of the king be done."

Then I stood still waiting to be killed, for, my father, in the fury of my heart at the wickedness which had been worked I could not hold back my words. Thrice Dingaan looked on me with a terrible face, and yet there was fear in his face striving with its rage, and I waited calmly to see which would conquer, the fear or the rage. When at last he spoke, it was one word, "*Go!*" not three words, "*Take him away.*" So I went yet living, and with me the councillors, leaving the king alone.

I went with a heavy heart, my father, for of all the evil sights that I have seen it seemed to me that this was the most evil—that the Amaboona should be slaughtered thus treacherously, and that the impi should be sent out treacherously to murder those who were left of them, together with their women and children. Ay, and they slew—six hundred of them did they slay—yonder in Weenen, the land of weeping.

Say, my father, why does the Umkulunkulu who sits in the Heavens above allow such things to be done on the earth beneath? I have heard the preaching of the white men, and they say that they know all about Him—that His names are Power and Mercy and Love. Why, then, does He suffer these things to be done—why does He suffer such men as Chaka and Dingaan to torment the people of the earth, and in the end pay them but one death for all the thousands that they have given to others? Because of the wickedness of the peoples, you say; but no, no, that cannot be, for do not the guiltless go with the guilty—ay, do not the innocent children perish by the hundred? Perchance there is another answer, though who am I, my father, that I, in my folly, should strive to search out the way of the Unsearchable? Perchance it is but a part of the great plan, a little piece of that pattern of which I spoke—the pattern on the cup that holds the waters of His wisdom. *Wow!* I do not understand, who am but a wild man, nor have I found more knowledge in the hearts of you tamed white people. You know many things, but of these you do not know: you cannot tell us what we were an hour before birth, nor what we shall be an hour after death, nor why we were born, nor why we die. You can only hope and believe—that is all, and perhaps, my father, before many days are sped I shall be wiser than all of you. For I am very aged, the fire of my life sinks low—it burns in my brain alone; there it is still bright, but soon that will go out also, and then perhaps I shall understand.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE WAR WITH THE HALAKAZI PEOPLE

Now, my father, I must tell of how Umslopogaas the Slaughterer and Galazi the Wolf fared in their war against the People of the Halakazi. When I had gone from the shadow of the Ghost Mountain, Umslopogaas summoned a gathering of all his headmen, and told them it was his desire that the People of the Axe should no longer be a little people; that they should grow great and number their cattle by tens of thousands.

The headmen asked how this might be brought about—would he then make war on Dingaan the King? Umslopogaas answered no, he would win the favour of the king thus: and he told them of the Lily maid and of the Halakazi tribe in Swaziland, and of how he would go up against that tribe. Now some of the headmen said yea to this and some said nay, and the talk ran high and lasted till the evening. But when the evening was come Umslopogaas rose and said that he was chief under the Axe, and none other, and it was his will that they should go up against the Halakazi. If there was any man there who would gainsay his will, let him stand forward and do battle with him, and he who conquered should order all things. To this there was no answer, for there were few who cared to face the beak of Groan-Maker, and so it came about that it was agreed that the People of the Axe should make war upon the Halakazi, and Umslopogaas sent out messengers to summon every fighting-man to his side.

But when Zinita, his head wife, came to hear of the matter she was angry, and upbraided Umslopogaas, and heaped curses on me, Mopo, whom she knew only as the mouth of Dingaan, because, as she said truly, I had put this scheme into the mind of the Slaughterer. "What!" she went on, "do you not live here in peace and plenty, and must you go to make war on those who have not harmed you; there, perhaps, to perish or to come to other ill? You say you do this to win a girl for Dingaan and to find favour in his sight. Has not Dingaan girls more than he can count? It is more likely that, wearying of us, your wives, you go to get girls for yourself, Bulalio; and as for finding favour, rest quiet, so shall you find most favour. If the king sends his impi against you, then it will be time to fight, O fool with little wit!"

Thus Zinita spoke to him, very roughly—for she always blurted out what was in her mind, and Umslopogaas could not challenge her to battle. So he must bear her talk as best he might, for it is often thus, my father, that the greatest of men grow small enough in their own huts. Moreover, he knew that it was because Zinita loved him that she spoke so bitterly.

Now on the third day all the fighting-men were gathered, and there might have been two thousand of them, good men and brave. Then Umslopogaas went out and spoke to them, telling them of this adventure, and Galazi the Wolf was with him. They listened silently, and it was plain to see that, as in the case of the headmen, some of them thought one thing and some another. Then Galazi spoke to them briefly, telling them that he knew the roads and the caves and the number of the Halakazi cattle; but still they doubted. Thereon Umslopogaas added these words:—

"To-morrow, at the dawn, I, Bulalio, Holder of the Axe, Chief of the People of the Axe, go up against the Halakazi, with Galazi the Wolf, my brother. If but ten men follow us, yet we will go. Now, choose, you soldiers! Let those come who will, and let those who will stop at home with the women and the little children."

Now a great shout rose from every throat.

"We will go with you, Bulalio, to victory or death!"

So on the morrow they marched, and there was wailing among the women of the People of the Axe. Only Zinita did not wail, but stood by in wrath, foreboding evil; nor would she bid her lord farewell, yet when he was gone she wept also.

Now Umslopogaas and his impi travelled fast and far, hungering and thirsting, till at length they came to the land of the Umswazi, and after a while entered the territory of the Halakazi by a high and narrow pass. The fear of Galazi the Wolf was that they should find this pass held, for though they had harmed none in the kraals as they went, and taken only enough cattle to feed themselves, yet he knew well that messengers had sped by day and night to warn the people of the Halakazi. But they found no man in the pass, and on the other side of it they rested, for the night was far spent. At dawn Umslopogaas looked out over the wide plains beyond, and Galazi showed him a long low hill, two hours' march away.

"There, my brother," he said, "lies the head kraal of the Halakazi, where I was born, and in that hill is the great cave."

Then they went on, and before the sun was high they came to the crest of a rise, and heard the sound of horns on its farther side. They stood upon the rise, and looked, and lo! yet far off, but running towards them, was the whole impi of the Halakazi, and it was a great impi.

"They have gathered their strength indeed," said Galazi. "For every man of ours there are three of these Swazis!"

The soldiers saw also, and the courage of some of them sank low. Then Umslopogaas spoke to them:—

"Yonder are the Swazi dogs, my children; they are many and we are few. Yet, shall it be told at home that we, men of the Zulu blood, were hunted by a pack of Swazi dogs? Shall our women and children sing *that* song in our ears, O Soldiers of the Axe?"

Now some cried "Never!" but some were silent; so Umslopogaas spoke again:—

"Turn back all who will: there is yet time. Turn back all who will, but ye who are men come forward with me. Or if ye will, go back all of you, and leave Axe Groan-Maker and Club Watcher to see this matter out alone."

Now there arose a mighty shout of "We will die together who have lived together!"

"Do you swear it?" cried Umslopogaas, holding Groan-Maker on high.

"We swear it by the Axe," they answered.

Then Umslopogaas and Galazi made ready for the battle. They posted all the young men in the broken ground above the bottom of the slope, for these could best be spared to the spear, and Galazi the Wolf took command of them; but the veterans stayed upon the hillside, and with them Umslopogaas.

Now the Halakazi came on, and there were four full regiments of them. The plain was black with them, the air was rent with their shoutings, and their spears flashed like lightnings. On the farther side of the slope they halted and sent a herald forward to demand what the People of the Axe would have from them. The Slaughterer answered that they would have three things: First, the head of their chief, whose place Galazi should fill henceforth; secondly, that fair maid whom men named the Lily; thirdly, a thousand head of cattle. If these demands were granted, then he would spare them, the Halakazi; if not, he would stamp them out and take all.

So the herald returned, and when he reached the ranks of the Halakazi he called aloud his answer. Then a great roar of laughter went up from the Halakazi regiments, a roar that shook the earth. The brow of Umslopogaas the Slaughterer burned red beneath the black when he heard it, and he shook Groan-Maker towards their host.

"Ye shall sing another song before this sun is set," he cried, and strode along the ranks speaking to this man and that by name, and lifting up their hearts with great words.

Now the Halakazi raised a shout, and charged to come at the young men led by Galazi the Wolf; but beyond the foot of the slope was peaty ground, and they came through it heavily, and as they came Galazi and the young men fell upon them and slew them; still, they could not hold them back for long, because of their great numbers, and presently the battle ranged all along the slope. But so well did Galazi handle the young men, and so fiercely did they fight beneath his eye, that before they could be killed or driven back all the force of the Halakazi was doing battle with them. Ay, and twice Galazi charged with such as he could gather, and twice he checked the Halakazi rush, throwing them into confusion, till at length company was mixed with company and regiment with regiment. But it might not endure, for now more than half the young men were down, and the rest were being pushed back up the hill, fighting madly.

But all this while Umslopogaas and the veterans sat in their ranks upon the brow of the slope and watched. "Those Swazi dogs have a fool for their general," quoth Umslopogaas. "He has no men left to fall back on, and Galazi has broken his array and mixed his regiments as milk and cream are mixed in a bowl. They are no longer an impi, they are a mob."

Now the veterans moved restlessly on their haunches, pushing their legs out and drawing them in again. They glanced at the fray, they looked into each other's eyes and spoke a word here, a word there, "Well smitten, Galazi! *Wow!* that one is down! A brave lad! Ho! a good club is the Watcher! The fight draws near, my brother!" And ever as they spoke their faces grew fiercer and their fingers played with their spears.

At length a captain called aloud to Umslopogaas:—

"Say, Slaughterer, is it not time to be up and doing? The grass is wet to sit on, and our limbs grow cramped."

"Wait awhile," answered Umslopogaas. "Let them weary of their play. Let them weary, I tell you."

As he spoke the Halakazi huddled themselves together, and with a rush drove back Galazi and those who were left of the young men. Yes, at last they were forced to flee, and after them came the Swazis, and in the forefront of the pursuit was their chief, ringed round with a circle of his bravest.

Umslopogaas saw it and bounded to his feet, roaring like a bull. "At them now, wolves!" he shouted.

Then the lines of warriors sprang up as a wave springs, and their crests were like foam upon the wave. As a wave that swells to break they rose suddenly, like a breaking wave they poured down the slope. In front of them was the Slaughterer, holding Groan-Maker aloft, and oh! his feet were swift. So swift were his feet that, strive as they would, he outran them by the quarter of a spear's throw. Galazi heard the thunder of their rush; he looked round, and as he looked, lo! the Slaughterer swept past him, running like a buck. Then Galazi, too, bounded forward, and the Wolf-Brethren sped down the hill, the length of four spears between them.

The Halakazi also saw and heard, and strove to gather themselves together to meet the rush. In front of Umslopogaas was their chief, a tall man hedged about with assegais. Straight at the shield-hedge drove Umslopogaas, and a score of spears were lifted to greet him, a score of shields heaved into the air—this was a fence that none might pass alive. Yet would the Slaughterer pass it—not alone! See! he steadies his pace, he gathers himself together, and now he leaps! High into the air he leaps; his feet knock the heads of the warriors and rattle against the crowns of their shields. They smite upwards with the spear, but he has swept over them like a swooping bird. He has cleared them—he has lit—and now the shield-hedge guards two chiefs. But not for long. *Ou!* Groan-Maker is aloft, he falls—and neither shield nor axe may stay his stroke, both are cleft through, and the Halakazi lack a leader.

The shield-ring wheels in upon itself. Fools! Galazi is upon you! What was that? Look, now! see how many bones are left unbroken in him whom the Watcher falls on full! What!—another down! Close up, shield-men—close up! *Ai!* are you fled?

Ah! the wave has fallen on the beach. Listen to its roaring—listen to the roaring of the shields! Stand, you men of the Halakazi—stand! Surely they are but a few. So! it is done! By the head of Chaka! they break—they are pushed back—now the wave of slaughter seethes along the sands—now the foe is swept like floating weed, and from all the line there comes a hissing like the hissing of thin waters. "*S'gee!*" says the hiss. "*S'gee! S'gee!*"

There, my father, I am old. What have I to do with the battle any more, with the battle and its joy? Yet it is better to die in such a fight as that than to live any other way. I have seen such—I have seen many such. Oh! we could fight when I was a man, my father, but none that I knew could ever fight like Umslopogaas the Slaughterer, son of Chaka, and his blood-brother Galazi the Wolf! So, so! they swept them away, those Halakazi; they swept them as a maid sweeps the dust of a hut, as the wind sweeps the withered leaves. It was soon done when once it was begun. Some were fled and some were dead, and this was the end of that fight. No, no, not of all the war. The Halakazi were worsted in the field, but many lived to win the great cave, and there the work must be finished. Thither, then, went the Slaughterer presently, with such of his impi as was left to him. Alas! many were killed; but how could they have died better than in that fight? Also those who were left were as good as all, for now they knew that they should not be overcome easily while Axe and Club still led the way.

Now they stood before a hill, measuring, perhaps, three thousand paces round its base. It was of no great height, and yet unclimbable, for, after a man had gone up a little way, the sides of it were sheer, offering no foothold except to the rock-rabbits and the lizards. No one was to be seen without this hill, nor in the great kraal of the Halakazi that lay to the east of it, and yet the ground about was trampled with the hoofs of oxen and the feet of men, and from within the mountain came a sound of lowing cattle.

"Here is the nest of Halakazi," quoth Galazi the Wolf.

"Here is the nest indeed," said Umslopogaas; "but how shall we come at the eggs to suck them? There are no branches on this tree."

"But there is a hole in the trunk," answered the Wolf.

Now he led them a little way till they came to a place where the soil was trampled as it is at the entrance to a cattle kraal, and they saw that there was a low cave which led into the cliff, like an archway such as you white men build. But this archway was filled up with great blocks of stone placed upon each other in such a fashion that it could not be forced from without. After the cattle were driven in it had been filled up.

"We cannot enter here," said Galazi. "Follow me."

So they followed him, and came to the north side of the mountain, and there, two spear-casts away, a soldier was standing. But when he saw them he vanished suddenly.

"There is the place," said Galazi, "and the fox has gone to earth in it."

Now they ran to the spot and saw a little hole in the rock, scarcely bigger than an ant-bear's burrow, and through the hole came sounds and some light.

"Now where is the hyena who will try a new burrow?" cried Umslopogaas. "A hundred head of cattle to the man who wins through and clears the way!"

Then two young men sprang forward who were flushed with victory and desired nothing more than to make a great name and win cattle, crying:—

"Here are hyenas, Bulalio."

"To earth, then!" said Umslopogaas, "and let him who wins through hold the path awhile till others follow."

The two young men sprang at the hole, and he who reached it first went down upon his hands and knees and crawled in, lying on his shield and holding his spear before him. For a little while the light in the burrow vanished, and they heard the sound of his crawling. Then came the noise of blows, and once more light crept through the hole. The man was dead.

"This one had a bad snake," said the second soldier; "his snake deserted him. Let me see if mine is better."

So down he went on his hands and knees, and crawled as the first had done, only he put his shield over his head. For awhile they heard him crawling, then once more came the sound of blows echoing on the ox-hide shield, and after the blows groans. He was dead also, yet it seemed that they had left his body in the hole, for now no light came through. This was the cause, my father: when they struck the man he had wriggled back a little way and died there, and none had entered from the farther side to drag him out.

Now the soldiers stared at the mouth of the passage and none seemed to love the look of it, for this was but a poor way to die. Umslopogaas and Galazi also looked at it, thinking.

"Now I am named Wolf," said Galazi, "and a wolf should not fear the dark; also, these are my people, and I must be the first to visit them," and he went down on his hands and knees without more ado. But Umslopogaas, having peered once more down the burrow, said: "Hold, Galazi; I will go first! I have a plan. Do you follow me. And you, my children, shout loudly, so that none may hear us move; and, if we win through, follow swiftly, for we cannot hold the mouth of that place for long. Hearken, also! this is my counsel to you: if I fall choose another chief—Galazi the Wolf, if he is still living."

"Nay, Slaughterer, do not name me," said the Wolf, "for together we live or die."

"So let it be, Galazi. Then choose you some other man and try this road no more, for if we cannot pass it none can, but seek food and sit down here till those jackals bolt; then be ready. Farewell, my children!"

"Farewell, father," they answered, "go warily, lest we be left like cattle without a herdsman, wandering and desolate."

Then Umslopogaas crept into the hole, taking no shield, but holding Groan-Maker before him, and at his heels crept Galazi. When he had covered the length of six spears he stretched out his hand, and, as he trusted to do, he found the feet of that man who had gone before and died in the place. Then Umslopogaas the wary did this: he put his head beneath the dead man's legs and thrust himself onward till all the body was on his back, and there he held it with one hand, gripping its two wrists in his hand. Then he crawled forward a little space and saw that he was coming to the inner mouth of the burrow, but that the shadow was deep there because of a great mass of rock which lay before the burrow shutting out the light. "This is well for me," thought Umslopogaas, "for now they will not know the dead from the living. I may yet look upon the sun again." Now he heard the Halakazi soldiers talking without.

"The Zulu rats do not love this run," said one, "they fear the rat-catcher's stick. This is good sport," and a man laughed.

Then Umslopogaas pushed himself forward as swiftly as he could, holding the dead man on his back, and suddenly came out of the hole into the open place in the dark shadow of the great rock.

"By the Lily," cried a soldier, "here's a third! Take this, Zulu rat!" And he struck the dead man heavily with a kerrie. "And that!" cried another, driving his spear through him so that it pricked Umslopogaas beneath. "And that! and this! and that!" said others, as they smote and stabbed.

Now Umslopogaas groaned heavily in the deep shadow and lay still. "No need to waste more blows," said the man who had struck first. "This one will never go back to Zululand, and I think that few will care to follow him. Let us make an end: run, some of you, and find stones to stop the burrow, for now the sport is done."

He turned as he spoke and so did the others, and this was what the Slaughterer sought. With a swift movement, he freed himself from the dead man and sprang to his feet. They heard the sound and turned again, but as they turned Groan-Maker pecked softly, and that man who had sworn by the Lily was no more a man. Then Umslopogaas leaped forwards, and, bounding on to the great rock, stood there like a buck against the sky.

"A Zulu rat is not so easily slain, O ye weasels!" he cried, as they came at him from all sides at once with a roar. He smote to the right and the left, and so swiftly that men could scarcely see the blows fall, for he struck with Groan-Maker's beak. But though men scarcely saw the blows, yet, my father, men fell beneath them. Now foes were all around, leaping up at the Slaughterer as rushing water leaps to hide a rock—everywhere shone spears, thrusting at him from this side and from that. Those in front and to the side

Groan-Maker served to stay, but one wounded Umslopogaas in the neck, and another was lifted to pierce his back when the strength of its holder was bowed to the dust—to the dust, to become of the dust.

For now the Wolf was through the hole also, and the Watcher grew very busy; he was so busy that soon the back of the Slaughterer had nothing to fear—yet those had much to fear who stood behind his back. The pair fought bravely, making a great slaughter, and presently, one by one, plumed heads of the People of the Axe showed through the burrow and strong arms mingled in the fray. Swiftly they came, leaping into battle as otters leap to the water—now there were ten of them, now there were twenty—and now the Halakazi broke and fled, since they did not bargain for this. Then the rest of the Men of the Axe came through in peace, and the evening grew towards the dark before all had passed the hole.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE FINDING OF NADA

Umslopogaas marshalled his companies.

"There is little light left," he said, "but it must serve us to start these conies from their burrows. Come, my brother Galazi, you know where the conies hide, take my place and lead us."

So Galazi led the impi. Turning a corner of the glen, he came with them to a large open space that had a fountain in its midst, and this place was full of thousands of cattle. Then he turned again to the left, and brought them to the inner side of the mountain, where the cliff hung over, and here was the mouth of a great cave. Now the cave was dark, but by its door was stacked a pile of resinous wood to serve as torches.

"Here is that which will give us light," said Galazi, and one man of every two took a torch and lit it at a fire that burned near the mouth of the cave. Then they rushed in, waving the flaring torches and with assegais aloft. Here for the last time the Halakazi stood against them, and the torches floated up and down upon the wave of war. But they did not stand for very long, for all the heart was out of them. *Wow!* yes, many were killed—I do not know how many. I know this only, that the Halakazi are no more a tribe since Umslopogaas, who is named Bulalio, stamped them with his feet—they are nothing but a name now. The People of the Axe drove them out into the open and finished the fight by starlight among the cattle.

In one corner of the cave Umslopogaas saw a knot of men clustering round something as though to guard it. He rushed at the men, and with him went Galazi and others. But when Umslopogaas was through, by the light of his torch he perceived a tall and slender man, who leaned against the wall of the cave and held a shield before his face.

"You are a coward!" he cried, and smote with Groan-Maker. The great axe pierced the hide, but, missing the head behind, rang loudly against the rock, and as it struck a sweet voice said:—

"Ah! soldier, do not kill me! Why are you angry with me?"

Now the shield had come away from its holder's hands upon the blade of the axe, and there was something in the notes of the voice that caused Umslopogaas to smite no more: it was as though a memory of childhood had come to him in a dream. His torch was burning low, but he thrust it forward to look at him who crouched against the rock. The dress was the dress of a man, but this was no man's form—nay, rather that of a lovely woman, well-nigh white in colour. She dropped her hands from before her face, and now he could see her well. He saw eyes that shone like stars, hair that curled and fell upon the shoulders, and such beauty as was not known among our people. And as the voice had spoken to him of something that was lost, so did the eyes seem to shine across the blackness of many years, and the beauty to bring back he knew not what.

He looked at the girl in all her loveliness, and she looked at him in his fierceness and his might, red with war and wounds. They both looked long, while the torchlight flared on them, on the walls of the cave, and the broad blade of Groan-Maker, and from around rose the sounds of the fray.

"How are you named, who are so fair to see?" he asked at length.

"I am named the Lily now: once I had another name. Nada, daughter of Mopo, I was once; but name and all else are dead, and I go to join them. Kill me and make an end. I will shut my eyes, that I may not see the great axe flash."

Now Umslopogaas gazed upon her again, and Groan-Maker fell from his hand.

"Look on me, Nada, daughter of Mopo," he said in a low voice; "look at me and say who am I."

She looked once more and yet again. Now her face was thrust forward as one who gazes over the edge of the world; it grew fixed and strange. "By my heart," she said, "by my heart, you are Umslopogaas, my brother who is dead, and whom dead as living I have loved ever and alone."

Then the torch flared out, but Umslopogaas took hold of her in the darkness and pressed her to him and kissed her, the sister whom he found after many years, and she kissed him.

"You kiss me now," she said, "yet not long ago that great axe shore my locks, missing me but by a finger's-breadth—and still the sound of fighting rings in my ears! Ah! a boon of you, my brother—a boon: let there be no more death since we are met once more. The people of the Halakazi are conquered, and it is their just doom, for thus, in this same way, they killed those with whom I lived before. Yet they have treated me well, not forcing me into wedlock, and protecting me from Dingaan; so spare them, my brother, if you may."

Then Umslopogaas lifted up his voice, commanding that the killing should cease, and sent messengers running swiftly with these words: "This is the command of Bulalio: that he who lifts hand against one more of the people of the Halakazi shall be killed himself"; and the soldiers obeyed him, though the order came somewhat late, and no more of the Halakazi were brought to doom. They were suffered to escape, except those of the women and children who were kept to be led away as captives. And they ran far that night. Nor did they come together again to be a people, for they feared Galazi the Wolf, who would be chief over them, but they were scattered wide in the world, to sojourn among strangers.

Now when the soldiers had eaten abundantly of the store of the Halakazi, and guards had been sent to ward the cattle and watch against surprise, Umslopogaas spoke long with Nada the Lily, taking her apart, and he told her all his story. She told him also the tale which you know, my father, of how she had lived with the little people that were subject to the Halakazi, she and her mother Macrophia, and how the fame of her beauty had spread about the land. Then she told him how the Halakazi had claimed her, and of

how, in the end, they had taken her by force of arms, killing the people of that kraal, and among them her own mother. Thereafter, she had dwelt among the Halakazi, who named her anew, calling her the Lily, and they had treated her kindly, giving her reverence because of her sweetness and beauty, and not forcing her into marriage.

"And why would you not wed, Nada, my sister?" asked Umslopogaas, "you who are far past the age of marriage?"

"I cannot tell you," she answered, hanging her head; "but I have no heart that way. I only seek to be left alone."

Now Umslopogaas thought awhile and spoke. "Do you not know then, Nada, why it is that I have made this war, and why the people of the Halakazi are dead and scattered and their cattle the prize of my arm? I will tell you: I am come here to win you, whom I knew only by report as the Lily maid, the fairest of women, to be a wife to Dingaan. The reason that I began this war was to win you and make my peace with Dingaan, and now I have carried it through to the end."

Now when she heard these words, Nada the Lily trembled and wept, and, sinking to the earth, she clasped the knees of Umslopogaas in supplication: "Oh, do not this cruel thing by me, your sister," she prayed; "take rather that great axe and make an end of me, and of the beauty which has wrought so much woe, and most of all to me who wear it! Would that I had not moved my head behind the shield, but had suffered the axe to fall upon it. To this end I was dressed as a man, that I might meet the fate of a man. Ah! a curse be on my woman's weakness that snatched me from death to give me up to shame!"

Thus she prayed to Umslopogaas in her low sweet voice, and his heart was shaken in him, though, indeed, he did not now purpose to give Nada to Dingaan, as Baleka was given to Chaka, perhaps in the end to meet the fate of Baleka.

"There are many, Nada," he said, "who would think it no misfortune that they should be given as a wife to the first of chiefs."

"Then I am not of their number," she answered; "nay, I will die first, by my own hand if need be."

Now Umslopogaas wondered how it came about that Nada looked upon marriage thus, but he did not speak of the matter; he said only, "Tell me then, Nada, how I can deliver myself of this charge. I must go to Dingaan as I promised our father Mopo, and what shall I say to Dingaan when he asks for the Lily whom I went out to pluck and whom his heart desires? What shall I say to save myself alive from the wrath of Dingaan?"

Then Nada thought and answered, "You shall say this, my brother. You shall tell him that the Lily, being clothed in the war-dress of a warrior, fell by chance in the fray. See, now, none of your people know that you have found me; they are thinking of other things than maids in the hour of their victory. This, then, is my plan: we will search now by the starlight till we find the body of a fair maid, for, doubtless, some were killed by hazard in the fight, and on her we will set a warrior's dress, and lay by her the corpse of one of your own men. To-morrow, at the light, you shall take the captains of your soldiers and, having laid the body of the girl in the dark of the cave, you shall show it to them hurriedly, and tell them that this was the Lily, slain by one of your own people, whom in your wrath you slew also. They will not look long on so common a sight, and if by hazard they see the maid, and think her not so very fair, they will deem that it is death which has robbed her of her comeliness. So the tale which you must tell to Dingaan shall be built up firmly, and Dingaan shall believe it to be true."

"And how shall this be, Nada?" asked Umslopogaas. "How shall this be when men see you among the captives and know you by your beauty? Are there, then, two such Lilies in the land?"

"I shall not be known, for I shall not be seen, Umslopogaas. You must set me free to-night. I will wander hence disguised as a youth and covered with a blanket, and if any meet me, who shall say that I am the Lily?"

"And where will you wander, Nada? to your death? Must we, then, meet after so many years to part again for ever?"

"Where was it that you said you lived, my brother? Beneath the shade of a Ghost Mountain, that men may know by a shape of stone which is fashioned like an old woman frozen into stone, was it not? Tell me of the road thither."

So Umslopogaas told her the road, and she listened silently.

"Good," she said. "I am strong and my feet are swift; perhaps they may serve to bring me so far, and perhaps, if I win the shadow of that mountain, you will find me a hut to hide in, Umslopogaas, my brother."

"Surely it shall be so, my sister," answered Umslopogaas, "and yet the way is long and many dangers lie in the path of a maid journeying alone, without food or shelter," and as he spoke Umslopogaas thought of Zinita his wife, for he guessed that she would not love Nada, although she was only his sister.

"Still, it must be travelled, and the dangers must be braved," she answered, smiling. "Alas! there is no other way."

Then Umslopogaas summoned Galazi the Wolf and told him all this story, for Galazi was the only man whom he could trust. The Wolf listened in silence, marvelling the while at the beauty of Nada, as the starlight showed it. When everything was told, he said only that he no longer wondered that the people of the Halakazi had defied Dingaan and brought death upon themselves for the sake of this maid. Still, to be plain, his heart thought ill of the matter, for death was not done with yet: there before them shone the Star of Death, and he pointed to the Lily.

Now Nada trembled at his words of evil omen, and the Slaughterer grew angry, but Galazi would neither add to them nor take away from them. "I have spoken that which my heart hears," he answered.

Then they rose and went to search among the dead for a girl who would suit their purpose; soon they found one, a tall and fair maiden, and Galazi bore her in his arms to the great cave. Here in the cave were none but the dead, and, tossed hither and thither in their last sleep, they looked awful in the glare of the torches.

"They sleep sound," said the Lily, gazing on them; "rest is sweet."

"We shall soon win it, maiden," answered Galazi, and again Nada trembled.

Then, having arrayed her in the dress of a warrior, and put a shield and spear by her, they laid down the body of the girl in a dark place in the cave, and, finding a dead warrior of the People of the Axe, placed him beside her. Now they left the cave, and, pretending that they visited the sentries, Umslopogaas and Galazi passed from spot to spot, while the Lily walked after them like a guard, hiding her face with a shield, holding a spear in her hand, and having with her a bag of corn and dried flesh.

So they passed on, till at length they came to the entrance in the mountain side. The stones that had blocked it were pulled down so as to allow those of the Halakazi to fly who had been spared at the entreaty of Nada, but there were guards by the entrance to watch that none came back. Umslopogaas challenged them, and they saluted him, but he saw that they were worn out with battle and journeying, and knew little of what they saw or said. Then he, Galazi, and Nada passed through the opening on to the plain beyond.

Here the Slaughterer and the Lily bade each other farewell, while Galazi watched, and presently the Wolf saw Umslopogaas return as one who is heavy at heart, and caught sight of the Lily skimming across the plain lightly like a swallow.

"I do not know when we two shall meet again," said Umslopogaas so soon as she had melted into the shadows of the night.

"May you never meet," answered Galazi, "for I am sure that if you meet that sister of yours will bring death on many more than those who now lie low because of her loveliness. She is a Star of Death, and when she sets the sky shall be blood red."

Umslopogaas did not answer, but walked slowly through the archway in the mountain side.

"How is this, chief?" said he who was captain of the guard. "Three went out, but only two return."

"Fool!" answered Umslopogaas. "Are you drunk with Halakazi beer, or blind with sleep? Two went out, and two return. I sent him who was with us back to the camp."

"So be it, father," said the captain. "Two went out, and two return. All is well!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE STAMPING OF THE FIRE

On the morrow the impi awoke refreshed with sleep, and, after they had eaten, Umslopogaas mustered them. Alas! nearly half of those who had seen the sun of yesterday would wake no more forever. The Slaughterer mustered them and thanked them for that which they had done, winning fame and cattle. They were merry, recking little of those who were dead, and sang his praises and the praises of Galazi in a loud song. When the song was ended Umslopogaas spoke to them again, saying that the victory was great, and the cattle they had won were countless. Yet something was lacking—she was lacking whom he came to seek to be a gift to Dingaan the king, and for whose sake this war was made. Where now was the Lily? Yesterday she had been here, clad in a moocha like a man and bearing a shield; this he knew from the captives. Where, then, was she now?

Then all the soldiers said that they had seen nothing of her. When they had done, Galazi spoke a word, as was agreed between him and Umslopogaas. He said that when they stormed the cave he had seen a man run at a warrior in the cave to kill him. Then as he came, he who was about to be slain threw down the shield and cried for mercy, and Galazi knew that this was no warrior of the Halakazi, but a very beautiful girl. So he called to the man to let her alone and not to touch her, for the order was that no women should be killed. But the soldier, being mad with the lust of fight, shouted that maid or man she should die, and slew her. Thereon, he—Galazi—in his wrath ran up and smote the man with the Watcher and killed him also, and he prayed that he had done no wrong.

“You have done well, my brother,” said Umslopogaas. “Come now, some of you, and let us look at this dead girl. Perhaps it is the Lily, and if so that is unlucky for us, for I do not know what tale we shall tell to Dingaan of the matter.”

So the captains went with Umslopogaas and Galazi, and came to the spot where the girl had been laid, and by her the man of the People of the Axe.

“All is as the Wolf, my brother, has told,” said Umslopogaas, waving the torch in his hand over the two who lay dead. “Here, without a doubt, lies she who was named the Lily, whom we came to win, and by her that fool who slew her, slain himself by the blow of the Watcher. An ill sight to see, and an ill tale for me to tell at the kraal of Dingaan. Still, what is is, and cannot be altered; and this maid who was the fairest of the fair is now none too lovely to look on. Let us away!” And he turned swiftly, then spoke again, saying:—

“Bind up this dead girl in ox hides, cover her with salt, and let her be brought with us.” And they did so.

Then the captains said: “Surely it is so, my father; now it cannot be altered, and Dingaan must miss his bride.” So said they all except that man who had been captain of the guard when Umslopogaas and Galazi and another passed through the archway. This man, indeed, said nothing, yet he was not without his thoughts. For it seemed to him that he had seen three pass through the archway, and not two. It seemed to him, moreover, that the kaross which the third wore had slipped aside as she pressed past him, and that beneath it he had seen the shape of a beautiful woman, and above it had caught the glint of a woman’s eye—an eye full and dark, like a buck’s.

Also, this captain noted that Bulalio called none of the captives to swear to the body of the Lily maid, and that he shook the torch to and fro as he held it over her—he whose hand was of the steadiest. All of this he kept in his mind, forgetting nothing.

Now it chanced afterwards, on the homeward march, my father, that Umslopogaas had cause to speak angrily to this man, because he tried to rob another of his share of the spoil of the Halakazi. He spoke sharply to him, degrading him from his rank, and setting another over him. Also he took cattle from the man, and gave them to him whom he would have robbed.

And thereafter, though he was justly served, this man thought more and more of the third who had passed through the arch of the cave and had not returned, and who seemed to him to have a fair woman’s shape, and eyes which gleamed like those of a woman.

On that day, then, Umslopogaas began his march to the kraal Umgugundhlovu, where Dingaan sat. But before he set his face homewards, in the presence of the soldiers, he asked Galazi the Wolf if he would come back with him, or if he desired to stay to be chief of the Halakazi, as he was by right of birth and war. Then the Wolf laughed, and answered that he had come out to seek for vengeance, and not for the place of a chief, also that there were few of the Halakazi people left over whom he might rule if he wished. Moreover, he added this: that, like twin trees, they two blood-brethren had grown up side by side till their roots were matted together, and that, were one of them dug up and planted in Swazi soil, he feared lest both should wither, or, at the least, that he, Galazi, would wither, who loved but one man and certain wolves.

So Umslopogaas said no more of the chieftainship, but began his journey. With him he brought a great number of cattle, to be a gift for Dingaan, and a multitude of captives, young women and children, for he would appease the heart of Dingaan, because he did not bring her whom he sought—the Lily, flower of flowers. Yet, because he was cautious and put little faith in the kindness of kings, Umslopogaas, so soon as he reached the borders of Zululand, sent the best of the cattle and the fairest of the maids and children on to the kraal of the People of the Axe by the Ghost Mountain. And he who had been captain of the guard but now was a common soldier noticed this also.

Now it chanced that on a certain morning I, Mopo, sat in the kraal Umgugundhlovu in attendance on Dingaan. For still I waited on the king, though he had spoken no word to me, good or bad, since the yesterday, when I foretold to him that in the blood of the white men whom he had betrayed grew the flower of his own death. For, my father, it was on the morrow of the slaying of the Amaboona that Umslopogaas came to the kraal Umgugundhlovu.

Now the mind of Dingaan was heavy, and he sought something to lighten it. Presently he bethought himself of the white praying man, who had come to the kraal seeking to teach us people of the Zulu to worship other gods than the assegai and the king. Now this

was a good man, but no luck went with his teaching, which was hard to understand; and, moreover, the indunas did not like it, because it seemed to set a master over the master, and a king over the king, and to preach of peace to those whose trade was war. Still, Dingaan sent for the white man that he might dispute with him, for Dingaan thought that he himself was the cleverest of all men.

Now the white man came, but his face was pale, because of that which he had seen befall the Boers, for he was gentle and hated such sights. The king bade him be seated and spoke to him saying:—

“The other day, O White Man, thou toldest me of a place of fire whither those go after death who have done wickedly in life. Tell me now of thy wisdom, do my fathers lie in that place?”

“How can I know, King,” answered the prayer-doctor, “who may not judge of the deeds of men? This I say only: that those who murder and rob and oppress the innocent and bear false witness shall lie in that place of fire.”

“It seems that my fathers have done all these things, and if they are in this place I would go there also, for I am minded to be with my fathers at the last. Yet I think that I should find a way to escape if ever I came there.”

“How, King?”

Now Dingaan had set this trap for the prayer-doctor. In the centre of that open space where he had caused the Boers to be fallen upon he had built up a great pyre of wood—brushwood beneath, and on top of the brushwood logs, and even whole trees. Perhaps, my father, there were sixty full wagonloads of dry wood piled together there in the centre of the place.

“Thou shalt see with thine eyes, White Man,” he answered, and bidding attendants set fire to the pile all round, he summoned that regiment of young men which was left in the kraal. Maybe there were a thousand and half a thousand of them—not more—the same that had slain the Boers.

Now the fire began to burn fiercely, and the regiment filed in and took its place in ranks. By the time that all had come, the pyre was everywhere a sheet of raging flame, and, though we sat a hundred paces from it, its heat was great when the wind turned our way.

“Now, Doctor of Prayers, is thy hot place hotter than yonder fire?” said the king.

He answered that he did not know, but the fire was certainly hot.

“Then I will show thee how I will come out of it if ever I go to lie in such a fire—ay, though it be ten times as big and fierce. Ho! my children!” he cried to the soldiers, and, springing up, “You see yonder fire. Run swiftly and stamp it flat with your feet. Where there was fire let there be blackness and ashes.”

Now the White Man lifted his hands and prayed Dingaan not to do this thing that should be the death of many, but the king bade him be silent. Then he turned his eyes upward and prayed to his gods. For a moment also the soldiers looked on each other in doubt, for the fire raged furiously, and spouts of flame shot high toward the heaven, and above it and about it the hot air danced. But their captain called to them loudly: “Great is the king! Hear the words of the king, who honours you! Yesterday we ate up the Amaboona—it was nothing, they were unarmed. There is a foe more worthy of our valour. Come, my children, let us wash in the fire—we who are fiercer than the fire! Great is the king who honours us!”

Thus he spoke and ran forward, and, with a roar, after him sprang the soldiers, rank by rank. They were brave men indeed; moreover, they knew that if death lay before them death also awaited him who lagged behind, and it is far better to die with honour than ashamed. On they went, as to the joy of battle, their captain leading them, and as they went they sang the Ingomo, the war-chant of the Zulu. Now the captain neared the raging fire; we saw him lift his shield to keep off its heat. Then he was gone—he had sprung into the heart of the furnace, and but little of him was ever found again. After him went the first company. In they went, beating at the flames with their ox-hide shields, stamping them out with their naked feet, tearing down the burning logs and casting them aside. Not one man of that company lived, my father; they fell down like moths which flutter through a candle, and where they fell they perished. But after them came other companies, and it was well for those in this fight who were last to grapple with the foe. Now a great smoke was mixed with the flame, now the flame grew less and less, and the smoke more and more; and now blackened men, hairless, naked, and blistered, white with the scorching of the fire, staggered out on the farther side of the flames, falling to earth here and there. After them came others; now there was no flame, only a great smoke in which men moved dimly; and presently, my father, it was done: they had conquered the fire, and that with but very little hurt to the last seven companies, though every man had trodden it. How many perished?—nay, I know not, they were never counted; but what between the dead and the injured that regiment was at half strength till the king drafted more men into it.

“See, Doctor of Prayers,” said Dingaan, with a laugh, “thus shall I escape the fires of that land of which thou tellest, if such there be indeed: I will bid my impi stamp them out.”

Then the praying man went from the kraal saying that he would teach no more among the Zulus, and afterwards he left the land. When he had gone the burnt wood and the dead were cleared away, the injured were doctored or killed according to their hurts, and those who had little harm came before the king and praised him.

“New shields and headdresses must be found for you, my children,” said Dingaan, for the shields were black and shrivelled, and of heads of hair and plumes there were but few left among that regiment.

“Wow!” said Dingaan again, looking at the soldiers who still lived: “shaving will be easy and cheap in that place of fire of which the white man speaks.”

Then he ordered beer to be brought to the men, for the heat had made them thirsty.

Now though you may not guess it, my father, I have told you this tale because it has something to do with my story; for scarcely had the matter been ended when messengers came, saying that Bulalio, chief of the People of the Axe, and his impi were without, having returned with much spoil from the slaying of the Halakazi in Swaziland. Now when I heard this my heart leapt for joy, seeing that I had feared greatly for the fate of Umslopogaas, my fosterling. Dingaan also was very glad, and, springing up, danced to and fro like a child.

“Now at last we have good tidings,” he said, at once forgetting the stamping of the fire, “and now shall my eyes behold that Lily whom my hand has longed to pluck. Let Bulalio and his people enter swiftly.”

For awhile there was silence; then from far away, without the high fence of the great place, there came a sound of singing, and through the gates of the kraal rushed two great men, wearing black plumes upon their heads, having black shields in their left hands, and in their right, one an axe and one a club; while about their shoulders were bound wolf-skins. They ran low, neck and neck, with

outstretched shields and heads held forward, as a buck runs when he is hard pressed by dogs, and no such running had been seen in the kraal Umgugundhlovu as the running of the Wolf-Brethren. Half across the space they ran, and halted suddenly, and, as they halted, the dead ashes of the fire flew up before their feet in a little cloud.

"By my head! look, these come armed before me!" said Dingaan, frowning, "and to do this is death. Now say who is that man, great and fierce, who bears an axe aloft? Did I not know him dead I should say it was the Black One, my brother, as he was in the days of the smiting of Zwide: so was his head set on his shoulders and so he was wont to look round, like a lion."

"I think that is Bulalio the Slaughterer, chief of the People of the Axe, O King," I answered.

"And who is the other with him? He is a great man also. Never have I seen such a pair!"

"I think that is Galazi the Wolf, he who is blood-brother to the Slaughterer, and his general," I said again.

Now after these two came the soldiers of the People of the Axe, armed with short sticks alone. Four by four they came, all holding their heads low, and with black shields outstretched, and formed themselves into companies behind the Wolf-Brethren, till all were there. Then, after them, the crowd of the Halakazi slaves were driven in,—women, boys, and maids, a great number—and they stood behind the ranks huddled together like frightened calves.

"A gallant sight, truly!" said Dingaan, as he looked upon the companies of black-plumed and shielded warriors. "I have no better soldiers in my impis, and yet my eyes behold these for the first time," and again he frowned.

Now suddenly Umslopogaas lifted his axe and started forward at full speed, and after him thundered the companies. On they rushed, and their plumes lay back upon the wind, till it seemed as though they must stamp us flat. But when he was within ten paces of the king Umslopogaas lifted Groan-Maker again, and Galazi held the Watcher on high, and every man halted where he was, while once more the dust flew up in clouds. They halted in long, unbroken lines, with outstretched shields and heads held low; no man's head rose more than the length of a dance kerrie from the earth. So they stood one minute, then, for the third time, Umslopogaas lifted Groan-Maker, and in an instant every man straightened himself, each shield was tossed on high, and from every throat was roared the royal salute, "*Bayéte!*"

"A pretty sight forsooth," quoth Dingaan; "but these soldiers are too well drilled who have never done me service nor the Black One who was before me, and this Slaughterer is too good a captain, I say. Come hither, ye twain!" he cried aloud.

Then the Wolf-Brethren strode forward and stood before the king, and for awhile they looked upon each other.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE LILY IS BROUGHT TO DINGAAN

"How are you named?" said Dingaan.

"We are named Bulalio the Slaughterer and Galazi the Wolf, O King," answered Umslopogaas.

"Was it thou who didst send a certain message to the Black One who is dead, Bulalio?"

"Yea, O King, I sent a message, but from all I have heard, Masilo, my messenger, gave more than the message, for he stabbed the Black One. Masilo had an evil heart."

Now Dingaan winced, for he knew well that he himself and one Mopo had stabbed the Black One, but he thought that this outland chief had not heard the tale, so he said no more of the message.

"How is it that ye dare to come before me armed? Know ye not the rule that he who appears armed before the king dies?"

"We have not heard that law, O King," said Umslopogaas. "Moreover, there is this to be told: by virtue of the axe I bear I rule alone. If I am seen without the axe, then any man may take my place who can, for the axe is chieftainness of the People of the Axe, and he who holds it is its servant."

"A strange custom," said Dingaan, "but let it pass. And thou, Wolf, what hast thou to say of that great club of thine?"

"There is this to be told of the club, O King," answered Galazi: "by virtue of the club I guard my life. If I am seen without the club, then may any man take my life who can, for the club is my Watcher, not I Watcher of the club."

"Never wast thou nearer to the losing of both club and life," said Dingaan, angrily.

"It may be so, O King," answered the Wolf. "When the hour is, then, without a doubt, the Watcher shall cease from his watching."

"Ye are a strange pair," quoth Dingaan. "Where have you been now, and what is your business at the Place of the Elephant?"

"We have been in a far country, O King!" answered Umslopogaas. "We have wandered in a distant land to search for a Flower to be a gift to a king, and in our searching we have trampled down a Swazi garden, and yonder are some of those who tended it"—and he pointed to the captives—"and without are the cattle that ploughed it."

"Good, Slaughterer! I see the gardeners, and I hear the lowing of the cattle, but what of the Flower? Where is this Flower ye went so far to dig in Swazi soil? Was it a Lily-bloom, perchance?"

"It was a Lily-bloom, O King! and yet, alas! the Lily has withered. Nothing is left but the stalk, white and withered as are the bones of men."

"What meanest thou?" said Dingaan, starting to his feet.

"That the king shall learn," answered Umslopogaas; and, turning, he spoke a word to the captains who were behind him. Presently the ranks opened up, and four men ran forward from the rear of the companies. On their shoulders they bore a stretcher, and upon the stretcher lay something wrapped about with raw ox-hides, and bound round with rimpis. The men saluted, and laid their burden down before the king.

"Open!" said the Slaughterer; and they opened, and there within the hides, packed in salt, lay the body of a girl who once was tall and fair.

"Here lies the Lily's stalk, O King!" said Umslopogaas, pointing with the axe, "but if her flower blooms on any air, it is not here."

Now Dingaan stared at the sight of death, and bitterness of heart took hold of him, since he desired above all things to win the beauty of the Lily for himself.

"Bear away this carrion and cast it to the dogs!" he cried, for thus he could speak of her whom he would have taken to wife, when once he deemed her dead. "Take it away, and thou, Slaughterer, tell me how it came about that the maid was slain. It will be well for thee if thou hast a good answer, for know thy life hangs on the words."

So Umslopogaas told the king all that tale which had been made ready against the wrath of Dingaan. And when he had finished Galazi told his story, of how he had seen the soldier kill the maid, and in his wrath had killed the soldier. Then certain of the captains who had seen the soldier and the maid lying in one death came forward and spoke to it.

Now Dingaan was very angry, and yet there was nothing to be done. The Lily was dead, and by no fault of any except of one, who was also dead and beyond his reach.

"Get you hence, you and your people," he said to the Wolf-Brethren. "I take the cattle and the captives. Be thankful that I do not take all your lives also—first, because ye have dared to make war without my word, and secondly, because, having made war, ye have so brought it about that, though ye bring me the body of her I sought, ye do not bring the life."

Now when the king spoke of taking the lives of all the People of the Axe, Umslopogaas smiled grimly and glanced at his companies. Then saluting the king, he turned to go. But as he turned a man sprang forwards from the ranks and called to Dingaan, saying:—

"Is it granted that I may speak truth before the king, and afterwards sleep in the king's shadow?"

Now this was that man who had been captain of the guard on the night when three passed out through the archway and two returned, that same man whom Umslopogaas had degraded from his rank.

"Speak on, thou art safe," answered Dingaan.

"O King, thy ears have been filled with lies," said the soldier. "Hearken, O King! I was captain of the guard of the gate on that night of the slaying of the Halakazi. Three came to the gate of the mountain—they were Bulalio, the Wolf Galazi, and another. That other was tall and slim, bearing a shield high—so. As the third passed the gate, the kaross he wore brushed against me and slipped aside. Beneath that kaross was no man's breast, O King, but the shape of a woman, almost white in colour, and very fair. In drawing back the kaross this third one moved the shield. Behind that shield was no man's face, O King, but the face of a girl, lovelier than the moon, and having eyes brighter than the stars. Three went out at the mountain gate, O King, only two returned, and, peeping after them, it seemed that I saw the third running swiftly across the plains, as a young maid runs, O King. This also, Elephant, Bulalio yonder denied me when, as captain of the guard, I asked for the third who had passed the gate, saying that only two had passed. Further, none of the captives were called to swear to the body of the maid, and now it is too late, and that man who lay beside her was not killed by Galazi in the cave. He was killed outside the cave by a blow of a Halakazi kerrie. I saw him fall with my own eyes, and slew the man who smote him. One thing more, King of the World, the best of the captives and the cattle are not here for a gift to thee—they are at the kraal of Bulalio, Chief of the People of the Axe. I have spoken, O King, yes, because my heart loves not lies. I have spoken the truth, and now do thou protect me from these Wolf-Brethren, O King, for they are very fierce."

Now all this while that the traitor told his tale Umslopogaas, inch by inch, was edging near to him and yet nearer, till at length he might have touched him with an outstretched spear. None noted him except I, Mopo, alone, and perhaps Galazi, for all were watching the face of Dingaan as men watch a storm that is about to burst.

"Fear thou not the Wolf-Brethren, soldier," gasped Dingaan, rolling his red eyes; "the paw of the Lion guards thee, my servant."

Ere the words had left the king's lips the Slaughterer leapt. He leaped full on to the traitor, speaking never a word, and oh! his eyes were awful. He leaped upon him, he seized him with his hands, lifting no weapon, and in his terrible might he broke him as a child breaks a stick—nay, I know not how, it was too swift to see. He broke him, and, hurling him on high, cast him dead at the feet of Dingaan, crying in a great voice:—

"Take thy servant, King! Surely he 'sleeps in thy shadow!'"

Then there was silence, only through the silence was heard a gasp of fear and wonder, for no such deed as this had been wrought in the presence of the king—no, not since the day of Senzangaona the Root.

Now Dingaan spoke, and his voice came thick with rage, and his limbs trembled.

"Slay him!" he hissed. "Slay the dog and all those with him!"

"Now we come to a game which I can play," answered Umslopogaas. "Ho, People of the Axe! Will you stand to be slaughtered by these singed rats?" and he pointed with Groan-Maker at those warriors who had escaped without hurt in the fire, but whose faces the fire had scorched.

Then for answer a great shout went up, a shout and a roar of laughter. And this was the shout:—

"No, Slaughterer, not so are we minded!" and right and left they faced to meet the foe, while from all along the companies came the crackling of the shaken shields.

Back sprang Umslopogaas to head his men; forward leaped the soldiers of the king to work the king's will, if so they might. And Galazi the Wolf also sprang forward, towards Dingaan, and, as he sprang, swung up the Watcher, crying in a great voice:—

"Hold!"

Again there was silence, for men saw that the shadow of the Watcher lay dark upon the head of Dingaan.

"It is a pity that many should die when one will suffice," cried the Wolf again. "Let a blow be struck, and where his shadow lies there shall the Watcher be, and lo! the world will lack a king. A word, King!"

Now Dingaan looked up at the great man who stood above him, and felt the shadow of the shining club lie cold upon his brow, and again he shook—this time it was with fear.

"Begone in peace!" he said.

"A good word for thee, King," said the Wolf, grinning, and slowly he drew himself backwards towards the companies, saying, "Praise the king! The king bids his children go in peace."

But when Dingaan felt that his brow was no longer cold with the shadow of death his rage came back to him, and he would have called to the soldiers to fall upon the People of the Axe, only I stayed him, saying:—

"Thy death is in it, O King; the Slaughterer will grind such men as thou hast here beneath his feet, and then once more shall the Watcher look upon thee."

Now Dingaan saw that this was true, and gave no command, for he had only those men with him whom the fire had left. All the rest were gone to slaughter the Boers in Natal. Still, he must have blood, so he turned on me.

"Thou art a traitor, Mopo, as I have known for long, and I will serve thee as yonder dog served his faithless servant!" and he thrust at me with the assegai in his hand.

But I saw the stroke, and, springing high into the air, avoided it. Then I turned and fled very swiftly, and after me came certain of the soldiers. The way was not far to the last company of the People of the Axe; moreover, it saw me coming, and, headed by Umslopogaas, who walked behind them all, ran to meet me. Then the soldiers who followed to kill me hung back out of reach of the axe.

"Here with the king is no place for me any more, my son," I said to Umslopogaas.

"Fear not, my father, I will find you a place," he answered.

Then I called a message to the soldiers who followed me, saying:—

"Tell this to the king: that he has done ill to drive me from him, for I, Mopo, set him on the throne and I alone can hold him there. Tell him this also, that he will do yet worse to seek me where I am, for that day when we are once more face to face shall be his day of death. Thus speaks Mopo the *inyanga*, Mopo the doctor, who never yet prophesied that which should not be."

Then we marched from the kraal Umgugundhlovu, and when next I saw that kraal it was to burn all of it which Dingaan had left unburnt, and when next I saw Dingaan—ah! that is to be told of, my father.

We marched from the kraal, none hindering us, for there were none to hinder, and after we had gone a little way Umslopogaas halted and said:—

"Now it is in my mind to return whence we came and slay this Dingaan, ere he slay me."

"Yet it is well to leave a frightened lion in his thicket, my son, for a lion at bay is hard to handle. Doubt not that every man, young and old, in Umgugundhlovu now stands armed about the gates, lest such a thought should take you, my son; and though just now he was afraid, yet Dingaan will strike for his life. When you might have killed you did not kill; now the hour has gone."

"Wise words!" said Galazi. "I would that the Watcher had fallen where his shadow fell."

"What is your counsel now, father?" asked Umslopogaas.

"This, then: that you two should abide no more beneath the shadow of the Ghost Mountain, but should gather your people and your cattle, and pass to the north on the track of Mosilikatze the Lion, who broke away from Chaka. There you may rule apart or together, and never dream of Dingaan."

"I will not do that, father," he answered. "I will dwell beneath the shadow of the Ghost Mountain while I may."

"And so will I," said Galazi, "or rather among its rocks. What! shall my wolves lack a master when they would go a-hunting? Shall Greysnout and Blackfang, Blood and Deathgrip, and their company black and grey, howl for me in vain?"

"So be it, children. Ye are young and will not listen to the counsel of the old. Let it befall as it chances."

I spoke thus, for I did not know then why Umslopogaas would not leave his kraals. It was for this reason: because he had bidden Nada to meet him there.

Afterwards, when he found her he would have gone, but then the sky was clear, the danger-clouds had melted for awhile.

Oh! that Umslopogaas my fosterling had listened to me! Now he would have reigned as a king, not wandered an outcast in strange lands I know not where; and Nada should have lived, not died, nor would the People of the Axe have ceased to be a people.

This of Dingaan. When he heard my message he grew afraid once more, for he knew me to be no liar.

Therefore he held his hand for awhile, sending no impi to smite Umslopogaas, lest it might come about that I should bring him his death as I had promised. And before the fear had worn away, it happened that Dingaan's hands were full with the war against the Amaboona, because of his slaughter of the white people, and he had no soldiers to spare with whom to wreak vengeance on a petty chief living far away.

Yet his rage was great because of what had chanced, and, after his custom, he murdered many innocent people to satisfy it.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### MOPO TELLS HIS TALE

Now afterwards, as we went upon our road, Umslopogaas told me all there was to tell of the slaying of the Halakazi and of the finding of Nada.

When I heard that Nada, my daughter, still lived, I wept for joy, though like Umslopogaas I was torn by doubt and fear, for it is far for an unaided maid to travel from Swaziland to the Ghost Mountain. Yet all this while I said nothing to Umslopogaas of the truth as to his birth, because on the journey there were many around us, and the very trees have ears, and the same wind to which we whispered might whisper to the king. Still I knew that the hour had come now when I must speak, for it was in my mind to bring it about that Umslopogaas should be proclaimed the son of Chaka, and be made king of the Zulus in the place of Dingaan, his uncle. Yet all these things had gone cross for us, because it was fated so, my father. Had I known that Umslopogaas still lived when I slew Chaka, then I think that I could have brought it about that he should be king. Or had things fallen out as I planned, and the Lily maid been brought to Dingaan, and Umslopogaas grew great in his sight, then, perhaps, I could have brought it about. But all things had gone wrong. The Lily was none other than Nada; and how could Umslopogaas give Nada, whom he thought his sister, and who was my daughter, to Dingaan against her will? Also, because of Nada, Dingaan and Umslopogaas were now at bitter enmity, and for this same cause I was disgraced and a fugitive, and my counsels would no longer be heard in the ear of the king.

So everything must be begun afresh: and as I walked with the impi towards the Ghost Mountain, I thought much and often of the manner in which this might be done. But as yet I said nothing.

Now at last we were beneath the Ghost Mountain, and looked upon the face of the old Witch who sits there aloft forever waiting for the world to die; and that same night we came to the kraal of the People of the Axe, and entered it with a great singing. But Galazi did not enter at that time; he was away to the mountain to call his flock of wolves, and as we passed its foot we heard the welcome that the wolves howled in greeting to him.

Now as we drew near the kraal, all the women and children came out to meet us, headed by Zinita, the head wife of Umslopogaas. They came joyfully, but when they found how many were wanting who a moon before had gone thence to fight, their joy was turned to mourning, and the voice of their weeping went up to heaven.

Umslopogaas greeted Zinita kindly; and yet I thought that there was something lacking. At first she spoke to him softly, but when she learned all that had come to pass, her words were not soft, for she reviled me and sang a loud song at Umslopogaas.

"See now, Slaughterer," she said, "see now what has come about because you listened to this aged fool!"—that was I, my father—"this fool who calls himself 'Mouth'! Ay, a mouth he is, a mouth out of which proceed folly and lies! What did he counsel you to do?—to go up against these Halakazi and win a girl for Dingaan! And what have you done?—you have fallen upon the Halakazi, and doubtless have killed many innocent people with that great axe of yours, also you have left nearly half of the soldiers of the Axe to whiten in the Swazi caves, and in exchange have brought back certain cattle of a small breed, and girls and children whom we must nourish!

"Nor does the matter end here. You went, it seems, to win a girl whom Dingaan desired, yet when you find that girl you let her go, because, indeed, you say she was your sister and would not wed Dingaan. Forsooth, is not the king good enough for this sister of yours? Now what is the end of the tale? You try to play tricks on the king, because of your sister, and are found out. Then you kill a man before Dingaan and escape, bringing this fool of an aged Mouth with you, that he may teach you his own folly. So you have lost half of your men, and you have gained the king for a foe who shall bring about the death of all of us, and a fool for a councillor. *Wow!* Slaughterer, keep to your trade and let others find you wit."

Thus she spoke without ceasing, and there was some truth in her words. Zinita had a bitter tongue. I sat silent till she had finished, and Umslopogaas also remained silent, though his anger was great, because there was no crack in her talk through which a man might thrust a word.

"Peace, woman!" I said at length, "do not speak ill of those who are wise and who had seen much before you were born."

"Speak no ill of him who is my father," growled Umslopogaas. "Ay! though you do not know it, this Mouth whom you revile is Mopo, my father."

"Then there is a man among the People of the Axe who has a fool for a father. Of all tidings this is the worst."

"There is a man among the People of the Axe who has a jade and a scold for a wife," said Umslopogaas, springing up. "Begone, Zinita!—and know this, that if I hear you snarl such words of him who is my father, you shall go further than your own hut, for I will put you away and drive you from my kraal. I have suffered you too long."

"I go," said Zinita. "Oh! I am well served! I made you chief, and now you threaten to put me away."

"My own hands made me chief," said Umslopogaas, and, springing up, he thrust her from the hut.

"It is a poor thing to be wedded to such a woman, my father," he said presently.

"Yes, a poor thing, Umslopogaas, yet these are the burdens that men must bear. Learn wisdom from it, Umslopogaas, and have as little to do with women as may be; at the least, do not love them overmuch, so shall you find the more peace." Thus I spoke, smiling, and would that he had listened to my counsel, for it is the love of women which has brought ruin on Umslopogaas!

All this was many years ago, and but lately I have heard that Umslopogaas is fled into the North, and become a wanderer to his death because of the matter of a woman who had betrayed him, making it seem that he had murdered one Loustra, who was his

blood brother, just as Galazi had been. I do not know how it came about, but he who was so fierce and strong had that weakness like his uncle Dingaan, and it has destroyed him at the last, and for this cause I shall behold him no more.

Now, my father, for awhile we were silent and alone in the hut, and as we sat I thought I heard a rat stir in the thatch.

Then I spoke. "Umslopogaas, at length the hour has come that I should whisper something into your ear, a word which I have held secret ever since you were born."

"Speak on, my father," he said, wondering.

I crept to the door of the hut and looked out. The night was dark and I could see none about, and could hear no one move, yet, being cautious, I walked round the hut. Ah, my father, when you have a secret to tell, be not so easily deceived. It is not enough to look forth and to peer round. Dig beneath the floor, and search the roof also; then, having done all this, go elsewhere and tell your tale. The woman was right: I was but a fool, for all my wisdom and my white hairs. Had I not been a fool I would have smoked out that rat in the thatch before ever I opened my lips. For the rat was Zinita, my father—Zinita, who had climbed the hut, and now lay there in the dark, her ear upon the smoke-hole, listening to every word that passed. It was a wicked thing to do, and, moreover, the worst of omens, but there is little honour among women when they learn that which others wish to hide away from them, nor, indeed, do they then weight omens.

So having searched and found nothing, I spoke to Umslopogaas, my fosterling, not knowing that death in a woman's shape lay on the hut above us. "Hearken," I said, "you are no son of mine, Umslopogaas, though you have called me father from a babe. You spring from a loftier stock, Slaughterer."

"Yet I was well pleased with my fathering, old man," said Umslopogaas. "The breed is good enough for me. Say, then, whose son am I?"

Now I bent forward and whispered to him, yet, alas! not low enough. "You are the son of the Black One who is dead, yea, sprung from the blood of Chaka and of Baleka, my sister."

"I still have some kinship with you then, Mopo, and that I am glad of. *Wow!* who would have guessed that I was the son of the *Silwana*, of that hyena man? Perhaps it is for this reason that, like Galazi, I love the company of the wolves, though no love grows in my heart for my father or any of his house."

"You have little cause to love him, Umslopogaas, for he murdered your mother, Baleka, and would have slain you also. But you are the son of Chaka and of no other man."

"Well, his eyes must be keen indeed, my uncle, who can pick his own father out of a crowd. And yet I once heard this tale before, though I had long forgotten it."

"From whom did you hear it, Umslopogaas? An hour since, it was known to one alone, the others are dead who knew it. Now it is known to two"—ah! my father, I did not guess of the third;—"from whom, then, did you hear it?"

"It was from the dead; at least, Galazi the Wolf heard it from the dead One who sat in the cave on Ghost Mountain, for the dead One told him that a man would come to be his brother who should be named Umslopogaas Bulalio, son of Chaka, and Galazi repeated it to me, but I had long forgotten it."

"It seems that there is wisdom among the dead," I answered, "for lo! to-day you are named Umslopogaas Bulalio, and to-day I declare you the son of Chaka. But listen to my tale."

Then I told him all the story from the hour of his birth onwards, and when I spoke of the words of his mother, Baleka, after I had told my dream to her, and of the manner of her death by the command of Chaka, and of the great fashion in which she had died, then, I say, Umslopogaas wept, who, I think, seldom wept before or after. But as my tale drew it its end I saw that he listened ill, as a man listens who has a weightier matter pressing on his heart, and before it was well done he broke in:—

"So, Mopo, my uncle, if I am the son of Chaka and Baleka, Nada the Lily is no sister to me."

"Nay, Umslopogaas, she is only your cousin."

"Over near of blood," he said; "yet that shall not stand between us," and his face grew glad.

I looked at him in question.

"You grow dull, my uncle. This is my meaning: that I will marry Nada if she still lives, for it comes upon me now that I have never loved any woman as I love Nada the Lily," and while he spoke, I heard the rat stir in the thatch of the hut.

"Wed her if you will, Umslopogaas," I answered, "yet I think that one Zinita, your *Inkosikasi*, will find words to say in the matter."

"Zinita is my head wife indeed, but shall she hold me back from taking other wives, after the lawful custom of our people?" he asked angrily, and his anger showed that he feared the wrath of Zinita.

"The custom is lawful and good," I said, "but it has bred trouble at times. Zinita can have little to say if she continues in her place and you still love her as of old. But enough of her. Nada is not yet at your gates, and perhaps she will never find them. See, Umslopogaas, it is my desire that you should rule in Zululand by right of blood, and, though things point otherwise, yet I think a way can be found to bring it about."

"How so?" he asked.

"Thus: Many of the great chiefs who are friends to me hate Dingaan and fear him, and did they know that a son of Chaka lived, and that son the Slaughterer, he well might climb to the throne upon their shoulders. Also the soldiers love the name of Chaka, though he dealt cruelly with them, because at least he was brave and generous. But they do not love Dingaan, for his burdens are the burdens of Chaka but his gifts are the gifts of Dingaan; therefore they would welcome Chaka's son if once they knew him for certain. But it is here that the necklet chafes, for there is but my word to prove it. Yet I will try."

"Perhaps it is worth trying and perhaps it is not, my uncle," answered Umslopogaas. "One thing I know: I had rather see Nada at my gates to-night than hear all the chiefs in the land crying 'Hail, O King!'"

"You will live to think otherwise, Umslopogaas; and now spies must be set at the kraal Umgugundhlovu to give us warning of the mind of the king, lest he should send an impi suddenly to eat you up. Perhaps his hands may be too full for that ere long, for those white Amaboona will answer his assegais with bullets. And one more word: let nothing be said of this matter of your birth, least of all to Zinita your wife, or to any other woman."

"Fear not, uncle," he answered; "I know how to be silent."

Now after awhile Umslopogaas left me and went to the hut of Zinita, his *Inkosikasi*, where she lay wrapped in her blankets, and, as it seemed, asleep.

"Greeting, my husband," she said slowly, like one who wakens. "I have dreamed a strange dream of you. I dreamed that you were called a king, and that all the regiments of the Zulus filed past giving you the royal salute, *Bayéte*."

Umslopogaas looked at her wondering, for he did not know if she had learned something or if this was an omen. "Such dreams are dangerous," he said, "and he who dreams them does well to lock them fast till they be forgotten."

"Or fulfilled," said Zinita, and again Umslopogaas looked at her wondering.

Now after this night I began my work, for I established spies at the kraal of Dingaan, and from them I learned all that passed with the king.

At first he gave orders that an impi should be summoned to eat up the People of the Axe, but afterwards came tidings that the Boers, to the number of five hundred mounted men, were marching on the kraal Umgugundhlovu. So Dingaan had no impi to spare to send to the Ghost Mountain, and we who were beneath its shadow dwelt there in peace.

This time the Boers were beaten, for Bogoza, the spy, led them into an ambush; still few were killed, and they did but draw back that they might jump the further, and Dingaan knew this. At this time also the English white men of Natal, the people of George, who attacked Dingaan by the Lower Tugela, were slain by our soldiers, and those with them.

Also, by the help of certain witch-doctors, I filled the land with rumours, prophecies, and dark sayings, and I worked cunningly on the minds of many chiefs that were known to me, sending them messages hardly to be understood, such as should prepare their thoughts for the coming of one who should be declared to them. They listened, but the task was long, for the men dwelt far apart, and some of them were away with the regiments.

So the time went by, till many days had passed since we reached the Ghost Mountain. Umslopogaas had no more words with Zinita, but she always watched him, and he went heavily. For he awaited Nada, and Nada did not come.

But at length Nada came.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE COMING OF NADA

One night—it was a night of full moon—I sat alone with Umslopogaas in my hut, and we spoke of the matter of our plots; then, when we had finished that talk, we spoke of Nada the Lily.

“Alas! my uncle,” said Umslopogaas sadly, “we shall never look more on Nada; she is surely dead or in bonds, otherwise she had been here long ago. I have sought far and wide, and can hear no tidings and find nothing.”

“All that is hidden is not lost,” I answered, yet I myself believed that there was an end of Nada.

Then we were silent awhile, and presently, in the silence, a dog barked. We rose, and crept out of the hut to see what it might be that stirred, for the night drew on, and it was needful to be wary, since a dog might bark at the stirring of a leaf, or perhaps it might be the distant footfall of an impi that it heard.

We had not far to look, for standing gazing at the huts, like one who is afraid to call, was a tall slim man, holding an assegai in one hand and a little shield in the other. We could not see the face of the man, because the light was behind him, and a ragged blanket hung about his shoulders. Also, he was footsore, for he rested on one leg. Now we were peering round the hut, and its shadow hid us, so that the man saw nothing. For awhile he stood still, then he spoke to himself, and his voice was strangely soft.

“Here are many huts,” said the voice, “now how may I know which is the house of my brother? Perhaps if I call I shall bring soldiers to me, and be forced to play the man before them, and I am weary of that. Well, I will lie here under the fence till morning; it is a softer bed than some I have found, and I am worn out with travel—sleep I must,” and the figure sighed and turned so that the light of the moon fell full upon its face.

My father, it was the face of Nada, my daughter, whom I had not seen for so many years, yet across the years I knew it at once; yes, though the bud had become a flower I knew it. The face was weary and worn, but ah! it was beautiful, never before nor since have I seen such beauty, for there was this about the loveliness of my daughter, the Lily: it seemed to flow from within—yes, as light will flow through the thin rind of a gourd, and in that she differed from the other women of our people, who, when they are fair are fair with the flesh alone.

Now my heart went out to Nada as she stood in the moonlight, one forsaken, not having where to lay her head, Nada, who alone was left alive of all my children. I motioned to Umslopogaas to hide himself in the shadow, and stepped forward.

“Ho!” I said roughly, “who are you, wanderer, and what do you here?”

Now Nada started like a frightened bird, but quickly gathered up her thoughts, and turned upon me in a lordly way.

“Who are you that ask me?” she said, feigning a man’s voice.

“One who can use a stick upon thieves and night-prowlers, boy. Come, show your business or be moving. You are not of this people; surely that moocha is of a Swazi make, and here we do not love Swazis.”

“Were you not old, I would beat you for your insolence,” said Nada, striving to look brave and all the while searching a way to escape. “Also, I have no stick, only a spear, and that is for warriors, not for an old *umfagozan* like you.” Ay, my father, I lived to hear my daughter name me an *umfagozan*—a low fellow!

Now making pretence to be angry, I leaped at her with my kerrie up, and, forgetting her courage, she dropped her spear, and uttered a little scream. But she still held the shield before her face. I seized her by the arm, and struck a blow upon the shield with my kerrie—it would scarcely have crushed a fly, but this brave warrior trembled sorely.

“Where now is your valour, you who name me *umfagozan*?” I said: “you who cry like a maid and whose arm is soft as a maid’s.”

She made no answer, but hugged her tattered blanket round her, and shifting my grip from her arm, I seized it and rent it, showing her breast and shoulder; then I let her go, laughing, and said:—

“Lo! here is the warrior that would beat an old *umfagozan* for his insolence, a warrior well shaped for war! Now, my pretty maid who wander at night in the garment of a man, what tale have you to tell? Swift with it, lest I drag you to the chief as his prize! The old man seeks a new wife, they tell me?”

Now when Nada saw that I had discovered her she threw down the shield after the spear, as a thing that was of no more use, and hung her head sullenly. But when I spoke of dragging her to the chief then she flung herself upon the ground, and clasped my knees, for since I called him old, she thought that this chief could not be Umslopogaas.

“Oh, my father,” said the Lily, “oh, my father, have pity on me! Yes, yes! I am a girl, a maid—no wife—and you who are old, you, perchance have daughters such as I, and in their name I ask for pity. My father, I have journeyed far, I have endured many things, to find my way to a kraal where my brother rules, and now it seems I have come to the wrong kraal. Forgive me that I spoke to you so, my father; it was but a woman’s feint, and I was hard pressed to hide my sex, for my father, you know it is ill to be a lonely girl among strange men.”

Now I said nothing in answer, for this reason only: that when I heard Nada call me father, not knowing me, and saw her clasp my knees and pray to me in my daughter’s name, I, who was childless save for her, went nigh to weeping. But she thought that I did not answer her because I was angry, and about to drag her to this unknown chief, and implored me the more even with tears.

“My father,” she said, “do not this wicked thing by me. Let me go and show me the path that I shall ask: you who are old, you know that I am too fair to be dragged before this chief of yours. Harken! All I knew are dead, I am alone except for this brother I

seek. Oh! if you betray me may such a fate fall upon your own daughter also! May she also know the day of slavery, and the love that she wills not!" and she ceased, sobbing.

Now I turned my head and spoke towards the hut, "Chief," I said, "your *Ehlosé* is kind to you to-night, for he has given you a maid fair as the Lily of the Halakazi"—here Nada glanced up wildly. "Come, then, and take the girl."

Now Nada turned to snatch up the assegai from the ground, but whether to kill me, or the chief she feared so much, or herself, I do not know, and as she turned, in her woe she called upon the name of Umslopogaas. She found the assegai, and straightened herself again. And lo! there before her stood a tall chief leaning on an axe; but the old man who threatened her was gone—not very far, in truth, but round the corner of the hut.

Now Nada the Lily looked, then rubbed her eyes, and looked again.

"Surely I dream?" she said at last. "But now I spoke to an old man, and in his place there stands before me the shape of one whom I desire to see."

"I thought, Maiden, that the voice of a certain Nada called upon one Umslopogaas," said he who leaned upon the axe.

"Ay, I called: but where is the old man who treated me so scurvily? Nay, what does it matter?—where he is, there let him stop. At least, you are Umslopogaas, my brother, or should be by your greatness and the axe. To the man I cannot altogether swear in this light; but to the axe I can swear, for once it passed so very near my eyes."

Thus she spoke on, gaining time, and all the while she watched Umslopogaas till she was sure that it was he and no other. Then she ceased talking, and, flinging herself on him, she kissed him.

"Now I trust that Zinita sleeps sound," murmured Umslopogaas, for suddenly he remembered that Nada was no sister of his, as she thought.

Nevertheless, he took her by the hand and said, "Enter, sister. Of all maidens in the world you are the most welcome here, for know I believed you dead."

But I, Mopo, ran into the hut before her, and when she entered she found me sitting by the fire.

"Now, here, my brother," said Nada, pointing at me with her finger, "here is that old *umfagozan*, that low fellow, who, unless I dream, but a very little while ago brought shame upon me—ay, my brother, he struck me, a maid, with his kerrie, and that only because I said that I would stab him for his insolence, and he did worse: he swore that he would drag me to some old chief of his to be a gift to him, and this he was about to do, had you not come. Will you suffer these things to go unpunished, my brother?"

Now Umslopogaas smiled grimly, and I answered:—

"What was it that you called me just now, Nada, when you prayed me to protect you? Father, was it not?" and I turned my face towards the blaze of the fire, so that the full light fell upon it.

"Yes, I called you father, old man. It is not strange, for a homeless wanderer must find fathers where she can—and yet! no, it cannot be—so changed—and that white hand? And yet, oh! who are you? Once there was a man named Mopo, and he had a little daughter, and she was called Nada—Oh! my father, my father, I know you now!"

"Ay, Nada, and I knew you from the first; through all your man's wrappings I knew you after these many years."

So the Lily fell upon my neck and sobbed there, and I remember that I also wept.

Now when she had sobbed her fill of joy, Umslopogaas brought Nada the Lily *maas* to eat and mealie porridge. She ate the curdled milk, but the porridge she would not eat, saying that she was too weary.

Then she told us all the tale of her wanderings since she had fled away from the side of Umslopogaas at the stronghold of the Halakazi, and it was long, so long that I will not repeat it, for it is a story by itself. This I will say only: that Nada was captured by robbers, and for awhile passed herself off among them as a youth. But, in the end, they found her out and would have given her as a wife to their chief, only she persuaded them to kill the chief and make her their ruler. They did this because of that medicine of the eyes which Nada had only among women, for as she ruled the Halakazi so she ruled the robbers. But, at the last, they all loved her, and she gave it out that she would wed the strongest. Then some of them fell to fighting, and while they killed each other—for it came about that Nada brought death upon the robbers as on all others—she escaped, for she said that she did not wish to look upon their struggle but would await the upshot in a place apart.

After that she had many further adventures, but at length she met an old woman who guided her on her way to the Ghost Mountain. And who this old woman was none could discover, but Galazi swore afterwards that she was the Stone Witch of the mountain, who put on the shape of an aged woman to guide Nada to Umslopogaas, to be the sorrow and the joy of the People of the Axe. I do not know, my father, yet it seems to me that the old witch would scarcely have put off her stone for so small a matter.

Now, when Nada had made an end of her tale, Umslopogaas told his, of how things had gone with Dingaan. When he told her how he had given the body of the girl to the king, saying that it was the Lily's stalk, she said it had been well done; and when he spoke of the slaying of the traitor she clapped her hands, though Nada, whose heart was gentle, did not love to hear of deeds of death. At last he finished, and she was somewhat sad, and said it seemed that her fate followed her, and that now the People of the Axe were in danger at the hands of Dingaan because of her.

"Ah! my brother," she cried, taking Umslopogaas by the hand, "it were better I should die than that I should bring evil upon you also."

"That would not mend matters, Nada," he answered. "For whether you be dead or alive, the hate of Dingaan is already earned. Also, Nada, know this: *I am not your brother.*"

When the Lily heard these words she uttered a little cry, and, letting fall the hand of Umslopogaas, clasped mine, shrinking up against me.

"What is this tale, father?" she asked. "He who was my twin, he with whom I have been bred up, says that he has deceived me these many years, that he is not my brother; who, then, is he, father?"

"He is your cousin, Nada."

"Ah," she answered, "I am glad. It would have grieved me had he whom I loved been shown to be but a stranger in whom I have no part," and she smiled a little in the eyes and at the corners of her mouth. "But tell me this tale also."

So I told her the tale of the birth of Umslopogaas, for I trusted her.

"Ah," she said, when I had finished, "ah! you come of a bad stock, Umslopogaas, though it is a kingly one. I shall love you little henceforth, child of the hyena man."

"Then that is bad news," said Umslopogaas, "for know, Nada, I desire now that you should love me more than ever—that you should be my wife and love me as your husband!"

Now the Lily's face grew sad and sweet, and all the hidden mockery went out of her talk—for Nada loved to mock.

"Did you not speak to me on that night in the Halakazi caves, Umslopogaas, of one Zinita, who is your wife, and *Inkosikaas* of the People of the Axe?"

Then the brow of Umslopogaas darkened: "What of Zinita?" he said. "It is true she is my chieftainess; is it not allowed a man to take more than one wife?"

"So I trust," answered Nada, smiling, "else men would go unwed for long, for few maids would marry them who then must labour alone all their days. But, Umslopogaas, if there are twenty wives, yet one must be first. Now this has come about hitherto: that wherever I have been it has been thrust upon me to be first, and perhaps it might be thus once more—what then, Umslopogaas?"

"Let the fruit ripen before you pluck it, Nada," he answered. "If you love me and will wed me, it is enough."

"I pray that it may not be more than enough," she said, stretching out her hand to him. "Listen, Umslopogaas: ask my father here what were the words I spoke to him many years ago, before I was a woman, when, with my mother, Macropha, I left him to go among the Swazi people. It was after you had been borne away by the lion, Umslopogaas, I told my father that I would marry no man all my life, because I loved only you, who were dead. My father reproached me, saying that I must not speak thus of my brother, but it was my heart which spoke, and it spoke truly; for see, Umslopogaas, you are no brother to me! I have kept that vow. How many men have sought me in wedlock since I became a woman, Umslopogaas? I tell you that they are as the leaves upon a tree. Yet I have given myself to none, and this has been my fortune: that none have sought to constrain me to marriage. Now I have my reward, for he whom I lost is found again, and to him alone I give my love. Yet, Umslopogaas, beware! Little luck has come to those who have loved me in the past; no, not even to those who have but sought to look on me."

"I will bear the risk, Nada," the Slaughterer answered, and gathering her to his great breast he kissed her.

Presently she slipped from his arms and bade him begone, for she was weary and would rest.

So he went.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE WAR OF THE WOMEN

Now on the morrow at daybreak, leaving his wolves, Galazi came down from the Ghost Mountain and passed through the gates of the kraal.

In front of my hut he saw Nada the Lily and saluted her, for each remembered the other. Then he walked on to the place of assembly and spoke to me.

"So the Star of Death has risen on the People of the Axe, Mopo," he said. "Was it because of her coming that my grey people howled so strangely last night? I cannot tell, but I know this, the Star shone first on me this morning, and that is my doom. Well, she is fair enough to be the doom of many, Mopo," and he laughed and passed on, swinging the Watcher. But his words troubled me, though they were foolish; for I could not but remember that wherever the beauty of Nada had pleased the sight of men, there men had been given to death.

Then I went to lead Nada to the place of assembly and found her awaiting me. She was dressed now in some woman's garments that I had brought her; her curling hair fell upon her shoulders; on her wrist and neck and knee were bracelets of ivory, and in her hand she bore a lily bloom which she had gathered as she went to bathe in the river. Perhaps she did this, my father, because she wished here, as elsewhere, to be known as the Lily, and it is the Zulu fashion to name people from some such trifle. But who can know a woman's reason, or whether a thing is by chance alone, my father? Also she had begged me of a cape I had; it was cunningly made by Basutus, of the whitest feathers of the ostrich; this she put about her shoulders, and it hung down to her middle. It had been a custom with Nada from childhood not to go about as do other girls, naked except for their girdles, for she would always find some rag or skin to lie upon her breast. Perhaps it was because her skin was fairer than that of other women, or perhaps because she knew that she who hides her beauty often seems the loveliest, or because there was truth in the tale of her white blood and the fashion came to her with the blood. I do not know, my father; at the least she did so.

Now I took Nada by the hand and led her through the morning air to the place of assembly, and ah! she was sweeter than the air and fairer than the dawn.

There were many people in the place of assembly, for it was the day of the monthly meeting of the council of the headmen, and there also were all the women of the kraal, and at their head stood Zinita. Now it had got about that the girl whom the Slaughterer went to seek in the caves of the Halakazi had come to the kraal of the People of the Axe, and all eyes watched for her.

"Wow!" said the men as she passed smiling, looking neither to the right nor to the left, yet seeing all—"Wow! but this flower is fair! Little wonder that the Halakazi died for her!"

The women looked also, but they said nothing of the beauty of Nada; they scarcely seemed to see it.

"That is she for whose sake so many of our people lie unburied," said one.

"Where, then, does she find her fine clothes?" quoth another, "she who came here last night a footsore wanderer?"

"Feathers are not enough for her: look! she must bear flowers also. Surely they are fitter to her hands than the handle of a hoe," said a third.

"Now I think that the chief of the People of the Axe will find one to worship above the axe, and that some will be left mourning," put in a fourth, glancing at Zinita and the other women of the household of the Slaughterer.

Thus they spoke, throwing words like assegais, and Nada heard them all, and knew their meaning, but she never ceased from smiling. Only Zinita said nothing, but stood looking at Nada from beneath her bent brows, while by one hand she held the little daughter of Umslopogaas, her child, and with the other played with the beads about her neck. Presently, we passed her, and Nada, knowing well who this must be, turned her eyes full upon the angry eyes of Zinita, and held them there awhile. Now what there was in the glance of Nada I cannot say, but I know that Zinita, who was afraid of few things, found something to fear in it. At the least, it was she who turned her head away, and the Lily passed on smiling, and greeted Umslopogaas with a little nod.

"Hail, Nada!" said the Slaughterer. Then he turned to his headmen and spoke: "This is she whom we went to the caves of the Halakazi to seek for Dingaan. *Ou!* the story is known now; one told it up at the kraal Umgugundhlovu who shall tell it no more. She prayed me to save her from Dingaan, and so I did, and all would have gone well had it not been for a certain traitor who is done with, for I took another to Dingaan. Look on her now, my friends, and say if I did not well to win her—the Lily flower, such as there is no other in the world, to be the joy of the People of the Axe and a wife to me."

With one accord the headmen answered: "Indeed you did well, Slaughterer," for the glamour of Nada was upon them and they would cherish her as others had cherished her. Only Galazi the Wolf shook his head. But he said nothing, for words do not avail against fate. Now as I found afterwards, since Zinita, the head wife of Umslopogaas, had learned of what stock he was, she had known that Nada was no sister to him. Yet when she heard him declare that he was about to take the Lily to wife she turned upon him, saying:—

"How can this be, Lord?"

"Why do you ask, Zinita?" he answered. "Is it not allowed to a man to take another wife if he will?"

"Surely, Lord," she said; "but men do not wed their sisters, and I have heard that it was because this Nada was your sister that you saved her from Dingaan, and brought the wrath of Dingaan upon the People of the Axe, the wrath that shall destroy them."

"So I thought then, Zinita," he answered; "now I know otherwise. Nada is daughter to Mopo yonder indeed, but he is no father to me, though he has been named so, nor was the mother of Nada my mother. That is so, Councillors."

Then Zinita looked at me and muttered, "O fool of a Mouth, not for nothing did I fear evil at your hands."

I heard the words and took no note, and she spoke again to Umslopogaas, saying: "Here is a mystery, O Lord Bulalio. Will it then please you to declare to us who is your father?"

"I have no father," he answered, waxing wroth; "the heavens above are my father. I am born of Blood and Fire, and she, the Lily, is born of Beauty to be my mate. Now, woman, be silent." He thought awhile, and added, "Nay, if you will know, my father was Indabazimbi the Witch-finder, the smeller-out of the king, the son of Arpi." This Umslopogaas said at a hazard, since, having denied me, he must declare a father, and dared not name the Black One who was gone. But in after years the saying was taken up in the land, and it was told that Umslopogaas was the son of Indabazimbi the Witch-finder, who had long ago fled the land; nor did he deny it. For when all this game had been played out he would not have it known that he was the son of Chaka, he who no longer sought to be a king, lest he should bring down the wrath of Panda upon him.

When the people heard this they thought that Umslopogaas mocked Zinita, and yet in his anger he spoke truth when he said first that he was born of the "heavens above," for so we Zulus name the king, and so the witch-doctor Indabazimbi named Chaka on the day of the great smelling out. But they did not take it in this sense. They held that he spoke truly when he gave it out that he was born of Indabazimbi the Witch-doctor, who had fled the land, whither I do not know.

Then Nada turned to Zinita and spoke to her in a sweet and gentle voice: "If I am not sister to Bulalio, yet I shall soon be sister to you who are the Chief's *Inkosikaas*, Zinita. Shall that not satisfy you, and will you not greet me kindly and with a kiss of peace, who have come from far to be your sister, Zinita?" and Nada held out her hands towards her, though whether she did this from the heart or because she would put herself in the right before the people I do not know. But Zinita scowled, and jerked at her necklace of beads, breaking the string on which they were threaded, so that the beads rolled upon the black earthen floor this way and that.

"Keep your kisses for our lord, girl," Zinita said roughly. "As my beads are scattered so shall you scatter this People of the Axe."

Now Nada turned away with a little sigh, and the people murmured, for they thought that Zinita had treated her badly. Then she stretched out her hand again, and gave the lily in it to Umslopogaas, saying:—

"Here is a token of our betrothal, Lord, for never a head of cattle have my father and I to send—we who are outcasts; and, indeed, the bridegroom must pay the cattle. May I bring you peace and love, my Lord!"

Umslopogaas took the flower, and looked somewhat foolish with it—he who was wont to carry the axe, and not a flower; and so that talk was ended.

Now as it chanced, this was that day of the year when, according to ancient custom, the Holder of the Axe must challenge all and sundry to come up against him to fight in single combat for Groan-Maker and the chieftainship of the people. Therefore, when the talk was done, Umslopogaas rose and went through the challenge, not thinking that any would answer him, since for some years none had dared to stand before his might. Yet three men stepped forward, and of these two were captains, and men whom the Slaughterer loved. With all the people, he looked at them astonished.

"How is this?" he said in a low voice to that captain who was nearest and who would do battle with him.

For answer the man pointed to the Lily, who stood by. Then Umslopogaas understood that because of the medicine of Nada's beauty all men desired to win her, and, since he who could win the axe would take her also, he must look to fight with many. Well, fight he must or be shamed.

Of the fray there is little to tell. Umslopogaas killed first one man and then the other, and swiftly, for, growing fearful, the third did not come up against him.

"Ah!" said Galazi, who watched, "what did I tell you, Mopo? The curse begins to work. Death walks ever with that daughter of yours, old man."

"I fear so," I answered, "and yet the maiden is fair and good and sweet."

"That will not mend matters," said Galazi.

Now on that day Umslopogaas took Nada the Lily to wife, and for awhile there was peace and quiet. But this evil thing came upon Umslopogaas, that, from the day when he wedded Nada, he hated even to look upon Zinita, and not at her alone, but on all his other wives also. Galazi said it was because Nada had bewitched him, but I know well that the only witcheries she used were the medicine of her eyes, her beauty, and her love. Still, it came to pass that henceforward, and until she had long been dead, the Slaughterer loved her, and her alone, and that is a strange sickness to come upon a man.

As may be guessed, my father, Zinita and the other women took this ill. They waited awhile, indeed, thinking that it would wear away, then they began to murmur, both to their husband and in the ears of other people, till at length there were two parties in the town, the party of Zinita and the party of Nada.

The party of Zinita was made up of women and of certain men who loved and feared their wives, but that of Nada was the greatest, and it was all of men, with Umslopogaas at the head of them, and from this division came much bitterness abroad, and quarrelling in the huts. Yet neither the Lily nor Umslopogaas heeded it greatly, nor indeed, anything, so lost and well content were they in each other's love.

Now on a certain morning, after they had been married three full moons, Nada came from her husband's hut when the sun was already high, and went down through the rock gully to the river to bathe. On the right of the path to the river lay the mealie-fields of the chief, and in them laboured Zinita and the other women of Umslopogaas, weeding the mealie-plants. They looked up and saw Nada pass, then worked on sullenly. After awhile they saw her come again fresh from the bath, very fair to see, and having flowers twined among her hair, and as she walked she sang a song of love. Now Zinita cast down her hoe.

"Is this to be borne, my sisters?" she said.

"No," answered another, "it is not to be borne. What shall we do—shall we fall upon her and kill her now?"

"It would be more just to kill Bulalio, our lord," answered Zinita. "Nada is but a woman, and, after the fashion of us women, takes all that she can gather. But he is a man and a chief, and should know wisdom and justice."

"She has bewitched him with her beauty. Let us kill her," said the other women.

"Nay," answered Zinita, "I will speak with her," and she went and stood in the path along which the Lily walked singing, her arms folded across her breast.

Now Nada saw her and, ceasing her song, stretched out her hand to welcome her, saying, "Greeting, sister." But Zinita did not take it. "It is not fitting, sister," she said, "that my hand, stained with toil, should defile yours, fresh with the scent of flowers. But I am charged with a message, on my own behalf and the behalf of the other wives of our Lord Bulalio; the weeds grow thick in yonder corn, and we women are few; now that your love days are over, will not you come and help us? If you brought no hoe from your Swazi home, surely we will buy you one."

Now Nada saw what was meant, and the blood poured to her head. Yet she answered calmly:—

"I would willingly do this, my sister, though I have never laboured in the fields, for wherever I have dwelt the men have kept me back from all work, save such as the weaving of flowers or the stringing of beads. But there is this against it—Umslopogaas, my husband, charged me that I should not toil with my hands, and I may not disobey my husband."

"Our husband charged you so, Nada? Nay, then it is strange. See, now, I am his head wife, his *Inkosikaas*—it was I who taught him how to win the axe. Yet he has laid no command on me that I should not labour in the fields after the fashion of women, I who have borne him children; nor, indeed, has he laid such a command upon any of our sisters, his other wives. Can it then be that Bulalio loves you better than us, Nada?"

Now the Lily was in a trap, and she knew it. So she grew bold.

"One must be most loved, Zinita," she said, "as one must be most fair. You have had your hour, leave me mine; perhaps it will be short. Moreover this: Umslopogaas and I loved each other much long years before you or any of his wives saw him, and we love each other to the end. There is no more to say."

"Nay, Nada, there is still something to say; there is this to say: Choose one of two things. Go and leave us to be happy with our lord, or stay and bring death on all."

Now Nada thought awhile, and answered: "Did I believe that my love would bring death on him I love, it might well chance that I would go and leave him, though to do so would be to die. But, Zinita, I do not believe it. Death chiefly loves the weak, and if he falls it will be on the Flower, not on the Slayer of Men," and she slipped past Zinita and went on, singing no more.

Zinita watched her till she was over the ridge, and her face grew evil as she watched. Then she returned to the women.

"The Lily flouts us all, my sisters," she said. "Now listen: my counsel is that we declare a feast of women to be held at the new moon in a secret place far away. All the women and the children shall come to it except Nada, who will not leave her lover, and if there be any man whom a woman loves, perhaps, my sisters, that man would do well to go on a journey about the time of the new moon, for evil things may happen at the town of the People of the Axe while we are away celebrating our feast."

"What, then, shall befall, my sister?" asked one.

"Nay, how can I tell?" she answered. "I only know that we are minded to be rid of Nada, and thus to be avenged on a man who has scorned our love—ay, and on those men who follow after the beauty of Nada. Is it not so, my sisters?"

"It is so," they answered.

"Then be silent on the matter, and let us give out our feast."

Now Nada told Umslopogaas of those words which she had bandied with Zinita, and the Slaughterer was troubled. Yet, because of his foolishness and of the medicine of Nada's eyes, he would not turn from his way, and was ever at her side, thinking of little else except of her. Thus, when Zinita came to him, and asked leave to declare a feast of women that should be held far away, he consented, and gladly, for, above all things, he desired to be free from Zinita and her angry looks for awhile; nor did he suspect a plot. Only he told her that Nada should not go to the feast; and in a breath both Zinita and Nada answered that his word was their will, as indeed it was, in this matter.

Now I, Mopo, saw the glamour that had fallen upon my fosterling, and spoke of it with Galazi, saying that a means must be found to wake him. Then I took Galazi fully into my mind, and told him all that he did not know of Umslopogaas, and that was little. Also, I told him of my plans to bring the Slaughterer to the throne, and of what I had done to that end, and of what I proposed to do, and this was to go in person on a journey to certain of the great chiefs and win them over.

Galazi listened, and said that it was well or ill, as the chance might be. For his part, he believed that the daughter would pull down faster than I, the father, could build up, and he pointed to Nada, who walked past us, following Umslopogaas.

Yet I determined to go, and that was on the day before Zinita won leave to celebrate the feast of women. So I sought Umslopogaas and told him, and he listened indifferently, for he would be going after Nada, and wearied of my talk of policy. I bade him farewell and left him; to Nada also I bade farewell. She kissed me, yet the name of her husband was mingled with her good-bye.

"Now madness has come upon these two," I said to myself. "Well, it will wear off, they will be changed before I come again."

I guessed little, my father, how changed they would be.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### ZINITA COMES TO THE KING

Dingaan the king sat upon a day in the kraal Umgugundhlovu, waiting till his impis should return from the Income that is now named the Blood River. He had sent them thither to destroy the laager of the Boers, and thence, as he thought, they would presently return with victory. Idly he sat in the kraal, watching the vultures wheel above the Hill of Slaughter, and round him stood a regiment.

"My birds are hungry," he said to a councillor.

"Doubtless there shall soon be meat to feed them, O King!" the councillor answered.

As he spoke one came near, saying that a woman sought leave to speak to the king upon some great matter.

"Let her come," he answered; "I am sick for tidings, perhaps she can tell of the impi."

Presently the woman was led in. She was tall and fair, and she held two children by the hand.

"What is thine errand?" asked Dingaan.

"Justice, O King," she answered.

"Ask for blood, it shall be easier to find."

"I ask blood, O King."

"The blood of whom?"

"The blood of Bulalio the Slaughterer, Chief of the People of the Axe, the blood of Nada the Lily, and of all those who cling to her."

Now Dingaan sprang up and swore an oath by the head of the Black One who was gone.

"What?" he cried, "does the Lily, then, live as the soldier thought?"

"She lives, O King. She is wife to the Slaughterer, and because of her witchcraft he has put me, his first wife, away against all law and honour. Therefore I ask vengeance on the witch and vengeance also on him who was my husband."

"Thou art a good wife," said the king. "May my watching spirit save me from such a one. Hearken! I would gladly grant thy desire, for I, too, hate this Slaughterer, and I, too, would crush this Lily. Yet, woman, thou comest in a bad hour. Here I have but one regiment, and I think that the Slaughterer may take some killing. Wait till my impis return from wiping out the white Amaboona, and it shall be as thou dost desire. Whose are those children?"

"They are my children and the children of Bulalio, who was my husband."

"The children of him whom thou wouldst cause to be slain."

"Yea, King."

"Surely, woman, thou art as good a mother as wife!" said Dingaan. "Now I have spoken—begone!"

But the heart of Zinita was hungry for vengeance, vengeance swift and terrible, on the Lily, who lay in her place, and on her husband, who had thrust her aside for the Lily's sake. She did not desire to wait—no, not even for an hour.

"Hearken, O King!" she cried, "the tale is not yet all told. This man, Bulalio, plots against thy throne with Mopo, son of Makedama, who was thy councillor."

"He plots against my throne, woman? The lizard plots against the cliff on which it suns itself? Then let him plot; and as for Mopo, I will catch him yet!"

"Yes, O King! but that is not all the tale. This man has another name—he is named Umslopogaas, son of Mopo. But he is no son of Mopo: he is son to the Black One who is dead, the mighty king who was thy brother, by Baleka, sister to Mopo. Yes, I know it from the lips of Mopo. I know all the tale. He is heir to thy throne by blood, O King, and thou sittest in his place."

For a little while Dingaan sat astounded. Then he commanded Zinita to draw near and tell him that tale.

Now behind the stool on which he sat stood two councillors, nobles whom Dingaan loved, and these alone had heard the last words of Zinita. He bade these nobles stand in front of him, out of earshot and away from every other man. Then Zinita drew near, and told Dingaan the tale of the birth of Umslopogaas and all that followed, and, by many a token and many a deed of Chaka's which he remembered, Dingaan the king knew that it was a true story.

When at length she had done, he summoned the captain of the regiment that stood around: he was a great man named Faku, and he also summoned certain men who do the king's bidding. To the captain of the impi he spoke sharply, saying:—

"Take three companies and guides, and come by night to the town of the People of the Axe, that is by Ghost Mountain, and burn it, and slay all the wizards who sleep therein. Most of all, slay the Chief of the People, who is named Bulalio the Slaughterer or Umslopogaas. Kill him by torture if you may, but kill him and bring his head to me. Take that wife of his, who is known as Nada the Lily, alive if ye can, and bring her to me, for I would cause her to be slain here. Bring the cattle also. Now go, and go swiftly, this hour. If ye return having failed in one jot of my command, ye die, every one of you—ye die, and slowly. Begone!"

The captain saluted, and, running to his regiment, issued a command. Three full companies leapt forward at his word, and ran after him through the gates of the kraal Umgugundhlovu, heading for the Ghost Mountain.

Then Dingaan called to those who do the king's bidding, and, pointing to the two nobles, his councillors, who had heard the words of Zinita, commanded that they should be killed.

The nobles heard, and, having saluted the king, covered their faces, knowing that they must die because they had learned too much. So they were killed. Now it was one of these councillors who had said that doubtless meat would soon be found to feed the king's birds.

Then the king commanded those who do his bidding that they should take the children of Zinita and make away with them.

But when Zinita heard this she cried aloud, for she loved her children. Then Dingaan mocked her.

"What?" he said, "art thou a fool as well as wicked? Thou sayest that thy husband, whom thou hast given to death, is born of one who is dead, and is heir to my throne. Thou sayest also that these children are born of him; therefore, when he is dead, they will be heirs to my throne. Am I then mad that I should suffer them to live? Woman, thou hast fallen into thine own trap. Take them away!"

Now Zinita tasted of the cup which she had brewed for other lips, and grew distraught in her misery, and wrung her hands, crying that she repented her of the evil and would warn Umslopogaas and the Lily of that which awaited them. And she turned to run towards the gates. But the king laughed and nodded, and they brought her back, and presently she was dead also.

Thus, then, my father, prospered the wickedness of Zinita, the head wife of Umslopogaas, my fosterling.

Now these were the last slayings that were wrought at the kraal Umgugundhlovu, for just as Dingaan had made an end of them and once more grew weary, he lifted his eyes and saw the hillsides black with men, who by their dress were of his own impi—men whom he had sent out against the Boers.

And yet where was the proud array, where the plumes and shields, where the song of victory? Here, indeed, were soldiers, but they walked in groups like women and hung their heads like chidden children.

Then he learned the truth. The impi had been defeated by the banks of the Income; thousands had perished at the laager, mowed down by the guns of the Boers, thousands more had been drowned in the Income, till the waters were red and the bodies of the slain pushed each other under, and those who still lived walked upon them.

Dingaan heard, and was seized with fear, for it was said that the Amaboona followed fast on the track of the conquered.

That day he fled to the bush on the Black Umfolozi river, and that night the sky was crimson with the burning of the kraal Umgugundhlovu, where the Elephant should trumpet no more, and the vultures were scared from the Hill of Slaughter by the roaring of the flames.

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Galazi sat on the lap of the stone Witch, gazing towards the wide plains below, that were yet white with the moon, though the night grew towards the morning. Greysnout whined at his side, and Deathgrip thrust his muzzle into his hand; but Galazi took no heed, for he was brooding on the fall of Umslopogaas from the man that he had been to the level of a woman's slave, and on the breaking up of the People of the Axe, because of the coming of Nada. For all the women and the children were gone to this Feast of Women, and would not return for long, and it seemed to Galazi that many of the men had slipped away also, as though they smelt some danger from afar.

"Ah, Deathgrip," said Galazi aloud to the wild brute at his side, "changed is the Wolf King my brother, all changed because of a woman's kiss. Now he hunts no more, no more shall Groan-Maker be aloft; it is a woman's kiss he craves, not the touch of your rough tongue, it is a woman's hand he holds, not the smooth haft of horn, he, who of all men, was the fiercest and the first; for this last shame has overtaken him. Surely Chaka was a great king though an evil, and he showed his greatness when he forbade marriage to the warriors, marriage that makes the heart soft and turns blood to water."

Now Galazi ceased, and gazed idly towards the kraal of the People of the Axe, and as he looked his eyes caught a gleam of light that seemed to travel in and out of the edge of the shadow of Ghost Mountain as a woman's needle travels through a skin, now seen and now lost in the skin.

He started and watched. Ah! there the light came out from the shadow. Now, by Chaka's head, it was the light of spears!

One moment more Galazi watched. It was a little impi, perhaps they numbered two hundred men, running silently, but not to battle, for they wore no plumes. Yet they went out to kill, for they ran in companies, and each man carried assegais and a shield.

Now Galazi had heard tell of such impis that hunt by night, and he knew well that these were the king's dogs, and their game was men, a big kraal of sleeping men, otherwise there had been fewer dogs. Is a whole pack sent out to catch an antelope on its form? Galazi wondered whom they sought. Ah! now they turned to the ford, and he knew. It was his brother Umslopogaas and Nada the Lily and the People of the Axe. These were the king's dogs, and Zinita had let them slip. For this reason she had called a feast of women, and taken the children with her; for this reason so many had been summoned from the kraal by one means or another: it was that they might escape the slaughter.

Galazi bounded to his feet. For one moment he thought. Might not these hunters be hunted? Could he not destroy them by the jaws of the wolves as once before they had destroyed a certain impi of the king's? Ay, if he had seen them but one hour before, then scarcely a man of them should have lived to reach the stream, for he would have waylaid them with his wolves. But now it might not be; the soldiers neared the ford, and Galazi knew well that his grey people would not hunt on the further plain, though for this he had heard one reason only, that which was given him by the lips of the dead in a dream.

What, then, might be done? One thing alone: warn Umslopogaas. Yet how? For him who could swim a rushing river, there was, indeed, a swifter way to the place of the People of the Axe—a way that was to the path of the impi as is the bow-string to the strung bow. And yet they had travelled well-nigh half the length of the bow. Still, he might do it, he whose feet were the swiftest in the land, except those of Umslopogaas. At the least, he would try. Mayhap, the impi would tarry to drink at the ford.

So Galazi thought in his heart, and his thought was swift as the light. Then with a bound he was away down the mountain side. From boulder to boulder he leapt like a buck, he crashed through the brake like a bull, he skimmed the level like a swallow. The mountain was travelled now; there in front of him lay the yellow river foaming in its flood, so he had swum it before when he went to

see the dead. Ah! a good leap far out into the torrent; it was strong, but he breasted it. He was through, he stood upon the bank shaking the water from him like a dog, and now he was away up the narrow gorge of stones to the long slope, running low as his wolves ran.

Before him lay the town—one side shone silver with the sinking moon, one was grey with the breaking dawn. Ah! they were there, he saw them moving through the grass by the eastern gate; he saw the long lines of slayers creep to the left and the right.

How could he pass them before the circle of death was drawn? Six spear-throws to run, and they had but such a little way! The mealie-plants were tall, and at a spot they almost touched the fence. Up the path! Could Umslopogaas, his brother, move more fast, he wondered, than the Wolf who sped to save him? He was there, hidden by the mealie stalks, and there, along the fence to the right and to the left, the slayers crept!

“*Wow!* What was that?” said one soldier of the king to another man as they joined their guard completing the death circle. “*Wow!* something great and black crashed through the fence before me.”

“I heard it, brother,” answered the other man. “I heard it, but I saw nothing. It must have been a dog: no man could leap so high.”

“More like a wolf,” said the first; “at the least, let us pray that it was not an *Esedowan*<sup>[1]</sup> who will put us into the hole in its back. Is your fire ready, brother? *Wow!* these wizards shall wake warm; the signal should be soon.”

<sup>[1]</sup> A fabulous animal, reported by the Zulus to carry off human beings in a hole in its back.

Then arose the sound of a great voice crying, “Awake, ye sleepers, the foe is at your gates!”

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE END OF THE PEOPLE, BLACK AND GREY

Galazi rushed through the town crying aloud, and behind him rose a stir of men. All slept and no sentinels were set, for Umslopogaas was so lost in his love for the Lily that he forgot his wisdom, and thought no more of war or death or of the hate of Dingaan. Presently the Wolf came to the large new hut which Umslopogaas had caused to be built for Nada the Lily, and entered it, for there he knew that he should find his brother Bulalio. On the far side of the hut the two lay sleeping, and the head of Umslopogaas rested on the Lily's breast, and by his side gleamed the great axe Groan-Maker.

"Awake!" cried the Wolf.

Now Umslopogaas sprang to his feet grasping at his axe, but Nada threw her arms wide, murmuring; "Let me sleep on, sweet is sleep."

"Sound shall ye sleep, anon!" gasped Galazi. "Swift, brother, bind on the wolf's hide, take shield! Swift, I say—for the Slayers of the king are at your gates!"

Now Nada sprang up also, and they did his bidding like people in a dream; and, while they found their garments and a shield, Galazi took beer and drank it, and got his breath again. They stood without the hut. Now the heaven was grey, and east and west and north and south tongues of flame shot up against the sky, for the town had been fired by the Slayers.

Umslopogaas looked and his sense came back to him: he understood. "Which way, brother?" he said.

"Through the fire and the impi to our Grey People on the mountain," said Galazi. "There, if we can win it, we shall find succour."

"What of my people in the kraal," asked Umslopogaas.

"They are not many, brother; the women and the children are gone. I have roused the men—most will escape. Hence, ere we burn!"

Now they ran towards the fence, and as they went men joined them to the number of ten, half awakened, fear-stricken, armed—some with spears, some with clubs—and for the most part naked. They sped on together towards the fence of the town that was now but a ring of fire, Umslopogaas and Galazi in front, each holding the Lily by a hand. They neared the fence—from without came the shouts of the Slayers—lo! it was afire. Nada shrank back in fear, but Umslopogaas and Galazi dragged her on. They rushed at the blazing fence, smiting with axe and club. It broke before them, they were through but little harmed. Without were a knot of the Slayers, standing back a small space because of the heat of the flames. The Slayers saw them, and crying, "This is Bulalio, kill the wizard!" sprang towards them with uplifted spears. Now the People of the Axe made a ring round Nada, and in the front of it were Umslopogaas and Galazi. Then they rushed on and met those of the Slayers who stood before them, and the men of Dingaan were swept away and scattered by Groan-Maker and the Watcher, as dust is swept of a wind, as grass is swept by a sickle.

They were through with only one man slain, but the cry went up that the chief of the wizards and the Lily, his wife, had fled. Then, as it was these whom he was chiefly charged to kill, the captain called off the impi from watching for the dwellers in the town, and started in pursuit of Umslopogaas. Now, at this time nearly a hundred men of the People of the Axe had been killed and of the Slayers some fifty men, for, having been awakened by the crying of Galazi, the soldiers of the axe fought bravely, though none saw where his brother stood, and none knew whither their chief had fled except those ten who went with the brethren.

Meanwhile, the Wolf-Brethren and those with them were well away, and it had been easy for them to escape, who were the swiftest-footed of any in the land. But the pace of a regiment is the pace of its slowest-footed soldier, and Nada could not run with the Wolf-Brethren. Yet they made good speed, and were halfway down the gorge that led to the river before the companies of Dingaan poured into it. Now they came to the end of it, and the foe was near—this end of the gorge is narrow, my father, like the neck of a gourd—then Galazi stopped and spoke:—

"Halt! ye People of the Axe," he said, "and let us talk awhile with these who follow till we get our breath again. But you, my brother, pass the river with the Lily in your hand. We will join you in the forest; but if perchance we cannot find you, you know what must be done: set the Lily in the cave, then return and call up the grey impi. Wow! my brother, I must find you if I may, for if these men of Dingaan have a mind for sport there shall be such a hunting on the Ghost Mountain as the old Witch has not seen. Go now, my brother!"

"It is not my way to turn and run while others stand and fight," growled Umslopogaas; "yet, because of Nada, it seems that I must."

"Oh! heed me not, my love," said Nada, "I have brought thee sorrow—I am weary, let me die; kill me and save yourselves!"

For answer, Umslopogaas took her by the hand and fled towards the river; but before he reached it he heard the sounds of the fray, the war-cry of the Slayers as they poured upon the People of the Axe, the howl of his brother, the Wolf, when the battle joined—ay, and the crash of the Watcher as the blow went home.

"Well bitten, Wolf!" he said, stopping; "that one shall need no more; oh! that I might"—but again he looked at Nada, and sped on.

Now they had leaped into the foaming river, and here it was well that the Lily could swim, else both had been lost. But they won through and passed forward to the mountain's flank. Here they walked on among the trees till the forest was almost passed, and at length Umslopogaas heard the howling of a wolf.

Then he must set Nada on his shoulders and carry her as once Galazi had carried another, for it was death for any except the Wolf-Brethren to walk on the Ghost Mountain when the wolves were awake.

Presently the wolves flocked around him, and leaped upon him in joy, glaring with fierce eyes at her who sat upon his shoulders. Nada saw them, and almost fell from her seat, fainting with fear, for they were many and dreadful, and when they howled her blood turned to ice.

But Umslopogaas cheered her, telling her that these were his dogs with whom he went out hunting, and with whom he should hunt presently. At length they came to the knees of the Old Witch and the entrance to the cave. It was empty except for a wolf or two, for Galazi abode here seldom now; but when he was on the mountain would sleep in the forest, which was nearer the kraal of his brother the Slaughterer.

"Here you must stay, sweet," said Umslopogaas when he had driven out the wolves. "Here you must rest till this little matter of the Slayers is finished. Would that we had brought food, but we had little time to seek it! See, now I will show you the secret of the stone; thus far I will push it, no farther. Now a touch only is needed to send it over the socket and home; but then they must be two strong men who can pull it back again. Therefore push it no farther except in the utmost need, lest it remain where it fall, whether you will it or not. Have no fear, you are safe here; none know of this place except Galazi, myself and the wolves, and none shall find it. Now I must be going to find Galazi, if he still lives; if not, to make what play I can against the Slayers, alone with the wolves."

Now Nada wept, saying that she feared to be left, and that she should never see him more, and her grief wrung his heart. Nevertheless, Umslopogaas kissed her and went, closing the stone after him in that fashion of which he had spoken. When the stone was shut the cave was almost dark, except for a ray of light that entered by a hole little larger than a man's hand, that, looked at from within, was on the right of the stone. Nada sat herself so that this ray struck full on her, for she loved light, and without it she would pine as flowers do. There she sat and thought in the darksome cave, and was filled with fear and sorrow. And while she brooded thus, suddenly the ray went out, and she heard a noise as of some beast that smells at prey. She looked, and in the gloom she saw the sharp nose and grinning fangs of a wolf that were thrust towards her through the little hole.

Nada cried aloud in fear, and the fangs were snatched back, but presently she heard a scratching without the cave, and saw the stone shake. Then she thought in her foolishness that the wolf knew how to open the stone, and that he would do this, and devour her, for she had heard the tale that all these wolves were the ghosts of evil men, having the understanding of men. So, in her fear and folly, she seized the rock and dragged on it as Umslopogaas had shown her how to do. It shook, it slipped over the socket ledge, and rolled home like a pebble down the mouth of a gourd.

"Now I am safe from the wolves," said Nada. "See, I cannot so much as stir the stone from within." And she laughed a little, then ceased from laughing and spoke again. "Yet it would be ill if Umslopogaas came back no more to roll away that rock, for then I should be like one in a grave—as one who is placed in a grave being yet strong and quick." She shuddered as she thought of it, but presently started up and set her ear to the hole to listen, for from far down the mountain there rose a mighty howling and a din of men.

When Umslopogaas had shut the cave, he moved swiftly down the mountain, and with him went certain of the wolves; not all, for he had not summoned them. His heart was heavy, for he feared that Galazi was no more. Also he was mad with rage, and plotted in himself to destroy the Slayers of the king, every man of them; but first he must learn what they would do. Presently, as he wended, he heard a long, low howl far away in the forest; then he rejoiced, for he knew the call—it was the call of Galazi, who had escaped the spears of the Slayers.

Swiftly he ran, calling in answer. He won the place. There, seated on a stone, resting himself, was Galazi, and round him surged the numbers of the Grey People. Umslopogaas came to him and looked at him, for he seemed somewhat weary. There were flesh wounds on his great breast and arms, the little shield was well-nigh hewn to strips, and the Watcher showed signs of war.

"How went it, brother?" asked Umslopogaas.

"Not so ill, but all those who stood with me in the way are dead, and with them a few of the foe. I alone am fled like a coward. They came on us thrice, but we held them back till the Lily was safe; then, all our men being down, I ran, Umslopogaas, and swam the torrent, for I was minded to die here in my own place."

Now, though he said little of it, I must tell you, my father, that Galazi had made a great slaughter there in the neck of the donga. Afterwards I counted the slain, and they were many; the nine men of the People of the Axe were hidden in them.

"Perhaps it shall be the Slayers who die, brother."

"Perhaps, at least, there shall be death for some. Still it is in my mind, Slaughterer, that our brotherhood draws to an end, for the fate of him who bears the Watcher, and which my father foretold, is upon me. If so, farewell. While it lasted our friendship has been good, and its ending shall be good. Moreover, it would have endured for many a year to come had you not sought, Slaughterer, to make good better, and to complete our joy of fellowship and war with the love of women. From that source flow these ills, as a river from a spring; but so it was fated. If I fall in this fray may you yet live on to fight in many another, and at the last to die gloriously with axe aloft; and may you find a brisker man and a better Watcher to serve you in your need. Should you fall and I live on, I promise this: I will avenge you to the last and guard the Lily whom you love, offering her comfort, but no more. Now the foe draws on, they have travelled round about by the ford, for they dared not face the torrent, and they cried to me that they are sworn to slay us or be slain, as Dingaan, the king, commanded. So the fighting will be of the best, if, indeed, they do not run before the fangs of the Grey People. Now, Chief, speak your word that I may obey it."

Thus Galazi spoke in the circle of the wolves, while Umslopogaas leaned upon his Axe Groan-Maker, and listened to him, ay, and wept as he listened, for after the Lily and me, Mopo, he loved Galazi most dearly of all who lived. Then he answered:—

"Were it not for one in the cave above, who is helpless and tender, I would swear to you, Wolf, that if you fall, on your carcase I will die; and I do swear that, should you fall, while I live Groan-Maker shall be busy from year to year till every man of yonder impi is as you are. Perchance I did ill, Galazi, when first I hearkened to the words of Zinita and suffered women to come between us. May we one day find a land where there are no women, and war only, for in that land we shall grow great. But now, at the least, we will make a good end to this fellowship, and the Grey People shall fight their fill, and the old Witch who sits aloft waiting for the world to die shall smile to see that fight, if she never smiled before. This is my word: that we fall upon the men of Dingaan twice, once in the glade of the forest whither they will come presently, and, if we are beaten back, then we must stand for the last time on the knees of the Witch in front of the cave where Nada is. Say, Wolf, will the Grey Folk fight?"

"To the last, brother, so long as one is left to lead them, after that I do not know! Still they have only fangs to set against spears. Slaughterer, your plan is good. Come, I am rested."

So they rose and numbered their flock, and all were there, though it was not as it had been years ago when first the Wolf-Brethren hunted on Ghost Mountain; for many of the wolves had died by men's spears when they harried the kraals of men, and no young were born to them. Then, as once before, the pack was halved, and half, the she-wolves, went with Umslopogaas, and half, the dog-wolves, went with Galazi.

Now they passed down the forest paths and hid in the tangle of the thickets at the head of the darksome glen, one on each side of the glen. Here they waited till they heard the footfall of the impi of the king's Slayers, as it came slowly along seeking them. In front of the impi went two soldiers watching for an ambush, and these two men were the same who had talked together that dawn when Galazi sprang between them. Now also they spoke as they peered this way and that; then, seeing nothing, stood awhile in the mouth of the glen waiting the coming of their company; and their words came to the ears of Umslopogaas.

"An awful place this, my brother," said one. "A place full of ghosts and strange sounds, of hands that seem to press us back, and whinings as of invisible wolves. It is named Ghost Mountain, and well named. Would that the king had found other business for us than the slaying of these sorcerers—for they are sorcerers indeed, and this is the home of their sorceries. Tell me, brother, what was that which leaped between us this morning in the dark! I say it was a wizard. *Wow!* they are all wizards. Could any who was but a man have done the deeds which he who is named the Wolf wrought down by the river yonder, and then have escaped? Had the Axe but stayed with the Club they would have eaten up our impi."

"The Axe had a woman to watch," laughed the other. "Yes, it is true this is a place of wizards and evil things. Methinks I see the red eyes of the *Esedowana* glaring at us through the dark of the trees and smell their smell. Yet these wizards must be caught, for know this, my brother: if we return to Umgugundhlovu with the king's command undone, then there are stakes hardening in the fire of which we shall taste the point. If we are all killed in the catching, and some, it seems, are missing already, yet they must be caught. Say, my brother, shall we draw on? The impi is nigh. Would that Faku, our captain yonder, might find two others to take our place, for in this thicket I had rather run last than first. Well, here leads the spoor—a wondrous mass of wolf-spoor mixed with the footprints of men; perhaps they are sometimes the one and sometimes the other—who knows, my brother? It is a land of ghosts and wizards. Let us on! Let us on!"

Now all this while the Wolf-Brethren had much ado to keep their people quiet, for their mouths watered and their eyes shone at the sight of the men, and at length it could be done no more, for with a howl a single she-wolf rushed from her lair and leapt at the throat of the man who spoke, nor did she miss her grip. Down went wolf and man, rolling together on the ground, and there they killed each other.

"The *Esedowana!* the *Esedowana* are upon us!" cried the other scout, and, turning, fled towards the impi. But he never reached it, for with fearful howlings the ghost-wolves broke their cover and rushed on him from the right and the left, and lo! there was nothing of him left except his spear alone.

Now a low cry of fear rose from the impi, and some turned to fly, but Faku, the captain, a great and brave man, shouted to them, "Stand firm, children of the king, stand firm, these are no *Esedowana*, these are but the Wolf-Brethren and their pack. What! will ye run from dogs, ye who have laughed at the spears of men? Ring round! Stand fast!"

The soldiers heard the voice of their captain, and they obeyed his voice, forming a double circle, a ring within a ring. They looked to the right, there, Groan-Maker aloft, the wolf fangs on his brow, the worn wolf-hide streaming on the wind, Bulalio rushed upon them like a storm, and with him came his red-eyed company. They looked to the left—ah, well they know that mighty Watcher! Have they not heard his strokes down by the river, and well they know the giant who wields it like a wand, the Wolf King, with the strength of ten! *Wow!* They are here! See the people black and grey, hear them howl their war-chant! Look how they leap like water—leap in a foam of fangs against the hedge of spears! The circle is broken; Groan-Maker has broken it! Ha! Galazi also is through the double ring; now must men stand back to back or perish!

How long did it last? Who can say? Time flies fast when blows fall thick. At length the brethren are beaten back; they break out as they broke in, and are gone, with such of their wolf-folk as were left alive. Yet that impi was somewhat the worse, but one-third of those lived who looked on the sun without the forest; the rest lay smitten, torn, mangled, dead, hidden under the heaps of bodies of wild beasts.

"Now this is a battle of evil spirits that live in the shapes of wolves, and as for the Wolf-Brethren, they are sorcerers of the rarest," said Faku the captain, "and such sorcerers I love, for they fight furiously. Yet I will slay them or be slain. At the least, if there be few of us left, the most of the wolves are dead also, and the arms of the wizards grow weary."

So he moved forward up the mountain with those of the soldiers who remained, and all the way the wolves harried them, pulling down a man here and a man there; but though they heard and saw them cheering on their pack the Wolf-Brethren attacked them no more, for they saved their strength for the last fight of all.

The road was long up the mountain, and the soldiers knew little of the path, and ever the ghost-wolves harried on their flanks. So it was evening before they came to the feet of the stone Witch, and began to climb to the platform of her knees. There, on her knees as it were, they saw the Wolf-Brethren standing side by side, such a pair as were not elsewhere in the world, and they seemed afire, for the sunset beat upon them, and the wolves crept round their feet, red with blood and fire.

"A glorious pair!" quoth great Faku; "would that I fought with them rather than against them! Yet, they must die!" Then he began to climb to the knees of the Witch.

Now Umslopogaas glanced up at the stone face of her who sat aloft, and it was alight with the sunset.

"Said I not that the old Witch should smile at this fray?" he cried. "Lo! she smiles! Up, Galazi, let us spend the remnant of our people on the foe, and fight this fight out, man to man, with no beast to spoil it! Ho! Blood and Greysnout! ho! Deathgrip! ho! wood-dwellers grey and black, at them, my children!"

The wolves heard; they were few and they were sorry to see, with weariness and wounds, but still they were fierce. With a howl, for the last time they leaped down upon the foe, tearing, harrying, and killing till they themselves were dead by the spear, every one of them except Deathgrip, who crept back sorely wounded to die with Galazi.

"Now I am a chief without a people," cried Galazi. "Well, it has been my lot in life. So it was in the Halakazi kraals, so it is on Ghost Mountain at the last, and so also shall it be even for the greatest kings when they come to their ends, seeing that they, too, must

die alone. Say, Slaughterer, choose where you will stand, to the left or to the right."

Now, my father, the track below separated, because of a boulder, and there were two little paths which led to the platform of the Witch's knees with, perhaps, ten paces between them. Umslopogaas guarded the left-hand path and Galazi took the right. Then they waited, having spears in their hands. Presently the soldiers came round the rock and rushed up against them, some on one path and some on the other.

Then the brethren hurled their spears at them and killed three men. Now the assegais were done, and the foe was on them. Umslopogaas bends forward, his long arm shoots out, the axe gleams, and a man who came on falls back.

"One!" cries Umslopogaas.

"One, my brother!" answers Galazi, as he draws back the Watcher from his blow.

A soldier rushes forward, singing. To and fro he moves in front of Umslopogaas, his spear poised to strike. Groan-Maker swoops down, but the man leaps back, the blow misses, and the Slaughterer's guard is down.

"A poor stroke, Sorcerer!" cries the man as he rushes in to stab him. Lo! the axe wheels in the air, it circles swiftly low down by the ground; it smites upward. Before the spearsman can strike the horn of Groan-Maker has sped from chin to brain.

"But a good return, fool!" says Umslopogaas.

"Two!" cries Galazi, from the right.

"Two! my brother," answers Umslopogaas.

Again two men come on, one against each, to find no better luck. The cry of "*Three!*" passes from brother to brother, and after it rises the cry of "*Four!*"

Now Faku bids the men who are left to hold their shields together and push the two from the mouths of the paths, and this they do, losing four more men at the hands of the brethren before it is done.

"Now we are on the open! Ring them round and down with them!" cries Faku.

But who shall ring round Groan-Maker that shines on all sides at once, Groan-Maker who falls heavily no more, but pecks and pecks and pecks like a wood-bird on a tree, and never pecks in vain? Who shall ring round those feet swifter than the Sassaby of the plains? *Wow!* He is here! He is there! He is a sorcerer! Death is in his hand, and death looks out of his eyes!

Galazi lives yet, for still there comes the sound of the Watcher as it thunders on the shields, and the Wolf's hoarse cry of the number of the slain. He has a score of wounds, yet he fights on! his leg is almost hewn from him with an axe, yet he fights on! His back is pierced again and again, yet he fights on! But two are left alive before him, one twists round and spears him from behind. He heeds it not, but smites down the foe in front. Then he turns and, whirling the Watcher on high, brings him down for the last time, and so mightily that the man before him is crushed like an egg.

Galazi brushes the blood from his eyes and glares round on the dead. "*All! Slaughterer,*" he cries.

"All save two, my brother," comes the answer, sounding above the clash of steel and the sound of smitten shields.

Now the Wolf would come to him, but cannot, for his life ebbs.

"Fare you well, my brother! Death is good! Thus, indeed, I would die, for I have made me a mat of men to lie on," he cried with a great voice.

"Fare you well! Sleep softly, Wolf!" came the answer. "All save one!"

Now Galazi fell dying on the dead, but he was not altogether gone, for he still spoke. "All save one! Ha! ha! ill for that one then when Groan-Maker yet is up. It is well to have lived so to die. *Victory! Victory!*"

And Galazi the Wolf struggled to his knees and for the last time shook the Watcher about his head, then fell again and died.

Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka, and Faku, the captain of Dingaan, gazed on each other. They alone were left standing upon the mountain, for the rest were all down. Umslopogaas had many wounds. Faku was unhurt; he was a strong man, also armed with an axe.

Faku laughed aloud. "So it has come to this, Slaughterer," he said, "that you and I must settle whether the king's word be done or no. Well, I will say that however it should fall out, I count it a great fortune to have seen this fight, and the highest of honours to have had to do with two such warriors. Rest you a little, Slaughterer, before we close. That wolf-brother of yours died well, and if it is given me to conquer in this bout, I will tell the tale of his end from kraal to kraal throughout the land, and it shall be a tale forever."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE LILY'S FAREWELL

Umslopogaas listened, but he made no answer to the words of Faku the captain, though he liked them well, for he would not waste his breath in talking, and the light grew low.

"I am ready, Man of Dingaen," he said, and lifted his axe.

Now for awhile the two circled round and round, each waiting for a chance to strike. Presently Faku smote at the head of Umslopogaas, but the Slaughterer lifted Groan-Maker to ward the blow. Faku crooked his arm and let the axe curl downwards, so that its keen edge smote Umslopogaas upon the head, severing his man's ring and the scalp beneath.

Made mad with the pain, the Slaughterer awoke, as it were. He grasped Groan-maker with both hands and struck thrice. The first blow hewed away the plumes and shield of Faku, and drove him back a spear's length, the second missed its aim, the third and mightiest twisted in his wet hands, so that the axe smote sideways. Nevertheless, it fell full on the breast of the captain Faku, shattering his bones, and sweeping him from the ledge of rock on to the slope beneath, where he lay still.

"It is finished with the daylight," said Umslopogaas, smiling grimly. "Now, Dingaen, send more Slayers to seek your slain," and he turned to find Nada in the cave.

But Faku the captain was not yet dead, though he was hurt to death. He sat up, and with his last strength he hurled the axe in his hand at him whose might had prevailed against him. The axe sped true, and Umslopogaas did not see it fly. It sped true, and its point struck him on the left temple, driving in the bone and making a great hole. Then Faku fell back dying, and Umslopogaas threw up his arms and dropped like an ox drops beneath the blow of the butcher, and lay as one dead, under the shadow of a stone.

All day long Nada crouched in the cave listening to the sounds of war that crept faintly up the mountain side; howling of wolves, shouting of men, and the clamour of iron on iron. All day long she sat, and now evening came apace, and the noise of battle drew near, swelled, and sank, and died away. She heard the voices of the Wolf-Brethren as they called to each other like bucks, naming the number of the slain. She heard Galazi's cry of "*Victory!*" and her heart leapt to it, though she knew that there was death in the cry. Then for the last time she heard the faint ringing of iron on iron, and the light went out and all grew still.

All grew still as the night. There came no more shouting of men and no more clash of arms, no howlings of wolves, no cries of pain or triumph—all was quiet as death, for death had taken all.

For awhile Nada the Lily sat in the dark of the cave, saying to herself, "Presently he will come, my husband, he will surely come; the Slayers are slain—he does not but tarry to bind his wounds; a scratch, perchance, here and there. Yes, he will come, and it is well, for I am weary of my loneliness, and this place is grim and evil."

Thus she spoke to herself in hope, but nothing came except the silence. Then she spoke again, and her voice echoed in the hollow cave. "Now I will be bold, I will fear nothing, I will push aside the stone and go out to find him. I know well he does but linger to tend some who are wounded, perhaps Galazi. Doubtless Galazi is wounded. I must go and nurse him, though he never loved me, and I do not love him overmuch who would stand between me and my husband. This wild wolf-man is a foe to women, and, most of all, a foe to me; yet I will be kind to him. Come, I will go at once," and she rose and pushed at the rock.

Why, what was this? It did not stir. Then she remembered that she had pulled it beyond the socket because of her fear of the wolf, and that the rock had slipped a little way down the neck of the cave. Umslopogaas had told her that she must not do this, and she had forgotten his words in her foolishness. Perhaps she could move the stone; no, not by the breadth of a grain of corn. She was shut in, without food or water, and here she must bide till Umslopogaas came. And if he did not come? Then she must surely die.

Now she shrieked aloud in her fear, calling on the name of Umslopogaas. The walls of the cave answered "*Umslopogaas!*" and that was all.

Afterwards madness fell upon Nada, my daughter, and she lay in the cave for days and nights, nor knew ever how long she lay. And with her madness came visions, for she dreamed that the dead One whom Galazi had told her of sat once more aloft in his niche at the end of the cave and spoke to her, saying:—

"Galazi is dead! The fate of him who bears the Watcher has fallen on him. Dead are the ghost-wolves; I also am dead of hunger in this cave, and as I died so shall you die, Nada the Lily! Nada, Star of Death! because of whose beauty and foolishness all this death has come about."

This is seemed to Nada, in her madness, that the shadow of him who had sat in the niche spoke to her from hour to hour.

It seemed to Nada, in her madness, that twice the light shone through the hole by the rock, and that was day, and twice it went out, and that was night. A third time the ray shone and died away, and lo! her madness left her, and she awoke to know that she was dying, and that a voice she loved spoke without the hole, saying in hollow accents:—

"Nada? Do you still live, Nada?"

"Yea," she answered hoarsely. "Water! give me water!"

Next she heard a sound as of a great snake dragging itself along painfully. A while passed, then a trembling hand thrust a little gourd of water through the hole. She drank, and now she could speak, though the water seemed to flow through her veins like fire.

"Is it indeed you, Umslopogaas?" she said, "or are you dead, and do I dream of you?"

"It is I, Nada," said the voice. "Hearken! have you drawn the rock home?"

"Alas! yes," she answered. "Perhaps, if the two of us strive at it, it will move."

"Ay, if our strength were what it was—but now! Still, let us try."

So they strove with a rock, but the two of them together had not the strength of a girl, and it would not stir.

"Give over, Umslopogaas," said Nada; "we do but waste the time that is left to me. Let us talk!"

For awhile there was no answer, for Umslopogaas had fainted, and Nada beat her breast, thinking that he was dead.

Presently he spoke, however, saying, "It may not be; we must perish here, one on each side of the stone, not seeing the other's face, for my might is as water; nor can I stand upon my feet to go and seek for food."

"Are you wounded, Umslopogaas?" asked Nada.

"Ay, Nada, I am pierced to the brain with the point of an axe; no fair stroke, the captain of Dingaan hurled it at me when I thought him dead, and I fell. I do not know how long I have lain yonder under the shadow of the rock, but it must be long, for my limbs are wasted, and those who fell in the fray are picked clean by the vultures, all except Galazi, for the old wolf Deathgrip lies on his breast dying, but not dead, licking my brother's wounds, and scares the fowls away. It was the beak of a vulture, who had smelt me out at last, that woke me from my sleep beneath the stone, Nada, and I crept hither. Would that he had not awakened me, would that I had died as I lay, rather than lived a little while till you perish thus, like a trapped fox, Nada, and presently I follow you."

"It is hard to die so, Umslopogaas," she answered, "I who am yet young and fair, who love you, and hoped to give you children; but so it has come about, and it may not be put away. I am well-nigh sped, husband; horror and fear have conquered me, my strength fails, but I suffer little. Let us talk no more of death, let us rather speak of our childhood, when we wandered hand in hand; let us talk also of our love, and of the happy hours that we have spent since your great axe rang upon the rock in the Halakazi caves, and my fear told you the secret of my womanhood. See, I thrust my hand through the hole; can you not kiss it, Umslopogaas?"

Now Umslopogaas stooped his shattered head, and kissed the Lily's little hand, then he held it in his own, and so they sat till the end—he without, resting his back against the rock, she within, lying on her side, her arm stretched through the little hole. They spoke of their love, and tried to forget their sorrow in it; he told her also of the fray which had been and how it went.

"Ah!" she said, "that was Zinita's work, Zinita who hated me, and justly. Doubtless she set Dingaan on this path."

"A little while gone," quoth Umslopogaas; "and I hoped that your last breath and mine might pass together, Nada, and that we might go together to seek great Galazi, my brother, where he is. Now I hope that help will find me, and that I may live a little while, because of a certain vengeance which I would wreak."

"Speak not of vengeance, husband," she answered, "I, too, am near to that land where the Slayer and the Slain, the Shedder of Blood and the Avenger of Blood are lost in the same darkness. I would die with love, and love only, in my heart, and your name, and yours only, on my lips, so that if anywhere we live again it shall be ready to spring forth to greet you. Yet, husband, it is in my heart that you will not go with me, but that you shall live on to die the greatest of deaths far away from here, and because of another woman. It seems that, as I lay in the dark of this cave, I saw you, Umslopogaas, a great man, gaunt and grey, stricken to the death, and the axe Groan-maker wavering aloft, and many a man dead upon a white and shimmering way, and about you the fair faces of white women; and you had a hole in your forehead, husband, on the left side."

"That is like to be true, if I live," he answered, "for the bone of my temple is shattered."

Now Nada ceased speaking, and for a long while was silent; Umslopogaas was also silent and torn with pain and sorrow because he must lose the Lily thus, and she must die so wretchedly, for one reason only, that the cast of Faku had robbed him of his strength. Alas! he who had done many deeds might not save her now; he could scarcely hold himself upright against the rock. He thought of it, and the tears flowed down his face and fell on to the hand of the Lily. She felt them fall and spoke.

"Weep not, my husband," she said, "I have been all too ill a wife to you. Do not mourn for me, yet remember that I loved you well." And again she was silent for a long space.

Then she spoke and for the last time of all, and her voice came in a gasping whisper through the hole in the rock:—

"Farewell, Umslopogaas, my husband and my brother, I thank you for your love, Umslopogaas. Ah! I die!"

Umslopogaas could make no answer, only he watched the little hand he held. Twice it opened, twice it closed upon his own, then it opened for the third time, turned grey, quivered, and was still forever!

Now it was at the hour of dawn that Nada died.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE VENGEANCE OF MOPO AND HIS FOSTERLING

It chanced that on this day of Nada's death and at that same hour of dawn I, Mopo, came from my mission back to the kraal of the People of the Axe, having succeeded in my end, for that great chief whom I had gone out to visit had hearkened to my words. As the light broke I reached the town, and lo! it was a blackness and a desolation.

"Here is the footmark of Dingaan," I said to myself, and walked to and fro, groaning heavily. Presently I found a knot of men who were of the people that had escaped the slaughter, hiding in the mealie-fields lest the Slayers should return, and from them I drew the story. I listened in silence, for, my father, I was grown old in misfortune; then I asked where were the Slayers of the king? They replied that they did not know; the soldiers had gone up the Ghost Mountain after the Wolf-Brethren and Nada the Lily, and from the forest had come a howling of beasts and sounds of war; then there was silence, and none had been seen to return from the mountain, only all day long the vultures hung over it.

"Let us go up the mountain," I said.

At first they feared, because of the evil name of the place; but in the end they came with me, and we followed on the path of the impi of the Slayers and guessed all that had befallen it. At length we reached the knees of stone, and saw the place of the great fight of the Wolf-Brethren. All those who had taken part in that fight were now but bones, because the vultures had picked them every one, except Galazi, for on the breast of Galazi lay the old wolf Deathgrip, that was yet alive. I drew near the body, and the great wolf struggled to his feet and ran at me with bristling hair and open jaws, from which no sound came. Then, being spent, he rolled over dead.

Now I looked round seeking the axe Groan-Maker among the bones of the slain, and did not find it and the hope came into my heart that Umslopogaas had escaped the slaughter. Then we went on in silence to where I knew the cave must be, and there by its mouth lay the body of a man. I ran to it—it was Umslopogaas, wasted with hunger, and in his temple was a great wound and on his breast and limbs were many other wounds. Moreover, in his hand he held another hand—a dead hand, that was thrust through a hole in the rock. I knew its shape well—it was the little hand of my child, Nada the Lily.

Now I understood, and, bending down, I felt the heart of Umslopogaas, and laid the down of an eagle upon his lips. His heart still stirred and the down was lifted gently.

I bade those with me drag the stone, and they did so with toil. Now the light flowed into the cave, and by it we saw the shape of Nada my daughter. She was somewhat wasted, but still very beautiful in her death. I felt her heart also: it was still, and her breast grew cold.

Then I spoke: "The dead to the dead. Let us tend the living."

So we bore in Umslopogaas, and I caused broth to be made and poured it down his throat; also I cleansed his great wound and bound healing herbs upon it, plying all my skill. Well I knew the arts of healing, my father; I who was the first of the *izinyanga* of medicine, and, had it not been for my craft, Umslopogaas had never lived, for he was very near his end. Still, there where he had once been nursed by Galazi the Wolf, I brought him back to life. It was three days till he spoke, and, before his sense returned to him, I caused a great hole to be dug in the floor of the cave. And there, in the hole, I buried Nada my daughter, and we heaped lily blooms upon her to keep the earth from her, and then closed in her grave, for I was not minded that Umslopogaas should look upon her dead, lest he also should die from the sight, and because of his desire to follow her. Also I buried Galazi the Wolf in the cave, and set the Watcher in his hand, and there they both sleep who are friends at last, the Lily and the Wolf together. Ah! when shall there be such another man and such another maid?

At length on the third day Umslopogaas spoke, asking for Nada. I pointed to the earth, and he remembered and understood. Thereafter the strength of Umslopogaas gathered on him slowly, and the hole in his skull skinned over. But now his hair was grizzled, and he scarcely smiled again, but grew even more grim and stern than he had been before.

Soon we learned all the truth about Zinita, for the women and children came back to the town of the People of the Axe, only Zinita and the children of Umslopogaas did not come back. Also a spy reached me from the Mahlabatine and told me of the end of Zinita and of the flight of Dingaan before the Boers.

Now when Umslopogaas had recovered, I asked him what he would do, and whether or not I should pursue my plots to make him king of the land.

But Umslopogaas shook his head, saying that he had no heart that way. He would destroy a king indeed, but now he no longer desired to be a king. He sought revenge alone. I said that it was well, I also sought vengeance, and seeking together we would find it.

Now, my father, there is much more to tell, but shall I tell it? The snow has melted, your cattle have been found where I told you they should be, and you wish to be gone. And I also, I would be gone upon a longer journey.

Listen, my father, I will be short. This came into my mind: to play off Panda against Dingaan; it was for such an hour of need that I had saved Panda alive. After the battle of the Blood River, Dingaan summoned Panda to a hunt. Then it was that I journeyed to the kraal of Panda on the Lower Tugela, and with me Umslopogaas. I warned Panda that he should not go to this hunt, for he was the game himself, but that he should rather fly into Natal with all his people. He did so, and then I opened talk with the Boers, and more especially with that Boer who was named Ungalunkulu, or Great Arm. I showed the Boer that Dingaan was wicked and not to be

believed, but Panda was faithful and good. The end of it was that the Boers and Panda made war together on Dingaan. Yes, I made that war that we might be revenged on Dingaan. Thus, my father, do little things lead to great.

Were we at the big fight, the battle of Magongo? Yes, my father; we were there. When Dingaan's people drove us back, and all seemed lost, it was I who put into the mind of Nongalaza, the general, to pretend to direct the Boers where to attack, for the Amaboona stood out of that fight, leaving it to us black people. It was Umslopogaas who cut his way with Groan-Maker through a wing of one of Dingaan's regiments till he came to the Boer captain Ungalunkulu, and shouted to him to turn the flank of Dingaan. That finished it, my father, for they feared to stand against us both, the white and the black together. They fled, and we followed and slew, and Dingaan ceased to be a king.

He ceased to be a king, but he still lived, and while he lived our vengeance was hungry. So we went to the Boer captain and to Panda, and spoke to them nicely, saying, "We have served you well, we have fought for you, and so ordered things that victory is yours. Now grant us this request, that we may follow Dingaan, who has fled into hiding, and kill him wherever we find him, for he has worked us wrong, and we would avenge it."

Then the white captain and Panda smiled and said, "Go children, and prosper in your search. No one thing shall please us more than to know that Dingaan is dead." And they gave us men to go with us.

Then we hunted that king week by week as men hunt a wounded buffalo. We hunted him to the jungles of the Umfalozi and through them. But he fled ever, for he knew that the avengers of blood were on his spoor. After that for awhile we lost him. Then we heard that he had crossed the Pongolo with some of the people who still clung to him. We followed him to the place Kwa Myawo, and there we lay hid in the bush watching. At last our chance came. Dingaan walked in the bush and with him two men only. We stabbed the men and seized him.

Dingaan looked at us and knew us, and his knees trembled with fear. Then I spoke:—

"What was that message which I sent thee, O Dingaan, who art no more a king—that thou didst evil to drive me away, was it not? because I set thee on thy throne and I alone could hold thee there?"

He made no answer, and I went on:—

"I, Mopo, son of Makedama, set thee on thy throne, O Dingaan, who wast a king, and I, Mopo, have pulled thee down from thy throne. But my message did not end there. It said that, ill as thou hadst done to drive me away, yet worse shouldst thou do to look upon my face again, for that day should be thy day of doom."

Still he made no answer. Then Umslopogaas spoke:—

"I am that Slaughterer, O Dingaan, no more a king, whom thou didst send Slayers many and fierce to eat up at the kraal of the People of the Axe. Where are thy Slayers now, O Dingaan? Before all is done thou shalt look upon them."

"Kill me and make an end; it is your hour," said Dingaan.

"Not yet awhile, O son of Senzangacona," answered Umslopogaas, "and not here. There lived a certain woman and she was named Nada the Lily. I was her husband, O Dingaan, and Mopo here, he was her father. But, alas! she died, and sadly—she lingered three days and nights before she died. Thou shalt see the spot and hear the tale, O Dingaan. It will wring thy heart, which was ever tender. There lived certain children, born of another woman named Zinita, little children, sweet and loving. I was their father, O Elephant in a pit, and one Dingaan slew them. Of them thou shalt hear also. Now away, for the path is far!"

Two days went by, my father, and Dingaan sat bound and alone in the cave on Ghost Mountain. We had dragged him slowly up the mountain, for he was heavy as an ox. Three men pushing at him and three others pulling on a cord about his middle, we dragged him up, staying now and again to show him the bones of those whom he had sent out to kill us, and telling him the tale of that fight.

Now at length we were in the cave, and I sent away those who were with us, for we wished to be alone with Dingaan at the last. He sat down on the floor of the cave, and I told him that beneath the earth on which he sat lay the bones of that Nada whom he had murdered and the bones of Galazi the Wolf.

On the third day before the dawn we came again and looked upon him.

"Slay me," he said, "for the Ghosts torment me!"

"No longer art thou great, O shadow of a king," I said, "who now dost tremble before two Ghosts out of all the thousands that thou hast made. Say, then, how shall it fare with thee presently when thou art of their number?"

Now Dingaan prayed for mercy.

"Mercy, thou hyena!" I answered, "thou prayest for mercy who showed none to any! Give me back my daughter. Give this man back his wife and children; then we will talk of mercy. Come forth, coward, and die the death of cowards."

So, my father, we dragged him out, groaning, to the cleft that is above in the breast of the old Stone Witch, that same cleft where Galazi had found the bones. There we stood, waiting for the moment of the dawn, that hour when Nada had died. Then we cried her name into his ears and the names of the children of Umslopogaas, and cast him into the cleft.

This was the end of Dingaan, my father—Dingaan, who had the fierce heart of Chaka without its greatness.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### MOPO ENDS HIS TALE

That is the tale of Nada the Lily, my father, and of how we avenged her. A sad tale—yes, a sad tale; but all was sad in those days. It was otherwise afterwards, when Panda reigned, for Panda was a man of peace.

There is little more to tell. I left the land where I could stay no longer who had brought about the deaths of two kings, and came here to Natal to live near where the kraal Duguza once had stood.

The bones of Dingaan as they lay in the cleft were the last things my eyes beheld, for after that I became blind, and saw the sun no more, nor any light—why I do not know, perhaps from too much weeping, my father. So I changed my name, lest a spear might reach the heart that had planned the death of two kings and a prince—Chaka, Dingaan, and Umhlangana of the blood royal. Silently and by night Umslopogaas, my fosterling, led me across the border, and brought me here to Stanger; and here as an old witch-doctor I have lived for many, many years. I am rich. Umslopogaas craved back from Panda the cattle of which Dingaan had robbed me, and drove them hither. But none were here who had lived in the kraal Duguza, none knew, in Zweete the blind old witch-doctor, that Mopo who stabbed Chaka, the Lion of the Zulu. None know it now. You have heard the tale, and you alone, my father. Do not tell it again till I am dead.

Umslopogaas? Yes, he went back to the People of the Axe and ruled them, but they were never so strong again as they had been before they smote the Halakazi in their caves, and Dingaan ate them up. Panda let him be and liked him well, for Panda did not know that the Slaughterer was son to Chaka his brother, and Umslopogaas let that dog lie, for when Nada died he lost his desire to be great. Yet he became captain of the Nkomabakosi regiment, and fought in many battles, doing mighty deeds, and stood by Umbulazi, son of Panda, in the great fray on the Tugela, when Cetywayo slew his brother Umbulazi.

After that also he plotted against Cetywayo, whom he hated, and had it not been for a certain white man, a hunter named Macumazahn, Umslopogaas would have been killed. But the white man saved him by his wit. Yes, and at times he came to visit me, for he still loved me as of old; but now he has fled north, and I shall hear his voice no more. Nay, I do not know all the tale; there was a woman in it. Women were ever the bane of Umslopogaas, my fostering. I forget the story of that woman, for I remember only these things that happened long ago, before I grew very old.

Look on this right hand of mine, my father! I cannot see it now; and yet I, Mopo, son of Makedama, seem to see it as once I saw, red with the blood of two kings. Look on—

Suddenly the old man ceased, his head fell forward upon his withered breast. When the White Man to whom he told this story lifted it and looked at him, he was dead!

# BOOK V

## THE GHOST KINGS

### I

#### THE GIRL

The afternoon was intensely, terribly hot. Looked at from the high ground where they were encamped above the river, the sea, a mile or two to her right—for this was the coast of Pondo-land—to little Rachel Dove staring at it with sad eyes, seemed an illimitable sheet of stagnant oil. Yet there was no sun, for a grey haze hung like a veil beneath the arch of the sky, so dense and thick that its rays were cut off from the earth which lay below silent and stifled. Tom, the Kaffir driver, had told her that a storm was coming, a father of storms, which would end the great drought. Therefore he had gone to a kloof in the mountains where the oxen were in charge of the other two native boys—since on this upland there was no pasturage to drive them back to the waggon. For, as he explained to her, in such tempests cattle are apt to take fright and rush away for miles, and without cattle their plight would be even worse than it was at present.

At least this was what Tom said, but Rachel, who had been brought up among natives and understood their mind, knew that his real reason was that he wished to be out of the way when the baby was buried. Kaffirs do not like death, unless it comes by the assegai in war, and Tom, a good creature, had been fond of that baby during its short little life. Well, it was buried now; he had finished digging its resting-place in the hard soil before he went. Rachel, poor child, for she was but fifteen, had borne it to its last bed, and her father had unpacked his surplice from a box, put it on and read the Burial Service over the grave. Afterwards together they had filled in that dry, red earth, and rolled stones on to it, and as there were few flowers at this season of the year, placed a shrivelled branch or two of mimosa upon the stones—the best offering they had to make.

Rachel and her father were the sole mourners at this funeral, if we may omit two rock rabbits that sat upon a shelf of stone in a neighbouring cliff, and an old baboon which peered at these strange proceedings from its crest, and finally pushed down a boulder before it departed, barking indignantly. Her mother could not come because she was ill with grief and fever in a little tent by the waggon. When it was all over they returned to her, and there had been a painful scene.

Mrs. Dove was lying on a bed made of the cartel, or frame strung with strips of green hide, which had been removed from the waggon, a pretty, pale-faced woman with a profusion of fair hair. Rachel always remembered that scene. The hot tent with its flaps turned up to let in whatever air there might be. Her mother in a blue dressing-gown, dingy with wear and travel, from which one of the ribbon bows hung by a thread, her face turned to the canvas and weeping silently. The gaunt form of her father with his fanatical, saint-like face, pale beneath its tan, his high forehead over which fell one grizzled lock, his thin, set lips and far-away grey eyes, taking off his surplice and folding it up with quick movements of his nervous hands, and herself, a scared, wondering child, watching them both and longing to slip away to indulge her grief in solitude. It seemed an age before that surplice was folded, pushed into a linen bag which in their old home used to hold dirty clothes, and finally stowed away in a deal box with a broken hinge. At length it was done, and her father straightened himself with a sigh, and said in a voice that tried to be cheerful:

“Do not weep, Janey. Remember this is all for the best. The Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Her mother sat up looking at him reproachfully with her blue eyes, and answered in her soft Scotch accent:

“You said that to me before, John, when the other one went, down at Grahamstown, and I am tired of hearing it. Don’t ask me to bless the Lord when He takes my babes, no, nor any mother. He Who could spare them if He chose. Why should the Lord give me fever so that I could not nurse it, and make a snake bite the cow so that it died? If the Lord’s ways are such, then those of the savages are more merciful.”

“Janey, Janey, do not blaspheme,” her father had exclaimed. “You should rejoice that the child is in Heaven.”

“Then do you rejoice and leave me to grieve. From to-day I only make one prayer, that I may never have another. John,” she added with a sudden outburst, “it is your fault. You know well I told you how it would be. I told you that if you would come this mad journey the babe would die, aye, and I tell you”—here her voice sank to a kind of wailing whisper—“before the tale is ended others will die too, all of us, except Rachel there, who was born to live her life. Well, for my part, the sooner the better, for I wish to go to sleep with my children.”

“This is evil,” broke in her husband, “evil and rebellious—”

“Then evil and rebellious let it be, John. But why am I evil if I have the second sight like my mother before me? Oh! she warned me what must come if I married you, and I would not listen; now I warn you, and you will not listen. Well, so be it, we must dree our own weird, everyone of us, a short one; all save Rachel, who was born to live her life. Man, I tell you, that the Spirit drives you on to convert the heathen just for one thing, that the heathen may make a martyr of you.”

“So let them,” her father answered proudly. “I seek no better end.”

“Aye,” she moaned, sinking back upon the cartel, “so let them, but my babe, my poor babe! Why should my babe die because too much religion has made you mad to win a martyr’s crown? Martyrs should not marry and have children, John.”

Then, unable to bear any more of it, Rachel had fled from the tent, and sat herself down at a distance to watch the oily sea.

It has been said that Rachel was only fifteen, but in Southern Africa girls grow quickly to womanhood; also her experiences had been of a nature to ripen her intelligence. Thus she was quite able to form a judgment of her parents, their virtues and their weaknesses. Rachel was English born, but had no recollection of England since she came to South Africa when she was four years old. It was shortly after her birth that this missionary-fury seized upon her father as a result of some meetings which he had attended in London. He was then a clergyman with a good living in a quiet Hertfordshire parish, and possessed of some private means, but nothing would suit him short of abandoning all his prospects and sailing for South Africa, in obedience to his “call.” Rachel knew all

this because her mother had often told her, adding that she and her people, who were of a good Scotch family, had struggled against this South African scheme even to the verge of open quarrel.

At length, indeed, it came to a choice between submission and separation. Mr. Dove had declared that not even for her sake would he be guilty of "sin against the Spirit" which had chosen him to bring light to those who sat in darkness—that is, the Kaffirs, and especially to that section of them who were in bondage to the Boers. For at this time an agitation was in progress in England which led ultimately to the freeing of the slaves of the Cape Dutch, and afterwards to the exodus of the latter into the wilderness and most of those wars with which our generation is familiar. So, as she was devoted to her husband, who, apart from his religious enthusiasm, or rather possession, was in truth a very lovable man, she gave way and came. Before they sailed, however, the general gloom was darkened by Mrs. Dove announcing that something in her heart told her that neither of them would ever see home again, as they were doomed to die at the hands of savages.

Now whatever the reason or explanation, scientifically impossible as the fact might be, it remained a fact that Janey Dove, like her mother and several of her Scottish ancestors, was foresighted, or at least so her kith and kin believed. Therefore, when she communicated to them her conviction as though it were a piece of everyday intelligence, they never doubted its accuracy for a minute, but only redoubled their efforts to prevent her from going to Africa. Even her husband did not doubt it, but remarked irritably that it seemed a pity she could not sometimes be foresighted as to agreeable future events, since for his part he was quite willing to wait for disagreeable ones until they happened. Not that he quailed personally from the prospect of martyrdom; this he could contemplate with complacency and even enthusiasm, but, zealot though he was, he did shrink from the thought that his beautiful and delicate wife might be called upon to share the glory of that crown. Indeed, as his own purpose was unalterable, he now himself suggested that he should go forth to seek it alone.

Then it was that his wife showed an unsuspected strength of character. She said that she had married him for better or for worse against the wishes of her family; that she loved and respected him, and that she would rather be murdered by Kaffirs in due season than endure a separation which might be lifelong. So in the end the pair of them with their little daughter Rachel departed in a sailing ship, and their friends and relations knew them no more.

Their subsequent history up to the date of the opening of this story may be told in very few words. As a missionary the Reverend John Dove was not a success. The Boers in the eastern part of the Cape Colony where he laboured, did not appreciate his efforts to Christianise their slaves. The slaves did not appreciate them either, inasmuch as, saint though he might be, he quite lacked the sympathetic insight which would enable him to understand that a native with thousands of generations of savagery behind him is a different being from a highly educated Christian, and one who should be judged by another law. Their sins, amongst which he included all their most cherished inherited customs, appalled him, as he continually proclaimed from the housetops. Moreover, when occasionally he did snatch a brand from the burning, and the said brand subsequently proved that it was still alight, or worse still, replaced its original failings by those of the white man, such as drink, theft and lying, whereof before it had been innocent, he would openly condemn it to eternal punishment. Further, he was too insubordinate, or, as he called it, too honest, to submit to the authority of his local superiors in the Church, and therefore would only work for his own hand. Finally he caused his "cup to overflow," as he described it, or, in plain English, made the country too hot to hold him, by becoming involved in a bitter quarrel with the Boers. Of these, on the whole, worthy folk, he formed the worst; and in the main a very unjust opinion, which he sent to England to be reprinted in Church papers, or to the Home Government to be published in Blue-books. In due course these documents reached South Africa again, where they were translated into Dutch and became incidentally one of the causes of the Great Trek.

The Boers were furious and threatened to shoot him as a slanderer. The English authorities were also furious, and requested him to cease from controversy or to leave the country. At last, stubborn as he might be, circumstances proved too much for him, and as his conscience would not allow him to be silent, Mr. Dove chose the latter alternative. The only question was whither he should go. As he was well off, having inherited a moderate fortune in addition to what he had before he left England, his poor wife pleaded with him to return home, pointing out that there he would be able to lay his case before the British public. This course had attractions for him, but after a night's reflection and prayer, he rejected it as a specious temptation sent by Satan.

What, he argued, should he return to live in luxury in England not only unmartyred but a palpable failure, his mission quite unfulfilled? His wife might go if she liked, and take their surviving children, Rachel and the new-born baby boy, with her (they had buried two other little girls), but he would stick to his post and his duty. He had seen some Englishmen who had visited the country called Natal where white people were beginning to settle. In that land it seemed there were no slave-driving Boers, and the natives, according to all accounts, much needed the guidance of the Gospel, especially a certain king of the people called Zulus, who was named Chaka or Dingaan, he was not sure which. This ferocious person he particularly desired to encounter, having little doubt that in the absence of the contaminating Boer, he would be able to induce him to see the error of his ways and change the national customs, especially those of fighting and, worse still, of polygamy.

His unhappy wife listened and wept, for now the martyr's crown which she had always foreseen, seemed uncomfortably near, indeed as it were, it glowed blood red within reach of her hand. Moreover, in her heart she did not believe that Kaffirs could be converted, at any rate at present. They were fighting men, as her Highland forefathers had been, and her Scottish blood could understand the weakness, while, as for this polygamy, she had long ago secretly concluded that the practice was one which suited them very well, as it had suited David and Solomon, and even Abraham. But for all this, although she was sure in her uncanny fashion that her baby's death would come of her staying, she refused to leave her husband as she had refused eleven years before.

Doubtless affection was at the bottom of it, for Janey Dove was a very faithful woman; also there were other things—her fatalism, and stronger still, her weariness. She believed that they were doomed. Well, let the doom fall; she had no fear of the Beyond. At the best it might be happy, and at the worst deep, everlasting rest and peace, and she felt as though she needed thousands of years of rest and peace. Moreover, she was sure no harm would come to Rachel, the very apple of her eye; that she was marked to live and to find happiness even in this wild land. So it came about that she refused her husband's offer to allow her to return home where she had no longer any ties, and for perhaps the twentieth time prepared herself to journey she knew not whither.

Rachel, seated there in the sunless, sweltering heat, reflected on these things. Of course she did not know all the story, but most of it had come under her observation in one way or other, and being shrewd by nature, she could guess the rest, for she who was companionless had much time for reflection and for guessing. She sympathised with her father in his ideas, understanding vaguely that there was something large and noble about them, but in the main, body and mind, she was her mother's child. Already she showed her mother's dreamy beauty, to which were added her father's straight features and clear grey eyes, together with a promise of

his height. But of his character she had little, that is outside of a courage and fixity of purpose which marked them both. For the rest she was far, or fore-seeing, like her mother, apprehending the end of things by some strange instinct; also very faithful in character.

Rachel was unhappy. She did not mind the hardship and the heat, for she was accustomed to both, and her health was so perfect that it would have needed much worse things to affect her. But she loved the baby that was gone, and wondered whether she would ever see it again. On the whole she thought so, for here that intuition of hers came in, but at the best she was sure that there would be long to wait. She loved her mother also, and grieved more for her than for herself, especially now when she was so ill. Moreover, she knew and shared her mind. This journey, she felt, was foolishness; her father was a man "led by a star" as the natives say, and would follow it over the edge of the world and be no nearer. He was not fit to have charge of her mother.

Of herself she did not think so much. Still, at Grahamstown, for a year or so there had been other children for companions, Dutch most of them, it is true, and all rough in mind and manner. Yet they were white and human. While she played with them she could forget she knew so much more than they did; that, for instance, she could read the Gospels in Greek—which her father had taught her ever since she was a little child—while they could scarcely spell them out in the Taal, or Boer dialect, and that they had never heard even of William the Conqueror. She did not care particularly about Greek and William the Conqueror, but she did care for friends, and now they were all gone from her, gone like the baby, as far off as William the Conqueror. And she, she was alone in the wilderness with a father who talked and thought of Heaven all day long, and a mother who lived in memories and walked in the shadow of doom, and oh! she was unhappy.

Her grey eyes filled with tears so that she could no longer see that everlasting ocean, which she did not regret as it wearied her. She wiped them with the back of her hand that was burnt quite brown by the sun, and turning impatiently, fell to watching two of those strange insects known as the Praying Mantis, or often in South Africa as Hottentot gods, which after a series of genuflections, were now fighting desperately among the dead stalks of grass at her feet. Men could not be more savage, she reflected, for really their ferocity was hideous. Then a great tear fell upon the head of one of them, and astonished by this phenomenon, or thinking perhaps that it had begun to rain, it ran away and hid itself, while its adversary sat up and looked about it triumphantly, taking to itself all the credit of conquest.

She heard a step behind her, and having again furtively wiped her eyes with her hand, the only handkerchief available, looked round to see her father stalking towards her.

"Why are you crying, Rachel?" he asked in an irritable voice. "It is wrong to cry because your little brother has been taken to glory."

"Jesus cried over Lazarus, and He wasn't even His brother," she answered in a reflective voice, then by way of defending herself added inconsequently: "I was watching two Hottentot gods fight."

As Mr. Dove could think of no reply to her very final Scriptural example, he attacked her on the latter point.

"A cruel amusement," he said, "especially as I have heard that boys, yes, and men, too, pit these poor insects against each other, and make bets upon them."

"Nature is cruel, not I, father. Nature is always cruel," and she glanced towards the little grave under the rock. Then, while for the second time her father hesitated, not knowing what to answer, she added quickly, "Is mother better now?"

"No," he said, "worse, I think, very hysterical and quite unable to see things in the true light."

She rose and faced him, for she was a courageous child, then asked:

"Father, why don't you take her back? She isn't fit to go on. It is wrong to drag her into this wilderness."

At this question he grew very angry, and began to scold and to talk of the wickedness of abandoning his "call."

"But mother has not got a 'call,'" she broke in.

Then, as for the third time he could find no answer, he declared vehemently that they were both in league against him, instruments used by the Evil One to tempt him from his duty by working on his natural fears and affections, and so forth.

The child watched him with her clear grey eyes, saying nothing further, till at last he grew calm and paused.

"We are all much upset," he went on, rubbing his high forehead with his thin hand. "I suppose it is the heat and this—this—trial of our faith. What did I come to speak to you about? Oh! I remember; your mother will eat nothing, and keeps asking for fruit. Do you know where there is any fruit?"

"It doesn't grow here, father." Then her face brightened, and she added: "Yes, it does, though. The day that we outspanned in this camp mother and I went down to the river and walked to that kind of island beyond the dry donga to get some flowers that grow on the wet ground. I saw lots of Cape gooseberries there, all quite ripe."

"Then go and get some, dear. You will have plenty of time before dark."

She started up as though to obey, then checked herself and said:

"Mother told me that I was not to go to the river alone, because we saw the spoor of lions and crocodiles in the mud."

"God will guard you from the lions and the crocodiles, if there are any," he answered doggedly, for was not this an opportunity to show his faith? "You are not afraid, are you?"

"No, father. I am afraid of nothing, perhaps because I don't care what happens. I will get the basket and go at once."

In another minute she was walking quickly towards the river, a lonely little figure in that great place. Mr. Dove watched her uneasily till she was hidden in the haze, for his reason told him that this was a foolish journey.

"The Lord will send His angels to protect her," he muttered to himself. "Oh! if only I could have more faith, all these troubles come upon me from a lack of faith, and through that I am continually tempted. I think I will run after her and go, too. No, there is Janey calling me, I cannot leave her alone. The Lord will protect her, but I need not mention to Janey that she has gone, unless she asks me outright. She will be quite safe, the storm will not break to-night."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BOY

The river towards which Rachel headed, one of the mouths of the Umtavuna, was much further off than it looked; it was, indeed, not less than a mile and a half away. She had said that she feared nothing, and it was true, for extraordinary courage was one of this child's characteristics. She could scarcely ever remember having felt afraid—for herself, except sometimes of her father when he grew angry—or was it mad that he grew?—and raged at her, threatening her with punishment in another world in reward for her childish sins. Even then the sensation did not last long, because she could not believe in that punishment which he so vividly imagined. So it came about that now she had no fear when there was so much cause.

For this place was lonely; not a living creature could be seen. Moreover, a dreadful hush brooded on the face of earth, and in the sky above; only far away over the mountains the lightning flickered incessantly, as though a monster in the skies were licking their precipices and pinnacles with a thousand tongues of fire. Nothing stirred, not even an insect; every creature that drew breath had hidden itself away until the coming terror was overpast.

The atmosphere was full of electricity struggling to be free. Although she knew not what it was, Rachel felt it in her blood and brain. In some strange way it affected her mind, opening windows there through which the eyes of her soul looked out. She became aware of some new influence drawing near to her life; of a sudden her budding womanhood burst into flower in her breast, shone on by an unseen sun; she was no more a child. Her being quickened and acknowledged the kinship of all things that are. That brooding, flame-threaded sky—she was a part of it, the earth she trod, it was a part of her; the Mind that caused the stars to roll and her to live, dwelt in her bosom, and like a babe she nestled within the arm of its almighty will.

Now, as in a dream, Rachel descended the steep, rock-strewn banks of the dry branch of the river-bed, wending her way between the boulders and noting that rotten weeds and peeled brushwood rested against the stems of the mimosa thorns which grew there, tokens which told her that here in times of flood the water flowed. Well, there was little enough of it now, only a pool or two to form a mirror for the lightning. In front of her lay the island where grew the Cape gooseberries, or winter cherries as they are sometimes called, which she came to seek. It was a low piece of ground, a quarter of a mile long, perhaps, but in the centre of it were some great rocks and growing among the rocks, trees, one of them higher than the rest. Beyond it ran the true river, even now at the end of the dry season three or four hundred yards in breadth, though so shallow that it could be forded by an ox-drawn waggon.

It was raining on the mountains yonder, raining in torrents poured from those inky clouds, as it had done off and on for the past twenty-four hours, and above their fire-laced bosom floated glorious-coloured masses of misty vapour, enflamed in a thousand hues by the arrows of the sinking sun. Above her, however, there was no sun, nothing but the curtain of cloud which grew gradually from grey to black and minute by minute sank nearer to the earth.

Walking through the dry river-bed, Rachel reached the island which was the last and highest of a line of similar islands that, separated from each other by narrow breadths of water, lay like a chain, between the dry donga and the river. Here she began to gather her gooseberries, picking the silvery, octagonal pods from the green stems on which they grew. At first she opened these pods, removing from each the yellow, sub-acid berry, thinking that thus her basket would hold more, but presently abandoned that plan as it took too much time. Also although the plants were plentiful enough, in that low and curious light it was not easy to see them among the dense growth of reedy vegetation.

While she was thus engaged she became aware of a low moaning noise and a stirring of the air about her which caused the leaves and grasses to quiver without bending. Then followed an ice-cold wind that grew in strength until it blew keen and hard, ruffling the surface of the marshy pools. Still Rachel went on with her task, for her basket was not more than half full, till presently the heavens above her began to mutter and to groan, and drops of rain as large as shillings fell upon her back and hands. Now she understood that it was time for her to be going, and started to walk across the island—for at the moment she was near its farther side—to reach the deep, rocky river-bed or donga.

Before ever she came there, with awful suddenness and inconceivable fury, the tempest burst. A hurricane of wind tore down the valley to the sea, and for a few minutes the darkness became so dense that she could scarcely stumble forward. Then there was light, a dreadful light; all the heavens seemed to take fire, yes, and the earth, too; it was as though its last dread catastrophe had fallen on the world.

Buffeted, breathless, Rachel at length reached the edge of the deep river-bed that may have been fifty yards in width, and was about to step into it when she became aware of two things. The first was a seething, roaring noise so loud that it seemed to still even the bellowing of the thunder, and the next, now seen, now lost, as the lightning pulsed and darkened, the figure of a youth, a white youth, who had dismounted from a horse that remained near to but above him, and stood, a gun in his hand, upon a rock at the farther side of the donga.

He had seen her also and was shouting to her, of this she was sure, for although the sound of his voice was lost in the tumult, she could perceive his gesticulations when the lightning flared, and even the movement of his lips. Wondering vaguely what a white boy could be doing in such a place and very glad at the prospect of his company, Rachel began to advance towards him in short rushes whenever the lightning showed her where to set her feet. She had made two of these rushes when from the violence and character of his movements at length she understood that he was trying to prevent her from coming further, and paused confused.

Another instant and she knew why. Some hundreds of yards above her the river bed took a turn, and suddenly round this turn, crested with foam, appeared a wall of water in which trees and the carcasses of animals were whirled along like straws. The flood had come down from the mountains, and was advancing on her more swiftly than a horse could gallop. Rachel ran forward a little way,

then understanding that she had no time to cross, stood bewildered, for the fearful tumult of the elements and the dreadful roaring of that advancing wall of foam overwhelmed her senses. The lightnings went out for a moment, then began to play again with tenfold frequency and force. They struck upon the nearing torrent, they struck in the dry bed before it, and leapt upwards from the earth as though Titans and gods were hurling spears at one another.

In the lurid sheen of them she saw the lad leap from his rock and rush towards her. A flash fell and split a boulder not thirty paces from him, causing him to stagger, but he recovered himself and ran on. Now he was quite close, but the water was closer still. It was coming in tiers or ledges, a thin sheet of foam in front, then other layers laid upon it, each of them a few yards behind its fellow. On the top ledge, in its very crest, was a bull buffalo, dead, but held head on and down as though it were charging, and Rachel thought vaguely that from the direction in which it came in a few moments its horns would strike her. Another second and an arm was about her waist—she noted how white it was where the sleeve was rolled up, dead white in the lightning—and she was being dragged towards the shore that she had left. The first film of water struck her and nearly washed her from her feet, but she was strong and active, and the touch of that arm seemed to have given her back her wit, so she regained them and splashed forward. Now the next tier took them both above the knees, but for a moment shallowed so that they did not fall. The high bank was scarce five yards away, and the wall of waters perhaps a score.

“Together for life or death!” said an English voice in her ear, and the shout of it only reached her in a whisper.

The boy and the girl leapt forward like bucks. They reached the bank and struggled up it. The hungry waters sprang at them like a living thing, grasping their feet and legs as though with hands; a stick as it whirled by them struck the lad upon the shoulder, and where it struck the clothes were rent away and red blood appeared. Almost he fell, but this time it was Rachel who supported him. Then one more struggle and they rolled exhausted on the ground just clear of the lip of the racing flood.

Thus through tempest, threatened by the waters of death from which he snatched her, and companioned by heaven’s lightnings, did Richard Darrien come into the life of Rachel Dove.

Presently, having recovered their breath, they sat up and looked at each other by lightning light, which was all there was. He was a handsome lad of about seventeen, though short for his years; sturdy in build, very fair-skinned and curiously enough with a singular resemblance to Rachel, except that his hair was a few shades darker than hers. They had the same clear grey eyes, and the same well-cut features; indeed seen together, most people would have thought them brother and sister, and remarked upon their family likeness. Rachel spoke the first.

“Who are you?” she shouted into his ear in one of the intervals of darkness, “and why did you come here?”

“My name is Richard Darrien,” he answered at the top of his voice, “and I don’t know why I came. I suppose something sent me to save you.”

“Yes,” she replied with conviction, “something sent you. If you had not come I should be dead, shouldn’t I? In glory, as my father says.”

“I don’t know about glory, or what it is,” he remarked, after thinking this saying over, “but you would have been rolling out to sea in the flood water, like that buffalo, with not a whole bone in you, which isn’t my idea of glory.”

“That’s because your father isn’t a missionary,” said Rachel.

“No, he is an officer, naval officer, or at least he was, now he trades and hunts. We are coming down from Natal. But what’s your name?”

“Rachel Dove.”

“Well, Rachel Dove—that’s very pretty, Rachel Dove, as you would be if you were cleaner—it is going to rain presently. Is there any place where we can shelter here?”

“I am as clean as you are,” she answered indignantly. “The river muddied me, that’s all. You can go and shelter, I will stop and let the rain wash me.”

“And die of the cold or be struck by lightning. Of course I knew you weren’t dirty really. Is there any place?”

She nodded, mollified.

“I think I know one. Come,” and she stretched out her hand.

He took it, and thus hand in hand they made their way to the highest point of the island where the trees grew, for here the rocks piled up together made a kind of cave in which Rachel and her mother had sat for a little while when they visited the place. As they groped their way towards it the lightning blazed out and they saw a great jagged flash strike the tallest tree and shatter it, causing some wild beast that had sheltered there to rush past them snorting.

“That doesn’t look very safe,” said Richard halting, “but come on, it isn’t likely to hit the same spot twice.”

“Hadn’t you better leave your gun?” she suggested, for all this while that weapon had been slung to his back and she knew that lightning has an affinity for iron.

“Certainly not,” he answered, “it is a new one which my father gave me, and I won’t be parted from it.”

Then they went on and reached the little cave just as the rain broke over them in earnest. As it chanced the place was dry, being so situated that all water ran away from it. They crouched in it shivering, trying to cover themselves with dead sticks and brushwood that had lodged here in the wet season when the whole island was under water.

“It would be nice enough if only we had a fire,” said Rachel, her teeth chattering as she spoke.

The lad Richard thought a while. Then he opened a leather case that hung on his rifle sling and took from it a powder flask and flint and steel and some tinder. Pouring a little powder on the damp tinder, he struck the flint until at length a spark caught and fired the powder. The tinder caught also, though reluctantly, and while Rachel blew on it, he felt round for dead leaves and little sticks, some of which were coaxed into flame.

After this things were easy since fuel lay about in abundance, so that soon they had a splendid fire burning in the mouth of the cave whence the smoke escaped. Now they were able to warm and dry themselves, and as the heat entered into their chilled bodies, their spirits rose. Indeed the contrast between this snug hiding place and blazing fire of drift wood and the roaring tempest without, conduced to cheerfulness in young people who had just narrowly escaped from drowning.

“I am so hungry,” said Rachel, presently.

Again Richard began to search, and this time produced from the pocket of his coat a long and thick strip of sun-dried meat.

"Can you eat biltong?" he asked.

"Of course," she answered eagerly.

"Then you must cut it up," he said, giving her the meat and his knife. "My arm hurts me, I can't."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "how selfish I am. I forgot about that stick striking you. Let me see the place."

He took off his coat and knelt down while she stood over him and examined his wound by the light of the fire, to find that the left upper arm was bruised, torn and bleeding. As it will be remembered that Rachel had no handkerchief, she asked Richard for his, which she soaked in a pool of rain water just outside the cave. Then, having washed the hurt thoroughly, she bandaged his arm with the handkerchief and bade him put on his coat again, saying confidently that he would be well in a few days.

"You are clever," he remarked with admiration. "Who taught you to bandage wounds?"

"My father always doctors the Kaffirs and I help him," Rachel answered, as, having stretched out her hands for the pouring rain to wash them, she took the biltong and began to cut it in thin slices.

These she made him eat before she touched any herself, for she saw that the loss of blood had weakened him. Indeed her own meal was a light one, since half the strip of meat must, she declared, be put aside in case they should not be able to get off the island. Then he saw why she had made him eat first and was very angry with himself and her, but she only laughed at him and answered that she had learned from the Kaffirs that men must be fed before women as they were more important in the world.

"You mean more selfish," he answered, contemplating this wise little maid and her tiny portion of biltong, which she swallowed very slowly, perhaps to pretend that her appetite was already satisfied with its superabundance. Then he fell to imploring her to take the rest, saying that he would be able to shoot some game in the morning, but she only shook her little head and set her lips obstinately.

"Are you a hunter?" she asked to change the subject.

"Yes," he answered with pride, "that is, almost. At any rate I have shot eland, and an elephant, but no lions yet. I was following the spoor of a lion just now, but it got up between the rocks and bolted away before I could shoot. I think that it must have been after you."

"Perhaps," said Rachel. "There are some about here; I have heard them roaring at night."

"Then," he went on, "while I was staring at you running across this island, I heard the sound of the water and saw it rushing down the donga, and saw too that you must be drowned, and—you know the rest."

"Yes, I know the rest," she said, looking at him with shining eyes. "You risked your life to save mine, and therefore," she added with quiet conviction, "it belongs to you."

He stared at her and remarked simply:

"I wish it did. This morning I wished to kill a lion with my new *roer*," and he pointed to the heavy gun at his side, "above everything else, but to-night I wish that your life belonged to me—above anything else."

Their eyes met, and child though she was, Rachel saw something in those of Richard that caused her to turn her head.

"Where are you going?" she asked quickly.

"Back to my father's farm in Graaf-Reinet, to sell the ivory. There are three others besides my father, two Boers and one Englishman."

"And I am going to Natal where you come from," she answered, "so I suppose that after to-night we shall never see each other again, although my life does belong to you—that is if we escape."

Just then the tempest which had lulled a little, came on again in fury, accompanied by a hurricane of wind and deluge of rain, through which the lightning blazed incessantly. The thunderclaps too were so loud and constant that the sound of them, which shook the earth, made it impossible for Richard and Rachel to hear each other speak. So they were silent perforce. Only Richard rose and looked out of the cave, then turned and beckoned to his companion. She came to him and watched, till suddenly a blinding sheet of flame lit up the whole landscape. Then she saw what he was looking at, for now nearly all the island, except that high part of it on which they stood, was under water, hidden by a brown, seething torrent, that tore past them to the sea.

"If it rises much more, we shall be drowned," he shouted in her ear.

She nodded, then cried back:

"Let us say our prayers and get ready," for it seemed to Rachel that the "glory" of which her father spoke so often was nearer to them than ever.

Then she drew him back into the cave and motioned to him to kneel beside her, which he did bashfully enough, and for a while the two children, for they were little more, remained thus with clasped hands and moving lips. Presently the thunder lessened a little so that once more they could hear each other speak.

"What did you pray about?" he asked when they had risen from their knees.

"I prayed that you might escape, and that my mother might not grieve for me too much," she answered simply. "And you?"

"I? Oh! the same—that you might escape. I did not pray for my mother as she is dead, and I forgot about father."

"Look, look!" exclaimed Rachel, pointing to the mouth of the cave.

He stared out at the darkness, and there, through the thin flames of the fire, saw two great yellow shapes which appeared to be walking up and down and glaring into the cave.

"Lions," he gasped, snatching at his gun.

"Don't shoot," she cried, "you might make them angry. Perhaps they only want to take refuge like ourselves. The fire will keep them away."

He nodded, then remembering that the charge and priming of his flint-lock *roer* must be damp, hurriedly set to work by the help of Rachel to draw it with the screw on the end of his ramrod, and this done, to reload with some powder that he had already placed to dry on a flat stone near the fire. This operation took five minutes or more. When at length it was finished, and the lock reprimed with the dry powder, the two of them, Richard holding the *roer*, crept to the mouth of the cave and looked out again.

The great storm was passing now, and the rain grew thinner, but from time to time the lightning, no longer forked or chain-shaped, flared in wide sheets. By its ghastly illumination they saw a strange sight. There on the island top the two lions marched backwards and forwards as though they were in a cage, making a kind of whimpering noise as they went, and staring round them uneasily. Moreover, these were not alone, for gathered there were various other animals, driven down by the flood from the islands above them, reed and water bucks, and a great eland. Among these the lions walked without making the slightest effort to attack them, nor did the antelopes, which stood sniffing and staring at the torrent, take any notice of the lions, or attempt to escape.

"You are right," said Richard, "they are all frightened, and will not harm us, unless the water rises more, and they rush into the cave. Come, make up the fire."

They did so, and sat down on its further side, watching till, as nothing happened, their dread of the lions passed away, and they began to talk again, telling to each other the stories of their lives.

Richard Darrien, it seemed, had been in Africa about five years, his father having emigrated there on the death of his mother, as he had nothing but the half-pay of a retired naval captain, and he hoped to better his fortunes in a new land. He had been granted a farm in the Graaf-Reinet district, but like many other of the early settlers, met with misfortunes. Now, to make money, he had taken to elephant-hunting, and with his partners was just returning from a very successful expedition in the coast lands of Natal, at that time an almost unexplored territory. His father had allowed Richard to accompany the party, but when they got back, added the boy with sorrow, he was to be sent for two or three years to the college at Capetown, since until then his father had not been able to afford him the luxury of an education. Afterwards he wished him to adopt a profession, but on this point he—Richard—had made up his mind, although at present he said little about that. He would be a hunter, and nothing else, until he grew too old to hunt, when he intended to take to farming.

His story done, Rachel told him hers, to which he listened eagerly.

"Is your father mad?" he asked when she had finished.

"No," she answered. "How dare you suggest it? He is only very good; much better than anybody else."

"Well, it seems to come to much the same thing, doesn't it?" said Richard, "for otherwise he would not have sent you to gather gooseberries here with such a storm coming on."

"Then why did your father send you to hunt lions with such a storm coming on?" she asked.

"He didn't send me. I came of myself; I said that I wanted to shoot a buck, and finding the spoor of a lion I followed it. The waggons must be a long way ahead now, for when I left them I returned to that kloof where I had seen the buck. I don't know how I shall overtake them again, and certainly nobody will ever think of looking for me here, as after this rain they can't spoor the horse."

"Supposing you don't find it—I mean your horse—tomorrow, what shall you do?" asked Rachel. "We haven't got any to lend you."

"Walk and try to catch them up," he replied.

"And if you can't catch them up?"

"Come back to you, as the wild Kaffirs ahead would kill me if I went on alone."

"Oh! But what would your father think?"

"He would think there was one boy the less, that's all, and be sorry for a while. People often vanish in Africa where there are so many lions and savages."

Rachel reflected a while, then finding the subject difficult, suggested that he should find out what their own particular lions were doing. So Richard went to look, and reported that the storm had ceased, and that by the moonlight he could see no lions or any other animals, so he thought that they must have gone away somewhere. The flood waters also appeared to be running down. Comforted by this intelligence Rachel piled on the fire nearly all the wood that remained to them. Then they sat down again side by side, and tried to continue their conversation. By degrees it drooped, however, and the end of it was that presently this pair were fast asleep in each other's arms.

## CHAPTER III.

### GOOD-BYE

Rachel was the first to wake, which she did, feeling cold, for the fire had burnt almost out. She rose and walked from the cave. The dawn was breaking quietly, for now no wind stirred, and no rain fell. So dense was the mist which rose from the river and sodden land, however, that she could not see two yards in front of her, and fearing lest she should stumble on the lions or some other animals, she did not dare to wander far from the mouth of the cave. Near to it was a large, hollow-surfaced rock, filled now with water like a bath. From this she drank, then washed and tidied herself as well as she could without the aid of soap, comb or towels, which done, she returned to the cave.

As Richard was still sleeping, very quietly she laid a little more wood on the embers to keep him warm, then sat down by his side and watched him, for now the grey light of the dawning crept into their place of refuge. To her this slumbering lad looked beautiful, and as she studied him her childish heart was filled with a strange, new tenderness, such as she had never felt before. Somehow he had grown dear to her, and Rachel knew that she would never forget him while she lived. Then following this wave of affection came a sharp and sudden pain, for she remembered that presently they must part, and never see each other any more. At least this seemed certain, for how could they when he was travelling to the Cape and she to Natal?

And yet, and yet a strange conviction told her otherwise. The power of prescience which came to her from her mother and her Highland forefathers awoke in her breast, and she knew that her life and this lad's life were interwoven. Perhaps she dozed off again, sitting there by the fire. At any rate it appeared to her that she dreamed and saw things in her dream. Wild tumultuous scenes opened themselves before her in a vision; scenes of blood and terror, sounds, too, of voices crying war. It appeared to her as if she were mad, and yet ruled a queen, death came near to her a score of times, but always fled away at her command. Now Richard Darrien was with her, and now she had lost him and sought—ah! how she sought through dark places of doom and unnatural night. It was as though he were dead, and she yet living, searched for him among the habitations of the dead. She found him also, and drew him towards her. How, she did not know.

Then there was a scene, a last scene, which remained fixed in her mind after everything else had faded away. She saw the huge trunks of forest trees, enormous, towering trees, gloomy trees beneath which the darkness could be felt. Down their avenues shot the level arrows of the dawn. They fell on her, Rachel, dressed in robes of white skin, turning her long, outspread hair to gold. They fell upon little people with faces of a dusky pallor, one of them crouched against the bole of a tree, a wizened monkey of a man who in all that vastness looked small. They fell upon another man, white-skinned, half-naked, with a yellow beard, who was lashed by hide ropes to a second tree. It was Richard Darrien grown older, and at his feet lay a broad-bladed spear!

The vision left her, or she was awakened from her sleep, whichever it might be, by the pleasant voice of this same Richard, who stood yawning before her, and said:

"It is time to get up. I say, why do you look so queer? Are you ill?"

"I have been up, long ago," she answered, struggling to her feet. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, except that you seemed a ghost a minute ago. Now you are a girl again, it must have been the light."

"Did I? Well, I dreamed of ghosts, or something of the sort," and she told him of the vision of the trees, though of the rest she could remember little.

"That's a queer story," he said when she had finished. "I wish you had got to the end of it, I should like to know what happened."

"We shall find out one day," she answered solemnly.

"Do you mean to say that you believe it is true, Rachel?"

"Yes, Richard, one day I shall see you tied to that tree."

"Then I hope you will cut me loose, that is all. What a funny girl you are," he added doubtfully. "I know what it is, you want something to eat. Have the rest of that biltong."

"No," she answered. "I could not touch it. There is a pool of water out there, go and bathe your arm, and I will bind it up again."

He went, still wondering, and a few minutes later returned, his face and head dripping, and whispered:

"Give me the gun. There is a reed buck standing close by. I saw it through the mist; we'll have a jolly breakfast off him."

She handed him the *roer*, and crept after him out of the cave. About thirty yards away to the right, looming very large through the dense fog, stood the fat reed buck. Richard wriggled towards it, for he wanted to make sure of his shot, while Rachel crouched behind a stone. The buck becoming alarmed, turned its head, and began to sniff at the air, whereon he lifted the gun and just as it was about to spring away, aimed and fired. Down it went dead, whereon, rejoicing in his triumph like any other young hunter who thinks not of the wonderful and happy life that he has destroyed, Richard sprang upon it exultantly, drawing his knife as he came, while Rachel, who always shrank from such sights, retreated to the cave. Half an hour later, however, being healthy and hungry, she had no objection to eating venison toasted upon sticks in the red embers of their fire.

Their meal finished at length, they reloaded the gun, and although the mist was still very dense, set out upon a journey of exploration, as by now the sun was shining brightly above the curtain of low-lying vapour. Stumbling on through the rocks, they discovered that the water had fallen almost as quickly as it rose on the previous night. The island was strewn, however, with the trunks of trees and other debris that it had brought down, amongst which lay the carcasses of bucks and smaller creatures, and with them a number of drowned snakes. The two lions, however, appeared to have escaped by swimming, at least they saw nothing of them.

Walking cautiously, they came to the edge of the donga, and sat down upon a stone, since as yet they could not see how wide and deep the water ran.

Whilst they remained thus, suddenly through the mist they heard a voice shouting from the other side of the donga.

"Missie," cried the voice in Dutch, "are you there missie?"

"That is Tom, our driver," she said, "come to look for me. Answer for me, Richard."

So the lad, who had very good lungs, roared in reply:

"Yes, I'm here, safe, waiting for the mist to lift, and the water to run down."

"God be thanked," yelled the distant Tom. "We thought that you were surely drowned. But, then, why is your voice changed?"

"Because an English heer is with me," cried Rachel. "Go and look for his horse and bring a rope, then wait till the mist rises. Also send to tell the pastor and my mother that I am safe."

"I am here, Rachel," shouted another voice, her father's. "I have been looking for you all night, and we have got the Englishman's horse. Don't come into the water yet. Wait till we can see."

"That's good news, any way," said Richard, "though I shall have to ride hard to catch up the waggons."

Rachel's face fell.

"Yes," she said; "very good news."

"Are you glad that I am going, then?" he asked in an offended tone.

"It was you who said the news was good," she replied gently.

"I meant I was glad that they had caught my horse, not that I had to ride away on it. Are you sorry, then?" and he glanced at her anxiously.

"Yes, I am sorry, for we have made friends, haven't we? It won't matter to you who will find plenty of people down there at the Cape, but you see when you are gone I shall have no friend left in this wilderness, shall I?"

Again Richard looked at her, and saw that her sweet grey eyes were full of tears. Then there rose within the breast of this lad who, be it remembered, was verging upon manhood, a sensation strangely similar, had he but known it, to that which had been experienced an hour or two before by the child at his side when she watched him sleeping in the cave. He felt as though these tear-laden grey eyes were drawing his heart as a magnet draws iron. Of love he knew nothing, it was but a name to him, but this feeling was certainly very new and queer.

"What have you done to me?" he asked brusquely. "I don't want to go away from you at all, which is odd, as I never liked girls much. I tell you," he went on with gathering vehemence, "that if it wasn't that it would be mean to play such a trick upon my father, I wouldn't go. I'd come with you, or follow after—all my life. Answer me—what have you done?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Rachel with a little sob, "except tie up your arm."

"That can't be it," he replied. "Anyone could tie up my arm. Oh! I know it is wrong, but I hope I shan't be able to overtake the waggons, for if I can't I will come back."

"You mustn't come back; you must go away, quite away, as soon as you can. Yes, as soon as you can. Your father will be very anxious," and she began to cry outright.

"Stop it," said Richard. "Do you hear me, stop it. I am not going to be made to snivel too, just because I shan't see a little girl any more whom I never met—till yesterday."

These last words came out with a gulp, and what is more, two tears came with them and trickled down his nose.

For a moment they sat thus looking at each other pitifully, and—the truth must be told—weeping, both of them. Then something got the better of Richard, let us call it primeval instinct, so that he put his arms about Rachel and kissed her, after which they continued to weep, their heads resting upon each other's shoulders. At length he let her go and stood up, saying argumentatively:

"You see now we are really friends."

"Yes," she answered, again rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand for lack of a pocket handkerchief in the fashion that on the previous day had so irritated her father, "but I don't know why you should kiss me like that, just because you are my friend, or" she added with an outburst of truthfulness, "why I should kiss you."

Richard stood over her frowning and reflecting. Then he gave up the problem as beyond his powers of interpretation, and said:

"You remember that rubbish you dreamt just now, about my being tied to a tree and the rest of it? Well, it wasn't nice, and it gives me the creeps to think of it, like the lions outside the cave. But I want to tell you that I hope it is true, for then we shall meet again, if it is only to say good-night."

"Yes, Richard," she answered, placing her slim fingers into his big brown hand, "we shall meet again, I am sure—I am quite sure. And I think that it will be to say, not good-night," and she looked up at him and smiled, "but good-morning."

As Rachel spoke a puff of wind blew down the donga, rolling up the mist before it, and of a sudden shining above them they saw the glorious sun. As though by magic butterflies appeared basking upon the rain-shattered lily blooms; bright birds flitted from tree to tree, ringdoves began to coo. The terror of the tempest and the darkness of night were overpast; the world awoke again to life and love and joy. Instantly this change reflected itself in their young hearts. They whose natures had as it were ripened prematurely in the stress of danger and the shadow of death, became children once again. The very real emotions that they had experienced were forgotten, or at any rate sank into abeyance. Now they thought, not of separation or of the dim, mysterious future that stretched before them, but only of how they should ford the stream and gain its further side, where Rachel saw her father, Tom, the driver, and the other Kaffirs, and Richard saw his horse which he had feared was lost.

They ran down to the brink of the water and examined it, but here it was still too deep for them to attempt its crossing. Then, directed by the shouts and motions of the Kaffir Tom and Mr. Dove, they proceeded up stream for several hundred yards, till they came to a rapid where the lessening flood ran thinly over a ridge of rock, and after investigation, proceeded to try its passage hand in hand. It proved difficult but not dangerous, for when they came near to the further side where the current was swift and the water rather deep, Tom threw them a waggon rope, clinging on to which they were dragged—wet, but laughing—in safety to the further bank.

"Ow!" exclaimed the Kaffirs, clapping their hands. "She is alive, the lightnings have turned away from her, she rules the waters, and the lightnings!" and then and there, after the native fashion, they gave Rachel a name which was destined to play a great part in her future. That name was "Lady of the Lightnings," or, to translate it more accurately, "of the Heavens."

"I never thought to see you again," said her father, looking at Rachel with a face that was still white and scared. "It was very wrong of me to send you so far with that storm coming on, and I have had a terrible night—yes, a terrible night; and so has your poor mother. However, she knows that you are safe by now, thank God, thank God!" and he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Well, father, you said that He would look after me, didn't you? And so He did, for He sent Richard here. If it hadn't been for Richard I should have been drowned," she added inconsequently.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Dove. "Providence manifests itself in many ways. But who is your young friend whom you call Richard? I suppose he has some other name."

"Of course," answered that youth himself, "everybody has except Kaffirs. Mine is Darrien."

"Darrien?" said Mr. Dove. "I had a friend called Darrien at school. I never saw him after I left, but I believe that he went into the Navy."

"Then he must be my father, sir, for I have heard him say that there had been no other Darrien in the service for a hundred years."

"I think so," answered Mr. Dove, "for now that I look at you, I can see a likeness. We slept side by side in the same dormitory once five-and-thirty years ago, so I remember. And now you have saved my daughter; it is very strange. But tell me the story."

So between them they told it, although to one scene of it—the last—neither of them thought it necessary to allude; or perhaps it was forgotten.

"Truly the Almighty has had you both in His keeping," exclaimed Mr. Dove, when their tale was done. "And now, Richard, my boy, what are you going to do? You see, we caught your horse—it was grazing about a mile away with the saddle twisted under its stomach—and wondered what white man could possibly have been riding it in this desolate place. Afterwards, however, one of my voo-loopers reported that he had seen two waggons yesterday afternoon trekking through the poort about five miles to the north there. The white men with them said that they were travelling towards the Cape, and pushing on to get out of the hills before the storm broke. They bade him, if he met you, to bid you follow after them as quickly as you could, and to say that they would wait for you, if you did not arrive before, at the Three Sluit outspan on this side of the Pondo country, at which you stopped some months ago."

"Yes," answered Richard, "I remember, but that outspan is thirty miles away, so I must be getting on, or they will come back to hunt for me."

"First you will stop and eat with us, will you not?" said Mr. Dove.

"No, no, I have eaten. Also I have saved some meat in my pouch. I must go, I must indeed, for otherwise my father will be angry with me. You see," he added, "I went out shooting without his leave."

"Ah! my boy," remarked Mr. Dove, who seldom neglected an opportunity for a word in season, "now you know what comes of disobedience."

"Yes, I know, sir," he answered looking at Rachel. "I was just in time to save your daughter's life here; as you said just now, Providence sent me. Well, good-bye, and don't think me wicked if I am very glad that I was disobedient, as I believe you are, too."

"Yes, I am. Good comes out of evil sometimes, though that is no reason why we should do evil," the missionary added, not knowing what else to say. Richard did not attempt to argue the point, for at the moment he was engaged in bidding farewell to Rachel. It was a very silent farewell; neither of them spoke a word, they only shook each other's hand and looked into each other's eyes. Then muttering something which it was as well that Mr. Dove did not hear, Richard swung himself into the saddle, for his horse stood at hand, and, without even looking back, cantered away towards the mountains.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rachel presently, "call him, father."

"What for?" asked Mr. Dove.

"I want to give him our address, and to get his."

"We have no address, Rachel. Also he is too far off, and why should you want the address of a chance acquaintance?"

"Because he saved my life and I do," replied the child, setting her face. Then, without another word, she turned and began to walk towards their camp—a very heavy journey it was to Rachel.

When Rachel reached the waggon she found that her mother was more or less recovered. At any rate the attack of fever had left her so that she felt able to rise from her bed. Now, although still weak, she was engaged in packing away the garments of her dead baby in a travelling chest, weeping in a silent, piteous manner as she worked. It was a very sad sight. When she saw Rachel she opened her arms without a word, and embraced her.

"You were not frightened about me, mother?" asked the child.

"No, my love," she answered, "because I knew that no harm would come to you. I have always known that. It was a mad thing of your father to send you to such a place at such a time, but no folly of his or of anyone else can hurt you who are destined to live. Never be afraid of anything, Rachel, for remember always you will only die in old age."

"I am not sure that I am glad of that," answered the girl, as she pulled off her wet clothes. "Life isn't a very happy thing, is it, mother, at least for those who live as we do?"

"There is good and bad in it, dear; we can't have one without the other—most of us. At any rate, we must take it as it comes, who have to walk a path that we did not make, and stop walking when our path comes to an end, not a step before or after. But, Rachel, you are changed since yesterday. I see it in your face. What has happened to you?"

"Lots of things, mother. I will tell you the story, all of it, every word. Would you like to hear it?"

Her mother nodded, and, the baby-clothes being at last packed away, shut the lid of the box with a sigh, sat down upon it and listened.

Rachel told her of her meeting with Richard Darrien, and of how he saved her from the flood. She told of the strange night that they had spent together in the little cave while the lions marched up and down without. She told of her vigil over the sleeping Richard at the daybreak, and of the dream that she had dreamed when she seemed to see him grown to manhood, and herself grown to womanhood, and clad in white skins, watching him lashed to the trunk of a gigantic tree as the first arrows of sunrise struck down the lanes of some mysterious forest. She told of how her heart had been stirred, and of how afterwards in the mist by the water's brink his heart had been stirred also, and of how they had kissed each other and wept because they must part.

Then she stopped, expecting that her mother would be angry with her and scold her for her thoughts and conduct, as she knew well her father would have done. But she was not angry, and she did not scold. She only stretched out her thin hands and stroked the child's fair hair, saying:

"Don't be frightened, Rachel, and don't be sad. You think that you have lost him, but soon or late he will come back to you, perhaps as you dreamed—perhaps otherwise."

"If I were sure of that, mother, I would not mind anything," said the girl, "though really I don't know why I should care," she added defiantly.

"No, you don't know now, but you will one day, and when you do, remember that, however long it seems to wait, you may be quite sure, because I who have the gift of knowing, told you so. Now tell me again what Richard Darrien was like while you remember, for perhaps I may never live to see his face, and I wish to get it into my mind."

So Rachel told her, and when she had described every detail, asked suddenly:

"Must we really go on, mother, into this awful wilderness? Would not father turn back if you asked him?"

"Perhaps," she answered. "But I shall not ask. He would never forgive me for preventing him from doing what he thinks his duty. It is a madness when we might be happy in the Cape or in England, but that cannot be helped, for it is also his destiny and ours. Don't judge hardly of your father, Rachel, because he is a saint, and this world is a bad place for saints and their families, especially their families. You think that he does not feel; that he is heartless about me and the poor babe, and sacrifices us all, but I tell you he feels more than either you or I can do. At night when I pretend to go to sleep I watch him groaning over his loss and for me, and praying for strength to bear it, and for help to enable him to do his duty. Last night he was nearly crazed about you, and in all that awful storm, when the Kaffirs would not stir from the waggon, went alone down to the river guided by the lightnings, but of course returned half dead, having found nothing. By dawn he was back there again, for love and fear would not let him rest a minute. Yet he will never tell you anything of that, lest you should think that his faith in Providence was shaken. I know that he is strange—it is no use hiding it, but if I were to thwart him he would go quite mad, and then I should never forgive myself, who took him for better and for worse, just as he is, and not as I should like him to be. So, Rachel, be as happy as you can, and make the best of things, as I try to do, for your life is all before you, whereas mine lies behind me, and yonder," and she pointed towards the place where the infant was buried. "Hush! here he comes. Now, help me with the packing, for we are to trek to the ford this afternoon."

## CHAPTER IV.

### ISHMAEL

It may be doubted whether any well-born young English lady ever had a stranger bringing-up than that which fell to the lot of Rachel Dove. To begin with, she had absolutely no associates, male or female, of her own age and station, for at that period in its history such people did not exist in the country where she dwelt. Practically her only companions were her father, a religious enthusiast, and her mother, a half broken-hearted woman, who never for a single hour could forget the children she had lost, and whose constitutional mysticism increased upon her continually until at times it seemed as though she had added some new quality to her normal human nature.

Then there were the natives, amongst whom from the beginning Rachel was a sort of queen. In those first days of settlement they had never seen anybody in the least like her, no one so beautiful—for she grew up beautiful—so fearless, or so kind. The tale of that adventure of hers as a child upon the island in the midst of the flooded torrent spread all through the country with many fabulous additions. Thus the Kaffirs said that she was a “Heaven-herd,” that is, a magical person who can ward off or direct the lightnings, which she was supposed to have done upon this night; also that she could walk upon the waters, for otherwise how did she escape the flood? And, lastly, that the wild beasts were her servants, for had not the driver Tom and the natives seen the spoor of great lions right at the mouth of the cave where she and her companion sheltered, and had they not heard that she called these lions into the cave to protect her and him from the other creatures? Therefore, as has been said, they gave her a name, a very long name that meant Chieftainess, or Lady of Heaven, *Inkosazana-y-Zoola*; for Zulu or Zoola, which we know as the title of that people, means Heaven, and *Udade-y-Silwana*, or Sister of wild beasts. As these appellations proved too lengthy for general use, even among the Bantu races, who have plenty of time for talking, ultimately it was shortened to Zoola alone, so that throughout that part of South-Eastern Africa Rachel came to enjoy the lofty title of “Heaven,” the first girl, probably, who was ever so called.

With all natives from her childhood up, Rachel was on the best of terms. She was never familiar with them indeed, for that is not the way for a white person to win the affection, or even the respect of a Kaffir. But she was intimate in the sense that she could enter into their thoughts and nature, a very rare gift. We whites are apt to consider ourselves the superior of such folk, whereas we are only different. In fact, taken altogether, it is quite a question whether the higher sections of the Bantu peoples are not our equals. Of course, we have learned more things, and our best men are their betters. But, on the other hand, among them there is nothing so low as the inhabitants of our slums, nor have they any vices which can surpass our vices. Is an assegai so much more savage than a shell? Is there any great gulf fixed between a Chaka and a Napoleon? At least they are not hypocrites, and they are not vulgar; that is the privilege of civilised nations.

Well, with these folk Rachel was intimate. She could talk to the warrior of his wars, to the woman of her garden and her children to the children of that wonder world which surrounds childhood throughout the universe. And yet there was never a one of these but lifted the hand to her in salute when her shadow fell upon them. To them all she was the *Inkosazana*, the Great Lady. They would laugh at her father and mimic him behind his back, but Rachel they never laughed at or mimicked. Of her mother also, although she kept herself apart from them, much the same may be said. For her they had a curious name which they would not, or were unable to explain. They called her “Flower-that-grows-on-a-grave.” For Mr. Dove their appellation was less poetical. It was “Shouter-about-Things-he-does-not-understand,” or, more briefly, “The Shouter,” a name that he had acquired from his habit of raising his voice when he grew moved in speaking to them. The things that he did not understand, it may be explained, were not to their minds his religious views, which, although they considered them remarkable, were evidently his own affair, but their private customs. Especially their family customs that he was never weary of denouncing to the bewilderment of these poor heathens, who for their part were not greatly impressed by those of the few white people with whom they came in contact. Therefore, with native politeness, they concluded that he spoke thus rudely because he did not understand. Hence his name.

But Rachel had other friends. In truth she was Nature’s child, if in a better and a purer sense than Byron uses that description. The sea, the veld, the sky, the forest and the river, these were her companions, for among them she dwelt solitary. Their denizens, too, knew her well, for unless she were driven to it, never would she lift her hand against anything that drew the breath of life. The buck would let her pass quite close to them, nor at her coming did the birds stir from off their trees. Often she stood and watched the great elephants feeding or at rest, and even dared to wander among the herds of savage buffalo. Of only two living things was she afraid—the snake and the crocodile, that are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field, because being cursed they have no sympathy or gentleness. She feared nothing else, she who was always fearless, nor brute or bird, did they fear her.

After Rachel’s adventure in the flooded river she and her parents pursued their journey by slow and tedious marches, and at length, though in those days this was strange enough, reached Natal unharmed. At first they went to live where the city of Durban now stands, which at that time had but just received its name. It was inhabited by a few rough men, who made a living by trading and hunting, and surrounded themselves with natives, refugees for the most part from the Zulu country. Amongst these people and their servants Mr. Dove commenced his labours, but ere long a bitter quarrel grew up between him and them.

These dwellers in the midst of barbarism led strange lives, and Mr. Dove, who rightly held it to be his duty to denounce wrongdoing of every sort, attacked them and their vices in no measured terms, and upon all occasions. For long years he kept up the fight, until at length he found himself ostracised. If they could avoid it, no white men would speak to him, nor would they allow him to instruct their Kaffirs. Thus his work came to an end in Durban as it had done in other places. Now, again, his wife and daughter hoped that he would leave South Africa for good, and return home. But it was not to be, for once more he announced that it was laid

upon him to follow the example of his divine Master, and that the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. So, with a few attendants, they trekked away from Durban.

On this occasion it was his wild design to settle in Zululand—where Chaka, the great king, being dead, Dingaan, his brother and murderer, ruled in his place—and there devote himself to the conversion of the Zulus. Indeed, it is probable that he would have carried out this plan had he not been prevented by an accident. One night when they were about forty miles from Durban they camped on a stream, a tributary of the Tugela River, which ran close by, and formed the boundary of the Zulu country. It was a singularly beautiful spot, for to the east of them, about a mile away, stretched the placid Indian Ocean, while to the west, overshadowing them almost, rose a towering cliff, over which the stream poured itself, looking like a line of smoke against its rocky face. They had outspanned upon a rising hillock at the foot of which this little river wound away like a silver snake till it joined the great Tugela. In its general aspect the country was like an English park, dotted here and there with timber, around which grazed or rested great elands and other buck, and amongst them a huge rhinoceros.

When the waggon had creaked to the top of the rise, for, of course, there was no road, and the Kaffirs were beginning to unyoke the hungry oxen, Rachel, who was riding with her father, sprang from her horse and ran to it to help her mother to descend. She was now a tall young woman, full of health and vigour, strong and straightly shaped. Mrs. Dove, frail, delicate, grey-haired, placed her foot upon the disselboom and hesitated, for to her the ground seemed far off, and the heels of the cattle very near.

“Jump,” said Rachel in her clear, laughing voice, as she smacked the near after-ox to make it turn round, which it did obediently, for all the team knew her. “I’ll catch you.”

But her mother still hesitated, so thrusting her way between the ox and the front wheel Rachel stretched out her arms and lifted her bodily to the ground.

“How strong you are, my love!” said her mother, with a sort of wondering admiration and a sad little smile; “it seems strange to think that I ever carried you.”

“One had need to be in this country, dear,” replied Rachel cheerfully. “Come and walk a little way, you must be stiff with sitting in that horrid waggon,” and she led her quite to the top of the knoll. “There,” she added, “isn’t the view lovely? I never saw such a pretty place in all Africa. And oh! look at those buck, and yes—that is a rhinoceros. I hope it won’t charge us.”

Mrs. Dove obeyed, gazing first at the glorious sea, then at the plain and the trees, and lastly behind her at the towering cliff steeped in shadow—for the sun was westering—down the face of which the waterfall seemed to hang like a silver rope.

As her eyes fell upon this cliff Mrs. Dove’s face changed.

“I know this spot,” she said in a hurried voice. “I have seen it before.”

“Nonsense, mother,” answered Rachel. “We have never trekked here, so how could you?”

“I can’t say, love, but I have. I remember that cliff and the waterfall; yes, and those three trees, and the buck standing under them.”

“One often feels like that, about having seen places, I mean, mother, but of course it is all nonsense, because it is impossible, unless one dreams of them first.”

“Yes, love, unless one dreams. Well, I think that I must have dreamt. What was the dream now? Rachel weeping—Rachel weeping—my love, I think that we are going to live here, and I think—I think—”

“All right,” broke in her daughter quickly, with a shade of anxiety in her voice as though she did not wish to learn what her mother thought. “I don’t mind, I am sure. I don’t want to go to Zululand, and see this horrid Dingaan, who is always killing people, and I am quite sure that father would never convert him, the wicked monster. It is like the Garden of Eden, isn’t it, with the sea thrown in. There are all the animals, and that green tree with the fruit on it might be the Tree of Life, and—oh, my goodness, there is Adam!”

Mrs. Dove followed the line of her daughter’s outstretched hand, and perceived three or four hundred yards away, as in that sparkling atmosphere it was easy to do, a white man apparently clad in skins. He was engaged in crawling up a little rise of ground with the obvious intention of shooting at some blesbuck which stood in a hollow beyond with quaggas and other animals, while behind him was a mounted Kaffir who held his master’s horse.

“I see,” said Mrs. Dove, mildly interested. “But he looks more like Robinson Crusoe without his umbrella. Adam did not kill the animals in the Garden, my dear.”

“He must have lived on something besides forbidden apples,” remarked Rachel, “unless perhaps he was a vegetarian as father wants to be. There—he has fired!”

As she spoke a cloud of smoke arose above the man, and presently the loud report of a *roer* reached their ears. One of the buck rolled over and lay struggling on the ground, while the rest, together with many others at a distance, turned and galloped off this way and that, frightened by this new and terrible noise. The old rhinoceros under the tree rose snorting, sniffed the air, then thundered away up wind towards the man, its pig-like tail held straight above its back.

“Adam has spoilt our Eden; I hope the rhinoceros will catch him,” said Rachel viciously. “Look, he has seen it and is running to his horse.”

Rachel was right. Adam—or whatever his name might be—was running with remarkable swiftness. Reaching the horse just as the rhinoceros appeared within forty yards of him, he bounded to the saddle, and with his servant galloped off to the right. The rhinoceros came to a standstill for a few moments as though it were wondering whether it dared attack these strange creatures, then making up its mind in the negative, rushed on and vanished. When it was gone, the white man and the Kaffir, who had pulled up their horses at a distance, returned to the fallen buck, cut its throat, and lifted it on to the Kaffir’s horse, then rode slowly towards the waggon.

“They are coming to call,” said Rachel. “How should one receive a gentleman in skins?”

Apparently some misgivings as to the effect that might be produced by his appearance occurred to the hunter. At any rate, he looked first at the two white women standing on the brow, and next at his own peculiar attire, which appeared to consist chiefly of the pelt of a lion, plus a very striking pair of trousers manufactured from the hide of a zebra, and halted about sixty yards away, staring at them. Rachel, whose sight was exceedingly keen, could see his face well, for the light of the setting sun fell on it, and he wore no head covering. It was a dark, handsome face of a man about thirty-five years of age, with strongly-marked features, black eyes and beard, and long black hair that fell down on to his shoulders. They gazed at each other for a while, then the man turned to his after-rider,

gave him an order in a clear, strong voice, and rode away inland. The after-rider, on the contrary, directed his horse up the rise until he was within a few yards of them, then sprang to the ground and saluted.

"What is it?" asked Rachel in Zulu, a language which she now spoke perfectly.

"Inkosikaas" (that is—Lady), answered the man, "my master thinks that you may be hungry and sends you a present of this buck," and, as he spoke, he loosed the riem or hide rope by which it was fastened behind his saddle, and let the animal fall to the ground.

Rachel turned her eyes from it, for it was covered with blood, and unpleasant to look at, then replied:

"My father and my mother thank your master. How is he named, and where does he dwell?"

"Lady, among us black people he is named Ibubesi (lion), but his white name is Hishmel."

"Hishmel, Hishmel?" said Rachel. "Oh! I know, he means Ishmael. There, mother, I told you he was something biblical, and of course Ishmael dwelt in the wilderness, didn't he, after his father had behaved so badly to poor Hagar, and was a wild man whose hand was against every man's."

"Rachel, Rachel," said her mother suppressing a little smile. "Your father would be very angry if he heard you. You should not speak lightly of holy persons."

"Well, mother, Abraham may have been a holy person, but we should think him a mean old thing nowadays, almost as mean as Sarah. You know they were most of them mean, so what is the use of pretending they were not?"

Then without waiting for an answer she asked the Kaffir again: "Where does the Inkoos Ishmael dwell?"

"In the wilderness," answered the man appropriately. "Now his kraal is yonder, two hours' ride away. It is called Mafooti," and he pointed over the top of the precipice, adding: "he is a hunter and trades with the Zulus."

"Is he Dutch?" asked Rachel, whose curiosity was excited.

The Kaffir shook his head. "No, he hates the Dutch; he is of the people of George."

"The people of George? Why, he must mean a subject of King George—an Englishman."

"Yes, yes, Lady, an Englishman, like you," and he grinned at her. "Have you any message for the Inkoos Hishmel?"

"Yes. Say to the Inkoos Ishmael or Lion-who-dwells-in-the-wilderness, hates the Dutch and wears zebra-skin trousers, that my father and my mother thank him very much for his present, and hope that his health is good. Go. That is all."

The man grinned again, suspecting a joke, for the Zulus have a sense of humour, then repeated the message word for word, trying to pronounce Ishmael as Rachel did, saluted, mounted his horse, and galloped off after his master.

"Perhaps you should have kept that Kaffir until your father came," suggested Mrs. Dove doubtfully.

"What was the good?" said Rachel. "He would only have asked Mr. Ishmael to call in order that he might find out his religious opinions, and I don't want to see any more of the man."

"Why not, Rachel?"

"Because I don't like him, mother. I think he is worse than any of the rest down there, too bad to stop among them probably, and —" she added with conviction, "I think we shall have more of his company than we want before all is done. Oh! it is no good to say that I am prejudiced—I do, and what is more, he came into our Garden of Eden and shot the buck. I hope he will meet that rhinoceros on the way home. There!"

Although she disapproved, or tried to think that she did, of such strong opinions so strongly expressed, Mrs. Dove offered no further opposition to them. The fact was that her daughter's bodily and mental vigour overshadowed her, as they did her husband also. Indeed, it seemed curious that this girl, so powerful in body and in mind, should have sprung from such a pair, a wrong-headed, narrow-viewed saint whose right place in the world would have been in a cell in the monastery or one of the stricter orders, and a gentle, uncomplaining, high-bred woman with a mind distinguished by its affectionate and mystical nature, a mind so unusual and refined that it seemed to be, and in truth was, open to influences whereof, mercifully enough, the majority of us never feel the subtle, secret power.

Of her father there was absolutely no trace in Rachel, except a certain physical resemblance—so far as he was concerned she must have thrown back to some earlier progenitor. Even their intellects and moral outlook were quite different. She had, it is true, something of his scholarly power; thus, notwithstanding her wild upbringing, as has been said, she could read the Greek Testament almost as well as he could, or even Homer, which she liked because the old, bloodthirsty heroes reminded her of the Zulus. He had taught her this and other knowledge, and she was an apt pupil. But there the resemblance stopped. Whereas his intelligence was narrow and enslaved by the priestly tradition, hers was wide and human. She searched and she criticised; she believed in God as he did, but she saw His purpose working in the evil as in the good. In her own thought she often compared these forces to the Day and Night, and believed both of them to be necessary to the human world. For her, savagery had virtues as well as civilisation, although it is true of the latter she knew but little.

From her mother Rachel had inherited more, for instance her grace of speech and bearing, and her intuition, or foresight. Only in her case this curious gift did not dominate her, her other forces held it in check. She felt and she knew, but feeling and knowledge did not frighten or make her weak, any more than the strength of her frame or of her spirit made her unwomanly. She accepted these things as part of her mental equipment, that was all, being aware that to her a door was opened which is shut firmly enough in the faces of most folk, but not on that account in the least afraid of looking through it as her mother was.

Thus when she saw the man called Ishmael, she knew well enough that he was destined to bring great evil upon her and hers, as when as a child she met the boy Richard Darrien, she had known other things. But she did not, therefore, fear the man and his attendant evil. She only shrank from the first and looked through the second, onward and outward to the ultimate good which she was convinced lay at the end of everything, and meanwhile, being young and merry, she found his zebra-skin trousers very ridiculous.

Just as Rachel and her mother finished their conversation about Mr. Ishmael, Mr. Dove arrived from a little Kloof, where he had been engaged with the Kaffirs in cutting bushes to make a thorn fence round their camp as a protection against lions and hyenas. He looked older than when we last met him, and save for a fringe of white hair, which increased his monkish appearance, was quite bald. His face, too, was even thinner and more eager, and his grey eyes were more far-away than formerly; also he had grown a long white beard.

"Where did that buck come from?" he asked, looking at the dead creature.

Rachel told him the story with the result that, as her mother had expected, he was very indignant with her. It was most unkind, and indeed, un-Christian, he said, not to have asked this very courteous gentleman into the camp, as he would much have liked to converse with him. He had often reproved her habit of judging by external, and in the veld, lion and zebra skins furnish a very suitable covering. She should remember that such were given to our first parents.

"Oh! I know, father," broke in Rachel, "when the climate grew too cold for leaf petticoats and the rest. Now don't begin to scold me, because I must go to cook the dinner. I didn't like the look of the man; besides, he rode off. Then it wasn't my business to ask him here, but mother's, who stood staring at him and never said a single word. If you want to see him so much, you can go to call upon him to-morrow, only don't take me, please. And now will you send Tom to skin the buck?"

Mr. Dove answered that Tom was busy with the fence, and, ceasing from argument which he felt to be useless with Rachel, suggested doubtfully that he had better be his own butcher.

"No, no," she replied, "you know you hate that sort of thing, as I do. Let it be till the Kaffirs have time. We have the cold meat left for supper, and I will boil some mealies. Go and help with the fence, father, while I light the fire."

Usually Rachel was the best of sleepers. So soon as she laid her head upon whatever happened to serve her for a pillow, generally a saddle, her eyes shut to open no more till daylight came. On this night, however, it was not so. She had her bed in a little flap tent which hooked on to the side of the waggon that was occupied by her parents. Here she lay wide awake for a long while, listening to the Kaffirs who, having partaken heartily of the buck, were now making themselves drunk by smoking *dakka*, or Indian hemp, a habit of which Mr. Dove had tried in vain to break them. At length the fire around which they sat near the thorn fence on the further side of the waggon, grew low, and their incoherent talk ended in silence, punctuated by snores. Rachel began to doze but was awakened by the laughing cries of the hyenas quite close to her. The brutes had scented the dead buck and were wandering round the fence in hope of a midnight meal. Rachel rose, and taking the gun that lay at her side, threw a cloak over her shoulders and left the tent.

The moon was shining brightly and by its light she saw the hyenas, two of them, wolves as they are called in South Africa, long grey creatures that prowled round the thorn fence hungrily, causing the oxen that were tied to the trek tow and the horses picketed on the other side of the waggon, to low and whinny in an uneasy fashion. The hyenas saw her also, for her head rose above the rough fence, and being cowardly beasts, slunk away. She could have shot them had she chose, but did not, first because she hated killing anything unnecessarily, even a wolf, and secondly because it would have aroused the camp. So she contented herself by throwing more dry wood on to the fire, stepping over the Kaffirs, who slept like logs, in order to do so. Then, resting upon her gun like some Amazon on guard, she gazed a while at the lovely moonlit sea, and the long line of game trekking silently to their drinking place, until seeing no more of the wolves or other dangerous beasts, she turned and sought her bed again.

She was thinking of Mr. Ishmael and his zebra-skin trousers; wondering why the man should have filled her with such an unreasoning dislike. If she had disliked him at a distance of fifty paces, how she would hate him when he was near! And yet he was probably only one of those broken soldiers of fortune of whom she had met several, who took to the wilderness as a last resource, and by degrees sank to the level of the savages among whom they lived, a person who was not worth a second thought. So she tried to put him from her mind, and by way of an antidote, since still she could not sleep, filled it with her recollections of Richard Darrien. Some years had gone by since they had met, and from that time to this she had never heard a word of him in which she could put the slightest faith. She did not even know whether he were alive or dead, only she believed that if he were dead she would be aware of it. No, she had never heard of him, and it seemed probable that she never would hear of him again. Yet she did not believe that either. Had she done so her happiness—for on the whole Rachel was a happy girl—would have departed from her, since this once seen lad never left her heart, nor had she forgotten their farewell kiss.

Reflecting thus, at length Rachel fell off to sleep and began to dream, still of Richard Darrien. It was a long dream whereof afterwards she could remember but little, but in it there were shoutings, and black faces, and the flashing of spears; also the white man Ishmael was present there. One part, however, she did remember; Richard Darrien, grown taller, changed and yet the same, leaning over her, warning her of danger to come, warning her against this man Ishmael.

She awoke suddenly to see that the light of dawn was creeping into her tent, that low, soft light which is so beautiful in Southern Africa. Rachel was disturbed, she felt the need of action, of anything that would change the current of her thoughts. No one was about yet. What should she do? She knew; the sea was not more than a mile away, she would go down to it and bathe, and be back before the rest of them were awake.

## CHAPTER V.

### NOIE

That a girl should set out alone to bathe through a country inhabited chiefly by wild beasts and a few wandering savages, sounds a somewhat dangerous form of amusement. So it was indeed, but Rachel cared nothing for such dangers, in fact she never even thought of them. Long ago she had discovered that the animals would not harm her if she did not harm them, except perhaps the rhinoceros, which is given to charging on sight, and that was large and could generally be discovered at a distance. As for elephants and lions, or even buffalo, her experience was that they ran away, except on rare occasions when they stood still, and stared at her. Nor was she afraid of the savages, who always treated her with the utmost respect, even if they had never seen her before. Still, in case of accidents she took her double-barrelled gun, loaded in one barrel with ball, and in the other with loopers or slugs, and awakened Tom, the driver, to tell him where she was going. The man stared at her sleepily, and murmured a remonstrance, but taking no heed of him she pulled out some thorns from the fence to make a passage, and in another minute was lost to sight in the morning mist.

Following a game path through the dew-drenched grass which grew upon the swells and valleys of the veld, and passing many small buck upon her way, in about twenty minutes, just as the light was really beginning to grow, Rachel reached the sea. It was dead calm, and the tide chancing to be out, soon she found the very place she sought—a large, rock-bound pool where there would be no fear of sharks that never stay in such a spot, fearing lest they should be stranded. Slipping off her clothes she plunged into the cool and crystal water and began to swim round and across the pool, for at this art she was expert, diving and playing like a sea-nymph. Her bath done she dried herself with a towel she had brought, all except her long, fair hair, which she let loose for the wind to blow on, and having dressed, stood a while waiting to see the glory of the sun rising from the ocean.

Whilst she remained thus, suddenly she heard the sound of horses galloping towards her, two of them, she could tell that from the hoof beats, although the low-lying mist made them invisible. A few more seconds and they emerged out of the fog. The first thing that she saw were stripes which caused her to laugh, thinking that she had mistaken zebras for horses. Then the laugh died on her lips as she recognised that the stripes were those of Mr. Ishmael's trousers. Yes, there was no doubt about it, Mr. Ishmael, wearing a rough coat instead of his lion-skin, but with the rest of his attire unchanged, was galloping down upon her furiously, leading a riderless horse. Remembering her wet and dishevelled hair, Rachel threw the towel over it, whence it hung like an old Egyptian head-dress, setting her beautiful face in a most becoming frame. Next she picked up the double-barrelled gun and cocked it, for she misdoubted her of this man's intentions. Not many modern books came her way, but she had read stories of young women who were carried off by force.

For an instant she was frightened, but as she lifted the hammer of the second barrel her constitutional courage returned.

"Let him try it," she thought to herself. "If he had come ten minutes ago it would have been awful, but now I don't care."

By this time Mr. Ishmael had arrived, and was dragging his horse to its haunches; also she saw that evidently he was much more frightened than she had been. The man's handsome face was quite white, and his lips were trembling. "Perhaps that rhinoceros is after him again," thought Rachel, then added aloud quietly:

"What is the matter?"

"Forgive me," he answered in a rich, and to Rachel's astonishment, perfectly educated voice, "forgive me for disturbing you. I am ashamed, but it is necessary. The Zulus—" and he paused.

"Well, sir," asked Rachel, "what about the Zulus?"

"A regiment of them are coming down here on the warpath. They are hunting fugitives. The fugitives, about fifty of them, passed my camp over an hour ago, and I saw the Impi following them. I rode to warn you all. They told me you were down by the sea. I came to bring you back to your waggon lest you should be cut off."

"Thank you very much," said Rachel. "But I am not afraid of the Zulus. I do not think that they will hurt me."

"Not hurt you! Not hurt you! White and beautiful as you are. Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know," she replied with a laugh, "but you see I am called Inkosazana-y-Zoola. They won't touch one with that name."

"Inkosazana-y-Zoola," he repeated astonished. "Why she is their Spirit, yes, and I remember—white like you, so they say. How did you get that name? But mount, mount! They will kill you first, and ask how you were called afterwards. Your father is much afraid."

"My mother would not be afraid; she knows," muttered Rachel to herself, as she sprang to the saddle of the led-horse.

Then, without more words, they began to gallop back towards the camp. Before they reached the crest of the second rise the sun shone out in earnest, thinning the seaward mist, although between them and the camp it still hung thick. Then suddenly in the fog-edge Rachel saw this sight: Towards them ran a delicately shaped and beautiful native girl, naked except for her moocha, and of a very light, copper-colour, whilst after her, brandishing an assegai, came a Zulu warrior. Evidently the girl was in the last stage of exhaustion; indeed she reeled over the ground, her tongue protruded from her lips and her eyes seemed to be starting from her head.

"Come on," shouted the man called Ishmael. "It is only one of the fugitives whom they are killing."

But Rachel did nothing of the sort; she pulled up her horse and waited. The girl caught sight of her and with a wild hoarse scream, redoubled her efforts, so that her pursuer, who had been quite close, was left behind. She reached Rachel and flung her arms about her legs gasping:

"Save me, white lady, save me!"

"Shoot her if she won't leave go," shouted Ishmael, "and come on."

But Rachel only sprang from the horse and stood face to face with the advancing Zulu.

"Stand," she said, and the man stopped.

"Now," she asked, "what do you want with this woman?"

"To take her or to kill her," gasped the soldier.

"By whose order?"

"By order of Dingaan the King."

"For what crime?"

"Witchcraft; but who are you who question me, white woman?"

"One whom you must obey," answered Rachel proudly. "Go back and leave the girl. She is mine."

The man stared at her, then laughed aloud and began to advance again.

"Go back," repeated Rachel.

He took no heed but still came on.

"Go back or die," she said for the third time.

"I shall certainly die if I go back to Dingaan without the girl," replied the soldier who was a bold-looking savage. "Now you, Noie, will you return with me or shall I kill you? Say, witch," and he lifted his assegai.

The girl sank in a heap upon the veld. "Kill," she murmured faintly, "I will not go back. I did not bewitch him to make him dream of me, and I will be Death's wife, not his; a ghost in his kraal, not a woman."

"Good," said the man, "I will carry your word to the king. Farewell, Noie," and he raised the assegai still higher, adding: "Stand aside, white woman, for I have no order to kill you also."

By way of answer Rachel put the gun to her shoulder and pointed it at him.

"Are you mad?" shouted Ishmael. "If you touch him they will murder every one of us. Are you mad?"

"Are you a coward?" she asked quietly, without taking her eyes off the soldier. Then she said in Zulu, "Listen. The land on this side of the Tugela has been given by Dingaan to the English. Here he has no right to kill. This girl is mine, not his. Come one step nearer and you die."

"We shall soon see who will die," answered the warrior with a laugh, and he sprang forward.

They were his last words. Rachel aimed and pressed the trigger, the gun exploded heavily in the mist; the Zulu leapt into the air and fell upon his back, dead. The white man, Ishmael, rode to them, pulled up his horse and sat still, staring. It was a strange picture in that lonely, silent spot. The soldier so very still and dead, his face hidden by the shield that had fallen across it; the tall, white girl, rigid as a statue, in whose hand the gun still smoked, the delicate, fragile Kaffir maiden kneeling on the veld, and looking at her wildly as though she were a spirit, and the two horses, one with its ears pricked in curiosity, and the other already cropping grass.

"My God! What have you done?" exclaimed Ishmael.

"Justice," answered Rachel.

"Then your blood be on your own head. I am not going to stop here to have my throat cut."

"Don't," answered Rachel. "I have a better guardian than you, and will look after my own blood."

To this speech the white man seemed to be able to find no answer. Turning his horse he galloped off swearing, but not towards the camp, whereon the other horse galloped after him, and presently they all vanished in the mist, leaving the two women alone.

At this moment from the direction of the waggon they heard the sound of shouting and of screams, which appeared to come from the valley between them and it.

"The king's men are killing my people," muttered the girl Noie. "Go, or they will kill you too."

Rachel thought a moment. Evidently it was impossible to get through to the camp; indeed, even had they tried to do so on the horses they would have been cut off. An idea came to her. They stood upon the edge of a steep, bush-clothed kloof, where in the wet season a stream ran down to the sea. This stream was now represented by a chain of deep and muddy pools, one of which pools lay directly underneath them.

"Help me to throw him into the water," said Rachel.

The girl understood, and with desperate energy they seized the dead soldier, dragged him to the edge of the little cliff and thrust him over. He fell with a heavy splash into the pool and vanished.

"Crocodiles live there," said Rachel, "I saw one as I passed. Now take the shield and spear and follow me."

She obeyed, for with hope her strength seemed to have returned to her, and the two of them scrambled down the cliffs into the kloof. As they reached the edge of the pool they saw great snouts and a disturbance in the water. Rachel was right, crocodiles lived there.

"Now," she said, "throw your moocha on that rock. They will find it and think——"

Noie nodded and did so, rending its fastening and wetting it in the water. Then quite naked she took Rachel's hand and swiftly, swiftly, the two of them leapt from stone to stone, so as to leave no footprints, heading for the sea. Only the fugitive stopped once to drink of the fresh water, for she was perishing with thirst. Now when Rachel was bathing she had observed upon the farther side of her pool and opening out of it, as it were, a little pocket in the rock, where the water was not more than three feet deep and covered by a dense growth of beautiful seaweed, some black and some ribbon-like and yellow. The pool was long, perhaps two hundred paces in all, and to go round it they would be obliged to expose themselves upon the sand, and thus become visible from a long way off.

"Can you swim?" said Rachel to Noie.

Again she nodded, and the two of them slipped into the water and swam across the pool till they reached the pocket-like place, on the edge of which they sat down, covering themselves with the seaweed.

They had not been there five minutes when they heard the sound of voices drawing near down the kloof, and at once slid into the water, covering themselves in it in such fashion that only their heads remained above the surface, mixed with the black and yellow seaweed, so that without close search none could have said which was hair and which was weed.

"The Zulus," said Noie, shivering so that the water shook about her, "they seek me."

"Lie still, then," answered Rachel. "I can't shoot now, the gun is wet."

The voices died away, and the two girls thought that the speakers had gone, but rendered cautious, still remained hidden in the water. It was well for them that they did so for presently they heard the voices again and much nearer. The Zulus were walking round the pool. Two of them came quite close to their little hiding-place, and sat down on some rocks to rest, and talk. Peeping through her covering of seaweed Rachel could see them, great men who held red spears in their hands.

"You are a fool," said one of them to the other, "and have given us this walk for nothing, as though our feet were not sore enough already. The crocodiles have that Noie, her witchcraft could not save her from them; it was a baboon's spoor you saw in the mud, not a woman's."

"It would seem so, brother," answered the other, "as we found the moocha. Still, if so, where is Bomba who was running her down? And what made that blood-mark on the grass?"

"Doubtless," replied the first man, "Bomba came up with her there and wounded her, whereon being a woman and a coward, she ran from him and jumped into the pool in which the crocodiles finished her. As for Bomba, I expect that he has gone back to Zululand, or is asleep somewhere resting. The other spoor we saw was that of a white woman, who puts skins upon her feet. There is a camp of them up yonder, but you remember, our orders were not to touch any of the people of George, so we need not trouble about them."

"Well, brother, if you are sure, we had better be starting back, lest there should be trouble with the white people. Dingaan will be satisfied when we show him the moocha, and sleep in peace henceforth. She must really have been *tagati* (uncanny), that little Noie, for otherwise, although it is true she was pretty, why should Dingaan who has all Zululand to choose from, have fallen in love with her, and why should she have refused to enter his house, and persuaded all her kraal to run away? For my part, I don't believe that she is dead now, notwithstanding the moocha. I think that she is a witch, and has changed into something else—a bird or a snake, perhaps. Well, the rest of them will never change into anything, except black mould. Let us see. We have killed every one; all the common people, the mother of Noie, the dwarf-wizard Seyapi her father, and her other mothers, four of them, and her brothers and sisters, twelve in all."

At these words Noie again trembled beneath her seaweed, so that the water shook all about her.

"There is a fish there," said the first Kaffir, "I saw it rise. It is a small pool, shall we try to catch it?"

"No, brother," answered the other, "only coast people eat fish. I am hungry, but I will wait for man's food. Take that, fish!" and he threw a stone into the pool which struck Rachel on the side, and caused her fair hair to float about among the yellow seaweed.

Then the two of them got up and went away, walking arm-in-arm like friends and amiable men, as they were in their own fashion.

For a long time the girls remained beneath their seaweed, fearing lest the men or others should return, until at length they could bear the cold of the water no longer, and crept out of it to the brink of the little pool, where, still wreathed in seaweed, they sat and warmed themselves in the hot sunlight. Now Noie seemed to be half dead; indeed Rachel thought that she would die.

"Awake," she said, "life is still before you."

"Would that it were behind me, Lady," moaned the poor girl. "You understand our tongue—did you not hear? My father, my own mother, my other mothers, my brothers and sisters, all killed, all killed for my sake, and I left living. Oh! you meant kindly, but why did you not let Bomba pass his spear through me? It would have been quickly over, and now I should sleep with the rest."

Rachel made no answer, for she saw that talking was useless in such a case. Only she took Noie's hand and pressed it in silent sympathy, until at length the poor girl, utterly outworn with agony and the fatigue of her long flight, fell asleep, there in the sunshine. Rachel let her sleep, knowing that she would take no harm in that warmth. Quietly she sat at her side for hour after hour while the fierce sun, from which she protected her head with seaweed, dried her garments. At length the shadows told her that midday was past, and the sea water which began to trickle over the surrounding rocks that the tide was approaching its full. They could stop there no longer unless they wished to be drowned.

"Come," she said to Noie, "the Zulus have gone, and the sea is here. We must swim to the shore and go back to my father's camp."

"What place have I in your kraal, Lady?" asked the girl when her senses had returned to her.

"I will find you a place," Rachel answered; "you are mine now."

"Yes, Lady, that is true," said Noie heavily, "I am yours and no one else's," and taking Rachel's hand she pressed it to her forehead.

Then together once more they swam the pool, and not too soon, for the tide was pouring into it. Reaching the shore in safety, no easy task for Rachel, who must hold the heavy gun above her head, Noie tied Rachel's towel about her middle to take the place of her moocha, and very cautiously they crept up the kloof, fearing lest some of the Zulus might still be lurking in the neighbourhood.

At length they came to the pool into which they had thrown the soldier Bomba, and saw two crocodiles, doubtless those that had eaten him, lying asleep in the sun upon flat rocks at its edge. Here they were obliged to leave the kloof both because they feared to pass the crocodiles, and for the reason that their road to the camp ran another way. So they climbed up the cliff and looked about, but could see only a pair of oribe bucks, one lying down under a tree, and one eating grass quite close to its mate.

"The Zulus have gone or there would be no buck here," said Rachel. "Come, now, hold the shield before you and the spear in your hand, to hide that you are a woman, and let us go on boldly."

So they went till they reached the crest of the next rise, and then sprang back behind it, for lying here and there they saw people who seemed to be asleep.

"The Zulus resting!" exclaimed Rachel.

"Nay," answered the girl with a sigh. "My people, dead! See the vultures gathered round them."

Rachel looked again, and saw that it was so. Without a word they walked forward, and as they passed each body Noie gave it its name. Here lay a brother, there a sister, yonder four folk of her father's kraal. They came to a tall and handsome woman of middle age, and she shivered as she had done in the pool and said in an icy voice:

"The mother who bore me!"

A few more steps and in a patch of high grass that grew round an ant-heap, they found two Zulu soldiers, each pierced through with a spear. Seated against the ant-heap also, as though he were but resting, was a light-coloured man, a dwarf in stature, spare of

frame, and with sharp features. His dress, if he wore any, seemed to have been removed from him, for he was almost naked, and Rachel noticed that no wound could be seen on him.

"Behold my father!" said Noie in the same icy voice.

"But," whispered Rachel, "he only sleeps. No spear has touched him."

"Not so, he is dead, dead by the White Death after the fashion of his people."

Now Rachel wondered what this White Death might be, and of which people the man was one. That he was not a Zulu who had been stunted in his growth she could see for herself, nor had she ever met a native who at all resembled him. Still she could ask no questions at that time; the thing was too awful. Moreover Noie had knelt down before the body, and with her arms thrown around its neck, was whispering into its ear. For a full minute she whispered thus, then set her own ear to the cold stirless lips, and for another minute or more, seemed to listen intently, nodding her head from time to time. Never before had Rachel witnessed anything so uncanny, and oddly enough, the fact that this scene was enacted in the bright sunlight added to its terrors. She stood paralysed, forgetting the Zulus, forgetting everything except that to all appearance the living was holding converse with the dead.

At length Noie rose, and turning to her companion said:

"My Spirit has been good to me; I thank my Spirit, which brought me here before it was too late for us to talk together. Now I have the message."

"The message! Oh! what message?" gasped Rachel.

An inscrutable look gathered on the face of the beautiful native girl.

"It is to me alone," she answered, "but this I may say, much of it was of you, Inkosazana-y-Zoola."

"Who told you that was my native name?" asked Rachel, springing back.

"It was in the message, O thou before whom kings shall bow."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Rachel, "you have heard it from our people."

"So be it, Lady; I have heard it from your people whom I have never seen. Now let us go, your father is troubled for you."

Again Rachel looked at her sideways, and Noie went on:

"Lady, from henceforth I am your servant, am I not? and that service will not be light."

"She thinks I shall make her dig," thought Rachel to herself, as the girl continued in her low, soft voice:

"Now I ask you one thing—when I tell you my story, let it be for your breast alone. Say only that I am a common girl whom you saved from the soldier."

"Why not?" answered Rachel. "That is all I have to tell."

Then once more they went on, Rachel wondering if she dreamed, the girl Noie walking at her side, stern and cold-faced as a statue.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CASTING OF THE LOTS

They reached the crest of the last rise, and there, facing them on the slope of the opposite wave of land, stood the waggon, surrounded by the thorn fence, within which the cattle and horses were still enclosed, doubtless for fear of the Zulus. Nothing could be more peaceful than the aspect of that camp. To look at it no one would have believed that within a few hundred yards a hideous massacre had just taken place. Presently, however, voices began to shout, and heads to bob up over the fence. Then it occurred to Rachel that they must think she was a prisoner in the charge of a Zulu, and she told Noie to lower the shield which she still held in front of her. The next instant some thorns were torn out, and her father, a gun in his hand, appeared striding towards them.

"Thank God that you are safe," he said as they met. "I have suffered great anxiety, although I hoped that the white man Israel—no, Ishmael—had rescued you. He came here to warn us," he added in explanation, "very early this morning, then galloped off to find you. Indeed his after-rider, whose horse he took, is still here. Where on earth have you been, Rachel, and"—suddenly becoming aware of Noie, who, arrayed only in a towel, a shield, and a stabbing spear, presented a curious if an impressive spectacle—"who is this young person?"

"She is a native girl I saved from the massacre," replied Rachel, answering the last question first. "It is a long story, but I shot the man who was going to kill her, and we hid in a pool. Are you all safe, and where is mother?"

"Shot the man! Shed human blood! Hid in a pool!" ejaculated Mr. Dove, overcome. "Really, Rachel, you are a most trying daughter. Why should you go out before daybreak and do such things?"

"I don't know, I am sure, father; predestination, I suppose—to save her life, you know."

Again he contemplated the beautiful Noie, then, murmuring something about a blanket, ran back to the camp. By this time Mrs. Dove had climbed out of the waggon, and arrived with the Kaffirs.

"I knew you would be safe, Rachel," she said in her gentle voice, "because nothing can hurt you. Still you do upset your poor father dreadfully, and—what are you going to do with that naked young woman?"

"Give her something to eat, dear," answered Rachel. "Don't ask me any more questions now. We have been sitting up to our necks in water for hours, and are starved and frozen, to say nothing of worse things."

At this moment Mr. Dove arrived with a blanket, which he offered to Noie, who took it from him and threw it round her body. Then they went into the camp, where Rachel changed her damp clothes, whilst Noie sat by her in a corner of the tent. Presently, too, food was brought, and Rachel ate hungrily, forcing Noie to do the same. Then she went out, leaving the girl to rest in the tent, and with certain omissions, such as the conduct of Noie when she found her dead father, told all the story which, wild as were the times and strange as were the things that happened in them, they found wonderful enough.

When she had done Mr. Dove knelt down and offered up thanks for his daughter's preservation through great danger, and with them prayers that she might be forgiven for having shot the Zulu, a deed that, except for the physical horror of it, did not weigh upon Rachel's mind.

"You know, father, you would have done the same yourself," she explained, "and so would mother there, if she could hold a gun, so what is the good of pretending that it is a sin? Also no one saw it except that white man and the crocodiles which buried the body, so the less we say about the matter the better it will be for all of us."

"I admit," answered Mr. Dove, "that the circumstances justified the deed, though I fear that the truth will out, since blood calls for blood. But what are we to do with the girl? They will come to seek her and kill us all."

"They will not seek, father, because they think that she is dead, and will never know otherwise unless that white man tells them, which he will scarcely do, as the Zulus would think that he shot the soldier, not I. She has been sent to us, and it is our duty to keep her."

"I suppose so," said her father doubtfully. "Poor thing! Truly she has cause for gratitude to Providence: all her relations killed by those bloodthirsty savages, and she saved!"

"If all of you were killed and I were saved, I do not know that I should feel particularly grateful," answered Rachel. "But it is no use arguing about such things, so let us be thankful that we are not killed too. Now I am tired out, and going to lie down, for of course we can't leave this place at present, unless we trek back to Durban."

Such was the finding of Noie.

When Rachel awoke from the sleep into which she had fallen, sunset was near at hand. She left the tent where Noie still lay slumbering or lost in stupor, to find that only her mother and Ishmael's after-rider remained in the camp, her father having gone out with the Kaffirs, in order to bury as many of the dead as possible before night came, and with it the jackals and hyenas. Rachel made up the fire and set to work with her mother's help to cook their evening meal. Whilst they were thus engaged her quick ears caught the sound of horses' hoofs, and she looked up to perceive the white man, Ishmael, still leading the spare horse on which she had ridden that morning. He had halted on the crest of ground where she had first seen him upon the previous day, and was peering at the camp, with the object apparently of ascertaining whether its occupants were still alive.

"I will go and ask him in," said Rachel, who, for reasons of her own, wished to have a word or two with the man.

Presently she came up to him, and saw at once that he seemed to be very much ashamed of himself.

"Well," she said cheerfully, "you see here I am, safe enough, and I am glad that you are the same."

"You are a wonderful woman," he replied, letting his eyes sink before her clear gaze, "as wonderful as you are beautiful."

"No compliments, please," said Rachel, "they are out of place in this savage land."

"I beg your pardon, I could not help speaking the truth. Did they kill the girl and let you go?"

"No, I managed to hide up with her; she is here now."

"That is very dangerous, Miss Dove. I know all about it; it is she whom Dingaan was after. When he hears that you have sheltered her he will send and kill you all. Take my advice and turn her out at once. I say it is most dangerous."

"Perhaps," answered Rachel calmly, "but all the same I shall do nothing of the sort unless she wishes to go, nor do I think that my father will either. Now please listen a minute. If this story comes to the ears of the Zulus—and I do not see why it should, as the crocodiles have eaten that soldier—who will they think shot him, I or the white man who was with me? Do you understand?"

"I understand and shall hold my tongue, for your sake."

"No, for your own. Well, by way of making the bargain fair, for my part I shall say as little as possible of how we separated this morning. Not that I blame you for riding off and leaving an obstinate young woman whom you did not know to take her chance. Still, other people might think differently."

"Yes," he answered, "they might, and I admit that I am ashamed of myself. But you don't know the Zulus as I do, and I thought that they would be all on us in a moment; also I was mad with you and lost my nerve. Really I am very sorry."

"Please don't apologise. It was quite natural, and what is more, all for the best. If we had gone on we should have ridden right into them, and perhaps never ridden out again. Now here comes my father; we have agreed that you will not say too much about this girl, have we not?"

He nodded and advanced with her, leading the horses, for he had dismounted, to meet Mr. Dove at the opening in the fence.

"Good evening," said the clergyman, who seemed depressed after his sad task, as he motioned to one of the Kaffirs to put down his mattock and take the horses. "I don't quite know what happened this morning, but I have to thank you for trying to save my daughter from those cruel men. I have been burying their victims in a little cleft that we found, or rather some of them. The vultures you know ——" and he paused.

"I didn't save her, sir," answered the stranger humbly. "It seemed hopeless, as she would not leave the Kaffir girl."

Mr. Dove looked at him searchingly, and there was a suspicion of contempt in his voice as he replied:

"You would not have had her abandon the poor thing, would you? For the rest, God saved them both, so it does not much matter exactly how, as everything has turned out for the best. Won't you come in and have some supper, Mr.—Ishmael—I am afraid I do not know the rest of your name."

"There is no more to know, Mr. Dove," he replied doggedly, then added: "Look here, sir, as I daresay you have found out, this is a rough country, and people come to it, some of them, whose luck has been rough elsewhere. Now, perhaps I am as well born as you are, and perhaps *my* luck was rough in other lands, so that I chose to come and live in a place where there are no laws or civilisation. Perhaps, too, I took the name of another man who was driven into the wilderness—you will remember all about him—also that it does not seem to have been his fault. Any way, if we should be thrown up together I'll ask you to take me as I am, that is, a hunter and a trader 'in the Zulu,' and not to bother about what I have been. Whatever I was christened, my name is Ishmael now, or among the Kaffirs Ibubesi, and if you want another, let us call it Smith."

"Quite so, Mr. Ishmael. It is no affair of mine," replied Mr. Dove with a smile, for he had met people of this sort before in Africa.

But within himself already he determined that this white and perchance fallen wanderer was one whom, perhaps, it would be his duty to lead back into the paths of Christian propriety and peace.

These matters settled, they went into the little camp, and a sentry having been set, for now the night was falling fast, Ishmael was introduced to Mrs. Dove, who looked him up and down and said little, after which they began their supper. When their simple meal was finished, Ishmael lit his pipe and sat himself upon the disselboom of the waggon, looking extremely handsome and picturesque in the flare of the firelight which fell upon his dark face, long black hair and curious garments, for although he had replaced his lion-skin by an old coat, his zebra-hide trousers and waistcoat made of an otter's pelt still remained. Contemplating him, Rachel felt sure that whatever his present and past might be, he had spoken the truth when he hinted that he was well-born. Indeed, this might be gathered from his voice and method of expressing himself when he grew more at ease, although it was true that sometimes he substituted a Zulu for an English word, and employed its idioms in his sentences, doubtless because for years he had been accustomed to speak and even to think in that language.

Now he was explaining to Mr. Dove the political and social position among that people, whose cruel laws and customs led to constant fights on the part of tribes or families, who knew that they were doomed, and their consequent massacre if caught, as had happened that day. Of course, the clergyman, who had lived for some years at Durban, knew that this was true, although, never having actually witnessed one of these dreadful events till now, he did not realise all their horror.

"I fear that my task will be even harder than I thought," he said with a sigh.

"What task?" asked Ishmael.

"That of converting the Zulus. I am trekking to the king's kraal now, and propose to settle there."

Ishmael knocked out his pipe and filled it again before he answered. Apparently he could find no words in which to express his thoughts, but when at length these came they were vigorous enough.

"Why not trek to hell and settle *there* at once?" he asked, "I beg pardon, I meant heaven, for you and your likes. Man," he went on excitedly, "have you any heart? Do you care about your wife and daughter?"

"I have always imagined that I did, Mr. Ishmael," replied the missionary in a cold voice.

"Then do you wish to see their throats cut before your eyes, or," and he looked at Rachel, "worse?"

"How can you ask such questions?" said Mr. Dove, indignantly. "Of course I know that there are risks among all wild peoples, but I trust to Providence to protect us."

Mr. Ishmael puffed at his pipe and swore to himself in Zulu.

"Yes," he said, when he had recovered a little, "so I suppose did Seyapi and his people, but you have been burying them this afternoon—haven't you?—all except the girl, Noie, whom you have sheltered, for which deed Dingaan will bury you all if you go into Zululand, or rather throw you to the vultures. Don't think that your being an *umfundusi*, I mean a teacher, will save you. The Almighty Himself can't save you there. You will be dead and forgotten in a month. What's more, you will have to drive your own waggon in, for your Kaffirs won't, they know better. A Bible won't turn the blade of an assegai."

"Please, Mr. Ishmael, please do not speak so—so irreligiously," said Mr. Dove in an irritated but nervous voice. "You do not seem to understand that I have a mission to perform, and if that should involve martyrdom——"

"Oh! bother martyrdom, which is what you are after, no doubt, 'casting down your golden crown upon a crystal sea,' and the rest of it—I remember the stuff. The question is, do you wish to murder your wife and daughter, for that's the plain English of it?"

"Of course not. How can you suggest such a thing?"

"Then you had better not cross the Tugela. Go back to Durban, or stop where you are at least, for, unless he finds out anything, Dingaan is not likely to interfere with a white man on this side of the river."

"That would involve abandoning my most cherished ambition, and impulses that—but I will not speak to you of things which perhaps you might not understand."

"I dare say I shouldn't, but I do understand what it feels like to have your neck twisted out of joint. Look here, sir, if you want to go into Zululand, you should go alone; it is no place for white ladies."

"That is for them to judge, sir," answered Mr. Dove. "I believe that their faith will be equal to this trial," and he looked at his wife almost imploringly.

For once, however, she failed him.

"My dear John," she said, "if you want my opinion, I think that this gentleman is quite right. For myself I don't care much, but it can never have been intended that we should absolutely throw away our lives. I have always given way to you, and followed you to many strange places without grumbling, although, as you know, we might be quite comfortable at home, or at any rate in some civilised town. Now I say that I think you ought not to go to Zululand, especially as there is Rachel to think of."

"Oh! don't trouble about me," interrupted that young lady, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I can take my chance as I have often done before—to-day, for instance."

"But I do trouble about you, my dear, although it is true I don't believe that you will be killed; you know I have always said so. Still I do trouble, and John—John," she added in a kind of pitiful cry, "can't you see that you have worn me out? Can't you understand that I am getting old and weak? Is there nobody to whom you have a duty as well as to the heathen? Are there not enough heathen here?" she went on with gathering passion. "If you must mix with them, do what this gentleman says, and stop here, that is, if you won't go back. Build a house and let us have a little peace before we die, for death will come soon enough, and terribly enough, I am sure," and she burst into a fit of weeping.

"My dear," said Mr. Dove, "you are upset; the unhappy occurrences of to-day, which—did we but know it—are doubtless all for the best, and your anxiety for Rachel have been too much for you. I think that you had better go to bed, and you too, Rachel. I will talk the matter over further with Mr. Ishmael, who, perhaps, has been sent to guide me. I am not unreasonable, as you think, and if he can convince me that there is any risk to your lives—for my own I care nothing—I will consider the suggestion of building a mission-station outside Zululand, at any rate for a few years. It may be that it is not intended that we should enter that country at present."

So Mrs. Dove and her daughter went, but for two hours or more Rachel heard her father and the hunter talking earnestly, and wondered in a sleepy fashion to what conclusion he had come. Personally she did not mind much on which side of the Tugela they were to live, if they must bide at all in the region of that river. Still, for her mother's sake she determined that if she could bring it about, they should stay where they were. Indeed there was no choice between this and returning to England, as her father had quarrelled too bitterly with the white men at Durban to allow of his taking up his residence among them again.

When Rachel woke on the following morning the first thing she saw in the growing light was the orphaned native Noie, seated on the further side of the little tent, her head resting upon her hand, and gazing at her vacantly. Rachel watched her a while, pretending to be still asleep, and for the first time understood how beautiful this girl was in her own fashion. Although small, that is in comparison with most Kaffir women, she was perfectly shaped and developed. Her soft skin in that light looked almost white, although it had about it nothing of the muddy colour of the half-breed; her hair was long, black and curly, and worn naturally, not forced into artificial shapes as is common among the Kaffirs. Her features were finely cut and intellectual, and her eyes, shaded by long lashes, somewhat oblong in shape, of a brown colour, and soft as those of a buck. Certainly for a native she was lovely, and what is more, quite unlike any Bantu that Rachel had ever seen, except indeed that dead man whom she said was her father, and who, although he was so small, had managed to kill two great Zulu warriors before, mysteriously enough, he died himself.

"Noie," said Rachel, when she had completed her observations, whereon with a quick and agile movement the girl rose, sank again on her knees beside her, took the hand that hung from the bed between her own, and pressed it to her lips, saying in the soft Zulu tongue,

"Inkosazana, I am here."

"Is that white man still asleep, Noie?"

"Nay, he has gone. He and his servant rode away before the light, fearing lest there might still be Zulus between him and his kraal."

"Do you know anything about him, Noie?"

"Yes, Lady, I have seen him in Zululand. He is a bad man. They call him there 'Lion,' not because he is brave, but because he hunts and springs by night."

"Just what I should have thought of him," answered Rachel, "and we know that he is not brave," she added with a smile. "But never mind this jackal in a lion's hide; tell me your story, Noie, if you will, only speak low, for this tent is thin."

"Lady," said the girl, "you who were born white in body and in spirit, hear me. I am but half a Zulu. My father who died yesterday in the flesh, departing back to the world of ghosts, was of another people who live far to the north, a small people but a strong. They live among the trees, they worship trees; they die when their tree dies; they are dealers in dreams; they are the companions of ghosts, little men before whom the tribes tremble; who hate the sun, and dwell in the deep of the forest. Myself I do not know them; I have

never seen them, but my father told me these things, and others that I may not repeat. When he was a young man my father fled from his people."

"Why?" asked Rachel, for the girl paused.

"Lady, I do not know; I think it was because he would have been their priest, or one of their priests, and he feared I think that he had seen a woman, a slave to them, whom therefore he might not marry. I think that woman was my mother. So he fled from them—with her, and came to live among the Zulus. He was a great doctor there in Chaka's time, not one of the *Abangomas*, not one of the 'Smellers-out-of-witches,' not a 'Bringer-down-to-death,' for like all his race he hated bloodshed. No, none of these things, but a doctor of medicines, a master of magic, an interpreter of dreams, a lord of wisdom; yes, it was his wisdom that made Chaka great, and when he withdrew it from him because of his cruelties, then Chaka died.

"Lady, Dingaan rules in Chaka's place, Dingaan who slew him, but although he had been Chaka's doctor, my father was spared because they feared him. I was the only child of my mother, but he took other wives after the Zulu fashion, not because he loved them, I think, but that he might not seem different to other men. So he grew great and rich, and lived in peace because they feared him. Lady, my father loved me, and to me alone he taught his language and his wisdom. I helped him with his medicines; I interpreted the dreams which he could not interpret, his blanket fell upon me. Often I was sought in marriage, but I did not wish to marry, Wisdom is my husband.

"There came an evil day; we knew that it must come, my father and I, and I wished to fly the land, but he could not do so because of his other wives and children. The maidens of my district were marshalled for the king to see. His eye fell upon me, and he thought me fair because I am different from Zulu women, and—you can guess. Yet I was saved, for the other doctors and the head wives of the king said that it was not wise that I should be taken into his house, I who knew too many secrets and could bewitch him if I willed, or prison him with drugs that leave no trace. So I escaped a while and was thankful. Now it came about that because he might not take me Dingaan began to think much of me, and to dream of me at nights. At last he asked me of my father, as a gift, not as a right, for so he thought that no ill would come with me. But I prayed my father to keep me from Dingaan, for I hated Dingaan, and told him that if I were sent to the king, I would poison him. My father listened to me because he loved me and could not bear to part with me, and said Dingaan nay. Now Dingaan grew very angry and asked counsel of his other doctors, but they would give him none because they feared my father. Then he asked counsel of that white man, Hishmel, who is called the Lion, and who is much at the kraal of Umgungundhlovu."

"Ah!" said Rachel, "now I understand why he wished you to be killed."

"The white man, Hishmel, the jackal in a lion's skin, as you named him, laughed at Dingaan's fears. He said to him, 'It is of the father, Seyapi, you should be afraid. He has the magic, not the girl. Kill the father, and his house, and take the daughter whom your heart desires, and be happy.'

"So spoke Hishmel, and Dingaan thought his counsel good, and paid him for it with the teeth of elephants, and certain women for whom he asked. Now my father foreboded ill, and I also, for both of us had dreamed a dream. Still we did not fly until the slayers were almost at the gates, because of his other wives and his children. Nor, save for them would he have fled then, or I either, but would have died after the fashion of his people, as he did at last."

"The White Death?" queried Rachel.

"Yes, Lady, the White Death. Still in the end we fled, thinking to gain the protection of the white men down yonder. I went first to escape the king's men who had orders to take me alive and bring me to him, that is why we were not together at the end. Lady, you know the rest. Hishmel doubtless had seen you, and thinking that the Impi would kill you, came to warn you. Then we met just as I was about to die, though perhaps not by that soldier's spear, as you thought. I have spoken."

"What message came to you when you knelt down before your dead father?" asked Rachel for the second time, since on this point she was intensely curious.

Again that inscrutable look gathered on the girl's face, and she answered.

"Did I not tell you it was for my ear alone, O Inkosazana-y-Zoola? I dare not say it, be satisfied. But this I may say. Your fate and mine are intertwined; yours and mine and another's, for our spirits are sisters which have dwelt together in past days."

"Indeed," said Rachel smiling, for she who had mixed with them from her childhood knew something of the mysticism of the natives, also that it was often nonsense. "Well, Noie, I love you, I know not why. Perhaps, for all you have suffered. Yet I say to you that if you wish to remain my sister in the spirit, you had better separate from me in the flesh. That jackal man knows your secret, girl, and soon or late will loose the assegai on you."

"Doubtless," she answered, "doubtless many things will come about. But they are doomed to come about. Whether I go or whether I stay they will happen. Say you therefore, Lady, and I will obey. Shall I go or shall I stay, or shall I die before your eyes?"

"It is on your own head," answered Rachel shrugging her shoulders.

"Nay, nay, Lady, you forget, it is on yours also, seeing that if I stay I may bring peril on you and your house. Have you then no order for me?"

"Noie, I have answered—one. Judge you."

"I will not judge. Let Heaven-above judge. Lady, give me a hair from your head."

Rachel plucked out the hair and handed it, a shining thread of gold, to Noie who drew one from her own dark tresses, and laid them side by side.

"See," she said, "they are of the same length. Now, without the wind blows gently; come then to the door of the tent, and I will throw these two hairs into the wind. If that which is black floats first to the ground, then I stay, if that which is golden, then I go to seek my hair. Is it agreed?"

"It is agreed."

So the two girls went to the entrance of the tent, and Noie with a swift motion tossed up the hairs. As it happened one of those little eddies of wind which are common in South Africa, caught them, causing them to rise almost perpendicularly into the air. At a certain height, about forty feet, the supporting wind seemed to fail, that is so far as the hair from Noie's head was concerned, for there it floated high above them like a black thread in the sunlight, and gently by slow degrees came to the earth just at their feet. But the

hair from Rachel's head, being caught by the fringe of the whirlwind, was borne upwards and onwards very swiftly, until at length it vanished from their sight.

"It seems that I stay," said Noie.

"Yes," answered Rachel. "I am very glad; also if any evil comes of it we are not to blame, the wind is to blame."

"Yes, Lady, but what makes the wind to blow?"

Again Rachel shrugged her shoulders, and asked a question in her turn.

"Whither has that hair of mine been borne, Noie?"

"I do not know, Lady. Perhaps my father's spirit took it for his own ends. I think so. I think it went northwards. At any rate when mine fell, it was snatched away, was it not? And yet they both floated up together. I think that one day you will follow that hair of yours, Lady, follow it to the land where great trees whisper secrets to the night."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MESSAGE OF THE KING

So it chanced that Noie became a member of the Dove household. For obvious reasons she changed her name, and thenceforward was called Nonha. Also it happened that Mr. Dove abandoned his idea of settling as a missionary in Zululand, and instead, took up his residence at this beautiful spot. He called it Ramah because it was a place of weeping, for here all the family and dependents of Seyapi had been destroyed by the spear. Mrs. Dove thought it an ill-omened name enough, but after her manner gave way to her husband in the matter.

"I think there will be more weeping here before everything is done," she said.

Rachel answered, however, that it was as good as any other, since names could alter nothing. Here, then, at Ramah, Mr. Dove built him a house on that knoll where first he had pitched his camp. It was a very good house after its fashion, for, as has been said, he did not lack for means, and was, moreover, clever in such matters. He hired a mason who had drifted to Natal to cut stone, of which a plenty lay at hand, and two half-breed carpenters to execute the wood-work, whilst the Kaffirs thatched the whole as only they can do. Then he set to work upon a church, which was placed on the crest of the opposite knoll where the white man, Ishmael, had appeared on the evening of their arrival. Like the house, it was excellent of its sort, and when at length it was finished after more than a year of labour, Mr. Dove felt a proud man.

Indeed at Ramah he was happier than he had ever been since he landed upon the shores of Africa, for now at length his dream seemed to be in the way of realisation. Very soon a considerable native village sprang up around him, peopled almost entirely by remnants of the Natal tribes whom Chaka had destroyed and who were but too glad to settle under the aegis of the white man, especially when they discovered how good he was. Of the doctrines which he preached to them day and night, most of them, it is true, did not understand much. Still they accepted them as the price of being allowed "to live in his shadow," but in the vast majority of cases they sturdily refused to put away all wives but one, as he earnestly exhorted them to do.

At first he wished to eject them from the settlement in punishment of this sin, but when it came to the point they absolutely refused to go, demonstrating to him that they had as much right to live there as he had, an argument that he was unable to controvert. So he was obliged to submit to the presence of this abomination, which he did in the hope that in time their hard hearts would be softened.

"Continue to preach to us, O Shouter," they said, "and we will listen. Mayhap in years to come we shall learn to think as you do. Meanwhile give us space to consider the point."

So he continued to preach, and contented himself with baptising the children and very old people who took no more wives. Except on this one point, however, they got on excellently together. Indeed, never since Chaka broke upon them like a destroying demon had these poor folk been so happy. The missionary imported ploughs and taught them to improve their agriculture, so that ere long this rich, virgin soil brought forth abundantly. Their few cattle multiplied also in an amazing fashion, as did their families, and soon they were as prosperous as they had been in the good old days before they knew the Zulu assegai, especially as, to their amazement, the Shouter never took from them even a calf or a bundle of corn by way of tax. Only the shadow of that Zulu assegai still lay upon them, for if Chaka was dead Dingaan ruled a few miles away across the Tugela. Moreover, hearing of the rise of this new town, and of certain strange matters connected with it, he sent spies to inspect and enquire. The spies returned and reported that there dwelt in it only a white medicine-man with his wife, and a number of Natal Kaffirs. Also they reported in great detail many wonderful stories concerning the beautiful maiden with a high name who passed as the white teacher's daughter, and who had already become the subject of so much native talk and rumour. On learning all these things Dingaan despatched an embassy, who delivered this message:

"I, Dingaan, king of the Zulus, have heard that you, O White Shouter, have built a town upon my borders, and peopled it with the puppies of the jackals whom Chaka hunted. I send to you now to say that you and your jackals shall have peace from me so long as you harbour none of my runaways, but if I find but one of them there, then an Impi shall wipe you out. I hear also that there dwells with you a beautiful white maiden said to be your daughter, who is known, throughout the land as Inkosazana-y-Zoola. Now that is the name of our Spirit who, the doctors say, is also white, and it is strange to us that this maiden should bear that great name. Some of the *Isanusi*s, the prophetesses, declare that she is our Spirit in the flesh, but that meat sticks in my throat, I cannot swallow it. Still, I invite this maiden to visit me that I may see her and judge of her, and I swear to you, and to her, by the ghosts of my ancestors, that no harm shall come to her then or at any time. He who so much as lays a finger upon her shall die, he and all his house. Because of her name, which I am told she has borne from a child, all the territories of the Zulus are her kraal and all the thousands of the Zulus are her servants. Yea, because of her high name I give to her power of life and death wherever men obey my word, and for an offering I send to her twelve of my royal white cattle and a bull, also an ox trained to riding. When she visits me let her ride upon the white ox that she may be known, but let no man come with her, for among the people of the Zulus she must be attended by Zulus only. I have spoken. I pray that she who is named Princess of the Zulus will appear before my messengers and acknowledge the gift of the King of the Zulus, that they may see her in the flesh and make report of her to me."

Now when Mr. Dove had received this message, one evening at sundown, he went into the house and repeated it to Rachel, for it puzzled him much, and he knew not what to answer.

Rachel in her turn took counsel with Noie who was hidden away lest some of the embassy should see and recognise her.

"Speak with the messengers," said Noie, "it is well to have power among the Zulus. I, who have some knowledge of this business, say, speak with them alone, and speak softly, saying that one day you will come."

So having explained the matter to her father, and obtained his consent, Rachel, who desired to impress these savages, threw a white shawl about her, as Noie instructed her to do. Then, letting her long, golden hair hang down, she went out alone carrying a light

assegai in her hand, to the place where the messengers, six of them, and those who had driven the cattle from Zululand, were encamped in the guest kraal, at the gate of which, as it chanced, lay a great boulder of rock. On this boulder she took her stand, unobserved, waiting there till the full moon shone out from behind a dark cloud, turning her white robe to silver. Now of a sudden the messengers who were seated together, talking and taking snuff, looked up and saw her.

"*Inkosazana-y-Zoola!*" exclaimed one of them, rising, whereon they all sprang to their feet and perceiving this beautiful and mysterious figure, by a common impulse lifted their right arms and gave to her what no woman had ever received before—the royal salute.

"Bayète!" they cried, "Bayète!" then stood silent.

"I hear you," said Rachel, who spoke their tongue as well as she did her own. "It has been reported to me that you wished to see me, O Mouths of the King. Behold I am pleased to appear before you. What would you of *Inkosazana-y-Zoola*, O Mouths of the King?"

Then their spokesman, an old man of high rank, with a withered hand, stepped forward from the line of his companions, stared at her for a while, and saluted again.

"Lady," he said humbly, "Lady or Spirit, we would know how thou camest by that great name of thine."

"It was given me as a child far away from here," she answered, "because in a mighty tempest the lightnings turned aside and smote me not; because the waters raged yet drowned me not; because the lions slept with me yet harmed me not. It came to me from the high Heaven that was my friend. I do not know how it came."

"We have heard the story," answered the old man (which indeed they had with many additions), "and we believe. We believe that the Heavens above gave thee their own name which is the name of the Spirit of our people. That Spirit I have seen in a dream, and she was like to thee, O *Inkosazana-y-Zoola*."

"It may be so, Mouth of the King, still I am woman, not spirit."

"Yet in every woman there dwells a spirit, or so we believe, and in thee a great one, or so we have heard and believe, O Lady of the Heavens. To thee, then, again we repeat the words of Dingaan and of his council which to-day we have said in the ears of him who thinks himself thy father. To thee the roads are open; thine are the cattle and the kraals; here is an earnest of them. Thine are the lives of men. Command now, if thou wilt, that one of us be slain before thee, and whilst thou watchest, he shall look his last upon the moon."

"I hear you," said Rachel, quietly, "but I seek the life of none who are good. I thank the King for his gift; I wish the King well. I remember that life and death lie in my hands. Say these words to the King."

"We will say them, but wilt thou not come, O Lady, as the King desires? A regiment shall meet thee on the river bank and lead thee to his house. Unharméd shalt thou come, unharméd shalt thou return, and what thou askest that shall be given thee."

"One day, perchance, I will come, but not now. Go in peace, O Mouths of the King."

As she spoke another dark cloud floated across the moon, and when it had passed away she stood no more upon the rock. Then, seeing that she was gone, those messengers gathered up their spears and mats, and returned swiftly to Zululand.

When she reached the house again Rachel told her father and mother all that had passed, laughing as she spoke.

"It seems scarcely right, my dear," said Mr. Dove, when she had done. "Those benighted heathens will really believe that you are something unearthly."

"Then let them," she answered. "It can do no one any harm, and the power of life and death with the rest of it, unless it was all talk as I suspect, might be very useful one day. Who knows? And now the Princess of the Heavens will go and set the supper, as Noie—I beg pardon, Nonha—is off duty for the present."

Afterwards she asked Noie who was the old man with a withered hand who had spoken as the "King's Mouth."

"Mopo is his name, Mopo or Umbopo, none other, O Zoola," she answered. "It was he who stabbed T'Chaka, the Black One. It is said also that alone among men living, he has seen the White Spirit: the *Inkosazana*. Thrice he has seen her, or so goes the tale that my father, who knew everything, told to me. That is why Dingaan sent him here to make report of you." And she told her all the wonderful story of Mopo and of the death of T'Chaka, which Rachel treasured in her mind.[\*]

[\*] For the history of Mopo, see "Nada the Lily."—AUTHOR.

Such was Rachel's first introduction to the Zulus, an occasion on which her undoubted histrionic abilities stood her in good stead.

This matter of the embassy happened and in due course was almost forgotten, that is until a certain event occurred which brought it into mind. For some time, however, Rachel thought of it a good deal, wondering how it came about that her native name and the strange significance which they appeared to give to it had taken such a hold of the imagination of the Zulus. Ultimately she discovered that the white man, Ishmael, was the chief cause of these things. He had lived so long among savages that he had caught something of their mind and dark superstitions. To him, as to them, it seemed a marvellous thing that she should have acquired the title of the legendary Spirit of the Zulu people. The calm courage, too, so unusual in a woman, which she showed when she shot the warrior, and at the risk of her own life saved that of the girl, Noie, impressed him as something almost ultra-human, especially when he remembered his own conduct on that occasion. All of this story, of course, he did not tell to the Zulus for he feared lest they should take vengeance for his share in it. But of Rachel he discoursed to the King and his *indunas*, or great men, as a white witch-doctress of super-natural power, whose name showed that she was mixed up with the fortunes of the race. Therefore, in the end, Dingaan sent Mopo, "he who knew the Spirit," to make report of her.

When he was not absent upon his hunting or trading expeditions, Ishmael visited Ramah a great deal and, as Rachel soon discovered, not without an object. Indeed, almost from the first, her feminine instincts led her to suspect that this man who, notwithstanding his good looks, repelled her so intensely, was falling in love with her, which in truth he had done once and for all at their first meeting. In the beginning he did not, it is true, say much that could be so interpreted, but his whole attitude towards her suggested it, as did other things. For instance, when he came to visit the Doves, he discarded his garments of hide, including the picturesque zebra-skin trousers, and appeared dressed in smart European clothes which he had contrived to obtain from Durban, and a large hat with a white ostrich feather, that struck Rachel as even more ludicrous than the famous trousers. Also he was continuously sending presents of game and of skins, or of rare karosses, that is, fur rugs, which he ordered to be delivered to her personally—

tokens, all of them, that she could not misunderstand. Her father, however, misunderstood them persistently, although her mother saw something of the truth, and did her best to shield her from attentions which she knew to be unwelcome. Mr. Dove believed that it was his company which Ishmael sought. Indeed in this matter the man was very clever, contriving to give the clergyman the impression that he required spiritual instruction and comfort, which, of course, he found forthcoming in an abundant supply. When Mrs. Dove remonstrated, saying that she misdoubted her of him and his character, her husband answered obstinately, that it was his duty to turn a sinner from his way, and declined to pursue the conversation. So Ishmael continued to come.

For her part Rachel did her best to avoid him, instructing Noie to keep a constant look-out both with her eyes and through the Kaffirs, and to warn her of his advent. Then she would slip away into the bush or down to the seashore, and remain there till he was gone, or if he came when she could not do so, in the evening for instance, would keep Noie at her side, and on the first opportunity retire to her own room.

Now the result of this method of self-protection was to cause Ishmael to hate Noie as bitterly as she hated him. He guessed that the girl knew the dreadful truth about him; that it was he, and no other, who had counselled Dingaan to kill her father and all his family, and take her by force into his house, and although she said nothing of it, he suspected that she had told everything to Rachel. Moreover, it was she who always thwarted him, who prevented him time upon time from having a single word alone with her mistress. Therefore he determined to be revenged upon Noie whenever an opportunity occurred. But as yet he could find none, since if he were to tell the Zulus that she still lived, and cause her to be killed or taken away, he was sure that it would mean a final breach with the Dove family, all of whom had learned to love this beautiful orphan maid. So he nursed his rage in secret.

Meanwhile his passion increased daily, burning ever more fiercely for its continued repression, until at length the chance for which he had waited so long came to him.

Having become aware of Rachel's habit of slipping away whenever he appeared, he showed himself on horseback at a little distance, then waited a while and, instead of going up to the mission station, rode round it, and hid in some bush whence he could command a view of the surrounding country. Presently he saw Rachel, who was alone, for she had not waited to call Noie, hurrying towards the seashore, along the edge of that kloof down which ran the stream where the crocodiles lived. Presently, when she had gone too far to return to the house if she caught sight of him, he followed after her, and, leaving his horse, at last came up with her seated on a rock by the pool in which she had bathed on the morning of the massacre.

Walking softly in his veld-schoens, or shoes made of raw hide, on the sand, Rachel knew nothing of his coming until his shadow fell upon her. Then she sprang up and saw him, smiling and bowing, the ostrich-plume hat in his hand. Her first impulse was to run away, but recovering herself she nodded in a friendly fashion, and bade him "Good day," adding:

"What are you doing here, Mr. Ishmael, hunting?"

"Yes," he answered, "that's it. Hunting you. It has been a long chase, but I have caught you at last."

"Really, I am not a wild creature, Mr. Ishmael," she said indignantly.

"No," he answered, "you are more beautiful and more dangerous than any wild creature."

Rachel looked at him. Then she made as though she would pass him, saying that she was going home. Now Ishmael stood between two rocks filling the only egress from this place.

He stretched out his arms so that his fingers touched the rocks on either side, and said:

"You can't. You must listen to me first. I came here to say what I have wanted to tell you for a long time. I love you, and I ask you to marry me."

"Indeed," she replied, setting her face. "How can that be? I understood that you were already married—several times over."

"Who told you that?" he asked, angrily. "I know—that accursed little witch, Noie."

"Don't speak any ill of Noie, please; she is my friend."

"Then you have a liar for your friend. Those women are only my servants."

"It doesn't matter to me what they are, Mr. Ishmael. I have no wish to know your private affairs. Shall we stop this talk, which is not pleasant?"

"No," he answered. "I tell you that I love you and I mean to marry you, with your will or without it. Let it be with your will, Rachel," he added, pleadingly, "for I will make you a good husband. Also I am well-born, much better than you think, and I am rich, rich enough to take you out of this country, if you like. I have thousands of cattle, and a great deal of money put by, good English gold that I have got from the sale of ivory. You shall come with me from among all these savage people back to England, and live as you like."

"Thank you, but I prefer the savages, as you seem to have done until now. No, do not try to touch me; you know that I can defend myself if I choose," and she glanced at the pistol which she always carried in that wild land, "I am not afraid of you, Mr. Ishmael; it is you who are afraid of me."

"Perhaps I am," he exclaimed, "because those Zulus are right, you are *tagati*, an enchantress, not like other women, white or black. If it were not so, would you have driven me mad as you have done? I tell you I can't sleep for thinking of you. Oh! Rachel, Rachel, don't be angry with me. Have pity on me. Give me some hope. I know that my life has been rough in the past, but I will become good again for your sake and live like a Christian. But if you refuse me, if you send me back to hell—then you shall learn what I can be."

"I know what you are, Mr. Ishmael, and that is quite enough. I do not wish to be unkind, or to say anything that will pain you, but please go away, and never try to speak to me again like this, as it is quite useless. You must understand that I will never marry you, never."

"Are you in love with somebody else?" he asked hoarsely, and at the question, do what she would to prevent it, Rachel coloured a little.

"How can I be in love here, unless it were with a dream?"

"A dream, a dream of a man you mean. Well, don't let him cross my path, or it will soon be the dream of a ghost. I tell you I'd kill him. If I can't have you, no one else shall. Do you understand?"

"I understand that I am tired of this. Let me go home, please."

"Home! Soon you will have no home to go to except mine—that is, if you don't change your mind about me. I have power here—don't you understand? I have power."

As he spoke these words the man looked so evil that Rachel shivered a little. But she answered boldly enough:

"I understand that you have no power at all against me; no one has. It is I who have the power."

"Yes, because as I said, you are *tagati*, but there are others——"

As these words passed his lips someone slipped by him. Starting back, he saw that it was Noie, draped in her usual white robe, for nothing would induce her to wear European clothes. Passing him as though she saw him not, she went to Rachel and said:

"Inkosazana, I was at my work in the house yonder and I thought that I heard you calling me down here by the seashore, so I came. Is it your pleasure that I should accompany you home?"

"For instance," he went on furiously, "there is that black slut whom you are fond of. Well, if I can't hurt you, I can hurt her. Daughter of Seyapi, you know how runaways die in Zululand, or if you don't you shall soon learn. I will pay you back for all your tricks," and he stopped, choking with rage.

Noie looked him up and down with her soft, dreamy brown eyes.

"Do you think so, Night-prowler?" she asked. "Do you think that what you did to the father and his house, you will do to the daughter also? Well, it is strange, but last night, just before the cock crew, I sat by Seyapi's grave, and he spoke to me of you, White Man. Listen, now, and I will tell you what he said," and stepping forward she whispered in his ear.

Rachel, watching, saw the man's swarthy face turn pale as he hearkened, then he lifted his hand as though to strike her, let it fall again, and muttering curses in English and in Zulu, turned and walked, or rather staggered away.

"What did you tell him, Noie?" asked Rachel.

"Never mind, Zoola," she answered. "Perhaps the truth; perhaps what came into my mind. At any rate I frightened him away. He was making love to you, was he not, the low *silwana* (wild beast)? Ah! I thought so, for that he has wished to do for long. And he threatened, did he not? Well, you are right; he cannot hurt you at all, and me only a little, I think. But he is very dangerous and very strong, and can hurt others. If your father is wise he will leave this place, Zoola."

"I think so too," answered Rachel. "Let us go home and tell him so."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MR. DOVE VISITS ISHMAEL

When Rachel and Noie reached the house, which they did not do for some time, as they waited to make sure that Ishmael had really gone, it was to see the man himself riding away from its gate.

"Be prepared," said Noie; "I think that he has been here before us to pour poison into your father's ears."

So it proved to be, indeed, for on the stoep or verandah they found Mr. Dove walking up and down evidently much disturbed in mind.

"What is all this trouble, Rachel?" he asked. "What have you done to Mr. Smith"—for Mr. Dove in pursuance of the suggestion made by the man, had adopted that name for him which he considered less peculiar than Ishmael. "He has been here much upset, declaring that you have used him cruelly, and that Nonha threatened him with terrible things in the future, of which, of course, she can know nothing."

"Well, father, if you wish to hear," answered Rachel. "Mr. Ishmael, or Mr. Smith as you call him, has been asking me to marry him, and when I refused, as of course I did, behaved very unpleasantly."

"Indeed, Rachel. I gathered from him that something of the sort had happened, only his story is that it was you who behaved unpleasantly, speaking to him as though he were dirt. Now, Rachel, of course I do not want you to marry this person, in fact, I should dislike it, although I have seen a great change for the better in him lately—I mean spiritually, of course—and an earnest repentance for the errors of his past life. All I mean is that the proffered affection of an honest man should not be met with scorn and sharp words."

Up to this point Rachel endured the lecture in silence, but now she could bear no more.

"Honest man!" she exclaimed. "Father, are you deaf and blind, or only so good yourself that you cannot see evil in others? Do you know that it was this 'honest man' who brought about the murder of all Noie's people in order that he might curry favour with the Zulus?"

Mr. Dove started, and turning, asked:

"Is that so, Nonha?"

"It is so, Teacher," answered Noie, "although I have never spoken of it to you. Afterwards I will tell you the story, if you wish."

"And do you know," went on Rachel, "why he will never let you visit his kraal among the hills yonder? Well, I will tell you. It is because this 'honest man,' who wishes me to marry him, keeps his Kaffir wives and children there!"

"Rachel!" replied her father, in much distress, "I will never believe it; you are only repeating native scandal. Why, he has often spoken to me with horror of such things."

"I daresay he has, father. Well, now, I ask you to judge for yourself. Take a guide and start two hours before daybreak to-morrow morning to visit that kraal, and see if what I say is not true."

"I will, indeed," exclaimed Mr. Dove, who was now thoroughly aroused, for it was conduct of this sort that had caused his bitter quarrel with the first settlers in Natal. "I cannot believe the story, Rachel, I really cannot; but I promise you that if I should find cause to do so, the man shall never put foot in my house again."

"Then I think that I am rid of him," said Rachel, with a sigh of relief, "only be careful, dear, that he does not do you a mischief, for such men do not like to be found out." Then she left the stoep, and went to tell her mother all that had happened.

When she had heard the story, Mrs. Dove, who detested Ishmael as much as her daughter did, tried to persuade her husband not to visit his kraal, saying that it would only breed a feud, and that under the circumstances, it would be easy to forbid him the house upon other grounds. But Mr. Dove, obstinate as usual, refused to listen to her, saying that he would not judge the man without evidence, and that of the natives could not be relied on. Also, if the tale were true, it was his duty as his spiritual adviser to remonstrate with him.

So his poor wife gave up arguing, as she always did, and long before dawn on the following morning, Mr. Dove, accompanied by two guides, departed upon his errand.

After he had ridden some twelve miles across the plain which lay behind Ramah, just at daybreak, he reached a pass or nek between two swelling hills, beyond which the guides said lay the kraal that was called Mafooti. Presently he saw it, a place situated in a cup-like valley, chosen evidently because the approaches to it were easy to defend. On a knoll in the centre of this rich valley stood the kraal, a small native town surrounded by walls, and stone enclosures full of cattle. As they approached the kraal, from its main entrance issued four or five good-looking native women, one of them accompanied by a boy, and all carrying hoes in their hands, for they were going out at sunrise to work in the mealie fields. When they saw Mr. Dove they stood still, staring at him, till he called to them not to be afraid, and riding up, asked them who they were.

"We are of the number of the wives of Ibubesi, the Lion," answered their spokeswoman, who held the little boy by the hand.

"Do you mean the *Umlungu* (that is, the white man), Ishmael?" he asked again.

"Whom else should we mean?" she answered. "I am his head wife, now that he has put away old Mami, and this is his son. If the light were stronger you would see that he is almost white," she added, with pride.

Mr. Dove knew not what to answer; this intelligence overwhelmed him, and he sat silent on his horse. The wives of Ishmael prepared to pass on to the mealie fields, then stopped, and began to whisper together. At length the mother of the boy turned and addressed him, while the others crowded behind her to listen.

"We desire to ask you a question, Teacher," she said, somewhat shyly, for evidently they knew well enough who he was. "Is it true that we are to have a new sister?"

"A new sister! What do you mean?" asked Mr. Dove.

"We mean, Teacher," she replied smiling, "that we have heard that Ibubesi is courting the beautiful Zoola, the daughter of your head wife, and we thought that perhaps you had come to arrange about the cattle that he must pay for her. Doubtless if she is so fair, it will be a whole herd."

This was too much, even for Mr. Dove.

"How dare you talk so, you heathen hussies?" he gasped. "Where is the white man?"

"Teacher," she replied with indignation, and drawing herself up, "why do you call us bad names? We are respectable women, the wives of one husband, as respectable as your own, although not so numerous, or so we hear from Ibubesi. If you desire to see him, he is in the big hut, yonder, with our youngest sister, she whom he married last month. We wish you good day, as we go to hoe our lord's fields, and we hope that when she comes, the Inkosazana, your daughter, will not be as rude as you are, for if so, how shall we love her as we wish to do?" Then wrapping her blanket round her with a dignified air, the offended lady stalked off, followed by her various "sisters."

As for Mr. Dove, who for once in his life was in a towering rage, he cut his horse viciously with the sjambok, or hippopotamus-hide whip, which he carried, and followed by his guides, galloped forward to a big hut in the centre of the kraal.

Apparently Ishmael heard the sound of his horse's hoofs, for as the missionary was dismounting he crawled out of the bee-hole of the hut upon his hands and knees, as a Kaffir does, followed by a young woman in the lightest of attire, who was yawning as though she had just been aroused from sleep. What is more, except for the colour of his skin, he *was* a Kaffir and nothing else, for his costume consisted of a skin moocha such as the natives wear, and a fur kaross thrown over his shoulders. Straightening himself, Ishmael saw for the first time who was his visitor. His jaw dropped, and he uttered an ejaculation that need not be recorded, then stood silent. Mr. Dove was silent also; for his wrath would not allow him to speak.

"How do you do, sir?" Ishmael jerked out at last. "You are an early visitor, and find me somewhat unprepared. If I had known that you were coming I would"—then suddenly he remembered his attire, or the lack of it, also his companion who was leaning on his shoulder, and peeping at the white man over it. Drawing the kaross tightly about him, he gave the poor girl a backward kick, and with a Kaffir oath bade her begone, then went on hurriedly: "I am afraid my dress is not quite what you are accustomed to, but among these poor heathens I find it necessary to conform more or less to their ways in order to gain their confidence and—um—affection. Will you come into the hut? My servant there will get you some *tywala* (Kaffir beer)—I mean some *amasi* (curdled milk) at once, and I will have a calf killed for breakfast."

Mr. Dove could bear it no longer.

"Ishmael, or Smith, or Ibubesi—whichever name you may prefer," he broke out, "do not lie to me about your servant, for now I know all the truth, which I refused to believe when my daughter and Nonha told it me. You are a black-hearted villain. But yesterday you dared to come and ask Rachel to marry you, and now I find that you are living—oh! I cannot say it, it makes me ashamed of my race. Listen to me, sir. If ever you dare to set foot in Ramah again, or to speak to my wife and daughter, the Kaffirs shall whip you off the place. Indeed," he added, shaking his sjambok in Ishmael's face, "although I am an older man than you are, were it not for my office I would give you the thrashing you deserve."

At first Ishmael had shrunk beneath this torrent of invective, but the threat of violence roused his fierce nature. His face grew evil, and his long black hair and beard bristled with wrath.

"You had best get out of this, you prayer-snuffling old humbug," he said savagely, "for if you stop much longer I will make you sing another tune. We have sea-cow whips here, too, and you shall learn what a hiding means, such a hiding that your own family won't know you, if you live to get back to them. Look here, I offered to marry your daughter on the square, and I meant what I said. I'd have got rid of all this black baggage, and she should have been the only one. Well, I'll marry her yet, only now she'll just take her place with the others. We are all one flesh and blood, black and white, ain't we? I have often heard you preach it. So what will she have to complain of?" he sneered. "She can go and hoe mealies like the rest."

As this brutal talk fell upon his ears Mr. Dove's reason departed from him entirely. After all, he was an English gentleman first, and a clergyman afterwards; also he loved his daughter, and to hear her spoken of like this was intolerable to him, as it would have been to any father. Lifting the sjambok he cut Ishmael across the mouth so sharply that the blood came from his lips, then suddenly remembering that this deed would probably mean his death, stood still awaiting the issue. As it chanced it did not, for the man, like most brutes and bullies, was a coward, as Rachel had already found out. Obeying his first impulse he sprang at the clergyman with an oath, then seeing that his two guides, who carried assegais, had ranged themselves beside him, checked himself, for he feared lest those spears should pierce his heart.

"You are in my house," he said, wiping the blood from his beard, "and an old man, so I can't kill you as I would anyone else. But you have made me your enemy now, you fool, and others can. I have protected you so far for your daughter's sake, but I won't do it any longer. You think of that when your time comes."

"My time, like yours, will come when God wills," answered Mr. Dove unflinchingly, "not when you or anyone else wills. I do not fear you in the least. Still, I am sorry that I struck you, it was a sin of which I repent as I pray that you may repent."

Then he mounted his horse and rode away from the kraal Mafooti.

When Mr. Dove reached Ramah he only said to Rachel that what she had heard was quite true, and that he had forbidden Ishmael the house. Of course, however, Noie soon learnt the whole story from the Kaffir guides, and repeated it to her mistress. To his wife, on the other hand, he told everything, with the result that she was very much disturbed. She pointed out to him that this white outcast was a most dangerous man, who would certainly be revenged upon them in one way or another. Again she implored him, as she had

often done before, to leave these savage countries wherein he had laboured for all the best years of his life, saying that it was not right that he should expose their daughter to the risks of them.

"But," answered her husband, "you have often told me that you were sure no harm would come to Rachel, and I think that, too."

"Yes, dear, I am sure; still, for many reasons it does not seem right to keep her here." She did not add, poor, unselfish woman, that there was another who should be considered as well as Rachel.

"How can I go away," he went on excitedly, "just when all the seed that I have sown is ripening to harvest? If I did so, my work would be utterly lost, and my people relapse into barbarism again. I am not afraid of this man, or of anything that he can do to my body, but if I ran away from him it would be injuring my soul, and what account should I give of my cowardice when my time comes? Do you go, my love, and take Rachel with you if you wish, leaving me to finish my work alone."

But now, as before, Mrs. Dove would not go, and Rachel, when she was asked, shrugged her shoulders and answered laughing that she was not afraid of anybody or anything, and, except for her mother's sake, did not care whether she went or stayed. Certainly she would not leave her, nor, she added, did she wish to say goodbye to Africa.

When she was asked why, she replied vaguely that she had grown up there, and it was her home. But her mother, watching her, knew well enough that she had another reason, although no word of it ever passed her lips. In Africa she had met Richard Darrien as a child, and in Africa and nowhere else she believed she would meet him again as a woman.

The weeks and months went by, bringing to the Ramah household no sight or tidings of the white man, Ishmael. They heard through the Kaffirs, indeed, that although he still kept his kraal at Mafooti, he himself had gone away on some trading journey far to the north, and did not expect to return for a year, news at which everyone rejoiced, except Noie, who shook her wise little head and said nothing.

So all fear of the man gradually died away, and things were very peaceful and prosperous at Ramah.

In fact this quiet proved to be but the lull before the storm.

One day, about eight months after Mr. Dove had visited the kraal Mafooti, another embassy came to Rachel from the Zulu king, Dingaan, bringing with it a present of more white cattle. She received them as she had done before, at night and alone, for they refused to speak to her in the presence of other people.

In substance their petition was the same that it had been before, namely, that she would visit Zululand, as the king and his indunas desired her counsel upon an important matter. When asked what this matter was they either were, or pretended to be, ignorant, saying that it had not been confided to them. Thereon she said that if Dingaan chose to submit the question to her by messenger, she would give him her opinion on it, but that she could not come to his kraal. They asked why, seeing that the whole nation would guard her, and no hair of her head be harmed.

"Because I am a child in the house of my people, and they will not allow me to leave even for a day," she answered, thinking that this reply would appeal to a race who believe absolutely in obedience to parents and every established authority.

"Is it so?" remarked the old induna who spoke as Dingaan's Mouth—not Mopo, but another. "Now, how can the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, before whom a whole nation will bow, be in bonds to a white *Umfundusi*, a mere sky-doctor? Shall the wide heavens obey a cloud?"

"If they are bred of that cloud," retorted Rachel.

"The heavens breed the cloud, not the cloud the heavens," answered the induna aptly.

Now it occurred to Rachel that this thing was going further than it should. To be set up as a kind of guardian spirit to the Zulus had seemed a very good joke, and naturally appealed to the love of power which is common to women. But when it involved, at any rate in the eyes of that people, dominion over her own parents, the joke was, she felt, becoming serious. So she determined suddenly to bring it to an end.

"What mean you, Messenger of the King?" she asked. "I am but the child of my parents, and the parents are greater than the child, and must be obeyed of her."

"Inkosazana," answered the old man with a deprecatory smile, "if it pleases you to tell us such tales, our ears must listen, as if it pleased you to order us to be killed, we must be killed. But learn that we know the truth. We know how as a child you came down from above in the lightning, and how these white people with whom you dwell found you lying in the mist on the mountain top, and took you to their home in place of a babe whom they had buried."

"Who told you that story?" asked Rachel amazed.

"It was revealed to the council of the doctors, Lady."

"Then that was revealed which is not true. I was born as other women are, and my name of 'Lady of the Heavens' came to me by chance, as by chance I resemble the Spirit of your people."

"We hear you," answered the "Mouth" politely. "You were born as other women are, by chance you had your high name, by chance you are tall and fair and golden-haired like the Spirit of our people. We hear you."

Then Rachel gave it up.

"Bear my words to the King," she said, and they rose, saluted her with a Bayète, that royal salute which never before had been given to woman, and departed.

When they had gone Rachel went in to supper and told her parents all the story. Mr. Dove, now that she seemed to take a serious view of the matter, affected to treat it as absurd, although when she had laughed, his attitude, it may be remembered, was different. He talked of the silly Zulu superstitions, showed how they had twisted up the story of the death of her baby brother, and her escape from the flood in the Umtavuna river, into that which they had narrated to her. He even suggested that the whole thing was nonsense, part of some political move to enable the King, or a party in the state, to declare that they had with them the word of their traditional spirit and oracle.

Mrs. Dove, however, who that night was strangely depressed and uneasy, thought far otherwise. She pointed out that they were playing with vast and cruel forces, and that whatever these people exactly believed about Rachel, it was a dreadful thing for a girl to be put in a position in which the lives of hundreds might hang upon her nod.

“Yes, and,” she added hysterically, “perhaps our own lives also—perhaps our own lives also!”

To change the conversation, which was growing painful, Rachel asked if anyone had seen Noie. Her father answered that two hours ago, just before the embassy arrived, he had met her going down to the banks of the stream, as he supposed, to gather flowers for the table. Then he began to talk about the girl, saying what a sweet creature she was, and how strange it seemed to him that although she appeared to accept all the doctrines of the Christian faith, as yet she had never consented to be baptised.

It was while he was speaking thus that Rachel suddenly observed her mother fall forward, so that her body rested on the table, as though a kind of fit had seized her. Rachel sprang towards her, but before she reached her she appeared to have quite recovered, only her face looked very white.

“What on earth is the matter, mother?”

“Oh! don’t ask me,” she answered, “a terrible thing, a sort of fancy that came to me from talking about those Zulus. I thought I saw this place all red with blood and tongues of fire licking it up. It went as quickly as it came, and of course I know that it is nonsense.”

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE TAKING OF NOIE

Presently Mrs. Dove, who seemed to have quite recovered from her curious seizure, went to bed.

"I don't like it, father," said Rachel when the door had closed behind her. "Of course it is contrary to experience and all that, but I believe that mother is fore-sighted."

"Nonsense, dear, nonsense," said her father. "It is her Scotch superstition, that is all. We have been married for five-and-twenty years now, and I have heard this sort of thing again and again, but although we have lived in wild places where anything might happen to us, nothing out of the way ever has happened; in fact, we have always been most mercifully preserved."

"That's true, father, still I am not sure; perhaps because I am rather that way myself, sometimes. Thus I *know* that she is right about me; no harm will happen to me, at least no permanent harm. I feel that I shall live out my life, as I feel something else."

"What else, Rachel?"

"Do you remember the lad, Richard Darrien?" she asked, colouring a little.

"What? The boy who was with you that night on the island? Yes, I remember him, although I have not thought of him for years."

"Well, I feel that I shall see him again."

Mr. Dove laughed. "Is that all?" he said. "If he is still alive and in Africa, it wouldn't be very wonderful if you did, would it? And at any rate, of course, you will one day when we all cease to be alive. Really," he added with irritation, "there are enough bothers in life without rubbish of this kind, which comes from living among savages and absorbing their ideas. I am beginning to think that I shall have to give way and leave Africa, though it will break my heart just when, after all the striving, my efforts are being crowned with success."

"I have always told you, father, that I don't want to leave Africa, still, there is mother to be considered. Her health is not what it was."

"Well," he said impatiently, "I will talk to her and weigh the thing. Perhaps I shall receive guidance, though for my part I cannot see what it matters. We've got to die some time, and if necessary I prefer that it should be while doing my duty. 'Take no thought for the morrow, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' has always been my motto, who am content with what it pleases Providence to send me."

Then Rachel, seeing no use in continuing the conversation, bade him good-night, and went to look for Noie, only to discover that she was not in the house. This disturbed her very much, although it occurred to her that she might possibly be with friends in the village, hiding till she was sure the Zulu embassy had gone. So she went to bed without troubling her father.

At daybreak next morning she rose, not having slept very well, and went out to look for the girl, without success, for no one had heard or seen anything of her. As she was returning to the house, however, she met a solitary Zulu, a dignified middle-aged man, whom she thought she recognised as one of the embassy, although of this she could not be sure, as she had only seen these people in the moonlight. The man, who was quite unarmed, except for a kerry which he carried, crouched down on catching sight of her in token of respect. As she approached he rose, and gave her the royal salute. Then she was sure.

"Speak," she said.

"Inkosazana," he answered humbly, "be not angry with me, I am Tamboosa, one of the King's indunas. You saw me with the others last night."

"I saw you."

"Inkosazana, there has been dwelling with you one Noie, the daughter of Seyapi the wizard, who with all his house was slain at this place by order of the King. She also should have been slain, but we have learned that you called down lightning from Heaven, and that with it you slew the soldier who had run her down, slew him and burned him up, as you had the right to do, and took the girl to be your slave, as you had the right to do."

"Speak on," said Rachel, showing none of the surprise which she felt.

"Inkosazana, we know that you have come to love this girl. Therefore, yesterday before we spoke with you we seized her as we were commanded, and hid her away, awaiting your answer to our message. Had you consented to visit the King at his Great Place, we would have let her go. But as you did not consent my companions have taken her to the King."

"An ill deed. What more, Tamboosa?"

"This; the King says by my mouth—Let the Inkosazana come and command, and her servant Noie shall go free and unharmed, for is she not a dog in her hut? But if she comes not and at once, then the girl dies."

"How know I that this tale is true, Tamboosa?" asked Rachel, controlling herself with an effort, for she loved Noie dearly.

The man turned towards some bushes that grew at a distance of about twenty paces, and cried: "Come hither."

Thereon from among the bushes where she lay hidden, rose a little maid of about fourteen, whom Rachel knew well as a girl that Noie often took with her to carry baskets and other things.

"Tell now the tale of the taking of Noie and deliver the message that she gave to you," commanded Tamboosa.

Thereon the trembling child began, and after the native fashion, suppressing no detail or circumstance, however small, narrated how the Zulus had surprised her and Noie while they were gathering flowers, and having bound their arms, had caused them to be hurried away unseen to some dense bush about four miles off. Here they had been kept hidden till in the night the embassy returned. Then they had spoken with Noie, who in the end called her and gave her a message. This was the message: "Say to the Inkosazana that the Zulus have caught me, and are taking me to Dingaan the King. Say that they declare that if she is pleased to come and speak the word, I shall be set free unharmed, that is, if she comes at once. But if she does not come, then I shall be killed. Say to her that I do not ask that she should come who am ready to die, and that though I believe that no harm will happen to her in Zululand, I think that she had better not come. Say that, living or dead, I love her."

Then the maid described how the embassy went on with Noie, leaving her in the charge of the man Tamboosa, who at the first break of dawn brought her back to Ramah, and made her hide in the bush.

Now Rachel had no more doubts. Clearly the tale was true, and the question was—what must be done? She thought a while, then bade Tamboosa and the child to follow her to the mission-house. On the stoep she found her father and mother sitting in the sun and drinking coffee, after the South African fashion.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Dove, looking at the man anxiously.

Rachel ordered him to repeat his story, and this he did, addressing Rachel alone, for of her father and mother he would take no notice. When he had done the child told her tale also.

"Go now, and wait without," said Rachel, when it was finished.

"Inkosazana, I go," answered the man, "but if it pleases you to save your servant, know that you must come swiftly. If you are not across the Tugela by sunset this night, word will be passed to the King, and she dies at once. Know also that you must come alone with me, for if any, white or black, accompany you, they will be killed."

"Now," said Rachel when the three of them were left alone, "now what is to be done?"

Mrs. Dove shook her head helplessly, and looked at her husband, who broke into a tirade against the Zulus, their superstitions, cruelties, customs, and everything that was theirs, and ended by declaring that it was of course utterly impossible that Rachel should go upon such a mad errand, and thus place herself in the power of savages.

"But, father," she said when he had done, "do you understand that you are pronouncing Noie's death sentence? If you were in my place, would you not go?"

"Of course I would. In fact I propose to do so as it is. No doubt Dingaan will listen to me."

"You mean that Dingaan will kill you. Did you not hear what that man Tamboosa said? Father, you must not go."

"No, John," broke in Mrs. Dove, "Rachel is right, you must not go, for you would never come back again. Also, how can you be so cruel as to think of leaving me here alone?"

"Then I suppose that we must abandon that poor girl to her fate," exclaimed Mr. Dove.

"How can you suppose anything so merciless, father, when it is in my power to save her?" asked Rachel. "If I let those horrible Zulus kill her I shall never be happy again all my life."

"And what if the horrible Zulus kill you?"

"They will not kill me, father; mother knows they will not, and so do I. But as they have got this madness into their heads, I am sure that if I do not go they will send an impi here to kill everybody else, and take me prisoner. The kidnapping of Noie is only a first move. It is one of two things: either I must visit Zululand, save Noie, and play my part there as best I can, or we must desert Noie, and all leave this place at once, tomorrow if possible. But then, as I told you, I shall never forgive myself, especially as I am not in the least afraid of the Zulus."

"It is true that God can protect you as much in Zululand as He can here," replied Mr. Dove, beginning to weaken in face of this desperate alternative.

"Of course, father, but if I go to Zululand I want you and mother to trek to Durban, and remain there till I return."

"Why, Rachel? It is absurd."

"Because I do not think that you are safe here, and it is not at all absurd," she answered stubbornly. "These people choose to believe that I am in some way in bondage to you; you remember all their talk about the heavens and the cloud. Of course it may mean nothing, but you will be much better in Durban for a while, where you can take to the water if necessary."

Now Mr. Dove's obstinacy asserted itself. He refused to entertain any such idea, giving reason after reason why he should not do so. Thus for another half hour the argument raged till at length a compromise was arrived at, as usual in such cases, not of too satisfactory an order. Rachel was to be allowed to undertake her mission on behalf of Noie, and her parents were to remain at Ramah. On her return, which they hoped would be within a week or eight days, the question of the abandonment of the mission was to be settled by the help of the experience she had gained. To this arrangement, then, they agreed, reluctantly enough all of them, in order to save Noie's life, and for no other reason.

The momentous decision once taken, in half an hour Rachel was ready for her journey, which she determined she would make upon her own horse, a grey mare that she had ridden for a long while, and could rely on in every way. The white riding-ox that Dingaan had sent as a present was also to accompany her, to carry her spare garments and other articles packed in skin bags, such as coffee, sugar and a few medicines, and to serve as a remount in case anything should happen to the horse. When it was laden Rachel sent for the Zulu, Tamboosa, and, pointing to the ox, said:

"I come to visit Dingaan the king, and to claim my servant. Lead the beast on, I will overtake you presently."

The man saluted and began to *bonga*, that is, to give her titles of praise, but she cut him short with a wave of her hand, and he departed leading the ox.

Now while Mr. Dove saw to the saddling of the horses, for he was to ride with her as far as the Tugela, Rachel went to bid farewell to her mother. She found her by herself in the sitting-room, seated at an open window, and looking out sadly towards the sea.

"I am quite ready, dear," she said in a cheerful voice. "Don't look so sad, I shall be back again in a week with Noie."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Dove, "I think that you and Noie will come back safely, but—" and she paused.

"But what, mother?"

"Oh! I don't know. I am very much oppressed, my heart is heavy in me. I hate parting with you, Rachel. Remember we have never been separated since you were born."

Her daughter looked at her, and was filled with grief and compunction.

"Mother," she said, "if you feel like that—well, I love Noie, but after all you are more to me than Noie, and if you wish I will give up this business and stop with you. It is very terrible, but it can't be helped; Noie will understand, poor thing," and her eyes filled with tears at the thought of the girl's dreadful fate.

"No, Rachel, somehow I think it best that you should go, not only for Noie's sake, but for your own. If your father would leave here to-day or to-morrow, as you suggested, it might be otherwise, but he won't do that, so it is no use talking of it. Let us hope for the best."

"As you wish, mother."

"Now, dear, kiss me and go. I hear your father calling you; and, Rachel, if we should not meet again in this world, I know you won't forget me, or that there is another where we shall. I did not want to frighten you with my fancies, which come from my not being well. Goodbye, my love, good-bye. God be with you, and make you happy, always—always."

Then Rachel kissed her in silence, for she could not trust herself to speak, and turning, left the room whence her mother watched her go, also in silence. In another minute she was mounted, and, accompanied by her father, riding on the road along which Tamboosa had led the white ox.

Presently they overtook him, whereon he stopped, and looking at Mr. Dove, said:

"Inkosazana, the King's orders are that none should accompany you into Zululand."

"Be silent," answered Rachel, proudly. "He rides with me as far as the river bank."

Then they went on, and Rachel was relieved to find that whatever might have been her mother's mood, that of her father was fairly cheerful. Indeed, his mind was so occupied with the details and object of her journey that he quite forgot its dangers.

Two hours' steady riding brought them to the ford of the Tugela river, across which lay Zululand. On the hills beyond it they could see a number of Kaffirs watching, who on catching sight of Rachel, ran down to the river and entered it, shouting and beating the water with their sticks, as she guessed, to scare away any crocodiles that might be lurking there.

Now that the moment of separation had come, Mr. Dove grew loth to part with his daughter, and again suggested to Tamboosa that he should accompany her to Dingaan's Great Place.

"If you set a foot across that river, Praying Man," answered the induna grimly, "you shall die; look, there are the spears that will kill you."

As he spoke he pointed to the crest of the opposing hill over which, running swiftly in ordered companies, now appeared a Zulu regiment who carried large white shields and wore white plumes rising from their head rings.

"It is the escort of the Inkosazana," he added. "Do you think that she can take hurt among so many? And do you think, if you dare to disobey the words of Dingaan, that you can escape so many? Go back now, lest they should come over and kill you where you are."

Then, seeing that both argument and resistance were useless, and that Tamboosa would brook no delay, Mr. Dove hurriedly embraced his daughter in farewell. Indeed, Rachel was glad that there was no time for words, for this parting was more terrible to her than she cared to own, and she feared lest she should break down before the Zulu who was watching her, and thereby be lowered in his eyes and in those of his people.

It was over and done. She had entered the water, riding her grey mare while Tamboosa led the white ox at her side. Presently she looked back, and saw her father kneeling in prayer upon the bank.

"What does the man?" asked Tamboosa, uneasily. "Is he bewitching us?"

"Nay," she answered, "he prays to the Heavens for us."

On they went between the two lines of natives, who ceased their beating of the water, and were silent as she passed. The river was shallow, and they crossed it with ease. By now the regiment was gathered on its further bank, two thousand men or more, brought hither to do honour to this white girl in whom they chose to consider that the guardian spirit of their people was incarnate. Contemplating them, Rachel wondered how it came about that they should be thus prepared for her advent. The answer rose in her mind. If she had refused to visit Zululand, it was their mission to fetch her. It was wise, therefore, that she had come of her own will.

Forward she rode, a striking figure in her long white cloak, down which her bright hair hung, sitting very proud and upright on her horse, without a sign of doubt or fear. As she approached, the captains of the regiment ran forward to meet her with lifted shield and crouching bodies.

"Hail!" cried their leader. "In the name of the Great Elephant, of Dingaan the King, hail to thee, Princess of the Heavens, Holder of the Spirit of Nomkubulwana."

Rachel rode on, taking no notice, marvelling who Nomkubulwana, whose spirit she was supposed to enshrine, might be. Afterwards she discovered that it was only another name for the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, that mysterious white ghost believed by this people to control their destinies, with whom it had pleased them to identify her. As her horse left the wide river and set foot upon dry land, every man of the two thousand soldiers, who were watching, as it seemed to her, with wonder and awe, began to beat his ox-hide shield with the handle of his spear. They beat very softly at first, producing a sound like the distant murmur of the sea, then harder and harder till its volume grew to a mighty roar, impossible to describe, a sound like the sound of thunder that echoed along the water and from hill to hill. The mighty noise sank and died away as it had begun, and for a moment there was silence. Then at some signal every spear flashed aloft in the sunlight, and from every throat came the royal salute—*Bayète*. It was a tremendous and most imposing welcome, so tremendous that Rachel could no longer doubt that this people regarded her as a being apart, and above the other white folk whom they knew.

At the time, however, she had little space for such thoughts, since the mare she rode, terrified by the tumult, bucked and shied so violently that she could scarcely keep her seat. She was a good rider, which was fortunate for her, since, had she been ignominiously thrown upon such an occasion, her prestige must have suffered, if indeed it were not destroyed. As it proved, it was greatly enhanced by this accident. Many of the Zulus of that day had never even seen a horse, which was considered by all of them to be a dangerous if not a magical beast. That a woman could remain seated on such a wild animal when it sprang into the air, and swerved from side to side, struck them, therefore, as something marvellous and out of experience, a proof indeed that she was not as others are.

She quieted the mare, and rode on between the white-shielded ranks, who, their greeting finished, remained absolutely still like bronze statues watching her with wondering eyes. When at length they were passed, the captains and a guard of about fifty men ran ahead of her. Then she came, and after her Tamboosa, leading the white ox, followed by another guard, which in turn was followed by the entire regiment. Thus royally escorted, asking no questions, and speaking no word, did Rachel make her entry into Zululand. Only in her heart she wondered whither she was going, and how that strange journey would end, wondered, too, how it would fare with her father and her mother till she returned to them.

Well might she wonder.

When she had ridden thus for about two hours an incident occurred which showed her how great, and indeed how dreadful was the eminence on which she had been set among these people. Suddenly some cattle, frightened by the approach of the impi, rushed through it towards their kraal, and a bull that was with them, seeing this unaccustomed apparition of a white woman mounted on a strange animal, put down its head and charged her furiously. She saw it coming, and by pulling the mare on to its haunches, avoided its rush. Now at the time she was riding on a path which ran along the edge of a little rock-strewn donga not more than eight or ten feet deep, but steep-sided. Into this donga the bull, which had shut its eyes to charge after the fashion of its kind, plunged headlong, and as it chanced struck its horns against a stone, twisting and dislocating the neck, so that it lay there still and dead.

When the Zulus saw what had happened they uttered a long-drawn *Ow-w* of amazement, for had not the beast dared to attack the White Spirit, and had not the Spirit rewarded it with instant death? Then a captain made a motion with his hand and instantly men sprang upon the remaining cattle, four or five of them that were following the bull, and despatched them with assegais. Before Rachel could interfere they were pierced with a hundred wounds. Now there was a little pause, while the carcasses of the beasts were dragged out of her path, and the bloodstains covered from her eyes with fresh earth. Just as this task was finished there appeared, scrambling up the donga, and followed by some men, a fat and hideous-looking woman, with fish bladders in her hair, and snake-skins tied about her, who, from her costume, Rachel knew at once must be an *Isanuzi* or witch-doctress. Evidently she was in a fury, as might be seen by the workings of her face, and the extraordinary swiftness with which she moved notwithstanding her years and bulk.

"Who has dared to kill my cattle?" she screamed. "Is it thou whom men name Nomkubulwana?"

"Woman," answered Rachel quietly, "the Heavens killed the bull which would have hurt me. For the rest, ask of the captains of the King."

The witch-doctress glanced at the dead bull which lay in the donga, its head twisted up in an unnatural fashion at right angles to the body, and for a moment seemed afraid. Then her rage at the loss of her herd broke out afresh, for she was a person in authority, one accustomed to be feared because of her black arts and her office.

"When the Inkosazana is seen in Zululand," she gasped, "death walks with her. There is the token of it," and she pointed to the dead cattle. "So it has ever been and so shall it ever be. Red is thy road through life, White One. Go back, go back now to thine own kraal, and see whether or no my words are true," and springing at the horse she seized it by the bridle as though she would drag it round.

Now in her hand Rachel held a little rod of white rhinoceros horn which she used as a riding whip, and with this rod she pointed at the woman, meaning that some of those with her should cause her to loose the bridle. Too late she remembered that in this savage land such a motion when made by the King or one in supreme command, had another dreadful interpretation—death without pity or reprieve.

In an instant, before she could interfere, before she could speak, the witch-doctress lay dead upon the carcase of the dead bull.

"What of the others, Queen, what of the others?" asked the chief of the slayers, bending low before her, and pointing with his spear to the attendants of the witch-doctress, who fled aghast. "Do they join this evil-doer who dared to lift her hand against thee?"

"Nay," she answered in a low voice, for horror had made her almost dumb. "I give them life. Forward."

"She gives them life!" shouted the praisers about her. "The Bearer of life and death gives life to the children of the evil-doer," and as the great cavalcade marched forward, company after company took up these words and sang them as a song.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE OMEN OF THE STAR

As it chanced and can easily be understood, Rachel could not have made a more effective entry into Zululand, or one more calculated to confirm her supernatural reputation. When the "wild beast" she rode plunged about she had remained seated on it as though she grew there, whereas every warrior knew that he would have fallen off. When the bull charged her that bull had died, slain by the Heavens. When the Isanuzi, a witch of repute, had lifted voice and hand against her she had commanded her death, showing that she feared no rival magic. True the woman would have been killed in any case, for such was the order of the King as to all who should dare to affront the Inkosazana, yet the captains had waited to see what Rachel would do that they might judge her accordingly. If she had shown fear, if she had even neglected to avenge, they might have marvelled whether after all she were more than a beautiful white maiden filled with the wisdom of the whites.

Now they knew better; she was a Spirit having the power of a Spirit over beast and man, who smote as a Spirit should. The fame of it went throughout the land, and little chance thenceforward had Rachel of escaping from the shadow of her own fearful renown.

Towards sundown they came to a kraal set upon a hill, and it was asked of her if she were pleased to spend the night there. She bowed her head in assent, and they entered the kraal. It was quite empty save for certain maidens dressed in bead petticoats, who waited there to serve her. All the other inhabitants had gone. They took her to a large and beautifully clean hut. Kneeling on their knees, the maidens presented her with food—meat and curdled milk, and roasted cobs of corn. She ate of the corn and the milk, but the meat she sent away as a gift to the captains. Then alone in that kraal, in which after they had served her even the girls seemed to fear to stay, Rachel slept as best she might in such solitude, while without the fence two thousand armed savages watched over her safety.

It was a troubled sleep, for she dreamed always of that dreadful-looking Isanuzi with the fish-bladders in her hair, yelling to her that her path through life was watered with blood, and bidding her go back to her own kraal and see whether the words were true, an ominous saying of which she could not read the riddle. She dreamed also of the woman's coarse, furious face turned suddenly to one of abject terror, and then of the dreadful end—the red death without mercy and without appeal which she had let loose by a motion of her hand. Another dream she had was of her father and her mother, who seemed to be lying side by side staring towards her with wide-open eyes, and that when she spoke to them they would not answer.

So the long night wore away, till at length Rachel woke with a start thinking that a hand had been laid upon her face, to see by the faint light of dawn which struggled into the hut through the cracks of the door-boards that the hand was only a great rat that had crawled over her and now nibbled at her hair. She sat up, frightening it and its companions away, then rose and washed herself with water that stood by in great gourds while without she heard the women singing some kind of song or hymn of which she could not catch the words.

Scarcely was she ready than they entered the hut, saluting her and bringing more food. Rachel ate, then bade one of them say to the captain of the impi that she was ready to start. Presently the girl returned with the message that all was prepared. She walked from the kraal to find her mare, which had been well fed and groomed by Tamboosa, who had seen horses in Natal, and knew how they should be treated, saddled and waiting, whilst before and behind it, arranged as on the previous day, stood the warriors, who received her in dead, respectful silence.

She mounted, and the procession went forward. With a two hours' halt at midday they marched on over hill and dale, passing many villages of beehive-shaped huts. As they came the inhabitants of these places deserted them and fled, crying "*Nomkubulwana! Nomkubulwana!*" It was evident to Rachel that the tale of the death of the Isanuzi had preceded her, and they feared lest, should they cross her path, her fate would be their fate. Indeed, one of the strangest circumstances of this strange adventure was the complete loneliness in which she lived. Except those who were actually ordered to wait upon her, none dared come near to Rachel; she was holy, a Spirit, to approach whom unbidden might mean death.

At nightfall they reached another empty kraal, where again she slept alone. When they left it in the morning she called Tamboosa to her and asked him at what hour they would come to Dingaan's great town, Umgugundhlovo, which means the Place of the trumpeting of the Elephant. He answered, at sunset.

So she rode on all that day also till as the sun began to sink, from a hill whereon grew large euphorbia trees, on a plain backed by mountains, she saw the town surrounded by a fence, inside of which were thousands of huts, that in their turn surrounded a great open space. Now they pushed forward quickly, and as darkness fell approached the main gate of the place, where, as usual, there was no one to be seen. But here they did not enter, marching on till they came to another gate, that of the Intunkulu, the King's house, where, their escort done, the regiment turned and went away, leaving Rachel alone with the envoy, Tamboosa, who still led the white ox. They entered this gate, and presently came to a second. It was that of the Emposeni, the Dwelling of the King's wives, out of which appeared women crawling on the ground before Rachel, and holding in their left hands torches of grass. These undid the baggage from the ox, and at their signals, for they did not seem to dare to speak to her, Rachel dismounted. Thereon Tamboosa saluted her, and taking the horse by the bridle, led it away with the ox.

Then Rachel felt that she was indeed alone, for Tamboosa at any rate had seen her home, which now was so far away. Still proudly enough she followed the women, who, bent double as before, led her to a great hut lit by a rude lamp filled with melted hippopotamus fat, where they set down her bags, and departed, to return presently with food and water.

Having washed off the dust of her long journey, and combed out her hair, Rachel ate all she could, for she was hungry, and guessed that she might need her strength that night. Then she lay down upon a pile of beautiful karosses that had been placed ready for her,

and rested. An hour or more went by, and just as she was beginning to fall asleep the door-board of the hut was thrust aside, and a tall woman entered, who knelt to her and said:

"Hail, Inkosazana! The King asks whether it be thy pleasure to appear before him this night."

"It is my pleasure," answered Rachel; "for that purpose have I travelled here. Lead me to the King."

So the woman went out of the hut, Rachel following her to find that the moon shone brightly in a clear sky. The woman conducted her through tortuous reed fences, until presently they came to an open court where, in the shadow of a hut, sat a number of men wrapped about with fur karosses. Guessing that she was in the presence of Dingaan, Rachel drew her white cloak round her tall form and walked forward slowly, till she reached the centre of the space, where she stopped and stood quite still, looking like a ghost in the moonlight. Then all the men to right and left rose and saluted her silently by the uplifting of one arm; only he who was in the midst of them remained seated and did not salute. Still she stayed motionless, uttering no word for a long while, six or seven minutes, perhaps. Her silence fought against theirs, and she knew that the one who spoke first would own to inferiority.

At length, in answering salutation, she lifted the little wand of white horn that she carried and turned slowly as though to leave the place, so that now the moonlight glistened on her lovely hair. Then, fearing perhaps lest she should depart or vanish away, the man seated in the centre said in a low half-awed voice:

"I am Dingaan, King of the Amazulu. Say, White One, who art thou?"

"By what name am I known here, O Dingaan the King?" she replied, answering the question with a question.

"By a high name, White One, a name that is seldom spoken, the name of Inkosazana-y-Zoola, the title of Nomkubulwana, the Spirit of our people. How camest thou by that name?"

"My name is my name," she said.

"We know, White One; the wind has borne all that story through the land, it whispers it from the leaves of the forest and the reeds of the water and the grass of the plains. We know that the Heavens gave thee their own name, O Child of Heaven, O Holder of the Spirit of Nomkubulwana."

"Thou sayest it, King. I do not say it, thou sayest it."

"I say it, and having seen thee I know that it is true, for thy beauty, White One, is not the beauty of woman alone, although still thou beest woman. Now I confirm to thee the words my messengers bore thee in past days. Here, with me, thou rulest. The land is thine, my impis wait thy word. Death and life are in thy hands; command, and they go forth to slay; command, and they return again. Only thou rulest alone with me, and the black folk, not the white, shall be thy servants."

"I hear thee, King. Now, as a first fruit, give to me Noie, daughter of Seyapi, my slave whom the soldiers stole away from Ramah beyond the river where I dwell."

"She is dead, White One, she is dead for her crimes," answered Dingaan, looking at her.

Now Rachel's heart sank in her, for it might well be that a trick had been played on her, and that this was true. Or perhaps this tale of Noie's death was but a trap to test her powers; moreover, it was not likely that the King, who had promised that she should live, would dare to break his word to one whom he believed or half-believed to be a spirit.

For a moment she thought; then, after her nature, determined to be bold and hazard all upon a throw. Therefore she did not argue or reproach, but said:

"She is not dead. I have questioned every spear in Zululand, and none of them is red with her blood."

"Thou art right," he answered; "the spears are clean. She died in the river."

Now Rachel was sure, and answered in her clear voice:

"I have questioned the waters, and I have questioned the crocodiles, and they answer that Noie has passed them safely."

"Thou art right, White One. She died by a rope in yonder huts."

Now Rachel looked at the huts and cried:

"Noie, I hear thee, I see thee, I smell thee out. Come forth, Noie."

The King and his councillors stared at her, whispering to one another, and before ever they had done their whisperings out from among the gloom of the huts crept Noie.

To Rachel she crept, taking no heed even of the King, and crouching down in the faint shadow of her that the moonlight threw, she flung her arms about her knees and pressed her forehead on her feet. Now Rachel's heart bounded with joy at the sight of her, and she longed to bend down and kiss her, but did not, lest her great dignity should be lessened in the eyes of the King; only she said:

"I greet you, Noie; be seated in my shadow, where you are safe, and tell me, have these men dealt well by you?"

"Not so ill, Inkosazana, that is since I reached the Great Kraal. But one of them, he who sits yonder," and she pointed to a certain induna, "struck me on the journey, and took away my food."

Now Rachel looked at the man angrily, playing with the little wand in her hand, whereon this induna shivered with terror, fearing lest she should point it at him. Rising, he came to Rachel and flung himself down before her.

"What have you to say," asked Rachel, "you who have dared to strike my servant?"

"Inkosazana," he mumbled, "the maid was obstinate, and tried to run away, and our orders were to bring her to the King. Spare my life, I pray thee."

"King," said Rachel, "I have power over this man, have I not?"

"It is so," answered Dingaan. "Kill him if thou wilt."

Rachel seemed to consider while the poor wretch, with chattering teeth, implored her to forgive. Then she turned to Noie, saying:

"He struck you, not me. I give him to you to do by as you will. Shall he sleep to-night with the living or the dead?"

Noie looked at him, and next at a mark on her arm, and the induna, ceasing from his prayers to Rachel, clutched Noie by the ankle, and begged her mercy.

"Your life has been given to you," he said, "give mine to me, lest ill-fortune follow you."

"Do you remember," asked Noie contemptuously, "how, when you had beaten me, yonder by the Tugela, you said you hoped that it would be your luck to put a spear through this heart of mine? And do you remember that I answered you that the spear would be over your own heart first, and that thereon you called me 'Daughter of Wizards' and struck me again—me, the child of Seyapi, upon whom the mantle of the Inkosazana lies, me who have drunk of her wisdom and of his—you struck *me*, you dog," and lifting her foot she spurned him in the face.

Now the King and his company, concluding that the thing was finished, glanced at Rachel to see her point with the rod and thus give the man to death. But Rachel waited, sure that Noie had not done. Moreover, whatever Noie might say, she had determined to save him.

Meanwhile, the girl, after a pause, said:

"Were you a man you would be too proud to ask your life of me, but you are a dog; and, Dog, I remember that you have children, among them a daughter of my own age, whom I saw come out to greet you. For her sake, then, take your life, and with it this new name that I give you—'Soldier-who-strikes-girls.'"

So the man rose, and weak with shame and the agony of suspense, crept swiftly from the place, fearing lest the Inkosazana or her servant might change her mind and kill him after all. But Noie's name clung to him so closely that at length, unable to bear the ridicule of it, he and his family fled from Zululand.

So this matter ended.

Now the King spoke, saying:

"White One, thy magic is great, and thine eyes could pierce the darkness and see thy servant hidden, and call her forth to thee. Yet know, she is mine, not thine, for when she fled I had already chosen her to be my wife, and afterwards I sent and killed the wizard Seyapi, and all his House."

"But this girl thou didst not kill, O King, for I saved her."

"It is so, White One. I have heard lately how thou didst call down the lightning and burn up my soldier who followed after her, so that nothing of him remained."

"Yes," said Rachel quietly, "as, were it to please me, I could burn thee up also, O King," a saying at which. Dingaan looked afraid.

"Yet," he went on, waving his hand as though to put aside this unpleasant suggestion, "the maid is mine, not thine, and therefore I took her."

"How didst thou learn that she dwelt at my kraal?" asked Rachel.

The King hesitated.

"The white man, Ishmael, he whom thou callest Ibubesi, told thee, did he not?"

Dingaan bowed his head.

"And he told thee that thou couldst make what promises thou wouldst to me as to the girl's life, but that afterwards when thou hadst called me here to claim it, thou mightest kill her or keep her as a wife, as it pleased thee."

"I can hide nought from thee; it is so," said Dingaan.

"Is that still in thy mind, O King?" asked Rachel again, beginning to play with the little wand.

"Not so, not so," he answered hurriedly. "Hadst thou not come the girl would have died, as she deserved to do according to our law. But thou hast come and claimed her, O Holder of the Spirit of Nomkubulwana, and she sits in thy shadow and is clothed with thy garment. Take her then, for henceforth she is holy, as thou art holy."

Rachel heard, and without any change of countenance waved her hand to show that this question was finished. Then she asked suddenly:

"What is this great matter whereof thou wouldst speak with me, O King?"

"Surely thy wisdom has told thee, White One," he answered uneasily.

"Perchance, yet I would have it from thy lips, and now."

Now Dingaan consulted a little with his council.

"White One," he said presently, "the thing is grave, and we need guidance. Therefore, as the circle of the witch-doctors have declared must be done, we ask it of thee who art named with the name of the Spirit of our people and hast of her wisdom. Thou knowest, White One, of the fights in past years between the white people of Natal and the Zulus, in which many were slain on either side. But now, when we are at peace with the English, we hear of another white people, the Amaboona" (*i.e.* the Dutch Boers), "who are marching towards us from the Cape, and have already fought with Moselikatze—the traitor who was once my captain—and killed thousands of his men. These Amaboona threaten us also, and say aloud that they will eat us up, for they are brave and armed with the white man's weapons that spit out lightning. Now, White One, what shall we do? Shall I send out my impis and fall on them while they are unprepared, and make an end of them, as seems wisest, and is the wish of my indunas? Or, shall I sit at home and watch, trying to be at peace with them, and only strike back if they strike at me? Answer not lightly, O Zoola, for much may hang upon thy words. Remember also that he whose name may not be spoken, the Lion who ruled before me and is gone, with his last breath uttered a certain prophecy concerning the white people and this land."

"Let me hear that prophecy, O King."

"Come forth," said Dingaan pointing to a councillor who sat in the circle, "come forth, thou who knowest, and tell the tale in the ears of this White One."

A figure rose, a draped figure whose face was hidden in a hood of blanket. It came forward, and as it came it drew the blanket tighter about it. Rachel, watching all things, saw, or thought she saw, that one of its hands was white as though it had been burned with fire. Surely she had seen such a hand before.

"Speak," she said.

"Name me by my name and tell me who I am and I will obey thee," answered the man.

Then she was sure, for she remembered the voice. She looked at him indifferently and asked:

"By what name shall I name you, O Slayer of a King? Will you be called Mopo or Umbopa, who have borne them both?"

Now Dingaan stared, and the shrouded form before her started as though in surprise.

"Why do you seek to mock me?" she went on. "Can a blanket of bark hide that face of yours from these eyes of mine which saw it a while ago at Ramah, when you came thither to judge of me, O Mouth of the King?"

Now the man let the blanket slip from his head and looked at her.

"It seems that it cannot," he answered. "Then I told thee that I had dreamed of the Spirit of our people, and that thou, White One, wast like to her of whom I had dreamed. Canst thou tell me what was the fashion of that dream of mine?"

Now Rachel understood that notwithstanding his words at Ramah, this man still doubted her, and was set up to prove her, and all that Noie had told her about him and the secret history of the Zulus came back into her mind.

"Surely Mopo or Umbopa," she replied, "you dreamed three dreams, not one. Is it of the last you speak?—that dream at the kraal Duguza, when the Inkosazana rode past you on a storm clothed in lightning, and shaking in her hand a spear of fire?"

"Yes, I speak of it," he replied in an awed voice, "but if thou art but a woman as thou hast said, how knowest thou these things?"

"Perchance I am both woman and spirit, and perchance the past tells them to me," Rachel answered; "but the past has many voices, and now that I dwell in the flesh I cannot hear them all. Let me search you out. Let me read your heart," and she bent forward and fixed her eyes upon him, holding him with her eyes.

"Ah! now I see and I hear," she said presently. "Had you not a sister, Mopo, a certain Baleka, who afterwards entered the house of the Black One and bore a son and died in the Tatiyana Cleft? Shall I tell you how she died?"

"Tell it not! Tell it not!" exclaimed the old man quaveringly.

"So be it. There is no need. Yet ere she died you made a promise to this Baleka, and that promise you kept at the kraal Duguza, you and the prince Umhlangana, and another prince whose name I forget," and she looked at Dingaan, who put his hand before his face. "You kept that promise with an assegai—let me look, let me look into your heart—yes, with a little assegai handled with the royal red wood, an assegai that had drunk much blood."

Now a low moan broke from the lips of Dingaan, and those who sat with them, while Umbopa shivered as though with cold.

"Have mercy, I pray thee," he gasped. "Forgive me if at times since we met at Ramah I thought thee but a white maiden, beautiful and bold, as thou didst declare thyself to be. Now I see thou hast the spirit, or else how didst thou know these things?"

Noie heard and smiled in the shadow, but Rachel stood silent.

"I was bidden to tell thee of the last words of the Black One," went on Umbopa hurriedly; "but what need is there to tell thee anything who knowest all? They were that he heard the sound of the running of the feet of a great white people which shall stamp out the children of the Zulus."

"Nay," answered Rachel, "I think they were; *Wherefore wouldst thou kill me, Mopo?*"

Again Dingaan moaned, for he had heard these very words spoken. Umbopa turned and stared at him, and he stared at Umbopa.

"Come hither," said Rachel, beckoning to the old man.

He obeyed, and she threw the corner of her cloak over his head, and whispered into his ear. He listened to her whisperings, then with a cry broke from her and fled away out of the council of the King.

When he had gone there was silence, though Dingaan looked a question with his eyes.

"Ask it not," she said, "ask it not of me, or of him. I think this Mopo here had his secrets in the past. I think that once he sat in a hut at night and bargained with certain Great Ones, a prince who lives, and a prince who died. Come hither, come hither, thou son of Senzangacona, come from the fields of Death and tell me what was that bargain which thou madest with Mopo, thou and another?" and once again Rachel beckoned, this time upwards in the air.

Now the face of Dingaan went grey, even in the moonlight it went grey beneath the blackness of his skin, for there rose before his mind a vision of a hut and of Mopo and of Umhlangana, the prince his brother whom he had slain, and of himself, seated in the darkness, their heads together beneath a blanket whispering of the murder of a king.

"Thou knowest all," he gasped, "thou art Nomkubulwana and no other. Spare us, Spirit who canst summon our dead sins from the grave of time, and make them walk alive before us."

"Nay, nay," she answered, mockingly, "surely I am but a woman, daughter of a Teacher who lives yonder over the Tugela, a white maiden who eats and sleeps and drinks as other maidens do. Take notice, King, and you his captains, that I am no spirit, nothing but a woman who chances to bear a high name, and to have some wisdom. Only," she added with meaning, "if any harm should come to me, if I should die, then I think that I should become a spirit, a terrible spirit, and that ill would it go with that people against whom my blood was laid."

"Oh!" said the King, who still shook with fear, "we know, we know. Mock us not, I pray. Thou art the Spirit who hast chosen to wear the robe of woman, as flame hides itself in flint, and woe be to the hand that strikes the fire from this stone. White One, give us now that wisdom whereof thou speakest. Shall I fall upon the Boers or shall I let them be?"

Rachel looked upwards, studying the stars.

"She takes counsel with the Heavens, she who is their daughter," muttered one of the indunas in a low voice.

As he spoke it chanced that a bright meteor travelling from the south-west swept across the sky to burst and vanish over the kraal of Umgugundhlovo.

"It is a messenger to her," said one. "I saw the fire shine upon her hair and vanish in her breast."

"Nay," answered another, "it is the *Ehlose*, the guardian ghost of the Amazulu that appears and dies."

"Not so," broke in a third, "that light shows the Amaboona travelling from the south-west to be eaten up in the blackness of our impis."

"Such a star runs ever before the death of kings. It fell the night ere the Black One died," murmured a fourth as though he spoke to himself.

Only Dingaan, taking no heed of them, said, addressing Rachel:

"Read thou the omen."

"Nay," she replied upon the swift impulse of the moment, "I read it not. Interpret it as ye will. Here is my answer to thy question, King. *Those who lift the spear shall perish by the spear.*"

At this saying the captains murmured a little, for they, who desired war, understood that she counselled peace between them and the Boers, though others thought that she meant that the Boers would perish. Dingaan also looked downcast. Watching their faces, Rachel was sure that not even her hand could hold them back from their desire. That war must come. Again she spoke:

"The star travels whither it is thrown by the hand of the Umkulunkulu, the Master of men; the spear finds the heart to which it is appointed. Read you the omen as you will. I have spoken, but ye will not understand. That which shall be, shall be."

She bent her head, and turned her ear towards the ground as though to hearken.

"What was that tale of the last words of the Great Lion who is gone?" she went on. "Ask it of Mopo, ask it of Dingaan the King. It seems to me that I also hear the feet of a people travelling over plain and mountain, and the rivers behind them run red with blood. Are they black feet or white feet? Read ye the omen as ye will. I have spoken for the first time and the last; trouble me no more with this matter of the white men and your war," and turning, Rachel glided from the court, followed by Noie with bowed head.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ISHMAEL VISITS THE INKOSAZANA

When at last they were in the hut and the door-board had been safely closed, Rachel took Noie in her arms and kissed her. But Noie did not kiss her back; she only pressed her hand against her forehead.

"Why do you not kiss me, Noie?" asked Rachel.

"How can I kiss you, Inkosazana," replied the girl humbly, "I who am but the dog at your feet, the dog whom twice it has pleased you to save from death."

"Inkosazana!" exclaimed Rachel. "I weary of that name. I am but a woman like yourself, and I hate this part which I must play."

"Yet it is a high part, and you play it very well. While I listened to you to-night, Zoola, twice and thrice I wondered if you are not something more than you deem yourself to be. That beautiful body of yours is but a cup like those of other women, but say, who fills the cup with the wine of wisdom? Why do kings and councillors fear you, and why do you fear nothing? Why did dead Seyapi talk to me of you in dreams? What strange chance gave you that name of yours and made you holy in these men's eyes? What power teaches you the truth and gives you wit and strength to speak it? Why are you different from the rest of maidens, white or black?"

"I do not know, Noie. Something tells me what to do and say. Also, I understand these Zulus, and you have taught me much. You told me all the hidden tale of yonder Mopo a year gone by, or more, as you have told me many of the darkest secrets of this people that you had from your father, who knew them all. At the pinch I remembered it, no more, and played upon them by my knowledge."

"What was it you said to Mopo under your cloak, Lady?"

Rachel smiled as she answered:

"I only asked him if it were not in his mind, having killed one king, to kill another also, and that spear went home."

"Ah!" exclaimed Noie in admiration, "at least I never told you that."

"No; I read it in his eyes; for a moment all his heart was open to me—yes, and the heart of Dingaan also. He fears Mopo, and Mopo hates him, and one day hate and fear will come together."

"Ah!" said Noie again, "you know much."

"Yes," answered Rachel with sudden passion, "more than I wish to know. Noie, you are right, I am not altogether as others are; there is a power in my blood. I see and hear what should not be seen and heard; at times fears fill me, or joys lift me up, and I think that I draw near to another world than ours. No; it is folly. I am over-wrought. Who would not be that must endure so much and be set upon this throne, a goddess among barbarians with life and death upon my lips? Oh! when the King asked me his riddle I knew not what to answer, who feared lest ten thousand lives might pay the price of a girl's incautious words. Then that meteor broke; there have been several this night, but none noted them till I looked upwards, and you know the rest. Let them guess its meaning, which they cannot, for it has none."

"Why did you not speak more plainly, Zoola?"

"Oh! because I dared not. Who am I to meddle with such matters, who came here but to save you? I warned them not to make war upon the Boers; what more could I do? Moreover, it is useless, for fight they must and will and pay the price. Of that I am sure. I feel it here," and she pressed her hand upon her heart. "Yes, and other nearer things! Oh! Noie, I would that I were back at home. Say, can we start to-morrow at the dawn?"

Noie shook her head.

"I do not think that they will let you go; they will keep you to be their great doctress. You should not have come. I sent you word—what did my life matter?"

"Keep me," answered Rachel, stamping her foot. "They dare not; here at least I am the Inkosazana, and I will be obeyed."

Noie made no answer; only she said:

"Ishmael is here. I have seen him. He wished to have me killed at once because he is afraid of me. But when he was sure that you were coming, Dingaan would not break his word which he had sent to you."

Rachel's face fell.

"Ishmael!" she exclaimed in dismay, then recovered herself and added: "Well, I am not afraid of Ishmael, for here his life is in my hand. Oh! I am worn out; I cannot talk of the man to-night. I must sleep, Noie, I must sleep. Come, lie at my side and let us sleep."

"Nay," answered the girl; "my place is at the door. But drink this milk and lay you down without fear, for I will watch."

Rachel obeyed, and Noie sat by her, holding her hand, till presently her eyes shut and she slept. But Noie did not sleep. All that night she sat there watching and listening, till at length the dawn came and she lay down also by the door and rested.

The sun was high in the heavens when Rachel woke.

"Good morrow to you, Zoola," said the sweet voice of Noie. "You have slept well. Now you must rise, bathe yourself and eat, for already messengers from the King have been to the outer gate, saying that they wait to escort you to a better house that has been made ready for you."

"I hoped that they waited to escort me out of Zululand," answered Rachel.

"I asked them of that, Zoola, but they declared it must not be, as the council of the doctors had been summoned to consider your sayings, and two days will pass before it can meet. Also they declare that your horse is sick and not fit to travel, meaning that they will not let you go."

"But I have the right to go, Noie."

"The bird has the right to fly, but what if it is in a cage, Zoola?"

"I am queen here, Noie; the bars will burst at my word."

"It may be so, Zoola, but what if the bird should find that it has no nest to fly to?"

"What do you mean?" asked Rachel, paling.

"Only that it seems best that you should not anger these Zulus, Lady, lest it should come into their minds to destroy your nest, thinking that so you might come to love this cage. No, no, I have heard nothing, but I guess their thoughts. You need rest; bide here, where you are safe, a day or two, and let us see what happens."

"Speak plainly, Noie. I do not understand your parable of birds and cages."

"Zoola, I obey. I think that if you say you will go, none, not the King himself, would dare to stay you, though you would have to go on foot, for then that horse would die. But an impi would go with you, or before you, and woe betide those who held you from returning to Zululand! Do you understand me now?"

"Yes," answered Rachel. "You mean!—oh! I cannot speak it. I will remain here a few days."

So she rose and bathed herself and was dressed by Noie, and ate of the food that had been brought to the door of the hut. Then she went out, and in the little courtyard found a litter waiting that was hung round with grass mats.

"The King's word is that you should enter the litter," said Noie.

She did so, whereon Noie clapped her hands and girls in bead dresses ran in, and having prostrated themselves before the litter, lifted it up and carried it away, Noie walking at its side.

Rachel, peeping between the mats, saw that she was borne out of the town, surrounded, but at a distance, by a guard of hundreds of armed men. Presently they began to ascend a hill, whereon grew many trees, and after climbing it for a while, reached a large kraal with huts between the outer and inner fence, and in its centre a great space of park-like land through which ran a stream.

Here, by the banks of the stream, stood a large new hut, and behind at a little distance two or three other huts. In front of this great hut the litter was set down by the bearers, who at once went away. Then at Noie's bidding Rachel came out of it and looked at the place which had been given her in which to dwell.

It was a beautiful spot, away from the dust and the noises of the Great Kraal, and so placed upon a shoulder of the hillside that the soldiers who guarded this House of the Inkosazana, as it was called, could not be seen or heard. Yet Rachel looked at it with distaste, feeling that it was that cage of which Noie had spoken.

A cage it proved indeed, a solitary cage, for here Rachel abode in regal seclusion and in state that could only be called awful. No man might approach her house unbidden, and the maidens who waited upon her did so with downcast eyes, never speaking, and falling on to their knees if addressed. On the first day of her imprisonment, for it was nothing less, an unhappy Zulu, through ignorance or folly, slipped through the outer guard and came near to the inner fence. Rachel, who was seated above, heard some shouts of rage and horror, and saw soldiers running towards him, and in another minute a body being carried away upon a shield. He had died for his sacrilege.

Once a day ambassadors came to her from the King to ask of her health, and if she had orders to give, but now even these men were not allowed to look upon her. They were led in by the women, each of them with a piece of bark cloth over his head, and from beneath this cloth they addressed her as though she were in truth divine. On the first day she bade them tell the King that her mission being ended, it was her desire to depart to her own home beyond the river. They heard her words in silence, then asked if she had anything to add. She replied—yes, it was her will that they should cease to wear veils in her presence, also that no more men should be killed upon her account as had happened that morning. They said that they would convey the order at once, as several were under sentence of death who had argued as to whether she were really the Inkosazana. So she sent them away instantly, fearing lest they should be too late, and they were led off backwards bowing and giving the royal salute. Afterwards she rejoiced to hear that her commands had arrived just in time, and that the blood of these poor people was not upon her head.

Next day the messengers returned at the same hour, unveiled as she desired, bearing the answer of the King and his council. It was to the effect that the Inkosazana had no need to ask permission to come or to go. Her Spirit, they knew, was mighty and could wander where it willed; all the impis of the Zulus could not hold her Spirit. But—and here came the sting of this clever answer—it was necessary, until her sayings had been considered, that the body in which that Spirit abode should remain with them a while. Therefore the King and his counsellors and the whole nation of the Zulus prayed her to be satisfied with the sending of her Spirit across the Tugela, leaving her body to dwell a space in the House of the Inkosazana.

Rachel looked at them in despair, for what was she to reply to such reasoning as this? Before she could make up her mind, their spokesman said that a white man, Ibubesi, who said that he had often spoken with her, asked leave to visit her in her house.

Now Rachel thought a while. Ishmael was the last person in the whole world whom she wished to see. After the interview when they parted, and all that had happened since, it could not be otherwise. She remembered the threats he had uttered then, and to her father afterwards, the brutal and revolting threats. Some of these had been directed against Noie, and subsequently Noie was kidnapped by the Zulus. That those directed at herself had not been fulfilled was, she felt sure, due to a lack of opportunity alone.

Little wonder, then, that she feared and hated the man. Still he was of white blood, and perhaps for this reason had authority among the Zulus, who, as she knew, often consulted him. Moreover, notwithstanding his vapourings, like the Zulus whose superstitions he had contracted, he looked upon herself with something akin to fear. If she saw him she had no cause to dread anything that he could do to her, at any rate in this country where she was supreme, whereas on the other hand she might obtain information from him which would be very useful, or make use of him to enable her to escape from Zululand. On the whole, then, it seemed wisest to grant him an interview, especially as she gathered from the fact that the question was raised by Dingaan's indunas, that for some reason of his own, the King hoped that she would do so.

Still she hesitated, loathing and despising him as she did.

"You have heard," she said in English to Noie, who stood behind her. "Now what shall I say?"

"Say—come," answered Noie in the same tongue.

"Read his black heart and find out truth; he no can keep it from you. Say—come with soldiers. If he behave bad, tell them kill him. They obey you. No mind me. I not afraid of that wild beast now."

Then Rachel said to the indunas:

"I hear the King's word, and understand that he wishes me to receive this Ibubesi. Yet I know that man, as I know all men, white and black. He is an evil man, and it is not my pleasure to speak with him alone. Let him come with a guard of six captains, and let the captains be armed with spears, so that if I give the word there may be an end of this Ibubesi."

Then the messengers saluted and departed as before.

On the morrow at about the same hour a praiser, or herald, arrived outside the inner fence of the kraal, and after he had shouted out Rachel's titles, attributes, beauties and supernatural powers for at least ten minutes, never repeating himself, announced that the indunas of the King were without accompanied by the white man, Ibubesi, awaiting her permission to enter. She gave it through Noie; and, the horn wand in her hand, seated herself upon a carved stool in front of the great hut. Presently an altercation arose upon the further side of the reed fence in which she recognised Ishmael's strident voice, mingled with the deeper tones of the Zulus, who seemed to be insisting upon something.

"They command him to take off his headdress," said Noie, "and threaten to beat him if he will not."

"Go, tell them to admit him as he is, that I may see his face, and learn if he be the white man whom I knew, or another," answered Rachel, and she went.

Then the gate was opened and the messengers were led in by women. After these came six captains, carrying broad spears, as she had commanded, and last of all Ishmael himself. Rachel's whole nature shrank at the sight of his dark, handsome features. She loathed the man now as always; her instinct warned her of danger at his hands. Also she remembered his threats when last they met and she rejected him, and what had passed between him and her father on the following day. But of all this she showed nothing, remaining seated in silence with calm, set face.

Ishmael was advancing with a somewhat defiant air. Except for a kaross upon his shoulders he wore European dress, and the ridiculous hat with the white ostrich feather in it, both of them now much the worse for wear, which she remembered so well. Also he had a lighted pipe in his mouth. Presently one of the captains appeared to become suddenly aware of this pipe, for, stretching out his hand, he snatched it away, and the hat with it, throwing them upon the ground. Ishmael, whose teeth and lips were hurt, turned on the man with an oath and struck him, whereon instantly he was seized, and would perhaps have been killed before Rachel could interfere had it not been unlawful to shed blood in her presence. As it was, with a motion of her wand, she signified that he was to be loosed, a command that Noie interpreted to them. At any rate, they let him go, though a captain placed his feet on the hat and pipe. Then Ishmael came forward and said awkwardly:

"How do you do? I did not expect to see you here," and he devoured her beauty with his bold, greedy eyes, though not without doubt and dread, or so thought Rachel.

Taking no notice of his greeting, she said in a cold voice:

"I have sent for you here to ask if you have any reason as to why I should not order you to be killed for your crime against my servant, Noie, and therefore against me?"

Now Ishmael paled, for he had not expected such a welcome, and began to deny the thing.

"Spare your falsehoods," went on Rachel. "I have it from the King's lips, and from my own knowledge. Remember only that here I am the Inkosazana, with power of life and death. If I speak the word, or point at you with this wand, in a minute you will have gone to your account."

"Inkosazana or not," he answered in a cowed voice, "you know too much. Well, then, she was taken that you might follow her to Zululand to ask her life, and you see that the plan was good, for you came; and," he added, recovering some of his insolence and familiarity: "we are here together, two white people among all these silly niggers."

Rachel looked him up and down; then she looked at the indunas seated in silence before her, at the great limbed captains with their broad spears beyond, reminding her in their plumes and attitudes of some picture that she had seen of Roman gladiators about to die. Lastly she looked at the delicately shaped Noie by her side, with her sweet, inscrutable face, the woman whose parents and kin this outcast had brought to a bloody death, the woman whom to forward his base ends he had vilely striven to murder. Slowly she looked at them all and at him, and said:

"Shall I explain to these nobles and captains what you call them, and what you are called among your own people? Shall I tell them something of your story, Mr. Ishmael?"

"You can do what you like," he answered sullenly. "You know why I got you here—because I love you: I told you that many months ago. While you were down at Ramah I had no chance with you, because of that old hypocrite of a father of yours, and this black girl," and he looked at Noie viciously. "Here I thought that it would be different—that you would be glad of my company, but you have turned yourself into a kind of goddess and hold me off," and he paused.

"Go on," said Rachel.

"All right, I will. You may think yourself a goddess, as I do myself sometimes. But I know that you are a woman too, and that soon you will get tired of this business. You want to go home to your father and mother, don't you? Well, you can't. You are a prisoner here, for these fools have got it into their heads that you are their Spirit, and that it would be unlucky to let you out of the country. So here you must stop, for years perhaps, or till they are sick of you and kill you. Just understand, Rachel, that nobody can help you to escape except me, and that I shan't do so for nothing."

Rachel straightened herself upon her seat, gripping the edge of it with her hands, for her temper was rising, while Noie bent forward and said something in her ear.

"What is that black devil whispering to you?" he asked. "Telling you to have me killed, I expect. Well, you daren't, for what would your holy parents say? It would be murder, wouldn't it, and you would go to hell, where I daresay you come from, for otherwise how could you be such a witch? Look here," he went on, changing his tone, "don't let's squabble. Make it up with me. I'll get you clear of this and marry you afterwards on the square. If you won't, it will be the worse for you—and everybody else, yes, everybody else."

"Mr. Ishmael," answered Rachel calmly, "you are making a very great mistake, about my scruples as to taking life I mean, amongst other things. Once when it was necessary you saw me kill a man. Well, if I am forced to it, what I did then I will do again, only not with my own hand. Mr. Ishmael, you said just now that you could get me out of Zululand. I take you at your word, not for my own sake, for I am comfortable enough here, but for that of my father and mother, who will be anxious," and her voice weakened a little as she spoke of them.

"Do you? Well, I won't. I am comfortable here also, and shall be more so as the husband of the Inkosazana. This is a very pretty kraal, and it is quite big enough for two," he added with an amorous sneer.

Now for a minute at least Rachel sat still and rigid. When she spoke again it was in a kind of gasp:

"Never," she said, "have you gone nearer to your death, you wanderer without name or shame. Listen now. I give you one week to arrange my escape home. If it is not done within that time, I will pay you back for those words. Be silent, I will hear no more."

Then she called out:

"Rise, men, and bear the message of the Inkosazana to Dingaan, King of the Zulus. Say to Dingaan that this wandering white dog whom he has sent into my house has done me insult. Say that he has asked me, the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, to be one of his wives."

At these words the counsellors and captains uttered a shout of rage, and two of the latter seized Ishmael by the arm, lifting their spears to plunge them into him. Rachel waved her wand and they let them fall again.

"Not yet," she said. "Take him to the King, and if my word comes to the King, then he dies, and not till then. I would not have his vile blood on my hands. Unless I speak, I, Queen of the Heavens, leave him to the vengeance of the Heavens. My mantle is over him, lead him back to the King and let me see his face no more."

"We hear and it shall be so," they answered with one voice, then forgetting their ceremony hustled Ishmael from the kraal.

"Have I done well?" asked Rachel of Noie, when they were alone.

"No, Zoola," she answered, "you should have killed the snake while you were hot against him, since when your blood grows cold you can never do it, and he will live to bite you."

"I have no right to kill a man, Noie, just because he makes love to me, and I hate him. Also, if I did so he could not help me to escape from Zululand, which he will do now because he is afraid of me."

"Will he be afraid of you when you are both across the Tugela?" asked Noie. "Inkosazana, give me power and ask no questions. Ibubesi killed my father and mother and brethren, and has tried to kill me. Therefore my heart would not be sore if, after the fashion of this land, I paid him spears for battle-axes, for he deserves to die."

"Perhaps, Noie, but not by my word."

"Perhaps by your hand, then," said Noie, looking at her curiously. "Well, soon or late he will die a red death—the reddest of deaths, I learned that from the spirit of my father."

"The spirit of your father?" said Rachel, looking at her.

"Certainly, it speaks to me often and tells me many things, though I may not repeat them to you till they are accomplished. Thus I was not afraid in the hands of Dingaan, for it told me that you would save me."

"I wish it would speak to me and tell me when I can go home," said Rachel with a sigh.

"It would if it could, Zoola, but it cannot because the curtain is too thick. Had all you loved been slain before your eyes, then the veil would be worn thin as mine is, and through it, you who are akin to them, would hear the talk of the ghosts, and dimly see them wandering beneath their trees."

"Beneath their trees——!"

"Yes, the trees of their life, of which all the boughs are deeds and all the leaves are words, under the shadow of which they must abide for ever. My people could tell you of those trees, and perhaps they will one day when we visit them together. Nay, pay no heed, I was wandering in my talk. It is the sight of that wild beast, Ibubesi. You will not let me kill him! Well, doubtless it is fated so. I think one day you will be sorry—but too late."

## CHAPTER XII.

### RACHEL SEES A VISION

That evening Ishmael was brought before the King. He was in evil case, for the captains, some of whom had grudges against him, when he tried to break away from them outside the gate, had beaten him with their spear shafts nearly all the way from the kraal to the Great Place, remarking that he fought and remonstrated, that the Inkosazana had forbidden them to kill him, but had said nothing as to giving him the flogging which he deserved. His clothes were torn, his hat and pipe were lost—indeed hours before Noie had thrown both of them into the fire—his eyes were black from the blow of a heavy stick and he was bruised all over.

Such was his appearance when he was thrust before Dingaan, seething with rage which he could scarcely suppress, even in that presence.

“Did you visit the Inkosazana to-day, White Man?” asked the King blandly, while the indunas stared at him with grim amusement.

Then Ishmael broke out into a recital of his wrongs, demanding that the captains who had beaten him, a white man, and a great person, should be killed.

“Silence,” said Dingaan at length. “The question, Night-prowler, is whether you should not be killed, you dog who dared to insult the Inkosazana by offering yourself to her as a husband. Had she commanded you to be speared, she would have done well, and if you trouble me with your shoutings, I will send you to sleep with the jackals to-night without waiting for her word.”

Now, seeing his danger, Ishmael was silent, and the King went on:

“Did you discover, as I bade you, why it is that the Inkosazana desires to leave us?”

“Yes, King. It is because she would return to her own people, the old prayer-doctor and his wife.”

“They are not her people!” exclaimed Dingaan. “We know that she came to them out of the storm, and that they are but the foster-parents chosen for her by the Heavens. You were the first to tell us that story, and how she caused the lightning to burn up my soldier yonder at Ramah. We are her people and no others. Can the Inkosazana have a father and a mother?”

“I don’t know,” answered Ishmael, “but she is a woman and I never knew a woman who was without them. At least I am sure that she looks upon them as her father and mother, obeying them in all things, and that she will never leave them while they live, unless they command her to do so.”

Dingaan stared at him with his pig-like eyes, repeating after him—“while they live, unless they command her to do so.” Then he asked:

“If the Inkosazana desires to go, who is there that dares to stay her, and if she puts out her magic, who is there that has the power? If a hand is lifted against her, will she not lay a curse on us and bring destruction upon us?”

“I don’t know,” answered Ishmael again, “but if she goes back among the white folk and is angry, I think that she will bring the Boers upon you.”

Now Dingaan’s face grew very troubled, and bidding Ishmael stand back awhile, he consulted with his council. Then he said:

“Listen to me, White Man. It would be a very evil thing if the Inkosazana were to leave us, for with her would go the Spirit of our people, and their good luck, so say the witch-doctors with one voice, and I believe them. Further, it is our desire that she should remain with us a while. This day the Council of the Diviners has spoken, saying that the words of the Inkosazana which she uttered here are too hard for them, and that other doctors of a people who live far away, must be sent for and brought face to face with her. Therefore here at Umgugundhlovo she should abide until they come.”

“Indeed,” answered Ishmael indifferently.

In the doctors who dwell far away, and the council of the Diviners he had no belief. But understanding the natives as he did he guessed correctly enough that the latter found themselves in a cleft stick. Worked on by their superstitions, which he had first awakened for his own ends, they had accepted Rachel as something more than human, as the incarnation of the Spirit of their people. This Mopo, who was said to have killed Chaka by command of that Spirit, had acknowledged her to be, and therefore they did not dare to declare that her words spoken as an oracle were empty words. But neither did they dare to interpret the saying that she meant that no attack must be made upon the Boers and should be obeyed. To do this would be to fly in the face of the martial aspirations of the nation and the secret wishes of the King, and perhaps if war ultimately broke out, would cost them their lives. So it came about that they announced that they could not understand her sayings, and had decided to thrust off the responsibility on to the shoulders of some other diviners, though who these men might be Ishmael neither knew nor took the trouble to ask.

“But,” went on the King, “who can force the dove to build in a tree that does not please it, seeing that it has wings and can fly away? Yet if its own tree, that in which it was reared from the nest, could be brought to it, it might be pleased to abide there. Do you understand, White Man?”

“No,” answered Ishmael, though in fact he understood well enough that the King was playing upon Rachel’s English name of Dove, and that he meant that her home might be moved into Zululand. “No, the Inkosazana is not a bird, and who can carry trees about?”

“Have the spear-shafts knocked the wit out of you, Ibubesi,” asked Dingaan, impatiently, “or are you drunk with beer? Learn then my meaning. The Inkosazana will not stay because her home is yonder, therefore it must be brought here and she will stay. At first I gave orders that if this old white teacher and his wife tried to accompany her, they should be killed. Now I eat up those words. They must come to Zululand.”

"How will you persuade them to be such fools?" asked Ishmael.

"How did I persuade the Inkosazana herself to come? Was it not to seek one whom she loved?"

"They will think that you have killed her, and wish to kill them also."

"No, because you will go in command of an impi and show them otherwise."

"I cannot go; your brutes of captains have hurt my head, and lamed me; I cannot walk or ride."

"Then you can be carried in a litter, or," he added threateningly, "you can abide here with the vultures. The Inkosazana is merciful, but why should I not avenge her wrongs upon you, white dog, who have dared to scratch at the kraal gate of the Inkosazana-y-Zoola?"

Now Ishmael saw that he had no choice; also a dark thought rose dimly in his mind. He desired to win Rachel above everything on earth, he was mad with love—or what he understood as love—of her, and this business might be worked to his advantage. Moreover, to stay was death. So he fell to bargaining for a reward for his services, a large reward in cattle and ivory; half of it to be paid down at once, and it was promised to him. Then he took his instructions. These were that he was to travel to the mission station of Ramah in command of a small impi of three hundred men, whose only orders would be that they were to obey him in all things! That he was to tell the Umfundusi who was called Shouter, that if they wished to see her any more, he and his wife must come to dwell with the Inkosazana, in Zululand: that if they refused he was to bring them by force. If, perchance, the Inkosazana, choosing to exercise her authority, crossed the Tugela and reached Ramah before he could do this, he was still to bring them, for then she would follow. In the same way, if the Shouter and his wife met her on the road, they were to travel on, for then she would turn and accompany them. He was to go at once and execute these orders.

"I hear," said Ishmael, "and will start as soon as the cattle have been delivered and sent on with the ivory to my kraal, Mafooti."

There was something in the man's voice, or in the look of low cunning which spread itself over his face, that attracted Dingaan's attention.

"The cattle and the ivory shall be sent," he said, sternly, "but ill shall it be for you, Ibubesi, if you seek to trick me in this matter. You have grown rich on my bounty, and yonder at your place, Mafooti, you have many cows, many wives, many children—my spies have given me count of all of them. Now, if you play me false, or if you dare to lift a finger against the White One, know that I will burn that kraal and slay the inhabitants with the spear and take the cattle, and when I catch you, Ibubesi, I will kill you, slowly, slowly. I have spoken, go.

"I go, Great Elephant, Calf of the Black Cow, and I will obey in all things," answered Ishmael in a humble voice, for he was frightened. "The white people shall be brought, only I trust to you to protect me from the anger of the Inkosazana for all that I may do."

"You must make your own peace with the Inkosazana," answered Dingaan, and turning, he crept into his hut.

An hour later the great induna, Tamboosa, appeared at Rachel's kraal, and craved leave to speak with her.

"What is it?" asked Rachel when he had been admitted. "Have you come to lead me out of Zululand, Tamboosa?"

"Nay, White One," he answered, "the land needs you yet awhile. I have come to tell you that Dingaan would speak with your servant Noie, if it be your good pleasure to let her visit him. Fear not. No harm shall come to her, if it does you may order me to be put to death. You, yourself, could not be safer than she shall be."

"Are you afraid to go?" asked Rachel of Noie.

"Not I," answered the girl, with a laugh. "I trust to the King's word and to your might."

"Depart then," said Rachel, "and come back as swiftly as you may. Tamboosa shall lead you."

So Noie went.

Two hours after sundown, while Rachel was eating her evening meal in her Great Hut, attended by the maidens, the door-board was drawn aside, and Noie entered, saluted, and sat down. Rachel signed to the women to clear away the food and depart. When they had gone she asked what the King's business was, eagerly enough, for she hoped that it had to do with her leaving Zululand.

"It is a long story, Zoola," answered Noie, "but here is the heart of it. I told you when first we met that I am not of this people, although my mother was a Zulu. I told you that I am of the Dream-people, the Ghost-people, the little Grey-people, who live away to the north beneath their trees, and worship their trees."

"Yes," answered Rachel, "and that is why you care nothing for men as other women do, but dream dreams and talk with spirits. But what of it?"

"That is why I dream dreams and talk with spirits, as one day I hope that I shall teach you to do, you whose soul is sister to my soul," replied Noie, her large eyes shining strangely in her delicate face. "And this of it—the Ghost-people are diviners, they can read the future and see the hearts of men; there are no diviners like them. Therefore chiefs and peoples who dwell far away send to them with great gifts, and pray them come read their fate, but they will seldom listen or obey. Now Dingaan and his councillors are troubled about this matter of the Boers, and the meaning of the words you spoke as to their waging war on them, and of the omen of the falling star. The council of the doctors can interpret none of these things, nor dare they ask you to do so, since you bade them speak no more to you of that matter, and they know, that if they did, either you would not answer, or, worse still, say words that would displease them."

"They are right there," said Rachel. "To have to play the dark oracle once is enough for me. If I speak again, it shall be plainly."

"Therefore they have bethought them of the Dealers in Dreams and desire to bring you face to face with their prophets, the Ghost-Kings, that these may see your greatness and tell them the meaning of your words, and of the omen that you caused to travel through the skies."

"Do you mean that they wish me to visit these Ghost-Kings, Noie?"

"Not so, Zoola, for then they must part with your presence. They wish that the priests of the Ghost-Kings should visit you, bearing with them the word of the Mother of the Trees."

"Visit me! How can they? Who will bring them here?"

"They wish that I should bring them, for as they know, I am of their blood, and I alone can talk their language, which my father taught me from a child."

"But, Noie, that would mean that we must be separated," said Rachel, in alarm.

"Yes, it would mean that, still I think it best that you should humour them and let me go, for otherwise I do not know how you will ever escape from Zululand. Now I told the King that I thought you would permit it on one condition only—that after you had been brought face to face with the priests of the Ghost-Kings, and they had interpreted your riddle, you should be escorted whence you came, and he answered that it should be so, and that meanwhile you could abide here in honour, peace and safety. Moreover, he promised that a messenger should be sent to Ramah to explain the reason of your delay."

"But how long will you be on the journey, Noie, and what if these prophets of yours refuse to visit Dingaan?"

"I cannot tell you who have never travelled that road. But I will march fast, and if I tire, swift runners shall bear me in a litter. To those who have the secret of its gate that country is not so very far away. Also, the Old Mother of the Trees is my father's aunt, and I think that the prophets will come at my prayer, or at the least send the answer to the question. Indeed, I am sure of it—ask me not why."

Still for a long while Rachel reasoned against this separation, which she dreaded, while Noie reasoned for it. She pointed out that here at least none could harm her, as they had seen in the treatment meted out to Ishmael, a white man whom the Zulus looked upon as their friend. Also she said with conviction that these mysterious Ghost-Kings were very powerful, and could free her from the clutches of the Zulus, and protect her from them afterwards, as they would do when they came to know her case.

The end of it was that Rachel gave way, not because Noie's arguments convinced her, but because she was sure that she had other reasons she did not choose to advance.

From that day when each of them tossed up a hair from her head at Ramah, notwithstanding the difference of their race and circumstances, these two had been as sisters. Rachel believed in Noie more, perhaps, than in any other living being, and thus also did Noie believe in Rachel. They knew that their destinies were intertwined, and were sure that not rivers or mountains or the will and violence of men, could keep them separate.

"I see," said Rachel, at length, "that you believe that my fate hangs upon this embassy of yours."

"I do believe it," answered Noie, confidently.

"Then go, but come back as swiftly as you may, for, my sister, I know not how without you I shall live on in this lonely greatness," and she took her in her arms and kissed her lips.

Afterwards, as they were laying themselves down to sleep, Rachel asked her if she had heard anything about Ishmael. She answered that she learned at the Great Kraal that he had been brought before the King that afternoon, and then taken back to his hut, where he was under guard. One of her escort told her, too, that since he saw the King, Ibubesi had fallen very sick, it was thought from a blow that he had received at the house of Inkosazana, and that now he was out of his mind and being attended by the doctors. "I wish," added Noie viciously, "that he were out of his body also, for then much sorrow would be spared. But that cannot be before the time."

On the next day before noon, Noie departed upon her journey. Rachel sent for the captains of her escort and the Isanusi, or doctors, who were to accompany her, and in a few stern words gave her into their charge, saying that they should answer for her safety with their lives, to which they replied that they knew it, and would do so. If any harm came to the daughter of Seyapi through their fault, they were prepared to die. Then she talked for a long while with Noie, telling her all she knew of the Boers and the purpose of their wanderings, that she might be able to repeat it to her people, and show them how dreadful would be a war between this white folk and the Zulus.

Noie answered that she would give her message, but that it was needless, since the Ghost-Kings could see all that passed "in the bowls of water beneath their trees, and doubtless knew already of her coming and of the cause of it," a reply of which Rachel had not time to inquire the meaning. After this they embraced and parted, not without some tears.

When the gate shut behind Noie, Rachel walked to the high ground at the back of her hut, whence she could see over the fence of the kraal, and watched her departure. She had an escort of a hundred picked soldiers, with whom went fifty or sixty strong bearers, who carried food, karosses, and a litter. Also there were three doctors of magic and medicine, and two women, widows of high rank who were to attend upon her. At the head of this procession, save for two guides, walked Noie herself, with sandals on her feet, a white robe about her shoulders, and in her hand a little bough on which grew shining leaves, whereof Rachel did not know the meaning. She watched them until they passed over the brow of the hill, on the crest of which Noie turned and waved the bough towards her. Then Rachel went back to her hut, and sat there alone and wept.

This was the beginning of many dreadful days, most of which she passed wandering about within the circuit of the kraal fence, a space of some three or four acres, or seated under the shadow of certain beautiful trees, which overhung a deep, clear pool of the stream that ran through the kraal, a reed-fringed pool whereon floated blooming lilies. That quiet water, the happy birds that nested in the trees and the flowering lilies seemed to be her only friends. Of the last, indeed, she would count the buds, watching them open in the morning and close again for their sleep at night, until a day came when their loveliness turned to decay, and others appeared in their place.

On the morrow of Noie's departure, Tamboosa and other indunas visited her, and asked her if she would not descend to the kraal of the King, and help him and his council to try cases, since while she was in the land she was its first judge. She answered, "No, that place smelt too much of blood." If they had cases for her to try, let them be brought before her in her own house. This she said idly, thinking no more of it, but next day was astonished to learn that the plaintiff and defendant in a great suit, with their respective advocates, and from thirty to forty witnesses, were waiting without to know when it was her pleasure to attend to their business.

With characteristic courage Rachel answered, "Now." Her knowledge of law was, it is true, limited to what, for lack of anything more exciting, she had read in some handbooks belonging to her father, who had been a justice of the peace in the Cape Colony, and to a few cases which she had seen tried in a rough-and-ready fashion at Durban, to which must be added an intimate acquaintance with Kaffir customs. Still, being possessed with a sincere desire to discover the truth and execute justice, she did very well. The matter in dispute was a large one, that of the ownership of a great herd of cattle which was claimed as an inheritance by each of the parties. Rachel soon discovered that both these men were very powerful chiefs, and that the reason of their cause being remitted to her was that the King knew that if he decided in favour of either of them he would mortally offend the other.

For a long while Rachel, seated on her stool, listened silently to the impassioned pleadings of the plaintiff's lawyers. Presently this plaintiff was called as a witness, and in the course of his evidence said something which convinced her that he was lying. Then breaking her silence for the first time, she asked him how he dared to give false witness before the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, to whom the

truth was always open, and who was acquainted with every circumstance connected with the cattle in dispute. The man, seeing her eyes fixed upon him, and being convinced of her supernatural powers, grew afraid, broke down, and publicly confessed his attempted fraud, into which he said he had been led by envy of his cousin, the defendant's, riches.

Rachel gave judgment accordingly, commanding that he should pay the costs in cattle and a fine to the King, and warned him to be more upright in future. The result was that her fame as a judge spread throughout the land, and every day her gates were beset with suitors whose causes she dealt with to the best of her ability, and to their entire satisfaction. Criminal prosecutions that involved the death-sentence or matters connected with witchcraft, however, she steadily refused to try, saying that the Inkosazana should not cause blood to flow. These things she left to the King and his Council, confining herself to such actions as in England would come before the Court of Chancery. Thus to her reputation as a spiritual queen, Rachel added that of an upright judge who could not be influenced by fear or bribes, the first, perhaps, that had ever been known in Zululand.

But she could not try such cases all day, the strain was too great, although in the end most of them partook of the nature of arbitrations, since the parties involved, having come to the conclusion that it was not possible to deceive one so wise, grew truthful and submitted their differences to the decision of her wisdom.

After they were dismissed, which was always at noon, for she opened her court at seven and would not sit more than five hours, Rachel was left in her solitary state until the next morning, and oh! the hours hung heavily upon her hands. A messenger was despatched to Ramah, but after ten days he returned saying that the Tugela was in flood, and he could not cross it. She sent him out again, and a week later was told that he had been killed by a lion on his journey. Then another messenger was chosen, but what became of him she never knew.

It was about this time that Rachel learned that Ishmael, having recovered from his sickness, had escaped from Umgugundhlovo by night, whither none seemed to know. From that moment fears gathered thick upon the poor girl. She dreaded Ishmael and guessed that his departure without communicating with her boded her no good. Indeed, once or twice she almost wished that she had taken Noie's counsel and given him over to the justice of the King. Meanwhile of Noie herself nothing had been heard. She had vanished into the wilderness.

Living this strange and most unnatural life, Rachel's nerves began to give way. While she tried her cases she seemed stern and calm. But when the crowd of humble suitors had dispersed from the outer court in which she sat as a judge, and the shouts of the praisers rushing up and down beyond the fence and roaring out her titles had died away, and having dismissed the obsequious maidens who waited upon her, she retired to the solitude of her hut to rest—ah! then it was different. Then she lay down upon her bed of rich furs and at times burst into tears because she who seemed to be a supernatural queen, was really but a white girl deserted by God and man.

Now it was the season of thunderstorms, and almost every afternoon these dreadful tempests broke over her kraal, which shook in the roll and crash of the meeting clouds, while beyond the fence the jagged lightning struck and struck again upon the ironstone of the hillside.

She had never feared such storms before, but now they terrified her. She dreaded their advent, and the worst of it was that she must not show her dread, she who was supposed to rule and direct the lightning. Indeed, the bounteous rains which fell ensuring a full harvest after several years of drought, were universally attributed to the good influence of her presence in the land. In the same way when a thunderbolt struck the hut of a doctor who but a day or two before had openly declared his disbelief in her powers, killing him and his principal wife, and destroying his kraal by fire, the accident was attributed to her vengeance, or to that of the Heavens, who were angry at this lack of faith. After this remarkable exhibition of supernatural strength, needless to say, the voice of adverse criticism was stayed; Rachel became supreme.

But the storms passed, and when they had rolled away at length, doing her no hurt, and the sun shone out again, she would go and sit beneath the trees at the edge of the beautiful pool until the closing lilies and the chill of the air told her that night drew on.

Oh! those long nights—how endless they seemed to Rachel in her loneliness. Now she who used to sleep so well, could not sleep, or when she slept she dreamed. She dreamed of her mother, always of her mother, that she was ill, and calling her, until she came to believe that in truth this was so. So much did this conviction work upon her mind, that she determined not to wait for the return of Noie, but at all costs to try to leave Zululand, and through Tamboosa declared her will to the King. Next morning the answer came back that of course none could control her movements, but if she would go, she must fly, as all the rivers were in flood, as she might see if she would walk to the top of the mountain behind her kraal. Tamboosa added that a company of men who had been sent to recapture Ishmael, were kept for a week upon the banks of the first of them, and at length, being unable to cross, had returned, as her messenger had done. Knowing from other sources that this was true, Rachel made no answer. What she did not know, however, was that Ishmael had crossed the smaller rivers before the flood came down, and gone on to meet the soldiers, who were ordered to await him on the banks of the Tugela.

Escape was evidently impossible at present, and if it had been otherwise, clearly the Zulus did not mean to let her go. She must abide here in the company of her terrors and her dreams.

At length, happily for her, these distressing dreams of Rachel's began to be varied by others of a pleasanter complexion, of which, although they were vivid enough, she could only remember upon waking that they had to do with Richard Darrien, the companion of her adventure in the river, of whom she had heard nothing for so many years. For aught she knew he might have died long ago, and yet she did not think that he was dead. Well, if he lived he might have forgotten her, and yet she did not believe that he had forgotten her, he who as a boy had wished to follow her all his life, and whom she had thought of day by day from that hour to this. Yes, she had thought of him, but not thus. Why, at such a time, did he arise in strength before her, seeming to occupy all her soul? Why was her mind never free of him? Could it be that they were about to meet again? She shivered as the hope took hold of her, shivered with joy, and remembered that her mother had always said that they would meet. Could it be that he of all men on the earth, for if he lived he was a man now, was coming to rescue her? Oh! then she would fear nothing. Then in every peril she would feel safe as a child in its mother's arms. No, the thing was too happy to come about; her imagination played tricks with her, no more. And yet, and yet, why did he haunt her sleep?

The dreary days went on; a month had passed since Noie vanished over yonder ridge, and worst of all, for three nights the dreams of Richard had departed, while those of her mother remained.

Rachel was worn out; she was in despair. All that morning she had spent in trying a long and heavy case, which occupied but wearied her mind, one of those eternal cases about the inheritance of cattle which were claimed by three brothers, descendants of

different wives of a grandfather who had owned the herd. Finally she had effected a compromise between the parties, and amidst their salutes and acclamations, retired to her hut. But she could not eat; the sameness of the food disgusted her. Neither could she rest, for the daily tempest was coming up, and the heavy atmosphere, or the electricity with which it was charged, and the overpowering heat, exasperated her nervous system and made sleep impossible. At length came the usual rush of icy wind and the bursting of the great storm. The thunder crashed and bellowed; the lightning flickered and flared; the rain fell in a torrent. It passed as it always did, and the sun shone out again. Gasping with relief, Rachel went out of the oven-like hut into the cool, sweet air, and sat down upon a tanned bull's hide which she had ordered her servants to spread for her by the pool of water upon the bank beneath the trees. It was very pleasant here, and the raindrops shaken from the wet leaves fell upon her fevered face and hands and refreshed her.

She tried to forget her troubles for a little while, and began to think of Richard Darrien, her boy-lover of a long-past hour, wondering what he looked like now that he was grown to be a man.

"If only you would come to help me! Oh! Richard, if only you would come to help me," the poor, worn-out girl murmured to herself, and so murmuring fell asleep.

Suddenly it seemed to her that she was wide awake, and staring into a part of the pool beneath her where the bottom was of granite and the water clear. In this water she saw a picture. She saw a great laager of waggons, and outside of one of them a group of bearded, jovial-looking men smoking and talking. Presently another man of sturdy build and resolute carriage, who was followed by a weary Kaffir, walked up to them. His back was towards her so that she could not see his face, but now she was able to hear all that was said, although the voices seemed thin and far away.

"What is it, Nephew?" asked the oldest of the bearded men, speaking in Dutch. "Why are you in such a hurry?"

"This, Uncle," he answered, in the same language, and in a pleasant voice that sounded familiar to Rachel's ears. "That spy, Quabi, whom we sent out a long time ago and who was reported dead, reached Dingaan's kraal, and has come back with a strange story."

"Almighty!" grunted the old man, "all these spies have strange stories, but let him tell it. Speak on, swartzel."[\*]

[\*] Black-fellow.

Then the tired spy began to talk, telling a long tale. He described how he had got into Zululand, and reached Umgugundhlovo and lodged there with a relative of his, and done his best to collect information as to the attitude of the King and indunas towards the Boers. While he was there the news came that the white Spirit, who was called Inkosazana-y-Zoola, was approaching the kraal from Natal, where she dwelt with her parents, who were teachers.

"Almighty!" interrupted the old man again, "What rubbish is this? How can a Spirit, white or black, have parents who are teachers?"

The weary-looking spy answered that he did not know, it was not for him to answer riddles, all he knew was that there was great excitement about the coming of this Queen of the Heavens, and he, being desirous of obtaining first-hand information, slipped out of the town with his relative, and walked more than a day's journey on the path that ran to the Tugela, till they came to a place where they hid themselves to see her pass. This place he described with minuteness, so minutely, indeed, that in her dream, Rachel recognised it well. It was the spot where the witch-doctress had died. He went on with his story; he told of her appearance riding on the white horse and surrounded by an impi. He described her beauty, her white cloak, her hair hanging down her back, the rod of horn she carried in her hand, the colour of her eyes, the shape of her features, everything about her, as only a native can. Then he told of the incident of the cattle rushing across her path, of the death of the bull that charged her, of the appearance of the furious witch-doctress who seized the rein of the horse, of the pointing of the wand, and the instant execution of the woman.

He told of how he had followed the impi to the Great Place, of the story of Noie as he had heard it, and the reports that had reached him concerning the interview between the King and this white Inkosazana, who, it was said, advised him not to fight the Boers.

"And where is she now?" asked the old Dutchman.

"There, at Umgugundhlovo," he answered, "ruling the land as its head Isanuzi, though it is said that she desires to escape, only the Zulus will not let her go."

"I think that we should find out more about this woman, especially as she seems to be a friend to our people," said the old Boer. "Now, who dares to go and learn the truth?"

"I will go," said the young man who had brought in the spy, and as he spoke he turned, and lo! *his face was the face of Richard Darrien*, bearded and grown to manhood, but without doubt Richard Darrien and none other.

"Why do you offer to undertake so dangerous a mission?" asked the Boer, looking at the young man kindly. "Is it because you wish to see this beautiful white witch of whom yonder Quabi tells us such lies, Nephew?"

The shadow of Richard nodded, and his face reddened, for the Boers around him were laughing at him.

"That is right, Uncle," he answered boldly. "You think me a fool, but I am not. Many years ago I knew a little maid who was the daughter of a teacher, and who, if she lives, must have grown into such a woman as Quabi describes. Well, I joined you Boers last year in order to look for that maid, and I am going to begin to look for her across the river yonder."

As the words reached whatever sense of Rachel's it was that heard them, of a sudden, in an instant, laager, Boers, and Richard vanished. In her sleep she tried to recreate them, at first without avail, then the curtain of darkness appeared to lift, and in the still water of the pool she saw another picture, that of Richard Darrien mounted on a black horse with one white foot, riding along a native path through a bush-clad country, while by his side trotted the spy whose name was Quabi.

They were talking together, and she heard, or, at any rate, knew their words.

"How far is it now to Umgugundhlovo?" asked Richard.

"Three days' journey, Inkosi, if we are not stopped by flooded rivers," answered Quabi.

For one second only Rachel saw and heard these things, then they, too, passed away, and she awoke to see in front of her the pool empty save for its lilies, and above to hear the whispering of the evening wind among the trees.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### RICHARD COMES

As the sun set Rachel rose and walked to her hut. She was utterly dazed, she could not understand. Was this but a fiction of an overwrought and disordered mind, or had she seen a vision of things passing, or that had passed, far away? If it were a dream, then this was but another drop in her cup of bitterness. If a true vision—oh! then what did it mean to her? It meant that Richard Darrien lived, Richard, of whom her heart had been full for years. It meant that his heart was full of her also, for had she not seemed to hear him say that he had travelled from the Cape with the Boers to look for her, and was he not journeying alone through a hostile land to pursue his search? Who would do such a thing for the sake of a girl unless—unless? It meant that he would protect her, would rescue her from her terrible plight, would take her from among these savages to her home again—oh! and perhaps much more that she did not dare to picture to herself.

Yet how could such things be? They were contrary to experience, at any rate, to the experience of white folk, though natives would believe in them easily enough. Yet in Nature things might be possible which were generally held to be impossible. Her mother had certain gifts—had she, perhaps, inherited them? Had her helplessness appealed to the pity of some higher power? Had her ceaseless prayers been heard? Yet, why should the universal laws be stretched for her? Why should she be allowed to lift a corner of the black veil of ignorance that hems us in, and see a glimpse of what lies beyond? If Richard were really coming, in a day or two she would have learned of his arrival naturally; there was no need that these mysterious influences should be set to work to inform her of his approach.

How selfish she was. The warning might concern him, not her. It was probable enough that the Zulus would kill a solitary white man, especially if they discovered that he proposed to visit their Inkosazana. Well, she had the power to protect him. If she “threw her mantle” over him, no man in all the land would dare to do him violence. Surely it was for this reason that she had been allowed to learn these things, if she had learned them, not for her own sake, but his. *If* she had learned them! Well, she would take the risk, would run the chance of failure and of mockery, yes, and of the loss of her power among these people. It should be done at once.

Rachel clapped her hands, and a maiden appeared whom she bade summon the captain of the guard without the gate. Presently he came, surrounded by a band of her women, since no man might visit the Inkosazana alone. Bidding him to cease from his salutations, she commanded him to go swiftly to the Great Place and pray of Dingaan that he would send her an escort and a litter, as she must see him that night on a matter which would not brook delay.

In an hour, just after she had finished her food, which she ate with more appetite than she had known for days, it was reported that they were there. Throwing on her white cloak, and taking her horn wand, she entered the litter and, guarded by a hundred men, was borne swiftly to the House of Dingaan. At its gate she descended, and once more entered that court by the moonlight.

As before, there sat the King and his indunas without the Great Hut, and while she walked towards them every man rose crying “Hail! Inkosazana.” Yes, even Dingaan, mountain of flesh though he was, struggled from his stool and saluted her. Rachel acknowledged the salutation by raising her wand, motioned to them to be seated, and waited.

“Art thou come, White One,” asked Dingaan, “to make clear those dark words thou spokest to us a moon ago?”

“Nay, King,” she answered, “what I said then, I said once and for all. Read thou the saying as thou wilt, or let the Ghost-people interpret it to thee. Hear me, King and Councillors. Ye have kept me here when I would be gone, my business being ended, that I might be a judge among this people. Ye have told me that the rivers were in flood, that the beast I rode was sick, that evil would befall the land if I deserted you. Now I know, and ye know, that if it pleased me I could have departed when and whither I would, but it was not fitting that the Inkosazana should creep out of Zululand like a thief in the night, so I abode on in my house yonder. Yet my heart grew wrath with you, and I, to whom the white people listen also, was half minded to bring hither the thousands of the Amaboona who are encamped beyond the Buffalo River, that they might escort me to my home.”

Now at these bold words the King looked uneasy, and one of the councillors whispered to another,

“How knows she that the white men are camped beyond the Buffalo?”

“Yet,” went on Rachel, “I did not do so, for then there must have been much fighting and bloodshed, and blood I hate. But I have done this. With these Amaboona travels an English chief, a young man, one Darrien, whom I knew from long years ago, and who does me reverence. Him, then, I have commanded to journey hither, and to lead me to my own place across the Tugela. To-night I am told he sleeps a short three days’ journey from this town, and I am come here to bid you send out swift messengers to guide him hither.”

She ceased, and they stared at her awhile. Then the King asked,

“What messenger is it, Inkosazana, that thou hast sent to this white chief, Dario? We have seen none pass from thy house.”

“Dost thou think, then, King, that thou canst see my messengers? My thoughts flew from me to him, and called in his ear in the night, and I saw his coming in the still pool that lies near my huts.”

“Ow!” exclaimed one of the Council, “she sent her thoughts to him like birds, and she saw his coming in the water of the pool. Great is the magic of the Inkosazana.”

“The chief, Darrien,” went on Rachel, without heeding the interruption, although she noted that it was Mopo of the withered hand who had spoken from beneath the blanket wrapped about his head, “may be known thus. He is fair of face, with eyes like my eyes, and beard and hair of the colour of gold. If I saw right, he rides upon a black horse with one white foot and his only companion is a

Kaffir named Quabi who, I think," and she passed her hand across her forehead, "yes, who was surely visiting a relation of his, at this, the Great Place, when I crossed the Tugela."

Now the King asked if any knew of this Quabi, and an induna answered in an awed voice, that it was true that a man so called had been in the town at the time given by the Inkosazana, staying with a soldier whose name he mentioned, but who was now away on service. He had, however, departed before the Inkosazana arrived, or so he believed, whither he knew not.

"I thought it was so," went on Rachel. "As I saw him in the pool he is a thin man whose shoulders stoop, and whose beard is white, although his hair is black. He wears no ring upon his head."

"That is the man," said the induna, "being a stranger I noted him well, as it was my business to do."

"Summon the messengers swiftly, King," went on Rachel, "and let them depart at once, for know that this white chief and his servant are under the protection of the Heavens, and if harm comes to them, then I lay my curse upon the land, and it shall break up in blood and ruin. Bid them say to Darrien, that the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, she who stood with him once on the rock in the river while the lightnings fell and the lions roared about them, sends him greetings and awaits him."

Now Dingaan turned to an induna and said,

"Go, do the bidding of the Inkosazana. Bid swift runners search out this white chief, and lead him to her house, and remember that if aught of ill befalls him, those men die, and thou diest also."

The induna leapt up and departed, and Rachel also made ready to go. A moment later the captain of the gate entered, fell upon his knees before Dingaan, and said,

"O King, tidings."

"What are they, man?" he asked.

"King, the watchmen report that it has been called from hilltop to hilltop that a white man who rides a black horse, has crossed the Buffalo, and travels towards the Great Place. What is thy pleasure? Shall he be killed or driven back?"

"When did that news come?" asked the King in the silence which followed this announcement.

"Not a minute gone," he answered. "The inner watchman ran with it, and is without the gates. There has been no other tidings from the West for days."

"Thy watchmen call but slowly, King, the water in the pool speaks swifter," said Rachel, then still in the midst of a heavy silence, for this thing was fearful to them, she turned and departed.

"So it is true, so it is true!" Rachel kept repeating to herself, the words suiting themselves to the time of the footfall of her bearers. She was spent with all the labour and emotions of that long day, culminating in the last scene, when she must play her dangerous, superhuman part before these keen-witted savages. She could think no more; scarcely could she undress and throw herself upon her bed in the hut. Yet that night she slept soundly, better than she had done since Noie went away. No dreams came to trouble her and in the morning she woke refreshed.

But now doubts did come. Might she not be mistaken after all? She knew the marvellous powers of the natives in the matter of the transmission of news, powers so strange that many, even among white people, attributed them to witchcraft. She had no doubt, therefore, as to the fact of some Englishman or Boer having entered Zululand. Doubtless the news of his arrival had been conveyed over scores of miles of country by the calling of it as the captain said, from hill to hill, or in some other fashion. But might not this arrival and the circumstance of her dream or vision be a mere coincidence? What was there to show that the stranger who was riding a black horse was really Richard Darrien? Perhaps it was all a mistake, and he was only one of those white wanderers of the stamp of the outcast Ishmael who, even at that date, made their way into savage countries for the purposes of gain or to enjoy a life of licence. And yet, and yet Quabi, of whom she also dreamed, had visited the Great Place—as she dreamed.

The next two days were terrible to Rachel. She endured them as she had endured all those that went before, trying the cases that were brought to her, keeping up her appearance of distant dignity and utter indifference. She asked no questions, since to do so would be to show doubt and weakness, although she was aware that the tale of her vision had spread through the land, and that the issue of the matter was of intense interest to thousands. From some talk which she overheard while she pretended to be listening to evidence, she learned even that two men going to execution had discussed it, saying that they regretted they would not live to know the truth. On the second day she did hear one piece of news, for although she sat by her pool and again tried to sleep by its waters, these remained blind and dumb.

The induna, Tamboosa, on one of his ceremonial visits, after speaking of the health of her mare, which, it seemed was improving, mentioned incidentally that the messengers running night and day had met the white man and "called back" that he was safe and well. He added that had it not been for her vision this said white man would certainly have been killed as a spy.

"Yes, I knew that," answered Rachel, indifferently, although her heart thumped within her bosom. "I forget if I said that the Inkosi was to be brought straight here when he arrives. If not, let it be known that such is my command. The King can receive him afterwards if it pleases him to do so, as probably we shall not depart until the next day."

Then she yawned, and as though by an afterthought asked if any news had been "called back" from Noie.

Tamboosa answered, No; no system of intelligence had been organised in the direction in which she had gone, for that country was empty of enemies, and indeed of population. However, this would not distress the Inkosazana, who had only to consult her Spirit to see all that happened to her servant.

Rachel replied that of course this was so, but as a matter of fact she had not troubled about the matter, then waved her hand to show that the interview was at an end.

It was the morning of the third day, and while Rachel was delivering judgment in a case, a messenger entered and whispered something to the induna on duty, who rose and saluted her.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Only this, Inkosazana; the white Inkoos from the Buffalo River has arrived, and is without."

"Good," said Rachel, "let him wait there." Then she went on with her judgment. Yes, she went on, although her eyes were blind, and the blood beating in her ears sounded like the roll of drums. She finished it, and after a decent interval, bowed her head in acknowledgement of the customary salutes, and made the sign which intimated that the Court was to be cleared.

Slowly, slowly, all the crowd melted away, leaving her alone with her women.

"Go," she said to one of them, "and bid the captain admit this white chief. Say that he is to come unarmed and alone. Then depart, all of you. If I should need you I will call."

The girl went on her errand while her companions filed away through the back gate of the inner fence. Rachel glanced round to make sure of her solitude. It was complete, no one was left. There she sat in state upon her carved stool, her wand in her hand, her white cloak upon her shoulders, and the sunlight that passed over the round of the hut behind her glinting on her hair till it shone like a crown of gold, but leaving her face in shadow; sat quite still like some lovely tinted statue.

The gate of the inner fence opened and closed again after a man who entered. He walked forward a few paces, then stood still, for the flood of light that revealed him so clearly at first prevented him from seeing her seated in the shadow. Oh! there could be no further doubt—before her was Richard Darrien, the lad grown to manhood, from whom she had parted so many years ago. Now, as then, he was not tall, though very strongly built, and for the rest, save for his short beard, the change in him seemed little. The same clear, thoughtful, grey eyes, the same pleasant, open face, the same determined mouth. She was not disappointed in him, she knew this at once. She liked him as well as she had done at the first.

Now he caught sight of her and stayed there, staring. She tried to speak, to welcome him, but could not, no words would come. He also seemed to be smitten with dumbness, and thus the two of them remained a while. At last he took off his hat almost mechanically, as though from instinct, and said vaguely,

"You are the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, are you not?"

"I am so called," she answered softly, and with effort.

The moment that he heard her voice, with a movement so swift that it was almost a spring, he advanced to her, saying,

"Now I am sure; you are Rachel Dove, the little girl who—Oh, Rachel, how lovely you have grown!"

"I am glad you think so, Richard," she answered again in the same low, deep voice, a voice laden with the love within her, and reddening to her eyes. Then she let fall her wand, and rising, stretched out both her hands to him.

They were face to face, now, but he did not take those hands; he passed his arms about her, drew her to him unresisting, and kissed her on the lips. She slipped from his embrace down on to her stool, white now as she had been red. Then while he stood over her, trembling and confused, Rachel looked up, her beautiful eyes filled with tears, and whispered,

"Why should I be ashamed? It is Fate."

"Yes," he answered, "Fate."

For so both of them knew it to be. Though they had seen each other but once before, their love was so great, the bond between their natures so perfect and complete, that this outward expression of it would not be denied. Here was a mighty truth which burst through all wrappings of convention and proclaimed itself in its pure strength and beauty. That kiss of theirs was the declaration of an existent unity which circumstances did not create, nor their will control, and thus they confessed it to each other.

"How long?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Eight years to-day," he answered, "since I rode away after those waggons."

"Eight years," she repeated, "and no word from you all that time. You have behaved badly to me, Richard."

"No, no, I could not find out. I wrote three times, but always the letters were returned, except one that went to the wrong people, who were angry about it. Then two years ago, I heard that your father and mother had been in Natal, but had gone to England, and that you were dead. Yes, a man told me that you were dead," he added with a gulp. "I suppose he was speaking of somebody else, as he could not remember whether the name was Dove or Cove, or perhaps he was just lying. At any rate, I did not believe, him. I always felt that you were alive."

"Why did you not come to see, Richard?"

"Why? Because it was impossible. For years my father was an invalid, paralysed; and I was his only child, and could not leave him."

She looked a question at him.

"Yes," he answered with a nod, "dead, ten months ago, and for a few weeks I had to remain to arrange about the property, of which he left a good deal, for we did well of late years. Just then I heard a rumour of an English missionary and his wife and daughter who were said to be living somewhere beyond the boundaries of Natal, in a savage place on the Transvaal side of the Drakensberg, and as some Boers I knew were trekking into that country I came with them on the chance—a pretty poor one, as the story was vague enough."

"You came—you came to seek the girl, Rachel Dove?"

"Of course. Otherwise why should I have left my farms down in the Cape to risk my neck among these savages?"

"And then," went on Rachel, "you or somebody else sent in the spy, Quabi, who returned to the Boer camp with his story about the Inkosazana-y-Zoola. You remember you brought him in limping to that old fellow with a grey beard and a large pipe, and the others who laughed at the tale. I mean when you said that this Inkosazana seemed very like an English maid, 'the daughter of a teacher,' whom you were looking for, and that you would go to find out the truth of the business."

"Yes, that's all right; but Rachel," he added with a start, "how do you know anything about it—Oom Piet and the rest, and the words I used? Your spies must be very good and quick, for you can't have seen Quabi."

"My spies are good and quick. Did you get my message sent by the King's men? It was that she who stood with you on the rock in the river, greeted you and awaited you?"

"Yes, I could not understand. I do not understand now. Just before that they were going to kill me as a Boer spy. Who told you everything?"

"My heart," she answered smiling. "I dreamed it all. I suppose that I was allowed to save your life that I might bring you here to save me. Listen now, Richard, while I tell you the strangest story that you ever heard; and if you don't believe it, go and ask the King and his indunas."

Then she told him of her vision by the pool and all that happened after it. When she had finished Richard could only shake his head and say:

"Still I don't understand; but no wonder these Zulus have made a goddess of you. Well, Rachel, what is to happen now? If you are to stop here they mayn't care for me as a high priest."

"I am not; I am going home, and you must take me. I told them that you were coming to do so. You have your horse, have you not, the black horse with the white forefoot? Well, we will start at once—no, you must eat first, and there are things to arrange. Now stand at a distance from me and look as respectful as you can, for I fill a strange position here."

Then Rachel clapped her hands and the women came running in.

"Bring food for the Inkosi Darrien," she said, "and send hither the captain of the gate."

Presently the man arrived crouched up in token of respect, and shouting her titles.

"Go to the King," said Rachel, "and tell him the Inkosazana commands that the horse on which she came be brought to her at once, as she leaves Zululand for a while; also that an impi be assembled within an hour to escort her and this white chief, her servant, to the Tugela. Say that the Inkosi Darrien has brought her tidings which make it needful that she should travel hence speedily if the Zulus, her people, are to be saved from great misfortune, and say, too, that he goes with her. If the King or his indunas would see the Inkosazana, or the chief Darrien, let him or the indunas meet them on their road, since they have no time to visit the Great Place. Let Tamboosa be in command of the impi, and say also that if it is not here at once, the Inkosazana will be angry and summon an impi of her own. Go now, for the lives of many hang upon your speed; yes, the lives of the greatest in the land."

The man saluted and shot away like an arrow.

"Will they obey you?" asked Richard.

"I think so, because they are afraid of me, especially since I saw you coming. At any rate we must act at once, it is our best chance—before they have time to think. Here is some food—eat. Woman, go, tell the guard that the Inkosi's horse must be fed at the gate, for he will need it presently, and his servant also."

"I have no servant, Inkosazana," broke in Richard. "I left Quabi at a kraal fifty miles away, laid up with a cut foot. As soon as he is better he will slip back across the Buffalo River."

Then while Richard ate, which he did heartily enough, for joy had made him very hungry, they talked, who had much to tell. He asked her why she thought it necessary to leave Zululand at once. She answered, for two reasons, first because of her desperate anxiety about her father and mother, as to whom her heart foreboded ill, and secondly for his own sake. She explained that the Zulus who had set her up as an image or a token of the guiding Spirit of their nation, were madly jealous concerning her, so jealous that if he remained here long she was by no means certain that even her power could protect him when they came to understand that he was much to her. It was impossible that she could see him often, and much more so that he could remain in her kraal. Therefore if they were detained he would be obliged to live at some distance from her where an assegai might find him at night or poison be put in his food. At present they were impressed by her foreknowledge of his arrival, and that was why he had been admitted to her at once. But this would wear off—and then who could say, especially if Ishmael returned?

He asked who Ishmael was and what he had to do with her. Rachel told him briefly, and though she suppressed much, he looked very grave at that story.

While she was finishing it a woman called without for leave to enter, and, as before, Rachel bade him stand in a respectful attitude, and at a distance from her. Richard obeyed, and the woman came in to say that certain of the King's indunas craved audience with her. They were admitted and saluted her in their usual humble fashion, but of Richard, beyond eyeing him curiously and, as she thought, hostilely, they took not the slightest heed.

"Are all things ready for my journey, as I commanded?" asked Rachel at once.

"Inkosazana," answered their spokesman, "they are ready, for how canst thou be disobeyed? Tamboosa and the impi wait without. Yet, Inkosazana, the heart of the Black One and the hearts of his councillors, and of all the Zulu people are cut in two because thou wouldst go and leave them mourning. Their hearts are sore also with this white man Dario, who has come to lead thee hence, so sore, that were he not thy servant," the induna added grimly, "he at least should stay in Zululand."

"He is my servant," answered Rachel haughtily, "whom I sent for. Let that suffice. Remember my words, all of you, and let them be told again in the ears of the King, that if any harm comes to this white chief who is my guest and yours, then there will be blood between me and the people of the Zulus that shall be terribly avenged in blood."

The indunas seemed to cower at this declaration, but made no answer. Only the chief of them said:

"The King would know if the Inkosi, thy servant, brings thee any tidings of the Amaboona, the white folk with whom he has been journeying."

"He brings tidings that they seek peace with the Zulus, to whom they will do no hurt if no hurt is done to them. Shall I tell them that the Zulus also seek peace?"

"The King gave us no message on that matter, Inkosazana," replied the induna. "He awaits the coming of the prophets of the Ghost-folk to interpret the meaning of thy words, and of the omen of the falling star."

"So be it," said Rachel. "When my servant, Noie, returns, let her be sent on to me at once, that I may hear and consider the words of her people," and she began to rise from her seat to intimate that the interview was finished.

"Inkosazana," said the induna hurriedly, "one question from the King—when dost thou return to Zululand?"

"I return when it is needful. Fear not, I think that I shall return, but I say to the King and to all of you: Be careful when I come that there is no blood between me and you, lest great evil fall upon your heads from Heaven. I have spoken. Good fortune go with you till we meet again."

The indunas looked at each other, then rose and departed humbly as they had entered.

An hour later, surrounded by the impi, and followed by Richard, Rachel was on the Tugela road. At the crest of a hill she pulled rein and looked back at the great kraal, Umgugundhlovu. Then she beckoned Richard to her side and said: "I think that before long I'll see that hateful place again."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because of the way in which those indunas looked at each other just now. There's some evil secret in their eyes. Richard, I'm afraid."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### WHAT CHANCED AT RAMAH

The news which reached Rachel that Ishmael had been ill after the rough handling of the captains in her presence, was true enough. For many days he was far too ill to travel, and when he recovered sufficiently to start he could only journey slowly to the Tugela.

It will be remembered that she was told that he had escaped, as indeed he seemed to do, slipping off at night, but this escape of his was carefully arranged beforehand, nor did any attempt to re-capture him upon his way. When at length he came to the river he found the small impi awaiting him, not knowing whither they were to go or what they were to do, their only orders being that they must obey him in all things. He found also that the Tugela was in furious flood, so that to ford it proved quite impossible. Here, then, he was obliged to remain for ten full days while the water ran down.

Ishmael was not idle during those ten days, which he spent in recovering his health, and incidentally in reflection. Thus he thought a great deal of his past life, and did not find the record satisfactory. With his exact history we need not trouble ourselves. He was well-born, as he had told Rachel, but had been badly brought up. His strong passions had led him into trouble while young, and instead of trying to reform him his belongings had cast him off. Then he had enlisted in the army, and so reached South Africa. There he committed a crime—as a matter of fact it was murder or something like it—and fled from justice far into the wilderness, where a touch of imagination prompted him to take the name of Ishmael.

For a while this new existence suited him well enough. Thus he had wives in plenty of a sort, and he grew rich, becoming just such a person as might be expected from his environment and unchecked natural tendencies. At length it happened that he met Rachel, who awoke in him certain forgotten associations. She was an English lady, and he remembered that once he had been an English gentleman, years and years ago. Also she was beautiful, which appealed to his strong animal nature, and spiritual, which appealed to a materialist soaked in Kaffir superstition. So he fell in love with her, really in love; that is to say, he came to desire to make her his wife more than he desired anything else on earth. For her sake he grew to dislike his black consorts, however handsome; even the heaping up of herds of cattle after the native fashion ceased to appeal to him. He wanted to live as his forbears had lived, quietly, respectably, with a woman of his own class.

So he made advances to her, with the results we know. For fifteen years or more he had been a savage, and he could not hide his savagery from her eyes any more than he could break off the ties and entanglements that had grown up about him. Had she happened to care for him, it is very possible, however, that in this he would have succeeded in time. He might even have reformed himself completely, and died in old age a much-respected colonial gentleman; perhaps a member of the local Legislature. But she did not; she detested him; she knew him for what he was, a cowardly outcast whose good looks did not appeal to her. So the spark of his new aspirations was trampled out beneath her merciless heel, and there remained only the acquired savagery and superstition mixed with the inborn instincts of a blackguard.

It was this superstition of his that had brought all her troubles upon Rachel, for however it came about, he had conceived the idea that she was something more than an ordinary woman and, with many tales of her mysterious origin and powers, imparted it to the Zulus, in whose minds it was fostered by the accident of the coincidence of her native name and personal loveliness with those of the traditional white Spirit of their race, and by Mopo's identification of her with that Spirit. Thus she became their goddess and his; at any rate for a time. But while they desired to worship her only, and use her rumoured wisdom as an oracle, he sought to make her his wife; the more impossible it became, the more he sought it. She refused him with contumely, and he laid plots to decoy her to Zululand, thinking that there she would be in his power. In the end he succeeded, basely enough, only to find that he was in her power, and that the contumely, and more, were still his share.

But all this did not in the least deter him from his aim, and as it chanced, fortune had put other cards into his hand. He knew that Rachel would not stay among the Zulus, as they knew it. Therefore they had commissioned him to bring her people to her. If her people were not brought he was sure that she would come to seek them, and *if she found no one*, then where could she go, or at least who would be at hand to help her? Surely his opportunity had come at last, and marriage by capture did not occur to him, who had spent so many years among savages, as a crime from which to shrink. Only he feared that the prospective captive, the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, was not one with whom it was safe to trifle. But his love was stronger than his fear. He thought that he would take the risk.

Such were the reflections of Ishmael upon the banks of the flooded Tugela, and when at length the waters went down sufficiently to enable him and the soldiers under his command to cross into Natal, he was fully determined to put them into practice, if the chance came his way. How this might best be done he left to luck, for if it could be avoided he did not wish to have more blood upon his hands. Only Rachel must be rendered homeless and friendless, for then who could protect her from him? An answer came into his mind—she might protect herself, or that Power which seemed to go with her might protect her. Something warned him that this evil enterprise was very dangerous. Yet the fire that burnt within him drove him on to face the danger.

Ishmael was still on the Zululand bank of the river when one day about noon an urgent message reached him from Dingaan. It said that the King was angry as a wounded buffalo to learn, as he had just done, that he, Ibubesi, still lingered on his road, and had not carried out his mission. The Inkosazana, accompanied by a white man, was travelling to Ramah, and unless he went forward at once, would overtake him. Therefore he must march instantly and bring back the old Teacher and his wife as he had been bidden. Should he meet the Inkosazana and her companion as he returned with the white prisoners she must not be touched or insulted in any way, only his ears and those of the soldiers with him were to be deaf to her orders or entreaties to release them, for then she would surely turn and follow of her own accord back to the Great Place. If the white man with her made trouble or resisted, he was to be bound,

but on no account must his blood be made to flow, for if this happened it would bring a curse upon the land, and he, Dingaan, swore by the head of the Black One who was gone (that is Chaka) that he would kill him, Ibubesi, in payment. Yes, he would smear him with honey and bind him over an ant-heap in the sun till he died, if he hunted Africa from end to end to catch him. Moreover, should he fail in the business, he would send a regiment and destroy his town at Mafooti, and put his wives and people to the spear, and seize his cattle. All this also he swore by the head of the Black One.

Now when Ishmael received this message he was much frightened, for he knew that these were not idle threats. Indeed, the exhausted messenger told him that never had any living man seen Dingaan so mad with rage as he was when he learned that he, Ibubesi, was still lingering on the banks of the Tugela, adding that he had foamed at the mouth with fury and uttered terrible threats. Ishmael sent him back with a humble answer, pointing out that it had been impossible to cross the river, which was "in wrath," but that now he would do all things as he was commanded, and especially that not a hair of the white man's head should be harmed.

"Then you must do them quickly," said the messenger with a grim smile as he rose and prepared to go, "for know that the Inkosazana is not more than half a day's march behind you, accompanied by the white Inkoos Dario."

"What is this Dario like?" asked Ishmael.

"Oh! he is young and very handsome, with hair and beard of gold, and eyes that are such as those of the Inkosazana herself. Some say that he is her brother, another child of the Heavens, and some that he is her husband. Who am I that I should speak of such high things? But it is evident that she loves him very much, for by her magic she told the King of his coming, and even when he is behind her she is always trying to turn her head to look at him."

"Oh! she loves him very much, does she?" said Ishmael, setting his white teeth. Then he turned, and calling the captain of the impi, gave orders that the river must be crossed at once, for so the King commanded, and it was better to die with honour by water than with shame by the spear.

So they waded and swam the river with great difficulty, but, as it chanced, without loss of life, Ishmael being borne over it upon the shoulders of the strongest men. Upon its further bank he summoned the captains and delivered to them the orders of the King. Then they set out for Ramah, Ishmael carried in a litter made of boughs.

Whilst the soldiers were constructing this litter, he called two men of the Swamp-dwellers, who had their homes upon the banks of the Tugela, and promising them a reward, bade them run to his town, Mafooti, and tell his head man there to come at once with thirty of the best soldiers, and to hide them in the bush of the kloof above Ramah, where he would join them that night. The men, who knew Ibubesi, and what happened to those who failed upon his business, went swiftly, and a little while afterwards, the litter being finished, Ishmael entered it, and the impi started for Ramah.

Before sundown they appeared upon a ridge overlooking the settlement, just as the herds were driving the cattle into their kraals. Seeing the Zulus while as yet they were some way off, these herds shouted an alarm, whereon the people of the place, thinking that Dingaan had sent a regiment to wipe them out, fled to the bush, the herds driving the cattle after them. Man, woman, and child, deserting their pastor, who knew nothing of all this, being occupied with a sad business, they fled, incontinently, so that when Ishmael and the impi entered Ramah, no one was left in it save a few aged and sick people, who could not walk.

At the outskirts of the town Ishmael descended from his litter and commanded the soldiers to surround it, with orders that they were to hurt no one, but if the white Umfundusi, who was called Shouter, or his wife attempted to escape, they were to be seized and brought to him. Then taking with him some of the captains and a guard of ten men, he advanced to the mission-house.

The door was open, and, followed by the Zulus, he entered to search the place, for he feared that its inhabitants might have seen them, and have gone with the others. Looking into the first room that they reached, of which, as it chanced, the door was also open, Ishmael saw that this was not so, for there upon the bed lay Mrs. Dove, apparently very ill, while by the side of the bed knelt her husband, praying. For a few moments Ishmael and the savages behind him stood still, staring at the pair, till suddenly Mrs. Dove turned her head and saw them. Lifting herself in the bed she pointed with her finger, and Ishmael noticed that her lips were quite blue, and that she did not seem to be able to speak. Then Mr. Dove, observing her outstretched hand, looked round. He had not seen Ishmael since that day when he struck him after their stormy interview at Mafooti, but recognising the man at once, he asked sternly:

"What are you doing, sir, with these savages in my house? Cannot you see that my wife is sick, and must not be disturbed?"

"I am sorry," Ishmael answered shamefacedly, for in his heart he was afraid of Mr. Dove, "but I am sent to you with a message from Dingaan the King, and," he added as an afterthought, "from your daughter."

"From my daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Dove eagerly. "What of her? Is she well? We cannot get any certain news of her, only rumours."

"I saw her but once," replied Ishmael, "and she was well enough, then. You know the Zulus have made her their Inkosazana, and keep her guarded."

"Does she live quite alone then with these savages?"

"She did, but I am sorry I must tell you that she seems to have a companion now, some scoundrel of a white man with whom she has taken up," he sneered.

"My daughter take up with a scoundrel of a white man! It is false. What is this man's name?"

"I don't know, but the natives call him Dario, and say that he is young, and has fair hair, and that she is in love with him. That's all I can tell you about the man."

Mr. Dove shook his head, but his wife sat up suddenly in bed, and plucked him by the sleeve, for she had been listening intently to everything that passed.

"Dario! Young, fair hair, in love with him—" she repeated in a thick whisper, then added, "John, it is Richard Darrien grown up—the boy who saved her in the Umtooma River, years ago, and whom she has never forgotten. Oh! thank God! Thank God! With him she will be safe. I always knew that he would find her, for they belong to each other," and she sank back exhausted.

"That's what the Zulus say, that they belong to each other," replied Ishmael, with another sneer. "Perhaps they are married native fashion."

"Stop insulting my daughter, sir," said Mr. Dove angrily. "She would not take a husband as you take your wives, nor if this man is Richard Darrien, as I pray, would he be a party to such a thing. Tell me, are they coming here?"

"Not they, they are far too comfortable where they are. Also the Zulus would prevent them. But don't be sad about it, for I am sent to take you both to join her at the Great Place where you are to live."

"To join her! It is impossible," ejaculated Mr. Dove, glancing at his sick wife.

"Impossible or not, you've got to come at once, both of you. That is the King's order and the Inkosazana's wish, and what is more there is an impi outside to see that you obey. Now I give you five minutes to get ready, and then we start."

"Man, are you mad? How can my wife travel to Zululand in her state? She cannot walk a step."

"Then she can be carried," answered Ishmael callously. "Come, don't waste time in talking. Those are my orders, and I am not going to have my throat cut for either of you. If Mrs. Dove won't dress wrap her up in blankets."

"You go, John, you go," whispered his wife, "or they will kill you. Never mind about me; my time has come, and I die happy, for Richard Darrien is with Rachel."

The mention of Richard's name seemed to infuriate Ishmael. At any rate he said brutally:

"Are you coming, or must I use force?"

"Coming, you wicked villain! How can I come?" shouted Mr. Dove, for he was mad with grief and rage. "Be off with your savages. I will shoot the first man who lays a finger on my wife," and as he spoke he snatched a double-barrelled pistol which hung upon the wall and cocked it.

Ishmael turned to the Zulus who stood behind him watching this scene with curiosity.

"Seize the Shouter," he said, "and bind him. Lift the old woman on her mattress, and carry her. If she dies on the road we cannot help it."

The captains hesitated, not from fear, but because Mrs. Dove's condition moved even their savage hearts to pity.

"Why do you not obey?" roared Ishmael. "Dogs and cowards, it is the King's word. Take her up or you shall die, every man of you, you know how. Knock down the old Evildoer with your sticks if he gives trouble."

Now the men hesitated no longer. Springing forward, several of them seized the mattress and began to lift it bodily. Mrs. Dove rose and tried to struggle from the bed, then uttered a low moaning cry, fell back, and lay still.

"You devils, you have killed her!" gasped Mr. Dove, as lifting the pistol he fired at the Zulu nearest to him, shooting him through the body so that he sank upon the floor dying. Then, fearing lest he should shoot again, the captains fell upon the poor old man, striking him with kerries and the handles of their spears, for they sought to disable him and make him drop the pistol.

As it chanced, though this was not their intention, in the confusion a heavy blow from a knobstick struck him on the temple. The second barrel of the pistol went off, and the bullet from it but just missed Ishmael who was standing to one side. When the smoke cleared away it was seen that Mr. Dove had fallen backwards on to the bed. The martyrdom he always sought and expected had overtaken him. He was quite dead. They were both dead!

The head induna in command of the impi stepped forward and looked at them, then felt their hearts.

"Wow!" he said, "these white people have 'gone beyond.' They have gone to join the spirits, both of them. What now, Ibubesi?"

Ishmael, who stood in the corner, very white-faced, and staring with round eyes, for the tragedy had taken a turn that he did not intend or expect, shook himself and rubbed his forehead with his hand, answering:

"Carry them into the Great Place, I suppose. The King ordered that they should be brought there. Why did you kill that old Shouter, you fools?" he added with irritation. "You have brought his blood and the curse of the Inkosazana on our heads."

"Wow!" answered the induna again, "you bade us strike him with sticks, and our orders were to obey you. Who would have guessed that the old man's skull was so thin from thinking? You or I would never have felt a tap like that. But they are 'gone beyond,' and we will not defile ourselves by touching them. Dead bones are of no use to anyone, and their ghosts might haunt us. Come, brethren, let us go back to the King and make report. The order was Ibubesi's, and we are not to blame."

"Yes," they answered, "let us go back and make report. Are you coming, Ibubesi?"

"Not I," he answered. "Do I want to have my neck twisted because of your clumsiness? Go you and win your own peace if you can, but if you see the Inkosazana, my advice is that you avoid her lest she learn the truth, and bring your deaths upon you, for, know, she travels hither, and she called these folk father and mother."

"Without doubt we will avoid her," said the captain, "who fear her terrible curse. But, Ibubesi, it is on you that it will fall, not on us who did but obey you as we were bidden; yes, on you she will bring down death before this moon dies. Make your peace with the Heavens, if you can, Ibubesi, as we go to try to make ours with the King."

"Would you bewitch me, you ill-omened dog?" shouted Ishmael, wiping the sweat of fear off his brow. "May you soon be stiff!"

"Nay, nay, Ibubesi, it is you who shall be stiff. The Inkosazana will see to that, and were I not sure of it I would make you so myself, who am a noble who will not be called names by a white *umfagozan*, a low-born fellow who plots for blood, but leaves its shedding to brave men. Farewell, Ibubesi; if the jackals leave anything of you after the Inkosazana has spoken, we will return to bury your bones," and he turned to go.

"Stay," cried the dying man on the floor, "would you leave me here in pain, my brothers?"

The induna stepped to him and examined him.

"It is mortal," he said, shaking his head, "right through the liver. Why did not the white man's thunder smite Ibubesi instead of you, and save the Inkosazana some trouble? Well, your arms are still strong and here is a spear; you know where to strike. Be quick with your messages. Yes, yes, I will see that they are delivered. Good-night, my brother. Do you remember how we stood side by side in that big fight twenty years ago, when the Pondo giant got me down and you fell on the top of me and thrust upwards and killed him? It was a very good fight, was it not? We will talk it over again in the World of Spirits. Good-night, my brother. Yes, yes, I will deliver the message to your little girl, and tell her where the necklace is to be found, and that you wish her to name her firstborn son after you. Good-night. Use that assegai at once, for your wound must be painful, or perhaps as you are down upon the ground Ibubesi will do it for you. Good-night, my brother, and Ibubesi, good-night to you also. We cross the Tugela by another drift, wait you here for the Inkosazana, and tell her how the Shouter died."

Then they turned and went. The wounded man watched them pass the door, and when the last of them had gone he used the assegai upon himself, and with his failing hand flung it feebly at Ishmael.

The dying Zulu's spear struck Ishmael, who had turned his head away, upon the cheek, just pricking it and causing the blood to flow, no more. Ishmael was still also, paralysed almost, or so he seemed, for even the pain of the cut did not make him move. He stared at the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Dove; he stared at the dead Zulu, and in his heart a voice cried: "You have murdered them. By now they are pleading to God for vengeance on you, Ishmael, the outcast. You will never dare to be alone again, for they will haunt you."

As he thought it the relaxed hand of the old clergyman who had fallen in a sitting posture on the bed, slipped from his wounded head which he had clasped just before he died, and for a moment seemed to point at him. He shivered, but still he could not stir. How dreadful and solemn was that face! And those eyes, how they searched out the black record of his heart! The quiet rays of the afternoon sun suddenly flowed in through the window place and illumined the awful, accusing face till it shone like that of a saint in glory. A drop of blood from the cut upon his cheek splashed on to the floor, and the noise of it struck on his strained nerves loud as a pistol-shot. Blood, his own blood wherewith he must pay for that which he had shed. The sight and the thought seemed to break the spell. With an oath he bounded out of the room like a frightened wolf, those dead staring at him as he went, and rushed from the house that held them.

Beyond its walls Ishmael paused. The Zulus had fled in one direction, and the inhabitants of Ramah in another; there was no one to be seen. His eye fell upon the dense mass of bush above the station, and he remembered the message that he had sent to his own people to meet him there. Perhaps they had already arrived. He would go to see, he who was in such sore need of human company. As he went his numbed faculties returned to him, and in the open light of day some of his terror passed. He began to think again. What was done was done; he could not bring the dead back to life. He was not really to blame, and after all, things had worked out well for him. Save for this white man, Dario, Rachel was now alone in the world, and dead people did not speak, there was no one to tell her of his share in the tragedy. Why should she not turn to him who had no one else to whom she could go? The white man, if he were still with her, could be got rid of somehow; very likely he would run away, and they two would be left quite alone. At any rate it was for her sake that he had entered on this black road of sin, and what did one step more matter, the step that led him to his reward? Of course it might lead him somewhere else. Rachel was a woman to be feared, and the Zulus were to be feared, and other things to which he could give no shape or name, but that he felt pressing round him, were still more to be feared. Perhaps he would do best to fly, far into the interior, or by ship to some other land where none would know him and his black story. What! Fly companioned by those ghosts, and leave Rachel, the woman for whom he burned, with this Dario, whom the Zulus said she loved, and with whom her mother, just before her end, had declared that she would be safe? Never. She was his; he had bought her with blood, and he would have the due the devil owed him.

He was in the bush now, and a voice called him, that of his head man.

"Come out, you dog," he said, searching the dense foliage with his eyes, and the man appeared, saluting him humbly.

"We received your message and we have come, Inkoos. We are but just arrived. What has chanced here that the town is so still?"

"The Zulus have been and gone. They have killed the white Teacher and his wife, though I thought to save them—look at my wound. Also the people are fled."

"Ah!" replied the head man, "that was an ill deed, for he was holy, and a great prophet, and doubtless his spirit is strong to revenge. Well for you is it, Master, that you had no hand in the deed, as at first I feared might be the case, for know that last night a strange dog climbed on to your hut and howled there and would not be driven away, nor could we kill it with spears, so we think it was a ghost. All your wives thought that evil had drawn near to you."

Ishmael struck him across the mouth, exclaiming:

"Be silent, you accursed wizard, or you shall howl louder than your ghost-dog."

"I meant no harm," answered the man humbly, but with a curious gleam in his eye. "What are your commands, Chief?"

"That we watch here. I think that the daughter of the Shouter, she who is called Inkosazana-y-Zoola, is coming, and she may need help. Have you brought thirty men with you as I bade you through my messengers?"

"Aye, Ibubesi, they are all hidden in the bush. I go to summon them, though I think that the mighty Inkosazana, who can command all the Zulu impis and all the spirits of the dead, will need little help from us."

## CHAPTER XV.

### RACHEL COMES HOME

As Rachel had travelled up from the Tugela to the Great Place, so she travelled back from the Great Place to the Tugela in state and dignity such as became a thing divine, perhaps the first white woman, moreover, who had ever entered Zululand. All day she rode alone, Tamboosa leading the white ox before her and Richard following behind, while in front and to the rear marched the serried ranks of the impi, her escort. At night, as before, she slept alone in the empty kraals provided for her, attended by the best-born maidens, Richard being lodged in some hut without the fence.

So at length, about noon one day, they reached the banks of the Tugela, not many hours after Ishmael had crossed it, and camped there. Now, after she had eaten, Rachel sent for Richard, with whom she had found but few opportunities to talk during that journey. He came and stood before her, as all must do, and she addressed him in English while the spies and captains watched him sullenly, for they were angry at this use of a foreign tongue which they could not understand. Preserving a cold and distant air, she asked him of his health, and how he had fared.

"Well enough," he answered. "And now, what are your plans? The river is in flood, you will find it difficult to cross. Still it can be done, for I hear that the white man, Ishmael, of whom you told me, forded it this morning with a company of armed men."

Aware of the eyes that watched her, with an effort Rachel showed no surprise.

"How is that?" she asked. "I thought the man fled from Zululand many days ago. Why then does he leave the country with soldiers?"

"I can't tell you, Rachel. There is something queer about the business. When I inquire, everyone shrugs his shoulders. They say that the King knows his own business. If I were you I would ask no questions, for you will learn nothing, and if you do not ask they will think that you know all."

"I understand," she said. "But, Richard, I must cross the river to-day. You and I must cross it alone and reach Ramah to-night. Richard, something weighs upon my heart; I am terribly afraid."

"How will you manage it?" he asked, ignoring the rest.

"I can't tell you yet, Richard, but keep my horse and yours saddled there where you are encamped," and she nodded towards a hut about fifty yards away. "I think that I shall come to you presently. Now go."

So he saluted her and went.

Presently Rachel sent for Tamboosa and the captains, and asked the state of the river which was out of sight about half a mile from them. They replied that it was "very angry"; none could think of attempting its passage, as much water was coming down.

"Is it so?" she said indifferently. "Well, I must look," and with slow steps she walked towards the hut where she knew the horses were, followed by Tamboosa and the captains.

Reaching it, she saw them standing saddled on its further side, and by them Richard, seated on the ground smoking. As she came he rose and saluted her, but, taking no heed of him, she went to her grey mare, and, placing her foot in the stirrup, sprang to the saddle, motioning to him to do likewise.

"Whither goest thou, Inkosazana?" asked Tamboosa anxiously.

"To throw a charm on the waters," she answered, "so that they may run down and I can cross them to-morrow. Come, Dario, and come Tamboosa, but let the rest stay behind, since common eyes must not look upon my magic, and he who dares to look shall be struck with blindness."

The captains hesitated, and turning on them fiercely she commanded them to obey her word lest some evil should befall them.

Then they fell back and she rode towards the Tugela, followed by Richard on horseback and Tamboosa on foot. Arrived at that spot on the bank where she had received the salutation of the regiment when she entered Zululand, Rachel saw at once that although the great river was full it could easily be forded on horseback. Calling Richard to her, she said:

"We must go, and now, while there is no one to stop us but Tamboosa. Do not hurt him unless he tries to spear you, for he has been kind to me."

Then she addressed Tamboosa, saying:

"I have spoken to the waters and they will not harm me. The hour has come when I must leave my people for a while, and go forward alone with my white servant, Dario. These are my commands, that none should dare to follow me save only yourself, Tamboosa, who can bring on the white ox with its load so soon as the water has run down and deliver them to me at Ramah. Do you hear me?"

"I hear, Inkosazana," answered the old induna, "and thy words split my heart."

"Yet you will obey them, Tamboosa."

"Yes, I will obey them who know what would befall me otherwise, and that it is the King's will that none should dare to thwart thee, even if they could. Yet I think that very soon thou wilt return to thy children. Therefore, why not abide with us until to-morrow, when the waters will be low?"

"Tamboosa," said Rachel, leaning forward and looking him in the eyes, "why did Ibubesi cross this river with soldiers but a few hours ago—Ibubesi, who fled from the Great Place when the moon was young that now is full? Look, there goes their spoor in the

mud."

"I know not," he answered, looking down. "Inkosazana, to-morrow I will bring on the white ox to Ramah, and I will bring it alone."

"So be it, Tamboosa, but if by chance you should not find me, ask where Ibubesi is, and if need be, seek for me with an impi, Tamboosa—for me and for this white man, Dario," and again she bent forward and looked at him.

"I know not what thou meanest, Inkosazana," he replied. "But of this be sure, that if I cannot find thee, then I will seek for thee, if need be with every spear in Zululand at my back."

"Farewell, then, Tamboosa, and to the regiment farewell also. Say to the captains that it is my will that they should return to the Great Place, bearing my greetings to the King and those of the white lord, Dario. Look for me to-morrow at Ramah."

Then, followed by Richard, she rode her horse past him into the lip of the water. As she went Tamboosa drew himself up and gave her the Bayète, the royal salute.

Although it was red with earth and flecked with foam and the roar of it was loud as it sped towards the sea, the river did not prove very difficult to ford. But once, indeed, were the horses swept off their feet and forced to swim, and then but for a few paces, after which they regained them, and plunged to the farther bank without accident.

"Free at last, Rachel, with our lives before us and nothing more to fear," called Richard in his cheery voice, as he forced his horse alongside of hers. Then suddenly he caught sight of her face and saw that it was white and drawn as though with pain; also that she leaned forward on her saddle, clasping its pommel as though she were about to faint.

"What is it?" he exclaimed in alarm. "Did the flood frighten you, Rachel—are you ill?"

For a few moments she made no answer, then straightened herself with a sigh and said in a low voice:

"Richard, I have been so long among those Zulus playing the part of a spirit that I begin to think I am one, or that their magic has got hold of me. I tell you that in the roar of the water I heard voices—the voices of my father and mother calling me and speaking of you—and, Richard, they seemed to be in great fear and pain, for a minute or more I heard them, then a dreadful cold wind blew on me—not this wind, it seemed to come from above—and everything passed away, leaving my mind numb and empty so that I do not remember how we came out of the river. Don't laugh at me, Richard; it is so. The Kaffirs are right; I have some power of the sort. Remember how I saw you travelling towards me in the pool."

"Why should I laugh at you, dearest?" he asked anxiously, for something of this uncanny fear passed from her mind into his, with which it was in tune. "Indeed, I don't laugh who know that you are not quite like other women. But, Rachel, the strain of those two months has worn you out, and now the reaction is too much. Perhaps it is nothing."

"Perhaps," she answered sadly, "I hope so. Richard, what is the time?"

"About a quarter to six, to judge by the sun," he answered,

"Then we shall not be able to reach Ramah before dark."

"No, Rachel, but there is a good moon."

"Yes, there is a good moon; I wonder what it will show us," and she shivered.

Then they pressed their horses to a canter and rode on, speaking little, for the fount of words seemed to be frozen in them, although Richard recollected, with a curious sense of wonder how he had looked forward to this opportunity of long, unfettered talk with Rachel and how much he had to tell her. Over hill and valley, through bush and stream they rode, till at last with the short twilight they reached the plain that ran to Ramah. Then came the dark in which they must ride slowly, till presently the round edge of the moon pushed itself up above the shoulder of a hill and there was light again—pure, peaceful light that turned the veld to silver and shone whitely on the pale face of Rachel.

Ramah was before them. They had met no living thing save some wild game trekking to the water, and heard no sound save the distant roar of some beast of prey. Ramah was before them. The moon shone on the roofs of the Mission-house and the little church and the clusters of Kaffir huts beyond. But, oh! it was silent: no cattle lowed, no child cried, nor did the bell of the church ring for evening prayer as at this hour it should have done. Also no lamp showed in the windows of the Mission-house and no smoke rose from the cooking fires of the kraals.

"Where are all the people, Richard?" whispered Rachel. "There is the place unharmed, but where are the people?"

But Richard could only shake his head: the terror of something dreadful had got hold of him also, and he knew not what to say.

Now they had come to the wall of the Mission-house and sprang from their horses which they left loose. As they advanced side by side towards the open gate, something leapt the stoep and rushed through it. It was a striped hyena; they could see the hair bristle on its back as it passed them with a whining growl. Hand in hand they ran to the house across the little garden patch—Rachel, led by some instinct, guiding her companion straight to her parents' room whereof the windows, that opened like doors, stood wide as the gate had done.

One more moment and they were there; another, and the moonlight showed them all.

For a long while—to Richard it seemed hours—Rachel said nothing; only stood still like the statue of a woman, staring at those cold faces that looked back at her through the unearthly moonlight. Indeed, it was Richard who spoke first, feeling that if he did not this dreadful silence would choke him or cause him to faint.

"The Zulus have murdered them," he said hoarsely, glancing at the dead Kaffir on the floor.

"No," she answered in a cold, small voice; "Ishmael, Ishmael!" and she pointed to something that lay at his feet.

Richard stooped and picked it up. It was a fly wisp of rhinoceros horn which the man had let fall when the Zulu's spear struck him.

"I know it," she went on; "he always carried it. He is the real murderer. The Zulus would not have dared," and she choked and was silent.

"Let me think," said Richard confusedly. "There is something in my mind. What is it? Oh! I know. If you are right that devil has not done this for nothing. He is somewhere near; he wants to take you"; and he ground his teeth at the thought, then added: "Rachel, we must get out of this and ride for Durban, at once—at once; the white people will protect you there."

"Who will bury my father and mother?" she asked in the same cold voice.

"I do not know, it does not matter, the living are more than the dead. I can return and see to it afterwards."

"You are right," she answered. Then she knelt down by the bed and lifting her beautiful, agonised face, put up some silent prayer. Next she rose and kissed first her father, then her mother, kissed their dead brows in a last farewell and turned to go. As she went her eyes fell upon the assegai that lay near to the dead Zulu. Stooping down, she took it and with it in her hand passed on to the stoep. Here her strength seemed to fail her, for she reeled against the wall, then with an effort flung herself into Richard's arms, moaning:

"Only you left, Richard, only you. Oh! if you were taken from me also, what would become of me?"

A moment later she became aware that the stoep was swarming with men who seemed to arise out of the shadows. A voice said in the Kaffir tongue:

"Seize that fellow and bind him."

Instantly, before he could do anything, before he could even turn, Richard was torn from her, struggling furiously, and thrown to the ground. Rachel sprang to the wall and stood with her back to it, raising the spear she held. It flashed into her mind that these were Zulus, and of Zulus she was not afraid.

"What dogs are these," she cried, "that dare to lift a hand against the Inkosazana and her servant?"

The black men about her swayed and murmured, then made way for a man who walked up the steps of the stoep. The moonlight fell upon him and she saw that it was Ishmael.

"Rachel," he said, taking off his hat politely, "these are my people. We saw that white scoundrel assault you, and of course seized him at once. As you know a dreadful thing has happened here. This afternoon the Zulus killed your father and mother, or rather they killed your father, and your mother, who was ill, died with the shock, because they refused to go to Zululand whither Dingaan had ordered that they should be taken. So seeing that you were travelling here I came to rescue you, lest you should fall into their hands, and," he added lamely, "you know the rest."

Ishmael had spoken in English, but Rachel answered him in Zulu.

"I know all, Night-prowler," she cried aloud. "I know that my father and mother were killed by your order, and in your presence; their spirits told me so but now, and for that crime I sentence you to death!" and she pointed at him with the spear. "Heaven above and earth beneath," she went on, "bear witness that I sentence this man to death. People of the Zulus, hear me in your kraals far away. Hear me, Dingaan, sitting in your Great Place. Hear me, every captain and induna, hear the voice of your Inkosazana: I sentence this man to death, since because of him there is blood between me and my people, the blood of my father and my mother. Now, Night-prowler, do your worst before you die, but know this, you his servants, that if I am harmed, or if this white man, the chief Dario, is harmed, then you shall die also, every one of you. What is your will, Night-prowler?"

"I will tell you that at Mafooti," answered Ishmael, trying to look bold. "I am not afraid of you like those Zulu savages, and Dingaan is a long way off. Will you come quietly? I hope so, for I don't want to hurt you or put you to shame, but you've got to come, and this Dario, too. If you make any trouble, I will have him killed at once. Understand, Rachel, that if you don't come, he shall be killed at once. My people may be afraid of you, but they won't mind cutting his throat," he added significantly.

"Never mind about me," said Richard in a choked voice from the ground where he was pinned down by the Kaffirs. "Do what you think best for yourself, Rachel."

Now Rachel, whose wits were made keen by doubt and anguish, looked at the faces of the natives about her, and even in that dim moonlight read them like a book, as she could always do. She saw that they were afraid of her, and that if she commanded them, they would let her go free, whatever their master might say or do. But she saw also that Ishmael spoke truth when he declared that they had no such dread of Richard, and might even believe that he was doing her some violence. If she escaped therefore it would be at the cost of Richard's life. Instantly in her bold fashion she made up her mind. It was borne in upon her that she had declared the truth; that Ishmael was doomed, that he had no power to work her any hurt, however sore her case might seem. Since Richard's life hung on it she would go with him.

"Servants of Ibubesi," she said, "lift the white chief Dario to his feet, and listen to my words."

They obeyed her at once, without even waiting for their master to speak, only holding Richard by the arms.

Now the most of the men went into the garden followed by Ishmael, and taking Richard with them, but a few remained to watch her. From this garden presently arose a sound of great quarrelling. Rachel was too far off to understand what was said, but from the sounds she judged that Ishmael was giving orders to his people which they refused to obey, for she could hear him cursing them furiously. Presently she heard something else—the loud report of a gun followed by groans. Then a Kaffir ran up to them and whispered something to those who surrounded her; it was that head man whom Ishmael had struck on the mouth in the bush when he told him that a dog had howled upon his hut, and his face was very frightened.

Rachel leaned against the wall and looked at him, for she could not speak, she who thought that Richard had been murdered.

"Have no fear, Inkosazana," said the man, answering the question in her eyes. "Ibubesi has killed one of us because we do not like this business and would clean it off our hands, that is all. The chief Dario is safe, and I swear to thee that no harm shall come to him from us. We will care for him and protect him to the death, and if we lead him away a prisoner it is because we must, since otherwise Ibubesi will kill us all. Therefore be merciful to us when the spear of thy power is lifted."

Before Rachel could answer Ishmael's voice was heard asking why they did not bring the Inkosazana as the horses were ready.

"I pray thee come, Zoola," said the man hurriedly, "or he will shoot more of us."

So Rachel walked down the steps of the stoep in front of them, holding her head high, leaving behind her the house of Ramah and its dead. At the gate of the garden stood the horses, on one of which, his own, Richard was already mounted, his arms bound, his feet made fast beneath it with a hide rope. Her path lay past him, and as she went by he said in a voice that was choking with rage:

"I am helpless, I cannot save you, but our hour will come."

"Yes, Richard," she answered quietly, "our hour will come when his has gone," and with the spear in her hand once more she pointed at Ishmael, who stood by watching them sullenly. Then she mounted her horse—how she could never remember—and they were separated.

After this she seemed to hear Ishmael talking to her, arguing, explaining, but she made no answer to his words. Her mind was a blank, and all she knew was that they were riding on for hours. Her tired horse stumbled up a pass and down its further side. Then she heard dogs bark and saw lights. The horse stopped and she slid from it, and as she was too exhausted to walk, was supported or

carried into a hut, as she thought by women who seemed very much afraid of touching her, after which she seemed to sink into blackness.

Rachel woke from her stupor to find herself lying on a bed in a great Kaffir hut that was furnished like a European room, for in it were chairs and a table, also rough window places closed with reed mats that took the place of glass. Through the smoke-hole at the top of the hut struck a straight ray of sunlight, by which she judged that it must be about midday. She began to think, till by degrees everything came back to her, and in that hour she nearly died of horror and of grief. Indeed she was minded to die. There at her side lay a means of death—the assegai which she had found by the body of the Zulu in Ramah, and none had taken from her. She lifted it and felt its edge, then laid it down again. Into the darkness of her despair some comfort seemed to creep. She was sure that Richard lived, and if she died, he would die also. While he lived, why should she die? Moreover, it would be a crime which she should only dare when all hope had gone and she stood face to face with shame.

Thrusting aside these thoughts she rose. On the table stood curdled milk and other food of which she forced herself to eat, that her strength might return to her, for she knew that she would need it all. Then she washed and dressed herself, for in a corner of the hut was water in wooden bowls, and even a comb and other things, that apparently had been set there for her to use. This done, she went to the door, which was made like that of a house, and finding that it was not secured, opened it and looked out. Beyond was a piece of ground floored with the soil taken from ant-heaps, and polished black after the native fashion. This space was surrounded by a high stone wall, and had at the end of it another very strong door. In its centre grew a large, shady tree under which was placed a bench. Taking the assegai with her she went to the door in the high wall and found that it was barred on the further side. Then she returned and sat down on the bench under the tree.

It seemed that she had been observed, for a little while afterwards bolts were shot back, the door in the wall opened, and Ishmael entered, closing it behind him. She looked at the man, and at the sight of his handsome, furtive face, his dark, guilt-laden eyes, her gorge rose. She was alone in this secret place with the murderer of her father and her mother, who sought her love. Yet, strangely enough, her heart was filled not with tears, but with contempt and icy anger. She did not shrink away from him as he came towards her in his gaudy clothes, with an assumed air of insolent confidence, but sat pale and proud, as she had sat at Umgundhlovu, when the Zulus brought their causes before her for judgment.

He advanced into the shadow of the tree, took off his hat with a flourish and bowed. Then as she made no answer to these salutations, but only searched him with her grey eyes, he began to speak in jerky sentences.

"I hope you have slept well, Rachel; I am, glad to see you looking so fresh. I was afraid that you would be over-tired after your long day. You rode many miles. Of course what you found at Ramah must have been a great shock to you. I want to explain to you quietly that I am not in the least to blame about that terrible business. It was those accursed Zulus who exceeded their orders."

So he went on, pausing between each remark for an answer, but no answer came. At length he stopped, confused, and Rachel, lifting the assegai, examined its blade, and asked him suddenly:

"Whose blood is on this spear? Yours?"

"A little of it, perhaps," he answered. "That fool of a Kaffir flourished it about after your father shot him and cut me with it accidentally," and he pointed to the wound on his face.

Rachel bent down and began to rub the blade against the foot of the bench as though to clean it. He did not know what she meant by this act, yet it frightened him.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

She paused in her task and said, looking up at him:

"I do not wish that your blood should defile mine even in death," and went on with her cleansing of the spear.

He watched her for a little while, then broke out:

"Curse it all! I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Ask the Zulus," she answered. "They understand me, and they will tell you. Or if there is no time, ask my father and mother—afterwards."

Ishmael paled visibly, then recovered himself with an effort and said:

"Let us finish with all this witch-doctor nonsense, and come to business. I had nothing to do with the death of your parents, indeed, I was wounded in trying to protect them——"

"Then why do I see both of them behind you with such accusing eyes?" she asked quietly.

He stalled, turned his head and stared about him.

"You won't frighten me like that," he went on. "I am not a silly Kaffir, so give it up. Look here, Rachel, you know I have loved you for a long while, and though you treat me so badly I love you more than ever now. Will you marry me?"

"I told you last night that you would be dead in a few days. Do not waste your time in talking of marriage. Sit in the dust and repent your sins before you go down into the dust."

"All right, Rachel, I know you are a good prophet——"

"Noie, too, is a good prophet," she broke in reflectively. "You used the Zulus to kill *her* father and mother also, did you not? Do you remember a message that she gave you from Seyapi one evening, down by the sea, before you kidnapped her to be a bait to trap me in Zululand?"

"Remember!" he answered, scowling. "Am I likely to forget her devilries? If you are the witch, she is the familiar, the black *ehlosé* (spirit) who whispers in your ears. Had she not gone I should never have caught you."

"But she will come back—although I fear not in time to bid you farewell."

"You tell me that I shall soon be dead," he exclaimed, ignoring this talk of Noie. "Well, I am not frightened. I don't believe you know anything about it, but if you are right the more reason I should live while I can. According to you, Rachel, we have no time to waste in a long engagement. When is it to be?"

"Never!" she answered contemptuously, "in this or any other world. Never! Why, you are hateful to me; when I see you, I shiver as though a snake crawled across my foot, and when I look at your hands they are red with blood, the blood of my parents and of Noie's parents, and of many others. That is my answer."

He looked at her a while, then said:

"You seem to forget that I am only asking for what I can take. No one can see you or hear you here, except my women. You are in my power at last, Rachel Dove."

These words which Ishmael intended should frighten her, as they might well have done, produced, as it chanced, a quite different effect. Rachel broke into a scornful laugh.

"Look," she said, pointing to an eagle that circled so high in the blue heavens above them that it seemed no larger than a hawk, "that bird is more in your power, and nearer to you than I am. Before you laid a finger on me I would find a dozen means of death, but that, I tell you again, you will never live to do."

For a while Ishmael was silent, weighing her words in his mind. Apparently he could find no answer to them, for when he spoke again it was of another matter.

"You say that you hate me, Rachel. If so, it is because of that accursed fellow, Darrien—whom you don't hate. Well, he, at any rate, is in my power. Now look here. You've got to make your choice. Either you stop all this nonsense and become my wife, or—your friend Darrien dies. Do you hear me?"

Rachel made no answer. Now for the first time she was really frightened, and feared lest her speech should show it.

"You have been through a lot," he went on, slowly; "you are tired out, and don't know what you say, and you believe that I killed the old people, which I didn't, and, of course, that has set you against me. Now, I don't want to be rough, or to hurry you, especially as I have plenty of things to see about before we are married. So I give you three days. If you don't change your mind at the end of them, the young man dies, that's all, and afterwards we will see whether or no you are in my power. Oh! you needn't stare. I've gone too far to turn back, and I don't mind a few extra risks. Meanwhile make yourself easy, dear Richard shall be well looked after, and I won't bother you with any more love-making. That can wait."

Rachel rose from her seat and pointed with the spear to the door in the wall.

"Go," she said.

"All right, I am going, Rachel. Good-bye till this time three days. I hope my women will make you as comfortable as possible in this rough place. Ask them for anything you want. Good-bye, Rachel," and he went, bolting the wall door behind him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE THREE DAYS

He was gone, his presence had ceased to poison the air, and, the long strain over, Rachel gave a gasp of relief. Then she sat down upon the bench and began to think. Her position, and that of Richard, was desperate; it seemed scarcely possible that they could escape with their lives, for if he died, she would die also—as to that she was quite determined. But at least they had three days, and who could say what would happen in three days? For instance, they might escape somehow, the Providence in which she believed might intervene, or the Zulus might come to seek her, if they only knew where she was gone. Oh! why had she not brought a guard of them with her to Ramah? At least they would never have insulted her, and Ishmael's shrift would have been short.

She wondered why he had given her three days. A reason suggested itself to her mind. Perhaps he believed what she had told him—that she was as safe from him as the eagle in the air—and was sure that the only way to snare her was by using Richard as a lure, in other words, by threatening to murder him. It is true that he could have brought the matter to a head at once, but then, if she remained obdurate, he must carry out his threat, and this, she believed, he was afraid to do unless it was absolutely forced upon him. Doubtless he had reflected that in three days she might weaken and give way.

Whilst Rachel brooded thus the door in the wall opened, and through it came three women, who saluted her respectfully, and announced that they were sent to clean the hut, and attend upon her. Rachel took stock of them carefully. Two of them were young, ordinary, good-looking Kaffirs, but the third was between thirty and forty, and no longer attractive, having become old early, as natives do. Moreover, her face was sad and sympathetic. Rachel asked her her name. She answered that it was Mami, and that they were all the wives of Ibubesi.

The women went about their duties in the hut in silence, and a while afterwards announced that all was made clean, and that they would return presently with food. Rachel answered that it was not necessary that three of them should be put to so much trouble. It would be enough if Mami came. She desired to be waited on by Mami alone, her sisters need not come any more.

They all three saluted again, and said that she should be obeyed; the two younger ones with alacrity. To Rachel it was evident that these women were much afraid of her. Her reputation had reached them, and they shrank from this task of attending on the mighty Inkosazana of the Zulus in her cage, not knowing what evil it might bring upon them.

An hour later the door was unbolted, and Mami reappeared with the food that had been very carefully cooked. Rachel ate of it, for she was determined to grow strong again, she who might need all her strength, and while she ate talked to Mami, who squatted on the ground before her. Soon she drew her story from her. The woman was Ishmael's first Kaffir wife, but he had never cared for her, and against all law and custom she was discarded, and made a slave. Even some of her cattle had been taken from her and given to other wives. So her heart was bitter against Ishmael, and she said that although once she was proud to be the wife of a white man, now she wished that she had never seen his face.

Here, then, was material ready to Rachel's hand, but she did not press the matter too far at this time. Only she said that she wished Mami to stay with her after the evening meal, and to sleep in her hut, as she was not accustomed to be alone at night. Mami replied that she would do so gladly if Ibubesi allowed it, although she was not worthy of such honour.

As it happened, Ishmael did allow it, for he thought that he could trust this old drudge, and told her to act as a spy upon Rachel, and report to him all that she said or did. Very soon Rachel found this out and warned her against obeying him, since if she did so it would come to her knowledge, and then great evil would fall on one who betrayed the words of the Inkosazana.

Mami answered that she knew it, and that Rachel need not be afraid. Any tale would do for Ishmael, whom she hated. Then, saying little herself, Rachel encouraged her to talk, which Mami did freely. So she heard some news. She learned, for instance, that the whole town of Mafooti, whereof Ibubesi was chief, which counted some sixty or seventy heads of families, was much disturbed by the events of the last few days. They did not like the Inkosazana being brought there, thinking that where she went the Zulus would follow, and as they were of Zulu blood themselves, they knew what that meant. They were alarmed at the deaths of the white sky-doctor, who was called Shouter, and his wife, with which Ibubesi had something to do, for they feared lest they should be held responsible for their blood. They objected to the imprisonment of the white chief, Dario, among them, because "he had hurt no one, and was under the mantle of the Inkosazana, who was a spirit, not a woman," and who had warned them that if any harm came to her or to him, death would be their reward. They were angry, also, because Ibubesi had killed one of them in some quarrel about the chief Dario at Ramah. Still, they were so much afraid of Ibubesi, who was a great tyrant, that they did not dare to interfere with him and his plans, lest they should lose their cattle, or, perhaps, their lives. So they did not know what to do. As for Ibubesi himself, he was actively engaged in strengthening the fortifications of the place; even the old people and the children were being forced to carry stones to the walls, from which it was evident that he feared some attack.

When Rachel had gathered this and much other information concerning Ishmael's past and habits, she asked Mami if she could convey a message from her to Richard. The woman answered that she would try on the following morning. So Rachel told her to say that she was safe and well, but that he must watch his footsteps, as both of them were in great danger. More she did not dare to say, fearing lest Mami should betray her, or be beaten till she confessed everything. Then, as there was nothing more to be done, Rachel lay down and slept as best she could.

The next day passed in much the same fashion as the first had done. For the most of it Rachel sat under the tree in the walled yard, companioned only by her terrible thoughts and fears. Nobody came near her, and nothing happened. In the morning Mami went out, and returning at the dinner hour, told Rachel that she had seen Ishmael, who had questioned her closely as to what the Inkosazana had done and said, to which she replied that she had only eaten and slept, and invoked the spirits on her knees. As for words, none had

passed her lips. She had not been able to get near the huts where Dario was in prison, as Ishmael was watching her. For the rest, the work of fortification went on without cease, even Ishmael's own wives being employed thereon.

In the afternoon Mami went out again and did not return till night, when she had much to tell. To begin with, while the sentry was dozing, being wearied with carrying stones to the wall, she had managed to approach the fence of the hut where Richard was confined. She said that he was walking up and down inside the fence with his hands tied, and she had spoken to him through a crack in the reeds, and given him Rachel's message. He listened eagerly, and bade her tell the Inkosazana that he thanked her for her words; that he, too, was strong and well, though much troubled in mind, but the future was in the hands of the Heavens, and that she must keep a high heart. Just then the sentry woke up, so Mami could not wait to hear any more.

That evening, however, a lad who had been sent out of the town to drive in some cattle, had returned with the tidings which she, Mami, heard him deliver to Ibubesi with her own ears.

He said that whilst he was collecting the oxen, a ringed Zulu came upon him, who from his manner and bearing he took to be a great chief, although he was alone, and seemed to be tired with walking. The Zulu has asked him if it were true that the Inkosazana and the white chief Dario were in prison at Mafooti, and when he hesitated about replying, threatened him with his assegai, saying that he would cut out his heart unless he told the truth. The Zulu replied that he knew it, as he had just come from Ramah, where he had seen strange things, and spoken with a man of Ibubesi's, whom he found dying in the garden of the house. Then he had given him this message:

"Say to Ibubesi that I know all his wickedness, and that if the Inkosazana is harmed, or a drop of the blood of the white chief, Dario, is shed, I will destroy him and everything that lives in his town down to the rats. Say to him also that he cannot escape, as already he is ringed in by the children of the Shouter, who have come back, and are watching him."

The lad had asked who it was that sent such a message, whereon he answered, "I am the Horn of the Black Bull; I am the Trunk of the Elephant; I am the Mouth of Dingaan."

Then straightway he turned and departed at a run towards Zululand. Moreover, Mami described the man in the words of the lad, and Rachel thought that he could be none other than Tamboosa, whom she had commanded to follow her with the white ox. Mami added that when he received this message Ibubesi seemed much disturbed, though to his people he declared that it was all nonsense, as Dingaan's Mouth would not come alone, or deliver the King's word to a boy. But the people thought otherwise, and murmured among themselves, fearing the terrible vengeance of Dingaan.

On the next day Mami went out again. At nightfall, when she returned, she told Rachel that she had not found it possible to approach the huts where Dario was, as the hole she made in the fence to speak with him had been discovered, and a stricter watch was kept over him. Ibubesi, she said, was in an ill humour, and working furiously to finish his fortifications, as he was now sure that the town was being watched, either by the Kaffirs of Ramah, or others. As for the people of Mafooti, they were grumbling very much, both on account of the heavy labour of working at the walls, and because they were in terror of being attacked and killed in payment for the evil deeds of their chief. Mami declared, indeed, that so great was their fear and discontent, that she thought they would desert the town in a body, were it not that they dreaded lest they should fall into the hands of the Kaffirs who were watching it. Rachel asked her whether they would not then take her and Dario and deliver them up to the Zulus, or to the white people on the coast. Mami answered she thought they would be afraid to do this, as Ibubesi alone had guns, and would shoot plenty of them; also if the Zulus found them with their Inkosazana they would kill them. She added that she had seen Ibubesi, who bade her tell the Inkosazana that he was coming for her answer on the morrow.

Rachel slept ill that night. The space of her reprieve had gone by, and next morning she must face the issue. For herself she did not so greatly care, for at the worst she had a refuge whither Ishmael could not follow her—the grave. After all she had endured it seemed to her that this must be a peaceful place; moreover, in her case what Power could blame her? But there was Richard to be thought of. If she refused Ishmael he swore that he would kill Richard. And yet how could she pay that price even to save her lover's life? Perhaps he would not kill him after all; perhaps he would be afraid of the vengeance of the Zulus, and was only trying to frighten her. Ah! if only the Zulus would come—before it was too late! It was scarcely to be hoped for. Tamboosa, if it were he who had spoken with the lad, would not have had time to return to Zululand and collect an impi, and when they did come, the deed might be done. If only these servants of Ibubesi would rise against him and kill him, or carry off Richard and herself! Alas! they feared the man too much, and she could not get at them to persuade them. There was nothing that she could do except pray. Richard and she must take their chance. Things must go as they were decreed.

If she could have seen Ishmael at this hour and read his thoughts, that sight and knowledge might have brought some comfort to her tortured heart. The man was seated in his hut alone, staring at the floor and pulling his long black beard with hands rough from toiling at the walls. He was drinking also, stiff tots of rum and water, but the fiery liquor seemed to bring him no comfort. As he drank, he thought. He was determined to get possession of Rachel; that desire had become a madness with him. He could never abandon it while he lived. But *she* might not live. She had sworn that she would rather die than become his wife, and she was not a woman who broke her word. Also she hated him bitterly, and with good cause. There was only one way to work on her—through her love for this man, Richard Darrien; for that she did love him, he had little doubt. If it were choice between yielding and the death of Darrien, then perhaps she might give way. But there came the rub.

Dingaan had sworn to him that if he made Darrien's blood to flow, then he should be killed, and, like Rachel, Dingaan kept his oaths. Moreover, that Zulu who met the cattle herd had sworn it again in almost the same words. Therefore it would seem that if he wished to continue to breathe, Darrien's blood must not be made to flow. All the rest might be explained when the impi came, as it would do sooner or later, especially if he could show to them that the Inkosazana was his willing wife, but the murder of Darrien could never be explained. Well, the man might die, or seem to die, and then who could hold him responsible? Or if they did, if any of his people remained faithful to him, an attack might be beaten off. Brave as they were, the Zulus could not storm those walls on which he had spent so much labour, though now he almost wished that he had left the walls alone and settled the affair of Rachel and of Darrien first.

Ishmael poured out more rum and drank it, neat this time, as though to nerve himself for some undertaking. Then he went to the door of the hut and called, whereon presently a hideous old woman crept in and squatted down in the circle of light thrown by the lamp. She was wrinkled and deformed, and her snake-skin moocha, with the inflated fish-bladder in her hair, showed that she was a witch-doctress.

"Well, Mother," he said, "have you made the poison?"

"Yes, Ibubesi, yes. I have made it as I alone can do. Oh! it is a wonderful drug, worth many cows. How many did you say you would give me? Six?"

"No, three; but if it does what is wanted you shall have the other three as well. Tell me again, how does it work?"

"Thus, Ibubesi. Whoever drinks this medicine becomes like one dead—none can tell the difference, no, not a doctor even—and remains so for a long while—perhaps one day, perhaps two, perhaps even three. Then life returns, and by degrees strength, but not memory; for whole moons the memory is gone, and he who has drunk remains like a child that has everything to learn."

"You lie, Mother. I never heard of such a medicine."

"You never heard of it because none can make it save me, and I had its secret from my grandmother; also few can afford to pay me for it. Still, it has been used, and were I not afraid I could give you cases. Stay, I will show you. Call that beast," and she pointed to a dog that was asleep at the side of the hut. "Here is milk; I will show you."

Ishmael hesitated, for he was fond of this dog; then as he wished to test the stuff he called it. It came and sat down beside him, looking up in his face with faithful eyes. Then the old witch poured milk into a bowl, and in the milk mixed some white powder which she took out of a folded leaf, and offered it to the animal. The dog sniffed the milk, growled slightly, and refused it.

"The evil beast does not like me; he bit me the other day," said the old doctress. "Do you give it to him, Ibubesi; he will trust you."

So Ishmael patted the dog on the head, then offered it the milk, which it lapped up to the last drop.

"There, evil beast," said the woman, with a chuckle, "you won't bite me any more; you'll forget all about me for a long time. Look at him, Ibubesi, look at him."

As she spoke, the poor dog's coat began to stare; then it uttered a low howl, ran to Ishmael, tried to lick his hand, and rolled over, to all appearance quite dead.

"You have killed my dog, which I love, you hag!" he said angrily.

"Then why did you give medicine to what you love, Ibubesi? But have no fear, the evil beast has only taken a small dose; to-morrow morning it will awake, but it will not know you or anyone. Who is the medicine for, Ibubesi? The Lady Zoola? If so, it may not work on her, for she is mighty, and cannot be harmed."

"Fool! Do you think that I would play tricks with the Inkosazana?"

"No, you want to marry her, don't you? but it seems to me that she has no mind that way. Then it is for the man for whom she has a mind? Well, Ibubesi, you have promised the six cows, and you saved me once from being killed for witchcraft, so I will say something. Don't give it to the chief Dario."

"Why not, you old fool; will it kill him after all?"

"No, no; it will do what I said, no less and no more, in this quantity," and she handed him another powder wrapped in dry leaves; "but I have had bad dreams about you, Ibubesi, and they were mixed up with the Inkosazana and this white man Dario. I dreamed they brought your death upon you—a dreadful death. Ibubesi, be wise, set Dario free, and change your mind as to marrying the Inkosazana, who is not for you."

"How can I change my mind, Descendant of Wizards?" broke out Ishmael. "Can a river penned between rocks change its course? Can it run backwards from the sea to the hill? This woman draws me as the sea draws the river; because of her my blood is afire. I had rather win her and die, than live rich and safe without her to old age. The more she hates and scorns me, the more I love her."

"I understand," said the doctress, nodding her head till the bladder in her hair bobbed about like a float at which a fish is pulling. "I understand. I have seen people like this before—men and women too—when a bad spirit enters into them because of some crime they have committed. The Inkosazana, or those who guard her, have sent you this bad spirit, and, Ibubesi, you must run the road upon which it is appointed that you should travel; for joy or sorrow you must run that road. But when we meet in the world of ghosts, which I think will be soon, do not blame me, do not say that I did not warn you. Now it is all right about those cows, is it not? although I dare say the Zulus will milk them and not I, for to-night I seem to smell Zulus in the air," and she lifted her broad nose and sniffed like a hound. "I wish you could have left the Inkosazana alone, and that Dario too, for he is a part of her; in my dreams they seemed to be one. But you won't, you will walk your own path; so good night, Ibubesi. The dog will wake again in the morning, but he will not know you. Good night, Ibubesi—of course I understand that the cows will be young ones that have not had more than two calves. Mix the powder in milk, or water, or anything; it is without taste or colour. Good night, Ibubesi," and without waiting for an answer the old wretch crept out of the hut.

When she was gone Ishmael cursed her aloud, then drank some more rum, which he seemed to need. The place was very lonely, and the sight of his dog, lying to all appearance dead at his side, oppressed him. He patted its head and it did not move; he lifted its paw and it fell down flabbily. The brute was as dead as anything could be. It occurred to him that before night came again he might look like that dog. His story might be told; he might have left the earth in company of all the deeds that he had done thereon. He had imagination enough to know his sins, and they were an evil host to face. Old Dove and his wife, for instance—holy people who believed in God and Vengeance, and had never done any wrong, only striven for years and years to benefit others; it would not be pleasant to meet them. Rachel had said that she saw them standing behind him, and he felt as though they were there at that moment. Look, one of them crossed between him and the lamp—there was the mark of the kerry on his head—and the woman followed; he could see her blue lips as she bent down to look at the dog. It was unbearable. He would go and talk to Rachel, and ask her if she had made up her mind. No, for if he broke in on her thus at night, he was sure that she would kill either herself or him with that spear she had taken from the dead Zulu, reddened with his own blood. He would keep faith with her and wait till the morrow. He would send for one of his wives. No, the thought of those women made him sick. He would go round the fortifications and beat any sentries whom he found asleep, or receive the reports of the spies. To stop in that hut in the company of a dog which seemed to be dead, and of imaginations that no rum could drown, was impossible.

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Once more the morning came, and Rachel sat in the walled yard awaiting the dreadful hour of her trial, for it was the day and time that Ishmael had appointed for her answer. Until now Rachel had cherished hopes that something might happen: that the people of

Mafooti might intervene to save her and Richard; that the Zulus might appear, even that Ishmael might relent and let them go. But Mami had been out that morning and brought back tidings which dispelled these hopes. She had ventured to sound some of the leading men, and said that, like all the people, they were very sullen and alarmed, but declared, as she had expected, that they dare do nothing, for Ibubesi would kill them, and if they escape him the Zulus would kill them because the Inkosazana was found in their possession. Of the Zulus themselves, scouts who had been out for miles, reported that they had seen no sign. It was clear also that Ishmael was as determined as ever, for he had sent her a message by Mami that he would wait upon her as he had promised, and bring the white man with him.

Then what should she say and what should she do? Rachel could think of no plan; she could only sit still and pray while the shadow of that awful hour crept ever nearer.

It had come; she heard voices without the wall, among them Ishmael's. Her heart stopped, then bounded like a live thing in her breast. He was commanding someone to "catch that dog and tie it up, for it was bewitched, and did not know him or anyone," then the sound of a dog being dragged away, whining feebly, and then the door opened. First Ishmael came in with an affectation of swaggering boldness, but looking like a man suffering from the effects of a long debauch. About his eyes were great black rings, and in them was a stare of sleeplessness. He carried a double-barrelled gun under his arm, but the hand with which he supported it shook visibly, and at every unusual sound he started. After him came Richard, his wrists bound together behind him, and on his legs hide shackles which only just allowed him to shuffle forward slowly. Moreover he was guarded by four men who carried spears. Rachel glanced quickly at his face, and saw that it was pale and resolute; quite untouched by fear.

"Are you well?" she asked quietly, taking no note of Ishmael.

"Yes," he answered, "and you, Rachel?"

"Quite well bodily, Richard, but oh! my soul is sick."

Before he could reply Ishmael turned on him savagely, and bade him be silent, or it would be the worse for him. Then he took off his hat with his shaking hand, and bowed to Rachel.

"Rachel," he said, "I have kept my promise, and left you alone for three days, but time is up and now this gentleman and I have come to hear your decision, which is so important to both of us."

"What am I to decide?" she asked in a low voice, looking straight before her.

"Have you forgotten? Your memory must be very bad. Well, it is best to have no mistake, and no doubt our friend here would like to know exactly how things stand. You have to decide whether you will take me as your husband to-day of your own free will, or whether Mr. Richard Darrien shall suffer the punishment of death, for having tried to kill his sentry and escape, a crime of which he has been guilty, and afterwards I should take you as my wife with, or without, your consent."

When Richard heard these words the veins in his forehead swelled with rage and horror till it seemed as though they would burst.

"You unutterable villain," he gasped, "you cowardly hound! Oh! if only my hands were free."

"Well, they ain't, Mr. Darrien, and it's no use your tugging at that buffalo hide, so hold your tongue, and let us hear the lady's answer," sneered Ishmael.

"Richard, Richard," said Rachel in a kind of wail, "you have heard. It is a matter of your life. What am I to do?"

"Do?" he answered, in loud, firm tones, "do? How can you ask me such a question? The matter is not one of my life, but of your—of your—oh! I cannot say it. Let this foul beast kill me, of course, and then, if you care enough, follow the same road. A few years sooner or later make little difference, and so we shall soon be together again."

She thought a moment, then said quietly:

"Yes, I care enough, and a hundred times more than that. Yes, that is the only way out. Listen, you Ishmael:—Richard Darrien, the man to whom I am sworn, and I, give you this answer. Murder him if you will, and bring God's everlasting vengeance on your head. He will not buy his life on such terms, and if I consented to them I should be false to him. Murder him as you murdered my father and mother, and when I know that he is dead I will go to join him and them."

"All right, Rachel," said Ishmael, whose face was white with fury, "I think I will take you at your word, and you can go to look for him down below, if you like, for if I am not to get you here, he shan't. Now then, say your prayers, Mr. Darrien," and stepping forward slowly he cocked the double-barrelled gun.

"Men of Mafooti," exclaimed Rachel in Zulu, "Ibubesi is about to do murder on one who like myself is under the mantle of Dingaana. If his blood should flow to-day or to-morrow, yours shall flow in payment, yours, and that of your wives and children, for the crime of the chief is the crime of the people."

At her words the four natives who had been watching this scene uneasily, although they could not understand the English talk, called out to Ishmael in remonstrance. His only answer was to lift the gun, and for an instant that seemed infinite Rachel waited to hear its explosion, and to see the grey-eyed, open-faced man she loved, who stood there like a rock, fall a shattered corpse. Then one of the Kaffirs, bolder than the rest, struck up the barrels with his arm, and not too soon, for whether or no he had meant to pull the trigger, the rifle went off.

"Try the other barrel," said Richard sarcastically, as the smoke cleared away, "that shot was too high."

Perhaps Ishmael might have done so, for the man was beside himself, but the Kaffirs would have no more of it. They rushed between them, lifting their spears threateningly, and shouting that they would not allow the blood of the white lord and the curse of the Inkosazana to be brought upon their heads and those of their families. Rather than that they would bind him, Ibubesi, and give him over to the Zulus. Then, whether or not he had really meant to kill Richard, Ishmael thought it politic to give way.

"So be it," he said to Rachel, "I am merciful, and both of you shall have another chance. I am going with this fellow, but the woman, Mami, shall come to you. If within three hours you send her to me with a message to say that you have changed your mind, he shall be spared. If not, before nightfall you shall see his body, and afterwards we will settle matters."

"Rachel, Rachel," cried Richard, "swear that you will send no such message."

Now the brute, Ishmael, rushed at him to strike him in the face. But Richard saw him coming, and bound though he was, put down his head and butted at him so fiercely, that being much the stronger man, he knocked him to the ground, where he lay breathless. "Swear, Rachel, swear," he repeated, "or dead or living, I'll never forgive you."

"I swear," she said faintly. Then he shuffled towards her. Bending down he kissed her on the face, and she kissed him back; no more words passed between them; this was their farewell. Two of the Kaffirs lifted Ishmael, and helped him from the yard, whilst the other two led away Richard, who made no resistance. At the gate he turned, and their eyes met for a moment. Then it closed behind him, and she was left alone again.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RACHEL LOSES HER SPIRIT

A little while later Mami entered, and said that she had been sent by Ibubesi to serve the Inkosazana as a messenger, should she need one. Rachel, seated on the bench, motioned to her to go into the hut and bide there, and she obeyed.

Minute by minute the time ebbed away, and still Rachel sat motionless on the bench. Towards the end of the third hour someone unbolted and knocked at the door. Mami opened it and reported that Ibubesi stood without, and desired to know whether she had any word for him.

"None," answered Rachel, remembering her oath, and the door was barred again.

After this a great silence seemed to fall upon the place. The sky was grey with distant rain, and the air heavy, and whatever may have been the cause, no sound came from man or beast without. To Rachel's strained nerves it seemed as though the Angel of Death had spread his wings above the town. There she sat paralysed, wondering what evil thing was being worked upon her lover; wondering if she had done right to give him as a sacrifice to this savage in order to save herself from dreadful wrong—wondering, wondering till the powers of her mind seemed to die within her, leaving it grey and empty as the grey and empty sky above.

Night drew on and the setting sun, bursting through the envelope of cloud, filled earth and sky with fire, and it came into Rachel's heart, she knew not whence, that fire was near, that soon it would swallow up all this place.

Look! the door was opening; it swung wide, and through it advanced eight Kaffirs, carrying something on a litter made of shields, something that was covered with a blanket of bark. They drew near to her with bent heads, and set down their burden at her feet. Then one of them lifted the blanket, revealing the body of Richard Darrien, and saying in an awed voice,

"Inkosazana, Ibubesi sends you this to look or to show you that he keeps his word. Later he will visit you himself."

Rachel knelt down by the litter of shields and looked at Richard's face. The stamp of death was on it. She felt his hand, it was turning cold; she felt his heart, it did not beat.

"Show me this dead lord's wounds," she said in an awful whisper, "that presently mine may be like to them."

"Inkosazana," said the spokesman, "he has no wound."

"How, then, did he die? Strange that he should die, and I not feel his spirit pass."

"Inkosazana, he was thirsty, and drank, then he died."

"So, so! he was slain by poison, and I have no poison. Mami, come forth and look on the white lord whom Ibubesi has murdered by poison."

The woman Mami, who had been sleeping in the hut, awoke and obeyed. She saw, and wailed aloud.

"Woe to Mafooti!" she cried, like one inspired, "and woe, woe to those that dwell therein, for now vengeance, red vengeance, shall fall on them from Heaven. The blood of the innocent is upon them, the curse of the Inkosazana is upon them, the spears of the Zulus are upon them. Slay the *silwana*, the wild beast—Ibubesi, and fly, people of Mafooti, fly, fly with that dead thing. Leave it not here to bear witness against you. Carry it far away, and heap a mountain on it. Bury it in a valley that no man can find; bury it in the black water, lest it should arise and bear witness against you. Leave it not here, but let the darkness cover it, and fly with it into the darkness, as I do," and turning she sped to the door and through it.

The light from the sunk sun went out smothered in the gathering thunder-clouds. Through the gloom the terrified bearers muttered to each other.

"Throw it down and away!" said one.

"Nay," answered another, "wisdom has come to Mami, her *ehlosé* has spoken to her. Take it with you, lest it should remain to bear witness against us."

"Remember what the Zulu swore," said a third, "that if harm came to this lord they would kill all, down to the rats. Take it away so that it may not be found. If you meet Ibubesi, spear him. If not, leave him the vengeance for his share."

Now, moved as though by a common impulse, the bearers cast back the blanket over the corpse, and lifting the litter, departed at a run. The door was shut and bolted behind them, and darkness fell upon the earth.

For a while Rachel stood still in the darkness.

"Now I am alone," she said in a quiet voice, yet to her ears the words seemed to be uttered with a roar of thunder that echoed through the firmament, and pierced upwards to the feet of God.

Then suddenly something snapped in her brain and she was changed. The horror left her, the terror left her, she felt very well and strong, so well that she laughed aloud, and again that laugh filled earth and heaven. Oh! she was hungry, and food stood on a table near by. She sprang to it and ate, ate heartily. Then she drank, muttering to herself, "Richard drank before he died. Let me drink also and cease to be alone."

Her meal finished, she walked up and down the place singing a song that seemed to be caught up triumphantly by a million voices, the voices of all who had ever lived and died. Their awful music stunned her and she ceased. Look! Wild beasts wearing the face of Ibubesi were licking the clouds with their tongues of fire. It was curious, but in that high-walled place she could not see it well. Now from the top of the hut the view would be better. Yes, and Ishmael was coming to visit her. Well, they would meet for the last time on the top of the hut. She was not afraid of him, not at all; but it would be strange to see him scrambling up the hut, and they would talk

there for a little while with their faces close together, till—ah!—till what—? Till something strange happened, something unhappy for Ishmael. Oh! no, no, she would not kill herself, she would wait to see what it was that happened to Ishmael, that strange thing which she knew so well, and yet could not remember.

How easy this hut was to climb, a cat could not have run up with less trouble. Now she stood on the top of it, her spear in one hand, and holding with the other to the pole that was set there to scare away the lightning; stood for a long time watching the wild beasts licking the clouds with their red tongues.

The beasts grew weary of lapping up clouds. Their appetites were satisfied for a while, at any rate she saw their tongues no more. The air was very hot and heavy, and the darkness very dense, it seemed to press about her as though she were plunged in cream. Yet Rachel thought that she heard sounds through it, a sound of feet to the west and a sound of feet to the east.

Then she heard another sound, that of the door in the wall opening, and of a soft, tentative footfall, like to the footfall of a questing wolf. She knew it at once, for now her senses were sharper than those of any savage; it was the step of Ibubesi, the Night-prowler. She felt inclined to laugh; it was so funny to think of herself standing there on the top of a hut while the Night-prowler slunk about below looking for her. But she refrained, remembering the dreadful noise when all the Heavens began to laugh in answer. So she was silent, for the Heavens do not reverberate silence, although she could hear her own thoughts passing through them, passing up one by one on their infinite journey.

Listen! He was walking round and round the yard. He went to the bench beneath the tree and felt along it with his fingers to see if she were there. Now he was entering the hut and groping at the bedstead, and now he had kindled a light, for the rays of it shone faintly up through the smoke-hole. Discovering nothing he came out again, leaving the lamp burning within, and called her softly.

"Rachel," he said, "Rachel, where are you?"

There was no answer, and he began to talk to himself.

"Has she got away?" he muttered. "Some of them have gone, I know, the accursed, cowardly fools. No, it is not possible, the watch was too good, unless she is really a spirit, and has melted, as spirits do. I hope not, for if so she will haunt me, and I want her company in the flesh, not in the spirit. I ought to have it too, for it has cost me pretty dear. She must have bewitched me, or why should I risk everything for her, just one white woman who hates the sight of me? The devil is at the back of it. This was his road from the first."

So he went on until Rachel could bear it no more, the thing was too absurd.

"Yes, yes," she said from the top of the hut, "his road from the first, and it ends not far away, at the red gates of Hell, Night-prowler."

The man below gasped, and fell against the fence.

"Whose voice is that? Where are you?" he asked of the air.

Then as there was no answer, he added: "It sounded like Rachel, but it spoke above me. I suppose that she has killed herself. I thought she might, but better that she should be dead than belong to that fellow. Only then why does she speak?"

He started to feel his way towards the hut, perhaps to fetch the lamp, when suddenly the skies behind were illumined in a blaze of light, a broad slow blaze that endured for several seconds. By it the eyes of Rachel, made quick with madness, saw many things. From her perch on the top of the hut she saw the town of Mafooti. On the plain to the west she saw a number of black dots, which she took to be people and cattle travelling away from the town. In the nek to the east she saw more dots, each of them crested with white, and carrying something white. Surely it was a Zulu impi marching! Some of these dots had come to the wall of the town; yes, and some of them were on the crest of it, while yet others were creeping down its main street not a hundred yards away.

Also these caught sight of something, for they paused and seemed to fall together as though in fear. Lastly, just before the light went out, she perceived Ishmael in the yard below, glaring up at her, for he, too, had seen her. Seen her standing above him in the air, the spear in her hand, and in her eyes fire. But of the dots to the east and of the dots to the west he had seen nothing. He appeared to fall to his knees and remain there muttering. Then the Heavens blazed again, for the storm was coming up, and by the flare of them he read the truth. This was no ghost, but the living woman.

"Oh!" he said, recovering himself, "that's where you've got to, is it? Come down, Rachel, and let us talk."

She made no answer, none at all, she who was so curious to see what he would do. For quite a long while he harangued her from below, walking round and round the hut. Then at length in despair he began to climb it. But in that darkness which now and again turned to dazzling light, unlike Rachel, he found the task difficult, and once, missing his hold, he fell to the ground heavily. Finding his feet he rushed at the hut with an oath, and clutching the straw and the grass strings that bound it, struggled almost to the top, to be met by the point of Rachel's spear held in his face. There then he hung, looking like a toad on the slope of a rock, unable to advance because of that spear, and unwilling to go down, lest his labour must be begun again.

"Rachel," he said, "come down, Rachel. Whatever I have done has been for your sake, come down and tell me that you forgive me."

She laughed out loud, a wild, screaming laugh, for really he looked most ridiculous, sprawling there on the bend of the hut, and the lightning showed her all sorts of pictures in his eyes.

"Did Richard Darrien forgive you?" she asked. "And what did you mix that poison with? Milk? The milk of human kindness! It was a very good poison, Toad, so good that I think you must have drawn it from your own blood. When you are dead all the Bushmen should come and dip their arrows in you, for then even crocodiles and the big snakes would die at a scratch."

He made no answer, so she went on.

"Have your people forgiven you? If so, why do they flee away, carrying that white thing which was a man? Have my father and mother forgiven you? Do you hear what they are saying to me—that judgment is the Lord's? Have the Zulus forgiven you, the Zulus who believe that judgment is the King's—and the Inkosazana's? Turn now, and ask them, for here they are," and she pointed over his head with her spear. "Turn, Toad, and set out your case and I will stand above and try it, the case of Dingaan against Ibubesi, and one by one I will call up all those who died through you, and they shall give their evidence, and I, the Judge, will sum it up to a jury of sharp spears. See, here come the spears. Look at the wall, Toad, *look at the wall!*"

As she raved on and pointed with her assegai, the lightning blazed out, and Ishmael, who had looked round at her bidding, saw Zulu warriors leaping down from the crest of the wall, and Zulu captains rushing in by the opened door. At this terrible sight he slid

to the ground purposing to reach his gun which he had left there, and defend or kill himself, who knows which? But before ever he could lay a hand upon it, those fierce men had pounced upon him like leopards on a goat. Now they held him fast, and a voice—it was that of Tamboosa, called through the darkness,

“Hail to thee! Inkosazana. Come down now and pass judgment on this wild beast who would have harmed thee.”

“Tamboosa,” she cried, “the Inkosazana has fled away, only the white woman in whom she dwelt remains; her spirit hangs in wrath over the people of the Zulus, as an eagle hangs above a hare. Tamboosa, there is blood between the Inkosazana and the people of the Zulus, the blood of those who gave her the body that she wore, who lie slain by them upon the bed at Ramah. Tamboosa, there is blood between her and Ibubesi, the blood of the white man who loved the body that she wore, and whom she loved, the white lord whom Ibubesi did to death this day because she who was the Inkosazana would not give herself to him. Tamboosa, the Inkosazana has suffered much from this Ibubesi, many an insult, many a shame, and when she called upon the Zulus, out of all their thousand thousands there was not a single spear to help her, because they were too busy killing those holy ones whom she called her father and her mother. And so, Tamboosa, the spirit of the Inkosazana departed like a bird from the egg, leaving but this shell behind, that is full of sorrows and of dreams. Yet, Tamboosa, she still speaks through these lips of mine, and she says that from the seed of blood that they have sown, her people, the Zulus, must harvest woe upon woe, as while she dwelt among them, she warned them that it would be if ill came to those she loved. Tamboosa, this is her command—that ye shield the breast in which she hid from the wild beast, Ibubesi and all evil men, and that ye lead this shape to Noie, the daughter of Seyapi, whom Ibubesi brought to death, for with Noie it would dwell.”

Thus she wailed through the deep darkness, while the soldiers who packed the space below groaned in their grief and terror because the soul of the Inkosazana had been made a wanderer by their sins, and the curse of the Inkosazana had fallen on their land.

Again the lightning flared, and in it they saw her standing on the crest of the hut. She had let drop the spear as though she needed it no more, and her arms were outstretched to the Heavens, and her beautiful face was upturned, and her long hair floated in the wind. Seen thus by that quick, white light, which shone in the madness of her eyes, she seemed no woman but what they had fabled her to be, a queen of Spirits, and at the vision of her they groaned again, while some of them fell to the earth and hid their faces with their hands.

The darkness fell once more, and a man went into the hut to bring out the lamp that burned there. When he returned Rachel stood among them; they had not seen or heard her descend. Ishmael saw her also, and feeling his doom in the fierce eyes that glowered at him, stretched out his hand and caught her by the robe, praying for pity.

At his touch she uttered a wild scream, which pierced like a knife through the hearts of all that heard it.

“Suffer it not,” she cried, “oh! my people, suffer not that I be thus defiled.”

They rent him from her with blows and execrations, looking up to their chief for his word to tear him to pieces.

“No,” said Tamboosa, grimly, “he shall to the King to tell this story ere he die.”

“Save me, Rachel, save me,” he moaned. “You don’t know what they mean. I was mad with love for you, do not judge me harshly and send me to be tortured.”

This appeal of his seemed to pierce the darkness of her brain, and for a little while her face grew human.

“I judge not,” she answered in Zulu; “pray to the Great One above who judges. Oh! man, man,” she went on in a kind of eerie whisper, “what have I done to you that you should treat me thus? Why did you command the soldiers to kill my father and my mother? Why did you poison my lover? Why did you drive away my soul, and fill me with this madness? Take me away from this accursed town, Tamboosa, before Heaven’s vengeance falls on it, and let me see that face no more.”

Then some of them made a guard about her and led her thence, along the central street, and through the barricaded gates, that they broke down for her passage. They led her to a little cave in the slope of the opposing hill, for although no rain fell, the gathered storm was breaking; the lightning flashed thick and fast, the thunder groaned and bellowed, and a wild wind beat the screeching trees.

Here in the mouth of this cave Rachel sat herself down and looked at the kraal, Mafooti, awaiting she knew not what, while the impi pillaged the town, and Ishmael, already half dead with fear, remained bound to the roof-tree of the hut that had been her prison.

Whilst she waited thus, and watched, of a sudden one of the outer huts began to burn, though whether the lightning or some soldier had fired it none could tell. Then, in an instant, as it seemed, driven by the raging wind, the flame leapt from roof to roof till Mafooti was but a sheet of fire. The soldiers at their work of pillage saw, and rushed hither and thither, confusedly, for they did not know the paths, and were tangled in the fences.

A figure appeared running down the central street, a figure of flame, for his clothes burned on him, and those by Rachel said,

“See, see, *Ibubesi!*”

He could not reach the gate, for a blazing hut fell across his path. Turning he sped to the edge of a cliff that rose near by, where, because of its steepness, there was no wall. Here for a while he ran up and down till the wind-driven fire from new-lit huts at its brink leapt out upon him like thin, scarlet tongues. He threw himself to the ground, he rose again, beating his head with his hand, for his long hair was ablaze. Then in his torment and despair, of a sudden he threw himself backwards into the dark gulf beneath. Fifty feet and more he fell to the rocks below, and where he fell there he lay till he died, and on the morrow the Zulus found and buried him.

Thus did Ishmael depart out of the life of Rachel to the end which he had earned.

Nor did he go alone, for of the Zulus in the town many were caught by the fire, and perished, so many that when the regiment mustered at dawn, that same regiment which had escorted the Inkosazana to the banks of the Tugela, fifty and one men were missing, whilst numbers of others appeared burned and blistered.

“Ah!” said Tamboosa as he surveyed the injured and counted the dead, “the curse is quickly at work among us, and I think that this is but the beginning of evil. Well, I expected it, no less.”

As for the town of Mafooti it was utterly destroyed. To this day the place is a wilderness where the grass grows rank between the crumbling, fire-blackened walls. For the people of Ibubesi who had fled, returned thither no more, nor would others build where it had been, since still they swear that the spot is haunted by the figure of a white man who, in times of thunder, rushes across it wrapped in fire, and plunges blazing into the gulf upon its northern side.

After the storm came the rain which poured all night long, a steady sheet of water reaching from earth to heaven. Rachel watched it vacantly for a while, then went to the head of the little cave and lay down wrapped in karosses that they had made ready for her.

Moreover, she slept as a child sleeps until the sun shone bright on the morrow, then she woke and asked for food.

But the impi did not sleep. All night long the soldiers stood in huddled groups beneath such shelter as the trees and rocks would give to them, while the water poured on them pitilessly till their teeth chattered and their limbs were frozen. Some died of the cold that night, and afterwards many others fell sick of agues and fevers of the lungs which killed a number of them.

In the morning when the storm was past and the sun shone hotly Tamboosa called the Council of the captains together, and consulted with them as to whether they should follow after the people of Mafooti who had fled, and destroy them, or return straight to Zululand. Most of the captains answered that of Mafooti and its people they had seen enough. Ibubesi was dead, slain by the vengeance of Heaven; the Inkosazana they had rescued, alive, though filled with madness; the white lord, Dario, had been murdered by Ibubesi, it was said with poison, and doubtless his body was burned in the fire. As for the people of Mafooti themselves, it would seem that most of them were innocent as they had fled the place, deserting their chief. To these arguments other captains answered that the people of Mafooti were not innocent inasmuch as they had helped Ibubesi to carry off the Inkosazana and the white lord, Dario, from Ramah, and consented to their imprisonment and to the death of one of them, only flying when they had tidings that the impi was on the way. Moreover the command was that every one of these dogs should be killed, whereas they had killed none of them, but only taken those cattle which were left behind in their flight. At length the dispute growing fierce, the captains being unable to come to an agreement, decided that they would lay the matter before the Inkosazana, and be guided by the words that fell from her, if they could understand them.

So Tamboosa went into the cave with one other man, and talked to Rachel, who sat staring at him with stony eyes as though she understood nothing. When at length he ceased, however, she cried:

"Lead me to Noie at the Great Place. Lead me to Noie," nor would she say any more.

So, as the people of Mafooti had fled they knew not where, and they had secured some of the cattle, and as many of the soldiers were sick from the cold and burns received in the fire, Tamboosa told the regiment that it was the will of the Inkosazana that they should return to Zululand.

A while later they started, those of them who were so badly burned that they could not travel, being carried on shields. But Rachel would not be carried, choosing to walk alone surrounded at a distance by a ring of soldiers who guarded her. For hours she walked thus, showing no sign of weariness, but now and again bursting out into shrill laughter, as though she saw things that moved her to merriment. Only the regiment that listened was not merry, for it had heard the words that the Inkosazana spoke in the town of Mafooti, foretelling evil to the Zulus because of the blood that was between them and her. They thought that she laughed over the misfortunes that were to come, and over those that had already befallen them in the fire and in the rain.

About midday they halted to eat, and as before Rachel took food in plenty, for now that her mind was wandering her body seemed to call for sustenance. When their meal was finished they moved down to the banks of the Buffalo River, which ran near by, to find that it was in great flood after the heavy rain and that it was not safe to try the ford. So they determined to camp there on the banks, murmuring among themselves that all went ill with them upon this journey, as was to be expected, and that they would have done better if they had spent the time in hunting down the people of Mafooti, instead of sitting idle like tired storks upon the banks of a river. Yet bad as things might seem, they were destined to be worse, for while some of them were cutting boughs and grass to make a hut for the Inkosazana, Rachel, who stood watching them with empty eyes, of a sudden laughed in her mad fashion, and sped like a swallow to the lip of the foaming ford. Here, before they could come up with her, she threw off the outer cloak she wore and rushed into the water till the current bore her from her feet. Then while the whole regiment shouted in dismay, she began to swim, striking out for the further bank, and being swept downwards by the stream. Now Tamboosa, who was almost crazed with fear lest she should drown, called out that where the Inkosazana went, they must follow, even to their deaths.

"It is so!" answered the soldiers, as each man locking his arms round the middle of him who stood in front, company by company, they plunged into the water in a fourfold chain, hoping thus to bridge it from bank to bank.

Meanwhile Rachel swam on in the strength of her madness as a woman has seldom swum before. Again and again the muddy waters broke over her head and the soldiers groaned, thinking that she was drowned. But always that golden hair reappeared above them. A great tree swept down upon her but she dived beneath it. She was dashed against a tall rock, but she warded herself away from it with her hands and still swam on, till at length with a shout of joy the Zulus saw her find her feet and struggle slowly to the further bank. Yes, and up it till she reached its crest where she stood and watched them idly as though unconscious of the danger she had passed, and of the water that ran from her hair and breast.

"Where a woman can go, we can follow," said some, but others answered:

"She is not a woman, but a spirit. Death himself cannot kill her."

Now the fourfold chain was near the centre of the ford, when suddenly those at the tip of it were lifted from their feet as Rachel had been, nor could those behind hold on to them. They were torn from their grasp and swept away, the most of them never to be seen again, for of these men but few could swim. Thrice this happened until strong swimmers were sent to the front, and at length these men won across as Rachel had done, and caught hold of the stones on the further side, thus forming a living chain from bank to bank, whereof the centre floated and was bent outwards by the weight of the water as the back of a bow bends when the string is drawn.

By the help of this human rope thus formed the companies began to come over, supporting themselves against it, till presently the strain and the push of them and of the angry river overcame its strength, and the chain burst in the middle so that many were borne down the stream and drowned. Yet with risk and toil and loss it joined itself together again and held fast until every man was over, save the sick and some lads who were left to tend them and the cattle on the further bank. Then that cable of brave warriors began to struggle forward like a great snake dragging its tail after it, and, so by degrees drew itself to safety and gasping out foam and water saluted the Inkosazana where she stood.

Many were drowned, and others were bruised by rocks, but of this they thought little since she was safe and they had found her again, to have lost whom would have been a shame from generation to generation. She watched the captains reckoning up the number of the dead, and when Tamboosa and some of them came to make report of it to her, a shadow as of pity floated across her stony eyes.

"Not on my head," she cried, "not on my head! There's blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus and that blood avenges itself in blood."

And she laughed her eerie laugh. "It's true, it's just, O Queen," answered Tamboosa solemnly; "the nation must pay for the sin of its children as the wild beast, Ibubesi's paid for his sins." Then as they could travel no further that day, they built a hut, and lit a great fire by which Rachel sat and dried herself, nor did she take any harm from the water, for as the Zulus had said, it seemed as though nothing could harm her now. The soldiers also lit fires and despatched messengers to neighbouring kraals commanding them to bring food, and to send maidens to attend on the Inkosazana, while others went to a mountain to call all this ill-tidings from hill to hill till it came to the Great Place of the King.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE CURSE OF THE INKOSAZANA

That night the regiment and Rachel slept upon the bank of the river, and nothing happened save that lions carried off two soldiers, while two more who had been injured against the rocks, died. Also others fell sick. On the following morning food arrived in plenty from the neighbouring kraals, and with it some girls of high birth to attend upon the Inkosazana.

But with these Rachel would have nothing to do, and when they came near to her only said:

"Where is Noie, daughter of Seyapi? Lead me to Noie."

So they began their march again, Rachel walking as before in the centre of a ring of soldiers, and that night slept at a kraal upon a hill. Here messengers from the King met them charged with many fine words, to which Rachel listened without understanding them, and then scared them away with her laughter. Also they brought a beautiful cloak made of the skins of a rare white monkey, and this she took and wrapped herself in it, for she seemed to understand that her clothes were ragged.

That day they passed through fertile country, where much corn was grown. Here they saw a strange sight, for as they went clouds seemed to arise in the sky from behind them, which presently were seen to be not clouds, but tens of millions of great winged grasshoppers that lit upon the corn, devouring it and every other green thing. Within a few hours nothing was left except the roots and bare branches, while the women of that land ran to and fro wailing, knowing that next winter they and their children must starve, and the cattle lowed about them hungrily, for the locusts had devoured all the grass. Moreover, having eaten everything, these insects themselves began to die in myriads so that soon the air was poisoned. The waters were also poisoned with their dead bodies, and at once sickness came which presently grew into a pestilence.

Now the men of the country sent a deputation to the Inkosazana, praying her to remove the curse, but when they had spoken she only repeated the words she had used upon the banks of the Buffalo River.

"Not on my head, not on my head! There is blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus. Famine and war and death upon the people of the Zulus because they have shed the holy blood!"

Then the men grew afraid and went away, and the regiment marched on accompanied by the myriads of the locusts that wasted all the land through which they passed.

At length, followed by a wail of misery, they came to the Great Place and entered it, preceded by the locusts which already were heaped up in the streets like winter leaves, and for lack of other provender gnawed at the straw of the huts, and the shields and moochas of the soldiers. It was a strange sight to see the men trying to stamp them to death, and the women and children rushing to and fro shrieking and brushing them from their hair.

Amid such scenes as these they passed through the town of Umgugundhlovu into which Rachel had been brought in order that the people might see that their Inkosazana had returned, and on to that kraal upon the hill, where she had spent all those weary weeks until Richard came. She reached it as the sun was setting, and although she did not seem to know any of them was received with joy and adoration by the women who had been her attendants. Here she slept that night, for they thought that she must be too weary to see the King at once; moreover, he desired first to receive the reports of Tamboosa and the captains, and to learn all that had happened in this strange business.

Next morning, whilst Rachel sat by the pool in which, once she had seen the vision of Richard, Tamboosa and an escort came to bring her to Dingaan. When they told her this, she said neither yea nor nay, but, refusing to enter a litter they had brought, walked at the head of them, back to the Great Place, and, watched by thousands, through the locust-strewn streets to the Intunkulu, the House of the King. Here, in front of his hut, and surrounded by his Council, sat Dingaan and the indunas who rose to greet her with the royal salute. She advanced towards them slowly, looking more beautiful than ever she had done, but with wild, wandering eyes. They set a stool for her, and she sat down on the stool, staring at the ground. Then as she said nothing, Dingaan, who seemed very sad and full of fear, commanded Tamboosa to report all that had happened in the ears of the Council, and he took up his tale.

He told of the journey to the Tugela, and of how the Inkosazana and the white lord, Dario, had crossed the river alone but a few hours after Ibubesi, ordering him to follow next day, also alone, with the white ox that bore her baggage. He told how he had done so, and on reaching Ramah had found the white Umfundusi and his wife lying dead in their room, and on the floor of it a Zulu of the men who had been sent with Ibubesi, also dead, and in the garden of the house a man of the people of Ibubesi, dying, who, with his last breath narrated to him the story of the taking of the Inkosazana and the white lord, by Ibubesi. He told of how he had run to the town of Mafooti, to find out the truth, and of the message that he had sent by the herd boy to Ibubesi and his people. Lastly he told all the rest of that story, of how he had come back to Zululand "as though he had wings," and finding the regiment that had escorted the Inkosazana still in camp near the river, had returned with them to attack Mafooti, which they discovered to be deserted by its people.

While he described how by the flare of the lightning they saw the Inkosazana standing on the roof of a hut, how they captured the wild beast, Ibubesi, how they learned that the Spirit of the Inkosazana was "wandering," and the dreadful words she said, the burning of Mafooti, and the fearful death of Ibubesi by fire, all the Council listened in utter silence. Thus they listened also whilst he showed how evil after evil had fallen upon the regiment, evil by fire and water and sickness, as evil had fallen upon the land also by the plague of locusts.

At length Tamboosa's story was finished, and certain men were brought forward bound, who had been the captains of the band that went with Ishmael, among them those who had killed, or caused to die, the white teacher and his wife.

Upon the stern command of the King these men also told their story, saying that they had not meant to kill the white man and that what they did was done at the word of Ibubesi, whom they were ordered to obey in all things, but who, as they now understood, had dared to lay a plot to capture the Inkosazana for himself. When they had finished the King rose and poured out his wrath on them, because through their deeds the Spirit of the Inkosazana had been driven away, and her curse laid upon the land, where already it was at work. Then he commanded that they should be led thence, all of them, and put to a terrible death, and with them those captains of the regiment who had spoken against the following of the people of Mafooti, who should, he said, have been destroyed, every one.

At his words executioners rushed in to seize these wretched men, and then it was that Rachel, who all this while had sat as though she heard nothing, lifted her head and spoke, for the first time.

"Set them free, set them free!" she commanded. "Vengeance is from Heaven, and Heaven will pour it out in plenty. Not on my hands, not on my hands shall be the blood of those who sent the Spirit of the Inkosazana to wander in the skies. Who was it that bade an impi run to Ramah, and what did they there in the house of those who gave me birth? When the Master calls, the dogs must search and kill. Set them free, lest there be more blood between the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus."

When he heard these words, spoken in a strange, wailing voice, Dingaan trembled, for he knew that it was he who had bidden his dogs to run.

"Let them go," he said, "and let the land see them no more for ever."

So those men went thankfully enough, and the land saw them no more. As they passed the gate other men entered, starved and hungry-looking men, whose bones almost pierced their skins, and who carried in their hands remnants of shields that looked as though they had been gnawed by rats. They saluted the King with feeble voices, and squatted down upon the ground.

"Who are those skeletons," he asked angrily, "who dare to break in upon my Council?"

"King," answered their spokesman, "we are captains of the Nobambe, the Nodwenge, and the Isangu regiments whom thou didst send to destroy the chief, Madaku and his people, who dwell far away in the swamp land to the north near where the Great River runs into the sea. King, we could not come at this chief because he fled away on rafts and in boats, he and his people, and we lost our path among the reeds where again and again we were ambushed, and many of us sank in the swamps and were drowned. Also, we found no food, and were forced to live upon our shields," and he held up a gnawed fragment in his hand. "So we perished by hundreds, and of all who went forth but twenty-one times ten remain alive."

When Dingaan heard this he groaned, for his arms had been defeated and three of his best regiments destroyed. But Rachel laughed aloud, the terrible laugh at which all who heard it shivered.

"Did I not say," she asked, "that Heaven would pour out its vengeance in plenty because of the blood that runs between the Spirit of the Inkosazana and her people of the Zulus?"

"Truly this curse works fast and well," exclaimed Dingaan. Then, turning to the men, he shouted: "Be gone, you starved rats, you cowards who do not know how to fight, and be thankful that the Great Elephant (Chaka) is dead, for surely he would have fed you upon shields until you perished."

So these captains crept away also.

Ere they were well gone a man appeared craving audience, a fat man who wore a woeful countenance, for tears ran down his bloated cheeks. Dingaan knew him well, for every week he saw him, and sometimes oftener.

"What is it, Movo, keeper of the kine," he asked anxiously, "that you break in on me thus at my Council?"

"O King," answered the fat man, "pardon me, but, O King, my tidings are so sad that I availed myself of my privilege, and pushed past the guards at the gate."

"Those who bear ill news ever run quickly," grunted the King. "Stop that weeping and out with it, Movo."

"Shaker of the Earth! Eater up of Enemies!" said Movo, "thou thyself art eaten up, or at least thy cattle are, the cattle that I love. A sore sickness has fallen on the great herd, the royal herd, the white herd with the twisted horns, and," here he paused to sob, "a thousand of them are dead, and many more are sick. Soon there will be no herd left," and he wept outright.

Now Dingaan leapt up in his wrath and struck the man so sharply with the shaft of the spear he held that it broke upon his head.

"Fat fool that you are," he exclaimed. "What have you done to my cattle? Speak, or you shall be slain for an evil-doer who has bewitched them."

"Is it a crime to be fat, O King," answered the indignant Movo, rubbing his skull, "when others are so much fatter?" and he looked reproachfully at Dingaan's enormous person. "Can I help it if a thousand of thy oxen are now but hides for shields?"

"Will you answer, or will you taste the other end of the spear?" asked Dingaan, grasping the broken shaft just above the blade. "What have you done to my cattle?"

"O King, I have done nothing to them. Can I help it if those accursed beasts choose to eat dead locusts instead of grass, and foam at the mouth and choke? Can the cattle help it if all the grass has become locusts so that there is nothing else for them to eat? I am not to blame, and the cattle are not to blame. Blame the Heavens above, to whom thou, or rather," he added hastily, "some wicked wizard must have given offence, for no such thing as this has been known before in Zululand."

Again Rachel broke in with her wild laughter, and said:

"Did I not tell thee that vengeance would be poured down in plenty, poured down like the rain, O Dingaan? Vengeance on the King, vengeance on the people, vengeance on the soldiers, vengeance on the corn, vengeance on the kine, vengeance on the whole land, because blood runs between the Spirit of the Inkosazana and the race of the Amazulu, whom once she loved!"

"It is true, it is true, White One, but why dost thou say it so often?" groaned the maddened Dingaan. "Why show the whip to those who must feel the blow? Now, you Movo, have you done?"

"Not quite, O King," answered the melancholy Movo, still rubbing his head. "The cattle of all the kraals around are dying of this same sickness, and the crops are quite eaten, so that next winter everyone must perish of famine."

"Is that all, O Movo?"

"Not quite, O King, since messengers have come to me, as head keeper of the kine, to say that all the other royal herds within two days' journey are also stricken, although if I understand them right, of some other pest. Also, which I forgot to add—"

"Hunt out this bearer of ill-tidings," roared Dingaan, "hunt him out, and send orders that his own cattle be taken to fill up the holes in my blanket."

Now some attendants sprang on the luckless Movo and began to beat him with their sticks. Still, before he reached the gates he succeeded in turning round weeping in good earnest and shouted:

"It is quite useless, O King, all my cattle are dead, too. They will find nothing but the horns and the hoofs, for I have sold the hides to the shield-makers."

Then they thrust him forth.

He was gone, and for a while there was silence, for despair filled the hearts of the King and his Councillors, as they gazed at Rachel dismayed, wondering within themselves how they might be rid of her and of the evils which she had brought upon them because of the blood of her people which lay at their doors.

Whilst they still stared thus in silence yet another messenger came running through the gate like one in great haste.

"Now I am minded to order this fellow to be killed before he opens his mouth," said Dingaan, "for of a surety he also is a bearer of ill-tidings."

"Nay, O King," cried out the man in alarm, "my news is only that an embassy awaits without."

"From whom?" asked Dingaan anxiously. "The white Amaboona?"

"Nay, O King, from the queen of the Ghost-people to whom thou didst dispatch Noie, daughter of Seyapi, a while ago."

Hearing the name Noie, Rachel lifted her head, and for the first time her face grew human.

"I remember," said Dingaan. "Admit the embassy."

Then followed a long pause. At length the gate opened and through it appeared Noie herself, clad in a garb of spotless white, and somewhat travel-worn, but beautiful as ever. She was escorted by four gigantic men who were naked except for their moochas, but wore copper ornaments on their wrists and ankles, and great rings of copper in their ears. After her came three litters whereof the grass curtains were tightly drawn, carried by bearers of the same size and race, and after these a bodyguard of fifty soldiers of a like stature. This strange and barbarous-looking company advanced slowly, whilst the Council stared at them wondering, for never before had they seen people so huge, and arriving in front of the King set down the litters, staring back in answer with their great round eyes.

As they came Rachel rose from her stool and turned slowly so that she and Noie, who walked in front of the embassy, stood face to face. For a moment they gazed at each other, then Noie, running forward, knelt before Rachel and kissed the hem of her robe, but Rachel bent down and lifted her up in her strong arms, embracing her as a mother embraces a child.

"Where hast thou been, Sister?" she asked. "I have sought thee long."

"Surely on thy business, Zoola," answered Noie, scanning her curiously. "Dost thou not remember?"

"Nay, I remember naught, Noie, save that I have sought thee long. My Spirit wanders, Noie."

"Lady," she said, "my people told me that it was so. They told me many terrible things, they who can see afar, they for whom distance has no gates, but I did not believe them. Now I see with my own eyes. Be at peace, Lady, my people will give thee back thy Spirit, though perchance thou must travel to find it, for in their land all spirits dwell. Be at peace and listen."

"With thee, Noie, I am at peace," replied Rachel, and still holding her hand, she reseated herself upon the stool.

"Where are the messengers?" asked Dingaan. "I see none."

"King," answered Noie, "they shall appear."

Then she made signs to the escort of giants, some of whom came forward and drew the curtains of the litters, whilst others opened huge umbrellas of split cane which they carried in their hands.

"Now what weapons are these?" asked Dingaan. "Daughter of Seyapi, you know that none may appear before the King armed."

"Weapons against the sun, O King, which my people hate."

"And who are the wizards that hate the sun?" queried Dingaan again in an astonished voice. Then he was silent, for out of the first litter came a little man, pale as the shoot from a bulb that has grown in darkness, with large, soft eyes like the eyes of an owl, that blinked in the light, and long hair out of which all the colour seemed to have faded.

As the man, who, like Noie, was dressed in a white robe, and in size measured no more than a twelve-year-old child, set his sandalled feet upon the ground, one of the huge guards sprang forward to shield him with the umbrella, but being awkward, struck his leg against the pole of the litter and stumbled against him, nearly knocking him to the ground, and in his efforts to save himself, letting fall the umbrella. The little man turned on him furiously, and holding one hand above his head as though to shield himself from the sun, with the other pointed at him, speaking in a low sibilant voice that sounded like the hiss of a snake. Thereon the guard fell to his knees, and bending down with outstretched arms, beat his forehead on the earth as though in prayer for mercy. The sight of this giant making supplication to one whom he could have killed with a blow, was so strange that Dingaan, unable to restrain his curiosity, asked Noie if the dwarf was ordering the other to be killed.

"Nay, King," answered Noie, "for blood is hateful to these people. He is saying that the soldier has offended many times. Therefore he curses him and tells him that he shall wither like a plucked leaf and die without seeing his home again."

"And will he die?" asked Dingaan.

"Certainly, King; those upon whom the Ghost-people lay their curse must obey the curse. Moreover, this man deserves his doom, for on the journey he killed another to take his food."

"Of a truth a terrible people!" said Dingaan uneasily. "Bid them lay no curse on me lest they should see more blood than they wish for."

"It is foolish to threaten the Great Ones of the Ghost-folk, King, for they hear even what they seem not to understand," answered Noie quietly.

"Wow!" exclaimed the King; "let my words be forgotten. I am sorry that I troubled them to come so far to visit me."

Meanwhile the offender had crept back upon his hands and knees, looking like a great beaten dog, whilst another soldier, taking his umbrella, held it over the angry dwarf. Also from the other litters two more dwarfs had descended, so like to the first that it was difficult to tell them apart, and were in the same fashion sheltered by guards with umbrellas. Mats were brought for them also, and on

these they sat themselves down at right angles to Dingaan, and to Rachel, whose stool was set in front of the King, whilst behind them stood three of their escort, each holding an umbrella over the head of one of them with the left hand, while with the right they fanned them with small branches upon which the leaves, although they were dead, remained green and shining.

With Dingaan and his Council the three dwarfs did not seem to trouble themselves, but at Rachel they peered earnestly. Then one of them made a sign and muttered something, whereon a soldier of the escort stepped forward with a fourth umbrella, which he opened over the heads of Rachel, and of Noie who stood at her side.

"Why does he do that?" asked Dingaan. "The Inkosazana is not a bat that she fears the sun."

"He does it," answered Noie, "that the Inkosazana may sit in the shade of the wisdom of the Ghost-people, and that her heart which is hot with many wrongs, may grow cool in the shade."

"What does he know about the Inkosazana and her wrongs?" asked Dingaan again, but Noie only shrugged her shoulders and made no answer.

Now one of the dwarfs made another sign, whereon more guards advanced, carrying small bowls of polished wood. These bowls they set upon the ground before the three dwarfs, one before each of them, filling them to the brim with water from a gourd.

"If your people are thirsty, Noie," exclaimed the King, "I have beer for them to drink, for at least the locusts have left me that. Bid them throw away the water, and I will give them beer."

"It is not water, King," she answered, "but dew gathered from certain trees before sunrise, and it is their spirits that are thirsty for knowledge, not their bodies, for in this dew they read the truth."

"Then the Inkosazana must be of their family, Noie, for she read of the coming of the white chief Dario in water, or so they say."

"Perhaps, O King, if it is so these prophets will know it and acknowledge her."

Now for a long while there was silence, so long a while indeed that Dingaan and his Councillors began to move uneasily, for they felt as though the dwarf men were fingering their heart-strings. At length the three dwarfs lifted their wrinkled faces that were bleached to the colour of half-ripe corn, and gazed at each other with their round, owl-like eyes; then as though with one accord they said to each other:

"What seest thou, Priest?" and at some sign from them Noie translated the words into Zulu.

Now the first of them, he who had cursed the soldier, spoke in his low hissing voice, a voice like to the whisper of leaves in the wind, Noie rendering his words.

"I see two maidens standing by a house that moves when cattle draw it. One of them is dark-skinned, it is she," and he pointed to Noie, "the other is fair-skinned, it is she," and he pointed to Rachel. "They cast, each of them, a hair from her head into the air. The black hair falls to the ground, but a spirit catches the hair of gold and bears it northward. It is the spirit of Seyapi whom the Zulus slew. Northwards he bears it, and lays it in the hand of the Mother of the Trees, and with it a message."

"Yes, with it a message," repeated the other two nodding their heads.

Then one of them drew a little package wrapped in leaves from his robe, and motioned to Noie that she should give it to Rachel. Noie obeyed, and the man said:

"Let us see if she has vision. Tell us, thou White One, what lies within the leaves."

Rachel, who had been sitting like a person in a dream, took the packet, and, without looking at it, answered:

"Many other leaves, and within the last of them a hair from this head of mine. I see it, but three knots have been tied therein. They are three great troubles."

"Open," said the dwarf to Noie, who cut the fibre binding the packet, and unfolded many layers of leaves. Within the last leaf was a golden hair, and in it were tied three knots.

Noie laid the hair upon the head of Rachel—it was hers. Then she showed it to the King and his Council, who stared at the knots not knowing what to say, and after they had looked at it, refolded it in the leaves and returned the packet to the dwarf.

Now the dwarf who had read the picture in his bowl turned to him who sat nearest and asked:

"What seest thou, Priest?"

The man stared at the limpid water and answered:

"I see this place at night. I see yonder King and his Councillors talking to a white man with evil eyes and the face of a hawk, who has been wounded on the head and foot. I read their lips. They bargain together; it is of the bringing of an old prophet and his wife hither by force. I see the prophet and his wife in a house, and with them Zulus. By the command of the white man with the evil eyes the Zulus kill the prophet whose head is bald, and his wife dies upon the bed. Before they kill the prophet he slays one of the Zulus with smoke that comes from an iron tube."

When he heard all this Dingaan groaned, but the dwarf who had spoken, taking no heed of him, said to the third dwarf:

"What seest thou, Priest?" to which that dwarf answered:

"I see the White One yonder standing on a hut, but her Spirit has fled from her, it has fled from her to haunt the Trees. In her hand is a spear, and below is the white man with the evil eyes, held by Zulus. I read her words: she says that there is blood," and he shivered as he said the word, "yes, blood between her Spirit and the people of the Zulus. She prophesies evil to them. I see the ill; I see many burnt in a great fire. I see many drowned in an angry river. I see the demons of sickness lay hold of many. I see her Spirit call up the locusts from the coast land. I see it bring disaster on their arms; I see it scatter plague among their cattle; I see a dim shape that it summons striding towards this land. It travels fast over a winter veld, and the head of it is the head of a skull, and the name of it is Famine."

As he ended his words the three dwarfs bent forward, and with one movement seized their bowls and emptied them on to the ground, saying:

"Earth, Earth, drink, drink and bear record of these visions!"

Now the Council was much disturbed, for, although there were great witch doctors among them, none had known magic like to this. Only Dingaan stared down brooding. Then he looked up, and his fat body shook with hoarse laughter.

"You play pretty tricks, little men," he said, "with your giants and your boughs and your huts that open, and your bowls of water. But for all that they are only tricks, since Noie, or others have told you of these things that happened in the past. Now if you are wizards indeed, read me the riddle of the words of the Inkosazana that she spoke before her Spirit left her because of the evil acts of the wolf, Ibubesi. Show me the answer to them in your bowls of water, little men, or be driven hence as cheats and liars. Also tell us your names by which we may know you."

When Noie had translated this speech the three dwarfs gathered themselves under one umbrella, and spoke to each other; then they slid back to their places, and the first of them, he who had cursed the soldier, said:

"King of the Zulus, I am Eddo, this on my right is Pani, and that on my left is Hana. We are children of the Mother of the Trees; we are high-priests of the Grey-people, the Dream-people, who rule by dreams and wisdom, not by spears as thou dost, O King. We are the Ghost-kings whom the ghosts obey, we are the masters of the dead, and the readers of hearts. Those are our names and titles, O King. We have travelled hither because thou sentest a messenger of our own blood who whispered a strange tale in the ear of the Mother of the Trees, a tale of one of whom we knew already but desired to see," and all three of them nodded towards Rachel seated on her stool. "We will read thy riddle, O King, but first thou must fix the fee."

"What do you demand, Ghost-people?" asked Dingaan. "Cattle are somewhat scarce here just now, and wives, I think, would be of little use to you. What is there, then, that you desire, and I can give?"

They looked at each other, then Eddo said, pointing with his thin hand upon which the nails grew long:

"We ask for the White One who sits there. We think that her Spirit dwells with us already, and we ask her body that we may join it to the Spirit again."

Now the Council murmured, but Dingaan replied:

"Once we sought to keep her in whom dwelt the Inkosazana of the Zulus. But things have gone amiss, and she brings curses on us. If shape and spirit were joined together again, mayhap the curses would be taken off our heads. Yet we dare not give her to you, unless she gives herself of her own will. Moreover, first the divination, then the pay. Is that enough?"

"It is enough," they answered, speaking all together. "Set out the matter, King of the Zulus, and we will see what we can do."

Then Dingaan beckoned to a man with a withered hand who sat close to him, listening and noting all things, but saying nothing, and said:

"Stand forth, thou Mopo, and tell the tale."

So Mopo rose and began his story. He told how he alone among the people of the Zulus had thrice seen the spirit of the Inkosazana in the days of the "Black-One-who-was-gone." He told how many moons ago the white man, Ibubesi, had come to the Great Place speaking of a beautiful white maiden who was known by the name of the Inkosazana-y-Zoola, a maiden who ruled the lightning, and was not as other maidens are, and how he had been sent to see her, and found that as was the Spirit of the Inkosazana which he knew, so was this maiden.

"Wow!" he added, "save that the one walked on air and the other on earth, they are the same."

Moreover, as a spirit she seemed wise. He told of the trapping of Noie, and of the decoying of Rachel into Zululand, and of the interview between her and the King by moonlight when she smelt out Noie. Now he was going on to speak of the question put by Dingaan to the Inkosazana, and the answer that she gave to him, when one of the little men who all this while sat as though they were asleep, blinking their eyes in the light—it was Eddo—said:

"Surely thou forgettest something, Tongue of the King, thou who are named Mopo, or Umbopa, Son of Makedama; thou forgettest certain words which the Inkosazana whispered to thee when she threw her cloak about thy head ere thou fleddest away from the Council of the King. Of course, we do not know the words, but why dost thou not repeat them, Tongue of the King?"

Mopo stared at them, and his teeth chattered, then he answered:

"Because they have nothing to do with the story, Ghost-men; because they were of my own death, which is a little matter."

The three dwarfs turned their heads towards each other and said, each to the other:

"Hearest thou, Priest, and hearest thou, Priest, and hearest thou, Priest? He says that the words were of his own death and have nothing to do with the story," and they smiled and nodded, and appeared to go to sleep again.

Now Mopo went on with his tale. He told of the question of the King, how he had asked the Inkosazana whether he should fall upon the Boers or let them be; of how she had searched the Heavens with her eyes; of how the meteor had travelled before them, and burst over the kraal, Umgugundhlovu, that star which she said was thrown by the hand of the Great-Great, the Umkulunkulu, and of how she had sworn that she also heard the feet of a people travelling over plain and mountain, and saw the rivers behind them running red with blood. Lastly, he told of how she had refused to add to or take from her words, or to set out their meaning.

Then Mopo sat himself down again in the circle of the Councillors, and watched and hearkened like a hungry wolf.

"Ye have heard, Ghost-men," said the King. "Now, if ye are really wise, interpret to us the meaning of this saying of the Inkosazana, and of the running star which none can read."

The priests awoke and consulted with each other, then Eddo said:

"This matter is too high for us, King of the Zulus."

Dingaan heard, and laughed angrily.

"I thought it, I thought it!" he cried. "Ye are but cheats after all who, like any common doctor, repeat the gossip that ye have heard, and pretend that it is a message from Heaven. Now why should I not whip you from my town with rods till ye see that red blood which ye so greatly fear?"

At the mention of the word blood, the little men seemed to curl up like cut grass before fire; then Eddo smiled, a sickly smile, and answered:

"Be gentle, King, walk softly, King. We are but poor cheats, yet we will do our best, we, or another for us. A new bowl, a big bowl, a red bowl for the red King, and fill it to the brink with dew."

As he piped out the words a man from among their company appeared with a vessel much larger than those into which they had gazed, and made of beautiful, polished, blood-hued wood that gleamed in the sunlight. Eddo took it in his hand and another slave

filled it with water from the gourd; the last drop of the water filled it to the brim. Then the three of them muttered invocations over it, and Eddo, beckoning to Noie, bade her bear it to the Inkosazana that she might gaze therein.

Rachel received it and looked; as she looked all the emptiness left her eyes which grew quick and active and full of horror.

"Thou seest something, Maiden?" queried Eddo.

"Aye," answered Rachel, "I see much. Must I speak?"

"Nay, nay! Breathe on the water thrice and fix the visions. Now bear the bowl to yonder King and let him look. Perchance he also will see something."

Rachel breathed on the water thrice, rose like one in a trance, and advancing to Dingaan placed the brimming bowl upon his knees.

"Look, King, look," cried Eddo, "and tell us if in what thou seest lies an answer to the oracle of the Inkosazana."

Dingaan stared at the water, angrily at first, as one who smells a trick. Then his face changed.

"By the head of the Black One," he said, "I see people fighting in this kraal, white men and Zulus, and the white men are mastered and the Zulus drag them out to death. The Zulus conquer, O my people. It is as I thought that it would be—that is the meaning of the riddle of the Inkosazana."

"Good, good," said the Council. "Doubtless it shall come to pass."

But the dwarf Eddo only smiled again and waved his hand.

"Look once more, King," he said in his low, hissing voice, and Dingaan looked.

Now his face darkened. "I see fire," he said. "Yes, in this kraal. Umgugundhlovu burns, my royal House burns, and yonder come the white men riding upon horses. Oh! they are gone."

Eddo waved his hand, saying:

"Look again and tell us what thou seest, King."

Unwillingly enough, but as though he could not resist, Dingaan looked and said:

"I see a mountain whereof the top is like the shape of a woman, and between her knees is the mouth of a cave. Beneath the floor of that cave I see bodies, the body of a great man and the body of a girl; she must have been fair, that girl."

Now when he heard this the Councillor who was named Mopo, he with the withered hand, started up, then sat down again, but all were so intent upon listening to Dingaan that none noticed his movements save Noie and the priests of the ghosts.

"I see a man, a fat man come out of the cave," went on Dingaan. "He seems to be wounded and weary, also his stomach is sunken as though with hunger. Two other men seize him, a tall warrior with muscles that stand out on his legs, and another that is thin and short. They drag him up the mountain to a great cleft that is between the breasts of her who sits thereon. They speak with him, but I cannot see their faces, for they are wrapped in mist, or the face of the fat man, for that also is wrapped in mist. They hale him to the edge of the cleft, they hurl him over, he falls headlong, and the mist is swept from his face. Ah! *it is my own face!*"[\*]

[\*] See "Nada the Lily," CHAPTER XXXV.

"Priest," whispered each of the little men to his fellow in the dead silence that followed, "Priest, this King says that he sees his own face. Priest, tell me now, has not the spirit of the Inkosazana interpreted the oracle of the Inkosazana? Will not yonder King be hurled down this cleft? Is *he* not the star that falls?"

And they nodded and smiled at each other.

But Dingaan leapt up in his rage and terror, and with him leapt up the Councillors and witch doctors, all save he who was named Mopo, son of Makedama, who sat still gazing at the ground. Dingaan leapt up, and seizing the bowl hurled it from him so that the water in it fell over Rachel like rain from the clouds. He leapt up, and he cursed the Ghost-priests as evil wizards, bidding them begone from his land. He raved at them, he threatened them, he cursed them again and again. The little men sat still and smiled till he grew weary and ceased. Then they spoke to each other, saying:

"He has sprinkled the White One with the dew of our Trees, and henceforth she belongs to the Trees. Is it not so, Priest?"

They nodded in assent, and Eddo rose and addressed the King in a new voice, a shrill commanding voice, saying:

"O man, thou that art called a King and causest much blood to flow, thou art but a bubble on a river of blood, thou slayer that shalt be slain, thou thrower of spears upon whom the spear shall fall, thou who shalt look upon the Face of Stone that knows not pity, thou whom the earth shall swallow, thou who shalt perish at the hands of—"

"The faces of the slayers were veiled, Priest," broke in the other two dwarfs, peeping up at him from beneath the shadow of their umbrellas; "surely the faces of those slayers were veiled, O Priest."

"Thou who shalt perish at the hands of avengers whose faces are veiled, thy riddle is read for thee as the Mother of the Trees decreed that it should be read. It is well read, it is truly read, it shall befall in its season. Now give to thy servants their reward and let them depart in peace. Give to them that White One whose lost Spirit spoke to thee from the water."

"Take her," roared Dingaan, "take her and begone, for to the Zulus she and Noie, the witch, bring naught but ill."

But one of the Council cried:

"The Inkosazana cannot be sent away with these magicians unless it is her will to go."

Then the little men nodded to Noie, and Noie whispered in the ear of Rachel.

Rachel listened and answered: "Whither thou goest, Noie, thither I go with thee, I who seek my Spirit."

So Noie took Rachel by the hand and led her from the Council-place of the King, and as she went, followed by the Ghost-priests and their escort, for the last time all the Councillors rose up and gave to her the royal salute. Only Dingaan sat upon the ground and beat it with his fists in fury.

Thus did the Inkosazana-y-Zoola depart from the Great Place of the King of the Zulus, and Mopo, the son of Makedama, shading his eyes with his hand, watched her go from between his withered fingers.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### RACHEL FINDS HER SPIRIT

Northward, ever northward, journeyed Rachel with the Ghost-priests; for days and weeks they journeyed, slowly, and for the most part at night, since these people dreaded the glare of the sun. Sometimes she was borne along in a litter with Noie upon the shoulders of the huge slaves, but more often she walked between the litters in the midst of a guard of soldiers, for now she was so strong that she never seemed to weary, nor even in the fever swamps where many fell ill, did any sickness touch her. Also this labour of the body seemed to soothe her wandering and tormented mind, as did the touch of Noie's hand and the sound of Noie's voice. At times, however, her madness got hold of her and she broke out into those bursts of wild laughter which had scared the Zulus. Then Eddo would descend from his litter and lay his long fingers on her forehead and look into her eyes in such a fashion that she went to sleep and was at peace. But if Noie spoke to her in these sleeps, she answered her questions, and even talked reasonably as she had done before the people of Mafooti laid the body of Richard at her feet, and she stood upon the roof of the hut which Ishmael strove to climb.

Thus it was that Noie came to learn all that had happened to her since they parted, for though she had gathered much from them, the Zulus could not, or would not tell her everything. In past days she had heard from Rachel of the lad, Richard Darrien, who had been her companion years before through that night of storm on the island in the river, and now she understood that her lady loved this Richard, and that it was because of his murder by the wild brute, Ibubesi, that she had become mad.

Yes, she was mad, and for that reason Noie rejoiced that the dwarf people were taking her to their home, since if she could be cured at all, they were able to heal her, they the great doctors. Moreover, if these priests and the Zulus would have let her go, whither else could she have gone whose parents and lover were dead, except to the white people on the coast, who did not reverence the insane, as do all black folk, but would have locked her up in a house with others like her until she died. No, although she knew that there were dangers before them, many and great dangers, Noie rejoiced that things had befallen thus.

Also in her tender care already Rachel improved much, and Noie believed that one day she would be herself again. Only she wished that she and her lady were alone together; that there were no priests with them, and above all no Eddo. For Eddo as she knew well was jealous of her authority over Rachel; jealous too of the love that they bore one to the other. He wished to use this crazed white chieftainess who had been accepted as their Inkosazana by the great Zulu people, for his own purposes. This had been clear from the beginning, and that was why when he first heard of her he had consented to go on the embassy to Dingaan, since by his magic he could foresee much of the future that was dark to Noie, whose blood was mixed and who had not all the gifts of the Ghost-kings.

Moreover, the Mother of the Trees was Noie's great aunt, being the sister of her grandfather, or of his father, Noie was not sure which, for she had dwelt among them but a few days, and never thought to inquire of the matter. But of one thing she was sure, that Eddo the first priest, hated this Mother of the Trees, who was named Nya, and desired that "when her tree fell" the next mother should be his servant, which Nya was not. Perhaps, reflected Noie, it was in his mind that her lady would fill this part, and being mad, obey him in all things.

Still she kept a watch upon her words, and even on her thoughts, for Eddo and his fellow-priests, Pani and Hana, were able to peer into human hearts, and read their secrets. Also she protected Rachel from him as much as she was able, never leaving her side for a moment, however weary she might be, for she feared lest he should become the master of her will. Only when the fits of madness fell upon her mistress, she was forced to allow Eddo to quell them with his touch and eye, since herself she lacked this power, nor dared she call the others to her help, for they were under the hand of Eddo.

Northward, ever northward. First they passed through the Zulus and their subject tribes who knew of them and of the Inkosazana. All of these were suffering from the curse that lay upon the land because, as they believed, there was blood between the Inkosazana and her people. The locusts devoured their crops and the plague ravaged their cattle, so that they were terrified of her, and of the little Grey-folk with whom she travelled, the wizards who had shown fearful things to Dingaan and left him sick with dread. They fled at their approach, only leaving a few of their old people to prostrate themselves before this Inkosazana who wandered in search of her own Spirit, and the Dream-men who dwelt with the ghosts in the heart of a forest, and to pray her and them to lift this cloud of evil from the land, bringing gifts of such things as were left to them.

At length all the Zulus were passed, and they entered into the territories of other tribes, wild, wandering tribes. But even these knew of the Ghost-kings, and attempted nothing against them, as they had attempted nothing against Noie and her escort when she travelled through this land on her embassy to the People of the Trees. Indeed, some of their doctors would visit them at their camps and ask an oracle, or an interpretation of dreams, or a charm against their enemies, or a deadly poison, offering great gifts in return. At times Eddo and his fellow-priests would listen, and the giants would bring a tiny bowl filled with dew into which they gazed, telling them the pictures they saw there, though this they did but seldom, as the supply of dew which they had brought with them from their own country ran low, and since it could not be used twice they kept it for their own purposes.

Next they came to a country of vast swamps, where dwelt few men and many wild beasts, a country full of fevers and reeds and pools, in which lived snakes and crocodiles. Yet no harm came to them from these things, for the Ghost-priests had medicines that warded off sickness, and charms that protected them from all evil creatures, and in their bowls they read what road to take and how dangers could be avoided. So they passed the swamps safely; only here that slave whom Eddo had cursed at the kraal of Dingaan, and who from that day onward had wasted till he seemed to be nothing but a great skeleton, sickened and died.

"Did I not tell you that it should be so?" said Eddo to the other slaves, who trembled before him as reeds tremble in the wind. "Be warned, ye fools, who think that the strength of men lies in their bodies and their spears." Then he kicked the corpse of the dead giant gently with his sandalled foot, and bade his brothers throw him into a pool for the crocodiles to eat.

Having passed the swamps and many rivers, at length they turned westward, travelling for days over grassy uplands like to those of Natal, among which wandered pastoral tribes with their herds of cattle. On these plains were multitudes of game and many lions, especially in the bush-clad slopes of great isolated mountains that rose up here and there. These lions roared round them at night, but the priests did not seem to be afraid, for when the brutes became overbold they placed deadly poison in the carcasses of buck that the nomad tribes brought them as offerings, of which the lions ate and died in numbers. Also they sold some of the poison to the tribe for a great price in cattle, as to the delivery of which cattle they gave minute directions, for they knew that none dared to cheat the Mother of the Trees and her prophets.

After the plains were left behind, they reached a vast, fertile and low-lying country that sloped upwards for miles and miles, which, as Noie explained to Rachel, when she would listen, was the outer territory of the Ghost-people, for here dwelt the race of the Umkulus, or Great Ones, who were their slaves, that folk to which the soldiers of their escort belonged. Of these there were thousands and tens of thousands who earned their living by agriculture, since although they were so huge and fierce-looking, they did not fight unless they were attacked. The chiefs of this people had their dwellings in vast caves in the sides of cliffs which, if need be, could be turned into impregnable fortresses, but their real ruler was the Mother of the Trees, and their office was to protect the country of the Trees and furnish it with food, since the Tree-people were dreamers who did little work.

While they travelled through this land all the headmen of the Umkulus accompanied them, and every morning a council was held at which these made report to the priests of all that had chanced of late, and laid their causes before them for judgment. These causes Eddo and his fellow-priests heard and settled as seemed best to them, nor did any dare to dispute their rulings. Indeed, even when they deposed a high chief and set another in his place, the man who had lost all knelt before them and thanked them for their goodness. Also they tried criminals who had stolen women or committed murder, but they never ordered such men to be slain outright. Sometimes Eddo would look at them dreamily and curse them in his slow, hissing voice, bidding them waste in body and in mind, as he had done to the soldier at Umgugundhlovu, and die within one year, or two, or three, as the case might be. Or sometimes, if the crime was very bad, he would command that they should be sent to "travel in the desert," that is, wander to and fro without food or water until death found them. Now and again miserable-looking men, mere skeletons, with hollow cheeks, and eyes that seemed to start from their heads, would appear at their camps weeping and imploring that the curse which had been laid upon them in past days should be taken off their heads. At such people Eddo and his brother-priests, Pani and Hana, would laugh softly, asking them how they throve upon the wrath of the Mother of the Trees, and whether they thought that others who saw them would be encouraged to sin as they had done. But when the poor wretches prayed that they might be killed outright with the spear, the priests shrank up in horror beneath their umbrellas, and asked if they were mad that they should wish them to "sprinkle their trees with blood."

One morning a number of these bewitched Umkulus, men, women and children, appeared, and when the three priests mocked them, as was their wont, and the guards, some of whom were their own relatives, sought to beat them away with sticks, threw themselves upon the ground and burst into weeping. Rachel, who was camped at a little distance with Noie, in a reed tent that the guard had made for her, which they folded up and carried as they did the umbrellas, heard the sound of this lamentation, and came out followed by Noie. For a space she stood contemplating their misery with a troubled air, then asked Noie why these people seemed so starved and why they wept. Noie told her that when she was on her embassy the head of their kraal, an enormous man of middle age, whom she pointed out to Rachel, had sought to detain her because she was beautiful, and he wished to make her his wife, although he knew well that she was on an embassy to the Mother of the Trees. She had escaped, but it was for this reason that the curse of which they were perishing had been laid upon him and his folk.

Now Rachel went on to where the three priests sat beneath their umbrellas dozing away the hours of sunlight, beckoning to the doomed family to follow her.

"Wake, priests," she cried in a loud voice, and they looked up astonished, rubbing their eyes, and asked what was the matter.

"This," said Rachel. "I command you to lift the weight of your malediction off the head of these people who have suffered enough."

"Thou commandest us!" exclaimed Eddo astonished. "And if we will not, Beautiful One, what then?"

"Then," answered Rachel, "I will lift it and set it on to your heads, and you shall perish as they are perishing. Oh! you think me mad, you priests, who kill more cruelly than did the Zulus, and mad I am whose Spirit wanders. Yet I tell you that new powers grow within me, though whence they come I know not, and what I say I can perform."

Now they stared at her muttering together, and sending for a wooden bowl, peeped into it. Whatever it was they saw there did not please them, for at length Eddo addressed the crowd of suppliants, saying:

"The Mother of the Trees forgives; the knot she tied she looses; the tree she planted she digs up. You are forgiven. Bones, put on strength; mouths, receive food; eyes, forget your blindness, and feet, your wanderings. Grow fat and laugh; increase and multiply; for the curse we give you a blessing, such is the will of the Mother of the Trees."

"Nay, nay," cried Rachel, when she understood their words, "believe him not, ye starvelings. Such is the will of the Inkosazana of the Zulus, she who has lost her Spirit and another's, and travels all this weary way to find them."

Then her madness seemed to come upon her again, for she tossed her arms on high and burst into one of her wild fits of laughter. But those whom she had redeemed heeded it not, for they ran to her, and since they dared not touch her, or even her robe, kissed the ground on which she had stood and blessed her. Moreover from that moment they began to mend, and within a few days were changed folk. This Noie knew, for they followed up Rachel to the confines of the desert, and she saw it with her eyes. Also the fame of the deed spread among the Umkulu people who groaned under the cruel rule of the Ghost-kings, and mad or sane, from that day forward they adored Rachel even more than the Zulus had done, and like the Zulus believed her to be a Spirit. No mere human being, they declared, could have lifted off the curse of the Mother of the Trees from those upon whom it had fallen.

Thenceforward Eddo, Pani, and Hana hid their judgments from Rachel, and would not suffer such suppliants to approach the camp. Also when they seized a number of men because these had conspired together to rebel against the Ghost-people, and brought them on towards their own country for a certain purpose, they forced them to act as bearers like the others, so that Rachel might not guess their doom. For now, with all their power, they also were afraid of this white Inkosazana, as Dingaan had been afraid.

So they travelled up this endless slope of fertile land, leaving all the kraals of the giant Umkulus behind them, and one morning at the dawn camped upon the edge of a terrible desert; a place of dry sands and sun-blasted rocks, that looked like the bottom of a drained ocean, where nothing lived save the fire lizards and certain venomous snakes that buried themselves in the sand, all except their heads, and only crawled out at night. After the people of the Umkulus this horrible waste was the great defence of the Ghost-kings, whose country it ringed about, since none could pass it without guides and water. Indeed, Noie had been forced to stay here for days with her escort, until the Mother of the Trees, learning of her coming in some strange fashion, had sent priests and guards to bring her to her land. But the Zulus who were with her they did not bring, except one witch-doctor to bear witness to her words. These they left among the Umkulus till she should return, nor were those Zulus sorry who had already heard enough of the magic of the Ghost-kings, and feared to come face to face with them.

But it is true that they also feared the Umkulus, whom, because of their great size and the fierceness of their air, the Zulus took to be evil spirits, though if this were so, they could not understand why they should obey a handful of grey dwarfs who lived far from them beyond the desert. Still these Umkulus did them no harm, for on her return Noie found them all safe and well.

That afternoon Rachel and the dwarfs plunged into the dreadful wilderness, heading straight for the ball of the sinking sun. Here, although she wished to do so, she was not allowed to walk, for fear lest the serpents should bite her, said Eddo, but must journey in the litter with Noie. So they entered it, and were borne forward at a great pace, the bearers travelling at a run, and being often changed. Also many other bearers came with them, and on the shoulders of each of them was strapped a hide bag of water. Of this they soon discovered the reason, for the sand of that wilderness was white with salt; the air also seemed to be full of salt, so that the thirst of those who travelled there was sharp and constant, and if it could not be satisfied they died.

It was a very strange journey, and although she did not seem to take much note of them at the time, its details and surroundings burned themselves deeply into Rachel's mind. The hush of the infinite desert, the white moonlight gleaming upon the salt, white sand; the tall rocks which stood up here and there like unfinished obelisks and colossal statues, the snowy clouds of dust that rose beneath the feet of the company; the hoarse shouts of the guides, the close heat, the halts for water which was greedily swallowed in great gulps; the occasional cry and confusion when a man fell out exhausted, or because he had been bitten by one of the serpents—all these things, amongst others, were very strange.

Once Rachel asked vaguely what became of these outworn and snake-poisoned men, and Noie only shook her head in answer, for she did not think fit to tell her that they were left to find their way back, or to perish, as might chance.

All that night and for the first hours of the day that followed, they went forward swiftly, camping at last to eat and sleep in the shadow of a mass of rock that looked like a gigantic castle with walls and towers. Here they remained in the burning heat until the sun began to sink once more, and then went on again, leaving some of the bearers behind them, because there was no longer water for so many. There the great men sat in patient resignation and watched them go, they who knew that having little or no water, few of them could hope to see their homes again. Still, so great was their dread of the Ghost-priests, that they never dared to murmur, or to ask that any of the store of water should be given to them, they who were but cattle to be used until they died.

The second night's journey was like the first, for this desert never changed its aspect, and on the following morning they halted beneath another pile of fantastic, sand-burnished rocks, from some of which hung salt like icicles. Here one of the bearers who had been denied water as a punishment for laziness, although in truth he was sick, began to suck the salt-icicles. Suddenly he went raving mad, and rushing with a knife at Eddo, Pani, and Hana where they sat under their cane umbrellas that, for the sake of coolness, were damped with this precious water, he tried to kill them.

Then as they saw the knife gleaming, all their imperturbable calm departed from these dwarfs. They squeaked in terror with thin voices as rats speak; they rolled upon the ground yelling to the slaves to save them from a "red death." The man was seized and, though he fought with all his giant strength, held down and choked in the sand. Once, however, he twisted his head free, howling a curse at them. Also he managed to hurl his knife at Eddo, and the point of it scratched him on the hand, causing the pale blood to flow, a sight at which Eddo and the other priests broke into tears and lamentations, that continued long after the Umkulu was dead.

"Why are they such cowards?" asked Rachel, dreamily, for she had not seen the murder of the slave, and thought that Eddo had only scratched himself.

"Because they fear the sight of blood, Zoola," answered Noie, "which is a very evil omen to them. Death they do not fear who are already among ghosts, but if it is a red death, their souls are spilt with their life, or so they believe."

Towards noon that day the sky banked up with lurid-coloured clouds; the sun which should have shone so hotly, went out, and a hush that was almost fearful in its heat and intensity, fell upon the desert. The Umkulu bearers became disturbed, and gathered together into knots, talking in low tones. Eddo and his brother priests who, either because of the adventure of the morning or the oppressive air, could not sleep, as was usual with them, were also disturbed. They crept from beneath their umbrellas which, as the sun had vanished, were of no use to them, and stood together staring at the salty plain, which under that leaden and lowering sky looked white as snow, and at the brooding clouds above. They even sent for their bowls to read in them pictures of what was about to happen, but there was no dew left, so these could not be used.

Then they consulted with the captains of the bearers, who told them what no magic was needed to guess—that a mighty storm was gathering, and that if it overtook them in the desert, they would be buried beneath the drifting sand. Now this was a "white death" which the dwarfs did not seem to desire, so they ordered an instant departure, instead of delaying the start until sunset, as they had intended, for then, if all went well, they would have arrived at their homes by dawn, and not in the middle of the night. So that litters were made ready, and they went forward through the overpowering heat, that caused the bearers to hang out their tongues and reel as they walked.

Towards evening the storm began to stir. Little wandering puffs of wind blew upon them and died away, and lightnings flickered intermittently. Then a hot breeze sprang up that gradually increased in strength until the sand rolled and rippled before it, now one way and now another, for this breeze seemed to blow in turn from every quarter of the heavens. Suddenly, however, after trying them all, it settled in the west, and drove straight into their faces with ever increasing force. Now Eddo thrust out his head between the curtains of his litter and called to the bearers to hurry, as they had but a little distance of desert left to pass, after which came the grass country where there would be no danger from the sand. They heard and obeyed, changing the pole gangs frequently, as those who carried the litters became exhausted.

But the storm was quicker than they; it burst upon them while they were still in the waste, though not in its full strength. Then the darkness came, utter darkness, for no moon or stars could be seen, and salt and sand drove down on them like hail. Through it all, the

bearers fought on, though how they found their way Noie, who was watching them, could not guess, since no landmarks were left to guide them. They fought on, blinded, choked with the salt sand that drove into their eyes and lungs, till man after man, they fell down and perished. Others took their places, and yet they fought on.

It must have been near to midnight when the company, or those who were left of them, staggered to the edge of that dreadful wilderness which was but a vast plain of stone and sand, bordered on the west as on the east by slopes of fertile soil. For a while the fierce tempest lifted a little, and the light of the stars which struggled through breaks in the clouds showed that they were marching down a steep descent of grassland. Thus they went on for several more hours, till at length the bearers of the litter in which were Rachel and Noie, who for a long time had been staggering to and fro like drunken men, came to a halt, and litter and all, sank to the ground, utterly exhausted.

Rachel and Noie disentangled themselves from the litter, for they were unhurt, and stood by it, not knowing where to go, till presently two other litters containing the priests came up, for the third had been abandoned, and its occupant crowded in with Eddo. Now a great clamour arose in the darkness, the priests hissing commands to the surviving bearers to take up the litter and proceed. But great as was their strength, this the poor men could not do. There they lay upon the ground answering that Eddo might curse them if he wished, or even kill them as their brothers had been killed, but they were unable to stir another step until they had rested and drunk. Where they were, there they must lie until rain fell. Then the priests wished Rachel to enter one of their litters, leaving Noie to walk, which they were afraid to do themselves. But when she understood, Rachel cut the matter short by answering,

"Not so, I will walk," and picking up the spear of one of the fallen Umkulu to serve as a staff, she took Noie by the hand and started forward down the hill.

One of the priests clasped her robe to draw her back, but she turned on him with the spear, whereon he shrank back into his litter like a snail into his shell and left her alone. So following the steep path they marched on, and after them came the two litters with the priests, carried by all the bearers who could still stand, for these old men weighed no more than children. From far below them rose a mighty sound as of an angry sea.

"What is that noise?" called Rachel into the ear of Noie, for the gale was rising again.

"The sound of wind in the forest where the Tree-folk dwell," she answered.

Then the dawn broke, an awful, blood-red dawn, and by degrees they saw. Beneath them ran a shallow river, and beyond it, stretching for league upon league farther than the eye could see, lay the mighty forest whereof the trees soared two hundred feet or more into the air; the dark illimitable forest that rolled as the sea rolls beneath the pressure of the gale, and indeed, seen from above, looked like a green and tossing ocean. At the sight of the water Rachel and Noie began to run towards it hand in hand, for they were parched with thirst whose mouths were full of the salt dust of the desert. The bearers of the litters in which were the three priests ran also, paying no heed to the cries of the dwarfs within. At length it was reached, and throwing themselves down they drank until that raging thirst of theirs was satisfied; even Eddo and his companions crawled out of their litters and drank. Then having washed their hands and faces in the cool water, they forded the fleet stream, and, filled with a new life, followed the road that ran beyond towards the forest. Scarcely had they set foot upon the farther bank when the heart of the tempest, which had been eddying round them all night long, burst over them in its fury. The lightnings blazed, the thunder rolled, and the wild wind grew to a hurricane, so fierce that the litters in which were Eddo, Pani, and Hana were torn from the grasp of the bearers and rolled upon the ground. From the wreck of them, for they were but frail things, the little grey priests emerged trembling, or rather were dragged by the hands of their giant bearers, to whom they clung as a frightened infant clings to its mother. Rachel saw them and laughed.

"Look at the Masters of Magic!" she cried to Noie, "those who kill with a curse, those who rule the Ghosts," and she pointed to the tiny, contemptible figures with fluttering robes being dragged along by those giants whom but a little while before they had threatened with death.

"I see them," answered Noie into her ear. "Their spirits are strong when they are at peace, but in trouble they fear doom more than others. Now, if I were those Umkulu, I would make an end of them while they can."

But these great, patient men did otherwise; indeed, when the dwarfs, worn out and bewildered by the hurricane, could walk no more, they took them up and carried them as a woman carries a babe.

Now they were passing a belt of open land between the river and the forest in which terrified mobs of cattle rushed to and fro, while their herds, slave-men of large size like the Umkulu, tried to drive them to some place where they would be safe from the tempest. In this belt also grew broad fields of grain, which furnished food for the Tree-folk. At last they came to the confines of the forest, and Rachel, looking round her with wondering eyes, saw at the foot of each great tree a tiny hut shaped like a tent, and in front of the hut a dwarf seated on the ground staring into a bowl of water, and beating his breast with his hands.

"What do they?" she asked of Noie.

"They strive to read their fates, Lady, and weep because the wind ripples the dew in their bowls, so that they can see nothing, and cannot be sure whether their tree will stand or fall. Follow me, follow me; I know the way, here we are not safe."

The hurricane was at its height; the huge trees about them rocked and bent like reeds, great boughs came crashing down; one of them fell upon a praying dwarf and crushed him to a pulp. Those around him saw it and uttered a wild shrill scream; Eddo, Pani, and Hana saw it and screamed also, in the arms of their bearers, for this sight of blood was terrible to them. The forest was alive with the voices of the storm, it seemed to howl and groan, and the lightnings illumined its gloomy aisles. The grandeur and the fearfulness of the scene excited Rachel; she waved the spear she carried, and began to laugh in the wild fashion of her madness, so that even the grey dwarfs, seated each at the foot of his tree, ceased from his prayers to glance at her askance.

On they went, expecting death at every step, but always escaping it, until they reached a wide clearing in the forest. In the centre of this clearing grew a tree more huge than any that Rachel had ever dreamed of, the bole of it, that sprang a hundred feet without a branch, was thicker than Dingaan's Great Hut, and its topmost boughs were lost in the scudding clouds. In front of this tree was gathered a multitude of people, men, women, and children, all dwarfs, and all of them on their knees engaged in prayer. At its bole, by a tent-shaped house, stood a little figure, a woman whose long grey hair streamed upon the wind.

"The Mother of the Trees," cried Noie through the screaming gale. "Come to her, she will shelter us," and she gripped Rachel's arm to lead her forward.

Scarcely had they gone a step when the lightning blazed above them fearfully, and with it came an awful rush of wind. Perhaps that flash fell upon the tree, or perhaps the wind snapped its roots. At least its mighty trunk burst in twain, and with a crash that for a

moment seemed to master even the roar of the volleying thunder, down it came to earth. Two huge limbs fell on either side of Rachel and Noie, but they were not touched. A bough struck the Umkulu slave who was carrying Eddo, and swept off his head, leaving the dwarf unharmed. Another bough fell upon Pani and his bearer, and buried them in the earth beneath its bulk, so that they were never seen again. As it chanced the most of the worshippers were beyond the reach of the falling branches, but some of these that were torn loose in the fall, or shattered by the lightning, the wind caught and hurled among them, slaying several and wounding others.

In ten seconds the catastrophe had come and gone, the Queen-Tree that had ruled the forest for a thousand years was down, a stack of green leaves, through which the shattered branches showed like bones, and a prostrate, splintered trunk. The shock threw Noie and Rachel to the ground, but Rachel, rising swiftly, pulled Noie to her feet after her; then, acting upon some impulse, leapt forward, and climbing on to the trunk where it forked, ran down it till she almost reached its base, and stood there against the great shield of earth that had been torn up with the roots. After that last fearful outburst a stillness fell, the storm seemed to have exhausted itself, at any rate for a while. Rachel was able to get her breath and look about her.

All around were lines of enormous trees, solemn aisles that seemed to lead up to the Queen of the Trees, and down these aisles, piercing the shadows cast by the interlacing branches overhead, shone the lights of that lurid morning. Rachel saw, and something struggled in the darkness of her brain, as the light struggled in the darkness of the forest aisles. She remembered—oh! what was it she remembered? Now she knew. It was the dream she had dreamed upon the island in the river, years and years ago, a dream of such trees as these, and of little grey people like to these, and of the boy, Richard, grown to manhood, lashed to the trunk of one of the trees. What had happened to her? She could recall nothing since she saw the body of Richard upon its bier in the kraal Mafooti.

But this was not the kraal Mafooti, nor had Noie, who stood at her side, been with her there, Noie, who had gone on an embassy to her father's folk, the dwarf people. Ah! these people were dwarfs. Look at them running to and fro screaming like little monkeys. She must have been dreaming a long, bad dream, whereof the pictures had escaped her. Doubtless she was still dreaming and presently would awake. Well, the torment had gone out of it, and the fear, only the wonder remained. She would stand still and see what happened. Something was happening now. A little thin hand appeared, gripping the rough bark at the side of the fallen tree.

She peeped over the swell of it and saw an old dwarf woman with long white hair, whose feet were set in a cleft of the shattered bole, and who hung to it as an ape hangs. Beneath her to the ground was a fall of full thirty feet, for the base of the bole was held high up by the roots, so that the little woman's hair hung down straight towards the ground, whither she must presently fall and be killed. Rachel wondered how she had come there, if she had clung to the trunk when it fell, or been thrown up by the shock, or lifted by a bough. Next she wondered how long it would be before she was obliged to leave go, and whether her white head or her back would first strike the earth all that depth beneath. Then it occurred to her that she might be saved.

"Hold my feet," she said to Noie, who had followed her along the trunk, speaking in her own natural voice, at the sound of which Noie looked at her in joyful wonder. "Hold my feet; I think I can reach that old woman," and without waiting for an answer she laid herself down upon the bole, her body hanging over the curve of it.

Now Noie saw her purpose, and seating herself with her heels set against the roughness of the bark, grasped her by the ankles. Supporting some of her weight on one hand, with the other Rachel reached downwards all the length of her long arm, and just as the grasp of the old woman below was slackening, contrived to grip her by the wrist. The dwarf swung loose, hanging in the air, but she was very light, of the weight of a five-year-old child, perhaps, no more, and Rachel was very strong. With an effort she lifted her up till the monkey-like fingers gripped the rough bark again. Another effort and the little body was resting on the round of the tree, one more and she was beside her.

Now Rachel rose to her feet again and laughed, but it was not the mad laughter that had scared Ishmael and the Zulus; it was her own laughter, that of a healthy, cultured woman.

The little creature, crouching on hands and knees at Rachel's feet, lifted her head and stared with her round eyes. At that moment, too, the sun broke out, and its rays, shining where they had never shone for ages, fell upon Rachel, upon her bright hair, and the white robes in which the dwarfs had clothed her, and the gleaming spear in her hand, causing her to look like some ancient statue of a goddess upon a temple roof.

"Who art thou," said the dwarf woman in the hissing voice of her race, "thou Beautiful One? I know! I know! Thou art that Inkosazana of the Zulus of whom we have had many visions, she for whom I sent. But the Inkosazana was mad, she had lost her Spirit; it has been seen here. Beautiful One, *thou* art not mad."

"What does she say, Noie?" asked Rachel. "I can only understand some words."

Noie told her, and Rachel hid her eyes in her hand. Presently she let it fall, saying:

"She is right. I lost my Spirit for a while; it went away with another Spirit. But I think that I have found it again. Tell her, Noie, that I have travelled far to seek my Spirit, and that I have found it again."

Noie, who could scarcely take her eyes from Rachel's face, obeyed, but the old woman hardly seemed to heed her words; a grief had got hold of her. She rocked herself to and fro like a monkey that has lost its young, and cried out:

"My tree has fallen, the tree of my House, which stood from the beginning of the world, has fallen, but that of Eddo still stands," and she pointed to another giant of the forest that soared up, unharmed, at a little distance. "Nya's tree has fallen—Eddo's tree still stands. His magic has prevailed against me, his magic has prevailed against me!"

As she spoke a man appeared scrambling along the bole towards them; it was Eddo himself. His round eyes shone, on his pale face there was a look of triumph, for whoever might be lost, the danger had passed him by.

"Nya," he piped, tapping her on the shoulder, "thy Ghost has deserted thee, old woman, thy tree is down. See, I spit upon it," and he did so. "Thou art no longer Mother of the Trees; thou art only the old woman Nya. The Ghost people, the Dream people, the little Grey people, have a new queen, and I am her minister, for I rule her Spirit. Yonder she stands," and he pointed at the tall and glittering Rachel. "Now, thou new-born Mother of the Trees, who wast the Inkosazana of the Zulus, obey me. Give death to this old woman, the Red Death, that her spirit may be spilt with her blood, and lost for ever. Give it to her with that spear in thy hand, while I hide my eyes, and reign thou in her place through me," and he bowed his head and waited.

"Not the Red Death, not the Red Death," wailed Nya. "Give me the White Death and save my soul, Beautiful One, and in return I will give thee something that thou desirest, who am still the wisest of them all, although my Tree is down."

Noie whispered for a while in Rachel's ear. Then while all the dwarf people gathered beneath them, watching, Rachel bent forward, and putting her arms about the trembling creature, lifted her up as though she were a child, and held her to her bosom. "Mother," she said, "I give thee no death, red or white; I give thee love. Thy tree is down; sit thou in my shadow and be safe. On him who harms thee"—and she looked at Eddo—"on him shall the Red Death fall."

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE MOTHER OF THE TREES

When Eddo understood these words he lifted his head and stared at Rachel amazed.

"This is thy doing, Bastard," he said savagely, addressing Noie, who had translated them. "I have felt thee fighting against me for long, and now thou causeth this Inkosazana to defy me. It was thou who didst work upon that old woman, thine aunt, to command that the white witch should be brought hither, and because as yet I dared not disobey, I made a terrible journey to bring her. Yes, and I did this gladly, for when my eyes fell upon her, there in the town of Dingaan, I saw that she was great and beautiful, but that her Spirit had gone, and I knew that I could make her mouth to speak my words, and her pure eyes to see things that are denied to mine, even the future as, when I bade her, she saw it yonder in the court of Dingaan. But now it seems that her Spirit has returned to her, so that there is no room for mine in her heart, and she speaks her own words, not my words. And thou hast done this thing, O Bastard."

"Perhaps," answered Noie unconcernedly.

"Thou thinkest," went on Eddo, in his fury beating the bole on which he sat, "thou thinkest to protect that old hag, Nya, because her blood runs in thee. But, fool, it is in vain, for her tree is down, her tree is down, and as its leaves wither, and its sap dries up, so must she wither and her blood dry up until she dies, she who thought to live on for many years."

"What does that matter?" asked Noie, "seeing that then she will only join the great company of the ghosts with whom she longs to be, and return with them to torment thee, Eddo, until thou, too, art one of them, and lookest on the face of Judgment."

"Thou thinkest," screamed the dwarf, ignoring this ominous suggestion, "thou thinkest, when she is gone, to be queen in her place, or to rule as high priestess through this White One."

"If I do, that will be a bad hour for thee, Eddo," replied Noie.

"It shall not be, woman. No bastard shall reign here as Mother of the Trees while the nations round cringe before her feet. I have spells; I have poisons; I have slaves who can shoot with arrows."

"Then use them if thou canst, thou evil-doer," said "Noie contemptuously.

"Aye, I will use them all, and not on thee only, but on that white witch whom thou lovest. She shall never pass living from this land that is ringed in by the desert and the forest. She shall choose me to reign through her as her high priest, or she shall die—die miserably. For a little while that old hag, Nya, may protect her with her wisdom, but when she passes, as she must, and quickly, for I will light fires beneath this fallen tree of hers, then I tell thee the Beautiful One shall choose between my rule and doom."

Now Noie would hear no more.

"Dog," she cried, "filthy night-bird, darest thou speak thus of the Inkosazana? Another word and I will offer that heart of thine to the sun thou hatest," and snatching the spear from Rachel's hand, she charged at him, holding it aloft.

Eddo saw her come. With a scream of fear he leapt to his feet, and ran swiftly along the bole till he reached the mass of the fallen branches. Into these he sprang, swinging himself from bough to bough like an ape until he vanished amongst the dark green foliage. Then, having quite lost sight of him, Noie returned laughing to Rachel, by whom stood the old Mother of the Trees who had slid from her arms, and gave her back the spear, saying in the dwarf language:

"This Eddo speaks great words, but he is also a great coward."

"Yes, yes," answered the old woman, "he is a great coward, because like all our folk he fears the Red Death; but, child, I tell thee he is terrible. He hates me because I rule through the white art, not the black, but while my tree stood he must obey me, and I was safe. Now it is down, and he may kill me if he can, according to the custom of my land, and set up another to be queen, she at whose feet my tree bowed itself and fell by the will of the Heavens, and whom, therefore, the people will accept. Through her he will wield all the power of the Ghost-kings, over whom no man may rule, but a woman only. Come, Child, and thou, White One, come also. I know where we may hide. Lady, the power that was mine is thine; protect me till I die, and in payment I will give thee whatever thy heart desires."

"I ask no payment," Rachel answered wearily, when she understood the words; "and I think that it is I who need protection from that wicked dwarf."

Then, guided by Nya, who clung to Rachel's hand, they walked down the bole of the tree and along a great branch, till at length they reached a place whence they could climb to the ground. Before they were clear of the boughs the dethroned Mother, from whose round eyes the tears fell, turned and kissed the bark of one of them, wailing aloud.

"Farewell, thou mighty one, under whose shade I, and the queens of my race before me, have dreamed for centuries. Thou art fallen beneath the stroke of Heaven, and great was thy fall, and I am fallen with thee. Save me from the Red Death, O Spirit of my tree, that in the land of ghosts I still may sleep beneath thy shade for ever."

Then she ran to the very point of the tree and broke off its topmost twig, which was covered with narrow and shining green leaves, and holding it in her hand, returned to Rachel.

"I will plant it," she said, "and perchance it will grow to be the house of queens unborn. Come, now, come," and she turned her face towards the forest.

The thunder had rolled away, and from time to time the sun shone fiercely, so fiercely that, unable to bear its rays, all the dwarfs who were gathered about the fallen tree had retreated into the shadow of the other trees around the open space. There they stood and

sat watching the three of them go by. Men, women and children, they all watched, and Rachel they saluted with their raised hands; but to her who had been their mother for unknown years they did no reverence. Only one hideous little man ran up to her and called out:

"Thou didst punish me once, old woman, now why should I not kill thee in payment? Thy tree is down at last."

Nya looked at him sadly, and answered:

"I remember. Thou shouldst have died, for thy sin was great, but I laid a lesser burden on thee. Man, thou canst not kill me yet; my tree is down, but it is not dead."

She held up the green bough in her hand and looked at him from beneath it, then went on slowly: "Man, my wisdom remains within me, and I tell thee that before I die thou shalt die, and not as thou desirest. Remember my words, people of the Ghosts."

Then she walked on with the others, leaving the dwarf staring after her with a face wherein hate struggled with fear.

"Thou liest," he screamed after her; "thy power is gone with thy tree."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when they heard a crash which caused them to look round. A bough, broken by the storm, had fallen from on high. It had fallen on to the head of the dwarf, and there he lay crushed and dead.

"Ah!" piped the other dwarfs, pointing towards the corpse with their fingers, and closing their eyes to shut out the sight of blood, "ah! Nya is right; she still has power. Those who would kill her must wait till her tree dies."

Taking no heed of what had happened, Nya walked on into the forest. For a while Rachel noted the little huts built, each of them, at the foot of a tree. There were hundreds of these huts that they could see, showing that the people were many, but by degrees they grew fewer, only one was visible here and there, set beneath some particularly vigorous and handsome timber. At last they ceased altogether; they had passed through that city, the strangest city in the world.

Trees—everywhere trees, hundreds of trees, tens of thousands of trees soaring up to heaven, making a canopy of their interlacing boughs, shutting out the light so that beneath them was a deep oppressive gloom. There was silence also, for if any beasts or birds dwelt there the hurricane had scared them away, silence only broken from time to time by the crash of some giant of the forest that, its length of days fulfilled at last, sank suddenly to ruin, to be buried in a tomb of brushwood whence in due course its successor would arise.

"Another life gone," said the old woman, Nya, flitting before them like a little grey ghost, every time that this weird sound struck upon their ears; "whose was it, I wonder? I will look in my bowl, I will look in my bowl."

For, as Rachel discovered afterwards, these people believed that the spirit of each tree of the forest is attached to the spirit of a human being, although that being may dwell in other lands, far away, which dies when the tree dies, sometimes slowly by disease, and sometimes in swift collapse, so that they pass together into the world of ghosts.

On they flitted through the gloom, on for mile after mile. Although the leaf-strewn ground showed no traces of it, evidently they were following some kind of path, for no fallen trunks barred their progress, nor were there any creepers or brushwood, although to right and left of them all these could be seen in plenty. At last, quite of a sudden, for the bole of a tree at the end of the path had hidden it from them, they came upon a clearing in the forest. It seemed to be a natural, or, at any rate, a very ancient clearing, since in it no stumps were visible, nor any scrub, or creepers, only tall grass and flowering plants. In the centre of this place, covering a quarter of it, perhaps, was a vast circular wall, fifty feet or more in height, and clothed with ferns. This wall, they noted, was built of huge blocks of stone, so huge indeed that it seemed wonderful that they could have been moved by human beings. At the sight of that marvellous wall Rachel and Noie halted involuntarily, and Noie asked:

"Who made it, Mother?"

"The giants who lived when the world was young. Can our hands lift such stones?" Nya answered, as, bending down, she thrust the top shoot from her fallen tree deep into the humid soil, then added: "On, child; there is danger here."

As she spoke something hissed through the air just above her head, and stuck fast in the bark of a sapling. Noie sprang forward and plucked it out. It was a little reed, feathered with grasses, and having a sharp ivory point, smeared with some green substance.

"Touch it not," cried Nya, "it is deadly poison. Eddo's work, Eddo's work! but my hour is not yet. Into the open before another comes."

So they ran forward, all three of them, seeing and hearing nothing of the shooter of the arrow. As they approached the titanic wall they saw that it enclosed a mound, on the top of which mound grew a cedar-like tree with branches so wide that they seemed to overshadow half of the enclosure. There were no gates to this wall, but while they wondered how it could be entered, Nya led them to a kind of cleft in its stones, not more than two feet in width, across which cleft were stretched strings of plaited grass. She pressed herself against them, breaking them, and walked forward, followed by Rachel and Noie. Suddenly they heard a noise above them, and, looking up, saw white-robed dwarfs perched upon the stones of the cleft, holding bent bows in their hands, whereof the arrows were pointed at their breasts. Nya halted, beckoning to them, whereon, recognising her, they dropped the arrows into the little quivers which they wore, and scrambled off, whither Rachel could not see.

"These are the guardians of the Temple that cannot either speak or hear, who were summoned by the breaking of the thread," said Nya, and went forward again.

Now to the right, and now to the left, ran the narrow path that wound its way in the thickness of the mighty wall, which towered so high above them that they walked almost in darkness, and at each turn of it were recesses; and above these projecting stones, where archers could stand for its defence. At length this path ended in a *cul-de-sac*, for in front of them was nothing but blank masonry. Whilst Rachel and Noie stared at it wondering whither they should go now, a large stone in this wall turned, leaving a narrow doorway through which they passed, whereon it shut again behind them, though by what machinery they could not see.

Thus they passed through the wall, emerging, however, at a different point in its circumference to that at which they had entered. In the centre of the enclosure rose the hill of earth that they had seen from without, which evidently was kept free from weeds and swept, and on its crest grew the huge cedar-like tree, the Tree of the Tribe. Between the base of this hill and the foot of the wall was a wide ring of level ground, also swept and weeded, and on this space, neatly arranged in lines, were hundreds of little hillocks that resembled ant-heaps.

"The burying-place of the Ghost-priests, Lady," said Nya, nodding at the hillocks. "Soon my bones will be added to them."

Walking across this strange cemetery, they came to the foot of the mound that was entirely overshadowed by the cedar above, from the outspread limbs of which hung long grey moss, that swayed ceaselessly in the wind. Here dwarfs appeared from right and left, the same whom they had seen within the thickness of the wall, or others like to them, some male and some female; melancholy-eyed little creatures who bowed to Nya, and looked with fear and wonder at the tall white Rachel. Evidently they were all of them deaf mutes, for they made signs to Nya, who answered them with other signs, the purport of which seemed to sadden and disturb them greatly.

"They have seen the fall of my tree in their bowls," explained Nya to Noie, "and ask me if it is a true vision. I tell them that I am come here to die and that is why they are sad. This is the place of dying of all the Ghost-priests, whence they pass into the world of spirits, and here no blood may be shed, no, not that of the most wicked evil-doer. If any one of the family of the priests reaches this place living, the glory of the White Death is won. Follow and see."

So they followed her up the mound, past what looked like the entrance to a cave, until they reached a low fence of reeds whereof the gate stood open.

"The gate is open, but enter not there," whispered the old Mother of the Trees, "for those who enter there live not long. Look, Lady, look."

Rachel peered through the gate, but so dense was the gloom in that holy spot that at first she could only see the enormous red bole of the cedar, and the ghostly, moss-clad branches which sprang from it at no great height above the ground. Presently, however, her eyes, grown accustomed to the light, distinguished several little white-robed figures seated upon the earth at some distance from the trunk staring into vessels of wood which were placed before them. These figures appeared to be those of both men and women, while one was that of a child. Even as they watched, the figure nearest to them fell forward over its bowl and lay quite still, whereon those around it set up a feeble, piping cry, that yet had in it a note of gladness. The dwarf-mutes who had accompanied them, and who alone seemed to have a right of entry into this sad place, ran forward and looked. Then very gently they lifted up the fallen figure and bore it out. As it was carried past them Rachel noted that it was the body of quite a young woman, whose little face, wasted to nothing, still looked sweet and gentle.

"Was she ill?" asked Rachel in an awed voice.

"Perhaps," answered the Mother, shaking her grey head, "or perhaps she was very unhappy, and came here to die. What does it matter? She is happy now."

"Ask her, Noie, if all must die who sit beneath that tree," said Rachel.

"Aye," answered Nya, "all save these dumb people who have been priests of the Tree from generation to generation. To touch its stem is to perish soon or late, for it is the Tree of Life and Death, and in it dwells the Spirit of the whole race."

"What then would happen if it fell down, or was destroyed like your tree, Mother?"

"Then the race would perish also," answered Nya, "since their Spirit would lack a home and depart to the world of Ghosts, whither they must follow. When it dies of old age, if it should ever die, then the race will die with it."

"And if someone should cut it down, Mother, what then?"

Now when Noie translated these words to her, the face of the old queen was filled with horror, and as her face was, so was Noie's face.

"White Maiden," she gasped, "speak not such wickedness lest the very thought of it should bring the curse upon us all. He who destroyed that tree would bring ruin upon this people. They would fly away, every one of them, far into the heart of the forest, and be seen no more by man. Moreover, he who did this evil thing would perish and pass down to vengeance among the ghosts, such vengeance as may not be spoken. Put that thought from thy mind, I pray thee, and let it never pass thy lips again."

"Do you believe all this, Noie?" asked Rachel in English with a smile.

"Yes, Zoola," answered Noie, shuddering, "for it is true. My father told me of it, and of what happened once to some wild men who broke into the sanctuary, and shot arrows at the Tree. No, no, I will not tell the story; it is dreadful."

"Yet it must be foolishness, Noie, for how can a tree have power over the lives of men?"

"I do not know, but it has, it has! If I were but to cast a stone at it, I should be dead in a day, and so would you—yes, even you—nothing could save you. Oh!" she went on earnestly, "swear to me, Sister, that you will never so much as touch that tree; I pray you, swear."

So Rachel swore, to please her, for she was tired of this tree and its powers.

Then they went down the hill again, till they came to the mouth of the cave.

"Enter, Lady," Nya said, "for this must be thy home a while until thou goest to rule as Mother of the Trees after me, or, if it pleases thee better, up yonder to die."

They went into the cave, having no choice. It was a great place lit dimly by the outer light, and farther down its length with lamps. Looking round her, Rachel saw that its roof was supported by white columns which she knew to be stalactites, for as a child she had seen their like. At the end of it, where the lamps burned and a fountain bubbled from the ground, rose a very large column shaped like the trunk of a tree, with branches at the top that looked like the boughs of a tree. Gazing at it Rachel understood why these dwarfs, or some ancient people before them, had chosen this cave as their temple.

"The ghost Tree of my race," said old Nya, pointing to it, "the only tree that never falls, the Tree that lives and grows for ever. Yes, it grows, for it is larger now than when my mother was a child."

As they drew near to this wondrous and ghostly looking object Rachel saw piled around and beyond it many precious things. There was gold in dust and heaps, and rings and nuggets; there were shining stones, red and green and white, that she knew were jewels; there were tusks of ivory and carvings in ivory; there were karosses and furs mouldering to decay; there were grotesque gods, fetishes of wood and stone.

"Offerings," said Nya, "which all the nations that live in darkness bring to the Mother of the Trees, and the priests of the Cave. Costly things which they value, but we value them not, who prize power and wisdom only. Yes, yes, costly things which they give to the Mother of the Trees, the fools without a spirit, when they come here to ask her oracle. Look, there are some of the gifts which were sent by Dingaan of the Zulus in payment for the oracle of his death. Thou broughtest them, Noie, my child."

"Yes," answered Noie, "I brought them, and the Inkosazana here, she delivered the oracle. Eddo gave her the bowl, and she saw pictures in the bowl and showed them to Dingaana."

"Nay, nay," said the old woman testily, "it was I who saw the pictures, and I showed them to Eddo and to this white virgin. You cannot understand, but it was so, it was so. Eddo's gift of vision is small, mine is great. None have ever had it as I have it, and that is why Eddo and the others have suffered my tree to live so long, because the light of my wisdom has shone about their heads and spoken through their tongues, and when I am gone they will seek and find it not. In thee they might have found it, Maiden, had thy heart remained empty, but now, it is full again and what room is there for wisdom such as ours?—the wisdom of the ghosts, not the wisdom of life and love and beating hearts."

Noie translated the words, but Rachel seemed to take no heed of them.

"Dingaana?" she asked. "Is Dingaana dead? He was well enough when—when Richard came to Zululand, and since then I have seen nothing of him. How did he die?"

"He did not die, Zoola," answered Noie, "though I think that ere long he will die, for you told him so. It was you who died for a while, not Dingaana. By-and-bye you shall learn all that story. Now you are very weary and must rest."

"Yes," said Rachel with a sob, "I think I died when Richard died, but now I seem to have come to life again—that is the worst of it. Oh!! Noie, Noie, why did you not let me remain dead, instead of bringing me to life again in this dreadful place?"

"Because it was otherwise fated, Sister," replied Noie. "No, do not begin to laugh and cry; it was otherwise fated," and bending down she whispered something into Nya's ear.

The old dwarf nodded, then, taking Rachel by the hand, led her to where some skins were spread upon the floor.

"Lie down," she said, "and rest. Rest, beautiful White One, and wake up to eat and be strong again," and she gazed into Rachel's eyes as Eddo had done when the fits of wild laughter were on her, singing something as she gazed.

While she sang the madness that was gathering there again went out of Rachel's eyes, the lids closed over them, and presently they were fast shut in sleep, nor did she open them again for many hours.

Rachel awoke and sat up looking round her wonderingly. Then by the dim light of the lamps she saw Noie seated at her side, and the old dwarf-woman, who was called Mother of the Trees, squatted at a little distance watching them both—and remembered.

"Thou hast had happy dreams, Lady, and thou art well again, is it not so?" queried Nya.

"Aye, Mother," she answered, "too happy, for they make my waking the more sad. And I am well, I who desire to die."

"Then go up through the open gate which thou sawest not so long ago, and satisfy thy desire, as it is easy to do," replied Nya grimly. "Nay," she added in a changed voice, "go not up, thou art too young and fair, the blood runs too red in those blue veins of thine. What hast thou to do with ghosts and death, and the darkness of the trees, thou child of the air and sunshine? Death for the dwarf-folk, death for the dealers in dreams, death for the death-lovers, but for thee life—life."

"Tell her, Noie," said Rachel, "that my mother, who was fore-sighted, always said that I should live out my days, and I fear that it is true, who must live them out alone."

"Yes, yes, she was right, that mother of thine," answered Nya, "and for the rest, who knows? But thou art hungry, eat; afterwards we will talk," and she pointed to a stool upon which was food.

Rachel tasted and found it very good, a kind of porridge, made of she knew not what, and with it forest fruits, but no flesh. So she ate heartily, and Noie ate with her. Nya ate also, but only a very little.

"Why should I trouble to eat?" she said, "I to whom death draws near?"

When they had finished eating, at some signal which Rachel did not perceive, mutes came in who bore away the fragments of the meal. After they had gone the three women washed themselves in the water of the fountain. Then Noie combed out Rachel's golden hair, and clothed her again in her robe of silken fur that she had cleansed, throwing over it a mantle of snowy white fibre, such as the dwarfs wove into cloth, which she and Nya had made ready while Rachel slept.

As Noie put it about her mistress and stepped back to see how it became her beauty, two of the dwarf-mutes appeared creeping up the cave, and squatting down before Nya began to make signs to her.

"What is it?" asked Rachel nervously.

"Eddo is without," answered the Mother, "and would speak with us."

"I fear Eddo and will not go," exclaimed Rachel.

"Nay, have no fear, Maiden, for here he can not harm thee or any of us; it is the place of sanctuary. Come, let us see this priest; perhaps we may learn something from him."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CITY OF THE DEAD

Nya led the way down the cave, followed by Rachel and Noie. Squatted in its entrance, so as to be out of reach of the rays of the sun, sat Eddo, looking like a malevolent toad, and with him were Hana and some other priests. As Rachel approached they all rose and saluted, but to Nya and Noie they gave no salute. Only to Nya Eddo said:

"Why art thou not within the Fence, old woman?" and he pointed with his chin towards the place of death above. "Thy tree is down, and all last night we were hacking off its branches that it may dry up the sooner. It is time for thee to die."

"I die when my tree dies, not before, Priest," answered Nya. "I have still some work to do before I die, also I have planted my tree again in good soil, and it may grow."

"I saw," said Eddo; "it is without the wall there, but many a generation must go by before a new Mother sits beneath its shade. Well, die when it pleases you, it does not matter when, since thou art no more our Mother. Moreover, learn that all have deserted thee, save a very few, most of whom have just now passed within the Fence above that they may attend thee amongst the ghosts."

"I thank them," said Nya simply, "and in that world we will rule together."

"The rest," went on Eddo, "have turned against thee, having heard how thou didst bring one of us to the Red Death yesterday by thy evil magic, him upon whom the bough fell."

"Who was it that strove to bring me to the Red Death before I reached the sanctuary? Who shot the poisoned arrow, Priest?"

"I do not know," answered Eddo, "but it seems that he shot badly for thou art still here. Now enough of thee, old woman. For many years we bore thy rule, which was always foolish, and sometimes bad, because we could not help it, for the tree of her who went before thee fell at thy feet, as thy tree has fallen at the feet of the White Virgin there. For long thou and I have struggled for the mastery, and now thou art dead and I have won, so be silent, old woman, and since that arrow missed thee, go hence in peace, for none need thee any more, who hast neither youth, nor comeliness, nor power."

"Aye," answered Nya, stung to fury by these insults, "I shall go hence in peace, but thou shalt not abide in peace, thou traitor, nor those who follow thee. When youth and comeliness fade then wisdom grows, and wisdom is power, Eddo, true power. I tell thee that last night I looked in my bowl and saw things concerning thee—aye, and all of our people, that are hid from thy eyes, terrible things, things that have not befallen since the Tree of the Tribe was a seed, and the Spirit of the Tribe came to dwell within it."

"Speak them, then," said Eddo, striving to hide the fear which showed through his round eyes.

"Nay, Priest, I speak them not. Live on and thou shalt discover them, thou and thy traitors. Well have I served you all for many years, mercy have I given to all, white magic have I practised and not black, none have died that I could save, none have suffered whom I could protect, no, not even the slave-peoples beneath our rule. All this have I done, knowing that ye plotted against me, knowing that ye strove to kill my tree by spells, knowing what the end must be. It has come at last, as come it must, and I do not grieve. Fool, I knew that it would come, and I knew the manner of its coming. It was I who sent for this virgin queen whom ye would set up to rule over you, foreseeing that at her feet my tree would fall. The ghost of Seyapi, who is of my blood, Seyapi whom years ago ye drove away for no offence, to dwell in a strange land, told me of her and of this Noie, his daughter, and of the end of it all. So she came; thou didst not bring her as thou thoughtest, I brought her, and my tree fell at her feet as it was doomed to fall, and she saved me from the Red Death as she was doomed to do, giving me love, not hate, as I gave her love not hate. For the rest ye shall see—all of you. I am finished—I am dead—but I live on elsewhere, and ye shall see."

Now Eddo would have answered, but the priest Hana, who appeared to be much frightened by Nya's words, plucked at his sleeve, whispering in his ear, and he was silent. Presently he spoke again, but to Rachel, bidding Noie translate:

"Thou White Maid," he said, "who wast called Princess of the Zulus, pay no heed to this old dotard, but listen to me. When thy Spirit wandered yonder, even then I saw the seeds of greatness in thee, and begged thee from the savage Dingaan. Also I and Pani, who is dead, and Hana, who lives, read by our magic that at thy feet the tree of Nya would fall, and that after her thou wast appointed to rule over us. All the Ghost-people read it also, and now they have named thee their Mother, and chosen thee a tree, a great tree, but young and strong, that shall stand for ages. Come forth, then, and take thy seat beneath that tree, and be our queen."

"Why should I come?" asked Rachel. "It seems that you dwarfs bring your queens to ill ends. Choose you another Mother."

"Inkosazana, we cannot if we would," answered Eddo, "for these matters are not in our hands, but in those of our Spirit. Harken, we will deal well with thee; we will make thee great, and grow in thy greatness, for thou shall give us of thy wisdom, that although thou knowest it not, thou hast above all other women. We weary of little things, we would rule the world. All the nations from sea to sea shall bow down before thee, and seek thine oracle. Thou shalt take their wealth, thou shalt drive them hither and thither as the wind drives clouds. Thou shalt make war, thou shalt ordain peace. At thy pleasure they shall rise up in life and lie down in death. Their kings shall cower before thee, their princes shall bring thee tribute, thou shalt reign a god."

"Until it shall please Eddo to bring thee to thine end, Lady, as it pleases him to bring me to mine," muttered Nya behind her. "Be not beguiled, Maiden; remain a woman and uncrowned, for so thou shalt find most joy."

"Thou meanest, Eddo," said Rachel, "that thou wilt rule and I do thy bidding. Noie, tell him that I will have none of it. When I came here a great sorrow had made me mad, and I knew nothing. Now I have found my Spirit again, and presently I go hence."

At this answer Eddo grew very angry.

"One thing I promise thee, Zoola," he said; "in the name of all the Ghost-people I promise it, that thou shalt not go hence alive. In this sanctuary thou art safe indeed, seated in the shadow of the Death-tree that is the Tree of Life, but soon or late a way will be found to draw thee hence, and then thou shalt learn who is the stronger—thou or Eddo—as the old woman behind thee has learned. Fare thee well for a while. I will tell the people that thou art weary and retest, and meanwhile I rule in thy name. Fare thee well, Inkosazana, till we meet without the wall," and he rose and went, accompanied by Hana and the other priests.

When he had gone a little way he turned, and pointing up the hill, screamed back to Nya:

"Go and look within the Fence, old hag. There thou wilt see the best of those that clung to thee, seeking for peace. Art thou a coward that thou lingerest behind them?"

"Nay, Eddo," she answered, "thou art the coward that hast driven them to death, because they are good and thou art evil. When my hour is ripe I join them, not before. Nor shalt thou abide here long behind me. One short day of triumph for thee, Eddo, and then night, black night for ever."

Eddo heard, and his yellow face grew white with rage, or fear. He stamped upon the ground, he shook his small fat fists, and spat out curses as a toad spits venom. Nya did not stay to listen to them, but walked up the cave and sat herself down upon her mat.

"Why does he hate thee so, Mother?" asked Rachel.

"Because those that are bad hate those that are good, Maiden. For many a year Eddo has sought to rule through me, and to work evil in the world, but I have not suffered it. He would abandon our secret, ancient faith, and reign a king, as Dingaan the Zulu reigns. He would send the slave-tribes out to war and conquer the nations, and build him a great house, and have many wives. But I held him fast, so that he could do few of these things. Therefore he plotted against me, but my magic was greater than his, and while my tree stood he could not prevail. At length it fell at thy feet, as he knew that it was doomed to fall, for all these things are fore-ordained, and at once he would have slain me by the Red Death, but thou didst protect me, and for that blessed be thou for ever."

"And why does he wish to make me Mother in thy place, Nya?"

"Because my tree fell at thy feet, and all the people demand it. Because he thinks that once the bond of the priesthood is tied between you, and his blood runs in thee, thy pure spirit will protect his spirit from its sins, and that thy wisdom, which he sees in thee, will make him greater than any of the Ghost-people that ever lived. Yet consent not, for afterwards if thou dost thwart him, he will find a way to bring down thy tree, and with it thy life, and set another to rule in thy place. Consent not, for know that here thou art safe from him."

"It may be so, Mother, but how can I dwell on in this dismal place? Already my heart is broken with its sorrows, and soon, like those poor folk, I should seek peace within the Fence."

"Tell me of those sorrows," said Nya gently. "Perhaps I do not know them all, and perhaps I could help thee."

So Rachel sat herself down also, and Noie, interpreting for her, told all her tale up to that point when she saw the body of Richard borne away, for after this she remembered nothing until she found herself standing upon the fallen tree in the land of the Ghost Kings. It was a long tale, and before ever she finished it night fell, but throughout its telling the old dwarf-woman said never a word, only watched Rachel's face with her kind, soft eyes. At last it was done, and she said:

"A sad story. Truly there is much evil in the world beyond the country of the Trees, for here at least we shed little blood. Now, Maiden, what is thy desire?"

"This is my desire," said Rachel, "to be joined again to him I love, whom Ishmael slew; yes, and to my father and mother also, whom the Zulus slew at the command of Ishmael."

"If they are all dead, how can that be, Maiden, unless thou seekest them in death? Pass within the Fence yonder, and let the poison of the Tree of the Tribe fall upon thee, and soon thou wilt find them."

"Nay, Mother, I may not, for it would be self-murder, and my faith knows few greater crimes."

"Then thou must wait till death finds thee, and that road may be very long."

"Already it is long, Mother, so long that I know not how to travel it, who am alone in the world without a friend save Noie here," and she began to weep.

"Not so, Thou hast another friend," and she laid her hand upon Rachel's heart, "though it is true that I may bide with thee but a little while."

After this they were all silent for a space, until Nya looked up at Rachel and asked suddenly:

"Art thou brave?"

"The Zulus and others thought so, Mother; but what can courage avail me now?"

"Courage of the body, nothing, Maiden; courage of the spirit much, perhaps. If thou sawest this lover of thine, and knew for certain that he lives on beneath the world awaiting thee, would it bring thee comfort?"

Rachel's breast heaved and her eyes sparkled with joy, as she answered:

"Comfort! What is there that could bring so much? But how can it be, Mother, seeing that the last gulf divides us, a gulf which mortals may not pass and live?"

"Thou sayest it; still I have great power, and thy spirit is white and clean. Perhaps I could despatch it across that gulf and call it back to earth again. Yet there are dangers, dangers to me of which I reckon little, and dangers to thee. Whither I sent thee, there thou mightest bide."

"I care not if I bide there, Mother, if only it be with him! Oh! send me on this journey to his side, and living or dead I will bless thee."

Now Nya thought a while and answered:

"For thy sake I will try what I would try for none other who has breathed, or breathes, for thou didst save me from the Red Death at the hands of Eddo. Yes, I will try, but not yet—first thou must eat and rest. Obey, or I do nothing."

So Rachel ate, and afterwards, feeling drowsy, even slept a while, perhaps because she was still weary with her journeying and her new-found mind needed repose, or perhaps because some drug had been mingled with her drink. When she awoke Nya led her to the mouth of the cave. There they stood awhile studying the stars. No breath of air stirred, and the silence was intense, only from time to

time the sound of trees falling in the forest reached their ears. Sometimes it was quite soft, as though a fleece of wool had been dropped to the earth, that was when the tree that died had grown miles and miles away from them; and sometimes the crash was as that of sudden thunder, that was when the tree which died had grown near to them.

A sense of the mystery and wonder of the place and hour sank into Rachel's heart. The stars above, the mighty entombing forest, in which the trees fell unceasingly after their long centuries of life, the encircling wall, built perhaps by hands that had ceased from their labours hundreds of thousands of years before those trees began to grow; the huge moss-clad cedar upon the mound beneath the shadow of whose branches day by day its worshippers gave up their breath, that immemorial cedar whereof, as they believed, the life was the life of the nation; the wizened little witch-woman at her side with the seal of doom already set upon her brow and the stare of farewell in her eyes; the sad, spiritual face of Noie, who held her hand, the loving, faithful Noie, who in that light seemed half a thing of air; the grey little dwarf-mutes who squatted on their mats staring at the ground, or now and again passed down the hill from the Fence of Death above, bearing between them a body to its burial; all were mysterious, all were wonderful.

As she looked and listened, a new strength stirred in Rachel's heart. At first she had felt afraid, but now courage flowed into her, and it seemed to come from the old, old woman at her side, the mistress of mysteries, the mother of magic, in whom was gathered the wisdom of a hundred generations of this half human race.

"Look at the stars, and the night," she was saying in her soft voice, "for soon thou shalt be beyond them all, and perchance thou shalt never see them more. Art thou fearful? If so, speak, and we will not try this journey in search of one whom we may not find."

"No," answered Rachel; "but, Mother, whither go we?"

"We go to the Land of Death. Come, then, the moment is at hand. It is hard on midnight. See, yonder star stands above the holy Tree," and she pointed to a bright orb that hung almost over the topmost bough of the cedar, "it marks thy road, and if thou wouldst pass it, now is the hour."

"Mother," asked Noie, "may I come with her? I also have my dead, and where my Sister goes I follow."

"Aye, if thou wilt, daughter of Seyapi, the path is wide enough for three, and if I stay on high, perchance thou that art of my blood mayest find strength to guide her earthwards through the wandering worlds."

Then Nya walked up the cave and sat herself down within the circle of the lamps with her back to the stalactite that was shaped like a tree, bidding Rachel and Noie be seated in front of her. Two of the dwarf-mutes appeared, women both of them, and squatted to right and left, each gazing into a bowl of limpid dew. Nya made a sign, and still gazing into their bowls, these dwarfs began to beat upon little drums that gave out a curious, rolling noise, while Nya sang to the sound of the drums a wild, low song. With her thin little hands she grasped the right hand of Rachel and of Noie and gazed into their eyes.

Things changed to Rachel. The dwarfs to right and left vanished away, but the low murmuring of their drums grew to a mighty music, and the stars danced to it. The song of Nya swelled and swelled till it filled all the space between earth and heaven; it was the rush of the gale among the forests, it was the beating of the sea upon an illimitable coast, it was the shout of all the armies of the world, it was the weeping of all the women of the world. It lessened again, she seemed to be passing away from it, she heard it far beneath her, it grew tiny in its volume—tiny as if it were an infinite speck or point of sound which she could still discern for millions and millions of miles, till at length distance and vastness overcame it, and it ceased. It ceased, this song of the earth, but a new song began, the song of the rushing worlds. Far away she could hear it, that ineffable music, far in the utter depths of space. Nearer it would come and nearer, a ringing, glorious sound, a sound and yet a voice, one mighty voice that sang and was answered by other voices as sun crossed the path of sun, and caught up and re-echoed by the innumerable choir of the constellations.

They were falling past her, those vast, glowing suns, those rounded planets that were now vivid with light, and now steeped in gloom, those infinite showers of distant stars. They were gone, they and their music together; she was far beyond them in a region where all life was forgotten, beyond the rush of the uttermost comet, beyond the last glimmer of the spies and outposts of the universe. One shape of light she sped into the black bosom of fathomless space, and its solitude shrivelled up her soul. She could not endure, she longed for some shore on which to set her mortal feet.

Behold! far away a shore appeared, a towering, cliff-bound shore, upon whose iron coasts all the black waves of space beat vainly and were eternally rolled back. Here there was light, but no such light as she had ever known; it did not fall from sun or star, but, changeful and radiant, welled upward from that land in a thousand hues, as light might well from a world of opal. In its dazzling, beautiful rays she saw fantastic palaces and pyramids, she saw seas and pure white mountains, she saw plains and new-hued flowers, she saw gulfs and precipices, and pale lakes pregnant with wavering flame. All that she had ever conceived of as lovely or as fearful, she beheld, far lovelier or a thousandfold more fearful.

Like a great rose of glory that world bloomed and changed beneath her. Petal by petal its splendours fell away and were swallowed in the sea of space, whilst from the deep heart of the immortal rose new splendours took their birth, and fresh-fashioned, mysterious, wonderful, reappeared the measureless city with its columns, its towers, and its glittering gates. It endured a moment, or a million years, she knew not which, and lo! where it had been, stood another city, different, utterly different, only a hundred times more glorious. Out of the prodigal heart of the world-rose were they created, into the black bosom of nothingness were they gathered; whilst others, ever more perfect, pressed into their place. So, too, changed the mountains, and so the trees, while the gulfs became a garden and the fiery lakes a pleasant stream, and from the seed of the strange flowers grew immemorial forests wreathed about with rosy mists and bedecked in glimmering dew. With music they were born, on the wings of music they fled away, and after them that sweet music wailed like memories.

A hand took hers and drew her downwards, and up to meet her leapt myriads of points of light, in every point a tiny face. They gazed at her with their golden eyes; they whispered together concerning her, and the sound of their whispering was the sound of a sea at peace. They accompanied her to the very heart of the opal rose of life whence all these wonders welled, they set her in a great grey hall roofed in with leaning cliffs, and there they left her desolate.

Fear came upon her, the loneliness choked her, it held her by the throat like a thing alive. She seemed about to die of it, when she became aware that once more she was companioned. Shapes stood about her. She could not see the shapes, save dimly now and again as they moved, but their eyes she could see, their great calm, pitiful eyes, which looked down on her, as the eye of a giant might look down upon a babe. They were terrible, but she did not fear them so much as the loneliness, for at least they lived.

One of the shapes bent over her, for its holy eyes drew near to her, and she heard a voice in her heart asking her for what great cause she had dared to journey hither before the time. She answered, in her heart, not with her lips, that she was bereaved of all she loved and came to seek them. Then, still in her heart, she heard that voice command:

"Let all this Rachel's dead be brought before her."

Instantly doors swung open at the end of that grey hall, and through them with noiseless steps, with shadowy wings, floated a being that bore in its arms a child. Before her it stayed, and the light of its starry head illumined the face of the child. She knew it at once—it was that baby brother whose bones lay by the shore of the African sea. It awoke from its sleep, it opened its eyes, it stretched out its arms and smiled at her. Then it was gone.

Other Shapes appeared, each of them bearing its burden—a companion who had died at school, friends of her youth and childhood whom she had thought yet living, a young man who once had wished to marry her and who was drowned, the soldier whom she had killed to save the life of Noie. At the sight of him she shrank, for his blood was on her hands, but he only smiled like the rest, and was borne away, to be followed by that witch-doctress whom the Zulus had slain because of her, who neither smiled nor frowned but passed like one who wonders.

Then another shadow swept down the hall, and in its arms her mother—her mother with joyful eyes, who held thin hands above her as though in blessing, and to whom she strove to speak but strove in vain. She was borne on still blessing her, and where she had been was her father, who blessed her also, and whose presence seemed to shed peace upon her soul. He pointed upwards and was gone, gazing at her earnestly, and lo! a form of darkness cast something at her feet. It was Ishmael who knelt before her, Ishmael whose tormented face gazed up at her as though imploring pardon.

A struggle rent her heart. Could she forgive? Oh! could she forgive him who had slain them all? Now she was aware that the place was filled with the points of light that were Spirits, and that every one of them looked at her awaiting the free verdict of her heart. Rank upon rank, also, the mighty Shapes gathered about her, and in their arms her dead, and all of them looked and looked, awaiting the free verdict of her heart. Then it arose within her, drawn how she knew not from every fibre of her infinite being, it arose within her, that spirit of pity and of pardon. As the dead had stretched out their arms above her, so she stretched out her arms over the head of that tortured soul, and for the first time her lips were given power to speak.

"As I hope for pardon, so I pardon," she said. "Go in peace!"

Voices and trumpets caught up the words, and through the grey hall they rang and echoed, proclaimed for ever and as they died away he too was gone, and with him went the myriad points of flame, in each of which gleamed a tiny face. She looked about her seeking another Spirit, that Spirit she had travelled so far and dared so much to find. But there came only a little dwarf that shambled alone down the great hall. She knew him at once for Pani, the priest, he who had been crushed in the tempest, Pani, the brother of Eddo. No Shape bore him, for he who on earth had been half a ghost, could walk this ghost-world on his mortal feet, or so her mind conceived. Past her he shuffled shamefaced, and was gone.

Now the great doors at the end of the hall closed; from far away she could see them roll together like lightning-severed clouds, and once more that awful loneliness overcame her. Her knees gave way beneath her, she sank down upon the floor, one little spot of white in its expanse, wishing that the roof of rock would fall and hide her. She covered her face with her golden hair, and wept behind its veil. She looked up and saw two great eyes gazing at her—no face, only two great, steady eyes. Then a voice speaking in her heart asked her why she wept, whose desire had been fulfilled, and she answered that it was because she could not find him whom she sought, Richard Darrien. Instantly the tongues and trumpets took up the name.

"Richard Darrien!" they cried, "Richard Darrien!"

But no Shape swept in bearing the spirit of Richard in its arms.

"He is not here," said the voice in her heart. "Go, seek him in some other world."

She grew angry.

"Thou mockest me," she answered, "He is dead, and this is the home of the dead; therefore he must be here. Shadow, thou mockest me."

"I mock not," came the swift answer. "Mortal, look now and learn."

Again the doors burst open, and through them poured the infinite rout of the dead. That hall would not hold them all, therefore it grew and grew till her sight could scarcely reach from wall to wall. Shapes headed and marshalled them by races and by generations, perhaps because thus only could her human heart imagine them, but now none were borne in their arms. They came in myriads and in millions, in billions and tens of billions, men and women and children, kings and priests and beggars, all wearing the garments of their age and country. They came like an ocean-tide, and their floating hair was the foam on the tide, and their eyes gleamed like the first shimmer of dawn above the snows. They came for hours and days and years and centuries, they came eternally, and as they came every finger of that host, compared to which all the sands of all the seas were but as a handful, was pointed at her, and every mouth shaped the words:

"Is it I whom thou seekest?"

Million by million she scanned them all, but the face of Richard Darrien was not there.

Now the dead Zulus were marching by. Down the stream of Time they marched in their marshalled regiments. Chaka stood over her—she knew him by his likeness to Dingaan—and threatened her with a little, red-handled spear, asking her how she dared to sit upon the throne of the Spirit of his nation. She began to tell him her story, but as she spoke the wide receding walls of that grey hall fell apart and crumbled, and amidst a mighty laughter the great-eyed Shapes rebuilt them to the fashion of the cave in the mound beneath the tree of the dwarf-folk. The sound of the trumpets died away, the shrill, sweet music of the spheres grew far and faint.

Rachel opened her eyes. There in front of her sat Nya, crooning her low song, and there, on either side crouched the mutes tapping upon their little drums and gazing into their bowls of water, while against her leaned Noie, who stirred like one awaking from sleep. Ages and ages ago when she started on that dread journey, the dwarf to her left was stretching out her hand to steady the bowl at her feet, and now it had but just reached the bowl. A great moth had singed its wings in the lamp, and was fluttering to the ground—it was still in mid-air. Noie was placing her arm about her neck, and it had but begun to fall upon her shoulder!

## CHAPTER XXII.

### IN THE SANCTUARY

Nya ceased her singing, and the dwarf women their beating on the drums.

"Hast thou been a journey, Maiden?" she asked, looking at Rachel curiously.

"Aye, Mother," she answered in a faint voice, "and a journey far and strange."

"And thou, Noie, my niece?"

"Aye, Mother," she answered, shivering as though with cold or fear, "but I went not with my Sister here, I went alone—for years and years."

"A far journey thou sayest, Inkosazana, and one that was for years and years, thou sayest, Noie, yet the eyes of both of you have been shut for so long only as it takes a burnt moth to fall from the lamp flame to the ground. I think that you slept and dreamed a moment, that is all."

"Mayhap, Mother," replied Rachel, "but if so mine was a most wondrous dream, such as has never visited me before, and as I pray, never may again. For I was borne beyond the stars into the glorious cities of the dead, and I saw all the dead, and those that I had known in life were brought to me by Shapes and Powers whereof I could only see the eyes."

"And didst thou find him whom thou soughtest most of all?"

"Nay," she answered, "him alone I did not find. I sought him, I prayed the Guardians of the dead to show him to me, and they called up all the dead, and I scanned them every one, and they summoned him by his name, but he was not of their number, and he came not. Only they spoke in my heart, bidding me to look for him in some other world."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nya starting a little, "they said that to thee, did they? Well, worlds are many, and such a search would be long." Then as though to turn the subject, she added, "And what sawest thou, Noie?"

"I, Mother? I went not beyond the stars, I climbed down endless ladders into the centre of the earth, my feet are still sore with them. I reached vast caves full of a blackness that shone, and there many dead folk were walking, going nowhere, and coming back from nowhere. They seemed strengthless but not unhappy, and they looked at me and asked me tidings of the upper world, but I could not answer them, for whenever I opened my lips to speak a cold hand was laid upon my mouth. I wandered among them for many moons, only there was no moon, nothing but the blackness that shone like polished coal, wandered from cave to cave. At length I came to a cave in which sat my father, Seyapi, and near to him my mother, and my other mothers, his wives, and my brothers and sisters, all of whom the Zulus killed, as the wild beast, Ibubesi, told them to do."

"I saw Ibubesi, and he prayed me for my pardon, and I granted it to him," broke in Rachel.

"I did not see him," went on Noie fiercely, "nor would I have pardoned him if I had. Nor do I think that my father and his family pardon him; I think that they wait to bear testimony against him before the Lord of the dead."

"Did Seyapi tell you so?" asked Rachel.

"Nay, he sat there beneath a black tree whereof I could not see the top, and gazed into a bowl of black water, and in that bowl he showed me many pictures of things that have been and things that are to come, but they are secret, I may say nothing of them."

"And what was the end of it, my niece?" asked Nya, bending forward eagerly.

"Mother, the end of it was that the black tree which was shaped like the tree of our tribe above us, took fire and went up in a fierce flame. Then the roofs of the caves fell in and all the people of the dwarfs flew through the roofs, singing and rejoicing, into a place of light; only," she added slowly, "it seemed to me that I was left alone amidst the ruins of the caves, I and the white ghost of the tree. Then a voice cried to me to make my heart bold, to bear all things with patience, since to those who dare much for love's sake, much will be forgiven. So I woke, but what those words mean I cannot guess, seeing that I love no man, and never shall," and she rested her chin upon her hand and sat there musing.

"No," replied Nya, "thou lovest no man, and therefore the riddle is hard," but as she spoke her eyes fell upon Rachel.

"Mother," said Rachel presently, "my heart is the hungrier for all that it has fed upon. Can thy magic send me back to that country of the dead that I may search for him again? If so, for his sake I will dare the journey."

"Not so," answered Nya shaking her head; "it is a road that very few have travelled, and none may travel twice and live."

Now Rachel began to weep.

"Weep not, Maiden, there are other roads and perchance to-morrow thou shall walk them. Now lie down and sleep, both of you, and fear no dreams."

So they laid themselves down and slept, but the old witch-wife, Nya, sat waiting and watched them.

"I think I understand," she murmured to herself, as she gazed at the slumbering Rachel, "for to her who is so pure and good, and who has suffered such cruel wrong, the Guardians would not lie. I think that I understand and that I can find a path. Sleep on, sweet maiden, sleep on in hope."

Then she looked at Noie and shook her grey head.

"I do not understand," she muttered. "The black tree shaped like the Tree of our Tribe, and Seyapi of the old blood seated beneath it. The tree that went up in fire, and the maid of the old blood left alone with the ghost of it, while the dwarf people fled into light and

freedom. What does it mean? Ah! that picture in the bowl! Now I can guess. 'Those who dare much for love.' It did not say for love of man, and woman can love woman. But would she dare a deed that none of our race could even dream? Well, the Zulu blood is bold. Perhaps, perhaps. Oh! Eddo, thou black sorcerer, whither art thou leading the Children of the Tree? On thy head be it, Eddo, not on mine; on thy head for ever and for ever."

When Rachel awoke, refreshed, on the following day, she lay a while thinking. Every detail of her vision was perfectly clear in her mind, only now she was sure that it had been but a dream. Yet what a wonderful dream! How, even in her sleep, had she found the imagination to conceive circumstances so inconceivable? That magic rush beyond the stars; that mighty world set round with black cliffs against which rolled the waves of space; that changeful, wondrous world which unfolded itself petal by petal like a rose, every petal lovelier and different from the last; that grey hall roofed with tilted precipices; and then those dead, those multitudes of the dead!

What power had been born in her that she could imagine such things as these? Vision she had, like her mother, but not after this sort. Perhaps it was but an aftermath of her madness, for into the minds of the mad creep strange sights and sounds, and this place, and the people amongst whom she sojourned, the Ghost-people, the grey Dwarf-people, the Dealers in dreams, the Dwellers in the sombre forest, might well open new doors in such a soul as hers. Or perhaps she was still mad. She did not know, she did not greatly care. All she knew was that her poor heart ached with love for a man who was dead, and yet whom she could not find even among the dead. She had wished to die, but now she longed for death no more, fearing lest after all there should be something in that vision which the magic of Nya had summoned up, and that when she reached the further shore she might not find him who dwelt in a different world. Oh! if only she could find him, then she would be glad enough to go wherever it was that he had gone.

Now Noie was awake at her side, and they talked together.

"We must have dreamt dreams, Noie," she said. "Perhaps the Mother mingled some drug with our food."

"I do not know, Zoola," answered Noie; "but, if so, I want no more of those dreams which bode no good to me. Besides, who can tell what is dream and what is truth? Mayhap this world is the dream, and the truth is such things as we saw last night," and she would say no more on the matter.

Nothing happened within the Wall that day—that is, nothing out of the common. A certain number of the privileged, priestly caste of the dwarfs were carried or conducted into the holy place, and up to the Fence of Death that they might die there, and a certain number were brought out for burial. Some of those who came in were folk weary of life, or, in other words, suicides, and these walked; and some were sick of various diseases, and these were carried. But the end was the same, they always died, though whether this result was really brought about by some poison distilled from the tree, as Nya alleged, or whether it was the effect of a physical collapse induced by that inherited belief, Rachel never discovered.

At least they died, some almost at once, and some within a day or two of entering that deadly shade, and were borne away to burial by the mutes who spent their spare time in the digging of little graves which they must fill. Indeed, these mutes either knew, or pretended that they knew who would be the occupant of each grave. At least they intimated by signs that this was revealed to them in their bowls, and when the victims appeared within the Wall, took pleasure in leading them to the holes they had prepared, and showing to them with what care these had been dug to suit their stature. For this service they received a fee that such moribund persons brought with them, either of finely woven robes, or of mats, or of different sorts of food, or sometimes of gold and copper rings manufactured by the Umkulu or other subject savages, which they wore upon their wrists and ankles.

Certain of these doomed folk, however, went to their fate with no light hearts, which was not wonderful, as it seemed that these were neither ill nor sought a voluntary euthanasia. They were political victims sent thither by Eddo as an alternative to the terror of the Red Death, whereby according to their strange and ancient creed, they would have risked the spilling of their souls. For the most part the crime of these poor people was that they had been adherents and supporters of the old Mother of the Tree, Nya, over whom Eddo was at last triumphant. On their way up to the Fence such individuals would stop to exchange a last few, sad words with their dethroned priestess.

Then without any resistance they went on with the rest, but from them the mutes received scant offerings, or none at all, with the result that they were cast into the worst situated and most inconvenient graves, or even tumbled two or three together into some shapeless corner hole. But, after all, that mattered nothing to them so long as they received sepulchre within the Wall, which was their birth-or, rather, their death-right.

The priest-mutes themselves were a strange folk, and, oddly enough, Rachel observed, by comparison, quite cheerful in their demeanour, for when off duty they would smile and gibber at each other like monkeys, and carry on a kind of market between themselves. They lived in that part of the circumference of the Wall which was behind the hill whereon grew the sacred tree. Here no burials took place, and instead of graves appeared their tiny huts arranged in neat streets and squares. In these they and their forefathers had dwelt from time immemorial; indeed, each little hut with a few yards of fenced-in ground about it ornamented with dwarf trees, was a freehold that descended from father to son. For the mutes married, and were given in marriage, like other folk, though their children were few, a family of three being considered very large, while many of the couples had none at all. But those who were born to them were all deaf-mutes, although their other senses seemed to be singularly acute.

These mutes had their virtues; thus some of them were very kind to each other, and especially to those from the outer forest world who came hither to bid farewell to that world, and others, renouncing marriage and all earthly joys, devoted their lives, which appeared to be long, to the worship of the Spirit of the Tree. Also they had their vices, such as theft, and the seducing away of the betrothed of others, but the chief of them was jealousy, which sometimes led to murder by poisoning, an art whereof they were great masters.

When such a crime was discovered, and a case of it happened during the first days of Rachel's sojourn among them, the accused was put upon his trial before the chief of the mutes, evidence for and against him being given by signs which they all understood. Then if a case were established against him, he was forced to drink a bowl of medicine. If he did this with impunity he was acquitted, but if it disagreed with him his guilt was held to be established. Now came the strange part of the matter. All his life the evil-doer had been accustomed to go within the Fence about his business and take no harm, but after such condemnation he was conducted there with the usual ceremonies and very shortly perished like any other uninitiated person. Whether this issue was due to magic or to mental collapse, or to the previous administration of poison, no one seemed to know, not even Nya herself. So, at least, she declared to Rachel.

At each new moon these mutes celebrated what Rachel was informed they looked upon as a festival. That is, they climbed the Tree of the Tribe and scattered themselves among its enormous branches, where for several hours they mumbled and gibbered in the dark like a troop of baboons. Then they came down, and mounting the huge, surrounding wall, crept around its circumference. Occasionally this journey resulted in an accident, as one of them would fall from the wall and be dashed to pieces, although it was noticed that the unfortunate was generally a person who, although guilty of no actual crime, chanced to be out of favour with the other priests and priestesses. After the circuit of the wall had been accomplished, with or without accidents, the dwarfs feasted round a fire, drinking some spirit that threw them into a sleep in which wonderful visions appeared to them. Such was their only entertainment, if so it could be called, since doubtless the ceremony was of a religious character. For the rest they seldom if ever left the holy place, which was known as "Within the Wall," most of them never doing so in the course of a long life.

Beyond the burial of the dead they did no work, as their food was brought to them daily by outside people, who were called "the slaves of the Wall." Their only method of conversation was by signs, and they seemed to desire no other. Indeed, if, as occasionally happened, a child was born to any of them who could hear or speak like other human beings, it was either given over to the other dwarfs, or if the discovery was not made until it was old enough to observe, it was sacrificed by being bound to the trunk of the tribal tree "lest it should tell the secret of the Tree."

Such were the weird, half-human folk among whom Rachel was destined to dwell. The Zulus had been bad and bloodthirsty, but compared to these little wizards they seemed to her as angels. The Zulus at any rate had left her her thoughts, but these stunted wretches, she was sure, pried into them and read them with the help of their bowls, for often she caught sight of them signing to each other about her as she passed, and pointing with grins at pictures which they saw in the water.

It was night again, still, silent night made odorous with the heavy cedar scents of the huge tree upon the mound. Rachel and Noie sat before Nya in the cave beneath the burning lamp about which fluttered the big-winged, gilded moths.

"Thou didst not find him yonder among the Shades," said Nya suddenly, as though she were continuing a conversation. "Say now, Maiden, art thou satisfied, or wouldst thou seek for him again?"

"I would seek him through all the heavens and all the earths. Mother, my soul burns for a sight of him, and if I cannot find him, then I must die, and go perchance where he is not."

"Good," said Nya; "the effort wearies me, for I grow weak, yet for thy sake I will try to help thee, who saved me from the Red Death."

Then the dwarf-women came in and beat upon their drums, and, as before, the old Mother of the Trees began to sing, but Noie sat aside, for in this night's play she would take no part. Again Rachel sank into sleep, and again it seemed to her that she was swept from the earth into the region of the stars and there searched world after world.

She saw many strange and marvellous things, things so wonderful that her memory was buried beneath the mass of them, so that when she woke again she could not recall their details. Only of Richard she saw nothing. Yet as her life returned to her, it seemed to Rachel that for one brief moment she was near to Richard. She could not see him, and she could not hear him, yet certainly he was near her. Then her eyes opened, and Nya ceasing from her song, asked:

"What tidings, Wanderer?"

"Little," she answered feebly, for she was very tired, and in a faint voice she told her all.

"Good," said Nya, nodding her grey head. "This time he was not so far away. To-morrow I will make thy spirit strong, and then perhaps he will come to thee. Now rest."

So next night Nya laid her charm upon Rachel as before, and again her spirit sought for Richard. This time it seemed to her that she did not leave the earth, but with infinite pain, with terrible struggling, wandered to and fro about it, bewildered by a multitude of faces, led astray by myriads of footsteps. Yet in the end she found him. She heard him not, she saw him not, she knew not where he was, but undoubtedly for a while she was with him, and awoke again, exhausted, but very happy.

Nya heard her story, weighing every word of it but saying nothing. Then she signed to the dwarfs to bring her a bowl of dew, and stared in it for a long while. The dwarf-women also stared into their bowls, and afterwards came to her, talking to her on their fingers, after which all three of them upset the dew upon a rock, "breaking the pictures."

"Hast thou seen aught?" asked Rachel eagerly.

"Yes, Maiden," answered the mother. "I and these wise women have seen something, the same thing, and therefore a true thing. But ask not what it was, for we may not tell thee, nor would it help thee if we did. Only be of a good courage, for this I say, there is hope for thee."

So Rachel went to sleep, pondering on these words, of which neither she nor Noie could guess the meaning. The next night when she prayed Nya to lay the spell upon her, the old Mother would not.

"Not so," she said. "Thrice have I rent thy soul from thy body and sent it afar, and this I may do no more and keep thee living, nor could I if I would, for I grow feeble. Neither is it necessary, seeing that although thou knowest it not, that spirit of thine, having found him, is with him wherever he may be, yes, at his side comforting him."

"Aye, but where is he, Mother? Let me look in the bowl and see his face, as I believe that thou hast done."

"Look if thou wilt," and she motioned to one of the dwarf-women to place a bowl before her.

So Rachel looked long and earnestly, but saw nothing of Richard, only many fantastic pictures, most of which she knew again for scenes from her own past. At length, worn out, she thrust away the bowl, and asked in a bitter voice why they mocked her, and how it came about that she who had seen the coming of Richard in the pool in Zululand, and the fate of Dingaan the King in the bowl of Eddo, could now see nothing of any worth.

"As regards the vision of the pool I cannot say, Maiden," replied Nya, "for that was born of thine own heart, and had nothing to do with our magic. As regards the visions in the bowl of Eddo, they were his visions, not thine, or rather my visions that I saw before he started hence. I passed them on to him, and he passed them on to thee, and thou didst pass them on to King Dingaan. Far-sighted and pure-souled as thou art, yet not having been instructed in their wizardry, thou wilt see nothing in the bowls of the dwarfs unless their blood is mingled with thy blood."

“Their blood mingled with my blood?” What dost thou mean, Mother?”

“What I say, neither more nor less. If Eddo has his will, thou wilt rule after me here as Mother of the Trees. But first thy veins must be opened, and the veins of Eddo must be opened, and Eddo’s blood must be poured into thee, and thy blood into him. Then thou wilt be able to read in the bowls as we can, and Eddo will be thy master, and thou must do his bidding while you both shall live.”

“If so,” answered Rachel, “I think that neither of us will live long.”

That night Rachel felt too exhausted to sleep, though why this should be she could not guess, as she had done nothing all day save watch the mutes at their dreary tasks, and it was strange, therefore, that she should feel as though she had made a long journey upon her feet. About an hour before the dawn she saw Nya rise and glide past her towards the mouth of the cave, carrying in her hand a little drum, like those used by the mute women. Something impelled her to follow, and waking Noie at her side, she bade her come also.

Outside of the cave by the faint starlight they saw the little shape of Nya creeping down the mound, and thence across the open space towards the wall, and went after her, thinking that she intended to pass the wall. But this she did not do, for when she came to its foot Nya, notwithstanding her feebleness, began to climb the rough stones as actively as any cat, and though their ascent seemed perilous enough, reached the crest of the wall sixty feet above in safety, and there sat herself down. Next they heard her beating upon the drum she bore, single strokes always, but some of them slow, and some rapid, with a pause between every five or ten strokes, “as though she were spelling out words,” thought Rachel.

After a while Nya ceased her beating, and in the utter silence of the night, which was broken only, as always, by the occasional crash of falling trees, for no breath of air stirred, and all the beasts of prey had sought their lairs before light came, both she and Noie seemed to hear, far, infinitely far away, the faint beat of an answering drum. It would appear that Nya heard it also, for she struck a single note upon hers as though in acknowledgement, after which the distant beating went on, paused as though for a reply from some other unheard drum, and again from time to time went on, perhaps repeating that reply.

For a long while this continued until the sky began to grow grey indeed, when Nya beat for several minutes and was answered by a single, far-off note. Then glancing at the heavens she prepared to descend the wall, while Rachel and Noie slipped back to the cave and feigned to be asleep. Soon she entered, and stood over them shaking her grey head and asking how it came about that they thought that she, the Mother of the Trees, should be so easily deceived.

“So thou sawest us,” said Rachel, trying not to look ashamed.

“No; I saw you not with my eyes, either of you, but I felt both of you following me, and heard in my heart what you were whispering to each other. Well, Inkosazana, art thou the wiser for this journey?”

“No, Mother, but tell us if thou wilt what thou wast beating on that drum.”

“Gladly,” she answered. “I was sending certain orders to the slave peoples who still know me as Mother of the Trees, and obey my words. Perhaps thou dost not believe that while I sat upon yonder wall I talked across the desert to the chiefs of the marches upon the far border of the land of the Umkulu, and that by now at my bidding they have sent out men upon an errand of mine.”

“What was the errand, Mother?” asked Rachel curiously.

“I said the errand was mine, not thine, Maiden. It is not pressing, but as I do not know how long my strength will last, I thought it well that it should be settled.” Then without more words she coiled herself up on her mat and seemed to go to sleep.

It was after this incident of the drums that Rachel experienced the strangest days, or rather weeks of her life. Nya sent her into no more trances, and to all outward seeming nothing happened. Yet within her much did happen. Her madness had utterly left her and still she was not as other women are, or as she herself had been in health. Her mind seemed to wander and she knew not whither it wandered. Yet for long hours, although she was awake and, so Noie said, talking or eating or walking as usual, it was away from her, and afterwards she could remember nothing. Also this happened at night as well as during the day, and ever more and more often.

She could remember nothing, yet out of this nothingness there grew upon her a continual sense of the presence of Richard Darrien, a presence that seemed to come nearer and nearer, closer and closer to her heart. It was the assurance of this presence that made those long days so happy to her, though when she was herself, she felt that it could be naught but a dream. Yet why should a dream move her so strangely, and why should a dream weary her so much? Why, after sleeping all night, should she awake feeling as though she had journeyed all night? Why should her limbs ache and she grow thin like one who travels without cease? Why should she seem time after time to have passed great dangers, to have known cold, and heat and want and struggle against waters and the battling against storms? Why should her knowledge of this Richard, of the very heart and soul of Richard, grow ever deeper till it was as though they were not twain, but one?

She could not answer these questions, and Noie could not answer them, and when she asked Nya the old Mother shook her head and could not, or would not answer. Only the dwarf-mutes seemed to know the answer, for when she passed them they nudged each other, and grinned and thrust their little woolly heads together staring, several of them, into one bowl. But if Noie and Nya knew nothing of the cause of these things the effect of them stirred them both, for they saw that Rachel, the tall and strong, grew faint and weak and began to fade away as one fades upon whom deadly sickness has laid its hand.

Thus three weeks or so went by, until one day in some fashion of her own Nya caused to arise in the mind of Eddo a knowledge of her desire to speak with him. Early the next morning Eddo arrived at the Holy Place accompanied only by his familiar, Hana, and Nya met them alone in the mouth of the cave.

“I see that thou art very white and thin, but still alive, old woman,” sneered Eddo, adding: “All the thousands of the people yonder thought that long ere this thou wouldst have passed within the Fence. May I take back that good tidings to them?”

The ancient Mother of the Trees looked at him sternly.

“It is true, thou evil mocker,” she said, “that I am white and thin. It is true that I grow like to the skeleton of a rotted leaf, all ribs and netted veins without substance. It is true that my round eyes start from my head like to those of a bush plover, or the tree lizard, and that soon I must pass within the Fence, as thou hast so long desired that I should do that thou mayest reign alone over the thousands of the People of the Dwarfs and wield their wisdom to increase thy power, thou poison-bloated toad. All these things are true, Eddo, yet ere I go I have a word to say to thee to which thou wilt do well to listen.”

“Speak on,” said Eddo. “Without doubt thou hast wisdom of a sort; honey thou hast garnered during many years, and it is well that I should suck the store before it is too late.”

"Eddo," said Nya, "I am not the only one in this Holy Place who grows white and thin. Look, there is another," and she nodded towards Rachel, who walked past them aimlessly with dreaming eyes, attended by Noie, upon whose arm she leant.

"I see," answered Eddo; "this haunted death-prison presses the life out of her, also I think that thou hast sent her Spirit travelling, as thou knowest how to do, and such journeys sap the strength of flesh and blood."

"Perhaps; but now before it is too late I would send her body travelling also; only thou, who hast the power for a while, dost bar the road."

"I know," said Eddo, nodding his head and looking at his companion. "We all know, do we not, Hana? we who have heard certain beatings of drums in the night, and studied dew drops beneath the trees at dawn. Thou wouldst send her to meet another traveller."

"Yes, and if thou art wise thou wilt let her go."

"Why should I let her go," asked the priest passionately, "and with her all my greatness? She must reign here after thee, for at her feet thy Tree fell, and it is the will of the people, who weary of dwarf queens and desire one that is tall and beautiful and white. Moreover, when my blood has been poured into her, her wisdom will be great, greater than thine or that of any Mother that went before thee, for she is '*Wensi*' the Virgin, and her soul is purer than them all. I will not let her go. If she leaves this Holy Place where none may do her harm, she shall die, and then her Spirit may go to seek that other traveller."

"Thou art mad, Eddo, mad and blind with pride and folly. Let her be, and choose another Mother. Now, there is Noie."

"Thy great-niece, Nya, who thinks as thou thinkest, and hates those whom thou hatest. Nay, I will have none of that half-breed. Yonder white Inkosazana shall be our queen and no other."

"Then, Eddo," whispered Nya, leaning forward and looking into his eyes, "she shall be the last Mother of this people. Fool, there are those who fight for her against whom thou canst not prevail. Thou knowest them not, but I know them, and I tell thee that they make ready thy doom. Have thy way, Eddo; it was not for her that I pleaded with thee, but for the sake of the ancient People of the Ghosts, whose fate draws nigh to them. Fool, have thy way, spin thy web, and be caught in it thyself. I tell thee, Eddo, that thy death shall be redder than any thou hast ever dreamed, nor shall it fall on thee alone. Begone now, and trouble me no more till in another place all that is left of thee shall creep to my feet, praying me for a pardon thou shalt not find. Begone, for the last leaf withers on my Tree and to-morrow I pass within the Fence. Say to the people that their Mother against whom they rebelled is dead, and that she bids them prepare to meet the evil which, alive, she warded from their heads."

Now Eddo strove to answer, but could not, for there was something in the flaming eyes of Nya which frightened him. He looked at Hana, and Hana looked back at him, then taking each other's hand they slunk away towards the wall, staggering blindly through the sunshine towards the shade.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DREAM IN THE NORTH

Richard Darrien remembered drinking a bowl of milk in the hut in which he was imprisoned at Mafooti, and instantly feeling a cold chill run to his heart and brain, after which he remembered no more for many a day. At length, however, by slow degrees, and with sundry slips back into unconsciousness, life and some share of his reason and memory returned to him. He awoke to find himself lying in a hut roughly fashioned of branches, and attended by a Kaffir woman of middle age.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am named Mami," she answered.

"Mami, Mami! I know the name, and I know the voice. Say, were you one of the wives of Ibubesi, she who spoke with me through the fence?" and he strove to raise himself on his arm to look at her, but fell back from weakness.

"Yes, Inkoos, I was one of his wives."

"Was? Then where is Ibubesi now?"

"Dead, Inkoos. The fire has burned him up with his kraal Mafooti."

"With the kraal Mafooti! Where, then, is the Inkosazana? Answer, woman, and be swift," he cried in a hollow voice.

"Alas! Inkoos, alas! she is dead also, for she was in the kraal when the fire swept it, and was seen standing on the top of a hut where she had taken refuge, and after that she was seen no more."

"Then let me die and go to her," exclaimed Richard with a groan, as he fell back upon his bed, where he lay almost insensible for three more days.

Yet he did not die, for he was young and very strong, and Mami poured milk down his throat to keep the life in him. Indeed little by little something of his strength came back, so that at last he was able to think and talk with her again, and learned all the dreadful story.

He learned how the people of Mafooti, fearing the vengeance of Dingaan, had fled away from their kraal, carrying what they thought to be his body with them, lest it should remain in evidence against them, and taking all the cattle that they could gather. Every one of them had fled that could travel, only Ibubesi and a few sick, and certain folk who chanced to be outside the walls, remaining behind. It was from two of these, who escaped during the burning of the kraal by the Zulus, or by fire from the Heavens, they knew not which, that they had heard of the awful end of Ibubesi, and of his prisoner, the Inkosazana. As for themselves, they had travelled night and day, till they reached a certain secret and almost inaccessible place in the great Quathlamba Mountains, in which people had lived whom Chaka wiped out, and there hidden themselves. In this place they remained, hoping that Dingaan would not care to follow them so far, and purposing to make it their home, since here they found good mealie lands, and fortunately the most of their cattle remained alive. That was all the story, there was nothing more to tell.

A day or two later Richard was able to creep out of the hut and see the place. It was as Mami had said, very strong, a kind of tableland ringed round with precipices that could only be climbed through a single narrow nek, and overshadowed by the great Quathlamba range. The people, who were engaged in planting their corn, gathered round him, staring at him as though he were one risen from the dead, and greeted him with respectful words. He spoke to several of them, including the two men who had seen the burning of Mafooti, though from a little distance. But they could tell him no more than Mami had done, except that they were sure that the Inkosazana had perished in the flames, as had many of the Zulus, who broke into the town. Richard was sure of it also—who would not have been?—and crept back broken-hearted to his hut, he who had lost all, and longed that he might die.

But he did not die, he grew strong again, and when he was well and fit to travel, went to the headmen of the people, saying that now he desired to leave them and return to his own place in the Cape Colony. The headmen said No, he must not leave, for in their hearts they were sure that he would go, not to the Cape Colony, but to Zululand, there to discover all he could as to the death of the Inkosazana. So they told him that with them he must bide, for then if the Zulus tracked them out they would be able to produce him, who otherwise would be put to the spear, every man of them, as his murderers. The sin of Ibubesi who had been their chief, clung to them, and they knew well what Dingaan and Tamboosa had sworn should happen to those who harmed the white chief, Dario, who was under the mantle of their Inkosazana.

Richard reasoned with them, but it was of no use, they would not let him go. Therefore in the end he appeared to fall in with their humour, and meanwhile began to plan escape. One dark night he tried it indeed, only to be seized in the mouth of the nek, and brought back to his hut. Next morning the headman spoke with him, telling him that he should only depart thence over their dead bodies, and that they watched him night and day; that the nek, moreover, was always guarded. Then they made an offer to him. He was a white man, they said, and cleverer than they were; let them come under his wing, let him be their chief, for he would know how to protect them from the Zulus and any other enemies. He could take over the wives of Ibubesi (at this proposition Richard shuddered), and they would obey him in all things, only he must not attempt to leave them—which he should never do alive.

Richard put the proposal by, but in the end, not because he wished it, but by the mere weight of his white man's blood, and for the lack of anything else to do, drifted into some such position. Only at the wives of Ibubesi, or any other wives, he would not so much as look, a slight that gave offence to those women, but made the others laugh.

So, for certain long weeks he sat in that secret nook in the mountains as the chief of a little Kaffir tribe, occupying himself with the planting of crops, the building of walls and huts, the drilling of men and the settling of quarrels. All day he worked thus, but after the

day came the night when he did not work, and those nights he dreaded. For then the languor, not of body, but of mind, which the poison the old witch-doctress had given to Ishmael had left behind it, would overcome him, bringing with it black despair, and his grief would get a hold of him, torturing his heart. For of the memory of Rachel he could never be rid for a single hour, and his love for her grew deeper day by day. And she was dead! Oh, she was dead, leaving him living.

One night he dreamed of Rachel, dreamed that she was searching for him and calling him. It was a very vivid dream, but he woke up and it passed away as such dreams do. Only all the day that followed he felt a strange throbbing in his head, and found himself turning ever towards the north. The next night he dreamed again of her, and heard her say, "The search has been far and long, but I have found you, Richard. Open your eyes now, and you will see my face." So he opened his eyes, and there, sure enough, in the darkness he perceived the outline of her sweet, remembered face, about which fell her golden hair. For one moment only he perceived it, then it was gone, and after that her presence never seemed to leave him. He could not see her, he could not touch her, and yet she was ever at his side. His brain ached with the thought of her, her breath seemed to fan his hands and hair. At night her face floated before him, and in his dreams her voice called him, saying: "*Come to me, come to me, Richard. I am in need of you. Come to me. I myself will be your guide.*"

Then he would wake, and remembering that she was dead, grew sure and ever surer that the Spirit of Rachel was calling him down to death. It called him from the north, always from the north. Soon he could scarcely walk southwards, or east or west, for ere he had gone many yards his feet turned and set his face towards the north, that was to the narrow nek between the precipices which the Kaffirs guarded night and day.

One evening he went to his hut to sleep, if sleep would come to him. It came, and with it that face and voice, but the face seemed paler, and the voice more insistent.

"Will you not listen to me," it said, "you who were my love? For how long must I plead with you? Soon my power will leave me, the opportunity will be passed, and then how will you find me, Richard, my lover? Rise up, rise up and follow ere it be too late, for I myself will be your guide."

He awoke. He could bear it no more. Perhaps he was mad, and these were visions of his madness, mocking visions that led him to his death. Well, if so, he still would follow them. Perhaps her body was buried in the north. If so, he would be buried there also; perhaps her Soul dwelt in the north. If so, his soul would fly thither to join it. The Kaffirs would kill him in the pass. Well, if so, he would die with his face set northwards whither Rachel drew him.

He rose up and wrapped himself in a cloak of goatskins. He filled a hide bag with sun-dried flesh and parched corn, and hung it about his shoulders with a gourd of water, for after all he might live a little while and need food and drink. As he had no gun he took a staff and a knife and a broad-bladed spear, and leaving the hut, set his face northward and walked towards the mouth of the nek. At the first step which he took the torment in his head seemed to leave him, who fought no longer, who had seemed obedient to that mysterious summons. Quietness and confidence possessed him. He was going to his end, but what did it matter? The dream beckoned and he must follow. The moon shone bright, but he took no trouble to hide himself, it did not seem to be worth while.

Now he was in the nek and drawing near to the place where the guard was stationed, still he marched on, boldly, openly. As he thought, they were on the alert. They drew out from behind the rocks and barred his path.

"Whither goest thou, lord Dario?" asked their captain. "Thou knowest that here thou mayest not pass."

"I follow a Ghost to the north," he answered, "and living or dead, I pass."

"Ow!" said the captain. "He says that he follows a Ghost. Well, we have nothing to do with ghosts. Take him, unharmed if possible, but take him."

So, urged thereto by their own fears, since for their safety's sake they dared not let him go, the men sprang towards him. They sprang towards him where he stood waiting the end, for give back he would not, and of a sudden fell down upon their faces, hiding their heads among the stones. Richard did not know what had happened to them that they behaved thus strangely, nor did he care. Only seeing them fallen he walked on over them, and pursued his way along the nek and down it to the plains beyond.

All that night he walked, looking behind him from time to time to see if any followed, but none came. He was alone, quite alone, save for the dream that led him towards the north. At sunrise he rested and slept a while, then, awaking after midday, went on his road. He did not know the road, yet never was he in doubt for a moment. It was always clear to him whither he should go. That night he finished his food and again slept a while, going forward at the dawn. In the morning he met some Kaffirs, who questioned him, but he answered only that he was following a Dream to the north. They stared at him, seemed to grow frightened and ran away. But presently some of them came back and placed food in his path, which he took and left them.

He came to the kraal Mafooti. It was utterly deserted, and he wandered amidst its ashes. Here and there he found the bones of those who had perished in the fire, and turned them over with his staff wondering whether any of them had belonged to Rachel. In that place he slept a night thinking that perhaps his journey was ended, and that here he would die where he believed Rachel had died. But when he waked at the dawn, it was to find that something within him still drew him towards the north, more strongly indeed than ever before.

So he left what had been the town Mafooti. Walking along the edge of the cleft into which Ishmael had leapt on fire, he climbed the walls built with so much toil to keep out the Zulus, and at last came to the river which Rachel had swum. It was low now, and wading it he entered Zululand. Here the natives seemed to know of his approach, for they gathered in numbers watching him, and put food in his path. But they would not speak to him, and when he addressed them saying that he followed a Dream and asking if they had seen the Dream, they cried out that he was *tagali*, bewitched, and fled away.

He continued his journey, finding each night a hut prepared for him to sleep in, and food for him to eat, till at length one evening he reached the Great Place, Umgugundhlovu. Through its streets he marched with a set face, while thousands stared at him in silence. Then a captain pointed out a hut to him, and into it he entered, ate and slept. At dawn he rose, for he knew that here he must not tarry; the spirit face of Rachel still hung before him, the spirit voice still whispered—"Forward, forward to the north. I myself will be your guide." In his path sat the King and his Councillors, and around them a regiment of men. He walked through them unheeding, till at length, when he was in front of the King, they barred his road, and he halted.

"Who art thou and what is thy business?" asked an old Councillor with a withered hand.

"I am Richard Darrien," he answered, "and here I have no business. I journey to the north. Stay me not."

"We know thee," said the Councillor, "thou art the lord Dario that didst dwell in the shadow of the Inkosazana. Thou art the white chief whom the wild beast, Ibubesi, slew at the kraal Mafooti. Why does thy ghost come hither to trouble us?"

"Living or dead, ghost or man, I travel to the north. Stay me not," he answered.

"What seekest thou in the north, thou lord Dario?"

"I seek a Dream; a Spirit leads me to find a Dream. Seest thou it not, Man with the withered hand?"

"Ah!" they repeated, "he seeks a Dream. A Spirit leads him to find a Dream in the north."

"What is this Dream like?" asked Mopo of the withered hand.

"Come, stand at my side and look. There, dost thou see it floating in the air before us, thou who hast eyes that can read a Dream?"

Mopo came and looked, then his knees trembled a little and he said:

"Aye, lord Dario, I see and I know that face."

"Thou knowest the face, old fool," broke in Dingaana angrily. "Then whose is it?"

"O King," answered Mopo, dropping his eyes, "it is not lawful to speak the name, but the face is the face of one who sat where that wanderer stands, and showed thee certain pictures in a bowl of water."

Now Dingaana trembled, for the memory of those visions haunted him night and day; moreover he thought at times that they drew near to their fulfilment.

"The white man is mad," he said, "and thou, Mopo, art mad also. I have often thought it, and that it would be well if thou wentest on a long journey—for thy health. This Dario shall stay here a while. I will not suffer him to wander through my land crazing the people with his tales of dreams and visions. Take him and hold him; the Circle of the Doctors shall inquire into the matter."

So Dingaana spoke, who in his heart was afraid lest this wild-eyed Dario should learn that he had given the Inkosazana to the dwarf folk when she was mad, to appease them after they had prophesied evil to him. Also he remembered that it was because of the murders done by Ibubesi that the Inkosazana had gone mad, and did not understand if Dario had been killed at the kraal Mafooti how it could be that he now stood before him. Therefore he thought that he would keep him a prisoner until he found out all the truth of the matter, and whether he were still a man or a ghost or a wizard clothed in the shape of the dead.

At the bidding of the King, guards sprang forward to seize Richard, but the old Councillor, Mopo, shrunk away behind him hiding his eyes with his withered hand. They sprang forward, and yet they laid no finger on him, but fell off to right and left, saying:

"Kill us, if thou wilt, Black One, we cannot!"

"The wizard has bewitched them," said Dingaana angrily. "Here, you Doctors, you whose trade it is to catch wizards, take this white fellow and bind him."

Unwillingly enough the Doctors, of whom there were eight or ten sitting apart, rose to do the King's bidding. They came on towards Richard, some of them singing songs, and some muttering charms, and as they came he laughed and said:

"Beware! you *Abangoma*, the Dream is looking at you very angrily." Then they too broke away to right and left, crying out that this was a wizard against whom they had no power.

Now Dingaana grew mad with wrath, and shouted to his soldiers to seize the white man, and if he resisted them to kill him with their sticks, for of witchcraft they had known enough in Zululand of late.

So thick as bees the regiment formed up in front of him, shouting and waving their kerries, for here in the King's Place they bore no spears.

"Make way there," said Richard, "I can stay no longer, I must to the north."

The soldiers did not stir, only a captain stepped out bidding him give up his spear and yield himself, or be killed. Richard walked forward and at a sign from the captain, men sprang at him, lifting their kerries, to dash out his brains. Then suddenly in front of Richard there appeared something faint and white, something that walked before him. The soldiers saw it, and the kerries fell from their hands. The regiment behind saw it, and turning, burst away like a scared herd of cattle. They did not wait to seek the gates, they burst through the fence of the enclosure, and were gone, leaving it flat behind them. The King and his Councillors saw it also, and more clearly than the rest.

"*The Inkosazana!*" they cried. "It is the Inkosazana who walks before him that she loved!" and they fell upon their faces. Only Dingaana remained seated on his stool.

"Go," he said hoarsely to Richard, "go, thou wizard, north or south or east or west, if only thou wilt take that Spirit with thee, for she bodes evil to my land."

So Richard, who had seen nothing, marched away from the kraal Umgugundhlovu, and once more set his face towards the north, the north that drew him as it draws the needle of a compass.

The road that Rachel and the dwarfs had travelled he travelled also. Although from day to day he knew not where his feet would lead him, still he travelled it step by step. Nor did any hurt come to him. In the country where men dwelt, being forewarned of his coming by messengers, they brought him food and guarded him, and when he passed out into the wilderness some other power guarded him. He had no fear at all. At night he would lie down without a fire, and the lions would roar about him, but they never harmed him. He would plunge into a swamp or a river and always pass it safely. When water failed he would find it without search; when there was no food, it would seem to be brought to him. Once an eagle dropped a bustard at his feet. Once he found a buck fresh slain by leopards. Once when he was very hungry he saw that he had laid down to sleep by a nest of ostrich eggs, and this food he cooked, making fire after the native fashion with sharp sticks, as he knew how to do.

At length all the swamps were passed and in the third week of his journeyings he reached the sloping uplands, on the edge of which he awoke one morning to find himself surrounded by a circle of great men, giants, who stood staring at him. He arose, thinking that at last his hour had come, as it seemed to him that they were about to kill him. But instead of killing him these huge men saluted him humbly, and offered him food upon their knees, and new hide shoes for his feet—for his own were worn out—and cloaks and garments of skin, which things he accepted thankfully, for by now he was almost naked. Then they brought a litter and wished him to enter it, but this he refused. Heeding them no more, as soon as he had eaten and filled his bag and water-bottle, he started on towards the north. Indeed, he could not have stayed if he had wished; his brain seemed to be full of one thought only, to travel till he reached his journey's end, whatever it might be, and before his eyes he saw one thing only, the spirit face of Rachel, that led him on towards

that end. Sometimes it was there for hours, then for hours again it would be absent. When it was present he looked at it; when it was gone he dreamed of it, for him it was the same. But one thing was ever with him, that magnet in his heart which drew his feet towards the north, and from step to step showed him the road that he should travel.

A number of the giant men accompanied him. He noticed it, but took no heed. So long as they did not attempt to stay or turn him he was indifferent whether they came or went away. As a result he travelled in much more comfort, since now everything was made easy and ready for him. Thus he was fed with the best that the land provided, and at night shelters were built for him to sleep in. He discovered that a captain of the giants could understand a few words of some native language which he knew, and asked him why they helped him. The captain replied by order of "Mother of Trees." Who or what "Mother of Trees" might be Richard was unable to discover, so he gave up his attempts at talk and walked on.

They traversed the fertile uplands and reached the edge of the fearful desert. It did not frighten him; he plunged into it as he would have plunged into a sea, or a lake of fire, had it lain in his way. He was like a bird whose instinct at the approach of summer or of winter leads it without doubt or error to some far spot, beyond continents and oceans, some land that it has never seen, leads it in surety and peace to its appointed rest. A guard of the giant men came with him into the desert, also carriers who bore skins of water. In that burning heat the journey was dreadful, yet Richard accomplished it, wearing down all his escort, until at its further lip but one man was left. There even he sank exhausted and began to beat upon a little drum that he carried, which drum had been passed on to him by those who were left behind. But Richard was not exhausted. His strength seemed to be greater than it had ever been before, or that which drew him forward had acquired more power. He wondered vaguely why a man should choose such a place and time to play upon a drum, and went on alone.

Before him, some miles away, he saw a forest of towering trees that stretched further than his eye could reach. As he approached that forest heading for a certain tall tree, why he knew not, the sunset dyed it red as though it had been on fire, and he thought that he discerned little shapes flitting to and fro amidst the boles of trees. Then he entered the forest, whereof the boughs arched above him like the endless roof of a cathedral borne upon innumerable pillars. There was deep gloom that grew presently to darkness wherein here and there glow-worms shone faintly like tapers dying before an altar, and winds sighed like echoes of evening prayers. He could see to walk no longer, sudden weariness overcame him, so according to his custom he laid himself down to sleep at the bole of a great tree.

A while had passed, he never knew how long, when Richard was awakened from deep slumber by feeling many hands fiercely at work upon him. These hands were small like those of children; this he could tell from the touch of them, although the darkness was so dense that he was able to see nothing. Two of them gripped him by the throat so as to prevent him from crying out; others passed cords about his wrists, ankles and middle until he could not stir a single limb. Then he was dragged back a few paces and lashed to the bole of a tree, as he guessed, that under which he had been sleeping. The hands let go of him, and his throat being free he called out for help. But those vast forest aisles seemed to swallow up his voice. It fell back on him from the canopy of huge boughs above, it was lost in the immense silence. Only from close at hand he heard little peals of thin and mocking laughter. So he too grew silent, for who was there to help him here? He struggled to loose himself, for the impalpable power which had guided him so far was now at work within him more strongly than ever before. It called to him to come, it drew him onward, it whispered to him that the goal was near. But the more he writhed and twisted the deeper did the cruel cords or creepers cut into his flesh. Yet he fought on till, utterly exhausted, his head fell forward, and he swooned away.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE END AND THE BEGINNING

On the day following that when she had summoned Eddo to speak with her, Nya sat at the mouth of the cave. It was late afternoon, and already the shadows gathered so quickly that save for her white hair, her little childlike shape, withered now almost to a skeleton, was scarcely visible against the black rock. Walking to and fro in her aimless fashion, as she would do for hours at a time, Rachel accompanied by Noie passed and repassed her, till at length the old woman lifted her head and listened to something which was quite inaudible to their ears. Then she beckoned to Noie, who led Rachel to her.

"Maiden beloved," she said in a feeble voice, after they had sat down in front of her, "my hour has come. I have sent for thee to bid thee farewell till we meet again in a country where thou hast travelled for a little while. Before the sun sets I pass within the Fence."

At this tidings Rachel began to weep, for she had learned to love this old dwarf-woman who had been so kind to her in her misery, and she was now so weak that she could not restrain her fears.

"Mother," she said, "for thee it is joy to go. I know it, and therefore cannot wish that thou shouldst stay. Yet what shall I do when thou hast left me alone amidst all these cruel folk? Tell me, what shall I do?"

"Perchance thou wilt seek another helper, Maiden, and perchance thou shall find another to guard and comfort thee. Follow thy heart, obey thy heart, and remember the last words of Nya—that no harm shall come to thee. Nay—if I know it, I may tell thee no more, thou who couldst not hear what the drums said to me but now. Farewell," and turning round she made a sign to certain dwarf-mutes who were gathered behind her as though they awaited her commands.

"Hast thou no last word for me, Mother?" asked Noie.

"Aye, Child," she answered. "Thy heart is very bold, and thou also must follow it. Though thy sin should be great, perchance thy greater love may pay its price. At least thou art but an arrow set upon the string, and that which must be, will be. I think that we shall meet again ere long. Come hither and kneel at my side."

Noie obeyed, and for a little space Nya whispered in her ear, while as she listened Rachel saw strange lights shining in Noie's eyes, lights of terror and of pride, lights of hope and of despair.

"What did she say to you, Noie?" asked Rachel presently.

"I may not tell, Zoola," she answered. "Question me no more."

Now the mutes brought forward a slight litter woven of boughs on which the withered leaves still hung, boughs from Nya's fallen tree. In this litter they placed her, for she could no longer walk, and lifted it on to their shoulders. For one moment she bade them halt, and calling Rachel and Noie to her, kissed them upon the brow, holding up her thin child-like hands over them in blessing. Then followed by them both, the bearers went forward with their burden, taking the road that ran up the hill towards the sacred tree. As the sun set they passed within the Fence, and laying down the litter without a word by the bole of the tree, turned and departed.

The darkness fell, and through it Rachel and Noie heard Nya singing for a little while. The song ceased, and they descended the hill to the cave, for there they feared to stay lest the Tree should draw them also. They ate a little food whilst the two women mutes who had sat on each side of Nya when she showed her magic, stared, now at them, and now into the bowls of dew that were set before them, wherein they seemed to find something that interested them much. Noie prayed Rachel to sleep, and she tried to do so, and could not. For hour after hour she tossed and turned, and at length sat up, saying to Noie:

"I have fought against it, and I can stay here no longer. Noie, I am being drawn from this place out into the forest, and I must go."

"What draws thee, Sister?" asked Noie. "Is it Eddo?"

"No, I think not, nothing to do with Eddo. Oh! Noie, Noie, it is the spirit of Richard Darrien. He is dead, but for days and weeks his spirit has been with my spirit, and now it draws me into the forest to die and find him."

"Then that is an evil journey thou wouldst take, Zoola?"

"Not so, Noie, it is the best and happiest of journeys. The thought of it fills me with joy. What said Nya? Follow thy heart. So I follow it. Noie, farewell, for I must go away."

"Nay," answered Noie, "if thou goest I go, who also was bidden to follow my heart that is sister to thy heart."

Rachel reasoned with her, but she would not listen. The end of it was that the two of them rose and threw on their cloaks; also Rachel took the great Umkulu spear which she had used as a staff on her journey from the desert to the forest. All this while the dwarf-women watched her, but did nothing, only watched.

They left the cave and walked to the mouth of the zig-zag slit in the great wall which was open.

"Perhaps the mutes will kill us in the heart of the wall," said Noie.

"If so the end will be soon and swift," answered Rachel.

Now they were in the cleft, following its slopes and windings. Above them they could hear the movements of the guardians of the wall who sat amongst the rough stones, but these did not try to stop them; indeed once or twice when they did not know which way to turn in the darkness, little hands took hold of Rachel's cloak and guided her. So they passed through the wall in safety. Outside of it Rachel paused a moment, looking this way and that. Then of a sudden she turned and walked swiftly towards the south.

It was dark, densely dark in the forest, yet she never seemed to lose her path. Holding Noie by the hand she wound in and out between the tree-trunks without stumbling or even striking her foot against a root. For an hour or more they walked on this, the

strangest of strange journeys, till at length Rachel whispered:

"Something tells me to stay here," and she leaned against a tree and stayed, while Noie, who was tired, sat down between the jutting roots of the tree.

It was a dead tree, and the top of it had been torn off in some hurricane so that they could see the sky above them, and by the grey hue of it knew that it was drawing near to dawn.

The sun rose, and its arrows, that even at midday could never pass the canopy of foliage, shot straight and vivid between the tall bare trunks. Oh! Rachel knew the place. It was that place which she had dreamed of as a child in the island of the flooded river. Just so had the light of the rising sun fallen on the boles of the great trees, and on her white cloak and out-spread hair, fallen on her and on another. She strained her eyes into the gloom. Now those rays pierced it also, and now by them she saw the yellow-bearded, half-naked man of that long-dead dream leaning against the tree. His eyes were shut, without doubt he was dead, this was but a vision of him who had drawn her hither to share his death. It was the spirit of Richard Darrien!

She drew a little nearer, and the eyes opened, gazing at her. Also from that form of his was cast a long shadow—there it lay upon the dead leaves. How came it, she wondered, that a spirit could throw a shadow, and why was a spirit bound to a tree, as now she perceived he was? He saw her, and in those grey eyes of his there came a wonderful look. He spoke.

"You have drawn me from far, Rachel, but I have never seen all of you before, only your face floating in the air before me, although others saw you. Now I see you also, so I suppose that my time has come. It will soon be over. Wait a little there, where I can look at you, and presently we shall be together again. I am glad."

Rachel could not speak. A lump rose in her throat and choked her. Betwixt fear and hope her heart stood still. Only with the spear in her hand she pointed at her own shadow thrown by the level rays of the rising sun. He looked, and notwithstanding the straitness of his bonds she saw him start.

"If you are a ghost why have you a shadow?" he asked hoarsely. "And if you are not a ghost, how did you come into this haunted place?"

Still Rachel did not seem to be able to speak. Only she glided up to him and kissed him on the lips. Now at length he understood—they both understood that they were still living creatures beneath the sky, not the denizens of some dim world which lies beyond.

"Free me," he said in a faint voice, for his brain reeled. "I was bound here in my sleep. They will be back presently."

Her intelligence awoke. With a few swift cuts of the spear she held Rachel severed his bonds, then picked up his own assegai that lay at his feet she thrust it into his numbed hand. As he took it the forest about them seemed to become alive, and from behind the boles of the trees around appeared a number of dwarfs who ran towards them, headed by Eddo. Noie sprang forward also, and stood at their side. Rachel turned on Eddo swiftly as a startled deer. She seemed to tower over him, the spear in her hand.

"What does this mean, Priest?" she asked.

"Inkosazana," he answered humbly, "it means that I have found a way to tempt thee from within the Wall where none might break thy sanctuary. Thou drewest this man to thee from far with the strength that old Nya gave thee. We knew it all, we saw it all, and we waited. Day by day in our bowls of dew we watched him coming nearer to thee. We heard the messages of Nya on the drums, bidding the Umkulu meet and escort him; we heard the last answering message from the borders of the desert, telling her that he was nigh. Then while he followed his magic path through the darkness of the forest we seized and bound him, knowing well that if he could not come to thee, thou wouldst come to him. And thou hast come."

"I understand. What now, Eddo?"

"This, Inkosazana: Thou hast been named Mother of the Trees by the people of the Dwarfs; be pleased to come with us that we may instal thee in thy great office."

"This lord here," said Rachel, "is my promised husband. What of him?"

Eddo bowed and smiled, a fearful smile, and answered:

"The Mother of the Trees has no husband. Wisdom is her husband. He has served his purpose, which was to draw thee from within the Wall, and for this reason only we permitted him to enter the holy forest living. Now he bides here to die, and since he has won thy love we will honour him with the White Death. Bind him to the tree again."

In an instant the spear that Rachel held was at Eddo's throat.

"Dwarf," she cried, "this is my man, and I am no Mother of Trees and no pale ghost, but a living woman. Let but one of these monkeys of thine lay a hand upon him, and thou diest, by the Red Death, Eddo, aye, by the Red Death. Stir a single inch, and this spear goes through thy heart, and thy spirit shall be spilled with thy blood."

The little priest sank to his knees trembling, glancing about him for a means of escape.

"If thou killest me, thou diest also," he hissed.

"What do I care if I die?" she answered. "If my man dies, I wish to die," then added in English: "Richard, take hold of him by one arm, and Noie, take the other. If he tries to escape kill him at once, or if you are afraid, I will."

So they seized him by his arms.

"Now," said Rachel, "let us go back to the Sanctuary, for there they dare not touch us. We cannot try the desert without water; also they would follow and kill us with their poisoned arrows. Tell them, Noie, that if they do not attempt to harm us, we will set this priest of theirs free within the Wall. But if a hand is lifted against us, then he dies at once—by the Red Death."

"Touch them not, touch them not," piped Eddo, "lest my ghost should be spilt with my blood. Touch them not, I command you."

The company of dwarfs chattered together like parrots at the dawn, and the march began. First went Eddo, dragged along between Richard and Noie, and after them, the raised spear in her hand, followed Rachel, while on either side, hiding themselves behind the boles of the trees, scrambled the people of the dwarfs. Back they went thus through the forest, Rachel telling them the road till at length the huge grey wall loomed up before them. They came to the slit in it, and Noie asked:

"What shall we do now? Kill this priest, take him in with us as a hostage, or let him go?"

"I said that he should be set free," answered Rachel, "and he would do us more harm dead than living; also his blood would be on our hands. Take him through the Wall, and loose him there."

So once more they passed the slopes and passages, while the mutes above watched them from their stones with marvelling eyes, till they reached the open space beyond, and there they loosed Eddo. The priest sprang back out of reach of the dreaded spears, and in a voice thick with rage, cried to them:

"Fools! You should have killed me while you could, for now you are in a trap, not I. You are strong and great, but you cannot live without food. We may not enter here to hurt you, but you shall starve, you shall starve until you creep out and beg my mercy."

Then making signs to the dwarfs who sat about above, he vanished between the stones.

"You should have killed him, Zoola," said Noie, "for now he will live to kill us."

"I think not, Sister," answered Rachel. "Nya said that I should follow my heart, and my heart bid me let him go. Our hands are clean of his blood, but if he had died, who can tell? Blood is a bad seed to sow."

Then, forgetting Eddo, she turned to Richard and began to ply him with questions.

But he seemed to be dazed and could answer little. It was as though some unnatural, supporting strength had been withdrawn, and now all the fatigues of his fearful journey were taking effect upon him. He could scarcely stand, but reeled to and fro like a man in drink, so that the two women were obliged to support him across the burial ground towards the cave. Advancing thus they entered into the shadow of the Holy Tree, and there at the edge of it met another procession descending from the mound. Eight mutes bore a litter of boughs, and on it lay Nya, dead, her long white hair hanging down on either side of the litter. With bowed heads they stood aside to let her pass to the grave made ready for her in a place of honour near the Wall where for a thousand years only the Mothers of the Trees had been laid to rest.

Then they went on, and entered the cave where the lamps burned before the great stalactite and the heap of offerings that were piled about it. Here sat the two women priests gazing into their bowls as they had left them. The death of Nya had not moved them, the advent of this white man did not seem to move them. Perhaps they expected him; at any rate food was made ready, and a bed of rugs prepared on which he could lie.

Richard ate some of the food, staring at Rachel all the while with vacant eyes as though she were still but a vision, the figment of a dream. Then he muttered something about being very tired, and sinking back upon the rugs fell into a deep sleep.

In that sleep he remained scarcely stirring for full four-and-twenty hours, while Rachel watched by his side, till at length her weariness overcame her, and she slept also. When she opened her eyes again they saw no other light than that which crept in from the mouth of the cave. The lamps which always burned there were out. Noie, who was seated near by, heard her stir, and spoke.

"If thou art rested, Zoola," she said, "I think that we had better carry the white lord from this place, for the two witch-women have gone, and I can find no more oil to fill the lamps."

So they felt their way to Richard, purposing to lift him between them, but at Rachel's touch he awoke, and with their help walked out of the cave. In the open space beyond they saw a strange sight, for across it were streaming all the dwarf-mutes carrying their aged and sick and infants, and bearing on their backs or piled up in litters their mats and cooking utensils. Evidently they were deserting the Sanctuary.

"Why are they going?" asked Rachel.

"I do not know," answered Noie, "but I think it is because no food has been brought to them as usual, and they are hungry. You remember that Eddo said we should starve. Only fear of death by hunger would make them leave a place where they and their forefathers have lived for generations."

Presently they were all gone. Not a living creature was left within the Wall except these three, nor were any more dwarfs brought in to die beneath the Holy Tree. Now, at length Richard seemed to awake, and taking Rachel by the hand began to ask questions of her in a low stammering voice, since words did not seem to come readily to him who had not spoken his own language for so long.

"Before you begin to talk, Sister," broke in Noie, "let us go and see if we can close the cleft in the Wall, for otherwise how shall we sleep in peace? Eddo and the dwarfs might creep in by night and murder us."

"I do not think they dare shed blood in their Holy Place," answered Rachel. "Still, let us see what we can do; it may be best."

So they went to the cleft, and as the stone door was open and they could not shut it, at one very narrow spot they rolled down rocks from the loose sides of the ancient wall above in such a fashion that it would be difficult to pass through or over them from without. This hard task took them many hours, moreover, it was labour wasted, since, as Rachel had thought probable, the dwarfs never tried to pass the Wall, but waited till hunger forced them to surrender.

Towards evening they returned to the cave and collected what food they could find. It was but little, enough for two spare meals, no more; nor could they discover any in the town of the dwarfs behind the Tree. Only of water they had plenty from the stream that ran out of the cave.

They ate a few mouthfuls, then took their mats and cloaks and went to camp by the opening in the wall, so that they might guard against surprise. Now for the first time they found leisure to talk, and Rachel and Richard told each other a little of their wonderful stories. But they did not tell them all, for their minds seemed to be bewildered, and there was much that they were not able to explain. It was enough for them to know that they had been brought together again thus marvellously, by what power they knew not, and that still living, they who for long weeks had deemed the other dead, were able to hold each other's hands and gaze into each other's eyes. Moreover, now that this had been brought about they were tired, so tired that they could scarcely speak above a whisper. The end of it was that they fell asleep, all of them, and so slept till morning, when they awoke somewhat refreshed, and ate what remained of the food.

The second day was like the first, only hotter and more sultry. Noie climbed to the top of the wall to watch, while Richard and Rachel wandered about among the little, anthep-like graves, and through the dwarf village, talking and wondering, happy even in their wretchedness. But before the day was gone hunger began to get a hold of them; also the terrible, stifling heat oppressed them so that their words seemed to die between their lips, and they could only sit against the wall, looking at one another.

Towards evening Noie descended from the Wall and reported that large numbers of the dwarfs were keeping watch without, flitting to and fro between the trunks of the trees like shadows. The stifling night went by, and another day dawned. Having no food they went to the stream and drank water. Then they sat down in the shadow and waited through the long hot hours. Towards evening, when it grew a little cooler, they gathered up their strength and tried to find some way of escape before it was too late. Richard suggested that as flight was impossible they should give themselves up to the dwarfs, but Rachel answered No, for then Eddo would certainly kill

him and Noie, and take her to fill the place of Mother of the Trees until she became useless to him, when she would be murdered also.

"Then there is nothing left for us but to die," said Richard.

"Nothing but to die," she answered, "to die together; and, dear, that should not be so hard, seeing that for so long we have thought each other dead apart."

"Yet it is hard," answered Richard, "after living through so much and being led so far to die at last and go whither we know not, before our time."

Rachel looked at Noie, who sat opposite to them, her head rested on her hand.

"Have you anything to say, Sister?" she asked.

"Yes, Zoola. Here is a little moss that I have found upon the stones," and she produced a small bundle. "Let us boil it and eat, it will keep us alive for another day."

"What is the use?" asked Rachel, "unless there is more."

"There is no more," said Noie, "for the leaves of yonder tree are deadly poison, and here grows no other living thing. Still, eat and live on, for I wait a message."

"A message from whom?" asked Rachel.

"A message from the dead, Sister. It was promised to me by Nya before she passed, and if it does not come, then it will be time to die."

So they made fire and boiled the moss till it was a horrible, sticky substance, which they swallowed as best they could, washing it down with gulps of water. Still it was food of a kind, and for a while stayed the gnawing, empty pains within them; only Noie ate but little, so that there might be more for the others.

That night was even hotter than those that had gone before, and during the day which followed the place became like a hell. They crept into the cave and lay there gasping, while from without came loud cracking sounds, caused, as they thought, by the trees of the forest splitting in the heat. About midday the sky suddenly became densely overcast, although no breath stirred; the air was thicker than ever, to breathe it was like breathing hot cream. In their restless despair they wandered out of the cave, and to their surprise saw a dwarf standing upon the top of the wall. It was Eddo, who called to them to come out and give themselves up.

"What are the terms?" asked Noie.

"That thou and the Wanderer shall die by the White Death, and that the Inkosazana shall be installed Mother of the Trees," was the answer.

"We refuse them," said Noie. "Let us go now and give us food and escort, and thou shall be spared. Refuse, and it is thou and thy people who will die by that Red Death which Nya promised thee."

"That we shall learn before to-morrow," said Eddo with a mocking laugh, and vanished down the wall.

As he went a hot gust of wind burst upon them, causing the forest without to rock and groan. Noie turned her face towards it and seemed to listen.

"What is it?" asked Rachel.

"I heard a voice in the wind, Sister," she answered. "The message I awaited has come to me."

"What message?" asked Richard listlessly.

"That I will tell you by and by, Chief," she answered. "Come to the cave, it is no longer safe here, the hurricane breaks."

So supporting each other they crept back to the cave, and there Noie made fire, feeding it with the idols and precious woods that had been brought thither as offerings. Richard and Rachel watched her wondering, for it seemed strange that she should make a fire in that heat where there was nothing to cook. Meanwhile gust succeeded gust, until a tempest of screaming wind swept over them, though no rain fell. Soon it was so fierce that the deep-rooted Tree of the Tribe rocked above them, and loose stones were blown from the crest of the great wall.

Then of a sudden Noie sprang up, and seized a flaming brand from the fire; it was the limb of a fetish, made of some resinous wood. She ran from the cave swiftly, before they could stop her, and vanished in the gathering gloom, to return again in a few moments weak and breathless. "Come out, now," she said, "and see a sight such as you shall never behold again," and there was something so strange in her voice that, notwithstanding their weakness, they rose and followed her.

Outside the cave they could not stand because of the might of the hurricane, but cast themselves upon the ground, and following Noie's outstretched arm, looked up towards the top of the mound. Then they saw that the Tree of the Tribe was *on fire*. Already its vast trunk and boughs were wrapped in flame, which burnt furiously because of the resin within them, while long flakes of blazing moss were being swept away to leeward, to fall among the forest that lay beyond the wall.

"Did you do this?" cried Rachel to Noie.

"Aye, Zoola, who else? That was the message which came to me. Now my office is fulfilled, but you two will live though I must die, I who have destroyed the People of the Dwarfs; I who was born that I should destroy them."

"Destroyed them!" exclaimed Rachel. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that when their Tree dies, they die, the whole race of them. Oh! Nya told me, Nya told me—they die as their Tree dies, by fire. To the Wall, to the Wall now, and look. Follow me."

Forgetting their hunger-bred weakness in the wild excitement of that moment, Rachel and Richard struggled hand in hand, after Noie's thin, ethereal form. Across the open space they struggled, through the furious buffetings of the gale, sometimes on their feet, sometimes on their hands and knees, till they came to the great wall where a stairway ran up it to an outlook tower. Up this stair they climbed slowly since at times the weight of the wind pinned them against the blocks of stone, till at length they reached its crest and crept into the shelter of the hollow tower. Hence, looking through the loopholes in the ancient masonry, they saw a fearful sight. The flakes of burning moss from the Tree of the Tribe had fallen among the tops of the forest, parched almost to tinder with drought and heat, and fired them here and there. Fanned by the screaming gale the flames spread rapidly, leaping from tree to tree, now in one

direction, now in another, as the hurricane veered, which it did continually, till the whole green forest became a sheet of fire, an ever-widening sheet which spread east and west and north and south for miles and miles and tens of miles.

Earth and sky were one blaze of light given out by the torch-like resinous trees as they burned from the top downwards. By that intense light the three watchers could see hundreds of the People of the Dwarfs flitting about between the trunks. Waving their arms and gibbering, they rushed this way and that, to the north to be met by fire, to the south to be met by fire, till at length the blazing boughs and boles fell upon them and they disappeared in showers of red sparks, or, more fortunate, fled away, never to return, before the flame that leapt after them. One company of them ran towards the Sanctuary; they could see them threading their path between the trees, and growing ever fewer as the burning branches fell among them from above. They leapt, they ran, they battled, springing this way and that, but ever the great flaring boughs crashed down among them, crushing them, shrivelling them up, till at length of all their number but a single man staggered into the open belt between the edge of the forest and the wall. His white hair and his garments seemed to be smouldering. He gripped at them with his hands, then coming to a little bush—it was the top of Nya's tree which she had thrust into the ground to grow there—dragged it up and began to beat himself with it as though to extinguish the flames. In an instant it took fire also, burning him horribly, so that with a yell he threw it to the ground, and ran on towards the wall. As he came they saw his face. It was that of Eddo.

At this moment, seized by some sudden weakness, Noie sank down upon the stones. Richard bent over her to lift her to her feet again, but she thrust him away, saying slowly and in gasps:

"Let me be, the doom has hold of me, I am dying. I passed within the Fence to fire the Tree, and its poison is at work within me, and the curse of all my people has fallen on my head. Yet I have saved thee, my sister, I have saved thee and thy lover, for the Dwarfs are no more, the Grey People are grey ashes. For my love's sake I did the sin; let my love atone the sin if it may, or at the least think kindly of me through the long, happy years that are to come, and at the end of them then seek for lost Noie in the World of Ghosts if she may be found there."

As she spoke they heard a sound of something scrambling among the stones, and at one of the four entrances of the turret there appeared a hideous, fire-twisted face, and a little form about which hung charred and smouldering strips of raiment. It was Eddo, who had climbed the wall and found them out. There he sat glowering at them, or rather at Noie, who was crouched upon the floor.

"Come hither, daughter of Seyapi," he screamed in his hissing, snake-like voice, "come hither, and see thy work, thou who hast made an end of the ancient People of the Ghosts. Come hither and tell me why thou didst this thing, for I would learn the truth before I die, that I may make report of it to the Fathers of our race."

Noie heard, and crept towards him; to Rachel and Richard it seemed as though she could not disobey that summons. Now they sat face to face outside the turret, clinging to the stones, and her long hair flowed outwards on the gale.

"I did it, Eddo," she said, "to save one whom I love, and him whom she loves. I did it to avenge the death of Nya upon you all, as she bade me to do. I did it because the cup of thy wickedness is full, and because I was appointed to bring thy doom upon thee. Thus ends the greatness thou hast plotted so many years to win, Eddo."

"Aye," he answered, "thus it ends, for the magic of the White One there has overcome me, and thus with it ends the reign of the Ghost Kings, and the forest wherein they reigned, and thus too, thou endest, traitress, who hast murdered them and whose soul shall be spilt with their souls."

As the words left his lips suddenly Eddo sprang upon Noie and gripped her about the middle. Richard and Rachel leapt forward, but before ever they could lay a hand upon her to save her, the dwarf in his rage and agony had dragged her to the edge of the wall. For a moment they struggled there in the vivid light of the flaming forest. Then Eddo screamed aloud, one wild savage shriek, and still holding Noie in his arms hurled himself from the wall, to fall crushed upon its foundation stones sixty feet beneath.

Thus perished Noie, who, for love's sake, gave her life to save Rachel, as once Rachel had saved her.

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It was morning, and after the tempest the sky was clear and cool, for heavy rain had fallen when the wind dropped, although far away the dense clouds of rolling smoke showed where the great fire still ate into the heart of the forest. Rachel and Richard, seated hand in hand in the little tower on the wall, looked at one another in that pure light, and saw signs in each other's face that could not be mistaken.

"What shall we do?" asked Richard. "Death is very near to us."

Rachel thought awhile, then answered:

"The dwarfs are gone, we have nothing more to fear from them. Yonder where the fire did not burn, dwell their slaves, whose villages are full of food, and beyond them live the Umkulu, who know and would befriend me. Let us go and seek food who desire to live on together, if we may."

So they climbed down the wall, and with difficulty, for they were very feeble, crawled over the stones which they had piled up in the passage to keep out the dwarfs, and thus passed to the open belt beyond. A strange scene met their eyes, all the wide lands that had been covered with giant trees were now piled over with white ashes amongst which, here and there, stood a black and smouldering trunk. The journey was terrible, but following a ridge of rock whereon no great trees had grown, hand in hand they passed through the outer edge of the burnt forest in safety, until they came to one of the towns of the slaves upon the fertile plain beyond, which led up to the desert. No human being could they see, since all had fled, but the kraal was full of sheep and cattle that had been penned there before the fire began, and in the huts were milk and food in plenty. They drank of the milk and, after a while, ate a little, then rested and drank more milk, till their strength began to return to them. Towards evening they went out of the town, and standing on a mound looked at the fire-wasted plain behind, and the green, grassy slopes in front.

They seemed quite alone in the world, those two, and yet their hearts were full of joy and thankfulness, for while they were left to each other they knew that they could never be alone.

"See, Rachel," said Richard, pointing to the smouldering wreck of the forest, "there lies our past, and here in front of us spreads the future clothed with flowers."

“Yes, Richard,” she answered, “but Noie and all whom I love save you are buried in that past, and in front of us the desert is not far away.”

“Life is ours, Rachel, and love is ours, and that which saved us through many a danger and brought me back to you, will surely keep us safe. Do you fear to pass the desert at my side?”

She looked at him with shining eyes, and answered:

“No, Richard, I fear no more, for now I seem to hear the voice of Noie speaking in my heart, telling me that trouble is behind us, and that we shall live out our lives together, as my mother foresaw that we should do.”

And there on the mound, standing between that dead sea of ashes and the green slopes of flowering plain, Rachel stretched out her arms to the man to whom she was decreed.

## BOOK VI MARIE EDITOR'S NOTE

The following extract explains how the manuscript of "Marie," and with it some others, one of which is named "Child of Storm," came into the hands of the Editor.

It is from a letter, dated January 17th, 1909, and written by Mr. George Curtis, the brother of Sir Henry Curtis, Bart., who, it will be remembered, was one of the late Mr. Allan Quatermain's friends and companions in adventure when he discovered King Solomon's Mines, and who afterwards disappeared with him in Central Africa.

This extract runs as follows:—

"You may recall that our mutual and dear friend, old Allan Quatermain, left me the sole executor of his will, which he signed before he set out with my brother Henry for Zuvendis, where he was killed. The Court, however, not being satisfied that there was any legal proof of his death, invested the capital funds in trustee securities, and by my advice let his place in Yorkshire to a tenant who has remained in occupation of it during the last two decades. Now that tenant is dead, and at the earnest prayer of the Charities which benefit under Quatermain's will, and of myself—for in my uncertain state of health I have for long been most anxious to wind up this executorship—about eight months ago the Court at last consented to the distribution of this large fund in accordance with the terms of the will.

"This, of course, involved the sale of the real property, and before it was put up to auction I went over the house in company of the solicitor appointed by the Court. On the top landing, in the room Quatermain used to occupy, we found a sealed cupboard that I opened. It proved to be full of various articles which evidently he had prized because of their associations with his early life. These I need not enumerate here, especially as I have reserved them as his residuary legatee and, in the event of my death, they will pass to you under my will.

"Among these relics, however, I found a stout box, made of some red foreign wood, that contained various documents and letters and a bundle of manuscripts. Under the tape which fastened these manuscripts together, as you will see, is a scrap of paper on which is written, in blue pencil, a direction signed 'Allan Quatermain,' that in the event of anything happening to him, these MSS. are to be sent to you (for whom, as you know, he had a high regard), and that at your sole discretion you are to burn or publish them as you may see fit.

"So, after all these years, as we both remain alive, I carry out our old friend's instructions and send you his bequest, which I trust may prove of interest and value. I have read the MS. called 'Marie,' and certainly am of the opinion that it ought to be published, for I think it a strange and moving tale of a great love—full, moreover, of forgotten history.

"That named 'Child of Storm' also seems very interesting as a study of savage life, and the others may be the same; but my eyes are troubling me so much that I have not been able to decipher them. I hope, however, that I may be spared long enough to see them in print.

"Poor old Allan Quatermain. It is as though he had suddenly reappeared from the dead! So at least I thought as I perused these stories of a period of his life of which I do not remember his speaking to me.

"And now my responsibility in this matter is finished and yours begins. Do what you like about the manuscripts."

"George Curtis."

As may be imagined, I, the Editor, was considerably astonished when I received this letter and the accompanying bundle of closely-written MSS. To me also it was as though my old friend had risen from the grave and once more stood before me, telling some history of his stormy and tragic past in that quiet, measured voice that I have never been able to forget.

The first manuscript I read was that entitled "Marie." It deals with Mr. Quatermain's strange experiences when as a very young man he accompanied the ill-fated Pieter Retief and the Boer Commission on an embassy to the Zulu despot, Dingaan. This, it will be remembered, ended in their massacre, Quatermain himself and his Hottentot servant Hans being the sole survivors of the slaughter. Also it deals with another matter more personal to himself, namely, his courtship of and marriage to his first wife, Marie Marais.

Of this Marie I never heard him speak, save once. I remember that on a certain occasion—it was that of a garden fête for a local charity—I was standing by Quatermain when someone introduced to him a young girl who was staying in the neighborhood and had distinguished herself by singing very prettily at the fête. Her surname I forget, but her Christian name was Marie. He started when he heard it, and asked if she were French. The young lady answered No, but only of French extraction through her grandmother, who also was called Marie.

"Indeed?" he said. "Once I knew a maiden not unlike you who was also of French extraction and called Marie. May you prove more fortunate in life than she was, though better or nobler you can never be," and he bowed to her in his simple, courtly fashion, then turned away. Afterwards, when we were alone, I asked him who was this Marie of whom he had spoken to the young lady. He paused a little, then answered:

“She was my first wife, but I beg you not to speak of her to me or to anyone else, for I cannot bear to hear her name. Perhaps you will learn all about her one day.” Then, to my grief and astonishment, he broke into something like a sob and abruptly left the room.

After reading the record of this Marie I can well understand why he was so moved. I print it practically as it left his hands.

There are other MSS. also, one of which, headed “Child of Storm,” relates the moving history of a beautiful and, I fear I must add, wicked Zulu girl named Mameena who did much evil in her day and went unrepentant from the world.

Another, amongst other things, tells the secret story of the causes of the defeat of Cetewayo and his armies by the English in 1879, which happened not long before Quatermain met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good.

These three narratives are, indeed, more or less connected with each other. At least, a certain aged dwarf, called Zikali, a witch-doctor and a terrible man, has to do with all of them, although in the first, “Marie,” he is only vaguely mentioned in connection with the massacre of Retief, whereof he was doubtless the primary instigator. As “Marie” comes first in chronological order, and was placed on the top of the pile by its author, I publish it first. With the others I hope to deal later on, as I may find time and opportunity.

But the future must take care of itself. We cannot control it, and its events are not in our hand. Meanwhile, I hope that those who in their youth have read of King Solomon’s Mines and Zuvendis, and perhaps some others who are younger, may find as much of interest in these new chapters of the autobiography of Allan Quatermain as I have done myself.

# CHAPTER I.

## ALLAN LEARNS FRENCH

Although in my old age I, Allan Quatermain, have taken to writing—after a fashion—never yet have I set down a single word of the tale of my first love and of the adventures that are grouped around her beautiful and tragic history. I suppose this is because it has always seemed to me too holy and far-off a matter—as holy and far-off as is that heaven which holds the splendid spirit of Marie Marais. But now, in my age, that which was far-off draws near again; and at night, in the depths between the stars, sometimes I seem to see the opening doors through which I must pass, and leaning earthwards across their threshold, with outstretched arms and dark and dewy eyes, a shadow long forgotten by all save me—the shadow of Marie Marais.

An old man's dream, doubtless, no more. Still, I will try to set down that history which ended in so great a sacrifice, and one so worthy of record, though I hope that no human eye will read it until I also am forgotten, or, at any rate, have grown dim in the gathering mists of oblivion. And I am glad that I have waited to make this attempt, for it seems to me that only of late have I come to understand and appreciate at its true value the character of her of whom I tell, and the passionate affection which was her bounteous offering to one so utterly unworthy as myself. What have I done, I wonder, that to me should have been decreed the love of two such women as Marie and that of Stella, also now long dead, to whom alone in the world I told all her tale? I remember I feared lest she should take it ill, but this was not so. Indeed, during our brief married days, she thought and talked much of Marie, and some of her last words to me were that she was going to seek her, and that they would wait for me together in the land of love, pure and immortal.

So with Stella's death all that side of life came to an end for me, since during the long years which stretch between then and now I have never said another tender word to woman. I admit, however, that once, long afterwards, a certain little witch of a Zulu did say tender words to me, and for an hour or so almost turned my head, an art in which she had great skill. This I say because I wish to be quite honest, although it—I mean my head, for there was no heart involved in the matter—came straight again at once. Her name was Mameena, and I have set down her remarkable story elsewhere.

To return. As I have already written in another book, I passed my youth with my old father, a Church of England clergyman, in what is now the Cradock district of the Cape Colony.

Then it was a wild place enough, with a very small white population. Among our few neighbours was a Boer farmer of the name of Henri Marais, who lived about fifteen miles from our station, on a fine farm called Maraisfontein. I say he was a Boer, but, as may be guessed from both his Christian and surname, his origin was Huguenot, his forefather, who was also named Henri Marais—though I think the Marais was spelt rather differently then—having been one of the first of that faith who emigrated to South Africa to escape the cruelties of Louis XIV. at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Unlike most Boers of similar descent, these particular Marais—for, of course, there are many other families so called—never forgot their origin. Indeed, from father to son, they kept up some knowledge of the French tongue, and among themselves often spoke it after a fashion. At any rate, it was the habit of Henri Marais, who was excessively religious, to read his chapter of the Bible (which it is, or was, the custom of the Boers to spell out every morning, should their learning allow them to do so), not in the *taal* or *patois* Dutch, but in good old French. I have the very book from which he used to read now, for, curiously enough, in after years, when all these events had long been gathered to the past, I chanced to buy it among a parcel of other works at the weekly auction of odds and ends on the market square of Maritzburg. I remember that when I opened the great tome, bound over the original leather boards in buckskin, and discovered to whom it had belonged, I burst into tears. There was no doubt about it, for, as was customary in old days, this Bible had sundry fly-leaves sewn up with it for the purpose of the recording of events important to its owner.

The first entries were made by the original Henri Marais, and record how he and his compatriots were driven from France, his father having lost his life in the religious persecutions. After this comes a long list of births, marriages and deaths continued from generation to generation, and amongst them a few notes telling of such matters as the change of the dwelling-places of the family, always in French. Towards the end of the list appears the entry of the birth of the Henri Marais whom I knew, alas! too well, and of his only sister. Then is written his marriage to Marie Labuschagne, also, be it noted, of the Huguenot stock. In the next year follows the birth of Marie Marais, my Marie, and, after a long interval, for no other children were born, the death of her mother. Immediately below appears the following curious passage:

*"Le 3 Janvier, 1836. Je quitte ce pays voulant me sauver du maudit gouvernement Britannique comme mes ancêtres se sont sauvés de ce diable—Louis XIV.*

*"A bas les rois et les ministres tyrannique! Vive la liberté!"*

Which indicates very clearly the character and the opinions of Henri Marais, and the feeling among the trek-Boers at that time.

Thus the record closes and the story of the Marais ends—that is, so far as the writings in the Bible go, for that branch of the family is now extinct.

Their last chapter I will tell in due course.

There was nothing remarkable about my introduction to Marie Marais. I did not rescue her from any attack of a wild beast or pull her out of a raging river in a fashion suited to romance. Indeed, we interchanged our young ideas across a small and extremely massive table, which, in fact, had once done duty as a block for the chopping up of meat. To this hour I can see the hundreds of lines running criss-cross upon its surface, especially those opposite to where I used to sit.

One day, several years after my father had emigrated to the Cape, the Heer Marais arrived at our house in search, I think, of some lost oxen. He was a thin, bearded man with rather wild, dark eyes set close together, and a quick nervous manner, not in the least like that of a Dutch Boer—or so I recall him. My father received him courteously and asked him to stop to dine, which he did.

They talked together in French, a tongue that my father knew well, although he had not used it for years; Dutch he could not, or, rather, would not, speak if he could help it, and Mr. Marais preferred not to talk English. To meet someone who could converse in French delighted him, and although his version of the language was that of two centuries before and my father's was largely derived from reading, they got on very well together, if not too fast.

At length, after a pause, Mr. Marais, pointing to myself, a small and stubbly-haired youth with a sharp nose, asked my father whether he would like me to be instructed in the French tongue. The answer was that nothing would please him better.

"Although," he added severely, "to judge by my own experience where Latin and Greek are concerned, I doubt his capacity to learn anything."

So an arrangement was made that I should go over for two days in each week to Maraisfontein, sleeping there on the intervening night, and acquire a knowledge of the French tongue from a tutor whom Mr. Marais had hired to instruct his daughter in that language and other subjects. I remember that my father agreed to pay a certain proportion of this tutor's salary, a plan which suited the thrifty Boer very well indeed.

Thither, accordingly, I went in due course, nothing loth, for on the veld between our station and Maraisfontein many *pauw* and *koran*—that is, big and small bustards—were to be found, to say nothing of occasional buck, and I was allowed to carry a gun, which even in those days I could use fairly well. So to Maraisfontein I rode on the appointed day, attended by a Hottentot after-rider, a certain Hans, of whom I shall have a good deal to tell. I enjoyed very good sport on the road, arriving at the stead laden with one *pauw*, two *koran*, and a little *klipspringer* buck which I had been lucky enough to shoot as it bounded out of some rocks in front of me.

There was a peach orchard planted round Maraisfontein, which just then was a mass of lovely pink blossom, and as I rode through it slowly, not being sure of my way to the house, a lanky child appeared in front of me, clad in a frock which exactly matched the colour of the peach bloom. I can see her now, her dark hair hanging down her back, and her big, shy eyes staring at me from the shadow of the Dutch *kappie* which she wore. Indeed, she seemed to be all eyes, like a *dikkop* or thick-headed plover; at any rate, I noted little else about her.

I pulled up my pony and stared at her, feeling very shy and not knowing what to say. For a while she stared back at me, being afflicted, presumably, with the same complaint, then spoke with an effort, in a voice that was very soft and pleasant.

"Are you the little Allan Quatermain who is coming to learn French with me?" she asked in Dutch.

"Of course," I answered in the same tongue, which I knew well; "but why do you call me little, missie? I am taller than you," I added indignantly, for when I was young my lack of height was always a sore point with me.

"I think not," she replied. "But get off that horse, and we will measure here against this wall."

So I dismounted, and, having assured herself that I had no heels to my boots (I was wearing the kind of raw-hide slippers that the Boers call *veld-shoon*), she took the writing slate which she was carrying—it had no frame, I remember, being, in fact, but a piece of the material used for roofing—and, pressing it down tight on my stubbly hair, which stuck up then as now, made a deep mark in the soft sandstone of the wall with the hard pointed pencil.

"There," she said, "that is justly done. Now, little Allan, it is your turn to measure me."

So I measured her, and, behold! she was the taller by a whole half-inch.

"You are standing on tiptoe," I said in my vexation.

"Little Allan," she replied, "to stand on tiptoe would be to lie before the good Lord, and when you come to know me better you will learn that, though I have a dreadful temper and many other sins, I do not lie."

I suppose that I looked snubbed and mortified, for she went on in her grave, grown-up way: "Why are you angry because God made me taller than you? especially as I am whole months older, for my father told me so. Come, let us write our names against these marks, so that in a year or two you may see how you outgrow me." Then with the slate pencil she scratched "Marie" against her mark very deeply, so that it might last, she said; after which I wrote "Allan" against mine.

Alas! Within the last dozen years chance took me past Maraisfontein once more. The house had long been rebuilt, but this particular wall yet stood. I rode to it and looked, and there faintly could still be seen the name Marie, against the little line, and by it the mark that I had made. My own name and with it subsequent measurements were gone, for in the intervening forty years or so the sandstone had flaked away in places. Only her autograph remained, and when I saw it I think that I felt even worse than I did on finding whose was the old Bible that I had bought upon the market square at Maritzburg.

I know that I rode away hurriedly without even stopping to inquire into whose hands the farm had passed. Through the peach orchard I rode, where the trees—perhaps the same, perhaps others—were once more in bloom, for the season of the year was that when Marie and I first met, nor did I draw rein for half a score of miles.

But here I may state that Marie always stayed just half an inch the taller in body, and how much taller in mind and spirit I cannot tell.

When we had finished our measuring match Marie turned to lead me to the house, and, pretending to observe for the first time the beautiful bustard and the two *koran* hanging from my saddle, also the *klipspringer* buck that Hans the Hottentot carried behind him on his horse, asked:

"Did you shoot all these, Allan Quatermain?"

"Yes," I answered proudly; "I killed them in four shots, and the *pauw* and *koran* were flying, not sitting, which is more than you could have done, although you are taller, Miss Marie."

"I do not know," she answered reflectively. "I can shoot very well with a rifle, for my father has taught me, but I never would shoot at living things unless I must because I was hungry, for I think that to kill is cruel. But, of course, it is different with men," she added hastily, "and no doubt you will be a great hunter one day, Allan Quatermain, since you can already aim so well."

"I hope so," I answered, blushing at the compliment, "for I love hunting, and when there are so many wild things it does not matter if we kill a few. I shot these for you and your father to eat."

"Come, then, and give them to him. He will thank you," and she led the way through the gate in the sandstone wall into the yard, where the outbuildings stood in which the riding horses and the best of the breeding cattle were kept at night, and so past the end of the long, one-storied house, that was stone-built and whitewashed, to the stoep or veranda in front of it.

On the broad stoep, which commanded a pleasant view over rolling, park-like country, where mimosa and other trees grew in clumps, two men were seated, drinking strong coffee, although it was not yet ten o'clock in the morning.

Hearing the sound of the horses, one of these, Mynheer Marais, whom I already knew, rose from his hide-strung chair. He was, as I think I have said, not in the least like one of the phlegmatic Boers, either in person or in temperament, but, rather, a typical Frenchman, although no member of his race had set foot in France for a hundred and fifty years. At least so I discovered afterwards, for, of course, in those days I knew nothing of Frenchmen.

His companion was also French, Leblanc by name, but of a very different stamp. In person he was short and stout. His large head was bald except for a fringe of curling, iron-grey hair which grew round it just above the ears and fell upon his shoulders, giving him the appearance of a tonsured but dishevelled priest. His eyes were blue and watery, his mouth was rather weak, and his cheeks were pale, full and flabby. When the Heer Marais rose, I, being an observant youth, noted that Monsieur Leblanc took the opportunity to stretch out a rather shaky hand and fill up his coffee cup out of a black bottle, which from the smell I judged to contain peach brandy.

In fact, it may as well be said at once that the poor man was a drunkard, which explains how he, with all his high education and great ability, came to hold the humble post of tutor on a remote Boer farm. Years before, when under the influence of drink, he had committed some crime in France—I don't know what it was, and never inquired—and fled to the Cape to avoid prosecution. Here he obtained a professorship at one of the colleges, but after a while appeared in the lecture-room quite drunk and lost his employment. The same thing happened in other towns, till at last he drifted to distant Maraisfontein, where his employer tolerated his weakness for the sake of the intellectual companionship for which something in his own nature seemed to crave. Also, he looked upon him as a compatriot in distress, and a great bond of union between them was their mutual and virulent hatred of England and the English, which in the case of Monsieur Leblanc, who in his youth had fought at Waterloo and been acquainted with the great Emperor, was not altogether unnatural.

Henri Marais's case was different, but of that I shall have more to say later.

"Ah, Marie," said her father, speaking in Dutch, "so you have found him at last," and he nodded towards me, adding: "You should be flattered, little man. Look you, this missie has been sitting for two hours in the sun waiting for you, although I told her you would not arrive much before ten o'clock, as your father the *prédicant* said you would breakfast before you started. Well, it is natural, for she is lonely here, and you are of an age, although of a different race"; and his face darkened as he spoke the words.

"Father," answered Marie, whose blushes I could see even in the shadow of her cap, "I was not sitting in the sun, but under the shade of a peach tree. Also, I was working out the sums that Monsieur Leblanc set me on my slate. See, here they are," and she held up the slate, which was covered with figures, somewhat smudged, it is true, by the rubbing of my stiff hair and of her cap.

Then Monsieur Leblanc broke in, speaking in French, of which, as it chanced I understood the sense, for my father had grounded me in that tongue, and I am naturally quick at modern languages. At any rate, I made out that he was asking if I was the little *cochon d'anglais*, or English pig, whom for his sins he had to teach. He added that he judged I must be, as my hair stuck up on my head—I had taken off my hat out of politeness—as it naturally would do on a pig's back.

This was too much for me, so, before either of the others could speak, I answered in Dutch, for rage made me eloquent and bold:

"Yes, I am he; but, mynheer, if you are to be my master, I hope you will not call the English pigs any more to me."

"Indeed, *gamin*" (that is, little scamp), "and pray, what will happen if I am so bold as to repeat that truth?"

"I think, mynheer," I replied, growing white with rage at this new insult, "the same that has happened to yonder buck," and I pointed to the *klipspringer* behind Hans's saddle. "I mean that I shall shoot you."

"*Peste! Au moins il a du courage, cet enfant*" (At least the child is plucky), exclaimed Monsieur Leblanc, astonished. From that moment, I may add, he respected me, and never again insulted my country to my face.

Then Marais broke out, speaking in Dutch that I might understand:

"It is you who should be called pig, Leblanc, not this boy, for, early as it is, you have been drinking. Look! the brandy bottle is half empty. Is that the example you set to the young? Speak so again and I turn you out to starve on the veld. Allan Quatermain, although, as you may have heard, I do not like the English, I beg your pardon. I hope you will forgive the words this sot spoke, thinking that you did not understand," and he took off his hat and bowed to me quite in a grand manner, as his ancestors might have done to a king of France.

Leblanc's face fell. Then he rose and walked away rather unsteadily; as I learned afterwards, to plunge his head in a tub of cold water and swallow a pint of new milk, which were his favourite antidotes after too much strong drink. At any rate, when he appeared

again, half an hour later, to begin our lesson, he was quite sober, and extremely polite.

When he had gone, my childish anger being appeased, I presented the Heer Marais with my father's compliments, also with the buck and the birds, whereof the latter seemed to please him more than the former. Then my saddle-bags were taken to my room, a little cupboard of a place next to that occupied by Monsieur Leblanc, and Hans was sent to turn the horses out with the others belonging to the farm, having first knee-haltered them tightly, so that they should not run away home.

This done, the Heer Marais showed me the room in which we were to have our lessons, one of the *sitkamer*, or sitting chambers, whereof, unlike most Boer steads, this house boasted two. I remember that the floor was made of *daga*, that is, ant-heap earth mixed with cow-dung, into which thousands of peach-stones had been thrown while it was still soft, in order to resist footwear—a rude but fairly efficient expedient, and one not displeasing to the eye. For the rest, there was one window opening on to the veranda, which, in that bright climate, admitted a shaded but sufficient light, especially as it always stood open; the ceiling was of unplastered reeds; a large bookcase stood in the corner containing many French works, most of them the property of Monsieur Leblanc, and in the centre of the room was the strong, rough table made of native yellow-wood, that once had served as a butcher's block. I recollect also a coloured print of the great Napoleon commanding at some battle in which he was victorious, seated upon a white horse and waving a field-marshal's baton over piles of dead and wounded; and near the window, hanging to the reeds of the ceiling, the nest of a pair of red-tailed swallows, pretty creatures that, notwithstanding the mess they made, afforded to Marie and me endless amusement in the intervals of our work.

When, on that day, I shuffled shyly into this homely place, and, thinking myself alone there, fell to examining it, suddenly I was brought to a standstill by a curious choking sound which seemed to proceed from the shadows behind the bookcase. Wondering as to its cause, I advanced cautiously to discover a pink-clad shape standing in the corner like a naughty child, with her head resting against the wall, and sobbing slowly.

"Marie Marais, why do you cry?" I asked.

She turned, tossing back the locks of long, black hair which hung about her face, and answered:

"Allan Quatermain, I cry because of the shame which has been put upon you and upon our house by that drunken Frenchman."

"What of that?" I asked. "He only called me a pig, but I think I have shown him that even a pig has tusks."

"Yes," she replied, "but it was not you he meant; it was all the English, whom he hates; and the worst of it is that my father is of his mind. He, too, hates the English, and, oh! I am sure that trouble will come of his hatred, trouble and death to many."

"Well, if so, we have nothing to do with it, have we?" I replied with the cheerfulness of extreme youth.

"What makes you so sure?" she said solemnly. "Hush! here comes Monsieur Leblanc."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ATTACK ON MARAISFONTEIN

I do not propose to set out the history of the years which I spent in acquiring a knowledge of French and various other subjects, under the tuition of the learned but prejudiced Monsieur Leblanc. Indeed, there is "none to tell, sir." When Monsieur Leblanc was sober, he was a most excellent and well-informed tutor, although one apt to digress into many side issues, which in themselves were not uninteresting. When tipsy, he grew excited and harangued us, generally upon politics and religion, or rather its reverse, for he was an advanced freethinker, although this was a side to his character which, however intoxicated he might be, he always managed to conceal from the Heer Marais. I may add that a certain childish code of honour prevented us from betraying his views on this and sundry other matters. When absolutely drunk, which, on an average, was not more than once a month, he simply slept, and we did what we pleased—a fact which our childish code of honour also prevented us from betraying.

But, on the whole, we got on very well together, for, after the incident of our first meeting, Monsieur Leblanc was always polite to me. Marie he adored, as did every one about the place, from her father down to the meanest slave. Need I add that I adored her more than all of them put together, first with the love that some children have for each other, and afterwards, as we became adult, with that wider love by which it is at once transcended and made complete. Strange would it have been if this were not so, seeing that we spent nearly half of every week practically alone together, and that, from the first, Marie, whose nature was as open as the clear noon, never concealed her affection for me. True, it was a very discreet affection, almost sisterly, or even motherly, in its outward and visible aspects, as though she could never forget that extra half-inch of height or month or two of age.

Moreover, from a child she was a woman, as an Irishman might say, for circumstances and character had shaped her thus. Not much more than a year before we met, her mother, whose only child she was, and whom she loved with all her strong and passionate heart, died after a lingering illness, leaving her in charge of her father and his house. I think it was this heavy bereavement in early youth which coloured her nature with a grey tinge of sadness and made her seem so much older than her years.

So the time went on, I worshipping Marie in my secret thought, but saying nothing about it, and Marie talking of and acting towards me as though I were her dear younger brother. Nobody, not even her father or mine, or Monsieur Leblanc, took the slightest notice of this queer relationship, or seemed to dream that it might lead to ultimate complications which, in fact, would have been very distasteful to them all for reasons that I will explain.

Needless to say, in due course, as they were bound to do, those complications arose, and under pressure of great physical and moral excitement the truth came out. It happened thus.

Every reader of the history of the Cape Colony has heard of the great Kaffir War of 1835. That war took place for the most part in the districts of Albany and Somerset, so that we inhabitants of Cradock, on the whole, suffered little. Therefore, with the natural optimism and carelessness of danger of dwellers in wild places, we began to think ourselves fairly safe from attack. Indeed, so we should have been, had it not been for a foolish action on the part of Monsieur Leblanc.

It seems that on a certain Sunday, a day that I always spent at home with my father, Monsieur Leblanc rode out alone to some hills about five miles distant from Maraisfontein. He had often been cautioned that this was an unsafe thing to do, but the truth is that the foolish man thought he had found a rich copper mine in these hills, and was anxious that no one should share his secret. Therefore, on Sundays, when there were no lessons, and the Heer Marais was in the habit of celebrating family prayers, which Leblanc disliked, it was customary for him to ride to these hills and there collect geological specimens and locate the strike of his copper vein. On this particular Sabbath, which was very hot, after he had done whatever he intended to do, he dismounted from his horse, a tame old beast. Leaving it loose, he partook of the meal he had brought with him, which seems to have included a bottle of peach brandy that induced slumber.

Waking up towards evening, he found that his horse had gone, and at once jumped to the conclusion that it had been stolen by Kaffirs, although in truth the animal had but strolled over a ridge in search of grass. Running hither and thither to seek it, he presently crossed this ridge and met the horse, apparently being led away by two of the Red Kaffirs, who, as was usual, were armed with assegais. As a matter of fact these men had found the beast, and, knowing well to whom it belonged, were seeking its owner, whom, earlier in the day, they had seen upon the hills, in order to restore it to him. This, however, never occurred to the mind of Monsieur Leblanc, excited as it was by the fumes of the peach brandy.

Lifting the double-barrelled gun he carried, he fired at the first Kaffir, a young man who chanced to be the eldest son and heir of the chief of the tribe, and, as the range was very close, shot him dead. Thereon his companion, leaving go of the horse, ran for his life. At him Leblanc fired also, wounding him slightly in the thigh, but no more, so that he escaped to tell the tale of what he and every other native for miles round considered a wanton and premeditated murder. The deed done, the fiery old Frenchman mounted his nag and rode quietly home. On the road, however, as the peach brandy evaporated from his brain, doubts entered it, with the result that he determined to say nothing of his adventure to Henri Marais, who he knew was particularly anxious to avoid any cause of quarrel with the Kaffirs.

So he kept his own counsel and went to bed. Before he was up next morning the Heer Marais, suspecting neither trouble nor danger, had ridden off to a farm thirty miles or more away to pay its owner for some cattle which he had recently bought, leaving his

home and his daughter quite unprotected, except by Leblanc and the few native servants, who were really slaves, that lived about the place.

Now on the Monday night I went to bed as usual, and slept, as I have always done through life, like a top, till about four in the morning, when I was awakened by someone tapping at the glass of my window. Slipping from the bed, I felt for my pistol, as it was quite dark, crept to the window, opened it, and keeping my head below the level of the sill, fearing lest its appearance should be greeted with an assegai, asked who was there.

"Me, baas," said the voice of Hans, our Hottentot servant, who, it will be remembered, had accompanied me as after-rider when first I went to Maraisfontein. "I have bad news. Listen. The baas knows that I have been out searching for the red cow which was lost. Well, I found her, and was sleeping by her side under a tree on the veld when, about two hours ago, a woman whom I know came up to my camp fire and woke me. I asked her what she was doing at that hour of the night, and she answered that she had come to tell me something. She said that some young men of the tribe of the chief Quabie, who lives in the hills yonder, had been visiting at their kraal, and that a few hours before a messenger had arrived from the chief saying that they must return at once, as this morning at dawn he and all his men were going to attack Maraisfontein and kill everyone in it and take the cattle!"

"Good God!" I ejaculated. "Why?"

"Because, young baas," drawled the Hottentot from the other side of the window, "because someone from Maraisfontein—I think it was the Vulture" (the natives gave this name to Leblanc on account of his bald head and hooked nose)—"shot Quabie's son on Sunday when he was holding his horse."

"Good God!" I said again, "the old fool must have been drunk. When did you say the attack was to be—at dawn?" and I glanced at the stars, adding, "Why, that will be within less than an hour, and the Baas Marais is away."

"Yes," croaked Hans; "and Missie Marie—think of what the Red Kaffirs will do with Missie Marie when their blood is up."

I thrust my fist through the window and struck the Hottentot's toad-like face on which the starlight gleamed faintly.

"Dog!" I said, "saddle my mare and the roan horse and get your gun. In two minutes I come. Be swift or I kill you."

"I go," he answered, and shot out into the night like a frightened snake.

Then I began to dress, shouting as I dressed, till my father and the Kaffirs ran into the room. As I threw on my things I told them all.

"Send out messengers," I said, "to Marais—he is at Botha's farm—and to all the neighbours. Send, for your lives; gather up the friendly Kaffirs and ride like hell for Maraisfontein. Don't talk to me, father; don't talk! Go and do what I tell you. Stay! Give me two guns, fill the saddle-bags with powder tins and *loopers*, and tie them to my mare. Oh! be quick, be quick!"

Now at length they understood, and flew this way and that with candles and lanterns. Two minutes later—it could scarcely have been more—I was in front of the stables just as Hans led out the bay mare, a famous beast that for two years I had saved all my money to buy. Someone strapped on the saddle-bags while I tested the girths; someone else appeared with the stout roan stallion that I knew would follow the mare to the death. There was not time to saddle him, so Hans clambered on to his back like a monkey, holding two guns under his arm, for I carried but one and my double-barrelled pistol.

"Send off the messengers," I shouted to my father. "If you would see me again send them swiftly, and follow with every man you can raise."

Then we were away with fifteen miles to do and five-and-thirty minutes before the dawn.

"Softly up the slope," I said to Hans, "till the beasts get their wind, and then ride as you never rode before."

Those first two miles of rising ground! I thought we should never come to the end of them, and yet I dared not let the mare out lest she should bucket herself. Happily she and her companion, the stallion—a most enduring horse, though not so very swift—had stood idle for the last thirty hours, and, of course, had not eaten or drunk since sunset. Therefore being in fine fettle, they were keen for the business; also we were light weights.

I held in the mare as she spurted up the rise, and the horse kept his pace to hers. We reached its crest, and before us lay the great level plain, eleven miles of it, and then two miles down hill to Maraisfontein.

"Now," I said to Hans, shaking loose the reins, "keep up if you can!"

Away sped the mare till the keen air of the night sung past my ears, and behind her strained the good roan horse with the Hottentot monkey on its back. Oh! what a ride was that!

Further I have gone for a like cause, but never at such speed, for I knew the strength of the beasts and how long it would last them. Half an hour of it they might endure; more, and at this pace they must founder or die.

And yet such was the agony of my fear, that it seemed to me as though I only crept along the ground like a tortoise.

The roan was left behind, the sound of his foot-beats died away, and I was alone with the night and my fear. Mile added itself to mile, for now and again the starlight showed me a stone or the skeleton of some dead beast that I knew. Once I dashed into a herd of trekking game so suddenly, that a springbok, unable to stop itself, leapt right over me. Once the mare put her foot in an ant-bear hole and nearly fell, but recovered herself—thanks be to God, unharmed—and I worked myself back into the saddle whence I had been almost shaken. If I had fallen; oh! if I had fallen!

We were near the end of the flat, and she began to fail. I had over-pressed her; the pace was too tremendous. Her speed lessened to an ordinary fast gallop as she faced the gentle rise that led to the brow. And now, behind me, once more I heard the sound of the hoofs of the roan. The tireless beast was coming up. By the time we reached the edge of the plateau he was quite near, not fifty yards behind, for I heard him whinny faintly.

Then began the descent. The morning star was setting, the east grew grey with light. Oh! could we get there before the dawn? Could we get there before the dawn? That is what my horse's hoofs beat out to me.

Now I could see the mass of the trees about the stead. And now I dashed into something, though until I was through it, I did not know that it was a line of men, for the faint light gleamed upon the spear of one of them who had been overthrown!

So it was no lie! The Kaffirs were there! As I thought it, a fresh horror filled my heart; perhaps their murdering work was already done and they were departing.

The minute of suspense—or was it but seconds?—seemed an eternity. But it ended at last. Now I was at the door in the high wall that enclosed the outbuildings at the back of the house, and there, by an inspiration, pulled up the mare—glad enough she was to stop, poor thing—for it occurred to me that if I rode to the front I should very probably be assailed and of no further use. I tried the door, which was made of stout stinkwood planks. By design, or accident, it had been left unbolted. As I thrust it open Hans arrived with a rush, clinging to the roan with his face hidden in its mane. The beast pulled up by the side of the mare which it had been pursuing, and in the faint light I saw that an assegai was fixed in its flank.

Five seconds later we were in the yard and locking and barring the door behind us. Then, snatching the saddle-bags of ammunition from the horses, we left them standing there, and I ran for the back entrance of the house, bidding Hans rouse the natives, who slept in the outbuildings, and follow with them. If any one of them showed signs of treachery he was to shoot him at once. I remember that as I went I tore the spear out of the stallion's flank and brought it away with me.

Now I was hammering upon the back door of the house, which I could not open. After a pause that seemed long, a window was thrown wide, and a voice—it was Marie's—asked in frightened tones who was there.

"I, Allan Quatermain," I answered. "Open at once, Marie. You are in great danger; the Red Kaffirs are going to attack the house."

She flew to the door in her nightdress, and at length I was in the place.

"Thank God! you are still safe," I gasped. "Put on your clothes while I call Leblanc. No, stay, do you call him; I must wait here for Hans and your slaves."

Away she sped without a word, and presently Hans arrived, bringing with him eight frightened men, who as yet scarcely knew whether they slept or woke.

"Is that all?" I asked. "Then bar the door and follow me to the *sitkamer*, where the baas keeps his guns."

Just as we reached it, Leblanc entered, clad in his shirt and trousers, and was followed presently by Marie with a candle.

"What is it?" he asked.

I took the candle from Marie's hand, and set it on the floor close to the wall, lest it should prove a target for an assegai or a bullet. Even in those days the Kaffirs had a few firearms, for the most part captured or stolen from white men. Then in a few words I told them all.

"And when did you learn all this?" asked Leblanc in French.

"At the Mission Station a little more than half an hour ago," I answered, looking at my watch.

"At the station a little more than half an hour ago! *Peste!* it is not possible. You dream or are drunken," he cried excitedly.

"All right, monsieur, we will argue afterwards," I answered. "Meanwhile the Kaffirs are here, for I rode through them; and if you want to save your life, stop talking and act. Marie, how many guns are there?"

"Four," she answered, "of my father's; two *roers* and two smaller ones."

"And how many of these men"—and I pointed to the Kaffirs—"can shoot?"

"Three well and one badly, Allan."

"Good," I said. "Let them load the guns with *loopers*"—that is, slugs, not bullets—"and let the rest stand in the passage with their assegais, in case the Quabies should try to force the back door."

Now, in this house there were in all but six windows, one to each sitting-room, one to each of the larger bedrooms, these four opening on to the veranda, and one at either end of the house, to give light and air to the two small bedrooms, which were approached through the larger bedrooms. At the back, fortunately, there were no windows, for the stead was but one room deep with a passage running from the front to the back door, a distance of little over fifteen feet.

As soon as the guns were loaded I divided up the men, a man with a gun at each window. The right-hand sitting-room window I took myself with two guns, Marie coming with me to load, which, like all girls in that wild country, she could do well enough. So we arranged ourselves in a rough-and-ready fashion, and while we were doing it felt quite cheerful—that is, all except Monsieur Leblanc, who, I noticed, seemed very much disturbed.

I do not for one moment mean to suggest that he was afraid, as he might well have been, for he was an extremely brave and even rash man; but I think the knowledge that his drunken act had brought this terrible danger upon us all weighed on his mind. Also there may have been more; some subtle fore-knowledge of the approaching end to a life that, when all allowances were made, could scarcely be called well spent. At any rate he fidgeted at his window-place cursing beneath his breath, and soon, as I saw out of the corner of my eye, began to have recourse to his favourite bottle of peach brandy, which he fetched out of a cupboard.

The slaves, too, were gloomy, as all natives are when suddenly awakened in the night; but as the light grew they became more cheerful. It is a poor Kaffir that does not love fighting, especially when he has a gun and a white man or two to lead him.

Now that we had made such little preparations as we could, which, by the way, I supplemented by causing some furniture to be piled up against the front and back doors, there came a pause, which, speaking for my own part—being, after all, only a lad at the time—I found very trying to the nerves. There I stood at my window with the two guns, one a double-barrel and one a single *roer*, or elephant gun, that took a tremendous charge, but both, be it remembered, flint locks; for, although percussion caps had been introduced, we were a little behind the times in Cradock. There, too, crouched on the ground beside me, holding the ammunition ready for re-loading, her long, black hair flowing about her shoulders, was Marie Marais, now a well-grown young woman. In the intense silence she whispered to me:

"Why did you come here, Allan? You were safe yonder, and now you will probably be killed."

"To try to save you," I answered simply. "What would you have had me do?"

"To try to save me? Oh! that is good of you, but you should have thought of yourself."

"Then I should still have thought of you, Marie."

"Why, Allan?"

"Because you are myself and more than myself. If anything happened to you, what would my life be to me?"

"I don't quite understand, Allan," she replied, staring down at the floor. "Tell me, what do you mean?"

"Mean, you silly girl," I said; "what can I mean, except that I love you, which I thought you knew long ago."

"Oh!" she said; "*now* I understand." Then she raised herself upon her knees, and held up her face to me to kiss, adding, "There, that's my answer, the first and perhaps the last. Thank you, Allan dear; I am glad to have heard that, for you see one or both of us may die soon."

As she spoke the words, an assegai flashed through the window-place, passing just between our heads. So we gave over love-making and turned our attention to war.

Now the light was beginning to grow, flowing out of the pearly eastern sky; but no attack had yet been delivered, although that one was imminent that spear fixed in the plaster of the wall behind us showed clearly. Perhaps the Kaffirs had been frightened by the galloping of horses through their line in the dark, not knowing how many of them there might have been. Or perhaps they were waiting to see better where to deliver their onset. These were the ideas that occurred to me, but both were wrong.

They were staying their hands until the mist lifted a little from the hollow below the stead where the cattle kraals were situated, for while the fog remained they could not see to get the beasts out. These they wished to make sure of and drive away before the fight began, lest during its progress something should happen to rob them of their booty.

Presently, from these kraals, where the Heer Marais's horned beasts and sheep were penned at night, about one hundred and fifty of the former and some two thousand of the latter, to say nothing of the horses, for he was a large and prosperous farmer, there arose a sound of bellowing, neighing, and baaing, and with it that of the shouting of men.

"They are driving off the stock," said Marie. "Oh! my poor father, he is ruined; it will break his heart."

"Bad enough," I answered, "but there are things that might be worse. Hark!"

As I spoke there came a sound of stamping feet and of a wild war chant. Then in the edge of the mist that hung above the hollow where the cattle kraals were, figures appeared, moving swiftly to and fro, looking ghostly and unreal. The Kaffirs were marshalling their men for the attack. A minute more and it had begun. On up the slope they came in long, wavering lines, several hundreds of them, whistling and screaming, shaking their spears, their war-plumes and hair trappings blown back by the breeze, the lust of slaughter in their rolling eyes. Two or three of them had guns, which they fired as they ran, but where the bullets went I do not know, over the house probably.

I called out to Leblanc and the Kaffirs not to shoot till I did, for I knew that they were poor marksmen and that much depended upon our first volley being effective. Then as the captain of this attack came within thirty yards of the stoep—for now the light, growing swiftly, was strong enough to enable me to distinguish him by his apparel and the rifle which he held—I loosed at him with the *roer* and shot him dead. Indeed the heavy bullet passing through his body mortally wounded another of the Quabies behind. These were the first men that I ever killed in war.

As they fell, Leblanc and the rest of our people fired also, the slugs from their guns doing great execution at that range, which was just long enough to allow them to scatter. When the smoke cleared a little I saw that nearly a dozen men were down, and that the rest, dismayed by this reception, had halted. If they had come on then, while we were loading, doubtless they might have rushed the place; but, being unused to the terrible effects of firearms, they paused, amazed. A number of them, twenty or thirty perhaps, clustered about the bodies of the fallen Kaffirs, and, seizing my second gun, I fired both barrels at these with such fearful effect that the whole regiment took to their heels and fled, leaving their dead and wounded on the ground. As they ran our servants cheered, but I called to them to be silent and load swiftly, knowing well that the enemy would soon return.

For a time, however, nothing happened, although we could hear them talking somewhere near the cattle kraal, about a hundred and fifty yards away. Marie took advantage of this pause, I remember, to fetch food and distribute it among us. I, for one, was glad enough to get it.

Now the sun was up, a sight for which I thanked Heaven, for, at any rate, we could no longer be surprised. Also, with the daylight, some of my fear passed away, since darkness always makes danger twice as terrible to man and beast. Whilst we were still eating and fortifying the window-places as best we could, so as to make them difficult to enter, a single Kaffir appeared, waving above his head a stick to which was tied a white ox-tail as a sign of truce. I ordered that no one should fire, and when the man, who was a bold fellow, had reached the spot where the dead captain lay, called to him, asking his business, for I could speak his language well.

He answered that he had come with a message from Quabie. This was the message: that Quabie's eldest son had been cruelly murdered by the fat white man called "Vulture" who lived with the Heer Marais, and that he, Quabie, would have blood for blood. Still, he did not wish to kill the young white chieftainess (that was Marie) or the others in the house, with whom he had no quarrel. Therefore if we would give up the fat white man that he might make him "die slowly," Quabie would be content with his life and with the cattle that he had already taken by way of a fine, and leave us and the house unmolested.

Now, when Leblanc understood the nature of this offer he went perfectly mad with mingled fear and rage, and began to shout and swear in French.

"Be silent," I said; "we do not mean to surrender you, although you have brought all this trouble on us. Your chance of life is as good as ours. Are you not ashamed to act so before these black people?"

When at last he grew more or less quiet I called to the messenger that we white folk were not in the habit of abandoning each other, and that we would live or die together. Still, I bade him tell Quabie that if we did die, the vengeance taken on him and all his people would be to wipe them out till not one of them was left, and therefore that he would do well not to cause any of our blood to flow. Also, I added, that we had thirty men in the house (which, of course, was a lie) and plenty of ammunition and food, so that if he chose to continue the attack it would be the worse for him and his tribe.

On hearing this the herald shouted back that we should every one of us be dead before noon if he had his way. Still, he would report my words faithfully to Quabie and bring his answer.

Then he turned and began to walk off. Just as he did so a shot was fired from the house, and the man pitched forward to the ground, then rose again and staggered back towards his people, with his right shoulder shattered and his arm swinging.

"Who did that?" I asked through the smoke, which prevented me from seeing.

"I, *parbleu!*" shouted Leblanc. "*Sapristi!* that black devil wanted to torture me, Leblanc, the friend of the great Napoleon. Well, at least I have tortured him whom I meant to kill."

"Yes, you fool," I answered; "and we, too, shall be tortured because of your wickedness. You have shot a messenger carrying a flag of truce, and that the Quabies will never forgive. Oh! I tell you that you have hit us as well as him, who had it not been for you might have been spared."

These words I said quite quietly and in Dutch, so that our Kaffirs might understand them, though really I was boiling with wrath.

But Leblanc did not answer quietly.

"Who are you," he shouted, "you wretched little Englishman, who dare to lecture me, Leblanc, the friend of the great Napoleon?"

Now I drew my pistol and walked up to the man.

"Be quiet, you drunken sot," I said, for I guessed that he had drunk more of the brandy in the darkness. "If you are not quiet and do not obey me, who am in command here, either I will blow your brains out, or I will give you to these men," and I pointed to Hans and the Kaffirs, who had gathered round him, muttering ominously. "Do you know what they will do with you? They will throw you out of the house, and leave you to settle your quarrel with Quabie alone."

Leblanc looked first at the pistol, and next at the faces of the natives, and saw something in one or other of them, or in both, that caused him to change his note.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said; "I was excited. I knew not what I said. If you are young you are brave and clever, and I will obey you," and he went to his station and began to re-load his gun. As he did so a great shout of fury rose from the cattle kraal. The wounded herald had reached the Quabies and was telling them of the treachery of the white people.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE RESCUE

The second Quabie advance did not begin till about half-past seven. Even savages love their lives and appreciate the fact that wounds hurt very much, and these were no exception to the rule. Their first rush had taught them a bitter lesson, of which the fruit was evident in the crippled or dying men who rolled to and fro baked in the hot sun within a few yards of the stoep, not to speak of those who would never stir again. Now, the space around the house being quite open and bare of cover, it was obvious that it could not be stormed without further heavy losses. In order to avoid such losses a civilised people would have advanced by means of trenches, but of these the Quabies knew nothing; moreover, digging tools were lacking to them.

So it came about that they hit upon another, and in the circumstances a not inefficient expedient. The cattle kraal was built of rough, unmortared stones. Those stones they took, each man carrying two or three, which, rushing forward, they piled up into scattered rough defences of about eighteen inches or two feet high. These defences were instantly occupied by as many warriors as could take shelter behind them, lying one on top of the other. Of course, those savages who carried the first stones were exposed to our fire, with the result that many of them fell, but there were always plenty more behind. As they were being built at a dozen different points, and we had but seven guns, before we could reload, a particular *schanz*, of which perhaps the first builders had fallen, would be raised so high that our slugs could no longer hurt those who lay behind it. Also, our supply of ammunition was limited, and the constant expenditure wasted it so much that at length only about six charges per man remained. At last, indeed, I was obliged to order the firing to cease, so that we might reserve ourselves for the great rush which could not now be much delayed.

Finding that they were no longer harassed by our bullets, the Quabies advanced more rapidly, directing their attack upon the south end of the house, where there was but one window, and thus avoiding the fire that might be poured upon them from the various openings under the veranda. At first I wondered why they selected this end, till Marie reminded me that this part of the dwelling was thatched with reeds, whereas the rest of the building, which had been erected more recently, was slated.

Their object was to fire the roof. So soon as their last wall was near enough (that is, about half-past ten of the clock) they began to throw into the thatch assegais to which were attached bunches of burning grass. Many of these went out, but at length, as we gathered from their shouts, one caught. Within ten minutes this part of the house was burning.

Now our state became desperate. We retreated across the central passage, fearing lest the blazing rafters should fall upon our natives, who were losing heart and would no longer stay beneath them. But the Quabies, more bold, clambered in through the south window, and attacked us in the doorway of the larger sitting-room.

Here the final fight began. As they rushed at us we shot, till they went down in heaps. Almost at our last charge they gave back, and just then the roof fell upon them.

Oh, what a terrible scene was that! The dense clouds of smoke, the screams of the trapped and burning men, the turmoil, the agony!

The front door was burst in by a flank onslaught.

Leblanc and a slave who was near him were seized by black, claw-like hands and dragged out. What became of the Frenchman I do not know, for the natives hauled him away, but I fear his end must have been dreadful, as he was taken alive. The servant I saw them assegai, so at least he died at once. I fired my last shot, killing a fellow who was flourishing a battle-axe, then dashed the butt of the gun into the face of the man behind him, felling him, and, seizing Marie by the hand, dragged her back into the northernmost room—that in which I was accustomed to sleep—and shut and barred the door.

"Allan," she gasped, "Allan dear, it is finished. I cannot fall into the hands of those men. Kill me, Allan."

"All right," I answered, "I will. I have my pistol. One barrel for you and one for me."

"No, no! Perhaps you might escape after all; but, you see, I am a woman, and dare not risk it. Come now, I am ready," and she knelt down, opening her arms to receive the embrace of death, and looked up at me with her lovely, pitiful eyes.

"It doesn't do to kill one's love and live on oneself," I answered hoarsely. "We have got to go together," and I cocked both barrels of the pistol.

The Hottentot, Hans, who was in the place with us, saw and understood.

"It is right, it is best!" he said; and turning, he hid his eyes with his hand.

"Wait a little, Allan," she exclaimed; "it will be time when the door is down, and perhaps God may still help us."

"He may," I answered doubtfully; "but I would not count on it. Nothing can save us now unless the others come to rescue us, and that's too much to hope for."

Then a thought struck me, and I added with a dreadful laugh: "I wonder where we shall be in five minutes."

"Oh! together, dear; together for always in some new and beautiful world, for you do love me, don't you, as I love you? Maybe that's better than living on here where we should be sure to have troubles and perhaps be separated at last."

I nodded my head, for though I loved life, I loved Marie more, and I felt that we were making a good end after a brave fight. They were battering at the door now, but, thank Heaven, Marais had made strong doors, and it held a while.

The wood began to give at last, an assegai appeared through a shattered plank, but Hans stabbed along the line of it with the spear he held, that which I had snatched from the flank of the horse, and it was dropped with a scream. Black hands were thrust through the hole, and the Hottentot hacked and cut at them with the spear. But others came, more than he could pierce, and the whole door-frame began to be dragged outwards.

"Now, Marie, be ready," I gasped, lifting the pistol.

"Oh, Christ receive me!" she answered faintly. "It won't hurt much, will it, Allan?"

"You will never feel anything," I whispered; as with the cold sweat pouring from me I placed the muzzle within an inch of her forehead and began to press the trigger. My God! yes, I actually began to press the trigger softly and steadily, for I wished to make no mistake.

It was at this very moment, above the dreadful turmoil of the roaring flames, the yells of the savages and the shrieks and groans of wounded and dying men, that I heard the sweetest sound which ever fell upon my ears—the sound of shots being fired, many shots, and quite close by.

"Great Heaven!" I screamed; "the Boers are here to save us. Marie, I will hold the door while I can. If I fall, scramble through the window—you can do it from the chest beneath—drop to the ground, and run towards the firing. There's a chance for you yet, a good chance."

"And you, you," she moaned. "I would rather die with you."

"Do what I bid you," I answered savagely, and bounded forward towards the rocking door.

It was falling outward, it fell, and on the top of it appeared two great savages waving broad spears. I lifted the pistol, and the bullet that had been meant for Marie's brain scattered that of the first of them, and the bullet which had been meant for my heart pierced that of the second. They both went down dead, there in the doorway.

I snatched up one of their spears and glanced behind me. Marie was climbing on to the chest; I could just see her through the thickening smoke. Another Quabie rushed on. Hans and I received him on the points of our assegais, but so fierce was his charge that they went through him as though he were nothing, and being but light, both of us were thrown backwards to the ground. I scrambled to my feet again, defenceless now, for the spear was broken in the Kaffir, and awaited the end. Looking back once more I saw that Marie had either failed to get through the window or abandoned the attempt. At any rate she was standing near the chest supporting herself by her right hand. In my despair I seized the blade end of the broken assegai and dragged it from the body of the Kaffir, thinking that it would serve to kill her, then turned to do the deed.

But even as I turned I heard a voice that I knew well shout: "Do you live, Marie?" and in the doorway appeared no savage, but Henri Marais.

Slowly I backed before him, for I could not speak, and the last dreadful effort of my will seemed to thrust me towards Marie. I reached her and threw my hand that still held the gory blade round her neck. Then as darkness came over me I heard her cry:

"Don't shoot, father. It is Allan, Allan who has saved my life!"

After that I remember no more. Nor did she for a while, for we both fell to the ground senseless.

When my senses returned to me I found myself lying on the floor of the wagon-house in the back yard. Glancing from my half-opened eyes, for I was still speechless, I saw Marie, white as a sheet, her hair all falling about her dishevelled dress. She was seated on one of those boxes that we put on the front of wagons to drive from, *voorkissies* they are called, and as her eyes were watching me I knew that she lived. By her stood a tall and dark young man whom I had never seen before. He was holding her hand and looking at her anxiously, and even then I felt angry with him. Also I saw other things; for instance, my old father leaning down and looking at me anxiously, and outside in the yard, for there were no doors to the wagon-house, a number of men with guns in their hands, some of whom I knew and others who were strangers. In the shadow, too, against the wall, stood my blood mare with her head hanging down and trembling all over. Not far from her the roan lay upon the ground, its flank quite red.

I tried to rise and could not, then feeling pain in my left thigh, looked and saw that it was red also. As a matter of fact an assegai had gone half through it and hit upon the bone. Although I never felt it at the time, this wound was dealt to me by that great Quabie whom Hans and I had received upon our spears, doubtless as he fell. Hans, by the way, was there also, an awful and yet a ludicrous spectacle, for the Quabie had fallen right on the top of him and lain so with results that may be imagined. There he sat upon the ground, looking upwards, gasping with his fish-like mouth. Each gasp, I remember, fashioned itself into the word *Allemachie!* that is "Almighty," a favourite Dutch expression.

Marie was the first to perceive that I had come to life again. Shaking herself free from the clasp of the young man, she staggered towards me and fell upon her knees at my side, muttering words that I could not catch, for they choked in her throat. Then Hans took in the situation, and wriggling his unpleasant self to my other side, lifted my hand and kissed it. Next my father spoke, saying:

"Praise be to God, he lives! Allan, my son, I am proud of you; you have done your duty as an Englishman should."

"Had to save my own skin if I could, thank you, father," I muttered.

"Why as an Englishman more than any other sort of man, Mynheer prédicant?" asked the tall stranger, speaking in Dutch, although he evidently understood our language.

"The point is one that I will not argue now, sir," answered my father, drawing himself up. "But if what I hear is true, there was a Frenchman in that house who did not do his duty; and if you belong to the same nation, I apologise to you."

"Thank you, sir; as it happens, I do, half. The rest of me is Portuguese, not English, thank God."

"God is thanked for many things that must surprise Him," replied my father in a suave voice.

At that moment this rather disagreeable conversation, which even then both angered and amused me faintly, came to an end, for the Heer Marais entered the place.

As might have been expected in so excitable a man, he was in a terrible state of agitation. Thankfulness at the escape of his only, beloved child, rage with the Kaffirs who had tried to kill her, and extreme distress at the loss of most of his property—all these conflicting emotions boiled together in his breast like antagonistic elements in a crucible.

The resulting fumes were parti-coloured and overpowering. He rushed up to me, blessed and thanked me (for he had learnt something of the story of the defence), called me a young hero and so forth, hoping that God would reward me. Here I may remark that *he* never did, poor man. Then he began to rave at Leblanc, who had brought all this dreadful disaster upon his house, saying that it was a judgment on himself for having sheltered an atheist and a drunkard for so many years, just because he was French and a man of intellect. Someone, my father as a matter of fact, who with all his prejudices possessed a great sense of justice, reminded him that the poor Frenchman had expiated, or perchance was now expiating any crimes that he might have committed.

This turned the stream of his invective on to the Quabie Kaffirs, who had burned part of his house and stolen nearly all his stock, making him from a rich man into a poor one in a single hour. He shouted for vengeance on the "black devils," and called on all there to help him to recover his beasts and kill the thieves. Most of those present—they were about thirty in all, not counting the Kaffir and Hottentot after-riders—answered that they were willing to attack the Quabies. Being residents in the district, they felt, and, indeed, said, that his case to-day might and probably would be their case to-morrow. Therefore they were prepared to ride at once.

Then it was that my father intervened.

"Heeren," he said, "it seems to me that before you seek vengeance, which, as the Book tells us, is the Lord's, it would be well, especially for the Heer Marais, to return thanks for what has been saved to him. I mean his daughter, who might now very easily have been dead or worse."

He added that goods came or went according to the chances of fortune, but a beloved human life, once lost, could not be restored. This precious life had been preserved to him, he would not say by man—here he glanced at me—but by the Ruler of the world acting through man. Perhaps those present did not quite understand what he (my father) had learned from Hans the Hottentot, that I, his son, had been about to blow out the brains of Marie Marais and my own when the sound of the shots of those who had been gathered through the warning which I left before I rode from the Mission Station, had stayed my hand. He called upon the said Hans and Marie herself to tell them the story, since I was too weak to do so.

Thus adjured, the little Hottentot, smothered as he was in blood, stood up. In the simple, dramatic style characteristic of his race, he narrated all that had happened since he met the woman on the veld but little over twelve hours before, till the arrival of the rescue party. Never have I seen a tale followed with deeper interest, and when at last Hans pointed to me lying on the ground and said, "There is he who did these things which it might be thought no man could do—he, but a boy," even from those phlegmatic Dutchmen there came a general cheer. But, lifting myself upon my hands, I called out:

"Whatever I did, this poor Hottentot did also, and had it not been for him I could not have done anything—for him and the two good horses."

Then they cheered again, and Marie, rising, said:

"Yes, father; to these two I owe my life."

After this, my father offered his prayer of thanksgiving in very bad Dutch—for, having begun to learn it late in life, he never could really master that language—and the stalwart Boers, kneeling round him, said "Amen." As the reader may imagine, the scene, with all its details, which I will not repeat, was both remarkable and impressive.

What followed this prayer I do not very well remember, for I became faint from exhaustion and the loss of blood. I believe, however, that the fire having been extinguished, they removed the dead and wounded from the unburnt portion of the house and carried me into the little room where Marie and I had gone through that dreadful scene when I went within an ace of killing her. After this the Boers and Marais's Kaffirs, or rather slaves, whom he had collected from where they lived away from the house, to the number of thirty or forty, started to follow the defeated Quabie, leaving about ten of their number as a guard. Here I may mention that of the seven or eight men who slept in the outbuildings and had fought with us, two were killed in the fight and two wounded. The remainder, one way or another, managed to escape unhurt, so that in all this fearful struggle, in which we inflicted so terrible a punishment upon the Kaffirs, we lost only three slain, including the Frenchman, Leblanc.

As to the events of the next three days I know only what I have been told, for practically during all that time I was off my head from loss of blood, complicated with fever brought on by the fearful excitement and exertion I had undergone. All I can recall is a vision of Marie bending over me and making me take food of some sort—milk or soup, I suppose—for it seems I would touch it from no other hand. Also I had visions of the tall shape of my white-haired father, who, like most missionaries, understood something of surgery and medicine, attending to the bandages on my thigh. Afterwards he told me that the spear had actually cut the walls of the big artery, but, by good fortune, without going through them. Another fortieth of an inch and I should have bled to death in ten minutes!

On this third day my mind was brought back from its wanderings by the sound of a great noise about the house, above which I heard the voice of Marais storming and shouting, and that of my father trying to calm him. Presently Marie entered the room, drawing-to behind her a Kaffir karoos, which served as a curtain, for the door, it will be remembered, had been torn out. Seeing that I was awake and reasonable, she flew to my side with a little cry of joy, and, kneeling down, kissed me on the forehead.

"You have been very ill, Allan, but I know you will recover now. While we are alone, which," she added slowly and with meaning, "I dare say we shall not be much in future, I want to thank you from my heart for all that you did to save me. Had it not been for you, oh! had it not been for you"—and she glanced at the blood stains on the earthen floor, put her hands before her eyes and shuddered.

“Nonsense, Marie,” I answered, taking her hand feebly enough, for I was very weak. “Anyone else would have done as much, even if they did not love you as I do. Let us thank God that it was not in vain. But what is all that noise? Have the Quabies come back?”

She shook her head.

“No; the Boers have come back from hunting them.”

“And did they catch them and recover the cattle?”

“Not so. They only found some wounded men, whom they shot, and the body of Monsieur Leblanc with his head cut off, taken away with other bits of him for medicine, they say to make the warriors brave. Quabie has burnt his kraal and fled with all his people to join the other Kaffirs in the Big Mountains. Not a cow or a sheep did they find, except a few that had fallen exhausted, and those had their throats cut. My father wanted to follow them and attack the Red Kaffirs in the mountains, but the others would not go. They said there are thousands of them, and that it would be a mad war, from which not one of them would return alive. He is wild with grief and rage, for, Allan dear, we are almost ruined, especially as the British Government are freeing the slaves and only going to give us a very small price, not a third of their value. But, hark! he is calling me, and you must not talk much or excite yourself, lest you should be ill again. Now you have to sleep and eat and get strong. Afterwards, dear, you may talk”; and, bending down once more, she blessed and kissed me, then rose and glided away.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HERNANDO PEREIRA

Several more days passed before I was allowed out of that little war-stained room of which I grew to hate the very sight. I entreated my father to take me into the air, but he would not, saying that he feared lest any movement should cause the bleeding to begin again or even the cut artery to burst. Moreover, the wound was not healing very well, the spear that caused it having been dirty or perhaps used to skin dead animals, which caused some dread of gangrene, that in those days generally meant death. As it chanced, although I was treated only with cold water, for antiseptics were then unknown, my young and healthy blood triumphed and no gangrene appeared.

What made those days even duller was that during them I saw very little of Marie, who now only entered the place in the company of her father. Once I managed to ask her why she did not come oftener and alone. Her face grew troubled as she whispered back, "Because it is not allowed, Allan," and then without another word left the place.

Why, I wondered to myself, was it not allowed, and an answer sprang up in my mind. Doubtless it was because of that tall young man who had argued with my father in the wagon-house. Marie had never spoken to me of him, but from the Hottentot Hans and my father I managed to collect a good deal of information concerning him and his business.

It appeared that he was the only child of Henri Marais's sister, who married a Portuguese from Delagoa Bay of the name of Pereira, who had come to the Cape Colony to trade many years before and settled there. Both he and his wife were dead, and their son, Hernando, Marie's cousin, had inherited all their very considerable wealth.

Indeed, now I remembered having heard this Hernando, or Hernan, as the Boers called him for short, spoken of in past years by the Heer Marais as the heir to great riches, since his father had made a large fortune by trading in wine and spirits under some Government monopoly which he held. Often he had been invited to visit Maraisfontein, but his parents, who doted on him and lived in one of the settled districts not far from Cape Town, would never allow him to travel so far from them into these wild regions.

Since their death, however, things had changed. It appeared that on the decease of old Pereira the Governor of the Colony had withdrawn the wine and spirit monopoly, which he said was a job and a scandal, an act that made Hernando Pereira very angry, although he needed no more money, and had caused him to throw himself heart and soul into the schemes of the disaffected Boers. Indeed, he was now engaged as one of the organisers of the Great Trek which was in contemplation. In fact, it had already begun, into the partially explored land beyond the borders of the Colony, where the Dutch farmers proposed to set up dominions of their own.

That was the story of Hernando Pereira, who was to be—nay, who had already become—my rival for the hand of the sweet and beautiful Marie Marais.

One night when my father and I were alone in the little room where he slept with me, and he had finished reading his evening portion of Scripture aloud, I plucked up my courage to tell him that I loved Marie and wished to marry her, and that we had plighted our troth during the attack of the Kaffirs on the stead.

"Love and war indeed!" he said, looking at me gravely, but showing no sign of surprise, for it appeared that he was already acquainted with our secret. This was not wonderful, for he informed me afterwards that during my delirium I had done nothing except rave of Marie in the most endearing terms. Also Marie herself, when I was at my worst, had burst into tears before him and told him straight out that she loved me.

"Love and war indeed!" he repeated, adding kindly, "My poor boy, I fear that you have fallen into great trouble."

"Why, father?" I asked. "Is it wrong that we should love each other?"

"Not wrong, but, in the circumstances, quite natural—I should have foreseen that it was sure to happen. No, not wrong, but most unfortunate. To begin with, I do not wish to see you marry a foreigner and become mixed up with these disloyal Boers. I hoped that one day, a good many years hence, for you are only a boy, Allan, you would find an English wife, and I still hope it."

"Never!" I ejaculated.

"Never is a long word, Allan, and I dare say that what you are so sure is impossible will happen after all," words that made me angry enough at the time, though in after years I often thought of them.

"But," he went on, "putting my own wishes, perhaps prejudices, aside, I think your suit hopeless. Although Henri Marais likes you well enough and is grateful to you just now because you have saved the daughter whom he loves, you must remember that he hates us English bitterly. I believe that he would almost as soon see his girl marry a half-caste as an Englishman, and especially a poor Englishman, as you are, and unless you can make money, must remain. I have little to leave you, Allan."

"I might make money, father, out of ivory, for instance. You know I am a good shot."

"Allan, I do not think you will ever make much money, it is not in your blood; or, if you do, you will not keep it. We are an old race, and I know our record, up to the time of Henry VIII. at any rate. Not one of us was ever commercially successful. Let us

suppose, however, that you should prove yourself the exception to the rule, it can't be done at once, can it? Fortunes don't grow in a night, like mushrooms."

"No, I suppose not, father. Still, one might have some luck."

"Possibly. But meanwhile you have to fight against a man who has the luck, or rather the money in his pocket."

"What do you mean?" I asked, sitting up.

"I mean Hernando Pereira, Allan, Marais's nephew, who they say is one of the richest men in the Colony. I know that he wishes to marry Marie."

"How do you know it, father?"

"Because Marais told me so this afternoon, probably with a purpose. He was struck with her beauty when he first saw her after your escape, which he had not done since she was a child, and as he stopped to guard the house while the rest went after the Quabies—well, you can guess. Such things go quickly with these Southern men."

I hid my face in the pillow, biting my lips to keep back the groan that was ready to burst from them, for I felt the hopelessness of the situation. How could I compete with this rich and fortunate man, who naturally would be favoured of my betrothed's father? Then on the blackness of my despair rose a star of hope. I could not, but perchance Marie might. She was very strong-natured and very faithful. She was not to be bought, and I doubted whether she could be frightened.

"Father," I said, "I may never marry Marie, but I don't think that Hernando Pereira ever will either."

"Why not, my boy?"

"Because she loves me, father, and she is not one to change. I believe that she would rather die."

"Then she must be a very unusual sort of woman. Still, it may be so; the future will tell to those who live to see it. I can only pray and trust that whatever happens will be for the best for both of you. She is a sweet girl and I like her well, although she may be Boer—or French. And now, Allan, we have talked enough, and you had better go to sleep. You must not excite yourself, you know, or it may set up new inflammation in the wound."

"Go to sleep. Must not excite yourself." I kept muttering those words for hours, serving them up in my mind with a spice of bitter thought. At last torpor, or weakness, overcame me, and I fell into a kind of net of bad dreams which, thank Heaven! I have now forgotten. Yet when certain events happened subsequently I always thought, and indeed still think, that these or something like them, had been a part of those evil dreams.

On the morning following this conversation I was at length allowed to be carried to the stoep, where they laid me down, wrapped in a very dirty blanket, upon a rumpi-strung bench or primitive sofa. When I had satisfied my first delight at seeing the sun and breathing the fresh air, I began to study my surroundings. In front of the house, or what remained of it, so arranged that the last of them at either end we made fast to the extremities of the stoep, was arranged an arc of wagons, placed as they are in a laager and protected underneath by earth thrown up in a mound and by boughs of the mimosa thorn. Evidently these wagons, in which the guard of Boers and armed natives who still remained on the place slept at night, were set thus as a defence against a possible attack by the Quabies or other Kaffirs.

During the daytime, however, the centre wagon was drawn a little on one side to leave a kind of gate. Through this opening I saw that a long wall, also semicircular, had been built outside of them, enclosing a space large enough to contain at night all the cattle and horses that were left to the Heer Marais, together with those of his friends, who evidently did not wish to see their oxen vanish into the depths of the mountains. In the middle of this extemporised kraal was a long, low mound, which, as I learned afterwards, contained the dead who fell in the attack on the house. The two slaves who had been killed in the defence were buried in the little garden that Marie had made, and the headless body of Leblanc in a small walled place to the right of the stead, where lay some of its former owners and one or two relatives of the Heer Marais, including his wife.

Whilst I was noting these things Marie appeared at the end of the veranda, having come round the burnt part of the house, followed by Hernan Pereira. Catching sight of me, she ran to the side of my couch with outstretched arms as though she intended to embrace me. Then seeming to remember, stopped suddenly at my side, coloured to her hair, and said in an embarrassed voice:

"Oh, Heer Allan"—she had never called me Heer in her life before—"I am so glad to find you out! How have you been getting on?"

"Pretty well, I thank you," I answered, biting my lips, "as you would have learnt, Marie, had you come to see me."

Next moment I was sorry for the words, for I saw her eyes fill with tears and her breast shake with something like a sob. However, it was Pereira and not Marie who answered, for at the moment I believe she could not speak.

"My good boy," he said in a pompous, patronising way and in English, which he knew perfectly, "I think that my cousin has had plenty to do caring for all these people during the last few days without running to look at the cut in your leg. However, I am glad to hear from your worthy father that it is almost well and that you will soon be able to play games again, like others of your age."

Now it was my turn to be unable to speak and to feel my eyes fill with tears, tears of rage, for remember that I was still very feeble. But Marie spoke for me.

"Yes, Cousin Hernan," she said in a cold voice, "thank God the Heer Allan Quatermain will soon be able to play games again, such bloody games as the defence of Maraisfontein with eight men against all the Quabie horde. Then Heaven help those who stand in front of his rifle," and she glanced at the mound that covered the dead Kaffirs, many of whom, as a matter of fact, I had killed.

"Oh! no offence, no offence, Marie," said Pereira in his smooth, rich voice. "I did not want to laugh at your young friend, who doubtless is as brave as they say all Englishmen are, and who fought well when he was lucky enough to have the chance of protecting you, my dear cousin. But after all, you know, he is not the only one who can hold a gun straight, as you seem to think, which I shall be happy to prove to him in a friendly fashion when he is stronger."

Here he stepped forward a pace and looked down at me, then added with a laugh, "Allemachte! I fear that won't be just at present. Why, the lad looks as though one might blow him away like a feather."

Still I said nothing, only glanced up at this tall and splendid man standing above me in his fine clothes, for he was richly dressed as the fashion of the time went, with his high colouring, broad shoulders, and face full of health and vigour. Mentally I compared him with myself, as I was after my fever and loss of blood, a poor, white-faced rat of a lad, with stubbly brown hair on my head and only a little down on my chin, with arms like sticks, and a dirty blanket for raiment. How could I compare with him in any way? What chance had I against this opulent bully who hated me and all my race, and in whose hands, even if I were well, I should be nothing but a child?

And yet, and yet as I lay there humiliated and a mock, an answer came into my mind, and I felt that whatever might be the case with my outward form; in spirit, in courage, in determination and in ability, in all, in short, that really makes a man, I was more than Pereira's equal. Yes, and that by the help of these qualities, poor as I was and frail as I seemed to be, I would beat him at the last and keep for myself what I had won, the prize of Marie's love.

Such were the thoughts which passed through me, and I think that something of the tenor of them communicated itself to Marie, who often could read my heart before my lips spoke. At any rate, her demeanour changed. She drew herself up. Her fine nostrils expanded and a proud look came into her dark eyes, as she nodded her head and murmured in a voice so low that I think I alone caught her words:

"Yes, yes, have no fear."

Pereira was speaking again (he had turned aside to strike the steel of his tinder-box, and was now blowing the spark to a glow before lighting his big pipe).

"By the way, Heer Allan," he said, "that is a very good mare of yours. She seems to have done the distance between the Mission Station and Maraisfontein in wonderful time, as, for the matter of that, the roan did too. I have taken a fancy to her, after a gallop on her back yesterday just to give her some exercise, and although I don't know that she is quite up to my weight, I'll buy her."

"The mare is not for sale, Heer Pereira," I said, speaking for the first time, "and I do not remember giving anyone leave to exercise her."

"No, your father did, or was it that ugly little beast of a Hottentot? I forget which. As for her not being for sale—why, in this world everything is for sale, at a price. I'll give you—let me see—oh, what does the money matter when one has plenty? I'll give you a hundred English pounds for that mare; and don't you think me a fool. I tell you I mean to get it back, and more, at the great races down in the south. Now what do you say?"

"I say that the mare is not for sale, Heer Pereira." Then a thought struck me, or an inspiration, and, as has always been my fashion, I acted on it at once. "But," I added slowly, "if you like, when I am a bit stronger I'll shoot you a match for her, you staking your hundred pounds and I staking the mare."

Pereira burst out laughing.

"Here, friends," he called to some of the Boers who were strolling up to the house for their morning coffee. "This little Englishman wants to shoot a match with me, staking that fine mare of his against a hundred pounds British; against me, Hernando Pereira, who have won every prize at shooting that ever I entered for. No, no, friend Allan, I am not a thief, I will not rob you of your mare."

Now among those Boers chanced to be the celebrated Heer Pieter Retief, a very fine man of high character, then in the prime of life, and of Huguenot descent like Heer Marais. He had been appointed by the Government one of the frontier commandants, but owing to some quarrel with the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Andries Stockenström, had recently resigned that office, and at this date was engaged in organizing the trek from the Colony. I now saw Retief for the first time, and ah! then little did I think how and where I should see him for the last. But all that is a matter of history, of which I shall have to tell later.

Now, while Pereira was mocking and bragging of his prowess, Pieter Retief looked at me, and our eyes met.

"Allemachte!" he exclaimed, "is that the young man who, with half a dozen miserable Hottentots and slaves, held this stead for five hours against all the Quabie tribe and kept them out?"

Somebody said that it was, remarking that I had been about to shoot Marie Marais and myself when help came.

"Then, Heer Allan Quatermain," said Retief, "give me your hand," and he took my poor wasted fingers in his big palm, adding, "Your father must be proud of you to-day, as I should be if I had such a son. God in Heaven! where will you stop if you can go so far while you are yet a boy? Friends, since I came here yesterday I have got the whole story for myself from the Kaffirs and from this *mooi meisje*" (pretty young lady), and he nodded towards Marie. "Also I have gone over the ground and the house, and have seen where each man fell—it is easy by the blood marks—most of them shot by yonder Englishman, except one of the last three, whom he killed with a spear. Well, I tell you that never in all my experience have I known a better arranged or a more finely carried out defence against huge odds. Perhaps the best part of it, too, was the way in which this young lion acted on the information he received and the splendid ride he made from the Mission Station. Again I say that his father should be proud of him."

"Well, if it comes to that, I am, mynheer," said my father, who just then joined us after his morning walk, "although I beg you to say no more lest the lad should grow vain."

"Bah!" replied Retief, "fellows of his stamp are not vain; it is your big talkers who are vain," and he glanced out of the corner of his shrewd eye at Pereira, "your turkey cocks with all their tails spread. I think this little chap must be such another as that great sailor of yours—what do you call him, Nelson?—who beat the French into frothed eggs and died to live for ever. He was small, too, they say, and weak in the stomach."

I must confess I do not think that praise ever sounded sweeter in my ears than did these words of the Commandant Retief, uttered as they were just when I felt crushed to the dirt. Moreover, as I saw by Marie's and, I may add, by my father's face, there were other ears to which they were not ungrateful. The Boers also, brave and honest men enough, evidently appreciated them, for they said:

“Ja! ja! *das ist recht*” (That is right).

Only Pereira turned his broad back and busied himself with relighting his pipe, which had gone out.

Then Retief began again.

“What is it you were calling us to listen to, Mynheer Pereira? That this Heer Allan Quatermain had offered to shoot you a match? Well, why not? If he can hit Kaffirs running at him with spears, as he has done, he may be able to hit other things also. You say that you won’t rob him of his money—no, it was his beautiful horse—because you have taken so many prizes shooting at targets. But did *you* ever hit a Kaffir running at *you* with an assegai, mynheer, you who live down there where everything is safe? If so, I never heard of it.”

Pereira answered that he did not understand me to propose a shooting match at Kaffirs charging with assegais, but at something else—he knew not what.

“Quite so,” said Retief. “Well, Mynheer Allan, what is it that you do propose?”

“That we should stand in the great kloof between the two *vleis* yonder—the Heer Marais knows the place—when the wild geese flight over an hour before sunset, and that he who brings down six of them in the fewest shots shall win the match.”

“If our guns are loaded with loopers that will not be difficult,” said Pereira.

“With loopers you would seldom kill a bird, mynheer,” I replied, “for they come over from seventy to a hundred yards up. No, I mean with rifles.”

“Allemachte!” broke in a Boer; “you will want plenty of ammunition to hit a goose at that height with a bullet.”

“That is my offer,” I said, “to which I add this, that when twenty shots have been fired by each man, he who has killed the most birds wins, even if he has not brought down the full six. Does the Heer Pereira accept? If so, I will venture to match myself against him, although he has won so many prizes.”

The Heer Pereira seemed extremely doubtful; so doubtful, indeed, that the Boers began to laugh at him. In the end he grew rather angry, and said that he was willing to shoot me at bucks or swallows, or fireflies, or anything else I liked.

“Then let it be at geese,” I answered, “since it is likely to be sometime before I am strong enough to ride after buck or other wild things.”

So the terms of the match were formally written down by Marie, as my father, although he took a keen sporting interest in the result, would have nothing to do with what he called a “wager for money,” and, except myself, there was no one else present with sufficient scholarship to pen a long document. Then we both signed them, Hernan Pereira not very willingly, I thought; and if my recovery was sufficiently rapid, the date was fixed for that day week. In case of any disagreement, the Heer Retief, who was staying at Maraisfontein, or in its neighbourhood, for a while, was appointed referee and stakeholder. It was also arranged that neither of us should visit the appointed place, or shoot at the geese before the match. Still we were at liberty to practise as much as we liked at anything else in the interval and to make use of any kind of rifle that suited us best.

By the time that these arrangements were finished, feeling quite tired with all the emotions of the morning, I was carried back to my room. Here my midday meal, cooked by Marie, was brought to me. As I finished eating it, for the fresh air had given me an appetite, my father came in, accompanied by the Heer Marais, and began to talk to me. Presently the latter asked me kindly enough if I thought I should be sufficiently strong to trek back to the station that afternoon in an ox-cart with springs to it and lying at full length upon a hide-strung *cartel* or mattress.

I answered, “Certainly,” as I should have done had I been at the point of death, for I saw that he wished to be rid of me.

“The fact is, Allan,” he said awkwardly, “I am not inhospitable as you may think, especially towards one to whom I owe so much. But you and my nephew, Hernan, do not seem to get on very well together, and, as you may guess, having just been almost beggared, I desire no unpleasantness with the only rich member of my family.”

I replied I was sure I did not wish to be the cause of any. It seemed to me, however, that the Heer Pereira wished to make a mock of me and to bring it home to me what a poor creature I was compared to himself—I a mere sick boy who was worth nothing.

“I know,” said Marais uneasily, “my nephew has been too fortunate in life, and is somewhat overbearing in his manner. He does not remember that the battle is not always to the strong or the race to the swift, he who is young and rich and handsome, a spoiled child from the first. I am sorry, but what I cannot help I must put up with. If I cannot have my mealies cooked, I must eat them green. Also, Allan, have you never heard that jealousy sometimes makes people rude and unjust?” and he looked at me meaningly.

I made no answer, for when one does not quite know what to say it is often best to remain silent, and he went on:

“I am vexed to hear of this foolish shooting match which has been entered into without my knowledge or consent. If he wins he will only laugh at you the more, and if you win he will be angry.”

“It was not my fault, mynheer,” I answered. “He wanted to force me to sell the mare, which he had been riding without my leave, and kept bragging about his marksmanship. So at last I grew cross and challenged him.”

“No wonder, Allan; I do not blame you. Still, you are silly, for it will not matter to him if he loses his money; but that beautiful mare is your ewe-lamb, and I should be sorry to see you parted from a beast which has done us so good a turn. Well, there it is; perhaps circumstances may yet put an end to this trial; I hope so.”

“I hope they won’t,” I answered stubbornly.

“I dare say you do, being sore as a galled horse just now. But listen, Allan, and you, too, *prédicant* Quatermain; there are other and more important reasons than this petty squabble why I should be glad if you could go away for a while. I must take counsel with my countrymen about certain secret matters which have to do with our welfare and future, and, of course they would not like it if all the while there were two Englishmen on the place, whom they might think were spies.”

“Say no more, Heer Marais,” broke in my father hotly; “still less should we like to be where we are not wanted or are looked upon with suspicion for the crime of being English. By God’s blessing, my son has been able to do some service to you and yours, but now that is all finished and forgotten. Let the cart you are so kind as to lend us be inspanned. We will go at once.”

Then Henri Marais, who was a gentleman at bottom, although, even in those early days, violent and foolish when excited or under the influence of his race prejudices, began to apologise quite humbly, assuring my father that he forgot nothing and meant no offence. So they patched the matter up, and an hour later we started.

All the Boers came to see us off, giving me many kind words and saying how much they looked forward to meeting me again on the following Thursday. Pereira, who was among them, was also very genial, begging me to be sure and get well, since he did not wish to beat one who was still crippled, even at a game of goose shooting. I answered that I would do my best; as for my part, I did not like being beaten at any game which I had set my heart on winning, whether it were little or big. Then I turned my head, for I was lying on my back all this time, to bid good-bye to Marie, who had slipped out of the house into the yard where the cart was.

“Good-bye, Allan,” she said, giving me her hand and a look from her eyes that I trusted was not seen. Then, under pretence of arranging the kaross which was over me, she bent down and whispered swiftly:

“Win that match if you love me. I shall pray God that you may every night, for it will be an omen.”

I think the whisper was heard, though not the words, for I saw Pereira bite his lip and make a movement as though to interrupt her. But Pieter Retief thrust his big form in front of him rather rudely, and said with one of his hearty laughs:

“Allemachte! friend, let the *missje* wish a good journey to the young fellow who saved her life.”

Next moment Hans, the Hottentot, screamed at the oxen in the usual fashion, and we rolled away through the gate.

But oh! if I had liked the Heer Retief before, now I loved him.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SHOOTING MATCH

My journey back to the Mission Station was a strange contrast to that which I had made thence a few days before. Then, the darkness, the swift mare beneath me rushing through it like a bird, the awful terror in my heart lest I should be too late, as with wild eyes I watched the paling stars and the first gathering grey of dawn. Now, the creaking of the ox-cart, the familiar veld, the bright glow of the peaceful sunlight, and in my heart a great thankfulness, and yet a new terror lest the pure and holy love which I had won should be stolen away from me by force or fraud.

Well, as the one matter had been in the hand of God, so was the other, and with that knowledge I must be content. The first trial had ended in death and victory. How would the second end? I wondered, and those words seemed to jumble themselves up in my mind and shape a sentence that it did not conceive. It was: "In the victory that is death," which, when I came to think of it, of course, meant nothing. How victory could be death I did not understand—at any rate, at that time, I who was but a lad of small experience.

As we trekked along comfortably enough, for the road was good and the cart, being on springs, gave my leg no pain, I asked my father what he thought that the Heer Marais had meant when he told us that the Boers had business at Maraisfontein, during which our presence as Englishmen would not be agreeable to them.

"Meant, Allan? He meant that these traitorous Dutchmen are plotting against their sovereign, and are afraid lest we should report their treason. Either they intend to rebel because of that most righteous act, the freeing of the slaves, and because we will not kill out all the Kaffirs with whom they chance to quarrel, or to trek from the Colony. For my part I think it will be the latter, for, as you have heard, some parties have already gone; and, unless I am mistaken, many more mean to follow, Marais and Retief and that plotter, Pereira, among them. Let them go; I say, the sooner the better, for I have no doubt that the English flag will follow them in due course."

"I hope that they won't," I answered with a nervous laugh; "at any rate, until I have won back my mare." (I had left her in Retief's care as stakeholder, until the match should be shot off.)

For the rest of that two and a half hours' trek my father, looking very dignified and patriotic, declaimed to me loudly about the bad behaviour of the Boers, who hated and traduced missionaries, loathed and abominated British rule and permanent officials, loved slavery and killed Kaffirs whenever they got the chance. I listened to him politely, for it was not wise to cross my parent when he was in that humour. Also, having mixed a great deal with the Dutch, I knew that there was another side to the question, namely, that the missionaries sometimes traduced them (as, in fact, they did), and that British rule, or rather, party government, played strange tricks with the interests of distant dependencies. That permanent officials and im-permanent ones too—such as governors full of a little brief authority—often misrepresented and oppressed them. That Kaffirs, encouraged by the variegated policy of these party governments and their servants, frequently stole their stock; and if they found a chance, murdered them with their women and children, as they had tried to do at Maraisfontein; though there, it is true, they had some provocation. That British virtue had liberated the slaves without paying their owners a fair price for them, and so forth.

But, to tell the truth, it was not of these matters of high policy, which were far enough away from a humble youth like myself, that I was thinking. What appealed to me and made my heart sick was the reflection that if Henri Marais and his friends trekked, Marie Marais must perforce trek with them; and that whereas I, an Englishman, could not be of that adventurous company, Hernando Pereira both could and would.

On the day following our arrival home, what between the fresh air, plenty of good food, for which I found I had an appetite, and liberal doses of Pontac—a generous Cape wine that is a kind of cross between port and Burgundy—I found myself so much better that I was able to hop about the place upon a pair of crutches which Hans improvised for me out of Kaffir sticks. Next morning, my improvement continuing at a rapid rate, I turned my attention seriously to the shooting match, for which I had but five days to prepare.

Now it chanced that some months before a young Englishman of good family—he was named the Honourable Vavasour Smyth—who had accompanied an official relative to the Cape Colony, came our way in search of sport, of which I was able to show him a good deal of a humble kind. He had brought with him, amongst other weapons, what in those days was considered a very beautiful hair-triggered small-bore rifle fitted with a nipple for percussion caps, then quite a new invention. It was by a maker of the name of J. Purdey, of London, and had cost quite a large sum because of the perfection of its workmanship. When the Honourable V. Smyth—of whom I have never heard since—took his leave of us on his departure for England, being a generous-hearted young fellow, as a souvenir of himself, he kindly presented me with this rifle,<sup>[1]</sup> which I still have.

[1] This single-barrelled percussion-cap rifle described by Allan Quatermain, which figures so prominently in the history of this epoch of his life, has been sent to me by Mr. Curtis, and is before me as I write. It was made in the year 1835 by J. Purdey, of 314½, Oxford Street, London, and is a beautiful piece of workmanship of its kind. Without the ramrod, which is now missing, it weighs only 5 lbs. 3¾ oz. The barrel is octagonal, and the rifled bore, designed to take a spherical bullet, is ½ in. in diameter. The hammer can be set to safety on the half-cock by means of a catch behind it.

Another peculiarity of the weapon, one that I have never seen before, is that by pressing on the back of the trigger the ordinary light pull of the

piece is so reduced that the merest touch suffices to fire it, thus rendering it hair-triggered in the fullest sense of the word.

It has two flap-sights marked for 150 and 200 yards, in addition to the fixed sight designed for firing at 100 yards.

On the lock are engraved a stag and a doe, the first lying down and the second standing.

Of its sort and period, it is an extraordinarily well-made and handy gun, finished with horn at the end of what is now called the tongue, and with the stock cut away so as to leave a raised cushion against which the cheek of the shooter rests.

What charge it took I do not know, but I should imagine from 2½ to 3 drachms of powder. It is easy to understand that in the hands of Allan Quatermain this weapon, obsolete as it is to-day, was capable of great things within the limits of its range, and that the faith he put in it at the trial of skill at the Groote Kloof, and afterwards in the fearful ordeal of the shooting of the vultures on the wing, upon the Mount of Slaughter, when the lives of many hung upon his marksmanship, was well justified. This, indeed, is shown by the results in both cases.

In writing of this rifle, Messrs. Purdey informed me that copper percussion caps were experimented with by Colonel Forsyth in 1820, and that their firm sold them in 1824, at a cost of £1 15s. per 1,000, although their use did not become general until some years later.—THE EDITOR.

That was about six months earlier than the time of which I write, and during those months I had often used this rifle for the shooting of game, such as blesbuck and also of bustards. I found it to be a weapon of the most extraordinary accuracy up to a range of about two hundred yards, though when I rode off in that desperate hurry for Maraisfontein I did not take it with me because it was a single barrel and too small in the bore to load with loopers at a pinch. Still, in challenging Pereira, it was this gun and no other that I determined to use; indeed, had I not owned it I do not think that I should have ventured on the match.

As it happened, Mr. Smyth had left me with the rifle a large supply of specially cast bullets and of the new percussion caps, to say nothing of some very fine imported powder. Therefore, having ammunition in plenty, I set to work to practise. Seating myself upon a chair in a deep kloof near the station, across which rock pigeons and turtle doves were wont to fly in numbers at a considerable height, I began to fire at them as they flashed over me.

Now, in my age, I may say without fear of being set down a boaster, that I have one gift, that of marksmanship, which, I suppose, I owe to some curious combination of judgment, quickness of eye, and steadiness of hand. I can declare honestly that in my best days I never knew a man who could beat me in shooting at a living object; I say nothing of target work, of which I have little experience. Oddly enough, also, I believe that at this art, although then I lacked the practice which since has come to me in such plenty, I was as good as a youth as I have ever been in later days, and, of course, far better than I am now. This I soon proved upon the present occasion, for seated there in that kloof, after a few trials, I found that I could bring down quite a number of even the swift, straight-flying rock pigeons as they sped over me, and this, be it remembered, not with shot, but with a single bullet, a feat that many would hold to be incredible.

So the days passed, and I practised, every evening finding me a little better at this terribly difficult sport. For always I learned more as to the exact capacities of my rifle and the allowance that must be made according to the speed of the bird, its distance, and the complications of the wind and of the light. During those days, also, I recovered so rapidly that at the end of them I was almost in my normal condition, and could walk well with the aid of a single stick.

At length the eventful Thursday came, and about midday—for I lay in bed late that morning and did not shoot—I drove, or, rather, was driven, in a Cape cart with two horses to the place known as Groote Kloof or Great Gully. Over this gorge the wild geese flighted from their *pans* or feeding grounds on the high lands above, to other *pans* that lay some miles below, and thence, I suppose, straight out to the sea coast, whence they returned at dawn.

On arriving at the mouth of Groote Kloof about four o'clock in the afternoon, my father and I were astonished to see a great number of Boers assembled there, and among them a certain sprinkling of their younger womankind, who had come on horseback or in carts.

"Good gracious!" I said to my father; "if I had known there was to be such a fuss as this about a shooting match, I don't think I could have faced it."

"Hum," he answered; "I think there is more in the wind than your match. Unless I am much mistaken, it has been made the excuse of a public meeting in a secluded spot, so as to throw the Authorities off the scent."

As a matter of fact, my father was quite right. Before we arrived there that day the majority of those Boers, after full and long discussion, had arranged to shake the dust of the Colony off their feet, and find a home in new lands to the north.

Presently we were among them, and I noticed that, one and all, their faces were anxious and preoccupied. Pieter Retief caught sight of me being helped out of the cart by my father and Hans, whom I had brought to load, and for a moment looked puzzled. Evidently his thoughts were far away. Then he remembered and exclaimed in his jolly voice:

"Why! here is our little Englishman come to shoot off his match like a man of his word. Friend Marais, stop talking about your losses"—this in a warning voice—"and give him good day."

So Marais came, and with him Marie, who blushed and smiled, but to my mind looked more of a grown woman than ever before; one who had left girlhood behind her and found herself face to face with real life and all its troubles. Following her close, very close, as I was quick to notice, was Hernan Pereira. He was even more finely dressed than usual and carried in his hand a beautiful new, single-barrelled rifle, also fitted to take percussion caps, but, as I thought, of a very large bore for the purpose of goose shooting.

"So you have got well again," he said in a genial voice that yet did not ring true. Indeed, it suggested to me that he wished I had done nothing of the sort. "Well, Mynheer Allan, here you find me quite ready to shoot your head off." (He didn't mean that, though I dare say he was.) "I tell you that the mare is as good as mine, for I have been practising, haven't I, Marie? as the *aasvogels*" (that is, vultures) "round the stead know to their cost."

"Yes, Cousin Hernan," said Marie, "you have been practising, but so, perhaps, has Allan."

By this time all the company of Boers had collected round us, and began to evince a great interest in the pending contest, as was natural among people who rarely had a gun out of their hands, and thought that fine shooting was the divinest of the arts. However, they were not allowed to stay long, as the Kaffirs said that the geese would begin their afternoon flight within about half an hour. So the spectators were all requested to arrange themselves under the sheer cliff of the kloof, where they could not be seen by the birds coming over them from behind, and there to keep silence. Then Pereira and I—I attended by my loader, but he alone, as he said a man at his elbow would bother him—and with us Retief, the referee, took our stations about a hundred and fifty yards from this face

of cliff. Here we screened ourselves as well as we could from the keen sight of the birds behind some tall bushes which grew at this spot.

I seated myself on a camp-stool, which I had brought with me, for my leg was still too weak to allow me to stand long, and waited. Presently Pereira said through Retief that he had a favour to ask, namely, that I would allow him to take the first six shots, as the strain of waiting made him nervous. I answered, "Certainly," although I knew well that the object of the request was that he believed that the outpost geese—"spy-geese" we called them—which would be the first to arrive, would probably come over low down and slow, whereas those that followed, scenting danger, might fly high and fast. This, in fact, proved to be the case, for there is no bird more clever than the misnamed goose.

When we had waited about a quarter of an hour Hans said:

"Hist! Goose comes."

As he spoke, though as yet I could not see the bird, I heard its cry of "*Honk, honk*" and the swish of its strong wings.

Then it appeared, an old spur-winged gander, probably the king of the flock, flying so low that it only cleared the cliff edge by about twenty feet, and passed over not more than thirty yards up, an easy shot. Pereira fired, and down it came rather slowly, falling a hundred yards or so behind him, while Retief said:

"One for our side."

Pereira loaded again, and just as he had capped his rifle three more geese, also flying low, came over, preceded by a number of ducks, passing straight above us, as they must do owing to the shape of the gap between the land waves of the veld above through which they flighted. Pereira shot, and to my surprise, the second, not the first, bird fell, also a good way behind him.

"Did you shoot at that goose, or the other, nephew?" asked Retief.

"At that one for sure," he answered with a laugh.

"He lies," muttered the Hottentot; "he shot at the first and killed the second."

"Be silent," I answered. "Who would lie about such a thing?"

Again Pereira loaded. By the time that he was ready more geese were approaching, this time in a triangle of seven birds, their leader being at the point of the triangle, which was flying higher than those that had gone before. He fired, and down came not one bird, but two, namely, the captain and the goose to the right of and a little behind it.

"Ah! uncle," exclaimed Pereira, "did you see those birds cross each other as I pulled? That was a lucky one for me, but I won't count the second if the Heer Allan objects."

"No, I did not, nephew," answered Retief, "but doubtless they must have done so, or the same bullet could not have pierced both."

Both Hans and I only looked at each other and laughed. Still we said nothing.

From the spectators under the cliff there came a murmur of congratulation not unmixed with astonishment. Again Pereira loaded, aimed, and loosed at a rather high goose—it may have been about seventy yards in the air. He struck it right enough, for the feathers flew from its breast; but to my astonishment the bird, after swooping down as though it were going to fall, recovered itself and flew away straight out of sight.

"Tough birds, these geese!" exclaimed Pereira. "They can carry as much lead as a sea-cow."

"Very tough indeed," answered Retief doubtfully. "Never before did I see a bird fly away with an ounce ball through its middle."

"Oh! he will drop dead somewhere," replied Pereira as he rammed his powder down.

Within four minutes more Pereira had fired his two remaining shots, selecting, as he was entitled to do, low and easy young geese that came over him slowly. He killed them both, although the last of them, after falling, waddled along the ground into a tuft of high grass.

Now murmurs of stifled applause broke from the audience, to which Pereira bowed in acknowledgment.

"You will have to shoot very well, Mynheer Allan," said Retief to me, "if you want to beat that. Even if I rule out one of the two birds that fell to a single shot, as I think I shall, Hernan has killed five out of six, which can scarcely be bettered."

"Yes," I answered; "but, mynheer, be so good as to have those geese collected and put upon one side. I don't want them mixed up with mine, if I am lucky enough to bring any down."

He nodded, and some Kaffirs were sent to bring in the geese. Several of these, I noted, were still flapping and had to have their necks twisted, but at the time I did not go to look at them. While this was being done I called to Retief, and begged him to examine the powder and bullets I was about to use.

"What's the good?" he asked, looking at me curiously. "Powder is powder, and a bullet is a bullet."

"None, I dare say. Still, oblige me by looking at them, my uncle."

Then at my bidding Hans took six bullets and placed them in his hand, begging him to return them to us as they were wanted.

"They must be a great deal smaller than Hernan's," said Retief, "who, being stronger, uses a heavier gun."

"Yes," I answered briefly, as Hans put the charge of powder into the rifle, and drove home the wad. Then, taking a bullet from Retief's hand, he rammed that down on to the top of it, capped the gun, and handed it to me.

By now the geese were coming thick, for the flight was at its full. Only, either because some of those that had already passed had sighted the Kaffirs collecting the fallen birds and risen—an example which the others noted from afar and followed—or because in an unknown way warning of their danger had been conveyed to them, they were flying higher and faster than the first arrivals.

"You will have the worst of it, Allan," said Retief. "It should have been shot and shot about."

"Perhaps," I answered, "but that can't be helped now."

Then I rose from my stool, the rifle in my hand. I had not long to wait, for presently over came a wedge of geese nearly a hundred yards up. I aimed at the first fellow, holding about eight yards ahead of him to allow for his pace, and pressed. Next second I heard the clap of the bullet, but alas! it had only struck the outstretched beak, of which a small portion fell to the ground. The bird itself, after wavering a second, resumed its place as leader of the squad and passed away apparently unharmed.

"Baas, baas," whispered Hans as he seized the rifle and began to re-load, "you were too far in front. These big water-birds do not travel as fast as the rock pigeons."

I nodded, wishing to save my breath. Then, quivering with excitement, for if I missed the next shot the match appeared to be lost, presently I took the rifle from his hand.

Scarcely had I done so when a single goose came over quite as high as the others and travelling "as though the black devil had kicked it," as Retief said. This time I allowed the same space to compensate for the object's increased speed and pressed.

Down it came like a stone, falling but a little way behind me with its head knocked off.

"Baas, baas," whispered Hans, "still too far in front. Why aim at the eye when you have the whole body?"

Again I nodded, and at the same time heaved a sigh of relief. At least the match was still alive. Soon a large flight came over, mixed up with mallard and widgeon. I took the right-hand angle bird, so that it could not be supposed I had "browed the lot," as here in England they say of one who fires at a covey and not at a particular partridge. Down he came, shot straight through the breast. Then I knew that I had got my nerve, and felt no more fear.

To cut a long story short, although two of them were extremely difficult and high, one being, I should say, quite a hundred and twenty yards above me, and the other by no means easy, I killed the next three birds one after the other, and I verily believe could have killed a dozen more without a miss, for now I was shooting as I had never shot before.

"Say, nephew Allan," asked Retief curiously in the pause between the fifth and sixth shots, "why do your geese fall so differently to Hernan's?"

"Ask him! don't talk to me," I answered, and next instant brought down number five, the finest shot of the lot.

A sound of wonder and applause came from all the audience, and I saw Marie wave a white handkerchief.

"That's the end," said the referee.

"One minute before you stir," I answered. "I want to shoot at something else that is not in the match, just to see if I can kill two birds with one bullet like the Heer Pereira."

He granted my request with a nod, holding up his hand to prevent the audience from moving, and bidding Pereira, who tried to interrupt, to be silent.

Now, while the match was in progress I had noticed two falcons about the size of the British peregrine wheeling round and round high over the kloof, in which doubtless they bred, apparently quite undisturbed by the shooting. Or, perhaps, they had their eyes upon some of the fallen geese. I took the rifle and waited for a long while, till at last my opportunity came. I saw that the larger hen falcon was about to cross directly over the circle of its mate, there being perhaps a distance of ten yards between them. I aimed; I judged—for a second my mind was a kind of calculating machine—the different arcs and speeds of the birds must be allowed for, and the lowest was ninety yards away. Then, with something like a prayer upon my lips, I pressed while every eye stared upwards.

Down came the lower falcon; a pause of half a second, and down came the higher one also, falling dead upon its dead mate!

Now, even from those Boers, who did not love to see an Englishman excel, there broke a shout of acclamation. Never had they beheld such a shot as this; nor in truth had I.

"Mynheer Retief," I said, "I gave you notice that I intended to try to kill both of them, did I not?"

"You did. Allemachte! you did! But tell me, Allan Quatermain, are your eye and hand quite human?"

"You must ask my father," I answered with a shrug as I sat myself down upon my stool and mopped my brow.

The Boers came up with a rush, Marie flying ahead of them like a swallow, and their stout womenfolk waddling behind, and formed a circle round us, all talking at once. I did not listen to their conversation, till I heard Pereira, who was engaged in some eye-play with Marie, say in a loud voice:

"Yes, it was pretty, very pretty, but all the same, Uncle Retief, I claim the match, as I shot six geese against five."

"Hans," I said, "bring my geese," and they were brought, each with a neat hole through it, and laid down near those that Pereira had shot. "Now," I said to Retief, "examine the wounds in these birds, and then that on the second bird which the Heer Pereira killed when he brought down two at once. I think it will be found that his bullet must have splintered."

Retief went and studied all the birds, taking them up one by one. Then he threw down the last with a curse and cried in a great voice:

"Mynheer Pereira, why do you bring shame on us before these two Englishmen? I say that you have been using *loopers*, or else bullets that were sawn in quarters and glued or tied with thread. Look, look!" and he pointed to the wounds, of which in one case there were as many as three on a single bird.

"Why not?" answered Pereira coolly. "The bargain was that we were to use bullets, but it was never said that they should not be cut. Doubtless the Heer Allan's were treated in the same way."

"No," I answered, "when I said that I would shoot with a bullet I meant a whole bullet, not one that had been sawn in pieces and fixed together again, so that after it left the muzzle it might spread out like shot. But I do not wish to talk about the matter. It is in the hands of the Heer Pieter Retief, who will give judgment as it pleases him."

Now, much excited argument ensued among the Boers, in the midst of which Marie managed to whisper to me unheard:

"Oh! I am glad, Allan, for whatever they may decide, you won, and the omen is good."

"I don't see what geese have to do with omens, sweetheart," I answered—"that is, since the time of the ancient Romans. Anyhow, I should say that the omens are bad, for there is going to be a row presently."

Just then Retief put up his hand, calling out:

"Silence! I have decided. The writing of the match did not say that the bullets were not to be cut, and therefore Hernan Pereira's birds must count. But that writing does say that any bird accidentally killed should not count, and therefore one goose must be subtracted from Pereira's total, which leaves the two shooters equal. So either the match is dead or, since the geese have ceased to come, it must be shot off another day."

"Oh! if there is any question," said Pereira, who felt that public opinion was much against him, "let the Englishman take the money. I dare say that he needs it, as the sons of missionaries are not rich."

"There is no question," I said, "since, rich or poor, not for a thousand pounds would I shoot again against one who plays such tricks. Keep your money, Mynheer Pereira, and I will keep my mare. The umpire has said that the match is dead, so everything is finished."

"Not quite," interrupted Retief, "for I have a word to say. Friend Allan, you have played fair, and I believe that there is no one who can shoot like you in Africa."

"That is so," said the audience of Boers.

"Mynheer Pereira," went on Retief, "although you, too, are a fine shot, as is well known, I believe that had you played fair also you would have been beaten, but as it is you have saved your hundred pounds. Mynheer Pereira," he added in a great voice, "you are a cheat, who have brought disgrace upon us Boers, and for my part I never want to shake your hand again."

Now, at these outspoken words, for when his indignation was aroused Retief was no measurer of language, Pereira's high-coloured face went white as a sheet.

"*Mein Gott*, mynheer," he said, "I am minded to make you answer for such talk," and his hand went to the knife at his girdle.

"What!" shouted Retief, "do you want another shooting match? Well, if so I am ready with whole bullets or with split ones. None shall say that Pieter Retief was afraid of any man, and, least of all, of one who is not ashamed to try to steal a prize as a hyena steals a bone from a lion. Come on, Hernan Pereira, come on!"

Now, I am sure I cannot say what would have happened, although I am quite certain that Pereira had no stomach for a duel with the redoubtable Retief, a man whose courage was as proverbial throughout the land as was his perfect uprightness of character. At any rate, seeing that things looked very black, Henri Marais, who had been listening to this altercation with evident annoyance, stepped forward and said:

"Mynheer Retief and nephew Hernan, you are both my guests, and I will not permit quarrelling over this foolishness, especially as I am sure that Hernan never intended to cheat, but only to do what he thought was allowed. Why should he, who is one of the finest shots in the Colony, though it may be that young Allan Quatermain here is even better? Will you not say so, too, friend Retief, especially just now when it is necessary that we should all be as brothers?" he added pleadingly.

"No," thundered Retief, "I will not tell a lie to please you or anyone."

Then, seeing that the commandant was utterly uncompromising, Marais went up to his nephew and whispered to him for a while. What he said I do not know. The result of it was, however, that after favouring both Retief and myself with an angry scowl, Pereira turned and walked to where his horse stood, mounted it, and rode off, followed by two Hottentot after-riders.

That was the last I saw of Hernan Pereira for a long while to come, and heartily do I wish that it had been the last I ever saw of him. But this was not to be.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PARTING

The Boers, who ostensibly had come to the kloof to see the shooting match, although, in fact, for a very different purpose, now began to disperse. Some of them rode straight away, while some went to wagons which they had outspanned at a distance, and trekked off to their separate homes. I am glad to say that before they left quite a number of the best of them came up and congratulated me both on the defence of Maraisfontein and on my shooting. Also not a few expressed their views concerning Pereira in very straightforward language.

Now, the arrangement was that my father and I were to sleep that night at Marais's stead, returning home on the following morning. But my father, who had been a silent but not unobservant witness of all this scene, coming to the conclusion that after what had happened we should scarcely be welcome there, and that the company of Pereira was to be avoided just now, went up to Marais and bade him farewell, saying that we would send for my mare.

"Not so, not so," he answered, "you are my guests to-night. Also, fear not, Hernan will be away. He has gone a journey upon some business."

As my father hesitated, Marais added: "Friend, I pray you to come, for I have some important words to say to you, which cannot be said here."

Then my father gave way, to my delight and relief. For if he had not, what chance would there have been of my getting some still more important words with Marie? So having collected the geese and the two falcons, which I proposed to skin for Marie, I was helped into the cart, and we drove off, reaching Maraisfontein just as night set in.

That evening, after we had eaten, Heer Marais asked my father and myself to speak with him in the sitting-room. By an afterthought also, or so it seemed to me, he told his daughter, who had been clearing away the dishes and with whom as yet I had found no opportunity to talk, to come in with us and close the door behind her.

When all were seated and we men had lit our pipes, though apprehension of what was to follow quite took away my taste for smoking, Marais spoke in English, which he knew to a certain extent. This was for the benefit of my father, who made it a point of honour not to understand Dutch, although he would answer Marais in that language when *he* pretended not to understand English. To me he spoke in Dutch, and occasionally in French to Marie. It was a most curious and polyglot conversation.

"Young Allan," he said, "and you, daughter Marie, I have heard stories concerning you that, although I never gave you leave to *opsit*" (that is, to sit up alone at night with candles, according to the Boer fashion between those who are courting), "you have been making love to each other."

"That is true, mynheer," I said. "I only waited an opportunity to tell you that we plighted our troth during the attack of the Quabies on this house."

"Allemachte! Allan, a strange time to choose," answered Marais, pulling at his beard; "the troth that is plighted in blood is apt to end in blood."

"A vain superstition to which I cannot consent," interrupted my father.

"Perhaps so," I answered. "I know not; God alone knows. I only know that we plighted our troth when we thought ourselves about to die, and that we shall keep that troth till death ends it."

"Yes, my father," added Marie, leaning forward across the scored yellow-wood table, her chin resting on her hand and her dark, buck-like eyes looking him in the face. "Yes, my father, that is so, as I have told you already."

"And I tell you, Marie, what I have told you already, and you too, Allan, that this thing may not be," answered Marais, hitting the table with his fist. "I have nothing to say against you, Allan; indeed, I honour you, and you have done me a mighty service, but it may not be."

"Why not, mynheer?" I asked.

"For three reasons, Allan, each of which is final. You are English, and I do not wish my daughter to marry an Englishman; that is the first. You are poor, which is no discredit to you, and since I am now ruined my daughter cannot marry a poor man; that is the second. You live here, and my daughter and I are leaving this country, therefore you cannot marry her; that is the third," and he paused.

"Is there not a fourth," I asked, "which is the real reason? Namely, that you wish your daughter to marry someone else."

"Yes, Allan; since you force me to it, there is a fourth. I have affianced my daughter to her cousin, Hernando Pereira, a man of substance and full age; no lad, but one who knows his own mind and can support a wife."

"I understand," I answered calmly, although within my heart a very hell was raging. "But tell me, mynheer, has Marie affianced herself—or perhaps she will answer with her own lips?"

"Yes, Allan," replied Marie in her quiet fashion, "I have affianced myself—to you and no other man."

"You hear, mynheer," I said to Marais.

Then he broke out in his usual excitable manner. He stormed, he argued, he rated us both. He said that he would never allow it; that first he would see his daughter in her grave. That I had abused his confidence and violated his hospitality; that he would shoot me if I came near his girl. That she was a minor, and according to the law he could dispose of her in marriage. That she must accompany him whither he was going; that certainly I should not do so, and much more of the same sort.

When at last he had tired himself out and smashed his favourite pipe upon the table, Marie spoke, saying:

"My father, you know that I love you dearly, for since my mother's death we have been everything to each other, have we not?"

"Surely, Marie, you are my life, and more than my life."

"Very well, my father. That being so, I acknowledge your authority over me, whatever the law may say. I acknowledge that you have the right to forbid me to marry Allan, and if you do forbid me—while I am under age, at any rate—I shall not marry him because of my duty to you. But"—here she rose and looked him full in the eyes, and oh! how stately she seemed at that moment in her simple strength and youthful grace!—"there is one thing, my father, that I do not acknowledge—your right to force me to marry any other man. As a woman with power over herself, I deny that right; and much as it pains me, my father, to refuse you anything, I say that first I will die. To Allan here I have given myself for good or for evil, and if I may not marry Allan, I will go to the grave unwed. If my words hurt you, I pray you to pardon me, but at the same time to remember that they are my words, which cannot be altered."

Marais looked at his daughter, and his daughter looked at Marais. At first I thought that he was about to curse her; but if this were so, something in her eyes seemed to change his mind, for all he said was:

"Intractable, like the rest of your race! Well, Fate may lead those who cannot be driven, and this matter I leave in the hands of Fate. While you are under age—that is, for two years or more—you may not marry without my consent, and have just promised not to do so. Presently we trek from this country into far-off lands. Who knows what may happen there?"

"Yes," said my father in a solemn voice, speaking for the first time, "who knows except God, Who governs all things, and will settle these matters according to His will, Henri Marais? Listen," he went on after a pause, for Marais made no answer, but sat himself down and stared gloomily at the table. "You do not wish my son to marry your daughter for various reasons, of which one is that you think him poor and a richer suitor has offered himself after a reverse of fortune has made *you* poor. Another and a greater, the true reason, is his English blood, which you hate so much that, although by God's mercy he saved her life, you do not desire that he should share her life. Is it not true?"

"Yes, it is true, Mynheer Quatermain. You English are bullies and cheats," he answered excitedly.

"And so you would give your daughter to one who has shown himself humble and upright, to that good hater of the English and plotter against his King, Hernando Pereira, whom you love because he alone is left of your ancient race."

Remembering the incident of the afternoon, this sarcasm reduced Marais to silence.

"Well," went on my father, "although I am fond of Marie, and know her to be a sweet and noble-hearted girl, neither do I wish that she should marry my son. I would see him wed to some English woman, and not dragged into the net of the Boers and their plottings. Still, it is plain that these two love each other with heart and soul, as doubtless it has been decreed that they should love. This being so, I tell you that to separate them and force another marriage upon one of them is a crime before God, of which, I am sure, He will take note and pay it back to you. Strange things may happen in those lands whither you go, Henri Marais. Will you not, then, be content to leave your child in safe keeping?"

"Never!" shouted Marais. "She shall accompany me to a new home, which is not under the shadow of your accursed British flag."

"Then I have no more to say. On your head be it here and hereafter," replied my father solemnly.

Now unable to control myself any longer I broke in:

"But I have, mynheer. To separate Marie and myself is a sin, and one that will break her heart. As for my poverty, I have something, more perhaps than you think, and in this rich country wealth can be earned by those who work, as I would do for her sake. The man to whom you would give her showed his true nature this day, for he who can play so low a trick to win a wager, will play worse tricks to win greater things. Moreover, the scheme must fail since Marie will not marry him."

"I say she shall," replied Marais; "and that whether she does or not, she shall accompany me and not stay here to be the wife of an English boy."

"Accompany you I will, father, and share your fortunes to the last. But marry Hernando Pereira I will not," said Marie quietly.

"Perhaps, mynheer," I added, "days may come when once again you will be glad of the help of an 'English boy.'"

The words were spoken at random, a kind of ejaculation from the heart, caused by the sting of Marais's cruelty and insults, like the cry of a beast beneath a blow. Little did I know how true they would prove, but at times it is thus that truth is mysteriously drawn from some well of secret knowledge hidden in our souls.

"When I want your help I will ask for it," raved Marais, who, knowing himself to be in the wrong, strove to cover up that wrong with violence.

"Asked or unasked, if I live it shall be given in the future as in the past, Mynheer Marais. God pardon you for the woe you are bringing on Marie and on me."

Now Marie began to weep a little, and, unable to bear that sight, I covered my eyes with my hand. Marais, who, when he was not under the influence of his prejudices or passion, had a kind heart, was moved also, but tried to hide his feelings in roughness. He swore at Marie, and told her to go to bed, and she obeyed, still weeping. Then my father rose and said:

"Henri Marais, we cannot leave here to-night because the horses are kraaled, and it would be difficult to find them in this darkness, so we must ask your hospitality till dawn."

"I do not ask it," I exclaimed. "I go to sleep in the cart," and I limped from the room and the house, leaving the two men together.

What passed afterwards between them I do not quite know. I gathered that my father, who, when roused, also had a temper and was mentally and intellectually the stronger man, told Marais his opinion of his wickedness and folly in language that he was not likely to forget. I believe he even drove him to confess that his acts seemed cruel, excusing them, however, by announcing that he had sworn before God that his daughter should never marry an Englishman. Also he said that he had promised her solemnly to Pereira, his own nephew, whom he loved, and could not break his word.

"No," answered my father, "because, being mad with the madness that runs before destruction, you prefer to break Marie's heart and perhaps become guilty of her blood."

Then he left him.

The darkness was intense. Through it I groped my way to the cart, which stood where it had been outspanned on the veld at a little distance from the house, wishing heartily, so miserable was I, that the Kaffirs might choose that black night for another attack and make an end of me.

When I reached it and lit the lantern which we always carried, I was astonished to find that, in a rough fashion, it had been made ready to sleep in. The seats had been cleared out, the hind curtain fastened, and so forth. Also the pole was propped up with an ox-yoke so as to make the vehicle level to lie in. While I was wondering vaguely who could have done this, Hans climbed on to the step, carrying two karosses which he had borrowed or stolen, and asked if I was comfortable.

"Oh, yes!" I answered; "but why were you going to sleep in the cart?"

"Baas," he replied, "I was not; I prepared it for you. How did I know that you were coming? Oh, very simply. I sat on the stoep and listened to all the talk in the *sitkamer*. The window has never been mended, baas, since the Quabies broke it. God in Heaven! what a talk that was. I never knew that white people could have so much to say about a simple matter. You want to marry the Baas Marais's daughter; the baas wants her to marry another man who can pay more cattle. Well, among us it would soon have been settled, for the father would have taken a stick and beaten you out of the hut with the thick end. Then he would have beaten the girl with the thin end until she promised to take the other man, and all would have been settled nicely. But you Whites, you talk and talk, and nothing is settled. You still mean to marry the daughter, and the daughter still means not to marry the man of many cows. Moreover, the father has really gained nothing except a sick heart and much bad luck to come."

"Why much bad luck to come, Hans?" I asked idly, for his naïve summing up of the case interested me in a vague way.

"Oh! Baas Allan, for two reasons. First, your reverend father, who made me true Christian, told him so, and a *prédicant* so good as he, is one down whom the curse of God runs from Heaven like lightning runs down a tree. Well, the Heer Marais was sitting under that tree, and we all know what happens to him who is under a tree when the lightning strikes it. That my first Christian reason. My second black-man reason, about which there can be no mistake, for it has always been true since there was a black man, is that the girl is yours by blood. You saved her life with your blood," and he pointed to my leg, "and therefore bought her for ever, for blood is more than cattle. Therefore, too, he who would divide her from you brings blood on her and on the other man who tries to steal her, blood, blood! and on himself I know not what." And he waved his yellow arms, staring up at me with his little black eyes in a way that was most uncanny.

"Nonsense!" I said. "Why do you talk such bad words?"

"Because they are true words, Baas Allan. Oh, you laugh at the poor Totty; but I had it from my father, and he from his father from generation to generation, amen, and you will see. You will see, as I have seen before now, and as the Heer Marais will see, who, if the great God had not made him mad—for mad he is, baas, as we know, if you Whites don't—might have lived in his home till he was old, and have had a good son-in-law to bury him in his blanket."

Now I seemed to have had enough of this eerie conversation. Of course it is easy to laugh at natives and their superstitions, but, after a long life of experience, I am bound to admit that they are not always devoid of truth. The native has some kind of sixth sense which the civilised man has lost, or so it seems to me.

"Talking of blankets," I said in order to change the subject, "from whom did you get these karosses?"

"From whom? Why, from the Missie, of course, baas. When I heard that you were to sleep in the cart I went to her and borrowed them to cover you. Also, I had forgotten, she gave me a writing for you," and he felt about, first in his dirty shirt, then under his arm, and finally in his fuzzy hair, from which last hiding place he produced a little bit of paper folded into a pellet. I undid it and read these words, written with a pencil and in French:—

"I shall be in the peach orchard half an hour before sunrise. Be there if you would bid me farewell.—M."

"Is there any answer, baas?" asked Hans when I had thrust the note into my pocket. "If so I can take it without being found out." Then an inspiration seemed to strike him, and he added: "Why do you not take it yourself? The Missie's window is easy to open, also I am sure she would be pleased to see you."

"Be silent," I said. "I am going to sleep. Wake me an hour before the cock-crow—and, stay—see that the horses have got out of the kraal so that you cannot find them too easily in case the Reverend wishes to start very early. But do not let them wander far, for here we are no welcome guests."

"Yes, baas. By the way, baas, the Heer Pereira, who tried to cheat you over those geese, is sleeping in an empty house not more than two miles away. He drinks coffee when he wakes up in the morning, and his servant, who makes it, is my good friend. Now would you like me to put a little something into it? Not to kill him, for that is against the law in the Book, but just to make him quite mad, for the Book says nothing about that. If so, I have a very good medicine, one that you white people do not know, which

improves the taste of the coffee, and it might save much trouble. You see, if he came dancing about the place without any clothes on, like a common Kaffir, the Heer Marais, although *he* is really mad also, might not wish for him as a son-in-law."

"Oh! go to the devil if you are not there already," I replied, and turned over as though to sleep.

There was no need for me to have instructed that faithful creature, the astute but immoral Hans, to call me early, as the lady did her mother in the poem, for I do not think that I closed an eye that night. I spare my reflections, for they can easily be imagined in the case of an earnest-natured lad who was about to be bereft of his first love.

Long before the dawn I stood in the peach orchard, that orchard where we had first met, and waited. At length Marie came stealing between the tree trunks like a grey ghost, for she was wrapped in some light-coloured garment. Oh! once more we were alone together. Alone in the utter solitude and silence which precede the African dawn, when all creatures that love the night have withdrawn to their lairs and hiding places, and those that love the day still sleep their soundest.

She saw me and stood still, then opened her arms and clasped me to her breast, uttering no word. A while later she spoke almost in a whisper, saying:

"Allan, I must not stay long, for I think that if my father found us together, he would shoot you in his madness."

Now as always it was of me she thought, not of herself.

"And you, my sweet?" I asked.

"Oh!" she answered, "that matters nothing. Except for the sin of it I wish he would shoot me, for then I should have done with all this pain. I told you, Allan, when the Kaffirs were on us yonder, that it might be better to die; and see, my heart spoke truly."

"Is there no hope?" I gasped. "Will he really separate us and take you away into the wilderness?"

"Certainly, nothing can turn him. Yet, Allan, there is this hope. In two years, if I live, I shall be of full age, and can marry whom I will; and this I swear, that I will marry none but you, no, not even if you were to die to-morrow."

"I bless you for those words," I said.

"Why?" she asked simply. "What others could I speak? Would you have me do outrage to my own heart and go through life faithless and ashamed?"

"And I, I swear also," I broke in.

"Nay, swear nothing. While I live I know that you will love me, and if I should be taken, it is my wish that you should marry some other good woman, since it is not well or right that man should live alone. With us maids it is different. Listen, Allan, for the cocks are beginning to crow, and soon there will be light. You must bide here with your father. If possible, I will write to you from time to time, telling you where we are and how we fare. But if I do not write, know that it is because I cannot, or because I can find no messenger, or because the letters have miscarried, for we go into wild countries, amongst savages."

"Whither do you go?" I asked.

"I believe up towards the great harbour called Delagoa Bay, where the Portuguese rule. My cousin Hernan, who accompanies us"—and she shivered a little in my arms—"is half Portuguese. He tells the Boers that he has relations there who have written him many fine promises, saying they will give us good country to dwell in where we cannot be followed by the English, whom he and my father hate so much."

"I have heard that is all fever veld, and that the country between is full of fierce Kaffirs," I said with a groan.

"Perhaps. I do not know, and I do not care. At least, that is the notion in my father's head, though, of course, circumstances may change it. I will try to let you know, Allan, or if I do not, perhaps you will be able to find out for yourself. Then, then, if we both live and you still care for me, who will always care for you, when I am of age, you will join us and, say and do what they may, I will marry no other man. And if I die, as may well happen, oh! then my spirit shall watch over you and wait for you till you join me beneath the wings of God. Look, it grows light. I must go. Farewell, my love, my first and only love, till in life or death we meet again, as meet we shall."

Once more we clung together and kissed, muttering broken words, and then she tore herself from my embrace and was gone. But oh! as I heard her feet steal through the dew-laden grass, I felt as though my heart were being rent from my breast. I have suffered much in life, but I do not think that ever I underwent a bitterer anguish than in this hour of my parting from Marie. For when all is said and done, what joy is there like the joy of pure, first love, and what bitterness like the bitterness of its loss?

Half an hour later the flowering trees of Maraisfontein were behind us, while in front rolled the fire-swept veld, black as life had become for me.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ALLAN'S CALL

A fortnight later Marais, Pereira and their companions, a little band in all of about twenty men, thirty women and children, and say fifty half-breeds and Hottentot after-riders, trekked from their homes into the wilderness. I rode to the crest of a table-topped hill and watched the long line of wagons, one of them containing Marie, crawl away northward across the veld a mile or more beneath.

Sorely was I tempted to gallop after them and seek a last interview with her and her father. But my pride forbade me. Henri Marais had given out that if I came near his daughter he would have me beaten back with *sjambocks* or hide whips. Perhaps he had gained some inkling of our last farewell in the peach orchard. I do not know. But I do know that if anyone had lifted a *sjambock* on me I should have answered with a bullet. Then there would have been blood between us, which is worse to cross than whole rivers of wrath and jealousy. So I just watched the wagons until they vanished, and galloped home down the rock-strewn slope, wishing that the horse would stumble and break my neck.

When I reached the station, however, I was glad that it had not done so, as I found my father sitting on the stoep reading a letter that had been brought by a mounted Hottentot.

It was from Henri Marais, and ran thus:—

“REVEREND HEER AND FRIEND QUATERMAIN,—I send this to bid you farewell, for although you are English and we have quarrelled at times, I honour you in my heart. Friend, now that we are starting, your warning words lie on me like lead, I know not why. But what is done cannot be undone, and I trust that all will come right. If not, it is because the Good Lord wills it otherwise.”

Here my father looked up and said: “When men suffer from their own passion and folly, they always lay the blame on the back of Providence.”

Then he went on, spelling out the letter:

“I fear your boy Allan, who is a brave lad, as I have reason to know, and honest, must think that I have treated him harshly and without gratitude. But I have only done what I must do. True, Marie, who, like her mother, is very strong and stubborn in mind, swears that she will marry no one else; but soon Nature will make her forget all that, especially as such a fine husband waits for her hand. So bid Allan forget all about her also, and when he is old enough choose some English girl. I have sworn a great oath before my God that he shall never marry my daughter with my consent.

“Friend, I write to ask you something because I trust you more than these slim agents. Half the price, a very poor one, that I have for my farm is still unpaid to me by Jacobus van der Merve, who remains behind and buys up all our lands. It is £100 English, due this day year, and I enclose you power of attorney to receive and give receipt for the same. Also there is due to me from your British Government £253 on account of slaves liberated which were worth quite £1,000. This also the paper gives you authority to receive. As regards my claims against the said cursed Government because of the loss brought on me by the Quabie Kaffirs, it will not acknowledge them, saying that the attack was caused by the Frenchman Leblanc, one of my household.”

“And with good reason,” commented my father.

“When you have received these monies, if ever, I pray you take some safe opportunity of sending them to me, wherever I may be, which doubtless you will hear in due course, although by that time I hope to be rich again and not to need money. Farewell and God be with you, as I hope He will be with me and Marie and the rest of us trek-Boers. The bearer will overtake us with your answer at our first outspan.

“HENRI MARAIS.”

“Well,” said my father with a sigh, “I suppose I must accept his trust, though why he should choose an ‘accursed Englishman’ with whom he has quarrelled violently to collect his debts instead of one of his own beloved Boers, I am sure I do not know. I will go and write to him. Allan, see that the messenger and his horse get something to eat.”

I nodded and went to the man, who was one of those that had defended Maraisfontein with me, a good fellow unless he got near liquor.

“Heer Allan,” he said, looking round to see that we were not overheard, “I have a little writing for you also,” and he produced from his pouch a note that was unaddressed.

I tore it open eagerly. Within was written in French, which no Boer would understand if the letter fell into his hands:

“Be brave and faithful, and remember, as I shall. Oh! love of my heart, adieu, adieu!”

This message was unsigned; but what need was there of signature?

I wrote an answer of a sort that may be imagined, though what the exact words were I cannot remember after the lapse of nearly half a century. Oddly enough, it is the things I said which I recall at such a distance of time rather than the things which I wrote, perhaps because, when once written, my mind being delivered, troubled itself with them no more. So in due course the Hottentot

departed with my father's letter and my own, and that was the last direct communication which we had with Henri or Marie Marais for more than a year.

I think that those long months were on the whole the most wretched I have ever spent. The time of life which I was passing through is always trying; that period of emergence from youth into full and responsible manhood which in Africa generally takes place earlier than it does here in England, where young men often seem to me to remain boys up to five-and-twenty. The circumstances which I have detailed made it particularly so in my own case, for here was I, who should have been but a cheerful lad, oppressed with the sorrows and anxieties, and fettered by the affections of maturity.

I could not get Marie out of my mind; her image was with me by day and by night, especially by night, which caused me to sleep badly. I became morose, supersensitive, and excitable. I developed a cough, and thought, as did others, that I was going into a decline. I remember that Hans even asked me once if I would not come and peg out the exact place where I should like to be buried, so that I might be sure that there would be no mistake made when I could no longer speak for myself. On that occasion I kicked Hans, one of the few upon which I have ever touched a native. The truth was that I had not the slightest intention of being buried. I wanted to live and marry Marie, not to die and be put in a hole by Hans. Only I saw no prospect of marrying Marie, or even of seeing her again, and that was why I felt low-spirited.

Of course, from time to time news of the trek-Boers reached us, but it was extremely confused. There were so many parties of them; their adventures were so difficult to follow, and, I may add, often so terrible; so few of them could write; trustworthy messengers were so scanty; distances were so great. At any rate, we heard nothing of Marais's band except a rumour that they had trekked to a district in what is now the Transvaal, which is called Rustenberg, and thence on towards Delagoa Bay into an unknown veld where they had vanished. From Marie herself no letter came, which showed me clearly enough that she had not found an opportunity of sending one.

Observing my depressed condition, my father suggested as a remedy that I should go to the theological college at Cape Town and prepare myself for ordination. But the Church as a career did not appeal to me, perhaps because I felt that I could never be sufficiently good; perhaps because I knew that as a clergyman I should find no opportunity of travelling north when my call came. For I always believed that this call would come.

My father, who wished that I should hear another kind of call, was vexed with me over this matter. He desired earnestly that I should follow the profession which he adorned, and indeed saw no other open for me any more than I did myself. Of course he was right in a way, seeing that in the end I found none, unless big game hunting and Kaffir trading can be called a profession. I don't know, I am sure. Still, poor business as it may be, I say now when I am getting towards the end of life that I am glad I did not follow any other. It has suited me; that was the insignificant hole in the world's affairs which I was destined to fit, whose only gifts were a remarkable art of straight shooting and the more common one of observation mixed with a little untrained philosophy.

So hot did our arguments become about this subject of the Church, for, as may be imagined, in the course of them I revealed some unorthodoxy, especially as regards the matter of our methods of Christianising Kaffirs, that I was extremely thankful when a diversion occurred which took me away from home. The story of my defence of Maraisfontein had spread far, and that of my feats of shooting, especially in the Goose Kloof, still farther. So the end of it was that those in authority commandeered me to serve in one of the continual Kaffir frontier wars which was in progress, and instantly gave me a commission as a kind of lieutenant in a border corps.

Now the events of that particular war have nothing to do with the history that I am telling, so I do not propose even to touch on them. I served in it for a year, meeting with many adventures, one or two successes, and several failures. Once I was wounded slightly, twice I but just escaped with my life. Once I was reprimanded for taking a foolish risk and losing some men. Twice I was commended for what were called gallant actions, such as bringing a wounded comrade out of danger under a warm fire, mostly of assegais, and penetrating by night, almost alone, into the stronghold of a chieftain, and shooting him.

At length that war was patched up with an inconclusive peace and my corps was disbanded. I returned home, no longer a lad, but a man with experience of various kinds and a rather unique knowledge of Kaffirs, their languages, history, and modes of thought and action. Also I had associated a good deal with British officers, and from them acquired much that I had found no opportunity of studying before, especially, I hope, the ideas and standards of English gentlemen.

I had not been back at the Mission Station more than three weeks, quite long enough for me to begin to be bored with idleness and inactivity, when that call for which I had been waiting came at last.

One day a *smous*, that is a low kind of white man, often a Jew, who travels about trading with unsophisticated Boers and Kaffirs, and cheating them if he can, called at the station with his cartful of goods. I was about to send him away, having no liking for such gentry, when he asked me if I were named Allan Quatermain. I said "Yes," whereon he replied that he had a letter for me, and produced a packet wrapped up in sail-cloth. I asked him whence he had it, and he answered from a man whom he had met at Port Elizabeth, an east coast trader, who, hearing that he was coming into the Cradock district, entrusted him with the letter. The man told him that it was very important, and that I should reward the bearer well if it were delivered safely.

While the Jew talked (I think he was a Jew) I was opening the sail-cloth. Within was a piece of linen which had been oiled to keep out water, addressed in some red pigment to myself or my father. This, too, I opened, not without difficulty, for it was carefully sewn up, and found within it a letter-packet, also addressed to myself or my father, in the handwriting of Marie.

Great Heaven! How my heart jumped at that sight! Calling to Hans to make the *smous* comfortable and give him food, I went into my own room, and there read the letter, which ran thus:

"MY DEAR ALLAN,—I do not know whether the other letters I have written to you have ever come to your hands, or indeed if this one will. Still, I send it on chance by a wandering Portuguese half-breed who is going to Delagoa Bay, about fifty miles, I believe, from the place where I now write, near the Crocodile River. My father has named it Maraisfontein, after our old home. If those letters reached you, you will have learned of the terrible things we went through on our journey; the attacks by the Kaffirs in the

Zoutpansberg region, who destroyed one of our parties altogether, and so forth. If not, all that story must wait, for it is too long to tell now, and, indeed, I have but little paper, and not much pencil. It will be enough to say, therefore, that to the number of thirty-five white people, men, women and children, we trekked at the beginning of the summer season, when the grass was commencing to grow, from the Lydenburg district—an awful journey over mountains and through flooded rivers. After many delays, some of them months long, we reached this place, about eight weeks ago, for I write to you at the beginning of June, if we have kept correct account of the time, of which I am not certain.

“It is a beautiful place to look at, a flat country of rich veld, with big trees growing on it, and about two miles from the great river that is called the Crocodile. Here, finding good water, my father and Hernan Pereira, who now rules him in all things, determined to settle, although some of the others wished to push on nearer to Delagoa Bay. There was a great quarrel about it, but in the end my father, or rather Hernan, had his will, as the oxen were worn out and many had already died from the bites of a poisonous fly which is called the tsetse. So we lotted out the land, of which there is enough for hundreds, and began to build rude houses.

“Then trouble came upon us. The Kaffirs stole most of our horses, although they have not dared to attack us, and except two belonging to Hernan, the rest died of the sickness, the last of them but yesterday. The oxen, too, have all died of the tsetse bites or other illnesses. But the worst is that although this country looks so healthy, it is poisoned with fever, which comes up, I think, in the mists from the river. Already out of the thirty-five of us, ten are dead, two men, three women, and five children, while more are sick. As yet my father and I and my cousin Pereira have, by God’s mercy, kept quite well; but although we are all very strong, how long this will continue I cannot tell. Fortunately we have plenty of ammunition and the place is thick with game, so that those of the men who remain strong can kill all the food we want, even shooting on foot, and we women have made a great quantity of biltong by salting flesh and drying it in the sun. So we shall not actually starve for a long while, even if the game goes away.

“But, dear Allan, unless help comes to us I think that we shall die every one, for God alone knows the miseries that we suffer and the horrible sights of sickness and death that are around us. At this moment there lies by me a little girl who is dying of fever.

“Oh, Allan, if you can help us, do so! Because of our sick it is impossible for us to get to Delagoa Bay, and if we did we have no money to buy anything there, for all that we had with us was lost in a wagon in a flooded river. It was a great sum, for it included Hernan’s rich fortune which he brought from the Cape with him in gold. Nor can we move anywhere else, for we have no cattle or horses. We have sent to Delagoa Bay, where we hear these are to be had, to try to buy them on credit; but my cousin Hernan’s relations, of whom he used to talk so much, are dead or gone away, and no one will trust us. With the neighbouring Kaffirs, too, who have plenty of cattle, we have quarrelled since, unfortunately, my cousin and some of the other Boers tried to take certain beasts of theirs without payment. So we are quite helpless, and can only wait for death.

“Allan, my father says that he asked your father to collect some monies that were owing to him. If it were possible for you or other friends to come to Delagoa in a ship with that money, I think that it might serve to buy some oxen, enough for a few wagons. Then perhaps we might trek back and fall in with a party of Boers who, we believe, have crossed the Quathlamba Mountains into Natal. Or perhaps we might get to the Bay and find a ship to take us anywhere from this horrible place. If you could come, the natives would guide you to where we are.

“But it is too much to hope that you will come, or that if you do come you will find us still alive.

“Allan, my dearest, I have one more thing to say, though I must say it shortly, for the paper is nearly finished. I do not know, supposing that you are alive and well, whether you still care for me, who left you so long ago—it seems years and years—but *my* heart is where it was, and where I promised it should remain, in your keeping. Of course, Hernan has pressed me to marry him, and my father has wished it. But I have always said no, and now, in our wretchedness, there is no more talk of marriage at present, which is the one good thing that has happened to me. And, Allan, before so very long I shall be of age, if I live. Still I dare say you no longer think of marriage with me, who, perhaps, are already married to someone else, especially as now I and all of us are no better than wandering beggars. Yet I have thought it right to tell you these things, which you may like to know.

“Oh, why did God ever put it into my father’s heart to leave the Cape Colony just because he hated the British Government and Hernan Pereira and others persuaded him? I know not, but, poor man, he is sorry enough now. It is pitiful to see him; at times I think that he is going mad.

“The paper is done, and the messenger is going; also the sick child is dying and I must attend to her. Will this letter ever come to your hands, I wonder? I am sending with it the little money I have to pay for its delivery—about four pounds English. If not, there is an end. If it does, and you cannot come or send others, at least pray for us. I dream of you by night and think of you by day, for how much I love you I cannot tell.

“In life or death I am

“Your MARIE.”

Such was this awful letter. I still have it; it lies before me, those ragged sheets of paper covered with faint pencil-writing that is blotted here and there with tear marks, some of them the tears of Marie who wrote, some of them the tears of me who read. I wonder if there exists a more piteous memorial of the terrible sufferings of the trek-Boers, and especially of such of them as forced their way into the poisonous veld around Delagoa, as did this Marais expedition and those under the command of Triehard. Better, like many of their people, to have perished at once by the spears of Umzilikazi and other savages than to endure these lingering tortures of fever and starvation.

As I finished reading this letter my father, who had been out visiting some of his Mission Kaffirs, entered the house, and I went into the sitting-room to meet him.

“Why, Allan, what is the matter with you?” he asked, noting my tear-stained face.

I gave him the letter, for I could not speak, and with difficulty he deciphered it.

“Merciful God, what dreadful news!” he said when he had finished. “Those poor people! those poor, misguided people! What can be done for them?”

"I know one thing that can be done, father, or at any rate can be attempted. I can try to reach them."

"Are you mad?" he asked. "How is it possible for you, one man, to get to Delagoa Bay, buy cattle, and rescue these folk, who probably are now all dead?"

"The first two things are possible enough, father. Some ship will take me to the Bay. You have Marais's money, and I have that five hundred pounds which my old aunt in England left me last year. Thank Heaven! owing to my absence on commando, it still lies untouched in the bank at Port Elizabeth. That is about eight hundred pounds in all, which would buy a great many cattle and other things. As for the third, it is not in our hands, is it? It may be that they cannot be rescued, it may be that they are dead. I can only go to see."

"But, Allan, Allan, you are my only son, and if you go it is probable that I shall never see you more."

"I have been through more dangers lately, father, and am still alive and well. Moreover, if Marie is dead"—I paused, then went on passionately—"Do not try to stop me, for I tell you, father, I will not be stopped. Think of the words in that letter and what a shameless hound I should be if I sat here quiet while Marie is dying yonder. Would you have done so if Marie had been my mother?"

"No," answered the old gentleman, "I should not. Go, and God be with you, Allan, and me also, for I never expect to see you again." And he turned his head aside for a while.

Then we went into matters. The *smous* was summoned and asked about the ship which brought the letter from Delagoa. It seemed that she was an English-owned brig known as the *Seven Stars*, and that her captain, one Richardson, proposed to sail back to the Bay on the morrow, that was the third of July, or in other words, within twenty-four hours.

Twenty-four hours! And Port Elizabeth was one hundred and eighteen miles away, and the *Seven Stars* might leave earlier if she had completed her cargo and wind and weather served. Moreover, if she did leave, it might be weeks or months before any other ship sailed for Delagoa Bay, for in those days, of course, there were no mail boats.

I looked at my watch. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and from a calendar we had, which gave the tides at Port Elizabeth and other South African harbours, it did not seem probable that the *Seven Stars* would sail, if she kept to her date, before about eight on the morrow. One hundred and twenty miles to be covered in, say, fourteen hours over rough country with some hills! Well, on the other hand, the roads were fairly good and dry, with no flooded rivers to cross, although there might be one to swim, and there was a full moon. It could be done—barely, and now I was glad indeed that Hernan Pereira had not won my swift mare in that shooting match.

I called to Hans, who was loafing about outside, and said quietly:

"I ride to Port Elizabeth, and must be there by eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Allemachte!" exclaimed Hans, who had been that road several times.

"You will go with me, and from Port Elizabeth on to Delagoa Bay. Saddle the mare and the roan horse, and put a headstall on the chestnut to lead with you as a spare. Give them all a feed, but no water. We start in half an hour." Then I added certain directions as to the guns we would take, saddle-bags, clothes, blankets and other details, and bade him start about the business.

Hans never hesitated. He had been with me through my recent campaign, and was accustomed to sudden orders. Moreover, I think that if I had told him I was riding to the moon, beyond his customary exclamation of "Allemachte!" he would have made no objection to accompanying me thither.

The next half-hour was a busy time for me. Henri Marais's money had to be got out of the strong box and arranged in a belt of buck's hide that I had strapped about me. A letter had to be written by my father to the manager of the Port Elizabeth bank, identifying me as the owner of the sum lodged there in my name. A meal must be eaten and some food prepared for us to carry. The horses' shoes had to be seen to, and a few clothes packed in the saddle-bags. Also there were other things which I have forgotten. Yet within five-and-thirty minutes the long, lean mare stood before the door. Behind her, with a tall crane's feather in his hat, was Hans, mounted on the roan stallion, and leading the chestnut, a four-year-old which I had bought as a foal on the mare as part of the bargain. Having been corn fed from a colt it was a very sound and well-grown horse, though not the equal of its mother in speed.

In the passage my poor old father, who was quite bewildered by the rapidity and urgent nature of this business, embraced me.

"God bless you, my dear boy," he said. "I have had little time to think, but I pray that this may be all for the best, and that we may meet again in the world. But if not, remember what I have taught you, and if I survive you, for my part I shall remember that you died trying to do your duty. Oh, what trouble has the blind madness of Henri Marais brought upon us all! Well, I warned him that it would be so. Good-bye, my dear boy, good-bye: my prayers will follow you, and for the rest—Well, I am old, and what does it matter if my grey hairs come with sorrow to the grave?"

I kissed him back, and with an aching heart sprang to the saddle. In five more minutes the station was out of sight.

Thirteen and a half hours later I pulled rein upon the quay of Port Elizabeth just, only just, in time to catch Captain Richardson as he was entering his boat to row out to the *Seven Stars*, on which the canvas was already being hoisted. As well as I could in my exhausted state, I explained matters and persuaded him to wait till the next tide. Then, thanking God for the mare's speed—the roan had been left foundered thirty miles away, and Hans was following on the chestnut, but not yet up—I dragged the poor beast to an inn at hand. There she lay down and died. Well, she had done her work, and there was no other horse in the country that could have caught that boat.

An hour or so later Hans came in flogging the chestnut, and here I may add that both it and the roan recovered. Indeed I rode them for many years, until they were quite old. When I had eaten, or tried to eat something and rested awhile, I went to the bank, succeeded in explaining the state of the case to the manager, and after some difficulty, for gold was not very plentiful in Port Elizabeth, procured three hundred pounds in sovereigns. For the other two he gave me a bill upon some agent in Delagoa Bay, together with a letter of recommendation to him and the Portuguese governor, who, it appeared, was in debt to their establishment.

By an afterthought, however, although I kept the letters, I returned him the bill and spent the £200 in purchasing a great variety of goods which I will not enumerate, that I knew would be useful for trading purposes among the east coast Kaffirs. Indeed, I practically cleared out the Port Elizabeth stores, and barely had time, with the help of Hans and the storekeepers, to pack and ship the goods before the *Seven Stars* put out to sea.

Within twenty-four hours from the time I had left the Mission Station, Hans and I saw behind us Port Elizabeth fading into the distance, and in front a waste of stormy waters.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CAMP OF DEATH

Everything went well upon that voyage, except with me personally. Not having been on the ocean since I was a child, I, who am naturally no good sailor, was extremely ill as day by day we ploughed through seas that grew ever more rough. Also, strong as I was, that fearful ride had overdone me. Added to these physical discomforts was my agonising anxiety of mind, which I leave anyone with imagination to picture for himself. Really there were times when I wished that the *Seven Stars* would plunge headlong to the bottom of the deep and put an end to me and my miseries.

These, however, so far as the bodily side of them was concerned, were, I think, surpassed by those of my henchman Hans, who, as a matter of fact, had never before set foot in any kind of boat. Perhaps this was fortunate, since had he known the horrors of the ocean, much as he loved me, he would, I am sure, by one means or another, have left me to voyage in the *Seven Stars* alone. There he lay upon the floor of my little cabin, rolling to and fro with the violent motion of the brig, overcome with terror. He was convinced that we were going to be drowned, and in the intervals of furious sea-sickness uttered piteous lamentations in Dutch, English, and various native tongues, mingled with curses and prayers of the most primitive and realistic order.

After the first twenty-four hours or so he informed me with many moans that the last bit of his inside had just come out of him, and that he was now quite hollow "like a gourd." Also he declared that all these evils had fallen upon him because he had been fool enough to forsake the religion of his people (what was that, I wonder), and allow himself to be "washed white," that is, be baptised, by my father.

I answered that as he had become white instead of staying yellow, I advised him to remain so, since it was evident that the Hottentot gods would have nothing more to do with one who had deserted them. Thereon he made a dreadful face, which even in the midst of my own woes caused me to laugh at him, uttered a prolonged groan, and became so silent that I thought he must be dead. However, the sailor who brought me my food—such food!—assured me that this was not so, and lashed him tight to the legs of the bunk by his arm and ankle so as to prevent him from being rolled to bits.

Next morning Hans was dosed with brandy, which, in his empty condition, made him extremely drunk, and from that time forward began to take a more cheerful view of things. Especially was this so when the hours for the "brandy medicine" came round. Hans, like most other Hottentots, loved spirits, and would put up with much to get them, even with my father's fiery indignation.

I think it was on the fourth day that at length we pitched and rolled ourselves over the shallow bar of Port Natal and found ourselves at peace for a while under shelter of the Point in the beautiful bay upon the shores of which the town of Durban now stands. Then it was but a miserable place, consisting of a few shanties which were afterwards burnt by the Zulus, and a number of Kaffir huts. For such white men as dwelt there had for the most part native followings, and, I may add, native wives.

We spent two days at this settlement of Durban, where Captain Richardson had some cargo to land for the English settlers, one or two of whom had started a trade with the natives and with parties of the emigrant Boers who were beginning to enter the territory by the overland route. Those days I passed on shore, though I would not allow Hans to accompany me lest he should desert, employing my time in picking up all the information I could about the state of affairs, especially with reference to the Zulus, a people with whom I was destined ere long to make an intimate acquaintance. Needless to say, I inquired both from natives and from white men whether anything was known of the fate of Marais's party, but no one seemed even to have heard of them. One thing I did learn, however, that my old friend, Pieter Retief, with a large following, had crossed the Quathlamba Mountains, which we now know as the Drakensberg, and entered the territory of Natal. Here they proposed to settle if they could get the leave of the Zulu king, Dingaan, a savage potentate of whom and of whose armies everyone seemed to live in terror.

On the third morning, to my great relief, for I was terrified lest we should be delayed, the *Seven Stars* sailed with a favouring wind. Three days later we entered the harbour of Delagoa, a sheet of water many miles long and broad. Notwithstanding its shallow entrance, it is the best natural port in Southeastern Africa, but now, alas! lost to the English.

Six hours later we anchored opposite a sandbank on which stood a dilapidated fort and a dirty settlement known as Lorenzo Marquez, where the Portuguese kept a few soldiers, most of them coloured. I pass over my troubles with the Customs, if such they could be called. Suffice it to say that ultimately I succeeded in landing my goods, on which the duty chargeable was apparently enormous. This I did by distributing twenty-five English sovereigns among various officials, beginning with the acting-governor and ending with a drunken black sweep who sat in a kind of sentry box on the quay.

Early next morning the *Seven Stars* sailed again, because of some quarrel with the officials, who threatened to seize her—I forget why. Her destination was the East African ports and, I think, Madagascar, where a profitable trade was to be done in carrying cattle and slaves. Captain Richardson said he might be back at Lorenzo Marquez in two or three months' time, or he might not. As a matter of fact the latter supposition proved correct, for the *Seven Stars* was lost on a sandbank somewhere up the coast, her crew only escaping to Mombasa after enduring great hardships.

Well, she had served my turn, for I heard afterwards that no other ship put into the Bay for a whole year from the date she left it. So if I had not caught her at Port Elizabeth I could not have come at all, except, of course, overland. This at best must have taken

many months, and was moreover a journey that no man could enter on alone.

Now I get back to my story again.

There was no inn at Lorenzo Marquez. Through the kindness of one of his native or half-breed wives, who could talk a little Dutch, I managed, however, to get a lodging in a tumble-down house belonging to a dissolute person who called himself Don José Ximenes, but who was really himself a half-breed. Here good fortune befriended me. Don José, when sober, was a trader with the natives, and a year before had acquired from them two good buck wagons. Probably they were stolen from some wandering Boers or found derelict after their murder or death by fever. These wagons he was only too glad to sell for a song. I think I gave him twenty pounds English for the two, and thirty more for twelve oxen that he had bought at the same time as the wagons. They were fine beasts of the Afrikander breed, that after a long rest had grown quite fat and strong.

Of course twelve oxen were not enough to draw two wagons, or even one. Therefore, hearing that there were natives on the mainland who possessed plenty of cattle, I at once gave out that I was ready to buy, and pay well in blankets, cloth, beads and so forth. The result was that within two days I had forty or fifty to choose from, small animals of the Zulu character and, I should add, unbroken. Still they were sturdy and used to that veld and its diseases. Here it was that my twelve trained beasts came in. By putting six of them to each wagon, two as fore- and two as after-oxen, and two in the middle, Hans and I were able to get the other ten necessary to make up a team of sixteen under some sort of control.

Heavens! how we worked during the week or so which went by before it was possible for me to leave Lorenzo Marquez. What with mending up and loading the wagons, buying and breaking in the wild oxen, purchasing provisions, hiring native servants—of whom I was lucky enough to secure eight who belonged to one of the Zulu tribes and desired to get back to their own country, whence they had wandered with some Boers, I do not think that we slept more than two or three hours out of the twenty-four.

But, it may be asked, what was my aim, whither went I, what inquiries had I made? To answer the last question first, I had made every possible inquiry, but with little or no result. Marie's letter had said that they were encamped on the bank of the Crocodile River, about fifty miles from Delagoa Bay. I asked everyone I met among the Portuguese—who, after all, were not many—if they had heard of such an encampment of emigrant Boers. But these Portuguese appeared to have heard nothing, except my host, Don José, who had a vague recollection of something—he could not remember what.

The fact was at this time the few people who lived at Lorenzo Marquez were too sodden with liquor and other vices to take any interest in outside news that did not immediately concern them. Moreover, the natives whom they flogged and oppressed if they were their servants, or fought with if they were not, told them little, and almost nothing that was true, for between the two races there was an hereditary hate stretching back for generations. So from the Portuguese I gained no information.

Then I turned to the Kaffirs, especially to those from whom I had bought the cattle. *They* had heard that some Boers reached the banks of the Crocodile moons ago—how many they could not tell. But that country, they said, was under the rule of a chief who was hostile to them, and killed any of their people who ventured thither. Therefore they knew nothing for certain. Still, one of them stated that a woman whom he had bought as a slave, and who had passed through the district in question a few weeks before, told him that someone had told her that these Boers were all dead of sickness. She added that she had seen their wagon caps from a distance, so, if they were dead, “their wagons were still alive.”

I asked to see this woman, but the native refused to produce her. After a great deal of talk, however, he offered to sell her to me, saying that he was tired of her. So I bargained with the man and finally agreed for her purchase for three pounds of copper wire and eight yards of blue cloth. Next morning she was produced, an extremely ugly person with a large, flat nose, who came from somewhere in the interior of Africa, having, I gathered, been taken captive by Arabs and sold from hand to hand. Her name, as near as I can pronounce it, was Jeel.

I had great difficulty in establishing communication with her, but ultimately found that one of my newly hired Kaffirs could understand something of her language. Even then it was hard to make her talk, for she had never seen a white man, and thought I had bought her for some dreadful purpose or other. However, when she found that she was kindly treated, she opened her lips and told me the same story that her late master had repeated, neither more nor less. Finally I asked her whether she could guide me to the place where she had seen the “live wagons.”

She answered: “Oh, yes,” as she had travelled many roads and never forgot any of them.

This, of course, was all I wanted from the woman, who, I may add, ultimately gave me a good deal of trouble. The poor creature seemed never to have experienced kindness, and her gratitude for the little I showed her was so intense that it became a nuisance. She followed me about everywhere, trying to do me service in her savage way, and even attempted to seize my food and chew it before I put it into my own mouth—to save me the trouble, I suppose. Ultimately I married her, somewhat against her will, I fear, to one of the hired Kaffirs, who made her a very good husband, although when he was dismissed from my service she wanted to leave him and follow me.

At length, under the guidance of this woman, Jeel, we made a start. There were but fifty miles to go, a distance that on a fair road any good horse would cover in eight hours, or less. But we had no horses, and there was no road—nothing but swamps and bush and rocky hills. With our untrained cattle it took us three days to travel the first twelve miles, though after that things went somewhat better.

It may be asked, why did I not send on? But whom could I send when no one knew the way, except the woman, Jeel, whom I feared to part with lest I should see her no more? Moreover, what was the use of sending, since the messengers could take no help? If everyone at the camp was dead, as rumour told us—well, they were dead. And if they lived, the hope was that they might live a little longer. Meanwhile, I dared not part with my guide, nor dared I leave the relief wagons to go on with her alone. If I did so, I knew that I should never see them again, since only the prestige of their being owned by a white man who was not a Portuguese prevented the natives from looting them.

It was a truly awful journey. My first idea had been to follow the banks of the Crocodile River, which is what I should have attempted had I not chanced on the woman, Jeel. Lucky was it that I did not do so, since I found afterwards that this river would

about a great deal and was joined by impassable tributaries. Also it was bordered by forests. Jeel's track, on the contrary, followed an old slave road that, bad as it was, avoided the swampy places of the surrounding country, and those native tribes which the experience of generations of the traders in this iniquitous traffic showed to be most dangerous.

Nine days of fearful struggle had gone by. We had camped one night below the crest of a long slope strewn with great rocks, many of which we were obliged to roll out of the path by main force in order to make a way for the wagons. The oxen had to lie in their yokes all night, since we dared not let them loose fearing lest they should stray; also lions were roaring in the distance, although, game being plentiful, these did not come near to us. As soon as there was any light we let out the teams to fill themselves on the tussocky grass that grew about, and meanwhile cooked and ate some food.

Presently the sun rose, and I saw that beneath us was a great stretch of plain covered with mist, and to the north, on our right, several denser billows of mist that marked the course of the Crocodile River.

By degrees this mist lifted, tall tops of trees appearing above it, till at length it thinned into vapour that vanished away as the sun rose. As I watched it idly, the woman, Jeel, crept up to me in her furtive fashion, touched me on the shoulder and pointed to a distant group of trees.

Looking closely at these trees, I saw between them what at first I took for some white rocks. Further examination, as the mist cleared, suggested to my mind, however, that they might be wagon tilts. Just then the Zulu who understood Jeel's talk came up. I asked him as well as I could, for at that time my knowledge of his tongue was very imperfect, what she wished to say. He questioned her, and answered that she desired to tell me that those were the moving houses of the Amaboona (the Boer people), just where she had seen them nearly two moons ago.

At this tidings my heart seemed to stand still, so that for more than a minute I could not speak. There were the wagons at last, but—oh! who and what should I find in them? I called Hans and bade him inspan as quickly as possible, explaining to him that yonder was Marais's camp.

"Why not let the oxen fill themselves first, baas?" he answered. "There is no hurry, for though the wagons are there, no doubt all the people are dead long ago."

"Do what I bid you, you ill-omened beast," I said, "instead of croaking of death like a crow. And listen: I am going to walk forward to that camp; you must follow with the wagons as fast as they can travel."

"No, baas, it is not safe that you should go alone. Kaffirs or wild beasts might take you."

"Safe or not, I am going; but if you think it wise, tell two of those Zulus to come with me."

A few minutes later I was on the road, followed by the two Kaffirs armed with spears. In my youth I was a good runner, being strong of leg and light in body, but I do not think that I ever covered seven miles, for that was about the distance to the camp, in quicker time than I did that morning. Indeed, I left those active Kaffirs so far behind that when I approached the trees they were not in sight. Here I dropped to a walk, as I said to myself—to get my breath. Really it was because I felt so terrified at what I might find that I delayed the discovery just for one minute more. While I approached, hope, however faint, still remained; when I arrived, hope might be replaced by everlasting despair.

Now I could see that there were some shanties built behind the wagons, doubtless those "rude houses" of which Marie had written. But I could not see anyone moving about them, or any cattle or any smoke, or other sign of life. Nor could I hear a single sound.

Doubtless, thought I to myself, Hans is right. They are all long dead.

My agony of suspense was replaced by an icy calm. At length I knew the worst. It was finished—I had striven in vain. I walked through the outlying trees and between two of the wagons. One of these I noticed, as we do notice things at such times, was the same in which Marais had trekked with his daughter, his favourite wagon that once I had helped to fit with a new dissel-boom.

Before me were the rough houses built of the branches of trees, daubed over with mud, or rather the backs of them, for they faced west. I stood still for a moment, and as I stood thought that I heard a faint sound as of someone reciting slowly. I crept along the end of the outermost house and, rubbing the cold sweat from my eyes, peeped round the corner, for it occurred to me that savages might be in possession. Then I saw what caused the sound. A tattered, blackened, bearded man stood at the head of a long and shallow hole saying a prayer.

It was Henri Marais, although at the time I did not recognise him, so changed was he. A number of little mounds to the right and left of him told me, however, that the hole was a grave. As I watched two more men appeared, dragging between them the body of a woman, which evidently they had not strength to carry, as its legs trailed upon the ground. From the shape of the corpse it seemed to be that of a tall young woman, but the features I could not see, because it was being dragged face downwards. Also the long hair hanging from the head hid them. It was dark hair, like Marie's. They reached the grave, and tumbled their sad burden into it; but I—I could not stir!

At length my limbs obeyed my will. I went forward to the men and said in a hollow voice in Dutch:

"Whom do you bury?"

"Johanna Meyer," answered someone mechanically, for they did not seem to have taken the trouble to look at me. As I listened to those words my heart, which had stood still waiting for the answer, beat again with a sudden bound that I could hear in the silence.

I looked up. There, advancing from the doorway of one of the houses, very slowly, as though overpowered by weakness, and leading by the hand a mere skeleton of a child, who was chewing some leaves, I saw—I saw *Marie Marais*! She was wasted to nothing, but I could not mistake her eyes, those great soft eyes that had grown so unnaturally large in the white, thin face.

She too saw me and stared for one moment. Then, loosing the child, she cast up her hands, through which the sunlight shone as through parchment, and slowly sank to the ground.

"She has gone, too," said one of the men in an indifferent voice. "I thought she would not last another day."

Now for the first time the man at the head of the grave turned. Lifting his hand, he pointed to me, whereon the other two men turned also.

"God above us!" he said in a choked voice, "at last I am quite mad. Look! there stands the *spook* of young Allan, the son of the English *prédicant* who lived near Cradock."

As soon as I heard the voice I knew the speaker.

"Oh, Mynheer Marais!" I cried, "I am no ghost, I am Allan himself come to save you."

Marais made no answer; he seemed bewildered. But one of the men cried out crazily:

"How can you save us, youngster, unless you are ready to be eaten? Don't you see, we starve, we starve!"

"I have wagons and food," I answered.

"Allemachte! Henri," exclaimed the man, with a wild laugh, "do you hear what your English *spook* says? He says that he has wagons and *food, food, food!*"

Then Marais burst into tears and flung himself upon my breast, nearly knocking me down. I wrenched myself free of him and ran to Marie, who was lying face upwards on the ground. She seemed to hear my step, for her eyes opened and she struggled to a sitting posture.

"Is it really you, Allan, or do I dream?" she murmured.

"It is I, it is I," I answered, lifting her to her feet, for she seemed to weigh no more than a child. Her head fell upon my shoulder, and she too began to weep.

Still holding her, I turned to the men and said:

"Why do you starve when there is game all about?" and I pointed to two fat elands strolling among the trees not more than a hundred and fifty yards away.

"Can we kill game with stones?" asked one of them, "we whose powder was all burnt a month ago. Those buck," he added, with a wild laugh, "come here to mock us every morning; but they will not walk into our pitfalls. They know them too well, and we have no strength to dig others."

Now when I left my wagons I had brought with me that same Purdey rifle with which I had shot the geese in the match against Pereira, choosing it because it was so light to carry. I held up my hand for silence, set Marie gently on the ground, and began to steal towards the elands. Taking what shelter I could, I got within a hundred yards of them, when suddenly they took alarm, being frightened, in fact, by my two Zulu servants, who were now arriving.

Off they galloped, the big bull leading, and vanished behind some trees. I saw their line, and that they would appear again between two clumps of bush about two hundred and fifty yards away. Hastily I raised the full sight on the rifle, which was marked for two hundred yards, lifted it, and waited, praying to God as I did so that my skill might not fail me.

The bull appeared, its head held forward, its long horns lying flat upon the back. The shot was very long, and the beast very large to bring down with so small a bullet. I aimed right forward—clear of it, indeed—high too, in a line with its backbone, and pressed the trigger.

The rifle exploded, the bullet clapped, and the buck sprang forward faster than ever. I had failed! But what was this? Suddenly the great bull swung round and began to gallop towards us. When it was not more than fifty yards away, it fell in a heap, rolled twice over like a shot rabbit, and lay still. That bullet was in its heart.

The two Kaffirs appeared breathless and streaming with perspiration.

"Cut meat from the eland's flank; don't stop to skin it," I said in my broken Zulu, helping the words out with signs.

They understood, and a minute later were at work with their assegais. Then I looked about me. Near by lay a store of dead branches placed there for fuel.

"Have you fire?" I asked of the skeleton Boers, for they were nothing more.

"*Nein, nein,*" they answered; "our fire is dead."

I produced the tinder-box which I carried with me, and struck the flint. Ten minutes later we had a cheerful blaze, and within three-quarters of an hour good soup, for iron pots were not wanting—only food to put into them. I think that for the rest of that day those poor creatures did little else but eat, sleeping between their meals. Oh! the joy I had in feeding them, especially after the wagons arrived, bringing with them salt—how they longed for that salt!—sugar and coffee.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PROMISE

Of the original thirty-five souls, not reckoning natives, who had accompanied Henri Marais upon his ill-fated expedition, there now remained but nine alive at the new Maraisfontein. These were himself, his daughter, four Prinsloos—a family of extraordinary constitution—and three Meyers, being the husband of the poor woman I had seen committed to the grave and two of her six children. The rest, Hernan Pereira excepted, had died of fever and actual starvation, for when the fever lessened with the change of the seasons, the starvation set in. It appeared that, with the exception of a very little, they had stored their powder in a kind of outbuilding which they constructed, placing it at a distance for safety's sake. When most of the surviving men were away, however, a grass fire set light to this outbuilding and all the powder blew up.

After this, for a while they supplied the camp with food by the help of such ammunition as remained to them. When that failed they dug pits in which to catch game. In time the buck came to know of these pits, so that they snared no more.

Then, as the "biltong" or sun-dried meat they had made was all consumed, they were driven to every desperate expedient that is known to the starving, such as the digging up of bulbs, the boiling of grass, twigs and leaves, the catching of lizards, and so forth. I believe that they actually ate caterpillars and earthworms. But after their last fire went out through the neglect of the wretched Kaffir who was left to watch it, and having no tinder, they failed to relight it by friction, of course even this food failed them. When I arrived they had practically been three days without anything to eat except green leaves and grass, such as I saw the child chewing. In another seventy hours doubtless every one of them would have been dead.

Well, they recovered rapidly enough, for those who had survived its ravages were evidently now impervious to fever. Who can tell the joy that I experienced as I watched Marie returning from the very brink of the grave to a state of full and lovely womanhood? After all, we were not so far away from the primitive conditions of humanity, when the first duty of man was to feed his women and his children, and I think that something of that instinct remains with us. At least, I know I never experienced a greater pleasure than I did, when the woman I loved, the poor, starving woman, ate and ate of the food which I was able to give her—she who for weeks had existed upon locusts and herbs.

For the first few days we did not talk much except of the immediate necessities of the hour, which occupied all our thoughts. Afterwards, when Marais and his daughter were strong enough to bear it, we had some conversation. He began by asking how I came to find them.

I replied, through Marie's letter, which, it appeared, he knew nothing of, for he had forbidden her to write to me.

"It seems fortunate that you were disobeyed, mynheer," I said, to which he answered nothing.

Then I told the tale of the arrival of that letter at the Mission Station in the Cape Colony by the hand of a wandering *smous*, and of my desperate ride upon the swift mare to Port Elizabeth, where I just succeeded in catching the brig *Seven Stars* before she sailed. Also I told them of the lucky chances that enabled me to buy the wagons and find a guide to their camp, reaching it but a few hours before it was too late.

"It was a great deed," said Henri Marais, taking the pipe from his mouth, for I had brought tobacco among my stores. "But tell me, Allan, why did you do it for the sake of one who has not treated you kindly?"

"I did it," I answered, "for the sake of one who has always treated me kindly," and I nodded towards Marie, who was engaged in washing up the cooking pots at a distance.

"I suppose so, Allan; but you know she is affianced to another."

"I know that she is affianced to me, and to no other," I answered warmly, adding, "And pray where is this other? If he lives I do not see him here."

"No," replied Marais in a curious voice. "The truth is, Allan, that Hernan Pereira left us about a fortnight before you came. One horse remained, which was his, and with two Hottentots, who were also his servants, he rode back upon the track by which we came, to try to find help. Since then we have heard nothing of him."

"Indeed; and how did he propose to get food on the way?"

"He had a rifle, or rather they all three had rifles, and about a hundred charges between them, which escaped the fire."

"With a hundred charges of powder carefully used your camp would have been fed for a month, or perhaps two months," I remarked. "Yet he went away with all of them—to find help?"

"That is so, Allan. We begged him to stay, but he would not; and, after all, the charges were his own property. No doubt he thought he acted for the best, especially as Marie would have none of him," Marais added with emphasis.

"Well," I replied, "it seems that it is I who have brought you the help, and not Pereira. Also, by the way, mynheer, I have brought you the money my father collected on your account, and some £500 of my own, or what is left of it, in goods and gold. Moreover, Marie does not refuse me. Say, therefore, to which of us does she belong?"

"It would seem that it should be to you," he answered slowly, "since you have shown yourself so faithful, and were it not for you she would now be lying yonder," and he pointed to the little heaps that covered the bones of most of the expedition. "Yes, yes, it would seem that it should be to you, who twice have saved her life and once have saved mine also."

Now I suppose that he saw on my face the joy which I could not conceal, for he added hastily: "Yet, Allan, years ago I swore on the Book before God that never with my will should my daughter marry an Englishman, even if he were a good Englishman. Also, just before we left the Colony, I swore again, in her presence and that of Hernan Pereira, that I would not give her to you, so I cannot break my oath, can I? If I did, the good God would be avenged upon me."

"Some might think that when I came here the good God was in the way of being avenged upon you for the keeping of that evil oath," I answered bitterly, glancing, in my turn, at the graves.

"Yes, they might, Allan," he replied without anger, for all his troubles had induced a reasonable frame of mind in him—for a while. "Yet, His ways are past finding out, are they not?"

Now my anger broke out, and, rising, I said:

"Do you mean, Mynheer Marais, that notwithstanding the love between us, which you know is true and deep, and notwithstanding that I alone have been able to drag both of you and the others out of the claws of death, I am never to marry Marie? Do you mean that she is to be given to a braggart who deserted her in her need?"

"And what if I do mean that, Allan?"

"This: although I am still young, as you know well I am a man who can think and act for himself. Also, I am your master here—I have cattle and guns and servants. Well, I will take Marie, and if any should try to stop me, I know how to protect myself and her."

This bold speech did not seem to surprise him in the least or to make him think the worse of me. He looked at me for a while, pulling his long beard in a meditative fashion, then answered:

"I dare say that at your age I should have played the same game, and it is true that you have things in your fist. But, much as she may love you, Marie would not go away with you and leave her father to starve."

"Then you can come with us as my father-in-law, Mynheer Marais. At any rate, it is certain that I will not go away and leave her here to starve."

Now I think that something which he saw in my eye showed him that I was in earnest. At least, he changed his tone and began to argue, almost to plead.

"Be reasonable, Allan," he said. "How can you marry Marie when there is no *prédicant* to marry you? Surely, if you love her so much, you would not pour mud upon her name, even in this wilderness?"

"She might not think it mud," I replied. "Men and women have been married without the help of priests before now, by open declaration and public report, for instance, and their children held to be born in wedlock. I know that, for I have read of the law of marriage."

"It may be, Allan, though I hold no marriage good unless the holy words are said. But why do you not let me come to the end of my story?"

"Because I thought it was ended, Mynheer Marais."

"Not so, Allan. I told you that I had sworn that she should never marry you with my will. But when she is of age, which will be in some six months' time, my will counts no longer, seeing that then she is a free woman who can dispose of herself. Also I shall be clear of my oath, for no harm will come to my soul if that happens which I cannot help. Now are you satisfied?"

"I don't know," I answered doubtfully, for somehow all Marais's casuistry, which I thought contemptible, did not convince me that he was sincere. "I don't know," I repeated. "Much may chance in six months."

"Of course, Allan. For instance, Marie might change her mind and marry someone else."

"Or I might not be there to marry, mynheer. Accidents sometimes happen to men who are not wanted, especially in wild countries or, for the matter of that, to those who are."

"*Allemachte!* Allan, you do not mean that I—"

"No, mynheer," I interrupted; "but there are other people in the world besides yourself—Hernan Pereira, for example, if he lives. Still, I am not the only one concerned in this matter. There is Marie yonder. Shall I call her?"

He nodded, preferring probably that I should speak to her in his presence rather than alone.

So I called Marie, who was watching our talk somewhat anxiously while she went about her tasks. She came at once, a very different Marie to the starving girl of a while before, for although she was still thin and drawn, her youth and beauty were returning to her fast under the influences of good food and happiness.

"What is it, Allan?" she asked gently. I told her all, repeating our conversation and the arguments which had been used on either side word for word, as nearly as I could remember them.

"Is that right?" I asked of Marais when I had finished.

"It is right; you have a good memory," he answered.

"Very well. And now what have you to say, Marie?"

"I, dear Allan? Why, this: My life belongs to you, who have twice saved this body of mine from death, as my love and spirit belong to you. Therefore, I should have thought it no shame if I had been given to you here and now before the people, and afterwards married by a clergyman when we found one. But my father has sworn an oath which weighs upon his mind, and he has shown you that within six months—a short six months—that oath dies of itself, since, by the law, he can no longer control me. So, Allan, as I would not grieve him, or perhaps lead him to say and do what is foolish, I think it would be well that we should wait for those six months, if, on his part, he promises that he will then do nothing to prevent our marriage."

"*Ja, ja*, I promise that then I will do nothing to prevent your marriage," answered Marais eagerly, like one who has suddenly seen some loophole of escape from an impossible position, adding, as though to himself, "But God may do something to prevent it, for all that."

"We are every one of us in the hand of God," she replied in her sweet voice. "Allan, you hear, my father has promised?"

"Yes, Marie, he has promised—after a fashion," I replied gloomily, for somehow his words struck a chill through me.

"I have promised, Allan, and I will keep my promise to you, as I have kept my oath to God, attempting to work you no harm, and leaving all in His hands. But you, on your part, must promise also that, till she is of age, you will not take Marie as a wife—no, not if you were left alone together in the veld. You must be as people who are affianced to each other, no more."

So, having no choice, I promised, though with a heavy heart. Then, I suppose in order to make this solemn contract public, Marais called the surviving Boers, who were loitering near, and repeated to them the terms of the contract that we had made.

The men laughed and shrugged their shoulders. But Vrouw Prinsloo, I remember, said outright that she thought the business foolish, since if anyone had a right to Marie, I had, wherever I chose to take her. She added that, as for Hernan Pereira, he was a "sneak and a stinkcat," who had gone off to save his own life, and left them all to die. If *she* were Marie, should they meet again, she would greet him with a pailful of dirty water in the face, as she herself meant to do if she got the chance.

Vrouw Prinsloo, it will be observed, was a very outspoken woman and, I may add, an honest one.

So this contract was settled. I have set it out at length because of its importance in our story. But now I wish—ah! how I wish that I had insisted upon being married to Marie then and there. If I had done so, I think I should have carried my point, for I was the "master of many legions" in the shape of cattle, food and ammunition, and rather than risk a quarrel with me, the other Boers would have forced Marais to give way. But we were young and inexperienced; also it was fated otherwise. Who can question the decrees of Fate written immutably, perhaps long before we were born, in the everlasting book of human destinies?

Yet, when I had shaken off my first fears and doubts, my lot and Marie's were very happy, a perfect paradise, indeed, compared with what we had gone through during that bitter time of silence and separation. At any rate, we were acknowledged to be affianced by the little society in which we lived, including her father, and allowed to be as much alone together as we liked. This meant that we met at dawn only to separate at nightfall, for, having little or no artificial light, we went to rest with the sun, or shortly after it. Sweet, indeed, was that companionship of perfect trust and love; so sweet, that even after all these years I do not care to dwell upon the holy memory of those blessed months.

So soon as the surviving Boers began to recover by the help of my stores and medicines and the meat which I shot in plenty, of course great discussions arose as to our future plans. First it was suggested that we should trek to Lorenzo Marquez, and wait for a ship there to take us down to Natal, for none of them would hear of returning beggared to the Cape to tell the story of their failure and dreadful bereavements. I pointed out, however, that no ship might come for a long while, perhaps for one or two years, and that Lorenzo Marquez and its neighborhood seemed to be a poisonous place to live in!

The next idea was that we should stop where we were, one which I rather welcomed, as I should have been glad to abide in peace with Marie until the six months of probation had gone by.

However, in the end this was rejected for many good reasons. Thus half a score of white people, of whom four were members of a single family, were certainly not strong enough to form a settlement, especially as the surrounding natives might become actively hostile at any moment. Again, the worst fever season was approaching, in which we should very possibly all be carried off. Further, we had no breeding cattle or horses, which would not live in this veld, and only the ammunition and goods that I had brought with me.

So it was clear that but one thing remained to be done, namely, to trek back to what is now the Transvaal territory, or, better still, to Natal, for this route would enable us to avoid the worst of the mountains. There we might join some other party of the emigrant Boers—for choice, that of Retief, of whose arrival over the Drakensberg I was able to tell them.

That point settled, we made our preparations. To begin with, I had only enough oxen for two wagons, whereas, even if we abandoned the rest of them, we must take at least four. Therefore, through my Kaffirs, I opened negotiations with the surrounding natives, who, when they heard that I was not a Boer and was prepared to pay for what I bought, soon expressed a willingness to trade. Indeed, very shortly we had quite a market established, to which cattle were brought that I bargained for and purchased, giving cloth, knives, hoes, and the usual Kaffir goods in payment for the same.

Also, they brought mealies and other corn; and oh! the delight with which those poor people, who for months and months had existed upon nothing but flesh-meat, ate of this farinaceous food. Never shall I forget seeing Marie and the surviving children partake of their first meal of porridge, and washing the sticky stuff down with draughts of fresh, sugared milk, for with the oxen I had succeeded in obtaining two good cows. It is enough to say that this change of diet soon completely re-established their health, and made Marie more beautiful than she had ever been before.

Having got the oxen, the next thing was to break them to the yoke; for, although docile creatures enough, they had never even seen a wagon. This proved a long and difficult process, involving many trial trips; moreover, the selected wagons, one of which had belonged to Pereira, must be mended with very insufficient tools and without the help of a forge. Indeed, had it not chanced that Hans, the Hottentot, had worked for a wagon-maker at some indefinite period of his career, I do not think that we could have managed the job at all.

It was while we were busy with these tasks that some news arrived which was displeasing enough to everyone, except perhaps to Henri Marais. I was engaged on a certain evening in trying to make sixteen of the Kaffir cattle pull together in the yoke, instead of tying themselves into a double knot and over-setting the wagon, when Hans, who was helping me, suddenly called out:

"Look! baas, here comes one of my brothers," or, in other words, a Hottentot.

Following the line of his hand, I saw a thin and wretched creature, clad only in some rags and the remains of a big hat with the crown out, staggering towards us between the trees.

"Why!" exclaimed Marie in a startled voice, for, as usual, she was at my side, "it is Klaus, one of my cousin Hernan's after-riders."

"So long as it is not your cousin Hernan himself, I do not care," I said.

Presently the poor, starved "Totty" arrived, and throwing himself down, begged for food. A cold shoulder of buck was given to him, which he devoured, holding it in both hands and tearing off great lumps of flesh with his teeth like a wild beast.

When at last he was satisfied, Marais, who had come up with the other Boers, asked him whence he came and what was his news of his master.

"Out of the bush," he answered, "and my news of the baas is that he is dead. At least, I left him so ill that I suppose he must be dead by now."

"Why did you leave him if he was ill?" asked Marais.

"Because he told me to, baas, that I might find help, for we were starving, having fired our last bullet."

"Is he alone, then?"

"Yes, yes, except for the wild beasts and the vultures. A lion ate the other man, his servant, a long while ago."

"How far is he off?" asked Marais again.

"Oh, baas, about five hours' journey on horseback on a good road." (This would be some thirty-five miles.)

Then he told this story: Pereira with his two Hottentot servants, he mounted and they on foot, had traversed about a hundred miles of rough country in safety, when at night a lion killed and carried off one of the Hottentots, and frightened away the horse, which was never seen again. Pereira and Klaus proceeded on foot till they came to a great river, on the banks of which they met some Kaffirs, who appear to have been Zulus on outpost duty. These men demanded their guns and ammunition to take to their king, and, on Pereira refusing to give them up, said that they would kill them both in the morning after they had made him instruct them in the use of the guns by beating him with sticks.

In the night a storm came on, under cover of which Pereira and Klaus escaped. As they dared not go forward for fear lest they should fall into the hands of the Zulus, they fled back northwards, running all night, only to find in the morning that they had lost their way in the bush. This had happened nearly a month before—or, at any rate, Klaus thought so, for no doubt the days went very slowly—during which time they had wandered about, trying to shape some sort of course by the sun with the object of returning to the camp. They met no man, black or white, and supported themselves upon game, which they shot and ate raw or sun-dried, till at length all their powder was done and they threw away their heavy *roers*, which they could no longer carry.

It was at this juncture that from the top of a tall tree Klaus saw a certain *koppie* a long way off, which he recognised as being within fifteen miles or so of Marais's camp. By now they were starving, only Klaus was the stronger of the two, for he found and devoured some carrion, a dead hyena I think it was. Pereira also tried to eat this horrible food, but, not having the stomach of a Hottentot, the first mouthful of it made him dreadfully ill. They sought shelter in a cave on the bank of a stream, where grew water-cresses and other herbs, such as wild asparagus. Here it was that Pereira told Klaus to try to make his way back to the camp, and, should he find anyone alive there, to bring him succour.

So Klaus went, taking the remaining leg of the hyena with him, and on the afternoon of the second day arrived as has been told.

## CHAPTER X.

### VROUW PRINSLOO SPEAKS HER MIND

Now, when the Hottentot's story was finished a discussion arose. Marais said that someone must go to see whether his nephew still lived, to which the other Boers replied "*Ja*" in an indifferent voice. Then the Vrouw Prinsloo took up her parable.

She remarked, as she had done before, that in her judgment Hernan Pereira was "a stinkcat and a sneak," who had tried to desert them in their trouble, and by the judgment of a just God had got into trouble himself. Personally, she wished that the lion had taken him instead of the worthy Hottentot, although it gave her a higher opinion of lions to conclude that it had not done so, because if it did it thought it would have been poisoned. Well, her view was that it would be just as well to let that traitor lie upon the bed which he had made. Moreover, doubtless by now he was dead, so what was the good of bothering about him?

These sentiments appeared to appeal to the Boers, for they remarked: "*Ja*, what is the good?"

"Is it right," asked Marais, "to abandon a comrade in misfortune, one of our own blood?"

"*Mein Gott!*" replied Vrouw Prinsloo; "he is no blood of mine, the evil-odoured Portuguese. But I admit he is of yours, Heer Marais, being your sister's son, so it is evident that you should be the one to go to seek after him."

"That seems to be so, Vrouw Prinsloo," said Marais in his meditative manner; "yet I must remember that I have Marie to look after."

"Ach! and so had he, too, until he remembered his own skin, and went off with the only horse and all the powder, leaving her and the rest of us to starve. Well, you won't go, and Prinsloo won't go, nor my boy either, for I'll see to that; so Meyer must go."

"*Nein, nein*, good vrouw," answered Meyer, "I have those children that are left to me to consider."

"Then," exclaimed Vrouw Prinsloo triumphantly, "nobody will go, so let us forget this stinkcat, as he forgot us."

"Does it seem right," asked Marais again, "that a Christian man should be left to starve in the wilderness?" and he looked at me.

"Tell me, Heer Marais," I remarked, answering the look, "why should I of all people go to look for the Heer Pereira, one who has not dealt too well with me?"

"I do not know, Allan. Yet the Book tells us to turn the other cheek and to forget injuries. Still, it is for you to judge, remembering that we must answer for all things at the last day, and not for me. I only know that were I your age and not burdened with a daughter to watch over, I should go."

"Why should you talk to me thus?" I asked with indignation. "Why do you not go yourself, seeing that I am quite ready to look after Marie?" (Here the Vrouw Prinsloo and the other Boers tittered.) "And why do you not address your remarks to these other *heeren* instead of to me, seeing that they are the friends and trek-companions of your nephew?"

At this point the male Prinsloos and Meyer found that they had business elsewhere.

"It is for you to judge, yet remember, Allan, that it is an awful thing to appear before our Maker with the blood of a fellow creature upon our hands. But if you and these other hard-hearted men will not go, I at my age, and weak as I am with all that I have suffered, will go myself."

"Good," said Vrouw Prinsloo; "that is the best way out of it. You will soon get sick of the journey, Heer Marais, and we shall see no more of the stinkcat."

Marais rose in a resigned fashion, for he never deigned to argue with Vrouw Prinsloo, who was too many for him, and said:

"Farewell, Marie. If I do not return, you will remember my wishes, and my will may be found between the first leaves of our Holy Book. Get up, Klaus, and guide me to your master," and he administered a somewhat vicious kick to the gorged and prostrate Hottentot.

Now Marie, who all this while had stood silent, touched me on the shoulder and said:

"Allan, is it well that my father should go alone? Will you not accompany him?"

"Of course," I answered cheerfully; "on such a business there should be two, and some Kaffirs also to carry the man, if he still lives."

Now for the end of the story. As the Hottentot Klaus was too exhausted to move that night, it was arranged that we should start at dawn. Accordingly, I rose before the light, and was just finishing my breakfast when Marie appeared at the wagon in which I slept. I got up to greet her, and, there being no one in sight, we kissed each other several times.

"Have done, my heart," she said, pushing me away. "I come to you from my father, who is sick in his stomach and would see you."

"Which means that I shall have to go after your cousin alone," I replied with indignant emphasis.

She shook her head, and led me to the little shanty in which she slept. Here by the growing light, that entered through the doorway for it had no window, I perceived Marais seated upon a wooden stool with his hands pressed on his middle and groaning.

"Good morning, Allan," he said in a melancholy voice; "I am ill, very ill, something that I have eaten perhaps, or a chill in the stomach, such as often precedes fever or dysentery."

"Perhaps you will get better as you walk, mynheer," I suggested, for, to tell the truth, I misdoubted me of this chill, and knew that he had eaten nothing but what was quite wholesome.

"Walk! God alone knows how I can walk with something gripping my inside like a wagon-maker's vice. Yet I will try, for it is impossible to leave that poor Hernan to die alone; and if I do not go to seek him, it seems that no one else will."

"Why should not some of my Kaffirs go with Klaus?" I asked.

"Allan," he replied solemnly, "if you were dying in a cave far from help, would you think well of those who sent raw Kaffirs to succour you when they might have come themselves, Kaffirs who certainly would let you die and return with some false story?"

"I don't know what I should think, Heer Marais. But I do know that if I were in that cave and Pereira were in this camp, neither would he come himself, nor so much as send a savage to save me."

"It may be so, Allan. But even if another's heart is black, should yours be black also? Oh! I will come, though it be to my death," and, rising from the stool with the most dreadful groan, he began to divest himself of the tattered blanket in which he was wrapped up.

"Oh! Allan, my father must not go; it will kill him," exclaimed Marie, who took a more serious view of his case than I did.

"Very well, if you think so," I answered. "And now, as it is time for me to be starting, good-bye."

"You have a good heart, Allan," said Marais, sinking back upon his stool and resuming his blanket, while Marie looked despairingly first at one and then at the other of us.

Half an hour later I was on the road in the very worst of tempers.

"Mind what you are about," called Vrouw Prinsloo after me. "It is not lucky to save an enemy, and if I know anything of that stinkcat, he will bite your finger badly by way of gratitude. Bah! lad, if I were you I should just camp for a few days in the bush, and then come back and say that I could find nothing of Pereira except the dead hyenas that had been poisoned by eating him. Good luck to you all the same, Allan; may I find such a friend in need. It seems to me that you were born to help others."

Beside the Hottentot Klaus, my companions on this unwelcome journey were three of the Zulu Kaffirs, for Hans I was obliged to leave in charge of my cattle and goods with the other men. Also, I took a pack-ox, an active beast that I had been training to carry loads and, if necessary a man, although as yet it was not very well broken.

All that day we marched over extremely rough country, till at last darkness found us in a mountainous kloof, where we slept, surrounded by watch-fires because of the lions. Next morning at the first light we moved on again, and about ten o'clock waded through a stream to a little natural cave, where Klaus said he had left his master. This cave seemed extremely silent, and, as I hesitated for a moment at its mouth, the thought crossed my mind that if Pereira were still there, he must be dead. Indeed, do what I would to suppress it, with that reflection came a certain feeling of relief and even of pleasure. For well I knew that Pereira alive was more dangerous to me than all the wild men and beasts in Africa put together. Thrusting back this unworthy sentiment as best I could, I entered the cave alone, for the natives, who dread the defilement of the touch of a corpse, lingered outside.

It was but a shallow cavity washed out of the overhanging rock by the action of water; and as soon as my eyes grew accustomed to its gloom, I saw that at the end of it lay a man. So still did he lie, that now I was almost certain that his troubles were over. I went up to him and touched his face, which was cold and clammy, and then, quite convinced, turned to leave the place, which, I thought, if a few rocks were piled in the mouth of it, would make an excellent sepulchre.

Just as I stepped out into the sunlight, and was about to call to the men to collect the rocks, however, I thought that I heard a very faint groan behind me, which at the moment I set down to imagination. Still, I returned, though I did not much like the job, knelt down by the figure, and waited with my hand over its heart. For five minutes or more I stayed here, and then, quite convinced, was about to leave again when, for the second time, I heard that faint groan. Pereira was not dead, but only on the extreme brink of death!

I ran to the entrance of the cave, calling the Kaffirs, and together we carried him out into the sunlight. He was an awful spectacle, mere bone with yellow skin stretched over it, and covered with filth and clotted blood from some hurt. I had brandy with me, of which I poured a little down his throat, whereon his heart began to beat feebly. Then we made some soup, and poured that down his throat with more brandy, and the end of it was he came to life again.

For three days did I doctor that man, and really I believe that if at any time during those days I had relaxed my attentions even for a couple of hours, he would have slipped through my fingers, for at this business Klaus and the Kaffirs were no good at all. But I pulled him round, and on the third morning he came to his senses. For a long while he stared at me, for I had laid him in the mouth of the cave, where the light was good, although the overhanging rocks protected him from the sun. Then he said:

"Allemachte! you remind me of someone, young man. I know. It is of that damned English boy who beat me at the goose shooting, and made me quarrel with *Oom* [uncle] Retief, the jackanapes that Marie was so fond of. Well, whoever you are, you can't be he, thank God."

"You are mistaken, Heer Pereira," I answered. "I am that same damned young English jackanapes, Allan Quatermain by name, who beat you at shooting. But if you take my advice, you will thank God for something else, namely, that your life has been saved."

"Who saved it?" he asked.

"If you want to know, I did; I have been nursing you these three days."

"You, Allan Quatermain! Now, that is strange, for certainly I would not have saved yours," and he laughed a little, then turned over and went to sleep.

From that time forward his recovery was rapid, and two days later we began our journey back to Marais's camp, the convalescent Pereira being carried in a litter by the four natives. It was a task at which they grumbled a good deal, for the load was heavy over rough ground, and whenever they stumbled or shook him he cursed at them. So much did he curse, indeed, that at length one of the

Zulus, a man with a rough temper, said that if it were not for the Inkoos, meaning myself, he would put his assegai through him, and let the vultures carry him. After this Pereira grew much more polite. When the bearers became exhausted we set him on the pack-ox, which two of us led, while the other two supported him on either side. It was in this fashion that at last we arrived at the camp one evening.

Here the Vrouw Prinsloo was the first to greet us. We found her standing in the game path which we were following, quite a quarter of a mile from the wagons, with her hands set upon her broad hips and her feet apart. Her attitude was so defiant, and had about it such an air of premeditation, that I cannot help thinking she had got wind of our return, perhaps from having seen the smoke of our last fires, and was watching for us. Also, her greeting was warm.

"Ah! here you come, Hernan Pereira," she cried, "riding on an ox, while better men walk. Well, now, I want a chat with you. How came it that you went off in the night, taking the only horse and all the powder?"

"I went to get help for you," he replied sulkily.

"Did you, did you, indeed! Well, it seems that it was you who wanted the help, after all. What do you mean to pay the Heer Allan Quatermain for saving your life, for I am sure he has done so? You have got no goods left, although you were always boasting about your riches; they are now at the bottom of a river, so it will have to be in love and service."

He muttered something about my wanting no payment for a Christian act.

"No, he wants no payment, Hernan Pereira, he is one of the true sort, but you'll pay him all the same and in bad coin if you get the chance. Oh! I have come out to tell you what I think of you. You are a stinkcat; do you hear that? A thing that no dog would bite if he could help it! You are a traitor also. You brought us to this cursed country, where you said your relatives would give us wealth and land, and then, after famine and fever attacked us, you rode away, and left us to die to save your own dirty skin. And now you come back here for help, saved by him whom you cheated in the Goose Kloof, by him whose true love you have tried to steal. Oh, *mein Gott!* why does the Almighty leave such fellows alive, while so many that are good and honest and innocent lie beneath the soil because of stinkcats like you?"

So she went on, striding at the side of the pack-ox, and reviling Pereira in a ceaseless stream of language, until at length he thrust his thumbs into his ears and glared at her in speechless wrath.

Thus it was that at last we arrived in the camp, where, having seen us coming, all the Boers were gathered. They are not a particularly humorous people, but this spectacle of the advance of Pereira seated on the pack-ox, a steed that is becoming to few riders, with the furious and portly Vrouw Prinsloo striding at his side and shrieking abuse at him, caused them to burst into laughter. Then Pereira's temper gave out, and he became even more abusive than Vrouw Prinsloo.

"Is this the way you receive me, you veld-hogs, you common Boers, who are not fit to mix with a man of position and learning like myself?" he began.

"Then in God's name why do you mix with us, Hernan Pereira?" asked the saturnine Meyer, thrusting his face forward till the Newgate fringe he wore by way of a beard literally seemed to curl with wrath. "When we were hungry you did not wish it, for you slunk away and left us, taking all the powder. But now that we are full again, thanks to the little Englishman, and you are hungry, you come back. Well, if I had my way I would give you a gun and six days' rations, and turn you out to shift for yourself."

"Don't be afraid, Jan Meyer," shouted Pereira from the back of the pack-ox. "As soon as I am strong enough I will leave you in charge of your English captain here"—and he pointed to me—"and go to tell our people what sort of folk you are."

"That is good news," interrupted Prinsloo, a stolid old Boer, who stood by puffing at his pipe. "Get well, get well as soon as you can, Hernan Pereira."

It was at this juncture that Marais arrived, accompanied by Marie. Where he came from I do not know, but I think he must have been keeping in the background on purpose to see what kind of a reception Pereira would meet with.

"Silence, brothers," he said. "Is this the way you greet my nephew, who has returned from the gate of death, when you should be on your knees thanking God for his deliverance?"

"Then go on your knees and thank Him yourself, Henri Marais," screamed the irrepressible Vrouw Prinsloo. "I give thanks for the safe return of Allan here, though it is true they would be warmer if he had left this stinkcat behind him. Allemachte! Henri Marais, why do you make so much of this Portuguese fellow? Has he bewitched you? Or is it because he is your sister's son, or because you want to force Marie there to marry him? Or is it, perhaps, that he knows of something bad in your past life, and you have to bribe him to keep his mouth shut?"

Now, whether this last unpleasant suggestion was a mere random arrow drawn from Vrouw Prinsloo's well-stored quiver, or whether the vrouw had got hold of the tail-end of some long-buried truth, I do not know. Of course, however, the latter explanation is possible. Many men have done things in their youth which they do not wish to see dug up in their age; and Pereira may have learned a family secret of the kind from his mother.

At any rate, the effect of the old lady's words upon Marais was quite remarkable. Suddenly he went into one of his violent and constitutional rages. He cursed Vrouw Prinsloo. He cursed everybody else, assuring them severally and collectively that Heaven would come even with them. He said there was a plot against him and his nephew, and that I was at the bottom of it, I who had made his daughter fond of my ugly little face. So furious were his words, whereof there were many more which I have forgotten, that at length Marie began to cry and ran away. Presently, too, the Boers strolled off, shrugging their shoulders, one of them saying audibly that Marais had gone quite mad at last, as he always thought he would.

Then Marais followed them, throwing up his arms and still cursing as he went, and, slipping over the tail of the pack-ox, Pereira followed him. So the Vrouw Prinsloo and I were left alone, for the coloured men had departed, as they always do when white people begin to quarrel.

"There, Allan, my boy," said the vrouw in triumph, "I have found the sore place on the mule's back, and didn't I make him squeal and kick, although on most days of the week he seems to be such a good and quiet mule—at any rate, of late."

"I dare say you did, vrouw," I said wrathfully, "but I wish you would leave Mynheer Marais's sore places alone, seeing that if the squeals are for you, the kicks are for me."

"What does that matter, Allan?" she asked. "He always was your enemy, so that it is just as well you should see his heels when you are out of reach of them. My poor boy, I think you will have a bad time of it between the stinkcat and the mule, although you have done so much for both of them. Well, there is one thing—Marie has a true heart. She will never marry any man except yourself, Allan—even if you are not here to marry," she added by an afterthought.

The old lady paused a little, staring at the ground. Then she looked up and said:

"Allan, my dear" (for she was really fond of me, and called me thus at times), "you didn't take the advice I gave you, namely, to look for Pereira and not to find him. Well, I will give you some more, which you *will* take if you are wise."

"What is it?" I asked doubtfully; for, although she was upright enough in her own way, the Vrouw Prinsloo could bring herself to look at things in strange lights. Like many other women, she judged of moral codes by the impulses of her heart, and was quite prepared to stretch them to suit circumstances or to gain an end which she considered good in itself.

"Just this, lad. Do you make a two days' march with Marie into the bush. I want a little change, so I will come, too, and marry you there; for I have got a prayer-book, and can spell out the service if we go through it once or twice first."

Now, the vision of Marie and myself being married by the Vrouw Prinsloo in the vast and untrodden veld, although attractive, was so absurd that I laughed.

"Why do you laugh, Allan? Anyone can marry people if there is no one else there; indeed, I believe that they can marry themselves."

"I dare say," I answered, not wishing to enter into a legal argument with the vrouw. "But you see, Tante, I solemnly promised her father that I would not marry her until she was of age, and if I broke my word I should not be an honest man."

"An honest man!" she exclaimed with the utmost contempt; "an honest man! Well, are Marais and Hernan Pereira honest men? Why do you not cut your stick the same length as theirs, Allan Quatermain? I tell you that your *verdomde* honesty will be your ruin. You remember my words later on," and she marched off in high dudgeon.

When she had gone I went to my wagons, where Hans was waiting for me with a detailed and interminable report of everything that had happened in my absence. Glad was I to find that, except for the death of one sickly ox, nothing had gone wrong. When at length he had ended his long story, I ate some food which Marie sent over for me ready cooked, for I was too tired to join any of the Boers that night. Just as I had finished my meal and was thinking of turning in, Marie herself appeared within the circle of the camp-fire's light. I sprang up and ran to her, saying that I had not expected to see her that evening, and did not like to come to the house.

"No," she answered, drawing me back into the shadows, "I understand. My father seems very much upset, almost mad, indeed. If the Vrouw Prinsloo's tongue had been a snake's fang, it could not have stung him worse."

"And where is Pereira?" I asked.

"Oh! my cousin sleeps in the other room. He is weak and worn out. All the same, Allan, he wanted to kiss me. So I told him at once how matters stood between you and me, and that we were to be married in six months."

"What did he say to that?" I asked.

"He turned to my father and said: 'Is this true, my uncle?' And my father answered: 'Yes, that is the best bargain I could make with the Englishman, seeing that you were not here to make a better.'"

"And what happened then, Marie?"

"Oh, then Hernan thought a while. At last he looked up and said: 'I understand. Things have gone badly. I acted for the best, who went away to try to find help for all of you. I failed. Meanwhile the Englishman came and saved you. Afterwards he saved me also. Uncle, in all this I see God's hand; had it not been for this Allan none of us would be alive. Yes, God used him that we might be kept alive. Well, he has promised that he will not marry Marie for six months. And you know, my uncle, that some of these English are great fools; they keep their promises even to their own loss. Now, in six months much may happen; who knows what will happen?'"

"Were you present when you heard all this, Marie?" I asked.

"No, Allan; I was the other side of the reed partition. But at those words I entered and said: 'My father and Cousin Hernan, please understand that there is one thing which will never happen.'

"What is that?" asked my cousin.

"It will never happen that I shall marry you, Hernan," I replied.

"Who knows, Marie, who knows?" he said.

"I do, Hernan," I answered. "Even if Allan were to die to-morrow, I would not marry you, either then or twenty years hence. I am glad that he has saved your life, but henceforth we are cousins, nothing more."

"You hear what the girl tells us," said my father; "why do you not give up the business? What is the use of kicking against the pricks?"

"If one wears stout boots and kicks hard enough, the pricks give way," said Hernan. "Six months is a long time, my uncle."

"It may be so, cousin," I said; "but remember that neither six months nor six years, nor six thousand years, are long enough to make me marry any man except Allan Quatermain, who has just rescued you from death. Do you understand?"

"Yes," he replied, "I understand that you will not marry me. Only then I promise that you shall not marry either Allan Quatermain or any other man."

"God will decide that," I answered and came away, leaving him and my father together. And now Allan, tell me all that's happened since we parted."

So I told her everything, including the Vrouw Prinsloo's advice. "Of course, Allan, you're quite right," she remarked when I had finished; "but I'm unsure that the Vrouw Prinsloo was not also right in her own fashion. I'm afraid of my cousin Hernan who holds my father in his hand—fast, fast. Still, we've promised and must keep our word."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SHOT IN THE KLOOF

I think it was about three weeks after these events that we began our southward trek. On the morning subsequent to our arrival at Marais's camp, Pereira came up to me when several people were present, and, taking my hand, thanked me in a loud voice for having saved his life. Thenceforward, he declared, I should be dearer to him than a brother, for was there not a blood bond between us?

I answered I did not think any such bond existed; indeed, I was not sure what it meant. I had done my duty by him, neither less nor more, and there was nothing further to be said.

It turned out, however, that there was a great deal further to be said, since Pereira desired to borrow money, or, rather, goods, from me. He explained that owing to the prejudices of the vulgar Boers who remained alive in that camp, and especially of the scandalous-tongued Vrouw Prinsloo, both he and his uncle had come to the conclusion that it would be wise for him to remove himself as soon as possible. Therefore he proposed to trek away alone.

I answered that I should have thought he had done enough solitary travelling in this veld, seeing how his last expedition had ended. He replied that he had, indeed, but everyone here was so bitter against him that no choice was left. Then he added with an outburst of truth:

"Allemachte! Mynheer Quatermain, do you suppose that it is pleasant for me to see you making love all day to the maid who was my betrothed, and to see her paying back the love with her eyes? Yes, and doubtless with her lips, too, from all I hear."

"You could leave her whom you called your betrothed, but who never was betrothed to anyone but me with her own will, to starve in the veld, mynheer. Why, then, should you be angry because I picked up that which you threw away, that, too, which was always my own and not yours? Had it not been for me, there would now be no maid left for us to quarrel over, as, had it not been for me, there would be no man left for me to quarrel with about the maid."

"Are you God, then, Englishman, that you dispose of the lives of men and women at your will? It was He Who saved us, not you."

"He may have saved you, but it was through me. I carried out the rescue of these poor people whom you deserted, and I nursed you back to life."

"I did not desert them; I went to get help for them."

"Taking all the powder and the only horse with you! Well, that is done with, and now you want to borrow goods to pay for cattle—from me, whom you hate. You are not proud, Mynheer Pereira, when you have an end to serve, whatever that end may be," and I looked at him. My instinct warned me against this false and treacherous man, who, I felt, was even then plotting in his heart to bring some evil upon me.

"No, I am not proud. Why should I be, seeing that I mean to repay you twice over for anything which you may lend me now?"

I reflected a while. Certainly our journey to Natal would be pleasanter if Pereira were not of the company. Also, if he went with us, I was sure that before we came to the end of that trek, one or other of us would leave his bones on the road. In short, not to put too fine a point on it, I feared lest in this way or in that he would bring me to my death in order that he might possess himself of Marie. We were in a wild country, with few witnesses and no law courts, where such deeds might be done again and again and the doer never called to account for lack of evidence and judges.

So I made up my mind to fall in with his wishes, and we began to bargain. The end of it was that I advanced him enough of my remaining goods to buy the cattle he required from the surrounding natives. It was no great quantity, after all, seeing that in this uncivilised place an ox could be purchased for a few strings of beads or a cheap knife. Further, I sold him a few of the beasts that I had broken, a gun, some ammunition and certain other necessities, for all of which things he gave me a note of hand written in my pocket-book. Indeed, I did more; for as none of the Boers would help him I assisted Pereira to break in the cattle he bought, and even consented when he asked me to give him the services of two of the Zulus whom I had hired.

All these preparations took a long while. If I remember right, twelve more days had gone by before Pereira finally trekked off from Marais's camp, by which time he was quite well and strong again.

We all assembled to see the start, and Marais offered up a prayer for his nephew's safe journey and our happy meeting again in Natal at the laager of Retief, which was to be our rendezvous, if that leader were still in Natal. No one else joined in the prayer. Only Vrouw Prinsloo audibly added another of her own. It was to the effect that he might not come back a second time, and that she might never see his face again, either at Retief's laager or anywhere else, if it would please the good Lord so to arrange matters.

The Boers tittered; even the Meyer children tittered, for by this time the hatred of the Vrouw Prinsloo for Hernan Pereira was the joke of the place. But Pereira himself pretended not to hear, said good-bye to us all affectionately, adding a special petition for the Vrouw Prinsloo, and off we went.

I say "we went" because with my usual luck, to help him with the half-broken oxen, I was commandeered to accompany this man to his first outspan, a place with good water about twelve miles from the camp, where he proposed to remain for the night.

Now, as we started about ten o'clock in the morning and the veld was fairly level, I expected that we should reach this outspan by three or four in the afternoon, which would give me time to walk back before sunset. In fact, however, so many accidents happened of one sort or another, both to the wagon itself, of which the woodwork had shrunk with long standing in the sun, and to the cattle, which, being unused to the yoke, tied themselves in a double knot upon every opportunity, that we only arrived there at the approach of night.

The last mile of that trek was through a narrow gorge cut out by water in the native rock. Here trees grew sparsely, also great ferns, but the bottom of the gorge, along which game were accustomed to travel, was smooth enough for wagons, save for a few fallen boulders, which it was necessary to avoid.

When at length we reached the outspan I asked the Hottentot, Klaus, who was assisting me to drive the team, where his master was, for I could not see him anywhere. He answered that he had gone back down the kloof to look for something that had fallen from the wagon, a bolt I think he said.

"Very good," I replied. "Then tell him, if we do not meet, that I have returned to the camp."

As I set out the sun was sinking below the horizon, but this did not trouble me overmuch, as I had a rifle with me, that same light rifle with which I had shot the geese in the great match. Also I knew that the moon, being full, would be up presently.

The sun sank, and the kloof was plunged in gloom. The place seemed eerie and lonesome, and suddenly I grew afraid. I began to wonder where Pereira was, and what he might be doing. I even thought of turning back and finding some way round, only having explored all this district pretty thoroughly in my various shooting expeditions from the camp. I knew there was no practicable path across those hills. So I went on with my rifle at full cock, whistling to keep up my courage, which, of course, in the circumstances was a foolish thing to do. It occurred to me at the time that it was foolish, but, in truth, I would not give way to the dark suspicions which crossed my mind. Doubtless by now Pereira had passed me and reached the outspan.

The moon began to shine—that wonderful African moon, which turns night to day—throwing a network of long, black shadows of trees and rocks across the game track I was following. Right ahead of me was a particularly dark patch of this shadow, caused by a projecting wall of cliff, and beyond it an equally bright patch of moonlight. Somehow I misdoubted me of that stretch of gloom, for although, of course, I could see nothing there, my quick ear caught the sound of movements.

I halted for a moment. Then, reflecting that these were doubtless caused by some night-walking creature, which, even should it chance to be dangerous, would flee at the approach of man, I plunged into it boldly. As I emerged at the other end—the shadow was eighteen or twenty paces long—it occurred to me that if any enemy were lurking there, I should be an easy target as I entered the line of clear light. So, almost instinctively, for I do not remember that I reasoned the thing out, after my first two steps forward in the light I gave a little spring to the left, where there was still shadow, although it was not deep. Well was it for me that I did so, for at that moment I felt something touch my cheek and heard the loud report of a gun immediately behind me.

Now, the wisest course would have been for me to run before whoever had fired found time to reload. But a kind of fury seized me, and run I would not. On the contrary, I turned with a shout, and charged back into the shadow. Something heard me coming, something fled in front of me. In a few seconds we were out into the moonlight beyond, and, as I expected, I saw that this something was a man—Pereira!

He halted and wheeled round, lifting the stock of his gun, club fashion.

"Thank God! it is you, Heer Allan," he said; "I thought you were a tiger."

"Then it is your last thought, murderer," I answered, raising my rifle.

"Don't shoot," he said. "Would you have my blood upon you? Why do you want to kill me?"

"Why did you try to kill me?" I answered, covering him.

"I try to kill you! Are you mad? Listen, for your own sake. I sat down on the bank yonder waiting for the moon, and, being tired, fell asleep. Then I woke up with a start, and, thinking from the sounds that a tiger was after me, fired to scare it. Allemachte! man, if I had aimed at you, could I have missed at that distance?"

"You did not quite miss, and had I not stepped to the left, you would have blown my head off. Say your prayers, you dog!"

"Allan Quatermain," he exclaimed with desperate energy, "you think I lie, who speak the truth. Kill me if you will, only then remember that you will hang for it. We court one woman, that is known, and who will believe this story of yours that I tried to shoot you? Soon the Kaffirs will come to look for me, probably they are starting already, and will find my body with your bullet in my heart. Then they will take it back to Marais's camp, and I say—who will believe your story?"

"Some, I think, murderer," but as I spoke the words a chill of fear struck me. It was true, I could prove nothing, having no witnesses, and henceforward I should be a Cain among the Boers, one who had slain a man for jealousy. His gun was empty; yes, but it might be said that I had fired it after his death. And as for the graze upon my cheek—why, a twig might have caused it. What should I do, then? Drive him before me to the camp, and tell this tale? Even then it would be but my word against his. No, he had me in a forked stick. I must let him go, and trust that Heaven would avenge his crime, since I could not. Moreover, by now my first rage was cooling, and to execute a man thus—

"Hernan Pereira," I said, "you are a liar and a coward. You tried to butcher me because Marie loves me and hates you, and you want to force her to marry you. Yet I cannot shoot you down in cold blood as you deserve. I leave it to God to punish you, as, soon or late, He will, here or hereafter; you who thought to slaughter me and trust to the hyenas to hide your crime, as they would have done before morning. Get you gone before I change my mind, and be swift."

Without another word he turned and ran swiftly as a buck, leaping from side to side as he ran, to disturb my aim in case I should shoot.

When he was a hundred yards away or more I, too, turned and ran, never feeling safe till I knew there was a mile of ground between us.

It was past ten o'clock that night when I got back to the camp, where I found Hans the Hottentot about to start to look for me, with two of the Zulus, and told him that I had been detained by accidents to the wagon. The Vrouw Prinsloo was still up also, waiting to hear of my arrival.

"What was the accident, Allan?" she asked. "It looks as though there had been a bullet in it," and she pointed to the bloody smear upon my cheek.

I nodded.

"Pereira's?" she asked again.

I nodded a second time.

"Did you kill him?"

"No; I let him go. It would have been said that I murdered him," and I told her what had happened.

"Ja, Allan," she remarked when I had finished. "I think you were wise, for you could have proved nothing. But oh! for what fate, I wonder, is God Almighty saving up that stinkcat. Well, I will go and tell Marie that you are back safe, for her father won't let her out of the hut so late; but nothing more unless you wish it."

"No, Tante; I think nothing more, at any rate at present."

Here I may state, however, that within a few days Marie and everyone else in the camp knew the story in detail, except perhaps Marais, to whom no one spoke of his nephew. Evidently Vrouw Prinsloo had found herself unable to keep secret such an example of the villainy of her aversion, Pereira. So she told her daughter, who told the others quickly enough, though I gathered that some of them set down what had happened to accident. Bad as they knew Pereira to be, they could not believe that he was guilty of so black a crime.

About a week later the rest of us started from Marais's camp, a place that, notwithstanding the sadness of many of its associations, I confess I left with some regret. The trek before us, although not so very long, was of an extremely perilous nature. We had to pass through about two hundred miles of country of which all we knew was that its inhabitants were the Amatonga and other savage tribes. Here I should explain that after much discussion we had abandoned the idea of retracing the route followed by Marais on his ill-fated journey towards Delagoa.

Had we taken this it would have involved our crossing the terrible Lobombo Mountains, over which it was doubtful whether our light cattle could drag the wagons. Moreover, the country beyond the mountains was said to be very bare of game and also of Kaffirs, so that food might be lacking. On the other hand, if we kept to the east of the mountains the veld through which we must pass was thickly populated, which meant that in all probability we could buy grain.

What finally decided us to adopt this route, however, was that here in these warm, low-lying lands there would be grass for the oxen. Indeed, now, at the beginning of spring, in this part of Africa it was already pushing. Even if it were not, the beasts could live upon what herbage remained over from last summer and on the leaves of trees, neither of which in this winter veld ever become quite lifeless, whereas on the sere and fire-swept plains beyond the mountains they might find nothing at all. So we determined to risk the savages and the lions which followed the game into these hot districts, especially as it was not yet the fever season or that of the heavy rains, so that the rivers would be fordable.

I do not propose to set out our adventures in detail, for these would be too long. Until the great one of which I shall have to tell presently, they were of an annoying rather than of a serious nature. Travelling as we did, between the mountains and the sea, we could not well lose our way, especially as my Zulus had passed through that country; and when their knowledge failed us, we generally managed to secure the services of local guides. The roads, however, or rather the game tracks and Kaffir paths which we followed, were terrible, for with the single exception of that of Pereira for part of the distance, no wagon had ever gone over them before. Indeed, a little later in the year they could not have been travelled at all. Sometimes we stuck in bogs out of which we had to dig the wheels, and sometimes in the rocky bottoms of streams, while once we were obliged literally to cut our way through a belt of dense bush from which it took us eight days to escape.

Our other chief trouble came from the lions, whereof there were great numbers in this veld. The prevalence of these hungry beasts forced us to watch our cattle very closely while they grazed, and at night, wherever it was possible, to protect them and ourselves in *bomas*, or fences of thorns, within which we lit fires to scare away wild beasts. Notwithstanding these precautions, we lost several of the oxen, and ourselves had some narrow escapes.

Thus, one night, just as Marie was about to enter the wagon where the women slept, a great lion, desperate with hunger, sprang over the fence. She leapt away from the beast, and in so doing caught her foot and fell down, whereon the lion came for her. In another few seconds she would have been dead, or carried off living.

But as it chanced, Vrouw Prinsloo was close at hand. Seizing a flaming bough from the fire, that intrepid woman ran at the lion and, as it opened its huge mouth to roar or bite, thrust the burning end of the bough into its throat. The lion closed its jaws upon it, then finding the mouthful not to its taste, departed even more quickly than it had come, uttering the most dreadful noises, and leaving Marie quite unhurt. Needless to say, after this I really worshipped the Vrouw Prinsloo, though she, good soul, thought nothing of the business, which in those days was but a common incident of travel.

I think it was on the day after this lion episode that we came upon Pereira's wagon, or rather its remains. Evidently he had tried to trek along a steep, rocky bank which overhung a stream, with the result that the wagon had fallen into the stream-bed, then almost dry, and been smashed beyond repair.

The Tonga natives of the neighbourhood, who had burned most of the woodwork in order to secure the precious iron bolts and fittings, informed us that the white man and his servants who were with the wagon had gone forward on foot some ten days before, driving their cattle with them. Whether this story were true or not we had no means of finding out. It was quite possible that Pereira and his companions had been murdered, though as we found the Tongas very quiet folk if well treated and given the usual

complimentary presents for wayleaves, this did not seem probable. Indeed, a week later our doubts upon this point were cleared up thus.

We had reached a big kraal called Fokoti, on the Umkusi River, which appeared to be almost deserted. We asked an old woman whom we met where its people had gone. She answered that they had fled towards the borders of Swaziland, fearing an attack from the Zulus, whose territories began beyond this Umkusi River. It seemed that a few days before a Zulu impi or regiment had appeared upon the banks of the river, and although there was no war at the time between the Zulus and the Tongas, the latter had thought it wise to put themselves out of reach of those terrible spears.

On hearing this news we debated whether it would not be well for us to follow their example and, trekking westwards, try to find a pass in the mountains. Upon this point there was a division of opinion among us. Marais, who was a fatalist, wished to go on, saying that the good Lord would protect us, as He had done in the past.

"Allemachte!" answered the Vrouw Prinsloo. "Did He protect all those who lie dead at Marais's camp, whither your folly led us, mynheer? The good Lord expects us to look after our own skins, and I know that these Zulus are of the same blood as Umsilikazi's Kaffirs, who have killed so many of our people. Let us try the mountains, say I."

Of course her husband and son agreed with her, for to them the vrouw's word was law; but Marais, being, as usual, obstinate, would not give way. All that afternoon they wrangled, while I held my tongue, declaring that I was willing to abide by the decision of the majority. In the end, as I foresaw they would, they appealed to me to act as umpire between them.

"Friends," I answered, "if you had asked me my opinion before, I should have voted for trying the mountains, beyond which, perhaps, we might find some Boers. I do not like this story of the Zulu impi. I think that someone has told them of our coming, and that it is us they mean to attack and not the Tongas, with whom they are at peace. My men say that it is not usual for impis to visit this part of the country."

"Who could have told them?" asked Marais.

"I don't know, mynheer. Perhaps the natives have sent on word, or perhaps—Hernan Pereira."

"I knew that you would suspect my nephew, Allan," he exclaimed angrily.

"I suspect no one; I only weigh what is probable. However, it is too late for us to move to-night either south or westwards, so I think I will sleep over the business and see what I can find out from my Zulus."

That night, or rather the following morning, the question was settled for us, for when I woke up at dawn, it was to see the faint light glimmering on what I knew must be spears. We were surrounded by a great company of Zulus, as I discovered afterwards, over two hundred strong. Thinking that after their fashion they were preparing to attack us at dawn, I called the news to the others, whereon Marais rushed forward, just as he had left his bed, cocking his roer as he came.

"For the love of God, do not shoot!" I said. "How can we resist so many? Soft words are our only chance."

Still he attempted to fire, and would have done so had I not thrown myself upon him and literally torn the gun from his hand. By this time the Vrouw Prinsloo had come up, a very weird spectacle, I recollect, in what she called her "sleep-garments," that included a night-cap made of a worn jackal skin and a kind of otter-pelt stomacher.

"Accursed fool!" she said to Marais, "would you cause all our throats to be cut? Go forward, you, Allan, and talk to those *swartzels*" (that is, black creatures), "gently, as you would to a savage dog. You have a tongue steeped in oil, and they may listen to you."

"Yes," I answered; "that seems the best thing to do. If I should not return, give my love to Marie."

So I beckoned to the headman of my Zulus whom I had hired at Delagoa, to accompany me, and marched forward boldly quite unarmed. We were encamped upon a rise of ground a quarter of a mile from the river, and the impi, or those of them whom we could see, were at the foot of this rise about a hundred and sixty yards away. The light was growing now, and when I was within fifty paces of them they saw me. At some word of command a number of men rushed toward me, their fighting shields held over their bodies and their spears up.

"We are dead!" exclaimed my Kaffir in a resigned voice. I shared his opinion, but thought I might as well die standing as running away.

Now I should explain that though as yet I had never mixed with these Zulus, I could talk several native dialects kindred to that which they used very well indeed. Moreover, ever since I had hired men of their race at Delagoa, I had spent all my spare time in conversing with them and acquiring a knowledge of their language, history and customs. So by this time I knew their tongue fairly, although occasionally I may have used terms which were unfamiliar to them.

Thus it came about that I was able to shout to them, asking what was their business with us. Hearing themselves addressed in words which they understood, the men halted, and seeing that I was unarmed, three of them approached me.

"We come to take you prisoners, white people, or to kill you if you resist," said their captain.

"By whose order?" I asked.

"By the order of Dingaan our king."

"Is it so? And who told Dingaan that we were here?"

"The Boer who came in front of you."

"Is it so?" I said again. "And now what do you need of us?"

"That you should accompany us to the kraal of Dingaan."

"I understand. We are quite willing, since it lies upon our road. But then why do you come against us, who are peaceful travellers, with your spears lifted?"

“For this reason. The Boer told us that there is among you a ‘child of George’” (an Englishman), “a terrible man who would kill us unless we killed or bound him first. Show us this child of George that we may make him fast, or slay him, and we will not hurt the rest of you.”

“I am the child of George,” I answered, “and if you think it necessary to make me fast, do so.”

Now the Zulus burst out laughing.

“You! Why, you are but a boy who weighs no more than a fat girl,” exclaimed their captain, a great, bony fellow who was named Kambula.

“That may be so,” I answered; “but sometimes the wisdom of their fathers dwells in the young. I am the son of George who saved these Boers from death far away, and I am taking them back to their own people. We desire to see Dingaan, your king. Be pleased therefore to lead us to him as he has commanded you to do. If you do not believe what I tell you, ask this man who is with me, and his companions who are of your own race. They will tell you everything.”

Then the captain Kambula called my servant apart and talked with him for a long while.

When the interview was finished he advanced to me and said:

“Now I have heard all about you. I have heard that although young you are very clever, so clever that you do not sleep, but watch by night as well as by day. Therefore, that I, Kambula, name you Macumazahn, Watcher-by-night, and by that name you shall henceforth be known among us. Now, Macumazahn, son of George, bring out these Boers whom you are guiding that I may lead them in their moving huts to the Great Place, Umgungundhlovu, where dwells Dingaan the king. See, we lay down our spears and will come to meet them unarmed, trusting to you to protect us, O Macumazahn, Son of George,” and he cast his assegai to the ground.

“Come,” I said, and led them to the wagons.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DINGAAN'S BET

As I advanced to the wagons accompanied by Kambula and his two companions, I saw that Marais, in a state of great excitement, was engaged in haranguing the two Prinsloo men and Meyer, while the Vrouw Prinsloo and Marie appeared to be attempting to calm him.

"They are unarmed," I heard him shout. "Let us seize the black devils and hold them as hostages."

Thereon, led by Marais, the three Boer men came towards us doubtfully, their guns in their hands.

"Be careful what you are doing," I called to them. "These are envoys," and they hung back a little while Marais went on with his haranguing.

The Zulus looked at them and at me, then Kambula said:

"Are you leading us into a trap, Son of George?"

"Not so," I answered; "but the Boers are afraid of you and think to take you prisoners."

"Tell them," said Kambula quietly, "that if they kill us or lay a hand on us, as no doubt they can do, very soon every one of them will be dead and their women with them."

I repeated this ultimatum energetically enough, but Marais shouted:

"The Englishman is betraying us to the Zulus! Do not trust him; seize them as I tell you."

What would have happened I am sure I do not know; but just then the Vrouw Prinsloo came up and caught her husband by the arm, exclaiming:

"You shall have no part in this fool's business. If Marais wishes to seize the Zulus, let him do so himself. Are you mad or drunk that you should think that Allan would wish to betray Marie to the Kaffirs, to say nothing of the rest of us?" and she began to wave an extremely dirty *vatdoek*, or dishcloth, which she always carried about with her and used for every purpose, towards Kambula as a sign of peace.

Now the Boers gave way, and Marais, seeing himself in a minority, glowered at me in silence.

"Ask these white people, O Macumazahn," said Kambula, "who is their captain, for to the captain I would speak."

I translated the question, and Marais answered:

"I am."

"No," broke in Vrouw Prinsloo, "I am. Tell them, Allan, that these men are all fools and have given the rule to me, a woman."

So I told them. Evidently this information surprised them a little, for they discussed together. Then Kambula said:

"So be it. We have heard that the people of George are now ruled by a woman, and as you, Macumazahn, are one of that people, doubtless it is the same among your party."

Here I may add that thenceforward the Zulus always accepted the Vrouw Prinsloo as the *Inkosikaas* or chieftainess of our little band, and with the single exception of myself, whom they looked upon as her "mouth," or *induna*, would only transact business with or give directions to her. The other Boers they ignored completely.

This point of etiquette settled, Kambula bade me repeat what he had already told me, that we were prisoners whom he was instructed by Dingaan to convey to his Great Place, and that if we made no attempt to escape we should not be hurt upon the journey.

I did so, whereon the vrouw asked as I had done, who had informed Dingaan that we were coming.

I repeated to her word for word what the Zulus had told me, that it was Pereira, whose object seems to have been to bring about my death or capture.

Then the vrouw exploded.

"Do you hear that, Henri Marais?" she screamed. "It is your stinkcat of a nephew again. Oh! I thought I smelt him! Your nephew has betrayed us to these Zulus that he may bring Allan to his death. Ask them, Allan, what this Dingaan has done with the stinkcat."

So I asked, and was informed they believed that the king had let Pereira go on to his own people in payment of the information that he had given him.

"My God!" said the vrouw, "I hoped that he had knocked him on the head. Well, what is to be done now?"

"I don't know," I answered. Then an idea occurred to me, and I said to Kambula:

"It seems to be me, the son of George, that your king wants. Take me, and let these people go on their road."

The three Zulus began to discuss this point, withdrawing themselves a little way so that I could not overhear them. But when the Boers understood the offer that I had made, Marie, who until now had been silent, grew more angry than ever I had seen her before.

"It shall not be!" she said, stamping her foot. "Father, I have been obedient to you for long, but if you consent to this I will be obedient no more. Allan saved my cousin Hernan's life, as he saved all our lives. In payment for that good deed Hernan tried to murder him in the kloof—oh! be quiet, Allan; I know all the story. Now he has betrayed him to the Zulus, telling them that he is a terrible and dangerous man who must be killed. Well, if he is to be killed, I will be killed with him, and if the Zulus take him and let us free, I go with him. Now make up your mind."

Marais tugged at his beard, staring first at his daughter and then at me. What he would have answered I do not know, for at that moment Kambula stepped forward and gave his decision.

It was to the effect that although it was the Son of George whom Dingaan wanted, his orders were that all with him were to be taken also. Those orders could not be disobeyed. The king would settle the matter as to whether some of us were to be killed and some let free, or if all were to be killed or let free, when we reached his House. Therefore he commanded that "we should tie the oxen to the moving huts and cross the river at once."

This was the end of that scene. Having no choice we inspanned and continued our journey, escorted by the company of two hundred savages. I am bound to say that during the four or five days that it took us to reach Dingaan's kraal they behaved very well to us. With Kambula and his officers, all of them good fellows in their way, I had many conversations, and from them learned much as to the state and customs of the Zulus. Also the peoples of the districts through which we passed flocked round us at every outspan, for most of them had never seen a white man before, and in return for a few beads brought us all the food that we required. Indeed, the beads, or their equivalents, were nothing but a present, since, by the king's command, they must satisfy our wants. This they did very thoroughly. For instance, when on the last day's trek, some of our oxen gave out, numbers of Zulus were inspanned in place of them, and by their help the wagons were dragged to the great kraal, Umgungundhlovu.

Here an outspan place was assigned to us near to the house, or rather the huts, of a certain missionary of the name of Owen, who with great courage had ventured into this country. We were received with the utmost kindness by him and his wife and household, and it is impossible for me to say what pleasure I found, after all my journeyings, in meeting an educated man of my own race.

Near to our camp was a stone-covered koppie, where, on the morning after our arrival, I saw six or eight men executed in a way that I will not describe. Their crime, according to Mr. Owen, was that they had bewitched some of the king's oxen.

While I was recovering from this dreadful spectacle, which, fortunately, Marie did not witness, the captain Kambula arrived, saying that Dingaan wished to see me. So taking with me the Hottentot Hans and two of the Zulus whom I had hired at Delagoa Bay—for the royal orders were that none of the other white people were to come, I was led through the fence of the vast town in which stood two thousand huts—the "multitude of houses" as the Zulus called it—and across a vast open space in the middle.

On the farther side of this space, where, before long, I was fated to witness a very tragic scene, I entered a kind of labyrinth. This was called *sikloho*, and had high fences with numerous turns, so that it was impossible to see where one was going or to find the way in or out. Ultimately, however, I reached a great hut named *intunkulu*, a word that means the "house of houses," or the abode of the king, in front of which I saw a fat man seated on a stool, naked except for the *moocha* about his middle and necklaces and armlets of blue beads. Two warriors held their broad shields over his head to protect him from the sun. Otherwise he was alone, although I felt sure that the numerous passages around him were filled with guards, for I could hear them moving.

On entering this place Kambula and his companions flung themselves upon their faces and began to sing praises of which the king took no notice. Presently he looked up, and appearing to observe me for the first time asked:

"Who is that white boy?"

Then Kambula rose and said:

"O king, this is the Son of George, whom you commanded me to capture. I have taken him and the *Amaboona*" (that is, the Boers), "his companions, and brought them all to you, O king."

"I remember," said Dingaan. "The big Boer who was here, and whom Tambusa"—he was one of Dingaan's captains—"let go against my will, said that he was a terrible man who should be killed before he worked great harm to my people. Why did you not kill him, Kambula, although it is true he does not look very terrible?"

"Because the king's word was that I should bring him to the king living," answered Kambula. Then he added cheerfully: "Still, if the king wishes it, I can kill him at once."

"I don't know," said Dingaan doubtfully; "perhaps he can mend guns." Next, after reflecting a while, he bade a shield-holder to fetch someone, I could not hear whom.

"Doubtless," thought I to myself, "it is the executioner," and at that thought a kind of mad rage seized me. Why should my life be ended thus in youth to satisfy the whim of a savage? And if it must be so, why should I go alone?

In the inside pocket of my ragged coat I had a small loaded pistol with two barrels. One of those barrels would kill Dingaan—at five paces I could not miss that bulk—and the other would blow out my brains, for I was not minded to have my neck twisted or to be beaten to death with sticks. Well, if it was to be done, I had better do it at once. Already my hand was creeping towards the pocket when a new idea, or rather two ideas, struck me.

The first was that if I shot Dingaan the Zulus would probably massacre Marie and the others—Marie, whose sweet face I should never see again. The second was that while there is life there is hope. Perhaps, after all, he had not sent for an executioner, but for someone else. I would wait. A few minutes more of existence were worth the having.

The shield-bearer returned, emerging from one of the narrow, reed-hedged passages, and after him came no executioner, but a young white man, who, as I knew from the look of him, was English. He saluted the king by taking off his hat, which I remember was stuck round with black ostrich feathers, then stared at me.

"O Tho-maas" (that is how he pronounced "Thomas"), said Dingaan, "tell me if this boy is one of your brothers, or is he a Boer?"

"The king wants to know if you are Dutch or British," said the white lad, speaking in English.

"As British as you are," I answered. "I was born in England, and come from the Cape."

"That may be lucky for you," he said, "because the old witch-doctor, Zikali, has told him that he must not kill any English. What is your name? Mine is Thomas Halstead. I am interpreter here."

"Allan Quatermain. Tell Zikali, whoever he may be, that if he sticks to his advice I will give him a good present."

"What are you talking about?" asked Dingaan suspiciously.

"He says he is English, no Boer, O king; that he was born across the Black Water, and that he comes from the country out of which all the Boers have trekked."

At this intelligence Dingaan pricked up his ears.

"Then he can tell me about these Boers," he said, "and what they are after, or could if he were able to speak my tongue. I do not trust you to interpret, you Tho-maas, whom I know to be a liar," and he glowered at Halstead.

"I can speak your tongue, though not very well, O king," I interrupted, "and I can tell you all about the Boers, for I have lived among them."

"Ow!" said Dingaan, intensely interested. "But perhaps you are also a liar. Or are you a praying man, like that fool yonder, who is named Oweena?"—he meant the missionary Mr. Owen—"whom I spare because it is not lucky to kill one who is mad, although he tries to frighten my soldiers with tales of a fire into which they will go after they are dead. As though it matters what happens to them after they are dead!" he added reflectively, taking a pinch of snuff.

"I am no liar," I answered. "What have I to lie about?"

"You would lie to save your own life, for all white men are cowards; not like the Zulus, who love to die for their king. But how are you named?"

"Your people call me Macumazahn."

"Well, Macumazahn, if you are no liar, tell me, is it true that these Boers rebelled against their king who was named George, and fled from him as the traitor Umsilikazi did from me?"

"Yes," I answered, "that is true."

"Now I am sure that you are a liar," said Dingaan triumphantly. "You say that you are English and therefore serve your king, or the *Inkosikaas*" (that is the Great Lady), "who they tell me now sits in his place. How does it come about then that you are travelling with a party of these very *Amaboona* who must be your enemies, since they are the enemies of your king, or of her who follows after him?"

Now I knew that I was in a tight place, for on this matter of loyalty, Zulu, and indeed all native ideas, are very primitive. If I said that I had sympathy with the Boers, Dingaan would set me down as a traitor. If I said that I hated the Boers, then still I should be a traitor because I associated with them, and a traitor in his eyes would be one to be killed. I do not like to talk religion, and anyone who has read what I have written in various works will admit that I have done so rarely, if ever. Yet at that moment I put up a prayer for guidance, feeling that my young life hung upon the answer, and it came to me—whence I do not know. The essence of that guidance was that I should tell the simple truth to this fat savage. So I said to him:

"The answer is this, O king. Among those Boers is a maiden whom I love and who betrothed herself to me since we were 'so high.' Her father took her north. But she sent a message to me saying that her people died of fever and she starved. So I went up in a ship to save her, and have saved her, and those who remained alive of her people with her."

"Ow!" said Dingaan; "I understand that reason. It is a good reason. However many wives he may have, there is no folly that a man will not commit for the sake of some particular girl who is not yet his wife. I have done as much myself, especially for one who was called Nada the Lily, of whom a certain Umslopogaas robbed me, one of my own blood of whom I am much afraid."<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[2]</sup> See the Author's book named "Nada the Lily."

For a while he brooded heavily, then went on:

"Your reason is good, Macumazahn, and I accept it. More, I promise you this. Perhaps I shall kill these Boers, or perhaps I shall not kill them. But if I make up my mind to kill them, this girl of yours shall be spared. Point her out to Kambula here—not to Tho-maas, for he is a liar and would tell me the wrong one—and she shall be spared."

"I thank you, O king," I said; "but what is the use of that if I am to be killed?"

"I did not say that you were to be killed, Macumazahn, though perhaps I shall kill you, or perhaps I shall not kill you. It depends upon whether I find you to be a liar, or not a liar. Now the Boer whom Tambusa let go against my wish said that you are a mighty magician as well as a very dangerous man, one who can shoot birds flying on the wing with a bullet, which is impossible. Can you do so?"

"Sometimes," I answered.

"Very good, Macumazahn. Now we will see if you are a wizard or a liar. I will make a bet with you. Yonder by your camp is a hill called 'Hloma Amabutu,' a hill of stones where evildoers are slain. This afternoon some wicked ones die there, and when they are dead the vultures will come to devour them. Now this is my bet with you. When those vultures come you shall shoot at them, and if you kill three out of the first five on the wing—not on the ground, Macumazahn—then I will spare these Boers. But if you miss them, then I shall know that you are a liar and no wizard, and I will kill them every one on the hill Hloma Amabutu. I will spare none of them except the girl, whom perhaps I will take as a wife. As to you, I will not yet say what I will do with you."

Now my first impulse was to refuse this monstrous wager, which meant that the lives of a number of people were to be set against my skill in shooting. But young Thomas Halstead, guessing the words that were about to break from me, said in English:

"Accept unless you are a fool. If you don't he will cut the throats of every one of them and stick your girl into the *emposeni*" (that is harem), "while you will become a prisoner as I am."

These were words that I could not resent or neglect, so although despair was in my heart, I said coolly:

"Be it so, O king. I take your wager. If I kill three vultures out of five as they hover over the hill, then I have your promise that all those who travel with me shall be allowed to go hence in safety."

"Yes, yes, Macumazahn; but if you fail to kill them, remember that the next vultures you shoot at shall be those that come to feed upon their flesh, for then I shall know that you are no magician, but a common liar. And now begone, Tho-maas. I will not have you spying on me; and you, Macumazahn, come hither. Although you talk my tongue so badly, I would speak with you about the Boers."

So Halstead went, shrugging his shoulders and muttering as he passed me:

"I hope you really *can* shoot."

After he had left I sat alone for a full hour with Dingaan while he cross-examined me about the Dutch, their movements and their aims in travelling to the confines of his country.

I answered his questions as best I could, trying to make out a good case for them.

At length, when he grew weary of talking, he clapped his hands, whereon a number of fine girls appeared, two of whom carried pots of beer, from which he offered me drink.

I replied that I would have none, since beer made the hand shake and that on the steadiness of my hand that afternoon depended the lives of many. To do him justice he quite understood the point. Indeed, he ordered me to be conducted back to the camp at once that I might rest, and even sent one of his own attendants with me to hold a shield over my head as I walked so that I should be protected from the sun.

"*Hamba gachle*" (that is "Go softly"), said the wicked old tyrant to me as I departed under the guidance of Kambula. "This afternoon, one hour before sundown, I will meet you at Hloma Amabutu, and there shall be settled the fate of these *Amaboona*, your companions."

When I reached the camp it was to find all the Boers clustered together waiting for me, and with them the Reverend Mr. Owen and his people, including a Welsh servant of his, a woman of middle age who, I remember, was called Jane.

"Well," said the Vrouw Prinsloo, "and what is your news, young man?"

"My news, aunt," I answered, "is that one hour before sundown to-day I have to shoot vultures on the wing against the lives of all of you. This you owe to that false-hearted hound Hernan Pereira, who told Dingaan that I am a magician. Now Dingaan would prove it. He thinks that only by magic can a man shoot soaring vultures with a bullet, and as he is determined to kill you all, except perhaps Marie, in the form of a bet he has set me a task which he believes to be impossible. If I fail, the bet is lost, and so are your lives. If I succeed I think your lives will be spared, since Kambula there tells me that the king always makes it a point of honour to pay his bets. Now you have the truth, and I hope you like it," and I laughed bitterly.

When I had finished a perfect storm of execration broke from the Boers. If curses could have killed Pereira, surely he would have died upon the spot, wherever he might be. Only two of them were silent, Marie, who turned very pale, poor girl, and her father. Presently one of them, I think it was Meyer, rounded on him viciously and asked him what he thought now of that devil, his nephew.

"I think there must be some mistake," answered Marais quietly, "since Hernan cannot have wished that we should all be put to death."

"No," shouted Meyer; "but he wished that Allan Quatermain should, which is just as bad; and now it has come about that once more our lives depend upon this English boy."

"At any rate," replied Marais, looking at me oddly, "it seems that he is not to be killed, whether he shoots the vultures or misses them."

"That remains to be proved, mynheer," I answered hotly, for the insinuation stung me. "But please understand that if all of you, my companions, are to be slaughtered, and Marie is to be put among this black brute's women, as he threatens, I have no wish to live on."

"My God! does he threaten that?" said Marais. "Surely you must have misunderstood him, Allan."

"Do you think that I should lie to you on such a matter—" I began.

But, before I could proceed, the Vrouw Prinsloo thrust herself between us, crying:

"Be silent, you, Marais, and you too, Allan. Is this a time that you should quarrel and upset yourself, Allan, so that when the trial comes you will shoot your worst and not your best? And is this a time, Henri Marais, that you should throw insults at one on whom all our lives hang, instead of praying for God's vengeance upon your accursed nephew? Come, Allan, and take food. I have fried the liver of that heifer which the king sent us; it is ready and very good. After you have eaten it you must lie down and sleep a while."

Now among the household of the Reverend Mr. Owen was an English boy called William Wood, who was not more than twelve or fourteen years of age. This lad knew both Dutch and Zulu, and acted as interpreter to the Owen family during the absence on a journey of a certain Mr. Hulley, who really filled that office. While this conversation was taking place in Dutch he was engaged in rendering every word of it into English for the benefit of the clergyman and his family. When Mr. Owen understood the full terror of the situation, he broke in saying:

"This is not a time to eat or to sleep, but a time to pray that the heart of the savage Dingaan may be turned. Come, let us pray!"

"Yes," rejoined Vrouw Prinsloo, when William Wood had translated. "Do you pray, *Predicant*, and all the rest of you who have nothing else to do, and while you are about it pray also that the bullets of Allan Quatermain may not be turned. As for me and Allan, we have other things to see to, so you must pray a little harder to cover us as well as yourselves. Now you come along, nephew Allan, or that liver may be overdone and give you indigestion, which is worse for shooting than even bad temper. No, not another word. If you try to speak any more, Henri Marais, I will box your ears," and she lifted a hand like a leg of mutton, then, as Marais retreated before her, seized me by the collar as though I were a naughty boy and led me away to the wagons.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE REHEARSAL

By the women's wagon we found the liver cooked in its frying-pan, as the vrouw had said. Indeed, it was just done to a turn. Selecting a particularly massive slice, she proceeded to take it from the pan with her fingers in order to set it upon a piece of tin, from which she had first removed the more evident traces of the morning meal with her constant companion, the ancient and unwashed *vatdoek*. As it chanced the effort was not very successful, since the boiling liver fat burnt the vrouw's fingers, causing her to drop it on the grass, and, I am sorry to add, to swear as well. Not to be defeated, however, having first sucked her fingers to ease their smart, she seized the sizzling liver with the *vatdoek* and deposited it upon the dirty tin.

"There, nephew," she said triumphantly, "there are more ways of killing a cat than by drowning. What a fool I was not to think of the *vatdoek* at first. Allemachte! how the flesh has burnt me; I don't suppose that being killed would hurt much more. Also, if the worst comes to the worst, it will soon be over. Think of it, Allan, by to-night I may be an angel, dressed in a long white nightgown like those my mother gave me when I was married, which I cut up for baby-clothes because I found them chilly wear, having always been accustomed to sleep in my vest and petticoat. Yes, and I shall have wings, too, like those on a white gander, only bigger if they are to carry *my* weight."

"And a crown of Glory," I suggested.

"Yes, of course, a crown of Glory—very large, since I shall be a martyr; but I hope one will only have to wear it on Sundays, as I never could bear anything heavy on my hair; moreover, it would remind me of a Kaffir's head-ring done in gold, and I shall have had enough of Kaffirs. Then there will be the harp," she went on as her imagination took fire at the prospect of these celestial delights. "Have you ever seen a harp, Allan? I haven't except that which King David carries in the picture in the Book, which looks like a broken *rimpi* chair frame set up edgewise. As for playing the thing, they will have to teach me, that's all, which will be a difficult business, seeing that I would sooner listen to cats on the roof than to music, and as for making it—"

So she chattered on, as I believe with the object of diverting and amusing me, for she was a shrewd old soul who knew how important it was that I should be kept in an equable frame of mind at this crisis in our fates.

Meanwhile I was doing my best with the lump of liver, that tasted painfully of *vatdoek* and was gritty with sand. Indeed, when the vrouw's back was turned I managed to throw the most of it to Hans behind me, who swallowed it at a gulp as a dog does, since he did not wish to be caught chewing it.

"God in heaven! how fast you eat, nephew," said the vrouw, catching sight of my empty tin. Then, eyeing the voracious Hottentot suspiciously, she added: "That yellow dog of yours hasn't stolen it, has he? If so, I'll teach him."

"No, no, vrouw," answered Hans in alarm. "No meat has passed my lips this day, except what I licked out of the pan after breakfast."

"Then, Allan, you will certainly have indigestion, which is just what I wanted to avoid. Have I not often told you that you should chew your bit twenty times before you swallow, which I would do myself if I had any back teeth left? Here, drink this milk; it is only a little sour and will settle your stomach," and she produced a black bottle and subjected it to the attentions of the *vatdoek*, growing quite angry when I declined it and sent for water.

Next she insisted upon my getting into her own bed in the wagon to sleep, forbidding me to smoke, which she said made the hand shake. Thither, then, I went, after a brief conversation with Hans, whom I directed to clean my rifle thoroughly. For I wished to be alone and knew that I had little chance of solitude outside of that somewhat fusty couch.

To tell the truth, although I shut my eyes to deceive the vrouw, who looked in occasionally to see how I was getting on, no sleep came to me that afternoon—at least, not for a long while. How could I sleep in that hot place when my heart was torn with doubt and terror? Think of it, reader, think of it! An hour or two, and on my skill would hang the lives of eight white people—men, women, and children, and the safety or the utter shame of the woman whom I loved and who loved me. No, she should be spared the worst. I would give her my pistol, and if there were need she would know what to do.

The fearful responsibility was more than I could bear. I fell into a veritable agony; I trembled and even wept a little. Then I thought of my father and what he would do in such circumstances, and began to pray as I had never prayed before.

I implored the Power above me to give me strength and wisdom; not to let me fail in this hour of trouble, and thereby bring these poor people to a bloody death. I prayed till the perspiration streamed down my face; then suddenly I fell into sleep or swoon. I don't know how long I lay thus, but I think it must have been the best part of an hour. At last I woke up all in an instant, and as I woke I distinctly heard a tiny voice, unlike any other voice in the whole world, speak inside my head, or so it seemed to me, saying:

"Go to the hill *Hloma Amabutu*, and watch how the vultures fly. Do what comes into your mind, and even if you seem to fail, fear nothing."

I sat up on the old vrouw's bed, and felt that some mysterious change had come over me. I was no longer the same man. My doubts and terrors had gone; my hand was like a rock; my heart was light. I knew that I should kill those three vultures. Of course the story seems absurd, and easy to be explained by the state of my nerves under the strain which was being put upon them, and for aught I

know that may be its true meaning. Yet I am not ashamed to confess that I have always held, and still hold, otherwise. I believe that in my extremity some kindly Power did speak to me in answer to my earnest prayers and to those of others, giving me guidance and, what I needed still more, judgment and calmness. At any rate, that this was my conviction at the moment may be seen from the fact that I hastened to obey the teachings of that tiny, unnatural voice.

Climbing out of the wagon, I went to Hans, who was seated near by in the full glare of the hot sun, at which he seemed to stare with unblinking eyes.

"Where's the rifle, Hans?" I said.

"*Intombi* is here, baas, where I have put her to keep her cool, so that she may not go off before it is wanted," and he pointed to a little grave-like heap of gathered grass at his side.

The natives, I should explain, named this particular gun *Intombi*, which means a young girl, because it was so much slimmer and more graceful than other guns.

"Is it clean?" I asked.

"Never was she cleaner since she was born out of the fire, baas. Also, the powder has been sifted and set to dry in the sun with the caps, and the bullets have been trued to the barrel, so that there may be no accidents when it comes to the shooting. If you miss the *aasvogels*, baas, it will not be the fault of *Intombi* or of the powder and the bullets; it will be your own fault."

"That's comforting," I answered. "Well, come on, I want to go to the Death-hill yonder."

"Why, baas, before the time?" asked the Hottentot, shrinking back a little. "It is no place to visit till one is obliged. These Zulus say that ghosts sit there even in the daylight, haunting the rocks where they were made ghosts."

"Vultures sit or fly there also, Hans; and I would see how they fly, that I may know when and where to shoot at them."

"That is right, baas," said the clever Hottentot. "This is not like firing at geese in the Groote Kloof. The geese go straight, like an assegai to its mark. But the *aasvogels* wheel round and round, always on the turn; it is easy to miss a bird that is turning, baas."

"Very easy. Come on."

Just as we were starting Vrouw Prinsloo appeared from behind the other wagon, and with her Marie, who, I noticed, was very pale and whose beautiful eyes were red, as though with weeping.

The vrouw asked me where we were going. I told her. After considering a little, she said that was a good thought of mine, as it was always well to study the ground before a battle.

I nodded, and led Marie aside behind some thorn trees that grew near.

"Oh! Allan, what will be the end of this?" she asked piteously. High as was her courage it seemed to fail her now.

"A good end, dearest," I answered. "We shall come out of this hole safely, as we have of many others."

"How do you know that, Allan, which is known to God alone?"

"Because God told me, Marie," and I repeated to her the story of the voice I had heard in my dream, which seemed to comfort her.

"Yet, yet," she exclaimed doubtfully, "it was but a dream, Allan, and dreams are such uncertain things. You may fail, after all."

"Do I look like one who will fail, Marie?"

She studied me from head to foot, then answered:

"No, you do not, although you did when you came back from the king's huts. Now you are quite changed. Still, Allan, you may fail, and then—what? Some of those dreadful Zulus have been here while you were sleeping, bidding us all make ready to go to the Hill of Death. They say that Dingaan is in earnest. If you do not kill the vultures, he will kill us. It seems that they are sacred birds, and if they escape he will think he has nothing to fear from the white men and their magic, and so will make a beginning by butchering us. I mean the rest of us, for I am to be kept alive, and oh! what shall I do, Allan?"

I looked at her, and she looked at me. Then I took the double-barrelled pistol out of my pocket and gave it to her.

"It is loaded and on the half-cock," I said.

She nodded, and hid it in her dress beneath her apron. Then without more words we kissed and parted, for both of us feared to prolong that scene.

The hill Hloma Amabutu was quite close to our encampment and the huts of the Reverend Mr. Owen, scarcely a quarter of a mile off, I should say, rising from the flat veld on the further side of a little depression that hardly amounted to a valley. As we approached it I noticed its peculiar and blasted appearance, for whereas all around the grass was vivid with the green of spring, on this place none seemed to grow. An eminence strewn with tumbled heaps of blackish rock, and among them a few struggling, dark-leaved bushes; that was its appearance. Moreover, many of these boulders looked as though they had been splashed and lined with whitewash, showing that they were the resting-place of hundreds of gorged vultures.

I believe it is the Chinese who declare that particular localities have good or evil influences attached to them, some kind of spirit of their own, and really Hloma Amabutu and a few other spots that I am acquainted with in Africa give colour to the fancy. Certainly as I set foot upon that accursed ground, that Golgotha, that Place of Skulls, a shiver went through me. It may have been caused by the atmosphere, moral and actual, of the mount, or it may have been a prescience of a certain dreadful scene which within a few months I was doomed to witness there. Or perhaps the place itself and the knowledge of the trial before me sent a sudden chill through my healthy blood. I cannot say which it was, but the fact remains as I have stated, although a minute or two later, when I saw what kind of sleepers lay upon that mount, it would not have been necessary for me to seek any far-fetched explanation of my fear.

Across this hill, winding in and out between the rough rocks that lay here, there and everywhere like hailstones after a winter storm, ran sundry paths. It seems that the shortest road to various places in the neighbourhood of the Great Kraal ran over it, and

although no Zulu ever dared to set foot there between sun-set and rise, in the daytime they used these paths freely enough. But I suppose that they also held that this evil-omened field of death had some spirit of its own, some invisible but imminent fiend, who needed to be propitiated, lest soon he should claim them also.

This was their method of propitiation, a common one enough, I believe, in many lands, though what may be its meaning I cannot tell. As the traveller came to those spots where the paths cut across each other, he took a stone and threw it on to a heap that had been accumulated there by the hands of other travellers. There were many such heaps upon the hill, over a dozen, I think, and the size of them was great. I should say that the biggest contained quite fifty loads of stones, and the smallest not fewer than twenty or thirty.

Now, Hans, although he had never set foot there before, seemed to have learned all the traditions of the place, and what rites were necessary to avert its curse. At any rate, when we came to the first heap, he cast a stone upon it, and begged me to do the same. I laughed and refused, but when we reached the second heap the same thing happened. Again I refused, whereon, before we came to a third and larger pile, Hans sat down upon the ground and began to groan, swearing that he would not go one step farther unless I promised to make the accustomed offering.

"Why not, you fool?" I asked.

"Because if you neglect it, baas, I think that we shall stop here for ever. Oh! you may laugh, but I tell you that already you have brought ill-luck upon yourself. Remember my words, baas, when you miss two of the five *aasvogels*."

"Bosh!" I exclaimed, or, rather, its Dutch equivalent. Still, as this talk of missing vultures touched me nearly, and it is always as well to conform to native prejudices, at the next and two subsequent heaps I cast my stone as humbly as the most superstitious Zulu in the land.

By this time we had reached the summit, which may have been two hundred yards long. It was hog-backed in shape, with a kind of depression in the middle cleared of stones, either by the hand of man or nature, and not unlike a large circus in its general conformation.

Oh! the sight that met my eyes. All about lay the picked and scattered bones of men and women, many of them broken up by the jaws of hyenas. Some were quite fresh, for the hair still clung to the skulls, others blanched and old. But new or ancient there must have been hundreds of them. Moreover, on the sides of the hill it was the same story, though there, for the most part, the bones had been gathered into gleaming heaps. No wonder that the vultures loved Hloma Amabutu, the Place of Slaughter of the bloody Zulu king.

Of these horrible birds, however, at the moment not one was to be seen. As there had been no execution for a few hours they were seeking their food elsewhere. Now, for my own purposes, I wanted to see them, since otherwise my visit was in vain, and presently bethought myself of a method of securing their arrival.

"Hans," I said, "I am going to pretend to kill you, and then you must lie quite still out there like one dead. Even if the *aasvogels* settle on you, you must lie quite still, so that I may see whence they come and how they settle."

The Hottentot did not take at all kindly to this suggestion. Indeed, he flatly refused to obey me, giving sundry good reasons. He said that this kind of rehearsal was ill-omened; that coming events have a way of casting their shadow before, and he did not wish to furnish the event. He said that the Zulus declared that the sacred *aasvogels* of Hloma Amabutu were as savage as lions, and that when once they saw a man down they would tear him to pieces, dead or living. In short, Hans and I came to an acute difference of opinion. As for every reason it was necessary that my view should prevail, however, I did not hesitate to put matters to him very plainly.

"Hans," I said, "you have to be a bait for vultures; choose if you will be a live bait or a dead bait," and I cocked the rifle significantly, although, in truth, the last thing that I wished or intended to do was to shoot my faithful old Hottentot friend. But Hans, knowing all I had at stake, came to a different conclusion.

"Allemachte! baas," he said, "I understand, and I do not blame you. Well, if I obey alive, perhaps my guardian Snake" (or spirit) "will protect me from the evil omen, and perhaps the *aasvogels* will not pick out my eyes. But if once you send a bullet through my stomach—why, then everything is finished, and for Hans it is 'Good night, sleep well.' I will obey you, baas, and lie where you wish, only, I pray you, do not forget me and go away, leaving me with those devil birds."

I promised him faithfully that I would not. Then we went through a very grim little pantomime. Proceeding to the centre of the arena-like space, I lifted the gun, and appeared to dash out Hans' brains with its butt. He fell upon his back, kicked about a little, and lay still. This finished Act 1.

Act 2 was that, capering like a brute of a Zulu executioner, I retired from my victim and hid myself in a bush on the edge of the plateau at a distance of forty yards. After this there was a pause. The place was intensely bright with sunshine and intensely silent; as silent as the skeletons of the murdered men about me; as silent as Hans, who lay there looking so very small and dead in that big theatre where no grass grew. It was an eerie wait in such surroundings, but at length the curtain rang up for Act 3.

In the infinite arch of blue above me I perceived a speck, no larger than a mote of dust. The *aasvogel* on watch up there far out of the range of man's vision had seen the deed, and, by sinking downwards, signalled it to his companions that were quartering the sky for fifty miles round; for these birds prey by sight, not by smell. Down he came and down, and long before he had reached the neighbourhood of earth other specks appeared in the distant blue. Now he was not more than four or five hundred yards above me, and began to wheel, floating round the place upon his wide wings, and sinking as he wheeled. So he sank softly and slowly until he was about a hundred and fifty feet above Hans. Then suddenly he paused, hung quite steady for a few seconds, shut his wings and fell like a bolt, only opening them again just before he reached the earth.

Here he settled, tilting forward in that odd way which vultures have, and scrambling a few awkward paces until he gained his balance. Then he froze into immobility, gazing with an awful, stony glare at the prostrate Hans, who lay within about fifteen feet of him. Scarcely was this *aasvogel* down, when others, summoned from the depths of sky, did as he had done. They appeared, they sank, they wheeled, always from east to west, the way the sun travels. They hovered for a few seconds, then fell like stones, pitched on to

their beaks, recovered themselves, waddled forward into line, and sat gazing at Hans. Soon there was a great ring of them about him, all immovable, all gazing, all waiting for something.

Presently that something appeared in the shape of an *aasvogel* which was nearly twice as big as any of the others. This was what the Boers and the natives call the “king vulture,” one of which goes with every flock. He it is who rules the roost and also the carcass, which without his presence and permission none dare to attack. Whether this vile fowl is of a different species from the others, or whether he is a bird of more vigorous growth and constitution that has outgrown the rest and thus become their overlord, is more than I can tell. At least it is certain, as I can testify from long and constant observation, that almost every flock of vultures has its king.

When this particular royalty had arrived, the other *aasvogels*, of which perhaps there were now fifty or sixty gathered round Hans, began to show signs of interested animation. They looked at the king bird, they looked at Hans, stretching out their naked red necks and winking their brilliant eyes. I, however, did not pay particular attention to those upon the earth, being amply occupied in watching their fellows in the air.

With delight I observed that the vulture is a very conservative creature. They all did what doubtless they have done since the days of Adam or earlier—wheeled, and then hung that little space of time before they dropped to the ground like lead. This, then, would be the moment at which to shoot them, when for four or five seconds they offered practically a sitting target. Now, at that distance, always under a hundred yards, I knew well that I could hit a tea plate every shot, and a vulture is much larger than a tea plate. So it seemed to me that, barring accidents, I had little to fear from the terrible trial of skill which lay before me. Again and again I covered the hovering birds with my rifle, feeling that if I had pressed the trigger I should have pierced them through.

Thinking it well to practise, I continued this game for a long while, till at last it came to an unexpected end. Suddenly I heard a scuffling sound. Dropping my glance I saw that the whole mob of *aasvogels* were rushing in upon Hans, helping themselves forward by flapping their great wings, and that about three feet in front of them was their king. Next instant Hans vanished, and from the centre of that fluffy, stinking mass there arose a frightful yell.

As a matter of fact, as I found afterwards, the king vulture had fastened on to his snub nose, whilst its dreadful companions, having seized other portions of his frame, were beginning to hang back after their fashion in order to secure some chosen morsel. Hans kicked and screamed, and I rushed in shouting, causing them to rise in a great, flapping cloud that presently vanished this way and that. Within a minute they had all gone, and the Hottentot and I were left alone.

“That is good,” I said. “You played well.”

“Good! baas,” he answered, “and I with two cuts in my nose in which I can lay my finger, and bites all over me. Look how my trousers are torn. Look at my head—where is the hair? Look at my nose. Good! Played well! It is those *verdomde aasvogels* that played. Oh! baas, if you had seen and smelt them, you would not say that it was good. See, one more second and I, who have two nostrils, should have had four.”

“Never mind, Hans,” I said, “it is only a scratch, and I will make you a present of some new trousers. Also, here is tobacco for you. Come to the bush; let us talk.”

So we went, and when Hans was a little composed I told him all that I had observed about the habits of the *aasvogel* in the air, and he told me all that he had observed about their habits on the ground, which, as I might not shoot them sitting, did not interest me. Still, he agreed with me that the right moment to fire would be just before they pounced.

Whilst we were still talking we heard a sound of shouts, and, looking over the brow of the hill that faced towards Umgungundhlovu, we saw a melancholy sight. Being driven up the slope towards us by three executioners and a guard of seven or eight soldiers, their hands tied behind their backs, were three men, one very old, one of about fifty years of age, and one a lad, who did not look more than eighteen. As I soon heard, they were of a single family, the grandfather, the father, and the eldest son, who had been seized upon some ridiculous charge of witchcraft, but really in order that the king might take their cattle.

Having been tried and condemned by the *Nyangas*, or witch-doctors, these poor wretches were now doomed to die. Indeed, not content with thus destroying the heads of the tribe, present and to come, for three generations, all their descendants and collaterals had already been wiped out by Dingaan, so that he might pose as sole heir to the family cattle.

Such were the dreadful cruelties that happened in Zululand in those days.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE PLAY

The doomed three were driven by their murderers into the centre of the depression, within a few yards of which Hans and I were standing.

After them came the head executioner, a great brute who wore a curiously shaped leopard-skin cap—I suppose as a badge of office—and held in his hand a heavy kerry, the shaft of which was scored with many notches, each of them representing a human life.

“See, White Man,” he shouted, “here is the bait which the king sends to draw the holy birds to you. Had it not been that you needed such bait, perhaps these wizards would have escaped. But the Black One said the little Son of George, who is named Macumazahn, needs them that he may show his magic, and therefore they must die to-day.”

Now, at this information I turned positively sick. Nor did it make me feel better when the youngest of the victims, hearing the executioner’s words, flung himself upon his knees, and began to implore me to spare him. His grandfather also addressed me, saying:

“Chief, will it not be enough if I die? I am old, and my life does not matter. Or if one is not sufficient, take me and my son, and let the lad, my grandson, go free. We are all of us innocent of any witchcraft, and he is not even old enough to practise such things, being but an unmarried boy. Chief, you, also, are young. Would not your heart be heavy if you had to be slain when the sun of your life was still new in the sky? Think, White Chief, what your father would feel, if you have one, should he be forced to see you killed before his eyes, that some stranger might use your body to show his skill with a magic weapon by slaying the wild things that would eat it.”

Now, almost with tears, I broke in, explaining to the venerable man as well as I could that their horrible fate had nothing to do with me. I told him that I was innocent of their blood, who was forced to be there to try to shoot vultures on the wing in order to save my white companions from a doom similar to their own. He listened attentively, asking a question now and again, and when he had mastered my meaning, said with a most dignified calmness:

“Now I understand, White Man, and am glad to learn that you are not cruel, as I thought. My children,” he added, turning to the others, “let us trouble this *Inkoos* no more. He only does what he must do to save the lives of his brethren by his skill, if he can. If we continue to plead with him and stir his heart to pity, the sorrow swelling in it may cause his hand to shake, and then they will die also, and their blood be on his head and ours. My children, it is the king’s will that we should be slain. Let us make ready to obey the king, as men of our House have always done. White lord, we thank you for your good words. May you live long, and may good fortune sleep in your hut to the end. May you shoot straight, also, with your magic tool, and thereby win the lives of your company out of the hand of the king. Farewell, *Inkoos*,” and since he could not lift his bound hands in salutation, he bowed to me, as did the others.

Then they walked to a little distance, and, seating themselves on the ground, began to talk together, and after a while to drone some strange chant in unison. The executioners and the guards also sat down not far away, laughing, chatting, and passing a horn of snuff from hand to hand. Indeed, I observed that the captain of them even took some snuff to the victims, and held it in his palm beneath their noses while they drew it up their nostrils and politely thanked him between the sneezes.

As for myself, I lit a pipe and smoked it, for I seemed to require a stimulant, or, rather, a sedative. Before it was finished Hans, who was engaged in doctoring his scratches made by the vultures’ beaks with a concoction of leaves which he had been chewing, exclaimed suddenly in his matter-of-fact voice:

“See, baas, here they come, the white people on one side and the black on the other, just like the goats and the sheep at Judgment Day in the Book.”

I looked, and there to my right appeared the party of Boers, headed by the Vrouw Prinsloo, who held the remnants of an old umbrella over her head. To the left advanced a number of Zulu nobles and councillors, in front of whom waddled Dingaan arrayed in his bead dancing dress. He was supported by two stalwart body-servants, whilst a third held a shield over his head to protect him from the sun, and a fourth carried a large stool, upon which he was to sit. Behind each party, also, I perceived a number of Zulus in their war-dress, all of them armed with broad stabbing spears.

The two parties arrived at the stone upon which I was sitting almost simultaneously, as probably it had been arranged that they should do, and halted, staring at each other. As for me, I sat still upon my stone and smoked on.

“Allemachte! Allan,” puffed the Vrouw Prinsloo, who was breathless with her walk up the hill, “so here you are! As you did not come back, I thought you had run away and left us, like that stinkcat Pereira.”

“Yes, *Tante* (aunt), here I am,” I answered gloomily, “and I wish to heaven that I was somewhere else.”

Just then Dingaan, having settled his great bulk upon the stool and recovered his breath, called to the lad Halstead, who was with him, and said:

“O Tho-maas, ask your brother, Macumazahn, if he is ready to try to shoot the vultures. If not, as I wish to be fair, I will give him a little more time to make his magic medicine.”

I replied sulkily that I was as ready as I was ever likely to be.

Then the Vrouw Prinsloo, understanding that the king of the Zulus was before her, advanced upon him, waving her umbrella. Catching hold of Halstead, who understood Dutch, she forced him to translate an harangue, which she addressed to Dingaan.

Had he rendered it exactly as it came from her lips, we should all have been dead in five minutes, but, luckily, that unfortunate young man had learnt some of the guile of the serpent during his sojourn among the Zulus, and varied her vigorous phrases. The gist of her discourse was that he, Dingaan, was a black-hearted and bloody-minded villain, with whom the Almighty would come even sooner or later (as, indeed, He did), and that if he dared to touch one hair of her or of her companions' heads, the Boers, her countrymen, would prove themselves to be the ministers of the Almighty in that matter (as, indeed, they did). As translated by Halstead into Zulu, what she said was that Dingaan was the greatest king in the whole world; in fact, that there was not, and never had been, any such a king either in power, wisdom, or personal beauty, and that if she and her companions had to die, the sight of his glory consoled them for their deaths.

"Indeed," said Dingaan suspiciously, "if that is what this man-woman says, her eyes tell one story and her lips another. Oh! Thomaas, lie no more. Speak the true words of the white chieftainess, lest I should find them out otherwise, and give you to the slayers."

Thus adjured, Halstead explained that he had not yet told all the words. The "man-woman," who was, as he, Dingaan, supposed, a great chieftainess among the Dutch, added that if he, the mighty and glorious king, the earth-shaker, the world-eater, killed her or any of her subjects, her people would avenge her by killing him and his people.

"Does she say that?" said Dingaan. "Then, as I thought, these Boers are dangerous, and not the peaceful folk they make themselves out to be," and he brooded for a while, staring at the ground. Presently he lifted his head and went on: "Well, a bet is a bet, and therefore I will not wipe out this handful, as otherwise I would have done at once. Tell the old cow of a chieftainess that, notwithstanding her threats, I stick to my promise. If the little Son of George, Macumazahn, can shoot three vultures out of five by help of his magic, then she and her servants shall go free. If not, the vultures which he has missed shall feed on them, and afterwards I will talk with her people when they come to avenge her. Now, enough of this *indaba*. Bring those evildoers here that they may thank and praise me, who give them so merciful an end."

So the grandfather, the father, and the son were hustled before Dingaan by the soldiers, and greeted him with the royal salute of "*bayèté*."

"O king," said the old man, "I and my children are innocent. Yet if it pleases you, O king, I am ready to die, and so is my son. Yet we pray you to spare the little one. He is but a boy, who may grow up to do you good service, as I have done to you and your House for many years."

"Be silent, you white-headed dog!" answered Dingaan fiercely. "This lad is a wizard, like the rest of you, and would grow up to bewitch me and to plot with my enemies. Know that I have stamped out all your family, and shall I then leave him to breed another that would hate me? Begone to the World of Spirits, and tell them how Dingaan deals with sorcerers."

The old man tried to speak again, for evidently he loved this grandchild of his, but a soldier struck him in the face, and Dingaan shouted:

"What! Are you not satisfied? I tell you that if you say more I will force you to kill the boy with your own hand. Take them away."

Then I turned and hid my face, as did all the white folk. Presently I heard the old man, whom they had saved to the last that he might witness the deaths of his descendants, cry in a loud voice:

"On the night of the thirtieth full moon from this day I, the far-sighted, I, the prophet, summon thee, Dingaan, to meet me and mine in the Land of Ghosts, and there to pay—"

Then with a roar of horror the executioners fell on him and he died. When there was silence I looked up, and saw that the king, who had turned a dirty yellow hue with fright, for he was very superstitious, was trembling and wiping the sweat from his brow.

"You should have kept the wizard alive," he said in a shaky voice to the head slayer, who was engaged in cutting three more nicks on the handle of his dreadful kerry. "Fool, I would have heard the rest of his lying message."

The man answered humbly that he thought it best it should remain unspoken, and got himself out of sight as soon as possible. Here I may remark that by an odd coincidence Dingaan actually was killed about thirty moons from that time. Mopo, his general, who slew his brother Chaka, slew him also with the help of Umslopogaas, the son of Chaka. In after years Umslopogaas told me the story of the dreadful ghost-haunted death of this tyrant, but, of course, he could not tell me exactly upon what day it happened. Therefore I do not know whether the prophecy was strictly accurate.<sup>[3]</sup>

[3] For the history of the death of Dingaan, see the Author's "*Nada the Lily*."

The three victims lay dead in the hollow of the Hill of Death. Presently the king, recovering himself, gave orders that the spectators should be moved back to places where they could see what happened without frightening the vultures. So the Boers, attended by their band of soldiers, who were commanded to slay them at once if they attempted to escape, went one way, and Dingaan and his Zulus went the other, leaving Hans and myself alone behind our bush. As the white people passed me, Vrouw Prinsloo wished me good luck in a cheerful voice, although I could see that her poor old hand was shaking, and she was wiping her eyes with the *vatdoek*. Henri Marais, also in broken tones, implored me to shoot straight for his daughter's sake. Then came Marie, pale but resolute, who said nothing, but only looked me in the eyes, and touched the pocket of her dress, in which I knew the pistol lay hid. Of the rest of them I took no notice.

The moment, that dreadful moment of trial, had come at last; and oh! the suspense and the waiting were hard to bear. It seemed an age before the first speck, that I knew to be a vulture, appeared thousands of feet above me and began to descend in wide circles.

"Oh, baas," said poor Hans, "this is worse than shooting at the geese in the Groote Kloof. Then you could only lose your horse, but now—"

"Be silent," I hissed, "and give me the rifle."

The vulture wheeled and sank, sank and wheeled. I glanced towards the Boers, and saw that they were all of them on their knees. I glanced towards the Zulus, and saw that they were watching as, I think, they had never watched anything before, for to them this was a new excitement. Then I fixed my eyes upon the bird.

Its last circle was accomplished. Before it pounced it hung on wide, outstretched wings, as the others had done, its head towards me. I drew a deep breath, lifted the rifle, got the foresight dead upon its breast, and touched the hair-trigger. As the charge exploded I saw the *aasvogel* give a kind of backward twist. Next instant I heard a loud clap, and a surge of joy went through me, for I thought that the bullet had found its billet. But alas! it was not so.

The clap was that of the air disturbed by the passing of the ball and the striking of this air against the stiff feathers of the wings. Anyone who has shot at great birds on the wing with a bullet will be acquainted with the sound. Instead of falling the vulture recovered itself. Not knowing the meaning of this unaccustomed noise, it dropped quietly to earth and sat down near the bodies, pitching forward in the natural way and running a few paces, as the others had done that afternoon. Evidently it was quite unhurt.

"Missed!" gasped Hans as he grasped the rifle to load it. "Oh! why did you not throw a stone on to the first heap?"

I gave Hans a look that must have frightened him; at any rate, he spoke no more. From the Boers went up a low groan. Then they began to pray harder than ever, while the Zulus clustered round the king and whispered to him. I learned afterwards that he was giving heavy odds against me, ten to one in cattle, which they were obliged to take, unwillingly enough.

Hans finished loading, capped and cocked the rifle, and handed it to me. By now other vultures were appearing. Being desperately anxious to get the thing over one way or another, at the proper moment I took the first of them. Again I covered it dead and pressed. Again as the gun exploded I saw that backward lurch of the bird, and heard the clap of the air upon its wings. Then—oh horror!—this *aasvogel* turned quietly, and began to mount the ladder of the sky in the same fashion as it had descended. I had missed once more.

"The second heap of stones has done this, baas," said Hans faintly, and this time I did not even look at him. I only sat down and buried my face in my hands. One more such miss, and then—

Hans began to whisper to me.

"Baas," he said, "those *aasvogels* see the flash of the gun, and shy at it like a horse. Baas, you are shooting into their faces, for they all hang with their beaks toward you before they drop. You must get behind them, and fire into their tails, for even an *aasvogel* cannot see with its tail."

I let fall my hands and stared at him. Surely the poor fellow had been inspired from on high! I understood it all now. While their beaks were towards me, I might fire at fifty vultures and never hit one, for each time they would swerve from the flash, causing the bullet to miss them, though but by a little.

"Come," I gasped, and began to walk quickly round the edge of the depression to a rock, which I saw opposite about a hundred yards away. My journey took me near the Zulus, who mocked me as I passed, asking where my magic was, and if I wished to see the white people killed presently. Dingaan was now offering odds of fifty cattle to one against me, but no one would take the bet even with the king.

I made no answer; no, not even when they asked me "if I had thrown down my spear and was running away." Grimly, despairingly, I marched on to the rock, and took shelter behind it with Hans. The Boers, I saw, were still upon their knees, but seemed to have ceased praying. The children were weeping; the men stared at each other; Vrouw Prinsloo had her arm about Marie's waist. Waiting there behind the rock, my courage returned to me, as it sometimes does in the last extremity. I remembered my dream and took comfort. Surely God would not be so cruel as to suffer me to fail and thereby bring all those poor people to their deaths.

Snatching the rifle from Hans, I loaded it myself; nothing must be trusted to another. As I put on the cap a vulture made its last circle. It hung in the air just as the others had done, and oh! its tail was towards me. I lifted, I aimed between the gathered-up legs, I pressed and shut my eyes, for I did not dare to look.

I heard the bullet strike, or seem to strike, and a few seconds later I heard something else—the noise of a heavy thud upon the ground. I looked, and there with outstretched wings lay the foul bird dead, stone dead, eight or ten paces from the bodies.

"Allemachte! that's better," said Hans. "You threw stones on to *all* the other heaps, didn't you, baas?"

The Zulus grew excited, and the odds went down a little. The Boers stretched out their white faces and stared at me; I saw them out of the corner of my eye as I loaded again. Another vulture came; seeing one of its companions on the ground, if in a somewhat unnatural attitude, perhaps it thought that there could be nothing to fear. I leaned against my rock, aimed, and fired, almost carelessly, so sure was I of the result. This time I did not shut my eyes, but watched to see what happened.

The bullet struck the bird between its thighs, raked it from end to end, and down it came like a stone almost upon the top of its fellow.

"Good, good!" said Hans with a guttural chuckle of delight. "Now, baas, make no mistake with the third, and '*als sall recht kommen*' (all shall be well)."

"Yes," I answered; "if I make no mistake with the third."

I loaded the rifle again myself, being very careful to ram down the powder well and to select a bullet that fitted perfectly true to the bore. Moreover, I cleared the nipple with a thorn, and shook a little fine powder into it, so as to obviate any chance of a miss-fire. Then I set on the cap and waited. What was going on among the Boers or the Zulus I do not know. In this last crisis of all our fates I never looked, being too intent upon my own part in the drama.

By now the vultures appeared to have realised that something unusual was in progress, which threatened danger to them. At any rate, although by this time they had collected in hundreds from east, west, north, and south, and were wheeling the heavens above in their vast, majestic circles, none of them seemed to care to descend to prey upon the bodies. I watched, and saw that among their number was that great king bird which had bitten Hans in the face; it was easy to distinguish him, because he was so much larger than

the others. Also, he had some white at the tips of his wings. I observed that certain of his company drew near to him in the skies, where they hung together in a knot, as though in consultation.

They separated out again, and the king began to descend, deputed probably to spy out the land. Down he came in ever-narrowing turns, till he reached the appointed spot for the plunge, and, according to the immemorial custom of these birds, hung a while before he pounced with his head to the south and his great, spreading tail towards me.

This was my chance, and, rejoicing in having so large a mark, I got the sight upon him and pulled. The bullet thudded, some feathers floated from his belly, showing that it had gone home, and I looked to see him fall as the others had done. But alas! he did not fall. For a few seconds he rocked to and fro upon his great wings, then commenced to travel upwards in vast circles, which grew gradually more narrow, till he appeared to be flying almost straight into the empyrean. I stared and stared. Everybody stared, till that enormous bird became, first a mere blot upon the blue, and at length but a speck. Then it vanished altogether into regions far beyond the sight of man.

"Now there is an end," I said to Hans.

"Ja, baas," answered the Hottentot between his chattering teeth, "there is an end. You did not put in enough powder. Presently we shall all be dead."

"Not quite," I said with a bitter laugh. "Hans, load the rifle, load it quick. Before they die there shall be another king in Zululand."

"Good, good!" he exclaimed as he loaded desperately. "Let us take that fat pig of a Dingaan with us. Shoot him in the stomach, baas; shoot him in the stomach, so that he too may learn what it is to die slowly. Then cut my throat, here is my big knife, and afterwards cut your own, if you have not time to load the gun again and shoot yourself, which is easier."

I nodded, for it was in my mind to do these things. Never could I stand still and see those poor Boers killed, and I knew that Marie would look after herself.

Meanwhile, the Zulus were coming towards me, and the soldiers who had charge of them were driving up Marais's people, making pretence to thrust them through with their assegais, and shouting at them as men do at cattle. Both parties arrived in the depression at about the same time, but remained separated by a little space. In this space lay the corpses of the murdered men and the two dead *aasvogels*, with Hans and myself standing opposite to them.

"Well, little Son of George," puffed Dingaan, "you have lost your bet, for you did but kill two vultures out of five with your magic, which was good as far as it went, but not good enough. Now you must pay, as I would have paid had you won."

Then he stretched out his hand, and issued the dreadful order of "*Bulala amalongu!*" (Kill the white people). "Kill them one by one, that I may see whether they know how to die, all except Macumazahn and the tall girl, whom I keep."

Some of the soldiers made a dash and seized the Vrouw Prinsloo, who was standing in front of the party.

"Wait a little, King," she called out as the assegais were lifted over her. "How do you know that the bet is lost? He whom you call Macumazahn hit that last vulture. It should be searched for before you kill us."

"What does the old woman say?" asked Dingaan, and Halstead translated slowly.

"True," said Dingaan. "Well, now I will send her to search for the vulture in the sky. Come back thence, Fat One, and tell us if you find it."

The soldiers lifted their assegais, waiting the king's word. I pretended to look at the ground, and cocked my rifle, being determined that if he spoke it, it should be his last. Hans stared upwards—I suppose to avoid the sight of death—then suddenly uttered a wild yell, which caused everyone, even the doomed people, to turn their eyes to him. He was pointing to the heavens, and they looked to see at what he pointed.

This was what they saw. Far, far above in that infinite sea of blue there appeared a tiny speck, which his sharp sight had already discerned, a speck that grew larger and larger as it descended with terrific and ever-growing speed.

*It was the king vulture falling from the heavens—dead!*

Down it came between the Vrouw Prinsloo and the slayers, smashing the lifted assegai of one of them and hurling him to the earth. Down it came, and lay there a mere mass of pulp and feathers.

"O Dingaan," I said in the midst of the intense silence that followed, "it seems that it is I who have won the bet, not you. I killed this king of birds, but being a king it chose to die high up and alone, that is all."

Dingaan hesitated, for he did not wish to spare the Boers, and I, noting his hesitation, lifted my rifle a little. Perhaps he saw it, or perhaps his sense of honour, as he understood the word, overcame his wish for their blood. At any rate, he said to one of his councillors:

"Search the carcase of that vulture and see if there is a bullet hole in it."

The man obeyed, feeling at the mass of broken bones and flesh. By good fortune he found, not the hole, for that was lost in the general destruction of the tissues, but the ball itself, which, having pierced the thick body from below upwards, had remained fast in the tough skin just by the back-bone where the long, red neck emerges from between the wings. He picked it out, for it was only hanging in the skin, and held it up for all to see.

"Macumazahn has won his bet," said Dingaan. "His magic has conquered, though by but a very little. Macumazahn, take these Boers, they are yours, and begone with them out of my country."

## CHAPTER XV.

### RETIEF ASKS A FAVOUR

Now and again during our troubled journey through life we reach little oases of almost perfect happiness, set jewel-like here and there in the thorny wilderness of time. Sometimes these are hours of mere animal content. In others they are made beautiful by waters blowing from our spiritual springs of being, as in those rare instances when the material veil of life seems to be rent by a mighty hand, and we feel the presence and the comfort of God within us and about us, guiding our footsteps to the ineffable end, which is Himself. Occasionally, however, all these, physical satisfaction and love divine and human, are blended to a whole, like soul and body, and we can say, "Now I know what is joy."

Such an hour came to me on the evening of that day of the winning of my bet with Dingaan, when a dozen lives or so were set against my nerve and skill. These had not failed me, although I knew that had it not been for the inspiration of the Hottentot Hans (who sent it, I wonder?) they would have been of no service at all. With all my thought and experience, it had never occurred to me that the wonderful eyes of the vultures would see the flash of the powder even through the pervading sunlight, and swerve before the deadly bullet could reach them.

On that night I was indeed a hero in a small way. Even Henri Marais thawed and spoke to me as a father might to his child, he who always disliked me in secret, partly because I was an Englishman, partly because I was everything to his daughter and he was jealous, and partly for the reason that I stood in the path of his nephew, Hernan Pereira, whom he either loved or feared, or both. As for the rest of them, men, women and children, they thanked and blessed me with tears in their eyes, vowing that, young as I was, thenceforth I and no other should be their leader. As may be imagined, although it is true that she set down my success to her meal of bullock's liver and the nap which she had insisted on my taking, the Vrouw Prinsloo was the most enthusiastic of them all.

"Look at him," she said, pointing with her fat finger at my insignificant self and addressing her family. "If only I had such a husband or a son, instead of you lumps that God has tied to me like clogs to the heels of a she-ass, I should be happy."

"God did that in order to prevent you from kicking, old vrouw," said her husband, a quiet man with a vein of sardonic humour. "If only He had tied another clog to your tongue, I should be happy also"; whereon the vrouw smacked his head and her children got out of the way sniggering.

But the most blessed thing of all was my interview with Marie. All that took place between us can best be left to the imagination, since the talk of lovers, even in such circumstances, is not interesting to others. Also, in a sense, it is too sacred to repeat. One sentence I will set down, however, because in the light of after events I feel that it was prophetic, and not spoken merely by chance. It was at the end of our talk, as she was handing me back the pistol that I had given her for a certain dreadful purpose.

"Three times you have saved my life, Allan—once at Maraisfontein, once from starvation, and now from Dingaan, whose touch would have meant my death. I wonder whether it will ever be my turn to save yours?"

She looked down for a little while, then lifted her head and laid her hand upon my shoulder, adding slowly: "Do you know, Allan, I think that it will at the—" and suddenly she turned and left me with her sentence unfinished.

So thus it came about that by the help of Providence I was enabled to rescue all these worthy folk from a miserable and a bloody death. And yet I have often reflected since that if things had gone differently; if, for instance, that king *aasvogel* had found strength to carry itself away to die at a distance instead of soaring straight upwards like a towering partridge, as birds injured in the lungs will often do—I suppose in search of air—it might have been better in the end. Then I should certainly have shot Dingaan dead and every one of us would as certainly have been killed on the spot. But if Dingaan had died that day, Retief and his companions would never have been massacred. Also as the peaceful Panda, his brother, would, I suppose, have succeeded to the throne, probably the subsequent slaughter at Weenen, and all the after fighting, would never have taken place. But so it was fated, and who am I that I should quarrel with or even question the decrees of fate? Doubtless these things were doomed to happen, and they happened in due course. There is nothing more to be said.

Early on the following morning we collected our oxen, which, although still footsore, were now full fed and somewhat rested. An hour or two later began our trek, word having come to us from Dingaan that we must start at once. Also he sent us guides, under the command of the captain Kambula, to show us the road to Natal.

I breakfasted that day with the Reverend Mr. Owen and his people, my object being to persuade him to come away with us, as I did not consider that Zululand was a safe place for white women and children. My mission proved fruitless. Mrs. Hulley, the wife of the absent interpreter, who had three little ones, Miss Owen and the servant, Jane Williams, were all of them anxious enough to do as I suggested. But Mr. and Mrs. Owen, who were filled with the true fervour of missionaries, would not listen. They said that God would protect them; that they had only been a few weeks in the country, and that it would be the act of cowards and of traitors to fly at the very beginning of their work. Here I may add that after the massacre of Retief they changed their opinion, small blame to them, and fled as fast as anyone else.

I told Mr. Owen how very close I had gone to shooting Dingaan, in which event they might all have been killed with us. This news shocked him much. Indeed, he lectured me severely on the sins of bloodthirstiness and a desire for revenge. So, finding that we looked at things differently, and that it was of no use wasting breath in argument, I wished him and his people good-bye and good fortune and went upon my way, little guessing how we should meet again.

An hour later we trekked. Passing by the accursed hill, Hloma Amabutu, where I saw some gorged vultures sleeping on the rocks, we came to the gate of the Great Kraal. Here, to my surprise, I saw Dingaan with some of his councillors and an armed guard of over a hundred men, seated under the shade of two big milk trees. Fearing treachery, I halted the wagons and advised the Boers to load their rifles and be ready for the worst. A minute or so later young Thomas Halstead arrived and told me that Dingaan wished to speak with us. I asked him if that meant that we were to be killed. He answered, "No, you are quite safe." The king had received some news that had put him in a good humour with the white people, and he desired to bid us farewell, that was all.

So we trekked boldly to where Dingaan was, and, stopping the wagons, went up to him in a body. He greeted us kindly enough, and even gave me his fat hand to shake.

"Macumazahn," he said, "although it has cost me many oxen, I am glad that your magic prevailed yesterday. Had it not done so I should have killed all these your friends, which would have been a cause of war between me and the Amaboona. Now, this morning I have learned that these Amaboona are sending a friendly embassy to me under one of their great chiefs, and I think that you will meet them on the road. I charge you, therefore, to tell them to come on, having no fear, as I will receive them well and listen to all they have to say."

I answered that I would do so.

"Good," he replied. "I am sending twelve head of cattle with you, six of them for your food during your journey, and six as a present to the embassy of the Amaboona. Also Kambula, my captain, has charge to see you safely over the Tugela River."

I thanked him and turned to go, when suddenly his eye fell upon Marie, who, foolishly enough, took this opportunity to advance from among the others and speak to me about something—I forget what.

"Macumazahn, is that the maiden of whom you spoke to me?" asked Dingaan; "she whom you are going to marry?"

I answered, "Yes."

"By the head of the Black One," he exclaimed, "she is very fair. Will you not make a present of her to me, Macumazahn?"

I answered, "No; she is not mine to give away."

"Well, then, Macumazahn, I will pay you a hundred head of cattle for her, which is the price of a royal wife, and give you ten of the fairest girls in Zululand in exchange."

I answered that it could not be.

Now the king began to grow angry.

"I will keep her, whether you wish it or no," he said.

"Then you will keep her dead, O Dingaan," I replied, "for there is more of that magic which slew the vultures."

Of course, I meant that Marie would be dead. But as my knowledge of the Zulu tongue was imperfect, he understood the words to mean that *he* would be dead, and I think they frightened him. At any rate, he said:

"Well, I promised you all safe-conduct if you won your bet, so *hamba gachlé* (go in peace). I wish to have no quarrel with the white folk, but, Macumazahn, you are the first of them who has refused a gift to Dingaan. Still, I bear you no grudge, and if you choose to come back again, you will be welcome, for I perceive that, although so small, you are very clever and have a will of your own; also that you mean what you say and speak the truth. Tell the People of George that my heart is soft towards them." Then he turned and walked away through the gates of the kraal.

Glad enough was I to see the last of him, for now I knew that we were safe, except from such accidents as may overtake any travellers through a wild country. For the present, at any rate until after he had seen this embassy, Dingaan wished to stand well with the Boers. Therefore it was obvious that he would never make an irreparable quarrel with them by treacherously putting us to death as we trekked through his country. Being sure of this, we went on our way with light hearts, thanking Heaven for the mercies which had been shown to us.

It was on the third day of our trek, when we were drawing near to the Tugela, that we met the Boer embassy, off-saddled by a little stream where we proposed to outspan to rest the oxen while we ate our midday meal. They were sleeping in the heat of the day and saw nothing of us till we were right on to them, when, catching sight of our Zulu advance guard, they sprang up and ran for their rifles. Then the wagons emerged from the bush, and they stared astonished, wondering who could be trekking in that country.

We called to them in Dutch not to be afraid and in another minute we were among them. While we were yet some way off my eye fell upon a burly, white-bearded man whose figure seemed to be familiar to me, and towards him I went, taking no heed of the others, of whom there may have been six or seven. Soon I was sure, and advancing with outstretched hand, said:

"Good-day, Mynheer Piet Retief. Who would have thought that we who parted so far away and so long ago would live to meet among the Zulus?"

He stared at me.

"Who is it? Who is it? Allemachte! I know now. The little Englishman, Allan Quatermain, who shot the geese down in the Old Colony. Well, I should not be surprised, for the man you beat in that match told me that you were travelling in these parts. Only I understood him to say that the Zulus had killed you."

"If you mean Hernan Pereira," I answered, "where did you meet him?"

"Why, down by the Tugela there, in a bad way. However, he can tell you all about that himself, for I have brought him with me to show us the path to Dingaan's kraal. Where is Pereira? Send Pereira here. I want to speak with him."

"Here I am," answered a sleepy voice, the hated voice of Pereira himself, from the other side of a thick bush, where he had been slumbering. "What is it, commandant? I come," and he emerged, stretching himself and yawning, just as the remainder of my party came up. He caught sight of Henri Marais first of all, and began to greet him, saying: "Thank God, my uncle, you are safe!"

Then his eyes fell on me, and I do not think I ever saw a man's face change more completely. His jaw dropped, the colour left his cheeks, leaving them of the yellow which is common to persons of Portuguese descent; his outstretched hand fell to his side.

"Allan Quatermain!" he ejaculated. "Why, I thought that you were dead."

"As I should have been, Mynheer Pereira, twice over if you could have had your way," I replied.

"What do you mean, Allan?" broke in Retief.

"I will tell you what he means," exclaimed the Vrouw Prinsloo, shaking her fat fist at Pereira. "That yellow dog means that twice he has tried to murder Allan—Allan, who saved his life and ours. Once he shot at him in a kloof and grazed his cheek; look, there is the scar of it. And once he plotted with the Zulus to slaughter him, telling Dingaan that he was an evildoer and a wizard, who would bring a curse upon his land."

Now Retief looked at Pereira.

"What do you say to this?" he asked.

"What do I say?" repeated Pereira, recovering himself. "Why, that it is a lie or a misunderstanding. I never shot at Heer Allan in any kloof. Is it likely that I should have done so when he had just nursed me back to life? I never plotted with the Zulus for his death, which would have meant the deaths of my uncle and my cousin and of all their companions. Am I mad that I should do such a thing?"

"Not mad, but bad," screamed the vrouw. "I tell you, Heer Retief, it is no lie. Ask those with me," she added, appealing to the others, who, with the exception of Marais, answered as with one voice:

"No; it is no lie."

"Silence!" said the commandant. "Now, nephew Allan, tell us your story."

So I told him everything, of course leaving out all details. Even then the tale was long, though it did not seem to be one that wearied my hearers.

"Allemachte!" said Retief when I had finished, "this is a strange story, the strangest that ever I heard. If it is true, Hernan Pereira, you deserve to have your back set against a tree and to be shot."

"God in heaven!" he answered, "am I to be condemned on such a tale—I, an innocent man? Where is the evidence? This Englishman tells all this against me for a simple reason—that he has robbed me of the love of my cousin, to whom I was affianced. Where are his witnesses?"

"As to the shooting at me in the kloof, I have none except God who saw you," I answered. "As to the plot that you laid against me among the Zulus, as it chances, however, there is one, Kambula, the captain who was sent to take me as you had arranged, and who now commands our escort."

"A savage!" exclaimed Pereira. "Is the tale of a savage to be taken against that of a white man? Also, who will translate his story? You, Mynheer Quatermain, are the only one here who knows his tongue, if you do know it, and you are my accuser."

"That is true," remarked Retief. "Such a witness should not be admitted without a sworn interpreter. Now listen; I pass judgment as commandant in the field. Hernan Pereira, I have known you to be a rogue in the past, for I remember that you cheated this very young man, Allan Quatermain, at a friendly trial of skill at which I was present; but since then till now I have heard nothing more of you, good or bad. To-day this Allan Quatermain and a number of my own countrymen bring grave charges against you, which, however, at present are not capable of proof or disproof. Well, I cannot decide those charges, whatever my own opinion may be. I think that you had better go back with your uncle, Henri Marais, to the trek-Boers, where they can be laid before a court and settled according to law."

"If so, he will go back alone," said the Vrouw Prinsloo. "He will not go back with us, for we will elect a field-cornet and shoot him—the stinkcat, who left us to starve and afterwards tried to kill little Allan Quatermain, who saved our lives"; and the chorus behind her echoed:

"Ja, ja, we will shoot him."

"Hernan Pereira," said Retief, rubbing his broad forehead, "I don't quite know why it is, but no one seems to want you as a companion. Indeed, to speak truth, I don't myself. Still, I think you would be safer with me than with these others whom you seem to have offended. Therefore, I suggest that you come on with us. But listen here, man," he added sternly, "if I find you plotting against us among the Zulus, that hour you are dead. Do you understand?"

"I understand that I am one slandered," replied Pereira. "Still, it is Christian to submit to injuries, and therefore I will do as you wish. As to these bearers of false witness, I leave them to God."

"And I leave you to the devil," shouted Vrouw Prinsloo, "who will certainly have you soon or late. Get out of my sight, stinkcat, or I will pull your hair off." And she rushed at him, flapping her dreadful *vatdoek*—which she produced from some recess in her raiment—in his face, driving him away as though he were a noxious insect.

Well, he went I know not where, and so strong was public opinion against him that I do not think that even his uncle, Henri Marais, sought him out to console him.

When Pereira was gone, our party and that of Retief fell into talk, and we had much to tell. Especially was the commandant interested in the story of my bet with Dingaan, whereby I saved the lives of all my companions by shooting the vultures.

"It was not for nothing, nephew, that God Almighty gave you the power of holding a gun so straight," said Retief to me when he understood the matter. "I remember that when you killed those wildfowl in the Groote Kloof with bullets, which no other man could have done, I wondered why you should have such a gift above all the rest of us, who have practised for so many more years. Well,

now I understand. God Almighty is no fool; He knows His business. I wish you were coming back with me to Dingaan; but as that tainted man, Hernan Pereira, is of my company, perhaps it is better that you should stay away. Tell me, now, about this Dingaan; does he mean to kill us?"

"Not this time, I think, uncle," I answered; "because first he wishes to learn all about the Boers. Still, do not trust him too far just because he speaks you softly. Remember, that if I had missed the third vulture, we should all have been dead by now. And, if you are wise, keep an eye upon Hernan Pereira."

"These things I will do, nephew, especially the last of them; and now we must be getting on. Stay; come here, Henri Marais; I have a word to say to you. I understand that this little Englishman, Allan Quatermain, who is worth ten bigger men, loves your daughter, whose life he has saved again and again, and that she loves him. Why, then, do you not let them marry in a decent fashion?"

"Because before God I have sworn her to another man—to my nephew, Hernan Pereira, whom everyone slanders," answered Marais sulkily. "Until she is of age that oath holds."

"Oho!" said Retief, "you have sworn your lamb to that hyena, have you? Well, look out that he does not crack your bones as well as hers, and perhaps some others also. Why does God give some men a worm in their brains, as He does to the *wildebeeste*, a worm that always makes them run the wrong way? I don't know, I am sure; but you who are very religious, Henri Marais, might think the matter over and tell me the answer when next we meet. Well, this girl of yours will soon be of age, and then, as I am commandant down yonder where she is going, I'll see she marries the man she wants, whatever you say, Henri Marais. Heaven above us! I only wish it were my daughter he was in love with. A fellow who can shoot to such good purpose might have the lot of them"; and uttering one of his great, hearty laughs, he walked off to his horse.

On the morrow of this meeting we forded the Tugela and entered the territory that is now called Natal. Two days' short trekking through a beautiful country brought us to some hills that I think were called Pakadi, or else a chief named Pakadi lived there, I forget which. Crossing these hills, on the further side of them, as Retief had told us we should do, we found a large party of the trek-Boers, who were already occupying this land on the hither side of the Bushman's River, little knowing, poor people, that it was fated to become the grave of many of them. To-day, and for all future time, that district is and will be known by the name of Weenen, or the Place of Weeping, because of those pioneers who here were massacred by Dingaan within a few weeks of the time of which I write.

Nice as the land was, for some reason or other it did not quite suit my fancy, and therefore, in view of my approaching marriage with Marie, having purchased a horse from one of the trek-Boers, I began to explore the country round. My object was to find a stretch of fertile veld where we could settle when we were wedded, and such a spot I discovered after some trouble. It lay about thirty miles away to the east, in the loop of a beautiful stream that is now known as the Mooi River.

Enclosed in this loop were some thirty thousand acres of very rich, low-lying soil, almost treeless and clothed with luxuriant grasses where game was extraordinarily numerous. At the head of it rose a flat-topped hill, from the crest of which, oddly enough, flowed a plentiful stream of water fed by a strong spring. Half-way down this hill, facing to the east, and irrigable by the stream, was a plateau several acres in extent, which furnished about the best site for a house that I know in all South Africa. Here I determined we would build our dwelling-place and become rich by the breeding up of great herds of cattle. I should explain that this ground, which once, as the remains of their old kraals showed, had belonged to a Kaffir tribe killed out by Chaka, the Zulu king, was to be had for the taking.

Indeed, as there was more land than we could possibly occupy, I persuaded Henri Marais, the Prinsloos and the Meyers, with whom I had trekked from Delagoa, to visit it with me. When they had seen it they agreed to make it their home in the future, but meanwhile elected to return to the other Boers for safety's sake. So with the help of some Kaffirs, of whom there were a few in the district, remnants of those tribes which Chaka had destroyed, I pegged out an estate of about twelve thousand acres for myself, and, selecting a site, set the natives to work to build a rough mud house upon it which would serve as a temporary dwelling. I should add that the Prinsloos and the Meyers also made arrangements for the building of similar shelters almost alongside of my own. This done, I returned to Marie and the trek-Boers.

On the morning after my return to the camp Piet Retief appeared there with his five or six companions. I asked him how he had got on with Dingaan.

"Well enough, nephew," he answered. "At first the king was somewhat angry, saying that we Boers had stolen six hundred head of his cattle. But I showed him that it was the chief, Sikonyela, who lives yonder on the Caledon River, who had dressed up his people in white men's clothes and put them upon horses, and afterwards drove the cattle through one of our camps to make it appear that we were the thieves. Then he asked me what was my object in visiting him. I answered that I sought a grant of the land south of the Tugela to the sea.

"Bring me back the cattle that you say Sikonyela has stolen," he said, "and we will talk about this land." To this I agreed and soon after left the kraal."

"What did you do with Hernan Pereira, uncle?" I asked.

"This, Allan. When I was at Umgungundhlovu I sought out the truth of that story you told me as to his having made a plot to get you killed by the Zulus on the ground that you were a wizard."

"And what did you discover, uncle?"

"I discovered that it was true, for Dingaan told me so himself. Then I sent for Pereira and ordered him out of my camp, telling him that if he came back among the Boers I would have him put on his trial for attempted murder. He said nothing, but went away."

"Whither did he go?"

"To a place that Dingaan gave him just outside his kraal. The king said that he would be useful to him, as he could mend guns and teach his soldiers to shoot with them. So there, I suppose, he remains, unless he has thought it wiser to make off. At any rate, I am sure that he will not come here to trouble you or anyone."

"No, uncle, but he may trouble you *there*," I said doubtfully.

"What do you mean, Allan?"

"I don't quite know, but he is black-hearted, a traitor by nature, and in one way or the other he will stir up sorrow. Do you think that he will love you, for instance, after you have hunted him out like a thief?"

Retief shrugged his shoulders and laughed as he answered:

"I will take my chance of that. What is the use of troubling one's head about such a snake of a man? And now, Allan, I have something to ask you. Are you married yet?"

"No, uncle, nor can be for another five weeks, when Marie comes of age. Her father still holds that his oath binds him, and I have promised that I will not take her till then."

"Does he indeed, Allan? I think that Henri Marais is '*kranstik*' (that is, cracked), or else his cursed nephew, Hernan, has fascinated him, as a snake does a bird. Still, I suppose that he has the law on his side, and, as I am commandant, I cannot advise anyone to break the law. Now listen. It is no use your staying here looking at the ripe peach you may not pluck, for that only makes the stomach sick. Therefore the best thing that you can do is to come with me to get those cattle from Sikonyela, for I shall be very glad of your company. Afterwards, too, I want you to return with me to Zululand when I go for the grant of all this country."

"But how about my getting married?" I asked in dismay.

"Oh! I dare say you will be able to marry before we start. Or if not, it must be when we return. Listen now; do not disappoint me in this matter, Allan. None of us can speak Zulu except you, who takes to these savage languages like a duck to water, and I want you to be my interpreter with Dingaan. Also the king specially asked that you should come with me when I brought the cattle, as he seems to have taken a great fancy to you. He said that you would render his words honestly, but that he did not trust the lad whom he has there to translate into Dutch and English. So you see it will help me very much in this big business if you come with me."

Still I hesitated, for some fear of the future lay heavy on my heart, warning me against this expedition.

"Alleluia!" said Retief angrily, "if you will not grant me a favour, let it be. Or is it that you want reward? If so, all I can promise you is twenty thousand acres of the best land in the country when we get it."

"No, Mynheer Retief," I replied; "it is no question of reward; and as for the land, I have already pegged out my farm on a river about thirty miles to the east. It is that I do not like to leave Marie alone, fearing lest her father should play some trick on me as regards her and Hernan Pereira."

"Oh, if that is all you are afraid of, Allan, I can soon settle matters; for I will give orders to the *prédicant* Celliers that he is not to marry Marie Marais to anyone except yourself, even if she asks him. Also I will order that if Hernan Pereira should come to the camp, he is to be shut up until I return to try him. Lastly, as commandant, I will name Henri Marais as one of those who are to accompany us, so that he will be able to plot nothing against you. Now are you satisfied?"

I said "Yes" as cheerfully as I could, though I felt anything but cheerful, and we parted, for, of course, the Commandant Retief had much to occupy him.

Then I went and told Marie what I had promised. Somewhat to my surprise she said that she thought I had acted wisely.

"If you stayed here," she added, "perhaps some new quarrel would arise between you and my father which might make bitterness afterwards. Also, dear, it would be foolish for you to offend the Commandant Retief, who will be the great man in this country, and who is very fond of you. After all, Allan, we shall only be separated for a little while, and when that is done we have the rest of our lives to spend together. As for me, do not be afraid, for you know I will never marry anyone but you—no, not to save myself from death."

So I left her somewhat comforted, knowing how sound was her judgment, and went off to make my preparations for the expedition to Sikonyela's country.

All this conversation with Retief I have set down in full, as nearly as I can remember it, because of its fateful consequences. Ah! if I could have foreseen; if only I could have foreseen!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE COUNCIL

Two days later we started to recover Dingaan's cattle, sixty or seventy of us, all well armed and mounted. With us went two of Dingaan's captains and a number of Zulus, perhaps a hundred, who were to drive the cattle if we recovered them. As I could speak their language I was more or less in command of this Zulu contingent, and managed to make myself very useful in that capacity. Also, during the month or so of our absence, by continually conversing with them, I perfected myself considerably in my knowledge of their beautiful but difficult tongue.

Now it is not my intention to write down the details of this expedition, during which there was no fighting and nothing serious happened. We arrived in due course at Sikonyela's and stated our errand. When he saw how numerous and well armed we were, and that behind us was all the might of the Zulu army, that wily old rascal thought it well to surrender the stolen cattle without further to-do, and with these some horses which he had lifted from the Boers. So, having received them, we delivered them over to the Zulu captains, with instructions to drive them carefully to Umgungundhlovu. The commandant sent a message by these men to the effect that, having fulfilled his part of the compact, he would wait upon Dingaan as soon as possible in order to conclude the treaty about the land.

This business finished, Retief took me and a number of the Boers to visit other bodies of the emigrant Dutch who were beyond the Drakensberg, in what is now the Transvaal territory. This occupied a long time, as these Boers were widely scattered, and at each camp we had to stop for several days while Retief explained everything to its leaders. Also he arranged with them to come down into Natal, so as to be ready to people it as soon as he received the formal cession of the country from Dingaan. Indeed, most of them began to trek at once, although jealousies between the various commandants caused some of the bands, luckily for themselves, to remain on the farther side of the mountains.

At length, everything being settled, we rode away, and reached the Bushman's River camp on a certain Saturday afternoon. Here, to my joy, we found all well. Nothing had been heard of Hernan Pereira, while the Zulus, if we might judge from messengers who came to us, seemed to be friendly. Marie, also, had now quite recovered from the fears and hardships which she had undergone. Never had I seen her look so sweet and beautiful as she did when she greeted me, arrayed no longer in rags, but in a simple yet charming dress made of some stuff that she had managed to buy from a trader who came up to the camp from Durban. Moreover, I think that there was another reason for the change, since the light of dawning happiness shone in her deep eyes.

The day, as I have said, was Saturday, and on the Monday she would come of age and be free to dispose of herself in marriage, for on that day lapsed the promise which we had given to her father. But, alas! by a cursed perversity of fate, on this very Monday at noon the Commandant Retief had arranged to ride into Zululand on his second visit to Dingaan, and with Retief I was in honour bound to go.

"Marie," I said, "will not your father soften towards us and let us be married to-morrow, so that we may have a few hours together before we part?"

"I do not know, my dear," she answered, blushing, "since about this matter he is very strange and obstinate. Do you know that all the time you were absent he never mentioned your name, and if anyone else spoke it he would get up and go away!"

"That's bad," I said. "Still, if you are willing, we might try."

"Indeed and indeed, Allan, I am willing, who am sick of being so near to you and yet so far. But how shall we do so?"

"I think that we will ask the Commandant Retief and the Vrouw Prinsloo to plead for us, Marie. Let us go to seek them."

She nodded, and hand in hand we walked through the Boers, who nudged each other and laughed at us as we passed to where the old vrouw was seated on a stool by her wagon drinking coffee. I remember that her *vatdoek* was spread over her knees, for she also had a new dress, which she was afraid of staining.

"Well, my dears," she said in her loud voice, "are you married already that you hang so close together?"

"No, my aunt," I answered; "but we want to be, and have come to you to help us."

"That I will do with all my heart, though to speak truth, young people, at your age, as things are, I should have been inclined to help myself, as I have told you before. Heaven above us! what is it that makes marriage in the sight of God? It is that male and female should declare themselves man and wife before all folk, and live as such. The pastor and his mumblings are very well if you can get them, but it is the giving of the hand, not the setting of the ring upon it; it is the vowing of two true hearts, and not words read out of a book, that make marriage. Still, this is bold talk, for which any reverend *prédicant* would reprove me, for if young folk acted on it, although the tie might hold good in law, what would become of his fee? Come, let us seek the commandant and hear what he has to say. Allan, pull me up off this stool, where, if I had my way, after so much travelling, I should like to sit while a house was built over my head and for the rest of my life."

I obeyed, not without difficulty, and we went to find Retief.

At the moment he was standing alone, watching two wagons that had just trekked away. These contained his wife with other members of his family, and some friends whom he was sending, under the charge of the Heer Smit, to a place called Doornkop, that lay at a distance of fifteen miles or more. At this Doornkop he had already caused a rough house, or rather shed, to be built for the Vrouw Retief's occupation, thinking that she would be more comfortable and perhaps safer there during his absence than at the crowded camp in a wagon.

"Allemachte! Allan," he said, catching sight of me, "my heart is sore; I do not know why. I tell you that when I kissed my old woman good-bye just now I felt as though I should never see her again, and the tears came into my eyes. I wish we were all safe back from Dingaan. But there, there, I will try to get over to see her to-morrow, as we don't start till Monday. What is it that you want, Allan, with that '*mooi mesje*' of yours?"—and he pointed to the tall Marie.

"What would any man want with such a one, save to marry her?" broke in the Vrouw Prinsloo. "Now, commandant, listen while I set out the tale."

"All right, aunt, only be brief, for I have no time to spare."

She obeyed, but I cannot say that she was brief.

When at last the old lady paused, breathless, Retief said:

"I understand everything; there is no need for you young people to talk. Now we will go and see Henri Marais, and, if he is not madder than usual, make him listen to reason."

So we walked to where Marais's wagon stood at the end of the line, and found him sitting on the *disselboom* cutting up tobacco with his pocket-knife.

"Good-day, Allan," he said, for we had not met since my return. "Have you had a nice journey?"

I was about to answer when the commandant broke in impatiently:

"See here, see here, Henri, we have not come to talk about Allan's journey, but about his marriage, which is more important. He rides with me to Zululand on Monday, as you do, and wants to wed your daughter to-morrow, which is Sunday, a good day for the deed."

"It is a day to pray, not to give and be given in marriage," commented Marais sulkily. "Moreover, Marie does not come of age before Monday, and until then the oath that I made to God holds."

"My *vatdoek* for your oath!" exclaimed the vrouw, flapping that awful rag in his face. "How much do you suppose that God cares what you in your folly swore to that stinkcat of a nephew of yours? Do you be careful, Henri Marais, that God does not make of your precious oath a stone to fall upon your head and break it like a peanut-shell."

"Hold your chattering tongue, old woman," said Marais furiously. "Am I to be taught my duty to my conscience and my daughter by you?"

"Certainly you are, if you cannot teach them to yourself," began the vrouw, setting her hands upon her hips.

But Retief pushed her aside, saying:

"No quarrelling here. Now, Henri Marais, your conduct about these two young people who love each other is a scandal. Will you let them be married to-morrow or not?"

"No, commandant, I will not. By the law I have power over my daughter till she is of age, and I refuse to allow her to marry a cursed Englishman. Moreover, the *prédicant* Celliers is away, so there is none to marry them."

"You speak strange words, Mynheer Marais," said Retief quietly, "especially when I remember all that this 'cursed Englishman' has done for you and yours, for I have heard every bit of that story, though not from him. Now hearken. You have appealed to the law, and, as commandant, I must allow your appeal. But after twelve o'clock to-morrow night, according to your own showing, the law ceases to bind your daughter. Therefore, on Monday morning, if there is no clergyman in the camp and these two wish it, I, as commandant, will marry them before all men, as I have the power to do."

Then Marais broke into one of those raving fits of temper which were constitutional in him, and to my mind showed that he was never quite sane. Oddly enough, it was on poor Marie that he concentrated his wrath. He cursed her horribly because she had withstood his will and refused to marry Hernan Pereira. He prayed that evil might fall on her; that she might never bear a child, and that if she did, it might die, and other things too unpleasant to mention.

We stared at him astonished, though I think that had he been any other man than the father of my betrothed, I should have struck him. Retief, I noticed, lifted his hand to do so, then let it fall again, muttering: "Let be; he is possessed with a devil."

At last Marais ceased, not, I think, from lack of words, but because he was exhausted, and stood before us, his tall form quivering, and his thin, nervous face working like that of a person in convulsions. Then Marie, who had dropped her head beneath this storm, lifted it, and I saw that her deep eyes were all ablaze and that she was very white.

"You are my father," she said in a low voice, "and therefore I must submit to whatever you choose to say to me. Moreover, I think it likely that the evil which you call down will fall upon me, since Satan is always at hand to fulfil his own wishes. But if so, my father, I am sure that this evil will recoil upon your own head, not only here, but hereafter. There justice will be done to both of us, perhaps before very long, and also to your nephew, Hernan Pereira."

Marais made no answer; his rage seemed to have spent itself. He only sat himself again upon the *disselboom* of the wagon and went on cutting up the tobacco viciously, as though he were slicing the heart of a foe. Even the Vrouw Prinsloo was silent and stared at him whilst she fanned herself with the *vatdoek*. But Retief spoke.

"I wonder if you are mad, or only wicked, Henri Marais," he said. "To curse your own sweet girl like this you must be one or the other—a single child who has always been good to you. Well, as you are to ride with me on Monday, I pray that you will keep your temper under control, lest it should bring us into trouble, and you also. As for you, Marie, my dear, do not fret because a wild beast has tried to toss you with his horns, although he happens to be your father. On Monday morning you pass out of his power into your

own, and on that day I will marry you to Allan Quatermain here. Meanwhile, I think you are safest away from this father of yours, who might take to cutting your throat instead of that tobacco. Vrouw Prinsloo, be so good as to look after Marie Marais, and on Monday morning next bring her before me to be wed. Until then, Henri Marais, I, as commandant, shall set a guard over you, with orders to seize you if it should be necessary. Now I advise you to take a walk, and when you are calm again, to pray God to forgive you your wicked words, lest they should be fulfilled and drag you down to judgment.”

Then we all went, leaving Henri Marais still cutting up his tobacco on the *disselboom*.

On the Sunday I met Marais walking about the camp, followed by the guard whom Retief had set over him. To my surprise he greeted me almost with affection.

“Allan,” he said, “you must not misunderstand me. I do not really wish ill to Marie, whom I love more dearly than I do my life; God alone knows how much I love her. But I made a promise to her cousin, Hernan, my only sister’s only child, and you will understand that I cannot break that promise, although Hernan has disappointed me in many ways—yes, in many ways. But if he is bad, as they say, it comes with that Portuguese blood, which is a misfortune that he cannot help, does it not? However bad he may be, as an honest man I am bound to keep my promise, am I not? Also, Allan, you must remember that you are English, and although you may be a good fellow in yourself, that is a fault which you cannot expect me to forgive. Still, if it is fated that you should marry my daughter and breed English children—Heaven above! to think of it, English children!—well, there is nothing more to be said. Don’t remember the words I spoke to Marie. Indeed, I can’t remember them myself. When I grow angry, a kind of rush of blood comes into my brain, and then I forget what I have said,” and he stretched out his hand to me.

I shook it and answered that I understood he was not himself when he spoke those dreadful words, which both Marie and I wished to forget.

“I hope you will come to our wedding to-morrow,” I added, “and wipe them out with a father’s blessing.”

“To-morrow! Are you really going to be married to-morrow?” he exclaimed, his sallow face twitching nervously. “O God, it was another man that I dreamed to see standing by Marie’s side. But he is not here; he has disgraced and deserted me. Well, I will come, if my gaolers will suffer it. Good-bye, you happy bridegroom of to-morrow, good-bye.”

Then he swung round and departed, followed by the guards, one of whom touched his brow and shook his head significantly as he passed me.

I think that Sunday seemed the longest day I ever spent. The Vrouw Prinsloo would scarcely allow me even a glimpse of Marie, because of some fad she had got into her mind that it was either not proper or not fortunate, I forget which, that a bride and bridegroom should associate on the eve of their marriage. So I occupied myself as best I could. First I wrote a long letter to my father, the third that I had sent, telling him everything that was going to happen, and saying how grieved I was that he could not be present to marry us and give us his blessing.

This letter I gave to a trader who was trekking to the bay on the following morning, begging him to forward it by the first opportunity.

That duty done, I saw about the horses which I was taking into Zululand, three of them, two for myself and one for Hans, who accompanied me as after-rider. Also the saddlery, saddle-bags, guns and ammunition must be overhauled, all of which took some time.

“You are going to spend a strange *wittebroodsweek* [white-bread-week, or, in other words, honeymoon], baas,” said Hans, squinting at me with his little eyes, as he brayed away at a buckskin which was to serve as a saddle-cloth. “Now, if I was to be married to-morrow, I should stop with my pretty for a few days, and only ride off somewhere else when I was tired of her, especially if that somewhere else chanced to be Zululand, where they are so fond of killing people.”

“I dare say you would, Hans; and so would I, if I could, you be sure. But, you see, the commandant wants me to interpret, and therefore it is my duty to go with him.”

“Duty; what is duty, baas? Love I understand. It is for love of you that I go with you; also for fear lest you should cause me to be beaten if I refused. Otherwise I would certainly stop here in the camp, where there is plenty to eat and little work to do, as, were I you, I should do also for love of that white missie. But duty—pah! that is a fool-word, which makes bones of a man before his time and leaves his girl to others.”

“Of course, you do not understand, Hans, any more than you coloured people understand what gratitude is. But what do you mean about this trek of ours? Are you afraid?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “A little, perhaps, baas. At least, I should be if I thought about the morrow, which I don’t, since to-day is enough for me, and thinking about what one can’t know makes the head ache. Dingaan is not a nice man, baas; we saw that, didn’t we? He is a hunter who knows how to set a trap. Also he has the Baas Pereira up there to help him. So perhaps you might be more comfortable here kissing Missie Marie. Why do you not say that you have hurt your leg and cannot run? It would not be much trouble to walk about on a crutch for a day or two, and when the commandant was well gone, your leg might heal and you could throw the stick away.”

“Get thee behind me, Satan,” I muttered to myself, and was about to give Hans a piece of my mind when I recollected that the poor fellow had his own way of looking at things and could not be blamed. Also, as he said, he loved me, and only suggested what he thought would tend to my joy and safety. How could I suppose that he would be interested in the success of a diplomatic mission to Dingaan, or think anything about it except that it was a risky business? So I only said:

“Hans, if you are afraid, you had better stop behind. I can easily find another after-rider.”

“Is the baas angry with me that he should speak so?” asked the Hottentot. “Have I not always been true to him; and if I should be killed, what does it matter? Have I not said that I do not think about to-morrow, and we must all go to sleep sometime? No; unless the baas beats me back, I shall come with him. But, baas”—this in a wheedling tone—“you might give me some brandy to drink your health in to-night. It is very good to get drunk when one has to be sober, and perhaps dead, for a long time afterwards. It would be

nice to remember when one is a spook, or an angel with white wings, such as the old baas, your father, used to tell us about in school on the Sabbath."

At this point, finding Hans hopeless, I got up and walked away, leaving him to finish our preparations.

That evening there was a prayer-meeting in the camp, for although no pastor was present, one of the Boer elders took his place and offered up supplications which, if simple and even absurd in their wording, at least were hearty enough. Amongst other requests, I remember that he petitioned for the safety of those who were to go on the mission to Dingaan and of those who were to remain behind. Alas! those prayers were not heard, for it pleased the Power to Whom they were addressed to decree otherwise.

After this meeting, in which I took an earnest share, Retief who just before it began had ridden in from Doornkop, whither he had been to visit his wife, held a kind of council, whereat the names of those who had volunteered or been ordered to accompany him, were finally taken down. At this council there was a good deal of discussion, since many of the Boers did not think the expedition wise—at any rate, if it was to be carried out on so large a scale. One of them, I forget which, an old man, pointed out that it might look like a war party, and that it would be wiser if only five or six went, as they had done before, since then there could be no mistake as to the peaceful nature of their intentions.

Retief himself combated this view, and at last turned suddenly to me, who was listening near by, and said:

"Allan Quatermain, you are young, but you have a good judgment; also, you are one of the very few who know Dingaan and can speak his language. Tell us now, what do you think?"

Thus adjured, I answered, perhaps moved thereto more than I thought by Hans's talk, that I, too, considered the thing dangerous, and that someone whose life was less valuable than the commandant's should go in command.

"Why do you say so, nephew," he said irritably, "seeing that all white men's lives are of equal value, and I can smell no danger in the business?"

"Because, commandant, I do smell danger, though what danger I cannot say, any more than a dog or a buck can when it sniffs something in the air and barks or runs. Dingaan is a tamed tiger just now, but tigers are not house cats that one can play with them, as I know, who have felt his claws and just, only just, come out from between them."

"What do you mean, nephew?" asked Retief in his direct fashion. "Do you believe that this *swartzel*" (that is, black creature) "means to kill us?"

"I believe that it is quite possible," I answered.

"Then, nephew, being a reasonable man as you are, you must have some ground for your belief. Come now, out with it."

"I have none, commandant, except that one who can set the lives of a dozen folk against a man's skill in shooting at birds on the wing, and who can kill people to be a bait for those birds, is capable of anything. Moreover, he told me that he did not love you Boers, and why should he?"

Now, all those who were standing about seemed to be impressed with this argument. At any rate, they turned towards Retief, anxiously waiting for his reply.

"Doubtless," answered the commandant, who, as I have said, was irritable that night, "doubtless those English missionaries have poisoned the king's mind against us Boers. Also," he added suspiciously, "I think you told me, Allan, that the king said he liked you and meant to spare you, even if he killed your companions, just because you also are English. Are you sure that you do not know more than you choose to tell us? Has Dingaan perhaps confided something to you—just because you are English?"

Then noting that these words moved the assembled Boers, in whom race prejudice and recent events had created a deep distrust of any born of British blood, I grew very angry and answered:

"Commandant, Dingaan confided nothing to me, except that some Kaffir witch-doctor, who is named Zikali, a man I never saw, had told him that he must not kill an Englishman, and therefore he wished to spare me, although one of your people, Hernan Pereira, had whispered to him that I ought to be killed. Yet I say outright that I think you are foolish to visit this king with so large a force. Still, I am ready to do so myself with one or two others. Let me go, then, and try to persuade him to sign this treaty as to the land. If I am killed or fail, you can follow after me and do better."

"Allemachte!" exclaimed Retief; "that is a fair offer. But how do I know, nephew, that when we came to read the treaty we should not find that it granted all the land to you English and not to us Boers? No, no, don't look angry. That was not a right thing to say, for you are honest whatever most of your blood may be. Nephew Allan, you who are a brave man, are afraid of this journey. Now, why is that, I wonder? Ah! I have it. I had forgotten. You are to be married to-morrow morning to a very pretty girl, and it is not natural that you should wish to spend the next fortnight in Zululand. Don't you see, brothers, he wants to get out of it because he is going to be married, as it is natural that he should, and therefore he tries to frighten us all? When we were going to be married, should we have wished to ride away at once to visit some stinking savage? Ach! I am glad I thought of that just as I was beginning to turn his gloomy colour, like a chameleon on a black hat, for it explains everything," and he struck his thigh with his big hand and burst into a roar of laughter.

All the company of Boers who stood around began to laugh also, uproariously, for this primitive joke appealed to them. Moreover, their nerves were strained; they also dreaded this expedition, and therefore they were glad to relieve themselves in bucolic merriment. Everything was clear to them now. Feeling myself in honour bound to go on the embassy, as I was their only interpreter, I, artful dog, was trying to play upon their fears in order to prevent it from starting, so that I might have a week or two of the company of my new-wed wife. They saw and appreciated the joke.

"He's slim, this little Englishman," shouted one.

"Don't be angry with him. We should have done as much ourselves," replied another.

"Leave him behind," said a third. "Even the Zulus do not send a new-married man on service." Then they smacked me on the back, and hustled me in their rude, kindly manner, till at length I fell into a rage and hit one of them on the nose, at which he only laughed

the louder, although I made it bleed.

“See here, friends,” I said, as soon as silence was restored; “married or no, whoever does not ride to Dingaan, I ride to him, although it is against my judgment. Let those laugh loudest who laugh last.”

“Good!” cried one; “if you set the pace we shall soon be home again, Allan Quatermain. Who would not with Marie Marais at the end of the journey?”

Then, followed by their rough and mocking laughter, I broke away from them, and took refuge in my wagon, little guessing that all this talk would be brought up against me on a day to come.

In a certain class of uneducated mind foresight is often interpreted as guilty knowledge.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MARRIAGE

I was awakened on my wedding morning by the crash and bellowing of a great thunderstorm. The lightning flashed fearfully all about us, killing two oxen quite near to my wagon, and the thunder rolled and echoed till the very earth seemed to shake. Then came a wail of cold wind, and after that the swish of torrential rain. Although I was well accustomed to such natural manifestations, especially at this season of the year, I confess that these sights and sounds did not tend to raise my spirits, which were already lower than they should have been on that eventful day. Hans, however, who arrived to help me put on my best clothes for the ceremony, was for once consoling.

"Don't look sick, baas," he said, "for if there is storm in the morning, there is shine at night."

"Yes," I answered, speaking more to myself than to him, "but what will happen between the storm of the morning and the peace of the night?"

It was arranged that the commission, which, counting the native after-riders, consisted of over a hundred people, among them several boys, who were little more than children, was to ride at one hour before noon. Nobody could get about to make the necessary preparations until the heavy rain had passed away, which it did a little after eight o'clock. Therefore when I left the wagon to eat, or try to eat some breakfast, I found the whole camp in a state of bustle.

Boers were shouting to their servants, horses were being examined, women were packing the saddle-bags of their husbands and fathers with spare clothes, the pack-beasts were being laden with biltong and other provisions, and so forth.

In the midst of all this tumult I began to wonder whether my private business would not be forgotten, since it seemed unlikely that time could be found for marriages. However, about ten o'clock when, having done everything that I had to do, I was sitting disconsolately upon my wagon box, being too shy to mix with that crowd of busy mockers or to go to the Prinsloos' camp to make inquiries, the vrouw herself appeared.

"Come on, Allan," she said, "the commandant is waiting and swearing because you are not there. Also, there is another waiting, and oh! she looks lovely. When they see her, every man in the camp will want her for himself, whether he has got a wife or not, for in that matter, although you mayn't think so just now, they are all the same as the Kaffirs. Oh! I know them, I know them, a white skin makes no difference."

While she held forth thus in her usual outspoken fashion, the vrouw was dragging me along by the hand, just as though I were a naughty little boy. Nor could I get free from that mighty grip, or, when once her great bulk was in motion, match my weight against it. Of course, some of the younger Boers, who, knowing her errand, had followed her, set up a shout of cheers and laughter, which attracted everybody to the procession.

"It is too late to hang back now, Englishman." "You must make the best of a bad business." "If you wanted to change your mind, you should have done it before," men and women roared and screamed with many other such bantering words, till at length I felt myself turn the colour of a red vlei lily.

So we came at last to where Marie stood, the centre of an admiring circle. She was clothed in a soft white gown made of some simple but becoming stuff, and she wore upon her dark hair a wreath woven by the other maidens in the camp, a bevy of whom stood behind her.

Now we were face to face. Our eyes met, and oh! hers were full of love and trust. They dazzled and bewildered me. Feeling that I ought to speak, and not knowing what to say, I merely stammered "Good morning," whereon everyone broke into a roar of laughter, except Vrouw Prinsloo, who exclaimed:

"Did any one ever see such a fool?" and even Marie smiled.

Then Piet Retief appeared from somewhere dressed in tall boots and rough riding clothes, such as the Boers wore in those days. Handing the *roer* he was carrying to one of his sons, after much fumbling he produced a book from his pocket, in which the place was marked with a piece of grass.

"Now then," he said, "be silent, all, and show respect, for remember I am not a man just now. I am a parson, which is quite a different thing, and, being a commandant and a veld cornet and other officers all rolled into one, by virtue of the law I am about to marry these young people, so help me God. Don't any of you witnesses ever say afterwards that they are not rightly and soundly married, because I tell you that they are, or will be." He paused for breath, and someone said, "Hear, hear," or its Dutch equivalent, whereon, having glared the offender into silence, Retief proceeded:

"Young man and young woman, what are your names?"

"Don't ask silly questions, commandant," broke in Vrouw Prinsloo; "you know their names well enough."

"Of course I do, aunt," he answered; "but for this purpose I must pretend not to know them. Are you better acquainted with the law than I am? But stay, where is the father, Henri Marais?"

Someone thrust Marais forward, and there he stood quite silent, staring at us with a queer look upon his face and his gun in his hand, for he, too, was ready to ride.

"Take away that gun," said Retief; "it might go off and cause disturbance or perhaps accidents," and somebody obeyed. "Now, Henri Marais, do you give your daughter to be married to this man?"

"No," said Marais softly.

"Very well, that is just like you, but it doesn't matter, for she is of age and can give herself. Is she not of age, Henri Marais? Don't stand there like a horse with the staggers, but tell me; is she not of age?"

"I believe so," he answered in the same soft voice.

"Then take notice, people all, that this woman is of age, and gives herself to be married to this man, don't you, my dear?"

"Yes," answered Marie.

"All right, now for it," and, opening the book, he held it up to the light, and began to read, or, rather, to stumble, through the marriage service.

Presently he stuck fast, being, like most Boers of his time, no great scholar, and exclaimed:

"Here, one of you help me with these hard words."

As nobody volunteered, Retief handed the book to me, for he knew that Marais would not assist him, saying:

"You are a scholar, Allan, being a clergyman's son. Read on till we come to the important bits, and I will say the words after you, which will do just as well and be quite according to law."

So I read, Heaven knows how, for the situation was trying enough, until I came to the crucial questions, when I gave the book back.

"Ah!" said Retief; "this is quite easy. Now then, Allan, do you take this woman to be your wife? Answer, putting in your name, which is left blank in the book."

I replied that I did, and the question was repeated to Marie, who did likewise.

"Well then, there you are," said Retief, "for I won't trouble you with all the prayers, which I don't feel myself parson enough to say. Oh! no, I forgot. Have you a ring?"

I drew one off my finger that had been my mother's—I believe it had served this same purpose at the wedding of her grandmother—and set the thin little hoop of gold upon the third finger of Marie's left hand. I still wear that ring to-day.

"It should have been a new one," muttered Vrouw Prinsloo.

"Be silent, aunt," said Retief; "are there any jewellers' shops here in the veld? A ring is a ring, even if it came off a horse's bit. There, I think that is all. No, wait a minute, I am going to say a prayer of my own over you, not one out of this book, which is so badly printed that I cannot read it. Kneel down, both of you; the rest may stand, as the grass is so wet."

Now, bethinking herself of Marie's new dress, the vrouw produced her *vatdoek* from a capacious pocket, and doubled up that dingy article for Marie to kneel on, which she did. Then Pieter Retief, flinging down the book, clasped his hands and uttered this simple, earnest prayer, whereof, strangely enough, every word remains fast in my mind. Coming as it did, not from a printed page, but from his honest and believing heart, it was very impressive and solemn.

"O God above us, Who sees all and is with us when we are born, when we are married, when we die, and if we do our duty for all time afterwards in Heaven, hear our prayer. I pray Thee bless this man and this woman who appear here before Thee to be wed. Make them love each other truly all their lives, be these long or short, be they sick or well, be they happy or in sorrow, be they rich or poor. Give them children to be reared up in Thy Word, give them an honest name and the respect of all who know them, and at last give them Thy Salvation through the Blood of Jesus the Saviour. If they are together, let them rejoice in each other. If they are apart, let them not forget each other. If one of them dies and the other lives, let that one who lives look forward to the day of reunion and bow the head to Thy Will, and keep that one who dies in Thy holy Hand. O Thou Who knowest all things, guide the lives of these two according to Thy eternal purpose, and teach them to be sure that whatever Thou doest, is done for the best. For Thou art a faithful Creator, Who wishes good to His children and not evil, and at the last Thou wilt give them that good if they do but trust in Thee through daylight and through darkness. Now let no man dare to put asunder those whom Thou hast joined together, O Lord God Almighty, Father of us all. Amen."

So he prayed, and all the company echoed that Amen from their hearts. That is all except one, for Henri Marais turned his back on us and walked away.

"So," said Retief, wiping his brow with the sleeve of his coat, "you are the last couple that ever I mean to marry. The work is too hard for a layman who has bad sight for print. Now kiss each other; it is the right thing to do."

So we kissed, and the congregation cheered.

"Allan," went on the commandant, pulling out a silver watch like a turnip, "you have just half an hour before we ride, and the Vrouw Prinsloo says that she has made you a wedding meal in that tent there, so you had best go eat it."

To the tent we went accordingly, to find a simple but bounteous feast prepared, of which we partook, helping each other to food, as is, or was, the custom with new-wedded folk. Also, many Boers came in and drank our healths, although the Vrouw Prinsloo told them that it would have been more decent to leave us alone. But Henri Marais did not come or drink our healths.

Thus the half-hour went all too swiftly, and not a word did we get alone. At last in despair, seeing that Hans was already waiting with the horses, I drew Marie aside, motioning to everyone to stand back.

"Dearest wife," I said in broken words, "this is a strange beginning to our married life, but you see it can't be helped."

"No, Allan," she answered, "it can't be helped; but oh! I wish my heart were happier about your journey. I fear Dingaan, and if anything should chance to you I shall die of grief."

"Why should anything chance, Marie? We are a strong and well-armed party, and Dingaan looks on us peacefully."

"I don't know, husband, but they say Hernan Pereira is with the Zulus, and he hates you."

"Then he had better mind his manners, or he will not be here long to hate anybody," I answered grimly, for my gorge rose at the thought of this man and his treacheries.

"Vrouw Prinsloo," I called to the old lady, who was near, "be pleased to come hither and listen. And, Marie, do you listen also. If by chance I should hear anything affecting your safety, and send you a message by someone you can trust, such as that you should remove yourselves elsewhere or hide, promise me that you will obey it without question."

"Of course I will obey you, husband. Have I not just sworn to do so?" Marie said with a sad smile.

"And so will I, Allan," said the vrouw; "not because I have sworn anything, but because I know you have a good head on your shoulders, and so will my man and the others of our party. Though why you should think you will have any message to send, I can't guess, unless you know something that is hidden from us," she added shrewdly. "You say you don't; well, it is not likely you would tell us if you did. Look! They are calling, you must go. Come on, Marie, let us see them off."

So we went to where the commission was gathered on horseback, just in time to hear Retief addressing the people, or, rather, the last of his words.

"Friends," he said, "we go upon an important business, from which I hope we shall return happily within a very little time. Still, this is a rough country, and we have to deal with rough people. Therefore my advice to all you who stay behind is that you should not scatter, but keep together, so that in case of any trouble the men who are left may be at hand to defend this camp. For if they are here you have nothing to fear from all the savages in Africa. And now God be with you, and good-bye. Come, trek, brothers, trek!"

Then followed a few moments of confusion while men kissed their wives, children and sisters in farewell, or shook each other by the hand. I, too, kissed Marie, and, tumbling on to my horse somehow, rode away, my eyes blind with tears, for this parting was bitter. When I could see clearly again I pulled up and looked back at the camp, which was now at some distance. It seemed a peaceful place indeed, for although the storm of the morning was returning and a pall of dark cloud hung over it, the sun still shone upon the white wagon caps and the people who went to and fro among them.

Who could have thought that within a little time it would be but a field of blood, that those wagons would be riddled with assegais, and that the women and children who were moving there must most of them lie upon the veld mutilated corpses dreadful to behold? Alas! the Boers, always impatient of authority and confident that their own individual judgment was the best, did not obey their commandant's order to keep together. They went off this way and that, to shoot the game which was then so plentiful, leaving their families almost without protection. Thus the Zulus found and slew them.

Presently as I rode forward a little apart from the others someone overtook me, and I saw that it was Henri Marais.

"Well, Allan," he said, "so God has given you to me for a son-in-law. Who would have thought it? You do not look to me like a new-married man, for that marriage is not natural when the bridegroom rides off and leaves the bride of an hour. Perhaps you will never be really married after all, for God, Who gives sons-in-law, can also take them away, especially when He was not asked for them. Ah!" he went on, lapsing into French, as was his wont when moved, "*qui vivra verra! qui vivra verra!*" Then, shouting this excellent but obvious proverb at the top of his voice, he struck his horse with the butt of his gun, and galloped away before I could answer him.

At that moment I hated Henri Marais as I had never hated anyone before, not even his nephew Hernan. Almost did I ride to the commandant to complain of him, but reflecting to myself, first that he was undoubtedly half mad, and therefore not responsible for his actions, and secondly that he was better here with us than in the same camp with my wife, I gave up the idea. Yet alas! it is the half-mad who are the most dangerous of lunatics.

Hans, who had observed this scene and overheard all Marais's talk, and who also knew the state of the case well enough, sidled his horse alongside of me, and whispered in a wheedling voice:

"Baas, I think the old baas is *kransick* and not safe. He looks like one who is going to harm someone. Now, baas, suppose I let my gun off by accident; you know we coloured people are very careless with guns! The Heer Marais would never be troubled with any more fancies, and you and the Missie Marie and all of us would be safer. Also, *you* could not be blamed, nor could I, for who can help an accident? Guns will go off sometimes, baas, when you don't want them to."

"Get out," I answered. Yet if Hans's gun had chanced to "go off," I believe it might have saved a multitude of lives!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE TREATY

Our journey to Umgungundhlovu was prosperous and without incident. When we were within half a day's march from the Great Kraal we overtook the herd of cattle that we had recaptured from Sikonyela, for these beasts had been driven very slowly and well rested that they might arrive in good condition. Also the commandant was anxious that we should present them ourselves to the king.

Driving this multitude of animals before us—there were over five thousand head of them—we reached the Great Place on Saturday the 3rd of February about midday, and forced them through its gates into the cattle kraals. Then we off-saddled and ate our dinner under those two milk trees near the gate of the kraal where I had bid good-bye to Dingaan.

After dinner messengers came to ask us to visit the king, and with them the youth, Thomas Halstead, who told the commandant that all weapons must be left behind, since it was the Zulu law that no man might appear before the king armed. To this Retief demurred, whereon the messengers appealed to me, whom they had recognised, asking if that were not the custom of their country.

I answered that I had not been in it long enough to know. Then there was a pause while they sent for someone to bear evidence; at the time I did not know whom, as I was not near enough to Thomas Halstead to make inquiries. Presently this someone appeared, and turned out to be none other than Hernan Pereira.

He advanced towards us attended by Zulus, as though he were a chief, looking fat and well and handsomer than ever. Seeing Retief, he lifted his hat with a flourish and held out his hand, which, I noted, the commandant did not take.

"So you are still here, Mynheer Pereira!" he said coldly. "Now be good enough to tell me, what is this matter about the abandoning of our arms?"

"The king charges me to say—" began Hernan.

"Charges you to say, Mynheer Pereira! Are you then this black man's servant? But continue."

"That none must come into his private enclosure armed."

"Well, then, mynheer, be pleased to go tell this king that we do not wish to come to his private enclosure. I have brought the cattle that he desired me to fetch, and I am willing to deliver them to him wherever he wishes, but we will not unarm in order to do so."

Now there was talk, and messengers were despatched, who returned at full speed presently to say that Dingaan would receive the Boers in the great dancing place in the midst of the kraal, and that they might bring their guns, as he wished to see how they fired them.

So we rode in, making as fine a show as we could, to find that the dancing place, which measured a good many acres in extent, was lined round with thousands of plumed but unarmed warriors arranged in regiments.

"You see," I heard Pereira say to Retief, "these have no spears."

"No," answered the commandant, "but they have sticks, which when they are a hundred to one would serve as well."

Meanwhile the vast mob of cattle were being driven in a double stream past a knot of men at the head of the space, and then away through gates behind. When the beasts had all gone we approached these men, among whom I recognised the fat form of Dingaan draped in a bead mantle. We ranged ourselves in a semicircle before him, and stood while he searched us with his sharp eyes. Presently he saw me, and sent a councillor to say that I must come and interpret for him.

So, dismounting, I went with Retief, Thomas Halstead, and a few of the leading Boers.

"*Sakubona* [Good day], Macumazahn," said Dingaan. "I am glad that you have come, as I know that you will speak my words truly, being one of the People of George whom I love, for Tho-maas here I do not trust, although he is also a Son of George."

I told Retief what he said.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with a grunt, "it seems that you English are a step in front of us Boers, even here."

Then he went forward and shook hands with the king, whom, it will be remembered, he had visited before.

After that the *indaba* or talk began, which I do not propose to set out at length, for it is a matter of history. It is enough to say that Dingaan, after thanking Retief for recovering the cattle, asked where was Sikonyela, the chief who had stolen them, as he wished to kill him. When he learned that Sikonyela remained in his own country, he became, or affected to become, angry. Then he asked where were the sixty horses which he heard we had captured from Sikonyela, as they must be given up to him.

Retief, by way of reply, touched his grey hairs, and inquired whether Dingaan thought that he was a child that he, Dingaan, should demand horses which did not belong to him. He added that these horses had been restored to the Boers, from whom Sikonyela had stolen them.

When Dingaan had expressed himself satisfied with this answer, Retief opened the question of the treaty. The king replied however, that the white men had but just arrived, and he wished to see them dance after their own fashion. As for the business, it might "sit still" till another day.

So in the end the Boers "danced" for his amusement. That is, they divided into two parties, and charged each other at full gallop, firing their guns into the air, an exhibition which seemed to fill all present with admiration and awe. When they paused, the king wished them to go on firing "a hundred shots apiece," but the commandant declined, saying he had no more powder to waste.

"What do you want powder for in a peaceful country?" asked Dingaan suspiciously.

Retief answered through me:

"To kill food for ourselves, or to protect ourselves if any evil-minded men should attack us."

"Then it will not be wanted here," said Dingaan, "since I will give you food, and as I, the king, am your friend, no man in Zululand dare be your enemy."

Retief said he was glad to hear it, and asked leave to retire with the Boers to his camp outside the gate, as they were all tired with riding. This Dingaan granted, and we said good-bye and went away. Before I reached the gate, however, a messenger, I remember it was my old friend Kambula, overtook me, and said that the king wished to speak with me alone. I answered him that I could not speak with the king alone without the permission of the commandant. Thereon Kambula said:

"Come with me, I pray you, O Macumazahn, since otherwise you will be taken by force."

Now, I told Hans to gallop on to Retief, and tell him of my predicament, for already I saw that at some sign from Kambula I was being surrounded by Zulus. He did so, and presently Retief came back himself accompanied only by one man, and asked me what was the matter now. I informed him, translating Kambula's words, which he repeated in his presence.

"Does the fellow mean that you will be seized if you do not go, or I refuse to allow you to do so?"

To this question Kambula's answer was:

"That is so, *Inkoos*, since the king has private words for the ear of Macumazahn. Therefore we must obey orders, and take him before the king, living or dead."

"Allemachte!" exclaimed Retief, "this is serious," and, as though to summon them to my help, he looked behind him towards the main body of the Boers, who by this time were nearly all of them through the gate, which was guarded by a great number of Zulus. "Allan," he went on, "if you are not afraid, I think that you must go. Perhaps it is only that Dingaan has some message about the treaty to send to me through you."

"I am not afraid," I answered. "What is the use of being afraid in a place like this?"

"Ask that Kaffir if the king gives you safe conduct," said Retief.

I did so, and Kambula answered:

"Yes, for this visit. Who am I that I can speak the king's unspoken words?" [which meant, guarantee his will in the future.]

"A dark saying," commented Retief. "But go, Allan, since you must, and God bring you back safe again. It is clear that Dingaan did not ask that you should come with me for nothing. Now I wish I had left you at home with that pretty wife of yours."

So we parted, I going to the king's private enclosure on foot and without my rifle, since I was not allowed to appear before him armed, and the commandant towards the gate of the kraal accompanied by Hans, who led my horse. Ten minutes later I stood before Dingaan, who greeted me kindly enough, and began to ask a number of questions about the Boers, especially if they were not people who had rebelled against their own king and run away from him.

I answered, Yes, they had run away, as they wanted more room to live; but I had told him all about that when I saw him before. He said he knew I had, but he wished to hear "whether the same words came out of the same mouth, or different words," so that he might know if I were a true man or not. Then, after pausing a while, he looked at me in his piercing fashion and asked:

"Have you brought me a present of that tall white girl with eyes like two stars, Macumazahn? I mean the girl whom you refused to me, and whom I could not take because you had won your bet, which gave all the white people to you; she for whose sake you make brothers of these Boers, who are traitors to their king?"

"No, O Dingaan," I answered; "there are no women among us. Moreover, this maid is now my wife."

"Your wife!" he exclaimed angrily. "By the Head of the Black One, have you dared to make a wife of her whom I desired? Now say, boy, you clever Watcher by Night; you little white ant, who work in the dark and only peep out at the end of your tunnel when it is finished; you wizard, who by your magic can snatch his prey out of the hand of the greatest king in all the world—for it was magic that killed those vultures on Hloma Amabutu, not your bullets, Macumazahn—say, why should I not make an end of you at once for this trick?"

I folded my arms and looked at him. A strange contrast we must have made, this huge, black tyrant with the royal air, for to do him justice he had that, at whose nod hundreds went the way of death, and I, a mere insignificant white boy, for in appearance, at any rate, I was nothing more.

"O Dingaan," I said coolly, knowing that coolness was my only chance. "I answer you in the words of the Commandant Retief, the great chief. Do you take me for a child that I should give up my own wife to you who already have so many? Moreover, you cannot kill me because I have the word of your captain, Kambula, that I am safe with you."

This reply seemed to amuse him. At any rate, with one of those almost infantile changes of mood which are common to savages of every degree, he passed from wrath to laughter.

"You are quick as a lizard," he said. "Why should I, who have so many wives, want one more, who would certainly hate me? Just because she is white, and would make the others, who are black, jealous, I suppose. Indeed, they would poison her, or pinch her to death in a month, and then come to tell me she had died of fretting. Also, you are right; you have my safe conduct, and must go hence unharmed this time. But look you, little lizard, although you escape me between the stones, I will pull off your tail. I have said that I want to pluck this tall white flower of yours, and I will pluck her. I know where she dwells. Yes, just where the wagon she sleeps in

stands in the line, for my spies have told me, and I will give orders that whoever is killed, she is to be spared and brought to me living. So perhaps you will meet this wife of yours here, Macumazahn."

Now, at these ominous words, that might mean so much or so little, the sweat started to my brow, and a shiver went down my back.

"Perhaps I shall and perhaps I shall not, O king," I answered. "The world is as full of chances to-day as it was not long ago when I shot at the sacred vultures on Hloma Amabutu. Still, I think that my wife will never be yours, O king."

"Ow!" said Dingaan; "this little white ant is making another tunnel, thinking that he will come up at my back. But what if I put down my heel and crush you, little white ant? Do you know," he added confidentially, "that the Boer who mends my guns and whom here we call 'Two-faces,' because he looks towards you Whites with one eye and towards us Blacks with the other, is still very anxious that I should kill you? Indeed, when I told him that my spies said that you were to ride with the Boers, as I had requested that you should be their Tongue, he answered that unless I promised to give you to the vultures, he would warn them against coming. So, since I wanted them to come as I had arranged with him, I promised."

"Is it so, O king?" I asked. "And pray why does this Two-faces, whom we name Pereira, desire that I should be killed?"

"Ow!" chuckled the obese old ruffian; "cannot you with all your cleverness guess that, O Macumazahn? Perhaps it is he who needs the tall white maiden, and not I. Perhaps if he does certain things for me, I have promised her to him in payment. And perhaps," he added, laughing quite loud, "I shall trick him after all, keeping her for myself, and paying him in another way, for can a cheat grumble if he is out-cheated?"

I answered that I was an honest man, and knew nothing about cheats, or at what they could or could not grumble.

"Yes, Macumazahn," replied Dingaan quite genially. "That is where you and I are alike. We are both honest, quite honest, and therefore friends, which I can never be with these Amaboona, who, as you and others have told me, are traitors. We play our game in the light, like men, and who wins, wins, and who loses, loses. Now hear me, Macumazahn, and remember what I say. Whatever happens to others, whatever you may see, you are safe while I live. Dingaan has spoken. Whether I get the tall white girl, or do not get her, still *you* are safe; it is on my head," and he touched the gum-ring in his hair.

"And why should I be safe if others are unsafe, O king?" I asked.

"Oh! if you would know that, ask a certain ancient prophet named Zikali, who was in this land in the days of Senzangacona, my father, and before then—that is, if you can find him. Also, I like you, who are not a flat-faced fool like these Amaboona, but have a brain that turns in and out through difficulties, as a snake does through reeds; and it would be a pity to kill one who can shoot birds wheeling high above him in the air, which no one else can do. So whatever you see and whatever you hear, remember that you are safe, and shall go safely from this land, or stay safely in it if you will, to be my voice to speak with the Sons of George.

"Now return to the commandant, and say to him that my heart is his heart, and that I am very pleased to see him here. To-morrow, and perhaps the next day, I will show him some of the dances of my people, and after that I will sign the writing, giving him all the land he asks and everything else he may desire, more than he can wish, indeed. *Hamba gachlé*, Macumazahn," and, rising with surprising quickness from his chair, which was cut out of a single block of wood, he turned and vanished through the little opening in the reed fence behind him that led to his private huts.

As I was being conducted back to the Boer camp by Kambula, who was waiting for me outside the gate of the labyrinth which is called *isikloho*, I met Thomas Halstead, who was lounging about, I think in order to speak with me. Halting, I asked him straight out what the king's intentions were towards the Boers.

"Don't know," he answered, shrugging his shoulders, "but he seems so sweet on them that I think he must be up to mischief. He is wonderfully fond of you, too, for I heard him give orders that the word was to be passed through all the regiments that if anyone so much as hurt you, he should be killed at once. Also, you were pointed out to the soldiers when you rode in with the rest, that they might all of them know you."

"That's good for me as far as it goes," I replied. "But I don't know why I should need special protection above others, unless there is someone who wants to harm me."

"There is that, Allan Quatermain. The *indunas* tell me that the good-looking Portugee, whom they call 'Two-faces,' asks the king to kill you every time he sees him. Indeed, I've heard him myself."

"That's kind of him," I answered, "but, then, Hernan Pereira and I never got on. Tell me what is he talking about to the king when he isn't asking him to kill me."

"Don't know," he said again. "Something dirty, I'll be bound. One may be sure of that by the native name they have given him. I think, however," he added in a whisper, "that he has had a lot to do with the Boers being allowed to come here at all in order to get their treaty signed. At least, one day when I was interpreting and Dingaan swore that he would not give them more land than was enough to bury them in, Pereira told him that it didn't matter what he signed, as 'what was written with the pen could be scratched out with the spear.'"

"Indeed! And what did the king say to that?"

"Oh! he laughed and said it was true, and that he would give the Boer commission all their people wanted and something over for themselves. But don't you repeat that, Quatermain, for if you do, and it gets to the ear of Dingaan, I shall certainly be killed. And, I say, you're a good fellow, and I won a big bet on you over that vulture shooting, so I will give you a bit of advice, which you will be wise to take. You get out of this country as soon as you can, and go to look after that pretty Miss Marais, whom you are sweet on. Dingaan wants her, and what Dingaan wants he gets in this part of the world."

Then, without waiting to be thanked, he turned and disappeared among a crowd of Zulus, who were following us from curiosity, leaving me wondering whether or no Dingaan was right when he called this young man a liar. His story seemed to tally so well with that told by the king himself, that on the whole I thought he was not.

Just after I had passed the main gateway of the great town, where, his office done, Kambula saluted and left me, I saw two white men engaged in earnest conversation beneath one of the milk trees which, as I think I have already mentioned, grow, or grew, there. They were Henri Marais and his nephew. Catching sight of me, Marais walked off, but Pereira advanced and spoke to me, although, warned perhaps by what had happened to him in the case of Retief, I am glad to say he did not offer me his hand.

"Good day to you, Allan," he said effusively. "I have just heard from my uncle that I have to congratulate you, about Marie I mean, and, believe me, I do so with all my heart."

Now, as he spoke these words, remembering what I had just heard, my blood boiled in me, but I thought it wise to control myself, and therefore only answered:

"Thank you."

"Of course," he went on, "we have both striven for this prize, but as it has pleased God that you should win it, why, I am not one to bear malice."

"I am glad to hear it," I replied. "I thought that perhaps you might be. Now tell me, to change the subject, how long will Dingaan keep us here?"

"Oh! two or three days at most. You see, Allan, luckily I have been able to persuade him to sign the treaty about the land without further trouble. So as soon as that is done, you can all go home."

"The commandant will be very grateful to you," I said. "But what are you going to do?"

"I do not know, Allan. You see, I am not a lucky fellow like yourself with a wife waiting for me. I think that perhaps I shall stop here a while. I see a way of making a great deal of money out of these Zulus; and having lost everything upon that Delagoa Bay trek, I want money."

"We all do," I answered, "especially if we are starting in life. So when it is convenient to you to settle your debts I shall be glad."

"Oh! have no fear," he exclaimed with a sudden lighting up of his dark face, "I will pay you what I owe you, every farthing, with good interest thrown in."

"The king has just told me that is your intention," I remarked quietly, looking him full in the eyes. Then I walked on, leaving him staring after me, apparently without a word to say.

I went straight to the hut that was allotted to Retief in the little outlying guard-kraal, which had been given to us for a camp. Here I found the commandant seated on a Kaffir stool engaged in painfully writing a letter, using a bit of board placed on his knees as a desk.

He looked up, and asked me how I had got on with Dingaan, not being sorry, as I think, of an excuse to pause in his clerical labours.

"Listen, commandant," I said, and, speaking in a low voice, so as not to be overheard, I told him every word that had passed in the interviews I had just had with Dingaan, with Thomas Halstead, and with Pereira.

He heard me out in silence, then said:

"This is a strange and ugly story, Allan, and if it is true, Pereira must be an even bigger scoundrel than I thought him. But I can't believe that it is true. I think that Dingaan has been lying to you for his own purposes; I mean about the plot to kill you."

"Perhaps, commandant. I don't know, and I don't much care. But I am sure that he was not lying when he said he meant to steal away my wife either for himself or for Pereira."

"What, then, do you intend to do, Allan?"

"I intend, commandant, with your permission to send Hans, my after-rider, back to the camp with a letter for Marie, telling her to remove herself quietly to the farm I have chosen down on the river, of which I told you, and there to lie hid till I come back."

"I think it needless, Allan. Still, if it will ease your mind, do so, since I cannot spare you to go yourself. Only you must not send this Hottentot, who would talk and frighten the people. I am despatching a messenger to the camp to tell them of our safe arrival and good reception by Dingaan. He can take your letter, in which I order you to say to your wife that if she and the Prinsloos and the Meyers go to this farm of yours, they are to go without talking, just as though they wanted a change, that is all. Have the letter ready by dawn to-morrow morning, as I trust mine may be," he added with a groan.

"It shall be ready, commandant; but what about Hernan Pereira and his tricks?"

"This about the accursed Hernan Pereira," exclaimed Retief, striking the writing-board with his fist. "On the first opportunity I will myself take the evidence of Dingaan and of the English lad, Halstead. If I find they tell me the same story they have told you, I will put Pereira on his trial, as I threatened to do before; and should he be found guilty, by God! I will have him shot. But for the present it is best to do nothing, except keep an eye on him, lest we should cause fear and scandal in the camp, and, after all, not prove the case. Now go and write your letter, and leave me to write mine."

So I went and wrote, telling Marie something, but by no means all of that I have set down. I bade her, and the Prinsloos and the Meyers, if they would accompany her, as I was sure they would, move themselves off at once to the farm I had beaconed out thirty miles away from the Bushman's River, under pretence of seeing how the houses that were being built there were getting on. Or if they would not go, I bade her go alone with a few Hottentot servants, or any other companions she could find.

This letter I took to Retief, and read it to him. At my request, also, he scrawled at the foot of it:

"I have seen the above and approve it, knowing all the story, which may be true or false. Do as your husband bids you, but do not talk of it in the camp except to those whom he mentions.—PIETER RETIEF."

So the messenger departed at dawn, and in due course delivered my letter to Marie.

The next day was Sunday. In the morning I went to call upon the Reverend Mr. Owen, the missionary, who was very glad to see me. He informed me that Dingaan was in good mind towards us, and had been asking him if he would write the treaty ceding the land which the Boers wanted. I stopped for service at the huts of Mr. Owen, and then returned to the camp. In the afternoon Dingaan celebrated a great war dance for us to witness, in which about twelve thousand soldiers took part.

It was a wonderful and awe-inspiring spectacle, and I remember that each of the regiments employed had a number of trained oxen which manoeuvred with them, apparently at given words of command. We did not see Dingaan that day, except at a distance, and after the dance was over returned to our camp to eat the beef which he had provided for us in plenty.

On the third day—that was Monday, the 5th of February, there were more dancings and sham fights, so many more, indeed, that we began to weary of this savage show. Late in the afternoon, however, Dingaan sent for the commandant and his men to come to see him, saying that he wished to talk with him about the matter of the treaty. So we went; but only three or four, of whom I was one, were admitted to Dingaan's presence, the rest remaining at a little distance, where they could see us but were out of earshot.

Dingaan then produced a paper which had been written by the Reverend Mr. Owen. This document, which I believe still exists, for it was found afterwards, was drawn up in legal or semi-legal form, beginning like a proclamation, "Know all men."

It ceded "the place called Port Natal, together with all the land annexed—that is to say, from Tugela to the Umzimvubu River westward, and from the sea to the north"—to the Boers, "for their everlasting property." At the king's request, as the deed was written in English by Mr. Owen, I translated it to him, and afterwards the lad Halstead translated it also, being called in to do so when I had finished.

This was done that my rendering might be checked, and the fact impressed all the Boers very favourably. It showed them that the king desired to understand exactly what he was to sign, which would not have been the case had he intended any trick or proposed to cheat them afterwards. From that moment forward Retief and his people had no further doubts as to Dingaan's good faith in this matter, and foolishly relaxed all precautions against treachery.

When the translating was finished, the commandant asked the king if he would sign the paper then and there. He answered, "No; he would sign it on the following morning, before the commission returned to Natal." It was then that Retief inquired of Dingaan, through Thomas Halstead, whether it was a true story which he had heard, that the Boer called Pereira, who had been staying with him, and whom the Zulus knew by the name of "Two-faces," had again asked him, Dingaan, to have me, Allan Quatermain, whom they called Macumazahn, killed. Dingaan laughed and answered:

"Yes, that is true enough, for he hates this Macumazahn. But let the little white Son of George have no fear, since my heart is soft towards him, and I swear by the head of the Black One that he shall come to no harm in Zululand. Is he not my guest, as you are?"

He then went on to say that if the commandant wished it, he would have "Two-faces" seized and killed because he had dared to ask for my life. Retief answered that he would look into that matter himself, and after Thomas Halstead had confirmed the king's story as to Pereira's conduct, he rose and said good-bye to Dingaan.

Of this matter of Hernan Pereira, Retief said little as we went back to the camp outside the Kraal, though the little that he did say showed his deep anger. When we arrived at the camp, however, he sent for Pereira and Marais and several of the older Boers. I remember that among these were Gerrit Bothma, Senior, Hendrik Labuschagne and Matthys Pretorius, Senior, all of them persons of standing and judgment. I also was ordered to be present. When Pereira arrived, Retief charged him openly with having plotted my murder, and asked him what he had to say. Of course, his answer was a flat denial, and an accusation against me of having invented the tale because we had been at enmity over a maiden whom I had since married.

"Then, Mynheer Pereira," said Retief, "as Allan Quatermain here has won the maiden who is now his wife, it would seem that his cause of enmity must have ceased, whereas yours may well have remained. However, I have no time to try cases of the sort now. But I warn you that this one will be looked into later on when we get back to Natal, whither I shall take you with me, and that meanwhile an eye is kept on you and what you do. Also I warn you that I have evidence for all that I say. Now be so good as to go, and to keep out of my sight as much as possible, for I do not like a man whom these Kaffirs name 'Two-faces.' As for you, friend Henri Marais, I tell you that you would do well to associate yourself less with one whose name is under so dark a cloud, although he may be your own nephew, whom all know you love blindly."

So far as I recollect neither of them made any answer to this direct speech. They simply turned and went away. But on the next morning, that of the fatal 6th of February, when I chanced to meet the Commandant Retief as he was riding through the camp making arrangements for our departure to Natal, he pulled up his horse and said:

"Allan, Hernan Pereira has gone, and Henri Marais with him, and for my part I am not sorry, for doubtless we shall meet again, in this world or the next, and find out all the truth. Here, read this, and give it back to me afterwards"; and he threw me a paper and rode on.

I opened the folded sheet and read as follows:

"To the Commandant Retief, Governor of the Emigrant Boers,

"Mynheer Commandant,

"I will not stay here, where such foul accusations are laid on me by black Kaffirs and the Englishman, Allan Quatermain, who, like all his race, is an enemy of us Boers, and, although you do not know it, a traitor who is plotting great harm against you with the Zulus. Therefore I leave you, but am ready to meet every charge at the right time before a proper Court. My uncle, Henri Marais, comes with me, as he feels that his honour is also touched. Moreover, he has heard that his daughter, Marie, is in danger from the Zulus, and returns to protect her, which he who is called her husband neglects to do. Allan Quatermain, the Englishman, who is the friend of Dingaan, can explain what I mean, for he knows more about the Zulu plans than I do, as you will find out before the end."

Then followed the signatures of Hernan Pereira and Henri Marais.

I put the letter in my pocket, wondering what might be its precise meaning, and in particular that of the absurd and undefined charge of treachery against myself. It seemed to me that Pereira had left us because he was afraid of something—either that he might

be placed upon his trial or of some ultimate catastrophe in which he would be involved. Marais probably had gone with him for the same reason that a bit of iron follows a magnet, because he never could resist the attraction of this evil man, his relative by birth. Or perhaps he had learned from him the story of his daughter's danger, upon which I had already acted, and really was anxious about her safety. For it must always be remembered that Marais loved Marie passionately, however ill the reader of this history may think that he behaved to her. She was his darling, the apple of his eye, and her great offence in his sight was that she cared for me more than she did for him. That is one of the reasons why he hated me as much as he loved her.

Almost before I had finished reading this letter, the order came that we were to go in a body to bid farewell to Dingaan, leaving our arms piled beneath the two milk trees at the gate of the town. Most of our after-riders were commanded to accompany us—I think because Retief wished to make as big a show as possible to impress the Zulus. A few of these Hottentots, however, were told to stay behind that they might collect the horses, that were knee-haltered and grazing at a distance, and saddle them up. Among these was Hans, for, as it chanced, I saw and sent him with the others, so that I might be sure that my own horses would be found and made ready for the journey.

Just as we were starting, I met the lad William Wood, who had come down from the Mission huts, where he lived with Mr. Owen, and was wandering about with an anxious face.

"How are you, William?" I asked.

"Not very well, Mr. Quatermain," he answered. "The fact is," he added with a burst of confidence, "I feel queerly about you all. The Kaffirs have told me that something is going to happen to you, and I think you ought to know it. I daren't say any more," and he vanished into the crowd.

At that moment I caught sight of Retief riding to and fro and shouting out orders. Going to him, I caught him by the sleeve, saying: "Commandant, listen to me."

"Well, what is it now, nephew?" he asked absently.

I told him what Wood had said, adding that I also was uneasy; I did not know why.

"Oh!" he answered with impatience, "this is all hailstones and burnt grass" (meaning that the one would melt and the other blow away, or in our English idiom, stuff and rubbish). "Why are you always trying to scare me with your fancies, Allan? Dingaan is our friend, not our enemy. So let us take the gifts that fortune gives us and be thankful. Come, march."

This he said about eight o'clock in the morning.

We strolled through the gates of the Great Kraal, most of the Boers, who, as usual, had piled their arms under the two milk trees, lounging along in knots of four or five, laughing and chatting as they went. I have often thought since, that although every one of them there, except myself, was doomed within an hour to have taken the dreadful step from time into eternity, it seems strange that advancing fate should have thrown no shadow on their hearts. On the contrary, they were quite gay, being extremely pleased at the successful issue of their mission and the prospect of an immediate return to their wives and children. Even Retief was gay, for I heard him joking with his companions about myself and my "white-bread-week," or honeymoon, which, he said, was drawing very near.

As we went, I noticed that most of the regiments who had performed the great military dances before us on the previous day were gone. Two, however, remained—the *Ischlangu Inhlope*, that is the "White Shields," who were a corps of veterans wearing the ring on their heads, and the *Ischlangu Umnyama*, that is the "Black Shields," who were all of them young men without rings. The "White Shields" were ranged along the fence of the great open place to our left, and the "Black Shields" were similarly placed to our right, each regiment numbering about fifteen hundred men. Except for their kerries and dancing-sticks they were unarmed.

Presently we reached the head of the dancing ground, and found Dingaan seated in his chair with two of his great *indunas*, Umhlela and Tambusa, squatting on either side of him. Behind him, standing in and about the entrance to the labyrinth through which the king had come, were other *indunas* and captains. On arriving in front of Dingaan we saluted him, and he acknowledged the salutation with pleasant words and smiles. Then Retief, two or three of the other Boers, Thomas Halstead and I went forward, whereon the treaty was produced again and identified as the same document that we had seen on the previous day.

At the foot of it someone—I forget who—wrote in Dutch, "*De merk van Koning Dingaan*" [that is, The mark of King Dingaan.] In the space left between the words "*merk*" and "*van*" Dingaan made a cross with a pen that was given to him, Thomas Halstead holding his hand and showing him what to do.

After this, three of his *indunas*, or great councillors, who were named Nwara, Yuliwana and Manondo, testified as witnesses for the Zulus, and M. Oosthuyzen, A. C. Greyling and B. J. Liebenberg, who were standing nearest to Retief, as witnesses for the Boers.

This done, Dingaan ordered one of his *isibongos*, or praisers, to run to and fro in front of the regiments and others there assembled, and proclaim that he had granted Natal to the Boers to be their property for ever, information which the Zulus received with shouts. Then Dingaan asked Retief if he would not eat, and large trenchers of boiled beef were brought out and handed round. This, however, the Boers refused, saying they had already breakfasted. Thereon the king said that at least they must drink, and pots of *twala*, or Kaffir beer, were handed round, of which all the Boers partook.

While they were drinking, Dingaan gave Retief a message to the Dutch farmers, to the effect that he hoped they would soon come and occupy Natal, which henceforth was their country. Also, black-hearted villain that he was, that they would have a pleasant journey home. Next he ordered the two regiments to dance and sing war songs, in order to amuse his guests.

This they began to do, drawing nearer as they danced.

It was at this moment that a Zulu appeared, pushing his way through the captains who were gathered at the gate of the labyrinth, and delivered some message to one of the *indunas*, who in turn passed it on to the king.

"Ow! is it so?" said the king with a troubled look. Then his glance fell on me as though by accident, and he added: "Macumazahn, one of my wives is taken very ill suddenly, and says she must have some of the medicine of the white men before they go away. Now,

you tell me that you are a new-married man, so I can trust you with my wives. I pray you to go and find out what medicine it is that she needs, for you can speak our tongue.”

I hesitated, then translated what he had said to Retief.

“You had best go, nephew,” said the commandant; “but come back quickly, for we ride at once.”

Still I hesitated, not liking this business; whereon the king began to grow angry.

“What!” he said, “do you white men refuse me this little favour, when I have just given you so much—you who have wonderful medicines that can cure the sick?”

“Go, Allan, go,” said Retief, when he understood his words, “or he will grow cross and everything may be undone.”

So, having no choice, I went through the gateway into the labyrinth.

Next moment men pounced on me, and before I could utter a word a cloth was thrown over my mouth and tied tight behind my head.

I was a prisoner and gagged.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### DEPART IN PEACE

A tall Kaffir, one of the king's household guards, who carried an assegai, came up to me and whispered:

"Hearken, little Son of George. The king would save you, if he can, because you are not Dutch, but English. Yet, know that if you try to cry out, if you even struggle, you die," and he lifted the assegai so as to be ready to plunge it through my heart.

Now I understood, and a cold sweat broke out all over me. My companions were to be murdered, every one! Oh! gladly would I have given my life to warn them. But alas! I could not, for the cloth upon my mouth was so thick that no sound could pass it.

One of the Zulus inserted a stick between the reeds of the fence. Working it to and fro sideways, he made an opening just in a line with my eyes—out of cruelty, I suppose, for now I must see everything.

For some time—ten minutes, I dare say—the dancing and beer-drinking went on. Then Dingaan rose from his chair and shook the hand of Retief warmly, bidding him "*Hamba gachlé*," that is, Depart gently, or in peace. He retreated towards the gate of the labyrinth, and as he went the Boers took off their hats, waving them in the air and cheering him. He was almost through it, and I began to breathe again.

Doubtless I was mistaken. After all, no treachery was intended.

In the very opening of the gate Dingaan turned, however, and said two words in Zulu which mean:

"Seize them!"

Instantly the warriors, who had now danced quite close and were waiting for these words, rushed upon the Boers. I heard Thomas Halstead call out in English:

"We are done for," and then add in Zulu, "Let me speak to the king!"

Dingaan heard also, and waved his hand to show that he refused to listen, and as he did so shouted thrice:

"*Bulala abatagati!*" that is, Slay the wizards!

I saw poor Halstead draw his knife and plunge it into a Zulu who was near him. The man fell, and again he struck at another soldier, cutting his throat. The Boers also drew their knives—those of them who had time—and tried to defend themselves against these black devils, who rushed on them in swarms. I heard afterwards that they succeeded in killing six or eight of them and wounding perhaps a score. But it was soon over, for what could men armed only with pocket-knives do against such a multitude?

Presently, amidst a hideous tumult of shouts, groans, curses, prayers for mercy, and Zulu battle cries, the Boers were all struck down—yes, even the two little lads and the Hottentot servants. Then they were dragged away, still living, by the soldiers, their heels trailing on the ground, just as wounded worms or insects are dragged by the black ants.

Dingaan was standing by me now, laughing, his fat face working nervously.

"Come, Son of George," he said, "and let us see the end of these traitors to your sovereign."

Then I was pulled along to an eminence within the labyrinth, whence there was a view of the surrounding country. Here we waited a little while, listening to the tumult that grew more distant, till presently the dreadful procession of death reappeared, coming round the fence of the Great Kraal and heading straight for the Hill of Slaughter, Hloma Amabutu. Soon its slopes were climbed, and there among the dark-leaved bushes and the rocks the black soldiers butchered them, every one.

I saw and swooned away.

I believe that I remained senseless for many hours, though towards the end of that time my swoon grew thin, as it were, and I heard a hollow voice speaking over me in Zulu.

"I am glad that the little Son of George has been saved," said the echoing voice, which I did not know, "for he has a great destiny and will be useful to the black people in time to come." Then the voice went on:

"O House of Senzangacona! now you have mixed your milk with blood, with white blood. Of that bowl you shall drink to the dregs, and afterwards must the bowl be shattered"; and the speaker laughed—a deep, dreadful laugh that I was not to hear again for years.

I heard him go away, shuffling along like some great reptile, and then, with an effort, opened my eyes. I was in a large hut, and the only light in the hut came from a fire that burned in its centre, for it was night time. A Zulu woman, young and good-looking, was bending over a gourd near the fire, doing something to its contents. I spoke to her light-headedly.

"O woman," I said, "is that a man who laughed over me?"

"Not altogether, Macumazahn," she answered in a pleasant voice. "That was Zikali, the Mighty Magician, the Counsellor of Kings, the Opener of Roads; he whose birth our grandfathers do not remember; he whose breath causes the trees to be torn out by the roots; he whom Dingaan fears and obeys."

"Did he cause the Boers to be killed?" I asked.

"Mayhap," she answered. "Who am I that I should know of such matters?"

"Are you the woman who was sick whom I was sent to visit?" I asked again.

"Yes, Macumazahn, I was sick, but now I am well and you are sick, for so things go round. Drink this," and she handed me a gourd of milk.

"How are you named?" I inquired as I took it.

"Naya is my name," she replied, "and I am your jailer. Don't think that you can escape me, though, Macumazahn, for there are other jailers without who carry spears. Drink."

So I drank and bethought me that the draught might be poisoned. Yet so thirsty was I that I finished it, every drop.

"Now am I a dead man?" I asked, as I put down the gourd.

"No, no, Macumazahn," she who called herself Naya replied in a soft voice; "not a dead man, only one who will sleep and forget."

Then I lost count of everything and slept—for how long I know not.

When I awoke again it was broad daylight; in fact, the sun stood high in the heavens. Perhaps Naya had put some drug into my milk, or perhaps I had simply slept. I do not know. At any rate, I was grateful for that sleep, for without it I think that I should have gone mad. As it was, when I remembered, which it took me some time to do, for a while I went near to insanity.

I recollect lying there in that hut and wondering how the Almighty could have permitted such a deed as I had seen done. How could it be reconciled with any theory of a loving and merciful Father? Those poor Boers, whatever their faults, and they had many, like the rest of us, were in the main good and honest men according to their lights. Yet they had been doomed to be thus brutally butchered at the nod of a savage despot, their wives widowed, their children left fatherless, or, as it proved in the end, in most cases murdered or orphaned!

The mystery was too great—great enough to throw off its balance the mind of a young man who had witnessed such a fearsome scene as I have described.

For some days really I think that my reason hung just upon the edge of that mental precipice. In the end, however, reflection and education, of which I had a certain amount, thanks to my father, came to my aid. I recalled that such massacres, often on an infinitely larger scale, had happened a thousand times in history, and that still through them, often, indeed, by means of them, civilisation has marched forward, and mercy and peace have kissed each other over the bloody graves of the victims.

Therefore even in my youth and inexperience I concluded that some ineffable purpose was at work through this horror, and that the lives of those poor men which had been thus sacrificed were necessary to that purpose. This may appear a dreadful and fatalistic doctrine, but it is one that is corroborated in Nature every day, and doubtless the sufferers meet with their compensations in some other state. Indeed, if it be not so, faith and all the religions are vain.

Or, of course, it may chance that such monstrous calamities happen, not through the will of the merciful Power of which I have spoken, but in its despite. Perhaps the devil of Scripture, at whom we are inclined to smile, is still very real and active in this world of ours. Perhaps from time to time some evil principle breaks into eruption, like the prisoned forces of a volcano, bearing death and misery on its wings, until in the end it must depart strengthless and overcome. Who can say?

The question is one that should be referred to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope of Rome in conclave, with the Lama of Thibet for umpire in case they disagreed. I only try to put down the thoughts that struck me so long ago as my mind renders them to-day. But very likely they are not quite the same thoughts, for a full generation has gone by me since then, and in that time the intelligence ripens as wine does in a bottle.

Besides these general matters, I had questions of my own to consider during those days of imprisonment—for instance, that of my own safety, though of this, to be honest, I thought little. If I were going to be killed, I was going to be killed, and there was an end. But my knowledge of Dingaan told me that he had not massacred Retief and his companions for nothing. This would be but the prelude to a larger slaughter, for I had not forgotten what he said as to the sparing of Marie and the other hints he gave me.

From all this I concluded, quite rightly as it proved, that some general onslaught was being made upon the Boers, who probably would be swept out to the last man. And to think that here I was, a prisoner in a Kaffir kraal, with only a young woman as a jailer, and yet utterly unable to escape to warn them. For round my hut lay a courtyard, and round it again ran a reed fence about five feet six inches high. Whenever I looked over this fence, by night or by day, I saw soldiers stationed at intervals of about fifteen yards. There they stood like statues, their broad spears in their hands, all looking inwards towards the fence. There they stood—only at night their number was doubled. Clearly it was not meant that I should escape.

A week went by thus—believe me, a very terrible week. During that time my sole companion was the pretty young woman, Naya. We became friends in a way and talked on a variety of subjects. Only, at the end of our conversations I always found that I had gained no information whatsoever about any matter of immediate interest. On such points as the history of the Zulu and kindred tribes, or the character of Chaka, the great king, or anything else that was remote she would discourse by the hour. But when we came to current events, she dried up like water on a red-hot brick. Still, Naya grew, or pretended to grow, quite attached to me. She even suggested naïvely that I might do worse than marry her, which she said Dingaan was quite ready to allow, as he was fond of me and thought I should be useful in his country. When I told her that I was already married, she shrugged her shining shoulders and asked with a laugh that revealed her beautiful teeth:

"What does that matter? Cannot a man have more wives than one? And, Macumazahn," she added, leaning forward and looking at me, "how do you know that you have even one? You may be divorced or a widower by now."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I? I mean nothing; do not look at me so fiercely, Macumazahn. Surely such things happen in the world, do they not?"

"Naya," I said, "you are two bad things—a bait and a spy—and you know it."

"Perhaps I do, Macumazahn," she answered. "Am I to blame for that, if my life is on it, especially when I really like you for yourself?"

"I don't know," I said. "Tell me, when am I going to get out of this place?"

"How can I tell you, Macumazahn?" Naya replied, patting my hand in her genial way, "but I think before long. When you are gone, Macumazahn, remember me kindly sometimes, as I have really tried to make you as comfortable as I could with a watcher staring through every straw in the hut."

I said whatever seemed to be appropriate, and next morning my deliverance came. While I was eating my breakfast in the courtyard at the back of the hut, Naya thrust her handsome and pleasant face round the corner and said that there was a messenger to see me from the king. Leaving the rest of the meal unswallowed, I went to the doorway of the yard and there found my old friend, Kambula.

"Greeting, *Inkoos*," he said to me; "I am come to take you back to Natal with a guard. But I warn you to ask me no questions, for if you do I must not answer them. Dingaan is ill, and you cannot see him, nor can you see the white praying-man, or anyone; you must come with me at once."

"I do not want to see Dingaan," I replied, looking him in the eyes.

"I understand," answered Kambula; "Dingaan's thoughts are his thoughts and your thoughts are your thoughts, and perhaps that is why he does not want to see *you*. Still, remember, *Inkoos*, that Dingaan has saved your life, snatching you unburned out of a very great fire, perhaps because you are of a different sort of wood, which he thinks it a pity to burn. Now, if you are ready, let us go."

"I am ready," I answered.

At the gate I met Naya, who said:

"You never thought to say good-bye to me, White Man, although I have tended you well. Ah! what else could I expect? Still, I hope that if I should have to fly from this land for *my* life, as may chance, you will do for me what I have done for you."

"That I will," I answered, shaking her by the hand; and, as it happened, in after years I did.

Kambula led me, not through the kraal Umgungundhlovu, but round it. Our road lay immediately past the death mount, Hloma Amabutu, where the vultures were still gathered in great numbers. Indeed, it was actually my lot to walk over the new-picked bones of some of my companions who had been despatched at the foot of the hill. One of these skeletons I recognised by his clothes to be that of Samuel Esterhuizen, a very good fellow, at whose side I had slept during all our march. His empty eye-sockets seemed to stare at me reproachfully, as though they asked me why I remained alive when he and all his brethren were dead. I echoed the question in my own mind. Why of that great company did I alone remain alive?

An answer seemed to rise within me: That I might be one of the instruments of vengeance upon that devilish murderer, Dingaan. Looking upon those poor shattered and desecrated frames that had been men, I swore in my heart that if I lived I would not fail in that mission. Nor did I fail, although the history of that great repayment cannot be told in these pages.

Turning my eyes from this dreadful sight, I saw that on the opposite slope, where we had camped during our southern trek from Delagoa, still stood the huts and wagons of the Reverend Mr. Owen. I asked Kambula whether he and his people were also dead.

"No, *Inkoos*," he answered; "they are of the Children of George, as you are, and therefore the king has spared them, although he is going to send them out of the country."

This was good news, so far as it went, and I asked again if Thomas Halstead had also been spared, since he, too, was an Englishman.

"No," said Kambula. "The king wished to save him, but he killed two of our people and was dragged off with the rest. When the slayers got to their work it was too late to stay their hands."

Again I asked whether I might not join Mr. Owen and trek with him, to which Kambula answered briefly:

"No, Macumazahn; the king's orders are that you must go by yourself."

So I went; nor did I ever again meet Mr. Owen or any of his people. I believe, however, that they reached Durban safely and sailed away in a ship called the *Comet*.

In a little while we came to the two milk trees by the main gate of the kraal, where much of our saddlery still lay scattered about, though the guns had gone. Here Kambula asked me if I could recognise my own saddle.

"There it is," I answered, pointing to it; "but what is the use of a saddle without a horse?"

"The horse you rode has been kept for you, Macumazahn," he replied.

Then he ordered one of the men with us to bring the saddle and bridle, also some other articles which I selected, such as a couple of blankets, a water-bottle, two tins containing coffee and sugar, a little case of medicines, and so forth.

About a mile further on I found one of my horses tethered by an outlying guard hut, and noted that it had been well fed and cared for. By Kambula's leave I saddled it and mounted. As I did so, he warned me that if I tried to ride away from the escort I should certainly be killed, since even if I escaped them, orders had been given throughout the land to put an end to me should I be seen alone.

I replied that, unarmed as I was, I had no idea of making any such attempt. So we went forward, Kambula and his soldiers walking or trotting at my side.

For four full days we journeyed thus, keeping, so far as I could judge, about twenty or thirty miles to the east of that road by which I had left Zululand before and re-entered it with Retief and his commission. Evidently I was an object of great interest to the Zulus of the country through which we passed, perhaps because they knew me to be the sole survivor of all the white men who had gone up to visit the king. They would come down in crowds from the kraals and stare at me almost with awe, as though I were a spirit and not a

man. Only, not one of them would say anything to me, probably because they had been forbidden to do so. Indeed, if I spoke to any of them, invariably they turned and walked or ran out of hearing.

It was on the evening of the fourth day that Kambula and his soldiers received some news which seemed to excite them a great deal. A messenger in a state of exhaustion, who had an injury to the fleshy part of his left arm, which looked to me as though it had been caused by a bullet, appeared out of the bush and said something of which, by straining my ears, I caught two words—"Great slaughter." Then Kambula laid his fingers on his lips as a signal for silence and led the man away, nor did I see or hear any more of him. Afterwards I asked Kambula who had suffered this great slaughter, whereon he stared at me innocently and replied that he did not know of what I was speaking.

"What is the use of lying to me, Kambula, seeing that I shall find out the truth before long?"

"Then, Macumazahn, wait till you do find it out, and may it please you," he replied, and went off to speak with his people at a distance.

All that night I heard them talking off and on—I, who lay awake plunged into new miseries. I was sure that some other dreadful thing had happened. Probably Dingaan's armies had destroyed all the Boers, and, if so, oh! what had become of Marie? Was she dead, or had she perhaps been taken prisoner, as Dingaan had told me would be done for his own vile purposes? For aught I knew she might now be travelling under escort to Umgungundhlovu, as I was travelling to Natal.

The morning came at last, and that day, about noon, we reached a ford of the Tugela which luckily was quite passable. Here Kambula bade me farewell, saying that his mission was finished. Also he delivered to me a message that I was to give from Dingaan to the English in Natal. It was to this effect: That he, Dingaan, had killed the Boers who came to visit him because he found out that they were traitors to their chief, and therefore not worthy to live. But that he loved the Sons of George, who were true-hearted people, and therefore had nothing to fear from him. Indeed, he begged them to come and see him at his Great Place, where he would talk matters over with them.

I said that I would deliver the message if I met any English people, but, of course, I could not say whether they would accept Dingaan's invitation to Umgungundhlovu. Indeed, I feared lest that town might have acquired such a bad name that they would prefer not to come there without an army.

Then, before Kambula had time to take any offence, I shook his outstretched hand and urged my horse into the stream. I never met Kambula again living, though after the battle of Blood River I saw him dead.

Once over the Tugela I rode forward for half a mile or so till I was clear of the bush and reeds that grew down to the water, fearing lest the Zulus should follow and take me back to Dingaan to explain my rather imprudent message. Seeing no signs of them, I halted, a desolate creature in a desolate country which I did not know, wondering what I should do and whither I should ride. Then it was that there happened one of the strangest experiences of all my adventurous life.

As I sat dejectedly upon my horse, which was also dejected, amidst some tumbled rocks that at a distant period in the world's history had formed the bank of the great river, I heard a voice which seemed familiar to me say:

"Baas, is that *you*, baas?"

I looked round and could see no one, so, thinking that I had been deceived by my imagination, I held my peace.

"Baas," said the voice again, "are you dead or are you alive? Because, if you are dead, I don't want to have anything to do with spooks until I am obliged."

Now I answered, "Who is it that speaks, and whence?" though, really, as I could see no one, I thought that I must be demented.

The next moment my horse snorted and shied violently, and no wonder, for out of a great ant-bear hole not five paces away appeared a yellow face crowned with black wool, in which was set a broken feather. I looked at the face and the face looked at me.

"Hans," I said, "is it you? I thought that *you* were killed with the others."

"And I thought that *you* were killed with the others, baas. Are you sure that you are alive?"

"What are you doing there, you old fool?" I asked.

"Hiding from the Zulus, baas. I heard them on the other bank, and then saw a man on a horse crossing the river, and went to ground like a jackal. I have had enough of Zulus."

"Come out," I said, "and tell me your story."

He emerged, a thin and bedraggled creature, with nothing left on him but the upper part of a pair of old trousers, but still Hans, undoubtedly Hans. He ran to me, and seizing my foot, kissed it again and again, weeping tears of joy and stuttering:

"Oh, baas, to think that I should find you who were dead, alive, and find myself alive, too. Oh! baas, never again will I doubt about the Big Man in the sky of whom your reverend father is so fond. For after I had tried all our own spirits, and even those of my ancestors, and met with nothing but trouble, I said the prayer that the reverend taught us, asking for my daily bread because I am so very hungry. Then I looked out of the hole and there you were. Have you anything to eat about you, baas?"

As it chanced, in my saddle-bags I had some biltong that I had saved against emergencies. I gave it to him, and he devoured it as a famished hyena might do, tearing off the tough meat in lumps and bolting them whole. When it was all gone he licked his fingers and his lips and stood still staring at me.

"Tell me your story," I repeated.

"Baas, I went to fetch the horses with the others, and ours had strayed. I got up a tree to look for them. Then I heard a noise, and saw that the Zulus were killing the Boers; so knowing that presently they would kill us, too, I stopped in that tree, hiding myself as well as I could in a stork's nest. Well, they came and assegaied all the other Totties, and stood under my tree cleaning their spears and getting their breath, for one of my brothers had given them a good run. But they never saw me, although I was nearly sick from fear on the top of them. Indeed, I was sick, but into the nest.

"Well, I sat in that nest all day, though the sun cooked me like beef on a stick; and when night came I got down and ran, for I knew it was no good to stop to look for you, and 'every man for himself' when a black devil is behind you," as your reverend father says. All night I ran, and in the morning hid up in a hole. Then when night came again I went on running. Oh! they nearly caught me once or twice, but never quite, for I know how to hide, and I kept where men do not go. Only I was hungry, hungry; yes, I lived on snails and worms, and grass like an ox, till my middle ached. Still, at last I got across the river and near to the camp.

"Then just before the day broke and I was saying, 'Now, Hans, although your heart is sad, your stomach will rejoice and sing,' what did I see but those Zulu devils, thousands of them, rush down on the camp and kill all the poor Boers. Men and women and the little children, they killed them by the hundred, till at last other Boers came and drove them away, although they took all the cattle with them. Well, as I was sure that they would come back, I did not stop there. I ran down to the side of the river, and have been crawling about in the reeds for days, living on the eggs of water-birds and a few small fish that I caught in the pools, till this morning, when I heard the Zulus again and slipped up here into this hole. Then you came and stood over the hole, and for a long while I thought you were a ghost.

"But now we are together once more and all is right, just as what your reverend father always said it would be with those who go to church on Sunday, like me when there was nothing else to do." And again he fell to kissing my foot.

"Hans," I said, "you saw the camp. Was the Missie Marie there?"

"Baas, how can I tell, who never went into it? But the wagon she slept in was not there; no, nor that of the Vrouw Prinsloo or of the Heer Meyer."

"Thank God!" I gasped, then added: "Where were you trying to get to, Hans, when you ran away from the camp?"

"Baas, I thought perhaps that the Missie and the Prinsloos and the Meyers had gone to that fine farm which you pegged out, and that I would go and see if they were there. Because if so, I was sure that they would be glad to know that you were really dead, and give me some food in payment for my news. But I was afraid to walk across the open veld for fear lest the Zulus should see me and kill me. Therefore I came round through the thick bush along the river, where one can only travel slowly, especially if hollow," and he patted his wasted stomach.

"But, Hans," I asked, "are we near my farm where I set the men to build the houses on the hill above the river?"

"Of course, baas. Has your brain gone soft that you cannot find your way about the veld? Four, or at most five, hours on horseback, riding slow, and you are there."

"Come on, Hans," I said, "and be quick, for I think that the Zulus are not far behind."

So we started, Hans hanging to my stirrup and guiding me, for I knew well enough that although he had never travelled this road, his instinct for locality would not betray a coloured man, who can find his way across the pathless veld as surely as a buck or a bird of the air.

On we went over the rolling plain, and as we travelled I told him my story, briefly enough, for my mind was too torn with fears to allow me to talk much. He, too, told me more of his escape and adventures. Now I understood what was that news which had so excited Kambula and his soldiers. It was evident that the Zulu impis had destroyed a great number of the Boers whom they found unprepared for attack, and then had been driven off by reinforcements that arrived from other camps.

That was why I had been kept prisoner for all those days. Dingaan feared lest I should reach Natal in time to warn his victims!

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE COURT-MARTIAL

One hour, two hours, three hours, and then suddenly from the top of a rise the sight of the beautiful Mooi River winding through the plain like a vast snake of silver, and there, in a loop of it, the flat-crested koppie on which I had hoped to make my home. Had hoped!—why should I not still hope? For aught I knew everything might yet be well. Marie might have escaped the slaughter as I had done, and if so, after all our troubles perchance many years of life and happiness awaited us. Only it seemed too good to be true.

I flogged my horse, but the poor beast was tired out and could only break into short canters, that soon lapsed to a walk again. But whether it cantered or whether it walked, its hoofs seemed to beat out the words—“Too good to be true!” Sometimes they beat them fast, and sometimes they beat them slow, but always their message seemed the same.

Hans, too, was outworn and weak from starvation. Also he had a cut upon his foot which hampered him so much that at last he said I had better go on alone; he would follow more slowly. Then I dismounted and set him on the horse, walking by it myself.

Thus it came about that the gorgeous sunset was finished and the sky had grown grey with night before we reached the foot of the koppie. Yet the last rays of the sinking orb had shown me something as they died. There on the slope of the hill stood some mud and wattle houses, such as I had ordered to be built, and near to them several white-capped wagons. Only I did not see any smoke rising from those houses as there should have been at this hour of the day, when men cooked their evening food. The moon would be up presently, I knew, but meanwhile it was dark and the tired horse stumbled and floundered among the stones which lay about at the foot of the hill.

I could bear it no longer.

“Hans,” I said, “do you stay here with the horse. I will creep to the houses and see if any dwell there.”

“Be careful, baas,” he answered, “lest you should find Zulus, for those black devils are all about.”

I nodded, for I could not speak, and then began the ascent. For several hundred yards I crept from stone to stone, feeling my way, for the Kaffir path that led to the little plateau where the spring was, above which the shanties stood, ran at the other end of the hill. I struck the spruit or rivulet that was fed by this spring, being guided to it by the murmur of the water, and followed up its bank till I heard a sound which caused me to crouch and listen.

I could not be sure because of the ceaseless babble of the brook, but the sound seemed like that of sobs. While I waited the great moon appeared suddenly above a bank of inky cloud, flooding the place with light, and oh! by that light, looking more ethereal than woman I saw—I saw Marie!

She stood not five paces from me, by the side of the stream, whither she had come to draw water, for she held a vessel in her hand. She was clothed in some kind of a black garment, such as widows wear, but made of rough stuff, and above it her face showed white in the white rays of the moon. Gazing at her from the shadow, I could even see the tears running down her cheeks, for it was she who wept in this lonely place, wept for one who would return no more.

My voice choked in my throat; I could not utter a single word. Rising from behind a rock I moved towards her. She saw me and started, then said in a thrilling whisper:

“Oh! husband, has God sent you to call me? I am ready, husband, I am ready!” and she stretched out her arms wildly, letting fall the vessel, that clanked upon the ground.

“Marie!” I gasped at length; and at that word the blood rushed to her face and brow, and I saw her draw in her breath as though to scream.

“Hush!” I whispered. “It is I, Allan, who have escaped alive.”

The next thing I remember was that she lay in my arms.

“What has happened here?” I asked when I had told my tale, or some of it.

“Nothing, Allan,” she answered. “I received your letter at the camp, and we trekked away as you bade us, without telling the others why, because you remember the Commandant Retief wrote to us not to do so. So we were out of the great slaughter, for the Zulus did not know where we had gone, and never followed us here, although I have heard that they sought for me. My father and my cousin Hernan only arrived at the camp two days after the attack, and discovering or guessing our hiding-place—I know not which—rode on hither. They say they came to warn the Boers to be careful, for they did not trust Dingaan, but were too late. So they too were out of the slaughter, for, Allan, many, many have been killed—they say five or six hundred, most of them women and children. But thank God! many more escaped, since the men came in from the other camps farther off and from their shooting parties, and drove away the Zulus, killing them by scores.”

“Are your father and Pereira here now?” I asked.

"No, Allan. They learned of the massacre and that the Zulus were all gone yesterday morning. Also they got the bad news that Retief and everyone with him had been killed at Dingaan's town, it is said through the treachery of the English, who arranged with Dingaan that he should kill them."

"That is false," I said; "but go on."

"Then, Allan, they came and told me that I was a widow like many other women—I who had never been a wife. Allan, Hernan said that I should not grieve for you, as you deserved your fate, since you had been caught in your own snare, being one of those who had betrayed the Boers. The Vrouw Prinsloo answered to his face that he lied, and, Allan, I said that I would never speak to him again until we met before the Judgment Seat of God; nor will I do so."

"But I will speak to him," I muttered. "Well, where are they now?"

"They rode this morning back to the other Boers. I think they want to bring a party of them here to settle, if they like this place, as it is so easy to defend. They said they would return to-morrow, and that meanwhile we were quite safe, as they had sure tidings that all the Zulus were back over the Tugela, taking some of their wounded with them, and also the Boer cattle as an offering to Dingaan. But come to the house, Allan—our home that I had made ready for you as well as I could. Oh! my God! our home on the threshold of which I believed you would never set a foot. Yes, when the moon rose from that cloud I believed it, and look, they are still quite close together. Hark, what is that?"

I listened, and caught the sound of a horse's hoofs stumbling among the rocks.

"Don't be frightened," I answered; "it is only Hans with my horse. He escaped also; I will tell you how afterwards." And as I spoke he appeared, a woebegone and exhausted object.

"Good day, missie," he said with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Now you should give me a fine dinner, for you see I have brought the baas back safe to you. Did I not tell you, baas, that everything would come right?"

Then he grew silent from exhaustion. Nor were we sorry, who at that moment did not wish to listen to the poor fellow's talk.

Something over two hours had gone by since the moon broke out from the clouds. I had greeted the Vrouw Prinsloo and all my other friends, and been received by them with rapture as one risen from the dead. If they had loved me before, now a new gratitude was added to their love, since had it not been for my warning they also must have made acquaintance with the Zulu spears and perished. It was on their part of the camp that the worst of the attack fell. Indeed, from those wagons hardly anyone escaped.

I had told them all the story, to which they listened in dead silence. Only when it was finished the Heer Meyer, whose natural gloom had been deepened by all these events, said:

"Allemachte! but you have luck, Allan, to be left when everyone else is taken. Now, did I not know you so well, like Hernan Pereira I should think that you and that devil Dingaan had winked at each other."

The Vrouw Prinsloo turned on him furiously.

"How dare you say such words, Carl Meyer?" she exclaimed. "Must Allan always be insulted just because he is English, which he cannot help? For my part, I think that if anyone winked at Dingaan it was the stinkcat Pereira. Otherwise why did he come away before the killing and bring that madman, Henri Marais, with him?"

"I don't know, I am sure, aunt," said Meyer humbly, for like everyone else he was afraid of the Vrouw Prinsloo.

"Then why can't you hold your tongue instead of saying silly things which must give pain?" asked the vrouw. "No, don't answer, for you will only make matters worse; but take the rest of that meat to the poor Hottentot, Hans"—I should explain that we had been supping—"who, although he has eaten enough to burst any white stomach, I dare say can manage another pound or two."

Meyer obeyed meekly, and the others melted away also as they were wont to do when the vrouw showed signs of war, so that she and we two were left alone.

"Now," said the vrouw, "everyone is tired, and I say that it is time to go to rest. Good night, nephew Allan and niece Marie," and she waddled away leaving us together.

"Husband," said Marie presently, "will you come and see the home that I made ready for you before I thought that you were dead? It is a poor place, but I pray God that we may be happy there," and she took me by the hand and kissed me once and twice and thrice.

About noon on the following day, when my wife and I were laughing and arguing over some little domestic detail of our meagre establishment—so soon are great griefs forgotten in an overwhelming joy, of a sudden I saw her face change, and asked what was the matter.

"Hist!" she said, "I hear horses," and she pointed in a certain direction.

I looked, and there, round the corner of the hill, came a body of Boers with their after-riders, thirty-two or three of them in all, of whom twenty were white men.

"See," said Marie, "my father is among them, and my cousin Hernan rides at his side."

It was true. There was Henri Marais, and just behind him, talking into his ear, rode Hernan Pereira. I remember that the two of them reminded me of a tale I had read about a man who was cursed with an evil genius that drew him to some dreadful doom in spite of the promptings of his better nature. The thin, worn, wild-eyed Marais, and the rich-faced, carnal Pereira whispering slyly into his ear; they were exact types of that man in the story and his evil genius who dragged him down to hell. Prompted by some impulse, I threw my arms round Marie and embraced her, saying:

"At least we have been very happy for a while."

"What do you mean, Allan?" she asked doubtfully.

"Only that I think our good hours are done with for the present."

"Perhaps," she answered slowly; "but at least they have been very good hours, and if I should die to-day I am glad to have lived to win them."

Then the cavalcade of Boers came up.

Hernan Pereira, his senses sharpened perhaps by the instincts of hate and jealousy, was the first to recognise me.

"Why, Mynheer Allan Quatermain," he said, "how is it that you are here? How is it that you still live? Commandant," he added, turning to a dark, sad-faced man of about sixty whom at that time I did not know, "here is a strange thing. This Heer Quatermain, an Englishman, was with the Governor Retief at the town of the Zulu king, as the Heer Henri Marais can testify. Now, as we know for sure Pieter Retief and all his people are dead, murdered by Dingaan, how then does it happen that this man has escaped?"

"Why do you put riddles to me, Mynheer Pereira?" asked the dark Boer. "Doubtless the Englishman will explain."

"Certainly I will, mynheer," I said. "Is it your pleasure that I should speak now?"

The commandant hesitated. Then, having called Henri Marais apart and talked to him for a little while, he replied:

"No, not now, I think; the matter is too serious. After we have eaten we will listen to your story, Mynheer Quatermain, and meanwhile I command you not to leave this place."

"Do you mean that I am a prisoner, commandant?" I asked.

"If you put it so—yes, Mynheer Quatermain—a prisoner who has to explain how some sixty of our brothers, who were your companions, came to be butchered like beasts in Zululand, while you escaped. Now, no more words; by and by doubtless there will be plenty of them. Here you, Carolus and Johannes, keep watch upon this Englishman, of whom I hear strange stories, with your guns loaded, please, and when we send to you, lead him before us."

"As usual, your cousin Hernan brings evil gifts," I said to Marie bitterly. "Well, let us also eat our dinner, which perhaps the Heeren Carolus and Johannes will do us the honour to share—bringing their loaded guns with them."

Carolus and Johannes accepted the invitation, and from them we heard much news, all of it terrible enough to learn, especially the details of the massacre in that district, which, because of this fearful event is now and always will be known as Weenen, or The Place of Weeping. Suffice it to say that they were quite enough to take away all our appetite, although Carolus and Johannes, who by this time had recovered somewhat from the shock of that night of blood and terror, ate in a fashion which might have filled Hans himself with envy.

Shortly after we had finished our meal, Hans, who, by the way, seemed to have quite recovered from his fatigues, came to remove the dishes. He informed us that all the Boers were having a great "talk," and that they were about to send for me. Sure enough, a few minutes later two armed men arrived and ordered me to follow them. I turned to say some words of farewell to Marie, but she said:

"I go where you do, husband," and, as no objection was made by the guard, she came.

About two hundred yards away, sitting under the shade of one of the wagons, we found the Boers. Six of them were seated in a semicircle upon stools or whatever they could find, the black-browed commandant being in the centre and having in front of him a rough table on which were writing materials.

To the left of these six were the Prinsloos and Meyers, being those folk whom I had rescued from Delagoa, and to the right the other Boers who had ridden into the camp that morning. I saw at a glance that a court-martial had been arranged and that the six elders were the judges, the commandant being the president of the court.

I do not give their names purposely, since I have no wish that the actual perpetrators of the terrible blunder that I am about to describe should be known to posterity. After all, they acted honestly according to their lights, and were but tools in the hand of that villain Hernan Pereira.

"Allan Quatermain," said the commandant, "you are brought here to be tried by a court-martial duly constituted according to the law published in the camps of the emigrant Boers. Do you acknowledge that law?"

"I know that there is such a law, commandant," I answered, "but I do not acknowledge the authority of your court-martial to try a man who is no Boer, but a subject of the Queen of Great Britain."

"We have considered that point, Allan Quatermain," said the commandant, "and we disallow it. You will remember that in the camp at Bushman's River, before you rode with the late Pieter Retief to the chief Sikonyela, when you were given command of the Zulus who went with him, you took an oath to interpret truly and to be faithful in all things to the General Retief, to his companions and to his cause. That oath we hold gives this court jurisdiction over you."

"I deny your jurisdiction," I answered, "although it is true that I took an oath to interpret faithfully, and I request that a note of my denial may be made in writing."

"It shall be done," said the commandant, and laboriously he made the note on the paper before him.

When he had finished he looked up and said: "The charge against you, Allan Quatermain, is that, being one of the commission who recently visited the Zulu king Dingaan, under command of the late Governor and General Pieter Retief, you did falsely and wickedly urge the said Dingaan to murder the said Pieter Retief and his companions, and especially Henri Marais, your father-in-law, and Hernando Pereira, his nephew, with both of whom you had a quarrel. Further, that afterwards you brought about the said murder, having first arranged with the king of the Zulus that you should be removed to a place of safety while it was done. Do you plead Guilty or Not guilty?"

Now when I heard this false and abominable charge my rage and indignation caused me to laugh aloud.

"Are you mad, commandant," I exclaimed, "that you should say such things? On what evidence is this wicked lie advanced against me?"

"No, Allan Quatermain, I am not mad," he replied, "although it is true that through your evil doings I, who have lost my wife and three children by the Zulu spears, have suffered enough to make me mad. As for the evidence against you, you shall hear it. But first I will write down that you plead Not guilty."

He did so, then said:

"If you will acknowledge certain things it will save us all much time, of which at present we have little to spare. Those things are that knowing what was going to happen to the commission, you tried to avoid accompanying it. Is that true?"

"No," I answered. "I knew nothing of what was going to happen to the commission, though I feared something, having but just saved my friends there"—and I pointed to the Prinsloos—"from death at the hands of Dingaan. I did not wish to accompany it for another reason: that I had been married on the day of its starting to Marie Marais. Still, I went after all because the General Retief, who was my friend, asked me to come, to interpret for him."

Now some of the Boers present said:

"That is true. We remember."

But the commandant continued, taking no heed of my answer or these interruptions.

"Do you acknowledge that you were on bad terms with Henri Marais and with Hernan Pereira?"

"Yes," I answered; "because Henri Marais did all in his power to prevent my marriage with his daughter Marie, behaving very ill to me who had saved his life and that of his people who remained to him up by Delagoa, and afterwards at Umgungundhlovu. Because, too, Hernan Pereira strove to rob me of Marie, who loved me. Moreover, although I had saved him when he lay sick to death, he afterwards tried to murder me by shooting me down in a lonely place. Here is the mark of it," and I touched the little scar upon the side of my forehead.

"That is true; he did so, the stinkcat," shouted the Vrouw Prinsloo, and was ordered to be silent.

"Do you acknowledge," went on the commandant, "that you sent to warn your wife and those with her to depart from the camp on the Bushman's River, because it was going to be attacked, charging them to keep the matter secret, and that afterwards both you and your Hottentot servant alone returned safely from Zululand, where all those who went with you lie dead?"

"I acknowledge," I answered, "that I wrote to tell my wife to come to this place where I had been building houses, as you see, and to bring with her any of our companions who cared to trek here, or, failing that, to go alone. This I did because Dingaan had told me, whether in jest or in earnest I did not know, that he had given orders that my said wife should be kidnapped, as he desired to make her one of his women, having thought her beautiful when he saw her. Also what I did was done with the knowledge and by the wish of the late Governor Retief, as can be shown by his writing on my letter. I acknowledge also that I escaped when all my brothers were killed, as did the Hottentot Hans, and if you wish to know I will tell you how we escaped and why."

The commandant made a further note, then he said:

"Let the witness Hernan Pereira be called and sworn."

This was done and he was ordered to tell his tale.

As may be imagined, it was a long tale, and one that had evidently been prepared with great care. I will only set down its blackest falsehoods. He assured the court that he had no enmity against me and had never attempted to kill me or do me any harm, although it was true that his heart felt sore because, against her father's will, I had stolen away the affection of his betrothed, who was now my wife. He said that he had stopped in Zululand because he knew that I should marry her as soon as she came of age, and it was too great pain for him to see this done. He said that while he was there, before the arrival of the commission, Dingaan and some of his captains had told him that I had again and again urged him, Dingaan, to kill the Boers because they were traitors to the sovereign of England, but that he, Dingaan, had refused to do so. He said that when Retief came up with the commission he tried to warn him against me, but that Retief would not listen, being infatuated with me as many others were, and he looked towards the Prinsloos.

Then came the worst of all. He said that while he was engaged in mending some guns for Dingaan in one of his private huts, he overheard a conversation between myself and Dingaan which took place outside the hut, I, of course, not knowing that he was within. The substance of this conversation was that I again urged Dingaan to kill the Boers and afterwards to send an impi to massacre their wives and families. Only I asked him to give me time to get away a girl whom I had married from among them, and with her a few of my own friends whom I wished should be spared, as I intended to become a kind of chief over them, and if he would grant it me, to hold all the land of Natal under his rule and the protection of the English. To these proposals Dingaan answered that "they seemed wise and good, and that he would think them over very carefully."

Pereira said further that coming out of the hut after Dingaan had gone away he reproached me bitterly for my wickedness, and announced that he would warn the Boers, which he did subsequently by word of mouth and in writing. That thereon I caused him to be detained by the Zulus while I went to Retief and told him some false story about him, Pereira, which caused Retief to drive him out of his camp and give orders that none of the Boers should so much as speak to him. That then he did the only thing he could. Going to his uncle, Henri Marais, he told him, not all the truth, but that he had learnt for certain that his daughter Marie was in dreadful danger of her life because of some intended attack of the Zulus, and that all the Boers among whom she dwelt were also in danger of their lives.

Therefore he suggested to Henri Marais that as the General Retief was besotted and would not listen to his story, the best thing they could do was to ride away and warn the Boers. This then they did secretly, without the knowledge of Retief, but being delayed upon their journey by one accident and another, which he set out in detail, they only reached the Bushman's River too late, after the massacre had taken place. Subsequently, as the commandant knew, hearing a rumour that Marie Marais and other Boers had trekked to this place before the slaughter, they came here and learned that they had done so upon a warning sent to them by Allan Quatermain, whereon they returned and communicated the news to the surviving Boers at Bushman's River.

That was all he had to say.

Then, as I reserved my cross-examination until I heard all the evidence against me, Henri Marais was sworn and corroborated his nephew's testimony on many points as to my relations to his daughter, his objection to my marriage to her because I was an Englishman whom he disliked and mistrusted, and so forth. He added further that it was true Pereira had told him he had sure information that Marie and the Boers were in danger from an attack upon them which had been arranged between Allan Quatermain and Dingaan; that he also had written to Retief and tried to speak to him but was refused a hearing. Thereon he had ridden away from Umgungundhlovu to try to save his daughter and warn the Boers. That was all he had to say.

As there were no further witnesses for the prosecution I cross-examined these two at full length, but absolutely without results, since every vital question that I asked was met with a direct negative.

Then I called my witnesses, Marie, whose evidence they refused to hear on the ground that she was my wife and prejudiced, the Vrouw Prinsloo and her family, and the Meyers. One and all told a true story of my relations with Hernan Pereira, Henri Marais, and Dingaan, so far as they knew them.

After this, as the commandant declined to take the evidence of Hans because he was a Hottentot and my servant, I addressed the court, relating exactly what had taken place between me and Dingaan, and how I and Hans came to escape on our second visit to his kraal. I pointed out also that unhappily for myself I could not prove my words, since Dingaan was not available as a witness, and all the others were dead. Further, I produced my letter to Marie, which was endorsed by Retief, and the letter to Retief signed by Marais and Pereira which remained in my possession.

By the time that I had finished my speech the sun was setting and everyone was tired out. I was ordered to withdraw under guard, while the court consulted, which it did for a long while. Then I was called forward again and the commandant said:

"Allan Quatermain, after prayer to God we have considered this case to the best of our judgment and ability. On the one hand we note that you are an Englishman, a member of a race which hates and has always oppressed our people, and that it was to your interest to get rid of two of them with whom you had quarrelled. The evidence of Henri Marais and Hernan Pereira, which we cannot disbelieve, shows that you were wicked enough, either in order to do this, or because of your malice against the Boer people, to plot their destruction with a savage. The result is that some seven hundred men, women, and children have lost their lives in a very cruel manner, whereas you, your servant, your wife and your friends have alone escaped unharmed. For such a crime as this a hundred deaths could not pay; indeed, God alone can give to it its just punishment, and to Him it is our duty to send you to be judged. We condemn you to be shot as a traitor and a murderer, and may He have mercy on your soul."

At these dreadful words Marie fell to the ground fainting and a pause ensued while she was carried off to the Prinsloos' house, whither the vrouw followed to attend her. Then the commandant went on:

"Still, although we have thus passed judgment on you; because you are an Englishman against whom it might be said that we had prejudices, and because you have had no opportunity of preparing a defence, and no witnesses to the facts, since all those whom you say you could have called are dead, we think it right that this unanimous sentence of ours should be confirmed by a general court of the emigrant Boers. Therefore to-morrow morning you will be taken with us to the Bushman's River camp, where the case will be settled, and, if necessary, execution done in accordance with the verdict of the generals and veld-cornets of that camp. Meanwhile you will be kept in custody in your own house. Now have you anything to say against this sentence?"

"Yes, this," I answered, "that although you do not know it, it is an unjust sentence, built up on the lies of one who has always been my enemy, and of a man whose brain is rotten. I never betrayed the Boers. If anyone betrayed them it was Hernan Pereira himself, who, as I proved to the General Retief, had been praying Dingaan to kill me, and whom Retief threatened to put upon his trial for this very crime, for which reason and no other Pereira fled from the kraal, taking his tool Henri Marais with him. You have asked God to judge me. Well, I ask God to judge him and Henri Marais also, and I know He will in one way or another. As for me, I am ready to die, as I have been for months while serving the cause of you Boers. Shoot me now if you will, and make an end. But I tell you that if I escape your hands I will not suffer this treatment to go unpunished. I will lay my case before the rulers of my people, and if necessary before my Queen, yes, if I have to travel to London to do it, and you Boers shall learn that you cannot condemn an innocent Englishman upon false testimony and not pay the price. I tell you that price shall be great if I live, and if I die it shall be greater still."

Now these words, very foolish words, I admit, which being young and inexperienced I spoke in my British pride, I could see made a great impression upon my judges. They believed, to be fair to them, that they had passed a just sentence. Blinded by prejudice and falsehood, and maddened by the dreadful losses their people had suffered during the past few days at the hands of a devilish savage, they believed that I was the instigator of those losses, one who ought to die. Indeed, all, or nearly all the Boers were persuaded that Dingaan was urged to this massacre by the counsels of Englishmen. The mere fact of my own and my servant's miraculous escape, when all my companions had perished, proved my guilt to them without the evidence of Pereira, which, being no lawyers, they thought sufficient to justify their verdict.

Still, they had an uneasy suspicion that this evidence was not conclusive, and might indeed be rejected *in toto* by a more competent court upon various grounds. Also they knew themselves to be rebels who had no legal right to form a court, and feared the power of the long arm of England, from which for a little while they had escaped. If I were allowed to tell my tale to the Parliament in London, what might not happen to them, they wondered—to them who had ventured to pass sentence of death upon a subject of the Queen of Great Britain? Might not this turn the scale against them? Might not Britain arise in wrath and crush them, these men who dared to invoke her forms of law in order to kill her citizen? Those, as I learned afterwards, were the thoughts that passed through their minds.

Also another thought passed through their minds—that if the sentence were executed at once, a dead man cannot appeal, and that here I had no friends to take up my cause and avenge me. But of all this they said nothing. Only at a sign I was marched away to my little house and imprisoned under guard.

Now I propose to tell the rest of the history of these tragic events as they happened, although some of them did not come to my knowledge till the morrow or afterwards, for I think this will be the more simple and the easier plan.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE INNOCENT BLOOD

After I had been taken away it seems that the court summoned Hernan Pereira and Henri Marais to accompany them to a lonely spot at a distance, where they thought that their deliberations would not be overheard. In this, however, they were mistaken, having forgotten the fox-like cunning of the Hottentot, Hans. Hans had heard me sentenced, and probably enough feared that he who also had committed the crime of escaping from Dingaan, might be called on to share that sentence. Also he wished to know the secret counsel of these Boers, whose language, of course, he understood as well as he did his own.

So making a circuit up the hillside, he crept towards them on his belly as a snake creeps, wriggling in and out between the tufts of last year's dead grass, which grew here in plenty, without so much as moving their tops. At length he lay still in the centre of a bush that grew behind a stone not five paces from where they were talking, whence he listened intently to every word that passed their lips.

This was the substance of their talk; that for the reasons I have already mentioned it would be best that I should die at once. Sentence, said the commandant, had been passed, and could not be rescinded, since even if it were, their offence would remain as heavy in the eyes of the English authorities. But if they took me to their main camp to be re-tried by their great council, possibly that sentence might be rescinded and they be left individually and collectively to atone for what they had done. Also they knew that I was very clever and might escape in some other way to bring the English, or possibly the Zulus, upon them, since they felt convinced that Dingaan and I were working together for their destruction, and that while I had breath in my body I should never cease my efforts to be avenged.

When it was found that they were all of one mind in this matter, the question arose: What should be done? Somebody suggested that I should be shot at once, but the commandant pointed out that such a deed, worked at night, would look like murder, especially as it violated the terms of their verdict.

Then another suggestion was made: that I should be brought out of my house just before the dawn on pretence that it was time to ride; that then I should be given the opportunity of escape and instantly shot down. Or it might be pretended that I had tried to escape, with a like result. Who, they urged, was to know in that half-light whether I had or had not actually attempted to run for my life, or to threaten their lives, circumstances under which the law said it was justifiable to shoot a prisoner already formally condemned to death?

To this black counsel they all agreed, being so terribly afraid of a poor English lad whose existence, although most of them did not know this, was to be taken from him upon false evidence. But then arose another question: By whose hand should the thing be done? Not one of them, it would seem, was anxious to fulfil this bloody office; indeed, they one and all refused to do so. A proposal was put forward that some of their native servants should be forced to serve as executioners; but when this had been vetoed by the general sense of the court, their counsels came to a deadlock.

Then, after a whispered conference, the commandant spoke some dreadful words.

"Hernando Pereira and Henri Marais," he said, "it is on your evidence that this young man has been condemned. We believe that evidence, but if by one jot or one tittle it is false, then not justice, but a foul murder will have been committed and his innocent blood will be upon your heads for ever. Hernando Pereira and Henri Marais, the court appoints you to be the guards who will bring the prisoner out of his house to-morrow morning just when the sky begins to lighten. It is from *you* that he will try to escape, and *you* will prevent his escape by his death. Then you must join us where we shall be waiting for you and report the execution."

When Henri Marais heard this he exclaimed:

"I swear by God that I cannot do it. Is it right or natural that a man should be forced to kill his own son-in-law?"

"You could bear evidence against your own son-in-law, Henri Marais," answered the stern-faced commandant. "Why then cannot you kill with your rifle one whom you have already helped to kill with your tongue?"

"I will not, I cannot!" said Marais, tearing at his beard. But the commandant only answered coldly:

"You have the orders of the court, and if you choose to disobey them we shall begin to believe that you have sworn falsely. Then you and your nephew will also appear before the great council when the Englishman is tried again. Still, it matters nothing to us whether you or Hernando Pereira shall fire the shot. See you to it, as the Jews said to Judas who had betrayed the innocent Lord."

Then he paused and went on, addressing Pereira:

"Do you also refuse, Hernando Pereira? Remember before you answer that if you do refuse we shall draw our own conclusions. Remember, too, that the evidence which you have given, showing that this wicked Englishman plotted and caused the deaths of our brothers and of our wives and children, which we believe to be true evidence, shall be weighed and investigated word by word before the great council."

"To give evidence is one thing, and to shoot the traitor and murderer another," said Pereira. Then he added with an oath, or so vowed Hans: "Yet why should I, who know all this villain's guilt, refuse to carry out the sentence of the law on him? Have no fear, commandant, the accursed Allan Quatermain shall not succeed in his attempt to escape to-morrow before the dawn."

"So be it," said the commandant. "Now, do all you who have heard those words take note of them."

Then Hans, seeing that the council was about to break up, and fearing lest he should be caught and killed, slipped away by the same road that he had come. His thought was to warn me, but this he could not do because of the guards. So he went to the Prinsloos, and finding the vrouw alone with Marie, who had recovered her mind, told them everything that he had heard.

As he said, Marie knelt down and prayed, or thought for a long while, then rose and spoke.

"Tante," she said to the vrouw, "one thing is clear, that Allan will be murdered at the dawn; now if he is hidden away he may escape."

"But where and how can we hide him," asked the vrouw, "seeing that the place is guarded?"

"Tante," said Marie again, "at the back of your house is an old cattle kraal made by Kaffirs, and in that cattle kraal, as I have seen, there are mealie-pits where those Kaffirs stored their grain. Now I suggest that we should put my husband into one of those mealie-pits and cover it over. There the Boers might not find him, however close they searched."

"That is a good idea," said the vrouw; "but how in the name of God are we to get Allan out of a guarded house into a mealie-pit?"

"Tante, I have a right to go to my husband's house, and there I will go. Afterwards, too, I shall have the right to leave his house before he is taken away. Well, he might leave it in my place, *as me*, and you and Hans might help him. Then in the morning the Boers would come to search the house and find no one except me."

"That is all very pretty," answered the vrouw; "but do you think, my niece, that those accursed vultures will go away until they have picked Allan's bones? Not they, for too much hangs on it. They will know that he cannot be far off, and slink about the place until they have found him in his mealie-hole or until he comes out. It is blood they are after, thanks to your cousin Hernan, the liar, and blood they will have for their own safety's sake. Never will they go away from here until they see Allan lying dead upon the ground."

Now, according to Hans, Marie thought again very deeply. Then she answered:

"There is a great risk, tante; but we must take it. Send your husband to chat with those guards, and give him a bottle of spirits. I will talk with Hans here and see what can be arranged."

So Marie went aside with Hans, as he told me afterwards, and asked him if he knew of any medicine that made people sleep for a long while without waking. He answered, Yes; all the coloured people had plenty of such medicine. Without doubt he could get some from the Kaffirs who dwelt upon the place, or if not he could dig the roots of a plant that he had seen growing near by which would serve the purpose. So she sent him to procure this stuff. Afterwards she spoke to the Vrouw Prinsloo, saying:

"My plan is that Allan should escape from our house disguised as myself. But as I know well that he will not run away while he has his senses, seeing that to do so in his mind would be to confess his guilt, I propose to take his senses from him by means of a drugged drink. Then I propose that you and Hans should carry him into the shadow of this house, and when no one is looking, to the old grain-pit that lies but a few yards away, covering the mouth of it with dead grass. There he will remain till the Boers grow tired of searching for him and ride away. Or if it should chance that they find him, he will be no worse off than he was before."

"A good plan enough, Marie, though not one that Allan would have anything to do with if he kept his wits," answered the vrouw, "seeing that he was always a man for facing things out, although so young in years. Still, we will try to save him in spite of himself from the claws of that stinkcat Pereira, whom may God curse, and his tool, your father. As you say, at the worst no harm will be done even if they find him, as probably they will, seeing that they will not leave this place without blood."

Such then was the trick which Marie arranged with the Vrouw Prinsloo. Or rather, I should say, seemed to arrange, since she told her nothing of her real mind, she who knew that the vrouw was right and that for their own sakes, as well as because they believed it to be justice, the Boers would never leave that place until they saw blood running on the grass.

This, oh! this was Marie's true and dreadful plan—to *give her life for mine*! She was sure that once he had slain his victim, Hernan Pereira would not stop to make examination of the corpse. He would ride away, hounded by his guilty conscience, and meanwhile I could escape.

She never thought the thing out in all its details, she who was maddened with terror and had no time. She only felt her way from step to step, dimly seeing my deliverance at the end of the journey. Marie told the Vrouw Prinsloo nothing, except that she proposed to drug me if I would not go undrugged. Then the vrouw must hide me as best she could, in the grain-pit or elsewhere, or, if I had my senses about me, let me hide myself. Afterwards she, Marie, would face the Boers and tell them to find me if they wanted me.

The vrouw answered that she had now thought of a better plan. It was that she should arrange with her husband and son and the Meyers, all of whom loved me, that they should rescue me, or if need be, kill or disable Pereira before he could shoot me.

Marie replied that this was good if it could be done, and the vrouw went out to find her husband and the other men. Presently, however, she returned with a long face, saying that the commandant had them all under guard. It seemed that it had occurred to him, or more probably to Pereira, that the Prinsloos and the Meyers, who looked on me as a brother, might attempt some rescue, or make themselves formidable in other ways. Therefore, as a matter of precaution, they had been put under arrest and their arms taken from them as mine had been. What the commandant said, however, was that he took these somewhat high-handed measures in order to be sure that they, the Prinsloos and the Meyers, should be ready on the following morning to ride with him and the prisoner to the main camp, where the great council might wish to interrogate them.

One concession, however, the vrouw had won from the commandant, who, knowing what was about to happen to me, had not, I suppose, the heart to refuse. It was that my wife and she might visit me and give me food on the stipulation that they both left the house where I was confined by ten o'clock that night.

So it came to this, that if anything was to be done, these two women and a Hottentot must do it, since they could hope for no help in their plans. Here I should add that the vrouw told Marie in Hans's presence that she had thought of attacking the commandant as to this matter of my proposed shooting by Pereira. On reflection, however, she refrained for two reasons, first because she feared lest she

might only make matters worse and rob me of my sole helpers, and secondly for fear lest she should bring about the death of Hans, to whom the story would certainly be traced.

As he was the solitary witness to the plot, it seemed to her that he would scarcely be allowed to escape to repeat it far and wide. Especially was this so, as the unexplained death of a Hottentot, suspected of treachery like his master, was not a matter that would have been thought worth notice in those rough and bloody times. She may have been right, or she may have been wrong, but in weighing her decision it must always be borne in mind that she was, and until the end remained, in utter ignorance of Marie's heroic design to go to her death in place of me.

So the two women and the Hottentot proceeded to mature the plans which I have outlined. One other alternative, however, Hans did suggest. It was that they should try to drug the guards with some of the medicated drink that was meant for me, and that then Marie, I and he should slip away and get down to the river, there to hide in the weeds. Thence, perhaps, we might escape to Port Natal where lived Englishmen who would protect us.

Of course this idea was hopeless from the first. The moonlight was almost as bright as day, and the veld quite open for a long way round, so that we should certainly have been seen and re-captured, which of course would have meant instant death. Further, as it happened, the guards had been warned against touching liquor of any sort since it was thought probable that an attempt would be made to intoxicate them. Still the women determined to try this scheme if they could find a chance. At least it was a second string to their bow.

Meanwhile they made their preparations. Hans went away for a little and returned with a supply of his sleep-producing drug, though whether he got this from the Kaffirs or gathered it himself, I do not remember, if I ever heard. At any rate it was boiled up in the water with which they made the coffee that I was to drink, though not in that which Marie proposed to drink with me, the strong taste and black hue of the coffee effectually hiding any flavour or colour that there might be in the herb. Also the vrouw cooked some food which she gave to Hans to carry. First, however, he went to investigate the old mealie-pit which was within a few paces of the back door of the Prinsloos' house. He reported that it would do well to hide a man in, especially as tall grass and bushes grew about its mouth.

Then the three of them started, and arriving at the door of my house, which was about a hundred yards away, were of course challenged by the sentries.

"Heeren," said Marie, "the commandant has given us leave to bring food to my husband, whom you guard within. Pray do not prevent us from entering."

"No," answered one of them gently enough, for he was touched with pity at her plight. "We have our orders to admit you, the Vrouw Prinsloo and the native servant, though why three of you should be needed to carry food to one man, I don't know. I should have thought that at such a time he would have preferred to be alone with his wife."

"The Vrouw Prinsloo wishes to ask my husband certain questions about his property here and what is to be done while he and her men are away at the main camp for the second trial, as I, whose heart is full of sorrow, have no head for such things. Also the Hottentot must have orders as to where he is to get a horse to ride with him, so pray let us pass, mynheer."

"Very good; it is no affair of ours, Vrouw Quatermain— Stay, I suppose that you have no arms under that long cloak of yours."

"Search me, if you will, mynheer," she answered, opening the cloak, whereon, after a quick glance, he nodded and bade them enter, saying:

"Mind, you are to come out by ten o'clock. You must not pass the night in that house, or we shall have the little Englishman oversleeping himself in the morning."

Then they entered and found me seated at a table preparing notes for my defence and setting down the heads of the facts of my relations with Pereira, Dingaans, and the late Commandant Retief.

Here I may state that my condition at the time was not one of fear, but rather of burning indignation. Indeed, I had not the slightest doubt but that when my case was re-tried before the great council, I should be able to establish my complete innocence of the abominable charges that had been brought against me. Therefore it came about that when Marie suggested that I should try to escape, I begged her almost roughly not to mention such a thing again.

"Run away!" I said. "Why, that would be to confess myself guilty, for only the guilty run away. What I want is to have all this business thrashed out and that devil Pereira exposed."

"But, Allan," said Marie, "how if you should never live to have it thrashed out? How if you should be shot first?" Then she rose, and having looked to see that the shutter-board was fast in the little window-place and the curtain that she had made of sacking drawn over it, returned and whispered: "Hans here has heard a horrible tale, Allan. Tell it to the baas, Hans."

So while Vrouw Prinsloo, in order to deceive any prying eyes if such by chance could see us, busied herself with lighting a fire on the hearth in the second room on which to warm the food, Hans told his story much as it has already been set out.

I listened to it with growing incredulity. The thing seemed to me impossible. Either Hans was deceived or lying, the latter probably, for well I knew the Hottentot powers of imagination. Or perhaps he was drunk; indeed, he smelt of liquor, of which I was aware he could carry a great quantity without outward signs of intoxication.

"I cannot believe it," I said when he had finished. "Even if Pereira is such a fiend, as is possible, would Henri Marais, your father—who, at any rate, has always been a good and God-fearing man—consent to work such a crime upon his daughter's husband, though he does dislike him?"

"My father is not what he was, Allan," said Marie. "Sometimes I think that his brain has gone."

"He did not speak like a man whose brain has gone this afternoon," I replied. "But let us suppose that this tale is true, what is it that you wish me to do?"

"Allan, I wish you to dress up in my clothes and get away to a hiding-place which Hans and the vrouw know, leaving me here instead of you."

"Why, Marie?" I said. "Then you might get yourself shot in my place, always supposing that they mean to shoot me. Also I should certainly be caught and killed, as they would have a right to kill me for trying to escape in disguise. That is a mad plan, and I have a better. Vrouw Prinsloo, go straight to the commandant and tell him all this story. Or, if he will not listen to you, scream it out at the top of your voice so that everyone may hear, and then come back and tell us the result. Of one thing I am sure, that if you do this, even if there was any thought of my being shot tomorrow morning, it will be abandoned. You can refuse to say who told you the tale."

"Yes, please do that," muttered Hans, "else I know one who will be shot."

"Good, I will go," said the vrouw, and she went, the guards letting her pass after a few words which we could not hear.

Half an hour later she returned and called to us to open the door.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "I have failed, nephew. Except those sentries outside the door, the commandant and all the Boers have ridden off, I know not where, taking our people with them."

"That's odd," I answered, "but I suppose they thought they had not enough grass for their horses, or Heaven knows what they thought. Stay now, I will do something," and, opening the door, I called to the guards, honest fellows in their way, whom I had known in past times.

"Listen, friends," I said. "A tale has been brought to me that I am not to be taken to the big camp to have my case inquired of by the council, but am to be shot down in cold blood when I come out of this house to-morrow morning. Is that true?"

"Allemachte, Englishman!" answered one of them. "Do you take us for murderers? Our orders are to lead you to the commandant wherever he may appoint, so have no fear that we shall shoot you like a Kaffir. Either you or they who told you such a story are mad."

"So I thought, friends," I answered. "But where is the commandant and where are the others? The Vrouw Prinsloo here has been to see them, and reports that they are all gone."

"That is very likely," said the Boer. "There is a rumour that some of your Zulu brothers have come across the Tugela again to hunt us, which, if you want to know the truth, is why we visited this place. Well, the commandant has taken his men for a ride to see if he can meet them by this bright moonlight. Pity he could not take you, too, since you would have known so well where to find them, if they are there at all. Now please talk no more nonsense to us, which it makes us sick to hear, and don't think that you can slip away because we are only two, for you know our *roers* are loaded with slugs, and we have orders to use them."

"There," I said when I had shut the door, "now you have heard for yourselves. As I thought, there is nothing in this fine story, so I hope you are convinced."

Neither the vrouw nor Marie made any answer, and Hans also held his tongue. Yet, as I remembered afterwards, I saw a strange glance pass between the two women, who were not at all convinced, and, although I never dreamed of such a thing, had now determined to carry out their own desperate plan. But of this I repeat the vrouw and Hans only knew one half; the rest was locked in Marie's loving heart.

"Perhaps you are right, Allan," said the vrouw in the tone of one who gives way to an unreasonable child. "I hope so, and, at any rate, you can refuse to come out of the house to-morrow morning until you are quite sure. And now let us eat some supper, for we shall not make matters better by going hungry. Hans, bring the food."

So we ate, or made pretence to eat, and I, being thirsty, drank two cups of the black coffee dashed with spirit to serve as milk. After this I grew strangely sleepy. The last thing I remember was Marie looking at me with her beautiful eyes, that were full—ah! so full of tender love, and kissing me again and again upon the lips.

I dreamed all sorts of dreams, rather pleasant dreams on the whole. Then I woke up by degrees to find myself in an earthen pit shaped like a bottle and having the remains of polished sides to it. It made me think of Joseph who was let down by his brethren into a well in the desert. Now, who on earth could have let me down into a well, especially as I had no brethren? Perhaps I was not really in a well. Perhaps this was a nightmare. Or I might be dead. I began to remember that there were certain good reasons why I should be dead. Only, only—why should they have buried me in woman's clothes as I seemed to wear?

And what was that noise that had awakened me?

It could not be the trump of doom, unless the trumping of doom went off like a double-barrelled gun.

I began to try to climb out of my hole, but as it was nine feet deep and bottle-shaped, which the light flowing in from the neck showed, I found this impossible. Just as I was giving up the attempt, a yellow face appeared in that neck, which looked to me like the face of Hans, and an arm was projected downwards.

"Jump, if you are awake, baas," said a voice—surely it was the voice of Hans—"and I will pull you out."

So I jumped, and caught the arm above the wrist. Then the owner of the arm pulled desperately, and the end of it was that I succeeded in gripping the edge of the bottle-like hole, and, with the help of the arm, in dragging myself out.

"Now, baas," said Hans, for it *was* Hans, "run, run before the Boers catch you."

"What Boers?" I asked, sleepily; "and how can I run with these things flapping about my legs?"

Then I looked about me, and, although the dawn was only just breaking, began to recognise my surroundings. Surely this was the Prinsloos' house to my right, and that, faintly seen through the mist about a hundred paces away, was Marie's and my own. There seemed to be something going on yonder which excited my awakening curiosity. I could see figures moving in an unusual manner, and desired to know what they were doing. I began to walk towards them, and Hans, for his part, began to try to drag me in an

opposite direction, uttering all sorts of gibberish as to the necessity of my running away. But I would not be dragged; indeed, I struck at him, until at last, with an exclamation of despair, he let go of me and vanished.

So I went on alone. I came to my house, or what I thought resembled it, and there saw a figure lying on its face on the ground some ten or fifteen yards to the right of the doorway, and noted abstractedly that it was dressed in my clothes. The Vrouw Prinsloo, in her absurd night garments, was waddling towards the figure, and a little way off stood Hernan Pereira, apparently in the act of reloading a double-barrelled gun. Beyond, staring at him, stood the lantern-faced Henri Marais, pulling at his long beard with one hand and holding a rifle in the other. Behind were two saddled horses in the charge of a raw Kaffir, who looked on stupidly.

The Vrouw Prinsloo reached the body that lay upon the ground dressed in what resembled my clothes, and bending down her stout shape with an effort, turned it over. She glared into its face and then began to shriek.

"Come here, Henri Marais," she shrieked, "come, see what your beloved nephew has done! You had a daughter who was all your life to you, Henri Marais. Well, come, look at her after your beloved nephew has finished his work with her!"

Henri Marais advanced slowly like one who does not understand. He stood over the body on the ground, and looked down upon it through the morning mists.

Then suddenly he went mad. His broad hat fell from his head, and his long hair seemed to stand up. Also his beard grew big and bristled like the feathers of a bird in frosty weather. He turned on Hernan Pereira. "You devil!" he shouted, and his voice sounded like the roar of a wild beast; "you devil, you have murdered my daughter! Because you could not get Marie for yourself, you have murdered her. Well, I will pay you back!"

Without more ado he lifted his gun and fired straight at Hernan Pereira, who sank slowly to the ground and lay there groaning.

Just then I grew aware that horsemen were advancing upon us, a great number of horsemen, though whence they came at that time I did not know. One of these I recognised even in my half-drunken state, for he had impressed himself very vividly upon my mind. He was the dark-browed commandant who had tried and condemned me to death. He dismounted, and, staring at the two figures that lay upon the ground, said in a loud and terrible voice:

"What is this? Who are these men, and why are they shot? Explain, Henri Marais."

"Men!" wailed Henri Marais, "they are not men. One is a woman—my only child; and the other is a devil, who, being a devil, will not die. See! he will not die. Give me another gun that I may make him die."

The commandant looked about him wildly, and his eye fell upon the Vrouw Prinsloo.

"What has chanced, vrouw?" he asked.

"Only this," she replied in a voice of unnatural calm. "Your murderers whom you set on in the name of law and justice have made a mistake. You told them to murder Allan Quatermain for reasons of your own. Well, they have murdered his wife instead."

Now the commandant struck his hand upon his forehead and groaned, and I, half awakened at last, ran forward, shaking my fists and gibbering.

"Who is that?" asked the commandant. "Is it a man or a woman?"

"It is a man in woman's clothing; it is Allan Quatermain," answered the vrouw, "whom we drugged and tried to hide from your butchers."

"God above us!" exclaimed the commandant, "is this earth or hell?"

Then the wounded Pereira raised himself upon one hand.

"I am dying," he cried; "my life is bleeding away, but before I die I must speak. All that story I told against the Englishman is false. He never plotted with Dingaan against the Boers. It was I who plotted with Dingaan. Although I hated him because he found me out, I did not wish Retief and our people to be killed. But I did wish Allan Quatermain to be killed, because he had won her whom I loved, though, as it happened, all the others were slain, and he alone escaped. Then I came here and learned that Marie was his wife—yes, his wife indeed—and grew mad with hate and jealousy. So I bore false witness against him, and, you fools, you believed me and ordered me to shoot him who is innocent before God and man. Then things went wrong. The woman tricked me again—for the last time. She dressed herself as the man, and in the dawnlight I was deceived. I killed her, her whom I love alone, and now her father, who loved her also, has killed me."

By this time I understood all, for my drugged brain had awakened at last. I ran to the brute upon the ground; grotesque in my woman's garments all awry, I leaped on him and stamped out the last of his life. Then, standing over his dead body, I shook my fists and cried:

"Men, see what you have done. May God pay you back all you owe her and me!"

They dismounted, they came round me, they protested, they even wept. And I, I raved at them upon the one side, while the mad Henri Marais raved upon the other; and the Vrouw Prinsloo, waving her big arms, called down the curse of God and the blood of the innocent upon their heads and those of their children for ever.

Then I remember no more.

When I came to myself two weeks afterwards, for I had been very ill and in delirium, I was lying in the house of the Vrouw Prinsloo alone. The Boers had all gone, east and west and north and south, and the dead were long buried. They had taken Henri Marais with them, so I was told, dragging him away in a bullock cart, to which he was tied, for he was raving mad. Afterwards he became quieter, and, indeed, lived for years, walking about and asking all whom he met if they could lead him to Marie. But enough of him—poor man, poor man!

The tale which got about was that Pereira had murdered Marie out of jealousy, and been shot by her father. But there were so many tragic histories in those days of war and massacre that this particular one was soon quite forgotten, especially as those

concerned in it for one reason and another did not talk overmuch of its details. Nor did I talk of it, since no vengeance could mend my broken heart.

They brought me a letter that had been found on Marie's breast, stained with her blood.

Here it is:

"MY HUSBAND,

"Thrice have you saved my life, and now it is my turn to save yours, for there is no other path. It may be that they will kill you afterwards, but if so, I shall be glad to have died first in order that I may be ready to greet you in the land beyond.

"I drugged you, Allan, then I cut off my hair and dressed myself in your clothes. The Vrouw Prinsloo, Hans and I set my garments upon you. They led you out as though you were fainting, and the guards, seeing me, whom they thought was you, standing in the doorway, let them pass without question.

"What may happen I do not know, for I write this after you are gone. I hope, however, that you will escape and lead some full and happy life, though I fear that its best moments will always be shadowed by memories of me. For I know you love me, Allan, and will always love me, as I shall always love you.

"The light is burning out—like mine—so farewell, farewell, farewell! All earthly stories come to an end at last, but at that end we shall meet again. Till then, adieu. Would that I could have done more for you, since to die for one who is loved with body, heart and soul is but a little thing. Still I have been your wife, Allan, and your wife I shall remain when the world is old. Heaven does not grow old, Allan, and there I shall greet you.

"The light is dead, but—oh!—in my heart another light arises!

"Your MARIE."

This was her letter.

I do not think there is anything more to be said.

Such is the history of my first love. Those who read it, if any ever do, will understand why I have never spoken of her before, and do not wish it to be known until I, too, am dead and have gone to join the great soul of Marie Marais.

ALLAN QUATERMAIN.

# BOOK VII

## THE WIFE

### I

## EARLY DAYS

It may be remembered that in the last pages of his diary, written just before his death, Allan Quatermain makes allusion to his long dead wife, stating that he has written of her fully elsewhere.

When his death was known, his papers were handed to myself as his literary executor. Among them I found two manuscripts, of which the following is one. The other is simply a record of events wherein Mr. Quatermain was not personally concerned—a Zulu novel, the story of which was told to him by the hero many years after the tragedy had occurred. But with this we have nothing to do at present.

I have often thought (Mr. Quatermain's manuscript begins) that I would set down on paper the events connected with my marriage, and the loss of my most dear wife. Many years have now passed since that event, and to some extent time has softened the old grief, though Heaven knows it is still keen enough. On two or three occasions I have even begun the record. Once I gave it up because the writing of it depressed me beyond bearing, once because I was suddenly called away upon a journey, and the third time because a Kaffir boy found my manuscript convenient for lighting the kitchen fire.

But now that I am at leisure here in England, I will make a fourth attempt. If I succeed, the story may serve to interest some one in after years when I am dead and gone; before that I should not wish it to be published. It is a wild tale enough, and suggests some curious reflections.

I am the son of a missionary. My father was originally curate in charge of a small parish in Oxfordshire. He had already been some ten years married to my dear mother when he went there, and he had four children, of whom I was the youngest. I remember faintly the place where we lived. It was an ancient long grey house, facing the road. There was a very large tree of some sort in the garden. It was hollow, and we children used to play about inside of it, and knock knots of wood from the rough bark. We all slept in a kind of attic, and my mother always came and kissed us when we were in bed. I used to wake up and see her bending over me, a candle in her hand. There was a curious kind of pole projecting from the wall over my bed. Once I was dreadfully frightened because my eldest brother made me hang to it by my hands. That is all I remember about our old home. It has been pulled down long ago, or I would journey there to see it.

A little further down the road was a large house with big iron gates to it, and on the top of the gate pillars sat two stone lions, which were so hideous that I was afraid of them. Perhaps this sentiment was prophetic. One could see the house by peeping through the bars of the gates. It was a gloomy-looking place, with a tall yew hedge round it; but in the summer-time some flowers grew about the sundial in the grass plat. This house was called the Hall, and Squire Carson lived there. One Christmas—it must have been the Christmas before my father emigrated, or I should not remember it—we children went to a Christmas-tree festivity at the Hall. There was a great party there, and footmen wearing red waistcoats stood at the door. In the dining-room, which was panelled with black oak, was the Christmas-tree. Squire Carson stood in front of it. He was a tall, dark man, very quiet in his manners, and he wore a bunch of seals on his waistcoat. We used to think him old, but as a matter of fact he was then not more than forty. He had been, as I afterwards learned, a great traveller in his youth, and some six or seven years before this date he married a lady who was half a Spaniard—a papist, my father called her. I can remember her well. She was small and very pretty, with a rounded figure, large black eyes, and glittering teeth. She spoke English with a curious accent. I suppose that I must have been a funny child to look at, and I know that my hair stood up on my head then as it does now, for I still have a sketch of myself that my mother made of me, in which this peculiarity is strongly marked. On this occasion of the Christmas-tree I remember that Mrs. Carson turned to a tall, foreign-looking gentleman who stood beside her, and, tapping him affectionately on the shoulder with her gold eye-glasses, said—

“Look, cousin—look at that droll little boy with the big brown eyes; his hair is like a—what you call him?—scrubbing-brush. Oh, what a droll little boy!”

The tall gentleman pulled at his moustache, and, taking Mrs. Carson's hand in his, began to smooth my hair down with it till I heard her whisper—

“Leave go my hand, cousin. Thomas is looking like—like the thunderstorm.”

Thomas was the name of Mr. Carson, her husband.

After that I hid myself as well as I could behind a chair, for I was shy, and watched little Stella Carson, who was the squire's only child, giving the children presents off the tree. She was dressed as Father Christmas, with some soft white stuff round her lovely little face, and she had large dark eyes, which I thought more beautiful than anything I had ever seen. At last it came to my turn to receive a present—oddly enough, considered in the light of future events, it was a large monkey. Stella reached it down from one of the lower boughs of the tree and handed it to me, saying—

“Dat is my Christmas present to you, little Allan Quatermain.”

As she did so her sleeve, which was covered with cotton wool, spangled over with something that shone, touched one of the tapers and caught fire—how I do not know—and the flame ran up her arm towards her throat. She stood quite still. I suppose that she was paralysed with fear; and the ladies who were near screamed very loud, but did nothing. Then some impulse seized me—perhaps

instinct would be a better word to use, considering my age. I threw myself upon the child, and, beating at the fire with my hands, mercifully succeeded in extinguishing it before it really got hold. My wrists were so badly scorched that they had to be wrapped up in wool for a long time afterwards, but with the exception of a single burn upon her throat, little Stella Carson was not much hurt.

This is all that I remember about the Christmas-tree at the Hall. What happened afterwards is lost to me, but to this day in my sleep I sometimes see little Stella's sweet face and the stare of terror in her dark eyes as the fire ran up her arm. This, however, is not wonderful, for I had, humanly speaking, saved the life of her who was destined to be my wife.

The next event which I can recall clearly is that my mother and three brothers all fell ill of fever, owing, as I afterwards learned, to the poisoning of our well by some evil-minded person, who threw a dead sheep into it.

It must have been while they were ill that Squire Carson came one day to the vicarage. The weather was still cold, for there was a fire in the study, and I sat before the fire writing letters on a piece of paper with a pencil, while my father walked up and down the room talking to himself. Afterwards I knew that he was praying for the lives of his wife and children. Presently a servant came to the door and said that some one wanted to see him.

"It is the squire, sir," said the maid, "and he says he particularly wishes to see you."

"Very well," answered my father, wearily, and presently Squire Carson came in. His face was white and haggard, and his eyes shone so fiercely that I was afraid of him.

"Forgive me for intruding on you at such a time, Quatermain," he said, in a hoarse voice, "but to-morrow I leave this place for ever, and I wish to speak to you before I go—indeed, I must speak to you."

"Shall I send Allan away?" said my father, pointing to me.

"No; let him bide. He will not understand." Nor, indeed, did I at the time, but I remembered every word, and in after years their meaning grew on me.

"First tell me," he went on, "how are they?" and he pointed upwards with his thumb.

"My wife and two of the boys are beyond hope," my father answered, with a groan. "I do not know how it will go with the third. The Lord's will be done!"

"The Lord's will be done," the squire echoed, solemnly. "And now, Quatermain, listen—my wife's gone."

"Gone!" my father answered. "Who with?"

"With that foreign cousin of hers. It seems from a letter she left me that she always cared for him, not for me. She married me because she thought me a rich English milord. Now she has run through my property, or most of it, and gone. I don't know where. Luckily, she did not care to encumber her new career with the child; Stella is left to me."

"That is what comes of marrying a papist, Carson," said my father. That was his fault; he was as good and charitable a man as ever lived, but he was bigoted. "What are you going to do—follow her?"

He laughed bitterly in answer.

"Follow her!" he said; "why should I follow her? If I met her I might kill her or him, or both of them, because of the disgrace they have brought upon my child's name. No, I never want to look upon her face again. I trusted her, I tell you, and she has betrayed me. Let her go and find her fate. But I am going too. I am weary of my life."

"Surely, Carson, surely," said my father, "you do not mean——"

"No, no; not that. Death comes soon enough. But I will leave this civilized world which is a lie. We will go right away into the wilds, I and my child, and hide our shame. Where? I don't know where. Anywhere, so long as there are no white faces, no smooth educated tongues——"

"You are mad, Carson," my father answered. "How will you live? How can you educate Stella? Be a man and wear it down."

"I will be a man, and I will wear it down, but not here, Quatermain. Education! Was not she—that woman who was my wife—was not she highly educated?—the cleverest woman in the country forsooth. Too clever for me, Quatermain—too clever by half! No, no, Stella shall be brought up in a different school; if it be possible, she shall forget her very name. Good-bye, old friend, good-bye for ever. Do not try to find me out, henceforth I shall be like one dead to you, to you and all I knew," and he was gone.

"Mad," said my father, with a heavy sigh. "His trouble has turned his brain. But he will think better of it."

At that moment the nurse came hurrying in and whispered something in his ear. My father's face turned deadly pale. He clutched at the table to support himself, then staggered from the room. My mother was dying!

It was some days afterwards, I do not know exactly how long, that my father took me by the hand and led me upstairs into the big room which had been my mother's bedroom. There she lay, dead in her coffin, with flowers in her hand. Along the wall of the room were arranged three little white beds, and on each of the beds lay one of my brothers. They all looked as though they were asleep, and they all had flowers in their hands. My father told me to kiss them, because I should not see them any more, and I did so, though I was very frightened. I did not know why. Then he took me in his arms and kissed me.

"The Lord hath given," he said, "and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

I cried very much, and he took me downstairs, and after that I have only a confused memory of men dressed in black carrying heavy burdens towards the grey churchyard!

Next comes a vision of a great ship and wide tossing waters. My father could no longer bear to live in England after the loss that had fallen on him, and made up his mind to emigrate to South Africa. We must have been poor at the time—indeed, I believe that a large portion of our income went from my father on my mother's death. At any rate we travelled with the steerage passengers, and the intense discomfort of the journey with the rough ways of our fellow emigrants still remain upon my mind. At last it came to an end, and we reached Africa, which I was not to leave again for many, many years.

In those days civilization had not made any great progress in Southern Africa. My father went up the country and became a missionary among the Kaffirs, near to where the town of Cradock now stands, and here I grew to manhood. There were a few Boer farmers in the neighbourhood, and gradually a little settlement of whites gathered round our mission station—a drunken Scotch blacksmith and wheelwright was about the most interesting character, who, when he was sober, could quote the Scottish poet Burns and the Ingoldsby Legends, then recently published, literally by the page. It was from that I contracted a fondness for the latter amusing writings, which has never left me. Burns I never cared for so much, probably because of the Scottish dialect which repelled me. What little education I got was from my father, but I never had much leaning towards books, nor he much time to teach them to me. On the other hand, I was always a keen observer of the ways of men and nature. By the time that I was twenty I could speak Dutch and three or four Kaffir dialects perfectly, and I doubt if there was anybody in South Africa who understood native ways of thought and action more completely than I did. Also I was really a very good shot and horseman, and I think—as, indeed, my subsequent career proves to have been the case—a great deal tougher than the majority of men. Though I was then, as now, light and small, nothing seemed to tire me. I could bear any amount of exposure and privation, and I never met the native who was my master in feats of endurance. Of course, all that is different now, I am speaking of my early manhood.

It may be wondered that I did not run absolutely wild in such surroundings, but I was held back from this by my father's society. He was one of the gentlest and most refined men that I ever met; even the most savage Kaffir loved him, and his influence was a very good one for me. He used to call himself one of the world's failures. Would that there were more such failures. Every morning when his work was done he would take his prayer-book and, sitting on the little stoep or verandah of our station, would read the evening psalms to himself. Sometimes there was not light enough for this, but it made no difference, he knew them all by heart. When he had finished he would look out across the cultivated lands where the mission Kaffirs had their huts.

But I knew it was not these he saw, but rather the grey English church, and the graves ranged side by side before the yew near the wicket gate.

It was there on the stoep that he died. He had not been well, and one evening I was talking to him, and his mind went back to Oxfordshire and my mother. He spoke of her a good deal, saying that she had never been out of his mind for a single day during all these years, and that he rejoiced to think he was drawing near that land whither she had gone. Then he asked me if I remembered the night when Squire Carson came into the study at the vicarage, and told him that his wife had run away, and that he was going to change his name and bury himself in some remote land.

I answered that I remembered it perfectly.

"I wonder where he went to," said my father, "and if he and his daughter Stella are still alive. Well, well! I shall never meet them again. But life is a strange thing, Allan, and you may. If you ever do, give them my kind love."

After that I left him. We had been suffering more than usual from the depredations of the Kaffir thieves, who stole our sheep at night, and, as I had done before, and not without success, I determined to watch the kraal and see if I could catch them. Indeed, it was from this habit of mine of watching at night that I first got my native name of Macumazahn, which may be roughly translated as "he who sleeps with one eye open." So I took my rifle and rose to go. But he called me to him and kissed me on the forehead, saying, "God bless you, Allan! I hope that you will think of your old father sometimes, and that you will lead a good and happy life."

I remember that I did not much like his tone at the time, but set it down to an attack of low spirits, to which he grew very subject as the years went on. I went down to the kraal and watched till within an hour of sunrise; then, as no thieves appeared, returned to the station. As I came near I was astonished to see a figure sitting in my father's chair. At first I thought it must be a drunken Kaffir, then that my father had fallen asleep there.

And so he had,—for he was dead!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRE-FIGHT

When I had buried my father, and seen a successor installed in his place—for the station was the property of the Society—I set to work to carry out a plan which I had long cherished, but been unable to execute because it would have involved separation from my father. Put shortly, it was to undertake a trading journey of exploration right through the countries now known as the Free State and the Transvaal, and as much further North as I could go. It was an adventurous scheme, for though the emigrant Boers had begun to occupy positions in these territories, they were still to all practical purposes unexplored. But I was now alone in the world, and it mattered little what became of me; so, driven on by the overmastering love of adventure, which, old as I am, will perhaps still be the cause of my death, I determined to undertake the journey.

Accordingly I sold such stock and goods as we had upon the station, reserving only the two best waggons and two spans of oxen. The proceeds I invested in such goods as were then in fashion, for trading purposes, and in guns and ammunition. The guns would have moved any modern explorer to merriment; but such as they were I managed to do a good deal of execution with them. One of them was a single-barrelled, smooth bore, fitted for percussion caps—a roer we called it—which threw a three-ounce ball, and was charged with a handful of coarse black powder. Many is the elephant that I killed with that roer, although it generally knocked me backwards when I fired it, which I only did under compulsion. The best of the lot, perhaps, was a double-barrelled No. 12 shot-gun, but it had flint locks. Also there were some old tower muskets, which might or might not throw straight at seventy yards. I took six Kaffirs with me, and three good horses, which were supposed to be salted—that is, proof against the sickness. Among the Kaffirs was an old fellow named Indaba-zimbi, which, being translated, means “tongue of iron.” I suppose he got this name from his strident voice and exhaustless eloquence. This man was a great character in his way. He had been a noted witch-doctor among a neighbouring tribe, and came to the station under the following circumstances, which, as he plays a considerable part in this history, are perhaps worth recording.

Two years before my father’s death I had occasion to search the country round for some lost oxen. After a long and useless quest it occurred to me that I had better go to the place where the oxen were bred by a Kaffir chief, whose name I forget, but whose kraal was about fifty miles from our station. There I journeyed, and found the oxen safe at home. The chief entertained me handsomely, and on the following morning I went to pay my respects to him before leaving, and was somewhat surprised to find a collection of some hundreds of men and women sitting round him anxiously watching the sky in which the thunder-clouds were banking up in a very ominous way.

“You had better wait, white man,” said the chief, “and see the rain-doctors fight the lightning.”

I inquired what he meant, and learned that this man, Indaba-zimbi, had for some years occupied the position of wizard-in-chief to the tribe, although he was not a member of it, having been born in the country now known as Zululand. But a son of the chief’s, a man of about thirty, had lately set up as a rival in supernatural powers. This irritated Indaba-zimbi beyond measure, and a quarrel ensued between the two witch-doctors that resulted in a challenge to trial by lightning being given and accepted. These were the conditions. The rivals must await the coming of a serious thunderstorm, no ordinary tempest would serve their turn. Then, carrying assegais in their hands, they must take their stand within fifty paces of each other upon a certain patch of ground where the big thunderbolts were observed to strike continually, and by the exercise of their occult powers and invocations to the lightning, must strive to avert death from themselves and bring it on their rival. The terms of this singular match had been arranged a month previously, but no storm worthy of the occasion had arisen. Now the local weather-prophets believed it to be brewing.

I inquired what would happen if neither of the men were struck, and was told that they must then wait for another storm. If they escaped the second time, however, they would be held to be equal in power, and be jointly consulted by the tribe upon occasions of importance.

The prospect of being a spectator of so unusual a sight overcame my desire to be gone, and I accepted the chief’s invitation to see it out. Before mid-day I regretted it, for though the western heavens grew darker and darker, and the still air heralded the coming of the storm, yet it did not come. By four o’clock, however, it became obvious that it must burst soon—at sunset, the old chief said, and in the company of the whole assembly I moved down to the place of combat. The kraal was built on the top of a hill, and below it the land sloped gently to the banks of a river about half a mile away. On the hither side of the bank was the piece of land that was, the natives said, “loved of the lightning.” Here the magicians took up their stand, while the spectators grouped themselves on the hillside about two hundred yards away—which was, I thought, rather too near to be pleasant. When we had sat there for a while my curiosity overcame me, and I asked leave of the chief to go down and inspect the arena. He said I might do so at my own risk. I told him that the fire from above would not hurt white men, and went to find that the spot was a bed of iron ore, thinly covered with grass, which of course accounted for its attracting the lightning from the storms as they travelled along the line of the river. At each end of this iron-stone area were placed the combatants, Indaba-zimbi facing the east, and his rival the west, and before each there burned a little fire made of some scented root. Moreover they were dressed in all the paraphernalia of their craft, snakeskins, fish-bladders, and I know not what beside, while round their necks hung circlets of baboons’ teeth and bones from human hands. First I went to the western end

where the chief's son stood. He was pointing with his assegai towards the advancing storm, and invoking it in a voice of great excitement.

"Come, fire, and lick up Indaba-zimbi!"

"Hear me, Storm Devil, and lick Indaba-zimbi with your red tongue!"

"Spit on him with your rain!"

"Whirl him away in your breath!"

"Make him as nothing—melt the marrow in his bones!"

"Run into his heart and burn away the lies!"

"Show all the people who is the true Witch Finder!"

"Let me not be put to shame in the eyes of this white man!"

Thus he spoke, or rather chanted, and all the while rubbed his broad chest—for he was a very fine man—with some filthy compound of medicine or *mouti*.

After a while, getting tired of his song, I walked across the iron-stone, to where Indaba-zimbi sat by his fire. He was not chanting at all, but his performance was much more impressive. It consisted in staring at the eastern sky, which was perfectly clear of cloud, and every now and again beckoning at it with his finger, then turning round to point with the assegai towards his rival. For a while I looked at him in silence. He was a curious wizened man, apparently over fifty years of age, with thin hands that looked as tough as wire. His nose was much sharper than is usual among these races, and he had a queer habit of holding his head sideways like a bird when he spoke, which, in addition to the humour that lurked in his eye, gave him a most comical appearance. Another strange thing about him was that he had a single white lock of hair among his black wool. At last I spoke to him:

"Indaba-zimbi, my friend," I said, "you may be a good witch-doctor, but you are certainly a fool. It is no good beckoning at the blue sky while your enemy is getting a start with the storm."

"You may be clever, but don't think you know everything, white man," the old fellow answered, in a high, cracked voice, and with something like a grin.

"They call you Iron-tongue," I went on; "you had better use it, or the Storm Devil won't hear you."

"The fire from above runs down iron," he answered, "so I keep my tongue quiet. Oh, yes, let him curse away, I'll put him out presently. Look now, white man."

I looked, and in the eastern sky there grew a cloud. At first it was small, though very black, but it gathered with extraordinary rapidity.

This was odd enough, but as I had seen the same thing happen before it did not particularly astonish me. It is by no means unusual in Africa for two thunderstorms to come up at the same time from different points of the compass.

"You had better get on, Indaba-zimbi," I said, "the big storm is coming along fast, and will soon eat up that baby of yours," and I pointed to the west.

"Babies sometimes grow to giants, white man," said Indaba-zimbi, beckoning away vigorously. "Look now at my cloud-child."

I looked; the eastern storm was spreading itself from earth to sky, and in shape resembled an enormous man. There was its head, its shoulders, and its legs; yes, it was like a huge giant travelling across the heavens. The light of the setting sun escaping from beneath the lower edge of the western storm shot across the intervening space in a sheet of splendour, and, lighting upon the advancing figure of cloud, wrapped its middle in hues of glory too wonderful to be described; but beneath and above this glowing belt his feet and head were black as jet. Presently, as I watched, an awful flash of light shot from the head of the cloud, circled it about as though with a crown of living fire, and vanished.

"Aha," chuckled old Indaba-zimbi, "my little boy is putting on his man's ring," and he tapped the gum ring on his own head, which natives assume when they reach a certain age and dignity. "Now, white man, unless you are a bigger wizard than either of us you had better clear off, for the fire-fight is about to begin."

I thought this sound advice.

"Good luck go with you, my black uncle," I said. "I hope you don't feel the iniquities of a mis-spent life weighing on you at the last."

"You look after yourself, and think of your own sins, young man," he answered, with a grim smile, and taking a pinch of snuff, while at that very moment a flash of lightning, I don't know from which storm, struck the ground within thirty paces of me. That was enough for me, I took to my heels, and as I went I heard old Indaba-zimbi's dry chuckle of amusement.

I climbed the hill till I came to where the chief was sitting with his indunas, or headmen, and sat down near to him. I looked at the man's face and saw that he was intensely anxious for his son's safety, and by no means confident of the young man's powers to resist the magic of Indaba-zimbi. He was talking in a low voice to the induna next to him. I affected to take no notice and to be concentrating my attention on the novel scene before me; but in those days I had very quick ears, and caught the drift of the conversation.

"Hearken!" the chief was saying, "if the magic of Indaba-zimbi prevails against my son I will endure him no more. Of this I am sure, that when he has slain my son he will slay me, me also, and make himself chief in my place. I fear Indaba-zimbi. *Ou!*"

"Black One," answered the induna, "wizards die as dogs die, and, once dead, dogs bark no more."

"And once dead," said the chief, "wizards work no more spells," and he bent and whispered in the induna's ear, looking at the assegai in his hand as he whispered.

"Good, my father, good!" said the induna, presently. "It shall be done to-night, if the lightning does not do it first."

"A bad look-out for old Indaba-zimbi," I said to myself. "They mean to kill him." Then I thought no more of the matter for a while, the scene before me was too tremendous.

The two storms were rapidly rushing together. Between them was a gulf of blue sky, and from time to time flashes of blinding light passed across this gulf, leaping from cloud to cloud. I remember that they reminded me of the story of the heathen god Jove and his thunderbolts. The storm that was shaped like a giant and ringed with the glory of the sinking sun made an excellent Jove, and I am sure that the bolts which leapt from it could not have been surpassed even in mythological times. Oddly enough, as yet the flashes were not followed by thunder. A deadly stillness lay upon the place, the cattle stood silently on the hillside, even the natives were awed to silence. Dark shadows crept along the bosom of the hills, the river to the right and left was hidden in wreaths of cloud, but before us and beyond the combatants it shone like a line of silver beneath the narrowing space of open sky. Now the western tempest was scrawled all over with lines of intolerable light, while the inky head of the cloud-giant to the east was continually suffused with a white and deadly glow that came and went in pulses, as though a blood of flame was being pumped into it from the heart of the storm.

The silence deepened and deepened, the shadows grew blacker and blacker, then suddenly all nature began to moan beneath the breath of an icy wind. On sped the wind; the smooth surface of the river was ruffled by it into little waves, the tall grass bowed low before it, and in its wake came the hissing sound of furious rain.

Ah! the storms had met. From each there burst an awful blaze of dazzling flame, and now the hill on which we sat rocked at the noise of the following thunder. The light went out of the sky, darkness fell suddenly on the land, but not for long. Presently the whole landscape grew vivid in the flashes, it appeared and disappeared, now everything was visible for miles, now even the men at my side vanished in the blackness. The thunder rolled and cracked and pealed like the trump of doom, whirlwinds tore round, lifting dust and even stones high into the air, and in a low, continuous undertone rose the hiss of the rushing rain.

I put my hand before my eyes to shield them from the terrible glare, and looked beneath it towards the lists of iron-stone. As flash followed flash, from time to time I caught sight of the two wizards. They were slowly advancing towards one another, each pointing at his foe with the assegai in his hand. I could see their every movement, and it seemed to me that the chain lightning was striking the iron-stone all round them.

Suddenly the thunder and lightning ceased for a minute, everything grew black, and, except for the rain, silent.

"It is over one way or the other, chief," I called out into the darkness.

"Wait, white man, wait!" answered the chief, in a voice thick with anxiety and fear.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the heavens were lit up again till they literally seemed to flame. There were the men, not ten paces apart. A great flash fell between them, I saw them stagger beneath the shock. Indaba-zimbi recovered himself first—at any rate when the next flash came he was standing bolt upright, pointing with his assegai towards his enemy. The chief's son was still on his legs, but he was staggering like a drunken man, and the assegai had fallen from his hand.

Darkness! then again a flash, more fearful, if possible, than any that had gone before. To me it seemed to come from the east, right over the head of Indaba-zimbi. At that instant I saw the chief's son wrapped, as it were, in the heart of it. Then the thunder pealed, the rain burst over us like a torrent, and I saw no more.

The worst of the storm was done, but for a while the darkness was so dense that we could not move, nor, indeed, was I inclined to leave the safety of the hillside where the lightning was never known to strike, and venture down to the iron-stone. Occasionally there still came flashes, but, search as we would, we could see no trace of either of the wizards. For my part, I believed that they were both dead. Now the clouds slowly rolled away down the course of the river, and with them went the rain; and now the stars shone in their wake.

"Let us go and see," said the old chief, rising and shaking the water from his hair. "The fire-fight is ended, let us go and see who has conquered."

I rose and followed him, dripping as though I had swum a hundred yards with my clothes on, and after me came all the people of the kraal.

We reached the spot; even in that light I could see where the iron-stone had been split and fused by the thunderbolts. While I was staring about me, I suddenly heard the chief, who was on my right, give a low moan, and saw the people cluster round him. I went up and looked. There, on the ground, lay the body of his son. It was a dreadful sight. The hair was burnt off his head, the copper rings upon his arms were fused, the assegai handle which lay near was literally shivered into threads, and, when I took hold of his arm, it seemed to me that every bone of it was broken.

The men with the chief stood gazing silently, while the women wailed.

"Great is the magic of Indaba-zimbi!" said a man, at length. The chief turned and struck him a heavy blow with the kerrie in his hand.

"Great or not, thou dog, he shall die," he cried, "and so shalt thou if thou singest his praises so loudly."

I said nothing, but thinking it probable that Indaba-zimbi had shared the fate of his enemy, I went to look. But I could see nothing of him, and at length, being thoroughly chilled with the wet, started back to my waggon to change my clothes. On reaching it, I was rather surprised to see a strange Kaffir seated on the driving-box wrapped up in a blanket.

"Hullo! come out of that," I said.

The figure on the box slowly unrolled the blanket, and with great deliberation took a pinch of snuff.

"It was a good fire-fight, white man, was it not?" said Indaba-zimbi, in his high, cracked voice. "But he never had a chance against me, poor boy. He knew nothing about it. See, white man, what becomes of presumption in the young. It is sad, very sad, but I made the flashes fly, didn't I?"

“You old humbug,” I said, “unless you are careful you will soon learn what comes of presumption in the old, for your chief is after you with an assegai, and it will take all your magic to dodge that.”

“Now you don’t say so,” said Indaba-zimbi, clambering off the waggon with rapidity; “and all because of this wretched upstart. There’s gratitude for you, white man. I expose him, and they want to kill me. Well, thank you for the hint. We shall meet again before long,” and he was gone like a shot, and not too soon, for just then some of the chief’s men came up to the waggon.

On the following morning I started homewards. The first face I saw on arriving at the station was that of Indaba-zimbi.

“How do you do, Macumazahn?” he said, holding his head on one side and nodding his white lock. “I hear you are Christians here, and I want to try a new religion. Mine must be a bad one seeing that my people wanted to kill me for exposing an impostor.”

## CHAPTER III.

### NORTHWARDS

I make no apology to myself, or to anybody who may happen to read this narrative in future, for having set out the manner of my meeting with Indaba-zimbi: first, because it was curious, and secondly, because he takes some hand in the subsequent events. If that old man was a humbug, he was a very clever one. What amount of truth there was in his pretensions to supernatural powers it is not for me to determine, though I may have my own opinion on the subject. But there was no mistake as to the extraordinary influence he exercised over his fellow-natives. Also he quite got round my poor father. At first the old gentleman declined to have him at the station, for he had a great horror of these Kaffir wizards or witch-finders. But Indaba-zimbi persuaded him that he was anxious to investigate the truths of Christianity, and challenged him to a discussion. The argument lasted two years—to the time of my father's death, indeed. At the conclusion of each stage Indaba-zimbi would remark, in the words of the Roman Governor, "Almost, praying white man, thou persuadest me to become a Christian," but he never quite became one—indeed, I do not think he ever meant to. It was to him that my father addressed his "Letters to a Native Doubter." This work, which, unfortunately, remains in manuscript, is full of wise saws and learned instances. It ought to be published together with a *précis* of the doubter's answers, which were verbal.

So the talk went on. If my father had lived I believe it would be going on now, for both the disputants were quite inexhaustible. Meanwhile Indaba-zimbi was allowed to live on the station on condition that he practised no witchcraft, which my father firmly believed to be a wile of the devil. He said that he would not, but for all that there was never an ox lost, or a sudden death, but he was consulted by those interested.

When he had been with us a year, a deputation came to him from the tribe he had left, asking him to return. Things had not gone well with them since he went away, they said, and now the chief, his enemy, was dead. Old Indaba-zimbi listened to them till they had done, and, as he listened, raked sand into a little heap with his toes. Then he spoke, pointing to the little heap, "There is your tribe to-day," he said. Then he lifted his heel and stamped the heap flat. "There is your tribe before three moons are gone. Nothing is left of it. You drove me away: I will have no more to do with you; but when you are being killed think of my words."

The messengers went. Three months afterwards I heard that the whole community had been wiped out by an Impi of raiding Pondos.

When I was at length ready to start upon my expedition, I went to old Indaba-zimbi to say good-bye to him, and was rather surprised to find him engaged in rolling up medicine, assegais, and other sundries in his blankets.

"Good-bye, Indaba-zimbi," I said, "I am going to trek north."

"Yes, Macumazahn," he answered, with his head on one side; "and so am I—I want to see that country. We will go together."

"Will we!" I said; "wait till you are asked, you old humbug."

"You had better ask me, then, Macumazahn, for if you don't you will never come back alive. Now that the old chief (my father) is gone to where the storms come from," and he nodded to the sky, "I feel myself getting into bad habits again. So last night I just threw up the bones and worked out about your journey, and I can tell you this, that if you don't take me you will die, and, what is more, you will lose one who is dearer to you than life in a strange fashion. So just because you gave me that hint a couple of years ago, I made up my mind to come with you."

"Don't talk stuff to me," I said.

"Ah, very well, Macumazahn, very well; but what happened to my own people six months ago, and what did I tell the messengers would happen? They drove me away, and they are gone. If you drive me away you will soon be gone too," and he nodded his white lock at me and smiled. Now I was not more superstitious than other people, but somehow old Indaba-zimbi impressed me. Also I knew his extraordinary influence over every class of native, and bethought me that he might be useful in that way.

"All right," I said; "I appoint you witch-finder to the expedition without pay."

"First serve, then ask for wages," he answered. "I am glad to see that you have enough imagination not to be altogether a fool, like most white men, Macumazahn. Yes, yes, it is want of imagination that makes people fools; they won't believe what they can't understand. You can't understand my prophecies any more than the fool at the kraal could understand that I was his master with the lightning. Well, it is time to trek, but if I were you, Macumazahn, I should take one waggon, not two."

"Why?" I said.

"Because you will lose your waggons, and it is better to lose one than two."

"Oh, nonsense!" I said.

"All right, Macumazahn, live and learn." And without another word he walked to the foremost waggon, put his bundle into it, and climbed on to the front seat.

So having bid an affectionate adieu to my white friends, including the old Scotchman who got drunk in honour of the event, and quoted Burns till the tears ran down his face, at length I started, and travelled slowly northwards. For the first three weeks nothing

very particular befell me. Such Kaffirs as we came in contact with were friendly, and game literally swarmed. Nobody living in those parts of South Africa nowadays can have the remotest idea of what the veldt was like even thirty years ago.

Often and often I have crept shivering on to my waggon-box just as the sun rose and looked out. At first one would see nothing but a vast field of white mist suffused towards the east by a tremulous golden glow, through which the tops of stony koppies stood up like gigantic beacons. From the dense mist would come strange sounds—snorts, gruntings, bellows, and the thunder of countless hoofs. Presently this great curtain would grow thinner, then it would melt, as the smoke from a pipe melts into the air, and for miles on miles the wide rolling country interspersed with bush opened to the view. But it was not tenantless as it is now, for as far as the eye could reach it would be literally black with game. Here to the right might be a herd of vilderbeeste that could not number less than two thousand. Some were grazing, some gambolled, whisking their white tails into the air, while all round the old bulls stood upon hillocks sniffing suspiciously at the breeze. There, in front, a hundred yards away, though to the unpractised eye they looked much closer, because of the dazzling clearness of the atmosphere, was a great herd of springbok trekking along in single file. Ah, they have come to the waggon-track and do not like the look of it. What will they do?—go back? Not a bit of it. It is nearly thirty feet wide, but that is nothing to a springbok. See, the first of them bounds into the air like a ball. How beautifully the sunshine gleams upon his golden hide! He has cleared it, and the others come after him in numberless succession, all except the fawns, who cannot jump so far, and have to scamper over the doubtful path with a terrified *bah*. What is that yonder, moving above the tops of the mimosa, in the little dell at the foot of the koppie? Giraffes, by George! three of them; there will be marrow-bones for supper to-night. Hark! the ground shakes behind us, and over the brow of the rise rush a vast herd of blesbock. On they come at full gallop, their long heads held low, they look like so many bearded goats. I thought so—behind them is a pack of wild dogs, their fur dragged, their tongues lolling. They are in full cry; the giraffes hear them and are away, rolling round the koppie like a ship in a heavy sea. No marrow-bones after all. See! the foremost dogs are close on a buck. He has galloped far and is outworn. One springs at his flank and misses him. The buck gives a kind of groan, looks wildly round and sees the waggon. He seems to hesitate a moment, then in his despair rushes up to it, and falls exhausted among the oxen. The dogs pull up some thirty paces away, panting and snarling. Now, boy, the gun—no, not the rifle, the shot-gun loaded with loopers.

Bang! bang! there, my friends, two of you will never hunt buck again. No, don't touch the buck, for he has come to us for shelter, and he shall have it.

Ah, how beautiful is nature before man comes to spoil it!

Such a sight as this have I seen many a hundred times, and I hope to see it again before I die.

The first real adventure that befell me on this particular journey was with elephants, which I will relate because of its curious termination. Just before we crossed the Orange River we came to a stretch of forest-land some twenty miles broad. The night we entered this forest we camped in a lovely open glade. A few yards ahead tambouki grass was growing to the height of a man, or rather it had been; now, with the exception of a few stalks here and there, it was crushed quite flat. It was already dusk when we camped; but after the moon got up I walked from the fire to see how this had happened. One glance was enough for me; a great herd of elephants had evidently passed over the tall grass not many hours before. The sight of their spoor rejoiced me exceedingly, for though I had seen wild elephants, at that time I had never shot one. Moreover, the sight of elephant spoor to the African hunter is what "colour in the pan" is to the prospector of gold. It is by the ivory that he lives, and to shoot it or trade it is his chief aim in life. My resolution was soon taken. I would camp the waggons for a while in the forest, and start on horseback after the elephants.

I communicated my decision to Indaba-zimbi and the other Kaffirs. The latter were not loth, for your Kaffir loves hunting, which means plenty of meat and congenial occupation, but Indaba-zimbi would express no opinion. I saw him retire to a little fire that he had lit for himself, and go through some mysterious performances with bones and clay mixed with ashes, which were watched with the greatest interest by the other Kaffirs. At length he rose, and, coming forward, informed me that it was all right, and that I did well to go and hunt the elephants, as I should get plenty of ivory; but he advised me to go on foot. I said I should do nothing of the sort, but meant to ride. I am wiser now; this was the first and last time that I ever attempted to hunt elephants on horseback.

Accordingly we started at dawn, I, Indaba-zimbi, and three men; the rest I left with the waggons. I was on horseback, and so was my driver, a good rider and a skilful shot for a Kaffir, but Indaba-zimbi and the others walked. From dawn till mid-day we followed the trail of the herd, which was as plain as a high road. Then we off-saddled to let the horses rest and feed, and about three o'clock started on again. Another hour or so passed, and still there was no sign of elephants. Evidently the herd had travelled fast and far, and I began to think that we should have to give it up, when suddenly I caught sight of a brown mass moving through the thorn-trees on the side of a slope about a quarter of a mile away. My heart seemed to jump into my mouth. Where is the hunter who has not felt like this at the sight of his first elephant?

I called a halt, and then the wind being right, we set to work to stalk the bull. Very quietly I rode down the hither side of the slope till we came to the bottom, which was densely covered with bush. Here I saw the elephants had been feeding, for broken branches and upturned trees lay all about. I did not take much notice, however, for all my thoughts were fixed upon the bull I was stalking, when suddenly my horse gave a violent start that nearly threw me from the saddle, and there came a mighty rush and upheaval of something in front of me. I looked: there was the hinder part of a second bull elephant not four yards off. I could just catch sight of its outstretched ears projecting on either side. I had disturbed it sleeping, and it was running away.

Obviously the best thing to do would have been to let it run, but I was young in those days and foolish, and in the excitement of the moment I lifted my "roer" or elephant gun and fired at the great brute over my horse's head. The recoil of the heavy gun nearly knocked me off the horse. I recovered myself, however, and, as I did so, saw the bull lurch forward, for the impact of a three-ounce bullet in the flank will quicken the movement even of an elephant. By this time I had realized the folly of the shot, and devoutly hoped that the bull would take no further notice of it. But he took a different view of the matter. Pulling himself up in a series of plunges, he spun round and came for me with outstretched ears and uplifted trunk, screaming terribly. I was quite defenceless, for my gun was empty, and my first thought was of escape. I dug my heels into the sides of my horse, but he would not move an inch. The poor animal was paralyzed with terror, and he simply stood still, his fore-legs outstretched, and quivering all over like a leaf.

On rushed the elephant, awful to see; I made one more vain effort to stir the horse. Now the trunk of the great bull swung aloft above my head. A thought flashed through my brain. Quick as light I rolled from the saddle. By the side of the horse lay a fallen tree, as thick through as a man's body. The tree was lifted a little off the ground by the broken boughs which took its weight, and with a single movement, so active is one in such necessities, I flung myself beneath it. As I did so, I heard the trunk of the elephant descend with a mighty thud on the back of my poor horse, and the next instant I was almost in darkness, for the horse, whose back was broken, fell over across the tree under which I lay ensconced. But he did not stop there long. In ten seconds more the bull had wound his trunk about my dead nag's neck, and, with a mighty effort, hurled him clear of the tree. I wriggled backwards as far as I could towards the roots of the tree, for I knew what he was after. Presently I saw the red tip of the bull's trunk stretching itself towards me. If he could manage to hook it round any part of me I was lost. But in the position I occupied, that was just what he could not do, although he knelt down to facilitate his operations. On came the snapping tip like a great open-mouthed snake; it closed upon my hat, which vanished. Again it was thrust down, and a scream of rage was bellowed through it within four inches of my head. Now it seemed to elongate itself. Oh, heavens! now it had me by the hair, which, luckily for myself, was not very long. Then it was my turn to scream, for next instant half a square inch of hair was dragged from my scalp by the roots. I was being plucked alive, as I have seen cruel Kaffir kitchen boys pluck a fowl.

The elephant, however, disappointed with these moderate results, changed his tactics. He wound his trunk round the fallen tree and lifted. The tree stirred, but fortunately the broken branches embedded in the spongy soil, and some roots, which still held, prevented it from being turned over, though he lifted it so much that, had it occurred to him, he could now easily have drawn me out with his trunk. Again he hoisted with all his mighty strength, and I saw that the tree was coming, and roared aloud for help. Some shots were fired close by in answer, but if they hit the bull, their only effect was to stir his energies to more active life. In another few seconds my shelter would be torn away, and I should be done for. A cold perspiration burst out over me as I realized that I was lost. Then of a sudden I remembered that I had a pistol in my belt, which I often used for despatching wounded game. It was loaded and capped. By this time the tree was lifted so much that I could easily get my hand down to my middle and draw the pistol from its case. I drew and cocked it. Now the tree was coming over, and there, within three feet of my head, was the great brown trunk of the elephant. I placed the muzzle of the pistol within an inch of it and fired. The result was instantaneous. Down sunk the tree again, giving one of my legs a considerable squeeze, and next instant I heard a crashing sound. The elephant had bolted.

By this time, what between fright and struggling, I was pretty well tired. I cannot remember how I got from under the fallen tree, or indeed anything, until I found myself sitting on the ground drinking some peach brandy from a flask, and old Indaba-zimbi opposite to me nodding his white lock sagely, while he fired off moral reflections on the narrowness of my escape, and my unwisdom in not having taken his advice to go on foot. That reminded me of my horse—I got up and went to look at it. It was quite dead, the blow of the elephant's trunk had fallen on the saddle, breaking the framework, and rendering it useless. I reflected that in another two seconds it would have fallen on *me*. Then I called to Indaba-zimbi and asked which way the elephants had gone.

"There!" he said, pointing down the gully, "and we had better go after them, Macumazahn. We have had the bad luck, now for the good."

There was philosophy in this, though, to tell the truth, I did not feel particularly sharp set on elephants at the moment. I seemed to have had enough of them. However, it would never do to show the white feather before the boys, so I assented with much outward readiness, and we started, I on the second horse, and the others on foot. When we had travelled for the best part of an hour down the valley, all of a sudden we came upon the whole herd, which numbered a little more than eighty. Just in front of them the bush was so thick that they seemed to hesitate about entering it, and the sides of the valley were so rocky and steep at this point that they could not climb them.

They saw us at the same moment as we saw them, and inwardly I was filled with fears lest they should take it into their heads to charge back up the gully. But they did not; trumpeting aloud, they rushed at the thick bush which went down before them like corn before a sickle. I do not think that in all my experiences I ever heard anything to equal the sound they made as they crashed through and over the shrubs and trees. Before them was a dense forest belt from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet in width. As they rushed on, it fell, so that behind them was nothing but a level roadway strewn with fallen trunks, crushed branches, and here and there a tree, too strong even for them, left stranded amid the wreck. On they went, and, notwithstanding the nature of the ground over which they had to travel, they kept their distance ahead of us. This sort of thing continued for a mile or more, and then I saw that in front of the elephants the valley opened into a space covered with reeds and grass—it might have been five or six acres in extent—beyond which the valley ran on again.

The herd reached the edge of this expanse, and for a moment pulled up, hesitating—evidently they mistrusted it. My men yelled aloud, as only Kaffirs can, and that settled them. Headed by the wounded bull, whose martial ardour, like my own, was somewhat cooled, they spread out and dashed into the treacherous swamp—for such it was, though just then there was no water to be seen. For a few yards all went well with them, though they clearly found it heavy going; then suddenly the great bull sank up to his belly in the stiff peaty soil, and remained fixed. The others, mad with fear, took no heed of his struggles and trumpeting, but plunged on to meet the same fate. In five minutes the whole herd of them were hopelessly bogged, and the more they struggled to escape, the deeper they sunk. There was one exception, indeed, a cow managed to win back to firm shore, and, lifting her trunk, prepared to charge us as we came up. But at that moment she heard the scream of her calf, and rushed back to its assistance, only to be bogged with the others.

Such a scene I never saw before or since. The swamp was spotted all over with the large forms of the elephants, and the air rang with their screams of rage and terror as they waved their trunks wildly to and fro. Now and then a monster would make a great effort and drag his mass from its peaty bed, only to stick fast again at the next step. It was a most pitiable sight, though one that gladdened the hearts of my men. Even the best natives have little compassion for the sufferings of animals.

Well, the rest was easy. The marsh that would not bear the elephants carried our weight well enough. Before midnight all were dead, for we shot them by moonlight. I would gladly have spared the young ones and some of the cows, but to do so would only have meant leaving them to perish of hunger; it was kinder to kill them at once. The wounded bull I slew with my own hand, and I cannot

say that I felt much compunction in so doing. He knew me again, and made a desperate effort to get at me, but I am glad to say that the peat held him fast.

The pan presented a curious sight when the sun rose next morning. Owing to the support given by the soil, few of the dead elephants had fallen: there they stood as though they were asleep.

I sent back for the waggons, and when they arrived on the morrow, formed a camp, about a mile away from the pan. Then began the work of cutting out the elephants' tusks; it took over a week, and for obvious reasons was a disgusting task. Indeed, had it not been for the help of some wandering bushmen, who took their pay in elephant meat, I do not think we could ever have managed it.

At last it was done. The ivory was far too cumbersome for us to carry, so we buried it, having first got rid of our bushmen allies. My boys wanted me to go back to the Cape with it and sell it, but I was too much bent on my journey to do this. The tusks lay buried for five years. Then I came and dug them up; they were but little harmed. Ultimately I sold the ivory for something over twelve hundred pounds—not bad pay for one day's shooting.

This was how I began my career as an elephant hunter. I have shot many hundreds of them since, but have never again attempted to do so on horseback.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ZULU IMPI

After burying the elephant tusks, and having taken careful notes of the bearings and peculiarities of the country so that I might be able to find the spot again, we proceeded on our journey. For a month or more I trekked along the line which now divides the Orange Free State from Griqualand West, and the Transvaal from Bechuanaland. The only difficulties met with were such as are still common to African travellers—occasional want of water and troubles about crossing sluits and rivers. I remember that I outspanned on the spot where Kimberley now stands, and had to press on again in a hurry because there was no water. I little dreamed then that I should live to see Kimberley a great city producing millions of pounds worth of diamonds annually, and old Indaba-zimbi's magic cannot have been worth so much after all, or he would have told me.

I found the country almost entirely depopulated. Not very long before Mosilikatze the Lion, Chaka's General had swept across it in his progress towards what is now Matabeleland. His footsteps were evident enough. Time upon time I trekked up to what had evidently been the sites of Kaffir kraals. Now the kraals were ashes and piles of tumbled stones, and strewn about among the rank grass were the bones of hundreds of men, women, and children, all of whom had kissed the Zulu assegai. I remember that in one of these desolate places I found the skull of a child in which a ground-lark had built its nest. It was the twittering of the young birds inside that first called my attention to it. Shortly after this we met with our second great adventure, a much more serious and tragic one than the first.

We were trekking parallel with the Kolong river when a herd of blesbock crossed the track. I fired at one of them and hit it behind. It galloped about a hundred yards with the rest of the herd, then lay down. As we were in want of meat, not having met with any game for a few days past, I jumped on to my horse, and, telling Indaba-zimbi that I would overtake the waggons or meet them on the further side of a rise about an hour's trek away, I started after the wounded buck. As soon as I came within a hundred yards of it, however, it jumped up and ran away as fast as though it were untouched, only to lie down again at a distance. I followed, thinking that strength would soon fail it. This happened three times. On the third occasion it vanished behind a ridge, and, though by now I was out of both temper and patience, I thought I might as well ride to the crest and see if I could get a shot at it on the further side.

I reached the ridge, which was strewn with stones, looked over it, and saw—a Zulu Impi!

I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Yes, there was no doubt of it. They were halted about a thousand yards away, by the water; some were lying down, some were cooking at fires, others were stalking about with spears and shields in their hands; there might have been two thousand or more of them in all. While I was wondering—and that with no little uneasiness—what on earth they could be doing there, suddenly I heard a wild cry to the right and left of me. I glanced first one way, then the other. From either side a great Zulu was bearing down on me, their broad stabbing assegais aloft, and black shields in their left hands. The man to the right was about fifteen yards away, he to the left was not more than ten. On they came, their fierce eyes almost starting out of their heads, and I felt, with a cold thrill of fear, that in another three seconds those broad "bangwans" might be buried in my vitals. On such occasions we act, I suppose, more from instinct than from anything else—there is no time for thought. At any rate, I dropped the reins and, raising my gun, fired point blank at the left-hand man. The bullet struck him in the middle of his shield, pierced it, and passed through him, and over he rolled upon the veldt. I swung round in the saddle; most happily my horse was accustomed to standing still when I fired from his back, also he was so surprised that he did not know which way to shy. The other savage was almost on me; his outstretched shield reached the muzzle of my gun as I pulled the trigger of the left barrel. It exploded, the warrior sprang high into the air, and fell against my horse dead, his spear passing just in front of my face.

Without waiting to reload, or even to look if the main body of the Zulus had seen the death of their two scouts, I turned my horse and drove my heels into his sides. As soon as I was down the slope of the rise I pulled a little to the right in order to intercept the waggons before the Zulus saw them. I had not gone three hundred yards in this new direction when, to my utter astonishment, I struck a trail marked with waggon-wheels and the hoofs of oxen. Of waggons there must have been at least eight, and several hundred cattle. Moreover, they had passed within twelve hours; I could tell that by the spoor. Then I understood; the Impi was following the track of the waggons, which, in all probability, belonged to a party of emigrant Boers.

The spoor of the waggons ran in the direction I wished to go, so I followed it. About a mile further on I came to the crest of a rise, and there, about five furlongs away, I saw the waggons drawn up in a rough laager upon the banks of the river. There, too, were my own waggons trekking down the slope towards them.

In another five minutes I was there. The Boers—for Boers they were—were standing about outside the little laager watching the approach of my two waggons. I called to them, and they turned and saw me. The very first man my eyes fell on was a Boer named Hans Botha, whom I had known well years ago in the Cape. He was not a bad specimen of his class, but a very restless person, with a great objection to authority, or, as he expressed it, "a love of freedom." He had joined a party of the emigrant Boers some years before, but, as I learned presently, had quarrelled with its leader, and was now trekking away into the wilderness to found a little colony of his own. Poor fellow! It was his last trek.

"How do you do, Meinheer Botha?" I said to him in Dutch.

The man looked at me, looked again, then, startled out of his Dutch stolidity, cried to his wife, who was seated on the box of the waggon—

“Come here, Frau, come. Here is Allan Quatermain, the Englishman, the son of the ‘Predicant.’ How goes it, Heer Quatermain, and what is the news down in the Cape yonder?”

“I don’t know what the news is in the Cape, Hans,” I answered, solemnly; “but the news here is that there is a Zulu Impi upon your spoor and within two miles of the waggons. That I know, for I have just shot two of their sentries,” and I showed him my empty gun.

For a moment there was a silence of astonishment, and I saw the bronzed faces of the men turn pale beneath their tan, while one or two of the women gave a little scream, and the children crept to their sides.

“Almighty!” cried Hans, “that must be the Umtetwa Regiment that Dingaan sent against the Basutus, but who could not come at them because of the marshes, and so were afraid to return to Zululand, and struck north to join Mosilikatze.”

“Laager up, Carles! Laager up for your lives, and one of you jump on a horse and drive in the cattle.”

At this moment my own waggons came up. Indaba-zimbi was sitting on the box of the first, wrapped in a blanket. I called him and told him the news.

“Ill tidings, Macumazahn,” he said; “there will be dead Boers about to-morrow morning, but they will not attack till dawn, then they will wipe out the laager *so!*” and he passed his hand before his mouth.

“Stop that croaking, you white-headed crow,” I said, though I knew his words were true. What chance had a laager of ten waggons all told against at least two thousand of the bravest savages in the world?

“Macumazahn, will you take my advice this time?” Indaba-zimbi said, presently.

“What is it?” I asked.

“This. Leave your waggons here, jump on that horse, and let us two run for it as hard as we can go. The Zulus won’t follow us, they will be looking after the Boers.”

“I won’t leave the other white men,” I said; “it would be the act of a coward. If I die, I die.”

“Very well, Macumazahn, then stay and be killed,” he answered, taking a pinch of snuff. “Come, let us see about the waggons,” and we walked towards the laager.

Here everything was in confusion. However, I got hold of Hans Botha and put it to him if it would not be best to desert the waggons and make a run for it.

“How can we do it?” he answered; “two of the women are too fat to go a mile, one is sick in childbed, and we have only six horses among us. Besides, if we did we should starve in the desert. No, Heer Allan, we must fight it out with the savages, and God help us!”

“God help us, indeed. Think of the children, Hans!”

“I can’t bear to think,” he answered, in a broken voice, looking at his own little girl, a sweet, curly-haired, blue-eyed child of six, named Tota, whom I had often nursed as a baby. “Oh, Heer Allan, your father, the Predicant, always warned me against trekking north, and I never would listen to him because I thought him a cursed Englishman; now I see my folly. Heer Allan, if you can, try to save my child from those black devils; if you live longer than I do, or if you can’t save her, kill her,” and he clasped my hand.

“It hasn’t come to that yet, Hans,” I said.

Then we set to work on the laager. The waggons, of which, including my two, there were ten, were drawn into the form of a square, and the disselboom of each securely lashed with reims to the underworks of that in front of it. The wheels also were locked, and the space between the ground and the bed-planks of the waggons was stuffed with branches of the “wait-a-bit” thorn that fortunately grew near in considerable quantities. In this way a barrier was formed of no mean strength as against a foe unprovided with firearms, places being left for the men to fire from. In a little over an hour everything was done that could be done, and a discussion arose as to the disposal of the cattle, which had been driven up close to the camp. Some of the Boers were anxious to get them into the laager, small as it was, or at least as many of them as it would hold. I argued strongly against this, pointing out that the brutes would probably be seized with panic as soon as the firing began, and trample the defenders of the laager under foot. As an alternative plan I suggested that some of the native servants should drive the herd along the valley of the river till they reached a friendly tribe or some other place of safety. Of course, if the Zulus saw them they would be taken, but the nature of the ground was favourable, and it was possible that they might escape if they started at once. The proposition was promptly agreed to, and, what is more, it was settled that one Dutchman and such of the women and children as could travel should go with them. In half an hour’s time twelve of them started with the natives, the Boer in charge, and the cattle. Three of my own men went with the latter, the three others and Indaba-zimbi stopped with me in the laager.

The parting was a heart-breaking scene, upon which I do not care to dwell. The women wept, the men groaned, and the children looked on with scared white faces. At length they were gone, and I for one was thankful of it. There remained in the laager seventeen white men, four natives, the two Boer fraus who were too stout to travel, the woman in childbed and her baby, and Hans Botha’s little daughter Tota, whom he could not make up his mind to part with. Happily her mother was already dead. And here I may state that ten of the women and children, together with about half of the cattle, escaped. The Zulu Impi never saw them, and on the third day of travel they came to the fortified place of a Griqua chief, who sheltered them on receiving half the cattle in payment. Thence by slow degrees they journeyed down to the Cape Colony, reaching a civilized region within a little more than a year from the date of the attack on the laager.

The afternoon was now drawing towards evening, but still there were no signs of the Impi. A wild hope struck us that they might have gone on about their business. Ever since Indaba-zimbi had heard that the regiment was supposed to belong to the Umtetwa tribe, he had, I noticed, been plunged in deep thought. Presently he came to me and volunteered to go out and spy upon their movements. At first Hans Botha was against this idea, saying that he was a “verdomde swartzel”—an accursed black creature—and would betray us. I pointed out that there was nothing to betray. The Zulus must know where the waggons were, but it was important for us to gain

information of their movements. So it was agreed that Indaba-zimbi should go. I told him this. He nodded his white lock, said "All right, Macumazahn," and started. I noticed with some surprise, however, that before he did so he went to the waggon and fetched his "mouti," or medicine, which, together with his other magical apparatus, he always carried in a skin bag. I asked him why he did this. He answered that it was to make himself invulnerable against the spears of the Zulus. I did not in the least believe his explanation, for in my heart I was sure that he meant to take the opportunity to make a bolt of it, leaving me to my fate. I did not, however, interfere to prevent this, for I had an affection for the old fellow, and sincerely hoped that he might escape the doom which overshadowed us.

So Indaba-zimbi sauntered off, and as I looked at his retreating form I thought I should never see it again. But I was mistaken, and little knew that he was risking his life, not for the Boers whom he hated one and all, but for me whom in his queer way he loved.

When he had gone we completed our preparations for defence, strengthening the waggons and the thorns beneath with earth and stones. Then at sunset we ate and drank as heartily as we could under the circumstances, and when we had done, Hans Botha, as head of the party, offered up prayer to God for our preservation. It was a touching sight to see the burly Dutchman, his hat off, his broad face lit up by the last rays of the setting sun, praying aloud in homely, simple language to Him who alone could save us from the spears of a cruel foe. I remember that the last sentence of his prayer was, "Almighty, if we must be killed, save the women and children and my little girl Tota from the accursed Zulus, and do not let us be tortured."

I echoed the request very earnestly in my own heart, that I know, for in common with the others I was dreadfully afraid, and it must be admitted not without reason.

Then the darkness came on, and we took up our appointed places each with a rifle in his hands and peered out into the gloom in silence. Occasionally one of the Boers would light his pipe with a brand from the smouldering fire, and the glow of it would shine for a few moments on his pale, anxious face.

Behind me one of the stout "fraus" lay upon the ground. Even the terror of our position could not keep her heavy eyes from their accustomed sleep, and she snored loudly. On the further side of her, just by the fire, lay little Tota, wrapped in a kaross. She was asleep also, her thumb in her mouth, and from time to time her father would come to look at her.

So the hours wore on while we waited for the Zulus. But from my intimate knowledge of the habits of natives I had little fear that they would attack us at night, though, had they done so, they could have compassed our destruction with but small loss to themselves. It is not the habit of this people, they like to fight in the light of day—at dawn for preference.

About eleven o'clock, just as I was nodding a little at my post, I heard a low whistle outside the laager. Instantly I was wide awake, and all along the line I heard the clicking of locks as the Boers cocked their guns.

"Macumazahn," said a voice, the voice of Indaba-zimbi, "are you there?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Then hold a light so that I can see how to climb into the laager," he said.

"Yah! yah! hold a light," put in one of the Boers. "I don't trust that black schepsel of yours, Heer Quatermain; he may have some of his countrymen with him." Accordingly a lantern was produced and held towards the voice. There was Indaba-zimbi alone. We let him into the laager and asked him the news.

"This is the news, white men," he said. "I waited till dark, and creeping up to the place where the Zulus are encamped, hid myself behind a stone and listened. They are a great regiment of Umtetwas as Baas Botha yonder thought. They struck the spoor of the waggons three days ago and followed it. To-night they sleep upon their spears, to-morrow at daybreak they will attack the laager and kill everybody. They are very bitter against the Boers, because of the battle at Blood River and the other fights, and that is why they followed the waggons instead of going straight north after Mosilikatze."

A kind of groan went up from the group of listening Dutchmen.

"I tell you what it is, Heeren," I said, "instead of waiting to be butchered here like buck in a pitfall, let us go out now and fall upon the Impi while it sleeps."

This proposition excited some discussion, but in the end only one man could be found to vote for it. Boers as a rule lack that dash which makes great soldiers; such forlorn hopes are not in their line, and rather than embark upon them they prefer to take their chance in a laager, however poor that chance may be. For my own part I firmly believe that had my advice been taken we should have routed the Zulus. Seventeen desperate white men, armed with guns, would have produced no small effect upon a camp of sleeping savages. But it was not taken, so it is no use talking about it.

After that we went back to our posts, and slowly the weary night wore on towards the dawn. Only those who have watched under similar circumstances while they waited the advent of almost certain and cruel death, can know the torturing suspense of those heavy hours. But they went somehow, and at last in the far east the sky began to lighten, while the cold breath of dawn stirred the tilts of the waggons and chilled me to the bone. The fat Dutchwoman behind me woke with a yawn, then, remembering all, moaned aloud, while her teeth chattered with cold and fear. Hans Botha went to his waggon and got a bottle of peach brandy, from which he poured into a tin pannikin, giving us each a stiff dram, and making attempts to be cheerful as he did so. But his affected jocularly only seemed to depress his comrades the more. Certainly it depressed me.

Now the light was growing, and we could see some way into the mist which still hung densely over the river, and now—ah! there it was. From the other side of the hill, a thousand yards or more from the laager, came a faint humming sound. It grew and grew till it gathered to a chant—the awful war chant of the Zulus. Soon I could catch the words. They were simple enough:

"We shall slay, we shall slay! Is it not so, my brothers?  
Our spears shall blush blood-red. Is it not so, my brothers?  
For we are the sucklings of Chaka, blood is our milk, my brothers.  
Awake, children of the Umtetwa, awake!  
The vulture wheels, the jackal sniffs the air;  
Awake, children of the Umtetwa—cry aloud, ye ringed men:

There is the foe, we shall slay them. Is it not so, my brothers?  
*S'gee! S'gee! S'gee!*"

Such is a rough translation of that hateful chant which to this very day I often seem to hear. It does not look particularly imposing on paper, but if, while he waited to be killed, the reader could have heard it as it rolled through the still air from the throats of nearly three thousand warriors singing all to time, he would have found it impressive enough.

Now the shields began to appear over the brow of the rise. They came by companies, each company about ninety strong. Altogether there were thirty-one companies. I counted them. When all were over they formed themselves into a triple line, then trotted down the slope towards us. At a distance of a hundred and fifty yards or just out of the shot of such guns as we had in those days, they halted and began singing again—

"Yonder is the kraal of the white man—a little kraal, my brothers;  
We shall eat it up, we shall trample it flat, my brothers.  
But where are the white man's cattle—where are his oxen, my brothers?"

This question seemed to puzzle them a good deal, for they sang the song again and again. At last a herald came forward, a great man with ivory rings about his arm, and, putting his hands to his mouth, called out to us asking where our cattle were.

Hans Botha climbed on to the top of a waggon and roared out that they might answer that question themselves.

Then the herald called again, saying that he saw the cattle had been sent away.

"We shall go and find the cattle," he said, "then we shall come and kill you, because without cattle you must stop where you are, but if we wait to kill you before we get the cattle, they may have trekked too far for us to follow. And if you try to run away we shall easily catch you white men!"

This struck me as a very odd speech, for the Zulus generally attack an enemy first and take his cattle afterwards; still, there was a certain amount of plausibility about it. While I was still wondering what it all might mean, the Zulus began to run past us in companies towards the river. Suddenly a shout announced that they had found the spoor of the cattle, and the whole Impi of them started down it at a run till they vanished over a rise about a quarter of a mile away.

We waited for half an hour or more, but nothing could we see of them.

"Now I wonder if the devils have really gone," said Hans Botha to me. "It is very strange."

"I will go and see," said Indaba-zimbi, "if you will come with me, Macumazahn. We can creep to the top of the ridge and look over."

At first I hesitated, but curiosity overcame me. I was young in those days and weary with suspense.

"Very well," I said, "we will go."

So we started. I had my elephant gun and ammunition. Indaba-zimbi had his medicine bag and an assegai. We crept to the top of the rise like sportsmen stalking a buck. The slope on the other side was strewn with rocks, among which grew bushes and tall grass.

"They must have gone down the Donga," I said to Indaba-zimbi, "I can't see one of them."

As I spoke there came a roar of men all round me. From every rock, from every tuft of grass rose a Zulu warrior. Before I could turn, before I could lift a gun, I was seized and thrown.

"Hold him! Hold the White Spirit fast!" cried a voice. "Hold him, or he will slip away like a snake. Don't hurt him, but hold him fast. Let Indaba-zimbi walk by his side."

I turned on Indaba-zimbi. "You black devil, you have betrayed me!" I cried.

"Wait and see, Macumazahn," he answered, coolly. "Now the fight is going to begin."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE END OF THE LAAGER

I gasped with wonder and rage. What did that scoundrel Indaba-zimbi mean? Why had I been drawn out of the laager and seized, and why, being seized, was I not instantly killed? They called me the "White Spirit." Could it be that they were keeping me to make me into medicine? I had heard of such things being done by Zulus and kindred tribes, and my blood ran cold at the thought. What an end! To be pounded up, made medicine of, and eaten!

However, I had little time for further reflection, for now the whole Impi was pouring back from the donga and river-banks where it had hidden while their ruse was carried out, and once more formed up on the side of the slope. I was taken to the crest of the slope and placed in the centre of the reserve line in the especial charge of a huge Zulu named Bombyane, the same man who had come forward as a herald. This brute seemed to regard me with an affectionate curiosity. Now and again he poked me in the ribs with the handle of his assegai, as though to assure himself that I was solid, and several times he asked me to be so good as to prophesy how many Zulus would be killed before the "Amaboona," as they called the Boers, were "eaten up."

At first I took no notice of him beyond scowling, but presently, goaded into anger, I prophesied that he would be dead in an hour!

He only laughed aloud. "Oh! White Spirit," he said, "is it so? Well, I've walked a long way from Zululand, and shall be glad of a rest."

And he got it shortly, as will be seen.

Now the Zulus began to sing again—

"We have caught the White Spirit, my brother! my brother!  
Iron-Tongue whispered of him, he smelt him out, my brother.  
Now the Maboona are ours—they are already dead, my brother."

So that treacherous villain Indaba-zimbi had betrayed me. Suddenly the chief of the Impi, a grey-haired man named Sususa, held up his assegai, and instantly there was silence. Then he spoke to some indunas who stood near him. Instantly they ran to the right and left down the first line, saying a word to the captain of each company as they passed him. Presently they were at the respective ends of the line, and simultaneously held up their spears. As they did so, with an awful roar of "Bulala Amaboona"—"Slay the Boers," the entire line, numbering nearly a thousand men, bounded forward like a buck startled from its form, and rushed down upon the little laager. It was a splendid sight to see them, their assegais glittering in the sunlight as they rose and fell above their black shields, their war-plumes bending back upon the wind, and their fierce faces set intently on the foe, while the solid earth shook beneath the thunder of their rushing feet. I thought of my poor friends the Dutchmen, and trembled. What chance had they against so many?

Now the Zulus, running in the shape of a bow so as to wrap the laager round on three sides, were within seventy yards, and now from every waggon broke tongues of fire. Over rolled a number of the Umtetwa, but the rest cared little. Forward they sped straight to the laager, striving to force a way in. But the Boers plied them with volley after volley, and, packed as the Zulus were, the elephant guns loaded with slugs and small shot did frightful execution. Only one man even got on to a waggon, and as he did so I saw a Boer woman strike him on the head with an axe. He fell down, and slowly, amid howls of derision from the two lines on the hill-side, the Zulu drew back.

"Let us go, father!" shouted the soldiers on the slope, among whom I was, to their chief, who had come up. "You have sent out the little girls to fight, and they are frightened. Let us show them the way."

"No, no!" the chief Sususa answered, laughing. "Wait a minute and the little girls will grow to women, and women are good enough to fight against Boers!"

The attacking Zulus heard the mockery of their fellows, and rushed forward again with a roar. But the Boers in the laager had found time to load, and they met with a warm reception. Reserving their fire till the Zulus were packed like sheep in a kraal, they loosed into them with the roers, and the warriors fell in little heaps. But I saw that the blood of the Umtetwas was up; they did not mean to be beaten back this time, and the end was near. See! six men had leapt on to a waggon, slain the man behind it, and sprung into the laager. They were killed there, but others followed, and then I turned my head. But I could not shut my ears to the cries of rage and death, and the terrible *S'gee! S'gee!* of the savages as they did their work of murder. Once only I looked up and saw poor Hans Botha standing on a waggon smiting down men with the butt of his rifle. The assegais shot up towards him like tongues of steel, and when I looked again he was gone.

I turned sick with fear and rage. But alas! what could I do? They were all dead now, and probably my own turn was coming, only my death would not be so swift.

The fight was ended, and the two lines on the slope broke their order, and moved down to the laager. Presently we were there, and a dreadful sight it was. Many of the attacking Zulus were dead—quite fifty I should say, and at least a hundred and fifty were wounded, some of them mortally. The chief Sususa gave an order, the dead men were picked up and piled in a heap, while those who were slightly hurt walked off to find some one to tie up their wounds. But the more serious cases met with a different treatment. The chief or one of his indunas considered each case, and if it was in any way bad, the man was taken up and thrown into the river which

ran near. None of them offered any objection, though one poor fellow swam to shore again. He did not stop there long, however, for they pushed him back and drowned him by force.

The strangest case of all was that of the chief's own brother. He had been captain of the line, and his ankle was smashed by a bullet. Sususa came up to him, and, having examined the wound, rated him soundly for failing in the first onslaught.

The poor fellow made the excuse that it was not his fault, as the Boers had hit him in the first rush. His brother admitted the truth of this, and talked to him amicably.

"Well," he said at length, offering him a pinch of snuff, "you cannot walk again."

"No, chief," said the wounded man, looking at his ankle.

"And to-morrow we must walk far," went on Sususa.

"Yes, chief."

"Say, then, will you sit here on the veldt, or——" and he nodded towards the river.

The man dropped his head on his breast for a minute as though in thought. Presently he lifted it and looked Sususa straight in the face.

"My ankle pains me, my brother," he said; "I think I will go back to Zululand, for there is the only kraal I wish to see again, even if I creep about it like a snake."[\*]

[\*] The Zulus believe that after death their spirits enter into the bodies of large green snakes, which glide about the kraals. To kill these snakes is sacrilege.

"It is well, my brother," said the chief. "Rest softly," and having shaken hands with him, he gave an order to one of the indunas, and turned away.

Then men came, and, supporting the wounded man, led him down to the banks of the stream. Here, at his request, they tied a heavy stone round his neck, and then threw him into a deep pool. I saw the whole sad scene, and the victim never even winced. It was impossible not to admire the extraordinary courage of the man, or to avoid being struck with the cold-blooded cruelty of his brother the chief. And yet the act was necessary from his point of view. The man must either die swiftly, or be left to perish of starvation, for no Zulu force will encumber itself with wounded men. Years of merciless warfare had so hardened these people that they looked on death as nothing, and were, to do them justice, as willing to meet it themselves as to inflict it on others. When this very Impi had been sent out by the Zulu King Dingaan, it consisted of some nine thousand men. Now it numbered less than three; all the rest were dead. They, too, would probably soon be dead. What did it matter? They lived by war to die in blood. It was their natural end. "Kill till you are killed." That is the motto of the Zulu soldier. It has the merit of simplicity.

Meanwhile the warriors were looting the waggons, including my own, having first thrown all the dead Boers into a heap. I looked at the heap; all of them were there, including the two stout fraus, poor things. But I missed one body, that of Hans Botha's daughter, little Tota. A wild hope came into my heart that she might have escaped; but no, it was not possible. I could only pray that she was already at rest.

Just then the great Zulu, Bombyane, who had left my side to indulge in the congenial occupation of looting, came out of a waggon crying that he had got the "little white one." I looked; he was carrying the child Tota, gripping her frock in one of his huge black hands. He stalked up to where we were, and held the child before the chief. "Is it dead, father?" he said, with a laugh.

Now, as I could well see, the child was not dead, but had been hidden away, and fainted with fear.

The chief glanced at it carelessly, and said—

"Find out with your kerrie."

Acting on this hint the black devil held up the child, and was about to kill it with his knobstick. This was more than I could bear. I sprang at him and struck him with all my force in the face, little caring if I was speared or not. He dropped Tota on the ground.

"Ou!" he said, putting his hand to his nose, "the White Spirit has a hard fist. Come, Spirit, I will fight you for the child."

The soldiers cheered and laughed. "Yes! yes!" they said, "let Bombyane fight the White Spirit for the child. Let them fight with assegais."

For a moment I hesitated. What chance had I against this black giant? But I had promised poor Hans to save the child if I could, and what did it matter? As well die now as later. However, I had wit enough left to make a favour of it, and intimated to the chief through Indaba-zimbi that I was quite willing to condescend to kill Bombyane, on condition that if I did so the child's life should be given to me. Indaba-zimbi interpreted my words, but I noticed that he would not look on me as he spoke, but covered his face with his hands and spoke of me as "the ghost" or the "son of the spirit." For some reason that I have never quite understood, the chief consented to the duel. I fancy it was because he believed me to be more than mortal, and was anxious to see the last of Bombyane.

"Let them fight," he said. "Give them assegais and no shields; the child shall be to him who conquers."

"Yes! yes!" cried the soldiers. "Let them fight. Don't be afraid, Bombyane; if he is a spirit, he's a very small one."

"I never was frightened of man or beast, and I am not going to run away from a White Ghost," answered the redoubtable Bombyane, as he examined the blade of his great bangwan or stabbing assegai.

Then they made a ring round us, gave me a similar assegai, and set us some ten paces apart. I kept my face as calm as I could, and tried to show no signs of fear, though in my heart I was terribly afraid. Humanly speaking, my doom was on me. The giant warrior before me had used the assegai from a child—I had no experience of the weapon. Moreover, though I was quick and active, he must have been at least twice as strong as I am. However, there was no help for it, so, setting my teeth, I grasped the great spear, breathed a prayer, and waited.

The giant stood awhile looking at me, and, as he stood, Indaba-zimbi walked across the ring behind me, muttering as he passed, "Keep cool, Macumazahn, and wait for him. I will make it all right."

As I had not the slightest intention of commencing the fray, I thought this good advice, though how Indaba-zimbi could “make it all right” I failed to see.

Heavens! how long that half-minute seemed! It happened many years ago, but the whole scene rises up before my eyes as I write. There behind us was the blood-stained laager, and near it lay the piles of dead; round us was rank upon rank of plumed savages, standing in silence to wait the issue of the duel, and in the centre stood the grey-haired chief and general, Sususa, in all his war finery, a cloak of leopard skin upon his shoulders. At his feet lay the senseless form of little Tota, to my left squatted Indaba-zimbi, nodding his white lock and muttering something—probably spells; while in front was my giant antagonist, his spear aloft and his plumes wavering in the gentle wind. Then over all, over grassy slope, river, and koppie, over the waggons of the laager, the piles of dead, the dense masses of the living, the swooning child, over all shone the bright impartial sun, looking down like the indifferent eye of Heaven upon the loveliness of nature and the cruelty of man. Down by the river grew thorn-trees, and from them floated the sweet scent of the mimosa flower, and came the sound of cooing turtle-doves. I never smell the one or hear the other without the scene flashing into my mind again, complete in its every detail.

Suddenly, without a sound, Bombyane shook his assegai and rushed straight at me. I saw his huge form come; like a man in a dream, I saw the broad spear flash on high; now he was on me! Then, prompted to it by some providential impulse—or had the spells of Indaba-zimbi anything to do with the matter?—I dropped to my knee, and quick as light stretched out my spear. He drove at me: the blade passed over my head. I felt a weight on my assegai; it was wrenched from my hand; his great limbs knocked against me. I glanced round. Bombyane was staggering along with head thrown back and outstretched arms from which his spear had fallen. His spear had fallen, but the blade of mine stood out between his shoulders—I had transfixed him. He stopped, swung slowly round as if he were about to look at me: then with a sigh the giant sank down—*dead*.

For a moment there was silence; then a great cry rose—a cry of “Bombyane is dead. The White Spirit has slain Bombyane. Kill the wizard, kill the ghost who has slain Bombyane by witchcraft.”

Instantly I was surrounded by fierce faces, and spears flashed before my eyes. I folded my arms and stood calmly waiting the end. In a moment it would have come, for the warriors were mad at seeing their champion overthrown thus easily. But presently through the tumult I heard the high, cracked voice of Indaba-zimbi.

“Stand back, you fools!” it cried; “can a spirit then be killed?”

“Spear him! spear him!” they roared in fury. “Let us see if he is a spirit. How did a spirit slay Bombyane with an assegai? Spear him, rain-maker, and we shall see.”

“Stand back,” cried Indaba-zimbi again, “and I will show you if he can be killed. I will kill him myself, and call him back to life again before your eyes.”

“Macumazahn, trust me,” he whispered in my ear in the Sisutu tongue, which the Zulus did not understand. “Trust me; kneel on the grass before me, and when I strike at you with the spear, roll over like one dead; then, when you hear my voice again, get up. Trust me—it is your only hope.”

Having no choice I nodded my head in assent, though I had not the faintest idea of what he was about to do. The tumult lessened somewhat, and once more the warriors drew back.

“Great White Spirit—Spirit of victory,” said Indaba-zimbi, addressing me aloud, and covering his eyes with his hand, “hear me and forgive me. These children are blind with folly, and think thee mortal because thou hast dealt death upon a mortal who dared to stand against thee. Deign to kneel down before me and let me pierce thy heart with this spear, then when I call upon thee, arise unhurt.”

I knelt down, not because I wished to, but because I must. I had not overmuch faith in Indaba-zimbi, and thought it probable that he was in truth about to make an end of me. But really I was so worn out with fears, and the horrors of the night and day had so shaken my nerves, that I did not greatly care what befell me. When I had been kneeling thus for about half a minute Indaba-zimbi spoke.

“People of the Umtetwa, children of T’Chaka,” he said, “draw back a little way, lest an evil fall on you, for now the air is thick with ghosts.”

They drew back a space, leaving us in a circle about twelve yards in diameter.

“Look on him who kneels before you,” went on Indaba-zimbi, “and listen to my words, to the words of the witch-finder, the words of the rain-maker, Indaba-zimbi, whose fame is known to you. He seems to be a young man, does he not? I tell you, children of the Umtetwa, he is no man. He is the Spirit who gives victory to the white men, he it is who gave them assegais that thunder and taught them how to slay. Why were the Impis of Dingaan rolled back at the Blood River? Because *he* was there. Why did the Amaboona slay the people of Mosilikatze by the thousand? Because *he* was there. And so I say to you that, had I not drawn him from the laager by my magic but three hours ago, you would have been conquered—yes, you would have been blown away like the dust before the wind; you would have been burnt up like the dry grass in the winter when the fire is awake among it. Ay, because he had but been there many of your bravest were slain in overcoming a few—a pinch of men who could be counted on the fingers. But because I loved you, because your chief Sususa is my half-brother—for had we not one father?—I came to you, I warned you. Then you prayed me and I drew the Spirit forth. But you were not satisfied when the victory was yours, when the Spirit, of all you had taken asked but one little thing—a white child to take away and sacrifice to himself, to make the medicine of his magic of——”

Here I could hardly restrain myself from interrupting, but thought better of it.

“You said him nay; you said, ‘Let him fight with our bravest man, let him fight with Bombyane the giant for the child.’ And he deigned to slay Bombyane as you have seen, and now you say, ‘Slay him; he is no spirit.’ Now I will show you if he is a spirit, for I will slay him before your eyes, and call him to life again. But you have brought this upon yourselves. Had you believed, had you offered no insult to the Spirit, he would have stayed with you, and you should have become unconquerable. Now he will arise and leave you, and woe be on you if you try to stay him.

"Now all men," he went on, "look for a space upon this assegai that I hold up," and he lifted the bangwan of the deceased Bombyane high above his head so that all the multitude could see it. Every eye was fixed upon the broad bright spear. For a while he held it still, then he moved it round and round in a circle, muttering as he did so, and still their gaze followed it. For my part, I watched his movements with the greatest anxiety. That assegai had already been nearer my person than I found at all pleasant, and I had no desire to make a further acquaintance with it. Nor, indeed, was I sure that Indaba-zimbi was not really going to kill me. I could not understand his proceedings at all, and at the best I did not relish playing the *corpus vile* to his magical experiments.

"Look! look! look!" he screamed.

Then suddenly the great spear flashed down towards my breast. I felt nothing, but, to my sight, it seemed as though it had passed through me.

"See!" roared the Zulus. "Indaba-zimbi has speared him; the red assegai stands out behind his back."

"Roll over, Macumazahn," Indaba-zimbi hissed in my ear, "roll over and pretend to die—quick! quick!"

I lost no time in following these strange instructions, but falling on to my side, threw my arms wide, kicked my legs about, and died as artistically as I could. Presently I gave a stage shiver and lay still.

"See!" said the Zulus, "he is dead, the Spirit is dead. Look at the blood upon the assegai!"

"Stand back! stand back!" cried Indaba-zimbi, "or the ghost will haunt you. Yes, he is dead, and now I will call him back to life again. Look!" and putting down his hand, he plucked the spear from wherever it was fixed, and held it aloft. "The spear is red, is it not? Watch, men, watch! *it grows white!*"

"Yes, it grows white," they said. "Ou! it grows white."

"It grows white because the blood returns to whence it came," said Indaba-zimbi. "Now, great Spirit, hear me. Thou art dead, the breath has gone out of thy mouth. Yet hear me and arise. Awake, White Spirit, awake and show thy power. Awake! arise unhurt!"

I began to respond cheerfully to this imposing invocation.

"Not so fast, Macumazahn," whispered Indaba-zimbi.

I took the hint, and first held up my arm, then lifted my head and let it fall again.

"He lives! by the head of T'Chaka he lives!" roared the soldiers, stricken with mortal fear.

Then slowly and with the greatest dignity I gradually arose, stretched my arms, yawned like one awaking from heavy sleep, turned and looked upon them unconcernedly. While I did so, I noticed that old Indaba-zimbi was almost fainting from exhaustion. Beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, his limbs trembled, and his breast heaved.

As for the Zulus, they waited for no more. With a howl of terror the whole regiment turned and fled across the rise, so that presently we were left alone with the dead, and the swooning child.

"How on earth did you do that, Indaba-zimbi?" I asked in amaze.

"Do not ask me, Macumazahn," he gasped. "You white men are very clever, but you don't quite know everything. There are men in the world who can make people believe they see things which they do not see. Let us be going while we may, for when those Umtetwas have got over their fright, they will come back to loot the waggons, and then perhaps *they* will begin asking questions that I can't answer."

And here I may as well state that I never got any further information on this matter from old Indaba-zimbi. But I have my theory, and here it is for whatever it may be worth. I believe that Indaba-zimbi *mesmerized* the whole crowd of onlookers, myself included, making them believe that they saw the assegai in my heart, and the blood upon the blade. The reader may smile and say, "Impossible;" but I would ask him how the Indian jugglers do their tricks unless it is by mesmerism. The spectators *seem* to see the boy go under the basket and there pierced with daggers, they *seem* to see women in a trance supported in mid-air upon the point of a single sword. In themselves these things are not possible, they violate the laws of nature, as those laws are known to us, and therefore must surely be illusion. And so through the glamour thrown upon them by Indaba-zimbi's will, that Zulu Impi seemed to see me transfixed with an assegai which never touched me. At least, that is my theory; if any one has a better, let him adopt it. The explanation lies between illusion and magic of a most imposing character, and I prefer to accept the first alternative.

## CHAPTER VI.

### STELLA

I was not slow to take Indaba-zimbi's hint. About a hundred and fifty yards to the left of the laager was a little dell where I had hidden my horse, together with one belonging to the Boers, and my saddle and bridle. Thither we went, I carrying the swooning Tota in my arms. To our joy we found the horses safe, for the Zulus had not seen them. Now, of course, they were our only means of locomotion, for the oxen had been sent away, and even had they been there we could not have found time to inspan them. I laid Tota down, caught my horse, undid his knee halter, and saddled up. As I was doing so a thought struck me, and I told Indaba-zimbi to run to the laager and see if he could find my double-barrelled gun and some powder and shot, for I had only my elephant "roer" and a few charges of powder and ball with me.

He went, and while he was away, poor little Tota came to herself and began to cry, till she saw my face.

"Ah, I have had such a bad dream," she said, in Dutch: "I dreamed that the black Kaffirs were going to kill me. Where is my papa?"

I winced at the question. "Your papa has gone on a journey, dear," I said, "and left me to look after you. We shall find him one day. You don't mind going with Heer Allan, do you?"

"No," she said, a little doubtfully, and began to cry again. Presently she remembered that she was thirsty, and asked for water. I led her to the river and she drank. "Why is my hand red, Heer Allan?" she asked, pointing to the smear of Bombyane's blood-stained fingers.

At this moment I felt very glad that I had killed Bombyane.

"It is only paint, dear," I said; "see, we will wash it and your face."

As I was doing this, Indaba-zimbi returned. The guns were all gone; he said the Zulus had taken them and the powder. But he had found some things and brought them in a sack. There was a thick blanket, about twenty pounds weight of biltong or sun-dried meat, a few double-handfuls of biscuits, two water-bottles, a tin pannikin, some matches and sundries.

"And now, Macumazahn," he said, "we had best be going, for those Umtetwas are coming back. I saw one of them on the brow of the rise."

That was enough for me. I lifted little Tota on to the bow of my saddle, climbed into it, and rode off, holding her in front of me. Indaba-zimbi slipped a rein into the mouth of the best of the Boer horses, threw the sack of sundries on to its back and mounted also, holding the elephant gun in his hand. We went eight or nine hundred yards in silence till we were quite out of range of sight from the waggons, which were in a hollow. Then I pulled up, with such a feeling of thankfulness in my heart as cannot be told in words; for now I knew that, mounted as we were, those black demons could never catch us. But where were we to steer for? I put the question to Indaba-zimbi, asking him if he thought that we had better try and follow the oxen which we had sent away with the Kaffirs and women on the preceding night. He shook his head.

"The Umtetwas will go after the oxen presently," he answered, "and we have seen enough of them."

"Quite enough," I answered, with enthusiasm; "I never want to see another; but where are we to go? Here we are alone with one gun and a little girl in the vast and lonely veldt. Which way shall we turn?"

"Our faces were towards the north before we met the Zulus," answered Indaba-zimbi; "let us still keep them to the north. Ride on, Macumazahn; to-night when we off-saddle I will look into the matter."

So all that long afternoon we rode on, following the course of the river. From the nature of the ground we could only go slowly, but before sunset I had the satisfaction of knowing that there must be at least twenty-five miles between us and those accursed Zulus. Little Tota slept most of the way, the motion of the horse was easy, and she was worn out.

At last the sunset came, and we off-saddled in a dell by the river. There was not much to eat, but I soaked some biscuit in water for Tota, and Indaba-zimbi and I made a scanty meal of biltong. When we had done I took off Tota's frock, wrapped her up in a blanket near the fire we had made, and lit a pipe. I sat there by the side of the sleeping orphaned child, and from my heart thanked Providence for saving her life and mine from the slaughter of that day. What a horrible experience it had been! It seemed like a nightmare to look back upon. And yet it was sober fact, one among those many tragedies which dotted the paths of the emigrant Boers with the bones of men, women, and children. These horrors are almost forgotten now; people living in Natal now, for instance, can scarcely realize that some forty years ago six hundred white people, many of them women and children, were thus massacred by the Impis of Dingaan. But it was so, and the name of the district, *Weenen*, or the Place of Weeping, will commemorate them for ever.

Then I fell to reflecting on the extraordinary adroitness old Indaba-zimbi had shown in saving my life. It appeared that he himself had lived among the Umtetwa Zulus in his earlier manhood, and was a noted rain-doctor and witch-finder. But when T'Chaka, Dingaan's brother, ordered a general massacre of the witch-finders, he alone had saved his life by his skill in magic, and ultimately fled south for reasons too long to set out here. When he heard, therefore, that the regiment was an Umtetwa regiment, which, leaving their wives and children, had broken away from Zululand to escape the cruelties of Dingaan; under pretence of spying on them, he

took the bold course of going straight up to the chief, Sususa, and addressing him as his brother, which he was. The chief knew him at once, and so did the soldiers, for his fame was still great among them. Then he told them his cock and bull story about my being a white spirit, whose presence in the laager would render it invincible, and with the object of saving my life in the slaughter which he knew must ensue, agreed to charm me out of the laager and deliver me into their keeping. How the plan worked has already been told; it was a risky one; still, but for it my troubles would have been done with these many days.

So I lay and thought with a heart full of gratitude, and as I did so saw old Indaba-zimbi sitting by the fire and going through some mysterious performances with bones which he produced from his bag, and ashes mixed with water. I spoke to him and asked what he was about. He replied that he was tracing out the route that we should follow. I felt inclined to answer "bosh!" but remembering the very remarkable instances which he had given of his prowess in occult matters I held my tongue, and taking little Tota into my arms, worn out with toil and danger and emotion, I went to sleep.

I awoke just as the dawn was beginning to flame across the sky in sheets of primrose and of gold, or rather it was little Tota who woke me by kissing me as she lay between sleep and waking, and calling me "papa." It wrung my heart to hear her, poor orphaned child. I got up, washed and dressed her as best I could, and we breakfasted as we had supped, on biltong and biscuit. Tota asked for milk, but I had none to give her. Then we caught the horses, and I saddled mine.

"Well, Indaba-zimbi," I said, "now what path do your bones point to?"

"Straight north," he said. "The journey will be hard, but in about four days we shall come to the kraal of a white man, an Englishman, not a Boer. His kraal is in a beautiful place, and there is a great peak behind it where there are many baboons."

I looked at him. "This is all nonsense, Indaba-zimbi," I said. "Whoever heard of an Englishman building a house in these wilds, and how do you know anything about it? I think that we had better strike east towards Port Natal."

"As you like, Macumazahn," he answered, "but it will take us three months' journey to get to Port Natal, if we ever get there, and the child will die on the road. Say, Macumazahn, have my words come true heretofore, or have they not? Did I not tell you not to hunt the elephants on horseback? Did I not tell you to take one waggon with you instead of two, as it is better to lose one than two?"

"You told me all these things," I answered.

"And so I tell you now to ride north, Macumazahn, for there you will find great happiness—yes, and great sorrow. But no man should run away from happiness because of the sorrow. As you will, as you will!"

Again I looked at him. In his divinations I did not believe, yet I came to the conclusion that he was speaking what he knew to be the truth. It struck me as possible that he might have heard of some white man living like a hermit in the wilds, but preferring to keep up his prophetic character would not say so.

"Very well, Indaba-zimbi," I said, "let us ride north."

Shortly after we started, the river we had followed hitherto turned off in a westerly direction, so we left it. All that day we rode across rolling uplands, and about an hour before sunset halted at a little stream which ran down from a range of hills in front of us. By this time I was heartily tired of the biltong, so taking my elephant rifle—for I had nothing else—I left Tota with Indaba-zimbi, and started to try if I could shoot something. Oddly enough we had seen no game all the day, nor did we see any on the subsequent days. For some mysterious reason they had temporarily left the district. I crossed the little streamlet in order to enter the belt of thorns which grew upon the hill-side beyond, for there I hoped to find buck. As I did so I was rather disturbed to see the spoor of two lions in the soft sandy edge of a pool. Breathing a hope that they might not still be in the neighbourhood, I went on into the belt of scattered thorns. For a long while I hunted about without seeing anything, except one duiker buck, which bounded off with a crash from the other side of a stone without giving me a chance. At length, just as it grew dusk, I spied a Petie buck, a graceful little creature, scarcely bigger than a large hare, standing on a stone, about forty yards from me. Under ordinary circumstances I should never have dreamed of firing at such a thing, especially with an elephant gun, but we were hungry. So I sat down with my back against a rock, and aimed steadily at its head. I did this because if I struck it in the body the three-ounce ball would have knocked it to bits. At last I pulled the trigger, the gun went off with the report of a small cannon, and the buck disappeared. I ran to the spot with more anxiety than I should have felt in an ordinary way over a koodoo or an eland. To my delight there the little creature lay—the huge bullet had decapitated it. Considering all the circumstances I do not think I have often made a better shot than this, but if any one doubts, let him try his hand at a rabbit's head fifty yards away with an elephant gun and a three-ounce ball.

I picked up the Petie in triumph, and returned to the camp. There we skinned him and toasted his flesh over the fire. He just made a good meal for us, though we kept the hind legs for breakfast.

There was no moon this night, and so it chanced that when I suddenly remembered about the lion spoor, and suggested that we had better tie up the horses quite close to us, we could not find them, though we knew they were grazing within fifty yards. This being so we could only make up the fire and take our chance. Shortly afterwards I went to sleep with little Tota in my arms. Suddenly I was awakened by hearing that peculiarly painful sound, the scream of a horse, quite close to the fire, which was still burning brightly. Next second there came a noise of galloping hoofs, and before I could even rise my poor horse appeared in the ring of firelight. As in a flash of lightning I saw his staring eyes and wide-stretched nostrils, and the broken rein with which he had been knee-haltered, flying in the air. Also I saw something else, for on his back was a great dark form with glowing eyes, and from the form came a growling sound. It was a lion.

The horse dashed on. He galloped right through the fire, for which he had run in his terror, fortunately, however, without treading on us, and vanished into the night. We heard his hoofs for a hundred yards or more, then there was silence, broken now and again by distant growls. As may be imagined, we did not sleep any more that night, but waited anxiously till the dawn broke, two hours later.

As soon as there was sufficient light we rose, and, leaving Tota still asleep, crept cautiously in the direction in which the horse had vanished. When we had gone fifty yards or so, we made out its remains lying on the veldt, and caught sight of two great cat-like forms slinking away in the grey light.

To go any further was useless; we knew all about it now, so we turned to look for the other horse. But our cup of misfortune was not yet full; the horse was nowhere to be found. Terrified by the sight and smell of the lions, it had with a desperate effort also burst the rein with which it had been knee-haltered, and galloped far away. I sat down, feeling as though I could cry like a woman. For now we were left alone in these vast solitudes without a horse to carry us, and with a child who was not old enough to walk for more than a little way at a time.

Well, it was no use giving in, so with a few words we went back to our camp, where I found Tota crying because she had woken to find herself alone. Then we ate a little food and prepared to start. First we divided such articles as we must take with us into two equal parts, rejecting everything that we could possibly do without. Then, by an afterthought, we filled our water-bottles, though at the time I was rather against doing so, because of the extra weight. But Indaba-zimbi overruled me in the matter, fortunately for all three of us. I settled to look after Tota for the first march, and to give the elephant gun to Indaba-zimbi. At length all was ready, and we set out on foot. By the help of occasional lifts over rough places, Tota managed to walk up the slope of the hill-side where I had shot the Petie buck. At length we reached it, and, looking at the country beyond, I gave an exclamation of dismay. To say that it was desert would be saying too much; it was more like the Karroo in the Cape—a vast sandy waste, studded here and there with low shrubs and scattered rocks. But it was a great expanse of desolate land, stretching further than the eye could reach, and bordered far away by a line of purple hills, in the centre of which a great solitary peak soared high into the air.

“Indaba-zimbi,” I said, “we can never cross this if we take six days.”

“As you will, Macumazahn,” he answered; “but I tell you that there”—and he pointed to the peak—“there the white man lives. Turn which way you like, but if you turn you will perish.”

I reflected for a moment, Our case was, humanly speaking, almost hopeless. It mattered little which way we went. We were alone, almost without food, with no means of transport, and a child to carry. As well perish in the sandy waste as on the rolling veldt or among the trees of the hill-side. Providence alone could save us, and we must trust to Providence.

“Come on,” I said, lifting Tota on to my back, for she was already tired. “All roads lead to rest.”

How am I to describe the misery of the next four days? How am I to tell how we stumbled on through that awful desert, almost without food, and quite without water, for there were no streams, and we saw no springs? We soon found how the case was, and saved almost all the water in our bottles for the child. To look back on it is like a nightmare. I can scarcely bear to dwell on it. Day after day, by turns carrying the child through the heavy sand; night after night lying down in the scrub, chewing the leaves, and licking such dew as there was from the scanty grass! Not a spring, not a pool, not a head of game! It was the third night; we were nearly mad with thirst. Tota was in a comatose condition. Indaba-zimbi still had a little water in his bottle—perhaps a wine-glassful. With it we moistened our lips and blackened tongues. Then we gave the rest to the child. It revived her. She awoke from her swoon to sink into sleep.

See, the dawn was breaking. The hills were not more than eight miles or so away now, and they were green. There must be water there.

“Come,” I said.

Indaba-zimbi lifted Tota into the kind of sling that we had made out of the blanket in which to carry her on our backs, and we staggered on for an hour through the sand. She awoke crying for water, and alas! we had none to give her; our tongues were hanging from our lips, we could scarcely speak.

We rested awhile, and Tota mercifully swooned away again. Then Indaba-zimbi took her. Though he was so thin the old man’s strength was wonderful.

Another hour; the slope of the great peak could not be more than two miles away now. A couple of hundred yards off grew a large baobab tree. Could we reach its shade? We had done half the distance when Indaba-zimbi fell from exhaustion. We were now so weak that neither of us could lift the child on to our backs. He rose again, and we each took one of her hands and dragged her along the road. Fifty yards—they seemed to be fifty miles. Ah, the tree was reached at last; compared with the heat outside, the shade of its dense foliage seemed like the dusk and cool of a vault. I remember thinking that it was a good place to die in. Then I remember no more.

I woke with a feeling as though the blessed rain were falling on my face and head. Slowly, and with great difficulty, I opened my eyes, then shut them again, having seen a vision. For a space I lay thus, while the rain continued to fall; I saw now that I must be asleep, or off my head with thirst and fever. If I were not off my head how came I to imagine that a lovely dark-eyed girl was bending over me sprinkling water on my face? A white girl, too, not a Kaffir woman. However, the dream went on.

“Hendrika,” said a voice in English, the sweetest voice that I had ever heard; somehow it reminded me of wind whispering in the trees at night. “Hendrika, I fear he dies; there is a flask of brandy in my saddle-bag; get it.”

“Ah! ah!” grunted a harsh voice in answer; “let him die, Miss Stella. He will bring you bad luck—let him die, I say.” I felt a movement of air above me as though the woman of my vision turned swiftly, and once again I opened my eyes. She had risen, this dream woman. Now I saw that she was tall and graceful as a reed. She was angry, too; her dark eyes flashed, and she pointed with her hand at a female who stood before her, dressed in nondescript kind of clothes such as might be worn by either a man or a woman. The woman was young, of white blood, very short, with bowed legs and enormous shoulders. In face she was not bad-looking, but the brow receded, the chin and ears were prominent—in short, she reminded me of nothing so much as a very handsome monkey. She might have been the missing link.

The lady was pointing at her with her hand. “How dare you?” she said. “Are you going to disobey me again? Have you forgotten what I told you, Babyan?”[\*]

[\*] Baboon.

“Ah! ah!” grunted the woman, who seemed literally to curl and shrivel up beneath her anger. “Don’t be angry with me, Miss Stella, because I can’t bear it. I only said it because it was true. I will fetch the brandy.”

Then, dream or no dream, I determined to speak.

"Not brandy," I gasped in English as well as my swollen tongue would allow; "give me water."

"Ah, he lives!" cried the beautiful girl, "and he talks English. See, sir, here is water in your own bottle; you were quite close to a spring, it is on the other side of the tree."

I struggled to a sitting position, lifted the bottle to my lips, and drank from it. Oh! that drink of cool, pure water! never had I tasted anything so delicious. With the first gulp I felt life flow back into me. But wisely enough she would not let me have much. "No more! no more!" she said, and dragged the bottle from me almost by force.

"The child," I said—"is the child dead?"

"I do not know yet," she answered. "We have only just found you, and I tried to revive you first."

I turned and crept to where Tota lay by the side of Indaba-zimbi. It was impossible to say if they were dead or swooning. The lady sprinkled Tota's face with the water, which I watched greedily, for my thirst was still awful, while the woman Hendrika did the same office for Indaba-zimbi. Presently, to my vast delight, Tota opened her eyes and tried to cry, but could not, poor little thing, because her tongue and lips were so swollen. But the lady got some water into her mouth, and, as in my case, the effect was magical. We allowed her to drink about a quarter of a pint, and no more, though she cried bitterly for it. Just then old Indaba-zimbi came to with a groan. He opened his eyes, glanced round, and took in the situation.

"What did I tell you, Macumazahn?" he gasped, and seizing the bottle, he took a long pull at it.

Meanwhile I sat with my back against the trunk of the great tree and tried to realize the situation. Looking to my left I saw too good horses—one bare-backed, and one with a rudely made lady's saddle on it. By the side of the horses were two dogs, of a stout greyhound breed, that sat watching us, and near the dogs lay a dead Oribé buck, which they had evidently been coursing.

"Hendrika," said the lady presently, "they must not eat meat just yet. Go look up the tree and see if there is any ripe fruit on it."

The woman ran swiftly into the plain and obeyed. Presently she returned. "I see some ripe fruit," she said, "but it is high, quite at the top."

"Fetch it," said the lady.

"Easier said than done," I thought to myself; but I was much mistaken. Suddenly the woman bounded at least three feet into the air and caught one of the spreading boughs in her large flat hands; then came a swing that would have filled an acrobat with envy—and she was on it.

"Now there is an end," I thought again, for the next bough was beyond her reach. But again I was mistaken. She stood up on the bough, gripping it with her bare feet, and once more sprang at the one above, caught it and swung herself into it.

I suppose that the lady saw my expression of astonishment. "Do not wonder, sir," she said, "Hendrika is not like other people. She will not fall."

I made no answer, but watched the progress of this extraordinary person with the most breathless interest. On she went, swinging herself from bough to bough, and running along them like a monkey. At last she reached the top, and began to swarm up a thin branch towards the ripe fruit. When she was near enough she shook the branch violently. There was a crack—a crash—it broke. I shut my eyes, expecting to see her crushed on the ground before me.

"Don't be afraid," said the lady again, laughing gently. "Look, she is quite safe."

I looked, and so she was. She had caught a bough as she fell, clung to it, and was now calmly dropping to another. Old Indaba-zimbi had also watched this performance with interest, but it did not seem to astonish him over-much. "Baboon-woman?" he said, as though such people were common, and then turned his attention to soothing Tota, who was moaning for more water. Meanwhile Hendrika came down the tree with extraordinary rapidity, and swinging by one hand from a bough, dropped about eight feet to the ground.

In another two minutes we were all three sucking the pulpy fruit. In an ordinary way we should have found it tasteless enough: as it was I thought it the most delicious thing I had ever tasted. After three days spent without food or water, in the desert, one is not particular. While we were still eating the fruit, the lady of my vision set her companion to work to partially flay the oribé which her dogs had killed, and busied herself in making a fire of fallen boughs. As soon as it burned brightly she took strips of the oribé flesh, toasted them, and gave them to us on leaves. We ate, and now were allowed a little more water. After that she took Tota to the spring and washed her, which she sadly needed, poor child! Next came our turn to wash, and oh, the joy of it!

I came back to the tree, walking painfully, indeed, but a changed man. There sat the beautiful girl with Tota on her knees. She was lulling her to sleep, and held up her finger to me enjoining silence. At last the child went off into a sound natural slumber—an example that I should have been glad to follow had it not been for my burning curiosity. Then I spoke.

"May I ask what your name is?" I said.

"Stella," she answered.

"Stella what?" I said.

"Stella nothing," she answered, in some pique; "Stella is my name; it is short and easy to remember at any rate. My father's name is Thomas, and we live up there," and she pointed round the base of the great peak. I looked at her astonished. "Have you lived there long?" I asked.

"Ever since I was seven years old. We came there in a waggon. Before that we came from England—from Oxfordshire; I can show you the place on a big map. It is called Garsingham."

Again I thought I must be dreaming. "Do you know, Miss Stella," I said, "it is very strange—so strange that it almost seems as though it could not be true—but I also came from Garsingham in Oxfordshire many years ago."

She started up. "Are you an English gentleman?" she said. "Ah, I have always longed to see an English gentleman. I have never seen but one Englishman since we lived here, and he certainly was not a gentleman—no white people at all, indeed, except a few wandering Boers. We live among black people and baboons—only I have read about English people—lots of books—poetry and novels. But tell me what is your name? Macumazahn the black man called you, but you must have a white name, too."

"My name is Allan Quatermain," I said.

Her face turned quite white, her rosy lips parted, and she looked at me wildly with her beautiful dark eyes.

"It is wonderful," she said, "but I have often heard that name. My father has told me how a little boy called Allan Quatermain once saved my life by putting out my dress when it was on fire—see!"—and she pointed to a faint red mark upon her neck—"here is the scar of the burn."

"I remember it," I said. "You were dressed up as Father Christmas. It was I who put out the fire; my wrists were burnt in doing so."

Then for a space we sat silent, looking at each other, while Stella slowly fanned herself with her wide felt hat, in which some white ostrich plumes were fixed.

"This is God's doing," she said at last. "You saved my life when I was a child; now I have saved yours and the little girl's. Is she your own daughter?" she added, quickly.

"No," I answered; "I will tell you the tale presently."

"Yes," she said, "you shall tell me as we go home. It is time to be starting home, it will take us three hours to get there. Hendrika, Hendrika, bring the horses here!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BABOON-WOMAN

Hendrika obeyed, leading the horses to the side of the tree.

"Now, Mr. Allan," said Stella, "you must ride on my horse, and the old black man must ride on the other. I will walk, and Hendrika will carry the child. Oh, do not be afraid, she is very strong, she could carry you or me."

Hendrika grunted assent. I am sorry that I cannot express her method of speech by any more polite term. Sometimes she grunted like a monkey, sometimes she clicked like a Bushman, and sometimes she did both together, when she became quite unintelligible.

I expostulated against this proposed arrangement, saying that we could walk, which was a fib, for I do not think that I could have done a mile; but Stella would not listen, she would not even let me carry my elephant gun, but took it herself. So we mounted with some difficulty, and Hendrika took up the sleeping Tota in her long, sinewy arms.

"See that the 'Baboon-woman' does not run away into the mountains with the little white one," said Indaba-zimbi to me in Kaffir, as he climbed slowly on to the horse.

Unfortunately Hendrika understood his speech. Her face twisted and grew livid with fury. She put down Tota and literally sprang at Indaba-zimbi as a monkey springs. But weary and worn as he was, the old gentleman was too quick for her. With an exclamation of genuine fright he threw himself from the horse on the further side, with the somewhat ludicrous result that all in a moment Hendrika was occupying the seat which he had vacated. Just then Stella realized the position.

"Come down, you savage, come down!" she said, stamping her foot.

The extraordinary creature flung herself from the horse and literally grovelled on the ground before her mistress and burst into tears.

"Pardon, Miss Stella," she clicked and grunted in villainous English, "but he called me 'Babyan-frau' (Baboon-woman)."

"Tell your servant that he must not use such words to Hendrika, Mr. Allan," Stella said to me. "If he does," she added, in a whisper, "Hendrika will certainly kill him."

I explained this to Indaba-zimbi, who, being considerably frightened, deigned to apologize. But from that hour there was hate and war between these two.

Harmony having been thus restored, we started, the dogs following us. A small strip of desert intervened between us and the slope of the peak—perhaps it was two miles wide. We crossed it and reached rich grass lands, for here a considerable stream gathered from the hills; but it did not flow across the barren lands, it passed to the east along the foot of the hills. This stream we had to cross by a ford. Hendrika walked boldly through it, holding Tota in her arms. Stella leapt across from stone to stone like a roebuck; I thought to myself that she was the most graceful creature that I had ever seen. After this the track passed around a pleasantly-wooded shoulder of the peak, which was, I found, known as Babyan Kap, or Baboon Head. Of course we could only go at a foot pace, so our progress was slow. Stella walked for some way in silence, then she spoke.

"Tell me, Mr. Allan," she said, "how it was that I came to find you dying in the desert?"

So I began and told her all. It took an hour or more to do so, and she listened intently, now and again asking a question.

"It is all very wonderful," she said when I had done, "very wonderful indeed. Do you know I went out this morning with Hendrika and the dogs for a ride, meaning to get back home by mid-day, for my father is ill, and I do not like to leave him for long. But just as I was going to turn, when we were about where we are now—yes, that was the very bush—an oribé got up, and the dogs chased it. I followed them for the gallop, and when we came to the river, instead of turning to the left as bucks generally do, the oribé swam the stream and took to the Bad Lands beyond. I followed it, and within a hundred yards of the big tree the dogs killed it. Hendrika wanted to turn back at once, but I said that we would rest under the shade of the tree, for I knew that there was a spring of water near. Well, we went; and there I saw you all lying like dead; but Hendrika, who is very clever in some ways, said no—and you know the rest. Yes, it is very wonderful."

"It is indeed," I said. "Now tell me, Miss Stella, who is Hendrika?"

She looked round before answering to see that the woman was not near.

"Hers is a strange story, Mr. Allan. I will tell you. You must know that all these mountains and the country beyond are full of baboons. When I was a girl of about ten I used to wander a great deal alone in the hills and valleys, and watch the baboons as they played among the rocks. There was one family of baboons that I watched especially—they used to live in a kloof about a mile from the house. The old man baboon was very large, and one of the females had a grey face. But the reason why I watched them so much was because I saw that they had with them a creature that looked like a girl, for her skin was quite white, and, what was more, that she was protected from the weather when it happened to be cold by a fur belt of some sort, which was tied round her throat. The old baboons seemed to be especially fond of her, and would sit with their arms round her neck. For nearly a whole summer I watched this particular white-skinned baboon till at last my curiosity quite overmastered me. I noticed that, though she climbed about the cliffs with the other monkeys, at a certain hour a little before sundown they used to put her with one or two other much smaller ones into a

little cave, while the family went off somewhere to get food, to the mealie fields, I suppose. Then I got an idea that I would catch this white baboon and bring it home. But of course I could not do this by myself, so I took a Hottentot—a very clever man when he was not drunk—who lived on the stead, into my confidence. He was called Hendrik, and was very fond of me; but for a long while he would not listen to my plan, because he said that the babyans would kill us. At last I bribed him with a knife that had four blades, and one afternoon we started, Hendrik carrying a stout sack made of hide, with a rope running through it so that the mouth could be drawn tight.

“Well, we got to the place, and, hiding ourselves carefully in the trees at the foot of the kloof, watched the baboons playing about and grunting to each other, till at length, according to custom, they took the white one and three other little babies and put them in the cave. Then the old man came out, looked carefully round, called to his family, and went off with them over the brow of the kloof. Now very slowly and cautiously we crept up over the rocks till we came to the mouth of the cave and looked in. All the four little baboons were fast asleep, with their backs towards us, and their arms round each other’s necks, the white one being in the middle. Nothing could have been better for our plans. Hendrik, who by this time had quite entered into the spirit of the thing, crept along the cave like a snake, and suddenly dropped the mouth of the hide bag over the head of the white baboon. The poor little thing woke up and gave a violent jump which caused it to vanish right into the bag. Then Hendrik pulled the string tight, and together we knotted it so that it was impossible for our captive to escape. Meanwhile the other baby baboons had rushed from the cave screaming, and when we got outside they were nowhere to be seen.

“Come on, Missie,” said Hendrik; ‘the babyans will soon be back.’ He had shouldered the sack, inside of which the white baboon was kicking violently, and screaming like a child. It was dreadful to hear its shrieks.

“We scrambled down the sides of the kloof and ran for home as fast as we could manage. When we were near the waterfall, and within about three hundred yards of the garden wall, we heard a voice behind us, and there, leaping from rock to rock, and running over the grass, was the whole family of baboons headed by the old man.

“Run, Missie, run!” gasped Hendrik, and I did, like the wind, leaving him far behind. I dashed into the garden, where some Kaffirs were working, crying, ‘The babyans! the babyans!’ Luckily the men had their sticks and spears by them and ran out just in time to save Hendrik, who was almost overtaken. The baboons made a good fight for it, however, and it was not till the old man was killed with an assegai that they ran away.

“Well, there is a stone hut in the kraal at the stead where my father sometimes shuts up natives who have misbehaved. It is very strong, and has a barred window. To this hut Hendrik carried the sack, and, having untied the mouth, put it down on the floor, and ran from the place, shutting the door behind him. In another moment the poor little thing was out and dashing round the stone hut as though it were mad. It sprung at the bars of the window, clung there, and beat its head against them till the blood came. Then it fell to the floor, and sat upon it crying like a child, and rocking itself backwards and forwards. It was so sad to see it that I began to cry too.

“Just then my father came in and asked what all the fuss was about. I told him that we had caught a young white baboon, and he was angry, and said that it must be let go. But when he looked at it through the bars of the window he nearly fell down with astonishment.

“‘Why!’ he said, ‘this is not a baboon, it is a white child that the baboons have stolen and brought up!’

“Now, Mr. Allan, whether my father is right or wrong, you can judge for yourself. You see Hendrika—we named her that after Hendrik, who caught her—she is a woman, not a monkey, and yet she has many of the ways of monkeys, and looks like one too. You saw how she can climb, for instance, and you hear how she talks. Also she is very savage, and when she is angry or jealous she seems to go mad, though she is as clever as anybody. I think that she must have been stolen by the baboons when she was quite tiny and nurtured by them, and that is why she is so like them.

“But to go on. My father said that it was our duty to keep Hendrika at any cost. The worst of it was, that for three days she would eat nothing, and I thought that she would die, for all the while she sat and wailed. On the third day, however, I went to the bars of the window place, and held out a cup of milk and some fruit to her. She looked at it for a long while, then crept up moaning, took the milk from my hand, drank it greedily, and afterwards ate the fruit. From that time forward she took food readily enough, but only if I would feed her.

“But I must tell you of the dreadful end of Hendrik. From the day that we captured Hendrika the whole place began to swarm with baboons which were evidently employed in watching the kraals. One day Hendrik went out towards the hills alone to gather some medicine. He did not come back again, so the next day search was made. By a big rock which I can show you, they found his scattered and broken bones, the fragments of his assegai, and four dead baboons. They had set upon him and torn him to pieces.

“My father was very much frightened at this, but still he would not let Hendrika go, because he said that she was human, and that it was our duty to reclaim her. And so we did—to a certain extent, at least. After the murder of Hendrik, the baboons vanished from the neighbourhood, and have only returned quite recently, so at length we ventured to let Hendrika out. By this time she had grown very fond of me; still, on the first opportunity she ran away. But in the evening she returned again. She had been seeking the baboons, and could not find them. Shortly afterwards she began to speak—I taught her—and from that time she has loved me so that she will not leave me. I think it would kill her if I went away from her. She watches me all day, and at night sleeps on the floor of my hut. Once, too, she saved my life when I was swept down the river in flood; but she is jealous, and hates everybody else. Look, how she is glaring at you now because I am talking to you!”

I looked. Hendrika was tramping along with the child in her arms and staring at me in a most sinister fashion out of the corners of her eyes.

While I was reflecting on the Baboon-woman’s strange story, and thinking that she was an exceedingly awkward customer, the path took a sudden turn.

“Look!” said Stella, “there is our home. Is it not beautiful?”

It was beautiful indeed. Here on the western side of the great peak a bay had been formed in the mountain, which might have measured eight hundred or a thousand yards across by three-quarters of a mile in depth. At the back of this indentation the sheer cliff

rose to the height of several hundred feet, and behind it and above it the great Babyan Peak towered up towards the heavens. The space of ground, embraced thus in the arms of the mountain, as it were, was laid out, as though by the cunning hand of man, in three terraces that rose one above the other. To the right and left of the topmost terrace were chasms in the cliff, and down each chasm fell a waterfall, from no great height, indeed, but of considerable volume. These two streams flowed away on either side of the enclosed space, one towards the north, and the other, the course of which we had been following, round the base of the mountain. At each terrace they made a cascade, so that the traveller approaching had a view of eight waterfalls at once. Along the edge of the stream to our left were placed Kaffir kraals, built in orderly groups with verandahs, after the Basutu fashion, and a very large part of the entire space of land was under cultivation. All of this I noted at once, as well as the extraordinary richness and depth of the soil, which for many ages past had been washed down from the mountain heights. Then following the line of an excellent waggon road, on which we now found ourselves, that wound up from terrace to terrace, my eye lit upon the crowning wonder of the scene. For in the centre of the topmost platform or terrace, which may have enclosed eight or ten acres of ground, and almost surrounded by groves of orange trees, gleamed buildings of which I had never seen the like. There were three groups of them, one in the middle, and one on either side, and a little to the rear, but, as I afterwards discovered, the plan of all was the same. In the centre was an edifice constructed like an ordinary Zulu hut—that is to say, in the shape of a beehive, only it was five times the size of any hut I ever saw, and built of blocks of hewn white marble, fitted together with extraordinary knowledge of the principles and properties of arch building, and with so much accuracy and finish that it was often difficult to find the joints of the massive blocks. From this centre hut ran three covered passages, leading to other buildings of an exactly similar character, only smaller, and each whole block was enclosed by a marble wall about four feet in height.

Of course we were as yet too far off to see all these details, but the general outline I saw at once, and it astonished me considerably. Even old Indaba-zimbi, whom the Baboon-woman had been unable to move, deigned to show wonder.

“Ou!” he said; “this is a place of marvels. Who ever saw kraals built of white stone?”

Stella watched our faces with an expression of intense amusement, but said nothing.

“Did your father build those kraals?” I gasped, at length.

“My father! no, of course not,” she answered. “How would it have been possible for one white man to do so, or to have made this road? He found them as you see.”

“Who built them, then?” I said again.

“I do not know. My father thinks that they are very ancient, for the people who live here now do not know how to lay one stone upon another, and these huts are so wonderfully constructed that, though they must have stood for ages, not a stone of them had fallen. But I can show you the quarry where the marble was cut; it is close by and behind it is the entrance to an ancient mine, which my father thinks was a silver mine. Perhaps the people who worked the mine built the marble huts. The world is old, and no doubt plenty of people have lived in it and been forgotten.”[\*]

[\*] Kraals of a somewhat similar nature to those described by Mr. Quatermain have been discovered in the Marico district of the Transvaal, and an illustration of them is to be found in Mr. Anderson's "Twenty-five Years in a Waggon," vol. ii. p. 55. Mr. Anderson says, "In this district are the ancient stone kraals mentioned in an early chapter; but it requires a fuller description to show that these extensive kraals must have been erected by a white race who understood building in stone and at right angles, with door-posts, lintels, and sills, and it required more than Kaffir skill to erect the stone huts, with stone circular roofs, beautifully formed and most substantially erected; strong enough, if not disturbed, to last a thousand years." — Editor.

Then we rode on in silence. I have seen many beautiful sights in Africa, and in such matters, as in others, comparisons are odious and worthless, but I do not think that I ever saw a lovelier scene. It was no one thing—it was the combination of the mighty peak looking forth on to the everlasting plains, the great cliffs, the waterfalls that sparkled in rainbow hues, the rivers girdling the rich cultivated lands, the gold-specked green of the orange trees, the flashing domes of the marble huts, and a thousand other things. Then over all brooded the peace of evening, and the infinite glory of the sunset that filled heaven with changing hues of splendour, that wrapped the mountain and cliffs in cloaks of purple and of gold, and lay upon the quiet face of the water like the smile of a god.

Perhaps also the contrast, and the memory of those three awful days and nights in the hopeless desert, enhanced the charm, and perhaps the beauty of the girl who walked beside me completed it. For of this I am sure, that of all sweet and lovely things that I looked on then, she was the sweetest and the loveliest.

Ah, it did not take me long to find my fate. How long will it be before I find her once again?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MARBLE KRAALS

At length the last platform, or terrace, was reached, and we pulled up outside the wall surrounding the central group of marble huts—for so I must call them, for want of a better name. Our approach had been observed by a crowd of natives, whose race I have never been able to determine accurately; they belonged to the Basutu and peaceful section of the Bantu peoples rather than to the Zulu and warlike. Several of these ran up to take the horses, gazing on us with astonishment, not unmixed with awe. We dismounted—speaking for myself, not without difficulty—indeed, had it not been for Stella's support I should have fallen.

"Now you must come and see my father," she said. "I wonder what he will think of it, it is all so strange. Hendrika, take the child to my hut and give her milk, then put her into my bed; I will come presently."

Hendrika went off with a somewhat ugly grin to do her mistress's bidding, and Stella led the way through the narrow gateway in the marble wall, which may have enclosed nearly half an "erf," or three-quarters of an acre of ground in all. It was beautifully planted as a garden, many European vegetables and flowers were growing in it, besides others with which I was not acquainted. Presently we came to the centre hut, and it was then that I noticed the extraordinary beauty and finish of the marble masonry. In the hut, and facing the gateway, was a modern door, rather rudely fashioned of Buckenhout, a beautiful reddish wood that has the appearance of having been sedulously pricked with a pin. Stella opened it, and we entered. The interior of the hut was the size of a large and lofty room, the walls being formed of plain polished marble. It was lighted somewhat dimly, but quite effectively, by peculiar openings in the roof, from which the rain was excluded by overhanging eaves. The marble floor was strewn with native mats and skins of animals. Bookcases filled with books were placed against the walls, there was a table in the centre, chairs seated with rimpis or strips of hide stood about, and beyond the table was a couch on which a man was lying reading.

"Is that you, Stella?" said a voice, that even after so many years seemed familiar to me. "Where have you been, my dear? I began to think that you had lost yourself again."

"No, father, dear, I have not lost myself, but I have found somebody else."

At that moment I stepped forward so that the light fell on me. The old gentleman on the couch rose with some difficulty and bowed with much courtesy. He was a fine-looking old man, with deep-set dark eyes, a pale face that bore many traces of physical and mental suffering, and a long white beard.

"Be welcome, sir," he said. "It is long since we have seen a white face in these wilds, and yours, if I am not mistaken, is that of an Englishman. There has been but one Englishman here for twelve years, and he, I grieve to say, was an outcast flying from justice," and he bowed again and stretched out his hand.

I looked at him, and then of a sudden his name flashed back into my mind. I took his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Carson?" I said.

He started as though he had been stung.

"Who told you that name?" he cried. "It is a dead name. Stella, is it you? I forbade you to let it pass your lips."

"I did not speak it, father. I have never spoken it," she answered.

"Sir," I broke in, "if you will allow me I will show you how I came to know your name. Do you remember many years ago coming into the study of a clergyman in Oxfordshire and telling him that you were going to leave England for ever?"

He bowed his head.

"And do you remember a little boy who sat upon the hearthrug writing with a pencil?"

"I do," he said.

"Sir, I was that boy, and my name is Allan Quatermain. Those children who lay sick are all dead, their mother is dead, and my father, your old friend, is dead also. Like you he emigrated, and last year he died in the Cape. But that is not all the story. After many adventures, I, one Kaffir, and a little girl, lay senseless and dying in the Bad Lands, where we had wandered for days without water, and there we should have perished, but your daughter, Miss——"

"Call her Stella," he broke in, hastily. "I cannot bear to hear that name. I have forsworn it."

"Miss Stella found us by chance and saved our lives."

"By chance, did you say, Allan Quatermain?" he answered. "There is little chance in all this; such chances spring from another will than ours. Welcome, Allan, son of my old friend. Here we live as it were in a hermitage, with Nature as our only friend, but such as we have is yours, and for as long as you will take it. But you must be starving; talk no more now. Stella, it is time to eat. To-morrow we will talk."

To tell the truth I can recall very little of the events of that evening. A kind of dizzy weariness overmastered me. I remember sitting at a table next to Stella, and eating heartily, and then I remember nothing more.

I awoke to find myself lying on a comfortable bed in a hut built and fashioned on the same model as the centre one. While I was wondering what time it was, a native came bringing some clean clothes on his arm, and, luxury of luxuries, produced a bath hollowed from wood. I rose, feeling a very different man, my strength had come back again to me; I dressed, and following a covered passage found myself in the centre hut. Here the table was set for breakfast with all manner of good things, such as I had not seen for many a month, which I contemplated with healthy satisfaction. Presently I looked up, and there before me was a more delightful sight, for standing in one of the doorways which led to the sleeping huts was Stella, leading little Tota by the hand.

She was very simply dressed in a loose blue gown, with a wide collar, and girdled in at the waist by a little leather belt. In the bosom of her robe was a bunch of orange blooms, and her rippling hair was tied in a single knot behind her shapely head. She greeted me with a smile, asking how I had slept, and then held Tota up for me to kiss. Under her loving care the child had been quite transformed. She was neatly dressed in a garment of the same blue stuff that Stella wore, her fair hair was brushed; indeed, had it not been for the sun blisters on her face and hands, one would scarcely have believed that this was the same child whom Indaba-zimbi and I had dragged for hour after hour through the burning, waterless desert.

"We must breakfast alone, Mr. Allan," she said; "my father is so upset by your arrival that he will not get up yet. Oh, you cannot tell how thankful I am that you have come. I have been so anxious about him of late. He grows weaker and weaker; it seems to me as though the strength were ebbing away from him. Now he scarcely leaves the kraal, I have to manage everything about the farm; he does nothing but read and think."

Just then Hendrika entered, bearing a jug of coffee in one hand and of milk in the other, which she set down upon the table, casting a look of little love at me as she did so.

"Be careful, Hendrika; you are spilling the coffee," said Stella. "Don't you wonder how we come to have coffee here, Mr. Allan? I will tell you—we grow it. That was my idea. Oh, I have lots of things to show you. You don't know what we have managed to do in the time that we have been here. You see we have plenty of labour, for the people about look upon my father as their chief."

"Yes," I said, "but how do you get all these luxuries of civilization?" and I pointed to the books, the crockery, and the knives and forks.

"Very simply. Most of the books my father brought with him when we first trekked into the wilds; there was nearly a waggon load of them. But every few years we have sent an expedition of three waggons right down to Port Natal. The waggons are loaded with ivory and other goods, and come back with all kinds of things that have been sent out from England for us. So you see, although we live in this wild place, we are not altogether cut off. We can send runners to Natal and back in three months, and the waggons get there and back in a year. The last lot arrived quite safe about three months ago. Our servants are very faithful, and some of them speak Dutch well."

"Have you ever been with the waggons?" I asked.

"Since I was a child I have never been more than thirty miles from Babyan's Peak," she answered. "Do you know, Mr. Allan, that you are, with one exception, the first Englishman that I have known out of a book. I suppose that I must seem very wild and savage to you, but I have had one advantage—a good education. My father has taught me everything, and perhaps I know some things that you don't. I can read French and German, for instance. I think that my father's first idea was to let me run wild altogether, but he gave it up."

"And don't you wish to go into the world?" I asked.

"Sometimes," she said, "when I get lonely. But perhaps my father is right—perhaps it would frighten and bewilder me. At any rate he would never return to civilization; it is his idea, you know, although I am sure I do not know where he got it from, nor why he cannot bear that our name should be spoken. In short, Mr. Quatermain, we do not make our lives, we must take them as we find them. Have you done your breakfast? Let us go out, and I will show you our home."

I rose and went to my sleeping-place to fetch my hat. When I returned, Mr. Carson—for after all that was his name, though he would never allow it to be spoken—had come into the hut. He felt better now, he said, and would accompany us on our walk if Stella would give him an arm.

So we started, and after us came Hendrika with Tota and old Indaba-zimbi whom I found sitting outside as fresh as paint. Nothing could tire that old man.

The view from the platform was almost as beautiful as that from the lower ground looking up to the peak. The marble kraals, as I have said, faced west, consequently all the upper terrace lay in the shadow of the great peak till nearly eleven o'clock in the morning—a great advantage in that warm latitude. First we walked through the garden, which was beautifully cultivated, and one of the most productive that I ever saw. There were three or four natives working in it, and they all saluted my host as "Baba," or father. Then we visited the other two groups of marble huts. One of these was used for stables and outbuildings, the other as storehouses, the centre hut having been, however, turned into a chapel. Mr. Carson was not ordained, but he earnestly tried to convert the natives, most of whom were refugees who had come to him for shelter, and he had practised the more elementary rites of the church for so long that I think he began to believe that he really was a clergyman. For instance, he always married those of his people who would consent to a monogamous existence, and baptized their children.

When we had examined those wonderful remains of antiquity, the marble huts, and admired the orange trees, the vines and fruits which thrive like weeds in this marvellous soil and climate, we descended to the next platform, and saw the farming operations in full swing. I think that it was the best farm I have ever seen in Africa. There was ample water for purposes of irrigation, the grass lands below gave pasturage for hundreds of head of cattle and horses, and, for natives, the people were most industrious. Moreover, the whole place was managed by Mr. Carson on the co-operative system; he only took a tithe of the produce—indeed, in this land of teeming plenty, what was he to do with more? Consequently the tribesmen, who, by the way, called themselves the "Children of Thomas," were able to accumulate considerable wealth. All their disputes were referred to their "father," and he also was judge of offences and crimes. Some were punished by imprisonment, whipping, and loss of goods, other and graver transgressions by

expulsion from the community, a fiat which to one of these favoured natives must have seemed as heavy as the decree that drove Adam from the Garden of Eden.

Old Mr. Carson leaned upon his daughter's arm and contemplated the scene with pride.

"I have done all this, Allan Quatermain," he said. "When renouncing civilization, I wandered here by chance; seeking a home in the remotest places of the world, I found this lonely spot a wilderness. Nothing was to be seen except the site, the domes of the marble huts, and the waterfalls. I took possession of the huts. I cleared the path of garden land and planted the orange grove. I had only six natives then, but by degrees others joined me, now my tribe is a thousand strong. Here we live in profound peace and plenty. I have all I need, and I seek no more. Heaven has prospered me so far—may it do so to the end, which for me draws nigh. And now I am tired and will go back. If you wish to see the old quarry and the mouth of the ancient mines, Stella will show them to you. No, my love, you need not trouble to come, I can manage. Look! some of the headmen are waiting to see me."

So he went; but still followed by Hendrika and Indaba-zimbi, we turned, and, walking along the bank of one of the rivers, passed up behind the marble kraals, and came to the quarry, whence the material of which they were built had been cut in some remote age. The pit opened up a very thick seam of the whitest and most beautiful marble. I know another like it in Natal. But by whom it had been worked I cannot say; not by natives, that is certain, though the builders of these kraals had condescended to borrow the shape of native huts for their model. By the way, the only relic of those builders that I ever saw was a highly finished bronze pick-axe which Stella had found one day in the quarry.

After we had examined this quarry we climbed the slope of the hill till we came to the mouth of the ancient mines which were situated in a gorge. I believe them to have been silver mines. The gorge was long and narrow, and the moment we entered it there rose from every side a sound of groaning and barking that was almost enough to deafen us. I knew what it was at once: the whole place was filled with baboons, which clambered down the rocks towards us from every direction, and in a manner that struck me as being unnaturally fearless. Stella turned a little pale and clung to my arm.

"It is very silly of me," she whispered. "I am not at all nervous, but ever since they killed Hendrik I cannot bear the sight of those animals. I always think that there is something human about them."

Meanwhile the baboons drew nearer, talking to each other as they came. Tota began to cry, and clung to Stella. Stella clung to me, while I and Indaba-zimbi put as bold a front on the matter as we could. Only Hendrika stood looking at the brutes with an unconcerned smile on her monkey face. When the great apes were quite near, she suddenly called aloud. Instantly they stopped their hideous clamour as though at a word of command. Then Hendrika addressed them: I can only describe it so. That is to say, she began to make a noise such as baboons do when they converse with each other. I have known Hottentots and Bushmen who said that they could talk with the baboons and understand their language, but I confess I never heard it done before or since.

From the mouth of Hendrika came a succession of grunts, groans, squeals, clicks, and every other abominable noise that can be conceived, conveying to my mind a general idea of expostulation. At any rate the baboons listened. One of them grunted back some answer, and then the whole mob drew off to the rocks.

I stood astonished, and without a word we turned back to the kraal, for Hendrika was too close to allow me to speak. When we reached the dining hut Stella went in, followed by Hendrika. But Indaba-zimbi plucked me by the sleeve, and I stopped outside.

"Macumazahn," he said. "Baboon-woman—devil-woman. Be careful, Macumazahn. She loves that Star (the natives aptly enough called Stella the Star), and is jealous. Be careful, Macumazahn, or the Star will set!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### “LET US GO IN, ALLAN!”

It is very difficult for me to describe the period of time which elapsed between my arrival at Babayan's Peak and my marriage with Stella. When I look back on it, it seems sweet as with the odour of flowers, and dim as with the happy dusk of summer eves, while through the sweetness comes the sound of Stella's voice, and through the gloom shines the starlight of her eyes. I think that we loved each other from the first, though for a while we said no word of love. Day by day I went about the place with her, accompanied by little Tota and Hendrika only, while she attended to the thousand and one matters which her father's ever-growing weakness had laid upon her; or rather, as time drew on, I attended to the business, and she accompanied me. All day through we were together. Then after supper, when the night had fallen, we would walk together in the garden and come at length to hear her father read aloud sometimes from the works of a poet, sometimes from history. Or, if he did not feel well, Stella would read, and when this was done, Mr. Carson would celebrate a short form of prayer, and we would separate till the morning once more brought our happy hour of meeting.

So the weeks went by, and with every week I grew to know my darling better. Often, I wonder now, if my fond fancy deceives me, or if indeed there are women as sweet and dear as she. Was it solitude that had given such depth and gentleness to her? Was it the long years of communing with Nature that had endowed her with such peculiar grace, the grace we find in opening flowers and budding trees? Had she caught that murmuring voice from the sound of the streams which fall continually about her rocky home? Was it the tenderness of the evening sky beneath which she loved to walk, that lay like a shadow on her face, and the light of the evening stars that shone in her quiet eyes? At the least to me she was the realization of that dream which haunts the sleep of sin-stained men; so my memory paints her, so I hope to find her when at last the sleep has rolled away and the fevered dreams are done.

At last there came a day—the most blessed of my life, when we told our love. We had been together all the morning, but after dinner Mr. Carson was so unwell that Stella stopped in with him. At supper we met again, and after supper, when she had put little Tota, to whom she had grown much attached, to bed, we went out, leaving Mr. Carson dozing on the couch.

The night was warm and lovely, and without speaking we walked up the garden to the orange grove and sat down upon a rock. There was a little breeze which shook the petals of the orange blooms over us in showers, and bore their delicate fragrance far and wide. Silence reigned around, broken only by the sound of the falling waterfalls that now died to a faint murmur, and now, as the wavering breeze turned, boomed loudly in our ears. The moon was not yet visible, but already the dark clouds which floated through the sky above us—for there had been rain—showed a glow of silver, telling us that she shone brightly behind the peak. Stella began to talk in her low, gentle voice, speaking to me of her life in the wilderness, how she had grown to love it, how her mind had gone on from idea to idea, and how she pictured the great rushing world that she had never seen as it was reflected to her from the books which she had read. It was a curious vision of life that she had: things were out of proportion to it; it was more like a dream than a reality—a mirage than the actual face of things. The idea of great cities, and especially of London, had a kind of fascination for her: she could scarcely realize the rush, the roar and hurry, the hard crowds of men and women, strangers to each other, feverishly seeking for wealth and pleasure beneath a murky sky, and treading one another down in the fury of their competition.

“What is it all for?” she asked earnestly. “What do they seek? Having so few years to live, why do they waste them thus?”

I told her that in the majority of instances it was actual hard necessity that drove them on, but she could barely understand me. Living as she had done, in the midst of the teeming plenty of a fruitful earth, she did not seem to be able to grasp the fact that there were millions who from day to day know not how to stay their hunger.

“I never want to go there,” she went on; “I should be bewildered and frightened to death. It is not natural to live like that. God put Adam and Eve in a garden, and that is how he meant their children to live—in peace, and looking always on beautiful things. This is my idea of perfect life. I want no other.”

“I thought you once told me that you found it lonely,” I said.

“So I did,” she answered, innocently, “but that was before you came. Now I am not lonely any more, and it is perfect—perfect as the night.”

Just then the full moon rose above the elbow of the peak, and her rays stole far and wide down the misty valley, gleaming on the water, brooding on the plain, searching out the hidden places of the rocks, wrapping the fair form of nature as in a silver bridal veil through which her beauty shone mysteriously.

Stella looked down the terraced valley; she turned and looked up at the scarred face of the golden moon, and then she looked at me. The beauty of the night was about her face, the scent of the night was on her hair, the mystery of the night shone in her shadowed eyes. She looked at me, I looked on her, and all our hearts' love blossomed within us. We spoke no word—we had no words to speak, but slowly we drew near, till lips were pressed to lips as we kissed our eternal troth.

It was she who broke that holy silence, speaking in a changed voice, in soft deep notes that thrilled me like the lowest chords of a smitten harp.

"Ah, now I understand," she said, "now I know why we are lonely, and how we can lose our loneliness. Now I know what it is that stirs us in the beauty of the sky, in the sound of water and in the scent of flowers. It is Love who speaks in everything, though till we hear his voice we understand nothing. But when we hear, then the riddle is answered and the gates of our heart are opened, and, Allan, we see the way that wends through death to heaven, and is lost in the glory of which our love is but a shadow.

"Let us go in, Allan. Let us go before the spell breaks, so that whatever overtakes us, sorrow, death, or separation, we may always have this perfect memory to save us. Come, dearest, let us go!"

I rose like a man in a dream, still holding her by the hand. But as I rose my eye fell upon something that gleamed white among the foliage of the orange bush at my side. I said nothing, but looked. The breeze stirred the orange leaves, the moonlight struck for a moment full upon the white object.

It was the face of Hendrika, the Babyan-woman, as Indaba-zimbi had called her, and on it was a glare of hate that made me shudder.

I said nothing; the face vanished, and just then I heard a baboon bark in the rocks behind.

Then we went down the garden, and Stella passed into the centre hut. I saw Hendrika standing in the shadow near the door, and went up to her.

"Hendrika," I said, "why were you watching Miss Stella and myself in the garden?"

She drew her lips up till her teeth gleamed in the moonlight.

"Have I not watched her these many years, Macumazahn? Shall I cease to watch because a wandering white man comes to steal her? Why were you kissing her in the garden, Macumazahn? How dare you kiss her who is a star?"

"I kissed her because I love her, and because she loves me," I answered. "What has that to do with you, Hendrika?"

"Because you love her," she hissed in answer; "and do I not love her also, who saved me from the babyans? I am a woman as she is, and you are a man, and they say in the kraals that men love women better than women love women. But it is a lie, though this is true, that if a woman loves a man she forgets all other love. Have I not seen it? I gather her flowers—beautiful flowers; I climb the rocks where you would never dare to go to find them; you pluck a piece of orange bloom in the garden and give it to her. What does she do?—she takes the orange bloom, she puts it in her breast, and lets my flowers die. I call to her—she does not hear me—she is thinking. You whisper to some one far away, and she hears and smiles. She used to kiss me sometimes; now she kisses that white brat you brought, because you brought it. Oh, I see it all—all; I have seen it from the first; you are stealing her from us, stealing her to yourself, and those who loved her before you came are forgotten. Be careful, Macumazahn, be careful, lest I am revenged upon you. You, you hate me; you think me half a monkey; that servant of yours calls me Baboon-woman. Well, I have lived with baboons, and they are clever—yes, they can play tricks and know things that you don't, and I am cleverer than they, for I have learnt the wisdom of white people also, and I say to you, Walk softly, Macumazahn, or you will fall into a pit," and with one more look of malice she was gone.

I stood for a moment reflecting. I was afraid of this strange creature who seemed to combine the cunning of the great apes that had reared her with the passions and skill of human kind. I foreboded evil at her hands. And yet there was something almost touching in the fierceness of her jealousy. It is generally supposed that this passion only exists in strength when the object loved is of another sex from the lover, but I confess that, both in this instance and in some others which I have met with, this has not been my experience. I have known men, and especially uncivilized men, who were as jealous of the affection of their friend or master as any lover could be of that of his mistress; and who has not seen cases of the same thing where parents and their children are concerned? But the lower one gets in the scale of humanity, the more readily this passion thrives; indeed, it may be said to come to its intensest perfection in brutes. Women are more jealous than men, small-hearted men are more jealous than those of larger mind and wider sympathy, and animals are the most jealous of all. Now Hendrika was in some ways not far removed from animal, which may perhaps account for the ferocity of her jealousy of her mistress's affection.

Shaking off my presentiments of evil, I entered the centre hut. Mr. Carson was resting on the sofa, and by him knelt Stella holding his hand, and her head resting on his breast. I saw at once that she had been telling him of what had come about between us; nor was I sorry, for it is a task that a would-be son-in-law is generally glad to do by deputy.

"Come here, Allan Quatermain," he said, almost sternly, and my heart gave a jump, for I feared lest he might be about to require me to go about my business. But I came.

"Stella tells me," he went on, "that you two have entered into a marriage engagement. She tells me also that she loves you, and that you say that you love her."

"I do indeed, sir," I broke in; "I love her truly; if ever a woman was loved in this world, I love her."

"I thank Heaven for it," said the old man. "Listen, my children. Many years ago a great shame and sorrow fell upon me, so great a sorrow that, as I sometimes think, it affected my brain. At any rate, I determined to do what most men would have considered the act of a madman, to go far away into the wilderness with my only child, there to live remote from civilization and its evils. I did so; I found this place, and here we have lived for many years, happily enough, and perhaps not without doing good in our generation, but still in a way unnatural to our race and status. At first I thought I would let my daughter grow up in a state of complete ignorance, that she should be Nature's child. But as time went on, I saw the folly and the wickedness of my plan. I had no right to degrade her to the level of the savages around me, for if the fruit of the tree of knowledge is a bitter fruit, still it teaches good from evil. So I educated her as well as I was able, till in the end I knew that in mind, as in body, she was in no way inferior to her sisters, the children of the civilized world. She grew up and entered into womanhood, and then it came into my mind that I was doing her a bitter wrong, that I was separating her from her kind and keeping her in a wilderness where she could find neither mate nor companion. But though I knew this, I could not yet make up my mind to return to active life; I had grown to love this place. I dreaded to return into the world I had abjured. Again and again I put my resolutions aside. Then at the commencement of this year I fell ill. For a while I waited, hoping that I might get better, but at last I realized that I should never get better, that the hand of Death was upon me."

“Ah, no, father, not that!” Stella said, with a cry.

“Yes, love, that, and it is true. Now you will be able to forget our separation in the happiness of a new meeting,” and he glanced at me and smiled. “Well, when this knowledge came home to me, I determined to abandon this place and trek for the coast, though I well knew that the journey would kill me. I should never live to reach it. But Stella would, and it would be better than leaving her here alone with savages in the wilderness. On the very day that I had made up my mind to take this step Stella found you dying in the Bad Lands, Allan Quatermain, and brought you here. She brought you, of all men in the world, you, whose father had been my dear friend, and who once with your baby hands had saved her life from fire, that she might live to save yours from thirst. At the time I said little, but I saw the hand of Providence in this, and I determined to wait and see what came about between you. At the worst, if nothing came about, I soon learned that I could trust you to see her safely to the coast after I was gone. But many days ago I knew how it stood between you, and now things are determined as I prayed they might be. God bless you both, my children; may you be happy in your love; may it endure till death and beyond it. God bless you both!” and he stretched out his hand towards me.

I took it, and Stella kissed him.

Presently he spoke again—

“It is my intention,” he said, “if you two consent, to marry you next Sunday. I wish to do so soon, for I do not know how much longer will be allowed to me. I believe that such a ceremony, solemnly celebrated and entered into before witnesses, will, under the circumstances, be perfectly legal; but of course you will repeat it with every formality the first moment it lies in your power so to do. And now, there is one more thing: when I left England my fortunes were in a shattered condition; in the course of years they have recovered themselves, the accumulated rents, as I heard but recently, when the waggons last returned from Port Natal, have sufficed to pay off all charges, and there is a considerable balance over. Consequently you will not marry on nothing, for of course you, Stella, are my heiress, and I wish to make a stipulation. It is this. That so soon as my death occurs you should leave this place and take the first opportunity of returning to England. I do not ask you to live there always; it might prove too much for people reared in the wilds, as both of you have been; but I do ask you to make it your permanent home. Do you consent and promise this?”

“I do,” I answered.

“And so do I,” said Stella.

“Very well,” he answered; “and now I am tired out. Again God bless you both, and good-night.”

## CHAPTER X.

### HENDRIKA PLOTS EVIL

On the following morning I had a conversation with Indaba-zimbi. First of all I told him that I was going to marry Stella.

"Oh!" he said, "I thought so, Macumazahn. Did I not tell you that you would find happiness on this journey? Most men must be content to watch the Star from a long way off, to you it is given to wear her on your heart. But remember, Macumazahn, remember that stars set."

"Can you not stop your croaking even for a day?" I answered, angrily, for his words sent a thrill of fear through me.

"A true prophet must tell the ill as well as the good, Macumazahn. I only speak what is on my mind. But what of it? What is life but loss, loss upon loss, till life itself be lost? But in death we may find all the things that we have lost. So your father taught, Macumazahn, and there was wisdom in his gentleness. Ou! I do not believe in death; it is change, that is all, Macumazahn. Look now, the rain falls, the drops of rain that were one water in the clouds fall side by side. They sink into the ground; presently the sun will come out, the earth will be dry, the drops will be gone. A fool looks and says the drops are dead, they will never be one again, they will never again fall side by side. But I am a rain-maker, and I know the ways of rain. It is not true. The drops will drain by many paths into the river, and will be one water there. They will go up to the clouds again in the mists of morning, and there will again be as they have been. We are the drops of rain, Macumazahn. When we fall that is our life. When we sink into the ground that is death, and when we are drawn up again to the sky, what is that, Macumazahn? No! no! when we find we lose, and when we seem to lose, then we shall really find. I am not a Christian, Macumazahn, but I am old, and have watched and seen things that perhaps Christians do not see. There, I have spoken. Be happy with your star, and if it sets, wait, Macumazahn, wait till it rises again. It will not be long; one day you will go to sleep, then your eyes will open on another sky, and there your star will be shining, Macumazahn."

I made no answer at the time. I could not bear to talk of such a thing. But often and often in the after years I have thought of Indaba-zimbi and his beautiful simile and gathered comfort from it. He was a strange man, this old rain-making savage, and there was more wisdom in him than in many learned atheists—those spiritual destroyers who, in the name of progress and humanity, would divorce hope from life, and leave us wandering in a lonesome, self-consecrated hell.

"Indaba-zimbi," I said, changing the subject, "I have something to say," and I told him of the threats of Hendrika.

He listened with an unmoved face, nodding his white lock at intervals as the narrative went on. But I saw that he was disturbed by it.

"Macumazahn," he said at length, "I have told you that this is an evil woman. She was nourished on baboon milk, and the baboon nature is in her veins. Such creatures should be killed, not kept. She will make you mischief if she can. But I will watch her, Macumazahn. Look, the Star is waiting for you; go, or she will hate me as Hendrika hates you."

So I went, nothing loth, for attractive as was the wisdom of Indaba-zimbi, I found a deeper meaning in Stella's simplest word. All the rest of that day I passed in her company, and the greater part of the two following days. At last came Saturday night, the eve of our marriage. It rained that night, so we did not go out, but spent the evening in the hut. We sat hand in hand, saying little, but Mr. Carson talked a good deal, telling us tales of his youth, and of countries that he had visited. Then he read aloud from the Bible, and bade us goodnight. I also kissed Stella and went to bed. I reached my hut by the covered way, and before I undressed opened the door to see what the night was like. It was very dark, and rain was still falling, but as the light streamed out into the gloom I fancied that I caught sight of a dusky form gliding away. The thought of Hendrika flashed into my mind; could she be skulking about outside there? Now I had said nothing of Hendrika and her threats either to Mr. Carson or Stella, because I did not wish to alarm them. Also I knew that Stella was attached to this strange person, and I did not wish to shake her confidence in her unless it was absolutely necessary. For a minute or two I stood hesitating, then, reflecting that if it was Hendrika, there she should stop, I went in and put up the stout wooden bar that was used to secure the door. For the last few nights old Indaba-zimbi had made a habit of sleeping in the covered passage, which was the only other possible way of access. As I came to bed I had stepped over him rolled up in his blanket, and to all appearances fast asleep. So it being evident that I had nothing to fear, I promptly dismissed the matter from my mind, which, as may be imagined, was indeed fully occupied with other thoughts.

I got into bed, and for awhile lay awake thinking of the great happiness in store for me, and of the providential course of events that had brought it within my reach. A few weeks since and I was wandering in the desert a dying man, bearing a dying child, and with scarcely a possession left in the world except a store of buried ivory that I never expected to see again. And now I was about to wed one of the sweetest and loveliest women on the whole earth—a woman whom I loved more than I could have thought possible, and who loved me back again. Also, as though that were not good fortune enough, I was to acquire with her very considerable possessions, quite sufficiently large to enable us to follow any plan of life we found agreeable. As I lay and reflected on all this I grew afraid of my good fortune. Old Indaba-zimbi's melancholy prophecies came into my mind. Hitherto he had always prophesied truly. What if these should be true also? I turned cold as I thought of it, and prayed to the Power above to preserve us both to live and love together. Never was prayer more needed. While its words were still upon my lips I dropped asleep and dreamed a most dreadful dream.

I dreamed that Stella and I were standing together to be married. She was dressed in white, and radiant with beauty, but it was a wild, spiritual beauty which frightened me. Her eyes shone like stars, a pale flame played about her features, and the wind that blew did not stir her hair. Nor was this all, for her white robes were death wrappings, and the altar at which we stood was formed of the piled-up earth from an open grave that yawned between us. So we stood waiting for one to wed us, but no one came. Presently from the open grave sprang the form of Hendrika. In her hand was a knife, with which she stabbed at me, but pierced the heart of Stella, who, without a cry, fell backwards into the grave, still looking at me as she fell. Then Hendrika leaped after her into the grave. I heard her feet strike heavily.

"Awake, Macumazahn! awake!" cried the voice of Indaba-zimbi.

I awoke and bounded from the bed, a cold perspiration pouring from me. In the darkness on the other side of the hut I heard sounds of furious struggling. Luckily I kept my head. Just by me was a chair on which were matches and a rush taper. I struck a match and held it to the taper. Now in the growing light I could see two forms rolling one over the other on the floor, and from between them came the flash of steel. The fat melted and the light burnt up. It was Indaba-zimbi and the woman Hendrika who were struggling, and, what is more, the woman was getting the better of the man, strong as he was. I rushed towards them. Now she was uppermost, now she had wrenched herself from his fierce grip, and now the great knife she had in her hand flashed up.

But I was behind her, and, placing my hands beneath her arms, jerked with all my strength. She fell backwards, and, in her effort to save herself, most fortunately dropped the knife. Then we flung ourselves upon her. Heavens! the strength of that she-devil! Nobody who has not experienced it could believe it. She fought and scratched and bit, and at one time nearly mastered the two of us. As it was she did break loose. She rushed at the bed, sprung on it, and bounded thence straight up at the roof of the hut. I never saw such a jump, and could not conceive what she meant to do. In the roof were the peculiar holes which I have described. They were designed to admit light, and covered with overhanging eaves. She sprung straight and true like a monkey, and, catching the edge of the hole with her hands, strove to draw herself through it. But here her strength, exhausted with the long struggle, failed her. For a moment she swung, then dropped to the ground and fell senseless.

"Ou!" gasped Indaba-zimbi. "Let us tie the devil up before she comes to life again."

I thought this a good counsel, so we took a reim that lay in the corner of the room, and lashed her hands and feet in such a fashion that even she could scarcely escape. Then we carried her into the passage, and Indaba-zimbi sat over her, the knife in his hand, for I did not wish to raise an alarm at that hour of the night.

"Do you know how I caught her, Macumazahn?" he said. "For several nights I have slept here with one eye open, for I thought she had made a plan. To-night I kept wide awake, though I pretended to be asleep. An hour after you got into the blankets the moon rose, and I saw a beam of light come into the hut through the hole in the roof. Presently I saw the beam of light vanish. At first I thought that a cloud was passing over the moon, but I listened and heard a noise as though some one was squeezing himself through a narrow space. Presently he was through, and hanging by his hands. Then the light came in again, and in the middle of it I saw the Babyan-frau swinging from the roof, and about to drop into the hut. She clung by both hands, and in her mouth was a great knife. She dropped, and I ran forward to seize her as she dropped, and gripped her round the middle. But she heard me come, and, seizing the knife, struck at me in the dark and missed me. Then we struggled, and you know the rest. You were very nearly dead to-night, Macumazahn."

"Very nearly indeed," I answered, still panting, and arranging the rags of my night-dress round me as best I might. Then the memory of my horrid dream flashed into my mind. Doubtless it had been conjured up by the sound of Hendrika dropping to the floor—in my dream it had been a grave that she dropped into. All of it, then, had been experienced in that second of time. Well, dreams are swift; perhaps Time itself is nothing but a dream, and events that seem far apart really occur simultaneously.

We passed the rest of the night watching Hendrika. Presently she came to herself and struggled furiously to break the reim. But the untanned buffalo hide was too strong even for her, and, moreover, Indaba-zimbi unceremoniously sat upon her to keep her quiet. At last she gave it up.

In due course the day broke—my marriage day. Leaving Indaba-zimbi to watch my would-be murderess, I went and fetched some natives from the stables, and with their aid bore Hendrika to the prison hut—that same hut in which she had been confined when she had been brought a baboon-child from the rocks. Here we shut her up, and, leaving Indaba-zimbi to watch outside, I returned to my sleeping-place and dressed in the best garments that the Babyan Kraals could furnish. But when I looked at the reflection of my face, I was horrified. It was covered with scratches inflicted by the nails of Hendrika. I doctored them up as best I could, then went out for a walk to calm my nerves, which, what between the events of the past night, and of those pending that day, were not a little disturbed.

When I returned it was breakfast time. I went into the dining hut, and there Stella was waiting to greet me, dressed in simple white and with orange flowers on her breast. She came forward to me shyly enough; then, seeing the condition of my face, started back.

"Why, Allan! what have you been doing to yourself?" she asked.

As I was about to answer, her father came in leaning on his stick, and, catching sight of me, instantly asked the same question.

Then I told them everything, both of Hendrika's threats and of her fierce attempt to carry them into execution. But I did not tell my horrid dream.

Stella's face grew white as the flowers on her breast, but that of her father became very stern.

"You should have spoken of this before, Allan," he said. "I now see that I did wrong to attempt to civilize this wicked and revengeful creature, who, if she is human, has all the evil passions of the brutes that reared her. Well, I will make an end of it this very day."

"Oh, father," said Stella, "don't have her killed. It is all dreadful enough, but that would be more dreadful still. I have been very fond of her, and, bad as she is, she has loved me. Do not have her killed on my marriage day."

"No," her father answered, "she shall not be killed, for though she deserves to die, I will not have her blood upon our hands. She is a brute, and has followed the nature of brutes. She shall go back whence she came."

No more was said on the matter at the time, but when breakfast—which was rather a farce—was done, Mr. Carson sent for his headman and gave him certain orders.

We were to be married after the service which Mr. Carson held every Sunday morning in the large marble hut set apart for that purpose. The service began at ten o'clock, but long before that hour all the natives on the place came up in troops, singing as they came, to be present at the wedding of the "Star." It was a pretty sight to see them, the men dressed in all their finery, and carrying shields and sticks in their hands, and the women and children bearing green branches of trees, ferns, and flowers. At length, about half-past nine, Stella rose, pressed my hand, and left me to my reflections. A few minutes to ten she reappeared again with her father, dressed in a white veil, a wreath of orange flowers on her dark curling hair, a bouquet of orange flowers in her hand. To me she seemed like a dream of loveliness. With her came little Tota in a high state of glee and excitement. She was Stella's only bridesmaid. Then we all passed out towards the church hut. The bare space in front of it was filled with hundreds of natives, who set up a song as we came. But we went on into the hut, which was crowded with such of the natives as usually worshipped there. Here Mr. Carson, as usual, read the service, though he was obliged to sit down in order to do so. When it was done—and to me it seemed interminable—Mr. Carson whispered that he meant to marry us outside the hut in sight of all the people. So we went out and took our stand under the shade of a large tree that grew near the hut facing the bare space where the natives were gathered.

Mr. Carson held up his hand to enjoin silence. Then, speaking in the native dialect, he told them that he was about to make us man and wife after the Christian fashion and in the sight of all men. This done, he proceeded to read the marriage service over us, and very solemnly and beautifully he did it. We said the words, I placed the ring—it was her father's signet ring, for we had no other—upon Stella's finger, and it was done.

Then Mr. Carson spoke. "Allan and Stella," he said, "I believe that the ceremony which has been performed makes you man and wife in the sight of God and man, for all that is necessary to make a marriage binding is, that it should be celebrated according to the custom of the country where the parties to it reside. It is according to the custom that has been in force here for fifteen years or more that you have been married in the face of all the people, and in token of it you will both sign the register that I have kept of such marriages, among those of my people who have adopted the Christian Faith. Still, in case there should be any legal flaw I again demand the solemn promise of you both that on the first opportunity you will cause this marriage to be re-celebrated in some civilized land. Do you promise?"

"We do," we answered.

Then the book was brought out and we signed our names. At first my wife signed hers "Stella" only, but her father bade her write it Stella Carson for the first and last time in her life. Then several of the indunas, or headmen, including old Indaba-zimbi, put their marks in witness. Indaba-zimbi drew his mark in the shape of a little star, in humorous allusion to Stella's native name. That register is before me now as I write. That, with a lock of my darling's hair which lies between its leaves, is my dearest possession. There are all the names and marks as they were written many years ago beneath the shadow of the tree at Babyan Kraals in the wilderness, but alas! and alas! where are those who wrote them?

"My people," said Mr. Carson, when the signing was done, and we had kissed each other before them all—"My people, Macumazahn and the Star, my daughter, are now man and wife, to live in one kraal, to eat of one bowl, to share one fortune till they reach the grave. Hear now, my people, you know this woman," and turning he pointed to Hendrika, who, unseen by us, had been led out of the prison hut.

"Yes, yes, we know her," said a little ring of headmen, who formed the primitive court of justice, and after the fashion of natives had squatted themselves in a circle on the ground in front of us. "We know her, she is the white Babyan-woman, she is Hendrika, the body servant of the Star."

"You know her," said Mr. Carson, "but you do not know her altogether. Stand forward, Indaba-zimbi, and tell the people what came about last night in the hut of Macumazahn."

Accordingly old Indaba-zimbi came forward, and, squatting down, told his moving tale with much descriptive force and many gestures, finishing up by producing the great knife from which his watchfulness had saved me.

Then I was called upon, and in a few brief words substantiated his story; indeed my face did that in the sight of all men.

Then Mr. Carson turned to Hendrika, who stood in sullen silence, her eyes fixed upon the ground, and asked her if she had anything to say.

She looked up boldly and answered—

"Macumazahn has robbed me of the love of my mistress. I would have robbed him of his life, which is a little thing compared to that which I have lost at his hands. I have failed, and I am sorry for it, for had I killed him and left no trace the Star would have forgotten him and shone on me again."

"Never," murmured Stella in my ear; but Mr. Carson turned white with wrath.

"My people," he said, "you hear the words of this woman. You hear how she pays me back, me and my daughter whom she swears she loves. She says that she would have murdered a man who has done her no evil, the man who is the husband of her mistress. We saved her from the babyans, we tamed her, we fed her, we taught her, and this is how she pays us back. Say, my people, what reward should be given to her?"

"Death," said the circle of indunas, pointing their thumbs downwards, and all the multitude beyond echoed the word "Death."

"Death," repeated the head induna, adding, "If you save her, my father, we will slay her with our own hands. She is a Babyan-woman, a devil-woman; ah, yes, we have heard of such before; let her be slain before she works more evil."

Then it was that Stella stepped forward and begged for Hendrika's life in moving terms. She pleaded the savagery of the woman's nature, her long service, and the affection that she had always shown towards herself. She said that I, whose life had been attempted, forgave her, and she, my wife, who had nearly been left a widow before she was made a bride, forgave her; let them forgive her also, let her be sent away, not slain, let not her marriage day be stained with blood.

Now her father listened readily enough, for he had no intention of killing Hendrika—indeed, he had already promised not to do so. But the people were in a different humour, they looked upon Hendrika as a devil, and would have torn her to pieces there and then, could they have had their way. Nor were matters mended by Indaba-zimbi, who had already gained a great reputation for wisdom and magic in the place. Suddenly the old man rose and made quite an impassioned speech, urging them to kill Hendrika at once or mischief would come of it.

At last matters got very bad, for two of the Indunas came forward to drag her off to execution, and it was not until Stella burst into tears that the sight of her grief, backed by Mr. Carson's orders and my own remonstrances, carried the day.

All this while Hendrika had been standing quite unmoved. At last the tumult ceased, and the leading induna called to her to go, promising that if ever she showed her face near the kraals again she should be stabbed like a jackal. Then Hendrika spoke to Stella in a low voice and in English—

“Better let them kill me, mistress, better for all. Without you to love I shall go mad and become a babyan again.”

Stella did not answer, and they loosed her. She stepped forward and looked at the natives with a stare of hate. Then she turned and walked past me, and as she passed whispered a native phrase in my ear, that, being literally translated, means, “Till another moon,” but which has the same significance as the French “au revoir.”

It frightened me, for I knew she meant that she had not done with me, and saw that our mercy was misplaced. Seeing my face change she ran swiftly from me, and as she passed Indaba-zimbi, with a sudden movement snatched her great knife from his hand. When she had gone about twenty paces she halted, looked long and earnestly on Stella, gave one loud cry of anguish, and fled. A few minutes later we saw her far away, bounding up the face of an almost perpendicular cliff—a cliff that nobody except herself and the baboons could possibly climb.

“Look,” said Indaba-zimbi in my ear—“Look, Macumazahn, there goes the Babyan-frau. But, Macumazahn, *she will come back again*. Ah, why will you not listen to my words. Have they not always been true words, Macumazahn?” and he shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

For a while I was much disturbed, but at any rate Hendrika was gone for the present, and Stella, my dear and lovely wife, was there at my side, and in her smiles I forgot my fears.

For the rest of that day, why should I write of it?—there are things too happy and too sacred to be written of.

At last I had, if only for a little while, found that rest, that perfect joy which we seek so continually and so rarely clasp.

## CHAPTER XI.

### GONE!

I wonder if many married couples are quite as happy as we found ourselves. Cynics, a growing class, declare that few illusions can survive a honeymoon. Well, I do not know about it, for I only married once, and can but speak from my limited experience. But certainly our illusion, or rather the great truth of which it is the shadow, did survive, as to this day it survives in my heart across all the years of utter separation, and across the unanswering gulf of gloom.

But complete happiness is not allowed in this world even for an hour. As our marriage day had been shadowed by the scene which has been described, so our married life was shadowed by its own sorrow.

Three days after our wedding Mr. Carson had a stroke. It had been long impending, now it fell. We came into the centre hut to dinner and found him lying speechless on the couch. At first I thought that he was dying, but this was not so. On the contrary, within four days he recovered his speech and some power of movement. But he never recovered his memory, though he still knew Stella, and sometimes myself. Curiously enough he remembered little Tota best of all three, though occasionally he thought that she was his own daughter in her childhood, and would ask her where her mother was. This state of affairs lasted for some seven months. The old man gradually grew weaker, but he did not die. Of course his condition quite precluded the idea of our leaving Babyan Kraals till all was over. This was the more distressing to me because I had a nervous presentiment that Stella was incurring danger by staying there, and also because the state of her health rendered it desirable that we should reach a civilized region as soon as possible. However, it could not be helped.

At length the end came very suddenly. We were sitting one evening by Mr. Carson's bedside in his hut, when to our astonishment he sat up and spoke in a strong, full voice.

"I hear you," he said. "Yes, yes, I forgive you. Poor woman! you too have suffered," and he fell back dead.

I have little doubt that he was addressing his lost wife, some vision of whom had flashed across his dying sense. Stella, of course, was overwhelmed with grief at her loss. Till I came her father had been her sole companion, and therefore, as may be imagined, the tie between them was much closer than is usual even in the case of father and daughter. So deeply did she mourn that I began to fear for the effect upon her health. Nor were we the only ones to grieve; all the natives on the settlement called Mr. Carson "father," and as a father they lamented him. The air resounded with the wailing of women, and the men went about with bowed heads, saying that "the sun had set in the heavens, now only the Star (Stella) remained." Indaba-zimbi alone did not mourn. He said that it was best that the Inkoos should die, for what was life worth when one lay like a log?—moreover, that it would have been well for all if he had died sooner.

On the following day we buried him in the little graveyard near the waterfall. It was a sad business, and Stella cried very much, in spite of all I could do to comfort her.

That night as I sat outside the hut smoking—for the weather was hot, and Stella was lying down inside—old Indaba-zimbi came up, saluted, and squatted at my feet.

"What is it, Indaba-zimbi?" I said.

"This, Macumazahn. When are you going to trek towards the coast?"

"I don't know," I answered. "The Star is not fit to travel now, we must wait awhile."

"No, Macumazahn, you must not wait, you must go, and the Star must take her chance. She is strong. It is nothing. All will be well."

"Why do you say so? why must we go?"

"For this reason, Macumazahn," and he looked cautiously round and spoke low. "The baboons have come back in thousands. All the mountain is full of them."

"I did not know that they had gone," I said.

"Yes," he answered, "they went after the marriage, all but one or two; now they are back, all the baboons in the world, I think. I saw a whole cliff black with them."

"Is that all?" I said, for I saw that he had something behind. "I am not afraid of a pack of baboons."

"No, Macumazahn, it is not all. The Babyan-frau, Hendrika, is with them."

Now nothing had been heard or seen of Hendrika since her expulsion, and though at first she and her threats had haunted me somewhat, by degrees she to a great extent had passed out of my mind, which was fully preoccupied with Stella and my father-in-law's illness. I started violently. "How do you know this?" I asked.

"I know it because I saw her, Macumazahn. She is disguised, she is dressed up in baboon skins, and her face is stained dark. But though she was a long way off, I knew her by her size, and I saw the white flesh of her arm when the skins slipped aside. She has

come back, Macumazahn, with all the baboons in the world, and she has come back to do evil. Now do you understand why you should trek?"

"Yes," I said, "though I don't see how she and the baboons can harm us, I think that it will be better to go. If necessary we can camp the waggons somewhere for a while on the journey. Hearken, Indaba-zimbi: say nothing of this to the Star; I will not have her frightened. And hearken again. Speak to the headmen, and see that watchers are set all round the huts and gardens, and kept there night and day. To-morrow we will get the waggons ready, and next day we will trek."

He nodded his white lock and went to do my bidding, leaving me not a little disturbed—unreasonably so, indeed. It was a strange story. That this woman had the power of conversing with baboons I knew.[\*] That was not so very wonderful, seeing that the Bushmen claim to be able to do the same thing, and she had been nurtured by them. But that she had been able to muster them, and by the strength of her human will and intelligence muster them in order to forward her ends of revenge, seemed to me so incredible that after reflection my fears grew light. Still I determined to trek. After all, a journey in an ox waggon would not be such a very terrible thing to a strong woman accustomed to roughing it, whatever her state of health. And when all was said and done I did not like this tale of the presence of Hendrika with countless hosts of baboons.

[\*] For an instance of this, see Anderson's "Twenty-five Years in a Waggon," vol. i. p. 262.—Editor.

So I went in to Stella, and without saying a word to her of the baboon story, told her I had been thinking matters over, and had come to the conclusion that it was our duty to follow her father's instructions to the letter, and leave Babyan Kraals at once. Into all our talk I need not enter, but the end of it was that she agreed with me, and declared that she could quite well manage the journey, saying, moreover, that now that her dear father was dead she would be glad to get away.

Nothing happened to disturb us that night, and on the following morning I was up early making preparations. The despair of the people when they learned that we were going to leave them was something quite pitiable. I could only console them by declaring that we were but on a journey, and would return the following year.

"They had lived in the shadow of their father, who was dead," they declared; "ever since they were little they had lived in his shadow. He had received them when they were outcasts and wanderers without a mat to lie on, or a blanket to cover them, and they had grown fat in his shadow. Then he had died, and the Star, their father's daughter, had married me, Macumazahn, and they had believed that I should take their father's place, and let them live in my shadow. What should they do when there was no one to protect them? The tribes were kept from attacking them by fear of the white man. If we went they would be eaten up," and so on. Alas! there was but too much foundation for their fears.

I returned to the huts at mid-day to get some dinner. Stella said that she was going to pack during the afternoon, so I did not think it necessary to caution her about going out alone, as I did not wish to allude to the subject of Hendrika and the baboons unless I was obliged to. I told her, however, that I would come back to help her as soon as I could get away. Then I went down to the native kraals to sort out such cattle as had belonged to Mr. Carson from those which belonged to the Kaffirs, for I proposed to take them with us. It was a large herd, and the business took an incalculable time. At length, a little before sundown, I gave it up, and leaving Indaba-zimbi to finish the job, got on my horse and rode homewards.

Arriving, I gave the horse to one of the stable boys, and went into the central hut. There was no sign of Stella, though the things she had been packing lay about the floor. I passed first into our sleeping hut, thence one by one into all the others, but still saw no sign of her. Then I went out, and calling to a Kaffir in the garden asked him if he had seen his mistress.

He answered "yes." He had seen her carrying flowers and walking towards the graveyard, holding the little white girl—my daughter—as he called her, by the hand, when the sun stood "there," and he pointed to a spot on the horizon where it would have been about an hour and a half before. "The two dogs were with them," he added. I turned and ran towards the graveyard, which was about a quarter of a mile from the huts. Of course there was no reason to be anxious—evidently she had gone to lay the flowers on her father's grave. And yet I was anxious.

When I got near the graveyard I met one of the natives, who, by my orders, had been set round the kraals to watch the place, and noticed that he was rubbing his eyes and yawning. Clearly he had been asleep. I asked him if he had seen his mistress, and he answered that he had not, which under the circumstances was not wonderful. Without stopping to reproach him, I ordered the man to follow me, and went on to the graveyard. There, on Mr. Carson's grave, lay the drooping flowers which Stella had been carrying, and there in the fresh mould was the spoor of Tota's veldschoon, or hide slipper. But where were they?

I ran from the graveyard and called aloud at the top of my voice, but no answer came. Meanwhile the native was more profitably engaged in tracing their spoor. He followed it for about a hundred yards till he came to a clump of mimosa bush that was situated between the stream and the ancient marble quarries just over the waterfall, and at the mouth of the ravine. Here he stopped, and I heard him give a startled cry. I rushed to the spot, passed through the trees, and saw this. The little open space in the centre of the glade had been the scene of a struggle. There, in the soft earth, were the marks of three pairs of human feet—two shod, one naked—Stella's, Tota's, and *Hendrika's*. Nor was this all. There, close by, lay the fragments of the two dogs—they were nothing more—and one baboon, not yet quite dead, which had been bitten in the throat by the dogs. All round was the spoor of numberless baboons. The full horror of what had happened flashed into my mind.

My wife and Tota had been carried off by the baboons. As yet they had not been killed, for if so their remains would have been found with those of the dogs. They had been carried off. The brutes, acting under the direction of that woman-monkey, Hendrika, had dragged them away to some secret den, there to keep them till they died—or kill them!

For a moment I literally staggered beneath the terror of the shock. Then I roused myself from my despair. I bade the native run and alarm the people at the kraals, telling them to come armed, and bring me guns and ammunition. He went like the wind, and I turned to follow the spoor. For a few yards it was plain enough—Stella had been dragged along. I could see where her heels had struck the ground; the child had, I presumed, been carried—at least there were no marks of her feet. At the water's edge the spoor vanished. The water was shallow, and they had gone along in it, or at least Hendrika and her victim had, in order to obliterate the trail. I could

see where a moss-grown stone had been freshly turned over in the water-bed. I ran along the bank some way up the ravine, in the vain hope of catching a sight of them. Presently I heard a bark in the cliffs above me; it was answered by another, and then I saw that scores of baboons were hidden about among the rocks on either side, and were softly swinging themselves down to bar the path. To go on unarmed as I was would be useless. I should only be torn to pieces as the dogs had been. So I turned and fled back towards the huts. As I drew near I could see that my messenger had roused the settlement, for natives with spears and kerries in their hands were running up towards the kraals. When I reached the hut I met old Indaba-zimbi, who wore a very serious face.

“So the evil has fallen, Macumazahn,” he said.

“It has fallen,” I answered.

“Keep a good heart, Macumazahn,” he said again. “She is not dead, nor is the little maid, and before they die we shall find them. Remember this, Hendrika loves her. She will not harm her, or allow the babyans to harm her. She will try to hide her away from you, that is all.”

“Pray God that we may find her,” I groaned. “The light is going fast.”

“The moon rises in three hours,” he answered; “we will search by moonlight. It is useless to start now; see, the sun sinks. Let us get the men together, eat, and make things ready. *Hamba gachla*. Hasten slowly, Macumazahn.”

As there was no help, I took his advice. I could eat no food, but I packed some up to take with us, and made ready ropes, and a rough kind of litter. If we found them they would scarcely be able to walk. Ah! if we found them! How slowly the time passed! It seemed hours before the moon rose. But at last it did rise.

Then we started. In all we were about a hundred men, but we only mustered five guns between us, my elephant roer and four that had belonged to Mr. Carson.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE MAGIC OF INDABA-ZIMBI

We gained the spot by the stream where Stella had been taken. The natives looked at the torn fragments of the dogs, and at the marks of violence, and I heard them swearing to each other, that whether the Star lived or died they would not rest till they had exterminated every baboon on Babyan's Peak. I echoed the oath, and, as shall be seen, we kept it.

We started on along the stream, following the spoor of the baboons as we best could. But the stream left no spoor, and the hard, rocky banks very little. Still we wandered on. All night we wandered through the lonely moonlit valleys, startling the silence into a thousand echoes with our cries. But no answer came to them. In vain our eyes searched the sides of precipices formed of water-riven rocks fantastically piled one upon another; in vain we searched through endless dells and fern-clad crannies. There was nothing to be found. How could we expect to find two human beings hidden away in the recesses of this vast stretch of mountain ground, which no man yet had ever fully explored. They were lost, and in all human probability lost for ever.

To and fro we wandered hopelessly, till at last dawn found us footsore and weary nearly at the spot whence we had started. We sat down waiting for the sun to rise, and the men ate of such food as they had brought with them, and sent to the kraals for more.

I sat upon a stone with a breaking heart. I cannot describe my feelings. Let the reader put himself in my position and perhaps he may get some idea of them. Near me was old Indaba-zimbi, who sat staring straight before him as though he were looking into space, and taking note of what went on there. An idea struck me. This man had some occult power. Several times during our adventures he had prophesied, and in every case his prophecies had proved true. He it was who, when we escaped from the Zulu Impi, had told me to steer north, because there we should find the place of a white man who lived under the shadow of a great peak that was full of baboons. Perhaps he could help in this extremity—at any rate it was worth trying.

"Indaba-zimbi," I said, "you say that you can send your spirit through the doors of space and see what we cannot see. At the least I know that you can do strange things. Can you not help me now? If you can, and will save her, I will give you half the cattle that we have here."

"I never said anything of the sort, Macumazahn," he answered. "I do things, I do not talk about them. Neither do I seek reward for what I do like a common witch-doctor. It is well that you have asked me to use my wisdom, Macumazahn, for I should not have used it again without being asked—no, not even for the sake of the Star and yourself, whom I love, for if so my Spirit would have been angry. In the other matters I had a part, for my life was concerned as well as yours; but in this matter I have no part, and therefore I might not use my wisdom unless you thought well to call upon my Spirit. However, it would have been no good to ask me before, for I have only just found the herb I want," and he produced a handful of the leaves of a plant that was unfamiliar to me. It had prickly leaves, shaped very much like those of the common English nettle.

"Now, Macumazahn," he went on, "bid the men leave us alone, and then follow me presently to the little glade down there by the water."

I did so. When I reached the glade I found Indaba-zimbi kindling a small fire under the shadow of a tree by the edge of the water.

"Sit there, Macumazahn," he said, pointing to a stone near the fire, "and do not be surprised or frightened at anything you see. If you move or call out we shall learn nothing."

I sat down and watched. When the fire was alight and burning brightly, the old fellow stripped himself stark naked, and, going to the foot of the pool, dipped himself in the water. Then he came back shivering with the cold, and, leaning over the little fire, thrust leaves of the plant I have mentioned into his mouth and began to chew them, muttering as he chewed. Most of the remaining leaves he threw on to the fire. A dense smoke rose from them, but he held his head in this smoke and drew it down his lungs till I saw that he was exhibiting every sign of suffocation. The veins in his throat and chest swelled, he gasped loudly, and his eyes, from which tears were streaming, seemed as though they were going to start from his head. Presently he fell over on his side, and lay senseless. I was terribly alarmed, and my first impulse was to run to his assistance, but fortunately I remembered his caution, and sat quiet.

Indaba-zimbi lay on the ground like a person quite dead. His limbs had all the utter relaxation of death. But as I watched I saw them begin to stiffen, exactly as though *rigor mortis* had set in. Then, to my astonishment, I perceived them once more relax, and this time there appeared upon his chest the stain of decomposition. It spread and spread; in three minutes the man, to all appearance, was a livid corpse.

I sat amazed watching this uncanny sight, and wondering if any further natural process was about to be enacted. Perhaps Indaba-zimbi was going to fall to dust before my eyes. As I watched I observed that the discoloration was beginning to fade. First it vanished from the extremities, then from the larger limbs, and lastly from the trunk. Then in turn came the third stage of relaxation, the second stage of stiffness or *rigor*, and the first stage of after-death collapse. When all these had rapidly succeeded each other, Indaba-zimbi quietly woke up.

I was too astonished to speak; I simply looked at him with my mouth open.

"Well, Macumazahn," he said, putting his head on one side like a bird, and nodding his white lock in a comical fashion, "it is all right; I have seen her."

"Seen who?" I said.

"The Star, your wife, and the little maid. They are much frightened, but unharmed. The Babyan-frau watches them. She is mad, but the baboons obey her, and do not hurt them. The Star was sleeping from weariness, so I whispered in her ear and told her not to be frightened, for you would soon rescue her, and that meanwhile she must seem to be pleased to have Hendrika near her."

"You whispered in her ear?" I said. "How could you whisper in her ear?"

"Bah! Macumazahn. How could I seem to die and go rotten before your eyes? You don't know, do you? Well, I will tell you one thing. I had to die to pass the doors of space, as you call them. I had to draw all the healthy strength and life from my body in order to gather power to speak with the Star. It was a dangerous business, Macumazahn, for if I had let things go a little further they must have stopped so, and there would have been an end of Indaba-zimbi. Ah, you white men, you know so much that you think you know everything. But you don't! You are always staring at the clouds and can't see the things that lie at your feet. You hardly believe me now, do you, Macumazahn? Well, I will show you. Have you anything on you that the Star has touched or worn?"

I thought for a moment, and said that I had a lock of her hair in my pocket-book. He told me to give it him. I did so. Going to the fire, he lit the lock of hair in the flame, and let it burn to ashes, which he caught in his left hand. These ashes he mixed up in a paste with the juice of one of the leaves of the plant I have spoken of.

"Now, Macumazahn, shut your eyes," he said.

I did so, and he rubbed his paste on to my eyelids. At first it burnt me, then my head swam strangely. Presently this effect passed off, and my brain was perfectly clear again, but I could not feel the ground with my feet. Indaba-zimbi led me to the side of the stream. Beneath us was a pool of beautifully clear water.

"Look into the pool, Macumazahn," said Indaba-zimbi, and his voice sounded hollow and far away in my ears.

I looked. The water grew dark; it cleared, and in it was a picture. I saw a cave with a fire burning in it. Against the wall of the cave rested Stella. Her dress was torn almost off her, she looked dreadfully pale and weary, and her eyelids were red as though with weeping. But she slept, and I could almost think that I saw her lips shape my name in her sleep. Close to her, her head upon Stella's breast, was little Tota; she had a skin thrown over her to keep out the night cold. The child was awake, and appeared to be moaning with fear. By the fire, and in such a position that the light fell full upon her face, and engaged in cooking something in a rough pot shaped from wood, sat the Baboon-woman, Hendrika. She was clothed in baboon skins, and her face had been rubbed with some dark stain, which was, however, wearing off it. In the intervals of her cooking she would turn on Stella her wild eyes, in which glared visible madness, with an expression of tenderness that amounted to worship. Then she would stare at the child and gnash her teeth as though with hate. Clearly she was jealous of it. Round the entrance arch of the cave peeped and peered the heads of many baboons. Presently Hendrika made a sign to one of them; apparently she did not speak, or rather grunt, in order not to wake Stella. The brute hopped forward, and she gave it a second rude wooden pot which was lying by her. It took it and went. The last thing that I saw, as the vision slowly vanished from the pool, was the dim shadow of the baboon returning with the pot full of water.

Presently everything had gone. I ceased to feel strange. There beneath me was the pool, and at my side stood Indaba-zimbi, smiling.

"You have seen things," he said.

"I have," I answered, and made no further remark on the matter. What was there to say?[\*] "Do you know the path to the cave?" I added.

[\*] For some almost equally remarkable instances of Kaffir magic the reader is referred to a work named "Among the Zulus," by David Leslie.—Editor.

He nodded his head. "I did not follow it all just now, because it winds," he said. "But I know it. We shall want the ropes."

"Then let us be starting; the men have eaten."

He nodded his head again, and going to the men I told them to make ready, adding that Indaba-zimbi knew the way. They said that was all right, if Indaba-zimbi had "smelt her out," they should soon find the Star. So we started cheerfully enough, and my spirits were so much improved that I was able to eat a boiled mealie cob or two as we walked.

We went up the valley, following the course of the stream for about a mile; then Indaba-zimbi made a sudden turn to the right, along another kloof, of which there were countless numbers in the base of the great hill.

On we went through kloof after kloof. Indaba-zimbi, who led us, was never at a loss, he turned up gulleys and struck across necks of hills with the certainty of a hound on a hot scent. At length, after about three hours' march, we came to a big silent valley on the northern slope of the great peak. On one side of this valley was a series of stony koppies, on the other rose a sheer wall of rock. We marched along the wall for a distance of some two miles. Then suddenly Indaba-zimbi halted.

"There is the place," he said, pointing to an opening in the cliff. This opening was about forty feet from the ground, and ellipse-shaped. It cannot have been more than twenty feet high by ten wide, and was partially hidden by ferns and bushes that grew about it in the surface of the cliff. Keen as my eyes were, I doubt if I should ever have noticed it, for there were many such cracks and crannies in the rocky face of the great mountain.

We drew near and looked carefully at the place. The first thing I noticed was that the rock, which was not quite perpendicular, had been worn by the continual passage of baboons; the second, that something white was hanging on a bush near the top of the ascent.

It was a pocket-handkerchief.

Now there was no more doubt about the matter. With a beating heart I began the ascent. For the first twenty feet it was comparatively easy, for the rock shelved; the next ten feet was very difficult, but still possible to an active man, and I achieved it, followed by Indaba-zimbi. But the last twelve or fifteen feet could only be scaled by throwing a rope over the trunk of a stunted tree, which grew at the bottom of the opening. This we accomplished with some trouble, and the rest was easy. A foot or two above my head the handkerchief fluttered in the wind. Hanging to the rope, I grasped it. It was my wife's. As I did so I noticed the face of a

baboon peering at me over the edge of the cleft, the first baboon we had seen that morning. The brute gave a bark and vanished. Thrusting the handkerchief into my breast, I set my feet against the cliff and scrambled up as hard as I could go. I knew that we had no time to lose, for the baboon would quickly alarm the others. I gained the cleft. It was a mere arched passage cut by water, ending in a gulley, which led to a wide open space of some sort. I looked through the passage and saw that the gulley was black with baboons. On they came by the hundred. I unslung my elephant gun from my shoulders and waited, calling to the men below to come up with all possible speed. The brutes streamed on down the gloomy gulf towards me, barking, grunting, and showing their huge teeth. I waited till they were within fifteen yards. Then I fired the elephant gun, which was loaded with slugs, right into the thick of them. In that narrow place the report echoed like a cannon shot, but its sound was quickly swallowed in the volley of piercing human-sounding groans and screams that followed. The charge of heavy slugs had ploughed through the host of baboons, of which at least a dozen lay dead or dying in the passage. For a moment they hesitated, then they came on again with a hideous clamour. Fortunately by this time Indaba-zimbi, who also had a gun, was standing by my side, otherwise I should have been torn to pieces before I could reload. He fired both barrels into them, and again checked the rush. But they came on again, and notwithstanding the appearance of two other natives with guns, which they let off with more or less success, we should have been overwhelmed by the great and ferocious apes had I not by this time succeeded in re-loading the elephant gun. When they were right on us, I fired, with even more deadly effect than before, for at that distance every slug told on their long line. The howls and screams of pain and rage were now something inconceivable. One might have thought that we were doing battle with a host of demons; indeed in that light—for the overhanging arch of rock made it very dark—the gnashing snouts and sombre glowing eyes of the apes looked like those of devils as they are represented by monkish fancy. But the last shot was too much for them; they withdrew, dragging some of their wounded with them, and thus gave us time to get our men up the cliff. In a few minutes all were there, and we advanced down the passage, which presently opened into a rocky gulley with shelving sides. This gulley had a water-way at the bottom of it; it was about a hundred yards long, and the slopes on either side were topped by precipitous cliffs. I looked at these slopes; they literally swarmed with baboons, grunting, barking, screaming, and beating their breasts with their long arms, in fury. I looked up the water-way; along it, accompanied by a mob, or, as it were, a guard of baboons, ran Hendrika, her long hair flying, madness written on her face, and in her arms was the senseless form of little Tota.

She saw us, and a foam of rage burst from her lips. She screamed aloud. To me the sound was a mere inarticulate cry, but the baboons clearly understood it, for they began to roll rocks down on to us. One boulder leaped past me and struck down a Kaffir behind; another fell from the roof of the arch on to a man's head and killed him. Indaba-zimbi lifted his gun to shoot Hendrika; I knocked it up, so that the shot went over her, crying that he would kill the child. Then I shouted to the men to open out and form a line from side to side of the shelving gulley. Furious at the loss of their two comrades, they obeyed me, and keeping in the water-way myself, together with Indaba-zimbi and the other guns, I gave the word to charge.

Then the real battle began. It is difficult to say who fought the most fiercely, the natives or the baboons. The Kaffirs charged along the slopes, and as they came, encouraged by the screams of Hendrika, who rushed to and fro holding the wretched Tota before her as a shield, the apes bounded at them in fury. Scores were killed by the assegais, and many more fell beneath our gun-shots; but still they came on. Nor did we go scathless. Occasionally a man would slip, or be pulled over in the grip of a baboon. Then the others would fling themselves upon him like dogs on a rat, and worry him to death. We lost five men in this way, and I myself received a bite through the fleshy part of the left arm, but fortunately a native near me assegaied the animal before I was pulled down.

At length, and all of a sudden, the baboons gave up. A panic seemed to seize them. Notwithstanding the cries of Hendrika they thought no more of fight, but only of escape; some even did not attempt to get away from the assegais of the Kaffirs, they simply hid their horrible faces in their paws, and, moaning piteously, waited to be slain.

Hendrika saw that the battle was lost. Dropping the child from her arms, she rushed straight at us, a very picture of horrible insanity. I lifted my gun, but could not bear to shoot. After all she was but a mad thing, half ape, half woman. So I sprang to one side, and she landed full on Indaba-zimbi, knocking him down. But she did not stay to do any more. Wailing terribly, she rushed down the gulley and through the arch, followed by a few of the surviving baboons, and vanished from our sight.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WHAT HAPPENED TO STELLA

The fight was over. In all we had lost seven men killed, and several more severely bitten, while but few had escaped without some tokens whereby he might remember what a baboon's teeth and claws are like. How many of the brutes we killed I never knew, because we did not count, but it was a vast number. I should think that the stock must have been low about Babyan's Peak for many years afterwards. From that day to this, however, I have always avoided baboons, feeling more afraid of them than any beast that lives.

The path was clear, and we rushed forward along the water-course. But first we picked up little Tota. The child was not in a swoon, as I had thought, but paralyzed by terror, so that she could scarcely speak. Otherwise she was unhurt, though it took her many a week to recover her nerve. Had she been older, and had she not remembered Hendrika, I doubt if she would have recovered it. She knew me again, and flung her little arms about my neck, clinging to me so closely that I did not dare to give her to any one else to carry lest I should add to her terrors. So I went on with her in my arms. The fears that pierced my heart may well be imagined. Should I find Stella living or dead? Should I find her at all? Well, we should soon know now. We stumbled on up the stony watercourse; notwithstanding the weight of Tota I led the way, for suspense lent me wings. Now we were through, and an extraordinary scene lay before us. We were in a great natural amphitheatre, only it was three times the size of any amphitheatre ever shaped by man, and the walls were formed of precipitous cliffs, ranging from one to two hundred feet in height. For the rest, the space thus enclosed was level, studded with park-like trees, brilliant with flowers, and having a stream running through the centre of it, that, as I afterwards discovered, welled up from the ground at the head of the open space.

We spread ourselves out in a line, searching everywhere, for Tota was too overcome to be able to tell us where Stella was hidden away. For nearly half an hour we searched and searched, scanning the walls of rock for any possible openings to a cave. In vain, we could find none. I applied to old Indaba-zimbi, but his foresight was at fault here. All he could say was that this was the place, and that the "Star" was hidden somewhere in a cave, but where the cave was he could not tell. At last we came to the top of the amphitheatre. There before us was a wall of rock, of which the lower parts were here and there clothed in grasses, lichens, and creepers. I walked along it, calling at the top of my voice.

Presently my heart stood still, for I thought I heard a faint answer. I drew nearer to the place from which the sound seemed to come, and again called. Yes, there was an answer in my wife's voice. It seemed to come from the rock. I went up to it and searched among the creepers, but still could find no opening.

"Move the stone," cried Stella's voice, "the cave is shut with a stone."

I took a spear and prodded at the cliff whence the sound came. Suddenly the spear sunk in through a mass of lichen. I swept the lichen aside, revealing a boulder that had been rolled into the mouth of an opening in the rock, which it fitted so accurately that, covered as it was by the overhanging lichen, it might well have escaped the keenest eye. We dragged the boulder out; it was two men's work to do it. Beyond was a narrow, water-worn passage, which I followed with a beating heart. Presently the passage opened into a small cave, shaped like a pickle bottle, and coming to a neck at the top end. We passed through and found ourselves in a second, much larger cave, that I at once recognized as the one of which Indaba-zimbi had shown me a vision in the water. Light reached it from above—how I know not—and by it I could see a form half-sitting, half lying on some skins at the top end of the cave. I rushed to it. It was Stella! Stella bound with strips of hide, bruised, torn, but still Stella, and alive.

She saw me, she gave one cry, then, as I caught her in my arms, she fainted. It was happy indeed that she did not faint before, for had it not been for the sound of her voice I do not believe we should ever have found that cunningly hidden cave, unless, indeed, Indaba-zimbi's magic (on which be blessings) had come to our assistance.

We bore her to the open air, laid her beneath the shade of a tree, and cut the bonds loose from her ankles. As we went I glanced at the cave. It was exactly as I had seen it in the vision. There burnt the fire, there were the rude wooden vessels, one of them still half full of the water which I had seen the baboon bring. I felt awed as I looked, and marvelled at the power wielded by a savage who could not even read and write.

Now I could see Stella clearly. Her face was scratched, and haggard with fear and weeping, her clothes were almost torn off her, and her beautiful hair was loose and tangled. I sent for water, and we sprinkled her face. Then I forced a little of the brandy which we distilled from peaches at the kraals between her lips, and she opened her eyes, and throwing her arms about me clung to me as little Tota had done, sobbing, "Thank God! thank God!"

After a while she grew quieter, and I made her and Tota eat some food from the store that we had brought with us. I too ate and was thankful, for with the exception of the mealie cobs I had tasted nothing for nearly four-and-twenty hours. Then she washed her face and hands, and tidied her rags of dress as well as she was able. As she did so by degrees I drew her story from her.

It seemed that on the previous afternoon, being wearied with packing, she went out to visit her father's grave, taking Tota with her, and was followed there by the two dogs. She wished to lay some flowers on the grave and take farewell of the dust it covered, for as we had expected to trek early on the morrow she did not know if she would find a later opportunity. They passed up the garden, and

gathering some flowers from the orange trees and elsewhere, went on to the little graveyard. Here she laid them on the grave as we had found them, and then sitting down, fell into a deep and sad reverie, such as the occasion would naturally induce. While she sat thus, Tota, who was a lively child and active as a kitten, strayed away without Stella observing it. With her went the dogs, who also had grown tired of inaction; a while passed, and suddenly she heard the dogs barking furiously about a hundred and fifty yards away. Then she heard Tota scream, and the dogs also yelling with fear and pain. She rose and ran as swiftly as she could towards the spot whence the sound came. Presently she was there. Before her in the glade, holding the screaming Tota in her arms, was a figure in which, notwithstanding the rough disguise of baboon skins and colouring matter, she had no difficulty in recognizing Hendrika, and all about her were numbers of baboons, rolling over and over in two hideous heaps, of which the centres were the unfortunate dogs now in process of being rent to fragments.

"Hendrika," Stella cried, "what does this mean? What are you doing with Tota and those brutes?"

The woman heard her and looked up. Then Stella saw that she was mad; madness stared from her eyes. She dropped the child, which instantly flew to Stella for protection. Stella clasped it, only to be herself clasped by Hendrika. She struggled fiercely, but it was of no use—the Babyan-frau had the strength of ten. She lifted her and Tota as though they were nothing, and ran off with them, following the bed of the stream in order to avoid leaving a spoor. Only the baboons who came with her, minus the one the dogs had killed, would not take to the water, but kept pace with them on the bank.

Stella said that the night which followed was more like a hideous nightmare than a reality. She was never able to tell me all that occurred in it. She had a vague recollection of being borne over rocks and along kloofs, while around her echoed the horrible grunts and clicks of the baboons. She spoke to Hendrika in English and Kaffir, imploring her to let them go; but the woman, if I may call her so, seemed in her madness to have entirely forgotten these tongues. When Stella spoke she would kiss her and stroke her hair, but she did not seem to understand what it was she said. On the other hand, she could, and did, talk to the baboons, that seemed to obey her implicitly. Moreover, she would not allow them to touch either Stella or the child in her arms. Once one of them tried to do so, and she seized a dead stick and struck it so heavily on the head that it fell senseless. Thrice Stella made an attempt to escape, for sometimes even Hendrika's giant strength waned and she had to set them down. But on each occasion she caught them, and it was in these struggles that Stella's clothes were so torn. At length before daylight they reached the cliff, and with the first break of light the ascent began. Hendrika dragged them up the first stages, but when they came to the precipitous place she tied the strips of hide, of which she had a supply wound round her waist, beneath Stella's arms. Steep as the place was the baboons ascended it easily enough, springing from a knob of rock to the trunk of the tree that grew on the edge of the crevasse. Hendrika followed them, holding the end of the hide reim in her teeth, one of the baboons hanging down from the tree to assist her ascent. It was while she was ascending that Stella bethought of letting fall her handkerchief in the faint hope that some searcher might see it.

By this time Hendrika was on the tree, and grunting out orders to the baboons which clustered about Stella below. Suddenly these seized her and little Tota who was in her arms, and lifted her from the ground. Then Hendrika above, aided by other baboons, put out all her great strength and pulled the two of them up the rock. Twice Stella swung heavily against the cliff. After the second blow she felt her senses going, and was consumed with terror lest she should drop Tota. But she managed to cling to her, and together they reached the cleft.

"From that time," Stella went on, "I remember no more till I woke to find myself in a gloomy cave resting on a bed of skins. My legs were bound, and Hendrika sat near me watching me, while round the edge of the cave peered the heads of those horrible baboons. Tota was still in my arms, and half dead from terror; her moans were pitiful to hear. I spoke to Hendrika, imploring her to release us; but either she has lost all understanding of human speech, or she pretends to have done so. All she would do was to caress me, and even kiss my hands and dress with extravagant signs of affection. As she did so, Tota shrunk closer to me. This Hendrika saw and glared so savagely at the child that I feared lest she was going to kill her. I diverted her attention by making signs that I wanted water, and this she gave me in a wooden bowl. As you saw, the cave was evidently Hendrika's dwelling-place. There are stores of fruit in it and some strips of dried flesh. She gave me some of the fruit and Tota a little, and I made Tota eat some. You can never know what I went through, Allan. I saw now that Hendrika was quite mad, and but little removed from the brutes to which she is akin, and over which she has such unholy power. The only trace of humanity left about her was her affection for me. Evidently her idea was to keep me here with her, to keep me away from you, and to carry out this idea she was capable of the exercise of every artifice and cunning. In this way she was sane enough, but in every other way she was mad. Moreover, she had not forgotten her horrible jealousy. Already I saw her glaring at Tota, and knew that the child's murder was only a matter of time. Probably within a few hours she would be killed before my eyes. Of escape, even if I had the strength, there was absolutely no chance, and little enough of our ever being found. No, we should be kept here guarded by a mad thing, half ape, half woman, till we perished miserably. Then I thought of you, dear, and of all that you must be suffering, and my heart nearly broke. I could only pray to God that I might either be rescued or die swiftly.

"As I prayed I dropped into a kind of doze from utter weariness, and then I had the strangest dream. I dreamed that Indaba-zimbi stood over me nodding his white lock, and spoke to me in Kaffir, telling me not to be frightened, for you would soon be with me, and that meanwhile I must humour Hendrika, pretending to be pleased to have her near me. The dream was so vivid that I actually seemed to see and hear him, as I see and hear him now."

Here I looked up and glanced at old Indaba-zimbi, who was sitting near. But it was not till afterwards that I told Stella of how her vision was brought about.

"At any rate," she went on, "when I awoke I determined to act on my dream. I took Hendrika's hand, and pressed it. She actually laughed in a wild kind of way with happiness, and laid her head upon my knee. Then I made signs that I wanted food, and she threw wood on the fire, which I forgot to tell you was burning in the cave, and began to make some of the broth that she used to cook very well, and she did not seem to have forgotten all about it. At any rate the broth was not bad, though neither Tota nor I could drink much of it. Fright and weariness had taken away our appetites.

"After the meal was done—and I prolonged it as much as possible—I saw Hendrika was beginning to get jealous of Tota again. She glared at her and then at the big knife which was tied round her own body. I knew the knife again, it was the one with which she

had tried to murder you, dear. At last she went so far as to draw the knife. I was paralyzed with fear, then suddenly I remembered that when she was our servant, and used to get out of temper and sulk, I could always calm her by singing to her. So I began to sing hymns. Instantly she forgot her jealousy and put the knife back into its sheath. She knew the sound of the singing, and sat listening to it with a rapt face; the baboons, too, crowded in at the entrance of the cave to listen. I must have sung for an hour or more, all the hymns that I could remember. It was so very strange and dreadful sitting there singing to mad Hendrika and those hideous man-like apes that shut their eyes and nodded their great heads as I sang. It was a horrible nightmare; but I believe that the baboons are almost as human as the Bushmen.

“Well, this went on for a long time till my voice was getting exhausted. Then suddenly I heard the baboons outside raise a loud noise, as they do when they are angry. Then, dear, I heard the boom of your elephant gun, and I think it was the sweetest sound that ever came to my ears. Hendrika heard it too. She sprang up, stood for a moment, then, to my horror, swept Tota into her arms and rushed down the cave. Of course I could not stir to follow her, for my feet were tied. Next instant I heard the sound of a rock being moved, and presently the lessening of the light in the cave told me that I was shut in. Now the sound even of the elephant gun only reached me very faintly, and presently I could hear nothing more, straining my ears as I would.

“At last I heard a faint shouting that reached me through the wall of rock. I answered as loud as I could. You know the rest; and oh, my dear husband, thank God! thank God!” and she fell weeping into my arms.

# BOOK IIX

## THE CHILD OF STORM

### I

## ALLAN QUATERMAIN HEARS OF MAMEENA

We white people think that we know everything. For instance, we think that we understand human nature. And so we do, as human nature appears to us, with all its trappings and accessories seen dimly through the glass of our conventions, leaving out those aspects of it which we have forgotten or do not think it polite to mention. But I, Allan Quatermain, reflecting upon these matters in my ignorant and uneducated fashion, have always held that no one really understands human nature who has not studied it in the rough. Well, that is the aspect of it with which I have been best acquainted.

For most of the years of my life I have handled the raw material, the virgin ore, not the finished ornament that is smelted out of it—if, indeed, it is finished yet, which I greatly doubt. I dare say that a time may come when the perfected generations—if Civilisation, as we understand it, really has a future and any such should be allowed to enjoy their hour on the World—will look back to us as crude, half-developed creatures whose only merit was that we handed on the flame of life.

Maybe, maybe, for everything goes by comparison; and at one end of the ladder is the ape-man, and at the other, as we hope, the angel. No, not the angel; he belongs to a different sphere, but that last expression of humanity upon which I will not speculate. While man is man—that is, before he suffers the magical death-change into spirit, if such should be his destiny—well, he will remain man. I mean that the same passions will sway him; he will aim at the same ambitions; he will know the same joys and be oppressed by the same fears, whether he lives in a Kafir hut or in a golden palace; whether he walks upon his two feet or, as for aught I know he may do one day, flies through the air. This is certain: that in the flesh he can never escape from our atmosphere, and while he breathes it, in the main with some variations prescribed by climate, local law and religion, he will do much as his forefathers did for countless ages.

That is why I have always found the savage so interesting, for in him, nakedly and forcibly expressed, we see those eternal principles which direct our human destiny.

To descend from these generalities, that is why also I, who hate writing, have thought it worth while, at the cost of some labour to myself, to occupy my leisure in what to me is a strange land—for although I was born in England, it is not my country—in setting down various experiences of my life that do, in my opinion, interpret this our universal nature. I dare say that no one will ever read them; still, perhaps they are worthy of record, and who knows? In days to come they may fall into the hands of others and prove of value. At any rate, they are true stories of interesting peoples, who, if they should survive in the savage competition of the nations, probably are doomed to undergo great changes. Therefore I tell of them before they began to change.

Now, although I take it out of its strict chronological order, the first of these histories that I wish to preserve is in the main that of an extremely beautiful woman—with the exception of a certain Nada, called “the Lily,” of whom I hope to speak some day, I think the most beautiful that ever lived among the Zulus. Also she was, I think, the most able, the most wicked, and the most ambitious. Her attractive name—for it was very attractive as the Zulus said it, especially those of them who were in love with her—was Mameena, daughter of Umbezi. Her other name was Child of Storm (*Ingane-ye-Sipepo*, or, more freely and shortly, *O-we-Zulu*), but the word “Ma-mee-na” had its origin in the sound of the wind that whailed about the hut when she was born.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] The Zulu word *Meena*—or more correctly *Mina*—means “Come here,” and would therefore be a name not unsuitable to one of the heroine’s proclivities; but Mr. Quatermain does not seem to accept this interpretation.—EDITOR.

Since I have been settled in England I have read—of course in a translation—the story of Helen of Troy, as told by the Greek poet, Homer. Well, Mameena reminds me very much of Helen, or, rather, Helen reminds me of Mameena. At any rate, there was this in common between them, although one of them was black, or, rather, copper-coloured, and the other white—they both were lovely; moreover, they both were faithless, and brought men by hundreds to their deaths. There, perhaps, the resemblance ends, since Mameena had much more fire and grit than Helen could boast, who, unless Homer misrepresents her, must have been but a poor thing after all. Beauty Itself, which those old rascals of Greek gods made use of to bait their snares set for the lives and honour of men, such was Helen, no more; that is, as I understand her, who have not had the advantage of a classical education. Now, Mameena, although she was superstitious—a common weakness of great minds—acknowledging no gods in particular, as we understand them, set her own snares, with varying success but a very definite object, namely, that of becoming the first woman in the world as she knew it—the stormy, bloodstained world of the Zulus.

But the reader shall judge for himself, if ever such a person should chance to cast his eye upon this history.

It was in the year 1854 that I first met Mameena, and my acquaintance with her continued off and on until 1856, when it came to an end in a fashion that shall be told after the fearful battle of the Tugela in which Umbelazi, Panda’s son and Cetewayo’s brother—who, to his sorrow, had also met Mameena—lost his life. I was still a youngish man in those days, although I had already buried my second wife, as I have told elsewhere, after our brief but happy time of marriage.

Leaving my boy in charge of some kind people in Durban, I started into “the Zulu”—a land with which I had already become well acquainted as a youth, there to carry on my wild life of trading and hunting.

For the trading I never cared much, as may be guessed from the little that ever I made out of it, the art of traffic being in truth repugnant to me. But hunting was always the breath of my nostrils—not that I am fond of killing creatures, for any humane man soon wearies of slaughter. No, it is the excitement of sport, which, before breechloaders came in, was acute enough, I can assure you; the lonely existence in wild places, often with only the sun and the stars for companions; the continual adventures; the strange tribes with whom I came in contact; in short, the change, the danger, the hope always of finding something great and new, that attracted and still attracts me, even now when I *have* found the great and the new. There, I must not go on writing like this, or I shall throw down my pen and book a passage for Africa, and incidentally to the next world, no doubt—that world of the great and new!

It was, I think, in the month of May in the year 1854 that I went hunting in rough country between the White and Black Umvolosi Rivers, by permission of Panda—whom the Boers had made king of Zululand after the defeat and death of Dingaan his brother. The district was very feverish, and for this reason I had entered it in the winter months. There was so much bush that, in the total absence of roads, I thought it wise not to attempt to bring my wagons down, and as no horses would live in that veld I went on foot. My principal companions were a Kafir of mixed origin, called Sikauli, commonly abbreviated into Scowl, the Zulu chief Saduko, and a headman of the Undwandwe blood named Umbezi, at whose kraal on the high land about thirty miles away I left my wagon and certain of my men in charge of the goods and some ivory that I had traded.

This Umbezi was a stout and genial-mannered man of about sixty years of age, and, what is rare among these people, one who loved sport for its own sake. Being aware of his tastes, also that he knew the country and was skilled in finding game, I had promised him a gun if he would accompany me and bring a few hunters. It was a particularly bad gun that had seen much service, and one which had an unpleasing habit of going off at half-cock; but even after he had seen it, and I in my honesty had explained its weaknesses, he jumped at the offer.

“O Macumazana” (that is my native name, often abbreviated into Macumazahn, which means “One who stands out,” or as many interpret it, I don’t know how, “Watcher-by-Night”)—“a gun that goes off sometimes when you do not expect it is much better than no gun at all, and you are a chief with a great heart to promise it to me, for when I own the White Man’s weapon I shall be looked up to and feared by everyone between the two rivers.”

Now, while he was speaking he handled the gun, that was loaded, observing which I moved behind him. Off it went in due course, its recoil knocking him backwards—for that gun was a devil to kick—and its bullet cutting the top off the ear of one of his wives. The lady fled screaming, leaving a little bit of her ear upon the ground.

“What does it matter?” said Umbezi, as he picked himself up, rubbing his shoulder with a rueful look. “Would that the evil spirit in the gun had cut off her tongue and not her ear! It is the Worn-out-Old-Cow’s own fault; she is always peeping into everything like a monkey. Now she will have something to chatter about and leave my things alone for awhile. I thank my ancestral Spirit it was not Mameena, for then her looks would have been spoiled.”

“Who is Mameena?” I asked. “Your last wife?”

“No, no, Macumazahn; I wish she were, for then I should have the most beautiful wife in the land. She is my daughter, though not that of the Worn-out-Old-Cow; her mother died when she was born, on the night of the Great Storm. You should ask Saduko there who Mameena is,” he added with a broad grin, lifting his head from the gun, which he was examining gingerly, as though he thought it might go off again while unloaded, and nodding towards someone who stood behind him.

I turned, and for the first time saw Saduko, whom I recognised at once as a person quite out of the ordinary run of natives.

He was a tall and magnificently formed young man, who, although his breast was scarred with assegai wounds, showing that he was a warrior, had not yet attained to the honour of the “ring” of polished wax laid over strips of rush bound round with sinew and sewn to the hair, the *isicoco* which at a certain age or dignity, determined by the king, Zulus are allowed to assume. But his face struck me more even than his grace, strength and stature. Undoubtedly it was a very fine face, with little or nothing of the negroid type about it; indeed, he might have been a rather dark-coloured Arab, to which stock he probably threw back. The eyes, too, were large and rather melancholy, and in his reserved, dignified air there was something that showed him to be no common fellow, but one of breeding and intellect.

“*Siyakubona* (that is, “we see you,” *anglice* “good morrow”) “Saduko,” I said, eyeing him curiously. “Tell me, who is Mameena?”

“*Inkoosi*,” he answered in his deep voice, lifting his delicately shaped hand in salutation, a courtesy that pleased me who, after all, was nothing but a white hunter, “*Inkoosi*, has not her father said that she is his daughter?”

“Aye,” answered the jolly old Umbezi, “but what her father has not said is that Saduko is her lover, or, rather, would like to be. Wow! Saduko,” he went on, shaking his fat finger at him, “are you mad, man, that you think a girl like that is for you? Give me a hundred cattle, not one less, and I will begin to think of it. Why, you have not ten, and Mameena is my eldest daughter, and must marry a rich man.”

“She loves me, O Umbezi,” answered Saduko, looking down, “and that is more than cattle.”

“For you, perhaps, Saduko, but not for me who am poor and want cows. Also,” he added, glancing at him shrewdly, “are you so sure that Mameena loves you though you be such a fine man? Now, I should have thought that whatever her eyes may say, her heart loves no one but herself, and that in the end she will follow her heart and not her eyes. Mameena the beautiful does not seek to be a poor man’s wife and do all the hoeing. But bring me the hundred cattle and we will see, for, speaking truth from my heart, if you were a big chief there is no one I should like better as a son-in-law, unless it were Macumazahn here,” he said, digging me in the ribs with his elbow, “who would lift up my House on his white back.”

Now, at this speech Saduko shifted his feet uneasily; it seemed to me as though he felt there was truth in Umbezi’s estimate of his daughter’s character. But he only said:

“Cattle can be acquired.”

“Or stolen,” suggested Umbezi.

"Or taken in war," corrected Saduko. "When I have a hundred head I will hold you to your word, O father of Mameena."

"And then what would you live on, fool, if you gave all your beasts to me? There, there, cease talking wind. Before you have a hundred head of cattle Mameena will have six children who will not call *you* father. Ah, don't you like that? Are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going," he answered, with a flash of his quiet eyes; "only then let the man whom they do call father beware of Saduko."

"Beware of how you talk, young man," said Umbezi in a grave voice. "Would you travel your father's road? I hope not, for I like you well; but such words are apt to be remembered."

Saduko walked away as though he did not hear.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"One of high blood," answered Umbezi shortly. "He might be a chief to-day had not his father been a plotter and a wizard. Dingaan smelt him out"—and he made a sideways motion with his hand that among the Zulus means much. "Yes, they were killed, almost every one; the chief, his wives, his children and his headmen—every one except Chosa his brother and his son Saduko, whom Zikali the dwarf, the Smeller-out-of-evil-doers, the Ancient, who was old before Senzangakona became a father of kings, hid him. There, that is an evil tale to talk of," and he shivered. "Come, White Man, and doctor that old Cow of mine, or she will give me no peace for months."

So I went to see the Worn-out-Old-Cow—not because I had any particular interest in her, for, to tell the truth, she was a very disagreeable and antique person, the cast-off wife of some chief whom at an unknown date in the past the astute Umbezi had married from motives of policy—but because I hoped to hear more of Miss Mameena, in whom I had become interested.

Entering a large hut, I found the lady so impolitely named "the Old Cow" in a parlous state. There she lay upon the floor, an unpleasant object because of the blood that had escaped from her wound, surrounded by a crowd of other women and of children. At regular intervals she announced that she was dying, and emitted a fearful yell, whereupon all the audience yelled also; in short, the place was a perfect pandemonium.

Telling Umbezi to get the hut cleared, I said that I would go to fetch my medicines. Meanwhile I ordered my servant, Scowl, a humorous-looking fellow, light yellow in hue, for he had a strong dash of Hottentot in his composition, to cleanse the wound. When I returned from the wagon ten minutes later the screams were more terrible than before, although the chorus now stood without the hut. Nor was this altogether wonderful, for on entering the place I found Scowl trimming up "the Old Cow's" ear with a pair of blunt nail-scissors.

"O Macumazana," said Umbezi in a hoarse whisper, "might it not perhaps be as well to leave her alone? If she bled to death, at any rate she would be quieter."

"Are you a man or a hyena?" I answered sternly, and set about the job, Scowl holding the poor woman's head between his knees.

It was over at length; a simple operation in which I exhibited—I believe that is the medical term—a strong solution of caustic applied with a feather.

"There, Mother," I said, for now we were alone in the hut, whence Scowl had fled, badly bitten in the calf, "you won't die now."

"No, you vile White Man," she sobbed. "I shan't die, but how about my beauty?"

"It will be greater than ever," I answered; "no one else will have an ear with such a curve in it. But, talking of beauty, where is Mameena?"

"I don't know where she is," she replied with fury, "but I very well know where she would be if I had my way. That peeled willow-wand of a girl"—here she added certain descriptive epithets I will not repeat—"has brought this misfortune upon me. We had a slight quarrel yesterday, White Man, and, being a witch as she is, she prophesied evil. Yes, when by accident I scratched her ear, she said that before long mine should burn, and surely burn it does." (This, no doubt, was true, for the caustic had begun to bite.)

"O devil of a White Man," she went on, "you have bewitched me; you have filled my head with fire."

Then she seized an earthenware pot and hurled it at me, saying, "Take that for your doctor-fee. Go, crawl after Mameena like the others and get her to doctor you."

By this time I was half through the bee-hole of the hut, my movements being hastened by a vessel of hot water which landed on me behind.

"What is the matter, Macumazahn?" asked old Umbezi, who was waiting outside.

"Nothing at all, friend," I answered with a sweet smile, "except that your wife wants to see you at once. She is in pain, and wishes you to soothe her. Go in; do not hesitate."

After a moment's pause he went in—that is, half of him went in. Then came a fearful crash, and he emerged again with the rim of a pot about his neck and his countenance veiled in a coating of what I took to be honey.

"Where is Mameena?" I asked him as he sat up spluttering.

"Where I wish I was," he answered in a thick voice; "at a kraal five hours' journey away."

Well, that was the first I heard of Mameena.

That night as I sat smoking my pipe under the flap lean-to attached to the wagon, laughing to myself over the adventure of "the Old Cow," falsely described as "worn out," and wondering whether Umbezi had got the honey out of his hair, the canvas was lifted, and a Kafir wrapped in a kaross crept in and squatted before me.

"Who are you?" I asked, for it was too dark to see the man's face.

"Inkoosi," answered a deep voice, "I am Saduko."

"You are welcome," I answered, handing him a little gourd of snuff in token of hospitality. Then I waited while he poured some of the snuff into the palm of his hand and took it in the usual fashion.

"*Inkoosi*," he said, when he had scraped away the tears produced by the snuff, "I have come to ask you a favour. You heard Umbezi say to-day that he will not give me his daughter, Mameena, unless I give him a hundred head of cows. Now, I have not got the cattle, and I cannot earn them by work in many years. Therefore I must take them from a certain tribe I know which is at war with the Zulus. But this I cannot do unless I have a gun. If I had a good gun, *Inkoosi*—one that only goes off when it is asked, and not of its own fancy, I who have some name could persuade a number of men whom I know, who once were servants of my father, or their sons, to be my companions in this venture."

"Do I understand that you wish me to give you one of my good guns with two mouths to it (i.e. double-barrelled), a gun worth at least twelve oxen, for nothing, O Saduko?" I asked in a cold and scandalised voice.

"Not so, O Watcher-by-Night," he answered; "not so, O He-who-sleeps-with-one-eye-open" (another free and difficult rendering of my native name, Macumazahn, or more correctly, Macumazana)—"I should never dream of offering such an insult to your high-born intelligence." He paused and took another pinch of snuff, then went on in a meditative voice: "Where I propose to get those hundred cattle there are many more; I am told not less than a thousand head in all. Now, *Inkoosi*," he added, looking at me sideways, "suppose you gave me the gun I ask for, and suppose you accompanied me with your own gun and your armed hunters, it would be fair that you should have half the cattle, would it not?"

"That's cool," I said. "So, young man, you want to turn me into a cow-thief and get my throat cut by Panda for breaking the peace of his country?"

"Neither, Macumazahn, for these are my own cattle. Listen, now, and I will tell you a story. You have heard of Matiwane, the chief of the Amangwane?"

"Yes," I answered. "His tribe lived near the head of the Umzinyati, did they not? Then they were beaten by the Boers or the English, and Matiwane came under the Zulus. But afterwards Dingaan wiped him out, with his House, and now his people are killed or scattered."

"Yes, his people are killed and scattered, but his House still lives. Macumazahn, I am his House, I, the only son of his chief wife, for Zikali the Wise Little One, the Ancient, who is of the Amangwane blood, and who hated Chaka and Dingaan—yes, and Senzangakona their father before them, but whom none of them could kill because he is so great and has such mighty spirits for his servants, saved and sheltered me."

"If he is so great, why, then, did he not save your father also, Saduko?" I asked, as though I knew nothing of this Zikali.

"I cannot say, Macumazahn. Perhaps the spirits plant a tree for themselves, and to do so cut down many other trees. At least, so it happened. It happened thus: Bangu, chief of the Amakoba, whispered into Dingaan's ear that Matiwane, my father, was a wizard; also that he was very rich. Dingaan listened because he thought a sickness that he had came from Matiwane's witchcraft. He said: 'Go, Bangu, and take a company with you and pay Matiwane a visit of honour, and in the night, O in the night! Afterwards, Bangu, we will divide the cattle, for Matiwane is strong and clever, and you shall not risk your life for nothing.'"

Saduko paused and looked down at the ground, brooding heavily.

"Macumazahn, it was done," he said presently. "They ate my father's meat, they drank his beer; they gave him a present from the king, they praised him with high names; yes, Bangu took snuff with him and called him brother. Then in the night, O in the night—!"

"My father was in the hut with my mother, and I, so big only"—and he held his hand at the height of a boy of ten—"was with them. The cry arose, the flames began to eat; my father looked out and saw. 'Break through the fence and away, woman,' he said; 'away with Saduko, that he may live to avenge me. Begone while I hold the gate! Begone to Zikali, for whose witchcrafts I pay with my blood.'

"Then he kissed me on the brow, saying but one word, 'Remember,' and thrust us from the hut.

"My mother broke a way through the fence; yes, she tore at it with her nails and teeth like a hyena. I looked back out of the shadow of the hut and saw Matiwane my father fighting like a buffalo. Men went down before him, one, two, three, although he had no shield: only his spear. Then Bangu crept behind him and stabbed him in the back and he threw up his arms and fell. I saw no more, for by now we were through the fence. We ran, but they perceived us. They hunted us as wild dogs hunt a buck. They killed my mother with a throwing assegai; it entered at her back and came out at her heart. I went mad, I drew it from her body, I ran at them. I dived beneath the shield of the first, a very tall man, and held the spear, so, in both my little hands. His weight came upon its point and it went through him as though he were but a bowl of buttermilk. Yes, he rolled over, quite dead, and the handle of the spear broke upon the ground. Now the others stopped astonished, for never had they seen such a thing. That a child should kill a tall warrior, oh! that tale had not been told. Some of them would have let me go, but just then Bangu came up and saw the dead man, who was his brother.

"*Wow!*" he said when he knew how the man had died. 'This lion's cub is a wizard also, for how else could he have killed a soldier who has known war? Hold out his arms that I may finish him slowly.'

"So two of them held out my arms, and Bangu came up with his spear."

Saduko ceased speaking, not that his tale was done, but because his voice choked in his throat. Indeed, seldom have I seen a man so moved. He breathed in great gasps, the sweat poured from him, and his muscles worked convulsively. I gave him a pannikin of water and he drank, then he went on:

"Already the spear had begun to prick—look, here is the mark of it"—and opening his kaross he pointed to a little white line just below the breast-bone—"when a strange shadow thrown by the fire of the burning huts came between Bangu and me, a shadow as that of a toad standing on its hind legs. I looked round and saw that it was the shadow of Zikali, whom I had seen once or twice. There he stood, though whence he came I know not, wagging his great white head that sits on the top of his body like a pumpkin on an ant-heap, rolling his big eyes and laughing loudly.

"*'A merry sight,'* he cried in his deep voice that sounded like water in a hollow cave. *'A merry sight, O Bangu, Chief of the Amakoba! Blood, blood, plenty of blood! Fire, fire, plenty of fire! Wizards dead here, there, and everywhere! Oh, a merry sight! I have seen many such; one at the kraal of your grandmother, for instance—your grandmother the great Inkosikazi, when myself I*

escaped with my life because I was so old; but never do I remember a merrier than that which this moon shines on,' and he pointed to the White Lady who just then broke through the clouds. 'But, great Chief Bangu, lord loved by the son of Senzangakona, brother of the Black One (Chaka) who has ridden hence on the assegai, what is the meaning of *this* play?' and he pointed to me and to the two soldiers who held out my little arms.

"I kill the wizard's cub, Zikali, that is all," answered Bangu.

"I see, I see," laughed Zikali. 'A gallant deed! You have butchered the father and the mother, and now you would butcher the child who has slain one of your grown warriors in fair fight. A very gallant deed, well worthy of the chief of the Amakoba! Well, loose his spirit—only—' He stopped and took a pinch of snuff from a box which he drew from a slit in the lobe of his great ear.

"Only what?" asked Bangu, hesitating.

"Only I wonder, Bangu, what you will think of the world in which you will find yourself before to-morrow's moon arises. Come back thence and tell me, Bangu, for there are so many worlds beyond the sun, and I would learn for certain which of them such a one as you inhabits: a man who for hatred and for gain murders the father and the mother and then butchers the child—the child that could slay a warrior who has seen war—with the spear hot from his mother's heart.'

"Do you mean that I shall die if I kill this lad?" shouted Bangu in a great voice.

"What else?" answered Zikali, taking another pinch of snuff.

"This, Wizard; that we will go together.'

"Good, good!" laughed the dwarf. 'Let us go together. Long have I wished to die, and what better companion could I find than Bangu, Chief of the Amakoba, Slayer of Children, to guard me on a dark and terrible road. Come, brave Bangu, come; kill me if you can,' and again he laughed at him.

"Now, Macumazahn, the people of Bangu fell back muttering, for they found this business horrible. Yes, even those who held my arms let go of them.

"What will happen to me, Wizard, if I spare the boy?" asked Bangu.

"Zikali stretched out his hand and touched the scratch that the assegai had made in me here. Then he held up his finger red with my blood, and looked at it in the light of the moon; yes, and tasted it with his tongue.

"I think this will happen to you, Bangu," he said. 'If you spare this boy he will grow into a man who will kill you and many others one day. But if you do not spare him I think that his spirit, working as spirits can do, will kill you to-morrow. Therefore the question is, will you live a while or will you die at once, taking me with you as your companion? For you must not leave me behind, brother Bangu.'

"Now Bangu turned and walked away, stepping over the body of my mother, and all his people walked away after him, so that presently Zikali the Wise and Little and I were left alone.

"What! have they gone?" said Zikali, lifting up his eyes from the ground. 'Then we had better be going also, Son of Matiwane, lest he should change his mind and come back. Live on, Son of Matiwane, that you may avenge Matiwane.'"

"A nice tale," I said. "But what happened afterwards?"

"Zikali took me away and nurtured me at his kraal in the Black Kloof, where he lived alone save for his servants, for in that kraal he would suffer no woman to set foot, Macumazahn. He taught me much wisdom and many secret things, and would have made a great doctor of me had I so willed. But I willed it not who find spirits ill company, and there are many of them about the Black Kloof, Macumazahn. So in the end he said: 'Go where your heart calls, and be a warrior, Saduko. But know this: You have opened a door that can never be shut again, and across the threshold of that door spirits will pass in and out for all your life, whether you seek them or seek them not.'

"It was you who opened the door, Zikali," I answered angrily.

"Mayhap," said Zikali, laughing after his fashion, 'for I open when I must and shut when I must. Indeed, in my youth, before the Zulus were a people, they named me Opener of Doors; and now, looking through one of those doors, I see something about you, O Son of Matiwane.'

"What do you see, my father?" I asked.

"I see two roads, Saduko: the Road of Medicine, that is the spirit road, and the Road of Spears, that is the blood road. I see you travelling on the Road of Medicine, that is my own road, Saduko, and growing wise and great, till at last, far, far away, you vanish over the precipice to which it leads, full of years and honour and wealth, feared yet beloved by all men, white and black. Only that road you must travel alone, since such wisdom may have no friends, and, above all, no woman to share its secrets. Then I look at the Road of Spears and see you, Saduko, travelling on that road, and your feet are red with blood, and women wind their arms about your neck, and one by one your enemies go down before you. You love much, and sin much for the sake of the love, and she for whom you sin comes and goes and comes again. And the road is short, Saduko, and near the end of it are many spirits; and though you shut your eyes you see them, and though you fill your ears with clay you hear them, for they are the ghosts of your slain. But the end of your journeying I see not. Now choose which road you will, Son of Matiwane, and choose swiftly, for I speak no more of this matter.'

"Then, Macumazahn, I thought a while of the safe and lonely path of wisdom, also of the blood-red path of spears where I should find love and war, and my youth rose up in me and—I chose the path of spears and the love and the sin and the unknown death."

"A foolish choice, Saduko, supposing that there is any truth in this tale of roads, which there is not."

"Nay, a wise one, Macumazahn, for since then I have seen Mameena and know why I chose that path."

"Ah!" I said. "Mameena—I forgot her. Well, after all, perhaps there is some truth in your tale of roads. When I have seen Mameena I will tell you what I think."

"When you have seen Mameena, Macumazahn, you will say that the choice was very wise. Well, Zikali, Opener of Doors, laughed loudly when he heard it. 'The ox seeks the fat pasture, but the young bull the rough mountainside where the heifers graze,' he said; 'and after all, a bull is better than an ox. Now begin to travel your own road, Son of Matiwane, and from time to time return to the Black Kloof and tell me how it fares with you. I will promise you not to die before I know the end of it.'

"Now, Macumazahn, I have told you things that hitherto have lived in my own heart only. And, Macumazahn, Bangu is in ill favour with Panda, whom he defies in his mountain, and I have a promise—never mind how—that he who kills him will be called to no account and may keep his cattle. Will you come with me and share those cattle, O Watcher-by-Night?"

"Get thee behind me, Satan," I said in English, then added in Zulu: "I don't know. If your story is true I should have no objection to helping to kill Bangu; but I must learn lots more about this business first. Meanwhile I am going on a shooting trip to-morrow with Umbezi the Fat, and I like you, O Chooser of the Road of Spears and Blood. Will you be my companion and earn the gun with two mouths in payment?"

"*Inkoosi*," he said, lifting his hand in salute with a flash of his dark eyes, "you are generous, you honour me. What is there that I should love better? Yet," he added, and his face fell, "first I must ask Zikali the Little, Zikali my foster-father."

"Oh!" I said, "so you are still tied to the Wizard's girdle, are you?"

"Not so, Macumazahn; but I promised him not long ago that I would undertake no enterprise, save that you know of, until I had spoken with him."

"How far off does Zikali live?" I asked Saduko.

"One day's journeying. Starting at sunrise I can be there by sunset."

"Good! Then I will put off the shooting for three days and come with you if you think that this wonderful old dwarf will receive me."

"I believe that he will, Macumazahn, for this reason—he told me that I should meet you and love you, and that you would be mixed up in my fortunes."

"Then he poured moonshine into your gourd instead of beer," I answered. "Would you keep me here till midnight listening to such foolishness when we must start at dawn? Begone now and let me sleep."

"I go," he answered with a little smile. "But if this is so, O Macumazana, why do you also wish to drink of the moonshine of Zikali?" and he went.

Yet I did not sleep very well that night, for Saduko and his strange and terrible story had taken a hold of my imagination. Also, for reasons of my own, I greatly wished to see this Zikali, of whom I had heard a great deal in past years. I wished further to find out if he was a common humbug, like so many witch-doctors, this dwarf who announced that my fortunes were mixed up with those of his foster-son, and who at least could tell me something true or false about the history and position of Bangu, a person for whom I had conceived a strong dislike, possibly quite unjustified by the facts. But more than all did I wish to see Mameena, whose beauty or talents produced so much impression upon the native mind. Perhaps if I went to see Zikali she would be back at her father's kraal before we started on our shooting trip.

Thus it was then that fate wove me and my doings into the web of some very strange events; terrible, tragic and complete indeed as those of a Greek play, as it has often done both before and since those days.

## Chapter II.

# THE MOONSHINE OF ZIKALI

On the following morning I awoke, as a good hunter always should do, just at that time when, on looking out of the wagon, nothing can be seen but a little grey glint of light which he knows is reflected from the horns of the cattle tied to the trek-tow. Presently, however, I saw another glint of light which I guessed came from the spear of Saduko, who was seated by the ashes of the cooking fire wrapped in his kaross of wildcat skins. Slipping from the *voorkisse*, or driving-box, I came behind him softly and touched him on the shoulder. He leapt up with a start which revealed his nervous nature, then recognising me through the soft grey gloom, said:

“You are early, Macumazahn.”

“Of course,” I answered; “am I not named Watcher-by-Night? Now let us go to Umbezi and tell him that I shall be ready to start on our hunting trip on the third morning from to-day.”

So we went, to find that Umbezi was in a hut with his last wife and asleep. Fortunately enough, however, as under the circumstances I did not wish to disturb him, outside the hut we found the Old Cow, whose sore ear had kept her very wide awake, who, for purposes of her own, although etiquette did not allow her to enter the hut, was waiting for her husband to emerge.

Having examined her wound and rubbed some ointment on it, with her I left my message. Next I woke up my servant Scowl, and told him that I was going on a short journey, and that he must guard all things until my return; and while I did so, took a nip of raw rum and made ready a bag of biltong, that is sun-dried flesh, and biscuits.

Then, taking with me a single-barrelled gun, that same little Purdey rifle with which I shot the vultures on the Hill of Slaughter at Dingaan’s Kraal,<sup>[1]</sup> we started on foot, for I would not risk my only horse on such a journey.

[1] For the story of this shooting of the vultures by Allan Quatermain, see the book called “Marie.”—EDITOR.

A rough journey it proved to be indeed, over a series of bush-clad hills that at their crests were covered with rugged stones among which no horse could have travelled. Up and down these hills we went, and across the valleys that divided them, following some path which I could not see, for all that live-long day. I have always been held a good walker, being by nature very light and active; but I am bound to say that my companion taxed my powers to the utmost, for on he marched for hour after hour, striding ahead of me at such a rate that at times I was forced to break into a run to keep up with him. Although my pride would not suffer me to complain, since as a matter of principle I would never admit to a Kafir that he was my master at anything, glad enough was I when, towards evening, Saduko sat himself down on a stone at the top of a hill and said:

“Behold the Black Kloof, Macumazahn,” which were almost the first words he had uttered since we started.

Truly the spot was well named, for there, cut out by water from the heart of a mountain in some primeval age, lay one of the most gloomy places that ever I had beheld. It was a vast cleft in which granite boulders were piled up fantastically, perched one upon another in great columns, and upon its sides grew dark trees set sparsely among the rocks. It faced towards the west, but the light of the sinking sun that flowed up it served only to accentuate its vast loneliness, for it was a big cleft, the best part of a mile wide at its mouth.

Up this dreary gorge we marched, mocked at by chattering baboons and following a little path not a foot wide that led us at length to a large hut and several smaller ones set within a reed fence and overhung by a gigantic mass of rock that looked as though it might fall at any moment. At the gate of the fence two natives of I know not what tribe, men of fierce and forbidding appearance, suddenly sprang out and thrust their spears towards my breast.

“Whom bring you here, Saduko?” asked one of them sternly.

“A white man that I vouch for,” he answered. “Tell Zikali that we wait on him.”

“What need to tell Zikali that which he knows already?” said the sentry. “Your food and that of your companion is already cooked in yonder hut. Enter, Saduko, with him for whom you vouch.”

So we went into the hut and ate, also I washed myself, for it was a beautifully clean hut, and the stools, wooden bowls, etc., were finely carved out of red ivory wood, this work, Saduko informed me, being done by Zikali’s own hand. Just as we were finishing our meal a messenger came to tell us that Zikali waited our presence. We followed him across an open space to a kind of door in the tall reed fence, passing which I set eyes for the first time upon the famous old witch-doctor of whom so many tales were told.

Certainly he was a curious sight in those strange surroundings, for they were very strange, and I think their complete simplicity added to the effect. In front of us was a kind of courtyard with a black floor made of polished ant-heap earth and cow-dung, two-thirds of which at least was practically roofed in by the huge over-hanging mass of rock whereof I have spoken, its arch bending above at a height of not less than sixty or seventy feet from the ground. Into this great, precipice-backed cavity poured the fierce light of the setting sun, turning it and all within it, even the large straw hut in the background, to the deep hue of blood. Seeing the wonderful effect of the sunset in that dark and forbidding place, it occurred to me at once that the old wizard must have chosen this moment to receive us because of its impressiveness.

Then I forgot these scenic accessories in the sight of the man himself. There he sat on a stool in front of his hut, quite unattended, and wearing only a cloak of leopard skins open in front, for he was unadorned with the usual hideous trappings of a witch-doctor, such as snake-skins, human bones, bladders full of unholy compounds, and so forth.

What a man he was, if indeed he could be called quite human. His stature, though stout, was only that of a child; his head was enormous, and from it plaited white hair fell down on to his shoulders. His eyes were deep and sunken, his face was broad and very stern. Except for this snow-white hair, however, he did not look ancient, for his flesh was firm and plump, and the skin on his cheeks and neck unwrinkled, which suggested to me that the story of his great antiquity was false. A man who was over a hundred years old, for instance, surely could not boast such a beautiful set of teeth, for even at that distance I could see them gleaming. On the other hand, evidently middle age was far behind him; indeed, from his appearance it was quite impossible to guess even approximately the number of his years. There he sat, red in the red light, perfectly still, and staring without a blink of his eyes at the furious ball of the setting sun, as an eagle is said to be able to do.

Saduko advanced, and I walked after him. My stature is not great, and I have never considered myself an imposing person, but somehow I do not think that I ever felt more insignificant than on this occasion. The tall and splendid native beside, or rather behind whom I walked, the gloomy magnificence of the place, the blood-red light in which it was bathed, and the solemn, solitary, little figure with wisdom stamped upon its face before me, all tended to induce humility in a man not naturally vain. I felt myself growing smaller and smaller, both in a moral and a physical sense; I wished that my curiosity had not prompted me to seek an interview with yonder uncanny being.

Well, it was too late to retreat; indeed, Saduko was already standing before the dwarf and lifting his right arm above his head as he gave him the salute of "*Makosi*!"<sup>[2]</sup> whereon, feeling that something was expected of me, I took off my shabby cloth hat and bowed, then, remembering my white man's pride, replaced it on my head.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Makosi*, the plural of *Inkoosi*, is the salute given to Zulu wizards, because they are not one but many, since in them (as in the possessed demoniac in the Bible) dwell an unnumbered horde of spirits.—EDITOR.

The wizard suddenly seemed to become aware of our presence, for, ceasing his contemplation of the sinking sun, he scanned us both with his slow, thoughtful eyes, which somehow reminded me of those of a chameleon, although they were not prominent, but, as I have said, sunken.

"Greeting, son Saduko!" he said in a deep, rumbling voice. "Why are you back here so soon, and why do you bring this flea of a white man with you?"

Now this was more than I could bear, so without waiting for my companion's answer I broke in:

"You give me a poor name, O Zikali. What would you think of me if I called you a beetle of a wizard?"

"I should think you clever," he answered after reflection, "for after all I must look something like a beetle with a white head. But why should you mind being compared to a flea? A flea works by night and so do you, Macumazahn; a flea is active and so are you; a flea is very hard to catch and kill and so are you; and lastly a flea drinks its fill of that which it desires, the blood of man and beast, and so you have done, do, and will, Macumazahn," and he broke into a great laugh that rolled and echoed about the rocky roof above.

Once, long years before, I had heard that laugh, when I was a prisoner in Dingaan's kraal, after the massacre of Retief and his company, and I recognised it again.

While I was searching for some answer in the same vein, and not finding it, though I thought of plenty afterwards, ceasing of a sudden from his unseemly mirth, he went on:

"Do not let us waste time in jests, for it is a precious thing, and there is but little of it left for any one of us. Your business, son Saduko?"

"*Baba*" (that is the Zulu for father), said Saduko, "this white *Inkoosi*, for, as you know well enough, he is a chief by nature, a man of a great heart and doubtless of high blood [this, I believe, is true, for I have been told that my ancestors were more or less distinguished, although, if this is so, their talents did not lie in the direction of money-making], has offered to take me upon a shooting expedition and to give me a good gun with two mouths in payment of my services. But I told him I could not engage in any fresh venture without your leave, and—he is come to see whether you will grant it, my father."

"Indeed," answered the dwarf, nodding his great head. "This clever white man has taken the trouble of a long walk in the sun to come here to ask me whether he may be allowed the privilege of presenting you with a weapon of great value in return for a service that any man of your years in Zululand would love to give for nothing in such company?"

"Son Saduko, because my eye-holes are hollow, do you think it your part to try to fill them up with dust? Nay, the white man has come because he desires to see him who is named Opener-of-Roads, of whom he heard a great deal when he was but a lad, and to judge whether in truth he has wisdom, or is but a common cheat. And you have come to learn whether or no your friendship with him will be fortunate; whether or no he will aid you in a certain enterprise that you have in your mind."

"True, O Zikali," I said. "That is so far as I am concerned."

But Saduko answered nothing.

"Well," went on the dwarf, "since I am in the mood I will try to answer both your questions, for I should be a poor *Nyanga*" [that is doctor] "if I did not when you have travelled so far to ask them. Moreover, O Macumazana, be happy, for I seek no fee who, having made such fortune as I need long ago, before your father was born across the Black Water, Macumazahn, no longer work for a reward—unless it be from the hand of one of the House of Senzangakona—and therefore, as you may guess, work but seldom."

Then he clapped his hands, and a servant appeared from somewhere behind the hut, one of those fierce-looking men who had stopped us at the gate. He saluted the dwarf and stood before him in silence and with bowed head.

"Make two fires," said Zikali, "and give me my medicine."

The man fetched wood, which he built into two little piles in front of Zikali. These piles he fired with a brand brought from behind the hut. Then he handed his master a catskin bag.

"Withdraw," said Zikali, "and return no more till I summon you, for I am about to prophesy. If, however, I should seem to die, bury me to-morrow in the place you know of and give this white man a safe-conduct from my kraal."

The man saluted again and went without a word.

When he had gone the dwarf drew from the bag a bundle of twisted roots, also some pebbles, from which he selected two, one white and the other black.

"Into this stone," he said, holding up the white pebble so that the light from the fire shone on it—since, save for the lingering red glow, it was now growing dark—"into this stone I am about to draw your spirit, O Macumazana; and into this one"—and he held up the black pebble—"yours, O Son of Matiwane. Why do you look frightened, O brave White Man, who keep saying in your heart, 'He is nothing but an ugly old Kafir cheat'? If I am a cheat, why do you look frightened? Is your spirit already in your throat, and does it choke you, as this little stone might do if you tried to swallow it?" and he burst into one of his great, uncanny laughs.

I tried to protest that I was not in the least frightened, but failed, for, in fact, I suppose my nerves were acted on by his suggestion, and I did feel exactly as though that stone were in my throat, only coming upwards, not going downwards. "Hysteria," thought I to myself, "the result of being overtired," and as I could not speak, sat still as though I treated his gibes with silent contempt.

"Now," went on the dwarf, "perhaps I shall seem to die; and if so do not touch me lest you should really die. Wait till I wake up again and tell you what your spirits have told me. Or if I do not wake up—for a time must come when I shall go on sleeping—well—for as long as I have lived—after the fires are quite out, not before, lay your hands upon my breast; and if you find me turning cold, get you gone to some other *Nyanga* as fast as the spirits of this place will let you, O ye who would peep into the future."

As he spoke he threw a big handful of the roots that I have mentioned on to each of the fires, whereon tall flames leapt up from them, very unholy-looking flames which were followed by columns of dense, white smoke that emitted a most powerful and choking odour quite unlike anything that I had ever smelt before. It seemed to penetrate all through me, and that accursed stone in my throat grew as large as an apple and felt as though someone were poking it upwards with a stick.

Next he threw the white pebble into the right-hand fire, that which was opposite to me, saying:

"Enter, Macumazahn, and look," and the black pebble he threw into the left-hand fire saying: "Enter, Son of Matiwane, and look. Then come back both of you and make report to me, your master."

Now it is a fact that as he said these words I experienced a sensation as though a stone had come out of my throat; so readily do our nerves deceive us that I even thought it grated against my teeth as I opened my mouth to give it passage. At any rate the choking was gone, only now I felt as though I were quite empty and floating on air, as though I were not I, in short, but a mere shell of a thing, all of which doubtless was caused by the stench of those burning roots. Still I could look and take note, for I distinctly saw Zikali thrust his huge head, first into the smoke of what I will call my fire, next into that of Saduko's fire, and then lean back, blowing the stuff in clouds from his mouth and nostrils. Afterwards I saw him roll over on to his side and lie quite still with his arms outstretched; indeed, I noticed that one of his fingers seemed to be in the left-hand fire and reflected that it would be burnt off. In this, however, I must have been mistaken, since I observed subsequently that it was not even scorched.

Thus Zikali lay for a long while till I began to wonder whether he were not really dead. Dead enough he seemed to be, for no corpse could have stayed more stirless. But that night I could not keep my thoughts fixed on Zikali or anything. I merely noted these circumstances in a mechanical way, as might one with whom they had nothing whatsoever to do. They did not interest me at all, for there appeared to be nothing in me to be interested, as I gathered according to Zikali, because I was not there, but in a warmer place than I hope ever to occupy, namely, in the stone in that unpleasant-looking, little right-hand fire.

So matters went as they might in a dream. The sun had sunk completely, not even an after-glow was left. The only light remaining was that from the smouldering fires, which just sufficed to illumine the bulk of Zikali, lying on his side, his squat shape looking like that of a dead hippopotamus calf. What was left of my consciousness grew heartily sick of the whole affair; I was tired of being so empty.

At length the dwarf stirred. He sat up, yawned, sneezed, shook himself, and began to rake among the burning embers of my fire with his naked hand. Presently he found the white stone, which was now red-hot—at any rate it glowed as though it were—and after examining it for a moment finally popped it into his mouth! Then he hunted in the other fire for the black stone, which he treated in a similar fashion. The next thing I remember was that the fires, which had died away almost to nothing, were burning very brightly again, I suppose because someone had put fuel on them, and Zikali was speaking.

"Come here, O Macumazana and O Son of Matiwane," he said, "and I will repeat to you what your spirits have been telling me."

We drew near into the light of the fires, which for some reason or other was extremely vivid. Then he spat the white stone from his mouth into his big hand, and I saw that now it was covered with lines and patches like a bird's egg.

"You cannot read the signs?" he said, holding it towards me; and when I shook my head went on: "Well, I can, as you white men read a book. All your history is written here, Macumazahn; but there is no need to tell you that, since you know it, as I do well enough, having learned it in other days, the days of Dingaana, Macumazahn. All your future, also, a very strange future," and he scanned the stone with interest. "Yes, yes; a wonderful life, and a noble death far away. But of these matters you have not asked me, and therefore I may not tell them even if I wished, nor would you believe if I did. It is of your hunting trip that you have asked me, and my answer is that if you seek your own comfort you will do well not to go. A pool in a dry river-bed; a buffalo bull with the tip of one horn shattered. Yourself and the bull in the pool. Saduko, yonder, also in the pool, and a little half-bred man with a gun jumping about upon the bank. Then a litter made of boughs and you in it, and the father of Mameena walking lamely at your side. Then a hut and you in it, and the maiden called Mameena sitting at your side.

"Macumazahn, your spirit has written on this stone that you should beware of Mameena, since she is more dangerous than any buffalo. If you are wise you will not go out hunting with Umbezi, although it is true that hunt will not cost you your life. There, away,

Stone, and take your writings with you!" and as he spoke he jerked his arm and I heard something whiz past my face.

Next he spat out the black stone and examined it in similar fashion.

"Your expedition will be successful, Son of Matiwane," he said. "Together with Macumazahn you will win many cattle at the cost of sundry lives. But for the rest—well, you did not ask me of it, did you? Also, I have told you something of that story before to-day. Away, Stone!" and the black pebble followed the white out into the surrounding gloom.

We sat quite still until the dwarf broke the deep silence with one of his great laughs.

"My witchcraft is done," he said. "A poor tale, was it not? Well, hunt for those stones to-morrow and read the rest of it if you can. Why did you not ask me to tell you everything while I was about it, White Man? It would have interested you more, but now it has all gone from me back into your spirit with the stones. Saduko, get you to sleep. Macumazahn, you who are a Watcher-by-Night, come and sit with me awhile in my hut, and we will talk of other things. All this business of the stones is nothing more than a Kafir trick, is it, Macumazahn? When you meet the buffalo with the split horn in the pool of a dried river, remember it is but a cheating trick, and now come into my hut and drink a *kamba* [bowl] of beer and let us talk of other things more interesting."

So he took me into the hut, which was a fine one, very well lighted by a fire in its centre, and gave me Kafir beer to drink, that I swallowed gratefully, for my throat was dry and still felt as though it had been scraped.

"Who are you, Father?" I asked point-blank when I had taken my seat upon a low stool, with my back resting against the wall of the hut, and lit my pipe.

He lifted his big head from the pile of karosses on which he was lying and peered at me across the fire.

"My name is Zikali, which means 'Weapons,' White Man. You know as much as that, don't you?" he answered. "My father 'went down' so long ago that his does not matter. I am a dwarf, very ugly, with some learning, as we of the Black House understand it, and very old. Is there anything else you would like to learn?"

"Yes, Zikali; how old?"

"There, there, Macumazahn, as you know, we poor Kafirs cannot count very well. How old? Well, when I was young I came down towards the coast from the Great River, you call it the Zambesi, I think, with Undwandwe, who lived in the north in those days. They have forgotten it now because it is some time ago, and if I could write I would set down the history of that march, for we fought some great battles with the people who used to live in this country. Afterwards I was the friend of the Father of the Zulus, he whom they still call *Inkoosi Umkulu*—the mighty chief—you may have heard tell of him. I carved that stool on which you sit for him and he left it back to me when he died."

"*Inkoosi Umkulu*!" I exclaimed. "Why, they say he lived hundreds of years ago."

"Do they, Macumazahn? If so, have I not told you that we black people cannot count as well as you do? Really it was only the other day. Anyhow, after his death the Zulus began to maltreat us Undwandwe and the Quabies and the Tetwas with us—you may remember that they called us the Amatefula, making a mock of us. So I quarrelled with the Zulus and especially with Chaka, he whom they named *Uhlanya* [the Mad One]. You see, Macumazahn, it pleased him to laugh at me because I am not as other men are. He gave me a name which means 'The-thing-which-should-never-have-been-born.' I will not speak that name, it is secret to me, it may not pass my lips. Yet at times he sought my wisdom, and I paid him back for his names, for I gave him very ill counsel, and he took it, and I brought him to his death, although none ever saw my finger in that business. But when he was dead at the hands of his brothers Dingaan and Umhlangana and of Umbopa, Umbopa who also had a score to settle with him, and his body was cast out of the kraal like that of an evil-doer, why I, who because I was a dwarf was not sent with the *men* against Sotshangana, went and sat on it at night and laughed thus," and he broke into one of his hideous peals of merriment.

"I laughed thrice: once for my wives whom he had taken; once for my children whom he had slain; and once for the mocking name that he had given me. Then I became the counsellor of Dingaan, whom I hated worse than I had hated Chaka, for he was Chaka again without his greatness, and you know the end of Dingaan, for you had a share in that war, and of Umhlangana, his brother and fellow-murderer, whom I counselled Dingaan to slay. This I did through the lips of the old Princess Menkabayi, Jama's daughter, Senzangakona's sister, the Oracle before whom all men bowed, causing her to say that 'This land of the Zulus cannot be ruled by a crimson assegai.' For, Macumazahn, it was Umhlangana who first struck Chaka with the spear. Now Panda reigns, the last of the sons of Senzangakona, my enemy, Panda the Fool, and I hold my hand from Panda because he tried to save the life of a child of mine whom Chaka slew. But Panda has sons who are as Chaka was, and against them I work as I worked against those who went before them."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why? Oh! if I were to tell you *all* my story you would understand why, Macumazahn. Well, perhaps I will one day." (Here I may state that as a matter of fact he did, and a very wonderful tale it is, but as it has nothing to do with this history I will not write it here.)

"I dare say," I answered. "Chaka and Dingaan and Umhlangana and the others were not nice people. But another question. Why do you tell me all this, O Zikali, seeing that were I but to repeat it to a talking-bird you would be smelt out and a single moon would not die before you do?"

"Oh! I should be smelt out and killed before one moon dies, should I? Then I wonder that this has not happened during all the moons that are gone. Well, I tell the story to you, Macumazahn, who have had so much to do with the tale of the Zulus since the days of Dingaan, because I wish that someone should know it and perhaps write it down when everything is finished. Because, too, I have just been reading your spirit and see that it is still a white spirit, and that you will not whisper it to a 'talking-bird.'"

Now I leant forward and looked at him.

"What is the end at which you aim, O Zikali?" I asked. "You are not one who beats the air with a stick; on whom do you wish the stick to fall at last?"

“On whom?” he answered in a new voice, a low, hissing voice. “Why, on these proud Zulus, this little family of men who call themselves the ‘People of Heaven,’ and swallow other tribes as the great tree-snake swallows kids and small bucks, and when it is fat with them cries to the world, ‘See how big I am! Everything is inside of me.’ I am a Ndwande, one of those peoples whom it pleases the Zulus to call ‘Amatefula’—poor hangers-on who talk with an accent, nothing but bush swine. Therefore I would see the swine tusk the hunter. Or, if that may not be, I would see the black hunter laid low by the rhinoceros, the white rhinoceros of your race, Macumazahn, yes, even if it sets its foot upon the Ndwande boar as well. There, I have told you, and this is the reason that I live so long, for I will not die until these things have come to pass, as come to pass they will. What did Chaka, Senzangakona’s son, say when the little red assegai, the assegai with which he slew his mother, aye and others, some of whom were near to me, was in his liver? What did he say to Mbopa and the princes? Did he not say that he heard the feet of a great white people running, of a people who should stamp the Zulus flat? Well, I, ‘The-thing-who-should-not-have-been-born,’ live on until that day comes, and when it comes I think that you and I, Macumazahn, shall not be far apart, and that is why I have opened out my heart to you, I who have knowledge of the future. There, I speak no more of these things that are to be, who perchance have already said too much of them. Yet do not forget my words. Or forget them if you will, for I shall remind you of them, Macumazahn, when the feet of your people have avenged the Ndwandes and others whom it pleases the Zulus to treat as dirt.”

Now, this strange man, who had sat up in his excitement, shook his long white hair which, after the fashion of wizards, he wore plaited into thin ropes, till it hung like a veil about him, hiding his broad face and deep eyes. Presently he spoke again through this veil of hair, saying:

“You are wondering, Macumazahn, what Saduko has to do with all these great events that are to be. I answer that he must play his part in them; not a very great part, but still a part, and it is for this purpose that I saved him as a child from Bangu, Dingaan’s man, and reared him up to be a warrior, although, since I cannot lie, I warned him that he would do well to leave spears alone and follow after wisdom. Well, he will slay Bangu, who now has quarrelled with Panda, and a woman will come into the story, one Mameena, and that woman will bring about war between the sons of Panda, and from this war shall spring the ruin of the Zulus, for he who wins will be an evil king to them and bring down on them the wrath of a mightier race. And so ‘The-thing-that-should-not-have-been-born’ and the Ndwandes and the Quabies and Twetwas, whom it has pleased the conquering Zulus to name ‘Amatefula,’ shall be avenged. Yes, yes, my Spirit tells me all these things, and they are true.”

“And what of Saduko, my friend and your fosterling?”

“Saduko, your friend and my fosterling, will take his appointed road, Macumazahn, as I shall and you will. What more could he desire, seeing it is that which he has chosen? He will take his road and he will play the part which the Great-Great has prepared for him. Seek not to know more. Why should you, since Time will tell you the story? And now go to rest, Macumazahn, as I must who am old and feeble. And when it pleases you to visit me again, we will talk further. Meanwhile, remember always that I am nothing but an old Kafir cheat who pretends to a knowledge that belongs to no man. Remember it especially, Macumazahn, when you meet a buffalo with a split horn in the pool of a dried-up river, and afterwards, when a woman named Mameena makes a certain offer to you, which you may be tempted to accept. Good night to you, Watcher-by-Night with the white heart and the strange destiny, good night to you, and try not to think too hardly of the old Kafir cheat who just now is called ‘Opener-of-Roads.’ My servant waits without to lead you to your hut, and if you wish to be back at Umbezi’s kraal by nightfall to-morrow, you will do well to start ere sunrise, since, as you found in coming, Saduko, although he may be a fool, is a very good walker, and you do not like to be left behind, Macumazahn, do you?”

So I rose to go, but as I went some impulse seemed to take him and he called me back and made me sit down again.

“Macumazahn,” he said, “I would add a word. When you were quite a lad you came into this country with Retief, did you not?”

“Yes,” I answered slowly, for this matter of the massacre of Retief is one of which I have seldom cared to speak, for sundry reasons, although I have made a record of it in writing.<sup>[3]</sup> Even my friends Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good have heard little of the part I played in that tragedy. “But what do you know of that business, Zikali?”

[3] Published under the title of “Marie.”—EDITOR.

“All that there is to know, I think, Macumazahn, seeing that I was at the bottom of it, and that Dingaan killed those Boers on my advice—just as he killed Chaka and Umhlangana.”

“You cold-blooded old murderer—” I began, but he interrupted me at once.

“Why do you throw evil names at me, Macumazahn, as I threw the stone of your fate at you just now? Why am I a murderer because I brought about the death of some white men that chanced to be your friends, who had come here to cheat us black folk of our country?”

“Was it for *this* reason that you brought about their deaths, Zikali?” I asked, staring him in the face, for I felt that he was lying to me.

“Not altogether, Macumazahn,” he answered, letting his eyes, those strange eyes that could look at the sun without blinking, fall before my gaze. “Have I not told you that I hate the House of Senzangakona? And when Retief and his companions were killed, did not the spilling of their blood mean war to the end between the Zulus and the White Men? Did it not mean the death of Dingaan and of thousands of his people, which is but a beginning of deaths? Now do you understand?”

“I understand that you are a very wicked man,” I answered with indignation.

“At least *you* should not say so, Macumazahn,” he replied in a new voice, one with the ring of truth in it.

“Why not?”

“Because I saved your life on that day. You escaped alone of the White Men, did you not? And you never could understand why, could you?”

“No, I could not, Zikali. I put it down to what you would call ‘the spirits.’”

“Well, I will tell you. Those spirits of yours wore my kaross,” and he laughed. “I saw you with the Boers, and saw, too, that you were of another people—the people of the English. You may have heard at the time that I was doctoring at the Great Place, although I kept out of the way and we did not meet, or at least you never knew that we met, for you were—asleep. Also I pitied your youth, for, although you do not believe it, I had a little bit of heart left in those days. Also I knew that we should come together again in the after years, as you see we have done to-day and shall often do until the end. So I told Dingaan that whoever died you must be spared, or he would bring up the ‘people of George’ [i.e. the English] to avenge you, and your ghost would enter into him and pour out a curse upon him. He believed me who did not understand that already so many curses were gathered about his head that one more or less made no matter. So you see you were spared, Macumazahn, and afterwards you helped to pour out a curse upon Dingaan without becoming a ghost, which is the reason why Panda likes you so well to-day, Panda, the enemy of Dingaan, his brother. You remember the woman who helped you? Well, I made her do so. How did it go with you afterwards, Macumazahn, with you and the Boer maiden across the Buffalo River, to whom you were making love in those days?”

“Never mind how it went,” I replied, springing up, for the old wizard’s talk had stirred sad and bitter memories in my heart. “That time is dead, Zikali.”

“Is it, Macumazahn? Now, from the look upon your face I should have said that it was still very much alive, as things that happened in our youth have a way of keeping alive. But doubtless I am mistaken, and it is all as dead as Dingaan, and as Retief, and as the others, your companions. At least, although you do not believe it, I saved your life on that red day, for my own purposes, of course, not because one white life was anything among so many in my count. And now go to rest, Macumazahn, go to rest, for although your heart has been awakened by memories this evening, I promise that you shall sleep well to-night,” and throwing the long hair back off his eyes he looked at me keenly, wagging his big head to and fro, and burst into another of his great laughs.

So I went. But, ah! as I went I wept.

Anyone who knew all that story would understand why. But this is not the place to tell it, that tale of my first love and of the terrible events which befell us in the time of Dingaan. Still, as I say, I have written it down, and perhaps one day it will be read.

## Chapter III.

### THE BUFFALO WITH THE CLEFT HORN

I slept very well that night, I suppose because I was so dog-tired I could not help it; but next day, on our long walk back to Umbezi's kraal, I thought a great deal.

Without doubt I had seen and heard very strange things, both of the past and the present—things that I could not in the least understand. Moreover, they were mixed up with all sorts of questions of high Zulu policy, and threw a new light upon events that happened to me and others in my youth.

Now, in the clear sunlight, was the time to analyse these things, and this I did in the most logical fashion I could command, although without the slightest assistance from Saduko, who, when I asked him questions, merely shrugged his shoulders.

These questions, he said, did not interest him; I had wished to see the magic of Zikali, and Zikali had been pleased to show me some very good magic, quite of his best indeed. Also he had conversed alone with me afterwards, doubtless on high matters—so high that he, Saduko, was not admitted to share the conversation—which was an honour he accorded to very few. I could form my own conclusions in the light of the White Man's wisdom, which everyone knew was great.

I replied shortly that I could, for Saduko's tone irritated me. Of course, the truth was that he felt aggrieved at being sent off to bed like a little boy while his foster-father, the old dwarf, made confidences to me. One of Saduko's faults was that he had always a very good opinion of himself. Also he was by nature terribly jealous, even in little things, as the readers of his history, if any, will learn.

We trudged on for several hours in silence, broken at length by my companion.

"Do you still mean to go on a shooting expedition with Umbezi, *Inkoosi*?" he asked, "or are you afraid?"

"Of what should I be afraid?" I answered tartly.

"Of the buffalo with the split horn, of which Zikali told you. What else?"

Now, I fear I used strong language about the buffalo with the split horn, a beast in which I declared I had no belief whatsoever, either with or without its accessories of dried river-beds and water-holes.

"If all this old woman's talk has made *you* afraid, however," I added, "you can stop at the kraal with Mameena."

"Why should the talk make me afraid, Macumazahn? Zikali did not say that this evil spirit of a buffalo would hurt *me*. If I fear, it is for you, seeing that if you are hurt you may not be able to go with me to look for Bangu's cattle."

"Oh!" I replied sarcastically; "it seems that you are somewhat selfish, friend Saduko, since it is of your welfare and not of my safety that you are thinking."

"If I were as selfish as you seem to believe, *Inkoosi*, should I advise you to stop with your wagons, and thereby lose the good gun with two mouths that you have promised me? Still, it is true that I should like well enough to stay at Umbezi's kraal with Mameena, especially if Umbezi were away."

Now, as there is nothing more uninteresting than to listen to other people's love affairs, and as I saw that with the slightest encouragement Saduko was ready to tell me all the history of his courtship over again, I did not continue the argument. So we finished our journey in silence, and arrived at Umbezi's kraal a little after sundown, to find, to the disappointment of both of us, that Mameena was still away.

Upon the following morning we started on our shooting expedition, the party consisting of myself, my servant Scowl, who, as I think I said, hailed from the Cape and was half a Hottentot; Saduko; the merry old Zulu, Umbezi, and a number of his men to serve as bearers and beaters. It proved a very successful trip—that is, until the end of it—for in those days the game in this part of the country was extremely plentiful. Before the end of the second week I killed four elephants, two of them with large tusks, while Saduko, who soon developed into a very fair shot, bagged another with the double-barrelled gun that I had promised him. Also, Umbezi—how, I have never discovered, for the thing partook of the nature of a miracle—managed to slay an elephant cow with fair ivories, using the old rifle that went off at half-cock.

Never have I seen a man, black or white, so delighted as was that vainglorious Kafir. For whole hours he danced and sang and took snuff and saluted with his hand, telling me the story of his deed over and over again, no single version of which tale agreed with the other. He took a new title also, that meant "Eater-up-of-Elephants"; he allowed one of his men to *bonga*—that is, praise—him all through the night, preventing us from getting a wink of sleep, until at last the poor fellow dropped in a kind of fit from exhaustion, and so forth. It really was very amusing until it became a bore.

Besides the elephants we killed lots of other things, including two lions, which I got almost with a right and left, and three white rhinoceroses, that now, alas! are nearly extinct. At last, towards the end of the third week, we had as much as our men could carry in the shape of ivory, rhinoceros horns, skins and sun-dried buckflesh, or biltong, and determined to start back for Umbezi's kraal next day. Indeed, this could not be long delayed, as our powder and lead were running low; for in those days, it will be remembered, breechloaders had not come in, and ammunition, therefore, had to be carried in bulk.

To tell the truth, I was very glad that our trip had come to such a satisfactory conclusion, for, although I would not admit it even to myself, I could not get rid of a kind of sneaking dread lest after all there might be something in the old dwarf's prophecy about a disagreeable adventure with a buffalo which was in store for me. Well, as it chanced, we had not so much as seen a buffalo, and as the road which we were going to take back to the kraal ran over high, bare country that these animals did not frequent, there was now little prospect of our doing so—all of which, of course, showed what I already knew, that only weak-headed superstitious idiots would put the slightest faith in the drivelling nonsense of deceiving or self-deceived Kafir medicine-men. These things, indeed, I pointed out with much vigour to Saduko before we turned in on the last night of the hunt.

Saduko listened in silence and said nothing at all, except that he would not keep me up any longer, as I must be tired.

Now, whatever may be the reason for it, my experience in life is that it is never wise to brag about anything. At any rate, on a hunting trip, to come to a particular instance, wait until you are safe at home till you begin to do so. Of the truth of this ancient adage I was now destined to experience a particularly fine and concrete example.

The place where we had camped was in scattered bush overlooking a great extent of dry reeds, that in the wet season was doubtless a swamp fed by a small river which ran into it on the side opposite to our camp. During the night I woke up, thinking that I heard some big beasts moving in these reeds; but as no further sounds reached my ears I went to sleep again.

Shortly after dawn I was awakened by a voice calling me, which in a hazy fashion I recognised as that of Umbezi.

"Macumazahn," said the voice in a hoarse whisper, "the reeds below us are full of buffalo. Get up. Get up at once."

"What for?" I answered. "If the buffalo came into the reeds they will go out of them. We do not want meat."

"No, Macumazahn; but I want their hides. Panda, the King, has demanded fifty shields of me, and without killing oxen that I can ill spare I have not the skins whereof to make them. Now, these buffalo are in a trap. This swamp is like a dish with one mouth. They cannot get out at the sides of the dish, and the mouth by which they came in is very narrow. If we station ourselves at either side of it we can kill many of them."

By this time I was thoroughly awake and had arisen from my blankets. Throwing a kaross over my shoulders, I left the hut, made of boughs, in which I was sleeping and walked a few paces to the crest of a rocky ridge, whence I could see the dry *vlei* below. Here the mists of dawn still clung, but from it rose sounds of grunts, bellows and tramlings which I, an old hunter, could not mistake. Evidently a herd of buffalo, one or two hundred of them, had established themselves in those reeds.

Just then my bastard servant, Scowl, and Saduko joined us, both of them full of excitement.

It appeared that Scowl, who never seemed to sleep at any natural time, had seen the buffalo entering the reeds, and estimated their number at two or three hundred. Saduko had examined the cleft through which they passed, and reported it to be so narrow that we could kill any number of them as they rushed out to escape.

"Quite so. I understand," I said. "Well, my opinion is that we had better let them escape. Only four of us, counting Umbezi, are armed with guns, and assegais are not of much use against buffalo. Let them go, I say."

Umbezi, thinking of a cheap raw material for the shields which had been requisitioned by the King, who would surely be pleased if they were made of such a rare and tough hide as that of buffalo, protested violently, and Saduko, either to please one whom he hoped might be his father-in-law or from sheer love of sport, for which he always had a positive passion, backed him up. Only Scowl—whose dash of Hottentot blood made him cunning and cautious—took my side, pointing out that we were very short of powder and that buffalo "ate up much lead." At last Saduko said:

"The lord Macumazana is our captain; we must obey him, although it is a pity. But doubtless the prophesying of Zikali weighs upon his mind, so there is nothing to be done."

"Zikali!" exclaimed Umbezi. "What has the old dwarf to do with this matter?"

"Never mind what he has or has not to do with it," I broke in, for although I do not think that he meant them as a taunt, but merely as a statement of fact, Saduko's words stung me to the quick, especially as my conscience told me that they were not altogether without foundation.

"We will try to kill some of these buffalo," I went on, "although, unless the herd should get bogged, which is not likely, as the swamp is very dry, I do not think that we can hope for more than eight or ten at the most, which won't be of much use for shields. Come, let us make a plan. We have no time to lose, for I think they will begin to move again before the sun is well up."

Half an hour later the four of us who were armed with guns were posted behind rocks on either side of the steep, natural roadway cut by water, which led down to the *vlei*, and with us some of Umbezi's men. That chief himself was at my side—a post of honour which he had insisted upon taking. To tell the truth, I did not dissuade him, for I thought that I should be safer so than if he were opposite to me, since, even if the old rifle did not go off of its own accord, Umbezi, when excited, was a most uncertain shot. The herd of buffalo appeared to have lain down in the reeds, so, being careful to post ourselves first, we sent three of the native bearers to the farther side of the *vlei*, with instructions to rouse the beasts by shouting. The remainder of the Zulus—there were ten or a dozen of them armed with stabbing spears—we kept with us.

But what did these scoundrels do? Instead of disturbing the herd by making a noise, as we told them, for some reason best known to themselves—I expect it was because they were afraid to go into the *vlei*, where they might meet the horn of a buffalo at any moment—they fired the dry reeds in three or four places at once, and this, if you please, with a strong wind blowing from them to us. In a minute or two the farther side of the swamp was a sheet of crackling flame that gave off clouds of dense white smoke. Then pandemonium began.

The sleeping buffalo leapt to their feet, and, after a few moments of indecision, crashed towards us, the whole huge herd of them, snorting and bellowing like mad things. Seeing what was about to happen, I nipped behind a big boulder, while Scowl shinned up a mimosa with the swiftness of a cat and, heedless of its thorns, sat himself in an eagle's nest at the top. The Zulus with the spears bolted to take cover where they could. What became of Saduko I did not see, but old Umbezi, bewildered with excitement, jumped into the exact middle of the roadway, shouting:

"They come! They come! Charge, buffalo folk, if you will. The Eater-up-of-Elephants awaits you!"

"You etceterad old fool!" I shouted, but got no farther, for just at this moment the first of the buffalo, which I could see was an enormous bull, probably the leader of the herd, accepted Umbezi's invitation and came, with its nose stuck straight out in front of it. Umbezi's gun went off, and next instant he went up. Through the smoke I saw his black bulk in the air, and then heard it alight with a thud on the top of the rock behind which I was crouching.

"Exit Umbezi," I said to myself, and by way of a requiem let the bull which had hoisted him, as I thought to heaven, have an ounce of lead in the ribs as it passed me. After that I did not fire any more, for it occurred to me that it was as well not to further advertise my presence.

In all my hunting experience I cannot remember ever seeing such a sight as that which followed. Out of the vlei rushed the buffalo by dozens, every one of them making remarks in its own language as it came. They jammed in the narrow roadway, they leapt on to each other's backs. They squealed, they kicked, they bellowed. They charged my friendly rock till I felt it shake. They knocked over Scowl's mimosa thorn, and would have shot him out of his eagle's nest had not its flat top fortunately caught in that of another and less accessible tree. And with them came clouds of pungent smoke, mixed with bits of burning reed and puffs of hot air.

It was over at last. With the exception of some calves, which had been trampled to death in the rush, the herd had gone. Now, like the Roman emperor—I think he was an emperor—I began to wonder what had become of my legions.

"Umbezi," I shouted, or, rather, sneezed through the smoke, "are you dead, Umbezi?"

"Yes, yes, Macumazahn," replied a choking and melancholy voice from the top of the rock, "I am dead, quite dead. That evil spirit of a *silwana* [i.e. wild beast] has killed me. Oh! why did I think I was a hunter; why did I not stop at my kraal and count my cattle?"

"I am sure I don't know, you old lunatic," I answered, as I scrambled up the rock to bid him good-bye.

It was a rock with a razor top like the ridge of a house, and there, hanging across this ridge like a pair of nether garments on a clothes-line, I found the "Eater-up-of-Elephants."

"Where did he get you, Umbezi?" I asked, for I could not see his wounds because of the smoke.

"Behind, Macumazahn, behind!" he groaned, "for I had turned to fly, but, alas! too late."

"On the contrary," I replied, "for one so heavy you flew very well; like a bird, Umbezi, like a bird."

"Look and see what the evil beast has done to me, Macumazahn. It will be easy, for my moocha has gone."

So I looked, examining Umbezi's ample proportions with care, but could discover nothing except a large smudge of black mud, as though he had sat down in a half-dried puddle. Then I guessed the truth. The buffalo's horns had missed him. He had been struck only with its muddy nose, which, being almost as broad as that portion of Umbezi with which it came in contact, had inflicted nothing worse than a bruise. When I was sure he had received no serious injury, my temper, already sorely tried, gave out, and I administered to him the soundest smacking—his position being very convenient—that he had ever received since he was a little boy.

"Get up, you idiot!" I shouted, "and let us look for the others. This is the end of your folly in making me attack a herd of buffalo in reeds. Get up. Am I to stop here till I choke?"

"Do you mean to tell me that I have no mortal wound, Macumazahn?" he asked, with a return of cheerfulness, accepting the castigation in good part, for he was not one who bore malice. "Oh, I am glad to hear it, for now I shall live to make those cowards who fired the reeds sorry that they are not dead; also to finish off that wild beast, for I hit him, Macumazahn, I hit him."

"I don't know whether you hit him; I know he hit you," I replied, as I shoved him off the rock and ran towards the tilted tree where I had last seen Scowl.

Here I beheld another strange sight. Scowl was still seated in the eagle's nest that he shared with two nearly fledged young birds, one of which, having been injured, was uttering piteous cries. Nor did it cry in vain, for its parents, which were of that great variety of kite that the Boers call *lammefange*, or lamb-lifters, had just arrived to its assistance, and were giving their new nestling, Scowl, the best doing that man ever received at the beak and claws of feathered kind. Seen through those rushing smoke wreaths, the combat looked perfectly titanic; also it was one of the noisiest to which I ever listened, for I don't know which shrieked the more loudly, the infuriated eagles or their victim.

Seeing how things stood, I burst into a roar of laughter, and just then Scowl grabbed the leg of the male bird, that was planted in his breast while it removed tufts of his wool with its hooked beak, and leapt boldly from the nest, which had become too hot to hold him. The eagle's outspread wings broke his fall, for they acted as a parachute; and so did Umbezi, upon whom he chanced to land. Springing from the prostrate shape of the chief, who now had a bruise in front to match that behind, Scowl, covered with pecks and scratches, ran like a lamp-lighter, leaving me to collect my second gun, which he had dropped at the bottom of the tree, but fortunately without injuring it. The Kafirs gave him another name after that encounter, which meant "He-who-fights-birds-and-gets-the-worst-of-it."

Well, we escaped from the line of the smoke, a dishevelled trio—indeed, Umbezi had nothing left on him except his head ring—and shouted for the others, if perchance they had not been trodden to death in the rush. The first to arrive was Saduko, who looked quite calm and untroubled, but stared at us in astonishment, and asked coolly what we had been doing to get in such a state. I replied in appropriate language, and asked in turn how he had managed to remain so nicely dressed.

He did not answer, but I believe the truth was that he had crept into a large ant-bear's hole—small blame to him, to be frank. Then the remainder of our party turned up one by one, some of them looking very blown, as though they had run a long way. None were missing, except those who had fired the reeds, and they thought it well to keep clear for a good many hours. I believe that afterwards they regretted not having taken a longer leave of absence; but when they finally did arrive I was in no condition to note what passed between them and their outraged chief.

Being collected, the question arose what we should do. Of course, I wished to return to camp and get out of this ill-omened place as soon as possible. But I had reckoned without the vanity of Umbezi. Umbezi stretched over the edge of a sharp rock, whither he

had been hoisted by the nose of a buffalo, and imagining himself to be mortally wounded, was one thing; but Umbezi in a borrowed moocha, although, because of his bruises, he supported his person with one hand in front and with the other behind, knowing his injuries to be purely superficial, was quite another.

"I am a hunter," he said; "I am named 'Eater-up-of-Elephants';" and he rolled his eyes, looking about for someone to contradict him, which nobody did. Indeed, his "praiser," a thin, tired-looking person, whose voice was worn out with his previous exertions, repeated in a feeble way:

"Yes, Black One, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants' is your name; 'Lifted-up-by-Buffalo' is your name."

"Be silent, idiot," roared Umbezi. "As I said, I am a hunter; I have wounded the wild beast that subsequently dared to assault me. [As a matter of fact, it was I, Allan Quatermain, who had wounded it.] I would make it bite the dust, for it cannot be far away. Let us follow it."

He glared round him, whereon his obsequious people, or one of them, echoed:

"Yes, by all means let us follow it, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants.' Macumazahn, the clever white man, will show us how, for where is the buffalo that he fears!"

Of course, after this there was nothing else to be done, so, having summoned the scratched Scowl, who seemed to have no heart in the business, we started on the spoor of the herd, which was as easy to track as a wagon road.

"Never mind, Baas," said Scowl, "they are two hours' march off by now."

"I hope so," I answered; but, as it happened, luck was against me, for before we had covered half a mile some over-zealous fellow struck a blood spoor.

I marched on that spoor for twenty minutes or so, till we came to a patch of bush that sloped downwards to a river-bed. Right to this river I followed it, till I reached the edge of a big pool that was still full of water, although the river itself had gone dry. Here I stood looking at the spoor and consulting with Saduko as to whether the beast could have swum the pool, for the tracks that went to its very verge had become confused and uncertain. Suddenly our doubts were ended, since out of a patch of dense bush which we had passed—for it had played the common trick of doubling back on its own spoor—appeared the buffalo, a huge bull, that halted on three legs, my bullet having broken one of its thighs. As to its identity there was no doubt, since on, or rather from, its right horn, which was cleft apart at the top, hung the remains of Umbezi's moocha.

"Oh, beware, *Inkoosi*," cried Saduko in a frightened voice. "*It is the buffalo with the cleft horn!*"

I heard him; I saw. All the scene in the hut of Zikali rose before me—the old dwarf, his words, everything. I lifted my rifle and fired at the charging beast, but knew that the bullet glanced from its skull. I threw down the gun—for the buffalo was right on me—and tried to jump aside.

Almost I did so, but that cleft horn, to which hung the remains of Umbezi's moocha, scooped me up and hurled me off the river bank backwards and sideways into the deep pool below. As I departed thither I saw Saduko spring forward and heard a shot fired that caused the bull to collapse for a moment. Then with a slow, sliding motion it followed me into the pool.

Now we were together, and there was no room for both, so after a certain amount of dodging I went under, as the lighter dog always does in a fight. That buffalo seemed to do everything to me which a buffalo could do under the circumstances. It tried to horn me, and partially succeeded, although I ducked at each swoop. Then it struck me with its nose and drove me to the bottom of the pool, although I got hold of its lip and twisted it. Then it calmly knelt on me and sank me deeper and deeper into the mud. I remember kicking it in the stomach. After this I remember no more, except a kind of wild dream in which I rehearsed all the scene in the dwarf's hut, and his request that when I met the buffalo with the cleft horn in the pool of a dried river, I should remember that he was nothing but a "poor old Kafir cheat."

After this I saw my mother bending over a little child in my bed in the old house in Oxfordshire where I was born, and then—blackness!

I came to myself again and saw, instead of my mother, the stately figure of Saduko bending over me upon one side, and on the other that of Scowl, the half-bred Hottentot, who was weeping, for his hot tears fell upon my face.

"He is gone," said poor Scowl; "that bewitched beast with the split horn has killed him. He is gone who was the best white man in all South Africa, whom I loved better than my father and all my relatives."

"That you might easily do, Bastard," answered Saduko, "seeing that you do not know who they are. But he is not gone, for the 'Opener-of-Roads' said that he would live; also I got my spear into the heart of that buffalo before he had kneaded the life out of him, as fortunately the mud was soft. Yet I fear that his ribs are broken"; and he poked me with his finger on the breast.

"Take your clumsy hand off me," I gasped.

"There!" said Saduko, "I have made him feel. Did I not tell you that he would live?"

After this I remember little more, except some confused dreams, till I found myself lying in a great hut, which I discovered subsequently was Umbezi's own, the same, indeed, wherein I had doctored the ear of that wife of his who was called "Worn-out-old-Cow."

## Chapter IV.

### MAMEENA

For a while I contemplated the roof and sides of the hut by the light which entered it through the smoke-vent and the door-hole, wondering whose it might be and how I came there.

Then I tried to sit up, and instantly was seized with agony in the region of the ribs, which I found were bound about with broad strips of soft tanned hide. Clearly they, or some of them, were broken.

What had broken them? I asked myself, and in a flash everything came back to me. So I had escaped with my life, as the old dwarf, "Opener-of-Roads," had told me that I should. Certainly he was an excellent prophet; and if he spoke truth in this matter, why not in others? What was I to make of it all? How could a black savage, however ancient, foresee the future?

By induction from the past, I supposed; and yet what amount of induction would suffice to show him the details of a forthcoming accident that was to happen to me through the agency of a wild beast with a peculiarly shaped horn? I gave it up, as before and since that day I have found it necessary to do in the case of many other events in life. Indeed, the question is one that I often have had cause to ask where Kafir "witch-doctors" or prophets are concerned, notably in the instance of a certain Mavovo, of whom I hope to tell one day, whose predictions saved my life and those of my companions.

Just then I heard the sound of someone creeping through the bee-hole of the hut, and half-closed my eyes, as I did not feel inclined for conversation. The person came and stood over me, and somehow—by instinct, I suppose—I became aware that my visitor was a woman. Very slowly I lifted my eyelids, just enough to enable me to see her.

There, standing in a beam of golden light that, passing through the smoke-hole, pierced the soft gloom of the hut, stood the most beautiful creature that I had ever seen—that is, if it be admitted that a person who is black, or rather copper-coloured, can be beautiful.

She was a little above the medium height, not more, with a figure that, so far as I am a judge of such matters, was absolutely perfect—that of a Greek statue indeed. On this point I had an opportunity of forming an opinion, since, except for her little bead apron and a single string of large blue beads about her throat, her costume was—well, that of a Greek statue. Her features showed no trace of the negro type; on the contrary, they were singularly well cut, the nose being straight and fine and the pouting mouth that just showed the ivory teeth between, very small. Then the eyes, large, dark and liquid, like those of a buck, set beneath a smooth, broad forehead on which the curling, but not woolly, hair grew low. This hair, by the way, was not dressed up in any of the eccentric native fashions, but simply parted in the middle and tied in a big knot over the nape of the neck, the little ears peeping out through its tresses. The hands, like the feet, were very small and delicate, and the curves of the bust soft and full without being coarse, or even showing the promise of coarseness.

A lovely woman, truly; and yet there was something not quite pleasing about that beautiful face; something, notwithstanding its childlike outline, which reminded me of a flower breaking into bloom, that one does not associate with youth and innocence. I tried to analyse what this might be, and came to the conclusion that without being hard, it was too clever and, in a sense, too reflective. I felt even then that the brain within the shapely head was keen and bright as polished steel; that this woman was one made to rule, not to be man's toy, or even his loving companion, but to use him for her ends.

She dropped her chin till it hid the little, dimple-like depression below her throat, which was one of her charms, and began not to look at, but to study me, seeing which I shut my eyes tight and waited. Evidently she thought that I was still in my swoon, for now she spoke to herself in a low voice that was soft and sweet as honey.

"A small man," she said; "Saduko would make two of him, and the other"—who was he, I wondered—"three. His hair, too, is ugly; he cuts it short and it sticks up like that on a cat's back. *Iya!*" (i.e. Piff!), and she moved her hand contemptuously, "a feather of a man. But white—white, one of those who rule. Why, they all of them know that he is their master. They call him 'He-who-never-Sleeps.' They say that he has the courage of a lioness with young—he who got away when Dingaan killed *Piti* [Retief] and the Boers; they say that he is quick and cunning as a snake, and that Panda and his great *indumas* think more of him than of any white man they know. He is unmarried also, though they say, too, that twice he had a wife, who died, and now he does not turn to look at women, which is strange in any man, and shows that he will escape trouble and succeed. Still, it must be remembered that they are all ugly down here in Zululand, cows, or heifers who will be cows. *Piff!* no more."

She paused for a little while, then went on in her dreamy, reflective voice:

"Now, if he met a woman who is not merely a cow or a heifer, a woman cleverer than himself, even if she were not white, I wonder —"

At this point I thought it well to wake up. Turning my head I yawned, opened my eyes and looked at her vaguely, seeing which her expression changed in a flash from that of brooding power to one of moved and anxious girlhood; in short, it became most sweetly feminine.

"You are Mameena?" I said; "is it not so?"

"Oh, yes, *Inkoosi*," she answered, "that is my poor name. But how did you hear it, and how do you know me?"

"I heard it from one Saduko"—here she frowned a little—"and others, and I knew you because you are so beautiful"—an incautious speech at which she broke into a dazzling smile and tossed her deer-like head.

"Am I?" she asked. "I never knew it, who am only a common Zulu girl to whom it pleases the great white chief to say kind things, for which I thank him"; and she made a graceful little reverence, just bending one knee. "But," she went on quickly, "whatever else I be, I am of no knowledge, not fit to tend you who are hurt. Shall I go and send my oldest mother?"

"Do you mean her whom your father calls the 'Worn-out-old-Cow,' and whose ear he shot off?"

"Yes, it must be she from the description," she answered with a little shake of laughter, "though I never heard him give her that name."

"Or if you did, you have forgotten it," I said dryly. "Well, I think not, thank you. Why trouble her, when you will do quite as well? If there is milk in that gourd, perhaps you will give me a drink of it."

She flew to the bowl like a swallow, and next moment was kneeling at my side and holding it to my lips with one hand, while with the other she supported my head.

"I am honoured," she said. "I only came to the hut the moment before you woke, and seeing you still lost in swoon, I wept—look, my eyes are still wet [they were, though how she made them so I do not know]—for I feared lest that sleep should be but the beginning of the last."

"Quite so," I said; "it is very good of you. And now, since your fears are groundless—thanks be to the heavens—sit down, if you will, and tell me the story of how I came here."

She sat down, not, I noted, as a Kafir woman ordinarily does, in a kind of kneeling position, but on a stool.

"You were carried into the kraal, *Inkoosi*," she said, "on a litter of boughs. My heart stood still when I saw that litter coming; it was no more heart; it was cold iron, because I thought the dead or injured man was—" And she paused.

"Saduko?" I suggested.

"Not at all, *Inkoosi*—my father."

"Well, it wasn't either of them," I said, "so you must have felt happy."

"Happy! *Inkoosi*, when the guest of our house had been wounded, perhaps to death—the guest of whom I have heard so much, although by misfortune I was absent when he arrived."

"A difference of opinion with your eldest mother?" I suggested.

"Yes, *Inkoosi*; my own is dead, and I am not too well treated here. She called me a witch."

"Did she?" I answered. "Well, I do not altogether wonder at it; but please continue your story."

"There is none, *Inkoosi*. They brought you here, they told me how the evil brute of a buffalo had nearly killed you in the pool; that is all."

"Yes, yes, Mameena; but how did I get out of the pool?"

"Oh, it seems that your servant, Sikauli, the bastard, leapt into the water and engaged the attention of the buffalo which was kneading you into the mud, while Saduko got on to its back and drove his assegai down between its shoulders to the heart, so that it died. Then they pulled you out of the mud, crushed and almost drowned with water, and brought you to life again. But afterwards you became senseless, and so lay wandering in your speech until this hour."

"Ah, he is a brave man, is Saduko."

"Like others, neither more nor less," she replied with a shrug of her rounded shoulders. "Would you have had him let you die? I think the brave man was he who got in front of the bull and twisted its nose, not he who sat on its back and poked at it with a spear."

At this period in our conversation I became suddenly faint and lost count of things, even of the interesting Mameena. When I awoke again she was gone, and in her place was old Umbezi, who, I noticed, took down a mat from the side of the hut and folded it up to serve as a cushion before he sat himself upon the stool.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said when he saw that I was awake; "how are you?"

"As well as can be hoped," I answered; "and how are you, Umbezi?"

"Oh, bad, Macumazahn; even now I can scarcely sit down, for that bull had a very hard nose; also I am swollen up in front where Sikauli struck me when he tumbled out of the tree. Also my heart is cut in two because of our losses."

"What losses, Umbezi?"

"Wow! Macumazahn, the fire that those low fellows of mine lit got to our camp and burned up nearly everything—the meat, the skins, and even the ivory, which it cracked so that it is useless. That was an unlucky hunt, for although it began so well, we have come out of it quite naked; yes, with nothing at all except the head of the bull with the cleft horn, that I thought you might like to keep."

"Well, Umbezi, let us be thankful that we have come out with our lives—that is, if I am going to live," I added.

"Oh, Macumazahn, you will live without doubt, and be none the worse. Two of our doctors—very clever men—have looked at you and said so. One of them tied you up in all those skins, and I promised him a heifer for the business, if he cured you, and gave him a goat on account. But you must lie here for a month or more, so he says. Meanwhile Panda has sent for the hides which he demanded of me to be made into shields, and I have been obliged to kill twenty-five of my beasts to provide them—that is, of my own and of those of my headmen."

"Then I wish you and your headmen had killed them before we met those buffalo, Umbezi," I groaned, for my ribs were paining me very much. "Send Saduko and Sikauli here; I would thank them for saving my life."

So they came, next morning, I think, and I thanked them warmly enough.

"There, there, Baas," said Scowl, who was literally weeping tears of joy at my return from delirium and coma to the light of life and reason; not tears of Mameena's sort, but real ones, for I saw them running down his snub nose, that still bore marks of the eagle's claws. "There, there, say no more, I beseech you. If you were going to die, I wished to die, too, who, if you had left it, should only have wandered through the world without a heart. That is why I jumped into the pool, not because I am brave."

When I heard this my own eyes grew moist. Oh, it is the fashion to abuse natives, but from whom do we meet with more fidelity and love than from these poor wild Kafirs that so many of us talk of as black dirt which chances to be fashioned to the shape of man?

"As for myself, *Inkoosi*," added Saduko, "I only did my duty. How could I have held up my head again if the bull had killed you while I walked away alive? Why, the very girls would have mocked at me. But, oh, his skin was tough. I thought that assegai would never get through it."

Observe the difference between these two men's characters. The one, although no hero in daily life, imperils himself from sheer, dog-like fidelity to a master who had given him many hard words and sometimes a flogging in punishment for drunkenness, and the other to gratify his pride, also perhaps because my death would have interfered with his plans and ambitions in which I had a part to play. No, that is a hard saying; still, there is no doubt that Saduko always first took his own interests into consideration, and how what he did would reflect upon his prospects and repute, or influence the attainment of his desires. I think this was so even when Mameena was concerned—at any rate, in the beginning—although certainly he always loved her with a single-hearted passion that is very rare among Zulus.

Presently Scowl left the hut to prepare me some broth, whereon Saduko at once turned the talk to this subject of Mameena.

He understood that I had seen her. Did I not think her very beautiful?

"Yes, very beautiful," I answered; "indeed, the most beautiful Zulu woman I have ever seen."

And very clever—almost as clever as a white?

"Yes, and very clever—much cleverer than most whites."

And—anything else?

"Yes; very dangerous, and one who could turn like the wind and blow hot and blow cold."

"Ah!" he said, thought a while, then added: "Well, what do I care how she blows to others, so long as she blows hot to me."

"Well, Saduko, and does she blow hot for you?"

"Not altogether, Macumazahn." Another pause. "I think she blows rather like the wind before a great storm."

"That is a biting wind, Saduko, and when we feel it we know that the storm will follow."

"I dare say that the storm will follow, *Inkoosi*, for she was born in a storm and storm goes with her; but what of that, if she and I stand it out together? I love her, and I had rather die with her than live with any other woman."

"The question is, Saduko, whether she would rather die with you than live with any other man. Does she say so?"

"*Inkoosi*, Mameena's thought works in the dark; it is like a white ant in its tunnel of mud. You see the tunnel which shows that she is thinking, but you do not see the thought within. Still, sometimes, when she believes that no one beholds or hears her"—here I bethought me of the young lady's soliloquy over my apparently senseless self—"or when she is surprised, the true thought peeps out of its tunnel. It did so the other day, when I pleaded with her after she had heard that I killed the buffalo with the cleft horn."

"Do I love you?" she said. 'I know not for sure. How can I tell? It is not our custom that a maiden should love before she is married, for if she did so most marriages would be things of the heart and not of cattle, and then half the fathers of Zululand would grow poor and refuse to rear girl-children who would bring them nothing. You are brave, you are handsome, you are well-born; I would sooner live with you than with any other man I know—that is, if you were rich and, better still, powerful. Become rich and powerful, Saduko, and I think that I shall love you.'

"I will, Mameena," I answered; 'but you must wait. The Zulu nation was not fashioned from nothing in a day. First Chaka had to come.'

"Ah!" she said, and, my father, her eyes flashed. 'Ah! Chaka! There was a man! Be another Chaka, Saduko, and I will love you more—more than you can dream of—thus and thus,' and she flung her arms about me and kissed me as I was never kissed before, which, as you know, among us is a strange thing for a girl to do. Then she thrust me from her with a laugh, and added: 'As for the waiting, you must ask my father of that. Am I not his heifer, to be sold, and can I disobey my father?' And she was gone, leaving me empty, for it seemed as though she took my vitals with her. Nor will she talk thus any more, the white ant who has gone back into its tunnel."

"And did you speak to her father?"

"Yes, I spoke to him, but in an evil moment, for he had but just killed the cattle to furnish Panda's shields. He answered me very roughly. He said: 'You see these dead beasts which I and my people must slay for the king, or fall under his displeasure? Well, bring me five times their number, and we will talk of your marriage with my daughter, who is a maid in some request.'

"I answered that I understood and would try my best, whereon he became more gentle, for Umbezi has a kindly heart."

"My son," he said, 'I like you well, and since I saw you save Macumazahn, my friend, from that mad wild beast of a buffalo I like you better than before. Yet you know my case. I have an old name and am called the chief of a tribe, and many live on me. But I am poor, and this daughter of mine is worth much. Such a woman few men have bred. Well, I must make the best of her. My son-in-law must be one who will prop up my old age, one to whom, in my need or trouble, I could always go as to a dry log,<sup>[1]</sup> to break off some of its bark to make a fire to comfort me, not one who treads me into the mire as the buffalo did to Macumazahn. Now I have spoken, and I do not love such talk. Come back with the cattle, and I will listen to you, but meanwhile understand that I am not bound to you or to anyone; I shall take what my spirit sends me, which, if I may judge the future by the past, will not be much. One word more: Do not linger about this kraal too long, lest it should be said that you are the accepted suitor of Mameena. Go hence and do a man's work, and return with a man's reward, or not at all.'"

[1] In Zululand a son-in-law is known as *isigodo so mkwenyana*, the “son-in-law log,” for the reason stated in the text.—EDITOR.]

“Well, Saduko, that spear has an edge on it, has it not?” I answered. “And now, what is your plan?”

“My plan is, Macumazahn,” he said, rising from his seat, “to go hence and gather those who are friendly to me because I am my father’s son and still the chief of the Amangwane, or those who are left of them, although I have no kraal and no hoof of kine. Then, within a moon, I hope, I shall return here to find you strong again and once more a man, and we will start out against Bangu, as I have whispered to you, with the leave of a High One, who has said that, if I can take any cattle, I may keep them for my pains.”

“I don’t know about that, Saduko. I never promised you that I would make war upon Bangu—with or without the king’s leave.”

“No, you never promised, but Zikali the Dwarf, the Wise Little One, said that you would—and does Zikali lie? Ask yourself, who will remember a certain saying of his about a buffalo with a cleft horn, a pool and a dry river-bed. Farewell, O my father Macumazahn; I walk with the dawn, and I leave Mameena in your keeping.”

“You mean that you leave me in Mameena’s keeping,” I began, but already he was crawling through the hole in the hut.

Well, Mameena kept me very comfortably. She was always in evidence, yet not too much so.

Heedless of her malice and abuse, she headed off the “Worn-out-old-Cow,” whom she knew I detested, from my presence. She saw personally to my bandages, as well as to the cooking of my food, over which matter she had several quarrels with the bastard, Scowl, who did not like her, for on him she never wasted any of her sweet looks. Also, as I grew stronger, she sat with me a good deal, talking, since, by common consent, Mameena the fair was exempted from all the field, and even the ordinary household labours that fall to the lot of Kafir women. Her place was to be the ornament and, I may add, the advertisement of her father’s kraal. Others might do the work, and she saw that they did it.

We discussed all sorts of things, from the Christian and other religions and European policy down, for her thirst for knowledge seemed to be insatiable. But what really interested her was the state of affairs in Zululand, with which she knew I was well acquainted, as a person who had played a part in its history and who was received and trusted at the Great House, and as a white man who understood the designs and plans of the Boers and of the Governor of Natal.

Now, if the old king, Panda, should chance to die, she would ask me, which of his sons did I think would succeed him—Umbelazi or Cetewayo, or another? Or, if he did not chance to die, which of them would he name his heir?

I replied that I was not a prophet, and that she had better ask Zikali the Wise.

“That is a very good idea,” she said, “only I have no one to take me to him, since my father would not allow me to go with Saduko, his ward.” Then she clapped her hands and added: “Oh, Macumazahn, will you take me? My father would trust me with you.”

“Yes, I dare say,” I answered; “but the question is, could I trust myself with you?”

“What do you mean?” she asked. “Oh, I understand. Then, after all, I am more to you than a black stone to play with?”

I think it was that unlucky joke of mine which first set Mameena thinking, “like a white ant in its tunnel,” as Saduko said. At least, after it her manner towards me changed; she became very deferential; she listened to my words as though they were all wisdom; I caught her looking at me with her soft eyes as though I were quite an admirable object. She began to talk to me of her difficulties, her troubles and her ambitions. She asked me for my advice as to Saduko. On this point I replied to her that, if she loved him, and her father would allow it, presumably she had better marry him.

“I like him well enough, Macumazahn, although he wearies me at times; but love— Oh, tell me, *what* is love?” Then she clasped her slim hands and gazed at me like a fawn.

“Upon my word, young woman,” I replied, “that is a matter upon which I should have thought you more competent to instruct me.”

“Oh, Macumazahn,” she said almost in a whisper, and letting her head droop like a fading lily, “you have never given me the chance, have you?” And she laughed a little, looking extremely attractive.

“Good gracious!”—or, rather, its Zulu equivalent—I answered, for I began to feel nervous. “What do you mean, Mameena? How could I—” There I stopped.

“I do not know what I mean, Macumazahn,” she exclaimed wildly, “but I know well enough what you mean—that you are white as snow and I am black as soot, and that snow and soot don’t mix well together.”

“No,” I answered gravely, “snow is good to look at, and so is soot, but mingled they make an ugly colour. Not that you are like soot,” I added hastily, fearing to hurt her feelings. “That is your hue”—and I touched a copper bangle she was wearing—“a very lovely hue, Mameena, like everything else about you.”

“Lovely,” she said, beginning to weep a little, which upset me very much, for if there is one thing I hate, it is to see a woman cry. “How can a poor Zulu girl be lovely? Oh, Macumazahn, the spirits have dealt hardly with me, who have given me the colour of my people and the heart of yours. If I were white, now, what you are pleased to call this loveliness of mine would be of some use to me, for then— then— Oh, cannot you guess, Macumazahn?”

I shook my head and said that I could not, and next moment was sorry, for she proceeded to explain.

Sinking to her knees—for we were quite alone in the big hut and there was no one else about, all the other women being engaged on rural or domestic tasks, for which Mameena declared she had no time, as her business was to look after me—she rested her shapely head upon my knees and began to talk in a low, sweet voice that sometimes broke into a sob.

“Then I will tell you—I will tell you; yes, even if you hate me afterwards. I could teach you what love is very well, Macumazahn; you are quite right—because I love you.” (*Sob.*) “No, you shall not stir till you have heard me out.” Here she flung her arms about my legs and held them tight, so that without using great violence it was absolutely impossible for me to move. “When I saw you first, all shattered and senseless, snow seemed to fall upon my heart, and it stopped for a little while and has never been the same since. I think that something is growing in it, Macumazahn, that makes it big.” (*Sob.*) “I used to like Saduko before that, but afterwards I did not like him at all—no, nor Masapo either—you know, he is the big chief who lives over the mountain, a very rich and powerful man,

who, I believe, would like to marry me. Well, as I went on nursing you my heart grew bigger and bigger, and now you see it has burst.” (*Sob.*) “Nay, stay still and do not try to speak. You *shall* hear me out. It is the least you can do, seeing that you have caused me all this pain. If you did not want me to love you, why did you not curse at me and strike me, as I am told white men do to Kafir girls?” She rose and went on:

“Now, hearken. Although I am the colour of copper, I am comely. I am well-bred also; there is no higher blood than ours in Zululand, both on my father’s and my mother’s side, and, Macumazahn, I have a fire in me that shows me things. I can be great, and I long for greatness. Take me to wife, Macumazahn, and I swear to you that in ten years I will make you king of the Zulus. Forget your pale white women and wed yourself to that fire which burns in me, and it shall eat up all that stands between you and the Crown, as flame eats up dry grass. More, I will make you happy. If you choose to take other wives, I will not be jealous, because I know that I should hold your spirit, and that, compared to me, they would be nothing in your thought—”

“But, Mameena,” I broke in, “I don’t want to be king of the Zulus.”

“Oh, yes, yes, you do, for every man wants power, and it is better to rule over a brave, black people—thousands and thousands of them—than to be no one among the whites. Think, think! There is wealth in the land. By your skill and knowledge the *amabuto* [regiments] could be improved; with the wealth you would arm them with guns—yes, and ‘by-and-byes’ also with the throat of thunder” (that is, or was, the Kafir name for cannon).<sup>[2]</sup> “They would be invincible. Chaka’s kingdom would be nothing to ours, for a hundred thousand warriors would sleep on their spears, waiting for your word. If you wished it even you could sweep out Natal and make the whites there your subjects, too. Or perhaps it would be safer to let them be, lest others should come across the green water to help them, and to strike northwards, where I am told there are great lands as rich and fair, in which none would dispute our sovereignty—”

<sup>[2]</sup> Cannon were called “by-and-byes” by the natives, because when field-pieces first arrived in Natal inquisitive Kafirs pestered the soldiers to show them how they were fired. The answer given was always “By-and-bye!” Hence the name.—EDITOR.

“But, Mameena,” I gasped, for this girl’s titanic ambition literally overwhelmed me, “surely you are mad! How would you do all these things?”

“I am not mad,” she answered; “I am only what is called great, and you know well enough that I can do them, not by myself, who am but a woman and tied with the ropes that bind women, but with you to cut those ropes and help me. I have a plan which will not fail. But, Macumazahn,” she added in a changed voice, “until I know that you will be my partner in it I will not tell it even to you, for perhaps you might talk—in your sleep, and then the fire in my breast would soon go out—for ever.”

“I might talk now, for the matter of that, Mameena.”

“No; for men like you do not tell tales of foolish girls who chance to love them. But if that plan began to work, and you heard say that kings or princes died, it might be otherwise. You might say, ‘I think I know where the witch lives who causes these evils’—in your sleep, Macumazahn.”

“Mameena,” I said, “tell me no more. Setting your dreams on one side, can I be false to my friend, Saduko, who talks to me day and night of you?”

“Saduko! *Piff!*” she exclaimed, with that expressive gesture of her hand.

“And can I be false,” I continued, seeing that Saduko was no good card to play, “to my friend, Umbezi, your father?”

“My father!” she laughed. “Why, would it not please him to grow great in your shadow? Only yesterday he told me to marry you, if I could, for then he would find a stick indeed to lean on, and be rid of Saduko’s troubling.”

Evidently Umbezi was a worse card even than Saduko, so I played another.

“And can I help you, Mameena, to tread a road that at the best must be red with blood?”

“Why not,” she asked, “since with or without you I am destined to tread that road, the only difference being that with you it will lead to glory and without you perhaps to the jackals and the vultures? Blood! *Piff!* What is blood in Zululand?”

This card also having failed, I tabled my last.

“Glory or no glory, I do not wish to share it, Mameena. I will not make war among a people who have entertained me hospitably, or plot the downfall of their Great Ones. As you told me just now, I am nobody—just one grain of sand upon a white shore—but I had rather be that than a haunted rock which draws the heavens’ lightnings and is drenched with sacrifice. I seek no throne over white or black, Mameena, who walk my own path to a quiet grave that shall perhaps not be without honour of its own, though other than you seek. I will keep your counsel, Mameena, but, because you are so beautiful and so wise, and because you say you are fond of me—for which I thank you—I pray you put away these fearful dreams of yours that in the end, whether they succeed or fail, will send you shivering from the world to give account of them to the Watcher-on-high.”

“Not so, O Macumazana,” she said, with a proud little laugh. “When your Watcher sowed my seed—if thus he did—he sowed the dreams that are a part of me also, and I shall only bring him back his own, with the flower and the fruit by way of interest. But that is finished. You refuse the greatness. Now, tell me, if I sink those dreams in a great water, tying about them the stone of forgetfulness and saying: ‘Sleep there, O dreams; it is not your hour’—if I do this, and stand before you just a woman who loves and who swears by the spirits of her fathers never to think or do that which has not your blessing—will you love me a little, Macumazahn?”

Now I was silent, for she had driven me to the last ditch, and I knew not what to say. Moreover, I will confess my weakness—I was strangely moved. This beautiful girl with the “fire in her heart,” this woman who was different from all other women that I had ever known, seemed to have twisted her slender fingers into my heart-strings and to be drawing me towards her. It was a great temptation, and I bethought me of old Zikali’s saying in the Black Kloof, and seemed to hear his giant laugh.

She glided up to me, she threw her arms about me and kissed me on the lips, and I think I kissed her back, but really I am not sure what I did or said, for my head swam. When it cleared again she was standing in front of me, looking at me reflectively.

“Now, Macumazahn,” she said, with a little smile that both mocked and dazzled, “the poor black girl has you, the wise, experienced white man, in her net, and I will show you that she can be generous. Do you think that I do not read your heart, that I do not know that you believe I am dragging you down to shame and ruin? Well, I spare you, Macumazahn, since you have kissed me and spoken words which already you may have forgotten, but which I do not forget. Go your road, Macumazahn, and I go mine, since the proud white man shall not be stained with my black touch. Go your road; but one thing I forbid you—to believe that you have been listening to lies, and that I have merely played off a woman’s arts upon you for my own ends. I love you, Macumazahn, as you will never be loved till you die, and I shall never love any other man, however many I may marry. Moreover, you shall promise me one thing—that once in my life, and once only, if I wish it, you shall kiss me again before all men. And now, lest you should be moved to folly and forget your white man’s pride, I bid you farewell, O Macumazana. When we meet again it will be as friends only.”

Then she went, leaving me feeling smaller than ever I felt in my life, before or since—even smaller than when I walked into the presence of old Zikali the Wise. Why, I wondered, had she first made a fool of me, and then thrown away the fruits of my folly? To this hour I cannot quite answer the question, though I believe the explanation to be that she did really care for me, and was anxious not to involve me in trouble and her plottings; also she may have been wise enough to see that our natures were as oil and water and would never blend.

## Chapter V.

### TWO BUCKS AND THE DOE

It may be thought that, as a sequel to this somewhat remarkable scene in which I was absolutely bowled over—perhaps bowled out would be a better term—by a Kafir girl who, after bending me to her will, had the genius to drop me before I repented, as she knew I would do so soon as her back was turned, thereby making me look the worst of fools, that my relations with that young lady would have been strained. But not a bit of it. When next we met, which was on the following morning, she was just her easy, natural self, attending to my hurts, which by now were almost well, joking about this and that, inquiring as to the contents of certain letters which I had received from Natal, and of some newspapers that came with them—for on all such matters she was very curious—and so forth.

Impossible, the clever critic will say—impossible that a savage could act with such finish. Well, friend critic, that is just where you are wrong. When you come to add it up there's very little difference in all main and essential matters between the savage and yourself.

To begin with, by what exact right do we call people like the Zulus savages? Setting aside the habit of polygamy, which, after all, is common among very highly civilised peoples in the East, they have a social system not unlike our own. They have, or had, their king, their nobles, and their commons. They have an ancient and elaborate law, and a system of morality in some ways as high as our own, and certainly more generally obeyed. They have their priests and their doctors; they are strictly upright, and observe the rites of hospitality.

Where they differ from us mainly is that they do not get drunk until the white man teaches them so to do, they wear less clothing, the climate being more genial, their towns at night are not disgraced by the sights that distinguish ours, they cherish and are never cruel to their children, although they may occasionally put a deformed infant or a twin out of the way, and when they go to war, which is often, they carry out the business with a terrible thoroughness, almost as terrible as that which prevailed in every nation in Europe a few generations ago.

Of course, there remain their witchcraft and the cruelties which result from their almost universal belief in the power and efficiency of magic. Well, since I lived in England I have been reading up this subject, and I find that quite recently similar cruelties were practised throughout Europe—that is in a part of the world which for over a thousand years has enjoyed the advantages of the knowledge and profession of the Christian faith.

Now, let him who is highly cultured take up a stone to throw at the poor, untaught Zulu, which I notice the most dissolute and drunken wretch of a white man is often ready to do, generally because he covets his land, his labour, or whatever else may be his.

But I wander from my point, which is that a clever man or woman among the people whom we call savages is in all essentials very much the same as a clever man or woman anywhere else.

Here in England every child is educated at the expense of the Country, but I have not observed that the system results in the production of more really able individuals. Ability is the gift of Nature, and that universal mother sheds her favours impartially over all who breathe. No, not quite impartially, perhaps, for the old Greeks and others were examples to the contrary. Still, the general rule obtains.

To return. Mameena was a very able person, as she chanced to be a very lovely one, a person who, had she been favoured by opportunity, would doubtless have played the part of a Cleopatra with equal or greater success, since she shared the beauty and the unscrupulousness of that famous lady and was, I believe, capable of her passion.

I scarcely like to mention the matter since it affects myself, and the natural vanity of man makes him prone to conclude that he is the particular object of sole and undying devotion. Could he know all the facts of the case, or cases, probably he would be much undeceived, and feel about as small as I did when Mameena walked, or rather crawled, out of the hut (she could even crawl gracefully). Still, to be honest—and why should I not, since all this business “went beyond” so long ago?—I do believe that there was a certain amount of truth in what she said—that, for Heaven knows what reason, she did take a fancy to me, which fancy continued during her short and stormy life. But the reader of her story may judge for himself.

Within a fortnight of the day of my discomfiture in the hut I was quite well and strong again, my ribs, or whatever part of me it was that the buffalo had injured with his iron knees, having mended up. Also, I was anxious to be going, having business to attend to in Natal, and, as no more had been seen or heard of Saduko, I determined to trek homewards, leaving a message that he knew where to find me if he wanted me. The truth is that I was by no means keen on being involved in his private war with Bangu. Indeed, I wished to wash my hands of the whole matter, including the fair Mameena and her mocking eyes.

So one morning, having already got up my oxen, I told Scowl to inspan them—an order which he received with joy, for he and the other boys wished to be off to civilisation and its delights. Just as the operation was beginning, however, a message came to me from old Umbezi, who begged me to delay my departure till after noon, as a friend of his, a big chief, had come to visit him who wished much to have the honour of making my acquaintance. Now, I wished the big chief farther off, but, as it seemed rude to refuse the request of one who had been so kind to me, I ordered the oxen to be unyoked but kept at hand, and in an irritable frame of mind walked up to the kraal. This was about half a mile from my place of outspan, for as soon as I was sufficiently recovered I had begun to sleep in my wagon, leaving the big hut to the “Worn-out-Old-Cow.”

There was no particular reason why I should be irritated, since time in those days was of no great account in Zululand, and it did not much matter to me whether I trekked in the morning or the afternoon. But the fact was that I could not get over the prophecy of Zikali, "the Little and Wise," that I was destined to share Saduko's expedition against Bangu, and, although he had been right about the buffalo and Mameena, I was determined to prove him wrong in this particular.

If I had left the country, obviously I could not go against Bangu, at any rate at present. But while I remained in it Saduko might return at any moment, and then, doubtless, I should find it hard to escape from the kind of half-promise that I had given to him.

Well, as soon as I reached the kraal I saw that some kind of festivity was in progress, for an ox had been killed and was being cooked, some of it in pots and some by roasting; also there were several strange Zulus present. Within the fence of the kraal, seated in its shadow, I found Umbezi and some of his headmen, and with them a great, brawny "ringed" native, who wore a tiger-skin moocha as a mark of rank, and some of *his* headmen. Also Mameena was standing near the gate, dressed in her best beads and holding a gourd of Kafir beer which, evidently, she had just been handing to the guests.

"Would you have run away without saying good-bye to me, Macumazahn?" she whispered to me as I came abreast of her. "That is unkind of you, and I should have wept much. However, it was not so fated."

"I was going to ride up and bid farewell when the oxen were inspanned," I answered. "But who is that man?"

"You will find out presently, Macumazahn. Look, my father is beckoning to us."

So I went on to the circle, and as I advanced Umbezi rose and, taking me by the hand, led me to the big man, saying:

"This is Masapo, chief of the Amansomi, of the Quabe race, who desires to know you, Macumazahn."

"Very kind of him, I am sure," I replied coolly, as I threw my eye over Masapo. He was, as I have said, a big man, and of about fifty years of age, for his hair was tinged with grey. To be frank, I took a great dislike to him at once, for there was something in his strong, coarse face, and his air of insolent pride, which repelled me. Then I was silent, since among the Zulus, when two strangers of more or less equal rank meet, he who speaks first acknowledges inferiority to the other. Therefore I stood and contemplated this new suitor of Mameena, waiting on events.

Masapo also contemplated me, then made some remark to one of his attendants, that I did not catch, which caused the fellow to laugh.

"He has heard that you are an *ipist*" (a great hunter), broke in Umbezi, who evidently felt that the situation was growing strained, and that it was necessary to say something.

"Has he?" I answered. "Then he is more fortunate than I am, for I have never heard of him or what he is." This, I am sorry to say, was a fib, for it will be remembered that Mameena had mentioned him in the hut as one of her suitors, but among natives one must keep up one's dignity somehow. "Friend Umbezi," I went on, "I have come to bid you farewell, as I am about to trek for Durban."

At this juncture Masapo stretched out his great hand to me, but without rising, and said:

"*Siyakubona* [that is, good-day], White Man."

"*Siyakubona*, Black Man," I answered, just touching his fingers, while Mameena, who had come up again with her beer, and was facing me, made a little grimace and tittered.

Now I turned on my heel to go, whereon Masapo said in a coarse, growling voice:

"O Macumazana, before you leave us I wish to speak with you on a certain matter. Will it please you to sit aside with me for a while?"

"Certainly, O Masapo." And I walked away a few yards out of hearing, whither he followed me.

"Macumazahn," he said (I give the gist of his remarks, for he did not come to the point at once), "I need guns, and I am told that you can provide them, being a trader."

"Yes, Masapo, I dare say that I can, at a price, though it is a risky business smuggling guns into Zululand. But might I ask what you need them for? is it to shoot elephants?"

"Yes, to shoot elephants," he replied, rolling his big eyes round him. "Macumazahn, I am told that you are discreet, that you do not shout from the top of a hut what you hear within it. Now, hearken to me. Our country is disturbed; we do not all of us love the seed of Senzangakona, of whom the present king, Panda, is one. For instance, you may know that we Quabies—for my tribe, the Amansomi, are of that race—suffered at the spear of Chaka. Well, we think that a time may come when we who live on shrubs like goats may again browse on tree-tops like giraffes, for Panda is no strong king, and he has sons who hate each other, one of whom may need our spears. Do you understand?"

"I understand that you want guns, O Masapo," I answered dryly. "Now, as to the price and place of delivery."

Then we bargained for a while, but the details of that business transaction of long ago will interest no one. Indeed, I only mention the matter to show that Masapo was plotting to bring trouble on the ruling house, whereof Panda was the representative at that time.

When we had concluded our rather nefarious negotiations, which were to the effect that I was to receive so many cattle in return for so many guns, if I could deliver them at a certain spot, namely, Umbezi's kraal, I returned to the circle where Umbezi, his followers and guests were sitting, purposing to bid him farewell. By now, however, meat had been served, and as I was hungry, having had little breakfast that morning, I stayed to eat. When I had finished my meal, and washed it down with a draught of *tshwala* (that is, Kafir beer), I rose to go, but just at that moment who should walk through the gate but Saduko?

"*Piff!*" said Mameena, who was standing near me, speaking in a voice that none but I could hear. "When two bucks meet, what happens, Macumazahn?"

"Sometimes they fight and sometimes one runs away. It depends very much on the doe," I answered in the same low voice, looking at her.

She shrugged her shoulders, folded her arms beneath her breast, nodded to Saduko as he passed, then leaned gracefully against the fence and awaited events.

"Greeting, Umbezi," said Saduko in his proud manner. "I see that you feast. Am I welcome here?"

"Of course you are always welcome, Saduko," replied Umbezi uneasily, "although, as it happens, I am entertaining a great man." And he looked towards Masapo.

"I see," said Saduko, eyeing the strangers. "But which of these may be the great man? I ask that I may salute him."

"You know well enough, *umfokazana*" (that is, low fellow), exclaimed Masapo angrily.

"I know that if you were outside this fence, Masapo, I would cram that word down your throat at the point of my assegai," replied Saduko in a fierce voice. "Oh, I can guess your business here, Masapo, and you can guess mine," and he glanced towards Mameena. "Tell me, Umbezi, is this little chief of the Amansomi your daughter's accepted suitor?"

"Nay, nay, Saduko," said Umbezi; "no one is her accepted suitor. Will you not sit down and take food with us? Tell us where you have been, and why you return here thus suddenly, and—uninvited?"

"I return here, O Umbezi, to speak with the white chief, Macumazahn. As to where I have been, that is my affair, and not yours or Masapo's."

"Now, if I were chief of this kraal," said Masapo, "I would hunt out of it this hyena with a mangy coat and without a hole who comes to devour your meat and, perhaps," he added with meaning, "to steal away your child."

"Did I not tell you, Macumazahn, that when two bucks met they would fight?" whispered Mameena suavely into my ear.

"Yes, Mameena, you did—or rather I told you. But you did not tell me what the doe would do."

"The doe, Macumazahn, will crouch in her form and see what happens—as is the fashion of does," and again she laughed softly.

"Why not do your own hunting, Masapo?" asked Saduko. "Come, now, I will promise you good sport. Outside this kraal there are other hyenas waiting who call me chief—a hundred or two of them—assembled for a certain purpose by the royal leave of King Panda, whose House, as we all know, you hate. Come, leave that beef and beer and begin your hunting of hyenas, O Masapo."

Now Masapo sat silent, for he saw that he who thought to snare a baboon had caught a tiger.

"You do not speak, O Chief of the little Amansomi," went on Saduko, who was beside himself with rage and jealousy. "You will not leave your beef and beer to hunt the hyenas who are captained by an *umfokazana*! Well, then, the *umfokazana* will speak," and, stepping up to Masapo, with the spear he carried poised in his right hand, Saduko grasped his rival's short beard with his left.

"Listen, Chief," he said. "You and I are enemies. You seek the woman I seek, and, mayhap, being rich, you will buy her. But if so, I tell you that I will kill you and all your House, you sneaking, half-bred dog!"

With these fierce words he spat in his face and tumbled him backwards. Then, before anyone could stop him, for Umbezi, and even Masapo's headmen, seemed paralysed with surprise, he stalked through the kraal gate, saying as he passed me:

"*Inkoosi*, I have words for you when you are at liberty."

"You shall pay for this," roared Umbezi after him, turning almost green with rage, for Masapo still lay upon his broad back, speechless, "you who dare to insult my guest in my own house."

"Somebody must pay," cried back Saduko from the gate, "but who it is only the unborn moons will see."

"Mameena," I said as I followed him, "you have set fire to the grass, and men will be burned in it."

"I meant to, Macumazahn," she answered calmly. "Did I not tell you that there was a flame in me, and it will break out sometimes? But, Macumazahn, it is you who have set fire to the grass, not I. Remember that when half Zululand is in ashes. Farewell, O Macumazahn, till we meet again, and," she added softly, "whoever else must burn, may the spirits have *you* in their keeping."

At the gate, remembering my manners, I turned to bid that company a polite farewell. By now Masapo had gained his feet, and was roaring out like a bull:

"Kill him! Kill the hyena! Umbezi, will you sit still and see me, your guest—me, Masapo—struck and insulted under the shadow of your own hut? Go forth and kill him, I say!"

"Why not kill him yourself, Masapo," asked the agitated Umbezi, "or bid your headmen kill him? Who am I that I should take precedence of so great a chief in a matter of the spear?" Then he turned towards me, saying: "Oh, Macumazahn the crafty, if I have dealt well by you, come here and give me your counsel."

"I come, Eater-up-of-Elephants," I answered, and I did.

"What shall I do—what shall I do?" went on Umbezi, brushing the perspiration off his brow with one hand, while he wrung the other in his agitation. "There stands a friend of mine"—he pointed to the infuriated Masapo—"who wishes me to kill another friend of mine," and he jerked his thumb towards the kraal gate. "If I refuse I offend one friend, and if I consent I bring blood upon my hands which will call for blood, since, although Saduko is poor, without doubt he has those who love him."

"Yes," I answered, "and perhaps you will bring blood upon other parts of yourself besides your hands, since Saduko is not one to sit still like a sheep while his throat is cut. Also did he not say that he is not quite alone? Umbezi, if you will take my advice, you will leave Masapo to do his own killing."

"It is good; it is wise!" exclaimed Umbezi. "Masapo," he called to that warrior, "if you wish to fight, pray do not think of me. I see nothing, I hear nothing, and I promise proper burial to any who fall. Only you had best be swift, for Saduko is walking away all this time. Come, you and your people have spears, and the gate stands open."

"Am I to go without my meat in order to knock that hyena on the head?" asked Masapo in a brave voice. "No, he can wait my leisure. Sit still, my people. I tell you, sit still. Tell him, you Macumazahn, that I am coming for him presently, and be warned to keep yourself away from him, lest you should tumble into his hole."

"I will tell him," I answered, "though I know not who made me your messenger. But listen to me, you Speaker of big words and Doer of small deeds, if you dare to lift a finger against me I will teach you something about holes, for there shall be one or more through that great carcass of yours."

Then, walking up to him, I looked him in the face, and at the same time tapped the handle of the big double-barrelled pistol I carried.

He shrank back muttering something.

"Oh, don't apologise," I said, "only be more careful in future. And now I wish you a good dinner, Chief Masapo, and peace upon your kraal, friend Umbezi."

After this speech I marched off, followed by the clamour of Masapo's furious attendants and the sound of Mameena's light and mocking laughter.

"I wonder which of them she will marry?" I thought to myself, as I set out for the wagons.

As I approached my camp I saw that the oxen were being inspanned, as I supposed by the order of Scowl, who must have heard that there was a row up at the kraal, and thought it well to be ready to bolt. In this I was mistaken, however, for just then Saduko strolled out of a patch of bush and said:

"I ordered your boys to yoke up the oxen, *Inkoosi*."

"Have you? That's cool!" I answered. "Perhaps you will tell me why."

"Because we must make a good trek to the northward before night, *Inkoosi*."

"Indeed! I thought that I was heading south-east."

"Bangu does not live in the south or the east," he replied slowly.

"Oh, I had almost forgotten about Bangu," I said, with a rather feeble attempt at evasion.

"Is it so?" he answered in his haughty voice. "I never knew before that Macumazahn was a man who broke a promise to his friend."

"Would you be so kind as to explain your meaning, Saduko?"

"Is it needful?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "Unless my ears played me tricks, you agreed to go up with me against Bangu. Well, I have gathered the necessary men—with the king's leave—they await us yonder," and he pointed with his spear towards a dense patch of bush that lay some miles beneath us. "But," he added, "if you desire to change your mind I will go alone. Only then, I think, we had better bid each other good-bye, since I love not friends who change their minds when the assegais begin to shake."

Now, whether Saduko spoke thus by design I do not know. Certainly, however, he could have found no better way to ensure my companionship for what it was worth, since, although I had made no actual promise in this case, I have always prided myself on keeping even a half-bargain with a native.

"I will go with you," I said quietly, "and I hope that, when it comes to the pinch, your spear will be as sharp as your tongue, Saduko. Only do not speak to me again like that, lest we should quarrel."

As I said this I saw a look of relief appear on his face, of very great relief.

"I pray your pardon, my lord Macumazahn," he said, seizing my hand, "but, oh! there is a hole in my heart. I think that Mameena means to play me false, and now that has happened with yonder dog, Masapo, which will make her father hate me."

"If you will take my advice, Saduko," I replied earnestly, "you will let this Mameena fall out of the hole in your heart; you will forget her name; you will have done with her. Ask me not why."

"Perhaps there is no need, O Macumazana. Perhaps she has been making love to you, and you have turned her away, as, being what you are, and my friend, of course you would do." (It is rather inconvenient to be set upon such a pedestal at times, but I did not attempt to assent or to deny anything, much less to enter into explanations.)

"Perhaps all this has happened," he continued, "or perhaps it is she who has sent for Masapo the Hog. I do not ask, because if you know you will not tell me. Moreover, it matters nothing. While I have a heart, Mameena will never drop out of it; while I can remember names, hers will never be forgotten by me. Moreover, I mean that she shall be my wife. Now, I am minded to take a few men and spear this hog, Masapo, before we go up against Bangu, for then he, at any rate, will be out of my road."

"If you do anything of the sort, Saduko, you will go up against Bangu alone, for I trek east at once, who will not be mixed up with murder."

"Then let it be, *Inkoosi*; unless he attacks me, as my Snake send that he may, the Hog can wait. After all, he will only be growing a little fatter. Now, if it pleases you order the wagons to trek. I will show the road, for we must camp in that bush to-night where my people wait me, and there I will tell you my plans; also you will find one with a message for you."

## Chapter VI.

### THE AMBUSH

We had reached the bush after six hours' downhill trek over a pretty bad track made by cattle—of course, there were no roads in Zululand at this date. I remember the place well. It was a kind of spreading woodland on a flat bottom, where trees of no great size grew sparsely. Some were mimosa thorns, others had deep green leaves and bore a kind of plum with an acid taste and a huge stone, and others silver-coloured leaves in their season. A river, too, low at this time of the year, wound through it, and in the scrub upon its banks were many guinea-fowl and other birds. It was a pleasing, lonely place, with lots of game in it, that came here in the winter to eat the grass, which was lacking on the higher veld. Also it gave the idea of vastness, since wherever one looked there was nothing to be seen except a sea of trees.

Well, we outspanned by the river, of which I forget the name, at a spot that Saduko showed us, and set to work to cook our food, that consisted of venison from a blue wildebeest, one of a herd of these wild-looking animals which I had been fortunate enough to shoot as they whisked past us, gambolling in and out between the trees.

While we were eating I observed that armed Zulus arrived continually in parties of from six to a score of men, and as they arrived lifted their spears, though whether in salutation to Saduko or to myself I did not know, and sat themselves down on an open space between us and the river-bank. Although it was difficult to say whence they came, for they appeared like ghosts out of the bush, I thought it well to take no notice of them, since I guessed that their coming was prearranged.

"Who are they?" I whispered to Scowl, as he brought me my tot of "squareface."

"Saduko's wild men," he answered in the same low voice, "outlaws of his tribe who live among the rocks."

Now I scanned them sideways, while pretending to light my pipe and so forth, and certainly they seemed a remarkably savage set of people. Great, gaunt fellows with tangled hair, who wore tattered skins upon their shoulders and seemed to have no possessions save some snuff, a few sleeping-mats, and an ample supply of large fighting shields, hardwood kerries or knob-sticks, and broad ixwas, or stabbing assegais. Such was the look of them as they sat round us in silent semicircles, like *aas-vögels*—as the Dutch call vultures—sit round a dying ox.

Still I smoked on and took no notice.

At length, as I expected, Saduko grew weary of my silence and spoke. "These are men of the Amangwane tribe, Macumazahn; three hundred of them, all that Bangu left alive, for when their fathers were killed, the women escaped with some of the children, especially those of the outlying kraals. I have gathered them to be revenged upon Bangu, I who am their chief by right of blood."

"Quite so," I answered. "I see that you have gathered them; but do they wish to be revenged on Bangu at the risk of their own lives?"

"We do, white *Inkoosi*," came the deep-throated answer from the three hundred.

"And do they acknowledge you, Saduko, to be their chief?"

"We do," again came the answer. Then a spokesman stepped forward, one of the few grey-haired men among them, for most of these Amangwane were of the age of Saduko, or even younger.

"O Watcher-by-Night," he said, "I am Tshoza, the brother of Matiwane, Saduko's father, the only one of his brothers that escaped the slaughter on the night of the Great Killing. Is it not so?"

"It is so," exclaimed the serried ranks behind him.

"I acknowledge Saduko as my chief, and so do we all," went on Tshoza.

"So do we all," echoed the ranks.

"Since Matiwane died we have lived as we could, O Macumazana; like baboons among the rocks, without cattle, often without a hut to shelter us; here one, there one. Still, we have lived, awaiting the hour of vengeance upon Bangu, that hour which Zikali the Wise, who is of our blood, has promised to us. Now we believe that it has come, and one and all, from here, from there, from everywhere, we have gathered at the summons of Saduko to be led against Bangu and to conquer him or to die. Is it not so, Amangwane?"

"It is, it is so!" came the deep, unanimous answer, that caused the stirless leaves to shake in the still air.

"I understand, O Tshoza, brother of Matiwane and uncle of Saduko the chief," I replied. "But Bangu is a strong man, living, I am told, in a strong place. Still, let that go; for have you not said that you come out to conquer or to die, you who have nothing to lose; and if you conquer, you conquer; and if you die, you die and the tale is told. But supposing that you conquer. What will Panda, King of the Zulus, say to you, and to me also, who stir up war in his country?"

Now the Amangwane looked behind them, and Saduko cried out:

"Appear, messenger from Panda the King!"

Before his words had ceased to echo I saw a little, withered man threading his way between the tall, gaunt forms of the Amangwane. He came and stood before me, saying:

"Hail, Macumazahn. Do you remember me?"

"Aye," I answered, "I remember you as Maputa, one of Panda's *indunas*."

"Quite so, Macumazahn; I am Maputa, one of his *indunas*, a member of his Council, a captain of his *impis* [that is, armies], as I was to his brothers who are gone, whose names it is not lawful that I should name. Well, Panda the King has sent me to you, at the request of Saduko there, with a message."

"How do I know that you are a true messenger?" I asked. "Have you brought me any token?"

"Aye," he answered, and, fumbling under his cloak, he produced something wrapped in dried leaves, which he undid and handed to me, saying:

"This is the token that Panda sends to you, Macumazahn, bidding me to tell you that you will certainly know it again; also that you are welcome to it, since the two little bullets which he swallowed as you directed made him very ill, and he needs no more of them."

I took the token, and, examining it in the moonlight, recognised it at once.

It was a cardboard box of strong calomel pills, on the top of which was written: "Allan Quatermain, Esq.: One *only* to be taken as directed." Without entering into explanations, I may state that I had taken "one as directed," and subsequently presented the rest of the box to King Panda, who was very anxious to "taste the white man's medicine."

"Do you recognise the token, Macumazahn?" asked the *induna*.

"Yes," I replied gravely; "and let the King return thanks to the spirits of his ancestors that he did not swallow three of the balls, for if he had done so, by now there would have been another Head in Zululand. Well, speak on, Messenger."

But to myself I reflected, not for the first time, how strangely these natives could mix up the sublime with the ridiculous. Here was a matter that must involve the death of many men, and the token sent to me by the autocrat who stood at the back of it all, to prove the good faith of his messenger, was a box of calomel pills! However, it served the purpose as well as anything else.

Maputa and I drew aside, for I saw that he wished to speak with me alone.

"O Macumazana," he said, when we were out of hearing of the others, "these are the words of Panda to you: 'I understand that you, Macumazahn, have promised to accompany Saduko, son of Matiwane, on an expedition of his against Bangu, chief of the Amakoba. Now, were anyone else concerned, I should forbid this expedition, and especially should I forbid you, a white man in my country, to share therein. But this dog of a Bangu is an evil-doer. Many years ago he worked on the Black One who went before me to send him to destroy Matiwane, my friend, filling the Black One's ears with false accusations; and thereafter he did treacherously destroy him and all his tribe save Saduko, his son, and some of the people and children who escaped. Moreover, of late he has been working against me, the King, striving to stir up rebellion against me, because he knows that I hate him for his crimes. Now I, Panda, unlike those who went before me, am a man of peace who do not wish to light the fire of civil war in the land, for who knows where such fires will stop, or whose kraals they will consume? Yet I do wish to see Bangu punished for his wickedness, and his pride abated. Therefore I give Saduko leave, and those people of the Amangwane who remain to him, to avenge their private wrongs upon Bangu if they can; and I give you leave, Macumazahn, to be of his party. Moreover, if any cattle are taken, I shall ask no account of them; you and Saduko may divide them as you wish. But understand, O Macumazana, that if you or your people are killed or wounded, or robbed of your goods, I know nothing of the matter, and am not responsible to you or to the white House of Natal; it is your own matter. These are my words. I have spoken.'"

"I see," I answered. "I am to pull Panda's hot iron out of the fire and to extinguish the fire. If I succeed I may keep a piece of the iron when it gets cool, and if I burn my fingers it is my own fault, and I or my House must not come crying to Panda."

"O Watcher-by-Night, you have speared the bull in the heart," replied Maputa, the messenger, nodding his shrewd old head. "Well, will you go up with Saduko?"

"Say to the King, O Messenger, that I will go up with Saduko because I promised him that I would, being moved by the tale of his wrongs, and not for the sake of the cattle, although it is true that if I hear any of them lowing in my camp I may keep them. Say to Panda also that if aught of ill befalls me he shall hear nothing of it, nor will I bring his high name into this business; but that he, on his part, must not blame me for anything that may happen afterwards. Have you the message?"

"I have it word for word; and may your Spirit be with you, Macumazahn, when you attack the strong mountain of Bangu, which, were I you," Maputa added reflectively, "I think I should do just at the dawn, since the Amakoba drink much beer and are heavy sleepers."

Then we took a pinch of snuff together, and he departed at once for Nodwengu, Panda's Great Place.

Fourteen days had gone by, and Saduko and I, with our ragged band of Amangwane, sat one morning, after a long night march, in the hilly country looking across a broad vale, which was sprinkled with trees like an English park, at that mountain on the side of which Bangu, chief of the Amakoba, had his kraal.

It was a very formidable mountain, and, as we had already observed, the paths leading up to the kraal were amply protected with stone walls in which the openings were quite narrow, only just big enough to allow one ox to pass through them at a time. Moreover, all these walls had been strengthened recently, perhaps because Bangu was aware that Panda looked upon him, a northern chief dwelling on the confines of his dominions, with suspicion and even active enmity, as he was also no doubt aware Panda had good cause to do.

Here in a dense patch of bush that grew in a kloof of the hills we held a council of war.

So far as we knew our advance had been unobserved, for I had left my wagons in the low veld thirty miles away, giving it out among the local natives that I was hunting game there, and bringing on with me only Scowl and four of my best hunters, all well-armed natives who could shoot. The three hundred Amangwane also had advanced in small parties, separated from each other, pretending to be Kafirs marching towards Delagoa Bay. Now, however, we had all met in this bush. Among our number were three Amangwane who, on the slaughter of their tribe, had fled with their mothers to this district and been brought up among the people of Bangu, but who at his summons had come back to Saduko. It was on these men that we relied at this juncture, for they alone knew the country. Long and anxiously did we consult with them. First they explained, and, so far as the moonlight would allow, for as yet the dawn had not broken, pointed out to us the various paths that led to Bangu's kraal.

"How many men are there in the town?" I asked.

"About seven hundred who carry spears," they answered, "together with others in outlying kraals. Moreover, watchmen are always set at the gateways in the walls."

"And where are the cattle?" I asked again.

"Here, in the valley beneath, Macumazahn," answered the spokesman. "If you listen you will hear them lowing. Fifty men, not less, watch them at night—two thousand head of them, or more."

"Then it would not be difficult to get round these cattle and drive them off, leaving Bangu to breed up a new herd?"

"It might not be difficult," interrupted Saduko, "but I came here to kill Bangu, as well as to seize his cattle, since with him I have a blood feud."

"Very good," I answered; "but that mountain cannot be stormed with three hundred men, fortified as it is with walls and schanzes. Our band would be destroyed before ever we came to the kraal, since, owing to the sentries who are set everywhere, it would be impossible to surprise the place. Also you have forgotten the dogs, Saduko. Moreover, even if it were possible, I will have nothing to do with the massacre of women and children, which must happen in an assault. Now, listen to me, O Saduko. I say let us leave the kraal of Bangu alone, and this coming night send fifty of our men, under the leadership of the guides, down to yonder bush, where they will lie hid. Then, after moonrise, when all are asleep, these fifty must rush the cattle kraal, killing any who may oppose them, should they be seen, and driving the herd out through yonder great pass by which we have entered the land. Bangu and his people, thinking that those who have taken the cattle are but common thieves of some wild tribe, will gather and follow the beasts to recapture them. But we, with the rest of the Amangwane, can set an ambush in the narrowest part of the pass among the rocks, where the grass is high and the euphorbia trees grow thick, and there, when they have passed the Nek, which I and my hunters will hold with our guns, we will give them battle. What say you?"

Now, Saduko answered that he would rather attack the kraal, which he wished to burn. But the old Amangwane, Tshoza, brother of the dead Matiwane, said:

"No, Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, is wise. Why should we waste our strength on stone walls, of which none know the number or can find the gates in the darkness, and thereby leave our skulls to be set up as ornaments on the fences of the accursed Amakoba? Let us draw the Amakoba out into the pass of the mountains, where they have no walls to protect them, and there fall on them when they are bewildered and settle the matter with them man to man. As for the women and children, with Macumazahn I say let them go; afterwards, perhaps, they will become *our* women and children."

"Aye," answered the Amangwane, "the plan of the white *Inkoosi* is good; he is clever as a weasel; we will have his plan and no other."

So Saduko was overruled and my counsel adopted.

All that day we rested, lighting no fires and remaining still as the dead in the dense bush. It was a very anxious day, for although the place was so wild and lonely, there was always the fear lest we should be discovered. It was true that we had travelled mostly by night in small parties, to avoid leaving a spoor, and avoided all kraals; still, some rumour of our approach might have reached the Amakoba, or a party of hunters might stumble on us, or those who sought for lost cattle.

Indeed, something of this sort did happen, for about midday we heard a footfall, and perceived the figure of a man, whom by his head-dress we knew for an Amakoba, threading his way through the bush. Before he saw us he was in our midst. For a moment he hesitated ere he turned to fly, and that moment was his last, for three of the Amangwane leapt on him silently as leopards leap upon a buck, and where he stood there he died. Poor fellow! Evidently he had been on a visit to some witch-doctor, for in his blanket we found medicine and love charms. This doctor cannot have been one of the stamp of Zikali the Dwarf, I thought to myself; at least, he had not warned him that he would never live to dose his beloved with that foolish medicine.

Meanwhile a few of us who had the quickest eyes climbed trees, and thence watched the town of Bangu and the valley that lay between us and it. Soon we saw that so far, at any rate, Fortune was playing into our hands, since herd after herd of kine were driven into the valley during the afternoon and enclosed in the stock-kraals. Doubtless Bangu intended on the morrow to make his half-yearly inspection of all the cattle of the tribe, many of which were herded at a distance from his town.

At length the long day drew to its close and the shadows of the evening thickened. Then we made ready for our dreadful game, of which the stake was the lives of all of us, since, should we fail, we could expect no mercy. The fifty picked men were gathered and ate food in silence. These men were placed under the command of Tshoza, for he was the most experienced of the Amangwane, and led by the three guides who had dwelt among the Amakoba, and who "knew every ant-heap in the land," or so they swore. Their duty, it will be remembered, was to cross the valley, separate themselves into small parties, unbar the various cattle kraals, kill or hunt off the herdsmen, and drive the beasts back across the valley into the pass. A second fifty men, under the command of Saduko, were to be left just at the end of this pass where it opened out into the valley, in order to help and reinforce the cattle-lifters, or, if need be, to check the following Amakoba while the great herds of beasts were got away, and then fall back on the rest of us in our ambush nearly two miles distant. The management of this ambush was to be my charge—a heavy one indeed.

Now, the moon would not be up till midnight. But two hours before that time we began our moves, since the cattle must be driven out of the kraals as soon as she appeared and gave the needful light. Otherwise the fight in the pass would in all probability be delayed till after sunrise, when the Amakoba would see how small was the number of their foes. Terror, doubt, darkness—these must be our allies if our desperate venture was to succeed.

All was arranged at last and the time had come. We, the three captains of our divided force, bade each other farewell, and passed the word down the ranks that, should we be separated by the accidents of war, my wagons were the meeting-place of any who survived.

Tshoza and his fifty glided away into the shadow silently as ghosts and were gone. Presently the fierce-faced Saduko departed also with his fifty. He carried the double-barrelled gun I had given him, and was accompanied by one of my best hunters, a Natal native, who was also armed with a heavy smooth-bore loaded with slugs. Our hope was that the sound of these guns might terrify the foe, should there be occasion to use them before our forces joined up again, and make them think they had to do with a body of raiding Dutch white men, of whose *roars*—as the heavy elephant guns of that day were called—all natives were much afraid.

So Saduko went with his fifty, leaving me wondering whether I should ever see his face again. Then I, my bearer Scowl, the two remaining hunters, and the ten score Amangwane who were left turned and soon were following the road by which we had come down the rugged pass. I call it a road, but, in fact, it was nothing but a water-washed gully strewn with boulders, through which we must pick our way as best we could in the darkness, having first removed the percussion cap from the nipple of every gun, for fear lest the accidental discharge of one of them should warn the Amakoba, confuse our other parties, and bring all our deep-laid plans to nothing.

Well, we accomplished that march somehow, walking in three long lines, so that each man might keep touch with him in front, and just as the moon began to rise reached the spot that I had chosen for the ambush.

Certainly it was well suited to that purpose. Here the track or gully bed narrowed to a width of not more than a hundred feet, while the steep slopes of the kloof on either side were clothed with scattered bushes and finger-like euphorbias which grew among stones. Behind these stones and bushes we hid ourselves, a hundred men on one side and a hundred on the other, whilst I and my three hunters, who were armed with guns, took up a position under shelter of a great boulder nearly five feet thick that lay but a little to the right of the gully itself, up which we expected the cattle would come. This place I chose for two reasons: first, that I might keep touch with both wings of my force, and, secondly, that we might be able to fire straight down the path on the pursuing Amakoba.

These were the orders that I gave to the Amangwane, warning them that he who disobeyed would be punished with death. They were not to stir until I, or, if I should be killed, one of my hunters, fired a shot; for my fear was lest, growing excited, they might leap out before the time and kill some of our own people, who very likely would be mixed up with the first of the pursuing Amakoba. Secondly, when the cattle had passed and the signal had been given, they were to rush on the Amakoba, throwing themselves across the gully, so that the enemy would have to fight upwards on a steep slope.

That was all I told them, since it is not wise to confuse natives by giving too many orders. One thing I added, however—that they must conquer or they must die. There was no mercy for them; it was a case of death or victory. Their spokesman—for these people always find a spokesman—answered that they thanked me for my advice; that they understood, and that they would do their best. Then they lifted their spears to me in salute. A wild lot of men they looked in the moonlight as they departed to take shelter behind the rocks and trees and wait.

That waiting was long, and I confess that before the end it got upon my nerves. I began to think of all sorts of things, such as whether I should live to see the sun rise again; also I reflected upon the legitimacy of this remarkable enterprise. What right had I to involve myself in a quarrel between these savages?

Why had I come here? To gain cattle as a trader? No, for I was not at all sure that I would take them if gained. Because Saduko had twitted me with faithlessness to my words? Yes, to a certain extent; but that was by no means the whole reason. I had been moved by the recital of the cruel wrongs inflicted upon Saduko and his tribe by this Bangu, and therefore had not been loath to associate myself with his attempted vengeance upon a wicked murderer. Well, that was sound enough so far as it went; but now a new consideration suggested itself to me. Those wrongs had been worked many years ago; probably most of the men who had aided and abetted them by now were dead or very aged, and it was their sons upon whom the vengeance would be wreaked.

What right had I to assist in visiting the sins of the fathers upon the sons? Frankly I could not say. The thing seemed to me to be a part of the problem of life, neither less nor more. So I shrugged my shoulders sadly and consoled myself by reflecting that very likely the issue would go against me, and that my own existence would pay the price of the venture and expound its moral. This consideration soothed my conscience somewhat, for when a man backs his actions with the risk of his life, right or wrong, at any rate he plays no coward's part.

The time went by very slowly and nothing happened. The waning moon shone brightly in a clear sky, and as there was no wind the silence seemed peculiarly intense. Save for the laugh of an occasional hyena and now and again for a sound which I took for the coughing of a distant lion, there was no stir between sleeping earth and moonlit heaven in which little clouds floated beneath the pale stars.

At length I thought that I heard a noise, a kind of murmur far away. It grew, it developed.

It sounded like a thousand sticks tapping upon something hard, very faintly. It continued to grow, and I knew the sound for that of the beating hoofs of animals galloping. Then there were isolated noises, very faint and thin; they might be shouts; then something that I could not mistake—shots fired at a distance. So the business was afoot; the cattle were moving, Saduko and my hunter were firing. There was nothing for it but to wait.

The excitement was very fierce; it seemed to consume me, to eat into my brain. The sound of the tapping upon the rocks grew louder until it merged into a kind of rumble, mixed with an echo as of that of very distant thunder, which presently I knew to be not thunder, but the bellowing of a thousand frightened beasts.

Nearer and nearer came the galloping hoofs and the rumble of bellowings; nearer and nearer the shouts of men, affronting the stillness of the solemn night. At length a single animal appeared, a koodoo buck that somehow had got mixed up with the cattle. It went past us like a flash, and was followed a minute or so later by a bull that, being young and light, had outrun its companions. That, too, went by, foam on its lips and its tongue hanging from its jaws.

Then the herd appeared—a countless herd it seemed to me—plunging up the incline—cows, heifers, calves, bulls, and oxen, all mixed together in one inextricable mass, and every one of them snorting, bellowing, or making some other kind of sound. The din was fearful, the sight bewildering, for the beasts were of all colours, and their long horns flashed like ivory in the moonlight. Indeed, the only thing in the least like it which I have ever seen was the rush of the buffaloes from the reed camp on that day when I got my injury.

They were streaming past us now, a mighty and moving mass so closely packed that a man might have walked upon their backs. In fact, some of the calves which had been thrust up by the pressure were being carried along in this fashion. Glad was I that none of us were in their path, for their advance seemed irresistible. No fence or wall could have saved us, and even stout trees that grew in the gully were snapped or thrust over.

At length the long line began to thin, for now it was composed of stragglers and weak or injured beasts, of which there were many. Other sounds, too, began to dominate the bellowings of the animals, those of the excited cries of men. The first of our companions, the cattle-lifters, appeared, weary and gasping, but waving their spears in triumph. Among them was old Tshoza. I stepped upon my rock, calling to him by name. He heard me, and presently was lying at my side panting.

“We have got them all!” he gasped. “Not a hoof is left save those that are trodden down. Saduko is not far behind with the rest of our brothers, except some that have been killed. All the Amakoba tribe are after us. He holds them back to give the cattle time to get away.”

“Well done!” I answered. “It is very good. Now make your men hide among the others that they may find their breath before the fight.”

So he stopped them as they came. Scarcely had the last of them vanished into the bushes when the gathering volume of shouts, amongst which I heard a gun go off, told us that Saduko and his band and the pursuing Amakoba were not far away. Presently they, too, appeared—that is the handful of Amangwane did—not fighting now, but running as hard as they could, for they knew they were approaching the ambush and wished to pass it so as not to be mixed up with the Amakoba. We let them go through us. Among the last of them came Saduko, who was wounded, for the blood ran down his side, supporting my hunter, who was also wounded, more severely as I feared.

I called to him.

“Saduko,” I said, “halt at the crest of the path and rest there so that you may be able to help us presently.”

He waved the gun in answer, for he was too breathless to speak, and went on with those who were left of his following—perhaps thirty men in all—in the track of the cattle. Before he was out of sight the Amakoba arrived, a mob of five or six hundred men mixed up together and advancing without order or discipline, for they seemed to have lost their heads as well as their cattle. Some of them had shields and some had none, some broad and some throwing assegais, while many were quite naked, not having stayed to put on their moochas and much less their war finery. Evidently they were mad with rage, for the sounds that issued from them seemed to concentrate into one mighty curse.

The moment had come, though to tell the truth I heartily wished that it had not. I wasn’t exactly afraid, although I never set up for great courage, but I did not quite like the business. After all we were stealing these people’s cattle, and now were going to kill as many of them as we could. I had to recall Saduko’s dreadful story of the massacre of his tribe before I could make up my mind to give the signal. That hardened me, and so did the reflection that after all they outnumbered us enormously and very likely would prove victors in the end. Anyhow it was too late to repent. What a tricky and uncomfortable thing is conscience, that nearly always begins to trouble us at the moment of, or after, the event, not before, when it might be of some use.

I raised myself upon the rock and fired both barrels of my gun into the advancing horde, though whether I killed anyone or no I cannot say. I have always hoped that I did not; but as the mark was large and I am a fair shot, I fear that is scarcely possible. Next moment, with a howl that sounded like that of wild beasts, from either side of the gorge the fierce Amangwane free-spears—for that is what they were—leapt out of their hiding-places and hurled themselves upon their hereditary foes. They were fighting for more than cattle; they were fighting for hate and for revenge since these Amakoba had slaughtered their fathers and their mothers, their sisters and their brothers, and they alone remained to pay them back blood for blood.

Great heaven! how they did fight, more like devils than human beings. After that first howl which shaped itself to the word “Saduko,” they were silent as bulldogs. Though they were so few, at first their terrible rush drove back the Amakoba. Then, as these recovered from their surprise, the weight of numbers began to tell, for they, too, were brave men who did not give way to panic. Scores of them went down at once, but the remainder pushed the Amangwane before them up the hill. I took little share in the fight, but was thrust backward with the others, only firing when I was obliged to save my own life. Foot by foot we were pushed back till at length we drew near to the crest of the pass.

Then, while the issue hung in the balance, there was another shout of “Saduko!” and that chief himself, followed by his thirty, rushed upon the Amakoba.

This charge decided the battle, for not knowing how many more were coming, those who were left of the Amakoba turned and fled, nor did we pursue them far.

We mustered on the hill-top, not more than two hundred of us now, the rest were fallen or desperately wounded, my poor hunter, whom I had lent to Saduko, being among the dead. Although wounded, he died fighting to the last, then fell down, shouting to me:

“Chief, have I done well?” and expired.

I was breathless and spent, but as in a dream I saw some Amangwane drag up a gaunt old savage, crying:

“Here is Bangu, Bangu the Butcher, whom we have caught alive.”

Saduko stepped up to him.

“Ah! Bangu,” he said, “now say, why should I not kill you as you would have killed the little lad Saduko long ago, had not Zikali saved him? See, here is the mark of your spear.”

“Kill,” said Bangu. “Your Spirit is stronger than mine. Did not Zikali foretell it? Kill, Saduko.”

“Nay,” answered Saduko. “If you are weary I am weary, too, and wounded as well. Take a spear, Bangu, and we will fight.”

So they fought there in the moonlight, man to man; fought fiercely while all watched, till presently I saw Bangu throw his arms wide and fall backwards.

Saduko was avenged. I have always been glad that he slew his enemy thus, and not as it might have been expected that he would do.

## Chapter VII.

### SADUKO BRINGS THE MARRIAGE GIFT

We reached my wagons in the early morning of the following day, bringing with us the cattle and our wounded. Thus encumbered it was a most toilsome march, and an anxious one also, for it was always possible that the remnant of the Amakoba might attempt pursuit. This, however, they did not do, for very many of them were dead or wounded, and those who remained had no heart left in them. They went back to their mountain home and lived there in shame and wretchedness, for I do not believe there were fifty head of cattle left among the tribe, and Kafirs without cattle are nothing. Still, they did not starve, since there were plenty of women to work the fields, and we had not touched their corn. The end of them was that Panda gave them to their conqueror, Saduko, and he incorporated them with the Amangwane. But that did not happen until some time afterwards.

When we had rested a while at the wagons the captured beasts were mustered, and on being counted were found to number a little over twelve hundred head, not reckoning animals that had been badly hurt in the flight, which we killed for beef. It was a noble prize, truly, and, notwithstanding the wound in his thigh, which hurt him a good deal now that it had stiffened, Saduko stood up and surveyed them with glistening eyes. No wonder, for he who had been so poor was now rich, and would remain so even after he had paid over whatever number of cows Umbezi chose to demand as the price of Mameena's hand. Moreover, he was sure, and I shared his confidence, that in these changed circumstances both that young woman and her father would look upon his suit with very favourable eyes. He had, so to speak, succeeded to the title and the family estates by means of a lawsuit brought in the "Court of the Assegai," and therefore there was hardly a father in Zululand who would shut his kraal gate upon him. We forgot, both of us, the proverb that points out how numerous are the slips between the cup and the lip, which, by the way, is one that has its Zulu equivalents. One of them, if I remember right at the moment, is: "However loud the hen cackles, the housewife does not always get the egg."

As it chanced, although Saduko's hen was cackling very loudly just at this time, he was not destined to find the coveted egg. But of that matter I will speak in its place.

I, too, looked at those cattle, wondering whether Saduko would remember our bargain, under which some six hundred head of them belonged to me. Six hundred head! Why, putting them at £5 apiece all round—and as oxen were very scarce just at that time, they were worth quite as much, if not more—that meant £3,000, a larger sum of money than I had ever owned at one time in all my life. Truly the paths of violence were profitable! But would he remember? On the whole I thought probably not, since Kafirs are not fond of parting with cattle.

Well, I did him an injustice, for presently he turned and said, with something of an effort:

"Macumazahn, half of all these belong to you, and truly you have earned them, for it was your cunning and good counsel that gained us the victory. Now we will choose them beast by beast."

So I chose a fine ox, then Saduko chose one; and so it went on till I had eight of my number driven out. As the eighth was taken I turned to Saduko and said:

"There, that will do. These oxen I must have to replace those in my teams which died on the trek, but I want no more."

"Wow!" said Saduko, and all those who stood with him, while one of them added—I think it was old Tshoza:

"He refuses six hundred cattle which are fairly his! He must be mad!"

"No friends," I answered, "I am not mad, but neither am I bad. I accompanied Saduko on this raid because he is dear to me and stood by me once in the hour of danger. But I do not love killing men with whom I have no quarrel, and I will not take the price of blood."

"Wow!" said old Tshoza again, for Saduko seemed too astonished to speak, "he is a spirit, not a man. He is *holy*!"

"Not a bit of it," I answered. "If you think that, ask Mameena"—a dark saying which they did not understand. "Now, listen. I will not take those cattle because I do not think as you Kafirs think. But as they are mine, according to your law, I am going to dispose of them. I give ten head to each of my hunters, and fifteen head to the relations of him who was killed. The rest I give to Tshoza and to the other men of the Amangwane who fought with us, to be divided among them in such proportions as they may agree, I being the judge in the event of any quarrel arising."

Now these men raised a great cry of "*Inkoosi*!" and, running up, old Tshoza seized my hand and kissed it.

"Your heart is big," he cried; "you drop fatness! Although you are so small, the spirit of a king lives in you, and the wisdom of the heavens."

Thus he praised me, while all the others joined in, till the din was awful. Saduko thanked me also in his magnificent manner. Yet I do not think that he was altogether pleased, although my great gift relieved him from the necessity of sharing up the spoil with his companions. The truth was, or so I believe, that he understood that henceforth the Amangwane would love me better than they loved him. This, indeed, proved to be the case, for I am sure that there was no man among all those wild fellows who would not have served me to the death, and to this day my name is a power among them and their descendants. Also it has grown into something of a

proverb among all those Kafirs who know the story. They talk of any great act of liberality in an idiom as “a gift of Macumazana,” and in the same way of one who makes any remarkable renunciation, as “a wearer of Macumazana’s blanket,” or as “he who has stolen Macumazana’s shadow.”

Thus did I earn a great reputation very cheaply, for really I could not have taken those cattle; also I am sure that had I done so they would have brought me bad luck. Indeed, one of the regrets of my life is that I had anything whatsoever to do with the business.

Our journey back to Umbezi’s kraal—for thither we were heading—was very slow, hampered as we were with wounded and by a vast herd of cattle. Of the latter, indeed, we got rid after a while, for, except those which I had given to my men, and a hundred or so of the best beasts that Saduko took with him for a certain purpose, they were sent away to a place which he had chosen, in charge of about half of his people, under the command of his uncle, Tshoza, there to await his coming.

Over a month had gone by since the night of the ambush when at last we outspanned quite close to Umbezi’s, in that bush where first I had met the Amangwane free-spears. A very different set of men they looked on this triumphant day to those fierce fellows who had slipped out of the trees at the call of their chief. As we went through the country Saduko had bought fine moochas and blankets for them; also head-dresses had been made with the long black feathers of the *sakabuli* finch, and shields and leglets of the hides and tails of oxen. Moreover, having fed plentifully and travelled easily, they were fat and well-favoured, as, given good food, natives soon become after a period of abstinence.

The plan of Saduko was to lie quiet in the bush that night, and on the following morning to advance in all his grandeur, accompanied by his spears, present the hundred head of cattle that had been demanded, and formally ask his daughter’s hand from Umbezi. As the reader may have gathered already, there was a certain histrionic vein in Saduko; also when he was in feather he liked to show off his plumage.

Well, this plan was carried out to the letter. On the following morning, after the sun was well up, Saduko, as a great chief does, sent forward two bedizened heralds to announce his approach to Umbezi, after whom followed two other men to sing his deeds and praises. (By the way, I observed that they had clearly been instructed to avoid any mention of a person called Macumazahn.) Then we advanced in force. First went Saduko, splendidly apparelled as a chief, carrying a small assegai and adorned with plumes, leglets and a leopard-skin kilt. He was attended by about half a dozen of the best-looking of his followers, who posed as *indunas* or councillors. Behind these I walked, a dusty, insignificant little fellow, attended by the ugly, snub-nosed Scowl in a very greasy pair of trousers, worn-out European boots through which his toes peeped, and nothing else, and by my three surviving hunters, whose appearance was even more disreputable. After us marched about four score of the transformed Amangwane, and after them came the hundred picked cattle driven by a few herdsmen.

In due course we arrived at the gate of the kraal, where we found the heralds and the praisers prancing and shouting.

“Have you seen Umbezi?” asked Saduko of them.

“No,” they answered; “he was asleep when we got here, but his people say that he is coming out presently.”

“Then tell his people that he had better be quick about it, or I shall turn him out,” replied the proud Saduko.

Just at this moment the kraal gate opened and through it appeared Umbezi, looking extremely fat and foolish; also, it struck me, frightened, although this he tried to conceal.

“Who visits me here,” he said, “with so much—um—ceremony?” and with the carved dancing-stick he carried he pointed doubtfully at the lines of armed men. “Oh, it is you, is it, Saduko?” and he looked him up and down, adding: “How grand you are to be sure. Have you been robbing anybody? And you, too, Macumazahn. Well, *you* do not look grand. You look like an old cow that has been suckling two calves on the winter veld. But tell me, what are all these warriors for? I ask because I have not food for so many, especially as we have just had a feast here.”

“Fear nothing, Umbezi,” answered Saduko in his grandest manner. “I have brought food for my own men. As for my business, it is simple. You asked a hundred head of cattle as the *lobola* [that is, the marriage gift] of your daughter, Mameena. They are there. Go send your servants to the kraal and count them.”

“Oh, with pleasure,” Umbezi replied nervously, and he gave some orders to certain men behind him. “I am glad to see that you have become rich in this sudden fashion, Saduko, though how you have done so I cannot understand.”

“Never mind how I have become rich,” answered Saduko. “I *am* rich; that is enough for the present. Be pleased to send for Mameena, for I would talk with her.”

“Yes, yes, Saduko, I understand that you would talk with Mameena; but”—and he looked round him desperately—“I fear that she is still asleep. As you know, Mameena was always a late riser, and, what is more, she hates to be disturbed. Don’t you think that you could come back, say, to-morrow morning? She will be sure to be up by then; or, better still, the day after?”

“In which hut is Mameena?” asked Saduko sternly, while I, smelling a rat, began to chuckle to myself.

“I really do not know, Saduko,” replied Umbezi. “Sometimes she sleeps in one, sometimes in another, and sometimes she goes several hours’ journey away to her aunt’s kraal for a change. I should not be in the least surprised if she had done so last night. I have no control over Mameena.”

Before Saduko could answer, a shrill, rasping voice broke upon our ears, which after some search I saw proceeded from an ugly and ancient female seated in the shadow, in whom I recognised the lady who was known by the pleasing name of “Worn-out-Old-Cow.”

“He lies!” screeched the voice. “He lies. Thanks be to the spirit of my ancestors that wild cat Mameena has left this kraal for good. She slept last night, not with her aunt, but with her husband, Masapo, to whom Umbezi gave her in marriage two days ago, receiving in payment a hundred and twenty head of cattle, which was twenty more than *you* bid, Saduko.”

Now when Saduko heard these words I thought that he would really go mad with rage. He turned quite grey under his dark skin and for a while trembled like a leaf, looking as though he were about to fall to the ground. Then he leapt as a lion leaps, and seizing Umbezi by the throat, hurled him backwards, standing over him with raised spear.

"You dog!" he cried in a terrible voice. "Tell me the truth or I will rip you up. What have you done with Mameena?"

"Oh! Saduko," answered Umbezi in choking tones, "Mameena has chosen to get married. It was no fault of mine; she would have her way."

He got no farther, and had I not intervened by throwing my arms about Saduko and dragging him back, that moment would have been Umbezi's last, for Saduko was about to pin him to the earth with his spear. As it proved, I was just in time, and Saduko, being weak with emotion, for I felt his heart going like a sledge-hammer, could not break from my grasp before his reason returned to him.

At length he recovered himself a little and threw down his spear as though to put himself out of temptation. Then he spoke, always in the same terrible voice, asking:

"Have you more to say about this business, Umbezi? I would hear all before I answer you."

"Only this, Saduko," replied Umbezi, who had risen to his feet and was shaking like a reed. "I did no more than any other father would have done. Masapo is a very powerful chief, one who will be a good stick for me to lean on in my old age. Mameena declared that she wished to marry him—"

"He lies!" screeched the "Old Cow." "What Mameena said was that she had no will towards marriage with any Zulu in the land, so I suppose she is looking after a white man," and she leered in my direction. "She said, however, that if her father wished to marry her to Masapo, she must be a dutiful daughter and obey him, but that if blood and trouble came of that marriage, let it be on his head and not on hers."

"Would you also stick your claws into me, cat?" shouted Umbezi, catching the old woman a savage cut across the back with the light dancing-stick which he still held in his hand, whereon she fled away screeching and cursing him.

"Oh, Saduko," he went on, "let not your ears be poisoned by these falsehoods. Mameena never said anything of the sort, or if she did it was not to me. Well, the moment that my daughter had consented to take Masapo as her husband his people drove a hundred and twenty of the most beautiful cattle over the hill, and would you have had me refuse them, Saduko? I am sure that when you have seen them you will say that I was quite right to accept such a splendid *lobola* in return for one sharp-tongued girl. Remember, Saduko, that although you had promised a hundred head, that is less by twenty, at the time you did not own one, and where you were to get them from I could not guess. Moreover," he added with a last, desperate, imaginative effort, for I think he saw that his arguments were making no impression, "some strangers who called here told me that both you and Macumazahn had been killed by certain evil-doers in the mountains. There, I have spoken, and, Saduko, if you now have cattle, why, on my part, I have another daughter, not quite so good-looking perhaps, but a much better worker in the field. Come and drink a sup of beer, and I will send for her."

"Stop talking about your other daughter and your beer and listen to me," replied Saduko, looking at the assegai which he had thrown to the ground so ominously that I set my foot on it. "I am now a greater chief than the boar Masapo. Has Masapo such a bodyguard as these Eaters-up-of-Enemies?" and he jerked his thumb backwards towards the serried lines of fierce-faced Amangwane who stood listening behind us. "Has Masapo as many cattle as I have, whereof those which you see are but a tithe brought as a *lobola* gift to the father of her who had been promised to me as wife? Is Masapo Panda's friend? I think that I have heard otherwise. Has Masapo just conquered a countless tribe by his courage and his wit? Is Masapo young and of high blood, or is he but an old, low-born boar of the mountains?"

"You do not answer, Umbezi, and perhaps you do well to be silent. Now listen again. Were it not for Macumazahn here, whom I do not desire to mix up with my quarrels, I would bid my men take you and beat you to death with the handles of their spears, and then go on and serve the Boar in the same fashion in his mountain sty. As it is, these things must wait a little while, especially as I have other matters to attend to first. Yet the day is not far off when I will attend to them also. Therefore my counsel to you, Cheat, is to make haste to die or to find courage to fall upon a spear, unless you would learn how it feels to be brayed with sticks like a green hide until none can know that you were once a man. Send now and tell my words to Masapo the Boar. And to Mameena say that soon I will come to take her with spears and not with cattle. Do you understand? Oh! I see that you do, since already you weep with fear like a woman. Then farewell to you till that day when I return with the sticks, O Umbezi the cheat and the liar, Umbezi, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants,'" and turning, Saduko stalked away.

I was about to follow in a great hurry, having had enough of this very unpleasant scene, when poor old Umbezi sprang at me and clasped me by the arm.

"O Macumazana," he exclaimed, weeping in his terror, "O Macumazana, if ever I have been a friend to you, help me out of this deep pit into which I have fallen through the tricks of that monkey of a daughter of mine, who I think is a witch born to bring trouble upon men. Macumazahn, if she had been your daughter and a powerful chief had appeared with a hundred and twenty head of such beautiful cattle, you would have given her to him, would you not, although he is of mixed blood and not very young, especially as she did not mind who only cares for place and wealth?"

"I think not," I answered; "but then it is not our custom to sell women in that fashion."

"No, no, I forgot; in this as in other matters you white men are mad and, Macumazahn, to tell you the truth, I believe it is you she really cares for; she said as much to me once or twice. Well, why did you not take her away when I was not looking? We could have settled matters afterwards, and I should have been free of her witcheries and not up to my neck in this hole as I am now."

"Because some people don't do that kind of thing, Umbezi."

"No, no, I forgot. Oh! why can I not remember that you are *quite* mad and therefore that it must not be expected of you to act as though you were sane. Well, at least you are that tiger Saduko's friend, which again shows that you must be very mad, for most people would sooner try to milk a cow buffalo than walk hand in hand with him. Don't you see, Macumazahn, that he means to kill me,

Macumazahn, to bray me like a green hide? Ugh! to beat me to death with sticks. Ugh! And what is more, that unless you prevent him, he will certainly do it, perhaps to-morrow or the next day. Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!”

“Yes, I see, Umbezi, and I think that he *will* do it. But what I do not see is how I am to prevent him. Remember that you let Mameena grow into his heart and behaved badly to him, Umbezi.”

“I never promised her to him, Macumazahn. I only said that if he brought a hundred cattle, then I might promise.”

“Well, he has wiped out the Amakoba, the enemies of his House, and there are the hundred cattle whereof he has many more, and now it is too late for you to keep your share of the bargain. So I think you must make yourself as comfortable as you can in the hole that your hands dug, Umbezi, which I would not share for all the cattle in Zululand.”

“Truly you are not one from whom to seek comfort in the hour of distress,” groaned poor Umbezi, then added, brightening up: “But perhaps Panda will kill him because he has wiped out Bangu in a time of peace. Oh Macumazahn, can you not persuade Panda to kill him? If so, I now have more cattle than I really want—”

“Impossible,” I answered. “Panda is his friend, and between ourselves I may tell you that he ate up the Amakoba by his especial wish. When the King hears of it he will call to Saduko to sit in his shadow and make him great, one of his councillors, probably with power of life and death over little people like you and Masapo.”

“Then it is finished,” said Umbezi faintly, “and I will try to die like a man. But to be brayed like a hide! And with thin sticks! Oh!” he added, grinding his teeth, “if only I can get hold of Mameena I will not leave much of that pretty hair of hers upon her head. I will tie her hands and shut her up with the ‘Old Cow,’ who loves her as a meer-cat loves a mouse. No; I will kill her. There—do you hear, Macumazahn, unless you do something to help me, I will kill Mameena, and you won’t like that, for I am sure she is dear to you, although you were not man enough to run away with her as she wished.”

“If you touch Mameena,” I said, “be certain, my friend, that Saduko’s sticks and your skin will not be far apart, for I will report you to Panda myself as an unnatural evil-doer. Now hearken to me, you old fool. Saduko is so fond of your daughter, on this point being mad, as you say I am, that if only he could get her I think he might overlook the fact of her having been married before. What you have to do is to try to buy her back from Masapo. Mind you, I say buy her back—not get her by bloodshed—which you might do by persuading Masapo to put her away. Then, if he knew that you were trying to do this, I think that Saduko might leave his sticks uncut for a while.”

“I will try. I will indeed, Macumazahn. I will try very hard. It is true Masapo is an obstinate pig; still, if he knows that his own life is at stake, he might give way. Moreover, when she learns that Saduko has grown rich and great, Mameena might help me. Oh, I thank you, Macumazahn; you are indeed the prop of my hut, and it and all in it are yours. Farewell, farewell, Macumazahn, if you must go. But why—why did you not run away with Mameena, and save me all this fear and trouble?”

So I and that old humbug, Umbezi, “Eater-up-of-Elephants,” parted for a while, and never did I know him in a more chastened frame of mind, except once, as I shall tell.

## Chapter VIII.

### THE KING'S DAUGHTER

When I got back to my wagons after this semi-tragical interview with that bombastic and self-seeking old windbag, Umbezi, it was to find that Saduko and his warriors had already marched for the King's kraal, Nodwengu. A message awaited me, however, to the effect that it was hoped that I would follow, in order to make report of the affair of the destruction of the Amakoba. This, after reflection, I determined to do, really, I think, because of the intense human interest of the whole business. I wanted to see how it would work out.

Also, in a way, I read Saduko's mind and understood that at the moment he did not wish to discuss the matter of his hideous disappointment. Whatever else may have been false in this man's nature, one thing rang true, namely, his love or his infatuation for the girl Mameena. Throughout his life she was his guiding star—about as evil a star as could have arisen upon any man's horizon; the fatal star that was to light him down to doom. Let me thank Providence, as I do, that I was so fortunate as to escape its baneful influences, although I admit that they attracted me not a little.

So, seduced thither by my curiosity, which has so often led me into trouble, I trekked to Nodwengu, full of many doubts not unmingled with amusement, for I could not rid my mind of recollections of the utter terror of the "Eater-up-of-Elephants" when he was brought face to face with the dreadful and concentrated rage of the robbed Saduko and the promise of his vengeance. Ultimately I arrived at the Great Place without experiencing any adventure that is worthy of record, and camped in a spot that was appointed to me by some *induna* whose name I forget, but who evidently knew of my approach, for I found him awaiting me at some distance from the town. Here I sat for quite a long while, two or three days, if I remember right, amusing myself with killing or missing turtle-doves with a shotgun, and similar pastimes, until something should happen, or I grew tired and started for Natal.

In the end, just as I was about to trek seawards, an old friend, Maputa, turned up at my wagons—that same man who had brought me the message from Panda before we started to attack Bangu.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said. "What of the Amakoba? I see they did not kill you."

"No," I answered, handing him some snuff, "they did not quite kill me, for here I am. What is your pleasure with me?"

"O Macumazana, only that the King wishes to know whether you have any of those little balls left in the box which I brought back to you, since, if so, he thinks he would like to swallow one of them in this hot weather."

I proffered him the whole box, but he would not take it, saying that the King would like me to give it to him myself. Now I understood that this was a summons to an audience, and asked when it would please Panda to receive me and "the-little-black-stones-that-work-wonders." He answered—at once.

So we started, and within an hour I stood, or rather sat, before Panda.

Like all his family, the King was an enormous man, but, unlike Chaka and those of his brothers whom I had known, one of a kindly countenance. I saluted him by lifting my cap, and took my place upon a wooden stool that had been provided for me outside the great hut, in the shadow of which he sat within his *isi-gohlo*, or private enclosure.

"Greeting, O Macumazana," he said. "I am glad to see you safe and well, for I understand that you have been engaged upon a perilous adventure since last we met."

"Yes, King," I answered; "but to which adventure do you refer—that of the buffalo, when Saduko helped me, or that of the Amakoba, when I helped Saduko?"

"The latter, Macumazahn, of which I desire to hear all the story."

So I told it to him, he and I being alone, for he commanded his councillors and servants to retire out of hearing.

"Wow!" he said, when I had finished, "you are clever as a baboon, Macumazahn. That was a fine trick to set a trap for Bangu and his Amakoba dogs and bait it with his own cattle. But they tell me that you refused your share of those cattle. Now, why was that, Macumazahn?"

By way of answer I repeated to Panda my reasons, which I have set out already.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, when I had finished. "Every one seeks greatness in his own way, and perhaps yours is better than ours. Well, the White man walks one road—or some of them do—and the Black man another. They both end at the same place, and none will know which is the right road till the journey is done. Meanwhile, what you lose Saduko and his people gain. He is a wise man, Saduko, who knows how to choose his friends, and his wisdom has brought him victory and gifts. But to you, Macumazahn, it has brought nothing but honour, on which, if a man feeds only, he will grow thin."

"I like to be thin, O Panda," I answered slowly.

"Yes, yes, I understand," replied the King, who, in common with most natives, was quick enough to seize a point, "and I, too, like people who keep thin on such food as yours, people, also, whose hands are always clean. We Zulus trust you, Macumazahn, as we trust few white men, for we have known for years that your lips say what your heart thinks, and that your heart always thinks the thing which is good. You may be named Watcher-by-Night, but you love light, not darkness."

Now, at these somewhat unusual compliments I bowed, and felt myself colouring a little as I did so, even through my sunburn, but I made no answer to them, since to do so would have involved a discussion of the past and its tragical events, into which I had no wish to enter. Panda, too, remained silent for a while. Then he called to a messenger to summon the princes, Cetewayo and Umbelazi, and to bid Saduko, the son of Matiwane, to wait without, in case he should wish to speak with him.

A few minutes later the two princes arrived. I watched their coming with interest, for they were the most important men in Zululand, and already the nation debated fiercely which of them would succeed to the throne. I will try to describe them a little.

They were both of much the same age—it is always difficult to arrive at a Zulu's exact years—and both fine young men. Cetewayo, however, had the stronger countenance. It was said that he resembled that fierce and able monster, Chaka the Wild Beast, his uncle, and certainly I perceived in him a likeness to his other uncle, Dingaan, Umpanda's predecessor, whom I had known but too well when I was a lad. He had the same surly eyes and haughty bearing; also, when he was angry his mouth shut itself in the same iron fashion.

Of Umbelazi it is difficult for me to speak without enthusiasm. As Mameena was the most beautiful woman I ever saw in Zululand—although it is true that old war-dog, Umslopogaas, a friend of mine who does not come into this story, used to tell me that Nada the Lily, whom I have mentioned, was even lovelier—so Umbelazi was by far the most splendid man. Indeed, the Zulus named him "Umbelazi the Handsome," and no wonder. To begin with, he stood at least three inches above the tallest of them; from a quarter of a mile away I have recognised him by his great height, even through the dust of a desperate battle, and his breadth was proportionate to his stature. Then he was perfectly made, his great, shapely limbs ending, like Saduko's, in small hands and feet. His face, too, was well-cut and open, his colour lighter than Cetewayo's, and his eyes, which always seemed to smile, were large and dark.

Even before they passed the small gate of the inner fence it was easy for me to see that this royal pair were not upon the best of terms, for each of them tried to get through it first, to show his right of precedence. The result was somewhat ludicrous, for they jammed in the gateway. Here, however, Umbelazi's greater weight told, for, putting out his strength, he squeezed his brother into the reeds of the fence, and won through a foot or so in front of him.

"You grow too fat, my brother," I heard Cetewayo say, and saw him scowl as he spoke. "If I had held an assegai in my hand you would have been cut."

"I know it, my brother," answered Umbelazi, with a good-humoured laugh, "but I knew also that none may appear before the King armed. Had it been otherwise, I would rather have followed after you."

Now, at this hint of Umbelazi's, that he would not trust his brother behind his back with a spear, although it seemed to be conveyed in jest, I saw Panda shift uneasily on his seat, while Cetewayo scowled even more ominously than before. However, no further words passed between them, and, walking up to the King side by side, they saluted him with raised hands, calling out "*Baba!*"—that is, Father.

"Greeting, my children," said Panda, adding hastily, for he foresaw a quarrel as to which of them should take the seat of honour on his right: "Sit there in front of me, both of you, and, Macumazahn, do you come hither," and he pointed to the coveted place. "I am a little deaf in my left ear this morning."

So these brothers sat themselves down in front of the King; nor were they, I think, grieved to find this way out of their rivalry; but first they shook hands with me, for I knew them both, though not well, and even in this small matter the old trouble arose, since there was some difficulty as to which of them should first offer me his hand. Ultimately, I remember, Cetewayo won this trick.

When these preliminaries were finished, Panda addressed the princes, saying:

"My sons, I have sent for you to ask your counsel upon a certain matter—not a large matter, but one that may grow." And he paused to take snuff, whereon both of them ejaculated:

"We hear you, Father."

"Well, my sons, the matter is that of Saduko, the son of Matiwane, chief of the Amangwane, whom Bangu, chief of the Amakoba, ate up years ago by leave of Him who went before me. Now, this Bangu, as you know, has for some time been a thorn in my foot—a thorn that caused it to fester—and yet I did not wish to make war on him. So I spoke a word in the ear of Saduko, saying, 'He is yours, if you can kill him; and his cattle are yours.' Well, Saduko is not dull. With the help of this white man, Macumazahn, our friend from of old, he has killed Bangu and taken his cattle, and already my foot is beginning to heal."

"We have heard it," said Cetewayo.

"It was a great deed," added Umbelazi, a more generous critic.

"Yes," continued Panda, "I, too, think it was a great deed, seeing that Saduko had but a small regiment of wanderers to back him —"

"Nay," interrupted Cetewayo, "it was not those eaters of rats who won him the day, it was the wisdom of this Macumazahn."

"Macumazahn's wisdom would have been of little use without the courage of Saduko and his rats," commented Umbelazi, and from this moment I saw that the two brothers were taking sides for and against Saduko, as they did upon every other matter, not because they cared for the right of whatever was in question, but because they wished to oppose each other.

"Quite so," went on the King; "I agree with both of you, my sons. But the point is this: I think Saduko a man of promise, and one who should be advanced that he may learn to love us all, especially as his House has suffered wrong from our House, since He-who-is-gone listened to the evil counsel of Bangu, and allowed him to kill out Matiwane's tribe without just cause. Therefore, in order to wipe away this stain and bind Saduko to us, I think it well to re-establish Saduko in the chieftainship of the Amangwane, with the lands that his father held, and to give him also the chieftainship of the Amakoba, of whom it seems that the women and children, with some of the men, remain, although he already holds their cattle which he has captured in war."

"As the King pleases," said Umbelazi, with a yawn, for he was growing weary of listening to the case of Saduko.

But Cetewayo said nothing, for he appeared to be thinking of something else.

"I think also," went on Panda in a rather uncertain voice, "in order to bind him so close that the bonds may never be broken, it would be wise to give him a woman of our family in marriage."

"Why should this little Amangwane be allowed to marry into the royal House?" asked Cetewayo, looking up. "If he is dangerous, why not kill him, and have done?"

"For this reason, my son. There is trouble ahead in Zululand, and I do not wish to kill those who may help us in that hour, nor do I wish them to become our enemies. I wish that they may be our friends; and therefore it seems to me wise, when we find a seed of greatness, to water it, and not to dig it up or plant it in a neighbour's garden. From his deeds I believe that this Saduko is such a seed."

"Our father has spoken," said Umbelazi; "and I like Saduko, who is a man of mettle and good blood. Which of our sisters does our father propose to give to him?"

"She who is named after the mother of our race, O Umbelazi; she whom your own mother bore—your sister Nandie" (in English, "The Sweet").

"A great gift, O my Father, since Nandie is both fair and wise. Also, what does she think of this matter?"

"She thinks well of it, Umbelazi, for she has seen Saduko and taken a liking to him. She told me herself that she wishes no other husband."

"Is it so?" replied Umbelazi indifferently. "Then if the King commands, and the King's daughter desires, what more is there to be said?"

"Much, I think," broke in Cetewayo. "I hold that it is out of place that this little man, who has but conquered a little tribe by borrowing the wit of Macumazahn here, should be rewarded not only with a chieftainship, but with the hand of the wisest and most beautiful of the King's daughters, even though Umbelazi," he added, with a sneer, "should be willing to throw him his own sister like a bone to a passing dog."

"Who threw the bone, Cetewayo?" asked Umbelazi, awaking out of his indifference. "Was it the King, or was it I, who never heard of the matter till this moment? And who are we that we should question the King's decrees? Is it our business to judge or to obey?"

"Has Saduko perchance made you a present of some of those cattle which he stole from the Amakoba, Umbelazi?" asked Cetewayo. "As our father asks no *lobola*, perhaps you have taken the gift instead."

"The only gift that I have taken from Saduko," said Umbelazi, who, I could see, was hard pressed to keep his temper, "is that of his service. He is my friend, which is why you hate him, as you hate all my friends."

"Must I then love every stray cur that licks your hand, Umbelazi? Oh, no need to tell me he is your friend, for I know it was you who put it into our father's heart to allow him to kill Bangu and steal his cattle, which I hold to be an ill deed, for now the Great House is thatched with his reeds and Bangu's blood is on its doorposts. Moreover, he who wrought the wrong is to come and dwell therein, and for aught I know to be called a prince, like you and me. Why should he not, since the Princess Nandie is to be given to him in marriage? Certainly, Umbelazi, you would do well to take the cattle which this white trader has refused, for all men know that you have earned them."

Now Umbelazi sprang up, straightening himself to the full of his great height, and spoke in a voice that was thick with passion.

"I pray your leave to withdraw, O King," he said, "since if I stay here longer I shall grow sorry that I have no spear in my hand. Yet before I go I will tell the truth. Cetewayo hates Saduko, because, knowing him to be a chief of wit and courage, who will grow great, he sought him for his man, saying, 'Sit you in my shadow,' after he had promised to sit in mine. Therefore it is that he heaps these taunts upon me. Let him deny it if he can."

"That I shall not trouble to do, Umbelazi," answered Cetewayo, with a scowl. "Who are you that spy upon my doings, and with a mouth full of lies call me to account before the King? I will hear no more of it. Do you bide here and pay Saduko his price with the person of our sister. For, as the King has promised her, his word cannot be changed. Only let your dog know that I keep a stick for him, if he should snarl at me. Farewell, my Father. I go upon a journey to my own lordship, the land of Gikazi, and there you will find me when you want me, which I pray may not be till after this marriage is finished, for on that I will not trust my eyes to look."

Then, with a salute, he turned and departed, bidding no good-bye to his brother.

My hand, however, he shook in farewell, for Cetewayo was always friendly to me, perhaps because he thought I might be useful to him. Also, as I learned afterwards, he was very pleased with me for the reason that I had refused my share of the Amakoba cattle, and that he knew I had no part in this proposed marriage between Saduko and Nandie, of which, indeed, I now heard for the first time.

"My Father," said Umbelazi, when Cetewayo had gone, "is this to be borne? Am I to blame in the matter? You have heard and seen—answer me, my Father."

"No, you are not to blame this time, Umbelazi," replied the King, with a heavy sigh. "But oh! my sons, my sons, where will your quarrelling end? I think that only a river of blood can quench so fierce a fire, and then which of you will live to reach its bank?"

For a while he looked at Umbelazi, and I saw love and fear in his eye, for towards him Panda always had more affection than for any of his other children.

"Cetewayo has behaved ill," he said at length; "and before a white man, who will report the matter, which makes it worse. He has no right to dictate to me to whom I shall or shall not give my daughters in marriage. Moreover, I have spoken; nor do I change my word because he threatens me. It is known throughout the land that I never change my word; and the white men know it also, do they not, O Macumazana?"

I answered yes, they did. Also, this was true, for, like most weak men, Panda was very obstinate, and honest, too, in his own fashion.

He waved his hand, to show that the subject was ended, then bade Umbelazi go to the gate and send a messenger to bring in "the son of Matiwane."

Presently Saduko arrived, looking very stately and composed as he lifted his right hand and gave Panda the *Bayéte*—the royal salute.

“Be seated,” said the King. “I have words for your ear.”

Thereon, with the most perfect grace, without hurrying and without undue delay, Saduko crouched himself down upon his knees, with one of his elbows resting on the ground, as only a native knows how to do without looking absurd, and waited.

“Son of Matiwane,” said the King, “I have heard all the story of how, with a small company, you destroyed Bangu and most of the men of the Amakoba, and ate up their cattle every one.”

“Your pardon, Black One,” interrupted Saduko. “I am but a boy, I did nothing. It was Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, who sits yonder. His wisdom taught me how to snare the Amakoba, after they were decoyed from their mountain, and it was Tshoza, my uncle, who loosed the cattle from the kraals. I say that I did nothing, except to strike a blow or two with a spear when I must, just as a baboon throws stones at those who would steal its young.”

“I am glad to see that you are no boaster, Saduko,” said Panda. “Would that more of the Zulus were like you in that matter, for then I must not listen to so many loud songs about little things. At least, Bangu was killed and his proud tribe humbled, and, for reasons of state, I am glad that this happened without my moving a regiment or being mixed up with the business, for I tell you that there are some of my family who loved Bangu. But I—I loved your father, Matiwane, whom Bangu butchered, for we were brought up together as boys—yes, and served together in the same regiment, the Amawombe, when the Wild One, my brother, ruled” (he meant Chaka, for among the Zulus the names of dead kings are *hlonipa*—that is, they must not be spoken if it can be avoided). “Therefore,” went on Panda, “for this reason, and for others, I am glad that Bangu has been punished, and that, although vengeance has crawled after him like a footsore bull, at length he has been tossed with its horns and crushed with its knees.”

“*Yebo, Ngonyama!*” (Yes, O Lion!) said Saduko.

“Now, Saduko,” went on Panda, “because you are your father’s son, and because you have shown yourself a man, although you are still little in the land, I am minded to advance you. Therefore I give to you the chieftainship over those who remain of the Amakoba and over all of the Amangwane blood whom you can gather.”

“*Bayéte!* As the King pleases,” said Saduko.

“And I give you leave to become a *kehla*—a wearer of the head-ring—although, as you have said, you are still but a boy, and with it a place upon my Council.”

“*Bayéte!* As the King pleases,” said Saduko, still apparently unmoved by the honours that were being heaped upon him.

“And, Son of Matiwane,” went on Panda, “you are still unmarried, are you not?”

Now, for the first time, Saduko’s face changed. “Yes, Black One,” he said hurriedly, “but—”

Here he caught my eye, and, reading some warning in it, was silent.

“But,” repeated Panda after him, “doubtless you would like to be? Well, it is natural in a young man who wishes to found a House, and therefore I give you leave to marry.”

“*Yebo, Silo!*” (Yes, O Wild Beast!) “I thank the King, but—”

Here I sneezed loudly, and he ceased.

“But,” repeated Panda, “of course, you do not know where to find a wife between the time the hawk stoops and the rat squeaks in its claws. How should you who have never thought of the matter? Also,” he continued, with a smile, “it is well that you have not thought of it, since she whom I shall give to you could not live in the second hut in your kraal and call another *Inkosikazi* [that is, head lady or chieftainess]. Umbelazi, my son, go fetch her of whom we have thought as a bride for this boy.”

Now Umbelazi rose, and went with a broad smile upon his face, while Panda, somewhat fatigued with all his speech-making—for he was very fat and the day was very hot—leaned his head back against the hut and closed his eyes.

“O Black One! O thou who consumeth with rage! [*Dhlangamandhla*]” broke out Saduko, who, I could see, was much disturbed. “I have something to say to you.”

“No doubt, no doubt,” answered Panda drowsily, “but save up your thanks till you have seen, or you will have none left afterwards,” and he snored slightly.

Now I, perceiving that Saduko was about to ruin himself, thought it well to interfere, though what business of mine it was to do so I cannot say. At any rate, if only I had held my tongue at this moment, and allowed Saduko to make a fool of himself, as he wished to do—for where Mameena was concerned he never could be wise—I verily believe that all the history of Zululand would have run a different course, and that many thousands of men, white and black, who are now dead would be alive to-day. But Fate ordered it otherwise. Yes, it was not I who spoke, but Fate. The Angel of Doom used my throat as his trumpet.

Seeing that Panda dozed, I slipped behind Saduko and gripped him by the arm.

“Are you mad?” I whispered into his ear. “Will you throw away your fortune, and your life also?”

“But Mameena,” he whispered back. “I would marry none save Mameena.”

“Fool!” I answered. “Mameena has betrayed and spat upon you. Take what the Heavens send you and give thanks. Would you wear Masapo’s soiled blanket?”

“Macumazahn,” he said in a hollow voice, “I will follow your head, and not my own heart. Yet you sow a strange seed, Macumazahn, or so you may think when you see its fruit.” And he gave me a wild look—a look that frightened me.

There was something in this look which caused me to reflect that I might do well to go away and leave Saduko, Mameena, Nandie, and the rest of them to “dree their weirs,” as the Scotch say, for, after all, what was my finger doing in that very hot stew? Getting burnt, I thought, and not collecting any stew.

Yet, looking back on these events, how could I foresee what would be the end of the madness of Saduko, of the fearful machinations of Mameena, and of the weakness of Umbelazi when she snared him in the net of her beauty, thus bringing about his ruin, through the hate of Saduko and the ambition of Cetewayo? How could I know that, at the back of all these events, stood the old dwarf, Zikali the Wise, working night and day to slake the enmity and fulfil the vengeance which long ago he had conceived and planned against the royal House of Senzangakona and the Zulu people over whom it ruled?

Yes, he stood there like a man behind a great stone upon the brow of a mountain, slowly, remorselessly, with infinite skill, labour, and patience, pushing that stone to the edge of the cliff, whence at length, in the appointed hour, it would thunder down upon those who dwelt beneath, to leave them crushed and no more a people. How could I guess that we, the actors in this play, were all the while helping him to push that stone, and that he cared nothing how many of us were carried with it into the abyss, if only we brought about the triumph of his secret, unutterable rage and hate?

Now I see and understand all these things, as it is easy to do, but then I was blind; nor did the Voices reach my dull ears to warn me, as, how or why I cannot tell, they did, I believe, reach those of Zikali.

Oh, what was the sum of it? Just this, I think, and nothing more—that, as Saduko and the others were Mameena's tools, and as all of them and their passions were Zikali's tools, so he himself was the tool of some unseen Power that used him and us to accomplish its design. Which, I suppose, is fatalism, or, in other words, all these things happened because they must happen. A poor conclusion to reach after so much thought and striving, and not complimentary to man and his boasted powers of free will; still, one to which many of us are often driven, especially if we have lived among savages, where such dramas work themselves out openly and swiftly, unhidden from our eyes by the veils and subterfuges of civilisation. At least, there is this comfort about it—that, if we are but feathers blown by the wind, how can the individual feather be blamed because it did not travel against, turn or keep back the wind?

Well, let me return from these speculations to the history of the facts that caused them.

Just as—a little too late—I had made up my mind that I would go after my own business, and leave Saduko to manage his, through the fence gateway appeared the great, tall Umbelazi leading by the hand a woman. As I saw in a moment, it did not need certain bangles of copper, ornaments of ivory and of very rare pink beads, called *imfibinga*, which only those of the royal House were permitted to wear, to proclaim her a person of rank, for dignity and high blood were apparent in her face, her carriage, her gestures, and all that had to do with her.

Nandie the Sweet was not a great beauty, as was Mameena, although her figure was fine, and her stature like that of all the race of Senzangakona—considerably above the average. To begin with, she was darker in hue, and her lips were rather thick, as was her nose; nor were her eyes large and liquid like those of an antelope. Further, she lacked the informing mystery of Mameena's face, that at times was broken and lit up by flashes of alluring light and quick, sympathetic perception, as a heavy evening sky, that seems to join the dim earth to the dimmer heavens, is illuminated by pulsings of fire, soft and many-hued, suggesting, but not revealing, the strength and splendour that it veils. Nandie had none of these attractions, which, after all, anywhere upon the earth belong only to a few women in each generation. She was a simple, honest-natured, kindly, affectionate young woman of high birth, no more; that is, as these qualities are understood and expressed among her people.

Umbelazi led her forward into the presence of the King, to whom she bowed gracefully enough. Then, after casting a swift, sidelong glance at Saduko, which I found it difficult to interpret, and another of inquiry at me, she folded her hands upon her breast and stood silent, with bent head, waiting to be addressed.

The address was brief enough, for Panda was still sleepy.

"My daughter," he said, with a yawn, "there stands your husband," and he jerked his thumb towards Saduko. "He is a young man and a brave, and unmarried; also one who should grow great in the shadow of our House, especially as he is a friend of your brother, Umbelazi. I understand also that you have seen him and like him. Unless you have anything to say against it, for as, not being a common father, the King receives no cattle—at least in this case—I am not prejudiced, but will listen to your words," and he chuckled in a drowsy fashion. "I propose that the marriage should take place to-morrow. Now, my daughter, have you anything to say? For if so, please say it at once, as I am tired. The eternal wranglings between your brethren, Cetewayo and Umbelazi, have worn me out."

Now Nandie looked about her in her open, honest fashion, her gaze resting first on Saduko, then on Umbelazi, and lastly upon me.

"My Father," she said at length, in her soft, steady voice, "tell me, I beseech you, who proposes this marriage? Is it the Chief Saduko, is it the Prince Umbelazi, or is it the white lord whose true name I do not know, but who is called Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night?"

"I can't remember which of them proposed it," yawned Panda. "Who can keep on talking about things from night till morning? At any rate, I propose it, and I will make your husband a big man among our people. Have you anything to say against it?"

"I have nothing to say, my Father. I have met Saduko, and like him well—for the rest, you are the judge. But," she added slowly, "does Saduko like me? When he speaks my name, does he feel it here?" and she pointed to her throat.

"I am sure I do not know what he feels in his throat," Panda replied testily, "but I feel that mine is dry. Well, as no one says anything, the matter is settled. To-morrow Saduko shall give the *umqoliso* [the Ox of the Girl], that makes marriage—if he has not got one here I will lend it to him, and you can take the new, big hut that I have built in the outer kraal to dwell in for the present. There will be a dance, if you wish it; if not, I do not care, for I have no wish for ceremony just now, who am too troubled with great matters. Now I am going to sleep."

Then sinking from his stool on to his knees, Panda crawled through the doorway of his great hut, which was close to him, and vanished.

Umbelazi and I departed also through the gateway of the fence, leaving Saduko and the Princess Nandie alone together, for there were no attendants present. What happened between them I am sure I do not know, but I gather that, in one way or another, Saduko made himself sufficiently agreeable to the princess to persuade her to take him to husband. Perhaps, being already enamoured of him,

she was not difficult to persuade. At any rate, on the morrow, without any great feasting or fuss, except the customary dance, the *umqoliso*, the "Ox of the Girl," was slaughtered, and Saduko became the husband of a royal maiden of the House of Senzangakona.

Certainly, as I remember reflecting, it was a remarkable rise in life for one who, but a few months before, had been without possessions or a home.

I may add that, after our brief talk in the King's kraal, while Panda was dozing, I had no further words with Saduko on this matter of his marriage, for between its proposal and the event he avoided me, nor did I seek him out. On the day of the marriage also, I trekked for Natal, and for a whole year heard no more of Saduko, Nandie, and Mameena; although, to be frank, I must admit I thought of the last of these persons more often, perhaps, than I should have done.

The truth is that Mameena was one of those women who sticks in a man's mind even more closely than a "Wait-a-bit" thorn does in his coat.

## Chapter IX.

### ALLAN RETURNS TO ZULULAND

A whole year had gone by, in which I did, or tried to do, various things that have no connection with this story, when once more I found myself in Zululand—at Umbezi's kraal indeed. Hither I had trekked in fulfilment of a certain bargain, already alluded to, that was concerned with ivory and guns, which I had made with the old fellow, or, rather, with Masapo, his son-in-law, whom he represented in this matter. Into the exact circumstances of that bargain I do not enter, since at the moment I cannot recall whether I ever obtained the necessary permit to import those guns into Zululand, although now that I am older I earnestly hope that I did so, since it is wrong to sell weapons to natives that may be put to all sorts of unforeseen uses.

At any rate, there I was, sitting alone with the Headman in his hut discussing a dram of "squareface" that I had given to him, for the "trade" was finished to our mutual satisfaction, and Scowl, my body servant, with the hunters, had just carried off the ivory—a fine lot of tusks—to my wagons.

"Well, Umbezi," I said, "and how has it fared with you since we parted a year ago? Have you seen anything of Saduko, who, you may remember, left you in some wrath?"

"Thanks be to my Spirit, I have seen nothing of that wild man, Macumazahn," answered Umbezi, shaking his fat old head in a fashion which showed great anxiety. "Yet I have heard of him, for he sent me a message the other day to tell me that he had not forgotten what he owed me."

"Did he mean the sticks with which he promised to bray you like a green hide?" I inquired innocently.

"I think so, Macumazahn—I think so, for certainly he owes me nothing else. And the worst of it is that, there at Panda's kraal, he has grown like a pumpkin on a dung heap—great, great!"

"And therefore is now one who can pay any debt that he owes, Umbezi," I said, taking a pull at the "squareface" and looking at him over the top of the pannikin.

"Doubtless he can, Macumazahn, and, between you and me, that is the real reason why I—or rather Masapo—was so anxious to get those guns. They were not for hunting, as he told you by the messenger, or for war, but to protect us against Saduko, in case he should attack. Well, now I hope we shall be able to hold our own."

"You and Masapo must teach your people to use them first, Umbezi. But I expect Saduko has forgotten all about both of you now that he is the husband of a princess of the royal blood. Tell me, how goes it with Mameena?"

"Oh, well, well, Macumazahn. For is she not the head lady of the Amasomi? There is nothing wrong with her—nothing at all, except that as yet she has no child; also that—," and he paused.

"That what?" I asked.

"That she hates the very sight of her husband, Masapo, and says that she would rather be married to a baboon—yes, to a baboon—than to him, which gives him offence, after he has paid so many cattle for her. But what of this, Macumazahn? There is always a grain missing upon the finest head of corn. Nothing is *quite* perfect in the world, Macumazahn, and if Mameena does not chance to love her husband—," and he shrugged his shoulders and drank some "squareface."

"Of course it does not matter in the least, Umbezi, except to Mameena and her husband, who no doubt will settle down in time, now that Saduko is married to a princess of the Zulu House."

"I hope so, Macumazahn, but, to tell the truth, I wish you had brought more guns, for I live amongst a terrible lot of people. Masapo, who is furious with Mameena because she will have none of him, and therefore with me, as though *I* could control Mameena; Mameena, who is mad with Masapo, and therefore with me, because I gave her in marriage to him; Saduko, who foams at the mouth at the name of Masapo, because he has married Mameena, whom, it is said, he still loves, and therefore at me, because I am her father and did my best to settle her in the world. Oh, give me some more of that fire-water, Macumazahn, for it makes me forget all these things, and especially that my guardian spirit made me the father of Mameena, with whom you would not run away when you might have done so. Oh, Macumazahn, why did you not run away with Mameena, and turn her into a quiet white woman who ties herself up in sacks, sings songs to the 'Great-Great' in the sky—[that is, hymns to the Power above us]—and never thinks of any man who is not her husband?"

"Because if I had done so, Umbezi, I should have ceased to be a quiet white man. Yes, yes, my friend, I should have been in some such place as yours to-day, and that is the last thing that I wish. And now, Umbezi, you have had quite enough 'squareface,' so I will take the bottle away with me. Good-night."

On the following morning I trekked very early from Umbezi's kraal—before he was up indeed, for the "squareface" made him sleep sound. My destination was Nodwengu, Panda's Great Place, where I hoped to do some trading, but, as I was in no particular hurry, my plan was to go round by Masapo's, and see for myself how it fared between him and Mameena. Indeed, I reached the borders of the Amasomi territory, whereof Masapo was chief, by evening, and camped there. But with the night came reflection, and

reflection told me that I should do well to keep clear of Mameena and her domestic complications, if she had any. So I changed my mind, and next morning trekked on to Nodwengu by the only route that my guides reported to be practicable, one which took me a long way round.

That day, owing to the roughness of the road—if road it could be called—and an accident to one of the wagons, we only covered about fifteen miles, and as night fell were obliged to outspan at the first spot where we could find water. When the oxen had been unyoked I looked about me, and saw that we were in a place that, although I had approached it from a somewhat different direction, I recognised at once as the mouth of the Black Kloof, in which, over a year before, I had interviewed Zikali the Little and Wise. There was no mistaking the spot; that blasted valley, with the piled-up columns of boulders and the overhanging cliff at the end of it, have, so far as I am aware, no exact counterparts in Africa.

I sat upon the box of the first wagon, eating my food, which consisted of some biltong and biscuit, for I had not bothered to shoot any game that day, which was very hot, and wondering whether Zikali were still alive, also whether I should take the trouble to walk up the kloof and find out. On the whole I thought that I would not, as the place repelled me, and I did not particularly wish to hear any more of his prophecies and fierce, ill-omened talk. So I just sat there studying the wonderful effect of the red evening light pouring up between those walls of fantastic rocks.

Presently I perceived, far away, a single human figure—whether it were man or woman I could not tell—walking towards me along the path which ran at the bottom of the cleft. In those gigantic surroundings it looked extraordinarily small and lonely, although perhaps because of the intense red light in which it was bathed, or perhaps just because it was human, a living thing in the midst of all that still, inanimate grandeur, it caught and focused my attention. I grew greatly interested in it; I wondered if it were that of man or woman, and what it was doing here in this haunted valley.

The figure drew nearer, and now I saw it was slender and tall, like that of a lad or of a well-grown woman, but to which sex it belonged I could not see, because it was draped in a cloak of beautiful grey fur. Just then Scowl came to the other side of the wagon to speak to me about something, which took off my attention for the next two minutes. When I looked round again it was to see the figure standing within three yards of me, its face hidden by a kind of hood which was attached to the fur cloak.

“Who are you, and what is your business?” I asked, whereon a gentle voice answered:

“Do you not know me, O Macumazana?”

“How can I know one who is tied up like a gourd in a mat? Yet is it not—is it not—”

“Yes, it is Mameena, and I am very pleased that you should remember my voice, Macumazahn, after we have been separated for such a long, long time,” and, with a sudden movement, she threw back the kaross, hood and all, revealing herself in all her strange beauty.

I jumped down off the wagon-box and took her hand.

“O Macumazana,” she said, while I still held it—or, to be accurate, while she still held mine—“indeed my heart is glad to see a friend again,” and she looked at me with her appealing eyes, which, in the red light, I could see appeared to float in tears.

“A friend, Mameena!” I exclaimed. “Why, now you are so rich, and the wife of a big chief, you must have plenty of friends.”

“Alas! Macumazahn, I am rich in nothing except trouble, for my husband saves, like the ants for winter. Why, he even grudged me this poor kaross; and as for friends, he is so jealous that he will not allow me any.”

“He cannot be jealous of women, Mameena!”

“Oh, women! *Piff!* I do not care for women; they are very unkind to me, because—because—well, perhaps you can guess why, Macumazahn,” she answered, glancing at her own reflection in a little travelling looking-glass that hung from the woodwork of the wagon, for I had been using it to brush my hair, and smiled very sweetly.

“At least you have your husband, Mameena, and I thought that perhaps by this time—”

She held up her hand.

“My husband! Oh, I would that I had him not, for I hate him, Macumazahn; and as for the rest—never! The truth is that I never cared for any man except one whose name *you* may chance to remember, Macumazahn.”

“I suppose you mean Saduko—” I began.

“Tell me, Macumazahn,” she inquired innocently, “are white people very stupid? I ask because you do not seem as clever as you used to be. Or have you perhaps a bad memory?”

Now I felt myself turning red as the sky behind me, and broke in hurriedly:

“If you did not like your husband, Mameena, you should not have married him. You know you need not unless you wished.”

“When one has only two thorn bushes to sit on, Macumazahn, one chooses that which seems to have the fewest prickles, to discover sometimes that they are still there in hundreds, although one did not see them. You know that at length everyone gets tired of standing.”

“Is that why you have taken to walking, Mameena? I mean, what are you doing here alone?”

“I? Oh, I heard that you were passing this way, and came to have a talk with you. No, from you I cannot hide even the least bit of the truth. I came to talk with you, but also I came to see Zikali and ask him what a wife should do who hates her husband.”

“Indeed! And what did he answer you?”

“He answered that he thought she had better run away with another man, if there were one whom she did not hate—out of Zululand, of course,” she replied, looking first at me and then at my wagon and the two horses that were tied to it.

“Is that all he said, Mameena?”

“No. Have I not told you that I cannot hide one grain of the truth from you? He added that the only other thing to be done was to sit still and drink my sour milk, pretending that it is sweet, until my Spirit gives me a new cow. He seemed to think that my Spirit

would be bountiful in the matter of new cows—one day.”

“Anything more?” I inquired.

“One little thing. Have I not told you that you shall have all—all the truth? Zikali seemed to think also that at last every one of my herd of cows, old and new, would come to a bad end. He did not tell me to what end.”

She turned her head aside, and when she looked up again I saw that she was weeping, really weeping this time, not just making her eyes swim, as she did before.

“Of course they will come to a bad end, Macumazahn,” she went on in a soft, thick voice, “for I and all with whom I have to do were ‘torn out of the reeds’ [i.e. created] that way. And that’s why I won’t tempt you to run away with me any more, as I meant to do when I saw you, because it is true, Macumazahn you are the only man I ever liked or ever shall like; and you know I could make you run away with me if I chose, although I am black and you are white—oh, yes, before to-morrow morning. But I won’t do it; for why should I catch you in my unlucky web and bring you into all sorts of trouble among my people and your own? Go you your road, Macumazahn, and I will go mine as the wind blows me. And now give me a cup of water and let me be away—a cup of water, no more. Oh, do not be afraid for me, or melt too much, lest I should melt also. I have an escort waiting over yonder hill. There, thank you for your water, Macumazahn, and good night. Doubtless we shall meet again ere long, and— I forgot; the Little Wise One said he would like to have a talk with you. Good night, Macumazahn, good night. I trust that you did a profitable trade with Umbezi my father and Masapo my husband. I wonder why such men as these should have been chosen to be my father and my husband. Think it over, Macumazahn, and tell me when next we meet. Give me that pretty mirror, Macumazahn; when I look in it I shall see you as well as myself, and that will please me—you don’t know how much. I thank you. Good night.”

In another minute I was watching her solitary little figure, now wrapped again in the hooded kaross, as it vanished over the brow of the rise behind us, and really, as she went, I felt a lump rising in my throat. Notwithstanding all her wickedness—and I suppose she was wicked—there was something horribly attractive about Mameena.

When she had gone, taking my only looking-glass with her, and the lump in my throat had gone also, I began to wonder how much fact there was in her story. She had protested so earnestly that she told me all the truth that I felt sure there must be something left behind. Also I remembered she had said Zikali wanted to see me. Well, the end of it was I took a moonlight walk up that dreadful gorge, into which not even Scowl would accompany me, because he declared that the place was well known to be haunted by *imikovu*, or spectres who have been raised from the dead by wizards.

It was a long and disagreeable walk, and somehow I felt very depressed and insignificant as I trudged on between those gigantic cliffs, passing now through patches of bright moonlight and now through deep pools of shadow, threading my way among clumps of bush or round the bases of tall pillars of piled-up stones, till at length I came to the overhanging cliffs at the end, which frowned down on me like the brows of some titanic demon.

Well, I got to the end at last, and at the gate of the kraal fence was met by one of those fierce and huge men who served the dwarf as guards. Suddenly he emerged from behind a stone, and having scanned me for a moment in silence, beckoned to me to follow him, as though I were expected. A minute later I found myself face to face with Zikali, who was seated in the clear moonlight just outside the shadow of his hut, and engaged, apparently, in his favourite occupation of carving wood with a rough native knife of curious shape.

For a while he took no notice of me; then suddenly looked up, shaking back his braided grey locks, and broke into one of his great laughs.

“So it is you, Macumazahn,” he said. “Well, I knew you were passing my way and that Mameena would send you here. But why do you come to see the ‘Thing-that-should-not-have-been-born’? To tell me how you fared with the buffalo with the split horn, eh?”

“No, Zikali, for why should I tell you what you know already? Mameena said you wished to talk with me, that was all.”

“Then Mameena lied,” he answered, “as is her nature, in whose throat live four false words for every one of truth. Still, sit down, Macumazahn. There is beer made ready for you by that stool; and give me the knife and a pinch of the white man’s snuff that you have brought for me as a present.”

I produced these articles, though how he knew that I had them with me I cannot tell, nor did I think it worth while to inquire. The snuff, I remember, pleased him very much, but of the knife he said that it was a pretty toy, but he would not know how to use it. Then we fell to talking.

“What was Mameena doing here?” I asked boldly.

“What was she doing at your wagons?” he asked. “Oh, do not stop to tell me; I know, I know. That is a very good Snake of yours, Macumazahn, which always just lets you slip through her fingers, when, if she chose to close her hand— Well, well, I do not betray the secrets of my clients; but I say this to you—go on to the kraal of the son of Senzangakona, and you will see things happen that will make you laugh, for Mameena will be there, and the mongrel Masapo, her husband. Truly she hates him well, and, after all, I would rather be loved than hated by Mameena, though both are dangerous. Poor Mongrel! Soon the jackals will be chewing his bones.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked.

“Only because Mameena tells me that he is a great wizard, and the jackals eat many wizards in Zululand. Also he is an enemy of Panda’s House, is he not?”

“You have been giving her some bad counsel, Zikali,” I said, blurting out the thought in my mind.

“Perhaps, perhaps, Macumazahn; only I may call it good counsel. I have my own road to walk, and if I can find some to clear away the thorns that would prick my feet, what of it? Also she will get her pay, who finds life dull up there among the Amasomi, with one she hates for a hut-fellow. Go you and watch, and afterwards, when you have an hour to spare, come and tell me what happens—that is, if I do not chance to be there to see for myself.”

"Is Saduko well?" I asked to change the subject, for I did not wish to become privy to the plots that filled the air.

"I am told that his tree grows great, that it overshadows all the royal kraal. I think that Mameena wishes to sleep in the shade of it. And now you are weary, and so am I. Go back to your wagons, Macumazahn, for I have nothing more to say to you to-night. But be sure to return and tell me what chances at Panda's kraal. Or, as I have said, perhaps I shall meet you there. Who knows, who knows?"

Now, it will be observed that there was nothing very remarkable in this conversation between Zikali and myself. He did not tell me any deep secrets or make any great prophecy. It may be wondered, indeed, when there is so much to record, why I set it down at all.

My answer is, because of the extraordinary impression that it produced upon me. Although so little was said, I felt all the while that those few words were a veil hiding terrible events to be. I was sure that some dreadful scheme had been hatched between the old dwarf and Mameena whereof the issue would soon become apparent, and that he had sent me away in a hurry after he learned that she had told me nothing, because he feared lest I should stumble on its cue and perhaps cause it to fail.

At any rate, as I walked back to my wagons by moonlight down that dreadful gorge, the hot, thick air seemed to me to have a physical taste and smell of blood, and the dank foliage of the tropical trees that grew there, when now and again a puff of wind stirred them, moaned like the fabled *imikovu*, or as men might do in their last faint agony. The effect upon my nerves was quite strange, for when at last I reached my wagons I was shaking like a reed, and a cold perspiration, unnatural enough upon that hot night, poured from my face and body.

Well, I took a couple of stiff tots of "squareface" to pull myself together, and at length went to sleep, to awake before dawn with a headache. Looking out of the wagon, to my surprise I saw Scowl and the hunters, who should have been snoring, standing in a group and talking to each other in frightened whispers. I called Scowl to me and asked what was the matter.

"Nothing, Baas," he said with a shamefaced air; "only there are so many spooks about this place. They have been passing in and out of it all night."

"Spooks, you idiot!" I answered. "Probably they were people going to visit the *Nyanga*, Zikali."

"Perhaps, Baas; only then we do not know why they should all look like dead people—princes, some of them, by their dress—and walk upon the air a man's height from the ground."

"Pooh!" I replied. "Do you not know the difference between owls in the mist and dead kings? Make ready, for we trek at once; the air here is full of fever."

"Certainly, Baas," he said, springing off to obey; and I do not think I ever remember two wagons being got under way quicker than they were that morning.

I merely mention this nonsense to show that the Black Kloof could affect other people's nerves as well as my own.

In due course I reached Nodwengu without accident, having sent forward one of my hunters to report my approach to Panda. When my wagons arrived outside the Great Place they were met by none other than my old friend, Maputa, he who had brought me back the pills before our attack upon Bangu.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said. "I am sent by the King to say that you are welcome and to point you out a good place to outspan; also to give you permission to trade as much as you will in this town, since he knows that your dealings are always fair."

I returned my thanks in the usual fashion, adding that I had brought a little present for the King which I would deliver when it pleased him to receive me. Then I invited Maputa, to whom I also offered some trifle which delighted him very much, to ride with me on the wagon-box till we came to the selected outspan.

This, by the way, proved, to be a very good place indeed, a little valley full of grass for the cattle—for by the King's order it had not been grazed—with a stream of beautiful water running down it. Moreover it overlooked a great open space immediately in front of the main gate of the town, so that I could see everything that went on and all who arrived or departed.

"You will be comfortable here, Macumazahn," said Maputa, "during your stay, which we hope will be long, since, although there will soon be a mighty crowd at Nodwengu, the King has given orders that none except your own servants are to enter this valley."

"I thank the King; but why will there be a crowd, Maputa?"

"Oh!" he answered with a shrug of the shoulders, "because of a new thing. All the tribes of the Zulus are to come up to be reviewed. Some say that Cetewayo has brought this about, and some say that it is Umbelazi. But I am sure that it is the work of neither of these, but of Saduko, your old friend, though what his object is I cannot tell you. I only trust," he added uneasily, "that it will not end in bloodshed between the Great Brothers."

"So Saduko has grown tall, Maputa?"

"Tall as a tree, Macumazahn. His whisper in the King's ear is louder than the shouts of others. Moreover, he has become a 'self-eater' [that is a Zulu term which means one who is very haughty]. You will have to wait on him, Macumazahn; he will not wait on you."

"Is it so?" I answered. "Well, tall trees are blown down sometimes."

He nodded his wise old head. "Yes, Macumazahn; I have seen plenty grow and fall in my time, for at last the swimmer goes with the stream. Anyhow, you will be able to do a good trade among so many, and, whatever happens, none will harm you whom all love. And now farewell; I bear your messages to the King, who sends an ox for you to kill lest you should grow hungry in his house."

That same evening I saw Saduko and the others, as I shall tell. I had been up to visit the King and give him my present, a case of English table-knives with bone handles, which pleased him greatly, although he did not in the least know how to use them. Indeed, without their accompanying forks these are somewhat futile articles. I found the old fellow very tired and anxious, but as he was surrounded by *indunas*, I had no private talk with him. Seeing that he was busy, I took my leave as soon as I could, and when I walked away whom should I meet but Saduko.

I saw him while he was a good way off, advancing towards the inner gate with a train of attendants like a royal personage, and knew very well that he saw me. Making up my mind what to do at once, I walked straight on to him, forcing him to give me the path, which he did not wish to do before so many people, and brushed past him as though he were a stranger. As I expected, this treatment had the desired effect, for after we had passed each other he turned and said:

"Do you not know me, Macumazahn?"

"Who calls?" I asked. "Why, friend, your face is familiar to me. How are you named?"

"Have you forgotten Saduko?" he said in a pained voice.

"No, no, of course not," I answered. "I know you now, although you seem somewhat changed since we went out hunting and fighting together—I suppose because you are fatter. I trust that you are well, Saduko? Good-bye. I must be going back to my wagons. If you wish to see me you will find me there."

These remarks, I may add, seemed to take Saduko very much aback. At any rate, he found no reply to them, even when old Maputa, with whom I was walking, and some others sniggered aloud. There is nothing that Zulus enjoy so much as seeing one whom they consider an upstart set in his place.

Well, a couple of hours afterwards, just as the sun was sinking, who should walk up to my wagons but Saduko himself, accompanied by a woman whom I recognised at once as his wife, the Princess Nandie, who carried a fine baby boy in her arms. Rising, I saluted Nandie and offered her my camp-stool, which she looked at suspiciously and declined, preferring to seat herself on the ground after the native fashion. So I took it back again, and after I had sat down on it, not before, stretched out my hand to Saduko, who by this time was quite humble and polite.

Well, we talked away, and by degrees, without seeming too much interested in them, I was furnished with a list of all the advancements which it had pleased Panda to heap upon Saduko during the past year. In their way they were remarkable enough, for it was much as though some penniless country gentleman in England had been promoted in that short space of time to be one of the premier peers of the kingdom and endowed with great offices and estates. When he had finished the count of them he paused, evidently waiting for me to congratulate him. But all I said was:

"By the Heavens above I am sorry for you, Saduko! How many enemies you must have made! What a long way there will be for you to fall one night!"—a remark at which the quiet Nandie broke into a low laugh that I think pleased her husband even less than my sarcasm. "Well," I went on, "I see that you have got a baby, which is much better than all these titles. May I look at it, *Inkosazana*?"

Of course she was delighted, and we proceeded to inspect the baby, which evidently she loved more than anything on earth. Whilst we were examining the child and chatting about it, Saduko sitting by meanwhile in the sulks, who on earth should appear but Mameena and her fat and sullen-looking husband, the chief Masapo.

"Oh, Macumazahn," she said, appearing to notice no one else, "how pleased I am to see you after a whole long year!"

I stared at her and my jaw dropped. Then I recovered myself, thinking she must have made a mistake and meant to say "week."

"Twelve moons," she went on, "and, Macumazahn, not one of them has gone by but I have thought of you several times and wondered if we should ever meet again. Where have you been all this while?"

"In many places," I answered; "amongst others at the Black Kloof, where I called upon the dwarf, Zikali, and lost my looking-glass."

"The *Nyanga*, Zikali! Oh, how often have I wished to see him. But, of course, I cannot, for I am told he will not receive any women."

"I don't know, I am sure," I replied, "but you might try; perhaps he would make an exception in your favour."

"I think I will, Macumazahn," she murmured, whereon I collapsed into silence, feeling that things were getting beyond me.

When I recovered myself a little it was to hear Mameena greeting Saduko with much effusion, and complimenting him on his rise in life, which she said she had always foreseen. This remark seemed to bowl out Saduko also, for he made no answer to it, although I noticed that he could not take his eyes off Mameena's beautiful face. Presently, however, he seemed to become aware of Masapo, and instantly his whole demeanour changed, for it grew proud and even terrible. Masapo tendered him some greeting; whereon Saduko turned upon him and said:

"What, chief of the Amasomi, do you give the good-day to an *umfokazana* and a mangy hyena? Why do you do this? Is it because the low *umfokazana* has become a noble and the mangy hyena has put on a tiger's coat?" And he glared at him like a veritable tiger.

Masapo made no answer that I could catch. Muttering some inaudible words, he turned to depart, and in doing so—quite innocently, I think—struck Nandie, knocking her over on to her back and causing the child to fall out of her arms in such fashion that its tender head struck against a pebble with sufficient force to cause it to bleed.

Saduko leapt at him, smiting him across the shoulders with the little stick that he carried. For a moment Masapo paused, and I thought that he was going to show fight. If he had any such intention, however, he changed his mind, for without a word, or showing any resentment at the insult which he had received, he broke into a heavy run and vanished among the evening shadows. Mameena, who had observed all, broke into something else, namely, a laugh.

"*Piff!* My husband is big yet not brave," she said, "but I do not think he meant to hurt you, woman."

"Do you speak to me, wife of Masapo?" asked Nandie with gentle dignity, as she gained her feet and picked up the stunned child. "If so, my name and titles are the *Inkosazana* Nandie, daughter of the Black One and wife of the lord Saduko."

"Your pardon," replied Mameena humbly, for she was cowed at once. "I did not know who you were, *Inkosazana*."

"It is granted, wife of Masapo. Macumazahn, give me water, I pray you, that I may bathe the head of my child."

The water was brought, and presently, when the little one seemed all right again, for it had only received a scratch, Nandie thanked me and departed to her own huts, saying with a smile to her husband as she passed that there was no need for him to accompany her,

as she had servants waiting at the kraal gate. So Saduko stayed behind, and Mameena stayed also. He talked with me for quite a long while, for he had much to tell me, although all the time I felt that his heart was not in his talk. His heart was with Mameena, who sat there and smiled continually in her mysterious way, only putting in a word now and again, as though to excuse her presence.

At length she rose and said with a sigh that she must be going back to where the Amasomi were in camp, as Masapo would need her to see to his food. By now it was quite dark, although I remember that from time to time the sky was lit up by sheet lightning, for a storm was brewing. As I expected, Saduko rose also, saying that he would see me on the morrow, and went away with Mameena, walking like one who dreams.

A few minutes later I had occasion to leave the wagons in order to inspect one of the oxen which was tied up by itself at a distance, because it had shown signs of some sickness that might or might not be catching. Moving quietly, as I always do from a hunter's habit, I walked alone to the place where the beast was tethered behind some mimosa thorns. Just as I reached these thorns the broad lightning shone out vividly, and showed me Saduko holding the unresisting shape of Mameena in his arms and kissing her passionately.

Then I turned and went back to the wagons even more quietly than I had come.

I should add that on the morrow I found out that, after all, there was nothing serious the matter with my ox.

## Chapter X.

### THE SMELLING-OUT

After these events matters went on quietly for some time. I visited Saduko's huts—very fine huts—about the doors of which sat quite a number of his tribesmen, who seemed glad to see me again. Here I learned from the Lady Nandie that her babe, whom she loved dearly, was none the worse for its little accident. Also I learned from Saduko himself, who came in before I left, attended like a prince by several notable men, that he had made up his quarrel with Masapo, and, indeed, apologised to him, as he found that he had not really meant to insult the princess, his wife, having only thrust her over by accident. Saduko added indeed that now they were good friends, which was well for Masapo, a man whom the King had no cause to like. I said that I was glad to hear it, and went on to call upon Masapo, who received me with enthusiasm, as also did Mameena.

Here I noted with pleasure that this pair seemed to be on much better terms than I understood had been the case in the past, for Mameena even addressed her husband on two separate occasions in very affectionate language, and fetched something that he wanted without waiting to be asked. Masapo, too, was in excellent spirits, because, as he told me, the old quarrel between him and Saduko was thoroughly made up, their reconciliation having been sealed by an interchange of gifts. He added that he was very glad that this was the case, since Saduko was now one of the most powerful men in the country, who could harm him much if he chose, especially as some secret enemy had put it about of late that he, Masapo, was an enemy of the King's House, and an evil-doer who practised witchcraft. In proof of his new friendship, however, Saduko had promised that these slanders should be looked into and their originator punished, if he or she could be found.

Well, I congratulated him and took my departure, "thinking furiously," as the Frenchman says. That there was a tragedy pending I was sure; this weather was too calm to last; the water ran so still because it was preparing to leap down some hidden precipice.

Yet what could I do? Tell Masapo I had seen his wife being embraced by another man? Surely that was not my business; it was Masapo's business to attend to her conduct. Also they would both deny it, and I had no witness. Tell him that Saduko's reconciliation with him was not sincere, and that he had better look to himself? How did I know it was not sincere? It might suit Saduko's book to make friends with Masapo, and if I interfered I should only make enemies and be called a liar who was working for some secret end.

Go to Panda and confide my suspicions to him? He was far too anxious and busy about great matters to listen to me, and if he did, would only laugh at this tale of a petty flirtation. No, there was nothing to be done except sit still and wait. Very possibly I was mistaken, after all, and things would smooth themselves out, as they generally do.

Meanwhile the "reviewing," or whatever it may have been, was in progress, and I was busy with my own affairs, making hay while the sun shone. So great were the crowds of people who came up to Nodwengu that in a week I had sold everything I had to sell in the two wagons, that were mostly laden with cloth, beads, knives and so forth. Moreover, the prices I got were splendid, since the buyers bid against each other, and before I was cleared out I had collected quite a herd of cattle, also a quantity of ivory. These I sent on to Natal with one of the wagons, remaining behind myself with the other, partly because Panda asked me to do so—for now and again he would seek my advice on sundry questions—and partly from curiosity.

There was plenty to be curious about up at Nodwengu just then, since no one was sure that civil war would not break out between the princes Cetewayo and Umbelazi, whose factions were present in force.

It was averted for the time, however, by Umbelazi keeping away from the great gathering under pretext of being sick, and leaving Saduko and some others to watch his interests. Also the rival regiments were not allowed to approach the town at the same time. So that public cloud passed over, to the enormous relief of everyone, especially of Panda the King. As to the private cloud whereof this history tells, it was otherwise.

As the tribes came up to the Great Place they were reviewed and sent away, since it was impossible to feed so vast a multitude as would have collected had they all remained. Thus the Amasomi, a small people who were amongst the first to arrive, soon left. Only, for some reason which I never quite understood, Masapo, Mameena and a few of Masapo's children and headmen were detained there; though perhaps, if she had chosen, Mameena could have given an explanation.

Well, things began to happen. Sundry personages were taken ill, and some of them died suddenly; and soon it was noted that all these people either lived near to where Masapo's family was lodged or had at some time or other been on bad terms with him. Thus Saduko himself was taken ill, or said he was; at any rate, he vanished from public gaze for three days, and reappeared looking very sorry for himself, though I could not observe that he had lost strength or weight. These catastrophes I pass over, however, in order to come to the greatest of them, which is one of the turning points of this chronicle.

After recovering from his alleged sickness Saduko gave a kind of thanksgiving feast, at which several oxen were killed. I was present at this feast, or rather at the last part of it, for I only put in what may be called a complimentary appearance, having no taste for such native gorgings. As it drew near its close Saduko sent for Nandie, who at first refused to come as there were no women present—I think because he wished to show his friends that he had a princess of the royal blood for his wife, who had borne him a son that one day would be great in the land. For Saduko, as I have said, had become a "self-eater," and this day his pride was inflamed by the adulation of the company and by the beer that he had drunk.

At length Nandie did come, carrying her babe, from which she never would be parted. In her dignified, ladylike fashion (although it seems an odd term to apply to a savage, I know none that describes her better) she greeted first me and then sundry of the other guests, saying a few words to each of them. At length she came opposite to Masapo, who had dined not wisely but too well, and to him, out of her natural courtesy, spoke rather longer than to the others, inquiring after his wife, Mameena, and others. At the moment it occurred to me that she did this in order to assure him that she bore no malice because of the accident of a while before, and was a party to her husband's reconciliation with him.

Masapo, in a hazy way, tried to reciprocate these kind intentions. Rising to his feet, his fat, coarse body swaying to and fro because of the beer that he had drunk, he expressed satisfaction at the feast that had been prepared in her house. Then, his eyes falling on the child, he began to declaim about its size and beauty, until he was stopped by the murmured protests of others, since among natives it is held to be not fortunate to praise a young child. Indeed, the person who does so is apt to be called an *umtakati*, or bewitcher, who will bring evil upon its head, a word that I heard murmured by several near to me. Not satisfied with this serious breach of etiquette, the intoxicated Masapo snatched the infant from its mother's arms under pretext of looking for the hurt that had been caused to its brow when it fell to the ground at my camp, and finding none, proceeded to kiss it with his thick lips.

Nandie dragged it from him, saying:

"Would you bring death upon my son, O Chief of the Amasomi?"

Then, turning, she walked away from the feasters, upon whom there fell a certain hush.

Fearing lest something unpleasant should ensue, for I saw Saduko biting his lips with rage not unmixed with fear, and remembering Masapo's reputation as a wizard, I took advantage of this pause to bid a general good night to the company and retire to my camp.

What happened immediately after I left I do not know, but just before dawn on the following morning I was awakened from sleep in my wagon by my servant Scowl, who said that a messenger had come from the huts of Saduko, begging that I would proceed there at once and bring the white man's medicines, as his child was very ill. Of course I got up and went, taking with me some *ipecacuanha* and a few other remedies that I thought might be suitable for infantile ailments.

Outside the huts, which I reached just as the sun began to rise, I was met by Saduko himself, who was coming to seek me, as I saw at once, in a state of terrible grief.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"O Macumazana," he answered, "that dog Masapo has bewitched my boy, and unless you can save him he dies."

"Nonsense," I said, "why do you utter wind? If the babe is sick, it is from some natural cause."

"Wait till you see it," he replied.

Well, I went into the big hut, and there found Nandie and some other women, also a native doctor or two. Nandie was seated on the floor looking like a stone image of grief, for she made no sound, only pointed with her finger to the infant that lay upon a mat in front of her.

A single glance showed me that it was dying of some disease of which I had no knowledge, for its dusky little body was covered with red blotches and its tiny face twisted all awry. I told the women to heat water, thinking that possibly this might be a case of convulsions, which a hot bath would mitigate; but before it was ready the poor babe uttered a thin wail and died.

Then, when she saw that her child was gone, Nandie spoke for the first time.

"The wizard has done his work well," she said, and flung herself face downwards on the floor of the hut.

As I did not know what to answer, I went out, followed by Saduko.

"What has killed my son, Macumazahn?" he asked in a hollow voice, the tears running down his handsome face, for he had loved his firstborn.

"I cannot tell," I replied; "but had he been older I should have thought he had eaten something poisonous, which seems impossible."

"Yes, Macumazahn, and the poison that he has eaten came from the breath of a wizard whom you may chance to have seen kiss him last night. Well, his life shall be avenged."

"Saduko," I exclaimed, "do not be unjust. There are many sicknesses that may have killed your son of which I have no knowledge, who am not a trained doctor."

"I will not be unjust, Macumazahn. The babe has died by witchcraft, like others in this town of late, but the evil-doer may not be he whom I suspect. That is for the smellers-out to decide," and without more words he turned and left me.

Next day Masapo was put upon his trial before a Court of Councillors, over which the King himself presided, a very unusual thing for him to do, and one which showed the great interest he took in the case.

At this court I was summoned to give evidence, and, of course, confined myself to answering such questions as were put to me. Practically these were but two. What had passed at my wagons when Masapo had knocked over Nandie and her child, and Saduko had struck him, and what had I seen at Saduko's feast when Masapo had kissed the infant? I told them in as few words as I could, and after some slight cross-examination by Masapo, made with a view to prove that the upsetting of Nandie was an accident and that he was drunk at Saduko's feast, to both of which suggestions I assented, I rose to go. Panda, however, stopped me and bade me describe the aspect of the child when I was called in to give it medicine.

I did so as accurately as possible, and could see that my account made a deep impression on the mind of the court. Then Panda asked me if I had ever seen any similar case, to which I was obliged to reply:

"No, I have not."

After this the Councillors consulted privately, and when we were called back the King gave his judgment, which was very brief. It was evident, he said, that there had been events which might have caused enmity to arise in the mind of Masapo against Saduko, by

whom Masapo had been struck with a stick. Therefore, although a reconciliation had taken place, there seemed to be a possible motive for revenge. But if Masapo killed the child, there was no evidence to show how he had done so. Moreover, that infant, his own grandson, had not died of any known disease. He had, however, died of a similar disease to that which had carried off certain others with whom Masapo had been mixed up, whereas more, including Saduko himself, had been sick and recovered, all of which seemed to make a strong case against Masapo.

Still, he and his Councillors wished not to condemn without full proof. That being so, they had determined to call in the services of some great witch-doctor, one who lived at a distance and knew nothing of the circumstances. Who that doctor should be was not yet settled. When it was and he had arrived, the case would be re-opened, and meanwhile Masapo would be kept a close prisoner. Finally, he prayed that the white man, Macumazahn, would remain at his town until the matter was settled.

So Masapo was led off, looking very dejected, and, having saluted the King, we all went away.

I should add that, except for the remission of the case to the court of the witch-doctor, which, of course, was an instance of pure Kafir superstition, this judgment of the King's seemed to me well reasoned and just, very different indeed from what would have been given by Dingaan or Chaka, who were wont, on less evidence, to make a clean sweep not only of the accused, but of all his family and dependents.

About eight days later, during which time I had heard nothing of the matter and seen no one connected with it, for the whole thing seemed to have become *Zila*—that is, not to be talked about—I received a summons to attend the “smelling-out,” and went, wondering what witch-doctor had been chosen for that bloody and barbarous ceremony. Indeed, I had not far to go, since the place selected for the occasion was outside the fence of the town of Nodwengu, on that great open stretch of ground which lay at the mouth of the valley where I was camped. Here, as I approached, I saw a vast multitude of people crowded together, fifty deep or more, round a little oval space not much larger than the pit of a theatre. On the inmost edge of this ring were seated many notable people, male and female, and as I was conducted to the side of it which was nearest to the gate of the town, I observed among them Saduko, Masapo, Mameena and others, and mixed up with them a number of soldiers, who were evidently on duty.

Scarcely had I seated myself on a camp-stool, carried by my servant Scowl, when through the gate of the kraal issued Panda and certain of his Council, whose appearance the multitude greeted with the royal salute of *Bayéte*, that came from them in a deep and simultaneous roar of sound. When its echoes died away, in the midst of a deep silence Panda spoke, saying:

“Bring forth the Nyanga [doctor]. Let the *umhlahlo* [that is, the witch-trial] begin!”

There was a long pause, and then in the open gateway appeared a solitary figure that at first sight seemed to be scarcely human, the figure of a dwarf with a gigantic head, from which hung long, white hair, plaited into locks. It was Zikali, no other!

Quite unattended, and naked save for his moocha, for he had on him none of the ordinary paraphernalia of the witch-doctor, he waddled forward with a curious toad-like gait till he had passed through the Councillors and stood in the open space of the ring. Halting there, he looked about him slowly with his deep-set eyes, turning as he looked, till at length his glance fell upon the King.

“What would you have of me, Son of Senzangakona?” he asked. “Many years have passed since last we met. Why do you drag me from my hut, I who have visited the kraal of the King of the Zulus but twice since the ‘Black One’ [Chaka] sat upon the throne—once when the Boers were killed by him who went before you, and once when I was brought forth to see all who were left of my race, shoots of the royal Dwandwe stock, slain before my eyes. Do you bear me hither that I may follow them into the darkness, O Child of Senzangakona? If so I am ready; only then I have words to say that it may not please you to hear.”

His deep, rumbling voice echoed into silence, while the great audience waited for the King's answer. I could see that they were all afraid of this man, yes, even Panda was afraid, for he shifted uneasily upon his stool. At length he spoke, saying:

“Not so, O Zikali. Who would wish to do hurt to the wisest and most ancient man in all the land, to him who touches the far past with one hand and the present with the other, to him who was old before our grandfathers began to be? Nay, you are safe, you on whom not even the ‘Black One’ dared to lay a finger, although you were his enemy and he hated you. As for the reason why you have been brought here, tell it to us, O Zikali. Who are we that we should instruct you in the ways of wisdom?”

When the dwarf heard this he broke into one of his great laughs.

“So at last the House of Senzangakona acknowledges that I have wisdom. Then before all is done they will think me wise indeed.”

He laughed again in his ill-omened fashion and went on hurriedly, as though he feared that he should be called upon to explain his words:

“Where is the fee? Where is the fee? Is the King so poor that he expects an old Dwandwe doctor to divine for nothing, just as though he were working for a private friend?”

Panda made a motion with his hand, and ten fine heifers were driven into the circle from some place where they had been kept in waiting.

“Sorry beasts!” said Zikali contemptuously, “compared to those we used to breed before the time of Senzangakona”—a remark which caused a loud “*Wow!*” of astonishment to be uttered by the multitude that heard it. “Still, such as they are, let them be taken to my kraal, with a bull, for I have none.”

The cattle were driven away, and the ancient dwarf squatted himself down and stared at the ground, looking like a great black toad. For a long while—quite ten minutes, I should think—he stared thus, till I, for one, watching him intently, began to feel as though I were mesmerised.

At length he looked up, tossing back his grey locks, and said:

“I see many things in the dust. Oh, yes, it is alive, it is alive, and tells me many things. Show that you are alive, O Dust. Look!”

As he spoke, throwing his hands upwards, there arose at his very feet one of those tiny and incomprehensible whirlwinds with which all who know South Africa will be familiar. It drove the dust together; it lifted it in a tall, spiral column that rose and rose to a height of fifty feet or more. Then it died away as suddenly as it had come, so that the dust fell down again over Zikali, over the King,

and over three of his sons who sat behind him. Those three sons, I remember, were named Tshonkwani, Dabulesinye, and Mantantashiya. As it chanced, by a strange coincidence all of these were killed at the great battle of the Tugela of which I have to tell.

Now again an exclamation of fear and wonder rose from the audience, who set down this lifting of the dust at Zikali's very feet not to natural causes, but to the power of his magic. Moreover, those on whom it had fallen, including the King, rose hurriedly and shook and brushed it from their persons with a zeal that was not, I think, inspired by a mere desire for cleanliness. But Zikali only laughed again in his terrible fashion and let it lie on his fresh-oiled body, which it turned to the dull, dead hue of a grey adder.

He rose and, stepping here and there, examined the new-fallen dust. Then he put his hand into a pouch he wore and produced from it a dried human finger, whereof the nail was so pink that I think it must have been coloured—a sight at which the circle shuddered.

“Be clever,” he said, “O Finger of her I loved best; be clever and write in the dust as yonder Macumazana can write, and as some of the Dwandwe used to write before we became slaves and bowed ourselves down before the Great Heavens.” (By this he meant the Zulus, whose name means the Heavens.) “Be clever, dear Finger which caressed me once, me, the ‘Thing-that-should-not-have-been-born,’ as more will think before I die, and write those matters that it pleases the House of Senzangakona to know this day.”

Then he bent down, and with the dead finger at three separate spots made certain markings in the fallen dust, which to me seemed to consist of circles and dots; and a strange and horrid sight it was to see him do it.

“I thank you, dear Finger. Now sleep, sleep, your work is done,” and slowly he wrapped the relic up in some soft material and restored it to his pouch.

Then he studied the first of the markings and asked: “What am I here for? What am I here for? Does he who sits upon the Throne desire to know how long he has to reign?”

Now, those of the inner circle of the spectators, who at these “smellings-out” act as a kind of chorus, looked at the King, and, seeing that he shook his head vigorously, stretched out their right hands, holding the thumb downwards, and said simultaneously in a cold, low voice:

“*Izwa!*” (That is, “We hear you.”)

Zikali stamped upon this set of markings.

“It is well,” he said. “He who sits upon the Throne does not desire to know how long he has to reign, and therefore the dust has forgotten and shows it not to me.”

Then he walked to the next markings and studied them.

“Does the Child of Senzangakona desire to know which of his sons shall live and which shall die; aye, and which of them shall sleep in his hut when he is gone?”

Now a great roar of “*Izwa!*” accompanied by the clapping of hands, rose from all the outer multitude who heard, for there was no information that the Zulu people desired so earnestly as this at the time of which I write.

But again Panda, who, I saw, was thoroughly alarmed at the turn things were taking, shook his head vigorously, whereon the obedient chorus negatived the question in the same fashion as before.

Zikali stamped upon the second set of markings, saying:

“The people desire to know, but the Great Ones are afraid to learn, and therefore the dust has forgotten who in the days to come shall sleep in the hut of the King and who shall sleep in the bellies of the jackals and the crops of the vultures after they have ‘gone beyond’ by the bridge of spears.”

Now, at this awful speech (which, both because of all that it implied of bloodshed and civil war and of the wild, wailing voice in which it was spoken, that seemed quite different from Zikali's, caused everyone who heard it, including myself, I am afraid, to gasp and shiver) the King sprang from his stool as though to put a stop to such doctoring. Then, after his fashion, he changed his mind and sat down again. But Zikali, taking no heed, went to the third set of marks and studied them.

“It would seem,” he said, “that I am awakened from sleep in my Black House yonder to tell of a very little matter, that might well have been dealt with by any common *Nyanga* born but yesterday. Well, I have taken my fee, and I will earn it, although I thought that I was brought here to speak of great matters, such as the death of princes and the fortunes of peoples. Is it desired that my Spirit should speak of wizardries in this town of Nodwengu?”

“*Izwa!*” said the chorus in a loud voice.

Zikali nodded his great head and seemed to talk with the dust, waiting now and again for an answer.

“Good,” he said; “they are many, and the dust has told them all to me. Oh, they are very many”—and he glared around him—“so many that if I spoke them all the hyenas of the hills would be full to-night—”

Here the audience began to show signs of great apprehension.

“But,” looking down at the dust and turning his head sideways, “what do you say, what do you say? Speak more plainly, Little Voices, for you know I grow deaf. Oh! now I understand. The matter is even smaller than I thought. Just of one wizard—”

“*Izwa!*” (loudly).

“—just of a few deaths and some sicknesses.”

“*Izwa!*”

“Just of one death, one principal death.”

“*Izwa!*” (very loudly).

“Ah! So we have it—one death. Now, was it a man?”

“*Izwa!*” (very coldly).

“A woman?”

"*Izwa!*" (still more coldly).

"Then a child? It must be a child, unless indeed it is the death of a spirit. But what do you people know of spirits? A child! A child! Ah! you hear me—a child. A male child, I think. Do you not say so, O Dust?"

"*Izwa!*" (emphatically).

"A common child? A bastard? The son of nobody?"

"*Izwa!*" (very low).

"A well-born child? One who would have been great? O Dust, I hear, I hear; a royal child, a child in whom ran the blood of the Father of the Zulus, he who was my friend? The blood of Senzangakona, the blood of the 'Black One,' the blood of Panda."

He stopped, while both from the chorus and from the thousands of the circle gathered around went up one roar of "*Izwa!*" emphasised by a mighty movement of outstretched arms and down-pointing thumbs.

Then silence, during which Zikali stamped upon all the remaining markings, saying:

"I thank you, O Dust, though I am sorry to have troubled you for so small a matter. So, so," he went on presently, "a royal boy-child is dead, and you think by witchcraft. Let us find out if he died by witchcraft or as others die, by command of the Heavens that need them. What! Here is one mark which I have left. Look! It grows red, it is full of spots! The child died with a twisted face."

"*Izwa! Izwa! Izwa!*" (crescendo).

"This death was not natural. Now, was it witchcraft or was it poison? Both, I think, both. And whose was the child? Not that of a son of the King, I think. Oh, yes, you hear me, People, you hear me; but be silent; I do not need your help. No, not of a son; of a daughter, then." He turned and, looked about him till his eye fell upon a group of women, amongst whom sat Nandie, dressed like a common person. "Of a daughter, a daughter—" He walked to the group of women. "Why, none of these are royal; they are the children of low people. And yet—and yet I seem to smell the blood of Senzangakona."

He sniffed at the air as a dog does, and as he sniffed drew ever nearer to Nandie, till at last he laughed and pointed to her.

"*Your* child, Princess, whose name I do not know. Your firstborn child, whom you loved more than your own heart."

She rose.

"Yes, yes, *Nyanga*," she cried. "I am the Princess Nandie, and he was my child, whom I loved more than my own heart."

"Haha!" said Zikali. "Dust, you did not lie to me. My Spirit, you did not lie to me. But now, tell me, Dust—and tell me, my Spirit—who killed this child?"

He began to waddle round the circle, an extraordinary sight, covered as he was with grey grime, varied with streaks of black skin where the perspiration had washed the dust away.

Presently he came opposite to me, and, to my dismay, paused, sniffing at me as he had at Nandie.

"Ah! ah! O Macumazana," he said, "you have something to do with this matter," a saying at which all that audience pricked their ears.

Then I rose up in wrath and fear, knowing my position to be one of some danger.

"Wizard, or Smeller-out of Wizards, whichever you name yourself," I called in a loud voice, "if you mean that *I* killed Nandie's child, you lie!"

"No, no, Macumazahn," he answered, "but you tried to save it, and therefore you had something to do with the matter, had you not? Moreover, I think that you, who are wise like me, know who did kill it. Won't you tell me, Macumazahn? No? Then I must find out for myself. Be at peace. Does not all the land know that your hands are white as your heart?"

Then, to my great relief, he passed on, amidst a murmur of approbation, for, as I have said, the Zulus liked me. Round and round he wandered, to my surprise passing both Mameena and Masapo without taking any particular note of them, although he scanned them both, and I thought that I saw a swift glance of recognition pass between him and Mameena. It was curious to watch his progress, for as he went those in front of him swayed in their terror like corn before a puff of wind, and when he had passed they straightened themselves as the corn does when the wind has gone by.

At length he had finished his journey and returned to his starting-point, to all appearance completely puzzled.

"You keep so many wizards at your kraal, King," he said, addressing Panda, "that it is hard to say which of them wrought this deed. It would have been easier to tell you of greater matters. Yet I have taken your fee, and I must earn it—I must earn it. Dust, you are dumb. Now, my *Idhlozi*, my Spirit, do you speak?" and, holding his head sideways, he turned his left ear up towards the sky, then said presently, in a curious, matter-of-fact voice:

"Ah! I thank you, Spirit. Well, King, your grandchild was killed by the House of Masapo, your enemy, chief of the Amasomi."

Now a roar of approbation went up from the audience, among whom Masapo's guilt was a foregone conclusion.

When this had died down Panda spoke, saying:

"The House of Masapo is a large house; I believe that he has several wives and many children. It is not enough to smell out the House, since I am not as those who went before me were, nor will I slay the innocent with the guilty. Tell us, O Opener-of-Roads, who among the House of Masapo has wrought this deed?"

"That's just the question," grumbled Zikali in a deep voice. "All that I know is that it was done by poisoning, and I smell the poison. It is here."

Then he walked to where Mameena sat and cried out:

"Seize that woman and search her hair."

Executioners who were in waiting sprang forward, but Mameena waved them away.

"Friends," she said, with a little laugh, "there is no need to touch me," and, rising, she stepped forward to the centre of the ring. Here, with a few swift motions of her hands, she flung off first the cloak she wore, then the moocha about her middle, and lastly the fillet that bound her long hair, and stood before that audience in all her naked beauty—a wondrous and a lovely sight.

"Now," she said, "let women come and search me and my garments, and see if there is any poison hid there."

Two old crones stepped forward—though I do not know who sent them—and carried out a very thorough examination, finally reporting that they had found nothing. Thereon Mameena, with a shrug of her shoulders, resumed such clothes as she wore, and returned to her place.

Zikali appeared to grow angry. He stamped upon the ground with his big feet; he shook his braided grey locks and cried out:

"Is my wisdom to be defeated in such a little matter? One of you tie a bandage over my eyes."

Now a man—it was Maputa, the messenger—came out and did so, and I noted that he tied it well and tight. Zikali whirled round upon his heels, first one way and then another, and, crying aloud: "Guide me, my Spirit!" marched forward in a zigzag fashion, as a blindfolded man does, with his arms stretched out in front of him. First he went to the right, then to the left, and then straight forward, till at length, to my astonishment, he came exactly opposite the spot where Masapo sat and, stretching out his great, groping hands, seized the kaross with which he was covered and, with a jerk, tore it from him.

"Search this!" he cried, throwing it on the ground, and a woman searched.

Presently she uttered an exclamation, and from among the fur of one of the tails of the kaross produced a tiny bag that appeared to be made out of the bladder of a fish. This she handed to Zikali, whose eyes had now been unbandaged.

He looked at it, then gave it to Maputa, saying:

"There is the poison—there is the poison, but who gave it I do not say. I am weary. Let me go."

Then, none hindering him, he walked away through the gate of the kraal.

Soldiers seized upon Masapo, while the multitude roared: "Kill the wizard!"

Masapo sprang up, and, running to where the King sat, flung himself upon his knees, protesting his innocence and praying for mercy. I also, who had doubts as to all this business, ventured to rise and speak.

"O King," I said, "as one who has known this man in the past, I plead with you. How that powder came into his kaross I know not, but perchance it is not poison, only harmless dust."

"Yes, it is but wood dust which I use for the cleaning of my nails," cried Masapo, for he was so terrified I think he knew not what he said.

"So you own to knowledge of the medicine?" exclaimed Panda. "Therefore none hid it in your kaross through malice."

Masapo began to explain, but what he said was lost in a mighty roar of "*Kill the wizard!*"

Panda held up his hand and there was silence.

"Bring milk in a dish," commanded the King, and it, was brought, and, at a further word from him, dusted with the powder.

"Now, O Macumazana," said Panda to me, "if you still think that yonder man is innocent, will you drink this milk?"

"I do not like milk, O King," I answered, shaking my head, whereon all who heard me laughed.

"Will Mameena, his wife, drink it, then?" asked Panda.

She also shook her head, saying:

"O King, I drink no milk that is mixed with dust."

Just then a lean, white dog, one of those homeless, mangy beasts that stray about kraals and live upon carrion, wandered into the ring. Panda made a sign, and a servant, going to where the poor beast stood staring about it hungrily, set down the wooden dish of milk in front of it. Instantly the dog lapped it up, for it was starving, and as it finished the last drop the man slipped a leathern thong about its neck and held it fast.

Now all eyes were fixed upon the dog, mine among them. Presently the beast uttered a long and melancholy howl which thrilled me through, for I knew it to be Masapo's death warrant, then began to scratch the ground and foam at the mouth. Guessing what would follow, I rose, bowed to the King, and walked away to my camp, which, it will be remembered, was set up in a little kloof commanding this place, at a distance only of a few hundred yards. So intent was all the multitude upon watching the dog that I doubt whether anyone saw me go. As for that poor beast, Scowl, who stayed behind, told me that it did not die for about ten minutes, since before its end a red rash appeared upon it similar to that which I had seen upon Saduko's child, and it was seized with convulsions.

Well, I reached my tent unmolested, and, having lit my pipe, engaged myself in making business entries in my note-book, in order to divert my mind as much as I could, when suddenly I heard a most devilish clamour. Looking up, I saw Masapo running towards me with a speed that I should have thought impossible in so fat a man, while after him raced the fierce-faced executioners, and behind came the mob.

"Kill the evil-doer!" they shouted.

Masapo reached me. He flung himself on his knees before me, gasping:

"Save me, Macumazahn! I am innocent. Mameena, the witch! Mameena—"

He got no farther, for the slayers had leapt on him like hounds upon a buck and dragged him from me.

Then I turned and covered up my eyes.

Next morning I left Nodwengu without saying good-bye to anyone, for what had happened there made me desire a change. My servant, Scowl, and one of my hunters remained, however, to collect some cattle that were still due to me. A month or more later, when they joined me in Natal, bringing the cattle, they told me that Mameena, the widow of Masapo, had entered the house of Saduko as his second wife. In answer to a question which I put to them, they added that it was said that the Princess Nandie did not approve of this choice of Saduko, which she thought would not be fortunate for him or bring him happiness. As her husband seemed to be much enamoured of Mameena, however, she had waived her objections, and when Panda asked if she gave her consent had told him that, although she would prefer that Saduko should choose some other woman who had not been mixed up with the wizard who killed her child, she was prepared to take Mameena as her sister, and would know how to keep her in her place.

## EXTRACT FROM LETTER HEADED “THE KING’S KRAAL, ZULULAND, 12TH MAY, 1855.”

“The Zulus about here have a strange story of a white girl who in Dingaan’s day was supposed to ‘hold the spirit’ of some legendary goddess of theirs who is also white. This girl, they say, was very beautiful and brave, and had great power in the land before the battle of the Blood River, which they fought with the emigrant Boers. Her title was Lady of the Zulus, or more shortly, Zoola, which means Heaven.

“She seems to have been the daughter of a wandering, pioneer missionary, but the king, I mean Dingaan, murdered her parents, of whom he was jealous, after which she went mad and cursed the nation, and it is to this curse that they still attribute the death of Dingaan, and their defeats and other misfortunes of that time.

“Ultimately, it appears, in order to be rid of this girl and her evil eye, they sold her to the doctors of a dwarf people, who lived far away in a forest and worshipped trees, since when nothing more has been heard of her. But according to them the curse stopped behind.

“If I can find out anything more of this curious story I will let you know, but I doubt if I shall be able to do so. Although fifteen years or so have passed since Dingaan’s death in 1840 the Kaffirs are very shy of talking about this poor lady, and, I think, only did so to me because I am neither an official nor a missionary, but one whom they look upon as a friend because I have doctored so many of them. When I asked the Indunas about her at first they pretended total ignorance, but on my pressing the question, one of them said that ‘all that tale was unlucky and “went beyond” with Mopo.’ Now Mopo, as I think I wrote to you, was the man who stabbed King Chaka, Dingaan’s brother. He is supposed to have been mixed up in the death of Dingaan also, and to be dead himself. At any rate he vanished away after Panda came to the throne.”

## Chapter XI.

### THE SIN OF UMBELAZI

About eighteen months had gone by, and once again, in the autumn of the year 1856, I found myself at old Umbezi's kraal, where there seemed to be an extraordinary market for any kind of gas-pipe that could be called a gun. Well, as a trader who could not afford to neglect profitable markets, which are hard things to find, there I was.

Now, in eighteen months many things become a little obscured in one's memory, especially if they have to do with savages, in whom, after all, one takes only a philosophical and a business interest. Therefore I may perhaps be excused if I had more or less forgotten a good many of the details of what I may call the Mameena affair. These, however, came back to me very vividly when the first person that I met—at some distance from the kraal, where I suppose she had been taking a country walk—was the beautiful Mameena herself. There she was, looking quite unchanged and as lovely as ever, sitting under the shade of a wild fig-tree and fanning herself with a handful of its leaves.

Of course I jumped off my wagon-box and greeted her.

"*Siyakubona* [that is, good morrow], Macumazahn," she said. "My heart is glad to see you."

"*Siyakubona*, Mameena," I answered, leaving out all reference to my heart. Then I added, looking at her: "Is it true that you have a new husband?"

"Yes, Macumazahn, an old lover of mine has become a new husband. You know whom I mean—Saduko. After the death of that evil-doer, Masapo, he grew very urgent, and the King, also the *Inkosazana* Nandie, pressed it on me, and so I yielded. Also, to be honest, Saduko was a good match, or seemed to be so."

By now we were walking side by side, for the train of wagons had gone ahead to the old outspan. So I stopped and looked her in the face.

"Seemed to be," I repeated. "What do you mean by 'seemed to be'? Are you not happy this time?"

"Not altogether, Macumazahn," she answered, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Saduko is very fond of me—fonder than I like indeed, since it causes him to neglect Nandie, who, by the way, has another son, and, although she says little, that makes Nandie cross. In short," she added, with a burst of truth, "I am the plaything, Nandie is the great lady, and that place suits me ill."

"If you love Saduko, you should not mind, Mameena."

"Love," she said bitterly. "*Piff!* What is love? But I have asked you that question once before."

"Why are you here, Mameena?" I inquired, leaving it unanswered.

"Because Saduko is here, and, of course, Nandie, for she never leaves him, and he will not leave me; because the Prince Umbelazi is coming; because there are plots afoot and the great war draws near—that war in which so many must die."

"Between Cetewayo and Umbelazi, Mameena?"

"Aye, between Cetewayo and Umbelazi. Why do you suppose those wagons of yours are loaded with guns for which so many cattle must be paid? Not to shoot game with, I think. Well, this little kraal of my father's is just now the headquarters of the Umbelazi faction, the *Isigqosa*, as the principedom of Gikazi is that of Cetewayo. My poor father!" she added, with her characteristic shrug, "he thinks himself very great to-day, as he did after he had shot the elephant—before I nursed you, Macumazahn—but often I wonder what will be the end of it—for him and for all of us, Macumazahn, including yourself."

"I!" I answered. "What have I to do with your Zulu quarrels?"

"That you will know when you have done with them, Macumazahn. But here is the kraal, and before we enter it I wish to thank you for trying to protect that unlucky husband of mine, Masapo."

"I only did so, Mameena, because I thought him innocent."

"I know, Macumazahn; and so did I, although, as I always told you, I hated him, the man with whom my father forced me to marry. But I am afraid, from what I have learned since, that he was not altogether innocent. You see, Saduko had struck him, which he could not forget. Also, he was jealous of Saduko, who had been my suitor, and wished to injure him. But what I do not understand," she added, with a burst of confidence, "is why he did not kill Saduko instead of his child."

"Well, Mameena, you may remember it was said he tried to do so."

"Yes, Macumazahn; I had forgotten that. I suppose that he did try, and failed. Oh, now I see things with both eyes. Look, yonder is my father. I will go away. But come and talk to me sometimes, Macumazahn, for otherwise Nandie will be careful that I should hear nothing—I who am the plaything, the beautiful woman of the House, who must sit and smile, but must not think."

So she departed, and I went on to meet old Umbezi, who came gambolling towards me like an obese goat, reflecting that, whatever might be the truth or otherwise of her story, her advancement in the world did not seem to have brought Mameena greater happiness and contentment.

Umbezi, who greeted me warmly, was in high spirits and full of importance. He informed me that the marriage of Mameena to Saduko, after the death of the wizard, her husband, whose tribe and cattle had been given to Saduko in compensation for the loss of his son, was a most fortunate thing for him.

I asked why.

"Because as Saduko grows great so I, his father-in-law, grow great with him, Macumazahn, especially as he has been liberal to me in the matter of cattle, passing on to me a share of the herds of Masapo, so that I, who have been poor so long, am getting rich at last. Moreover, my kraal is to be honoured with a visit from Umbelazi and some of his brothers to-morrow, and Saduko has promised to lift me up high when the Prince is declared heir to the throne."

"Which prince?" I asked.

"Umbelazi, Macumazahn. Who else? Umbelazi, who without doubt will conquer Cetewayo."

"Why without doubt, Umbezi? Cetewayo has a great following, and if *he* should conquer I think that you will only be lifted up in the crops of the vultures."

At this rough suggestion Umbezi's fat face fell.

"O Macumazahn," he said, "if I thought that, I would go over to Cetewayo, although Saduko is my son-in-law. But it is not possible, since the King loves Umbelazi's mother most of all his wives, and, as I chance to know, has sworn to her that he favours Umbelazi's cause, since he is the dearest to him of all his sons, and will do everything that he can to help him, even to the sending of his own regiment to his assistance, if there should be need. Also, it is said that Zikali, Opener-of-Roads, who has all wisdom, has prophesied that Umbelazi will win more than he ever hoped for."

"The King!" I said, "a straw blown hither and thither between two great winds, waiting to be wafted to rest by that which is strongest! The prophecy of Zikali! It seems to me that it can be read two ways, if, indeed, he ever made one. Well, Umbezi, I hope that you are right, for, although it is no affair of mine, who am but a white trader in your country, I like Umbelazi better than Cetewayo, and think that he has a kinder heart. Also, as you have chosen his side, I advise you to stick to it, since traitors to a cause seldom come to any good, whether it wins or loses. And now, will you take count of the guns and powder which I have brought with me?"

Ah! better would it have been for Umbezi if he had listened to my advice and remained faithful to the leader he had chosen, for then, even if he had lost his life, at least he would have kept his good name. But of him presently, as they say in pedigrees.

Next day I went to pay my respects to Nandie, whom I found engaged in nursing her new baby and as quiet and stately in her demeanour as ever. Still, I think that she was very glad to see me, because I had tried to save the life of her first child, whom she could not forget, if for no other reason. Whilst I was talking to her of that sad matter, also of the political state of the country, as to which I think she wished to say something to me, Mameena entered the hut, without waiting to be asked, and sat down, whereon Nandie became suddenly silent.

This, however, did not trouble Mameena, who talked away about anything and everything, completely ignoring the head-wife. For a while Nandie bore it with patience, but at length she took advantage of a pause in the conversation to say in her firm, low voice:

"This is my hut, daughter of Umbezi, a thing which you remember well enough when it is a question whether Saduko, our husband, shall visit you or me. Can you not remember it now when I would speak with the white chief, Watcher-by-Night, who has been so good as to take the trouble to come to see me?"

On hearing these words Mameena leapt up in a rage, and I must say I never saw her look more lovely.

"You insult me, daughter of Panda, as you always try to do, because you are jealous of me."

"Your pardon, sister," replied Nandie. "Why should I, who am Saduko's *Inkosikazi*, and, as you say, daughter of Panda, the King, be jealous of the widow of the wizard, Masapo, and the daughter of the headman, Umbezi, whom it has pleased our husband to take into his house to be the companion of his leisure?"

"Why? Because you know that Saduko loves my little finger more than he does your whole body, although you are of the King's blood and have borne him brats," she answered, looking at the infant with no kindly eye.

"It may be so, daughter of Umbezi, for men have their fancies, and without doubt you are fair. Yet I would ask you one thing—if Saduko loves you so much, how comes it he trusts you so little that you must learn any matter of weight by listening at my door, as I found you doing the other day?"

"Because you teach him not to do so, O Nandie. Because you are ever telling him not to consult with me, since she who has betrayed one husband may betray another. Because you make him believe my place is that of his toy, not that of his companion, and this although I am cleverer than you and all your House tied into one bundle, as you may find out some day."

"Yes," answered Nandie, quite undisturbed, "I do teach him these things, and I am glad that in this matter Saduko has a thinking head and listens to me. Also I agree that it is likely I shall learn many more ill things through and of you one day, daughter of Umbezi. And now, as it is not good that we should wrangle before this white lord, again I say to you that this is my hut, in which I wish to speak alone with my guest."

"I go, I go!" gasped Mameena; "but I tell you that Saduko shall hear of this."

"Certainly he will hear of it, for I shall tell him when he comes to-night."

Another instant and Mameena was gone, having shot out of the hut like a rabbit from its burrow.

"I ask your pardon, Macumazahn, for what has happened," said Nandie, "but it had become necessary that I should teach my sister, Mameena, upon which stool she ought to sit. I do not trust her, Macumazahn. I think that she knows more of the death of my child than she chooses to say, she who wished to be rid of Masapo for a reason you can guess. I think also she will bring shame and trouble upon Saduko, whom she has bewitched with her beauty, as she bewitches all men—perhaps even yourself a little, Macumazahn. And now let us talk of other matters."

To this proposition I agreed cordially, since, to tell the truth, if I could have managed to do so with any decent grace, *I* should have been out of that hut long before Mameena. So we fell to conversing on the condition of Zululand and the dangers that lay ahead for all who were connected with the royal House—a state of affairs which troubled Nandie much, for she was a clear-headed woman, and one who feared the future.

“Ah! Macumazahn,” she said to me as we parted, “I would that I were the wife of some man who did not desire to grow great, and that no royal blood ran in my veins.”

On the next day the Prince Umbelazi arrived, and with him Saduko and a few other notable men. They came quite quietly and without any ostensible escort, although Scowl, my servant, told me he heard that the bush at a little distance was swarming with soldiers of the *Isigqosa* party. If I remember rightly, the excuse for the visit was that Umbezi had some of a certain rare breed of white cattle whereof the prince wished to secure young bulls and heifers to improve his herd.

Once inside the kraal, however, Umbelazi, who was a very open-natured man, threw off all pretence, and, after greeting me heartily enough, told me with plainness that he was there because this was a convenient spot on which to arrange the consolidation of his party.

Almost every hour during the next two weeks messengers—many of whom were chiefs disguised—came and went. I should have liked to follow their example—that is, so far as their departure was concerned—for I felt that I was being drawn into a very dangerous vortex. But, as a matter of fact, I could not escape, since I was obliged to wait to receive payment for my stuff, which, as usual, was made in cattle.

Umbelazi talked with me a good deal at that time, impressing upon me how friendly he was towards the English white men of Natal, as distinguished from the Boers, and what good treatment he was prepared to promise to them, should he ever attain to authority in Zululand. It was during one of the earliest of these conversations, which, of course, I saw had an ultimate object, that he met Mameena, I think, for the first time.

We were walking together in a little natural glade of the bush that bordered one side of the kraal, when, at the end of it, looking like some wood nymph of classic fable in the light of the setting sun, appeared the lovely Mameena, clothed only in her girdle of fur, her necklace of blue beads and some copper ornaments, and carrying upon her head a gourd.

Umbelazi noted her at once, and, ceasing his political talk, of which he was obviously tired, asked me who that beautiful *intombi* (that is, girl) might be.

“She is not an *intombi*, Prince,” I answered. “She is a widow who is again a wife, the second wife of your friend and councillor, Saduko, and the daughter of your host, Umbezi.”

“Is it so, Macumazahn? Oh, then I have heard of her, though, as it chances, I have never met her before. No wonder that my sister Nandie is jealous, for she is beautiful indeed.”

“Yes,” I answered, “she looks pretty against the red sky, does she not?”

By now we were drawing near to Mameena, and I greeted her, asking if she wanted anything.

“Nothing, Macumazahn,” she answered in her delicate, modest way, for never did I know anyone who could seem quite so modest as Mameena, and with a swift glance of her shy eyes at the tall and splendid Umbelazi, “nothing. Only,” she added, “I was passing with the milk of one of the few cows my father gave me, and saw you, and I thought that perhaps, as the day has been so hot, you might like a drink of it.”

Then, lifting the gourd from her head, she held it out to me.

I thanked her, drank some—who could do less?—and returned it to her, whereon she made as though she would hasten to depart.

“May I not drink also, daughter of Umbezi?” asked Umbelazi, who could scarcely take his eyes off her.

“Certainly, sir, if you are a friend of Macumazahn,” she replied, handing him the gourd.

“I am that, Lady, and more than that, since I am a friend of your husband, Saduko, also, as you will know when I tell you that my name is Umbelazi.”

“I thought it must be so,” she replied, “because of your—of your stature. Let the Prince accept the offering of his servant, who one day hopes to be his subject,” and, dropping upon her knee, she held out the gourd to him. Over it I saw their eyes meet. He drank, and as he handed back the vessel she said:

“O Prince, may I be granted a word with you? I have that to tell which you would perhaps do well to hear, since news sometimes reaches the ears of humble women that escapes those of the men, our masters.”

He bowed his head in assent, whereon, taking a hint which Mameena gave me with her eyes, I muttered something about business and made myself scarce. I may add that Mameena must have had a great deal to tell Umbelazi. Fully an hour and a half had gone by before, by the light of the moon, from a point of vantage on my wagon-box, whence, according to my custom, I was keeping a lookout on things in general, I saw her slip back to the kraal silently as a snake, followed at a little distance by the towering form of Umbelazi.

Apparently Mameena continued to be the recipient of information which she found it necessary to communicate in private to the prince. At any rate, on sundry subsequent evenings the dullness of my vigil on the wagon-box was relieved by the sight of her graceful figure gliding home from the kloof that Umbelazi seemed to find a very suitable spot for reflection after sunset. On one of the last of these occasions I remember that Nandie chanced to be with me, having come to my wagon for some medicine for her baby.

“What does it mean, Macumazahn?” she asked, when the pair had gone by, as they thought unobserved, since we were standing where they could not see us.

“I don’t know, and I don’t want to know,” I answered sharply.

“Neither do I, Macumazahn; but without doubt we shall learn in time. If the crocodile is patient and silent the buck always drops into its jaws at last.”

On the day after Nandie made this wise remark Saduko started on a mission, as I understood, to win over several doubtful chiefs to the cause of *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti* (the Elephant-with-the-tuft-of-hair), as the Prince Umbelazi was called among the Zulus, though not to his face. This mission lasted ten days, and before it was concluded an important event happened at Umbezi's kraal.

One evening Mameena came to me in a great rage, and said that she could bear her present life no longer. Presuming on her rank and position as head-wife, Nandie treated her like a servant—nay, like a little dog, to be beaten with a stick. She wished that Nandie would die.

"It will be very unlucky for you if she does," I answered, "for then, perhaps, Zikali will be summoned to look into the matter, as he was before."

What was she to do, she went on, ignoring my remark.

"Eat the porridge that you have made in your own pot, or break the pot" (i.e. go away), I suggested. "There was no need for you to marry Saduko, any more than there was for you to marry Masapo."

"How can you talk to me like that, Macumazahn," she answered, stamping her foot, "when you know well it is your fault if I married anyone? *Piff!* I hate them all, and, since my father would only beat me if I took my troubles to him, I will run off, and live in the wilderness alone and become a witch-doctress."

"I am afraid you will find it very dull, Mameena," I began in a bantering tone, for, to tell the truth, I did not think it wise to show her too much sympathy while she was so excited.

Mameena never waited for the end of the sentence, but, sobbing out that I was false and cruel, she turned and departed swiftly. Oh! little did I foresee how and where we should meet again.

Next morning I was awakened shortly after sunrise by Scowl, whom I had sent out with another man the night before to look for a lost ox.

"Well, have you found the ox?" I asked.

"Yes, Baas; but I did not waken you to tell you that. I have a message for you, Baas, from Mameena, wife of Saduko, whom I met about four hours ago upon the plain yonder."

I bade him set it out.

"These were the words of Mameena, Baas: 'Say to Macumazahn, your master, that *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti*, taking pity on my wrongs and loving me with his heart, has offered to take me into his House and that I have accepted his offer, since I think it better to become the *Inkosazana* of the Zulus, as I shall one day, than to remain a servant in the house of Nandie. Say to Macumazahn that when Saduko returns he is to tell him that this is all his fault, since if he had kept Nandie in her place I would have died rather than leave him. Let him say to Saduko also that, although from henceforth we can be no more than friends, my heart is still tender towards him, and that by day and by night I will strive to water his greatness, so that it may grow into a tree that shall shade the land. Let Macumazahn bid him not to be angry with me, since what I do I do for his good, as he would have found no happiness while Nandie and I dwelt in one house. Above all, also let him not be angry with the Prince, who loves him more than any man, and does but travel whither the wind that I breathe blows him. Bid Macumazahn think of me kindly, as I shall of him while my eyes are open.'"

I listened to this amazing message in silence, then asked if Mameena was alone.

"No, Baas; Umbelazi and some soldiers were with her, but they did not hear her words, for she stepped aside to speak with me. Then she returned to them, and they walked away swiftly, and were swallowed up in the night."

"Very good, Sikauli," I said. "Make me some coffee, and make it strong."

I dressed and drank several cups of the coffee, all the while "thinking with my head," as the Zulus say. Then I walked up to the kraal to see Umbezi, whom I found just coming out of his hut, yawning.

"Why do you look so black upon this beautiful morning, Macumazahn?" asked the genial old scamp. "Have you lost your best cow, or what?"

"No, my friend," I answered; "but you and another have lost *your* best cow." And word for word I repeated to him Mameena's message. When I had finished really I thought that Umbezi was about to faint.

"Curses be on the head of this Mameena!" he exclaimed. "Surely some evil spirit must have been her father, not I, and well was she called Child of Storm.<sup>[1]</sup> What shall I do now, Macumazahn? Thanks be to my Spirit," he added, with an air of relief, "she is too far gone for me to try to catch her; also, if I did, Umbelazi and his soldiers would kill me."

[1] That, if I have not said so already, was the meaning which the Zulus gave to the word *Mameena*, although as I know the language I cannot get any such interpretation out of the name. I believe that it was given to her, however, because she was born just before a terrible tempest, when the wind wailing round the hut made a sound like the word *Ma-mee-na*. —A. Q.

"And what will Saduko do if you don't?" I asked.

"Oh, of course he will be angry, for no doubt he is fond of her. But, after all, I am used to that. You remember how he went mad when she married Masapo. At least, he cannot say that I made her run away with Umbelazi. After all, it is a matter which they must settle between them."

"I think it may mean great trouble," I said, "at a time when trouble is not needed."

"Oh, why so, Macumazahn? My daughter did not get on with the Princess Nandie—we could all see that—for they would scarcely speak to each other. And if Saduko is fond of her—well, after all, there are other beautiful women in Zululand. I know one or two of them myself whom I will mention to Saduko—or rather to Nandie. Really, as things were, I am not sure but that he is well rid of her."

"But what do you think of the matter as her father?" I asked, for I wanted to see to what length his accommodating morality would stretch.

"As her father—well, of course, Macumazahn, as her father I am sorry, because it will mean talk, will it not, as the Masapo business did? Still, there is this to be said for Mameena," he added, with a brightening face, "she always runs away up the tree, not down. When she got rid of Masapo—I mean when Masapo was killed for his witchcraft—she married Saduko, who was a bigger man—Saduko, whom she would not marry when Masapo was the bigger man. And now, when she has got rid of Saduko, she enters the hut of Umbelazi, who will one day be King of the Zulus, the biggest man in all the world, which means that she will be the biggest woman, for remember, Macumazahn, she will walk round and round that great Umbelazi till whatever way he looks he will see her and no one else. Oh, she will grow great, and carry up her poor old father in the blanket on her back. Oh, the sun still shines behind the cloud, Macumazahn, so let us make the best of the cloud, since we know that it will break out presently."

"Yes, Umbezi; but other things besides the sun break out from clouds sometimes—lightning, for instance; lightning which kills."

"You speak ill-omened words, Macumazahn; words that take away my appetite, which is generally excellent at this hour. Well, if Mameena is bad it is not my fault, for I brought her up to be good. After all," he added with an outburst of petulance, "why do you scold me when it is your fault? If you had run away with the girl when you might have done so, there would have been none of this trouble."

"Perhaps not," I answered; "only then I am sure I should have been dead to-day, as I think that all who have to do with her will be ere long. And now, Umbezi, I wish you a good breakfast."

On the following morning, Saduko returned and was told the news by Nandie, whom I had carefully avoided. On this occasion, however, I was forced to be present, as the person to whom the sinful Mameena had sent her farewell message. It was a very painful experience, of which I do not remember all the details. For a while after he learned the truth Saduko sat still as a stone, staring in front of him, with a face that seemed to have become suddenly old. Then he turned upon Umbezi, and in a few terrible words accused him of having arranged the matter in order to advance his own fortunes at the price of his daughter's dishonour. Next, without listening to his ex-father-in-law's voluble explanations, he rose and said that he was going away to kill Umbelazi, the evil-doer who had robbed him of the wife he loved, with the connivance of all three of us, and by a sweep of his hand he indicated Umbezi, the Princess Nandie and myself.

This was more than I could stand, so I, too, rose and asked him what he meant, adding in the irritation of the moment that if I had wished to rob him of his beautiful Mameena, I thought I could have done so long ago—a remark that staggered him a little.

Then Nandie rose also, and spoke in her quiet voice.

"Saduko, my husband," she said, "I, a Princess of the Zulu House, married you who are not of royal blood because I loved you, and although Panda the King and Umbelazi the Prince wished it, for no other reason whatsoever. Well, I have been faithful to you through some trials, even when you set the widow of a wizard—if, indeed, as I have reason to suspect, she was not herself the wizard—before me, and although that wizard had killed our son, lived in her hut rather than in mine. Now this woman of whom you thought so much has deserted you for your friend and my brother, the Prince Umbelazi—Umbelazi who is called the Handsome, and who, if the fortune of war goes with him, as it may or may not, will succeed to Panda, my father. This she has done because she alleges that I, your *Inkosikazi* and the King's daughter, treated her as a servant, which is a lie. I kept her in her place, no more, who, if she could have had her will, would have ousted me from mine, perhaps by death, for the wives of wizards learn their arts. On this pretext she has left you; but that is not her real reason. She has left you because the Prince, my brother, whom she has befooled with her tricks and beauty, as she has befooled others, or tried to"—and she glanced at me—"is a bigger man than you are. You, Saduko, may become great, as my heart prays that you will, but my brother may become a king. She does not love him any more than she loved you, but she does love the place that may be his, and therefore hers—she who would be the first doe of the herd. My husband, I think that you are well rid of Mameena, for I think also that if she had stayed with us there would have been more deaths in our House; perhaps mine, which would not matter, and perhaps yours, which would matter much. All this I say to you, not from jealousy of one who is fairer than I, but because it is the truth. Therefore my counsel to you is to let this business pass over and keep silent. Above all, seek not to avenge yourself upon Umbelazi, since I am sure that he has taken vengeance to dwell with him in his own hut. I have spoken."

That this moderate and reasoned speech of Nandie's produced a great effect upon Saduko I could see, but at the time the only answer he made to it was:

"Let the name of Mameena be spoken no more within hearing of my ears. Mameena is dead."

So her name was heard no more in the Houses of Saduko and of Umbezi, and when it was necessary for any reason to refer to her, she was given a new name, a composite Zulu word, *O-we-Zulu*, I think it was, which is "Storm-child" shortly translated, for "Zulu" means a storm as well as the sky.

I do not think that Saduko spoke of her to me again until towards the climax of this history, and certainly I did not mention her to him. But from that day forward I noted that he was a changed man. His pride and open pleasure in his great success, which had caused the Zulus to name him the "Self-eater," were no longer marked. He became cold and silent, like a man who is thinking deeply, but who shuts his thoughts lest some should read them through the windows of his eyes. Moreover, he paid a visit to Zikali the Little and Wise, as I found out by accident; but what advice that cunning old dwarf gave to him I did not find out—then.

The only other event which happened in connection with this elopement was that a message came from Umbelazi to Saduko, brought by one of the princes, a brother of Umbelazi, who was of his party. As I know, for I heard it delivered, it was a very humble message when the relative positions of the two men are considered—that of one who knew that he had done wrong, and, if not repentant, was heartily ashamed of himself.

"Saduko," it said, "I've stolen a cow of yours and hope you'll forgive me since that cow didn't love the pasture in your kraal but in mine she grows fat and is content. Moreover, in return I'll give you many other cows. Everything that I've to give, I'll give to you who're my friend and trusted councillor. Send me word, O Saduko, that this wall that I've built between us is broken down since ere long you and I must stand together in war."

To this message Saduko's answer was: "O Prince, you're troubled about a very little thing. That cow which you have taken was of no worth to me for who wishes to keep a beast that's ever tearing and lowing at the gates of the kraal, disturbing those who'd sleep inside with her noise? Had you asked her of me, I'd have given her to you freely. I thank you for your offer but I need no more cows especially if like this one they've no calves. As for a wall between us, there's none for how can two men who if the battle's to be won, must stand shoulder to shoulder, fight if divided by a wall? O Son of the King, I'm dreaming by day and night of the battle and the victory and I've forgotten all about the barren cow that ran away after you, the great bull of the herd. Only don't be surprised if one day you find that this cow's a sharp horn."

## Chapter XII.

### PANDA'S PRAYER

About six weeks later, in the month of November, 1856, I chanced to be at Nodwengu when the quarrel between the princes came to a head. Although none of the regiments was actually allowed to enter the town—that is, as a regiment—the place was full of people, all of them in a state of great excitement, who came in during the daytime and went to sleep in the neighbouring military kraals at night. One evening, as some of these soldiers—about a thousand of them, if I remember right—were returning to the Ukubaza kraal, a fight occurred between them, which led to the final outbreak.

As it happened, at that time there were two separate regiments stationed at this kraal. I think that they were the Imkulutshana and the Hlaba, one of which favoured Cetewayo and the other Umbelazi. As certain companies of each of these regiments marched along together in parallel lines, two of their captains got into dispute on the eternal subject of the succession to the throne. From words they came to blows, and the end of it was that he who favoured Umbelazi killed him who favoured Cetewayo with his kerry. Thereon the comrades of the slain man, raising a shout of "*Usutu*," which became the war-cry of Cetewayo's party, fell upon the others, and a dreadful combat ensued. Fortunately the soldiers were only armed with sticks, or the slaughter would have been very great; but as it was, after an indecisive engagement, about fifty men were killed and many more injured.

Now, with my usual bad luck, I, who had gone out to shoot a few birds for the pot—pauw, or bustard, I think they were—was returning across this very plain to my old encampment in the kloof where Masapo had been executed, and so ran into the fight just as it was beginning. I saw the captain killed and the subsequent engagement. Indeed, as it happened, I did more. Not knowing where to go or what to do, for I was quite alone, I pulled up my horse behind a tree and waited till I could escape the horrors about me; for I can assure anyone who may ever read these words that it is a very horrible sight to see a thousand men engaged in fierce and deadly combat. In truth, the fact that they had no spears, and could only batter each other to death with their heavy kerries, made it worse, since the duels were more desperate and prolonged.

Everywhere men were rolling on the ground, hitting at each other's heads, until at last some blow went home and one of them threw out his arms and lay still, either dead or senseless. Well, there I sat watching all this shocking business from the saddle of my trained shooting pony, which stood like a stone, till presently I became aware of two great fellows rushing at me with their eyes starting out of their heads and shouting as they came:

"Kill Umbelazi's white man! Kill! Kill!"

Then, seeing that the matter was urgent and that it was a question of my life or theirs, I came into action.

In my hand I held a double-barrelled shotgun loaded with what we used to call "loopers," or B.B. shot, of which but a few went to each charge, for I had hoped to meet with a small buck on my way to camp. So, as these soldiers came, I lifted the gun and fired, the right barrel at one of them and the left barrel at the other, aiming in each case at the centre of the small dancing shields, which from force of habit they held stretched out to protect their throats and breasts. At that distance, of course, the loopers sank through the soft hide of the shields and deep into the bodies of those who carried them, so that both of them dropped dead, the left-hand man being so close that he fell against my pony, his uplifted kerry striking me upon the thigh and bruising me.

When I saw what I had done, and that my danger was over for the moment, without waiting to reload I dug the spurs into my horse's sides and galloped off to Nodwengu, passing between the groups of struggling men. On arriving unharmed at the town, I went instantly to the royal huts and demanded to see the King, who sent word that I was to be admitted. On coming before him I told him exactly what had happened—that I had killed two of Cetewayo's men in order to save my own life, and on that account submitted myself to his justice.

"O Macumazana," said Panda in great distress, "I know well that you are not to blame, and already I have sent out a regiment to stop this fighting, with command that those who caused it should be brought before me to-morrow for judgment. I am glad indeed, Macumazahn, that you have escaped without harm, but I must tell you that I fear henceforth your life will be in danger, since all the *Usutu* party will hold it forfeit if they can catch you. While you are in my town I can protect you, for I will set a strong guard about your camp; but here you will have to stay until these troubles are done with, since if you leave you may be murdered on the road."

"I thank you for your kindness, King," I answered; "but all this is very awkward for me, who hoped to trek for Natal to-morrow."

"Well, there it is, Macumazahn, you will have to stay here unless you wish to be killed. He who walks into a storm must put up with the hailstones."

So it came about that once again Fate dragged me into the Zulu maelstrom.

On the morrow I was summoned to the trial, half as a witness and half as one of the offenders. Going to the head of the Nodwengu kraal, where Panda was sitting in state with his Council, I found the whole great space in front of him crowded with a dense concourse of fierce-faced partisans, those who favoured Cetewayo—the *Usutu*—sitting on the right, and those who favoured Umbelazi—the *Isigqosa*—sitting on the left. At the head of the right-hand section sat Cetewayo, his brethren and chief men. At the head of the left-hand section sat Umbelazi, his brethren and his chief men, amongst whom I saw Saduko take a place immediately behind the Prince, so that he could whisper into his ear.

To myself and my little band of eight hunters, who by Panda's express permission, came armed with their guns, as I did also, for I was determined that if the necessity arose we would sell our lives as dearly as we could, was appointed a place almost in front of the King and between the two factions. When everyone was seated the trial began, Panda demanding to know who had caused the tumult of the previous night.

I cannot set out what followed in all its details, for it would be too long; also I have forgotten many of them. I remember, however, that Cetewayo's people said that Umbelazi's men were the aggressors, and that Umbelazi's people said that Cetewayo's men were the aggressors, and that each of their parties backed up these statements, which were given at great length, with loud shouts.

"How am I to know the truth?" exclaimed Panda at last. "Macumazahn, you were there; step forward and tell it to me."

So I stood out and told the King what I had seen, namely that the captain who favoured Cetewayo had begun the quarrel by striking the captain who favoured Umbelazi, but that in the end Umbelazi's man had killed Cetewayo's man, after which the fighting commenced.

"Then it would seem that the *Usutu* are to blame," said Panda.

"Upon what grounds do you say so, my father?" asked Cetewayo, springing up. "Upon the testimony of this white man, who is well known to be the friend of Umbelazi and of his henchman Saduko, and who himself killed two of those who called me chief in the course of the fight?"

"Yes, Cetewayo," I broke in, "because I thought it better that I should kill them than that they should kill me, whom they attacked quite unprovoked."

"At any rate, you killed them, little White Man," shouted Cetewayo, "for which cause your blood is forfeit. Say, did Umbelazi give you leave to appear before the King accompanied by men armed with guns, when we who are his sons must come with sticks only? If so, let him protect you!"

"That I will do if there is need!" exclaimed Umbelazi.

"Thank you, Prince," I said; "but if there is need I will protect myself as I did yesterday," and, cocking my double-barrelled rifle, I looked full at Cetewayo.

"When you leave here, then at least I will come even with you, Macumazahn!" threatened Cetewayo, spitting through his teeth, as was his way when mad with passion.

For he was beside himself, and wished to vent his temper on someone, although in truth he and I were always good friends.

"If so I shall stop where I am," I answered coolly, "in the shadow of the King, your father. Moreover, are you so lost in folly, Cetewayo, that you should wish to bring the English about your ears? Know that if I am killed you will be asked to give account of my blood."

"Aye," interrupted Panda, "and know that if anyone lays a finger on Macumazana, who is my guest, he shall die, whether he be a common man or a prince and my son. Also, Cetewayo, I fine you twenty head of cattle, to be paid to Macumazana because of the unprovoked attack which your men made upon him when he rightly slew them."

"The fine shall be paid, my father," said Cetewayo more quietly, for he saw that in threatening me he had pushed matters too far.

Then, after some more talk, Panda gave judgment in the cause, which judgment really amounted to nothing. As it was impossible to decide which party was most to blame, he fined both an equal number of cattle, accompanying the fine with a lecture on their ill-behaviour, which was listened to indifferently.

After this matter was disposed of the real business of the meeting began.

Rising to his feet, Cetewayo addressed Panda.

"My father," he said, "the land wanders and wanders in darkness, and you alone can give light for its feet. I and my brother, Umbelazi, are at variance, and the quarrel is a great one, namely, as to which of us is to sit in your place when you are 'gone down,' when we call and you do not answer. Some of the nation favour one of us and some favour the other, but you, O King, and you alone, have the voice of judgment. Still, before you speak, I and those who stand with me would bring this to your mind. My mother, Umqumbazi, is your *Inkosikazi*, your head-wife, and therefore, according to our law, I, her eldest son, should be your heir. Moreover, when you fled to the Boers before the fall of him who sat in your place before you [Dingaan], did not they, the white Amabunu, ask you which amongst your sons was your heir, and did you not point me out to the white men? And thereon did not the Amabunu clothe me in a dress of honour because I was the King to be? But now of late the mother of Umbelazi has been whispering in your ear, as have others"—and he looked at Saduko and some of Umbelazi's brethren—"and your face has grown cold towards me, so cold that many say that you will point out Umbelazi to be King after you and stamp on my name. If this is so, my father, tell me at once, that I may know what to do."

Having finished this speech, which certainly did not lack force and dignity, Cetewayo sat down again, awaiting the answer in sullen silence. But, making none, Panda looked at Umbelazi, who, on rising, was greeted with a great cheer, for although Cetewayo had the larger following in the land, especially among the distant chiefs, the Zulus individually loved Umbelazi more, perhaps because of his stature, beauty and kindly disposition—physical and moral qualities that naturally appeal to a savage nation.

"My father," he said, "like my brother, Cetewayo, I await your word. Whatever you may have said to the Amabunu in haste or fear, I do not admit that Cetewayo was ever proclaimed your heir in the hearing of the Zulu people. I say that my right to the succession is as good as his, and that it lies with you, and you alone, to declare which of us shall put on the royal kaross in days that my heart prays may be distant. Still, to save bloodshed, I am willing to divide the land with Cetewayo" (here both Panda and Cetewayo shook their heads and the audience roared "Nay"), "or, if that does not please him, I am willing to meet Cetewayo man to man and spear to spear and fight till one of us be slain."

"A safe offer!" sneered Cetewayo, "for is not my brother named 'Elephant,' and the strongest warrior among the Zulus? No, I will not set the fortunes of those who cling to me on the chance of a single stab, or on the might of a man's muscles. Decide, O father; say

which of the two of us is to sit at the head of your kraal after you have gone over to the Spirits and are but an ancestor to be worshipped."

Now, Panda looked much disturbed, as was not wonderful, since, rushing out from the fence behind which they had been listening, Umqumbazi, Cetewayo's mother, whispered into one of his ears, while Umbelazi's mother whispered into the other. What advice each of them gave I do not know, although obviously it was not the same advice, since the poor man rolled his eyes first at one and then at the other, and finally put his hands over his ears that he might hear no more.

"Choose, choose, O King!" shouted the audience. "Who is to succeed you, Cetewayo or Umbelazi?"

Watching Panda, I saw that he fell into a kind of agony; his fat sides heaved, and, although the day was cold, sweat ran from his brow.

"What would the white men do in such a case?" he said to me in a hoarse, low voice, whereon I answered, looking at the ground and speaking so that few could hear me:

"I think, O King, that a white man would do nothing. He would say that others might settle the matter after he was dead."

"Would that I could say so, too," muttered Panda; "but it is not possible."

Then followed a long pause, during which all were silent, for every man there felt that the hour was big with doom. At length Panda rose with difficulty, because of his unwieldy weight, and uttered these fateful words, that were none the less ominous because of the homely idiom in which they were couched:

*"When two young bulls quarrel they must fight it out."*

Instantly in one tremendous roar volleyed forth the royal salute of *Bayéte*, a signal of the acceptance of the King's word—the word that meant civil war and the death of many thousands.

Then Panda turned and, so feebly that I thought he would fall, walked through the gateway behind him, followed by the rival queens. Each of these ladies struggled to be first after him in the gate, thinking that it would be an omen of success for her son. Finally, however, to the disappointment of the multitude, they only succeeded in passing it side by side.

When they had gone the great audience began to break up, the men of each party marching away together as though by common consent, without offering any insult or molestation to their adversaries. I think that this peaceable attitude arose, however, from the knowledge that matters had now passed from the stage of private quarrel into that of public war. It was felt that their dispute awaited decision, not with sticks outside the Nodwengu kraal, but with spears upon some great battlefield, for which they went to prepare.

Within two days, except for those regiments which Panda kept to guard his person, scarcely a soldier was to be seen in the neighbourhood of Nodwengu. The princes also departed to muster their adherents, Cetewayo establishing himself among the Mandhlakazi that he commanded, and Umbelazi returning to the kraal of Umbezi, which happened to stand almost in the centre of that part of the nation which adhered to him.

Whether he took Mameena with him there I am not certain. I believe, however, that, fearing lest her welcome at her birthplace should be warmer than she wished, she settled herself at some retired and outlying kraal in the neighbourhood, and there awaited the crisis of her fortune. At any rate, I saw nothing of her, for she was careful to keep out of my way.

With Umbelazi and Saduko, however, I did have an interview. Before they left Nodwengu they called on me together, apparently on the best of terms, and said in effect that they hoped for my support in the coming war.

I answered that, however well I might like them personally, a Zulu civil war was no affair of mine, and that, indeed, for every reason, including the supreme one of my own safety, I had better get out of the way at once.

They argued with me for a long while, making great offers and promises of reward, till at length, when he saw that my determination could not be shaken, Umbelazi said:

"Come, Saduko, let us humble ourselves no more before this white man. After all, he is right; the business is none of his, and why should we ask him to risk his life in our quarrel, knowing as we do that white men are not like us; they think a great deal of their lives. Farewell, Macumazahn. If I conquer and grow great you will always be welcome in Zululand, whereas if I fail perhaps you will be best over the Tugela river."

Now, I felt the hidden taunt in this speech very keenly. Still, being determined that for once I would be wise and not allow my natural curiosity and love of adventure to drag me into more risks and trouble, I replied:

"The Prince says that I am not brave and love my life, and what he says is true. I fear fighting, who by nature am a trader with the heart of a trader, not a warrior with the heart of a warrior, like the great *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti*"—words at which I saw the grave Saduko smile faintly. "So farewell to you, Prince, and may good fortune attend you."

Of course, to call the Prince to his face by this nickname, which referred to a defect in his person, was something of an insult; but I had been insulted, and meant to give him "a Roland for his Oliver." However, he took it in good part.

"What is good fortune, Macumazahn?" Umbelazi replied as he grasped my hand. "Sometimes I think that to live and prosper is good fortune, and sometimes I think that to die and sleep is good fortune, for in sleep there is neither hunger nor thirst of body or of spirit. In sleep there come no cares; in sleep ambitions are at rest; nor do those who look no more upon the sun smart beneath the treacheries of false women or false friends. Should the battle turn against me, Macumazahn, at least that good fortune will be mine, for never will I live to be crushed beneath Cetewayo's heel."

Then he went. Saduko accompanied him for a little way, but, making some excuse to the Prince, came back and said to me:

"Macumazahn, my friend, I dare say that we part for the last time, and therefore I make a request to you. It is as to one who is dead to me. Macumazahn, I believe that Umbelazi the thief—these words broke from his lips with a hiss—"has given her many cattle and hidden her away either in the kloof of Zikali the Wise, or near to it, under his care. Now, if the war should go against Umbelazi and I should be killed in it, I think evil will fall upon that woman's head, I who have grown sure that it was she who was the wizard and not Masapo the Boar. Also, as one connected with Umbelazi, who has helped him in his plots, she will be killed if she is caught.

Macumazahn, hearken to me. I will tell you the truth. My heart is still on fire for that woman. She has bewitched me; her eyes haunt my sleep and I hear her voice in the wind. She is more to me than all the earth and all the sky, and although she has wronged me I do not wish that harm should come to her. Macumazahn, I pray you if I die, do your best to befriend her, even though it be only as a servant in your house, for I think that she cares more for you than for anyone, who only ran away with him"—and he pointed in the direction that Umbelazi had taken—"because he is a prince, who, in her folly, she believes will be a king. At least take her to Natal, Macumazahn, where, if you wish to be free of her, she can marry whom she will and will live safe until night comes. Panda loves you much, and, whoever conquers in the war, will give you her life if you ask it of him."

Then this strange man drew the back of his hand across his eyes, from which I saw the tears were running, and, muttering, "If you would have good fortune remember my prayer," turned and left me before I could answer a single word.

As for me, I sat down upon an ant-heap and whistled a whole hymn tune that my mother had taught me before I could think at all. To be left the guardian of Mameena! Talk of a "*damnosa hereditas*," a terrible and mischievous inheritance—why, this was the worst that ever I heard of. A servant in my house indeed, knowing what I did about her! Why, I had sooner share the "good fortune" which Umbelazi anticipated beneath the sod. However, that was not in the question, and without it the alternative of acting as her guardian was bad enough, though I comforted myself with the reflection that the circumstances in which this would become necessary might never arise. For, alas! I was sure that if they did arise I should have to live up to them. True, I had made no promise to Saduko with my lips, but I felt, as I knew he felt, that this promise had passed from my heart to his.

"That thief Umbelazi!" Strange words to be uttered by a great vassal of his lord, and both of them about to enter upon a desperate enterprise. "A prince whom in her folly she believes will be a king." Stranger words still. Then Saduko did not believe that he *would* be a king! And yet he was about to share the fortunes of his fight for the throne, he who said that his heart was still on fire for the woman whom "Umbelazi the thief" had stolen. Well, if I were Umbelazi, thought I to myself, I would rather that Saduko were not my chief councillor and general. But, thank Heaven! I was not Umbelazi, or Saduko, or any of them! And, thank Heaven still more, I was going to begin my trek from Zululand on the morrow!

Man proposes but God disposes. I did not trek from Zululand for many a long day. When I got back to my wagons it was to find that my oxen had mysteriously disappeared from the veld on which they were accustomed to graze. They were lost; or perhaps *they* had felt the urgent need of trekking from Zululand back to a more peaceful country. I sent all the hunters I had with me to look for them, only Scowl and I remaining at the wagons, which in those disturbed times I did not like to leave unguarded.

Four days went by, a week went by, and no sign of either hunters or oxen. Then at last a message, which reached me in some roundabout fashion, to the effect that the hunters had found the oxen a long way off, but on trying to return to Nodwengu had been driven by some of the *Usutu*—that is, by Cetewayo's party—across the Tugela into Natal, whence they dared not attempt to return.

For once in my life I went into a rage and cursed that nondescript kind of messenger, sent by I know not whom, in language that I think he will not forget. Then, realising the futility of swearing at a mere tool, I went up to the Great House and demanded an audience with Panda himself. Presently the *inceku*, or household servant, to whom I gave my message, returned, saying that I was to be admitted at once, and on entering the enclosure I found the King sitting at the head of the kraal quite alone, except for a man who was holding a large shield over him in order to keep off the sun.

He greeted me warmly, and I told him my trouble about the oxen, whereon he sent away the shield-holder, leaving us two together.

"Watcher-by-Night," he said, "why do you blame me for these events, when you know that I am nobody in my own House? I say that I am a dead man, whose sons fight for his inheritance. I cannot tell you for certain who it was that drove away your oxen. Still, I am glad that they are gone, since I believe that if you had attempted to trek to Natal just now you would have been killed on the road by the *Usutu*, who believe you to be a councillor of Umbelazi."

"I understand, O King," I answered, "and I dare say that the accident of the loss of my oxen is fortunate for me. But tell me now, what am I to do? I wish to follow the example of John Dunn [another white man in the country who was much mixed up with Zulu politics] and leave the land. Will you give me more oxen to draw my wagons?"

"I have none that are broken in, Macumazahn, for, as you know, we Zulus possess few wagons; and if I had I would not lend them to you, who do not desire that your blood should be upon my head."

"You are hiding something from me, O King," I said bluntly. "What is it that you want me to do? Stay here at Nodwengu?"

"No, Macumazahn. When the trouble begins I want you to go with a regiment of my own that I shall send to the assistance of my son, Umbelazi, so that he may have the benefit of your wisdom. O Macumazana, I will tell you the truth. My heart loves Umbelazi, and I fear me that he is overmatched by Cetewayo. If I could I would save his life, but I know not how to do so, since I must not seem to take sides too openly. But I can send down a regiment as your escort, if you choose to go to view the battle as my agent and make report to me. Say, will you not go?"

"Why should I go?" I answered, "seeing that whoever wins I may be killed, and that if Cetewayo wins I shall certainly be killed, and all for no reward."

"Nay, Macumazahn; I will give orders that whoever conquers, the man that dares to lift a spear against you shall die. In this matter, at least, I shall not be disobeyed. Oh! I pray you, do not desert me in my trouble. Go down with the regiment that I shall send and breathe your wisdom into the ear of my son, Umbelazi. As for your reward, I swear to you by the head of the Black One [Chaka] that it shall be great. I will see to it that you do not leave Zululand empty-handed, Macumazahn."

Still I hesitated, for I mistrusted me of this business.

"O Watcher-by-Night," exclaimed Panda, "you will not desert me, will you? I am afraid for the son of my heart, Umbelazi, whom I love above all my children; I am much afraid for Umbelazi," and he burst into tears before me.

It was foolish, no doubt, but the sight of the old King weeping for his best-beloved child, whom he believed to be doomed, moved me so much that I forgot my caution. "If you wish it O Panda," I said, "I'll go down to the battle with your regiment and stand there by the side of the Prince Umbelazi."

## Chapter XIII.

### UMBELAZI THE FALLEN

So I stayed on at Nodwengu, who, indeed, had no choice in the matter, and was very wretched and ill at ease. The place was almost deserted, except for a couple of regiments which were quartered there, the Sangqu and the Amawombe. This latter was the royal regiment, a kind of Household Guards, to which the Kings Chaka, Dingaan and Panda all belonged in turn. Most of the headmen had taken one side or the other, and were away raising forces to fight for Cetewayo or Umbelazi, and even the greater part of the women and children had gone to hide themselves in the bush or among the mountains, since none knew what would happen, or if the conquering army would not fall upon and destroy them.

A few councillors, however, remained with Panda, among whom was old Maputa, the general, who had once brought me the "message of the pills." Several times he visited me at night and told me the rumours that were flying about. From these I gathered that some skirmishes had taken place and the battle could not be long delayed; also that Umbelazi had chosen his fighting ground, a plain near the banks of the Tugela.

"Why has he done this," I asked, "seeing that then he will have a broad river behind him, and if he is defeated water can kill as well as spears?"

"I know not for certain," answered Maputa; "but it is said because of a dream that Saduko, his general, has dreamed thrice, which dream declares that there and there alone Umbelazi will find honour. At any rate, he has chosen this place; and I am told that all the women and children of his army, by thousands, are hidden in the bush along the banks of the river, so that they may fly into Natal if there is need."

"Have they wings," I asked, "wherewith to fly over the Tugela 'in wrath,' as it well may be after the rains? Oh, surely his Spirit has turned from Umbelazi!"

"Aye, Macumazahn," he answered, "I, too, think that *ufulatewe idhlozi* [that is, his own Spirit] has turned its back on him. Also I think that Saduko is no good councillor. Indeed, were I the prince," added the old fellow shrewdly, "I would not keep him whose wife I had stolen as the whisperer in my ear."

"Nor I, Maputa," I answered as I bade him good-bye.

Two days later, early in the morning, Maputa came to me again and said that Panda wished to see me. I went to the head of the kraal, where I found the King seated and before him the captains of the royal Amawombe regiment.

"Watcher-by-Night," he said, "I have news that the great battle between my sons will take place within a few days. Therefore I am sending down this, my own royal regiment, under the command of Maputa the skilled in war to spy out the battle, and I pray that you will go with it, that you may give to the General Maputa and to the captains the help of your wisdom. Now these are my orders to you, Maputa, and to you, O captains—that you take no part in the fight unless you should see that the Elephant, my son Umbelazi, is fallen into a pit, and that then you shall drag him out if you can and save him alive. Now repeat my words to me."

So they repeated the words, speaking with one voice.

"Your answer, O Macumazana," he said when they had spoken.

"O King, I have told you that I will go—though I do not like war—and I will keep my promise," I replied.

"Then make ready, Macumazahn, and be back here within an hour, for the regiment marches ere noon."

So I went up to my wagons and handed them over to the care of some men whom Panda had sent to take charge of them. Also Scowl and I saddled our horses, for this faithful fellow insisted upon accompanying me, although I advised him to stay behind, and got out our rifles and as much ammunition as we could possibly need, and with them a few other necessities. These things done, we rode back to the gathering-place, taking farewell of the wagons with a sad heart, since I, for one, never expected to see them again.

As we went I saw that the regiment of the Amawombe, picked men every one of them, all fifty years of age or over, nearly four thousand strong, was marshalled on the dancing-ground, where they stood company by company. A magnificent sight they were, with their white fighting-shields, their gleaming spears, their otter-skin caps, their kilts and armlets of white bulls' tails, and the snowy egret plumes which they wore upon their brows. We rode to the head of them, where I saw Maputa, and as I came they greeted me with a cheer of welcome, for in those days a white man was a power in the land. Moreover, as I have said, the Zulus knew and liked me well. Also the fact that I was to watch, or perchance to fight with them, put a good heart into the Amawombe.

There we stood until the lads, several hundreds of them, who bore the mats and cooking vessels and drove the cattle that were to be our commissariat, had wended away in a long line. Then suddenly Panda appeared out of his hut, accompanied by a few servants, and seemed to utter some kind of prayer, as he did so throwing dust or powdered medicine towards us, though what this ceremony meant I did not understand.

When he had finished Maputa raised a spear, whereon the whole regiment, in perfect time, shouted out the royal salute, *Bayéte*, with a sound like that of thunder. Thrice they repeated this tremendous and impressive salute, and then were silent. Again Maputa

raised his spear, and all the four thousand voices broke out into the *Ingoma*, or national chant, to which deep, awe-inspiring music we began our march. As I do not think it has ever been written down, I will quote the words. They ran thus:

“Ba ya m’zonda,  
Ba ya m’loyisa,  
Izizwe zonke,  
Ba zond’, Inkoosi.”[1]

[1] Literally translated, this famous chant, now, I think, published for the first time, which, I suppose, will never again pass the lips of a Zulu *impi*, means:

“They [*i.e.* the enemy] bear him [*i.e.* the King] hatred,  
They call down curses on his head,  
All of them throughout this land  
Abhor our King.”

The *Ingoma* when sung by twenty or thirty thousand men rushing down to battle must, indeed, have been a song to hear.—EDITOR.]

The *spirit* of this fierce *Ingoma*, conveyed by sound, gesture and inflection of voice, not the exact *words*, remember, which are very rude and simple, leaving much to the imagination, may perhaps be rendered somewhat as follows. An exact translation into English verse is almost impossible—at any rate, to me:

“Loud on their lips is lying,  
Red are their eyes with hate;  
Rebels their King defying.  
Lo! where our *impis* wait  
There shall be dead and dying,  
Vengeance insatiate!”

It was early on the morning of the 2nd of December, a cold, miserable morning that came with wind and driving mist, that I found myself with the Amawombe at the place known as Endondakusuka, a plain with some kopjes in it that lies within six miles of the Natal border, from which it is separated by the Tugela river.

As the orders of the Amawombe were to keep out of the fray if that were possible, we had taken up a position about a mile to the right of what proved to be the actual battlefield, choosing as our camping ground a rising knoll that looked like a huge tumulus, and was fronted at a distance of about five hundred yards by another smaller knoll. Behind us stretched bushland, or rather broken land, where mimosa thorns grew in scattered groups, sloping down to the banks of the Tugela about four miles away.

Shortly after dawn I was roused from the place where I slept, wrapped up in some blankets, under a mimosa tree—for, of course, we had no tents—by a messenger, who said that the Prince Umbelazi and the white man, John Dunn, wished to see me. I rose and tidied myself as best I could, since, if I can avoid it, I never like to appear before natives in a dishevelled condition. I remember that I had just finished brushing my hair when Umbelazi arrived.

I can see him now, looking a veritable giant in that morning mist. Indeed, there was something quite unearthly about his appearance as he arose out of those rolling vapours, such light as there was being concentrated upon the blade of his big spear, which was well known as the broadest carried by any warrior in Zululand, and a copper torque he wore about his throat.

There he stood, rolling his eyes and hugging his kaross around him because of the cold, and something in his anxious, indeterminate expression told me at once that he knew himself to be a man in terrible danger. Just behind him, dark and brooding, his arms folded on his breast, his eyes fixed upon the ground, looking, to my moved imagination, like an evil genius, stood the stately and graceful Saduko. On his left was a young and sturdy white man carrying a rifle and smoking a pipe, whom I guessed to be John Dunn, a gentleman whom, as it chanced, I had never met, while behind were a force of Natal Government Zulus, clad in some kind of uniform and armed with guns, and with them a number of natives, also from Natal—“kraal Kafirs,” who carried stabbing assegais. One of these led John Dunn’s horse.

Of those Government men there may have been thirty or forty, and of the “kraal Kafirs” anything between two and three hundred.

I shook Umbelazi’s hand and gave him good-day.

“That is an ill day upon which no sun shines, O Macumazana,” he answered—words that struck me as ominous. Then he introduced me to John Dunn, who seemed glad to meet another white man. Next, not knowing what to say, I asked the exact object of their visit, whereon Dunn began to talk. He said that he had been sent over on the previous afternoon by Captain Walmsley, who was an officer of the Natal Government stationed across the border, to try to make peace between the Zulu factions, but that when he spoke of peace one of Umbelazi’s brothers—I think it was Mantantashiya—had mocked at him, saying that they were quite strong enough to cope with the Usutu—that was Cetewayo’s party. Also, he added, that when he suggested that the thousands of women and children and the cattle should be got across the Tugela drift during the previous night into safety in Natal, Mantantashiya would not listen, and Umbelazi being absent, seeking the aid of the Natal Government, he could do nothing.

“*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat*” [whom God wishes to destroy, He first makes mad], quoted I to myself beneath my breath. This was one of the Latin tags that my old father, who was a scholar, had taught me, and at that moment it came back to my mind. But as I suspected that John Dunn knew no Latin, I only said aloud:

“What an infernal fool!” (We were talking in English.) “Can’t you get Umbelazi to do it now?” (I meant, to send the women and children across the river.)

“I fear it is too late, Mr. Quatermain,” he answered. “The *Usutu* are in sight. Look for yourself.” And he handed me a telescope which he had with him.

I climbed on to some rocks and scanned the plain in front of us, from which just then a puff of wind rolled away the mist. It was black with advancing men! As yet they were a considerable distance away—quite two miles, I should think—and coming on very slowly in a great half-moon with thin horns and a deep breast; but a ray from the sun glittered upon their countless spears. It seemed

to me that there must be quite twenty or thirty thousand of them in this breast, which was in three divisions, commanded, as I learned afterwards, by Cetewayo, Uzimela, and by a young Boer named Groening.

"There they are, right enough," I said, climbing down from my rocks. "What are you going to do, Mr. Dunn?"

"Obey orders and try to make peace, if I can find anyone to make peace with; and if I can't—well, fight, I suppose. And you, Mr. Quatermain?"

"Oh, obey orders and stop here, I suppose. Unless," I added doubtfully, "these Amawombe take the bit between their teeth and run away with me."

"They'll do that before nightfall, Mr. Quatermain, if I know anything of the Zulus. Look here, why don't you get on your horse and come off with me? This is a queer place for you."

"Because I promised not to," I answered with a groan, for really, as I looked at those savages round me, who were already fingering their spears in a disagreeable fashion, and those other thousands of savages advancing towards us, I felt such little courage as I possessed sinking into my boots.

"Very well, Mr. Quatermain, you know your own business best; but I hope you will come out of it safely, that is all."

"Same to you," I replied.

Then John Dunn turned, and in my hearing asked Umbelazi what he knew of the movements of the *Usutu* and of their plan of battle.

The Prince replied, with a shrug of his shoulders:

"Nothing at present, Son of Mr. Dunn, but doubtless before the sun is high I shall know much."

As he spoke a sudden gust of wind struck us, and tore the nodding ostrich plume from its fastening on Umbelazi's head-ring. Whilst a murmur of dismay rose from all who saw what they considered this very ill-omened accident, away it floated into the air, to fall gently to the ground at the feet of Saduko. He stooped, picked it up, and reset it in its place, saying as he did so, with that ready wit for which some Kafirs are remarkable:

"So may I live, O Prince, to set the crown upon the head of Panda's favoured son!"

This apt speech served to dispel the general gloom caused by the incident, for those who heard it cheered, while Umbelazi thanked his captain with a nod and a smile. Only I noted that Saduko did not mention the name of "Panda's favoured son" upon whose head he hoped to live to set the crown. Now, Panda had many sons, and that day would show which of them was favoured.

A minute or two later John Dunn and his following departed, as he said, to try to make peace with the advancing *Usutu*. Umbelazi, Saduko and their escort departed also towards the main body of the host of the *Isigqosa*, which was massed to our left, "sitting on their spears," as the natives say, and awaiting the attack. As for me, I remained alone with the Amawombe, drinking some coffee that Scowl had brewed for me, and forcing myself to swallow food.

I can say honestly that I do not ever remember partaking of a more unhappy meal. Not only did I believe that I was looking on the last sun I should ever see—though by the way, there was uncommonly little of that orb visible—but what made the matter worse was that, if so, I should be called upon to die alone among savages, with not a single white face near to comfort me. Oh, how I wished I had never allowed myself to be dragged into this dreadful business. Yes, and I was even mean enough to wish that I had broken my word to Panda and gone off with John Dunn when he invited me, although now I thank goodness that I did not yield to that temptation and thereby sacrifice my self-respect.

Soon, however, things grew so exciting that I forgot these and other melancholy reflections in watching the development of events from the summit of our tumulus-like knoll, whence I had a magnificent view of the whole battle. Here, after seeing that his regiment made a full meal, as a good general should, old Maputa joined me, whom I asked whether he thought there would be any fighting for him that day.

"I think so, I think so," he answered cheerfully. "It seems to me that the *Usutu* greatly outnumber Umbelazi and the *Isigqosa*, and, of course, as you know, Panda's orders are that if he is in danger we must help him. Oh, keep a good heart, Macumazahn, for I believe I can promise you that you will see our spears grow red to-day. You will not go hungry from this battle to tell the white people that the Amawombe are cowards whom you could not flog into the fight. No, no, Macumazahn, my Spirit looks towards me this morning, and I who am old and who thought that I should die at length like a cow, shall see one more great fight—my twentieth, Macumazahn; for I fought with this same Amawombe in all the Black One's big battles, and for Panda against Dingaan also."

"Perhaps it will be your last," I suggested.

"I dare say, Macumazahn; but what does that matter if only I and the royal regiment can make an end that shall be spoken of? Oh, cheer up, cheer up, Macumazahn; your Spirit, too, looks towards you, as I promise that we all will do when the shields meet; for know, Macumazahn, that we poor black soldiers expect that you will show us how to fight this day, and, if need be, how to fall hidden in a heap of the foe."

"Oh!" I replied, "so this is what you Zulus mean by the 'giving of counsel,' is it?—you infernal, bloodthirsty old scoundrel," I added in English.

But I think Maputa never heard me. At any rate, he only seized my arm and pointed in front, a little to the left, where the horn of the great *Usutu* army was coming up fast, a long, thin line alive with twinkling spears; their moving arms and legs causing them to look like spiders, of which the bodies were formed by the great war shields.

"See their plan?" he said. "They would close on Umbelazi and gore him with their horns and then charge with their head. The horn will pass between us and the right flank of the *Isigqosa*. Oh! awake, awake, Elephant! Are you asleep with Mameena in a hut? Unloose your spears, Child of the King, and at them as they mount the slope. Behold!" he went on, "it is the Son of Dunn that begins the battle! Did I not tell you that we must look to the white men to show us the way? Peep through your tube, Macumazahn, and tell me what passes."

So I “peeped,” and, the telescope which John Dunn had kindly left with me being good though small, saw everything clearly enough. He rode up almost to the point of the left horn of the *Usutu*, waving a white handkerchief and followed by his small force of police and Natal Kafirs. Then from somewhere among the *Usutu* rose a puff of smoke. Dunn had been fired at.

He dropped the handkerchief and leapt to the ground. Now he and his police were firing rapidly in reply, and men fell fast among the *Usutu*. They raised their war shout and came on, though slowly, for they feared the bullets. Step by step John Dunn and his people were thrust back, fighting gallantly against overwhelming odds. They were level with us, not a quarter of a mile to our left. They were pushed past us. They vanished among the bush behind us, and a long while passed before ever I heard what became of them, for we met no more that day.

Now, the horns having done their work and wrapped themselves round Umbelazi’s army as the nippers of a wasp close about a fly (why did not Umbelazi cut off those horns, I wondered), the *Usutu* bull began his charge. Twenty or thirty thousand strong, regiment after regiment, Cetewayo’s men rushed up the slope, and there, near the crest of it, were met by Umbelazi’s regiments springing forward to repel the onslaught and shouting their battle-cry of “*Laba! Laba! Laba! Laba!*”

The noise of their meeting shields came to our ears like that of the roll of thunder, and the sheen of their stabbing-spears shone as shines the broad summer lightning. They hung and wavered on the slope; then from the Amawombe ranks rose a roar of

“*Umbelazi wins!*”

Watching intently, we saw the *Usutu* giving back. Down the slope they went, leaving the ground in front of them covered with black spots which we knew to be dead or wounded men.

“Why does not the Elephant charge home?” said Maputa in a perplexed voice. “The *Usutu* bull is on his back! Why does he not trample him?”

“Because he is afraid, I suppose,” I answered, and went on watching.

There was plenty to see, as it happened. Finding that they were not pursued, Cetewayo’s *impi* reformed swiftly at the bottom of the slope, in preparation for another charge. Among that of Umbelazi, above them, rapid movements took place of which I could not guess the meaning, which movements were accompanied by much noise of angry shouting. Then suddenly, from the midst of the *Isigqosa* army, emerged a great body of men, thousands strong, which ran swiftly, but in open order, down the slope towards the *Usutu*, holding their spears reversed. At first I thought that they were charging independently, till I saw the *Usutu* ranks open to receive them with a shout of welcome.

“Treachery!” I said. “Who is it?”

“Saduko, with the Amakoba and Amangwane soldiers and others. I know them by their head-dresses,” answered Maputa in a cold voice.

“Do you mean that Saduko has gone over to Cetewayo with all his following?” I asked excitedly.

“What else, Macumazahn? Saduko is a traitor: Umbelazi is finished,” and he passed his hand swiftly across his mouth—a gesture that has only one meaning among the Zulus.

As for me, I sat down upon a stone and groaned, for now I understood everything.

Presently the *Usutu* raised fierce, triumphant shouts, and once again their *impi*, swelled with Saduko’s power, began to advance up the slope. Umbelazi, and those of the *Isigqosa* party who clung to him—now, I should judge, not more than eight thousand men—never stayed to wait the onslaught. They broke! They fled in a hideous rout, crashing through the thin, left horn of the *Usutu* by mere weight of numbers, and passing behind us obliquely on their road to the banks of the Tugela. A messenger rushed up to us, panting.

“These are the words of Umbelazi,” he gasped. “O Watcher-by-Night and O Maputa, *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti* prays that you will hold back the *Usutu*, as the King bade you do in case of need, and so give to him and those who cling to him time to escape with the women and children into Natal. His general, Saduko, has betrayed him, and gone over with three regiments to Cetewayo, and therefore we can no longer stand against the thousands of the *Usutu*.”

“Go tell the prince that Macumazahn, Maputa, and the Amawombe regiment will do their best,” answered Maputa calmly. “Still, this is our advice to him, that he should cross the Tugela swiftly with the women and the children, seeing that we are few and Cetewayo is many.”

The messenger leapt away, but, as I heard afterwards, he never found Umbelazi, since the poor man was killed within five hundred yards of where we stood.

Then Maputa gave an order, and the Amawombe formed themselves into a triple line, thirteen hundred men in the first line, thirteen hundred men in the second line, and about a thousand in the third, behind whom were the carrier boys, three or four hundred of them. The place assigned to me was in the exact centre of the second line, where, being mounted on a horse, it was thought, as I gathered, that I should serve as a convenient rallying-point.

In this formation we advanced a few hundred yards to our left, evidently with the object of interposing ourselves between the routed *impi* and the pursuing *Usutu*, or, if the latter should elect to go round us, with that of threatening their flank. Cetewayo’s generals did not leave us long in doubt as to what they would do. The main body of their army bore away to the right in pursuit of the flying foe, but three regiments, each of about two thousand five hundred spears, halted. Five minutes passed perhaps while they marshalled, with a distance of some six hundred yards between them. Each regiment was in a triple line like our own.

To me that seemed a very long five minutes, but, reflecting that it was probably my last on earth, I tried to make the best of it in a fashion that can be guessed. Strange to say, however, I found it impossible to keep my mind fixed upon those matters with which it ought to have been filled. My eyes and thoughts would roam. I looked at the ranks of the veteran Amawombe, and noted that they were still and solemn as men about to die should be, although they showed no sign of fear. Indeed, I saw some of those near me passing their snuffboxes to each other. Two grey-haired men also, who evidently were old friends, shook hands as people do who are

parting before a journey, while two others discussed in a low voice the possibility of our wiping out most of the *Usutu* before we were wiped out ourselves.

"It depends," said one of them, "whether they attack us regiment by regiment or all together, as they will do if they are wise."

Then an officer bade them be silent, and conversation ceased. Maputa passed through the ranks giving orders to the captains. From a distance his withered old body, with a fighting shield held in front of it, looked like that of a huge black ant carrying something in its mouth. He came to where Scowl and I sat upon our horses.

"Ah! I see that you are ready, Macumazahn," he said in a cheerful voice. "I told you that you should not go away hungry, did I not?"

"Maputa," I said in remonstrance, "what is the use of this? Umbelazi is defeated, you are not of his *impi*, why send all these"—and I waved my hand—"down into the darkness? Why not go to the river and try to save the women and children?"

"Because we shall take many of those down into the darkness with us, Macumazahn," and he pointed to the dense masses of the *Usutu*. "Yet," he added, with a touch of compunction, "this is not your quarrel. You and your servant have horses. Slip out, if you will, and gallop hard to the lower drift. You may get away with your lives."

Then my white man's pride came to my aid.

"Nay," I answered, "I will not run while others stay to fight."

"I never thought you would, Macumazahn, who, I am sure, do not wish to earn a new and ugly name. Well, neither will the Amawombe run to become a mock among their people. The King's orders were that we should try to help Umbelazi, if the battle went against him. We obey the King's orders by dying where we stand. Macumazahn, do you think that you could hit that big fellow who is shouting insults at us there? If so, I should be obliged to you, as I dislike him very much," and he showed me a captain who was swaggering about in front of the lines of the first of the *Usutu* regiments, about six hundred yards away.

"I will try," I answered, "but it's a long shot." Dismounting, I climbed a pile of stones and, resting my rifle on the topmost of them, took a very full sight, aimed, held my breath, and pressed the trigger. A second afterwards the shouter of insults threw his arms wide, letting fall his spear, and pitched forward on to his face.

A roar of delight rose from the watching Amawombe, while old Maputa clapped his thin brown hands and grinned from ear to ear.

"Thank you, Macumazahn. A very good omen! Now I am sure that, whatever those *Isigqosa* dogs of Umbelazi's may do, we King's men shall make an excellent end, which is all that we can hope. Oh, what a beautiful shot! It will be something to think of when I am an *idhlozi*, a spirit-snake, crawling about my own kraal. Farewell, Macumazahn," and he took my hand and pressed it. "The time has come. I go to lead the charge. The Amawombe have orders to defend you to the last, for I wish you to see the finish of this fight. Farewell."

Then off he hurried, followed by his orderlies and staff-officers.

I never saw him again alive, though I think that once in after years I did meet his *idhlozi* in his kraal under strange circumstances. But that has nothing to do with this history.

As for me, having reloaded, I mounted my horse again, being afraid lest, if I went on shooting, I should miss and spoil my reputation. Besides, what was the use of killing more men unless I was obliged? There were plenty ready to do that.

Another minute, and the regiment in front of us began to move, while the other two behind it ostentatiously sat themselves down in their ranks, to show that they did not mean to spoil sport. The fight was to begin with a duel between about six thousand men.

"Good!" muttered the warrior who was nearest me. "They are in our bag."

"Aye," answered another, "those little boys" (used as a term of contempt) "are going to learn their last lesson."

For a few seconds there was silence, while the long ranks leant forward between the hedges of lean and cruel spears. A whisper went down the line; it sounded like the noise of wind among trees, and was the signal to prepare. Next a far-off voice shouted some word, which was repeated again and again by other voices before and behind me. I became aware that we were moving, quite slowly at first, then more quickly. Being lifted above the ranks upon my horse I could see the whole advance, and the general aspect of it was that of a triple black wave, each wave crowned with foam—the white plumes and shields of the Amawombe were the foam—and alive with sparkles of light—their broad spears were the light.

We were charging now—and oh! the awful and glorious excitement of that charge! Oh, the rush of the bending plumes and the dull thudding of eight thousand feet! The *Usutu* came up the slope to meet us. In silence we went, and in silence they came. We drew near to each other. Now we could see their faces peering over the tops of their mottled shields, and now we could see their fierce and rolling eyes.

Then a roar—a rolling roar such as at that time I had never heard: the thunder of the roar of the meeting shields—and a flash—a swift, simultaneous flash, the flash of the lightning of the stabbing spears. Up went the cry of:

"Kill, Amawombe, kill!" answered by another cry of:

"Toss, *Usutu*, toss!"

After that, what happened? Heaven knows alone—or at least I do not. But in later years Mr. Osborn, afterwards the resident magistrate at Newcastle, in Natal, who, being young and foolish in those days, had swum his horse over the Tugela and hidden in a little kopje quite near to us in order to see the battle, told me that it looked as though some huge breaker—that breaker being the splendid Amawombe—rolling in towards the shore with the weight of the ocean behind it, had suddenly struck a ridge of rock and, rearing itself up, submerged and hidden it.

At least, within three minutes that *Usutu* regiment was no more. We had killed them every one, and from all along our lines rose a fierce hissing sound of "*S'gee, S'gee*" ("*Zhi*" in the Zulu) uttered as the spears went home in the bodies of the conquered.

That regiment had gone, taking nearly a third of our number with it, for in such a battle as this the wounded were as good as dead. Practically our first line had vanished in a fray that did not last more than a few minutes. Before it was well over the second *Usutu* regiment sprang up and charged. With a yell of victory we rushed down the slope towards them. Again there was the roar of the meeting shields, but this time the fight was more prolonged, and, being in the front rank now, I had my share of it. I remember shooting two *Usutu* who stabbed at me, after which my gun was wrenched from my hand. I remember the mêlée swinging backwards and forwards, the groans of the wounded, the shouts of victory and despair, and then Scowl's voice saying:

"We have beat them, Baas, but here come the others."

The third regiment was on our shattered lines. We closed up, we fought like devils, even the bearer boys rushed into the fray. From all sides they poured down upon us, for we had made a ring; every minute men died by hundreds, and, though their numbers grew few, not one of the Amawombe yielded. I was fighting with a spear now, though how it came into my hand I cannot remember for certain. I think, however, I wrenched it from a man who rushed at me and was stabbed before he could strike. I killed a captain with this spear, for as he fell I recognised his face. It was that of one of Cetewayo's companions to whom I had sold some cloth at Nodwengu. The fallen were piled up quite thick around me—we were using them as a breastwork, friend and foe together. I saw Scowl's horse rear into the air and fall. He slipped over its tail, and next instant was fighting at my side, also with a spear, muttering Dutch and English oaths as he struck.

"*Beetje varm!* [a little hot] *Beetje varm*, Baas!" I heard him say. Then my horse screamed aloud and something hit me hard upon the head—I suppose it was a thrown kerry—after which I remember nothing for a while, except a sensation of passing through the air.

I came to myself again, and found that I was still on the horse, which was ambling forward across the veld at a rate of about eight miles an hour, and that Scowl was clinging to my stirrup leather and running at my side. He was covered with blood, so was the horse, and so was I. It may have been our own blood, for all three were more or less wounded, or it may have been that of others; I am sure I do not know, but we were a terrible sight. I pulled upon the reins, and the horse stopped among some thorns. Scowl felt in the saddlebags and found a large flask of Hollands gin and water—half gin and half water—which he had placed there before the battle. He uncorked and gave it to me. I took a long pull at the stuff, that tasted like veritable nectar, then handed it to him, who did likewise. New life seemed to flow into my veins. Whatever teetotallers may say, alcohol is good at such a moment.

"Where are the Amawombe?" I asked.

"All dead by now, I think, Baas, as we should be had not your horse bolted. *Wow!* but they made a great fight—one that will be told of! They have carried those three regiments away upon their spears."

"That's good," I said. "But where are we going?"

"To Natal, I hope, Baas. I have had enough of the Zulus for the present. The Tugela is not far away, and we will swim it. Come on, before our hurts grow stiff."

So we went on, till presently we reached the crest of a rise of ground overlooking the river, and there saw and heard dreadful things, for beneath us those devilish *Usutu* were massacring the fugitives and the camp-followers. These were being driven by the hundred to the edge of the water, there to perish on the banks or in the stream, which was black with drowned or drowning forms.

And oh! the sounds! Well, these I will not attempt to describe.

"Keep up stream," I said shortly, and we struggled across a kind of donga, where only a few wounded men were hidden, into a somewhat denser patch of bush that had scarcely been entered by the flying *Isiggosa*, perhaps because here the banks of the river were very steep and difficult; also, between them its waters ran swiftly, for this was above the drift.

For a while we went on in safety, then suddenly I heard a noise. A great man plunged past me, breaking through the bush like a buffalo, and came to a halt upon a rock which overhung the Tugela, for the floods had eaten away the soil beneath.

"Umbelazi!" said Scowl, and as he spoke we saw another man following as a wild dog follows a buck.

"Saduko!" said Scowl.

I rode on. I could not help riding on, although I knew it would be safer to keep away. I reached the edge of that big rock. Saduko and Umbelazi were fighting there.

In ordinary circumstances, strong and active as he was, Saduko would have had no chance against the most powerful Zulu living. But the prince was utterly exhausted; his sides were going like a blacksmith's bellows, or those of a fat eland bull that has been galloped to a standstill. Moreover, he seemed to me to be distraught with grief, and, lastly, he had no shield left, nothing but an assegai.

A stab from Saduko's spear, which he partially parried, wounded him slightly on the head, and cut loose the fillet of his ostrich plume, that same plume which I had seen blown off in the morning, so that it fell to the ground. Another stab pierced his right arm, making it helpless. He snatched the assegai with his left hand, striving to continue the fight, and just at that moment we came up.

"What are you doing, Saduko?" I cried. "Does a dog bite his own master?"

He turned and stared at me; both of them stared at me.

"Aye, Macumazahn," he answered in an icy voice, "sometimes when it is starving and that full-fed master has snatched away its bone. Nay, stand aside, Macumazahn" (for, although I was quite unarmed, I had stepped between them), "lest you should share the fate of this woman-thief."

"Not I, Saduko," I cried, for this sight made me mad, "unless you murder me."

Then Umbelazi spoke in a hollow voice, sobbing out his words:

"I thank you, White Man, yet do as this snake bids you—this snake that has lived in my kraal and fed out of my cup. Let him have his fill of vengeance because of the woman who bewitched me—yes, because of the sorceress who has brought me and thousands to the dust. Have you heard, Macumazahn, of the great deed of this son of Matiwane? Have you heard that all the while he was a traitor

in the pay of Cetewayo, and that he went over, with the regiments of his command, to the *Usutu* just when the battle hung upon the turn? Come, Traitor, here is my heart—the heart that loved and trusted you. Strike—strike hard!”

“Out of the way, Macumazahn!” hissed Saduko. But I would not stir.

He sprang at me, and, though I put up the best fight that I could in my injured state, got his hands about my throat and began to choke me. Scowl ran to help me, but his wound—for he was hurt—or his utter exhaustion took effect on him. Or perhaps it was excitement. At any rate, he fell down in a fit. I thought that all was over, when again I heard Umbelazi’s voice, and felt Saduko’s grip loosen at my throat, and sat up.

“Dog,” said the Prince, “where is your assegai?” And as he spoke he threw it from him into the river beneath, for he had picked it up while we struggled, but, as I noted, retained his own. “Now, dog, why do I not kill you, as would have been easy but now? I will tell you. Because I will not mix the blood of a traitor with my own. See!” He set the haft of his broad spear upon the rock and bent forward over the blade. “You and your witch-wife have brought me to nothing, O Saduko. My blood, and the blood of all who clung to me, is on your head. Your name shall stink for ever in the nostrils of all true men, and I whom you have betrayed—I, the Prince Umbelazi—will haunt you while you live; yes, my spirit shall enter into you, and when you die—ah! then we’ll meet again. Tell this tale to the white men, Macumazahn, my friend, on whom be honour and blessings.”

He paused, and I saw the tears gush from his eyes—tears mingled with blood from the wound in his head. Then suddenly he uttered the battle-cry of “*Laba! Laba!*” and let his weight fall upon the point of the spear.

It pierced him through and through. He fell on to his hands and knees. He looked up at us—oh, the piteousness of that look!—and then rolled sideways from the edge of the rock.

A heavy splash, and that was the end of Umbelazi the Fallen—Umbelazi, about whom Mameena had cast her net.

A sad story in truth. Although it happened so many years ago I weep as I write it—I weep as Umbelazi wept.

## Chapter XIV.

### UMBEZI AND THE BLOOD ROYAL

After this I think that some of the *Usutu* came up, for it seemed to me that I heard Saduko say:

"Touch not Macumazahn or his servant. They are my prisoners. He who harms them dies, with all his House."

So they put me, fainting, on my horse, and Scowl they carried away upon a shield.

When I came to I found myself in a little cave, or rather beneath some overhanging rocks, at the side of a kopje, and with me Scowl, who had recovered from his fit, but seemed in a very bewildered condition. Indeed, neither then nor afterwards did he remember anything of the death of Umbelazi, nor did I ever tell him that tale. Like many others, he thought that the Prince had been drowned in trying to swim the Tugela.

"Are they going to kill us?" I asked of him, since, from the triumphant shouting without, I knew that we must be in the midst of the victorious *Usutu*.

"I don't know, Baas," he answered. "I hope not; after we have gone through so much it would be a pity. Better to have died at the beginning of the battle."

I nodded my head in assent, and just at that moment a Zulu, who had very evidently been fighting, entered the place carrying a dish of toasted lumps of beef and a gourd of water.

"Cetewayo sends you these, Macumazahn," he said, "and is sorry that there is no milk or beer. When you have eaten a guard waits without to escort you to him." And he went.

"Well," I said to Scowl, "if they were going to kill us, they would scarcely take the trouble to feed us first. So let us keep up our hearts and eat."

"Who knows?" answered poor Scowl, as he crammed a lump of beef into his big mouth. "Still, it is better to die on a full than on an empty stomach."

So we ate and drank, and, as we were suffering more from exhaustion than from our hurts, which were not really serious, our strength came back to us. As we finished the last lump of meat, which, although it had been only half cooked upon the point of an assegai, tasted very good, the Zulu put his head into the mouth of the shelter and asked if we were ready. I nodded, and, supporting each other, Scowl and I limped from the place. Outside were about fifty soldiers, who greeted us with a shout that, although it was mixed with laughter at our pitiable appearance, struck me as not altogether unfriendly. Amongst these men was my horse, which stood with its head hanging down, looking very depressed. I was helped on to its back, and, Scowl clinging to the stirrup leather, we were led a distance of about a quarter of a mile to Cetewayo.

We found him seated, in the full blaze of the evening sun, on the eastern slope of one of the land-waves of the veld, with the open plain in front of him. It was a strange and savage scene. There sat the victorious prince, surrounded by his captains and *indunas*, while before him rushed the triumphant regiments, shouting his titles in the most extravagant language. *Izimbongi* also—that is, professional praisers—were running up and down before him dressed in all sorts of finery, telling his deeds, calling him "Eater-up-of-the-Earth," and yelling out the names of those great ones who had been killed in the battle.

Meanwhile parties of bearers were coming up continually, carrying dead men of distinction upon shields and laying them out in rows, as game is laid out at the end of a day's shooting in England. It seems that Cetewayo had taken a fancy to see them, and, being too tired to walk over the field of battle, ordered that this should be done. Among these, by the way, I saw the body of my old friend, Maputa, the general of the Amawombe, and noted that it was literally riddled with spear thrusts, every one of them in front; also that his quaint face still wore a smile.

At the head of these lines of corpses were laid six dead, all men of large size, in whom I recognised the brothers of Umbelazi, who had fought on his side, and the half-brothers of Cetewayo. Among them were those three princes upon whom the dust had fallen when Zikali, the prophet, smelt out Masapo, the husband of Mameena.

Dismounting from my horse, with the help of Scowl, I limped through and over the corpses of these fallen royalties, cut in the Zulu fashion to free their spirits, which otherwise, as they believed, would haunt the slayers, and stood in front of Cetewayo.

"*Siyakubona*, Macumazahn," he said, stretching out his hand to me, which I took, though I could not find it in my heart to wish *him* "good day."

"I hear that you were leading the Amawombe, whom my father, the King, sent down to help Umbelazi, and I am very glad that you have escaped alive. Also my heart is proud of the fight that they made, for you know, Macumazahn, once, next to the King, I was general of that regiment, though afterwards we quarrelled. Still, I am pleased that they did so well, and I have given orders that every one of them who remains alive is to be spared, that they may be officers of a new Amawombe which I shall raise. Do you know, Macumazahn, that you have nearly wiped out three whole regiments of the *Usutu*, killing many more people than did all my brother's army, the *Isigqosa*? Oh, you are a great man. Had it not been for the loyalty"—this word was spoken with just a tinge of sarcasm

—“of Saduko yonder, you would have won the day for Umbelazi. Well, now that this quarrel is finished, if you will stay with me I will make you general of a whole division of the King’s army, since henceforth I shall have a voice in affairs.”

“You are mistaken, O Son of Panda,” I answered; “the splendour of the Amawombe’s great stand against a multitude is on the name of Maputa, the King’s councillor and the *induna* of the Black One [Chaka], who is gone. He lies yonder in his glory,” and I pointed to Maputa’s pierced body. “I did but fight as a soldier in his ranks.”

“Oh, yes, we know that, we know all that, Macumazahn; and Maputa was a clever monkey in his way, but we know also that you taught him how to jump. Well, he is dead, and nearly all the Amawombe are dead, and of my three regiments but a handful is left; the vultures have the rest of them. That is all finished and forgotten, Macumazahn, though by good fortune the spears went wide of you, who doubtless are a magician, since otherwise you and your servant and your horse would not have escaped with a few scratches when everyone else was killed. But you did escape, as you have done before in Zululand; and now you see here lie certain men who were born of my father. Yet one is missing—he against whom I fought, aye, and he whom, although we fought, I loved the best of all of them. Now, it has been whispered in my ear that you alone know what became of him, and, Macumazahn, I would learn whether he lives or is dead; also, if he is dead, by whose hand he died, who would reward that hand.”

Now, I looked round me, wondering whether I should tell the truth or hold my tongue, and as I looked my eyes met those of Saduko, who, cold and unconcerned, was seated among the captains, but at a little distance from any of them—a man apart; and I remembered that he and I alone knew the truth of the end of Umbelazi.

Why, I do not know, but it came into my mind that I would keep the secret. Why should I tell the triumphant Cetewayo that Umbelazi had been driven to die by his own hand; why should I lay bare Saduko’s victory and shame? All these matters had passed into the court of a different tribunal. Who was I that I should reveal them or judge the actors of this terrible drama?

“O Cetewayo,” I said, “as it chanced I saw the end of Umbelazi. No enemy killed him. He died of a broken heart upon a rock above the river; and for the rest of the story go ask the Tugela into which he fell.”

For a moment Cetewayo hid his eyes with his hand.

“Is it so?” he said presently. “*Wow!* I say again that had it not been for Saduko, the son of Matiwane, yonder, who had some quarrel with *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti* about a woman and took his chance of vengeance, it might have been I who died of a broken heart upon a rock above the river. Oh, Saduko, I owe you a great debt and will pay you well; but you shall be no friend of mine, lest we also should chance to quarrel about a woman, and I should find myself dying of a broken heart on a rock above a river. O my brother Umbelazi, I mourn for you, my brother, for, after all, we played together when we were little and loved each other once, who in the end fought for a toy that is called a throne, since, as our father said, two bulls cannot live in the same yard, my brother. Well, you are gone and I remain, yet who knows but that at the last your lot may be happier than mine. You died of a broken heart, Umbelazi, but of what shall I die, I wonder?”<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] That history of Cetewayo’s fall and tragic death and of Zikali’s vengeance I hope to write one day, for in these events also I was destined to play a part.—A. Q.

I have given this interview in detail, since it was because of it that the saying went abroad that Umbelazi died of a broken heart.

So in truth he did, for before his spear pierced it his heart was broken.

Now, seeing that Cetewayo was in one of his soft moods, and that he seemed to look upon me kindly, though I had fought against him, I reflected that this would be a good opportunity to ask his leave to depart. To tell the truth, my nerves were quite shattered with all I had gone through, and I longed to be away from the sights and sounds of that terrible battlefield, on and about which so many thousand people had perished this fateful day, as I had seldom longed for anything before. But while I was making up my mind as to the best way to approach him, something happened which caused me to lose my chance.

Hearing a noise behind me, I looked round, to see a stout man arrayed in a very fine war dress, and waving in one hand a gory spear and in the other a head-plume of ostrich feathers, who was shouting out:

“Give me audience of the son of the King! I have a song to sing to the Prince. I have a tale to tell to the conqueror, Cetewayo.”

I stared. I rubbed my eyes. It could not be—yes, it was—Umbezi, “Eater-up-of-Elephants,” the father of Mameena. In a few seconds, without waiting for leave to approach, he had bounded through the line of dead princes, stopping to kick one of them on the head and address his poor clay in some words of shameful insult, and was prancing about before Cetewayo, shouting his praises.

“Who is this *umfokazana*?” [that is, low fellow] growled the Prince. “Bid him cease his noise and speak, lest he should be silent for ever.”

“O Calf of the Black Cow, I am Umbezi, ‘Eater-up-of-Elephants,’ chief captain of Saduko the Cunning, he who won you the battle, father of Mameena the Beautiful, whom Saduko wed and whom the dead dog, Umbelazi, stole away from him.”

“Ah!” said Cetewayo, screwing up his eyes in a fashion he had when he meant mischief, which among the Zulus caused him to be named the “Bull-who-shuts-his-eyes-to-toss,” “and what have you to tell me, ‘Eater-up-of-Elephants’ and father of Mameena, whom the dead dog, Umbelazi, took away from your master, Saduko the Cunning?”

“This, O Mighty One; this, O Shaker of the Earth, that well am I named ‘Eater-up-of-Elephants,’ who have eaten up *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti*—the Elephant himself.”

Now Saduko seemed to awake from his brooding and started from his place; but Cetewayo sharply bade him be silent, whereon Umbezi, the fool, noting nothing, continued his tale.

“O Prince, I met Umbelazi in the battle, and when he saw me he fled from me; yes, his heart grew soft as water at the sight of me, the warrior whom he had wronged, whose daughter he had stolen.”

“I hear you,” said Cetewayo. “Umbelazi’s heart turned to water at the sight of you because he had wronged you—you who until this morning, when you deserted him with Saduko, were one of his jackals. Well, and what happened then?”

"He fled, O Lion with the Black Mane; he fled like the wind, and I, I flew after him like—a stronger wind. Far into the bush he fled, till at length he came to a rock above the river and was obliged to stand. Then there we fought. He thrust at me, but I leapt over his spear *thus*," and he gambolled into the air. "He thrust at me again, but I bent myself *thus*," and he ducked his great head. "Then he grew tired and my time came. He turned and ran round the rock, and I, I ran after him, stabbing him through the back, *thus*, and *thus*, and *thus*, till he fell, crying for mercy, and rolled off the rock into the river; and as he rolled I snatched away his plume. See, is it not the plume of the dead dog Umbelazi?"

Cetewayo took the ornament and examined it, showing it to one or two of the captains near him, who nodded their heads gravely.

"Yes," he said, "this is the war plume of Umbelazi, beloved of the King, strong and shining pillar of the Great House; we know it well, that war plume at the sight of which many a knee has loosened. And so you killed him, 'Eater-up-of-Elephants,' father of Mameena, you who this morning were one of the meanest of his jackals. Now, what reward shall I give you for this mighty deed, O Umbezi?"

"A great reward, O Terrible One," began Umbezi, but in an awful voice Cetewayo bade him be silent.

"Yes," he said, "a great reward. Hearken, Jackal and Traitor. Your own words bear witness against you. You, *you* have dared to lift your hand against the blood-royal, and with your foul tongue to heap lies and insults upon the name of the mighty dead."

Now, understanding at last, Umbezi began to babble excuses, yes, and to declare that all his tale was false. His fat cheeks fell in, he sank to his knees.

But Cetewayo only spat towards the man, after his fashion when enraged, and looked round him till his eye fell upon Saduko.

"Saduko," he said, "take away this slayer of the Prince, who boasts that he is red with my own blood, and when he is dead cast him into the river from that rock on which he says he stabbed Panda's son."

Saduko looked round him wildly and hesitated.

"Take him away," thundered Cetewayo, "and return ere dark to make report to me."

Then, at a sign from the Prince, soldiers flung themselves upon the miserable Umbezi and dragged him thence, Saduko going with them; nor was the poor liar ever seen again. As he passed by me he called to me, for Mameena's sake, to save him; but I could only shake my head and bethink me of the warning I had once given to him as to the fate of traitors.

It may be said that this story comes straight from the history of Saul and David, but I can only answer that it happened. Circumstances that were not unlike ended in a similar tragedy, that is all. What David's exact motives were, naturally I cannot tell; but it is easy to guess those of Cetewayo, who, although he could make war upon his brother to secure the throne, did not think it wise to let it go abroad that the royal blood might be lightly spilt. Also, knowing that I was a witness of the Prince's death, he was well aware that Umbezi was but a boastful liar who hoped thus to ingratiate himself with an all-powerful conqueror.

Well, this tragic incident had its sequel. It seems—to his honour, be it said—that Saduko refused to be the executioner of his father-in-law, Umbezi; so those with him performed this office and brought him back a prisoner to Cetewayo.

When the Prince learned that his direct order, spoken in the accustomed and fearful formula of "*Take him away*," had been disobeyed, his rage was, or seemed to be, great. My own conviction is that he was only seeking a cause of quarrel against Saduko, who, he thought, was a very powerful man, who would probably treat him, should opportunity arise, as he had treated Umbelazi, and perhaps now that the most of Panda's sons were dead, except himself and the lads M'tonga, Sikota and M'kungu, who had fled into Natal, might even in future days aspire to the throne as the husband of the King's daughter. Still, he was afraid or did not think it politic at once to put out of his path this master of many legions, who had played so important a part in the battle. Therefore he ordered him to be kept under guard and taken back to Nodwengu, that the whole matter might be investigated by Panda the King, who still ruled the land, though henceforth only in name. Also he refused to allow me to depart into Natal, saying that I, too, must come to Nodwengu, as there my testimony might be needed.

So, having no choice, I went, it being fated that I should see the end of the drama.

## Chapter XV.

### MAMEENA CLAIMS THE KISS

When I reached Nodwengu I was taken ill and laid up in my wagon for about a fortnight. What my exact sickness was I do not know, for I had no doctor at hand to tell me, as even the missionaries had fled the country. Fever resulting from fatigue, exposure and excitement, and complicated with fearful headache—caused, I presume, by the blow which I received in the battle—were its principal symptoms.

When I began to get better, Scowl and some Zulu friends who came to see me informed me that the whole land was in a fearful state of disorder, and that Umbelazi's adherents, the *Isigqosa*, were still being hunted out and killed. It seems that it was even suggested by some of the *Usutu* that I should share their fate, but on this point Panda was firm. Indeed, he appears to have said publicly that whoever lifted a spear against me, his friend and guest, lifted it against him, and would be the cause of a new war. So the *Usutu* left me alone, perhaps because they were satisfied with fighting for a while, and thought it wisest to be content with what they had won.

Indeed, they had won everything, for Cetewayo was now supreme—by right of the assegai—and his father but a cipher. Although he remained the "Head" of the nation, Cetewayo was publicly declared to be its "Feet," and strength was in these active "Feet," not in the bowed and sleeping "Head." In fact, so little power was left to Panda that he could not protect his own household. Thus one day I heard a great tumult and shouting proceeding apparently from the *Isi-gohlo*, or royal enclosure, and on inquiring what it was afterwards, was told that Cetewayo had come from the Amangwe kraal and denounced Nomantshali, the King's wife, as *umtakati*, or a witch. More, in spite of his father's prayers and tears, he had caused her to be put to death before his eyes—a dreadful and a savage deed. At this distance of time I cannot remember whether Nomantshali was the mother of Umbelazi or of one of the other fallen princes.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] On re-reading this history it comes back to me that she was the mother of M'tonga, who was much younger than Umbelazi. —A. Q.

A few days later, when I was up and about again, although I had not ventured into the kraal, Panda sent a messenger to me with a present of an ox. On his behalf this man congratulated me on my recovery, and told me that, whatever might have happened to others, I was to have no fear for my own safety. He added that Cetewayo had sworn to the King that not a hair of my head should be harmed, in these words:

"Had I wished to kill Watcher-by-Night because he fought against me, I could have done so down at Endondakusuka; but then I ought to kill you also, my father, since you sent him thither against his will with your own regiment. But I like him well, who is brave and who brought me good tidings that the Prince, my enemy, was dead of a broken heart. Moreover, I wish to have no quarrel with the White House [the English] on account of Macumazahn, so tell him that he may sleep in peace."

The messenger said further that Saduko, the husband of the King's daughter, Nandie, and Umbelazi's chief *induna*, was to be put upon his trial on the morrow before the King and his council, together with Mameena, daughter of Umbezi, and that my presence was desired at this trial.

I asked what was the charge against them. He replied that, so far as Saduko was concerned, there were two: first, that he had stirred up civil war in the land, and, secondly, that having pushed on Umbelazi into a fight in which many thousands perished, he had played the traitor, deserting him in the midst of the battle, with all his following—a very heinous offence in the eyes of Zulus, to whatever party they may belong.

Against Mameena there were three counts of indictment. First, that it was she who had poisoned Saduko's child and others, not Masapo, her first husband, who had suffered for that crime. Secondly, that she had deserted Saduko, her second husband, and gone to live with another man, namely, the late Prince Umbelazi. Thirdly, that she was a witch, who had enmeshed Umbelazi in the web of her sorceries and thereby caused him to aspire to the succession to the throne, to which he had no right, and made the *isililo*, or cry of mourning for the dead, to be heard in every kraal in Zululand.

"With three such pitfalls in her narrow path, Mameena will have to walk carefully if she would escape them all," I said.

"Yes, *Inkoosi*, especially as the pitfalls are dug from side to side of the path and have a pointed stake set at the bottom of each of them. Oh, Mameena is already as good as dead, as she deserves to be, who without doubt is the greatest *umtakati* north of the Tugela."

I sighed, for somehow I was sorry for Mameena, though why she should escape when so many better people had perished because of her I did not know; and the messenger went on:

"The Black One [that is, Panda] sent me to tell Saduko that he would be allowed to see you, Macumazahn, before the trial, if he wished, for he knew that you had been a friend of his, and thought that you might be able to give evidence in his favour."

"And what did Saduko say to that?" I asked.

"He said that he thanked the King, but that it was not needful for him to talk with Macumazahn, whose heart was white like his skin, and whose lips, if they spoke at all, would tell neither more nor less than the truth. The Princess Nandie, who is with him—for

she will not leave him in his trouble, as all others have done—on hearing these words of Saduko's, said that they were true, and that for this reason, although you were her friend, she did not hold it necessary to see you either."

Upon this intimation I made no comment, but "my head thought," as the natives say, that Saduko's real reason for not wishing to see me was that he felt ashamed to do so, and Nandie's that she feared to learn more about her husband's perfidies than she knew already.

"With Mameena it is otherwise," went on the messenger, "for as soon as she was brought here with Zikali the Little and Wise, with whom, it seems, she has been sheltering, and learned that you, Macumazahn, were at the kraal, she asked leave to see you—"

"And is it granted?" I broke in hurriedly, for I did not at all wish for a private interview with Mameena.

"Nay, have no fear, *Inkoosi*," replied the messenger with a smile; "it is refused, because the King said that if once she saw you she would bewitch you and bring trouble on you, as she does on all men. It is for this reason that she is guarded by women only, no man being allowed to go near to her, for on women her witcheries will not bite. Still, they say that she is merry, and laughs and sings a great deal, declaring that her life has been dull up at old Zikali's, and that now she is going to a place as gay as the veld in spring, after the first warm rain, where there will be plenty of men to quarrel for her and make her great and happy. That is what she says, the witch who knows perhaps what the Place of Spirits is like."

Then, as I made no remarks or suggestions, the messenger departed, saying that he would return on the morrow to lead me to the place of trial.

Next morning, after the cows had been milked and the cattle loosed from their kraals, he came accordingly, with a guard of about thirty men, all of them soldiers who had survived the great fight of the Amawombe. These warriors, some of whom had wounds that were scarcely healed, saluted me with loud cries of "*Inkoosi*!" and "*Baba*" as I stepped out of the wagon, where I had spent a wretched night of unpleasant anticipation, showing me that there were at least some Zulus with whom I remained popular. Indeed, their delight at seeing me, whom they looked upon as a comrade and one of the few survivors of the great adventure, was quite touching. As we went, which we did slowly, their captain told me of their fears that I had been killed with the others, and how rejoiced they were when they learned that I was safe. He told me also that, after the third regiment had attacked them and broken up their ring, a small body of them, from eighty to a hundred only, managed to cut a way through and escape, running, not towards the Tugela, where so many thousands had perished, but up to Nodwengu, where they reported themselves to Panda as the only survivors of the Amawombe.

"And are you safe now?" I asked of the captain.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "You see, we were the King's men, not Umbelazi's, so Cetewayo bears us no grudge. Indeed, he is obliged to us, because we gave the *Usutu* their stomachs full of good fighting, which is more than did those cows of Umbelazi's. It is towards Saduko that he bears a grudge, for you know, my father, one should never pull a drowning man out of the stream—which is what Saduko did, for had it not been for his treachery, Cetewayo would have sunk beneath the water of Death—especially if it is only to spite a woman who hates him. Still, perhaps Saduko will escape with his life, because he is Nandie's husband, and Cetewayo fears Nandie, his sister, if he does not love her. But here we are, and those who have to watch the sky all day will be able to tell of the evening weather" (in other words, those who live will learn).

As he spoke we passed into the private enclosure of the *isi-gohlo*, outside of which a great many people were gathered, shouting, talking and quarrelling, for in those days all the usual discipline of the Great Place was relaxed. Within the fence, however, that was strongly guarded on its exterior side, were only about a score of councillors, the King, the Prince Cetewayo, who sat upon his right, the Princess Nandie, Saduko's wife, a few attendants, two great, silent fellows armed with clubs, whom I guessed to be executioners, and, seated in the shade in a corner, that ancient dwarf, Zikali, though how he came to be there I did not know.

Obviously the trial was to be quite a private affair, which accounted for the unusual presence of the two "slayers." Even my Amawombe guard was left outside the gate, although I was significantly informed that if I chose to call upon them they would hear me, which was another way of saying that in such a small gathering I was absolutely safe.

Walking forward boldly towards Panda, who, though he was as fat as ever, looked very worn and much older than when I had last seen him, I made my bow, whereon he took my hand and asked after my health. Then I shook Cetewayo's hand also, as I saw that it was stretched out to me. He seized the opportunity to remark that he was told that I had suffered a knock on the head in some scrimmage down by the Tugela, and he hoped that I felt no ill effects. I answered: No, though I feared that there were a few others who had not been so fortunate, especially those who had stumbled against the Amawombe regiment, with whom I chanced to be travelling upon a peaceful mission of inquiry.

It was a bold speech to make, but I was determined to give him a *quid pro quo*, and, as a matter of fact, he took it in very good part, laughing heartily at the joke.

After this I saluted such of the councillors present as I knew, which was not many, for most of my old friends were dead, and sat down upon the stool that was placed for me not very far from the dwarf Zikali, who stared at me in a stony fashion, as though he had never seen me before.

There followed a pause. Then, at some sign from Panda, a side gate in the fence was opened, and through it appeared Saduko, who walked proudly to the space in front of the King, to whom he gave the salute of "*Bayéte*," and, at a sign, sat himself down upon the ground. Next, through the same gate, to which she was conducted by some women, came Mameena, quite unchanged and, I think, more beautiful than she had ever been. So lovely did she look, indeed, in her cloak of grey fur, her necklet of blue beads, and the gleaming rings of copper which she wore upon her wrists and ankles, that every eye was fixed upon her as she glided gracefully forward to make her obeisance to Panda.

This done, she turned and saw Nandie, to whom she also bowed, as she did so inquiring after the health of her child. Without waiting for an answer, which she knew would not be vouchsafed, she advanced to me and grasped my hand, which she pressed warmly, saying how glad she was to see me safe after going through so many dangers, though she thought I looked even thinner than I used to be.

Only of Saduko, who was watching her with his intent and melancholy eyes, she took no heed whatsoever. Indeed, for a while I thought that she could not have seen him. Nor did she appear to recognise Cetewayo, although he stared at her hard enough. But, as her glance fell upon the two executioners, I thought I saw her shudder like a shaken reed. Then she sat down in the place appointed to her, and the trial began.

The case of Saduko was taken first. An officer learned in Zulu law—which I can assure the reader is a very intricate and well-established law—I suppose that he might be called a kind of attorney-general, rose and stated the case against the prisoner. He told how Saduko, from a nobody, had been lifted to a great place by the King and given his daughter, the Princess Nandie, in marriage. Then he alleged that, as would be proved in evidence, the said Saduko had urged on Umbelazi the Prince, to whose party he had attached himself, to make war upon Cetewayo. This war having begun, at the great battle of Endondakusuka, he had treacherously deserted Umbelazi, together with three regiments under his command, and gone over to Cetewayo, thereby bringing Umbelazi to defeat and death.

This brief statement of the case for the prosecution being finished, Panda asked Saduko whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty.

“Guilty, O King,” he answered, and was silent.

Then Panda asked him if he had anything to say in excuse of his conduct.

“Nothing, O King, except that I was Umbelazi’s man, and when you, O King, had given the word that he and the Prince yonder might fight, I, like many others, some of whom are dead and some alive, worked for him with all my ten fingers that he might have the victory.”

“Then why did you desert my son the Prince in the battle?” asked Panda.

“Because I saw that the Prince Cetewayo was the stronger bull and wished to be on the winning side, as all men do—for no other reason,” answered Saduko calmly.

Now, everyone present stared, not excepting Cetewayo. Panda, who, like the rest of us, had heard a very different tale, looked extremely puzzled, while Zikali, in his corner, set up one of his great laughs.

After a long pause, at length the King, as supreme judge, began to pass sentence. At least, I suppose that was his intention, but before three words had left his lips Nandie rose and said:

“My Father, ere you speak that which cannot be unspoken, hear me. It is well known that Saduko, my husband, was my brother Umbelazi’s general and councillor, and if he is to be killed for clinging to the Prince, then I should be killed also, and countless others in Zululand who still remain alive because they were not in or escaped the battle. It is well known also, my Father, that during that battle Saduko went over to my brother Cetewayo, though whether this brought about the defeat of Umbelazi I cannot say. Why did he go over? He tells you because he wished to be on the winning side. It is not true. He went over in order to be revenged upon Umbelazi, who had taken from him yonder witch”—and she pointed with her finger at Mameena—“yonder witch, whom he loved and still loves, and whom even now he would shield, even though to do so he must make his own name shameful. Saduko sinned; I do not deny it, my Father, but there sits the real traitress, red with the blood of Umbelazi and with that of thousands of others who have ‘*ishonile*’d [gone down to keep him company among the ghosts]. Therefore, O King, I beseech you, spare the life of Saduko, my husband, or, if he must die, learn that I, your daughter, will die with him. I have spoken, O King.”

And very proudly and quietly she sat herself down again, waiting for the fateful words.

But those words were not spoken, since Panda only said: “Let us try the case of this woman, Mameena.”

Thereon the law officer rose again and set out the charges against Mameena, namely, that it was she who had poisoned Saduko’s child, and not Masapo; that, after marrying Saduko, she had deserted him and gone to live with the Prince Umbelazi; and that finally she had bewitched the said Umbelazi and caused him to make civil war in the land.

“The second charge, if proved, namely, that this woman deserted her husband for another man, is a crime of death,” broke in Panda abruptly as the officer finished speaking; “therefore, what need is there to hear the first and the third until that is examined. What do you plead to that charge, woman?”

Now, understanding that the King did not wish to stir up these other matters of murder and witchcraft for some reason of his own, we all turned to hear Mameena’s answer.

“O King,” she said in her low, silvery voice, “I cannot deny that I left Saduko for Umbelazi the Handsome, any more than Saduko can deny that he left Umbelazi the beaten for Cetewayo the conqueror.”

“Why did you leave Saduko?” asked Panda.

“O King, perhaps because I loved Umbelazi; for was he not called the Handsome? Also *you* know that the Prince, your son, was one to be loved.” Here she paused, looking at poor Panda, who winced. “Or, perhaps, because I wished to be great; for was he not of the Blood Royal, and, had it not been for Saduko, would he not one day have been a king? Or, perhaps, because I could no longer bear the treatment that the Princess Nandie dealt out to me; she who was cruel to me and threatened to beat me, because Saduko loved my hut better than her own. Ask Saduko; he knows more of these matters than I do,” and she gazed at him steadily. Then she went on: “How can a woman tell her reasons, O King, when she never knows them herself?”—a question at which some of her hearers smiled.

Now Saduko rose and said slowly:

“Hear me, O King, and I will give the reason that Mameena hides. She left me for Umbelazi because I bade her to do so, for I knew that Umbelazi desired her, and I wished to tie the cord tighter which bound me to one who at that time I thought would inherit the Throne. Also, I was weary of Mameena, who quarrelled night and day with the Princess Nandie, my *Inkosikazi*.”

Now Nandie gasped in astonishment (and so did I), but Mameena laughed and said:

“Yes, O King, those were the two real reasons that I had forgotten. I left Saduko because he bade me, as he wished to make a present to the Prince. Also, he *was* tired of me; for many days at a time he would scarcely speak to me, because, however kind she

might be, I could not help quarrelling with the Princess Nandie. Moreover, there was another reason which I have forgotten: I had no child, and not having any child I did not think it mattered whether I went or stayed. If Saduko searches, he will remember that I told him so, and that he agreed with me."

Again she looked at Saduko, who said hurriedly:

"Yes, yes, I told her so; I told her that I wished for no barren cows in my kraal."

Now some of the audience laughed outright, but Panda frowned.

"It seems," he said, "that my ears are being stuffed with lies, though which of these two tells them I cannot say. Well, if the woman left the man by his own wish, and that his ends might be furthered, as he says, he had put her away, and therefore the fault, if any, is his, not hers. So that charge is ended. Now, woman, what have you to tell us of the witchcraft which it is said you practised upon the Prince who is gone, thereby causing him to make war in the land?"

"Little that you would wish to hear, O King, or that it would be seemly for me to speak," she answered, drooping her head modestly. "The only witchcraft that ever I practised upon Umbelazi lies here"—and she touched her beautiful eyes—"and here"—and she touched her curving lips—"and in this poor shape of mine which some have thought so fair. As for the war, what had I to do with war, who never spoke to Umbelazi, who was so dear to me"—and she looked up with tears running down her face—"save of love? O King, is there a man among you all who would fear the witcheries of such a one as I; and because the Heavens made me beautiful with the beauty that men must follow, am I also to be killed as a sorceress?"

Now, to this argument neither Panda nor anyone else seemed to find an answer, especially as it was well known that Umbelazi had cherished his ambition to the succession long before he met Mameena. So that charge was dropped, and the first and greatest of the three proceeded with; namely, that it was she, Mameena, and not her husband, Masapo, who had murdered Nandie's child.

When this accusation was made against her, for the first time I saw a little shade of trouble flit across Mameena's soft eyes.

"Surely, O King," she said, "that matter was settled long ago, when the Ndwande, Zikali, the great Nyanga, smelt out Masapo the wizard, he who was my husband, and brought him to his death for this crime. Must I then be tried for it again?"

"Not so, woman," answered Panda. "All that Zikali smelt out was the poison that wrought the crime, and as some of that poison was found upon Masapo, he was killed as a wizard. Yet it may be that it was not he who used the poison."

"Then surely the King should have thought of that before he died," murmured Mameena. "But I forget: It is known that Masapo was always hostile to the House of Senzangakona."

To this remark Panda made no answer, perhaps because it was unanswerable, even in a land where it was customary to kill the supposed wizard first and inquire as to his actual guilt afterwards, or not at all. Or perhaps he thought it politic to ignore the suggestion that he had been inspired by personal enmity. Only, he looked at his daughter, Nandie, who rose and said:

"Have I leave to call a witness on this matter of the poison, my Father?"

Panda nodded, whereon Nandie said to one of the councillors:

"Be pleased to summon my woman, Nahana, who waits without."

The man went, and presently returned with an elderly female who, it appeared, had been Nandie's nurse, and, never having married, owing to some physical defect, had always remained in her service, a person well known and much respected in her humble walk of life.

"Nahana," said Nandie, "you are brought here that you may repeat to the King and his council a tale which you told to me as to the coming of a certain woman into my hut before the death of my first-born son, and what she did there. Say first, is this woman present here?"

"Aye, *Inkosazana*," answered Nahana, "yonder she sits. Who could mistake her?" and she pointed to Mameena, who was listening to every word intently, as a dog listens at the mouth of an ant-bear hole when the beast is stirring beneath.

"Then what of the woman and her deeds?" asked Panda.

"Only this, O King. Two nights before the child that is dead was taken ill, I saw Mameena creep into the hut of the lady Nandie, I who was asleep alone in a corner of the big hut out of reach of the light of the fire. At the time the lady Nandie was away from the hut with her son. Knowing the woman for Mameena, the wife of Masapo, who was on friendly terms with the *Inkosazana*, whom I supposed she had come to visit, I did not declare myself; nor did I take any particular note when I saw her sprinkle a little mat upon which the babe, Saduko's son, was wont to be laid, with some medicine, because I had heard her promise to the *Inkosazana* a powder which she said would drive away insects. Only, when I saw her throw some of this powder into the vessel of warm water that stood by the fire, to be used for the washing of the child, and place something, muttering certain words that I could not catch, in the straw of the doorway, I thought it strange, and was about to question her when she left the hut. As it happened, O King, but a little while afterwards, before one could count ten tens indeed, a messenger came to the hut to tell me that my old mother lay dying at her kraal four days' journey from Nodwengu, and prayed to see me before she died. Then I forgot all about Mameena and the powder, and, running out to seek the Princess Nandie, I craved her leave to go with the messenger to my mother's kraal, which she granted to me, saying that I need not return until my mother was buried.

"So I went. But, oh! my mother took long to die. Whole moons passed before I shut her eyes, and all this while she would not let me go; nor, indeed, did I wish to leave her whom I loved. At length it was over, and then came the days of mourning, and after those some more days of rest, and after them again the days of the division of the cattle, so that in the end six moons or more had gone by before I returned to the service of the Princess Nandie, and found that Mameena was now the second wife of the lord Saduko. Also I found that the child of the lady Nandie was dead, and that Masapo, the first husband of Mameena, had been smelt out and killed as the murderer of the child. But as all these things were over and done with, and as Mameena was very kind to me, giving me gifts and sparing me tasks, and as I saw that Saduko my lord loved her much, it never came into my head to say anything of the matter of the powder that I saw her sprinkle on the mat.

"After she had run away with the Prince who is dead, however, I did tell the lady Nandie. Moreover, the lady Nandie, in my presence, searched in the straw of the doorway of the hut and found there, wrapped in soft hide, certain medicines such as the Nyangas sell, wherewith those who consult them can bewitch their enemies, or cause those whom they desire to love them or to hate their wives or husbands. That is all I know of the story, O King."

"Do my ears hear a true tale, Nandie?" asked Panda. "Or is this woman a liar like others?"

"I think not, my Father; see, here is the *muti* [medicine] which Nahana and I found hid in the doorway of the hut that I have kept unopened till this day."

And she laid on the ground a little leather bag, very neatly sewn with sinews, and fastened round its neck with a fibre string.

Panda directed one of the councillors to open the bag, which the man did unwillingly enough, since evidently he feared its evil influence, pouring out its contents on to the back of a hide shield, which was then carried round so that we might all look at them. These, so far as I could see, consisted of some withered roots, a small piece of human thigh bone, such as might have come from the skeleton of an infant, that had a little stopper of wood in its orifice, and what I took to be the fang of a snake.

Panda looked at them and shrank away, saying:

"Come hither, Zikali the Old, you who are skilled in magic, and tell us what is this medicine."

Then Zikali rose from the corner where he had been sitting so silently, and waddled heavily across the open space to where the shield lay in front of the King. As he passed Mameena, she bent down over the dwarf and began to whisper to him swiftly; but he placed his hands upon his big head, covering up his ears, as I suppose, that he might not hear her words.

"What have I to do with this matter, O King?" he asked.

"Much, it seems, O Opener-of-Roads," said Panda sternly, "seeing that you were the doctor who smelt out Masapo, and that it was in your kraal that yonder woman hid herself while her lover, the Prince, my son, who is dead, went down to the battle, and that she was brought thence with you. Tell us, now, the nature of this *muti*, and, being wise, as you are, be careful to tell us truly, lest it should be said, O Zikali, that you are not a *Nyanga* only, but an *umtakati* as well. For then," he added with meaning, and choosing his words carefully, "perchance, O Zikali, I might be tempted to make trial of whether or no it is true that you cannot be killed like other men, especially as I have heard of late that your heart is evil towards me and my House."

For a moment Zikali hesitated—I think to give his quick brain time to work, for he saw his great danger. Then he laughed in his dreadful fashion and said:

"Oho! the King thinks that the otter is in the trap," and he glanced at the fence of the *isi-gohlo* and at the fierce executioners, who stood watching him sternly. "Well, many times before has this otter seemed to be in a trap, yes, ere your father saw light, O Son of Senzangakona, and after it also. Yet here he stands living. Make no trial, O King, of whether or no I be mortal, lest if Death should come to such a one as I, he should take many others with him also. Have you not heard the saying that when the Opener-of-Roads comes to the end of his road there will be no more a King of the Zulus, as when he began his road there was no King of the Zulus, since the days of his manhood are the days of *all* the Zulu kings?"

Thus he spoke, glaring at Panda and at Cetewayo, who shrank before his gaze.

"Remember," he went on, "that the Black One who is 'gone down' long ago, the Wild Beast who fathered the Zulu herd, threatened him whom he named the 'Thing-that-should-not-have-been-born,' aye, and slew those whom he loved, and afterwards was slain by others, who also are 'gone down,' and that you alone, O Panda, did *not* threaten him, and that you alone, O Panda, have *not* been slain. Now, if you would make trial of whether I die as other men die, bid your dogs fall on, for Zikali is ready," and he folded his arms and waited.

Indeed, all of us waited breathlessly, for we understood that the terrible dwarf was matching himself against Panda and Cetewayo and defying them both. Presently it became obvious that he had won the game, since Panda only said:

"Why should I slay one whom I have befriended in the past, and why do you speak such heavy words of death in my ears, O, Zikali the Wise, which of late have heard so much of death?" He sighed, adding: "Be pleased now, to tell us of this medicine, or, if you will not, go, and I will send for other *Nyangas*."

"Why should I not tell you, when you ask me softly and without threats, O King? See"—and Zikali took up some of the twisted roots—"these are the roots of a certain poisonous herb that blooms at night on the tops of mountains, and woe be to the ox that eats thereof. They have been boiled in gall and blood, and ill will befall the hut in which they are hidden by one who can speak the words of power. This is the bone of a babe that has never lived to cut its teeth—I think of a babe that was left to die alone in the bush because it was hated, or because none would father it. Such a bone has strength to work ill against other babes; moreover, it is filled with a charmed medicine. Look!" and, pulling out the plug of wood, he scattered some grey powder from the bone, then stopped it up again. "This," he added, picking up the fang, "is the tooth of a deadly serpent, that, after it has been doctored, is used by women to change the heart of a man from another to herself. I have spoken."

And he turned to go.

"Stay!" said the King. "Who set these foul charms in the doorway of Saduko's hut?"

"How can I tell, O King, unless I make preparation and cast the bones and smell out the evil-doer? You have heard the story of the woman Nahana. Accept it or reject it as your heart tells you."

"If that story be true, O Zikali, how comes it that you yourself smelt out, not Mameena, the wife of Masapo, but Masapo, her husband, himself, and caused him to be slain because of the poisoning of the child of Nandie?"

"You err, O King. I, Zikali, smelt out the House of Masapo. Then I smelt out the poison, searching for it first in the hair of Mameena, and finding it in the kaross of Masapo. I never smelt out that it was Masapo who gave the poison. That was the judgment of you and of your Council, O King. Nay, I knew well that there was more in the matter, and had you paid me another fee and bade me to continue to use my wisdom, without doubt I should have found this magic stuff hidden in the hut, and mayhap have learned the

name of the hider. But I was weary, who am very old; and what was it to me if you chose to kill Masapo or chose to let him go? Masapo, who, being your secret enemy, was a man who deserved to die—if not for this matter, then for others.”

Now, all this while I had been watching Mameena, who sat, in the Zulu fashion, listening to this deadly evidence, a slight smile upon her face, and without attempting any interruption or comment. Only I saw that while Zikali was examining the medicine, her eyes were seeking the eyes of Saduko, who remained in his place, also silent, and, to all appearance, the least interested of anyone present. He tried to avoid her glance, turning his head uneasily; but at length her eyes caught his and held them. Then his heart began to beat quickly, his breast heaved, and on his face there grew a look of dreamy content, even of happiness. From that moment forward, till the end of the scene, Saduko never took his eyes off this strange woman, though I think that, with the exception of the dwarf, Zikali, who saw everything, and of myself, who am trained to observation, none noted this curious by-play of the drama.

The King began to speak. “Mameena,” he said, “you have heard. Have you aught to say? For if not it would seem that you are a witch and a murderess, and one who must die.”

“Yea, a little word, O King,” she answered quietly. “Nahana speaks truth. It is true that I entered the hut of Nandie and set the medicine there. I say it because by nature I am not one who hides the truth or would attempt to throw discredit even upon a humble serving-woman,” and she glanced at Nahana.

“Then from between your own teeth it is finished,” said Panda.

“Not altogether, O King. I have said that I set the medicine in the hut. I have not said, and I will not say, how and why I set it there. That tale I call upon Saduko yonder to tell to you, he who was my husband, that I left for Umbelazi, and who, being a man, must therefore hate me. By the words he says I will abide. If he declares that I am guilty, then I am guilty, and prepared to pay the price of guilt. But if he declares that I am innocent, then, O King and O Prince Cetewayo, without fear I trust myself to your justness. Now speak, O Saduko; speak the whole truth, whatever it may be, if that is the King’s will.”

“It is my will,” said Panda.

“And mine also,” added Cetewayo, who, I could see, like everyone else, was much interested in this matter.

Saduko rose to his feet, the same Saduko that I had always known, and yet so changed. All the life and fire had gone from him; his pride in himself was no more; none could have known him for that ambitious, confident man who, in his day of power, the Zulus named the “Self-Eater.” He was a mere mask of the old Saduko, informed by some new, some alien, spirit. With dull, lack-lustre eyes fixed always upon the lovely eyes of Mameena, in slow and hesitating tones he began his tale.

“It is true, O Lion,” he said, “that Mameena spread the poison upon my child’s mat. It is true that she set the deadly charms in the doorway of Nandie’s hut. These things she did, not knowing what she did, and it was I who instructed her to do them. This is the case. From the beginning I have always loved Mameena as I have loved no other woman and as no other woman was ever loved. But while I was away with Macumazahn, who sits yonder, to destroy Bangu, chief of the Amakoba, he who had killed my father, Umbezi, the father of Mameena, he whom the Prince Cetewayo gave to the vultures the other day because he had lied as to the death of Umbelazi, he, I say, forced Mameena, against her will, to marry Masapo the Boar, who afterwards was executed for wizardry. Now, here at your feast, when you reviewed the people of the Zulus, O King, after you had given me the lady Nandie as wife, Mameena and I met again and loved each other more than we had ever done before. But, being an upright woman, Mameena thrust me away from her, saying:

“‘I have a husband, who, if he is not dear to me, still is my husband, and while he lives to him I will be true.’ Then, O King, I took counsel with the evil in my heart, and made a plot in myself to be rid of the Boar, Masapo, so that when he was dead I might marry Mameena. This was the plot that I made—that my son and Princess Nandie’s should be poisoned, and that Masapo should seem to poison him, so that he might be killed as a wizard and I marry Mameena.”

Now, at this astounding statement, which was something beyond the experience of the most cunning and cruel savage present there, a gasp of astonishment went up from the audience; even old Zikali lifted his head and stared. Nandie, too, shaken out of her usual calm, rose as though to speak; then, looking first at Saduko and next at Mameena, sat herself down again and waited. But Saduko went on again in the same cold, measured voice:

“I gave Mameena a powder which I had bought for two heifers from a great doctor who lived beyond the Tugela, but who is now dead, which powder I told her was desired by Nandie, my *Inkosikazi*, to destroy the little beetles that ran about the hut, and directed her where she was to spread it. Also, I gave her the bag of medicine, telling her to thrust it into the doorway of the hut, that it might bring a blessing upon my House. These things she did ignorantly to please me, not knowing that the powder was poison, not knowing that the medicine was bewitched. So my child died, as I wished it to die, and, indeed, I myself fell sick because by accident I touched the powder.

“Afterwards Masapo was smelt out as a wizard by old Zikali, I having caused a bag of the poison to be sewn in his kaross in order to deceive Zikali, and killed by your order, O King, and Mameena was given to me as a wife, also by your order, O King, which was what I desired. Later on, as I have told you, I wearied of her, and wishing to please the Prince who has wandered away, I commanded her to yield herself to him, which Mameena did out of her love for me and to advance my fortunes, she who is blameless in all things.”

Saduko finished speaking and sat down again, as an automaton might do when a wire is pulled, his lack-lustre eyes still fixed upon Mameena’s face.

“You have heard, O King,” said Mameena. “Now pass judgment, knowing that, if it be your will, I am ready to die for Saduko’s sake.”

But Panda sprang up in a rage.

“Take him away!” he said, pointing to Saduko. “Take away that dog who is not fit to live, a dog who eats his own child that thereby he may cause another to be slain unjustly and steal his wife.”

The executioners leapt forward, and, having something to say, for I could bear this business no longer, I began to rise to my feet. Before I gained them, however, Zikali was speaking.

“O King,” he said, “it seems that you have killed one man unjustly on this matter, namely, Masapo. Would you do the same by another?” and he pointed to Saduko.

“What do you mean?” asked Panda angrily. “Have you not heard this low fellow, whom I made great, giving him the rule over tribes and my daughter in marriage, confess with his own lips that he murdered his child, the child of my blood, in order that he might eat a fruit which grew by the roadside for all men to nibble at?” and he glared at Mameena.

“Aye, Child of Senzangakona,” answered Zikali, “I heard Saduko say this with his own lips, but the voice that spoke from the lips was not the voice of Saduko, as, were you a skilled Nyanga like me, you would have known as well as I do, and as well as does the white man, Watcher-by-Night, who is a reader of hearts.

“Hearken now, O King, and you great ones around the King, and I will tell you a story. Matiwane, the father of Saduko, was my friend, as he was yours, O King, and when Bangu slew him and his people, by leave of the Wild Beast [Chaka], I saved the child, his son, aye, and brought him up in my own House, having learned to love him. Then, when he became a man, I, the Opener-of-Roads, showed him two roads, down either of which he might choose to walk—the Road of Wisdom and the Road of War and Women: the white road that runs through peace to knowledge, and the red road that runs through blood to death.

“But already there stood one upon this red road who beckoned him, she who sits yonder, and he followed after her, as I knew he would. From the beginning she was false to him, taking a richer man for her husband. Then, when Saduko grew great, she grew sorry, and came to ask my counsel as to how she might be rid of Masapo, whom she swore she hated. I told her that she could leave him for another man, or wait till her Spirit moved him from her path; but I never put evil into her heart, seeing that it was there already.

“Then she and no other, having first made Saduko love her more than ever, murdered the child of Nandie, his *Inkosikazi*; and so brought about the death of Masapo and crept into Saduko’s arms. Here she slept a while, till a new shadow fell upon her, that of the ‘Elephant-with-the-tuft-of-hair,’ who will walk the woods no more. Him she beguiled that she might grow great the quicker, and left the house of Saduko, taking his heart with her, she who was destined to be the doom of men.

“Now, into Saduko’s breast, where his heart had been, entered an evil spirit of jealousy and of revenge, and in the battle of Endondakusuka that spirit rode him as a white man rides a horse. As he had arranged to do with the Prince Cetewayo yonder—nay, deny it not, O Prince, for I know all; did you not make a bargain together, on the third night before the battle, among the bushes, and start apart when the buck leapt out between you?” (Here Cetewayo, who had been about to speak, threw the corner of his kaross over his face.) “As he had arranged to do, I say, he went over with his regiments from the *Isigqosa* to the *Usutu*, and so brought about the fall of Umbelazi and the death of many thousands. Yes, and this he did for one reason only—because yonder woman had left him for the Prince, and he cared more for her than for all the world could give him, for her who had filled him with madness as a bowl is filled with milk. And now, O King, you have heard this man tell you a story, you have heard him shout out that he is viler than any man in all the land; that he murdered his own child, the child he loved so well, to win this witch; that afterwards he gave her to his friend and lord to buy more of his favour, and that lastly he deserted that lord because he thought that there was another lord from whom he could buy more favour. Is it not so, O King?”

“It is so,” answered Panda, “and therefore must Saduko be thrown out to the jackals.”

“Wait a while, O King. I say that Saduko has spoken not with his own voice, but with the voice of Mameena. I say that she is the greatest witch in all the land, and that she has drugged him with the medicine of her eyes, so that he knows not what he says, even as she drugged the Prince who is dead.”

“Then prove it, or he dies!” exclaimed the King.

Now the dwarf went to Panda and whispered in his ear, whereon Panda whispered in turn into the ears of two of his councillors. These men, who were unarmed, rose and made as though to leave the *isi-gohlo*. But as they passed Mameena one of them suddenly threw his arms about her, pinioning her arms, the other tearing off the kaross he wore—for the weather was cold—flung it over her head and knotted it behind her so that she was hidden except for her ankles and feet. Then, although she did not move or struggle, they caught hold of her and stood still.

Now Zikali hobbled to Saduko and bade him rise, which he did. Then he looked at him for a long while and made certain movements with his hands before his face, after which Saduko uttered a great sigh and stared about him.

“Saduko,” said Zikali, “I pray you tell me, your foster-father, whether it is true, as men say, that you sold your wife, Mameena, to the Prince Umbelazi in order that his favour might fall on you like heavy rain?”

“Wow! Zikali,” said Saduko, with a start of rage, “were you as others are I would kill you, you toad, who dare to spit slander on my name. She ran away with the Prince, having beguiled him with the magic of her beauty.”

“Strike me not, Saduko,” went on Zikali, “or at least wait to strike until you have answered one more question. Is it true, as men say, that in the battle of Endondakusuka you went over to the *Usutu* with your regiments because you thought that *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti* would be beaten, and wished to be on the side of him who won?”

“What, Toad! More slander?” cried Saduko. “I went over for one reason only—to be revenged upon the Prince because he had taken from me her who was more to me than life or honour. Aye, and when I went over Umbelazi was winning; it was because I went that he lost and died, as I meant that he should die, though now,” he added sadly, “I would that I had not brought him to ruin and the dust, who think that, like myself, he was but wet clay in a woman’s fingers.

“O King,” he added, turning to Panda, “kill me, I pray you, who am not worthy to live, since to him whose hand is red with the blood of his friend, death alone is left, who, while he breathes, must share his sleep with ghosts that watch him with their angry eyes.”

Then Nandie sprang up and said:

“Nay, Father, listen not to him who is mad, and therefore holy.<sup>[2]</sup> What he has done, he has done, who, as he has said, was but a tool in another’s hand. As for our babe, I know well that he would have died sooner than harm it, for he loved it much, and when it

was taken away, for three whole days and nights he wept and would touch no food. Give this poor man to me, my Father—to me, his wife, who loves him—and let us go hence to some other land, where perchance we may forget.”

[2] The Zulus suppose that insane people are inspired. —A.Q.

“Be silent, daughter,” said the King; “and you, O Zikali, the *Nyanga*, be silent also.”

They obeyed, and, after thinking awhile, Panda made a motion with his hand, whereon the two councillors lifted the kaross from off Mameena, who looked about her calmly and asked if she were taking part in some child’s game.

“Aye, woman,” answered Panda, “you are taking part in a great game, but not, I think, such as is played by children—a game of life and death. Now, have you heard the tale of Zikali the Little and Wise, and the words of Saduko, who was once your husband, or must they be repeated to you?”

“There is no need, O King; my ears are too quick to be muffled by a fur bag, and I would not waste your time.”

“Then what have you to say, woman?”

“Not much,” she answered with a shrug of her shoulders, “except that I have lost in this game. You will not believe me, but if you had left me alone I should have told you so, who did not wish to see that poor fool, Saduko, killed for deeds he had never done. Still, the tale he told you was not told because I had bewitched him; it was told for love of me, whom he desired to save. It was Zikali yonder; Zikali, the enemy of your House, who in the end will destroy your House, O Son of Senzangakona, that bewitched him, as he has bewitched you all, and forced the truth out of his unwilling heart.

“Now, what more is there to say? Very little, as I think. I did the things that are laid to my charge, and worse things which have not been stated. Oh, I played for great stakes, I, who meant to be the *Inkosazana* of the Zulus, and, as it chanced, by the weight of a hair I have lost. I thought that I had counted everything, but the hair’s weight which turned the balance against me was the mad jealousy of this fool, Saduko, upon which I had not reckoned. I see now that when I left Saduko I should have left him dead. Thrice I had thought of it. Once I mixed the poison in his drink, and then he came in, weary with his plottings, and kissed me ere he drank; and my woman’s heart grew soft and I overset the bowl that was at his lips. Do you not remember, Saduko?

“So, so! For that folly alone I deserve to die, for she who would reign”—and her beautiful eyes flashed royally—“must have a tiger’s heart, not that of a woman. Well, because I was too kind I must die; and, after all is said, it is well to die, who go hence awaited by thousands upon thousands that I have sent before me, and who shall be greeted presently by your son, Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti, and his warriors, greeted as the *Inkosazana* of Death, with red, lifted spears and with the royal salute!

“Now, I have spoken. Walk your little road, O King and Prince and Councillors, till you reach the gulf into which I sink, that yawns for all of you. O King, when you meet me again at the bottom of that gulf, what a tale you will have to tell me, you who are but the shadow of a king, you whose heart henceforth must be eaten out by a worm that is called *Love-of-the-Lost*. O Prince and Conqueror Cetewayo, what a tale you will have to tell me when I greet you at the bottom of that gulf, you who will bring your nation to a wreck and at last die as I must die—only the servant of others and by the will of others. Nay, ask me not how. Ask old Zikali, my master, who saw the beginning of your House and will see its end. Oh, yes, as you say, I am a witch, and I know, I know! Come, I am spent. You men weary me, as men have always done, being but fools whom it is so easy to make drunk, and who when drunk are so unpleasing. *Piff!* I am tired of you sober and cunning, and I am tired of you drunken and brutal, you who, after all, are but beasts of the field to whom *Mvelingangi*, the Creator, has given heads which can think, but which always think wrong.

“Now, King, before you unchain your dogs upon me, I ask one moment. I said that I hated all men, yet, as you know, no woman can tell the truth—quite. There is a man whom I do not hate, whom I never hated, whom I think I love because he would not love me. He sits there,” and to my utter dismay, and the intense interest of that company, she pointed at me, Allan Quatermain!

“Well, once by my ‘magic,’ of which you have heard so much, I got the better of this man against his will and judgment, and, because of that soft heart of mine, I let him go; yes, I let the rare fish go when he was on my hook. It is well that I should have let him go, since, had I kept him, a fine story would have been spoiled and I should have become nothing but a white hunter’s servant, to be thrust away behind the door when the white *Inkosikazi* came to eat his meat—I, Mameena, who never loved to stand out of sight behind a door. Well, when he was at my feet and I spared him, he made me a promise, a very small promise, which yet I think he will keep now when we part for a little while. Macumazahn, did you not promise to kiss me once more upon the lips whenever and wherever I should ask you?”

“I did,” I answered in a hollow voice, for in truth her eyes held me as they had held Saduko.

“Then come now, Macumazahn, and give me that farewell kiss. The King will permit it, and since I have now no husband, who take Death to husband, there is none to say you nay.”

I rose. It seemed to me that I could not help myself. I went to her, this woman surrounded by implacable enemies, this woman who had played for great stakes and lost them, and who knew so well how to lose. I stood before her, ashamed and yet not ashamed, for something of her greatness, evil though it might be, drove out my shame, and I knew that my foolishness was lost in a vast tragedy.

Slowly she lifted her languid arm and threw it about my neck; slowly she bent her red lips to mine and kissed me, once upon the mouth and once upon the forehead. But between those two kisses she did a thing so swiftly that my eyes could scarcely follow what she did. It seemed to me that she brushed her left hand across her lips, and that I saw her throat rise as though she swallowed something. Then she thrust me from her, saying:

“Farewell, O Macumazana, you will never forget this kiss of mine; and when we meet again we shall have much to talk of, for between now and then your story will be long. Farewell, Zikali. I pray that all your plannings may succeed, since those you hate are those I hate, and I bear you no grudge because you told the truth at last. Farewell, Prince Cetewayo. You will never be the man your brother would have been, and your lot is very evil, you who are doomed to pull down a House built by One who was great. Farewell, Saduko the fool, who threw away your fortune for a woman’s eyes, as though the world were not full of women. Nandie the Sweet and the Forgiving will nurse you well until your haunted end. Oh! why does Umbelazi lean over your shoulder, Saduko, and look at me so

strangely? Farewell, Panda the Shadow. Now let loose your slayers. Oh! let them loose swiftly, lest they should be balked of my blood!"

Panda lifted his hand and the executioners leapt forward, but ere ever they reached her, Mameena shivered, threw wide her arms and fell back—dead. The poisonous drug she had taken worked well and swiftly.

Such was the end of Mameena, Child of Storm.

A deep silence followed, a silence of awe and wonderment, till suddenly it was broken by a sound of dreadful laughter. It came from the lips of Zikali the Ancient, Zikali, the

"Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born."

## Chapter XVI.

### MAMEENA—MAMEENA—MAMEENA!

That evening at sunset, just as I was about to trek, for the King had given me leave to go, and at that time my greatest desire in life seemed to be to bid good-bye to Zululand and the Zulus—I saw a strange, beetle-like shape hobbling up the hill towards me, supported by two big men. It was Zikali.

He passed me without a word, merely making a motion that I was to follow him, which I did out of curiosity, I suppose, for Heaven knows I had seen enough of the old wizard to last me for a lifetime. He reached a flat stone about a hundred yards above my camp, where there was no bush in which anyone could hide, and sat himself down, pointing to another stone in front of him, on which I sat myself down. Then the two men retired out of earshot, and, indeed, of sight, leaving us quite alone.

“So you are going away, O Macumazana?” he said.

“Yes, I am,” I answered with energy, “who, if I could have had my will, would have gone away long ago.”

“Yes, yes, I know that; but it would have been a great pity, would it not? If you had gone, Macumazahn, you would have missed seeing the end of a strange little story, and you, who love to study the hearts of men and women, would not have been so wise as you are to-day.”

“No, nor as sad, Zikali. Oh! the death of that woman!” And I put my hand before my eyes.

“Ah! I understand, Macumazahn; you were always fond of her, were you not, although your white pride would not suffer you to admit that black fingers were pulling at your heartstrings? She was a wonderful witch, was Mameena; and there is this comfort for you—that she pulled at other heartstrings as well. Masapo’s, for instance; Saduko’s, for instance; Umbelazi’s, for instance, none of whom got any luck from her pulling—yes, and even at mine.”

Now, as I did not think it worth while to contradict his nonsense so far as I was concerned personally, I went off on this latter point.

“If you show affection as you did towards Mameena to-day, Zikali, I pray my Spirit that you may cherish none for me,” I said.

He shook his great head pityingly as he answered:

“Did you never love a lamb and kill it afterwards when you were hungry, or when it grew into a ram and butted you, or when it drove away your other sheep, so that they fell into the hands of thieves? Now, I am very hungry for the fall of the House of Senzangakona, and the lamb, Mameena, having grown big, nearly laid me on my back to-day within the reach of the slayer’s spear. Also, she was hunting my sheep, Saduko, into an evil net whence he could never have escaped. So, somewhat against my will, I was driven to tell the truth of that lamb and her tricks.”

“I daresay,” I exclaimed; “but, at any rate, she is done with, so what is the use of talking about her?”

“Ah! Macumazahn, she is done with, or so you think, though that is a strange saying for a white man who believes in much that we do not know; but at least her work remains, and it has been a great work. Consider now. Umbelazi and most of the princes, and thousands upon thousands of the Zulus, whom I, the Dwande, hate, dead, dead! *Mameena’s work*, Macumazahn! Panda’s hand grown strengthless with sorrow and his eyes blind with tears. *Mameena’s work*, Macumazahn! Cetewayo, king in all but name; Cetewayo, who shall bring the House of Senzangakona to the dust. *Mameena’s work*, Macumazahn! Oh! a mighty work. Surely she has lived a great and worthy life, and she died a great and worthy death! And how well she did it! Had you eyes to see her take the poison which I gave her—a good poison, was it not?—between her kisses, Macumazahn?”

“I believe it was your work, and not hers,” I blurted out, ignoring his mocking questions. “You pulled the strings; you were the wind that caused the grass to bend till the fire caught it and set the town in flames—the town of your foes.”

“How clever you are, Macumazahn! If your wits grow so sharp, one day they will cut your throat, as, indeed, they have nearly done several times already. Yes, yes, I know how to pull strings till the trap falls, and to blow grass until the flame catches it, and how to puff at that flame until it burns the House of Kings. And yet this trap would have fallen without me, only then it might have snared other rats; and this grass would have caught fire if I had not blown, only then it might have burnt another House. I did not make these forces, Macumazahn; I did but guide them towards a great end, for which the White House [that is, the English] should thank me one day.” He brooded a while, then went on: “But what need is there to talk to you of these matters, Macumazahn, seeing that in a time to come you will have your share in them and see them for yourself? After they are finished, then we will talk.”

“I do not wish to talk of them,” I answered. “I have said so already. But for what other purpose did you take the trouble to come here?”

“Oh, to bid you farewell for a little while, Macumazahn. Also to tell you that Panda, or rather Cetewayo, for now Panda is but his Voice, since the Head must go where the Feet carry it, has spared Saduko at the prayer of Nandie and banished him from the land, giving him his cattle and any people who care to go with him to wherever he may choose to live from henceforth. At least, Cetewayo says it was at Nandie’s prayer, and at mine and yours, but what he means is that, after all that has happened, he thought it wise that Saduko should die of himself.”

“Do you mean that he should kill himself, Zikali?”

“No, no; I mean that his own *idhlozi*, his Spirit, should be left to kill him, which it will do in time. You see, Macumazahn, Saduko is now living with a ghost, which he calls the ghost of Umbelazi, whom he betrayed.”

“Is that your way of saying he is mad, Zikali?”

“Oh, yes, he lives with a ghost, or the ghost lives in him, or he is mad—call it which you will. The mad have a way of living with ghosts, and ghosts have a way of sharing their food with the mad. Now you understand everything, do you not?”

“Of course,” I answered; “it is as plain as the sun.”

“Oh! did I not say you were clever, Macumazahn, you who know where madness ends and ghosts begin, and why they are just the same thing? Well, the sun is no longer plain. Look, it has sunk; and you would be on your road who wish to be far from Nodwengu before morning. You will pass the plain of Endondakusuka, will you not, and cross the Tugela by the drift? Have a look round, Macumazahn, and see if you can recognise any old friends. Umbezi, the knave and traitor, for instance; or some of the princes. If so, I should like to send them a message. What! You cannot wait? Well, then, here is a little present for you, some of my own work. Open it when it is light again, Macumazahn; it may serve to remind you of the strange little tale of Mameena with the Heart of Fire. I wonder where she is now? Sometimes, sometimes—” And he rolled his great eyes about him and sniffed at the air like a hound. “Farewell till we meet again. Farewell, Macumazahn. Oh! if you had only run away with Mameena, how different things might have been to-day!”

I jumped up and fled from that terrible old dwarf, whom I verily believe— No; where is the good of my saying what I believe? I fled from him, leaving him seated on the stone in the shadows, and as I fled, out of the darkness behind me there arose the sound of his loud and eerie laughter.

Next morning I opened the packet which he had given me, after wondering once or twice whether I should not thrust it down an ant-bear hole as it was. But this, somehow, I could not find the heart to do, though now I wish I had. Inside, cut from the black core of the *umzimbiti* wood, with just a little of the white sap left on it to mark the eyes, teeth and nails, was a likeness of Mameena. Of course, it was rudely executed, but it was—or rather is, for I have it still—a wonderfully good portrait of her, for whether Zikali was or was not a wizard, he was certainly a good artist. There she stands, her body a little bent, her arms outstretched, her head held forward with the lips parted, just as though she were about to embrace somebody, and in one of her hands, cut also from the white sap of the *umzimbiti*, she grasps a human heart—Saduko’s, I presume, or perhaps Umbelazi’s.

Nor was this all, for the figure was wrapped in a woman’s hair, which I knew at once for that of Mameena, this hair being held in place by the necklet of big blue beads she used to wear about her throat.

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Some five years had gone by, during which many things had happened to me that need not be recorded here, when one day I found myself in a rather remote part of the Umvoti district of Natal, some miles to the east of a mountain called the Eland’s Kopje, whither I had gone to carry out a big deal in mealies, over which, by the way, I lost a good bit of money. That has always been my fate when I plunged into commercial ventures.

One night my wagons, which were overloaded with these confounded weevilly mealies, got stuck in the drift of a small tributary of the Tugela that most inopportunistly had come down in flood. Just as darkness fell I managed to get them up the bank in the midst of a pelting rain that soaked me to the bone. There seemed to be no prospect of lighting a fire or of obtaining any decent food, so I was about to go to bed supperless when a flash of lightning showed me a large kraal situated upon a hillside about half a mile away, and an idea entered my mind.

“Who is the headman of that kraal?” I asked of one of the Kafirs who had collected round us in our trouble, as such idle fellows always do.

“Tshoza, *Inkoosi*,” answered the man.

“Tshoza! Tshoza!” I said, for the name seemed familiar to me. “Who is Tshoza?”

“*Ikona* [I don’t know], *Inkoosi*. He came from Zululand some years ago with Saduko the Mad.”

Then, of course, I remembered at once, and my mind flew back to the night when old Tshoza, the brother of Matiwane, Saduko’s father, had cut out the cattle of the Bangu and we had fought the battle in the pass.

“Oh!” I said, “is it so? Then lead me to Tshoza, and I will give you a ‘Scotchman.’” (That is, a two-shilling piece, so called because some enterprising emigrant from Scotland passed off a vast number of them among the simple natives of Natal as substitutes for half-crowns.)

Tempted by this liberal offer—and it was very liberal, because I was anxious to get to Tshoza’s kraal before its inhabitants went to bed—the meditative Kafir consented to guide me by a dark and devious path that ran through bush and dripping fields of corn. At length we arrived—for if the kraal was only half a mile away, the path to it covered fully two miles—and glad enough was I when we had waded the last stream and found ourselves at its gate.

In response to the usual inquiries, conducted amid a chorus of yapping dogs, I was informed that Tshoza did not live there, but somewhere else; that he was too old to see anyone; that he had gone to sleep and could not be disturbed; that he was dead and had been buried last week, and so forth.

“Look here, my friend,” I said at last to the fellow who was telling me all these lies, “you go to Tshoza in his grave and say to him that if he does not come out alive instantly, Macumazahn will deal with his cattle as once he dealt with those of Bangu.”

Impressed with the strangeness of this message, the man departed, and presently, in the dim light of the rain-washed moon, I perceived a little old man running towards me; for Tshoza, who was pretty ancient at the beginning of this history, had not been made

younger by a severe wound at the battle of the Tugela and many other troubles.

"Macumazahn," he said, "is that really you? Why, I heard that you were dead long ago; yes, and sacrificed an ox for the welfare of your Spirit."

"And ate it afterwards, I'll be bound," I answered.

"Oh! it must be you," he went on, "who cannot be deceived, for it is true we ate that ox, combining the sacrifice to your Spirit with a feast; for why should anything be wasted when one is poor? Yes, yes, it must be you, for who else would come creeping about a man's kraal at night, except the Watcher-by-Night? Enter, Macumazahn, and be welcome."

So I entered and ate a good meal while we talked over old times.

"And now, where is Saduko?" I asked suddenly as I lit my pipe.

"Saduko?" he answered, his face changing as he spoke. "Oh! of course he is here. You know I came away with him from Zululand. Why? Well, to tell the truth, because after the part we had played—against *my* will, Macumazahn—at the battle of Endondakusuka, I thought it safer to be away from a country where those who have worn their karosses inside out find many enemies and few friends."

"Quite so," I said. "But about Saduko?"

"Oh, I told you, did I not? He is in the next hut, and dying!"

"Dying! What of, Tshoza?"

"I don't know," he answered mysteriously; "but I think he must be bewitched. For a long while, a year or more, he has eaten little and cannot bear to be alone in the dark; indeed, ever since he left Zululand he has been very strange and moody."

Now I remembered what old Zikali had said to me years before to the effect that Saduko was living with a ghost which would kill him.

"Does he think much about Umbelazi, Tshoza?" I asked.

"O Macumazana, he thinks of nothing else; the Spirit of Umbelazi is in him day and night."

"Indeed," I said. "Can I see him?"

"I don't know, Macumazahn. I will go and ask the lady Nandie at once, for, if you can, I believe there is no time to lose." And he left the hut.

Ten minutes later he returned with a woman, Nandie the Sweet herself, the same quiet, dignified Nandie whom I used to know, only now somewhat worn with trouble and looking older than her years.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," she said. "I am pleased to see you, although it is strange, very strange, that you should come here just at this time. Saduko is leaving us—on a long journey, Macumazahn."

I answered that I had heard so with grief, and wondered whether he would like to see me.

"Yes, very much, Macumazahn; only be prepared to find him different from the Saduko whom you knew. Be pleased to follow me."

So we went out of Tshoza's hut, across a courtyard to another large hut, which we entered. It was lit with a good lamp of European make; also a bright fire burned upon the hearth, so that the place was as light as day. At the side of the hut a man lay upon some blankets, watched by a woman. His eyes were covered with his hand, and he was moaning:

"Drive him away! Drive him away! Cannot he suffer me to die in peace?"

"Would you drive away your old friend, Macumazahn, Saduko?" asked Nandie very gently, "Macumazahn, who has come from far to see you?"

He sat up, and, the blankets falling off him, showed me that he was nothing but a living skeleton. Oh! how changed from that lithe and handsome chief whom I used to know. Moreover, his lips quivered and his eyes were full of terrors.

"Is it really you, Macumazahn?" he said in a weak voice. "Come, then, and stand quite close to me, so that *he* may not get between us," and he stretched out his bony hand.

I took the hand; it was icy cold.

"Yes, yes, it is I, Saduko," I said in a cheerful voice; "and there is no man to get between us; only the lady Nandie, your wife, and myself are in the hut; she who watched you has gone."

"Oh, no, Macumazahn, there is another in the hut whom you cannot see. There he stands," and he pointed towards the hearth. "Look! The spear is through him and his plume lies on the ground!"

"Through whom, Saduko?"

"Whom? Why, the Prince Umbelazi, whom I betrayed for Mameena's sake."

"Why do you talk wind, Saduko?" I asked. "Years ago I saw *Indhlovu-ene-Sihlonti* die."

"Die, Macumazahn! We do not die; it is only our flesh that dies. Yes, yes, I have learned that since we parted. Do you not remember his last words: 'I will haunt you while you live, and when you cease to live, ah! then we shall meet again'? Oh! from that hour to this he *has* haunted me, Macumazahn—he and the others; and now, now we are about to meet as he promised."

Then once more he hid his eyes and groaned.

"He is mad," I whispered to Nandie.

"Perhaps. Who knows?" she answered, shaking her head.

Saduko uncovered his eyes.

"Make 'the-thing-that-burns' brighter," he gasped, "for I do not perceive him so clearly when it is bright. Oh! Macumazahn, he is looking at you and whispering. To whom is he whispering? I see! to Mameena, who also looks at you and smiles. They are talking. Be

silent. I must listen.”

Now, I began to wish that I were out of that hut, for really a little of this uncanny business went a long way. Indeed, I suggested going, but Nandie would not allow it.

“Stay with me till the end,” she muttered. So I had to stay, wondering what Saduko heard Umbelazi whispering to Mameena, and on which side of me he saw her standing.

He began to wander in his mind.

“That was a clever pit you dug for Bangu, Macumazahn; but you would not take your share of the cattle, so the blood of the Amakoba is not on your head. Ah! what a fight was that which the Amawombe made at Endondakusuka. You were with them, you remember, Macumazahn; and why was I not at your side? Oh! then we would have swept away the *Usutu* as the wind sweeps ashes. Why was I not at your side to share the glory? I remember now—because of the Daughter of Storm. She betrayed me for Umbelazi, and I betrayed Umbelazi for her; and now he haunts me, whose greatness I brought to the dust; and the *Usutu* wolf, Cetewayo, curls himself up in his form and grows fat on his food. And—and, Macumazahn, it has all been done in vain, for Mameena hates me. Yes, I can read it in her eyes. She mocks and hates me worse in death than she did in life, and she says that—that it was not all her fault—because she loves—because she loves—”

A look of bewilderment came upon his face—his poor, tormented face; then suddenly Saduko threw his arms wide, and sobbed in an ever-weakening voice:

“All—all done in vain! Oh! *Mameena, Ma—mee—na, Ma—meena!*” and fell back dead.

“Saduko has gone away,” said Nandie, as she drew a blanket over his face. “But I wonder,” she added with a little hysterical smile, “oh! how I wonder who it was the Spirit of Mameena told him that she loved—Mameena, who was born without a heart?”

I made no answer, for at that moment I heard a very curious sound, which seemed to me to proceed from somewhere above the hut. Of what did it remind me? Ah! I knew. It was like the sound of the dreadful laughter of Zikali, Opener-of-Roads—Zikali, the “Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born.”

Doubtless, however, it was only the cry of some storm-driven night bird. Or perhaps it was an hyena that laughed—an hyena that scented death.

## CHAPTER XIV

### 15 YEARS AFTER

Both Stella and Tota were too weary to be moved, so we camped that night in the baboons' home, but were troubled by no baboons. Stella would not sleep in the cave; she said the place terrified her, so I made her up a kind of bed under a thorn-tree. As this rock-bound valley was one of the hottest places I ever was in, I thought that this would not matter; but when at sunrise on the following morning I saw a veil of miasmatic mist hanging over the surface of the ground, I changed my opinion. However, neither Stella nor Tota seemed the worse, so as soon as was practical we started homewards. I had already on the previous day sent some of the men back to the kraals to fetch a ladder, and when we reached the cliff we found them waiting for us beneath. With the help of the ladder the descent was easy. Stella simply got out of her rough litter at the top of the cliff, for we found it necessary to carry her, climbed down the ladder, and got into it again at the bottom.

Well, we reached the kraals safely enough, seeing nothing more of Hendrika, and, were this a story, doubtless I should end it here with—"and lived happily ever after." But alas! it is not so. How am I to write it?

My dearest wife's vital energy seemed completely to fail her now that the danger was past, and within twelve hours of our return I saw that her state was such as to necessitate the abandonment of any idea of leaving Babyan Kraals at present. The bodily exertion, the anguish of mind, and the terror which she had endured during that dreadful night, combined with her delicate state of health, had completely broken her down. To make matters worse, also, she was taken with an attack of fever, contracted no doubt in the unhealthy atmosphere of that accursed valley. In time she shook the fever off, but it left her dreadfully weak, and quite unfit to face the trial before her.

I think she knew that she was going to die; she always spoke of my future, never of *our* future. It is impossible for me to tell how sweet she was; how gentle, how patient and resigned. Nor, indeed, do I wish to tell it, it is too sad. But this I will say, I believe that if ever a woman drew near to perfection while yet living on the earth, Stella Quatermain did so.

The fatal hour drew on. My boy Harry was born, and his mother lived to kiss and bless him. Then she sank. We did what we could, but we had little skill, and might not hold her back from death. All through one weary night I watched her with a breaking heart.

The dawn came, the sun rose in the east. His rays falling on the peak behind were reflected in glory upon the bosom of the western sky. Stella awoke from her swoon and saw the light. She whispered to me to open the door of the hut. I did so, and she fixed her dying eyes on the splendour of the morning sky. She looked on me and smiled as an angel might smile. Then with a last effort she lifted her hand, and, pointing to the radiant heavens, whispered:

*"There, Allan, there!"*

It was done, and I was broken-hearted, and broken-hearted I must wander to the end. Those who have endured my loss will know my sorrow; it cannot be written. In such peace and at such an hour may I also die!

Yes, it is a sad story, but wander where we will about the world we can never go beyond the sound of the passing bell. For me, as for my father before me, and for the millions who have been and who shall be, there is but one word of comfort. "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away." Let us, then, bow our heads in hope, and add with a humble heart, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

I buried her by her father's side, and the weeping of the people who had loved her went up to heaven. Even Indaba-zimbi wept, but I could weep no more.

On the second night from her burial I could not sleep. I rose, dressed myself, and went out into the night. The moon was shining brightly, and by its rays I shaped my course towards the graveyard. I drew near silently, and as I came I thought that I heard a sound of moaning on the further side of the wall. I looked over it. Crouched by Stella's grave, and tearing at its sods with her hands, as though she would unearth that which lay within, was *Hendrika*. Her face was wild and haggard, her form was so emaciated that when the pelts she wore slipped aside, the shoulder-blades seemed to project almost through her skin. Suddenly she looked up and saw me. Laughing a dreadful maniac laugh, she put her hand to her girdle and drew her great knife from it. I thought that she was about to attack me, and prepared to defend myself as I best could, for I was unarmed. But she made no effort to do so. Lifting the knife on high, for a moment she held it glittering in the moonlight, then plunged it into her own breast, and fell headlong to the ground.

I sprang over the wall and ran to her. She was not yet dead. Presently she opened her eyes, and I saw that the madness had gone out of them.

"Macumazahn," she said, speaking in English and in a thick difficult voice like one who half forgot and half remembered—"Macumazahn, I remember now. I have been mad. Is she really dead, Macumazahn?"

"Yes," I said, "she is dead, and you killed her."

"I killed her!" the dying woman faltered, "and I loved her. Yes, yes, I know now. I became a brute again and dragged her to the brutes, and now once more I am a woman, and she is dead, and I killed her—because I loved her so. I killed her who saved me from the brutes. I am not dead yet, Macumazahn. Take me and torture me to death, slowly, very slowly. It was jealousy of you that drove me mad, and I have killed her, and now she never can forgive me."

"Ask forgiveness from above," I said, for Hendrika had been a Christian, and the torment of her remorse touched me.

"I ask no forgiveness," she said. "May God torture me for ever, because I killed her; may I become a brute for ever till she comes to find me and forgives me! I only want her forgiveness." And wailing in an anguish of the heart so strong that her bodily suffering seemed to be forgotten, Hendrika, the Baboon-woman, died.

I went back to the kraals, and, waking Indaba-zimbi, told him what had happened, asking him to send some one to watch the body, as I proposed to give it burial. But next morning it was gone, and I found that the natives, hearing of the event, had taken the corpse and thrown it to the vultures with every mark of hate. Such, then, was the end of Hendrika.

A week after Hendrika's death I left Babyan Kraals. The place was hateful to me now; it was a haunted place. I sent for old Indaba-zimbi and told him that I was going. He answered that it was well. "The place has served your turn," he said; "here you have won that joy which it was fated you should win, and have suffered those things that it was fated you should suffer. Yes, and though you know it not now, the joy and the suffering, like the sunshine and the storm, are the same thing, and will rest at last in the same heaven, the heaven from which they came. Now go, Macumazahn."

I asked him if he was coming with me.

"No," he answered, "our paths lie apart henceforth, Macumazahn. We met together for certain ends. Those ends are fulfilled. Now each one goes his own way. You have still many years before you, Macumazahn; my years are few. When we shake hands here it will be for the last time. Perhaps we may meet again, but it will not be in this world. Henceforth we have each of us a friend the less."

"Heavy words," I said.

"True words," he answered.

Well, I have little heart to write the rest of it. I went, leaving Indaba-zimbi in charge of the place, and making him a present of such cattle and goods as I did not want.

Tota, I of course took with me. Fortunately by this time she had almost recovered the shock to her nerves. The baby Harry, as he was afterwards named, was a fine healthy child, and I was lucky in getting a respectable native woman, whose husband had been killed in the fight with the baboons, to accompany me as his nurse.

Slowly, and followed for a distance by all the people, I trekked away from Babyan Kraals. My route towards Natal was along the edge of the Bad Lands, and my first night's outspan was beneath that very tree where Stella, my lost wife, had found us as we lay dying of thirst.

I did not sleep much that night. And yet I was glad that I had not died in the desert about eleven months before. I felt then, as from year to year I have continued to feel while I wander through the lonely wilderness of life, that I had been preserved to an end. I had won my darling's love, and for a little while we had been happy together. Our happiness was too perfect to endure. She is lost to me now, but she is lost to be found again.

Here on the following morning I bade farewell to Indaba-zimbi.

"Good-bye, Macumazahn," he said, nodding his white lock at me. "Good-bye for a while. I am not a Christian; your father could not make me that. But he was a wise man, and when he said that those who loved each other shall meet again, he did not lie. And I too am a wise man in my way, Macumazahn, and I say it is true that we shall meet again. All my prophecies to you have come true, Macumazahn, and this one shall come true also. I tell you that you shall return to Babyan Kraals and shall not find me. I tell you that you shall journey to a further land than Babyan Kraals and shall find me. Farewell!" and he took a pinch of snuff, turned, and went.

Of my journey down to Natal there is little to tell. I met with many adventures, but they were of an every-day kind, and in the end arrived safely at Port Durban, which I now visited for the first time. Both Tota and my baby boy bore the journey well. And here I may as well chronicle the destiny of Tota. For a year she remained under my charge. Then she was adopted by a lady, the wife of an English colonel, who was stationed at the Cape. She was taken by her adopted parents to England, where she grew up a very charming and pretty girl, and ultimately married a clergyman in Norfolk. But I never saw her again, though we often wrote to each other.

Before I returned to the country of my birth, she too had been gathered to the land of shadows, leaving three children behind her. Ah me! all this took place so long ago, when I was young who now am old.

Perhaps it may interest the reader to know the fate of Mr. Carson's property, which should of course have gone to his grandson Harry. I wrote to England to claim the estate on his behalf, but the lawyer to whom the matter was submitted said that my marriage to Stella, not having been celebrated by an ordained priest, was not legal according to English law, and therefore Harry could not inherit. Foolishly enough I acquiesced in this, and the property passed to a cousin of my father-in-law's; but since I have come to live in England I have been informed that this opinion is open to great suspicion, and that there is every probability that the courts would have declared the marriage perfectly binding as having been solemnly entered into in accordance with the custom of the place where it was contracted. But I am now so rich that it is not worth while to move in the matter. The cousin is dead, his son is in possession, so let him keep it.

Once, and once only, did I revisit Babyan Kraals. Some fifteen years after my darling's death, when I was a man in middle life, I undertook an expedition to the Zambesi, and one night outspanned at the mouth of the well-known valley beneath the shadow of the great peak. I mounted my horse, and, quite alone, rode up the valley, noticing with a strange prescience of evil that the road was overgrown, and, save for the music of the waterfalls, the place silent as death. The kraals that used to be to the left of the road by the river had vanished. I rode towards their site; the mealie fields were choked with weeds, the paths were dumb with grass. Presently I reached the place. There, overgrown with grass, were the burnt ashes of the kraals, and there among the ashes, gleaming in the moonlight, lay the white bones of men. Now it was clear to me. The settlement had been fallen on by some powerful foe, and its inhabitants put to the assegai. The forebodings of the natives had come true; Babyan Kraals were peopled by memories alone.

I passed on up the terraces. There shone the roofs of the marble huts. They would not burn, and were too strong to be easily pulled down. I entered one of them—it had been our sleeping hut—and lit a candle which I had with me. The huts had been sacked; leaves

of books and broken mouldering fragments of the familiar furniture lay about. Then I remembered that there was a secret place hollowed in the floor and concealed by a stone, where Stella used to hide her little treasures. I went to the stone and dragged it up. There was something within wrapped in rotting native cloth. I undid it. It was the dress my wife had been married in. In the centre of the dress were the withered wreath and flowers she had worn, and with them a little paper packet. I opened it; it contained a lock of my own hair!

I remembered then that I had searched for this dress when I came away and could not find it, for I had forgotten the secret recess in the floor.

Taking the dress with me, I left the hut for the last time. Leaving my horse tied to a tree, I walked to the graveyard, through the ruined garden. There it was a mass of weeds, but over my darling's grave grew a self-sown orange bush, of which the scented petals fell in showers on to the mound beneath. As I drew near, there was a crash and a rush. A great baboon leapt from the centre of the graveyard and vanished into the trees. I could almost believe that it was the wraith of Hendrika doomed to keep an eternal watch over the bones of the woman her jealous rage had done to death.

I tarried there a while, filled with such thoughts as may not be written. Then, leaving my dead wife to her long sleep where the waters fall in melancholy music beneath the shadow of the everlasting mountain, I turned and sought that spot where first we had told our love. Now the orange grove was nothing but a tangled thicket; many of the trees were dead, choked with creepers, but some still flourished. There stood the one beneath which we had lingered, there was the rock that had been our seat, and there on the rock sat the wraith of *Stella*, the Stella whom I had wed! Ay! there she sat, and on her upturned face was that same spiritual look which I saw upon it in the hour when we first had kissed. The moonlight shone in her dark eyes, the breeze wavered in her curling hair, her breast rose and fell, a gentle smile played about her parted lips. I stood transfixed with awe and joy, gazing on that lost loveliness which once was mine. I could not speak, and she spoke no word; she did not even seem to see me. Now her eyes fell. For a moment they met mine, and their message entered into me.

Then she was gone. She was gone; nothing was left but the tremulous moonlight falling where she had been, the melancholy music of the waters, the shadow of the everlasting mountain, and, in my heart, the sorrow and the hope.

# BOOK IX

## THE 3 LIONS

### I

## THE INTEREST ON 10 SHILLINGS

Most of you will have heard that Allan Quatermain, who was one of the party that discovered King Solomon's mines some little time ago, and who afterwards came to live in England near his friend Sir Henry Curtis. He went back to the wilderness again, as these old hunters almost invariably do, on one pretext or another. [\*] They cannot endure civilization for very long, its noise and racket and the omnipresence of broad-clothed humanity proving more trying to their nerves than the dangers of the desert. I think that they feel lonely here, for it is a fact that is too little understood, though it has often been stated, that there is no loneliness like the loneliness of crowds, especially to those who are unaccustomed to them. "What is there in the world," old Quatermain would say, "so desolate as to stand in the streets of a great city and listen to the footsteps falling, falling, multitudinous as the rain, and watch the white line of faces as they hurry past, you know not whence, you know not whither? They come and go, their eyes meet yours with a cold stare, for a moment their features are written on your mind, and then they are gone for ever. You will never see them again; they will never see you again; they come up out of the unknown, and presently they once more vanish into the unknown, taking their secrets with them. Yes, that is loneliness pure and undefiled; but to one who knows and loves it, the wilderness is not lonely, because the spirit of nature is ever there to keep the wanderer company. He finds companions in the winds—the sunny streams babble like Nature's children at his feet; high above them, in the purple sunset, are domes and minarets and palaces, such as no mortal man has built, in and out of whose flaming doors the angels of the sun seem to move continually. And there, too, is the wild game, following its feeding-grounds in great armies, with the springbuck thrown out before for skirmishers; then rank upon rank of long-faced blesbuck, marching and wheeling like infantry; and last the shining troops of quagga, and the fierce-eyed shaggy vilderbeeste to take, as it were, the place of the cossack host that hangs upon an army's flanks.

*[\*] This of course was written before Mr. Quatermain's account of the adventures in the newly-discovered country of Zu-Vendis of himself, Sir Henry Curtis, and Capt. John Good had been received in England.—Editor.*

"Oh, no," he would say, "the wilderness is not lonely, for, my boy, remember that the further you get from man, the nearer you grow to God," and though this is a saying that might well be disputed, it is one I am sure that anybody will easily understand who has watched the sun rise and set on the limitless deserted plains, and seen the thunder chariots of the clouds roll in majesty across the depths of unfathomable sky.

Well, at any rate we went back again, and now for many months I have heard nothing at all of him, and to be frank, I greatly doubt if anybody will ever hear of him again. I fear that the wilderness, that has for so many years been a mother to him, will now also prove his grave and the grave of those who accompanied him, for the quest upon which he and they have started is a wild one indeed.

But while he was in England for those three years or so between his return from the successful discovery of the wise king's buried treasures, and the death of his only son, I saw a great deal of old Allan Quatermain. I had known him years before in Africa, and after he came home, whenever I had nothing better to do, I used to run up to Yorkshire and stay with him, and in this way I at one time and another heard many of the incidents of his past life, and most curious some of them were. No man can pass all those years following the rough existence of an elephant-hunter without meeting with many strange adventures, and in one way and another old Quatermain has certainly seen his share. Well, the story that I am going to tell you in the following pages is one of the later of these adventures, though I forget the exact year in which it happened, at any rate I know that it was the only trip upon which he took his son Harry (who is since dead) with him, and that Harry was then about fourteen. And now for the story, which I will repeat, as nearly as I can, in the words in which Hunter Quatermain told it to me one night in the old oak-panelled vestibule of his house in Yorkshire. We were talking about gold-mining—

"Gold-mining!" he broke in; "ah! yes, I once went gold-mining at Pilgrims' Rest in the Transvaal, and it was after that that we had the business about Jim-Jim and the lions. Do you know Pilgrim's Rest? Well, it is, or was, one of the queerest little places you ever saw. The town itself was pitched in a stony valley, with mountains all about it, and in the middle of such scenery as one does not often get the chance of seeing. Many and many is the time that I have thrown down my pick and shovel in disgust, clambered out of my claim, and walked a couple of miles or so to the top of some hill. Then I would lie down in the grass and look out over the glorious stretch of country—the smiling valleys, the great mountains touched with gold—real gold of the sunset, and clothed in sweeping robes of bush, and stare into the depths of the perfect sky above; yes, and thank Heaven I had got away from the cursing and the coarse jokes of the miners, and the voices of those Basutu Kaffirs as they toiled in the sun, the memory of which is with me yet.

"Well, for some months I dug away patiently at my claim, till the very sight of a pick or of a washing-trough became hateful to me. A hundred times a day I lamented my own folly in having invested eight hundred pounds, which was about all that I was worth at the time, in this gold-mining. But like other better people before me, I had been bitten by the gold bug, and now was forced to take the consequences. I bought a claim out of which a man had made a fortune—five or six thousand pounds at least—as I thought, very cheap; that is, I gave him five hundred pounds down for it. It was all that I had made by a very rough year's elephant-hunting beyond the Zambesi, and I sighed deeply and prophetically when I saw my successful friend, who was a Yankee, sweep up the roll of Standard Bank notes with the lordly air of the man who has made his fortune, and cram them into his breeches pockets. 'Well,' I said to him—the happy vendor—"it is a magnificent property, and I only hope that my luck will be as good as yours has been."

"He smiled; to my excited nerves it seemed that he smiled ominously, as he answered me in a peculiar Yankee drawl: 'I guess, stranger, as I ain't the one to make a man quarrel with his food, more especial when there ain't no more going of the rounds; and as for that there claim, well, she's been a good nigger to me; but between you and me, stranger, speaking man to man, now that there ain't any filthy lucre between us to obscure the features of the truth, I guess she's about worked out!'

"I gasped; the fellow's effrontery took the breath out of me. Only five minutes before he had been swearing by all his gods—and they appeared to be numerous and mixed—that there were half a dozen fortunes left in the claim, and that he was only giving it up because he was downright weary of shovelling the gold out.

"Don't look so vexed, stranger," went on my tormentor, 'perhaps there is some shine in the old girl yet; anyway you are a downright good fellow, you are, therefore you will, I guess, have a real A1 opportunity of working on the feelings of Fortune. Anyway it will bring the muscle up upon your arm, for the stuff is uncommon stiff, and, what is more, you will in the course of a year earn a sight more than two thousand dollars in value of experience.'

"Then he went just in time, for in another moment I should have gone for him, and I saw his face no more.

"Well, I set to work on the old claim with my boy Harry and half a dozen Kaffirs to help me, which, seeing that I had put nearly all my worldly wealth into it, was the least that I could do. And we worked, my word, we did work—early and late we went at it—but never a bit of gold did we see; no, not even a nugget large enough to make a scarf-pin out of. The American gentleman had secured it all and left us the sweepings.

"For three months this went on, till at last I had paid away all, or very near all, that was left of her little capital in wages and food for the Kaffirs and ourselves. When I tell you that Boer meal was sometimes as high as four pounds a bag, you will understand that it did not take long to run through our banking account.

"At last the crisis came. One Saturday night I had paid the men as usual, and bought a muid of mealie meal at sixty shillings for them to fill themselves with, and then I went with my boy Harry and sat on the edge of the great hole that we had dug in the hill-side, and which we had in bitter mockery named Eldorado. There we sat in the moonlight with our feet over the edge of the claim, and were melancholy enough for anything. Presently I pulled out my purse and emptied its contents into my hand. There was a half-sovereign, two florins, ninepence in silver, no coppers—for copper practically does not circulate in South Africa, which is one of the things that make living so dear there—in all exactly fourteen and ninepence.

"There, Harry, my boy!" I said, 'that is the sum total of our worldly wealth; that hole has swallowed all the rest.'

"By George!" said Master Harry; 'I say, father, you and I shall have to let ourselves out to work with the Kaffirs and live on mealie pap,' and he sniggered at his unpleasant little joke.

"But I was in no mood for joking, for it is not a merry thing to dig like anything for months and be completely ruined in the process, especially if you happen to dislike digging, and consequently I resented Harry's light-heartedness.

"Be quiet, boy!" I said, raising my hand as though to give him a cuff, with the result that the half-sovereign slipped out of it and fell into the gulf below.

"Oh, bother," said I, 'it's gone.'

"There, Dad," said Harry, 'that's what comes of letting your angry passions rise; now we are down to four and nine.'

"I made no answer to these words of wisdom, but scrambled down the steep sides of the claim, followed by Harry, to hunt for my little all. Well, we hunted and we hunted, but the moonlight is an uncertain thing to look for half-sovereigns by, and there was some loose soil about, for the Kaffirs had knocked off working at this very spot a couple of hours before. I took a pick and raked away the clods of earth with it, in the hope of finding the coin; but all in vain. At last in sheer annoyance I struck the sharp end of the pickaxe down into the soil, which was of a very hard nature. To my astonishment it sunk in right up to the haft.

"Why, Harry," I said, 'this ground must have been disturbed!'

"I don't think so, father," he answered; 'but we will soon see,' and he began to shovel out the soil with his hands. 'Oh,' he said presently, 'it's only some old stones; the pick has gone down between them, look!' and he began to pull at one of the stones.

"I say, Dad," he said presently, almost in a whisper, 'it's precious heavy, feel it;' and he rose and gave me a round, brownish lump about the size of a very large apple, which he was holding in both his hands. I took it curiously and held it up to the light. It *was* very heavy. The moonlight fell upon its rough and filth-encrusted surface, and as I looked, curious little thrills of excitement began to pass through me. But I could not be sure.

"Give me your knife, Harry," I said.

"He did so, and resting the brown stone on my knee I scratched at its surface. Great heavens, it was soft!

"Another second and the secret was out, we had found a great nugget of pure gold, four pounds of it or more. 'It's gold, lad,' I said, 'it's gold, or I'm a Dutchman!'

"Harry, with his eyes starting out of his head, glared down at the gleaming yellow scratch that I had made upon the virgin metal, and then burst out into yell upon yell of exultation, which went ringing away across the silent claims like shrieks of somebody being murdered.

"Be quiet!" I said; 'do you want every thief on the fields after you?'

"Scarcely were the words out of my mouth when I heard a stealthy footstep approaching. I promptly put the big nugget down and sat on it, and uncommonly hard it was. As I did so I saw a lean dark face poked over the edge of the claim and a pair of beady eyes searching us out. I knew the face, it belonged to a man of very bad character known as Handspike Tom, who had, I understood, been so named at the Diamond Fields because he had murdered his mate with a handspike. He was now no doubt prowling about like a human hyæna to see what he could steal.

"Is that you, 'unter Quatermain?" he said.

"Yes, it's I, Mr. Tom," I answered, politely.

"And what might all that there yelling be?" he asked. 'I was walking along, a-taking of the evening air and a-thinking on the stars, when I 'ears 'owl after 'owl.'

"Well, Mr. Tom," I answered, 'that is not to be wondered at, seeing that like yourself they are nocturnal birds.'

"Owl after 'owl!' he repeated sternly, taking no notice of my interpretation, 'and I stops and says, "That's murder," and I listens again and thinks, "No, it ain't; that 'owl is the 'owl of hexultation; some one's been and got his fingers into a gummy yellor pot, I'll swear, and gone off 'is 'ead in the sucking of them." Now, 'unter Quatermain, is I right? is it nuggets? Oh, lor!' and he smacked his lips audibly—'great big yellow boys—is it them that you have just been and tumbled across?'

"No," I said boldly, 'it isn't'—the cruel gleam in his black eyes altogether overcoming my aversion to untruth, for I knew that if once he found out what it was that I was sitting on—and by the way I have heard of rolling in gold being spoken of as a pleasant process, but I certainly do not recommend anybody who values comfort to try sitting on it—I should run a very good chance of being 'handspiked' before the night was over.

“If you want to know what it was, Mr. Tom,” I went on, with my politest air, although in agony from the nugget underneath—for I hold it is always best to be polite to a man who is so ready with a handspike—“my boy and I have had a slight difference of opinion, and I was enforcing my view of the matter upon him; that’s all.”

“Yes, Mr. Tom,” put in Harry, beginning to weep, for Harry was a smart boy, and saw the difficulty we were in, “that was it—I halloed because father beat me.”

“Well, now, did yer, my dear boy—did yer? Well, all I can say is that a played-out old claim is a wonderful queer sort of place to come to for to argify at ten o’clock of night, and what’s more, my sweet youth, if ever I should ‘ave the argifying of yer—and he leered unpleasantly at Harry—“yer won’t ‘oller in quite such a jolly sort ‘o way. And now I’ll be saying good-night, for I don’t like disturbing of a family party. No, I ain’t that sort of man, I ain’t. Good-night to yer, ‘unter Quatermain—good-night to yer, my argified young one;” and Mr. Tom turned away disappointed, and prowled off elsewhere, like a human jackal, to see what he could thieve or kill.

“Thank goodness!” I said, as I slipped off the lump of gold. “Now, then, do you get up, Harry, and see if that consummate villain has gone.” Harry did so, and reported that he had vanished towards Pilgrim’s Rest, and then we set to work, and very carefully, but trembling with excitement, with our hands hollowed out all the space of ground into which I had struck the pick. Yes, as I hoped, there was a regular nest of nuggets, twelve in all, running from the size of a hazel-nut to that of a hen’s egg, though of course the first one was much larger than that. How they all came there nobody can say; it was one of those extraordinary freaks, with stories of which, at any rate, all people acquainted with alluvial gold-mining will be familiar. It turned out afterwards that the American who sold me the claim had in the same way made his pile—a much larger one than ours, by the way—out of a single pocket, and then worked for six months without seeing colour, after which he gave it up.

“At any rate, there the nuggets were, to the value, as it turned out afterwards, of about twelve hundred and fifty pounds, so that after all I took out of that hole four hundred and fifty pounds more than I put into it. We got them all out and wrapped them up in a handkerchief, and then, fearing to carry home so much treasure, especially as we knew that Mr. Handspike Tom was on the prowl, made up our minds to pass the night where we were—a necessity which, disagreeable as it was, was wonderfully sweetened by the presence of that handkerchief full of virgin gold—the interest of my lost half-sovereign.

“Slowly the night wore away, for with the fear of Handspike Tom before my eyes I did not dare to go to sleep, and at last the dawn came. I got up and watched its growth, till it opened like a flower upon the eastern sky, and the sunbeams began to spring up in splendour from mountain-top to mountain-top. I watched it, and as I did so it flashed upon me, with a complete conviction which I had not felt before, that I had had enough of gold-mining to last me the rest of my natural life, and I then and there made up my mind to clear out of Pilgrims’ Rest and go and shoot buffalo towards Delagoa Bay. Then I turned, took the pick and shovel, and although it was a Sunday morning, woke up Harry and set to work to see if there were any more nuggets about. As I expected, there were none. What we had got had lain together in a little pocket filled with soil that felt quite different from the stiff stuff round and outside the pocket. There was not another trace of gold. Of course it is possible that there were more pocketfuls somewhere about, but all I have to say is I made up my mind that, whoever found them, I should not; and, as a matter of fact, I have since heard that this claim has been the ruin of two or three people, as it very nearly was the ruin of me.

“Harry,” I said presently, “I am going away this week towards Delagoa to shoot buffalo. Shall I take you with me, or send you down to Durban?”

“Oh, take me with you, father!” begged Harry, “I want to kill a buffalo!”

“And supposing that the buffalo kills you instead?” I asked.

“Oh, never mind,” he said, gaily, “there are lots more where I came from.”

“I rebuked him for his flippancy, but in the end I consented to take him.”

## II

# WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE POOL

"Something over a fortnight had passed since the night when I lost half-a-sovereign and found twelve hundred and fifty pounds in looking for it, and instead of that horrid hole, for which, after all, Eldorado was hardly a misnomer, a very different scene stretched away before us clad in the silver robe of the moonlight. We were camped—Harry and I, two Kaffirs, a Scotch cart, and six oxen—on the swelling side of a great wave of bushclad land. Just where we had made our camp, however, the bush was very sparse, and only grew about in clumps, while here and there were single flat-topped mimosa-trees. To our right a little stream, which had cut a deep channel for itself in the bosom of the slope, flowed musically on between banks green with maidenhair, wild asparagus, and many beautiful grasses. The bed-rock here was red granite, and in the course of centuries of patient washing the water had hollowed out some of the huge slabs in its path into great troughs and cups, and these we used for bathing-places. No Roman lady, with her baths of porphyry or alabaster, could have had a more delicious spot to bathe herself than we found within fifty yards of our skerm, or rough inclosure of mimosa thorn, that we had dragged together round the cart to protect us from the attacks of lions. That there were several of these brutes about, I knew from their spoor, though we had neither heard nor seen them.

"Our bath was a little nook where the eddy of the stream had washed away a mass of soil, and on the edge of it there grew a most beautiful old mimosa thorn. Beneath the thorn was a large smooth slab of granite fringed all round with maidenhair and other ferns, that sloped gently down to a pool of the clearest sparkling water, which lay in a bowl of granite about ten feet wide by five feet deep in the centre. Here to this slab we went every morning to bathe, and that delightful bath is among the most pleasant of my hunting reminiscences, as it is also, for reasons which will presently appear, among the most painful.

"It was a lovely night. Harry and I sat to the windward of the fire, where the two Kaffirs were busily employed in cooking some impala steaks off a buck which Harry, to his great joy, had shot that morning, and were as perfectly contented with ourselves and the world at large as two people could possibly be. The night was beautiful, and it would require somebody with more words on the tip of his tongue than I have to describe properly the chastened majesty of those moonlit wilds. Away for ever and for ever, away to the mysterious north, rolled the great bush ocean over which the silence brooded. There beneath us a mile or more to the right ran the wide Oliphant, and mirror-like flashed back the moon, whose silver spears were shivered on its breast, and then tossed in twisted lines of light far and wide about the mountains and the plain. Down upon the river-banks grew great timber-trees that through the stillness pointed solemnly to Heaven, and the beauty of the night lay upon them like a cloud. Everywhere was silence—silence in the starred depths, silence on the bosom of the sleeping earth. Now, if ever, great thoughts might rise in a man's mind, and for a space he might forget his littleness in the sense that he partook of the pure immensity about him.

"Hark! what was that?"

"From far away down by the river there comes a mighty rolling sound, then another, and another. It is the lion seeking his meat.

"I saw Harry shiver and turn a little pale. He was a plucky boy enough, but the roar of a lion heard for the first time in the solemn bush veldt at night is apt to shake the nerves of any lad.

"Lions, my boy," I said; 'they are hunting down by the river there; but I don't think that you need make yourself uneasy. We have been here three nights now, and if they were going to pay us a visit I think that they would have done so before this. However, we will make up the fire.'

"Here, Pharaoh, do you and Jim-Jim get some more wood before we go to sleep, else the cats will be purring round you before morning.'

"Pharaoh, a great brawny Swazi, who had been working for me at Pilgrims' Rest, laughed, rose, and stretched himself, then calling to Jim-Jim to bring the axe and a reim, started off in the moonlight towards a clump of sugar-bush where we cut our fuel from some dead trees. He was a fine fellow in his way, was Pharaoh, and I think that he had been named Pharaoh because he had an Egyptian cast of countenance and a royal sort of swagger about him. But his way was a somewhat peculiar way, on account of the uncertainty of his temper, and very few people could get on with him; also if he could find liquor he would drink like a fish, and when he drank he became shockingly bloodthirsty. These were his bad points; his good ones were that, like most people of the Zulu blood, he became exceedingly attached if he took to you at all; he was a hard-working and intelligent man, and about as dare-devil and plucky a fellow at a pinch as I have ever had to do with. He was about five-and-thirty years of age or so, but not a 'keshla' or ringed man. I believe that he had got into trouble in some way in Swaziland, and the authorities of his tribe would not allow him to assume the ring, and that is why he came to work at the gold-fields. The other man, or rather lad, Jim-Jim, was a Mapoch Kaffir, or Knobnose, and even in the light of subsequent events I fear I cannot speak very well of him. He was an idle and careless young rascal, and only that very morning I had to tell Pharaoh to give him a beating for letting the oxen stray, which Pharaoh did with the greatest gusto, although he was by way of being very fond of Jim-Jim. Indeed, I saw him consoling Jim-Jim afterwards with a pinch of snuff from his own ear-box, whilst he explained to him that the next time it came in the way of duty to flog him, he meant to thrash him with the other hand, so as to cross the old cuts and make a "pretty pattern" on his back.

"Well, off they went, though Jim-Jim did not at all like leaving the camp at that hour, even when the moonlight was so bright, and in due course returned safely enough with a great bundle of wood. I laughed at Jim-Jim, and asked him if he had seen anything, and he said yes, he had; he had seen two large yellow eyes staring at him from behind a bush, and heard something snore.

"As, however, on further investigation the yellow eyes and the snore appeared to have existed only in Jim-Jim's lively imagination, I was not greatly disturbed by this alarming report; but having seen to the making-up of the fire, got into the skerm and went quietly to sleep with Harry by my side.

"Some hours afterwards I woke up with a start. I don't know what woke me. The moon had gone down, or at least was almost hidden behind the soft horizon of bush, only her red rim being visible. Also a wind had sprung up and was driving long hurrying lines of cloud across the starry sky, and altogether a great change had come over the mood of the night. By the look of the sky I judged that we must be about two hours from day-break.

"The oxen, which were as usual tied to the disselboom of the Scotch cart, were very restless—they kept snuffling and blowing, and rising up and lying down again, so I at once suspected that they must wind something. Presently I knew what it was that they winded, for within fifty yards of us a lion roared, not very loud, but quite loud enough to make my heart come into my mouth.

"Pharaoh was sleeping on the other side of the cart, and, looking beneath it, I saw him raise his head and listen.

"'Lion, Inkoos,' he whispered, 'lion!'

"Jim-Jim also jumped up, and by the faint light I could see that he was in a very great fright indeed.

"Thinking that it was as well to be prepared for emergencies, I told Pharaoh to throw wood upon the fire, and woke up Harry, who I verily believe was capable of sleeping happily through the crack of doom. He was a little scared at first, but presently the excitement of the position came home to him, and he grew quite anxious to see his majesty face to face. I got my rifle handy and gave Harry his—a Westley Richards falling block, which is a very useful gun for a youth, being light and yet a good killing rifle, and then we waited.

"For a long time nothing happened, and I began to think that the best thing we could do would be to go to sleep again, when suddenly I heard a sound more like a cough than a roar within about twenty yards of the skerm. We all looked out, but could see nothing; and then followed another period of suspense. It was very trying to the nerves, this waiting for an attack that might be developed from any quarter or might not be developed at all; and though I was an old hand at this sort of business I was anxious about Harry, for it is wonderful how the presence of anybody to whom one is attached unnerves a man in moments of danger. I know, although it was now chilly enough, I could feel the perspiration running down my nose, and in order to relieve the strain on my attention employed myself in watching a beetle which appeared to be attracted by the firelight, and was sitting before it thoughtfully rubbing his antennæ against each other.

"Suddenly, the beetle gave such a jump that he nearly pitched headlong into the fire, and so did we all—gave jumps, I mean, and no wonder, for from right under the skerm fence there came a most frightful roar—a roar that literally made the Scotch cart shake and took the breath out of me.

"Harry made an exclamation, Jim-Jim howled outright, while the poor oxen, who were terrified almost out of their hides, shivered and lowed piteously.

"The night was almost entirely dark now, for the moon had quite set, and the clouds had covered up the stars, so that the only light we had came from the fire, which by this time was burning up brightly again. But, as you know, firelight is absolutely useless to shoot by, it is so uncertain, and besides, it penetrates but a very little way into the darkness, although if one is in the dark outside, one can see it from far away.

"Presently the oxen, after standing still for a moment, suddenly winded the lion and did what I feared they would do—began to 'skrek,' that is, to try and break loose from the trektow to which they were tied, to rush off madly into the wilderness. Lions know of this habit on the part of oxen, which are, I do believe, the most foolish animals under the sun, a sheep being a very Solomon compared to them; and it is by no means uncommon for a lion to get in such a position that a herd or span of oxen may wind him, skrek, break their reims, and rush off into the bush. Of course, once there, they are helpless in the dark; and then the lion chooses the one that he loves best and eats him at his leisure.

"Well, round and round went our six poor oxen, nearly trampling us to death in their mad rush; indeed, had we not hastily tumbled out of the way, we should have been trodden to death, or at the least seriously injured. As it was, Harry was run over, and poor Jim-Jim being caught by the trektow somewhere beneath the arm, was hurled right across the skerm, landing by my side only some paces off.

"Snap went the disselboom of the cart beneath the transverse strain put upon it. Had it not broken the cart would have overset; as it was, in another minute, oxen, cart, trektow, reims, broken disselboom, and everything were soon tied in one vast heaving, plunging, bellowing, and seemingly inextricable knot.

"For a moment or two this state of affairs took my attention off from the lion that had caused it, but whilst I was wondering what on earth was to be done next, and how we should manage if the cattle broke loose into the bush and were lost—for cattle frightened in this manner will so straight away like mad things—my thoughts were suddenly recalled to the lion in a very painful fashion.

"For at that moment I perceived by the light of the fire a kind of gleam of yellow travelling through the air towards us.

"'The lion! the lion!' holloaed Pharaoh, and as he did so, he, or rather she, for it was a great gaunt lioness, half wild no doubt with hunger, lit right in the middle of the skerm, and stood there in the smoky gloom lashing her tail and roaring. I seized my rifle and fired it at her, but what between the confusion, my agitation, and the uncertain light, I missed her, and nearly shot Pharaoh. The flash of the rifle, however, threw the whole scene into strong relief, and a wild sight it was I can tell you—with the seething mass of oxen twisted all round the cart, in such a fashion that their heads looked as though they were growing out of their rumps; and their horns seemed to protrude from their backs; the smoking fire with just a blaze in the heart of the smoke; Jim-Jim in the foreground, where the oxen had thrown him in their wild rush, stretched out there in terror, and then as a centre to the picture the great gaunt lioness glaring round with hungry yellow eyes, roaring and whining as she made up her mind what to do.

"It did not take her long, however, just the time that it takes a flash to die into darkness, for, before I could fire again or do anything, with a most fiendish snort she sprang upon poor Jim-Jim.

"I heard the unfortunate lad shriek, and then almost instantly I saw his legs thrown into the air. The lioness had seized him by the neck, and with a sudden jerk thrown his body over her back so that his legs hung down upon the further side.[\*] Then, without the slightest hesitation, and apparently without any difficulty, she cleared the skerm face at a single bound, and bearing poor Jim-Jim with her vanished into the darkness beyond, in the direction of the bathing-place that I have already described. We jumped up perfectly mad with horror and fear, and rushed wildly after her, firing shots at haphazard on the chance that she would be frightened by them into dropping her prey, but nothing could we see, and nothing could we hear. The lioness had vanished into the darkness, taking Jim-Jim with her, and to attempt to follow her till daylight was madness. We should only expose ourselves to the risk of a like fate.

*[\*] I have known a lion carry a two-year-old ox over a stone wall four feet high in this fashion, and a mile away into the bush beyond. He was subsequently poisoned by strychnine put into the carcass of the ox, and I still have his claws.*  
—Editor.

"So with scared and heavy hearts we crept back to the skerm, and sat down to wait for the dawn, which now could not be much more than an hour off. It was absolutely useless to try even to disentangle the oxen till then, so all that was left for us to do was to sit and wonder how it came to pass that the one should be taken and the other left, and to hope against hope that our poor servant might have been mercifully delivered from the lion's jaws.

"At length the faint dawn came stealing like a ghost up the long slope of bush, and glinted on the tangled oxen's horns, and with white and frightened faces we got up and set to the task of disentangling the oxen, till such time as there should be light enough to enable us to follow the trail of the lioness which had gone off with Jim-Jim. And here a fresh trouble awaited us, for when at last with infinite difficulty we had disentangled the great helpless brutes, it was only to find that one of the best of them was very sick. There was no mistake about the way he stood with his legs slightly apart and his head hanging down. He had got the redwater, I was sure of it. Of all the difficulties connected with life and travelling in South Africa those connected with oxen are perhaps the worst. The ox is the most exasperating animal in the world, a negro excepted. He has absolutely no constitution, and never neglects an opportunity of falling sick of some mysterious disease. He will get thin upon the slightest provocation, and from mere maliciousness die of 'poverty'; whereas it is his chief delight to turn round and refuse to pull whenever he finds himself well in the centre of a river, or the waggon-wheel nicely fast in a mud hole. Drive him a few miles over rough roads and you will find that he is footsore; turn him loose to feed and you will discover that he has run away, or if he has not run away he has of malice aforethought eaten 'tulip' and poisoned himself. There is always something with him. The ox is a brute. It was of a piece with his accustomed behaviour for the one in question to break out—on purpose probably—with redwater just when a lion had walked off with his herd. It was exactly what I should have expected, and I was therefore neither disappointed nor surprised.

"Well, it was no use crying as I should almost have liked to do, because if this ox had redwater it was probable that the rest of them had it too, although they had been sold to me as 'salted,' that is, proof against such diseases as redwater and lungsick. One gets hardened to this sort of thing in South Africa in course of time, for I suppose in no other country in the world is the waste of animal life so great.

"So taking my rifle and telling Harry to follow me (for we had to leave Pharaoh to look after the oxen—Pharaoh's lean kine, I called them), I started to see if anything could be found of or appertaining to the unfortunate Jim-Jim. The ground round our little camp was hard and rocky, and we could not hit off any spoor of the lioness, though just outside the skerm was a drop or two of blood. About three hundred yards from the camp, and a little to the right, was a patch of sugar bush mixed up with the usual mimosa, and for this I made, thinking that the lioness would have been sure to take her prey there to devour it. On we pushed through the long grass that was bent down beneath the weight of the soaking dew. In two minutes we were wet through up to the thighs, as wet as though we had waded through water. In due course, however, we reached the patch of bush, and by the grey light of the morning cautiously and slowly pushed our way into it. It was very dark under the trees, for the sun was not yet up, so we walked with the most extreme care, half expecting every minute to come across the lioness licking the bones of poor Jim-Jim. But no lioness could we see, and as for Jim-Jim there was not even a finger-joint of him to be found. Evidently they had not come here.

"So pushing through the bush we proceeded to hunt every other likely spot, but with the same result.

"I suppose she must have taken him right away," I said at last, sadly enough. "At any rate he will be dead by now, so God have mercy on him, we can't help him. What's to be done now?"

"I suppose that we had better wash ourselves in the pool, and then go back and get something to eat. I am filthy," said Harry.

"This was a practical if a somewhat unfeeling suggestion. At least it struck me as unfeeling to talk of washing when poor Jim-Jim had been so recently eaten. However, I did not let my sentiment carry me away, so we went down to the beautiful spot that I have described, to wash. I was the first to reach it, which I did by scrambling down the ferny bank. Then I turned round, and started back with a yell—as well I might, for almost from beneath my feet there came a most awful snarl.

"I had lit nearly upon the back of the lioness, that had been sleeping on the slab where we always stood to dry ourselves after bathing. With a snarl and a growl, before I could do anything, before I could even cock my rifle, she had bounded right across the crystal pool, and vanished over the opposite bank. It was all done in an instant, as quick as thought.

"She had been sleeping on the slab, and oh, horror! what was that sleeping beside her? It was the red remains of poor Jim-Jim, lying on a patch of blood-stained rock.

"Oh! father, father!" shrieked Harry, 'look in the water!'

"I looked. There, floating in the centre of the lovely tranquil pool, was Jim-Jim's head. The lioness had bitten it right off, and it had rolled down the sloping rock into the water."

### III

## JIM-JIM IS AVENGED

"We never bathed in that pool again; indeed for my part I could never look at its peaceful purity fringed round with waving ferns without thinking of that ghastly head which rolled itself off through the water when we tried to catch it.

"Poor Jim-Jim! We buried what was left of him, which was not very much, in an old bread-bag, and though whilst he lived his virtues were not great, now that he was gone we could have wept over him. Indeed, Harry did weep outright; while Pharaoh used very bad language in Zulu, and I registered a quiet little vow on my account that I would let daylight into that lioness before I was forty-eight hours older, if by any means it could be done.

"Well, we buried him, and there he lies in the bread-bag (which I rather grudged him, as it was the only one we had), where lions will not trouble him any more—though perhaps the hyenas will, if they consider that there is enough on him left to make it worth their while to dig him up. However, he won't mind that; so there is an end of the book of Jim-Jim.

"The question that now remained was, how to circumvent his murderess. I knew that she would be sure to return as soon as she was hungry again, but I did not know when she would be hungry. She had left so little of Jim-Jim behind her that I should scarcely expect to see her the next night, unless indeed she had cubs. Still, I felt that it would not be wise to miss the chance of her coming, so we set about making preparations for her reception. The first thing that we did was to strengthen the bush wall of the skerm by dragging a large quantity of the tops of thorn-trees together, and laying them one on the other in such a fashion that the thorns pointed outwards. This, after our experience of the fate of Jim-Jim, seemed a very necessary precaution, since if where one goat can jump another can follow, as the Kaffirs say, how much more is this the case when an animal so active and so vigorous as the lion is concerned! And now came the further question, how were we to beguile the lioness to return? Lions are animals that have a strange knack of appearing when they are not wanted, and keeping studiously out of the way when their presence is required. Of course it was possible that if she had found Jim-Jim to her liking she would come back to see if there were any more of his kind about, but still it was not to be relied on.

"Harry, who as I have said was an eminently practical boy, suggested to Pharaoh that he should go and sit outside the skerm in the moonlight as a sort of bait, assuring him that he would have nothing to fear, as we should certainly kill the lioness before she killed him. Pharaoh however, strangely enough, did not seem to take to this suggestion. Indeed, he walked away, much put out with Harry for having made it.

"It gave me an idea, however.

"By Jove!" I said, 'there is the sick ox. He must die sooner or later, so we may as well utilize him.'

"Now, about thirty yards to the left of our skerm, as one stood facing down the hill towards the river, was the stump of a tree that had been destroyed by lightning many years before, standing equidistant between, but a little in front of, two clumps of bush, which were severally some fifteen paces from it.

"Here was the very place to tie the ox; and accordingly a little before sunset the sick animal was led forth by Pharaoh and made fast there, little knowing, poor brute, for what purpose; and we began our long vigil, this time without a fire, for our object was to attract the lioness and not to scare her.

"For hour after hour we waited, keeping ourselves awake by pinching each other—it is, by the way, remarkable what a difference of opinion as to the force of pinches requisite to the occasion exists in the mind of pincher and pinched—but no lioness came. At last the moon went down, and darkness swallowed up the world, as the Kaffirs say, but no lions came to swallow us up. We waited till dawn, because we did not dare to go to sleep, and then at last with many bad thoughts in our hearts we took such rest as we could get, and that was not much.

"That morning we went out shooting, not because we wanted to, for we were too depressed and tired, but because we had no more meat. For three hours or more we wandered about in a broiling sun looking for something to kill, but with absolutely no results. For some unknown reason the game had grown very scarce about the spot, though when I was there two years before every sort of large game except rhinoceros and elephant was particularly abundant. The lions, of whom there were many, alone remained, and I fancy that it was the fact of the game they live on having temporarily migrated which made them so daring and ferocious. As a general rule a lion is an amiable animal enough if he is left alone, but a hungry lion is almost as dangerous as a hungry man. One hears a great many different opinions expressed as to whether or no the lion is remarkable for his courage, but the result of my experience is that very much depends upon the state of his stomach. A hungry lion will not stick at a trifle, whereas a full one will flee at a very small rebuke.

"Well, we hunted all about, and nothing could we see, not even a duiker or a bush buck; and at last, thoroughly tired and out of temper, we started on our way back to camp, passing over the brow of a steepish hill to do so. Just as we climbed the crest of the ridge I came to a stand, for there, about six hundred yards to my left, his beautiful curved horns outlined against the soft blue of the sky, I saw a noble koodoo bull (*Strepsiceros kudu*). Even at that distance, for as you know my eyes are very keen, I could distinctly see the white stripes on its side when the light fell upon it, and its large and pointed ears twitch as the flies worried it.

"So far so good; but how were we to get at it? It was ridiculous to risk a shot at that great distance, and yet both the ground and the wind lay very ill for stalking. It seemed to me that the only chance would be to make a detour of at least a mile or more, and come up on the other side of the koodoo. I called Harry to my side, and explained to him what I thought would be our best course, when suddenly, without any delay, the koodoo saved us further trouble by suddenly starting off down the hill like a leaping rocket. I do not know what had frightened it, certainly we had not. Perhaps a hyena or a leopard—a tiger as we call it there—had suddenly appeared; at any rate, off it went, running slightly towards us, and I never saw a buck go faster. I am afraid that forgetting Harry's presence I used strong language, and really there was some excuse. As for Harry, he stood watching the beautiful animal's course. Presently it vanished behind a patch of bush, to emerge a few seconds later about five hundred paces from us, on a stretch of comparatively level ground that was strewn with boulders. On it went, clearing the boulders in its path with a succession of great bounds that were

beautiful to behold. As it did so, I happened to look round at Harry, and perceived to my astonishment that he had got his rifle to his shoulder.

“You young donkey!” I exclaimed, ‘surely you are not going to’—and just at that moment the rifle went off.

“And then I think I saw what was in its way one of the most wonderful things I ever remember in my hunting experience. The koodoo was at the moment in the air, clearing a pile of stones with its fore-legs tucked up underneath it. All of an instant the legs stretched themselves out in a spasmodic fashion, it lit on them, and they doubled up beneath it. Down went the noble buck, down upon his head. For a moment he seemed to be standing on his horns, his hind-legs high in the air, and then over he rolled and lay still.

“Great Heavens!” I said, ‘why, you’ve hit him! He’s dead.’

“As for Harry, he said nothing, but merely looked scared, as well he might, for such a marvellous, I may say such an appalling and ghastly fluke it has never been my lot to witness. A man, let alone a boy, might have fired a thousand such shots without ever touching the object; which, mind you, was springing and bounding over rocks quite five hundred yards away; and here this lad—taking a snap shot, and merely allowing for speed and elevation by instinct, for he did not put up his sights—had knocked the bull over as dead as a door-nail. Well, I made no further remark, as the occasion was too solemn for talking, but merely led the way to where the koodoo had fallen. There he lay, beautiful and quite still; and there, high up, about half-way down his neck, was a neat round hole. The bullet had severed the spinal marrow, passing through the vertebrae and away on the other side.

“It was already evening when, having cut as much of the best meat as we could carry from the bull, and tied a red handkerchief and some tufts of grass to his spiral horns, which, by the way, must have been nearly five feet in length, in the hope of keeping the jackals and aasvögels (vultures) from him, we finally got back to camp, to find Pharaoh, who was getting rather anxious at our absence, ready to greet us with the pleasing intelligence that another ox was sick. But even this dreadful bit of intelligence could not dash Harry’s spirits; the fact of the matter being, incredible as it may appear, I do verily believe that in his heart of hearts he set down the death of the koodoo to the credit of his own skill. Now, though the lad was a pretty shot enough, this of course was ridiculous, and I told him so plainly.

“By the time that we had finished our supper of koodoo steaks (which would have been better if the koodoo had been a little younger), it was time to get ready for Jim-Jim’s murderess. Accordingly we determined again to expose the unfortunate sick ox, that was now absolutely on its last legs, being indeed scarcely able to stand. All the afternoon Pharaoh told us it had been walking round and round in a circle as cattle in the last stage of redwater generally do. Now it had come to a standstill, and was swaying to and fro with its head hanging down. So we tied him up to the stump of the tree as on the previous night, knowing that if the lioness did not kill him he would be dead by morning. Indeed I was afraid that he would die at once, in which case he would be of but little use as a bait, for the lion is a sportsmanlike animal, and unless he is very hungry generally prefers to kill his own dinner, though when that is once killed he will come back to it again and again.

“Then we again went through our experience of the previous night, sitting there hour after hour, till at last Harry fell fast asleep, and, though I am accustomed to this sort of thing, even I could scarcely keep my eyes open. Indeed I was just dropping off, when suddenly Pharaoh gave me a push.

“Listen!” he whispered.

“I was awake in a second, and listening with all my ears. From the clump of bush to the right of the lightning-shattered stump to which the sick ox was tied came a faint crackling noise. Presently it was repeated. Something was moving there, faintly and quietly enough, but still moving perceptibly, for in the intense stillness of the night any sound seemed loud.

“I woke up Harry, who instantly said, ‘Where is she? where is she?’ and began to point his rifle about in a fashion that was more dangerous to us and the oxen than to any possible lioness.

“Be quiet!” I whispered, savagely; and as I did so, with a low and hideous growl a flash of yellow light sped out of the clump of bush, past the ox, and into the corresponding clump upon the other side. The poor sick creature gave a sort of groan, staggered round and then began to tremble. I could see it do so clearly in the moonlight, which was now very bright, and I felt a brute for having exposed the unfortunate animal to such agony as he must undoubtedly be undergoing. The lioness, for it was she, passed so quickly that we could not even distinguish her movements, much less fire. Indeed at night it is absolutely useless to attempt to shoot unless the object is very close and standing perfectly still, and then the light is so deceptive and it is so difficult to see the foresight that the best shot will miss more often than he hits.

“She will be back again presently,” I said; ‘look out, but for Heaven’s sake don’t fire unless I tell you to.’

“Hardly were the words out of my mouth when back she came, and again passed the ox without striking him.

“What on earth is she doing?” whispered Harry.

“Playing with it as a cat does with a mouse, I suppose. She will kill it presently.’

“As I spoke, the lioness once more flashed out of the bush, and this time sprang right over the doomed and trembling ox. It was a beautiful sight to see her clear him in the bright moonlight, as though it were a trick which she had been taught.

“I believe that she has escaped from a circus,” whispered Harry; ‘it’s jolly to see her jump.’

“I said nothing, but I thought to myself that if it was, Master Harry did not quite appreciate the performance, and small blame to him. At any rate, his teeth were chattering a little.

“Then came a longish pause, and I began to think that the lioness must have gone away, when suddenly she appeared again, and with one mighty bound landed right on to the ox, and struck it a frightful blow with her paw.

“Down it went, and lay on the ground kicking feebly. She put down her wicked-looking head, and, with a fierce growl of contentment, buried her long white teeth in the throat of the dying animal. When she lifted her muzzle again it was all stained with blood. She stood facing us obliquely, licking her bloody chops and making a sort of purring noise.

“Now’s our time,” I whispered, ‘fire when I do.’

“I got on to her as well as I could, but Harry, instead of waiting for me as I told him, fired before I did, and that of course hurried me. But when the smoke cleared, I was delighted to see that the lioness was rolling about on the ground behind the body of the ox, which covered her in such a fashion, however, that we could not shoot again to make an end of her.

“She’s done for! she’s dead, the yellow devil!” yelled Pharaoh in exultation; and at that very moment the lioness, with a sort of convulsive rush, half-rolled, half-sprang, into the patch of thick bush to the right. I fired after her as she went, but so far as I could see

without result; indeed the probability is that I missed her clean. At any rate she got to the bush in safety, and once there, began to make such a diabolical noise as I never heard before. She would whine and shriek with pain, and then burst out into perfect volleys of roaring that shook the whole place.

"Well," I said, 'we must just let her roar; to go into that bush after her at night would be madness.'

"At that moment, to my astonishment and alarm, there came an answering roar from the direction of the river, and then another from behind the swell of bush. Evidently there were more lions about. The wounded lioness redoubled her efforts, with the object, I suppose, of summoning the others to her assistance. At any rate they came, and quickly too, for within five minutes, peeping through the bushes of our skerm fence, we saw a magnificent lion bounding along towards us, through the tall tambouki grass, that in the moonlight looked for all the world like ripening corn. On he came in great leaps, and a glorious sight it was to see him. When within fifty yards or so, he stood still in an open space and roared. The lioness roared too; then there came a third roar, and another great black-maned lion stalked majestically up, and joined number two, till really I began to realize what the ox must have undergone.

"Now, Harry," I whispered, 'whatever you do don't fire, it's too risky. If they let us be, let them be.'

"Well, the pair marched off to the bush, where the wounded lioness was now roaring double tides, and the three of them began to snarl and grumble away together there. Presently, however, the lioness ceased roaring, and the two lions came out again, the black-maned one first—to prospect, I suppose—walked to where the carcass of the ox lay, and sniffed at it.

"Oh, what a shot!" whispered Harry, who was trembling with excitement.

"Yes," I said; 'but don't fire; they might all of them come for us.'

"Harry said nothing, but whether it was from the natural impetuosity of youth, or because he was thrown off his balance by excitement, or from sheer recklessness and devilment, I am sure I cannot tell you, never having been able to get a satisfactory explanation from him; but at any rate the fact remains, he, without word or warning, entirely disregarding my exhortations, lifted up his Westley Richards and fired at the black-maned lion, and, what is more, hit it slightly on the flank.

"Next second there was a most awful roar from the injured lion. He glared around him and roared with pain, for he was badly stung; and then, before I could make up my mind what to do, the great black-maned brute, clearly ignorant of the cause of his hurt, sprang right at the throat of his companion, to whom he evidently attributed his misfortune. It was a curious sight to see the astonishment of the other lion at this most unprovoked assault. Over he rolled with an angry snarl, and on to him sprang the black-maned demon, and began to worry him. This finally awoke the yellow-maned lion to a sense of the situation, and I am bound to say that he rose to it in a most effective manner. Somehow or other he got to his feet, and, roaring and snarling frightfully, closed with his mighty foe.

"Then ensued a most tremendous scene. You know what a shocking thing it is to see two large dogs fighting with abandonment. Well, a whole hundred of dogs could not have looked half so terrible as those two great brutes as they rolled and roared and rent in their horrid rage. They gripped each other, they tore at each other's throat, till their manes came out in handfuls, and the red blood streamed down their yellow hides. It was an awful and a wonderful thing to see the great cats tearing at each other with all the fierce energy of their savage strength, and making the night hideous with their heart-shaking noise. And the fight was a grand one too. For some minutes it was impossible to say which was getting the best of it, but at last I saw that the black-maned lion, though he was slightly bigger, was failing. I am inclined to think that the wound in his flank crippled him. Anyway, he began to get the worst of it, which served him right, as he was the aggressor. Still I could not help feeling sorry for him, for he had fought a gallant fight, when his antagonist finally got him by the throat, and, struggle and strike out as he would, began to shake the life out of him. Over and over they rolled together, a hideous and awe-inspiring spectacle, but the yellow one would not loose his hold, and at length poor black-maned grew faint, his breath came in great snorts and seemed to rattle in his nostrils, then he opened his huge mouth, gave the ghost of a roar, quivered, and was dead.

"When he was quite sure that the victory was his own, the yellow-maned lion loosed his grip and sniffed at the fallen foe. Then he licked the dead lion's eye, and next, with his fore-feet resting on the carcass, sent up his own chant of victory, that went rolling and peeling down the dark paths of the night. And at this point I interfered. Taking a careful sight at the centre of his body, in order to give the largest possible margin for error, I fired, and sent a .570 express bullet right through him, and down he dropped dead upon the carcass of his mighty foe.

"After that, fairly satisfied with our performances, we slept peaceably till dawn, leaving Pharaoh to keep watch in case any more lions should take it into their heads to come our way.

"When the sun was well up we arose, and went very cautiously—at least Pharaoh and I did, for I would not allow Harry to come—to see if we could find any trace of the wounded lioness. She had ceased roaring immediately upon the arrival of the two lions, and had not made a sound since, from which we concluded that she was probably dead. I was armed with my express, while Pharaoh, in whose hands a rifle was indeed a dangerous weapon, to his companions, had an axe. On our way we stopped to look at the two dead lions. They were magnificent animals, both of them, but their pelts were entirely spoiled by the terrible mauling they had given to each other, which was a sad pity.

"In another minute we were following the blood spoor of the wounded lioness into the bush, where she had taken refuge. This, I need hardly say, we did with the utmost caution; indeed, I for one did not at all like the job, and was only consoled by the reflection that it was necessary, and that the bush was not thick. Well, we stood there, keeping as far from the trees as possible, searching and looking about, but no lioness could we see, though we saw plenty of blood.

"She must have gone somewhere to die, Pharaoh," I said in Zulu.

"Yes, Inkoos," he answered, 'she has certainly gone away.'

"Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when I heard a roar, and starting round saw the lioness emerge from the very centre of a bush, in which she had been curled up, just behind Pharaoh. Up she went on to her hind-legs, and as she did so I noticed that one of her fore-paws was broken near the shoulder, for it hung limply down. Up she went, towering right over Pharaoh's head, as she did so lifting her uninjured paw to strike him to the earth. And then, before I could get my rifle round or do anything to avert the oncoming catastrophe, the Zulu did a very brave and clever thing. Realizing his own imminent danger, he bounded to one side, and swinging the heavy axe round his head, brought it down right on to the back of the lioness, severing the vertebræ and killing her instantaneously. It was wonderful to see her collapse all in a heap like an empty sack.

"My word, Pharaoh!" I said, 'that was well done, and none too soon.'

“‘Yes,’ he answered, with a little laugh, ‘it was a good stroke, Inkoos. Jim-Jim will sleep better now.’

“Then, calling Harry to us, we examined the lioness. She was old, if one might judge from her worn teeth, and not very large, but thickly made, and must have possessed extraordinary vitality to have lived so long, shot as she was; for, in addition to her broken shoulder, my express bullet had blown a great hole in her middle that one might have put a fist into.

“Well, that is the story of the death of poor Jim-Jim and how we avenged it. It is rather interesting in its way, because of the fight between the two lions, of which I never saw the like in all my experience, and I know something of lions and their manners.”

“And how did you get back to Pilgrim’s Rest?” I asked Hunter Quatermain when he had finished his yarn.

“Ah, we had a nice job with that,” he answered. “The second sick ox died, and so did another, and we had to get on as best we could with three harnessed unicorn fashion, while we pushed behind. We did about four miles a day, and it took us nearly a month, during the last week of which we pretty well starved.”

“I notice,” I said, “that most of your trips ended in disaster of some sort or another, and yet you went on making them, which strikes one as a little strange.”

“Yes, I dare say: but then, remember I got my living for many years out of hunting. Besides, half the charm of the thing lay in the dangers and disasters, though they were terrible enough at the time. Another thing is, my trips were not all disastrous. Some time, if you like, I will tell you a story of one which was very much the reverse, for I made several thousand pounds out of it, and saw one of the most extraordinary sights a hunter ever came across. It was on this trip that I met the bravest native woman I ever knew; her name was Maiwa. But it is too late now, and besides, I am tired of talking about myself. Pass the water, will you!”

# BOOK X

## THE REVENGE OF MAIWA & THE WAR OF THE LITTLE HAND

### I

### GOBO STRIKES

One day—it was about a week after Allan Quatermain told me his story of the “Three Lions,” and of the moving death of Jim-Jim—he and I were walking home together on the termination of a day’s shooting. He owned about two thousand acres of shooting round the place he had bought in Yorkshire, over a hundred of which were wood. It was the second year of his occupation of the estate, and already he had reared a very fair head of pheasants, for he was an all-round sportsman, and as fond of shooting with a shot-gun as with an eight-bore rifle. We were three guns that day, Sir Henry Curtis, Old Quatermain, and myself; but Sir Henry was obliged to leave in the middle of the afternoon in order to meet his agent, and inspect an outlying farm where a new shed was wanted. However, he was coming back to dinner, and going to bring Captain Good with him, for Brayley Hall was not more than two miles from the Grange.

We had met with very fair sport, considering that we were only going through outlying cover for cocks. I think that we had killed twenty-seven, a woodcock and a leash of partridges which we secured out of a driven covey. On our way home there lay a long narrow spinney, which was a very favourite “lie” for woodcocks, and generally held a pheasant or two as well.

“Well, what do you say?” said old Quatermain, “shall we beat through this for a finish?”

I assented, and he called to the keeper who was following with a little knot of beaters, and told him to beat the spinney.

“Very well, sir,” answered the man, “but it’s getting wonderful dark, and the wind’s rising a gale. It will take you all your time to hit a woodcock if the spinney holds one.”

“You show us the woodcocks, Jeffries,” answered Quatermain quickly, for he never liked being crossed in anything to do with sport, “and we will look after shooting them.”

The man turned and went rather sulkily. I heard him say to the under-keeper, “He’s pretty good, the master is, I’m not saying he isn’t, but if he kills a woodcock in this light and wind, I’m a Dutchman.”

I think that Quatermain heard him too, though he said nothing. The wind was rising every minute, and by the time the beat begun it blew big guns. I stood at the right-hand corner of the spinney, which curved round somewhat, and Quatermain stood at the left, about forty paces from me. Presently an old cock pheasant came rocketing over me, looking as though the feathers were being blown out of his tail. I missed him clean with the first barrel, and was never more pleased with myself in my life than when I doubled him up with the second, for the shot was not an easy one. In the faint light I could see Quatermain nodding his head in approval, when through the groaning of the trees I heard the shouts of the beaters, “Cock forward, cock to the right.” Then came a whole volley of shouts, “Woodcock to the right,” “Cock to the left,” “Cock over.”

I looked up, and presently caught sight of one of the woodcocks coming down the wind upon me like a flash. In that dim light I could not follow all his movements as he zigzagged through the naked tree-tops; indeed I could see him when his wings flitted up. Now he was passing me—*bang*, and a flick of the wing, I had missed him; *bang* again. Surely he was down; no, there he went to my left.

“Cock to you,” I shouted, stepping forward so as to get Quatermain between me and the faint angry light of the dying day, for I wanted to see if he would “wipe my eye.” I knew him to be a wonderful shot, but I thought that cock would puzzle him.

I saw him raise his gun ever so little and bend forward, and at that moment out flashed two woodcocks into the open, the one I had missed to his right, and the other to his left.

At the same time a fresh shout arose of, “Woodcock over,” and looking down the spinney I saw a third bird high up in the air, being blown along like a brown and whirling leaf straight over Quatermain’s head. And then followed the prettiest little bit of shooting that I ever saw. The bird to the right was flying low, not ten yards from the line of a hedgerow, and Quatermain took him first because he would become invisible the soonest of any. Indeed, nobody who had not his hawk’s eyes could have seen to shoot at all. But he saw the bird well enough to kill it dead as a stone. Then turning sharply, he pulled on the second bird at about forty-five yards, and over he went. By this time the third woodcock was nearly over him, and flying very high, straight down the wind, a hundred feet up or more, I should say. I saw him glance at it as he opened his gun, threw out the right cartridge and slipped in another, turning round as he did so. By this time the cock was nearly fifty yards away from him, and travelling like a flash. Lifting his gun he fired after it, and, wonderful as the shot was, killed it dead. A tearing gust of wind caught the dead bird, and blew it away like a leaf torn from an oak, so that it fell a hundred and thirty yards off or more.

“I say, Quatermain,” I said to him when the beaters were up, “do you often do this sort of thing?”

“Well,” he answered, with a dry smile, “the last time I had to load three shots as quickly as that was at rather larger game. It was at elephants. I killed them all three as dead as I killed those woodcocks; but it very nearly went the other way, I can tell you; I mean that they very nearly killed me.”

Just at that moment the keeper came up, “Did you happen to get one of them there cocks, sir?” he said, with the air of a man who did not in the least expect an answer in the affirmative.

“Well, yes, Jeffries,” answered Quatermain; “you will find one of them by the hedge, and another about fifty yards out by the plough there to the left——”

The keeper had turned to go, looking a little astonished, when Quatermain called him back.

"Stop a bit, Jeffries," he said. "You see that pollard about one hundred and forty yards off? Well, there should be another woodcock down in a line with it, about sixty paces out in the field."

"Well, if that bean't the very smartest bit of shooting," murmured Jeffries, and departed.

After that we went home, and in due course Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good arrived for dinner, the latter arrayed in the tightest and most ornamental dress-suit I ever saw. I remember that the waistcoat was adorned with five pink coral buttons.

It was a very pleasant dinner. Old Quatermain was in an excellent humour; induced, I think, by the recollection of his triumph over the doubting Jeffries. Good, too, was full of anecdotes. He told us a most miraculous story of how he once went shooting ibex in Kashmir. These ibex, according to Good, he stalked early and late for four entire days. At last on the morning of the fifth day he succeeded in getting within range of the flock, which consisted of a magnificent old ram with horns so long that I am afraid to mention their measure, and five or six females. Good crawled upon his stomach, painfully taking shelter behind rocks, till he was within two hundred yards; then he drew a fine bead upon the old ram. At this moment, however, a diversion occurred. Some wandering native of the hills appeared upon a distant mountain top. The females turned, and rushing over a rock vanished from Good's ken. But the old ram took a bolder course. In front of him stretched a mighty crevasse at least thirty feet in width. He went at it with a bound. Whilst he was in mid-air Good fired, and killed him dead. The ram turned a complete somersault in space, and fell in such fashion that his horns hooked themselves upon a big projection of the opposite cliffs. There he hung, till Good, after a long and painful détour, gracefully dropped a lasso over him and fished him up.

This moving tale of wild adventure was received with undeserved incredulity.

"Well," said Good, "if you fellows won't believe my story when I tell it—a perfectly true story mind—perhaps one of you will give us a better; I'm not particular if it is true or not." And he lapsed into a dignified silence.

"Now, Quatermain," I said, "don't let Good beat you, let us hear how you killed those elephants you were talking about this evening just after you shot the woodcocks."

"Well," said Quatermain, dryly, and with something like a twinkle in his brown eyes, "it is very hard fortune for a man to have to follow on Good's 'spoor.' Indeed if it were not for that running giraffe which, as you will remember, Curtis, we saw Good bowl over with a Martini rifle at three hundred yards, I should almost have said that this was an impossible tale."

Here Good looked up with an air of indignant innocence.

"However," he went on, rising and lighting his pipe, "if you fellows like, I will spin you a yarn. I was telling one of you the other night about those three lions and how the lioness finished my unfortunate 'voorlooper,' Jim-Jim, the boy whom we buried in the bread-bag.

"Well, after this little experience I thought that I would settle down a bit, so I entered upon a venture with a man who, being of a speculative mind, had conceived the idea of running a store at Pretoria upon strictly cash principles. The arrangement was that I should find the capital and he the experience. Our partnership was not of a long duration. The Boers refused to pay cash, and at the end of four months my partner had the capital and I had the experience. After this I came to the conclusion that store-keeping was not in my line, and having four hundred pounds left, I sent my boy Harry to a school in Natal, and buying an outfit with what remained of the money, started upon a big trip.

"This time I determined to go further afield than I had ever been before; so I took a passage for a few pounds in a trading brig that ran between Durban and Delagoa Bay. From Delagoa Bay I marched inland accompanied by twenty porters, with the idea of striking up north, towards the Limpopo, and keeping parallel to the coast, but at a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles from it. For the first twenty days of our journey we suffered a good deal from fever, that is, my men did, for I think that I am fever proof. Also I was hard put to it to keep the camp in meat, for although the country proved to be very sparsely populated, there was but little game about. Indeed, during all that time I hardly killed anything larger than a waterbuck, and, as you know, waterbuck's flesh is not very appetising food. On the twentieth day, however, we came to the banks of a largish river, the Gonooroo it was called. This I crossed, and then struck inland towards a great range of mountains, the blue crests of which we could see lying on the distant heavens like a shadow, a continuation, as I believe, of the Drakensberg range that skirts the coast of Natal. From this main range a great spur shoots out some fifty miles or so towards the coast, ending abruptly in one tremendous peak. This spur I discovered separated the territories of two chiefs named Nala and Wambe, Wambe's territory being to the north, and Nala's to the south. Nala ruled a tribe of bastard Zulus called the Butiana, and Wambe a much larger tribe, called the Matuku, which presents marked Bantu characteristics. For instance, they have doors and verandahs to their huts, work skins perfectly, and wear a waistcloth and not a moocha. At this time the Butiana were more or less subject to the Matuku, having been surprised by them some twenty years before and mercilessly slaughtered down. The tribe was now recovering itself, however, and as you may imagine, it did not love the Matuku.

"Well, I heard as I went along that elephants were very plentiful in the dense forests which lie upon the slopes and at the foot of the mountains that border Wambe's territory. Also I heard a very ill report of that worthy himself, who lived in a kraal upon the side of the mountain, which was so strongly fortified as to be practically impregnable. It was said that he was the most cruel chief in this part of Africa, and that he had murdered in cold blood an entire party of English gentlemen, who, some seven years before, had gone into his country to hunt elephants. They took an old friend of mine with them as guide, John Every by name, and often had I mourned over his untimely death. All the same, Wambe or no Wambe, I determined to hunt elephants in his country. I never was afraid of natives, and I was not going to show the white feather now. I am a bit of a fatalist, as you fellows know, so I came to the conclusion that if it was fated that Wambe should send me to join my old friend John Every, I should have to go, and there was an end of it. Meanwhile, I meant to hunt elephants with a peaceful heart.

"On the third day from the date of our sighting the great peak, we found ourselves beneath its shadow. Still following the course of the river which wound through the forests at the base of the peak, we entered the territory of the redoubtable Wambe. This, however, was not accomplished without a certain difference of opinion between my bearers and myself, for when we reached the spot where Wambe's boundary was supposed to run, the bearers sat down and emphatically refused to go a step further. I sat down too, and argued with them, putting my fatalistic views before them as well as I was able. But I could not persuade them to look at the matter in the same light. 'At present,' they said, 'their skins were whole; if they went into Wambe's country without his leave they would soon be like a water-eaten leaf. It was very well for me to say that this would be Fate. Fate no doubt might be walking about in Wambe's country, but while they stopped outside they would not meet him.'

"Well," I said to Gobo, my head man, "and what do you mean to do?"

"We mean to go back to the coast, Macumazahn," he answered insolently.

“Do you?” I replied, for my bile was stirred. ‘At any rate, Mr. Gobo, you and one or two others will never get there; see here, my friend,’ and I took a repeating rifle and sat myself comfortably down, resting my back against a tree—‘I have just breakfasted, and I had as soon spend the day here as anywhere else. Now if you or any of those men walk one step back from here, and towards the coast, I shall fire at you; and you know that I don’t miss.’

“The man fingered the spear he was carrying—luckily all my guns were stacked against the tree—and then turned as though to walk away, the others keeping their eyes fixed upon him all the while. I rose and covered him with the rifle, and though he kept up a brave appearance of unconcern, I saw that he was glancing nervously at me all the time. When he had gone about twenty yards I spoke very quietly—

“Now, Gobo,” I said, ‘come back, or I shall fire.’

“Of course this was taking a very high hand; I had no real right to kill Gobo or anybody else because they objected to run the risk of death by entering the territory of a hostile chief. But I felt that if I wished to keep up any authority it was absolutely necessary that I should push matters to the last extremity short of actually shooting him. So I sat there, looking fierce as a lion, and keeping the sight of my rifle in a dead line for Gobo’s ribs. Then Gobo, feeling that the situation was getting strained, gave in.

“Don’t shoot, Boss,” he shouted, throwing up his hand, ‘I will come with you.’

“I thought you would,” I answered quietly; ‘you see Fate walks about outside Wambe’s country as well as in it.’

“After that I had no more trouble, for Gobo was the ringleader, and when he collapsed the others collapsed also. Harmony being thus restored, we crossed the line, and on the following morning I began shooting in good earnest.”

## CHAPTER II.

### A MORNING'S SPORT

"Moving some five or six miles round the base of the great peak of which I have spoken, we came the same day to one of the fairest bits of African country that I have seen outside of Kukuanaland. At this spot the mountain spur that runs out at right angles to the great range, which stretches its cloud-clad length north and south as far as the eye can reach, sweeps inwards with a vast and splendid curve. This curve measures some five-and-thirty miles from point to point, and across its moon-like segment the river flashed, a silver line of light. On the further side of the river is a measureless sea of swelling ground, a natural park covered with great patches of bush—some of them being many square miles in extent. These are separated one from another by glades of grass land, broken here and there with clumps of timber trees; and in some instances by curious isolated koppies, and even by single crags of granite that start up into the air as though they were monuments carved by man, and not tombstones set by nature over the grave of ages gone. On the west this beautiful plain is bordered by the lonely mountain, from the edge of which it rolls down toward the fever coast; but how far it runs to the north I cannot say—eight days' journey, according to the natives, when it is lost in an untravelled morass.

"On the hither side of the river the scenery is different. Along the edge of its banks, where the land is flat, are green patches of swamp. Then comes a wide belt of beautiful grass land covered thickly with game, and sloping up very gently to the borders of the forest, which, beginning at about a thousand feet above the level of the plain, clothes the mountain-side almost to its crest. In this forest grow great trees, most of them of the yellow-wood species. Some of these trees are so lofty, that a bird in their top branches would be out of range of an ordinary shot gun. Another peculiar thing about them is, that they are for the most part covered with a dense growth of the Orchilla moss; and from this moss the natives manufacture a most excellent deep purple dye, with which they stain tanned hides and also cloth, when they happen to get any of the latter. I do not think that I ever saw anything more remarkable than the appearance of one of these mighty trees festooned from top to bottom with trailing wreaths of this sad-hued moss, in which the wind whispers gently as it stirs them. At a distance it looks like the gray locks of a Titan crowned with bright green leaves, and here and there starred with the rich bloom of orchids.

"The night of that day on which I had my little difference of opinion with Gobo, we camped by the edge of this great forest, and on the following morning at daylight I started out shooting. As we were short of meat I determined to kill a buffalo, of which there were plenty about, before looking for traces of elephants. Not more than half a mile from camp we came across a trail broad as a cart-road, evidently made by a great herd of buffaloes which had passed up at dawn from their feeding ground in the marshes, to spend the day in the cool air of the uplands. This trail I followed boldly; for such wind as there was blew straight down the mountain-side, that is, from the direction in which the buffaloes had gone, to me. About a mile further on the forest began to be dense, and the nature of the trail showed me that I must be close to my game. Another two hundred yards and the bush was so thick that, had it not been for the trail, we could scarcely have passed through it. As it was, Gobo, who carried my eight-bore rifle (for I had the .570-express in my hand), and the other two men whom I had taken with me, showed the very strongest dislike to going any further, pointing out that there was 'no room to run away.' I told them that they need not come unless they liked, but that I was certainly going on; and then, growing ashamed, they came.

"Another fifty yards, and the trail opened into a little glade. I knelt down and peeped and peered, but no buffalo could I see. Evidently the herd had broken up here—I knew that from the spoor—and penetrated the opposite bush in little troops. I crossed the glade, and choosing one line of spoor, followed it for some sixty yards, when it became clear to me that I was surrounded by buffaloes; and yet so dense was the cover that I could not see any. A few yards to my left I could hear one rubbing its horns against a tree, while from my right came an occasional low and throaty grunt which told me that I was uncomfortably near an old bull. I crept on towards him with my heart in my mouth, as gently as though I were walking upon eggs for a bet, lifting every little bit of wood in my path, and placing it behind me lest it should crack and warn the game. After me in single file came my three retainers, and I don't know which of them looked the most frightened. Presently Gobo touched my leg; I glanced round, and saw him pointing slantwise towards the left. I lifted my head a little and peeped over a mass of creepers; beyond the creepers was a dense bush of sharp-pointed aloes, of that kind of which the leaves project laterally, and on the other side of the aloes, not fifteen paces from us, I made out the horns, neck, and the ridge of the back of a tremendous old bull. I took my eight-bore, and getting on to my knee prepared to shoot him through the neck, taking my chance of cutting his spine. I had already covered him as well as the aloe leaves would allow, when he gave a kind of sigh and lay down.

"I looked round in dismay. What was to be done now? I could not see to shoot him lying down, even if my bullet would have pierced the intervening aloes—which was doubtful—and if I stood up he would either run away or charge me. I reflected, and came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was to lie down also; for I did not fancy wandering after other buffaloes in that dense bush. If a buffalo lies down, it is clear that he must get up again some time, so it was only a case of patience—'fighting the fight of sit down,' as the Zulus say.

"Accordingly I sat down and lighted a pipe, thinking that the smell of it might reach the buffalo and make him get up. But the wind was the wrong way, and it did not; so when it was done I lit another. Afterwards I had cause to regret that pipe.

"Well, we squatted like this for between half and three quarters of an hour, till at length I began to grow heartily sick of the performance. It was about as dull a business as the last hour of a comic opera. I could hear buffaloes snorting and moving all round, and see the red-beaked tic birds flying up off their backs, making a kind of hiss as they did so, something like that of the English missel-thrush, but I could not see a single buffalo. As for my old bull, I think he must have slept the sleep of the just, for he never even stirred.

"Just as I was making up my mind that something must be done to save the situation, my attention was attracted by a curious grinding noise. At first I thought that it must be a buffalo chewing the cud, but was obliged to abandon the idea because the noise was too loud. I shifted myself round and stared through the cracks in the bush, in the direction whence the sound seemed to come, and once I thought that I saw something gray moving about fifty yards off, but could not make certain. Although the grinding noise still continued I could see nothing more, so I gave up thinking about it, and once again turned my attention to the buffalo. Presently, however, something happened. Suddenly from about forty yards away there came a tremendous snorting sound, more like that made by an engine getting a heavy train under weigh than anything else in the world.

"By Jove," I thought, turning round in the direction from which the grinding sound had come, 'that must be a rhinoceros, and he has got our wind.' For, as you fellows know, there is no mistaking the sound made by a rhinoceros when he gets wind of you.

"Another second, and I heard a most tremendous crashing noise. Before I could think what to do, before I could even get up, the bush behind me seemed to burst asunder, and there appeared not eight yards from us, the great horn and wicked twinkling eye of a charging rhinoceros. He had winded us or my pipe, I do not know which, and, after the fashion of these brutes, had charged up the scent. I could not rise, I could not even get the gun up, I had no time. All that I was able to do was to roll over as far out of the monster's path as the bush would allow. Another second and he was over me, his great bulk towering above me like a mountain, and, upon my word, I could not get his smell out of my nostrils for a week. Circumstances impressed it on my memory, at least I suppose so. His hot breath blew upon my face, one of his front feet just missed my head, and his hind one actually trod upon the loose part of my trousers and pinched a little bit of my skin. I saw him pass over me lying as I was upon my back, and next second I saw something else. My men were a little behind me, and therefore straight in the path of the rhinoceros. One of them flung himself backwards into the bush, and thus avoided him. The second with a wild yell sprung to his feet, and bounded like an india-rubber ball right into the aloe bush, landing well among the spikes. But the third, it was my friend Gobo, could not by any means get away. He managed to gain his feet, and that was all. The rhinoceros was charging with his head low; his horn passed between Gobo's legs, and feeling something on his nose, he jerked it up. Away went Gobo, high into the air. He turned a complete somersault at the apex of the curve, and as he did so, I caught sight of his face. It was gray with terror, and his mouth was wide open. Down he came, right on to the great brute's back, and that broke his fall. Luckily for him the rhinoceros never turned, but crashed straight through the aloe bush, only missing the man who had jumped into it by about a yard.

"Then followed a complication. The sleeping buffalo on the further side of the bush, hearing the noise, sprang to his feet, and for a second, not knowing what to do, stood still. At that instant the huge rhinoceros blundered right on to him, and getting his horn beneath his stomach gave him such a fearful dig that the buffalo was turned over on to his back, while his assailant went a most amazing cropper over his carcass. In another moment, however, the rhinoceros was up, and wheeling round to the left, crashed through the bush down-hill and towards the open country.

"Instantly the whole place became alive with alarming sounds. In every direction troops of snorting buffaloes charged through the forest, wild with fright, while the injured bull on the further side of the bush began to bellow like a mad thing. I lay quite still for a moment, devoutly praying that none of the flying buffaloes would come my way. Then when the danger lessened I got on to my feet, shook myself, and looked round. One of my boys, he who had thrown himself backward into the bush, was already half way up a tree—if heaven had been at the top of it he could not have climbed quicker. Gobo was lying close to me, groaning vigorously, but, as I suspected, quite unhurt; while from the aloe bush into which No. 3 had bounded like a tennis ball, issued a succession of the most piercing yells.

"I looked, and saw that this unfortunate fellow was in a very tight place. A great spike of aloe had run through the back of his skin waist-belt, though without piercing his flesh, in such a fashion that it was impossible for him to move, while within six feet of him the injured buffalo bull, thinking, no doubt, that he was the aggressor, bellowed and ramped to get at him, tearing the thick aloes with his great horns. That no time was to be lost, if I wished to save the man's life, was very clear. So seizing my eight-bore, which was fortunately uninjured, I took a pace to the left, for the rhinoceros had enlarged the hole in the bush, and aimed at the point of the buffalo's shoulder, since on account of my position I could not get a fair side shot for the heart. As I did so I saw that the rhinoceros had given the bull a tremendous wound in the stomach, and that the shock of the encounter had put his left hind-leg out of joint at the hip. I fired, and the bullet striking the shoulder broke it, and knocked the buffalo down. I knew that he could not get up any more, because he was now injured fore and aft, so notwithstanding his terrific bellows I scrambled round to where he was. There he lay glaring furiously and tearing up the soil with his horns. Stepping up to within two yards of him I aimed at the vertebra of his neck and fired. The bullet struck true, and with a thud he dropped his head upon the ground, groaned, and died.

"This little matter having been attended to with the assistance of Gobo, who had now found his feet, I went on to extricate our unfortunate companion from the aloe bush. This we found a thorny task, but at last he was dragged forth uninjured, though in a very pious and prayerful frame of mind. His 'spirit had certainly looked that way,' he said, or he would now have been dead. As I never like to interfere with true piety, I did not venture to suggest that his spirit had deigned to make use of my eight-bore in his interest.

"Having despatched this boy back to the camp to tell the bearers to come and cut the buffalo up, I bethought me that I owed that rhinoceros a grudge which I should love to repay. So without saying a word of what was in my mind to Gobo, who was now more than ever convinced that Fate walked about loose in Wambe's country, I just followed on the brute's spoor. He had crashed through the bush till he reached the little glade. Then moderating his pace somewhat, he had followed the glade down its entire length, and once more turned to the right through the forest, shaping his course for the open land that lies between the edge of the bush and the river. Having followed him for a mile or so further, I found myself quite on the open. I took out my glasses and searched the plain. About a mile ahead was something brown—as I thought, the rhinoceros. I advanced another quarter of a mile, and looked once more—it was not the rhinoceros, but a big ant-heap. This was puzzling, but I did not like to give it up, because I knew from his spoor that he must be somewhere ahead. But as the wind was blowing straight from me towards the line that he had followed, and as a rhinoceros can smell you for about a mile, it would not, I felt, be safe to follow his trail any further; so I made a détour of a mile and more, till I was nearly opposite the ant-heap, and then once more searched the plain. It was no good, I could see nothing of him, and was about to give it up and start after some oryx I saw on the skyline, when suddenly at a distance of about three hundred yards from the ant-heap, and on its further side, I saw my rhino stand up in a patch of grass.

"Heavens! I thought to myself, 'he's off again;' but no, after standing staring for a minute or two he once more lay down.

"Now I found myself in a quandary. As you know, a rhinoceros is a very short-sighted brute, indeed his sight is as bad as his scent is good. Of this fact he is perfectly aware, but he always makes the most of his natural gifts. For instance, when he lies down he invariably does so with his head down wind. Thus, if any enemy crosses his wind he will still be able to escape, or attack him; and if,

on the other hand, the danger approaches up wind he will at least have a chance of seeing it. Otherwise, by walking delicately, one might actually kick him up like a partridge, if only the advance was made up wind.

"Well, the point was, how on earth should I get within shot of this rhinoceros? After much deliberation I determined to try a side approach, thinking that in this way I might get a shoulder shot. Accordingly we started in a crouching attitude, I first, Gobo holding on to my coat tails, and the other boy on to Gobo's moocha. I always adopt this plan when stalking big game, for if you follow any other system the bearers will get out of line. We arrived within three hundred yards safely enough, and then the real difficulties began. The grass had been so closely eaten off by game that there was scarcely any cover. Consequently it was necessary to go on to our hands and knees, which in my case involved laying down the eight-bore at every step and then lifting it up again. However, I wriggled along somehow, and if it had not been for Gobo and his friend no doubt everything would have gone well. But as you have, I dare say, observed, a native out stalking is always of that mind which is supposed to actuate an ostrich—so long as his head is hidden he seems to think that nothing else can be seen. So it was in this instance, Gobo and the other boy crept along on their hands and toes with their heads well down, but, though unfortunately I did not notice it till too late, bearing the fundamental portions of their frames high in the air. Now all animals are quite as suspicious of this end of mankind as they are of his face, and of that fact I soon had a proof. Just when we had got within about two hundred yards, and I was congratulating myself that I had not had this long crawl with the sun beating on the back of my neck like a furnace for nothing, I heard the hissing note of the rhinoceros birds, and up flew four or five of them from the brute's back, where they had been comfortably employed in catching tics. Now this performance on the part of the birds is to a rhinoceros what the word 'cave' is to a schoolboy—it puts him on the *qui vive* at once. Before the birds were well in the air I saw the grass stir.

"Down you go," I whispered to the boys, and as I did so the rhinoceros got up and glared suspiciously around. But he could see nothing, indeed if we had been standing up I doubt if he would have seen us at that distance; so he merely gave two or three sniffs and then lay down, his head still down wind, the birds once more settling on his back.

"But it was clear to me that he was sleeping with one eye open, being generally in a suspicious and unchristian frame of mind, and that it was useless to proceed further on this stalk, so we quietly withdrew to consider the position and study the ground. The results were not satisfactory. There was absolutely no cover about except the ant-heap, which was some three hundred yards from the rhinoceros upon his up-wind side. I knew that if I tried to stalk him in front I should fail, and so I should if I attempted to do so from the further side—he or the birds would see me; so I came to a conclusion: I would go to the ant-heap, which would give him my wind, and instead of stalking him I would let him stalk me. It was a bold step, and one which I should never advise a hunter to take, but somehow I felt as though rhino and I must play the hand out.

"I explained my intentions to the men, who both held up their arms in horror. Their fears for my safety were a little mitigated, however, when I told them that I did not expect them to come with me.

"Gobo breathed a prayer that I might not meet Fate walking about, and the other one sincerely trusted that my spirit might look my way when the rhinoceros charged, and then they both departed to a place of safety.

"Taking my eight-bore, and half-a-dozen spare cartridges in my pocket, I made a détour, and reaching the ant-heap in safety lay down. For a moment the wind had dropped, but presently a gentle puff of air passed over me, and blew on towards the rhinoceros. By the way, I wonder what it is that smells so strong about a man? Is it his body or his breath? I have never been able to make out, but I saw it stated the other day, that in the duck decoys the man who is working the ducks holds a little piece of burning turf before his mouth, and that if he does this they cannot smell him, which looks as though it were the breath. Well, whatever it was about me that attracted his attention, the rhinoceros soon smelt me, for within half a minute after the puff of wind had passed me he was on his legs, and turning round to get his head up wind. There he stood for a few seconds and sniffed, and then he began to move, first of all at a trot, then, as the scent grew stronger, at a furious gallop. On he came, snorting like a runaway engine, with his tail stuck straight up in the air; if he had seen me lie down there he could not have made a better line. It was rather nervous work, I can tell you, lying there waiting for his onslaught, for he looked like a mountain of flesh. I determined, however, not to fire till I could plainly see his eye, for I think that rule always gives one the right distance for big game; so I rested my rifle on the ant-heap and waited for him, kneeling. At last, when he was about forty yards away, I saw that the time had come, and aiming straight for the middle of the chest I pulled.

"Thud went the heavy bullet, and with a tremendous snort over rolled the rhinoceros beneath its shock, just like a shot rabbit. But if I had thought that he was done for I was mistaken, for in another second he was up again, and coming at me as hard as ever, only with his head held low. I waited till he was within ten yards, in the hope that he would expose his chest, but he would do nothing of the sort; so I just had to fire at his head with the left barrel, and take my chance. Well, as luck would have it, of course the animal put its horn in the way of the bullet, which cut clean through it about three inches above the root and then glanced off into space.

"After that things got rather serious. My gun was empty and the rhinoceros was rapidly arriving, so rapidly indeed that I came to the conclusion that I had better make way for him. Accordingly I jumped to my feet and ran to the right as hard as I could go. As I did so he arrived full tilt, knocked my friendly ant-heap flat, and for the third time that day went a most magnificent cropper. This gave me a few seconds' start, and I ran down wind—my word, I did run! Unfortunately, however, my modest retreat was observed, and the rhinoceros, as soon as he had found his legs again, set to work to run after me. Now no man on earth can run so fast as an irritated rhinoceros can gallop, and I knew that he must soon catch me up. But having some slight experience of this sort of thing, luckily for myself, I kept my head, and as I fled I managed to open my rifle, get the old cartridges out, and put in two fresh ones. To do this I was obliged to steady my pace a little, and by the time that I had snapped the rifle to I heard the beast snorting and thundering away within a few paces of my back. I stopped, and as I did so rapidly cocked the rifle and slued round upon my heel. By this time the brute was within six or seven yards of me, but luckily his head was up. I lifted the rifle and fired at him. It was a snap shot, but the bullet struck him in the chest within three inches of the first, and found its way into his lungs. It did not stop him, however, so all I could do was to bound to one side, which I did with surprising activity, and as he brushed past me to fire the other barrel into his side. That did for him. The ball passed in behind the shoulder and right through his heart. He fell over on to his side, gave one more awful squeal—a dozen pigs could not have made such a noise—and promptly died, keeping his wicked eyes wide open all the time.

"As for me, I blew my nose, and going up to the rhinoceros sat on his head, and reflected that I had done a capital morning's shooting."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FIRST ROUND

"After this, as it was now midday, and I had killed enough meat, we marched back triumphantly to camp, where I proceeded to concoct a stew of buffalo beef and compressed vegetables. When this was ready we ate the stew, and then I took a nap. About four o'clock, however, Gobo woke me up, and told me that the head man of one of Wambe's kraals had arrived to see me. I ordered him to be brought up, and presently he came, a little, wizened, talkative old man, with a waistcloth round his middle, and a greasy, frayed kaross made of the skins of rock rabbits over his shoulders.

"I told him to sit down, and then abused him roundly. 'What did he mean,' I asked, 'by disturbing me in this rude way? How did he dare to cause a person of my quality and evident importance to be awakened in order to interview his entirely contemptible self?'

"I spoke thus because I knew that it would produce an impression on him. Nobody, except a really great man, he would argue, would dare to speak to him in that fashion. Most savages are desperate bullies at heart, and look on insolence as a sign of power.

"The old man instantly collapsed. He was utterly overcome, he said; his heart was split in two, and well realized the extent of his misbehaviour. But the occasion was very urgent. He heard that a mighty hunter was in the neighbourhood, a beautiful white man, how beautiful he could not have imagined had he not seen (this to me!), and he came to beg his assistance. The truth was, that three bull elephants such as no man ever saw had for years been the terror of their kraal, which was but a small place—a cattle kraal of the great chief Wambe's, where they lived to keep the cattle. And now of late these elephants had done them much damage; but last night they had destroyed a whole patch of mealie land, and he feared that if they came back they would all starve next season for want of food. Would the mighty white man then be pleased to come and kill the elephants? It would be easy for him to do—oh, most easy! It was only necessary that he should hide himself in a tree, for there was a full moon, and then when the elephants appeared he would speak to them with the gun, and they would fall down dead, and there would be an end of their troubling.

"Of course I hummed and hawed, and made a great favour of consenting to his proposal, though really I was delighted to have such a chance. One of the conditions that I made was that a messenger should at once be despatched to Wambe, whose kraal was two days' journey from where I was, telling him that I proposed to come and pay my respects to him in a few days, and to ask his formal permission to shoot in his country. Also I intimated that I was prepared to present him with 'hongo,' that is, blackmail, and that I hoped to do a little trade with him in ivory, of which I heard he had a great quantity.

"This message the old gentleman promised to despatch at once, though there was something about his manner which showed me that he was doubtful as to how it would be received. After that we struck our camp and moved on to the kraal, which we reached about an hour before sunset. This kraal was a collection of huts surrounded by a slight thorn-fence, perhaps there were ten of them in all. It was situated in a kloof of the mountain down which a rivulet flowed. The kloof was densely wooded, but for some distance above the kraal it was free from bush, and here on the rich deep ground brought down by the rivulet were the cultivated lands, in extent somewhere about twenty or twenty-five acres. On the kraal side of these lands stood a single hut, that served for a mealie store, which at the moment was used as a dwelling-place by an old woman, the first wife of our friend the head man.

"It appears that this lady, having had some difference of opinion with her husband about the extent of authority allowed to a younger and more amiable wife, had refused to dwell in the kraal any more, and, by way of marking her displeasure, had taken up her abode among the mealies. As the issue will show, she was, it happened, cutting off her nose to spite her face.

"Close by this hut grew a large baobab tree. A glance at the mealie grounds showed me that the old head man had not exaggerated the mischief done by the elephants to his crops, which were now getting ripe. Nearly half of the entire patch was destroyed. The great brutes had eaten all they could, and the rest they had trampled down. I went up to their spoor and started back in amazement—never had I seen such a spoor before. It was simply enormous, more especially that of one old bull, that carried, so said the natives, but a single tusk. One might have used any of the footprints for a hip-bath.

"Having taken stock of the position, my next step was to make arrangements for the fray. The three bulls, according to the natives, had been spoorred into the dense patch of bush above the kloof. Now it seemed to me very probable that they would return to-night to feed on the remainder of the ripening mealies. If so, there was a bright moon, and it struck me that by the exercise of a little ingenuity I might bag one or more of them without exposing myself to any risk, which, having the highest respect for the aggressive powers of bull elephants, was a great consideration to me.

"This then was my plan. To the right of the huts as you look up the kloof, and commanding the mealie lands, stands the baobab tree that I have mentioned. Into that baobab tree I made up my mind to go. Then if the elephants appeared I should get a shot at them. I announced my intentions to the head man of the kraal, who was delighted. 'Now,' he said, 'his people might sleep in peace, for while the mighty white hunter sat aloft like a spirit watching over the welfare of his kraal what was there to fear?'

"I told him that he was an ungrateful brute to think of sleeping in peace while, perched like a wounded vulture on a tree, I watched for his welfare in wakeful sorrow; and once more he collapsed, and owned that my words were 'sharp but just.'

"However, as I have said, confidence was completely restored; and that evening everybody in the kraal, including the superannuated victim of jealousy in the little hut where the mealie cobs were stored, went to bed with a sense of sweet security from elephants and all other animals that prowl by night.

"For my part, I pitched my camp below the kraal; and then, having procured a beam of wood from the head man—rather a rotten one, by the way—I set it across two boughs that ran out laterally from the baobab tree, at a height of about twenty-five feet from the ground, in such fashion that I and another man could sit upon it with our legs hanging down, and rest our backs against the bole of the

tree. This done I went back to the camp and ate my supper. About nine o'clock, half-an-hour before the moon-rise, I summoned Gobo, who, thinking that he had seen about enough of the delights of big game hunting for that day, did not altogether relish the job; and, despite his remonstrances, gave him my eight-bore to carry, I having the .570-express. Then we set out for the tree. It was very dark, but we found it without difficulty, though climbing it was a more complicated matter. However, at last we got up and sat down, like two little boys on a form that is too high for them, and waited. I did not dare to smoke, because I remembered the rhinoceros, and feared that the elephants might wind the tobacco if they should come my way, and this made the business more wearisome, so I fell to thinking and wondering at the completeness of the silence.

"At last the moon came up, and with it a moaning wind, at the breath of which the silence began to whisper mysteriously. Lonely enough in the newborn light looked the wide expanse of mountain, plain, and forest, more like some vision of a dream, some reflection from a fair world of peace beyond our ken, than the mere face of garish earth made soft with sleep. Indeed, had it not been for the fact that I was beginning to find the log on which I sat very hard, I should have grown quite sentimental over the beautiful sight; but I will defy anybody to become sentimental when seated in the damp, on a very rough beam of wood, and half-way up a tree. So I merely made a mental note that it was a particularly lovely night, and turned my attention to the prospect of elephants. But no elephants came, and after waiting for another hour or so, I think that what between weariness and disgust, I must have dropped into a gentle doze. Presently I awoke with a start. Gobo, who was perched close to me, but as far off as the beam would allow—for neither white man nor black like the aroma which each vows is the peculiar and disagreeable property of the other—was faintly, very faintly clicking his forefinger against his thumb. I knew by this signal, a very favourite one among native hunters and gun-bearers, that he must have seen or heard something. I looked at his face, and saw that he was staring excitedly towards the dim edge of the bush beyond the deep green line of mealies. I stared too, and listened. Presently I heard a soft large sound as though a giant were gently stretching out his hands and pressing back the ears of standing corn. Then came a pause, and then, out into the open majestically stalked the largest elephant I ever saw or ever shall see. Heavens! what a monster he was; and how the moonlight gleamed upon his one splendid tusk—for the other was missing—as he stood among the mealies gently moving his enormous ears to and fro, and testing the wind with his trunk. While I was still marvelling at his girth, and speculating upon the weight of that huge tusk, which I swore should be my tusk before very long, out stepped a second bull and stood beside him. He was not quite so tall, but he seemed to me to be almost thicker-set than the first; and even in that light I could see that both his tusks were perfect. Another pause, and the third emerged. He was shorter than either of the others, but higher in the shoulder than No. 2; and when I tell you, as I afterwards learnt from actual measurement, that the smallest of these mighty bulls measured twelve feet one and a half inches at the shoulder, it will give you some idea of their size. The three formed into line and stood still for a minute, the one-tusked bull gently caressing the elephant on the left with his trunk.

"Then they began to feed, walking forward and slightly to the right as they gathered great bunches of the sweet mealies and thrust them into their mouths. All this time they were more than a hundred and twenty yards away from me (this I knew, because I had paced the distances from the tree to various points), much too far to allow of my attempting a shot at them in that uncertain light. They fed in a semicircle, gradually drawing round towards the hut near my tree, in which the corn was stored and the old woman slept.

"This went on for between an hour and an hour and a half, till, what between excitement and hope, that maketh the heart sick, I grew so weary that I was actually contemplating a descent from the tree and a moonlight stalk. Such an act in ground so open would have been that of a stark staring lunatic, and that I should even have been contemplating it will show you the condition of my mind. But everything comes to him who knows how to wait, and sometimes too to him who doesn't, and so at last those elephants, or rather one of them, came to me.

"After they had fed their fill, which was a very large one, the noble three stood once more in line some seventy yards to the left of the hut, and on the edge of the cultivated lands, or in all about eighty-five yards from where I was perched. Then at last the one with a single tusk made a peculiar rattling noise in his trunk, just as though he were blowing his nose, and without more ado began to walk deliberately toward the hut where the old woman slept. I made my rifle ready and glanced up at the moon, only to discover that a new complication was looming in the immediate future. I have said that a wind rose with the moon. Well, the wind brought rain-clouds along its track. Several light ones had already lessened the light for a little while, though without obscuring it, and now two more were coming up rapidly, both of them very black and dense. The first cloud was small and long, and the one behind big and broad. I remember noticing that the pair of them bore a most comical resemblance to a dray drawn by a very long raw-boned horse. As luck would have it, just as the elephant arrived within twenty-five yards or so of me, the head of the horse-cloud floated over the face of the moon, rendering it impossible for me to fire. In the faint twilight which remained, however, I could just make out the gray mass of the great brute still advancing towards the hut. Then the light went altogether and I had to trust to my ears. I heard him fumbling with his trunk, apparently at the roof of the hut; next came a sound as of straw being drawn out, and then for a little while there was complete silence.

"The cloud began to pass; I could see the outline of the elephant; he was standing with his head quite over the top of the hut. But I could not see his trunk, and no wonder, for it was *inside the hut*. He had thrust it through the roof, and, attracted no doubt by the smell of the mealies, was groping about with it inside. It was growing light now, and I got my rifle ready, when suddenly there was a most awful yell, and I saw the trunk reappear, and in its mighty fold the old woman who had been sleeping in the hut. Out she came through the hole like a periwinkle on the point of a pin, still wrapped up in her blanket, and with her skinny arms and legs stretched to the four points of the compass, and as she did so, gave that most alarming screech. I really don't know who was the most frightened, she, or I, or the elephant. At any rate the last was considerably startled; he had been fishing for mealies—the old woman was a mere accident, and one that greatly discomposed his nerves. He gave a sort of trumpet, and threw her away from him right into the crown of a low mimosa tree, where she stuck shrieking like a metropolitan engine. The old bull lifted his tail, and flapping his great ears prepared for flight. I put up my eight-bore, and aiming hastily at the point of his shoulder (for he was broadside on), I fired. The report rang out like thunder, making a thousand echoes in the quiet hills. I saw him go down all of a heap as though he were stone dead. Then, alas! whether it was the kick of the heavy rifle, or the excited bump of that idiot Gobo, or both together, or merely an unhappy coincidence, I do not know, but the rotten beam broke and I went down too, landing flat at the foot of the tree upon a certain humble portion of the human frame. The shock was so severe that I felt as though all my teeth were flying through the roof of my mouth, but although I sat slightly stunned for a few seconds, luckily for me I fell light, and was not in any way injured.

"Meanwhile the elephant began to scream with fear and fury, and, attracted by his cries, the other two charged up. I felt for my rifle; it was not there. Then I remembered that I had rested it on a fork of the bough in order to fire, and doubtless there it remained. My position was now very unpleasant. I did not dare to try and climb the tree again, which, shaken as I was, would have been a task

of some difficulty, because the elephants would certainly see me, and Gobo, who had clung to a bough, was still aloft with the other rifle. I could not run because there was no shelter near. Under these circumstances I did the only thing feasible, clambered round the trunk as softly as possible, and keeping one eye on the elephants, whispered to Gobo to bring down the rifle, and awaited the development of the situation. I knew that if the elephants did not see me—which, luckily, they were too enraged to do—they would not smell me, for I was up-wind. Gobo, however, either did not, or, preferring the safety of the tree, would not hear me. He said the former, but I believed the latter, for I knew that he was not enough of a sportsman to really enjoy shooting elephants by moonlight in the open. So there I was behind my tree, dismayed, unarmed, but highly interested, for I was witnessing a remarkable performance.

“When the two other bulls arrived the wounded elephant on the ground ceased to scream, but began to make a low moaning noise, and to gently touch the wound near his shoulder, from which the blood was literally spouting. The other two seemed to understand; at any rate, they did this. Kneeling down on either side, they placed their trunks and tusks underneath him, and, aided by his own efforts, with one great lift got him on to his feet. Then leaning against him on either side to support him, they marched off at a walk in the direction of the village.[\*] It was a pitiful sight, and even then it made me feel a brute.

[\*] The Editor would have been inclined to think that in relating this incident Mr. Quatermain was making himself interesting at the expense of the exact truth, did it not happen that a similar incident has come within his knowledge.—Editor.

“Presently, from a walk, as the wounded elephant gathered himself together a little, they broke into a trot, and after that I could follow them no longer with my eyes, for the second black cloud came up over the moon and put her out, as an extinguisher puts out a dip. I say with my eyes, but my ears gave me a very fair notion of what was going on. When the cloud came up the three terrified animals were heading directly for the kraal, probably because the way was open and the path easy. I fancy that they grew confused in the darkness, for when they came to the kraal fence they did not turn aside, but crashed straight through it. Then there were ‘times,’ as the Irish servant-girl says in the American book. Having taken the fence, they thought that they might as well take the kraal also, so they just ran over it. One hive-shaped hut was turned quite over on to its top, and when I arrived upon the scene the people who had been sleeping there were bumbling about inside like bees disturbed at night, while two more were crushed flat, and a third had all its side torn out. Oddly enough, however, nobody was hurt, though several people had a narrow escape of being trodden to death.

“On arrival I found the old head man in a state painfully like that favoured by Greek art, dancing about in front of his ruined abodes as vigorously as though he had just been stung by a scorpion.

“I asked him what ailed him, and he burst out into a flood of abuse. He called me a Wizard, a Sham, a Fraud, a Bringer of bad luck! I had promised to kill the elephants, and I had so arranged things that the elephants had nearly killed him, etc.

“This, still smarting, or rather aching, as I was from that most terrific bump, was too much for my feelings, so I just made a rush at my friend, and getting him by the ear, I banged his head against the doorway of his own hut, which was all that was left of it.

““You wicked old scoundrel,” I said, “you dare to complain about your own trifling inconveniences, when you gave me a rotten beam to sit on, and thereby delivered me to the fury of the elephant” (*bump! bump! bump!*), “when your own wife” (*bump!*) “has just been dragged out of her hut” (*bump!*) “like a snail from its shell, and thrown by the Earth-shaker into a tree” (*bump! bump!*).

““Mercy, my father, mercy!” gasped the old fellow. “Truly I have done amiss—my heart tells me so.”

““I should hope it did, you old villain” (*bump!*).

““Mercy, great white man! I thought the log was sound. But what says the unequalled chief—is the old woman, my wife, indeed dead? Ah, if she is dead all may yet prove to have been for the very best;” and he clasped his hands and looked up piously to heaven, in which the moon was once more shining brightly.

“I let go his ear and burst out laughing, the whole scene and his devout aspirations for the decease of the partner of his joys, or rather woes, were so intensely ridiculous.

““No, you old iniquity,” I answered; “I left her in the top of a thorn-tree, screaming like a thousand bluejays. The elephant put her there.”

““Alas! alas!” he said, “surely the back of the ox is shaped to the burden. Doubtless, my father, she will come down when she is tired;” and without troubling himself further about the matter, he began to blow at the smouldering embers of the fire.

“And, as a matter of fact, she did appear a few minutes later, considerably scratched and startled, but none the worse.

“After that I made my way to my little camp, which, fortunately, the elephants had not walked over, and wrapping myself up in a blanket, was soon fast asleep.

“And so ended my first round with those three elephants.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LAST ROUND

"On the morrow I woke up full of painful recollections, and not without a certain feeling of gratitude to the Powers above that I was there to wake up. Yesterday had been a tempestuous day; indeed, what between buffalo, rhinoceros, and elephant, it had been very tempestuous. Having realized this fact, I next bethought me of those magnificent tusks, and instantly, early as it was, broke the tenth commandment. I coveted my neighbour's tusks, if an elephant could be said to be my neighbour *de jure*, as certainly, so recently as the previous night, he had been *de facto*—a much closer neighbour than I cared for, indeed. Now when you covet your neighbour's goods, the best thing, if not the most moral thing, to do is to enter his house as a strong man armed, and take them. I was not a strong man, but having recovered my eight-bore I was armed, and so was the other strong man—the elephant with the tusks. Consequently I prepared for a struggle to the death. In other words, I summoned my faithful retainers, and told them that I was now going to follow those elephants to the edge of the world, if necessary. They showed a certain bashfulness about the business, but they did not gainsay me, because they dared not. Ever since I had prepared with all due solemnity to execute the rebellious Gobo they had conceived a great respect for me.

"So I went up to bid adieu to the old head man, whom I found alternately contemplating the ruins of his kraal and, with the able assistance of his last wife, thrashing the jealous lady who had slept in the mealie hut, because she was, as he declared, the fount of all his sorrows.

"Leaving them to work a way through their domestic differences, I levied a supply of vegetable food from the kraal in consideration of services rendered, and left them with my blessing. I do not know how they settled matters, because I have not seen them since.

"Then I started on the spoor of the three bulls. For a couple of miles or so below the kraal—as far, indeed, as the belt of swamp that borders the river—the ground is at this spot rather stony, and clothed with scattered bushes. Rain had fallen towards the daybreak, and this fact, together with the nature of the soil, made spooring a very difficult business. The wounded bull had indeed bled freely, but the rain had washed the blood off the leaves and grass, and the ground being so rough and hard did not take the footmarks so clearly as was convenient. However, we got along, though slowly, partly by the spoor, and partly by carefully lifting leaves and blades of grass, and finding blood underneath them, for the blood gushing from a wounded animal often falls upon their inner surfaces, and then, of course, unless the rain is very heavy, it is not washed away. It took us something over an hour and a half to reach the edge of the marsh, but once there our task became much easier, for the soft soil showed plentiful evidences of the great brutes' passage. Threading our way through the swampy land, we came at last to a ford of the river, and here we could see where the poor wounded animal had lain down in the mud and water in the hope of easing himself of his pain, and could see also how his two faithful companions had assisted him to rise again. We crossed the ford, and took up the spoor on the further side, and followed it into the marsh-like land beyond. No rain had fallen on this side of the river, and the blood-marks were consequently much more frequent.

"All that day we followed the three bulls, now across open plains, and now through patches of bush. They seemed to have travelled on almost without stopping, and I noticed that as they went the wounded bull recovered his strength a little. This I could see from his spoor, which had become firmer, and also from the fact that the other two had ceased to support him. At last evening closed in, and having travelled some eighteen miles, we camped, thoroughly tired out.

"Before dawn on the following day we were up, and the first break of light found us once more on the spoor. About half-past five o'clock we reached the place where the elephants had fed and slept. The two unwounded bulls had taken their fill, as the condition of the neighbouring bushes showed, but the wounded one had eaten nothing. He had spent the night leaning against a good-sized tree, which his weight had pushed out of the perpendicular. They had not long left this place, and could not be very far ahead, especially as the wounded bull was now again so stiff after his night's rest that for the first few miles the other two had been obliged to support him. But elephants go very quick, even when they seem to be travelling slowly, for shrub and creepers that almost stop a man's progress are no hindrance to them. The three had now turned to the left, and were travelling back again in a semicircular line toward the mountains, probably with the idea of working round to their old feeding grounds on the further side of the river.

"There was nothing for it but to follow their lead, and accordingly we followed with industry. Through all that long hot day did we tramp, passing quantities of every sort of game, and even coming across the spoor of other elephants. But, in spite of my men's entreaties, I would not turn aside after these. I would have those mighty tusks or none.

"By evening we were quite close to our game, probably within a quarter of a mile, but the bush was dense, and we could see nothing of them, so once more we must camp, thoroughly disgusted with our luck. That night, just after the moon rose, while I was sitting smoking my pipe with my back against a tree, I heard an elephant trumpet, as though something had startled it, and not three hundred yards away. I was very tired, but my curiosity overcame my weariness, so, without saying a word to any of the men, all of whom were asleep, I took my eight-bore and a few spare cartridges, and steered toward the sound. The game path which we had been following all day ran straight on in the direction from which the elephant had trumpeted. It was narrow, but well trodden, and the light struck down upon it in a straight white line. I crept along it cautiously for some two hundred yards, when it opened suddenly into a most beautiful glade some hundred yards or more in width, wherein tall grass grew and flat-topped trees stood singly. With the caution born of long experience I watched for a few moments before I entered the glade, and then I saw why the elephant had trumpeted. There in the middle of the glade stood a large maned lion. He stood quite still, making a soft purring noise, and waving his tail to and fro. Presently the grass about forty yards on the hither side of him gave a wide ripple, and a lioness sprang out of it like a flash, and bounded noiselessly up to the lion. Reaching him, the great cat halted suddenly, and rubbed her head against his shoulder.

Then they both began to purr loudly, so loudly that I believe that in the stillness one might have heard them two hundred yards or more away.

"After a time, while I was still hesitating what to do, either they got a whiff of my wind, or they wearied of standing still, and determined to start in search of game. At any rate, as though moved by a common impulse, they bounded suddenly away, leap by leap, and vanished in the depths of the forest to the left. I waited for a little while longer to see if there were any more yellow skins about, and seeing none, came to the conclusion that the lions must have frightened the elephants away, and that I had taken my stroll for nothing. But just as I was turning back I thought that I heard a bough break upon the further side of the glade, and, rash as the act was, I followed the sound. I crossed the glade as silently as my own shadow. On its further side the path went on. Albeit with many fears, I went on too. The jungle growth was so thick here that it almost met overhead, leaving so small a passage for the light that I could scarcely see to grope my way along. Presently, however, it widened, and then opened into a second glade slightly smaller than the first, and there, on the further side of it, about eighty yards from me, stood the three enormous elephants.

"They stood thus:—Immediately opposite and facing me was the wounded one-tusked bull. He was leaning his bulk against a dead thorn-tree, the only one in the place, and looked very sick indeed. Near him stood the second bull as though keeping a watch over him. The third elephant was a good deal nearer to me and broadside on. While I was still staring at them, this elephant suddenly walked off and vanished down a path in the bush to the right.

"There are now two things to be done—either I could go back to the camp and advance upon the elephants at dawn, or I could attack them at once. The first was, of course, by far the wiser and safer course. To engage one elephant by moonlight and single-handed is a sufficiently rash proceeding; to tackle three was little short of lunacy. But, on the other hand, I knew that they would be on the march again before daylight, and there might come another day of weary trudging before I could catch them up, or they might escape me altogether.

"No," I thought to myself, 'faint heart never won fair tusk. I'll risk it, and have a slap at them. But how?' I could not advance across the open, for they would see me; clearly the only thing to do was to creep round in the shadow of the bush and try to come upon them so. So I started. Seven or eight minutes of careful stalking brought me to the mouth of the path down which the third elephant had walked. The other two were now about fifty yards from me, and the nature of the wall of bush was such that I could not see how to get nearer to them without being discovered. I hesitated, and peeped down the path which the elephant had followed. About five yards in, it took a turn round a shrub. I thought that I would just have a look behind it, and advanced, expecting that I should be able to catch a sight of the elephant's tail. As it happened, however, I met his trunk coming round the corner. It is very disconcerting to see an elephant's trunk when you expect to see his tail, and for a moment I stood paralyzed almost under the vast brute's head, for he was not five yards from me. He too halted, threw up his trunk and trumpeted preparatory to a charge. I was in for it now, for I could not escape either to the right or left, on account of the bush, and I did not dare turn my back. So I did the only thing that I could do—raised the rifle and fired at the black mass of his chest. It was too dark for me to pick a shot; I could only brown him, as it were.

"The shot rung out like thunder on the quiet air, and the elephant answered it with a scream, then dropped his trunk and stood for a second or two as still as though he had been cut in stone. I confess that I lost my head; I ought to have fired my second barrel, but I did not. Instead of doing so, I rapidly opened my rifle, pulled out the old cartridge from the right barrel and replaced it. But before I could snap the breech to, the bull was at me. I saw his great trunk fly up like a brown beam, and I waited no longer. Turning, I fled for dear life, and after me thundered the elephant. Right into the open glade I ran, and then, thank Heaven, just as he was coming up with me the bullet took effect on him. He had been shot right through the heart, or lungs, and down he fell with a crash, stone dead.

"But in escaping from Scylla I had run into the jaws of Charybdis. I heard the elephant fall, and glanced round. Straight in front of me, and not fifteen paces away, were the other two bulls. They were staring about, and at that moment they caught sight of me. Then they came, the pair of them—came like thunderbolts, and from different angles. I had only time to snap my rifle to, lift it, and fire, almost at haphazard, at the head of the nearest, the unwounded bull.

"Now, as you know, in the case of the African elephant, whose skull is convex, and not concave like that of the Indian, this is always a most risky and very frequently a perfectly useless shot. The bullet loses itself in the masses of bone, that is all. But there is one little vital place, and should the bullet happen to strike there, it will follow the channel of the nostrils—at least I suppose it is that of the nostrils—and reach the brain. And this was what happened in the present case—the ball struck the fatal spot in the region of the eye and travelled to the brain. Down came the great bull all of a heap, and rolled on to his side as dead as a stone. I swung round at that instant to face the third, the monster bull with one tusk that I had wounded two days before. He was already almost over me, and in the dim moonlight seemed to tower above me like a house. I lifted the rifle and pulled at his neck. It would not go off! Then, in a flash, as it were, I remembered that it was on the half-cock. The lock of this barrel was a little weak, and a few days before, in firing at a cow eland, the left barrel had jarred off at the shock of the discharge of the right, knocking me backwards with the recoil; so after that I had kept it on the half-cock till I actually wanted to fire it.

"I gave one desperate bound to the right, and, my lame leg notwithstanding, I believe that few men could have made a better jump. At any rate, it was none too soon, for as I jumped I felt the wind made by the tremendous downward stroke of the monster's trunk. Then I ran for it.

"I ran like a buck, still keeping hold of my gun, however. My idea, so far as I could be said to have any fixed idea, was to bolt down the pathway up which I had come, like a rabbit down a burrow, trusting that he would lose sight of me in the uncertain light. I sped across the glade. Fortunately the bull, being wounded, could not go full speed; but wounded or no, he could go quite as fast as I could. I was unable to gain an inch, and away we went, with just about three feet between our separate extremities. We were at the other side now, and a glance served to show me that I had miscalculated and overshot the opening. To reach it now was hopeless; I should have blundered straight into the elephant. So I did the only thing I could do: I swerved like a course hare, and started off round the edge of the glade, seeking for some opening into which I could plunge. This gave me a moment's start, for the bull could not turn as quickly as I could, and I made the most of it. But no opening could I see; the bush was like a wall. We were speeding round the edge of the glade, and the elephant was coming up again. Now he was within about six feet, and now, as he trumpeted or rather screamed, I could feel the fierce hot blast of his breath strike upon my head. Heavens! how it frightened me!

"We were three parts round the glade now, and about fifty yards ahead was the single large dead thorn-tree against which the bull had been leaning. I spurted for it; it was my last chance of safety. But spurt as I would, it seemed hours before I got there. Putting out my right hand, I swung round the tree, thus bringing myself face to face with the elephant. I had not time to lift the rifle to fire, I had barely time to cock it, and run sideways and backward, when he was on to me. Crash! he came, striking the tree full with his forehead. It snapped like a carrot about forty inches from the ground. Fortunately I was clear of the trunk, but one of the dead

branches struck me on the chest as it went down and swept me to the ground. I fell upon my back, and the elephant blundered past me as I lay. More by instinct than anything else I lifted the rifle with one hand and pulled the trigger. It exploded, and, as I discovered afterwards, the bullet struck him in the ribs. But the recoil of the heavy rifle held thus was very severe; it bent my arm up, and sent the butt with a thud against the top of my shoulder and the side of my neck, for the moment quite paralyzing me, and causing the weapon to jump from my grasp. Meanwhile the bull was rushing on. He travelled for some twenty paces, and then suddenly he stopped. Faintly I reflected that he was coming back to finish me, but even the prospect of imminent and dreadful death could not rouse me into action. I was utterly spent; I could not move.

"Idly, almost indifferently, I watched his movements. For a moment he stood still, next he trumpeted till the welkin rang, and then very slowly, and with great dignity, he knelt down. At this point I swooned away.

"When I came to myself again I saw from the moon that I must have been insensible for quite two hours. I was drenched with dew, and shivering all over. At first I could not think where I was, when, on lifting my head, I saw the outline of the one-tusked bull still kneeling some five-and-twenty paces from me. Then I remembered. Slowly I raised myself, and was instantly taken with a violent sickness, the result of over-exertion, after which I very nearly fainted a second time. Presently I grew better, and considered the position. Two of the elephants were, as I knew, dead; but how about No. 3? There he knelt in majesty in the lonely moonlight. The question was, was he resting, or dead? I rose on my hands and knees, loaded my rifle, and painfully crept a few paces nearer. I could see his eye now, for the moonlight fell full upon it—it was open, and rather prominent. I crouched and watched; the eyelid did not move, nor did the great brown body, or the trunk, or the ear, or the tail—nothing moved. Then I knew that he must be dead.

"I crept up to him, still keeping the rifle well forward, and gave him a thump, reflecting as I did so how very near I had been to being thumped instead of thumping. He never stirred; certainly he was dead, though to this day I do not know if it was my random shot that killed him, or if he died from concussion of the brain consequent upon the tremendous shock of his contact with the tree. Anyhow, there he was. Cold and beautiful he lay, or rather knelt, as the poet neatly puts it. Indeed, I do not think that I have ever seen a sight more imposing in its way than that of the mighty beast crouched in majestic death, and shone upon by the lonely moon.

"While I stood admiring the scene, and heartily congratulating myself upon my escape, once more I began to feel sick. Accordingly, without waiting to examine the other two bulls, I staggered back to the camp, which in due course I reached in safety. Everybody in it was asleep. I did not wake them, but having swallowed a mouthful of brandy I threw off my coat and shoes, rolled myself up in a blanket, and was soon fast asleep.

"When I woke it was already light, and at first I thought that, like Joseph, I had dreamed a dream. At that moment, however, I turned my head, and quickly knew that it was no dream, for my neck and face were so stiff from the blow of the butt-end of the rifle that it was agony to move them. I collapsed for a minute or two. Gobo and another man, wrapped up like a couple of monks in their blankets, thinking that I was still asleep, were crouched over a little fire they had made, for the morning was damp and chilly, and holding sweet converse.

"Gobo said that he was getting tired of running after elephants which they never caught. Macumazahn (that is, myself) was without doubt a man of parts, and of some skill in shooting, but also he was a fool. None but a fool would run so fast and far after elephants which it was impossible to catch, when they kept cutting the spoor of fresh ones. He certainly was a fool, but he must not be allowed to continue in his folly; and he, Gobo, had determined to put a stop to it. He should refuse to accompany him any further on so mad a hunt.

"‘Yes,’ the other answered, ‘the poor man certainly was sick in his head, and it was quite time that they checked his folly while they still had a patch of skin left upon their feet. Moreover, he for his part certainly did not like this country of Wambe’s, which really was full of ghosts. Only the last night he had heard the spooks at work—they were out shooting, at least it sounded as though they were. It was very queer, but perhaps their lunatic of a master—’

"‘Gobo, you scoundrel!’ I shouted out at this juncture, sitting bolt upright on the blankets, ‘stop idling there and make me some coffee.’

"Up sprang Gobo and his friend, and in half a moment were respectfully skipping about in a manner that contrasted well with the lordly contempt of their previous conversation. But all the time they were in earnest in what they said about hunting the elephants any further, for before I had finished my coffee they came to me in a body, and said that if I wanted to follow those elephants I must follow them myself, for they would not go.

"I argued with them, and affected to be much put out. The elephants were close at hand, I said; I was sure of it; I had heard them trumpet in the night.

"‘Yes,’ answered the men mysteriously, ‘they too had heard things in the night, things not nice to hear; they had heard the spooks out shooting, and no longer would they remain in a country so vilely haunted.’

"‘It was nonsense,’ I replied. ‘If ghosts went out shooting, surely they would use air-guns and not black powder, and one would not hear an air-gun. Well, if they were cowards, and would not come, of course I could not force them to, but I would make a bargain with them. They should follow those elephants for one half-hour more, then if we failed to come upon them I would abandon the pursuit, and we would go straight to Wambe, chief of the Matuku, and give him hongo.’

"To this compromise the men agreed readily. Accordingly about half-an-hour later we struck our camp and started, and notwithstanding my aches and bruises, I do not think that I ever felt in better spirits in my life. It is something to wake up in the morning and remember that in the dead of the night, single-handed, one has given battle to and overthrown three of the largest elephants in Africa, slaying them with three bullets. Such a feat to my knowledge had never been done before, and on that particular morning I felt a very ‘tall man of my hands’ indeed. The only thing I feared was, that should I ever come to tell the story nobody would believe it, for when a strange tale is told by a hunter, people are apt to think it is necessarily a lie, instead of being only probably so.[\*]

[\*] For the satisfaction of any who may be so disbelieving as to take this view of Mr. Quatermain's story, the Editor may state that a gentleman with whom he is acquainted, and whose veracity he believes to be beyond doubt, not long ago described to him how he chanced to kill *four* African elephants with four consecutive bullets. Two of these elephants were charging him simultaneously, and out of the four three were killed with the head shot, a very uncommon thing in the case of the African elephant.—Editor.

"Well, we passed on till, having crossed the first glade where I had seen the lions, we reached the neck of bush that separated it from the second glade, where the dead elephants were. And here I began to take elaborate precautions, amongst others ordering Gobo

to keep some yards ahead and look out sharp, as I thought that the elephants might be about. He obeyed my instructions with a superior smile, and pushed ahead. Presently I saw him pull up as though he had been shot, and begin to snap his fingers faintly.

“What is it?” I whispered.

“The elephant, the great elephant with one tusk kneeling down.”

“I crept up beside him. There knelt the bull as I had left him last night, and there too lay the other bulls.

“Do these elephants sleep?” I whispered to the astonished Gobo.

“Yes, Macumazahn, they sleep.”

“Nay, Gobo, they are dead.”

“Dead? How can they be dead? Who killed them?”

“What do people call me, Gobo?”

“They call you Macumazahn.”

“And what does Macumazahn mean?”

“It means the man who keeps his eyes open, the man who gets up in the night.”

“Yes, Gobo, and I am that man. Look, you idle, lazy cowards; while you slept last night I rose, and alone I hunted those great elephants, and slew them by the moonlight. To each of them I gave one bullet and only one, and it fell dead. Look,” and I advanced into the glade, “here is my spoor, and here is the spoor of the great bull charging after me, and there is the tree that I took refuge behind; see, the elephant shattered it in his charge. Oh, you cowards, you who would give up the chase while the blood spoor steamed beneath your nostrils, see what I did single-handed while you slept, and be ashamed.”

“*Ou!*” said the men, “*ou!* Koos! Koos y umcool!” (Chief, great Chief!) And then they held their tongues, and going up to the three dead beasts, gazed upon them in silence.

“But after that those men looked upon me with awe as being almost more than mortal. No mere man, they said, could have slain those three elephants alone in the night-time. I never had any further trouble with them. I believe that if I had told them to jump over a precipice and that they would take no harm, they would have believed me.

“Well, I went up and examined the bulls. Such tusks as they had I never saw and never shall see again. It took us all day to cut them out; and when they reached Delagoa Bay, as they did ultimately, though not in my keeping, the single tusk of the big bull scaled one hundred and sixty pounds, and the four other tusks averaged ninety-nine and a half pounds—a most wonderful, indeed an almost unprecedented, lot of ivory.[\*] Unfortunately I was forced to saw the big tusk in two, otherwise we could not have carried it.”

[\*] The largest elephant tusk of which the Editor has any certain knowledge scaled one hundred and fifty pounds.

“Oh, Quatermain, you barbarian!” I broke in here, “the idea of spoiling such a tusk! Why, I would have kept it whole if I had been obliged to drag it myself.”

“Oh yes, young man,” he answered, “it is all very well for you to talk like that, but if you had found yourself in the position which it was my privilege to occupy a few hours afterwards, it is my belief that you would have thrown the tusks away altogether and taken to your heels.”

“Oh,” said Good, “so that isn’t the end of the yarn? A very good yarn, Quatermain, by the way—I couldn’t have made up a better one myself.”

The old gentleman looked at Good severely, for it irritated him to be chaffed about his stories.

“I don’t know what you mean, Good. I don’t see that there is any comparison between a true story of adventure and the preposterous tales which you invent about ibex hanging by their horns. No, it is not the end of the story; the most exciting part is to come. But I have talked enough for to-night; and if you go on in that way, Good, it will be some time before I begin again.”

“Sorry I spoke, I’m sure,” said Good, humbly. “Let’s have a split to show that there is no ill-feeling.” And they did.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MESSAGE OF MAIWA

On the following evening we once more dined together, and Quatermain, after some pressure, was persuaded to continue his story—for Good's remark still rankled in his breast.

"At last," he went on, "a few minutes before sunset, the task was finished. We had laboured at it all day, stopping only once for dinner, for it is no easy matter to hew out five such tusks as those which now lay before me in a white and gleaming line. It was a dinner worth eating, too, I can tell you, for we dined off the heart of the great one-tusked bull, which was so big that the man whom I sent inside the elephant to look for his heart was forced to remove it in two pieces. We cut it into slices and fried it with fat, and I never tasted heart to equal it, for the meat seemed to melt in one's mouth. By the way, I examined the jaw of the elephant; it never grew but one tusk; the other had not been broken off, nor was it present in a rudimentary form.

"Well, there lay the five beauties, or rather four of them, for Gobo and another man were engaged in sawing the grand one in two. At last with many sighs I ordered them to do this, but not until by practical experiment I had proved that it was impossible to carry it in any other way. One hundred and sixty pounds of solid ivory, or rather more in its green state, is too great a weight for two men to bear for long across a broken country. I sat watching the job and smoking the pipe of contentment, when suddenly the bush opened, and a very handsome and dignified native girl, apparently about twenty years of age, stood before me, carrying a basket of green mealies upon her head.

"Although I was rather surprised to see a native girl in such a wild spot, and, so far as I knew, a long way from any kraal, the matter did not attract my particular notice; I merely called to one of the men, and told him to bargain with the woman for the mealies, and ask her if there were any more to be bought in the neighbourhood. Then I turned my head and continued to superintend the cutting of the tusk. Presently a shadow fell upon me. I looked up, and saw that the girl was standing before me, the basket of mealies still on her head.

"Marême, Marême," she said, gently clapping her hands together. The word Marême among these Matuku (though she was no Matuku) answers to the Zulu 'Kooos,' and the clapping of hands is a form of salutation very common among the tribes of the Basutu race.

"What is it, girl?" I asked her in Sisutu. 'Are those mealies for sale?'

"No, great white hunter," she answered in Zulu, 'I bring them as a gift.'

"Good," I replied; 'set them down.'

"A gift for a gift, white man.'

"Ah," I grumbled, 'the old story—nothing for nothing in this wicked world. What do you want—beads?'

"She nodded, and I was about to tell one of the men to go and fetch some from one of the packs, when she checked me.

"A gift from the giver's own hand is twice a gift," she said, and I thought that she spoke meaningfully.

"You mean that you want me to give them to you myself?'

"Surely.'

"I rose to go with her. 'How is it that, being of the Matuku, you speak in the Zulu tongue?' I asked suspiciously.

"I am not of the Matuku," she answered as soon as we were out of hearing of the men. 'I am of the people of Nala, whose tribe is the Butiana tribe, and who lives there,' and she pointed over the mountain. 'Also I am one of the wives of Wambe,' and her eyes flashed as she said the name.

"And how did you come here?'

"On my feet," she answered laconically.

"We reached the packs, and undoing one of them, I extracted a handful of beads. 'Now,' I said, 'a gift for a gift. Hand over the mealies.'

"She took the beads without even looking at them, which struck me as curious, and setting the basket of mealies on the ground, emptied it.

"At the bottom of the basket were some curiously-shaped green leaves, rather like the leaves of the gutta-percha tree in shape, only somewhat thicker and of a more fleshy substance. As though by hazard, the girl picked one of these leaves out of the basket and smelt it. Then she handed it to me. I took the leaf, and supposing that she wished me to smell it also, was about to oblige her by doing so, when my eye fell upon some curious red scratches on the green surface of the leaf.

"Ah," said the girl (whose name, by the way, was Maiwa), speaking beneath her breath, 'read the signs, white man.'

"Without answering her I continued to stare at the leaf. It had been scratched or rather written upon with a sharp tool, such as a nail, and wherever this instrument had touched it, the acid juice oozing through the outer skin had turned a rusty blood colour. Presently I found the beginning of the scrawl, and read this in English, and covering the surface of the leaf and of two others that were in the basket.

"I hear that a white man is hunting in the Matuku country. This is to warn him to fly over the mountain to Nala. Wambe sends an impi at daybreak to eat him up, because he has hunted before bringing hongo. For God's sake, whoever you are, try to help me. I have been the slave of this devil Wambe for nearly seven years, and am beaten and tortured continually. He murdered all the rest of

us, but kept me because I could work iron. Maiwa, his wife, takes this; she is flying to Nala her father because Wambe killed her child. Try to get Nala to attack Wambe; Maiwa can guide them over the mountain. You won't come for nothing, for the stockade of Wambe's private kraal is made of elephants' tusks. For God's sake, don't desert me, or I shall kill myself. I can bear this no longer.

"John Every."

"Great heavens!" I gasped. "Every!—why, it must be my old friend." The girl, or rather the woman Maiwa, pointed to the other side of the leaf, where there was more writing. It ran thus—"I have just heard that the white man is called Macumazahn. If so, it must be my friend Quatermain. Pray Heaven it is, for I know he won't desert an old chum in such a fix as I am. It isn't that I'm afraid of dying, I don't care if I die, but I want to get a chance at Wambe first."

"No, old boy," thought I to myself, "it isn't likely that I am going to leave you there while there is a chance of getting you out. I have played fox before now—there's still a double or two left in me. I must make a plan, that's all. And then there's that stockade of tusks. I am not going to leave that either." Then I spoke to the woman.

"You are called Maiwa?"

"It is so."

"You are the daughter of Nala and the wife of Wambe?"

"It is so."

"You fly from Wambe to Nala?"

"I do."

"Why do you fly? Stay, I would give an order,"—and calling to Gobo, I ordered him to get the men ready for instant departure. The woman, who, as I have said, was quite young and very handsome, put her hand into a little pouch made of antelope hide which she wore fastened round the waist, and to my horror drew from it the withered hand of a child, which evidently had been carefully dried in the smoke.

"I fly for this cause," she answered, holding the poor little hand towards me. "See now, I bore a child. Wambe was its father, and for eighteen months the child lived and I loved it. But Wambe loves not his children; he kills them all. He fears lest they should grow up to slay one so wicked, and he would have killed this child also, but I begged its life. One day, some soldiers passing the hut saw the child and saluted him, calling him the 'chief who soon shall be.' Wambe heard, and was mad. He smote the babe, and it wept. Then he said that it should weep for good cause. Among the things that he had stolen from the white men whom he slew is a trap that will hold lions. So strong is the trap that four men must stand on it, two on either side, before it can be opened."

Here old Quatermain broke off suddenly.

"Look here, you fellows," he said, "I can't bear to go on with this part of the story, because I never could stand either seeing or talking of the sufferings of children. You can guess what that devil did, and what the poor mother was forced to witness. Would you believe it, she told me the tale without a tremor, in the most matter-of-fact way. Only I noticed that her eyelid quivered all the time."

"Well," I said, as unconcernedly as though I had been talking of the death of a lamb, though inwardly I was sick with horror and boiling with rage, "and what do you mean to do about the matter, Maiwa, wife of Wambe?"

"I mean to do this, white man," she answered, drawing herself up to her full height, and speaking in tones as hard as steel and cold as ice—"I mean to work, and work, and work, to bring this to pass, and to bring that to pass, until at length it comes to pass that with these living eyes I behold Wambe dying the death that he gave to his child and my child."

"Well said," I answered.

"Ay, well said, Macumazahn, well said, and not easily forgotten. Who could forget, oh, who could forget? See where this dead hand rests against my side; so once it rested when alive. And now, though it is dead, now every night it creeps from its nest and strokes my hair and clasps my fingers in its tiny palm. Every night it does this, fearing lest I should forget. Oh, my child! my child! ten days ago I held thee to my breast, and now this alone remains of thee," and she kissed the dead hand and shivered, but never a tear did she weep.

"See now," she went on, "the white man, the prisoner at Wambe's kraal, he was kind to me. He loved the child that is dead, yes, he wept when its father slew it, and at the risk of his life told Wambe, my husband—ah, yes, my husband!—that which he is! He too it was who made a plan. He said to me, 'Go, Maiwa, after the custom of thy people, go purify thyself in the bush alone, having touched a dead one. Say to Wambe thou goest to purify thyself alone for fifteen days, according to the custom of thy people. Then fly to thy father, Nala, and stir him up to war against Wambe for the sake of the child that is dead.' This then he said, and his words seemed good to me, and that same night ere I left to purify myself came news that a white man hunted in the country, and Wambe, being mad with drink, grew very wrath, and gave orders that an impi should be gathered to slay the white man and his people and seize his goods. Then did the 'Smiter of Iron' (Every) write the message on the green leaves, and bid me seek thee out, and show forth the matter, that thou mightest save thyself by flight; and behold, this thing have I done, Macumazahn, the hunter, the Slayer of Elephants."

"Ah," I said, "I thank you. And how many men be there in the impi of Wambe?"

"A hundred of men and half a hundred."

"And where is the impi?"

"There to the north. It follows on thy spoor. I saw it pass yesterday, but myself I guessed that thou wouldst be nigher to the mountain, and came this way, and found thee. To-morrow at the daybreak the slayers will be here."

"Very possibly," I thought to myself, "but they won't find Macumazahn. I have half a mind to put some strychnine into the carcasses of those elephants for their especial benefit though." I knew that they would stop to eat the elephants, as indeed they did, to our great gain, but I abandoned the idea of poisoning them, because I was rather short of strychnine."

"Or because you did not like to play the trick, Quatermain?" I suggested with a laugh.

"I said because I had not enough strychnine. It would take a great deal of strychnine to poison three elephants effectually," answered the old gentleman testily.

I said nothing further, but I smiled, knowing that old Allan could never have resorted to such an artifice, however severe his strait. But that was his way; he always made himself out to be a most unmerciful person.

"Well," he went on, "at that moment Gobo came up and announced that we were ready to march. 'I am glad that you are ready,' I said, 'because if you don't march, and march quick, you will never march again, that is all. Wambe has an impi out to kill us, and it will be here presently.'

"Gobo turned positively green, and his knees knocked together. 'Ah, what did I say?' he exclaimed. 'Fate walks about loose in Wambe's country.'

"Very good; now all you have to do is to walk a little quicker than he does. No, no, you don't leave those elephant tusks behind—I am not going to part with them I can tell you.'

"Gobo said no more, but hastily directed the men to take up their loads, and then asked which way we were to run.

"Ah," I said to Maiwa, 'which way?'

"There," she answered, pointing towards the great mountain spur which towered up into the sky some forty miles away, separating the territories of Nala and Wambe—"there, below that small peak, is one place where men may pass, and one only. Also it can easily be blocked from above. If men pass not there, then they must go round the great peak of the mountain, two days' journey and half a day.'

"And how far is the peak from us?'

"All to-night shall you walk and all to-morrow, and if you walk fast, at sunset you shall stand on the peak.'

"I whistled, for that meant a five-and-forty miles trudge without sleep. Then I called to the men to take each of them as much cooked elephant's meat as he could carry conveniently. I did the same myself, and forced the woman Maiwa to eat some as we went. This I did with difficulty, for at that time she seemed neither to sleep nor eat nor rest, so fiercely was she set on vengeance.

"Then we started, Maiwa guiding us. After going for a half-hour over gradually rising ground, we found ourselves on the further edge of a great bush-clad depression something like the bottom of a lake. This depression, through which we had been travelling, was covered with bush to a very great extent, indeed almost altogether so, except where it was pitted with glades such as that wherein I had shot the elephants.

"At the top of this slope Maiwa halted, and putting her hand over her eyes looked back. Presently she touched me on the arm and pointed across the sea of forest towards a comparatively vacant space of country some six or seven miles away. I looked, and suddenly I saw something flash in the red rays of the setting sun. A pause, and then another quick flash.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It is the spears of Wambe's impi, and they travel fast," she answered coolly.

"I suppose that my face showed how little I liked the news, for she went on—

"Fear not; they will stay to feast upon the elephants, and while they feast we shall journey. We may yet escape.'

"After that we turned and pushed on again, till at length it grew so dark that we had to wait for the rising of the moon, which lost us time, though it gave us rest. Fortunately none of the men had seen that ominous flashing of the spears; if they had, I doubt if even I could have kept control of them. As it was, they travelled faster than I had ever known loaded natives to go before, so thorough-paced was their desire to see the last of Wambe's country. I, however, took the precaution to march last of all, fearing lest they should throw away their loads to lighten themselves, or, worse still, the tusks; for these kind of fellows would be capable of throwing anything away if their own skins were at stake. If the pious Æneas, whose story you were reading to me the other night, had been a mongrel Delagoa Bay native, Anchises would have had a poor chance of getting out of Troy, that is, if he was known to have made a satisfactory will.

"At moonrise we set out again, and with short occasional halts travelled till dawn, when we were forced to rest and eat. Starting once more, about half-past five, we crossed the river at noon. Then began the long toilsome ascent through thick bush, the same in which I shot the bull buffalo, only some twenty miles to the west of that spot, and not more than twenty-five miles on the hither side of Wambe's kraal. There were six or seven miles of this dense bush, and hard work it was to get through it. Next came a belt of scattered forest which was easier to pass, though, in revenge, the ground was steeper. This was about two miles wide, and we passed it by about four in the afternoon. Above this scattered bush lay a long steep slope of boulder-strewn ground, which ran up to the foot of the little peak some three miles away. As we emerged, footsore and weary, on to this inhospitable plain, some of the men looking round caught sight of the spears of Wambe's impi advancing rapidly not more than a mile behind us.

"At first there was a panic, and the bearers tried to throw off their loads and run, but I harangued them, calling out to them that certainly I would shoot the first man who did so and that if they would but trust in me I would bring them through the mess. Now, ever since I had killed those three elephants single-handed, I had gained great influence over these men, and they listened to me. So off we went as hard as ever we could go—the members of the Alpine Club would not have been in it with us. We made the boulders burn, as a Frenchman would say.

"When we had done about a mile the spears began to emerge from the belt of scattered bush, and the whoop of their bearers as they viewed us broke upon our ears. Quick as our pace had been before, it grew much quicker now, for terror lent wings to my gallant crew. But they were sorely tired, and the loads were heavy, so that run, or rather climb, as we would, Wambe's soldiers, a scrubby-looking lot of men armed with big spears and small shields, but without plumes, climbed considerably faster. The last mile of that pleasing chase was like a fox hunt, we being the fox, and always in view. What astonished me was the extraordinary endurance and activity shown by Maiwa. She never even flagged. I think that girl's muscles must have been made of iron, or perhaps it was the strength of her will that supported her. At any rate she reached the foot of the peak second, poor Gobo, who was an excellent hand at running away, being first.

"Presently I came up panting, and glanced at the ascent. Before us was a wall of rock about one hundred and fifty feet in height, upon which the strata were laid so as to form a series of projections sufficiently resembling steps to make the ascent easy, comparatively speaking, except at one spot, where it was necessary to climb over a projecting angle of cliff and bear a little to the left. It was not a really difficult place, but what made it awkward was, that immediately beneath this projection gaped a deep fissure or donga, on the brink of which we now stood, originally dug out, no doubt, by the rush of water from the peak and cliff. This gulf beneath would be trying to the nerves of a weak-headed climber at the critical point, and so it proved in the result. The projecting angle once passed, the remainder of the ascent was very simple. At the summit, however, the brow of the cliff hung over and was pierced by a single narrow path cut through it by water, in such fashion that a single boulder rolled into it at the top would make the cliff quite impassable to men without ropes.

"At this moment Wambe's soldiers were about a thousand yards from us, so it was evident that we had no time to lose. I at once ordered the men to commence the ascent, the girl Maiwa, who was familiar with the pass, going first to show them the way. Accordingly they began to mount with alacrity, pushing and lifting their loads in front of them. When the first of them, led by Maiwa, reached the projecting angle, they put down their loads upon a ledge of rock and clambered over. Once there, by lying on their stomachs upon a boulder, they could reach the loads which were held to them by the men beneath, and in this way drag them over the awkward place, whence they were carried easily to the top.

"But all of this took time, and meanwhile the soldiers were coming up fast, screaming and brandishing their big spears. They were now within about four hundred yards, and several loads, together with all the tusks, had yet to be got over the rock. I was still standing at the bottom of the cliff, shouting directions to the men above, but it occurred to me that it would soon be time to move. Before doing so, however, I thought that it might be well to try and produce a moral effect upon the advancing enemy. In my hand I held a Winchester repeating carbine, but the distance was too great for me to use it with effect, so I turned to Gobo, who was shivering with terror at my side, and handing him the carbine, took my express from him.

"The enemy was now about three hundred and fifty yards away, and the express was only sighted to three hundred. Still I knew that it could be trusted for the extra fifty yards. Running in front of Wambe's soldiers were two men—captains, I suppose—one of them very tall. I put up the three hundred yard flap, and sitting down with my back against the rock, I drew a long breath to steady myself, and covered the tall man, giving him a full sight. Feeling that I was on him, I pulled, and before the sound of the striking bullet could reach my ears, I saw the man throw up his arms and pitch forward on to his head. His companion stopped dead, giving me a fair chance. I rapidly covered him, and fired the left barrel. He turned round once, and then sank down in a heap. This caused the enemy to hesitate—they had never seen men killed at such a distance before, and thought that there was something uncanny about the performance. Taking advantage of the lull, I gave the express back to Gobo, and slinging the Winchester repeater over my back I began to climb the cliff.

"When we reached the projecting angle all the loads were over, but the tusks still had to be passed up, and owing to their weight and the smoothness of their surface, this was a very difficult task. Of course I ought to have abandoned the tusks; often and often have I since reproached myself for not doing so. Indeed, I think that my obstinacy about them was downright sinful, but I was always obstinate about such things, and I could not bear the idea of leaving those splendid tusks which had cost me so much pains and danger to come by. Well, it nearly cost me my life also, and did cost poor Gobo his, as will be seen shortly, to say nothing of the loss inflicted by my rifle on the enemy. When I reached the projection I found that the men, with their usual stupidity, were trying to hand up the tusks point first. Now the result of this was that those above had nothing to grip except the round polished surface of the ivory, and in the position in which they were, this did not give them sufficient hold to enable them to lift the weight. I told them to reverse the tusks and push them up, so that the rough and hollow ends came to the hands of the men above. This they did, and the first two were dragged up in safety.

"At this point, looking behind me, I saw the Matukus streaming up the slope in a rough extended order, and not more than a hundred yards away. Cocking the Winchester I turned and opened fire on them. I don't quite know how many I missed, but I do know that I never shot better in my life. I had to keep shifting myself from one enemy to the other, firing almost without getting a sight, that is, by the eye alone, after the fashion of the experts who break glass balls. But quick as the work was, men fell thick, and by the time that I had emptied the carbine of its twelve cartridges, for the moment the advance was checked. I rapidly pushed in some more cartridges, and hardly had I done so when the enemy, seeing that we were about to escape them altogether, came on once more with a tremendous yell. By this time the two halves of the single tusk of the great bull alone remained to be passed up. I fired and fired as effectively as before, but notwithstanding all that I could do, some men escaped my hail of bullets and began to ascend the cliff. Presently my rifle was again empty. I slung it over my back, and, drawing my revolver, turned to run for it, the attackers being now quite close. As I did so, a spear struck the cliff close to my head.

"The last half of the tusk was now vanishing over the rock, and I sung out to Gobo and the other man who had been pushing it up to vanish after it. Gobo, poor fellow, required no second invitation; indeed, his haste was his undoing. He went at the projecting rock with a bound. The end of the tusk was still hanging over, and instead of grasping the rock he caught at it. It twisted in his hand—he slipped—he fell; with one wild shriek he vanished into the abyss beneath, his falling body brushing me as it passed. For a moment we stood aghast, and presently the dull thud of his fall smote heavily upon our ears. Poor fellow, he had met the Fate which, as he declared, walked about loose in Wambe's country. Then with an oath the remaining man sprang at the rock and clambered over it in safety. Aghast at the awfulness of what had happened, I stood still, till I saw the great blade of a Matuku spear pass up between my feet. That brought me to my senses, and I began to clamber up the rock like a cat. I was half way round it. Already I had clasped the hand of that brave girl Maiwa, who came down to help me, the men having scrambled forward with the ivory, when I felt some one seize my ankle.

"Pull, Maiwa, pull," I gasped, and she certainly did pull. Maiwa was a very muscular woman, and never before did I appreciate the advantages of the physical development of females so keenly. She tugged at my left arm, the savage below tugged at my right leg, till I began to realize that something must give way ere long. Luckily I retained my presence of mind, like the man who threw his mother-in-law out of the window, and carried the mattress down-stairs, when a fire broke out in his house. My right hand was still free, and in it I held my revolver, which was secured to my wrist by a leather thong. The pistol was cocked, and I simply pointed it downwards and fired. The result was instantaneous—and so far as I am concerned, most satisfactory. The bullet hit the man beneath me somewhere, I am sure I don't know where; at any rate, he let go of my leg and plunged headlong into the gulf beneath to join Gobo. In another moment I was on the top of the rock, and going up the remaining steps like a lamplighter. A single other soldier appeared in pursuit, but one of my boys at the top fired my elephant gun at him. I don't know if he hit him or only frightened him; at any rate, he vanished whence he came. I do know, however, that he very nearly hit me, for I felt the wind of the bullet.

"Another thirty seconds, and I and the woman Maiwa were at the top of the cliff panting, but safe.

"My men, being directed thereto by Maiwa, had most fortunately rolled up some big boulders which lay about, and with these we soon managed to block the passage through the overhanging ridge of rock in such fashion that the soldiers below could not possibly climb over it. Indeed, so far as I could see, they did not even try to do so—their heart was turned to fat, as the Zulus say.

"Then having rested a few moments we took up the loads, including the tusks of ivory that had cost us so dear, and in silence marched on for a couple of miles or more, till we reached a patch of dense bush. And here, being utterly exhausted, we camped for the night, taking the precaution, however, of setting a guard to watch against any attempt at surprise."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

"Notwithstanding all that we had gone through, perhaps indeed on account of it, for I was thoroughly worn out, I slept that night as soundly as poor Gobo, round whose crushed body the hyænas would now be prowling. Rising refreshed at dawn we went on our way towards Nala's kraal, which we reached at nightfall. It is built on open ground after the Zulu fashion, in a ring fence and with beehive huts. The cattle kraal is behind and a little to the left. Indeed, both from their habits and their talk it was easy to see that these Butiana belong to that section of the Bantu people which, since T'Chaka's time, has been known as the Zulu race. We did not see the chief Nala that night. His daughter Maiwa went on to his private huts as soon as we arrived, and very shortly afterwards one of his head men came to us bringing a sheep and some mealies and milk with him. 'The chief sent us greeting,' he said, 'and would see us on the morrow.' Meanwhile he was ordered to bring us to a place of resting, where we and our goods should be safe and undisturbed. Accordingly he led the way to some very good huts just outside Nala's private enclosure, and here we slept comfortably.

"On the morrow about eight o'clock the head man came again, and said that Nala requested that I would visit him. I followed him into the private enclosure and was introduced to the chief, a fine-looking man of about fifty, with very delicately-shaped hands and feet, and a rather nervous mouth. The chief was seated on a tanned ox-hide outside his hut. By his side stood his daughter Maiwa, and squatted on their haunches round him were some twenty head men or Indunas, whose number was continually added to by fresh arrivals. These men saluted me as I entered, and the chief rose and took my hand, ordering a stool to be brought for me to sit on. When this was done, with much eloquence and native courtesy he thanked me for protecting his daughter in the painful and dangerous circumstances in which she found herself placed, and also complimented me very highly upon what he was pleased to call the bravery with which I had defended the pass in the rocks. I answered in appropriate terms, saying that it was to Maiwa herself that thanks were due, for had it not been for her warning and knowledge of the country we should not have been here to-day; while as to the defence of the pass, I was fighting for my life, and that put heart into me.

"These courtesies concluded, Nala called upon his daughter Maiwa to tell her tale to the head men, and this she did most simply and effectively. She reminded them that she had gone as an unwilling bride to Wambe—that no cattle had been paid for her, because Wambe had threatened war if she was not sent as a free gift. Since she had entered the kraal of Wambe her days had been days of heaviness and her nights nights of weeping. She had been beaten, she had been neglected and made to do the work of a low-born wife—she, a chief's daughter. She had borne a child, and this was the story of the child. Then amidst a dead silence she told them the awful tale which she had already narrated to me. When she had finished, her hearers gave a loud ejaculation. '*Ou!*' they said, '*ou!* Maiwa, daughter of Nala!'

"'Ay,' she went on with flashing eyes, 'ay, it is true; my mouth is as full of truth as a flower of honey, and for tears my eyes are like the dew upon the grass at dawn. It is true I saw the child die—here is the proof of it, councillors,' and she drew forth the little dead hand and held it before them.

"'*Ou!*' they said again, '*ou!* it is the dead hand!'

"'Yes,' she continued, 'it is the dead hand of my dead child, and I bear it with me that I may never forget, never for one short hour, that I live that I may see Wambe die, and be avenged. Will you bear it, my father, that your daughter and your daughter's child should be so treated by a Matuku? Will ye bear it, men of my own people?'

"'No,' said an old Induna, rising, 'it is not to be borne. Enough have we suffered at the hands of these Matuku dogs and their loud-tongued chief; let us put it to the issue.'

"'It is not to be borne indeed,' said Nala; 'but how can we make head against so great a people?'

"'Ask of him—ask of Macumazahn, the wise white man,' said Maiwa, pointing at me.

"'How can we overcome Wambe, Macumazahn the hunter?'

"'How does the jackal overreach the lion, Nala?'

"'By cleverness, Macumazahn.'

"'So shall you overcome Wambe, Nala.'

"At this moment an interruption occurred. A man entered and said that messengers had arrived from Wambe.

"'What is their message?' asked Nala.

"'They come to ask that thy daughter Maiwa be sent back, and with her the white hunter.'

"'How shall I make answer to this, Macumazahn?' said Nala, when the man had withdrawn.

"'Thus shalt thou answer,' I said after reflection; 'say that the woman shall be sent and I with her, and then bid the messengers be gone. Stay, I will hide myself here in the hut that the men may not see me,' and I did.

"Shortly afterwards, through a crack in the hut, I saw the messengers arrive, and they were great truculent-looking fellows. There were four of them, and evidently they had travelled night and day. They entered with a swagger and squatted down before Nala.

"'Your business?' said Nala, frowning.

"'We come from Wambe, bearing the orders of Wambe to Nala his servant,' answered the spokesman of the party.

"'Speak,' said Nala, with a curious twitch of his nervous-looking mouth.

“These are the words of Wambe: ‘Send back the woman, my wife, who has run away from my kraal, and send with her the white man who has dared to hunt in my country without my leave, and to slay my soldiers.’ These are the words of Wambe.”

“And if I say I will not send them?” asked Nala.

“Then on behalf of Wambe we declare war upon you. Wambe will eat you up. He will wipe you out; your kraals shall be stamped flat—so,” and with an expressive gesture he drew his hand across his mouth to show how complete would be the annihilation of that chief who dared to defy Wambe.

“These are heavy words,” said Nala. “Let me take counsel before I answer.”

“Then followed a little piece of acting that was really very creditable to the untutored savage mind. The heralds withdrew, but not out of sight, and Nala went through the show of earnestly consulting his Indunas. The girl Maiwa too flung herself at his feet, and appeared to weep and implore his protection, while he wrung his hands as though in doubt and tribulation of mind. At length he summoned the messengers to draw near, and addressed them, while Maiwa sobbed very realistically at his side.

“Wambe is a great chief,” said Nala, “and this woman is his wife, whom he has a right to claim. She must return to him, but her feet are sore with walking, she cannot come now. In eight days from this day she shall be delivered at the kraal of Wambe; I will send her with a party of my men. As for the white hunter and his men, I have nought to do with them, and cannot answer for their misdeeds. They have wandered hither unbidden by me, and I will deliver them back whence they came, that Wambe may judge them according to his law; they shall be sent with the girl. For you, go your ways. Food shall be given you without the kraal, and a present for Wambe in atonement of the ill-doing of my daughter. I have spoken.”

“At first the heralds seemed inclined to insist upon Maiwa’s accompanying them then and there, but on being shown the swollen condition of her feet, ultimately they gave up the point and departed.

“When they were well out of the way I emerged from the hut, and we went on to discuss the situation and make our plans. First of all, as I was careful to explain to Nala, I was not going to give him my experience and services for nothing. I heard that Wambe had a stockade round his kraal made of elephant tusks. These tusks, in the event of our succeeding in the enterprise, I should claim as my perquisite, with the proviso that Nala should furnish me with men to carry them down to the coast.

“To this modest request Nala and the head men gave an unqualified and hearty assent, the more hearty perhaps because they never expected to get the ivory.

“The next thing I stipulated was, that if we conquered, the white man John Every should be handed over to me, together with any goods which he might claim. His cruel captivity was, I need hardly say, the only reason that induced me to join in so hair-brained an expedition, but I was careful from motives of policy to keep this fact in the background. Nala accepted this condition. My third stipulation was that no women or children should be killed. This being also agreed to, we went on to consider ways and means. Wambe, it appeared, was a very powerful petty chief, that is, he could put at least six thousand fighting men into the field, and always had from three to four thousand collected about his kraal, which was supposed to be impregnable. Nala, on the contrary, at such short notice could not collect more than from twelve to thirteen hundred men, though, being of the Zulu stock, they were of much better stuff for fighting purposes than Wambe’s Matukus.

“These odds, though large, under the circumstances were not overwhelming. The real obstacle to our chance of success was the difficulty of delivering a crushing assault against Wambe’s strong place. This was, it appeared, fortified all round with schanses or stone walls, and contained numerous caves and koppies in the hill-side and at the foot of the mountain which no force had ever been able to capture. It is said that in the time of the Zulu monarch Dingaan, a great impi of that king’s having penetrated to this district, had delivered an assault upon the kraal then owned by a forefather of Wambe’s, and been beaten back with the loss of more than a thousand men.

“Having thought the question over, I interrogated Maiwa closely as to the fortifications and the topographical peculiarities of the spot, and not without results. I discovered that the kraal was indeed impregnable to a front attack, but that it was very slightly defended to the rear, which ran up a slope of the mountain, indeed only by two lines of stone walls. The reason of this was that the mountain is quite impassable except by one secret path supposed to be known only to the chief and his councillors, and this being so, it had not been considered necessary to fortify it.

“Well,” I said, when she had done, “and now as to this secret path of thine—knowest thou aught of it?”

“Ay,” she answered, “I am no fool, Macumazahn. Knowledge learned is power earned. I won the secret of that path.”

“And canst thou guide an impi thereon so that it shall fall upon the town from behind?”

“Yes, I can do this, if only Wambe’s people know not that the impi comes, for if they know, then they can block the way.”

“So then here is my plan. Listen, Nala, and say if it be good, or if thou hast a better, show it forth. Let messengers go out and summon all thy impi, that it be gathered here on the third day from now. This being done, let the impi, led by Maiwa, march on the morrow of the fourth day, and crossing the mountains let it travel along on the other side of the mountains till it come to the place on the further side of which is the kraal of Wambe; that shall be some three days’ journey in all.[\*] Then on the night of the third day’s journey, let Maiwa lead the impi in silence up the secret path, so that it comes to the crest of the mountain that is above the strong place, and here let it hide among the rocks.

[\*] About one hundred and twenty miles.—Editor.

“Meanwhile on the sixth day from now let one of thy Indunas, Nala, bring with him two hundred men that have guns, and lead me and my men as prisoners, and take also a girl from among the Butiana people, who by form and face is like unto Maiwa, and bind her hands, and pass by the road on which we came and through the cutting in the cliff on to the kraal of Wambe. But the men shall take no shields or plumes with them, only their guns and one short spear, and when they meet the people of Wambe they shall say that they come to give up the woman and the white man and his party to Wambe, and to make atonement to Wambe. So shall they pass in peace. And travelling thus, on the evening of the seventh day we shall come to the gates of the place of Wambe, and nigh the gates there is, so says Maiwa, a koppie very strong and full of rocks and caves, but having no soldiers on it except in time of war, or at the worst but a few such as can easily be overpowered.

“This being done, at the dawn of day the impi on the mountain behind the town must light a fire and put wet grass on it, so that the smoke goes up. Then at the sight of the smoke we in the koppie will begin to shoot into the town of Wambe, and all the soldiers will run to kill us. But we will hold our own, and while we fight the impi shall charge down the mountain side and climb the schanses, and

put those who defend them to the assegai, and then falling upon the town shall surprise it, and drive the soldiers of Wambe as a wind blows the dead husks of corn. This is my plan. I have spoken.'

"*Ou!*" said Nala, 'it is good, it is very good. The white man is cleverer than a jackal. Yes, so shall it be; and may the snake of the Butiana people stand up upon its tail and prosper the war, for so shall we be rid of Wambe and the tyrannies of Wambe.'

"After that the girl Maiwa stood up, and once more producing the dreadful little dried hand, made her father and several of his head councillors swear by it and upon it that they would carry out the war of vengeance to the bitter end. It was a very curious sight to see. And by the way, the fight that ensued was thereafter known among the tribes of that district as the War of the Little Hand.

"The next two days were busy ones for us. Messengers were sent out, and every available man of the Butiana tribe was ordered up to 'a great dance.' The country was small, and by the evening of the second day, some twelve hundred and fifty men were assembled with their assegais and shields, and a fine hardy troop they were. At dawn of the following day, the fourth from the departure of the heralds, the main impi, having been doctored in the usual fashion, started under the command of Nala himself, who, knowing that his life and chieftainship hung upon the issue of the struggle, wisely determined to be present to direct it. With them went Maiwa, who was to guide them up the secret path. Of course we were obliged to give them two days' start, as they had more than a hundred miles of rough country to pass, including the crossing of the great mountain range which ran north and south, for it was necessary that the impi should make a wide *détour* in order to escape detection.

"At length, however, at dawn on the sixth day, I took the road, accompanied by my most unwilling bearers, who did not at all like the idea of thus putting their heads into the lion's mouth. Indeed, it was only the fear of Nala's spears, together with a vague confidence in myself, that induced them to accept the adventure. With me also were about two hundred Butianas, all armed with guns of various kinds, for many of these people had guns, though they were not very proficient in the use of them. But they carried no shields and wore no head-dress or armlets; indeed, every warlike appearance was carefully avoided. With our party went also a sister of Maiwa's, though by a different mother, who strongly resembled her in face and form, and whose mission it was to impersonate the runaway wife.

"That evening we camped upon the top of the cliff up which we had so barely escaped, and next morning at the first breaking of the light we rolled away the stones with which we had blocked the passage some days before, and descended to the hill-side beneath. Here the bodies, or rather the skeletons of the men who had fallen before my rifle, still lay about. The Matuku soldiers had left their comrades to be buried by the vultures. I descended the gully into which poor Gobo had fallen, and searched for his body, but in vain, although I found the spot where he and the other man had struck, together with the bones of the latter, which I recognized by the waist-cloth. Either some beast of prey had carried Gobo off, or the Matuku people had disposed of his remains, and also of my express rifle which he carried. At any rate, I never saw or heard any more of him.

"Once in Wambe's country, we adopted a very circumspect method of proceeding. About fifty men marched ahead in loose order to guard against surprise, while as many more followed behind. The remaining hundred were gathered in a bunch between, and in the centre of these men I marched, together with the girl who was personating Maiwa, and all my bearers. We were disarmed, and some of my men were tied together to show that we were prisoners, while the girl had a blanket thrown over her head, and moved along with an air of great dejection. We headed straight for Wambe's place, which was at a distance of about twenty-five miles from the mountain-pass.

"When we had gone some five miles we met a party of about fifty of Wambe's soldiers, who were evidently on the look-out for us. They stopped us, and their captain asked where we were going. The head man of our party answered that he was conveying Maiwa, Wambe's runaway wife, together with the white hunter and his men, to be given up to Wambe in accordance with his command. The captain then wanted to know why we were so many, to which our spokesman replied that I and my men were very desperate fellows, and that it was feared that if we were sent with a smaller escort we should escape, and bring disgrace and the wrath of Wambe upon their tribe. Thereon this gentleman, the Matuku captain, began to amuse himself at my expense, and mock me, saying that Wambe would make me pay for the soldiers whom I had killed. He would put me into the 'Thing that bites,' in other words, the lion trap, and leave me there to die like a jackal caught by the leg. I made no answer to this, though my wrath was great, but pretended to look frightened. Indeed there was not much pretence about it, I was frightened. I could not conceal from myself that ours was a most hazardous enterprise, and that it was very possible that I might make acquaintance with that lion trap before I was many days older. However, it seemed quite impossible to desert poor Every in his misfortune, so I had to go on, and trust to Providence, as I have so often been obliged to do before and since.

"And now a fresh difficulty arose. Wambe's soldiers insisted upon accompanying us, and what is more, did all they could to urge us forward, as they were naturally anxious to get to the chief's place before evening. But we, on the other hand, had excellent reasons for not arriving till night was closing in, since we relied upon the gloom to cover our advance upon the koppie which commanded the town. Finally, they became so importunate that we were obliged to refuse flatly to move faster, alleging as a reason that the girl was tired. They did not accept this excuse in good part, and at one time I thought that we should have come to blows, for there is no love lost between Butianas and Matukus. At last, however, either from motives of policy, or because they were so evidently outnumbered, they gave in and suffered us to go our own pace. I earnestly wished that they would have added to the obligation by going theirs, but this they declined absolutely to do. On the contrary, they accompanied us every foot of the way, keeping up a running fire of allusions to the 'Thing that bites' that jarred upon my nerves and discomposed my temper.

"About half-past four in the afternoon we came to a neck or ridge of stony ground, whence we could see Wambe's town plainly lying some six or seven miles away, and three thousand feet beneath us. The town is built in a valley, with the exception of Wambe's own kraal, that is situated at the mouth of some caves upon the slope of the opposing mountains, over which I hoped to see our impi's spears flashing in the morrow's light. Even from where we stood, it was easy to see how strongly the place was fortified with schanses and stone walls, and how difficult of approach. Indeed, unless taken by surprise, it seemed to me quite impregnable to a force operating without cannon, and even cannon would not make much impression on rocks and stony koppies filled with caves.

"Then came the descent of the pass, and an arduous business it was, for the path—if it may be called a path—is almost entirely composed of huge water-worn boulders, from the one to the other of which we must jump like so many grasshoppers. It took us two hours to climb down, and, travelling through that burning sun, when at last we did reach the bottom, I for one was nearly played out. Shortly afterwards, just as it was growing dark, we came to the first line of fortifications, which consisted of a triple stone wall pierced by a gateway, so narrow that a man could hardly squeeze through it. We passed this without question, being accompanied by Wambe's soldiers. Then came a belt of land three hundred paces or more in width, very rocky and broken, and having no huts upon it. Here in hollows in this belt the cattle were kraaled in case of danger. On the further side were more fortifications and another small

gateway shaped like a V, and just beyond and through it I saw the koppie we had planned to seize looming up against the line of mountains behind.

“As we went I whispered my suggestions to our captain, with the result that at the second gateway he halted the cavalcade, and addressing the captain of Wambe’s soldiers, said that we would wait here till we received Wambe’s word to enter the town. The other man said that this was well, only he must hand over the prisoners to be taken up to the chief’s kraal, for Wambe, was ‘hungry to begin upon them,’ and his ‘heart desired to see the white man at rest before he closed his eyes in sleep,’ and as for his wife, ‘surely he would welcome her.’ Our leader replied that he could not do this thing, because his orders were to deliver the prisoners to Wambe at Wambe’s own kraal, and they might not be broken. How could he be responsible for the safety of the prisoners if he let them out of his hand? No, they would wait there till Wambe’s word was brought.

“To this, after some demur, the other man consented, and went away, remarking that he would soon be back. As he passed me he called out with a sneer, pointing as he did so to the fading red in the western sky—‘Look your last upon the light, White Man, for the “Thing that bites” lives in the dark.’

“Next day it so happened that I shot this man, and, do you know, I think that he is about the only human being who has come to harm at my hands for whom I do not feel sincere sorrow and, in a degree, remorse.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ATTACK

"Just where we halted ran a little stream of water. I looked at it, and an idea struck me: probably there would be no water on the koppie. I suggested this to our captain, and, acting on the hint, he directed all the men to drink what they could, and also to fill the seven or eight cooking pots which we carried with us with water. Then came the crucial moment. How were we to get possession of the koppie? When the captain asked me, I said that I thought that we had better march up and take it, and this accordingly we went on to do. When we came to the narrow gateway we were, as I expected, stopped by two soldiers who stood on guard there and asked our business. The captain answered that we had changed our minds, and would follow on to Wambe's kraal. The soldiers said no, we must now wait.

"To this we replied by pushing them to one side and marching in single file through the gateway, which was not distant more than a hundred yards from the koppie. While we were getting through, the men we had pushed away ran towards the town calling for assistance, a call that was promptly responded to, for in another minute we saw scores of armed men running hard in our direction. So we ran too, for the koppie. As soon as they understood what we were after, which they did not at first, owing to the dimness of the light, they did their best to get there before us. But we had the start of them, and with the exception of one unfortunate man who stumbled and fell, we were well on to the koppie before they arrived. This man they captured, and when fighting began on the following morning, and he refused to give any information, they killed him. Luckily they had no time to torture him, or they would certainly have done so, for these Matuku people are very fond of torturing their enemies.

"When we reached the koppie, the base of which covers about half an acre of ground, the soldiers who had been trying to cut us off halted, for they knew the strength of the position. This gave us a few minutes before the light had quite vanished to reconnoitre the place. We found that it was unoccupied, fortified with a regular labyrinth of stone walls, and contained three large caves and some smaller ones. The next business was to post the soldiers to such advantage as time would allow. My own men I was careful to place quite at the top. They were perfectly useless from terror, and I feared that they might try to escape and give information of our plans to Wambe. So I watched them like the apple of my eye, telling them that should they dare to stir they would be shot.

"Then it grew quite dark, and presently out of the darkness I heard a voice—it was that of the leader of the soldiers who had escorted us—calling us to come down. We replied that it was too dark to move, we should hit our feet against the stones. He insisted upon our descending, and we flatly refused, saying that if any attempt was made to dislodge us we would fire. After that, as they had no real intention of attacking us in the dark, the men withdrew, but we saw from the fires which were lit around that they were keeping a strict watch upon our position.

"That night was a wearing one, for we never quite knew how the situation was going to develop. Fortunately we had some cooked food with us, so we did not starve. It was lucky, however, that we drunk our fill before coming up, for, as I had anticipated, there was not a drop of water on the koppie.

"At length the night wore away, and with the first tinge of light I began to go my rounds, and stumbling along the stony paths, to make things as ready as I could for the attack, which I felt sure would be delivered before we were two hours older. The men were cramped and cold, and consequently low-spirited, but I exhorted them to the best of my ability, bidding them remember the race from which they sprang, and not to show the white feather before a crowd of Matuku dogs. At length it began to grow light, and presently I saw long columns of men advancing towards the koppie. They halted under cover at a distance of about a hundred and fifty yards, and just as the dawn broke a herald came forward and called to us. Our captain stood up upon a rock and answered him.

"These are the words of Wambe," the herald said. "Come forth from the koppie, and give over the evil-doers, and go in peace, or stay in the koppie and be slain."

"It is too early to come out as yet," answered our man in fine diplomatic style. "When the sun sucks up the mist then we will come out. Our limbs are stiff with cold."

"Come forth even now," said the herald.

"Not if I know it, my boy," said I to myself; but the captain replied that he would come out when he thought proper, and not before.

"Then make ready to die," said the herald, for all the world like the villain of a transpontine piece, and majestically stalked back to the soldiers.

"I made my final arrangements, and looked anxiously at the mountain crest a couple of miles or so away, from which the mist was now beginning to lift, but no column of smoke could I see. I whistled, for if the attacking force had been delayed or made any mistake, our position was likely to grow rather warm. We had barely enough water to wet the mouths of the men, and when once it was finished we could not hold the place for long in that burning heat.

"At length, just as the sun rose in glory over the heights behind us, the Matuku soldiers, of whom about fifteen hundred were now assembled, set up a queer whistling noise, which ended in a chant. Then some shots were fired, for the Matuku had a few guns, but without effect, though one bullet passed just by a man's head.

"Now they are going to begin," I thought to myself, and I was not far wrong, for in another minute the body of men divided into three companies, each about five hundred strong, and, heralded by a running fire, charged at us on three sides. Our men were now all well under cover, and the fire did us no harm. I mounted on a rock so as to command a view of as much of the koppie and plain as possible, and yelled to our men to reserve their fire till I gave the word, and then to shoot low and load as quickly as possible. I knew

that, like all natives, they were sure to be execrable shots, and that they were armed with weapons made out of old gas-pipes, so the only chance of doing execution was to let the enemy get right on to us.

"On they came with a rush; they were within eighty yards now, and as they drew near the point of attack, I observed that they closed their ranks, which was so much the better for us.

"Shall we not fire, my father?" sung out the captain.

"No, confound you!" I answered.

"Sixty yards—fifty—forty—thirty. Fire, you scoundrels!" I yelled, setting the example by letting off both barrels of my elephant gun into the thickest part of the company opposite to me.

"Instantly the place rang out with the discharge of two hundred and odd guns, while the air was torn by the passage of every sort of missile, from iron pot legs down to slugs and pebbles coated with lead. The result was very prompt. The Matukus were so near that we could not miss them, and at thirty yards a lead-coated stone out of a gas-pipe is as effective as a Martini rifle, or more so. Over rolled the attacking soldiers by the dozen, while the survivors, fairly frightened, took to their heels. We plied them with shot till they were out of range—I made it very warm for them with the elephant gun, by the way—and then we loaded up in quite a cheerful frame of mind, for we had not lost a man, whereas I could count more than fifty dead and wounded Matukus. The only thing that damped my ardour was that, stare as I would, I could see no column of smoke upon the mountain crest.

"Half an hour elapsed before any further steps were taken against us. Then the attacking force adopted different tactics. Seeing that it was very risky to try to rush us in dense masses, they opened out into skirmishing order and ran across the open space in lots of five and six. As it happened, right at the foot of the koppie the ground broke away a little in such fashion that it was almost impossible for us to search it effectually with our fire. On the hither side of this dip Wambe's soldiers were now congregating in considerable numbers. Of course we did them as much damage as we could while they were running across, but this sort of work requires good shots, and that was just what we had not got. Another thing was, that so many of our men would insist upon letting off the things they called guns at every little knot of the enemy that ran across. Thus, the first few lots were indeed practically swept away, but after that, as it took a long while to load the gas-pipes and old flint muskets, those who followed got across in comparative safety. For my own part, I fired away with the elephant gun and repeating carbine till they grew almost too hot to hold, but my individual efforts could do nothing to stop such a rush, or perceptibly to lessen the number of our enemies.

"At length there were at least a thousand men crowded into the dip of ground within a few yards of us, whence those of them who had guns kept up a continued fusillade upon the koppie. They killed two of my bearers in this way, and wounded a third, for being at the top of the koppie these men were most exposed to the fire from the dip at its base. Seeing that the situation was growing most serious, at length, by the dint of threats and entreaties, I persuaded the majority of our people to cease firing useless shots, to reload, and prepare for the rush. Scarcely had I done so when the enemy came for us with a roar. I am bound to say that I should never have believed that Matukus had it in them to make such a determined charge. A large party rushed round the base of the koppie, and attacked us in flank, while the others swarmed wherever they could get a foothold, so that we were taken on every side.

"Fire!" I cried, and we did with terrible effect. Many of their men fell, but though we checked we could not stop them. They closed up and rushed the first fortification, killing a good number of its defenders. It was almost all cold steel work now, for we had no time to reload, and that suited the Butiana habits of fighting well enough, for the stabbing assegai is a weapon which they understand. Those of our people who escaped from the first line of walls took refuge in the second, where I stood myself, encouraging them, and there the fight raged fiercely. Occasionally parties of the enemy would force a passage, only to perish on the hither side beneath the Butiana spears. But still they kept it up, and I saw that, fight as we would, we were doomed. We were altogether outnumbered, and to make matters worse, fresh bodies of soldiers were pouring across the plain to the assistance of our assailants. So I made up my mind to direct a retreat into the caves, and there expire in a manner as heroic as circumstances would allow; and while mentally lamenting my hard fate and reflecting on my sins I fought away like a fiend. It was then, I remember, that I shot my friend the captain of our escort of the previous day. He had caught sight of me, and making a vicious dig at my stomach with a spear (which I successfully dodged), shouted out, or rather began to shout out, one of his unpleasant allusions to the 'Thing that——' He never got as far as 'bites,' because I shot him after 'that.'

"Well, the game was about up. Already I saw one man throw down his spear in token of surrender—which act of cowardice cost him his life, by the way—when suddenly a shout arose.

"Look at the mountain," they cried; 'there is an impi on the mountain side.'

"I glanced up, and there sure enough, about half-way down the mountain, nearing the first fortification, the long-plumed double line of Nala's warriors was rushing down to battle, the bright light of the morning glancing on their spears. Afterwards we discovered that the reason of their delay was that they had been stopped by a river in flood, and could not reach the mountain crest by dawn. When they did reach it, however, they saw instantly that the fight was already going on, was 'in flower,' as they put it, and so advanced at once without waiting to light signal-fires.

"Meanwhile they had been observed from the town, and parties of soldiers were charging up the steep side of the hill, to occupy the schanses, and the second line of fortifications behind them. The first line they did not now attempt to reach or defend; Nala pressed them too close. But they got to the schanses or pits protected with stone walls, and constructed to hold from a dozen to twenty men, and soon began to open fire from them, and from isolated rocks. I turned my eyes to the gates of the town, which were placed to the north and south. Already they were crowded with hundreds of fugitive women and children flying to the rocks and caves for shelter from the foe.

"As for ourselves, the appearance of Nala's impi produced a wonderful change for the better in our position. The soldiers attacking us turned, realizing that the town was being assailed from the rear, and clambering down the koppie streamed off to protect their homes against this new enemy. In five minutes there was not a man left except those who would move no more, or were too sorely wounded to escape. I felt inclined to ejaculate '*Saved!*' like the gentleman in the play, but did not because the occasion was too serious. What I did do was to muster all the men and reckon up our losses. They amounted to fifty-one killed and wounded, sixteen men having been killed outright. Then I sent men with the cooking-pots to the stream of water, and we drank. This done I set my bearers, being the most useless part of the community, from a fighting point of view, to the task of attending the injured, and turned to watch the fray.

"By this time Nala's impi had climbed the first line of fortifications without opposition, and was advancing in a long line upon the schanses or pits which were scattered about between it and the second line, singing a war chant as it came. Presently puffs of smoke

began to start from the schanses, and with my glasses I could see several of our men falling over. Then as they came opposite a schanse that portion of the long line of warriors would thicken up and charge it with a wild rush. I could see them leap on to the walls and vanish into the depths beneath, some of their number falling backward on each occasion, shot or stabbed to death.

"Next would come another act in the tragedy. Out from the hither side of the schanse would pour such of its defenders as were left alive, perhaps three or four and perhaps a dozen, running for dear life, with the war dogs on their tracks. One by one they would be caught, then up flashed the great spear and down fell the pursued—dead. I saw ten of our men leap into one large schanse, but though I watched for some time nobody came out. Afterwards we inspected the place and found these men all dead, together with twenty-three Matukus. Neither side would give in, and they had fought it out to the bitter end.

"At last they neared the second line of fortifications, behind which the whole remaining Matuku force, numbering some two thousand men, was rapidly assembling. One little pause to get their breath, and Nala's men came at it with a rush and a long wild shout of '*Bulala Matuku*' (kill the Matuku) that went right through me, thrilling every nerve. Then came an answering shout, and the sounds of heavy firing, and presently I saw our men retreating, somewhat fewer in numbers than they had advanced. Their welcome had been a warm one for the Matuku fight splendidly behind walls. This decided me that it was necessary to create a diversion; if we did not do so it seemed very probable that we should be worsted after all. I called to the captain of our little force, and rapidly put the position before him.

"Seeing the urgency of the occasion, he agreed with me that we must risk it, and in two minutes more, with the exception of my own men, whom I left to guard the wounded, we were trotting across the open space and through the deserted town towards the spot where the struggle was taking place, some seven hundred yards away. In six or eight minutes we reached a group of huts—it was a head man's kraal, that was situated about a hundred and twenty yards behind the fortified wall, and took possession of it unobserved. The enemy was too much engaged with the foe in front of him to notice us, and besides, the broken ground rose in a hog-back shape between. There we waited a minute or two and recovered our breath, while I gave my directions. So soon as we heard the Butiana impi begin to charge again, we were to run out in a line to the brow of the hogback and pour our fire into the mass of defenders behind the wall. Then the guns were to be thrown down and we must charge with the assegai. We had no shields, but that could not be helped; there would be no time to reload the guns, and it was absolutely necessary that the enemy should be disconcerted at the moment when the main attack was delivered.

"The men, who were as plucky a set of fellows as ever I saw, and whose blood was now thoroughly up, consented to this scheme, though I could see that they thought it rather a large order, as indeed I did myself. But I knew that if the impi was driven back a second time the game would be played, and for me at any rate it would be a case of the 'Thing that bites,' and this sure and certain knowledge filled my breast with valour.

"We had not long to wait. Presently we heard the Butiana war-song swelling loud and long; they had commenced their attack. I made a sign, and the hundred and fifty men, headed by myself, poured out of the kraal, and getting into a rough line ran up the fifty or sixty yards of slope that intervened between ourselves and the crest of the hog-backed ridge. In thirty seconds we were there, and immediately beyond us was the main body of the Matuku host waiting the onslaught of the enemy with guns and spears. Even now they did not see us, so intent were they upon the coming attack. I signed to my men to take careful aim, and suddenly called out to them to fire, which they did with a will, dropping thirty or forty Matukus.

"*'Charge!'* I shouted, again throwing down my smoking rifle and drawing my revolver, an example which they followed, snatching up their spears from the ground where they had placed them while they fired. The men set up a savage whoop, and we started. I saw the Matuku soldiers wheel around in hundreds, utterly taken aback at this new development of the situation. And looking over them, before we had gone twenty yards I saw something else. For of a sudden, as though they had risen from the earth, there appeared above the wall hundreds of great spears, followed by hundreds of savage faces shadowed with drooping plumes. With a yell they sprang upon the wall shaking their broad shields, and with a yell they bounded from it straight into our astonished foes.

"*'Crash!'* we were in them now, and fighting like demons. *'Crash!'* from the other side. Nala's impi was at its work, and still the spears and plumes appeared for a moment against the brown background of the mountain, and then sprang down and rushed like a storm upon the foe. The great mob of men turned this way and turned that way, astonished, bewildered, overborne by doubt and terror.

"Meanwhile the slayers stayed not their hands, and on every side spears flashed, and the fierce shout of triumph went up to heaven. There too on the wall stood Maiwa, a white garment streaming from her shoulders, an assegai in her hand, her breast heaving, her eyes flashing. Above all the din of battle I could catch the tones of her clear voice as she urged the soldiers on to victory. But victory was not yet. Wambe's soldiers gathered themselves together, and bore our men back by the sheer weight of numbers. They began to give, then once more they rallied, and the fight hung doubtfully.

"*'Slay, you war-whelps,'* cried Maiwa from the wall. *'Are you afraid, you women, you chicken-hearted women! Strike home, or die like dogs! What—you give way! Follow me, children of Nala.'* And with one long cry she leapt from the wall as leaps a stricken antelope, and holding the spear poised rushed right into the thickest of the fray. The warriors saw her, and raised such a shout that it echoed like thunder against the mountains. They massed together, and following the flutter of her white robe crashed into the dense heart of the foe. Down went the Matuku before them like trees before a whirlwind. Nothing could stand in the face of such a rush as that. It was as the rush of a torrent bursting its banks. All along their line swept the wild desperate charge; and there, straight in the forefront of the battle, still waved the white robe of Maiwa.

"Then they broke, and, stricken with utter panic, Wambe's soldiers streamed away a scattered crowd of fugitives, while after them thundered the footfall of the victors.

"The fight was over, we had won the day; and for my part I sat down upon a stone and wiped my forehead, thanking Providence that I had lived to see the end of it. Twenty minutes later Nala's warriors began to return panting. *'Wambe's soldiers had taken to the bush and the caves,'* they said, *'where they had not thought it safe to follow them,'* adding significantly, that many had stopped on the way.

"I was utterly dazed, and now that the fight was over my energy seemed to have left me, and I did not pay much attention, till presently I was aroused by somebody calling me by my name. I looked up, and saw that it was the chief Nala himself, who was bleeding from a flesh wound in his arm. By his side stood Maiwa panting, but unhurt, and wearing on her face a proud and terrifying air.

"*'They are gone, Macumazahn,'* said the chief; *'there is little to fear from them, their heart is broken. But where is Wambe the chief?—and where is the white man thou camest to save?'*

“‘I know not,’ I answered.

“Close to where we stood lay a Matuku, a young man who had been shot through the fleshy part of the calf. It was a trifling wound, but it prevented him from running away.

“‘Say, thou dog,’ said Nala, stalking up to him and shaking his red spear in his face, ‘say, where is Wambe? Speak, or I slay thee. Was he with the soldiers?’

“‘Nay, lord, I know not,’ groaned the terrified man, ‘he fought not with us; Wambe has no stomach for fighting. Perchance he is in his kraal yonder, or in the cave behind the kraal,’ and he pointed to a small enclosure on the hillside, about four hundred yards to the right of where we were.

“‘Let us go and see,’ said Nala, summoning his soldiers.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MAIWA IS AVENGED

"The impi formed up; alas, an hour before it had been stronger by a third than it was now. Then Nala detached two hundred men to collect and attend to the injured, and at my suggestion issued a stringent order that none of the enemy's wounded, and above all no women or children, were to be killed, as is the savage custom among African natives. On the contrary, they were to be allowed to send word to their women that they might come in to nurse them and fear nothing, for Nala made war upon Wambe the tyrant, and not on the Matuku tribe.

"Then we started with some four hundred men for the chief's kraal. Very soon we were there. It was, as I have said, placed against the mountain side, but within the fortified lines, and did not at all cover more than an acre and a half of ground. Outside was a tiny reed fence, within which, neatly arranged in a semi-circular line, stood the huts of the chief's principal wives. Maiwa of course knew every inch of the kraal, for she had lived in it, and led us straight to the entrance. We peeped through the gateway—not a soul was to be seen. There were the huts and there was the clear open space floored with a concrete of lime, on which the sun beat fiercely, but nobody could we see or hear.

"The jackal has gone to earth,' said Maiwa; 'he will be in the cave behind his hut,' and she pointed with her spear towards another small and semi-circular enclosure, over which a large hut was visible, that had the cliff itself for a background. I stared at this fence; by George! it was true, it was entirely made of tusks of ivory planted in the ground with their points bending outwards. The smallest ones, though none were small, were placed nearest to the cliff on either side, but they gradually increased in size till they culminated in two enormous tusks, which, set up so that their points met, something in the shape of an inverted V, formed the gateway to the hut. I was dumbfounded with delight; and indeed, where is the elephant-hunter who would not be, if he suddenly saw five or six hundred picked tusks set up in a row, and only waiting for him to take them away? Of course the stuff was what is known as 'black' ivory; that is, the exterior of the tusks had become black from years or perhaps centuries of exposure to wind and weather, but I was certain that it would be none the worse for that. Forgetting the danger of the deed, in my excitement I actually ran right across the open space, and drawing my knife scratched vigorously at one of the great tusks to see how deep the damage might be. As I thought, it was nothing; there beneath the black covering gleamed the pure white ivory. I could have capered for joy, for I fear that I am very mercenary at heart, when suddenly I heard the faint echo of a cry for assistance. 'Help!' screamed a voice in the Sisutu dialect from somewhere behind the hut; 'help! they are murdering me.'

"*I knew the voice*; it was John Every's. Oh, what a selfish brute was I! For the moment that miserable ivory had driven the recollection of him out of my head, and now—perhaps it was too late.

"Nala, Maiwa, and the soldiers had now come up. They too heard the voice and interpreted its tone, though they had not caught the words.

"This way,' cried Maiwa, and we started at a run, passing round the hut of Wambe. Behind was the narrow entrance to a cave. We rushed through it heedless of the danger of the ambush, and this is what we saw, though very confusedly at first, owing to the gloom.

"In the centre of the cave, and with either end secured to the floor by strong stakes, stood a huge double-sprung lion trap edged with sharp and grinning teeth. It was set, and beyond the trap, indeed almost over it, a terrible struggle was in progress. A naked or almost naked white man, with a great beard hanging down over his breast, in spite of his furious struggles, was being slowly forced and dragged towards the trap by six or eight women. Only one man was present, a fat, cruel-looking man with small eyes and a hanging lip. It was the chief Wambe, and he stood by the trap ready to force the victim down upon it so soon as the women had dragged him into the necessary position.

"At this instant they caught sight of us, and there came a moment's pause, and then, before I knew what she was going to do, Maiwa lifted the assegai she still held, and whirled it at Wambe's head. I saw the flash of light speed towards him, and so did he, for he stepped backward to avoid it—stepped backward right into the trap. He yelled with pain as the iron teeth of the 'Thing that bites' sprang up with a rattling sound like living fangs and fastened into him—such a yell I have not often heard. Now at last he tasted of the torture which he had inflicted upon so many, and though I trust I am a Christian, I cannot say that I felt sorry for him.

"The assegai sped on and struck one of the women who had hold of the unfortunate Every, piercing through her arm. This made her leave go, an example that the other women quickly followed, so that Every fell to the ground, where he lay gasping.

"Kill the witches,' roared Nala, in a voice of thunder, pointing to the group of women.

"Nay,' gasped Every, 'spare them. He made them do it,' and he pointed to the human fiend in the trap. Then Maiwa waved her hand to us to fall back, for the moment of her vengeance was come. We did so, and she strode up to her lord, and flinging the white robe from her stood before him, her fierce beautiful face fixed like stone.

"Who am I?' she cried in so terrible a voice that he ceased his yells. 'Am I that woman who was given to thee for wife, and whose child thou slewest? Or am I an avenging spirit come to see thee die?'

"What is this?' she went on, drawing the withered baby-hand from the pouch at her side.

"Is it the hand of a babe? and how came that hand to be thus alone? What cut it off from the babe? and where is the babe? Is it a hand? or is it the vision of a hand that shall presently tear thy throat?'

"Where are thy soldiers, Wambe? Do they sleep and eat and go forth to do thy bidding? or are they perchance dead and scattered like the winter leaves?'

"He groaned and rolled his eyes while the fierce-faced woman went on.

“Art thou still a chief, Wambe? or does another take thy place and power, and say, Lord, what doest thou there? and what is that slave’s leglet upon thy knee?”

“Is it a dream, Wambe, great lord and chief? or”—and she lifted her clenched hands and shook them in his face—“hath a woman’s vengeance found thee out and a woman’s wit o’ermatched thy tyrannous strength? and art thou about to slowly die in torments horrible to think on, oh, thou accursed murderer of little children?”

“And with one wild scream she dashed the dead hand of the child straight into his face, and then fell senseless on the floor. As for the demon in the trap, he shrank back so far as its iron bounds would allow, his yellow eyes starting out of his head with pain and terror, and then once more began to yell.

“The scene was more than I could bear.

“‘Nala,’ I said, ‘this must stop. That man is a fiend, but he must not be left to die there. See thou to it.’

“‘Nay,’ answered Nala, ‘let him taste of the food wherewith he hath fed so many; leave him till death shall find him.’

“‘That I will not,’ I answered. ‘Let his end be swift; see thou to it.’

“‘As thou wilt, Macumazahn,’ answered the chief, with a shrug of the shoulders; ‘first let the white man and Maiwa be brought forth.’

“So the soldiers came forward and carried Every and the woman into the open air. As the former was borne past his tormentor, the fallen chief, so cowardly was his wicked heart, actually prayed him to intercede for him, and save him from a fate which, but for our providential appearance, would have been Every’s own.

“So we went away, and in another moment one of the biggest villains on the earth troubled it no more. Once in the fresh air Every recovered quickly. I looked at him, and horror and sorrow pierced me through to see such a sight. His face was the face of a man of sixty, though he was not yet forty, and his poor body was cut to pieces with stripes and scars, and other marks of the torments which Wambe had for years amused himself with inflicting on him.

“As soon as he recovered himself a little he struggled on to his knees, burst into a paroxysm of weeping, and clasping my legs with his emaciated arms, would have actually kissed my feet.

“‘What are you about, old fellow?’ I said, for I am not accustomed to that sort of thing, and it made me feel uncomfortable.

“‘Oh, God bless you?’ he moaned, ‘God bless you! If only you knew what I have gone through; and to think that you should have come to help me, and at the risk of your own life! Well, you were always a true friend—yes, yes, a true friend.’

“‘Bosh,’ I answered testily; ‘I’m a trader, and I came after that ivory,’ and I pointed to the stockade of tusks. ‘Did you ever hear of an elephant-hunter who would not have risked his immortal soul for them, and much more his carcase?’

“But he took no notice of my explanations, and went on God blessing me as hard as ever, till at last I bethought me that a nip of brandy, of which I had a flask full, might steady his nerves a bit. I gave it him, and was not disappointed in the result, for he brisked up wonderfully. Then I hunted about in Wambe’s hut, and found a kaross to put over his poor bruised shoulders, and he was quite a man again.

“‘Now,’ I said, ‘why did the late lamented Wambe want to put you in that trap?’

“‘Because as soon as they heard that the fight was going against them, and that Maiwa was charging at the head of Nala’s impi, one of the women told Wambe that she had seen me write something on some leaves and give them to Maiwa before she went away to purify herself. Then of course he guessed that I had to do with your seizing the koppie and holding it while the impi rushed the place from the mountain, so he determined to torture me to death before help could come. Oh, heavens! what a mercy it is to hear English again.’

“‘How long have you been a prisoner here, Every?’ I asked.

“‘Six years and a bit, Quatermain; I have lost count of the odd months lately. I came up here with Major Aldey and three other gentlemen and forty bearers. That devil Wambe ambushed us, and murdered the lot to get their guns. They weren’t much use to him when he got them, being breech-loaders, for the fools fired away all the ammunition in a month or two. However, they are all in good order, and hanging up in the hut there. They didn’t kill me because one of them saw me mending a gun just before they attacked us, so they kept me as a kind of armourer. Twice I tried to make a bolt of it, but was caught each time. Last time Wambe had me flogged very nearly to death—you can see the scars upon my back. Indeed I should have died if it hadn’t been for the girl Maiwa, who nursed me by stealth. He got that accursed lion trap among our things also, and I suppose he has tortured between one and two hundred people to death in it. It was his favourite amusement, and he would go every day and sit and watch his victim till he died. Sometimes he would give him food and water to keep him alive longer, telling him or her that he would let him go if he lived till a certain day. But he never did let them go. They all died there, and I could show you their bones behind that rock.’

“‘The devil!’ I said, grinding my teeth. ‘I wish I hadn’t interfered; I wish I had left him to the same fate.’

“‘Well, he got a taste of it any way,’ said Every; ‘I’m glad he got a taste. There’s justice in it, and now he’s gone to hell, and I hope there is another one ready for him there. By Jove! I should like to have the setting of it.’

“And so he talked on, and I sat and listened to him, wondering how he had kept his reason for so many years. But he didn’t talk as I have told it, in plain English. He spoke very slowly, and as though he had got something in his mouth, continually using native words because the English ones had slipped his memory.

“At last Nala came up and told us that food was made ready, and thankful enough we were to get it, I can tell you. After we had eaten we held a consultation. Quite a thousand of Wambe’s soldiers were put *hors de combat*, but at least two thousand remained hidden in the bush and rocks, and these men, together with those in the outlying kraals, were a source of possible danger. The question arose, therefore, what was to be done—were they to be followed or left alone? I waited till everybody had spoken, some giving one opinion and some another, and then being appealed to I gave mine. It was to the effect that Nala should take a leaf out of the great Zulu T’Chaka’s book, and incorporate the tribe, not destroy it. We had a good many women among the prisoners. Let them, I suggested, be sent to the hiding-places of the soldiers and make an offer. If the men would come and lay down their arms and declare allegiance to Nala, they and their town and cattle should be spared. Wambe’s cattle alone would be seized as the prize of war. Moreover, Wambe having left no children, his wife Maiwa should be declared chieftainess of the tribe, under Nala. If they did not accept this offer by the morning of the second day it should be taken as a declaration that they wished to continue the war. Their town

should be burned, their cattle, which our men were already collecting and driving in in great numbers, would be taken, and they should be hunted down.

"This advice was at once declared to be wise, and acted on. The women were despatched, and I saw from their faces that they never expected to get such terms, and did not think that their mission would be in vain. Nevertheless, we spent that afternoon in preparations against possible surprise, and also in collecting all the wounded of both parties into a hospital, which we extemporized out of some huts, and there attending to them as best we could.

"That evening Every had the first pipe of tobacco that he had tasted for six years. Poor fellow, he nearly cried with joy over it. The night passed without any sign of attack, and on the following morning we began to see the effect of our message, for women, children, and a few men came in in little knots, and took possession of their huts. It was of course rather difficult to prevent our men from looting, and generally going on as natives, and for the matter of that white men too, are in the habit of doing after a victory. But one man who after warning was caught maltreating a woman was brought out and killed by Nala's order, and though there was a little grumbling, that put a stop to further trouble.

"On the second morning the head men and numbers of their followers came in in groups, and about midday a deputation of the former presented themselves before us without their weapons. They were conquered, they said, and Wambe was dead, so they came to hear the words of the great lion who had eaten them up, and of the crafty white man, the jackal, who had dug a hole for them to fall in, and of Maiwa, Lady of War, who had led the charge and turned the fate of the battle.

"So we let them hear the words, and when we had done an old man rose and said, that in the name of the people he accepted the yoke that was laid upon their shoulders, and that the more gladly because even the rule of a woman could not be worse than the rule of Wambe. Moreover, they knew Maiwa, the Lady of War, and feared her not, though she was a witch and terrible to see in battle.

"Then Nala asked his daughter if she was willing to become chieftainess of the tribe under him.

"Maiwa, who had been very silent since her revenge was accomplished, answered yes, that she was, and that her rule should be good and gentle to those who were good and gentle to her, but the froward and rebellious she would smite with a rod of iron; which from my knowledge of her character I thought exceedingly probable.

"The head man replied that that was a good saying, and they did not complain at it, and so the meeting ended.

"Next day we spent in preparations for departure. Mine consisted chiefly in superintending the digging up of the stockade of ivory tusks, which I did with the greatest satisfaction. There were some five hundred of them altogether. I made inquiries about it from Every, who told me that the stockade had been there so long that nobody seemed to know exactly who had collected the tusks originally. There was, however, a kind of superstitious feeling about them which had always prevented the chiefs from trying to sell this great mass of ivory. Every and I examined it carefully, and found that although it was so old its quality was really as good as ever, and there was very little soft ivory in the lot. At first I was rather afraid lest, now that my services had been rendered, Nala should hesitate to part with so much valuable property, but this was not the case. When I spoke to him on the subject he merely said, 'Take it, Macumazahn, take it; you have earned it well,' and, to speak the truth, though I say it who shouldn't, I think I had. So we pressed several hundred Matuku bearers into our service, and next day marched off with the lot.

"Before we went I took a formal farewell of Maiwa, whom we left with a bodyguard of three hundred men to assist her in settling the country. She gave me her hand to kiss in a queenly sort of way, and then said,

"Macumazahn, you are a brave man, and have been a friend to me in my need. If ever you want help or shelter, remember that Maiwa has a good memory for friend and foe. All I have is yours.

"And so I thanked her and went. She was certainly a very remarkable woman. A year or two ago I heard that her father Nala was dead, and that she had succeeded to the chieftainship of both tribes, which she ruled with great justice and firmness.

"I can assure you that we ascended the pass leading to Wambe's town with feelings very different from those with which we had descended it a few days before. But if I was grateful for the issue of events, you can easily imagine what poor Every's feelings were. When we got to the top of the pass, before the whole impi he actually flopped down upon his knees and thanked Heaven for his escape, the tears running down his face. But then, as I have said, his nerves were shaken—though now that his beard was trimmed and he had some sort of clothes on his back, and hope in his heart, he looked a very different man from the poor wretch whom we had rescued from death by torture.

"Well, we separated from Nala at the little stairway or pass over the mountain—Every and I and the ivory going down the river which I had come up a few weeks before, and the chief returning to his own kraal on the further side of the mountain. He gave us an escort of a hundred and fifty men, however, with instructions to accompany us for six days' journey, and to keep the Matuku bearers in order and then return. I knew that in six days we should be able to reach a district where porters were plentiful, and whence we could easily get the ivory conveyed to Delagoa Bay."

"And did you land it up safe?" I asked.

"Well no," said Quatermain, "we lost about a third of it in crossing a river. A flood came down suddenly just as the men were crossing and many of them had to throw down their tusks to save their lives. We had no means of dragging it up, and so we were obliged to leave it, which was very sad. However, we sold what remained for nearly seven thousand pounds, so we did not do so badly. I don't mean that I got seven thousand pounds out of it, because, you see, I insisted upon Every taking a half share. Poor fellow, he had earned it, if ever a man did. He set up a store in the old colony on the proceeds and did uncommonly well."

"And what did you do with the lion trap?" asked Sir Henry.

"Oh, I brought that away with me also, and when I reached Durban I put it in my house. But really I could not bear to sit opposite to it at nights as I smoked. Visions of that poor woman and the hand of her dead child would rise up in my mind, and also of all the horrors of which it had been the instrument. I began to dream at last that it held me by the leg. This was too much for my nerves, so I just packed it up and shipped it to its maker in England, whose name was stamped upon the steel, sending him a letter at the same time to tell him to what purpose the infernal machine had been put. I believe that he gave it to some museum or other."

"And what became of the tusks of the three bulls which you shot! You must have left them at Nala's kraal, I suppose."

The old gentleman's face fell at this question.

"Ah," he said, "that is a very sad story. Nala promised to send them with my goods to my agent at Delagoa, and so he did. But the men who brought them were unarmed, and, as it happened, they fell in with a slave caravan under the command of a half-bred Portuguese, who seized the tusks, and what is worse, swore that he had shot them. I paid him out afterwards, however," he added with

a smile of satisfaction, "but it did not give me back my tusks, which no doubt have been turned into hair brushes long ago;" and he sighed.

"Well," said Good, "that is a capital yarn of yours, Quatermain, but——"

"But what?" he asked sharply, foreseeing a draw.

"But I don't think that it was so good as mine about the ibex—it hasn't the same *finish*."

Mr. Quatermain made no reply. Good was beneath it.

"Do you know, gentlemen," he said, "it is half-past two in the morning, and if we are going to shoot the big wood to-morrow we ought to leave here at nine-thirty sharp."

"Oh, if you shoot for a hundred years you will never beat the record of those three woodcocks," I said.

"Or of those three elephants," added Sir Henry.

And then we all went to bed, and I dreamed that I had married Maiwa, and was much afraid of that attractive but determined lady.

## BOOK XI

### THE HUNTER

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Sir Henry Curtis, as everybody acquainted with him knows, is one of the most hospitable men on earth. It was in the course of the enjoyment of his hospitality at his place in Yorkshire the other day that I heard the hunting story which I am now about to transcribe. Many of those who read it will no doubt have heard some of the strange rumours that are flying about to the effect that Sir Henry Curtis and his friend Captain Good, R.N., recently found a vast treasure of diamonds out in the heart of Africa, supposed to have been hidden by the Egyptians, or King Solomon, or some other antique people. I first saw the matter alluded to in a paragraph in one of the society papers the day before I started for Yorkshire to pay my visit to Curtis, and arrived, needless to say, burning with curiosity; for there is something very fascinating to the mind in the idea of hidden treasure. When I reached the Hall, I at once asked Curtis about it, and he did not deny the truth of the story; but on my pressing him to tell it he would not, nor would Captain Good, who was also staying in the house.

"You would not believe me if I did," Sir Henry said, with one of the hearty laughs which seem to come right out of his great lungs. "You must wait till Hunter Quatermain comes; he will arrive here from Africa to-night, and I am not going to say a word about the matter, or Good either, until he turns up. Quatermain was with us all through; he has known about the business for years and years, and if it had not been for him we should not have been here to-day. I am going to meet him presently."

I could not get a word more out of him, nor could anybody else, though we were all dying of curiosity, especially some of the ladies. I shall never forget how they looked in the drawing-room before dinner when Captain Good produced a great rough diamond, weighing fifty carats or more, and told them that he had many larger than that. If ever I saw curiosity and envy printed on fair faces, I saw them then.

It was just at this moment that the door was opened, and Mr. Allan Quatermain announced, whereupon Good put the diamond into his pocket, and sprang at a little man who limped shyly into the room, convoyed by Sir Henry Curtis himself.

"Here he is, Good, safe and sound," said Sir Henry, gleefully. "Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to one of the oldest hunters and the very best shot in Africa, who has killed more elephants and lions than any other man alive."

Everybody turned and stared politely at the curious-looking little lame man, and though his size was insignificant, he was quite worth staring at. He had short grizzled hair, which stood about an inch above his head like the bristles of a brush, gentle brown eyes, that seemed to notice everything, and a withered face, tanned to the colour of mahogany from exposure to the weather. He spoke, too, when he returned Good's enthusiastic greeting, with a curious little accent, which made his speech noticeable.

It so happened that I sat next to Mr. Allan Quatermain at dinner, and, of course, did my best to draw him; but he was not to be drawn. He admitted that he had recently been a long journey into the interior of Africa with Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, and that they had found treasure, and then politely turned the subject and began to ask me questions about England, where he had never been before—that is, since he came to years of discretion. Of course, I did not find this very interesting, and so cast about for some means to bring the conversation round again.

Now, we were dining in an oak-panelled vestibule, and on the wall opposite to me were fixed two gigantic elephant tusks, and under them a pair of buffalo horns, very rough and knotted, showing that they came off an old bull, and having the tip of one horn split and chipped. I noticed that Hunter Quatermain's eyes kept glancing at these trophies, and took an occasion to ask him if he knew anything about them.

"I ought to," he answered, with a little laugh; "the elephant to which those tusks belonged tore one of our party right in two about eighteen months ago, and as for the buffalo horns, they were nearly my death, and were the end of a servant of mine to whom I was much attached. I gave them to Sir Henry when he left Natal some months ago;" and Mr. Quatermain sighed and turned to answer a question from the lady whom he had taken down to dinner, and who, needless to say, was also employed in trying to pump him about the diamonds.

Indeed, all round the table there was a simmer of scarcely suppressed excitement, which, when the servants had left the room, could no longer be restrained.

"Now, Mr. Quatermain," said the lady next him, "we have been kept in an agony of suspense by Sir Henry and Captain Good, who have persistently refused to tell us a word of this story about the hidden treasure till you came, and we simply can bear it no longer; so, please, begin at once."

"Yes," said everybody, "go on, please."

Hunter Quatermain glanced round the table apprehensively; he did not seem to appreciate finding himself the object of so much curiosity.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said at last, with a shake of his grizzled head, "I am very sorry to disappoint you, but I cannot do it. It is this way. At the request of Sir Henry and Captain Good I have written down a true and plain account of King Solomon's Mines and how we found them, so you will soon be able to learn all about that wonderful adventure for yourselves; but until then I will say nothing about it, not from any wish to disappoint your curiosity, or to make myself important, but simply because the whole story partakes so much of the marvellous, that I am afraid to tell it in a piecemeal, hasty fashion, for fear I should be set down as one of those common fellows of whom there are so many in my profession, who are not ashamed to narrate things they have not seen, and even to tell wonderful stories about wild animals they have never killed. And I think that my companions in adventure, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, will bear me out in what I say."

"Yes, Quatermain, I think you are quite right," said Sir Henry. "Precisely the same considerations have forced Good and myself to hold our tongues. We did not wish to be bracketed with—well, with other famous travellers."

There was a murmur of disappointment at these announcements.

"I believe you are all hoaxing us," said the young lady next Mr. Quatermain, rather sharply.

"Believe me," answered the old hunter, with a quaint courtesy and a little bow of his grizzled head; "though I have lived all my life in the wilderness, and amongst savages, I have neither the heart, nor the want of manners, to wish to deceive one so lovely."

Whereat the young lady, who was pretty, looked appeased.

"This is very dreadful," I broke in. "We ask for bread and you give us a stone, Mr. Quatermain. The least that you can do is to tell us the story of the tusks opposite and the buffalo horns underneath. We won't let you off with less."

"I am but a poor story-teller," put in the old hunter, "but if you will forgive my want of skill, I shall be happy to tell you, not the story of the tusks, for that is part of the history of our journey to King Solomon's Mines, but that of the buffalo horns beneath them, which is now ten years old."

"Bravo, Quatermain!" said Sir Henry. "We shall all be delighted. Fire away! Fill up your glass first."

The little man did as he was bid, took a sip of claret, and began:—"About ten years ago I was hunting up in the far interior of Africa, at a place called Gatgarra, not a great way from the Chobe River. I had with me four native servants, namely, a driver and voorlooper, or leader, who were natives of Matabeleland, a Hottentot named Hans, who had once been the slave of a Transvaal Boer, and a Zulu hunter, who for five years had accompanied me upon my trips, and whose name was Mashune. Now near Gatgarra I found a fine piece of healthy, park-like country, where the grass was very good, considering the time of year; and here I made a little camp or head-quarter settlement, from whence I went expeditions on all sides in search of game, especially elephant. My luck, however, was bad; I got but little ivory. I was therefore very glad when some natives brought me news that a large herd of elephants were feeding in a valley about thirty miles away. At first I thought of trekking down to the valley, waggon and all, but gave up the idea on hearing that it was infested with the deadly 'tsetse' fly, which is certain death to all animals, except men, donkeys, and wild game. So I reluctantly determined to leave the waggon in the charge of the Matabele leader and driver, and to start on a trip into the thorn country, accompanied only by the Hottentot Hans, and Mashune.

"Accordingly on the following morning we started, and on the evening of the next day reached the spot where the elephants were reported to be. But here again we were met by ill luck. That the elephants had been there was evident enough, for their spoor was plentiful, and so were other traces of their presence in the shape of mimosa trees torn out of the ground, and placed topsy-turvy on their flat crowns, in order to enable the great beasts to feed on their sweet roots; but the elephants themselves were conspicuous by their absence. They had elected to move on. This being so, there was only one thing to do, and that was to move after them, which we did, and a pretty hunt they led us. For a fortnight or more we dodged about after those elephants, coming up with them on two occasions, and a splendid herd they were—only, however, to lose them again. At length we came up with them a third time, and I managed to shoot one bull, and then they started off again, where it was useless to try and follow them. After this I gave it up in disgust, and we made the best of our way back to the camp, not in the sweetest of tempers, carrying the tusks of the elephant I had shot.

"It was on the afternoon of the fifth day of our tramp that we reached the little koppie overlooking the spot where the waggon stood, and I confess that I climbed it with a pleasurable sense of home-coming, for his waggon is the hunter's home, as much as his house is that of the civilized person. I reached the top of the koppie, and looked in the direction where the friendly white tent of the waggon should be, but there was no waggon, only a black burnt plain stretching away as far as the eye could reach. I rubbed my eyes, looked again, and made out on the spot of the camp, not my waggon, but some charred beams of wood. Half wild with grief and anxiety, followed by Hans and Mashune, I ran at full speed down the slope of the koppie, and across the space of plain below to the spring of water, where my camp had been. I was soon there, only to find that my worst suspicions were confirmed.

"The waggon and all its contents, including my spare guns and ammunition, had been destroyed by a grass fire.

"Now before I started, I had left orders with the driver to burn off the grass round the camp, in order to guard against accidents of this nature, and here was the reward of my folly: a very proper illustration of the necessity, especially where natives are concerned, of doing a thing one's self if one wants it done at all. Evidently the lazy rascals had not burnt round the waggon; most probably, indeed, they had themselves carelessly fired the tall and resinous tambouki grass near by; the wind had driven the flames on to the waggon tent, and there was quickly an end of the matter. As for the driver and leader, I know not what became of them: probably fearing my anger, they bolted, taking the oxen with them. I have never seen them from that hour to this.

"I sat down on the black veldt by the spring, and gazed at the charred axles and disselboom of my waggon, and I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, I felt inclined to weep. As for Mashune and Hans they cursed away vigorously, one in Zulu and the other in Dutch. Ours was a pretty position. We were nearly 300 miles away from Bamangwato, the capital of Khama's country, which was the nearest spot where we could get any help, and our ammunition, spare guns, clothing, food, and everything else, were all totally destroyed. I had just what I stood in, which was a flannel shirt, a pair of 'veldt-schoons,' or shoes of raw hide, my eight-bore rifle, and a few cartridges. Hans and Mashune had also each a Martini rifle and some cartridges, not many. And it was with this equipment that we had to undertake a journey of 300 miles through a desolate and almost uninhabited region. I can assure you that I have rarely been in a worse position, and I have been in some queer ones. However, these things are the natural incidents of a hunter's life, and the only thing to do was to make the best of them.

"Accordingly, after passing a comfortless night by the remains of my waggon, we started next morning on our long journey towards civilization. Now if I were to set to work to tell you all the troubles and incidents of that dreadful journey I should keep you listening here till midnight; so I will, with your permission, pass on to the particular adventure of which the pair of buffalo horns opposite are the melancholy memento.

"We had been travelling for about a month, living and getting along as best we could, when one evening we camped some forty miles from Bamangwato. By this time we were indeed in a melancholy plight, footsore, half starved, and utterly worn out; and, in addition, I was suffering from a sharp attack of fever, which half blinded me and made me weak as a babe. Our ammunition, too, was exhausted; I had only one cartridge left for my eight-bore rifle, and Hans and Mashune, who were armed with Martini Henrys, had three between them. It was about an hour from sundown when we halted and lit a fire—for luckily we had still a few matches. It was a charming spot to camp, I remember. Just off the game track we were following was a little hollow, fringed about with flat-crowned mimosa trees, and at the bottom of the hollow, a spring of clear water welled up out of the earth, and formed a pool, round the edges

of which grew an abundance of watercresses of an exactly similar kind to those which were handed round the table just now. Now we had no food of any kind left, having that morning devoured the last remains of a little oribé antelope, which I had shot two days previously. Accordingly Hans, who was a better shot than Mashune, took two of the three remaining Martini cartridges, and started out to see if he could not kill a buck for supper. I was too weak to go myself.

"Meanwhile Mashune employed himself in dragging together some dead boughs from the mimosa trees to make a sort of 'skerm,' or shelter for us to sleep in, about forty yards from the edge of the pool of water. We had been greatly troubled with lions in the course of our long tramp, and only on the previous night have very nearly been attacked by them, which made me nervous, especially in my weak state. Just as we had finished the skerm, or rather something which did duty for one, Mashune and I heard a shot apparently fired about a mile away.

"Hark to it!" sung out Mashune in Zulu, more, I fancy, by way of keeping his spirits up than for any other reason—for he was a sort of black Mark Tapley, and very cheerful under difficulties. 'Hark to the wonderful sound with which the "Maboona" (the Boers) shook our fathers to the ground at the Battle of the Blood River. We are hungry now, my father; our stomachs are small and withered up like a dried ox's paunch, but they will soon be full of good meat. Hans is a Hottentot, and an "umfagozan," that is, a low fellow, but he shoots straight—ah! he certainly shoots straight. Be of a good heart, my father, there will soon be meat upon the fire, and we shall rise up men.'

"And so he went on talking nonsense till I told him to stop, because he made my head ache with his empty words.

"Shortly after we heard the shot the sun sank in his red splendour, and there fell upon earth and sky the great hush of the African wilderness. The lions were not up as yet, they would probably wait for the moon, and the birds and beasts were all at rest. I cannot describe the intensity of the quiet of the night: to me in my weak state, and fretting as I was over the non-return of the Hottentot Hans, it seemed almost ominous—as though Nature were brooding over some tragedy which was being enacted in her sight.

"It was quiet—quiet as death, and lonely as the grave.

"Mashune," I said at last, 'where is Hans? my heart is heavy for him.'

"Nay, my father, I know not; mayhap he is weary, and sleeps, or mayhap he has lost his way.'

"Mashune, art thou a boy to talk folly to me?" I answered. 'Tell me, in all the years thou hast hunted by my side, didst thou ever know a Hottentot to lose his path or to sleep upon the way to camp?'

"Nay, Macumazahn' (that, ladies, is my native name, and means the man who 'gets up by night,' or who 'is always awake'), 'I know not where he is.'

"But though we talked thus, we neither of us liked to hint at what was in both our minds, namely, that misfortunate had overtaken the poor Hottentot.

"Mashune," I said at last, 'go down to the water and bring me of those green herbs that grow there. I am hungered, and must eat something.'

"Nay, my father; surely the ghosts are there; they come out of the water at night, and sit upon the banks to dry themselves. An Isanusi[\*] told it me.'

[\*] Isanusi, witch-finder.

"Mashune was, I think, one of the bravest men I ever knew in the daytime, but he had a more than civilized dread of the supernatural.

"Must I go myself, thou fool?" I said, sternly.

"Nay, Macumazahn, if thy heart yearns for strange things like a sick woman, I go, even if the ghosts devour me.'

"And accordingly he went, and soon returned with a large bundle of watercresses, of which I ate greedily.

"Art thou not hungry?" I asked the great Zulu presently, as he sat eyeing me eating.

"Never was I hungrier, my father.'

"Then eat," and I pointed to the watercresses.

"Nay, Macumazahn, I cannot eat those herbs.'

"If thou dost not eat thou wilt starve: eat, Mashune.'

"He stared at the watercresses doubtfully for a while, and at last seized a handful and crammed them into his mouth, crying out as he did so, 'Oh, why was I born that I should live to feed on green weeds like an ox? Surely if my mother could have known it she would have killed me when I was born!' and so he went on lamenting between each fistful of watercresses till all were finished, when he declared that he was full indeed of stuff, but it lay very cold on his stomach, 'like snow upon a mountain.' At any other time I should have laughed, for it must be admitted he had a ludicrous way of putting things. Zulus do not like green food.

"Just after Mashune had finished his watercress, we heard the loud 'woof! woof!' of a lion, who was evidently promenading much nearer to our little skerm than was pleasant. Indeed, on looking into the darkness and listening intently, I could hear his snoring breath, and catch the light of his great yellow eyes. We shouted loudly, and Mashune threw some sticks on the fire to frighten him, which apparently had the desired effect, for we saw no more of him for a while.

"Just after we had had this fright from the lion, the moon rose in her fullest splendour, throwing a robe of silver light over all the earth. I have rarely seen a more beautiful moonrise. I remember that sitting in the skerm I could with ease read faint pencil notes in my pocket-book. As soon as the moon was up game began to trek down to the water just below us. I could, from where I sat, see all sorts of them passing along a little ridge that ran to our right, on their way to the drinking place. Indeed, one buck—a large eland—came within twenty yards of the skerm, and stood at gaze, staring at it suspiciously, his beautiful head and twisted horns standing out clearly against the sky. I had, I recollect, every mind to have a pull at him on the chance of providing ourselves with a good supply of beef; but remembering that we had but two cartridges left, and the extreme uncertainty of a shot by moonlight, I at length decided to refrain. The eland presently moved on to the water, and a minute or two afterwards there arose a great sound of splashing, followed by the quick fall of galloping hoofs.

"What's that, Mashune?" I asked.

"That dam lion; buck smell him," replied the Zulu in English, of which he had a very superficial knowledge.

"Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before we heard a sort of whine over the other side of the pool, which was instantly answered by a loud coughing roar close to us.

"By Jove!" I said, 'there are two of them. They have lost the buck; we must look out they don't catch us.' And again we made up the fire, and shouted, with the result that the lions moved off.

"Mashune," I said, 'do you watch till the moon gets over that tree, when it will be the middle of the night. Then wake me. Watch well, now, or the lions will be picking those worthless bones of yours before you are three hours older. I must rest a little, or I shall die.'

"Koos!" (chief), answered the Zulu. 'Sleep, my father, sleep in peace; my eyes shall be open as the stars; and like the stars watch over you.'

"Although I was so weak, I could not at once follow his advice. To begin with, my head ached with fever, and I was torn with anxiety as to the fate of the Hottentot Hans; and, indeed, as to our own fate, left with sore feet, empty stomachs, and two cartridges, to find our way to Bamangwato, forty miles off. Then the mere sensation of knowing that there are one or more hungry lions prowling round you somewhere in the dark is disquieting, however well one may be used to it, and, by keeping the attention on the stretch, tends to prevent one from sleeping. In addition to all these troubles, too, I was, I remember, seized with a dreadful longing for a pipe of tobacco, whereas, under the circumstances, I might as well have longed for the moon.

"At last, however, I fell into an uneasy sleep as full of bad dreams as a prickly pear is of points, one of which, I recollect, was that I was setting my naked foot upon a cobra which rose upon its tail and hissed my name, 'Macumazahn,' into my ear. Indeed, the cobra hissed with such persistency that at last I roused myself.

"*Macumazahn, nanzia, nanzia!*" (there, there!) whispered Mashune's voice into my drowsy ears. Raising myself, I opened my eyes, and I saw Mashune kneeling by my side and pointing towards the water. Following the line of his outstretched hand, my eyes fell upon a sight that made me jump, old hunter as I was even in those days. About twenty paces from the little skerm was a large ant-heap, and on the summit of the ant-heap, her four feet rather close together, so as to find standing space, stood the massive form of a big lioness. Her head was towards the skerm, and in the bright moonlight I saw her lower it and lick her paws.

"Mashune thrust the Martini rifle into my hands, whispering that it was loaded. I lifted it and covered the lioness, but found that even in that light I could not make out the foresight of the Martini. As it would be madness to fire without doing so, for the result would probably be that I should wound the lioness, if, indeed, I did not miss her altogether, I lowered the rifle; and, hastily tearing a fragment of paper from one of the leaves of my pocket-book, which I had been consulting just before I went to sleep, I proceeded to fix it on to the front sight. But all this took a little time, and before the paper was satisfactorily arranged, Mashune again gripped me by the arm, and pointed to a dark heap under the shade of a small mimosa tree which grew not more than ten paces from the skerm.

"Well, what is it?" I whispered; 'I can see nothing.'

"It is another lion," he answered.

"Nonsense! thy heart is dead with fear, thou seest double;" and I bent forward over the edge of the surrounding fence, and stared at the heap.

"Even as I said the words, the dark mass rose and stalked out into the moonlight. It was a magnificent, black-maned lion, one of the largest I had ever seen. When he had gone two or three steps he caught sight of me, halted, and stood there gazing straight towards us;—he was so close that I could see the firelight reflected in his wicked, greenish eyes.

"Shoot, shoot!" said Mashune. 'The devil is coming—he is going to spring!'

"I raised the rifle, and got the bit of paper on the foresight, straight on to a little path of white hair just where the throat is set into the chest and shoulders. As I did so, the lion glanced back over his shoulder, as, according to my experience, a lion nearly always does before he springs. Then he dropped his body a little, and I saw his big paws spread out upon the ground as he put his weight on them to gather purchase. In haste I pressed the trigger of the Martini, and not a moment too soon; for, as I did so, he was in the act of springing. The report of the rifle rang out sharp and clear on the intense silence of the night, and in another second the great brute had landed on his head within four feet of us, and rolling over and over towards us, was sending the bushes which composed our little fence flying with convulsive strokes of his great paws. We sprang out of the other side of the 'skerm,' and he rolled on to it and into it and then right through the fire. Next he raised himself and sat upon his haunches like a great dog, and began to roar. Heavens! how he roared! I never heard anything like it before or since. He kept filling his lungs with air, and then emitting it in the most heart-shaking volumes of sound. Suddenly, in the middle of one of the loudest roars, he rolled over on to his side and lay still, and I knew that he was dead. A lion generally dies upon his side.

"With a sigh of relief I looked up towards his mate upon the ant-heap. She was standing there apparently petrified with astonishment, looking over her shoulder, and lashing her tail; but to our intense joy, when the dying beast ceased roaring, she turned, and, with one enormous bound, vanished into the night.

"Then we advanced cautiously towards the prostrate brute, Mashune droning an improvised Zulu song as he went, about how Macumazahn, the hunter of hunters, whose eyes are open by night as well as by day, put his hand down the lion's stomach when it came to devour him and pulled out his heart by the roots, &c., &c., by way of expressing his satisfaction, in his hyperbolical Zulu way, at the turn events had taken.

"There was no need for caution; the lion was as dead as though he had already been stuffed with straw. The Martini bullet had entered within an inch of the white spot I had aimed at, and travelled right through him, passing out at the right buttock, near the root of the tail. The Martini has wonderful driving power, though the shock it gives to the system is, comparatively speaking, slight, owing to the smallness of the hole it makes. But fortunately the lion is an easy beast to kill.

"I passed the rest of that night in a profound slumber, my head reposing upon the deceased lion's flank, a position that had, I thought, a beautiful touch of irony about it, though the smell of his singed hair was disagreeable. When I woke again the faint primrose lights of dawn were flushing in the eastern sky. For a moment I could not understand the chill sense of anxiety that lay like a lump of ice at my heart, till the feel and smell of the skin of the dead lion beneath my head recalled the circumstances in which we were placed. I rose, and eagerly looked round to see if I could discover any signs of Hans, who, if he had escaped accident, would surely return to us at dawn, but there were none. Then hope grew faint, and I felt that it was not well with the poor fellow. Setting Mashune to build up the fire I hastily removed the hide from the flank of the lion, which was indeed a splendid beast, and cutting off

some lumps of flesh, we toasted and ate them greedily. Lions' flesh, strange as it may seem, is very good eating, and tastes more like veal than anything else.

"By the time we had finished our much-needed meal the sun was getting up, and after a drink of water and a wash at the pool, we started to try and find Hans, leaving the dead lion to the tender mercies of the hyenas. Both Mashune and myself were, by constant practice, pretty good hands at tracking, and we had not much difficulty in following the Hottentot's spoor, faint as it was. We had gone on in this way for half-an-hour or so, and were, perhaps, a mile or more from the site of our camping-place, when we discovered the spoor of a solitary bull buffalo mixed up with the spoor of Hans, and were able, from various indications, to make out that he had been tracking the buffalo. At length we reached a little glade in which there grew a stunted old mimosa thorn, with a peculiar and overhanging formation of root, under which a porcupine, or an ant-bear, or some such animal, had hollowed out a wide-lipped hole. About ten or fifteen paces from this thorn-tree there was a thick patch of bush.

"See, Macumazahn! see!" said Mashune, excitedly, as we drew near the thorn; 'the buffalo has charged him. Look, here he stood to fire at him; see how firmly he planted his feet upon the earth; there is the mark of his crooked toe (Hans had one bent toe). Look! here the bull came like a boulder down the hill, his hoofs turning up the earth like a hoe. Hans had hit him: he bled as he came; there are the blood spots. It is all written down there, my father—there upon the earth.'

"Yes," I said; 'yes; but *where is Hans?*'

"Even as I said it Mashune clutched my arm, and pointed to the stunted thorn just by us. Even now, gentlemen, it makes me feel sick when I think of what I saw.

"For fixed in a stout fork of the tree some eight feet from the ground was Hans himself, or rather his dead body, evidently tossed there by the furious buffalo. One leg was twisted round the fork, probably in a dying convulsion. In the side, just beneath the ribs, was a great hole, from which the entrails protruded. But this was not all. The other leg hung down to within five feet of the ground. The skin and most of the flesh were gone from it. For a moment we stood aghast, and gazed at this horrifying sight. Then I understood what had happened. The buffalo, with that devilish cruelty which distinguishes the animal, had, after his enemy was dead, stood underneath his body, and licked the flesh off the pendant leg with his file-like tongue. I had heard of such a thing before, but had always treated the stories as hunters' yarns; but I had no doubt about it now. Poor Hans' skeleton foot and ankle were an ample proof.

"We stood aghast under the tree, and stared and stared at this awful sight, when suddenly our cogitations were interrupted in a painful manner. The thick bush about fifteen paces off burst asunder with a crashing sound, and uttering a series of ferocious pig-like grunts, the bull buffalo himself came charging out straight at us. Even as he came I saw the blood mark on his side where poor Hans' bullet had struck him, and also, as is often the case with particularly savage buffaloes, that his flanks had recently been terribly torn in an encounter with a lion.

"On he came, his head well up (a buffalo does not generally lower his head till he does so to strike); those great black horns—as I look at them before me, gentlemen, I seem to see them come charging at me as I did ten years ago, silhouetted against the green bush behind;—on, on!"

"With a shout Mashune bolted off sideways towards the bush. I had instinctively lifted my eight-bore, which I had in my hand. It would have been useless to fire at the buffalo's head, for the dense horns must have turned the bullet; but as Mashune bolted, the bull slewed a little, with the momentary idea of following him, and as this gave me a ghost of a chance, I let drive my only cartridge at his shoulder. The bullet struck the shoulder-blade and smashed it up, and then travelled on under the skin into his flank; but it did not stop him, though for a second he staggered.

"Throwing myself on to the ground with the energy of despair, I rolled under the shelter of the projecting root of the thorn, crushing myself as far into the mouth of the ant-bear hole as I could. In a single instant the buffalo was after me. Kneeling down on his uninjured knee—for one leg, that of which I had broken the shoulder, was swinging helplessly to and fro—he set to work to try and hook me out of the hole with his crooked horn. At first he struck at me furiously, and it was one of the blows against the base of the tree which splintered the tip of the horn in the way that you see. Then he grew more cunning, and pushed his head as far under the root as possible, made long semicircular sweeps at me, grunting furiously, and blowing saliva and hot steamy breath all over me. I was just out of reach of the horn, though every stroke, by widening the hole and making more room for his head, brought it closer to me, but every now and again I received heavy blows in the ribs from his muzzle. Feeling that I was being knocked silly, I made an effort and seizing his rough tongue, which was hanging from his jaws, I twisted it with all my force. The great brute bellowed with pain and fury, and jerked himself backwards so strongly, that he dragged me some inches further from the mouth of the hole, and again made a sweep at me, catching me this time round the shoulder-joint in the hook of his horn.

"I felt that it was all up now, and began to holloa.

"He has got me!" I shouted in mortal terror. '*Gwasa, Mashune, gwasa!*' ('Stab, Mashune, stab!').

"One hoist of the great head, and out of the hole I came like a periwinkle out of his shell. But even as I did so, I caught sight of Mashune's stalwart form advancing with his 'bangwan,' or broad stabbing assegai, raised above his head. In another quarter of a second I had fallen from the horn, and heard the blow of the spear, followed by the indescribable sound of steel shearing its way through flesh. I had fallen on my back, and, looking up, I saw that the gallant Mashune had driven the assegai a foot or more into the carcass of the buffalo, and was turning to fly.

"Alas! it was too late. Bellowing madly, and spouting blood from mouth and nostrils, the devilish brute was on him, and had thrown him up like a feather, and then gored him twice as he lay. I struggled up with some wild idea of affording help, but before I had gone a step the buffalo gave one long sighing bellow, and rolled over dead by the side of his victim.

"Mashune was still living, but a single glance at him told me that his hour had come. The buffalo's horn had driven a great hole in his right lung, and inflicted other injuries.

"I knelt down beside him in the uttermost distress, and took his hand.

"Is he dead, Macumazahn?" he whispered. 'My eyes are blind; I cannot see.'

"Yes, he is dead.'

"Did the black devil hurt thee, Macumazahn?"

"No, my poor fellow, I am not much hurt.'

"Ow! I am glad.'

“Then came a long silence, broken only by the sound of the air whistling through the hole in his lung as he breathed.

“Macumazahn, art thou there? I cannot feel thee.’

“I am here, Mashune.’

“I die, Macumazahn—the world flies round and round. I go—I go out into the dark! Surely, my father, at times in days to come—thou wilt think of Mashune who stood by thy side—when thou killest elephants, as we used—as we used——’

“They were his last words, his brave spirit passed with him. I dragged his body to the hole under the tree, and pushed it in, placing his broad assegai by him, according to the custom of his people, that he might not go defenceless on his long journey; and then, ladies—I am not ashamed to confess—I stood alone there before it, and wept like a woman.”

## BOOK XII

### LONG ODDS

The story which is narrated in the following pages came to me from the lips of my old friend Allan Quatermain, or Hunter Quatermain, as we used to call him in South Africa. He told it to me one evening when I was stopping with him at the place he bought in Yorkshire. Shortly after that, the death of his only son so unsettled him that he immediately left England, accompanied by two companions, his old fellow-voyagers, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, and has now utterly vanished into the dark heart of Africa. He is persuaded that a white people, of which he has heard rumours all his life, exists somewhere on the highlands in the vast, still unexplored interior, and his great ambition is to find them before he dies. This is the wild quest upon which he and his companions have departed, and from which I shrewdly suspect they never will return. One letter only have I received from the old gentleman, dated from a mission station high up the Tana, a river on the east coast, about three hundred miles north of Zanzibar. In it he says that they have gone through many hardships and adventures, but are alive and well, and have found traces which go far towards making him hope that the results of their wild quest may be a "magnificent and unexampled discovery." I greatly fear, however, that all he has discovered is death; for this letter came a long while ago, and nobody has heard a single word of the party since. They have totally vanished.

It was on the last evening of my stay at his house that he told the ensuing story to me and Captain Good, who was dining with him. He had eaten his dinner and drunk two or three glasses of old port, just to help Good and myself to the end of the second bottle. It was an unusual thing for him to do, for he was a most abstemious man, having conceived, as he used to say, a great horror of drink from observing its effects upon the class of colonists—hunters, transport riders and others—amongst whom he had passed so many years of his life. Consequently the good wine took more effect on him than it would have done on most men, sending a little flush into his wrinkled cheeks, and making him talk more freely than usual.

Dear old man! I can see him now, as he went limping up and down the vestibule, with his grey hair sticking up in scrubbing-brush fashion, his shrivelled yellow face, and his large dark eyes, that were as keen as any hawk's, and yet soft as a buck's. The whole room was hung with trophies of his numerous hunting expeditions, and he had some story about every one of them, if only he could be got to tell it. Generally he would not, for he was not very fond of narrating his own adventures, but to-night the port wine made him more communicative.

"Ah, you brute!" he said, stopping beneath an unusually large skull of a lion, which was fixed just over the mantelpiece, beneath a long row of guns, its jaws distended to their utmost width. "Ah, you brute! you have given me a lot of trouble for the last dozen years, and will, I suppose to my dying day."

"Tell us the yarn, Quatermain," said Good. "You have often promised to tell me, and you never have."

"You had better not ask me to," he answered, "for it is a longish one."

"All right," I said, "the evening is young, and there is some more port."

Thus adjured, he filled his pipe from a jar of coarse-cut Boer tobacco that was always standing on the mantelpiece, and still walking up and down the room, began—

"It was, I think, in the March of '69 that I was up in Sikukuni's country. It was just after old Sequati's time, and Sikukuni had got into power—I forget how. Anyway, I was there. I had heard that the Bapedi people had brought down an enormous quantity of ivory from the interior, and so I started with a waggon-load of goods, and came straight away from Middelburg to try and trade some of it. It was a risky thing to go into the country so early, on account of the fever; but I knew that there were one or two others after that lot of ivory, so I determined to have a try for it, and take my chance of fever. I had become so tough from continual knocking about that I did not set it down at much.

"Well, I got on all right for a while. It is a wonderfully beautiful piece of bush veldt, with great ranges of mountains running through it, and round granite koppies starting up here and there, looking out like sentinels over the rolling waste of bush. But it is very hot—hot as a stew-pan—and when I was there that March, which, of course, is autumn in this part of Africa, the whole place reeked of fever. Every morning, as I trekked along down by the Oliphant River, I used to creep from the waggon at dawn and look out. But there was no river to be seen—only a long line of billows of what looked like the finest cotton wool tossed up lightly with a pitchfork. It was the fever mist. Out from among the scrub, too, came little spirals of vapour, as though there were hundreds of tiny fires alight in it—reek rising from thousands of tons of rotting vegetation. It was a beautiful place, but the beauty was the beauty of death; and all those lines and blots of vapour wrote one great word across the surface of the country, and that word was 'fever.'

"It was a dreadful year of illness that. I came, I remember, to one little kraal of Knobnoses, and went up to it to see if I could get some 'maas', or curdled butter-milk, and a few mealies. As I drew near I was struck with the silence of the place. No children began to chatter, and no dogs barked. Nor could I see any native sheep or cattle. The place, though it had evidently been inhabited of late, was as still as the bush round it, and some guinea-fowl got up out of the prickly pear bushes right at the kraal gate. I remember that I hesitated a little before going in, there was such an air of desolation about the spot. Nature never looks desolate when man has not yet laid his hand upon her breast; she is only lonely. But when man has been, and has passed away, then she looks desolate.

"Well, I passed into the kraal, and went up to the principal hut. In front of the hut was something with an old sheep-skin kaross thrown over it. I stooped down and drew off the rug, and then shrank back amazed, for under it was the body of a young woman recently dead. For a moment I thought of turning back, but my curiosity overcame me; so going past the dead woman, I went down on my hands and knees and crept into the hut. It was so dark that I could not see anything, though I could smell a great deal, so I lit a match. It was a 'tandstickor' match, and burnt slowly and dimly, and as the light gradually increased I made out what I took to be a family of people, men, women, and children, fast asleep. Presently it burnt up brightly, and I saw that they too, five of them altogether, were quite dead. One was a baby. I dropped the match in a hurry, and was making my way from the hut as quick as I could go, when I caught sight of two bright eyes staring out of a corner. Thinking it was a wild cat, or some such animal, I redoubled my haste, when suddenly a voice near the eyes began first to mutter, and then to send up a succession of awful yells.

"Hastily I lit another match, and perceived that the eyes belonged to an old woman, wrapped up in a greasy leather garment. Taking her by the arm, I dragged her out, for she could not, or would not, come by herself, and the stench was overpowering me. Such a sight as she was—a bag of bones, covered over with black, shrivelled parchment. The only white thing about her was her wool, and she seemed to be pretty well dead except for her eyes and her voice. She thought that I was a devil come to take her, and that is why she yelled so. Well, I got her down to the waggon, and gave her a 'tot' of Cape smoke, and then, as soon as it was ready, poured about a pint of beef-tea down her throat, made from the flesh of a blue vilderbeeste I had killed the day before, and after that she brightened up wonderfully. She could talk Zulu—indeed, it turned out that she had run away from Zululand in T'Chaka's time—and she told me that all the people whom I had seen had died of fever. When they had died the other inhabitants of the kraal had taken the cattle and gone away, leaving the poor old woman, who was helpless from age and infirmity, to perish of starvation or disease, as the case might be. She had been sitting there for three days among the bodies when I found her. I took her on to the next kraal, and gave the headman a blanket to look after her, promising him another if I found her well when I came back. I remember that he was much astonished at my parting with two blankets for the sake of such a worthless old creature. 'Why did I not leave her in the bush?' he asked. Those people carry the doctrine of the survival of the fittest to its extreme, you see.

"It was the night after I had got rid of the old woman that I made my first acquaintance with my friend yonder," and he nodded towards the skull that seemed to be grinning down at us in the shadow of the wide mantelsheff. "I had trekked from dawn till eleven o'clock—a long trek—but I wanted to get on, and had turned the oxen out to graze, sending the voorlooper to look after them, my intention being to inspan again about six o'clock, and trek with the moon till ten. Then I got into the waggon and had a good sleep till half-past two or so in the afternoon, when I rose and cooked some meat, and had my dinner, washing it down with a pannikin of black coffee—for it was difficult to get preserved milk in those days. Just as I had finished, and the driver, a man called Tom, was washing up the things, in comes the young scoundrel of a voorlooper driving one ox before him.

"'Where are the other oxen?' I asked.

"'Koos!' he said, 'Koos! the other oxen have gone away. I turned my back for a minute, and when I looked round again they were all gone except Kaptein, here, who was rubbing his back against a tree.'

"'You mean that you have been asleep, and let them stray, you villain. I will rub your back against a stick,' I answered, feeling very angry, for it was not a pleasant prospect to be stuck up in that fever trap for a week or so while we were hunting for the oxen. 'Off you go, and you too, Tom, and mind you don't come back till you have found them. They have trekked back along the Middelburg Road, and are a dozen miles off by now, I'll be bound. Now, no words; go both of you.'

"Tom, the driver, swore, and caught the lad a hearty kick, which he richly deserved, and then, having tied old Kaptein up to the disselboom with a reim, they took their assegais and sticks, and started. I would have gone too, only I knew that somebody must look after the waggon, and I did not like to leave either of the boys with it at night. I was in a very bad temper, indeed, although I was pretty well used to these sort of occurrences, and soothed myself by taking a rifle and going to kill something. For a couple of hours I poked about without seeing anything that I could get a shot at, but at last, just as I was again within seventy yards of the waggon, I put up an old Impala ram from behind a mimosa thorn. He ran straight for the waggon, and it was not till he was passing within a few feet of it that I could get a decent shot at him. Then I pulled, and caught him half-way down the spine. Over he went, dead as a door-nail, and a pretty shot it was, though I ought not to say it. This little incident put me into rather a better humour, especially as the buck had rolled right against the after-part of the waggon, so I had only to gut him, fix a reim round his legs, and haul him up. By the time I had done this the sun was down, and the full moon was up, and a beautiful moon it was. And then there came that wonderful hush which sometimes falls over the African bush in the early hours of the night. No beast was moving, and no bird called. Not a breath of air stirred the quiet trees, and the shadows did not even quiver, they only grew. It was very oppressive and very lonely, for there was not a sign of the cattle or the boys. I was quite thankful for the society of old Kaptein, who was lying down contentedly against the disselboom, chewing the cud with a good conscience.

"Presently, however, Kaptein began to get restless. First he snorted, then he got up and snorted again. I could not make it out, so like a fool I got down off the waggon-box to have a look round, thinking it might be the lost oxen coming.

"Next instant I regretted it, for all of a sudden I heard a roar and saw something yellow flash past me and light on poor Kaptein. Then came a bellow of agony from the ox, and a crunch as the lion put his teeth through the poor brute's neck, and I began to understand what had happened. My rifle was in the waggon, and my first thought being to get hold of it, I turned and made a bolt for the box. I got my foot up on the wheel and flung my body forward on to the waggon, and there I stopped as if I were frozen, and no wonder, for as I was about to spring up I heard the lion behind me, and next second I felt the brute, ay, as plainly as I can feel this table. I felt him, I say, sniffing at my left leg that was hanging down.

"My word! I did feel queer; I don't think that I ever felt so queer before. I dared not move for the life of me, and the odd thing was that I seemed to lose power over my leg, which developed an insane sort of inclination to kick out of its own mere motion—just as hysterical people want to laugh when they ought to be particularly solemn. Well, the lion sniffed and sniffed, beginning at my ankle and slowly nosing away up to my thigh. I thought that he was going to get hold then, but he did not. He only growled softly, and went back to the ox. Shifting my head a little I got a full view of him. He was about the biggest lion I ever saw, and I have seen a great

many, and he had a most tremendous black mane. What his teeth were like you can see—look there, pretty big ones, ain't they? Altogether he was a magnificent animal, and as I lay sprawling on the fore-tongue of the waggon, it occurred to me that he would look uncommonly well in a cage. He stood there by the carcass of poor Kaptein, and deliberately disembowelled him as neatly as a butcher could have done. All this while I dared not move, for he kept lifting his head and keeping an eye on me as he licked his bloody chops. When he had cleaned Kaptein out he opened his mouth and roared, and I am not exaggerating when I say that the sound shook the waggon. Instantly there came back an answering roar.

"Heavens!" I thought, 'there is his mate.'

"Hardly was the thought out of my head when I caught sight in the moonlight of the lioness bounding along through the long grass, and after her a couple of cubs about the size of mastiffs. She stopped within a few feet of my head, and stood, waved her tail, and fixed me with her glowing yellow eyes; but just as I thought that it was all over she turned and began to feed on Kaptein, and so did the cubs. There were the four of them within eight feet of me, growling and quarrelling, rending and tearing, and crunching poor Kaptein's bones; and there I lay shaking with terror, and the cold perspiration pouring out of me, feeling like another Daniel come to judgment in a new sense of the phrase. Presently the cubs had eaten their fill, and began to get restless. One went round to the back of the waggon and pulled at the Impala buck that hung there, and the other came round my way and commenced the sniffing game at my leg. Indeed, he did more than that, for, my trouser being hitched up a little, he began to lick the bare skin with his rough tongue. The more he licked the more he liked it, to judge from his increased vigour and the loud purring noise he made. Then I knew that the end had come, for in another second his file-like tongue would have rasped through the skin of my leg—which was luckily pretty tough—and have drawn the blood, and then there would be no chance for me. So I just lay there and thought of my sins, and prayed to the Almighty, and reflected that after all life was a very enjoyable thing.

"Then of a sudden I heard a crashing of bushes and the shouting and whistling of men, and there were the two boys coming back with the cattle, which they had found trekking along all together. The lions lifted their heads and listened, then bounded off without a sound—and I fainted.

"The lions came back no more that night, and by the next morning my nerves had got pretty straight again; but I was full of wrath when I thought of all that I had gone through at the hands, or rather noses, of those four brutes, and of the fate of my after-ox Kaptein. He was a splendid ox, and I was very fond of him. So wroth was I that like a fool I determined to attack the whole family of them. It was worthy of a greenhorn out on his first hunting trip; but I did it nevertheless. Accordingly after breakfast, having rubbed some oil upon my leg, which was very sore from the cub's tongue, I took the driver, Tom, who did not half like the business, and having armed myself with an ordinary double No. 12 smoothbore, the first breechloader I ever had, I started. I took the smoothbore because it shot a bullet very well; and my experience has been that a round ball from a smoothbore is quite as effective against a lion as an express bullet. The lion is soft, and not a difficult animal to finish if you hit him anywhere in the body. A buck takes far more killing.

"Well, I started, and the first thing I set to work to do was to try to discover whereabouts the brutes lay up for the day. About three hundred yards from the waggon was the crest of a rise covered with single mimosa trees, dotted about in a park-like fashion, and beyond this lay a stretch of open plain running down to a dry pan, or water-hole, which covered about an acre of ground, and was densely clothed with reeds, now in the sere and yellow leaf. From the further edge of this pan the ground sloped up again to a great cleft, or nullah, which had been cut out by the action of the water, and was pretty thickly sprinkled with bush, amongst which grew some large trees, I forget of what sort.

"It at once struck me that the dry pan would be a likely place to find my friends in, as there is nothing a lion is fonder of than lying up in reeds, through which he can see things without being seen himself. Accordingly thither I went and prospected. Before I had got half-way round the pan I found the remains of a blue vilderbeeste that had evidently been killed within the last three or four days and partially devoured by lions; and from other indications about I was soon assured that if the family were not in the pan that day they spent a good deal of their spare time there. But if there, the question was how to get them out; for it was clearly impossible to think of going in after them unless one was quite determined to commit suicide. Now there was a strong wind blowing from the direction of the waggon, across the reedy pan towards the bush-clad kloof or donga, and this first gave me the idea of firing the reeds, which, as I think I told you, were pretty dry. Accordingly Tom took some matches and began starting little fires to the left, and I did the same to the right. But the reeds were still green at the bottom, and we should never have got them well alight had it not been for the wind, which grew stronger and stronger as the sun climbed higher, and forced the fire into them. At last, after half-an-hour's trouble, the flames got a hold, and began to spread out like a fan, whereupon I went round to the further side of the pan to wait for the lions, standing well out in the open, as we stood at the copse to-day where you shot the woodcock. It was a rather risky thing to do, but I used to be so sure of my shooting in those days that I did not so much mind the risk. Scarcely had I got round when I heard the reeds parting before the onward rush of some animal. 'Now for it,' said I. On it came. I could see that it was yellow, and prepared for action, when instead of a lion out bounded a beautiful reit bok which had been lying in the shelter of the pan. It must, by the way, have been a reit bok of a peculiarly confiding nature to lay itself down with the lion, like the lamb of prophecy, but I suppose the reeds were thick, and that it kept a long way off.

"Well, I let the reit bok go, and it went like the wind, and kept my eyes fixed upon the reeds. The fire was burning like a furnace now; the flames crackling and roaring as they bit into the reeds, sending spouts of fire twenty feet and more into the air, and making the hot air dance above in a way that was perfectly dazzling. But the reeds were still half green, and created an enormous quantity of smoke, which came rolling towards me like a curtain, lying very low on account of the wind. Presently, above the crackling of the fire, I heard a startled roar, then another and another. So the lions were at home.

"I was beginning to get excited now, for, as you fellows know, there is nothing in experience to warm up your nerves like a lion at close quarters, unless it is a wounded buffalo; and I became still more so when I made out through the smoke that the lions were all moving about on the extreme edge of the reeds. Occasionally they would pop their heads out like rabbits from a burrow, and then, catching sight of me standing about fifty yards away, draw them back again. I knew that it must be getting pretty warm behind them, and that they could not keep the game up for long; and I was not mistaken, for suddenly all four of them broke cover together, the old

black-maned lion leading by a few yards. I never saw a more splendid sight in all my hunting experience than those four lions bounding across the veldt, overshadowed by the dense pall of smoke and backed by the fiery furnace of the burning reeds.

"I reckoned that they would pass, on their way to the bushy kloof, within about five and twenty yards of me, so, taking a long breath, I got my gun well on to the lion's shoulder—the black-maned one—so as to allow for an inch or two of motion, and catch him through the heart. I was on, dead on, and my finger was just beginning to tighten on the trigger, when suddenly I went blind—a bit of reed-ash had drifted into my right eye. I danced and rubbed, and succeeded in clearing it more or less just in time to see the tail of the last lion vanishing round the bushes up the kloof.

"If ever a man was mad I was that man. It was too bad; and such a shot in the open! However, I was not going to be beaten, so I just turned and marched for the kloof. Tom, the driver, begged and implored me not to go, but though as a general rule I never pretend to be very brave (which I am not), I was determined that I would either kill those lions or they should kill me. So I told Tom that he need not come unless he liked, but I was going; and being a plucky fellow, a Swazi by birth, he shrugged his shoulders, muttered that I was mad or bewitched, and followed doggedly in my tracks.

"We soon reached the kloof, which was about three hundred yards in length and but sparsely wooded, and then the real fun began. There might be a lion behind every bush—there certainly were four lions somewhere; the delicate question was, where. I peeped and poked and looked in every possible direction, with my heart in my mouth, and was at last rewarded by catching a glimpse of something yellow moving behind a bush. At the same moment, from another bush opposite me out burst one of the cubs and galloped back towards the burnt pan. I whipped round and let drive a snap shot that tipped him head over heels, breaking his back within two inches of the root of the tail, and there he lay helpless but glaring. Tom afterwards killed him with his assegai. I opened the breech of the gun and hurriedly pulled out the old case, which, to judge from what ensued, must, I suppose, have burst and left a portion of its fabric sticking to the barrel. At any rate, when I tried to, get in the new cartridge it would only enter half-way; and—would you believe it?—this was the moment that the lioness, attracted no doubt by the outcry of her cub, chose to put in an appearance. There she stood, twenty paces or so from me, lashing her tail and looking just as wicked as it is possible to conceive. Slowly I stepped backwards, trying to push in the new case, and as I did so she moved on in little runs, dropping down after each run. The danger was imminent, and the case would not go in. At the moment I oddly enough thought of the cartridge maker, whose name I will not mention, and earnestly hoped that if the lion got *me* some condign punishment would overtake *him*. It would not go in, so I tried to pull it out. It would not come out either, and my gun was useless if I could not shut it to use the other barrel. I might as well have had no gun.

"Meanwhile I was walking backward, keeping my eye on the lioness, who was creeping forward on her belly without a sound, but lashing her tail and keeping her eye on me; and in it I saw that she was coming in a few seconds more. I dashed my wrist and the palm of my hand against the brass rim of the cartridge till the blood poured from them—look, there are the scars of it to this day!"

Here Quatermain held up his right hand to the light and showed us four or five white cicatrices just where the wrist is set into the hand.

"But it was not of the slightest use," he went on, "the cartridge would not move. I only hope that no other man will ever be put in such an awful position. The lioness gathered herself together, and I gave myself up for lost, when suddenly Tom shouted out from somewhere in my rear—

"'You are walking on to the wounded cub; turn to the right.'

"I had the sense, dazed as I was, to take the hint, and slewing round at right-angles, but still keeping my eyes on the lioness, I continued my backward walk.

"To my intense relief, with a low growl she straightened herself, turned, and bounded further up the kloof.

"'Come on, Macumazahn,' said Tom, 'let's get back to the waggon.'

"'All right, Tom,' I answered. 'I will when I have killed those three other lions,' for by this time I was bent on shooting them as I never remember being bent on anything before or since. 'You can go if you like, or you can get up a tree.'

"He considered the position a little, and then he very wisely got up a tree. I wish that I had done the same.

"Meanwhile I had found my knife, which had an extractor in it, and succeeded after some difficulty in pulling out the cartridge which had so nearly been the cause of my death, and removing the obstruction in the barrel. It was very little thicker than a postage-stamp; certainly not thicker than a piece of writing-paper. This done, I loaded the gun, bound a handkerchief round my wrist and hand to staunch the flowing of the blood, and started on again.

"I had noticed that the lioness went into a thick green bush, or rather cluster of bushes, growing near the water, about fifty yards higher up, for there was a little stream running down the kloof, and I walked towards this bush. When I got there, however, I could see nothing, so I took up a big stone and threw it into the bushes. I believe that it hit the other cub, for out it came with a rush, giving me a broadside shot, of which I promptly availed myself, knocking it over dead. Out, too, came the lioness like a flash of light, but quick as she went I managed to put the other bullet into her ribs, so that she rolled right over three times like a shot rabbit. I instantly got two more cartridges into the gun, and as I did so the lioness rose again and came crawling towards me on her fore-paws, roaring and groaning, and with such an expression of diabolical fury on her countenance as I have not often seen. I shot her again through the chest, and she fell over on to her side quite dead.

"That was the first and last time that I ever killed a brace of lions right and left, and, what is more, I never heard of anybody else doing it. Naturally I was considerably pleased with myself, and having again loaded up, I went on to look for the black-maned beauty

who had killed Kaptein. Slowly, and with the greatest care, I proceeded up the kloof, searching every bush and tuft of grass as I went. It was wonderfully exciting, work, for I never was sure from one moment to another but that he would be on me. I took comfort, however, from the reflection that a lion rarely attacks a man—rarely, I say; sometimes he does, as you will see—unless he is cornered or wounded. I must have been nearly an hour hunting after that lion. Once I thought I saw something move in a clump of tambouki grass, but I could not be sure, and when I trod out the grass I could not find him.

"At last I worked up to the head of the kloof, which made a cul-de-sac. It was formed of a wall of rock about fifty feet high. Down this rock trickled a little waterfall, and in front of it, some seventy feet from its face, rose a great piled-up mass of boulders, in the crevices and on the top of which grew ferns, grasses, and stunted bushes. This mass was about twenty-five feet high. The sides of the kloof here were also very steep. Well, I came to the top of the nullah and looked all round. No signs of the lion. Evidently I had either overlooked him further down or he had escaped right away. It was very vexatious; but still three lions were not a bad bag for one gun before dinner, and I was fain to be content. Accordingly I departed back again, making my way round the isolated pillar of boulders, beginning to feel, as I did so, that I was pretty well done up with excitement and fatigue, and should be more so before I had skinned those three lions. When I had got, as nearly as I could judge, about eighteen yards past the pillar or mass of boulders, I turned to have another look round. I have a pretty sharp eye, but I could see nothing at all.

"Then, on a sudden, I saw something sufficiently alarming. On the top of the mass of boulders, opposite to me, standing out clear against the rock beyond, was the huge black-maned lion. He had been crouching there, and now arose as though by magic. There he stood lashing his tail, just like a living reproduction of the animal on the gateway of Northumberland House that I have seen in a picture. But he did not stand long. Before I could fire—before I could do more than get the gun to my shoulder—he sprang straight up and out from the rock, and driven by the impetus of that one mighty bound came hurtling through the air towards me.

"Heavens! how grand he looked, and how awful! High into the air he flew, describing a great arch. Just as he touched the highest point of his spring I fired. I did not dare to wait, for I saw that he would clear the whole space and land right upon me. Without a sight, almost without aim, I fired, as one would fire a snap shot at a snipe. The bullet told, for I distinctly heard its thud above the rushing sound caused by the passage of the lion through the air. Next second I was swept to the ground (luckily I fell into a low, creeper-clad bush, which broke the shock), and the lion was on the top of me, and the next those great white teeth of his had met in my thigh—I heard them grate against the bone. I yelled out in agony, for I did not feel in the least benumbed and happy, like Dr. Livingstone—whom, by the way, I knew very well—and gave myself up for dead. But suddenly, at that moment, the lion's grip on my thigh loosened, and he stood over me, swaying to and fro, his huge mouth, from which the blood was gushing, wide opened. Then he roared, and the sound shook the rocks.

"To and fro he swung, and then the great head dropped on me, knocking all the breath from my body, and he was dead. My bullet had entered in the centre of his chest and passed out on the right side of the spine about half way down the back.

"The pain of my wound kept me from fainting, and as soon as I got my breath I managed to drag myself from under him. Thank heavens, his great teeth had not crushed my thigh-bone; but I was losing a great deal of blood, and had it not been for the timely arrival of Tom, with whose aid I loosed the handkerchief from my wrist and tied it round my leg, twisting it tight with a stick, I think that I should have bled to death.

"Well, it was a just reward for my folly in trying to tackle a family of lions single-handed. The odds were too long. I have been lame ever since, and shall be to my dying day; in the month of March the wound always troubles me a great deal, and every three years it breaks out raw.

"I need scarcely add that I never traded the lot of ivory at Sikukuni's. Another man got it—a German—and made five hundred pounds out of it after paying expenses. I spent the next month on the broad of my back, and was a cripple for six months after that. And now I've told you the yarn, so I will have a drop of Hollands and go to bed. Good-night to you all, good-night!"

# BOOK XIII

## THE HOLY FLOWER

### I

#### BROTHER JOHN

I do not suppose that anyone who knows the name of Allan Quatermain would be likely to associate it with flowers, and especially with orchids. Yet as it happens it was once my lot to take part in an orchid hunt of so remarkable a character that I think its details should not be lost. At least I will set them down, and if in the after days anyone cares to publish them, well—he is at liberty to do so.

It was in the year—oh! never mind the year, it was a long while ago when I was much younger, that I went on a hunting expedition to the north of the Limpopo River which borders the Transvaal. My companion was a gentleman of the name of Scroope, Charles Scroope. He had come out to Durban from England in search of sport. At least, that was one of his reasons. The other was a lady whom I will call Miss Margaret Manners, though that was not her name.

It seems that these two were engaged to be married, and really attached to each other. Unfortunately, however, they quarrelled violently about another gentleman with whom Miss Manners danced four consecutive dances, including two that were promised to her *fiancé* at a Hunt ball in Essex, where they all lived. Explanations, or rather argument, followed. Mr. Scroope said that he would not tolerate such conduct. Miss Manners replied that she would not be dictated to; she was her own mistress and meant to remain so. Mr. Scroope exclaimed that she might so far as he was concerned. She answered that she never wished to see his face again. He declared with emphasis that she never should and that he was going to Africa to shoot elephants.

What is more, he went, starting from his Essex home the next day without leaving any address. As it transpired afterwards, long afterwards, had he waited till the post came in he would have received a letter that might have changed his plans. But they were high-spirited young people, both of them, and played the fool after the fashion of those in love.

Well, Charles Scroope turned up in Durban, which was but a poor place then, and there we met in the bar of the Royal Hotel.

"If you want to kill big game," I heard some one say, who it was I really forget, "there's the man to show you how to do it—Hunter Quatermain; the best shot in Africa and one of the finest fellows, too."

I sat still, smoking my pipe and pretending to hear nothing. It is awkward to listen to oneself being praised, and I was always a shy man.

Then after a whispered colloquy Mr. Scroope was brought forward and introduced to me. I bowed as nicely as I could and ran my eye over him. He was a tall young man with dark eyes and a rather romantic aspect (that was due to his love affair), but I came to the conclusion that I liked the cut of his jib. When he spoke, that conclusion was affirmed. I always think there is a great deal in a voice; personally, I judge by it almost as much as by the face. This voice was particularly pleasant and sympathetic, though there was nothing very original or striking in the words by which it was, so to speak, introduced to me. These were:

"How do you do, sir. Will you have a split?"

I answered that I never drank spirits in the daytime, or at least not often, but that I should be pleased to take a small bottle of beer.

When the beer was consumed we walked up together to my little house on what is now called the Berea, the same in which, amongst others, I received my friends, Curtis and Good, in after days, and there we dined. Indeed, Charlie Scroope never left that house until we started on our shooting expedition.

Now I must cut all this story short, since it is only incidentally that it has to do with the tale I am going to tell. Mr. Scroope was a rich man and as he offered to pay all the expenses of the expedition while I was to take all the profit in the shape of ivory or anything else that might accrue, of course I did not decline his proposal.

Everything went well with us on that trip until its unfortunate end. We only killed two elephants, but of other game we found plenty. It was when we were near Delagoa Bay on our return that the accident happened.

We were out one evening trying to shoot something for our dinner, when between the trees I caught sight of a small buck. It vanished round a little promontory of rock which projected from the side of the kloof, walking quietly, not running in alarm. We followed after it. I was the first, and had just wriggled round these rocks and perceived the buck standing about ten paces away (it was a bush-bok), when I heard a rustle among the bushes on the top of the rock not a dozen feet above my head, and Charlie Scroope's voice calling:

"Look out, Quatermain! He's coming."

"Who's coming?" I answered in an irritated tone, for the noise had made the buck run away.

Then it occurred to me, all in an instant of course, that a man would not begin to shout like that for nothing; at any rate when his supper was concerned. So I glanced up above and behind me. To this moment I can remember exactly what I saw. There was the granite water-worn boulder, or rather several boulders, with ferns growing in their cracks of the maiden-hair tribe, most of them, but some had a silver sheen on the under side of their leaves. On one of these leaves, bending it down, sat a large beetle with red wings and a black body engaged in rubbing its antennæ with its front paws. And above, just appearing over the top of the rock, was the head of an extremely fine leopard. As I write, I seem to perceive its square jowl outlined against the arc of the quiet evening sky with the saliva dropping from its lips.

This was the last thing which I did perceive for a little while, since at that moment the leopard—we call them tigers in South Africa—dropped upon my back and knocked me flat as a pancake. I presume that it also had been stalking the buck and was angry at my appearance on the scene. Down I went, luckily for me, into a patch of mossy soil.

"All up!" I said to myself, for I felt the brute's weight upon my back pressing me down among the moss, and what was worse, its hot breath upon my neck as it dropped its jaws to bite me in the head. Then I heard the report of Scroope's rifle, followed by furious snarling from the leopard, which evidently had been hit. Also it seemed to think that I had caused its injuries, for it seized me by the shoulder. I felt its teeth slip along my skin, but happily they only fastened in the shooting coat of tough corduroy that I was wearing. It began to shake me, then let go to get a better grip. Now, remembering that Scroope only carried a light, single-barrelled rifle, and

therefore could not fire again, I knew, or thought I knew, that my time had come. I was not exactly afraid, but the sense of some great, impending change became very vivid. I remembered—not my whole life, but one or two odd little things connected with my infancy. For instance, I seemed to see myself seated on my mother's knee, playing with a little jointed gold-fish which she wore upon her watch-chain.

After this I muttered a word or two of supplication, and, I think, lost consciousness. If so, it can only have been for a few seconds. Then my mind returned to me and I saw a strange sight. The leopard and Scroope were fighting each other. The leopard, standing on one hind leg, for the other was broken, seemed to be boxing Scroope, whilst Scroope was driving his big hunting knife into the brute's carcase. They went down, Scroope undermost, the leopard tearing at him. I gave a wriggle and came out of that mossy bed—I recall the sucking sound my body made as it left the ooze.

Close by was my rifle, uninjured and at full cock as it had fallen from my hand. I seized it, and in another second had shot the leopard through the head just as it was about to seize Scroope's throat.

It fell stone dead on the top of him. One quiver, one contraction of the claws (in poor Scroope's leg) and all was over. There it lay as though it were asleep, and underneath was Scroope.

The difficulty was to get it off him, for the beast was very heavy, but I managed this at last with the help of a thorn bough I found which some elephant had torn from a tree. This I used as a lever. There beneath lay Scroope, literally covered with blood, though whether his own or the leopard's I could not tell. At first I thought that he was dead, but after I had poured some water over him from the little stream that trickled down the rock, he sat up and asked inconsequently:

"What am I now?"

"A hero," I answered. (I have always been proud of that repartee.)

Then, discouraging further conversation, I set to work to get him back to the camp, which fortunately was close at hand.

When we had proceeded a couple of hundred yards, he still making insequent remarks, his right arm round my neck and my left arm round his middle, suddenly he collapsed in a dead faint, and as his weight was more than I could carry, I had to leave him and fetch help.

In the end I got him to the tents by aid of the Kaffirs and a blanket, and there made an examination. He was scratched all over, but the only serious wounds were a bite through the muscles of the left upper arm and three deep cuts in the right thigh just where it joins the body, caused by a stroke of the leopard's claws. I gave him a dose of laudanum to send him to sleep and dressed these hurts as best I could. For three days he went on quite well. Indeed, the wounds had begun to heal healthily when suddenly some kind of fever took him, caused, I suppose, by the poison of the leopard's fangs or claws.

Oh! what a terrible week was that which followed! He became delirious, raving continually of all sorts of things, and especially of Miss Margaret Mannors. I kept up his strength as well as was possible with soup made from the flesh of game, mixed with a little brandy which I had. But he grew weaker and weaker. Also the wounds in the thigh began to suppurate.

The Kaffirs whom we had with us were of little use in such a case, so that all the nursing fell on me. Luckily, beyond a shaking, the leopard had done me no hurt, and I was very strong in those days. Still the lack of rest told on me, since I dared not sleep for more than half an hour or so at a time. At length came a morning when I was quite worn out. There lay poor Scroope turning and muttering in the little tent, and there I sat by his side, wondering whether he would live to see another dawn, or if he did, for how long I should be able to tend him. I called to a Kaffir to bring me my coffee, and just as I was lifting the pannikin to my lips with a shaking hand, help came.

It arrived in a very strange shape. In front of our camp were two thorn trees, and from between these trees, the rays from the rising sun falling full on him, I saw a curious figure walking towards me in a slow, purposeful fashion. It was that of a man of uncertain age, for though the beard and long hair were white, the face was comparatively youthful, save for the wrinkles round the mouth, and the dark eyes were full of life and vigour. Tattered garments, surmounted by a torn kaross or skin rug, hung awkwardly upon his tall, thin frame. On his feet were veld-schoen of untanned hide, on his back a battered tin case was strapped, and in his bony, nervous hand he clasped a long staff made of the black and white wood the natives call *unzimbiti*, on the top of which was fixed a butterfly net. Behind him were some Kaffirs who carried cases on their heads.

I knew him at once, since we had met before, especially on a certain occasion in Zululand, when he calmly appeared out of the ranks of a hostile native *impi*. He was one of the strangest characters in all South Africa. Evidently a gentleman in the true sense of the word, none knew his history (although I know it now, and a strange story it is), except that he was an American by birth, for in this matter at times his speech betrayed him. Also he was a doctor by profession, and to judge from his extraordinary skill, one who must have seen much practice both in medicine and in surgery. For the rest he had means, though where they came from was a mystery, and for many years past had wandered about South and Eastern Africa, collecting butterflies and flowers.

By the natives, and I might add by white people also, he was universally supposed to be mad. This reputation, coupled with his medical skill, enabled him to travel wherever he would without the slightest fear of molestation, since the Kaffirs look upon the mad as inspired by God. Their name for him was "Dogeetah," a ludicrous corruption of the English word "doctor," whereas white folk called him indifferently "Brother John," "Uncle Jonathan," or "Saint John." The second appellation he got from his extraordinary likeness (when cleaned up and nicely dressed) to the figure by which the great American nation is typified in comic papers, as England is typified by John Bull. The first and third arose in the well-known goodness of his character and a taste he was supposed to possess for living on locusts and wild honey, or their local equivalents. Personally, however, he preferred to be addressed as "Brother John."

Oh! who can tell the relief with which I saw him; an angel from heaven could scarcely have been more welcome. As he came I poured out a second jorum of coffee, and remembering that he liked it sweet, put in plenty of sugar.

"How do you do, Brother John?" I said, proffering him the coffee.

"Greeting, Brother Allan," he answered—in those days he affected a kind of old Roman way of speaking, as I imagine it. Then he took the coffee, put his long finger into it to test the temperature and stir up the sugar, drank it off as though it were a dose of medicine, and handed back the tin to be refilled.

"Bug-hunting?" I queried.

He nodded. "That and flowers and observing human nature and the wonderful works of God. Wandering around generally."

"Where from last?" I asked.

"Those hills nearly twenty miles away. Left them at eight in the evening; walked all night."

"Why?" I said, looking at him.

"Because it seemed as though someone were calling me. To be plain, you, Allan."

"Oh! you heard about my being here and the trouble?"

"No, heard nothing. Meant to strike out for the coast this morning. Just as I was turning in, at 8.5 exactly, got your message and started. That's all."

"My message——" I began, then stopped, and asking to see his watch, compared it with mine. Oddly enough, they showed the same time to within two minutes.

"It is a strange thing," I said slowly, "but at 8.5 last night I did try to send a message for some help because I thought my mate was dying," and I jerked my thumb towards the tent. "Only it wasn't to you or any other man, Brother John. Understand?"

"Quite. Message was expressed on, that's all. Expressed and I guess registered as well."

I looked at Brother John and Brother John looked at me, but at the time we made no further remark. The thing was too curious, that is, unless he lied. But nobody had ever known him to lie. He was a truthful person, painfully truthful at times. And yet there are people who do not believe in prayer.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Mauled by leopard. Wounds won't heal, and fever. I don't think he can last long."

"What do you know about it? Let me see him."

Well, he saw him and did wonderful things. That tin box of his was full of medicines and surgical instruments, which latter he boiled before he used them. Also he washed his hands till I thought the skin would come off them, using up more soap than I could spare. First he gave poor Charlie a dose of something that seemed to kill him; he said he had that drug from the Kaffirs. Then he opened up those wounds upon his thigh and cleaned them out and bandaged them with boiled herbs. Afterwards, when Scroope came to again, he gave him a drink that threw him into a sweat and took away the fever. The end of it was that in two days' time his patient sat up and asked for a square meal, and in a week we were able to begin to carry him to the coast.

"Guess that message of yours saved Brother Scroope's life," said old John, as he watched him start.

I made no answer. Here I may state, however, that through my own men I inquired a little as to Brother John's movements at the time of what he called the message. It seemed that he *had* arranged to march towards the coast on the next morning, but that about two hours after sunset suddenly he ordered them to pack up everything and follow him. This they did and to their intense disgust those Kaffirs were forced to trudge all night at the heels of Dogeetah, as they called him. Indeed, so weary did they become, that had they not been afraid of being left alone in an unknown country in the darkness, they said they would have thrown down their loads and refused to go any further.

That is as far as I was able to take the matter, which may be explained by telepathy, inspiration, instinct, or coincidence. It is one as to which the reader must form his own opinion.

During our week together in camp and our subsequent journey to Delagoa Bay and thence by ship to Durban, Brother John and I grew very intimate, with limitations. Of his past, as I have said, he never talked, or of the real object of his wanderings which I learned afterwards, but of his natural history and ethnological (I believe that is the word) studies he spoke a good deal. As, in my humble way, I also am an observer of such matters and know something about African natives and their habits from practical experience, these subjects interested me.

Amongst other things, he showed me many of the specimens that he had collected during his recent journey; insects and beautiful butterflies neatly pinned into boxes, also a quantity of dried flowers pressed between sheets of blotting paper, amongst them some which he told me were orchids. Observing that these attracted me, he asked me if I would like to see the most wonderful orchid in the whole world. Of course I said yes, whereon he produced out of one of his cases a flat package about two feet six square. He undid the grass mats in which it was wrapped, striped, delicately woven mats such as they make in the neighbourhood of Zanzibar. Within these was the lid of a packing-case. Then came more mats and some copies of *The Cape Journal* spread out flat. Then sheets of blotting paper, and last of all between two pieces of cardboard, a flower and one leaf of the plant on which it grew.

Even in its dried state it was a wondrous thing, measuring twenty-four inches from the tip of one wing or petal to the tip of the other, by twenty inches from the top of the back sheath to the bottom of the pouch. The measurement of the back sheath itself I forget, but it must have been quite a foot across. In colour it was, or had been, bright golden, but the back sheath was white, barred with lines of black, and in the exact centre of the pouch was a single black spot shaped like the head of a great ape. There were the overhanging brows, the deep recessed eyes, the surly mouth, the massive jaws—everything.

Although at that time I had never seen a gorilla in the flesh, I had seen a coloured picture of the brute, and if that picture had been photographed on the flower the likeness could not have been more perfect.

"What is it?" I asked, amazed.

"Sir," said Brother John, sometimes he used this formal term when excited, "it is the most marvellous *Cypripedium* in the whole earth, and, sir, I have discovered it. A healthy root of that plant will be worth £20,000."

"That's better than gold mining," I said. "Well, have you got the root?"

Brother John shook his head sadly as he answered:

"No such luck."

"How's that as you have the flower?"

"I'll tell you, Allan. For a year past and more I have been collecting in the district back of Kilwa and found some wonderful things, yes, wonderful. At last, about three hundred miles inland, I came to a tribe, or rather, a people, that no white man had ever visited. They are called the Mazitu, a numerous and warlike people of bastard Zulu blood."

"I have heard of them," I interrupted. "They broke north before the days of Senzangakona, two hundred years or more ago."

"Well, I could make myself understood among them because they still talk a corrupt Zulu, as do all the tribes in those parts. At first they wanted to kill me, but let me go because they thought that I was mad. Everyone thinks that I am mad, Allan; it is a kind of public delusion, whereas I think that I am sane and that most other people are mad."

"A private delusion," I suggested hurriedly, as I did not wish to discuss Brother John's sanity. "Well, go on about the Mazitu."

"Later they discovered that I had skill in medicine, and their king, Bausi, came to me to be treated for a great external tumour. I risked an operation and cured him. It was anxious work, for if he had died I should have died too, though that would not have troubled me very much," and he sighed. "Of course, from that moment I was supposed to be a great magician. Also Bausi made a blood brotherhood with me, transfusing some of his blood into my veins and some of mine into his. I only hope he has not inoculated me with his tumours, which are congenital. So I became Bausi and Bausi became me. In other words, I was as much chief of the Mazitu as he was, and shall remain so all my life."

"That might be useful," I said, reflectively, "but go on."

"I learned that on the western boundary of the Mazitu territory were great swamps; that beyond these swamps was a lake called Kirua, and beyond that a large and fertile land supposed to be an island, with a mountain in its centre. This land is known as Pongo, and so are the people who live there."

"That is a native name for the gorilla, isn't it?" I asked. "At least so a fellow who had been on the West Coast told me."

"Indeed, then that's strange, as you will see. Now these Pongo are supposed to be great magicians, and the god they worship is said to be a gorilla, which, if you are right, accounts for their name. Or rather," he went on, "they have two gods. The other is that flower you see there. Whether the flower with the monkey's head on it was the first god and suggested the worship of the beast itself, or *vice versa*, I don't know. Indeed I know very little, just what I was told by the Mazitu and a man who called himself a Pongo chief, no more."

"What did they say?"

"The Mazitu said that the Pongo people are devils who came by the secret channels through the reeds in canoes and stole their children and women, whom they sacrificed to their gods. Sometimes, too, they made raids upon them at night, 'howling like hyenas.' The men they killed and the women and children they took away. The Mazitu want to attack them but cannot do so, because they are not water people and have no canoes, and therefore are unable to reach the island, if it is an island. Also they told me about the wonderful flower which grows in the place where the ape-god lives, and is worshipped like the god. They had the story of it from some of their people who had been enslaved and escaped."

"Did you try to get to the island?" I asked.

"Yes, Allan. That is, I went to the edge of the reeds which lie at the end of a long slope of plain, where the lake begins. Here I stopped for some time catching butterflies and collecting plants. One night when I was camped there by myself, for none of my men would remain so near the Pongo country after sunset, I woke up with a sense that I was no longer alone. I crept out of my tent and by the light of the moon, which was setting, for dawn drew near, I saw a man who leant upon the handle of a very wide-bladed spear which was taller than himself, a big man over six feet two high, I should say, and broad in proportion. He wore a long, white cloak reaching from his shoulders almost to the ground. On his head was a tight-fitting cap with lappets, also white. In his ears were rings of copper or gold, and on his wrists bracelets of the same metal. His skin was intensely black, but the features were not at all negroid. They were prominent and finely-cut, the nose being sharp and the lips quite thin; indeed of an Arab type. His left hand was bandaged, and on his face was an expression of great anxiety. Lastly, he appeared to be about fifty years of age. So still did he stand that I began to wonder whether he were one of those ghosts which the Mazitu swore the Pongo wizards send out to haunt their country."

"For a long while we stared at each other, for I was determined that I would not speak first or show any concern. At last he spoke in a low, deep voice and in Mazitu, or a language so similar that I found it easy to understand."

"Is not your name Dogeetah, O White Lord, and are you not a master of medicine?"

"Yes," I answered, 'but who are you who dare to wake me from my sleep?'

"Lord, I am the Kalubi, the Chief of the Pongo, a great man in my own land yonder."

"Then why do you come here alone at night, Kalubi, Chief of the Pongo?"

"Why do *you* come here alone, White Lord?" he answered evasively.

"What do you want, anyway?" I asked.

"O! Dogeetah, I have been hurt, I want you to cure me," and he looked at his bandaged hand.

"Lay down that spear and open your robe that I may see you have no knife."

"He obeyed, throwing the spear to some distance."

"Now unwrap the hand."

"He did so. I lit a match, the sight of which seemed to frighten him greatly, although he asked no questions about it, and by its light examined the hand. The first joint of the second finger was gone. From the appearance of the stump which had been cauterized and was tied tightly with a piece of flexible grass, I judged that it had been bitten off."

"What did this?" I asked.

"Monkey," he answered, 'poisonous monkey. Cut off the finger, O Dogeetah, or tomorrow I die.'

"Why do you not tell your own doctors to cut off the finger, you who are Kalubi, Chief of the Pongo?"

"No, no," he replied, shaking his head. "They cannot do it. It is not lawful. And I, I cannot do it, for if the flesh is black the hand must come off too, and if the flesh is black at the wrist, then the arm must be cut off."

"I sat down on my camp stool and reflected. Really I was waiting for the sun to rise, since it was useless to attempt an operation in that light. The man, Kalubi, thought that I had refused his petition and became terribly agitated."

"Be merciful, White Lord," he prayed, 'do not let me die. I am afraid to die. Life is bad, but death is worse. O! If you refuse me, I will kill myself here before you and then my ghost will haunt you till you die also of fear and come to join me. What fee do you ask? Gold or ivory or slaves? Say and I will give it.'

"Be silent," I said, for I saw that if he went on thus he would throw himself into a fever, which might cause the operation to prove fatal. For the same reason I did not question him about many things I should have liked to learn. I lit my fire and boiled the instruments—he thought I was making magic. By the time that everything was ready the sun was up."

"Now," I said, 'let me see how brave you are.'

“Well, Allan, I performed that operation, removing the finger at the base where it joins the hand, as I thought there might be something in his story of the poison. Indeed, as I found afterwards on dissection, and can show you, for I have the thing in spirits, there was, for the blackness of which he spoke—a kind of mortification, I presume—had crept almost to the joint, though the flesh beyond was healthy enough. Certainly that Kalubi was a plucky fellow. He sat like a rock and never even winced. Indeed, when he saw that the flesh was sound he uttered a great sigh of relief. After it was all over he turned a little faint, so I gave him some spirits of wine mixed with water which revived him.

“‘O Lord Dogeetah,’ he said, as I was bandaging his hand, ‘while I live I am your slave. Yet, do me one more service. In my land there is a terrible wild beast, that which bit off my finger. It is a devil; it kills us and we fear it. I have heard that you white men have magic weapons which slay with a noise. Come to my land and kill me that wild beast with your magic weapon. I say, Come, Come, for I am terribly afraid,’ and indeed he looked it.

“‘No,’ I answered, ‘I shed no blood; I kill nothing except butterflies, and of these only a few. But if you fear this brute why do you not poison it? You black people have many drugs.’

“‘No use, no use,’ he replied in a kind of wail. ‘The beast knows poisons, some it swallows and they do not harm it. Others it will not touch. Moreover, no black man can do it hurt. It is white, and it has been known from of old that if it dies at all, it must be by the hand of one who is white.’

“‘A very strange animal,’ I began, suspiciously, for I felt sure that he was lying to me. But just at that moment I heard the sound of my men’s voices. They were advancing towards me through the giant grass, singing as they came, but as yet a long way off. The Kalubi heard it also and sprang up.

“‘I must be gone,’ he said. ‘None must see me here. What fee, O Lord of medicine, what fee?’

“‘I take no payment for my medicine,’ I said. ‘Yet—stay. A wonderful flower grows in your country, does it not? A flower with wings and a cup beneath. I would have that flower.’

“‘Who told you of the Flower?’ he asked. ‘The Flower is holy. Still, O White Lord, still for you it shall be risked. Oh, return and bring with you one who can kill the beast and I will make you rich. Return and call to the reeds for the Kalubi, and the Kalubi will hear and come to you.’

“Then he ran to his spear, snatched it from the ground and vanished among the reeds. That was the last I saw, or am ever likely to see, of him.”

“But, Brother John, you got the flower somehow.”

“Yes, Allan. About a week later when I came out of my tent one morning, there it was standing in a narrow-mouthed, earthenware pot filled with water. Of course I meant that he was to send me the plant, roots and all, but I suppose he understood that I wanted a bloom. Or perhaps he dared not send the plant. Anyhow, it is better than nothing.”

“Why did you not go into the country and get it for yourself?”

“For several reasons, Allan, of which the best is that it was impossible. The Mazitu swear that if anyone sees that flower he is put to death. Indeed, when they found that I had a bloom of it, they forced me to move to the other side of the country seventy miles away. So I thought that I would wait till I met with some companions who would accompany me. Indeed, to be frank, Allan, it occurred to me that you were the sort of man who would like to interview this wonderful beast that bites off people’s fingers and frightens them to death,” and Brother John stroked his long, white beard and smiled, adding, “Odd that we should have met so soon afterwards, isn’t it?”

“Did you?” I replied, “now did you indeed? Brother John, people say all sorts of things about you, but I have come to the conclusion that there’s nothing the matter with your wits.”

Again he smiled and stroked his long, white beard.

## CHAPTER II

### THE AUCTION ROOM

I do not think that this conversation about the Pongo savages who were said to worship a Gorilla and a Golden Flower was renewed until we reached my house at Durban. Thither of course I took Mr. Charles Scroope, and thither also came Brother John who, as bedroom accommodation was lacking, pitched his tent in the garden.

One night we sat on the step smoking; Brother John's only concession to human weakness was that he smoked. He drank no wine or spirits; he never ate meat unless he was obliged, but I rejoice to say that he smoked cigars, like most Americans, when he could get them.

"John," said I, "I have been thinking over that yarn of yours and have come to one or two conclusions."

"What may they be, Allan?"

"The first is that you were a great donkey not to get more out of the Kalubi when you had the chance."

"Agreed, Allan, but, amongst other things, I am a doctor and the operation was uppermost in my mind."

"The second is that I believe this Kalubi had charge of the gorilla-god, as no doubt you've guessed; also that it was the gorilla which bit off his finger."

"Why so?"

"Because I have heard of great monkeys called *sokos* that live in Central East Africa which are said to bite off men's toes and fingers. I have heard too that they are very like gorillas."

"Now you mention it, so have I, Allan. Indeed, once I saw a *soko*, though some way off, a huge, brown ape which stood on its hind legs and drummed upon its chest with its fists. I didn't see it for long because I ran away."

"The third is that this yellow orchid would be worth a great deal of money if one could dig it up and take it to England."

"I think I told you, Allan, that I valued it at £20,000, so that conclusion of yours is not original."

"The fourth is that I should like to dig up that orchid and get a share of the £20,000."

Brother John became intensely interested.

"Ah!" he said, "now we are getting to the point. I have been wondering how long it would take you to see it, Allan, but if you are slow, you are sure."

"The fifth is," I went on, "that such an expedition to succeed would need a great deal of money, more than you or I could find. Partners would be wanted, active or sleeping, but partners with cash."

Brother John looked towards the window of the room in which Charlie Scroope was in bed, for being still weak he went to rest early.

"No," I said, "he's had enough of Africa, and you told me yourself that it will be two years before he is really strong again. Also there's a lady in this case. Now listen. I have taken it on myself to write to that lady, whose address I found out while he didn't know what he was saying. I have said that he was dying, but that I hoped he might live. Meanwhile, I added, I thought she would like to know that he did nothing but rave of her; also that he was a hero, with a big H twice underlined. My word! I did lay it on about the hero business with a spoon, a real hotel gravy spoon. If Charlie Scroope knows himself again when he sees my description of him, well, I'm a Dutchman, that's all. The letter caught the last mail and will, I hope, reach the lady in due course. Now listen again. Scroope wants me to go to England with him to look after him on the voyage—that's what he says. What he means is that he hopes I might put in a word for him with the lady, if I should chance to be introduced to her. He offers to pay all my expenses and to give me something for my loss of time. So, as I haven't seen England since I was three years old, I think I'll take the chance."

Brother John's face fell. "Then how about the expedition, Allan?" he asked.

"This is the first of November," I answered, "and the wet season in those parts begins about now and lasts till April. So it would be no use trying to visit your Pongo friends till then, which gives me plenty of time to go to England and come out again. If you'll trust that flower to me I'll take it with me. Perhaps I might be able to find someone who would be willing to put down money on the chance of getting the plant on which it grew. Meanwhile, you are welcome to this house if you care to stay here."

"Thank you, Allan, but I can't sit still for so many months. I'll go somewhere and come back." He paused and a dreamy look came into his dark eyes, then went on, "You see, Brother, it is laid on me to wander and wander through all this great land until—I know."

"Until you know what?" I asked, sharply.

He pulled himself together with a jerk, as it were, and answered with a kind of forced carelessness.

"Until I know every inch of it, of course. There are lots of tribes I have not yet visited."

"Including the Pongo," I said. "By the way, if I can get the money together for a trip up there, I suppose you mean to come too, don't you? If not, the thing's off so far as I am concerned. You see, I am reckoning on you to get us through the Mazitu and into Pongo-land by the help of your friends."

"Certainly I mean to come. In fact, if you don't go, I shall start alone. I intend to explore Pongo-land even if I never come out of it again."

Once more I looked at him as I answered:

"You are ready to risk a great deal for a flower, John. Or are you looking for more than a flower? If so, I hope you will tell me the truth."

This I said as I was aware that Brother John had a foolish objection to uttering, or even acting lies.

"Well, Allan, as you put it like that, the truth is that I heard something more about the Pongo than I told you up country. It was after I had operated on that Kalubi, or I would have tried to get in alone. But this I could not do then as I have said."

"And what did you hear?"

"I heard that they had a white goddess as well as a white god."

"Well, what of it? A female gorilla, I suppose."

"Nothing, except that goddesses have always interested me. Good night."

"You are an odd old fish," I remarked after him, "and what is more you have got something up your sleeve. Well, I'll have it down one day. Meanwhile, I wonder whether the whole thing is a lie, no; not a lie, an hallucination. It can't be—because of that orchid. No one can explain away the orchid. A queer people, these Pongo, with their white god and goddess and their Holy Flower. But after all Africa is a land of queer people, and of queer gods too."

And now the story shifts away to England. (Don't be afraid, my adventurous reader, if ever I have one, it is coming back to Africa again in a very few pages.)

Mr. Charles Scroope and I left Durban a day or two after my last conversation with Brother John. At Cape Town we caught the mail, a wretched little boat you would think it now, which after a long and wearisome journey at length landed us safe at Plymouth. Our companions on that voyage were very dull. I have forgotten most of them, but one lady I do remember. I imagine that she must have commenced life as a barmaid, for she had the orthodox tow hair and blowsy appearance. At any rate, she was the wife of a wine-merchant who had made a fortune at the Cape. Unhappily, however, she had contracted too great a liking for her husband's wares, and after dinner was apt to become talkative. For some reason or other she took a particular aversion to me. Oh! I can see her now, seated in that saloon with the oil lamp swinging over her head (she always chose the position under the oil lamp because it showed off her diamonds). And I can hear her too. "Don't bring any of your elephant-hunting manners here, Mr. Allan" (with an emphasis on the Allan) "Quatermain, they are not fit for polite society. You should go and brush your hair, Mr. Quatermain." (I may explain that my hair sticks up naturally.)

Then would come her little husband's horrified "Hush! hush! you are quite insulting, my dear."

Oh! why do I remember it all after so many years when I have even forgotten the people's names? One of those little things that stick in the mind, I suppose. The Island of Ascension, where we called, sticks also with its long swinging rollers breaking in white foam, its bare mountain peak capped with green, and the turtles in the ponds. Those poor turtles. We brought two of them home, and I used to look at them lying on their backs in the fore-castle flapping their fins feebly. One of them died, and I got the butcher to save me the shell. Afterwards I gave it as a wedding present to Mr. and Mrs. Scroope, nicely polished and lined. I meant it for a work-basket, and was overwhelmed with confusion when some silly lady said at the marriage, and in the hearing of the bride and bridegroom, that it was the most beautiful cradle she had ever seen. Of course, like a fool, I tried to explain, whereon everybody tittered.

But why do I write of such trifles that have nothing to do with my story?

I mentioned that I had ventured to send a letter to Miss Margaret Manners about Mr. Charles Scroope, in which I said incidentally that if the hero should happen to live I should probably bring him home by the next mail. Well, we got into Plymouth about eight o'clock in the morning, on a mild, November day, and shortly afterwards a tug arrived to take off the passengers and mails; also some cargo. I, being an early riser, watched it come and saw upon the deck a stout lady wrapped in furs, and by her side a very pretty, fair-haired young woman clad in a neat serge dress and a pork-pie hat. Presently a steward told me that someone wished to speak to me in the saloon. I went and found these two standing side by side.

"I believe you are Mr. Allan Quatermain," said the stout lady. "Where is Mr. Scroope whom I understand you have brought home? Tell me at once."

Something about her appearance and fierce manner of address alarmed me so much that I could only answer feebly:

"Below, madam, below."

"There, my dear," said the stout lady to her companion, "I warned you to be prepared for the worst. Bear up; do not make a scene before all these people. The ways of Providence are just and inscrutable. It is your own temper that was to blame. You should never have sent the poor man off to these heathen countries."

Then, turning to me, she added sharply: "I suppose he is embalmed; we should like to bury him in Essex."

"Embalmed!" I gasped. "Embalmed! Why, the man is in his bath, or was a few minutes ago."

In another second that pretty young lady who had been addressed was weeping with her head upon my shoulder.

"Margaret!" exclaimed her companion (she was a kind of heavy aunt), "I told you not to make a scene in public. Mr. Quatermain, as Mr. Scroope is alive, would you ask him to be so good as to come here."

Well, I fetched him, half-shaved, and the rest of the business may be imagined. It is a very fine thing to be a hero with a big H. Henceforth (thanks to me) that was Charlie Scroope's lot in life. He has grandchildren now, and they all think him a hero. What is more, he does not contradict them. I went down to the lady's place in Essex, a fine property with a beautiful old house. On the night I arrived there was a dinner-party of twenty-four people. I had to make a speech about Charlie Scroope and the leopard. I think it was a good speech. At any rate everybody cheered, including the servants, who had gathered at the back of the big hall.

I remember that to complete the story I introduced several other leopards, a mother and two three-part-grown cubs, also a wounded buffalo, and told how Mr. Scroope finished them off one after the other with a hunting knife. The thing was to watch his face as the history proceeded. Luckily he was sitting next to me and I could kick him under the table. It was all very amusing, and very happy also, for these two really loved each other. Thank God that I, or rather Brother John, was able to bring them together again.

It was during that stay of mine in Essex, by the way, that I first met Lord Ragnall and the beautiful Miss Holmes with whom I was destined to experience some very strange adventures in the after years.

After this interlude I got to work. Someone told me that there was a firm in the City that made a business of selling orchids by auction, flowers which at this time were beginning to be very fashionable among rich horticulturists. This, thought I, would be the place for me to show my treasure. Doubtless Messrs. May and Primrose—that was their world-famed style—would be able to put me

in touch with opulent orchidists who would not mind venturing a couple of thousands on the chance of receiving a share in a flower that, according to Brother John, should be worth untold gold. At any rate, I would try.

So on a certain Friday, about half-past twelve, I sought out the place of business of Messrs. May and Primrose, bearing with me the golden *Cypripedium*, which was now enclosed in a flat tin case.

As it happened I chose an unlucky day and hour, for on arriving at the office and asking for Mr. May, I was informed that he was away in the country valuing.

"Then I would like to see Mr. Primrose," I said.

"Mr. Primrose is round at the Rooms selling," replied the clerk, who appeared to be very busy.

"Where are the Rooms?" I asked.

"Out of the door, turn to the left, turn to the left again and under the clock," said the clerk, and closed the shutter.

So disgusted was I with his rudeness that I nearly gave up the enterprise. Thinking better of it, however, I followed the directions given, and in a minute or two found myself in a narrow passage that led to a large room. To one who had never seen anything of the sort before, this room offered a curious sight. The first thing I observed was a notice on the wall to the effect that customers were not allowed to smoke pipes. I thought to myself that orchids must be curious flowers if they could distinguish between the smoke of a cigar and a pipe, and stepped into the room. To my left was a long table covered with pots of the most beautiful flowers that I had ever seen; all of them orchids. Along the wall and opposite were other tables closely packed with withered roots which I concluded were also those of orchids. To my inexperienced eye the whole lot did not look worth five shillings, for they seemed to be dead.

At the head of the room stood the rostrum, where sat a gentleman with an extremely charming face. He was engaged in selling by auction so rapidly that the clerk at his side must have had difficulty in keeping a record of the lots and their purchasers. In front of him was a horseshoe table, round which sat buyers. The end of this table was left unoccupied so that the porters might exhibit each lot before it was put up for sale. Standing under the rostrum was yet another table, a small one, upon which were about twenty pots of flowers, even more wonderful than those on the large table. A notice stated that these would be sold at one-thirty precisely. All about the room stood knots of men (such ladies as were present sat at the table), many of whom had lovely orchids in their buttonholes. These, I found out afterwards, were dealers and amateurs. They were a kindly-faced set of people, and I took a liking to them.

The whole place was quaint and pleasant, especially by contrast with the horrible London fog outside. Squeezing my small person into a corner where I was in nobody's way, I watched the proceedings for a while. Suddenly an agreeable voice at my side asked me if I would like a look at the catalogue. I glanced at the speaker, and in a sense fell in love with him at once—as I have explained before, I am one of those to whom a first impression means a great deal. He was not very tall, though strong-looking and well-made enough. He was not very handsome, though none so ill-favoured. He was just an ordinary fair young Englishman, four or five-and-twenty years of age, with merry blue eyes and one of the pleasantest expressions that I ever saw. At once I felt that he was a sympathetic soul and full of the milk of human kindness. He was dressed in a rough tweed suit rather worn, with the orchid that seemed to be the badge of all this tribe in his buttonhole. Somehow the costume suited his rather pink and white complexion and rumpled fair hair, which I could see as he was sitting on his cloth hat.

"Thank you, no," I answered, "I did not come here to buy. I know nothing about orchids," I added by way of explanation, "except a few I have seen growing in Africa, and this one," and I tapped the tin case which I held under my arm.

"Indeed," he said. "I should like to hear about the African orchids. What is it you have in the case, a plant or flowers?"

"One flower only. It is not mine. A friend in Africa asked me to—well, that is a long story which might not interest you."

"I'm not sure. I suppose it must be a *Cymbidium* scape from the size."

I shook my head. "That's not the name my friend mentioned. He called it a *Cypripedium*."

The young man began to grow curious. "One *Cypripedium* in all that large case? It must be a big flower."

"Yes, my friend said it is the biggest ever found. It measures twenty-four inches across the wings, petals I think he called them, and about a foot across the back part."

"Twenty-four inches across the petals and a foot across the dorsal sepal!" said the young man in a kind of gasp, "and a *Cypripedium*! Sir, surely you are joking?"

"Sir," I answered indignantly, "I am doing nothing of the sort. Your remark is tantamount to telling me that I am speaking a falsehood. But, of course, for all I know, the thing may be some other kind of flower."

"Let me see it. In the name of the goddess Flora let me see it!"

I began to undo the case. Indeed it was already half-open when two other gentlemen, who had either overheard some of our conversation or noted my companion's excited look, edged up to us. I observed that they also wore orchids in their buttonholes.

"Hullo! Somers," said one of them in a tone of false geniality, "what have you got there?"

"What has your friend got there?" asked the other.

"Nothing," replied the young man who had been addressed as Somers, "nothing at all; that is—only a case of tropical butterflies."

"Oh! butterflies," said No. 1 and sauntered away. But No. 2, a keen-looking person with the eye of a hawk, was not so easily satisfied.

"Let us see these butterflies," he said to me.

"You can't," ejaculated the young man. "My friend is afraid lest the damp should injure their colours. Ain't you, Brown?"

"Yes, I am, Somers," I replied, taking his cue and shutting the tin case with a snap.

Then the hawk-eyed person departed, also grumbling, for that story about the damp stuck in his throat.

"Orchidist!" whispered the young man. "Dreadful people, orchidists, so jealous. Very rich, too, both of them. Mr. Brown—I hope that is your name, though I admit the chances are against it."

"They are," I replied, "my name is Allan Quatermain."

"Ah! much better than Brown. Well, Mr. Allan Quatermain, there's a private room in this place to which I have admittance. Would you mind coming with that——" here the hawk-eyed gentleman strolled past again, "that case of butterflies?"

"With pleasure," I answered, and followed him out of the auction chamber down some steps through the door to the left, and ultimately into a little cupboard-like room lined with shelves full of books and ledgers.

He closed the door and locked it.

"Now," he said in a tone of the villain in a novel who at last has come face to face with the virtuous heroine, "now we are alone. Mr. Quatermain, let me see—those butterflies."

I placed the case on a deal table which stood under a skylight in the room. I opened it; I removed the cover of wadding, and there, pressed between two sheets of glass and quite uninjured after all its journeyings, appeared the golden flower, glorious even in death, and by its side the broad green leaf.

The young gentleman called Somers looked at it till I thought his eyes would really start out of his head. He turned away muttering something and looked again.

"Oh! Heavens," he said at last, "oh! Heavens, is it possible that such a thing can exist in this imperfect world? You haven't faked it, Mr. Half—I mean Quatermain, have you?"

"Sir," I said, "for the second time you are making insinuations. Good morning," and I began to shut up the case.

"Don't be offhanded," he exclaimed. "Pity the weaknesses of a poor sinner. You don't understand. If only you understood, you would understand."

"No," I said, "I am bothered if I do."

"Well, you will when you begin to collect orchids. I'm not mad, really, except perhaps on this point, Mr. Quatermain,"—this in a low and thrilling voice—"that marvellous *Cypripedium*—your friend is right, it is a *Cypripedium*—is worth a gold mine."

"From my experience of gold mines I can well believe that," I said tartly, and, I may add, prophetically.

"Oh! I mean a gold mine in the figurative and colloquial sense, not as the investor knows it," he answered. "That is, the plant on which it grew is priceless. Where is the plant, Mr. Quatermain?"

"In a rather indefinite locality in Africa east by south," I replied. "I can't place it to within three hundred miles."

"That's vague, Mr. Quatermain. I have no right to ask it, seeing that you know nothing of me, but I assure you I am respectable, and in short, would you mind telling me the story of this flower?"

"I don't think I should," I replied, a little doubtfully. Then, after another good look at him, suppressing all names and exact localities, I gave him the outline of the tale, explaining that I wanted to find someone who would finance an expedition to the remote and romantic spot where this particular *Cypripedium* was believed to grow.

Just as I finished my narrative, and before he had time to comment on it, there came a violent knocking at the door.

"Mr. Stephen," said a voice, "are you there, Mr. Stephen?"

"By Jove! that's Briggs," exclaimed the young man. "Briggs is my father's manager. Shut up the case, Mr. Quatermain. Come in, Briggs," he went on, unlocking the door slowly. "What is it?"

"It is a good deal," replied a thin and agitated person who thrust himself through the opening door. "Your father, I mean Sir Alexander, has come to the office unexpectedly and is in a nice taking because he didn't find you there, sir. When he discovered that you had gone to the orchid sale he grew furious, sir, furious, and sent me to fetch you."

"Did he?" replied Mr. Somers in an easy and unruffled tone. "Well, tell Sir Alexander I am coming at once. Now please go, Briggs, and tell him I am coming at once."

Briggs departed not too willingly.

"I must leave you, Mr. Quatermain," said Mr. Somers as he shut the door behind him. "But will you promise me not to show that flower to anyone until I return? I'll be back within half an hour."

"Yes, Mr. Somers. I'll wait half an hour for you in the sale room, and I promise that no one shall see that flower till you return."

"Thank you. You are a good fellow, and I promise you shall lose nothing by your kindness if I can help it."

We went together into the sale room, where some thought suddenly struck Mr. Somers.

"By Jove!" he said, "I nearly forgot about that *Odontoglossum*. Where's Woodden? Oh! come here, Woodden, I want to speak to you."

The person called Woodden obeyed. He was a man of about fifty, indefinite in colouring, for his eyes were very light-blue or grey and his hair was sandy, tough-looking and strongly made, with big hands that showed signs of work, for the palms were horny and the nails worn down. He was clad in a suit of shiny black, such as folk of the labouring class wear at a funeral. I made up my mind at once that he was a gardener.

"Woodden," said Mr. Somers, "this gentleman here has got the most wonderful orchid in the whole world. Keep your eye on him and see that he isn't robbed. There are people in this room, Mr. Quatermain, who would murder you and throw your body into the Thames for that flower," he added, darkly.

On receipt of this information Woodden rocked a little on his feet as though he felt the premonitory movements of an earthquake. It was a habit of his whenever anything astonished him. Then, fixing his pale eye upon me in a way which showed that my appearance surprised him, he pulled a lock of his sandy hair with his thumb and finger and said:

"Servant, sir, and where might this horchid be?"

I pointed to the tin case.

"Yes, it's there," went on Mr. Somers, "and that's what you've got to watch. Mr. Quatermain, if anyone attempts to rob you, call for Woodden and he will knock them down. He's my gardener, you know, and entirely to be trusted, especially if it is a matter of knocking anyone down."

"Aye, I'll knock him down surely," said Woodden, doubling his great fist and looking round him with a suspicious eye.

"Now listen, Woodden. Have you looked at that *Odontoglossum Pavo*, and if so, what do you think of it?" and he nodded towards a plant which stood in the centre of the little group that was placed on the small table beneath the auctioneer's desk. It bore a spray of the most lovely white flowers. On the top petal (if it is a petal), and also on the lip of each of these rounded flowers was a blotch or

spot of which the general effect was similar to the iridescent eye on the tail feathers of a peacock, whence, I suppose, the flower was named "Pavo," or Peacock.

"Yes, master, and I think it the beautifullest thing that ever I saw. There isn't a 'glossum in England like that there 'glossum Paving," he added with conviction, and rocked again as he said the word. "But there's plenty after it. I say they're a-smelling round that blossom like, like—dawgs round a rat hole. And" (this triumphantly) "they don't do that for nothing."

"Quite so, Woodden, you have got a logical mind. But, look here, we must have that 'Pavo' whatever it costs. Now the Governor has sent for me. I'll be back presently, but I might be detained. If so, you've got to bid on my behalf, for I daren't trust any of these agents. Here's your authority," and he scribbled on a card, "Woodden, my gardener, has directions to bid for me.—S.S." "Now, Woodden," he went on, when he had given the card to an attendant who passed it up to the auctioneer, "don't you make a fool of yourself and let that 'Pavo' slip through your fingers."

In another instant he was gone.

"What did the master say, sir?" asked Woodden of me. "That I was to get that there 'Paving' whatever it cost?"

"Yes," I said, "that's what he said. I suppose it will fetch a good deal—several pounds."

"Maybe, sir, can't tell. All I know is that I've got to buy it as you can bear me witness. Master, he ain't one to be crossed for money. What he wants, he'll have, that is if it be in the orchid line."

"I suppose you are fond of orchids, too, Mr. Woodden?"

"Fond of them, sir? Why, I loves 'em!" (Here he rocked.) "Don't feel for nothing else in the same way; not even for my old woman" (then with a burst of enthusiasm) "no, not even for the master himself, and I'm fond enough of him, God knows! But, begging your pardon, sir" (with a pull at his forelock), "would you mind holding that tin of yours a little tighter? I've got to keep an eye on that as well as on 'O. Paving,' and I just see'd that chap with the tall hat alooking at it suspicious."

After this we separated. I retired into my corner, while Woodden took his stand by the table, with one eye fixed on what he called the "O. Paving" and the other on me and my tin case.

An odd fish truly, I thought to myself. Positive, the old woman; Comparative, his master; Superlative, the orchid tribe. Those were his degrees of affection. Honest and brave and a good fellow though, I bet.

The sale languished. There were so many lots of one particular sort of dried orchid that buyers could not be found for them at a reasonable price, and many had to be bought in. At length the genial Mr. Primrose in the rostrum addressed the audience.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I quite understand that you didn't come here to-day to buy a rather poor lot of *Cattleya Mossiæ*. You came to buy, or to bid for, or to see sold the most wonderful *Odontoglossum* that has ever been flowered in this country, the property of a famous firm of importers whom I congratulate upon their good fortune in having obtained such a gem. Gentlemen, this miraculous flower ought to adorn a royal greenhouse. But there it is, to be taken away by whoever will pay the most for it, for I am directed to see that it will be sold without reserve. Now, I think," he added, running his eye over the company, "that most of our great collectors are represented in this room to-day. It is true that I do not see that spirited and liberal young orchidist, Mr. Somers, but he has left his worthy head-gardener, Mr. Woodden, than whom there is no finer judge of an orchid in England" (here Woodden rocked violently) "to bid for him, as I hope, for the glorious flower of which I have been speaking. Now, as it is exactly half-past one, we will proceed to business. Smith, hand the 'Odontoglossum Pavo' round, that everyone may inspect its beauties, and be careful you don't let it fall. Gentlemen, I must ask you not to touch it or to defile its purity with tobacco smoke. Eight perfect flowers in bloom, gentlemen, and four—no, five more to open. A strong plant in perfect health, six pseudo-bulbs with leaves, and three without. Two black leads which I am advised can be separated off at the proper time. Now, what bids for the 'Odontoglossum Pavo.' Ah! I wonder who will have the honour of becoming the owner of this perfect, this unmatched production of Nature. Thank you, sir—three hundred. Four. Five. Six. Seven in three places. Eight. Nine. Ten. Oh! gentlemen, let us get on a little faster. Thank you, sir—fifteen. Sixteen. It is against you, Mr Woodden. Ah! thank you, seventeen."

There came a pause in the fierce race for "O. Pavo," which I occupied in reducing seventeen hundred shillings to pounds sterling.

My word! I thought to myself, £85 is a goodish price to pay for one plant, however rare. Woodden is acting up to his instructions with a vengeance.

The pleading voice of Mr. Primrose broke in upon my meditations.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he said, "surely you are not going to allow the most wondrous production of the floral world, on which I repeat there is no reserve, to be knocked down at this miserable figure. Come, come. Well, if I must, I must, though after such a disgrace I shall get no sleep to-night. One," and his hammer fell for the first time. "Think, gentlemen, upon my position, think what the eminent owners, who with their usual delicacy have stayed away, will say to me when I am obliged to tell them the disgraceful truth. Two," and his hammer fell a second time. "Smith, hold up that flower. Let the company see it. Let them know what they are losing."

Smith held up the flower at which everybody glared. The little ivory hammer circled round Mr. Primrose's head. It was about to fall, when a quiet man with a long beard who hitherto had not joined in the bidding, lifted his head and said softly:

"Eighteen hundred."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Primrose, "I thought so. I thought that the owner of the greatest collection in England would not see this treasure slip from his grasp without a struggle. Against you, Mr. Woodden."

"Nineteen, sir," said Woodden in a stony voice.

"Two thousand," echoed the gentleman with the long beard.

"Twenty-one hundred," said Woodden.

"That's right, Mr. Woodden," cried Mr. Primrose, "you are indeed representing your principal worthily. I feel sure that you do not mean to stop for a few miserable pounds."

"Not if I knows it," ejaculated Woodden. "I has my orders and I acts up to them."

"Twenty-two hundred," said Long-beard.

"Twenty-three," echoed Woodden.

"Oh, damn!" shouted Long-beard and rushed from the room.

“‘Odontoglossum Pavo’ is going for twenty-three hundred, only twenty-tree hundred,” cried the auctioneer. “Any advance on twenty-three hundred? What? None? Then I must do my duty. One. Two. For the last time—no advance? Three. Gone to Mr. Woodden, bidding for his principal, Mr. Somers.”

The hammer fell with a sharp tap, and at this moment my young friend sauntered into the room.

“Well, Woodden,” he said, “have they put the ‘Pavo’ up yet?”

“It’s up and it’s down, sir. I’ve bought him right enough.”

“The deuce you have! What did it fetch?”

Woodden scratched his head.

“I don’t rightly know, sir, never was good at figures, not having much book learning, but it’s twenty-three something.”

“£23? No, it would have brought more than that. By Jingo! it must be £230. That’s pretty stiff, but still, it may be worth it.”

At this moment Mr. Primrose, who, leaning over his desk, was engaged in animated conversation with an excited knot of orchid fanciers, looked up:

“Oh! there you are, Mr. Somers,” he said. “In the name of all this company let me congratulate you on having become the owner of the matchless ‘Odontoglossum Pavo’ for what, under all the circumstances, I consider the quite moderate price of £2,300.”

Really that young man took it very well. He shivered slightly and turned a little pale, that is all. Woodden rocked to and fro like a tree about to fall. I and my tin box collapsed together in the corner. Yes, I was so surprised that my legs seemed to give way under me. People began to talk, but above the hum of the conversation I heard young Somers say in a low voice:

“Woodden, you’re a born fool.” Also the answer: “That’s what my mother always told me, master, and she ought to know if anyone did. But what’s wrong now? I obeyed orders and bought ‘O. Paving.’”

“Yes. Don’t bother, my good fellow, it’s my fault, not yours. I’m the born fool. But heavens above! how am I to face this?” Then, recovering himself, he strolled up to the rostrum and said a few words to the auctioneer. Mr. Primrose nodded, and I heard him answer:

“Oh, that will be all right, sir, don’t bother. We can’t expect an account like this to be settled in a minute. A month hence will do.”

Then he went on with the sale.

## CHAPTER III

### SIR ALEXANDER AND STEPHEN

It was just at this moment that I saw standing by me a fine-looking, stout man with a square, grey beard and a handsome, but not very good-tempered face. He was looking about him as one does who finds himself in a place to which he is not accustomed.

"Perhaps you could tell me, sir," he said to me, "whether a gentleman called Mr. Somers is in this room. I am rather short-sighted and there are a great many people."

"Yes," I answered, "he has just bought the wonderful orchid called 'Odontoglossum Pavo.' That is what they are all talking about."

"Oh, has he? Has he indeed? And pray what did he pay for the article?"

"A huge sum," I answered. "I thought it was two thousand three hundred shillings, but it appears it was £2,300."

The handsome, elderly gentleman grew very red in the face, so red that I thought he was going to have a fit. For a few moments he breathed heavily.

"A rival collector," I thought to myself, and went on with the story which, it occurred to me, might interest him.

"You see, the young gentleman was called away to an interview with his father. I heard him instruct his gardener, a man named Woodden, to buy the plant at any price."

"At any price! Indeed. Very interesting; continue, sir."

"Well, the gardener bought it, that's all, after tremendous competition. Look, there he is packing it up. Whether his master meant him to go as far as he did I rather doubt. But here he comes. If you know him——"

The youthful Mr. Somers, looking a little pale and *distract*, strolled up apparently to speak to me; his hands were in his pockets and an unlighted cigar was in his mouth. His eyes fell upon the elderly gentleman, a sight that caused him to shape his lips as though to whistle and drop the cigar.

"Hullo, father," he said in his pleasant voice. "I got your message and have been looking for you, but never thought that I should find you here. Orchids aren't much in your line, are they?"

"Didn't you, indeed!" replied his parent in a choked voice. "No, I haven't much use for—this stinking rubbish," and he waved his umbrella at the beautiful flowers. "But it seems that you have, Stephen. This little gentleman here tells me you have just bought a very fine specimen."

"I must apologize," I broke in, addressing Mr. Somers. "I had not the slightest idea that this—big gentleman," here the son smiled faintly, "was your intimate relation."

"Oh! pray don't, Mr. Quatermain. Why should you not speak of what will be in all the papers. Yes, father, I have bought a very fine specimen, the finest known, or at least Woodden has on my behalf, while I was hunting for you, which comes to the same thing."

"Indeed, Stephen, and what did you pay for this flower? I have heard a figure, but think that there must be some mistake."

"I don't know what you heard, father, but it seems to have been knocked down to me at £2,300. It's a lot more than I can find, indeed, and I was going to ask you to lend me the money for the sake of the family credit, if not for my own. But we can talk about that afterwards."

"Yes, Stephen, we can talk of that afterwards. In fact, as there is no time like the present, we will talk of it now. Come to my office. And, sir" (this was to me) "as you seem to know something of the circumstances, I will ask you to come also; and you too, Blockhead" (this was to Woodden, who just then approached with the plant).

Now, of course, I might have refused an invitation conveyed in such a manner. But, as a matter of fact, I didn't. I wanted to see the thing out; also to put in a word for young Somers, if I got the chance. So we all departed from that room, followed by a titter of amusement from those of the company who had overheard the conversation. In the street stood a splendid carriage and pair; a powdered footman opened its door. With a ferocious bow Sir Alexander motioned to me to enter, which I did, taking one of the back seats as it gave more room for my tin case. Then came Mr. Stephen, then Woodden bundled in holding the precious plant in front of him like a wand of office, and last of all, Sir Alexander, having seen us safe, entered also.

"Where to, sir?" asked the footman.

"Office," he snapped, and we started.

Four disappointed relatives in a funeral coach could not have been more silent. Our feelings seemed to be too deep for words. Sir Alexander, however, did make one remark and to me. It was:

"If you will remove the corner of that infernal tin box of yours from my ribs I shall be obliged to you, sir."

"Your pardon," I exclaimed, and in my efforts to be accommodating, dropped it on his toe. I will not repeat the remark he made, but I may explain that he was gouty. His son suddenly became afflicted with a sense of the absurdity of the situation. He kicked me on the shin, he even dared to wink, and then began to swell visibly with suppressed laughter. I was in agony, for if he had exploded I do not know what would have happened. Fortunately, at this moment the carriage stopped at the door of a fine office. Without waiting for the footman Mr. Stephen bundled out and vanished into the building—I suppose to laugh in safety. Then I descended with the tin case; then, by command, followed Woodden with the flower, and lastly came Sir Alexander.

"Stop here," he said to the coachman; "I shan't be long. Be so good as to follow me, Mr. What's-your-name, and you, too, Gardener."

We followed, and found ourselves in a big room luxuriously furnished in a heavy kind of way. Sir Alexander Somers, I should explain, was an enormously opulent bullion-broker, whatever a bullion-broker may be. In this room Mr. Stephen was already established; indeed, he was seated on the window-sill swinging his leg.

"Now we are alone and comfortable," growled Sir Alexander with sarcastic ferocity.

"As the boa-constrictor said to the rabbit in the cage," I remarked.

I did not mean to say it, but I had grown nervous, and the thought leapt from my lips in words. Again Mr. Stephen began to swell. He turned his face to the window as though to contemplate the wall beyond, but I could see his shoulders shaking. A dim light of intelligence shone in Woodden's pale eyes. About three minutes later the joke got home. He gurgled something about boa-constrictors and rabbits and gave a short, loud laugh. As for Sir Alexander, he merely said:

"I did not catch your remark, sir, would you be so good as to repeat it?"

As I appeared unwilling to accept the invitation, he went on:

"Perhaps, then, you would repeat what you told me in that sale-room?"

"Why should I?" I asked. "I spoke quite clearly and you seemed to understand."

"You are right," replied Sir Alexander; "to waste time is useless." He wheeled round on Woodden, who was standing near the door still holding the paper-wrapped plant in front of him. "Now, Blockhead," he shouted, "tell me why you brought that thing."

Woodden made no answer, only rocked a little. Sir Alexander reiterated his command. This time Woodden set the plant upon a table and replied:

"If you're aspeaking to me, sir, that baint my name, and what's more, if you calls me so again, I'll punch your head, whoever you be," and very deliberately he rolled up the sleeves on his brawny arms, a sight at which I too began to swell with inward merriment.

"Look here, father," said Mr. Stephen, stepping forward. "What's the use of all this? The thing's perfectly plain. I did tell Woodden to buy the plant at any price. What is more I gave him a written authority which was passed up to the auctioneer. There's no getting out of it. It is true it never occurred to me that it would go for anything like £2,300—the odd £300 was more my idea, but Woodden only obeyed his orders, and ought not to be abused for doing so."

"There's what I call a master worth serving," remarked Woodden.

"Very well, young man," said Sir Alexander, "you have purchased this article. Will you be so good as to tell me how you propose it should be paid for?"

"I propose, father, that you should pay for it," replied Mr. Stephen sweetly. "Two thousand three hundred pounds, or ten times that amount, would not make you appreciably poorer. But if, as is probable, you take a different view, then I propose to pay for it myself. As you know a certain sum of money came to me under my mother's will in which you have only a life interest. I shall raise the amount upon that security—or otherwise."

If Sir Alexander had been angry before, now he became like a mad bull in a china shop. He pranced round the room; he used language that should not pass the lips of any respectable merchant of bullion; in short, he did everything that a person in his position ought not to do. When he was tired he rushed to a desk, tore a cheque from a book and filled it in for a sum of £2,300 to bearer, which cheque he blotted, crumpled up and literally threw at the head of his son.

"You worthless, idle young scoundrel," he bellowed. "I put you in this office here that you may learn respectable and orderly habits and in due course succeed to a very comfortable business. What happens? You don't take a ha'porth of interest in bullion-broking, a subject of which I believe you to remain profoundly ignorant. You don't even spend your money, or rather my money, upon any gentleman-like vice, such as horse-racing, or cards, or even—well, never mind. No, you take to flowers, miserable, beastly flowers, things that a cow eats and clerks grow in back gardens."

"An ancient and Arcadian taste. Adam is supposed to have lived in a garden," I ventured to interpolate.

"Perhaps you would ask your friend with the stubbly hair to remain quiet," snorted Sir Alexander. "I was about to add, although for the sake of my name I meet your debts, that I have had enough of this kind of thing. I disinherit you, or will do if I live till 4 p.m. when the lawyer's office shuts, for thank God! there are no entailed estates, and I dismiss you from the firm. You can go and earn your living in any way you please, by orchid-hunting if you like." He paused, gasping for breath.

"Is that all, father?" asked Mr. Stephen, producing a cigar from his pocket.

"No, it isn't, you cold-blooded young beggar. That house you occupy at Twickenham is mine. You will be good enough to clear out of it; I wish to take possession."

"I suppose, father, I am entitled to a week's notice like any other tenant," said Mr. Stephen, lighting the cigar. "In fact," he added, "if you answer no, I think I shall ask you to apply for an ejection order. You will understand that I have arrangements to make before taking a fresh start in life."

"Oh! curse your cheek, you—you—cucumber!" raged the infuriated merchant prince. Then an inspiration came to him. "You think more of an ugly flower than of your father, do you? Well, at least I'll put an end to that," and he made a dash at the plant on the table with the evident intention of destroying the same.

But the watching Woodden saw. With a kind of lurch he interposed his big frame between Sir Alexander and the object of his wrath.

"Touch 'O. Paving' and I knocks yer down," he drawled out.

Sir Alexander looked at "O. Paving," then he looked at Woodden's leg-of-mutton fist, and—changed his mind.

"Curse 'O. Paving,'" he said, "and everyone who has to do with it," and swung out of the room, banging the door behind him.

"Well, that's over," said Mr. Stephen gently, as he fanned himself with a pocket-handkerchief. "Quite exciting while it lasted, wasn't it, Mr. Quatermain—but I have been there before, so to speak. And now what do you say to some luncheon? Pym's is close by, and they have very good oysters. Only I think we'll drive round by the bank and hand in this cheque. When he's angry my parent is capable of anything. He might even stop it. Woodden, get off down to Twickenham with 'O. Pavo.' Keep it warm, for it feels rather like frost. Put it in the stove for to-night and give it a little, just a little tepid water, but be careful not to touch the flower. Take a four-wheeled cab, it's slow but safe, and mind you keep the windows up and don't smoke. I shall be home for dinner."

Woodden pulled his forelock, seized the pot in his left hand, and departed with his right fist raised—I suppose in case Sir Alexander should be waiting for him round the corner.

Then we departed also and, after stopping for a minute at the bank to pay in the cheque, which I noted, notwithstanding its amount, was accepted without comment, ate oysters in a place too crowded to allow of conversation.

"Mr. Quatermain," said my host, "it is obvious that we cannot talk here, and much less look at that orchid of yours, which I want to study at leisure. Now, for a week or so at any rate I have a roof over my head, and in short, will you be my guest for a night or two? I know nothing about you, and of me you only know that I am the disinherited son of a father, to whom I have failed to give satisfaction. Still it is possible that we might pass a few pleasant hours together talking of flowers and other things; that is, if you have no previous engagement."

"I have none," I answered. "I am only a stranger from South Africa lodging at an hotel. If you will give me time to call for my bag, I will pass the night at your house with pleasure."

By the aid of Mr. Somers' smart dog-cart, which was waiting at a city mews, we reached Twickenham while there was still half an hour of daylight. The house, which was called Verbena Lodge, was small, a square, red-brick building of the early Georgian period, but the gardens covered quite an acre of ground and were very beautiful, or must have been so in summer. Into the greenhouse we did not enter, because it was too late to see the flowers. Also, just when we came to them, Woodden arrived in his four-wheeled cab and departed with his master to see to the housing of "O. Pavo."

Then came dinner, a very pleasant meal. My host had that day been turned out upon the world, but he did not allow this circumstance to interfere with his spirits in the least. Also he was evidently determined to enjoy its good things while they lasted, for his champagne and port were excellent.

"You see, Mr. Quatermain," he said, "it's just as well we had the row which has been boiling up for a long while. My respected father has made so much money that he thinks I should go and do likewise. Now, I don't see it. I like flowers, especially orchids, and I hate bullion-broking. To me the only decent places in London are that sale-room where we met and the Horticultural Gardens."

"Yes," I answered rather doubtfully, "but the matter seems a little serious. Your parent was very emphatic as to his intentions, and after this kind of thing," and I pointed to the beautiful silver and the port, "how will you like roughing it in a hard world?"

"Don't think I shall mind a bit; it would be rather a pleasant change. Also, even if my father doesn't alter his mind, as he may, for he likes me at bottom because I resemble my dear mother, things ain't so very bad. I have got some money that she left me, £6,000 or £7,000, and I'll sell that 'Odontoglossum Pavo' for what it will fetch to Sir Joshua Tredgold—he was the man with the long beard who you tell me ran up Woodden to over £2,000—or failing him to someone else. I'll write about it to-night. I don't think I have any debts to speak of, for the Governor has been allowing me £3,000 a year, at least that is my share of the profits paid to me in return for my bullion-broking labours, and except flowers, I have no expensive tastes. So the devil take the past, here's to the future and whatever it may bring," and he polished off the glass of port he held and laughed in his jolly fashion.

Really he was a most attractive young man, a little reckless, it is true, but then recklessness and youth mix well, like brandy and soda.

I echoed the toast and drank off my port, for I like a good glass of wine when I can get it, as would anyone who has had to live for months on rotten water, although I admit that agrees with me better than the port.

"Now, Mr. Quatermain," he went on, "if you have done, light your pipe and let's go into the other room and study that *Cypripedium* of yours. I shan't sleep to-night unless I see it again first. Stop a bit, though, we'll get hold of that old ass, Woodden, before he turns in."

"Woodden," said his master, when the gardener had arrived, "this gentleman, Mr. Quatermain, is going to show you an orchid that is ten times finer than 'O. Pavo!'"

"Beg pardon, sir," answered Woodden, "but if Mr. Quatermain says that, he lies. It ain't in Nature; it don't bloom nowhere."

I opened the case and revealed the golden *Cypripedium*. Woodden stared at it and rocked. Then he stared again and felt his head as though to make sure it was on his shoulders. Then he gasped.

"Well, if that there flower baint made up, it's a MASTER ONE! If I could see that there flower ablowing on the plant I'd die happy."

"Woodden, stop talking, and sit down," exclaimed his master. "Yes, there, where you can look at the flower. Now, Mr. Quatermain, will you tell us the story of that orchid from beginning to end. Of course omitting its habitat if you like, for it isn't fair to ask that secret. Woodden can be trusted to hold his tongue, and so can I."

I remarked that I was sure they could, and for the next half-hour talked almost without interruption, keeping nothing back and explaining that I was anxious to find someone who would finance an expedition to search for this particular plant; as I believed, the only one of its sort that existed in the world.

"How much will it cost?" asked Mr. Somers.

"I lay it at £2,000," I answered. "You see, we must have plenty of men and guns and stores, also trade goods and presents."

"I call that cheap. But supposing, Mr. Quatermain, that the expedition proves successful and the plant is secured, what then?"

"Then I propose that Brother John, who found it and of whom I have told you, should take one-third of whatever it might sell for, that I as captain of the expedition should take one-third, and that whoever finds the necessary money should take the remaining third."

"Good! That's settled."

"What's settled?" I asked.

"Why, that we should divide in the proportions you named, only I bargain to be allowed to take my whack in kind—I mean in plant, and to have the first option of purchasing the rest of the plant at whatever value may be agreed upon."

"But, Mr. Somers, do you mean that you wish to find £2,000 and make this expedition in person?"

"Of course I do. I thought you understood that. That is, if you will have me. Your old friend, the lunatic, you and I will together seek for and find this golden flower. I say that's settled."

On the morrow accordingly, it was settled with the help of a document, signed in duplicate by both of us.

Before these arrangements were finally concluded, however, I insisted that Mr. Somers should meet my late companion, Charlie Scroope, when I was not present, in order that the latter might give him a full and particular report concerning myself. Apparently the interview was satisfactory, at least so I judged from the very cordial and even respectful manner in which young Somers met me after it was over. Also I thought it my duty to explain to him with much clearness in the presence of Scroope as a witness, the great

dangers of such an enterprise as that on which he proposed to embark. I told him straight out that he must be prepared to find his death in it from starvation, fever, wild beasts or at the hands of savages, while success was quite problematical and very likely would not be attained.

"You are taking these risks," he said.

"Yes," I answered, "but they are incident to the rough trade I follow, which is that of a hunter and explorer. Moreover, my youth is past, and I have gone through experiences and bereavements of which you know nothing, that cause me to set a very slight value on life. I care little whether I die or continue in the world for some few added years. Lastly, the excitement of adventure has become a kind of necessity for me. I do not think that I could live in England for very long. Also I'm a fatalist. I believe that when my time comes I must go, that this hour is foreordained and that nothing I can do will either hasten or postpone it by one moment. Your circumstances are different. You are quite young. If you stay here and approach your father in a proper spirit, I have no doubt but that he will forget all the rough words he said to you the other day, for which indeed you know you gave him some provocation. Is it worth while throwing up such prospects and undertaking such dangers for the chance of finding a rare flower? I say this to my own disadvantage, since I might find it hard to discover anyone else who would risk £2,000 upon such a venture, but I do urge you to weigh my words."

Young Somers looked at me for a little while, then he broke into one of his hearty laughs and exclaimed, "Whatever else you may be, Mr. Allan Quatermain, you are a gentleman. No bullion-broker in the City could have put the matter more fairly in the teeth of his own interests."

"Thank you," I said.

"For the rest," he went on, "I too am tired of England and want to see the world. It isn't the golden Cypripedium that I seek, although I should like to win it well enough. That's only a symbol. What I seek are adventure and romance. Also, like you I am a fatalist. God chose His own time to send us here, and I presume that He will choose His own time to take us away again. So I leave the matter of risks to Him."

"Yes, Mr. Somers," I replied rather solemnly. "You may find adventure and romance, there are plenty of both in Africa. Or you may find a nameless grave in some fever-haunted swamp. Well, you have chosen, and I like your spirit."

Still I was so little satisfied about this business, that a week or so before we sailed, after much consideration, I took it upon myself to write a letter to Sir Alexander Somers, in which I set forth the whole matter as clearly as I could, not blinking the dangerous nature of our undertaking. In conclusion, I asked him whether he thought it wise to allow his only son to accompany such an expedition, mainly because of a not very serious quarrel with himself.

As no answer came to this letter I went on with our preparations. There was money in plenty, since the re-sale of "O. Pavo" to Sir Joshua Tredgold, at some loss, had been satisfactorily carried out, which enabled me to invest in all things needful with a cheerful heart. Never before had I been provided with such an outfit as that which preceded us to the ship.

At length the day of departure came. We stood on the platform at Paddington waiting for the Dartmouth train to start, for in those days the African mail sailed from that port. A minute or two before the train left, as we were preparing to enter our carriage I caught sight of a face that I seemed to recognise, the owner of which was evidently searching for someone in the crowd. It was that of Briggs, Sir Alexander's clerk, whom I had met in the sale-room.

"Mr. Briggs," I said as he passed me, "are you looking for Mr. Somers? If so, he is in here."

The clerk jumped into the compartment and handed a letter to Mr. Somers. Then he emerged again and waited. Somers read the letter and tore off a blank sheet from the end of it, on which he hastily wrote some words. He passed it to me to give to Briggs, and I could not help seeing what was written. It was: "Too late now. God bless you, my dear father. I hope we may meet again. If not, try to think kindly of your troublesome and foolish son, Stephen."

In another minute the train had started.

"By the way," he said, as we steamed out of the station, "I have heard from my father, who enclosed this for you."

I opened the envelope, which was addressed in a bold, round hand that seemed to me typical of the writer, and read as follows:

*"My Dear Sir,—I appreciate the motives which caused you to write to me and I thank you very heartily for your letter, which shows me that you are a man of discretion and strict honour. As you surmise, the expedition on which my son has entered is not one that commends itself to me as prudent. Of the differences between him and myself you are aware, for they came to a climax in your presence. Indeed, I feel that I owe you an apology for having dragged you into an unpleasant family quarrel. Your letter only reached me to-day having been forwarded to my place in the country from my office. I should have at once come to town, but unfortunately I am laid up with an attack of gout which makes it impossible for me to stir. Therefore, the only thing I can do is to write to my son hoping that the letter which I send by a special messenger will reach him in time and avail to alter his determination to undertake this journey. Here I may add that although I have differed and do differ from him on various points, I still have a deep affection for my son and earnestly desire his welfare. The prospect of any harm coming to him is one upon which I cannot bear to dwell.*

*"Now I am aware that any change of his plans at this eleventh hour would involve you in serious loss and inconvenience. I beg to inform you formally, therefore, that in this event I will make good everything and will in addition write off the £2,000 which I understand he has invested in your joint venture. It may be, however, that my son, who has in him a vein of my own obstinacy, will refuse to change his mind. In that event, under a Higher Power I can only commend him to your care and beg that you will look after him as though he were your own child. I can ask and you can do no more. Tell him to write me as opportunity offers, as perhaps you will too; also that, although I hate the sight of them, I will look after the flowers which he has left at the house*

at Twickenham.—

*"Your obliged servant, ALEXANDER SOMERS."*

This letter touched me much, and indeed made me feel very uncomfortable. Without a word I handed it to my companion, who read it through carefully.

"Nice of him about the orchids," he said. "My dad has a good heart, although he lets his temper get the better of him, having had his own way all his life."

"Well, what will you do?" I asked.

"Go on, of course. I've put my hand to the plough and I am not going to turn back. I should be a cur if I did, and what's more, whatever he might say he'd think none the better of me. So please don't try to persuade me, it would be no good."

For quite a while afterwards young Somers seemed to be comparatively depressed, a state of mind that in his case was rare indeed. At last, he studied the wintry landscape through the carriage window and said nothing. By degrees, however, he recovered, and when we reached Dartmouth was as cheerful as ever, a mood that I could not altogether share.

Before we sailed I wrote to Sir Alexander telling him exactly how things stood, and so I think did his son, though he never showed me the letter.

At Durban, just as we were about to start up country, I received an answer from him, sent by some boat that followed us very closely. In it he said that he quite understood the position, and whatever happened would attribute no blame to me, whom he should always regard with friendly feelings. He told me that, in the event of any difficulty or want of money, I was to draw on him for whatever might be required, and that he had advised the African Bank to that effect. Further, he added, that at least his son had shown grit in this matter, for which he respected him.

And now for a long while I must bid good-bye to Sir Alexander Somers and all that has to do with England.

## CHAPTER IV

### MAVOVO AND HANS

We arrived safely at Durban at the beginning of March and took up our quarters at my house on the Berea, where I expected that Brother John would be awaiting us. But no Brother John was to be found. The old, lame Griqua, Jack, who looked after the place for me and once had been one of my hunters, said that shortly after I went away in the ship, Dogeetah, as he called him, had taken his tin box and his net and walked off inland, he knew not where, leaving, as he declared, no message or letter behind him. The cases full of butterflies and dried plants were also gone, but these, I found he had shipped to some port in America, by a sailing vessel bound for the United States which chanced to put in at Durban for food and water. As to what had become of the man himself I could get no clue. He had been seen at Maritzburg and, according to some Kaffirs whom I knew, afterwards on the borders of Zululand, where, so far as I could learn, he vanished into space.

This, to say the least of it, was disconcerting, and a question arose as to what was to be done. Brother John was to have been our guide. He alone knew the Mazitu people; he alone had visited the borders of the mysterious Pongo-land, I scarcely felt inclined to attempt to reach that country without his aid.

When a fortnight had gone by and still there were no signs of him, Stephen and I held a solemn conference. I pointed out the difficulties and dangers of the situation to him and suggested that, under the circumstances, it might be wise to give up this wild orchid-chase and go elephant-hunting instead in a certain part of Zululand, where in those days these animals were still abundant.

He was inclined to agree with me, since the prospect of killing elephants had attractions for him.

"And yet," I said, after reflection, "it's curious, but I never remember making a successful trip after altering plans at the last moment, that is, unless one was driven to it."

"I vote we toss up," said Somers; "it gives Providence a chance. Now then, heads for the Golden Cyp, and tails for the elephants."

He spun a half-crown into the air. It fell and rolled under a great, yellow-wood chest full of curiosities that I had collected, which it took all our united strength to move. We dragged it aside and not without some excitement, for really a good deal hung upon the chance, I lit a match and peered into the shadow. There in the dust lay the coin.

"What is it?" I asked of Somers, who was stretched on his stomach on the chest.

"Orchid—I mean head," he answered. "Well, that's settled, so we needn't bother any more."

The next fortnight was a busy time for me. As it happened there was a schooner in the bay of about one hundred tons burden which belonged to a Portuguese trader named Delgado, who dealt in goods that he carried to the various East African ports and Madagascar. He was a villainous-looking person whom I suspected of having dealings with the slave traders, who were very numerous and a great power in those days, if indeed he were not one himself. But as he was going to Kilwa whence we proposed to start inland, I arranged to make use of him to carry our party and the baggage. The bargain was not altogether easy to strike for two reasons. First, he did not appear to be anxious that we should hunt in the districts at the back of Kilwa, where he assured me there was no game, and secondly, he said that he wanted to sail at once. However, I overcame his objections with an argument he could not resist—namely, money, and in the end he agreed to postpone his departure for fourteen days.

Then I set about collecting our men, of whom I had made up my mind there must not be less than twenty. Already I had sent messengers summoning to Durban from Zululand and the upper districts of Natal various hunters who had accompanied me on other expeditions. To the number of a dozen or so they arrived in due course. I have always had the good fortune to be on the best of terms with my Kaffirs, and where I went they were ready to go without asking any questions. The man whom I had selected to be their captain under me was a Zulu of the name of Mavovo. He was a short fellow, past middle age, with an enormous chest. His strength was proverbial; indeed, it was said that he could throw an ox by the horns, and myself I have seen him hold down the head of a wounded buffalo that had fallen, until I could come up and shoot it.

When I first knew Mavovo he was a petty chief and witch doctor in Zululand. Like myself, he had fought for the Prince Umbelazi in the great battle of the Tugela, a crime which Cetewayo never forgave him. About a year afterwards he got warning that he had been smelt out as a wizard and was going to be killed. He fled with two of his wives and a child. The slayers overtook them before he could reach the Natal border, and stabbed the elder wife and the child of the second wife. They were four men, but, made mad by the sight, Mavovo turned on them and killed them all. Then, with the remaining wife, cut to pieces as he was, he crept to the river and through it to Natal. Not long after this wife died also; it was said from grief at the loss of her child. Mavovo did not marry again, perhaps because he was now a man without means, for Cetewayo had taken all his cattle; also he was made ugly by an assegai wound which had cut off his right nostril. Shortly after the death of his second wife he sought me out and told me he was a chief without a kraal and wished to become my hunter. So I took him on, a step which I never had any cause to regret, since although morose and at times given to the practice of uncanny arts, he was a most faithful servant and brave as a lion, or rather as a buffalo, for a lion is not always brave.

Another man whom I did not send for, but who came, was an old Hottentot named Hans, with whom I had been more or less mixed up all my life. When I was a boy he was my father's servant in the Cape Colony and my companion in some of those early wars. Also he shared some very terrible adventures with me which I have detailed in the history I have written of my first wife, Marie Marais. For instance, he and I were the only persons who escaped from the massacre of Retief and his companions by the Zulu king, Dingaan. In the subsequent campaigns, including the Battle of the Blood River, he fought at my side and ultimately received a good share of captured cattle. After this he retired and set up a native store at a place called Pinetown, about fifteen miles out of Durban. Here I am afraid he got into bad ways and took to drink more or less; also to gambling. At any rate, he lost most of his property, so much of it indeed that he scarcely knew which way to turn. Thus it happened that one evening when I went out of the house where I had been making up my accounts, I saw a yellow-faced white-haired old fellow squatted on the verandah smoking a pipe made out of a corn-cob.

"Good day, Baas," he said, "here am I, Hans."

"So I see," I answered, rather coldly. "And what are you doing here, Hans? How can you spare time from your drinking and gambling at Pinetown to visit me here, Hans, after I have not seen you for three years?"

"Baas, the gambling is finished, because I have nothing more to stake, and the drinking is done too, because but one bottle of Cape Smoke makes me feel quite ill next morning. So now I only take water and as little of that as I can, water and some tobacco to cover up its taste."

"I am glad to hear it, Hans. If my father, the Predikant who baptised you, were alive now, he would have much to say about your conduct as indeed I have no doubt he will presently when you have gone into a hole (i.e., a grave). For there in the hole he will be waiting for you, Hans."

"I know, I know, Baas. I have been thinking of that and it troubles me. Your reverend father, the Predikant, will be very cross indeed with me when I join him in the Place of Fires where he sits awaiting me. So I wish to make my peace with him by dying well, and in your service, Baas. I hear that the Baas is going on an expedition. I have come to accompany the Baas."

"To accompany me! Why, you are old, you are not worth five shillings a month and your *scoff* (food). You are a shrunken old brandy cask that will not even hold water."

Hans grinned right across his ugly face.

"Oh! Baas, I am old, but I am clever. All these years I have been gathering wisdom. I am as full of it as a bee's nest is with honey when the summer is done. And, Baas, I can stop those leaks in the cask."

"Hans, it is no good, I don't want you. I am going into great danger. I must have those about me whom I can trust."

"Well, Baas, and who can be better trusted than Hans? Who warned you of the attack of the Quabies on Maraisfontein, and so saved the life of——"

"Hush!" I said.

"I understand. I will not speak the name. It is holy, not to be mentioned. It is the name of one who stands with the white angels before God; not to be mentioned by poor drunken Hans. Still, who stood at your side in that great fight? Ah! it makes me young again to think of it, when the roof burned; when the door was broken down; when we met the Quabies on the spears; when you held the pistol to the head of the Holy One whose name must not be mentioned, the Great One who knew how to die. Oh! Baas, our lives are twisted up together like the creeper and the tree, and where you go, there I must go also. Do not turn me away. I ask no wages, only a bit of food and a handful of tobacco, and the light of your face and a word now and again of the memories that belong to both of us. I am still very strong. I can shoot well—well, Baas, who was it that put it into your mind to aim at the tails of the vultures on the Hill of Slaughter yonder in Zululand, and so saved the lives of all the Boer people, and of her whose holy name must not be mentioned? Baas, you will not turn me away?"

"No," I answered, "you can come. But you will swear by the spirit of my father, the Predikant, to touch no liquor on this journey."

"I swear by his spirit and by that of the Holy One," and he flung himself forward on to his knees, took my hand and kissed it. Then he rose and said in a matter-of-fact tone, "If the Baas can give me two blankets, I shall thank him, also five shillings to buy some tobacco and a new knife. Where are the Baas's guns? I must go to oil them. I beg that the Baas will take with him that little rifle which is named *Intombi* (Maiden), the one with which he shot the vultures on the Hill of Slaughter, the one that killed the geese in the Goose Kloof when I loaded for him and he won the great match against the Boer whom Dingaan called Two-faces."

"Good," I said. "Here are the five shillings. You shall have the blankets and a new gun and all things needful. You will find the guns in the little back room and with them those of the Baas, my companion, who also is your master. Go see to them."

At length all was ready, the cases of guns, ammunition, medicines, presents and food were on board the *Maria*. So were four donkeys that I had bought in the hope that they would prove useful, either to ride or as pack beasts. The donkey, be it remembered, and man are the only animals which are said to be immune from the poisonous effects of the bite of tsetse fly, except, of course, the wild game. It was our last night at Durban, a very beautiful night of full moon at the end of March, for the Portugee Delgado had announced his intention of sailing on the following afternoon. Stephen Somers and I were seated on the stoep smoking and talking things over.

"It is a strange thing," I said, "that Brother John should never have turned up. I know that he was set upon making this expedition, not only for the sake of the orchid, but also for some other reason of which he would not speak. I think that the old fellow must be dead."

"Very likely," answered Stephen (we had become intimate and I called him Stephen now), "a man alone among savages might easily come to grief and never be heard of again. Hark! What's that?" and he pointed to some gardenia bushes in the shadow of the house near by, whence came a sound of something that moved.

"A dog, I expect, or perhaps it is Hans. He curls up in all sorts of places near to where I may be. Hans, are you there?"

A figure arose from the gardenia bushes.

"Ja, I am here, Baas."

"What are you doing, Hans?"

"I am doing what the dog does, Baas—watching my master."

"Good," I answered. Then an idea struck me. "Hans, you have heard of the white Baas with the long beard whom the Kaffirs call Dogeetah?"

"I have heard of him and once I saw him, a few moons ago passing through Pinetown. A Kaffir with him told me that he was going over the Drakensberg to hunt for things that crawl and fly, being quite mad, Baas."

"Well, where is he now, Hans? He should have been here to travel with us."

"Am I a spirit that I can tell the Baas whither a white man has wandered? Yet, stay. Mavovo may be able to tell. He is a great doctor, he can see through distance, and even now, this very night his Snake of divination has entered into him and he is looking into the future, yonder, behind the house. I saw him form the circle."

I translated what Hans said to Stephen, for he had been talking in Dutch, then asked him if he would like to see some Kaffir magic.

"Of course," he answered, "but it's all bosh, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, all bosh, or so most people say," I answered evasively. "Still, sometimes these *Inyangas* tell one strange things."

Then, led by Hans, we crept round the house to where there was a five-foot stone wall at the back of the stable. Beyond this wall, within the circle of some huts where my Kaffirs lived, was an open space with an ant-heap floor where they did their cooking. Here, facing us, sat Mavovo, while in a ring around him were all the hunters who were to accompany us; also Jack, the lame Griqua, and the two house-boys. In front of Mavovo burned a number of little wood fires. I counted them and found that there were fourteen, which, I reflected, was the exact number of our hunters, plus ourselves. One of the hunters was engaged in feeding these fires with little bits of stick and handfuls of dried grass so as to keep them burning brightly. The others sat round perfectly silent and watched with rapt attention. Mavovo himself looked like a man who is asleep. He was crouched on his haunches with his big head resting almost upon his knees. About his middle was a snake-skin, and round his neck an ornament that appeared to be made of human teeth. On his right side lay a pile of feathers from the wings of vultures, and on his left a little heap of silver money—I suppose the fees paid by the hunters for whom he was divining.

After we had watched him for some while from our shelter behind the wall he appeared to wake out of his sleep. First he muttered; then he looked up to the moon and seemed to say a prayer of which I could not catch the words. Next he shuddered three times convulsively and exclaimed in a clear voice:

"My Snake has come. It is within me. Now I can hear, now I can see."

Three of the little fires, those immediately in front of him, were larger than the others. He took up his bundle of vultures' feathers, selected one with care, held it towards the sky, then passed it through the flame of the centre one of the three fires, uttering as he did so, my native name, Macumazana. Withdrawing it from the flame he examined the charred edges of the feather very carefully, a proceeding that caused a cold shiver to go down my back, for I knew well that he was inquiring of his "Spirit" what would be my fate upon this expedition. How it answered, I cannot tell, for he laid the feather down and took another, with which he went through the same process. This time, however, the name he called out was Mwamwazela, which in its shortened form of Wazela, was the Kaffir appellation that the natives had given to Stephen Somers. It means a Smile, and no doubt was selected for him because of his pleasant, smiling countenance.

Having passed it through the right-hand fire of the three, he examined it and laid it down.

So it went on. One after another he called out the names of the hunters, beginning with his own as captain; passed the feather which represented each of them through the particular fire of his destiny, examined and laid it down. After this he seemed to go to sleep again for a few minutes, then woke up as a man does from a natural slumber, yawned and stretched himself.

"Speak," said his audience, with great anxiety. "Have you seen? Have you heard? What does your Snake tell you of me? Of me? Of me? Of me?"

"I have seen, I have heard," he answered. "My Snake tells me that this will be a very dangerous journey. Of those who go on it six will die by the bullet, by the spear or by sickness, and others will be hurt."

"Ow?" said one of them, "but which will die and which will come out safe? Does not your Snake tell you that, O Doctor?"

"Yes, of course my Snake tells me that. But my Snake tells me also to hold my tongue on the matter, lest some of us should be turned to cowards. It tells me further that the first who should ask me more, will be one of those who must die. Now do you ask? Or you? Or you? Or you? Ask if you will."

Strange to say no one accepted the invitation. Never have I seen a body of men so indifferent to the future, at least to every appearance. One and all they seemed to come to the conclusion that so far as they were concerned it might be left to look after itself.

"My Snake told me something else," went on Mavovo. "It is that if among this company there is any jackal of a man who, thinking that he might be one of the six to die, dreams to avoid his fate by deserting, it will be of no use. For then my Snake will point him out and show me how to deal with him."

Now with one voice each man present there declared that desertion from the lord Macumazana was the last thing that could possibly occur to him. Indeed, I believe that those brave fellows spoke truth. No doubt they put faith in Mavovo's magic after the fashion of their race. Still the death he promised was some way off, and each hoped he would be one of the six to escape. Moreover, the Zulu of those days was too accustomed to death to fear its terrors over much.

One of them did, however, venture to advance the argument, which Mavovo treated with proper contempt, that the shillings paid for this divination should be returned by him to the next heirs of such of them as happened to de cease. Why, he asked, should these pay a shilling in order to be told that they must die? It seemed unreasonable.

Certainly the Zulu Kaffirs have a queer way of looking at things.

"Hans," I whispered, "is your fire among those that burn yonder?"

"Not so, Baas," he wheezed back into my ear. "Does the Baas think me a fool? If I must die, I must die; if I am to live, I shall live. Why then should I pay a shilling to learn what time will declare? Moreover, yonder Mavovo takes the shillings and frightens everybody, but tells nobody anything. I call it cheating. But, Baas, do you and the Baas Wazela have no fear. You did not pay shillings, and therefore Mavovo, though without doubt he is a great *Inyanga*, cannot really prophesy concerning you, since his Snake will not work without a fee."

The argument seems remarkably absurd. Yet it must be common, for now that I come to think of it, no gipsy will tell a "true fortune" unless her hand is crossed with silver.

"I say, Quatermain," said Stephen idly, "since our friend Mavovo seems to know so much, ask him what has become of Brother John, as Hans suggested. Tell me what he says afterwards, for I want to see something."

So I went through the little gate in the wall in a natural kind of way, as though I had seen nothing, and appeared to be struck by the sight of the little fires.

"Well, Mavovo," I said, "are you doing doctor's work? I thought that it had brought you into enough trouble in Zululand."

"That is so, *Baba*," replied Mavovo, who had a habit of calling me "father," though he was older than I. "It cost me my chieftainship and my cattle and my two wives and my son. It made of me a wanderer who is glad to accompany a certain Macumazana to strange lands where many things may befall me, yes," he added with meaning, "even the last of all things. And yet a gift is a gift and must be used. You, *Baba*, have a gift of shooting and do you cease to shoot? You have a gift of wandering and can you cease to wander?"

He picked up one of the burnt feathers from the little pile by his side and looked at it attentively. "Perhaps, *Baba*, you have been told—my ears are very sharp, and I thought I heard some such words floating through the air just now—that we poor Kaffir *Inyangas* can prophesy nothing true unless we are paid, and perhaps that is a fact so far as something of the moment is concerned. And yet the Snake in the *Inyanga*, jumping over the little rock which hides the present from it, may see the path that winds far and far away through the valleys, across the streams, up the mountains, till it is lost in the 'heaven above.' Thus on this feather, burnt in my magic fire, I seem to see something of your future, O my father Macumazana. Far and far your road runs," and he drew his finger along the feather. "Here is a journey," and he flicked away a carbonised flake, "here is another, and another, and another," and he flicked off flake after flake. "Here is one that is very successful, it leaves you rich; and here is yet one more, a wonderful journey this in which you see strange things and meet strange people. Then"—and he blew on the feather in such a fashion that all the charred filaments (Brother John says that *laminae* is the right word for them) fell away from it—"then, there is nothing left save such a pole as some of my people stick upright on a grave, the Shaft of Memory they call it. O, my father, you will die in a distant land, but you will leave a great memory behind you that will live for hundreds of years, for see how strong is this quill over which the fire has had no power. With some of these others it is quite different," he added.

"I daresay," I broke in, "but, Mavovo, be so good as to leave me out of your magic, for I don't at all want to know what is going to happen to me. To-day is enough for me without studying next month and next year. There is a saying in our holy book which runs: 'Sufficient to the day is its evil.'"

"Quite so, O Macumazana. Also that is a very good saying as some of those hunters of yours are thinking now. Yet an hour ago they were forcing their shillings on me that I might tell them of the future. And *you*, too, want to know something. You did not come through that gate to quote to me the wisdom of your holy book. What is it, *Baba*? Be quick, for my Snake is getting very tired. He wishes to go back to his hole in the world beneath."

"Well, then," I answered in rather a shamefaced fashion, for Mavovo had an uncanny way of seeing into one's secret motives, "I should like to know, if you can tell me, which you can't, what has become of the white man with the long beard whom you black people call Dogeetah? He should have been here to go on this journey with us; indeed, he was to be our guide and we cannot find him. Where is he and why is he not here?"

"Have you anything about you that belonged to Dogeetah, Macumazana?"

"No," I answered; "that is, yes," and from my pocket I produced the stump of pencil that Brother John had given me, which, being economical, I had saved up ever since. Mavovo took it, and after considering it carefully as he had done in the case of the feathers, swept up a pile of ashes with his horny hand from the edge of the largest of the little fires, that indeed which had represented myself. These ashes he patted flat. Then he drew on them with the point of the pencil, tracing what seemed to me to be the rough image of a man, such as children scratch upon whitewashed walls. When he had finished he sat up and contemplated his handiwork with all the satisfaction of an artist. A breeze had risen from the sea and was blowing in little gusts, so that the fine ashes were disturbed, some of the lines of the picture being filled in and others altered or enlarged.

For a while Mavovo sat with his eyes shut. Then he opened them, studied the ashes and what remained of the picture, and taking a blanket that lay near by, threw it over his own head and over the ashes. Withdrawing it again presently he cast it aside and pointed to the picture which was now quite changed. Indeed, in the moonlight, it looked more like a landscape than anything else.

"All is clear, my father," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "The white wanderer, Dogeetah, is not dead. He lives, but he is sick. Something is the matter with one of his legs so that he cannot walk. Perhaps a bone is broken or some beast has bitten him. He lies in a hut such as Kaffirs make, only this hut has a verandah round it like your stoep, and there are drawings on the wall. The hut is a long way off, I don't know where."

"Is that all?" I asked, for he paused.

"No, not all. Dogeetah is recovering. He will join us in that country whither we journey, at a time of trouble. That is all, and the fee is half-a-crown."

"You mean one shilling," I suggested.

"No, my father Macumazana. One shilling for simple magic such as foretelling the fate of common black people. Half-a-crown for very difficult magic that has to do with white people, magic of which only great doctors, like me, Mavovo, are the masters."

I gave him the half-crown and said:

"Look here, friend Mavovo, I believe in you as a fighter and a hunter, but as a magician I think you are a humbug. Indeed, I am so sure of it that if ever Dogeetah turns up at a time of trouble in that land whither we are journeying, I will make you a present of that double-barrelled rifle of mine which you admired so much."

One of his rare smiles appeared upon Mavovo's ugly face.

"Then give it to me now, *Baba*," he said, "for it is already earned. My Snake cannot lie—especially when the fee is half-a-crown."

I shook my head and declined, politely but with firmness.

"Ah!" said Mavovo, "you white men are very clever and think that you know everything. But it is not so, for in learning so much that is new, you have forgotten more that is old. When the Snake that is in you, Macumazana, dwelt in a black savage like me a thousand thousand years ago, you could have done and did what I do. But now you can only mock and say, 'Mavovo the brave in battle, the great hunter, the loyal man, becomes a liar when he blows the burnt feather, or reads what the wind writes upon the charmed ashes.'"

"I do not say that you are a liar, Mavovo, I say that you are deceived by your own imaginings. It is not possible that man can know what is hidden from man."

"Is it indeed so, O Macumazana, Watcher by Night? Am I, Mavovo, the pupil of Zikali, the Opener of Roads, the greatest of wizards, indeed deceived by my own imaginings? And has man no other eyes but those in his head, that he cannot see what is hidden from man? Well, you say so and all we black people know that you are very clever, and why should I, a poor Zulu, be able to see what you cannot see? Yet when to-morrow one sends you a message from the ship in which we are to sail, begging you to come fast because there is trouble on the ship, then bethink you of your words and my words, and whether or no man can see what is hidden from man in the blackness of the future. Oh! that rifle of yours is mine already, though you will not give it to me now, you who think that I am a cheat. Well, my father Macumazana, because you think I'm a cheat, never again will I blow the feather or read what the wind writes upon the ashes for you or any who eat your food." Then he rose, saluted me with uplifted right hand, collected his little pile of money and bag of medicines and marched on to the sleeping hut. On our way round the house we met my old lame caretaker, Jack. "Inkoosi," he said, "the white chief Wazela bade me say that he and the cook, Sam, have gone to sleep on board the ship to look after the goods. Sam came up just now and fetched him away; he says he will show you why tomorrow." I nodded and passed on, wondering to myself why Stephen had suddenly determined to stay the night on the *Maria*.

## CHAPTER V

### HASAN

I suppose it must have been two hours after dawn on the following morning that I was awakened by knocks upon the door and the voice of Jack saying that Sam, the cook, wanted to speak to me.

Wondering what he could be doing there, as I understood he was sleeping on the ship, I called out that he was to come in. Now this Sam, I should say, hailed from the Cape, and was a person of mixed blood. The original stock, I imagine, was Malay which had been crossed with Indian coolie. Also, somewhere or other, there was a dash of white and possibly, but of this I am not sure, a little Hottentot. The result was a person of few vices and many virtues. Sammy, I may say at once, was perhaps the biggest coward I ever met. He could not help it, it was congenital, though, curiously enough, this cowardice of his never prevented him from rushing into fresh danger. Thus he knew that the expedition upon which I was engaged would be most hazardous; remembering his weakness I explained this to him very clearly. Yet that knowledge did not deter him from imploring that he might be allowed to accompany me. Perhaps this was because there was some mutual attachment between us, as in the case of Hans. Once, a good many years before, I had rescued Sammy from a somewhat serious scrape by declining to give evidence against him. I need not enter into the details, but a certain sum of money over which he had control had disappeared. I will merely say, therefore, that at the time he was engaged to a coloured lady of very expensive tastes, whom in the end he never married.

After this, as it chanced, he nursed me through an illness. Hence the attachment of which I have spoken.

Sammy was the son of a native Christian preacher, and brought up upon what he called "The Word." He had received an excellent education for a person of his class, and in addition to many native dialects with which a varied career had made him acquainted, spoke English perfectly, though in the most bombastic style. Never would he use a short word if a long one came to his hand, or rather to his tongue. For several years of his life he was, I believe, a teacher in a school at Capetown where coloured persons received their education; his "department," as he called it, being "English Language and Literature."

Wearying of or being dismissed from his employment for some reason that he never specified, he had drifted up the coast to Zanzibar, where he turned his linguistic abilities to the study of Arabic and became the manager or head cook of an hotel. After a few years he lost this billet, I know not how or why, and appeared at Durban in what he called a "reversed position." Here it was that we met again, just before my expedition to Pongo-land.

In manners he was most polite, in disposition most religious; I believe he was a Baptist by faith, and in appearance a small, brown dandy of a man of uncertain age, who wore his hair parted in the middle and, whatever the circumstances, was always tidy in his garments.

I took him on because he was in great distress, an excellent cook, the best of nurses, and above all for the reason that, as I have said, we were in a way attached to each other. Also, he always amused me intensely, which goes for something on a long journey of the sort that I contemplated.

Such in brief was Sammy.

As he entered the room I saw that his clothes were very wet and asked him at once if it were raining, or whether he had got drunk and been sleeping in the damp grass.

"No, Mr. Quatermain," he answered, "the morning is extremely fine, and like the poor Hottentot, Hans, I have abjured the use of intoxicants. Though we differ on much else, in this matter we agree."

"Then what the deuce is up?" I interrupted, to cut short his flow of fine language.

"Sir, there is trouble on the ship" (remembering Mavovo I started at these words) "where I passed the night in the company of Mr. Somers at his special request." (It was the other way about really.) "This morning before the dawn, when he thought that everybody was asleep, the Portuguese captain and some of his Arabs began to weigh the anchor quite quietly; also to hoist the sails. But Mr. Somers and I, being very much awake, came out of the cabin and he sat upon the capstan with a revolver in his hand, saying—well, sir, I will not repeat what he said."

"No, don't. What happened then?"

"Then, sir, there followed much noise and confusion. The Portuguese and the Arabs threatened Mr. Somers, but he, sir, continued to sit upon the capstan with the stern courage of a rock in a rushing stream, and remarked that he would see them all somewhere before they touched it. After this, sir, I do not know what occurred, since while I watched from the bulwarks someone knocked me head over heels into the sea and being fortunately, a good swimmer, I gained the shore and hurried here to advise you."

"And did you advise anyone else, you idiot?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. As I sped along I communicated to an officer of the port that there was the devil of a mess upon the *Maria* which he would do well to investigate."

By this time I was in my shirt and trousers and shouting to Mavovo and the others. Soon they arrived, for as the costume of Mavovo and his company consisted only of a moocha and a blanket, it did not take them long to dress.

"Mavovo," I began, "there is trouble on the ship——"

"O *Baba*," he interrupted with something resembling a grin, "it is very strange, but last night I dreamed that I told you——"

"Curse your dreams," I said. "Gather the men and go down—no, that won't work, there would be murder done. Either it is all over now or it is all right. Get the hunters ready; I come with them. The luggage can be fetched afterwards."

Within less than an hour we were at that wharf off which the *Maria* lay in what one day will be the splendid port of Durban, though in those times its shipping arrangements were exceedingly primitive. A strange-looking band we must have been. I, who was completely dressed, and I trust tidy, marched ahead. Next came Hans in the filthy wide-awake hat which he usually wore and greasy

corduroys and after him the oleaginous Sammy arrayed in European reach-me-downs, a billy-cock and a bright blue tie striped with red, garments that would have looked very smart had it not been for his recent immersion. After him followed the fierce-looking Mavovo and his squad of hunters, all of whom wore the "ring" or *isicoco*, as the Zulus call it; that is, a circle of polished black wax sewn into their short hair. They were a grim set of fellows, but as, according to a recent law it was not allowable for them to appear armed in the town, their guns had already been shipped, while their broad stabbing spears were rolled up in their sleeping mats, the blades wrapped round with dried grass.

Each of them, however, bore in his hand a large knobkerry of red-wood, and they marched four by four in martial fashion. It is true that when we embarked on the big boat to go to the ship much of their warlike ardour evaporated, since these men, who feared nothing on the land, were terribly afraid of that unfamiliar element, the water.

We reached the *Maria*, an unimposing kind of tub, and climbed aboard. On looking aft the first thing that I saw was Stephen seated on the capstan with a pistol in his hand, as Sammy had said. Near by, leaning on the bulwark was the villainous-looking Portuguese, Delgado, apparently in the worst of tempers and surrounded by a number of equally villainous-looking Arab sailors clad in dirty white. In front was the Captain of the port, a well-known and esteemed gentleman of the name of Cato, like myself a small man who had gone through many adventures. Accompanied by some attendants, he was seated on the after-skylight, smoking, with his eyes fixed upon Stephen and the Portuguese.

"Glad to see you, Quatermain," he said. "There's some row on here, but I have only just arrived and don't understand Portuguese, and the gentleman on the capstan won't leave it to explain."

"What's up, Stephen?" I asked, after shaking Mr. Cato by the hand.

"What's up?" replied Somers. "This man," and he pointed to Delgado, "wanted to sneak out to sea with all our goods, that's all, to say nothing of me and Sammy, whom, no doubt, he'd have chucked overboard, as soon as he was out of sight of land. However, Sammy, who knows Portuguese, overheard his little plans and, as you see, I objected."

Well, Delgado was asked for his version of the affair, and, as I expected, explained that he only intended to get a little nearer to the bar and there wait till we arrived. Of course he lied and knew that we were aware of the fact and that his intention had been to slip out to sea with all our valuable property, which he would sell after having murdered or marooned Stephen and the poor cook. But as nothing could be proved, and we were now in strong enough force to look after ourselves and our belongings, I did not see the use of pursuing the argument. So I accepted the explanation with a smile, and asked everybody to join in a morning nip.

Afterwards Stephen told me that while I was engaged with Mavovo on the previous night, a message had reached him from Sammy who was on board the ship in charge of our belongings, saying that he would be glad of some company. Knowing the cook's nervous nature, fortunately enough he made up his mind at once to go and sleep upon the *Maria*. In the morning trouble arose as Sammy had told me. What he did not tell me was that he was not knocked overboard, as he said, but took to the water of his own accord, when complications with Delgado appeared imminent.

"I understand the position," I said, "and all's well that ends well. But it's lucky you thought of coming on board to sleep."

After this everything went right. I sent some of the men back in the charge of Stephen for our remaining effects, which they brought safely aboard, and in the evening we sailed. Our voyage up to Kilwa was beautiful, a gentle breeze driving us forward over a sea so calm that not even Hans, who I think was one of the worst sailors in the world, or the Zulu hunters were really sick, though as Sammy put it, they "declined their food."

I think it was on the fifth night of our voyage, or it may have been the seventh, that we anchored one afternoon off the island of Kilwa, not very far from the old Portuguese fort. Delgado, with whom we had little to do during the passage, hoisted some queer sort of signal. In response a boat came off containing what he called the Port officials, a band of cut-throat, desperate-looking, black fellows in charge of a pock-marked, elderly half-breed who was introduced to us as the Bey Hassan-ben-Mohammed. That Mr. Hassan-ben-Mohammed entirely disapproved of our presence on the ship, and especially of our proposed landing at Kilwa, was evident to me from the moment that I set eyes upon his ill-favoured countenance. After a hurried conference with Delgado, he came forward and addressed me in Arabic, of which I could not understand a word. Luckily, however, Sam the cook, who, as I think I said, was a great linguist, had a fair acquaintance with this tongue, acquired, it appears, while at the Zanzibar hotel; so, not trusting Delgado, I called on him to interpret.

"What is he saying, Sammy?" I asked.

He began to talk to Hassan and replied presently:

"Sir, he makes you many compliments. He says that he has heard what a great man you are from his friend, Delgado, also that you and Mr. Somers are English, a nation which he adores."

"Does he?" I exclaimed. "I should never have thought it from his looks. Thank him for his kind remarks and tell him that we are going to land here and march up country to shoot."

Sammy obeyed, and the conversation went on somewhat as follows:

"With all humility I (i.e. Hassan) request you not to land. This country is not a fit place for such noble gentlemen. There is nothing to eat and no head of game has been seen for years. The people in the interior are savages of the worst sort, whom hunger has driven to take to cannibalism. I would not have your blood upon my head. I beg of you, therefore, to go on in this ship to Delagoa Bay, where you will find a good hotel, or to any other place you may select."

A.Q.: "Might I ask you, noble sir, what is your position at Kilwa, that you consider yourself responsible for our safety?"

H.: "Honoured English lord, I am a trader here of Portuguese nationality, but born of an Arab mother of high birth and brought up among that people. I have gardens on the mainland, tended by my native servants who are as children to me, where I grow palms and cassava and ground nuts and plantains and many other kinds of produce. All the tribes in this district look upon me as their chief and venerated father."

A.Q.: "Then, noble Hassan, you will be able to pass us through them, seeing that we are peaceful hunters who wish to harm no one."

(A long consultation between Hassan and Delgado, during which I ordered Mavovo to bring his Zulus on deck with their guns.)

H.: "Honoured English lord, I cannot allow you to land."

A.Q.: "Noble son of the Prophet, I intend to land with my friend, my followers, my donkeys and my goods early to-morrow morning. If I can do so with your leave I shall be glad. If not——" and I glanced at the fierce group of hunters behind me.

H.: "Honoured English lord, I shall be grieved to use force, but let me tell you that in my peaceful village ashore I have at least a hundred men armed with rifles, whereas here I see under twenty."

A.Q., after reflection and a few words with Stephen Somers: "Can you tell me, noble sir, if from your peaceful village you have yet sighted the English man-of-war, *Crocodile*; I mean the steamer that is engaged in watching for the dhows of wicked slavers? A letter from her captain informed me that he would be in these waters by yesterday. Perhaps, however, he has been delayed for a day or two."

If I had exploded a bomb at the feet of the excellent Hassan its effect could scarcely have been more remarkable than that of this question. He turned—not pale, but a horrible yellow, and exclaimed:

"English man-of-war! *Crocodile*! I thought she had gone to Aden to refit and would not be back at Zanzibar for four months."

A.Q.: "You have been misinformed, noble Hassan. She will not refit till October. Shall I read you the letter?" and I produced a piece of paper from my pocket. "It may be interesting since my friend, the captain, whom you remember is named Flowers, mentions you in it. He says——"

Hassan waved his hand. "It is enough. I see, honoured lord, that you are a man of mettle not easily to be turned from your purpose. In the name of God the Compassionate, land and go wheresoever you like."

A.Q.: "I think that I had almost rather wait until the *Crocodile* comes in."

H.: "Land! Land! Captain Delgado, get up the cargo and man your boat. Mine too is at the service of these lords. You, Captain, will like to get away by this night's tide. There is still light, Lord Quatermain, and such hospitality as I can offer is at your service."

A.Q.: "Ah! I knew Bey Hassan, that you were only joking with me when you said that you wished us to go elsewhere. An excellent jest, truly, from one whose hospitality is so famous. Well, to fall in with your wishes, we will come ashore this evening, and if the Captain Delgado chances to sight the Queen's ship *Crocodile* before he sails, perhaps he will be so good as to signal to us with a rocket."

"Certainly, certainly," interrupted Delgado, who up to this time had pretended that he understood no English, the tongue in which I was speaking to the interpreter, Sammy.

Then he turned and gave orders to his Arab crew to bring up our belongings from the hold and to lower the *Maria's* boat.

Never did I see goods transferred in quicker time. Within half an hour every one of our packages was off that ship, for Stephen Somers kept a count of them. Our personal baggage went into the *Maria's* boat, and the goods together with the four donkeys which were lowered on to the top of them, were rumbled pell-mell into the barge-like punt belonging to Hassan. Here also I was accommodated, with about half of our people, the rest taking their seats in the smaller boat under the charge of Stephen.

At length all was ready and we cast off.

"Farewell, Captain," I cried to Delgado. "If you should sight the *Crocodile*——"

At this point Delgado broke into such a torrent of bad language in Portuguese, Arabic and English that I fear the rest of my remarks never reached him.

As we rowed shorewards I observed that Hans, who was seated near to me under the stomach of a jackass, was engaged in sniffing at the sides and bottom of the barge, as a dog might do, and asked him what he was about.

"Very odd smell in this boat," he whispered back in Dutch. "It stinks of Kaffir man, just like the hold of the *Maria*. I think this boat is used to carry slaves."

"Be quiet," I whispered back, "and stop nosing at those planks." But to myself I thought, Hans is right, we are in a nest of slave-traders, and this Hassan is their leader.

We rowed past the island, on which I observed the ruins of an old Portuguese fort and some long grass-roofed huts, where, I reflected, the slaves were probably kept until they could be shipped away. Observing my glance fixed upon these, Hassan hastened to explain, through Sammy, that they were storehouses in which he dried fish and hides, and kept goods.

"How interesting!" I answered. "Further south we dry hides in the sun."

Crossing a narrow channel we arrived at a rough jetty where we disembarked, whence we were led by Hassan not to the village which I now saw upon our left, but to a pleasant-looking, though dilapidated house that stood a hundred yards from the shore. Something about the appearance of this house impressed me with the idea that it was never built by slavers; the whole look of the place with its verandah and garden suggested taste and civilisation. Evidently educated people had designed it and resided here. I glanced about me and saw, amidst a grove of neglected orange trees that were surrounded with palms of some age, the ruins of a church. About this there was no doubt, for there, surmounted by a stone cross, was a little pent-house in which still hung the bell that once summoned the worshippers to prayer.

"Tell the English lord," said Hassan to Sammy, "that these buildings were a mission station of the Christians, who abandoned them more than twenty years ago. When I came here I found them empty."

"Indeed," I answered, "and what were the names of those who dwelt in them?"

"I never heard," said Hassan; "they had been gone a long while when I came."

Then we went up to the house, and for the next hour and more were engaged with our baggage which was piled in a heap in what had been the garden and in unpacking and pitching two tents for the hunters which I caused to be placed immediately in front of the rooms that were assigned to us. Those rooms were remarkable in their way. Mine had evidently been a sitting chamber, as I judged from some much broken articles of furniture, that appeared to be of American make. That which Stephen occupied had once served as a sleeping-place, for the bedstead of iron still remained there. Also there were a hanging bookcase, now fallen, and some tattered remnants of books. One of these, that oddly enough was well-preserved, perhaps because the white ants or other creatures did not like the taste of its morocco binding, was a Keble's *Christian Year*, on the title-page of which was written, "To my dearest Elizabeth on her birthday, from her husband." I took the liberty to put it in my pocket. On the wall, moreover, still hung the small watercolour picture of a very pretty young woman with fair hair and blue eyes, in the corner of which picture was written in the same handwriting as that in the book, "Elizabeth, aged twenty." This also I annexed, thinking that it might come in useful as a piece of evidence.

"Looks as if the owners of this place had left it in a hurry, Quatermain," said Stephen.

"That's it, my boy. Or perhaps they didn't leave; perhaps they stopped here."

"Murdered?"

I nodded and said, "I dare say friend Hassan could tell us something about the matter. Meanwhile as supper isn't ready yet, let us have a look at that church while it is light."

We walked through the palm and orange grove to where the building stood finely placed upon a mound. It was well-constructed of a kind of coral rock, and a glance showed us that it had been gutted by fire; the discoloured walls told their own tale. The interior was now full of shrubs and creepers, and an ugly, yellowish snake glided from what had been the stone altar. Without, the graveyard was enclosed by a broken wall, only we could see no trace of graves. Near the gateway, however, was a rough mound.

"If we could dig into that," I said, "I expect we should find the bones of the people who inhabited this place. Does that suggest anything to you, Stephen?"

"Nothing, except that they were probably killed."

"You should learn to draw inferences. It is a useful art, especially in Africa. It suggests to me that, if you are right, the deed was not done by natives, who would never take the trouble to bury the dead. Arabs, on the contrary, might do so, especially if there were any bastard Portuguese among them who called themselves Christians. But whatever happened must have been a long while ago," and I pointed to a self-sown hardwood tree growing from the mound which could scarcely have been less than twenty years old.

We returned to the house to find that our meal was ready. Hassan had asked us to dine with him, but for obvious reasons I preferred that Sammy should cook our food and that he should dine with us. He appeared full of compliments, though I could see hate and suspicion in his eye, and we fell to on the kid that we had bought from him, for I did not wish to accept any gifts from this fellow. Our drink was square-face gin, mixed with water that I sent Hans to fetch with his own hands from the stream that ran by the house, lest otherwise it should be drugged.

At first Hassan, like a good Mohammedan, refused to touch any spirits, but as the meal went on he politely relented upon this point, and I poured him out a liberal tot. The appetite comes in eating, as the Frenchman said, and the same thing applies to drinking. So at least it was in Hassan's case, who probably thought that the quantity swallowed made no difference to his sin. After the third dose of square-face he grew quite amiable and talkative. Thinking the opportunity a good one, I sent for Sammy, and through him told our host that we were anxious to hire twenty porters to carry our packages. He declared that there was not such a thing as a porter within a hundred miles, whereon I gave him some more gin. The end of it was that we struck a bargain, I forget for how much, he promising to find us twenty good men who were to stay with us for as long as we wanted them.

Then I asked him about the destruction of the mission station, but although he was half-drunk, on this point he remained very close. All he would say was that he had heard that twenty years ago the people called the Mazitu, who were very fierce, had raided right down to the coast and killed those who dwelt there, except a white man and his wife who had fled inland and never been seen again.

"How many of them were buried in that mound by the church?" I asked quickly.

"Who told you they were buried there?" he replied, with a start, but seeing his mistake, went on, "I do not know what you mean. I never heard of anyone being buried. Sleep well, honoured lords, I must go and see to the loading of my goods upon the *Maria*." Then rising, he salaamed and walked, or rather rolled, away.

"So the *Maria* hasn't sailed after all," I said, and whistled in a certain fashion. Instantly Hans crept into the room out of the darkness, for this was my signal to him.

"Hans," I said, "I hear sounds upon that island. Slip down to the shore and spy out what is happening. No one will see you if you are careful."

"No, Baas," he answered with a grin, "I do not think that anyone will see Hans if he is careful, especially at night," and he slid away as quietly as he had come.

Now I went out and spoke to Mavovo, telling him to keep a good watch and to be sure that every man had his gun ready, as I thought that these people were slave-traders and might attack us in the night.

In that event, I said, they were to fall back upon the stoep, but not to fire until I gave the word.

"Good, my father," he answered. "This is a lucky journey; I never thought there would be hope of war so soon. My Snake forgot to mention it the other night. Sleep safe, Macumazana. Nothing that walks shall reach you while we live."

"Don't be so sure," I answered, and we lay down in the bedroom with our clothes on and our rifles by our sides.

The next thing I remember was someone shaking me by the shoulder. I thought it was Stephen, who had agreed to keep awake for the first part of the night and to call me at one in the morning. Indeed, he was awake, for I could see the glow from the pipe he smoked.

"Baas," whispered the voice of Hans, "I have found out everything. They are loading the *Maria* with slaves, taking them in big boats from the island."

"So," I answered. "But how did you get here? Are the hunters asleep without?"

He chuckled. "No, they are not asleep; they look with all their eyes and listen with all their ears, yet old Hans passed through them; even the Baas Somers did not hear him."

"That I didn't," said Stephen; "thought a rat was moving, no more."

I stepped through the place where the door had been on to the stoep. By the light of the fire which the hunters had lit without I could see Mavovo sitting wide awake, his gun upon his knees, and beyond him two sentries. I called him and pointed to Hans.

"See," I said, "what good watchmen you are when one can step over your heads and enter my room without your knowing it!"

Mavovo looked at the Hottentot and felt his clothes and boots to see whether they were wet with the night dew.

"Ow!" he exclaimed in a surly voice, "I said that nothing which walks could reach you, Macumazana, but this yellow snake has crawled between us on his belly. Look at the new mud that stains his waistcoat."

"Yet snakes can bite and kill," answered Hans with a snigger. "Oh! you Zulus think that you are very brave, and shout and flourish spears and battleaxes. One poor Hottentot dog is worth a whole impi of you after all. No, don't try to strike me, Mavovo the warrior, since we both serve the same master in our separate ways. When it comes to fighting I will leave the matter to you, but when it is a case of watching or spying, do you leave it to Hans. Look here, Mavovo," and he opened his hand in which was a horn snuff-box such as Zulus sometimes carry in their ears. "To whom does this belong?"

"It is mine," said Mavovo, "and you have stolen it."

"Yes," jeered Hans, "it is yours. Also I stole it from your ear as I passed you in the dark. Don't you remember that you thought a gnat had tickled you and hit up at your face?"

"It is true," growled Mavovo, "and you, snake of a Hottentot, are great in your own low way. Yet next time anything tickles me, I shall strike, not with my hand, but with a spear."

Then I turned them both out, remarking to Stephen that this was a good example of the eternal fight between courage and cunning. After this, as I was sure that Hassan and his friends were too busy to interfere with us that night, we went to bed and slept the sleep of the just.

When I got up the next morning I found that Stephen Somers had already risen and gone out, nor did he appear until I was half through my breakfast.

"Where on earth have you been?" I asked, noting that his clothes were torn and covered with wet moss.

"Up the tallest of those palm trees, Quatermain. Saw an Arab climbing one of them with a rope and got another Arab to teach me the trick. It isn't really difficult, though it looks alarming."

"What in the name of goodness——" I began.

"Oh!" he interrupted, "my ruling passion. Looking through the glasses I thought I caught sight of an orchid growing near the crown, so went up. It wasn't an orchid after all, only a mass of yellow pollen. But I learned something for my pains. Sitting in the top of that palm I saw the *Maria* working out from under the lee of the island. Also, far away, I noted a streak of smoke, and watching it through the glasses, made out what looked to me uncommonly like a man-of-war steaming slowly along the coast. In fact, I am sure it was, and English too. Then the mist came up and I lost sight of them."

"My word!" I said, "that will be the *Crocodile*. What I told our host, Hassan, was not altogether bunkum. Mr. Cato, the port officer at Durban, mentioned to me that the *Crocodile* was expected to call there within the next fortnight to take in stores after a slave-hunting cruise down the coast. Now it would be odd if she chanced to meet the *Maria* and asked to have a look at her cargo, wouldn't it?"

"Not at all, Quatermain, for unless one or the other of them changes her course that is just what she must do within the next hour or so, and I jolly well hope she will. I haven't forgiven that beast, Delgado, the trick he tried to play on us by slipping away with our goods, to say nothing of those poor devils of slaves. Pass the coffee, will you?"

For the next ten minutes we ate in silence, for Stephen had an excellent appetite and was hungry after his morning climb.

Just as we finished our meal Hassan appeared, looking even more villainous than he had done the previous day. I saw also that he was in a truculent mood, induced perhaps by the headache from which he was evidently suffering as a result of his potations. Or perhaps the fact that the *Maria* had got safe away with the slaves, as he imagined unobserved by us, was the cause of the change of his demeanour. A third alternative may have been that he intended to murder us during the previous night and found no safe opportunity of carrying out his amiable scheme.

We saluted him courteously, but without salaaming in reply he asked me bluntly through Sammy when we intended to be gone, as such "Christian dogs defiled his house," which he wanted for himself.

I answered, as soon as the twenty bearers whom he had promised us appeared, but not before.

"You lie," he said. "I never promised you bearers; I have none here."

"Do you mean that you shipped them all away in the *Maria* with the slaves last night?" I asked, sweetly.

My reader, have you ever taken note of the appearance and proceedings of a tom-cat of established age and morose disposition when a little dog suddenly disturbs it on the prowl? Have you observed how it contorts itself into arched but unnatural shapes, how it swells visibly to almost twice its normal size, how its hair stands up and its eyes flash, and the stream of unmentionable language that proceeds from its open mouth? If so, you will have a very good idea of the effect produced upon Hassan by this remark of mine. The fellow looked as though he were going to burst with rage. He rolled about, his bloodshot eyes seemed to protrude, he cursed us horribly, he put his hand upon the hilt of the great knife he wore, and finally he did what the tom-cat does, he spat.

Now, Stephen was standing with me, looking as cool as a cucumber and very much amused, and being, as it chanced, a little nearer to Hassan than I was, received the full benefit of this rude proceeding. My word! didn't it wake him up. He said something strong, and the next second flew at the half-breed like a tiger, landing him a beauty straight upon the nose. Back staggered Hassan, drawing his knife as he did so, but Stephen's left in the eye caused him to drop it, as he dropped himself. I pounced upon the knife, and since it was too late to interfere, for the mischief had been done, let things take their course and held back the Zulus who had rushed up at the noise.

Hassan rose and, to do him credit, came on like a man, head down. His great skull caught Stephen, who was the lighter of the two, in the chest and knocked him over, but before the Arab could follow up the advantage, he was on his feet again. Then ensued a really glorious mill. Hassan fought with head and fists and feet, Stephen with fists alone. Dodging his opponent's rushes, he gave it to him as he passed, and soon his coolness and silence began to tell. Once he was knocked over by a hooked one under the jaw, but in the next round he sent the Arab literally flying head over heels. Oh! how those Zulus cheered, and I, too, danced with delight. Up Hassan came again, spitting out several teeth and, adopting new tactics, grabbed Stephen round the middle. To and fro they swung, the Arab trying to kick the Englishman with his knees and to bite him also, till the pain reminded him of the absence of his front teeth. Once he nearly got him down—nearly, but not quite, for the collar by which he had gripped him (his object was to strangle) burst and, at that juncture, Hassan's turban fell over his face, blinding him for a moment.

Then Stephen gripped him round the middle with his left arm and with his right pommelled him unmercifully till he sank in a sitting position to the ground and held up his hand in token of surrender.

"The noble English lord has beaten me," he gasped.

"Apologise!" yelled Stephen, picking up a handful of mud, "or I shove this down your dirty throat."

He seemed to understand. At any rate, he bowed till his forehead touched the ground, and apologised very thoroughly.

"Now that is over," I said cheerfully to him, "so how about those bearers?"

"I have no bearers," he answered.

"You dirty liar," I exclaimed; "one of my people has been down to your village there and says it is full of men."

"Then go and take them for yourself," he replied, viciously, for he knew that the place was stockaded.

Now I was in a fix. It was all very well to give a slave-dealer the thrashing he deserved, but if he chose to attack us with his Arabs we should be in a poor way. Watching me with the eye that was not bunged up, Hassan guessed my perplexity.

"I have been beaten like a dog," he said, his rage returning to him with his breath, "but God is compassionate and just, He will avenge in due time."

The words had not left his lips for one second when from somewhere out at sea there floated the sullen boom of a great gun. At this moment, too, an Arab rushed up from the shore, crying:

"Where is the Bey Hassan?"

"Here," I said, pointing at him.

The Arab stared until I thought his eyes would drop out, for the Bey Hassan was indeed a sight to see. Then he gabbled in a frightened voice:

"Captain, an English man-of-war is chasing the *Maria*."

Boom went the great gun for the second time. Hassan said nothing, but his jaw dropped, and I saw that he had lost exactly three teeth.

"That is the *Crocodile*," I remarked slowly, causing Sammy to translate, and as I spoke, produced from my inner pocket a Union Jack which I had placed there after I heard that the ship was sighted. "Stephen," I went on as I shook it out, "if you have got your wind, would you mind climbing up that palm tree again and signalling with this to the *Crocodile* out at sea?"

"By George! that's a good idea," said Stephen, whose jovial face, although swollen, was now again wreathed in smiles. "Hans, bring me a long stick and a bit of string."

But Hassan did not think it at all a good idea.

"English lord," he gasped, "you shall have the bearers. I will go to fetch them."

"No, you won't," I said, "you will stop here as a hostage. Send that man."

Hassan uttered some rapid orders and the messenger sped away, this time towards the stockaded village on the right.

As he went another messenger arrived, who also stared amazedly at the condition of his chief.

"Bey—if you are the Bey," he said, in a doubtful voice, for by now the amiable face of Hassan had begun to swell and colour, "with the telescope we have seen that the English man-of-war has sent a boat and boarded the *Maria*."

"God is great!" muttered the discomfited Hassan, "and Delgado, who is a thief and a traitor from his mother's breast, will tell the truth. The English sons of Satan will land here. All is finished; nothing is left but flight. Bid the people fly into the bush and take the slaves—I mean their servants. I will join them."

"No, you won't," I interrupted, through Sammy; "at any rate, not at present. You will come with us."

The miserable Hassan reflected, then he asked:

"Lord Quatermain" (I remember the title, because it is the nearest I ever got, or am likely to get, to the peerage), "if I furnish you with the twenty bearers and accompany you for some days on your journey inland, will you promise not to signal to your countrymen on the ship and bring them ashore?"

"What do you think?" I asked of Stephen.

"Oh!" he answered, "I think I'd agree. This scoundrel has had a pretty good dusting, and if once the *Crocodile* people land, there'll be an end of our expedition. As sure as eggs are eggs they will carry us off to Zanzibar or somewhere to give evidence before a slave court. Also nothing will be gained, for by the time the sailors get here, all these rascals will have bolted, except our friend, Hassan. You see it isn't as though we were sure he would be hung. He'd probably escape after all. International law, subject of a foreign Power, no direct proof—that kind of thing, you know."

"Give me a minute or two," I said, and began to reflect very deeply.

Whilst I was thus engaged several things happened. I saw twenty natives being escorted towards us, doubtless the bearers who had been promised; also I saw many others, accompanied by other natives, flying from the village into the bush. Lastly, a third messenger arrived, who announced that the *Maria* was sailing away, apparently in charge of a prize-crew, and that the man-of-war was putting about as though to accompany her. Evidently she had no intention of effecting a landing upon what was, nominally at any rate, Portuguese territory. Therefore, if anything was to be done, we must act at once.

Well, the end of it was that, like a fool, I accepted Stephen's advice and did nothing, always the easiest course and generally that which leads to most trouble. Ten minutes afterwards I changed my mind, but then it was too late; the *Crocodile* was out of signalling distance. This was subsequent to a conversation with Hans.

"Baas," said that worthy, in his leery fashion, "I think you have made a mistake. You forget that these yellow devils in white robes who have run away will come back again, and that when you return from up country, they may be waiting for you. Now if the English man-of-war had destroyed their town, and their slave-sheds, they might have gone somewhere else. However," he added, as an afterthought, glancing at the disfigured Hassan, "we have their captain, and of course you mean to hang him, Baas. Or if you don't like to, leave it to me. I can hang men very well. Once, when I was young, I helped the executioner at Cape Town."

"Get out," I said, but, nevertheless, I knew that Hans was right.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SLAVE ROAD

The twenty bearers having arrived, in charge of five or six Arabs armed with guns, we went to inspect them, taking Hassan with us, also the hunters. They were a likely lot of men, though rather thin and scared-looking, and evidently, as I could see from their physical appearance and varying methods of dressing the hair, members of different tribes. Having delivered them, the Arabs, or rather one of them, entered into excited conversation with Hassan. As Sammy was not at hand I do not know what was said, although I gathered that they were contemplating his rescue. If so, they gave up the idea and began to run away as their companions had done. One of them, however, a bolder fellow than the rest, turned and fired at me. He missed by some yards, as I could tell from the sing of the bullet, for these Arabs are execrable shots. Still his attempt at murder irritated me so much that I determined he should not go scot-free. I was carrying the little rifle called "Intombi," that with which, as Hans had reminded me, I shot the vultures at Dingaan's kraal many years before. Of course, I could have killed the man, but this I did not wish to do. Or I could have shot him through the leg, but then we should have had to nurse him or leave him to die! So I selected his right arm, which was outstretched as he fled, and at about fifty paces put a bullet through it just above the elbow.

"There," I said to the Zulus as I saw it double up, "that low fellow will never shoot at anyone again."

"Pretty, Macumazana, very pretty!" said Mavovo, "but as you can aim so well, why not have chosen his head? That bullet is half-wasted."

Next I set to work to get into communication with the bearers, who thought, poor devils, that they had been but sold to a new master. Here I may explain that they were slaves not meant for exportation, but men kept to cultivate Hassan's gardens. Fortunately I found that two of them belonged to the Mazitu people, who it may be remembered are of the same blood as the Zulus, although they separated from the parent stock generations ago. These men talked a dialect that I could understand, though at first not very easily. The foundation of it was Zulu, but it had become much mixed with the languages of other tribes whose women the Mazitu had taken to wife.

Also there was a man who could speak some bastard Arabic, sufficiently well for Sammy to converse with him.

I asked the Mazitus if they knew the way back to their country. They answered yes, but it was far off, a full month's journey. I told them that if they would guide us thither, they should receive their freedom and good pay, adding that if the other men served us well, they also should be set free when we had done with them. On receiving this information the poor wretches smiled in a sickly fashion and looked at Hassan-ben-Mohammed, who glowered at them and us from the box on which he was seated in charge of Mavovo.

How can we be free while that man lives, their look seemed to say. As though to confirm their doubts Hassan, who understood or guessed what was passing, asked by what right we were promising freedom to his slaves.

"By right of that," I answered, pointing to the Union Jack which Stephen still had in his hand. "Also we will pay you for them when we return, according as they have served us."

"Yes," he muttered, "you will pay me for them when you return, or perhaps before that, Englishman."

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before we were able to make a start. There was so much to be arranged that it might have been wiser to wait till the morrow, had we not determined that if we could help it nothing would induce us to spend another night in that place. Blankets were served out to each of the bearers who, poor naked creatures, seemed quite touched at the gift of them; the loads were apportioned, having already been packed at Durban in cases such as one man could carry. The pack saddles were put upon the four donkeys which proved to be none the worse for their journey, and burdens to a weight of about 100 lbs. each fixed on them in waterproof hide bags, besides cooking calabashes and sleeping mats which Hans produced from somewhere. Probably he stole them out of the deserted village, but as they were necessary to us I confess I asked no questions. Lastly, six or eight goats which were wandering about were captured to take with us for food till we could find game. For these I offered to pay Hassan, but when I handed him the money he threw it down in a rage, so I picked it up and put it in my pocket again with a clear conscience.

At length everything was more or less ready, and the question arose as to what was to be done with Hassan. The Zulus, like Hans, wished to kill him, as Sammy explained to him in his best Arabic. Then this murderous fellow showed what a coward he was at heart. He flung himself upon his knees, he wept, he invoked us in the name of the Compassionate Allah who, he explained, was after all the same God that we worshipped, till Mavovo, growing impatient of the noise, threatened him with his kerry, whereon he became silent. The easy-natured Stephen was for letting him go, a plan that seemed to have advantages, for then at least we should be rid of his abominable company. After reflection, however, I decided that we had better take him along with us, at any rate for a day or so, to hold as a hostage in case the Arabs should follow and attack us. At first he refused to stir, but the assegai of one of the Zulu hunters pressed gently against what remained of his robe, furnished an argument that he could not resist.

At length we were off. I with the two guides went ahead. Then came the bearers, then half of the hunters, then the four donkeys in charge of Hans and Sammy, then Hassan and the rest of the hunters, except Mavovo, who brought up the rear with Stephen. Needless to say, all our rifles were loaded, and generally we were prepared for any emergency. The only path, that which the guides said we must follow, ran by the seashore for a few hundred yards and then turned inland through Hassan's village where he lived, for it seemed that the old mission house was not used by him. As we marched along a little rocky cliff—it was not more than ten feet high—where a deep-water channel perhaps fifty yards in breadth separated the mainland from the island whence the slaves had been loaded on to the *Maria*, some difficulty arose about the donkeys. One of these slipped its load and another began to buck and evinced an inclination to leap into the sea with its precious burden. The rearguard of hunters ran to get hold of it, when suddenly there was a splash.

The brute's in! I thought to myself, till a shout told me that not the ass, but Hassan had departed over the cliff's edge. Watching his opportunity and being, it was clear, a first-rate swimmer, he had flung himself backwards in the midst of the confusion and falling into deep water, promptly dived. About twenty yards from the shore he came up for a moment, then dived again heading for the

island. I dare say I could have potted him through the head with a snap shot, but somehow I did not like to kill a man swimming for his life as though he were a hippopotamus or a crocodile. Moreover, the boldness of the manoeuvre appealed to me. So I refrained from firing and called to the others to do likewise.

As our late host approached the shore of the island I saw Arabs running down the rocks to help him out of the water. Either they had not left the place, or had re-occupied it as soon as H.M.S. *Crocodile* had vanished with her prize. As it was clear that to recapture Hassan would involve an attack upon the garrison of the island which we were in no position to carry out, I gave orders for the march to be resumed. These, the difficulty with the donkey having been overcome, were obeyed at once.

It was fortunate that we did not delay, for scarcely had the caravan got into motion when the Arabs on the island began to fire at us. Luckily no one was hit, and we were soon round a point and under cover; also their shooting was as bad as usual. One missile, however, it was a pot-leg, struck a donkey-load and smashed a bottle of good brandy and a tin of preserved butter. This made me angry, so motioning to the others to proceed I took shelter behind a tree and waited till a torn and dirty turban, which I recognised as that of Hassan, poked up above a rock. Well, I put a bullet through that turban, for I saw the thing fly, but unfortunately, not through the head beneath it. Having left this P.P.C. card on our host, I bolted from the rock and caught up the others.

Presently we passed round the village; through it I would not go for fear of an ambushade. It was quite a big place, enclosed with a strong fence, but hidden from the sea by a rise in the intervening land. In the centre was a large eastern-looking house, where doubtless Hassan dwelt with his harem. After we had gone a little way further, to my astonishment I saw flames breaking out from the palm-leaf roof of this house. At the time I could not imagine how this happened, but when, a day or two later, I observed Hans wearing a pair of large and very handsome gold pendants in his ears and a gold bracelet on his wrist, and found that he and one of the hunters were extremely well set up in the matter of British sovereigns—well, I had my doubts. In due course the truth came out. He and the hunter, an adventurous spirit, slipped through a gate in the fence without being observed, ran across the deserted village to the house, stole the ornaments and money from the women's apartments and as they departed, fired the place "in exchange for the bottle of good brandy," as Hans explained.

I was inclined to be angry, but after all, as we had been fired on, Hans's exploit became an act of war rather than a theft. So I made him and his companion divide the gold equally with the rest of the hunters, who no doubt had kept their eyes conveniently shut, not forgetting Sammy, and said no more. They netted £8 apiece, which pleased them very much. In addition to this I gave £1 each, or rather goods to that value, to the bearers as their share of the loot.

Hassan, I remarked, was evidently a great agriculturist, for the gardens which he worked by slave labour were beautiful, and must have brought him in a large revenue.

Passing through these gardens we came to sloping land covered with bush. Here the track was not too good, for the creepers hampered our progress. Indeed, I was very glad when towards sunset we reached the crest of a hill and emerged upon a tableland which was almost clear of trees and rose gradually till it met the horizon. In that bush we might easily have been attacked, but in this open country I was not so much afraid, since the loss to the Arabs would have been great before we were overpowered. As a matter of fact, although spies dogged us for days no assault was ever attempted.

Finding a convenient place by a stream we camped for the night, but as it was so fine, did not pitch the tents. Afterwards I was sorry that we had not gone further from the water, since the mosquitoes bred by millions in the marshes bordering the stream gave us a dreadful time. On poor Stephen, fresh from England, they fell with peculiar ferocity, with the result that in the morning what between the bruises left by Hassan and their bites, he was a spectacle for men and angels. Another thing that broke our rest was the necessity of keeping a strict watch in case the slave-traders should elect to attack us in the hours of darkness; also to guard against the possibility of our bearers running away and perhaps stealing the goods. It is true that before they went to sleep I explained to them very clearly that any of them who attempted to give us the slip would certainly be seen and shot, whereas if they remained with us they would be treated with every kindness. They answered through the two Mazitu that they had nowhere to go, and did not wish to fall again into the power of Hassan, of whom they spoke literally with shudders, pointing the while to their scarred backs and the marks of the slave yokes upon their necks. Their protestations seemed and indeed proved to be sincere, but of this of course we could not then be sure.

As I was engaged at sunrise in making certain that the donkeys had not strayed and generally that all was well, I noted through the thin mist a little white object, which at first I thought was a small bird sitting on an upright stick about fifty yards from the camp. I went towards it and discovered that it was not a bird but a folded piece of paper stuck in a cleft wand, such as natives often use for the carrying of letters. I opened the paper and with great difficulty, for the writing within was bad Portuguese, read as follows:

*"English Devils.—Do not think that you have escaped me. I know where you are going, and if you live through the journey it will be but to die at my hands after all. I tell you that I have at my command three hundred brave men armed with guns who worship Allah and thirst for the blood of Christian dogs. With these I will follow, and if you fall into my hands alive, you shall learn what it is to die by fire or pinned over ant-heaps in the sun. Let us see if your English man-of-war will help you then, or your false God either. Misfortune go with you, white-skinned robbers of honest men!"*

This pleasing epistle was unsigned, but its anonymous author was not hard to identify. I showed it to Stephen who was so infuriated at its contents that he managed to dab some ammonia with which he was treating his mosquito bites into his eye. When at length the pain was soothed by bathing, we concocted this answer:

*"Murderer, known among men as Hassan-ben-Mohammed—Truly we sinned in not hanging you when you were in our power. Oh! wolf who grows fat upon the blood of the innocent, this is a fault that we shall not commit again. Your death is near to you and we believe at our hands. Come with all your villains whenever you will. The more there are of them the better we shall be pleased, who would rather rid the world of many fiends than of a few,*

*"Till we meet again, Allan Quatermain,*

"Neat, if not Christian," I said when I had read the letter over.

"Yes," replied Stephen, "but perhaps just a little bombastic in tone. If that gentleman did arrive with three hundred armed men—eh?"

"Then, my boy," I answered, "in this way or in that we shall thrash him. I don't often have an inspiration, but I've got one now, and it is to the effect that Mr. Hassan has not very long to live and that we shall be intimately connected with his end. Wait till you have seen a slave caravan and you will understand my feelings. Also I know these gentry. That little prophecy of ours will get upon his nerves and give him a foretaste of things. Hans, go and set this letter in that cleft stick. The postman will call for it before long."

As it happened, within a few days we did see a slave caravan, some of the merchandise of the estimable Hassan.

We had been making good progress through a beautiful and healthy country, steering almost due west, or rather a little to the north of west. The land was undulating and rich, well-watered and only bush-clad in the neighbourhood of the streams, the higher ground being open, of a park-like character, and dotted here and there with trees. It was evident that once, and not very long ago, the population had been dense, for we came to the remains of many villages, or rather towns with large market-places. Now, however, these were burned with fire, or deserted, or occupied only by a few old bodies who got a living from the overgrown gardens. These poor people, who sat desolate and crooning in the sun, or perhaps worked feebly at the once fertile fields, would fly screaming at our approach, for to them men armed with guns must of necessity be slave-traders.

Still from time to time we contrived to catch some of them, and through one member of our party or the other to get at their stories. Really it was all one story. The slaving Arabs, on this pretext or on that, had set tribe against tribe. Then they sided with the stronger and conquered the weaker by aid of their terrible guns, killing out the old folk and taking the young men, women and children (except the infants whom they butchered) to be sold as slaves. It seemed that the business had begun about twenty years before, when Hassan-ben-Mohammed and his companions arrived at Kilwa and drove away the missionary who had built a station there.

At first this trade was extremely easy and profitable, since the raw material lay near at hand in plenty. By degrees, however, the neighbouring communities had been worked out. Countless numbers of them were killed, while the pick of the population passed under the slave yoke, and those of them who survived, vanished in ships to unknown lands. Thus it came about that the slavers were obliged to go further afield and even to conduct their raids upon the borders of the territory of the great Mazitu people, the inland race of Zulu origin of whom I have spoken. According to our informants, it was even rumoured that they proposed shortly to attack these Mazitus in force, relying on their guns to give them the victory and open to them a new and almost inexhaustible store of splendid human merchandise. Meanwhile they were cleaning out certain small tribes which hitherto had escaped them, owing to the fact that they had their residence in bush or among difficult hills.

The track we followed was the recognised slave road. Of this we soon became aware by the numbers of skeletons which we found lying in the tall grass at its side, some of them with heavy slave-sticks still upon their wrists. These, I suppose, had died from exhaustion, but others, as their split skulls showed had been disposed of by their captors.

On the eighth day of our march we struck the track of a slave caravan. It had been travelling towards the coast, but for some reason or other had turned back. This may have been because its leaders had been warned of the approach of our party. Or perhaps they had heard that another caravan, which was at work in a different district, was drawing near, bringing its slaves with it, and wished to wait for its arrival in order that they might join forces.

The spoor of these people was easy to follow. First we found the body of a boy of about ten. Then vultures revealed to us the remains of two young men, one of whom had been shot and the other killed by a blow from an axe. Their corpses were roughly hidden beneath some grass, I know not why. A mile or two further on we heard a child wailing and found it by following its cries. It was a little girl of about four who had been pretty, though now she was but a living skeleton. When she saw us she scrambled away on all fours like a monkey. Stephen followed her, while I, sick at heart, went to get a tin of preserved milk from our stores. Presently I heard him call to me in a horrified voice. Rather reluctantly, for I knew that he must have found something dreadful, I pushed my way through the bush to where he was. There, bound to the trunk of a tree, sat a young woman, evidently the mother of the child, for it clung to her leg.

Thank God she was still living, though she must have died before another day dawned. We cut her loose, and the Zulu hunters, who are kind folk enough when they are not at war, carried her to camp. In the end with much trouble we saved the lives of that mother and child. I sent for the two Mazitus, with whom I could by now talk fairly well, and asked them why the slavers did these things.

They shrugged their shoulders and one of them answered with a rather dreadful laugh:

"Because, Chief, these Arabs, being black-hearted, kill those who can walk no more, or tie them up to die. If they let them go they might recover and escape, and it makes the Arabs sad that those who have been their slaves should live to be free and happy."

"Does it? Does it indeed?" exclaimed Stephen with a snort of rage that reminded me of his father. "Well, if ever I get a chance I'll make them sad with a vengeance."

Stephen was a tender-hearted young man, and for all his soft and indolent ways, an awkward customer when roused.

Within forty-eight hours he got his chance, thus: That day we camped early for two reasons. The first was that the woman and child we had rescued were so weak they could not walk without rest, and we had no men to spare to carry them; the second that we came to an ideal spot to pass the night. It was, as usual, a deserted village through which ran a beautiful stream of water. Here we took possession of some outlying huts with a fence round them, and as Mavovo had managed to shoot a fat eland cow and her half-grown calf, we prepared to have a regular feast. Whilst Sammy was making some broth for the rescued woman, and Stephen and I smoked our pipes and watched him, Hans slipped through the broken gate of the thorn fence, or *boma*, and announced that Arabs were coming, two lots of them with many slaves.

We ran out to look and saw that, as he had said, two caravans were approaching, or rather had reached the village, but at some distance from us, and were now camping on what had once been the market-place. One of these was that whose track we had followed, although during the last few hours of our march we had struck away from it, chiefly because we could not bear such sights as I have described. It seemed to comprise about two hundred and fifty slaves and over forty guards, all black men carrying guns, and

most of them by their dress Arabs, or bastard Arabs. In the second caravan, which approached from another direction, were not more than one hundred slaves and about twenty or thirty captors.

"Now," I said, "let us eat our dinner and then, if you like, we will go to call upon those gentlemen, just to show that we are not afraid of them. Hans, get the flag and tie it to the top of that tree; it will show them to what country we belong."

Up went the Union Jack duly, and presently through our glasses we saw the slavers running about in a state of excitement; also we saw the poor slaves turn and stare at the bit of flapping bunting and then begin to talk to each other. It struck me as possible that someone among their number had seen a Union Jack in the hands of an English traveller, or had heard of it as flying upon ships or at points on the coast, and what it meant to slaves. Or they may have understood some of the remarks of the Arabs, which no doubt were pointed and explanatory. At any rate, they turned and stared till the Arabs ran among them with sjambocks, that is, whips of hippopotamus hide, and suppressed their animated conversation with many blows.

At first I thought that they would break camp and march away; indeed, they began to make preparations to do this, then abandoned the idea, probably because the slaves were exhausted and there was no other water they could reach before nightfall. In the end they settled down and lit cooking fires. Also, as I observed, they took precautions against attack by stationing sentries and forcing the slaves to construct a *boma* of thorns about their camp.

"Well," said Stephen, when we had finished our dinner, "are you ready for that call?"

"No!" I answered, "I do not think that I am. I have been considering things, and concluded that we had better leave well alone. By this time those Arabs will know all the story of our dealings with their worthy master, Hassan, for no doubt he has sent messengers to them. Therefore, if we go to their camp, they may shoot us at sight. Or, if they receive us well, they may offer hospitality and poison us, or cut our throats suddenly. Our position might be better, still it is one that I believe they would find difficult to take. So, in my opinion, we had better stop still and await developments."

Stephen grumbled something about my being over-cautious, but I took no heed of him. One thing I did do, however. Sending for Hans, I told him to take one of the Mazitu—I dared not risk them both for they were our guides—and another of the natives whom we had borrowed from Hassan, a bold fellow who knew all the local languages, and creep down to the slavers' camp as soon as it was quite dark. There I ordered him to find out what he could, and if possible to mix with the slaves and explain that we were their friends. Hans nodded, for this was exactly the kind of task that appealed to him, and went off to make his preparations.

Stephen and I also made some preparations in the way of strengthening our defences, building large watch-fires and setting sentries.

The night fell, and Hans with his companions departed stealthily as snakes. The silence was intense, save for the occasional wailings of the slaves, which now and again broke out in bursts of melancholy sound, "*La-lu-La-lua!*" and then died away, to be followed by horrid screams as the Arabs laid their lashes upon some poor wretch. Once too, a shot was fired.

"They have seen Hans," said Stephen.

"I think not," I answered, "for if so there would have been more than one shot. Either it was an accident or they were murdering a slave."

After this nothing more happened for a long while, till at length Hans seemed to rise out of the ground in front of me, and behind him I saw the figures of the Mazitu and the other man.

"Tell your story," I said.

"Baas, it is this. Between us we have learned everything. The Arabs know all about you and what men you have. Hassan has sent them orders to kill you. It is well that you did not go to visit them, for certainly you would have been murdered. We crept near and overheard their talk. They purpose to attack us at dawn to-morrow morning unless we leave this place before, which they will know of as we are being watched."

"And if so, what then?" I asked.

"Then, Baas, they will attack as we are making up the caravan, or immediately afterwards as we begin to march."

"Indeed. Anything more, Hans?"

"Yes, Baas. These two men crept among the slaves and spoke with them. They are very sad, those slaves, and many of them have died of heart-pain because they have been taken from their homes and do not know where they are going. I saw one die just now; a young woman. She was talking to another woman and seemed quite well, only tired, till suddenly she said in a loud voice, 'I am going to die, that I may come back as a spirit and bewitch these devils till they are spirits too.' Then she called upon the fetish of her tribe, put her hands to her breast and fell down dead. At least," added Hans, spitting reflectively, "she did not fall quite down because the slave-stick held her head off the ground. The Arabs were very angry, both because she had cursed them and was dead. One of them came and kicked her body and afterwards shot her little boy who was sick, because the mother had cursed them. But fortunately he did not see us, because we were in the dark far from the fire."

"Anything more, Hans?"

"One thing, Baas. These two men lent the knives you gave them to two of the boldest among the slaves that they might cut the cords of the slave-sticks and the other cords with which they were tied, and then pass them down the lines, that their brothers might do the same. But perhaps the Arabs will find it out, and then the Mazitu and the other must lose their knives. That is all. Has the Baas a little tobacco?"

"Now, Stephen," I said when Hans had gone and I had explained everything, "there are two courses open to us. Either we can try to give these gentlemen the slip at once, in which case we must leave the woman and child to their fate, or we can stop where we are and wait to be attacked."

"I won't run," said Stephen sullenly; "it would be cowardly to desert that poor creature. Also we should have a worse chance marching. Remember Hans said that they are watching us."

"Then you would wait to be attacked?"

"Isn't there a third alternative, Quatermain? To attack them?"

"That's the idea," I said. "Let us send for Mavovo."

Presently he came and sat down in front of us, while I set out the case to him.

"It is the fashion of my people to attack rather than to be attacked, and yet, my father, in this case my heart is against it. Hans" (he called him *Inblatu*, a Zulu word which means Spotted Snake, that was the Hottentot's Kaffir name) "says that there are quite sixty of the yellow dogs, all armed with guns, whereas we have not more than fifteen, for we cannot trust the slave men. Also he says that they are within a strong fence and awake, with spies out, so that it will be difficult to surprise them. But here, father, we are in a strong fence and cannot be surprised. Also men who torture and kill women and children, except in war must, I think, be cowards, and will come on faintly against good shooting, if indeed they come at all. Therefore, I say, 'Wait till the buffalo shall either charge or run.' But the word is with you, Macumazana, wise Watcher-by-Night, not with me, your hunter. Speak, you who are old in war, and I will obey."

"You argue well," I answered; "also another reason comes to my mind. Those Arab brutes may get behind the slaves, of whom we should butcher a lot without hurting them. Stephen, I think we had better see the thing through here."

"All right, Quatermain. Only I hope that Mavovo is wrong in thinking that those blackguards may change their minds and run away."

"Really, young man, you are becoming very blood-thirsty—for an orchid grower," I remarked, looking at him. "Now, for my part, I devoutly hope that Mavovo is right, for let me tell you, if he isn't it may be a nasty job."

"I've always been peaceful enough up to the present," replied Stephen. "But the sight of those unhappy wretches of slaves with their heads cut open, and of the woman tied to a tree to starve——"

"Make you wish to usurp the functions of God Almighty," I said. "Well, it is a natural impulse and perhaps, in the circumstances, one that will not displease Him. And now, as we have made up our minds what we are going to do, let's get to business so that these Arab gentlemen may find their breakfast ready when they come to call."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RUSH OF THE SLAVES

Well, we did all that we could in the way of making ready. After we had strengthened the thorn fence of our *boma* as much as possible and lit several large fires outside of it to give us light, I allotted his place to each of the hunters and saw that their rifles were in order and that they had plenty of ammunition. Then I made Stephen lie down to sleep, telling him that I would wake him to watch later on. This, however, I had no intention of doing as I wanted him to rise fresh and with a steady nerve on the occasion of his first fight.

As soon as I saw that his eyes were shut I sat down on a box to think. To tell the truth, I was not altogether happy in my mind. To begin with I did not know how the twenty bearers would behave under fire. They might be seized with panic and rush about, in which case I determined to let them out of the *boma* to take their chance, for panic is a catching thing.

A worse matter was our rather awkward position. There were a good many trees round the camp among which an attacking force could take cover. But what I feared much more than this, or even than the reedy banks of the stream along which they could creep out of reach of our bullets, was a sloping stretch of land behind us, covered with thick grass and scrub and rising to a crest about two hundred yards away. Now if the Arabs got round to this crest they would fire straight into our *boma* and make it untenable. Also if the wind were in their favour, they might burn us out or attack under the clouds of smoke. As a matter of fact, by the special mercy of Providence, none of these things happened, for a reason which I will explain presently.

In the case of a night, or rather a dawn attack, I have always found that hour before the sky begins to lighten very trying indeed. As a rule everything that can be done is done, so that one must sit idle. Also it is then that both the physical and the moral qualities are at their lowest ebb, as is the mercury in the thermometer. The night is dying, the day is not yet born. All nature feels the influence of that hour. Then bad dreams come, then infants wake and call, then memories of those who are lost to us arise, then the hesitating soul often takes its plunge into the depths of the Unknown. It is not wonderful, therefore, that on this occasion the wheels of Time drove heavily for me. I knew that the morning was at hand by many signs. The sleeping bearers turned and muttered in their sleep, a distant lion ceased its roaring and departed to its own place, an alert-minded cock crew somewhere, and our donkeys rose and began to pull at their tether-ropes. As yet, however, it was quite dark. Hans crept up to me; I saw his wrinkled, yellow face in the light of the watch-fire.

"I smell the dawn," he said and vanished again.

Mavovo appeared, his massive frame silhouetted against the blackness.

"Watcher-by-Night, the night is done," he said. "If they come at all, the enemy should soon be here."

Saluting, he too passed away into the dark, and presently I heard the sounds of spear-blades striking together and of rifles being cocked.

I went to Stephen and woke him. He sat up yawning, muttered something about greenhouses; then remembering, said:

"Are those Arabs coming? We are in for a fight at last. Jolly, old fellow, isn't it?"

"You are a jolly old fool!" I answered inconsequently; and marched off in a rage.

My mind was uneasy about this inexperienced young man. If anything should happen to him, what should I say to his father? Well, in that event, it was probable that something would happen to me too. Very possibly we should both be dead in an hour. Certainly I had no intention of allowing myself to be taken alive by those slaving devils. Hassan's remarks about fires and ant-heaps and the sun were too vividly impressed upon my memory.

In another five minutes everybody was up, though it required kicks to rouse most of the bearers from their slumbers. They, poor men, were accustomed to the presence of Death and did not suffer him to disturb their sleep. Still I noted that they muttered together and seemed alarmed.

"If they show signs of treachery, you must kill them," I said to Mavovo, who nodded in his grave, silent fashion.

Only we left the rescued slave-woman and her child plunged in the stupor of exhaustion in a corner of the camp. What was the use of disturbing her?

Sammy, who seemed far from comfortable, brought two pannikins of coffee to Stephen and myself.

"This is a momentous occasion, Messrs. Quatermain and Somers," he said as he gave us the coffee, and I noted that his hand shook and his teeth chattered. "The cold is extreme," he went on in his copybook English by way of explaining these physical symptoms which he saw I had observed. "Mr. Quatermain, it is all very well for you to paw the ground and smell the battle from afar, as is written in the Book of Job. But I was not brought up to the trade and take it otherwise. Indeed I wish I was back at the Cape, yes, even within the whitewashed walls of the Place of Detention."

"So do I," I muttered, keeping my right foot on the ground with difficulty.

But Stephen laughed outright and asked:

"What will you do, Sammy, when the fighting begins?"

"Mr. Somers," he answered, "I have employed some wakeful hours in making a hole behind that tree-trunk, through which I hope bullets will not pass. There, being a man of peace, I shall pray for our success."

"And if the Arabs get in, Sammy?"

"Then, sir, under Heaven, I shall trust to the fleetness of my legs."

I could stand it no longer, my right foot flew up and caught Sammy in the place at which I had aimed. He vanished, casting a reproachful look behind him.

Just then a terrible clamour arose in the slavers' camp which hitherto had been very silent, and just then also the first light of dawn glinted on the barrels of our guns.

"Look out!" I cried, as I gulped down the last of my coffee, "there's something going on there."

The clamour grew louder and louder till it seemed to fill the skies with a concentrated noise of curses and shrieking. Distinct from it, as it were, I heard shouts of alarm and rage, and then came the sounds of gunshots, yells of agony and the thud of many running feet. By now the light was growing fast, as it does when once it comes in these latitudes. Three more minutes, and through the grey mist of the dawn we saw dozens of black figures struggling up the slope towards us. Some seemed to have logs of wood tied behind them, others crawled along on all fours, others dragged children by the hand, and all yelled at the top of their voices.

"The slaves are attacking us," said Stephen, lifting his rifle.

"Don't shoot," I cried. "I think they have broken loose and are taking refuge with us."

I was right. These unfortunates had used the two knives which our men smuggled to them to good purpose. Having cut their bonds during the night they were running to seek the protection of the Englishmen and their flag. On they surged, a hideous mob, the slave-sticks still fast to the necks of many of them, for they had not found time or opportunity to loose them all, while behind came the Arabs firing. The position was clearly very serious, for if they burst into our camp, we should be overwhelmed by their rush and fall victims to the bullets of their captors.

"Hans," I cried, "take the men who were with you last night and try to lead those slaves round behind us. Quick! Quick now before we are stamped flat."

Hans darted away, and presently I saw him and the two other men running towards the approaching crowd, Hans waving a shirt or some other white object to attract their attention. At the time the foremost of them had halted and were screaming, "Mercy, English! Save us, English!" having caught sight of the muzzles of our guns.

This was a fortunate occurrence indeed, for otherwise Hans and his companions could never have stopped them. The next thing I saw was the white shirt bearing away to the left on a line which led past the fence of our *boma* into the scrub and high grass behind the camp. After it struggled and scrambled the crowd of slaves like a flock of sheep after the bell-wether. To them Hans's shirt was a kind of "white helmet of Navarre."

So that danger passed by. Some of the slaves had been struck by the Arab bullets or trodden down in the rush or collapsed from weakness, and at those of them who still lived the pursuers were firing. One woman, who had fallen under the weight of the great slave-stick which was fastened about her throat, was crawling forward on her hands and knees. An Arab fired at her and the bullet struck the ground under her stomach but without hurting her, for she wriggled forward more quickly. I was sure that he would shoot again, and watched. Presently, for by now the light was good, I saw him, a tall fellow in a white robe, step from behind the shelter of a banana-tree about a hundred and fifty yards away, and take a careful aim at the woman. But I too took aim and—well, I am not bad at this kind of snap-shooting when I try. That Arab's gun never went off. Only he went up two feet or more into the air and fell backwards, shot through the head which was the part of his person that I had covered.

The hunters uttered a low "Ow!" of approval, while Stephen, in a sort of ecstasy, exclaimed:

"Oh! what a heavenly shot!"

"Not bad, but I shouldn't have fired it," I answered, "for they haven't attacked us yet. It is a kind of declaration of war, and," I added, as Stephen's sun-helmet leapt from his head, "there's the answer. Down, all of you, and fire through the loopholes."

Then the fight began. Except for its grand finale it wasn't really much of a fight when compared with one or two we had afterwards on this expedition. But, on the other hand, its character was extremely awkward for us. The Arabs made one rush at the beginning, shouting on Allah as they came. But though they were plucky villains they did not repeat that experiment. Either by good luck or good management Stephen knocked over two of them with his double-barrelled rifle, and I also emptied my large-bore breech-loader—the first I ever owned—among them, not without results, while the hunters made a hit or two.

After this the Arabs took cover, getting behind trees and, as I had feared, hiding in the reeds on the banks of the stream. Thence they harassed us a great deal, for amongst them were some very decent shots. Indeed, had we not taken the precaution of lining the thorn fence with a thick bank of earth and sods, we should have fared badly. As it was, one of the hunters was killed, the bullet passing through the loophole and striking him in the throat as he was about to fire, while the unfortunate bearers who were on rather higher ground, suffered a good deal, two of them being dispatched outright and four wounded. After this I made the rest of them lie flat on the ground close against the fence, in such a fashion that we could fire over their bodies.

Soon it became evident that there were more of these Arabs than we had thought, for quite fifty of them were firing from different places. Moreover, by slow degrees they were advancing with the evident object of outflanking us and gaining the high ground behind. Some of them, of course, we stopped as they rushed from cover to cover, but this kind of shooting was as difficult as that at bolting rabbits across a woodland ride, and to be honest, I must say that I alone was much good at the game, for here my quick eye and long practice told.

Within an hour the position had grown very serious indeed, so much so that we found it necessary to consider what should be done. I pointed out that with our small number a charge against the scattered riflemen, who were gradually surrounding us, would be worse than useless, while it was almost hopeless to expect to hold the *boma* till nightfall. Once the Arabs got behind us, they could rake us from the higher ground. Indeed, for the last half-hour we had directed all our efforts to preventing them from passing this *boma*, which, fortunately, the stream on the one side and a stretch of quite open land on the other made it very difficult for them to do without more loss than they cared to face.

"I fear there is only one thing for it," I said at length, during a pause in the attack while the Arabs were either taking counsel or waiting for more ammunition, "to abandon the camp and everything and bolt up the hill. As those fellows must be tired and we are all good runners, we may save our lives in that way."

"How about the wounded," asked Stephen, "and the slave-woman and child?"

"I don't know," I answered, looking down.

Of course I did know very well, but here, in an acute form, arose the ancient question: Were we to perish for the sake of certain individuals in whom we had no great interest and whom we could not save by remaining with them? If we stayed where we were our end seemed fairly certain, whereas if we ran for it, we had a good chance of escape. But this involved the desertion of several injured

bearers and a woman and child whom we had picked up starving, all of whom would certainly be massacred, save perhaps the woman and child.

As these reflections flitted through my brain I remembered that a drunken Frenchman named Leblanc, whom I had known in my youth and who had been a friend of Napoleon, or so he said, told me that the great emperor when he was besieging Acre in the Holy Land, was forced to retreat. Being unable to carry off his wounded men, he left them in a monastery on Mount Carmel, each with a dose of poison by his side. Apparently they did not take the poison, for according to Leblanc, who said he was present there (not as a wounded man), the Turks came and butchered them. So Napoleon chose to save his own life and that of his army at the expense of his wounded. But, after all, I reflected, he was no shining example to Christian men and I hadn't time to find any poison. In a few words I explained the situation to Mavovo, leaving out the story of Napoleon, and asked his advice.

"We must run," he answered. "Although I do not like running, life is more than stores, and he who lives may one day pay his debts."

"But the wounded, Mavovo; we cannot carry them."

"I will see to them, Macumazana; it is the fortune of war. Or if they prefer it, we can leave them—to be nursed by the Arabs," which of course was just Napoleon and his poison over again.

I confess that I was about to assent, not wishing that I and Stephen, especially Stephen, should be potted in an obscure engagement with some miserable slave-traders, when something happened.

It will be remembered that shortly after dawn Hans, using a shirt for a flag, had led the fugitive slaves past the camp up to the hill behind. There he and they had vanished, and from that moment to this we had seen nothing of him or them. Now of a sudden he reappeared still waving the shirt. After him rushed a great mob of naked men, two hundred of them perhaps, brandishing slave-sticks, stones and the boughs of trees. When they had almost reached the *boma* whence we watched them amazed, they split into two bodies, half of them passing to our left, apparently under the command of the Mazitu who had accompanied Hans to the slave-camp, and the other half to the right following the old Hottentot himself. I stared at Mavovo, for I was too thunderstruck to speak.

"Ah!" said Mavovo, "that Spotted Snake of yours" (he referred to Hans), "is great in his own way, for he has even been able to put courage into the hearts of slaves. Do you not understand, my father, that they are about to attack those Arabs, yes, and to pull them down, as wild dogs do a buffalo calf?"

It was true: this was the Hottentot's superb design. Moreover, it succeeded. Up on the hillside he had watched the progress of the fight and seen how it must end. Then, through the interpreter who was with him, he harangued those slaves, pointing out to them that we, their white friends, were about to be overwhelmed, and that they must either strike for themselves, or return to the yoke. Among them were some who had been warriors in their own tribes, and through these he stirred the others. They seized the slave-sticks from which they had been freed, pieces of rock, anything that came to their hands, and at a given signal charged, leaving only the women and children behind them.

Seeing them come the scattered Arabs began to fire at them, killing some, but thereby revealing their own hiding-places. At these the slaves rushed. They hurled themselves upon the Arabs; they tore them, they dashed out their brains in such fashion that within another five minutes quite two-thirds of them were dead; and the rest, of whom we took some toll with our rifles as they bolted from cover, were in full flight.

It was a terrible vengeance. Never did I witness a more savage scene than that of these outraged men wreaking their wrongs upon their tormentors. I remember that when most of the Arabs had been killed and a few were escaped, the slaves found one, I think it was the captain of the gang, who had hidden himself in a little patch of dead reeds washed up by the stream. Somehow they managed to fire these; I expect that Hans, who had remained discreetly in the background after the fighting began, emerged when it was over and gave them a match. In due course out came the wretched Arab. Then they flung themselves on him as marching ants do upon a caterpillar, and despite his cries for mercy, tore him to fragments, literally to fragments. Being what they were, it was hard to blame them. If we had seen our parents shot, our infants pitilessly butchered, our homes destroyed and our women and children marched off in the slave-sticks to be sold into bondage, should we not have done the same? I think so, although we are not ignorant savages.

Thus our lives were saved by those whom we had tried to save, and for once justice was done even in those dark parts of Africa, for in that time they were dark indeed. Had it not been for Hans and the courage which he managed to inspire into the hearts of these crushed blacks, I have little doubt but that before nightfall we should have been dead, for I do not think that any attempt at retreat would have proved successful. And if it had, what would have happened to us in that wild country surrounded by enemies and with only the few rounds of ammunition that we could have carried in our flight?

"Ah! Baas," said the Hottentot a little while later, squinting at me with his bead-like eyes, "after all you did well to listen to my prayer and bring me with you. Old Hans is a drunkard, yes, or at least he used to be, and old Hans gambles, yes, and perhaps old Hans will go to hell. But meanwhile old Hans can think, as he thought one day before the attack on Maraisfontein, as he thought one day on the Hill of Slaughter by Dingaan's kraal, and as he thought this morning up there among the bushes. Oh! he knew how it must end. He saw that those dogs of Arabs were cutting down a tree to make a bridge across that deep stream and get round to the high ground at the back of you, whence they would have shot you all in five minutes. And now, Baas, my stomach feels very queer. There was no breakfast on the hillside and the sun was very hot. I think that just one tot of brandy—oh! I know, I promised not to drink, but if *you* give it me the sin is yours, not mine."

Well, I gave him the tot, a stiff one, which he drank quite neat, although it was against my principles, and locked up the bottle afterwards. Also I shook the old fellow's hand and thanked him, which seemed to please him very much, for he muttered something to the effect that it was nothing, since if I had died he would have died too, and therefore he was thinking of himself, not of me. Also two big tears trickled down his snub nose, but these may have been produced by the brandy.

Well, we were the victors and elated as may be imagined, for we knew that the few slavers who had escaped would not attack us again. Our first thought was for food, for it was now past midday and we were starving. But dinner presupposed a cook, which reminded us of Sammy. Stephen, who was in such a state of jubilation that he danced rather than walked, the helmet with a bullet-hole through it stuck ludicrously upon the back of his head, started to look for him, and presently called to me in an alarmed voice. I went to the back of the camp and, staring into a hole like a small grave, that had been hollowed behind a solitary thorn tree, at the bottom of which lay a huddled heap, I found him. It was Sammy to all appearance. We got hold of him, and up he came, limp, senseless, but still holding in his hand a large, thick Bible, bound in boards. Moreover, in the exact centre of this Bible was a bullet-

hole, or rather a bullet which had passed through the stout cover and buried itself in the paper behind. I remember that the point of it reached to the First Book of Samuel.

As for Sammy himself, he seemed to be quite uninjured, and indeed after we had poured some water on him—he was never fond of water—he revived quickly enough. Then we found out what had happened.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I was seated in my place of refuge, being as I have told you a man of peace, enjoying the consolation of religion—he was very pious in times of trouble. “At length the firing slackened, and I ventured to peep out, thinking that perhaps the foe had fled, holding the Book in front of my face in case of accidents. After that I remember no more.”

“No,” said Stephen, “for the bullet hit the Bible and the Bible hit your head and knocked you silly.”

“Ah!” said Sammy, “how true is what I was taught that the Book shall be a shield of defence to the righteous. Now I understand why I was moved to bring the thick old Bible that belonged to my mother in heaven, and not the little thin one given to me by the Sunday school teacher, through which the ball of the enemy would have passed.”

Then he went off to cook the dinner.

Certainly it was a wonderful escape, though whether this was a direct reward of his piety, as he thought, is another matter.

As soon as we had eaten, we set to work to consider our position, of which the crux was what to do with the slaves. There they sat in groups outside the fence, many of them showing traces of the recent conflict, and stared at us stupidly. Then of a sudden, as though with one voice, they began to clamour for food.

“How are we to feed several hundred people?” asked Stephen.

“The slavers must have done it somehow,” I answered. “Let’s go and search their camp.”

So we went, followed by our hungry clients, and, in addition to many more things, to our delight found a great store of rice, mealies and other grain, some of which was ground into meal. Of this we served out an ample supply together with salt, and soon the cooking pots were full of porridge. My word! how those poor creatures did eat, nor, although it was necessary to be careful, could we find it in our hearts to stint them of the first full meal that had passed their lips after weeks of starvation. When at length they were satisfied we addressed them, thanking them for their bravery, telling them that they were free and asking what they meant to do.

Upon this point they seemed to have but one idea. They said that they would come with us who were their protectors. Then followed a great *indaba*, or consultation, which really I have not time to set out. The end of it was that we agreed that so many of them as wished should accompany us till they reached country that they knew, when they would be at liberty to depart to their own homes. Meanwhile we divided up the blankets and other stores of the Arabs, such as trade goods and beads, among them, and then left them to their own devices, after placing a guard over the foodstuffs. For my part I hoped devoutly that in the morning we should find them gone.

After this we returned to our *boma* just in time to assist at a sad ceremony, that of the burial of my hunter who had been shot through the head. His companions had dug a deep hole outside the fence and within a few yards of where he fell. In this they placed him in a sitting position with his face turned towards Zululand, setting by his side two gourds that belonged to him, one filled with water and the other with grain. Also they gave him a blanket and his two assegais, tearing the blanket and breaking the handles of the spears, to “kill” them as they said. Then quietly enough they threw in the earth about him and filled the top of the hole with large stones to prevent the hyenas from digging him up. This done, one by one, they walked past the grave, each man stopping to bid him farewell by name. Mavovo, who came last, made a little speech, telling the deceased to *namba kachle*, that is, go comfortably to the land of ghosts, as, he added, no doubt he would do who had died as a man should. He requested him, moreover, if he returned as a spirit, to bring good and not ill-fortune on us, since otherwise when he, Mavovo, became a spirit in his turn, he would have words to say to him on the matter. In conclusion, he remarked that as his, Mavovo’s Snake, had foretold this event at Durban, a fact with which the deceased would now be acquainted he, the said deceased, could never complain of not having received value for the shilling he had paid as a divining fee.

“Yes,” exclaimed one of the hunters with a note of anxiety in his voice, “but your Snake mentioned six of us to you, O doctor!”

“It did,” replied Mavovo, drawing a pinch of snuff up his uninjured nostril, “and our brother there was the first of the six. Be not afraid, the other five will certainly join him in due course, for my Snake must speak the truth. Still, if anyone is in a hurry,” and he glared round the little circle, “let him stop and talk with me alone. Perhaps I could arrange that his turn——” here he stopped, for they were all gone.

“Glad I didn’t pay a shilling to have my fortune told by Mavovo,” said Stephen, when we were back in the *boma*, “but why did they bury his pots and spears with him?”

“To be used by the spirit on its journey,” I answered. “Although they do not quite know it, these Zulus believe, like all the rest of the world, that man lives on elsewhere.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MAGIC MIRROR

I did not sleep very well that night, for now that the danger was over I found that the long strain of it had told upon my nerves. Also there were many noises. Thus, the bearers who were shot had been handed over to their companions, who disposed of them in a simple fashion, namely by throwing them into the bush where they attracted the notice of hyenas. Then the four wounded men who lay near to me groaned a good deal, or when they were not groaning uttered loud prayers to their local gods. We had done the best we could for these unlucky fellows. Indeed, that kind-hearted little coward, Sammy, who at some time in his career served as a dresser in a hospital, had tended their wounds, none of which were mortal, very well indeed, and from time to time rose to minister to them.

But what disturbed me most was the fearful hubbub which came from the camp below. Many of the tropical African tribes are really semi-nocturnal in their habits, I suppose because there the night is cooler than the day, and on any great occasion this tendency asserts itself.

Thus every one of these freed slaves seemed to be howling his loudest to an accompaniment of clashing iron pots or stones, which, lacking their native drums, they beat with sticks.

Moreover, they had lit large fires, about which they flitted in an ominous and unpleasant fashion, that reminded me of some mediaeval pictures of hell, which I had seen in an old book.

At last I could stand it no longer, and kicking Hans who, curled up like a dog, slept at my feet, asked him what was going on. His answer caused me to regret the question.

"Plenty of those slaves cannibal men, Baas. Think they eat the Arabs and like them very much," he said with a yawn, then went to sleep again.

I did not continue the conversation.

When at length we made a start on the following morning the sun was high over us. Indeed, there was a great deal to do. The guns and ammunition of the dead Arabs had to be collected; the ivory, of which they carried a good store, must be buried, for to take it with us was impossible, and the loads apportioned.[\*] Also it was necessary to make litters for the wounded, and to stir up the slaves from their debauch, into the nature of which I made no further inquiries, was no easy task. On mustering them I found that a good number had vanished during the night, where to I do not know. Still a mob of well over two hundred people, a considerable portion of whom were women and children, remained, whose one idea seemed to be to accompany us wherever we might wander. So with this miscellaneous following at length we started.

[\*] To my sorrow we never saw this ivory again.—A.Q.

To describe our adventures during the next month would be too long if not impossible, for to tell the truth, after the lapse of so many years, these have become somewhat entangled in my mind. Our great difficulty was to feed such a multitude, for the store of rice and grain, upon which we were quite unable to keep a strict supervision, they soon devoured. Fortunately the country through which we passed, at this time of the year (the end of the wet season) was full of game, of which, travelling as we did very slowly, we were able to shoot a great deal. But this game killing, delightful as it may be to the sportsman, soon palled on us as a business. To say nothing of the expenditure of ammunition, it meant incessant work.

Against this the Zulu hunters soon began to murmur, for, as Stephen and I could rarely leave the camp, the burden of it fell on them. Ultimately I hit upon this scheme. Picking out thirty or forty of the likeliest men among the slaves, I served out to each of them ammunition and one of the Arab guns, in the use of which we drilled them as best we could. Then I told them that they must provide themselves and their companions with meat. Of course accidents happened. One man was accidentally shot and three others were killed by a cow elephant and a wounded buffalo. But in the end they learned to handle their rifles sufficiently well to supply the camp. Moreover, day by day little parties of the slaves disappeared, I presume to seek their own homes, so that when at last we entered the borders of the Mazitu country there were not more than fifty of them left, including seventeen of those whom we had taught to shoot.

Then it was that our real adventures began.

One evening, after three days' march through some difficult bush in which lions carried off a slave woman, killed one of the donkeys and mauled another so badly that it had to be shot, we found ourselves upon the edge of a great grassy plateau that, according to my aneroid, was 1,640 feet above sea level.

"What place is this?" I asked of the two Mazitu guides, those same men whom we had borrowed from Hassan.

"The land of our people, Chief," they answered, "which is bordered on one side by the bush and on the other by the great lake where live the Pongo wizards."

I looked about me at the bare uplands that already were beginning to turn brown, on which nothing was visible save vast herds of buck such as were common further south. A dreary prospect it was, for a slight rain was falling, accompanied by mist and a cold wind.

"I do not see your people or their kraals," I said; "I only see grass and wild game."

"Our people will come," they replied, rather nervously. "No doubt even now their spies watch us from among the tall grass or out of some hole."

"The deuce they do," I said, or something like it, and thought no more of the matter. When one is in conditions in which anything *may* happen, such as, so far as I am concerned, have prevailed through most of my life, one grows a little careless as to what *will* happen. For my part I have long been a fatalist, to a certain extent. I mean I believe that the individual, or rather the identity which animates him, came out from the Source of all life a long while, perhaps hundreds of thousands or millions of years ago, and when his career is finished, perhaps hundreds of thousands or millions of years hence, or perhaps to-morrow, will return perfected, but still as an individual, to dwell in or with that Source of Life. I believe also that his various existences, here or elsewhere, are fore-known

and fore-ordained, although in a sense he may shape them by the action of his free will, and that nothing which he can do will lengthen or shorten one of them by a single hour. Therefore, so far as I am concerned, I have always acted up to the great injunction of our Master and taken no thought for the morrow.

However, in this instance, as in many others of my experience, the morrow took plenty of thought for itself. Indeed, before the dawn, Hans, who never seemed really to sleep any more than a dog does, woke me up with the ominous information that he heard a sound which he thought was caused by the tramp of hundreds of marching men.

"Where?" I asked, after listening without avail—to look was useless, for the night was dark as pitch.

He put his ear to the ground and said:

"There."

I put *my* ear to the ground, but although my senses are fairly acute, could hear nothing.

Then I sent for the sentries, but these, too, could hear nothing. After this I gave the business up and went to sleep again.

However, as it proved, Hans was quite right; in such matters he generally was right, for his senses were as keen as those of any wild beast. At dawn I was once more awakened, this time by Mavovo, who reported that we were being surrounded by a regiment, or regiments. I rose and looked out through the mist. There, sure enough, in dim and solemn outline, though still far off, I perceived rank upon rank of men, armed men, for the light glimmered faintly upon their spears.

"What is to be done, Macumazana?" asked Mavovo.

"Have breakfast, I think," I answered. "If we are going to be killed it may as well be after breakfast as before," and calling the trembling Sammy, I instructed him to make the coffee. Also I awoke Stephen and explained the situation to him.

"Capital!" he answered. "No doubt these are the Mazitu, and we have found them much more easily than we expected. People generally take such a lot of hunting for in this confounded great country."

"That's not such a bad way of looking at things," I answered, "but would you be good enough to go round the camp and make it clear that not on any account is anyone to fire without orders. Stay, collect all the guns from those slaves, for heaven knows what they will do with them if they are frightened!"

Stephen nodded and sauntered off with three or four of the hunters. While he was gone, in consultation with Mavovo, I made certain little arrangements of my own, which need not be detailed. They were designed to enable us to sell our lives as dearly as possible, should things come to the worst. One should always try to make an impression upon the enemy in Africa, for the sake of future travellers if for no other reason.

In due course Stephen and the hunters returned with the guns, or most of them, and reported that the slave people were in a great state of terror, and showed a disposition to bolt.

"Let them bolt," I answered. "They would be of no use to us in a row and might even complicate matters. Call in the Zulus who are watching at once."

He nodded, and a few minutes later I heard—for the mist which hung about the bush to the east of the camp was still too dense to allow of my seeing anything—a clamour of voices, followed by the sound of scuttling feet. The slave people, including our bearers, had gone, every one of them. They even carried away the wounded. Just as the soldiers who surrounded us were completing their circle they bolted between the two ends of it and vanished into the bush out of which we had marched on the previous evening. Often since then I have wondered what became of them. Doubtless some perished, and the rest worked their way back to their homes or found new ones among other tribes. The experiences of those who escaped must be interesting to them if they still live. I can well imagine the legends in which these will be embodied two or three generations hence.

Deducting the slave people and the bearers whom we had wrung out of Hassan, we were now a party of seventeen, namely eleven Zulu hunters including Mavovo, two white men, Hans and Sammy, and the two Mazitus who had elected to remain with us, while round us was a great circle of savages which closed in slowly.

As the light grew—it was long in coming on that dull morning—and the mist lifted, I examined these people, without seeming to take any particular notice of them. They were tall, much taller than the average Zulu, and slither in their build, also lighter in colour. Like the Zulus they carried large hide shields and one very broad-bladed spear. Throwing assegais seemed to be wanting, but in place of them I saw that they were armed with short bows, which, together with a quiver of arrows, were slung upon their backs. The officers wore a short skin cloak or kaross, and the men also had cloaks, which I found out afterwards were made from the inner bark of trees.

They advanced in the most perfect silence and very slowly. Nobody said anything, and if orders were given this must have been done by signs. I could not see that any of them had firearms.

"Now," I said to Stephen, "perhaps if we shot and killed some of those fellows, they might be frightened and run away. Or they might not; or if they did they might return."

"Whatever happened," he remarked sagely, "we should scarcely be welcome in their country afterwards, so I think we had better do nothing unless we are obliged."

I nodded, for it was obvious that we could not fight hundreds of men, and told Sammy, who was perfectly livid with fear, to bring the breakfast. No wonder he was afraid, poor fellow, for we were in great danger. These Mazitu had a bad name, and if they chose to attack us we should all be dead in a few minutes.

The coffee and some cold buck's flesh were put upon our little camp-table in front of the tent which we had pitched because of the rain, and we began to eat. The Zulu hunters also ate from a bowl of mealie porridge which they had cooked on the previous night, each of them with his loaded rifle upon his knees. Our proceedings appeared to puzzle the Mazitu very much indeed. They drew quite near to us, to within about forty yards, and halted there in a dead circle, staring at us with their great round eyes. It was like a scene in a dream; I shall never forget it.

Everything about us appeared to astonish them, our indifference, the colour of Stephen and myself (as a matter of fact at that date Brother John was the only white man they had ever seen), our tent and our two remaining donkeys. Indeed, when one of these beasts broke into a bray, they showed signs of fright, looking at each other and even retreating a few paces.

At length the position got upon my nerves, especially as I saw that some of them were beginning to fiddle with their bows, and that their General, a tall, one-eyed old fellow, was making up his mind to do something. I called to one of the two Mazitus, whom I forgot

to say we had named Tom and Jerry, and gave him a pannikin of coffee.

"Take that to the captain there with my good wishes, Jerry, and ask him if he will drink with us," I said.

Jerry, who was a plucky fellow, obeyed. Advancing with the steaming coffee, he held it under the Captain's nose. Evidently he knew the man's name, for I heard him say:

"O Babemba, the white lords, Macumazana and Wazela, ask if you will share their holy drink with them?"

I could perfectly understand the words, for these people spoke a dialect so akin to Zulu that by now it had no difficulty for me.

"Their holy drink!" exclaimed the old fellow, starting back. "Man, it is hot red-water. Would these white wizards poison me with *mwavi*?"

Here I should explain that *mwavi* or *mkasa*, as it is sometimes called, is the liquor distilled from the inner bark of a sort of mimosa tree or sometimes from a root of the strychnos tribe, which is administered by the witch-doctors to persons accused of crime. If it makes them sick they are declared innocent. If they are thrown into convulsions or stupor they are clearly guilty and die, either from the effects of the poison or afterwards by other means.

"This is no *mwavi*, O Babemba," said Jerry. "It is the divine liquor that makes the white lords shoot straight with their wonderful guns which kill at a thousand paces. See, I will swallow some of it," and he did, though it must have burnt his tongue.

Thus encouraged, old Babemba sniffed at the coffee and found it fragrant. Then he called a man, who from his peculiar dress I took to be a doctor, made him drink some, and watched the results, which were that the doctor tried to finish the pannikin. Snatching it away indignantly Babemba drank himself, and as I had half-filled the cup with sugar, found the mixture good.

"It is indeed a holy drink," he said, smacking his lips. "Have you any more of it?"

"The white lords have more," said Jerry. "They invite you to eat with them."

Babemba stuck his finger into the tin, and covering it with the sediment of sugar, sucked and reflected.

"It's all right," I whispered to Stephen. "I don't think he'll kill us after drinking our coffee, and what's more, I believe he is coming to breakfast."

"This may be a snare," said Babemba, who now began to lick the sugar out of the pannikin.

"No," answered Jerry with creditable resource; "though they could easily kill you all, the white lords do not hurt those who have partaken of their holy drink, that is unless anyone tries to harm them."

"Cannot you bring some more of the holy drink here?" he asked, giving a final polish to the pannikin with his tongue.

"No," said Jerry, "if you want it you must go there. Fear nothing. Would I, one of your own people, betray you?"

"True!" exclaimed Babemba. "By your talk and your face you are a Mazitu. How came you—well, we will speak of that afterwards. I am very thirsty. I will come. Soldiers, sit down and watch, and if any harm happens to me, avenge it and report to the king."

Now, while all this was going on, I had made Hans and Sammy open one of the boxes and extract therefrom a good-sized mirror in a wooden frame with a support at the back so that it could be stood anywhere. Fortunately it was unbroken; indeed, our packing had been so careful that none of the looking-glasses or other fragile things were injured. To this mirror I gave a hasty polish, then set it upright upon the table.

Old Babemba came along rather suspiciously, his one eye rolling over us and everything that belonged to us. When he was quite close it fell upon the mirror. He stopped, he stared, he retreated, then drawn by his overmastering curiosity, came on again and again stood still.

"What is the matter?" called his second in command from the ranks.

"The matter is," he answered, "that here is great magic. Here I see myself walking towards myself. There can be no mistake, for one eye is gone in my other self."

"Advance, O Babemba," cried the doctor who had tried to drink all the coffee, "and see what happens. Keep your spear ready, and if your witch-self attempts to harm you, kill it."

Thus encouraged, Babemba lifted his spear and dropped it again in a great hurry.

"That won't do, fool of a doctor," he shouted back. "My other self lifts a spear also, and what is more all of you who should be behind are in front of me. The holy drink has made me drunk; I am bewitched. Save me!"

Now I saw that the joke had gone too far, for the soldiers were beginning to string their bows in confusion. Luckily at this moment, the sun at length came out almost opposite to us.

"O Babemba," I said in a solemn voice, "it is true that this magic shield, which we have brought as a gift to you, gives you another self. Henceforth your labours will be halved, and your pleasures doubled, for when you look into this shield you will be not one but two. Also it has other properties—see," and lifting the mirror I used it as a heliograph, flashing the reflected sunlight into the eyes of the long half-circle of men in front of us. My word! didn't they run.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed old Babemba, "and can I learn to do that also, white lord?"

"Certainly," I answered, "come and try. Now, hold it so while I say the spell," and I muttered some hocus-pocus, then directed it towards certain of the Mazitu who were gathering again. "There! Look! Look! You have hit them in the eye. You are a master of magic. They run, they run!" and run they did indeed. "Is there anyone yonder whom you dislike?"

"Yes, plenty," answered Babemba with emphasis, "especially that witch-doctor who drank nearly all the holy drink."

"Very well; by-and-by I will show you how you can burn a hole in him with this magic. No, not now, not now. For a while this mocker of the sun is dead. Look," and dipping the glass beneath the table I produced it back first. "You cannot see anything, can you?"

"Nothing except wood," replied Babemba, staring at the deal slip with which it was lined.

Then I threw a dish-cloth over it and, to change the subject, offered him another pannikin of the "holy drink" and a stool to sit on.

The old fellow perched himself very gingerly upon the stool, which was of the folding variety, stuck the iron-tipped end of his great spear in the ground between his knees and took hold of the pannikin. Or rather he took hold of a pannikin and not the right one. So ridiculous was his appearance that the light-minded Stephen, who, forgetting the perils of the situation, had for the last

minute or two been struggling with inward laughter, clapped down his coffee on the table and retired into the tent, where I heard him gurgling in unseemly merriment. It was this coffee that in the confusion of the moment Sammy gave to old Babemba. Presently Stephen reappeared, and to cover his confusion seized the pannikin meant for Babemba and drank it, or most of it. Then Sammy, seeing his mistake, said:

"Mr. Somers, I regret that there is an error. You are drinking from the cup which that stinking savage has just licked clean."

The effect was dreadful and instantaneous, for then and there Stephen was violently sick.

"Why does the white lord do that?" asked Babemba. "Now I see that you are truly deceiving me, and that what you are giving me to swallow is nothing but hot *mwavi*, which in the innocent causes vomiting, but that in those who mean evil, death."

"Stop that foolery, you idiot," I muttered to Stephen, kicking him on the shins, "or you'll get our throats cut." Then, collecting myself with an effort, I said:

"Oh! not at all, General. This white lord is the priest of the holy drink and—what you see is a religious rite."

"Is it so," said Babemba. "Then I hope that the rite is not catching."

"Never," I replied, proffering him a biscuit. "And now, General Babemba, tell me, why do you come against us with about five hundred armed men?"

"To kill you, white lords—oh! how hot is this holy drink, yet pleasant. You said that it was not catching, did you not? For I feel —"

"Eat the cake," I answered. "And why do you wish to kill us? Be so good as to tell me the truth now, or I shall read it in the magic shield which portrays the inside as well as the out," and lifting the cloth I stared at the glass.

"If you can read my thoughts, white lord, why trouble me to tell them?" asked Babemba sensibly enough, his mouth full of biscuit. "Still, as that bright thing may lie, I will set them out. Bausi, king of our people, has sent me to kill you, because news has reached him that you are great slave dealers who come hither with guns to capture the Mazitus and take them away to the Black Water to be sold and sent across it in big canoes that move of themselves. Of this he has been warned by messengers from the Arab men. Moreover, we know that it is true, for last night you had with you many slaves who, seeing our spears, ran away not an hour ago."

Now I stared hard at the looking-glass and answered coolly:

"This magic shield tells a somewhat different story. It says that your king, Bausi, for whom by the way we have many things as presents, told you to lead us to him with honour, that we might talk over matters with him."

The shot was a good one. Babemba grew confused.

"It is true," he stammered, "that—I mean, the king left it to my judgment. I will consult the witch-doctor."

"If he left it to your judgment, the matter is settled," I said, "since certainly, being so great a noble, you would never try to murder those of whose holy drink you have just partaken. Indeed, if you did so," I added in a cold voice, "you would not live long yourself. One secret word and that drink will turn to *mwavi* of the worst sort inside of you."

"Oh! yes, white lord, it is settled," exclaimed Babemba, "it is settled. Do not trouble the secret word. I will lead you to the king and you shall talk with him. By my head and my father's spirit you are safe from me. Still, with your leave, I will call the great doctor, Imbozwi, and ratify the agreement in his presence, and also show him the magic shield."

So Imbozwi was sent for, Jerry taking the message. Presently he arrived. He was a villainous-looking person of uncertain age, humpbacked like the picture of Punch, wizened and squint-eyed. His costume was of the ordinary witch-doctor type being set off with snake skins, fish bladders, baboon's teeth and little bags of medicine. To add to his charms a broad strip of pigment, red ochre probably, ran down his forehead and the nose beneath, across the lips and chin, ending in a red mark the size of a penny where the throat joins the chest. His woolly hair also, in which was twisted a small ring of black gum, was soaked with grease and powdered blue. It was arranged in a kind of horn, coming to a sharp point about five inches above the top of the skull. Altogether he looked extremely like the devil. What was more, he was a devil in a bad temper, for the first words he said embodied a reproach to us for not having asked him to partake of our "holy drink" with Babemba.

We offered to make him some more, but he refused, saying that we should poison him.

Then Babemba set the matter out, rather nervously I thought, for evidently he was afraid of this old wizard, who listened in complete silence. When Babemba explained that without the king's direct order it would be foolish and unjustifiable to put to death such magicians as we were, Imbozwi spoke for the first time, asking why he called us magicians.

Babemba instanced the wonders of the shining shield that showed pictures.

"Pooh!" said Imbozwi, "does not calm water or polished iron show pictures?"

"But this shield will make fire," said Babemba. "The white lords say it can burn a man up."

"Then let it burn me up," replied Imbozwi with ineffable contempt, "and I will believe that these white men are magicians worthy to be kept alive, and not common slave-traders such as we have often heard of."

"Burn him, white lords, and show him that I am right," exclaimed the exasperated Babemba, after which they fell to wrangling. Evidently they were rivals, and by this time both of them had lost their tempers.

The sun was now very hot, quite sufficiently so to enable us to give Mr. Imbozwi a taste of our magic, which I determined he should have. Not being certain whether an ordinary mirror would really reflect enough heat to scorch, I drew from my pocket a very powerful burning-glass which I sometimes used for the lighting of fires in order to save matches, and holding the mirror in one hand and the burning-glass in the other, I worked myself into a suitable position for the experiment. Babemba and the witch-doctor were arguing so fiercely that neither of them seemed to notice what I was doing. Getting the focus right, I directed the concentrated spark straight on to Imbozwi's greased top-knot, where I knew he would feel nothing, my plan being to char a hole in it. But as it happened this top-knot was built up round something of a highly inflammable nature, reed or camphor-wood, I expect. At any rate, about thirty seconds later the top-knot was burning like a beautiful torch.

"Ow!" said the Kaffirs who were watching. "My Aunt!" exclaimed Stephen. "Look, look!" shouted Babemba in tones of delight. "Now will you believe, O blown-out bladder of a man, that there are greater magicians than yourself in the world?"

"What is the matter, son of a dog, that you make a mock of me?" screeched the unfuried Imbozwi, who alone was unaware of anything unusual.

As he spoke some suspicion rose in his mind which caused him to put his hand to his top-knot, and withdraw it with a howl. Then he sprang up and began to dance about, which of course only fanned the fire that had now got hold of the grease and gum. The Zulus applauded; Babemba clapped his hands; Stephen burst into one of his idiotic fits of laughter. For my part I grew frightened. Near at hand stood a large wooden pot such as the Kaffirs make, from which the coffee kettle had been filled, that fortunately was still half-full of water. I seized it and ran to him.

"Save me, white lord!" he howled. "You are the greatest of magicians and I am your slave."

Here I cut him short by clapping the pot bottom upwards on his burning head, into which it vanished as a candle does into an extinguisher. Smoke and a bad smell issued from beneath the pot, the water from which ran all over Imbozwi, who stood quite still. When I was sure the fire was out, I lifted the pot and revealed the discomfited wizard, but without his elaborate head-dress. Beyond a little scorching he was not in the least hurt, for I had acted in time; only he was bald, for when touched the charred hair fell off at the roots.

"It is gone," he said in an amazed voice after feeling at his scalp.

"Yes," I answered, "quite. The magic shield worked very well, did it not?"

"Can you put it back again, white lord?" he asked.

"That will depend upon how you behave," I replied.

Then without another word he turned and walked back to the soldiers, who received him with shouts of laughter. Evidently Imbozwi was not a popular character, and his discomfiture delighted them.

Babemba also was delighted. Indeed, he could not praise our magic enough, and at once began to make arrangements to escort us to the king at his head town, which was called Beza, vowing that we need fear no harm at his hands or those of his soldiers. In fact, the only person who did not appreciate our black arts was Imbozwi himself. I caught a look in his eye as he marched off which told me that he hated us bitterly, and reflected to myself that perhaps I had been foolish to use that burning-glass, although in truth I had not intended to set his head on fire.

"My father," said Mavovo to me afterwards, "it would have been better to let that snake burn to death, for then you would have killed his poison. I am something of a doctor myself, and I tell you there is nothing our brotherhood hates so much as being laughed at. You have made a fool of him before all his people and he will not forget it, Macumazana."

## CHAPTER IX

### BAUSI THE KING

About midday we made a start for Beza Town where King Bausi lived, which we understood we ought to reach on the following evening. For some hours the regiment marched in front, or rather round us, but as we complained to Babemba of the noise and dust, with a confidence that was quite touching, he sent it on ahead. First, however, he asked us to pass our word "by our mothers," which was the most sacred of oaths among many African peoples, that we would not attempt to escape. I confess that I hesitated before giving an answer, not being entirely enamoured of the Mazitu and of our prospects among them, especially as I had discovered through Jerry that the discomfited Imbozwi had departed from the soldiers on some business of his own. Had the matter been left to me, indeed, I should have tried to slip back into the bush over the border, and there put in a few months shooting during the dry season, while working my way southwards. This, too, was the wish of the Zulu hunters, of Hans, and I need not add of Sammy. But when I mentioned the matter to Stephen, he implored me to abandon the idea.

"Look here, Quatermain," he said, "I have come to this God-forsaken country to get that great Cypripedium, and get it I will or die in the attempt. Still," he added after surveying our rather blank faces, "I have no right to play with your lives, so if you think the thing too dangerous I will go on alone with this old boy, Babemba. Putting everything else aside, I think that one of us ought to visit Bausi's kraal in case the gentleman you call Brother John should turn up there. In short, I have made up my mind, so it is no use talking."

I lit my pipe, and for quite a time contemplated this obstinate young man while considering the matter from every point of view. Finally, I came to the conclusion that he was right and I was wrong. It was true that by bribing Babemba, or otherwise, there was still an excellent prospect of effecting a masterly retreat and of avoiding many perils. On the other hand, we had not come to this wild place in order to retreat. Further, at whose expense had we come here? At that of Stephen Somers who wished to proceed. Lastly, to say nothing of the chance of meeting Brother John, to whom I felt no obligation since he had given us the slip at Durban, I did not like the idea of being beaten. We had started out to visit some mysterious savages who worshipped a monkey and a flower, and we might as well go on till circumstances were too much for us. After all, dangers are everywhere; those who turn back because of dangers will never succeed in any life that we can imagine.

"Mavovo," I said presently, pointing to Stephen with my pipe, "the *inkoosi* Wazela does not wish to try to escape. He wishes to go on to the country of the Pongo people if we can get there. And, Mavovo, remember that he has paid for everything; we are his hired servants. Also that he says that if we run back he will walk forward alone with these Mazitus. Still, if any of you hunters desire to slip off, he will not look your way, nor shall I. What say you?"

"I say, Macumazana, that, though young, Wazela is a chief with a great heart, and that where you and he go, I shall go also, as I think will the rest of us. I do not like these Mazitu, for if their fathers were Zulus their mothers were low people. They are bastards, and of the Pongo I hear nothing but what is evil. Still, no good ox ever turns in the yoke because of a mud-hole. Let us go on, for if we sink in the swamp what does it matter? Moreover, my Snake tells me that we shall not sink, at least not all of us."

So it was arranged that no effort should be made to return. Sammy, it is true, wished to do so, but when it came to the point and he was offered one of the remaining donkeys and as much food and ammunition as he could carry, he changed his mind.

"I think it better, Mr. Quatermain," he said, "to meet my end in the company of high-born, lofty souls than to pursue a lonely career towards the inevitable in unknown circumstances."

"Very well put, Sammy," I answered; "so while waiting for the inevitable, please go and cook the dinner."

Having laid aside our doubts, we proceeded on the journey comfortably enough, being well provided with bearers to take the place of those who had run away. Babemba, accompanied by a single orderly, travelled with us, and from him we collected much information. It seemed that the Mazitu were a large people who could muster from five to seven thousand spears. Their tradition was that they came from the south and were of the same stock as the Zulus, of whom they had heard vaguely. Indeed, many of their customs, to say nothing of their language, resembled those of that country. Their military organisation, however, was not so thorough, and in other ways they struck me as a lower race. In one particular, it is true, that of their houses, they were more advanced, for these, as we saw in the many kraals that we passed, were better built, with doorways through which one could walk upright, instead of the Kaffir bee-holes.

We slept in one of these houses on our march, and should have found it very comfortable had it not been for the innumerable fleas which at length drove us out into the courtyard. For the rest, these Mazitu much resembled the Zulus. They had kraals and were breeders of cattle; they were ruled by headmen under the command of a supreme chief or king; they believed in witchcraft and offered sacrifice to the spirits of their ancestors, also in some kind of a vague and mighty god who dominated the affairs of the world and declared his will through the doctors. Lastly, they were, and I dare say still are, a race of fighting men who loved war and raided the neighbouring peoples upon any and every pretext, killing their men and stealing their women and cattle. They had their virtues, too, being kindly and hospitable by nature, though cruel enough to their enemies. Moreover, they detested dealing in slaves and those who practised it, saying that it was better to kill a man than to deprive him of his freedom. Also they had a horror of the cannibalism which is so common in the dark regions of Africa, and for this reason, more than any other, loathed the Pongo folk who were supposed to be eaters of men.

On the evening of the second day of our march, during which we had passed through a beautiful and fertile upland country, very well watered, and except in the valleys, free from bush, we arrived at Beza. This town was situated on a wide plain surrounded by low hills and encircled by a belt of cultivated land made beautiful by the crops of maize and other cereals which were then ripe to harvest. It was fortified in a way. That is, a tall, unclimbable palisade of timber surrounded the entire town, which fence was strengthened by prickly pears and cacti planted on its either side.

Within this palisade the town was divided into quarters more or less devoted to various trades. Thus one part of it was called the Ironsmiths' Quarter; another the Soldiers' Quarter; another the Quarter of the Land-tillers; another that of the Skin-dressers, and so

on. The king's dwelling and those of his women and dependents were near the North gate, and in front of these, surrounded by semi-circles of huts, was a wide space into which cattle could be driven if necessary. This, however, at the time of our visit, was used as a market and a drilling ground.

We entered the town, that must in all have contained a great number of inhabitants, by the South gate, a strong log structure facing a wooded slope through which ran a road. Just as the sun was setting we marched to the guest-huts up a central street lined with the population of the place who had gathered to stare at us. These huts were situated in the Soldiers' Quarter, not far from the king's house and surrounded by an inner fence to keep them private.

None of the people spoke as we passed them, for the Mazitu are polite by nature; also it seemed to me that they regarded us with awe tempered by curiosity. They only stared, and occasionally those of them who were soldiers saluted us by lifting their spears. The huts into which we were introduced by Babemba, with whom we had grown very friendly, were good and clean.

Here all our belongings, including the guns which we had collected just before the slaves ran away, were placed in one of the huts over which a Mazitu mounted guard, the donkeys being tied to the fence at a little distance. Outside this fence stood another armed Mazitu, also on guard.

"Are we prisoners here?" I asked of Babemba.

"The king watches over his guests," he answered enigmatically. "Have the white lords any message for the king whom I am summoned to see this night?"

"Yes," I answered. "Tell the king that we are the brethren of him who more than a year ago cut a swelling from his body, whom we have arranged to meet here. I mean the white lord with a long beard who among you black people is called Dogeetah."

Babemba started. "You are the brethren of Dogeetah! How comes it then that you never mentioned his name before, and when is he going to meet you here? Know that Dogeetah is a great man among us, for with him alone of all men the king has made blood-brotherhood. As the king is, so is Dogeetah among the Mazitu."

"We never mentioned him because we do not talk about everything at once, Babemba. As to when Dogeetah will meet us I am not sure; I am only sure that he is coming."

"Yes, lord Macumazana, but when, when? That is what the king will want to know and that is what you must tell him. Lord," he added, dropping his voice, "you are in danger here where you have many enemies, since it is not lawful for white men to enter this land. If you would save your lives, be advised by me and be ready to tell the king to-morrow when Dogeetah, whom he loves, will appear here to vouch for you, and see that he does appear very soon and by the day you name. Since otherwise when he comes, if come he does, he may not find you able to talk to him. Now I, your friend, have spoken and the rest is with you."

Then without another word he rose, slipped through the door of the hut and out by the gateway of the fence from which the sentry moved aside to let him pass. I, too, rose from the stool on which I sat and danced about the hut in a perfect fury.

"Do you understand what that infernal (I am afraid I used a stronger word) old fool told me?" I exclaimed to Stephen. "He says that we must be prepared to state exactly when that other infernal old fool, Brother John, will turn up at Beza Town, and that if we don't we shall have our throats cut as indeed has already been arranged."

"Rather awkward," replied Stephen. "There are no express trains to Beza, and if there were we couldn't be sure that Brother John would take one of them. I suppose there *is* a Brother John?" he added reflectively. "To me he seems to be—intimately connected with Mrs. Harris."

"Oh! there is, or there was," I explained. "Why couldn't the confounded ass wait quietly for us at Durban instead of fooling off butterfly hunting to the north of Zululand and breaking his leg or his neck there if he has done anything of the sort?"

"Don't know, I am sure. It's hard enough to understand one's own motives, let alone Brother John's."

Then we sat down on our stools again and stared at each other. At this moment Hans crept into the hut and squatted down in front of us. He might have walked in as there was a doorway, but he preferred to creep on his hands and knees, I don't know why.

"What is it, you ugly little toad?" I asked viciously, for that was just what he looked like; even the skin under his jaw moved like a toad's.

"The Baas is in trouble?" remarked Hans.

"I should think he was," I answered, "and so will you be presently when you are wriggling on the point of a Mazitu spear."

"They are broad spears that would make a big hole," remarked Hans again, whereupon I rose to kick him out, for his ideas were, as usual, unpleasant.

"Baas," he went on, "I have been listening—there is a very good hole in this hut for listening if one lies against the wall and pretends to be asleep. I have heard all and understood most of your talk with that one-eyed savage and the Baas Stephen."

"Well, you little sneak, what of it?"

"Only, Baas, that if we do not want to be killed in this place from which there is no escape, it is necessary that you should find out exactly on what day and at what hour Dogeetah is going to arrive."

"Look here, you yellow idiot," I exclaimed, "if you are beginning that game too, I'll——" then I stopped, reflecting that my temper was getting the better of me and that I had better hear what Hans had to say before I vented it on him.

"Baas, Mavovo is a great doctor; it is said that his Snake is the straightest and the strongest in all Zululand save that of his master, Zikali, the old slave. He told you that Dogeetah was laid up somewhere with a hurt leg and that he was coming to meet you here; no doubt therefore he can tell you also *when* he is coming. I would ask him, but he won't set his Snake to work for me. So you must ask him, Baas, and perhaps he will forget that you laughed at his magic and that he swore you would never see it again."

"Oh! blind one," I answered, "how do I know that Mavovo's story about Dogeetah was not all nonsense?"

Hans stared at me amazed.

"Mavovo's story nonsense! Mavovo's Snake a liar! Oh! Baas, that is what comes of being too much a Christian. Now, thanks to your father the Predikant, I am a Christian too, but not so much that I have forgotten how to know good magic from bad. Mavovo's Snake a liar, and after he whom we buried yonder was the first of the hunters whom the feathers named to him at Durban!" and he began to chuckle in intense amusement, then added, "Well, Baas, there it is. You must either ask Mavovo, and very nicely, or we shall

all be killed. *I* don't mind much, for I should rather like to begin again a little younger somewhere else, but just think what a noise Sammy will make!" and turning he crept out as he had crept in.

"Here's a nice position," I groaned to Stephen when he had gone. "I, a white man, who, in spite of some coincidences with which I am acquainted, know that all this Kaffir magic is bosh am to beg a savage to tell me something of which he *must* be ignorant. That is, unless we educated people have got hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether. It is humiliating; it isn't Christian, and I'm hanged if I'll do it!"

"I dare say you will be—hanged I mean—whether you do it or whether you don't," replied Stephen with his sweet smile. "But I say, old fellow, how do you know it is all bosh? We are told about lots of miracles which weren't bosh, and if miracles ever existed, why can't they exist now? But there, I know what you mean and it is no use arguing. Still, if you're proud, I ain't. I'll try to soften the stony heart of Mavovo—we are rather pals, you know—and get him to unroll the book of his occult wisdom," and he went.

A few minutes later I was called out to receive a sheep which, with milk, native beer, some corn, and other things, including green forage for the donkeys, Bausi had sent for us to eat. Here I may remark that while we were among the Mazitu we lived like fighting cocks. There was none of that starvation which is, or was, so common in East Africa where the traveller often cannot get food for love or money—generally because there is none.

When this business was settled by my sending a message of thanks to the king with an intimation that we hoped to wait upon him on the morrow with a few presents, I went to seek Sammy in order to tell him to kill and cook the sheep. After some search I found, or rather heard him beyond a reed fence which divided two of the huts. He was acting as interpreter between Stephen Somers and Mavovo.

"This Zulu man declares, Mr. Somers," he said, "that he quite understands everything you have been explaining, and that it is probable that we shall all be butchered by this savage Bausi, if we cannot tell him when the white man, Dogeetah, whom he loves, will arrive here. He says also that he thinks that by his magic he could learn when this will happen—if it is to happen at all—(which of course, Mr. Somers, for your private information only, is a mighty lie of the ignorant heathen). He adds, however, that he does not care one brass farthing—his actual expression, Mr. Somers, is 'one grain of corn on a mealie-cob'—about his or anybody else's life, which from all I have heard of his proceedings I can well believe to be true. He says in his vulgar language that there is no difference between the belly of a Mazitu-land hyena and that of any other hyena, and that the earth of Mazitu-land is as welcome to his bones as any other earth, since the earth is the wickedest of all hyenas, in that he has observed that soon or late it devours everlastingly everything which once it bore. You must forgive me for reproducing his empty and childish talk, Mr. Somers, but you bade me to render the words of this savage with exactitude. In fact, Mr. Somers, this reckless person intimates, in short that some power with which he is not acquainted—he calls it the 'Strength that makes the Sun to shine and broiders the blanket of the night with stars' (forgive me for repeating his silly words), caused him 'to be born into this world, and, at an hour already appointed, will draw him from this world back into its dark, eternal bosom, there to be rocked in sleep, or nursed to life again, according to its unknown will'—I translate exactly, Mr. Somers, although I do not know what it all means—and that he does not care a curse when this happens. Still, he says that whereas he is growing old and has known many sorrows—he alludes here, I gather, to some nigger wives of his whom another savage knocked on the head; also to a child to whom he appears to have been attached—you are young with all your days and, he hopes, joys, before you. Therefore he would gladly do anything in his power to save your life, because although you are white and he is black he has conceived an affection for you and looks on you as his child. Yes, Mr. Somers, although I blush to repeat it, this black fellow says he looks upon you as his child. He adds, indeed, that if the opportunity arises, he will gladly give his life to save your life, and that it cuts his heart in two to refuse you anything. Still he must refuse this request of yours, that he will ask the creature he calls his Snake—what he means by that, I don't know, Mr. Somers—to declare when the white man, named Dogeetah, will arrive in this place. For this reason, that he told Mr. Quatermain when he laughed at him about his divinations that he would make no more magic for him or any of you, and that he will die rather than break his word. That's all, Mr. Somers, and I dare say you will think—quite enough, too."

"I understand," replied Stephen. "Tell the chief, Mavovo" (I observed he laid an emphasis on the word, *chief*) "that I *quite* understand, and that I thank him very much for explaining things to me so fully. Then ask him whether, as the matter is so important, there is no way out of this trouble?"

Sammy translated into Zulu, which he spoke perfectly, as I noted without interpolations or additions.

"Only one way," answered Mavovo in the intervals of taking snuff. "It is that Macumazana himself shall ask me to do this thing. Macumazana is my old chief and friend, and for his sake I will forget what in the case of others I should always remember. If he will come and ask me, without mockery, to exercise my skill on behalf of all of us, I will try to exercise it, although I know very well that he believes it to be but as an idle little whirlwind that stirs the dust, that raises the dust and lets it fall again without purpose or meaning, forgetting, as the wise white men forget, that even the wind which blows the dust is the same that breathes in our nostrils, and that to it, we also are as is the dust."

Now I, the listener, thought for a moment or two. The words of this fighting savage, Mavovo, even those of them of which I had heard only the translation, garbled and beslavered by the mean comments of the unutterable Sammy, stirred my imagination. Who was I that I should dare to judge of him and his wild, unknown gifts? Who was I that I should mock at him and by my mockery intimate that I believed him to be a fraud?

Stepping through the gateway of the fence, I confronted him.

"Mavovo," I said, "I have overheard your talk. I am sorry if I laughed at you in Durban. I do not understand what you call your magic. It is beyond me and may be true or may be false. Still, I shall be grateful to you if you will use your power to discover, if you can, whether Dogeetah is coming here, and if so, when. Now, do as it may please you; I have spoken."

"And I have heard, Macumazana, my father. To-night I will call upon my Snake. Whether it will answer or what it will answer, I cannot say."

Well, he did call upon his Snake with due and portentous ceremony and, according to Stephen, who was present, which I declined to be, that mystic reptile declared that Dogeetah, alias Brother John, would arrive in Beza Town precisely at sunset on the third day from that night. Now as he had divined on Friday, according to our almanac, this meant that we might hope to see him—hope exactly described my state of mind on the matter—on the Monday evening in time for supper.

"All right," I said briefly. "Please do not talk to me any more about this impious rubbish, for I want to go to sleep."

Next morning early we unpacked our boxes and made a handsome selection of gifts for the king, Bausi, hoping thus to soften his royal heart. It included a bale of calico, several knives, a musical box, a cheap American revolver, and a bundle of tooth-picks; also several pounds of the best and most fashionable beads for his wives. This truly noble present we sent to the king by our two Mazitu servants, Tom and Jerry, who were marched off in the charge of several sentries, for I hoped that these men would talk to their compatriots and tell them what good fellows we were. Indeed I instructed them to do so.

Imagine our horror, therefore, when about an hour later, just as we were tidying ourselves up after breakfast, there appeared through the gate, not Tom and Jerry, for they had vanished, but a long line of Mazitu soldiers each of whom carried one of the articles that we had sent. Indeed the last of them held the bundle of toothpicks on his fuzzy head as though it were a huge faggot of wood. One by one they set them down upon the lime flooring of the verandah of the largest hut. Then their captain said solemnly:

“Bausi, the Great Black One, has no need of the white men’s gifts.”

“Indeed,” I replied, for my dander was up. “Then he won’t get another chance at them.”

The men turned away without more words, and presently Babemba turned up with a company of about fifty soldiers.

“The king is waiting to see you, white lords,” he said in a voice of very forced jollity, “and I have come to conduct you to him.”

“Why would he not accept our presents?” I asked, pointing to the row of them.

“Oh! that is because of Imbozwi’s story of the magic shield. He said he wanted no gifts to burn his hair off. But, come, come. He will explain for himself. If the Elephant is kept waiting he grows angry and trumpets.”

“Does he?” I said. “And how many of us are to come?”

“All, all, white lord. He wishes to see every one of you.”

“Not me, I suppose?” said Sammy, who was standing close by. “I must stop to make ready the food.”

“Yes, you too,” replied Babemba. “The king would look on the mixer of the holy drink.”

Well, there was no way out of it, so off we marched, all well armed as I need not say, and were instantly surrounded by the soldiers. To give an unusual note to the proceedings I made Hans walk first, carrying on his head the rejected musical box from which flowed the touching melody of “Home, Sweet Home.” Then came Stephen bearing the Union Jack on a pole, then I in the midst of the hunters and accompanied by Babemba, then the reluctant Sammy, and last of all the two donkeys led by Mazitus, for it seemed that the king had especially ordered that these should be brought also.

It was a truly striking cavalcade, the sight of which under any other circumstances would have made me laugh. Nor did it fail in its effect, for even the silent Mazitu people through whom we wended our way, were moved to something like enthusiasm. “Home, Sweet Home” they evidently thought heavenly, though perhaps the two donkeys attracted them most, especially when these brayed.

“Where are Tom and Jerry?” I asked of Babemba.

“I don’t know,” he answered; “I think they have been given leave to go to see their friends.”

Imbozwi is suppressing evidence in our favour, I thought to myself, and said no more.

Presently we reached the gate of the royal enclosure. Here to my dismay the soldiers insisted on disarming us, taking away our rifles, our revolvers, and even our sheath knives. In vain did I remonstrate, saying that we were not accustomed to part with these weapons. The answer was that it was not lawful for any man to appear before the king armed even with so much as a dancing-stick. Mavovo and the Zulus showed signs of resisting and for a minute I thought there was going to be a row, which of course would have ended in our massacre, for although the Mazitus feared guns very much, what could we have done against hundreds of them? I ordered him to give way, but for once he was on the point of disobeying me. Then by a happy thought I reminded him that, according to his Snake, Dogeetah was coming, and that therefore all would be well. So he submitted with an ill grace, and we saw our precious guns borne off we knew not where.

Then the Mazitu soldiers piled their spears and bows at the gate of the kraal and we proceeded with only the Union Jack and the musical box, which was now discoursing “Britannia rules the waves.”

Across the open space we marched to where several broad-leaved trees grew in front of a large native house. Not far from the door of this house a fat, middle-aged and angry-looking man was seated on a stool, naked except for a moocha of catskins about his loins and a string of large blue beads round his neck.

“Bausi, the King,” whispered Babemba.

At his side squatted a little hunchbacked figure, in whom I had no difficulty in recognising Imbozwi, although he had painted his scorched scalp white with vermillion spots and adorned his snub nose with a purple tip, his dress of ceremony I presume. Round and behind there were a number of silent councillors. At some signal or on reaching a given spot, all the soldiers, including old Babemba, fell upon their hands and knees and began to crawl. They wanted us to do the same, but here I drew the line, feeling that if once we crawled we must always crawl.

So at my word we advanced upright, but with slow steps, in the midst of all this wriggling humanity and at length found ourselves in the august presence of Bausi, “the Beautiful Black One,” King of the Mazitu.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SENTENCE

We stared at Bausi and Bausi stared at us.

"I am the Black Elephant Bausi," he exclaimed at last, worn out by our solid silence, "and I trumpet! I trumpet! I trumpet!" (It appeared that this was the ancient and hallowed formula with which a Mazitu king was wont to open a conversation with strangers.)

After a suitable pause I replied in a cold voice:

"We are the white lions, Macumazana and Wazela, and we roar! we roar! we roar!"

"I can trample," said Bausi.

"And we can bite," I said haughtily, though how we were to bite or do anything else effectual with nothing but a Union Jack, I did not in the least know.

"What is that thing?" asked Bausi, pointing to the flag.

"That which shadows the whole earth," I answered proudly, a remark that seemed to impress him, although he did not at all understand it, for he ordered a soldier to hold a palm leaf umbrella over him to prevent it from shadowing *him*.

"And that," he asked again, pointing to the music box, "which is not alive and yet makes a noise?"

"That sings the war-song of our people," I said. "We sent it to you as a present and you returned it. Why do you return our presents, O Bausi?"

Then of a sudden this potentate grew furious.

"Why do you come here, white men," he asked, "uninvited and against the law of my land, where only one white man is welcome, my brother Dogeetah, who cured me of sickness with a knife? I know who you are. You are dealers in men. You come here to steal my people and sell them into slavery. You had many slaves with you on the borders of my country, but you sent them away. You shall die, you shall die, you who call yourselves lions, and the painted rag which you say shadows the world, shall rot with your bones. As for that box which sings a war-song, I will smash it; it shall not bewitch me as your magic shield bewitched my great doctor, Imbozwi, burning off his hair."

Then springing up with wonderful agility for one so fat, he knocked the musical box from Hans's head, so that it fell to the ground and after a little whirring grew silent.

"That is right," squeaked Imbozwi. "Trample on their magic, O Elephant. Kill them, O Black One; burn them as they burned my hair."

Now things were, I felt, very serious, for already Bausi was looking about him as though to order his soldiers to make an end of us. So I said in desperation:

"O King, you mentioned a certain white man, Dogeetah, a doctor of doctors, who cured you of sickness with a knife, and called him your brother. Well, he is our brother also, and it was by his invitation that we have come to visit you here, where he will meet us presently."

"If Dogeetah is your friend, then you are my friends," answered Bausi, "for in this land he rules as I rule, he whose blood flows in my veins, as my blood flows in his veins. But you lie. Dogeetah is no brother of slave-dealers, his heart is good and yours are evil. You say that he will meet you here. When will he meet you? Tell me, and if it is soon, I will hold my hand and wait to hear his report of you before I put you to death, for if he speaks well of you, you shall not die."

Now I hesitated, as well I might, for I felt that looking at our case from his point of view, Bausi, believing us to be slave-traders, was not angry without cause. While I was racking my brains for a reply that might be acceptable to him and would not commit us too deeply, to my astonishment Mavovo stepped forward and confronted the king.

"Who are you, fellow?" shouted Bausi.

"I am a warrior, O King, as my scars show," and he pointed to the assegai wounds upon his breast and to his cut nostril. "I am a chief of a people from whom your people sprang and my name is Mavovo, Mavovo who is ready to fight you or any man whom you may name, and to kill him or you if you will. Is there one here who wishes to be killed?"

No one answered, for the mighty-chested Zulu looked very formidable.

"I am a doctor also," went on Mavovo, "one of the greatest of doctors who can open the 'Gates of Distance' and read that which is hid in the womb of the Future. Therefore I will answer your questions which you put to the lord Macumazana, the great and wise white man whom I serve, because we have fought together in many battles. Yes, I will be his Mouth, I will answer. The white man Dogeetah, who is your blood-brother and whose word is your word among the Mazitu, will arrive here at sunset on the second day from now. I have spoken."

Bausi looked at me in question.

"Yes," I exclaimed, feeling that I must say something and that it did not much matter what I said, "Dogeetah will arrive here on the second day from now within half an hour after sunset."

Something, I know not what, prompted me to allow that extra half-hour, which in the event, saved all our lives. Now Bausi consulted a while with the execrable Imbozwi and also with the old one-eyed General Babemba while we watched, knowing that our fate hung upon the issue.

At length he spoke.

"White men," he said, "Imbozwi, the head of the witch-finders here, whose hair you burnt off by your evil magic, says that it would be better to kill you at once as your hearts are bad and you are planning mischief against my people. So I think also. But Babemba

my General, with whom I am angry because he did not obey my orders and put you to death on the borders of my country when he met you there with your caravan of slaves, thinks otherwise. He prays me to hold my hand, first because you have bewitched him into liking you and secondly because if you should happen to be speaking the truth—which we do not believe—and to have come here at the invitation of my brother Dogeetah, he, Dogeetah, would be pained if he arrived and found you dead, nor could even he bring you to life again. This being so, since it matters little whether you die now or later, my command is that you be kept prisoners till sunset of the second day from this, and that then you will be led out and tied to stakes in the market-place, there to wait till the approach of darkness, by when you say Dogeetah will be here. If he arrives and owns you as his brethren, well and good; if he does not arrive, or disowns you—better still, for then you shall be shot to death with arrows as a warning to all other stealers of men not to cross the borders of the Mazitu.”

I listened to this atrocious sentence with horror, then gasped out:

“We are not stealers of men, O King, we are freers of men, as Tom and Jerry of your own people could tell you.”

“Who are Tom and Jerry?” he asked, indifferently. “Well, it does not matter, for doubtless they are liars like the rest of you. I have spoken. Take them away, feed them well and keep them safe till within an hour of sunset on the second day from this.”

Then, without giving us any further opportunity of speaking, Bausi rose, and followed by Imbozwi and his councillors, marched off into his big hut. We too, were marched off, this time under a double guard commanded by someone whom I had not seen before. At the gate of the kraal we halted and asked for the arms that had been taken from us. No answer was given; only the soldiers put their hands upon our shoulders and thrust us along.

“This is a nice business,” I whispered to Stephen.

“Oh! it doesn’t matter,” he answered. “There are lots more guns in the huts. I am told that these Mazitus are dreadfully afraid of bullets. So all we have to do is just to break out and shoot our way through them, for of course they will run when we begin to fire.”

I looked at him but did not answer, for to tell the truth I felt in no mood for argument.

Presently we arrived at our quarters, where the soldiers left us, to camp outside. Full of his warlike plan, Stephen went at once to the hut in which the slavers’ guns had been stored with our own spare rifles and all the ammunition. I saw him emerge looking very blank indeed and asked him what was the matter.

“Matter!” he answered in a voice that for once really was full of dismay. “The matter is that those Mazitu have stolen all the guns and all the ammunition. There’s not enough powder left to make a blue devil.”

“Well,” I replied, with the kind of joke one perpetrates under such circumstances, “we shall have plenty of blue devils without making any more.”

Truly ours was a dreadful situation. Let the reader imagine it. Within a little more than forty-eight hours we were to be shot to death with arrows if an erratic old gentleman who, for aught I knew might be dead, did not turn up at what was then one of the remotest and most inaccessible spots in Central Africa. Moreover, our only hope that such a thing would happen, if hope it could be called, was the prophecy of a Kaffir witch-doctor.

To rely on this in any way was so absurd that I gave up thinking of it and set my mind to considering if there were any possible means of escape. After hours of reflection I could find none. Even Hans, with all his experience and nearly superhuman cunning, could suggest none. We were unarmed and surrounded by thousands of savages, all of whom save perhaps Babemba, believed us to be slave-traders, a race that very properly they held in abhorrence, who had visited the country with the object of stealing their women and children. The king, Bausi, a very prejudiced fellow, was dead against us. Also by a piece of foolishness which I now bitterly regretted, as indeed I regretted the whole expedition, or at any rate entering on it in the absence of Brother John, we had made an implacable enemy of the head medicine-man, who to these folk was a sort of Archbishop of Canterbury. Short of a miracle, there was no hope for us. All that we could do was to say our prayers and prepare for the end.

Mavovo, it is true, remained cheerful. His faith in his “Snake” was really touching. He offered to go through that divination process again in our presence and demonstrate that there was no mistake. I declined because I had no faith in divinations, and Stephen also declined, for another reason, namely that the result might prove to be different, which, he held, would be depressing. The other Zulus oscillated between belief and scepticism, as do the unstable who set to work to study the evidences of Christianity. But Sammy did not oscillate, he literally howled, and prepared the food which poured in upon us so badly that I had to turn on Hans to do the cooking, for however little appetite we might have, it was necessary that we should keep up our strength by eating.

“What, Mr. Quatermain,” asked Sammy between his tears, “is the use of dressing viands that our systems will never have time to thoroughly assimilate?”

The first night passed somehow, and so did the next day and the next night which heralded our last morning. I got up quite early and watched the sunrise. Never, I think, had I realised before what a beautiful thing the sunrise is, at least not to the extent I did now when I was saying good-bye to it for ever. Unless indeed there should prove to be still lovelier sunrises beyond the dark of death! Then I went into our hut, and as Stephen, who had the nerves of a rhinoceros, was still sleeping like a tortoise in winter, I said my prayers earnestly enough, mourned over my sins which proved to be so many that at last I gave up the job in despair, and then tried to occupy myself by reading the Old Testament, a book to which I have always been extremely attached.

As a passage that I lit on described how the prophet Samuel for whom I could not help reading “Imbozwi,” hewed Agag in pieces after Bausi—I mean Saul—had relented and spared his life, I cannot say that it consoled me very much. Doubtless, I reflected, these people believe that I, like Agag, had “made women childless” by my sword, so there remained nothing save to follow the example of that unhappy king and walk “delicately” to doom.

Then, as Stephen was still sleeping—how *could* he do it, I wondered—I set to work to make up the accounts of the expedition to date. It had already cost £1,423. Just fancy expending £1,423 in order to be tied to a post and shot to death with arrows. And all to get a rare orchid! Oh! I reflected to myself, if by some marvel I should escape, or if I should live again in any land where these particular flowers flourish, I would never even look at them. And as a matter of fact I never have.

At length Stephen did wake up and, as criminals are reported to do in the papers before execution, made an excellent breakfast.

“What’s the good of worrying?” he said presently. “I shouldn’t if it weren’t for my poor old father. It must have come to this one day, and the sooner it is over the sooner to sleep, as the song says. When one comes to think of it there are enormous advantages in sleep, for that’s the only time one is quite happy. Still, I should have liked to see that *Cypripedium* first.”

"Oh! drat the Cypripedium!" I exclaimed, and blundered from the hut to tell Sammy that if he didn't stop his groaning I would punch his head.

"Jumps! Regular jumps! Who'd have thought it of Quatermain?" I heard Stephen mutter in the intervals of lighting his pipe.

The morning went "like lightning that is greased," as Sammy remarked. Three o'clock came and Mavovo and his following sacrificed a kid to the spirits of their ancestors, which, as Sammy remarked again, was "a horrible, heathen ceremony much calculated to prejudice our cause with Powers Above."

When it was over, to my delight, Babemba appeared. He looked so pleasant that I jumped to the conclusion that he brought the best of news with him. Perhaps that the king had pardoned us, or perhaps—blessed thought—that Brother John had really arrived before his time.

But not a bit of it! All he had to say was that he had caused inquiries to be made along the route that ran to the coast and that certainly for a hundred miles there was at present no sign of Dogeetah. So as the Black Elephant was growing more and more enraged under the stirrings up of Imbozwi, it was obvious that that evening's ceremony must be performed. Indeed, as it was part of his duty to superintend the erection of the posts to which we were to be tied and the digging of our graves at their bases, he had just come to count us again to be sure that he had not made any mistake as to the number. Also, if there were any articles that we would like buried with us, would we be so kind as to point them out and he would be sure to see to the matter. It would be soon over, and not painful, he added, as he had selected the very best archers in Beza Town who rarely missed and could, most of them, send an arrow up to the feather into a buffalo.

Then he chatted a little about other matters, as to where he should find the magic shield I had given him, which he would always value as a souvenir, etc., took a pinch of snuff with Mavovo and departed, saying that he would be sure to return again at the proper time.

It was now four o'clock, and as Sammy was quite beyond it, Stephen made himself some tea. It was very good tea, especially as we had milk to put in it, although I did not remember what it tasted like till afterwards.

Now, having abandoned hope, I went into a hut alone to compose myself to meet my end like a gentleman, and seated there in silence and semi-darkness my spirit grew much calmer. After all, I reflected, why should I cling to life? In the country whither I travelled, as the reader who has followed my adventures will know, were some whom I clearly longed to see again, notably my father and my mother, and two noble women who were even more to me. My boy, it is true, remained (he was alive then), but I knew that he would find friends, and as I was not so badly off at that time, I had been able to make a proper provision for him. Perhaps it was better that I should go, seeing that if I lived on it would only mean more troubles and more partings.

What was about to befall me of course I could not tell, but I knew then as I know now, that it was not extinction or even that sleep of which Stephen had spoken. Perhaps I was passing to some place where at length the clouds would roll away and I should understand; whence, too, I should see all the landscape of the past and future, as an eagle does watching from the skies, and be no longer like one struggling through dense bush, wild-beast and serpent haunted, beat upon by the storms of heaven and terrified with its lightnings, nor knowing whither I hewed my path. Perhaps in that place there would be no longer what St. Paul describes as another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. Perhaps there the past would be forgiven by the Power which knows whereof we are made, and I should become what I have always longed to be—good in every sense and even find open to me new and better roads of service. I take these thoughts from a note that I made in my pocket-book at the time.

Thus I reflected and then wrote a few lines of farewell in the fond and foolish hope that somehow they might find those to whom they were addressed (I have those letters still and very oddly they read to-day). This done, I tried to throw out my mind towards Brother John if he still lived, as indeed I had done for days past, so that I might inform him of our plight and, I am afraid, reproach him for having brought us to such an end by his insane carelessness or want of faith.

Whilst I was still engaged thus Babemba arrived with his soldiers to lead us off to execution. It was Hans who came to tell me that he was there. The poor old Hottentot shook me by the hand and wiped his eyes with his ragged coat-sleeve.

"Oh! Baas, this is our last journey," he said, "and you are going to be killed, Baas, and it is all my fault, Baas, because I ought to have found a way out of the trouble which is what I was hired to do. But I can't, my head grows so stupid. Oh! if only I could come even with Imbozwi I shouldn't mind, and I will, I *will*, if I have to return as a ghost to do it. Well, Baas, you know the Predikant, your father, told us that we don't go out like a fire, but burn again for always elsewhere——"

("I hope not," I thought to myself.)

"And that quite easily without anything to pay for the wood. So I hope that we shall always burn together, Baas. And meanwhile, I have brought you a little something," and he produced what looked like a peculiarly obnoxious horseball. "You swallow this now and you will never feel anything; it is a very good medicine that my grandfather's grandfather got from the Spirit of his tribe. You will just go to sleep as nicely as though you were very drunk, and wake up in the beautiful fire which burns without any wood and never goes out for ever and ever, Amen."

"No, Hans," I said, "I prefer to die with my eyes open."

"And so would I, Baas, if I thought there was any good in keeping them open, but I don't, for I can't believe any more in the Snake of that black fool, Mavovo. If it had been a good Snake, it would have told him to keep clear of Beza Town, so I will swallow one of these pills and give the other to the Baas Stephen," and he crammed the filthy mess into his mouth and with an effort got it down, as a young turkey does a ball of meal that is too big for its throat.

Then, as I heard Stephen calling me, I left him invoking a most comprehensive and polyglot curse upon the head of Imbozwi, to whom he rightly attributed all our woes.

"Our friend here says it is time to start," said Stephen, rather shakily, for the situation seemed to have got a hold of him at last, and nodding towards old Babemba, who stood there with a cheerful smile looking as though he were going to conduct us to a wedding.

"Yes, white lord," said Babemba, "it is time, and I have hurried so as not to keep you waiting. It will be a very fine show, for the 'Black Elephant' himself is going to do you the honour to be present, as will all the people of Beza Town and those for many miles round."

"Hold your tongue, you old idiot," I said, "and stop your grinning. If you had been a man and not a false friend you would have got us out of this trouble, knowing as you do very well that we are no sellers of men, but rather the enemy of those who do such things."

"Oh! white lord," said Babemba, in a changed voice, "believe me I only smile to make you happy up to the end. My lips smile, but I am crying inside. I know that you are good and have told Bausi so, but he will not believe me, who thinks that I have been bribed by you. What can I do against that evil-hearted Imbozwi, the head of the witch-doctors, who hates you because he thinks you have better magic than he has and who whispers day and night into the king's ear, telling him that if he does not kill you, all our people will be slain or sold for slaves, as you are only the scouts of a big army that is coming. Only last night Imbozwi held a great divination *indaba*, and read this and a great deal more in the enchanted water, making the king think he saw it in pictures, whereas I, looking over his shoulder, could see nothing at all, except the ugly face of Imbozwi reflected in the water. Also he swore that his spirit told me that Dogeetah, the king's blood-brother, being dead, would never come to Beza Town again. I have done my best. Keep your heart white towards me, O Macumazana, and do not haunt me, for I tell you I have done my best, and if ever I should get a chance against Imbozwi, which I am afraid I shan't, as he will poison me first, I will pay him back. Oh! he shall not die quickly as you will."

"I wish I could get a chance at him," I muttered, for even in this solemn moment I could cultivate no Christian spirit towards Imbozwi.

Feeling that he was honest after all, I shook old Babemba's hand and gave him the letters I had written, asking him to try and get them to the coast. Then we started on our last walk.

The Zulu hunters were already outside the fence, seated on the ground, chatting and taking snuff. I wondered if this was because they really believed in Mavovo's confounded Snake, or from bravado, inspired by the innate courage of their race. When they saw me they sprang to their feet and, lifting their right hands, gave me a loud and hearty salute of "Inkoosi! Baba! Inkoosi! Macumazana!" Then, at a signal from Mavovo, they broke into some Zulu war-chant, which they kept up till we reached the stakes. Sammy, too, broke into a chant, but one of quite a different nature.

"Be quiet!" I said to him. "Can't you die like a man?"

"No, indeed I cannot, Mr. Quatermain," he answered, and went on howling for pity in about twenty different languages.

Stephen and I walked together, he still carrying the Union Jack, of which no one tried to deprive him. I think the Mazitu believed it was his fetish. We didn't talk much, though once he said:

"Well, the love of orchids has brought many a man to a bad end. I wonder whether the Governor will keep my collection or sell it."

After this he relapsed into silence, and not knowing and indeed not caring what would happen to his collection, I made no answer.

We had not far to go; personally I could have preferred a longer walk. Passing with our guards down a kind of by-street, we emerged suddenly at the head of the market-place, to find that it was packed with thousands of people gathered there to see our execution. I noticed that they were arranged in orderly companies and that a broad open roadway was left between them, running to the southern gate of the market, I suppose to facilitate the movements of so large a crowd.

All this multitude received us in respectful silence, though Sammy's howls caused some of them to smile, while the Zulu war-chant appeared to excite their wonder, or admiration. At the head of the market-place, not far from the king's enclosure, fifteen stout posts had been planted on as many mounds. These mounds were provided so that everyone might see the show and, in part at any rate, were made of soil hollowed from fifteen deep graves dug almost at the foot of the mounds. Or rather there were seventeen posts, an extra large one being set at each end of the line in order to accommodate the two donkeys, which it appeared were also to be shot to death. A great number of soldiers kept a space clear in front of the posts. On this space were gathered Bausi, his councillors, some of his head wives, Imbozwi more hideously painted than usual, and perhaps fifty or sixty picked archers with strung bows and an ample supply of arrows, whose part in the ceremony it was not difficult for us to guess.

"King Bausi," I said as I was led past that potentate, "you are a murderer and Heaven Above will be avenged upon you for this crime. If our blood is shed, soon you shall die and come to meet us where *we* have power, and your people shall be destroyed."

My words seemed to frighten the man, for he answered:

"I am no murderer. I kill you because you are robbers of men. Moreover, it is not I who have passed sentence on you. It is Imbozwi here, the chief of the doctors, who has told me all about you, and whose spirit says you must die unless my brother Dogeetah appears to save you. If Dogeetah comes, which he cannot do because he is dead, and vouches for you, then I shall know that Imbozwi is a wicked liar, and as you were to die, so he shall die."

"Yes, yes," screeched Imbozwi. "If Dogeetah comes, as that false wizard prophesies," and he pointed to Mavovo, "then I shall be ready to die in your place, white slave-dealers. Yes, yes, then you may shoot *me* with arrows."

"King, take note of those words, and people, take note of those words, that they may be fulfilled if Dogeetah comes," said Mavovo in a great, deep voice.

"I take note of them," answered Bausi, "and I swear by my mother on behalf of all the people, that they shall be fulfilled—if Dogeetah comes."

"Good," exclaimed Mavovo, and stalked on to the stake which had been pointed out to him.

As he went he whispered something into Imbozwi's ear that seemed to frighten that limb of Satan, for I saw him start and shiver. However, he soon recovered, for in another minute he was engaged in superintending those whose business it was to lash us to the posts.

This was done simply and effectively by tying our wrists with a grass rope behind these posts, each of which was fitted with two projecting pieces of wood that passed under our arms and practically prevented us from moving. Stephen and I were given the places of honour in the middle, the Union Jack being fixed, by his own request, to the top of Stephen's stake. Mavovo was on my right, and the other Zulus were ranged on either side of us. Hans and Sammy occupied the end posts respectively (except those to which the poor jackasses were bound). I noted that Hans was already very sleepy and that shortly after he was fixed up, his head dropped forward on his breast. Evidently his medicine was working, and almost I regretted that I had not taken some while I had the chance.

When we were all fastened, Imbozwi came round to inspect. Moreover, with a piece of white chalk he made a round mark on the breast of each of us; a kind of bull's eye for the archers to aim at.

"Ah! white man," he said to me as he chalked away at my shooting coat, "you will never burn anyone's hair again with your magic shield. Never, never, for presently I shall be treading down the earth upon you in that hole, and your goods will belong to me."

I did not answer, for what was the use of talking to this vile brute when my time was so short. So he passed on to Stephen and began to chalk him. Stephen, however, in whom the natural man still prevailed, shouted:

"Take your filthy hands off me," and lifting his leg, which was unfettered, gave the painted witch-doctor such an awful kick in the stomach, that he vanished backwards into the grave beneath him.

"Ow! Well done, Wazela!" said the Zulus, "we hope that you have killed him."

"I hope so too," said Stephen, and the multitude of spectators gasped to see the sacred person of the head witch-doctor, of whom they evidently went in much fear, treated in such a way. Only Babemba grinned, and even the king Bausi did not seem displeased.

But Imbozwi was not to be disposed of so easily, for presently, with the help of sundry myrmidons, minor witch-doctors, he scrambled out of the grave, cursing and covered with mud, for it was wet down there. After that I took no more heed of him or of much else. Seeing that I had only half an hour to live, as may be imagined, I was otherwise engaged.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE COMING OF DOGEETAH

The sunset that day was like the sunrise, particularly fine, although as in the case of the tea, I remembered little of it till afterwards. In fact, thunder was about, which always produces grand cloud effects in Africa.

The sun went down like a great red eye, over which there dropped suddenly a black eyelid of cloud with a fringe of purple lashes.

There's the last I shall see of you, my old friend, thought I to myself, unless I catch you up presently.

The gloom began to gather. The king looked about him, also at the sky overhead, as though he feared rain, then whispered something to Babemba, who nodded and strolled up to my post.

"White lord," he said, "the Elephant wishes to know if you are ready, as presently the light will be very bad for shooting?"

"No," I answered with decision, "not till half an hour after sundown as was agreed."

Babemba went to the king and returned to me.

"White lord, the king says that a bargain is a bargain, and he will keep to his word. Only you must not then blame him if the shooting is bad, since of course he did not know that the night would be so cloudy, which is not usual at this time of year."

It grew darker and darker, till at length we might have been lost in a London fog. The dense masses of the people looked like banks, and the archers, flitting to and fro as they made ready, might have been shadows in Hades. Once or twice lightning flashed and was followed after a pause by the distant growling of thunder. The air, too, grew very oppressive. Dense silence reigned. In all those multitudes no one spoke or stirred; even Sammy ceased his howling, I suppose because he had become exhausted and fainted away, as people often do just before they are hanged. It was a most solemn time. Nature seemed to be adapting herself to the mood of sacrifice and making ready for us a mighty pall.

At length I heard the sound of arrows being drawn from their quivers, and then the squeaky voice of Imbozwi, saying:

"Wait a little, the cloud will lift. There is light behind it, and it will be nicer if they can see the arrows coming."

The cloud did begin to lift, very slowly, and from beneath it flowed a green light like that in a cat's eye.

"Shall we shoot, Imbozwi?" asked the voice of the captain of the archers.

"Not yet, not yet. Not till the people can watch them die."

The edge of cloud lifted a little more; the green light turned to a fiery red thrown by the sunk sun and reflected back upon the earth from the dense black cloud above. It was as though all the landscape had burst into flames, while the heaven over us remained of the hue of ink. Again the lightning flashed, showing the faces and staring eyes of the thousands who watched, and even the white teeth of a great bat that flittered past. That flash seemed to burn off an edge of the lowering cloud and the light grew stronger and stronger, and redder and redder.

Imbozwi uttered a hiss like a snake. I heard a bow-string twang, and almost at the same moment the thud of an arrow striking my post just above my head. Indeed, by lifting myself I could touch it. I shut my eyes and began to see all sorts of queer things that I had forgotten for years and years. My brain swam and seemed to melt into a kind of confusion. Through the intense silence I thought I heard the sound of some animal running heavily, much as a fat bull eland does when it is suddenly disturbed. Someone uttered a startled exclamation, which caused me to open my eyes again. The first thing I saw was the squad of savage archers lifting their bows—evidently that first arrow had been a kind of trial shot. The next, looking absolutely unearthly in that terrible and ominous light, was a tall figure seated on a white ox shambling rapidly towards us along the open roadway that ran from the southern gate of the market-place.

Of course, I knew that I dreamed, for this figure exactly resembled Brother John. There was his long, snowy beard. There in his hand was his butterfly net, with the handle of which he seemed to be prodding the ox. Only he was wound about with wreaths of flowers as were the great horns of the ox, and on either side of him and before and behind him ran girls, also wreathed with flowers. It was a vision, nothing else, and I shut my eyes again awaiting the fatal arrow.

"Shoot!" screamed Imbozwi.

"Nay, shoot not!" shouted Babemba. "*Dogeetah is come!*"

A moment's pause, during which I heard arrows falling to the ground; then from all those thousands of throats a roar that shaped itself to the words:

"Dogeetah! Dogeetah is come to save the white lords."

I must confess that after this my nerve, which is generally pretty good, gave out to such an extent that I think I fainted for a few minutes. During that faint I seemed to be carrying on a conversation with Mavovo, though whether it ever took place or I only imagined it I am not sure, since I always forgot to ask him.

He said, or I thought he said, to me:

"And now, Macumazana, my father, what have you to say? Does my Snake stand upon its tail or does it not? Answer, I am listening."

To which I replied, or seemed to reply:

"Mavovo, my child, certainly it appears as though your Snake *does* stand upon its tail. Still, I hold that all this is a phantasy; that we live in a land of dream in which nothing is real except those things which we cannot see or touch or hear. That there is no me and no you and no Snake at all, nothing but a Power in which we move, that shows us pictures and laughs when we think them real."

Whereon Mavovo said, or seemed to say:

"Ah! at last you touch the truth, O Macumazana, my father. All things are a shadow and we are shadows in a shadow. But what throws the shadow, O Macumazana, my father? Why does Dogeetah appear to come hither riding on a white ox and why do all these thousands think that my Snake stands so very stiff upon its tail?"

"I'm hanged if I know," I replied and woke up.

There, without doubt, was old Brother John with a wreath of flowers—I noted in disgust that they were orchids—hanging in a bacchanalian fashion from his dented sun-helmet over his left eye. He was in a furious rage and reviling Bausi, who literally crouched before him, and I was in a furious rage and reviling him. What I said I do not remember, but he said, his white beard bristling with indignation while he threatened Bausi with the handle of the butterfly net:

"You dog! You savage, whom I saved from death and called Brother. What were you doing to these white men who are in truth my brothers, and to their followers? Were you about to kill them? Oh! if so, I will forget my vow, I will forget the bond that binds us and \_\_\_\_\_"

"Don't, pray don't," said Bausi. "It is all a horrible mistake; I am not to be blamed at all. It is that witch-doctor, Imbozwi, whom by the ancient law of the land I must obey in such matters. He consulted his Spirit and declared that you were dead; also that these white lords were the most wicked of men, slave-traders with spotted hearts, who came hither to spy out the Mazitu people and to destroy them with magic and bullets."

"Then he lied," thundered Brother John, "and he knew that he lied."

"Yes, yes, it is evident that he lied," answered Bausi. "Bring him here, and with him those who serve him."

Now by the light of the moon which was shining brightly in the heavens, for the thunder-clouds had departed with the last glow of sunset, soldiers began an active search for Imbozwi and his confederates. Of these they caught eight or ten, all wicked-looking fellows hideously painted and adorned like their master, but Imbozwi himself they could not find.

I began to think that in the confusion he had given us the slip, when presently from the far end of the line, for we were still all tied to our stakes, I heard the voice of Sammy, hoarse, it is true, but quite cheerful now, saying:

"Mr. Quatermain, in the interests of justice, will you inform his Majesty that the treacherous wizard for whom he is seeking, is now peeping and muttering at the bottom of the grave which was dug to receive my mortal remains."

I did inform his Majesty, and in double-quick time our friend Imbozwi was once more fished out of a grave by the strong arms of Babemba and his soldiers, and dragged into the presence of the irate Bausi.

"Loose the white lords and their followers," said Bausi, "and let them come here."

So our bonds were undone and we walked to where the king and Brother John stood, the miserable Imbozwi and his attendant doctors huddled in a heap before them.

"Who is this?" said Bausi to him, pointing at Brother John. "Is it not he whom you vowed was dead?"

Imbozwi did not seem to think that the question required an answer, so Bausi continued:

"What was the song that you sang in our ears just now—that if Dogeetah came you would be ready to be shot to death with arrows in the place of these white lords whose lives you swore away, was it not?"

Again Imbozwi made no answer, although Babemba called his attention to the king's query with a vigorous kick. Then Bausi shouted:

"By your own mouth are you condemned, O liar, and that shall be done to you which you have yourself decreed," adding almost in the words of Elijah after he had triumphed over the priests of Baal, "Take away these false prophets. Let none of them escape. Say you not so, O people?"

"Aye," roared the multitude fiercely, "take them away."

"Not a popular character, Imbozwi," Stephen remarked to me in a reflective voice. "Well, he is going to be served hot on his own toast now, and serve the brute right."

"Who is the false doctor now?" mocked Mavovo in the silence that followed. "Who is about to sup on arrow-heads, O Painter-of-white-spots?" and he pointed to the mark that Imbozwi had so gleefully chalked over his heart as a guide to the arrows of the archers.

Now, seeing that all was lost, the little humpbacked villain with a sudden twist caught me by the legs and began to plead for mercy. So piteously did he plead, that being already softened by the fact of our wonderful escape from those black graves, my heart was melted in me. I turned to ask the king to spare his life, though with little hope that the prayer would be granted, for I saw that Bausi feared and hated the man and was only too glad of the opportunity to be rid of him. Imbozwi, however, interpreted my movement differently, since among savages the turning of the back always means that a petition is refused. Then, in his rage and despair, the venom of his wicked heart boiled over. He leapt to his feet, and drawing a big, carved knife from among his witch-doctor's trappings, sprang at me like a wild cat, shouting:

"At least you shall come too, white dog!"

Most mercifully Mavovo was watching him, for that is a good Zulu saying which declares that "Wizard is Wizard's fate." With one bound he was on him. Just as the knife touched me—it actually pricked my skin though without drawing blood, which was fortunate as probably it was poisoned—he gripped Imbozwi's arm in his grasp of iron and hurled him to the ground as though he were but a child.

After this of course all was over.

"Come away," I said to Stephen and Brother John; "this is no place for us."

So we went and gained our huts without molestation and indeed quite unobserved, for the attention of everyone in Beza Town was fully occupied elsewhere. From the market-place behind us rose so hideous a clamour that we rushed into my hut and shut the door to escape or lessen the sound. It was dark in the hut, for which I was really thankful, for the darkness seemed to soothe my nerves. Especially was this so when Brother John said:

"Friend, Allan Quatermain, and you, young gentleman, whose name I don't know, I will tell you what I think I never mentioned to you before, that, in addition to being a doctor, I am a clergyman of the American Episcopalian Church. Well, as a clergyman, I will ask your leave to return thanks for your very remarkable deliverance from a cruel death."

"By all means," I muttered for both of us, and he did so in a most earnest and beautiful prayer. Brother John may or may not have been a little touched in the head at this time of his life, but he was certainly an able and a good man.

Afterwards, as the shrieks and shouting had now died down to a confused murmur of many voices, we went and sat outside under the projecting eaves of the hut, where I introduced Stephen Somers to Brother John.

"And now," I said, "in the name of goodness, where do you come from tied up in flowers like a Roman priest at sacrifice, and riding on a bull like the lady called Europa? And what on earth do you mean by playing us such a scurvy trick down there in Durban, leaving us without a word after you had agreed to guide us to this hellish hole?"

Brother John stroked his long beard and looked at me reproachfully.

"I guess, Allan," he said in his American fashion, "there is a mistake somewhere. To answer the last part of your question first, I did not leave you without a word; I gave a letter to that lame old Griqua gardener of yours, Jack, to be handed to you when you arrived."

"Then the idiot either lost it and lied to me, as Griquas will, or he forgot all about it."

"That is likely. I ought to have thought of that, Allan, but I didn't. Well, in that letter I said that I would meet you here, where I should have been six weeks ago awaiting you. Also I sent a message to Bausi to warn him of your coming in case I should be delayed, but I suppose that something happened to it on the road."

"Why did you not wait and come with us like a sensible man?"

"Allan, as you ask me straight out, I will tell you, although the subject is one of which I do not care to speak. I knew that you were going to journey by Kilwa; indeed it was your only route with a lot of people and so much baggage, and I did not wish to visit Kilwa." He paused, then went on: "A long while ago, nearly twenty-three years to be accurate, I went to live at Kilwa as a missionary with my young wife. I built a mission station and a church there, and we were happy and fairly successful in our work. Then on one evil day the Swahili and other Arabs came in dhows to establish a slave-dealing station. I resisted them, and the end of it was that they attacked us, killed most of my people and enslaved the rest. In that attack I received a cut from a sword on the head—look, here is the mark of it," and drawing his white hair apart he showed us a long scar that was plainly visible in the moonlight.

"The blow knocked me senseless just about sunset one evening. When I came to myself again it was broad daylight and everybody was gone, except one old woman who was tending me. She was half-crazed with grief because her husband and two sons had been killed, and another son, a boy, and a daughter had been taken away. I asked her where my young wife was. She answered that she, too, had been taken away eight or ten hours before, because the Arabs had seen the lights of a ship out at sea, and thought they might be those of a British man-of-war that was known to be cruising on the coast. On seeing these they had fled inland in a hurry, leaving me for dead, but killing the wounded before they went. The old woman herself had escaped by hiding among some rocks on the seashore, and after the Arabs had gone had crept back to the house and found me still alive.

"I asked her where my wife had been taken. She said she did not know, but some others of our people told her that they had heard the Arabs say they were going to some place a hundred miles inland, to join their leader, a half-bred villain named Hassan-ben-Mohammed, to whom they were carrying my wife as a present.

"Now we knew this wretch, for after the Arabs landed at Kilwa, but before actual hostilities broke out between us, he had fallen sick of smallpox and my wife had helped to nurse him. Had it not been for her, indeed, he would have died. However, although the leader of the band, he was not present at the attack, being engaged in some slave-raiding business in the interior.

"When I learned this terrible news, the shock of it, or the loss of blood, brought on a return of insensibility, from which I only awoke two days later to find myself on board a Dutch trading vessel that was sailing for Zanzibar. It was the lights of this ship that the Arabs had seen and mistaken for those of an English man-of-war. She had put into Kilwa for water, and the sailors, finding me on the verandah of the house and still living, in the goodness of their hearts carried me on board. Of the old woman they had seen nothing; I suppose that at their approach she ran away.

"At Zanzibar, in an almost dying condition, I was handed over to a clergyman of our mission, in whose house I lay desperately ill for a long while. Indeed six months went by before I fully recovered my right mind. Some people say that I have never recovered it; perhaps you are one of them, Allan.

"At last the wound in my skull healed, after a clever English naval surgeon had removed some bits of splintered bone, and my strength came back to me. I was and still am an American subject, and in those days we had no consul at Zanzibar, if there is one there now, of which I am not sure, and of course no warship. The English made what inquiries they could for me, but could find out little or nothing, since all the country about Kilwa was in possession of Arab slave-traders who were supported by a ruffian who called himself the Sultan of Zanzibar."

Again he paused, as though overcome by the sadness of his recollections.

"Did you never hear any more of your wife?" asked Stephen.

"Yes, Mr. Somers; I heard at Zanzibar from a slave whom our mission bought and freed, that he had seen a white woman who answered to her description alive and apparently well, at some place I was unable to identify. He could only tell me that it was fifteen days' journey from the coast. She was then in charge of some black people, he did not know of what tribe, who, he believed, had found her wandering in the bush. He noted that the black people seemed to treat her with the greatest reverence, although they could not understand what she said. On the following day, whilst searching for six lost goats, he was captured by Arabs who, he heard afterwards, were out looking for this white woman. The day after the man had told me this, he was seized with inflammation of the lungs, of which, being in a weak state from his sufferings in the slave gang, he quickly died. Now you will understand why I was not particularly anxious to revisit Kilwa."

"Yes," I said, "we understand that, and a good deal more of which we will talk later. But, to change the subject, where do you come from now, and how did you happen to turn up just in the nick of time?"

"I was journeying here across country by a route I will show you on my map," he answered, "when I met with an accident to my leg" (here Stephen and I looked at each other) "which kept me laid up in a Kaffir hut for six weeks. When I got better, as I could not walk very well I rode upon oxen that I had trained. That white beast you saw is the last of them; the others died of the bite of the tsetse fly. A fear which I could not define caused me to press forward as fast as possible; for the last twenty-four hours I have scarcely stopped to eat or sleep. When I got into the Mazitu country this morning I found the kraals empty, except for some women and girls, who knew me again, and threw these flowers over me. They told me that all the men had gone to Beza Town for a great feast, but

what the feast was they either did not know or would not reveal. So I hurried on and arrived in time—thank God in time! It is a long story; I will tell you the details afterwards. Now we are all too tired. What's that noise?"

I listened and recognised the triumphant song of the Zulu hunters, who were returning from the savage scene in the market-place. Presently they arrived, headed by Sammy, a very different Sammy from the wailing creature who had gone out to execution an hour or two before. Now he was the gayest of the gay, and about his neck were strung certain weird ornaments which I identified as the personal property of Imbozwi.

"Virtue is victorious and justice has been done, Mr. Quatermain. These are the spoils of war," he said, pointing to the trappings of the late witch-doctor.

"Oh! get out, you little cur! We want to know nothing more," I said. "Go, cook us some supper," and he went, not in the least abashed.

The hunters were carrying between them what appeared to be the body of Hans. At first I was frightened, thinking that he must be dead, but examination showed that he was only in a state of insensibility such as might be induced by laudanum. Brother John ordered him to be wrapped up in a blanket and laid by the fire, and this was done.

Presently Mavovo approached and squatted down in front of us.

"Macumazana, my father," he said quietly, "what words have you for me?"

"Words of thanks, Mavovo. If you had not been so quick, Imbozwi would have finished me. As it is, the knife only touched my skin without breaking it, for Dogeetah has looked to see."

Mavovo waved his hand as though to sweep this little matter aside, and asked, looking me straight in the eyes:

"And what other words, Macumazana? As to my Snake I mean."

"Only that you were right and I was wrong," I answered shamefacedly. "Things have happened as you foretold, how or why I do not understand."

"No, my father, because you white men are so vain" ("blown out" was his word), "that you think you have all wisdom. Now you have learned that this is not so. I am content. The false doctors are all dead, my father, and I think that Imbozwi——"

I held up my hand, not wishing to hear details. Mavovo rose, and with a little smile, went about his business.

"What does he mean about his Snake?" inquired Brother John curiously.

I told him as briefly as I could, and asked him if he could explain the matter. He shook his head.

"The strangest example of native vision that I have ever heard of," he answered, "and the most useful. Explain! There is no explanation, except the old one that there are more things in heaven and earth, etc., and that God gives different gifts to different men."

Then we ate our supper; I think one of the most joyful meals of which I have ever partaken. It is wonderful how good food tastes when one never expected to swallow another mouthful. After it was finished the others went to bed but, with the still unconscious Hans for my only companion, I sat for a while smoking by the fire, for on this high tableland the air was chilly. I felt that as yet I could not sleep; if for no other reason because of the noise that the Mazitu were making in the town, I suppose in celebration of the execution of the terrible witch-doctors and the return of Dogeetah.

Suddenly Hans awoke, and sitting up, stared at me through the bright flame which I had recently fed with dry wood.

"Baas," he said in a hollow voice, "there you are, here I am, and there is the fire which never goes out, a very good fire. But, Baas, why are we not inside of it as your father the Predikant promised, instead of outside here in the cold?"

"Because you are still in the world, you old fool, and not where you deserve to be," I answered. "Because Mavovo's Snake was a snake with a true tongue after all, and Dogeetah came as it foretold. Because we are all alive and well, and it is Imbozwi with his spawn who are dead upon the posts. That is why, Hans, as you would have seen for yourself if you had kept awake, instead of swallowing filthy medicine like a frightened woman, just because you were afraid of death, which at your age you ought to have welcomed."

"Oh! Baas," broke in Hans, "don't tell me that things are so and that we are really alive in what your honoured father used to call this gourd full of tears. Don't tell me, Baas, that I made a coward of myself and swallowed that beastliness—if you knew what it was made of you would understand, Baas—for nothing but a bad headache. Don't tell me that Dogeetah came when my eyes were not open to see him, and worst of all, that Imbozwi and his children were tied to those poles when I was not able to help them out of the bottle of tears into the fire that burns for ever and ever. Oh! it is too much, and I swear, Baas, that however often I have to die, henceforward it shall always be with my eyes open," and holding his aching head between his hands he rocked himself to and fro in bitter grief.

Well might Hans be sad, seeing that he never heard the last of the incident. The hunters invented a new and gigantic name for him, which meant "The little-yellow-mouse-who-feeds-on-sleep-while-the-black-rats eat-up-their-enemies." Even Sammy made a mock of him, showing him the spoils which he declared he had wrenched unaided from the mighty master of magic, Imbozwi. As indeed he had—after the said Imbozwi was stone dead at the stake.

It was very amusing until things grew so bad that I feared Hans would kill Sammy, and had to put a stop to the joke.

## CHAPTER XII

### BROTHER JOHN'S STORY

Although I went to bed late I was up before sunrise. Chiefly because I wished to have some private conversation with Brother John, whom I knew to be a very early riser. Indeed, he slept less than any man I ever met.

As I expected, I found him astir in his hut; he was engaged in pressing flowers by candlelight.

"John," I said, "I have brought you some property which I think you have lost," and I handed him the morocco-bound *Christian Year* and the water-colour drawing which we had found in the sacked mission house at Kilwa.

He looked first at the picture and then at the book; at least, I suppose he did, for I went outside the hut for a while—to observe the sunrise. In a few minutes he called me, and when the door was shut, said in an unsteady voice:

"How did you come by these relics, Allan?"

I told him the story from beginning to end. He listened without a word, and when I had finished said:

"I may as well tell what perhaps you have guessed, that the picture is that of my wife, and the book is her book."

"Is!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Allan. I say *is* because I do not believe that she is dead. I cannot explain why, any more than I could explain last night how that great Zulu savage was able to prophesy my coming. But sometimes we can wring secrets from the Unknown, and I believe that I have won this truth in answer to my prayers, that my wife still lives."

"After twenty years, John?"

"Yes, after twenty years. Why do you suppose," he asked almost fiercely, "that for two-thirds of a generation I have wandered about among African savages, pretending to be crazy because these wild people revere the mad and always let them pass unharmed?"

"I thought it was to collect butterflies and botanical specimens."

"Butterflies and botanical specimens! These were the pretext. I have been and am searching for my wife. You may think it a folly, especially considering what was her condition when we separated—she was expecting a child, Allan—but I do not. I believe that she is hidden away among some of these wild peoples."

"Then perhaps it would be as well not to find her," I answered, bethinking me of the fate which had overtaken sundry white women in the old days, who had escaped from shipwrecks on the coast and become the wives of Kaffirs.

"Not so, Allan. On that point I fear nothing. If God has preserved my wife, He has also protected her from every harm. And now," he went on, "you will understand why I wish to visit these Pongo—the Pongo who worship a white goddess!"

"I understand," I said and left him, for having learned all there was to know, I thought it best not to prolong a painful conversation. To me it seemed incredible that this lady should still live, and I feared the effect upon him of the discovery that she was no more. How full of romance is this poor little world of ours! Think of Brother John (Eversley was his real name as I discovered afterwards), and what his life had been. A high-minded educated man trying to serve his Faith in the dark places of the earth, and taking his young wife with him, which for my part I have never considered a right thing to do. Neither tradition nor Holy Writ record that the Apostles dragged their wives and families into the heathen lands where they went to preach, although I believe that some of them were married. But this is by the way.

Then falls the blow; the mission house is sacked, the husband escapes by a miracle and the poor young lady is torn away to be the prey of a vile slave-trader. Lastly, according to the quite unreliable evidence of some savage already in the shadow of death, she is seen in the charge of other unknown savages. On the strength of this the husband, playing the part of a mad botanist, hunts for her for a score of years, enduring incredible hardships and yet buoyed up by a high and holy trust. To my mind it was a beautiful and pathetic story. Still, for reasons which I have suggested, I confess that I hoped that long ago she had returned into the hands of the Power which made her, for what would be the state of a young white lady who for two decades had been at the mercy of these black brutes?

And yet, and yet, after my experience of Mavovo and his Snake, I did not feel inclined to dogmatise about anything. Who and what was I, that I should venture not only to form opinions, but to thrust them down the throats of others? After all, how narrow are the limits of the knowledge upon which we base our judgments. Perhaps the great sea of intuition that surrounds us is safer to float on than are these little islets of individual experience, whereon we are so wont to take our stand.

Meanwhile my duty was not to speculate on the dreams and mental attitudes of others, but like a practical hunter and trader, to carry to a successful issue an expedition that I was well paid to manage, and to dig up a certain rare flower root, if I could find it, in the marketable value of which I had an interest. I have always prided myself upon my entire lack of imagination and all such mental phantasies, and upon an aptitude for hard business and an appreciation of the facts of life, that after all are the things with which we have to do. This is the truth; at least, I hope it is. For if I were to be *quite* honest, which no one ever has been, except a gentleman named Mr. Pepys, who, I think, lived in the reign of Charles II, and who, to judge from his memoirs, which I have read lately, did not write for publication, I should have to admit that there is another side to my nature. I sternly suppress it, however, at any rate for the present.

While we were at breakfast Hans who, still suffering from headache and remorse, was lurking outside the gateway far from the madding crowd of critics, crept in like a beaten dog and announced that Babemba was approaching followed by a number of laden soldiers. I was about to advance to receive him. Then I remembered that, owing to a queer native custom, such as that which caused Sir Theophilus Shepstone, whom I used to know very well, to be recognised as the holder of the spirit of the great Chaka and therefore as the equal of the Zulu monarchs, Brother John was the really important man in our company. So I gave way and asked him to be good enough to take my place and to live up to that station in savage life to which it had pleased God to call him.

I am bound to say he rose to the occasion very well, being by nature and appearance a dignified old man. Swallowing his coffee in a hurry, he took his place at a little distance from us, and stood there in a statuesque pose. To him entered Babemba crawling on his hands and knees, and other native gentlemen likewise crawling, also the burdened soldiers in as obsequious an attitude as their loads would allow.

"O King Dogeetah," said Babemba, "your brother king, Bausi, returns the guns and fire-goods of the white men, your children, and sends certain gifts."

"Glad to hear it, General Babemba," said Brother John, "although it would be better if he had never taken them away. Put them down and get on to your feet. I do not like to see men wriggling on their stomachs like monkeys."

The order was obeyed, and we checked the guns and ammunition; also our revolvers and the other articles that had been taken away from us. Nothing was missing or damaged; and in addition there were four fine elephant's tusks, an offering to Stephen and myself, which, as a business man, I promptly accepted; some karosses and Mazitu weapons, presents to Mavovo and the hunters, a beautiful native bedstead with ivory legs and mats of finely-woven grass, a gift to Hans in testimony to his powers of sleep under trying circumstances (the Zulus roared when they heard this, and Hans vanished cursing behind the huts), and for Sammy a weird musical instrument with a request that in future he would use it in public instead of his voice.

Sammy, I may add, did not see the joke any more than Hans had done, but the rest of us appreciated the Mazitu sense of humour very much.

"It is very well, Mr. Quatermain," he said, "for these black babes and sucklings to sit in the seat of the scornful. On such an occasion silent prayers would have been of little use, but I am certain that my loud crying to Heaven delivered you all from the bites of the heathen arrows."

"O Dogeetah and white lords," said Babemba, "the king invites your presence that he may ask your forgiveness for what has happened, and this time there will be no need for you to bring arms, since henceforward no hurt can come to you from the Mazitu people."

So presently we set out once more, taking with us the gifts that had been refused. Our march to the royal quarters was a veritable triumphal progress. The people prostrated themselves and clapped their hands slowly in salutation as we passed, while the girls and children pelted us with flowers as though we were brides going to be married. Our road ran by the place of execution where the stakes, at which I confess I looked with a shiver, were still standing, though the graves had been filled in.

On our arrival Bausi and his councillors rose and bowed to us. Indeed, the king did more, for coming forward he seized Brother John by the hand, and insisted upon rubbing his ugly black nose against that of this revered guest. This, it appeared, was the Mazitu method of embracing, an honour which Brother John did not seem at all to appreciate. Then followed long speeches, washed down with draughts of thick native beer. Bausi explained that his evil proceedings were entirely due to the wickedness of the deceased Imbozwi and his disciples, under whose tyranny the land had groaned for long, since the people believed them to speak "with the voice of 'Heaven Above.'"

Brother John, on our behalf, accepted the apology, and then read a lecture, or rather preached a sermon, that took exactly twenty-five minutes to deliver (he is rather long in the wind), in which he demonstrated the evils of superstition and pointed to a higher and a better path. Bausi replied that he would like to hear more of that path another time which, as he presumed that we were going to spend the rest of our lives in his company, could easily be found—say during the next spring when the crops had been sown and the people had leisure on their hands.

After this we presented our gifts, which now were eagerly accepted. Then I took up my parable and explained to Bausi that so far from stopping in Beza Town for the rest of our lives, we were anxious to press forward at once to Pongo-land. The king's face fell, as did those of his councillors.

"Listen, O lord Macumazana, and all of you," he said. "These Pongo are horrible wizards, a great and powerful people who live by themselves amidst the swamps and mix with none. If the Pongo catch Mazitu or folk of any other tribe, either they kill them or take them as prisoners to their own land where they enslave them, or sometimes sacrifice them to the devils they worship."

"That is so," broke in Babemba, "for when I was a lad I was a slave to the Pongo and doomed to be sacrificed to the White Devil. It was in escaping from them that I lost this eye."

Needless to say, I made a note of this remark, though I did not think the moment opportune to follow the matter up. If Babemba has once been to Pongo-land, I reflected to myself, Babemba can go again or show us the way there.

"And if we catch any of the Pongo," went on Bausi, "as sometimes we do when they come to hunt for slaves, we kill them. Ever since the Mazitu have been in this place there has been hate and war between them and the Pongo, and if I could wipe out those evil ones, then I should die happily."

"That you will never do, O King, while the White Devil lives," said Babemba. "Have you not heard the Pongo prophecy, that while the White Devil lives and the Holy Flower blooms, they will live. But when the White Devil dies and the Holy Flower ceases to bloom, then their women will become barren and their end will be upon them."

"Well, I suppose that this White Devil will die some day," I said.

"Not so, Macumazana. It will never die of itself. Like its wicked Priest, it has been there from the beginning and will always be there unless it is killed. But who is there that can kill the White Devil?"

I thought to myself that I would not mind trying, but again I did not pursue the point.

"My brother Dogeetah and lords," exclaimed Bausi, "it is not possible that you should visit these wizards except at the head of an army. But how can I send an army with you, seeing that the Mazitu are a land people and have no canoes in which to cross the great lake, and no trees whereof to make them?"

We answered that we did not know but would think the matter over, as we had come from our own place for this purpose and meant to carry it out.

Then the audience came to an end, and we returned to our huts, leaving Dogeetah to converse with his "brother Bausi" on matters connected with the latter's health. As I passed Babemba I told him that I should like to see him alone, and he said that he would visit me that evening after supper. The rest of the day passed quietly, for we had asked that people might be kept away from our encampment.

We found Hans, who had not accompanied us, being a little shy of appearing in public just then, engaged in cleaning the rifles, and this reminded me of something. Taking the double-barrelled gun of which I have spoken, I called Mavovo and handed it to him, saying:

"It is yours, O true prophet."

"Yes, my father," he answered, "it is mine for a little while, then perhaps it will be yours again."

The words struck me, but I did not care to ask their meaning. Somehow I wanted to hear no more of Mavovo's prophecies.

Then we dined, and for the rest of that afternoon slept, for all of us, including Brother John, needed rest badly. In the evening Babemba came, and we three white men saw him alone.

"Tell us about the Pongo and this white devil they worship," I said.

"Macumazana," he answered, "fifty years have gone by since I was in that land and I see things that happened to me there as through a mist. I went to fish amongst the reeds when I was a boy of twelve, and tall men robed in white came in a canoe and seized me. They led me to a town where there were many other such men, and treated me very well, giving me sweet things to eat till I grew fat and my skin shone. Then in the evening I was taken away, and we marched all night to the mouth of a great cave. In this cave sat a horrible old man about whom danced robed people, performing the rites of the White Devil.

"The old man told me that on the following morning I was to be cooked and eaten, for which reason I had been made so fat. There was a canoe at the mouth of the cave, beyond which lay water. While all were asleep I crept to the canoe. As I loosed the rope one of the priests woke up and ran at me. But I hit him on the head with the paddle, for though only a boy I was bold and strong, and he fell into the water. He came up again and gripped the edge of the canoe, but I struck his fingers with the paddle till he let go. A great wind was blowing that night, tearing off boughs from the trees which grew upon the other shore of the water. It whirled the canoe round and round and one of the boughs struck me in the eye. I scarcely felt it at the time, but afterwards the eye withered. Or perhaps it was a spear or a knife that struck me in the eye, I do not know. I paddled till I lost my senses and always that wind blew. The last thing that I remember was the sound of the canoe being driven by the gale through reeds. When I woke up again I found myself near a shore, to which I waded through the mud, scaring great crocodiles. But this must have been some days later, for now I was quite thin. I fell down upon the shore, and there some of our people found me and nursed me till I recovered. That is all."

"And quite enough too," I said. "Now answer me. How far was the town from the place where you were captured in Mazitu-land?"

"A whole day's journey in the canoe, Macumazana. I was captured in the morning early and we reached the harbour in the evening at a place where many canoes were tied up, perhaps fifty of them, some of which would hold forty men."

"And how far was the town from this harbour?"

"Quite close, Macumazana."

Now Brother John asked a question.

"Did you hear anything about the land beyond the water by the cave?"

"Yes, Dogeetah. I heard then, or afterwards—for from time to time rumours reach us concerning these Pongo—that it is an island where grows the Holy Flower, of which you know, for when last you were here you had one of its blooms. I heard, too, that this Holy Flower was tended by a priestess named Mother of the Flower, and her servants, all of whom were virgins."

"Who was the priestess?"

"I do not know, but I have heard that she was one of those people who, although their parents are black, are born white, and that if any females among the Pongo are born white, or with pink eyes, or deaf and dumb, they are set apart to be the servants of the priestess. But this priestess must now be dead, seeing that when I was a boy she was already old, very, very old, and the Pongo were much concerned because there was no one of white skin who could be appointed to succeed her. Indeed she *is* dead, since many years ago there was a great feast in Pongo-land and numbers of slaves were eaten, because the priests had found a beautiful new princess who was white with yellow hair and had finger-nails of the right shape."

Now I bethought me that this finding of the priestess named "Mother of the Flower," who must be distinguished by certain personal peculiarities, resembled not a little that of the finding of the Apis bull-god, which also must have certain prescribed and holy markings, by the old Egyptians, as narrated by Herodotus. However, I said nothing about it at the time, because Brother John asked sharply:

"And is this priestess also dead?"

"I do not know, Dogeetah, but I think not. If she were dead I think that we should have heard some rumour of the Feast of the eating of the dead Mother."

"Eating the dead mother!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Macumazana. It is the law among the Pongo that, for a certain sacred reason, the body of the Mother of the Flower, when she dies, must be partaken of by those who are privileged to the holy food."

"But the White Devil neither dies nor is eaten?" I said.

"No, as I have told you, he never dies. It is he who causes others to die, as if you go to Pongo-land doubtless you will find out," Babemba added grimly.

Upon my word, thought I to myself, as the meeting broke up because Babemba had nothing more to say, if I had my way I would leave Pongo-land and its white devil alone. Then I remembered how Brother John stood in reference to this matter, and with a sigh resigned myself to fate. As it proved it, I mean Fate, was quite equal to the occasion. The very next morning, early, Babemba turned up again.

"Lords, lords," he said, "a wonderful thing has happened! Last night we spoke of the Pongo and now behold! an embassy from the Pongo is here; it arrived at sunrise."

"What for?" I asked.

"To propose peace between their people and the Mazitu. Yes, they ask that Bausi should send envoys to their town to arrange a lasting peace. As if anyone would go!" he added.

"Perhaps some might dare to," I answered, for an idea occurred to me, "but let us go to see Bausi."

Half an hour later we were seated in the king's enclosure, that is, Stephen and I were, for Brother John was already in the royal hut, talking to Bausi. As we went a few words had passed between us.

"Has it occurred to you, John," I asked, "that if you really wish to visit Pongo-land here is perhaps what you would call a providential opportunity. Certainly none of these Mazitu will go, since they fear lest they should find a permanent peace—inside of the Pongo. Well, you are a blood-brother to Bausi and can offer to play the part of Envoy Extraordinary, with us as the members of your staff."

"I have already thought of it, Allan," he replied, stroking his long beard.

We sat down among a few of the leading councillors, and presently Bausi came out of his hut accompanied by Brother John, and having greeted us, ordered the Pongo envoys to be admitted. They were led in at once, tall, light-coloured men with regular and Semitic features, who were clothed in white linen like Arabs, and wore circles of gold or copper upon their necks and wrists.

In short, they were imposing persons, quite different from ordinary Central African natives, though there was something about their appearance which chilled and repelled me. I should add that their spears had been left outside, and that they saluted the king by folding their arms upon their breasts and bowing in a dignified fashion.

"Who are you?" asked Bausi, "and what do you want?"

"I am Komba," answered their spokesman, quite a young man with flashing eyes, "the Accepted-of-the-Gods, who, in a day to come that perhaps is near, will be the Kalubi of the Pongo people, and these are my servants. I have come here bearing gifts of friendship which are without, by the desire of the holy Motombo, the High Priest of the gods——"

"I thought that the Kalubi was the priest of your gods," interrupted Bausi.

"Not so. The Kalubi is the King of the Pongo as you are the King of the Mazitu. The Motombo, who is seldom seen, is King of the spirits and the Mouth of the gods."

Bausi nodded in the African fashion, that is by raising the chin, not depressing it, and Komba went on:

"I have placed myself in your power, trusting to your honour. You can kill me if you wish, though that will avail nothing, since there are others waiting to become Kalubi in my place."

"Am I a Pongo that I should wish to kill messengers and eat them?" asked Bausi, with sarcasm, a speech at which I noticed the Pongo envoys winced a little.

"King, you are mistaken. The Pongo only eat those whom the White God has chosen. It is a religious rite. Why should they who have cattle in plenty desire to devour men?"

"I don't know," grunted Bausi, "but there is one here who can tell a different story," and he looked at Babemba, who wriggled uncomfortably.

Komba also looked at him with his fierce eyes.

"It is not conceivable," he said, "that anybody should wish to eat one so old and bony, but let that pass. I thank you, King, for your promise of safety. I have come here to ask that you should send envoys to confer with the Kalubi and the Motombo, that a lasting peace may be arranged between our peoples."

"Why do not the Kalubi and the Motombo come here to confer?" asked Bausi.

"Because it is not lawful that they should leave their land, O King. Therefore they have sent me who am the Kalubi-to-come. Hearken. There has been war between us for generations. It began so long ago that only the Motombo knows of its beginning which he has from the gods. Once the Pongo people owned all this land and only had their sacred places beyond the water. Then your forefathers came and fell on them, killing many, enslaving many and taking their women to wife. Now, say the Motombo and the Kalubi, in the place of war let there be peace; where there is but barren sand, there let corn and flowers grow; let the darkness, wherein men lose their way and die, be changed to pleasant light in which they can sit in the sun holding each other's hands."

"Hear, hear!" I muttered, quite moved by this eloquence. But Bausi was not at all moved; indeed, he seemed to view these poetic proposals with the darkest suspicion.

"Give up killing our people or capturing them to be sacrificed to your White Devil, and then in a year or two we may listen to your words that are smeared with honey," he said. "As it is, we think that they are but a trap to catch flies. Still, if there are any of our councillors willing to visit your Motombo and your Kalubi and hear what they have to propose, taking the risk of whatever may happen to them there, I do not forbid it. Now, O my Councillors, speak, not altogether, but one by one, and be swift, since to the first that speaks shall be given this honour."

I think I never heard a denser silence than that which followed this invitation. Each of the *indunas* looked at his neighbour, but not one of them uttered a single word.

"What!" exclaimed Bausi, in affected surprise. "Do none speak? Well, well, you are lawyers and men of peace. What says the great general, Babemba?"

"I say, O King, that I went once to Pongo-land when I was young, taken by the hair of my head, to leave an eye there and that I do not wish to visit it again walking on the soles of my feet."

"It seems, O Komba, that since none of my people are willing to act as envoys, if there is to be talk of peace between us, the Motombo and the Kalubi must come here under safe conduct."

"I have said that cannot be, O King."

"If so, all is finished, O Komba. Rest, eat of our food and return to your own land."

Then Brother John rose and said:

"We are blood-brethren, Bausi, and therefore I can speak for you. If you and your councillors are willing, and these Pongos are willing, I and my friends do not fear to visit the Motombo and the Kalubi, to talk with them of peace on behalf of your people, since we love to see new lands and new races of mankind. Say, Komba, if the king allows, will you accept us as ambassadors?"

"It is for the king to name his own ambassadors," answered Komba. "Yet the Kalubi has heard of the presence of you white lords in Mazitu-land and bade me say that if it should be your pleasure to accompany the embassy and visit him, he would give you welcome. Only when the matter was laid before the Motombo, the oracle spoke thus:

"Let the white men come if come they will, or let them stay away. But if they come, let them bring with them none of those iron tubes, great or small, whereof the land has heard, that vomit smoke with a noise and cause death from afar. They will not need them to kill meat, for meat shall be given to them in plenty; moreover, among the Pongo they will be safe, unless they offer insult to the god."

These words Komba spoke very slowly and with much emphasis, his piercing eyes fixed upon my face as though to read the thoughts it hid. As I heard them my courage sank into my boots. Well, I knew that the Kalubi was asking us to Pongo-land that we might kill this Great White Devil that threatened his life, which, I took it, was a monstrous ape. And how could we face that or some other frightful brute without firearms? My mind was made up in a minute.

"O Komba," I said, "my gun is my father, my mother, my wife and all my other relatives. I do not stir from here without it."

"Then, white lord," answered Komba, "you will do well to stop in this place in the midst of your family, since, if you try to bring it with you to Pongo-land, you will be killed as you set foot upon the shore."

Before I could find an answer Brother John spoke, saying:

"It is natural that the great hunter, Macumazana, should not wish to be parted from what which to him is as a stick to a lame man. But with me it is different. For years I have used no gun, who kill nothing that God made, except a few bright-winged insects. I am ready to visit your country with naught save this in my hand," and he pointed to the butterfly net that leaned against the fence behind him.

"Good, you are welcome," said Komba, and I thought that I saw his eyes gleam with unholy joy. There followed a pause, during which I explained everything to Stephen, showing that the thing was madness. But here, to my horror, that young man's mulish obstinacy came in.

"I say, you know, Quatermain," he said, "we can't let the old boy go alone, or at least I can't. It's another matter for you who have a son dependent on you. But putting aside the fact that I mean to get——" he was about to add, "the orchid," when I nudged him. Of course, it was ridiculous, but an uneasy fear took me lest this Komba should in some mysterious way understand what he was saying. "What's up? Oh! I see, but the beggar can't understand English. Well, putting aside everything else, it isn't the game, and there you are, you know. If Mr. Brother John goes, I'll go too, and indeed if he doesn't go, I'll go alone."

"You unutterable young ass," I muttered in a stage aside.

"What is it the young white lord says he wishes in our country?" asked the cold Komba, who with diabolical acuteness had read some of Stephen's meaning in his face.

"He says that he is a harmless traveller who would like to study the scenery and to find out if you have any gold there," I answered.

"Indeed. Well, he shall study the scenery and we have gold," and he touched the bracelets on his arm, "of which he shall be given as much as he can carry away. But perchance, white lords, you would wish to talk this matter over alone. Have we your leave to withdraw a while, O King?"

Five minutes later we were seated in the king's "great house" with Bausi himself and Babemba. Here there was a mighty argument. Bausi implored Brother John not to go, and so did I. Babemba said that to go would be madness, as he smelt witchcraft and murder in the air, he who knew the Pongo.

Brother John replied sweetly that he certainly intended to avail himself of this heaven-sent opportunity to visit one of the few remaining districts in this part of Africa through which he had not yet wandered. Stephen yawned and fanned himself with a pocket-handkerchief, for the hut was hot, and remarked that having come so far after a certain rare flower he did not mean to return empty-handed.

"I perceive, Dogeetah," said Bausi at last, "that you have some reason for this journey which you are hiding from me. Still, I am minded to hold you here by force."

"If you do, it will break our brotherhood," answered Brother John. "Seek not to know what I would hide, Bausi, but wait till the future shall declare it."

Bausi groaned and gave in. Babemba said that Dogeetah and Wazela were bewitched, and that I, Macumazana, alone retained my senses.

"Then that's settled," exclaimed Stephen. "John and I are to go as envoys to the Pongo, and you, Quatermain, will stop here to look after the hunters and the stores."

"Young man," I replied, "do you wish to insult me? After your father put you in my charge, too! If you two are going, I shall come also, if I have to do so mother-naked. But let me tell you once and for all in the most emphatic language I can command, that I consider you a brace of confounded lunatics, and that if the Pongo don't eat you, it will be more than you deserve. To think that at my age I should be dragged among a lot of cannibal savages without even a pistol, to fight some unknown brute with my bare hands! Well, we can only die once—that is, so far as we know at present."

"How true," remarked Stephen; "how strangely and profoundly true!"

Oh! I could have boxed his ears.

We went into the courtyard again, whither Komba was summoned with his attendants. This time they came bearing gifts, or having them borne for them. These consisted, I remember, of two fine tusks of ivory which suggested to me that their country could not be entirely surrounded by water, since elephants would scarcely live upon an island; gold dust in a gourd and copper bracelets, which showed that it was mineralized; white native linen, very well woven, and some really beautiful decorated pots, indicating that the people had artistic tastes. Where did they get them from, I wonder, and what was the origin of their race? I cannot answer the question, for I never found out with any certainty. Nor do I think they knew themselves.

The indaba was resumed. Bausi announced that we three white men with a servant apiece (I stipulated for this) would visit Pongo-land as his envoys, taking no firearms with us, there to discuss terms of peace between the two peoples, and especially the questions of trade and intermarriage. Komba was very insistent that this should be included; at the time I wondered why. He, Komba, on behalf of the Motombo and the Kalubi, the spiritual and temporal rulers of his land, guaranteed us safe conduct on the understanding that we attempted no insult or violence to the gods, a stipulation from which there was no escape, though I liked it little. He swore also that we should be delivered safe and sound in the Mazitu country within six days of our having left its shores. Bausi said that it was good, adding that he would send five hundred armed men to escort us to the place where we were to embark, and to receive us on our return; also that if any hurt came to us he would wage war upon the Pongo people for ever until he found means to destroy them. So we parted, it being agreed that we were to start upon our journey on the following morning.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RICA TOWN

As a matter of fact we did not leave Beza Town till twenty-four hours later than had been arranged, since it took some time for old Babemba, who was to be in charge of it, to collect and provision our escort of five hundred men.

Here, I may mention, that when we got back to our huts we found the two Mazitu bearers, Tom and Jerry, eating a hearty meal, but looking rather tired. It appeared that in order to get rid of their favourable evidence, the deceased witch-doctor, Imbozwi, who for some reason or other had feared to kill them, caused them to be marched off to a distant part of the land where they were imprisoned. On the arrival of the news of the fall and death of Imbozwi and his subordinates, they were set at liberty, and at once returned to us at Beza Town.

Of course it became necessary to explain to our servants what we were about to do. When they understood the nature of our proposed expedition they shook their heads, and when they learned that we had promised to leave our guns behind us, they were speechless with amazement.

*"Kransick! Kransick!"* which means "ill in the skull," or "mad," exclaimed Hans to the others as he tapped his forehead significantly. "They have caught it from Dogeetah, one who lives on insects which he entangles in a net, and carries no gun to kill game. Well, I knew they would."

The hunters nodded in assent, and Sammy lifted his arms to Heaven as though in prayer. Only Mavovo seemed indifferent. Then came the question of which of them was to accompany us.

"So far as I am concerned that is soon settled," said Mavovo. "I go with my father, Macumazana, seeing that even without a gun I am still strong and can fight as my male ancestors fought with a spear."

"And I, too, go with the Baas Quatermain," grunted Hans, "seeing that even without a gun I am cunning, as *my* female ancestors were before me."

"Except when you take medicine, Spotted Snake, and lose yourself in the mist of sleep," mocked one of the Zulus. "Does that fine bedstead which the king sent you go with you?"

"No, son of a fool!" answered Hans. "I'll lend it to you who do not understand that there is more wisdom within me when I am asleep than there is in you when you are awake."

It remained to be decided who the third man should be. As neither of Brother John's two servants, who had accompanied him on his cross-country journey, was suitable, one being ill and the other afraid, Stephen suggested Sammy as the man, chiefly because he could cook.

"No, Mr. Somers, no," said Sammy, with earnestness. "At this proposal I draw the thick rope. To ask one who can cook to visit a land where he will be cooked, is to seethe the offspring in its parent's milk."

So we gave him up, and after some discussion fixed upon Jerry, a smart and plucky fellow, who was quite willing to accompany us. The rest of that day we spent in making our preparations which, if simple, required a good deal of thought. To my annoyance, at the time I wanted to find Hans to help me, he was not forthcoming. When at length he appeared I asked him where he had been. He answered, to cut himself a stick in the forest, as he understood we should have to walk a long way. Also he showed me the stick, a long, thick staff of a hard and beautiful kind of bamboo which grows in Mazitu-land.

"What do you want that clumsy thing for," I said, "when there are plenty of sticks about?"

"New journey, new stick! Baas. Also this kind of wood is full of air and might help me to float if we are upset into the water."

"What an idea!" I exclaimed, and dismissed the matter from my mind.

At dawn, on the following day, we started, Stephen and I riding on the two donkeys, which were now fat and lusty, and Brother John upon his white ox, a most docile beast that was quite attached to him. All the hunters, fully armed, came with us to the borders of the Mazitu country, where they were to await our return in company with the Mazitu regiment. The king himself went with us to the west gate of the town, where he bade us all, and especially Brother John, an affectionate farewell. Moreover, he sent for Komba and his attendants, and again swore to him that if any harm happened to us, he would not rest till he had found a way to destroy the Pongo, root and branch.

"Have no fear," answered the cold Komba, "in our holy town of Rica we do not tie innocent guests to stakes to be shot to death with arrows."

The repartee, which was undoubtedly neat, irritated Bausi, who was not fond of allusions to this subject.

"If the white men are so safe, why do you not let them take their guns with them?" he asked, somewhat illogically.

"If we meant evil, King, would their guns help them, they being but few among so many. For instance, could we not steal them, as you did when you plotted the murder of these white lords. It is a law among the Pongo that no such magic weapon shall be allowed to enter their land."

"Why?" I asked, to change the conversation, for I saw that Bausi was growing very wrath and feared complications.

"Because, my lord Macumazana, there is a prophecy among us that when a gun is fired in Pongo-land, its gods will desert us, and the Motombo, who is their priest, will die. That saying is very old, but until a little while ago none knew what it meant, since it spoke of 'a hollow spear that smoked,' and such a weapon was not known to us."

"Indeed," I said, mourning within myself that we should not be in a position to bring about the fulfilment of that prophecy, which, as Hans said, shaking his head sadly, "was a great pity, a very great pity!"

Three days' march over country that gradually sloped downwards from the high tableland on which stood Beza Town, brought us to the lake called Kirua, a word which, I believe, means The Place of the Island. Of the lake itself we could see nothing, because of the dense brake of tall reeds which grew out into the shallow water for quite a mile from the shore and was only pierced here and there with paths made by the hippopotami when they came to the mainland at night to feed. From a high mound which looked exactly like a tumulus and, for aught I know, may have been one, however, the blue waters beyond were visible, and in the far distance what, looked at through glasses, appeared to be a tree-clad mountain top. I asked Komba what it might be, and he answered that it was the Home of the gods in Pongo-land.

"What gods?" I asked again, whereon he replied like a black Herodotus, that of these it was not lawful to speak.

I have rarely met anyone more difficult to pump than that frigid and un-African Komba.

On the top of this mound we planted the Union Jack, fixed to the tallest pole that we could find. Komba asked suspiciously why we did so, and as I was determined to show this unsympathetic person that there were others as unpumpable as himself, I replied that it was the god of our tribe, which we set up there to be worshipped, and that anyone who tried to insult or injure it, would certainly die, as the witch-doctor, Imbozwi, and his children had found out. For once Komba seemed a little impressed, and even bowed to the bunting as he passed by.

What I did not inform him was that we had set the flag there to be a sign and a beacon to us in case we should ever be forced to find our way back to this place unguided and in a hurry. As a matter of fact, this piece of forethought, which oddly enough originated with the most reckless of our party, Stephen, proved our salvation, as I shall tell later on. At the foot of the mound we set our camp for the night, the Mazitu soldiers under Babemba, who did not mind mosquitoes, making theirs nearer to the lake, just opposite to where a wide hippopotamus lane pierced the reeds, leaving a little canal of clear water.

I asked Komba when and how we were to cross the lake. He said that we must start at dawn on the following morning when, at this time of the year, the wind generally blew off shore, and that if the weather were favourable, we should reach the Pongo town of Rica by nightfall. As to how we were to do this, he would show me if I cared to follow him. I nodded, and he led me four or five hundred yards along the edge of the reeds in a southerly direction.

As we went, two things happened. The first of these was that a very large, black rhinoceros, which was sleeping in some bushes, suddenly got our wind and, after the fashion of these beasts, charged down on us from about fifty yards away. Now I was carrying a heavy, single-barrelled rifle, for as yet we and our weapons were not parted. On came the rhinoceros, and Komba, small blame to him for he only had a spear, started to run. I cocked the rifle and waited my chance.

When it was not more than fifteen paces away the rhinoceros threw up its head, at which, of course, it was useless to fire because of the horn, and I let drive at the throat. The bullet hit it fair, and I suppose penetrated to the heart. At any rate, it rolled over and over like a shot rabbit, and with a single stretch of its limbs, expired almost at my feet.

Komba was much impressed. He returned; he stared at the dead rhinoceros and at the hole in its throat; he stared at me; he stared at the still smoking rifle.

"The great beast of the plains killed with a noise!" he muttered. "Killed in an instant by this little monkey of a white man" (I thanked him for that and made a note of it) "and his magic. Oh! the Motombo was wise when he commanded——" and with an effort he stopped.

"Well, friend, what is the matter?" I asked. "You see there was no need for you to run. If you had stepped behind me you would have been as safe as you are now—after running."

"It is so, lord Macumazana, but the thing is strange to me. Forgive me if I do not understand."

"Oh! I forgive you, my lord Kalubi—that is—to be. It is clear that you have a good deal to learn in Pongo-land."

"Yes, my lord Macumazana, and so perhaps have you," he replied dryly, having by this time recovered his nerve and sarcastic powers.

Then after telling Mavovo, who appeared mysteriously at the sound of the shot—I think he was stalking us in case of accidents—to fetch men to cut up the rhinoceros, Komba and I proceeded on our walk.

A little further on, just by the edge of the reeds, I caught sight of a narrow, oblong trench dug in a patch of stony soil, and of a rusted mustard tin half-hidden by some scanty vegetation.

"What is that?" I asked, in seeming astonishment, though I knew well what it must be.

"Oh!" replied Komba, who evidently was not yet quite himself, "that is where the white lord Dogeetah, Bausi's blood-brother, set his little canvas house when he was here over twelve moons ago."

"Really!" I exclaimed, "he never told me he was here." (This was a lie, but somehow I was not afraid of lying to Komba.) "How do you know that he was here?"

"One of our people who was fishing in the reeds saw him."

"Oh! that explains it, Komba. But what an odd place for him to fish in; so far from home; and I wonder what he was fishing for. When you have time, Komba, you must explain to me what it is that you catch amidst the roots of thick reeds in such shallow water."

Komba replied that he would do so with pleasure—when he had time. Then, as though to avoid further conversation he ran forward, and thrusting the reeds apart, showed me a great canoe, big enough to hold thirty or forty men, which with infinite labour had been hollowed out of the trunk of a single, huge tree. This canoe differed from the majority of those that personally I have seen used on African lakes and rivers, in that it was fitted for a mast, now unshipped. I looked at it and said it was a fine boat, whereon Komba replied that there were a hundred such at Rica Town, though not all of them were so large.

Ah! thought I to myself as we walked back to the camp. Then, allowing an average of twenty to a canoe, the Pongo tribe number about two thousand males old enough to paddle, an estimate which turned out to be singularly correct.

Next morning at dawn we started, with some difficulty. To begin with, in the middle of the night old Babemba came to the canvas shelter under which I was sleeping, woke me up and in a long speech implored me not to go. He said he was convinced that the Pongo intended foul play of some sort and that all this talk of peace was a mere trick to entrap us white men into the country, probably in order to sacrifice us to its gods for a religious reason.

I answered that I quite agreed with him, but that as my companions insisted upon making this journey, I could not desert them. All that I could do was to beg him to keep a sharp look-out so that he might be able to help us in case we got into trouble.

"Here I will stay and watch for you, lord Macumazana," he answered, "but if you fall into a snare, am I able to swim through the water like a fish, or to fly through the air like a bird to free you?"

After he had gone one of the Zulu hunters arrived, a man named Ganza, a sort of lieutenant to Mavovo, and sang the same song. He said that it was not right that I should go without guns to die among devils and leave him and his companions wandering alone in a strange land.

I answered that I was much of the same opinion, but that Dogeetah insisted upon going and that I had no choice.

"Then let us kill Dogeetah, or at any rate tie him up, so that he can do no more mischief in his madness," Ganza suggested blandly, whereon I turned him out.

Lastly Sammy arrived and said:

"Mr. Quatermain, before you plunge into this deep well of foolishness, I beg that you will consider your responsibilities to God and man, and especially to us, your household, who are now but lost sheep far from home, and further, that you will remember that if anything disagreeable should overtake you, you are indebted to me to the extent of two months' wages which will probably prove unrecoverable."

I produced a little leather bag from a tin box and counted out to Sammy the wages due to him, also those for three months in advance.

To my astonishment he began to weep. "Sir," he said, "I do not seek filthy lucre. What I mean is that I am afraid you will be killed by these Pongo, and, alas! although I love you, sir, I am too great a coward to come and be killed with you, for God made me like that. I pray you not to go, Mr. Quatermain, because I repeat, I love you, sir."

"I believe you do, my good fellow," I answered, "and I also am afraid of being killed, who only seem to be brave because I must. However, I hope we shall come through all right. Meanwhile, I am going to give this box and all the gold in it, of which there is a great deal, into your charge, Sammy, trusting to you, if anything happens to us, to get it safe back to Durban if you can."

"Oh! Mr. Quatermain," he exclaimed, "I am indeed honoured, especially as you know that once I was in jail for—embezzlement—with extenuating circumstances, Mr. Quatermain. I tell you that although I am a coward, I will die before anyone gets his fingers into that box."

"I am sure that you will, Sammy my boy," I said. "But I hope, although things look queer, that none of us will be called upon to die just yet."

The morning came at last, and the six of us marched down to the canoe which had been brought round to the open waterway. Here we had to undergo a kind of customs-house examination at the hands of Komba and his companions, who seemed terrified lest we should be smuggling firearms.

"You know what rifles are like," I said indignantly. "Can you see any in our hands? Moreover, I give you my word that we have none."

Komba bowed politely, but suggested that perhaps some "little guns," by which he meant pistols, remained in our baggage—by accident. Komba was a most suspicious person.

"Undo all the loads," I said to Hans, who obeyed with an enthusiasm which I confess struck me as suspicious.

Knowing his secretive and tortuous nature, this sudden zeal for openness seemed almost unnatural. He began by unrolling his own blanket, inside of which appeared a miscellaneous collection of articles. I remember among them a spare pair of very dirty trousers, a battered tin cup, a wooden spoon such as Kaffirs use to eat their *scoff* with, a bottle full of some doubtful compound, sundry roots and other native medicines, an old pipe I had given him, and last but not least, a huge head of yellow tobacco in the leaf, of a kind that the Mazitu, like the Pongos, cultivate to some extent.

"What on earth do you want so much tobacco for, Hans?" I asked.

"For us three black people to smoke, Baas, or to take as snuff, or to chew. Perhaps where we are going we may find little to eat, and then tobacco is a food on which one can live for days. Also it brings sleep at nights."

"Oh! that will do," I said, fearing lest Hans, like a second Walter Raleigh, was about to deliver a long lecture upon the virtue of tobacco.

"There is no need for the yellow man to take this weed to our land," interrupted Komba, "for there we have plenty. Why does he cumber himself with the stuff?" and he stretched out his hand idly as though to take hold of and examine it closely.

At this moment, however, Mavovo called attention to his bundle which he had undone, whether on purpose or by accident, I do not know, and forgetting the tobacco, Komba turned to attend to him. With a marvellous celerity Hans rolled up his blanket again. In less than a minute the lashings were fast and it was hanging on his back. Again suspicion took me, but an argument which had sprung up between Brother John and Komba about the former's butterfly net, which Komba suspected of being a new kind of gun or at least a magical instrument of a dangerous sort, attracted my notice. After this dispute, another arose over a common garden trowel that Stephen had thought fit to bring with him. Komba asked what it was for. Stephen replied through Brother John that it was to dig up flowers.

"Flowers!" said Komba. "One of our gods is a flower. Does the white lord wish to dig up our god?"

Of course this was exactly what Stephen did desire to do, but not unnaturally he kept the fact to himself. The squabble grew so hot that finally I announced that if our little belongings were treated with so much suspicion, it might be better that we should give up the journey altogether.

"We have passed our word that we have no firearms," I said in the most dignified manner that I could command, "and that should be enough for you, O Komba."

Then Komba, after consultation with his companions, gave way. Evidently he was anxious that we should visit Pongo-land.

So at last we started. We three white men and our servants seated ourselves in the stern of the canoe on grass cushions that had been provided. Komba went to the bows and his people, taking the broad paddles, rowed and pushed the boat along the water-way made by the hippopotami through the tall and matted reeds, from which ducks and other fowl rose in multitudes with a sound like thunder. A quarter of an hour or so of paddling through these weed-encumbered shallows brought us to the deep and open lake. Here, on the edge of the reeds a tall pole that served as a mast was shipped, and a square sail, made of closely-woven mats, run up. It filled

with the morning off-land breeze and presently we were bowling along at a rate of quite eight miles the hour. The shore grew dim behind us, but for a long while above the clinging mists I could see the flag that we had planted on the mound. By degrees it dwindled till it became a mere speck and vanished. As it grew smaller my spirits sank, and when it was quite gone, I felt very low indeed.

Another of your fool's errands, Allan my boy, I said to myself. I wonder how many more you are destined to survive.

The others, too, did not seem in the best of spirits. Brother John stared at the horizon, his lips moving as though he were engaged in prayer, and even Stephen was temporarily depressed. Jerry had fallen asleep, as a native generally does when it is warm and he has nothing to do. Mavovo looked very thoughtful. I wondered whether he had been consulting his Snake again, but did not ask him. Since the episode of our escape from execution by bow and arrow I had grown somewhat afraid of that unholy reptile. Next time it might foretell our immediate doom, and if it did I knew that I should believe.

As for Hans, he looked much disturbed, and was engaged in wildly hunting for something in the flap pockets of an antique corduroy waistcoat which, from its general appearance, must, I imagine, years ago have adorned the person of a British game-keeper.

"Three," I heard him mutter. "By my great grandfather's spirit! only three left."

"Three what?" I asked in Dutch.

"Three charms, Baas, and there ought to have been quite twenty-four. The rest have fallen out through a hole that the devil himself made in this rotten stuff. Now we shall not die of hunger, and we shall not be shot, and we shall not be drowned, at least none of those things will happen to me. But there are twenty-one other things that may finish us, as I have lost the charms to ward them off. Thus——"

"Oh! stop your rubbish," I said, and fell again into the depths of my uncomfortable reflections. After this I, too, went to sleep. When I woke it was past midday and the wind was falling. However, it held while we ate some food we had brought with us, after which it died away altogether, and the Pongo people took to their paddles. At my suggestion we offered to help them, for it occurred to me that we might just as well learn how to manage these paddles. So six were given to us, and Komba, who now I noted was beginning to speak in a somewhat imperious tone, instructed us in their use. At first we made but a poor hand at the business, but three or four hours' steady practice taught us a good deal. Indeed, before our journey's end, I felt that we should be quite capable of managing a canoe, if ever it became necessary for us to do so.

By three in the afternoon the shores of the island we were approaching—if it really was an island, a point that I never cleared up—were well in sight, the mountain top that stood some miles inland having been visible for hours. In fact, through my glasses, I had been able to make out its configuration almost from the beginning of the voyage. About five we entered the mouth of a deep bay fringed on either side with forests, in which were cultivated clearings with small villages of the ordinary African stamp. I observed from the smaller size of the trees adjacent to these clearings, that much more land had once been under cultivation here, probably within the last century, and asked Komba why this was so.

He answered in an enigmatic sentence which impressed me so much that I find I entered it verbatim in my notebook.

"When man dies, corn dies. Man is corn, and corn is man."

Under this entry I see that I wrote "Compare the saying, 'Bread is the staff of life.'"

I could not get any more out of him. Evidently he referred, however, to a condition of shrinking in the population, a circumstance which he did not care to discuss.

After the first few miles the bay narrowed sharply, and at its end came to a point where a stream of no great breadth fell into it. On either side of this stream that was roughly bridged in many places stood the town of Rica. It consisted of a great number of large huts roofed with palm leaves and constructed apparently of whitewashed clay, or rather, as we discovered afterwards, of lake mud mixed with chopped straw or grass.

Reaching a kind of wharf which was protected from erosion by piles formed of small trees driven into the mud, to which were tied a fleet of canoes, we landed just as the sun was beginning to sink. Our approach had doubtless been observed, for as we drew near the wharf a horn was blown by someone on the shore, whereon a considerable number of men appeared. I suppose, out of the huts, and assisted to make the canoe fast. I noted that these all resembled Komba and his companions in build and features; they were so like each other that, except for the difference of their ages, it was difficult to tell them apart. They might all have been members of one family; indeed, this was practically the case, owing to constant intermarriage carried on for generations.

There was something in the appearance of these tall, cold, sharp-featured, white-robed men that chilled my blood, something unnatural and almost inhuman. Here was nothing of the usual African jollity. No one shouted, no one laughed or chattered. No one crowded on us, trying to handle our persons or clothes. No one appeared afraid or even astonished. Except for a word or two they were silent, merely contemplating us in a chilling and distant fashion, as though the arrival of three white men in a country where before no white man had ever set foot were an everyday occurrence.

Moreover, our personal appearance did not seem to impress them, for they smiled faintly at Brother John's long beard and at my stubby hair, pointing these out to each other with their slender fingers or with the handles of their big spears. I remarked that they never used the blade of the spear for this purpose, perhaps because they thought that we might take this for a hostile or even a warlike demonstration. It is humiliating to have to add that the only one of our company who seemed to move them to wonder or interest was Hans. His extremely ugly and wrinkled countenance, it was clear, did appeal to them to some extent, perhaps because they had never seen anything in the least like it before, or perhaps for another reason which the reader may guess in due course.

At any rate, I heard one of them, pointing to Hans, ask Komba whether the ape-man was our god or only our captain. The compliment seemed to please Hans, who hitherto had never been looked on either as a god or a captain. But the rest of us were not flattered; indeed, Mavovo was indignant, and told Hans outright that if he heard any more such talk he would beat him before these people, to show them that he was neither a captain nor a god.

"Wait till I claim to be either, O butcher of a Zulu, before you threaten to treat me thus!" ejaculated Hans, indignantly. Then he added, with his peculiar Hottentot snigger, "Still, it is true that before all the meat is eaten (i.e. before all is done) you may think me both," a dark saying which at the time we did not understand.

When we had landed and collected our belongings, Komba told us to follow him, and led us up a wide street that was very tidily kept and bordered on either side by the large huts whereof I have spoken. Each of these huts stood in a fenced garden of its own, a thing I have rarely seen elsewhere in Africa. The result of this arrangement was that although as a matter of fact it had but a

comparatively small population, the area covered by Rica was very great. The town, by the way, was not surrounded with any wall or other fortification, which showed that the inhabitants feared no attack. The waters of the lake were their defence.

For the rest, the chief characteristic of this place was the silence that brooded there. Apparently they kept no dogs, for none barked, and no poultry, for I never heard a cock crow in Pongo-land. Cattle and native sheep they had in abundance, but as they did not fear any enemy, these were pastured outside the town, their milk and meat being brought in as required. A considerable number of people were gathered to observe us, not in a crowd, but in little family groups which collected separately at the gates of the gardens.

For the most part these consisted of a man and one or more wives, finely formed and handsome women. Sometimes they had children with them, but these were very few; the most I saw with any one family was three, and many seemed to possess none at all. Both the women and the children, like the men, were decently clothed in long, white garments, another peculiarity which showed that these natives were no ordinary African savages.

Oh! I can see Rica Town now after all these many years: the wide street swept and garnished, the brown-roofed, white-walled huts in their fertile, irrigated gardens, the tall, silent folk, the smoke from the cooking fires rising straight as a line in the still air, the graceful palms and other tropical trees, and at the head of the street, far away to the north, the rounded, towering shape of the forest-clad mountain that was called House of the Gods. Often that vision comes back to me in my sleep, or at times in my waking hours when some heavy odour reminds me of the overpowering scent of the great trumpet-like blooms which hung in profusion upon broad-leaved bushes that were planted in almost every garden.

On we marched till at last we reached a tall, live fence that was covered with brilliant scarlet flowers, arriving at its gate just as the last red glow of day faded from the sky and night began to fall. Komba pushed open the gate, revealing a scene that none of us are likely to forget. The fence enclosed about an acre of ground of which the back part was occupied by two large huts standing in the usual gardens.

In front of these, not more than fifteen paces from the gate, stood another building of a totally different character. It was about fifty feet in length by thirty broad and consisted only of a roof supported upon carved pillars of wood, the spaces between the pillars being filled with grass mats or blinds. Most of these blinds were pulled down, but four exactly opposite the gate were open. Inside the shed forty or fifty men, who wore white robes and peculiar caps and who were engaged in chanting a dreadful, melancholy song, were gathered on three sides of a huge fire that burned in a pit in the ground. On the fourth side, that facing the gate, a man stood alone with his arms outstretched and his back towards us.

Of a sudden he heard our footsteps and turned round, springing to the left, so that the light might fall on us. Now we saw by the glow of the great fire, that over it was an iron grid not unlike a small bedstead, and that on this grid lay some fearful object. Stephen, who was a little ahead, stared, then exclaimed in a horrified voice:

“My God! it is a woman!”

In another second the blinds fell down, hiding everything, and the singing ceased.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE KALUBI'S OATH

"Be silent!" I whispered, and all understood my tone if they did not catch the words. Then steadying myself with an effort, for this hideous vision, which might have been a picture from hell, made me feel faint, I glanced at Komba, who was a pace or two in front of us. Evidently he was much disturbed—the motions of his back told me this—by the sense of some terrible mistake that he had made. For a moment he stood still, then wheeled round and asked me if we had seen anything.

"Yes," I answered indifferently, "we saw a number of men gathered round a fire, nothing more."

He tried to search our faces, but luckily the great moon, now almost at her full, was hidden behind a thick cloud, so that he could not read them well. I heard him sigh in relief as he said:

"The Kalubi and the head men are cooking a sheep; it is their custom to feast together on those nights when the moon is about to change. Follow me, white lords."

Then he led us round the end of the long shed at which we did not even look, and through the garden on its farther side to the two fine huts I have mentioned. Here he clapped his hands and a woman appeared, I know not whence. To her he whispered something. She went away and presently returned with four or five other women who carried clay lamps filled with oil in which floated a wick of palm fibre. These lamps were set down in the huts that proved to be very clean and comfortable places, furnished after a fashion with wooden stools and a kind of low table of which the legs were carved to the shape of antelope's feet. Also there was a wooden platform at the end of the hut whereon lay beds covered with mats and stuffed with some soft fibre.

"Here you may rest safe," he said, "for, white lords, are you not the honoured guests of the Pongo people? Presently food" (I shuddered at the word) "will be brought to you, and after you have eaten well, if it is your pleasure, the Kalubi and his councillors will receive you in yonder feast-house and you can talk with them before you sleep. If you need aught, strike upon that jar with a stick," and he pointed to what looked like a copper cauldron that stood in the garden of the hut near the place where the women were already lighting a fire, "and some will wait on you. Look, here are your goods; none are missing, and here comes water in which you may wash. Now I must go to make report to the Kalubi," and with a courteous bow he departed.

So after a while did the silent, handsome women—to fetch our meal, I understood one of them to say, and at length we were alone.

"My aunt!" said Stephen, fanning himself with his pocket-handkerchief, "did you see that lady toasting? I have often heard of cannibals, those slaves, for instance, but the actual business! Oh! my aunt!"

"It is no use addressing your absent aunt—if you have got one. What did you expect if you would insist on coming to a hell like this?" I asked gloomily.

"Can't say, old fellow. Don't trouble myself much with expectations as a rule. That's why I and my poor old father never could get on. I always quoted the text 'Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof' to him, until at length he sent for the family Bible and ruled it out with red ink in a rage. But I say, do you think that we shall be called upon to understudy St. Lawrence on that grid?"

"Certainly, I do," I replied, "and, as old Babemba warned you, you can't complain."

"Oh! but I will and I can. And so will you, won't you, Brother John?"

Brother John woke up from a reverie and stroked his long beard.

"Since you ask me, Mr. Somers," he said, reflectively, "if it were a case of martyrdom for the Faith, like that of the saint to whom you have alluded, I should not object—at any rate in theory. But I confess that, speaking from a secular point of view, I have the strongest dislike to being cooked and eaten by these very disagreeable savages. Still, I see no reason to suppose that we shall fall victims to their domestic customs."

I, being in a depressed mood, was about to argue to the contrary, when Hans poked his head into the hut and said:

"Dinner coming, Baas, very fine dinner!"

So we went out into the garden where the tall, impassive ladies were arranging many wooden dishes on the ground. Now the moon was clear of clouds, and by its brilliant light we examined their contents. Some were cooked meat covered with a kind of sauce that made its nature indistinguishable. As a matter of fact, I believe it was mutton, but—who could say? Others were evidently of a vegetable nature. For instance, there was a whole platter full of roasted mealie cobs and a great boiled pumpkin, to say nothing of some bowls of curdled milk. Regarding this feast I became aware of a sudden and complete conversion to those principles of vegetarianism which Brother John was always preaching to me.

"I am sure you are quite right," I said to him, nervously, "in holding that vegetables are the best diet in a hot climate. At any rate I have made up my mind to try the experiment for a few days," and throwing manners to the winds, I grabbed four of the upper mealie cobs and the top of the pumpkin which I cut off with a knife. Somehow I did not seem to fancy that portion of it which touched the platter, for who knew what those dishes might have contained and how often they were washed.

Stephen also appeared to have found salvation on this point, for he, too, patronized the mealie cobs and the pumpkin; so did Mavovo, and so did even that inveterate meat-eater, Hans. Only the simple Jerry tackled the fleshpots of Egypt, or rather of Pongoland, with appetite, and declared that they were good. I think that he, being the last of us through the gateway, had not realized what it was which lay upon the grid.

At length we finished our simple meal—when you are very hungry it takes a long time to fill oneself with squashy pumpkin, which is why I suppose ruminants and other grazing animals always seem to be eating—and washed it down with water in preference to the sticky-looking milk which we left to the natives.

"Allan," said Brother John to me in a low voice as we lit our pipes, "that man who stood with his back to us in front of the gridiron was the Kalubi. Against the firelight I saw the gap in his hand where I cut away the finger."

"Well, if we want to get any further, you must cultivate him," I answered. "But the question is, shall we get further than—that grid? I believe we have been trapped here to be eaten."

Before Brother John could reply, Komba arrived, and after inquiring whether our appetites had been good, intimated that the Kalubi and head men were ready to receive us. So off we went with the exception of Jerry, whom we left to watch our things, taking with us the presents we had prepared.

Komba led us to the feast-house, where the fire in the pit was out, or had been covered over, and the grid and its horrible burden had disappeared. Also now all the mats were rolled up, so that the clear moonlight flowed into and illuminated the place. Seated in a semicircle on wooden stools with their faces towards the gateway were the Kalubi, who occupied the centre, and eight councillors, all of them grey-haired men. This Kalubi was a tall, thin individual of middle age with, I think, the most nervous countenance that I ever saw. His features twitched continually and his hands were never still. The eyes, too, as far as I could see them in that light, were full of terrors.

He rose and bowed, but the councillors remained seated, greeting us with a long-continued and soft clapping of the hands, which, it seemed, was the Pongo method of salute.

We bowed in answer, then seated ourselves on three stools that had been placed for us, Brother John occupying the middle stool. Mavovo and Hans stood behind us, the latter supporting himself with his large bamboo stick. As soon as these preliminaries were over the Kalubi called upon Komba, whom he addressed in formal language as "You-who-have-passed-the-god," and "You-the-Kalubi-to-be" (I thought I saw him wince as he said these words), to give an account of his mission and of how it came about that they had the honour of seeing the white lords there.

Komba obeyed. After addressing the Kalubi with every possible title of honour, such as "Absolute Monarch," "Master whose feet I kiss," "He whose eyes are fire and whose tongue is a sword," "He at whose nod people die," "Lord of the Sacrifice, first Taster of the Sacred meat," "Beloved of the gods" (here the Kalubi shrank as though he had been pricked with a spear), "Second to none on earth save the Motombo the most holy, the most ancient, who comes from heaven and speaks with the voice of heaven," etc., etc., he gave a clear but brief account of all that had happened in the course of his mission to Beza Town.

Especially did he narrate how, in obedience to a message which he had received from the Motombo, he had invited the white lords to Pongo-land, and even accepted them as envoys from the Mazitu when none would respond to King Bausi's invitation to fill that office. Only he had stipulated that they should bring with them none of their magic weapons which vomited out smoke and death, as the Motombo had commanded. At this information the expressive countenance of the Kalubi once more betrayed mental disturbance that I think Komba noted as much as we did. However, he said nothing, and after a pause, Komba went on to explain that no such weapons had been brought, since, not satisfied with our word that this was so, he and his companions had searched our baggage before we left Mazitu-land.

Therefore, he added, there was no cause to fear that we should bring about the fulfilment of the old prophecy that when a gun was fired among the Pongo the gods would desert the land and the people cease to be a people.

Having finished his speech, he sat down in a humble place behind us. Then the Kalubi, after formally accepting us as ambassadors from Bausi, King of the Mazitu, discoursed at length upon the advantages which would result to both peoples from a lasting peace between them. Finally he propounded the articles of such a peace. These, it was clear, had been carefully prepared, but to set them out would be useless, since they never came to anything, and I doubt whether it was intended that they should. Suffice it to say that they provided for intermarriage, free trade between the countries, blood-brotherhood, and other things that I have forgotten, all of which was to be ratified by Bausi taking a daughter of the Kalubi to wife, and the Kalubi taking a daughter of Bausi.

We listened in silence, and when he had finished, after a pretended consultation between us, I spoke as the Mouth of Brother John, who, I explained, was too grand a person to talk himself, saying that the proposals seemed fair and reasonable, and that we should be happy to submit them to Bausi and his council on our return.

The Kalubi expressed great satisfaction at this statement, but remarked incidentally that first of all the whole matter must be laid before the Motombo for his opinion, without which no State transaction had legal weight among the Pongo. He added that with our approval he proposed that we should visit his Holiness on the morrow, starting when the sun was three hours old, as he lived at a distance of a day's journey from Rica. After further consultation we replied that although we had little time to spare, as we understood that the Motombo was old and could not visit us, we, the white lords, would stretch a point and call on him. Meanwhile we were tired and wished to go to bed. Then we presented our gifts, which were gracefully accepted, with an intimation that return presents would be made to us before we left Pongo-land.

After this the Kalubi took a little stick and broke it, to intimate that the conference was at an end, and having bade him and his councillors good night we retired to our huts.

I should add, because it has a bearing on subsequent events, that on this occasion we were escorted, not by Komba, but by two of the councillors. Komba, as I noted for the first time when we rose to say good-bye, was no longer present at the council. When he left it I cannot say, since it will be remembered that his seat was behind us in the shadow, and none of us saw him go.

"What do you make of all that?" I asked the others when the door was shut.

Brother John merely shook his head and said nothing, for in those days he seemed to be living in a kind of dreamland.

Stephen answered. "Bosh! Tommy rot! All my eye and my elbow! Those man-eating Johnnies have some game up their wide sleeves, and whatever it may be, it isn't peace with the Mazitu."

"I agree," I said. "If the real object were peace they would have haggled more, stood out for better terms, or hostages, or something. Also they would have got the consent of this Motombo beforehand. Clearly he is the master of the situation, not the Kalubi, who is only his tool; if business were meant he should have spoken first, always supposing that he exists and isn't a myth. However, if we live we shall learn, and if we don't, it doesn't matter, though personally I think we should be wise to leave Motombo alone and to clear out to Mazitu-land by the first canoe to-morrow morning."

"I intend to visit this Motombo," broke in Brother John with decision.

"Ditto, ditto," exclaimed Stephen, "but it's no use arguing that all over again."

"No," I replied with irritation. "It is, as you remark, of no use arguing with lunatics. So let's go to bed, and as it will probably be our last, have a good night's sleep."

"Hear, hear!" said Stephen, taking off his coat and placing it doubled up on the bed to serve as a pillow. "I say," he added, "stand clear a minute while I shake this blanket. It's covered with bits of something," and he suited the action to the word.

"Bits of something?" I said suspiciously. "Why didn't you wait a minute to let me see them. I didn't notice any bits before."

"Rats running about the roof, I expect," said Stephen carelessly.

Not being satisfied, I began to examine this roof and the clay walls, which I forgot to mention were painted over in a kind of pattern with whorls in it, by the feeble light of the primitive lamps. While I was thus engaged there was a knock on the door. Forgetting all about the dust, I opened it and Hans appeared.

"One of these man-eating devils wants to speak to you, Baas. Mavovo keeps him without."

"Let him in," I said, since in this place fearlessness seemed our best game, "but watch well while he is with us."

Hans whispered a word over his shoulder, and next moment a tall man wrapped from head to foot in white cloth, so that he looked like a ghost, came or rather shot into the hut and closed the door behind him.

"Who are you?" I asked.

By way of answer he lifted or unwrapped the cloth from about his face, and I saw that the Kalubi himself stood before us.

"I wish to speak alone with the white lord, Dogeetah," he said in a hoarse voice, "and it must be now, since afterwards it will be impossible."

Brother John rose and looked at him.

"How are you, Kalubi, my friend?" he asked. "I see that your wound has healed well."

"Yes, yes, but I would speak with you alone."

"Not so," replied Brother John. "If you have anything to say, you must say it to all of us, or leave it unsaid, since these lords and I are one, and that which I hear, they hear."

"Can I trust them?" muttered the Kalubi.

"As you can trust me. Therefore speak, or go. Yet, first, can we be overheard in this hut?"

"No, Dogeetah. The walls are thick. There is no one on the roof, for I have looked all round, and if any strove to climb there, we should hear. Also your men who watch the door would see him. None can hear us save perhaps the gods."

"Then we will risk the gods, Kalubi. Go on; my brothers know your story."

"My lords," he began, rolling his eyes about him like a hunted creature, "I am in a terrible pass. Once, since I saw you, Dogeetah, I should have visited the White God that dwells in the forest on the mountain yonder, to scatter the sacred seed. But I feigned to be sick, and Komba, the Kalubi-to-be, 'who has passed the god,' went in my place and returned unharmed. Now to-morrow, the night of the full moon, as Kalubi, I must visit the god again and once more scatter the seed and—Dogeetah, he will kill me whom he has once bitten. He will certainly kill me unless I can kill him. Then Komba will rule as Kalubi in my stead, and he will kill you in a way you can guess, by the 'Hot death,' as a sacrifice to the gods, that the women of the Pongo may once more become the mothers of many children. Yes, yes, unless we can kill the god who dwells in the forest, we all must die," and he paused, trembling, while the sweat dropped from him to the floor.

"That's pleasant," said Brother John, "but supposing that we kill the god how would that help us or you to escape from the Motombo and these murdering people of yours? Surely they would slay us for the sacrilege."

"Not so, Dogeetah. If the god dies, the Motombo dies. It is known from of old, and therefore the Motombo watches over the god as a mother over her child. Then, until a new god is found, the Mother of the Holy Flower rules, she who is merciful and will harm none, and I rule under her and will certainly put my enemies to death, especially that wizard Komba."

Here I thought I heard a faint sound in the air like the hiss of a snake, but as it was not repeated and I could see nothing, concluded that I was mistaken.

"Moreover," he went on, "I will load you with gold dust and any gifts you may desire, and set you safe across the water among your friends, the Mazitu."

"Look here," I broke in, "let us understand matters clearly, and, John, do you translate to Stephen. Now, friend Kalubi, first of all, who and what is this god you talk of?"

"Lord Macumazana, he is a huge ape white with age, or born white, I know not which. He is twice as big as any man, and stronger than twenty men, whom he can break in his hands, as I break a reed, or whose heads he can bite off in his mouth, as he bit off my finger for a warning. For that is how he treats the Kalubis when he wearies of them. First he bites off a finger and lets them go, and next he breaks them like a reed, as also he breaks those who are doomed to sacrifice before the fire."

"Ah!" I said, "a great ape! I thought as much. Well, and how long has this brute been a god among you?"

"I do not know how long. From the beginning. He was always there, as the Motombo was always there, for they are one."

"That's a lie any way," I said in English, then went on. "And who is this Mother of the Holy Flower? Is she also always there, and does she live in the same place as the ape god?"

"Not so, lord Macumazana. She dies like other mortals, and is succeeded by one who takes her place. Thus the present Mother is a white woman of your race, now of middle age. When she dies she will be succeeded by her daughter, who also is a white woman and very beautiful. After she dies another who is white will be found, perhaps one who is of black parents but born white."

"How old is this daughter?" interrupted Brother John in a curiously intent voice, "and who is her father?"

"The daughter was born over twenty years ago, Dogeetah, after the Mother of the Flower was captured and brought here. She says that the father was a white man to whom she was married, but who is dead."

Brother John's head dropped upon his chest, and his eyes shut as though he had gone to sleep.

"As for where the Mother lives," went on the Kalubi, "it is on the island in the lake at the top of the mountain that is surrounded by water. She has nothing to do with the White God, but those women who serve her go across the lake at times to tend the fields where grows the seed that the Kalubi sows, of which the corn is the White God's food."

"Good," I said, "now we understand—not much, but a little. Tell us next what is your plan? How are we to come into the place where this great ape lives? And if we come there, how are we to kill the beast, seeing that your successor, Komba, was careful to

prevent us from bringing our firearms to your land?"

"Aye, lord Macumazana, may the teeth of the god meet in his brain for that trick; yes, may he die as I know how to make him die. That prophecy of which he told you is no prophecy from of old. It arose in the land within the last moon only, though whether it came from Komba or from the Motombo I know not. None save myself, or at least very few here, had heard of the iron tubes that throw out death, so how should there be a prophecy concerning them?"

"I am sure I don't know, Kalubi, but answer the rest of the question."

"As to your coming into the forest—for the White God lives in a forest on the slopes of the mountain, lords—that will be easy since the Motombo and the people will believe that I am trapping you there to be a sacrifice, such as they desire for sundry reasons," and he looked at the plump Stephen in a very suggestive way. "As to how you are to kill the god without your tubes of iron, that I do not know. But you are very brave and great magicians. Surely you can find a way."

Here Brother John seemed to wake up again.

"Yes," he said, "we shall find a way. Have no fear of that, O Kalubi. We are not afraid of the big ape whom you call a god. Yet it must be at a price. We will not kill this beast and try to save your life, save at a price."

"What price?" asked the Kalubi nervously. "There are wives and cattle—no, you do not want the wives, and the cattle cannot be taken across the lake. There are gold dust and ivory. I have already promised these, and there is nothing more that I can give."

"The price is, O Kalubi, that you hand over to us to be taken away the white woman who is called Mother of the Holy Flower, with her daughter——"

"And," interrupted Stephen, to whom I had been interpreting, "the Holy Flower itself, all of it dug up by the roots."

When he heard these modest requests the poor Kalubi became like one upon the verge of madness.

"Do you understand," he gasped, "do you understand that you are asking for the gods of my country?"

"Quite," replied Brother John with calmness; "for the gods of your country—nothing more nor less."

The Kalubi made as though he would fly from the hut, but I caught him by the arm and said:

"See, friend, things are thus. You ask us, at great danger to ourselves, to kill one of the gods of your country, the highest of them, in order to save your life. Well, in payment we ask you to make a present of the remaining gods of your country, and to see us and them safe across the lake. Do you accept or refuse?"

"I refuse," answered the Kalubi sullenly. "To accept would mean the last curse upon my spirit; that is too horrible to tell."

"And to refuse means the first curse upon your body; namely, that in a few hours it must be broken and chewed by a great monkey which you call a god. Yes, broken and chewed, and afterwards, I think, cooked and eaten as a sacrifice. Is it not so?"

The Kalubi nodded his head and groaned.

"Yet," I went on, "for our part we are glad that you have refused, since now we shall be rid of a troublesome and dangerous business and return in safety to Mazitu land."

"How will you return in safety, O lord Macumazana, you who are doomed to the 'Hot Death' if you escape the fangs of the god?"

"Very easily, O Kalubi, by telling Komba, the Kalubi-to-be, of your plots against this god of yours, and how we have refused to listen to your wickedness. In fact, I think this may be done at once while you are here with us, O Kalubi, where perhaps you do not expect to be found. I will go strike upon the pot without the door; doubtless though it is late, some will hear. Nay, man, stand you still; we have knives and our servants have spears," and I made as though to pass him.

"Lord," he said, "I will give you the Mother of the Holy Flower and her daughter; aye, and the Holy Flower itself dug up by the roots, and I swear that if I can, I will set you and them safe across the lake, only asking that I may come with you, since here I dare not stay. Yet the curse will come too, but if so, it is better to die of a curse in a day to be, than to-morrow at the fangs of the god. Oh! why was I born! Why was I born!" and he began to weep.

"That is a question many have asked and none have been able to answer, O friend Kalubi, though mayhap there is an answer somewhere," I replied in a kind voice.

For my heart was stirred with pity of this poor wretch mazed and lost in his hell of superstition; this potentate who could not escape from the trappings of a hateful power, save by the door of a death too horrible to contemplate; this priest whose doom it was to be slain by the very hands of his god, as those who went before him had been slain, and as those who came after him would be slain.

"Yet," I went on, "I think you have chosen wisely, and we hold you to your word. While you are faithful to us, we will say nothing. But of this be sure—that if you attempt to betray us, we who are not so helpless as we seem, will betray you, and it shall be you who die, not us. Is it a bargain?"

"It is a bargain, white lord, although blame me not if things go wrong, since the gods know all, and they are devils who delight in human woe and mock at bargains and torment those who would injure them. Yet, come what will, I swear to keep faith with you thus, by the oath that may not be broken," and drawing a knife from his girdle, he thrust out the tip of his tongue and pricked it. From the puncture a drop of blood fell to the floor.

"If I break my oath," he said, "may my flesh grow cold as that blood grows cold, and may it rot as that blood rots! Aye, and may my spirit waste and be lost in the world of ghosts as that blood wastes into the air and is lost in the dust of the world!"

It was a horrible scene and one that impressed me very much, especially as even then there fell upon me a conviction that this unfortunate man was doomed, that a fate which he could not escape was upon him.

We said nothing, and in another moment he had thrown his white wrappings over his face and slipped through the door.

"I am afraid we are playing it rather low down on that jumpy old boy," said Stephen remorsefully.

"The white woman, the white woman and her daughter," muttered Brother John.

"Yes," reflected Stephen aloud. "One is justified in doing anything to get two white women out of this hell, if they exist. So one may as well have the orchid also, for they'd be lonely without it, poor things, wouldn't they? Glad I thought of that, it's soothing to the conscience."

"I hope you'll find it so when we are all on that iron grid which I noticed is wide enough for three," I remarked sarcastically. "Now be quiet, I want to go to sleep."

I am sorry to have to add that for the most of that night Want remained my master. But if I couldn't sleep, I could, or rather was obliged to, think, and I thought very hard indeed.

First I reflected on the Pongo and their gods. What were these and why did they worship them? Soon I gave it up, remembering that the problem was one which applied equally to dozens of the dark religions of this vast African continent, to which none could give an answer, and least of all their votaries. That answer indeed must be sought in the horrible fears of the unenlightened human heart, which sees death and terror and evil around it everywhere and, in this grotesque form or in that, personifies them in gods, or rather in devils who must be propitiated. For always the fetish or the beast, or whatever it may be, is not the real object of worship. It is only the thing or creature which is inhabited by the spirit of the god or devil, the temple, as it were, that furnishes it with a home, which temple is therefore holy. And these spirits are diverse, representing sundry attributes or qualities.

Thus the great ape might be Satan, a prince of evil and blood. The Holy Flower might symbolise fertility and the growth of the food of man from the bosom of the earth. The Mother of the Flower might represent mercy and goodness, for which reason it was necessary that she should be white in colour, and dwell, not in the shadowed forest, but on a soaring mountain, a figure of light, in short, as opposed to darkness. Or she might be a kind of African Ceres, a goddess of the corn and harvest which were symbolised in the beauteous bloom she tended. Who could tell? Not I, either then or afterwards, for I never found out.

As for the Pongo themselves, their case was obvious. They were a dying tribe, the last descendants of some higher race, grown barren from intermarriage. Probably, too, they were at first only cannibals occasionally and from religious reasons. Then in some time of dearth they became very religious in that respect, and the habit overpowered them. Among cannibals, at any rate in Africa, as I knew, this dreadful food is much preferred to any other meat. I had not the slightest doubt that although the Kalubi himself had brought us here in the wild hope that we might save him from a terrible death at the hands of the Beelzebub he served, Komba and the councillors, inspired thereto by the prophet called Motombo, designed that we should be murdered and eaten as an offering to the gods. How we were to escape this fate, being unarmed, I could not imagine, unless some special protection were vouchsafed to us. Meanwhile, we must go on to the end, whatever it might be.

Brother John, or to give him his right name, the Reverend John Eversley, was convinced that the white woman imprisoned in the mountain was none other than the lost wife for whom he had searched for twenty weary years, and that the second white woman of whom we had heard that night was, strange as it might seem, her daughter and his own. Perhaps he was right and perhaps he was wrong. But even in the latter case, if two white persons were really languishing in this dreadful land, our path was clear. We must go on in faith until we saved them or until we died.

*"Our life is granted, not in Pleasure's round,  
Or even Love's sweet dream, to lapse, content;  
Duty and Faith are words of solemn sound,  
And to their echoes must the soul be bent,"*

as some one or other once wrote, very nobly I think. Well, there was but little of "Pleasure's round" about the present entertainment, and any hope of "Love's sweet dream" seemed to be limited to Brother John (here I was quite mistaken, as I so often am). Probably the "echoes" would be my share; indeed, already I seemed to hear their ominous thunder.

At last I did go to sleep and dreamed a very curious dream. It seemed to me that I was disembodied, although I retained all my powers of thought and observation; in fact, dead and yet alive. In this state I hovered over the people of the Pongo who were gathered together on a great plain under an inky sky. They were going about their business as usual, and very unpleasant business it often was. Some of them were worshipping a dim form that I knew was the devil; some were committing murders; some were feasting—at that on which they feasted I would not look; some were labouring or engaged in barter; some were thinking. But I, who had the power of looking into them, saw within the breast of each a tiny likeness of the man or woman or child as it might be, humbly bent upon its knees with hands together in an attitude of prayer, and with imploring, tear-stained face looking upwards to the black heaven.

Then in that heaven there appeared a single star of light, and from this star flowed lines of gentle fire that spread and widened till all the immense arc was one flame of glory. And now from the pulsing heart of the Glory, which somehow reminded me of moving lips, fell countless flakes of snow, each of which followed an appointed path till it lit upon the forehead of one of the tiny, imploring figures hidden within those savage breasts, and made it white and clean.

Then the Glory shrank and faded till there remained of it only the similitude of two transparent hands stretched out as though in blessing—and I woke up wondering how on earth I found the fancy to invent such a vision, and whether it meant anything or nothing.

Afterwards I repeated it to Brother John, who was a very spiritually minded as well as a good man—the two things are often quite different—and asked him to be kind enough to explain. At the time he shook his head, but some days later he said to me:

"I think I have read your riddle, Allan; the answer came to me quite of a sudden. In all those sin-stained hearts there is a seed of good and an aspiration towards the right. For every one of them also there is at last mercy and forgiveness, since how could they learn who never had a teacher? Your dream, Allan, was one of the ultimate redemption of even the most evil of mankind, by gift of the Grace that shall one day glow through the blackness of the night in which they wander."

That is what he said, and I only hope that he was right, since at present there is something very wrong with the world, especially in Africa.

Also we blame the blind savage for many things, but on the balance are we so much better, considering our lights and opportunities? Oh! the truth is that the devil—a very convenient word that—is a good fisherman. He has a large book full of flies of different sizes and colours, and well he knows how to suit them to each particular fish. But white or black, every fish takes one fly or the other, and then comes the question—is the fish that has swallowed the big gaudy lure so much worse or more foolish than that which has fallen to the delicate white moth with the same sharp barb in its tail?

In short, are we not all miserable sinners as the Prayer Book says, and in the eye of any judge who can average up the elemental differences of those waters wherein we were bred and are called upon to swim, is there so much to choose between us? Do we not all need those outstretched Hands of Mercy which I saw in my dream?

But there, there! What right has a poor old hunter to discuss things that are too high for him?

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MOTOMBO

After my dream I went to sleep again, till I was finally aroused by a strong ray of light hitting me straight in the eye.

Where the dickens does that come from? thought I to myself, for these huts had no windows.

Then I followed the ray to its source, which I perceived was a small hole in the mud wall some five feet above the floor. I rose and examined the said hole, and noted that it appeared to have been freshly made, for the clay at the sides of it was in no way discoloured. I reflected that if anyone wanted to eavesdrop, such an aperture would be convenient, and went outside the hut to pursue my investigations. Its wall, I found, was situated about four feet from the eastern part of the encircling reed fence, which showed no signs of disturbance, although there, in the outer face of the wall, was the hole, and beneath it on the lime flooring lay some broken fragments of plaster. I called Hans and asked him if he had kept watch round the hut when the wrapped-up man visited us during the night. He answered yes, and that he could swear that no one had come near it, since several times he had walked to the back and looked.

Somewhat comforted, though not satisfied, I went in to wake up the others, to whom I said nothing of this matter since it seemed foolish to alarm them for no good purpose. A few minutes later the tall, silent women arrived with our hot water. It seemed curious to have hot water brought to us in such a place by these very queer kind of housemaids, but so it was. The Pongo, I may add, were, like the Zulus, very clean in their persons, though whether they all used hot water, I cannot say. At any rate, it was provided for us.

Half an hour later they returned with breakfast, consisting chiefly of a roasted kid, of which, as it was whole, and therefore unmistakable, we partook thankfully. A little later the Majestic Komba appeared. After many compliments and inquiries as to our general health, he asked whether we were ready to start on our visit to the Motombo who, he added, was expecting us with much eagerness. I inquired how he knew that, since we had only arranged to call on him late on the previous night, and I understood that he lived a day's journey away. But Komba put the matter by with a smile and a wave of his hand.

So in due course off we went, taking with us all our baggage, which now that it had been lightened by the delivery of the presents, was of no great weight.

Five minutes' walk along the wide, main street led us to the northern gate of Rica Town. Here we found the Kalubi himself with an escort of thirty men armed with spears; I noted that unlike the Mazitu they had no bows and arrows. He announced in a loud voice that he proposed to do us the special honour of conducting us to the sanctuary of the Holy One, by which we understood him to mean the Motombo. When we politely begged him not to trouble, being in an irritable mood, or assuming it, he told us rudely to mind our own business. Indeed, I think this irritability was real enough, which, in the circumstances known to the reader, was not strange. At any rate, an hour or so later it declared itself in an act of great cruelty which showed us how absolute was this man's power in all temporal matters.

Passing through a little clump of bush we came to some gardens surrounded by a light fence through which a number of cattle of a small and delicate breed—they were not unlike Jerseys in appearance—had broken to enjoy themselves by devouring the crops. This garden, it appeared, belonged to the Kalubi for the time being, who was furious at the destruction of its produce by the cattle which also belonged to him.

"Where is the herd?" he shouted.

A hunt began—and presently the poor fellow—he was no more than a lad, was discovered asleep behind a bush. When he was dragged before him the Kalubi pointed, first to the cattle, then to the broken fence and the devastated garden. The lad began to mutter excuses and pray for mercy.

"Kill him!" said the Kalubi, whereon the herd flung himself to the ground, and clutching him by the ankles, began to kiss his feet, crying out that he was afraid to die. The Kalubi tried to kick himself free, and failing in this, lifted his big spear and made an end of the poor boy's prayers and life at a single stroke.

The escort clapped their hands in salute or approval, after which four of them, at a sign, took up the body and started with it at a trot for Rica Town, where probably that night it appeared upon the grid. Brother John saw, and his big white beard bristled with indignation like the hair on the back of an angry cat, while Stephen spluttered something beginning with "You brute," and lifted his fist as though to knock the Kalubi down. This, had I not caught hold of him, I have no doubt he would have done.

"O Kalubi!" gasped Brother John, "do you not know that blood calls for blood? In the hour of your own death remember this death."

"Would you bewitch me, white man?" said the Kalubi, glaring at him angrily. "If so——" and once more he lifted the spear, but as John never stirred, held it poised irresolutely. Komba thrust himself between them, crying:

"Back, Dogeetah, who dare to meddle with our customs! Is not the Kalubi Lord of life and death?"

Brother John was about to answer, but I called to him in English:

"For Heaven's sake be silent, unless you want to follow the boy. We are in these men's power."

Then he remembered and walked away, and presently we marched forward as though nothing had happened. Only from that moment I do not think that any of us worried ourselves about the Kalubi and what might befall him. Still, looking back on the thing, I think that there was this excuse to be made for the man. He was mad with the fear of death and knew not what he did.

All that day we travelled on through a rich, flat country that, as we could tell from various indications, had once been widely cultivated. Now the fields were few and far between, and bush, for the most part a kind of bamboo scrub, was reoccupying the land. About midday we halted by a water-pool to eat and rest, for the sun was hot, and here the four men who had carried off the boy's body rejoined us and made some report. Then we went forward once more towards what seemed to be a curious and precipitous wall of black cliff, beyond which the volcanic-looking mountain towered in stately grandeur. By three o'clock we were near enough to this

cliff, which ran east and west as far as the eye could reach, to see a hole in it, apparently where the road terminated, that appeared to be the mouth of a cave.

The Kalubi came up to us, and in a shy kind of way tried to make conversation. I think that the sight of this mountain, drawing ever nearer, vividly recalled his terrors and caused him to desire to efface the bad impression he knew he had made on us, to whom he looked for safety. Among other things he told us that the hole we saw was the door of the House of the Motombo.

I nodded my head, but did not answer, for the presence of this murderous king made me feel sick. So he went away again, looking at us in a humble and deprecatory manner.

Nothing further happened until we reached the remarkable wall of rock that I have mentioned, which I suppose is composed of some very hard stone that remained when the softer rock in which it lay was disintegrated by millions of years of weather or washings by the water of the lake. Or perhaps its substance was thrown out of the bowels of the volcano when this was active. I am no geologist, and cannot say, especially as I lacked time to examine the place. At any rate there it was, and there in it appeared the mouth of a great cave that I presume was natural, having once formed a kind of drain through which the lake overflowed when Pongo-land was under water.

We halted, staring dubiously at this darksome hole, which no doubt was the same that Babemba had explored in his youth. Then the Kalubi gave an order, and some of the soldiers went to huts that were built near the mouth of the cave, where I suppose guardians or attendants lived, though of these we saw nothing. Presently they returned with a number of lighted torches that were distributed among us. This done, we plunged, shivering (at least, I shivered), into the gloomy recesses of that great cavern, the Kalubi going before us with half of our escort, and Komba following behind us with the remainder.

The floor of the place was made quite smooth, doubtless by the action of water, as were the walls and roof, so far as we could see them, for it was very wide and lofty. It did not run straight, but curved about in the thickness of the cliff. At the first turn the Pongo soldiers set up a low and eerie chant which they continued during its whole length, that according to my paces was something over three hundred yards. On we wound, the torches making stars of light in the intense blackness, till at length we rounded a last corner where a great curtain of woven grass, now drawn, was stretched across the cave. Here we saw a very strange sight.

On either side of it, near to the walls, burned a large wood fire that gave light to the place. Also more light flowed into it from its further mouth that was not more than twenty paces from the fires. Beyond the mouth was water which seemed to be about two hundred yards wide, and beyond the water rose the slopes of the mountain that was covered with huge trees. Moreover, a little bay penetrated into the cavern, the point of which bay ended between the two fires. Here the water, which was not more than six or eight feet wide, and shallow, formed the berthing place of a good-sized canoe that lay there. The walls of the cavern, from the turn to the point of the tongue of water, were pierced with four doorways, two on either side, which led, I presume, to chambers hewn in the rock. At each of these doorways stood a tall woman clothed in white, who held in her hand a burning torch. I concluded that these were attendants set there to guide and welcome us, for after we had passed, they vanished into the chambers.

But this was not all. Set across the little bay of water just above the canoe that floated there was a wooden platform, eight feet or so square, on either side of which stood an enormous elephant's tusk, bigger indeed than any I have seen in all my experience, which tusks seemed to be black with age. Between the tusks, squatted upon rugs of some kind of rich fur, was what from its shape and attitude I at first took to be a huge toad. In truth, it had all the appearance of a very bloated toad. There was the rough corrugated skin, there the prominent backbone (for its back was towards us), and there were the thin, splayed-out legs.

We stared at this strange object for quite a long while, unable to make it out in that uncertain light, for so long indeed, that I grew nervous and was about to ask the Kalubi what it might be. As my lips opened, however, it stirred, and with a slow, groping, circular movement turned itself towards us very slowly. At length it was round, and as the head came in view all the Pongo from the Kalubi down ceased their low, weird chant and flung themselves upon their faces, those who had torches still holding them up in their right hands.

Oh! what a thing appeared! It was not a toad, but a man that moved upon all fours. The large, bald head was sunk deep between the shoulders, either through deformity or from age, for this creature was undoubtedly very old. Looking at it, I wondered how old, but could form no answer in my mind. The great, broad face was sunken and withered, like to leather dried in the sun; the lower lip hung pendulously upon the prominent and bony jaw. Two yellow, tusk-like teeth projected one at each corner of the great mouth; all the rest were gone, and from time to time it licked the white gums with a red-pointed tongue as a snake might do. But the chief wonder of the Thing lay in its eyes that were large and round, perhaps because the flesh had shrunk away from them, which gave them the appearance of being set in the hollow orbits of a skull. These eyes literally shone like fire; indeed, at times they seemed positively to blaze, as I have seen a lion's eyes do in the dark. I confess that the aspect of the creature terrified and for a while paralysed me; to think that it was human was awful.

I glanced at the others and saw that they, too, were frightened. Stephen turned very white. I thought that he was going to be sick again, as he was after he drank the coffee out of the wrong bowl on the day we entered Mazitu-land. Brother John stroked his white beard and muttered some invocation to Heaven to protect him. Hans exclaimed in his abominable Dutch:

*"Oh! keek, Baas, da is je lelicher oud deel!"* ("Oh! look, Baas, there is the ugly old devil himself!")

Jerry went flat on his face among the Pongo, muttering that he saw Death before him. Only Mavovo stood firm; perhaps because as a witch-doctor of repute he felt that it did not become him to show the white feather in the presence of an evil spirit.

The toad-like creature on the platform swayed its great head slowly as a tortoise does, and contemplated us with its flaming eyes. At length it spoke in a thick, guttural voice, using the tongue that seemed to be common to this part of Africa and indeed to that branch of the Bantu people to which the Zulus belong, but, as I thought, with a foreign accent.

"So *you* are the white men come back," it said slowly. "Let me count!" and lifting one skinny hand from the ground, it pointed with the forefinger and counted. "One. Tall, with a white beard. Yes, that is right. Two. Short, nimble like a monkey, with hair that wants no comb; clever, too, like a father of monkeys. Yes, that is right. Three. Smooth-faced, young and stupid, like a fat baby that laughs at the sky because he is full of milk, and thinks that the sky is laughing at him. Yes, that is right. All three of you are just the same as you used to be. Do you remember, White Beard, how, while we killed you, you said prayers to One Who sits above the world, and held up a cross of bone to which a man was tied who wore a cap of thorns? Do you remember how you kissed the man with the cap of thorns as the spear went into you? You shake your head—oh! you are a clever liar, but I will show you that you are a liar, for I have the thing yet," and snatching up a horn which lay on the kaross beneath him, he blew.

As the peculiar, wailing note that the horn made died away, a woman dashed out of one of the doorways that I have described and flung herself on her knees before him. He muttered something to her and she dashed back again to re-appear in an instant holding in her hand a yellow ivory crucifix.

"Here it is, here it is," he said. "Take it, White Beard, and kiss it once more, perhaps for the last time," and he threw the crucifix to Brother John, who caught it and stared at it amazed. "And do you remember, Fat Baby, how we caught you? You fought well, very well, but we killed you at last, and you were good, very good; we got much strength from you.

"And do you remember, Father of Monkeys, how you escaped from us by your cleverness? I wonder where you went to and how you died. I shall not forget you, for you gave me this," and he pointed to a big white scar upon his shoulder. "You would have killed me, but the stuff in that iron tube of yours burned slowly when you held the fire to it, so that I had time to jump aside and the iron ball did not strike me in the heart as you meant that it should. Yet, it is still here; oh! yes, I carry it with me to this day, and now that I have grown thin I can feel it with my finger."

I listened astonished to this harangue, which if it meant anything, meant that we had all met before, in Africa at some time when men used matchlocks that were fired with a fuse—that is to say, about the year 1700, or earlier. Reflection, however, showed me the interpretation of this nonsense. Obviously this old priest's forefather, or, if one put him at a hundred and twenty years of age, and I am sure that he was not a day less, perhaps his father, as a young man, was mixed up with some of the first Europeans who penetrated to the interior of Africa. Probably these were Portuguese, of whom one may have been a priest and the other two an elderly man and his son, or young brother, or companion. The manner of the deaths of these people and of what happened to them generally would of course be remembered by the descendants of the chief or head medicine-man of the tribe.

"Where did we meet, and when, O Motombo?" I asked.

"Not in this land, not in this land, Father of Monkeys," he replied in his low rumbling voice, "but far, far away towards the west where the sun sinks in the water; and not in this day, but long, long ago. Twenty Kalubis have ruled the Pongo since that day; some have ruled for many years and some have ruled for a few years—that depends upon the will of my brother, the god yonder," and he chuckled horribly and jerked his thumb backwards over his shoulder towards the forest on the mountain. "Yes, twenty have ruled, some for thirty years and none for less than four."

"Well, you *are* a large old liar," I thought to myself, for, taking the average rule of the Kalubis at ten years, this would mean that we met him two centuries ago at least.

"You were clothed otherwise then," he went on, "and two of you wore hats of iron on the head, but that of White Beard was shaven. I caused a picture of you to be beaten by the master-smith upon a plate of copper. I have it yet."

Again he blew upon his horn; again a woman darted out, to whom he whispered; again she went to one of the chambers and returned bearing an object which he cast to us.

We looked at it. It was a copper or bronze plaque, black, apparently with age, which once had been nailed on something for there were the holes. It represented a tall man with a long beard and a tonsured head who held a cross in his hand; and two other men, both short, who wore round metal caps and were dressed in queer-looking garments and boots with square toes. These men carried big and heavy matchlocks, and in the hand of one of them was a smoking fuse. That was all we could make out of the thing.

"Why did you leave the far country and come to this land, O Motombo?" I asked.

"Because we were afraid that other white men would follow on your steps and avenge you. The Kalubi of that day ordered it, though I said No, who knew that none can escape by flight from what must come when it must come. So we travelled and travelled till we found this place, and here we have dwelt from generation to generation. The gods came with us also; my brother that dwells in the forest came, though we never saw him on the journey, yet he was here before us. The Holy Flower came too, and the white Mother of the Flower—she was the wife of one of you, I know not which."

"Your brother the god?" I said. "If the god is an ape as we have heard, how can he be the brother of a man?"

"Oh! you white men do not understand, but we black people understand. In the beginning the ape killed my brother who was Kalubi, and his spirit entered into the ape, making him as a god, and so he kills every other Kalubi and their spirits enter also into him. Is it not so, O Kalubi of to-day, you without a finger?" and he laughed mockingly.

The Kalubi, who was lying on his stomach, groaned and trembled, but made no other answer.

"So all has come about as I foresaw," went on the toad-like creature. "You have returned, as I knew you would, and now we shall learn whether White Beard yonder spoke true words when he said that his god would be avenged upon our god. You shall go to be avenged on him if you can, and then we shall learn. But this time you have none of your iron tubes which alone we fear. For did not the god declare to us through me that when the white men came back with an iron tube, then he, the god, would die, and I, the Motombo, the god's Mouth, would die, and the Holy Flower would be torn up, and the Mother of the Flower would pass away, and the people of the Pongo would be dispersed and become wanderers and slaves? And did he not declare that if the white men came again without their iron tubes, then certain secret things would happen—oh! ask them not, in time they shall be known to you, and the people of the Pongo who were dwindling would again become fruitful and very great? And that is why we welcome you, white men, who arise again from the land of ghosts, because through you we, the Pongo, shall become fruitful and very great."

Of a sudden he ceased his rumbling talk, his head sank back between his shoulders and he sat silent for a long while, his fierce, sparkling eyes playing on us as though he would read our very thoughts. If he succeeded, I hope that mine pleased him. To tell the truth, I was filled with mixed fear, fury and loathing. Although, of course, I did not believe a word of all the rubbish he had been saying, which was akin to much that is evolved by these black-hearted African wizards, I hated the creature whom I felt to be only half-human. My whole nature sickened at his aspect and talk. And yet I was dreadfully afraid of him. I felt as a man might who wakes up to find himself alone with some peculiarly disgusting Christmas-story kind of ghost. Moreover I was quite sure that he meant us ill, fearful and imminent ill. Suddenly he spoke again:

"Who is that little yellow one," he said, "that old one with a face like a skull," and he pointed to Hans, who had kept as much out of sight as possible behind Mavovo, "that wizened, snub-nosed one who might be a child of my brother the god, if ever he had a child? And why, being so small, does he need so large a staff?" Here he pointed again to Hans's big bamboo stick. "I think he is as full of guile as a new-filled gourd with water. The big black one," and he looked at Mavovo, "I do not fear, for his magic is less than my magic," (he seemed to recognise a brother doctor in Mavovo) "but the little yellow one with the big stick and the pack upon his back, I fear him. I think he should be killed."

He paused and we trembled, for if he chose to kill the poor Hottentot, how could we prevent him? But Hans, who saw the great danger, called his cunning to his aid.

"O Motombo," he squeaked, "you must not kill me for I am the servant of an ambassador. You know well that all the gods of every land hate and will be revenged upon those who touch ambassadors or their servants, whom they, the gods, alone may harm. If you kill me I shall haunt you. Yes, I shall sit on your shoulder at night and jibber into your ear so that you cannot sleep, until you die. For though you are old you must die at last, Motombo."

"It is true," said the Motombo. "Did I not tell you that he was full of cunning? All the gods will be avenged upon those who kill ambassadors or their servants. That"—here he laughed again in his dreadful way—"is the rights of the gods alone. Let the gods of the Pongo settle it."

I uttered a sigh of relief, and he went on in a new voice, a dull, business-like voice if I may so describe it:

"Say, O Kalubi, on what matter have you brought these white men to speak with me, the Mouth of the god? Did I dream that it was a matter of a treaty with the King of the Mazitu? Rise and speak."

So the Kalubi rose and with a humble air set out briefly and clearly the reason of our visit to Pongo-land as the envoys of Bausi and the heads of the treaty that had been arranged subject to the approval of the Motombo and Bausi. We noted that the affair did not seem to interest the Motombo at all. Indeed, he appeared to go to sleep while the speech was being delivered, perhaps because he was exhausted with the invention of his outrageous falsehoods, or perhaps for other reasons. When it was finished he opened his eyes and pointed to Komba, saying:

"Arise, Kalubi-that-is-to-be."

So Komba rose, and in his cold, precise voice narrated his share in the transaction, telling how he had visited Bausi, and all that had happened in connection with the embassy. Again the Motombo appeared to go to sleep, only opening his eyes once as Komba described how we had been searched for firearms, whereon he nodded his great head in approval and licked his lips with his thin red tongue. When Komba had done, he said:

"The gods tell me that the plan is wise and good, since without new blood the people of the Pongo will die, but of the end of the matter the god knows alone, if even he can read the future."

He paused, then asked sharply:

"Have you anything more to say, O Kalubi-that-is-to-be? Now of a sudden the god puts it into my mouth to ask if you have anything more to say?"

"Something, O Motombo. Many moons ago the god bit *off* the finger of our High Lord, the Kalubi. The Kalubi, having heard that a white man skilled in medicine who could cut off limbs with knives, was in the country of the Mazitu and camped on the borders of the great lake, took a canoe and rowed to where the white man was camped, he with the beard, who is named Dogeetah, and who stands before you. I followed him in another canoe, because I wished to know what he was doing, also to see a white man. I hid my canoe and those who went with me in the reeds far from the Kalubi's canoe. I waded through the shallow water and concealed myself in some thick reeds quite near to the white man's linen house. I saw the white man cut off the Kalubi's finger and I heard the Kalubi pray the white man to come to our country with the iron tubes that smoke, and to kill the god of whom he was afraid."

Now from all the company went up a great gasp, and the Kalubi fell down upon his face again, and lay still. Only the Motombo seemed to show no surprise, perhaps because he already knew the story.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"No, O Mouth of the god. Last night, after the council of which you have heard, the Kalubi wrapped himself up like a corpse and visited the white men in their hut. I thought that he would do so, and had made ready. With a sharp spear I bored a hole in the wall of the hut, working from outside the fence. Then I thrust a reed through from the fence across the passage between the fence and the wall, and through the hole in the hut, and setting my ear to the end of the reed, I listened."

"Oh! clever, clever!" muttered Hans in involuntary admiration, "and to think that I looked and looked too low, beneath the reed. Oh! Hans, though you are old, you have much to learn."

"Among much else I heard this," went on Komba in sentences so clear and cold that they reminded me of the tinkle of falling ice, "which I think is enough, though I can tell you the rest if you wish, O Mouth. I heard," he said, in the midst of a silence that was positively awful, "our lord, the Kalubi, whose name is Child of the god, agree with the white men that they should kill the god—how I do not know, for it was not said—and that in return they should receive the persons of the Mother of the Holy Flower and of her daughter, the Mother-that-is-to-be, and should dig up the Holy Flower itself by the roots and take it away across the water, together with the Mother and the Mother-that-is-to-be. That is all, O Motombo."

Still in the midst of an intense silence, the Motombo glared at the prostrate figure of the Kalubi. For a long while he glared. Then the silence was broken, for the wretched Kalubi sprang from the floor, seized a spear and tried to kill himself. Before the blade touched him it was snatched from his hand, so that he remained standing, but weaponless.

Again there was silence and again it was broken, this time by the Motombo, who rose from his seat before which he stood, a huge, bloated object, and roared aloud in his rage. Yes, he roared like a wounded buffalo. Never would I have believed that such a vast volume of sound could have proceeded from the lungs of a single aged man. For fully a minute his furious bellowings echoed down that great cave, while all the Pongo soldiers, rising from their recumbent position, pointed their hands, in some of which torches still burned, at the miserable Kalubi on whom their wrath seemed to be concentrated, rather than on us, and hissed like snakes.

Really it might have been a scene in hell with the Motombo playing the part of Satan. Indeed, his swollen, diabolical figure supported on the thin, toad-like legs, the great fires burning on either side, the lurid lights of evening reflected from the still water beyond and glowering among the tree tops of the mountain, the white-robed forms of the tall Pongo, bending, every one of them, towards the wretched culprit and hissing like so many fierce serpents, all suggested some uttermost deep in the infernal regions as one might conceive them in a nightmare.

It went on for some time, I don't know how long, till at length the Motombo picked up his fantastically shaped horn and blew. Thereon the women darted from the various doorways, but seeing that they were not wanted, checked themselves in their stride and remained standing so, in the very attitude of runners about to start upon a race. As the blast of the horn died away the turmoil was suddenly succeeded by an utter stillness, broken only by the crackling of the fires whose flames, of all the living things in that place, alone seemed heedless of the tragedy which was being played.

“All up now, old fellow!” whispered Stephen to me in a shaky voice.

“Yes,” I answered, “all up high as heaven, where I hope we are going. Now back to back, and let’s make the best fight we can. We’ve got the spears.”

While we were closing in the Motombo began to speak.

“So you plotted to kill the god, Kalubi-who-*was*,” he screamed, “with these white ones whom you would pay with the Holy Flower and her who guards it. Good! You shall go, all of you, and talk with the god. And I, watching here, will learn who dies—you or the god. Away with them!”

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GODS

With a roar the Pongo soldiers leapt on us. I think that Mavovo managed to get his spear up and kill a man, for I saw one of them fall backwards and lie still. But they were too quick for the rest of us. In half a minute we were seized, the spears were wrenched from our hands and we were thrown headlong into the canoe, all six of us, or rather seven including the Kalubi. A number of the soldiers, including Komba, who acted as steersman, also sprang into the canoe that was instantly pushed out from beneath the bridge or platform on which the Motombo sat and down the little creek into the still water of the canal or estuary, or whatever it may be, that separates the wall of rock which the cave pierces from the base of the mountain.

As we floated out of the mouth of the cave the toad-like Motombo, who had wheeled round upon his stool, shouted an order to Komba.

"O Kalubi," he said, "set the Kalubi-who-*was* and the three white men and their three servants on the borders of the forest that is named House-of-the-god and leave them there. Then return and depart, for here I would watch alone. When all is finished I will summon you."

Komba bowed his handsome head and at a sign two of the men got out paddles, for more were not needed, and with slow and gentle strokes rowed us across the water. The first thing I noted about this water at the time was that its blackness was inky, owing, I suppose, to its depth and the shadows of the towering cliff on one side and of the tall trees on the other. Also I observed—for in this emergency, or perhaps because of it, I managed to keep my wits about me—that its banks on either side were the home of great numbers of crocodiles which lay there like logs. I saw, further, that a little lower down where the water seemed to narrow, jagged boughs projected from its surface as though great trees had fallen, or been thrown into it. I recalled in a numb sort of way that old Babemba had told us that when he was a boy he had escaped in a canoe down this estuary, and reflected that it would not be possible for him to do so now because of those snags. Unless, indeed, he had floated over them in a time of great flood.

A couple of minutes or so of paddling brought us to the further shore which, as I think I have said, was only about two hundred yards from the mouth of the cave. The bow of the canoe grated on the bank, disturbing a huge crocodile that vanished into the depths with an angry plunge.

"Land, white lords, land," said Komba with the utmost politeness, "and go, visit the god who doubtless is waiting for you. And now, as we shall meet no more—farewell. You are wise and I am foolish, yet hearken to my counsel. If ever you should return to the Earth again, be advised by me. Cling to your own god if you have one, and do not meddle with those of other peoples. Again farewell."

The advice was excellent, but at that moment I felt a hate for Komba which was really superhuman. To me even the Motombo seemed an angel of light as compared with him. If wishes could have killed, our farewell would indeed have been complete.

Then, admonished by the spear points of the Pongo, we landed in the slimy mud. Brother John went first with a smile upon his handsome countenance that I thought idiotic under the circumstances, though doubtless he knew best when he ought to smile, and the wretched Kalubi came last. Indeed, so great was his shrinking from that ominous shore, that I believe he was ultimately propelled from the boat by his successor in power, Komba. Once he had trodden it, however, a spark of spirit returned to him, for he wheeled round and said to Komba,

"Remember, O Kalubi, that my fate to-day will be yours also in a day to come. The god wearies of his priests. This year, next year, or the year after; he always wearies of his priests."

"Then, O Kalubi-that-was," answered Komba in a mocking voice as the canoe was pushed off, "pray to the god for me, that it may be the year after; pray it as your bones break in his embrace."

While we watched that craft depart there came into my mind the memory of a picture in an old Latin book of my father's, which represented the souls of the dead being paddled by a person named Charon across a river called the Styx. The scene before us bore a great resemblance to that picture. There was Charon's boat floating on the dreadful Styx. Yonder glowed the lights of the world, here was the gloomy, unknown shore. And we, we were the souls of the dead awaiting the last destruction at the teeth and claws of some unknown monster, such as that which haunts the recesses of the Egyptian hell. Oh! the parallel was painfully exact. And yet, what do you think was the remark of that irrepressible young man Stephen?

"Here we are at last, Allan, my boy," he said, "and after all without any trouble on our own part. I call it downright providential. Oh! isn't it jolly! Hip, hip, hooray!"

Yes, he danced about in that filthy mud, threw up his cap and cheered!

I withered, or rather tried to wither him with a look, muttering the single word: "Lunatic."

Providential! Jolly! Well, it's fortunate that some people's madness takes a cheerful turn. Then I asked the Kalubi where the god was.

"Everywhere," he replied, waving his trembling hand at the illimitable forest. "Perhaps behind this tree, perhaps behind that, perhaps a long way off. Before morning we shall know."

"What are you going to do?" I inquired savagely.

"Die," he answered.

"Look here, fool," I exclaimed, shaking him, "you can die if you like, but we don't mean to. Take us to some place where we shall be safe from this god."

"One is never safe from the god, lord, especially in his own House," and he shook his silly head and went on, "How can we be safe when there is nowhere to go and even the trees are too big to climb?"

I looked at them, it was true. They were huge and ran up for fifty or sixty feet without a bough. Moreover, it was probable that the god climbed better than we could. The Kalubi began to move inland in an indeterminate fashion, and I asked him where he was going.

"To the burying-place," he answered. "There are spears yonder with the bones."

I pricked up my ears at this—for when one has nothing but some clasp knives, spears are not to be despised—and ordered him to lead on. In another minute we were walking uphill through the awful wood where the gloom at this hour of approaching night was that of an English fog.

Three or four hundred paces brought us to a kind of clearing, where I suppose some of the monster trees had fallen down in past years and never been allowed to grow up again. Here, placed upon the ground, were a number of boxes made of imperishable ironwood, and on the top of each box sat, or rather lay, a mouldering and broken skull.

"Kalubi-that-were!" murmured our guide in explanation. "Look, Komba has made my box ready," and he pointed to a new case with the lid off.

"How thoughtful of him!" I said. "But show us the spears before it gets quite dark." He went to one of the newer coffins and intimated that we should lift off the lid as he was afraid to do so.

I shoved it aside. There within lay the bones, each of them separate and wrapped up in something, except of course the skull. With these were some pots filled apparently with gold dust, and alongside of the pots two good spears that, being made of copper, had not rusted much. We went on to other coffins and extracted from them more of these weapons that were laid there for the dead man to use upon his journey through the Shades, until we had enough. The shafts of most of them were somewhat rotten from the damp, but luckily they were furnished with copper sockets from two and a half to three feet long, into which the wood of the shaft fitted, so that they were still serviceable.

"Poor things these to fight a devil with," I said.

"Yes, Baas," said Hans in a cheerful voice, "very poor. It is lucky that I have got a better."

I stared at him; we all stared at him.

"What do you mean, Spotted Snake?" asked Mavovo.

"What do you mean, child of a hundred idiots? Is this a time to jest? Is not one joker enough among us?" I asked, and looked at Stephen.

"Mean, Baas? Don't you know that I have the little rifle with me, that which is called *Intombi*, that with which you shot the vultures at Dingaan's kraal? I never told you because I was sure you knew; also because if you didn't know it was better that you should not know, for if *you* had known, those Pongo *skellums* (that is, vicious ones) might have come to know also. And if *they* had known——"

"Mad!" interrupted Brother John, tapping his forehead, "quite mad, poor fellow! Well, in these depressing circumstances it is not wonderful."

I inspected Hans again, for I agreed with John. Yet he did not look mad, only rather more cunning than usual.

"Hans," I said, "tell us where this rifle is, or I will knock you down and Mavovo shall flog you."

"Where, Baas! Why, cannot you see it when it is before your eyes?"

"You are right, John," I said, "he's off it"; but Stephen sprang at Hans and began to shake him.

"Leave go, Baas," he said, "or you may hurt the rifle."

Stephen obeyed in sheer astonishment. Then, oh! then Hans did something to the end of his great bamboo stick, turned it gently upside down and out of it slid the barrel of a rifle neatly tied round with greased cloth and stoppered at the muzzle with a piece of tow!

I could have kissed him. Yes, such was my joy that I could have kissed that hideous, smelly old Hottentot.

"The stock?" I panted. "The barrel isn't any use without the stock, Hans."

"Oh! Baas," he answered, grinning, "do you think that I have shot with you all these years without knowing that a rifle must have a stock to hold it by?"

Then he slipped off the bundle from his back, undid the lashings of the blanket, revealing the great yellow head of tobacco that had excited my own and Komba's interest on the shores of the lake. This head he tore apart and produced the stock of the rifle nicely cleaned, a cap set ready on the nipple, on to which the hammer was let down, with a little piece of wad between to prevent the cap from being fired by any sudden jar.

"Hans," I exclaimed, "Hans, you are a hero and worth your weight in gold!"

"Yes, Baas, though you never told me so before. Oh! I made up my mind that I wouldn't go to sleep in the face of the Old Man (death). Oh! which of you ought to sleep now upon that bed that Bausi sent me?" he asked as he put the gun together. "*You*, I think, you great stupid Mavovo. *You* never brought a gun. If you were a wizard worth the name you would have sent the rifles on and had them ready to meet us here. Oh! will you laugh at me any more, you thick-head of a Zulu?"

"No," answered Mavovo candidly. "I will give you *sibonga*. Yes, I will make for you Titles of Praise, O clever Spotted Snake."

"And yet," went on Hans, "I am not all a hero; I am worth but half my weight in gold. For, Baas, although I have plenty of powder and bullets in my pocket, I lost the caps out of a hole in my waistcoat. You remember, Baas, I told you it was charms I lost. But three remain; no, four, for there is one on the nipple. There, Baas, there is *Intombi* all ready and loaded. And now when the white devil comes you can shoot him in the eye, as you know how to do up to a hundred yards, and send him to the other devils down in hell. Oh! won't your holy father the Predikant be glad to see him there."

Then with a self-satisfied smirk he half-cocked the rifle and handed it to me ready for action.

"I thank God!" said Brother John solemnly, "who has taught this poor Hottentot how to save us."

"No, Baas John, God never taught me, I taught myself. But, see, it grows dark. Had we not better light a fire," and forgetting the rifle he began to look about for wood.

"Hans," called Stephen after him, "if ever we get out of this, I will give you £500, or at least my father will, which is the same thing."

"Thank you, Baas, thank you, though just now I'd rather have a drop of brandy and—I don't see any wood."

He was right. Outside of the graveyard clearing lay, it is true, some huge fallen boughs. But these were too big for us to move or cut. Moreover, they were so soaked with damp, like everything in this forest, that it would be impossible to fire them.

The darkness closed in. It was not absolute blackness, because presently the moon rose, but the sky was rainy and obscured it; moreover, the huge trees all about seemed to suck up whatever light there was. We crouched ourselves upon the ground back to back as near as possible to the centre of the place, unrolled such blankets as we had to protect us from the damp and cold, and ate some biltong or dried game flesh and parched corn, of which fortunately the boy Jerry carried a bagful that had remained upon his shoulders when he was thrown into the canoe. Luckily I had thought of bringing this food with us; also a flask of spirits.

Then it was that the first thing happened. Far away in the forest resounded a most awful roar, followed by a drumming noise, such a roar as none of us had ever heard before, for it was quite unlike that of a lion or any other beast.

"What is that?" I asked.

"The god," groaned the Kalubi, "the god praying to the moon with which he always rises."

I said nothing, for I was reflecting that four shots, which was all we had, was not many, and that nothing should tempt me to waste one of them. Oh! why had Hans put on that rotten old waistcoat instead of the new one I gave him in Durban?

Since we heard no more roars Brother John began to question the Kalubi as to where the Mother of the Flower lived.

"Lord," answered the man in a distracted way, "there, towards the East. You walk for a quarter of the sun's journey up the hill, following a path that is marked by notches cut upon the trees, till beyond the garden of the god at the top of the mountain more water is found surrounding an island. There on the banks of the water a canoe is hidden in the bushes, by which the water may be crossed to the island, where dwells the Mother of the Holy Flower."

Brother John did not seem to be quite satisfied with the information, and remarked that he, the Kalubi, would be able to show us the road on the morrow.

"I do not think that I shall ever show you the road," groaned the shivering wretch.

At that moment the god roared again much nearer. Now the Kalubi's nerve gave out altogether, and quickened by some presentiment, he began to question Brother John, whom he had learned was a priest of an unknown sort, as to the possibility of another life after death.

Brother John, who, be it remembered, was a very earnest missionary by calling, proceeded to administer some compressed religious consolations, when, quite near to us, the god began to beat upon some kind of very large and deep drum. He didn't roar this time, he only worked away at a massed-band military drum. At least that is what it sounded like, and very unpleasant it was to hear in that awful forest with skulls arranged on boxes all round us, I can assure you, my reader.

The drumming ceased, and pulling himself together, Brother John continued his pious demonstrations. Also just at that time a thick rain-cloud quite obscured the moon, so that the darkness grew dense. I heard John explaining to the Kalubi that he was not really a Kalubi, but an immortal soul (I wonder whether he understood him). Then I became aware of a horrible shadow—I cannot describe it in any other way—that was blacker than the blackness, which advanced towards us at extraordinary speed from the edge of the clearing.

Next second there was a kind of scuffle a few feet from me, followed by a stifled yell, and I saw the shadow retreating in the direction from which it had come.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Strike a match," answered Brother John; "I think something has happened."

I struck a match, which burnt up very well, for the air was quite still. In the light of it I saw first the anxious faces of our party—how ghastly they looked!—and next the Kalubi who had risen and was waving his right arm in the air, a right arm that was bloody and *lacked the hand*.

"The god has visited me and taken away my hand!" he moaned in a wailing voice.

I don't think anybody spoke; the thing was beyond words, but we tried to bind the poor fellow's arm up by the light of matches. Then we sat down again and watched.

The darkness grew still denser as the thick of the cloud passed over the moon, and for a while the silence, that utter silence of the tropical forest at night, was broken only by the sound of our breathing, the buzz of a few mosquitoes, the distant splash of a plunging crocodile and the stifled groans of the mutilated man.

Again I saw, or thought I saw—this may have been half an hour later—that black shadow dart towards us, as a pike darts at a fish in a pond. There was another scuffle, just to my left—Hans sat between me and the Kalubi—followed by a single prolonged wail.

"The king-man has gone," whispered Hans. "I felt him go as though a wind had blown him away. Where he was there is nothing but a hole."

Of a sudden the moon shone out from behind the clouds. In its sickly light about half-way between us and the edge of the clearing, say thirty yards off, I saw—oh! what did I see! The devil destroying a lost soul. At least, that is what it looked like. A huge, grey-black creature, grotesquely human in its shape, had the thin Kalubi in its grip. The Kalubi's head had vanished in its maw and its vast black arms seemed to be employed in breaking him to pieces.

Apparently he was already dead, though his feet, that were lifted off the ground, still moved feebly.

I sprang up and covered the beast with the rifle which was cocked, getting full on to its head which showed the clearest, though this was rather guesswork, since I could not see distinctly the fore-sight. I pulled, but either the cap or the powder had got a little damp on the journey and hung fire for the fraction of a second. In that infinitesimal time the devil—it is the best name I can give the thing—saw me, or perhaps it only saw the light gleaming on the barrel. At any rate it dropped the Kalubi, and as though some intelligence warned it what to expect, threw up its massive right arm—I remember how extraordinarily long the limb seemed and that it looked thick as a man's thigh—in such a fashion as to cover its head.

Then the rifle exploded and I heard the bullet strike. By the light of the flash I saw the great arm tumble down in a dead, helpless kind of way, and next instant the whole forest began to echo with peal upon peal of those awful roarings that I have described, each of which ended with a dog-like *yowp* of pain.

"You have hit him, Baas," said Hans, "and he isn't a ghost, for he doesn't like it. But he's still very lively."

"Close up," I answered, "and hold out the spears while I reload."

My fear was that the brute would rush on us. But it did not. For all that dreadful night we saw or heard it no more. Indeed, I began to hope that after all the bullet had reached some mortal part and that the great ape was dead.

At length, it seemed to be weeks afterwards, the dawn broke and revealed us sitting white and shivering in the grey mist; that is, all except Stephen, who had gone comfortably to sleep with his head resting on Mavovo's shoulder. He is a man so equably minded and so devoid of nerves, that I feel sure he will be one of the last to be disturbed by the trump of the archangel. At least, so I told him indignantly when at length we roused him from his indecent slumbers.

"You should judge things by results, Allan," he said with a yawn. "I'm as fresh as a pippin while you all look as though you had been to a ball with twelve extras. Have you retrieved the Kalubi yet?"

Shortly afterwards, when the mist lifted a little, we went out in a line to "retrieve the Kalubi," and found—well, I won't describe what we found. He was a cruel wretch, as the incident of the herd-boy had told us, but I felt sorry for him. Still, his terrors were over, or at least I hope so.

We deposited him in the box that Komba had kindly provided in preparation for this inevitable event, and Brother John said a prayer over his miscellaneous remains. Then, after consultation and in the very worst of spirits, we set out to seek the way to the home of the Mother of the Flower. The start was easy enough, for a distinct, though very faint path led from the clearing up the slope of the hill. Afterwards it became more difficult for the denser forest began. Fortunately very few creepers grew in this forest, but the flat tops of the huge trees meeting high above entirely shut out the sky, so that the gloom was great, in places almost that of night.

Oh! it was a melancholy journey as, filled with fears, we stole, a pallid throng, from trunk to trunk, searching them for the notches that indicated our road, and speaking only in whispers, lest the sound of our voices should attract the notice of the dreadful god. After a mile or two of this we became aware that its notice was attracted despite our precautions, for at times we caught glimpses of some huge grey thing slipping along parallel to us between the boles of the trees. Hans wanted me to try a shot, but I would not, knowing that the chances of hitting it were small indeed. With only three charges, or rather three caps left, it was necessary to be saving.

We halted and held a consultation, as a result of which we decided that there was no more danger in going on than in standing still or attempting to return. So we went on, keeping close together. To me, as I was the only one with a rifle, was accorded what I did not at all appreciate, the honour of heading the procession.

Another half-mile and again we heard that strange rolling sound which was produced, I believe, by the great brute beating upon its breast, but noted that it was not so continuous as on the previous night.

"Ha!" said Hans, "he can only strike his drum with one stick now. Your bullet broke the other, Baas."

A little farther and the god roared quite close, so loudly that the air seemed to tremble.

"The drum is all right, whatever may have happened to the sticks," I said.

A hundred yards or so more and the catastrophe occurred. We had reached a spot in the forest where one of the great trees had fallen down, letting in a little light. I can see it to this hour. There lay the enormous tree, its bark covered with grey mosses and clumps of a giant species of maidenhair fern. On our side of it was the open space which may have measured forty feet across, where the light fell in a perpendicular ray, as it does through the smoke-hole of a hut. Looking at this prostrate trunk, I saw first two lurid and fiery eyes that glowed red in the shadow; and then, almost in the same instant, made out what looked like the head of a fiend enclosed in a wreath of the delicate green ferns. I can't describe it. I can only repeat that it looked like the head of a very large fiend with a pallid face, huge overhanging eyebrows and great yellow tushes on either side of the mouth.

Before I had even time to get the rifle up, with one terrific roar the brute was on us. I saw its enormous grey shape on the top of the trunk, I saw it pass me like a flash, running upright as a man does, but with the head held forward, and noted that the arm nearest to me was swinging as though broken. Then as I turned I heard a scream of terror and perceived that it had gripped the poor Mazitu. Jerry, who walked last but one of our line which was ended by Mavovo. Yes, it had gripped him and was carrying him off, clasped to its breast with its sound arm. When I say that Jerry, although a full-grown man and rather inclined to stoutness, looked like a child in that fell embrace, it will give some idea of the creature's size.

Mavovo, who had the courage of a buffalo, charged at it and drove the copper spear he carried into its side. They all charged like berserkers, except myself, for even then, thank Heaven! I knew a trick worth two of that. In three seconds there was a struggling mass in the centre of the clearing. Brother John, Stephen, Mavovo and Hans were all stabbing at the enormous gorilla, for it was a gorilla, although their blows seemed to do it no more harm than pinpricks. Fortunately for them, for its part, the beast would not let go of Jerry, and having only one sound arm, could but snap at its assailants, for if it had lifted a foot to rend them, its top-heavy bulk would have caused it to tumble over.

At length it seemed to realise this, and hurled Jerry away, knocking down Brother John and Hans with his body. Then it leapt on Mavovo, who, seeing it come, placed the copper socket of the spear against his own breast, with the result that when the gorilla tried to crush him, the point of the spear was driven into its carcase. Feeling the pain, it unwound its arm from about Mavovo, knocking Stephen over with the backward sweep. Then it raised its great hand to crush Mavovo with a blow, as I believe gorillas are wont to do.

This was the chance for which I was waiting. Up till that moment I had not dared to fire, fearing lest I should kill one of my companions. Now for an instant it was clear of them all, and steadying myself, I aimed at the huge head and let drive. The smoke thinned, and through it I saw the gigantic ape standing quite still, like a creature lost in meditation.

Then it threw up its sound arm, turned its fierce eyes to the sky, and uttering one pitiful and hideous howl, sank down dead. The bullet had entered just behind the ear and buried itself in the brain.

The great silence of the forest flowed in over us, as it were; for quite a while no one did or said anything. Then from somewhere down amidst the mosses I heard a thin voice, the sound of which reminded me of air being squeezed out of an indiarubber cushion.

"Very good shot, Baas," it piped up, "as good as that which killed the king-vulture at Dingaan's kraal, and more difficult. But if the Baas could pull the god off me I should say—Thank you."

The "thank you" was almost inaudible, and no wonder, for poor Hans had fainted. There he lay under the huge bulk of the gorilla, just his nose and mouth appearing between the brute's body and its arm. Had it not been for the soft cushion of wet moss in which he reclined, I think that he would have been crushed flat.

We rolled the creature off him somehow and poured a little brandy down his throat, which had a wonderful effect, for in less than a minute he sat up, gasping like a dying fish, and asked for more.

Leaving Brother John to examine Hans to see if he was really injured, I bethought me of poor Jerry and went to look at him. One glance was enough. He was quite dead. Indeed, he seemed to be crushed out of shape like a buck that has been enveloped in the coils of a boa-constrictor. Brother John told me afterwards that both his arms and nearly all his ribs had been broken in that terrible embrace. Even his spine was dislocated.

I have often wondered why the gorilla ran down the line without touching me or the others, to vent his rage upon Jerry. I can only suggest that it was because the unlucky Mazitu had sat next to the Kalubi on the previous night, which may have caused the brute to identify him by smell with the priest whom he had learned to hate and killed. It is true that Hans had sat on the other side of the Kalubi, but perhaps the odour of the Pongo had not clung to him so much, or perhaps it meant to deal with him after it had done with Jerry.

When we knew that the Mazitu was past human help and had discovered to our joy that, save for a few bruises, no one else was really hurt, although Stephen's clothes were half-torn off him, we made an examination of the dead god. Truly it was a fearful creature.

What its exact weight or size may have been we had no means of ascertaining, but I never saw or heard of such an enormous ape, if a gorilla is really an ape. It needed the united strength of the five of us to lift the carcase with a great effort off the fainting Hans and even to roll it from side to side when subsequently we removed the skin. I would never have believed that so ancient an animal of its stature, which could not have been more than seven feet when it stood erect, could have been so heavy. For ancient undoubtedly it was. The long, yellow, canine tusks were worn half-away with use; the eyes were sunken far into the skull; the hair of the head, which I am told is generally red or brown, was quite white, and even the bare breast, which should be black, was grey in hue. Of course, it was impossible to say, but one might easily have imagined that this creature was two hundred years or more old, as the Motombo had declared it to be.

Stephen suggested that it should be skinned, and although I saw little prospect of our being able to carry away the hide, I assented and helped in the operation on the mere chance of saving so great a curiosity. Also, although Brother John was restless and murmured something about wasting time, I thought it necessary that we should have a rest after our fearful anxieties and still more fearful encounter with this consecrated monster. So we set to work, and as a result of more than an hour's toil, dragged off the hide, which was so tough and thick that, as we found, the copper spears had scarcely penetrated to the flesh. The bullet that I had put into it on the previous night struck, we discovered, upon the bone of the upper arm, which it shattered sufficiently to render that limb useless, if it did not break it altogether. This, indeed, was fortunate for us, for had the creature retained both its arms uninjured, it would certainly have killed more of us in its attack. We were saved only by the fact that when it was hugging Jerry it had no limb left with which it could strike, and luckily did not succeed in its attempts to get hold with its tremendous jaws that had nipped off the Kalubi's hand as easily as a pair of scissors severs the stalk of a flower.

When the skin was removed, except that of the hands, which we did not attempt to touch, we pegged it out, raw side uppermost, to dry in the centre of the open place where the sun struck. Then, having buried poor Jerry in the hollow trunk of the great fallen tree, we washed ourselves with the wet mosses and ate some of the food that remained to us.

After this we started forward again in much better spirits. Jerry, it was true, was dead, but so was the god, leaving us happily still alive and practically untouched. Never more would the Kalubis of Pongo-land shiver out their lives at the feet of this dreadful divinity who soon or late must become their executioner, for I believe, with the exception of two who committed suicide through fear, that no Kalubi was ever known to have died except by the hand—or teeth—of the god.

What would I not give to know that brute's history? Could it possibly, as the Motombo said, have accompanied the Pongo people from their home in Western or Central Africa, or perhaps have been brought here by them in a state of captivity? I am unable to answer the question, but it should be noted that none of the Mazitu or other natives had ever heard of the existence of more true gorillas in this part of Africa. The creature, if it had its origin in the locality, must either have been solitary in its habits or driven away from its fellows, as sometimes happens to old elephants, which then, like this gorilla, become fearfully ferocious.

That is all I can say about the brute, though of course the Pongo had their own story. According to them it was an evil spirit in the shape of an ape, which evil spirit had once inhabited the body of an early Kalubi, and had been annexed by the ape when it killed the said Kalubi. Also they declared that the reason the creature put all the Kalubis to death, as well as a number of other people who were offered up to it, was that it needed "to refresh itself with the spirits of men," by which means it was enabled to avoid the effects of age. It will be remembered that the Motombo referred to this belief, of which afterwards I heard in more detail from Babemba. But if this god had anything supernatural about it, at least its magic was no shield against a bullet from a Purdey rifle.

Only a little way from the fallen tree we came suddenly upon a large clearing, which we guessed at once must be that "Garden of the god" where twice a year the unfortunate Kalubis were doomed to scatter the "sacred seed." It was a large garden, several acres of it, lying on a shelf, as it were, of the mountain and watered by a stream. Maize grew in it, also other sorts of corn, while all round was a thick belt of plantain trees. Of course these crops had formed the food of the god who, whenever it was hungry, came to this place and helped itself, as we could see by many signs. The garden was well kept and comparatively free from weeds. At first we wondered how this could be, till I remembered that the Kalubi, or someone, had told me that it was tended by the servants of the Mother of the Flower, who were generally albinos or mutes.

We crossed it and pushed on rapidly up the mountain, once more following an easy and well-beaten path, for now we saw that we were approaching what we thought must be the edge of a crater. Indeed, our excitement was so extreme that we did not speak, only scrambled forward, Brother John, notwithstanding his lame leg, leading at a greater pace than we could equal. He was the first to reach our goal, closely followed by Stephen. Watching, I saw him sink down as though in a swoon. Stephen also appeared astonished, for he threw up his hands.

I rushed to them, and this was what I saw. Beneath us was a steep slope quite bare of forest, which ceased at its crest. This slope stretched downwards for half a mile or more to the lip of a beautiful lake, of which the area was perhaps two hundred acres. Set in the centre of the deep blue water of this lake, which we discovered afterwards to be unfathomable, was an island not more than five and twenty or thirty acres in extent, that seemed to be cultivated, for on it we could see fields, palms and other fruit-bearing trees. In the middle of the island stood a small, near house thatched after the fashion of the country, but civilized in its appearance, for it was oblong, not round, and encircled by a verandah and a reed fence. At a distance from this house were a number of native huts, and in

front of it a small enclosure surrounded by a high wall, on the top of which mats were fixed on poles as though to screen something from wind or sun.

"The Holy Flower lives there, you bet," gasped Stephen excitedly—he could think of nothing but that confounded orchid. "Look, the mats are up on the sunny side to prevent its scorching, and those palms are planted round to give it shade."

"The Mother of the Flower lives there," whispered Brother John, pointing to the house. "Who is she? Who is she? Suppose I should be mistaken after all. God, let me not be mistaken, for it would be more than I can bear."

"We had better try to find out," I remarked practically, though I am sure I sympathised with his suspense, and started down the slope at a run.

In five minutes or less we reached the foot of it, and, breathless and perspiring though we were, began to search amongst the reeds and bushes growing at the edge of the lake for the canoe of which we had been told by the Kalubi. What if there were none? How could we cross that wide stretch of deep water? Presently Hans, who, following certain indications which caught his practised eye, had cast away to the left, held up his hand and whistled. We ran to him.

"Here it is, Baas," he said, and pointed to something in a tiny bush-fringed inlet, that at first sight looked like a heap of dead reeds. We tore away at the reeds, and there, sure enough, was a canoe of sufficient size to hold twelve or fourteen people, and in it a number of paddles.

Another two minutes and we were rowing across that lake.

We came safely to the other side, where we found a little landing-stage made of poles sunk into the lake. We tied up the canoe, or rather I did, for nobody else remembered to take that precaution, and presently were on a path which led through the cultivated fields to the house. Here I insisted upon going first with the rifle, in case we should be suddenly attacked. The silence and the absence of any human beings suggested to me that this might very well happen, since it would be strange if we had not been seen crossing the lake.

Afterwards I discovered why the place seemed so deserted. It was owing to two reasons. First, it was now noontime, an hour at which these poor slaves retired to their huts to eat and sleep through the heat of the day. Secondly, although the "Watcher," as she was called, had seen the canoe on the water, she concluded that the Kalubi was visiting the Mother of the Flower and, according to practice on these occasions, withdrew herself and everybody else, since the rare meetings of the Kalubi and the Mother of the Flower partook of the nature of a religious ceremony and must be held in private.

First we came to the little enclosure that was planted about with palms and, as I have described, screened with mats. Stephen ran at it and, scrambling up the wall, peeped over the top.

Next instant he was sitting on the ground, having descended from the wall with the rapidity of one shot through the head.

"Oh! by Jingo!" he ejaculated, "oh! by Jingo!" and that was all I could get out of him, though it is true I did not try very hard at the time.

Not five paces from this enclosure stood a tall reed fence that surrounded the house. It had a gate also of reeds, which was a little ajar. Creeping up to it very cautiously, for I thought I heard a voice within, I peeped through the half-opened gate. Four or five feet away was the verandah from which a doorway led into one of the rooms of the house where stood a table on which was food.

Kneeling on mats upon this verandah were—*two white women*—clothed in garments of the purest white adorned with a purple fringe, and wearing bracelets and other ornaments of red native gold. One of these appeared to be about forty years of age. She was rather stout, fair in colouring, with blue eyes and golden hair that hung down her back. The other might have been about twenty. She also was fair, but her eyes were grey and her long hair was of a chestnut hue. I saw at once that she was tall and very beautiful. The elder woman was praying, while the other, who knelt by her side, listened and looked up vacantly at the sky.

"O God," prayed the woman, "for Christ's sake look in pity upon us two poor captives, and if it be possible, send us deliverance from this savage land. We thank Thee Who hast protected us unharmed and in health for so many years, and we put our trust in Thy mercy, for Thou alone canst help us. Grant, O God, that our dear husband and father may still live, and that in Thy good time we may be reunited to him. Or if he be dead and there is no hope for us upon the earth, grant that we, too, may die and find him in Thy Heaven."

Thus she prayed in a clear, deliberate voice, and I noticed that as she did so the tears ran down her cheeks. "Amen," she said at last, and the girl by her side, speaking with a strange little accent, echoed the "Amen."

I looked round at Brother John. He had heard something and was utterly overcome. Fortunately enough he could not move or even speak.

"Hold him," I whispered to Stephen and Mavovo, "while I go in and talk to these ladies."

Then, handing the rifle to Hans, I took off my hat, pushed the gate a little wider open, slipped through it and called attention to my presence by coughing.

The two women, who had risen from their knees, stared at me as though they saw a ghost.

"Ladies," I said, bowing, "pray do not be alarmed. You see God Almighty sometimes answers prayers. In short, I am one of—a party—of white people who, with some trouble, have succeeded in getting to this place and—and—would you allow us to call on you?"

Still they stared. At length the elder woman opened her lips.

"Here I am called the Mother of the Holy Flower, and for a stranger to speak with the Mother is death. Also if you are a man, how did you reach us alive?"

"That's a long story," I answered cheerfully. "May we come in? We will take the risks, we are accustomed to them and hope to be able to do you a service. I should explain that three of us are white men, two English and one—American."

"American!" she gasped, "American! What is he like, and how is he named?"

"Oh!" I replied, for my nerve was giving out and I grew confused, "he is oldish, with a white beard, rather like Father Christmas in short, and his Christian name (I didn't dare to give it all at once) is—er—John, Brother John, we call him. Now I think of it," I added, "he has some resemblance to your companion there."

I thought that the lady was going to die, and cursed myself for my awkwardness. She flung her arm about the girl to save herself from falling—a poor prop, for she, too, looked as though she were going to die, having understood some, if not all, of my talk. It must be remembered that this poor young thing had never even seen a white man before.

“Madam, madam,” I expostulated, “I pray you to bear up. After living through so much sorrow it would be foolish to debase of—joy. May I call in Brother John? He is a clergyman and might be able to say something appropriate, which I, who am only a hunter, cannot do.”

She gathered herself together, opened her eyes and whispered:

“Send him here.”

I pushed open the gate behind which the others were clustered. Catching Brother John, who by now had recovered somewhat, by the arm, I dragged him forward. The two stood staring at each other, and the young lady also looked with wide eyes and open mouth.

“Elizabeth!” said John.

She uttered a faint scream, then with a cry of “*Husband!*” flung herself upon his breast.

I slipped through the gate and shut it fast.

“I say, Allan,” said Stephen, when we had retreated to a little distance, “did you see her?”

“Her? Who? Which?” I asked.

“The young lady in the white clothes. She is lovely.”

“Hold your tongue, you donkey!” I answered. “Is this a time to talk of female looks?”

Then I went away behind the wall and literally wept for joy. It was one of the happiest moments of my life, for how seldom things happen as they should!

Also I wanted to put up a little prayer of my own, a prayer of thankfulness and for strength and wit to overcome the many dangers that yet awaited us.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HOME OF THE HOLY FLOWER

Half an hour or so passed, during which I was engaged alternately in thinking over our position and in listening to Stephen's rhapsodies. First he dilated on the loveliness of the Holy Flower that he had caught a glimpse of when he climbed the wall, and secondly, on the beauty of the eyes of the young lady in white. Only by telling him that he might offend her did I persuade him not to attempt to break into the sacred enclosure where the orchid grew. As we were discussing the point, the gate opened and she appeared.

"Sirs," she said, with a reverential bow, speaking slowly and in the drollest halting English, "the mother and the father—yes, the father—ask, will you feed?"

We intimated that we would "feed" with much pleasure, and she led the way to the house, saying:

"Be not astonished at them, for they are very happy too, and please forgive our unleavened bread."

Then in the politest way possible she took me by the hand, and followed by Stephen, we entered the house, leaving Mavovo and Hans to watch outside.

It consisted of but two rooms, one for living and one for sleeping. In the former we found Brother John and his wife seated on a kind of couch gazing at each other in a rapt way. I noted that they both looked as though they had been crying—with happiness, I suppose.

"Elizabeth," said John as we entered, "this is Mr. Allan Quatermain, through whose resource and courage we have come together again, and this young gentleman is his companion, Mr. Stephen Somers."

She bowed, for she seemed unable to speak, and held out her hand, which we shook.

"What be 'resource and courage'?" I heard her daughter whisper to Stephen, "and why have you none, O Stephen Somers?"

"It would take a long time to explain," he said with his jolly laugh, after which I listened to no more of their nonsense.

Then we sat down to the meal, which consisted of vegetables and a large bowl of hard-boiled ducks' eggs, of which eatables an ample supply was carried out to Hans and Mavovo by Stephen and Hope. This, it seemed, was the name that her mother had given to the girl when she was born in the hour of her black despair.

It was an extraordinary story that Mrs. Eversley had to tell, and yet a short one.

She *had* escaped from Hassan-ben-Mohammed and the slave-traders, as the rescued slave told her husband at Zanzibar before he died, and, after days of wandering, been captured by some of the Pongo who were scouring the country upon dark business of their own, probably in search of captives. They brought her across the lake to Pongo-land and, the former Mother of the Flower, an albino, having died at a great age, installed her in the office on this island, which from that day she had never left. Hither she was led by the Kalubi of the time and some others who had "passed the god." This brute, however, she had never seen, although once she heard him roar, for it did not molest them or even appear upon their journey.

Shortly after her arrival on the island her daughter was born, on which occasion some of the women "servants of the Flower" nursed her. From that moment both she and the child were treated with the utmost care and veneration, since the Mother of the Flower and the Flower itself being in some strange way looked upon as embodiments of the natural forces of fertility, this birth was held to be the best of omens for the dwindling Pongo race. Also it was hoped that in due course the "Child of the Flower" would succeed the Mother in her office. So here they dwelt absolutely helpless and alone, occupying themselves with superintending the agriculture of the island. Most fortunately also when she was captured, Mrs. Eversley had a small Bible in her possession which she had never lost. From this she was able to teach her child to read and all that is to be learned in the pages of Holy Writ.

Often I have thought that if I were doomed to solitary confinement for life and allowed but one book, I would choose the Bible, since, in addition to all its history and the splendour of its language, it contains the record of the hope of man, and therefore should be sufficient for him. So at least it had proved to be in this case.

Oddly enough, as she told us, like her husband, Mrs. Eversley during all those endless years had never lost some kind of belief that she would one day be saved otherwise than by death.

"I always thought that you still lived and that we should meet again, John," I heard her say to him.

Also her own and her daughter's spirits were mysteriously supported, for after the first shock and disturbance of our arrival we found them cheerful people; indeed, Miss Hope was quite a merry soul. But then she had never known any other life, and human nature is very adaptable. Further, if I may say so, she had grown up a lady in the true sense of the word. After all, why should she not, seeing that her mother, the Bible and Nature had been her only associates and sources of information, if we except the poor slaves who waited on them, most of whom were mutes.

When Mrs. Eversley's story was done, we told ours, in a compressed form. It was strange to see the wonder with which these two ladies listened to its outlines, but on that I need not dwell. When it was finished I heard Miss Hope say:

"So it would seem, O Stephen Somers, that it is you who are saviour to us."

"Certainly," answered Stephen, "but why?"

"Because you see the dry Holy Flower far away in England, and you say, 'I must be Holy Father to that Flower.' Then you pay down shekels (here her Bible reading came in) for the cost of journey and hire brave hunter to kill devil-god and bring my old white-head parent with you. Oh yes, you are saviour," and she nodded her head at him very prettily.

"Of course," replied Stephen with enthusiasm; "that is, not exactly, but it is all the same thing, as I will explain later. But, Miss Hope, meanwhile could you show us the Flower?"

"Oh! Holy Mother must do that. If you look thereon without her, you die."

"Really!" said Stephen, without alluding to his little feat of wall climbing.

Well, the end of it was that after a good deal of hesitation, the Holy Mother obliged, saying that as the god was dead she supposed nothing else mattered. First, however, she went to the back of the house and clapped her hands, whereon an old woman, a mute and a very perfect specimen of an albino native, appeared and stared at us wonderingly. To her Mrs. Eversley talked upon her fingers, so rapidly that I could scarcely follow her movements. The woman bowed till her forehead nearly touched the ground, then rose and ran towards the water.

"I have sent her to fetch the paddles from the canoe," said Mrs. Eversley, "and to put my mark upon it. Now none will dare to use it to cross the lake."

"That is very wise," I replied, "as we don't want news of our whereabouts to get to the Motombo."

Next we went to the enclosure, where Mrs. Eversley with a native knife cut a string of palm fibres that was sealed with clay on to the door and one of its uprights in such a fashion that none could enter without breaking the string. The impression was made with a rude seal that she wore round her neck as a badge of office. It was a very curious object fashioned of gold and having deeply cut upon its face a rough image of an ape holding a flower in its right paw. As it was also ancient, this seemed to show that the monkey god and the orchid had been from the beginning jointly worshipped by the Pongo.

When she had opened the door, there appeared, growing in the centre of the enclosure, the most lovely plant, I should imagine, that man ever saw. It measured some eight feet across, and the leaves were dark green, long and narrow. From its various crowns rose the scapes of bloom. And oh! those blooms, of which there were about twelve, expanded now in the flowering season. The measurements made from the dried specimen I have given already, so I need not repeat them. I may say here, however, that the Pongo augured the fertility or otherwise of each succeeding year from the number of the blooms on the Holy Flower. If these were many the season would prove very fruitful; if few, less so; while if, as sometimes happened, the plant failed to flower, drought and famine were always said to follow. Truly those were glorious blossoms, standing as high as a man, with their back sheaths of vivid white barred with black, their great pouches of burnished gold and their wide wings also of gold. Then in the centre of each pouch appeared the ink-mark that did indeed exactly resemble the head of a monkey. But if this orchid astonished me, its effect upon Stephen, with whom this class of flower was a mania, may be imagined. Really he went almost mad. For a long while he glared at the plant, and finally flung himself upon his knees, causing Miss Hope to exclaim:

"What, O Stephen Somers! do you also make sacrifice to the Holy Flower?"

"Rather," he answered; "I'd—I'd—die for it!"

"You are likely to before all is done," I remarked with energy, for I hate to see a grown man make a fool of himself. There's only one thing in the world which justifies *that*, and it isn't a flower.

Mavovo and Hans had followed us into the enclosure, and I overheard a conversation between them which amused me. The gist of it was that Hans explained to Mavovo that the white people admired this weed—he called it a weed—because it was like gold, which was the god they really worshipped, although that god was known among them by many names. Mavovo, who was not at all interested in the affair, replied with a shrug that it might be so, though for his part he believed the true reason to be that the plant produced some medicine which gave courage or strength. Zulus, I may say, do not care for flowers unless they bear a fruit that is good to eat.

When I had satisfied myself with the splendour of these magnificent blooms, I asked Mrs. Eversley what certain little mounds might be that were dotted about the enclosure, beyond the circle of cultivated peaty soil which surrounded the orchid's roots.

"They are the graves of the Mothers of the Holy Flower," she answered. "There are twelve of them, and here is the spot chosen for the thirteenth, which was to have been mine."

To change the subject I asked another question, namely: If there were more such orchids growing in the country?

"No," she replied, "or at least I never heard of any. Indeed, I have always been told that this one was brought from far away generations ago. Also, under an ancient law, it is never allowed to increase. Any shoots it sends up beyond this ring must be cut off by me and destroyed with certain ceremonies. You see that seed-pod which has been left to grow on the stalk of one of last year's blooms. It is now ripe, and on the night of the next new moon, when the Kalubi comes to visit me, I must with much ritual burn it in his presence, unless it has burst before he arrives, in which case I must burn any seedlings that may spring up with almost the same ritual."

"I don't think the Kalubi will come any more; at least, not while you are here. Indeed, I am sure of it," I said.

As we were leaving the place, acting on my general principle of making sure of anything of value when I get the chance, I broke off that ripe seed-pod, which was of the size of an orange. No one was looking at the time, and as it went straight into my pocket, no one missed it.

Then, leaving Stephen and the young lady to admire this *Cypripedium*—or each other—in the enclosure, we three elders returned to the house to discuss matters.

"John and Mrs. Eversley," I said, "by Heaven's mercy you are reunited after a terrible separation of over twenty years. But what is to be done now? The god, it is true, is dead, and therefore the passage of the forest will be easy. But beyond it is the water which we have no means of crossing and beyond the water that old wizard, the Motombo, sits in the mouth of his cave watching like a spider in its web. And beyond the Motombo and his cave are Komba, the new Kalubi and his tribe of cannibals——"

"Cannibals!" interrupted Mrs. Eversley, "I never knew that they were cannibals. Indeed, I know little about the Pongo, whom I scarcely ever see."

"Then, madam, you must take my word for it that they are; also, as I believe, that they have every expectation of eating *us*. Now, as I presume that you do not wish to spend the rest of your lives, which would probably be short, upon this island, I want to ask how you propose to escape safely out of the Pongo country?"

They shook their heads, which were evidently empty of ideas. Only John stroked his white beard, and inquired mildly:

"What have you arranged, Allan? My dear wife and I are quite willing to leave the matter to you, who are so resourceful."

"Arranged!" I stuttered. "Really, John, under any other circumstances——" Then after a moment's reflection I called to Hans and Mavovo, who came and squatted down upon the verandah.

"Now," I said, after I had put the case to them, "what have *you* arranged?" Being devoid of any feasible suggestions, I wished to pass on that intolerable responsibility.

"My father makes a mock of us," said Mavovo solemnly. "Can a rat in a pit arrange how it is to get out with the dog that is waiting at the top? So far we have come in safety, as the rat does into the pit. Now I see nothing but death."

"That's cheerful," I said. "Your turn, Hans."

"Oh! Baas," replied the Hottentot, "for a while I grew clever again when I thought of putting the gun *Intombi* into the bamboo. But now my head is like a rotten egg, and when I try to shake wisdom out of it my brain melts and washes from side to side like the stuff in the rotten egg. Yet, yet, I have a thought—let us ask the Missie. Her brain is young and not tired, it may hit on something: to ask the Baas Stephen is no good, for already he is lost in other things," and Hans grinned feebly.

More to give myself time than for any other reason I called to Miss Hope, who had just emerged from the sacred enclosure with Stephen, and put the riddle to her, speaking very slowly and clearly, so that she might understand me. To my surprise she answered at once.

"What is a god, O Mr. Allen? Is it not more than man? Can a god be bound in a pit for a thousand years, like Satan in Bible? If a god want to move, see new country and so on, who can say no?"

"I don't quite understand," I said, to draw her out further, although, in fact, I had more than a glimmering of what she meant.

"O Allan, Holy Flower there a god, and my mother priestess. If Holy Flower tired of this land, and want to grow somewhere else, why priestess not carry it and go too?"

"Capital idea," I said, "but you see, Miss Hope, there are, or were, two gods, one of which cannot travel."

"Oh! that very easy, too. Put skin of god of the woods on to this man," and she pointed to Hans, "and who know difference? They like as two brothers already, only he smaller."

"She's got it! By Jingo, she's got it!" exclaimed Stephen in admiration.

"What Missie say?" asked Hans, suspiciously.

I told him.

"Oh! Baas," exclaimed Hans, "think of the smell inside of that god's skin when the sun shines on it. Also the god was a very big god, and I am small."

Then he turned and made a proposal to Mavovo, explaining that his stature was much better suited to the job.

"First will I die," answered the great Zulu. "Am I, who have high blood in my veins and who am a warrior, to defile myself by wrapping the skin of a dead brute about me and appear as an ape before men? Propose it to me again, Spotted Snake, and we shall quarrel."

"See here, Hans," I said. "Mavovo is right. He is a soldier and very strong in battle. You also are very strong in your wits, and by doing this you will make fools of all the Pongo. Also, Hans, it is better that you should wear the skin of a gorilla for a few hours than that I, your master, and all these should be killed."

"Yes, Baas, it is true, Baas; though for myself I almost think that, like Mavovo, I would rather die. Yet it would be sweet to deceive those Pongo once again, and, Baas, I won't see you killed just to save myself another bad smell or two. So, if you wish it, I will become a god."

Thus through the self-sacrifice of that good fellow, Hans, who is the real hero of this history, that matter was settled, if anything could be looked on as settled in our circumstances. Then we arranged that we would start upon our desperate adventure at dawn on the following morning.

Meanwhile, much remained to be done. First, Mrs. Eversley summoned her attendants, who, to the number of twelve, soon appeared in front of the verandah. It was very sad to see these poor women, all of whom were albinos and unpleasant to look on, while quite half appeared to be deaf and dumb. To these, speaking as a priestess, she explained that the god who dwelt in the woods was dead, and that therefore she must take the Holy Flower, which was called "Wife of the god" and make report to the Motombo of this dreadful catastrophe. Meanwhile, they must remain on the island and continue to cultivate the fields.

This order threw the poor creatures, who were evidently much attached to their mistress and her daughter, into a great state of consternation. The eldest of them all, a tall, thin old lady with white wool and pink eyes who looked, as Stephen said, like an Angora rabbit, prostrated herself and kissing the Mother's foot, asked when she would return, since she and the "Daughter of the Flower" were all they had to love, and without them they would die of grief.

Suppressing her evident emotion as best she could, the Mother replied that she did not know; it depended on the will of Heaven and the Motombo. Then to prevent further argument she bade them bring their picks with which they worked the land; also poles, mats, and palmstrung, and help to dig up the Holy Flower. This was done under the superintendence of Stephen, who here was thoroughly in his element, although the job proved far from easy. Also it was sad, for all these women wept as they worked, while some of them who were not dumb, wailed aloud.

Even Miss Hope cried, and I could see that her mother was affected with a kind of awe. For twenty years she had been guardian of this plant, which I think she had at last not unnaturally come to look upon with some of the same veneration that was felt for it by the whole Pongo people.

"I fear," she said, "lest this sacrilege should bring misfortune upon us."

But Brother John, who held very definite views upon African superstitions, quoted the second commandment to her, and she became silent.

We got the thing up at last, or most of it, with a sufficiency of earth to keep it alive, injuring the roots as little as possible in the process. Underneath it, at a depth of about three feet, we found several things. One of these was an ancient stone fetish that was rudely shaped to the likeness of a monkey and wore a gold crown. This object, which was small, I still have. Another was a bed of charcoal, and amongst the charcoal were some partially burnt bones, including a skull that was very little injured. This may have belonged to a woman of a low type, perhaps the first Mother of the Flower, but its general appearance reminded me of that of a gorilla. I regret that there was neither time nor light to enable me to make a proper examination of these remains, which we found it impossible to bring away.

Mrs. Eversley told me afterwards, however, that the Kalubis had a tradition that the god once possessed a wife which died before the Pongo migrated to their present home. If so, these may have been the bones of that wife. When it was finally clear of the ground

on which it had grown for so many generations, the great plant was lifted on to a large mat, and after it had been packed with wet moss by Stephen in a most skilful way, for he was a perfect artist at this kind of work, the mat was bound round the roots in such a fashion that none of the contents could escape. Also each flower scape was lashed to a thin bamboo so as to prevent it from breaking on the journey. Then the whole bundle was lifted on to a kind of bamboo stretcher that we made and firmly secured to it with palm-fibre ropes.

By this time it was growing dark and all of us were tired.

"Baas," said Hans to me, as we were returning to the house, "would it not be well that Mavovo and I should take some food and go sleep in the canoe? These women will not hurt us there, but if we do not, I, who have been watching them, fear lest in the night they should make paddles of sticks and row across the lake to warn the Pongo."

Although I did not like separating our small party, I thought the idea so good that I consented to it, and presently Hans and Mavovo, armed with spears and carrying an ample supply of food, departed to the lake side.

One more incident has impressed itself upon my memory in connection with that night. It was the formal baptism of Hope by her father. I never saw a more touching ceremony, but it is one that I need not describe.

Stephen and I slept in the enclosure by the packed flower, which he would not leave out of his sight. It was as well that we did so, since about twelve o'clock by the light of the moon I saw the door in the wall open gently and the heads of some of the albino women appear through the aperture. Doubtless, they had come to steal away the holy plant they worshipped. I sat up, coughed, and lifted the rifle, whereon they fled and returned no more.

Long before dawn Brother John, his wife and daughter were up and making preparations for the march, packing a supply of food and so forth. Indeed, we breakfasted by moonlight, and at the first break of day, after Brother John had first offered up a prayer for protection, departed on our journey.

It was a strange out-setting, and I noted that both Mrs. Eversley and her daughter seemed sad at bidding good-bye to the spot where they had dwelt in utter solitude and peace for so many years; where one of them, indeed, had been born and grown up to womanhood. However, I kept on talking to distract their thoughts, and at last we were off.

I arranged that, although it was heavy for them, the two ladies, whose white robes were covered with curious cloaks made of soft prepared bark, should carry the plant as far as the canoe, thinking it was better that the Holy Flower should appear to depart in charge of its consecrated guardians. I went ahead with the rifle, then came the stretcher and the flower, while Brother John and Stephen, carrying the paddles, brought up the rear. We reached the canoe without accident, and to our great relief found Mavovo and Hans awaiting us. I learned, however, that it was fortunate they had slept in the boat, since during the night the albino women arrived with the evident object of possessing themselves of it, and only ran away when they saw that it was guarded. As we were making ready the canoe those unhappy slaves appeared in a body and throwing themselves upon their faces with piteous words, or those of them who could not speak, by signs, implored the Mother not to desert them, till both she and Hope began to cry. But there was no help for it, so we pushed off as quickly as we could, leaving the albinos weeping and wailing upon the bank.

I confess that I, too, felt compunction at abandoning them thus, but what could we do? I only trust that no harm came to them, but of course we never heard anything as to their fate.

On the further side of the lake we hid away the canoe in the bushes where we had found it, and began our march. Stephen and Mavovo, being the two strongest among us, now carried the plant, and although Stephen never murmured at its weight, how the Zulu did swear after the first few hours! I could fill a page with his objurgations at what he considered an act of insanity, and if I had space, should like to do so, for really some of them were most amusing. Had it not been for his friendship for Stephen I think that he would have thrown it down.

We crossed the Garden of the god, where Mrs. Eversley told me the Kalubi must scatter the sacred seed twice a year, thus confirming the story that we had heard. It seems that it was then, as he made his long journey through the forest, that the treacherous and horrid brute which we had killed, would attack the priest of whom it had grown weary. But, and this shows the animal's cunning, the onslaught always took place *after* he had sown the seed which would in due season produce the food it ate. Our Kalubi, it is true, was killed before we had reached the Garden, which seems an exception to the rule. Perhaps, however, the gorilla knew that his object in visiting it was not to provide for its needs. Or perhaps our presence excited it to immediate action.

Who can analyse the motives of a gorilla?

These attacks were generally spread over a year and a half. On the first occasion the god which always accompanied the priest to the garden and back again, would show animosity by roaring at him. On the second he would seize his hand and bite off one of the fingers, as happened to our Kalubi, a wound that generally caused death from blood poisoning. If, however, the priest survived, on the third visit it killed him, for the most part by crushing his head in its mighty jaws. When making these visits the Kalubi was accompanied by certain dedicated youths, some of whom the god always put to death. Those who had made the journey six times without molestation were selected for further special trials, until at last only two remained who were declared to have "passed" or "been accepted by" the god. These youths were treated with great honour, as in the instance of Komba and on the destruction of the Kalubi, one of them took his office, which he generally filled without much accident, for a minimum of ten years, and perhaps much longer.

Mrs. Eversley knew nothing of the sacramental eating of the remains of the Kalubi, or of the final burial of his bones in the wooden coffins that we had seen, for such things, although they undoubtedly happened, were kept from her. She added, that each of the three Kalubis whom she had known, ultimately went almost mad through terror at his approaching end, especially after the preliminary roarings and the biting off of the finger. In truth uneasy lay the head that wore a crown in Pongo-land, a crown that, mind you, might not be refused upon pain of death by torture. Personally, I can imagine nothing more terrible than the haunted existence of these poor kings whose pomp and power must terminate in such a fashion.

I asked her whether the Motombo ever visited the god. She answered, Yes, once in every five years. Then after many mystic ceremonies he spent a week in the forest at a time of full moon. One of the Kalubis had told her that on this occasion he had seen the Motombo and the god sitting together under a tree, each with his arm round the other's neck and apparently talking "like brothers." With the exception of certain tales of its almost supernatural cunning, this was all that I could learn about the god of the Pongos which I have sometimes been tempted to believe was really a devil hid in the body of a huge and ancient ape.

No, there was one more thing which I quote because it bears out Babemba's story. It seems that captives from other tribes were sometimes turned into the forest that the god might amuse itself by killing them. This, indeed, was the fate to which we ourselves had

been doomed in accordance with the hateful Pongo custom.

Certainly, thought I to myself when she had done, I did a good deed in sending that monster to whatever dim region it was destined to inhabit, where I sincerely trust it found all the dead Kalubis and its other victims ready to give it an appropriate welcome.

After crossing the god's garden, we came to the clearing of the Fallen Tree, and found the brute's skin pegged out as we had left it, though shrunken in size. Only it had evidently been visited by a horde of the forest ants which, fortunately for Hans, had eaten away every particle of flesh, while leaving the hide itself absolutely untouched, I suppose because it was too tough for them. I never saw a neater job. Moreover, these industrious little creatures had devoured the beast itself. Nothing remained of it except the clean, white bones lying in the exact position in which we had left the carcass. Atom by atom that marching myriad army had eaten all and departed on its way into the depths of the forest, leaving this sign of their passage.

How I wished that we could carry off the huge skeleton to add to my collection of trophies, but this was impossible. As Brother John said, any museum would have been glad to purchase it for hundreds of pounds, for I do not suppose that its like exists in the world. But it was too heavy; all I could do was to impress its peculiarities upon my mind by a close study of the mighty bones. Also I picked out of the upper right arm, and kept the bullet I had fired when it carried off the Kalubi. This I found had sunk into and shattered the bone, but without absolutely breaking it.

On we went again bearing with us the god's skin, having first stuffed the head, hands and feet (these, I mean the hands and feet, had been cleaned out by the ants) with wet moss in order to preserve their shape. It was no light burden, at least so declared Brother John and Hans, who bore it between them upon a dead bough from the fallen tree.

Of the rest of our journey to the water's edge there is nothing to tell, except that notwithstanding our loads, we found it easier to walk down that steep mountain side than it had been to ascend the same. Still our progress was but slow, and when at length we reached the burying-place only about an hour remained to sunset. There we sat down to rest and eat, also to discuss the situation.

What was to be done? The arm of stagnant water lay near to us, but we had no boat with which to cross to the further shore. And what was that shore? A cave where a creature who seemed to be but half-human, sat watching like a spider in its web. Do not let it be supposed that this question of escape had been absent from our minds. On the contrary, we had even thought of trying to drag the canoe in which we crossed to and from the island of the Flower through the forest. The idea was abandoned, however, because we found that being hollowed from a single log with a bottom four or five inches thick, it was impossible for us to carry it so much as fifty yards. What then could we do without a boat? Swimming seemed to be out of the question because of the crocodiles. Also on inquiry I discovered that of the whole party Stephen and I alone could swim. Further there was no wood of which to make a raft.

I called to Hans and leaving the rest in the graveyard where we knew that they were safe, we went down to the edge of the water to study the situation, being careful to keep ourselves hidden behind the reeds and bushes of the mangrove tribe with which it was fringed. Not that there was much fear of our being seen, for the day, which had been very hot, was closing in and a great storm, heralded by black and bellying clouds, was gathering fast, conditions which must render us practically invisible at a distance.

We looked at the dark, slimy water—also at the crocodiles which sat upon its edge in dozens waiting, eternally waiting, for what, I wondered. We looked at the sheer opposing cliff, but save where a black hole marked the cave mouth, far as the eye could see, the water came up against it, as that of a moat does against the wall of a castle. Obviously, therefore, the only line of escape ran through this cave, for, as I have explained, the channel by which I presume Babemba reached the open lake, was now impracticable. Lastly, we searched to see if there was any fallen log upon which we could possibly propel ourselves to the other side, and found—nothing that could be made to serve, no, nor, as I have said, any dry reeds or brushwood out of which we might fashion a raft.

"Unless we can get a boat, here we must stay," I remarked to Hans, who was seated with me behind a screen of rushes at the water's edge.

He made no answer, and as I thought, in a sort of subconscious way, I engaged myself in watching a certain tragedy of the insect world. Between two stout reeds a forest spider of the very largest sort had spun a web as big as a lady's open parasol. There in the midst of this web of which the bottom strands almost touched the water, sat the spider waiting for its prey, as the crocodiles were waiting on the banks, as the great ape had waited for the Kalubis, as Death waits for Life, as the Motombo was waiting for God knows what.

It rather resembled the Motombo in his cave, did that huge, black spider with just a little patch of white upon its head, or so I thought fancifully enough. Then came the tragedy. A great, white moth of the Hawk species began to dart to and fro between the reeds, and presently struck the web on its lower side some three inches above the water. Like a flash that spider was upon it. It embraced the victim with its long legs to still its tremendous battlings. Next, descending below, it began to make the body fast, when something happened. From the still surface of the water beneath poked up the mouth of a very large fish which quite quietly closed upon the spider and sank again into the depths, taking with it a portion of the web and thereby setting the big moth free. With a struggle it loosed itself, fell on to a piece of wood and floated away, apparently little the worse for the encounter.

"Did you see that, Baas?" said Hans, pointing to the broken and empty web. "While you were thinking, I was praying to your reverend father the Predikant, who taught me how to do it, and he has sent us a sign from the Place of Fire."

Even then I could not help laughing to myself as I pictured what my dear father's face would be like if he were able to hear his convert's remarks. An analysis of Hans's religious views would be really interesting, and I only regret that I never made one. But sticking to business I merely asked:

"What sign?"

"Baas, this sign: That web is the Motombo's cave. The big spider is the Motombo. The white moth is us, Baas, who are caught in the web and going to be eaten."

"Very pretty, Hans," I said, "but what is the fish that came up and swallowed the spider so that the moth fell on the wood and floated away?"

"Baas, *you* are the fish, who come up softly, softly out of the water in the dark, and shoot the Motombo with the little rifle, and then the rest of us, who are the moth, fall into the canoe and float away. There is a storm about to break, Baas, and who will see you swim the stream in the storm and the night?"

"The crocodiles," I suggested.

"Baas, I didn't see a crocodile eat the fish. I think the fish is laughing down there with the fat spider in its stomach. Also when there is a storm crocodiles go to bed because they are afraid lest the lightning should kill them for their sins."

Now I remembered that I had often heard, and indeed to some extent noted, that these great reptiles do vanish in disturbed weather, probably because their food hides away. However that might be, in an instant I made up my mind.

As soon as it was quite dark I would swim the water, holding the little rifle, *Intombi*, above my head, and try to steal the canoe. If the old wizard was watching, which I hoped might not be the case, well, I must deal with him as best I could. I knew the desperate nature of the expedient, but there was no other way. If we could not get a boat we must remain in that foodless forest until we starved. Or if we returned to the island of the Flower, there ere long we should certainly be attacked and destroyed by Komba and the Pongos when they came to look for our bodies.

"I'll try it, Hans," I said.

"Yes, Baas, I thought you would. I'd come, too, only I can't swim and when I was drowning I might make a noise, because one forgets oneself then, Baas. But it will be all right, for if it were otherwise I am sure that your reverend father would have shown us so in the sign. The moth floated off quite comfortably on the wood, and just now I saw it spread its wings and fly away. And the fish, ah! how he laughs with that fat old spider in his stomach!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FATE STABS

We went back to the others whom we found crouched on the ground among the coffins, looking distinctly depressed. No wonder; night was closing in, the thunder was beginning to growl and echo through the forest and rain to fall in big drops. In short, although Stephen remarked that every cloud has a silver lining, a proverb which, as I told him, I seemed to have heard before, in no sense could the outlook be considered bright.

"Well, Allan, what have you arranged?" asked Brother John, with a faint attempt at cheerfulness as he let go of his wife's hand. In those days he always seemed to be holding his wife's hand.

"Oh!" I answered, "I am going to get the canoe so that we can all row over comfortably."

They stared at me, and Miss Hope, who was seated by Stephen, asked in her usual Biblical language:

"Have you the wings of a dove that you can fly, O Mr. Allan?"

"No," I answered, "but I have the fins of a fish, or something like them, and I can swim."

Now there arose a chorus of expostulation.

"You shan't risk it," said Stephen, "I can swim as well as you and I'm younger. I'll go, I want a bath."

"That you will have, O Stephen," interrupted Miss Hope, as I thought in some alarm. "The latter rain from heaven will make you clean." (By now it was pouring.)

"Yes, Stephen, you can swim," I said, "but you will forgive me for saying that you are not particularly deadly with a rifle, and clean shooting may be the essence of this business. Now listen to me, all of you. I am going. I hope that I shall succeed, but if I fail it does not so very much matter, for you will be no worse off than you were before. There are three pairs of you. John and his wife; Stephen and Miss Hope; Mavovo and Hans. If the odd man of the party comes to grief, you will have to choose a new captain, that is all, but while I lead I mean to be obeyed."

Then Mavovo, to whom Hans had been talking, spoke.

"My father Macumazana is a brave man. If he lives he will have done his duty. If he dies he will have done his duty still better, and, on the earth or in the under-world among the spirits of our fathers, his name shall be great for ever; yes, his name shall be a song."

When Brother John had translated these words, which I thought fine, there was silence.

"Now," I said, "come with me to the water's edge, all of you. You will be in less danger from the lightning there, where are no tall trees. And while I am gone, do you ladies dress up Hans in that gorilla-skin as best you can, lacing it on to him with some of that palm-fibre string which we brought with us, and filling out the hollows and the head with leaves or reeds. I want him to be ready when I come back with the canoe."

Hans groaned audibly, but made no objection and we started with our impedimenta down to the edge of the estuary where we hid behind a clump of mangrove bushes and tall, feathery reeds. Then I took off some of my clothes, stripping in fact to my flannel shirt and the cotton pants I wore, both of which were grey in colour and therefore almost invisible at night.

Now I was ready and Hans handed me the little rifle.

"It is at full cock, Baas, with the catch on," he said, "and carefully loaded. Also I have wrapped the lining of my hat, which is very full of grease, for the hair makes grease especially in hot weather, Baas, round the lock to keep away the wet from the cap and powder. It is not tied, Baas, only twisted. Give the rifle a shake and it will fall off."

"I understand," I said, and gripped the gun with my left hand by the tongue just forward of the hammer, in such a fashion that the horrid greased rag from Hans's hat was held tight over the lock and cap. Then I shook hands with the others and when I came to Miss Hope I am proud to add that she spontaneously and of her own accord imprinted a kiss upon my mediaeval brow. I felt inclined to return it, but did not.

"It is the kiss of peace, O Allan," she said. "May you go and return in peace."

"Thank you," I said, "but get on with dressing Hans in his new clothes."

Stephen muttered something about feeling ashamed of himself. Brother John put up a vigorous and well-directed prayer. Mavovo saluted with the copper assegai and began to give me *sibonga* or Zulu titles of praise beneath his breath, and Mrs. Eversley said:

"Oh! I thank God that I have lived to see a brave English gentleman again," which I thought a great compliment to my nation and myself, though when I afterwards discovered that she herself was English by birth, it took off some of the polish.

Next, just after a vivid flash of lightning, for the storm had broken in earnest now, I ran swiftly to the water's edge, accompanied by Hans, who was determined to see the last of me.

"Get back, Hans, before the lightning shows you," I said, as I slid gently from a mangrove-root into that filthy stream, "and tell them to keep my coat and trousers dry if they can."

"Good-bye, Baas," he murmured, and I heard that he was sobbing. "Keep a good heart, O Baas of Baases. After all, this is nothing to the vultures of the Hill of Slaughter. *Intombi* pulled us through then, and so she will again, for she knows who can hold her straight!"

That was the last I heard of Hans, for if he said any more, the hiss of the torrential rain smothered his words.

Oh! I had tried to "keep a good heart" before the others, but it is beyond my powers to describe the deadly fright I felt, perhaps the worst of all my life, which is saying a great deal. Here I was starting on one of the maddest ventures that was ever undertaken by man.

I needn't put its points again, but that which appealed to me most at the moment was the crocodiles. I have always hated crocodiles since—well, never mind—and the place was as full of them as the ponds at Ascension are of turtles.

Still I swam on. The estuary was perhaps two hundred yards wide, not more, no great distance for a good swimmer as I was in those days. But then I had to hold the rifle above the water with my left hand at all cost, for if once it went beneath it would be useless. Also I was desperately afraid of being seen in the lightning flashes, although to minimise this risk I had kept my dark-coloured cloth hat upon my head. Lastly there was the lightning itself to fear, for it was fearful and continuous and seemed to be striking along the water. It was a fact that a fire-ball or something of the sort hit the surface within a few yards of me, as though it had aimed at the rifle-barrel and just missed. Or so I thought, though it may have been a crocodile rising at the moment.

In one way, or rather, in two, however, I was lucky. The first was the complete absence of wind which must have raised waves that might have swamped me and would at any rate have wetted the rifle. The second was that there was no fear of my losing my path for in the mouth of the cave I could see the glow of the fires which burned on either side of the Motombo's seat. They served the same purpose to me as did the lamp of the lady called Hero to her lover Leander when he swam the Hellespont to pay her clandestine visits at night. But he had something pleasant to look forward to, whereas I——! Still, there was another point in common between us. Hero, if I remember right, was a priestess of the Greek goddess of love, whereas the party who waited me was also in a religious line of business. Only, as I firmly believe, he was a priest of the devil.

I suppose that swim took me about a quarter-of-an-hour, for I went slowly to save my strength, although the crocodiles suggested haste. But thank Heaven they never appeared to complicate matters. Now I was quite near the cave, and now I was beneath the overhanging roof and in the shallow water of the little bay that formed a harbour for the canoe. I stood upon my feet on the rock bottom, the water coming up to my breast, and peered about me, while I rested and worked my left arm, stiff with the up-holding of the gun, to and fro. The fires had burnt somewhat low and until my eyes were freed from the raindrops and grew accustomed to the light of the place I could not see clearly.

I took the rag from round the lock of the rifle, wiped the wet off the barrel with it and let it fall. Then I loosed the catch and by touching a certain mechanism, made the rifle hair-triggered. Now I looked again and began to make out things. There was the platform and there, alas! on it sat the toad-like Motombo. But his back was to me; he was gazing not towards the water, but down the cave. I hesitated for one fateful moment. Perhaps the priest was asleep, perhaps I could get the canoe away without shooting. I did not like the job; moreover, his head was held forward and invisible, and how was I to make certain of killing him with a shot in the back? Lastly, if possible, I wished to avoid firing because of the report.

At that instant the Motombo wheeled round. Some instinct must have warned him of my presence, for the silence was gravelike save for the soft splash of the rain without. As he turned the lightning blazed and he saw me.

"It is the white man," he muttered to himself in his hissing whisper, while I waited through the following darkness with the rifle at my shoulder, "the white man who shot me long, long ago, and again he has a gun! Oh! Fate stabs, doubtless the god is dead and I too must die!"

Then as if some doubt struck him he lifted the horn to summon help.

Again the lightning flashed and was accompanied by a fearful crack of thunder. With a prayer for skill, I covered his head and fired by the glare of it just as the trumpet touched his lips. It fell from his hand. He seemed to shrink together, and moved no more.

Oh! thank God, thank God! in this supreme moment of trial the art of which I am a master had not failed me. If my hand had shaken ever so little, if my nerves, strained to breaking point, had played me false in the least degree, if the rag from Hans's hat had not sufficed to keep away the damp from the cap and powder! Well, this history would never have been written and there would have been some more bones in the graveyard of the Kalubis, that is all!

For a moment I waited, expecting to see the women attendants dart from the doorways in the sides of the cave, and to hear them sound a shrill alarm. None appeared, and I guessed that the rattle of the thunder had swallowed up the crack of the rifle, a noise, be it remembered, that none of them had ever heard. For an unknown number of years this ancient creature, I suppose, had squatted day and night upon that platform, whence, I daresay, it was difficult for him to move. So after they had wrapped his furs round him at sunset and made up the fires to keep him warm, why should his women come to disturb him unless he called them with his horn? Probably it was not even lawful that they should do so.

Somewhat reassured I waded forward a few paces and loosed the canoe which was tied by the prow. Then I scrambled into it, and laying down the rifle, took one of the paddles and began to push out of the creek. Just then the lightning flared once more, and by it I caught sight of the Motombo's face that was now within a few feet of my own. It seemed to be resting almost on his knees, and its appearance was dreadful. In the centre of the forehead was a blue mark where the bullet had entered, for I had made no mistake in that matter. The deep-set round eyes were open and, all their fire gone, seemed to stare at me from beneath the overhanging brows. The massive jaw had fallen and the red tongue hung out upon the pendulous lip. The leather-like skin of the bloated cheeks had assumed an ashen hue still streaked and mottled with brown.

Oh! the thing was horrible, and sometimes when I am out of sorts, it haunts me to this day. Yet that creature's blood does not lie heavy on my mind, of it my conscience is not afraid. His end was necessary to save the innocent and I am sure that it was well deserved. For he was a devil, akin to the great god ape I had slain in the forest, to whom, by the way, he bore a most remarkable resemblance in death. Indeed if their heads had been laid side by side at a little distance, it would not have been too easy to tell them apart with their projecting brows, beardless, retreating chins and yellow tushes at the corners of the mouth.

Presently I was clear of the cave. Still for a while I lay to at one side of it against the towering cliff, both to listen in case what I had done should be discovered, and for fear lest the lightning which was still bright, although the storm centre was rapidly passing away, should reveal me to any watchers.

For quite ten minutes I hid thus, and then, determining to risk it, paddled softly towards the opposite bank keeping, however, a little to the west of the cave and taking my line by a certain very tall tree which, as I had noted, towered up against the sky at the back of the graveyard.

As it happened my calculations were accurate and in the end I directed the bow of the canoe into the rushes behind which I had left my companions. Just then the moon began to struggle out through the thinning rain-clouds, and by its light they saw me, and I saw what for a moment I took to be the gorilla-god himself waddling forward to seize the boat. There was the dreadful brute exactly as he had appeared in the forest, except that it seemed a little smaller.

Then I remembered and laughed and that laugh did me a world of good.

"Is that you, Baas?" said a muffled voice, speaking apparently from the middle of the gorilla. "Are you safe, Baas?"

"Of course," I answered, "or how should I be here?" adding cheerfully, "Are you comfortable in that nice warm skin on this wet night, Hans?"

"Oh! Baas," answered the voice, "tell me what happened. Even in this stink I burn to know."

"Death happened to the Motombo, Hans. Here, Stephen, give me your hand and my clothes, and, Mavovo, hold the rifle and the canoe while I put them on."

Then I landed and stepping into the reeds, pulled off my wet shirt and pants, which I stuffed away into the big pockets of my shooting coat, for I did not want to lose them, and put on the dry things that, although scratchy, were quite good enough clothing in that warm climate. After this I treated myself to a good sup of brandy from the flask, and ate some food which I seemed to require. Then I told them the story, and cutting short their demonstrations of wonder and admiration, bade them place the Holy Flower in the canoe and get in themselves. Next with the help of Hans who poked out his fingers through the skin of the gorilla's arms, I carefully re-loaded the rifle, setting the last cap on the nipple. This done, I joined them in the canoe, taking my seat in the prow and bidding Brother John and Stephen paddle.

Making a circuit to avoid observation as before, in a very short time we reached the mouth of the cave. I leant forward and peeped round the western wall of rock. Nobody seemed to be stirring. There the fires burned dimly, there the huddled shape of the Motombo still crouched upon the platform. Silently, silently we disembarked, and I formed our procession while the others looked askance at the horrible face of the dead Motombo.

I headed it, then came the Mother of the Flower, followed by Hans, playing his part of the god of the forest; then Brother John and Stephen carrying the Holy Flower. After it walked Hope, while Mavovo brought up the rear. Near to one of the fires, as I had noted on our first passage of the cave, lay a pile of the torches which I have already mentioned. We lit some of them, and at a sign from me, Mavovo dragged the canoe back into its little dock and tied the cord to its post. Its appearance there, apparently undisturbed, might, I thought, make our crossing of the water seem even more mysterious. All this while I watched the doors in the sides of the cave, expecting every moment to see the women rush out. But none came. Perhaps they slept, or perhaps they were absent; I do not know to this day.

We started, and in solemn silence threaded our way down the windings of the cave, extinguishing our torches as soon as we saw light at its inland outlet. At a few paces from its mouth stood a sentry. His back was towards the cave, and in the uncertain gleams of the moon, struggling with the clouds, for a thin rain still fell, he never noted us till we were right on to him. Then he turned and saw, and at the awful sight of this procession of the gods of his land, threw up his arms, and without a word fell senseless. Although I never asked, I think that Mavovo took measures to prevent his awakening. At any rate when I looked back later on, I observed that he was carrying a big Pongo spear with a long shaft, instead of the copper weapon which he had taken from one of the coffins.

On we marched towards Rica Town, following the easy path by which we had come. As I have said, the country was very deserted and the inhabitants of such huts as we passed were evidently fast asleep. Also there were no dogs in this land to awake them with their barking. Between the cave and Rica we were not, I think, seen by a single soul.

Through that long night we pushed on as fast as we could travel, only stopping now and again for a few minutes to rest the bearers of the Holy Flower. Indeed at times Mrs. Eversley relieved her husband at this task, but Stephen, being very strong, carried his end of the stretcher throughout the whole journey.

Hans, of course, was much oppressed by the great weight of the gorilla skin, which, although it had shrunk a good deal, remained as heavy as ever. But he was a tough old fellow, and on the whole got on better than might have been expected, though by the time we reached the town he was sometimes obliged to follow the example of the god itself and help himself forward with his hands, going on all fours, as a gorilla generally does.

We reached the broad, long street of Rica about half an hour before dawn, and proceeded down it till we were past the Feast-house still quite unobserved, for as yet none were stirring on that wet morning. Indeed it was not until we were within a hundred yards of the harbour that a woman possessed of the virtue, or vice, of early rising, who had come from a hut to work in her garden, saw us and raised an awful, piercing scream.

"The gods!" she screamed. "The gods are leaving the land and taking the white men with them."

Instantly there arose a hubbub in the houses. Heads were thrust out of the doors and people ran into the gardens, every one of whom began to yell till one might have thought that a massacre was in progress. But as yet no one came near us, for they were afraid.

"Push on," I cried, "or all is lost."

They answered nobly. Hans struggled forward on all fours, for he was nearly done and his hideous garment was choking him, while Stephen and Brother John, exhausted though they were with the weight of the great plant, actually broke into a feeble trot. We came to the harbour and there, tied to the wharf, was the same canoe in which we had crossed to Pongo-land. We sprang into it and cut the fastenings with my knife, having no time to untie them, and pushed off from the wharf.

By now hundreds of people, among them many soldiers were hard upon and indeed around us, but still they seemed too frightened to do anything. So far the inspiration of Hans' disguise had saved us. In the midst of them, by the light of the rising sun, I recognised Komba, who ran up, a great spear in his hand, and for a moment halted amazed.

Then it was that the catastrophe happened which nearly cost us all our lives.

Hans, who was in the stern of the canoe, began to faint from exhaustion, and in his efforts to obtain air, for the heat and stench of the skin were overpowering him, thrust his head out through the lacings of the hide beneath the reed-stuffed mask of the gorilla, which fell over languidly upon his shoulder. Komba saw his ugly little face and knew it again.

"It is a trick!" he roared. "These white devils have killed the god and stolen the Holy Flower and its priestess. The yellow man is wrapped in the skin of the god. To the boats! To the boats!"

"Paddle," I shouted to Brother John and Stephen, "paddle for your lives! Mavovo, help me get up the sail."

As it chanced on that stormy morning the wind was blowing strongly towards the mainland.

We laboured at the mast, shipped it and hauled up the mat sail, but slowly for we were awkward at the business. By the time that it began to draw the paddles had propelled us about four hundred yards from the wharf, whence many canoes, with their sails already

set, were starting in pursuit. Standing in the prow of the first of these, and roaring curses and vengeance at us, was Komba, the new Kalubi, who shook a great spear above his head.

An idea occurred to me, who knew that unless something were done we must be overtaken and killed by these skilled boatmen. Leaving Mavovo to attend to the sail, I scrambled aft, and thrusting aside the fainting Hans, knelt down in the stern of the canoe. There was still one charge, or rather one cap, left, and I meant to use it. I put up the largest flapsight, lifted the little rifle and covered Komba, aiming at the point of his chin. *Intombi* was not sighted for or meant to use at this great distance, and only by this means of allowing for the drop of the bullet, could I hope to hit the man in the body.

The sail was drawing well now and steadied the boat, also, being still under the shelter of the land, the water was smooth as that of a pond, so really I had a very good firing platform. Moreover, weary though I was, my vital forces rose to the emergency and I felt myself grow rigid as a statue. Lastly, the light was good, for the sun rose behind me, its level rays shining full on to my mark. I held my breath and touched the trigger. The charge exploded sweetly and almost at the instant; as the smoke drifted to one side, I saw Komba throw up his arms and fall backwards into the canoe. Then, quite a long while afterwards, or so it seemed, the breeze brought the faint sound of the thud of that fateful bullet to our ears.

Though perhaps I ought not to say so, it was really a wonderful shot in all the circumstances, for, as I learned afterwards, the ball struck just where I hoped that it might, in the centre of the breast, piercing the heart. Indeed, taking everything into consideration, I think that those four shots which I fired in Pongo-land are the real record of my career as a marksman. The first at night broke the arm of the gorilla god and would have killed him had not the charge hung fire and given him time to protect his head. The second did kill him in the midst of a great scrimmage when everything was moving. The third, fired by the glare of lightning after a long swim, slew the Motombo, and the fourth, loosed at this great distance from a moving boat, was the bane of that cold-blooded and treacherous man, Komba, who thought that he had trapped us to Pongo-land to be murdered and eaten as a sacrifice. Lastly there was always the consciousness that no mistake must be made, since with but four percussion caps it could not be retrieved.

I am sure that I could not have done so well with any other rifle, however modern and accurate it might be. But to this little Purdey weapon I had been accustomed from my youth, and that, as any marksman will know, means a great deal. I seemed to know it and it seemed to know me. It hangs on my wall to this day, although of course I never use it now in our breech-loading era. Unfortunately, however, a local gunsmith to whom I sent it to have the lock cleaned, re-browned it and scraped and varnished the stock, etc., without authority, making it look almost new again. I preferred it in its worn and scratched condition.

To return: the sound of the shot, like that of John Peel's horn, aroused Hans from his sleep. He thrust his head between my legs and saw Komba fall.

"Oh! beautiful, Baas, beautiful!" he said faintly. "I am sure that the ghost of your reverend father cannot kill his enemies more nicely down there among the Fires. Beautiful!" and the silly old fellow fell to kissing my boots, or what remained of them, after which I gave him the last of the brandy.

This quite brought him to himself again, especially when he was free from that filthy skin and had washed his head and hands.

The effect of the death of Komba upon the Pongos was very strange. All the other canoes clustered round that in which he lay. Then, after a hurried consultation, they hauled down their sails and paddled back to the wharf. Why they did this I cannot tell. Perhaps they thought that he was bewitched, or only wounded and required the attentions of a medicine-man. Perhaps it was not lawful for them to proceed except under the guidance of some reserve Kalubi who had "passed the god" and who was on shore. Perhaps it was necessary, according to their rites, that the body of their chief should be landed with certain ceremonies. I do not know. It is impossible to be sure as to the mysterious motives that actuate many of these remote African tribes.

At any rate the result was that it gave us a great start and a chance of life, who must otherwise have died upon the spot. Outside the bay the breeze blew merrily, taking us across the lake at a spanking pace, until about midday when it began to fall. Fortunately, however, it did not altogether drop till three o'clock by which time the coast of Mazitu-land was comparatively near; we could even distinguish a speck against the skyline which we knew was the Union Jack that Stephen had set upon the crest of a little hill.

During those hours of peace we ate the food that remained to us, washed ourselves as thoroughly as we could and rested. Well was it, in view of what followed, that we had this time of repose. For just as the breeze was failing I looked aft and there, coming up behind us, still holding the wind, was the whole fleet of Pongo canoes, thirty or forty of them perhaps, each carrying an average of about twenty men. We sailed on for as long as we could, for though our progress was but slow, it was quicker than what we could have made by paddling. Also it was necessary that we should save our strength for the last trial.

I remember that hour very well, for in the nervous excitement of it every little thing impressed itself upon my mind. I remember even the shape of the clouds that floated over us, remnants of the storm of the previous night. One was like a castle with a broken-down turret showing a staircase within; another had a fantastic resemblance to a wrecked ship with a hole in her starboard bow, two of her masts broken and one standing with some fragments of sails flapping from it, and so forth.

Then there was the general aspect of the great lake, especially at a spot where two currents met, causing little waves which seemed to fight with each other and fall backwards in curious curves. Also there were shoals of small fish, something like chub in shape, with round mouths and very white stomachs, which suddenly appeared upon the surface, jumping at invisible flies. These attracted a number of birds that resembled gulls of a light build. They had coal-black heads, white backs, greyish wings, and slightly webbed feet, pink as coral, with which they seized the small fish, uttering as they did so, a peculiar and plaintive cry that ended in a long-drawn *e-e-é*. The father of the flock, whose head seemed to be white like his back, perhaps from age, hung above them, not troubling to fish himself, but from time to time forcing one of the company to drop what he had caught, which he retrieved before it reached the water. Such are some of the small things that come back to me, though there were others too numerous and trivial to mention.

When the breeze failed us at last we were perhaps something over three miles from the shore, or rather from the great bed of reeds which at this spot grow in the shallows off the Mazitu coast to a breadth of seven or eight hundred yards, where the water becomes too deep for them. The Pongos were then about a mile and a half behind. But as the wind favoured them for a few minutes more and, having plenty of hands, they could help themselves on by paddling, when at last it died to a complete calm, the distance between us was not more than one mile. This meant that they must cover four miles of water, while we covered three.

Letting down our now useless sail and throwing it and the mast overboard to lighten the canoe, since the sky showed us that there was no more hope of wind, we began to paddle as hard as we could. Fortunately the two ladies were able to take their share in this exercise, since they had learned it upon the Lake of the Flower, where it seemed they kept a private canoe upon the other side of the

island which was used for fishing. Hans, who was still weak, we set to steer with a paddle aft, which he did in a somewhat erratic fashion.

A stern chase is proverbially a long chase, but still the enemy with their skilled rowers came up fast. When we were a mile from the reeds they were within half a mile of us, and as we tired the proportion of distance lessened. When we were two hundred yards from the reeds they were not more than fifty or sixty yards behind, and then the real struggle began.

It was short but terrible. We threw everything we could overboard, including the ballast stones at the bottom of the canoe and the heavy hide of the gorilla. This, as it proved, was fortunate, since the thing sank but slowly and the foremost Pongo boats halted a minute to recover so precious a relic, checking the others behind them, a circumstance that helped us by twenty or thirty yards.

"Over with the plant!" I said.

But Stephen, looking quite old from exhaustion and with the sweat streaming from him as he laboured at his unaccustomed paddle, gasped:

"For Heaven's sake, no, after all we have gone through to get it."

So I didn't insist; indeed there was neither time nor breath for argument.

Now we were in the reeds, for thanks to the flag which guided us, we had struck the big hippopotamus lane exactly, and the Pongos, paddling like demons, were about thirty yards behind. Thankful was I that those interesting people had never learned the use of bows and arrows, and that their spears were too heavy to throw. By now, or rather some time before, old Babemba and the Mazitu had seen us, as had our Zulu hunters. Crowds of them were wading through the shallows towards us, yelling encouragements as they came. The Zulus, too, opened a rather wild fire, with the result that one of the bullets struck our canoe and another touched the brim of my hat. A third, however, killed a Pongo, which caused some confusion in the ranks of Tusculum.

But we were done and they came on remorselessly. When their leading boat was not more than ten yards from us and we were perhaps two hundred from the shore, I drove my paddle downwards and finding that the water was less than four feet deep, shouted:

"Overboard, all, and wade. It's our last chance!"

We scrambled out of that canoe the prow of which, as I left it the last, I pushed round across the water-lane to obstruct those of the Pongo. Now I think all would have gone well had it not been for Stephen, who after he had floundered forward a few paces in the mud, bethought him of his beloved orchid. Not only did he return to try to rescue it, he also actually persuaded his friend Mavovo to accompany him. They got back to the boat and began to lift the plant out when the Pongo fell upon them, striking at them with their spears over the width of our canoe. Mavovo struck back with the weapon he had taken from the Pongo sentry at the cave mouth, and killed or wounded one of them. Then some one hurled a ballast stone at him which caught him on the side of the head and knocked him down into the water, whence he rose and reeled back, almost senseless, till some of our people got hold of him and dragged him to the shore.

So Stephen was left alone, dragging at the great orchid, till a Pongo reaching over the canoe drove a spear through his shoulder. He let go of the orchid because he must and tried to retreat. Too late! Half a dozen or more of the Pongo pushed themselves between the stern or bow of our canoe and the reeds, and waded forward to kill him. I could not help, for to tell the truth at the moment I was stuck in a mud-hole made by the hoof of a hippopotamus, while the Zulu hunters and the Mazitu were as yet too far off. Surely he must have died had it not been for the courage of the girl Hope, who, while wading shorewards a little in front of me, had turned and seen his plight. Back she came, literally bounding through the water like a leopard whose cubs are in danger.

Reaching Stephen before the Pongo she thrust herself between him and them and proceeded to address them with the utmost vigour in their own language, which of course she had learned from those of the albinos who were not mutes.

What she said I could not exactly catch because of the shouts of the advancing Mazitu. I gathered, however, that she was anathematizing them in the words of some old and potent curse that was only used by the guardians of the Holy Flower, which consigned them, body and spirit, to a dreadful doom. The effect of this malediction, which by the way neither the young lady nor her mother would repeat to me afterwards, was certainly remarkable. Those men who heard it, among them the would-be slayers of Stephen, stayed their hands and even inclined their heads towards the young priestess, as though in reverence or deprecation, and thus remained for sufficient time for her to lead the wounded Stephen out of danger. This she did wading backwards by his side and keeping her eyes fixed full upon the Pongo. It was perhaps the most curious rescue that I ever saw.

The Holy Flower, I should add, they recaptured and carried off, for I saw it departing in one of their canoes. That was the end of my orchid hunt and of the money which I hoped to make by the sale of this floral treasure. I wonder what became of it. I have good reason to believe that it was never replanted on the Island of the Flower, so perhaps it was borne back to the dim and unknown land in the depths of Africa whence the Pongo are supposed to have brought it when they migrated.

After this incident of the wounding and the rescue of Stephen by the intrepid Miss Hope, whose interest in him was already strong enough to induce her to risk her life upon his behalf, all we fugitives were dragged ashore somehow by our friends. Here, Hans, I and the ladies collapsed exhausted, though Brother John still found sufficient strength to do what he could for the injured Stephen and Mavovo.

Then the Battle of the Reeds began, and a fierce fray it was. The Pongos who were about equal in numbers to our people, came on furiously, for they were mad at the death of their god with his priest, the Motombo, of which I think news had reached them and at the carrying off of the Mother of the Flower. Springing from their canoes because the waterway was too narrow for more than one of these to travel at a time, they plunged into the reeds with the intention of wading ashore. Here their hereditary enemies, the Mazitu, attacked them under the command of old Babemba. The struggle that ensued partook more of the nature of a series of hand-to-hand fights than of a set battle. It was extraordinary to see the heads of the combatants moving among the reeds as they stabbed at each other with the great spears, till one went down. There were few wounded in that fray, for those who fell sank in the mud and water and were drowned.

On the whole the Pongo, who were operating in what was almost their native element, were getting the best of it, and driving the Mazitu back. But what decided the day against them were the guns of our Zulu hunters. Although I could not lift a rifle myself I managed to collect these men round me and to direct their fire, which proved so terrifying to the Pongos that after ten or a dozen of them had been knocked over, they began to give back sullenly and were helped into their canoes by those men who were left in charge of them.

Then at length at a signal they got out their paddles, and, still shouting curses and defiance at us, rowed away till they became but specks upon the bosom of the great lake and vanished.

Two of the canoes we captured, however, and with them six or seven Pongos. These the Mazitu wished to put to death, but at the bidding of Brother John, whose orders, it will be remembered, had the same authority in Mazitu-land as those of the king, they bound their arms and made them prisoners instead.

In about half an hour it was all over, but of the rest of that day I cannot write, as I think I fainted from utter exhaustion, which was not, perhaps, wonderful, considering all that we had undergone in the four and a half days that had elapsed since we first embarked upon the Great Lake. For constant strain, physical and mental, I recall no such four days during the whole of my adventurous life. It was indeed wonderful that we came through them alive.

The last thing I remember was the appearance of Sammy, looking very smart, in his blue cotton smock, who, now that the fighting was over, emerged like a butterfly when the sun shines after rain.

"Oh! Mr. Quatermain," he said, "I welcome you home again after arduous exertions and looking into the eyes of bloody war. All the days of absence, and a good part of the nights, too, while the mosquitoes hunted slumber, I prayed for your safety like one o'clock, and perhaps, Mr. Quatermain, that helped to do the trick, for what says poet? Those who serve and wait are almost as good as those who cook dinner."

Such were the words which reached and, oddly enough, impressed themselves upon my darkening brain. Or rather they were part of the words, excerpts from a long speech that there is no doubt Sammy had carefully prepared during our absence.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE TRUE HOLY FLOWER

When I came to myself again it was to find that I had slept fifteen or sixteen hours, for the sun of a new day was high in the heavens. I was lying in a little shelter of boughs at the foot of that mound on which we flew the flag that guided us back over the waters of the Lake Kirua. Near by was Hans consuming a gigantic meal of meat which he had cooked over a neighbouring fire. With him, to my delight, I saw Mavovo, his head bound up, though otherwise but little the worse. The stone, which probably would have killed a thin-skulled white man, had done no more than knock him stupid and break the skin of his scalp, perhaps because the force of it was lessened by the gum man's-ring which, like most Zulus of a certain age or dignity, he wore woven in his hair.

The two tents we had brought with us to the lake were pitched not far away and looked quite pretty and peaceful there in the sunlight.

Hans, who was watching me out of the corner of his eye, ran to me with a large pannikin of hot coffee which Sammy had made ready against my awakening; for they knew that my sleep was, or had become of a natural order. I drank it to the last drop, and in all my life never did I enjoy anything more. Then while I began upon some pieces of the toasted meat, I asked him what had happened.

"Not much, Baas," he answered, "except that we are alive, who should be dead. The Maam and the Missie are still asleep in that tent, or at least the Maam is, for the Missie is helping Dogeetah, her father, to nurse Baas Stephen, who has an ugly wound. The Pongos have gone and I think will not return, for they have had enough of the white man's guns. The Mazitu have buried those of their dead whom they could recover, and have sent their wounded, of whom there were only six, back to Beza Town on litters. That is all, Baas."

Then while I washed, and never did I need a bath more, and put on my underclothes, in which I had swum on the night of the killing of the Motombo, that Hans had wrung out and dried in the sun, I asked that worthy how he was after his adventures.

"Oh! well enough, Baas," he answered, "now that my stomach is full, except that my hands and wrists are sore with crawling along the ground like a babyan (baboon), and that I cannot get the stink of that god's skin out of my nose. Oh! you don't know what it was: if I had been a white man it would have killed me. But, Baas, perhaps you did well to take drunken old Hans with you on this journey after all, for I was clever about the little gun, wasn't I? Also about your swimming of the Crocodile Water, though it is true that the sign of the spider and the moth which your reverend father sent, taught me that. And now we have got back safe, except for the Mazitu, Jerry, who doesn't matter, for there are plenty more like him, and the wound in Baas Stephen's shoulder, and that heavy flower which he thought better than brandy."

"Yes, Hans," I said, "I did well to take you and you are clever, for had it not been for you, we should now be cooked and eaten in Pongo-land. I thank you for your help, old friend. But, Hans, another time please sew up the holes in your waistcoat pocket. Four caps wasn't much, Hans."

"No, Baas, but it was enough; as they were all good ones. If there had been forty you could not have done much more. Oh! your reverend father knew all that" (my departed parent had become a kind of patron saint to Hans) "and did not wish this poor old Hottentot to have more to carry than was needed. He knew you wouldn't miss, Baas, and that there were only one god, one devil, and one man waiting to be killed."

I laughed, for Hans's way of putting things was certainly original, and having got on my coat, went to see Stephen. At the door of the tent I met Brother John, whose shoulder was dreadfully sore from the rubbing of the orchid stretcher, as were his hands with paddling, but who otherwise was well enough and of course supremely happy.

He told me that he had cleansed and sewn up Stephen's wound, which appeared to be doing well, although the spear had pierced right through the shoulder, luckily without cutting any artery. So I went in to see the patient and found him cheerful enough, though weak from weariness and loss of blood, with Miss Hope feeding him with broth from a wooden native spoon. I didn't stop very long, especially after he got on to the subject of the lost orchid, about which he began to show signs of excitement. This I allayed as well as I could by telling him that I had preserved a pod of the seed, news at which he was delighted.

"There!" he said. "To think that you, Allan, should have remembered to take that precaution when I, an orchidist, forgot all about it!"

"Ah! my boy," I answered, "I have lived long enough to learn never to leave anything behind that I can possibly carry away. Also, although not an orchidist, it occurred to me that there are more ways of propagating a plant than from the original root, which generally won't go into one's pocket."

Then he began to give me elaborate instructions as to the preservation of the seed-pod in a perfectly dry and air-tight tin box, etc., at which point Miss Hope unceremoniously bundled me out of the tent.

That afternoon we held a conference at which it was agreed that we should begin our return journey to Beza Town at once, as the place where we were camped was very malarious and there was always a risk of the Pongo paying us another visit.

So a litter was made with a mat stretched over it in which Stephen could be carried, since fortunately there were plenty of bearers, and our other simple preparations were quickly completed. Mrs. Eversley and Hope were mounted on the two donkeys; Brother John, whose hurt leg showed signs of renewed weakness, rode his white ox, which was now quite fat again; the wounded hero, Stephen, as I have said, was carried; and I walked, comparing notes with old Babemba on the Pongo, their manners, which I am bound to say were good, and their customs, that, as the saying goes, were "simply beastly."

How delighted that ancient warrior was to hear again about the sacred cave, the Crocodile Water, the Mountain Forest and its terrible god, of the death of which and of the Motombo he made me tell him the story three times over. At the conclusion of the third recital he said quietly:

"My lord Macumazana, you are a great man, and I am glad to have lived if only to know you. No one else could have done these deeds."

Of course I was complimented, but felt bound to point out Hans's share in our joint achievement.

"Yes, yes," he answered, "the Spotted Snake, Inhlatu, has the cunning to scheme, but you have the power to do, and what is the use of a brain to plot without the arm to strike? The two do not go together because the plotter is not a striker. His mind is different. If the snake had the strength and brain of the elephant, and the fierce courage of the buffalo, soon there would be but one creature left in the world. But the Maker of all things knew this and kept them separate, my lord Macumazana."

I thought, and still think, that there was a great deal of wisdom in this remark, simple as it seems. Oh! surely many of these savages whom we white men despise, are no fools.

After about an hour's march we camped till the moon rose which it did at ten o'clock, when we went on again till near dawn, as it was thought better that Stephen should travel in the cool of the night. I remember that our cavalcade, escorted before, behind and on either flank by the Mazitu troops with their tall spears, looked picturesque and even imposing as it wound over those wide downs in the lovely and peaceful light of the moon.

There is no need for me to set out the details of the rest of our journey, which was not marked by any incident of importance.

Stephen bore it very well, and Brother John, who was one of the best doctors I ever met, gave good reports of him, but I noted that he did not seem to get any stronger, although he ate plenty of food. Also, Miss Hope, who nursed him, for her mother seemed to have no taste that way, informed me that he slept but little, as indeed I found out for myself.

"O Allan," she said, just before we reached Beza Town, "Stephen, your son" (she used to call him my son, I don't know why) "is sick. The father says it is only the spear-hurt, but I tell you it is more than the spear-hurt. He is sick in himself," and the tears that filled her grey eyes showed me that she spoke what she believed. As a matter of fact she was right, for on the night after we reached the town, Stephen was seized with an attack of some bad form of African fever, which in his weak state nearly cost him his life, contracted, no doubt, at that unhealthy Crocodile Water.

Our reception at Beza was most imposing, for the whole population, headed by old Bausi himself, came out to meet us with loud shouts of welcome, from which we had to ask them to desist for Stephen's sake.

So in the end we got back to our huts with gratitude of heart. Indeed, we should have been very happy there for a while, had it not been for our anxiety about Stephen. But it is always thus in the world; who was ever allowed to eat his pot of honey without finding a fly or perhaps a cockroach in his mouth?

In all, Stephen was really ill for about a month. On the tenth day after our arrival at Beza, according to my diary, which, having little else to do, I entered up fully at this time, we thought that he would surely die. Even Brother John, who attended him with the most constant skill, and who had ample quinine and other drugs at his command, for these we had brought with us from Durban in plenty, gave up the case. Day and night the poor fellow raved and always about that confounded orchid, the loss of which seemed to weigh upon his mind as though it were a whole sackful of unrepented crimes.

I really think that he owed his life to a subterfuge, or rather to a bold invention of Hope's. One evening, when he was at his very worst and going on like a mad creature about the lost plant—I was present in the hut at the time alone with him and her—she took his hand and pointing to a perfectly open space on the floor, said:

"Look, O Stephen, the flower has been brought back."

He stared and stared, and then to my amazement answered:

"By Jove, so it has! But those beggars have broken off all the blooms except one."

"Yes," she echoed, "but one remains and it is the finest of them all."

After this he went quietly to sleep and slept for twelve hours, then took some food and slept again and, what is more, his temperature went down to, or a little below, normal. When he finally woke up, as it chanced, I was again present in the hut with Hope, who was standing on the spot which she had persuaded him was occupied by the orchid. He stared at this spot and he stared at her—he could not see, for I was behind him—then said in a weak voice:

"Didn't you tell me, Miss Hope, that the plant was where you are and that the most beautiful of the flowers was left?"

I wondered what on earth her answer would be. However, she rose to the occasion.

"O Stephen," she replied, in her soft voice and speaking in a way so natural that it freed her words from any boldness, "it is here, for am I not its child"—her native appellation, it will be remembered, was "Child of the Flower." "And the fairest of the flowers is here, too, for I am that Flower which you found in the island of the lake. O Stephen, I pray you to trouble no more about a lost plant of which you have seed in plenty, but make thanks that you still live and that through you my mother and I still live, who, if you had died, would weep our eyes away."

"Through me," he answered. "You mean through Allan and Hans. Also it was you who saved my life there in the water. Oh! I remember it all now. You are right, Hope; although I didn't know it, you are the true Holy Flower that I saw."

She ran to him and kneeling by his side, gave him her hand, which he pressed to his pale lips.

Then I sneaked out of that hut and left them to discuss the lost flower that was found again. It was a pretty scene, and one that to my mind gave a sort of spiritual meaning to the whole of an otherwise rather insane quest. He sought an ideal flower, he found—the love of his life.

After this, Stephen recovered rapidly, for such love is the best of medicines—if it be returned.

I don't know what passed between the pair and Brother John and his wife, for I never asked. But I noted that from this day forward they began to treat him as a son. The new relationship between Stephen and Hope seemed to be tacitly accepted without discussion. Even the natives accepted it, for old Mavovo asked me when they were going to be married and how many cows Stephen had promised to pay Brother John for such a beautiful wife. "It ought to be a large herd," he said, "and of a big breed of cattle."

Sammy, too, alluded to the young lady in conversation with me, as "Mr. Somers's affianced spouse." Only Hans said nothing. Such a trivial matter as marrying and giving in marriage did not interest him. Or, perhaps, he looked upon the affair as a foregone conclusion and therefore unworthy of comment.

We stayed at Bausi's kraal for a full month longer whilst Stephen recovered his strength. I grew thoroughly bored with the place and so did Mavovo and the Zulus, but Brother John and his wife did not seem to mind. Mrs. Eversley was a passive creature, quite content to take things as they came and after so long an absence from civilization, to bide a little longer among savages. Also she had her beloved John, at whom she would sit and gaze by the hour like a cat sometimes does at a person to whom it is attached. Indeed, when she spoke to him, her voice seemed to me to resemble a kind of blissful purr. I think it made the old boy rather fidgety sometimes, for after an hour or two of it he would rise and go to hunt for butterflies.

To tell the truth, the situation got a little on my nerves at last, for wherever I looked I seemed to see there Stephen and Hope making love to each other, or Brother John and his wife admiring each other, which didn't leave me much spare conversation. Evidently they thought that Mavovo, Hans, Sammy, Bausi, Babemba and Co. were enough for me—that is, if they reflected on the matter at all. So they were, in a sense, for the Zulu hunters began to get out of hand in the midst of this idleness and plenty, eating too much, drinking too much native beer, smoking too much of the intoxicating *dakka*, a mischievous kind of hemp, and making too much love to the Mazitu women, which of course resulted in the usual rows that I had to settle.

At last I struck and said that we must move on as Stephen was now fit to travel.

"Quite so," said Brother John, mildly. "What have you arranged, Allan?"

With some irritation, for I hated that sentence of Brother John's, I replied that I had arranged nothing, but that as none of them seemed to have any suggestions to make, I would go out and talk the matter over with Hans and Mavovo, which I did.

I need not chronicle the results of our conference since other arrangements were being made for us at which I little guessed.

It all came very suddenly, as great things in the lives of men and nations sometimes do. Although the Mazitu were of the Zulu family, their military organization had none of the Zulu thoroughness. For instance, when I remonstrated with Bausi and old Babemba as to their not keeping up a proper system of outposts and intelligence, they laughed at me and answered that they never had been attacked and now that the Pongo had learnt a lesson, were never likely to be.

By the way, I see that I have not yet mentioned that at Brother John's request those Pongos who had been taken prisoners at the Battle of the Reeds were conducted to the shores of the lake, given one of the captured canoes and told that they might return to their own happy land. To our astonishment about three weeks later they reappeared at Beza Town with this story.

They said that they had crossed the lake and found Rica still standing, but utterly deserted. They then wandered through the country and even explored the Motombo's cave. There they discovered the remains of the Motombo, still crouched upon his platform, but nothing more. In one hut of a distant village, however, they came across an old and dying woman who informed them with her last breath that the Pongos, frightened by the iron tubes that vomited death and in obedience to some prophecy, "had all gone back whence they came in the beginning," taking with them the recaptured "Holy Flower." She had been left with a supply of food because she was too weak to travel. So, perhaps, that flower grows again in some unknown place in Africa, but its worshippers will have to provide themselves with another god of the forest, another Mother of the Flower, and another high-priest to fill the office of the late Motombo.

These Pongo prisoners, having now no home, and not knowing where their people had gone except that it was "towards the north," asked for leave to settle among the Mazitu, which was granted them. Their story confirmed me in my opinion that Pongo-land is not really an island, but is connected on the further side with the continent by some ridge or swamp. If we had been obliged to stop much longer among the Mazitu, I would have satisfied myself as to this matter by going to look. But that chance never came to me until some years later when, under curious circumstances, I was again destined to visit this part of Africa.

To return to my story. On the day following this discussion as to our departure we all breakfasted very early as there was a great deal to be done. There was a dense mist that morning such as in these Mazitu uplands often precedes high, hot wind from the north at this season of the year, so dense indeed that it was impossible to see for more than a few yards. I suppose that this mist comes up from the great lake in certain conditions of the weather. We had just finished our breakfast and rather languidly, for the thick, sultry air left me unenergetic, I told one of the Zulus to see that the two donkeys and the white ox which I had caused to be brought into the town in view of our near departure and tied up by our huts, were properly fed. Then I went to inspect all the rifles and ammunition, which Hans had got out to be checked and overhauled. It was at this moment that I heard a far-away and unaccustomed sound, and asked Hans what he thought it was.

"A gun, Baas," he answered anxiously.

Well might he be anxious, for as we both knew, no one in the neighbourhood had guns except ourselves, and all ours were accounted for. It is true that we had promised to give the majority of those we had taken from the slavers to Bausi when we went away, and that I had been instructing some of his best soldiers in the use of them, but not one of these had as yet been left in their possession.

I stepped to a gate in the fence and ordered the sentry there to run to Bausi and Babemba and make report and inquiries, also to pray them to summon all the soldiers, of whom, as it happened, there were at the time not more than three hundred in the town. As perfect peace prevailed, the rest, according to their custom, had been allowed to go to their villages and attend to their crops. Then, possessed by a rather undefined nervousness, at which the others were inclined to laugh, I caused the Zulus to arm and generally make a few arrangements to meet any unforeseen crisis. This done I sat down to reflect what would be the best course to take if we should happen to be attacked by a large force in that straggling native town, of which I had often studied all the strategic possibilities. When I had come to my own conclusion I asked Hans and Mavovo what they thought, and found that they agreed with me that the only defensible place was outside the town where the road to the south gate ran down to a rocky wooded ridge with somewhat steep flanks. It may be remembered that it was by this road and over this ridge that Brother John had appeared on his white ox when we were about to be shot to death with arrows at the posts in the market-place.

Whilst we were still talking two of the Mazitu captains appeared, running hard and dragging between them a wounded herdsman, who had evidently been hit in the arm by a bullet.

This was his story. That he and two other boys were out herding the king's cattle about half a mile to the north of the town, when suddenly there appeared a great number of men dressed in white robes, all of whom were armed with guns. These men, of whom he thought there must be three or four hundred, began to take the cattle and seeing the three herds, fired on them, wounding him and killing his two companions. He then ran for his life and brought the news. He added that one of the men had called after him to tell the white people that they had come to kill them and the Mazitu who were their friends and to take away the white women.

"Hassan-ben-Mohammed and his slavers!" I said, as Babemba appeared at the head of a number of soldiers, crying out:

"The slave-dealing Arabs are here, lord Macumazana. They have crept on us through the mist. A herald of theirs has come to the north gate demanding that we should give up you white people and your servants, and with you a hundred young men and a hundred young women to be sold as slaves. If we do not do this they say that they will kill all of us save the unmarried boys and girls, and that you white people they will take and put to death by burning, keeping only the two women alive. One Hassan sends this message."

"Indeed," I answered quietly, for in this fix I grew quite cool as was usual with me. "And does Bausi mean to give us up?"

"How can Bausi give up Dogeetah who is his blood brother, and you, his friend?" exclaimed the old general, indignantly. "Bausi sends me to his brother Dogeetah that he may receive the orders of the white man's wisdom, spoken through your mouth, lord Macumazana."

"Then there's a good spirit in Bausi," I replied, "and these are Dogeetah's orders spoken through my mouth. Go to Hassan's messengers and ask him whether he remembers a certain letter which two white men left for him outside their camp in a cleft stick. Tell him that the time has now come for those white men to fulfil the promise they made in that letter and that before to-morrow he will be hanging on a tree. Then, Babemba, gather your soldiers and hold the north gate of the town for as long as you can, defending it with bows and arrows. Afterwards retreat through the town, joining us among the trees on the rocky slope that is opposite the south gate. Bid some of your men clear the town of all the aged and women and children and let them pass though the south gate and take refuge in the wooded country beyond the slope. Let them not tarry. Let them go at once. Do you understand?"

"I understand everything, lord Macumazana. The words of Dogeetah shall be obeyed. Oh! would that we had listened to you and kept a better watch!"

He rushed off, running like a young man and shouting orders as he went.

"Now," I said, "we must be moving."

We collected all the rifles and ammunition, with some other things, I am sure I forget what they were, and with the help of a few guards whom Babemba had left outside our gate started through the town, leading with us the two donkeys and the white ox. I remember by an afterthought, telling Sammy, who was looking very uncomfortable, to return to the huts and fetch some blankets and a couple of iron cooking-pots which might become necessities to us.

"Oh! Mr. Quatermain," he answered, "I will obey you, though with fear and trembling."

He went and when a few hours afterwards I noted that he had never reappeared, I came to the conclusion, with a sigh, for I was very fond of Sammy in a way, that he had fallen into trouble and been killed. Probably, I thought, "his fear and trembling" had overcome his reason and caused him to run in the wrong direction with the cooking-pots.

The first part of our march through the town was easy enough, but after we had crossed the market-place and emerged into the narrow way that ran between many lines of huts to the south gate it became more difficult, since this path was already crowded with hundreds of terrified fugitives, old people, sick being carried, little boys, girls, and women with infants at the breast. It was impossible to control these poor folk; all we could do was to fight our way through them. However, we got out at last and climbing the slope, took up the best position we could on and just beneath its crest where the trees and scattered boulders gave us very fair cover, which we improved upon in every way feasible in the time at our disposal, by building little breastworks of stone and so forth. The fugitives who had accompanied us, and those who followed, a multitude in all, did not stop here, but flowed on along the road and vanished into the wooded country behind.

I suggested to Brother John that he should take his wife and daughter and the three beasts and go with them. He seemed inclined to accept the idea, needless to say for their sakes, not for his own, for he was a very fearless old fellow. But the two ladies utterly refused to budge. Hope said that she would stop with Stephen, and her mother declared that she had every confidence in me and preferred to remain where she was. Then I suggested that Stephen should go too, but at this he grew so angry that I dropped the subject.

So in the end we established them in a pleasant little hollow by a spring just over the crest of the rise, where unless our flank were turned or we were rushed, they would be out of the reach of bullets. Moreover, without saying anything more we gave to each of them a double-barrelled and loaded pistol.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE BATTLE OF THE GATE

By now heavy firing had begun at the north gate of the town, accompanied by much shouting. The mist was still too thick to enable us to see anything at first. But shortly after the commencement of the firing a strong, hot wind, which always followed these mists, got up and gradually gathered to a gale, blowing away the vapours. Then from the top of the crest, Hans, who had climbed a tree there, reported that the Arabs were advancing on the north gate, firing as they came, and that the Mazitu were replying with their bows and arrows from behind the palisade that surrounded the town. This palisade, I should state, consisted of an earthen bank on the top of which tree trunks were set close together. Many of these had struck in that fertile soil, so that in general appearance this protective work resembled a huge live fence, on the outer and inner side of which grew great masses of prickly pear and tall, finger-like cacti. A while afterwards Hans reported that the Mazitu were retreating and a few minutes later they began to arrive through the south gate, bringing several wounded with them. Their captain said that they could not stand against the fire of the guns and had determined to abandon the town and make the best fight they could upon the ridge.

A little later the rest of the Mazitu came, driving before them all the non-combatants who remained in the town. With these was King Bausi, in a terrible state of excitement.

"Was I not wise, Macumazana," he shouted, "to fear the slave-traders and their guns? Now they have come to kill those who are old and to take the young away in their gangs to sell them."

"Yes, King," I could not help answering, "you were wise. But if you had done what I said and kept a better look-out Hassan could not have crept on you like a leopard on a goat."

"It is true," he groaned; "but who knows the taste of a fruit till he has bitten it?"

Then he went to see to the disposal of his soldiers along the ridge, placing, by my advice, the most of them at each end of the line to frustrate any attempt to out-flank us. We, for our part, busied ourselves in serving out those guns which we had taken in the first fight with the slavers to the thirty or forty picked men whom I had been instructing in the use of firearms. If they did not do much damage, at least, I thought, they could make a noise and impress the enemy with the idea that we were well armed.

Ten minutes or so later Babemba arrived with about fifty men, all the Mazitu soldiers who were left in the town. He reported that he had held the north gate as long as he could in order to gain time, and that the Arabs were breaking it in. I begged him to order the soldiers to pile up stones as a defence against the bullets and to lie down behind them. This he went to do.

Then, after a pause, we saw a large body of the Arabs who had effected an entry, advancing down the central street towards us. Some of them had spears as well as guns, on which they carried a dozen or so of human heads cut from the Mazitus who had been killed, waving them aloft and shouting in triumph. It was a sickening sight, and one that made me grind my teeth with rage. Also I could not help reflecting that ere long our heads might be upon those spears. Well, if the worst came to the worst I was determined that I would not be taken alive to be burned in a slow fire or pinned over an ant-heap, a point upon which the others agreed with me, though poor Brother John had scruples as to suicide, even in despair.

It was just then that I missed Hans and asked where he had gone. Somebody said that he thought he had seen him running away, whereon Mavovo, who was growing excited, called out:

"Ah! Spotted Snake has sought his hole. Snakes hiss, but they do not charge."

"No, but sometimes they bite," I answered, for I could not believe that Hans had showed the white feather. However, he was gone and clearly we were in no state to send to look for him.

Now our hope was that the slavers, flushed with victory, would advance across the open ground of the market-place, which we could sweep with our fire from our position on the ridge. This, indeed, they began to do, whereon, without orders, the Mazitu to whom we had given the guns, to my fury and dismay, commenced to blaze away at a range of about four hundred yards, and after a good deal of firing managed to kill or wound two or three men. Then the Arabs, seeing their danger, retreated and, after a pause, renewed their advance in two bodies. This time, however, they followed the streets of huts that were built thickly between the outer palisade of the town and the market-place, which, as it had been designed to hold cattle in time of need, was also surrounded with a wooden fence strong enough to resist the rush of horned beasts. On that day, I should add, as the Mazitu never dreamed of being attacked, all their stock were grazing on some distant veldt. In this space between the two fences were many hundreds of huts, wattle and grass built, but for the most part roofed with palm leaves, for here, in their separate quarters, dwelt the great majority of the inhabitants of Beza Town, of which the northern part was occupied by the king, the nobles and the captains. This ring of huts, which entirely surrounded the market-place except at the two gateways, may have been about a hundred and twenty yards in width.

Down the paths between these huts, both on the eastern and the western side, advanced the Arabs and half-breeds, of whom there appeared to be about four hundred, all armed with guns and doubtless trained to fighting. It was a terrible force for us to face, seeing that although we may have had nearly as many men, our guns did not total more than fifty, and most of those who held them were quite unused to the management of firearms.

Soon the Arabs began to open fire on us from behind the huts, and a very accurate fire it was, as our casualties quickly showed, notwithstanding the stone *schanzes* we had constructed. The worst feature of the thing also was that we could not reply with any effect, as our assailants, who gradually worked nearer, were effectively screened by the huts, and we had not enough guns to attempt organised volley firing. Although I tried to keep a cheerful countenance I confess that I began to fear the worst and even to wonder if we could possibly attempt to retreat. This idea was abandoned, however, since the Arabs would certainly overtake and shoot us down.

One thing I did. I persuaded Babemba to send about fifty men to build up the southern gate, which was made of trunks of trees and opened outwards, with earth and the big stones that lay about in plenty. While this was being done quickly, for the Mazitu soldiers worked at the task like demons and, being sheltered by the palisade, could not be shot, all of a sudden I caught sight of four or five

wisps of smoke that arose in quick succession at the north end of the town and were instantly followed by as many bursts of flame which leapt towards us in the strong wind.

Someone was firing Beza Town! In less than an hour the flames, driven by the gale through hundreds of huts made dry as tinder by the heat, would reduce Beza to a heap of ashes. It was inevitable, nothing could save the place! For an instant I thought that the Arabs must have done this thing. Then, seeing that new fires continually arose in different places, I understood that no Arabs, but a friend or friends were at work, who had conceived the idea of *destroying the Arabs with fire*.

My mind flew to Sammy. Without doubt Sammy had stayed behind to carry out this terrible and masterly scheme, of which I am sure none of the Mazitu would have thought, since it involved the absolute destruction of their homes and property. Sammy, at whom we had always mocked, was, after all, a great man, prepared to perish in the flames in order to save his friends!

Babemba rushed up, pointing with a spear to the rising fire. Now my inspiration came.

"Take all your men," I said, "except those who are armed with guns. Divide them, encircle the town, guard the north gate, though I think none can win back through the flames, and if any of the Arabs succeed in breaking through the palisade, kill them."

"It shall be done," shouted Babemba, "but oh! for the town of Beza where I was born! Oh! for the town of Beza!"

"Drat the town of Beza!" I holloaed after him, or rather its native equivalent. "It is of all our lives that I'm thinking."

Three minutes later the Mazitu, divided into two bodies, were running like hares to encircle the town, and though a few were shot as they descended the slope, the most of them gained the shelter of the palisade in safety, and there at intervals halted by sections, for Babemba managed the matter very well.

Now only we white people, with the Zulu hunters under Mavovo, of whom there were twelve in all, and the Mazitu armed with guns, numbering about thirty, were left upon the slope.

For a little while the Arabs did not seem to realise what had happened, but engaged themselves in peppering at the Mazitu, who, I think, they concluded were in full flight. Presently, however, they either heard or saw.

Oh! what a hubbub ensued. All the four hundred of them began to shout at once. Some of them ran to the palisade and began to climb it, but as they reached the top of the fence were pinned by the Mazitu arrows and fell backwards, while a few who got over became entangled in the prickly pears on the further side and were promptly speared. Giving up this attempt, they rushed back along the lane with the intention of escaping at the north-gate. But before ever they reached the head of the market-place the roaring, wind-swept flames, leaping from hut to hut, had barred their path. They could not face that awful furnace.

Now they took another counsel and in a great confused body charged down the market-place to break out at the south gate, and our turn came. How we raked them as they sped across the open, an easy mark! I know that I fired as fast as I could using two rifles, swearing the while at Hans because he was not there to load for me. Stephen was better off in this respect, for, looking round, to my astonishment I saw Hope, who had left her mother on the other side of the hill, in the act of capping his second gun. I should explain that during our stay in Beza Town we had taught her how to use a rifle.

I called to him to send her away, but again she would not go, even after a bullet had pierced her dress.

Still, all our shooting could not stop that rush of men, made desperate by the fear of a fiery death. Leaving many stretched out behind them, the first of the Arabs drew near to the south gate.

"My father," said Mavovo in my ear, "now the real fighting is going to begin. The gate will soon be down. We must be the gate."

I nodded, for if the Arabs once got through, there were enough of them left to wipe us out five times over. Indeed, I do not suppose that up to this time they had actually lost more than forty men. A few words explained the situation to Stephen and Brother John, whom I told to take his daughter to her mother and wait there with them. The Mazitu I ordered to throw down their guns, for if they kept these I was sure they would shoot some of us, and to accompany us, bringing their spears only.

Then we rushed down the slope and took up our position in a little open space in front of the gate, that now was tottering to its fall beneath the blows and draggings of the Arabs. At this time the sight was terrible and magnificent, for the flames had got hold of the two half-circles of huts that embraced the market-place, and, fanned by the blast, were rushing towards us like a thing alive. Above us swept a great pall of smoke in which floated flakes of fire, so thick that it hid the sky, though fortunately the wind did not suffer it to sink and choke us. The sounds also were almost inconceivable, for to the crackling roar of the conflagration as it devoured hut after hut, were added the coarse, yelling voices of the half-breed Arabs, as in mingled rage and terror they tore at the gateway or each other, and the reports of the guns which many of them were still firing, half at hazard.

We formed up before the gate, the Zulus with Stephen and myself in front and the thirty picked Mazitu, commanded by no less a person than Bausi, the king, behind. We had not long to wait, for presently down the thing came and over it and the mound of earth and stones we had built beyond, began to pour a mob of white-robed and turbaned men whose mixed and tumultuous exit somehow reminded me of the pips and pulp being squeezed out of a grenadilla fruit.

I gave the word, and we fired into that packed mass with terrible effect. Really I think that each bullet must have brought down two or three of them. Then, at a command from Mavovo, the Zulus threw down their guns and charged with their broad spears. Stephen, who had got hold of an assegai somehow, went with them, firing a Colt's revolver as he ran, while at their backs came Bausi and his thirty tall Mazitu.

I will confess at once that I did not join in this terrific onslaught. I felt that I had not weight enough for a scrimmage of the sort, also that I should perhaps be better employed using my wits outside and watching for a chance to be of service, like a half-back in a football field, than in getting my brains knocked out in a general row. Or mayhap my heart failed me and I was afraid. I dare say, for I have never pretended to great courage. At any rate, I stopped outside and shot whenever I got the chance, not without effect, filling a humble but perhaps a useful part.

It was really magnificent, that fray. How those Zulus did go in. For quite a long while they held the narrow gateway and the mound against all the howling, thrusting mob, much as the Roman called Horatius and his two friends held the entrance to some bridge or other long ago at Rome against a great force of I forget whom. They shouted their Zulu battle-cry of *Laba! Laba!* that of their regiment, I suppose, for most of them were men of about the same age, and stabbed and fought and struggled and went down one by one.

Back the rest of them were swept; then, led by Mavovo, Stephen and Bausi, charged again, reinforced with the thirty Mazitu. Now the tongues of flame met almost over them, the growing fence of prickly pear and cacti withered and crackled, and still they fought

on beneath that arch of fire.

Back they were driven again by the mere weight of numbers. I saw Mavovo stab a man and go down. He rose and stabbed another, then fell again for he was hard hit.

Two Arabs rushed to kill him. I shot them both with a right and left, for fortunately my rifle was just reloaded. He rose once more and killed a third man. Stephen came to his support and grappling with an Arab, dashed his head against the gate-post so that he fell. Old Bausi, panting like a grampus, plunged in with his remaining Mazitu and the combatants became so confused in the dark gloom of the overhanging smoke that I could scarcely tell one from the other. Yet the maddened Arabs were winning, as they must, for how could our small and ever-lessening company stand against their rush?

We were in a little circle now of which somehow I found myself the centre, and they were attacking us on all sides. Stephen got a knock on the head from the butt end of a gun, and tumbled against me, nearly upsetting me. As I recovered myself I looked round in despair.

Now it was that I saw a very welcome sight, namely Hans, yes, the lost Hans himself, with his filthy hat whereof I noticed even then the frayed ostrich feathers were smouldering, hanging by a leather strap at the back of his head. He was shambling along in a sly and silent sort of way, but at a great rate with his mouth open, beckoning over his shoulder, and behind him came about one hundred and fifty Mazitu.

Those Mazitu soon put another complexion upon the affair, for charging with a roar, they drove back the Arabs, who had no space to develop their line, straight into the jaws of that burning hell. A little later the rest of the Mazitu returned with Babemba and finished the job. Only quite a few of the Arabs got out and were captured after they had thrown down their guns. The rest retreated into the centre of the market-place, whither our people followed them. In this crisis the blood of these Mazitu told, and they stuck to the enemy as Zulus themselves would certainly have done.

It was over! Great Heaven! it was over, and we began to count our losses. Four of the Zulus were dead and two others were badly wounded—no, three, including Mavovo. They brought him to me leaning on the shoulder of Babemba and another Mazitu captain. He was a shocking sight, for he was shot in three places, and badly cut and battered as well. He looked at me a little while, breathing heavily, then spoke.

"It was a very good fight, my father," he said. "Of all that I have fought I can remember none better, although I have been in far greater battles, which is well as it is my last. I foreknew it, my father, for though I never told it you, the first death lot that I drew down yonder in Durban was my own. Take back the gun you gave me, my father. You did but lend it me for a little while, as I said to you. Now I go to the Underworld to join the spirits of my ancestors and of those who have fallen at my side in many wars, and of those women who bore my children. I shall have a tale to tell them there, my father, and together we will wait for you—till you, too, die in war!"

Then he lifted up his arm from the neck of Babemba, and saluted me with a loud cry of *Baba! Inkosi!* giving me certain great titles which I will not set down, and having done so sank to the earth.

I sent one of the Mazitu to fetch Brother John, who arrived presently with his wife and daughter. He examined Mavovo and told him straight out that nothing could help him except prayer.

"Make no prayers for me, Dogeetah," said the old heathen; "I have followed my star," (i.e. lived according to my lights) "and am ready to eat the fruit that I have planted. Or if the tree prove barren, then to drink of its sap and sleep."

Waving Brother John aside he beckoned to Stephen.

"O Wazela!" he said, "you fought very well in that fight; if you go on as you have begun in time you will make a warrior of whom the Daughter of the Flower and her children will sing songs after you have come to join me, your friend. Meanwhile, farewell! Take this assegai of mine and clean it not, that the red rust thereon may put you in mind of Mavovo, the old Zulu doctor and captain with whom you stood side by side in the Battle of the Gate, when, as though they were winter grass, the fire burnt up the white-robed thieves of men who could not pass our spears."

Then he waved his hand again, and Stephen stepped aside muttering something, for he and Mavovo had been very intimate and his voice choked in his throat with grief. Now the old Zulu's glazing eye fell upon Hans, who was sneaking about, I think with a view of finding an opportunity of bidding him a last good-bye.

"Ah! Spotted Snake," he cried, "so you have come out of your hole now that the fire has passed it, to eat the burnt frogs in the cinders. It is a pity that you who are so clever should be a coward, since our lord Macumazana needed one to load for him on the hill and would have killed more of the hyenas had you been there."

"Yes, Spotted Snake, it is so," echoed an indignant chorus of the other Zulus, while Stephen and I and even the mild Brother John looked at him reproachfully.

Now Hans, who generally was as patient under affront as a Jew, for once lost his temper. He dashed his hat upon the ground, and danced on it; he spat towards the surviving Zulu hunters; he even vituperated the dying Mavovo.

"O son of a fool!" he said, "you pretend that you can see what is hid from other men, but I tell you that there is a lying spirit in your lips. You called me a coward because I am not big and strong as you were, and cannot hold an ox by the horns, but at least there is more brain in my stomach than in all your head. Where would all of you be now had it not been for poor Spotted Snake the 'coward,' who twice this day has saved every one of you, except those whom the Baas's father, the reverend Predikant, has marked upon the forehead to come and join him in a place that is even hotter and brighter than that burning town?"

Now we looked at Hans, wondering what he meant about saving us twice, and Mavovo said:

"Speak on quickly, O Spotted Snake, for I would hear the end of your story. How did you help us in your hole?"

Hans began to grub about in his pockets, from which finally he produced a match-box wherein there remained but one match.

"With this," he said. "Oh! could none of you see that the men of Hassan had all walked into a trap? Did none of you know that fire burns thatched houses, and that a strong wind drives it fast and far? While you sat there upon the hill with your heads together, like sheep waiting to be killed, I crept away among the bushes and went about my business. I said nothing to any of you, not even to the Baas, lest he should answer me, 'No, Hans, there may be an old woman sick in one of those huts and therefore you must not fire them.' In such matters who does not know that white people are fools, even the best of them, and in fact there were several old

women, for I saw them running for the gateway. Well, I crept up by the green fence which I knew would not burn and I came to the north gate. There was an Arab sentry left there to watch.

"He fired at me, look! Well for Hans his mother bore him short"; and he pointed to a hole in the filthy hat. "Then before that Arab could load again, poor coward Hans got his knife into him from behind. Look!" and he produced a big blade, which was such as butchers use, from his belt and showed it to us. "After that it was easy, since fire is a wonderful thing. You make it small and it grows big of itself, like a child, and never gets tired, and is always hungry, and runs fast as a horse. I lit six of them where they would burn quickest. Then I saved the last match, since we have few left, and came through the gate before the fire ate me up; me, its father, me the Sower of the Red Seed!"

We stared at the old Hottentot in admiration, even Mavovo lifted his dying head and stared. But Hans, whose annoyance had now evaporated, went on in a jog-trot mechanical voice:

"As I was returning to find the Baas, if he still lived, the heat of the fire forced me to the high ground to the west of the fence, so that I saw what was happening at the south gate, and that the Arab men must break through there because you who held it were so few. So I ran down to Babemba and the other captains very quickly, telling them there was no need to guard the fence any more, and that they must get to the south gate and help you, since otherwise you would all be killed, and they, too, would be killed afterwards. Babemba listened to me and started sending out messengers to collect the others and we got here just in time. Such is the hole I hid in during the Battle of the Gate, O Mavovo. That is all the story which I pray that you will tell to the Baas's reverend father, the Predikant, presently, for I am sure that it will please him to learn that he did not teach me to be wise and help all men and always to look after the Baas Allan, to no purpose. Still, I am sorry that I wasted so many matches, for where shall we get any more now that the camp is burnt?" and he gazed ruefully at the all but empty box.

Mavovo spoke once more in a slow, gasping voice.

"Never again," he said, addressing Hans, "shall you be called Spotted Snake, O little yellow man who are so great and white of heart. Behold! I give you a new name, by which you shall be known with honour from generation to generation. It is 'Light in Darkness.' It is 'Lord of the Fire.'"

Then he closed his eyes and fell back insensible. Within a few minutes he was dead. But those high names with which he christened Hans with his dying breath, clung to the old Hottentot for all his days. Indeed from that day forward no native would ever have ventured to call him by any other. Among them, far and wide, they became his titles of honour.

The roar of the flames grew less and the tumult within their fiery circle died away. For now the Mazitu were returning from the last fight in the market-place, if fight it could be called, bearing in their arms great bundles of the guns which they had collected from the dead Arabs, most of whom had thrown down their weapons in a last wild effort to escape. But between the spears of the infuriated savages on the one hand and the devouring fire on the other what escape was there for them? The blood-stained wretches who remained in the camps and towns of the slave-traders, along the eastern coast of Africa, or in the Isle of Madagascar, alone could tell how many were lost, since of those who went out from them to make war upon the Mazitu and their white friends, none returned again with the long lines of expected captives. They had gone to their own place, of which sometimes that flaming African city has seemed to me a symbol. They were wicked men indeed, devils stalking the earth in human form, without pity, without shame. Yet I could not help feeling sorry for them at the last, for truly their end was awful.

They brought the prisoners up to us, and among them, his white robe half-burnt off him, I recognised the hideous pock-marked Hassan-ben-Mohammed.

"I received your letter, written a while ago, in which you promised to make us die by fire, and, this morning, I received your message, Hassan," I said, "brought by the wounded lad who escaped from you when you murdered his companions, and to both I sent you an answer. If none reached you, look around, for there is one written large in a tongue that all can read."

The monster, for he was no less, flung himself upon the ground, praying for mercy. Indeed, seeing Mrs. Eversley, he crawled to her and catching hold of her white robe, begged her to intercede for him.

"You made a slave of me after I had nursed you in the spotted sickness," she answered, "and tried to kill my husband for no fault. Through you, Hassan, I have spent all the best years of my life among savages, alone and in despair. Still, for my part, I forgive you, but oh! may I never see your face again."

Then she wrenched herself free from his grasp and went away with her daughter.

"I, too, forgive you, although you murdered my people and for twenty years made my time a torment," said Brother John, who was one of the truest Christians I have ever known. "May God forgive you also"; and he followed his wife and daughter.

Then the old king, Bausi, who had come through that battle with a slight wound, spoke, saying:

"I am glad, Red Thief, that these white people have granted you what you asked—namely, their forgiveness—since the deed is greatly to their honour and causes me and my people to think them even nobler than we did before. But, O murderer of men and women and trafficker in children, I am judge here, not the white people. Look on your work!" and he pointed first to the lines of Zulu and Mazitu dead, and then to his burning town. "Look and remember the fate you promised to us who have never harmed you. Look! Look! Look! O Hyena of a man!"

At this point I too went away, nor did I ever ask what became of Hassan and his fellow-captives. Moreover, whenever any of the natives or Hans tried to inform me, I bade them hold their tongues.

## EPILOGUE

I have little more to add to this record, which I fear has grown into quite a long book. Or, at any rate, although the setting of it down has amused me during the afternoons and evenings of this endless English winter, now that the spring is come again I seem to have grown weary of writing. Therefore I shall leave what remains untold to the imagination of anyone who chances to read these pages.

We were victorious, and had indeed much cause for gratitude who still lived to look upon the sun. Yet the night that followed the Battle of the Gate was a sad one, at least for me, who felt the death of my friend the foresighted hero, Mavovo, of the bombastic but faithful Sammy, and of my brave hunters more than I can say. Also the old Zulu's prophecy concerning me, that I too should die in battle, weighed upon me, who seemed to have seen enough of such ends in recent days and to desire one more tranquil.

Living here in peaceful England as I do now, with no present prospect of leaving it, it does not appear likely that it will be fulfilled. Yet, after my experience of the divining powers of Mavovo's "Snake"—well, those words of his make me feel uncomfortable. For when all is said and done, who can know the future? Moreover, it is the improbable that generally happens[\*]

[\*] As the readers of "Allan Quatermain" will be aware, this prophecy of the dying Zulu was fulfilled. Mr. Quatermain died at Zuvendis as a result of the wound he received in the battle between the armies of the rival Queens.—Editor.

Further, the climatic conditions were not conducive to cheerfulness, for shortly after sunset it began to rain and poured for most of the night, which, as we had little shelter, was inconvenient both to us and to all the hundreds of the homeless Mazitu.

However, the rain ceased in due time, and on the following morning the welcome sun shone out of a clear sky. When we had dried and warmed ourselves a little in its rays, someone suggested that we should visit the burned-out town where, except for some smouldering heaps that had been huts, the fire was extinguished by the heavy rain. More from curiosity than for any other reason I consented and accompanied by Bausi, Babemba and many of the Mazitu, all of us, except Brother John, who remained behind to attend to the wounded, climbed over the debris of the south gate and walked through the black ruins of the huts, across the market-place that was strewn with dead, to what had been our own quarters.

These were a melancholy sight, a mere heap of sodden and still smoking ashes. I could have wept when I looked at them, thinking of all the trade goods and stores that were consumed beneath, necessities for the most part, the destruction of which must make our return journey one of great hardship.

Well, there was nothing to be said or done, so after a few minutes of contemplation we turned to continue our walk through what had been the royal quarters to the north gate. Hans, who, I noted, had been ferreting about in his furtive way as though he were looking for something, and I were the last to leave. Suddenly he laid his hand upon my arm and said:

"Baas, listen! I hear a ghost. I think it is the ghost of Sammy asking us to bury him."

"Bosh!" I answered, and then listened as hard as I could.

Now I also seemed to hear something coming from I knew not where, words which were frequently repeated and which seemed to be:

*"O Mr. Quatermain, I beg you to be so good as to open the door of this oven."*

For a while I thought I must be cracked. However, I called back the others and we all listened. Of a sudden Hans made a pounce, like a terrier does at the run of a mole that he hears working underground, and began to drag, or rather to shovel, at a heap of ashes in front of us, using a bit of wood as they were still too hot for his hands. Then we listened again and this time heard the voice quite clearly coming from the ground.

"Baas," said Hans, "it is Sammy in the corn-pit!"

Now I remembered that such a pit existed in front of the huts which, although empty at the time, was, as is common among the Bantu natives, used to preserve corn that would not immediately be needed. Once I myself went through a very tragic experience in one of these pits, as any who may read the history of my first wife, that I have called *Marie*, can see for themselves.

Soon we cleared the place and had lifted the stone, with ventilating holes in it—well was it for Sammy that those ventilating holes existed; also that the stone did not fit tight. Beneath was a bottle-shaped and cemented structure about ten feet deep by, say, eight wide. Instantly through the mouth of this structure appeared the head of Sammy with his mouth wide open like that of a fish gasping for air. We pulled him out, a process that caused him to howl, for the heat had made his skin very tender, and gave him water which one of the Mazitu fetched from a spring. Then I asked him indignantly what he was doing in that hole, while we wasted our tears, thinking that he was dead.

"Oh! Mr. Quatermain," he said, "I am a victim of too faithful service. To abandon all these valuable possessions of yours to a rapacious enemy was more than I could bear. So I put every one of them in the pit, and then, as I thought I heard someone coming, got in myself and pulled down the stone. But, Mr. Quatermain, soon afterwards the enemy added arson to murder and pillage, and the whole place began to blaze. I could hear the fire roaring above and a little later the ashes covered the exit so that I could no longer lift the stone, which indeed grew too hot to touch. Here, then, I sat all night in the most suffocating heat, very much afraid, Mr. Quatermain, lest the two kegs of gunpowder that were with me should explode, till at last, just as I had abandoned hope and prepared to die like a tortoise baked alive by a bushman, I heard your welcome voice. And Mr. Quatermain, if there is any soothing ointment to spare, I shall be much obliged, for I am scorched all over."

"Ah! Sammy, Sammy," I said, "you see what comes of cowardice? On the hill with us you would not have been scorched, and it is only by the merest chance of owing to Hans's quick hearing that you were not left to perish miserably in that hole."

"That is so, Mr. Quatermain. I plead guilty to the hot impeachment. But on the hill I might have been shot, which is worse than being scorched. Also you gave me charge of your goods and I determined to preserve them even at the risk of personal comfort. Lastly, the angel who watches me brought you here in time before I was quite cooked through. So all's well that ends well, Mr. Quatermain, though it is true that for my part I have had enough of bloody war, and if I live to regain civilized regions I propose

henceforth to follow the art of food-dressing in the safe kitchen of an hotel; that is, if I cannot obtain a berth as an instructor in the English tongue!"

"Yes," I answered, "all's well that ends well, Sammy my boy, and at any rate you have saved the stores, for which we should be thankful to you. So go along with Mr. Stephen and get doctored while we haul them out of that grain-pit."

Three days later we bid farewell to old Bausi, who almost wept at parting with us, and the Mazitu, who were already engaged in the re-building of their town. Mavovo and the other Zulus who died in the Battle of the Gate, we buried on the ridge opposite to it, raising a mound of earth over them that thereby they might be remembered in generations to come, and laying around them the Mazitu who had fallen in the fight. As we passed that mound on our homeward journey, the Zulus who remained alive, including two wounded men who were carried in litters, stopped and saluted solemnly, praising the dead with loud songs. We white people too saluted, but in silence, by raising our hats.

By the way, I should add that in this matter also Mavovo's "Snake" did not lie. He had said that six of his company would be killed upon our expedition, and six were killed, neither more nor less.

After much consulting we determined to take the overland route back to Natal, first because it was always possible that the slave-trading fraternity, hearing of their terrible losses, might try to attack us again on the coast, and secondly for the reason that even if they did not, months or perhaps years might pass before we found a ship at Kilwa, then a port of ill repute, to carry us to any civilized place. Moreover, Brother John, who had travelled it, knew the inland road well and had established friendly relations with the tribes through whose country we must pass, till we reached the brothers of Zululand, where I was always welcome. So as the Mazitu furnished us with an escort and plenty of bearers for the first part of the road and, thanks to Sammy's stewardship in the corn-pit, we had ample trade goods left to hire others later on, we made up our minds to risk the longer journey.

As it turned out this was a wise conclusion, since although it took four weary months, in the end we accomplished it without any accident whatsoever, if I except a slight attack of fever from which both Miss Hope and I suffered for a while. Also we got some good shooting on the road. My only regret was that this change of plan obliged us to abandon the tusks of ivory we had captured from the slavers and buried where we alone could find them.

Still, it was a dull time for me, who, for obvious reasons, of which I have already spoken, was literally a fifth wheel to the coach. Hans was an excellent fellow, and, as the reader knows, quite a genius in his own way, but night after night in Hans's society began to pall on me at last, while even his conversation about my "reverend father," who seemed positively to haunt him, acquired a certain sameness. Of course, we had other subjects in common, especially those connected with Retief's massacre, whereof we were the only two survivors, but of these I seldom cared to speak. They were and still remain too painful.

Therefore, for my part I was thankful when at last, in Zululand, we fell in with some traders whom I knew, who hired us one of their wagons. In this vehicle, abandoning the worn-out donkeys and the white ox, which we presented to a chief of my acquaintance, Brother John and the ladies proceeded to Durban, Stephen attending them on a horse that we had bought, while I, with Hans, attached myself to the traders.

At Durban a surprise awaited us since, as we trekked into the town, which at that time was still a small place, whom should we meet but Sir Alexander Somers, who, hearing that wagons were coming from Zululand, had ridden out in the hope of obtaining news of us. It seemed that the choleric old gentleman's anxiety concerning his son had so weighed on his mind that at length he made up his mind to proceed to Africa to hunt for him. So there he was. The meeting between the two was affectionate but peculiar.

"Hullo, dad!" said Stephen. "Whoever would have thought of seeing you here?"

"Hullo, Stephen," said his father. "Whoever would have expected to find you alive and looking well—yes, very well? It is more than you deserve, you young ass, and I hope you won't do it again."

Having delivered himself thus, the old boy seized Stephen by the hair and solemnly kissed him on the brow.

"No, dad," answered his son, "I don't mean to do it again, but thanks to Allan there we've come through all right. And, by the way, let me introduce you to the lady I am going to marry, also to her father and mother."

Well, all the rest may be imagined. They were married a fortnight later in Durban and a very pleasant affair it was, since Sir Alexander, who by the way, treated me most handsomely from a business point of view, literally entertained the whole town on that festive occasion. Immediately afterwards Stephen, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Eversley and his father, took his wife home "to be educated," though what that process consisted of I never heard. Hans and I saw them off at the Point and our parting was rather sad, although Hans went back the richer by the £500 which Stephen had promised him. He bought a farm with the money, and on the strength of his exploits, established himself as a kind of little chief. Of whom more later—as they say in the pedigree books.

Sammy, too, was set up as the proprietor of a small hotel, where he spent most of his time in the bar dilating to the customers in magnificent sentences that reminded me of the style of a poem called "The Essay on Man" (which I once tried to read and couldn't), about his feats as a warrior among the wild Mazitu and the man-eating, devil-worshipping Pongo tribes.

Two years or less afterwards I received a letter, from which I must quote a passage:

*"As I told you, my father has given a living which he owns to Mr. Eversley, a pretty little place where there isn't much for a parson to do. I think it rather bores my respected parents-in-law. At any rate, 'Dogeetah' spends a lot of his time wandering about the New Forest, which is near by, with a butterfly-net and trying to imagine that he is back in Africa. The 'Mother of the Flower' (who, after a long course of boot-kissing mutes, doesn't get on with English servants) has another amusement. There is a small lake in the Rectory grounds in which is a little island. Here she has put up a reed fence round a laurustinus bush which flowers at the same time of year as did the Holy Flower, and within this reed fence she sits whenever the weather will allow, as I believe going through 'the rites of the Flower.' At least when I called upon her there one day, in a boat, I found her wearing a white robe and singing some mystical native song."*

Many years have gone by since then. Both Brother John and his wife have departed to their rest and their strange story, the strangest almost of all stories, is practically forgotten. Stephen, whose father has also departed, is a prosperous baronet and rather

heavy member of Parliament and magistrate, the father of many fine children, for the Miss Hope of old days has proved as fruitful as a daughter of the Goddess of Fertility, for that was the "Mother's" real office, ought to be.

"Sometimes," she said to me one day with a laugh, as she surveyed a large (and noisy) selection of her numerous offspring, "sometimes, O Allan"—she still retains that trick of speech—"I wish that I were back in the peace of the Home of the Flower. Ah!" she added with something of a thrill in her voice, "never can I forget the blue of the sacred lake or the sight of those skies at dawn. Do you think that I shall see them again when I die, O Allan?"

At the time I thought it rather ungrateful of her to speak thus, but after all human nature is a queer thing and we are all of us attached to the scenes of our childhood and long at times again to breathe our natal air.

I went to see Sir Stephen the other day, and in his splendid greenhouses the head gardener, Woodden, an old man now, showed me three noble, long-leaved plants which sprang from the seed of the Holy Flower that I had saved in my pocket.

But they have not yet bloomed.

Somehow I wonder what will happen when they do. It seems to me as though when once more the glory of that golden bloom is seen of the eyes of men, the ghosts of the terrible god of the Forest, of the hellish and mysterious Motombo, and perhaps of the Mother of the Flower herself, will be there to do it reverence. If so, what gifts will they bring to those who stole and reared the sacred seed?

P.S.—I shall know ere long, for just as I laid down my pen a triumphant epistle from Stephen was handed to me in which he writes excitedly that at length two of the three plants are *showing for flower*.

*Allan Quatermain.*

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**BOOK XIV**  
**HEU-HEU - THE MONSTER**  
**NOTE**

Some time before the discovery in Rhodesia of the fossilized and immeasurably ancient remains of the proto-human person who might well have been one of the Heu-heu, the Hairy Wood-Folk of which it tells through the mouth of Allan Quatermain.

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**CHAPTER I**

**THE STORM**

Now I, the Editor, whose duty it has been as an executor or otherwise, to give to the world so many histories of, or connected with, the adventures of my dear friend, the late Allan Quatermain, or Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, as the natives in Africa used to call him, come to one of the most curious of them all. Here I should say at once that he told it to me many years ago at his house called "The Grange," in Yorkshire, where I was staying, but a little while before he departed with Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good upon his last expedition into the heart of Africa, whence he returned no more.

At the time I made very copious notes of a history that struck me as strange and suggestive, but the fact is that afterwards I lost them and could never trust my memory to reproduce even their substance with the accuracy which I knew my departed friend would have desired.

Only the other day, however, in turning out a box-room, I came upon a hand-bag which I recognized as one that I had used in the far past when I was practising, or trying to practise, at the Bar. With a certain emotion such as overtakes us when, after the lapse of many years, we are confronted by articles connected with the long-dead events of our youth, I took it to a window and with some difficulty opened its rusted catch. In the bag was a small collection of rubbish: papers connected with cases on which once I had worked as "devil" for an eminent and learned friend who afterwards became a judge, a blue pencil with a broken point, and so forth.

I looked through the papers and studied my own marginal notes made on points in causes which I had utterly forgotten, though doubtless these had been important enough to me at the time, and, with a sigh, tore them up and threw them on the floor. Then I reversed the bag to knock out the dust. As I was doing this there slipped from an inner pocket, a very thick notebook with a shiny black cover such as used to be bought for sixpence. I opened that book and the first thing that my eye fell upon was this heading:

"Summary of A. Q.'s Strange Story of the Monster-God, or Fetish, Heu-Heu, which He and the Hottentot Hans Discovered in Central South Africa."

Instantly everything came back to me. I saw myself, a young man in those days, making those shorthand notes late one night in my bedroom at the Grange before the impression of old Allan's story had become dim in my mind, also continuing them on the train upon my journey south on the morrow, and subsequently expanding them in my chambers at Elm Court in the Temple whenever I found time to spare.

I remembered, too, my annoyance when I discovered that this notebook was nowhere to be found, although I was aware that I had put it away in some place that I thought particularly safe. I can still see myself hunting for it in the little study of the house I had in a London suburb at the time, and at last giving up the quest in despair. Then the years went on and many things happened, so that in the end both notes and the story they outlined were forgotten. Now they have appeared again from the dust-heap of the past, reviving many memories, and I set out the tale of this particular chapter of the history of the adventurous life of my beloved friend, Allan Quatermain, who so long ago was gathered to the Shades that await us all.

One night, after a day's shooting, we—that is, old Allan, Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good, and I—were seated in the smoking room of Quatermain's house, the Grange, in Yorkshire, smoking and talking of many things.

I happened to mention that I had read a paragraph, copied from an American paper, which stated that a huge reptile of an antediluvian kind had been seen by some hunters in a swamp of the Zambesi, and asked Allan if he believed the story. He shook his head and answered in a cautious fashion which suggested to me, I remember, his unwillingness to give his views as to the continued existence of such creatures on the earth, that Africa is a big place and it was possible that in its recesses prehistoric animals or reptiles lingered on.

"I know that this is the case with snakes," he continued hurriedly as though to avoid the larger topic, "for once I came across one as large as the biggest Anaconda that is told of in South America, where occasionally they are said to reach a length of sixty feet or more. Indeed, we killed it—or rather my Hottentot servant, Hans, did—after it had crushed and swallowed one of our party. This snake was worshipped as a king of gods, and might have given rise to the tale of enormous reptiles. Also, to omit other experiences of which I prefer not to speak, I have seen an elephant so much above the ordinary in size that it might have belonged to a prehistoric age. This elephant has been known for centuries and was named Jana.

"Did you kill it?" inquired Good, peering at him through his eyeglasses in his quick, inquisitive way.

Allan coloured beneath his tan and wrinkles, and said, rather sharply for him, who was so gentle and hard to irritate,

"Have you not learned, Good, that you should never ask a hunter, and above all a professional hunter, whether he did or did not kill a particular head of game unless he volunteers the information? However, if you want to know, I did not kill that elephant; it was Hans who killed it and thereby saved my life. I missed it with both barrels at a distance of a few yards!"

"Oh, I say, Quatermain!" ejaculated the irrepressible Good. "Do you mean to tell us that *you* missed a particularly big elephant that was only a few yards off? You must have been in a pretty fright to do that."

"Have I not said that I missed it, Good? For the rest, perhaps you are right, and I was frightened, for as you know, I never set myself up as a person remarkable for courage. In the circumstances of the encounter with this beast, Jana, any one might have been frightened; indeed, even you yourself, Good. Or, if you choose to be charitable, you may conclude that there were other reasons for that disgraceful—yes, disgraceful exhibition of which I cannot bear to think and much less to talk, seeing that in the end it brought about the death of old Hans—whom I loved."

Now Good was about to answer again, for argument was as the breath of his nostrils, but I saw Sir Henry stretch out his long leg and kick him on the shin, after which he was silent.

"To return," said Allan hastily, as one does who desires to escape from an unpleasant subject, "in the course of my life I did once meet, not with a prehistoric reptile, but with a people who worshipped a Monster-god, or fetish, of which perhaps the origin may have been a survival from the ancient world."

He stopped with the air of one who meant to say no more, and I asked eagerly: "What was it, Allan?"

"To answer that would involve a long story, my friend," he replied, "and one that, if I told it, Good, I am sure, would not believe; also, it is getting late and might bore you. Indeed, I could not finish it to-night."

"There are whisky, soda, and tobacco, and whatever Curtis and Good may do, here, fortified by these, I remain between you and the door until you tell me that tale, Allan. You know it is rude to go to bed before your guests, so please get on with it at once," I added, laughing.

The old boy hummed and hawed and looked cross, but as we all sat round him in an irritating silence which seemed to get upon his nerves, he began at last:

Well, if you will have it, many years ago, when by comparison I was a young man, I camped one day well up among the slopes of the Drakensberg. I was going up Pretoria way with a load of trade goods which I hoped to dispose of among the natives beyond, and when I had done so to put in a month or two game-shooting towards the north. As it happened, when we were in an open space of ground between two of the foothills of the Berg, we got caught in a most awful thunderstorm, one of the worst that ever I experienced. If I remember right, it was about mid-January and you, my friend [this was addressed to me], know what Natal thunderstorms can be at that hot time of the year. It seemed to come upon us from two quarters of the sky, the fact being that it was a twin storm of which the component parts were travelling towards each other.

The air grew thick and dense; then came the usual moaning, icy wind followed by something like darkness, although it was early in the afternoon. On the peaks of the mountains around us lightnings were already playing, but as yet I heard no thunder, and there was no rain. In addition to the driver and voorlooper of the wagon I had with me Hans, of whom I was speaking just now, a little wrinkled Hottentot who, from my boyhood, had been the companion of my journeys and adventures. It was he who came with me as my after-rider when as a very young man I accompanied Piet Retief on that fatal embassy to Dingaan, the Zulu king, of whom practically all except Hans and myself were massacred.

He was a curious, witty little fellow of uncertain age and of his sort one of the cleverest men in Africa. I never knew his equal in resource or in following a spoor, but, like all Hottentots, he had his faults; thus, whenever he got the chance, he would drink like a fish and become a useless nuisance. He had his virtues, also, since he was faithful as a dog and—well, he loved me as a dog loves the master that has reared it from a blind puppy. For me he would do anything—lie or steal or commit murder, and think it no wrong, but rather a holy duty. Yes, and any day he was prepared to die for me, as in the end he did.

Allan paused, ostensibly to knock out his pipe, which was unnecessary, as he had only just filled it, but really, I think, to give himself a chance of turning towards the fire in front of which he was standing, and thus to hide his face. Presently he swung round upon his heel in the light, quick fashion that was one of his characteristics, and went on:

I was walking in front of the wagon, keeping a lookout for bad places and stones in what in those days was by courtesy called the road, though in fact it was nothing but a track twisting between the mountains, and just behind, in his usual place—for he always stuck to me like a shadow—was Hans. Presently I heard him cough in a hollow fashion, as was his custom when he wanted to call my attention to anything, and asked over my shoulder,

"What is it, Hans?"

"Nothing, Baas," he answered, "only that there is a big storm coming up. Two storms, Baas, not one, and when they meet they will begin to fight and there will be plenty of spears flying about in the sky, and then both those clouds will weep rain or perhaps hail."

"Yes," I said, "there is, but as I don't see anywhere to shelter, there is nothing to be done."

Hans came up level with me and coughed again, twirling his dirty apology for a hat in his skinny fingers, thereby intimating that he had a suggestion to make.

"Many years ago, Baas," he said, pointing with his chin towards a mass of tumbled stones at the foot of a mountain slope about a mile to our left, "there used to be a big cave yonder, for once when I was a boy I sheltered in it with some Bushmen. It was after the Zulus had cleaned out Natal and there was nothing to eat in the land, so that the people who were left fed upon one another."

"Then how did the Bushmen live, Hans?"

"On slugs and grasshoppers, for the most part, Baas, and buck when they were lucky enough to kill any with their poisoned arrows. Fried caterpillars are not bad, Baas, nor are locusts when you can get nothing else. I remember that I, who was starving, grew fat on them."

"You mean that we had better make for this cave of yours, Hans, if you are sure it's there?"

"Yes, Baas, caves can't run away, and though it is many years ago, I don't forget a place where I have lived for two months."

I looked at those advancing clouds and reflected. They were uncommonly black and evidently there was going to be the devil of a storm. Moreover, the situation was not pleasant for we were crossing a patch of ironstone on which, as I knew from experience, lightning always strikes, and a wagon and a team of oxen have an attraction for electric flashes.

While I was reflecting a party of Kaffirs came up from behind, running for all they were worth, no doubt to seek shelter. They were dressed in their finery—evidently people going to or returning from a wedding-feast, young men and girls, most of them—and as they went by one of them shouted to me, whom evidently he knew, as did most of the natives in those parts, "Hurry, hurry, Macumazahn!" as you know the Zulus called me. "Hurry, this place is beloved of lightnings," and he pointed with his dancing stick first to the advancing tempest and then to the ground where the ironstone cropped up.

That decided me, and running back to the wagon I told the voorlooper to follow Hans, and the driver to flog up the oxen. Then I scrambled in behind and off we went, turning to the left and heading for the place at the foot of the slope where Hans said the cave was. Luckily the ground was fairly flat and open—hard, too; moreover, although he had not been there for so many years, Hans's memory of the spot was perfect. Indeed, as he said, it was one of his characteristics never to forget any place that he had once visited.

Thus, from the driving box to which I had climbed, suddenly I saw him direct the voorlooper to bear sharply to the right and could not imagine why, as the surface there seemed similar to that over which we were travelling. As we passed it, however, I perceived the reason, for here was a ground spring which turned a large patch of an acre or more into a swamp, where certainly we should have been bogged. It was the same with other obstacles that I need not detail.

By now a great stillness pervaded the air and the gloom grew so thick that the front oxen looked shadowy; also it became very cold. The lightning continued to play upon the mountain crests, but still there was no thunder. There was something frightening and unnatural in the aspect of nature; even the cattle felt it, for they strained at the yokes and went off very fast indeed, without the urgings of whips or shouts, as though they too knew they were flying from peril. Doubtless they did, since instinct has its voices which speak to everything that breathes. For my part, my nerves became affected and I hoped earnestly that we should soon reach that cave.

Presently I hoped it still more, for at length those clouds met and from their edges as they kissed each other came an awful burst of fire—perhaps it was a thunderbolt—that rushed down and struck the earth with a loud detonation. At any rate, it caused the ground to shake and me to wish that I were anywhere else, for it fell within fifty yards of the wagon, exactly where we had been a minute or so before. Simultaneously there was a most awful crash of thunder, showing that the tempest now lay immediately overhead.

This was the opening of the ball; the first sudden burst of music. Then the dance began with sheets and forks of flame for dancers and the great sky for the floor upon which they performed.

It is difficult to describe such a hellish tempest because, as you, my friend, who have seen them, will know, they are beyond description. Lightnings, everywhere lightnings; flash upon flash of them of all shapes—one, I remember, looked like a crown of fire encircling the brow of a giant cloud. Moreover, they seemed to leap upwards from the earth as well as downwards from the heaven, to the accompaniment of one continuous roar of thunder.

"Where the deuce is your cave?" I yelled into the ear of Hans, who had climbed on to the driving box beside me.

He shrieked something in answer which I could not catch because of the tumult, and pointed to the base of the mountain slope, now about two hundred yards away.

The oxen *skrecked* and began to gallop, causing the wagon to bump and sway so that I thought it would overset, and the voorlooper to leave hold of the *reim* and run alongside of them for fear lest he should be trodden to death, guiding them as best he could, which was not well. Luckily, however, they ran in the right direction.

On we tore, the driver plying his whip to keep the beasts straight, and as I could see from the motion of his lips, swearing his hardest in Dutch and Zulu, though not a word reached my ears. At length they were brought to a halt by

the steep slope of the mountain and proceeded to turn round and tie themselves into a kind of knot after the fashion of frightened oxen that for any reason can no longer pull their load.

We leapt down and began to outspan them, getting the yokes off as quickly as we could—no easy job, I can tell you, both because of the mess in which they were and for the reason that it must be carried out literally under fire, since the flashes were falling all about us. Momentarily I expected that one of them would catch the wagon and make an end of us and our story. Indeed, I was so frightened that I was sorely tempted to leave the oxen to their fate and bolt to the cave, if cave there were—for I could see none.

However, pride came to my aid, for if I ran away, how could I ever expect my Kaffirs to stand again in a difficulty? Be as much afraid as you like, but never show fear before a native; if you do, your influence over him is gone. You are no longer the great White Chief of higher blood and breeding; you are just a common fellow like himself; inferior to himself, indeed, if he chanced to be a brave specimen of a people among whom most of the men are brave.

So I pretended to take no heed of the lightnings, even when one struck a thorn tree not more than thirty paces away. I happened to be looking in that direction and saw the thorn in the flare, every bough of it. Next second all I saw was a column of dust; the thorn had gone and one of its splinters hit my hat.

With the others I tugged and kicked at the oxen, getting the thongs off the *yoke-skeis* as best I could, till at length all were loose and galloping away to seek shelter under overhanging rocks or where they could in accordance with their instincts. The last two, the pole oxen—valuable beasts—were particularly difficult to free, as they were trying to follow their brethren and strained at the yokes so much that in the end I had to cut the *rimpis*, as I could not get them out of the notches of the *yoke-skeis*. Then they tore off after the others, but did not get far, poor brutes, for presently I saw both of them—they were running together—go down as though they were shot through the heart. A flash had caught them; one of them never stirred again; the other lay on its back kicking for a few seconds and then grew as still as its yoke-mate.

“And what did you say?” inquired Good in a reflective voice.

“What would you have said, Good?” asked Allan severely, “if you had lost your best two oxen in such a fashion, and happened not to have a sixpence with which to buy others? Well, we all know your command of strong language, so I do not think I need ask you to answer.”

“I should have said—” began Good, bracing himself to the occasion, but Allan cut him short with a wave of his hand.

“Something about *Jupiter Tonans*, no doubt,” he said.

Then he went on.

Well, what I said was only overheard by the recording angel, though perhaps Hans guessed it, for he screamed at me,

“It might have been *us*, Baas. When the sky is angry, it will have *something*; better the oxen than us, Baas.”

“The cave, you idiot!” I roared. “Shut your mouth and take us to the cave, if there is one, for here comes the hail.”

Hans grinned and nodded, then hastened by a large hailstone which hit him on the head, began to skip up the hill at a surprising rate, beckoning to the rest of us to follow. Presently we came to a tumbled pile of rocks through which we dodged and scrambled in the gloom that now, when the hail had begun to fall, was denser than ever between the flashes. At the back of the biggest of these rocks Hans dived among some bushes, dragging me after him between two stones that formed a kind of natural gateway to a cavity beyond.

“This is the place, Baas,” he said, wiping the blood that ran down his forehead from a cut in the head made by the hailstone.

As he spoke, a particularly vivid flash showed me that we were in the mouth of a cavern of unknown size. That it must be large, however, I guessed from the echoes of the thunder that followed the flash, which seemed to reverberate in that hollow place from unmeasured depths in the bowels of the mountain.

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## THE PICTURE IN THE CAVE

We did not reach the cave too soon, for as the boys scrambled into it after us the hail began to come down in earnest, and you fellows know, or at any rate have heard, what African hail can be, especially among the mountains of the Berg. I have known it to go through sheets of galvanized iron like rifle bullets, and really I believe that some of the stones which fell on this occasion would have pierced two of them put together, for they were as big as flints and jagged at that. If anybody had been caught in that particular storm on the open veldt without a wagon to creep under or a saddle to put over his head, I doubt whether he would have lived to see a clear sky again.

The driver, who was already almost weeping with distress over the loss of Kaptein and Deutchmann, as the two pole oxen were named, grew almost crazed because he thought that the hail would kill the others, and actually wanted to run out into it with the wild idea of herding them into some shelter. I told him to sit still and not be a fool, since we could do nothing to help them. Hans, who had a habit of growing religious when there was lightning about, remarked sententiously that he had no doubt that the "Great-Great" in the sky would look after the cattle since my Reverend Father (who had converted him to the peculiar faith, or mixture of faiths, which, with Hans, passed for Christianity) had told him that the cattle on a thousand hills were His especial property, and, here in the Berg, were they not among the thousand hills? The Zulu driver who had not "found religion," but was just a raw savage, replied with point that if that were so the "Great-Great" might have protected Kaptein and Deutchmann, which He had clearly neglected to do. Then, after the fashion of some furious woman, by way of relieving his nerves, he fell to abusing Hans, whom he called "a yellow jackal," adding that the tail of the worst of the oxen was of more value than his whole body, and that he wished his worthless skin were catching the hailstones instead of their inestimable hides.

These nasty remarks about his personal appearance irritated Hans, who drew up his lips as does an angry dog, and replied in suitable language, which involved reflections upon that Zulu's family, and especially on his mother. In short, had I not intervened there would have been a very pretty row that might have ended in a blow from a kerry or a knife thrust. This, however, I did with vigour, saying that he who spoke another word should be kicked out of the cave to keep company with the hail and the lightning, after which peace was restored.

That storm went on for a long while, for after it had seemed to go away it returned again, travelling in a circle as such tempests sometimes do, and when the hail was finished, it was followed by torrential rain. The result was that by the time the thunder had ceased to roar and echo among the mountain-tops darkness was at hand, so it became evident that we must stop where we were for the night, especially as the boys, who had gone out to look for the oxen, reported that they could not find them. This was not pleasant, as the cave was uncommonly cold and the wagon was too soaked with the rain to sleep in.

Here, however, once more Hans's memory came in useful. Having borrowed my matches, he crept off down the cave and presently returned, dragging a quantity of wood after him, dusty and worm-eaten-looking wood, but dry and very suitable for firing.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

"Baas," he replied, "when I lived in this place with the Bushmen, long before those black children" (this insult referred to the driver and the voorlooper, Mavoon and Induka by name) "were begotten of their unknown fathers, I hid away a great stock of wood for the winter, or in case I should ever come back here, and there it is still, covered with stones and dust. The ants that run about the ground do the same thing, Baas, that their children may have food when they are dead. So now if those Kaffirs will help me to get the wood we may have a good fire and be warm."

Marvelling at the little Hottentot's foresight that was bred into his blood by the necessities of a hundred generations of his forefathers, I bade the others to accompany him to the cache, which they did, glowering, with the result that presently we had a glorious fire. Then I fetched some food, for luckily I had killed a Duiker buck that morning, the flesh of which we toasted on the embers, and with it a bottle of Square-face from the wagon, so that soon we were eating a splendid dinner. I know that there are many who do not approve of giving spirits to natives, but for my part I have found that when they are chilled and tired a "tot" does them no harm and wonderfully improves their tempers. The trouble was to prevent Hans from getting more than one, to do which I made a bedfellow of that bottle of Square-face.

When we were filled I lit my pipe and began to talk with Hans, whom the grog had made loquacious and therefore interesting. He asked me how old the cave was, and I told him that it was as old as the mountains of the Berg. He answered that he had thought so because there were footprints stamped in the rock floor farther down it, and turned to stone, which were not made by any beasts that he had ever heard of or seen, which footprints he would show me on the morrow if I cared to look at them. Further, that there were queer bones lying about, also turned to stone, that he thought must have belonged to giants. He believed that he could find some of these bones when the sun shone into the cave in the early morning.

Then I explained to Hans and the Kaffirs how once, thousands of thousands of years ago, before there were any men in the world, great creatures had lived there, huge elephants and reptiles as large as a hundred crocodiles made into one, and, as I had been told, enormous apes, much bigger than any gorilla. They were very interested, and Hans

said that it was quite true about the apes, since he had seen a picture of one of them, or of a giant that looked like an ape.

"Where?" I asked. "In a book?"

"No, Baas, here in this cave. The Bushman made it ten thousand years ago." By which he meant at some indefinite time in the past.

Now I bethought me of a fabulous creature called the *Ngoloko* which was said to inhabit an undefined area of swamps on the East Coast and elsewhere. This animal, in which, I may add, I did not in the least believe, for I set it down as a native bogey, was supposed to be at least eight feet high, to be covered with gray hair and to have a claw in the place of toes. My chief authority for it was a strange old Portuguese hunter whom I had once known, who swore that he had seen its footprints in the mud, also that it had killed one of his men and twisted the head off his body. I asked Hans if he had ever heard of it. He replied that he had, under another name, that of *Milhoj*, I think, but that the devil painted in the cave was larger than that.

Now I thought that he was pitching me a yarn, as natives will, and said that if so he had better show me the picture forthwith.

"Best wait until the sun shines in the morning, Baas," he replied, "for then the light will be good. Also this devil is not nice to look at at night."

"Show it me," I repeated with asperity; "we have lanterns from the wagon."

So, somewhat unwillingly, Hans led the way up the cave for fifty paces or more, for the place was very big, he carrying one lantern and I another, while the two Zulus followed with candles in their hands. As we went I saw that on the walls there were many Bushmen paintings, also one or two of the carvings of this strange people. Some of these paintings seemed quite fresh, while others were faded or perhaps the ochre used by the primitive artist had flaked off. They were of the usual character, drawings of elands and other buck being hunted by men who shot at them with arrows; also of elephants and a lion charging at some spearmen.

One, however, which oddly enough was the best preserved of any of the collection, excited me enormously. It represented men whose faces were painted white and who seemed to wear a kind of armour and queer pointed caps upon their heads, of the sort that I believe are known as Phrygian, attacking a native kraal of which the reed fence was clearly indicated, as were the round huts behind. Moreover, to the left some of these men were dragging away women to what from a series of wavy lines, looked like a rude representation of the sea.

I stared and gasped, for surely here before me was a picture of Phoenicians carrying out one of their women-hunting raids, as ancient writers tell us it was their habit to do. And if so, that picture must have been painted by a Bushman who lived at least two thousand years ago, and possibly more. The thing was amazing. Hans, however, did not seem to be interested, but pushed on as though to finish a disagreeable task, and I was obliged to follow him, fearing lest I should be lost in the recesses of that vast cave.

Presently he came to a crevice in the side of the cavern which I should have passed unnoticed, as it was exactly like many others.

"Here is the place, Baas," he said, "just as it used to be. Now follow me and be careful where you step, for there are cracks in the floor."

So I squeezed myself into the opening where, although I am not very large, there was barely room for me to pass. Within its lips was a narrow tunnel, either cut out by water or formed by the rush of explosive gases hundreds of thousands of years ago—I think the latter, as the roof, which was not more than eight or nine feet from the floor, had sharp points and roughnesses that showed no water-wear. But as I have not the faintest idea how these great African caves were formed, I will not attempt to discuss the matter. This floor, however, was quite smooth, as though for many generations it had been worn by the feet of men, which no doubt was the case.

When we had crept ten or twelve paces down the tunnel, Hans called to me to stand quite still—not to move on any account. I obeyed him, wondering, and by the light of my lantern saw him lift his own, which had a loop of hide fastened through the tin eye at the top of it for convenience in hanging it up in the wagon, and set it, or rather the hide loop, round his neck, so that it hung upon his back. Then he flattened himself against the side of the cavern with his face to the wall as though he did not wish to see what was behind him, and cautiously crept forward with sidelong steps, gripping the roughnesses in the rock with his hands. When he had gone some twenty or thirty feet in this crab-like fashion, he turned and said,

"Now, Baas, you must do as I did."

"Why?" I asked.

"Hold down the lantern and you will see, Baas."

I did so, and perceived that a pace or two farther on there was a great chasm in the floor of the tunnel of unknown depth, since the lamplight did not penetrate to its bottom. Also I noted that the ledge at the side that formed the bridge by which Hans had passed, was nowhere more than twelve inches, and in some places less than six inches wide.

"Is it deep?" I asked.

By way of answer Hans found a bit of broken rock and threw it into the gulf. I listened, and it was quite a long while before I heard it strike below.

"I told the Baas," said Hans in a superior tone, "that he had better wait until to-morrow when some light comes down this hole, but the Baas would not listen to me and doubtless he knows best. Now would the Baas like to go back to bed, as I think wisest, and return to-morrow?"

If the truth were known there was nothing that I should have liked better, for the place was detestable. But I was in such a rage with Hans for playing me this trick that even if I thought that I was going to break my neck I would not give him the pleasure of mocking me in his sly way.

"No," I answered quietly, "I will go to bed when I have seen this picture you talk about, and not before."

Now Hans grew alarmed and begged me in good earnest not to try to cross the gulf, which reminded me vaguely of the parable of Abraham and Dives in the Bible, with myself playing the part of Dives, except that I was not thirsty, and Hans did not in any way resemble Abraham.

"I see how it is," I said, "there is not any picture and you are simply playing one of your monkey tricks on me. Well, I'm coming to look, and if I find you have been telling lies I'll make you sorry for yourself."

"The picture is there or was when I was young," answered Hans sullenly, "and for the rest, the Baas knows best. If he breaks every bone in his body presently, don't let him blame me, and I pray that he will tell the truth, all of it, to his Reverend Father in the sky who left him in my charge, saying that Hans begged him not to come but that because of his evil temper he would not listen. Meanwhile, the Baas had better take off his boots, since the feet of those Bushmen whose spooks I feel all about me have made the ledge very slippery."

In silence I sat down and removed my boots, thinking to myself that I would gladly give all my savings that were on deposit in the bank at Durban, to be spared this ordeal. What a strange thing is the white man's pride, especially if he be of the Anglo-Saxon breed, or what passes by that name. There was no need for me to take this risk, yet, rather than be secretly mocked at by Hans and those Kaffirs, here I was about to do so just for pride's sake. In my heart I cursed Hans and the cave and the hole and the picture and the thunderstorm that brought me there, and everything else I could remember. Then, as it had no strap like that of Hans, although it smelt horribly, I took the tin loop of my lantern in my teeth because it seemed the only thing to do, put up a silent but most earnest prayer, and started as though I liked the job.

To tell the truth, I remember little of that journey except that it seemed to take about three hours instead of under a minute, and the voices of woe and lamentation from the two Zulus behind, who insisted upon bidding me a tender farewell as I proceeded, amidst other demonstrations of affection, calling me their father and their mother for four generations.

Somehow I wriggled myself along that accursed ridge, shoving my stomach as hard as I could against the wall of the passage as though this organ possessed some prehensile quality, and groping for knobs of rock on which I broke two of my nails. However, I did get over all right, although just towards the end one of my feet slipped and I opened my mouth to say something, with the result that the lantern fell into the abyss, taking with it a loose front tooth. But Hans stretched out his skinny hand, and, meaning to catch me by the coat collar, got hold of my left ear, and, thus painfully supported, I came to firm ground and cursed him into heaps. Although some might have thought my language pointed, he did not resent it in the least, being too delighted at my safe arrival.

"Never mind the tooth, Baas," he said. "It is best that it should be gone without knowing it, as it were, because you see you can now eat crusts and hard biltong again, which you have not been able to do for months. The lantern, however, is another matter, though perhaps we can get a new one at Pretoria or wherever we go."

Recovering myself, I peered over the edge of the abyss. There, far, far below, I saw my lantern, which was a sort that burns oil, flaring upon a bed of something white, for the container had burst and all the oil was on fire.

"What is that white stuff down there?" I asked. "Lime?"

"No, Baas, it is the broken bones of men. Once when I was young, with the help of the Bushmen I let myself down by a rope that we twisted out of rushes and buckskins, just to look, Baas. There is another cave underneath this one, Baas, but I didn't go into it because I was frightened."

"And how did all those bones come there, Hans? Why, there must be hundreds of them!"

"Yes, Baas, many hundreds, and they came this way. Since the beginning of the world the Bushmen lived in this cave and set a trap here by laying branches over the hole and covering them with dust so that they looked like rock, just as one makes a game pit, Baas—yes, they did this until the last of them were killed not so long ago by the Boers and Zulus, whose sheep and beasts they stole. Then when their enemies attacked them, which was often, for it has always been right to kill Bushmen—they would run down the cave and into the cleft and creep along the narrow edge of rock, which they could do with their eyes shut. But the silly Kaffirs, or whoever it might be, running after them to kill them would fall through the branches and get killed themselves. They must have done this quite often, Baas, since there are such a lot of their skulls down there, many of them quite black with age and turned to stone.

"One might have thought that the Kaffirs would have grown wiser, Hans."

"Yes, Baas, but the dead keep their wisdom to themselves, for I believe that when all the attackers were in the passage, then other Bushmen, who had been hiding in the cave, came up behind and shot them with poisoned arrows and drove them on into the hole so that none went back; indeed, the Bushmen told me that this used to be their father's plan. Also, if any did escape, in a generation or two all was forgotten, and the same thing happened again because, Baas, there are always plenty of fools in the world and the fool who comes after is just as big as the fool who went before. Death spills the water of wisdom upon the sand, Baas, and sand is thirsty stuff that soon grows dry again. If it were not so, Baas, men would soon stop falling in love with women, and yet even great ones—like you, Baas—fall in love."

Having delivered this thrust, in order to prevent the possibility of answer Hans began to chat with the driver and the voorlooper on the other side of the gulf.

"Be quick and come over, you brave Zulus there," he said, "for you are keeping your Chief waiting and me also."

The Zulus, holding their candles forward, peered into the pit below.

"*Ow!*" said one of them, "are we bats that we can fly over a hole like that or baboons that we can climb on a shelf no wider than a spear, or flies that we can walk upon a wall? *Ow!* we are not coming, we will wait here. That road is only for yellow monkeys like you or for those who have the white man's magic like the Inkoos Macumazahn."

"No," replied Hans reflectively, "you are none of these creatures which are all of them good in their way. You are just a couple of low-born Kaffir cowards, black skins blown up to look like men. I, the 'yellow jackal,' can walk the gulf, and the Baas can walk the gulf, but you, Windbags, cannot even float over it for fear lest you should burst in the middle. Well, Windbags, float back to the wagon and fetch the coil of small rope that is in the *voorkissie*, for we may want it."

One of them replied in a humbled voice that they did not take orders from him, a Hottentot, whereon I said,

"Go and fetch the rope and return at once."

So they went with a dejected air, for Hans's winged words had gone home, and again they learned that at the end he always got the best of a quarrel. The truth is that they were as brave as men can be, but no Zulu is any good underground and least of all in the dark in a place that he thinks haunted.

"Now, Baas," said Hans, "we will go and look at the picture—that is, unless you are quite sure I am lying and that there is no picture, in which case it is not worth while to take the trouble, and you had better sit here and cut your broken nails until Mavoon and Induka come back with the rope."

"Oh, get on, you poisonous little vermin!" I said, exasperated by his jeers, emphasizing my words with a tremendous kick.

Here, however, I made a great mistake, since I had forgotten that at the moment I lacked boots, and either Hans carried a collection of hard articles in the seat of his filthy trousers or his posterior was of a singularly stonelike nature. In short, I hurt my toes most abominably and him not at all.

"Ah, Baas," said Hans with a sweet smile, "you should remember what your Reverend Father taught me: always to put on your boots before you kick against the thorn pricks. I have a gimlet and some nails in my pistol pocket, Baas, that I was using this morning to mend that box of yours."

Then he bolted incontinently lest I should experiment on his head and see if there were nails in that also, and as he had the only lantern, I was obliged to limp, or rather to hop, after him.

The passage, of which the floor was still worn smooth by thousands of dead feet, went on straight for eight or ten paces and then bent to the right. When we came to this elbow in it I saw a light ahead of me which I could not understand till presently I found myself standing in a kind of pit or funnel—it may have measured some thirty feet across—that rose from the level at which we stood, right through the strata to the mountain-side eighty or a hundred feet above us. What had formed it thus I cannot conceive, but there it was—a funnel, as I have said, in shape exactly like those that are used when beer is poured into barrels or port wine into a decanter, the place on which we were, being, of course, its narrower end. The light that I had seen came, therefore, from the sky, which, now that the tempest had passed away, was clean-washed and beautiful, sown with stars also, for at the moment a dense black cloud remaining from the storm hid the moon, now just past its full.

For a little way, perhaps five-and-twenty feet, the sides of this tunnel were almost sheer, after which they sloped outwards steeply to the mouth of the pit in the mountain flank. One other peculiarity I noticed—namely, that on the western face of the tunnel which, as it chanced, was in front of us as we stood, just where it began to expand, projected a sloping ridge of rock like to the roof of a lean-to shed, which ridge ran right across this face.

"Well, Hans," I said, when I had inspected this strange natural cavity, "where is your picture? I don't see it."

"*Wacht een beetje*" (that is, "Wait a bit"), "Baas. The moon is climbing up that cloud; presently she will get to the top of it and then you will see the picture, unless someone has rubbed it out since I was young."

I turned to look at the cloud and to witness a sight of which I never have grown tired: the uprising of the glorious African moon out of her secret halls of blackness. Already silver rays of light were shooting across the vastness of the firmament, causing the stars to pale. Then suddenly her bent edge appeared and with extraordinary swiftness grew

and grew till the whole splendid orb emerged from a bed of inky vapour and for a while rested on its marge, perfect, wonderful! In an instant our hole was filled with light so strong and clear that by it I could have read a letter.

For a few moments I stood thrilled with the beauty of the scene, and forgetting all else in its contemplation, till Hans said with a hoarse cackle,

“Now turn round, Baas, and look at the pretty picture.”

I did so, and followed the line of his outstretched hand, which pointed to that face of the rock with the pent roof that looked towards the east. Next second—my friends, I am not exaggerating—I nearly fell backwards. Have any of you fellows ever had a nightmare in which you dreamed you were in hell and suddenly met the devil *tete-a-tete*, all by your little selves? At any rate, I have, and there in front of me was the devil, only much worse than fond fancy can paint him even with the brush of the acutest indigestion.

Imagine a monster double life size—that is to say, eleven or twelve feet high—brilliantly portrayed in the best ochres of which these Bushmen have always had the secret, namely, white, red, black, and yellow, and with eyes formed apparently of polished lumps of rock crystal. Imagine this thing as a huge ape to which the biggest gorilla would be but a child, and yet not an ape but a man, and yet not a man, but a fiend.

It was covered with hair like an ape, long gray hair that grew in tufts. It had a great, red, bushy beard like a man; its limbs were tremendous, the arms being of abnormal length like to the arms of a gorilla, but, mark this, it had no fingers, only a great claw where the thumb should be. The rest of the hand was all grown together into one piece like a duck's foot, although what should have been the finger part was flexible and could grip like fingers, as shall be seen.

At least, that is what the picture suggested, though it occurred to me afterwards that it might represent the creature as wearing fingerless gloves such as men in this country use when cutting fences. The feet however, which were certainly shown as bare, were the same; I mean that there were no toes, only one terrible claw where the big toe should be. The carcass was enormous; supposing it to have been drawn from life, the original, I should guess, would have weighed at least thirty stone; the chest was vast, indicating strength, and the paunch beneath wrinkled and protuberant. But—and here came one of the human touches—about its middle the thing wore a moocha or, rather, a hide tied round it by the leg skins, which hide seemed to have been dressed.

So much for the body. Now for the head and face. These I know not how to describe, but I will try. The neck was as that of a bull, and perched horribly on the top of it was quite a small head, which—notwithstanding the great red beard whereof I have spoken that grew upon the chin, and a wide mouth from whose upper jaw projected yellow tusks like to those of a baboon that hung over the lower lip—was curiously feminine in appearance; indeed, that of an old, old she-devil with an aquiline nose. The brow, however, was disproportionate to the rest of the face, being prominent, massive, and not unintellectual, while set deep in it and unnaturally far apart were those awful glaring crystal eyes.

That was not all, for the creature seemed to be laughing cruelly, and the drawing showed by it laughed. One of its feet was set upon the body of a man into which the great claw was driven deep. One of its hands held the head of the man, that evidently it had just twisted from the body. The other hand grasped by the hair a living naked girl badly drawn, as though this detail had not interested the artist, whom apparently it was about to drag away.

“Isn't it a pretty picture, Baas?” sniggered Hans. “Now the Baas will not say that I tell lies, no, not for quite a week.”

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## THE OPENER-OF-ROADS

I stared and stared, then was overcome with faintness and sat down upon the ground.

I see you laughing at me, young man [this was addressed to me, the recorder of the tale] who no doubt have already decided that this drawing was the work of some imaginative Bushman who had gone mad and set down upon the rock the hellish dream of a mind diseased. Of course, that was the conclusion I came to myself next morning, but at the time it did not strike me like that.

The place was lonesome and eerie, a horrible place with the pit full of bones near by; heavily silent also except for a distant hyena or jackal howling at the moon, and I had gone through some trials that day—the passage of the death-pit, for instance, which reminded me of the oubliettes in ancient Norman castles that I have read of down which prisoners were hurled to doom. Also, as you may have observed, even in your short career, moonlight differs from sunlight and we, or some of us, are much more affected by horrible things at night than we are by day. At any rate, I sat down because I felt faint and thought that I was going to be ill.

“What is it, Baas?” queried the observant Hans, still mocking. “If you want to be sick, Baas, please don’t mind me, for I’ll turn my back. I remember that I was sick myself when first I saw Heu-Heu—just there,” he added reminiscently, pointing to a certain spot.

“Why do you call that thing ‘Heu-Heu,’ Hans?” I asked, trying to master the reflex action of my interior arrangements.

“Because that is his nice name, Baas, given him by his Mammie when he was little, perhaps.”

(Here I nearly *was* sick, the idea of that creature with a mother almost finished me—like the sight and smell of a bit of fat bacon in a gale at sea.)

“How do you know that?” I gurgled.

“Because the Bushmen told me, Baas. They said that their fathers, a thousand years ago, knew this Heu-Heu far away, and that they left that part of the country because of him as they never slept well at night there, just like a Boer when another Boer comes and builds a house within six miles of him, Baas. I think they meant that they heard Heu-Heu when he talked, for they told me that their great-great-grandfathers could hear him doing it and beating his breast when he was miles away. But I daresay they lied, for I don’t believe they really knew anything about Heu-Heu, or who painted his portrait on the rock, Baas.”

“No,” I answered, “nor do I. Well, Hans, I think I have had enough of your friend Heu-Heu for this evening, and should like to go back to bed.”

“Yes, Baas, so should I, Baas. Still, take another good look at him before you leave. You don’t see a picture like that every night, Baas, and you know you wanted to come.”

Now I would have kicked Hans again, but luckily I remembered those nails in his pocket in time, so, after one lingering glance, I only rose and loftily motioned to him to lead on.

This was the last that I saw of the likeness of Heu-Heu or Beelzebub, or whoever the monster may have been. Somehow, although I intended to return to examine it more closely by the light of day, when morning came I thought that I would not risk another scramble over that ledge but would be satisfied with the memory of first impressions. These they say, are always the best—like first kisses, as Hans added when I explained this to him.

Not that I could forget Heu-Heu; on the contrary, it is not too much to say that this devilish creature haunted me. I could not dismiss that picture as some mere flight of distorted savage imagination. From a hundred characteristics I knew or thought I knew it, erroneously as I now believe, to be Bushmen’s work and was certain that no Bushman, even if he had *delirium tremens*—not a complaint from which these people ever suffered, because they lacked the opportunity of doing so, could have evolved this monstrous creation out of his own soul—if a Bushman has a soul. No, Bushman or not, that artist was drawing something that he had seen, or thought that he had seen.

Of this there were several indications. Thus, on Heu-Heu’s right arm the elbow joint was much swollen as though he had once suffered an injury there. Again, the claw of one of his horrible hands—the left, I think—was broken and divided at the point. Further, there was a wart or protuberance upon the brow, just beneath where the long iron-gray tufts of hair parted in the middle and hung down on each side of the demoniacal, womanish face. Now the painter must have remembered these blemishes and set them down faithfully, copying from some original, real or imagined. Certainly, I reflected, he would not have invented them.

Where, then, did he get his model? I have mentioned that I had heard rumours of creatures called *Ngolokos*, which I took it, if they existed at all, were peculiarly terrific apes of an unknown variety. Heu-Heu, then, might be a most distinguished and improved specimen of these apes. Yet that could scarcely be, for this beast was more man than monkey, notwithstanding his huge claws where the thumbs and big toes should be. Or perhaps I should say that he was more devil than either.

Another idea occurred to me: he might have been the god of these Bushmen, only I never heard that they had any god except their own stomachs. Afterwards I questioned Hans on this point but he replied that he did not know, as the Bushmen he lived with in the cave had never told him anything to that effect. It was true, however, that they did not go to the place where the picture was except through fear of enemies, and that when they did they would not look or speak about it more than they could help. Perhaps, he suggested with his usual shrewdness, Heu-Heu might be the god of some other people with whom the Bushmen had nothing to do.

Another question—when was this work executed? Owing to its sheltered position the colours were still fairly bright, but it must have been a long while ago. Hans said that the Bushmen told him that they did not know who painted it or what it represented, but that it was “*old, old, old!*” which might mean anything or nothing, since to a people without writing five or six generations become remote antiquity. One thing was certain, however, that another of the paintings in the cave was undoubtedly old, that of the Phoenicians raiding a kraal of which I have spoken, which can scarcely have been executed since the time of Christ. Of this I am sure, for I examined it carefully on the following morning and it was not more faded than that of the Monster. Further, in this picture a piece of the rock had scaled off just above the left knee, and I had noticed that the surface thus exposed seemed as much weathered as that of the surrounding rock outside the limits of the painting.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that the Phoenician picture was under cover, while that of Heu-Heu was exposed to the air and would therefore age more rapidly.

Well, all that night I dreamed of this horrid Heu-Heu, dreamed that he was alive and challenging me to fight him, dreamed that someone was calling to me to rescue her—it was certainly her—not him—from the power of the beast; dreamed that I did fight him and that he got me down and was about to twist my head off as he had done to the man in the picture, when something happened—I do not know what—and I woke up covered with perspiration and in a most pitiable fright.

Now at the time I visited this cave I was not far from the borders of Zululand on one of my trading expeditions, the wagon being laden with blankets, beads, iron pots, knives, hoes, and such other articles as the simple savage loves, or in those days loved to pay for in cattle. Before the storm overtook us, however, I was contemplating leaving the Zulus alone on this trip and trying to break new ground somewhere north of Pretoria among less sophisticated natives who might put a higher value on my wares. After seeing Heu-Heu, as it chanced, I changed my mind for two reasons. The first of these was that the lightning had killed my two best oxen and I thought that I could replace these without cash expenditure in Zululand, where debts were owing to me that I might collect in kind. The second was connected with that confounded and obsessing Heu-Heu. I felt convinced that only one man in the world could tell me about this monster, if, indeed, there were anything to tell, namely, old Zikali, the wizard of the Black Kloof, the *Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born*, as Chaka, the great Zulu king, named him.

I think that I have told you all about Zikali before, but in case I have not, I will say that he was the greatest witch doctor who ever lived in Zululand and the most terrible. No one knew when he was born, but undoubtedly he was very ancient and under his native name of “Opener-of-Roads” had been known and dreaded in the land for some generations. For many years, since my boyhood, indeed, he and I had been friends in a fashion, though of course I was aware that from the first he was using me for his own ends, as, indeed, became very clear before all was done and he had triumphed over and brought about the fall of the Zulu Royal House, which he hated.

However, Zikali, like a wise merchant, always paid those who served him with a generous hand, in one coin or another, as he paid those he hated. My coin was information, either historical or concerning the hidden secrets of the strange land of Africa, of which, for all our knowledge, we white men really understand so little. If any one could give information about the picture in the cave and its origin, it would be Zikali, and therefore to Zikali I would go. Curiosity about such matters, as perhaps you have guessed, was always one of my besetting sins.

We had great trouble in recovering our remaining fourteen oxen since some of them had wandered far to find cover from the storm. At last, however, they were found uninjured except for some bruises from the hailstones, for it is wonderful, if they are left alone, how cattle manage to protect themselves against the forces of nature. In Africa, however, they seldom take shelter beneath trees during a thunderstorm, as is their habit here in England, perhaps because, such tempests being so frequent, they have inherited from their progenitors an instinctive knowledge that lightning strikes trees and kills anything that happens to be underneath them. At least, that is my experience.

Well, we inspanned and trekked away from that remarkable cave. Many years afterwards, by the way, when Hans was dead, I tried to find it again and could not. I thought that I reached the same mountain slope in which it was, but I suppose that I must have been mistaken, since in that neighbourhood there are multitudes of such slopes and on the one that I identified I could discover no trace of the cave.

Perhaps this was because there had been a landslide and, with the funnel-like shaft in the mountain side down which the moonlight poured on to the picture of Heu-Heu, the orifice that, it will be remembered, was very small, had been covered up with rocks. Or it may be that I was searching the wrong slope, not having taken my bearings sufficiently when I visited the place at a time of tempest and hurry.

Further, I was pressed and, desiring to reach a certain outspan before night fell, could only give about an hour to the quest and when it failed was obliged to get on. Nor have I ever met any one who was acquainted with this cave, so I

suppose that it must have been known to the Bushmen and Hans only, dead now all of them, which is a pity because of the wonderful paintings that it contains or contained.

You will remember I told you that just before the storm broke we were overtaken by a party of Kaffirs going to or returning from some feast. When we had gone about half a mile we found one of those Kaffirs again quite dead, but whether he (the body was that of a young man) had been killed by the lightning or by the hail, I was not sure. Evidently his companions were so frightened that they had left him where he lay, proposing, I suppose, to return and bury him later. So you will see that when it gave us shelter, this cave did us a good turn.

Now I will skip all the details of my trek into Zululand, which was as are other treks, only slower, because it was a hard job to get that heavily laden wagon along with but fourteen oxen. Once, indeed, we stuck in a river, the White Umfolozi, quite near to the Nongela Rock or Cliff which frowns above a pool of the river. I shall never forget that accident because it caused me to be the unwilling witness of a very dreadful sight.

Whilst we were fast in the drift a party of men appeared upon the brow of this Nongela Rock, about two hundred and fifty yards away, dragging with them two young women. Studying them through my glasses, I came to the conclusion from the way they moved their heads and stared wildly about them, that these young women were blind or had been blinded. As I looked at them, wondering what to do, the men seized the women by the arms and hurled them over the edge of the cliff. With a piteous wail the poor creatures rolled down the stratified rock into the deep pool below and there the crocodiles got them, for distinctly I saw the rush of the reptiles. Indeed, in this pool they were always on the look-out, as it was a favourite place of execution under the Zulu kings.

When their horrible business was finished the party of "slayers"—there were about fifteen of them—came down to the ford to interview us. At first I thought there might be trouble, and to tell the truth, should not have been sorry, for the sight of this butchery had made me furious and reckless. As soon as they found out, however, that the wagon belonged to me, Macumazahn, they were all amiability, and wading into the water, tackled on to the wheels, with the result that by their help we came safe to the farther bank.

There I asked their leader who the two murdered girls might be. He replied that they were the daughters of Panda, the King. I did not question this statement although, knowing Panda's kindly character, I doubted very much whether they were actually his children. Then I asked why they were blind, and what crime they had committed. The captain replied that they had been blinded by the order of Prince Cetywayo, who even then was the real ruler of Zululand, because "they had looked where they should not."

Further inquiry elicited the fact that these unhappy girls had fallen in love with two young men, and run away with them against the King's orders, or Cetywayo's, which was the same thing. The party were overtaken before they could reach the Natal border, where they would have been safe; the young men were killed at once and the girls brought up for judgment, with the result that I have described. Such was the end of their honeymoon!

Moreover, the captain informed me cheerfully that a body of soldiers had been sent out to kill the fathers and mothers of the young men and all who could be found in their kraals. This kind of free love must be put a stop to, he said, as there had been too much of it going on; indeed, he did not know what had come to the young people in Zululand, who had grown very independent of late, contaminated, no doubt, by the example of the Zulus in Natal, where the white men allowed them to do what they liked without punishment.

Then with a sigh over the degeneracy of the times, this crusty old conservative took a pinch of snuff, bade me a hearty farewell, and departed, singing a little song which I think he must have invented, as it was about the love of children for their parents. If it had been safe I should have liked to let him have a charge of shot behind to take away as a souvenir, but it was not. Also, after all, he was but an executive officer, a product of the iron system of Zululand in the day of the kings.

Well, I trekked on, trading as I went, and getting paid in cows and heifers, which I sent back to Natal, but could come by no oxen that were fit for the yoke, and much less any that had been broken in, since in those days such were almost unknown in Zululand. However, I did hear of some that had been left behind by a white trader because they were sick or footsore, I forget which, who took young cattle in exchange for them. These were said now to be fat again, but no one seemed to know exactly where they were. One friendly chief told me, however, that the "Opener-of-Roads," that is, old Zikali, might be able to do so, as he knew everything and the oxen had been traded away in his district.

Now by this time, although I was still obsessed about Heu-Heu, I had almost made up my mind to abandon the idea of visiting Zikali on this trip, because I had noticed that whenever I did so, always I became involved in arduous and unpleasant adventures as an immediate consequence. Being, however, badly in need of more oxen, for, not to mention the two that were dead, others of my team seemed never to have recovered from the effects of the hailstorm and one or two showed signs of sickness, this news caused me to revert to my original plan. So after consultation with Hans, who also thought it the best thing to be done, I headed for the Black Kloof, which was only two short days' trek away.

Arriving at the mouth of that hateful and forbidding gulf on the afternoon of the second day, I outspanned by the spring and, leaving the cattle in charge of Mavoon and Induka, walked up it accompanied by Hans.

The place, of course, was just as it had always been, and yet, as it ever did, struck me with a fresh sense of novelty and amazement. In all Africa I scarcely know a gorge that is so eerie and depressing. Those towering cliffsides that look

as though they are about to fall in upon the traveller, the stunted, melancholy aloe plants which grow among the rocks; the pale vegetation; the jackals and hyaenas that start away at the sound of voices or echoing footsteps; the dense dark shadows; the whispering winds that seem to wail about one even when the air is still over-head, draughts, I suppose, that are drawing backwards and forwards through the gully; all of these are peculiar to it. The ancients used to declare that particular localities had their own genii or spirits, but whether these were believed to be evolved by the locality or to come thither because it suited their character and nature, I do not know.

In the Black Kloof and some other spots to which I have wandered, I have often thought of this fable and almost found myself accepting it as true. But, then, what kind of a spirit would it be that chose to inhabit this dreadful gorge? I think some embodiment—no, that word is a contradiction—some impalpable essence of Tragedy, some doomed soul whereof the head was bowed and the wings were leaded with a weight of ineffable and unrepented crime.

Well, what need was there to fly to fable and imagine such an invisible inhabitant when Zikali, the *Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born*, was, and for uncounted years had been, the Dweller in this tomb-like gulf? Surely he was Tragedy personified, and that hoary head of his was crowned with ineffable and unrepented crime. How many had this hideous dwarf brought down to doom and how many were yet destined to perish in the snares that year by year he wove for them? And yet this sinner had been sinned against and did but pay back his sufferings in kind, he whose wives and children had been murdered and whose tribe had been stamped flat beneath the cruel feet of Chaka, whose House he hated and lived on to destroy. Even for Zikali allowances could be made; he was not altogether bad. Is any man *altogether* bad, I wonder.

Musing thus, I tramped on up the gorge, followed by the dejected Hans, whom the place always depressed, even more than it did myself.

“Baas,” he said presently, in a hollow whisper, for here he did not dare to speak aloud, “Baas, do you think that the Opener-of-Roads was once Heu-Heu himself who has now shrunk to a dwarf with age, or at any rate, that Heu-Heu’s spirit lives in him?”

“No, I don’t,” I answered, “for he has fingers and toes like the rest of us, but I do think that if there is any Heu-Heu he may be able to tell us where to find him.”

“Then, Baas, I hope that he has forgotten, or that Heu-Heu has gone to heaven where the fires go on burning of themselves without the need for wood. For, Baas, I do not want to meet Heu-Heu; the thought of him turns my stomach cold.”

“No, you would rather go to Durban and meet a gin bottle that would turn your stomach warm, Hans, and your head, too, and land you in the Trunk for seven days,” I replied, improving the occasion.

Then we turned the corner and came upon Zikali’s kraal. As usual, I appeared to be expected, for one of his great silent body servants was waiting, who saluted me with uplifted spear. I suppose that Zikali must have had a look-out man stationed somewhere who watched the plain beneath and told him who was approaching. Or possibly he had other methods of obtaining information. At any rate, he always knew of my advent and often enough why I came and whence, as, indeed, he did on this occasion.

“The Father of Spirits awaits you, Lord Macumazahn,” said the body servant. “He bids the little yellow man who is named Light-in-Darkness, to accompany you and will see you at once.”

I nodded and the man led me to the gate of the fence that surrounded Zikali’s great hut, on which he tapped with the handle of his spear. It was opened, by whom I did not see, and we entered, whereon someone slipped out of the shadows and closed the gate behind us, then vanished. There in front of the door of his hut, with a fire burning before him, crouched the dwarf wrapped in a fur kaross, his huge head, on either side of which the gray locks fell down much as they did in the picture of Heu-Heu, bent forward, and the light of the fire into which he was staring shining in his cavernous eyes. We advanced across the shiny beaten floor of the courtyard and stood in front of him, but for half a minute or more he took no notice of our presence. At length, without looking up, he spoke in that hollow, resounding voice which was unlike to any other I ever heard, saying:

“Why do you always come so late, Macumazahn, when the sun is off the hut and it grows cold in the shadows? You know I hate the cold, as the aged always do, and I was minded not to receive you.”

“Because I could not get here before, Zikali,” I answered.

“Then you might have waited until to-morrow morning unless, perhaps, you thought that I should die in the night, which I shall not do. No, nor for many nights. Well, here you are, little white Wanderer who hops from place to place like a flea.”

“Yes, here I am,” I replied, nettled, “to visit you who do not wander but sit in one spot like a toad in a stone, Zikali.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” he laughed—that wonderful laugh of his which echoed from the rocks and always made me feel cold down the back, “Ho, ho, ho! how easy it is to make you angry. Keep your temper, Macumazahn, lest it should run away with you as your oxen did before the storm in the mountains the other day. What do you want? You only come here when you want something from him whom once you named the Old Cheat. So I don’t wander, don’t I, but sit like a toad in a stone? How do you know that? Is it only the body that wanders? Cannot the spirit wander also, far, oh, far,

even to the 'Heaven Above' sometimes, and perhaps to that land which is under the earth, the place where they say the dead are to be found again? Well, what do you want? Stay, and I will tell you, who explain yourself so badly, who, although you think that you speak Zulu like a native, have never really learned it properly because to do that you must think in it and not in your own stupid tongue, that has no words for many things. Man, my medicines."

A figure darted out of the hut, set down a cat-skin bag before him, and was gone again. Zikali plunged his claw-like hand into the bag and drew out a number of knuckle bones, polished, but yellow with age, which he threw carelessly on to the ground in front of him, then glanced at them.

"Ha," he said, "something about cattle, I see; yes, you want to get oxen, broken oxen, not wild ones, and think that I can tell you where to do it cheap. By the way, what present have you brought for me? Is it a pound of your white man's snuff?" (As a matter of fact, it was a quarter of a pound.) "Now am I right about the oxen?"

"Yes," I replied, rather amazed.

"That astonishes you. It is wonderful, isn't it, that the poor Old Cheat should know what you want? Well, I'll tell you how it is done. You lost two oxen by lightning, did you not? You therefore, naturally would want others, especially as some of those which remain"—here he glanced at the bones once more—"were hurt, yes, by hailstones, very large hailstones, and others are showing signs of sickness, red-water, I think. Therefore, it isn't strange that the poor Old Cheat should guess that you needed oxen, is it? Only a silly Zulu would put such a thing down to magic. About the snuff, too, which I see you have taken from your pocket—a very little parcel, by the way. You've brought me snuff before, haven't you? Therefore, it isn't strange that I should guess that you would do so again, is it? No magic there."

"None, Zikali, but how did you learn of the lightning killing the cattle and of the hailstorm?"

"How did I learn that the lightning killed your pole-oxen, Kaptein and Deutchmann? Why, are you not a very great man in whom all are interested, and is it wonderful that I should be told of accidents that happen a hundred miles or so away? You met a party going to a wedding, did you not, just before the storm, and found one of them dead afterwards? By the way, he wasn't killed either by lightning or by hail. The flash fell near and stunned him, but really he died of the cold during the night. I thought that you might like to know that, as you are curious on the point. Of course, those Kaffirs would have told me about it, would they not? No magic, again you see. That's how we poor witch doctors gain repute, just by keeping our eyes and ears open. When you are old you might set up in the trade yourself, Macumazahn, since you do the same thing, even at night, they say."

Now while he went on mocking me he had gathered up the bones out of the dust and suddenly threw them again with a curious spiral twist that caused them to fall in a little heap, perched on one another. He looked at them, and said,

"Why, what do these silly things remind me of? They are some of the tools of my trade, you know, Macumazahn, used to impress the fools that come to see us witch doctors, who think that they will tell us secrets, and to take off their attention while we read their hearts. Somehow or other they remind me of rocks piled one on another as on a mountain slope, and look! there is a hollow in the middle like the mouth of a cave.

"Did you chance to take refuge from that storm in a cave, Macumazahn? Oh, you did! Well, see how cleverly I guessed it. No magic there again, only just a guess. Isn't it likely that you would go to a cave to escape from such a tempest, leaving the wagon outside? Look at that bone there, lying a little distance off the others, that's what made me think of the wagon being outside. But the question is, what did you see in the cave? Anything out of the way, I wonder? The bones can't tell me that, can they? I must guess that somehow else, mustn't I? Well, I'll try to do so, just to give you, the wise white man, another lesson in the manner that we poor rascals of witch doctors do our work and take in fools. But won't you tell me, Macumazahn?"

"No, I won't," I answered crossly, who knew that the old dwarf was making a butt of me.

"Then I suppose that I must try to discover for myself, but how, how? Come here, you little yellow monkey of a man, and sit between me and the fire so that its light shines through you, for then perchance I may be able to see something of what is going on in that thick head of yours, Light-in-Darkness, as you are called, and get some light in my darkness."

Hans advanced unwillingly enough and squatted down at the spot that Zikali indicated with his bony finger, being very careful that none of the magic bones should touch any portion of his anatomy, for fear lest they should bewitch him, I suppose. There he sat, holding his ragged felt hat upon the pit of his stomach as though to ward off the gimlet-like glances of Zikali's burning eyes.

"Ho-ho! Yellow Man," said the dwarf after a few seconds of inspection, which caused Hans to wriggle uncomfortably and even to colour beneath his wrinkled skin, like a young woman being studied by her prospective husband, who desires to ascertain whether she will or will not do for a fifth wife. "Ho-ho! it seems to me that you knew this cave before you went there in the storm, but of course I should guess that, for how otherwise would you have found it in such a hurry; also that it had something to do with Bushmen, as most caves have in this land.

"The question is, what was in it? No, don't tell me. I want to find out for myself. It is strange that the thought comes to me of pictures. No, it isn't strange, since the Bushmen often used to paint pictures in caves. Now, you shouldn't nod your head, Yellow Man, because it makes the riddle too easy. Just stare at me and think of nothing at all.

Pictures, lots of them, but one principal picture, I think; something that was difficult to come at. Yes, dangerous, even. Was it perchance a picture of yourself that a Bushman drew long ago when you were young and handsome, Yellow Man?

"There, again you are shaking your head. Keep it quite still, will you, so that the thoughts in it don't ripple like water beneath a wind. At least it was a picture of something hideous, but much bigger than you. Ah! it grows and grows. I am getting it now. Macumazahn, come and stand by me, and you, Yellow Man, turn your back so that you face the fire. Bah! it burns badly, does it not, and the air is so cold, so cold! I must make it brighter.

"Are you there, Macumazahn? Yes. Now look at this stuff of mine; see what a fine blaze it causes," and putting his hand into the bag, he drew out some kind of powder, only a little of it, which he threw on to the embers. Then he stretched his skinny fingers over them as though for warmth, and slowly lifted his arms high into the air. It is a fact that after him the flames sprang up to a height of three or four feet. He dropped his arms again and the flames sank down. He lifted them once more and once more they rose, only this time much higher. A third time he repeated this performance, and now the sheet of flame sprang fully fifteen feet into the air and so remained burning steadily, like the flame of a lamp.

"Look at that fire, Macumazahn, and you also, Yellow Man," he said, in a strange new voice, a sort of dreamy far-off voice, "and tell me if you see anything in it, for I can't—I can't."

I looked, and for a moment perceived nothing. Then some shape began to grow upon the blazing background. It wavered; it changed; it became fixed and definite, yes, clear and real. There before me, etched in flame, I saw Heu-Heu—Heu-Heu as he had been in the painting on the cave wall, only, as it seemed to me, alive, for his eyes blinked—Heu-Heu, looking like a devil in hell. I gasped but stood firm. As for Hans, he ejaculated in his vile Dutch,

"*Allemaghte! Da is die leeliker auld deil!*" (that is, "Almighty! There is the ugly old devil!") and having said this, rolled over on to his back and lay still, frozen with terror.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Zikali. "Ho, ho, ho!" and from a dozen places the walls of the kloof echoed back, "Ho, ho, ho!"

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## THE LEGEND OF HEU-HEU

Zikali stopped laughing and contemplated us with his hollow eyes.

"Who was it who first said that all men are fools?" he asked. "I do not know, but I think it must have been a woman, a pretty woman who played with them and found that it was so. If so, she was wise, as all women are in their narrow way, which the saying shows, since they are left out of it. Well, I will add to the proverb; all men are cowards also in one matter or another, though in the rest they may be brave enough. Further, they are all the same, for what is the difference between you, Macumazahn, wise White Man who have dared death a hundred times, and yonder little yellow ape?" Here he pointed to Hans lying upon his back, with rolling eyes and muttering prayers to a variety of gods between his chattering teeth. "Both of you are afraid, one as much as the other; the only difference being that the White Lord tries to conceal his fear, whilst the Yellow Monkey chatters it out, as monkeys do.

"Why are you so frightened? Just because by a common trick I show to your eyes a picture of that which is in the minds of both of you. Mark you again, not by magic but by a common trick which any child could learn, if somebody taught it to him. I hope that you will not behave like this when you see Heu-Heu himself, for if you do I shall be disappointed in you and soon there will be two more skulls in that cave of his. But then, perhaps, you will be brave; yes, I think so, I think so, since never would you like to die remembering how long and loud I should laugh when I heard of it."

Thus the old wizard rambled on, as was his fashion when he wished to combine his acrid mockery with the desire to gain space for thought, till presently he grew silent and took some of the snuff which I had brought him, for he had been engaged in opening the packet while he talked, all the while continuing to watch us as though he would search out our very souls.

Now, because I thought that I must say something, if only to show that he had not frightened me with his accursed manifestations, or whatever they were, I answered,

"You are right, Zikali, when you say that all men are fools, seeing that you are the first and biggest fool among them."

"I have often thought it, Macumazahn, for reasons that I keep to myself. But why do you say so? Let me hear, who would learn whether yours are the same as my own."

"First, because you talk as though there were such a creature as Heu-Heu, which, as you know well, does not live and never did; and secondly, because you speak as though Hans and I would meet it face to face, which we shall never do. So cease from such nonsense and show us how to make pictures in the fire—an art, you tell us, any child could learn."

"If they are taught, Macumazahn, *if* they are taught how. But were I to do this, I should indeed be the first of fools. Do you think that I wish to establish two rival cheats—you see, between ourselves, I give myself my right name—in the land to trade against me? No, no, let each keep the knowledge he has gained for himself, for if it becomes common to all, who will pay for it? But why do you believe that you will never stand face to face with Heu-Heu except in pictures on rock or fire?"

"Because he doesn't exist," I answered with irritation; "and if he does, I suppose his home is a long way off and I cannot trek without fresh oxen."

"Ah!" said Zikali, "that reminds me of how you refuted in the cave from the storm and the rest said that you wanted more oxen. So, knowing that you would be in as great a hurry to get to Heu-Heu as a young man is to find his first wife, I made ready. The story you heard was quite true. A white trader did leave a very fine team of footsore oxen in this neighbourhood, salted, every one of them, which after three moons' rest, are now fat and sound. I will have them driven up to-morrow morning and take care of yours while you are away."

"I have no money to pay for more oxen," I said.

"Is not the promise of Macumazahn better than any money, even the red English gold? Does not the whole land know it? Moreover," he added slowly, "when you return from visiting Heu-Heu you ought to have plenty of money—or, rather, of diamonds, which is the same thing—and perhaps of ivory, though of that I am not so sure. No, I am not sure whether you will be able to carry the ivory. If I do not speak truth I will pay for the oxen myself."

Now at the word "diamonds" I pricked up my ears, for just then all Africa was beginning to talk about these stones; even Hans rose from the ground and began once more to take interest in earthly things.

"That's a fair offer," I said, "but stop blowing dust" (i.e. talking nonsense) "and tell me straight out what you mean before it grows dark. I hate this kloof in the dark. Who is Heu-Heu? And if he or it lives, or lived, where is Heu-Heu, dead or alive? Also, supposing that there was or is a Heu-Heu, why do you, Zikali, wish me to find him, as I perceive you do, who always have a reason for what you wish?"

"I will answer the last question first, Macumazahn, who, as you say, always have a reason for what I want you or others to do."

Here he stopped and clapped his hands, whereon instantly one of his great serving men appeared from the hut behind, to whom he gave some order. The man darted away and presently was back with more of the skin bags such as witch doctors use to carry their medicines. Zikali opened one of these and showed me that it was almost empty, there being in it but a pinch of brown powder.

"This stuff, Macumazahn," he said, "is the most wonderful of all drugs, even more wonderful than the herb called *taduki* that can open the paths of the past, with which herb you will become acquainted one day. By means of it—I speak not of *taduki*, but of the powder in the bag—I do most of my tricks. For instance, it was with a dust of it that I was able to show you and the little yellow man the picture of Heu-Heu in the flames just now."

"You mean that it is a poison, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, among other things, by adding another powder it can be made into a very deadly poison; so deadly that as little of it as will lie upon the point of a thorn will kill the strongest man and leave no trace. But it has other properties also that have to do with the mind and the spirit; never mind what they are; if I tried to tell you, you would not understand. Well, the Tree of Visions from the leaves of which this medicine is ground grows only in the garden of Heu-Heu and nowhere else in Africa, and I got my last supply of it thence many years ago, long before you were born, indeed, Macumazahn; never mind how.

"Now I must have more, of those leaves, or what these Zulus call my magic, which wise white men like you know to be but my tricks, will fail me, and the world will say that the Opener-of-Roads has lost his strength and turn to seek wiser doctors."

"Then why do you not send and get some, Zikali?"

"Whom can I send that would dare to enter the land of Heu-Heu and rob his garden? No one but yourself, Macumazahn. Ah! I read your mind. You are wondering now if that be so, why I do not order that the leaves should be brought to me from the place of Heu-Heu. For this reason, Macumazahn. The dwellers there may not leave their hidden land; it is against their law. Moreover, if they might they would not part even with a handful of that drug, except at a great price. Once, a hundred years ago" (by which, I suppose, he meant a long time), "I paid such a price and bought a quantity of the stuff of which you see the last in that bag. But that is an old story with which I will not trouble you. Oh! many went and but two returned, and they mad, as those are apt to be who have looked on Heu-Heu and left him living. If ever you see Heu-Heu, Macumazahn, be sure to destroy him and all that is his, lest his curse should follow you for the rest of your days. Fallen, he will be powerless, but standing, his hate is very strong and reaches far, or that of his priests does, which is the same thing."

"Rubbish!" I said. "If there is any Heu-Heu, he is but a big ape, and living or dead, I am not afraid of any ape."

"I am glad to hear that, Macumazahn, and hope that you will always be of the same mind. Doubtless it is only his picture painted on rock or in the fire that frightens you, just as a dream is more terrible than anything real. Some day you shall tell me which was the worse, Heu-Heu's picture or Heu-Heu himself. But you asked me other questions. The first of them was, Who is Heu-Heu?"

"Well, I do not know. The legend tells that once, in the beginning, there was a people white, or almost white, who lived far away to the north. This people, says the old tale, were ruled over by a giant, very cruel and very terrible; a great wizard also, or cheat, as you would call him. So cruel and terrible was he, indeed, that his people rose against him, and strong as he might be, forced him to fly southwards with some who clung to him or could not escape him.

"So south he came with them, thousands of miles, until he found a secret place that suited him to dwell in. That place is beneath the shadow of a mountain of a sort that I have heard spouted out fire when the world was young, which even now smokes from time to time. Here this people, who are named Walloo, built them a town after their northern fashion out of the black stone which flowed from the mountain in past ages. But their king, the giant wizard, continued his cruelties to them forcing them to labour night and day at his city and Great House and a cave in which he was worshipped as a god, till at last they could bear no more and murdered him by night.

"Before he died, however, which he took long to do because of his magic, he mocked them, telling them that not thus would they be rid of him since he would come back in a worse shape than before and still rule over them from generation to generation. Moreover, he prophesied disaster to them and laid this curse upon them, that if they strove to leave the land that he had chosen, and to cross the ring of mountains by which it is enclosed, they should die, every one of them. This, indeed, happened, or so I have heard, since if even one of them travels down the river, by which alone that country can be approached from the desert, and sets foot in the desert, he dies, sometimes by sudden sickness, or sometimes by the teeth of lions and other wild beasts that live in the great swamp where the river enters the desert, whither the elephants and other game come to drink from hundreds of miles around."

"Perhaps fever kills them," I suggested.

"Maybe so, or poison, or a curse. At least, soon or late they die, and therefore it comes about that now none of them leaves that land."

"And what happened to the Walloos after they had finished off this kind king of theirs?" I asked, for Zikali's romantic fable interested me. Of course, I knew that it was a fable, but in such tales, magnified by native rumour, there is sometimes a grain of truth. Also Africa is a great country, and in it there are very queer places and peoples.

"Something very bad happened, Macumazahn, for scarcely was their king dead when the mountain began to belch out fire and hot ashes, which killed many of them and caused the rest to fly in boats across the lake that makes an island of the mountain, to the forest lands that lie around. There they live to this day upon the banks of the river which flows through the forest, the same that passes through the gorge of the mountains into the swamp, and there loses itself in the desert sands. So, at least, my messengers told me a hundred years ago, when they brought me the medicine that grows in Heu-Heu's garden."

"I suppose that they were afraid to go back to their town after the eruption was over," I said.

"Yes, they were afraid, at which you will not wonder when you see it, for when the mountain blew up the gases killed very many of them and what is more, turned them to stone. Aye, there they sit, Macumazahn, to this day, turned to stone, and with them their dogs and cattle."

Now at this amazing tale I burst out laughing, and even Hans grinned.

"I have noted, Macumazahn," said Zikali, "that in the beginning it is you who always laugh at me, while in the end it is I who laugh at you, and so I believe it will be in this case also. I tell you that there those people sit turned to stone, and if it is not so, you need not pay me for the oxen that I bought from the white man even should you come back with your pockets full of diamonds."

Now I bethought me of what happened at Pompeii, and ceased to laugh. After all, the thing was possible.

"That is one reason why they did not return to their town, even when the mountain went to sleep again, but there was another, Macumazahn, that was stronger still. Soon they found that it was haunted."

"Haunted! By what? By the stone men?"

"No, they are quiet enough, though what their spirits may be I cannot tell you. Haunted by their king who they had killed, turned into a gigantic ape, turned into Heu-Heu."

Now at this statement I did not laugh, although at first sight it seemed much more absurd than that of the dead people who had been petrified. For this reason: as I knew well, it is the commonest of beliefs among savages, and especially those of Central Africa, that dead chiefs, notably if they have been tyrants during their life, are metamorphosed into some terrible animal, which thenceforward persecutes them from generation to generation. The animal may be a rogue elephant or a man-killing lion, or perhaps a very poisonous snake. But whatever shape it takes, it always has this characteristic, that it does not die and cannot be killed—at any rate, by any of those whom it afflicts. Indeed, in my own experience I have come across sundry examples of this belief among natives. Therefore, it did not strike me as strange that these people should imagine their country to be cursed by the spirit of a legendary tyrant turned into a monster.

Only in the monster itself I put no faith. If it existed at all probably it would resolve itself into a large ape, or perhaps a gorilla living upon an island in the lake where it had become marooned, or drifted upon a tree in a flood.

"And what does this spirit do?" I asked Zikali incredulously. "Throw nuts or stones at people?"

"No, Macumazahn. According to what I have been told, it does much more. At times it crosses to the mainland—some say on a log, some say by swimming, some say as spirits can. There, if it meets any one, it twists off his or her head" (here I bethought me of the picture in the cave), "for no man can fight against its strength, or woman either, because if she be old and ugly, it serves her in the same fashion, but if she be young and well favoured, then it carries her away. The island is said to be full of such women who cultivate the garden of Heu-Heu. Moreover, it is reported that they have children who cross the lake and live in the forest—terrible, hairy creatures that are half human, for they can make fire and use clubs and bows and arrows. These savage people are named Heuheua. They dwell in the forests, and between them and the Walloos there is perpetual war."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Yes, one thing. At a certain time of the year the Walloos must take their fairest and best-born maiden and tie her to an appointed rock upon the shore of the island upon a night of full moon. Then they go away and leave her alone, returning at sunrise."

"And what do they find?"

"One of two things, Macumazahn; either that the maiden has gone, in which case they are well pleased, except those of them to whom she is related, or that she has been torn to pieces, having been rejected by Heu-Heu, in which case they weep and groan, not for her but for themselves."

"Why do they rejoice, and why do they weep, Zikali?"

"For this reason. If the maiden has been taken, Heu-Heu, or his servants, the Heuheua, will spare them and his priests for that year. Moreover, their crops will prosper and they be free from sickness. If she has been killed, he or his servants haunt them, snatching away other women, and they will have bad harvests; also fever and other ills fall upon them. Therefore, the Offering of the Maiden is their great ceremony, which, should she be taken, is followed by the Feast of Rejoicing, and should she be rejected and slain, by the Fast of Lamentation and the sacrifice of her parents or others."

"A pleasant religion, Zikali. Tell me, is it one that pleases these Walloos?"

"Does any religion please any man, Macumazahn, and do tears, want, sickness, bereavement, and death please those who are born into the world? For example, like the rest of us, you white people suffer these things, or so I have heard; also you have your own Heu-Heu or devil who claims such sacrifices and yet avenges himself upon you. You are not pleased with him, still you go on making your sacrifices of war and blood and all wickedness in return for what he did to you, thereby binding yourselves to him afresh and confirming his power over you, and as you do, so do we all. Yet if you and the rest of us would but stand up against him, perhaps his strength might be broken, or he might be slain. Why, then, do we continue to sacrifice our maidens of virtue, truth, and purity to him, and how are we better than those who worship Heu-Heu, who do so to save their lives?"

I considered his argument, which was subtle for a savage, however old and instructed, to have evolved from his limited opportunities of observation, and answered rather humbly,

"I do not suppose that we are better at all." Then to change the subject to something more practical, I added, "But what about those diamonds?"

"The diamonds! Oho! the diamonds, which, by the way, I believe are one of the offerings that you white people make to your own Heu-Heu. Well, these people seem to have plenty of them. Of course, they are useless to them, as they do not trade. Still, the women know that they are pretty, and fasten them about themselves in little nets of hair after polishing them upon stone, because they do not know how to make holes in them, being so hard, and cannot set them in metals. Also they stick them in the clay of their eating dishes before these are dried, making pretty patterns with them. It seems that these stones and others that are red, are washed down by the river from some desert across which it flows above, through a tunnel in the mountains, I believe. At any rate, they find them in plenty in the gravel on its banks, which they set the children to sift in a closely woven sieve of human hair, or in some such fashion. Stay, I will show you what they are like, for my messengers brought me a fistful or two many years ago," and he clapped his hands.

Instantly, as before, one of his servants appeared, to whom he gave certain instructions. The man went, and presently returned with a little packet of ancient, wrinkled skin that looked like a bit of an old glove. This he untied and gave to me. Within were a quantity of small stones that looked and felt like diamonds, very good diamonds, as I judged from their colour, though none of them were large. Also among them was a sprinkling of other stones that might have been rubies, though of this I could not be sure. At a guess I should have estimated the value of the parcel at 200 or 300 pounds. When I had examined them, I offered them back to Zikali, but he waved his hand and said:

"Keep them, Macumazahn, keep them. They are no good to me, and when you come to the land of Heu-Heu, compare them with those you will find there, just to show yourself that in this matter I do not lie."

"When I come to the land of Heu-Heu!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Where, then, is this land, and how am I to reach it?"

"That I propose to tell you to-morrow, Macumazahn, not to-night, since it would be useless to waste time and breath upon the business until I know two things: first, whether you will go there, and secondly, whether the Walloos will receive you if you do go."

"When I have heard the answer to the second question, we will talk of the first, Zikali. But why do you try to make a fool of me? These Walloos and the savage Heuheuas with whom they fight, I understand, dwell far away. How, then, can you have the answer by to-morrow?"

"There are ways, there are ways," he answered dreamily, then seemed to go into a kind of doze with his great head sunk upon his breast.

I stared at him for a while, till, growing weary of the occupation, I looked about me and noted that of a sudden it was growing dusk. Whilst I did so I began to hear screechings in the air: sharp, thin screechings such as are made by rats.

"Look, Baas," whispered Hans in a frightened voice, "his spirits come," and he pointed upwards.

I did look, and far above, as though they were descending from the sky, saw some wide-winged, flittering shapes, three of them. They descended in circles very swiftly, and I perceived that they were bats, enormous and evil-looking bats. Now they were wheeling about us so closely that twice their outstretched wings touched my face, sending a horrid thrill through me; and each time that a creature passed, it screeched in my ear, setting my teeth on edge.

Hans tried to beat away one of them from investigating him, whereon it clung to his hand and bit his finger, or so I judged from the yell he gave, after which he dragged his hat down over his head and plunged his hands into his pockets. Then the bats concentrated their attention upon Zikali. Round and round him they went in a dizzy whirl which grew closer and closer, till at last two of them settled on his shoulders just by his ears, and began to twitter in them, while the third hung itself on to his chin and thrust its hideous head against his lips.

At this point in the proceedings Zikali seemed to wake up, for his eyes opened and grew bright, also with his skinny hands he stroked the bats upon his shoulders as though they were pet birds. More, he seemed to speak with the creature that hung to his chin, talking in a language which I could not understand, while it twittered back the answers in its slate-pencil notes. Then suddenly he waved his arms and all three of them took flight again, wheeling outwards and upwards, till presently they vanished in the gloom.

"I tame bats and these are quite fond of me," he said by way of explanation, then added, "Come back to-morrow morning, Macumazahn, and perhaps I shall be able to tell you whether the Walloos wish for a visit from you, and if so, to show you a road to their country."

So we went, glad enough to get away, since the Opener-of-Roads, with his peculiar talk and manifestations, as I believe they call them in spiritualistic circles, was a person who soon got upon one's nerves, especially at nightfall. As we stumbled down that hateful gorge in the gloom, Hans asked,

"What were those things that hung to Zikali's shoulders and chin?"

"Bats, very large bats. What else?" I answered.

"I think a great deal else, Baas. I think that they are his familiars whom he is sending to those Walloos, just as he said."

"Do you believe in the Walloos and the Heuheua then, Hans? I don't."

"Yes, I do, Baas, and what is more, I believe that we shall visit them, because Zikali means that we should, and who is there that can fight against the will of the Opener-of-Roads?"

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## ALLAN MAKES A PROMISE

I never could sleep well in the neighbourhood of the Black Kloof. It always seemed to me to give out evil and disturbing emanations, nor was this night any exception to the rule. For hour after hour, cogitating the old wizard's marvellous tale of the Walloos and Heu-Heu, their devil-ghost, I lay in the midst of the intense silence of that lonely place which was broken only by the occasional scream of a night-hawk, or perhaps of the prey that it gripped, or the echoing bark of some baboon among the rocks.

The story was foolishness. And yet—and yet there were so many strange peoples hidden away in the vast recesses of Africa, and some of them had these extremely queer beliefs or superstitions. Indeed, I began to wonder whether it is not possible for these superstitions, persisted in through ages, to produce something concrete, at any rate to the minds of those whom they affect.

Also there were odd circumstances connected with this tale or romance that might, in a way, be called corroborative. For instance, the picture of Heu-Heu in the cave which Zikali, by his infernal arts or tricks, reproduced in the flame of fire; for instance, the diamonds and rubies, or crystals and spinels, whichever they might be, that at present reposed in the pocket of my shooting coat. These, presuming them to be the former, must have come from some very far-off or hidden spot, since I had never seen or heard of such in any place that I had visited, as they were entirely unlike those which, at that time, they were beginning to find at Kimberley, being, for one thing, much more water-worn.

Still, the presence of diamonds in a certain district had nothing to do with the possible existence of a Heu-Heu. Therefore, they proved nothing, one way or the other.

And if there were a Heu-Heu, did I wish to meet him face to face? In one sense, not at all, but in another, very much indeed. My curiosity was always great, and it would be wonderful to behold that which no white man's eyes had ever seen, and still more wonderful also to struggle with and kill such a monster. A vision rose before my eyes of Heu-Heu stuffed in the British Museum with a large painted placard underneath:

Shot in Central Africa by Allan Quatermain, Esq.

Why, then I, the most humble and unknown of persons, would become famous and have my likeness published in the *Graphic*, and probably the *Illustrated London News* also, perhaps with my foot set upon the breast of the prostrate Heu-Heu.

That, indeed, would be glory! Only Heu-Heu looked a very nasty customer, and the story might have a wrong ending; his foot might be set upon *my* breast, and he might be twisting off my head, as in the cave picture. Well, in that case the illustrated papers would publish nothing about it.

Then there was the story of the town full of petrified men and animals. This must either be true or false, since it lacked ghostly implications. Although I had never heard of anything of the sort, there might be such a place, and if so, it would be splendid to be its discoverer.

Oh, of what was I thinking? Zikali's yarn must be nonsense, and rank fiction. Yet it reminded me of something I had once heard in my youth, which for a long while I could not recall. At last, in a flash, it came back to me. My old father, who was a learned scholar, had a book of Grecian legends, and one of these about a lady called Andromeda, the daughter of a king who, in obedience to popular pressure and in order to avert calamities from his country, tied her up to a rock, to be carried off by a monster that rose out of the sea. Then a magically aided hero of the name of Perseus arrived at the critical moment, killed the monster and took away the lady to be his wife.

Why, this Heu-Heu story was the same thing over again. The maiden was tied to a rock; the monster came out of the sea, or rather, the lake, and carried her off, whereby calamities were duly averted. So similar was it, indeed, that I began to wonder whether it were not an echo of the ancient myth that somehow had found its way into Africa. Only hitherto there had been no Perseus in Heuheua Land. That role, apparently, was reserved for me. And if so, what should I do with the maiden? Restore her to a grateful family, I suppose, for certainly I had no intention of marrying her. Oh, I was growing silly with thinking! I would go to sleep; I *would*, I *wo* -

A minute or two later, or so it seemed, I woke up thinking, not of Andromeda, but of the prophet Samuel, and for a while wondered what on earth could have put this austere patriarch and priest into my head. Then, being a great student of the Old Testament, I remembered that autocratic seer's indignation when he heard the lowing of the oxen which Saul spared from the general "eating up" of the Amalekites, as the Zulus would describe it, by divine command. (What was the use of cutting the throats of all that good stock, personally, I could never understand.)

Well, in my ears also was the lowing of oxen, which, of course, formed the connecting link. I marvelled what they could be, for our own were grazing at a little distance, and poked my head out under the wagon-hood to perceive a really beautiful team of trek cattle, eighteen of them, for there were two spare beasts, which had just been driven up to my camp by two strange Kaffirs. Then, of course, I remembered about the oxen which Zikali had promised to sell me upon easy terms, or under certain circumstances to give me, and thought to myself that in this matter, at any rate, he had proved a wizard of his word.

Slipping on my trousers, I descended from the wagon to examine them, and with the most satisfactory results. They had quite recovered from their poverty and footsoreness that had caused their former owner to leave them behind in Zikali's charge, and were now as fat as butter, looking as though they would pull anything anywhere. Indeed, even the critical Hans expressed his unqualified approval of the beasts which, as he pointed out from various indications, really seemed to be "salted," and inoculated also, some of them, as could be seen from the loss of the ends of their tails.

Having sent them to graze in charge of the Kaffirs who had brought them, for I did not wish them to mix with my own beasts, which showed signs of sickness, I breakfasted in excellent spirits, as wherever I might go I was now set up with draught beasts, and then bethought me of my undertaking to revisit Zikali. Hans tried to excuse himself from accompanying me, saying that he wanted to study the new oxen which those strange Zulus might steal, etc.; the fact being, of course, that he was afraid of the old wizard, and would not go near him again unless he were obliged. However, I made him come, since his memory was first rate, and four ears were better than two when Zikali was concerned.

Off we trudged up the kloof, and as before, without delay, were admitted within the fence surrounding the witch doctor's hut, to find the Opener-of-Roads seated in front of it, as usual with a fire burning before him. However hot the weather, he always kept that fire going.

"What do you think of the oxen, Macumazahn?" he asked abruptly.

I replied with caution that I would tell him after I had proved them.

"Cunning as ever," said Zikali. "Well, you must make the best of them, Macumazahn, and as I told you, you can pay me when you get back."

"Get back from where?" I asked.

"From wherever you are going, which at present you do not know."

"No, I don't, Zikali," I said, and was silent.

He also was silent for a long while, so long that at last he outwore my patience, and I inquired sarcastically whether he had heard from his friend Heu-Heu, by bat-post.

"Yes, yes, I have heard, or think that I have heard—not by bats, but perchance by dreams or visions. Oho! Macumazahn, I have caught you again. Why do you always walk into my snare so easily? You see some bats, which in truth, as I told you, are but creatures that I have tamed by feeding them for many years, flitter about me and fly away, and you half believe that I have sent them a thousand miles to carry a message and bring back an answer, which is impossible.

"Now I will tell the truth. Not thus do I communicate with those who are afar. Nay, I send out my thought and it flies everywhere to the ends of the earth, so that the whole earth might read it if it could. Yet perchance it is attuned to one mind only among the millions, by which it can be caught and interpreted. But for the vulgar—yes, and even for the wise White Man who cannot understand—there remains the symbol of the bats and their message. Why will you always seek the aid of magic to explain natural things, Macumazahn?"

Now I reflected that my idea of nature and Zikali's differed, but knowing that he was mocking me after his custom, and declining to enter into argument as though it were beneath me, I said,

"All this is so plain that I wonder you waste breath in setting it out. I only desired to know if you have any answer to your message, however it was sent, and if so—what answer."

"Yes, Macumazahn, as it happens I have; it came to me just as I was waking this morning. This is its substance; that the chief of the Walloos, with whom my heart talked, and, as he believes, most of his people, will be very glad to welcome you in their land, though, as he believes again, the priests of Heu-Heu, who worship him as a god and are sworn to his service, will not be glad. Should you choose to come, the chief will give you all that you desire of the river diamonds or aught else that he possesses, and you can carry away with you, also, the medicine that I desire. Further, he will protect you from dangers so far as he is able. Yet for these gifts he requires payment."

"What payment, Zikali?"

"The overthrow of Heu-Heu at your hands."

"And if I cannot overthrow Heu-Heu, Zikali?"

"Then certainly you will be overthrown and the bargain will fall to the ground."

"Is it so? Well, if I go, shall I be killed, Zikali?"

"Who am I that I should dispense life or death, Macumazahn? Yet," he added slowly, separating his words by deliberate pinches of snuff—"yet I do not think that you will be killed. If I did I should not trust you to pay me for those oxen on your return. Also I believe that you have much work left to do in the world—my work, some of it, Macumazahn, that could not be carried out without you. This being so, the last thing I should wish would be to send you to your death."

I reflected that probably this was true, since always the old wizard was hinting of some great future enterprise in which we should be mixed up together; also I knew that he had a regard for me in his own strange way, and therefore

wished me no evil. Moreover, of a sudden a great longing seized me to undertake this adventure in which perchance I might see remarkable new things—I who was wearying of the old ones. However, I hid this, if anything could be hid from Zikali, and asked in a businesslike fashion,

“Where do you want me to go, how far off is it, and if I went, how should I get there?”

“Now we begin to handle our assegaïs, Macumazahn” (by which he meant that we were coming to business). “Hearken, and I will tell you.”

Tell me he did indeed for over an hour, but I will not trouble you fellows with all that he said, since geographical details are wearisome and I want to get on with my story. You, my friend [this was addressed to me, the Editor], are only stopping here over to-morrow night, and it will take me all that time to finish it—that is, if you wish to hear the end.

It is enough to say, therefore, that I had to trek about three hundred miles north, cross the Zambesi, and then trek another three hundred miles west. After this I must travel nor-west for a rather indefinite distance till I came to a gorge in certain hills. Here I must leave the wagon, if by this time I had any wagon, and tramp for two days through a waterless patch of desert till I came to a swamp-like oasis. Here the river of which Zikali had spoken lost itself in the sands of the desert, whence I could see on a clear day the smoke of the volcano of which he had also spoken. Crossing the swamp, or making my way round it, I must steer for this slope, till at length I came to a second gorge in the mountains, through which the river ran from Heuheua Land out into the desert. There, according to Zikali, I should find a party of Walloos waiting for me with canoes or boats, who would take me on into their country, where things would go as they were fated.

Before you leave, my friend, I will give you a map[\*] of the route, which I drew after travelling it, in case you or anybody else should like to form a company and go to look for diamonds and fossilized men in Heuheua Land, stipulating, however, that you do not ask me to take shares in the venture.

[\* If Allan ever gave me this map, of which, after the lapse of so many years, I am not sure, I have put it away so carefully that it is entirely lost, nor do I propose to hunt for it amidst the accumulated correspondence of some five-and-thirty years. Moreover, if it were found and published, it might lead to foolish speculation and probable loss of money among maiden ladies, the clergy, and other venturesome persons.—Editor.]

“So that’s the trek,” I said, when at last Zikali had finished. “Well, I tell you straight out that I am not going to make it through unknown country. How could I ever find my way without a guide? I’m off to Pretoria with your oxen or without them.”

“Is it so, Macumazahn? I begin to think that I am very clever. I thought that you would talk like that and therefore have made ready by finding a man who will lead you straight to the House of Heu-Heu. Indeed, he is here, and I will send for him,” and he summoned a servant in his usual way and gave an order.

“Whence does he come, who is he, and how long has he been here?” I asked.

“I don’t quite know who he is, Macumazahn, for he does not talk much about himself, but I understand that he comes from the neighbourhood of Heuheua Land, or out of it, for aught I know, and he has been here long enough for me to be able to teach him something of our Zulu language, though that does not matter much since you know Arabic well, do you not?”

“I can talk it, Zikali, and so can Hans, a little.”

“Well, that is his tongue, Macumazahn, or so I believe, which will make things easier. I may tell you at once that he is a strange sort of man, not in the least like any one you would expect, but of that you will judge for yourself.”

I made no answer, but Hans whispered to me that doubtless he was one of the children of the Heu-Heu and just like a great monkey. Although he spoke in a low voice, and at a distance Zikali seemed to overhear him, for he remarked,

“Then you will feel as though you had found a new brother, is it not so, Light-in-Darkness?” which, if I have not said so before, was a title that Hans had earned upon a certain honourable occasion.

Thereon Hans grew silent, since he dared not show his resentment of this comparison of himself to a monkey to the mighty Opener-of-Roads. I, too, was silent, being occupied with my own reflections, for now, in a flash, as it were, I saw the whole trick laid bare of its mysterious and pseudo-magical trappings. A messenger from some strange and distant country had come to Zikali, demanding his help for reasons that I did not know.

This he had determined to give through me, whom he thought suited to the purpose. Hence his bribe of the oxen, the news of which he had conveyed to me while I was still far off, having in some way become acquainted with my dilemma. Indeed, it looked as though everything had been part of a plan, though of course this was not possible, since Zikali could not have arranged that I should take shelter in a particular cave during a thunderstorm.

The sum of it was, however, that I should serve his turn, though what exactly that might be I did not know. He said that he wanted to obtain the leaves of a certain tree, which perhaps was true, but I felt sure that there was more behind.

Possibly his curiosity was excited and he desired information about a distant, secret people, since for knowledge of every kind he had a perfect lust. Or perhaps in some occult fashion this Heu-Heu, if there were a Heu-Heu, might be a rival who stood between him and his plans, and therefore was one to be removed.

Allowing ninety per cent. of Zikali's supernatural powers to be pure humbug, without doubt the remaining ten per cent. were genuine. Certainly he lived and moved and had his being upon a different plane from that of ordinary mortals, and was in touch with things and powers of which we are ignorant. Also as I have reason to know, though I do not trouble you with instances, he was in touch with others of the same class or hierarchy throughout Africa— yes, thousands of miles distant—of whom some may have been his friends and some his enemies but all were mighty in their way.

While I was reflecting thus and old Zikali was reading my thoughts —as I am sure he did, for I saw him smile in his grim manner and nod his great head as though in approval of my acumen—the servant returned from somewhere, ushering in a tall figure picturesquely draped in a fur kaross that covered his head as well as his body. Arrived in front of us, this person threw off the kaross and bowed in salutation, first to Zikali and then to myself. Indeed, so great was his politeness that he even honoured Hans in the same way, but with a slighter bow.

I looked at him in amazement, as well I might, since before me stood the most beautiful man that I had ever seen. He was tall, something over six feet high, and superbly shaped, having a deep chest, a sinewy form, and hands and feet that would have done credit to a Greek statue. His face, too, was wonderful, if rather sombre, perfectly chiselled and almost white in colour, with great dark eyes, and there was something about it that suggested high and ancient blood. He looked, indeed, as though he had just stepped straight out of the bygone ages. He might have been an inhabitant of the lost continent of Atlantis or a sun-burned old Greek, for his hair, which was chestnut brown, curled tightly, even where it hung down upon his shoulders, though none grew upon his chin or about the curved lips. Perhaps he was shaven. In short, he was a glorious specimen of mankind, differing from any other I had seen.

His costume, too, was striking and peculiar, although dilapidated; indeed, it might have been rifled from the body of an Egyptian Pharaoh. It consisted of a linen robe that seemed to be twisted about him, which was brodered at the edges with faded purple, a tall and battered linen headdress shaped like the lower half of a soda-water bottle reversed and coming to a point, a leather apron narrow at the top but broadening towards the knees, also brodered, and sandals of the same material.

I stared at him amazed, wondering whether he belonged to some people unknown to me, or was another of Zikali's illusions, and so did Hans, for his muddy little eyes nearly fell out of his head and he asked me in a whisper,

"Is he a man, Baas, or a spirit?"

For the rest the stranger wore a plain torque or necklet apparently of gold, and about him was girdled a cross-hilted sword with an ivory handle and a red sheath.

For a while this remarkable person stood before us, his hands folded and his head bent in a humble fashion, though it was really I who should have been humble, owing to the physical contrast between us. Apparently he did not think it proper to speak first, while Zikali squatted there grimly, not helping me at all. At last, seeing that something must be done, I rose from the stool upon which I was seated and held out my hand. After a moment's hesitation the splendid stranger took it, but not to shake in the usual fashion, for he bent his head and gently touched my fingers with his lips, as though he were a French courtier and I a pretty lady. I bowed again with the best grace I could command, then putting my hand in my trouser pocket, said, "How do you do?" and as he did not seem to understand, repeated it in the Zulu word, "*Sakubona*." This also failing, I greeted him in the name of the Prophet in my best Arabic.

Here I struck oil, as an American friend of mine named Brother John used to say, for he replied in the same tongue, or something like it. Speaking in a soft and pleasing voice, but without alluding to the Prophet, he addressed me as "Great Lord Macumazahn, whose fame and prowess echo across the earth," and a lot of other nonsense, with which I could see that Zikali had stuffed him, that may be omitted.

"Thank you," I cut in, "thank you, Mr. -?" and I paused.

"My name is Issicore," he said.

"And a very nice name, too, though I never heard one like it," I replied. "Well, Issicore, what can I do for you?" An inadequate remark, I admit, but I wanted to come to the facts.

"Everything," he answered fervently, pressing his hands to his breast. "You can save from death a most beautiful lady who will love you."

"Will she?" I exclaimed. "Then I will have nothing to do with that business, which always leads to trouble."

Here Zikali broke in for the first time, speaking very slowly to Issicore in Zulu, which I remembered he said he had been teaching him, and saying,

"The Lord Macumazahn is already full of woman's love and has no room for more. Speak not to him of love, O Issicore, lest you should anger the ghost of one who haunts this spot, a certain royal Mameena whom once he knew too well."

Now I turned upon Zikali, promising to give him a piece of my mind, when Issicore, smiling a little, repeated,

"Who will love you—as a brother."

"That's better," I said, "though I don't know that I want to take on a sister at my time of life, but I suppose you mean that she will be much obliged?"

"That is so, O Lord. Also the reward will be great."

"Ah!" I replied, really interested. "Now be so good as to tell me exactly what you want."

Well, to cut a long story short, with variations he repeated Zikali's tale. I was to travel to his remote land, bring about the destruction of a nebulous monster, or fetish, or system of religion, and in payment to be given as many diamonds as I could carry.

"But why can't you get rid of your own devil?" I asked. "You look a warrior and are big and strong."

"Lord," he replied gently, spreading out his hands in an appealing fashion, "I am strong and I trust that I am brave, but it cannot be. No man of my people can prevail against the god of my people, if so he may be called. Even to revile him openly would bring a curse upon us; moreover, his priests would murder us—"

"So he has priests?" I interrupted.

"Yes, Lord, the god has priests sworn to his service, evil men as he is evil. O Lord, come, I beseech you, and save Sabeela the beautiful."

"Why are you so interested in this lady?" I asked.

"Lord, because she loves me—not as a brother—and I love her. She, the great Lady of my land and my cousin, is my betrothed and, if the god is not overthrown, as the fairest of all our maidens she will be taken by the god." Here emotion seemed to overcome him, very real emotion, which touched me, for he bowed his head and I saw tears trickle down from his dark eyes.

"Hearken, Lord," he went on, "there is an ancient prophecy in my land that this god of ours, whose hideous shape hides the spirit of a long-dead chief, can only be destroyed by one of another race who can see in the night, some man of great valour destined to be born in due season. Now through our dream-doctors I caused enquiry to be made of this Master of Spirits, who is named Zikali, for I was in despair and knew what must happen at the appointed time. From him I learned that there lived in the south such a man as is spoken of in the prophecy and that his name meant Watcher-by-Night. Then I dared the journey and the curse and came to seek you, and lo! I have found you."

"Yes," I answered, "you have found one whose native name means Watcher-by-Night, but who cannot see in the dark better than any one else, and is not a hero or very brave, but only a trader and a hunter of wild beasts. Yet I tell you, Issicore, that I do not wish to interfere with your gods and priests and tribal matters, or to give battle to some great ape, if it exists, on the chance of earning a pocketful of bright stones should I live to take them away, and of getting a bundle of leaves that this doctor desires. You had better seek some other white man with eyes like a cat's and more strength and courage, Issicore."

"How can I see another when, without doubt, you are the one appointed, Lord? If you will not come, then I return to die with Sabeela, and all is finished."

He paused a few moments, and continued, "Lord, I can offer you little, but is not a good deed its own reward, and will not the memory of it feed your heart through life and death? Because you are noble I beseech you to come, not for what you may gain, but just because you are noble and will save others from cruelty and wrong. I have spoken—choose."

"Why did you not bring Zikali his accursed leaves yourself?" I asked furiously.

"Lord, I could not come to the place where that tree grows in the garden of Heu-Heu; nor, indeed, did I know that this Master of Spirits needed that medicine. Lord, be noble according to your nature, which is known afar."

Now I tell you fellows when I heard this I felt flattered. We all think that we are noble at times, but there are precious few who tell us so, and therefore the thing came as a pleasant surprise from this extraordinarily dignified, handsome and, if it would appear in his own fashion, well-educated son of Ham—if he were a son of Ham. To my mind, he looked more like a prince in disguise, somebody of unknown but highly distinguished race who had walked out of a fairy book. But when I came to think of it, that was exactly what he said he was. Anyway, he was a most discriminating person with a singular insight into character. (It did not occur to me at the moment that Zikali was also a discriminating person with an insight into character which had induced him to bring us two together for secret purposes of his own. Or that, in order to impress me, he had stuffed Issicore with the story of a predestined white man, told of in prophecy, who could see in the dark, as, without doubt, he had done.)

Also the adventure proposed was of an order so wild and unusual that it drew me like a magnet. Supposing that I lived to old age, could I, Allan Quatermain, bear to look back and remember that I had turned down an opportunity of that sort and was departing into the grave without knowing if there was or was not a Heu-Heu who snatched away lovely Andromedas—I mean Sabeelas—off rocks, and combined in his hideous personality the qualities of a god or fetish, a ghost, a devil, and a super-gorilla?

Could I bury my two humble talents of adventure and straight shooting in that fashion? Really, I thought not, for if I did, how could I face my own conscience in those last failing years? And yet there was so much to be said on the

other side into which I need not enter. In the end, being unable to make up my mind, I fell into weakness and determined to refer the matter to fate. Yes, I determined to toss up, using Hans for the spinning coin.

"Hans," I said in Dutch, a tongue which neither of the other two understood, "shall we travel to this man's country, or shall we stay in our own? You have heard all; speak and I will accept your judgment. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Baas," said Hans, twirling his hat in his vacant fashion, "I understand that the Baas, as is usual when he is in a deep pit, seeks the wisdom of Hans to get him out—of Hans who has brought him up from a child and taught him most of what he knows; of Hans upon whom his Reverend Father, the Predikant, used to lean as upon a staff, that is, after he had made him into a good Christian. But the matter is important, and before I give my judgment that will settle it one way or another, I would ask a few questions."

Then he wheeled round, and, addressing the patient Issicore in his vile Arabic, said,

"Long Baas with a hooked nose, tell me, do you know the way back to this country of yours, and if so, how much of it can be travelled in a wagon?"

"I do," answered Issicore, "and all of it can be travelled in a wagon until the first range of hills is reached. Also along it there is plenty of game and water, except in the desert of which you have been told. The journey should take about three moons, though, myself alone, I accomplished it in two."

"Good, and if my Baas, Macumazahn, comes to your country, how will he be received?"

"Well by most of the people, but not well by the priests of Heu-Heu, if they think he comes to harm the god, and certainly not well by the Hairy Folk who live in the forest, who are called the Children of the god. With these he must be prepared to war, though the prophecy says that he will conquer all of them."

"Is there plenty to eat in your country, and is there tobacco, and something better than water to drink, Long Baas?"

"There is plenty of all these things. There is wealth of every kind, O Counsellor of the White Lord, and all of them shall be his and yours, though," he added with meaning, "those who have to deal with the priests of the god and the Hairy Folk would do well to drink water, lest they should be found asleep."

"Have you guns there?" Hans asked, pointing to my rifle.

"No, our weapons are swords and spears, and the Hairy Folk shoot with arrows from bows."

Hans ceased from his questions and began to yawn as though he were tired, as he did so, staring up at the sky where some vultures were wheeling.

"Baas," he said, "how many vultures do you see up there? Is it seven or eight? I have not counted them but I think there are seven."

"No, Hans, there are eight; one, the highest, was hid behind a cloud."

"You are quite sure that there are eight, Baas?"

"Quite," I answered angrily. "Why do you ask such silly questions when you can count for yourself?"

Hans yawned again and said, "Then we will go with this fine, hook-nosed Baas to the country of Heu-Heu. That is settled."

"What the deuce do you mean, Hans? What on earth has the number of vultures got to do with the matter?"

"Everything, Baas. You see, the burden of this choice was too heavy for my shoulders, so I lifted my eyes and put up a prayer to your Reverend Father to help me, and in doing so saw the vultures. Then your Reverend Father in the heaven above seemed to say to me, 'If there are an even number of vultures, Hans, then go; if an odd number, then stop where you are. But, Hans, do not count the vultures. Make my son, the Baas Allan, count them, for then he will not be able to grumble at you if things turn out badly whether you go or whether you stay behind, and say that you counted wrong or cheated.' And now, Baas, I have had enough of this, and should like to return to our outspan and examine those new oxen."

I looked at Hans, speechless with indignation. In my cowardice I had left it to his cunning and experience to decide this matter, virtually tossing up, as I have said. And what had the little rascal done? He had concocted one of his yarns about my poor old father and tossed up in his turn, going odd or even on the number of the vultures which he made *me* count! So angry was I that I lifted my foot with meaning, whereon Hans, who had been expecting something of the sort, bolted, and I did not see him again until I got back to the camp.

"Oho! Oho!" laughed Zikali, "Oho!" while the dignified Issicore studied the scene with mild astonishment.

Then I turned on Zikali, saying, "A cheat I have called you before, and a cheat I call you again, with all your nonsense about bat-messengers and the tale you have taught to this man as to a prophecy of his people, and the rest. *There* is the bat who brought the message, or the dream, or the vision, or whatever you like to call it, and all the while he was hidden beneath your eaves," and I pointed to Issicore. "And now I have been tricked into saying that I will go upon this fool's errand, and as I do not turn my back upon my word, go I must."

"Have you, Macumazahn?" asked Zikali innocently. "You talked with Light- in-Darkness in Dutch, which neither I nor this man understood, and therefore we did not know what you said. But, as out of the honesty of your heart you

have told us, we understand now, and of course we know, as everyone knows, that your word once spoken is worth all the writings of the white men put together, and that only death or sickness will prevent you from accompanying Issicore to his own country. Oho ho! It has all come about as I would have it, for reasons with which I will not trouble you, Macumazahn."

Now I saw that I was doubly tricked, hit, as it were, with the right barrel by Hans and with the left by Zikali. To tell the truth, I had quite forgotten that he did not understand Dutch, although I remembered it when I began to use that tongue, and that therefore it did not in the least matter what I had said privately to Hans. But if Zikali did not understand Dutch, of which after all I am not so sure, at any rate he understood human nature, and could read thoughts, for he went on:

"Do not boil within yourself, like a pot with a stone on its lid, Macumazahn, because your crafty foot has slipped and you have repeated publicly in one tongue what you had already said secretly in another, and therefore made a promise to both of us. For all the while, Macumazahn, you had made that promise and your white heart would not have suffered you to swallow it again just because we could not hear it with our ears. No, that great white heart of yours would have risen in your throat and shut it fast. So kick away the burning sticks from beneath the water of your anger and let it cease from boiling, and go forth as you have promised, to see wonderful things and do wonderful deeds and snatch the pure and innocent out of the hands of evil gods or men."

"Yes, and burn my fingers, scooping your porridge out of the blazing pot, Zikali," I said with a snort.

"Perhaps, Macumazahn, perhaps, for if I had no porridge to be saved, should I have taken all this trouble? But what does that matter to you, to the brave White Lord who seeks the truth as a thrown spear seeks the heart of the foe? You will find plenty of truth yonder, Macumazahn, new truth, and what does it matter if the spear is a little red after it has reached the heart of things? It can be cleaned again, Macumazahn, it can be cleaned, and amidst many other services, you will have done one to your old friend, Zikali the Cheat."

Here Allan glanced at the clock and stopped.

"I say—do you know what time it is?" he said. "Twenty minutes past one—by the head of Chaka. If you fellows want to finish the story to-night, you can do so for yourselves according to taste. I'm off, or out shooting to-morrow I shan't hit a haystack sitting."

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## THE BLACK RIVER

On the following evening, pleasantly tired after a capital day's shooting and a good dinner, once more the four of us—Curtis, Good, myself (the Editor) and old Allan—were gathered round the fire in his comfortable den at "The Grange."

"Now then, Allan," I said, "get on with your tale."

"What tale?" he asked, pretending to forget, for he was always a bad starter where his own reminiscences were concerned.

"That about the monkey-man and the fellow who looked like Apollo," answered Good. "I dreamt about it all night, and that I rescued the lady—a dark girl dressed in blue—and that just as I was about to receive a well-earned kiss of thanks, she changed her mind and turned into stone."

"Which is just what she would have done if she had any sense in her head and you were concerned, Good," said Allan severely, adding, "Perhaps it was your dream that made you shoot more vilely than usual to-day. I saw you miss eight cock pheasants in succession at that last corner."

"And I saw you kill eighteen in succession at the first," replied Good cheerily, "so you see the average was all right. Now then, get on with the romance. I like romance in the evening after a dose of the hard facts of life in the shape of impossible cock pheasants."

"Romance!" began Allan indignantly. "Am I romantic? Pray do not confuse me with yourself, Good."

Here I intervened imploring him not to waste time in arguing with Good, who was unworthy of his notice, and at last, mollified, he began.

Now I am in a hurry and want to be done with this job that dries up my throat—who, having lived so much alone, am not used to talking like a politician—and makes me drink more whisky and water than I ought. You are in a hurry, too, all of you, especially Good, who wants to get to the end of the story in order that he may argue about it and try to show that he would have managed much better, and you, my friend, because you have to leave to-morrow morning early and must see to your packing before you get to bed. Therefore, I am going to skip a lot, all about our journey, for instance, although, in fact, it was one of the most interesting treks I ever made, and for much of the way through a country that was quite new to me, about which one might write a book.

I will simply say, therefore, that in due course after some necessary delay to re-pack the wagon, leaving behind all articles that were not wanted in Zikali's charge, we trekked from the Black Kloof. The oxen that I had bought—on credit—from Zikali were in the yokes, and we drove with us his two extra beasts as well as four of the best of my old team to serve as spares.

Also I took, in addition to my own driver and voorlooper, Mavoon and Induka, two other Zulus, Zikali's servants, who I knew would be faithful because they feared their terrible master, although I knew also that they would spy upon me and, if ever they returned alive, make report of everything to him.

Well, leaving out all the details of this remarkable trek in which we met with no fighting, disasters, or great troubles and always had plenty to eat, game being numerous throughout, I will take up the tale on our arrival, safe and sound, at the first line of hills that I show upon the map, of which Zikali had spoken as bordering the desert. Here we were obliged to leave the wagon, for it was impossible to get it over the hills or through the desert beyond.

This, fortunately, we were able to do at a little village of peaceable folk who lived in a charming and well-watered situation, and, having no near neighbours, were able to cultivate their lands unmolested. I placed it in the charge of Mavoon and Induka, whom I could trust and who would not run away, also the oxen, of which, by good fortune, we had only lost three. With them, as Issicore declared that we must go on alone, I left Zikali's servants, knowing that they would keep an eye on my men, and my men on them, and promised the headman of the village a good present if we found everything safe on our return.

He said that he would do his best, but added impressively—he was a melancholy person—that if we were going to the country of Heu-Heu we never should return, as it was a land of devils. In that event he asked what was to happen to the wagon and goods. I replied that I had given orders that if I did not reappear within a year, it was to trek back to whence we came and announce that we were gone, but that he need not be afraid as, being a great magician, I knew that we should be back long before that time.

He shrugged his shoulders, looking doubtfully at Issicore, and there the conversation ended. However, I persuaded him to lend us three of his people to guide us across the mountains and to carry water through the desert on the understanding that they should be allowed to return as soon as we sighted the swamp. Nothing would induce them to go nearer to the country of Heu-Heu.

So in due course off we started, leaving Mavoon and Induka almost in tears, for the gloom of the headman had spread to them and they too believed that they would see us no more. Hans, it is true, they never would have missed,

since they hated him as he hated them, but in my case the matter was different because they loved me in their own way.

Our baggage was light: rifles (I took a double-barrelled Express), as much ammunition as we could manage, some medicines, blankets, etc., a few spare clothes and boots for myself, a couple of revolvers and as many vessels of one sort or another as possible to carry water, including two paraffin tins slung at either end of a piece of wood after the fashion of a milkman's yoke. Also we had tobacco, a good supply of matches, candles, and a bundle of dried biltong to eat in case we found no game. It doesn't sound much, but before we got across that desert I felt inclined to throw away half of it; indeed, I don't think we could have got the stuff over the mountain pass, which proved to be precipitous, without the assistance of the three water-bearers.

It took us twelve hours to reach and cross that mountain's crest, just beneath which we camped, and another six to descend the other side next day. At its foot was thin, tussocky grass with occasional thorn trees growing in a barren veldt that by degrees merged into desert. By the last water we camped for the second night; then, having filled up all our vessels, started out into the arid, sandy wilderness.

Now, you fellows know what an African desert is, for we went through a worse one than this on our journey to Solomon's Mines. Still, the particular specimen I am speaking of was pretty bad. To begin with, the heat was tremendous. Then, in parts, it consisted of rolling slopes or waves of sand, up which we must scramble and down which we must slide—a most exhausting process. Further, there grew in it a variety of thick-leaved plant with sharp spines that, if touched, caused a painful soreness, which abominable and useless growths made it impossible to travel at night, or even if the light were low, when they could not be seen and avoided.

We spent three days crossing that wretched desert, that had another peculiarity. Here and there in its waste, columns of stones, polished by blowing sand, stood up like obelisks, sometimes in one piece, monoliths, and sometimes in several, piled on each other. I suppose that they were the remains of strata: hard cores that had resisted the action of wind and water, which in the course of thousands or millions of years had worn away the softer rock, grinding it to dust.

Those obelisk-like columns gave a very strange appearance to that wilderness, suggesting the idea of monuments; also, incidentally, they were useful, since it was by them that our water-bearing guides, who were accustomed to haunt the place to kill ostriches or to steal their eggs, steered their path. Of these ostriches we saw a good number, which showed that the desert could not be so very wide, since in it there seemed to be nothing for them to live on, unless they ate the prickly plants. There was no other life in the place.

Fortunately, by dint of economy and self-denial, our water held out, until on the afternoon of the third day, as we trudged along parched and weary, from the crest of one of the sand waves we saw far off a patch of dense green that marked the end, or, rather, the beginning, of the swamp. Now our agreement with the guides was that when they came in sight of this swamp they should return, for which purpose we had saved some of the water for them to drink on their homeward journey.

After a brief consultation, however, they determined to come on with us, and when I asked why, wheeled round and pointed to dense clouds that were gathering in the heavens behind us. These clouds, they explained, foretold a sand tempest in which no man could live in the desert. Therefore they urged us forward at all speed; indeed, exhausted as we were, we covered the last three miles between us and the edge of the swamp at a run. As we reached the reeds the storm burst, but still we plunged forward through them, till we came to a spot where they grew densely and where, by digging pits in the mud with our hands, we could get water which, thick as it was, we drank greedily. Here we crouched for hours while the storm raged.

It was a terrific sight, for now the face of the desert behind was hidden by clouds of driven sand, which even among the reeds fell upon us thickly, so that occasionally we had to rise to shake its weight off us. Had we still been in the desert, we should have been buried alive. As it was we escaped, though half choked and with our skins fretted by the wear of the particles of sand.

So we squatted all night till before dawn the storm ceased and the sun rose in a perfectly clear sky. Having drunk more water, of which we seemed to need enormous quantities, we struggled back to the edge of the swamp and from the crest of a sand wave looked about us. Issicore stretched out his arm towards the north and touched me on the shoulder. I looked, and far away, staining the delicate blue of the heavens, perceived a dark, mushroom-shaped patch of vapour.

"It is a cloud," I said. "Let us go back to the reeds; the storm is returning."

"No, Lord," he answered, "it is the smoke from the Fire Mountain of my country."

I studied it and said nothing, reflecting, however, that in this particular, at any rate, Zikali had not lied. If so, was it not possible that he had spoken truth about other matters also? If there existed a volcano as yet unreported by any explorer, might there not also be a buried city filled with petrified people, and even a Heu-Heu? No, in Heu-Heu I could not believe.

Here, after they had filled themselves and their gourds with water, the three natives from the village left us, saying that they would go no farther and that they could now depart safely as the sandstorm would not return for some weeks.

They added that our magic must be very strong, since had we delayed even for a few hours we should certainly all have been killed.

So they departed, and we camped by the reeds, hoping to rest after our exhausting journey. In this, however, we were disappointed, for as soon as the sun went down we became aware that this vast area of swampy land was the haunt of countless game that came thither, I suppose, from all the country round in order to drink and to fill themselves with its succulent growths.

By the light of the moon I saw great herds of elephants appearing out of the shadows and marching majestically towards the water. Also there were troops of buffalo, some of which broke out of the reeds showing that they had hidden there during the day, and almost every kind of antelope in plenty, while in the morass itself we could hear sea cows wallowing and grunting, and great splashes which I suppose were caused by frightened crocodiles leaping into pools.

Nor was this all, since so much animal life upon which they could prey attracted many lions that coughed and roared and slew according to their nature. Whenever one of them sprang on to some helpless buck, a stampede of all the game in the neighbourhood would follow. The noise they made crashing through the reeds was terrific, so much so that sleep was impossible. Moreover, there was always a possibility that the lions might be tempted to try a change of diet and eat us, especially as we had no bushes with which to form a *boma*, or fence. So we made a big fire of dry, last year's reeds, of which, fortunately, there were many standing near, and kept watch.

Once or twice I saw the long shape of a lion pass us, but I did not fire for fear lest I should wound the beast only and perhaps cause it to charge. In short, the place was a veritable sportsman's paradise, and yet quite useless from a hunter's point of view, since, if he killed elephants, it would be impossible to carry the ivory across the desert, and only a boy desires to slaughter game in order to leave it to rot. At dawn, it is true, I did shoot a reed buck for food, which was the only shot I fired.

As amidst all this hubbub the idea of sleep must be abandoned, I took the opportunity to question Issicore about his country and what lay before us there. During our journey I had not talked much to him on the matter, since he seemed very silent and reserved, all his energies being concentrated upon pushing forward as quickly as possible; also, there was no object in doing so while we were still far away. Now, however, I thought that the time had come for a talk.

In answer to my queries, he said that if we travelled hard, by marching round the narrow western end of the swamp, in three days we should arrive at the mouth of the gorge down which the river ran that flowed through the mountains surrounding his country. These mountains, I should add, we had sighted as a black line in the distance almost as soon as we entered the desert, which showed that they were high. Here, if we reached it without accident, he hoped to find a boat waiting in which we could be paddled to his town, though why anybody should be expecting us I could not elicit from him.

Leaving that question unsolved, I asked him about this town and its inhabitants. He replied that it was large and contained a great number of people, though not so many as it used to do in bygone generations. The race was dwindling, partly from intermarriage and partly because of the terror in which they lived, that made the women unwilling to bear children lest these should be snatched away by the Hairy Folk who dwelt in the surrounding forest, or perhaps sacrificed to the god himself. I inquired whether he really believed that there was such a god, and he replied with earnestness that certainly he did, as once he had seen him, though from some way off, and he was so awful that description was impossible. I must judge of him for myself when we met—an occasion that I began to wish might be avoided.

I cross-examined him persistently about this god, but with small result, for the subject seemed to be one on which he did not care to dwell. I gathered, however, that he, Issicore, had been in a canoe when he saw Heu-Heu on a rock at dawn, surrounded by women, upon the occasion of some sacrifice, and that he had not looked much at him because he was afraid to do so. He noted, however, that he was taller than a man and walked stiffly. He added that Heu-Heu never came to the mainland, though his priests did.

Then, dropping the subject of Heu-Heu, he went on to tell me of the system of government amongst the Walloos, which, it appeared, was an hereditary chieftainship that could be held either by men or women. The present chief, an old man, like the people was named Walloo, as indeed were all the chiefs of the tribe in succession, for "Walloo" was really a title which he thought had come with them from whatever land they inhabited in the dark, forgotten ages. He had but one child living, a daughter, the lady Sabeela, of whom he had spoken to me at the hut of the Opener-of-Roads, she who was doomed to sacrifice. He, Issicore, was her second cousin, being descended from the brother of her grandfather, and therefore of the pure Walloo blood.

"Then if this lady died, I suppose you would be the chief, Issicore?" I said.

"Yes, Lord, by descent," he answered; "yet perhaps not so. There is another power in the land greater than that of the kings or chiefs—the power of the priests of Heu-Heu. It is their purpose, Lord, should Sabeela die, to seize the chieftainship for themselves. A certain Dacha, who is also of the pure Walloo blood, is the chief priest, and he has sons to follow him."

"Then it is to this Dacha's interest that Sabeela should die?"

"It is to his interest, Lord, that she should die and I also, or, better still, both of us together, for then his part would be clear."

"But what of her father, the Walloo? He cannot desire the death of his only child."

"Nay, Lord, he loves her much and desires that she should marry me. But, as I have said, he is an old man and terror-haunted. He fears the god, who already has taken one of his daughters; he fears the priests, who are the oracles of the god, and, it is said, murdered his son as they have striven to murder me. Therefore, being frozen by fear, he is powerless, and without his leadership none can act, since all must be done in the name of the Walloo and by his authority. Yet it was he also who sent me to seek for help from the great wizard of the South with whom he and his fathers have had dealings in bygone years. Yes, because of the ancient prophecy that the god could only be overthrown and the tyranny of the priests be broken by a white man from the South, he sent me, who am the betrothed of his daughter, secretly and without the knowledge of Dacha, and because of Sabeela I dared the curse and went, for which deed perchance I must pay dearly. He it is also who watches for my return."

"And if he exists, which you have not proved to me, how am I to kill this god, Issicore? By shooting him?"

"I do not know, Lord. It is believed that he cannot be harmed by weapons, over whom only fire and water have power, since legend tells that he came out of the fire and certainly he lives surrounded by water. The prophecy does not say how he will be killed by the stranger from the South."

Now, listening to this weird talk in that wild-beast-peopled wilderness from the mouth of a man who evidently was very frightened, and wearied as I was, I confess that I grew frightened also, and wished most heartily that I had never been beguiled into this adventure. Probably the terrible god, of whom I could learn no details, question as I would, was nothing but an invention of the priests, or perhaps one of their number disguised. But, however this might be, no doubt I was travelling to a fetish-ridden land in which witchcraft and murder were rampant; in short, one of Satan's peculiar possessions. Yes, I, Allan Quatermain, was brought here to play the part of a modern Hercules and clean out this Augean stable of bloodshed and superstitions, to say nothing of fighting the lion in the shape of Heu-Heu, always supposing that there was a Heu-Heu, a creature taller than a man that "walked stiffly," whom Issicore believed he had once seen from a distance at dawn.

However, I was in for it, and to show fear would be as useless as it was undignified, since, unless I turned and ran back into the desert, which my pride would never suffer me to do, I could see no escape. Having put my hand to the plough I must finish the furrow. So I sat silent, making no comment upon Issicore's rather nebulous information. Only after a while I asked him casually when this sacrifice was to take place, to which he replied with evident agitation,

"On the night of the full harvest moon, which is this moon, fourteen days from now; wherefore we must hurry, since at best it will take us five days to reach the town of Walloo, three in travelling round the swamp and two upon the river. Do not delay, Lord, I pray you do not delay, lest we should be too late and find Sabeela gone."

"No," I answered, "I shall not be late, and I can assure you, my friend Issicore, that the sooner I am through with this business one way or another, the better I shall be pleased. And now that all those beasts in the swamp seem to have grown a little quieter I will try to go to sleep."

Happily I was successful in this effort and obtained several hours' sound rest, which I needed sorely, before the sun appeared and Hans woke me. I rose, and, taking my rifle, shot a fat reed-buck, which I selected out of a number which stood quite close by, a young female off which we breakfasted, for, as you know, if the meat of antelopes is cooked before it grows cold it is often as tender as though it had been hung for a week. The odd thing was that the sound of the shot did not seem to disturb the other beasts at all; evidently they had never heard anything of the sort before, and thought that their companion was just lying down.

An hour later we started on our long tramp round the edge of that swamp. I did not like to march before for fear lest we should get into complications with the herds of elephants and other animals that were trekking out of it in all directions with the light, though where they went to feed I am sure I do not know. In all my life I never saw such quantities of game as had collected in this place, which probably furnished the only water for many miles round.

However, as I have said, it was of no use to us, and therefore our object was to keep as clear of it as possible. Even then we stumbled right on to a sleeping white rhinoceros with the longest horn that ever I saw. It must have measured nearly six feet, and anywhere else would have been a great prize. Fortunately the wind was blowing from it to us, so it did not smell us and charged off in another direction, for, as you know, the rhinoceros is almost blind.

Now I am not going to give all the details of that interminable trudge through sand, for in the mud of the swamp we could not walk at all. During the day we were scorched by the heat and at night we were tormented by mosquitoes and disturbed by the noise of the game and the roaring of lions, which fortunately, being so full fed, never molested us. By the third night, bearing always to the right, we had come quite close to the mountain range, which, although it was not so very lofty, seemed to be absolutely precipitous, faced, indeed, by sheer cliffs that rose to a height of from five to eight hundred feet. To what extraordinary geological conditions these black cliffs and the desert by which they were surrounded owe their origin, I am sure I do not know, but there they were, and no doubt are.

Before sunset on this third day, by Issicore's direction, we collected a huge pile of dried reeds, which we set upon the crest of a sand mound, and after dark fired them, so that for a quarter of an hour or so they burned in a bright column of flame. Issicore gave no explanation of this proceeding, but as Hans remarked, doubtless it was a signal to his

friends. Next morning, at his request, we started on before the dawn, taking our chances of meeting with elephants or buffaloes, and at sunrise found ourselves right under the cliffs.

An hour later, following a little bay in them where there was no swamp, because here the ground rose, of a sudden we turned a corner and perceived a tall, white-robed man with a big spear standing upon a rock, evidently keeping a look-out. As soon as he saw us he leapt down from his rock with the agility of a *klip-springer* and came towards us.

After one curious glance at me he went straight to Issicore, knelt down and, taking his hand, pressed it to his forehead, which showed me that our guide was a venerated person. Then they conversed together in low tones, after which Issicore came to me and said that so far all was well, as our fire had been seen and a big canoe awaited us. We went on, guided by the sentry, and after one turn suddenly came on quite a large river, which had been hidden by the reeds. To the left appeared this deep, slow-flowing river; to the right, within a hundred paces, indeed, it changed into swamp or morass, of which the pools were fringed with very tall and beautiful papyrus plants, such open water as there was being almost covered by every kind of wild fowl that rose in flocks with a deafening clamour. This stream, the Black River, as the Walloos called it, was bordered on either side by precipices through which I suppose it had cut its way in the course of millenniums, so high and impending that they seemed almost to meet above, leaving the surface of the water nearly dark. It was a stream gloomy as the Roman Styx, and, glancing at it, I half expected to see Charon and his boat approaching to row us to the Infernal fields. Indeed, into my mind there floated a memory of the poet's lines, which I hope I quote correctly:

In Kubla Khan a river ran Through caverns measureless to man, Down to a sunless sea.

I confess honestly that the aspect of the place filled me with fear: it was forbidding—indeed, unholy—and I marvelled what kind of a sunless sea lay beyond this hell gate. Had I been alone, or with Hans only, I admit that I should have turned tail and marched back round that swamp, upon which, at any rate, the sun shone, and, if I could, across the desert beyond to where I had left the wagon. But in the presence of the stately Issicore and his myrmidon, this I could not do because of my white man's pride. No, I must go on to the end, whatever it might be.

If I was frightened, Hans was much more so, for his teeth began to chatter with terror.

"Oh, Baas," he said, "if this is the door, what will the house beyond be like?"

"That we shall learn in due course," I answered, "so there is no good in thinking about it."

"Follow me, Lord," said Issicore, after some further talk with his companion.

I did so, accompanied by Hans, who stuck to me as closely as possible. We advanced round the rock and discovered a little indent in the bank of the river where a great canoe, hollowed apparently from a single huge tree, or rather its prow, was drawn up on the sandy shore. In this canoe sat sixteen rowers or paddle-men—I remember there were sixteen of them because at the time Hans remarked that the number was the same as that of a wagon team and subsequently called these paddlers "water oxen."

As we approached they lifted their paddles in salute, apparently of Issicore, since of me and my companion, except by swift, surreptitious glances, they took no notice.

With a kind of silent, unobtrusive haste Issicore caused our small baggage, which consisted chiefly of cartridge bags, to be stowed away in the prow of the canoe that for a few feet was hollowed out in such a fashion that it made a kind of cupboard roofed with solid wood, and showed us where to sit. Next he entered it himself, while the lookout man ran down the canoe and took hold of the steering oar.

Then at a word all the paddlers back-watered and the craft slid off the sandy beach into the river which was full to the banks, almost in flood indeed. It seemed that here the rain had been nearly incessant for some months and the lowering sky showed that ere long there was much more to come.

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## THE WALLOO

In perfect stillness, except for the sound of the dipping of the paddles in the water, we glided away very swiftly up the placid river. I think that nothing upon this strange journey, or at any rate during the first part of it, struck me more than its quietness. The water was still, flowing peacefully between its rocky walls towards the desert in which it would be lost, just as the life of some good man flows towards death. The rocky precipices on either side were still; they were so steep that on them nothing which breathed could find a footing, except bats, perhaps, that do not stir in the daytime. The riband of grey sky above us was still, though occasionally a draught of air blew between the cliffs with a moaning noise, such as one might imagine to be caused by the passing wind of spiritual wings. But stillest of all were those rowers who for hour after hour laboured at their task in silence, and with a curious intentness, or, if speak they must, did so only in a whisper.

Gradually an impression of nightmare stole over me; I felt as though I were a sleeper taking part in the drama of a dream. Perhaps, in fact, this was so, since I was very tired, having rested but little for a good many nights and laboured hard during the day trudging through the sand with a heavy rifle and a load of cartridges upon my back. So really I may have been in a doze, such as is easily induced in any circumstances by the sound of lapping water. If so, it was not a pleasant dream, for the titanic surroundings in which I found myself and the dread possibilities of the whole enterprise oppressed my spirit with a sensation of departure from the familiar things of life into something unholy and unknown.

Soon the cliffs grew so high and the light so faint that I could only just see the stern, handsome faces of the rowers appearing as they bent forward to their ordered stroke, and vanishing into the gloom as they leant back after it was accomplished. The very regularity of the effort produced a kind of mesmeric effect which was unpleasant. The faces looked to me like those of ghosts peeping at one through cracks of the curtains round a bed, then vanishing, continually to return and peep again.

I suppose that at last I went to sleep in good earnest. It was a haunted sleep, however, for I dreamed that I was entering into some dim Hades where all realities had been replaced by shadows, strengthless but alarming.

At length I was awakened by the voice of Issicore, saying that we had come to the place where we must rest for the night, as it was impossible to travel in the dark and the rowers were weary. Here the cliffs widened out a little, leaving a strip of shore upon either side of the river, upon which we landed. By the last light that struggled to us from the line of sky above we ate such food as we had, supplemented by biscuits of a sort that were carried in the canoe, for no fire was lighted. Before we had finished, dense darkness fell upon us, for the moonbeams were not strong enough to penetrate into that place, so that there was nothing to be done except lie down upon the sand and sleep with the wailing of the night air between the cliffs for lullaby.

The night passed somehow. It seemed so long that I began to think or dream that I must be dead and waiting for my next incarnation, and when occasionally I half woke up, was only reassured by hearing Hans at my side muttering prayers in his sleep to my old father, of which the substance was that he should be provided with a half-gallon bottle of gin! At last a star that shone in the black riband far above vanished and the riband turned blue, or, rather, grey, which showed that it was dawn. We rose and stumbled into the canoe, for it was impossible to see where to place our feet, and started. Within a few hundred yards of our sleeping place suddenly the cliffs that hemmed in the river widened out, so that now they rose at a distance of a mile or more from either bank of flat, water-levelled land.

These banks, which here were steep, were clothed with great, dark- coloured, spreading trees of which the boughs projected far over the water and cut off the light almost as much as the precipices had done lower down the stream. Thus we travelled in gloom, especially as the sun was not yet up. Presently through this gloom, to which my trained eyes had grown accustomed, I thought that I caught sight of tall, dark-hued figures moving between the trees. Sometimes these figures seemed to stand upright and walk upon their feet, and sometimes to run swiftly upon all fours.

"Look, Hans," I whispered—everyone whispered in that place —"there are baboons!"

"Baboons, Baas!" he answered. "Were ever baboons such a size? No, they are devils."

Now from behind me Issicore also whispered,

"They are the Hairy Men who dwell in the forest, Lord. Be silent, I pray you, lest they should attack us."

Then he began to consult with the rowers in low tones, apparently as to whether we should go on or turn back. Finally we went on, paddling at a double pace. A moment later a sound arose in that dim forest, a sound of indescribable weirdness that was half an animal grunt and half a human cry, which to my ears shaped itself into the syllables, "*Heu-Heu!*" In an instant it was taken up upon all sides, and from everywhere came this wail of "*Heu-Heu!*" which was so horrid to hear that my hair stood up even straighter than usual. Listening to it, I understood whence came the name of the god I had travelled so far to visit.

Nor was this all, for there followed heavy splashes in the water, like to those made by plunging crocodiles, and in the deep shadow beneath the spreading trees I saw hideous heads swimming towards us.

"The Hairy Folk have smelt us," whispered Issicore again, in a voice that I thought perturbed. "Do nothing, Lord; they are very curious. Perhaps when they have looked they will go away."

"And if they don't?" I asked—a question to which he returned no answer.

The canoe was steered over towards the left bank and driven forward at great speed with all the strength of the rowers. Now in the space of open water, upon which the light began to shine more strongly, I saw a beast-like, bearded head that yet undoubtedly was human, yellow-eyed, thick-lipped, with strong, gleaming teeth, coming towards us at the speed of a very strong swimmer, for it had entered the water above us and was travelling downstream. It reached us, lifted up a powerful arm that was completely covered with brown hair like to that of a monkey, caught hold of the gunwale of the boat just opposite to where I sat, and reared its shoulders out of the water, thereby showing me that its great body was for the most part also covered with long hair.

Now its other hand was also on the gunwale, and it stood in the water, resting on its arms, the hideous head so close to me that its stinking breath blew into my face. Yes, there it stood and jabbered at me. I confess that I was terrified who never before had seen a creature like this. Still, for a while I sat quiet.

Then of a sudden I felt that I could bear no more, who believed that the brute was about to get into the boat, or perhaps to drag me out of it. I lost control of myself, and drawing my heavy hunting-knife—the one you see on the wall there, friends—I struck at the hand that was nearest. The blow fell upon the fingers and cut one of them right off so that it fell into the canoe. With an appalling yell the man or beast let go and plunged into the water, where I saw him waving his bleeding hand above his head.

Issicore began to say something to me in frightened tones, but just then Hans ejaculated,

"*Allemaghter!* here's another!" and a second huge head and body reared itself up, this time on his side.

"Do nothing!" I heard Issicore exclaim. But the appearance of the creature was too much for Hans, who drew his revolver and fired two shots in rapid succession into its body. It also tumbled back into the water, where it began to wallow, screaming, but in a thinner voice. I thought, and rightly, that it must be female.

Before the echo of the shots had died away there rose another hideous chorus of *Heu-Heus* and other cries, all of them savage and terrible. From both banks more of the creatures precipitated themselves into the water, but luckily not to attack us because they were too much occupied with the plight of their companion. They congregated round her and dragged her to the shore. Yes, I saw them lift the body out of the stream, for by this time I was sure from its hanging arms and legs that it was dead, an act which showed me that although they had the shape and the covering of beasts, in fact they were human.

"Elephants will do as much," interrupted Curtis.

"Yes," said Allan, "that is true. Sometimes they will; I have seen it twice. But everything about the behaviour of those Hairy Men was human. For instance, their wailing over the dead, which was dreadful and reminded me of the tales of banshees. Moreover, I had not far to look for proof. At my feet lay the finger that I had cut off. It was a human finger, only very thick, short, and covered with hair, having the nail worn down, too, doubtless in climbing trees and grubbing for roots."

Even then with a shock I realized that I had stumbled on the Missing Link, or something that resembled it very strongly. Here in this unknown spot still survived a people such as were our forefathers hundreds of thousands or millions of years ago. Also I reflected that I ought to be proud, for I had made a great discovery, although, to tell the truth, just then I should have been quite willing to resign its glory to someone else.

After this I began to reflect upon other things, for a large jagged stone whizzed within an inch of my head, and presently was followed by a rude arrow tipped with fish bone that stuck in the side of the canoe.

Amidst a shower of these missiles, which fortunately, beyond a bruise or two, did us no harm, we headed out into mid-stream again where they could not reach us, and as no more of the Hairy People swam from the banks to cut us off, soon were pursuing our way in peace. For once, however, the imperturbable Issicore was much disturbed. He came forward and sat by me and said:

"A very evil thing has happened, Lord. You have declared war upon the Hairy Men and the Hairy Men never forget. It will be war to the end."

"I can't help it," I answered feebly, for I was sick with the sight and sound of those creatures. "Are there many of them, and are they all over your country?"

"A good many, perhaps a thousand or more, Lord, but they only live in the forests. You must never go into the forest, Lord, at any rate, not alone; or on to the island where *Heu-Heu* lives, for he is their king and keeps some of them about him."

"I have no present intention of doing so," I answered.

Now, as we went, the cliffs receded farther and farther from the river, till at length they ceased altogether. We were through the lip of the mountains, if I may so call it, and had entered a stretch of unbroken virgin forest, a veritable sea of great trees that occupied the rich land of the plain and grew to an enormous size and tallness.

Moreover, before us appeared clearly the cone of the volcano, broad but of no great height, over which hung the mushroom-shaped cloud of smoke.

All day long we travelled up this tranquil river, rejoicing in the comparative brightness in its centre, although, of course, the trees upon either edge overhung it much.

Late in the afternoon a bend of the banks brought us within sight of a great sheet of water from which apparently the river issued, although, as I learned afterwards, it flowed into it upon the other side, from I know not whence. This lake—for it was a big lake many miles in circumference—surrounded an island of considerable size, in the centre of which rose the volcano, now a mere grey-hued mountain that looked quite harmless, although over it hung that ominous cloud of smoke which, oddly enough, one could not see issuing from its crest. I suppose that it must have gone up in steam and condensed into smoke above. At the foot of the mountain, upon a plain between it and the lake, with the help of my glasses I could see what looked like buildings of some size, constructed of black stone or lava.

"They are ruins," said Issicore, who had observed that I was examining them. "Once the great city of my forefathers stood yonder until the fire from the mountain destroyed it."

"Then does nobody live on the island now?" I asked.

"The priests of Heu-Heu live there, Lord. Also Heu-Heu himself lives there in a great cave upon the farther side of the mountain, or so it is said, for none of us has ever visited that cave, and with him some of the Hairy People who are his servants. My grandfather did so, however, and saw him there. Indeed, as I have told you, once I saw him myself; but what he looked like you must not ask me, Lord, for I do not remember," he added hastily. "In front of the cave is his garden, where grows the magic tree of which the Master of Spirits yonder in the South desires leaves to mix with his medicines; the tree that gives dreams with long life and vision."

"Does Heu-Heu eat of this tree?" I asked.

"I do not know, but I know that he eats the flesh of beasts, because of these we must make offerings to him, and sometimes of men, or so it is said. Near the foot of the garden burn the eternal fires, and between them is the rock upon which the offerings are made."

Now I thought to myself I should much like to see this place of which it was evident that Issicore knew or would tell very little, where there was a great cave in which dwelt a reputed demon with his slaves and hierophants; and where too grew a tree supposed to be magical, flanked by eternal fires. What were these eternal fires, I wondered. I could only suppose that they had something to do with the volcano.

As it happened, however, whilst I was preparing to question Issicore upon the subject, we passed round a tree-clad headland, for here the river had widened into a kind of estuary, and on the shore of the bay beyond it discovered a town of considerable size, covering several hundred acres of ground. The houses of this town, most of which stood in their own gardens, though some of the smaller ones were arranged in streets, had an Eastern appearance, inasmuch as they were low and flat-roofed.

Only there was this difference: Eastern houses of the primitive sort as a rule are whitewashed, but these were all black, being built of lava, as I discovered afterwards. All round the town also, except on the lake side, ran a high wall likewise of black stone, the presence of which excited my curiosity and caused me to inquire its object.

"It is to defend us from the Hairy Folk who attack by night," answered Issicore. "In the daylight they never come, and therefore our fields beyond are not walled," and he pointed to a great stretch of cultivated land that I suppose had been cleared of trees, which extended for miles into the surrounding forest.

Then he went on to explain that they laboured there while the sun was up and at nightfall returned to the town, except certain of them who slept in forts or blockhouses to guard the crops and cattle kraals.

Now I looked at this place and thought to myself that never in my life had I seen one more gloomy, especially in the late afternoon under a sullen, rain-laden sky. The black houses, the high black walls that reminded me of a prison, the black waters of the lake, the outlook on to the black volcano and the black mass of the forest behind, all contributed to this effect.

"Oh, Baas, if I lived here I should soon go mad!" said Hans, and upon my word, I agreed with him.

Now we paddled towards the shore, and presently ran alongside a little jetty formed of stones loosely thrown together, on which we landed. Evidently our approach had been observed, for a number of people—forty or fifty of them, perhaps—were collected at the shore end of the jetty awaiting us. A glance showed me that although of varying ages and both sexes, in type they all resembled our guide, Issicore. That is to say, they were tall, well-shaped, light-coloured and extremely handsome, also clothed in white robes, while some of the men wore hats of the Pharaonic type that I have described. The women's headdress, however, consisted of a close-fitting linen cap with lappets hanging down on either side, and was extraordinarily becoming to their severe cast of beauty. From what race could this people have sprung, I wondered. I had not the faintest idea; to me they looked like the survivals of some ancient civilization.

Conducted by Issicore, we advanced, carrying our scanty baggage, a forlorn and battered little company. As we drew near, the crowd separated into two lines, men to the right and women to the left, like the congregation in a very high church, and stood quite silent, watching us intently with their large, melancholy eyes. Never a word did they say

as we passed between them, only watched and watched till I felt quite nervous. They did not even offer any greeting to Issicore, although it seemed to me that he had earned one after his long and dangerous journey.

I observed, however, although at the time I took little notice of the matter, and afterwards forgot all about it until Hans brought the circumstance back to my mind, that a certain dark man of austere countenance, clothed rather differently from the rest, approached Issicore, addressed him, and thrust something into his hand. Issicore glanced at this object, whatever it might be, and distinctly I saw him tremble and turn pale. Then he hid it away, saying nothing.

Turning to the right, we marched along a roadway that bordered the lake, which was constructed about twelve feet above its level, perhaps to serve as a protection against inundation, till we came to a wall in which was a door built of solid balks of wood. This door opened as we approached, and, passing it, we found ourselves in a large garden cultivated with taste and refinement, for in it were beds of flowers, the only cheerful thing I ever saw in this town that, it appeared, was named Walloo after the tribe or its ruler. At the end of the garden stood a long, solid, flat-roofed house built of the prevailing lava rock.

Entering, we found ourselves in a spacious room which, as dusk was gathering, was lit with cresset-like lamps of elegant shape placed upon pedestals cut from great tusks of ivory.

In the centre of this room were two large chairs made of ebony and ivory with high backs and footstools, and in these chairs sat a man and a woman who were well worth seeing. The man was old, for his silver hair hung down upon his shoulders, and his fine, sad face was deeply wrinkled.

At a glance I saw that he must be the king or chief, because of his dignified if somewhat senile appearance. Moreover, his robes, with their purple borders, had a royal look, and about his neck he wore a heavy chain of what seemed to be gold, while in his hand was a black staff tipped with gold, no doubt his sceptre. For the rest, his eyes had a rather frightened air, and his whole aspect gave an idea of weakness and indecision.

The woman sat in the other chair with the light from one of the lamps shining full upon her, and I knew at once that she must be the Lady Sabeela, the love of Issicore. No wonder that he loved her, for she was beautiful exceedingly; tall, well developed, straight as a reed, great-eyed, with chiselled features that were yet rounded and womanly, and wonderfully small hands and feet. She, too, wore purple-bordered robes. About her waist hung a girdle thickly sewn with red stones that I took to be rubies, and upon her shapely head, serving as a fillet for her abundant hair, which flowed down her in long waving strands of a rich and ruddy hue of brown or chestnut, was a simple golden band. Except for a red flower on her breast she wore no other ornament, perhaps because she knew that none was needed.

Leaving us by the door of the chamber, Issicore advanced and knelt before the old man, who first touched him with his staff and then laid a hand upon his head. Presently he rose, went to the lady and knelt before her also, whereon she stretched out her fingers for him to kiss, while a look of sudden hope and joy, which even at that distance I could distinguish, gathered on her face. He whispered to her for a while, then turned and began to speak earnestly to her father. At length he crossed the room, came to me and led me forward, followed by Hans at my heels.

"O Lord Macumazahn," he said, "here sit the Walloo, the Prince of my people, and his daughter, the Lady Sabeela. O Prince my cousin, this is the white noble famous for his skill and courage, whom the Wizard of the South made known to me and who at my prayer, out of the goodness of his heart, has come to help us in our peril."

"I thank him," said the Walloo in the same dialect of Arabic that was used by Issicore. "I thank him in my own name, in that of my daughter who now alone is left to me, and in the name of my people."

Here he rose from his seat and bowed to me with a strange and foreign courtesy such as I had not known in Africa, while the lady also rose and bowed, or rather curtsied. Seating himself again, he said,

"Without doubt you are weary and would rest and eat, after which perchance we may talk."

Then we were led away through a door at the end of the great room into another room that evidently had been prepared for me. Also there was a place beyond for Hans, a kind of alcove. Here water, which I noticed had been warmed—an unusual thing in Africa—was brought in a large earthenware vessel by two quiet women of middle age, and with it an undershirt of beautiful fine linen which was laid upon a bed, or cushioned couch, that was arranged upon the floor and covered by fur rugs.

I washed myself, pouring the warm water into a stone basin that was set upon a stand, and put on the shirt, also the change of clothes that I had with me, and, with the help of Hans and a pair of pocket scissors, trimmed my beard and hair. Scarcely had I finished when the women reappeared, bringing food on wooden platters—roast lamb, it seemed to be—and with it drink in jars of earthenware that were of elegant shape and powdered all over with the little rough diamonds of which Zikali had given me specimens, that evidently had been set in it in patterns before the clay dried. This drink, by the way was a kind of native beer, sweet to the taste but pleasant and rather strong, so that I had to be careful lest Hans should take too much of it.

After we had finished our meal, which was very welcome, for we had eaten no properly cooked food since we left the wagon, Issicore arrived and took us back to the large room, where we found the Walloo and his daughter seated as before, with several old men squatting about them on the ground. A stool having been set for me the talk began.

I need not enter into all its details, since in substance they set out what I had already heard from Issicore; namely, that there dwelt Something or Somebody on the island in the lake who required annually the sacrifice of a beautiful

virgin. This was demanded through the head priest of a college, also established on the island which acknowledged the being, real or imaginary, that lived there as its god or fetish. Further, that creature (if he existed) was said to be the king of all the Hairy Folk who inhabited the forest. Lastly, there was a legend that he was the reincarnation of some ancient monarch of the Walloo folk, who had come to a bad end at the hands of his indignant subjects at some date undefined. Walloo, it seemed, was their correct name, that of Heuheua applying only to the Hairy Men of the woods.

This story I dismissed at once, being quite convinced that it was only a variant of a very common African fable. Doubtless Heu-Heu, if there really were a Heu-Heu, was the ruler of the savage hairy aboriginals of the place that once in the far past had been conquered by the invading Walloo, who poured into the country from the north or west, being themselves the survivors of some civilized but forgotten people. This conclusion, I may add, I never found any reason to doubt. Africa is a very ancient land, and in it once lived many races that have vanished, or survive only in a debased condition, dwindling from generation to generation until the day of their extinction comes.

Here I may state briefly the final opinions at which I have arrived about this people.

Almost certainly these Walloos were such a dying race, hailing, as names among them seemed to suggest from some region in West Africa, where their forefathers had been highly civilized. Thus, although they could not write, they had traditions of writing and even inscriptions graven upon stones, of which I saw several in a character that I did not know, though to me it had the look of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Also they still had knowledge of certain cultured arts such as the weaving of fine linen, the carving of wood and marble, the making of pottery, and the smelting of metals with which their land abounded, including gold that they found in little nuggets in the gravel of the streams.

Most of these crafts, however, were dying out except those that were necessary to life, such as the moulding of pottery and the building of houses and walls, and particularly agriculture, in which they were very proficient. When I saw them all the higher arts were practised only by the very old men. As they never intermarried with any other blood, their hereditary beauty, which was truly remarkable, remained to them, but owing to the causes I have mentioned already, the stock was dwindling, the total population being now not more than half of what it was within the memory of the fathers of their oldest men. Their melancholy, which now had become constitutional, doubtless was induced by their gloomy surroundings and the knowledge that as a race they were doomed to perish at the hands of the savage aboriginals who once had been their slaves.

Lastly, although they retained traces of some higher religion, since they made prayer to a Great Spirit, they were fetish-ridden and believed that they could continue to exist only by making sacrifice to a devil who, if they neglected to do so, would crush them with misfortunes and give them over to destruction at the hands of the dreadful Forest-dwellers. Therefore they, or a section of them, became the priests of this devil called Heu-Heu, and thereby kept peace between them and the Hairy Men.

Nor was this the end of their troubles, since, as Issicore had told me, these priests, after the fashion of priests all the world over, now aspired to the absolute rule of the race, and for this reason plotted the extinction of the hereditary chief and all his family.

Such, in substance, was the lugubrious story that the unhappy Walloo poured into my ears that night, ending it in these words:

"Now you will understand, O Lord Macumazahn, why in our extremity and in obedience to the ancient prophecy, which has come down to us from our fathers, we communicated with the great Wizard of the South, with whom we had been in touch in ancient days, praying him to send us the helper of the prophecy. Behold, he has sent you and now I implore you to save my daughter from the fate that awaits her. I understand that you will require payment in white and red stones, also in gold and ivory. Take as much as you want. Of the stones there are jars full hidden away and the fences of some of my courtyards at the back of this house are made of tusks of ivory, though it is black with age, and I know not how you would carry it hence. Also there is a quantity of gold melted into bars, which my grandfather caused to be collected, whereof we make little use except now and again for women's ornaments, but that, too, would be heavy to carry across the desert. Still, it is all yours. Take it. Take everything you wish, only save my daughter."

"We will talk of the reward afterwards," I said, for my heart was touched at the sight of the old man's grief. "Meanwhile, let me hear what can be done."

"Lord, I do not know," he answered, wringing his hands. "The third night from this is that of full moon, the full moon which marks the beginning of harvest. On that night we must carry my daughter, on whom the lot has fallen, to the island in the lake where stands the smoking mountain and bind her to the pillar upon the Rock of Offering that is set between the two undying fires. There we must leave her, and at the dawn, so it is said, Heu-Heu himself seizes her and carries her into his cavern, where she vanishes for ever. Or, if he does not come, his priests do, to drag her to the god, and we see her no more."

"Then why do you take her to the island? Why do you not call your people together and fight and kill this god or his priest?"

"Lord, because not one man among us, save perhaps Issicore yonder, who can do nothing alone, would lift a hand to save her. They believe that if they did the mountain would break into flames, as happened in the bygone ages, turning all upon whom the ashes fell into stone; also, that the waters would rise and destroy the crops, so that we must die of starvation, and that any who escaped the fire and the water and the want would perish at the hands of the cruel

Wood-devils. Therefore, if I ask the Walloos to save the maiden from Heu- Heu, they will kill me and give her up in accordance with the law."

"I understand," I said, and was silent.

"Lord," went on the old Walloo presently, "here with me you are safe, for none of my people will harm you or those with you. But I learn from Issicore that you have stabbed a Hairy Man with a knife, and that your servant slew one of their women with the strange weapons that you carry. Therefore, from the Wood-devils you are not safe, for, if they can, they will kill you both and feast upon your bodies."

"That's cheerful," I thought to myself, but made no further answer, for I did not know what to say.

Just then the Walloo rose from his chair, saying that he must go to pray to the spirits of his ancestors to help him, but that we would talk again upon the morrow. After this he bade us good-night and departed without another word, followed by the old men, who all this while had sat silent, only nodding their heads from time to time like porcelain images of Chinese mandarins.

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## THE HOLY ISLE

When the door had closed behind him, I turned to Issicore and asked him straight out if he had any plan to suggest. He shook his noble-looking head and answered, "None," as it was impossible to resist both the will of the people and the law of the priests.

"Then what is the use of your having brought me all this way?" I inquired with indignation. "Cannot you think of some scheme? For instance, would it not be possible for you and this lady to fly with us down the river and escape to a land which is not full of demons?"

"It would not be possible," he answered in a melancholy voice. "Day and night we are watched and would be seized before we had travelled a mile. Moreover, could she leave her father, and could I leave all my relations to be murdered in payment for our sacrilege?"

"Have you no thought in your mind at all?" I asked again. "Is there nothing that would save the Lady Sabeela?"

"Nothing, Lord, except the end of Heu-Heu and his priests. It is to you, great Lord, that we look to find a way to destroy them, as the prophecy declares will be done by the White Deliverer from the South."

"Oh, dash the prophecy! I never knew prophecies to help anybody yet," I ejaculated in English, as I contemplated that beautiful but helpless pair. Then I added in Arabic, "I am tired and am going to bed. I hope that I shall find more wisdom in my dreams than I do in you, Issicore," I added, staring at the man in whom I seemed to detect some subtle change, some access of fatalistic helplessness, even of despair.

Now Sabeela, seeing that I was angry, broke in,

"O Lord, be not wrath, for we are but flies in the spider's web, and the threads of that web are the priests of Heu-Heu, and the posts to which it is fixed are the beliefs of my people, and Heu-Heu himself is the spider, and in my breast his claws are fixed."

Now, listening to her allegory, I thought to myself that a better one might have been drawn from a snake and a bird, for really, like the rest of them, this poor girl seemed to be mesmerized with terror and to have made up her mind to sit still waiting to be struck by the poisoned fangs.

"Lord," she went on, "we have done all we could. Did not Issicore make a great journey to find you? Yes, did he not even dare the curse which falls upon the heads of those who try to leave our country, and travel south to seek the counsel of the Great Wizard, who once sent messengers here to obtain the leaves of the tree that grows in Heu-Heu's garden, the tree that makes men drunk and gives them visions?"

"Yes," I answered, "he did that, Lady, and might I say to you that his health seems none the worse. Those curses of which you speak have not yet hurt him."

"It is true they have not hurt his body—yet," she said in a musing voice, as though a new thought had struck her.

"Well, if that is true, Sabeela, may it not be true also that all this talk about the power of Heu-Heu is nonsense? Tell me, have you ever spoken with or seen Heu-Heu?"

"No, Lord, no, though unless you can save me I shall soon see him."

"Well, and has any one else?"

"No, Lord, no one has ever spoken with him, except, of course, his priests, such as my distant cousin, Dacha, who is the head of them, but whom I used to know before he was chosen by Heu-Heu to be one of their company."

"Oh! So no one has seen him? Then he must be a very secret kind of god who does not take exercise, but lives, I understand, in a cave with priests."

"I did not say that no one had ever seen Heu-Heu, Lord. Many say that they have seen him, as Issicore has done, when he came out of the cave on a Night of Offering, but of what they saw it is death to speak. Ask me and Issicore no more of Heu-Heu, Lord I pray you, lest the curse should fall. It is not lawful that we should tell you of him, whose secrets are sacred even to his priests," she added with agitation.

Then in despair I gave up asking questions about Heu-Heu and inquired how many priests he had.

"About twenty, I believe, Lord," she answered, ceasing from evasions, "not counting their wives and families, and it is said that they do not live with Heu-Heu in the cave, but in houses outside of it."

"And what do they do when they are not worshipping Heu-Heu, Sabeela?"

"Oh, they cultivate the land and they rule the Wild People of the Woods, who, it is believed, are all Heu-Heu's children. Also they come here and spy on us."

"Do they indeed?" I remarked. "And is it true that they hope to rule over you Walloos also?"

"Yes, I believe that it is true. At least, should my father die and I die, it is said that Dacha means to make war upon the Walloos and take the chieftainship, setting aside or killing my cousin and betrothed Issicore. For Dacha was always one who desired to be first."

"So you used to know Dacha pretty well, Lady?"

"Yes, Lord, when I was quite young before he became a priest. Also," she added, colouring, "I have seen him since he became a priest."

"And what did he say to you?"

"He said that if I would take him for a husband perhaps I should escape from Heu-Heu."

"And what did you answer, Lady?"

"Lord, I answered that I would rather go to Heu-Heu."

"Why?"

"Because Dacha, it is reported, has many wives already. Also I hate him. Also from Heu-Heu at the last I can always escape."

"How?"

"By death, Lord. We have swift poison in this country, and I carry some of it hidden in my hair," she added with emphasis.

"Quite so. I understand. But, Lady Sabeela, as you have been so good as to ask my advice about these matters, I will give you some. It is that you should not taste that poison till all else has failed and there is no escape. While we breathe there is hope, and all that seems lost still may be won, but the dead do not live again, Lady Sabeela."

"I hear and will obey you, Lord," she answered, weeping. "Yet sleep is better than Dacha or Heu-Heu."

"And life is better than all three of them put together," I replied, "especially life with love."

Then I bowed myself off to bed, followed by Hans, also bowing—like a monkey for pennies on a barrel-organ. At the door I looked back, and saw these two poor people in each other's arms, thinking, doubtless, that we were already out of sight of them. Yes, her head was upon Issicore's shoulder, and from the convulsive motions of her form I guessed that she was sobbing, while he tried to console her in the ancient, world-wide fashion. I only hope that she got more comfort from Issicore than I did. To me he now seemed to be but a singularly unresourceful member of a played-out race, though it is true that he had courage, since otherwise he would not have attempted the journey to Zululand. Also, as I have said, quite suddenly he had changed in some subtle fashion.

When we were in our own room with the door bolted (it had no windows, light and ventilation being provided by holes in the roof) I gave Hans some tobacco and bade him sit down on the other side of the lamp, where he squatted upon the floor like a toad.

"Now, Hans," I said, "tell me all the truth of this business and what we are to do to help this pretty lady and the old chief, her father."

Hans looked at the roof and looked at the wall; then he spat upon the floor, for which I reproved him.

"Baas," he said at length, "I think the best thing we can do is to find out where those bright stones are, fill our pockets with them, and escape from this country which is full of fools and devils. I am sure that Beautiful One would be better off with the priest Dacha, or even with Heu-Heu, than with Issicore, who now has become but a carved and painted lump of wood made to look like a man."

"Possibly, Hans, but the tastes of women are curious, and she likes this lump of wood, who, after all, is brave, except where ghosts and spirits are concerned. Otherwise he would not have journeyed so far for her sake. Moreover, we have a bargain to keep. What should we say to the Opener-of-Roads if we returned, having run away and without his medicine? No, Hans, we must play out this game."

"Yes, Baas, I thought that the Baas would say that because of his foolishness. Had I been alone, by now, or a little later, I should have been in that canoe going down-stream. However, the Baas has settled that we must save the lady and give her to the Lump of Wood for a wife. So now I think I will go to sleep, and to-morrow or the next day the Baas can save her. I don't think very much of the beer in this country, Baas—it is too sweet; and all these handsome fools who talk about devils and priests weary me. Also, it is a bad climate and very damp. I think it is going to rain again, Baas."

Having nothing else at hand, I threw my tobacco-pouch at Hans's head. He caught it deftly, and in an absent-minded fashion, put it into his own pocket.

"If the Baas really wishes to know what I think," he said, yawning, "it is that the medicine man named Dacha wants the pretty lady for himself; also to rule alone over all these dull people. As for Heu-Heu, I don't know anything about him, but perhaps he is one of those Hairy Men who came here at the beginning of the world. I think that the best thing we can do, Baas, would be to take a boat to-morrow morning and go to that island, where we can find out the truth for ourselves. Perhaps the Lump of Wood and some of his men can row us there. And now I have nothing more to say, so, if the Baas does not mind, I will go to sleep. Keep your pistol ready, Baas, in case any of the Hairy People wish to call upon us—just to talk about the one I shot."

Then he retired to a corner, rolling himself up in a skin rug, and presently was snoring, though, as I knew well enough, with one eye open all the time. No Hairy Man, or any one else, would have come near that place without Hans hearing him, for his sleep was like to that of a dog who watches his master.

As I prepared to follow his example, I reflected that his remarks, casual as they seemed, were full of wisdom. These folk were superstition-riddled fools and useless; probably the only ones that had wits among them became priests. But the Hairy aborigines were an ugly fact, as the priests knew, since apparently they had obtained rule over them. For the rest, the only thing to do was to visit the Holy Island and find out the truth for ourselves, as Hans had said. It would be dangerous, no doubt, but at the least it would also be exciting.

Next morning I rose after an excellent night's rest and found my way into the garden, where I amused myself by examining the shrubs and flowers, some of which were strange to me. Also I studied the sky, which was heavy and lowering, and seemed full of rain. I could study nothing else because the high wall cut off the view upon every side so that little was to be seen except the top of the volcano, which rose from the lake at a distance of several miles, for it was a large sheet of water. Presently the door of the garden opened and Issicore appeared, looking weary and somewhat bewildered. It occurred to me that he had been sitting up late with Sabeela. As they were to be parted so soon, naturally they would see as much as they could of each other. Or for aught I knew, he might have been praying to his ancestral spirits and trying to make up his mind what to do, no doubt a difficult process under the circumstances. I went to the point at once.

"Issicore," I said, "as soon as possible after breakfast, will you have a canoe ready to take me and Hans to the island in the lake?"

"To the island in the lake, Lord!" he exclaimed, amazed. "Why, it is holy!"

"I daresay, but I am holy also, so that if I go there it will be holier."

Then he advanced all kinds of objections, and even brought out the Walloo and his grey-heads to reinforce his arguments. Hans and Sabeela also joined the party; the latter, I noted, looking even more beautiful by day than she did in the lamplight. Sabeela, indeed, proved my only ally, for presently, when the others had talked themselves hoarse, she said,

"The White Lord has been brought hither that we, who are bewildered and foolish, may drink of the cup of his wisdom. If his wisdom bids him visit the Holy Isle, let him do so, my father."

As no one seemed to be convinced, I stood silent, not knowing what more to say. Then Hans took up his parable, speaking in his bad coast-Arabic:

"Baas, Issicore, although he is so big and strong, and all these others are afraid of Heu-Heu and his priests. But we, who are good Christians, are not afraid of any devils because we know how to deal with them. Also we can paddle, therefore let the Chief give us quite a small canoe and show us which way to row, and we will go to the island by ourselves."

In sporting parlance, this shot hit the bull in the eye, and Issicore, who, as I have said, was a brave man at bottom, fired up and answered,

"Am I a coward that I should listen to such words from your servant, Lord Macumazahn? I and some others whom I can find will row you to the island, though on it we will not set our foot because it is not lawful for us to do so. Only, Lord, if you come back no more, blame me not."

"Then that is settled," I replied quietly, "and now, if we may, let us eat, for I am hungry."

About two hours later we started from the quay, taking with us all our small possessions, down to some spare powder in flasks which we had brought to reload fired cartridge cases, for Hans refused to leave anything behind with no one to watch it. The canoe which was given to us was much smaller than that in which we had come up the river, though, like it, hollowed from a single log; and its crew consisted of Issicore, who steered, and four other Walloos, who paddled, stout and determined-looking fellows, all of them. The island was about five miles away, but we made a wide circuit to the south, I suppose in the hope of avoiding observation, and therefore it took us the best part of two hours to reach its southern shore.

As we approached I examined the place carefully through my glasses, and observed that it was much larger than I had thought—several miles in circumference, indeed, for in addition to the central volcanic cone there was a great stretch of low-lying land all round its base, which land seemed not to rise more than a foot or two above the level of the lake. In character, except on these flats by the lake, it was stony and barren, being, in fact, strewn with lumps of lava ejected from the volcano during the last eruption.

Issicore informed me, however, that the northern part of the island where the priests lived, which had not been touched by the lava stream, was very fertile. I should add that the crater of the volcano seemed to bear out his statement as to the direction of the flow, since on the south it was blown away to a great depth, whereas the northern segment rose in a high and perfect wall of rock.

The day was very misty—a circumstance which favoured our approach—and the sky, which, as I have said, was black and pregnant with coming rain, seemed almost to touch the crest of the mountain. These conditions, until we were quite close, prevented us from seeing that a stream of glowing lava, not very broad, was pouring down the mountain-side. When they discovered this, the Walloos grew much alarmed, and Issicore told me that such a thing had not been known "for a hundred years," and that he thought it portended something unusual, as the mountain was supposed to be "asleep."

"It is awake enough to smoke, anyway," I answered, and continued my examination.

Among the stones, and sometimes half-buried by them, I saw what appeared to be the remains of those buildings of which I have spoken. There, Issicore said, had once been part of the city of his forefathers, adding that, as he had been told, in some of them the said forefathers were still to be seen turned to stone, which, you will remember, exactly bore out Zikali's story.

Anything more desolate and depressing than the aspect of this place seen on that grey day and beneath the brooding sky cannot be imagined. Still I burned to examine it, for this tale of fossilized people excited me, who have always loved the remains of antiquity and strange sights.

Forgetting all about Heu-Heu and his priests for the moment, I told the Walloos to paddle to the shore, and, after a moment of mute protest, they obeyed, running into a little bay. Hans and I stepped easily on to the rocks and, carrying our bags and rifles, started on our search. First, however, we arranged with Issicore that he should await our return and then row us back round the island so that we might have a view of the priests' settlement. With a sigh he promised to do so, and at once paddled out to about a hundred yards from the shore, where the canoe was anchored by means of a pierced stone tied to a cord.

Off went Hans and I towards the nearest group of ruins. As we approached them, Hans said,

"Look out, Baas! There's a dog between those rocks."

I stared at the spot he indicated, and there, sure enough, saw a large grey dog with a pointed muzzle, which seemed to be fast asleep. We drew nearer, and as it did not stir, Hans threw a stone and hit it on the back. Still it did not stir, so we went up and examined it.

"It is a stone dog," I said. "The people who lived here must have made statues," for as yet I did not believe the stories I had heard about petrified creatures, which, after all, must be very legendary.

"If so, Baas, they put bones into their carvings. Look," and he touched one of the dog's front paws which was broken off. There, in the middle of it, appeared the bone fossilized. Then I understood.

The animal had been fleeing away to the shore when the poisonous gases overcame it at the time of the eruption. After this, I suppose, some rain of petrifying fluid had fallen on it and turned it into stone. It was a marvellous thing, but I could not doubt the evidence of my own eyes. All the tale was true, and I had made a great discovery.

We hurried on to the houses, which, of course, now were roofless, and in some instances choked with lava, though the outer walls, being strongly built of rock, still stood. On certain of these walls were the faint remains of frescoes; one of people sitting at a feast, another of a hunting scene, and so forth.

We passed on to a second group of buildings standing at some distance against the flank of the mountain and more or less protected by an overhanging ledge or shelf of stone. These appeared to have been a palace or a temple, for they were large, with stone columns that supported the roofs. We went on through the great hall to the rooms behind, and in the furthestmost, which was under the ledge of rock and probably had been used as a store chamber, we saw an extraordinary sight.

There, huddled together, and in some instances clasping each other, were a number of people, twenty or thirty of them—men, women, and children—all turned to stone. Doubtless the petrifying fluid had flowed into the chamber through the cracks in the rock above and done its office on them. They were naked, every one, which suggested that their clothing had either been burnt off them or had rotted away before the process was complete. The former hypothesis seemed to be borne out by the fact that none of them had any hair left upon their heads. The features were not easy to distinguish, but the general type of the bodies was certainly very similar to that of the Walloos.

Speechless with amazement, we emerged from that death chamber and wandered about the place. Here and there we found the bodies of others who had perished in the great catastrophe and once came across an arm projecting from a mass of lava, which seemed to show that many more were buried underneath. Also we found a number of fossilized goats in a kraal. What a place to dig in! I thought to myself. Given some spades, picks, and blasting-powder, what might one not find in these ruins?

All the relics of a past civilization, perhaps—its inscriptions, its jewellery, the statues of its gods; even, perhaps, its domestic furniture buried beneath the lava and the dust, though probably this had rotted. Here, certainly, was another Pompeii, and perhaps beneath that another Herculaneum.

Whilst I mused thus over glories passed away and wondered when they had passed, Hans dug me in the ribs and, in his horrible Boer Dutch, ejaculated a single word, "*Kek!*" which, as perhaps you know, means "Look!" at the same time nodding towards the lake.

I did look, and saw our canoe paddling off for all it was worth, going "hell for leather," as my old father used to say, towards the Walloo shore.

"Now why is it doing that?" I asked.

"I expect because something is behind it, Baas," he replied with resignation, then sat down on a rock, pulled out his pipe, filled it, and lit a match.

As usual, Hans was right, for presently from round the curve of the island there appeared two other canoes, very large canoes, rowing after ours with great energy and determination, and, as I guessed, with malignant intent.

"I think those priests have seen our boat and mean to catch it, if they can," remarked Hans, spitting reflectively, "though as Issicore has got a long start, perhaps they won't. And now, Baas, what are we to do? We can't live here with dead men, and stone goat is not good to eat."

I considered the situation, and my heart sank into my boots, for the position seemed desperate. A moment before I had been filled with enthusiasm over this ruined city and its fossilized remains. Now I hated the very thought of them, and wished that they were at the bottom of the lake. Thus do circumstances alter cases, and our poor variable human moods. Then an idea came to me, and I said boldly,

"Do! Why, there is only one thing to do. We must go to call on Heu-Heu, or his priests."

"Yes, Baas. But the Baas remembers the picture in the cave on the Berg. If it is a true picture, Heu-Heu knows how to twist off men's heads!"

"I don't believe there is a Heu-Heu," I said stoutly. "You will have noticed, Hans, that we have heard all sorts of stories about Heu-Heu, but that no one seems to have seen him clearly enough to give us an accurate description of what he is like or what he does—not even Zikali. He showed us a picture of the beast on his fire, but after all it was only what we had seen on the wall of the cave, and I think that he got it out of our own minds. At any rate, it is just as well to die quickly without a head, as slowly with an empty stomach, since I am sure those Walloos will never come back to look for us."

"Yes, Baas, I think so, too. Issicore used to have courage, but he seems to have changed, as though something had happened to him since he got back into his own country. And now, if the Baas is ready, I think we had better be trekking, unless, indeed, he would like to look at a few more stone men first. It is beginning to rain, Baas, and we have been much longer here than the Baas thinks, since it is a slow business crawling about these old houses. Therefore, if we are to get to the other side of the island before nightfall, it is time to go."

So off we went, keeping to the western side of the volcano, since there it did not seem to project so far into the flat lands. A while later we turned round and looked at the lake. There in the far distance our canoe appeared a mere speck, with two other specks, those of the pursuers, close upon its heels. As we watched, out of the mists on the Walloo shore came yet other specks, which were doubtless Walloo boats paddling to the rescue, for the priests' canoes gave up the chase and turned homewards.

"Issicore will have a very nice story to tell to the Lady Sabeela," said Hans; "but perhaps she will not kiss him after she has heard it."

"He was quite wise to go. What good could he have done by staying?" I answered, as we trudged on, adding, "Still, you are right, Hans, Issicore has changed."

It was a hard walk over rough ground, at least at first, for so soon as we got round the shoulder of the volcano the character of the country altered and we found ourselves in fertile, cultivated land that appeared to be irrigated.

"These fields must lie very low, Baas," said Hans, "since otherwise how do they get the lake water on to them?"

"I don't know," I replied crossly, for I was thinking of the sky water, which was beginning to descend in a steady drizzle upon ourselves. But all the same, the remark stuck in my mind and was useful afterwards. On we marched, till at length we entered a grove of palm trees that was traversed by a road.

Presently we came to the end of the road and found ourselves in a village of well-built stone houses, with one very large house in the middle of it, of which the back was set almost against the foot of the mountain. As there was nothing else to be done, we walked on into the village, at first without being observed, for everybody was under cover because of the rain. Soon, however, dogs began to bark, and a woman, looking out of the doorway of one of the houses, caught sight of us and screamed. A minute later men with shaven heads and wearing white, priestly-looking robes, appeared and ran towards us flourishing big spears.

"Hans," I said, "keep your rifle ready, but don't shoot unless you are obliged. In this case, words may serve us better than bullets."

"Yes, Baas, though I don't believe that either will serve us much."

Then he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree that lay by the roadside, and waited, and I followed his example, taking the opportunity to light my pipe.

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## THE FEAST

When they were within a few paces of us the men halted, apparently astonished at our appearance, which certainly did not compare favourably with their own, for they were all of the splendid Walloo type. Evidently what astonished them still more was the match with which I was lighting my pipe, and indeed the pipe itself, for although these people grew tobacco, they only took it in the form of snuff.

That match went out and I struck another, and at the sight of the sudden appearance of fire they stepped back a pace or two. At length one of them, pointing to the burning match, asked in the same tongue that was used by the Walloos,

“What is that, O Stranger?”

“Magic fire,” I answered, adding by an inspiration, “which I am bringing as a present to the great god Heu-Heu.”

This information seemed to mollify them, for, lowering their spears, they turned to speak to another man who at this moment arrived upon the scene. He was a stout, fine-looking man of considerable presence, with a hooked nose and flashing black eyes. Also he wore a priestly cap upon his head and his white robes were brodered.

“Very big fellow, this, Baas,” Hans whispered to me, and I nodded, observing as I did so that the other priests bowed as they addressed him.

“Dacha in person,” thought I to myself, and sure enough Dacha it was.

He advanced and, looking at the wax match, said:

“Where does the magic fire of which you speak live, Stranger?”

“In this case covered with holy secret writing,” I replied, holding before his eyes a box labelled “Wax Vestas, Made in England,” and adding solemnly, “Woe be to him that touches it or him that bears it without understanding, for it will surely leap forth and consume that foolish man, O Dacha.”

Now Dacha followed the example of his companions and stepped back a little way, remarking,

“How do you know my name, and who sends this present of self-conceiving fire to Heu-Heu?”

“Is not the name of Dacha known to the ends of the earth?” I asked—a remark which seemed to please him very much; “yes, as far as his spells can travel, which is the sky and back again. As to who sends the magic fire, it is a great one, a wizard of the best, if not quite so good as Dacha, who is named Zikali, who is named the ‘Opener-of-Roads,’ who is named ‘the Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born.’”

“We have heard of him,” said Dacha. “His messengers were here in our father’s day. And what does Zikali want of us, O Stranger?”

“He wants leaves of a certain tree that grows in Heu-Heu’s garden, that is called the Tree of Visions, that he may mix them with his medicines.”

Dacha nodded and so did the other priests. Evidently they knew all about the Tree of Visions, as I, or rather Zikali, had named it.

“Then why did he not come for them himself?”

“Because he is old and infirm. Because he is detained by great affairs. Because it was easier for him to send me, who, being a lover of that which is holy, was anxious to do homage to Heu-Heu and to make the acquaintance of the great Dacha.”

“I understand,” the priest replied, highly gratified, as his face shewed. “But how are you named, O Messenger of Zikali?”

“I am named ‘Blowing-Wind,’ because I pass where I would, none seeing me come or go, and therefore am the best and swiftest of messengers. And this little one, this small but great-souled one with me”—here I pointed to the smirking Hans, who by now was quite alive to the humours of the situation and to its advantages from our point of view—is named ‘Lord-of-the-Fire’ and ‘Light-in-Darkness’” (this was true enough and worked in very well) “because it is he who is guardian of the magic fire” (also true, for he had half a dozen spare boxes in his pockets that he had stolen at one time or another) “of which, if he is offended, he can make enough to burn up all this island and everyone thereon; yes, more than is hidden in the womb of that mountain.”

“Can he, by Heu-Heu!” said Dacha, regarding Hans with great respect.

“Certainly he can. Mighty though I be, I must be careful not to anger him lest myself I should be burnt to cinders.”

At this moment a doubt seemed to strike Dacha, for he asked:

“Tell me, O Blowing-Wind and O Lord-of-Fire, how you came to this island? We observed a canoe manned with some of our rebellious subjects who serve that old usurper the Walloo, which is being hunted that they may be killed for the sacrilege in approaching this holy place. Were you perchance in that canoe?”

“We were,” I answered boldly. “When we arrived at yonder town I met a lady, a very beautiful lady, named Sabeela, and asked her where dwelt the great Dacha. She said here—more, that she knew you and that you were the

most beautiful and noblest of men, as well as the wisest. She said also that with some of her servants, including a stupid fellow called Issicore, of whom she never can be rid wherever she goes, she herself would paddle us to the island on the chance of seeing your face again." (I may explain to you fellows that this lie was perfectly safe, as I knew Issicore and his people had escaped.) "So she brought us here and landed us that we might look at the ruined city before coming on to see you. But then your people roughly hunted her away, so that we were obliged to walk to your town. That is all."

Now Dacha became agitated. "I pray Heu-Heu," he said, "that those fools may not have caught and killed her with the others."

"I pray so also, since she is too fair to die," I answered, "who would be a lovely wife for any man. But stay, I will tell you what has chanced. Lord-of-the-Fire, make fire."

Hans produced a match and lit it on the seat of his trousers, which was the only part of him that was not damp. He held it in his joined hands and I stared at the flame, muttering. Then he whispered:

"Be quick, Baas, it is burning my fingers!"

"All is well," I said solemnly. "The canoe with Sabeela the Beautiful escaped your people, since other canoes, seven—no, eight of them," I corrected, studying the ashes of the match, also the blister on Hans's finger, "came out from the town and drove yours away just as they were overtaking the Lady Sabeela."

This was a most fortunate stroke, for at that moment a messenger arrived and gave Dacha exactly the same intelligence, which he punctuated with many bows.

"Wonderful!" said the priest. "Wonderful! Here we have magicians indeed!" and he stared at us with much awe. Then again a doubt struck him.

"Lord," he said, "Heu-Heu is the ruler of the savage Hairy People who live in the woods and are named Heuheuas after him. Now a tale has reached us that one of these people has been mysteriously killed with a noise by some strangers. Had you aught to do with her death, Lord?"

"Yes," I answered. "She annoyed the Lord-of-the-Fire with her attentions, so he slew her, as was right and proper. I cut off the finger of another who wished to shake hands with me when I had told him to go away."

"But how did he slay her, Lord?"

Now I may explain that there was one inhabitant of this place that greeted us with no cordiality at all, namely a large and particularly ferocious dog, that all this while had been growling round us and finally had got hold of Hans's coat, which it held between its teeth, still growling.

"*Scheet! Hans, scheet seen dood!*" ("Shoot! Hans, shoot him dead!") I whispered, and Hans, who was always quick to catch an idea, put his hand into his pocket where he kept his pistol, and pressing the muzzle against the brute's head, fired through the cloth, with the result that this dog went wherever bad dogs go.

Then there was consternation. Indeed, one of the priests fell down with fear and the others turned tail, all of them except Dacha, who stood his ground.

"A little of the magic fire!" I remarked airily, "and there is plenty more where that came from," at the same time, as though by accident, slapping Hans's pocket, which I saw was smouldering. "And now, noble Dacha, it is setting in wet and we are hungry. Be pleased to give us shelter and food."

"Certainly, Lord, certainly!" he exclaimed, and started off with us, keeping me well between himself and Hans, while the others, who had returned, followed with the dead dog.

Presently, recovering from his fear, he asked me whether the Lady Sabeela had said anything more about him.

"Only one thing," I answered: "that it was a pity that a maiden should be obliged to marry a god when there were such men as you in the world."

Here I stopped and watched the effect of my shot out of the corner of my eye.

His coarse but handsome face grew cunning, and he smacked his lips.

"Yes, Lord, yes," he said hurriedly. "But who knows? Things are not always what they seem, Lord, and I have noted that sometimes the faithful servant tithes the master's offering."

"By Jingo! I've got it!" thought I to myself. "*You*, my friend, are Heu-Heu, or at any rate his business part." But aloud, glancing at the redoubtable Hans, I only remarked something to the effect that Dacha's powers of observation were keen and that, like the Lord-of-the-Fire himself, as he said truly, things were not always what they seemed.

We crossed a bare platform of rock, to the right of which, beyond a space of garden, I observed the mouth of a large cave. At the edge of this platform a strange sight was to be seen, for here, just on the borders of the lake, at a distance of about twenty paces from each other, burned two columns of flame which hitherto had been hidden from us by the lie of the ground and trees, between which columns was a pillar or post of stone.

"The 'eternal fires,'" thought I to myself, and then inquired casually what they were.

"They are flames which have always burned in that place from the beginning; we do not know why," Dacha replied indifferently. "No rain puts them out."

"Ah!" I reflected, "natural gas coming from the volcano, such as I have heard of in Canada."

Then we turned to the right along the outer wall of the garden I have mentioned, and came to some fine houses, that, to my fancy, had a kind of collegiate appearance, all one-storied and built against the rock of the mountain. As a matter of fact, I was right, for these were the dwellings of the priests of Heu-Heu and their numerous female belongings. These priests, I should say, had their privileges, for whereas the people on the mainland for the most part married only one wife, they were polygamous, the ladies being supplied to them through spiritual pressure put upon the unfortunate Walloos, or, if that failed, by the simple and ancient expedient of kidnapping. Once, however, they had arrived upon the island and thus became dedicated to the god, they vanished so far as their kinsfolk were concerned, and never afterwards were they allowed to cross the water or even to attempt any communication with them. In short, those who became alive in Heu-Heu, became also dead to the world.

Hans and I were led to the largest of this group of houses, that abutting immediately on to the garden wall, the inhabitants of which apparently had already been advised of our coming by messenger, since we found them in a bustle of preparation. Thus I saw handsome, white-robed women flitting about and heard hurried orders being given. We were taken to a room where a driftwood fire had been lighted on the hearth because the night was damp and chill, at which we warmed and dried ourselves after we had washed. A while later a priest summoned us to eat and then retired outside the door awaiting our convenience.

"Hans," I said, "all has gone well so far; we are accepted as the friends of Heu-Heu, not as his enemies."

"Yes, Baas, thanks to the cleverness of the Baas about the matches and the rest. But what has the Baas in his mind?"

"This, Hans; that all must continue to go well, for remember what is our duty, namely, to save the lady Sabeela, if we can, as we have sworn to do. Now if we are to bring this about we must keep our eyes open and our wits sharp. Hans, I daresay that they have strange liquors in this place which will be offered to us to make us talk. But while we are here we must drink nothing but water. Do you understand, Hans?"

"Yes, Baas, I understand."

"And do you swear, Hans?"

Hans rubbed his middle reflectively, and replied:

"My stomach is cold, Baas, and I should like a glass of something more warming than water after all this damp and the sight of those stone men. Yet, Baas, I swear. Yes, I swear by your Reverend Father that I will only drink water, or coffee if they make it, which, of course, they don't."

"That is all right, Hans. You know that if you break your oath my Reverend Father will certainly come even with you, and so shall I in this world or the next."

"Yes, Baas. But will the Baas please remember that a gin bottle is not the only bait that the devil sets upon his hook. Different men have different tastes, Baas. Now if some pretty lady were to come and tell the Baas that he was oh! so beautiful and that she loved him, oh! ever so much, someone like that Mameena, for instance, of whom old Zikali is always talking as having been a friend of yours, will the Baas swear by his Reverend Father—"

"Cease from folly and be silent," I said majestically. "Is this the time and place to chatter of pretty women?"

Nevertheless, in myself I appreciated the shrewdness of Hans's repartee, and as a matter of fact an attempt was made to play off that trick on me, though if I am to get to the end of this story, I shall have no time to tell you about it.

Our compact sealed, we went through the door and found the priest waiting outside. He led us down a passage into a fine hall plentifully lit with lamps for now the night had fallen. Here several tables were spread, but we were taken to one at the head of the hall where we were welcomed by Dacha dressed in grand robes, and some other priests; also by women, all of them handsome and beautifully arrayed in their wild fashion, whom I took to be the wives of these worthies. One of them, I noticed, had a singular resemblance to the Lady Sabeela, although she appeared to be her elder by some years.

We sat down at the table in curious, carved chairs, and I found myself between Dacha and this lady, whose name, I discovered, was Dramana. The feast began, and I may say at once that it was a very fine feast, for it appeared that we had arrived upon a day of festival. Indeed, I had not eaten such a meal for years.

Of course, it was barbaric in its way. Thus the food was served in great earthenware dishes, already cut up; there were no knives or forks, the fingers of the eaters taking their place, and the plates consisted of the tough green leaves of some kind of waterlily that grew in the lake, which were removed after each course and replaced by fresh ones.

Of its sort, however, it was excellent and included fish of a good flavour, kid cooked with spices, wild fowl, and a kind of pudding made of ground corn and sweetened with honey. Also, there was plenty of the strong native beer, which was handed round in ornamented earthenware cups that were, however, inlaid not with small diamonds and rubies, but with pearls found, I was informed, in the shells of fresh-water mussels, and set in the clay when damp.

These pearls were irregular in shape and for the most part not large, but the effect of them thus employed, was very pretty. Still, some attained to a considerable size, since Dramana and other women wore necklaces of them bored and strung upon fibres. Without going into further details, I may say that this feast and its equipment convinced me

more than ever that these people had once belonged to some unknown but highly civilized race which was now dying out in its last home and sinking into barbarism before it died.

In pursuance of our agreement Hans, who squatted on a stool behind me, for he would not sit at the table, and I, saying that we were bound by a vow to touch nothing else, drank water only, although I heard him groan each time the beer cups went round. I may add that this happened frequently, and the amount of liquor consumed was considerable, as became evident by the behaviour of the drinkers, many of whom grew more or less intoxicated, with the usual unpleasant results that I need not describe. Also they grew affectionate, for they threw their arms about the women and began to kiss them in a way which I considered improper. I observed, however, that the lady called Dramana drank but little. Also, as she sat between me and an extremely deaf priest who became sleepy in his cups, she was, of course, freed from any such unwelcome attentions.

All these circumstances, and especially the fact that Dacha was much occupied with a handsome female on his left, gave Dramana and myself opportunities of conversation which I think were welcome to her. After a few general remarks, presently she said in a low voice:

"I hear, Lord, that you have seen Sabeela, the daughter of the Walloo, chief of the mainland. Tell me of her, for she is my sister on whom I have not looked for a long while, for we never visit the mainland, and those who dwell there never visit us—unless they are obliged," she added significantly.

"She is beautiful but lives in great terror because she, who desires to be married to a man, must be married to a god," I answered.

"She does well to be afraid, Lord, for by you sits that god," and with a shiver of disgust and the slightest possible motion of her head, she indicated Dacha, who had become quite drunken and at the moment was engaged in embracing the lady on his left, who also seemed to be somewhat the worse for alcoholic wear, or to put it plainly, "half seas over."

"Nay," I answered, "the god I mean is called Heu-Heu, not Dacha."

"Heu-Heu, Lord! You will learn all about Heu-Heu before the night is over. It is Dacha whom she must marry."

"But Dacha is your husband, lady."

"Dacha is the husband of many, Lord," and she glanced at several of the most handsome women present, "for the god is liberal to his high priest. Since I was bound between the eternal fires there have been eight such marriages, though some of the brides have been handed on to others or sacrificed for crimes against the god, or attempting to escape, or for other reasons.

"Lord," she went on, dropping her voice till I could scarcely catch what she said, although my hearing is keen, "be warned by me. Unless you are indeed a god greater than Heu-Heu, and your companion also, whatever you may see or hear, lift neither voice nor hand. If you do, you will be rent to pieces without helping any one and perhaps bring about the death of many, my own among them. Hush! Speak of something else. He is beginning to watch us. Yet, O Lord, help me if you can. Yes, save me and my sister if you can."

I glanced round. Dacha, who had ceased embracing the lady, was looking at us suspiciously, as though he had caught some word. Perhaps Hans thought so as well, for he managed to make a great clatter, either by tumbling off his stool or dropping his drinking cup, I know not which, that drew away Dacha's half-drunken attention from us and prevented him from hearing anything.

"You see to find the Lady Dramana pleasant, O Lord Blowing-Wind," sneered Dacha. "Well, I am not jealous and I would give such guests of the best I have, especially when the god is going to be so good to me. Also the Lady Dramana knows better than to tell secrets and what happens here to those who do. So talk to her as much as you like, little Blowing-Wind, before you blow yourself away," and he leered at me in a manner that made me feel very uncomfortable.

"I was asking the Lady Dramana about the sacred tree of which the great wizard, Zikali, desires some of the leaves for his medicine," I said, pretending not to understand.

"Oh!" he answered, with a change of manner which suggested that his suspicions were in course of being dissipated, "oh, were you? I thought you were asking of other things. Well, there is no secret about that, and she shall show it to you to-morrow, if you like; also anything else you wish, for I and my brethren will be otherwise engaged. Meanwhile, here comes the Cup of Illusions that is brewed from the fruit of the tree of which you must taste though you be a water-drinker, yes, and the yellow dwarf, Lord-of-the-Fire, also, for in it we pledge the god into whose presence we must enter very soon."

I answered hurriedly that I was weary and would not trouble the god by paying my respects to him at present.

"All who come here must pass the god, Lord Blowing-Wind," he answered, glaring at me, and adding: "Either they must pass the god living, or, if they prefer it, they may pass him dead. Did not Zikali tell you that, O Blowing-Wind? Choose, then. Will you wait upon the god living, or will you wait upon him dead?"

Now I thought it was time to assert myself, and looking this ill-conditioned brute in the eyes, I said slowly:

“Who is this that talks to me of death, not knowing perchance that I am a lord of death? Does he seek such a fate as that which befell the hound without your doors? Learn, O Priest of Heu-Heu, that it is dangerous to use ill-omened words to me or to the Lord-of-the-Fire, lest we should answer them with lightnings.”

I suppose that these remarks, or something in my eye, impressed him. At any rate, his manner became humble, almost servile indeed, especially as Hans had risen and stood at my side, holding in his extended hand the box of matches, at which all stared suspiciously. Well they might have stared, had they known that his other hand, innocently buried in his pocket, grasped the butt of an excellent Colt revolver. I should have told you, by the way, that as we could not bring them with us to the feast we had left our rifles hidden in our beds, loaded and full clocked, so that they would be sure to go off if any thief began to finger them.

“Pardon, Lord, pardon,” said Dacha. “Could I wish to insult one so powerful? If I said aught to offend, why, this beer is strong.”

I bowed benignantly, but remembered the old Latin saying to the effect that drink digs out the truth. Then, by way of changing the subject, he pointed to the end of the room. Here appeared two pretty women dressed in exceedingly light attire and with wreaths upon their heads, who bore between them a large bowl of liquor in which floated red flowers. (The whole scene, I should say, much resembled some picture I had seen of an ancient Roman—or perhaps it was Egyptian feast taken from a fresco.) They brought the bowl to Dacha, and with a simultaneous movement of their graceful forms lifted it up, whereon all of the company who were not too drunk rose, bowed towards the bowl and twice cried out together:

“The Cup of Illusions! The Cup of Illusions!”

“Drink,” said Dacha to me. “Drink to the glory of Heu-Heu.” Then observing that I hesitated, he added: “Nay, I will drink first to show that it is not poisoned,” and muttering, “O Spirit of Heu-Heu, descend upon thy priest!” drink he did, a considerable quantity.

Then the women brought the bowl, which reminded me of the loving-cup at a Lord Mayor’s feast, and held it to my lips. I took a pull at it, making motions of my throat as though it were a long one, though in reality I only swallowed a sip. Next it was handed to Hans to whom I murmured one Boer Dutch word over my shoulder. It was “*Beetje*,” which means “little,” and as I turned my head to watch him, I think he took the advice.

After this the bowl, in which, I should add, the liquor was of a greenish colour and tasted something like Chartreuse, was taken from one to another till all present had drunk of it, the girls who bore it finishing up the little that was left.

This I saw, but after it I did not see much else for a while, for, small as had been my draught, the stuff went to my head and seemed to cloud my brain. Moreover, all kinds of queer visions, some of them not too desirable, sprang up in my mind, and with them a sense of vastness that was peopled by innumerable forms; beautiful forms, grotesque forms, forms of folk that I had known, now long dead, forms of others whom I had never seen, all of whom had this peculiarity, that they seemed to be staring at me with a strange intentness. Also these forms grouped themselves together and began to enact dramas of one kind or another, dramas of war and love and death that had all the vividness of a nightmare.

Presently, however, these illusions passed away and I remained filled with a great calm and a wonderful sense of well-being, also with my powers of observation rendered most acute.

Looking about me, I noted that all who had drunk seemed to be undergoing similar experiences. At first they showed signs of excitement; then they grew very still and sat like statues with their eyes fixed on vacancy, speaking not a word, moving not a muscle.

This state lasted quite a long time, till at length those who had drunk first appeared to awake, for they began to talk to each other in low tones. I noted that every sign of drunkenness had vanished; one and all they looked as sober as a whole Bench of Judges; moreover, their faces had grown solemn and their eyes seemed to be filled with some cold and fateful purpose.

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## THE SACRIFICE

After a solemn pause, Dacha rose and said in an icy voice:

"I hear the god calling us. Let us pass into the presence of the god and make offering of the yearly sacrifice."

Then a procession was formed. Dacha and Dramana went first, Hans and I followed next, and after us came all who had been at the feast, to a total of about fifty people.

"Baas," whispered Hans, "after I had drunk that stuff, which was so nice and warming that I wished you had let me have more of it, your Reverend Father came and talked to me."

"And what did he say to you, Hans?"

"He said, Baas, that we were going into very queer company and had better keep our eyes skinned. Also that it would be wise not to interfere in matters that did not concern us."

I reflected to myself that within an hour I had received advice of the same sort from a purely terrestrial source, which was an odd coincidence, unless indeed Hans had overheard or absorbed it subconsciously. To him I only observed, however, that such mandates must be obeyed, and that whatever chanced he would do well to sit quite still, keeping his pistol ready, but only use it in case of absolute necessity to save ourselves from death.

The procession left the hall by a back entrance behind the table at which we had sat, and entered a kind of tunnel that was lit with lamps, though whether this was hollowed in the rock or built of blocks of stone I am not sure. After walking for about fifty paces down this tunnel, suddenly we found ourselves in a great cavern, also dimly lit with lamps, mere spots of light in the surrounding blackness.

Here all the priests, including Dacha, left us; at least, peering about, I could not see any of them. The women alone remained in the cave, where they knelt down singly and at a distance from each other like scattered worshippers in a dimly lit cathedral when no service is in progress.

Dramana, to whose charge we seemed to have been consigned, led us to a stone bench upon which she took her seat with us. I noted that she did not kneel and worship like the others. For a while we remained thus in silence, staring at the blackness in front where no lamps burned. It was an eerie business in such surroundings that I confess began to get upon my nerves. At length I could bear it no longer, and in a whisper asked Dramana whether anything was about to happen, and if so, what.

"The sacrifice is about to happen," she whispered back. "Be silent, for here the ears of the god are everywhere."

I obeyed, thinking it safer, and another ten minutes or so went by in an intolerable stillness.

"When does the play begin, Baas?" muttered Hans in my ear. (Once I had taken him to a theatre in Durban to improve his mind, and he thought that this was another, as indeed it was, if of an unusual sort.)

I kicked him on the shins to keep him quiet, and just then at a distance I heard the sound of chanting. It was a weird and melancholy music that seemed to swing backwards and forwards between two bands of singers, each strophe and antistrophe, if those are the right words, ending in a kind of wail or cry of despair which turned my blood cold. When this had gone on for a little while, I thought that I saw figures moving through the gloom in front of us. So did Hans, for he whispered:

"The Hairy People are here, Baas."

"Can you see them?" I asked in the same low voice.

"I think so, Baas. At any rate, I can smell them."

"Then keep your pistol ready," I answered.

A moment later I saw a lighted torch floating in the air in front of us, though the bearer of it I could not see. The torch was bent downwards, and I heard the sound of kindling taking fire. A little flame sprang up revealing a pile of logs arranged for burning, and beyond it the tall form of Dacha wearing a strange headdress and white, priestlike robes, different from those in which he had been clad at the feast. Between his hands, which he held in front of him, was a white human skull reversed, I mean that its upper part was towards the floor.

"Burn, Dust of Illusion, burn," he cried, "and show us our desires," and out of the skull he emptied a quantity of powder on to the pile of wood.

A dense, penetrating smoke arose which seemed to fill the cave, vast though it was, and blot out everything. It passed away and was followed by a blaze of brilliant flame that lit up all the place and revealed a terrific spectacle.

Behind the fire, at a distance of ten paces or so, was an awful object, an appalling black figure at least twelve feet in height, a figure of Heu-Heu as we had seen him depicted in the Cave of the Berg, only there his likeness was far too flattering. For this was the very image of the devil as he might have been imagined by a mad monk, and from his eyes shot a red light.

As I have said before, the figure was like to that of a huge gorilla and yet no ape but a man, and yet no man but a fiend. There was the long gray hair growing in tufts about the body. There was the great, red, bushy beard. There were

the enormous limbs and the long arms and the hands with claws on them where the thumbs should be, and the webbed fingers. The bull neck on the top of which sat the small head that somehow resembled an old woman's with a hooked nose; the huge mouth from which the baboon-like tusks protruded, the round, massive, able-looking brow, the deepest glaring eyes, now alight with red fire, the cruel smile—all were there intensified. There, too, was the shape of a dead man into the breast of which the clawed foot was driven, and in the left hand the head that had been twisted from the man's body.

Oh! evidently the painter of the picture in the Berg can have been no Bushman as once I had supposed, but some priest of Heu-Heu whom fate or chance had brought thither in past ages, and who had depicted it to be the object of his private worship. When I saw the thing I gasped aloud and felt as though I should fall to the ground through fear, so hellish was it. But Hans gripped my arm and said:

"Baas, be not afraid. It is not alive; it is but a thing of stone and paint with fire set within."

I stared again; he was right.

*Heu-Heu was but an idol! Heu-Heu did not live except in the hearts of his worshippers!*

Only out of what Satanic mind had this image sprung?

I sighed with relief as this knowledge came home to me, and began to observe details. There were plenty to be seen. For instance, on either side of the statue stood a line of the hideous Hairy Folk, men to the right and women to the left, with white cloths tied about their middles. In front of this line behind their high priest, Dacha, were the other priests, Heu-Heu's clergy, and on a raised table behind them just at the foot of the base of the statue, which I now saw stood upon a kind of pedestal so as to make it more dominant, lay a dead body, that of one of the Hairy women, as the clear light of the flame revealed.

"Baas," said Hans again, "I believe that is the gorilla-woman I shot in the river. I seem to know her pretty face."

"If so, I hope we shall not join her on that table presently," I answered.

After this suddenly I went mad; everybody went mad. I suppose that the vapour from that accursed powder had got into our brains. Had not Dacha called it the "Dust of Illusions"? Certainly, of illusions there were plenty, most of them bad, like those of a nightmare.

Still, before they possessed me completely, I had the sense to understand what was happening to me and to grip hold of Hans, who I saw was going mad also, and command him to sit quiet. Then came the illusions which really I can't describe to you. You fellows have read of the effects of opium smoking; well, it was that kind of thing, only worse.

I dreamed that Heu-Heu got off his pedestal and came dancing down the hall, also that he bent over me and kissed me on the forehead. In fact, I think it was Dramana who kissed me, for she, too, had gone mad. Everything that I had done bad in my life re-enacted itself in my mind and, all put together, seemed to make me a sinner indeed, because you see the good was entirely omitted. The Hairy Folk began an infernal dance before the statue; the women round us raved and shouted with extraordinary expressions upon their faces; the priests waved their arms and set up yells of adoration as did those of Baal in the Old Testament. In short, literally there was the devil to pay.

Yet strangely enough it was all wildly, deliriously exciting and really I seemed to enjoy it. It shows how wicked we must be at bottom. A sight of hell while you remain on the *terra firma* of our earth is not uninteresting, even though you be temporarily affected by its atmosphere.

Presently the nightmare came to an end, suddenly as it had commenced, and I woke to find my head on Dramana's shoulder, or hers on mine, I forget which, with Hans engaged in kissing my boot under the impression that it was the chaste brow of some black maiden whom he had known about thirty years before. I kicked him on his snub nose, whereon he rose and apologized, remarking that this was the strongest *dacca*—the hemp which the natives smoke with intoxicating effects—that he had ever tasted.

"Yes," I answered, "and now I understand where Zikali's magic comes from. No wonder he wants more of the leaves of that tree and thought it worth while to send us so far to get them."

Then I ceased talking, for something in the atmosphere of the place absorbed my attention. A sudden chill seemed to have fallen upon it and its occupants who, in strange contrast to their recent excesses, now appeared to be possessed by the very spirit of Mrs. Grundy. There they stood, exuding piety at every pore and gazing with rapt countenance at the hideous image of their god. Only to me those countenances had grown very cruel. It was as though they awaited the consummation of some dreadful drama with a kind of cold joy, which, of course, may have been an aftermath of their unholy intoxication. It was the scene at the feast repeated but with a difference. There they had been drunken with liquor and sobered by the potent stuff they had swallowed after it; now they had been made drunken with fumes and were sobered by I knew not what. Their master Satan, perhaps!

The fire still burnt brightly though it gave off no more of these fumes, being fed I suppose with natural fuel, and by the light of it I saw that Dacha was addressing the image with impassioned gestures. What he said I do not know, for my ears were still buzzing and of it I could hear nothing. But presently he turned and pointed to us and then began to beckon.

"What is it he wants us to do?" I asked of Dramana who now was seated at my side, a perfect model of propriety.

"He says that you must come up and make your offering to the god."

"What offering?" I asked, thinking that perhaps it would be of a painful nature.

"The offering of the sacred fire that the Lord of Fire," and she pointed to Hans, "bears about with him."

I was puzzled for a moment till Hans remarked:

"I think she means the matches, Baas."

Then I understood, and bade him produce a new box of Best Wax Vestas and hold it out in his hand. Thus armed we advanced and, passing round the fire, bowed, as the Bible potentate whom the Prophet cured bargained he should be allowed to do in the House of Rimmon, to the beastly effigy of Heu-Heu. Then in obedience to the muttered directions of Dacha, Hans solemnly deposited the box of matches upon the stone table, after which we were allowed to retreat.

Anything more ridiculous than this scene it is impossible to imagine. I suppose that its intense absurdity was caused, or at any rate accentuated by its startling and indeed horrible contrasts. There was the towering and demoniacal idol; there were the rogue priests, their faces alight with a fierce fanaticism; there, looking only half human, were the long lines of savage Hairy Folk; there was the burning fire reflecting itself to the farthest recesses of the cavern and showing the forms of the scattered worshippers.

Finally there was myself, a bronzed and tattered individual, and the dirty, abject-looking Hans holding in his hand that absurd box of matches which finally he deposited in the exact middle of the stone table about six inches from the swollen body of the aboriginal whom he had shot in the river. In those vast surroundings this box looked so lonely and so small that the sight of it moved me to internal convulsions. Shaking with hysterical laughter I returned to my seat as quickly as I could, dragging Hans after me, for I saw that his case was the same, although fortunately it is not the custom of Hottentots to burst into open merriment.

"What will Heu-Heu do with the matches, Baas?" asked Hans. "Surely there must be plenty of fire where he is, Baas."

"Yes, lots," I replied with energy, "but perhaps of another sort."

Then I observed that Dacha was pointing to the right and that the eyes of all present were fixed in that direction.

"The sacrifice comes," murmured Dramana, and as she spoke a woman appeared, a tall woman covered with a white robe or veil, who was led forward by two of the Hairy People. She was brought to the front of the table on which lay the body and the matches, and there stood quite still.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"Last year's bride, with whom the priest has done and passes on into the keeping of the god," answered Dramana with a stony smile.

"Do you mean that they are going to kill the poor thing?" I said, horrified.

"The god is about to take her into his keeping," she replied enigmatically.

At this moment one of the savage attendants snatched away the veil which draped the victim, revealing a very beautiful woman clad in a white kirtle which was cut low upon her breast and reached to her knees. Tall and stately, she stood quite still before us, her black hair streaming down upon her shoulders. Then, as though at some signal, all the women in the audience stood up and screamed:

"Wed her to the god! Wed her to the god and let us drink of the cup that through her unites us to the god!"

Two of the Hairy Folk drew near to the girl, each of whom had something in his hand, though what it was at the moment I could not see, and stood still, as though waiting for a sign. Then followed a pause during which I glanced about me at the faces of the women, made hideous by the unholy passions that raged within them, who stood with outstretched arms pointing at the victim. They looked horrible, and I hated them, all except Dramana, who, I noted with relief, had not cried aloud and did not stretch out her hands like the rest.

What was I about to see? Some dreadful act of voodooism such as negroes practise in Haiti and on the West Coast? Perhaps. If so, I could not bear it. Whatever the risk might be I could not bear it; almost automatically my hand grasped the stock of my revolver.

Dacha seemed as though he were about to say something, a word of doom mayhap. I measured the distance between me and himself with my eyes, calculating where I should aim to put a bullet through his large head and give the god a sacrifice which it did not expect. Indeed, had he spoken such a word, without doubt I should have done it, for as you fellows know I am handy with a pistol, and probably, as a result, never have lived to tell you this story.

As this juncture, however, the victim waved her arms and said in a loud, clear voice:

"I claim the ancient right to make my prayer to the god before I am given to the god."

"Speak on," said Dacha, "and be swift."

She turned and curtsied to the hideous idol, then wheeled about again and addressed it in form although really she was speaking to the audience.

"O Fiend Heu-Heu," she said in a voice filled with awful scorn and bitterness, "whom my people worship to their ruin, I who was stolen from my people come to thee because I would have none of yonder high-priest and therefore must pay the price in blood. So be it, but ere I come I have something to tell these priests who grow fat in wickedness. Hearken! A spirit is in me, giving me sight. I see this place a sea of water, I see flames bursting through the water, turning thy hideous effigy to dust and burning up thy evil servants, so that not one of them remains. The Prophecy! The Prophecy! Let all who hear me bethink them of the ancient prophecy, for at length its hour is fulfilled!"

Then she stared towards Hans and myself, waving her arms, and I thought was about to address us. If so, she changed her mind and did not.

So far the priests and the congregation had listened in the silence of amazement, or perhaps of fear. Now, however, a howl of furious execration broke from them, and when it died down I heard Dacha shouting:

"Let this blaspheming witch be slain. Let the sacrifice be accomplished!"

The two savages stepped towards her, and now I saw that what they held in their hands were coils of rope with which doubtless she was to be bound. If so, she was too swift for them, for with a great bound she sprang upon the table where lay the body of the Hairy woman and the box of matches. Next instant I saw a knife flashing in her hand; I suppose it had been concealed somewhere in her dress. She lifted it and plunged it to her heart, crying as she did so:

"My blood be on you, Priests of Heu-Heu!"

Then she fell down there upon the table and was still.

In the hush that followed I heard Hans say:

"That was a brave lady, Baas, and doubtless all she said will come true. May I shoot that priest, Baas, or will you?"

"No," I began, but before I could get out another word my voice was overwhelmed by a tumult of shouts,

"The god has been robbed of his sacrifice and is hungry. Let the strangers be offered to the god."

These and other like things said the shouts.

Dacha looked towards us, hesitating, and I saw that it was time to act. Rising, I called out:

"Know, O Dacha, that before one hand is laid upon us I will make you as my companion, Lord-of-the-Fire, made the dog without your doors."

Evidently Dacha believed me, for he grew quiet humble. "Have no fear, Lords," he said. "Are you not our honoured guests and the messengers of a Great One? Go in peace and safety."

Then at his command or sign the brightly burning fire was scattered, so that the cave grew almost dark, especially as some of the lights had gone out.

"Follow me swiftly—swiftly," said Dramana, and taking my hand she led me away through the gloom.

Presently we found ourselves in the passage, though for aught I know it was another passage; at any rate, it led to the hall where we had feasted. This was now empty, although in it lights still burned. Crossing it, Dramana conducted us back to the house, where a hasty examination shewed us that our rifles were just as we had left them; nothing had been touched. Here, seeing that we were quite alone, for all had gone to the sacrifice, I spoke to her.

"Lady Dramana," I said, "does my heart tell me truly or do I only dream that you desire to depart from out of the shadow of Heu-Heu?"

She glanced about her cautiously, then answered in a low voice: "Lord, there is nothing that I desire so much—unless perchance it be death," she added with a sigh. "Hearken! Seven years ago I was bound upon the Rock of Offering, where my sister will stand to-morrow, having been chosen by the god and dedicated to him by the mad terror of my people, which means, Lord, that I had been chosen by Dacha and dedicated to Dacha."

"Why, then, do you still live?" I asked, "seeing that she who was chosen last year must be sacrificed this year?"

"Lord, am I not the daughter of the Walloo, the ruler of the people of the Mainland, and might not the title to that rule be acquired through me while I breathe? It is not the best of titles, it is true, because I was born of a lesser wife of my father, the Walloo, whereas my sister Sabeela is born of the great wife. Still, at a pinch, it might serve. That is why I still live."

"What then is Dacha's plan, Lady Dramana?"

"It stands thus, Lord. Hitherto for many generations, it is said since the great fire burned upon the island and destroyed the city, there have been two governments in this land: that of the priests of Heu-Heu, who govern the minds of its people, also the wild Wood Folk, and that of the Walloos, who govern their bodies and are kings by ancient right. Now Dacha, who, when he is not lost in drink or other follies, is farseeing and ambitious, purposes to rule both minds and bodies and it may be to bring in new blood from outside our country and once more to build up a great people, such as tradition tells we were in the beginning, when we came here from the north or from the west. He does but wait until he has married my sister, the lawful heiress to the Walloo, my father, who by now must be an old and feeble man, to strike his blow, and in her name to seize the government and power.

"The priests, as you have seen, are but few and cannot do this of their own strength, but they command all the savage folk who are called the Children of Heu-Heu. Now these people are very angry because the other day one of

their women was killed upon the river, she who lay on the altar before the god, and this they think was done by the Walloo, not understanding that it was your servant, the yellow man there, who slew her. Or if they understand, they believe that he did so by the order of Issicore who, we hear, is betrothed to my sister Sabeela.

"Therefore they wish to make a great war upon the Walloo under the guidance of the priests of Heu-Heu, whom they call their Father, because his image is like to them. Already their mankind are gathering on the island, rowing themselves hither upon logs or bundles of reeds, and by to-morrow night all will be collected. Then, after what is called the Holy Marriage, when my sister Sabeela has been brought as an offering by the Walloo and bound to the pillar between the Everlasting Fires, led by Dacha they will attack the city on the mainland, which they dare not do alone. It will surrender to them, and Dacha will kill my old father and the lord Issicore who stands next to him, and any of the ancient blood who cling to him, and cause himself to be declared Walloo. After this his purpose is to poison the Forest Folk as he well knows how to do and as I have told you, perhaps to bring new blood into the land which is rich and wide, and found a kingdom."

"A big scheme," I said, not without admiration, for on hearing it, to tell the truth, I began to conceive a certain respect for that villain Dacha, who, at any rate, had ideas and presented a striking contrast to the helpless and superstition-ridden inhabitants of the mainland.

"But, Lady," I went on, "what is to happen to me and to my companion who is named Lord-of-the-Fire?"

"I do not know, Lord, who have had little talk with Dacha since you came, or with any to whom he reveals his secrets. I think, however, that he is afraid of you, believing you to be magicians, or in league with the greatest of magicians, the prophet Zikali, who dwells in the south, with whom the priests of Heu-Heu communicate from time to time. Also it is probable that he holds that you may be able to help him to build up a nation and that therefore he would wish to keep you in his service in this country, only killing you if you try to escape. On the other hand, when the Wood Folk come to understand that it was really you, or one of you, who killed the woman, they may clamour for your lives. Then, if he thinks it wisest to please them, at the great feast which is called the finishing of the Holy Marriage, you may be tied upon the altar as a Sacrifice while the blood is drained from you, to be drunk by the priests with the lips of Heu-Heu. Perhaps that matter will be settled at the Council of the Priests to-morrow, Lord."

"Thank you," I said, "never mind the details."

"Meanwhile," she went on, "for the present you are safe. Indeed I, who by my rank am the Mistress of Households, have been commanded to honour you in every way, and to-morrow, when the priests are engaged in preparations for the Holy Marriage, to show you all that you would see, also to provide you with boughs from the Tree of Illusions which Zikali the prophet desires."

"Thank you," I said again, "we shall be most happy to take a walk with you, even if it rains, as I think from the sounds upon the roof it is doing at present. Meanwhile, I understand that you wish to get out of this place and to save your sister. Well, I may as well tell you at once, Lady Dramana, that my companion, who chooses to assume the shape of a yellow dwarf, and I, who choose to be as I am, *are* in fact great magicians with much more power than we seem to possess. Therefore, it is quite possible that we may be able to help you in all ways, and to do other things more remarkable. Yet we may need your aid, since generally that which is mighty works through that which is small, and what I want to know is whether we can count upon it."

"To the death, Lord," she answered.

"So be it, Dramana, for know that if you fail us certainly you will die."

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## THE SLUICE GATE

All that night it poured, not merely in the usual tropical torrent, but positively in waterspouts. Seldom in my life have I heard such rain as that which fell upon the roof of the house where we were, which must have been wonderfully well built, for otherwise it would have given away. When we rose in the morning and went to the door to look out, all the place was swimming and a solid wall of water seemed to stretch from heaven to earth.

"I think there will be a flood after this, Baas," remarked Hans.

"I think so, too," I answered, "and if we were not here I wish that it might be deep enough to drown every human brute upon this island."

"It cannot do that, Baas, because at the worst they would climb up the mountain, though it might get into the cave and give Heu-Heu a washing—which he needs."

"If it got into the cave, it would probably get into the mountain as well," I began—then stopped, for an idea occurred to me.

I had noticed that this cave sloped downwards somewhat steeply, I mean into the base of the mountain and towards its centre. Probably, in its origin it was a vent blown through the rock at some time in the past when the volcano was very active, which, for aught I knew, remained unblocked, or only slightly blocked. Suppose now that a great volume of water ran down that cave and vanished into the interior of the mountain, was it not probable that something unusual would happen? The volcano was still alive—this I knew from the smoke that hung above it, also by the stream of red-hot lava that we had seen trickling down its southern face—and fire and water do not agree well together. They make steam, and steam expands. This thought took such a persistent hold on me that I began to wonder whether it did not partake of the nature of an inspiration. However, I said nothing of it to Hans, who, being a savage, did not understand such matters.

A little later food was brought to us by one of the serving priests. With it came a message from Dacha to the effect that he grieved he could not wait on us that day as he had many matters to which he must attend, but that the Lady Dramana would do so shortly and show us all there was to be seen, if the rain permitted.

In due course she arrived—alone, as I had hoped she would—and at once began to talk of the rainfall of the previous night, which she said was such as had never been known in their country. She added that all the priests had been out that morning, dragging the great stone sluice gate into its place so as to keep out the water of the lake, lest the arable land should be flooded and the crops destroyed.

I told her that I was much interested in such matters, and asked questions about this sluice which she could not answer as she knew little of its working. She said, however, that she would show it to me so that I might study the system.

I thanked her and inquired whether the lake had risen much. She answered, Not yet, but that probably it would do so during the day and the following night when it became filled with the water brought down by the flooded river which ran into it from the country to the north. At any rate, this was feared, and it had been thought best to set the sluice in place, a difficult task because of its weight. Indeed, a woman who had gone to help out of curiosity had been caught by a lever—I understood that was what she meant—and killed. She still lay by the sluice, since it was not lawful for the priests of Heu-Heu or their servants to touch a dead body between the Feast of Illusions, which had been held on the previous night, and the Feast of Marriage, which would be held on the night of the morrow, when, she added significantly, they often touched plenty.

"It is a Feast of Blood, then?" I said.

"Yes, Lord, a Feast of Blood, and I pray that it may not be of your blood also."

"Have no fear of that," I answered airily, though in truth I felt much depressed. Then I asked her to tell me exactly what was going to happen as to the delivery of the "Holy Bride."

"This, Lord," she said. "Before midnight, when the moon should be at its fullest, a canoe comes, bringing the bride from the City of the Walloos. Priests receive her and tie her to the pillar that stands on the Rock of Offerings between the Everlasting Fires. Then the canoe goes and waits at a distance. The priests go also and leave the bride alone. I know it all, Lord, for I have been that bride. So she stands until the first ray of the rising sun strikes upon her. Then from the mouth of the cave comes out the high priest dressed in skins to resemble the image of the god, and followed by women and some of the Hairy savage folk shouting in triumph. He looses the bride, and they bear her in the cave, and there, Lord, she vanishes."

"Do you think that she will be brought at all, Dramana?"

"Certainly she will be brought, since if my father, the Walloo, or Issicore, or any refused to send her, they would be killed by their own people, who believe that then disaster would overtake them. Unless you can save her by your arts, Lord, my sister Sabeela must become the wife of Heu-Heu, which means the wife of Dacha."

"I will think the matter over," I said. "But if I make up my mind to help, am I right in understanding that you also desire to escape from this island?"

"Lord, I have told you so already, and I will only add this. Dacha hates me and when I have served his purpose and he has in his hands Sabeela, the true heiress to the chieftainship over our people unless first I tread her road, certainly it will be my lot to stand where that poor woman stood last night, who slew herself to escape worse things. Oh, Lord, save me if you can!"

"I will save you—if I can," I replied, and I meant it—almost as much as I meant to save myself.

Then I impressed upon her that she must obey me in all things without question, and this she swore to do. Also I asked her if she could provide us with a canoe.

"It is impossible," she replied. "Dacha is clever; he has bethought him that you might depart in a canoe. Therefore, every one of them has been moved round to the other side of the island where they are kept under watch of the Savage Folk. That is why he gives you leave to roam about the place, because he knows that you cannot leave it, unless you have wings, for the lake is too wide for any man to swim, and if it were not, the Walloo shore is haunted by crocodiles."

Now, my friends, as you may guess, this was a blow indeed. However, I kept my countenance and said that as this was the case something else must be arranged, only asking casually if there were any crocodiles about this part of the island coast. She answered that there were none, because, as she supposed, the flames of the Everlasting Fires, or some smell from the smoke of the mountain, frightened them away.

Next, as the torrents of rain had ceased, at any rate for a while, I suggested that we should go out, and we did so. Also I did not mind much about the weather, as to protect us from it she had brought with her for our use and her own three of the strangest waterproofs that ever I saw. These consisted of two giant leaves from some kind of waterlily that grew on the borders of the lake, sewn together, with a hole at the top of the leaves, where the stalk comes, for the wearer's head to go through, and two openings left for his arms. For the rest no mackintosh ever turned wet so well as did these leaves, the only drawback about them, as I was informed, being that they must be renewed once in every three days.

Arrayed in these queer garments we went out in rain that here we should call fairly heavy, though it was but the merest drizzle compared to what had gone before. This rain I may explain, had great advantages so far as we were concerned, seeing that in it not even the most curious woman put her nose outside her own door. So it came about that we were able to examine the village of the priests of Heu-Heu quite unobserved and at our leisure.

This settlement was small since there were never more than fifty priests in the college, if so it may be called, to whom, of course, must be added their wives and women, on an average, perhaps, of three or four per man.

The odd thing was that there seemed to be no children and no old people. Either offspring did not arrive and folk died young upon the island, or in both cases they were made away with, perhaps as sacrifices to Heu-Heu. I am sorry to say that in the pressure of great dangers I do not remember making any inquiry upon the point, or if I did I cannot recall the answer given. It was only afterwards that I reflected upon this strange circumstance. The fact remains that on the island there were no young and no aged. Another possible explanation, by the way, is that both may have been exported to the mainland.

Here I will add that with the exception of Dramana and a few discarded wives who may have been doomed to sacrifice, the women were fiercer bigots and more cruel votaries of Heu-Heu than were the men themselves. So, indeed, I had observed when I sat among them at the Feast of Illusions in the cave.

For the rest they all lived in dwellings such as that which was given to us, and were waited upon by servants or slaves from the savage race that was called Heuheua. Low as these Heuheua were and disgusting as might be their appearance, like our South African Bushmen, they were clever in their way, and, when trained, could do many things. Also they were faithful to the commands of their god Heu-Heu, or rather to those of his priests, though they hated the Walloos, from whom these priests sprang, and waged continual war against them.

Soon we had left the houses and were among the cultivated lands, all of which Dramana informed us were worked by the Heuheua slaves. These laboured here in gangs for a year at a time, and then were returned to their women in the forests on the mainland, for, except as servants, none of them were allowed upon the island. Those lands were extraordinarily fertile, as was shewn by the crops on them, which, although much beaten down by the torrential rain, were now ready for harvest. They were enclosed by a kind of sea wall built of blocks of lava and must at some time have been reclaimed from the muddy shallows of the lake, which accounted for their richness. Everywhere about them ran irrigation channels that were used in the dry sowing season and controlled by the sluice gate that has been mentioned. That is all I have to say about the gardens, except that the existence of this irrigation system is to my mind another proof that these Walloos sprang originally from some highly civilized race. Their fields extended to that extremity of the island which was nearest to the Walloo coast, and I know not how far in the other direction, for I did not go there.

Standing upon this point we saw in the distance a number of moving specks upon the water. I asked Dramana if they were hippopotami, and she answered:

"No, Lord, they are the Hairy Folk who, in obedience to the summons of the god, cross the lake upon bundles of reeds that they may be ready to fight in the coming war against the Walloo. Already there are hundreds of them

gathered upon the farther side of the mountain, and by to-night all their able-bodied men will have come, leaving only the females, the aged, and the children hidden away in the depths of the forests. On the third day from now they will paddle back across the lake, led by the priests under the command of Dacha, and attack Walloo.”

“A great deal may happen in three days,” I said, and dropped the subject.

We walked back towards the village and the cave mouth by the sea wall, upon the top of which ran a path, and thus at last came to the Rock of Offering, upon each side of which burned the two curious columns of flame that, I took it, were fed with natural gas generated in the womb of the volcano. They were not very large fires—at any rate, when I saw them—the flame may have been about eight or ten feet high, no more. But there they burned, and had done so, Dramana said, from the beginning of things. Between them, at a little distance, stood a post of stone with rings also of stone, to which the bride was bound. I noted that from these rings hung new ropes placed there to serve as the bonds of Sabeela during the coming night.

Having seen all there was to see on this Rock of Offering, including the steps by which the victim was landed, we went on to a long shed with a steep reed roof, which contained the machinery, if so I can call it, that regulated the irrigation sluice. It had a heavy wooden door which Dramana unlocked with an odd-shaped stone key that she produced from a bag she was wearing. This key, she told us, had been given to her by Dacha with strict orders that she was to return it after we had examined the place, should we wish to do so.

As it happened there was a good deal to examine. Near one end of the shed the main irrigation canal, which may have been twelve feet wide, passed beneath it. Here, under the centre of the roof, was a pit of which the water that stood in it prevented us from seeing the depth. On either side of this pit were perpendicular grooves cut in the solid rock, very deep grooves that were exactly filled by a huge slab of dressed stone six or seven inches thick. When this stone, or the upper part of it, was lifted out of the rock floor of the channel, where normally it stood in its niche, forming part of the bed of the channel, it entirely cut off the inflow of water from the lake, and was, moreover, tall enough to stop any possible additional inflow at a time of flood.

Perhaps I can make the thing clear in this way. When Good and I were last in London together we went to Madame Tussaud’s and saw the famous guillotine that was used in the French Revolution. The knife of that guillotine, you will remember, was raised between uprights, and when brought into action, let fall again to the bottom of the apparatus, severing the neck of the victim in its course. Now imagine that those uprights were the rock walls of the pit, and that the knife, instead of being but a narrow thing, were a great sheet of steel, or rather stone. Then, when it was drawn to the top of the uprights from the niche at the bottom, it would entirely fill the space to the head of the grooves, and none of the water that normally passed over it could flow between the uprights, or rather walls, because the sheet of stone barred its passage. Now do you understand?

As Good, who was stupid about such matters, looked doubtful, Allan went on:

“Perhaps a better illustration would be that of a portcullis; even you, Good, have seen a portcullis, which, by the way, must mean a door in a groove. Imagine a subterranean or rather subaqueous, portcullis that, when it was desired to shut it, rose in its grooves from below instead of falling from above, and you will have an exact idea of the water door of the priests of Heu- Heu. I’d draw it for you if it wasn’t so late.”

“I see now,” said Good, “and I suppose they wound the thing up with a windlass.”

“Why not say with a donkey engine at once, Good? Windlasses had not occurred to the Walloos. No, they acted on a simpler and more ancient plan. They lifted it with a lever. Near the top of this slab of rock, or water door, was drilled a hole. Through this hole passed a bolt of stone, of which the ends went into the cut-out base of the lever, thus forming a kind of hinge. The lever itself was a bar of stone—evidently they would not trust to wood which rots—massive and about twenty feet long, so as to obtain the best possible purchase. When the door was quite down in its niche at the bottom of the bed of the channel, the end of the lever naturally rose high into the air, almost to the top of the pitched roof of the shed, indeed.”

When it was desired to raise the door so as to regulate the amount of water passing into the irrigation channel beyond, or to cut it off altogether in case of flood, the lever was pulled down by ropes that were tied to its end by the strength of a number of men and that end was passed into, or rather under, one or other of half a dozen hooks of stone hollowed into a face of solid rock. Here, of course, it remained immovable until it was released, again by the united strength of a number of men, and flew back to the roof, letting the portcullis slab drop into its bed or groove at the bottom of the channel, thus admitting the lake water.

On the present occasion, as a great flood was anticipated, this slab was raised to its full extent, and when I saw it, the top of it stood five or six feet above the level of the water, while the end of the handle of the lever was made fast beneath the lowest hook of rock within a foot of the floor.

Hans and I examined this primitive but effective apparatus for preventing inundations very carefully. Supposing, thought I, that any one wanted to release that lever so that the door fell and water rushed in over it, how could it be done? Answer: it could only be done by the application of the united force of a great number of men pressing on the end of the lever till it was pushed clear of the point of the hook, when naturally it would fly upwards and the door would fall. Or, secondly, by breaking the lever in two, when, of course, the same thing would happen. Now two men, that is Hans and myself, could not possibly release this beam of stone from its hook; indeed, I doubt whether ten men

could have done it. Nor could two men possibly break that beam of stone. Perhaps, if they had suitable marble saws, such as workers in stone use, and plenty of time, they might cut it in two, although it seemed to be made of a kind of rock that was as hard as iron. But we had no saw. Therefore, so far as we were concerned the task was impossible; that idea must be dismissed.

Still, there is a way out of most difficulties if only it can be hit upon. My own mental resources were exhausted, it is true, but Hans remained, and possibly he might have some suggestion of value to make. He was a curious creature, Hans, and often his concentrated primitive instincts led him more directly to the mark than did all my civilized reasonings.

So speaking without emphasis in Dutch, for I did not wish Dramana to guess my internal excitement, I put the problem to Hans in these words:

"Supposing and you and I, Hans, with none to help, except perhaps this woman, found it necessary to break that bar of stone and cause the water gate to fall, so as to let in the lake flood over it, how could we do it with such means as we have in this place?"

Hans stared about him, twiddling his hat in his usual vacuous fashion, and remarked,

"I don't know, Baas."

"Then find out, for I want to learn if your conclusions agree with my own," I answered.

"I think that if they agree with the Baas's, they will agree with nothing at all," said Hans, delivering this shrewd and perfectly accurate shot with such a wooden expression of utter stupidity that I could have kicked him.

Next, without more words, he removed himself from my neighbourhood and began to examine the lever in a casual fashion, especially the hook of rock which held it in its place. Presently he remarked in Arabic, so that Dramana might understand, that he wanted to see how deep the pit was, which we could not do from the floor of the shed, and instantly climbed up the slope of the beam-like lever with all the agility of a monkey, and sat himself, cross-legged, on the top of it, just below the stone hinge that I have described. Here he remained for a while, apparently staring into the darkness of the hole or pit on the farther side of the stone slab, where, of course, it was almost empty, as the door cut off the water from the irrigation channel on the island side.

"That hole is too dark to see into," he said, presently, and swarmed down the shaft again. Then he called my attention to the body of the dead woman who Dramana had told us was struck by the lever and killed while it was being dragged into place, which lay almost out of sight in the shadow by the wall of the shed. We went to look at her. She was a tall woman, handsome, like all these people, and young. Outwardly she showed no signs of injury, for her long white robe was unstained. I suppose that she had been crushed between the lever and the hook, or perhaps struck in the side of the head as it was being swung into place. Whilst we were examining the corpse of this unfortunate, Hans said to me, still speaking in Dutch,

"Does the Baas remember that we have two pound tins of the best rifle powder in our bag and that he scolded me because I did not take them out when we left the house of the Walloo, saying that it was foolish to bring them with us as they would be quite useless to us on the island?"

I replied that I had some recollection of the incident, and that, as a matter of fact, they had been heavy to carry. Then Hans proceeded to set a riddle in his irritating and sententious way, asking,

"Who does the Baas think knows most about things that are to happen —the Baas or the Baas's Reverend Father in Heaven?"

"My father, I presume, Hans," I replied airily.

"The Baas is right. The Baas's father in the sky knows much more than the Baas, but sometimes I think that Hans knows better than either, at any rate, here on the earth."

I stared at the little wretch, rendered speechless by his irreverent impudence, but he went on unabashed:

"I did not forget to leave that powder behind, Baas; I brought it with me thinking that it might be useful, because with powder you can blow up men and other things. Also, I did not wish it to stay where we might never see it again."

"Well, what about the powder?" I asked.

"Nothing much, Baas. At least, only this. These Walloo do not bore stones very well; they make the holes too big for what has to go through them. That in the water gate is so large that there would be room to put two pound flasks of powder beneath the pin, so that the strain lifts it up to the top of the hole."

"And what would be the use of putting two flasks of powder in such a place?" I inquired carelessly, for at the moment I was thinking about the dead woman.

"None at all, Baas; none at all. Only I thought the Baas asked me how we could loose that stone arm. If two pounds of powder were put into the hole, covered with a little mud, and fired, I think that they would blow out the bit of rock at the top of the hole, or break the pin, or both. Then, as there would be nothing to hold it, the stone door would fall down and the lake would come in and water the fields of the priests of Heu-Heu, if in his wisdom and kindness the Baas thinks they want it at harvest time, and after so much rain."

“You little wretch,” I said; “you infernal, clever little wretch! Hang me if I don’t think you have got hold of the right end of the stick this time. Only the business will take a lot of thinking out and arrangement.”

“Yes, Baas, and we had better do that in the house, which, as the Baas knows, is quite close, only about a hundred paces away. Let us get out of this place, Baas, before the lady begins to smell rats; only, as you go, take a good squint at that hole in the top of the stone door and the rock pin that goes through it.”

Then Hans, who all this while had been staring at the body of the woman and apparently talking about her, bowed towards it, remarking in Arabic, “Allah, I mean Heu-Heu, receive her into his bosom,” and retreated reverentially.

So we went away, but I, lingering behind, examined the hole and the pin very carefully.

Hans was quite right: there was just room left in the former to accommodate two tin flasks of powder, also, there were not more than three inches of rock on the topside of the hole. Surely two pounds of powder would suffice to blow out this ring of stone and perhaps to shatter the pin as well.

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## CHAPTER 12

### THE PLOT

We left the shed and, after she had locked its door very carefully and returned the stone key to her pouch, were taken by Dramana to see the famous Tree of Illusions, of which the juice and leaves, if powdered and burnt, could produce such strange dreams and intoxicating effects. It grew in a large walled space that was called Heu-Heu's Garden, though nothing else was planted there. Dramana assured us indeed that this tree had a poisonous effect upon all other vegetation.

Passing the wall by a door of which she also produced some kind of key out of her bag, we found ourselves standing in front of the famous tree, if so it can be called, for its growth was shrub-like and its topmost twigs were not more than twenty feet above the ground. On the other hand, it covered a great area and had a trunk two or three feet thick from which projected a vast number of branches whereof the extremities lay upon the soil, and I think rooted there, after the manner of wild figs, though of this I am not certain.

It was an unholy product of nature, inasmuch as it had no real foliage, only dark green, euphorbia-like and flesh fingers—indeed, I think it must have been some variety of euphorbia. At the extremities of these green fingers appeared purple-coloured blooms with a most evil smell that reminded me of the odour of something dead; also down their sides—for, like the orange, the tree appeared to have the property of flowering and fruiting at the same time—were yellow seed vessels about the size of those of a prickly pear. Except that the trunk was covered with corrugated gray bark and that the finger-like leaves were full of resinous white milk like those of other euphorbias, there is nothing more to say about it. I should add, however, that Dramana told us no other specimen existed, either on the mainland or the island, and that to attempt its propagation elsewhere was a capital offence. In short, the Tree of Illusions was a monopoly of the priests.

Hans set to work and cut a large faggot of the leaves, or fingers, which he tied up with a piece of string he had in his pocket, to be conveyed to Zikali, though there seemed to be such a small prospect of their ever reaching him. It was not an agreeable job, for when it was cut the white juice of the tree spurted out, and if it fell upon the flesh, burned like caustic.

I was glad when it came to an end because of the stench of the flowers, but before I left I took the opportunity, when Dramana was not looking, of picking some of the ripest of the fruits and putting them in my pocket, with the idea of planting the seeds should we ever escape from that country. I am sorry to say, however, that I never did so, as the sharp spines that grew upon the fruits wore a hole in the lining of my pocket, which already was thin from use, and they tumbled out unobserved. Evidently the Tree of Illusions did not intend to be reproduced elsewhere; at least, that was Hans's explanation.

On our way back to the house we had to pass round a lava boulder on the lake side of the sluice shed, crossing by a little bridge the water channel that ran beneath it, near to a flight of landing steps that were used by fishermen. I examined this channel which pierced the sea wall and here, outside the sluice gate, was about twenty feet wide. At the side of it, built into the wall, was a slab of stone on which were marks, cut there, no doubt, to indicate the height of the water level and the rate at which it rose. I noticed that the topmost of these marks was already covered, and that during the little while I stood and watched, it vanished altogether, showing that the water was rising rapidly.

Seeing that I was interested, Dramana remarked that the priests said that tradition never told of the water having reached that topmost mark before, even during the greatest rains. She added that she supposed it had done so now owing to the unprecedented wetness of the summer and great tempests farther up the river that fed the lake, of which we were experiencing the last.

"It is fortunate that you have such a strong door to keep out the water," I said.

"Yes, Lord," she answered, "since if it broke all this side of the island would be flooded. If you look you will see that already the lake stands higher than the cultivated lands and even than the mouth of the Cave of Heu-Heu. It is told in tradition that when first, hundreds of years ago, these lands were reclaimed from the mud of the lake and the wall was built to protect them, the priests of Heu-Heu trusted to the rain for their crops. Then came many dry seasons, and they cut a way through the wall and let in water to irrigate them, making the sluice gate that you have seen to keep it out if it rose too high. An old priest of that time said that this was madness and would one day prove their destruction, but they laughed at him and made the sluice. He was wrong also, since thenceforward their crops were doubled, and the gate is so well-fashioned that no floods, however great, have ever passed through or over it; nor can they do so, because the top of the stone gate rises to the height of a child above the level of the water wall which separates the lake from the reclaimed land."

"The lake might come over the crest of the wall," I suggested.

"No, Lord. If you look you will see that the wall is raised far above its level, to a height that no flood could ever reach."

"Then safety depends upon the gate, Dramana?"

"Yes, Lord. If the flood were high enough, which it never has been within the memory of man, the safety of the town would depend upon the gate, and that of the Cave of Heu-Heu also. Before the mountain broke into flame and destroyed the city of our ancestors, the new mouth was made on the level, for formerly, it is said, it was entered from the slope above. Moreover, there is no danger, because if any accident happened and the flood broke through, all could flee up the mountain. Only then the cultivated land would be ruined for a time and there might be scarcity, during which people must obtain corn from the mainland or draw it from that which is stored in pits in the hillside, to be used in case of war or siege."

I thanked her for her explanation of these interesting hydraulic problems, and after another glance at the scale rock, on which the marks had now vanished completely, showing me that the lake was still rising rapidly, we went to the house to rest and eat.

Here Dramana left us, saying that she would return at sundown. I begged her to do so without fail. This I did for her own sake, a fact that I did not explain. Personally, I was indifferent as to whether she came back or not, having learned all she could teach us, but as I was planning catastrophe, I was anxious, should it come, to give her any chance of escape that might offer for ourselves. After all, she had been a good friend to us and was one who hated Dacha and Heu-Heu and loved her sister Sabeela.

Hans led her to the door and in an awkward fashion made much ado in helping her to put on her leaf raincoat, which she had discarded and was carrying. For now suddenly the rain, which had almost ceased while we walked, had begun to fall again in torrents.

When we had eaten and were left alone within closed doors, Hans and I took counsel together.

"What is to be done, Hans?" I asked, wishing to hear his views.

"This, I think, Baas," he answered. "When it draws near to midnight we must go to hide near the steps, there by the Rock of Offerings, not the smaller ones near the sluice gate. Then when the canoe comes and lands the Lady Sabeela to be married, as soon as she has been taken and tied to the post we must swim out to it, get aboard, and go back to Walloo-town."

"But that would not save the Lady Sabeela, Hans."

"No, Baas, I was not troubling my head about the Lady Sabeela who I hope will be happy with Heu-Heu, but it would save *us*, though perhaps we shall have to leave some of our things behind. If Issicore and the rest wish to save Lady Sabeela, they had better cease from being cowards who are afraid of a stone statue and a handful of priests, and do so for themselves."

"Listen, Hans," I said. "We came here to get a bundle of stinking leaves for Zikali and to save the Lady Sabeela who is the victim of folly and wickedness. The first we have got, the second remains to be done. I mean to save that unfortunate woman, or to die in the attempt."

"Yes, Baas. I thought the Baas would say that, since we are all fools in our different ways, and how can any one dig out of his heart the folly that his mother put there before he was born? Therefore, since the Baas is a fool, or in love with Lady Sabeela because she is so pretty—I don't know which—we must make another plan and try to get ourselves killed in carrying it out."

"What plan?" I asked, disregarding his crude satire.

"I don't know, Baas," he said, staring at the roof. "If I had something to drink, I might be able to think of one, as all this wet has filled my head with fog, just as my stomach is full of water. Still, Baas, do I understand the Baas to say that if that stone gate were broken the lake would flow in and flood this place, also the Cave of Heu-Heu, where all the priests and their wives will be gathered worshipping him?"

"Yes, Hans, so I believe, and very quickly. As soon as the water began to run it would tear away the wall on either side of the sluice and enter in a mighty flood; especially now as the rain is again falling heavily."

"Then, Baas, we must let the stone fall, and as we are not strong enough to do it ourselves, we must ask this to help us," and he produced from his bag the two pounds of powder done up in stout flasks of soldered tin as it had left the maker in England. "As I am called Lord-of-the-Fire, the priests of Heu-Heu will think it quite natural," he added with a grin.

"Yes, Hans," I said, nodding, "but the question is—how?"

"I think like this, Baas. We must pack these two tins tight into that hole in the rock door beneath the pin with the help of little stones, and cover them over thickly with mud to give the powder time to work before the tins are blown out of the hole. But first we must bore holes in the tins and make slow matches and put the ends of them into the holes. Only how are we to make these slow matches?"

I looked about me. There on a shelf in the room stood the clay lamps with which it was lighted at night, and by them lay a coil of the wick which these people used, made of fine and dry plaited rushes, many feet of it.

"There's the very stuff!" I said.

We got it down, we soaked it in a mixture of the native oil, mixed with gunpowder that I extracted from a cartridge, and behold! in half an hour we had two splendid slow matches that by experiment I reckoned would take

quite five minutes to burn before the fire reached the powder. That was all we could do for the moment.

"Now, Baas," said Hans, when we had finished our preparations and hidden the matches away to dry, "all this is very nice, but supposing that the stone falls and the water runs in and everything goes softly, how are we to get off the island? If we drown the priests of Heu-Heu—though I do not think we shall drown them because they will bolt up the mountain-side like rock rabbits—we drown ourselves also, and travel in their company to the Place of Fires of which your Reverend Father was so fond of talking. It will be very nice to try to drown the priests of Heu-Heu, Baas, but we shall be no better off, nor will the Lady Sabeela if we leave her tied to that post."

"We shall not leave her, Hans, that is if things go as I hope; we shall leave someone else."

Hans saw light and his face brightened.

"Oh, Baas, now I understand! You mean that you will tie to the post the Lady Dramana, who is older and not quite so nice-looking as the Lady Sabeela, which is why you told her she must stay with us all the time after she comes back? That is quite a good plan, especially as it will save us trouble with her afterwards. Only, Baas, it will be necessary to give her a little knock on the head first lest she should make a noise and betray us in her selfishness."

"Hans, you are a brute to think that I mean anything of the sort," I said indignantly.

"Yes, Baas, of course I am a brute who think of you and myself before I do of others. But then *who* will the Baas leave? Surely he does not mean to leave *me* dressed up in a bride's robe?" he added in genuine alarm.

"Hans, you are a fool as well as a brute, for, silly as you may be, how could I get on without you? I do not mean to leave any one living. I mean to leave that dead woman in the gate house."

He stared at me in evident admiration and answered,

"The Baas is growing quite clever. For once he has thought of something that I have not thought of first. It is a good plan—if we can carry her there without any one seeing us, and the Lady Sabeela does not betray us by making a noise, laughing and crying both together like stupid women do. But suppose that it all happens, there will be four of us, and how are we to get into that canoe, Baas, if those cowardly Walloos wait so long?"

"Thus, Hans. When the canoe lands the Lady Sabeela and she has been tied to the post, if Dramana speaks truth, it waits for the dawn at a little distance. While it is waiting you must swim out to it, taking your pistol with you, which you will hold above your head with one hand to keep the cartridges dry, but leaving everything else behind. Then you must get into the boat, telling the Walloo and Issicore, or whoever is there, who you are. Later, when all is quiet, the Lady Dramana and I will carry the dead woman to the post and tie her there in place of Sabeela. After this you will bring the canoe to the landing steps—the small landing steps by the big boulder which we saw near to the sluice mouth on the lake wall, those that Dramana told us were used by fishermen, because it is not lawful for them to set foot upon the Rock of Offerings. You remember them?"

"Yes, Baas. You mean the ones at the end of a little pier which Dramana also said was built to keep mud from the lake from drifting into the sluice mouth and blocking it."

"When I see you coming, Hans, I shall fire the slow matches and we will run down to the pier and get into the canoe. I hope that the priests and their women in the cave, which is at a distance, will not hear the powder explode beneath that shed, and that when they come out of the cave they will find the water running in and swamping them. This might give them something else to do besides pursuing us, as doubtless they would otherwise, for I am sure they have canoes hidden away somewhere near by, although Dramana may not know where they are. Now do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, Baas. As I said, the Baas has grown quite clever all of a sudden. I think it must be that Wine of Dreams he drank last night that has woke up his mind. But the Baas has missed one thing. Supposing that I get into the canoe safely, how am I to make those people row in to the landing steps and take you off? Probably they will be afraid, Baas, or say that it is against their custom, or that Heu-Heu will catch them if they do, or something of the sort."

"You will talk to them gently, Hans, and if they will not listen, then you will talk to them with your pistol. Yes, if necessary, you will shoot one or more of them, Hans, after which I think the rest will obey you. But I hope that this will not be necessary, since if Issicore is there, certainly he will desire to win back Sabeela from Heu-Heu. Now we have settled everything, and I am going to sleep for a while, with the slow matches under me to dry them, as I advise you to do also. We had little rest last night, and to-night we shall have none at all, so we may as well take some while we can. But first bring that mat and tie up the twigs from the stinking tree for Zikali, on whom be every kind of curse for sending us on this job."

"Settled everything!" I repeated to myself with inward sarcasm as I lay down and shut my eyes. In truth, nothing at all was ever less settled, since success in such a desperate adventure depended upon a string of hypotheses long enough to reach from where we were to Capetown. Our case was an excellent example of the old proverb:

If ifs and ands made pots and pans, There'd be no work for tinkers' hands.

*If the canoe came; if it waited off the rock; if Hans could swim out to it without being observed and get aboard; if he could persuade those fetish-ridden Walloos to come to take us off; if we could carry out our little game about the powder undetected; if the powder went off all right and broke up the sluice-handle as per our plan; if we could free Sabeela from the post; if she did not play the fool in some female fashion; if blackguards of sorts did not manage to cut*

our throats during all these operations, and a score of other "ifs," why, then our pots and pans would be satisfactorily manufactured and perhaps the priests of Heu-Heu would be satisfactorily frightened away or drowned. As it was, it looked to me as though, so far from not getting any rest that night, we should slumber more soundly than ever we did before—in the last long sleep of all.

Well, it could not be helped, so I just fell back upon my favourite fatalism, said my prayers and went off to sleep, which, thank God, I can do at any time and under almost any circumstances. Had it not been for that gift I should have been dead long ago.

When I woke up it was dark, and I found Dramana standing over me; indeed, it was her entry that roused me. I looked at my watch and discovered to my surprise that it was past ten o'clock at night.

"Why did you not wake me before?" I said to Hans.

"What was the use, Baas, seeing that there was nothing to be done and it is dull to be idle without a drop to drink?"

That's what he said, but the fact was that he had been fast asleep himself. Well, I was thankful, as thus we got rid of many weary hours of waiting.

Suddenly I made up my mind to tell Dramana everything, and did so. There was something about this woman that made me trust her; also, obviously, she was mad with desire to escape from Dacha, whom she hated and who hated her and had determined to murder her as soon as he had obtained possession of Sabeela.

She listened and stared at me, amazed at the boldness of my plans.

"It may all end well," she said, "though there is the magic of the priests to be feared which may tell them things that their eyes do not see."

"I will risk the magic," I said.

"There is also another thing," she went on. "We cannot get into the place where the stone gate is which you would destroy. As I was bidden, when I went back to the cave, I gave up the bag in which I carried the key and that of Heu-Heu's Garden to Dacha, and he has put it away, I know not where. The door is very strong, Lord, and cannot be broken down, and if I went to ask Dacha for the key again he would guess all, especially as the water is rising more fast than it ever rose before in the memory of man, and priests have been to make sure that the stone gate is fixed so that it cannot be moved—yes, and bound down the handle with ropes."

Now I sat still, not knowing what to say, for I had overlooked this matter of the key. While I did so I heard Hans chuckling idiotically.

"What are you laughing at, you little donkey?" I asked. "Is it a time to laugh when all our plans have come to nothing?"

"No, Baas, or rather, yes, Baas. You see, Baas, I guessed that something of this sort might happen, so, just in case it should, I took the key out of the Lady Dramana's bag and put in a stone of about the same weight in place of it. Here it is," and from his pocket he produced that ponderous and archaic lock-opening instrument.

"That was wise. Only you say, Dramana, that the priests have been to the shed. How did they get in without the key?" I asked.

"Lord, there are two keys. He who is called the Watcher of the Gate has one of his own. According to his oath he carries it about him all day at his girdle and sleeps with it at night. The key I had was that of the high priest, who uses it, and others that he may look into all things when he pleases, though this he does seldom, if ever."

"So far so good, then, Dramana. Have you aught to tell us?"

"Yes, Lord. You will do well to escape from this island to-night, if you can, since at to-day's council an oracle has gone forth from Heu-Heu that you and your companion are to be sacrificed at the bridal feast to-morrow. It is an offering to the Wood-dwellers, who now know that the woman was killed by you on the river and say that if you are allowed to live they will not fight against the Walloos. I think also that I am to be sacrificed with you."

"Are we indeed?" I said, reflecting to myself that any scruples I might have had as to attempting to drown out these fanatical brutes were now extinct for reasons which quite satisfied my conscience. I did not intend to be sacrificed if I could help it, then or at any future time, and evidently the best way to prevent this would be to give the prospective sacrificers a dose of their own medicine. From that moment I became as ruthless as Hans himself.

Now I understood why we were being treated with so much courtesy and allowed to see everything we wished. It was to lull our suspicions. What did it matter how much we learned, if within a few hours we were to be sent to a land whence we could communicate it to no one else?

I asked more particularly about this oracle, but only got answers from Dramana that I could not understand. It appeared, however, that as she said, it had undoubtedly been issued in reply to prayers from the savage Hairy Folk, who demanded satisfaction for the death of their countrywoman on the river, and threatened rebellion if it were not granted. This explained everything, and really the details did not matter.

Having collected all the information I could, we sat down to supper, during which Dramana told us incidentally that it had been arranged that our arms, which were known "to spit out fire," should be stolen from us while we slept

before dawn, so as to make us helpless when we were seized.

So it came to this: if we were to act at all, it must be at once.

I ate as much as I was able, because food gives strength, and Hans did the same. Indeed, I am sure that he would have made an excellent meal even in sight of the noose which his neck was about to occupy. Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, would have been Hans's favourite motto if he had known it, as perhaps he did. Indeed, we did drink also of some of the native liquor which Dramana had brought with her, since I thought that a moderate amount of alcohol would do us both good, especially Hans, who had the prospect of a cold swim before him. Immediately I had swallowed the stuff I regretted it, since it occurred to me that it might be drugged. However, it was not; Dramana had seen to that.

When we had finished our food we packed up our small belongings in the most convenient way we could. One half of these I gave to Dramana to carry, as she was a strong woman, and, of course, as he had to swim, Hans could be burdened with nothing except his pistol and the bundle of twigs from the Tree of Illusions, which we thought might help both to support and to conceal him in the water.

Then about eleven o'clock we started, throwing over our heads goatskin rugs that had served for coverings on our beds, to make us resemble those animals if that were possible.

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## THE TERRIBLE NIGHT

Leaving the house very softly, we found that the torrential rain had dwindled to a kind of heavy drizzle which thickened the air, while on the surface of the lake and the low-lying cultivated land there hung a heavy mist. This, of course, was very favourable to us, since even if there were watchers about they could not see us unless we stumbled right into them.

As a matter of fact I think that there was none, all the population of the place being collected at the ceremony in the cave. We neither saw nor heard anybody; not even a dog barked, for these animals, of which there were few on the island, were sleeping in the houses out of the wet and cold. Above the mist, however, the great full moon shone in a clear sky which suggested that the weather was mending, as in fact proved to be the case, the tempest of rain, which we learned afterwards had raged for months with some intervals of fine weather, having worn itself out at last.

We reached the sluice house, and to our surprise found that the door was unlocked. Supposing that it had been left thus through carelessness by the inspecting priests, we entered softly and closed it behind us. Then I lit a candle, some of which I always carried with me, and held it up that we might look about us. Next moment I stepped back horror-struck, for there on the coping of the water shaft sat a man with a great spear in his hand.

Whilst I wondered what to do, staring at this man, who seemed to be half asleep and even more frightened than I was myself, with the greater quickness of the savage, Hans acted. He sprang at the fellow as a leopard springs. I think he drew his knife, but I am not sure. At any rate, I heard a blow and then the light of the candle shone upon the soles of the man's feet as he vanished backwards into the pit of water. What happened to him there I do not know; so far as we were concerned he vanished for ever.

"How is this? You told us no one would be here," I said to Dramana savagely, for I suspected a trap.

She fell upon her knees, thinking, probably, that I was going to kill her with the man's spear which I had picked up, and answered,

"Lord, I do not know. I suppose that the priests grew suspicious and set one of their number to watch. Or it may have been because of the great flood which is rising fast."

Believing her explanations, I told her to rise, and we set to work. Having fastened the door from within, Hans climbed up the lever, and by the light of the candle, which could not betray us, as there were no windows to the shed, fixed the two flasks of powder in the hole in the stone gate immediately beneath the pin of the lever. Then, as we had arranged, he wedged them tight with pebbles that we had brought with us.

This done, I procured a quantity of the sticky clay with which the walls of the shed were plastered, taking it from a spot where the damp had come through and made it moist. This clay we stuck all over the flasks and the stones to a thickness of several inches. Only immediately beneath the pin we left an opening, hoping thereby to concentrate the force of the explosion on it and on the upper rim of the hole that was bored through the sluice gate. The slow matches, which now were dry, we inserted in the holes we had made in the flasks, bringing them out through the clay encased in two long, hollow reeds that we had drawn from the roof of our house where we lodged, hoping thus to keep the damp away from them.

Thus arranged, their ends hung to within six feet of the ground, where they could easily be lighted, even in a hurry.

By now it was a quarter past eleven, and the most terrible and dangerous part of our task must be faced. Lifting the corpse of the dead woman who had been killed, presumably, by a blow from the lever that morning, Hans and I — Dramana would not touch her — bore her out of the shed. Followed by Dramana with all our goods, for we dared not leave them behind, as our retreat might be cut off, we carried her with infinite labour, for she was very heavy, some fifty yards to a spot I had noted during our examination in the morning at the edge of the Rock of Offering, which spot, fortunately, rose to a height of six feet or rather less above the level of the surrounding ground. Here there was a little hollow in the rock face washed out by the action of water; a small, roofless cavity large enough to shelter the three of us and the corpse as well.

In this place we hid, for there, fortunately, the shape of the surrounding rock cut off the glare from the two eternal fires, which in so much wet seemed to be burning dully and with a good deal of smoke, the nearer of them at a distance of not more than a dozen paces from us. The post to which the victim was to be tied was perhaps the length of a cricket pitch away.

In this hiding hole we could scarcely be discovered unless by ill fortune someone walked right on to the top of us or approached from behind. We crouched down and waited. A while later, shortly before midnight, in the great stillness we heard a sound of paddles on the lake. The canoe was coming! A minute afterwards we distinguished the voices of men talking quite close to us.

Lifting my head, I peered very cautiously over the top of the rock. A large canoe was approaching the landing steps, or rather, where these had been, for now, except the topmost, they were under water because of the flood. On the rock itself four priests, clad in white and wearing veils over their faces with eyeholes cut in them, which made them

look like monks in old pictures of the Spanish Inquisition, were marching towards these steps. As they reached them, so did the canoe. Next, from its prow was thrust a tall woman, entirely draped in a white cloak that covered both head and body, who from her height might very well be Sabeela.

The priests received her without a word, for all this drama was enacted in utter silence, and half led, half carried her to the stone post between the fires, where, so far as I could see through the mist—that night I blessed the mist, as we do in church in one of the psalms—no, it is the mist that blesses the Lord, but it does not matter—they bound her to the post. Then, still in utter silence, they turned and marched away down the sloping rock to the mouth of the cave, where they vanished. The canoe also paddled backwards a few yards—not far, I judged from the number of strokes taken—and there floated quietly.

So far all had happened as Dramana told us that it must. In a whisper I asked her if the priests would return. She answered no; no one would come on to the rock till sunrise, when Heu-Heu, accompanied by women, would issue from the cave to take his bride. She swore that this was true, since it was the greatest of crimes for any one to look upon the Holy Bride between the time that she was bound to the rock and the appearance of the sun above the horizon.

“Then the sooner we get to business the better,” I said, setting my teeth, and without stopping to ask her what she meant by saying that Heu-Heu would come with the women, when, as we knew well, there was no such person.

“Come on, Hans, while the mist still lies thick; it may lift at any moment,” I added.

Swiftly, desperately, we clambered on to the rock, dragging the dead woman after us. Staggering round the nearer fire with our awful burden, we arrived with it behind the post—it seemed to take an age. Here by the mercy of Providence the smoky reek from the fire propelled by a slight breath of air, combined with the hanging fog to make us almost invisible. On the farther side of the post stood Sabeela, bound, her head dropping forward as though she were fainting. Hans swore that it was Sabeela because he knew her “by her smell,” which was just like him, but I could not be sure, being less gifted in that way. However, I risked it and spoke to her, though doubtfully, for I did not like the look of her. To tell the truth, I rather feared lest she should have acted on her threat that as a last resource she would take the poison which she said she carried hidden in her hair.

“Sabeela, do not start or cry out. Sabeela, it is we, the Lord Watcher-by- Night and he who is named Light-in-Darkness, come to save you,” I said, and waited anxiously, wondering whether I should ever hear an answer.

Presently I gave a sigh of relief, for she moved her head slightly and murmured,

“I dream! I dream!”

“Nay,” I answered, “you do not dream, or if you do, cease from dreaming, lest we should all sleep for ever.”

Then I crept round the post and bade her tell me where was the knot by which the rope about her was fastened. She nodded downwards with her head; with her hands she could not point, because they were tied, and muttered in a shaken voice,

“At my feet, Lord.”

I knelt down and found the knot, since if I cut the rope we should have nothing with which to tie the body to the post. Fortunately, it was not drawn tight because this was thought unnecessary, as no Holy Bride had ever been known to attempt to escape. Therefore, although my hands were cold, I was able to loose it without much difficulty. A minute later Sabeela was free and I had cut the lashings which bound her arms. Next came a more difficult matter, that of setting the dead woman in her place, for, being dead, all her weight came upon the rope. However, Hans and I managed it somehow, having first thrown Sabeela’s cloak and veil over her icy form and face.

“Hope Heu-Heu will think her nice!” whispered Hans as we cast an anxious look at our handiwork.

Then, all being done, we retreated as we had come, bending low to keep our bodies in the layer of the mist which now was thinning and hung only about three feet above the ground like an autumn fog on an England marsh. We reached our hole, Hans bundling Sabeela over its edge unceremoniously, so that she fell on to the back of her sister, Dramana, who crouched in it terrified. Never, I think, did two tragically separated relations have a stranger meeting. I was the last of our party, and as I was sliding into the hollow I took a good look round.

This is what I saw. Out of the mouth of the cave emerged two priests. They ran swiftly up the gentle slope of rock till they reached the two columns of burning natural gas or petroleum or whatever it was, one of them halting by each column. Here they wheeled round and through the holes in their masks or veils stared at the victim bound to the post. Apparently what they saw satisfied them, for after one glance they wheeled about and ran back to the cave as swiftly as they had come, but in a methodical manner which showed no surprise or emotion.

“What does this mean, Dramana?” I exclaimed. “You told me that it was against the law for any one to look upon the Holy Bride until the moment of sunrise.”

“I don’t know, Lord,” she answered. “Certainly it is against the law. I suppose that the diviners must have felt that something was wrong and sent out messengers to report. As I have told you, the priests of Heu-Heu are masters of magic, Lord.”

“Then they are bad masters, for they have found out nothing,” I remarked indifferently.

But in my heart I was more thankful than words can tell that I had persisted in the idea of lashing the dead woman to the post in place of Sabeela. Whilst we were dragging her from the shed, and again when we were lifting her out of the hole on to the rock, Hans had suggested that this was unnecessary, since Dramana had vowed that no man ever looked upon the Holy Bride between her arrival upon the rock and the moment of sunrise, and that all we needed to do was to loose Sabeela.

Fortunately some providence warned me against giving way. Had I done so all would have been discovered and humanly speaking we must have perished. Probably this would have happened even had I not remembered to run back and pick up the pieces of cord that I had cut from Sabeela's wrists and left lying on the rock, since the messengers might have seen them and guessed a trick. As it was, so far we were safe.

"Now, Hans," I said, "the time has come for you to swim to the canoe, which you must do quickly, for the mist seems to be melting beneath the moon and otherwise you may be seen."

"No, Baas, I shall not be seen, for I shall put that bundle from the Tree of Dreams on my head, which will make me look like floating weeds, Baas. But would not the Baas like, perhaps, to go himself? He swims better than I do and does not mind cold so much; also he is clever and the Walloo fools in the boat will listen to him more than they will to me; and if it comes to shooting, he is a better shot. I think, too, that I can look after the Lady Sabeela and the other lady and know how to fire a slow match as well as he can."

"No," I answered, "it is too late to change our plans, though I wish I were going to get into that boat instead of you, for I should feel happier there."

"Very good, Baas. The Baas knows best," he replied resignedly. Then, quite indifferent to conventions, Hans stripped himself, placing his dirty clothes inside the mat in which was wrapped the bundle of twigs from the Tree of Illusions, because, as he said, it would be nice to have dry things to put on when he reached the boat, or the next world, he did not know which.

These preparations made, having fastened the bundle on to his head by the help of the bonds which we had cut off Sabeela's hands, that I tied for him beneath his armpits, he started, shivering, a hideous, shrivelled, yellow object. First, however, he kissed my hand and asked me whether I had any message for my Reverend Father in the Place of Fires, where, he remarked, it would be, at any rate, warmer than it was here. Also he declared that he thought that the Lady Sabeela was not worth all the trouble we were taking about her, especially as she was going to marry someone else. Lastly he said with emphasis that if ever we got out of this country, he intended to get drunk for two whole days at the first town we came to where gin could be brought—a promise, I remember, that he kept very faithfully. Then he sneaked down the side of the rock and holding his revolver and little buckskin cartridge case above his head, glided into the water as silently as does an otter.

By now, as I have said, the mist was varnishing rapidly, perhaps before a draught of air which drew out of the east, as I have noticed it often does in those parts of Africa between midnight and sunrise, even on still nights. On the face of the water it still hung, however, so that through it I could only discover the faint outline of the canoe about a hundred yards away.

Presently, with a beating heart, I observed that something was happening there, since the canoe seemed to turn round and I thought that I heard astonished voices speaking in it, and saw people standing up. Then there was a splash and once more all became still and silent. Evidently Hans reached the boat safely, though whether he had entered it I could not tell. I could only wonder and hope.

As we could do no good by remaining in our present most dangerous position, I set out to return to the sluice shed where other matters pressed, carrying all our gear as before, but, thank goodness! without the encumbrance of the corpse. Sabeela seemed to be still half dazed, so at present I did not try to question her. Dramana took her left arm and I her right and, supporting her thus, we ran, doubled up, back to the shed and entered it in safety. Leaving the two women here, I went out on to the little pier and crouched at the top of the fishermen's steps, watching and waiting for the coming of Hans with the canoe to take us off, for, as you may remember, the arrangement was that I was not to fire the slow matches until it had arrived.

No canoe appeared. During all the long hours—they seemed an eternity—before the breaking of the dawn did I wait and watch, returning now and again to the shed to make sure that Dramana and Sabeela were safe. On one of these visits I learned that both her father, the Walloo, and Issicore were in the canoe, which made its non-arrival not to be explained, that is, if Hans reached it safely. But if he had not, or perhaps had been killed or met with some other accident in attempting to board it, then the explanation was easy enough, as her crew would not know our plight or that we were waiting to be rescued. Lastly they might have refused to make the attempt—for religious reasons.

The problem was agonizing. Before long there would be light and without doubt we should be discovered and killed, perhaps by torture. On the other hand, if I fired the powder the noise of the explosion would probably be heard, in which case also we should be discovered. Yet there was an argument for doing this, since then, if things went well, the water would rush in and give those priests something to think about that would take their minds off hunting for and capturing us.

I looked about me. The canoe was invisible in the mist. It might be there or it might be gone, only if it were gone and Hans were still alive, I was certain that, as arranged, to advise me he would have fired his pistol, which, to keep the

cartridges dry, he had carried above his head in his left hand. Indeed, I thought it probable that, rather than desert me thus, he would have swum back to the island, so that we might see the business through together. The longer I pondered all these and other possibilities, the more confused I grew and the more despairing. Evidently something had happened, but what —what?

The water continued to rise; now all the steps were covered and it was within an inch or two of the surface of the pier on which I must crouch. It was a mighty flood that looked as though presently it would begin to flow over the top of the sea wall, in which case the sluice shed would undoubtedly be inundated and made uninhabitable.

As I think I told you, a few yards to our right, rising above the top of the sea wall to a height of seven or eight feet, was a great rock that had the appearance of a boulder ejected at some time from the crater of the volcano, which rock would be easy to climb and was large enough to accommodate the three of us. Moreover, no flood could reach its top, since to do so it must cover the land beyond to a depth of many feet. Considering it and everything else, suddenly I came to a conclusion, so suddenly indeed and so fixedly that I felt as though it were inspired by some outside influence.

I would bring the women out and make them lie down upon the top of that boulder, trusting to Dramana's dark cloak to hide them from observation even in that brilliant moonlight. Then I would return to the shed and set light to the match, and, after I had done this, join them upon the rock whence we could see all that happened, and watch for the canoe, though of this I had begun to despair.

Abandoning all doubts and hesitations, I set to work to carry out this scheme with cold yet frantic energy. I fetched the two sisters, who, imagining that relief was in sight, came readily enough, made them clamber up the rock and lie down there on their faces, throwing Dramana's large dark cloak over both of them and our belongings. Then I went back to the shed, struck a light, and applied it to the ends of the slow matches, that began to smoulder well and clearly. Rushing from the shed, I locked the heavy door and sped back to the rock, which I climbed.

Five minutes passed, and just as I was beginning to think that the matches had failed in some way, I heard a heavy thud. It was not very loud; indeed, at a distance of even fifty yards I doubted whether any one would have noticed it unless his attention were on the strain. That shed was well built and roofed and smothered sounds. Also this one had nothing of the crack of a rifle about it, but rather resembled that which is caused by something heavy falling to the ground.

After this for a while nothing particular happened. Presently, however, looking down from my rock I saw that the water in the sluice, which, being retained by the stone door in the shed, hitherto had been still, was now running like a mill race, and with a thrill of triumph learned that I had succeeded.

*The sluice was down and the flood was rushing over it!*

Watching intently, a minute or so later I observed a stone fall from the coping of the channel, for it was full to the brim, then another, and another, till presently the whole work seemed to melt away. Where it had been was now a great and ever-growing gap in the sea wall through which the swollen waters of the lake poured ceaselessly and increasingly. Next instant the shed vanished like a card house, its foundations being washed out, and I perceived that over its site, and beyond it, a veritable river, on the face of which floated portions of its roof, was fast inundating the low-lying lands behind that had been protected by the wall.

I looked at the east; it was lightening, for now the blackness of the sky where it seemed to meet the great lake, had turned to grey. The dawn was at hand.

With a steady roar, through the gap in the sea wall which grew wider every moment, the waters rushed in, remorseless, inexhaustible; the aspect of them was terrifying. Now our rock was a little island surrounded by a sea, and now in the east appeared the first ray from the unrisen sun stabbing the rain-washed sky like a giant spear. It was a wondrous spectacle and, thinking that probably it was the last I should ever witness upon earth, I observed it with great interest.

By this time the women at my side were sobbing with terror, believing that they were going to be drowned. As I was of the same opinion, for I felt our rock trembling beneath us as though it were about to turn over or, washed from its foundations, to sink into some bottomless gulf, and could do nothing to help them, I pretended to take no notice of their terror, but only stared towards the east.

It was just then that, emerging out of the mist on the face of the waters within a few yards of us, I saw the canoe. Hear the sound of the paddles I could not, because of the roar of the rushing water. In it at the stern, with his pistol held to the head of the steersman, stood Hans.

I rose up, and he saw me. Then I made signs to him which way he should come, keeping the canoe straight over the crest of the broken wall where the water was shallow. It was a dangerous business, for every moment I thought it would upset or be sucked into the torrent beyond, where the sluice channel had been; but those Walloos were clever with their paddles, and Hans's pistol gave them much encouragement.

Now the prow of the canoe grated against the rock, and Hans, who had scrambled forward, threw me a rope. I held it with one hand and with the other thrust down the shrinking women. He seized them and bundled them into the canoe like sacks of corn. Next I threw in our gear and then sprang wildly myself, for I felt our stone turning. I half fell

into the water, but Hans and someone else gripped me and I was dragged in over the gunwale. Another instant and the rock had vanished beneath the yellow, yeasty flood!

The canoe oscillated and began to spin round; happily it was large and strong, with at least a score of rowers, being hollowed from a single, huge tree. Hans shrieked directions and the paddlers paddled as never they had done before. For quite a minute our fate hung doubtful, for the torrent was sucking at us and we did not seem to gain an inch. At last, however, we moved forward a little, towards the Rock of Sacrifice this time, and with sixty seconds were safe and out of the reach of the landward rush of the water.

“Why did you not come before, Hans?” I asked.

“Oh, Baas, because these fools would not move until they saw the first light, and when the Walloo and Issicore wanted to, told them that they would kill them. They said it was against their law, Baas.”

“Curse them all for ten generations!” I exclaimed, then was silent, for what was the use of arguing with such a superstition-ridden set?

Superstition is still king of most of the world, though often it calls itself Religion. These Walloos thought themselves very religious indeed.

Thus ended that terrible night.

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## THE END OF HEU-HEU

Opposite to the Rock of Offering the canoe came to a standstill quite close to the edge of the rock. I inquired why, and the old Walloo, who sat in the middle of the boat draped in wondrous and imperial garments and a headdress, that, having worked itself to one side in the course of our struggles, made him look as though he were drunk, answered feebly:

"Because it is our law, Lord. Our law bids us wait till the sun appears and the glory of Heu-Heu comes forth to take the Holy Bride."

"Well," I answered, "as the Holy Bride is sitting in this boat with her head upon my knee" (this was true, because Sabeela had insisted upon sticking to me as the only person upon whom she could rely, and so, for the matter of that, had Dramana, for *her* head was on my other knee), "I should recommend the glory of Heu-Heu, whatever that may be, not to come here to look for her. Unless, indeed, it wants a hole as big as my fist blown through it," I added with emphasis, tapping my double-barrelled Express which was by my side, safe in its waterproof case.

"Yet we must wait, Lord," answered the Walloo humbly, "for I see that there is still a Holy Bride tied to the post, and until she is loosed our law says that we may not go away."

"Yes," I exclaimed, "the holiest of all brides, for she is stone dead and all the dead are holy. Well, wait if you like, for I want to see what happens, and I think they can't get at us here."

So we hung upon our oars, or rather paddles, and waited, till presently the rim of the red sun appeared and revealed the strangest of scenes. The water of the lake, swollen by weeks of continuous rain and the recent tempest, flowing in with a steady rush that somehow reminded me of the ordered advance of an infinite army, through the great gap in the lake wall that was broadening minute by minute beneath its devouring bite—is there anything so mighty as water in the world, I wonder—had now flooded most of the cultivated land to a depth of several feet.

As yet, however, it had not reached the houses built against the mountain, in one of which we had been lodged. Nor had it overflowed the great Rock of Offering, which, you will remember, stood about the height of a man above the level of the plain, being in fact a large slab of consolidated lava that once had flowed from the crater into the lake in a glacier-like stream of limited breadth. It is true that the circumstance that the rock sloped downwards to the cave mouth seemed to contradict that theory, but this I attribute to some subsequent subsidence at its base, such as often happens in volcanic areas where hidden forces are at work beneath the surface of the earth.

Well, I repeat, the rock was not yet flooded, and so it came about that, at the proper moment, as had happened on this day, perhaps for hundreds of years, Heu-Heu emerged from the cave "to claim his Holy Bride."

"How could he do that?" asked Good triumphantly, thinking, I suppose that he had caught Allan tripping. "You said that Heu-Heu was a statue, so how could he come out of the cave?"

"Does not it occur to you, Good," asked Allan, "that a statue is sometimes carried? However, in this case it was not so, for Heu-Heu himself walked out of that cave, followed by a number of women, with some of the Hairy Folk behind them, and looking at him as he stalked along, hideous and gigantic, I understood two things. The first of these was, how it came about that Sabeela had vowed to me that many had seen Heu-Heu with their eyes, as Issicore also declared he had done himself, 'walking stiffly.' The second, why it was a law that the canoe which brought the Holy Bride should wait until she was removed at dawn; namely in order that those in it might behold Heu-Heu and go back to their land to testify to his bodily existence, even if they were not allowed to give details as to his appearance, because to speak of this would, they believed, bring a 'curse' upon them."

"But there wasn't a Heu-Heu," objected Good again.

"Good," said Allan, "really you are what Hans called me—quite clever. With extraordinary acumen you have arrived at the truth. There wasn't a Heu-Heu. But, Good, if you live long enough," he went on with a gentle sarcasm which showed that he was annoyed, "yes, if you live long enough, you will learn that this world is full of deceptions, and that the Tree of Illusions does not, or rather did not, grow only in Heu-Heu's Garden. As you say, no Heu-Heu existed, but there did exist an excellent copy of him made up with a skill worthy of a high-class pantomime artist; so excellent indeed that from fifty yards or so away, it was impossible to tell the difference between it and the great original as depicted in the cave."

There in all his hairy, grinning horror, "walking stiffly," marched Heu-Heu, eleven or twelve feet high. Or to come to the facts, there marched Dacha on stilts, artistically draped in dyed skins and wearing on the top of or over his head a wickerwork and canvas or cloth mask beautifully painted to resemble the features of his amiable god.

The pious crew of our boat saw him, and bowed their classic heads in reverence to the divinity. Even Issicore bowed, a performance that I observed caused Dramana, yes, and the loving Sabeela herself, to favour him with glances of indignation, not unmixed with contempt. At least this was certainly the case with Dramana, who had lived behind the scenes, but Sabeela may have been moved by other reflections. Perhaps *she* still believed that there was a Heu-Heu, and that Issicore would have done better to show himself less devoted to these religious observances and less

willing to surrender her to the god's divine attentions. You may all have noticed that however piously disposed, there is a point at which the majority of women become very practical indeed.

Meanwhile Heu-Heu stalked forward with a gait that might very literally be called stilted, and the bevy of white-robed ladies followed after him apparently singing a bridal song, while behind these, "moping and mowing," came their hairy attendants. By the aid of my glasses, however, I could see that these ladies, at any rate, were not enjoying the entertainment, whatever may have been the case with Dacha inside his paste boards. They stared at the rising water and one of them turned to run but was dragged back into place by her companions, for probably on this solemn occasion flight was a capital offence. So on they came till they reached the post to which we had tied the dead woman, whereon according to custom, the bridesmaids skipped up to release her, while the Hairy Folk ranged themselves behind.

Next moment I saw the first of these bridesmaids suddenly stand still and stare; then she emitted a yell so terrific that it echoed all over the lake like the blast of a train. The others stared also and in their turn began to yell. Then Heu-Heu himself ambled round and apparently had a look, a good look, for by now someone had torn away the veil which I had thrown over the corpse's head. He did not look long, for next moment he was legging, or rather stilting, back to the cave as fast as he could go.

This was too much for me. By my side was my double-barrelled Express rifle loaded with expanding bullets. I drew it from its case, lifted it, and got a bead on to Heu-Heu just above where I guessed the head of the man within to be, for I did not want to kill the brute but only to frighten him. By now the light was good and so was my aim, for a moment later the expanding bullet hit in the appointed spot and cleared away all that top hamper of wicker and baboon skins, or whatever it may have been. Never before was there such a sudden disrobement of an ecclesiastical dignitary draped in all his trappings.

Everything seemed to come off at once, as did Dacha from his stilts, for he went a most imperial crowner that must have flattened his hooked nose upon that lava rock. There he lay a moment, then, leaving his stilts behind him, he rose and fled after the screaming women and their ape-like attendants back into the cave.

"Now," I remarked oracularly to the old Walloo and the others who were terrified at the report of the rifle, "now, my friends, you see what your god is made of."

The Walloo attempted no reply, apparently he was too astonished—disillusionment is often painful, you know—but one of his company who seemed to be a kind of official timekeeper, said that the sun being up and the Holy Bridal being accomplished, though strangely, it was lawful for them to return home.

"No, you don't," I answered. "I have waited here a long time for you and now you shall wait a little while for me, as I want to see what happens."

The timekeeper, however, a man of routine, if one devoid of curiosity, dipped his paddle into the water as a signal to the other rowers to do likewise, whereon Hans hit him hard over the fingers with the butt of his revolver, and then held its barrel to his head.

This argument convinced him that obedience was best, and he drew in the paddle, as did the others, making polite apologies to Hans.

So we remained where we were and watched.

There was lots to see, for by now the water was beginning to run over the rock. It reached the eternal fires with the result that they ceased to be eternal, for they went out in clouds of smoke and steam. Three minutes later it was pouring in a cataract down the slope into the mouth of the cave. Before I could count a hundred, people began to come out of that cave in the greatest of hurries, as wasps do if you stir up their nest with a stick. Among them I recognised Dacha, who had a very good idea of looking after himself.

He and the first of those who followed, wading through the water, got clear and began to scramble up the mountainside behind. But the rest were not so fortunate, for by now the stream was several feet deep and they could not fight it. For a moment they appeared struggling amid the foam and bubbles. Then they were swept back into the mouth of the cave and gathered to the breast of Heu-Heu for the last time. Next, as though at a signal, all the houses, including that in which we had been lodged, crumbled away together. They just collapsed and vanished.

Everything seemed finished and I wondered whether I would put a bullet into Dacha, who now was standing on a ridge of rock and wringing his hands as he watched the destruction of his temple, his god, his town, his women, and his servants. Concluding that I would not, for something seemed to tell me to leave this wicked rascal to destiny, I was about to give the order to paddle away when Hans called to me to look at the mountain top.

I did so, and observed that from it was rushing a great cloud of steam, such as comes from a railway engine when it is standing still with too much heat in its boiler, but multiplied a millionfold. Moreover, as the engine screams in such circumstances, so did the mountain scream, or rather roar, emitting a volume of sound that was awful to hear.

"What's up now, Hans?" I shouted.

"Don't know, Baas. Think that water and fire are having a talk together inside that mountain, Baas, and saying they hate each other, just like badly married man and woman who quarrel in a small hut, Baas, and can't get out. Hiss,

spit, go woman; pop, bang, go man—" Here he paused from his nonsense, staring at the mountain top with all his eyes, then repeated in a slow voice, "Yes, pop, bang, go man! Just *look* at him, Baas!"

At this moment, with an amazing noise like to that of a magnified thunderclap, the volcano seemed to split in two and the crest of it to fly off into space.

"Baas," said Hans, "I am called Lord-of-the-Fire, am I not? Well, I am not Lord of that fire and I think that the farther off we get from it, the safer we shall be. *Allemagter!* Look there," and he pointed to a huge mass of flaming lava which appeared to descend from the clouds and plunge into the lake about a couple of hundred yards away, sending up a fountain of steam and foam, like a torpedo when it bursts.

"Paddle for your lives!" I shouted to the Walloos, who began to get the canoe about in a very great hurry.

As she came round—it seemed to take an age—I saw a strange and in a way a terrible sight. Dacha had left his ledge and was running down into the lake, followed by a stream of molten lava, dancing while he ran, as though with pain, probably because the stream had scorched him. He plunged into the water, and just then a great wave formed, driven outwards doubtless by some subterranean explosion. It rushed towards us, and on its very crest was Dacha.

"I think that priest wants us to give him a row, Baas," said Hans. "He has had enough of his happy island home, and wishes to live on the mainland."

"Does he?" I replied. "Well, there is no room in the canoe," and I drew my pistol.

The wave bore Dacha quite close to us. He reared himself in the water, or more probably was lifted up by the pressure underneath, so that almost he appeared to be standing on the crest of the wave. He saw us, he shouted curses upon us and shook his fists, apparently at Sabeela and Issicore. It was a horrible sight.

Hans, however, was not affected, for by way of reply he pointed first to me, then to Sabeela and lastly to himself, after which, such was his unconquerable vulgarity, he put his thumb to his nose and as schoolboys say "cocked a snook" at the struggling high priest.

The wave became a hollow and Dacha disappeared "to look for Heu-Heu," as Hans remarked. That was the end of this cruel but able man.

"I am glad," said Hans after reflection, "that the Predikant Dacha should have learned who sent him down to Heu-Heu before he went there, which he knew well enough or he would not have been so cross, Baas. Has it occurred to the Baas what clever people we are, all of whose plans have succeeded so nicely? At one time I thought that things were going wrong. It was after I scrambled into this canoe and those fools would not move to fetch you and the women, because they said it was against their law. While I was putting on my clothes, which got here quite dry because I was so careful, Baas, for I had asked them to paddle to fetch you while I was still naked and been told that they would not, I wondered whether I should try to make them do so by shooting one of them. Only I thought that I had better wait a while, Baas, and see what happened, because if I shot one, the others might have become more stupid and obstinate than before, and perhaps have paddled away after they had killed me. So I waited, which the Baas will admit was the best thing to do, and everything came right in the end, having doubtless been arranged by your Reverend Father, watching us in the sky."

"Yes, Hans, but if you had made up your mind otherwise, whom would you have shot?" I asked. "The Walloo?"

"No, Baas, because he is old and stupid as a dead owl. I should have shot Issicore because he tires me so much and I should like to save the Lady Sabeela from being made weary for many years. What is the good of a man, Baas, who, when he thinks his girl is being given over to a devil, sits in a boat and groans and says that ancient laws must not be broken lest a curse should follow? He did that, Baas, when I asked him to order the men to row to the steps."

"I don't know, Hans. It is a matter for them to settle between them, isn't it?"

"Yes, Baas, and when the lady has got her mind again and at last that hour comes, as it always does when there is something to pay, Baas, I shall be sorry for Issicore, for I don't think he will look so pretty when she has done with him. No, I think that when he says 'Kiss! Kiss!' she will answer, 'Smack! Smack!' on both sides of his head, Baas. Look, she has turned her back on him already. Well, Baas, it doesn't matter to me, or to you either, who have the Lady Dramana there to deal with. She isn't turning her back, Baas, she is eating you up with her eyes and saying in her heart that at last she has found a Heu-Heu worth something, even though he be small and withered and ugly, with hair that sticks up. It is what is in a man that matters, Baas, not what he looks like outside, as women often used to say to me when I was young, Baas."

Here with an exclamation that I need not repeat, for none of us really like to have our personal appearance reflected upon by a candid friend, however faithful, I lifted the butt of my rifle, purposing to drop it gently on Hans's toes. At that point, however, my attention was diverted from this rubbish, which was Hans's way of showing his joy at our escape, by another blazing boulder which fell quite near to the canoe, and immediately afterwards by the terrific spectacle of the final dissolution of the volcano.

I don't know exactly what happened, but sheets of wavering flame and clouds of steam ascended high into the heavens. These were accompanied by earth-shaking rumblings and awful explosions that resounded like the loudest thunder, each of them followed by the ejection of showers of blazing stones and the rushing out of torrents of molten lava which ran into the lake, making it hiss and boil. After this came tidal waves that caused our canoe to rock

perilously, dense clouds of ashes and a kind of hot rain which darkened the air so much that for a while we could see nothing, no, not for a yard before our noses. Altogether, it was a most terrifying exhibition of the forces of nature which, by some connection of ideas, made me think of the Day of Judgment.

"Heu-Heu avenges himself upon us!" wailed the old Walloo, "because we have robbed him of his Holy Bride."

Here his speech came to an end, for a good reason, since a large hot stone fell upon his head, and, as Hans who was next to him explained through the fog, "squashed him like a beetle."

When from the outcry of his followers Sabeela realized that her father was dead, for he never moved or spoke again, she seemed to wake up in good earnest, just as though she felt that the mantle of authority had fallen upon her.

"Throw that hot coal out of the boat," she said, "lest it burn through the bottom and we sink."

With the help of a paddle Issicore obeyed her, and, the body of the Walloo having been covered up with a cloak, we rowed on desperately. By good fortune about this time a strong wind began to blow from the shore towards the island which kept back or drove away the hot rain and pumice dust, so that we could once more see about us. Now our only danger was from the rocks, such as that which had killed the Walloo, that fell into the water all around, sending up spouts of foam. It was just as though we were under heavy bombardment, but happily no more of them hit the canoe, and as we got farther off the island the risk became less. As we found afterwards, however, some of them were thrown as far as the mainland.

Still, there was one more peril to be passed, for suddenly we ran into a whole fleet of rude canoes, or rather bundles of reed and brushwood, or sometimes logs sharpened at both ends by fire, on each of which one of the Hairy savages sat astride directing it with a double-bladed paddle.

I presume that these people must have been a contingent of the aboriginal Wood-folk who had started for the island in obedience to the summons of Heu-Heu, where, as I have told, a great number of them were already gathered preparatory to attacking the town of Walloo. Or they may have been escaping from the island; really I do not know. One thing was clear; however low they may have been in the scale of humanity, they were sharp enough to connect us with the awful, natural catastrophe that was happening, for squeaking and jabbering like so many great apes, they pointed to that vision of hell, the flaming volcano now sinking to dissolution, and to us.

Then with their horrible yells of *Heu-Heu! Heu-Heu!* they set to work to attack us.

There was only one thing to be done—open fire on them, which Hans and I did with effect, and meanwhile try to escape by our superior speed. I am bound to say that those hideous and miserable creatures showed the greatest courage, for undeterred by the sight of the death of their companions whom our bullets struck, they tried to close upon us with the object, no doubt, of oversetting the canoe and drowning us all.

Hans and I fired as rapidly as possible, but we could deal with only a tithe of them, so that speed and manoeuvring were our principal hope. Sabeela stood up in the boat and cried directions to the paddlers, while Hans and I shot, first with the rifles and then with our revolvers.

Still, one huge gorilla-like fellow, whose hair grew down to his beetling eyebrows, got hold of the gunwale and began to pull the canoe over. We could not shoot him because both rifles and revolvers were empty; nor did our blows make him loosen his grip. The canoe rocked from side to side increasingly, and began to take in water.

Just as I feared that the end had come, for more hairy men were almost on to us, Sabeela saved the situation in a bold and desperate fashion. By her side lay the broad spear of that priest whom Hans had killed in the sluice shed, knocking him backwards into the water pit. She seized it and with amazing strength stabbed the great beast-like creature who had hold of the canoe and was putting all his weight on it to force the gunwale under water. He let go and sank. By skilful steering we avoided the others, and in three minutes were clear of them, since they could not keep pace with us on their rude craft.

"Plenty to do to-night, Baas!" soliloquized Hans, wiping his brow. "Perhaps if a crocodile does not swallow us between here and the shore, or these fools do not sacrifice us to the ghost of Heu-Heu, or we are not killed by lightning, the Baas will let me drink some of that native beer when we get back to the town. All this fire about has made me very thirsty."

Well, we arrived there at last—a generation seemed to have passed since I left that quay, which we found crowded with the entire terror-stricken population of the place. They received the body of the Walloo in respectful silence, but it seemed to me without any particular grief. Indeed, these people appeared to have outworn the acuter human emotions. All such extremes, I suppose, had been smoothed away from their characters by time, and by the degrading action of the vile fetishism under which they lived. In short, they had become mere handsome, human automata who walked about with their ears cocked listening for the voice of the god and catching it in every natural sound. To tell the truth, however interesting may have been their origin, in their decadence they filled me with contempt.

The reappearance of Sabeela astonished them very much but seemed to cause no delight.

"She is the god's wife," I heard one of them say. "It is because she has run away from the god that all these misfortunes have happened." She heard it also and rounded on them with spirit, having by now quite recovered her nerve, or so it seemed, which is more than could be said of Issicore, who, although he should have been wild with joy, remained depressed and almost silent.

"What misfortunes?" she asked. "My father is dead, it is true, killed by a hot stone that fell upon him and I weep for him. Still, he was a very old man who must soon have passed away. For the rest, is it a misfortune that through the courage and power of these strangers I, his daughter and heiress, have been freed from the clutches of Dacha? I tell you that Dacha was the god; Heu-Heu whom you worship was but a painted idol. If you do not believe it, ask the White Lord here, and ask my sister Dramana whom you seem to have forgotten, who in past years was given to him as a Holy Bride. Is it a misfortune that Dacha and his priests have been destroyed, and with him the most of the savage hairy Wood-folk, our enemies? Is it a misfortune that the hateful smoking mountain should have melted away in fire, as it is doing now, and with it the cave of mysteries, out of which came so many oracles of terror, thus fulfilling the prophecy that we should be delivered from our burdens by a white lord from the south?"

At these vigorous words the frightened crowd grew silent and hung their heads. Sabeela looked about her for a little while, then went on:

"Issicore, my betrothed, come forward and tell the people you rejoice that these things have happened. To save me from Heu-Heu, at my prayer you travelled far to ask succour of the great Magician of the South. He has sent the succour and I have been saved. Yet you helped to row the boat which took me to the sacrifice. For that I do not blame you, because you must do so, being of the rank you are, or be cursed under the ancient law. Now I have been saved, though not by you, who, thinking the White Lord dead upon the Holy Isle, consented to my surrender to the god, and the law is at an end with the destruction of Heu-Heu and his priests, slain by the wisdom and might of that White Lord and his companion. Tell them, therefore, how greatly you rejoice that you have not journeyed in vain, and they did not listen in vain to your petition for help; that I stand before them here also free and undefiled, and that henceforth the land is rid of the curse of Heu-Heu. Yes, tell the people these things and give thanks to the noble-hearted strangers who brought them to pass and saved me with Dramana my sister."

Now, tired out as I was, I watched Issicore not without excitement, for I was curious to hear what he had to say. Well, after a pause, he came forward and answered in a hesitating voice,

"I do rejoice, Beloved, that you have returned safe, though I hoped when I led the White Lord from the South, that he would have saved you in some fashion other than by working sacrilege and killing the priests of the god with fire and water, men who from the beginning have been known to be divine. You, the Lady Sabeela, declare that Heu-Heu is dead, but how know we that he is dead? He is a spirit, and can a spirit die? Was it a dead god who threw the stone that killed the Walloo, and will he not perhaps throw other stones that will kill us, and especially you, Lady, who have stood upon the Rock of Offerings, wearing the robe of the Holy Bride?"

"Baas," inquired Hans reflectively, in the silence which followed these timorous queries, "do you think that Issicore is really a man, or is he in truth but made of wood and painted to look like one, as Dacha was painted to look like Heu-Heu?"

"I thought that he was a man yonder in the Black Kloof, Hans," I answered, "but then he was long way off Heu-Heu. Now I am not so sure. But perhaps he is only very frightened and will come to himself by and by."

Meanwhile Sabeela was looking her extremely handsome lover up and down; up and down she looked him, and never a word did she say—at least, to him. Presently, however, she spoke to the crowd in a commanding voice, thus:

"Take notice that my father being dead, I am now the Walloo, and one to be obeyed. Go about your tasks fearing nothing, since Heu-Heu is no more and the most of the Hairy Folk are slain. I depart to rest, taking with me these, my guests and deliverers," and she pointed to me and Hans. "Afterwards I will talk with you, and with you also, my lord Issicore. Bear the late Walloo, my father, to the burial place of the Walloos."

Then she turned and, followed by us and the members of her household, went to her home.

Here she bade us farewell for a while, since we were all half dead with fatigue and sorely needed rest. As we parted, she took my hand and kissed it, thanking me with tears welling from her beautiful eyes for all that I had done, and Dramana did likewise.

"How comes it, Baas," said Hans as we ate food and drank of the native beer before we lay down to sleep, "that those ladies did not kiss my hand, seeing that I too have done something to help them?"

"Because they were too tired, Hans," I answered, "and made one kiss serve for both of us."

"I see, Baas, but I expect that to-morrow they will still be too tired to kiss poor old Hans."

Then he filled the cup out of which he had been drinking with the last of the liquor from the jar and emptied it at a swallow. "There, Baas," he said; "that's only right; you may take all the kisses, so long as I get the beer."

Exhausted as I was I could not help laughing, although to tell the truth, I should have liked another glass myself. Then I tumbled on to the couch and instantly went to sleep.

It is a fact that we slept all the rest of that day and all the following night, waking only when the first rays of the sun shone into our room through the window place. At least, I did, for when I opened my eyes, feeling a different creature and blessing Heaven for its gift of sleep to man, Hans was already up and engaged in cleaning the rifles and revolvers.

I looked at the ugly little Hottentot, reflecting how wonderful it was that so much courage, cunning, and fidelity should be packed away within his yellow skin and projecting skull. Had it not been for Hans, without a doubt I should

now be dead, and the women also. It was he who had conceived the idea of letting down the sluice gate by exploding gunpowder beneath the pin of the lever. I had racked my brain for expedients, but this, the only one possible, escaped me. How tremendous had been the results of that inspiration— all of them due to Hans.

Although certain ideas had occurred to me, the most that I had hoped to do was to flood the low-lying lands, and perhaps the cave, in order to divert the attention of the priests while we were attempting escape. As it was we had loosed the forces of nature with the most fearful results. The water had run down the vent-holes of the eternal fires and into the bowels of the volcano, there to generate steam in enormous volumes, of which the imprisoned strength had been so great that it had rent the mountain like a rotten rag and destroyed the home of Heu-Heu for ever, and with it all his votaries.

It was a fearful event in which I thought I saw the mind of Providence acting through Hans. Yes, the cunning of the Hottentot had been used by the Powers above to sweep from the earth a vile tyranny and to destroy a blood-soaked idol and its worshippers.

Without a doubt—or so I believe in my simple faith—this had been designed from the beginning. When some escaped follower of Heu-Heu painted the picture in the Bushmen's cave, probably hundreds of years ago, it was already designed. So was Zikali's desire for a certain medicine, or his insatiable thirst for knowledge, or whatever it was that caused him to persuade me to undertake this mission, and so was all the rest of the story.

Again, with what wonderful judgment Hans had acted after his brave swim to the canoe!

Had he tried to force those fetish-ridden cravens to come to our rescue at once, as I directed him to do, the probability was that, fearing to break their silly law, they would have resisted, or perhaps have rowed right away, leaving us to our fate, after knocking him on the head with a paddle. But he had the patience to wait, although, as he told me afterwards, his heart was torn in two with anxiety for my sake. Balancing everything in his artful and experienced mind he had found patience to wait until the conditions of their "law" were fulfilled, when they came willingly enough.

From Hans my thoughts turned to Issicore. How was it that this man's character had changed so completely since he arrived in his native country? His journey to seek aid made alone over hundreds of miles, was a really remarkable performance, showing great courage and determination. Also as a guide, although silent and abstracted, he had never lacked for resource or energy. But from the day that he arrived home, morally he had gone to pieces. It was with the greatest difficulty that he could be persuaded to row us to the island, where at the first sign of danger he had left us to our fate and fled away.

Again, he had meekly helped to conduct Sabeela, whom, when he was at the Black Kloof evidently he loved to desperation, to her doom without lifting a finger to save her from a hideous destiny. Lastly, only a few hours ago, he had made a pusillanimous and contemptible speech, which I could see shocked and disgusted his betrothed, who, for her part, after her rescue and the death of her father, seemed to have gained the courage that he had lost, and more.

It was inexplicable, at any rate to me, and in my bewilderment I referred the problem to Hans.

He listened while I set out the case as it appeared to me, then answered,

"The Baas does not keep his eyes open—at any rate, in the daytime, when he thinks everything is safe. If he did, he would understand why Issicore has become soft as a heated bar of iron. What makes men soft, Baas?"

"Love," I suggested.

"Yes. At times love makes some men soft—I mean men like the Baas. And what else, Baas?"

"Drink," I answered savagely, getting it back on Hans.

"Yes, at times drink makes some men soft. Men like me, Baas, who know that now and again it is wise to cease from being wise, lest Heaven should grow jealous of our wisdom and want to share it. But what makes all men soft?"

"I don't know."

"Then once more I must teach the Baas, as his Reverend Father, the Predikant, told me to do when I saw that the Baas had used up all his wits, saying to me before he died, 'Hans, whenever you perceive that my son Allan, who does not always look where he is going, walks into water and gets out of his depth, swim in and pull him out, Hans.'"

"You little liar!" I ejaculated, but taking no notice, Hans went on,

"Baas, it is *fear* that makes all men soft. Issicore is bending about like a heated ramrod because within him burns the fire of fear."

"Fear of what, Hans?"

"As I have said, if the Baas had kept his eyes open, he would know. Did not the Baas notice a tall, dark-faced priest before whom the crowd parted, who came up to Issicore when first we landed on the quay here?"

"Yes, I saw such a man. He bowed politely and I thought was greeting Issicore and making him some present."

"And did the Baas see what kind of a present he made him and hear his words of wisdom? The Baas shakes his head. Well, I did. The present he gave to Issicore was a little skull carved out of black ivory or shell, or it may have been of polished lava rock. And the words of welcome were, 'The gift of Heu-Heu to the lord Issicore, that gift which Heu-

Heu sends to all who break the law and dare to leave the Land of the Walloos.' Those were the words, for standing near by, I heard them, though I kept them from the Baas, waiting to see what would happen afterwards.

"Then the priest went away, and what Issicore did with the little black skull I do not know. Perhaps he wears it round his neck, as he hasn't got a watch chain, just as the Baas used to wear things that ladies had given him, or their pictures in a little silver brandy flask."

"Well, and what about this skull, Hans? What does it mean?"

"Baas, I made inquiries of an old man in that canoe, to pass the time away, Baas, as Issicore was at the other end and could not hear me. It means *death*, Baas. Does not the Baas remember how we were told at the Black Kloof that those who dared to leave the Land of Heu-Heu were always smitten with some sickness and died? Well, Baas, Issicore got out all right and left the sickness behind him, I expect because the priests did not know that he was going. But he made a mistake, Baas, that of coming back again, being drawn by his love of Sabeela, just as a fish is drawn by the bait on the hook, Baas. And now the hook is fast in his mouth, for the priests knew of his return well enough, Baas, and of course were waiting for him."

"What do you mean, Hans? How can the priests hurt Issicore, especially when they are all dead?"

"Yes, Baas, they are all dead and can harm no one, but Issicore is right when he says that Heu-Heu is not dead, because the devil never dies, Baas. His priests are dead, but Heu-Heu could kill the old Walloo, and so he can kill Issicore. There is a great deal in this fetish business, Baas, that good Christians like you and I do not understand. It won't work on Christians, Baas, which is why Heu-Heu can't kill us, but those who worship the Black One, at last the Black One takes by the throat."

I thought to myself that here Hans, although he did not know it, was enunciating one of the profoundest and most fundamental of truths, since those who bow the knee to Baal are Baal's servants and live under his law, even to the death, and what is Baal but Heu-Heu, or Satan? The fruit is always the same, by whatever name the tree may be called. However, I did not enter upon this argument with Hans, whom it would have bewildered, but only asked him what he meant and what he imagined was going to happen to Issicore. He answered,

"I mean just what I have said, Baas; I mean that Issicore is going to die. That old man told me that those who 'receive the Black Skull,' always die within the month, and often more quickly. From the look of him, I should think that Issicore will not last more than a week. Although so handsome, he is really very dull, Baas, so it does not much matter, especially as the Lady Sabeela will get over it quite soon. That is why Issicore has changed, Baas. It is because the fear of death is upon him. In the same way Sabeela has changed because the fear of death and what to her, perhaps, is worse, has passed away."

"Bosh!" I exclaimed, but internally I had my doubts. I knew something of this fetish business, although I believed it to be the greatest of rubbish, I was sure that it is extremely dangerous rubbish. The secret soul of man, especially of savage, or primitive and untaught man, or the sub-conscious self, or whatever you choose to call it, is a terrible entity when brought into action by the hereditary superstitions that are born in his blood. In nine cases out of ten, if the victim of those superstitions is told with the accustomed ceremonies by the oracle of the god or devil from which they flow, that he will die, he does die. Nothing kills him, but he commits a kind of moral suicide. As Hans had said—Fear makes him soft. Then some kind of nervous disease penetrates his system and at the appointed hour withers up his physical life and causes him to pass away.

Such, as it proved, was to be the fate of that Apollo-like person, the unhappy Issicore.

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## SABEELA'S FAREWELL

Now of this story there is little left to tell, and as it is very late and I see that you are all yawning, my friends [this was not true, for we were deeply interested, especially over the moral or spiritual problem of Issicore], I will cut that little as short as I can. It shall be a mere footnote.

After we had eaten that morning, we went to see Sabeela, whom we found very agitated. This was natural enough, considering all she had gone through, as after mental strain and the passing of great perils, a nervous reaction invariably follows. Also, in a sudden and terrible fashion, she had lost her father, to whom she was attached. But the real cause of her distress was different.

Issicore, it seemed, had been taken very ill. Nobody knew what was the matter with him, but Sabeela was persuaded that he had been poisoned. She begged me to visit him at once and cure him—a request that made me indignant. I explained to her that I was no authority on their native poisons, if he suffered from anything of the sort, and had few medicines with me, the only one of which that dealt with poisons was an antidote to snake bites. However, as she was very insistent, I said that I would go and see what I could do, which would probably be nothing.

So, together with Hans, I was conducted by some of the old headmen, or councillors of the Walloo, such people as in Zululand we should call *Indunas*, to the house of Issicore, a rather fine building of its sort at the other end of the town. We walked by the road that ran along the edge of the lake, which gave us an opportunity to observe the island, or rather what had been the island.

Now it was nothing but a low, dark mass, over which hung dense clouds of steam. When the winds stirred these clouds, I saw that beneath them were red streams of lava that ran into the lake. There were no more eruptions and the volcano appeared to have vanished away. Much dust was still falling. It lay thick upon the roadway and all the trees and other vegetation were covered with it, turning the landscape to a hue of ashen grey. Otherwise no damage had been done on the mainland, except that here and there boulders had fallen and some of the lower-lying fields were inundated by the great flood, which was now abating, although the river still overflowed its banks.

We reached the house of Issicore and were shown into his chamber, where he lay upon a couch of skins, attended by some women who, I understood, were his relatives. When Hans and I entered, these women bowed and went out, leaving us alone with the patient. A glance told me that he was a dying man. His fine eyes were fixed on vacancy; he breathed in gasps; his fingers clasped and unclasped themselves automatically, and from time to time he was taken with violent shiverings. These I thought must be due to some form of fever until I had tested his temperature with the thermometer I had in my little medicine case and found that it was two degrees below normal. On being questioned, he said that he had no pain and suffered only from great weakness and from a whirling of the head, by which I suppose meant giddiness.

I asked him to what he attributed his condition. He answered,

“To the curse of Heu-Heu, Lord Macumazahn. Heu-Heu is killing me.”

I inquired why, for to argue about the folly of the business was futile, and he replied,

“For two reasons, Lord: first, because I left the land without his leave, and secondly, because I rowed you and the yellow man called Light-in-Darkness to the Holy Isle, to visit which unsummoned is the greatest of crimes. For this cause I must die more quickly than otherwise I should have done, but in any case my doom was certain, because I left the land to seek help for Sabeela. Here is the proof of it,” and from somewhere about his person he produced the little black Death’s Head which Hans had described to me. Then, without allowing me to touch the horrid thing, he hid it away again.

I tried to laugh him out of this idea, but he only smiled sadly and said,

“I know that you must have thought me a coward, Lord, because of the way I have borne myself since we reached this town of Walloo, but it was the curse of Heu-Heu working within me that changed my spirit. I pray you to explain this to Sabeela, whom I love, but who I think also believes me a coward, for yesterday I read it in her eyes. Now while I have still strength I would speak to you. First, I thank you and the yellow man, Light-in-Darkness, who by courage or by magic—I know not which—have saved Sabeela from Heu-Heu, and have destroyed his House and his priests and, I am told, his image. Heu-Heu, it is true, lives on since he cannot die, but henceforward here he is without a home or a shape or a worshipper, and therefore his power over the souls and bodies of men is gone, and among the Walloos, in time his worship will die out. Perhaps no more of my people will perish by the curse of Heu-Heu, Lord.”

“But why should you die, Issicore?”

“Because the curse fell on me first, Lord, while Heu-Heu reigned over the Walloos, as he has done from the beginning, he who was once their earthly king.”

I began to combat this nonsense, but he waved his hand in protest, and went on:

“Lord, my time is short and I would say something to you. Soon I shall be no more and forgotten, even by Sabeela, whose husband I had hoped to become. I pray, therefore, that you will marry Sabeela.”

Here I gasped, but held my peace till he had finished.

“Already I have caused her to be informed that such is my last wish. Also I have caused all the elders of the Walloos to be informed, and at a meeting held this morning they decided that this marriage would be right and wise, and have sent a messenger to tell me to die as quickly as I can, in order that it may be arranged at once.”

“Great Heavens!” I exclaimed, but again he motioned to me to be silent, and went on:

“Lord, although she is not of your race, Sabeela is very beautiful, very wise also, and with you for her husband she may be able once more to build up the Walloos into a great people, as tradition says they were in the old days before there fell upon them the curse of Heu-Heu, which is now broken. For you, too, are wise and bold, and know many things which we do not know, and the people will serve you as a god and perhaps come to worship you in place of Heu-Heu, so that you found a mighty dynasty. At first this thought may seem strange to you, but soon you will come to see that it is great and good. Moreover, even if you were unwilling, things must come about as I have said.”

“Why?” I asked, unable to contain myself any longer.

“Because, Lord, here in this land you must spend the rest of your life, for in it now you are a prisoner, nor with all your courage can you escape, since none will row you down the river, nor can you force a way, for it will be watched. Moreover, when you return to the house of the Walloo you will find that your cartridges have been taken, so that except for a few that you have about you, you are weaponless. Therefore, as here you must live, it is better that you should do so with Sabeela rather than with any other woman, since she is the fairest and the cleverest of them all. Also by right of blood she is the ruler, and through her you will become Walloo, as I should have done according to our custom.”

At this point he closed his eyes and for a while appeared to become senseless. Presently he opened them again and, staring at me, lifted his feeble hands and cried:

“Greeting to the Walloo! Long life and glory to the Walloo!”

Nor was this all, for, to my horror, from the other side of the partition that divided the house I heard the women whom I have mentioned echo the salutation:

“Greeting to the Walloo! Long life and glory to the Walloo!”

Then again Issicore became senseless; at least, nothing I said seemed to reach his understanding. So after waiting for a time Hans and I went away, thinking that all was over. This, however, was not so, since he lived till nightfall and, I was told, recovered his senses for some hours before the end, during which time Sabeela visited him, accompanied by certain of the notables or elders. It was then, as I suppose, that this ill-fated but most unselfish Issicore, the handsomest man whom ever I beheld, to his own satisfaction, if not to mine, settled everything for what he conceived to be the welfare of his country and his ladylove.

“Well, Baas,” said Hans when we were outside the house, “I suppose we had better go home. It is *your* home now, isn’t it, Baas? No, Baas, it is no use looking at that river, for you see these Walloos are so kind that they have already provided you with a chief’s escort.”

I looked. It was true enough. In place of the one man who had guided us to the house there were now twenty great fellows armed with spears who saluted me in a most reverential manner and insisted upon sticking close to my heels, I presume in case I should try to take to them. So back we went, the guard of twenty marching in a soldierlike fashion immediately behind, while Hans declaimed at me:

“It is just what I expected, Baas, for of course if a man is very fond of women, in his inside, Baas, they know it and like him—no need to tell them in so many words, Baas—and being kind-hearted, are quite ready to be fond of him. That is what has happened here, Baas. From the moment that the lady Sabeela saw you, she didn’t care a pinch of snuff for Issicore, although he was so good-looking and had walked such a long way to help her. No, Baas, she perceived something in you which she couldn’t find in two yards and a bit of Issicore, who after all was an empty kind of drum, Baas, and only made a noise when you hit him—a little noise for a small tap, Baas, and a big noise for a bang. Moreover, whatever he was, he is done now, so it is no use wasting time talking about him.

“Well, this won’t be such a bad country to live in now that the most of those Heuheua are dead—look! there are some of their bodies lying on the shore—and no doubt the beer can be brewed stronger, and there is tobacco. So it will be all right till we get tired of it, Baas, after which, perhaps, we shall be able to run away. Still, I am glad none of them wish to marry me, Baas, and make me work like a whole team of oxen to drag them out of their mudholes.”

Thus he went on pouring out his bosh by the yard, and literally I was so crushed that I couldn’t find a word in answer. Truly, it is the unexpected that always happens. During the last few days I had foreseen many dangers and dealt with some. But this was one of which I had never dreamed. What a fate! To be kept a prisoner in a kind of gilded cage and made to labour for my living too, like a performing monkey. Well, I would find a way between the bars or my name wasn’t Allan Quatermain. Only what way? At the time I could see none, for those bars seemed to be thick and strong. Moreover, there were those gentlemen with the spears behind.

In due course we arrived at the Walloo’s house without incident and went straight to our room where, after investigation in a corner, Hans called out:

"Issicore was quite right, Baas. All the cartridges have gone and the rifles also. Now we have only got our pistols and twenty-four rounds of ammunition between us."

I looked. It was so! Then I stared out of the window-place, and behold! there in the garden were the twenty men already engaged in marking out ground for the erection of a guard-hut.

"They mean to settle there, so as to be nice and handy in case the Baas wants them—or they want the Baas," said Hans significantly, adding, "I believe that wherever he goes the Walloo always has an escort of twenty men!"

Now for the next few days I saw nothing of Sabeela, or of Dramana either, since they were engaged in the ceremonious obsequies, first of the Walloo and next of the unlucky Issicore, to which for some religious reason or other, I was not invited.

Certain headmen or Indunas, however, were always waiting to pounce on me. Whenever I put my nose out-of-doors they appeared, bowing humbly, and proceeded to take the occasion to instruct me in the history and customs of the Walloo people, till I thought that my boyhood had returned and I was once more reading "Sandford and Merton" and acquiring knowledge through the art of conversation. Those old gentlemen bored me stiff. I tried to get rid of them by taking long walks at a great pace, but they responded nobly, being ready to trot by my side till they dropped, talking, talking, talking. Moreover, if I could outwalk those ancient councillors, the guard of twenty who formed a kind of chorus on these expeditions, were excellent hands with their legs, as an Irishman might say, and never turned a hair. Sometimes they turned me, however, if they thought I was going where I should not, since then half of them would dart ahead and politely bar the way.

At length, on the third or fourth day, all the ceremonies were finished and I was summoned into Sabeela's presence.

As Hans said afterwards, it was all very fine. Indeed, I thought it pathetic with its somewhat tawdry conditions of ancient, almost forgotten ceremonial inherited from a highly civilized race that was now sinking into barbarism. There was the Lady Sabeela, very beautiful to see, for she was a lovely woman and grandly dressed in a half-wild fashion, who played the part of a queen and not without dignity, as perhaps her ancestresses had done thousands of years before on some greater stage. Here too were her white-haired attendants or Indunas, the same who bored me out walking, representing the councillors and high officials of forgotten ages.

Yet the Queen was no longer a queen; she was merging into the savage chieftainess, as the councillors were into the chattering mob that surrounds such a person in a thousand kraals or towns of Africa. The proceedings, too, were very long, for each of these councillors or elders made a speech in which he repeated all that the others had said before, narrating with variations everything that happened in the land since I had set foot within it, together with fancy accounts of what Hans and I had done upon the island.

From these speeches, however, I learned one thing, namely, that most of the wild Hairy Folk, who were named Heuheua, had perished in the great catastrophe of the blowing up of the mountain, only a few, together with the old men, the children and the females, being left to carry on the race. Therefore, they said, the Walloos were safe from attack, at any rate, for a couple of generations to come, as might be learned from the wailings which arose in the forest at night—that, as a matter of fact, I had heard myself—pathetic and horrible sounds of almost animal grief. This, said these merciless sages, gave the Walloos a great opportunity, for now was the time to hunt down and kill the Wood-folk to the last woman and child—a task which they considered I was eminently fitted to carry out!

When they had all spoken, Sabeela's turn came. She rose from her throne-like chair and addressed us with real eloquence. First of all she pointed out that she was a woman suffering from a double grief—the death of her father and that of the man to whom she had been affianced, losses that made her heart heavy. Then, very touchingly, she thanked Hans and myself for all we had done to save her. But for us, she said, either she would now have been dead or nothing but a degraded slave in the house of Heu-Heu, which we had destroyed together with Heu-Heu himself, with the result that she and the land were free once more. Next she announced in words which evidently had been prepared, that this was no time for her to think of past sorrows or love, who now must look to the future. For a man like myself there was but one fitting reward, and that was the rule over the Walloo people, and with it the gift of her own person.

Therefore, by the wish of her Councillors, she had decreed that we were to be wed on the fourth morning from that of the present day, after which, by right of marriage, I was publicly to be declared the Walloo. Meanwhile, she summoned me to her side (where an empty chair had been set in preparation for this event) that we might exchange the kiss of betrothal.

Now, as may be imagined, I hung back; indeed, never have I felt more firmly fixed to a seat than at that fearsome moment. I did not know what to say, and my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my mouth. So I just sat still with all those old donkeys staring at me, Sabeela watching me out of the corners of her eyes and waiting. The silence grew painful, and in its midst Hans coughed in his husky fashion, then delivered himself thus.

"Get up, Baas," he whispered, "and go through with it. It isn't half as bad as it looks, and indeed, some people would like it very much. It is better to kiss a pretty lady than to have your throat cut, Baas, for that is what I think will happen if you don't, because a woman whom you don't kiss, after she has asked you in public, *always* turns nasty, Baas."

I felt that there was force in this argument, and, to cut a long story short, I went up into that chair and did—well—all that was required. Lord! what a fool I felt while those idiots cheered and Hans below grinned at me like a whole cagel of baboons. However, it was but ceremonial, a mere formality, just touching the brow of the fair Sabeela with my lips and receiving an acknowledgment in kind.

After this we sat a while side by side listening to those old Walloo Councillors chanting a ridiculous song, something about the marriage of a hero to a goddess, which I presume they must have composed for the occasion. Under cover of the noise, which was great, for they had excellent lungs, Sabeela spoke to me in a low voice and without turning her face or looking at me.

“Lord,” she said, “try to look less unhappy, lest these people should suspect something and listen to what we are saying. The law is that we should meet no more till the marriage day, but I must see you alone to-night. Have no fear,” she added with a rather sarcastic smile, “for, although I must be alone, you can bring your companion with you, since what I have to say concerns you both. Meet me in the passage that runs from this chamber to your own, at midnight when all sleep. It has no window places and its walls are thick, so that there we can be neither seen nor heard. Be careful to bolt the door behind you, as I will that of this chamber. Do you understand?”

Clapping my hands hilariously to show my delight in the musical performance, I whispered back that I did.

“Good. When the singing comes to an end, announce that you have a request to make of me. Ask that to-morrow you may be given a canoe and paddlers to row to the island to learn what has happened there and to discover whether any of the Wood-folk are still alive upon its shores. Say that if so measures must be taken to make an end of them, lest they should escape. Now speak no more.”

At length the song was finished, and with it the ceremony. To show that this was over, Sabeela rose from her chair and curtseyed to me, whereon I also rose and returned the compliment with my best bow. Thus, then, we bade a public farewell of each other until the happy marriage morn. Before we parted, however, I asked as a favour in a loud voice that I might be permitted to visit the island, or, at any rate, to row round it, giving the reasons she had suggested. To this she answered, “Let it be as my Lord wishes,” and before any one could raise objections, withdrew herself, followed by some serving woman and by Dramana, who I thought did not seem too pleased at the turn events had taken.

I pass on to that midnight interview. At the appointed time, or rather a little before it, I went into the passage accompanied by Hans, who was most unwilling to come for reasons which he gave in a Dutch proverb to the effect of our own; that two’s company and three’s none. Here we stood in the dark and waited. A few minutes later the door at the far end of it opened—it was a very long passage—and walking down it appeared Sabeela, clad in white and bearing in her hand a naked lamp. Somehow in this garb and in these surroundings, thus illumined, she looked more beautiful than I had ever seen her, almost spirit-like indeed. We met, and without any greeting she said to me,

“Lord Watcher-by-Night, I find you watching by night according to my prayer. It may have seemed a strange prayer to you, but hearken to its reason. I cannot think that you believe me to desire this marriage, which I know to be hateful to you, seeing that I am of another race to yourself and that you only look upon me as a half-savage woman whom it has been your fortune to save from shame or death. Nay, contradict me not, I beseech you, since at times the truth is good. Because it is so good I will add to it, telling you the reason why I also do not desire this marriage, or rather the greatest reason; namely, that I loved Issicore, who from childhood had been my playmate until he became more than playmate.”

“Yes,” I interrupted, “and I know that he loved you. Only then why was it that on his deathbed he himself urged on this matter?”

“Because, Lord, Issicore had a noble heart. He thought you the greatest man whom he had ever known, half a god indeed, for he told me so. He held also that you would make me happy and rule this country well, lifting it up again out of its long sleep. Lastly, he knew that if you did not marry me, you and your companion would be murdered. If he judged wrongly in these matters, it must be remembered, moreover, that his mind was blotted with the poison that had been given to him, for myself I am sure that he did not die of fear alone.”

“I understand. All honour be to him,” I said.

“I thank you. Now, Lord, know that, although I am ignorant I believe that we live again beyond the gate of Death. Perhaps that faith has come down to me from my forefathers when they worshipped other gods besides the devil Heu-Heu; at least, it is mine. My hope is, therefore, that when I have passed that gate, which perhaps will be before so very long, on its farther side I shall once more find Issicore—Issicore as he was before the curse of Heu-Heu fell upon him and he drank the poison of the priests—and for this reason I desire to wed no other man.”

“All honour be to you also,” I murmured.

“Again, I thank you, Lord. Now let us turn to other matters. To-morrow after midday a canoe will be ready, and in it you will find your weapons that have been stolen and all that is yours. It will be manned by four rowers; men known to be spies of the priests of Heu-Heu, stationed here upon the mainland to watch the Walloos, who in time would themselves have become priests. Therefore, now that Heu-Heu has fallen they are doomed to die, not at once but after a while, perhaps, as it will seem, by sickness or accident, because if they live, the Walloo Councillors fear lest they should re-establish the rule of Heu-Heu. They know this well, and therefore they desire above all things to escape the land while their life is yet in them.”

“Have you seen these men, Sabeela?”

“Nay, but Dramana has seen them. Now, Lord, I will tell you something, if you have not guessed it for yourself, though I do this not without shame. Dramana does not desire our marriage, Lord. You saved Dramana as well as myself, and Dramana, like Issicore, has come to look on you as half a god. Need I say more, save that, of course, for this reason she does desire your escape, since she would rather that you went free and were lost to both of us than that you should bide here and marry me. Have I said enough?”

“Plenty,” I answered, knowing that she spoke truth.

“Then what is there to add, save that I trust all will go well, and that by the dawn of the day that follows this, you and the yellow man, your servant, will be safely out of this accursed land. If that comes about, as I believe it will, for after the dusk has fallen and before the moon rises those who guide the canoe will bring it, not to the quay, but into the mouth of the river down which you must paddle by the moonlight; then I pray of you at times in your own country to think of Sabeela, the broken-hearted chieftainess of a doomed people, as day by day, when she rises and lays herself down to sleep, she will think of you who saved her and all of us from ruin. My Lord, farewell, and to you, Light-in-Darkness, also farewell.”

Then she took my hand, kissed it, and, without another word, glided away as she had come.

This was the last that ever I saw or heard of Sabeela the Beautiful. I wonder whether she lived long. Somehow I do not think so; that night I seemed to see death in her eyes.

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## THE RACE FOR LIFE

Now, like a Scotch parson, I have come to “lastly”—that inspiring word at which the sleepest congregation awakes. The morning following this strange midnight meeting, Hans and I spent in our room, for it appeared to be the ancient Walloo etiquette that, save by special permission, the prospective bridegroom should not go out for several days before the marriage, I suppose because of some primitive idea that his affections might be diverted by the sight of alien beauty.

At midday we ate, or, so far as I was concerned, pretended to eat, for anxiety took away my appetite. A little while afterwards, to my intense relief, the captain of our prison-warders, for that is what they were, appeared and said that he was commanded to conduct us to the canoe which was to paddle us to inspect what remained of the island. I replied that we would graciously consent to go. So taking all our small possessions with us, including a bundle containing our spare clothes and the twigs from the Tree of Illusions, we departed and were escorted to the quay by our guards, of whose faces I was heartily tired. Here we found a small canoe awaiting us, manned by four secret-faced men, strong fellows all of them, who raised their paddles in salute. Apparently the place had been cleared of loiterers, since there was only one other person present, a woman wrapped in a long cloak that hid her face.

As we were about to enter the canoe this woman approached us and lifted her head. She was Dramana.

“Lord,” she said, “I have been sent by my sister, the new Walloo, to tell you that you will find the iron tubes which spit out fire and all that belongs to them under a mat in the prow of the canoe. Also she bids me wish you a prosperous journey to the island that aforetime was named Holy, which island she wishes never to see again.”

I thanked her and bade her convey my greeting to the Walloo, my bride to be, adding in a loud voice, that I hoped ere long to be able to do this in person when her “veil fell down.”

Then I turned to enter the canoe.

“Lord,” said Dramana with a convulsive movement of her hands, “I make a prayer to you. It is that you will take me with you to look my last upon that isle where I dwelt so long a slave, which I desire to see once more— now that I am free.”

Instinctively I felt that a crisis had arisen which demanded firm and even brutal treatment.

“Nay, Dramana,” I answered, “it is always unlucky for an escaped slave to revisit his prison, lest once more its bars should close about that slave.”

“Lord,” she said, “the loosed prisoner is sometimes dazed by freedom, so that the heart cries again for its captivity. Lord, I am a good slave and a loving. Will you not take me with you?”

“Nay, Dramana,” I answered as I sprang into the canoe. “This boat is fully loaded. It would not be for your welfare or for mine. Farewell!”

She gazed at me earnestly with a pitiful countenance that grew wrathful by degrees, as might well happen in the case of a woman scorned: then, muttering something about being “cast off,” burst into angry tears and turned away. For my part I motioned to the oarsmen to loose the craft and departed, feeling like a thief and traitor. Yet I was not to blame, for what else could I do? Dramana, it is true, had been a good friend to us, and I liked her. But we had repaid her help by saving her from Heu-Heu, and for the rest, one must draw the line somewhere. If once she had entered that canoe, metaphorically speaking, she would never have got out of it again.

Presently we were out on the open lake where the wavelets danced and the sun shone brightly, and glad I was to be clear of all those painful complications and once more in the company of pure and natural things. We paddled away to the island and made the land, or rather drew near to it, at the spot where the ancient city had stood in which we had found the petrified men and animals. But we did not set foot on it, for everywhere little streams of glowing lava trickled down into the lake and the ruins had vanished beneath a sea of ashes. I do not think that any one will ever again behold those strange relics of a past I know not how remote.

Turning, we paddled on slowly round the island till we came to the place where the Rock of Offering had been, upon which I had experienced so terrible an adventure. It had vanished, and with it the cave mouth, the garden of Heu-Heu, its Tree of Illusions, and all the rich cultivated land. The waters of the lake, turbid and steaming, now beat against the face of a stony hillock which was all that remained of the Holy Isle. The catastrophe was complete; the volcano was but a lump of lava from the dying heart of which its life-blood of flame still palpitated in red and ebbing streams. I wonder whether its smothered fires will ever break out again elsewhere. For aught I know they may have done so already somewhere on the mainland.

By the time that we had completed our journey round the place on which no living creature now was left, though once or twice we saw the bloated body of a Heuheua savage bobbing about in the water, the sun was setting, and it was dark before we were again off the town of the Walloos. While any light remained by which we could be seen, we headed straight for the landing place, that which we had left when we started for the island.

The moment that its last rays faded, however, there was a whispered conference between our four paddlemen, the ex-neophytes of Heu-Heu. Then the direction of the canoe was altered, and instead of making for the main land, we rowed on parallel with it till we came to the mouth of the Black River. It was so dark that I could not discern the exact time at which we left the lake and entered the stream; indeed, I did not know that we were in it until the increased current told me so. This current was now running very strongly after the great flood and bore us along at a good pace. My fear was lest in the gloom we should be dashed against rocks on the banks, or caught by the overhanging branches of trees or strike a snag, but those four men seemed to know every yard of the river and managed to keep us in its centre, probably by following the current where it ran most swiftly.

So we went on, not paddling very fast for fear of accidents, until the moon rose, which, as she was only a few days past her full, gave us considerable light even in that dark place. So soon as her rays reached us our paddlers gave way with a will, and we shot down the flooded stream as a great speed.

"I think we are all right now, Baas," said Hans, "for with so good a start those Walloos could scarcely catch us, even if they try. We are lucky, too, for you have left behind you two ladies who between them would have torn you into pieces, and I have left a place where the fools who live in it wearied me so much that I should soon have died."

He paused for a moment, then added in a horrified voice:

"*Allemagter!* we are not so lucky after all; we have forgotten something."

"What?" I asked anxiously.

"Why, Baas, those red and white stones we came to fetch, of which, before Heu-Heu dropped a red-hot rock upon his head, that old *kraansick*" (that is, mad) "Walloo, promised us as many as we wished. Sabeela would have filled the boat with them if we had only asked her, and we should never have had to work any more, but could have sat in fine houses and drunk the best gin from morning to night."

At these words I felt positively sick. It was too true. Amongst other pressing matters, concerning life, death, marriage, and liberty, I had forgotten utterly all about the diamonds and gold. Still when I came to think of it, although perhaps Hans might have done so, in view of the manner of our parting, I did not quite see how I could have asked Sabeela for them. It would have been an anticlimax and might have left a nasty taste in her mouth. How could she continue to look upon a man as—well, something quite out of the ordinary, who called her back to remind her that there was a little pecuniary matter to be settled and a fee to be paid for services rendered? Further, the sight of us bearing sacks of treasure might have excited suspicion; unless, indeed, Sabeela had caused them to be placed in the boat as she did in the case of the guns. Also they would have been heavy and inconvenient to carry, as I explained to Hans. Yet I did feel sick, for once more my hopes of wealth, or, at any rate, of a solid competence for the rest of my days, had vanished into thin air.

"Life is more than gold," I said sententiously to Hans, "and great honour is better than both."

It sounded like something out of the Book of Proverbs, but somehow I had not got it quite right though I reflected that fortunately Hans would not know the difference. However, he knew more than I thought, for he answered,

"Yes, Baas, your Reverend Father used to talk like that. Also he said that it was better to live on watercresses with an easy mind, however angry they might make your stomach, than to dwell in a big hut with a couple of cross women, which is what would have happened to you, Baas, if you had stopped at Walloo. Besides, we are quite safe now, even if we haven't got the gold and diamonds, which, as you say, are heavy things, so safe that I think I shall go to sleep, Baas. *Allemagter!* Baas, *what's that?*"

"Only those poor hairy women howling over their dead in the forest," I answered rather carelessly, for their cries, which were very distressing in the silence of the river, still echoed in my ears. Also I was still thinking of the lost diamonds.

"I wish it were, Baas. They might howl till their heads fell off for all I care. But it isn't. It's paddles. *The Walloos are hunting us, Baas. Listen!*"

I did listen, and to my horror heard the regular stroke of paddles striking the water at a distance behind us, a great number of them, fifty I should say. One of the big canoes must be on our track.

"Oh, Baas!" said Hans, "it is your fault again. Without doubt that lady Dramana loves you so much that she can't make up her mind to part with you and has ordered out a big canoe to fetch you back. Unless, indeed," he added with an access of hopefulness, "it is the Lady Sabeela sending a farewell gift of jewels after us, having remembered that we should like some to make us think of her afterwards."

"It is those confounded Walloos sending a gift of spears," I answered gloomily, adding, "Get the rifles ready, Hans, for I'm not going to be taken alive."

Whatever the cause, it was clear that we were being pursued, and in my heart I did wonder whether Dramana had anything to do with it. No doubt I had treated her rudely because I could not help it, also Dramana had been badly trained among those rascally priests. But I hoped, and still hope, that she was innocent of this treachery. The truth of the matter I never learned.

Our crew of escaping priestly spies had also heard the paddles, for I saw the frightened look they gave to each other and the fierce energy with which they bent themselves to their work. Good heavens! how they paddled, who

knew that their lives hung upon the issue. For hour after hour away we flew down that flooded, rushing river, while behind us, drawing nearer minute by minute, sounded the beat of those insistent paddles. Our canoe was swift, but how could we hope to escape from one driven by fifty men when we had but four?

It was just as we passed the place where we had slept on our inward journey—for now we had left the forest behind and were between the cliffs, travelling quite twice as fast as we had done up stream—that I caught sight of the pursuing boat, perhaps half a mile behind us, and saw that it was one of the largest of the Walloo fleet. After this, owing to the position of the moon, that in this narrow place left the surface of the water quite dark, I saw it no more for several hours. But I heard it drawing nearer, ever nearer, like some sure and deadly bloodhound following on the spoor of a fleeing slave.

Our men began to tire. Hans and I took the paddles of two of them to give the pair a rest and time to eat; then for a spell the paddles of the other two, while they did likewise. This, however, caused us to lose way, since we were not experts at the game, though here after the flood the river rushed so fast that our lack of skill made little difference.

At length the daylight came and gathered till at last the glimmer of it reached us in our cleft, and by that faint, uncertain light I saw the pursuing canoe not a hundred yards behind. In its way it was a very weird and impressive spectacle. There were the precipitous, towering cliffs, between or rather above which appeared a line of blue sky. There was the darksome, flood-filled, foaming river, and there on its surface was our tiny boat propelled by four weary and perspiring men, while behind came the great war canoe whose presence could just be detected in a dim outline and by the white of the water where its oarsmen smote it into froth.

“They are coming up fast, Baas, and we still have a long way to go. Soon they will catch us, Baas,” said Hans.

“Then we must try to stop them for a while,” I answered grimly. “Give me the Express rifle, Hans, and do you take the Winchester.”

Then, lying down in the canoe and resting the rifles on its stern, we waited our opportunity. Presently we came to a place where at some time there had been a cliff-slide, for here the debris of it narrowed the river, turning it, now that it was so full, into something like a torrent. At this spot, also, because of the enlargement of the cleft, more light reached us, so that we could see our pursuers, who were about fifty yards away, not clearly indeed, but well enough for our purpose.

“Aim low and pump it into them, Hans,” I said, and next instant discharged both barrels of the Express at the foremost rowers.

Hans followed suit, but, as the Winchester held five cartridges, went on firing after I had ceased.

The result was instantaneous. Some men sank down, some paddles fell into the water—I could not tell how many—and a great cry arose from the smitten or their companions. He who steered or captained the canoe from the prow apparently was among the hit. She veered round and for a while was broadside on to the current, exposing her bottom and threatening to turn over. Into this, having loaded, I sent two expanding bullets, hoping to spring a leak in her, though I was not certain if I should succeed, as the wood of these canoes is thick. I think I did, however, since even when she had got on her course again she came more slowly, and I thought that once I saw a man bailing.

On we went, making the most of the advantage that this check gave to us. But by now our men were very tired and their hands were raw from blisters, so that only the terror of death forced them to continue paddling. Indeed, at the last our progress grew very slow, and in fact was due more to the current than to our own efforts. Therefore the following canoe, which as was customary in Walloo boats of that size, probably carried spare paddle men, once more gained upon us.

Hereabouts the river wound between its cliffs so that we only got sight of it from time to time. Whenever we did so I took the Winchester and fired, no doubt inflicting some damage and checking its advance.

At length the winding ceased and we reached the last stretch, a clear run of a mile or so before the river ended in the swamp that I have described.

By this time pursuers and pursued, both of us, were going but slowly, drifting rather than paddling, since all were exhausted. Whenever I could get a sight I fired away, but still with a sullen determination and in utter silence our assailants came up, till now they were scarcely twenty paces from us, and some of them threw spears, one of which stuck in the bottom of our canoe, just missing my foot. At this spot the cliffs drew so near together at the top that I ceased shooting, as I could not see to aim, and, having no cartridges to waste, decided to keep those that remained for the emergency of the last attack.

Now we were in the ultimate reach of the river, and now at last we grounded upon the first mudbank of the swamp. Those who remained unhurt of the following Walloos made a final effort to overtake us; by the strong light that flowed from the open land beyond us I could see their glaring eyeballs and their tongues hanging from their jaws with exhaustion. I yelled an order.

“Seize everything we have and run for it!” I cried, grabbing at my rifle and such other articles as were within reach, including the remaining cartridges.

The others did likewise—I do not think that anything was left in that canoe except the paddles. Then I leapt on to the shore and ran to the right, following the edge of the swamp, the rest coming after me. Fifty yards or more away I

sank down upon a little ridge from sheer exhaustion and because my cramped legs would no longer carry me, and watched to see what would happen. Indeed, I was so worn out that I felt I would rather die where I was than try to flee farther.

We grouped ourselves together, awaiting the crisis, for I thought that surely we should be attacked. But we were not. At the mudbank the pursuing Walloos ceased from their efforts. For a little while they sat dejectedly in their craft till they had recovered breath.

Then for the first time those mute hunting-hounds gave tongue, for they shouted maledictions on us, and especially on our four paddlers, the neophytes of Heu-Heu, telling these that although to follow them farther was not lawful, they would die, as Issicore died who left the land. One of our men, stung into repartee, retaliated in words to the effect that some of them had died in attempting to keep us in the land, as they would find if they counted their oarsmen.

To this obvious truth the pursuers made no answer, nor did they inform us who sent them on the chase. Securing our small canoe, they laid in it certain dead men who had fallen beneath the bullets of Hans and myself, and departed slowly up stream, towing it after them. This was the last that I saw of their handsome, fanatical faces and of their confounded country in which I went so near to death, or to becoming a prisoner for life, that might have been worse.

"Baas," said Hans, lighting his pipe, "that was a great journey and one which it will be nice to think about, now that it is over, though I wish that we had killed more of those Walloo men-stealers."

"I don't, Hans; I hated being obliged to shoot them," I answered; "nor do I wish to think any more of that race for our lives, unless it comes back in a nightmare when I can't help doing so."

"Don't you, Baas? I find such thoughts pleasant when the danger is past and we who might have been dead are alive, and the others who were alive are dead and telling the tale to Heu-Heu."

"Each to his taste; yours isn't mine," I muttered.

Hans puffed at his pipe for a while, and went on,

"It's funny, Baas, that those *carles* did not get out of their canoe and come to kill us with their spears. I suppose they were afraid of the rifles."

"No, Hans," I answered, "they are brave men who would not have stopped because of the bullets. They were afraid of more than these: they feared the Curse which says that those who leave their land will die and go to hell. Heu-Heu has done us a good turn there, Hans."

"Yes, Baas, no doubt he has become a Christian in the Place of Fires and is repaying good for evil, turning the other cheek, Baas. I felt like that myself when I thought those Walloos were going to catch us, but now I feel quite different. Baas, you remember how your Reverend Father used to say that if you love Heaven, Heaven looks after you and pulls you out of every kind of mudhole. That's why I'm sitting here smoking, Baas, instead of making meat for crocodiles. If it wasn't for our forgetting about those jewels, it has looked after us very well, but there are so many up there that perhaps Heaven forgot them also."

"No, Hans," I said, "Heaven remembered that if we had tried to carry bags of stones out of that boat, as well as Zikali's medicine and the rest, the Walloos would have caught us before we got away. They were quite close, Hans."

"Yes, Baas, I see, and that was very nice of Heaven. And now, Baas, I think we had better be moving. Those Walloos might forget about the curse for a little while and come back to look for us. Heaven is a queer thing, Baas. Sometimes it changes its face all of a sudden and grows angry—just like the lady Dramana did when you said that you wouldn't take her with you in the canoe yesterday."

Allan paused to help himself to a little weak whisky and water, then said in his jerky fashion,

"Well, that's the end of the story, of which I am glad, whatever you may be, for my throat is dry with talking. We got back to the wagon all right after sundry difficulties and a tiring march across the desert, and it was time we did so, for when we arrived we had only three rifle cartridges left between us. You see we were obliged to fire such a lot at the Heuheua, when they attacked us on the lake, and afterwards at those Walloos to prevent them from catching us that night. However, there were more in the wagon, and I shot four elephants with them going home. They had very large tusks, which afterwards I sold for about enough to cover the expenses of the journey."

"Did old Zikali make you pay for those oxen?" I asked.

"No, he did not, because I told him that if he tried it on I would not give him his bundle of *mouti* that we cut from the Tree of Illusions and carried safely all that way. So as he was very keen on the medicine, he made me a present of the oxen. Also I found my own there grown fat and strong again. It was a curious thing, but the old scoundrel seemed to know most of what had happened to us before ever I told him a word. Perhaps he learned it all from one of those acolytes of Heu-Heu who fled with us because they feared that they would be murdered if they stayed in their own land. I forgot to tell you that these men—most uncommunicative persons—melted away upon our homeward journey. Suddenly they were missing. I presume that they departed to set up as witch doctors on their own account. If so, very possibly one or more of them may have come into touch with Zikali, the head of the craft in that part of Africa, and before I reached the Black Kloof.

"The first thing he asked me was: 'Why did you not bring any gold and diamonds away with you? Had you done so, you might have become rich who now remain poor, Macumazahn.'

"Because I forgot to ask for them,' I said.

"Yes, I know you forgot to ask for them. You were thinking so much of the pain of saying goodbye to that beautiful lady whose name I have not learned that you forgot to ask for them. It is just like you, Macumazahn. *Oho! Oho!* it is just like you.'

"Then he stared at his fire for a while, in front of which, as usual, he was sitting, and added: 'Yet somehow I think that diamonds will make you rich one day, when there is no woman left to say good-bye to, Macumazahn.'

"It was a good shot of his, for, as you fellows know, that came about at King Solomon's mines, didn't it? when there was 'no woman left to say good-bye to.'"

Here Good turned his head away, and Allen went on hurriedly, I think because he remembered Foulata, and saw that his thoughtless remark had given pain.

"Zikali was very interested in all our story and made me stop at the Black Kloof for some days to tell him every detail.

"I knew that Heu-Heu was an idol,' he said, 'though I wanted you to find it out for yourself, and therefore told you nothing about it, just as I knew that handsome man, Issicore, would die. But I didn't tell him anything about that either, because, if I had, you see he might have died before he had shown you the way to his country, and then I shouldn't have got my *mouti*, which is necessary to me, for without it how should I paint more pictures on my fire? Well, you brought me a good bundle of leaves which will last my time, and as the Tree of Illusions is burned and there is no other left in the world, there will be no more of it. I am glad that it is burned, for I do not wish that any wizard should arise in the land who will be as great as was Zikali, Opener-of-Roads. While that tree grew the high priest of Heu-Heu was almost as great, but now he is dead and his tree is burned, and I, Zikali, reign alone. That is what I desired, Macumazahn, and that is why I sent you to Heuheua Land.'

"You cunning old villain!' I exclaimed.

"Yes, Macumazahn, I am cunning just as you are simple, and my heart is black like my skin, just as yours is white like your skin. That is why I am great, Macumazahn, and wield power over thousands and accomplish my desires, whereas you are small and have no power and will die with all your desires unaccomplished. Yet, in the end, who knows, who knows? Perhaps in the land beyond it may be otherwise. Heu-Heu was great also and where is Heu-Heu to-day?'

"There never was a Heu-Heu,' I said.

"No, Macumazahn, there never was a Heu-Heu, but there were priests of Heu-Heu. Is it not so with many of the gods men set up? They are not and never were, but their priests *are* and shake the spear of power and pierce the hearts of men with terrors. What, then, does it matter about the gods whom no man sees, when the priest is there shaking the spear of power and piercing the hearts of their worshippers? The god is the priest or the priest is the god —have it which way you like, Macumazahn.'

"Not always, Zikali.' Then, as I did not wish to enter into argument with him on such a subject, I asked, 'Who carved the statue of Heu-Heu in the Cave of Illusions? The Walloos did not know.'

"Nor do I, Macumazahn,' he answered. 'The world is very old and there have been peoples in it of whom we have heard nothing, or so my Spirit tells me. Without doubt one of those peoples carved it thousands of years ago, an invading people, the last of their race, who had been driven out elsewhere and coming south, those who were left of them, hid themselves away from their enemies in this secret place amid a horde of savages so hideous that it was reported to be haunted by demons. There, in a cave in the midst of a lake where they could not be come at, they carved an image of their god, or perhaps of the god of the savages, whom it seems that it resembled.

"Mayhap the savages took their name from Heu-Heu, or mayhap Heu-Heu took his name from them. Who can tell? At any rate, when men seek a god, Macumazahn, they make one like themselves, only larger, uglier, and more evil, at least in this land, for what they do elsewhere I know not. Also, often they say that this god was once their king, since at the bottom all worship their ancestors who gave them life, if they worship anything at all, and often, too, because they gave them life, they think that they must have been devils. Great ancestors were the first gods, Macumazahn, and if they had not been evil they would never have been great. Look at Chaka, the Lion of the Zulus. He is called great because he was so wicked and cruel, and so it was and is with others if they succeed, though, if they fail, men speak otherwise of them.'

"That is not a pretty faith, Zikali,' I said.

"No, Macumazahn, but then little in the world is pretty, except the world itself. The Heuheua are not pretty, or rather were not, for I think that you killed most of them when you blew up the mountain, which is a good thing. Heu-Heu was not pretty, nor were his priests. Only the Walloos, and especially their women, remain pretty because of the old blood that runs in them, the high old blood that Heu-Heu sucked from their veins.'

"Well, Heu-Heu has gone, Zikali, and now what will become of the Walloos?'

“I cannot say, Macumazahn, but I expect they will follow Heu-Heu, who has taken hold of their souls and will drag them after him. If so, it does not matter, since they are but the rotting stump of a tree that once was tall and fair. The dust of Time hides many such stumps, Macumazahn. But what of that? Other fine trees are growing which also will become stumps in their season, and so on for ever.’

“Thus Zikali held forth, though of what he said I forget much. I daresay that he spoke truth, but I remember that his melancholy and pessimistic talk depressed me, and that I cut it as short as I could. Also it did not really explain anything, since he could not tell me who the Walloos or the Hairy Folk were, or why they worshipped Heu-Heu, or what was their beginning, or what would be their end.

“All these things remained and remain lost in mystery, since I have never heard anything more of them, and if any subsequent travellers have visited the district where they live, which is not probable, they did not succeed in ascending the river, or if they did, they never descended it again. So if you want to know more of the story, you must go and find it out for yourselves. Only, as I think I said, I won’t go with you.”

“Well,” said Captain Good, “it is a wonderful yarn. Hang me, if I could have told it better myself!”

“No, Good,” answered Allan, as he lit a hand candle, “I am quite sure that you could not, because, you see, facts are one thing and what you call ‘yarns’ are another. Good-night to you all, good-night.”

Then he went off to bed.

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THE END

# BOOK XV

## SHE & ALLAN

### NOTE BY THE LATE MR. ALLAN QUATERMAIN

My friend, into whose hands I hope that all these manuscripts of mine will pass one day, of this one I have something to say to you.

A long while ago I jotted down in it the history of the events that it details with more or less completeness. This I did for my own satisfaction. You will have noted how memory fails us as we advance in years; we recollect, with an almost painful exactitude, what we experienced and saw in our youth, but the happenings of our middle life slip away from us or become blurred, like a stretch of low-lying landscape overflowed by grey and nebulous mist. Far off the sun still seems to shine upon the plains and hills of adolescence and early manhood, as yet it shines about us in the fleeting hours of our age, that ground on which we stand to-day, but the valley between is filled with fog. Yes, even its prominences, which symbolise the more startling events of that past, often are lost in this confusing fog.

It was an appreciation of these truths which led me to set down the following details (though of course much is omitted) of my brief intercourse with the strange and splendid creature whom I knew under the names of *Ayesha*, or *Híya*, or *She-who-commands*; not indeed with any view to their publication, but before I forgot them that, if I wished to do so, I might re-peruse them in the evening of old age to which I hope to attain.

Indeed, at the time the last thing I intended was that they should be given to the world even after my own death, because they, or many of them, are so unusual that I feared lest they should cause smiles and in a way cast a slur upon my memory and truthfulness. Also, as you will read, as to this matter I made a promise and I have always tried to keep my promises and to guard the secrets of others. For these reasons I proposed, in case I neglected or forgot to destroy them myself, to leave a direction that this should be done by my executors. Further, I have been careful to make no allusion *whatever* to them either in casual conversation or in anything else that I may have written, my desire being that this page of my life should be kept quite private, something known only to myself. Therefore, too, I never so much as hinted of them to anyone, not even to yourself to whom I have told so much.

Well, I recorded the main facts concerning this expedition and its issues, simply and with as much exactness as I could, and laid them aside. I do not say that I never thought of them again, since amongst them were some which, together with the problems they suggested, proved to be of an unforgettable nature.

Also, whenever any of Ayesha's sayings or stories which are not preserved in these pages came back to me, as has happened from time to time, I jotted them down and put them away with this manuscript. Thus among these notes you will find a history of the city of Kôr as she told it to me, which I have omitted here. Still, many of these remarkable events did more or less fade from my mind, as the image does from an unfixed photograph, till only their outlines remained, faint if distinguishable.

To tell the truth, I was rather ashamed of the whole story in which I cut so poor a figure. On reflection it was obvious to me, although honesty had compelled me to set out all that is essential exactly as it occurred, adding nothing and taking nothing away, that I had been the victim of very gross deceit. This strange woman, whom I had met in the ruins of a place called Kôr, without any doubt had thrown a glamour over my senses and at the moment almost caused me to believe much that is quite unbelievable.

For instance, she had told me ridiculous stories as to interviews between herself and certain heathen goddesses, though it is true that, almost with her next breath, these she qualified or contradicted. Also, she had suggested that her life had been prolonged far beyond our mortal span, for hundreds and hundreds of years, indeed; which, as Euclid says, is absurd, and had pretended to supernatural powers, which is still more absurd. Moreover, by a clever use of some hypnotic or mesmeric power, she had feigned to transport me to some place beyond the earth and in the Halls of Hades to show me what is veiled from the eyes of man, and not only me, but the savage warrior Umhlopekazi, commonly called Umslopogaas of the Axe, who, with Hans, a Hottentot, was my companion upon that adventure. There were like things equally incredible, such as her appearance, when all seemed lost, in the battle with the troll-like Rezu. To omit these, the sum of it was that I had been shamefully duped, and if anyone finds himself in that position, as most people have at one time or another in their lives, Wisdom suggests that he had better keep the circumstances to himself.

Well, so the matter stood, or rather lay in the recesses of my mind—and in the cupboard where I hide my papers—when one evening someone, as a matter of fact it was Captain Good, an individual of romantic tendencies who is fond, sometimes I think too fond, of fiction, brought a book to this house which he insisted over and over again really I must peruse.

Ascertaining that it was a novel I declined, for to tell the truth I am not fond of romance in any shape, being a person who has found the hard facts of life of sufficient interest as they stand.

Reading I admit I like, but in this matter, as in everything else, my range is limited. I study the Bible, especially the Old Testament, both because of its sacred lessons and of the majesty of the language of its inspired translators; whereof that of Ayesha, which I render so poorly from her flowing and melodious Arabic, reminded me. For poetry I turn to Shakespeare, and, at the other end of the scale, to the Ingoldsby Legends, many of which I know almost by heart, while for current affairs I content myself with the newspapers.

For the rest I peruse anything to do with ancient Egypt that I happen to come across, because this land and its history have a queer fascination for me, that perhaps has its roots in occurrences or dreams of which this is not the place to speak. Lastly now and again I read one of the Latin or Greek authors in a translation, since I regret to say that my lack of education does not enable me to do so in the original. But for modern fiction I have no taste, although from time to time I sample it in a railway train and occasionally am amused by such excursions into the poetic and unreal.

So it came about that the more Good bothered me to read this particular romance, the more I determined that I would do nothing of the sort. Being a persistent person, however, when he went away about ten o'clock at night, he deposited it by my side, under my

nose indeed, so that it might not be overlooked. Thus it came about that I could not help seeing some Egyptian hieroglyphics in an oval on the cover, also the title, and underneath it your own name, my friend, all of which excited my curiosity, especially the title, which was brief and enigmatic, consisting indeed of one word, "*She*."

I took up the work and on opening it the first thing my eye fell upon was a picture of a veiled woman, the sight of which made my heart stand still, so painfully did it remind me of a certain veiled woman whom once it had been my fortune to meet. Glancing from it to the printed page one word seemed to leap at me. It was *Kôr*! Now of veiled women there are plenty in the world, but were there also two *Kôrs*?

Then I turned to the beginning and began to read. This happened in the autumn when the sun does not rise till about six, but it was broad daylight before I ceased from reading, or rather rushing through that book.

Oh! what was I to make of it? For here in its pages (to say nothing of old Billali, who, by the way lied, probably to order, when he told Mr. Holly that no white man had visited his country for many generations, and those gloomy, man-eating Amahagger scoundrels) once again I found myself face to face with *She-who-commands*, now rendered as *She-who-must-be-obeyed*, which means much the same thing—in her case at least; yes, with Ayesha the lovely, the mystic, the changeful and the imperious.

Moreover the history filled up many gaps in my own limited experiences of that enigmatical being who was half divine (though, I think, rather wicked or at any rate unmoral in her way) and yet all woman. It is true that it showed her in lights very different from and higher than those in which she had presented herself to me. Yet the substratum of her character was the same, or rather of her characters, for of these she seemed to have several in a single body, being, as she said of herself to me, "not One but Many and not Here but Everywhere."

Further, I found the story of Kallikrates, which I had set down as a mere falsehood invented for my bewilderment, expanded and explained. Or rather not explained, since, perhaps that she might deceive, to me she had spoken of this murdered Kallikrates without enthusiasm, as a handsome person to whom, because of an indiscretion of her youth, she was bound by destiny and whose return—somewhat to her sorrow—she must wait. At least she did so at first, though in the end when she bared her heart at the moment of our farewell, she vowed she loved him only and was "appointed" to him "by a divine decree."

Also I found other things of which I knew nothing, such as the Fire of Life with its fatal gift of indefinite existence, although I remember that like the giant Rezu whom Umslopogaas defeated, she did talk of a "Cup of Life" of which she had drunk, that might have been offered to my lips, had I been politic, bowed the knee and shown more faith in her and her supernatural pretensions.

Lastly I saw the story of her end, and as I read it I wept, yes, I confess I wept, although I feel sure that she will return again. Now I understood why she had quailed and even seemed to shrivel when, in my last interview with her, stung beyond endurance by her witcheries and sarcasms, I had suggested that even for her with all her powers, Fate might reserve one of its shrewdest blows. Some prescience had told her that if the words seemed random, Truth spoke through my lips, although, and this was the worst of it, she did not know what weapon would deal the stroke or when and where it was doomed to fall.

I was amazed, I was overcome, but as I closed that book I made up my mind, first that I would continue to preserve absolute silence as to Ayesha and my dealings with her, as, during my life, I was bound by oath to do, and secondly that I would *not* cause my manuscript to be destroyed. I did not feel that I had any right to do so in view of what already had been published to the world. There let it lie to appear one day, or not to appear, as might be fated. Meanwhile my lips were sealed. I would give Good back his book without comment and—buy another copy!

One more word. It is clear that I did not touch more than the fringe of the real Ayesha. In a thousand ways she bewitched and deceived me so that I never plumbed her nature's depths. Perhaps this was my own fault because from the first I shewed a lack of faith in her and she wished to pay me back in her own fashion, or perhaps she had other private reasons for her secrecy. Certainly the character she discovered to me differed in many ways from that which she revealed to Mr. Holly and to Leo Vincey, or Kallikrates, whom, it seems, once she slew in her jealousy and rage.

She told me as much as she thought it fit that I should know, and no more!

Allan Quatermain.

The Grange, Yorkshire.

# CHAPTER I.

## THE TALISMAN

I believe it was the old Egyptians, a very wise people, probably indeed much wiser than we know, for in the leisure of their ample centuries they had time to think out things, who declared that each individual personality is made up of six or seven different elements, although the Bible only allows us three, namely, body, soul, and spirit. The body that the man or woman wore, if I understand their theory aright which perhaps I, an ignorant person, do not, was but a kind of sack or fleshly covering containing these different principles. Or mayhap it did not contain them all, but was simply a house as it were, in which they lived from time to time and seldom all together, although one or more of them was present continually, as though to keep the place warmed and aired.

This is but a casual illustrative suggestion, for what right have I, Allan Quatermain, out of my little reading and probably erroneous deductions, to form any judgment as to the theories of the old Egyptians? Still these, as I understand them, suffice to furnish me with the text that man is not one, but many, in which connection it may be remembered that often in Scripture he is spoken of as being the home of many demons, seven, I think. Also, to come to another far-off example, the Zulus talk of their witch-doctors as being inhabited by "a multitude of spirits."

Anyhow of one thing I am quite sure, we are not always the same. Different personalities actuate us at different times. In one hour passion of this sort or the other is our lord; in another we are reason itself. In one hour we follow the basest appetites; in another we hate them and the spirit arising through our mortal murk shines within or above us like a star. In one hour our desire is to kill and spare not; in another we are filled with the holiest compassion even towards an insect or a snake, and are ready to forgive like a god. Everything rules us in turn, to such an extent indeed, that sometimes one begins to wonder whether we really rule anything.

Now the reason of all this homily is that I, Allan, the most practical and unimaginative of persons, just a homely, half-educated hunter and trader who chances to have seen a good deal of the particular little world in which his lot was cast, at one period of my life became the victim of spiritual longings.

I am a man who has suffered great bereavements in my time such as have seared my soul, since, perhaps because of my rather primitive and simple nature, my affections are very strong. By day or night I can never forget those whom I have loved and whom I believe to have loved me.

For you know, in our vanity some of us are apt to hold that certain people with whom we have been intimate upon the earth, really did care for us and, in our still greater vanity—or should it be called madness?—to imagine that they still care for us after they have left the earth and entered on some new state of society and surroundings which, if they exist, inferentially are much more congenial than any they can have experienced here. At times, however, cold doubts strike us as to this matter, of which we long to know the truth. Also behind looms a still blacker doubt, namely whether they live at all.

For some years of my lonely existence these problems haunted me day by day, till at length I desired above everything on earth to lay them at rest in one way or another. Once, at Durban, I met a man who was a spiritualist to whom I confided a little of my perplexities. He laughed at me and said that they could be settled with the greatest ease. All I had to do was to visit a certain local medium who for a fee of one guinea would tell me everything I wanted to know. Although I rather grudged the guinea, being more than usually hard up at the time, I called upon this person, but over the results of that visit, or rather the lack of them, I draw a veil.

My queer and perhaps unwholesome longing, however, remained with me and would not be abated. I consulted a clergyman of my acquaintance, a good and spiritually-minded man, but he could only shrug his shoulders and refer me to the Bible, saying, quite rightly I doubt not, that with what it reveals I ought to be contented. Then I read certain mystical books which were recommended to me. These were full of fine words, undiscoverable in a pocket dictionary, but really took me no forwarder, since in them I found nothing that I could not have invented myself, although while I was actually studying them, they seemed to convince me. I even tackled Swedenborg, or rather samples of him, for he is very copious, but without satisfactory results. [Ha!—JB]

Then I gave up the business.

Some months later I was in Zululand and being near the Black Kloof where he dwelt, I paid a visit to my acquaintance of whom I have written elsewhere, the wonderful and ancient dwarf, Zikali, known as "The-Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born," also more universally among the Zulus as "Opener-of-Roads." When we had talked of many things connected with the state of Zululand and its politics, I rose to leave for my waggon, since I never cared for sleeping in the Black Kloof if it could be avoided.

"Is there nothing else that you want to ask me, Macumazahn?" asked the old dwarf, tossing back his long hair and looking at—I had almost written through—me.

I shook my head.

"That is strange, Macumazahn, for I seem to see something written on your mind—something to do with spirits."

Then I remembered all the problems that had been troubling me, although in truth I had never thought of propounding them to Zikali.

"Ah! it comes back, does it?" he exclaimed, reading my thought. "Out with it, then, Macumazahn, while I am in a mood to answer, and before I grow tired, for you are an old friend of mine and will so remain till the end, many years hence, and if I can serve you, I will."

I filled my pipe and sat down again upon the stool of carved red-wood which had been brought for me.

"You are named 'Opener-of-Roads,' are you not, Zikali?" I said.

"Yes, the Zulus have always called me that, since before the days of Chaka. But what of names, which often enough mean nothing at all?"

"Only that I want to open a road, Zikali, that which runs across the River of Death."

"Oho!" he laughed, "it is very easy," and snatching up a little assegai that lay beside him, he proffered it to me, adding, "Be brave now and fall on that. Then before I have counted sixty the road will be wide open, but whether you will see anything on it I cannot tell you."

Again I shook my head and answered,

"It is against our law. Also while I still live I desire to know whether I shall meet certain others on that road after my time has come to cross the River. Perhaps you who deal with spirits, can prove the matter to me, which no one else seems able to do."

"Oho!" laughed Zikali again. "What do my ears hear? Am I, the poor Zulu cheat, as you will remember once you called me, Macumazahn, asked to show that which is hidden from all the wisdom of the great White People?"

"The question is," I answered with irritation, "not what you are asked to do, but what you can do."

"That I do not know yet, Macumazahn. Whose spirits do you desire to see? If that of a woman called Mameena is one of them, I think that perhaps I whom she loved——"<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> For the history of Mameena see the book called "Child of Storm."—Editor.

"She is *not* one of them, Zikali. Moreover, if she loved you, you paid back her love with death."

"Which perhaps was the kindest thing I could do, Macumazahn, for reasons that you may be able to guess, and others with which I will not trouble you. But if not hers, whose? Let me look, let me look! Why, there seems to be two of them, head-wives, I mean, and I thought that white men only took one wife. Also a multitude of others; their faces float up in the water of your mind. An old man with grey hair, little children, perhaps they were brothers and sisters, and some who may be friends. Also very clear indeed that Mameena whom you do not wish to see. Well, Macumazahn, this is unfortunate, since she is the only one whom I can show you, or rather put you in the way of finding. Unless indeed there are other Kaffir women——"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, Macumazahn, that only black feet travel on the road which I can open; over those in which ran white blood I have no power."

"Then it is finished," I said, rising again and taking a step or two towards the gate.

"Come back and sit down, Macumazahn. I did not say so. Am I the only ruler of magic in Africa, which I am told is a big country?"

I came back and sat down, for my curiosity, a great failing with me, was excited.

"Thank you, Zikali," I said, "but I will have no dealings with more of your witch-doctors."

"No, no, because you are afraid of them; quite without reason, Macumazahn, seeing that they are all cheats except myself. I am the last child of wisdom, the rest are stuffed with lies, as Chaka found out when he killed every one of them whom he could catch. But perhaps there might be a white doctor who would have rule over white spirits."

"If you mean missionaries——" I began hastily.

"No, Macumazahn, I do not mean your praying men who are cast in one mould and measured with one rule, and say what they are taught to say, not thinking for themselves."

"Some of them think, Zikali."

"Yes, and then the others fall on them with big sticks. The real priest is he to whom the Spirit comes, not he who feeds upon its wrappings, and speaks through a mask carved by his father's fathers. I am a priest like that, which is why all my fellowship have hated me."

"If so, you have paid back their hate, Zikali, but cease to cast round the lion, like a timid hound, and tell me what you mean. Of whom do you speak?"

"That is the trouble, Macumazahn. I do not know. This lion, or rather lioness, lies hid in the caves of a very distant mountain and I have never seen her—in the flesh."

"Then how can you talk of what you have never seen?"

"In the same way, Macumazahn, that your priests talk of what they have never seen, because they, or a few of them, have knowledge of it. I will tell you a secret. All seers who live at the same time, if they are great, commune with each other because they are akin and their spirits meet in sleep or dreams. Therefore I know of a mistress of our craft, a very lioness among jackals, who for thousands of years has lain sleeping in the northern caves and, humble though I am, she knows of me."

"Quite so," I said, yawning, "but perhaps, Zikali, you will come to the point of the spear. What of her? How is she named, and if she exists will she help me?"

"I will answer your question backwards, Macumazahn. I think that she will help you if you help her, in what way I do not know, because although witch-doctors sometimes work without pay, as I am doing now, Macumazahn, witch-doctoresses never do. As for her name, the only one that she has among our company is 'Queen,' because she is the first of all of them and the most beautiful among women. For the rest I can tell you nothing, except that she has always been and I suppose, in this shape or in that, will always be while the world lasts, because she has found the secret of life unending."

"You mean that she is immortal, Zikali," I answered with a smile.

"I do not say that, Macumazahn, because my little mind cannot shape the thought of immortality. But when I was a babe, which is far ago, she had lived so long that scarce would she know the difference between then and now, and already in her breast was all wisdom gathered. I know it, because although, as I have said, we have never seen each other, at times we walk together in our sleep, for thus she shares her loneliness, and I think, though this may be but a dream, that last night she told me to send you on to her to

seek an answer to certain questions which you would put to me to-day. Also to me she seemed to desire that you should do her a service; I know not what service."

Now I grew angry and asked,

"Why does it please you to fool me, Zikali, with such talk as this? If there is any truth in it, show me where the woman called *Queen* lives and how I am to come to her."

The old wizard took up the little assegai which he had offered to me and with its blade raked out ashes from the fire that always burnt in front of him. While he did so, he talked to me, as I thought in a random fashion, perhaps to distract my attention, of a certain white man whom he said I should meet upon my journey and of his affairs, also of other matters, none of which interested me much at the time. These ashes he patted down flat and then on them drew a map with the point of his spear, making grooves for streams, certain marks for bush and forest, wavy lines for water and swamps and little heaps for hills.

When he had finished it all he bade me come round the fire and study the picture across which by an after-thought he drew a wandering furrow with the edge of the assegai to represent a river, and gathered the ashes in a lump at the northern end to signify a large mountain.

"Look at it well, Macumazahn," he said, "and forget nothing, since if you make this journey and forget, you die. Nay, no need to copy it in that book of yours, for see, I will stamp it on your mind."

Then suddenly he gathered up the warm ashes in a double handful and threw them into my face, muttering something as he did so and adding aloud,

"There, now you will remember."

"Certainly I shall," I answered, coughing, "and I beg that you will not play such a joke upon me again."

As a matter of fact, whatever may have been the reason, I never forgot any detail of that extremely intricate map.

"That big river must be the Zambesi," I stuttered, "and even then the mountain of your Queen, if it be her mountain, is far away, and how can I come there alone?"

"I don't know, Macumazahn, though perhaps you might do so in company. At least I believe that in the old days people used to travel to the place, since I have heard a great city stood there once which was the heart of a mighty empire."

Now I pricked up my ears, for though I believed nothing of Zikali's story of a wonderful Queen, I was always intensely interested in past civilisations and their relics. Also I knew that the old wizard's knowledge was extensive and peculiar, however he came by it, and I did not think that he would lie to me in this matter. Indeed to tell the truth, then and there I made up my mind that if it were in any way possible, I would attempt this journey.

"How did people travel to the city, Zikali?"

"By sea, I suppose, Macumazahn, but I think that you will be wise not to try that road, since I believe that on the sea side the marshes are now impassable and you will be safer on your feet."

"You want me to go on this adventure, Zikali. Why? I know you never do anything without motive."

"Oho! Macumazahn, you are clever and see deeper into the trunk of a tree than most. Yes, I want you to go for three reasons. First, that you may satisfy your soul on certain matters and I would help you to do so. Secondly, because I want to satisfy mine, and thirdly, because I know that you will come back safe to be a prop to me in things that will happen in days unborn. Otherwise I would have told you nothing of this story, since it is necessary to me that you should remain living beneath the sun."

"Have done, Zikali. What is it that you desire?"

"Oh! a great deal that I shall get, but chiefly two things, so with the rest I will not trouble you. First I desire to know whether these dreams of mine of a wonderful white witch-doctress, or witch, and of my converse with her are indeed more than dreams. Next I would learn whether certain plots of mine at which I have worked for years, will succeed."

"What plots, Zikali, and how can my taking a distant journey tell you anything about them?"

"You know them well enough, Macumazahn; they have to do with the overthrow of a Royal House that has worked me bitter wrong. As to how your journey can help me, why, thus. You shall promise to me to ask of this Queen whether Zikali, Opener-of-Roads, shall triumph or be overthrown in that on which he has set his heart."

"As you seem to know this witch so well, why do you not ask her yourself, Zikali?"

"To ask is one thing, Macumazahn. To get an answer is another. I have asked in the watches of the night, and the reply was, 'Come hither and perchance I will tell you.' 'Queen,' I said, 'how can I come save in the spirit, who am an ancient and a crippled dwarf scarcely able to stand upon my feet?'"

"Then send a messenger, Wizard, and be sure that he is white, for of black savages I have seen more than enough. Let him bear a token also that he comes from you and tell me of it in your sleep. Moreover let that token be something of power which will protect him on the journey."

"Such is the answer that comes to me in my dreams, Macumazahn."

"Well, what token will you give me, Zikali?"

He groped about in his robe and produced a piece of ivory of the size of a large chessman, that had a hole in it, through which ran a plaited cord of the stiff hairs from an elephant's tail. On this article, which was of a rusty brown colour, he breathed, then having whispered to it for a while, handed it to me.

I took the talisman, for such I guessed it to be, idly enough, held it to the light to examine it, and started back so violently that almost I let it fall. I do not quite know why I started, but I think it was because some influence seemed to leap from it to me. Zikali started also and cried out,

"Have a care, Macumazahn. Am I young that I can bear being dashed to the ground?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, still staring at the thing which I perceived to be a most wonderfully fashioned likeness of the old dwarf himself as he appeared before me crouched upon the ground. There were the deepset eyes, the great head, the toad-like shape, the long hair, all.

"It is a clever carving, is it not, Macumazahn? I am skilled in that art, you know, and therefore can judge of carving."

"Yes, I know," I answered, bethinking me of another statuette of his which he had given to me on the morrow of the death of her from whom it was modelled. "But what of the thing?"

"Macumazahn, it has come down to me through the ages. As you may have heard, all great doctors when they die pass on their wisdom and something of their knowledge to another doctor of spirits who is still living on the earth, that nothing may be lost, or as little as possible. Also I have learned that to such likenesses as these may be given the strength of him or her from whom they were shaped."

Now I bethought me of the old Egyptians and their *Ka* statues of which I had read, and that these statues, magically charmed and set in the tombs of the departed, were supposed to be inhabited everlastingly by the Doubles of the dead endued with more power even than ever these possessed in life. But of this I said nothing to Zikali, thinking that it would take too much explanation, though I wondered very much how he had come by the same idea.

"When that ivory is hung over your heart, Macumazahn, where you must always wear it, learn that with it goes the strength of Zikali; the thought that would have been his thought and the wisdom that is his wisdom, will be your companions, as much as though he walked at your side and could instruct you in every peril. Moreover north and south and east and west this image is known to men who, when they see it, will bow down and obey, opening a road to him who wears the medicine of the Opener-of-Roads."

"Indeed," I said, smiling, "and what is this colour on the ivory?"

"I forget, Macumazahn, who have had it a great number of years, ever since it descended to me from a forefather of mine, who was fashioned in the same mould as I am. It looks like blood, does it not? It is a pity that Mameena is not still alive, since she whose memory was so excellent might have been able to tell you," and as he spoke, with a motion that was at once sure and swift, he threw the loop of elephant hair over my head.

Hastily I changed the subject, feeling that after his wont this old wizard, the most terrible man whom ever I knew, who had been so much concerned with the tragic death of Mameena, was stabbing at me in some hidden fashion.

"You tell me to go on this journey," I said, "and not alone. Yet for companion you give me only an ugly piece of ivory shaped as no man ever was," here I got one back at Zikali, "and from the look of it, steeped in blood, which ivory, if I had my way, I would throw into the camp fire. Who, then, am I to take with me?"

"Don't do that, Macumazahn—I mean throw the ivory into the fire—since I have no wish to burn before my time, and if you do, you who have worn it might burn with me. At least certainly you would die with the magic thing and go to acquire knowledge more quickly than you desire. No, no, and do not try to take it off your neck, or rather try if you will."

I did try, but something seemed to prevent me from accomplishing my purpose of giving the carving back to Zikali as I wished to do. First my pipe got in the way of my hand, then the elephant hairs caught in the collar of my coat; then a pang of rheumatism to which I was accustomed from an old lion-bite, developed of a sudden in my arm, and lastly I grew tired of bothering about the thing.

Zikali, who had been watching my movements, burst out into one of his terrible laughs that seemed to fill the whole kloof and to re-echo from its rocky walls. It died away and he went on, without further reference to the talisman or image.

"You asked whom you were to take with you, Macumazahn. Well, as to this I must make inquiry of those who know. Man, my medicines!"

From the shadows in the hut behind darted out a tall figure carrying a great spear in one hand and in the other a catskin bag which with a salute he laid down at the feet of his master. This salute, by the way, was that of a Zulu word which means "Lord" or "Home" of Ghosts.

Zikali groped in the bag and produced from it certain knuckle-bones.

"A common method," he muttered, "such as every vulgar wizard uses, but one that is quick and, as the matter concerned is small, will serve my turn. Let us see now, whom you shall take with you, Macumazahn."

Then he breathed upon the bones, shook them up in his thin hands and with a quick turn of the wrist, threw them into the air. After this he studied them carefully, where they lay among the ashes which he had raked out of the fire, those that he had used for the making of his map.

"Do you know a man named Umslopogaas, Macumazahn, the chief of a tribe that is called The People of the Axe, whose titles of praise are Bulalio or the Slaughterer, and Woodpecker, the latter from the way he handles his ancient axe? He is a savage fellow, but one of high blood and higher courage, a great captain in his way, though he will never come to anything, save a glorious death—in your company, I think, Macumazahn." (Here he studied the bones again for a while.) "Yes, I am sure, in your company, though not upon this journey."

"I have heard of him," I answered cautiously. "It is said in the land that he is a son of Chaka, the great king of the Zulus."

"Is it, Macumazahn? And is it said also that he was the slayer of Chaka's brother, Dingaan, also the lover of the fairest woman that the Zulus have ever seen, who was called Nada the Lily? Unless indeed a certain Mameena, who, I seem to remember, was a friend of yours, may have been even more beautiful?"

"I know nothing of Nada the Lily," I answered.

"No, no, Mameena, 'the Waiting Wind,' has blown over her fame, so why should you know of one who has been dead a long while? Why also, Macumazahn, do you always bring women into every business? I begin to believe that although you are so strict in a white man's fashion, you must be too fond of them, a weakness which makes for ruin to any man. Well, now, I think that this wolf-man, this axe-man, this warrior, Umslopogaas should be a good fellow to you on your journey to visit the white witch, Queen—another woman by the way, Macumazahn, and therefore one of whom you should be careful. Oh! yes, he will come with you—because of a man called Lousta and a woman named Monazi, a wife of his who hates him and does—not hate Lousta. I am almost sure that he will come with you, so do not stop to ask questions about him."

"Is there anyone else?" I inquired.

Zikali glanced at the bones again, poking them about in the ashes with his toe, then replied with a yawn,

"You seem to have a little yellow man in your service, a clever snake who knows how to creep through grass, and when to strike and when to lie hidden. I should take him too, if I were you."

"You know well that I have such a man, Zikali, a Hottentot named Hans, clever in his way but drunken, very faithful too, since he loved my father before me. He is cooking my supper in the waggon now. Are there to be any others?"

"No, I think you three will be enough, with a guard of soldiers from the People of the Axe, for you will meet with fighting and a ghost or two. Umslopogaas has always one at his elbow named Nada, and perhaps you have several. For instance, there was a certain Mameena whom I always seem to feel about me when you are near, Macumazahn.

"Why, the wind is rising again, which is odd on so still an evening. Listen to how it wails, yes, and stirs your hair, though mine hangs straight enough. But why do I talk of ghosts, seeing that you travel to seek other ghosts, white ghosts, beyond my ken, who can only deal with those who were black?"

"Good-night, Macumazahn, good-night. When you return from visiting the white Queen, that Great One beneath whose feet I, Zikali, who am also great in my way, am but a grain of dust, come and tell me her answer to my question.

"Meanwhile, be careful always to wear that pretty little image which I have given you, as a young lover sometimes wears a lock of hair cut from the head of some fool-girl that he thinks is fond of him. It will bring you safety and luck, Macumazahn, which, for the most part, is more than the lock of hair does to the lover. Oh! it is a strange world, full of jest to those who can see the strings that work it. I am one of them, and perhaps, Macumazahn, you are another, or will be before all is done—or begun.

"Good-night, and good fortune to you on your journeyings, and, Macumazahn, although you are so fond of women, be careful not to fall in love with that white Queen, because it would make others jealous; I mean some whom you have lost sight of for a while, also I think that being under a curse of her own, she is not one whom you can put into your sack. *Oho! Oho-ho!* Slave, bring me my blanket, it grows cold, and my medicine also, that which protects me from the ghosts, who are thick to-night. Macumazahn brings them, I think. *Oho-ho!*"

I turned to depart but when I had gone a little way Zikali called me back again and said, speaking very low,

"When you meet this Umslopogaas, as you will meet him, he who is called the Woodpecker and the Slaughterer, say these words to him,

"A bat has been twittering round the hut of the Opener-of-Roads, and to his ears it squeaked the name of a certain Lousta and the name of a woman called Monazi. Also it twittered another greater name that may not be uttered, that of an elephant who shakes the earth, and said that this elephant sniffs the air with his trunk and grows angry, and sharpens his tusks to dig a certain Woodpecker out of his hole in a tree that grows near the Witch Mountain. Say, too, that the Opener-of-Roads thinks that this Woodpecker would be wise to fly north for a while in the company of one who watches by night, lest harm should come to a bird that pecks at the feet of the great and chatters of it in his nest."

Then Zikali waved his hand and I went, wondering into what plot I had stumbled.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MESSENGERS

I did not rest as I should that night who somehow was never able to sleep well in the neighbourhood of the Black Kloof. I suppose that Zikali's constant talk about ghosts, with his hints and innuendoes concerning those who were dead, always affected my nerves till, in a subconscious way, I began to believe that such things existed and were hanging about me. Many people are open to the power of suggestion, and I am afraid that I am one of them.

However, the sun which has such strength to kill noxious things, puts an end to ghosts more quickly even than it does to other evil vapours and emanations, and when I woke up to find it shining brilliantly in a pure heaven, I laughed with much heartiness over the whole affair.

Going to the spring near which we were outspanned, I took off my shirt to have a good wash, still chuckling at the memory of all the hocus-pocus of my old friend, the Opener-of-Roads.

While engaged in this matutinal operation I struck my hand against something and looking, observed that it was the hideous little ivory image of Zikali, which he had set about my neck. The sight of the thing and the memory of his ridiculous talk about it, especially of its assertion that it had come down to him through the ages, which it could not have done, seeing that it was a likeness of himself, irritated me so much that I proceeded to take it off with the full intention of throwing it into the spring.

As I was in the act of doing this, from a clump of reeds mixed with bushes, quite close to me, there came a sound of hissing, and suddenly above them appeared the head of a great black *immamba*, perhaps the deadliest of all our African snakes, and the only one I know which will attack man without provocation.

Leaving go of the image, I sprang back in a great hurry towards where my gun lay. Then the snake vanished and making sure that it had departed to its hole, which was probably at a distance, I returned to the pool, and once more began to take off the talisman in order to consign it to the bottom of the pool.

After all, I reflected, it was a hideous and probably a blood-stained thing which I did not in the least wish to wear about my neck like a lady's love-token.

Just as it was coming over my head, suddenly from the other side of the bush that infernal snake popped up again, this time, it was clear, really intent on business. It began to move towards me in the lightning-like way *immambas* have, hissing and flicking its tongue.

I was too quick for my friend, however, for snatching up the gun that I had lain down beside me, I let it have a charge of buckshot in the neck which nearly cut it in two, so that it fell down and expired with hideous convulsive writhings.

Hearing the shot Hans came running from the waggon to see what was the matter. Hans, I should say, was that same Hottentot who had been the companion of most of my journeyings since my father's day. He was with me when as a young fellow I accompanied Retief to Dingaan's kraal, and like myself, escaped the massacre.<sup>[1]</sup> Also we shared many other adventures, including the great one in the Land of the Ivory Child where he slew the huge elephant-god, Jana, and himself was slain. But of this journey we did not dream in those days.

[1] See the book called "Marie."—Editor.

For the rest Hans was a most entirely unprincipled person, but as the Boers say, "as clever as a waggonload of monkeys." Also he drank when he got the chance. One good quality he had, however; no man was ever more faithful, and perhaps it would be true to say that neither man nor woman ever loved me, unworthy, quite so well.

In appearance he rather resembled an antique and dilapidated baboon; his face was wrinkled like a dried nut and his quick little eyes were bloodshot. I never knew what his age was, any more than he did himself, but the years had left him tough as whipcord and absolutely untiring. Lastly he was perhaps the best hand at following a spoor that ever I knew and up to a hundred and fifty yards or so, a very deadly shot with a rifle especially when he used a little single-barrelled, muzzle-loading gun of mine made by Purdey which he named *Intombi* or Maiden. Of that gun, however, I have written in "The Holy Flower" and elsewhere.

"What is it, Baas?" he asked. "Here there are no lions, nor any game."

"Look the other side of the bush, Hans."

He slipped round it, making a wide circle with his usual caution, then, seeing the snake which was, by the way, I think, the biggest *immamba* I ever killed, suddenly froze, as it were, in a stiff attitude that reminded me of a pointer when it scents game. Having made sure that it was dead, he nodded and said,

"Black '*mamba*, or so you would call it, though I know it for something else."

"What else, Hans?"

"One of the old witch-doctor Zikali's spirits which he sets at the mouth of this kloof to warn him of who comes or goes. I know it well, and so do others. I saw it listening behind a stone when you were up the kloof last evening talking with the Opener-of-Roads."

"Then Zikali will lack a spirit," I answered, laughing, "which perhaps he will not miss amongst so many. It serves him right for setting the brute on me."

"Quite so, Baas. He will be angry. I wonder why he did it?" he added suspiciously, "seeing that he is such a friend of yours."

"He didn't do it, Hans. These snakes are very fierce and give battle, that is all."

Hans paid no attention to my remark, which probably he thought only worthy of a white man who does not understand, but rolled his yellow, bloodshot eyes about, as though in search of explanations. Presently they fell upon the ivory that hung about my neck, and he started.

"Why do you wear that pretty likeness of the Great One yonder over your heart, as I have known you do with things that belonged to women in past days, Baas? Do you know that it is Zikali's Great Medicine, nothing less, as everyone does throughout the land? When Zikali sends an order far away, he always sends that image with it, for then he who receives the order knows that he must obey or die. Also the messenger knows that he will come to no harm if he does not take it off, because, Baas, the image is Zikali himself, and Zikali is the image. They are one and the same. Also it is the image of his father's father's father—or so he says."

"That is an odd story," I said.

Then I told Hans as much as I thought advisable of how this horrid little talisman came into my possession.

Hans nodded without showing any surprise.

"So we are going on a long journey," he said. "Well, I thought it was time that we did something more than wander about these tame countries selling blankets to stinking old women and so forth, Baas. Moreover, Zikali does not wish that you should come to harm, doubtless because he does wish to make use of you afterwards—oh! it's safe to talk now when that spirit is away looking for another snake. What were you doing with the Great Medicine, Baas, when the *mamba* attacked you?"

"Taking it off to throw it into the pool, Hans, as I do not like the thing. I tried twice and each time the *immamba* appeared."

"Of course it appeared, Baas, and what is more, if you had taken that Medicine off and thrown it away *you* would have disappeared, since the *mamba* would have killed you. Zikali wanted to show you that, Baas, and that is why he set the snake at you."

"You are a superstitious old fool, Hans."

"Yes, Baas, but my father knew all about that Great Medicine before me, for he was a bit of a doctor, and so does every wizard and witch for a thousand miles or more. I tell you, Baas, it is known by all though no one ever talks about it, no, not even the king himself. Baas, speaking to you, not with the voice of Hans the old drunkard, but with that of the Predikant, your reverend father, who made so good a Christian of me and who tells me to do so from up in Heaven where the hot fires are which the wood feeds of itself, I beg you not to try to throw away the Medicine again, or if you wish to do so, to leave me behind on this journey. For you see, Baas, although I am now so good, almost like one of those angels with the pretty goose's wings in the pictures, I feel that I should like to grow a little better before I go to the Place of Fires to make report to your reverend father, the Predikant."

Thinking of how horrified my dear father would be if he could hear all this string of ridiculous nonsense and learn the result of his moral and religious lessons on raw Hottentot material, I burst out laughing. But Hans went on as gravely as a judge,

"Wear the Great Medicine, Baas, wear it; part with the liver inside you before you part with that, Baas. It may not be as pretty or smell as sweet as a woman's hair in a little gold bottle, but it is much more useful. The sight of the woman's hair will only make you sick in your stomach and cause you to remember a lot of things which you had much better forget, but the Great Medicine, or rather Zikali who is in it, will keep the assegaïs and sickness out of you and turn back bad magic on to the heads of those who sent it, and always bring us plenty to eat and perhaps, if we are lucky, a little to drink too sometimes."

"Go away," I said, "I want to wash."

"Yes, Baas, but with the Baas's leave I will sit on the other side of that bush with the gun—not to look at the Baas without his clothes, because white people are always so ugly that it makes me feel ill to see them undressed, also because—the Baas will forgive me—but because they smell. No, not for that, but just to see that no other snake comes."

"Get out of the road, you dirty little scoundrel, and stop your impudence," I said, lifting my foot suggestively.

Thereon he scooted with a subdued grin round the other side of the bush, whence as I knew well he kept his eye fixed on me to be sure that I made no further attempt to take off the Great Medicine.

Now of this talisman I may as well say at once that I am no believer in it or its precious influences. Therefore, although it was useful sometimes, notably twice when Umslopogaas was concerned, I do not know whether personally I should have done better or worse upon that journey if I had thrown it into the pool.

It is true, however, that until quite the end of this history when it became needful to do so to save another, I never made any further attempt to remove it from my neck, not even when it rubbed a sore in my skin, because I did not wish to offend the prejudices of Hans.

It is true, moreover, that this hideous ivory had a reputation which stretched very far from the place where it was made and was regarded with great reverence by all kinds of queer people, even by the Amahagger themselves, of whom presently, as they say in pedigrees, a fact of which I found sundry proofs. Indeed, I saw a first example of it when a little while later I met that great warrior, Umslopogaas, Chief of the People of the Axe.

For, after determining firmly, for reasons which I will set out, that I would not visit this man, in the end I did so, although by then I had given up any idea of journeying across the Zambesi to look for a mysterious and non-existent witch-woman, as Zikali had suggested that I should do. To begin with I knew that his talk was all rubbish and, even if it were not, that at the bottom of it was some desire of the Opener-of-Roads that I should make a path for him to travel towards an indefinite but doubtless evil object of his own. Further, by this time I had worn through that mood of mine which had caused me to yearn for correspondence with the departed and a certain knowledge of their existence.

I wonder whether many people understand, as I do, how entirely distinct and how variable are these moods which sway us, or at any rate some of us, at sundry periods of our lives. As I think I have already suggested, at one time we are all spiritual; at another all physical; at one time we are sure that our lives here are as a dream and a shadow and that the real existence lies elsewhere; at another that these brief days of ours are the only business with which we have to do and that of it we must make the best. At one time we think our loves much more immortal than the stars; at another that they are mere shadows cast by the baleful sun of desire upon the shallow and fleeting water we call Life which seems to flow out of nowhere into nowhere. At one time we are full of faith, at another all such hopes are blotted out by a black wall of Nothingness, and so on *ad infinitum*. Only very stupid people, or humbugs, are or pretend to be, always consistent and unchanging.

To return, I determined not only that I would not travel north to seek that which no living man will ever find, certainly as to the future, but also, to show my independence of Zikali, that I would not visit this chief, Umslopogaas. So, having traded all my goods and made a fair profit (on paper), I set myself to return to Natal, proposing to rest awhile in my little house at Durban, and told Hans my mind.

"Very good, Baas," he said. "I, too, should like to go to Durban. There are lots of things there that we cannot get here," and he fixed his roving eye upon a square-faced gin bottle, which as it happened was filled with nothing stronger than water, because all the gin was drunk. "Yet, Baas, we shall not see the Berea for a long while."

"Why do you say that?" I asked sharply.

"Oh! Baas, I don't know, but you went to visit the Opener-of-Roads, did you not, and he told you to go north and lent you a certain Great Medicine, did he not?"

Here Hans proceeded to light his corncob pipe with an ash from the fire, all the time keeping his beady eyes fixed upon that part of me where he knew the talisman was hung.

"Quite true, Hans, but now I mean to show Zikali that I am not his messenger, for south or north or east or west. So to-morrow morning we cross the river and trek for Natal."

"Yes, Baas, but then why not cross it this evening? There is still light."

"I have said that we will cross it to-morrow morning," I answered with that firmness which I have read always indicates a man of character, "and I do not change my word."

"No, Baas, but sometimes other things change besides words. Will the Baas have that buck's leg for supper, or the stuff out of a tin with a dint in it, which we bought at a store two years ago? The flies have got at the buck's leg, but I cut out the bits with the maggots on it and ate them myself."

Hans was right, things do change, especially the weather. That night, unexpectedly, for when I turned in the sky seemed quite serene, there came a terrible rain long before it was due, which lasted off and on for three whole days and continued intermittently for an indefinite period. Needless to say the river, which it would have been so easy to cross on this particular evening, by the morning was a raging torrent, and so remained for several weeks.

In despair at length I trekked south to where a ford was reported, which, when reached, proved impracticable.

I tried another, a dozen miles further on, which was very hard to come to over boggy land. It looked all right and we were getting across finely, when suddenly one of the wheels sank in an unsuspected hole and there we stuck. Indeed, I believe the waggon, or bits of it, would have remained in the neighbourhood of that ford to this day, had I not managed to borrow some extra oxen belonging to a Christian Kaffir, and with their help to drag it back to the bank whence we had started.

As it happened I was only just in time, since a new storm which had burst further up the river, brought it down in flood again, a very heavy flood.

In this country, England, where I write, there are bridges everywhere and no one seems to appreciate them. If they think of them at all it is to grumble about the cost of their upkeep. I wish they could have experienced what a lack of them means in a wild country during times of excessive rain, and the same remark applied to roads. You should think more of your blessings, my friends, as the old woman said to her complaining daughter who had twins two years running, adding that they might have been triplets.

To return—after this I confessed myself beaten and gave up until such time as it should please Providence to turn off the water-tap. Trekking out of sight of that infernal river which annoyed me with its constant gurgling, I camped on a comparatively dry spot that overlooked a beautiful stretch of rolling veld. Towards sunset the clouds lifted and I saw a mile or two away a most extraordinary mountain on the lower slopes of which grew a dense forest. Its upper part, which was of bare rock, looked exactly like the seated figure of a grotesque person with the chin resting on the breast. There was the head, there were the arms, there were the knees. Indeed, the whole mass of it reminded me strongly of the effigy of Zikali which was tied about my neck, or rather of Zikali himself.

"What is that called?" I said to Hans, pointing to this strange hill, now blazing in the angry fire of the setting sun that had burst out between the storm clouds, which made it appear more ominous even than before.

"That is the Witch Mountain, Baas, where the Chief Umslopogaas and a blood brother of his who carried a great club used to hunt with the wolves. It is haunted and in a cave at the top of it lie the bones of Nada the Lily, the fair woman whose name is a song, she who was the love of Umslopogaas."<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[2]</sup> For the story of Umslopogaas and Nada see the book called "Nada the Lily."—Editor.

"Rubbish," I said, though I had heard something of all that story and remembered that Zikali had mentioned this Nada, comparing her beauty to that of another whom once I knew.

"Where then lives the Chief Umslopogaas?"

"They say that his town is yonder on the plain, Baas. It is called the Place of the Axe and is strongly fortified with a river round most of it, and his people are the People of the Axe. They are a fierce people, and all the country round here is uninhabited because Umslopogaas has cleaned out the tribes who used to live in it, first with his wolves and afterwards in war. He is so strong a chief and so terrible in battle that even Chaka himself was afraid of him, and they say that he brought Dingaan the King to his end because of a quarrel about this Nada. Cetywayo, the present king, too leaves him alone and to him he pays no tribute."

Whilst I was about to ask Hans from whom he had collected all this information, suddenly I heard sounds, and looking up, saw three tall men clad in full herald's dress rushing towards us at great speed.

"Here come some chips from the Axe," said Hans, and promptly bolted into the waggon.

I did not bolt because there was no time to do so without loss of dignity, but, although I wished I had my rifle with me, just sat still upon my stool and with great deliberation lighted my pipe, taking not the slightest notice of the three savage-looking fellows.

These, who I noted carried axes instead of assegais, rushed straight at me with the axes raised in such a fashion that anyone unacquainted with the habits of Zulu warriors of the old school, might have thought that they intended nothing short of murder.

As I expected, however, within about six feet of me they halted suddenly and stood there still as statues. For my part I went on lighting my pipe as though I did not see them and when at length I was obliged to lift my head, surveyed them with an air of mild interest.

Then I took a little book out of my pocket, it was my favourite copy of the Ingoldsby Legends—and began to read.

The passage which caught my eye, if “axe” be substituted for “knife” was not inappropriate. It was from “The Nurse’s Story,” and runs,

“But, oh! what a thing ’tis to see and to know  
That the bare knife is raised in the hand of the foe,  
Without hope to repel or to ward off the blow!”

This proceeding of mine astonished them a good deal who felt that they had, so to speak, missed fire. At last the soldier in the middle said,

“Are you blind, White Man?”

“No, Black Fellow,” I answered, “but I am short-sighted. Would you be so good as to stand out of my light?” a remark which puzzled them so much that all three drew back a few paces.

When I had read a little further I came to the following lines,

“’Tis plain,  
As anatomists tell us, that never again,  
Shall life revisit the foully slain  
When once they’ve been cut through the jugular vein.”

In my circumstances at that moment this statement seemed altogether too suggestive, so I shut up the book and remarked,

“If you are wanderers who want food, as I judge by your being so thin, I am sorry that I have little meat, but my servants will give you what they can.”

“Ow!” said the spokesman, “he calls us wanderers! Either he must be a very great man or he is mad.”

“You are right. I *am* a great man,” I answered, yawning, “and if you trouble me too much you will see that I can be mad also. Now what do you want?”

“We are messengers from the great Chief Umslopogaas, Captain of the People of the Axe, and we want tribute,” answered the man in a somewhat changed tone.

“Do you? Then you won’t get it. I thought that only the King of Zululand had a right to tribute, and your Captain’s name is not Cetywayo, is it?”

“Our Captain is King here,” said the man still more uncertainly.

“Is he indeed? Then away with you back to him and tell this King of whom I have never heard, though I have a message for a certain Umslopogaas, that Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, intends to visit him to-morrow, if he will send a guide at the first light to show the best path for the waggon.”

“Hearken,” said the man to his companions, “this is Macumazahn himself and no other. Well, we thought it, for who else would have dared——”

Then they saluted with their axes, calling me “Chief” and other fine names, and departed as they had come, at a run, calling out that my message should be delivered and that doubtless Umslopogaas would send the guide.

So it came about that, quite contrary to my intention, after all circumstances brought me to the Town of the Axe. Even to the last moment I had not meant to go there, but when the tribute was demanded I saw that it was best to do so, and having once passed my word it could not be altered. Indeed, I felt sure that in this event there would be trouble and that my oxen would be stolen, or worse.

So Fate having issued its decree, of which Hans’s version was that Zikali, or his Great Medicine, had so arranged things, I shrugged my shoulders and waited.

## CHAPTER III.

### UMSLOPOGAAS OF THE AXE

Next morning at the dawn guides arrived from the Town of the Axe, bringing with them a yoke of spare oxen, which showed that its Chief was really anxious to see me. So, in due course we inspanned and started, the guides leading us by a rough but practicable road down the steep hillside to the saucer-like plain beneath, where I saw many cattle grazing. Travelling some miles across this plain, we came at last to a river of no great breadth that encircled a considerable Kaffir town on three sides, the fourth being protected by a little line of koppies which were joined together with walls. Also the place was strongly fortified with fences and in every other way known to the native mind.

With the help of the spare oxen we crossed the river safely at the ford, although it was very full, and on the further side were received by a guard of men, tall, soldierlike fellows, all of them armed with axes as the messengers had been. They led us up to the cattle enclosure in the centre of the town, which although it could be used to protect beasts in case of emergency, also served the practical purpose of a public square.

Here some ceremony was in progress, for soldiers stood round the kraal while heralds pranced and shouted. At the head of the place in front of the chief's big hut was a little group of people, among whom a big, gaunt man sat upon a stool clad in a warrior's dress with a great and very long axe hafted with wire-lashed rhinoceros horn, laid across his knees.

Our guides led me, with Hans sneaking after me like a dejected and low-bred dog (for the waggon had stopped outside the gate), across the kraal to where the heralds shouted and the big man sat yawning. At once I noted that he was a very remarkable person, broad and tall and spare of frame, with long, tough-looking arms and a fierce face which reminded me of that of the late King Dingaan. Also he had a great hole in his head above the temple where the skull had been driven in by some blow, and keen, royal-looking eyes.

He looked up and seeing me, cried out,

"What! Has a white man come to fight me for the chieftainship of the People of the Axe? Well, he is a small one."

"No," I answered quietly, "but Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, has come to visit you in answer to your request, O Umslopogaas; Macumazahn whose name was known in this land before yours was told of, O Umslopogaas."

The Chief heard and rising from his seat, lifted the big axe in salute.

"I greet you, O Macumazahn," he said, "who although you are small in stature, are very great indeed in fame. Have I not heard how you conquered Bangu, although Saduko slew him, and of how you gave up the six hundred head of cattle to Tshoza and the men of the Amangwane who fought with you, the cattle that were your own? Have I not heard how you led the Tswana against the Usutu and stamped flat three of Cetwayo's regiments in the days of Panda, although, alas! because of an oath of mine I lifted no steel in that battle, I who will have nothing to do with those that spring from the blood of Senzangacona—perhaps because I smell too strongly of it, Macumazahn. Oh! yes, I have heard these and many other things concerning you, though until now it has never been my fortune to look upon your face, O Watcher-by-Night, and therefore I greet you well, Bold one, Cunning one, Upright one, Friend of us Black People."

"Thank you," I answered, "but you said something about fighting. If there is to be anything of the sort, let us get it over. If you want to fight, I am quite ready," and I tapped the rifle which I carried.

The grim Chief broke into a laugh and said,

"Listen. By an ancient law any man on this day in each year may fight me for this Chieftainship, as I fought and conquered him who held it before me, and take it from me with my life and the axe, though of late none seems to like the business. But that law was made before there were guns, or men like Macumazahn who, it is said, can hit a lizard on a wall at fifty paces. Therefore I tell you that if you wish to fight me with a rifle, O Macumazahn, I give in and you may have the chieftainship," and he laughed again in his fierce fashion.

"I think it is too hot for fighting either with guns or axes, and Chieftainships are honey that is full of stinging bees," I answered.

Then I took my seat on a stool that had been brought for me and placed by the side of Umslopogaas, after which the ceremony went on.

The heralds cried out the challenge to all and sundry to come and fight the Holder of the Axe for the chieftainship of the Axe without the slightest result, since nobody seemed to desire to do anything of the sort. Then, after a pause, Umslopogaas rose, swinging his formidable weapon round his head and declared that by right of conquest he was Chief of the Tribe for the ensuing year, an announcement that everybody accepted without surprise.

Again the heralds summoned all and sundry who had grievances, to come forward and to state them and receive redress.

After a little pause there appeared a very handsome woman with large eyes, particularly brilliant eyes that rolled as though they were in search of someone. She was finely dressed and I saw by the ornaments she wore that she held the rank of a chief's wife.

"I, Monazi, have a complaint to make," she said, "as it is the right of the humblest to do on this day. In succession to Zinita whom Dingaan slew with her children, I am your *Inkosikaas*, your head-wife, O Umslopogaas."

"That I know well enough," said Umslopogaas, "what of it?"

"This, that you neglect me for other women, as you neglected Zinita for Nada the Beautiful, Nada the witch. I am childless, as are all your wives because of the curse that this Nada left behind her. I demand that this curse should be lifted from me. For your sake I

abandoned Lousta the Chief, to whom I was betrothed, and this is the end of it, that I am neglected and childless.”

“Am I the Heavens Above that I can cause you to bear children, woman?” asked Umslopogaas angrily. “Would that you had clung to Lousta, my blood-brother and my friend, whom you lament, and left me alone.”

“That still may chance, if I am not better treated,” answered Monazi with a flash of her eyes. “Will you dismiss yonder new wife of yours and give me back my place, and will you lift the curse of Nada off me, or will you not?”

“As to the first,” answered Umslopogaas, “learn, Monazi, that I will not dismiss my new wife, who at least is gentler-tongued and truer-hearted than you are. As to the second, you ask that which it is not in my power to give, since children are the gift of Heaven, and barrenness is its bane. Moreover, you have done ill to bring into this matter the name of one who is dead, who of all women was the sweetest and most innocent. Lastly, I warn you before the people to cease from your plottings or traffic with Lousta, lest ill come of them to you, or him, even though he be my blood-brother, or to both.”

“Plottings!” cried Monazi in a shrill and furious voice. “Does Umslopogaas talk of plottings? Well, I have heard that Chaka the Lion left a son, and that this son has set a trap for the feet of him who sits on Chaka’s throne. Perchance that king has heard it also; perchance the People of the Axe will soon have another Chief.”

“Is it thus?” said Umslopogaas quietly. “And if so, will he be named Lousta?”

Then his smouldering wrath broke out and in a kind of roaring voice he went on,

“What have I done that the wives of my bosom should be my betrayers, those who would give me to death? Zinita betrayed me to Dingaan and in reward was slain, and my children with her. Now would you, Monazi, betray me to Cetywayo—though in truth there is naught to betray? Well, if so, bethink you and let Lousta bethink him of what chanced to Zinita, and of what chances to those who stand before the axe of Umslopogaas. What have I done, I say, that women should thus strive to work me ill?”

“This,” answered Monazi with a mocking laugh, “that you have loved one of them too well. If he would live in peace, he who has wives should favour all alike. Least of anything should he moan continually over one who is dead, a witch who has left a curse behind her and thus insulted and do wrong to the living. Also he would be wise to attend to the matters of his own tribe and household and to cease from ambitions that may bring him to the assegai, and them with him.”

“I have heard your counsel, Wife, so now begone!” said Umslopogaas, looking at her very strangely, and it seemed to me not without fear.

“Have you wives, Macumazahn?” he asked of me in a low voice when she was out of hearing.

“Only among the spirits,” I answered.

“Well for you then; moreover, it is a bond between us, for I too have but one true wife and she also is among the spirits. But go rest a while, and later we will talk.”

So I went, leaving the Chief to his business, thinking as I walked away of a certain message with which I was charged for him and of how into that message came names that I had just heard, namely that of a man called Lousta and of a woman called Monazi. Also I thought of the hints which in her jealous anger and disappointment at her lack of children, this woman had dropped about a plot against him who sat on the throne of Chaka, which of course must mean King Cetywayo himself.

I came to the guest-hut, which proved to be a very good place and clean; also in it I found plenty of food made ready for me and for my servants. After eating I slept for a time as it is always my fashion to do when I have nothing else on hand, since who knows for how long he may be kept awake at night? Indeed, it was not until the sun had begun to sink that a messenger came, saying that the Chief desired to see me if I had rested. So I went to his big hut which stood alone with a strong fence set round it at a distance, so that none could come within hearing of what was said, even at the door of the hut. I observed also that a man armed with an axe kept guard at the gateway in this fence round which he walked from time to time.

The Chief Umslopogaas was seated on a stool by the door of his hut with his rhinoceros-horn-handled axe which was fastened to his right wrist by a thong, leaning against his thigh, and a wolfskin hanging from his broad shoulders. Very grim and fierce he looked thus, with the red light of the sunset playing on him. He greeted me and pointed to another stool on which I sat myself down. Apparently he had been watching my eyes, for he said,

“I see that like other creatures which move at night, such as leopards and hyenas, you take note of all, O Watcher-by-Night, even of the soldier who guards this place and of where the fence is set and of how its gate is fashioned.”

“Had I not done so I should have been dead long ago, O Chief.”

“Yes, and because it is not my nature to do so as I should, perchance I shall soon be dead. It is not enough to be fierce and foremost in the battle, Macumazahn. He who would sleep safe and of whom, when he dies, folk will say ‘He has eaten’ (i.e., he has lived out his life), must do more than this. He must guard his tongue and even his thoughts! he must listen to the stirring of rats in the thatch and look for snakes in the grass; he must trust few, and least of all those who sleep upon his bosom. But those who have the Lion’s blood in them or who are prone to charge like a buffalo, often neglect these matters and therefore in the end they fall into a pit.”

“Yes,” I answered, “especially those who have the lion’s blood in them, whether that lion be man or beast.”

This I said because of the rumours I had heard that this Slaughterer was in truth the son of Chaka. Therefore not knowing whether or no he were playing on the word “lion,” which was Chaka’s title, I wished to draw him, especially as I saw in his face a great likeness to Chaka’s brother Dingaan, whom, it was whispered, this same Umslopogaas had slain. As it happened I failed, for after a pause he said,

“Why do you come to visit me, Macumazahn, who have never done so before?”

“I do not come to visit you, Umslopogaas. That was not my intention. You brought me, or rather the flooded rivers and you together brought me, for I was on my way to Natal and could not cross the drifts.”

“Yet I think you have a message for me, White Man, for not long ago a certain wandering witch-doctor who came here told me to expect you and that you had words to say to me.”

“Did he, Umslopogaas? Well, it is true that I have a message, though it is one that I did not mean to deliver.”

“Yet being here, perchance you will deliver it, Macumazahn, for those who have messages and will not speak them, sometimes come to trouble.”

"Yes, being here, I will deliver it, seeing that so it seems to be fated. Tell me, do you chance to know a certain Small One who is great, a certain Old One whose brain is young, a doctor who is called Opener-of-Roads?"

"I have heard of him, as have my forefathers for generations."

"Indeed, and if it pleases you to tell me, Umslopogaas, what might be the names of those forefathers of yours, who have heard of this doctor for generations? They must have been short-lived men and as such I should like to know of them."

"That you cannot," replied Umslopogaas shortly, "since they are *hlonipa* (i.e. not to be spoken) in this land."

"Indeed," I said again. "I thought that rule applied only to the names of kings, but of course I am but an ignorant white man who may well be mistaken on such matters of your Zulu customs."

"Yes, O Macumazahn, you may be mistaken or—you may not. It matters nothing. But what of this message of yours?"

"It came at the end of a long story, O Bulalio. But since you seek to know, these were the words of it, so nearly as I can remember them."

Then sentence by sentence I repeated to him all that Zikali had said to me when he called me back after bidding me farewell, which doubtless he did because he wished to cut his message more deeply into the tablets of my mind.

Umslopogaas listened to every syllable with a curious intentness, and then asked me to repeat it all again, which I did.

"Lousta! Monazi!" he said slowly. "Well, you heard those names to-day, did you not, White Man? And you heard certain things from the lips of this Monazi who was angry, that give colour to that talk of the Opener-of-Roads. It seems to me," he added, glancing about him and speaking in a low voice, "that what I suspected is true and that without doubt I am betrayed."

"I do not understand," I replied indifferently. "All this talk is dark to me, as is the message of the Opener-of-Roads, or rather its meaning. By whom and about what are you betrayed?"

"Let that snake sleep. Do not kick it with your foot. Suffice it you to know that my head hangs upon this matter; that I am a rat in a forked stick, and if the stick is pressed on by a heavy hand, then where is the rat?"

"Where all rats go, I suppose, that is, unless they are wise rats that bite the hand which holds the stick before it is pressed down."

"What is the rest of this story of yours, Macumazahn, which was told before the Opener-of-Roads gave you that message? Does it please you to repeat it to me that I may judge of it with my ears?"

"Certainly," I answered, "on one condition, that what the ears hear, the heart shall keep to itself alone."

Umslopogaas stooped and laid his hand upon the broad blade of the weapon beside him, saying,

"By the Axe I swear it. If I break the oath be the Axe my doom."

Then I told him the tale, as I have set it down already, thinking to myself that of it he would understand little, being but a wild warrior-man. As it chanced, however, I was mistaken, for he seemed to understand a great deal, perchance because such primitive natures are in closer touch with high and secret things than we imagine; perchance for other reasons with which I became acquainted later.

"It stands thus," he said when I had finished, "or so I think. You, Macumazahn, seek certain women who are dead to learn whether they still live, or are really dead, but so far have failed to find them. Still seeking, you asked the counsel of Zikali, Opener-of-Roads, he who among other titles is also called 'Home of Spirits.' He answered that he could not satisfy your heart because this tree was too tall for him to climb, but that far to the north there lives a certain white witch who has powers greater than his, being able to fly to the top of any tree, and to this white witch he bade you go. Have I the story right thus far?"

I answered that he had.

"Good! Then Zikali went on to choose you companions for your journey, but two, leaving out the guards or servants. I, Umhlopekazi, called Bulalio the Slaughterer, called the Woodpecker also, was one of these, and that little yellow monkey of a man whom I saw with you to-day, called Hansi, was the other. Then you made a mock of Zikali by determining not to visit me, Umhlopekazi, and not to go north to find the great white Queen of whom he had told you, but to return to Natal. Is that so?"

I said it was.

"Then the rain fell and the winds blew and the rivers rose in wrath so that you could not return to Natal, and after all by chance, or by fate, or by the will of Zikali, the wizard of wizards, you drifted here to the kraal of me, Umhlopekazi, and told me this story."

"Just so," I answered.

"Well, White Man, how am I to know that all this is not but a trap for my feet which already seem to feel cords between the toes of both of them? What token do you bring, O Watcher-by-Night? How am I to know that the Opener-of-Roads really sent me this message which has been delivered so strangely by one who wished to travel on another path? The wandering witch-doctor told me that he who came would bear some sign."

"I can't say," I answered, "at least in words. But," I added after reflection, "as you ask for a token, perhaps I might be able to show you something that would bring proof to your heart, if there were any secret place——"

Umslopogaas walked to the gateway of the fence and saw that the sentry was at his post. Then he walked round the hut casting an eye upon its roof, and muttered to me as he returned.

"Once I was caught thus. There lived a certain wife of mine who set her ear to the smoke-hole and so brought about the death of many, and among them of herself and of our children. Enter. All is safe. Yet if you talk, speak low."

So we went into the hut taking the stools with us, and seated ourselves by the fire that burned there on to which Umslopogaas threw chips of resinous wood.

"Now," he said.

I opened my shirt and by the clear light of the flame showed him the image of Zikali which hung about my neck. He stared at it, though touch it he would not. Then he stood up and lifting his great axe, he saluted the image with the word "*Makosi!*" the salute that is given to great wizards because they are supposed to be the home of many spirits.

"It is the big Medicine, the Medicine itself," he said, "that which has been known in the land since the time of Senzangacona, the father of the Zulu Royal House, and as it is said, before him."

"How can that be?" I asked, "seeing that this image represents Zikali, Opener-of-Roads, as an old man, and Senzangacona died many years ago?"

"I do not know," he answered, "but it is so. Listen. There was a certain Mopo, or as some called him, Umbopo, who was Chaka's body-servant and my foster-father, and he told me that twice this Medicine," and he pointed to the image, "was sent to Chaka, and that each time the Lion obeyed the message that came with it. A third time it was sent, but he did not obey the message and then—where was Chaka?"

Here Umslopogaas passed his hand across his mouth, a significant gesture amongst the Zulus.

"Mopo," I said, "yes, I have heard the story of Mopo, also that Chaka's body became *his* servant in the end, since Mopo killed him with the help of the princes Dingaan and Umhlangana. Also I have heard that this Mopo still lives, though not in Zululand."

"Does he, Macumazahn?" said Umslopogaas, taking snuff from a spoon and looking at me keenly over the spoon. "You seem to know a great deal, Macumazahn; too much as some might think."

"Yes," I answered, "perhaps I do know too much, or at any rate more than I want to know. For instance, O fosterling of Mopo and son of—was the lady named Baleka?—I know a good deal about *you*."

Umslopogaas stared at me and laying his hand upon the great axe, half rose. Then he sat down again.

"I think that this," and I touched the image of Zikali upon my breast, "would turn even the blade of the axe named Groan-maker," I said and paused. As nothing happened, I went on, "For instance, again I think I know—or have I dreamed it?—that a certain chief, whose mother's name I believe was Baleka—by the way, was she not one of Chaka's 'sisters'?—has been plotting against that son of Panda who sits upon the throne, and that his plots have been betrayed, so that he is in some danger of his life."

"Macumazahn," said Umslopogaas hoarsely, "I tell you that did you not wear the Great Medicine on your breast, I would kill you where you sit and bury you beneath the floor of the hut, as one who knows—too much."

"It would be a mistake, Umslopogaas, one of the many that you have made. But as I *do* wear the Medicine, the question does not arise, does it?"

Again he made no answer and I went on, "And now, what about this journey to the north? If indeed I must make it, would you wish to accompany me?"

Umslopogaas rose from the stool and crawled out of the hut, apparently to make some inspection. Presently he returned and remarked that the night was clear although there were heavy storm clouds on the horizon, by which I understood him to convey in Zulu metaphor that it was safe for us to talk, but that danger threatened from afar.

"Macumazahn," he said, "we speak under the blanket of the Opener-of-Roads who sits upon your heart, and whose sign you bring to me, as he sent me word that you would, do we not?"

"I suppose so," I answered. "At any rate we speak as man to man, and hitherto the honour of Macumazahn has not been doubted in Zululand. So if you have anything to say, Chief Bulalio, say it at once, for I am tired and should like to eat and rest."

"Good, Macumazahn. I have this to say. I who am the son of one who was greater than he, have plotted to seize the throne of Zululand from him who sits upon that throne. It is true, for I grew weary of my idleness as a petty chief. Moreover, I should have succeeded with the help of Zikali, who hates the House of Senzangacona, though me, who am of its blood, he does not hate, because ever I have striven against that House. But it seems from his message and those words spoken by an angry woman, that I have been betrayed, and that to-night or to-morrow night, or by the next moon, the slayers will be upon me, smiting me before I can smite, at which I cannot grumble."

"By whom have you been betrayed, Umslopogaas?"

"By that wife of mine, as I think, Macumazahn. Also by Lousta, my blood-brother, over whom she has cast her net and made false to me, so that he hopes to win her whom he has always loved and with her the Chieftainship of the Axe. Now what shall I do?—Tell me, you whose eyes can see in the dark."

I thought a moment and answered, "I think that if I were you, I would leave this Lousta to sit in my place for a while as Chief of the People of the Axe, and take a journey north, Umslopogaas. Then if trouble comes from the Great House where a king sits, it will come to Lousta who can show that the People of the Axe are innocent and that you are far away."

"That is cunning, Macumazahn. There speaks the Great Medicine. If I go north, who can say that I have plotted, and if I leave my betrayer in my place, who can say that I was a traitor, who have set him where I used to sit and left the land upon a private matter? And now tell me of this journey of yours."

So I told him everything, although until that moment I had not made up my mind to go upon this journey, I who had come here to his kraal by accident, or so it seemed, and by accident had delivered to him a certain message.

"You wish to consult a white witch-doctress, Macumazahn, who according to Zikali lives far to the north, as to the dead. Now I too, though perchance you will not think it of a black man, desire to learn of the dead; yes, of a certain wife of my youth who was sister and friend as well as wife, whom too I loved better than all the world. Also I desire to learn of a brother of mine whose name I never speak, who ruled the wolves with me and who died at my side on yonder Witch-Mountain, having made him a mat of men to lie on in a great and glorious fight. For of him as of the woman I think all day and dream all night, and I would know if they still live anywhere and I may look to see them again when I have died as a warrior should and as I hope to do. Do you understand, Watcher-by-Night?"

I answered that I understood very well, as his case seemed to be like my own.

"It may happen," went on Umslopogaas, "that all this talk of the dead who are supposed to live after they are dead, is but as the sound of wind whispering in the reeds at night, that comes from nowhere and goes nowhere and means nothing. But at least ours will be a great journey in which we shall find adventure and fighting, since it is well known in the land that wherever Macumazahn goes there is plenty of both. Also it seems well for reasons that have been spoken of between us, as Zikali says, that I should leave the country of the Zulus for a while, who desire to die a man's death at the last and not to be trapped like a jackal in a pit. Lastly I think that we shall agree well together though my temper is rough at times, and that neither of us will desert the other in trouble, though of that little yellow dog of yours I am not so sure."

"I answer for him," I replied. "Hans is a true man, cunning also when once he is away from drink." Then we spoke of plans for our journey and when and where we should meet to make it, talking till it was late, after which I went to sleep in the guest-hut.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE LION AND THE AXE

Next day early I left the town of the People of the Axe, having bid a formal farewell to Umslopogaas, saying in a voice that all could hear that as the rivers were still flooded, I proposed to trek to the northern parts of Zululand and trade there until the weather was better. Our private arrangement, however, was that on the night of the next full moon, which happened about four weeks later, we should meet at the eastern foot of a certain great, flat-topped mountain known to both of us, which stands to the north of Zululand but well beyond its borders.

So northward I trekked, slowly to spare my oxen, trading as I went. The details do not matter, but as it happened I met with more luck upon that journey than had come my way for many a long year. Although I worked on credit since nearly all my goods were sold, as owing to my repute I could always do in Zululand, I made some excellent bargains in cattle, and to top up with, bought a large lot of ivory so cheap that really I think it must have been stolen.

All of this, cattle and ivory together, I sent to Natal in charge of a white friend of mine whom I could trust, where the stuff was sold very well indeed, and the proceeds paid to my account, the "trade" equivalents being duly remitted to the native vendors.

In fact, my good fortune was such that if I had been superstitious like Hans, I should have been inclined to attribute it to the influence of Zikali's "Great Medicine." As it was I knew it to be one of the chances of a trader's life and accepted it with a shrug as often as I had been accustomed to do in the alternative of losses.

Only one untoward incident happened to me. Of a sudden a party of the King's soldiers under the command of a well-known *Induna* or Councillor, arrived and insisted upon searching my waggon, as I thought at first in connection with that cheap lot of ivory which had already departed to Natal. However, never a word did they say of ivory, nor indeed was a single thing belonging to me taken by them.

I was very indignant and expressed my feelings to the *Induna* in no measured terms. He on his part was most apologetic, and explained that what he did he was obliged to do "by the King's orders." Also he let it slip that he was seeking for a certain "evil-doer" who, it was thought, might be with me without my knowing his real character, and as this "evil-doer," whose name he would not mention, was a very fierce man, it had been necessary to bring a strong guard with him.

Now I bethought me of Umslopogaas, but merely looked blank and shrugged my shoulders, saying that I was not in the habit of consorting with evil-doers.

Still unsatisfied, the *Induna* questioned me as to the places where I had been during this journey of mine in the Zulu country. I told him with the utmost frankness, mentioning among others—because I was sure that already he knew all my movements well—the town of the People of the Axe.

Then he asked me if I had seen its Chief, a certain Umslopogaas or Bulalio. I answered, Yes, that I had met him there for the first time and thought him a very remarkable man.

With this the *Induna* agreed emphatically, saying that perhaps I did not know *how* remarkable. Next he asked me where he was now, to which I replied that I had not the faintest idea, but I presumed in his kraal where I had left him. The *Induna* explained that he was *not* in his kraal; that he had gone away leaving one Lousta and his own head wife Monazi to administer the chieftainship for a while, because, as he stated, he wished to make a journey.

I yawned as if weary of the subject of this chief, and indeed of the whole business. Then the *Induna* said that I must come to the King and repeat to him all the words that I had spoken. I replied that I could not possibly do so as, having finished my trading, I had arranged to go north to shoot elephants. He answered that elephants lived a long while and would not die while I was visiting the King.

Then followed an argument which grew heated and ended in his declaring that to the King I must come, even if he had to take me there by force.

I sat silent, wondering what to say or do and leant forward to pick a piece of wood out of the fire wherewith to light my pipe. Now my shirt was not buttoned and as it chanced this action caused the ivory image of Zikali that hung about my neck to appear between its edges. The *Induna* saw it and his eyes grew big with fear.

"Hide that!" he whispered, "hide that, lest it should bewitch me. Indeed, already I feel as though I were being bewitched. It is the Great Medicine itself."

"That will certainly happen to you," I said, yawning again, "if you insist upon my taking a week's trek to visit the Black One, or interfere with me in any way now or afterwards," and I lifted my hand towards the talisman, looking him steadily in the face.

"Perhaps after all, Macumazahn, it is not necessary for you to visit the King," he said in an uncertain voice. "I will go and make report to him that you know nothing of this evil-doer."

And he went in such a hurry that he never waited to say good-bye. Next morning before the dawn I went also and trekked steadily until I was clear of Zululand.

In due course and without accident, for the weather, which had been so wet, had now turned beautifully fine and dry, we came to the great, flat-topped hill that I have mentioned, trekking thither over high, sparsely-timbered veld that offered few difficulties to the

waggon. This peculiar hill, known to such natives as lived in those parts by a long word that means "Hut-with-a-flat-roof," is surrounded by forest, for here trees grow wonderfully well, perhaps because of the water that flows from its slopes. Forcing our way through this forest, which was full of game, I reached its eastern foot and there camped, five days before that night of full moon on which I had arranged to meet Umslopogaas.

That I should meet him I did not in the least believe, firstly because I thought it very probable that he would have changed his mind about coming, and secondly for the excellent reason that I expected he had gone to call upon the King against his will, as I had been asked to do. It was evident to me that he was up to his eyes in some serious plot against Cetywayo, in which he was the old dwarf Zikali's partner, or rather, tool; also that his plot had been betrayed, with the result that he was "wanted" and would have little chance of passing safely through Zululand. So taking one thing with another I imagined that I had seen his grim face and his peculiar, ancient-looking axe for the last time.

To tell the truth I was glad. Although at first the idea had appealed to me a little, I did not want to make this wild-goose, or wild-witch chase through unknown lands to seek for a totally fabulous person who dwelt far across the Zambesi. I had, as it were, been forced into the thing, but if Umslopogaas did not appear, my obligations would be at an end and I should return to Natal at my leisure. First, however, I would do a little shooting since I found that a large herd of elephants haunted this forest. Indeed I was tempted to attack them at once, but did not do so since, as Hans pointed out, if we were going north it would be difficult to carry the ivory, especially if we had to leave the waggon, and I was too old a hunter to desire to kill the great beasts for the fun of the thing.

So I just sat down and rested, letting the oxen feed throughout the hours of light on the rich grasses which grew upon the bottom-most slopes of the big mountain where we were camped by a stream, not more than a hundred yards above the timber line.

At some time or other there had been a native village at this spot; probably the Zulus had cleaned it out in long past years, for I found human bones black with age lying in the long grass. Indeed, the cattle-kraal still remained and in such good condition that by piling up a few stones here and there on the walls and closing the narrow entrances with thorn bushes, we could still use it to enclose our oxen at night. This I did for fear lest there should be lions about, though I had neither seen nor heard them.

So the days went by pleasantly enough with lots to eat, since whenever we wanted meat I had only to go a few yards to shoot a fat buck at a spot whither they trekked to drink in the evening, till at last came the time of full moon. Of this I was also glad, since, to tell the truth, I had begun to be bored. Rest is good, but for a man who has always led an active life too much of it is very bad, for then he begins to think and thought in large doses is depressing.

Of the fire-eating Umslopogaas there was no sign, so I made up my mind that on the morrow I would start after those elephants and when I had shot—or failed to shoot—some of them, return to Natal. I felt unable to remain idle any more; it never was my gift to do so, which is perhaps why I employ my ample leisure here in England in jotting down such reminiscences as these.

Well, the full moon came up in silver glory and after I had taken a good look at her for luck, also at all the veld within sight, I turned in. An hour or two later some noise from the direction of the cattle-kraal woke me up. As it did not recur, I thought that I would go to sleep again. Then an uneasy thought came to me that I could not remember having looked to see whether the entrance was properly closed, as it was my habit to do. It was the same sort of troublesome doubt which in a civilised house makes a man get out of bed and go along the cold passages to the sitting-room to see whether he has put out the lamp. It always proves that he *has* put it out, but that does not prevent a repetition of the performance next time the perplexity arises.

I reflected that perhaps the noise was caused by the oxen pushing their way through the carelessly-closed entrance, and at any rate that I had better go to see. So I slipped on my boots and a coat and went without waking Hans or the boys, only taking with me a loaded, single-barrelled rifle which I used for shooting small buck, but no spare cartridges.

Now in front of the gateway of the cattle-kraal, shading it, grew a single big tree of the wild fig order. Passing under this tree I looked and saw that the gateway was quite securely closed, as now I remembered I had noted at sunset. Then I started to go back but had not stepped more than two or three paces when, in the bright moonlight, I saw the head of my smallest ox, a beast of the Zulu breed, suddenly appear over the top of the wall. About this there would have been nothing particularly astonishing, had it not been for the fact that this head belonged to a dead animal, as I could tell from the closed eyes and the hanging tongue.

"What in the name of goodness—" I began to myself, when my reflections were cut short by the appearance of another head, that of one of the biggest lions I ever saw, which had the ox by the throat, and with the enormous strength that is given to these creatures, by getting its back beneath the body, was deliberately hoisting it over the wall, to drag it away to devour at its leisure.

There was the brute within twelve feet of me, and what is more, it saw me as I saw it, and stopped, still holding the ox by the throat.

"What a chance for Allan Quatermain! Of course he shot it dead," one can fancy anyone saying who knows me by repute, also that by the gift of God I am handy with a rifle. Well, indeed, it should have been, for even with the small-bore piece that I carried, a bullet ought to have pierced through the soft parts of its throat to the brain and to have killed that lion as dead as Julius Cæsar. Theoretically the thing was easy enough; indeed, although I was startled for a moment, by the time that I had the rifle to my shoulder I had little fear of the issue, unless there was a miss-fire, especially as the beast seemed so astonished that it remained quite still.

Then the unexpected happened as generally it does in life, particularly in hunting, which, in my case, is a part of life. I fired, but by misfortune the bullet struck the tip of the horn of that confounded ox, which tip either was or at that moment fell in front of the spot on the lion's throat whereat half-unconsciously I had aimed. Result: the ball was turned and, departing at an angle, just cut the skin of the lion's neck deeply enough to hurt it very much and to make it madder than all the hatters in the world.

Dropping the ox, with a most terrific roar it came over the wall at me—I remember that there seemed to be yards of it—I mean of the lion—in front of which appeared a cavernous mouth full of gleaming teeth.

I skipped back with much agility, also a little to one side, because there was nothing else to do, reflecting in a kind of inconsequent way, that after all Zikali's Great Medicine was not worth a curse. The lion landed on my side of the wall and reared itself upon its hind legs before getting to business, towering high above me but slightly to my left.

Then I saw a strange thing. A shadow thrown by the moon flitted past me—all I noted of it was the distorted shape of a great, lifted axe, probably because the axe came first. The shadow fell and with it another shadow, that of a lion's paw dropping to the ground. Next there was a most awful noise of roaring, and wheeling round I saw such a fray as never I shall see again. A tall, grim, black man was fighting the great lion, that now lacked one paw, but still stood upon its hind legs, striking at him with the other.

The man, who was absolutely silent, dodged the blow and hit back with the axe, catching the beast upon the breast with such weight that it came to the ground in a lopsided fashion, since now it had only one fore-foot on which to light.

The axe flashed up again and before the lion could recover itself, or do anything else, fell with a crash upon its skull, sinking deep into the head. After this all was over, for the beast's brain was cut in two.

"I am here at the appointed time, Macumazahn," said Umslopogaas, for it was he, as with difficulty he dragged his axe from the lion's severed skull, "to find you watching by night as it is reported that you always do."

"No," I retorted, for his tone irritated me, "you are late, Bulalio, the moon has been up some hours."

"I said, O Macumazahn, that I would meet you on the *night* of the full moon, not at the rising of the moon."

"That is true," I replied, mollified, "and at any rate you came at a good moment."

"Yes," he answered, "though as it happens in this clear light the thing was easy to anyone who can handle an axe. Had it been darker the end might have been different. But, Macumazahn, you are not so clever as I thought, since otherwise you would not have come out against a lion with a toy like that," and he pointed to the little rifle in my hand.

"I did not know that there was a lion, Umslopogaas."

"That is why you are not so clever as I thought, since of one sort or another there is always a lion which wise men should be prepared to meet, Macumazahn."

"You are right again," I replied.

At that moment Hans arrived upon the scene, followed at a discreet distance by the waggon boys, and took in the situation at a glance.

"The Great Medicine of the Opener-of-Roads has worked well," was all he said.

"The great medicine of the Opener-of-Heads has worked better," remarked Umslopogaas with a little laugh and pointing to his red axe. "Never before since she came into my keeping has *Inkosikaas* (i.e. 'Chieftainess,' for so was this famous weapon named) sunk so low as to drink the blood of beasts. Still, the stroke was a good one so she need not be ashamed. But, Yellow Man, how comes it that you who, I have been told, are cunning, watch your master so ill?"

"I was asleep," stuttered Hans indignantly.

"Those who serve should never sleep," replied Umslopogaas sternly. Then he turned and whistled, and behold! out of the long grass that grew at a little distance, emerged twelve great men, all of them bearing axes and wearing cloaks of hyena skins, who saluted me by raising their axes.

"Set a watch and skin me this beast by dawn. It will make us a mat," said Umslopogaas, whereon again they saluted silently and melted away.

"Who are these?" I asked.

"A few picked warriors whom I brought with me, Macumazahn. There were one or two more, but they got lost on the way."

Then we went to the waggon and spoke no more that night.

Next morning I told Umslopogaas of the visit I had received from the *Induna* of the King who wished me to come to the royal kraal. He nodded and said,

"As it chanced certain thieves attacked me on my journey, which is why one or two of my people remain behind who will never travel again. We made good play with those thieves; not one of them escaped," he added grimly, "and their bodies we threw into a river where are many crocodiles. But their spears I brought away and I think that they are such as the King's guard use. If so, his search for them will be long, since the fight took place where no man lives and we burned the shields and trappings. Oho! he will think that the ghosts have taken them."

That morning we trekked on fast, fearing lest a regiment searching for these "thieves" should strike and follow our spoor. Luckily the ox that the lion had killed was one of some spare cattle which I was driving with me, so its loss did not inconvenience us. As we went Umslopogaas told me that he had duly appointed Lousta and his wife Monazi to rule the tribe during his absence, an office which they accepted doubtfully, Monazi acting as Chieftainess and Lousta as her head *Induna* or Councillor.

I asked him whether he thought this wise under all the circumstances, seeing that it had occurred to me since I made the suggestion, that they might be unwilling to surrender power on his return, also that other domestic complications might ensue.

"It matters little, Macumazahn," he said with a shrug of his great shoulders, "for of this I am sure, that I have played my part with the People of the Axe and to stop among them would have meant my death, who am a man betrayed. What do I care who love none and now have no children? Still, it is true that I might have fled to Natal with the cattle and there have led a fat and easy life. But ease and plenty I do not desire who would live and fall as a warrior should."

"Never again, mayhap, shall I see the Ghost-Mountain where the wolves ravened and the old Witch sits in stone waiting for the world to die, or sleep in the town of the People of the Axe. What do I want with wives and oxen while I have *Inkosikaas* the Groan-maker and she is true to me?" he added, shaking the ancient axe above his head so that the sun gleamed upon the curved blade and the hollow gouge or point at the back beyond the shaft socket. "Where the Axe goes, there go the strength and virtue of the Axe, O Macumazahn."

"It is a strange weapon," I said.

"Aye, a strange and an old, forged far away, says Zikali, by a warrior-wizard hundreds of years ago, a great fighter who was also the first of smiths and who sits in the Under-world waiting for it to return to his hand when its work is finished beneath the sun. That will be soon, Macumazahn, since Zikali told me that I am the last Holder of the Axe."

"Did you then see the Opener-of-Roads?" I asked.

"Aye, I saw him. He it was who told me which way to go to escape from Zululand. Also he laughed when he heard how the flooded rivers brought you to my kraal, and sent you a message in which he said that the spirit of a snake had told him that you tried to throw the Great Medicine into a pool, but were stopped by that snake, whilst it was still alive. This, he said, you must do no more, lest he should send another snake to stop *you*."

"Did he?" I replied indignantly, for Zikali's power of seeing or learning about things that happened at a distance puzzled and annoyed me.

Only Hans grinned and said,

"I told you so, Baas."

On we travelled from day to day, meeting with such difficulties and dangers as are common on roadless veld in Africa, but no more, for the grass was good and there was plenty of game, of which we shot what we wanted for meat. Indeed, here in the back regions of what is known as Portuguese South East Africa, every sort of wild animal was so numerous that personally I wished we could turn our journey into a shooting expedition.

But of this Umslopogaas, whom hunting bored, would not hear. In fact, he was much more anxious than myself to carry out our original purpose. When I asked him why, he answered because of something Zikali had told him. What this was he would not say, except that in the country whither we wandered he would fight a great fight and win much honour.

Now Umslopogaas was by nature a fighting man, one who took a positive joy in battle, and like an old Norseman, seemed to think that thus only could a man decorously die. This amazed me, a peaceful person who loves quiet and a home. Still, I gave way, partly to please him, partly because I hoped that we might discover something of interest, and still more because, having once undertaken an enterprise, my pride prompted me to see it through.

Now while he was preparing to draw his map in the ashes, or afterwards, I forget which, Zikali had told me that when we drew near to the great river we should come to a place on the edge of bush-veld that ran down to the river, where a white man lived, adding, after casting his bones and reading from them, that he thought this white man was a "trek-Boer." This, I should explain, means a Dutchman who has travelled away from wherever he lived and made a home for himself in the wilderness, as some wandering spirit and the desire to be free of authority often prompt these people to do. Also, after another inspection of his enchanted knuckle-bones, he had declared that something remarkable would happen to this man or his family, while I was visiting him. Lastly in that map he drew in the ashes, the details of which were impressed so indelibly upon my memory, he had shown me where I should find the dwelling of this white man, of whom and of whose habitation doubtless he knew through the many spies who seemed to be at the service of all witch-doctors, and more especially of Zikali, the greatest among them.

Travelling by the sun and the compass I had trekked steadily in the exact direction which he indicated, to find that in this useful particular he was well named the "Opener-of-Roads," since always before me I found a practicable path, although to the right or to the left there would have been none. Thus when we came to mountains, it was at a spot where we discovered a pass; when we came to swamps it was where a ridge of high ground ran between, and so forth. Also such tribes as we met upon our journey always proved of a friendly character, although perhaps the aspect of Umslopogaas and his fierce band whom, rather irreverently, I named his twelve Apostles, had a share in inducing this peaceful attitude.

So smooth was our progress and so well marked by water at certain intervals, that at last I came to the conclusion that we must be following some ancient road which at a forgotten period of history, had run from south to north, or *vice versa*. Or rather, to be honest, it was the observant Hans who made this discovery from various indications which had escaped my notice. I need not stop to detail them, but one of these was that at certain places the water-holes on a high, rather barren land had been dug out, and in one or more instances, lined with stones after the fashion of an ancient well. Evidently we were following an old trade route made, perhaps, in forgotten ages when Africa was more civilised than it is now.

Passing over certain high, misty lands during the third week of our trek, where frequently at this season of the year the sun never showed itself before ten o'clock and disappeared at three or four in the afternoon, and where twice we were held up for two whole days by dense fog, we came across a queer nomadic people who seemed to live in movable grass huts and to keep great herds of goats and long-tailed sheep.

These folk ran away from us at first, but when they found that we did them no harm, became friendly and brought us offerings of milk, also of a kind of slug or caterpillar which they seemed to eat. Hans, who was a great master of different native dialects, discovered a tongue, or a mixture of tongues, in which he could make himself understood to some of them.

They told him that in their day they had never seen a white man, although their fathers' fathers (an expression by which they meant their remote ancestors) had known many of them. They added, however, that if we went on steadily towards the north for another seven days' journey, we should come to a place where a white man lived, one, they had heard, who had a long beard and killed animals with guns, as we did.

Encouraged by this intelligence we pushed forward, now travelling down hill out of the mists into a more genial country. Indeed, the veld here was beautiful, high, rolling plains like those of the East African plateau, covered with a deep and fertile chocolate-coloured soil, as we could see where the rains had washed out dongas. The climate, too, seemed to be cool and very healthful. Altogether it was a pity to see such lands lying idle and tenanted only by countless herds of game, for there were not any native inhabitants, or at least we met none.

On we trekked, our road still sloping slightly down hill, till at length we saw far away a vast sea of bush-veld which, as I guessed correctly, must fringe the great Zambesi River. Moreover we, or rather Hans, whose eyes were those of a hawk, saw something else, namely buildings of a more or less civilised kind, which stood among trees by the side of a stream several miles on this side of the great belt of bush.

"Look, Baas," said Hans, "those wanderers did not lie; there is the house of the white man. I wonder if he drinks anything stronger than water," he added with a sigh and a kind of reminiscent contraction of his yellow throat.

As it happened, he did.

## CHAPTER V.

### INEZ

We had sighted the house from far away shortly after sunrise and by midday we were there. As we approached I saw that it stood almost immediately beneath two great baobab trees, babyan trees we call them in South Africa, perhaps because monkeys eat their fruit. It was a thatched house with whitewashed walls and a stoep or veranda round it, apparently of the ordinary Dutch type. Moreover, beyond it, at a little distance were other houses or rather shanties with waggon sheds, etc., and beyond and mixed up with these a number of native huts. Further on were considerable fields green with springing corn; also we saw herds of cattle grazing on the slopes. Evidently our white man was rich.

Umslopogaas surveyed the place with a soldier's eye and said to me,

"This must be a peaceful country, Macumazahn, where no attack is feared, since of defences I see none."

"Yes," I answered, "why not, with a wilderness behind it and bush-veld and a great river in front?"

"Men can cross rivers and travel through bush-veld," he answered, and was silent.

Up to this time we had seen no one, although it might have been presumed that a waggon trekking towards the house was a sufficiently unusual sight to have attracted attention.

"Where can they be?" I asked.

"Asleep, Baas, I think," said Hans, and as a matter of fact he was right. The whole population of the place was indulging in a noonday siesta.

At last we came so near to the house that I halted the waggon and descended from the driving-box in order to investigate. At this moment someone did appear, the sight of whom astonished me not a little, namely, a very striking-looking young woman. She was tall, handsome, with large dark eyes, good features, a rather pale complexion, and I think the saddest face that I ever saw. Evidently she had heard the noise of the waggon and had come out to see what caused it, for she had nothing on her head, which was covered with thick hair of a raven blackness. Catching sight of the great Umslopogaas with his gleaming axe and of his savage-looking bodyguard, she uttered an exclamation and not unnaturally turned to fly.

"It's all right," I sang out, emerging from behind the oxen, and in English, though before the words had left my lips I reflected that there was not the slightest reason to suppose that she would understand them. Probably she was Dutch, or Portuguese, although by some instinct I had addressed her in English.

To my surprise she answered me in the same tongue, spoken, it is true, with a peculiar accent which I could not place, as it was neither Scotch nor Irish.

"Thank you," she said. "I, sir, was frightened. Your friends look——" Here she stumbled for a word, then added, "terrocious."

I laughed at this composite adjective and answered,

"Well, so they are in a way, though they will not harm you or me. But, young lady, tell me, can we outspan here? Perhaps your husband——"

"I have no husband, I have only a father, sir," and she sighed.

"Well, then, could I speak to your father? My name is Allan Quatermain and I am making a journey of exploration, to find out about the country beyond, you know."

"Yes, I will go to wake him. He is asleep. Everyone sleeps here at midday—except me," she said with another sigh.

"Why do you not follow their example?" I asked jocosely, for this young woman puzzled me and I wanted to find out about her.

"Because I sleep little, sir, who think too much. There will be plenty of time to sleep soon for all of us, will there not?"

I stared at her and inquired her name, because I did not know what else to say.

"My name is Inez Robertson," she answered. "I will go to wake my father. Meanwhile please unyoke your oxen. They can feed with the others; they look as though they wanted rest, poor things." Then she turned and went into the house.

"Inez Robertson," I said to myself, "that's a queer combination. English father and Portuguese mother, I suppose. But what can an Englishman be doing in a place like this? If it had been a trek-Boer I should not have been surprised." Then I began to give directions about out-spanning.

We had just got the oxen out of the yokes, when a big, raw-boned, red-bearded, blue-eyed, roughly-clad man of about fifty years of age appeared from the house, yawning. I threw my eye over him as he advanced with a peculiar rolling gait, and formed certain conclusions. A drunkard who has once been a gentleman, I reflected to myself, for there was something peculiarly dissolute in his appearance, also one who has had to do with the sea, a diagnosis which proved very accurate.

"How do you do, Mr. Allan Quatermain, which I think my daughter said is your name, unless I dreamed it, for it is one that I seem to have heard before," he exclaimed with a broad Scotch accent which I do not attempt to reproduce. "What in the name of blazes brings you here where no real white man has been for years? Well, I am glad enough to see you any way, for I am sick of half-breed Portuguese and niggers, and snuff-and-butter girls, and gin and bad whisky. Leave your people to attend to those oxen and come in and have a drink."

"Thank you, Mr. Robertson——"

"Captain Robertson," he interrupted. "Man, don't look astonished. You mightn't guess it, but I commanded a mail-steamer once and should like to hear myself called rightly again before I die."

"I beg your pardon—Captain Robertson, but myself, I don't drink anything before sundown. However, if you have something to eat——?"

"Oh yes, Inez—she's my daughter—will find you a bite. Those men of yours," and he also looked doubtfully at Umslopogaas and his savage company, "will want food as well. I'll have a beast killed for them; they look as if they could eat it, horns and all. Where are my people? All asleep, I suppose, the lazy lubbers. Wait a bit, I'll wake them up."

Going to the house he snatched a great sjambok cut from hippopotamus hide, from where it hung on a nail in the wall, and ran towards the group of huts which I have mentioned, roaring out the name Thomaso, also a string of oaths such as seamen use, mixed with others of a Portuguese variety. What happened there I could not see because boughs were in the way, but presently I heard blows and screams, and caught sight of people, all dark-skinned, flying from the huts.

A little later a fat, half-breed man—I should say from his curling hair that his mother was a negress and his father a Portuguese—appeared with some other nondescript fellows and began to give directions in a competent fashion about our oxen, also as to the killing of a calf. He spoke in bastard Portuguese, which I could understand, and I heard him talk of Umslopogaas to whom he pointed, as "that nigger," after the fashion of such cross-bred people who choose to consider themselves white men. Also he made uncomplimentary remarks about Hans, who of course understood every word he said. Evidently Thomaso's temper had been ruffled by this sudden and violent disturbance of his nap.

Just then our host appeared puffing with his exertions and declaring that he had stirred up the swine with a vengeance, in proof of which he pointed to the sjambok that was reddened with blood.

"Captain Robertson," I said, "I wish to give you a hint to be passed on to Mr. Thomaso, if that is he. He spoke of the Zulu soldier there as a nigger, etc. Well, he is a chief of a high rank and rather a terrible fellow if roused. Therefore I recommend Mr. Thomaso not to let him understand that he is insulting him."

"Oh! that's the way of these 'snuff-and-butters' one of whose grandmothers once met a white man," replied the Captain, laughing, "but I'll tell him," and he did in Portuguese.

His retainer listened in silence, looking at Umslopogaas rather sulkily. Then we walked into the house. As we went the Captain said,

"Señor Thomaso—he calls himself Señor—is my manager here and a clever man, honest too in his way and attached to me, perhaps because I saved his life once. But he has a nasty temper, as have all these cross-breeds, so I hope he won't get wrong with that native who carries a big axe."

"I hope so too, for his own sake," I replied emphatically.

The Captain led the way into the sitting-room; there was but one in the house. It proved a queer kind of place with rude furniture seated with strips of hide after the Boer fashion, and yet bearing a certain air of refinement which was doubtless due to Inez, who, with the assistance of a stout native girl, was already engaged in setting the table. Thus there was a shelf with books, Shakespeare was one of these, I noticed—over which hung an ivory crucifix, which suggested that Inez was a Catholic. On the walls, too, were some good portraits, and on the window-ledge a jar full of flowers. Also the forks and spoons were of silver, as were the mugs, and engraved with a tremendous coat-of-arms and a Portuguese motto.

Presently the food appeared, which was excellent and plentiful, and the Captain, his daughter and I sat down and ate. I noted that he drank gin and water, an innocent-looking beverage but strong as he took it. It was offered to me, but like Miss Inez, I preferred coffee.

During the meal and afterwards while we smoked upon the veranda, I told them as much as I thought desirable of my plans. I said that I was engaged upon a journey of exploration of the country beyond the Zambesi, and that having heard of this settlement, which, by the way, was called Strathmuir, as I gathered after a place in far away Scotland where the Captain had been born and passed his childhood, I had come here to inquire as to how to cross the great river, and about other things.

The Captain was interested, especially when I informed him that I was that same "Hunter Quatermain" of whom he had heard in past years, but he told me that it would be impossible to take the waggon down into the low bush-veld which we could see beneath us, as there all the oxen would die of the bite of the tsetse fly. I answered that I was aware of this and proposed to try to make an arrangement to leave it in his charge till I returned.

"That might be managed, Mr. Quatermain," he answered. "But, man, will you ever return? They say there are queer folk living on the other side of the Zambesi, savage men who are cannibals, Amahagger I think they call them. It was they who in past years cleaned out all this country, except a few river tribes who live in floating huts or on islands among the reeds, and that's why it is so empty. But this happened long ago, much before my time, and I don't suppose they will ever cross the river again."

"If I might ask, what brought you here, Captain?" I said, for the point was one on which I felt curious.

"That which brings most men to wild places, Mr. Quatermain—trouble. If you want to know, I had a misfortune and piled up my ship. There were some lives lost and, rightly or wrongly, I got the sack. Then I started as a trader in a God-forsaken hole named Chinde, one of the Zambesi mouths, you know, and did very well, as we Scotchmen have a way of doing.

"There I married a Portuguese lady, a real lady of high blood, one of the old sort. When my girl, Inez, was about twelve years old I got into more trouble, for my wife died and it pleased a certain relative of hers to say that it was because I had neglected her. This ended in a row and the truth is that I killed him—in fair fight, mind you. Still, kill him I did though I scarcely knew that I had done it at the time, after which the place grew too hot to hold me. So I sold up and swore that I would have no more to do with what they are pleased to call civilisation on the East Coast.

"During my trading I had heard that there was fine country up this way, and here I came and settled years ago, bringing my girl and Thomaso, who was one of my managers, also a few other people with me. And here I have been ever since, doing very well as before, for I trade a lot of ivory and other things and grow stuff and cattle, which I sell to the River natives. Yes, I am a rich man now and could go to live on my means in Scotland, or anywhere."

"Why don't you?" I asked.

"Oh! for many reasons. I have lost touch with all that and become half wild and I like this life and the sunshine and being my own master. Also, if I did, things might be raked up against me, about that man's death. Also, though I daresay it will make you think badly of me for it, Mr. Quatermain, I have ties down there," and he waved his hand towards the village, if so it could be called, "which it wouldn't be easy for me to break. A man may be fond of his children, Mr. Quatermain, even if their skins ain't so white as they ought to be. Lastly I have habits—you see, I am speaking out to you as man to man—which might get me into trouble again if I went back to the world," and he nodded his fine, capable-looking head in the direction of the bottle on the table.

"I see," I said hastily, for this kind of confession bursting out of the man's lonely heart when what he had drunk took a hold of him, was painful to hear. "But how about your daughter, Miss Inez?"

"Ah!" he said, with a quiver in his voice, "there you touch it. She ought to go away. There is no one for her to marry here, where we haven't seen a white man for years, and she's a lady right enough, like her mother. But who is she to go to, being a Roman Catholic whom my own dour Presbyterian folk in Scotland, if any of them are left, would turn their backs on? Moreover, she loves me in her own fashion, as I love her, and she wouldn't leave me because she thinks it her duty to stay and knows that if she did, I should go to the devil altogether. Still—perhaps you might help me about her, Mr. Quatermain, that is if you live to come back from your journey," he added doubtfully.

I felt inclined to ask how I could possibly help in such a matter, but thought it wisest to say nothing. This, however, he did not notice, for he went on,

"Now I think I will have a nap, as I do my work in the early morning, and sometimes late at night when my brain seems to clear up again, for you see I was a sailor for many years and accustomed to keeping watches. You'll look after yourself, won't you, and treat the place as your own?" Then he vanished into the house to lie down.

When I had finished my pipe I went for a walk. First I visited the waggon where I found Umslopogaas and his company engaged in cooking the beast that had been given them, Zulu fashion; Hans with his usual cunning had already secured a meal, probably from the servants, or from Inez herself; at least he left them and followed me. First we went down to the huts, where we saw a number of good-looking young women of mixed blood, all decently dressed and engaged about their household duties. Also we saw four or five boys and girls, to say nothing of a baby in arms, fine young people, one or two of whom were more white than coloured.

"Those children are very like the Baas with the red beard," remarked Hans reflectively.

"Yes," I said, and shivered, for now I understood the awfulness of this poor man's case. He was the father of a number of half-breeds who tied him to this spot as anchors tie a ship. I went on rather hastily past some sheds to a long, low building which proved to be a store. Here the quarter-blood called Thomaso, and some assistants were engaged in trading with natives from the Zambesi swamps, men of a kind that I had never seen, but in a way more civilised than many further south. What they were selling or buying, I did not stop to see, but I noticed that the store was full of goods of one sort or another, including a great deal of ivory, which, as I supposed, had come down the river from inland.

Then we walked on to the cultivated fields where we saw corn growing very well, also tobacco and other crops. Beyond this were cattle kraals and in the distance we perceived a great number of cattle and goats feeding on the slopes.

"This red-bearded Baas must be very rich in all things," remarked the observant Hans when we had completed our investigations.

"Yes," I answered, "rich and yet poor."

"How can a man be both rich and yet poor, Baas?" asked Hans.

Just at that moment some of the half-breed children whom I have mentioned, ran past us more naked than dressed and whooping like little savages. Hans contemplated them gravely, then said,

"I think I understand now, Baas. A man may be rich in things he loves and yet does not want, which makes him poor in other ways."

"Yes," I answered, "as *you* are, Hans, when you take too much to drink."

Just then we met the stately Miss Inez returning from the store, carrying some articles in a basket, soap, I think, and tea in a packet, amongst them. I told Hans to take the basket and bear it to the house for her. He went off with it and, walking slowly, we fell into conversation.

"Your father must do very well here," I said, nodding at the store with the crowd of natives round it.

"Yes," she answered, "he makes much money which he puts in a bank at the coast, for living costs us nothing and there is great profit in what he buys and sells, also in the crops he grows and in the cattle. But," she added pathetically, "what is the use of money in a place like this?"

"You can get things with it," I answered vaguely.

"That is what my father says, but what does he get? Strong stuff to drink; dresses for those women down there, and sometimes pearls, jewels and other things for me which I do not want. I have a box full of them set in ugly gold, or loose which I cannot use, and if I put them on, who is there to see them? That clever half-breed, Thomaso—for he is clever in his way, faithful too—or the women down there—no one else."

"You do not seem to be happy, Miss Inez."

"No. I cannot tell how unhappy others are, who have met none, but sometimes I think that I must be the most miserable woman in the world."

"Oh! no," I replied cheerfully, "plenty are worse off."

"Then, Mr. Quatermain, it must be because they cannot feel. Did you ever have a father whom you loved?"

"Yes, Miss Inez. He is dead, but he was a very good man, a kind of saint. Ask my servant, the little Hottentot Hans; he will tell you about him."

"Ah! a very good man. Well, as you may have guessed, mine is not, though there is much good in him, for he has a kind heart, and a big brain. But the drink and those women down there, they ruin him," and she wrung her hands.

"Why don't you go away?" I blurted out.

"Because it is my duty to stop. That is what my religion teaches me, although of it I know little except through books, who have seen no priest for years except one who was a missionary, a Baptist, I think, who told me that my faith was false and would lead me to

hell. Yes, not understanding how I lived, he said that, who did not know that hell is here. No, I cannot go, who hopes always that still God and the Saints will show me how to save my father, even though it be with my blood. And now I have said too much to you who are quite a stranger. Yet, I do not know why, I feel that you will not betray me, and what is more, that you will help me if you can, since you are not one of those who drink, or——” and she waved her hand towards the huts.

“I have my faults, Miss Inez,” I answered.

“Yes, no doubt, else you would be a saint, not a man, and even the saints had their faults, or so I seem to remember, and became saints by repentance and conquering them. Still, I am sure that you will help me if you can.”

Then with a sudden flash of her dark eyes that said more than all her words, she turned and left me.

Here’s a pretty kettle of fish, thought I to myself as I strolled back to the waggon to see how things were going on there, and how to get the live fish out of the kettle before they boil or spoil is more than I know. I wonder why fate is always finding me such jobs to do.

Even as I thought thus a voice in my heart seemed to echo that poor girl’s words—because it is your duty—and to add others to them—woe betide him who neglects his duty. I was appointed to try to hook a few fish out of the vast kettle of human woe, and therefore I must go on hooking. Meanwhile this particular problem seemed beyond me. Perhaps Fate would help, I reflected. As a matter of fact, in the end Fate did, if Fate is the right word to use in this connection.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SEA-COW HUNT

Now it had been my intention to push forward across the river at once, but here luck, or our old friend, Fate, was against me. To begin with several of Umslopogaas' men fell sick with a kind of stomach trouble, arising no doubt from something they had eaten. This, however, was not their view, or that of Umslopogaas himself. It happened that one of these men, Goroko by name, who practised as a witch-doctor in his lighter moments, naturally suspected that a spell had been cast upon them, for such people see magic in everything.

Therefore he organised a "smelling-out" at which Umslopogaas, who was as superstitious as the rest, assisted. So did Hans, although he called himself a Christian, partly out of curiosity, for he was as curious as a magpie, and partly from fear lest some implication should be brought against him in his absence. I saw the business going on from a little distance, and, unseen myself, thought it well to keep an eye upon the proceedings in case anything untoward should occur. This I did with Miss Inez, who had never witnessed anything of the sort, as a companion.

The circle, a small one, was formed in the usual fashion; Goroko rigged up in the best witch-doctor's costume that he could improvise, duly came under the influence of his "Spirit" and skipped about, waving a wildebeeste's tail, and so forth.

Finally to my horror he broke out of the ring, and running to a group of spectators from the village, switched Thomaso, who was standing among them with a lordly and contemptuous air, across the face with the gnu's tail, shouting out that he was the wizard who had poisoned the bowels of the sick men. Thereon Thomaso, who although he could be insolent, like most crossbreeds was not remarkable for courage, seeing the stir that this announcement created amongst the fierce-faced Zulus and fearing developments, promptly bolted, none attempting to follow him.

After this, just as I thought that everything was over and that the time had come for me to speak a few earnest words to Umslopogaas, pointing out that matters must go no further as regards Thomaso, whom I knew that he and his people hated, Goroko went back to the circle and was seized with a new burst of inspiration.

Throwing down his whisk, he lifted his arms above his head and stared at the heavens. Then he began to shout out something in a loud voice which I was too far off to catch. Whatever it may have been, evidently it frightened his hearers, as I could see from the expressions on their faces. Even Umslopogaas was alarmed, for he let his axe fall for a moment, rose as though to speak, then sat down again and covered his eyes with his hands.

In a minute it was over; Goroko seemed to become normal, took some snuff and as I guessed, after the usual fashion of these doctors, began to ask what he had been saying while the "Spirit" possessed him, which he either had, or affected to have, forgotten. The circle, too, broke up and its members began to talk to each other in a subdued way, while Umslopogaas remained seated on the ground, brooding, and Hans slipped away in his snake-like fashion, doubtless in search of me.

"What was it all about, Mr. Quatermain?" asked Inez.

"Oh! a lot of nonsense," I said. "I fancy that witch-doctor declared that your friend Thomaso put something into those men's food to make them sick."

"I daresay that he did; it would be just like him, Mr. Quatermain, as I know that he hates them, especially Umslopogaas, of whom I am very fond. He brought me some beautiful flowers this morning which he had found somewhere, and made a long speech which I could not understand."

The idea of Umslopogaas, that man of blood and iron, bringing flowers to a young lady, was so absurd that I broke out laughing and even the sad-faced Inez smiled. Then she left me to see about something and I went to speak to Hans and asked him what had happened.

"Something rather queer, I think, Baas," he answered vacuously, "though I did not quite understand the last part. The doctor, Goroko, smelt out Thomaso as the man who had made them sick, and though they will not kill him because we are guests here, those Zulus are very angry with Thomaso and I think will beat him if they get a chance. But that is only the small half of the stick," and he paused.

"What is the big half, then?" I asked with irritation.

"Baas, the Spirit in Goroko——"

"The jackass in Goroko, you mean," I interrupted. "How can you, who are a Christian, talk such rubbish about spirits? I only wish that my father could hear you."

"Oh! Baas, your reverend father, the Predikant, is now wise enough to know all about Spirits and that there are some who come into black witch-doctors though they turn up their noses at white men and leave them alone. However, whatever it is that makes Goroko speak, got hold of him so that his lips said, though he remembered nothing of it afterwards, that soon this place would be red with blood—that there would be a great killing here, Baas. That is all."

"Red with blood! Whose blood? What did the fool mean?"

"I don't know, Baas, but what you call the jackass in Goroko, declared that those who are 'with the Great Medicine'—meaning what you wear, Baas—will be quite safe. So I hope that it will not be our blood; also that you will get out of this place as soon as you can."

Well, I scolded Hans because he believed in what this doctor said, for I could see that he did believe it, then went to question Umslopogaas, whom I found looking quite pleased, which annoyed me still more.

"What is it that Goroko has been saying and why do you smile, Bulalio?" I asked.

"Nothing much, Macumazahn, except that the man who looks like tallow that has gone bad, put something in our food which made us sick, for which I would kill him were he not Red-beard's servant and that it would frighten the lady his daughter. Also he said that soon there will be fighting, which is why I smiled, who grow weary of peace. We came out to fight, did we not?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "We came out to make a quiet journey in strange lands, which is what I mean to do."

"Ah! well, Macumazahn, in strange lands one meets strange men with whom one does not always agree, and then *Inkosikaas* begins to talk," and he whirled the great axe round his head, making the air whistle as it was forced through the gouge at its back.

I could get no more out of him, so having extracted a promise from him that nothing should happen to Thomaso who, I pointed out, was probably quite unjustly accused, I went away.

Still, the whole incident left a disagreeable impression on my mind, and I began to wish that we were safe across the Zambesi without more trouble. But we could not start at once because two of the Zulus were still not well enough to travel and there were many preparations to be made about the loads, and so forth, since the waggon must be left behind. Also, and this was another complication—Hans had a sore upon his foot, resulting from the prick of a poisonous thorn, and it was desirable that this should be quite healed before we marched.

So it came about that I was really glad when Captain Robertson suggested that we should go down to a certain swamp formed, I gathered, by some small tributary of the Zambesi to take part in a kind of hippopotamus battue. It seemed that at this season of the year these great animals always frequented the place in numbers, also that by barring a neck of deep water through which they gained it, they, or a proportion of them, could be cut off and killed.

This had been done once or twice in the past, though not of late, perhaps because Captain Robertson had lacked the energy to organise such a hunt. Now he wished to do so again, taking advantage of my presence, both because of the value of the hides of the sea-cows which were cut up to be sent to the coast and sold as *sjamboks* or whips, and because of the sport of the thing. Also I think he desired to show me that he was not altogether sunk in sloth and drink.

I fell in with the idea readily enough, since in all my hunting life I had never seen anything of the sort, especially as I was told that the expedition would not take more than a week and I reckoned that the sick men and Hans would not be fit to travel sooner. So great preparations were made. The riverside natives, whose share of the spoil was to be the carcasses of the slain sea-cows, were summoned by hundreds and sent off to their appointed stations to beat the swamps at a signal given by the firing of a great pile of reeds. Also many other things were done upon which I need not enter.

Then came the time for us to depart to the appointed spot over twenty miles away, most of which distance it seemed we could trek in the waggon. Captain Robertson, who for the time had cut off his gin, was as active about the affair as though he were once more in command of a mail-steamer. Nothing escaped his attention; indeed, in the care which he gave to details he reminded me of the captain of a great ship that is leaving port, and from it I learned how able a man he must once have been.

"Does your daughter accompany us?" I asked on the night before we started.

"Oh! no," he answered, "she would only be in the way. She will be quite safe here, especially as Thomaso, who is no hunter, remains in charge of the place with some of the older natives to look after the women and children."

Later I saw Inez herself, who said that she would have liked to come, although she hated to see great beasts killed, but that her father was against it because he thought she might catch fever. So she supposed that she had better remain where she was.

I agreed, though in my heart I was doubtful, and said that I would leave Hans, whose foot was not as yet quite well, and with whom she had made friends as she had done with Umslopogaas, to look after her. Also there would be with him the two great Zulus who were now recovering from their attack of stomach sickness, so that she would have nothing to fear. She answered with her slow smile that she feared nothing, still, she would have liked to come with us. Then we parted, as it proved for a long time.

It was quite a ceremony. Umslopogaas, "in the name of the Axe" solemnly gave over Inez to the charge of his two followers, bidding them guard her with so much earnestness that I began to suspect he feared something which he did not choose to mention. My mind went back indeed to the prophecy of the witch-doctor Goroko, of which it was possible that he might be thinking, but as while he spoke he kept his fierce eyes fixed upon the fat and pompous quarter-breed, Thomaso, I concluded that here was the object of his doubts.

It might have occurred to him that this Thomaso would take the opportunity of her father's absence to annoy Inez. If so I was sure that he was mistaken for various reasons, of which I need only quote one, namely, that even if such an idea had ever entered his head, Thomaso was far too great a coward to translate it into action. Still, suspecting something, I also gave Hans instructions to keep a sharp eye on Inez and generally to watch the place, and if he saw anything suspicious, to communicate with us at once.

"Yes, Baas," said Hans, "I will look after 'Sad-Eyes'"—for so with their usual quickness of observation our Zulus had named Inez—"as though she were my grandmother, though what there is to fear for her, I do not know. But, Baas, I would much rather come and look after you, as your reverend father, the Predikant, told me to do always, which is my duty, not girl-herding, Baas. Also my foot is now quite well and—I want to shoot sea-cows, and——" Here he paused.

"And what, Hans?"

"And Goroko said that there was going to be much fighting and if there should be fighting and you should come to harm because I was not there to protect you, what would your reverend father think of me then?"

All of which meant two things: that Hans never liked being separated from me if he could help it, and that he much preferred a shooting trip to stopping alone in this strange place with nothing to do except eat and sleep. So I concluded, though indeed I did not get quite to the bottom of the business. In reality Hans was putting up a most gallant struggle against temptation.

As I found out afterwards, Captain Robertson had been giving him strong drink on the sly, moved thereto by sympathy with a fellow toper. Also he had shown him where, if he wanted it, he could get more, and Hans always wanted gin very badly indeed. To leave it within his reach was like leaving a handful of diamonds lying about in the room of a thief. This he knew, but was ashamed to tell me the truth, and thence came much trouble.

"You will stop here, Hans, look after the young lady and nurse your foot," I said sternly, whereon he collapsed with a sigh and asked for some tobacco.

Meanwhile Captain Robertson, who I think had been taking a stirrup cup to cheer him on the road, was making his farewells down in what was known as "the village," for I saw him there kissing a collection of half-breed children, and giving Thomaso instructions to look after them and their mothers. Returning at length, he called to Inez, who remained upon the veranda, for she always seemed to shrink from her father after his visits to the village, to "keep a stiff upper lip" and not feel lonely, and commanded the cavalcade to start.

So off we went, about twenty of the village natives, a motley crew armed with every kind of gun, marching ahead and singing songs. Then came the waggon with Captain Robertson and myself seated on the driving-box, and lastly Umslopogaas and his Zulus, except the two who had been left behind.

We trekked along a kind of native road over fine veld of the same character as that on which Strathmuir stood, having the lower-lying bush-veld which ran down to the Zambesi on our right. Before nightfall we came to a ridge whereon this bush-veld turned south, fringing that tributary of the great river in the swamps of which we were to hunt for sea-cows. Here we camped and next morning, leaving the waggon in charge of my *voorlooper* and a couple of the Strathmuir natives, for the driver was to act as my gun-bearer—we marched down into the sea of bush-veld. It proved to be full of game, but at this we dared not fire for fearing of disturbing the hippopotami in the swamps beneath, whence in that event they might escape us back to the river.

About midday we passed out of the bush-veld and reached the place where the drive was to be. Here, bordered by steep banks covered with bush, was swampy ground not more than two hundred yards wide, down the centre of which ran a narrow channel of rather deep water, draining a vast expanse of morass above. It was up this channel that the sea-cows travelled to the feeding ground where they loved to collect at that season of the year.

There with the assistance of some of the riverside natives we made our preparations under the direction of Captain Robertson. The rest of these men, to the number of several hundreds, had made a wide détour to the head of the swamps, miles away, whence they were to advance at a certain signal. These preparations were simple. A quantity of thorn trees were cut down and by means of heavy stones fastened to their trunks, anchored in the narrow channel of deep water. To their tops, which floated on the placid surface, were tied a variety of rags which we had brought with us, such as old red flannel shirts, gay-coloured but worn-out blankets, and I know not what besides. Some of these fragments also were attached to the anchored ropes under water.

Also we selected places for the guns upon the steep banks that I have mentioned, between which this channel ran. Foreseeing what would happen, I chose one for myself behind a particularly stout rock and what is more, built a stone wall to the height of several feet on the landward side of it, as I guessed that the natives posted near to me would prove wild in their shooting.

These labours occupied the rest of that day, and at night we retired to higher ground to sleep. Before dawn on the following morning we returned and took up our stations, some on one side of the channel and some on the other which we had to reach in a canoe brought for the purpose by the river natives.

Then, before the sun rose, Captain Robertson fired a huge pile of dried reeds and bushes, which was to give the signal to the river natives far away to begin their beat. This done, we sat down and waited, after making sure that every gun had plenty of ammunition ready.

As the dawn broke, by climbing a tree near my *schanze* or shelter, I saw a good many miles away to the south a wide circle of little fires, and guessed that the natives were beginning to burn the dry reeds of the swamp. Presently these fires drew together into a thin wall of flame. Then I knew that it was time to return to the *schanze* and prepare. It was full daylight, however, before anything happened.

Watching the still channel of water, I saw ripples on it and bubbles of air rising. Suddenly there appeared the head of a great bull-hippopotamus which, having caught sight of our rag barricade, either above or below water, had risen to the surface to see what it might be. I put a bullet from an eight-bore rifle through its brain, whereon it sank, as I guessed, stone dead to the bottom of the channel, thus helping to increase the barricade by the bulk of its great body. Also it had another effect. I have observed that sea-cows cannot bear the smell and taint of blood, which frightens them horribly, so that they will expose themselves to almost any risk, rather than get it into their nostrils.

Now, in this still water where there was no perceptible current, the blood from the dead bull soon spread all about so that when the herd, following their leader, began to arrive they were much alarmed. Indeed, the first of them on winding or tasting it, turned and tried to get back up the channel where, however, they met others following, and there ensued a tremendous confusion. They rose to the surface, blowing, snorting, bellowing and scrambling over each other in the water, while continually more and more arrived behind them, till there was a perfect pandemonium in that narrow place.

All our guns opened fire wildly upon the mass; it was like a battle and through the smoke I caught sight of the riverside natives who were acting as beaters, advancing far away, fantastically dressed, screaming with excitement and waving spears, or sometimes torches of flaming reeds. Most of these were scrambling along the banks, but some of the bolder spirits advanced over the lagoon in canoes, driving the hippopotami towards the mouth of the channel by which alone they could escape into the great swamps below and so on to the river. In all my hunting experience I do not think I ever saw a more remarkable scene. Still, in a way, to me it was unpleasant, for I flatter myself that I am a sportsman and a battle of this sort is not sport as I understand the term.

At length it came to this; the channel for quite a long way was literally full of hippopotami—I should think there must have been a hundred of them or more of all sorts and sizes, from great bulls down to little calves. Some of these were killed, not many, for the shooting of our gallant company was execrable and almost at hazard. Also for every sea-cow that died, of which number I think that Captain Robertson and myself accounted for most—many were only wounded.

Still, the unhappy beasts, crazed with noise and fire and blood, did not seem to dare to face our frail barricade, probably for the reason that I have given. For a while they remained massed together in the water, or under it, making a most horrible noise. Then of a sudden they seemed to take a resolution. A few of them broke back towards the burning reeds, the screaming beaters and the advancing canoes. One of these, indeed, a wounded bull, charged a canoe, crushed it in its huge jaws and killed the rower, how exactly I do not know, for his body was never found. The majority of them, however, took another counsel, for emerging from the water on either side, they began to scramble towards us along the steep banks, or even to climb up them with surprising agility. It was at this point in the proceedings that I congratulated myself earnestly upon the solid character of the water-worn rock which I had selected as a shelter.

Behind this rock together with my gun-bearer and Umslopogaas, who, as he did not shoot, had elected to be my companion, I crouched and banged away at the unwieldy creatures as they advanced. But fire fast as I might with two rifles, I could not stop the half of them—they were drawing unpleasantly near. I glanced at Umslopogaas and even then was amused to see that probably for the first time in his life that redoubtable warrior was in a genuine fright.

"This is madness, Macumazahn," he shouted above the din. "Are we to stop here and be stamped flat by a horde of water-pigs?"

"It seems so," I answered, "unless you prefer to be stamped flat outside—or eaten," I added, pointing to a great crocodile that had also emerged from the channel and was coming along towards us with open jaws.

"By the Axe!" shouted Umslopogaas again, "I—a warrior—will not die thus, trodden on like a slug by an ox."

Now I have mentioned a tree which I climbed. In his extremity Umslopogaas rushed for that tree and went up it like a lamplighter, just as the crocodile wriggled past its trunk, snapping at his retreating legs.

After this I took no more note of him, partly because of the advancing sea-cows, and more for the reason that one of the village natives posted above me, firing wildly, put a large round bullet through the sleeve of my coat. Indeed, had it not been for the wall which I built that protected us, I am certain that both my bearer and I would have been killed, for afterwards I found it splashed over with lead from bullets which had struck the stones.

Well, thanks to the strength of my rock and to the wall, or as Hans said afterwards, to Zikali's Great Medicine, we escaped unhurt. The rush went by me; indeed, I killed one sea-cow so close that the powder from the rifle actually burned its hide. But it did go by, leaving us untouched. All, however, were not so fortunate, since of the village natives two were trampled to death, while a third had his leg broken.

Also, and this was really amusing—a bewildered bull charging at full speed, crashed into the trunk of Umslopogaas' tree, and as it was not very thick, snapped it in two. Down came the top in which the dignified chief was ensconced like a bird in a nest, though at that moment there was precious little dignity about him. However, except for scratches he was not hurt, as the hippopotamus had other business in urgent need of attention and did not stop to settle with him.

"Such are the things which happen to a man who mixes himself up with matters of which he knows nothing," said Umslopogaas sententiously to me afterwards. But all the same he could never bear any allusion to this tree-climbing episode in his martial career, which, as it happened, had taken place in full view of his retainers, among whom it remained the greatest of jokes. Indeed, he wanted to kill a man, the wag of the party, who gave him a slang name which, being translated, means "*He-who-is-so-brave-that-he-dares-to-ride-a-water-horse-up-a-tree.*"

It was all over at last, for which I thanked Providence devoutly. A good many of the sea-cows were dead, I think twenty-one was our exact bag, but the majority of them had escaped in one way or another, many as I fear, wounded. I imagine that at the last the bulk of the herd overcame its fears and swimming through our screen, passed away down the channel. At any rate they were gone, and having ascertained that there was nothing to be done for the man who had been trampled on my side of the channel, I crossed it in the canoe with the object of returning quietly to our camp to rest.

But as yet there was to be no quiet for me, for there I found Captain Robertson, who I think had been refreshing himself out of a bottle and was in a great state of excitement about a native who had been killed near him who was a favourite of his, and another whose leg was broken. He declared vehemently that the hippopotamus which had done this had been wounded and rushed into some bushes a few hundred yards away, and that he meant to take vengeance upon it. Indeed, he was just setting off to do so.

Seeing his agitated state I thought it wisest to follow him. What happened need not be set out in detail. It is sufficient to say that he found that hippopotamus and blazed both barrels at it in the bushes, hitting it, but not seriously. Out lumbered the creature with its mouth open, wishing to escape. Robertson turned to fly as he was in its path, but from one cause or another, tripped and fell down. Certainly he would have been crushed beneath its huge feet had I not stepped in front of him and sent two solid eight-bore bullets down that yawning throat, killing it dead within three feet of where Robertson was trying to rise, and I may add, of myself.

This narrow escape sobered him, and I am bound to say that his gratitude was profuse.

"You are a brave man," he said, "and had it not been for you by now I should be wherever bad people go. I'll not forget it, Mr. Quatermain, and if ever you want anything that John Robertson can give, why, it's yours."

"Very well," I answered, being seized by an inspiration, "I do want something that you can give easily enough."

"Give it a name and it's yours, half my place, if you like."

"I want," I went on as I slipped new cartridges into the rifle, "I want you to promise to give up drink for your daughter's sake. That's what nearly did for you just now, you know."

"Man, you ask a hard thing," he said slowly. "But by God I'll try for her sake and for yours too."

Then I went to help to set the leg of the injured man, which was all the rest I got that morning.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE OATH

We spent three more days at that place. First it was necessary to allow time to elapse before the gases which generated in their great bodies caused those of the sea-cows which had been killed in the water, to float. Then they must be skinned and their thick hides cut into strips and pieces to be traded for *sjamboks* or to make small native shields for which some of the East Coast tribes will pay heavily.

All this took a long while, during which I amused, or disgusted myself in watching those river natives devouring the flesh of the beasts. The lean, what there was of it, they dried and smoked into a kind of "biltong," but a great deal of the fat they ate at once. I had the curiosity to weigh a lump which was given to one thin, hungry-looking fellow. It scaled quite twenty pounds. Within four hours he had eaten it to the last ounce and lay there, a distended and torpid log. What would not we white people give for such a digestion!

At last all was over and we started homewards, the man with a broken leg being carried in a kind of litter. On the edge of the bushveld we found the waggon quite safe, also one of Captain Robertson's that had followed us from Strathmuir in order to carry the expected load of hippopotamus' hides and ivory. I asked my *voorlooper* if anything had happened during our absence. He answered nothing, but on the previous evening after dark, he had seen a glow in the direction of Strathmuir which lay on somewhat lower ground about twenty miles away, as though numerous fires had been lighted there. It struck him so much, he added, that he climbed a tree to observe it better. He did not think, however, that any building had been burned there, as the glow was not strong enough for that.

I suggested that it was caused by some grass fire or reed-burning, to which he replied indifferently that he did not think so as the line of the glow was not sufficiently continuous.

There the matter ended, though I confess that the story made me anxious, for what exact reason I could not say. Umslopogaas also, who had listened to it, for our talk was in Zulu, looked grave, but made no remark. But as since his tree-climbing experience he had been singularly silent, of this I thought little.

We had trekked at a time which we calculated would bring us to Strathmuir about an hour before sundown, allowing for a short halt half way. As my oxen were got in more quickly than those of the other waggon after this outspan, I was the first away, followed at a little distance by Umslopogaas, who preferred to walk with his Zulus. The truth was that I could not get that story about the glow of fires out of my mind and was anxious to push on, which had caused me to hurry up the inspanning.

Perhaps we had covered a couple of miles of the ten or twelve which still lay between us and Strathmuir, when far off on the crest of one of the waves of the veld which much resembled those of the swelling sea frozen while in motion, I saw a small figure approaching us at a rapid trot. Somehow that figure suggested Hans to my mind, so much so that I fetched my glasses to examine it more closely. A short scrutiny through them convinced me that Hans it was, Hans and no other, advancing at a great pace.

Filled with uneasiness, I ordered the driver to flog up the oxen, with the result that in a little over five minutes we met. Halting the waggon, I leapt from the waggon-box and calling to Umslopogaas who had kept up with us at a slow, swinging trot, went to Hans, who, when he saw me, stood still at a little distance, swinging his apology for a hat in his hand, as was his fashion when ashamed or perplexed.

"What is the matter, Hans?" I asked when we were within speaking distance.

"Oh! Baas, everything," he answered, and I noticed that he kept his eyes fixed upon the ground and that his lips twitched.

"Speak, you fool, and in Zulu," I said, for by now Umslopogaas had joined me.

"Baas," he answered in that tongue, "a terrible thing has come about at the farm of Red-Beard yonder. Yesterday afternoon at the time when people are in the habit of sleeping there till the sun grows less hot, a body of great men with fierce faces who carried big spears—perhaps there were fifty of them, Baas—crept up to the place through the long grass and growing crops, and attacked it."

"Did you see them come?" I asked.

"No, Baas. I was watching at a little distance as you bade me do and the sun being hot, I shut my eyes to keep out the glare of it, so that I did not see them until they had passed me and heard the noise."

"You mean that you were asleep or drunk, Hans, but go on."

"Baas, I do not know," he answered shamefacedly, "but after that I climbed a tall tree with a kind of bush at the top of it" (I ascertained afterwards that this was a sort of leafy-crowned palm), "and from it I saw everything without being seen."

"What did you see, Hans?" I asked him.

"I saw the big men run up and make a kind of circle round the village. Then they shouted, and the people in the village came out to see what was the matter. Thomaso and some of the men caught sight of them first and ran away fast into the hillside at the back where the trees grow, before the circle was complete. Then the women and the children came out and the big men killed them with their spears—all, all!"

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "And what happened at the house and to the lady?"

"Baas, some of the men had surrounded that also and when she heard the noise the lady Sad-Eyes came out on to the stoep and with her came the two Zulus of the Axe who had been left sick but were now quite recovered. A number of the big men ran as though to take her, but the two Zulus made a great fight in front of the little steps to the stoep, having their backs protected by the stoep, and

killed six of them before they themselves were killed. Also Sad-Eyes shot one with a pistol she carried, and wounded another so that the spear fell out of his hand.

"Then the rest fell on her and tied her up, setting her in a chair on the stoep where two remained to watch her. They did her no hurt, Baas; indeed, they seemed to treat her as gently as they could. Also they went into the house and there they caught that tall fat yellow girl who always smiles and is called Janee, she who waits upon the Lady Sad-Eyes, and brought her out to her. I think they told her, Baas, that she must look after her mistress and that if she tried to run away she would be killed, for afterwards I saw Janee bring her food and other things."

"And then, Hans?"

"Then, Baas, most of the great men rested a while, though some of them went through the store gathering such things as they liked, blankets, knives and iron cooking-pots, but they set fire to nothing, nor did they try to catch the cattle. Also they took dry wood from the pile and lit big fires, eight or nine of them, and when the sun set they began to feast."

"What did they feast on, Hans, if they took no cattle?" I asked with a shiver, for I was afraid of I knew not what.

"Baas," answered Hans, turning his head away and looking at the ground, "they feasted on the children whom they had killed, also on some of the young women. These tall soldiers are men-eaters, Baas."

At this horrible intelligence I turned faint and felt as though I was going to fall, but recovering myself, signed to him to go on with his story.

"They feasted quite nicely, Baas," he continued, "making no noise. Then some of them slept while others watched, and that went on all night. As soon as it was dark, but before the moon rose, I slid down the tree and crept round to the back of the house without being seen or heard, as I can, Baas. I got into the house by the back door and crawled to the window of the sitting-room. It was open and peeping through I saw Sad-Eyes still tied to the seat on the stoep not more than a pace away, while the girl Janee crouched on the floor at her feet—I think she was asleep or fainting.

"I made a little noise, like a night-adder hissing, and kept on making it, till at last Sad-Eyes turned her head. Then I spoke in a very low whisper, for fear lest I should wake the two guards who were dozing on either side of her wrapped in their blankets, saying, 'It is I, Hans, come to help you.' 'You cannot,' she answered, also speaking very low. 'Get to your master and tell him and my father to follow. These men are called Amahagger and live far away across the river. They are going to take me to their home, as I understand, to rule them, because they want a white woman to be a queen over them who have always been ruled by a certain white queen, against whom they have rebelled. I do not think they mean to do me any harm, unless perhaps they want to marry me to their chief, but of this I am not sure from their talk which I understand badly. Now go, before they catch you.'

"I think you might get away," I whispered back. 'I will cut your bonds. When you are free, slip through the window and I will guide you.'

"Very well, try it," she said.

"So I drew my knife and stretched out my arm. But then, Baas, I showed myself a fool—if the Great Medicine had still been there I might have known better. I forgot the starlight which shone upon the blade of the knife. That girl Janee came out of her sleep or swoon, lifted her head and saw the knife. She screamed once, then at a word from her mistress was silent. But it was enough, for it woke up the guards who glared about them and threatened Janee with their great spears, also they went to sleep no more, but began to talk together, though what they said I could not hear, for I was hiding on the floor of the room. After this, knowing that I could do no good and might do harm and get myself killed, I crept out of the house as I had crept in, and crawled back to my tree."

"Why did you not come to me?" I asked.

"Because I still hoped I might be able to help Sad-Eyes, Baas. Also I wanted to see what happened, and I knew that I could not bring you here in time to be any good. Yet it is true I thought of coming though I did not know the road."

"Perhaps you were right."

"At the first dawn," continued Hans, "the great men who are called Amahagger rose and ate what was left over from the night before. Then they gathered themselves together and went to the house. Here they found a large chair, that seated with *rimpis* in which the Baas Red-Beard sits, and lashed two poles to the chair. Beneath the chair they tied the garments and other things of the Lady Sad-Eyes which they made Janee gather as Sad-Eyes directed her. This done, very gently they sat Sad-Eyes herself in the chair, bowing while they made her fast. After this eight of them set the poles upon their shoulders, and they all went away at a trot, heading for the bush-veld, driving with them a herd of goats which they had stolen from the farm, and making Janee run by the chair. I saw everything, Baas, for they passed just beneath my tree. Then I came to seek you, following the outward spoor of the waggons which I could not have done well at night. That is all, Baas."

"Hans," I said, "you have been drinking and because of it the lady Sad-Eyes is taken a prisoner by cannibals; for had you been awake and watching, you might have seen them coming and saved her and the rest. Still, afterwards you did well, and for the rest you must answer to Heaven."

"I must tell your reverend father, the Predikant, Baas, that the white master, Red-Beard, gave me the liquor and it is rude not to do as a great white master does, and drink it up. I am sure he will understand, Baas," said Hans abjectly.

I thought to myself that it was true and that the spear which Robertson cast had fallen upon his own head, as the Zulus say, but I made no answer, lacking time for argument.

"Did you say," asked Umslopogaas, speaking for the first time, "that my servants killed only six of these men-eaters?"

Hans nodded and answered, "Yes, six. I counted the bodies."

"It was ill done, they should have killed six each," said Umslopogaas moodily. "Well, they have left the more for us to finish," and he fingered the great axe.

Just then Captain Robertson arrived in his waggon, calling out anxiously to know what was the matter, for some premonition of evil seemed to have struck him. My heart sank at the sight of him, for how was I to tell such a story to the father of the murdered children and of the abducted girl?

In the end I felt that I could not. Yes, I turned coward and saying that I must fetch something out of the waggon, bolted into it, bidding Hans go forward and repeat his tale. He obeyed unwillingly enough and looking out between the curtains of the waggon tent I saw all that happened, though I could not hear the words that passed.

Robertson had halted the oxen and jumping from the waggon-box strode forward and met Hans, who began to speak with him, twitching his hat in his hands. Gradually as the tale progressed, I saw the Captain's face freeze into a mask of horror. Then he began to argue and deny, then to weep—oh! it was a terrible sight to see that great man weeping over those whom he had lost, and in such a fashion.

After this a kind of blind rage seized him and I thought he was going to kill Hans, who was of the same opinion, for he ran away. Next he staggered about, shaking his fists, cursing and shouting, till presently he fell of a heap and lay face downwards, beating his head against the ground and groaning.

Now I went to him because I must.

He saw me coming and sat up.

"That's a pretty story, Quatermain, which this little yellow monkey has been gibbering at me. Man, do you understand what he says? He says that all those half-blood children of mine are dead, murdered by savages from over the Zambesi, yes, and eaten, too, with their mothers. Do you take the point? Eaten like lambs. Those fires your man saw last night were the fires on which they were cooked, my little *so-and-so* and *so-and-so*," and he mentioned half a dozen different names. "Yes, cooked, Quatermain. And that isn't all of it, they have taken Inez too. They didn't eat her, but they have dragged her off a captive for God knows what reason. I couldn't understand. The whole ship's crew is gone, except the captain absent on leave and the first officer, Thomaso, who deserted with some Lascar stokers, and left the women and children to their fate. My God, I'm going mad. I'm going mad! If you have any mercy in you, give me something to drink."

"All right," I said, "I will. Sit here and wait a minute."

Then I went to the waggon and poured out a stiff tot of spirits into which I put an amazing dose of bromide from a little medicine chest I always carry with me, and thirty drops of chlorodyne on the top of it. All this compound I mixed up with a little water and took it to him in a tin cup so that he could not see the colour.

He drank it at a gulp and throwing the pannikin aside, sat down on the veld, groaning while the company watched him at a respectful distance, for Hans had joined the others and his tale had spread like fire in drought-parched grass.

In a few minutes the drugs began to take effect upon Robertson's tortured nerves, for he rose and said quietly,

"What now?"

"Vengeance, or rather justice," I answered.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "vengeance. I swear that I will be avenged, or die—or both."

Again I saw my opportunity and said, "You must swear more than that, Robertson. Only sober men can accomplish great things, for drink destroys the judgment. If you wish to be avenged for the dead and to rescue the living, you must be sober, or I for one will not help you."

"Will you help me if I do, to the end, good or ill, Quatermain?" he added.

I nodded.

"That's as much as another's oath," he muttered. "Still, I will put my thought in words. I swear by God, by my mother—like these natives—and by my daughter born in honest marriage, that I will never touch another drop of strong drink, until I have avenged those poor women and their little children, and rescued Inez from their murderers. If I do you may put a bullet through me."

"That's all right," I said in an offhand fashion, though inwardly I glowed with pride at the success of my great idea, for at the time I thought it great, and went on,

"Now let us get to business. The first thing to do is to trek to Strathmuir and make preparations; the next to start upon the trail. Come to sit on the waggon with me and tell me what guns and ammunition you have got, for according to Hans those savages don't seem to have touched anything, except a few blankets and a herd of goats."

He did as I asked, telling me all he could remember. Then he said,

"It is a strange thing, but now I recall that about two years ago a great savage with a high nose, who talked a sort of Arabic which, like Inez, I understand, having lived on the coast, turned up one day and said he wanted to trade. I asked him what in, and he answered that he would like to buy some children. I told him that I was not a slave-dealer. Then he looked at Inez, who was moving about, and said that he would like to buy her to be a wife for his Chief, and offered some fabulous sum in ivory and in gold, which he said should be paid before she was taken away. I snatched his big spear from his hand, broke it over his head and gave him the best hiding with its shaft that he had ever heard of. Then I kicked him off the place. He limped away but when he was out of reach, turned and called out that one day he would come again with others and take her, meaning Inez, without leaving the price in ivory and gold. I ran for my gun, but when I got back he had gone and I never thought of the matter again from that day to this."

"Well, he kept his promise," I said, but Robertson made no answer, for by this time that thundering dose of bromide and laudanum had taken effect on him and he had fallen asleep, of which I was glad, for I thought that this sleep would save his sanity, as I believe it did for a while.

We reached Strathmuir towards sunset, too late to think of attempting the pursuit that day. Indeed, during our trek, I had thought the matter out carefully and come to the conclusion that to try to do so would be useless. We must rest and make preparations; also there was no hope of our overtaking these brutes who already had a clear twelve hours' start, by a sudden spurt. They must be run down patiently by following their spoor, if indeed they could be run down at all before they vanished into the vast recesses of unknown Africa. The most we could do this night was to get ready.

Captain Robertson was still sleeping when we passed the village and of this I was heartily glad, since the remains of a cannibal feast are not pleasant to behold, especially when they are—! Indeed, of these I determined to be rid at once, so slipping off the waggon with Hans and some of the farm boys, for none of the Zulus would defile themselves by touching such human remnants—I made up two of the smouldering fires, the light of which the *voorlooper* had seen upon the sky, and on to them cast, or caused to be cast, those poor fragments. Also I told the farm natives to dig a big grave and in it to place the other bodies and generally to remove the traces of murder.

Then I went on to the house, and not too soon. Seeing the waggons arrive and having made sure that the Amahagger were gone, Thomaso and the other cowards emerged from their hiding-places and returned. Unfortunately for the former the first person he met

was Umslopogaas, who began to revile the fat half-breed in no measured terms, calling him dog, coward, and other opprobrious names, such as deserter of women and children, and so forth—all of which someone translated.

Thomaso, an insolent person, tried to swagger the matter out, saying that he had gone to get assistance. Infuriated at this lie, Umslopogaas leapt upon him with a roar and though he was a strong man, dealt with him as a lion does with a buck. Lifting him from his feet, he hurled him to the ground, then as he strove to rise and run, caught him again and as it seemed to me, was about to break his back across his knee. Just at this juncture I arrived.

"Let the man go," I shouted to him. "Is there not enough death here already?"

"Yes," answered Umslopogaas, "I think there is. Best that this jackal should live to eat his own shame," and he cast Thomaso to the ground, where he lay groaning.

Robertson, who was still asleep in the waggon, woke up at the noise, and descended from it, looking dazed. I got him to the house and in doing so made my way past, or rather between the bodies of the two Zulus and of the six men whom they had killed, also of him whom Inez had shot. Those Zulus had made a splendid fight for they were covered with wounds, all of them in front, as I found upon examination.

Having made Robertson lie down upon his bed, I took a good look at the slain Amahagger. They were magnificent men, all of them; tall, spare and shapely with very clear-cut features and rather frizzled hair. From these characteristics, as well as the lightness of their colour, I concluded that they were of a Semitic or Arab type, and that the admixture of their blood with that of the Bantus was but slight, if indeed there were any at all. Their spears, of which one had been cut through by a blow of a Zulu's axe, were long and broad, not unlike to those used by the Masai, but of finer workmanship.

By this time the sun was setting and thoroughly tired by all that I had gone through, I went into the house to get something to eat, having told Hans to find food and prepare a meal. As I sat down Robertson joined me and I made him also eat. His first impulse was to go to the cupboard and fetch the spirit bottle; indeed, he rose to do so.

"Hans is making coffee," I said warningly.

"Thank you," he answered, "I forgot. Force of habit, you know."

Here I may state that never from that moment did I see him touch another drop of liquor, not even when I drank my modest tot in front of him. His triumph over temptation was splendid and complete, especially as the absence of his accustomed potations made him ill for some time and of course depressed his spirits, with painful results that were apparent in due course.

In fact, the man became totally changed. He grew gloomy but resourceful, also full of patience. Only one idea obsessed him—to rescue his daughter and avenge the murder of his people; indeed, except his sins, he thought of and found interest in nothing else. Moreover, his iron constitution cast off all the effects of his past debauchery and he grew so strong that although I was pretty tough in those days, he could out-tire me.

To return; I engaged him in conversation and with his help made a list of what we should require on our vendetta journey, all of which served to occupy his mind. Then I sent him to bed, saying that I would call him before dawn, having first put a little more bromide into his third cup of coffee. After this I turned in and notwithstanding the sight of those remains of the cannibal feast and the knowledge of the dead men who lay outside my window, I slept like a top.

Indeed, it was the Captain who awakened me, not I the Captain, saying that daylight was on the break and we had better be stirring. So we went down to the Store, where I was thankful to find that everything had been tidied up in accordance with my directions.

On our way Robertson asked me what had become of the remains, whereon I pointed to the smouldering ashes of one of the great fires. He went to it and kneeling down, said a prayer in broad Scotch, doubtless one that he had learned at his mother's knee. Then he took some of the ashes from the edge of the pyre—for such it was—and threw them into the glowing embers where, as he knew, lay all that was left of those who had sprung from him. Also he tossed others of them into the air, though what he meant by this I did not understand and never asked. Probably it was some rite indicative of expiation or of revenge, or both, which he had learned from the savages among whom he had lived so long.

After this we went into the Store and with the help of some of the natives, or half-breeds, who had accompanied us on the sea-cow expedition, selected all the goods we wanted, which we sent to the house.

As we returned thither I saw Umslopogaas and his men engaged, with the usual Zulu ceremonies, in burying their two companions in a hole they had made in the hillside. I noted, however, that they did not inter their war-axes or their throwing-spears with them as usual, probably because they thought that these might be needed. In place of them they put with the dead little models roughly shaped of bits of wood, which models they "killed" by first breaking them across.

I lingered to watch the funeral and heard Goroko, the witch-doctor, make a little speech.

"O Father and Chief of the Axe," he said, addressing Umslopogaas, who stood silent leaning on his weapon and watching all, a portentous figure in the morning mist, "O Father, O Son of the Heavens" (this was an allusion to the royal blood of Umslopogaas of which the secret was well known, although it would never have been spoken aloud in Zululand), "O Slaughterer (Bulalio), O Woodpecker who picks at the hearts of men; O King-Slayer; O Conqueror of the Halakazi; O Victor in a hundred fights; O Gatherer of the Lily-bloom that faded in the hand; O Wolf-man, Captain of the Wolves that ravened; O Slayer of Faku; O Great One whom it pleases to seem small, because he must follow his blood to the end appointed——"

This was the opening of the speech, the "*bonga-ing*" or giving of Titles of Praise to the person addressed, of which I have quoted but a sample, for there were many more of them that I have forgotten. Then the speaker went on,

"It was told to me, though of it I remember nothing, that when my Spirit was in me a while ago I prophesied that this place would flow with blood, and lo! the blood has flowed, and with it that of these our brothers," and he gave the names of the two dead Zulus, also those of their forefathers for several generations.

"It seems, Father, that they died well, as you would have wished them to die, and as doubtless they desired to die themselves, leaving a tale behind them, though it is true that they might have died better, killing more of the men-eaters, as it is certain they would have done, had they not been sick inside. They are finished; they have gone beyond to await us in the Under-world among the ghosts. Their story is told and soon to their children they will be but names whispered in honour after the sun has set. Enough of them who have showed us how to die as our fathers did before them."

Goroko paused a while, then added with a waving of his hands, "My Spirit comes to me again and I know that these our brothers shall not pass unavenged. Chief of the Axe, great glory awaits the Axe, for it shall feed full. I have spoken."

"Good words!" grunted Umslopogaas. Then he saluted the dead by raising Inkosikaas and came to me to consult about our journey.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PURSUIT

After all we did not get away much before noon, because first there was a great deal to be done. To begin with the loads had to be arranged. These consisted largely of ammunition, everything else being cut down to an irreducible minimum. To carry them we took two donkeys there were on the place, also half a dozen pack oxen, all of which animals were supposed to be "salted"—that is, to have suffered and recovered from every kind of sickness, including the bite of the deadly tsetse fly. I suspected, it is true, that they would not be proof against further attacks, still, I hoped that they would last for some time, as indeed proved to be the case.

In the event of the beasts failing us, we took also ten of the best of those Strathmuir men who had accompanied us on the sea-cow trip, to serve as bearers when it became necessary. It cannot be said that these snuff-and-butter fellows—for most, if not all of them had some dash of white blood in their veins—were exactly willing volunteers. Indeed, if a choice had been left to them, they would, I think, have declined this adventure.

But there was no choice. Their master, Robertson, ordered them to come and after a glance at the Zulus they concluded that the command was one which would be enforced and that if they stopped behind, it would not be as living men. Also some of them had lost wives or children in the slaughter, which, if they were not very brave, filled them with a desire for revenge. Lastly, they could all shoot after a fashion and had good rifles; moreover if I may say so, I think that they put confidence in my leadership. So they made the best of a bad business and got themselves ready.

Then arrangements must be made about the carrying on of the farm and store during our absence. These, together with my waggon and oxen, were put in the charge of Thomaso, since there was no one else who could be trusted at all—a very battered and crestfallen Thomaso, by the way. When he heard of it he was much relieved, since I think he feared lest he also should be expected to take part in the hunt of the Amahagger man-eaters. Also it may have occurred to him that in all probability none of us would ever come back at all, in which case by a process of natural devolution, he might find himself the owner of the business and much valuable property. However, he swore by sundry saints—for Thomaso was nominally a Catholic—that he would look after everything as though it were his own, as no doubt he hoped it might become.

"Hearken, fat pig," said Umslopogaas, Hans obligingly translating so that there might be no mistake, "if I come back, and come back I shall who travel with the Great Medicine—and find even one of the cattle of the white lord, Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, missing, or one article stolen from his waggon, or the fields of your master not cultivated or his goods wasted, I swear by the Axe that I will hew you into pieces with the axe; yes, if to do it I have to hunt you from where the sun rises to where it sets and down the length of the night between. Do you understand, fat pig, deserter of women and children, who to save yourself could run faster than a buck?"

Thomaso replied that he understood very clearly indeed, and that, Heaven helping him, all should be kept safe and sound. Still, I was sure that in his manly heart he was promising great gifts to the saints if they would so arrange matters that Umslopogaas and his axe were never seen at Strathmuir again, and reflecting that after all the Amahagger had their uses. However, as I did not trust him in the least, much against their will, I left my driver and *voorlooper* to guard my belongings.

At last we did get off, pursued by the fervent blessings of Thomaso and the prayers of the others that we would avenge their murdered relatives. We were a curious and motley procession. First went Hans, because at following a spoor he was, I believe, almost unequalled in Africa, and with him, Umslopogaas, and three of his Zulus to guard against surprise. These were followed by Captain Robertson, who seemed to prefer to walk alone and whom I thought it best to leave undisturbed. Then I came and after me straggled the Strathmuir boys with the pack animals, the cavalcade being closed by the remaining Zulus under the command of Goroko. These walked last in case any of the mixed-bloods should attempt to desert, as we thought it quite probable that they would.

Less than an hour's tramp brought us to the bush-veld where I feared that our troubles might begin, since if the Amahagger were cunning, they would take advantage of it to confuse or hide their spoor. As it chanced, however, they had done nothing of the sort and a child could have followed their march. Just before nightfall we came to their first halting-place where they had made a fire and eaten one of the herd of farm goats which they had driven away with them, although they left the cattle, I suppose, because goats are docile and travel well.

Hans showed us everything that had happened; where the chair in which Inez was carried was set down, where she and Janee had been allowed to walk that she might stretch her stiff limbs, the dregs of some coffee that evidently Janee had made in a saucepan, and so forth.

He even told us the exact number of the Amahagger, which he said totalled forty-one, including the man whom Inez had wounded. His spoor he distinguished from that of the others both by an occasional drop of blood and because he walked lightly on his right foot, doubtless for the reason that he wished to avoid jarring his wound, which was on that side.

At this spot we were obliged to stay till daybreak, since it was impossible to follow the spoor by night, a circumstance that gave the cannibals a great advantage over us.

The next two days were repetitions of the first, but on the fourth we passed out of the bush-veld into the swamp country that bordered the great river. Here our task was still easy since the Amahagger had followed one of the paths made by the river-dwellers who had their habitations on mounds, though whether these were natural or artificial I am not sure, and sometimes on floating islands.

On our second day in the reeds we came upon a sad sight. To our left stood one of these mound villages, if a village it could be called, since it consisted only of four or five huts inhabited perhaps by twenty people. We went up to it to obtain information and

stumbled across the body of an old man lying in the pathway. A few yards further on we found the ashes of a big fire and by it such remains as we had seen at Strathmuir. Here there had been another cannibal feast. The miserable huts were empty, but as at Strathmuir, had not been burnt.

We were going away when the acute ears of Hans caught the sound of groans. We searched about and in a clump of reeds near the foot of the mound, found an old woman with a great spear wound just above her skinny thigh piercing deep into the vitals, but of a nature which is not immediately mortal. One of Robertson's people who understood the language of these swamp-dwellers well, spoke to her. She told him that she wanted water. It was brought and she drank copiously. Then in answer to his questions she began to talk.

She said that the Amahagger had attacked the village and killed all who could not escape. They had eaten a young woman and three children. She had been wounded by a spear and fled away into the place where we found her, where none of them took the trouble to follow her as she "was not worth eating."

By my direction the man asked her whether she knew anything of these Amahagger. She replied that her grandfathers had, though she had heard nothing of them since she was a child, which must have been seventy years before. They were a fierce people who lived far up north across the Great River, the remnants of a race that had once "ruled the world."

Her grandfathers used to say that they were not always cannibals, but had become so long before because of a lack of food and now had acquired the taste. It was for this purpose that they still raided to get other people to eat, since their ruler would not allow them to eat one another. The flesh of cattle they did not care for, although they had plenty of them, but sometimes they ate goats and pigs because they said they tasted like man. According to her grandfathers they were a very evil people and full of magic.

All of this the old woman told us quite briskly after she had drunk the water, I think because her wound had mortified and she felt no pain. Her information, however, as is common with the aged, dealt entirely with the far past; of the history of the Amahagger since the days of her forebears she knew nothing, nor had she seen anything of Inez. All she could tell us was that some of them had attacked her village at dawn and that when she ran out of the hut she was speared.

While Robertson and I were wondering what we should do with the poor old creature whom it seemed cruel to leave here to perish, she cleared up the question by suddenly expiring before our eyes. Uttering the name of someone with whom, doubtless, she had been familiar in her youth, three or four times over, she just sank down and seemed to go to sleep and on examination we found that she was dead. So we left her and went on.

Next day we came to the edge of the Great River, here a sheet of placid running water about a mile across, for at this time of the year it was low. Perceiving quite a big village on our left, we went to it and made enquiries, to find that it had not been attacked by the cannibals, probably because it was too powerful, but that three nights before some of their canoes had been stolen, in which no doubt these had crossed the river.

As the people of this village had traded with Robertson at Strathmuir, we had no difficulty in obtaining other canoes from them in which to cross the Zambesi in return for one of our oxen that I could see was already sickening from tsetse bite. These canoes were large enough to take the donkeys that were patient creatures and stood still, but the cattle we could not get into them for fear of an upset. So we killed the two driven beasts that were left to us and took them with us as dead meat for food, while the three remaining pack oxen we tried to swim across, dragging them after the canoes with hide *reims* round their horns. As a result two were drowned, but one, a bold-hearted and enterprising animal, gained the other bank.

Here again we struck a sea of reeds in which, after casting about, Hans once more found the spoor of the Amahagger. That it was theirs beyond doubt was proved by the circumstance that on a thorny kind of weed we found a fragment of a cotton dress which, because of the pattern stamped on it, we all recognised as one that Inez had been wearing. At first I thought that this had been torn off by the thorns, but on examination we became certain that it had been placed there purposely, probably by Janee, to give us a clue. This conclusion was confirmed when at subsequent periods of the hunt we found other fragments of the same garment.

Now it would be useless for me to set out the details of this prolonged and arduous chase which in all endured for something over three weeks. Again and again we lost the trail and were only able to recover it by long and elaborate search, which occupied much time. Then, after we escaped from the reeds and swamps, we found ourselves upon stony uplands where the spoor was almost impossible to follow, indeed, we only rediscovered it by stumbling across the dead body of that cannibal whom Inez had wounded. Evidently he had perished from his hurt, which I could see had mortified. From the state of his remains we gathered that the raiders must be about two days' march ahead of us.

Striking their spoor again on softer ground where the impress of their feet remained—at any rate to the cunning sight of Hans—we followed them down across great valleys wherein trees grew sparsely, which valleys were separated from each other by ridges of high and barren land. On these belts of rocky soil our difficulties were great, but here twice we were put on the right track by more fragments torn from the dress of Inez.

At length we lost the spoor altogether; not a sign of it was to be found. We had no idea which way to go. All about us appeared these valleys covered with scattered bush running this way and that, so that we could not tell which of them to follow or to cross. The thing seemed hopeless, for how could we expect to find a little body of men in that immensity? Hans shook his head and even the fierce and steadfast Robertson was discouraged.

"I fear my poor lassie is gone," he said, and relapsed into brooding as had become his wont.

"Never say die! It's dogged as does it!" I replied cheerfully in the words of Nelson, who also had learned what it meant to hunt an enemy over trackless wastes, although his were of water.

I walked to the top of the rise where we were encamped, and sat down alone to think matters over. Our condition was somewhat parlous; all our beasts were now dead, even the second donkey, which was the last of them, having perished that morning, and been eaten, for food was scanty since of late we had met with little game. The Strathmuir men, who now must carry the loads, were almost worn out and doubtless would have deserted, except for the fact that there was no place to which they could go. Even the Zulus were discouraged, and said they had come away from home across the Great River to fight, not to run about in wildernesses and starve, though Umslopogaas made no complaint, being buoyed up by the promise of his soothsayer, Goroko, that battle was ahead of him in which he would win great glory.

Hans, however, remained cheerful, for the reason, as he remarked vacuously, that the Great Medicine was with us and that therefore, however bad things seemed to be, all in fact was well; an argument that carried no conviction to my soul.

It was on a certain evening towards sunset that I went away thus alone. I looked about me, east and west and north. Everywhere appeared the same bush-clad valleys and barren rises, miles upon miles of them. I bethought me of the map that old Zikali had drawn in the ashes, and remembered that it showed these valleys and rises and that beyond them there should be a great swamp, and beyond the swamp a mountain. So it seemed that we were on the right road to the home of his white Queen, if such a person existed, or at any rate we were passing over country similar to that which he had pictured or imagined.

But at this time I was not troubling my head about white queens. I was thinking of poor Inez. That she was alive a few days before we knew from the fragments of her dress. But where was she now? The spoor was utterly lost on that stony ground, or if any traces of it remained a heavy deluge of rain had washed them away. Even Hans had confessed himself beaten.

I stared about me helplessly, and as I did so a flying ray of light from the setting sun reflected downwards from a storm-cloud, fell upon a white patch on the crest of one of the distant land-waves. It struck me that probably limestone outcropped at this spot, as indeed proved to be the case; also that such a patch of white would be a convenient guide for any who were travelling across that sea of bush. Further, some instinct within seemed to impel me to steer for it, although I had all but made up my mind to go in a totally different direction many more points to the east. It was almost as though a voice were calling to me to take this path and no other. Doubtless this was an effect produced by weariness and mental overstrain. Still, there it was, very real and tangible, one that I did not attempt to combat.

So next morning at the dawn I headed north by west, laying my course for that white patch and for the first time breaking the straight line of our advance. Captain Robertson, whose temper had not been bettered by prolonged and frightful anxiety, or I may add, by his unaccustomed abstinence, asked me rather roughly why I was altering the course.

"Look here, Captain," I answered, "if we were at sea and you did something of the sort, I should not put such a question to you, and if by any chance I did, I should not expect you to answer. Well, by your own wish I am in command here and I think that the same argument holds."

"Yes," he replied. "I suppose you have studied your chart, if there is any of this God-forsaken country, and at any rate discipline is discipline. So steam ahead and don't mind me."

The others accepted my decision without comment; most of them were so miserable that they did not care which way we went, also they were good enough to repose confidence in my judgment.

"Doubtless the Baas has reasons," said Hans dubiously, "although the spoor, when last we saw it, headed towards the rising sun and as the country is all the same, I do not see why those man-eaters should have returned."

"Yes," I said, "I have reasons," although in fact I had none at all.

Hans surveyed me with a watery eye as though waiting for me to explain them, but I looked haughty and declined to oblige.

"The Baas has reasons," continued Hans, "for taking us on what I think to be the wrong side of that great ridge, there to hunt for the spoor of the men-eaters, and they are so deep down in his mind that he cannot dig them up for poor old Hans to look at. Well, the Baas wears the Great Medicine and perhaps it is there that the reasons sit. Those Strathmuir fellows say that they can go no further and wish to die. Umslopogaas has just gone to them with his axe to tell them that he is ready to help them to their wish. Look, he has got there, for they are coming quickly, who after all prefer to live."

Well, we started for my white patch of stones which no one else had noticed and of which I said nothing to anyone, and reached it by the following evening, to find, as I expected, that it was a lime outcrop.

By now we were in a poor way, for we had practically nothing left to eat, which did not tend to raise the spirits of the party. Also that lime outcrop proved to be an uninteresting spot overlooking a wide valley which seemed to suggest that there were other valleys of a similar sort beyond it, and nothing more.

Captain Robertson sat stern-faced and despondent at a distance muttering into his beard, as had become a habit with him. Umslopogaas leaned upon his axe and contemplated the heavens, also occasionally the Strathmuir men who cowered beneath his eye. The Zulus squatted about sharing such snuff as remained to them in economic pinches. Goroko, the witch-doctor, engaged himself in consulting his "Spirit," by means of bone-throwing, upon the humble subject of whether or no we should succeed in killing any game for food to-morrow, a point on which I gathered that his "Spirit" was quite uncertain. In short, the gloom was deep and universal and the sky looked as though it were going to rain.

Hans became sarcastic. Sneaking up to me in his most aggravating way, like a dog that means to steal something and cover up the theft with simulated affection, he pointed out one by one all the disadvantages of our present position. He indicated *per contra*, that if *his* advice had been followed, his conviction was that even if we had not found the man-eaters and rescued the lady called Sad-Eyes, our state would have been quite different. He was sure, he added, that the valley which he had suggested we should follow, was one full of game, inasmuch as he had seen their spoor at its entrance.

"Then why did you not say so?" I asked.

Hans sucked at his empty corn-cob pipe, which was his way of indicating that he would like me to give him some tobacco, much as a dog groans heavily under the table when he wants a bit to eat, and answered that it was not for him to point out things to one who knew everything, like the great Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, his honoured master. Still, the luck did seem to have gone a bit wrong. The privations could have been put up with (here he sucked very loudly at the empty pipe and looked at mine, which was alight), everything could have been put up with, if only there had been a chance of coming even with those men-eaters and rescuing the Lady Sad-Eyes, whose face haunted his sleep. As it was, however, he was convinced that by following the course I had mapped out we had lost their spoor finally and that probably they were now three days' march away in another direction. Still, the Baas had said that he had his reasons, and that of course was enough for him, Hans, only if the Baas would condescend to tell him, he would as a matter of curiosity like to know what the reasons were.

At that moment I confess that, much as I was attached to him, I should have liked to murder Hans, who, I felt, believing that he had me "on toast," to use a vulgar phrase, was taking advantage of my position to make a mock of me in his sly, Hottentot way.

I tried to continue to look grand, but felt that the attitude did not impress. Then I stared about me as though taking counsel with the Heavens, devoutly hoping that the Heavens would respond to my mute appeal. As a matter of fact they did.

"There is my reason, Hans," I said in my most icy voice, and I pointed to a faint line of smoke rising against the twilight sky on the further side of the intervening valley.

"You will perceive, Hans," I added, "that those Amahagger cannibals have forgotten their caution and lit a fire yonder, which they have not done for a long time. Perhaps you would like to know why this has happened. If so I will tell you. It is because for some days past I have purposely lost their spoor, which they knew we were following, and lit fires to puzzle them. Now, thinking that they have done with us, they have become incautious and shown us where they are. That is my reason, Hans."

He heard and, although of course he did not believe that I had lost the spoor on purpose, stared at me till I thought his little eyes were going to drop out of his head. But even in his admiration he contrived to convey an insult as only a native can.

"How wonderful is the Great Medicine of the Opener-of-Roads, that it should have been able thus to instruct the Baas," he said. "Without doubt the Great Medicine is right and yonder those men-eaters are encamped, who might just as well as have been anywhere else within a hundred miles."

"Drat the Great Medicine," I replied, but beneath my breath, then added aloud,

"Be so good, Hans, as to go to Umslopogaas and to tell him that Macumazahn, or the Great Medicine, proposes to march at once to attack the camp of the Amahagger, and—here is some tobacco."

"Yes, Baas," answered Hans humbly, as he snatched the tobacco and wriggled away like a worm.

Then I went to talk with Robertson.

The end of it was that within an hour we were creeping across that valley towards the spot where I had seen the line of smoke rising against the twilight sky.

Somewhere about midnight we reached the neighbourhood of this place. How near or how far we were from it, we could not tell since the moon was invisible, as of course the smoke was in the dark. Now the question was, what should we do?

Obviously there would be enormous advantages in a night attack, or at least in locating the enemy, so that it might be carried out at dawn before he marched. Especially was this so, since we were scarcely in a condition even if we could come face to face with them, to fight these savages when they were prepared and in the light of day. Only we two white men, with Hans, Umslopogaas and his Zulus, could be relied upon in such a case, since the Strathmuir mixed-bloods had become entirely demoralised and were not to be trusted at a pinch. Indeed, tired and half starving as we were, none of us was at his best. Therefore a surprise seemed our only chance. But first we must find those whom we wished to surprise.

Ultimately, after a hurried consultation, it was agreed that Hans and I should go forward and see if we could locate the Amahagger. Robertson wished to come too, but I pointed out that he must remain to look after his people, who, if he left them, might take the opportunity to melt away in the darkness, especially as they knew that heavy fighting was at hand. Also if anything happened to me it was desirable that one white man should remain to lead the party. Umslopogaas, too, volunteered, but knowing his character, I declined his help. To tell the truth, I was almost certain that if we came upon the men-eaters, he would charge the whole lot of them and accomplish a fine but futile end after hacking down a number of cannibal barbarians, whose extinction or escape remained absolutely immaterial to our purpose, namely, the rescue of Inez.

So it came about that Hans and I started alone, I not at all enjoying the job. I suppose that there lurks in my nature some of that primeval terror of the dark, which must continually have haunted our remote forefathers of a hundred or a thousand generations gone and still lingers in the blood of most of us. At any rate even if I am named the Watcher-by-Night, greatly do I prefer to fight or to face peril in the sunlight, though it is true that I would rather avoid both at any time.

In fact, I wished heartily that the Amahagger were at the other side of Africa, or in heaven, and that I, completely ignorant of the person called Inez Robertson, were seated smoking the pipe of peace on my own stoep in Durban. I think that Hans guessed my state of mind, since he suggested that he should go alone, adding with his usual unveiled rudeness, that he was quite certain that he would do much better without me, since white men always made a noise.

"Yes," I replied, determined to give him a Roland for his Oliver, "I have no doubt you would—under the first bush you came across, where you would sleep till dawn, and then return and say that you could not find the Amahagger."

Hans chuckled, quite appreciating the joke, and having thus mutually affronted each other, we started on our quest.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SWAMP

Neither Hans nor I carried rifles that we knew would be in the way on our business, which was just to scout. Moreover, one is always tempted to shoot if a gun is at hand, and this I did not want to do at present. So, although I had my revolver in case of urgent necessity, my only other weapon was a Zulu axe, that formerly had belonged to one of those two men who died defending Inez on the veranda at Strathmuir, while Hans had nothing but his long knife. Thus armed, or unarmed, we crept forward towards that spot whence, as we conjectured, we had seen the line of smoke rising some hours before.

For about a quarter of a mile we went on thus without seeing or hearing anything, and a difficult job it was in that gloom among the scattered trees with no light save such as the stars gave us. Indeed, I was about to suggest that we had better abandon the enterprise until daybreak when Hans nudged me, whispering,

“Look to the right between those twin thorns.”

I obeyed and following the line of sight which he had indicated, perceived, at a distance of about two hundred yards a faint glow, so faint indeed that I think only Hans would have noticed it. Really it might have been nothing more than the phosphorescence rising from a heap of fungus, or even from a decaying animal.

“The fire of which we saw the smoke that has burnt to ashes,” whispered Hans again. “I think that they have gone, but let us look.”

So we crawled forward very cautiously to avoid making the slightest noise; so cautiously, indeed, that it must have taken us nearly half an hour to cover those two hundred yards.

At length we were within about forty yards of that dying fire and, afraid to go further, came to a stand—or rather, a lie-still—behind some bushes until we knew more. Hans lifted his head and sniffed with his broad nostrils; then he whispered into my ear, but so low that I could scarcely hear him.

“Amahagger there all right, Baas, I smell them.”

This of course was possible, since what wind there was blew from the direction of the fire, although I whose nose is fairly keen could smell nothing at all. So I determined to wait and watch a while, and indicated my decision to Hans, who, considering our purpose accomplished, showed signs of wishing to retreat.

Some minutes we lay thus, till of a sudden this happened. A branch of resinous wood of which the stem had been eaten through by the flames, fell upon the ashes of the fire and burnt up with a brilliant light. In it we saw that the Amahagger were sleeping in a circle round the fire wrapped in their blankets.

Also we saw another thing, namely that nearer to us, not more than a dozen yards away, indeed, was a kind of little tent, also made of fur rugs or blankets, which doubtless sheltered Inez. Indeed, this was evident from the fact that at the mouth of it, wrapped up in something, lay none other than her maid, Janee, for her face being towards us, was recognised by us both in the flare of the flaming branch. One more thing we noted, namely, that two of the cannibals, evidently a guard, were sleeping between us and the little tent. Of course they ought to have been awake, but fatigue had overcome them and there they slumbered, seated on the ground, their heads hanging forward almost upon their knees.

An idea came to me. If we could kill those men without waking the others in that gloom, it might be possible to rescue Inez at once. Rapidly I weighed the *pros* and *cons* of such an attempt. Its advantages, if successful, were that the object of our pursuit would be carried through without further trouble and that it was most doubtful whether we should ever get such a chance again. If we returned to fetch the others and attacked in force, the probability was that those Amahagger, or one of them, would hear some sound made by the advance of a number of men, and fly into the darkness; or, rather than lose Inez, they might kill her. Or if they stood and fought, she might be slain in the scrimmage. Or, as after all we had only about a dozen effectives, for the Strathmuir bearers could not be relied upon, they might defeat and kill us whom they outnumbered by two or three to one.

These were the arguments for the attempt. Those for not making it were equally obvious. To begin with it was one of extraordinary risk; the two guards or someone else behind them might wake up—for such people, like dogs, mostly sleep with one eye open, especially when they know that they are being pursued. Or if they did not we might bungle the business so that they raised an outcry before they grew silent for ever, in which case both of us and perhaps Inez also would probably pay the penalty before we could get away.

Such was the horned dilemma upon one point or other of which we ran the risk of being impaled. For a full minute or more I considered the matter with an earnestness almost amounting to mental agony, and at last all but came to the conclusion that the danger was too enormous. It would be better, notwithstanding the many disadvantages of that plan, to go back and fetch the others.

But then it was that I made one of my many mistakes in life. Most of us do more foolish things than wise ones and sometimes I think that in spite of a certain reputation for caution and far-sightedness, I am exceptionally cursed in this respect. Indeed, when I look back upon my past, I can scarcely see the scanty flowers of wisdom that decorate its path because of the fat, ugly trees of error by which it is overshadowed.

On that occasion, forgetting past experiences where Hans was concerned, my natural tendency to blunder took the form of relying upon another's judgment instead of on my own. Although I had formed a certain view as to what should be done, the *pros* and *cons* seemed so evenly balanced that I determined to consult the little Hottentot and accept his verdict. This, after all, was but a form of gambling like pitch and toss, since, although it is true Hans was a clever, or at any rate a cunning man according to his lights, and

experienced, it meant that I was placing my own judgment in abeyance, which no one considering a life-and-death enterprise should do, taking the chance of that of another, whatever it might be. However, not for the first time, I did so—to my grief.

In the tiniest of whispers with my lips right against his smelly head, I submitted the problem to Hans, asking him what we should do, go on or go back. He considered a while, then answered in a voice which he contrived to make like the drone of a night beetle.

“Those men are fast asleep, I know it by their breathing. Also the Baas has the Great Medicine. Therefore I say go on, kill them and rescue Sad-Eyes.”

Now I saw that the Fates to which I had appealed had decided against me and that I must accept their decree. With a sick and sinking heart—for I did not at all like the business—I wondered for a moment what had led Hans to take this view, which was directly opposite to any I had expected from him. Of course his superstition about the Great Medicine had something to do with it, but I felt convinced that this was not all.

Even then I guessed that two arguments appealed to him, of which the first was that he desired, if possible, to put an end to this intolerable and unceasing hunt which had worn us all out, no matter what that end might be. The second and more powerful, however, was, I believed, and rightly, that the idea of this stealthy, midnight blow appealed irresistibly to the craft of his half-wild nature in which the strains of the leopard and the snake seemed to mingle with that of the human being. For be it remembered that notwithstanding his veneer of civilisation, Hans was a savage whose forefathers for countless ages had preserved themselves alive by means of such attacks and stratagems.

The die having been cast, in the same infinitesimal whispers we made our arrangements, which were few and simple. They amounted to this—that we were to creep on to the men and each of us to kill that one who was opposite to him, I with the axe and Hans with his knife, remembering that it must be done with a single stroke—that is, if they did not wake up and kill us—after which we were to get Inez out of her shelter, dressed or undressed, and make off with her into the darkness where we were pretty sure of being able to baffle pursuit until we reached our own camp.

Provided that we could kill the two guards in the proper fashion—rather a large proviso, I admit—the thing was simple as shelling peas which, notwithstanding the proverb, in my experience is not simple at all, since generally the shells crack the wrong way and at least one of the peas remained in the pod. So it happened in this case, for Janee, whom we had both forgotten, remained in the pod.

I am sure I don't know why we overlooked her; indeed, the error was inexcusable, especially as Hans had already experienced her foolishness and she was lying there before our eyes. I suppose that our minds were so concentrated upon the guard-killing and the tragic and impressive Inez that there was no room in them for the stolid and matter-of-fact Janee. At any rate she proved to be the pea that would not come out of the pod.

Often in my life I have felt terrified, not being by nature one of those who rejoices in dangers and wild adventures for their own sake, which only the stupid do, but who has, on the contrary, been forced to undertake them by the pressure of circumstances, a kind of hydraulic force that no one can resist, and who, having undertaken, has been carried through them, triumphing over the shrinkings of his flesh by some secret reserve of nerve power. Almost am I tempted to call it spirit-power, something that lives beyond and yet inspires our frail and fallible bodies.

Well, rarely have I been more frightened than I was at this moment. Actually I hung back until I saw that Hans slithering through the grass like a thick yellow snake with the great knife in his right hand, was quite a foot ahead of me. Then my pride came to the rescue and I spurted, if one can spurt upon one's stomach, and drew level with him. After this we went at a pace so slow that any able-bodied snail would have left us standing still. Inch by inch we crept forward, lying motionless a while after each convulsive movement, once for quite a long time, since the left-hand cannibal seemed about to wake up, for he opened his mouth and yawned. If so, he changed his mind and rolling from a sitting posture on to his side, went to sleep much more soundly than before.

A minute or so later the right-hand ruffian, my man, also stirred, so sharply that I thought he had heard something. Apparently, however, he was only haunted by dreams resulting from an evil life, or perhaps by the prescience of its end, for after waving his arm and muttering something in a frightened voice, he too, wearied out, poor devil, sank back into sleep.

At last we were on them, but paused because we could not see exactly where to strike and knew, each of us, that our first blow must be the last and fatal. A cloud had come up and dimmed what light there was, and we must wait for it to pass. It was a long wait, or so it seemed.

At length that cloud did pass and in faint outline I saw the classical head of my Amahagger bowed in deep sleep. With a heart beating as it does only in the fierce extremities of love or war, I hissed like a snake, which was our agreed signal. Then rising to my knees, I lifted the Zulu axe and struck with all my strength.

The blow was straight and true; Umslopogaas himself could not have dealt a better. The victim in front of me uttered no sound and made no movement; only sank gently on to his side, and there lay as dead as though he had never been born.

It appeared that Hans had done equally well, since the other man kicked out his long legs, which struck me on the knees. Then he also became strangely still. In short, both of them were stone dead and would tell no stories this side of Judgment Day.

Recovering my axe, which had been wrenched from my hand, I crept forward and opened the curtain-like rugs or blankets, I do not know which they were, that covered Inez. I heard her stir at once. The movement had awakened her, since captives sleep lightly.

“Make no noise, Inez,” I whispered. “It is I, Allan Quatermain, come to rescue you. Slip out and follow me; do you understand?”

“Yes, quite,” she whispered back and began to rise.

At this moment a blood-curdling yell seemed to fill earth and heaven, a yell at the memory of which even now I feel faint, although I am writing years after its echoes died away.

I may as well say at once that it came from Janee who, awaking suddenly, had perceived against the background of the sky, Hans standing over her, looking like a yellow devil with a long knife in his hand, which she thought was about to be used to murder her.

So, lacking self-restraint, she screamed in the most lusty fashion, for her lungs were excellent, and—the game was up.

Instantly every man sleeping round the fire leapt to his feet and rushed in the direction of the echoes of Janee's yell. It was impossible to get Inez free of her tent arrangement or to do anything, except whisper to her,

“Feign sleep and know nothing. We will follow you. Your father is with us.”

Then I bolted back into the bushes, which Hans had reached already.

A minute or two later when we were clear of the hubbub and nearing our own camp, Hans remarked to me sententiously,

"The Great Medicine worked well, Baas, but not quite well enough, for what medicine can avail against a woman's folly?"

"It was our own folly we should blame," I answered. "We ought to have known that fool-girl would shriek, and taken precautions."

"Yes, Baas, we ought to have killed her too, for nothing else would have kept her quiet," replied Hans in cheerful assent. "Now we shall have to pay for our mistake, for the hunt must go on."

At this moment we stumbled across Robertson and Umslopogaas who, with the others, and every living thing within a mile or two had also heard Janee's yell, and briefly told our story. When he learned how near we had been to rescuing his daughter, Robertson groaned, but Umslopogaas only said,

"Well, there are two less of the men-eaters left to deal with. Still, for once your wisdom failed you, Macumazahn. When you had found the camp you should have returned, so that we might all attack it together. Had we done so, before the dawn there would not have been one of them left."

"Yes," I answered, "I think that my wisdom did fail me, if I have any to fail. But come; perhaps we may catch them yet."

So we advanced, Hans and I showing the road. But when we reached the place it was too late, for all that remained of the Amahagger, or of Inez and Janee, were the two dead men whom we had killed, and in that darkness pursuit was impossible. So we went back to our own camp to rest and await the dawn before taking up the trail, only to find ourselves confronted with a new trouble. All the Strathmuir half-breeds whom we had left behind as useless, had taken advantage of our absence and that of the Zulus, to desert. They had just bolted back upon our tracks and vanished into the sea of bush. What became of them I do not know, as we never saw them again, but my belief is that these cowardly fellows all perished, for certainly not one of them reached Strathmuir.

Fortunately for us, however, they departed in such a hurry that they left all their loads behind them, and even some of the guns they carried. Evidently Janee's yell was the last straw which broke the back of such nerve as remained to them. Doubtless they believed it to be the signal of attack by hordes of cannibals.

As there was nothing to be said or done, since any pursuit of these curs was out of the question, we made the best of things as they were. It proved a simple business. From the loads we selected such articles as were essential, ammunition for the most part, to carry ourselves—and the rest we abandoned, hiding it under a pile of stones in case we should ever come that way again.

The guns they had thrown aside we distributed among the Zulus who had none, though the thought that they possessed them, so far as I was concerned, added another terror to life. The prospect of going into battle with those wild axemen letting off bullets in every direction was not pleasant, but fortunately when that crisis came, they cast them away and reverted to the weapons to which they were accustomed.

Now all this sounds much like a tale of disaster, or at any rate of failure. It is, however, wonderful by what strange ways good results are brought about, so much so that at times I think that these seeming accidents must be arranged by an Intelligence superior to our own, to fulfil through us purposes of which we know nothing, and frequently, be it admitted, of a nature sufficiently obscure. Of course this is a fatalistic doctrine, but then, as I have said before, within certain limits I am a fatalist.

To take the present case, for instance, the whole Inez episode at first sight might appear to be an excrescence on my narrative, of which the object is to describe how I met a certain very wonderful woman and what I heard and experienced in her company. Yet it is not really so, since had it not been for the Inez adventure, it is quite clear that I should never have reached the home of this woman, if woman she were, or have seen her at all. Before long this became very obvious to me, as shall be told.

From the night upon which Hans and I failed to rescue Inez we had no more difficulty in following the trail of the cannibals, who thenceforward were never more than a few hours ahead of us and had no time to be careful or to attempt to hide their spoor. Yet so fast did they travel that do what we would, burdened and wearied as we were, it proved impossible to overtake them.

For the first three days the track ran on through scattered, rolling bush-veld of the character that I have described, but tending continually down hill. When we broke camp on the morning of the fourth day, eating a hasty meal at dawn (for now game had become astonishingly plentiful, so that we did not lack food) the rising sun showed beneath us an endless sea of billowy mist stretching in every direction far as the sight could carry.

To the north, however, it did come to an end, for there, as I judged fifty or sixty miles away, rose the grim outline of what looked like a huge fortress, which I knew must be one of those extraordinary mountain formations, probably owing their origin to volcanic action, that are to be met with here and there in the vast expanses of Central and Eastern Africa. Being so distant it was impossible to estimate its size, which I guessed must be enormous, but in looking at it I bethought me of that great mountain in which Zikali said the marvellous white Queen lived, and wondered whether it could be the same, as from my memory of his map upon the ashes, it well might be, that is, if such a place existed at all. If so the map had shown it as surrounded by swamps and—well, surely that mist hid the face of a mighty swamp?

It did indeed, since before nightfall, following the spoor of those Amahagger, we had plunged into a morass so vast that in all my experience I have never seen or heard of its like. It was a veritable ocean of papyrus and other reeds, some of them a dozen or more feet high, so that it was impossible to see a yard in any direction.

Here it was that the Amahagger ahead of us proved our salvation, since without them to guide us we must soon have perished. For through that gigantic swamp there ran a road, as I think an ancient road, since in one or two places I saw stone work which must have been laid by man. Yet it was not a road which it would have been possible to follow without a guide, seeing that it also was overgrown with reeds. Indeed, the only difference between it and the surrounding swamp was that on the road the soil was comparatively firm, that is to say, one seldom sank into it above the knee, whereas on either side of it quagmires were often apparently bottomless, and what is more, partook of the nature of quicksand.

This we found out soon after we entered the swamp, since Robertson, pushing forward with the fierce eagerness which seemed to consume him, neglected to keep his eye upon the spoor and stepped off the edge on to land that appeared to be exactly similar to its surface. Instantly he began to sink in greasy and tenacious mud. Umslopogaas and I were only twenty yards behind, yet by the time we reached him in answer to his shouts, already he was engulfed up to his middle and going down so rapidly that in another minute he would have vanished altogether. Well, we got him out but not with ease, for that mud clung to him like the tentacles of an octopus. After this we were more careful.

Nor did this road run straight; on the contrary, it curved about and sometimes turned at right angles, doubtless to avoid a piece of swamp over which it had proved impossible for the ancients to construct a causeway, or to follow some out-crop of harder soil beneath.

The difficulties of that horrible place are beyond description, and indeed can scarcely be imagined. First there was that of a kind of grass which grew among the roots of the reeds and had edges like to those of knives. As Robertson and I wore gaiters we did not suffer so much from it, but the poor Zulus with their bare legs were terribly cut about and in some cases lame.

Then there were the mosquitoes which lived here by the million and all seemed anxious for a bite; also snakes of a peculiarly deadly kind were numerous. A Zulu was bitten by one of them of so poisonous a nature that he died within three minutes, for the venom seemed to go straight to his heart. We threw his body into the swamp, where it vanished at once.

Lastly there was the all-pervading stench and the intolerable heat of the place, since no breath of air could penetrate that forest of reeds, while a minor trouble was that of the multitude of leeches which fastened on to our bodies. By looking one could see the creatures sitting on the under side of leaves with their heads stretched out waiting to attack anything that went by. As wayfarers there could not have been numerous, I wondered what they had lived on for the last few thousand years. By the way, I found that paraffin, of which we had a small supply for our hand-lamps, rubbed over all exposed surfaces, was to some extent a protection against these blood-sucking worms and the gnats, although it did make one go about smelling like a dirty oil tin.

During the day, except for the occasional rush of some great iguana or other reptile, and the sound of the wings of the flocks of wildfowl passing over us from time to time, the march was deathly silent. But at night it was different, for then the bull-frogs boomed incessantly, as did the bitterns, while great swamp owls and other night-flying birds uttered their weird cries. Also there were mysterious sucking noises caused, no doubt, by the sinking of areas of swamp, with those of bursting bubbles of foul, up-rushing gas.

Strange lights, too, played about, will-o'-the-wisps or St. Elmo fires, as I believe they are called, that frightened the Zulus very much, since they believed them to be spirits of the dead. Perhaps this superstition had something to do with their native legend that mankind was "torn out of the reeds." If so, they may have imagined that the ghosts of men went back to the reeds, of which there were enough here to accommodate those of the entire Zulu nation. Any way they were much scared; even the bold witch-doctor, Goroko, was scared and went through incantations with the little bag of medicines he carried to secure protection for himself and his companions. Indeed, I think even the iron Umslopogaas himself was not as comfortable as he might have been, although he did inform me that he had come out to fight and did not care whether it were with man, or wizard, or spirit.

In short, of all the journeys that I have made, with the exception of the passage of the desert on our way to King Solomon's Mines, I think that through this enormous swamp was the most miserable. Heartily did I curse myself for ever having undertaken such a quest in a wild attempt to allay that sickness, or rather to quench that thirst of the soul which, I imagine, at times assails most of those who have hearts and think or dream.

For this was at the bottom of the business: this it was which had delivered me into the hands of Zikali, Opener-of-Roads, who, as now I am sure, was merely making use of me for his private occult purposes. He desired to consult the distant Oracle, if such a person existed, as to great schemes of his own, and therefore, to attain his end, made use of my secret longings which I had been so foolish as to reveal to him, quite careless of what happened to me in the process. [A bit narrow and uncharitable, this view. It seems to me that Zikali is taking a big risk in giving him the Great Medicine.—JB]

Well, I was in for the business and must follow it to the finish whatever that might be. After all it was very interesting and if there were anything in what Zikali said (if there were not I could not conceive what object he had in sending me on such a wild-goose chase through this home of geese and ducks), it might become more interesting still. For being pretty well fever-proof I did not think I should die in that morass, as of course nine white men out of ten would have done, and, beyond it lay the huge mountain which day by day grew larger and clearer.

Nor did Hans, who, with a childlike trust, pinned his faith to the Great Medicine. This, he remarked, was the worst veld through which he had ever travelled, but as the Great Medicine would never consent to be buried in that stinking mud, he had no doubt that we should come safely through it some time. I replied that this wonderful medicine of his had not saved one of our companions who had now made a grave in the same mud.

"No, Baas," he said, "but those Zulus have nothing to do with the Medicine which was given to you, and to me who accompanied you when we saw the Opener-of-Roads. Therefore perhaps they will all die, except Umslopogaas, whom you were told to take with you. If so, what does it matter, since there are plenty of Zulus, although there be but one Macumazahn or one Hans? Also the Baas may remember that he began by offending a snake and therefore it is quite natural that this snake's brother should have bitten the Zulu."

"If you are right, he should have bitten me, Hans."

"Yes, Baas, and so no doubt he would have done had you not been protected by the Great Medicine, and me too had not my grandfather been a snake-charmer, to say nothing of the smell of the Medicine being on me as well. The snakes know those that they should bite, Baas."

"So do the mosquitoes," I answered, grabbing a handful of them. "The Great Medicine has no effect upon them."

"Oh! yes, Baas, it has, since though it pleases them to bite, the bites do us no harm, or at least not much, and all are made happy. Still, I wish we could get out of these reeds of which I never want to see another, and Baas, please keep your rifle ready for I think I hear a crocodile stirring there."

"No need, Hans," I remarked sarcastically. "Go and tell him that I have the Great Medicine."

"Yes, Baas, I will; also that if he is very hungry, there are some Zulus camped a few yards further down the road," and he went solemnly to the reeds a little way off and began to talk to them.

"You infernal donkey!" I murmured, and drew my blanket over my head in a vain attempt to keep out the mosquitoes and smoking furiously with the same object, tried to get to sleep.

At last the swamp bottom began to slope upwards a little, with the result that as the land dried through natural drainage, the reeds grew thinner by degrees, until finally they ceased and we found ourselves on firmer ground; indeed, upon the lowest slopes of the great mountain that I have mentioned, that now towered above us, forbidden and majestic.

I had made a little map in my pocket-book of the various twists and turns of the road through that vast Slough of Despond, marking them from hour to hour as we followed its devious wanderings. On studying this at the end of that part of our journey I realised afresh how utterly impossible it would have been for us to thread that misty maze where a few false steps would always have

meant death by suffocation, had it not been for the spoor of those Amahagger travelling immediately ahead of us who were acquainted with its secrets. Had they been friendly guides they could not have done us a better turn.

What I wondered was why they had not tried to ambush us in the reeds, since our fires must have shown them that we were close upon their heels. That they did try to burn us out was clear from certain evidences that I found, but fortunately at this season of the year in the absence of a strong wind the rank reeds were too green to catch fire. For the rest I was soon to learn the reason of their neglect to attack us in that dense cover.

They were waiting for a better opportunity!

## CHAPTER X.

### THE ATTACK

We won out of the reeds at last, for which I fervently thanked God, since to have crossed that endless marsh unguided, with the loss of only one man, seemed little less than miraculous. We emerged from them late in the afternoon and being wearied out, stopped for a while to rest and eat of the flesh of a buck that I had been fortunate enough to shoot upon their fringe. Then we pushed forward up the slope, proposing to camp for the night on the crest of it a mile or so away where I thought we should escape from the deadly mist in which we had been enveloped for so long, and obtain a clear view of the country ahead.

Following the bank of a stream which here ran down into the marsh, we came at length to this crest just as the sun was sinking. Below us lay a deep valley, a fold, as it were, in the skin of the mountain, well but not densely bushed. The woods of this valley climbed up the mountain flank for some distance above it and then gave way to grassy slopes that ended in steep sides of rock, which were crowned by a black and frowning precipice of unknown height.

There was, I remember, something very impressive about this towering natural wall, which seemed to shut off whatever lay beyond the gaze of man, as though it veiled an ancient mystery. Indeed, the aspect of it thrilled me, I knew not why. I observed, however, that at one point in the mighty cliff there seemed to be a narrow cleft down which, no doubt, lava had flowed in a remote age, and it occurred to me that up this cleft ran a roadway, probably a continuation of that by which we had threaded the swamp. The fact that through my glasses I could see herds of cattle grazing on the slopes of the mountain went to confirm this view, since cattle imply owners and herdsmen, and search as I would, I could find no native villages on the slopes. The inference seemed to be that those owners dwelt beyond or within the mountain.

All of these things I saw and pointed out to Robertson in the light of the setting sun.

Meanwhile Umslopogaas had been engaged in selecting the spot where we were to camp for the night. Some soldierlike instinct, or perchance some prescience of danger, caused him to choose a place particularly suitable to defence. It was on a steep-sided mound that more or less resembled a gigantic ant-heap. Upon one side this mound was protected by the stream which because of a pool was here rather deep, while at the back of it stood a collection of those curious and piled-up water-worn rocks that are often to be found in Africa. These rocks, lying one upon another like the stones of a Cyclopean wall, curved round the western side of the mound, so that practically it was only open for a narrow space, say thirty or forty feet, upon that face of it which looked on to the mountain.

"Umslopogaas expects battle," remarked Hans to me with a grin, "otherwise with all this nice plain round us he would not have chosen to camp in a place which a few men could hold against many. Yes, Baas, he thinks that those cannibals are going to attack us."

"Stranger things have happened," I answered indifferently, and having seen to the rifles, went to lie down, observing as I did so that the tired Zulus seemed already to be asleep. Only Umslopogaas did not sleep. On the contrary, he stood leaning on his axe staring at the dim outlines of the opposing precipice.

"A strange mountain, Macumazahn," he said, "compared to it that of the Witch, beneath which my kraal lies, is but a little baby. I wonder what we shall find within it. I have always loved mountains, Macumazahn, ever since a dead brother of mine and I lived with the wolves in the Witch's lap, for on them I have had the best of my fighting."

"Perhaps it is not done with yet," I answered wearily.

"I hope not, Macumazahn, since some is due for us, after all these days of mud and stench. Sleep a while now, Macumazahn, for that head of yours which you use so much, must need rest. Fear not, I and the little yellow man who do not think as much as you do, will keep watch and wake you if there is need, as mayhap there will be before the dawn. Here none can come at us except in front, and the place is narrow."

So I lay down and slept as soundly as ever I had done in my life, for a space of four or five hours I suppose. Then, by some instinct perhaps, I awoke suddenly, feeling much refreshed in that sweet mountain air, a new man indeed, and in the moonlight saw Umslopogaas striding towards me.

"Arise, Macumazahn," he said, "I hear men stirring below us."

At this moment Hans slipped past him, whispering,

"The cannibals are coming, Baas, a good number of them. I think they mean to attack before dawn."

Then he passed behind me to warn the Zulus. As he went by, I said to him,

"If so, Hans, now is the time for your Great Medicine to show what it can do."

"The Great Medicine will look after you and me all right, Baas," he replied, pausing and speaking in Dutch, which Umslopogaas did not understand, "but I expect there will be fewer of those Zulus to cook for before the sun grows hot. Their spirits will be turned into snakes and go back into the reeds from which they say they were 'torn out,'" he added over his shoulder.

I should explain that Hans acted as cook to our party and it was a grievance with him that the Zulus ate so much of the meat which he was called upon to prepare. Indeed, there is never much sympathy between Hottentots and Zulus.

"What is the little yellow man saying about us?" asked Umslopogaas suspiciously.

"He is saying that if it comes to battle, you and your men will make a great fight," I replied diplomatically.

"Yes, we will do that, Macumazahn, but I thought he said that we should be killed and that this pleased him."

"Oh dear no!" I answered hastily. "How could he be pleased if that happened, since then he would be left defenceless, if he were not killed too. Now, Umslopogaas, let us make a plan for this fight."

So, together with Robertson, rapidly we discussed the thing. As a result, with the help of the Zulus, we dragged together some loose stones and the tops of three small thorn trees which we had cut down, and with them made a low breastwork, sufficient to give us some protection if we lay down to shoot. It was the work of a few minutes since we had prepared the material when we camped in case an emergency should arise.

Behind this breastwork we gathered and waited, Robertson and I being careful to get a little to the rear of the Zulus, who it will be remembered had the rifles which the Strathmuir bastards had left behind them when they bolted, in addition to their axes and throwing assegais. The question was how these cannibals would fight. I knew that they were armed with long spears and knives but I did not know if they used those spears for thrusting or for throwing. In the former case it would be difficult to get at them with the axes because they must have the longer reach. Fortunately as it turned out, they did both.

At length all was ready and there came that long and trying wait, the most disagreeable part of a fight in which one grows nervous and begins to reflect earnestly upon one's sins. Clearly the Amahagger, if they really intended business, did not mean to attack till just before dawn, after the common native fashion, thinking to rush us in the low and puzzling light. What perplexed me was that they should wish to attack us at all after having let so many opportunities of doing so go by. Apparently these men were now in sight of their own home, where no doubt they had many friends, and by pushing on could reach its shelter before us, especially as they knew the roads and we did not.

They had come out for a secret purpose that seemed to have to do with the abduction of a certain young white woman for reasons connected with their tribal statecraft or ritual, which is the kind of thing that happens not infrequently among obscure and ancient African tribes. Well, they had abducted their young woman and were in sight of safety and success in their objects, whatever these might be. For what possible reason, then, could they desire to risk a fight with the outraged friends and relatives of that young woman?

It was true that they outnumbered us and therefore had a good chance of victory, but on the other hand, they must know that it would be very dearly won, and if it were not won, that we should retake their captive, so that all their trouble would have been for nothing. Further they must be as exhausted and travel-worn as we were ourselves and in no condition to face a desperate battle.

The problem was beyond me and I gave it up with the reflection that either this threatened attack was a mere feint to delay us, or that behind it was something mysterious, such as a determination to prevent us at all hazards from discovering the secrets of that mountain stronghold.

When I put the riddle to Hans, who was lying next to me, he was ready with another solution.

"They are men-eaters, Baas," he said, "and being hungry, wish to eat us before they get to their own land where doubtless they are not allowed to eat each other."

"Do you think so," I answered, "when we are so thin?" and I surveyed Hans' scraggy form in the moonlight.

"Oh! yes, Baas, we should be quite good boiled—like old hens, Baas. Also it is the nature of cannibals to prefer thin man to fat beef. The devil that is in them gives them that taste, Baas, just as he makes me like gin, or you turn your head to look at pretty women, as those Zulus say you always did in their country, especially at a certain witch who was named Mameena and whom you kissed before everybody——"

Here I turned my head to look at Hans, proposing to smite him with words, or physically, since to have this Mameena myth, of which I have detailed the origin in the book called *Child of Storm*, re-arise out of his hideous little mouth was too much. But before I could get out a syllable he held up his finger and whispered,

"Hush! the dawn breaks and they come. I hear them."

I listened intently but could distinguish nothing. Only straining my eyes, presently I thought that about a hundred yards down the slope beneath us in the dim light I caught sight of ghostlike figures flitting from tree to tree; also that these figures were drawing nearer.

"Look out!" I said to Robertson on my right, "I believe they are coming."

"Man," he answered sternly, "I hope so, for whom else have I wanted to meet all these days?"

Now the figures vanished into a little fold of the ground. A minute or so later they re-appeared upon its hither side where such light as there was from the fading stars and the gathering dawn fell full upon them, for here were no trees. I looked and a thrill of horror went through me, for with one glance I recognised that these were *not the men whom we had been following*. To begin with, there were many more of them, quite a hundred, I should think, also they had painted shields, wore feathers in their hair, and generally so far as I could judge, seemed to be fat and fresh.

"We have been led into an ambush," I said first in Zulu to Umslopogaas immediately in front, and then in English to Robertson.

"If so, man, we must just do the best we can," answered the latter, "but God help my poor daughter, for those other devils will have taken her away, leaving their brethren to make an end of us."

"It is so, Macumazahn," broke in Umslopogaas. "Well, whatever the end of it, we shall have a better fight. Now do you give the word and we will obey."

The savages, for so I call them, although I admit that cannibals or not, they looked more like high-class Arabs than savages, came on in perfect silence, hoping, I suppose, to catch us asleep. When they were about fifty yards away, running in a treble line with spears advanced, I called out "Fire!" in Zulu, and set the example by loosing off both barrels of my express rifle at men whom I had picked out as leaders, with results that must have been more satisfactory to me than to the two Amahagger whose troubles in this world came to an end.

There followed a tremendous fusillade, the Zulus banging off their guns wildly, but even at that distance managing for the most part to shoot over the enemy's heads. Captain Robertson and Hans, however, did better and the general result was that the Amahagger, who appeared to be unaccustomed to firearms, retreated in a hurry to a fold of the ground whence they had emerged. Before the last of them got there I loaded again, so that two more stopped behind. Altogether we had put nine or ten of them out of action.

Now I hoped that they would give the business up. But this was not so, for being brave fellows, after a pause of perhaps five minutes, once more they charged in a body, hoping to overwhelm us. Again we greeted them with bullets and knocked out several, whereon the rest threw a volley of their long spears at us. I was glad to see them do this although one of the Zulus got his death from it, while two more were wounded. I myself had a very narrow escape, for a spear passed between my neck and shoulder. Each of them carried but one of these weapons and I knew that if they used them up in throwing, only their big knives would remain to them with which to attack us.

After this discharge of spears which was kept up for some time, they rushed at us and there followed a great fight. The Zulus, throwing down their guns, rose to their feet and holding their little fighting shields which had been carried in their mats, in the left hand, wielded their axes with the right. Umslopogaas, who stood in the centre of them, however, had no shield and swung his great axe with both arms. This was the first time that I had seen him fight and the spectacle was in a way magnificent. Again and again the axe crashed down and every time it fell it left one dead beneath the stroke, till at length those Amahagger shrank back out of his reach.

Meanwhile Robertson, Hans and I, standing on some stones at the back, kept up a continual fire upon them, shooting over the heads of the Zulus, who were playing their part like men. Yes, they shrank back, leaving many dead behind them. Then a captain tried to gather them for another rush, and once more they moved forward. I killed that captain with a revolver shot, for my rifle had become too hot to hold, and at the sight of his fall, they broke and ran back into the little hollow where our bullets could not reach them.

So far we had held our own, but at a price, for three of the Zulus were now dead and three more wounded, one of them severely, the other two but enough to cripple them. In fact, now there were left of them but three untouched men, and Umslopogaas, so that in all for fighting purposes we were but seven. What availed it that we had killed a great number of these Amahagger, when we were but seven? How could seven men withstand such another onslaught?

There in the pale light of the dawn we looked at each other dismayed.

"Now," said Umslopogaas, leaning on his red axe, "there remains but one thing to do, make a good end, though I would that it were in a greater cause. At least we must either fight or fly," and he looked down at the wounded.

"Think not of us, Father," murmured one of them, the man who had a mortal hurt. "If it is best, kill us and begone that you may live to bear the Axe in years to come."

"Well spoken!" said Umslopogaas, and again stood still a while, then added, "The word is with you, Macumazahn, who are our captain."

I set out the situation to Robertson and Hans as briefly as I could, showing that there was a chance of life if we ran, but so far as I could see, none if we stayed.

"Go if you like, Quatermain," answered the Captain, "but I shall stop and die here, for since my girl is gone I think I'm better dead."

I motioned to Hans to speak.

"Baas," he answered, "the Great Medicine is here with us upon the earth and your reverend father, the Predikant, is with us in the sky, so I think we had better stop here and do what we can, especially as I do not want to see those reeds any more at present."

"So do I," I said briefly, giving no reasons.

So we made ready for the next attack which we knew would be the last, strengthening our little wall and dragging the dead Amahagger up against it as an added protection. As we were thus engaged the sun rose and in its first beams, some miles away on the opposing slopes of the mountain looking tiny against the black background of the precipice, we saw a party of men creeping forward. Lifting my glasses I studied it and perceived that in its midst was a litter.

"There goes your daughter," I said, and handed the glasses to Robertson.

"Oh! my God," he answered, "those villains have outwitted us after all."

Another minute and the litter, or rather the chair with its escort, had vanished into the shadow of the great cliffs, probably up some pass which we could not see.

Next moment our thoughts were otherwise engaged, since from various symptoms we gathered that the attack was about to be renewed. Spears upon which shone the light of the rising sun, appeared above the edge of the ground-fold that I have mentioned, which to the east increased to a deep, bush-clad ravine. Also there were voices as of leaders encouraging their men to a desperate effort.

"They are coming," I said to Robertson.

"Yes," he answered, "they are coming and we are going. It's a queer end to the thing we call life, isn't it, Quatermain, and hang it all! I wonder what's beyond? Not much for me, I expect, but whatever it is could scarcely be worse than what I've gone through here below in one way and another."

"There's hope for all of us," I replied as cheerfully as I could, for the man's deep depression disturbed me.

"Mayhap, Quatermain, for who knows the infinite mercy of whatever made us as we are? My old mother used to preach of it and I remember her words now. But in my case I expect it will stop at hope, or sleep, and if it wasn't for Inez, I'd not mind so much, for I tell you I've had enough of the world and life. Look, there's one of them. Take that, you black devil!" and lifting his rifle he aimed and fired at an Amahagger who appeared upon the edge of the fold of ground. What is more he hit him, for I saw the man double up and fall backwards.

Then the game began afresh, for the cannibals (I suppose they were cannibals like their brethren) crept out of shelter, advancing on their stomachs or their hands and knees, so as to offer a smaller mark, and dragging between them a long and slender tree-trunk with which clearly they intended to batter down our wall.

Of course I blazed away at them, pretty carefully too, for I was determined that what I believed to be the last exercise of the gift of shooting that has been given to me, should prove a record. Therefore I selected my men and even where I would hit them, and as subsequent examination showed, I made no mistakes in the seven or eight shots that I fired. But all the while, like poor Captain Robertson, I was thinking of other things; namely, where I was bound for presently and if I should meet certain folk there and what

was the meaning of this show called Life, which unless it leads somewhere, according to my judgment has none at all. Until these questions were solved, however, my duty was to kill as many of those ruffians as I could, and this I did with finish and despatch.

Robertson and Hans were firing also, with more or less success, but there were too many to be stopped by our three rifles. Still they came on till at length their fierce faces were within a few yards of our little parapet and Umslopogaas had lifted his great axe to give them greeting. They paused a moment before making their final rush, and so did we to slip in fresh cartridges.

"Die well, Hans," I said, "and if you get there first, wait for me on the other side."

"Yes, Baas, I always meant to do that, though not yet. We are not going to die this time, Baas. Those who have the Great Medicine don't die; it is the others who die, like that fellow," and he pointed to an Amahagger who went reeling round and round with a bullet from his Winchester through the middle, for he had fired in the midst of his remarks.

"Curse—I mean bless—the Great Medicine," I said as I lifted my rifle to my shoulder.

At that moment all those Amahagger—there were about sixty of them left—became seized with a certain perturbation. They stood still, they stared towards the fold of ground out of which they had emerged; they called to each other words which I did not catch, and then—they turned to run.

Umslopogaas saw, and with a leader's instinct, acted. Springing over the parapet, followed by his remaining Zulus of the Axe, he leapt upon them with a roar. Down they went before *Inkosikaas*, like corn before a sickle. The thing was marvellous to see, it was like the charge of a leopard, so swift was the rush and so lightning-like were the strokes or rather the pecks of that flashing axe, for now he was tapping at their heads or spines with the gouge-like point upon its back. Nor were these the only victims, for those brave followers of his also did their part. In a minute all who remained upon their feet of the Amahagger were in full flight, vanishing this way and that among the trees. Hans fired a parting shot after the last of them, then sat down upon a stone and finding his corn-cob pipe, proceeded to fill it.

"The Great Medicine, Baas," he began sententially, "or perhaps your reverend father, the Predikant——" Here he paused and pointed doubtfully with the bowl of the pipe towards the fold in the ground, adding, "Here it is, but I think it must be your reverend father, not the Great Medicine, yes, the Predikant himself, returned from Heaven, the Place of Fires!"

Looking vaguely in the direction indicated, for I could not conceive what he meant and thought that the excitement must have made him mad, I perceived a venerable old man with a long white beard and clothed in a flowing garment, also white, who reminded me of Father Christmas at a child's party, walking towards us and radiating benignancy. Also behind him I perceived a whole forest of spear points emerging from the gully. He seemed to take it for granted that we should not shoot at him, for he came on quite unconcerned, carefully picking his way among the corpses. When he was near enough he stopped and said in a kind of Arabic which I could understand,

"I greet you, Strangers, in the name of her I serve. I see that I am just in time, but this does not surprise me, since she said that it would be so. You seem to have done very well with these dogs," and he prodded a dead Amahagger with his sandalled foot. "Yes, very well indeed. You must be great warriors."

Then he paused and we stared at each other.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN WALL

"These do not seem to be friends of yours," I said, pointing to the fallen. "And yet," I added, nodding towards the spearmen who were now emerging from the gully, "they are very like your friends."

"Puppies from the same litter are often alike, yet when they grow up sometimes they fight each other," replied Father Christmas blandly. "At least these come to save and not to kill you. Look! they kill the others!" and he pointed to them making an end of some of the wounded men. "But who are these?" and he glanced with evident astonishment, first at the fearsome-looking Umslopogaas and then at the grotesque Hans. "Nay, answer not, you must be weary and need rest. Afterwards we can talk."

"Well, as a matter of fact we have not yet breakfasted," I replied. "Also I have business to attend to here," and I glanced at our wounded.

The old fellow nodded and went to speak to the captains of his force, doubtless as to the pursuit of the enemy, for presently I saw a company spring forward on their tracks. Then, assisted by Hans and the remaining Zulus, of whom one was Goroko, I turned to attend to our own people. The task proved lighter than I expected, since the badly injured man was dead or dying and the hurts of the two others were in their legs and comparatively slight, such as Goroko could doctor in his own native fashion.

After this, taking Hans to guard my back, I went down to the stream and washed myself. Then I returned and ate, wondering the while that I could do so with appetite after the terrible dangers which we had passed. Still, we had passed them, and Robertson, Umslopogaas with three of his men, I and Hans were quite unharmed, a fact for which I returned thanks in silence but sincerely enough to Providence.

Hans also returned thanks in his own fashion, after he had filled himself, not before, and lit his corn-cob pipe. But Robertson made no remark; indeed, when he had satisfied his natural cravings, he rose and walking a few paces forward, stood staring at the cleft in the mountain cliff into which he had seen the litter vanish that bore his daughter to some fate unknown.

Even the great fight that we had fought and the victory we had won against overpowering odds did not appear to impress him. He only glared at the mountain into the heart of which Inez had been raped away, and shook his fist. Since she was gone all else went for nothing, so much so that he did not offer to assist with the wounded Zulus or show curiosity about the strange old man by whom we had been rescued.

"The Great Medicine, Baas," said Hans in a bewildered way, "is even more powerful than I thought. Not only has it brought us safely through the fighting and without a scratch, for those Zulus there do not matter and there will be less cooking for me to do now that they are gone; it has also brought down your reverend father the Predikant from the Place of Fires in Heaven, somewhat changed from what I remember him, it is true, but still without doubt the same. When I make my report to him presently, if he can understand my talk, I shall——"

"Stop your infernal nonsense, you son of a donkey," I broke in, for at this moment old Father Christmas, smiling more benignly than before, re-appeared from the kloof into which he had vanished and advanced towards us bowing with much politeness.

Having seated himself upon the little wall that we had built up, he contemplated us, stroking his beautiful white beard, then said, addressing me,

"Of a certainty you should be proud who with a few have defeated so many. Still, had I not been ordered to come at speed, I think that by now you would have been as those are," and he looked towards the dead Zulus who were laid out at a distance like men asleep, while their companions sought for a place to bury them.

"Ordered by whom?" I asked.

"There is only one who can order," he answered with mild astonishment. "'She-who-commands, She-who-is-everlasting'!"

It occurred to me that this must be some Arabic idiom for the Eternal Feminine, but I only looked vague and said,

"It would appear that there are some whom this exalted everlasting She cannot command; those who attacked us; also those who have fled away yonder," and I waved my hand towards the mountain.

"No command is absolute; in every country there are rebels, even, as I have heard, in Heaven above us. But, Wanderer, what is your name?"

"Watcher-by-Night," I answered.

"Ah! a good name for one who must have watched well by night, and by day too, to reach this country living where She-who-commands says that no man of your colour has set foot for many generations. Indeed, I think she told me once that two thousand years had gone by since she spoke to a white man in the City of Kôr."

"Did she indeed?" I exclaimed, stifling a cough.

"You do not believe me," he went on, smiling. "Well, She-who-commands can explain matters for herself better than I who was not alive two thousand years ago, so far as I remember. But what must I call him with the Axe?"

"Warrior is his name."

"Again a good name, as to judge by the wounds on them, certain of those rebels I think are now telling each other in Hell. And this man, if indeed he be a man——" he added, looking doubtfully at Hans.

"Light-in-Darkness is his name."

"I see, doubtless because his colour is that of the winter sun in thick fog, or a bad egg broken into milk. And the other white man who mutters and whose brow is like a storm?"

"He is called Avenger; you will learn why later on," I answered impatiently, for I grew tired of this catechism, adding, "And what are you called and, if you are pleased to tell it to us, upon what errand do you visit us in so fortunate an hour?"

"I am named Billali," he answered, "the servant and messenger of She-who-commands, and I was sent to save you and to bring you safely to her."

"How can this be, Billali, seeing that none knew of our coming?"

"Yet She-who-commands knew," he said with his benignant smile. "Indeed, I think that she learned of it some moons ago through a message that was sent to her and so arranged all things that you should be guided safely to her secret home; since otherwise how would you have passed a great pathless swamp with the loss, I think she said, of but one man whom a snake bit?"

Now I stared at the old fellow, for how could he know of the death of this man, but thought it useless to pursue the conversation further.

"When you are rested and ready," he went on, "we will start. Meanwhile I leave you that I may prepare litters to carry those wounded men, and you also, Watcher-by-Night, if you wish." Then with a dignified bow, for everything about this old fellow was stately, he turned and vanished into the kloof.

The next hour or so was occupied in the burial of the dead Zulus, a ceremony in which I took no part beyond standing up and raising my hat as they were borne away, for as I have said somewhere, it is best to leave natives alone on these occasions. Indeed, I lay down, reflecting that strangely enough there seemed to be something in old Zikali's tale of a wonderful white Queen who lived in a mountain fastness, since there was the mountain as he had drawn it on the ashes, and the servants of that Queen who, apparently, had knowledge of our coming, appeared in the nick of time to rescue us from one of the tightest fixes in which ever I found myself.

Moreover, the antique and courteous individual called Billali, spoke of her as "She-who-is-everlasting." What the deuce could he mean by that, I wondered? Probably that she was very old and therefore disagreeable to look on, which I confessed to myself would be a disappointment.

And how did she know that we were coming? I could not guess and when I asked Robertson, he merely shrugged his shoulders and intimated that he took no interest in the matter. The truth is that nothing moved the man, whose whole soul was wrapped in one desire, namely to rescue, or avenge, the daughter against whom he knew he had so sorely sinned.

In fact, this loose-living but reformed seaman was becoming a monomaniac, and what is more, one of the religious type. He had a Bible with him that had been given to him by his mother when he was a boy, and in this he read constantly; also he was always on his knees and at night I could hear him groaning and praying aloud. Doubtless now that the chains of drink had fallen off him, the instincts and the blood of the dour old Covenanters from whom he was descended, were asserting themselves. In a way this was a good thing though for some time past I had feared lest it should end in his going mad, and certainly as a companion he was more cheerful in his unregenerate days.

Abandoning speculation as useless and taking my chance of being murdered where I lay, for after all Billali's followers were singularly like the men with whom we had been fighting and for aught I knew might be animated by identical objects—I just went to sleep, as I can do at any time, to wake up an hour or so later feeling wonderfully refreshed. Hans, who when I closed my eyes was already asleep slumbering at my feet curled up like a dog on a spot where the sun struck hotly, roused me by saying:

"Awake, Baas, they are here!"

I sprang up, snatching at my rifle, for I thought that he meant that we were being attacked again, to see Billali advancing at the head of a train of four litters made of bamboo with grass mats for curtains and coverings, each of which was carried by stalwart Amahagger, as I supposed that they must be. Two of these, the finest, Billali indicated were for Robertson and myself, and the two others for the wounded. Umslopogaas and the remaining Zulus evidently were expected to walk, as was Hans.

"How did you make these so quickly," I asked, surveying their elegant and indeed artistic workmanship.

"We did not make them, Watcher-by-Night, we brought them with us folded up. She-who-commands looked in her glass and said that four would be needed, besides my own which is yonder, two for white lords and two for wounded black men, which you see is the number required."

"Yes," I answered vaguely, marvelling what kind of a glass it was that gave the lady this information.

Before I could inquire upon the point Billali added,

"You will be glad to learn that my men caught some of those rebels who dared to attack you, eight or ten of them who had been hurt by your missiles or axe-cuts, and put them to death in the proper fashion—yes, quite the proper fashion," and he smiled a little. "The rest had gone too far where it would have been dangerous to follow them among the rocks. Enter now, my lord Watcher-by-Night, for the road is steep and we must travel fast if we would reach the place where She-who-commands is camped in the ancient holy city, before the moon sinks behind the cliffs to-night."

So having explained matters to Robertson and Umslopogaas, who announced that nothing would induce *him* to be carried like an old woman, or a corpse upon a shield, and seen that the hurt Zulus were comfortably accommodated, Robertson and I got into our litters, which proved to be delightfully easy and restful.

Then when our gear was collected by the hook-nosed bearers to whom we were obliged to trust, though we kept with us our rifles and a certain amount of ammunition, we started. First went a number of Billali's spearmen, then came the litters with the wounded alongside of which Umslopogaas and his three uninjured Zulus stalked or trotted, then another litter containing Billali, then my own by which ran Hans, and Robertson's, and lastly the rest of the Amahagger and the relief bearers.

"I see now, Baas," said Hans, thrusting his head between my curtains, "that yonder Whitebeard cannot be your reverend father, the Predikant, after all."

"Why not?" I asked, though the fact was fairly obvious.

"Because, Baas, if he were, he would not have left Hans, of whom he always thought so well, to run in the sun like a dog, while he and others travel in carriages like great white ladies."

"You had better save your breath instead of talking nonsense, Hans," I said, "since I believe that you have a long way to go."

In fact, it proved to be a very long way indeed, especially as after we began to breast the mountain, we must travel slowly. We started about ten o'clock in the morning, for the fight which after all did not take long—had, it will be remembered, begun shortly after dawn, and it was three in the afternoon before we reached the base of the towering cliff which I have mentioned.

Here, at the foot of a remarkable, isolated column of rock, on which I was destined to see a strange sight in the after days, we halted and ate of the remaining food which we had brought with us, while the Amahagger consumed their own, that seemed to consist largely of curdled milk, such as the Zulus call *maas*, and lumps of a kind of bread.

I noted that they were a very curious people who fed in silence and on whose handsome, solemn faces one never saw a smile. Somehow it gave me the creeps to look at them. Robertson was affected in the same way, for in one of the rare intervals of his abstraction he remarked that they were “no canny.” Then he added,

“Ask yon old wizard who might be one of the Bible prophets come to life—what those man-eating devils have done with my daughter.”

I did so, and Billali answered,

“Say that they have taken her away to make a queen of her, since having rebelled against their own queen, they must have another who is white. Say too that She-who-commands will wage war on them and perhaps win her back, unless they kill her first.”

“Ah!” Robertson repeated when I had translated, “unless they kill her first—or worse.” Then he relapsed into his usual silence.

Presently we started on again, heading straight for what looked like a sheer wall of black rock a thousand feet or more in height, up a path so steep that Robertson and I got out and walked, or rather scrambled, in order to ease the bearers. Billali, I noticed, remained in his litter. The convenience of the bearers did not trouble him; he only ordered an extra gang to the poles. I could not imagine how we were to negotiate this precipice. Nor could Umslopogaas, who looked at it and said,

“If we are to climb that, Macumazahn, I think that the only one who will live to get to the top will be that little yellow monkey of yours,” and he pointed with his axe at Hans.

“If I do,” replied that worthy, much nettled, for he hated to be called a “yellow monkey” by the Zulus, “be sure that I will roll down stones upon any black butcher whom I see sprawling upon the cliff below.”

Umslopogaas smiled grimly, for he had a sense of humour and could appreciate a repartee even when it hit him hard. Then we stopped talking for the climb took all our breath.

At length we came to the cliff face where, to all appearance, our journey must end. Suddenly, however, out of the blind black wall in front of us started the apparition of a tall man armed with a great spear and wearing a white robe, who challenged us hoarsely.

Suddenly he stood before us, as a ghost might do, though whence he came we could not see. Presently the mystery was explained. Here in the cliff face there was a cleft, though one invisible even from a few paces away, since its outer edge projected over the inner wall of rock. Moreover, this opening was not above four feet in width, a mere split in the huge mountain mass caused by some titanic convulsion in past ages. For it was a definite split since, once entered, far, far above could be traced a faint line of light coming from the sky, although the gloom of the passage was such that torches, which were stored at hand, must be used by those who threaded it. One man could have held the place against a hundred—until he was killed. Still, it was guarded, not only at the mouth where the warrior had appeared, but further along at every turn in the jagged chasm, and these were many.

Into this grim place we went. The Zulus did not like it at all, for they are a light-loving people and I noted that even Umslopogaas seemed scared and hung back a little. Nor did Hans, who with his usual suspicion, feared some trap; nor, for the matter of that, did I, though I thought it well to appear much interested. Only Robertson seemed quite indifferent and trudged along stolidly after a man carrying a torch.

Old Billali put his head out of the litter and shouted back to me to fear nothing, since there were no pitfalls in the path, his voice echoing strangely between those narrow walls of measureless height.

For half an hour or more we pursued this dreary, winding path round the corners of which the draught tore in gusts so fierce that more than once the litters with the wounded men and those who bore them were nearly blown over. It was safe enough, however, since on either side of us, smooth and without break, rose the sheer walls of rock over which lay the tiny ribbon of blue sky. At length the cleft widened somewhat and the light grew stronger, making the torches unnecessary.

Then of a sudden we came to its end and found ourselves upon a little plateau in the mountainside. Behind us for a thousand feet or so rose the sheer rock wall as it did upon the outer face, while in front and beneath, far beneath, was a beautiful plain circular in shape and of great extent, which plain was everywhere surrounded, so far as I could see, by the same wall of rock. In short, notwithstanding its enormous size, without doubt it was neither more nor less than the crater of a vast extinct volcano. Lastly, not far from the centre of this plain was what appeared to be a city, since through my glasses I could see great walls built of stone, and what I thought were houses, all of them of a character more substantial than any that I had discovered in the wilds of Africa.

I went to Billali's litter and asked him who lived in the city.

“No one,” he answered, “it has been dead for thousands of years, but She-who-commands is camped there at present with an army, and thither we go at once. Forward, bearers.”

So, Robertson and I having re-entered our litters, we started on down hill at a rapid pace, for the road, though steep, was safe and kept in good order. All the rest of that afternoon we travelled and by sunset reached the edge of the plain, where we halted a while to rest and eat, till the light of the growing moon grew strong enough to enable us to proceed. Umslopogaas came up and spoke to me.

“Here is a fortress indeed, Macumazahn,” he said, “since none can climb that fence of rock in which the holes seem to be few and small.”

“Yes,” I answered, “but it is one out of which those who are in, would find it difficult to get out. We are buffaloes in a pit, Umslopogaas.”

“That is so,” he answered, “I have thought it already. But if any would meddle with us we still have our horns and can toss for a while.”

Then he went back to his men.

The sunset in that great solemn place was a wonderful thing to see. First of all the measureless crater was filled with light like a bowl with fire. Then as the great orb sank behind the western cliff, half of the plain became quite dark while shadows seemed to rush forward over the eastern part of its surface, till that too was swallowed up in gloom and for a little while there remained only a glow

reflected from the cliff face and from the sky above, while on the crest of the parapet of rock played strange and glorious fires. Presently these too vanished and the world was dark.

Then the half moon broke from behind a bank of clouds and by its silver, uncertain light we struggled forward across the flat plain, rather slowly now, for even the iron muscles of those bearers grew tired. I could not see much of it, but I gathered that we were passing through crops, very fine crops to judge by their height, as doubtless they would be upon this lava soil; also once or twice we splashed through streams.

At length, being tired and lulled by the swaying of the litter and by the sound of a weird, low chant that the bearers had set up now that they neared home and were afraid of no attack, I sank into a doze. When I awoke again it was to find that the litter had halted and to hear the voice of Billali say,

“Descend, White Lords, and come with your companions, the black Warrior and the yellow man who is named Light-in-Darkness. She-who-commands desires to see you at once before you eat and sleep, and must not be kept waiting. Fear not for the others, they will be cared for till you return.”

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WHITE WITCH

I descended from the litter and told the others what the old fellow had said. Robertson did not want to come, and indeed refused to do so until I suggested to him that such conduct might prejudice a powerful person against us. Umslopogaas was indifferent, putting, as he remarked, no faith in a ruler who was a woman.

Only Hans, although he was so tired, acquiesced with some eagerness, the fact being that his brain was more alert and that he had all the curiosity of the monkey tribe which he so much resembled in appearance, and wanted to see this queen whom Zikali revered.

In the end we started, conducted by Billali and by men who carried torches whereof the light showed me that we were passing between houses, or at any rate walls that had been those of houses, and along what seemed to be a paved street.

Walking under what I took to be a great arch or portico, we came into a court that was full of towering pillars but unroofed, for I could see the stars above. At its end we entered a building of which the doorway was hung with mats, to find that it was lighted with lamps and that all down its length on either side guards with long spears stood at intervals.

"Oh, Baas," said Hans hesitatingly, "this is the mouth of a trap," while Umslopogaas glared about him suspiciously, fingering the handle of his great axe.

"Be silent," I answered. "All this mountain is a trap, therefore another does not matter, and we have our pistols."

Walking forward between the double line of guards who stood immovable as statues, we came to some curtains hung at the end of a long, narrow hall which, although I know little of such things, were, I noted, made of rich stuff embroidered in colours and with golden threads. Before these curtains Billali motioned us to halt.

After a whispered colloquy with someone beyond carried on through the join of the curtains, he vanished between them, leaving us alone for five minutes or more. At length they opened and a tall and elegant woman with an Arab cast of countenance and clad in white robes, appeared and beckoned to us to enter. She did not speak or answer when I spoke to her, which was not wonderful as afterwards I discovered that she was a mute. We went in, I wondering very much what we were going to see.

On the further side of the curtains was a room of no great size illumined with lamps of which the light fell upon sculptured walls. It looked to me as though it might once have been the inmost court or a sanctuary of some temple, for at its head was a dais upon which once perhaps had stood the shrine or statue of a god. On this dais there was now a couch and on the couch—a goddess!

There she sat, straight and still, clothed in shining white and veiled, but with her draperies so arranged that they emphasised rather than concealed the wonderful elegance of her tall form. From beneath the veil, which was such as a bride wears, appeared two plaits of glossy, raven hair of great length, to the end of each of which was suspended a single large pearl. On either side of her stood a tall woman like to her who had led us through the curtains, and on his knees in front, but to the right, knelt Billali.

About this seated personage there was an air of singular majesty, such as might pervade a queen as fancy paints her, though she had a nobler figure than any queen I ever saw depicted. Mystery seemed to flow from her; it clothed her like the veil she wore, which of course heightened the effect. Beauty flowed from her also; although it was shrouded I knew that it was there, no veil or coverings could obscure it—at least, to my imagination. Moreover she breathed out power also; one felt it in the air as one feels a thunderstorm before it breaks, and it seemed to me that this power was not quite human, that it drew its strength from afar and dwelt a stranger to the earth.

To tell the truth, although my curiosity, always strong, was enormously excited and though now I felt glad that I had attempted this journey with all its perils, I was horribly afraid, so much afraid that I should have liked to turn and run away. From the beginning I knew myself to be in the presence of an unearthly being clothed in soft and perfect woman's flesh, something alien, too, and different from our human race.

What a picture it all made! There she sat, quiet and stately as a perfect marble statue; only her breast, rising and falling beneath the white robe, showed that she was alive and breathed as others do. Another thing showed it also—her eyes. At first I could not see them through the veil, but presently either because I grew accustomed to the light, or because they brightened as those of certain animals have power to do when they watch intently, it ceased to be a covering to them. Distinctly I saw them now, large and dark and splendid with a tinge of deep blue in the iris; alluring and yet awful in their majestic aloofness which seemed to look through and beyond, to embrace all without seeking and without effort. Those eyes were like windows through which light flows from within, a light of the spirit.

I glanced round to see the effect of this vision upon my companions. It was most peculiar. Hans had sunk to his knees; his hands were joined in the attitude of prayer and his ugly little face reminded me of that of a big fish out of water and dying from excess of air. Robertson, startled out of his abstraction, stared at the royal-looking woman on the couch with his mouth open.

"Man," he whispered, "I've got them back although I have touched nothing for weeks, only this time they are lovely. For yon's no human lady, I feel it in my bones."

Umslopogaas stood great and grim, his hands resting on the handle of his tall axe; and he stared also, the blood pulsing against the skin that covered the hole in his head.

"Watcher-by-Night," he said to me in his deep voice, but also speaking in a whisper, "this chieftainess is not one woman, but all women. Beneath those robes of hers I seem to see the beauty of one who has 'gone Beyond,' of the Lily who is lost to me. Do you not feel it thus, Macumazahn?"

Now that he mentioned it, certainly I did; indeed, I had felt it all along although amid the rush of sensations this one had scarcely disentangled itself in my mind. I looked at the draped shape and saw—well, never mind whom I saw; it was not one only but several in sequence; also a woman who at that time I did not know although I came to know her afterwards, too well, perhaps, or at any rate quite enough to puzzle me. The odd thing was that in this hallucination the personalities of these individuals seemed to overlap and merge, till at last I began to wonder whether they were not parts of the same entity or being, manifesting itself in sundry shapes, yet springing from one centre, as different coloured rays flow from the same crystal, while the beams from their source of light shift and change. But the fancy is too metaphysical for my poor powers to express as clearly as I would. Also no doubt it was but a hallucination that had its origin, perhaps, in the mischievous brain of her who sat before us.

At length she spoke and her voice sounded like silver bells heard over water in a great calm. It was low and sweet, oh! so sweet that at its first notes for a moment my senses seemed to swoon and my pulse to stop. It was to me that she addressed herself.

“My servant here,” and ever so slightly she turned her head towards the kneeling Billali, “tells me that you who are named Watcher-in-the-Night, understand the tongue in which I speak to you. Is it so?”

“I understand Arabic of a kind well enough, having learned it on the East Coast and from Arabs in past years, but not such Arabic as you use, O——” and I paused.

“Call me *Hiya*,” she broke in, “which is my title here, meaning, as you know, She, or Woman. Or if that does not please you, call me Ayesha. It would rejoice me after so long to hear the name I bore spoken by the lips of one of my colour and of gentle blood.”

I blushed at the compliment so artfully conveyed, and repeated stupidly enough,

“—Not such Arabic as you use, O—Ayesha.”

“I thought that you would like the sound of the word better than that of *Hiya*, though afterwards I will teach you to pronounce it as you should, O—have you any other name save Watcher-by-Night, which seems also to be a title?”

“Yes,” I answered. “Allan.”

“—O—Allan. Tell me of these,” she went on quickly, indicating my companions with a sweep of her slender hand, “for they do not speak Arabic, I think. Or stay, I will tell you of them and you shall say if I do so rightly. This one,” and she nodded towards Robertson, “is a man bemused. There comes from him a colour which I see if you cannot, and that colour betokens a desire for revenge, though I think that in his time he has desired other things also, as I remember men always did from the beginning, to their ruin. Human nature does not change, Allan, and wine and women are ancient snares. Enough of him for this time. The little yellow one there is afraid of me, as are all of you. That is woman’s greatest power, although she is so weak and gentle, men are still afraid of her just because they are so foolish that they cannot understand her. To them after a million years she still remains the Unknown and to us all the Unknown is also the awful. Do you remember the proverb of the Romans that says it well and briefly?”

I nodded, for it was one of the Latin tags that my father had taught me.

“Good. Well, he is a little wild man, is he not, nearer to the apes from whose race our bodies come? But do you know that, Allan?”

I nodded again, and said,

“There are disputes upon the point, Ayesha.”

“Yes, they had begun in my day and we will discuss them later. Still, I say—nearer to the ape than you or I, and therefore of interest, as the germ of things is always. Yet he has qualities, I think; cunning, and fidelity and love which in its round is all in all. Do you understand, Allan, that love is all in all?”

I answered warily that it depended upon what she meant by love, to which she replied that she would explain afterwards when we had leisure to talk, adding,

“What this little yellow monkey understands by it at least has served you well, or so I believe. You shall tell me the tale of it some day. Now of the last, this Black One. Here I think is a man indeed, a warrior of warriors such as there used to be in the early world, if a savage. Well, believe me, Allan, savages are often the best. Moreover, all are still savage at heart, even you and I. For what is termed culture is but coat upon coat of paint laid on to hide our native colour, and often there is poison in the paint. That axe of his has drunk deep, I think, though always in fair fight, and I say that it shall drink deeper yet. Have I read these men aright, Allan?”

“Not so ill,” I answered.

“I thought it,” she said with a musical laugh, “although at this place I rust and grow dull like an unused sword. Now you would rest. Go—all of you. To-morrow you and I will talk alone. Fear nothing for your safety; you are watched by my slaves and I watch my slaves. Until to-morrow, then, farewell. Go now, eat and sleep, as alas we all must do who linger on this ball of earth and cling to a life we should do well to lose. Billali, lead them hence,” and she waved her hand to signify that the audience was ended.

At this sign Hans, who apparently was still much afraid, rose from his knees and literally bolted through the curtains. Robertson followed him. Umslopogaas stood a moment, drew himself up and lifting the great axe, cried *Bayéte*, after which he too turned and went.

“What does that word mean, Allan?” she asked.

I explained that it was the salutation which the Zulu people only give to kings.

“Did I not say that savages are often the best?” she exclaimed in a gratified voice. “The white man, your companion, gave me no salute, but the Black One knows when he stands before a woman who is royal.”

“He too is of royal blood in his own land,” I said.

“If so, we are akin, Allan.”

Then I bowed deeply to her in my best manner and rising from her couch for the first time she stood up, looking very tall and commanding, and bowed back.

After this I went to find the others on the further side of the curtains, except Hans, who had run down the long narrow hall and through the mats at its end. We followed, marching with dignity behind Billali and between the double line of guards, who raised their spears as we passed them, and on the further side of the mats discovered Hans, still looking terrified.

“Baas,” he said to me as we threaded our way through the court of columns, “in my life I have seen all kinds of dreadful things and faced them, but never have I been so much afraid as I am of that white witch. Baas, I think that she is the devil of whom your reverend father, the Predikant, used to talk so much, or perhaps his wife.”

"If so, Hans," I answered, "the devil is not so black as he is painted. But I advise you to be careful of what you say as she may have long ears."

"It doesn't matter at all what one says, Baas, because she reads thoughts before they pass the lips. I felt her doing it there in that room. And do you be careful, Baas, or she will eat up your spirit and make you fall in love with her, who, I expect, is very ugly indeed, since otherwise she would not wear a veil. Whoever saw a pretty woman tie up her head in a sack, Baas?"

"Perhaps she does this because she is so beautiful, Hans, that she fears the hearts of men who look upon her would melt."

"Oh, no, Baas, all women want to melt men's hearts; the more the better. They seem to have other things in their minds, but really they think of nothing else until they are too old and ugly, and it takes them a long while to be sure of that."

So Hans went on talking his shrewd nonsense till, following so far as I could see, the same road as that by which we had come, we reached our quarters, where we found food prepared for us, broiled goat's flesh with corncakes and milk, I think it was; also beds for us two white men covered with skin rugs and blankets woven of wool.

These quarters, I should explain, consisted of rooms in a house built of stone of which the walls had once been painted. The roof of the house was gone now, for we could see the stars shining above us, but as the air was very soft in this sheltered plain, this was an advantage rather than otherwise. The largest room was reserved for Robertson and myself, while another at the back was given to Umslopogaas and his Zulus, and a third to the two wounded men.

Billali showed us these arrangements by the light of lamps and apologised that they were not better because, as he explained, the place was a ruin and there had been no time to build us a house. He added that we might sleep without fear as we were guarded and none would dare to harm the guests of She-who-commands, on whom he was sure we, or at any rate I and the black Warrior, had produced an excellent impression. Then he bowed himself out, saying that he would return in the morning, and left us to our own devices.

Robertson and I sat down on stools that had been set for us, and ate, but he seemed so overcome by his experiences, or by his sombre thoughts, that I could not draw him into conversation. All he remarked was that we had fallen into queer company and that those who supped with Satan needed a long spoon. Having delivered himself of this sentiment he threw himself upon the bed, prayed aloud for a while as had become his fashion, to be "protected from warlocks and witches," amongst other things, and went to sleep.

Before I turned in I visited Umslopogaas's room to see that all was well with him and his people, and found him standing in the doorway staring at the star-spangled sky.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said, "you who are white and wise and I who am black and a fighter have seen many strange things beneath the sun, but never such a one as we have looked upon to-night. Who and what is that chieftainess, Macumazahn?"

"I do not know," I said, "but it is worth while to have lived to see her, even though she be veiled."

"Nor do I, Macumazahn. Nay, I do know, for my heart tells me that she is the greatest of all witches and that you will do well to guard your spirit lest she should steal it away. If she were not a witch, should I have seemed to behold the shape of Nada the Lily who was the wife of my youth, beneath those white robes of hers, and though the tongue in which she spoke was strange to me, to hear the murmur of Nada's voice between her lips, of Nada who has gone further from me than those stars. It is good that you wear the Great Medicine of Zikali upon your breast, Macumazahn, for perhaps it will shield you from harm at those hands that are shaped of ivory."

"Zikali is another of the tribe," I answered, laughing, "although less beautiful to see. Also I am not afraid of any of them, and from this one, if she be more than some white woman whom it pleases to veil herself, I shall hope to gather wisdom."

"Yes, Macumazahn, such wisdom as Spirits and the dead have to give."

"Mayhap, Umslopogaas, but we came here to seek Spirits and the dead, did we not?"

"Aye," answered Umslopogaas, "these and war, and I think that we shall find enough of all three. Only I hope that war will come the first, lest the Spirits and the dead should bewitch me and take away my skill and courage."

Then we parted, and too tired even to wonder any more, I threw myself down on my bed and slept.

I was awakened when the sun was already high, by the sound of Robertson, who was on his knees, praying aloud as usual, a habit of his which I confess got on my nerves. Prayer, in my opinion, is a private matter between man and his Creator, that is, except in church; further, I did not in the least wish to hear all about Robertson's sins, which seemed to have been many and peculiar. It is bad enough to have to bear the burden of one's own transgressions without learning of those of other people, that is, unless one is a priest and must do so professionally. So I jumped up to escape and make arrangements for a wash, only to butt into old Billali, who was standing in the doorway contemplating Robertson with much interest and stroking his white beard.

He greeted me with his courteous bow and said,

"Tell your companion, O Watcher, that it is not necessary for him to go upon his knees to She-who-commands—and must be obeyed," he added with emphasis, "when he is not in her presence, and that even then he would do well to keep silent, since so much talking in a strange tongue might trouble her."

I burst out laughing and answered,

"He does not go upon his knees and pray to She-who-commands, but to the Great One who is in the sky."

"Indeed, Watcher. Well, here we only know a Great One who is upon the earth, though it is true that perhaps she visits the skies sometimes."

"Is it so, Billali?" I answered incredulously. "And now, I would ask you to take me to some place where I can bathe."

"It is ready," he replied. "Come."

So I called to Hans, who was hanging about with a rifle on his arm, to follow with a cloth and soap, of which fortunately we had a couple of pieces left, and we started along what had once been a paved roadway running between stone houses, whereof the time-eaten ruins still remained on either side.

"Who and what is this Queen of yours, Billali?" I asked as we went. "Surely she is not of the Amahagger blood."

"Ask it of herself, O Watcher, for I cannot tell you. All I know is that I can trace my own family for ten generations and that my tenth forefather told his son on his deathbed, for the saying has come down through his descendants—that when he was young She-who-commands had ruled the land for more scores of years than he could count months of life."

I stopped and stared at him, since the lie was so amazing that it seemed to deprive me of the power of motion. Noting my very obvious disbelief he continued blandly,

"If you doubt, ask. And now here is where you may bathe."

Then he led me through an arched doorway and down a wrecked passage to what very obviously once had been a splendid bath-house such as some I have seen pictures of that were built by the Romans. Its size was that of a large room; it was constructed of a kind of marble with a sloping bottom that varied from three to seven feet in depth, and water still ran in and out of it through large glazed pipes. Moreover round it was a footway about five feet across, from which opened chambers, unroofed now, that the bathers used as dressing-rooms, while between these chambers stood the remains of statues. One at the end indeed, where an alcove had protected it from sun and weather, was still quite perfect, except for the outstretched arms which were gone (the right hand I noticed lying at the bottom of the bath). It was that of a nude young woman in the attitude of diving, a very beautiful bit of work, I thought, though of course I am no judge of sculpture. Even the smile mingled with trepidation upon the girl's face was most naturally portrayed.

This statue showed two things, that the bath was used by females and that the people who built it were highly civilised, also that they belonged to an advanced if somewhat Eastern race, since the girl's nose was, if anything, Semitic in character, and her lips, though prettily shaped, were full. For the rest, the basin was so clean that I presume it must have been made ready for me or other recent bathers, and at its bottom I discovered gratings and broken pipes of earthenware which suggested that in the old days the water could be warmed by means of a furnace.

This relic of a long-past civilisation excited Hans even more than it did myself, since having never seen anything of the sort, he thought it so strange that, as he informed me, he imagined that it must have been built by witchcraft. In it I had a most delightful and much-needed bath. Even Hans was persuaded to follow my example—a thing I had rarely known him to do before—and seated in its shallowest part, splashed some water over his yellow, wrinkled anatomy. Then we returned to our house, where I found an excellent breakfast had been provided which was brought to us by tall, silent, handsome women who surveyed us out of the corners of their eyes, but said nothing.

Shortly after I had finished my meal, Billali, who had disappeared, came back again and said that She-who-commands desired my presence as she would speak with me; also that I must come alone. So, after attending to the wounded, who both seemed to be getting on well, I went, followed by Hans armed with his rifle, though I only carried my revolver. Robertson wished to accompany me, as he did not seem to care about being left alone with the Zulus in that strange place, but this Billali would not allow. Indeed, when he persisted, two great men stepped forward and crossed their spears before him in a somewhat threatening fashion. Then at my entreaty, for I feared lest trouble should arise, he gave in and returned to the house.

Following our path of the night before, we walked up a ruined street which I could see was only one of scores in what had once been a very great city, until we came to the archway that I have mentioned, a large one now overgrown with plants that from their yellow, sweet-scented bloom I judged to be a species of wallflower, also with a kind of houseleek or saxifrage.

Here Hans was stopped by guards, Billali explaining to me that he must await my return, an order which he obeyed unwillingly enough. Then I went on down the narrow passage, lined as before by guards who stood silent as statues, and came to the curtains at the end. Before these at a motion from Billali, who did not seem to dare to speak in this place, I stood still and waited.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ALLAN HEARS A STRANGE TALE

For some minutes I remained before those curtains until, had it not been for something electric in the air which got into my bones, a kind of force that, perhaps in my fancy only, seemed to pervade the place, I should certainly have grown bored. Indeed I was about to ask my companion why he did not announce our arrival instead of standing there like a stuck pig with his eyes shut as though in prayer or meditation, when the curtains parted and from between them appeared one of those tall waiting women whom we had seen on the previous night. She contemplated us gravely for a few moments, then moved her hand twice, once forward, towards Billali as a signal to him to retire, which he did with great rapidity, and next in a beckoning fashion towards myself to invite me to follow her.

I obeyed, passing between the thick curtains which she fastened in some way behind me, and found myself in the same roofed and sculptured room that I have already described. Only now there were no lamps, such light as penetrated it coming from an opening above that I could not see, and falling upon the dais at its head, also on her who sat upon the dais.

Yes, there she was in her white robes and veil, the point and centre of a little lake of light, a wondrous and in a sense a spiritual vision, for in truth there was something about her which was not of the world, something that drew and yet frightened me. Still as a statue she sat, like one to whom time is of no account and who has grown weary of motion, and on either side of her yet more still, like caryatides supporting a shrine, stood two of the stately women who were her attendants.

For the rest a sweet and subtle odour pervaded the chamber which took hold of my senses as *hasheesh* might do, which I was sure proceeded from her, or from her garments, for I could see no perfumes burning. She spoke no word, yet I knew she was inviting me to come nearer and moved forward till I reached a curious carved chair that was placed just beneath the dais, and there halted, not liking to sit down without permission.

For a long while she contemplated me, for as before I could feel her eyes searching me from head to foot and as it were looking through me as though she would discover my very soul. Then at length she moved, waving those two ivory arms of hers outwards with a kind of swimming stroke, whereon the women to right and left of her turned and glided away, I know not whither.

"Sit, Allan," she said, "and let us talk, for I think we have much to say to each other. Have you slept well? And eaten?—though I fear that the food is but rough. Also was the bath made ready for you?"

"Yes, Ayesha," I answered to all three questions, adding, for I knew not what to say, "It seems to be a very ancient bath."

"When I last saw it," she replied, "it was well enough with statues standing round it worked by a sculptor who had seen beauty in his dreams. But in two thousand years—or is it more?—the tooth of Time bites deep, and doubtless like all else in this dead place it is now a ruin."

I coughed to cover up the exclamation of disbelief that rose to my lips and remarked blandly that two thousand years was certainly a long time.

"When you say one thing, Allan, and mean another, your Arabic is even more vile than usual and does not serve to cloak your thought."

"It may be so, Ayesha, for I only know that tongue as I do many other of the dialects of Africa by learning it from common men. My own speech is English, in which, if you are acquainted with it, I should prefer to talk."

"I know not English, which doubtless is some language that has arisen since I left the world. Perhaps later you shall teach it to me. I tell you, you anger me whom it is not well to anger, because you believe nothing that passes my lips and yet do not dare to say so."

"How can I believe one, Ayesha, who if I understand aright, speaks of having seen a certain bath two thousand years ago, whereas one hundred years are the full days of man? Forgive me therefore if I cannot believe what I know to be untrue."

Now I thought that she would be very angry and was sorry that I had spoken. But as it happened she was not.

"You must have courage to give me the lie so boldly—and I like courage," she said, "who have been cringed to for so long. Indeed, I know that you are brave, who have heard how you bore yourself in the fight yesterday, and much else about you. I think that we shall be friends, but—seek no more."

"What else should I seek, Ayesha?" I asked innocently.

"Now you are lying again," she said, "who know well that no man who is a man sees a woman who is beautiful and pleases him, without wondering whether, should he desire it, she could come to love him, that is, if she be young."

"Which at least is not possible if she has lived two thousand years. Then naturally she would prefer to wear a veil," I said boldly, seeking to avoid the argument into which I saw she wished to drag me.

"Ah!" she answered, "the little yellow man who is named Light-in-Darkness put that thought into your heart, I think. Oh, do not trouble as to how I know it, who have many spies here, as he guessed well enough. So a woman who has lived two thousand years must be hideous and wrinkled, must she? The stamp of youth and loveliness must long have fled from her; of that you, the wise man, are sure. Very well. Now you tempt me to do what I had determined I would not do and you shall pluck the fruit of that tree of curiosity which grows so fast within you. Look, Allan, and say whether I am old and hideous, even though I have lived two thousand years upon the earth and mayhap many more."

Then she lifted her hands and did something to her veil, so that for a moment—only one moment—her face was revealed, after which the veil fell into its place.

I looked, I saw, and if that chair had lacked a back I believe that I should have fallen out of it to the ground. As for what I saw—well, it cannot be described, at any rate by me, except perhaps as a flash of glory.

Every man has dreamed of perfect beauty, basing his ideas of it perhaps on that of some woman he has met who chanced to take his fancy, with a few accessories from splendid pictures or Greek statues thrown in, *plus* a garnishment of the imagination. At any rate I have, and here was that perfect beauty multiplied by ten, such beauty, that at the sight of it the senses reeled. And yet I repeat that it is not to be described.

I do not know what the nose or the lips were like; in fact, all that I can remember with distinctness is the splendour of the eyes, of which I had caught some hint through her veil on the previous night. Oh, they were wondrous, those eyes, but I cannot tell their colour save that the groundwork of them was black. Moreover they seemed to be more than eyes as we understand them. They were indeed windows of the soul, out of which looked thought and majesty and infinite wisdom, mixed with all the allurements and the mystery that we are accustomed to see or to imagine in woman.

Here let me say something at once. If this marvellous creature expected that the revelation of her splendour was going to make me her slave; to cause me to fall in love with her, as it is called, well, she must have been disappointed, for it had no such effect. It frightened and in a sense humbled me, that is all, for I felt myself to be in the presence of something that was not human, something alien to me as a man, which I could fear and even adore as humanity would adore that which is Divine, but with which I had no desire to mix. Moreover, was it divine, or was it something very different? I did not know, I only knew that it was not for me; as soon should I have thought of asking for a star to set within my lantern.

I think that she felt this, felt that her stroke had missed, as the French say, that is if she meant to strike at all at this moment. Of this I am not certain, for it was in a changed voice, one with a suspicion of chill in it that she said with a little laugh,

“Do you admit now, Allan, that a woman may be old and still remain fair and unwrinkled?”

“I admit,” I answered, although I was trembling so much that I could hardly speak with steadiness, “that a woman may be splendid and lovely beyond anything that the mind of man can conceive, whatever her age, of which I know nothing. I would add this, Ayesha, that I thank you very much for having revealed to me the glory that is hid beneath your veil.”

“Why?” she asked, and I thought that I detected curiosity in her question.

“For this reason, Ayesha. Now there is no fear of my troubling you in such a fashion as you seemed to dread a little while ago. As soon would a man desire to court the moon sailing in her silver loveliness through heaven.”

“The moon! It is strange that you should compare me to the moon,” she said musingly. “Do you know that the moon was a great goddess in Old Egypt and that her name was Isis and—well, once I had to do with Isis? Perhaps you were there and knew it, since more lives than one are given to most of us. I must search and learn. For the rest, all have not thought as you do, Allan. Many, on the contrary, love and seek to win the Divine.”

“So do I at a distance, Ayesha, but to come too near to it I do not aspire. If I did perhaps I might be consumed.”

“You have wisdom,” she replied, not without a note of admiration in her voice. “The moths are few that fear the flame, but those are the moths which live. Also I think that you have scorched your wings before and learned that fire hurts. Indeed, now I remember that I have heard of three such fires of love through which you have flown, Allan, though all of them are dead ashes now, or shine elsewhere. Two burned in your youth when a certain lady died to save you, a great woman that, is it not so? And the third, ah! she was fire indeed, though of a copper hue. What was her name? I cannot remember, but I think it had something to do with the wind, yes, with the wind when it wails.”

I stared at her. Was this Mameena myth to be dug up again in a secret place in the heart of Africa? And how the deuce did she know anything about Mameena? Could she have been questioning Hans or Umslopogaas? No, it was not possible, for she had never seen them out of my presence.

“Perhaps,” she went on in a mocking voice, “perhaps once again you disbelieve, Allan, whose cynic mind is so hard to open to new truths. Well, shall I show you the faces of these three? I can,” and she waved her hand towards some object that stood on a tripod to the right of her in the shadow—it looked like a crystal basin. “But what would it serve when you who know them so well, believed that I drew their pictures out of your own soul? Also perchance but one face would appear and that one strange to you. [Lady Ragnall perhaps?—JB]

“Have you heard, Allan, that among the wise some hold that not all of us is visible at once here on earth within the same house of flesh; that the whole self in its home above, separates itself into sundry parts, each of which walks the earth in different form, a segment of life’s circle that can never be dissolved and must unite again at last?”

I shook my head blankly, for I had never heard anything of the sort.

“You have still much to learn, Allan, although doubtless there are some who think you wise,” she went on in the same mocking voice. “Well, I hold that this doctrine is built upon a rock of truth; also,” she added after studying me for a minute, “that in your case these three women do not complete that circle. I think there is a fourth who as yet is strange to you in this life, though you have known her well enough in others.”

I groaned, imagining that she alluded to herself, which was foolish of me, for at once she read my mind and went on with a rather acid little laugh,

“No, no, not the humble slave who sits before you, whom, as you have told me, it would please you to reject as unworthy were she brought to you in offering, as in the old days was done at the courts of the great kings of the East. O fool, fool! who hold yourself so strong and do not know that if I chose, before yon shadow had moved a finger’s breadth, I could bring you to my feet, praying that you might be suffered to kiss my robe, yes, just the border of my robe.”

“Then I beg of you not to choose, Ayesha, since I think that when there is work to be done by both of us, we shall find more comfort side by side than if I were on the ground seeking to kiss a garment that doubtless then it would delight you to snatch away.”

At these words her whole attitude seemed to change. I could see her lovely shape brace itself up, as it were, beneath her robes and felt in some way that her mind had also changed; that it had rid itself of mockery and woman’s pique and like a shifting searchlight, was directed upon some new objective.

“Work to be done,” she repeated after me in a new voice. “Yes, I thank you who bring it to my mind, since the hours pass and that work presses. Also I think there is a bargain to be made between us who are both of the blood that keeps bargains, even if they be not

written on a roll and signed and sealed. Why do you come to me and what do you seek of me, Allan, Watcher-in-the-Night? Say it and truthfully, for though I may laugh at lies and pass them by when they have to do with the eternal sword-play which Nature decrees between man and woman, until these break apart or, casting down the swords, seek arms in which they agree too well, when they have to do with policy and high purpose and ambition's ends, why then I avenge them upon the liar."

Now I hesitated, as what I had to tell her seemed so foolish, indeed so insane, while she waited patiently as though to give me time to shape my thoughts. Speaking at last because I must, I said,

"I come to ask you, Ayesha, to show me the dead, if the dead still live elsewhere."

"And who told you, Allan, that I could show you the dead, if they are not truly dead? There is but one, I think, and if you are his messenger, show me his token. Without it we do not speak together of this business."

"What token?" I asked innocently, though I guessed her meaning well enough.

She searched me with her great eyes, for I felt, and indeed saw them on me through the veil, then answered,

"I think—nay, let me be sure," and half rising from the couch, she bent her head over the tripod that I have described, and stared into what seemed to be a crystal bowl. "If I read aright," she said, straightening herself presently, "it is a hideous thing enough, the carving of an abortion of a man such as no woman would care to look on lest her babe should bear its stamp. It is a charmed thing also that has virtues for him who wears it, especially for you, Allan, since something tells me that it is dyed with the blood of one who loved you. If you have it, let it be revealed, since without it I do not talk with you of these dead you seek."

Now I drew Zikali's talisman from its hiding-place and held it towards her.

"Give it to me," she said.

I was about to obey when something seemed to warn me not to do so.

"Nay," I answered, "he who lent me this carving for a while, charged me that except in emergency and to save others, I must wear it night and day till I returned it to his hand, saying that if I parted from it fortune would desert me. I believe none of this talk and tried to be rid of it, whereon death drew near to me from a snake, such a snake as I see you wear about you, which doubtless also has poison in its fangs, if of another sort, Ayesha."

"Draw near," she said, "and let me look. Man, be not afraid."

So I rose from my chair and knelt before her, hoping secretly that no one would see me in that ridiculous position, which the most unsuspicious might misinterpret. I admit, however, that it proved to have compensations, since even through the veil I saw her marvellous eyes better than I had done before, and something of the pure outline of her classic face; also the fragrance of her hair was wonderful.

She took the talisman in her hand and examined it closely.

"I have heard of this charm and it is true that the thing has power," she said, "for I can feel it running through my veins, also that it is a shield of defence to him who wears it. Yes, and now I understand what perplexed me somewhat, namely, how it came about that when you vexed me into unveiling—but let that matter be. The wisdom was not your own, but another's, that is all. Yes, the wisdom of one whose years have borne him beyond the shafts that fly from woman's eyes, the ruinous shafts which bring men down to doom and nothingness. Tell me, Allan, is this the likeness of him who gave it to you?"

"Yes, Ayesha, the very picture, as I think, carved by himself, though he said that it is ancient, and others tell that it has been known in the land for centuries."

"So perchance has he," she answered drily, "since some of our company live long. Now tell me this wizard's names. Nay, wait awhile for I would prove that indeed you are his messenger with whom I may talk about the dead, and other things, Allan. You can read Arabic, can you not?"

"A little," I answered.

Then from a stool at her side she took paper, or rather papyrus and a reed pen, and on her knee wrote something on the sheet which she gave to me folded up.

"Now tell me the names," she said, "and then let us see if they tally with what I have written, for if so you are a true man, not a mere wanderer or a spy."

"The principal names of this doctor are Zikali, the Opener-of-Roads, the '*Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born*,'" I answered.

"Read the writing, Allan," she said.

I unfolded the sheet and read Arabic words which meant, "Weapons, Cleaver-of-Rocks, One-at-whom-dogs-bark-and-children-wail."

"The last two are near enough," she said, "but the first is wrong."

"Nay, Ayesha, since in this man's tongue the word 'Zikali' means 'Weapons'; intelligence at which she clapped her hands as a merry girl might do. "The man," I went on, "is without doubt a great doctor, one who sees and knows things that others do not, but I do not understand why this token carved in his likeness should have power, as you say it has."

"Because with it goes his spirit, Allan. Have you never heard of the Egyptians, a very wise people who, as I remember, declared that man has a *Ka* or Double, a second self, that can either dwell in his statue or be sent afar?"

I answered that I had heard this.

"Well the *Ka* of this Zikali goes with that hideous image of him, which is perhaps why you have come safe through many dangers and why also I seemed to dream so much of him last night. Tell me now, what does Zikali want of me whose power he knows very well?"

"An oracle, the answer to a riddle, Ayesha."

"Then set it out another time. So you desire to see the dead, and this old dwarf, who is a home of wisdom, desires an oracle from one who is greater than he. Good. And what are you, or both of you, prepared to pay for these boons? Know, Allan, that I am a merchant who sells my favours dear. Tell me then, will you pay?"

"I think that it depends upon the price," I answered cautiously. "Set out the price, Ayesha."

"Be not afraid, O cunning dealer," she mocked. "I do not ask your soul or even that love of yours which you guard so jealously, since these things I could take without the asking. Nay, I ask only what a brave and honest man may give without shame: your help in war, and perhaps," she added with a softer tone, "your friendship. I think, Allan, that I like you well, perhaps because you remind me of another whom I knew long ago."

I bowed at the compliment, feeling proud and pleased at the prospect of a friendship with this wonderful and splendid creature, although I was aware that it had many dangers. Then I sat still and waited. She also waited, brooding.

"Listen," she said after a while, "I will tell you a story and when you have heard it you shall answer, even if you do not believe it, but not before. Does it please you to listen to something of the tale of my life which I am moved to tell you, that you may know with whom you have to deal?"

Again I bowed, thinking to myself that I knew nothing that would please me more, who was eaten up with a devouring curiosity about this woman.

Now she rose from her couch and descending off the dais, began to walk up and down the chamber. I say, to walk, but her movements were more like the gliding of an eagle through the air or the motion of a swan upon still water, so smooth were they and gracious. As she walked she spoke in a low and thrilling voice.

"Listen," she said again, "and even if my story seems marvellous to you, interrupt, and above all, mock me not, lest I should grow angry, which might be ill for you. I am not as other women are, O Allan, who having conquered the secrets of Nature," here I felt an intense desire to ask what secrets, but remembered and held my tongue, "to my sorrow have preserved my youth and beauty through many ages. Moreover in the past, perhaps in payment for my sins, I have lived other lives of which some memory remains with me."

"By my last birth I am an Arab lady of royal blood, a descendant of the Kings of the East. There I dwelt in the wilderness and ruled a people, and at night I gathered wisdom from the stars and the spirits of the earth and air. At length I wearied of it all and my people too wearied of me and besought me to depart, for, Allan, I would have naught to do with men, yet men went mad because of my beauty and slew each other out of jealousy. Moreover other peoples made war upon my people, hoping to take me captive that I might be a wife to their kings. So I left them, and being furnished with great wealth in hoarded gold and jewels, together with a certain holy man, my master, I wandered through the world, studying the nations and their worship. At Jerusalem I tarried and learned of Jehovah who is, or was, its God."

"At Paphos in the Isle of Chitum I dwelt a while till the folk of that city thought that I was Aphrodite returned to earth and sought to worship me. For this reason and because I made a mock of Aphrodite, I, who, as I have said, would have naught to do with men, she through her priests cursed me, saying that her yoke should lie more heavily upon my neck from age to age than on that of any woman who had breathed beneath the sun."

"It was a wondrous scene," she added reflectively, "that of the cursing, since for every word I gave back two. Moreover I told the hoary villain of a high-priest to make report to his goddess that long after she was dead in the world, I would live on, for the spirit of prophecy was on me in that hour. Yet the curse fell in its season, since in her day, doubt it or not, Aphrodite had strength, as indeed under other names she has and will have while the world endures, and for aught I know, beyond it. Do they worship her now in any land, Allan?"

"No, only her statues because of their beauty, though Love is always worshipped."

"Yes, who can testify to that better than you yourself, Allan, if he who is called Zikali tells me the truth concerning you in the dreams he sends? As for the statues, I saw some of them as they left the master's hand in Greece, and when I told him that he might have found a better model, once I was that model. If this marble still endures, it must be the most famous of them all, though perchance Aphrodite has shattered it in her jealous rage. You shall tell me of these statues afterwards; mine had a mark on the left shoulder like to a mole, but the stone was imperfect, not my flesh, as I can prove if you should wish."

Thinking it better not to enter on a discussion as to Ayesha's shoulder, I remained silent and she went on.

"I dwelt in Egypt also, and there, to be rid of men who wearied me with their sighs and importunities, also to acquire more wisdom of which she was the mistress, I entered the service of the goddess Isis, Queen of Heaven, vowing to remain virgin for ever. Soon I became her high-priestess and in her most sacred shrines upon the Nile, I communed with the goddess and shared her power, since from me her daughter, she withheld none of her secrets. So it came about that though Pharaohs held the sceptre, it was I who ruled Egypt and brought it and Sidon to their fall, it matters not how or why, as it was fated that I must do. Yes, kings would come to seek counsel from me where I sat throned, dressed in the garb of Isis and breathing out her power. Yet, my task accomplished, of it all I grew weary, as men will surely do of the heavens that they preach, should they chance to find them."

I wondered what this "task" might be, but only asked, "Why?"

"Because in their pictured heaven all things lie to their hands and man, being man, cannot be happy without struggle, and woman, being woman, without victory over others. What is cheaply bought, or given, has no value, Allan; to be enjoyed, it must first be won. But I bade you not to break my thought."

I asked pardon and she went on,

"Then it was that the shadow of the curse of Aphrodite fell upon me, yes, and of the curse of Isis also, so that these twin maledictions have made me what I am, a lost soul dwelling in the wilderness waiting the fulfilment of a fate whereof I know not the end. For though I have all wisdom, all knowledge of the Past and much power together with the gift of life and beauty, the future is as dark to me as night without its moon and stars."

"Hearken, this chanced to me. Though it be to my shame I tell it you that all may be clear. At a temple of Isis on the Nile where I ruled, there was a certain priest, a Greek by birth, vowed like myself to the service of the goddess and therefore to wed none but her, the goddess herself—that is, in the spirit. He was named Kallikrates, a man of courage and of beauty, such an one as those Greeks carved in the statues of their god Apollo. Never, I think, was a man more beautiful in face and form, though in soul he was not great, as often happens to men who have all else, and well-nigh always happens to women, save myself and perhaps one or two others that history tells of, doubtless magnifying their fabled charms."

"The Pharaoh of that day, the last of the native blood, him whom the Persians drove to doom, had a daughter, the Princess of Egypt, Amenartas by name, a fair woman in her fashion, though somewhat swarthy. In her youth this Amenartas became enamoured of Kallikrates and he of her, when he was a captain of the Grecian Mercenaries at Pharaoh's Court. Indeed, she brought blood upon

his hands because of her, wherefore he fled to Isis for forgiveness and for peace. Thither in after time she followed him and again urged her love.

“Learning of the thing and knowing it for sacrilege, I summoned this priest and warned him of his danger and of the doom which awaited him should he continue in that path. He grew affrighted. He flung himself upon the ground before me with groans and supplications, and kissing my feet, vowed most falsely to me that his dealings with the royal Amenartas were but a veil and that it was I whom he worshipped. His unhallowed words filled me with horror and sternly I bade him begone and do penance for his crime, saying that I would pray the goddess on behalf of him.

“He went, leaving me alone lost in thought in the darkening shrine. Then sleep fell on me and in my sleep I dreamed a dream, or saw a vision. For suddenly there stood before me a woman beauteous as myself clad in nothing save a golden girdle and a veil of gossamer.

“‘O Ayesha,’ she said in a honeyed voice, ‘priestess of Isis of the Egyptians, sworn to the barren worship of Isis and fed on the ashes of her unprofitable wisdom, know that I am Aphrodite of the Greeks whom many times thou hast mocked and defied, and Queen of the breathing world, as Isis is Queen of the world that is dead. Now because thou didst despise me and pour contempt upon my name, I smite thee with my strength and lay a curse upon thee. It is that thou shalt love and desire this man who but now hath kissed thy feet, ever longing till the world’s end to kiss his lips in payment, although thou art as far above him as the moon thou servest is above the Nile. Think not that thou shalt escape my doom, for know that however strong the spirit, here upon the earth the flesh is stronger still and of all flesh I am the queen.’

“Then she laughed softly and smiting me across the eyes with a lock of her scented hair, was gone.

“Allan, I awoke from my sleep and a great trouble fell upon me, for I who had never loved before now was rent with a rage of love and for this man who till that moment had been naught to me but as some beauteous image of gold and ivory. I longed for him, my heart was racked with jealousy because of the Egyptian who favoured him, an eating flame possessed my breast. I grew mad. There in the shrine of Isis the divine I cast myself upon my knees and cried to Aphrodite to return and give me him I sought, for whose sake I would renounce all else, even if I must pour my wisdom into a beauteous, empty cup. Yes, thus I prayed and lay upon the ground and wept until, outworn, once more sleep fell upon me.

“Now in the darkness of the holy place once more there came a dream or vision, since before me in her glory stood the goddess Isis crowned with the crescent of the young moon and holding in her hand the jewelled *sistrum* that is her symbol, from which came music like to the melody of distant bells. She gazed at me and in her great eyes were scorn and anger.

“‘O Ayesha, Daughter of Wisdom,’ she said in a solemn voice, ‘whom I, Isis, had come to look upon rather as a child than a servant, since in none other of my priestesses was such greatness to be found, and whom in a day to be I had purposed to raise to the very steps of my heavenly throne, thou hast broken thine oath and, forsaking me, hast worshipped false Aphrodite of the Greeks who is mine enemy. Yea, in the eternal war between the spirit and the flesh, thou hast chosen the part of flesh. Therefore I hate thee and add my doom to that which Aphrodite laid upon thee, which, hadst thou prayed to me and not to her, I would have lifted from thy heart.

“‘Hearken! The Grecian whom thou hast chosen, by Aphrodite’s will, thou shalt love as the Pathian said. More, thy love shall bring his blood upon thy hands, nor mayest thou follow him to the grave. For I will show thee the Source of Life and thou shalt drink of it to make thyself more fair even than thou art and thus outpace thy rival, and when thy lover is dead, in a desolate place thou shalt wait in grief and solitude till he is born again and find thee there.

“‘Yet shall this be but the beginning of thy sorrows, since through all time thou shalt pursue thy fate till at length thou canst draw up this man to the height on which thine own soul stands by the ropes of love and loss and suffering. Moreover through it all thou shalt despise thyself, which is man’s and woman’s hardest lot, thou who having the rare feast of spirit spread out before thee, hast chosen to fill thyself from the troughs of flesh.’

“Then, Allan, in my dream I made a proud answer to the goddess, saying, ‘Hear me, mighty mistress of many Forms who dost appear in all that lives! An evil fate has fallen upon me, but was it I who chose that fate? Can the leaf contend against the driving gale? Can the falling stone turn upwards to the sky, or when Nature draws it, can the tide cease to flow? A goddess whom I have offended, that goddess whose strength causes the whole world to be, has laid her curse upon me and because I have bent before the storm, as bend I must, or break, another goddess whom I serve, thou thyself, Mother Isis, hast added to the curse. Where then is Justice, O Lady of the Moon?’

“‘Not here, Woman,’ she answered. ‘Yet far away Justice lives and shall be won at last and mayhap because thou art so proud and high-stomached, it is laid upon thee to seek her blinded eyes through many an age. Yet at last I think thou shalt set thy sins against her weights and find the balance even. Therefore cease from questioning the high decrees of destiny which thou canst not understand and be content to suffer, remembering that all joy grows from the root of pain. Moreover, know this for thy comfort, that the wisdom which thou hast shall grow and gather on thee and with it thy beauty and thy power; also that at the last thou shalt look upon my face again, in token whereof I leave to thee my symbol, the *sistrum* that I bear, and with it this command. Follow that false priest of mine wherever he may go and avenge me upon him, and if thou lose him there, wait while the generations pass till he return again. Such and no other is thy destiny.’

“Allan, the vision faded and when I awoke the lights of dawn played upon the image of the goddess in the sanctuary. They played, moreover, upon the holy jewelled thing that in my dream her hand had held, the *sistrum* of her worship, shaped like the loop of life, the magic symbol that she had vowed to me, wherewith goes her power, which henceforth was mine.

“I took it and followed after the priest Kallikrates, to whom thenceforward I was bound by passion’s ties that are stronger than all the goddesses in this wide universe.”

Here I, Allan, could contain myself no longer and asked, “What for?” then, fearing her wrath, wished that I had been silent.

But she was not angry, perhaps because this tale of her interviews with goddesses, doubtless fabled, had made her humble, for she answered quietly,

“By Aphrodite, or by Isis, or both of them I did not know. All I knew was that I *must* seek him, then and evermore, as seek I do today and shall perchance through æons yet unborn. So I followed, as I was taught and commanded, the *sistrum* being my guide, how it matters not, and giving me the means, and so at last I came to this ancient land whereof the ruin in which you sit was once known as Kôr.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ALLAN MISSES OPPORTUNITY

All the while that she was talking thus the Lady or the Queen or the Witch-woman, Ayesha, had been walking up and down the place from the curtains to the foot of the dais, sweeping me with her scented robes as she passed to and fro, and as she walked she waved her arms as an orator might do to emphasise the more moving passages of her tale. Now at the end of it, or what I took to be the end, she stepped on to the dais and sank upon the couch as if exhausted, though I think her spirit was weary rather than her body.

Here she sat awhile, brooding, her chin resting on her hand, then suddenly looked up and fixing her glance upon me—for I could see the flash of it through her thin veil—said,

“What think you of this story, Allan? Do you believe it and have you ever heard its like?”

“*Never*,” I answered with emphasis, “and of course I believe every word. Only there are one or two questions that with your leave I would wish to ask, Ayesha.”

“By which you mean, Allan, that you believe nothing, being by nature without faith and doubtful of all that you cannot see and touch and handle. Well, perhaps you are wise, since what I have told you is not all the truth. For example, it comes back to me now that it was not in the temple on the Nile, or indeed upon the Earth, that I saw the vision of Aphrodite and of Isis, but elsewhere; also that it was here in Kôr that I was first consumed by passion for Kallikrates whom hitherto I had scorned. In two thousand years one forgets much, Allan. Out with your questions and I will answer them, unless they be too long.”

“Ayesha,” I said humbly, reflecting to myself that my questions would, at any rate, be shorter than her varying tale, “even I who am not learned have heard of these goddesses of whom you speak, of the Grecian Aphrodite who rose from the sea upon the shores of Cyprus and dwelt at Paphos and elsewhere——”

“Yes, doubtless like most men you have heard of her and perchance also have been struck across the eyes with her hair, like your betters before you,” she interrupted with sarcasm.

“——Also,” I went on, avoiding argument, “I have heard of Isis of the Egyptians, Lady of the Moon, Mother of Mysteries, Spouse of Osiris whose child was Horus the Avenger.”

“Aye, and I think will hear more of her before you have done, Allan, for now something comes back to me concerning you and her and another. I am not the only one who has broken the oaths of Isis and received her curse, Allan, as *you* may find out in the days to come. But what of these heavenly queens?”

“Only this, Ayesha; I have been taught that they were but phantasms fabled by men with many another false divinity, and could have sworn that this was true. And yet you talk of them as real and living, which perplexes me.”

“Being dull of understanding doubtless it perplexes you, Allan. Yet if you had imagination you might understand that these goddesses are great Principles of Nature; Isis, of throned Wisdom and strait virtue, and Aphrodite, of Love, as it is known to men and women who, being human, have it laid upon them that they must hand on the torch of Life in their little hour. Also you would know that such Principles can seem to take shape and form and at certain ages of the world appear to their servants visible in majesty, though perchance to-day others with changed names wield their sceptres and work their will. Now you are answered on this matter. So to the next.”

Privately I did not feel as though I were answered at all and I was sure that I know nothing of the kind she indicated, but thinking it best to leave the subject, I went on,

“If I understood rightly, Ayesha, the events which you have been pleased first to describe to me, and then to qualify or contradict, took place when the Pharaohs reigned. Now no Pharaoh has sat upon the throne of Egypt for near two thousand years, for the last was a Grecian woman whom the Romans conquered and drove to death. And yet, Ayesha, you speak as though you have lived all through that gulf of time, and in this there must be error, because it is impossible. Therefore I suppose you to mean that this history has come down to you in writing, or perhaps in dreams. I believe that even in such far-off times there were writers of romance, and we all know of what stuff dreams are made. At least this thought comes to me,” I added hurriedly, fearing lest I had said too much, “and one so wise as you are, I repeat, knows well that a woman who says she has lived two thousand years must be mad or—suffer from delusions, because I repeat, it is impossible.”

At these quite innocent remarks she sprang to her feet in a rage that might truly be called royal in every sense.

“Impossible! Romance! Dreams! Delusions! Mad!” she cried in a ringing voice. “Oh! of a truth you weary me, and I have a mind to send you whither you will learn what is impossible and what is not. Indeed, I would do it, and now, only I need your services, and if I did there would be none left for me to talk with, since your companion is moonstruck and the others are but savages of whom I have seen enough.

“Hearken, fool! *Nothing* is impossible. Why do you seek, you who talk of the impossible, to girdle the great world in the span of your two hands and to weigh the secrets of the Universe in the balance of your petty mind and, of that which you cannot understand, to say that it is not? Life you admit because you see it all about you. But that it should endure for two thousand years, which after all is but a second’s beat in the story of the earth, that to you is ‘impossible,’ although in truth the buried seed or the sealed-up toad can live as long. Doubtless, also, you have some faith which promises you this same boon to all eternity, after the little change called Death.

"Nay, Allan, it is possible enough, like to many other things of which you do not dream to-day that will be common to the eyes of those who follow after you. Mayhap you think it impossible that I should speak with and learn of you from yonder old black wizard who dwells in the country whence you came. And yet whenever I will I do so in the night because he is in tune with me, and what I do shall be done by all men in the years unborn. Yes, they shall talk together across the wide spaces of the earth, and the lover shall hear her lover's voice although great seas roll between them. Nor perchance will it stop at this; perchance in future time men shall hold converse with the denizens of the stars, and even with the dead who have passed into silence and the darkness. Do you hear and understand me?"

"Yes, yes," I answered feebly.

"You lie, as you are too prone to do. You hear but you do not understand nor believe, and oh! you vex me sorely. Now I had it in my mind to tell you the secret of this long life of mine; long, mark you, but not endless, for doubtless I must die and change and return again, like others, and even to show you how it may be won. But you are not worthy in your faithlessness."

"No, no, I am not worthy," I answered, who at that moment did not feel the least desire to live two thousand years, perhaps with this woman as a neighbour, rating me from generation to generation. Yet it is true, that now when I am older and a certain event cannot be postponed much longer, I do often regret that I neglected to take this unique chance, if in truth there was one, of prolonging an existence which after all has its consolations—especially when one has made one's pile. Certainly it is a case, a flagrant case, of neglected opportunities, and my only consolation for having lost them is that this was due to the uprightness of my nature which made it so hard for me to acquiesce in alternative statements that I had every cause to disbelieve and thus to give offence to a very powerful and petulant if attractive lady.

"So that is done with," she went on with a little stamp of indignation, "as soon you will be also, who, had you not crossed and doubted me, might have lived on for untold time and become one of the masters of the world, as I am."

Here she paused, choked, I think, with her almost childish anger, and because I could not help it, I said,

"Such place and power, if they be yours, Ayesha, do not seem to bring you much reward. If I were a master of the world I do not think that I should choose to dwell unchangingly among savages who eat men and in a pile of ruins. But perhaps the curses of Aphrodite and of Isis are stronger masters still?" and I paused inquiringly.

This bold argument—for now I see that it was bold—seemed to astonish and even bewilder my wonderful companion.

"You have more wisdom than I thought," she said reflectively, "who have come to understand that no one is really lord of anything, since above there is always a more powerful lord who withers all his pomp and pride to nothingness, even as the great kings learned in olden days, and I, who am higher than they are, am learning now. Harken. Troubles beset me wherein I would have your help and that of your companions, for which I will pay each of you the fee that he desires. The brooding white man who is with you shall free his daughter and unharmed; though that *he* will be unharmed I do not promise. The black savage captain shall fight his fill and gain the glory that he seeks, also something that he seeks still more. The little yellow man asks nothing save to be with his master like a dog and to satisfy at once his stomach and his apish curiosity. You, Allan, shall see those dead over whom you brood at night, though the other guerdon that you might have won is now passed from your reach because you mock me in your heart."

"What must we do to gain these things?" I asked. "How can we humble creatures help one who is all powerful and who has gathered in her breast the infinite knowledge of two thousand years?"

"You must make war under my banner and rid me of my foes. As for the reason, listen to the end of my tale and you shall learn."

I reflected that it was a marvellous thing that this queen who claimed supernatural powers should need our help in a war, but thinking it wiser to keep my meditations to myself, said nothing. As a matter of fact I might just as well have spoken, since as usual she read my thoughts.

"You are thinking that it is strange, Allan, that I, the Mighty and Undying, should seek your aid in some petty tribal battle, and so it would be were my foes but common savages. But they are more; they are men protected by the ancient god of this immemorial city of Kôr, a great god in his day whose spirit still haunts these ruins and whose strength still protects the worshippers who cling to him and practise his unholy rites of human sacrifice."

"How was this god named?" I asked.

"*Rezu* was his name, and from him came the Egyptian Re or Ra, since in the beginning Kôr was the mother of Egypt and the conquering people of Kôr took their god with them when they burst into the valley of the Nile and subdued its peoples long before the first Pharaoh, Menes, wore Egypt's crown."

"Ra was the sun, was he not?" I asked.

"Aye, and Rezu also was a sun-god whom from his throne in the fires of the Lord of Day, gave life to men, or slew them if he willed with his thunderbolts of drought and pestilence and storm. He was no gentle king of heaven, but one who demanded blood-sacrifice from his worshippers, yes, even that of maids and children. So it came about that the people of Kôr, who saw their virgins slain and eaten by the priests of Rezu, and their infants burned to ashes in the fires that his rays lit, turned themselves to the worship of the gentle moon, the goddess whom they named *Lulala*, while some of them chose Truth for their queen, since Truth, they said, was greater and more to be desired than the fierce Sun-King or even the sweet Moon-Lady, Truth, who sat above them both throned in the furthest stars of Heaven. Then the demon, Rezu, grew wroth and sent a pestilence upon Kôr and its subject lands and slew their people, save those who clung to him in the great apostasy, and with them some others who served Lulala and Truth the Divine, that escaped I know not how."

"Did you see this great pestilence?" I asked, much interested.

"Nay, it befell generations before I came to Kôr. One Junis, a priest, wrote a record of it in the caves yonder where I have my home and where is the burying-place of the countless thousands that it slew. In my day Kôr, of which, should you desire to hear it, I will tell you the history, was a ruin as it is now, though scattered in the lands amidst the tumbled stones which once built up her subject cities, a people named the Amahagger dwelt in Households, or Tribes and there sacrificed men by fire and devoured them, following the rites of the demon Rezu. For these were the descendants of those who escaped the pestilence. Also there were certain others, children of the worshippers of Lulala whose kingdom is the moon, and of Truth the Queen, who clung to the gentle worship of their forefathers and were ever at war with the followers of Rezu."

"What brought *you* to Kôr, Ayesha?" I asked irrelevantly.

"Have I not said that I was led hither by the command and the symbol of great Isis whom I serve? Also," she added after a pause, "that I might find a certain pair, one of whom had broken his oaths to her, tempted thereto by the other."

"And did you find them, Ayesha?" I asked.

"Aye, I found them, or rather they found me, and in my presence the goddess executed her decree upon her false priest and drove his temptress back to the world."

"That must have been dreadful for you, Ayesha, since I understood that you also—liked this priest."

She sprang from her couch and in a low, hissing voice which resembled the sound made by an angry snake and turned my blood cold to hear, exclaimed,

"Man, do you dare to mock me? Nay, you are but a blundering, curious fool, and it is well for you that this is so, since otherwise like Kallikrates, never should you leave Kôr living. Cease from seeking that which you may not learn. Suffice it for you to know that the doom of Isis fell upon the lost Kallikrates, her priest forsworn, and that on me also fell her doom, who must dwell here, dead yet living, till he return again and the play begins afresh.

"Stranger," she went on in a softer voice, "perchance your faith, whate'er it be, parades a hell to terrify its worshippers and give strength to the arms of its prophesying priests, who swear they hold the keys of doom or of the eternal joys. I see you sign assent" (I had nodded at her extremely accurate guess) "and therefore can understand that in such a hell as this, here upon the earth I have dwelt for some two thousand years, expiating the crime of Powers above me whereof I am but the hand and instrument, since those Powers which decreed that I should love, decree also that I must avenge that love."

She sank down upon the couch as though exhausted by emotion, of which I could only guess the reasons, hiding her face in her hands. Presently she let them fall again and continued,

"Of these woes ask me no more. They sleep till the hour of their resurrection, which I think draws nigh; indeed, I thought that you perchance——But let that be. 'Twas near the mark; nearer, Allan, than you know, not in it! Therefore leave them to their sleep as I would if I might——ah! if I might, whose companions they are throughout the weary ages. Alas! that through the secret which was revealed to me I remain undying on the earth who in death might perhaps have found a rest, and being human although half divine, must still busy myself with the affairs of earth.

"Look you, Wanderer, after that which was fated had happened and I remained in my agony of solitude and sorrow, after, too, I had drunk of the cup of enduring life and like the Prometheus of old fable, found myself bound to this changeless rock, whereon day by day the vultures of remorse tear out my living heart which in the watches of the night is ever doomed to grow again within my woman's breast, I was plunged into petty troubles of the flesh, aye and welcomed them because their irk at times gave me forgetfulness. When the savage dwellers in this land came to know that a mighty one had arisen among them who was the servant of the Lady of the Moon, those of them who still worshipped their goddess Lulala, gathered themselves about me, while those of them who worshipped Rezu sought to overthrow me.

"Here," they said, "is the goddess Lulala come to earth. In the name of Rezu let us slay her and make an end," for these fools thought that I could be killed. Allan, I conquered them, but their captain, who also is named Rezu and whom they held and hold to be an emanation of the god himself walking the earth, I could not conquer."

"Why not?" I asked.

"For this reason, Allan. In some past age his god showed him the same secret that was shown to me. He too had drunk of the Cup of Life and lives on unharmed by Time, so that being in strength my equal, no spear of mine can reach his heart clad in the armour of his evil god."

"Then what spear can?" I inquired helplessly, who was bewildered.

"None at all, Allan, yet an *axe* may, as you shall hear, or so I think. For many generations there has been peace of a sort between the worshippers of Lulala who dwell with me in the Plain of Kôr, or rather of myself, since to these people I am Lulala, and the worshippers of Rezu, who dwell in the strongholds beyond the mountain crest. But of late years their chief Rezu, having devastated the lands about, has grown restless and threatened attack on Kôr, which is not strong enough to stand against him. Moreover he has sought for a white queen to rule under him, purposing to set her up to mock my majesty."

"Is that why those cannibals carried away the daughter of my companion, the Sea-Captain who is named Avenger?" I asked.

"It is, Allan, since presently he will give it out that I am dead or fled, if he has not done so already, and that this new queen has arisen in my place. Thereby he hopes to draw away many who cling to me ere he advances upon Kôr, carrying with him this girl veiled as I am, so that none may know the difference between us, since not a man of them has ever looked upon my face, Allan. Therefore this Rezu must die, if die he can; otherwise, although it is impossible that he should harm me, he may slay or draw away my people and leave me with none to rule in this place where by the decree of Fate I must dwell on until he whom I seek returns. You are thinking in your heart that such savages would be little loss and this is so, but still they serve as slaves to me in my loneliness. Moreover I have sworn to protect them from the demon Rezu and they have trusted in me and therefore my honour is at stake, for never shall it be said that those who trusted in She-who-commands, were overthrown because they put faith in one who was powerless."

"What do you mean about an axe, Ayesha?" I asked. "Why can an axe alone kill Rezu?"

"The thing is a mystery, O Allan, of which I may not tell you all, since to do so I must reveal secrets which I have determined you shall not learn. Suffice it to you to know that when this Rezu drank of the Cup of Life he took with him his axe. Now this axe was an ancient weapon rumoured to have been fashioned by the gods and, as it chanced, that axe drew to itself more and stronger life than did Rezu, how, it does not matter, if indeed the tale be more than a fable. At least this I know is true, for he who guarded the Gate of Life, a certain Noot, a master of mysteries, and mine also in my day of youth, who being a philosopher and very wise, chose never to pass that portal which was open to him, said it to me himself ere he went the way of flesh. He told this Rezu also that now he had naught to fear save his own axe and therefore he counselled him to guard it well, since if it was lifted against him in another's hands it would bring him down to death, which nothing else could do. Like to the heel of Achilles whereof the great Homer sings—have you read Homer, Allan?"

"In a translation," I answered.

"Good, then you will remember the story. Like to the heel of Achilles, I say, that axe would be the only gate by which death could enter his invulnerable flesh, or rather it alone could make the gate."

"How did Noot know that?" I asked.

"I cannot say," she answered with irritation. "Perchance he did not know it. Perchance it is all an idle tale, but at least it is true that Rezu believed and believes it, and what a man believes is true for him and will certainly befall. If it were otherwise, what is the use of faith which in a thousand forms supports our race and holds it from the horrors of the Pit? Only those who believe nothing inherit what they believe—nothing, Allan."

"It may be so," I replied prosaically, "but what happened about the axe?"

"In the end it was lost, or as some say stolen by a woman whom Rezu had deserted, and therefore he walks the world in fear from day to day. Nay, ask no more empty questions" (I had opened my mouth to speak) "but hear the end of the tale. In my trouble concerning Rezu I remembered this wild legend of the axe and since, when lost in a forest every path that may lead to safety should be explored, I sent my wisdom forth to make inquiry concerning it, as I who am great, have the power to do, of certain who are in tune with me throughout this wide land of Africa. Amongst others, I inquired of that old wizard whom you named Zikali, Opener of Roads, and he gave me an answer that there lived in his land a certain warrior who ruled a tribe called the People of the Axe by right of the Axe, of which axe none, not even he, knew the beginning or the legend. On the chance, though it was a small one, I bade the wizard send that warrior here with his axe. Last night he stood before me and I looked upon him and the axe, which at least is ancient and has a story. Whether it be the same that Rezu bore I do not know who never saw it, yet perchance he who bears it now is prepared to hold it aloft in battle even against Rezu, though he be terrible to see, and then we shall learn."

"Oh! yes," I answered, "he is quite prepared, for that is his nature. Also among this man's people, the holder of the Axe is thought to be unconquerable."

"Yet some must have been conquered who held it," she replied musingly. "Well, you shall tell me that tale later. Now we have talked long and you are weary and astonished. Go, eat and rest yourself. To-night when the moon rises I will come to where you are, not before, for I have much that must be done, and show you those with whom you must fight against Rezu, and make a plan of battle."

"But I do not want to fight," I answered, "who have fought enough and came here to seek wisdom, not bloodshed."

"First the sacrifice, then the reward," she answered, "that is if any are left to be rewarded. Farewell."

## CHAPTER XV.

### ROBERTSON IS LOST

So I went and was conducted by Billali, the old chamberlain, for such seemed to be his office, who had been waiting patiently without all this while, back to our rest-house. On my way I picked up Hans, whom I found sitting outside the arch, and found that as usual that worthy had been keeping his eyes and ears open.

"Baas," he said, "did the White Witch tell you that there is a big *impi* encamped over yonder outside the houses, in what looks like a great dry ditch, and on the edge of the plain beyond?"

"No, Hans, but she said that this evening she would show us those in whose company we must fight."

"Well, Baas, they are there, some thousands of them, for I crept through the broken walls like a snake and saw them. And, Baas, I do not think they are men, I think that they are evil spirits who walk at night only."

"Why, Hans?"

"Because when the sun is high, Baas, as it is now, they are all sleeping. Yes, there they lie abed, fast asleep, as other people do at night, with only a few sentries out on guard, and these are yawning and rubbing their eyes."

"I have heard that there are folk like that in the middle of Africa where the sun is very hot, Hans," I answered, "which perhaps is why She-who-commands is going to take us to see them at night. Also these people, it seems, are worshippers of the moon."

"No, Baas, they are worshippers of the devil and that White Witch is his wife."

"You had better keep your thoughts to yourself, Hans, for whatever she is I think that she can read thoughts from far away, as you guessed last night. Therefore I would not have any if I were you."

"No, Baas, or if I must think, henceforth, it shall be only of gin which in this place is also far away," he replied, grinning.

Then we came to the rest-house where I found that Robertson had already eaten his midday meal and like the Amahagger gone to sleep, while apparently Umslopogaas had done the same; at least I saw nothing of him. Of this I was glad, since that wondrous Ayesha seemed to draw vitality out of me and after my long talk with her I felt very tired. So I too ate and then went to lie down under an old wall in the shade at a little distance, and to reflect upon the marvellous things that I had heard.

Here be it said at once that I believed nothing of them, or at least very little indeed. All the involved tale of Ayesha's long life I dismissed at once as incredible. Clearly she was some beautiful woman who was more or less mad and suffered from megalomania; probably an Arab, who had wandered to this place for reasons of her own, and become the chieftainess of a savage tribe whose traditions she had absorbed and reproduced as personal experiences, again for reasons of her own.

For the rest, she was now threatened by another tribe and knowing that we had guns and could fight from what happened on the yesterday, wished naturally enough for our assistance in the coming battle. As for the marvellous chief Rezu, or rather for his supernatural attributes and all the cock-and-bull story about an axe—well, it was humbug like the rest, and if she believed in it she must be more foolish than I took her to be—even if she were unhinged on certain points. For the rest, her information about myself and Umslopogaas doubtless had reached her from Zikali in some obscure fashion, as she herself acknowledged.

But heavens! how beautiful she was! That flash of loveliness when out of pique or coquetry she lifted her veil, blinded like the lightning. But thank goodness, also like the lightning it frightened; instinctively one felt that it was very dangerous, even to death, and with it I for one wished no closer acquaintance. Fire may be lovely and attractive, also comforting at a proper distance, but he who sits on the top of it is cremated, as many a moth has found.

So I argued, knowing well enough all the while that if this particular human—or inhuman—fire desired to make an holocaust of me, it could do so easily enough, and that in reality I owed my safety so far to a lack of that desire on its part. The glorious Ayesha saw nothing to attract her in an insignificant and withered hunter, or at any rate in his exterior, though with his mind she might find some small affinity. Moreover to make a fool of him just for the fun of it would not serve her purpose, since she needed his assistance in a business that necessitated clear wits and unprejudiced judgment.

Lastly she had declared herself to be absorbed in some tiresome complication with another man, of which it was rather difficult to follow the details. It is true that she described him as a handsome but somewhat empty-headed person whom she had last seen two thousand years ago, but probably this only meant that she thought poorly of him because he had preferred some other woman to herself, while the two thousand years were added to the tale to give it atmosphere.

The worst of scandals becomes romantic and even respectable in two thousand years; witness that of Cleopatra with Caesar, Mark Antony and other gentlemen. The most virtuous read of Cleopatra with sympathy, even in boarding-schools, and it is felt that were she by some miracle to be blotted out of the book of history, the loss would be enormous. The same applied to Helen, Phryne, and other bad lots. In fact now that one comes to think of it, most of the attractive personages in history, male or female, especially the latter, were bad lots. When we find someone to whose name is added "the good" we skip. No doubt Ayesha, being very clever, appreciated this regrettable truth, and therefore moved her murky entanglements of the past decade or so back for a couple of thousand years, as many of us would like to do.

There remained the very curious circumstance of her apparent correspondence with old Zikali who lived far away. This, however, after all was not inexplicable. In the course of a great deal of experience I have observed that all the witch-doctor family, to which doubtless she belonged, have strange means of communication.

In most instances these are no doubt physical, carried on by help of messengers, or messages passed from one to the other. But sometimes it is reasonable to assume what is known as telepathy, as their link of intercourse. Between two such highly developed experts as Ayesha and Zikali, it might for the sake of argument safely be supposed that it was thus they learned each other's mind and co-operated in each other's projects, though perhaps this end was effected by commoner methods.

Whatever its interpretations, the issue of the business seemed to be that I was to be let in for more fighting. Well, in any case this could not be avoided, since Robertson's daughter, Inez, had to be saved at all costs, if it could possibly be done, even if we lost our lives in the attempt. Therefore fight we must, so there was nothing more to be said. Also without doubt this adventure was particularly interesting and I could only hope that good luck, or Zikali's Great Medicine, or rather Providence, would see me through it safely.

For the rest the fact that our help was necessary to her in this war-like venture showed me clearly enough that all this wonderful woman's pretensions to supernatural powers were the sheerest nonsense. Had they been otherwise she would not have needed our help in her tribal fights, notwithstanding the rubbish she talked about the chief, Rezu, who according to her account of him, must resemble one of the fabulous "trolls," half-human and half-ghostly evil creatures, of whom I have read in the Norse Sagas, who could only be slain by some particular hero armed with a particular weapon.

Reflecting thus I went to sleep and did not wake until the sun was setting. Finding that Hans was also sleeping at my feet just like a faithful dog, I woke him up and we went back together to the rest-house, which we reached as the darkness fell with extraordinary swiftness, as it does in those latitudes, especially in a place surrounded by cliffs.

Not finding Robertson in the house, I concluded that he was somewhere outside, possibly making a reconnaissance on his own account, and told Hans to get supper ready for both of us. While he was doing so, by aid of the Amahagger lamps, Umslopogaas suddenly appeared in the circle of light, and looking about him, said,

"Where is Red-Beard, Macumazahn?"

I answered that I did not know and waited, for I felt sure that he had something to say.

"I think that you had better keep Red-Beard close to you, Macumazahn," he went on. "This afternoon, when you had returned from visiting the white doctress and having eaten, had gone to sleep under the wall yonder, I saw Red-Beard come out of the house carrying a gun and a bag of cartridges. His eyes rolled wildly and he turned first this way and then that, sniffing at the air, like a buck that scents danger. Then he began to talk aloud in his own tongue and as I saw that he was speaking with his Spirit, as those do who are mad, I went away and left him."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because, as you know, Macumazahn, it is a law among us Zulus never to disturb one who is mad and engaged in talking with his Spirit. Moreover, had I done so, probably he would have shot me, nor should I have complained who would have thrust myself in where I had no right to be."

"Then why did you not come to call me, Umslopogaas?"

"Because then he might have shot you, for, as I have seen for some time he is inspired of heaven and knows not what he does upon the earth, thinking only of the Lady Sad-Eyes who has been stolen away from him, as is but natural. So I left him walking up and down, and when I returned later to look, saw that he was gone, as I thought into this walled hut. Now when Hansi tells me that he is not here, I have come to speak to you about him."

"No, certainly he is not here," I said, and I went to look at the bed where Robertson slept to see if it had been used that evening.

Then for the first time I saw lying on it a piece of paper torn from a pocketbook and addressed to myself. I seized and read it. It ran thus:

"The merciful Lord has sent me a vision of Inez and shown me where she is over the cliff-edge away to the west, also the road to her. In my sleep I heard her talking to me. She told me that she is in great danger—that they are going to marry her to some brute—and called to me to come at once and save her; yes, and to come alone without saying anything to anyone. So I am going at once. Don't be frightened or trouble about me. All will be well, all will be quite well. I will tell you the rest when we meet."

Horrorstruck I translated this insane screed to Umslopogaas and Hans. The former nodded gravely.

"Did I not tell you that he was talking with his Spirit, Macumazahn?" (I had rendered "the merciful Lord" as the Good Spirit.) "Well, he has gone and doubtless his Spirit will take care of him. It is finished."

"At any rate we cannot, Baas," broke in Hans, who I think feared that I might send him out to look for Robertson. "I can follow most spoors, but not on such a night as this when one could cut the blackness into lumps and build a wall of it."

"Yes," I answered, "he has gone and nothing can be done at present," though to myself I reflected that probably he had not gone far and would be found when the moon rose, or at any rate on the following morning.

Still I was most uneasy about the man who, as I had noted for a long while, was losing his balance more and more. The shock of the barbarous and dreadful slaughter of his half-breed children and of the abduction of Inez by these grim, man-eating savages began the business, and I think that it was increased and accentuated by his sudden conversion to complete temperance after years of heavy drinking.

When I persuaded him to this course I was very proud of myself, thinking that I had done a clever thing, but now I was not so sure. Perhaps it would have been better if he had continued to drink something, at any rate for a while, but the trouble is that in such cases there is generally no half-way house. A man, or still more a woman, given to this frailty either turns aggressively sober or remains very drunken. At any rate, even if I had made a mess of it, I had acted for the best and could not blame myself.

For the rest it was clear that in his new phase the religious associations of his youth had re-asserted themselves with remarkable vigour, for I gathered that he had been brought up almost as a Calvinist, and in the rush of their return, had overset his equilibrium. As I have said, he prayed night and day without any of those reserves which most people prefer in their religious exercises, and when he talked of matters outside our quest, his conversation generally revolved round the devil, or hell and its torments, which, to say the

truth, did not make him a cheerful companion. Indeed in this respect I liked him much better in his old, unregenerate days, being, I fear, myself a somewhat worldly soul.

Well, the sum of it was that the poor fellow had gone mad and given us the slip, and as Hans said, to search for him at once in that darkness was impossible. Indeed, even if it had been lighter, I do not think that it would have been safe among these Amahagger nightbirds whom I did not trust. Certainly I could not have asked Hans to undertake the task, and if I had, I do not think he would have gone since he was afraid of the Amahagger. Therefore there was nothing to be done except wait and hope for the best.

So I waited till at last the moon came and with it Ayesha, as she had promised. Clad in a rich, dark cloak she arrived in some pomp, heralded by Billali, followed by women, also cloaked, and surrounded by a guard of tall spearmen. I was seated outside the house, smoking, when suddenly she arrived from the shadows and stood before me.

I rose respectfully and bowed, while Umslopogaas, Goroko and the other Zulus who were with me, gave her the royal salute, and Hans cringed like a dog that is afraid of being kicked.

After a swift glance at them, as I guessed by the motion of her veiled head, she seemed to fix her gaze upon my pipe that evidently excited her curiosity, and asked me what it was. I explained as well as I could, expatiating on the charms of smoking.

"So men have learned another useless vice since I left the world, and one that is filthy also," she said, sniffing at the smoke and waving her hand before her face, whereon I dropped the pipe into my pocket, where, being alight, it burnt a hole in my best remaining coat.

I remember the remark because it showed me what a clever actress she was who, to keep up her character of antiquity, pretended to be astonished at a habit with which she must have been well acquainted, although I believe that it was unknown in the ancient world.

"You are troubled," she went on, swiftly changing the subject, "I read it in your face. One of your company is missing. Who is it? Ah! I see, the white man you name Avenger. Where is he gone?"

"That is what I wish to ask you, Ayesha," I said.

"How can I tell you, Allan, who in this place lack any glass into which to look for things that pass afar. Still, let me try," and pressing her hands to her forehead, she remained silent for perhaps a minute, then spoke slowly.

"I think that he has gone over the mountain lip towards the worshippers of Rezu. I think that he is mad; sorrow and something else which I do not understand have turned his brain; something that has to do with the Heavens. I think also that we shall recover him living, if only for a little while, though of this I cannot be sure since it is not given to me to read the future, but only the past, and sometimes the things that happen in the present though they be far away."

"Will you send to search for him, O Ayesha?" I asked anxiously.

"Nay, it is useless, for he is already distant. Moreover those who went might be taken by the outposts of Rezu, as perchance has happened to your companion wandering in his madness. Do you know what he went to seek?"

"More or less," I answered and translated to her the letter that Robertson had left for me.

"It may be as the man writes," she commented, "since the mad often see well in their dreams, though these are not sent by a god as he imagines. The mind in its secret places knows all things, O Allan, although it seems to know little or nothing, and when the breath of vision or the fury of a soul distraught blows away the veils or burns through the gates of distance, then for a while it sees and learns, since, whatever fools may think, often madness is true wisdom. Now follow me with the little yellow man and the Warrior of the Axe. Stay, let me look upon that axe."

I interpreted her wish to Umslopogaas who held it out to her but refused to loose it from his wrist to which it was attached by the leathern thong.

"Does the Black One think that I shall cut him down with his own weapon, I who am so weak and gentle?" she asked, laughing.

"Nay, Ayesha, but it is his law not to part with this Drinker of Lives, which he names 'Chieftainess and Groan-maker,' and clings to closer by day and night than a man does to his wife."

"There he is wise, Allan, since a savage captain may get more wives but never such another axe. The thing is ancient," she added musingly after examining its every detail, "and who knows? It may be that whereof the legend tells which is fated to bring Rezu to the dust. Now ask this fierce-eyed Slayer whether, armed with his axe he can find courage to face the most terrible of all men and the strongest, one who is a wizard also, of whom it is prophesied that only by such an axe as this can he be made to bite the dust."

I obeyed. Umslopogaas laughed grimly and answered,

"Say to the White Witch that there is no man living upon the earth whom I would not face in war, I who have never been conquered in fair fight, though once a chance blow brought me to the doors of death," and he touched the great hole in his forehead. "Say to her also that I have no fear of defeat, I from whom doom is, as I think, still far away, though the Opener-of-Roads has told me that among a strange people I shall die in war at last, as I desire to do, who from my boyhood have lived in war."

"He speaks well," she answered with a note of admiration in her voice. "By Isis, were he but white I would set him to rule these Amahagger under me. Tell him, Allan, that if he lays Rezu low he shall have a great reward."

"And tell the White Witch, Macumazahn," Umslopogaas replied when I had translated, "that I seek no reward, save glory only, and with it the sight of one who is lost to me but with whom my heart still dwells, if indeed this Witch has strength to break the wall of blackness that is built between me and her who is 'gone down.'"

"Strange," reflected Ayesha when she understood, "that this grim Destroyer should yet be bound by the silken bonds of love and yearn for one whom the grave has taken. Learn from it, Allan, that all humanity is cast in the same mould, since my longings and your longings are his also, though the three of us be far apart as are the sun and the moon and the earth, and as different in every other quality. Yet it is true that sun and moon and earth are born of the same black womb of chaos. Therefore in the beginning they were identical, as doubtless they will be in the end when, their journeyings done, they rush together to light space with a flame at which the mocking gods that made them may warm their hands. Well, so it is with men, Allan, whose soul-stuff is drawn from the gulf of Spirit by Nature's hand, and, cast upon the cold air of this death-driven world, freezes into a million shapes each different to the other and yet, be sure, the same. Now talk no more, but follow me. Slave" (this was addressed to Billali), "bid the guards lead on to the camp of the servants of Lulala."

So we went through the silent ruins. Ayesha walked, or rather glided a pace or two ahead, then came Umslopogaas and I side by side, while at our heels followed Hans, very close at our heels since he did not wish to be out of reach of the virtue of the Great Medicine and incidentally of the protection of axe and rifle.

Thus we marched surrounded by the solemn guard for something between a quarter and half a mile, till at length we climbed the debris of a mighty wall that once had encompassed the city, and by the moonlight saw beneath us a vast hollow which clearly at some unknown time had been the bed of an enormous moat and filled with water.

Now, however, it was dry and all about its surface were dotted numerous camp-fires round which men were moving, also some women who appeared to be engaged in cooking food. At a little distance too, upon the further edge of the moat-like depression were a number of white-robed individuals gathered in a circle about a large stone upon which something was stretched that resembled the carcass of a sheep or goat, and round these a great number of spectators.

"The priests of Lulala who make sacrifice to the moon, as they do night by night, save when she is dead," said Ayesha, turning back towards me as though in answer to the query which I had conceived but left unuttered.

What struck me about the whole scene was its extraordinary animation and briskness. All the folk round the fires and outside of them moved about quickly and with the same kind of liveliness which might animate a camp of more natural people at the rising of the sun. It was as though they had just got up full of vigour to commence their daily, or rather their nightly round, which in truth was the case, since as Hans discovered, by habitude these Amahagger preferred to sleep during the day unless something prevented them, and to carry on the activities of life at night. It only remains to add that there seemed to be a great number of them, for their fires following the round of the dry moat, stretched further than I could see.

Scrambling down the crumpled wall by a zig-zag pathway, we came upon the outposts of the army beneath us who challenged, then seeing with whom they had to do, fell flat upon their faces, leaving their great spears, which had iron spikes on their shafts like to those of the Masai, sticking in the ground beside them.

We passed on between some of the fires and I noted how solemn and gloomy, although handsome, were the countenances of the folk by whom these were surrounded. Indeed, they looked like denizens of a different world to ours, one alien to the kindly race of men. There was nothing social about these Amahagger, who seemed to be a people labouring under some ancient ancestral curse of which they could never shake off the memory. Even the women rarely smiled; their clear-cut, stately countenances remained stern and set, except when they glowered at us incuriously. Only when Ayesha passed they prostrated themselves like the rest.

We went on through them and across the moat, climbing its further slope and here suddenly came upon a host of men gathered in a hollow square, apparently in order to receive us. They stood in ranks of five or six deep and their spear-points glimmering in the moonlight looked like long bands of level steel. As we entered the open side of the square all these spears were lifted. Thrice they were lifted and at each uplifting there rose a deep-throated cry of *Hiya*, which is the Arabic for She, and I suppose was a salutation to Ayesha.

She swept on taking no heed, till we came to the centre of the square where a number of men were gathered who prostrated themselves in the usual fashion. Motioning to them to rise she said,

"Captains, this very night within two hours we march against Rezu and the sun-worshippers, since otherwise as my arts tell me, they march against us. She-who-commands is immortal, as your fathers have known from generation to generation, and cannot be destroyed; but you, her servants, can be destroyed, and Rezu, who also has drunk of the Cup of Life, out-numbers you by three to one and prepares a queen to set up in my place over his own people and such of you as remain. As though," she added with a contemptuous laugh, "any woman of a day could take my place."

She paused and the spokesman of the captains said,

"We hear, O Hiya, and we understand. What wouldst thou have us do, O Lulala-come-to-earth? The armies of Rezu are great and from the beginning he has hated thee and us, also his magic is as thy magic and his length of days as thy length of days. How then can we who are few, three thousand men at the most, match ourselves against Rezu, Son of the Sun? Would it not be better that we should accept the terms of Rezu, which are light, and acknowledge him as our king?"

As she heard these words I saw the tall shape of Ayesha quiver beneath her robes, as I think, not with fear but with rage, because the meaning of them was clear enough, namely that rather than risk a battle with Rezu, these people were contemplating surrender and her own deposition, if indeed she could be deposed. Still she answered in a quiet voice,

"It seems that I have dealt too gently with you and with your fathers, Children of Lulala, whose shadow I am here upon the earth, so that because you only see the scabbard, you have forgotten the sword within and that it can shine forth and smite. Well, why should I be wrath because the brutish will follow the law of brutes, though it be true that I am minded to slay you where you stand? Hearken! Were I less merciful I would leave you to the clutching hands of Rezu, who would drag you one by one to the stone of sacrifice and there offer up your hearts to his god of fire and devour your bodies with his heat. But I bethink me of your wives and children and of your forefathers whom I knew in the dead days, and therefore, if I may, I still would save you from yourselves and your heads from the glowing pot.

"Take counsel together now and say—Will you fight against Rezu, or will you yield? If that is your desire, speak it, and by tomorrow's sun I will begone, taking these with me," and she pointed to us, "whom I have summoned to help us in the war. Aye, I will begone, and when you are stretched upon the stone of sacrifice, and your women and children are the slaves of the men of Rezu, then shall you cry,

"Oh, where is Hiya whom our fathers knew? Oh, will she not return and save us from this hell?"

"Yes, so shall you cry but there shall come no answer, since then she will have departed to her own habitations in the moon and thence appear no more. Now consult together and answer swiftly, since I weary of you and your ways."

The captains drew apart and began to talk in low voices, while Ayesha stood still, apparently quite unconcerned, and I considered the situation.

It was obvious to me that these people were almost in rebellion against their strange ruler, whose power over them was of a purely moral nature, one that emanated from her personality alone. What I wondered was, being what she seemed to be, why she thought it worth while to exercise it at all. Then I remembered her statement that here and nowhere else she must abide for some secret reason, until a certain mystical gentleman with a Greek name came to fetch her away from this appointed *rendezvous*. Therefore I supposed

she had no choice, or rather, suffering as she did from hallucinations, believed herself to have no choice and was obliged to put up with a crowd of disagreeable savages in quarters which were sadly out of repair.

Presently the spokesman returned, saluted with his spear, and asked,

“If we go up to fight against Rezu, who will lead us in the battle, O Hiya?”

“My wisdom shall be your guide,” she answered, “this white man shall be your General and there stands the warrior who shall meet Rezu face to face and bring him to the dust,” and she pointed to Umslopogaas leaning upon his axe and watching them with a contemptuous smile.

This reply did not seem to please the man for he withdrew to consult again with his companions. After a debate which I suppose was animated for the Amahagger, men of few words who did not indulge in oratory, all of them advanced on us and the spokesman said,

“The choice of a General does not please us, Hiya. We know that the white man is brave because of the fight he made against the men of Rezu over the mountain yonder; also that he and his followers have weapons that deal death from afar. But there is a prophecy among us of which none know the beginning, that he who commands in the last great battle between Lulala and Rezu must produce before the eyes of the People of Lulala a certain holy thing, a charm of power, without which defeat will be the portion of Lulala. Of this holy thing, this spirit-haunted shape of power, we know the likeness and the fashion, for these have come down among our priests, though who told it to them we cannot tell, but of it I will say this only, that it speaks both of the spirit and the body, of man and yet of more than man.”

“And if this wondrous charm, this talisman of might, cannot be shown by the white lord here, what then?” asked Ayesha coldly.

“Then, Hiya, this is the word of the People of Lulala, that we will not serve under him in the battle, and this also is their word that we will not go up against Rezu. That thou art mighty we know well, Hiya, also that thou canst slay if thou wilt, but we know also that Rezu is mightier and that against him thou hast no power. Therefore kill us if thou dost so desire, until thy heart is satisfied with death. For it is better that we should perish thus than upon the altar of sacrifice wearing the red-hot crowns of Rezu.”

“So say we all,” exclaimed the rest of the company when he had finished.

“The thought comes to me to begin to satisfy my heart with thy coward blood and that of thy companions,” said Ayesha contemptuously. Then she paused and turning to me, added, “O Watcher-by-Night, what counsel? Is there aught that will convince these chicken-hearted ones over whom I have spread my feathers for so long?”

I shook my head blankly, whereat they murmured together and made as though they would go.

Then it was that Hans, who understood something of Arabic as he did of most African tongues, pulled my sleeve and whispered in my ear.

“The Great Medicine, Baas! Show them Zikali’s Great Medicine.”

Here was an idea. The description of the article required, a “spirit-haunted shape of power” that spoke “both of the spirit and the body of man and yet of more than man,” was so vague that it might mean anything or nothing. And yet——

I turned to Ayesha and prayed her to ask them if what they wanted should be produced, whether they would follow me bravely and fight Rezu to the death. She did so and with one voice they replied,

“Aye, bravely and to the death, him and the Bearer of the Axe of whom also our legend tells.”

Then with deliberation I opened my shirt and holding out the image of Zikali as far as the chain of elephant hair would allow, I asked,

“Is this the holy thing, the charm of power, of which your legend tells, O People of the Amahagger and worshippers of Lulala?”

The spokesman glanced at it, then snatching a brand from a watch-fire that burnt near by held it over the carving and stared, and stared again; and as he did, so did the others bending over him.

“Dog! would you singe my beard?” I cried in affected rage, and seizing the brand from his hand I smote him with it over the head.

But he took no heed of the affront which I had offered to him merely to assert my authority. Still for a few moments he stared although the sparks from the wood were frizzling in his greasy hair, then of a sudden went down on his face before me, as did all the others and cried out,

“It is the Holy Thing! It is the spirit-haunted Shape of Power itself, and we the Worshippers of Lulala will follow thee to the death, O white lord, Watcher-by-Night. Yes, where thou goest and he goes who bears the Axe, thither will we follow till not one of us is left upon his feet.”

“Then that’s settled,” I said, yawning, since it is never wise to show concern about anything before savages. Indeed personally I had no wish to be the leader of this very peculiar tribe in an adventure of which I knew nothing, and therefore had hoped that they would leave that honour to someone else. Then I turned and told Umslopogaas what had passed, a tale at which he only shrugged his great shoulders, handling his axe as though he were minded to try its edge upon some of these “Dark-lovers,” as he named the Amahagger people because of their nocturnal habits.

Meanwhile Ayesha gave certain orders. Then she came to me and said,

“These men march at once, three thousand strong, and by dawn will camp on the northern mountain crest. At sunrise litters will come to bear you and those with you if they will, to join them, which you should do by midday. In the afternoon marshall them as you think wise, for the battle will take place in the small hours of the following morning, since the People of Lulala only fight at night. I have said.”

“Do you not come with us?” I asked, dismayed.

“Nay, not in a war against Rezu, why it matters not. Yet my Spirit will go with you, for I shall watch all that passes, how it matters not and perchance you may see it there—I know not. On the third day from to-morrow we shall meet again in the flesh or beyond it, but as I think in the flesh, and you can claim the reward which you journeyed here to seek. A place shall be prepared for the white lady whom Rezu would have set up as a rival queen to me. Farewell, and farewell also to yonder Bearer of the Axe that shall drink the blood of Rezu, also to the little yellow man who is rightly named Light-in-Darkness, as you shall learn ere all is done.”

Then before I could speak she turned and glided away, swiftly surrounded by her guards, leaving me astonished and very uncomfortable.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ALLAN'S VISION

The old chamberlain, Billali, conducted us back to our camp. As we went he discoursed to me of these Amahagger, of whom it seemed he was himself a developed specimen, one who threw back, perhaps tens of generations, to some superior ancestor who lived before they became debased. In substance he told me that they were a wild and lawless lot who lived amongst ruins or in caves, or some of them in swamp dwellings, in small separate communities, each governed by its petty headman who was generally a priest of their goddess Lulala.

Originally they and the people of Rezu were the same, in times when they worshipped the sun and the moon jointly, but "thousands of years" ago, as he expressed it, they had separated, the Rezuites having gone to dwell to the north of the Great Mountain, whence they continually threatened the Lulalaite whom, had it not been for She-who-commands, they would have destroyed long before. The Rezuites, it seemed, were habitual cannibals, whereas the Lulalaite branch of the Amahagger only practised cannibalism occasionally when by a lucky chance they got hold of strangers. "Such as yourself, Watcher-by-Night, and your companions," he added with meaning. If their crime were discovered, however, Hiya, She-who-commands, punished it by death.

I asked if she exercised an active rule over these people. He answered that she did not, as she lacked sufficient interest in them; only when she was angry with individuals she would destroy some of them by "her arts," as she had power to do if she chose. Most of them indeed had never seen her and only knew of her existence by rumour. To them she was a spirit or a goddess who inhabited the ancient tombs that lay to the south of the old city whither she had come because of the threatened war with Rezu, whom alone she feared, he did not know why. He told me again, moreover, that she was the greatest magician who had ever been, and that it was certain she did not die, since their forefathers knew her generations ago. Still she seemed to be under some curse, like the Amahagger themselves, who were the descendants of those who had once inhabited Kôr and the country round it, as far as the sea-coast and for hundreds of miles inland, having been a mighty people in their day before a great plague destroyed them.

For the rest he thought that she was a very unhappy woman who "lived with her own soul mourning the dead" and consorting with none upon the earth.

I asked him why she stayed here, whereat he shook his head and replied, he supposed because of the "curse," since he could conceive of no other reason. He informed me also that her moods varied very much. Sometimes she was fierce and active and at others by comparison mild and low-spirited. Just now she was passing through one of the latter stages, perhaps because of the Rezu trouble, for she did not wish her people to be destroyed by this terrible person; or perhaps for some other reason with which he was not acquainted.

When she chose, she knew all things, except the distant future. Thus she knew that we were coming, also the details of our march and that we should be attacked by the Rezuites who were going out to meet their returning company that had been sent afar to find a white queen. Therefore she had ordered him to go with soldiers to our assistance. I asked why she went veiled, and he replied, because of her beauty which drove even savage men mad, so that in old days she had been obliged to kill a number of them.

That was all he seemed to know about her, except that she was kind to those who served her well, like himself, and protected them from evil of every sort.

Then I asked him about Rezu. He answered that he was a dreadful person, undying, it was said, like She-who-commands, though he had never seen the man himself and never wanted to do so. His followers being cannibals and having literally eaten up all those that they could reach, were now desirous of conquering the people of Lulala that they might eat them also at their leisure. Each other they did not eat, because dog does not eat dog, and therefore they were beginning to grow hungry, although they had plenty of grain and cattle of which they used the milk and hides.

As for the coming battle, he knew nothing about it or what would happen, save that She-who-commands said that it would go well for the Lulalaite under my direction. She was so sure that it would go well, that she did not think it worth while to accompany the army, for she hated noise and bloodshed.

It occurred to me that perhaps she was afraid that she too would be taken captive and eaten, but I kept my reflection to myself.

Just then we arrived at our camp-house, where Billali bade me farewell, saying that he wished to rest as he must be back at dawn with litters, when he hoped to find us ready to start. Then he departed. Umslopogaas and Hans also went away to sleep, leaving me alone who, having taken my repose in the afternoon, did not feel drowsy at the moment. So lovely was the night indeed that I made up my mind to take a little walk during the midnight hours, after the manner of the Amahagger themselves, for having now been recognised as Generalissimo of their forces, I had little fear of being attacked, especially as I carried a pistol in my pocket. So off I set strolling slowly down what seemed to have been a main street of the ancient city, which in its general appearance resembled excavated Pompeii, only on an infinitely larger scale.

As I went I meditated on the strange circumstances in which I found myself. Really they tempted me to believe that I was suffering from delusions and perhaps all the while in fact lay stretched upon a bed in the delirium of fever. That marvellous woman, for instance—even rejecting her tale of miraculously extended life, which I did—what was I to make of her? I did not know, except that wondrous as she was, it remained clear that she claimed a great deal more power than she possessed. This was evident from her tone in the interview with the captains, and from the fact that she had shuffled off the command of her tribe on to my shoulders. If she were so mighty, why did she not command it herself and bring her celestial, or infernal, powers to bear upon the enemy? Again, I could not say, but one fact emerged, namely that she was as interesting as she was beautiful, and uncommonly clever into the bargain.

But what a task was this that she had laid upon me, to lead into battle, with a foe of unascertained strength, a mob of savages probably quite undisciplined, of whose fighting qualities I knew nothing and whom I had no opportunity of organising. The affair seemed madness and I could only hope that luck or destiny would take me through somehow.

To tell the truth, I believed it would, for I had grown almost as superstitious about Zikali and his Great Medicine as was Hans himself. Certainly the effect of it upon those captains was very odd, or would have been had not the explanation come to me in a flash. On the first night of our meeting, as I have described, I showed this talisman to Ayesha, as a kind of letter of credentials, and now I could see that it was she who had arranged all the scene with the captains, or their tribal magician, in order to get her way about my appointment to the command.

Everything about her conduct bore this out, even her feigning ignorance of the existence of the charm and the leaving of it to Hans to suggest its production, which perhaps she did by influencing his mind subconsciously. No doubt more or less it fitted in with one of those nebulous traditions which are so common amongst ancient savage races, and therefore once shown to her confederate, or confederates, would be accepted by the common people as a holy sign, after which the rest was easy.

Such an obvious explanation involved the death of any illusions I might still cherish about this Arab lady, Ayesha, and it is true that I parted with them with regret, as we all do when we think we have discovered something wonderful in the female line. But there it was, and to bother any more about her, her history and aims, seemed useless.

So dismissing her and all present anxieties from my mind, I began to look about me and to wonder at the marvellous scene which unfolded itself before me in the moonlight. That I might see it better, although I was rather afraid of snakes which might hide among the stones, by an easy ascent I climbed a mound of ruins and up the broad slope of a tumbled massive wall, which from its thickness I judged must have been that of some fort or temple. On the crest of this wall, some seventy or eighty feet above the level of the streets, I sat down and looked about me.

Everywhere around me stretched the ruins of the great city, now as fallen and as deserted as Babylon herself. The majestic loneliness of the place was something awful. Even the vision of companies and battalions of men crossing the plain towards the north with the moonlight glistening on their spear-points, did little to lessen this sense of loneliness. I knew that these were the regiments which I was destined to command, travelling to the camp where I must meet them. But in such silence did they move that no sound came from them even in the deathly stillness of the perfect night, so that almost I was tempted to believe them to be the shadow-ghosts of some army of old Kôr.

They vanished, and musing thus I think I must have dozed. At any rate it seemed to me that of a sudden the city was as it had been in the days of its glory. I saw it brilliant with a hundred colours; everywhere was colour, on the painted walls and roofs, the flowering trees that lined the streets and the bright dresses of the men and women who by thousands crowded them and the marts and squares. Even the chariots that moved to and fro were coloured as were the countless banners which floated from palace walls and temple tops.

The enormous place teemed with every activity of life; brides being borne to marriage and dead men to burial; squadrons marching, clad in glittering armour; merchants chaffering; white-robed priests and priestesses passing in procession (who or what did they worship? I wondered); children breaking out of school; grave philosophers debating in the shadow of a cool arcade; a royal person making a progress preceded by runners and surrounded by slaves, and lastly the multitudes of citizens going about the daily business of life.

Even details were visible, such as those of officers of the law chasing an escaped prisoner who had a broken rope tied to his arm, and a collision between two chariots in a narrow street, about the wrecks of which an idle mob gathered as it does to-day if two vehicles collide, while the owners argued, gesticulating angrily, and the police and grooms tried to lift a fallen horse on to its feet. Only no sound of the argument or of anything else reached me. I saw, and that was all. The silence remained intense, as well it might do, since those chariots must have come to grief thousands upon thousands of years ago.

A cloud seemed to pass before my eyes, a thin, gauzy cloud which somehow reminded me of the veil that Ayesha wore. Indeed at the moment, although I could not see her, I would have sworn that she was present at my side, and what is more, that she was mocking me who had set her down as so impotent a trickstress, which doubtless was part of the dream.

At any rate I returned to my normal state, and there about me were the miles of desolate streets and the thousands of broken walls, and the black blots of roofless houses and the wide, untenanted plain bounded by the battlemented line of encircling mountain crests, and above all, the great moon shining softly in a tender sky.

I looked and thrilled, though oppressed by the drear and desolate beauty of the scene around me, descended the wall and the ruined slope and made my way homewards, afraid even of my own shadow. For I seemed to be the only living thing among the dead habitations of immemorial Kôr.

Reaching our camp I found Hans awake and watching for me.

"I was just coming to look for you, Baas," he said. "Indeed I should have done so before, only I knew that you had gone to pay a visit to that tall white 'Missis' who ties up her head in a blanket, and thought that neither of you would like to be disturbed."

"Then you thought wrong," I answered, "and what is more, if you had made that visit I think it might have been one from which you would never have come back."

"Oh yes, Baas," sniggered Hans. "The tall white lady would not have minded. It is you who are so particular, after the fashion of men whom Heaven made very shy."

Without deigning to reply to the gibes of Hans I went to lie down, wondering what kind of a bed poor Robertson occupied that night, and soon fell asleep, as fortunately for myself I have the power to do, whatever my circumstances at the moment. Men who can sleep are those who do the work of the world and succeed, though personally I have had more of the work than of the success.

I was awakened at the first grey dawn by Hans, who informed me that Billali was waiting outside with litters, also that Goroko had already made his incantations and doctored Umslopogaas and his two men for war after the Zulu fashion when battle was expected. He added that these Zulus had refused to be left behind to guard and nurse their wounded companions, and said that rather than do so, they would kill them.

Somehow, he informed me, in what way he could not guess, this had come to the ears of the White Lady who "hid her face from men because it was so ugly," and she had sent women to attend to the sick ones, with word that they should be well cared for. All of this proved to be true enough, but I need not enter into the details.

In the end off we went, I in my litter following Billali's, with an express and a repeating rifle and plenty of ammunition for both, and Hans, also well armed, in that which had been sent for Umslopogaas, who preferred to walk with Goroko and the two other Zulus.

For a little while Hans enjoyed the sensation of being carried by somebody else, and lay upon the cushions smoking with a seraphic smile and addressing sarcastic remarks to the bearers, who fortunately did not understand them. Soon, however, he wearied of these novel delights and as he was still determined not to walk until he was obliged, climbed on to the roof of the litter, astride of which he sat as though it were a horse, looking for all the world like a toy monkey on a horizontal stick.

Our road ran across the level, fertile plain but a small portion of which was cultivated, though I could see that at some time or other, when its population was greater, every inch of it had been under crop. Now it was largely covered by trees, many of them fruit-bearing, between which meandered streams of water which once, I think, had been irrigation channels.

About ten o'clock we reached the foot of the encircling cliffs and began the climb of the escarpment, which was steep, tortuous and difficult. By noon we reached its crest and here found all our little army encamped and, except for the sentries, sleeping, as seemed to be the invariable custom of these people in the daytime.

I caused the chief captains to be awakened and with them made a circuit of the camp, reckoning the numbers of the men which came to about 3,250 and learning what I could concerning them and their way of fighting. Then, accompanied by Umslopogaas and Hans with the Zulus as a guard, also by three of the head-captains of the Amahagger, I walked forward to study the lie of the land.

Coming to the further edge of the escarpment, I found that at this place two broad-based ridges, shaped like those that spring from the boles of certain tropical forest trees, ran from its crest to the plain beneath at a gentle slope. Moreover I saw that on this plain between the ends of the ridges an army was encamped which, by the aid of my glasses, I examined and estimated to number at least ten thousand men.

This army, the Amahagger captains informed me, was that of Rezu, who, they said, intended to commence his attack at dawn on the following morning, since the People of Rezu, being sun-worshippers, would never fight until their god appeared above the horizon. Having studied all there was to see I asked the captains to set out their plan of battle, if they had a plan.

The chief of them answered that it was to advance halfway down the right-hand ridge to a spot where there was a narrow flat piece of ground, and there await attack, since at this place their smaller numbers would not so much matter, whereas these made it impossible for them to assail the enemy.

"But suppose that Rezu should choose to come up to the other ridge and get behind you. What would happen then?" I inquired.

He replied that he did not know, his ideas of strategy being, it was clear, of a primitive order.

"Do your people fight best at night or in the day?" I went on.

He said undoubtedly at night, indeed in all their history there was no record of their having done so in the daytime.

"And yet you propose to let Rezu join battle with you when the sun is high, or in other words to court defeat," I remarked.

Then I went aside and discussed things for a while with Umslopogaas and Hans, after which I returned and gave my orders, declining all argument. Briefly these were that in the dusk before the rising of the moon, our Amahagger must advance down the right-hand ridge in complete silence, and hide themselves among the scrub which I saw grew thickly near its root. A small party, however, under the leadership of Goroko, whom I knew to be a brave and clever captain, was to pass halfway down the left-hand ridge and there light fires over a wide area, so as to make the enemy think that our whole force had encamped there. Then at the proper moment which I had not yet decided upon, we would attack the army of Rezu.

The Amahagger captains did not seem pleased with this plan which I think was too bold for their fancy, and began to murmur together. Seeing that I must assert my authority at once, I walked up to them and said to their chief man,

"Hearken, my friend. By your own wish, not mine, I have been appointed your general and I expect to be obeyed without question. From the moment that the advance begins you will keep close to me and to the Black One, and if so much as one of your men hesitates or turns back, you will die," and I nodded towards the axe of Umslopogaas. "Moreover, afterwards She-who-commands will see that others of you die, should you escape in the fight."

Still they hesitated. Thereon without another word, I produced Zikali's Great Medicine and held it before their eyes, with the result that the sight of this ugly thing did what even the threat of death could not do. They went flat on the ground, every one of them, and swore by Lulala and by She-who-commands, her priestess, that they would do all I said, however mad it seemed to them.

"Good," I answered. "Now go back and make ready, and for the rest, by this time to-morrow we shall know who is or is not mad."

From that moment till the end I had no more trouble with these Amahagger.

I will get on quickly with the story of this fight whereof the preliminary details do not matter. At the proper time Goroko went off with two hundred and fifty men and one of the two Zulus to light the fires and, at an agreed signal, namely the firing of two shots in rapid succession by myself, to begin shouting and generally make as much noise as they could.

We also went off with the remaining three thousand, and before the moon rose, crept as quietly as ghosts down the right-hand ridge. Being such a silent folk who were accustomed to move at night and could see in the dark almost as well as cats, the Amahagger executed this manoeuvre splendidly, wrapping their spear-blades in bands of dry grass lest light should glint on them and betray our movements. So in due course we came to the patch of bush where the ridge widened out about five hundred yards from the plain beneath, and there lay down in four companies or regiments, each of them about seven hundred and fifty strong.

Now the moon had risen, but because of the mist which covered the surface of the plain, we could see nothing of the camp of Rezu which we knew must be within a thousand yards of us, unless indeed it had been moved, as the silence seemed to suggest.

This circumstance gave me much anxiety, since I feared lest abandoning their reputed habits, these Rezuites were also contemplating a night attack. Umslopogaas, too, was disturbed on the subject, though because of Goroko and his men whose fires began to twinkle on the opposing ridge something over a mile away, they could not pass up there without our knowledge.

Still, for aught I knew there might be other ways of scaling this mountain. I did not trust the Amahagger, who declared that none existed, since their local knowledge was slight as they never visited these northern slopes because of their fear of Rezu. Supposing that the enemy gained the crest and suddenly assaulted us in the rear! The thought of it made me feel cold down the back.

While I was wondering how I could find out the truth, Hans, who was squatted behind a bush, suddenly rose and gave the rifle he was carrying to the remaining Zulu.

“Baas,” he said, “I am going to look and find out what those people are doing, if they are still there, and then you will know how and when to attack them. Don’t be afraid for me, Baas, it will be easy in that mist and you know I can move like a snake. Also if I should not come back, it does not matter and it will tell you that they *are* there.”

I hesitated who did not wish to expose the brave little Hottentot to such risks. But when he understood, Umslopogaas said,

“Let the man go. It is his gift and duty to spy, as it is mine to smite with the axe, and yours to lead, Macumazahn. Let him go, I say.”

I nodded my head, and having kissed my hand in his silly fashion in token of much that he did not wish to say, Hans slipped out of sight, saying that he hoped to be back within an hour. Except for his great knife, he went unarmed, who feared that if he took a pistol he might be tempted to fire it and make a noise.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MIDNIGHT BATTLE

That hour went by very slowly. Again and again I consulted my watch by the light of the moon, which was now rising high in the heavens, and thought that it would never come to an end. Listen as I would, there was nothing to be heard, and as the mist still prevailed the only thing I could see except the heavens, was the twinkling of the fires lit by Goroko and his party.

At length it was done and there was no sign of Hans. Another half hour passed and still no sign of Hans.

"I think that Light-in-Darkness is dead or taken prisoner," said Umslopogaas.

I answered that I feared so, but that I would give him another fifteen minutes and then, if he did not appear, I proposed to order an advance, hoping to find the enemy where we had last seen them from the top of the mountain.

The fifteen minutes went by also, and as I could see that the Amahagger captains who sat at a little distance were getting very nervous, I picked up my double-barrelled rifle and turned round so that I faced up hill with a view of firing it as had been agreed with Goroko, but in such a fashion that the flashes perhaps would not be seen from the plain below. For this purpose I moved a few yards to the left to get behind the trunk of a tree that grew there, and was already lifting the rifle to my shoulder, when a yellow hand clasped the barrel and a husky voice said,

"Don't fire yet, Baas, as I want to tell you my story first."

I looked down and there was the ugly face of Hans wearing a grin that might have frightened the man in the moon.

"Well," I said with cold indifference, assumed I admit to hide my excessive joy at his safe return, "tell on, and be quick about it. I suppose you lost your way and never found them."

"Yes, Baas, I lost my way for the fog was very thick down there. But in the end I found them all right, by my nose, Baas, for those man-eating people smell strong and I got the wind of one of their sentries. It was easy to pass him in the mist, Baas, so easy that I was tempted to cut his throat as I went, but I didn't for fear lest he should make a noise. No, I walked on right into the middle of them, which was easy too, for they were all asleep, wrapped up in blankets. They hadn't any fires perhaps because they didn't want them to be seen, or perhaps because it is so hot down in that low land, I don't know which.

"So I crept on taking note of all I saw, till at last I came to a little hill of which the top rose above the level of the mist, so that I could see on it a long hut built of green boughs with the leaves still fresh upon them. Now I thought that I would crawl up to the hut since it came into my mind that Rezu himself must be sleeping there and that I might kill him. But while I stood hesitating I heard a noise like to that made by an old woman whose husband had thrown a blanket over her head to keep her quiet, or to that of a bee in a bottle, a sort of droning noise that reminded me of something.

"I thought a while and remembered that when Red Beard was on his knees praying to Heaven, as is his habit when he has nothing else to do, Baas, he makes a noise just like that. I crept towards the sound and presently there I found Red Beard himself tied upon a stone and looking as mad as a buffalo bull stuck in a swamp, for he shook his head and rolled his eyes about, just as though he had had two bottles of bad gin, Baas, and all the while he kept saying prayers. Now I thought that I would cut him loose, and bent over him to do so, when by ill-luck he saw my face and began to shout, saying,

"Go away, you yellow devil. I know you have come to take me to hell, but you are too soon, and if my hands were loose I would twist your head off your shoulders."

"He said this in English, Baas, which as you know I can understand quite well, after which I was sure that I had better leave him alone. Whilst I was thinking, there came out of the hut above two old men dressed in night-shirts, such as you white people wear, with yellow things upon their heads that had a metal picture of the sun in front of them."

"Medicine-men," I suggested.

"Yes, Baas, or Predikants of some sort, for they were rather like your reverend father when he dressed himself up and went into a box to preach. Seeing them I slipped back a little way to where the mist began, lay down and listened. They looked at Red Beard, for his shouts at me had brought them out, but he took no notice of them, only went on making a noise like a beetle in a tin can.

"It is nothing," said one of the Predikants to the other in the same tongue that these Amahagger use. 'But when is he to be sacrificed? Soon, I hope, for I cannot sleep because of the noise he makes.'

"When the edge of the sun appears, not before," answered the other Predikant. 'Then the new queen will be brought out of the hut and this white man will be sacrificed to her.'

"I think it is a pity to wait so long," said the first Predikant, 'for never shall we sleep in peace until the red-hot pot is on his head.'

"First the victory, then the feast," answered the second Predikant, 'though he will not be so good to eat as that fat young woman who was with the new queen.'

"Then, Baas, they both smacked their lips and one of them went back towards the hut. But the other did not go back. No, he sat down on the ground and glowered at Baas Red-Beard upon the stone. More, he struck him on the face to make him quiet.

"Now, Baas, when I saw this and remembered that they had said that they had eaten Janee whom I liked although she was such a fool, the spirit in me grew so very angry and I thought that I would give this old *skellum* (i.e. rascal) of a Predikant a taste of sacrifice himself, after which I purposed to creep to the hut and see if I could get speech with the Lady Sad-Eyes, if she was there.

"So I wriggled up behind the Predikant as he sat glowering over Red-Beard, and stuck my knife into his back where I thought it would kill him at once. But it didn't, Baas, for he fell on to his face and began to make a noise like a wounded hyena before I could finish him. Then I heard a sound of shouts, and to save my life was obliged to run away into the mist, without loosing Red-Beard or seeing Lady Sad-Eyes. I ran very hard, Baas, making a wide circle to the left, and so at last got back here. That's all, Baas."

"And quite enough, too," I answered, "though if they did not see you, the death of the Medicine-man may frighten them. Poor Jane! Well, I hope to come even with those devils before they are three hours older."

Then I called up Umslopogaas and the Amahagger captains and told them the substance of the story, also that Hans had located the army, or part of it.

The end of it was that we made up our minds to attack at once; indeed I insisted on this, as I was determined if I could to save that unfortunate man, Robertson, who, from Hans' account, evidently was now quite mad and raving. So I fired the two shots as had been arranged and presently heard the sound of distant shoutings on the slope of the opposing ridge. A few minutes later we started, Umslopogaas and I leading the vanguard and the Amahagger captains following with the three remaining companies.

Now the reader, presuming the existence of such a person, will think that everything is sure to go right; that this cunning old fellow, Allan Quatermain, is going to surprise and wipe the floor with those Rezuities, who were already beguiled by the trick he had instructed Goroko to play. That after this he will rescue Robertson who doubtless shortly recovers his mind, also Inez with the greatest ease, in fact that everything will happen as it ought to do if this were a romance instead of a mere record of remarkable facts. But being the latter, as it happened, matters did not work out quite in this convenient way.

To begin with, when those Amahagger told me that the Rezuities never fought in the dark or before the sun was well up, either they lied or they were much mistaken, for at any rate on this occasion they did the exact contrary. All the while that we thought we were stalking them, they were stalking us. The Goroko manoeuvre had not deceived them in the least, since from their spies they knew its exact significance.

Here, I may add that those spies were in our own ranks, traitors, in short, who were really in the pay of Rezu and possibly belonged to his abominable faith, some of whom slipped away from time to time to the enemy to report our progress and plans, so far as they knew them.

Further, what Hans had stumbled on was a mere rear guard left around the place of sacrifice and the hut where Inez was confined. The real army he never found at all. That was divided into two bodies and hidden in bush to the right and left of the ridge which we were descending just at the spot where it joined the plain beneath, and into the jaws of these two armies we marched gaily.

Now that hypothetical reader will say, "Why didn't that silly old fool, Allan, think of all these things? Why didn't he remember that he was commanding a pack of savages with whom he had no real acquaintance, among whom there were sure to be traitors, especially as they were of the same blood as the Rezuities, and take precautions?"

Ah! my dear reader, I will only answer that I wish you had handled the job yourself, and enjoyed the opportunity of seeing what *you* could do in the circumstances. Do you suppose I didn't think of all these points? Of course I did. But have you ever heard of the difficulty of making silk purses out of sows' ears, or of turning a lot of gloomy and disagreeable barbarians whom you had never even drilled, into trustworthy and efficient soldiers ready to fight three times their own number and beat them?

Also I beg to observe that I did get through somehow, as you shall learn, which is more than you might have done, Mr. Wisdom, though I admit, not without help from another quarter. It is all very well for you to sit in your armchair and be sapient and turn up your learned nose, like the gentlemen who criticise plays and poems, an easy job compared to the writing of them. From all of which, however, you will understand that I am, to tell the truth, rather ashamed of what followed, since *qui s'excuse, s'accuse*.

As we slunk down that hill in the moonlight, a queer-looking crowd, I admit also that I felt very uncomfortable. To begin with I did not like that remark of the Medicine-man which Hans reported, to the effect that the feast must come after the victory, especially as he had said just before that Robertson was to be sacrificed as the sun rose, which would seem to suggest that the "victory" was planned to take place before that event.

While I was ruminating upon this subject, I looked round for Hans to cross-examine him as to the priest's exact words, only to find that he had slunk off somewhere. A few minutes later he reappeared running back towards us swiftly and, I noticed, taking shelter behind tree trunks and rocks as he came.

"Baas," he gasped, for he was out of breath, "be careful, those Rezu men are on either side ahead. I went forward and ran into them. They threw many spears at me. Look!" and he showed a slight cut on his arm from which blood was flowing.

Instantly I understood that we were ambushed and began to think very hard indeed. As it chanced we were passing across a large flat space upon the ridge, say seven or eight acres in extent, where the bush grew lightly, though owing to the soil being better, the trees were tall.

On the steep slope below this little plain it seemed to be denser and there it was, according to Hans, that the ambush was set. I halted my regiment and sent back messengers to the others that they were to halt also as they came up, on the pretext of giving them a rest before they were marshalled and we advanced to the battle.

Then I told Umslopogaas what Hans said and asked him to send out his Zulu soldier whom he could trust, to see if he could obtain confirmation of the report. This he did at once. Also I asked him what he thought should be done, supposing that it was true.

"Form the Amahagger into a ring or a square and await attack," he answered.

I nodded, for that was my own opinion, but replied,

"If they were Zulus, the plan would be good. But how do we know that these men will stand?"

"We know nothing, Macumazahn, and therefore can only try. If they run it must be up-hill."

Then I called the captains and told them what was toward, which seemed to alarm them very much. Indeed one or two of them wanted to retreat at once, but I said I would shoot the first man who tried to do so. In the end they agreed to my plan and said that they would post their best soldiers above, at the top of the square, with the orders to stop any attempt at a flight up the mountain.

After this we formed up the square as best we could, arranging it in a rather rough, four-fold line. While we were doing this we heard some shouts below and presently the Zulu returned, who reported that all was as Hans had said and that Rezu's men were moving round us, having discovered, as he thought, that we had halted and escaped their ambush.

Still the attack did not develop at once, for the reason that the Rezu army was crawling up the steep flanks of the spur on either side of the level piece of ground, with a view of encircling us altogether, so as to make a clean sweep of our force. As a matter of fact, considered from our point of view, this was a most fortunate move, since thereby they stopped any attempt at a retreat on the part of our Amahagger, whose bolt-hole was now blocked.

When we had done all we could, we sat down, or at least I did, and waited. The night, I remember, was strangely still, only from the slopes on either side of our plateau came a kind of rustling sound which in fact was caused by the feet of Rezu's people, as they marched to surround us.

It ceased at last and the silence grew complete, so much so that I could hear the teeth of some of our tall Amahagger chattering with fear, a sound that gave me little confidence and caused Umslopogaas to remark that the hearts of these big men had never grown; they remained "as those of babies." I told the captains to pass the word down the ranks that those who stood might live, but those who fled would certainly die. Therefore if they wished to see their homes again they had better stand and fight like men. Otherwise most of them would be killed and the rest eaten by Rezu. This was done, and I observed that the message seemed to produce a steadying effect upon our ranks.

Suddenly all around us, from below, from above and on either side there broke a most awful roar which seemed to shape itself into the word, *Rezu*, and next minute also from above, below and either side, some ten thousand men poured forth upon our square.

In the moonlight they looked very terrible with their flowing white robes and great gleaming spears. Hans and I fired some shots, though for all the effect they produced, we might as well have pelted a breaker with pebbles. Then, as I thought that I should be more useful alive than dead, I retreated within the square, Umslopogaas, his Zulu, and Hans coming with me.

On the whole our Amahagger stood the attack better than I expected. They beat back the first rush with considerable loss to the enemy, also the second after a longer struggle. Then there was a pause during which we re-formed our ranks, dragging the wounded men into the square.

Scarcely had we done this when with another mighty shout of "Rezu!" the enemy attacked again—that was about an hour after the battle had begun. But now they had changed their tactics, for instead of trying to rush all sides of the square at once, they concentrated their efforts on the western front, that which faced towards the plain below.

On they came, and among them in the forefront of the battle, now and again I caught sight of a gigantic man, a huge creature who seemed to me to be seven feet high and big in proportion. I could not see him clearly because of the uncertain moonlight, but I noted his fierce aspect, also that he had an enormous beard, black streaked with grey, that flowed down to his middle, and that his hair hung in masses upon his shoulders.

"Rezu himself!" I shouted to Umslopogaas.

"Aye, Macumazahn, Rezu himself without doubt, and I rejoice to see him for he will be a worthy foe to fight. Look! he carries an axe as I do. Now I must save my strength for when we come face to face I shall need it all."

I thought that I would spare Umslopogaas this exertion and watched my opportunity to put a bullet through this giant. But I could never get one. Once when I had covered him an Amahagger rushed in front of my gun so that I could not shoot, and when a second chance came a little cloud floated over the face of the moon and made him invisible. After that I had other things to which to attend, since, as I expected would happen, the western face of our square gave, and yelling like devils, the enemy began to pour in through the gap.

A cold thrill went through me for I saw that the game was up. To re-form these undisciplined Amahagger was impossible; nothing was to be expected except panic, rout and slaughter. I cursed my folly for ever having had anything to do with the business, while Hans screamed to me in a thin voice that the only chance was for us three and the Zulu to bolt and hide in the bush.

I did not answer him because, apart from any nasty pride, the thing was impossible, for how could we get through those struggling masses of men which surrounded us on every side? No, my clock had struck, so I went on making a kind of mental sandwich of prayers and curses; prayers for my soul and forgiveness for my sins, and curses on the Amahagger and everything to do with them, especially Zikali and the woman called Ayesha, who, between them, had led me into this affair.

"Perhaps the Great Medicine of Zikali," piped Hans again as he fired a rifle at the advancing foe.

"Hang the Great Medicine," I shouted back, "and Ayesha with it. No wonder she declined to take a hand in this business."

As I spoke the words I saw old Billali, who not being a man of war was keeping as close to us as he could, go flat onto his venerable face, and reflected that he must have got a thrown spear through him. Casting a hurried glance at him to see if he were done for or only wounded, out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of something diaphanous which gleamed in the moonlight and reminded me of I knew not what at the moment.

I looked round quickly to see what it might be and lo! there, almost at my side was the veiled Ayesha herself, holding in her hand a little rod made of black wood inlaid with ivory not unlike a field marshal's baton, or a sceptre.

I never saw her come and to this day I do not know how she did so; she was just there and what is more she must have put luminous paint or something else on her robes, for they gleamed with a sort of faint, phosphorescent fire, which in the moonlight made her conspicuous all over the field of battle. Nor did she speak a single word, she only waved the rod, pointed with it towards the fierce hordes who were drawing near to us, killing as they came, and began to move forward with a gliding motion.

Now from every side there went up a roar of "*She-who-commands! She-who-commands!*" while the people of Rezu in front shouted "*Lulala! Lulala! Fly, Lulala!* upon us with the witchcrafts of the moon!"

She moved forward and by some strange impulse, for no order was given, we all began to move after her. Yes, the ranks that a minute before were beginning to give way to wild panic, became filled with a marvellous courage and moved after her.

The men of Rezu also, and I suppose with them Rezu himself, for I saw no more of him at that time, began to move uncommonly fast over the edge of the plateau towards the plain beneath. In fact they broke into flight and leaping over dead and dying, we rushed after them, always following the gleaming robe of Ayesha, who must have been an extremely agile person, since without any apparent exertion she held her place a few steps ahead of us.

There was another curious circumstance about this affair, namely, that terrified though they were, those Rezuites, after the first break, soon seemed to find it impossible to depart with speed. They kept turning round to look behind them at that following vision, as though they were so many of Lot's wives. Moreover, the same fate overtook many of them which fell upon that scriptural lady since they appeared to become petrified and stood there quite still, like rabbits fascinated by a snake, until our people came up and killed them. This slaying went on all down the last steep slope of the ridge, on which I suppose at least two-thirds of the army of Rezu must have perished, since our Amahagger showed themselves very handy men when it came to exterminating foes who were too terror-struck to fight, and, exhilarated by the occupation, gained courage every moment.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE SLAYING OF REZU

At last we were on the plain, the bemused remnant of Rezu's army still doubling before us like a mob of game pursued by wild dogs. Here we halted to re-form our ranks; it seemed to me, although still she spoke no word, that some order reached me from the gleaming Ayesha that I should do this. The business took twenty minutes or so, and then, numbering about two thousand five hundred strong, for the rest had fallen in the fight of the square, we advanced again.

Now there came that dusk which often precedes the rising of the sun, and through it I could see that the battle was not yet over, since gathered in front of us was still a force about equal to our own. Ayesha pointed towards it with her wand and we leapt forward to the attack. Here the men of Rezu stood awaiting us, for they seemed to overcome their terror with the approach of day.

The battle was fierce, a very strange battle in that dim, uncertain light, which scarcely showed us friend from foe. Indeed I am not sure that we should have won it, since Ayesha was no longer visible to give our Amahagger confidence, and as the courage of the Rezuites increased, so theirs seemed to lessen with the passing of the night.

Fortunately, however, just as the issue hung doubtful, there was a shout to our left and looking, I made out the tall shape of Goroko, the witch-doctor, with the other Zulu, followed by his two hundred and fifty men, and leaping on to the flank of the line of Rezu.

That settled the business. The enemy crumpled up and melted, and just then the first lights of dawn appeared in the sky. I looked about me for Ayesha, but she had gone, where to I knew not, though at the moment I feared that she must have been killed in the mêlée.

Then I gave up looking and thinking, since now or never was the time for action. Signalling and shouting to those hatchet-faced Amahagger to advance, accompanied by Umslopogaas with Goroko who had joined us, and Hans, I sprang forward to give them an example, which, to be just to them, they took.

"This is the mound on which Red-Beard should be," cried Hans as we faced a little slope.

I ran up it and through the gloom which precedes the actual dawn, saw a group of men gathered round something, as people collect about a street accident.

"Red-Beard on the stone. They are killing him," screeched Hans again.

It was so; at least several white-robed priests were bending over a prostrate figure with knives in their hands, while behind stood the huge fellow whom I took to be Rezu, staring towards the east as though he were waiting for the rim of the sun to appear before he gave some order. At that very moment it did appear, just a thin edge of bright light on the horizon, and he turned, shouting the order.

Too late! For we were on them. Umslopogaas cut down one of the priests with his axe, and the men about me dealt with the others, while Hans with a couple of sweeps of his long knife, severed the cords with which Robertson was tied.

The poor man who in the growing light I could see was raving mad, sprang up, calling out something in Scotch about "the deil." Seizing a great spear which had fallen from the hand of one of the priests, he rushed furiously at the giant who had given the order, and with a yell drove it at his heart. I saw the spear snap, from which I concluded that this man, whom rightly I took to be Rezu, wore some kind of armour.

Next instant the axe he held, a great weapon, flashed aloft and down went Robertson before its awful stroke, stone dead, for as we found out afterwards, he was cloven almost in two. At the sight of the death of my poor friend rage took hold of me. In my hand was a double-barrelled rifle, an Express loaded with hollow-pointed bullets. I covered the giant and let drive, first with one barrel and then with the other, and what is more, distinctly I heard both bullets strike upon him.

Yet he did not fall. He rocked a little, that is all, then turned and marched off towards a hut, that whereof Hans had told me, which stood about fifty yards away.

"Leave him to me," shouted Umslopogaas. "Steel cuts where bullets cannot pierce," and with a bound like to that of a buck, the great Zulu leapt away after him.

I think that Rezu meant to enter the hut for some purpose of his own, but Umslopogaas was too hard upon his tracks. At any rate he ran past it and down the other slope of the little hill on to the plain behind where the remnants of his army were trying to re-form. There in front of them the giant turned and stood at bay.

Umslopogaas halted also, waiting for us to come up, since, cunning old warrior as he was, he feared lest should he begin the fight before that happened, the horde of them would fall on him. Thirty seconds later we arrived and found him standing still with bent body, small shield advanced and the great axe raised as though in the act of striking, a wondrous picture outlined as it was against the swiftly rising-sun.

Some ten paces away stood the giant leaning on the axe he bore, which was not unlike to that with which woodmen fell big trees. He was an evil man to see and at this, my first full sight of him, I likened him in my mind to Goliath whom David overthrew. Huge he was and hairy, with deep-set, piercing eyes and a great hooked nose. His face seemed thin and ancient also, when with a motion of the great head, he tossed his long locks back from about it, but his limbs were those of a Hercules and his movements full of a youthful vigour. Moreover his aspect as a whole was that of a devil rather than of a man; indeed the sight of it sickened me.

"Let me shoot him," I cried to Umslopogaas, for I had reloaded the rifle as I ran.

"Nay, Watcher-by-Night," answered the Zulu without moving his head, "rifle has had its chance and failed. Now let us see what axe can do. If I cannot kill this man, I will be borne hence feet first who shall have made a long journey for nothing."

Then the giant began to talk in a low, rumbling voice that reverberated from the slope of the little hill behind us.

"Who are you?" he asked, speaking in the same tongue that the Amahagger use, "who dare to come face to face with Rezu? Black hound, do you not know that I cannot be slain who have lived a year for every week of your life's days, and set my foot upon the necks of men by thousands. Have you not seen the spear shatter and the iron balls melt upon my breast like rain-drops, and would you try to bring me down with that toy you carry? My army is defeated—I know it. But what matters that when I can get me more? Because the sacrifice was not completed and the white queen was not wed, therefore my army was defeated by the magic of Lulala, the White Witch who dwells in the tombs. But I am not defeated who cannot be slain until I show my back, and then only by a certain axe which long ago has rusted into dust."

Now of this long speech Umslopogaas understood nothing, so I answered for him, briefly enough, but to the point, for there flashed into my mind all Ayesha's tale about an axe.

"A certain axe!" I cried. "Aye, a certain axe! Well, look at that which is held by the Black One, the captain who is named Slaughterer, the ancient axe whose title is Chieftainess, because if so she wills, she takes the lives of all. Look at it well, Rezu, Giant and Wizard, and say whether it is not that which your forefather lost, that which is destined to bring you to your doom?"

Thus I spoke, very loudly that all might hear, slowly also, pausing between each word because I wished to give time for the light to strengthen, seeing as I did that the rays of the rising sun struck upon the face of the giant, whereas the eyes of Umslopogaas were less dazzled by it.

Rezu heard, and stared at the axe which Umslopogaas held aloft, causing it to quiver slightly by an imperceptible motion of his arm. As he stared I saw his hideous face change, and that on it for the first time gathered a look of something resembling fear. Also his followers behind him who were also studying the axe, began to murmur together.

For here I should say that as though by common consent the battle had been stayed; we no longer attacked and the enemy no longer ran. They, or those who were left of them, stood still as though they felt that the real and ultimate issue of the fight depended upon the forthcoming duel between these two champions, though of that issue they had little doubt since, as I learned afterwards, they believed their king to be invulnerable.

For quite a while Rezu went on staring. Then he said aloud as if he were thinking to himself.

"It is like, very like. The horn haft is the same; the pointed gouge is the same; the blade shaped like the young moon is the same. Almost could I think that before me shook the ancient holy axe. Nay, the gods have taken that back long ago and this is but a trick of the witch, Lulala of the Caves."

Thus he spoke, but still for a moment hesitated.

"Umslopogaas," I said in the deep silence that followed, "hear me."

"I hear you," he answered without turning his head or moving his arms. "What counsel, Watcher-by-Night?"

"This, Slaughterer. Strike not at that man's face and breast, for there I think he is protected by witchcraft or by armour. Get behind him and strike at his back. Do you understand?"

"Nay, Macumazahn, I understand not. Yet I will do your bidding because you are wiser than I and utter no empty words. Now be still."

Then Umslopogaas threw the axe into the air and caught it as it fell, and as he did so began to chant his own praises Zulu fashion.

"Oho!" he said, "I am the child of the Lion, the Black-maned Lion, whose claws never loosened of their prey. I am the Wolf-king, he who hunted with the wolves upon the Witch-mountain with my brother, Bearer of the Club named Watcher-of-the-Fords, I am he who slew him called the Unconquered, Chief of the People of the Axe, he who bore the ancient Axe before me; I am he who smote the Halakazi tribe in their caves and won me Nada the Lily to wife. I am he who took to the King Dingaan a gift that he loved little, and afterward with Mopo, my foster-sire, hurled this Dingaan down to death. I am the Royal One, named Bulalio the Slaughterer, named Woodpecker, named Umhlopekazi the Captain, before whom never yet man has stood in fair and open fight. Now, thou Wizard Rezu, now thou Giant, now thou Ghost-man, come on against me and before the sun has risen by a hand's breadth, all those who watch shall see which of us is better at the game of war. Come on, then! Come on, for I say that my blood boils over and my feet grow cold. Come on, thou grinning dog, thou monster grown fat with eating the flesh of men, thou hook-beaked vulture, thou old, grey-whiskered wolf!"

Thus he chanted in his fierce, boastful way, while his two remaining Zulus clapped their hands and sentence by sentence echoed his words, and Goroko, the witch-doctor, muttered incantations behind him.

While he sang thus Umslopogaas began to stir. First only his head and shoulders moved gently, swaying from side to side like a reed shaken in the wind or a snake about to strike. Then slowly he put out first one foot and next the other and drew them back again, as a dancer might do, tempting Rezu to attack.

But the giant would not, his shield held before him, he stood still and waited to see what this black warrior would do.

The snake struck. Umslopogaas darted in and let drive with the long axe. Rezu raised his shield above his head and caught the blow. From the clank it made I knew that this shield which seemed to be of hide, was lined with iron. Rezu smote back, but before the blow could fall the Zulu was out of his reach. This taught me how great was the giant's strength, for though the stroke was heavy, like the steel-hatted axe he bore, still when he saw that it had missed he checked the weapon in mid air, which only a mighty man could have done.

Umslopogaas saw these things also and changed his tactics. His axe was six or eight inches longer in the haft than that of Rezu, and therefore he could reach where Rezu could not, for the giant was short-armed. He twisted it round in his hand so that the moon-shaped blade was uppermost, and keeping it almost at full length, began to peck with the gouge-shaped point on the back at the head and arms of Rezu, that as I knew was a favourite trick of his in fight from which he won his name of "Woodpecker." Rezu defended his head with his shield as best he could against the sharp points of steel which flashed all about him.

Twice it seemed to me that the Zulu's pecks went home upon the giant's breast, but if so they did no harm. Either Rezu's thick beard, or armour beneath it stopped them from penetrating his body. Still he roared out as though with pain, or fury, or both, and growing mad, charged at Umslopogaas and smote with all his strength.

The Zulu caught the blow upon his shield, through which it shored as though the tough hide were paper. Stay the stroke it could not, yet it turned its direction, so that the falling axe slid past Umslopogaas's shoulder, doing him no hurt. Next instant, before Rezu could strike again, the Zulu threw the severed shield into his face and seizing the axe with both hands, leapt in and struck. It was a mighty blow, for I saw the rhinoceros-horn handle of the famous axe bend like a drawn bow, and it went home with a dull thud full upon Rezu's breast. He shook, but no more. Evidently the razor edge of *Inkosikaas* had failed to pierce. There was a sound as though a hollow tree had been smitten and some strands of the long beard, shorn off, fell to the ground, but that was all.

"*Tagati!* (bewitched)," cried the watching Zulus. "That stroke should have cut him in two!" while I thought to myself that this man knew how to make good armour.

Rezu laughed aloud, a bellowing kind of laugh, while Umslopogaas sprang back astonished.

"Is it thus!" he cried in Zulu. "Well, all wizards have some door by which their Spirit enters and departs. I must find the door, I must find the door!"

So he spoke and with springing movements tried to get past Rezu, first to the right and then to the left, all the while keeping out of reach. But Rezu ever turned and faced him, as he did so retreating step by step down the slope of the little hill and striking whenever he found a chance, but without avail, for always Umslopogaas was beyond his reach. Also the sunlight which now grew strong, dazzled him, or so I thought. Moreover he seemed to tire somewhat—or so I thought also.

At any rate he determined to make an end of the play, for with a swift motion, as Umslopogaas had done, he threw away his shield and grasping the iron handle of his axe with both hands, charged the Zulu like a bull. Umslopogaas leapt back out of reach. Then suddenly he turned and ran up the rise. Yes, Bulalio the Slaughterer ran!

A roar of mockery went up from the sun-worshippers behind, while our Amahagger laughed and Goroko and the two Zulus stared astonished and ashamed. Only I read his mind aright and wondered what guile he had conceived.

He ran, and Rezu ran after him, but never could he catch the swiftest-footed man in Zululand. To and fro he followed him, for Umslopogaas was taking a zig-zag path towards the crest of the slope, till at length Rezu stopped breathless. But Umslopogaas still ran another twenty yards or so until he reached the top of the slope and there halted and wheeled round.

For ten seconds or more he stood drawing his breath in great gasps, and, looking at his face, I saw that it had become as the face of a wolf. His lips were drawn up into a terrible grin, showing the white teeth between; his cheeks seemed to have fallen in and his eyes glared, while the skin over the hole in his forehead beat up and down.

There he stood, gathering himself together for some mighty effort.

"Run on!" shouted the spectators. "Run back to Kôr, black dog!"

Umslopogaas knew that they were mocking him, but he took no heed, only bent down and rubbed his sweating hand in the grit of the dry earth. Then he straightened himself and charged down on Rezu.

I, Allan Quatermain, have seen many things in battle, but never before or since did I see aught like to this charge. It was swift as that of a lioness, so swift that the Zulu's feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground. On he sped like a thrown spear, till, when within about a dozen feet of Rezu who stood staring at him, he bent his frame almost double and leapt into the air.

Oh! what a leap was that. Surely he must have learnt it from the lion, or the spring-buck. High he rose and now I saw his purpose; it was to clear the tall shape of Rezu. Aye, and he cleared him with half a foot to spare, and as he passed above, smote downwards with the axe so that the blow fell upon the back of Rezu's head. Moreover it went home this time, for I saw the red blood stream and Rezu fell forward on his face. Umslopogaas landed far beyond him, ran a little way because he must, then wheeled round and charged again.

Rezu was rising, but before he gained his feet, the axe *Inkosikaas* thundered down where the neck joins the shoulder and sank in. Still, so great was his strength that Rezu found his feet and smote out wildly. But now his movements were slow and again Umslopogaas got behind him, smiting at his back. Once, twice, thrice, he smote, and at the third blow it seemed as though the massive spine were severed, for his weapon fell from Rezu's hand and slowly he sank down to the ground, and lay there, a huddled heap.

Believing that all was over I ran to where he lay with Umslopogaas standing over him, as it seemed to me, utterly exhausted, for he supported himself by the axe and tottered upon his feet. But Rezu was not yet dead. He opened his cavernous eyes and glared at the Zulu with a look of hellish hate.

"*Thou* hast not conquered me, Black One," he gasped. "It is thine axe which gave thee victory; the ancient, holy axe that once was mine until the woman stole it, yes, that and the craft of the Witch of the Caves who told thee to smite where the Spirit of Life which I feared to enter wholly, had not kissed my flesh, and there only left me mortal. Wolf of a black man, may we meet elsewhere and fight this fray again. Ah! would that I could get these hands about thy throat and take thee with me down into the Darkness. But Lulala wins if only for a while, since her fate, I think, shall be worse than mine. Ah! I see the magic beauty that she boasts turn to shameful \_\_\_\_\_"

Here of a sudden life left him and throwing his great arms wide, a last breath passed bubbling from his lips.

As I stooped to examine the man's huge and hairy carcase that to me looked only half human, with a thunder of feet our Amahagger rushed down upon us and thrusting me aside, fell upon the body of their ancient foe like hounds upon a helpless fox, and with hands and spears and knives literally tore and hacked it limb from limb, till no semblance of humanity remained.

It was impossible to stop them; indeed I was too outworn with labours and emotions to make any such attempt. This I regret the more since I lost the opportunity of making an examination of the body of this troll-like man, and of ascertaining what kind of armour it was he wore beneath that great beard of his, which was strong enough to stop my bullets, and even the razor edge of the axe *Inkosikaas* driven with all the might of the arms of the Zulu, Bulalio. For when I looked again at the sickening sight the giant was but scattered fragments and the armour, whatever it might have been, was gone, rent to little pieces and carried off, doubtless, by the Amahagger, perhaps to be divided between them to serve as charms.

So of Rezu I know only that he was the hugest, most terrible-looking man I have ever seen, one too who carried his vast strength very late in life, since from the aspect of his countenance I imagine that he must have been nigh upon seventy years of age, though his supposed unnatural antiquity of course was nothing but a fable put about by the natives for their own purposes.

Presently Umslopogaas seemed to recover from the kind of faint into which he had fallen and opening his eyes, looked about him. The first person they fell on was old Billali who stood stroking his white beard and contemplating the scene with an air which was at once philosophic and satisfied. This seemed to anger Umslopogaas, for he cried,

"I think it was you, ancient bag of words and sweeper of paths for the feet of the great, who made a mock of me but now, when you thought that I fled before the horns of yonder man-eating bull—" and he nodded towards the fragments of what once had been Rezu. "Find now his axe and though I am weak and weary, I will wash away the insult with your blood."

"What does this glorious black hero say, Watcher-by-Night?" asked Billali in his most courteous tones.

I told him word by word, whereon Billali lifted his hands in horror, turned and fled. Nor did I see him again until we arrived at Kôr.

At the sight of the fall of their giant chief Rezu whom they believed to be invulnerable, his followers, who were watching the fray, set up a great wailing, a most mournful and uncanny noise to hear. Then, as I think did the hosts of the Philistines when David brought down Goliath by his admirable shot with a stone, they set out for their homes wherever these may have been, at an absolutely record pace and in the completest disarray.

Our Amahagger followed them for a while, but soon were left standing still. So they contented themselves with killing any wounded they could find and returned. I did not accompany them; indeed the battle being won, metaphorically I washed my hands of them, and in my thoughts consigned them to a certain locality as a people of whom it might well be said that manners they had none and their customs were simply beastly. Also, although fierce and cruel, these night-bats were not good fighting men and in short never did I wish to have to do with such another company.

Moreover, a very different matter pressed. The object of this business so far as I was concerned, had been to rescue poor Inez, since had it not been for her sake, never would I have consented to lead those Amahagger against their fellow blackguards, the Rezuities.

But where was Inez? If Hans had understood the medicine-man aright, she was, or had been, in the hut, where it was my earnest hope that she still remained, since otherwise the hunt must be continued. This at any rate was easy to discover. Calling Hans, who was amusing himself by taking long shots at the flying enemy, so that they might not forget him, as he said, and the Zulus, I walked up the slope to the hut, or rather booth of boughs, for it was quite twenty feet long by twelve or fifteen broad.

At its eastern end was a doorway or opening closed with a heavy curtain. Here I paused full of tremors, and listened, for to tell the truth I dreaded to draw that curtain, fearing what I might see within. Gathering up my courage at length I tore it aside and, a revolver in my hand, looked in. At first after the strong light without, for the sun was now well up, I could see nothing, since those green boughs and palm leaves were very closely woven. As my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, however, I perceived a glittering object seated on a kind of throne at the end of the booth, while in a double row in front knelt six white-robed women who seemed to wear chains about their necks and carried large knives slung round their middles. On the floor between these women and the throne lay a dead man, a priest of some sort as I gathered from his garb, who still held a huge spear in his hand. So silent were the figure on the throne and those that knelt before it, that at first I thought that all of them must be dead.

"Lady Sad-Eyes," whispered Hans, "and her bride-women. Doubtless that old Predikant came to kill her when he saw that the battle was lost, but the bride-women killed him with their knives."

Here I may state that Hans' suppositions proved to be quite correct, which shows how quick and deductive was his mind. The figure on the throne was Inez; the priest in his disappointed rage *had* come to kill her, and the bride-women had killed *him* with their knives before he could do so.

I bade the Zulus tear down the curtain and pull away some of the end boughs, so as to let in more light. Then we advanced up the place, holding our pistols and spears in readiness. The kneeling women turned their heads to look at us and I saw that they were all young and handsome in their fashion, although fierce-faced. Also I saw their hands go to the knives they wore. I called to them to let these be and come out, and that if they did so they had nothing to fear. But if they understood, they did not heed my words.

On the contrary while Hans and I covered them with our pistols, fearing lest they should stab the person on the throne whom we took to be Inez, at some word from one of them, they bowed simultaneously towards her, then at another word, suddenly they drew the knives and plunged them to their own hearts!

It was a dreadful sight and one of which I never saw the like. Nor to this day do I know why the deed was done, unless perhaps the women were sworn to the service of the new queen and feared that if they failed to protect her, they would be doomed to some awful end. At any rate we got them out dead or dying, for their blows had been strong and true, and not one of them lived for more than a few minutes.

Then I advanced to the figure on the throne, or rather foot-stooled chair of black wood inlaid with ivory, which sat so silent and motionless that I was certain it was that of a dead woman, especially when I perceived that she was fastened to the chair with leather straps, which were sewn over with gold wire. Also she was veiled and, with one exception, made up, if I may use the term, exactly to resemble the lady Ayesha, even down to the two long plaits of black hair, each finished with some kind of pearl and to the sandalled feet.

The exception was that about her hung a great necklace of gold ornaments from which were suspended pendants also of gold representing the rayed disc of the sun in rude but bold and striking workmanship.

I went to her and having cut the straps, since I could not stop to untie their knots, lifted the veil.

Beneath it was Inez sure enough, and Inez living, for her breast rose and fell as she breathed, but Inez senseless. Her eyes were wide open, yet she was quite senseless. Probably she had been drugged, or perhaps some of the sights of horror which she saw, had taken away her mind. I confess that I was glad that this was so, who otherwise must have told her the dreadful story of her father's end.

We bore her out and away from that horrible place, apparently quite unhurt, and laid her under the shadow of a tree till a litter could be procured. I could do no more who knew not how to treat her state, and had no spirits with me to pour down her throat.

This was the end of our long pursuit, and thus we rescued Inez, whom the Zulus called the Lady Sad-Eyes.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE SPELL

Of our return to Kôr I need say nothing, except that in due course we reached that interesting ruin. The journey was chiefly remarkable for one thing, that on this occasion, I imagine for the first and last time in his life, Umslopogaas consented to be carried in a litter, at least for part of the way. He was, as I have said, unwounded, for the axe of his mighty foe had never once so much as touched his skin. What he suffered from was shock, a kind of collapse, since, although few would have thought it, this great and utterly fearless warrior was at bottom a nervous, highly-strung man.

It is only the nervous that climb the highest points of anything, and this is true of fights as of all others. That fearful fray with Rezu had been a great strain on the Zulu. As he put it himself, "the wizard had sucked the strength" out of him, especially when he found that owing to his armour he could not harm him in front, and owing to his cunning could not get at him behind. Then it was that he conceived the desperate expedient of leaping over his head and smiting backwards as he leapt, a trick, he told me, that he had once played years before when he was young, in order to break a shield ring and reach one who stood in its centre.

In this great leap over Rezu's head Umslopogaas knew that he must succeed, or be slain, which in turn would mean my death and that of the others. For this reason he faced the shame of seeming to fly in order to gain the higher ground, whence alone he could gather the speed necessary to such a terrific spring.

Well, he made it and thereby conquered, and this was the end, but as he said, it had left him, "weak as a snake when it crawls out of its hole into the sun after the long winter sleep."

Of one thing, Umslopogaas added, he was thankful, namely that Rezu had never succeeded in getting his arms round him, since he was quite certain that if he had he would have broken him "as a baboon breaks a mealie-stalk." No strength, not even his, could have resisted the iron might of that huge, gorilla-like man.

I agreed with him who had noted Rezu's vast chest and swelling muscles, also the weight of the blows that he struck with the steel-hafted axe (which, by the way, when I sought for it, was missing, stolen, I suppose, by one of the Amahagger).

Whence did that strength come, I wondered, in one who from his face appeared to be old? Was there perchance, after all, some truth in the legend of Samson and did it dwell in that gigantic beard and those long locks of his? It was impossible to say and probably the man was but a Herculean freak, for that he was as strong as Hercules all the stories that I heard afterwards of his feats, left little room for doubt.

About one thing only was I certain in connection with him, namely, that the tales of his supernatural abilities were the merest humbug. He was simply one of the representatives of the family of "strong men," of whom examples are still to be seen doing marvellous feats all over the earth.

For the rest, he was dead and broken up by those Amahagger blood-hounds before I could examine him, or his body-armour either, and there was an end of him and his story. But when I looked at the corpse of poor Robertson, which I did as we buried it where he fell, and saw that though so large and thick-set, it was cleft almost in two by a single blow of Rezu's axe, I came to understand what the might of this savage must have been.

I say savage, but I am not sure that this is a right description of Rezu. Evidently he had a religion of a sort, also imagination, as was shown by the theft of the white woman to be his queen; by his veiling of her to resemble Ayesha whom he dreaded; by the intended propitiatory sacrifice; by the guard of women sworn to her service who slew the priest that tried to kill her, and afterwards committed suicide when they had failed in their office, and by other things. All this indicated something more than savagery, perhaps survivals from a forgotten civilisation, or perhaps native ability on the part of an individual ruler. I do not know and it matters nothing.

Rezu is dead and the world is well rid of him, and those who want to learn more of his people can go to study such as remain of them in their own habitat, which for my part I never wish to visit any more.

During our journey to Kôr poor Inez never stirred. Whenever I went to look at her in the litter, I found her lying there with her eyes open and a fixed stare upon her face which frightened me very much, since I began to fear lest she should die. However I could do nothing to help her, except urge the bearers to top speed. So swiftly did we travel down the hill and across the plain that we reached Kôr just as the sun was setting. As we crossed the moat I perceived old Billali coming to meet us. This he did with many bows, keeping an anxious eye upon the litter which he had learned contained Umslopogaas. Indeed his attitude and that of the Amahagger towards the two of us, and even Hans, thenceforward became almost abject, since after our victory over Rezu and his death beneath the axe, they looked upon us as half divine and treated us accordingly.

"O mighty General," he said, "She-who-commands bids me conduct the lady who is sick to the place that has been made ready for her, which is near your own so that you may watch over her if you will."

I wondered how Ayesha knew that Inez was sick, but being too tired to ask questions, merely bade him lead on. This he did, taking us to another ruined house next to our own quarters which had been swept, cleaned and furnished after a fashion, and moreover cleverly roofed in with mats, so that it was really quite comfortable. Here we found two middle-aged women of a very superior type, who, Billali informed me, were by trade nurses of the sick. Having seen her laid upon her bed, I committed Inez to their charge, since the case was not one that I dared to try to doctor myself, not knowing what drug of the few I possessed should be administered to her.

Moreover Billali comforted me with the information that soon She-who-commands would visit her and “make her well again,” as she could do.

I answered that I hoped so and went to our quarters where I found an excellent meal ready cooked and with it a stone flagon, of the contents of which Billali said we were all three to drink by the command of Ayesha, who declared that it would take away our weariness.

I tried the stuff, which was pale yellow in colour like sherry and, for aught I knew, might be poison, to find it most comforting, though it did not seem to be very strong to the taste. Certainly, too, its effects were wonderful, since presently all my great weariness fell from me like a discarded cloak, and I found myself with a splendid appetite and feeling better and stronger than I had done for years. In short that drink was a “cocktail” of the best, one of which I only wish I possessed the recipe, though Ayesha told me afterwards that it was distilled from quite harmless herbs and not in any sense a spirit.

Having discovered this, I gave some of it to Hans, also to Umslopogaas, who was with the wounded Zulus, who, we found, were progressing well towards complete recovery, and lastly to Goroko who also was worn out. On all of these the effect of that magical brew proved most satisfactory.

Then, having washed, I ate a splendid dinner, though in this respect Hans, who was seated on the ground nearby, far outpassed my finest efforts.

“Baas,” he said, “things have gone very well with us when they might have gone very ill. The Baas Red-Beard is dead, which is a good thing, since a madman would have been difficult to look after, and a brain full of moonshine is a bad companion for any one. Oh! without doubt he is better dead, though your reverend father the Predikant will have a hard job looking after him there in the Place of Fires.”

“Perhaps,” I said with a sigh, “since it is better to be dead than to live a lunatic. But what I fear is that the lady his daughter will follow him.”

“Oh, no! Baas,” replied Hans cheerfully, “though I daresay that she will always be a little mad also, because you see it is in her blood and doubtless she has looked on dreadful things. But the Great Medicine will see to it that she does not die after we have taken so much trouble and gone into such big dangers to save her. That Great Medicine is very wonderful, Baas. First of all it makes you General over those Amahagger who without you would never have fought, as the Witch who ties up her head in a cloth knew well enough. Then it brings us safe through the battle and gives strength to Umslopogaas to kill the old man-eating giant.”

“Why did it not give *me* strength to kill him, Hans? I let him have two Express bullets on his chest, which hurt him no more than a tap upon the horns with a dancing stick would hurt a bull-buffalo.”

“Oh! Baas, perhaps you missed him, who because you hit things sometimes, think that you do so always.”

Having waited to see if I would rise to this piece of insolence, which of course I did not, he went on by way of letting me down easily, “Or perhaps he wore very good armour under his beard, for I saw some of those Amahagger who pulled his hair off and cut him to pieces, go away with what looked like little bits of brass. Also the Great Medicine meant that he should be killed by Umslopogaas and not by you, since otherwise Umslopogaas would have been sad for the rest of his life, whereas now he will walk about the world as proud as a cock with two tails and crow all night as well as all day. Then, Baas, when Rezu broke the square and the Amahagger began to run, without doubt it was the Great Medicine which changed their hearts and made them brave again, so that they charged at the right moment when they saw it going forward on your breast, and instead of being eaten up, ate up the cannibals.”

“Indeed! I thought that the Lady who dwells yonder had something to do with that business. Did you see her, Hans?”

“Oh, yes! I saw her, Baas, and I think that without doubt she lifted the cloth from over her head and when the people of Rezu saw how ugly was the face beneath, it did frighten them a little. But doubtless the Great Medicine put that thought into her also, for, Baas, what could a silly woman do in such a case? Did you ever know of a woman who was of any use in a battle, or for anything else except to nurse babies, and this one does not even do that, no doubt because being so hideous under that sheet, no man can be found to marry her.”

Now I looked up by chance and in the light of the lamps saw Ayesha standing in the room, which she had entered through the open doorway, within six feet of Hans’ back indeed.

“Be sure Baas,” he went on, “that this bundle of rags is nothing but a common old cheat who frightens people by pretending to be a spook, as, if she dared to say that it was she who made those stinking Amahagger charge, and not the Great Medicine of the Opener-of-Roads, I would tell her to her face.”

Now I was too paralysed to speak, and while I was reflecting that it was fortunate Ayesha did not understand Dutch, she moved a little so that one of the lamps behind her caused her shadow to fall on to the back of the squatting Hans and over it on to the floor beyond. He saw it and stared at the distorted shape of the hooded head, then slowly screwed his neck round and looked upwards behind him.

For a moment he went on staring as though he were frozen, then uttering a wild yell, he scrambled to his feet, bolted out of the house and vanished into the night.

“It seems, Allan,” said Ayesha slowly, “that yonder yellow ape of yours is very bold at throwing sticks when the leopardess is not beneath the tree. But when she comes it is otherwise with him. Oh! make no excuse, for I know well that he was speaking ill things of me, because being curious, as apes are, he burns to learn what is behind my veil, and being simple, believes that no woman would hide her face unless its fashion were not pleasing to the nice taste of men.”

Then, to my relief, she laughed a little, softly, which showed me that she had a sense of humour, and went on, “Well, let him be, for he is a good ape and courageous in his fashion, as he showed when he went out to spy upon the host of Rezu, and stabbed the murderer-priest by the stone of sacrifice.”

“How can you know the words of Hans, Ayesha,” I asked, “seeing that he spoke in a tongue which you have never learned?”

“Perchance I read faces, Allan.”

“Or backs,” I suggested, remembering that his was turned to her.

“Or backs, or voices, or hearts. It matters little which, since read I do. But have done with such childish talk and lead me to this maiden who has been snatched from the claws of Rezu and a fate that is worse than death. Do you understand, Allan, that ere the demon Rezu took her to wife, the plan was to sacrifice her own father to her and then eat him as the woman with her was eaten, and

before her eyes? Now the father is dead, which is well, as I think the little yellow man said to you—nay, start not, I read it from his back [Ha!—JB]—since had he lived whose brain was rotted, he would have raved till his death's day. Better, therefore, that he should die like a man fighting against a foe unconquerable by all save one. But she still lives."

"Aye, but mindless, Ayesha."

"Which, in great trouble such as she has passed, is a blessed state, O Allan. Bethink you, have there not been days, aye and months, in your own life when you would have rejoiced to sleep in mindlessness? And should we not, perchance, be happier, all of us, if like the beasts we could not remember, foreknow and understand? Oh! men talk of Heaven, but believe me, the real Heaven is one of dreamless sleep, since life and wakefulness, however high their scale and on whatever star, mean struggle, which being so oft mistaken, must breed sorrow—or remorse that spoils all. Come now."

So I preceded her to the next ruined house where we found Inez lying on the bed still clothed in her barbaric trappings, although the veil had been drawn off her face. There she lay, wide-eyed and still, while the women watched her. Ayesha looked at her a while, then said to me,

"So they tricked her out to be Ayesha's mock and image, and in time accepted by those barbarians as my very self, and even set the seals of royalty on her," and she pointed to the gold discs stamped with the likeness of the sun. "Well, she is a fair maiden, white and gently bred, the first such that I have seen for many an age. Nor did she wish this trickery. Moreover she has taken no hurt; her soul has sunk deep into a sea of horror and that is all, whence doubtless it can be drawn again. Yet I think it best that for a while she should remember naught, lest her brain break, as did her father's, and therefore no net of mine shall drag her back to memory. Let that return gently in future days, and then of it not too much, for so shall all this terror become to her a void in which sad shapes move like shadows, and as shadows are soon forgot and gone, no more to be held than dreams by the awakening sense. Stand aside, Allan, and you women, leave us for a while."

I obeyed, and the women bowed and went. Then Ayesha drew up her veil, and knelt down by the bed of Inez, but in such a fashion that I could not see her face although I admit that I tried to do so. I could see, however, that she set her lips against those of Inez and as I gathered by her motions, seemed to breathe into her lips. Also she lifted her hands and placing one of them upon the heart of Inez, for a minute or more swayed the other from side to side above her eyes, pausing at times to touch her upon the forehead with her finger-tips.

Presently Inez stirred and sat up, whereon Ayesha took a vessel of milk which stood upon the floor and held it to her lips. Inez drank to the last drop, then sank on to the bed again. For a while longer Ayesha continued the motions of her hands, then let fall her veil and rose.

"Look, I have laid a spell upon her," she said, beckoning to me to draw near.

I did so and perceived that now the eyes of Inez were shut and that she seemed to be plunged in a deep and natural sleep.

"So she will remain for this night and that day which follows," said Ayesha, "and when she wakes it will be, I think, to believe herself once more a happy child. Not until she sees her home again will she find her womanhood, and then all this story will be forgotten by her. Of her father you must tell her that he died when you went out to hunt the river-beasts together, and if she seeks for certain others, that they have gone away. But I think that she will ask little more when she learns that he is dead, since I have laid that command upon her soul."

"Hypnotic suggestion," thought I to myself, "and I only hope to heaven that it will work."

Ayesha seemed to guess what was passing through my mind, for she nodded and said,

"Have no fear, Allan, for I am what the black axe-bearer and the little yellow man called a 'witch' which means, as you who are instructed know, one who has knowledge of medicine and other things and who holds a key to some of the mysteries that lie hid in Nature."

"For instance," I suggested, "of how to transport yourself into a battle at the right moment, and out of it again—also at the right moment."

"Yes, Allan, since watching from afar, I saw that those Amahagger curs were about to flee and that I was needed there to hearten them and to put fear into the army of Rezu. So I came."

"But how did you come, Ayesha?"

She laughed as she answered,

"Perhaps I did not come at all. Perhaps you only thought I came; since I seemed to be there the rest matters nothing."

As I still looked unconvinced she went on,

"Oh! foolish man, seek not to learn of that which is too high for you. Yet listen. You in your ignorance suppose that the soul dwells within the body, do you not?"

I answered that I had always been under this impression.

"Yet, Allan, it is otherwise, for the body dwells within the soul."

"Like the pearl in an oyster," I suggested.

"Aye, in a sense, since the pearl which to you is beautiful, is to the oyster a sickness and a poison, and so is the body to the soul whose temple it troubles and defiles. Yet round it is the white and holy soul that ever seeks to bring the vile body to its own purity and colour, yet oft-times fails. Learn, Allan, that flesh and spirit are the deadliest foes joined together by a high decree that they may forget their hate and perfect each other, or failing, be separate to all eternity, the spirit going to its own place and the flesh to its corruption."

"A strange theory," I said.

"Aye, Allan, and one which is so new to you that never will you understand it. Yet it is true and I set it out for this reason. The soul of man, being at liberty and not cooped within his narrow breast, is in touch with that soul of the Universe, which men know as God Whom they call by many names. Therefore it has all knowledge and perhaps all power, and at times the body within it, if it be a wise body, can draw from this well of knowledge and abounding power. So at least can I. And now you will understand why I am so good a doctress and how I came to appear in the battle, as you said, at the right time, and to leave it when my work was done."

"Oh! yes," I answered, "I quite understand. I thank you much for putting it so plainly."

She laughed a little, appreciating my jest, looked at the sleeping Inez, and said,

"The fair body of this lady dwells in a large soul, I think, though one of a somewhat sombre hue, for souls have their colours, Allan, and stain that which is within them. She will never be a happy woman."

"The black people named her Sad-Eyes," I said.

"Is it so? Well, I name her Sad-Heart, though for such often there is joy at last. Meanwhile she will forget; yes, she will forget the worst and how narrow was the edge between her and the arms of Rezu."

"Just the width of the blade of the axe, *Inkosikaas*," I answered. "But tell me, Ayesha, why could not that axe cut and why did my bullets flatten or turn aside when these smote the breast of Rezu?"

"Because his front-armour was good, Allan, I suppose," she replied indifferently, "and on his back he wore none."

"Then why did you fill my ears with such a different tale about that horrible giant having drunk of a Cup of Life, and all the rest?" I asked with irritation.

"I have forgotten, Allan. Perhaps because the curious, such as you are, like to hear tales even stranger than their own, which in the days to be may become their own. Therefore you will be wise to believe only what I do, and of what I tell you, nothing."

"I don't," I exclaimed exasperated.

She laughed again and replied,

"What need to say to me that which I know already? Yet perhaps in the future it may be different, since often by the alchemy of the mind the fables of our youth are changed into the facts of our age, and we come to believe in anything, as your little yellow man believes in some savage named Zikali, and those Amahagger believe in the talisman round your neck, and I who am the maddest of you all, believe in Love and Wisdom, and the black warrior, Umslopogaas, believes in the virtue of that great axe of his, rather than in those of his own courage and of the strength that wields it. Fools, every one of us, though perchance I am the greatest fool among them. Now take me to the warrior, Umslopogaas, whom I would thank, as I thank you, Allan, and the little yellow man, although he jeers at me with his sharp tongue, not knowing that if I were angered, with a breath I could cause him to cease to be."

"Then why did you not choose Rezu to cease to be, and his army also, Ayesha?"

"It seems that I have done these things through the axe of Umslopogaas and by the help of your generalship, Allan. Why then, waste my own strength when yours lay to my hand?"

"Because you had no power over Rezu, Ayesha, or so you told me."

"Have I not said that my words are snowflakes, meant to melt and leave no trace, hiding my thoughts as this veil hides my beauty? Yet as the beauty is beneath the veil, perchance there is truth beneath the words, though not that truth you think. So you are well answered, and for the rest, I wonder whether Rezu thought I had no power over him when yonder on the mountain spur he saw me float down upon his companies like a spirit of the night. Well, perchance some day I shall learn this and many other things."

I made no answer, since what was the use of arguing with a woman who told me frankly that all she said was false. So, although I longed to ask her why these Amahagger had such reverence for the talisman that Hans called the Great Medicine, since now I guessed that her first explanations concerning it were quite untrue, I held my tongue.

Yet as we went out of the house, by some coincidence she alluded to this very matter.

"I wish to tell you, Allan," she said, "why it was those Amahagger would not accept you as a General till their eyes had seen that which you wear upon your breast. Their tale of a legend of this very thing seemed that of savages or of their cunning priests, not to be believed by a wise man such as you are, like some others that you have heard in Kôr. Yet it has in it a grain of truth, for as it chanced a little while ago, about a hundred years ago, I think, the old wizard whose picture is cut upon the wood, came to visit her who held my place before me as ruler of this tribe—she was very like me and as I believe, my mother, Allan—because of her repute for wisdom.

"At that time I have heard there was a question of war between the worshippers of Lulala and the grandfather of Rezu. But this Zikali told the People of Lulala that they must not fight the People of Rezu until in a day to come a white man should visit Kôr and bring with him a piece of wood on which was cut the image of a dwarf like to that of Zikali himself. Then and not before they must fight and conquer the People of Rezu. Now this story came down among them and you who may have thought the first tale magical, will understand it in its simplicity: is it not so, you wise Allan?"

"Oh! yes," I answered, "except that I do not see how Zikali can have come here a hundred years ago, since men do not live as long, although he pretends to have done so."

"No, Allan, nor do I, but perhaps it was his father, or his grandfather who came, since being observant, you will have noted that if the parent is mis-formed, so often are the descendants; also that the pretence of wizardry at times comes down with the blood."

Again I made no answer for I saw that Ayesha was fooling me, and before she could exhaust that amusement we reached the place where Umslopogaas and his men were gathered round a camp fire. He sat silent, but Goroko with much animation was telling the story of the fight in picturesque and colourful language, or that part of it which he had seen, for the benefit of the two wounded men who took no share in it and who, lying on their blankets with heads thrust forward, were listening with eagerness to the entrancing tale. Suddenly they caught sight of Ayesha, and those of the party who could stand sprang to their feet, while one and all they gave her the royal salute of *Bayéte*.

She waited till the sound had died away. Then she said,

"I come to thank you and your men, O Wielder of the Axe, who have shown yourself very great in battle, and to say to you that my Spirit tells me that every one of you, yes, even those who are still sick, will come safe to your own land again and live out your years with honour."

Again they saluted at this pleasing intelligence, when I had translated it to them, for of course they knew no Arabic. Then she went on,

"I am told, Umslopogaas, Son of the Lion, as a certain king was named in your land, that the fight you made against Rezu was a very great fight, and that such a leap as yours above his head when you smote him with the axe on the hinder parts where he wore no armour, and brought him to his death, has not been seen before, nor will be again."

I rendered the words, and Umslopogaas, preferring truth to modesty, replied emphatically that this was the case.

“Because of that fight and that leap,” Ayesha went on, “as for other deeds that you have done and will do, my Spirit tells me that your name will live in story for many generations. Yet of what use is fame to the dead? Therefore I make you an offer. Bide here with me and you shall rule these Amahagger, and with them the remnant of the People of Rezu. Your cattle shall be countless and your wives the fairest in the land, and your children many, for I will lift a certain curse from off you so that no more shall you be childless. Do you accept, O Holder of the Axe?”

When he understood, Umslopogaas, after pondering a moment, asked if I meant to stay in this land and marry the white chieftainess who spoke such wise words and could appear and disappear in the battle at her will, and like a mountain-top hid her head in a cloud, which was his way of alluding to her veil.

I answered at once and with decision that I intended to do nothing of the sort and immediately regretted my words, since, although I spoke in Zulu, I suppose she read their meaning from my face. At any rate she understood the drift of them.

“Tell him, Allan,” she said with a kind of icy politeness, “that you will not stop here and marry me, because if ever I chose a husband he would not be a little man at the doors of whose heart so many women’s hands have knocked—yes, even those that are black—and not, I think, in vain. One, moreover, who holds himself so clever that he believes he has nothing left to learn, and in every flower of truth that is shown to him, however fair, smells only poison, and beneath, nurturing it, sees only the gross root of falsehood planted in corruption. Tell him these things, Allan, if it pleases you.”

“It does not please me,” I answered in a rage at her insults.

“Nor is it needful, Allan, since if I caught the meaning of that barbarous tongue you use aright, you have told him already. Well, let the jest pass, O man who least of all things desires to be Ayesha’s husband, and whom Ayesha least of all things desires as her spouse, and ask the Axe-bearer nothing since I perceive that without you he will not stay at Kôr. Nor indeed is it fated that he should do so, for now my Spirit tells me what it hid from me when I spoke a moment gone, that this warrior shall die in a great fight far away and that between then and now much sorrow waits him who save that of one, knows not how to win the love of women. Let him say moreover what reward he desires since if I can give it to him, it shall be his.”

Again I translated. Umslopogaas received her prophecies in stoical silence, and as I thought with indifference, and only said in reply,

“The glory that I have won is my reward and the only boon I seek at this queen’s hands is that if she can she should give me sight of a woman for whom my heart is hungry, and with it knowledge that this woman lives in that land whither I travel like all men.”

When she heard these words Ayesha said,

“True, I had forgotten. Your heart also is hungry, I think, Allan, for the vision of sundry faces that you see no more. Well, I will do my best, but since only faith fulfils itself, how can I who must strive to pierce the gates of darkness for one so unbelieving, know that they will open at my word? Come to me, both of you, at the sunset to-morrow.”

Then as though to change the subject, she talked to me for a long while about Kôr, of which she told me a most interesting history, true or false, that I omit here.

At length, as though suddenly she had grown tired, waving her hand to show that the conversation was ended, Ayesha went to the wounded men and touched them each in turn.

“Now they will recover swiftly,” she said, and leaving the place was gone into the darkness.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE GATE OF DEATH

Before turning in I examined these wounded men for myself. The truth is that I was anxious to learn their exact condition in order that I might make an estimate as to when it would be possible for us to leave this valley or crater bottom of Kôr, of which I was heartily tired. Who could desire to stay in a place where he had not only been involved in a deal of hard, doubtful, and very dangerous fighting from which all personal interest was absent, but where also he was meshed in a perfect spider's web of bewilderment, and exposed to continual insult into the bargain?

For that is what it came to; this Ayesha took every opportunity to jeer at and affront me. And why? Just because I had conceived doubts, which somehow she discovered, of the amazing tales with which it had amused her to stuff me, as a farmer's wife does a turkey poult with meal pellets. How could she expect me, a man, after all, of some experience, to believe such lies, which, not half an hour before, in the coolest possible fashion she had herself admitted to be lies and nothing else, told for the mere pleasure of romancing?

The immortal Rezu, for instance, who had drunk of the Cup of Life or some such rubbish, now turned out to be nothing but a brawny savage descended from generations of chiefs also called Rezu. Moreover the immemorial Ayesha, who also had drunk of Cups of Life, and according to her first story, had lived in this place for thousands of years, had come here with a mother, who filled the same mystic rôle before her for the benefit of an extremely gloomy and disagreeable tribe of Semitic savages. Yet she was cross with me because I had not swallowed her crude and indigestible mixture of fable and philosophy without a moment's question.

At least I supposed that this was the reason, though another possible explanation did come into my mind. I had refused to be duly overcome by her charms, not because I was unimpressed, for who could be, having looked upon that blinding beauty even for a moment? but rather because, after sundry experiences, I had at last attained to some power of judgment and learned what it is best to leave alone. Perhaps this had annoyed her, especially as no white man seemed to have come her way for a long while and the fabulous Kallikrates had not put in his promised appearance.

Also it was unfortunate that in one way or another—how did she do it, I wondered—she had interpreted Umslopogaas' question to me about marrying her, and my compromising reply. Not that for one moment, as I saw very clearly, did she wish to marry me. But that fact, intuition suggested to my mind, did not the least prevent her from being angry because I shared her views upon this important subject.

Oh! the whole thing was a bore and the sooner I saw the last of that veiled lady and the interesting but wearisome ruins in which she dwelt, the better I should be pleased, although apparently I must trek homewards with a poor young woman who was out of her mind, leaving the bones of her unfortunate father behind me. I admitted to myself, however, that there were consolations in the fact that Providence had thus decreed, for Robertson since he gave up drink had not been a cheerful companion, and two mad people would really have been more than I could manage.

To return, for these reasons I examined the two wounded Zulus with considerable anxiety, only to discover another instance of the chicanery which it amused this Ayesha to play off upon me. For what did I find? That they were practically well. Their hurts, which had never been serious, had healed wonderfully in that pure air, as those of savages have a way of doing, and they told me themselves that they felt quite strong again. Yet with colossal impudence Ayesha had managed to suggest to my mind that she was going to work some remarkable cure upon them, who were already cured.

Well, it was of a piece with the rest of her conduct and there was nothing to do except go to bed, which I did with much gratitude that my resting place that night was not of another sort. The last thing I remember was wondering how on earth Ayesha appeared and disappeared in the course of that battle, a problem as to which I could find no solution, though, as in the case of the others, I was sure that one would occur to me in course of time.

I slept like a top, so soundly indeed that I think there was some kind of soporific in the pick-me-up which looked like sherry, especially as the others who had drunk of it also passed an excellent night.

About ten o'clock on the following morning I awoke feeling particularly well and quite as though I had been enjoying a week at the seaside instead of my recent adventures, which included an abominable battle and some agonising moments during which I thought that my number was up upon the board of Destiny.

I spent the most of that day lounging about, eating, talking over the details of the battle with Umslopogaas and the Zulus and smoking more than usual. (I forgot to say that these Amahagger grew some capital tobacco of which I had obtained a supply, although like most Africans, they only used it in the shape of snuff.) The truth was that after all my marvellings and acute anxieties, also mental and physical exertions, I felt like the housemaid who caused to be cut upon her tombstone that she had gone to a better land where her ambition was to do nothing "for ever and ever." I just wanted to be completely idle and vacuous-minded for at least a month, but as I knew that all I could expect in that line was a single bank holiday, like a City clerk on the spree, of it I determined to make the most.

The result was that before the evening I felt very bored indeed. I had gone to look at Inez, who was still fast asleep, as Ayesha said would be the case, but whose features seemed to have plumped up considerably. The reason of this I gathered from her Amahagger nurses, was that at certain intervals she had awakened sufficiently to swallow considerable quantities of milk, or rather cream, which I hoped would not make her ill. I had chatted with the wounded Zulus, who were now walking about, more bored even than I was myself, and heaping maledictions on their ancestral spirits because they had not been well enough to take part in the battle against Rezu.

I even took a little stroll to look for Hans, who had vanished in his mysterious fashion, but the afternoon was so hot and oppressive with coming thunder, that soon I came back again and fell into a variety of reflections that I need not detail.

While I was thus engaged and meditating, not without uneasiness, upon the ordeal that lay before me after sunset, for I felt sure that it would be an ordeal, Hans appeared and said that the Amahagger *impi* or army was gathered on that spot where I had been elected to the proud position of their General. He added that he believed—how he got this information I do not know—that the White Lady was going to hold a review of them and give them the rewards that they had earned in the battle.

Hearing this, Umslopogaas and the other Zulus said that they would like to see this review if I would accompany them. Although I did not want to go nor indeed desired ever to look at another Amahagger, I consented to save the trouble of argument, on condition that we should do so from a distance.

So, including the wounded men, we strolled off and presently came to the crumbled wall of the old city, beyond which lay the great moat now dry, that once had encircled it with water.

Here on the top of this wall we sat down where we could see without being seen, and observed the Amahagger companies, considerably reduced during the battle, being marshalled by their captains beneath us and about a couple of hundred yards away. Also we observed several groups of men under guard. These we took to be prisoners captured in the fight with Rezu, who, as Hans remarked with a smack of his lips, were probably awaiting sacrifice.

I said I hoped not and yawned, for really the afternoon was intensely hot and the weather most peculiar. The sun had vanished behind clouds, and vapours filled the still air, so dense that at times it grew almost dark; also when these cleared for brief intervals, the landscape in the grey, unholy light looked distorted and unnatural, as it does during an eclipse of the sun.

Goroko, the witch-doctor, stared round him, sniffed the air and then remarked ocularly that it was “wizard’s weather” and that there were many spirits about. Upon my word I felt inclined to agree with him, for my feelings were very uncomfortable, but I only replied that if so, I should be obliged if he, as a professional, would be good enough to keep them off me. Of course I knew that electrical charges were about, which accounted for my sensations, and wished that I had never left the camp.

It was during one of these periods of dense gloom that Ayesha must have arrived upon the review ground. At least, when it lifted, there she was in her white garments, surrounded by women and guards, engaged apparently in making an oration, for although I could not hear a word, I could see by the motions of her arms that she was speaking.

Had she been the central figure in some stage scene, no limelights could have set her off to better advantage, than did those of the heavens above her. Suddenly, through the blanket of cloud, flowing from a hole in it that looked like an eye, came a blood-red ray which fell full upon her, so that she alone was fiercely visible whilst all around was gloom in which shapes moved dimly. Certainly she looked strange and even terrifying in that red ray which stained her robe till I who had but just come out of battle with its “confused noise,” began to think of “the garments rolled in blood” of which I often read in my favourite Old Testament. For crimson was she from head to foot; a tall shape of terror and of wrath.

The eye in heaven shut and the ray went out. Then came one of the spaces of grey light and in it I saw men being brought up, apparently from the groups of prisoners, under guard, and, to the number of a dozen or more, stood in a line before Ayesha.

Then I saw nothing more for a long while, because blackness seemed to flow in from every quarter of the heavens and to block out the scene beneath. At least after a pause of perhaps five minutes, during which the stillness was intense, the storm broke.

It was a very curious storm; in all my experience of African tempests I cannot recall one which it resembled. It began with the usual cold and wailing wind. This died away, and suddenly the whole arch of heaven was alive with little lightnings that seemed to strike horizontally, not downwards to the earth, weaving a web of fire upon the surface of the sky.

By the illumination of these lightnings which, but for the swiftness of their flashing and greater intensity, somewhat resembled a dense shower of shooting stars, I perceived that Ayesha was addressing the men that had been brought before her, who stood dejectedly in a long line with their heads bent, quite unattended, since their guards had fallen back.

“If I were going to receive a reward of cattle or wives, I should look happier than those moon-worshippers, Baas,” remarked Hans reflectively.

“Perhaps it would depend,” I answered, “upon what the cattle and wives were like. If the cattle had red-water and would bring disease into your herd, or wild bulls that would gore you, and the wives were skinny old widows with evil tongues, then I think you would look as do those men, Hans.”

I don’t quite know what made me speak thus, but I believe it was some sense of pending death or disaster, suggested, probably, by the ominous character of the setting provided by Nature to the curious drama of which we were witnesses.

“I never thought of that, Baas,” commented Hans, “but it is true that all gifts are not good, especially witches’ gifts.”

As he spoke the little net-like lightnings died away, leaving behind them a gross darkness through which, far above us, the wind wailed again.

Then suddenly all the heaven was turned into one blaze of light, and by it I saw Ayesha standing tall and rigid with her hand pointed towards the line of men in front of her. The blaze went out, to be followed by blackness, and to return almost instantly in a yet fiercer blaze which seemed to fall earthwards in a torrent of fire that concentrated itself in a kind of flame-spout upon the spot where Ayesha stood.

Through that flame or rather in the heart of it, I saw Ayesha and the file of men in front of her, as the great King saw the prophets in the midst of the furnace that had been heated sevenfold. Only these men did not walk about in the fire; no, they fell backwards, while Ayesha alone remained upon her feet with outstretched hand.

Next came more blackness and crash upon crash of such thunder that the earth shook as it reverberated from the mountain cliffs. Never in my life did I hear such fearful thunder. It frightened the Zulus so much, that they fell upon their faces, except Goroko and Umslopogaas, whose pride kept them upon their feet, the former because he had a reputation to preserve as a “Heaven-herd,” or Master of tempests.

I confess that I should have liked to follow their example, and lie down, being dreadfully afraid lest the lightning should strike me. But there—I did not.

At last the thunder died away and in the most mysterious fashion that violent tempest came to a sudden end, as does a storm upon the stage. No rain fell, which in itself was surprising enough and most unusual, but in place of it a garment of the completest calm

descended upon the earth. By degrees, too, the darkness passed and the westering sun reappeared. Its rays fell upon the place where the Amahagger companies had stood, but now not one of them was to be seen.

They were all gone and Ayesha with them. So completely had they vanished away that I should have thought that we suffered from illusions, were it not for the line of dead men which lay there looking very small and lonesome on the veld; mere dots indeed at that distance.

We stared at each other and at them, and then Goroko said that he would like to inspect the bodies to learn whether lightning killed at Kôr as it did elsewhere, also whether it had smitten them altogether or leapt from man to man. This, as a professional "Heaven-herd," he declared he could tell from the marks upon these unfortunates.

As I was curious also and wanted to make a few observations, I consented. So with the exception of the wounded men, who I thought should avoid the exertion, we scrambled down the débris of the tumbled wall and across the open space beyond, reaching the scene of the tragedy without meeting or seeing anyone.

There lay the dead, eleven of them, in an exact line as they had stood. They were all upon their backs with widely-opened eyes and an expression of great fear frozen upon their faces. Some of these I recognised, as did Umslopogaas and Hans. They were soldiers or captains who had marched under me to attack Rezu, although until this moment I had not seen any of them after we began to descend the ridge where the battle took place.

"Baas," said Hans, "I believe that these were the traitors who slipped away and told Rezu of our plans so that he attacked us on the ridge, instead of our attacking him on the plain as we had arranged so nicely. At least they were none of them in the battle and afterwards I heard the Amahagger talking of some of them."

I remarked that if so the lightning had discriminated very well in this instance.

Meanwhile Goroko was examining the bodies one by one, and presently called out,

"These doomed ones died not by lightning but by witchcraft. There is not a burn upon one of them, nor are their garments scorched."

I went to look and found that it was perfectly true; to all outward appearance the eleven were quite unmarked and unharmed. Except for their frightened air, they might have died a natural death in their sleep.

"Does lightning always scorch?" I asked Goroko.

"Always, Macumazahn," he answered, "that is, if he who has been struck is killed, as these are, and not only stunned. Moreover, most of yonder dead wear knives which should have melted or shattered with the sheaths burnt off them. Yet those knives are as though they had just left the smith's hammer and the whet-stone," and he drew some of them to show me.

Again it was quite true and here I may remark that my experience tallied with that of Goroko, since I have never seen anyone killed by lightning on whom or on whose clothing there was not some trace of its passage.

"Ow!" said Umslopogaas, "this is witchcraft, not Heaven-wrath. The place is enchanted. Let us get away lest we be smitten also who have not earned doom like those traitors."

"No need to fear," said Hans, "since with us is the Great Medicine of Zikali which can tie up the lightning as an old woman does a bundle of sticks."

Still I observed that for all his confidence, Hans himself was the first to depart and with considerable speed. So we went back to our camp without more conversation, since the Zulus were scared and I confess that myself I could not understand the matter, though no doubt it admitted of some quite simple explanation.

However that might be, this Kôr was a queer place with its legends, its sullen Amahagger and its mysterious queen, to whom at times, in spite of my inner conviction to the contrary, I was still inclined to attribute powers beyond those that are common even among very beautiful and able women.

This reflection reminded me that she had promised us a further exhibition of those powers and within an hour or two. Remembering this I began to regret that I had ever asked for any such manifestations, for who knew what these might or might not involve?

So much did I regret it that I determined, unless Ayesha sent for us, as she had said she would do, I would conveniently forget the appointment. Luckily Umslopogaas seemed to be of the same way of thinking; at any rate he went off to eat his evening meal without alluding to it at all. So I made up my mind that I would not bring the matter to his notice and having ascertained that Inez was still asleep, I followed his example and dined myself, though without any particular appetite.

As I finished the sun was setting in a perfectly clear sky, so as there was no sign of any messenger, I thought that I would go to bed early, leaving orders that I was not to be disturbed. But on this point my luck was lacking, for just as I had taken off my coat, Hans arrived and said that old Billali was without and had come to take me somewhere.

Well, there was nothing to do but to put it on again. Before I had finished this operation Billali himself arrived with undignified and unusual haste. I asked him what was the matter, and he answered inconsequently that the Black One, the slayer of Rezu, was at the door "with his axe."

"That generally accompanies him," I replied. Then, remembering the cause of Billali's alarm, I explained to him that he must not take too much notice of a few hasty words spoken by an essentially gentle-natured person whose nerve had given way beneath provocation and bodily effort. The old fellow bowed in assent and stroked his beard, but I noticed that while Umslopogaas was near, he clung to me like a shadow. Perhaps he thought that nervous attacks might be recurrent, like those of fever.

Outside the house I found Umslopogaas leaning on his axe and looking at the sky in which the last red rays of evening lingered.

"The sun has set, Macumazahn," he said, "and it is time to visit this white queen as she bade us, and to learn whether she can indeed lead us 'down below' where the dead are said to dwell."

So he had not forgotten, which was disconcerting. To cover up my own doubts I asked him with affected confidence and cheerfulness whether he was not afraid to risk this journey "down below," that is, to the Realm of Death.

"Why should I fear to tread a road that awaits the feet of all of us and at the gate of which we knock day by day, especially if we chance to live by war, as do you and I, Macumazahn?" he inquired with a quiet dignity, which made me feel ashamed.

"Why indeed?" I answered, adding to myself, "though I should much prefer any other highway."

After this we started without more words, I keeping up my spirits by reflecting that the whole business was nonsense and that there could be nothing to dread.

All too soon we passed the ruined archway and were admitted into Ayesha's presence in the usual fashion. As Billali, who remained outside of them, drew the curtains behind us, I observed, to my astonishment, that Hans had sneaked in after me, and squatted down quite close to them, apparently in the hope of being overlooked.

It seemed, as I gathered later, that somehow or other he had guessed, or become aware of the object of our visit, and that his burning curiosity had overcome his terror of the "White Witch." Or possibly he hoped to discover whether or not she were so ugly as he supposed her veil-hidden face to be. At any rate there he was, and if Ayesha noticed him, as I think she did, for I saw by the motion of her head, that she was looking in his direction, she made no remark.

For a while she sat still in her chair contemplating us both. Then she said,

"How comes it that you are late? Those that seek their lost loves should run with eager feet, but yours have tarried."

I muttered some excuse to which she did not trouble to listen, for she went on,

"I think, Allan, that your sandals, which should be winged like to those of the Roman Mercury, are weighted with the grey lead of fear. Well, it is not strange, since you have come to travel through the Gates of Death that are feared by all, even by Ayesha's self, for who knows what he may find beyond them? Ask the Axe-Bearer if he also is afraid."

I obeyed, rendering all that she had said into the Zulu idiom as best I could.

"Say to the Queen," answered Umslopogaas, when he understood, "that I fear nothing, except women's tongues. I am ready to pass the Gates of Death and, if need be, to come back no more. With the white people I know it is otherwise because of some dark teachings to which they listen, that tell of terrors to be, such as we who are black do not dread. Still, we believe that there are ghosts and that the spirits of our fathers live on and as it chances I would learn whether this is so, who above all things desire to meet a certain ghost, for which reason I journeyed to this far land."

"Say these things to the white Queen, Macumazahn, and tell her that if she should send me to a place whence there is no return, I who do not love the world, shall not blame her overmuch, though it is true that I should have chosen to die in war. Now I have spoken."

When I had passed on all this speech to Ayesha, her comment on it was,

"This black Captain has a spirit as brave as his body, but how is it with your spirit, Allan? Are you also prepared to risk so much? Learn that I can promise you nothing, save that when I loose the bonds of your mortality and send out your soul to wander in the depths of Death, as I believe that I can do, though even of this I am not certain—you must pass through a gate of terrors that may be closed behind you by a stronger arm than mine. Moreover, what you will find beyond it I do not know, since be sure of this, each of us has his own heaven or his own hell, or both, that soon or late he is doomed to travel. Now will you go forward, or go back? Make choice while there is still time."

At all this ominous talk I felt my heart shrivel like a fire-withered leaf, if I may use that figure, and my blood assume the temperature and consistency of ice-cream. Earnestly did I curse myself for having allowed my curiosity about matters which we are not meant to understand to bring me to the edge of such a choice. Swiftly I determined to temporise, which I did by asking Ayesha whether she would accompany me upon this eerie expedition.

She laughed a little as she answered,

"Bethink you, Allan. Am I, whose face you have seen, a meet companion for a man who desires to visit the loves that once were his? What would they say or think, if they should see you hand in hand with such a one?"

"I don't know and don't care," I replied desperately, "but this is the kind of journey on which one requires a guide who knows the road. Cannot Umslopogaas go first and come back to tell me how it has fared with him?"

"If the brave and instructed white lord, panoplied in the world's last Faith, is not ashamed to throw the savage in his ignorance out like a feather to test the winds of hell and watch the while to learn whether these blow him back unscorched, or waft him into fires whence there is no return, perchance it might so be ordered, Allan. Ask him yourself, Allan, if he is willing to run this errand for your sake. Or perhaps the little yellow man——" and she paused.

At this point Hans, who having a smattering of Arabic understood something of our talk, could contain himself no longer.

"No, Baas," he broke in from his corner by the curtain, "not *me*. I don't care for hunting spooks, Baas, which leave no spoor that you can follow and are always behind when you think they are in front. Also there are too many of them waiting for me down there and how can I stand up to them until I am a spook myself and know their ways of fighting? Also if you should die when your spirit is away, I want to be left that I may bury you nicely."

"Be silent," I said in my sternest manner. Then, unable to bear more of Ayesha's mockery, for I felt that as usual she was mocking me, I added with all the dignity that I could command,

"I am ready to make this journey through the gate of Death, Ayesha, if indeed you can show me the road. For one purpose and no other I came to Kôr, namely to learn, if so I might, whether those who have died upon the world, live on elsewhere. Now, what must I do?"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE LESSON

"Yes," answered Ayesha, laughing very softly, "for that purpose alone, O truth-seeking Allan, whose curiosity is so fierce that the wide world cannot hold it, did you come to Kôr and not to seek wealth or new lands, or to fight more savages. No, not even to look upon a certain Ayesha, of whom the old wizard told you, though I think you have always loved to try to lift the veil that hides women's hearts, if not their faces. Yet it was I who brought you to Kôr for my own purposes, not your desire, nor Zikali's map and talisman, since had not the white lady who lies sick been stolen by Rezu, never would you have pursued the journey nor found the way hither."

"How could you have had anything to do with that business?" I asked testily, for my nerves were on edge and I said the first thing that came into my mind.

"That, Allan, is a question over which you will wonder for a long while either beneath or beyond the sun, as you will wonder concerning much that has to do with me, which your little mind, shut in its iron box of ignorance and pride, cannot understand to-day.

"For example, you have been wondering, I am sure, how the lightning killed those eleven men whose bodies you went to look on an hour or two ago, and left the rest untouched. Well, I will tell you at once that it was not lightning that killed them, although the strength within me was manifest to you in storm, but rather what that witch-doctor of your following called wizardry. Because they were traitors who betrayed your army to Rezu, I killed them with my wrath and by the wand of my power. Oh! you do not believe, yet perhaps ere long you will, since thus to fulfil your prayer I must also kill you—almost. That is the trouble, Allan. To kill you outright would be easy, but to kill you just enough to set your spirit free and yet leave one crevice of mortal life through which it can creep back again, that is most difficult; a thing that only I can do and even of myself I am not sure."

"Pray do not try the experiment——" I began thoroughly alarmed, but she cut me short.

"Disturb me no more, Allan, with the tremors and changes of your uncertain mind, lest you should work more evil than you think, and making mine uncertain also, spoil my skill. Nay, do not try to fly, for already the net has thrown itself about you and you cannot stir, who are bound like a little gilded wasp in the spider's web, or like birds beneath the eyes of basilisks."

This was true, for I found that, strive as I would, I could not move a limb or even an eyelid. I was frozen to that spot and there was nothing for it except to curse my folly and say my prayers.

All this while she went on talking, but of what she said I have not the faintest idea, because my remaining wits were absorbed in these much-needed implorations.

Presently, of a sudden, I appeared to see Ayesha seated in a temple, for there were columns about her, and behind her was an altar on which a fire burned. All round her, too, were hooded snakes like to that which she wore about her middle, fashioned in gold. To these snakes she sang and they danced to her singing; yes, with flickering tongues they danced upon their tails! What the scene signified I cannot conceive, unless it meant that this mistress of magic was consulting her familiars.

Then that vision vanished and Ayesha's voice began to seem very far away and dreamy, also her wondrous beauty became visible to me through her veil, as though I had acquired a new sense that overcame the limitations of mortal sight. Even in this extremity I reflected it was well that the last thing I looked on should be something so glorious. No, not quite the last thing, for out of the corners of my eyes I saw that Umslopogaas from a sitting position had sunk on to his back and lay, apparently dead, with his axe still gripped tightly and held above his head, as though his arm had been turned to ice.

After this terrible things began to happen to me and I became aware that I was dying. A great wind seemed to catch me up and blow me to and fro, as a leaf is blown in the eddies of a winter gale. Enormous rushes of darkness flowed over me, to be succeeded by vivid bursts of brightness that dazzled like lightning. I fell off precipices and at the foot of them was caught by some fearful strength and tossed to the very skies.

From those skies I was hurled down again into a kind of whirlpool of inky night, round which I spun perpetually, as it seemed for hours and hours. But worst of all was the awful loneliness from which I suffered. It seemed to me as though there were no other living thing in all the Universe and never had been and never would be any other living thing. I felt as though I were the Universe rushing solitary through space for ages upon ages in a frantic search for fellowship, and finding none.

Then something seemed to grip my throat and I knew that I had died—for the world floated away from beneath me.

Now fear and every mortal sensation left me, to be replaced by a new and spiritual terror. I, or rather my disembodied consciousness, seemed to come up for judgment, and the horror of it was that I appeared to be my own judge. There, a very embodiment of cold justice, my Spirit, grown luminous, sat upon a throne and to it, with dread and merciless particularity I set out all my misdeeds. It was as if some part of me remained mortal, for I could see my two eyes, my mouth and my hands, but nothing else—and strange enough they looked. From the eyes came tears, from the mouth flowed words and the hands were joined, as though in prayer to that throned and adamant Spirit which was ME.

It was as though this Spirit were asking how my body had served its purposes and advanced its mighty ends, and in reply—oh! what a miserable tale I had to tell. Fault upon fault, weakness upon weakness, sin upon sin; never before did I understand how black was my record. I tried to relieve the picture with some incidents of attempted good, but that Spirit would not hearken. It seemed to

say that it had gathered up the good and knew it all. It was of the evil that it would learn, not of the good that had bettered it, but of the evil by which it had been harmed.

Hearing this there rose up in my consciousness some memory of what Ayesha had said; namely, that the body lived within the temple of the spirit which is oft defied, and not the spirit in the body.

The story was told and I hearkened for the judgment, my own judgment on myself, which I knew would be accepted without question and registered for good or ill. But none came, since ere the balance sank this way or that, ere it could be uttered, I was swept afar.

Through Infinity I was swept, and as I fled faster than the light, the meaning of what I had seen came home to me. I knew, or seemed to know for the first time, that at the last *man must answer to himself*, or perhaps to a divine principle within himself, that out of his own free-will, through long æons and by a million steps, he climbs or sinks to the heights or depths dormant in his nature; that from what he was, springs what he is, and what he is, engenders what he shall be for ever and aye.

Now I envisaged Immortality and splendid and awful was its face. It clasped me to its breast and in the vast circle of its arms I was up-borne, I who knew myself to be without beginning and without end, and yet of the past and of the future knew nothing, save that these were full of mysteries.

As I went I encountered others, or overtook them, making the same journey. Robertson swept past me, and spoke, but in a tongue I could not understand. I noted that the madness had left his eyes and that his fine-cut features were calm and spiritual. The other wanderers I did not know.

I came to a region of blinding light; the thought rose in me that I must have reached the sun, or a sun, though I felt no heat. I stood in a lovely, shining valley about which burned mountains of fire. There were huge trees in that valley, but they glowed like gold and their flowers and fruit were as though they had been fashioned of many-coloured flames.

The place was glorious beyond compare, but very strange to me and not to be described. I sat me down upon a boulder which burned like a ruby, whether with heat or colour I do not know, by the edge of a stream that flowed with what looked like fire and made a lovely music. I stooped down and drank of this water of flames and the scent and the taste of it were as those of the costliest wine.

There, beneath the spreading limbs of a fire-tree I sat, and examined the strange flowers that grew around, coloured like rich jewels and perfumed above imagining. There were birds also which might have been feathered with sapphires, rubies and amethysts, and their song was so sweet that I could have wept to hear it. The scene was wonderful and filled me with exaltation, for I thought of the land where it is promised that there shall be no more night.

People began to appear; men, women, and even children, though whence they came I could not see. They did not fly and they did not walk; they seemed to drift towards me, as unguided boats drift upon the tide. One and all they were very beautiful, but their beauty was not human although their shapes and faces resembled those of men and women made glorious. None were old, and except the children, none seemed very young; it was as though they had grown backwards or forwards to middle life and rested there at their very best.

Now came the marvel; all these uncounted people were known to me, though so far as my knowledge went I had never set eyes on most of them before. Yet I was aware that in some forgotten life or epoch I had been intimate with every one of them; also that it was the fact of my presence and the call of my sub-conscious mind which drew them to this spot. Yet that presence and that call were not visible or audible to them, who, I suppose, flowed down some stream of sympathy, why or whither they did not know. Had I been as they were perchance they would have seen me, as it was they saw nothing and I could not speak and tell them of my presence.

Some of this multitude, however, I knew well enough even when they had departed years and years ago. But about these I noted this, that every one of them was a man or a woman or a child for whom I had felt love or sympathy or friendship. Not one was a person whom I had disliked or whom I had no wish to see again. If they spoke at all I could not hear—or read—their speech, yet to a certain extent I could hear their thoughts.

Many of these were beyond the power of my appreciation on subjects of which I had no knowledge, or that were too high for me, but some were of quite simple things such as concern us upon the earth, such as of friendship, or learning, or journeys made or to be made, or art, or literature, or the wonders of Nature, or of the fruits of the earth, as they knew them in this region.

This I noted too, that each separate thought seemed to be hallowed and enclosed in an atmosphere of prayer or heavenly aspiration, as a seed is enclosed in the heart of a flower, or a fruit in its odorous rind, and that this prayer or aspiration presently appeared to bear the thought away, whither I knew not. Moreover, all these thoughts, even of the humblest things, were beauteous and spiritual, nothing cruel or impure or even coarse was to be found among them: they radiated charity, purity and goodness.

Among them I perceived were none that had to do with our earth; this and its affairs seemed to be left far behind these thinkers, a truth that chilled my soul was alien to their company. Worse still, so far as I could discover, although I knew that all these bright ones had been near to me at some hour in the measurements of time and space, not one of their musings dwelt upon me or on aught with which I had to do.

Between me and them there was a great gulf fixed and a high wall built.

Oh, look! One came shining like a star, and from far away came another with dove-like eyes and beautiful exceedingly, and with this last a maiden, whose eyes were as hers who my own heart told me was her mother.

Well, I knew them both; they were those whom I had come to seek, the women who had been mine upon the earth, and at the sight of them my spirit thrilled. Surely they would discover me. Surely at least they would speak of me and feel my presence.

But, although they stayed within a pace or two of where I rested, alas! it was not so. They seemed to kiss and to exchange swift thoughts about many things, high things of which I will not write, and common things; yes, even of the shining robes they wore, but never a one of *me*! I strove to rise and go to them, but could not; I strove to speak and could not; I strove to throw out my thought to them and could not; it fell back upon my head like a stone hurled heavenward.

They were remote from me, utterly apart. I wept tears of bitterness that I should be so near and yet so far; a dull and jealous rage burned in my heart, and this they did seem to feel, or so I fancied; at any rate, apparently by mutual consent, they moved further from me as though something pained them. Yes, my love could not reach their perfected natures, but my anger hurt them.

As I sat chewing this root of bitterness, a man appeared, a very noble man, in whom I recognised my father grown younger and happier-looking, but still my father, with whom came others, men and women whom I knew to be my brothers and sisters who had died in youth far away in Oxfordshire. Joy leapt up in me, for I thought—these will surely know me and give me welcome, since, though here sex has lost its power, blood must still call to blood.

But it was not so. They spoke, or interchanged their thoughts, but not one of me. I read something that passed from my father to them. It was a speculation as to what had brought them all together there, and read also the answer hazarded, that perhaps it might be to give welcome to some unknown who was drawing near from below and would feel lonely and unfriended. Thereon my father replied that he did not see or feel this wanderer, and thought that it could not be so, since it was his mission to greet such on their coming.

Then in an instant all were gone and that lovely, glowing plain was empty, save for myself seated on the ruby-like stone, weeping tears of blood and shame and loss within my soul.

So I sat a long while, till presently I was aware of a new presence, a presence dusky and splendid and arrayed in rich barbaric robes. Straight she came towards me, like a thrown spear, and I knew her for a certain royal and savage woman who on earth was named Mameena, or “Wind-that-wailed.” Moreover she divined me, though see me she could not.

“Art there, Watcher-in-the-Night, watching in the light?” she said or thought, I know not which, but the words came to me in the Zulu tongue.

“Aye,” she went on, “I know that thou art there; from ten thousand leagues away I felt thy presence and broke from my own place to welcome thee, though I must pay for it with burning chains and bondage. How did those welcome thee whom thou camest out to seek? Did they clasp thee in their arms and press their kisses on thy brow? Or did they shrink away from thee because the smell of earth was on thy hands and lips?”

I seemed to answer that they did not appear to know that I was there.

“Aye, they did not know because their love is not enough, because they have grown too fine for love. But I, the sinner, I knew well, and here am I ready to suffer all for thee and to give thee place within this stormy heart of mine. Forget them, then, and come to rule with me who still am queen in my own house that thou shalt share. There we will live royally and when our hour comes, at least we shall have had our day.”

Now before I could reply, some power seemed to seize this splendid creature and whirl her thence so that she departed, flashing these words from her mind to mine,

“For a little while farewell, but remember always that Mameena, the Wailing Wind, being still as a sinful woman in a woman’s love and of the earth, earthy, found thee, whom all the rest forgot. O Watcher-in-the-Night, watch in the night for me, for there thou shalt find me, the Child of Storm, again, and yet again.”

She was gone and once more I sat in utter solitude upon that ruby stone, staring at the jewelled flowers and the glorious flaming trees and the lambent waters of the brook. What was the meaning of it all, I wondered, and why was I deserted by everyone save a single savage woman, and why had she a power to find me which was denied to all the rest? Well, she had given me an answer, because she was “as a sinful woman with a woman’s love and of the earth, earthy,” while with the rest it was otherwise. Oh! this was clear, that in the heavens man has no friend among the heavenly, save perhaps the greatest Friend of all Who understands both flesh and spirit.

Thus I mused in this burning world which was still so beautiful, this alien world into which I had thrust myself unwanted and unsought. And while I mused this happened. The fiery waters of the stream were disturbed by something and looking up I saw the cause.

A dog had plunged into them and was swimming towards me. At a glance I knew that dog on which my eyes had not fallen for decades. It was a mongrel, half spaniel and half bull-terrier, which for years had been the dear friend of my youth and died at last on the horns of a wounded wildebeeste that attacked me when I had fallen from my horse upon the veld. Boldly it tackled the maddened buck, thus giving me time to scramble to my rifle and shoot it, but not before the poor hound had yielded its life for mine, since presently it died disembowelled, but licking my hand and forgetful of its agonies. This dog, Smut by name, it was that swam or seemed to swim the brook of fire. It scrambled to the hither shore, it nosed the earth and ran to the ruby stone and stared about it whining and sniffing.

At last it seemed to see or feel me, for it stood upon its hind legs and licked my face, yelping with mad joy, as I could see though I heard nothing. Now I wept in earnest and bent down to hug and kiss the faithful beast, but this I could not do, since like myself it was only shadow.

Then suddenly all dissolved in a cataract of many-coloured flames and I fell down into an infinite gulf of blackness.

Surely Ayesha was talking to me! What did she say? What did she say? I could not catch her words, but I caught her laughter and knew that after her fashion she was making a mock of me. My eyelids were dragged down as though with heavy sleep; it was difficult to lift them. At last they were open and I saw Ayesha seated on her couch before me and—this I noted at once—with her lovely face unveiled. I looked about me, seeking Umslopogaas and Hans. But they were gone as I guessed they must be, since otherwise Ayesha would not have been unveiled. We were quite alone. She was addressing me and in a new fashion, since now she had abandoned the formal “you” and was using the more impressive and intimate “thou,” much as is the manner of the French.

"Thou hast made thy journey, Allan," she said, "and what thou hast seen there thou shalt tell me presently. Yet from thy mien I gather this—that thou art glad to look upon flesh and blood again and, after the company of spirits, to find that of mortal woman. Come then and sit beside me and tell thy tale."

"Where are the others?" I asked as I rose slowly to obey, for my head swam and my feet seemed feeble.

"Gone, Allan, who as I think have had enough of ghosts, which is perhaps thy case also. Come, drink this and be a man once more. Drink it to me whose skill and power have brought thee safe from lands that human feet were never meant to tread," and taking a strange-shaped cup from a stool that stood beside her, she offered it to me.

I drank to the last drop, neither knowing nor caring whether it were wine or poison, since my heart seemed desperate at its failure and my spirit crushed beneath the weight of its great betrayal. I suppose it was the former, for the contents of that cup ran through my veins like fire and gave me back my courage and the joy of life.

I stepped to the dais and sat me down upon the couch, leaning against its rounded end so that I was almost face to face with Ayesha who had turned towards me, and thence could study her unveiled loveliness. For a while she said nothing, only eyed me up and down and smiled and smiled, as though she were waiting for that wine to do its work with me.

"Now that thou art a man again, Allan, tell me what thou didst see when thou wast more—or less—than man."

So I told her all, for some power within her seemed to draw the truth out of me. Nor did the tale appear to cause her much surprise.

"There is truth in thy dream," she said when I had finished; "a lesson also."

"Then it was all a dream?" I interrupted.

"Is not everything a dream, even life itself, Allan? If so, what can this be that thou hast seen, but a dream within a dream, and itself containing other dreams, as in the old days the ball fashioned by the eastern workers of ivory would oft be found to contain another ball, and this yet another and another and another, till at the inmost might be found a bead of gold, or perchance a jewel, which was the prize of him who could draw out ball from ball and leave them all unbroken. That search was difficult and rarely was the jewel come by, if at all, so that some said there was none, save in the maker's mind. Yes, I have seen a man go crazed with seeking and die with the mystery unsolved. How much harder, then, is it to come at the diamond of Truth which lies at the core of all our nest of dreams and without which to rest upon they could not be fashioned to seem realities?"

"But was it really a dream, and if so, what were the truth and the lesson?" I asked, determined not to allow her to bemuse or escape me with her metaphysical talk and illustrations.

"The first question has been answered, Allan, as well as I can answer, who am not the architect of this great globe of dreams, and as yet cannot clearly see the ineffable gem within, whose prisoned rays illuminate their substance, though so dimly that only those with the insight of a god can catch their glamour in the night of thought, since to most they are dark as glow-flies in the glare of noon."

"Then what are the truth and the lesson?" I persisted, perceiving that it was hopeless to extract from her an opinion as to the real nature of my experiences and that I must content myself with her deductions from them.

"Thou tellest me, Allan, that in thy dream or vision thou didst seem to appear before thyself seated on a throne and in that self to find thy judge. That is the Truth whereof I spoke, though how it found its way through the black and ignorant shell of one whose wit is so small, is more than I can guess, since I believed that it was revealed to me alone."

(Now I, Allan, thought to myself that I began to see the origin of all these fantasies and that for once Ayesha had made a slip. If she had a theory and I developed that same theory in a hypnotic condition, it was not difficult to guess its fount. However, I kept my mouth shut, and luckily for once she did not seem to read my mind, perhaps because she was too much occupied in spinning her smooth web of entangling words.)

"All men worship their own god," she went on, "and yet seem not to know that this god dwells within them and that of him they are a part. There he dwells and there they mould him to their own fashion, as the potter moulds his clay, though whatever the shape he seems to take beneath their fingers, still he remains the god infinite and unalterable. Still he is the Seeker and the Sought, the Prayer and its Fulfilment, the Love and the Hate, the Virtue and the Vice, since all these qualities the alchemy of his spirit turns into an ultimate and eternal Good. For the god is in all things and all things are in the god, whom men clothe with such diverse garments and whose countenance they hide beneath so many masks."

"In the tree flows the sap, yet what knows the great tree it nurtures of the sap? In the world's womb burns the fire that gives life, yet what of the fire knows the glorious earth it conceived and will destroy; in the heavens the great globes swing through space and rest not, yet what know they of the Strength that sent them spinning and in a time to come will stay their mighty motions, or turn them to another course? Therefore of everything this all-present god is judge, or rather, not one but many judges, since of each living creature he makes its own magistrate to deal out justice according to that creature's law which in the beginning the god established for it and decreed. Thus in the breast of everyone there is a rule and by that rule, at work through a countless chain of lives, in the end he shall be lifted up to Heaven, or bound about and cast down to Hell and death."

"You mean a conscience," I suggested rather feebly, for her thoughts and images overpowered me.

"Aye, a conscience, if thou wilt, and canst only understand that term, though it fits my theme but ill. This is my meaning, that consciences, as thou namest them, are many. I have one; thou, Allan, hast another; that black Axe-bearer has a third; the little yellow man a fourth, and so on through the tale of living things. For even a dog such as thou sawest has a conscience and—like thyself or I—must in the end be its own judge, because of the spark that comes to it from above, the same spark which in me burns as a great fire, and in thee as a smouldering ember of green wood."

"When *you* sit in judgment on yourself in a day to come, Ayesha," I could not help interpolating, "I trust that you will remember that humility did not shine among your virtues."

She smiled in her vivid way—only twice or thrice did I see her smile thus and then it was like a flash of summer lightning illumining a clouded sky, since for the most part her face was grave and even sombre.

"Well answered," she said. "Goad the patient ox enough and even it will grow fierce and paw the ground."

"Humility! What have I to do with it, O Allan? Let humility be the part of the humble-souled and lowly, but for those who reign as I do, and they are few indeed, let there be pride and the glory they have earned. Now I have told thee of the Truth thou sawest in thy

vision and wouldst thou hear the Lesson?"

"Yes," I answered, "since I may as well be done with it at once, and doubtless it will be good for me."

"The Lesson, Allan, is one which thou preachest—humility. Vain man and foolish as thou art, thou didst desire to travel the Underworld in search of certain ones who once were all in all to thee—nay, not all in all since of them there were two or more—but at least much. Thus thou wouldst do because, as thou saidest, thou didst seek to know whether they still lived on beyond the gates of Blackness. Yes, thou saidest this, but what thou didst hope to learn in truth was whether they lived on in *thee* and for *thee* only. For thou, thou in thy vanity, didst picture these departed souls as doing naught in that Heaven they had won, save think of thee still burrowing on the earth, and, at times lightening thy labours with kisses from other lips than theirs."

"Never!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Never! it is not true."

"Then I pray pardon, Allan, who only judged of thee by others that were as men are made, and being such, not to be blamed if perchance from time to time, they turned to look on women, who alas! were as they are made. So at least it was when I knew the world, but mayhap since then its richest wine has turned to water, whereby I hope it has been bettered. At the least this was thy thought, that those women who had been thine for an hour, through all eternity could dream of naught else save thy perfections, and hope for naught else than to see thee at their sides through that eternity, or such part of thee as thou couldst spare to each of them. For thou didst forget that where they have gone there may be others even more peerless than thou art and more fit to hold a woman's love, which as we know on earth was ever changeable, and perhaps may so remain where it is certain that new lights must shine and new desires beckon. Dost understand me, Allan?"

"I think so," I answered with a groan. "I understand you to mean that worldly impressions soon wear out and that people who have departed to other spheres may there form new ties and forget the old."

"Yes, Allan, as do those who remain upon this earth, whence these others have departed. Do men and women still re-marry in the world, Allan, as in my day they were wont to do?"

"Of course—it is allowed."

"As many other things, or perchance this same thing, may be allowed elsewhere, for when there are so many habitations from which to choose, why should we always dwell in one of them, however strait the house or poor the prospect?"

Now understanding that I was symbolised by the "strait house" and the "poor prospect" I should have grown angry, had not a certain sense of humour come to my rescue, who remembered that after all Ayesha's satire was profoundly true. Why, beyond the earth, should anyone desire to remain unalterably tied to and inextricably wrapped up in such a personality as my own, especially if others of superior texture abounded about them? Now that I came to think of it, the thing was absurd and not to be the least expected in the midst of a thousand new and vivid interests. I had met with one more disillusionment, that was all.

"Dost understand, Allan," went on Ayesha, who evidently was determined that I should drink this cup to the last drop, "that these dwellers in the sun, or the far planet where thou hast been according to thy tale, saw thee not and knew naught of thee? It may chance therefore that at this time thou wast not in their minds which at others dream of thee continually. Or it may chance that they never dream of thee at all, having quite forgotten thee, as the weaned cub forgets its mother."

"At least there was one who seemed to remember," I exclaimed, for her poisoned mocking stung the words out of me, "one woman and—a dog."

"Aye, the savage, who being Nature's child, a sinner that departed hence by her own act" (how Ayesha knew this I cannot say, I never told her), "has not yet put on perfection and therefore still remembers him whose kiss was last upon her lips. But surely, Allan, it is not thy desire to pass from the gentle, ordered claspings of those white souls for the tumultuous arms of such a one as this. Still, let that be, for who knows what men will or will not do in jealousy and disappointed love? And the dog, it remembered also and even sought thee out, since dogs are more faithful and single-hearted than is mankind. There at least thou hast thy lesson, namely to grow more humble and never to think again that thou holdest all a woman's soul for aye, because once she was kind to thee for a little while on earth."

"Yes," I answered, jumping up in a rage, "as you say, I have my lesson, and more of it than I want. So by your leave, I will now bid you farewell, hoping that when it comes to be *your* turn to learn this lesson, or a worse, Ayesha, as I am sure it will one day, for something tells me so, you may enjoy it more than I have done."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AYESHA'S FAREWELL

Thus I spoke whose nerves were on edge after all that I had seen or, as even then I suspected, seemed to see. For how could I believe that these visions of mine had any higher origin than Ayesha's rather malicious imagination? Already I had formed my theory.

It was that she must be a hypnotist of power, who, after she had put a spell upon her subject, could project into his mind such fancies as she chose together with a selection of her own theories. Only two points remained obscure. The first was—how did she get the necessary information about the private affairs of a humble individual like myself, for these were not known even to Zikali with whom she seemed to be in some kind of correspondence, or to Hans, at any rate in such completeness?

I could but presume that in some mysterious way she drew them from, or rather excited them in my own mind and memory, so that I seemed to see those with whom once I had been intimate, with modifications and in surroundings that her intelligence had carefully prepared. It would not be difficult for a mind like hers familiar, as I gathered it was, with the ancient lore of the Greeks and the Egyptians, to create a kind of Hades and, by way of difference, to change it from one of shadow to one of intense illumination, and into it to plunge the consciousness of him upon whom she had laid her charm of sleep. I had seen nothing and heard nothing that she might not thus have moulded, always given that she had access to the needful clay of facts which I alone could furnish.

Granting this hypothesis, the second point was—what might be the object of her elaborate and most bitter jest? Well, I thought that I could guess. First, she wished to show her power, or rather to make me believe that she had power of a very unusual sort. Secondly, she owed Umslopogaas and myself a debt for our services in the war with Rezu which we had been told would be repaid in this way. Thirdly, I had offended her in some fashion and she took her opportunity of settling the score. Also there was a fourth possibility—that really she considered herself a moral instructress and desired, as she said, to teach me a lesson by showing how futile were human hopes and vanities in respect to the departed and their affections.

Now I do not pretend that all this analysis of Ayesha's motives occurred to me at the moment of my interview with her; indeed, I only completed it later after much careful thought, when I found it sound and good. At that time, although I had inklings, I was too bewildered to form a just judgment.

Further, I was too angry and it was from this bow of my anger that I loosed a shaft at a venture as to some lesson which awaited *her*. Perhaps certain words spoken by the dying Rezu had shaped that shaft. Or perhaps some shadow of her advancing fate fell upon me.

The success of the shot, however, was remarkable. Evidently it pierced the joints of her harness, and indeed went home to Ayesha's heart. She turned pale; all the peach-bloom hues faded from her lovely face, her great eyes seemed to lessen and grow dull and her cheeks to fall in. Indeed, for a moment she looked old, very old, quite an aged woman. Moreover she wept, for I saw two big tears drop upon her white raiment and I was horrified.

"What has happened to you?" I said, or rather gasped.

"Naught," she answered, "save that thou hast hurt me sore. Dost thou not know, Allan, that it is cruel to prophesy ill to any, since such words feathered from Fate's own wing and barbed with venom, fester in the breast and mayhap bring about their own accomplishment. Most cruel of all is it when with them are repaid friendship and gentleness."

I reflected to myself—yes, friendship of the order that is called candid, and gentleness such as is hid in a cat's velvet paw, but contented myself with asking how it was that she who said she was so powerful, came to fear anything at all.

"Because as I have told thee, Allan, there is no armour that can turn the spear of Destiny which, when I heard those words of thine, it seemed to me, I know not why, was directed by thy hand. Look now on Rezu who thought himself unconquerable and yet was slain by the black Axe-bearer and whose bones to-night stay the famine of the jackals. Moreover I am accursed who sought to steal its servant from Heaven to be my love, and how know I when and where vengeance will fall at last? Indeed, it has fallen already on me, who through the long ages amid savages must mourn widowed and alone, but not all of it—oh! I think, not all."

Then she began to weep in good earnest, and watching her, for the first time I understood that this glorious creature who seemed to be so powerful, was after all one of the most miserable of women and as much a prey to loneliness, every sort of passion and apprehensive fear, as can be any common mortal. If, as she said, she had found the secret of life, which of course I did not believe, at least it was obvious that she had lost that of happiness.

She sobbed softly and wept and while she did so the loveliness, which had left her for a little while, returned to her like light to a grey and darkened sky. Oh, how beautiful she seemed with the abundant locks in disorder over her tear-stained face, how beautiful beyond imagining! My heart melted as I studied her; I could think of nothing else except her surpassing charm and glory.

"I pray you, do not weep," I said; "it hurts me and indeed I am sorry if I said anything to give you pain."

But she only shook that glorious hair further about her face and behind its veil wept on.

"You know, Ayesha," I continued, "you have said many hard things to me, making me the target of your bitter wit, therefore it is not strange that at last I answered you."

"And hast thou not deserved them, Allan?" she murmured in soft and broken tones from behind that veil of scented locks.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because from the beginning thou didst defy me, showing in thine every accent that thou heldest me a liar and one of no account in body or in spirit, one not worthy of thy kind look, or of those gentle words which once were my portion among men. Oh! thou hast

dealt hardly with me and therefore perchance—I know not—I paid thee back with such poor weapons as a woman holds, though all the while I liked thee well.”

Then again she fell to sobbing, swaying herself gently to and fro in her sweet sorrow.

It was too much. Not knowing what else to do to comfort her, I patted her ivory hand which lay upon the couch beside me, and as this appeared to have no effect, I kissed it, which she did not seem to resent. Then suddenly I remembered and let it fall.

She tossed back her hair from her face and fixing her big eyes on me, said gently enough, looking down at her hand,

“What ails thee, Allan?”

“Oh, nothing,” I answered; “only I remembered the story you told me about some man called Kallikrates.”

She frowned.

“And what of Kallikrates, Allan? Is it not enough that for my sins, with tears, empty longings and repentance, I must wait for him through all the weary centuries? Must I also wear the chains of this Kallikrates, to whom I owe many a debt, when he is far away? Say, didst thou see him in that Heaven of thine, Allan, for there perchance he dwells?”

I shook my head and tried to think the thing out while all the time those wonderful eyes of hers seemed to draw the soul from me. It seemed to me that she bent forward and held up her face to me. Then I lost my reason and also bent forward. Yes, she made me mad, and, save her, I forgot all.

Swiftly she placed her hand upon my heart, saying,

“Stay! What meanest thou? Dost love me, Allan?”

“I think so—that is—yes,” I answered.

She sank back upon the couch away from me and began to laugh very softly.

“What words are these,” she said, “that they pass thy lips so easily and so unmeant, perchance from long practice? Oh! Allan, I am astonished. Art thou the same man who some few days ago told me, and this unasked, that as soon wouldst thou think of courting the moon as of courting me? Art thou he who not a minute gone swore proudly that never had his heart and his lips wandered from certain angels whither they should not? And now, and now——?”

I coloured to my eyes and rose, muttering,

“Let me be gone!”

“Nay, Allan, why? I see no mark here,” and she held up her hand, scanning it carefully. “Thou art too much what thou wert before, except perhaps in thy soul, which is invisible,” she added with a touch of malice. “Nor am I angry with thee; indeed, hadst thou not tried to charm away my woe, I should have thought but poorly of thee as a man. There let it rest and be forgotten—or remembered as thou wilt. Still, in answer to thy words concerning my Kallikrates, what of those adored ones that, according to thy tale, but now thou didst find again in a place of light? Because they seemed faithless, shouldst thou be faithless also? Shame on thee, thou fickle Allan!”

She paused, waiting for me to speak.

Well, I could not. I had nothing to say who was utterly disgraced and overwhelmed.

“Thou thinkest, Allan,” she went on, “that I have cast my net about thee, and this is true. Learn wisdom from it, Allan, and never again defy a woman—that is, if she be fair, for then she is stronger than thou art, since Nature for its own purpose made her so. Whatever I have done by tears, that ancient artifice of my sex, as in other ways, is for thy instruction, Allan, that thou mayest benefit thereby.”

Again I sprang up, uttering an English exclamation which I trust Ayesha did not understand, and again she motioned to me to be seated, saying,

“Nay, leave me not yet since, even if the light fancy of a man that comes and goes like the evening wind and for a breath made me dear to thee, has passed away, there remains certain work which we must do together. Although, thinking of thyself alone, thou hast forgotten it, having been paid thine own fee, one is yet due to that old wizard in a far land who sent thee to visit Kôr and me, as indeed he has reminded me and within an hour.”

This amazing statement aroused me from my personal and painful pre-occupation and caused me to stare at her blankly.

“Again thou disbelievest me,” she said, with a little stamp. “Do so once more, Allan, and I swear I’ll bring thee to grovel on the ground and kiss my foot and babble nonsense to a woman sworn to another man, such as never for all thy days thou shalt think of without a blush of shame.”

“Oh! no,” I broke in hurriedly, “I assure you that you are mistaken. I believe every word you have said, or say or will say; I do in truth.”

“Now thou liest. Well, what is one more falsehood among so many? Let it pass.”

“What, indeed?” I echoed in eager affirmation, “and as for Zikali’s message——” and I paused.

“It was to recall to my mind that he desired to learn whether a certain great enterprise of his will succeed, the details of which he says thou canst tell me. Repeat them to me.”

So, glad enough to get away from more dangerous topics, I narrated to her as briefly and clearly as I could, the history of the old witch-doctor’s feud with the Royal House of Zululand. She listened, taking in every word, and said,

“So now he yearns to know whether he will conquer or be conquered; and that is why he sent, or thinks that he sent thee on this journey, not for thy sake, Allan, but for his own. I cannot tell thee, for what have I do to with the finish of this petty business, which to him seems so large? Still, as I owe him a debt for luring the Axe-Bearer here to rid me of mine enemy, and thee to lighten my solitude for an hour by the burnishing of thy mind, I will try. Set that bowl before me, Allan,” and she pointed to a marble tripod on which stood a basin half full of water, “and come, sit close by me and look into it, telling me what thou seest.”

I obeyed her instructions and presently found myself with my head over the basin, staring into the water in the exact attitude of a person who is about to be shampooed.

“This seems rather foolish,” I said abjectly, for at that moment I resembled the Queen of Sheba in one particular, if in no other, namely, that there was no more spirit in me. “What am I supposed to do? I see nothing at all.”

"Look again," she said, and as she spoke the water grew clouded. Then on it appeared a picture. I saw the interior of a Kaffir hut dimly lighted by a single candle set in the neck of a bottle. To the left of the door of the hut was a bedstead and on it lay stretched a wasted and dying man, in whom, to my astonishment, I recognised Cetywayo, King of the Zulus. At the foot of the bed stood another man—myself grown older by many years, and leaning over the bed, apparently whispering into the dying man's ear, was a grotesque and malevolent figure which I knew to be that of Zikali, Opener-of-Roads, whose glowing eyes were fixed upon the terrified and tortured face of Cetywayo. All was as it happened afterwards, as I have written down in the book called "Finished."

I described what I saw to Ayesha, and while I was doing so the picture vanished away, so that nothing remained save the clear water in the marble bowl. The story did not seem to interest her; indeed, she leaned back and yawned a little.

"Thy vision is good, Allan," she said indifferently, "and wide also, since thou canst see what passes in the sun or distant stars, and pictures of things to be in the water, to say nothing of other pictures in a woman's eyes, all within an hour. Well, this savage business concerns me not and of it I want to know no more. Yet it would appear that here the old wizard who is thy friend, has the answer that he desires. For there in the picture the king he hates lies dying while he hisses in his ear and thou dost watch the end. What more can he seek? Tell him it when ye meet, and tell him also it is my will that in future he should trouble me less, since I love not to be wakened from my sleep to listen to his half-instructed talk and savage vapourings. Indeed, he presumes too much. And now enough of him and his dark plots. Ye have your desires, all of you, and are paid in full."

"Over-paid, perhaps," I said with a sigh.

"Ah, Allan, I think that Lesson thou hast learned pleases thee but little. Well, be comforted for the thing is common. Hast never heard that there is but one morsel more bitter to the taste than desire denied, namely, desire fulfilled? Believe me that there can be no happiness for man until he attains a land where all desire is dead."

"That is what the Buddha preaches, Ayesha."

"Aye, I remember the doctrines of that wise man well, who without doubt had found a key to the gate of Truth, one key only, for, mark thou, Allan, there are many. Yet, man being man must know desires, since without them, robbed of ambitions, strivings, hopes, fears, aye and of life itself, the race must die, which is not the will of the Lord of Life who needs a nursery for his servant's souls, wherein his swords of Good and Ill shall shape them to his pattern. So it comes about, Allan, that what we think the worst is oft the best for us, and with that knowledge, if we are wise, let us assuage our bitterness and wipe away our tears."

"I have often thought that," I said.

"I doubt it not, Allan, since though it has pleased me to make a jest of thee, I know that thou hast thy share of wisdom, such little share as thou canst gather in thy few short years. I know, too, that thy heart is good and aspires high, and Friend—well, I find in thee a friend indeed, as I think not for the first time, nor certainly for the last. Mark, Allan, what I say, not a lover, but a *friend*, which is higher far. For when passion dies with the passing of the flesh, if there be no friendship what will remain save certain memories that, mayhap, are well forgot? Aye, how would those lovers meet elsewhere who were never more than lovers? With weariness, I hold, as they stared into each other's empty soul, or even with disgust.

"Therefore the wise will seek to turn those with whom Fate mates them into friends, since otherwise soon they will be lost for aye. More, if they are wiser still, having made them friends, they will suffer them to find lovers where they will. Good maxims, are they not? Yet hard to follow, or so, perchance, thou thinkest them—as I do."

She grew silent and brooded a while, resting her chin upon her hand and staring down the hall. Thus the aspect of her face was different from any that I had seen it wear. No longer had it the allure of Aphrodite or the majesty of Hera; rather might it have been that of Athene herself. So wise it seemed, so calm, so full of experience and of foresight, that almost it frightened me.

What was this woman's true story, I wondered, what her real self, and what the sum of her gathered knowledge? Perhaps it was accident, or perhaps, again, she guessed my mind. At any rate her next words seemed in some sense an answer to these speculations. Lifting her eyes she contemplated me a while, then said,

"My friend, we part to meet no more in thy life's day. Often thou wilt wonder concerning me, as to what in truth I am, and mayhap in the end thy judgment will be to write me down some false and beauteous wanderer who, rejected of the world or driven from it by her crimes, made choice to rule among savages, playing the part of Oracle to that little audience and telling strange tales to such few travellers as come her way. Perhaps, indeed, I do play this part among many others, and if so, thou wilt not judge me wrongly.

"Allan, in the old days, mariners who had sailed the northern seas, told me that therein amidst mist and storm float mountains of ice, shed from dizzy cliffs which are hid in darkness where no sun shines. They told me also that whereas above the ocean's breast appears but a blue and dazzling point, sunk beneath it is oft a whole frozen isle, invisible to man.

"Such am I, Allan. Of my being thou seest but one little peak glittering in light or crowned with storm, as heaven's moods sweep over it. But in the depths beneath are hid its white and broad foundations, hollowed by the seas of time to caverns and to palaces which my spirit doth inhabit. So picture me, therefore, as wise and fair, but with a soul unknown, and pray that in time to come thou mayest see it in its splendour.

"Hadst thou been other than thou art, I might have shown thee secrets, making clear to thee the parable of much that I have told thee in metaphor and varying fable, aye, and given thee great gifts of power and enduring days of which thou knowest nothing. But of those who visit shrines, O Allan, two things are required, worship and faith, since without these the oracles are dumb and the healing waters will not flow.

"Now I, Ayesha, am a shrine; yet to me thou broughtest no worship until I won it by a woman's trick, and in me thou hast no faith. Therefore for thee the oracle will not speak and the waters of deliverance will not flow. Yet I blame thee not, who art as thou wast made and the hard world has shaped thee.

"And so we part: Think not I am far from thee because thou seest me not in the days to come, since like that Isis whose majesty alone I still exercise on earth, I, whom men name Ayesha, am in all things. I tell thee that I am not One but Many and, being many, am both Here and Everywhere. When thou standest beneath the sky at night and lookest on the stars, remember that in them mine eyes behold thee; when the soft winds of evening blow, that my breath is on thy brow and when the thunder rolls, that there am I riding on the lightnings and rushing with the gale."

"Do you mean that you are the goddess Isis?" I asked, bewildered. "Because if so why did you tell me that you were but her priestess?"

"Have it as thou wilt, Allan. All sounds do not reach thine ears; all sights are not open to thy eyes and therefore thou art both half deaf and blind. Perchance now that her shrines are dust and her worship is forgot, some spark of the spirit of that immortal Lady whose chariot was the moon, lingers on the earth in this woman's shape of mine, though her essence dwells afar, and perchance her other name is Nature, my mother and thine, O Allan. At the least hath not the World a soul—and of that soul am I not mayhap a part, aye, and thou also? For the rest are not the priest and the Divine he bows to, oft the same?"

It was on my lips to answer, Yes, if the priest is a knave or a self-deceiver, but I did not.

"Farewell, Allan, and let Ayesha's benison go with thee. Safe shalt thou reach thy home, for all is prepared to take thee hence, and thy companions with thee. Safe shalt thou live for many a year, till thy time comes, and then, perchance, thou wilt find those whom thou hast lost more kind than they seemed to be to-night."

She paused awhile, then added,

"Hearken unto my last word! As I have said, much that I have told thee may bear a double meaning, as is the way of parables, to be interpreted as thou wilt. Yet one thing is true. I love a certain man, in the old days named Kallikrates, to whom alone I am appointed by a divine decree, and I await him here. Oh, shouldst thou find him in the world without, tell him that Ayesha awaits him and grows weary in the waiting. Nay, thou wilt never find him, since even if he be born again, by what token would he be known to thee? Therefore I charge thee, keep my secrets well, lest Ayesha's curse should fall on thee. While thou livest tell naught of me to the world thou knowest. Dost thou swear to keep my secrets, Allan?"

"I swear, Ayesha."

"I thank thee, Allan," she answered, and grew silent for a while.

At length Ayesha rose and drawing herself up to the full of her height, stood there majestic. Next she beckoned to me to come near, for I too had risen and left the dais.

I obeyed, and bending down she held her hands over me as though in blessing, then pointed towards the curtains which at this moment were drawn asunder, by whom I do not know.

I went and when I reached them, turned to look my last on her.

There she stood as I had left her, but now her eyes were fixed upon the ground and her face once more was brooding absently as though no such a man as I had ever been. It came into my mind that already she had forgotten me, the plaything of an hour, who had served her turn and been cast aside.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### WHAT UMSLOPOGAAS SAW

Like one who dreams I passed down the outer hall where stood the silent guards as statues might, and out through the archway. Here I paused for a moment, partly to calm my mind in the familiar surroundings of the night, and partly because I thought that I heard someone approaching me through the gloom, and in such a place where I might have many enemies, it was well to be prepared.

As it chanced, however, my imaginary assailant was only Hans, who emerged from some place where he had been hiding; a very disturbed and frightened Hans.

"Oh, Baas," he said in a low and shaky whisper, "I am glad to see you again, and standing on your feet, not being carried with them sticking straight in front of you as I expected."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh, Baas, because of the things that happened in that place where the tall *vrouw* with her head tied up as though she had tooth-ache, sits like a spider in a web."

"Well, what happened, Hans?" I asked as we walked forward.

"This, Baas. The Doctoress talked and talked at you and Umslopogaas, and as she talked, your faces began to look as though you had drunk half a flask too much of the best gin, such as I wish I had some of here to-night, at once wise and foolish, and full and empty, Baas. Then you both rolled over and lay there quite dead, and whilst I was wondering what I should do and how I should get out your bodies to bury them, the Doctoress came down off her platform and bent, first over you and next over Umslopogaas, whispering into the ears of both of you. Then she took off a snake that looked as though it were made of gold with green eyes, which she wears about her middle beneath the long dish-cloth, Baas, and held it to your lips and next to those of Umslopogaas."

"Well, and what then, Hans?"

"After that all sorts of things came about, Baas, and I felt as though the whole house were travelling through the air, Baas, twice as fast as a bullet does from a rifle. Suddenly, too, the room became filled with fire so hot that it scorched me, and so bright that it made my eyes water, although they can look at the sun without winking. And, Baas, the fire was full of spooks which walked around; yes, I saw some of them standing on your head and stomach, Baas, also on that of Umslopogaas, whilst others went and talked to the white Doctoress as quietly as though they had met her in the market-place and wanted to sell her eggs or butter. Then, Baas, suddenly I saw your reverend father, the Predikant, who looked as though he were red-hot, as doubtless he is in the Place of Fires. I thought he came up to me, Baas, and said, 'Get out of this, Hans. This is no place for a good Hottentot like you, Hans, for here only the very best Christians can bear the heat for long.'

"That finished me, Baas. I just answered that I handed you, the Baas Allan his son, over to his care, hoping that he would see that you did not burn in that oven, whatever happened to Umslopogaas. Then I shut my eyes and mouth and held my nose, and wriggled beneath those curtains as a snake does, Baas, and ran down the hall and across the kraal-yard and through the archway out into the night, where I have been sitting cooling myself ever since, waiting for you to be carried away, Baas. And now you have come alive and with not even your hair burnt off, which shows how wonderful must be the Great Medicine of Zikali, Baas, since nothing else could have saved you in that fire, no, not even your reverend father, the Predikant."

"Hans," I said when he had finished, "you are a very wonderful fellow, for you can get drunk on nothing at all. Please remember, Hans, that you have been drunk to-night, yes, very drunk indeed, and never dare to repeat anything that you thought you saw while you were drunk."

"Yes, Baas, I understand that I was drunk and already have forgotten everything. But, Baas, there is still a bottle full of brandy and if I could have just one more tot I should forget *so* much better!"

By now we had reached our camp and here I found Umslopogaas sitting in the doorway and staring at the sky.

"Good-evening to you, Umslopogaas," I said in my most unconcerned manner, and waited.

"Good-evening, Watcher-by-Night, who I thought was lost in the night, since in the end the night is stronger than any of its watchers."

At this cryptic remark I looked bewildered but said nothing. At length Umslopogaas, whose nature, for a Zulu, was impulsive and lacking in the ordinary native patience, asked,

"Did you make a journey this evening, Macumazahn, and if so, what did you see?"

"Did you have a dream this evening, Umslopogaas?" I inquired by way of answer, "and if so, what was it about? I thought that I saw you shut your eyes in the House of the White One yonder, doubtless because you were weary of talk which you did not understand."

"Aye, Macumazahn, as you suppose I grew weary of that talk which flowed from the lips of the White Witch like the music that comes from a little stream babbling over stones when the sun is hot, and being weary, I fell asleep and dreamed. What I dreamed does not much matter. It is enough to say that I felt as though I were thrown through the air like a stone cast from his sling by a boy who is set upon a stage to scare the birds out of a mealie garden. Further than any stone I went, aye, further than a shooting star, till I reached a wonderful place. It does not much matter what it was like either, and indeed I am already beginning to forget, but there I met everyone I have ever known. I met the Lion of the Zulus, the Black One, the Earth-Shaker, he who had a 'sister' named Baleka, which sister," here he dropped his voice and looked about him suspiciously, "bore a child, which child was fostered by one Mopo,

that Mopo who afterwards slew the Black one with the Princes. Now, Macumazahn, I had a score to settle with this Black One, aye, even though our blood be much of the same colour, I had a score to settle with him, because of the slaying of this sister of his, Baleka, together with the Langeni tribe.<sup>[1]</sup> So I walked up to him and took him by the head-ring and spat in his face and bade him find a spear and shield, and meet me as man to man. Yes, I did this.”

[1] For the history of Baleka, the mother of Umslopogaas, and Mopo, see the book called “Nada the Lily.”—Editor.

“And what happened then, Umslopogaas?” I said, when he paused in his narrative.

“Macumazahn, nothing happened at all. My hand seemed to go through his head-ring and the skull beneath, and to shut upon itself while he went on talking to someone else, a captain whom I recognised, yes, one Faku, whom in the days of Dingaan, the Black One’s brother, I myself slew upon the Ghost-Mountain.

“Yes, Macumazahn, and Faku was telling him the tale of how I killed him and of the fight that I and my blood-brother and the wolves made, there on the knees of the old witch who sits aloft on the Ghost Mountain waiting for the world to die, for I could understand their talk, though mine went by them like the wind.

“Macumazahn, they passed away and there came others, Dingaan among them, aye, Dingaan who also knows something of the Witch-Mountain, seeing that there Mopo and I hurled him to his death. With him also I would have had words, but it was the same story, only presently he caught sight of the Black One, yes, of Chaka whom he slew, stabbing him with the little red assegai, and turned and fled, because in that land I think he still fears Chaka, Macumazahn, or so the dream told.

“I went on and met others, men I had fought in my day, most of them, among them was Jikiza, he who ruled the People of the Axe before me whom I slew with his own axe. I lifted the axe and made me ready to fight again, but not one of them took any note of me. There they walked about, or sat drinking beer or taking snuff, but never a sup of the beer or a pinch of the snuff did they offer me, no, not even those among them whom I chanced not to have killed. So I left them and walked on, seeking for Mopo, my foster-father, and a certain man, my blood-brother, by whose side I hunted with the wolves, yes, for them, and for another.”

“Well, and did you find them?” I asked.

“Mopo I found not, which makes me think, Macumazahn, that, as once you hinted to me, he whom I thought long dead, perchance still lingers on the earth. But the others I did find . . .” and he ceased, brooding.

Now I knew enough of Umslopogaas’s history to be aware that he had loved this man and woman of whom he spoke more than any others on the earth. The “blood-brother,” whose name he would not utter, by which he did not mean that he was his brother in blood but one with whom he had made a pact of eternal friendship by the interchange of blood or some such ceremony, according to report, had dwelt with him on the Witch-Mountain where legend told, though this I could scarcely believe, that they had hunted with a pack of hyenas. There, it said also, they fought a great fight with a band sent out by Dingaan the king under the command of that Faku whom Umslopogaas had mentioned, in which fight the “Blood-Brother,” wielder of a famous club known as Watcher-of-the-Fords, got his death after doing mighty deeds. There also, as I had heard, Nada the Lily, whose beauty was still famous in the land, died under circumstances strange as they were sad.

Naturally, remembering my own experiences, or rather what seemed to be my experiences, for already I had made up my mind that they were but a dream, I was most anxious to learn whether these two who had been so dear to this fierce Zulu, had recognised him.

“Well, and what did they say to you, Umslopogaas?” I asked.

“Macumazahn, they said nothing at all. Harken! There stood this pair, or sometimes they moved to and fro; my brother, an even greater man than he used to be, with the wolfskin girt about him and the club, Watcher-of-the-Fords, which he alone could wield, upon his shoulder, and Nada, grown lovelier even than she was of old, so lovely, Macumazahn, that my heart rose into my throat when I saw her and stopped my breath. Yes, Macumazahn, there they stood, or walked about arm in arm as lovers might, and looked into each other’s eyes and talked of how they had known each other on the earth, for I could understand their words or thoughts, and how it was good to be at rest together where they were.”

“You see, they were old friends, Umslopogaas,” I said.

“Yes, Macumazahn, very old friends as I thought. So much so that they had never had a word to say of me who also was the old friend of both of them. Aye, my brother, whose name I am sworn not to speak, the woman-hater who vowed he loved nothing save me and the wolves, could smile into the face of Nada the Lily, Nada the bride of my youth, yet never a word of me, while she could smile back and tell him how great a warrior he had been and never a word of me whose deeds she was wont to praise, who saved her in the Halakazi caves and from Dingaan; no, never a word of me although I stood there staring at them.”

“I suppose that they did not see you, Umslopogaas.”

“That is so, Macumazahn; I am sure that they did not see me, for if they had they would not have been so much at ease. But I saw them and as they would not take heed when I shouted, I ran up calling to my brother to defend himself with his club. Then, as he still took no note, I lifted the axe *Inkosikaas*, making it circle in the light, and smote with all my strength.”

“And what happened, Umslopogaas?”

“Only this, Macumazahn, that the axe went straight through my brother from the crown of his head to the groin, cutting him in two, and he just went on talking! Indeed, he did more, for stooping down he gathered a white lily-bloom which grew there and gave it to Nada, who smelt at it, smiled and thanked him, and then thrust it into her girdle, still thanking him all the while. Yes, she did this for I saw it with my eyes, Macumazahn.”

Here the Zulu’s voice broke and I think that he wept, for in the faint light I saw him draw his long hand across his eyes, whereon I took the opportunity to turn my back and light a pipe.

“Macumazahn,” he went on presently, “it seems that madness took hold of me for a long while, for I shouted and raved at them, thinking that words and rage might hurt where good steel could not, and as I did so they faded away and disappeared, still smiling and talking, Nada smelling at the lily which, having a long stalk, rose up above her breast. After this I rushed away and suddenly met that savage king, Rezu, whom I slew a few days gone. At him I went with the axe, wondering whether he would put up a better fight this second time.”

“And did he, Umslopogaas?”

"Nay, but I think he felt me for he turned and fled and when I tried to follow I could not see him. So I ran on and presently who should I find but Baleka, Baleka, Chaka's 'sister' who—repeat it not, Macumazahn—was my mother; and, Macumazahn, *she* saw me. Yes, though I was but little when last she looked on me who now am great and grim, she saw and knew me, for she floated up to me and smiled at me and seemed to press her lips upon my forehead, though I could feel no kiss, and to draw the soreness out of my heart. Then she, too, was gone and of a sudden I fell down through space, having, I suppose, stepped into some deep hole, or perchance a well.

"The next thing I knew was that I awoke in the house of the White Witch and saw you sleeping at my side and the Witch leaning back upon her bed and smiling at me through the thin blanket with which she covers herself up, for I could see the laughter in her eyes.

"Now I grew mad with her because of the things that I had seen in the Place of Dreams, and it came into my heart that it would be well to kill her that the world might be rid of her and her evil magic which can show lies to men. So, being distraught, I sprang up and lifted the axe and stepped towards her, whereon she rose and stood before me, laughing out loud. Then she said something in the tongue I cannot understand, and pointed with her finger, and lo! next moment it was as if giants had seized me and were whirling me away, till presently I found myself breathless but unharmed beyond the arch and—what does it all mean, Macumazahn?"

"Very little, as I think, Umslopogaas, except that this queen has powers to which those of Zikali are as nothing, and can cause visions to float before the eyes of men. For know that such things as you saw, I saw, and in them those whom I have loved also seemed to take no thought of me but only to be concerned with each other. Moreover when I awoke and told this to the queen who is called She-who-commands, she laughed at me as she did at you, and said that it was a good lesson for my pride who in that pride had believed that the dead only thought of the living. But I think that the lesson came from her who wished to humble us, Umslopogaas, and that it was her mind that shaped these visions which we saw."

"I think so too, Macumazahn, but how she knew of all the matters of your life and mine, I do not know, unless perchance Zikali told them to her, speaking in the night-watches as wizards can."

"Nay, Umslopogaas, I believe that by her magic she drew our stories out of our own hearts and then set them forth to us afresh, putting her own colour on them. Also it may be that she drew something from Hans, and from Goroko and the other Zulus with you, and thus paid us the fee that she had promised for our service, but in lung-sick oxen and barren cows, not in good cattle, Umslopogaas."

He nodded and said,

"Though at the time I seemed to go mad and though I know that women are false and men must follow where they lead them, never will I believe that my brother, the woman-hater, and Nada are lovers in the land below and have there forgotten me, the comrade of one of them and the husband of the other. Moreover I hold, Macumazahn, that you and I have met with a just reward for our folly.

"We have sought to look through the bottom of the grave at things which the Great-Great in Heaven above did not mean that men should see, and now that we have seen we are unhappier than we were, since such dreams burn themselves upon the heart as a red-hot iron burns the hide of an ox, so that the hair will never grow again where it has been and the hide is marred.

"To you, Watcher-by-Night, I say, 'Content yourself with your watching and whatever it may bring to you in fame and wealth.' And to myself I say, 'Holder of the Axe, content yourself with the axe and what it may bring to you in fair fight and glory'; and to both of us I say, 'Let the Dead sleep unawakened until we go to join them, which surely will be soon enough.'"

"Good words, Umslopogaas, but they should have been spoken ere ever we set out on this journey."

"Not so, Macumazahn, since that journey we were fated to make to save one who lies yonder, the Lady Sad-Eyes, and, as they tell me, is well again. Also Zikali willed it, and who can resist the will of the Opener-of-Roads? So it is made and we have seen many strange things and won some glory and come to know how deep is the pool of our own foolishness, who thought that we could search out the secrets of Death, and there have only found those of a witch's mind and venom, reflected as in water. And now having discovered all these things I wish to be gone from this haunted land. When do we march, Macumazahn?"

"To-morrow morning, I believe, if the Lady Sad-Eyes and the others are well enough, as She-who-commands says they will be."

"Good. Then I would sleep who am more weary than I was after I had killed Rezu in the battle on the mountain."

"Yes," I answered, "since it is harder to fight ghosts than men, and dreams, if they be bad, are more dreadful than deeds. Good-night, Umslopogaas."

He went, and I too went to see how it fared with Inez. I found that she was fast asleep but in a quite different sleep to that into which Ayesha seemed to have plunged her. Now it was absolutely natural and looking at her lying there upon the bed, I thought how young and healthy was her appearance. The women in charge of her also told me that she had awakened at the hour appointed by She-who-commands, as it seemed, quite well and very hungry, although she appeared to be puzzled by her surroundings. After she had eaten, they added that she had "sung a song," which was probably a hymn, and prayed upon her knees, "making signs upon her breast" and then gone quietly to bed.

My anxiety relieved as regards Inez, I returned to my own quarters. Not feeling inclined for slumber, however, instead of turning in I sat at the doorway contemplating the beauty of the night while I watched the countless fireflies that seemed to dust the air with sparks of burning gold; also the great owls and other fowl that haunt the dark. These had come out in numbers from their hiding-places among the ruins and sailed to and fro like white-winged spirits, now seen and now lost in the gloom.

While I sat thus many reflections came to me as to the extraordinary nature of my experiences during the past few days. Had any man ever known the like, I wondered? What could they mean and what could this marvellous woman Ayesha be? Was she perhaps a personification of Nature itself, as indeed to some extent all women are? Was she human at all, or was she some spirit symbolising a departed people, faith and civilisation, and haunting the ruins where once she reigned as queen? No, the idea was ridiculous, since such beings do not exist, though it was impossible to doubt that she possessed powers beyond those of common humanity, as she possessed beauty and fascination greater than are given to any other woman.

Of one thing I was certain, however, that the Shades I had seemed to visit had their being in the circle of her own imagination and intelligence. There Umslopogaas was right; we had seen no dead, we had only seen pictures and images that she drew and fashioned.

Why did she do this, I wondered. Perhaps to pretend to powers which she did not possess, perhaps out of sheer elfish mischief, or perhaps, as she asserted, just to teach us a lesson and to humble us in our own sight. Well, if so she had succeeded, for never did I feel so crushed and humiliated as at that moment.

I had seemed to descend, or ascend, into Hades, and there had only seen things that gave me little joy and did but serve to reopen old wounds. Then, on awaking, I had been bewitched; yes, fresh from those visions of the most dear dead, I had been bewitched by the overpowering magic of this woman's loveliness and charm, and made a fool of myself, only to be brought back to my senses by her triumphant mockery. Oh, I was humbled indeed, and yet the odd thing is that I could not feel angry with her, and what is more that, perhaps from vanity, I believed in her profession of friendship towards myself.

Well, the upshot of it was that, like Umslopogaas, more than anything else in the world did I desire to depart from this haunted Kôr and to bury all its recollections in such activities as fortune might bring to me. And yet, and yet it was well to have seen it and to have plucked the flower of such marvellous experience, nor, as I knew even then, could I ever enter the memory of Ayesha the wise, the perfect in all loveliness, and the half-divine in power.

When I awoke the next morning the sun was well up and after I had taken a swim in the old bath and dressed myself, I went to see how it fared with Inez. I found her sitting at the door of her house looking extremely well and with a radiant face. She was engaged in making a chain of some small and beautiful blue flowers of the iris tribe, of which quantities grew about, that she threaded together upon stalks of dry grass.

This chain, which was just finished, she threw over her head so that it hung down upon her white robe, for now she was dressed like an Arab woman though without the veil. I watched her unseen for a little while then came forward and spoke to her. She started at the sight of me and rose as though to run away; then, apparently reassured by my appearance, selected a particularly fine flower and offered it to me.

I saw at once that she did not know me in the least and thought that she had never seen me before, in short, that her mind had gone, exactly as Ayesha had said that it would do. By way of making conversation I asked her if she felt well. She replied, Oh, yes, she had never felt better, then added,

"Daddy has gone on a long journey and will not be back for weeks and weeks."

An idea came to me and I answered,

"Yes, Inez, but I am a friend of his and he has sent me to take you to a place where I hope that we shall find him. Only it is far away, so you also must make a long journey."

She clapped her hands and answered,

"Oh, that will be nice, I do so love travelling, especially to find Daddy, who I expect will have my proper clothes with him, not these which, although they are very comfortable and pretty, seem different to what I used to wear. You look very nice too and I am sure that we shall be great friends, which I am glad of, for I have been rather lonely since my mother went to live with the saints in Heaven, because, you see, Daddy is so busy and so often away, that I do not see much of him."

Upon my word I could have wept when I heard her prattle on thus. It is so terribly unnatural, almost dreadful indeed, to listen to a full grown woman who talks in the accents and expresses the thoughts of a child. However, under all the circumstances I recognised that her calamity was merciful, and remembering that Ayesha had prophesied the recovery of her mind as well as its loss and how great seemed to be her powers in these directions, I took such comfort as I could.

Leaving her I went to see the two Zulus who had been wounded and found to my joy that they were now quite well and fit to travel, for here, too, Ayesha's prophecy had proved good. The other men also were completely rested and anxious to be gone like Umslopogaas and myself.

While I was eating my breakfast Hans announced the venerable Billali, who with a sweeping bow informed me that he had come to inquire when we should be ready to start, as he had received orders to see to all the necessary arrangements. I replied—within an hour, and he departed in a hurry.

But little after the appointed time he reappeared with a number of litters and their bearers, also with a bodyguard of twenty-five picked men, all of whom we recognised as brave fellows who had fought well in the battle. These men and the bearers old Billali harangued, telling them that they were to guide, carry and escort us to the other side of the great swamp, or further if we needed it, and that it was the word of She-who-commands that if so much as the smallest harm came to any one of us, even by accident, they should die every man of them "by the hot-pot," whatever that might be, for I was not sure of the significance of this horror.<sup>[2]</sup> Then he asked them if they understood. They replied with fervour that they understood perfectly and would lead and guard us as though we were their own mothers.

<sup>[2]</sup> For this see the book called "She."—Editor.

As a matter of fact they did, and I think would have done so independently of Ayesha's command, since they looked upon Umslopogaas and myself almost as gods and thought that we could destroy them all if we wished, as we had destroyed Rezu and his host.

I asked Billali if he were not coming with us, to which he replied, No, as She-who-commands had returned to her own place and he must follow her at once. I asked him again where her own place might be, to which he answered vaguely that it was everywhere and he stared first at the heavens and then at the earth as though she inhabited most of them, adding that generally it was "in the Caves," though what he meant by that I did not know. Then he said that he was very glad to have met us and that the sight of Umslopogaas killing Rezu was a spectacle that he would remember with pleasure all his life. Also he asked me for a present. I gave him a spare pencil that I possessed in a little German silver case, with which he was delighted. Thus I parted with old Billali, of whom I shall always think with a certain affection.

I noticed even then that he kept very clear indeed of Umslopogaas, thinking, I suppose, that he might take a last opportunity to fulfil his threats and introduce him to his terrible Axe.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### UMSLOPOGAAS WEARS THE GREAT MEDICINE

A little while later we started, some of us in litters, including the wounded Zulus, who I insisted should be carried for a day or two, and some on foot. Inez I caused to be borne immediately in front of myself so that I could keep an eye upon her. Moreover I put her in the especial charge of Hans, to whom fortunately she took a great fancy at once, perhaps because she remembered subconsciously that she knew him and that he had been kind to her, although when they met after her long sleep, as in my own case, she did not recognise him in the least.

Soon, however, they were again the fastest of friends, so much so that within a day or two the little Hottentot practically filled the place of a maid to her, attending to her every want and looking after her exactly as a nurse does after a child, with the result that it was quite touching to see how she came to depend upon him, "her monkey," as she called him, and how fond he grew of her.

Once, indeed, there was trouble, since hearing a noise, I came up to find Hans bristling with fury and threatening to shoot one of the Zulus, who stupidly, or perhaps rudely, had knocked against the litter of Inez and nearly turned it over. For the rest, the Lady Sad-Eyes, as they called her, had for the time become the Lady Glad-Eyes, since she was merry as the day was long, laughing and singing and playing just as a healthy happy child should do.

Only once did I see her wretched and weep. It was when a kitten which she had insisted on bringing with her, sprang out of the litter and vanished into some bush where it could not be found. Even when she was soon consoled and dried her tears, when Hans explained to her in a mixture of bad English and worse Portuguese, that it had only run away because it wished to get back to its mother which it loved, and that it was cruel to separate it from its mother.

We made good progress and by the evening of the first day were over the crest of the cliff or volcano lip that encircles the great plain of Kôr, and descending rapidly to a sheltered spot on the outer slope where our camp was to be set for the night.

Not very far from this place, as I think I have mentioned, stood, and I suppose still stands, a very curious pinnacle of rock, which, doubtless being of some harder sort, had remained when, hundreds of thousands or millions of years before, the surrounding lava had been washed or had corroded away. This rock pillar was perhaps fifty feet high and as smooth as though it had been worked by man; indeed, I remembered having remarked to Hans, or Umslopogaas—I forget which—when we passed it on our inward journey, that there was a column which no monkey could climb.

As we went by it for the second time, the sun had already disappeared behind the western cliff, but a fierce ray from its sinking orb, struck upon a storm-cloud that hung over us, and thence was reflected in a glow of angry light of which the focus or centre seemed to fall upon the summit of this strange and obelisk-like pinnacle of rock.

At the moment I was out of my litter and walking with Umslopogaas at the end of the line, to make sure that no one straggled in the oncoming darkness. When we had passed the column by some forty or fifty yards, something caused Umslopogaas to turn and look back. He uttered an exclamation which made me follow his example, with the result that I saw a very wonderful thing. For there on the point of the pillar, like St. Simeon Stylites on his famous column, glowing in the sunset rays as though she were on fire, stood Ayesha herself!

It was a strange and in a way a glorious sight, for poised thus between earth and heaven, she looked like some glowing angel rather than a woman, standing as she seemed to do upon the darkness; since the shadows, save for the faintest outline, had swallowed up the column that supported her. Moreover, in the intense, rich light that was focussed on her, we could see every detail of her form and face, for she was unveiled, and even her large and tender eyes which gazed upwards empty (at this moment they seemed very tender), yes, and the little gold studs that glittered on her sandals and the shine of the snake girdle she wore about her waist.

We stared and stared till I said inconsequently,

"Learn, Umslopogaas, what a liar is that old Billali, who told me that She-who-commands had departed from Kôr to her own place."

"Perhaps this rock edge is her own place, if she be there at all, Macumazahn."

"If she be there," I answered angrily, for my nerves were at once thrilled and torn. "Speak not empty words, Umslopogaas, for where else can she be when we see her with our eyes?"

"Who am I that I should know the ways of witches who, like the winds, are able to go and come as they will? Can a woman run up a wall of rock like a lizard, Macumazahn?"

"Doubtless——" and I began some explanation which I have forgotten, when a passing cloud, or I know not what, cut off the light so that both the pinnacle and she who stood on it became invisible. A minute later it returned for a little while, and there was the point of the needle-shaped rock, but it was empty, as, save for the birds that rested on it, it had been since the beginning of the world.

Then Umslopogaas and I shook our heads and pursued our way in silence.

This was the last that I saw of the glorious Ayesha, if indeed I did see her and not her ghost. Yet it is true that for all the first part of the journey, till we were through the great swamp in fact, from time to time I was conscious, or imagined that I was conscious of her presence. Moreover, once others saw her, or someone who might have been her. It happened thus.

We were in the centre of the great swamp and the trained guides who were leading came to a place where the path forked and were uncertain which road to take. Finally they fixed on the right-hand path and were preparing to follow it together with those who bore the litter of Inez, by the side of which Hans was walking as usual.

At this moment, as Hans told me, the guides went down upon their faces and he saw standing in front of them a white-veiled form who pointed to the left-hand path, and then seemed to be lost in the mist. Without a word the guides rose and followed this left-hand path. Hans stopped the litter till I came up when he told me what had happened, while Inez also began to chatter in her childish fashion about a "White Lady."

I had the curiosity to walk a little way along the right-hand path which they were about to take. Only a few yards further on I found myself sinking in a floating quagmire, from which I extricated myself with much difficulty but just in time for as I discovered afterwards by probing with a pole, the water beneath the matted reeds was deep. That night I questioned the guides upon the subject, but without result, for they pretended to have seen nothing and not to understand what I meant. Of neither of these incidents have I any explanation to offer, except that once contracted, it is as difficult to be rid of the habit of hallucinations as of any other.

It is not necessary that I should give all the details of our long homeward journey. So I will only say that having dismissed our bearers and escorts when we reached higher ground beyond the horrible swamp, keeping one litter for Inez in which the Zulus carried her when she was tired, we accomplished it in complete safety and having crossed the Zambesi, at last one evening reached the house called Strathmuir.

Here we found the waggon and oxen quite safe and were welcomed rapturously by my Zulu driver and the *voorlooper*, who had made up their minds that we were dead and were thinking of trekking homewards. Here also Thomaso greeted us, though I think that, like the Zulus, he was astonished at our safe return and indeed not over-pleased to see us. I told him that Captain Robertson had been killed in a fight in which we had rescued his daughter from the cannibals who had carried her off (information which I cautioned him to keep to himself) but nothing else that I could help.

Also I warned the Zulus through Umslopogaas and Goroko, that no mention was to be made of our adventures, either then or afterwards, since if this were done the curse of the White Queen would fall on them and bring them to disaster and death. I added that the name of this queen and everything that was connected with her, or her doings, must be locked up in their own hearts. It must be like the name of dead kings, not to be spoken. Nor indeed did they ever speak it or tell the story of our search, because they were too much afraid both of Ayesha whom they believed to be the greatest of all witches, and of the axe of their captain, Umslopogaas.

Inez went to bed that night without seeming to recognise her old home, to all appearance just a mindless child as she had been ever since she awoke from her trance at Kôr. Next morning, however, Hans came to tell me that she was changed and that she wished to speak with me. I went, wondering, to find her in the sitting-room, dressed in European clothes which she had taken from where she kept them, and once more a reasoning woman.

"Mr. Quatermain," she said, "I suppose that I must have been ill, for the last thing I remember is going to sleep on the night after you started for the hippopotamus hunt. Where is my father? Did any harm come to him while he was hunting?"

"Alas!" I answered, lying boldly, for I feared lest the truth should take away her mind again, "it did. He was trampled upon by a hippopotamus bull, which charged him, and killed, and we were obliged to bury him where he died."

She bowed her head for a while and muttered some prayer for his soul, then looked at me keenly and said,

"I do not think you are telling me everything, Mr. Quatermain, but something seems to say that this is because it is not well that I should learn everything."

"No," I answered, "you have been ill and out of your mind for quite a long while; something gave you a shock. I think that you learned of your father's death, which you have now forgotten, and were overcome with the news. Please trust to me and believe that I keep anything back from you, it is because I think it best to do so for the present."

"I trust and I believe," she answered. "Now please leave me, but tell me first where are those women and their children?"

"After your father died they went away," I replied, lying once more.

She looked at me again but made no comment.

Then I left her.

How much Inez ever learned of the true story of her adventures I do not know to this hour, though my opinion is that it was but little. To begin with, everyone, including Thomaso, was threatened with the direst consequences if he said a word to her on the subject; moreover in her way she was a wise woman, one who knew when it was best not to ask questions. She was aware that she had suffered from a fit of aberration or madness and that during this time her father had died and certain peculiar things had happened. There she was content to leave the business and she never again spoke to me upon the subject. Of this I was very glad, as how on earth could I have explained to her about Ayesha's prophecies as to her lapse into childishness and subsequent return to a normal state when she reached her home seeing that I did not understand them myself?

Once indeed she did inquire what had become of Janeé to which I answered that she had died during her sickness. It was another lie, at any rate by implication, but I hold that there are occasions when it is righteous to lie. At least these particular falsehoods have never troubled my conscience.

Here I may as well finish the story of Inez, that is, as far as I can. As I have shown she was always a woman of melancholy and religious temperament, qualities that seemed to grow upon her after her return to health. Certainly the religion did, for continually she was engaged in prayer, a development with which heredity may have had something to do, since after he became a reformed character and grew unsettled in his mind, her father followed the same road.

On our return to civilisation, as it chanced, one of the first persons with whom she came in contact was a very earnest and excellent old priest of her own faith. The end of this intimacy was much what might have been expected. Very soon Inez determined to renounce the world, which I think never had any great attractions for her, and entered a sisterhood of an extremely strict Order in Natal, where, added to her many merits, her considerable possessions made her very welcome indeed.

Once in after years I saw her again when she expected before long to become the Mother-Superior of her convent. I found her very cheerful and she told me that her happiness was complete. Even then she did not ask me the true story of what had happened to her during that period when her mind was a blank. She said that she knew something had happened but that as she no longer felt any curiosity about earthly things, she did not wish to know the details. Again I rejoiced, for how could I tell the true tale and expect to be believed, even by the most confiding and simple-minded nun?

To return to more immediate events. When we had been at Strathmuir for a day or two and I thought that her mind was clear enough to judge of affairs, I told Inez that I must journey on to Natal, and asked her what she wished to do. Without a moment's hesitation she replied that she desired to come with me, as now that her father was dead nothing would induce her to continue to live at Strathmuir without friends, or indeed the consolations of religion.

Then she showed me a secret hiding-place cunningly devised in a sort of cellar under the sitting-room floor, where her father was accustomed to keep the spirits of which he consumed so great a quantity. In this hole beneath some bricks, we discovered a large sum in gold stored away, which Robertson had always told his daughter she would find there, in the event of anything happening to him. With the money were his will and securities, also certain mementos of his youth and some love-letters together with a prayer-book that his mother had given him.

These valuables, of which no one knew the existence except herself, we removed and then made our preparations for departure. They were simple; such articles of value as we could carry were packed into the waggon and the best of the cattle we drove with us. The place with the store and the rest of the stock were handed over to Thomaso on a half-profit agreement under arrangement that he should remit the share of Inez twice a year to a bank on the coast, where her father had an account. Whether or not he ever did this I am unable to say, but as no one wished to stop at Strathmuir, I could conceive no better plan because purchasers of property in that district did not exist.

As we trekked away one fine morning I asked Inez whether she was sorry to leave the place.

"No," she replied with energy, "my life there has been a hell and I never wish to see it again."

Now it was after this, on the northern borders of Zululand, that Zikali's Great Medicine, as Hans called it, really played its chief part, for without it I think that we should have been killed, every one of us. I do not propose to set out the business in detail; it is too long and intricate. Suffice it to say, therefore, that it had to do with the plots of Umslopogaas against Cetuywayo, which had been betrayed by his wife Monazi and her lover Lousta, both of whom I have mentioned earlier in this record. The result was that a watch for him was kept on all the frontiers, because it was guessed that sooner or later he would return to Zululand; also it had become known that he was travelling in my company.

So it came about that when my approach was reported by spies, a company was gathered under the command of a man connected with the Royal House, and by it we were surrounded. Before attacking, however, this captain sent men to me with the message that with me the King had no quarrel, although I was travelling in doubtful company, and that if I would deliver over to him Umslopogaas, Chief of the People of the Axe, and his followers, I might go whither I wished unharmed, taking my goods with me. Otherwise we should be attacked at once and killed every one of us, since it was not desired that any witnesses should be left of what happened to Umslopogaas. Having delivered this ultimatum and declined any argument as to its terms, the messengers retired, saying that they would return for my answer within half an hour.

When they were out of hearing Umslopogaas, who had listened to their words in grim silence, turned and spoke in such fashion as might have been expected of him.

"Macumazahn," he said, "now I come to the end of an unlucky journey, though mayhap it is not so evil as it seems, since I who went out to seek the dead but to be filled by yonder White Witch with the meat of mocking shadows, am about to find the dead in the only way in which they can be found, namely by becoming of their number."

"It seems that this is the case with all of us, Umslopogaas."

"Not so, Macumazahn. That child of the King will give you safe-conduct. It is I and mine whose blood he seeks, as he has the right to do, since it is true that I would have raised rebellion against the King, I who wearied of my petty lot and knew that by blood his place was mine. In this quarrel you have no share, though you, whose heart is as white as your skin, are not minded to desert me. Moreover, even if you wished to fight, there is one in the waggon yonder whose life is not yours to give. The Lady Sad-Eyes is as a child in your arms and her you must bear to safety."

Now this argument was so unanswerable that I did not know what to say. So I only asked what he meant to do, as escape was impossible, seeing that we were surrounded on every side.

"Make a glorious end, Macumazahn," he said with a smile. "I will go out with those who cling to me, that is with all who remain of my men, since my fate must be theirs, and stand back to back on yonder mound and there wait till these dogs of the King come up against us. Watch a while, Macumazahn, and see how Umslopogaas, Bearer of the Axe, and the warriors of the Axe can fight and die."

Now I was silent for I knew not what to say. There we all stood silent, while minute by minute I watched the shadow creeping forward towards a mark that the head messenger had made with his spear upon the ground, for he had said that when it touched that mark he would return for his answer.

In this rather dreadful silence I heard a dry little cough, which I knew came from the throat of Hans, and to be his method of indicating that he had a remark to make.

"What is it?" I asked with irritation, for it was annoying to see him seated there on the ground fanning himself with the remains of a hat and staring vacantly at the sky.

"Nothing, Baas, or rather, only this, Baas: Those hyenas of Zulus are even more afraid of the Great Medicine than were the cannibals up north, since the maker of it is nearer to them, Baas. You remember, Baas, they knelt to it, as it were, when we were going out of Zululand."

"Well, what of it, now that we are going into Zululand?" I inquired sharply. "Do you want me to show it to them?"

"No, Baas. What is the use, seeing that they are ready to let you pass, also the Lady Sad-Eyes, and me and the cattle with the driver and *voorlooper*, which is better still, and all the other goods. So what have you to gain by showing them the medicine? But perchance if it were on the neck of Umslopogaas and *he* showed it to them and brought it to their minds that those who touch him who is in the shadow of Zikali's Great Medicine, or ought that is his, die within three moons in this way or in that—well, Baas, who knows?" and again he coughed drily and stared up at the sky.

I translated what Hans had said in Dutch to Umslopogaas, who remarked indifferently,

"This little yellow man is well named Light-in-Darkness; at least the plan can be tried—if it fails there is always time to die."

So thinking that this was an occasion on which I might properly do so, for the first time I took off the talisman which I had worn for so long, and Umslopogaas put it over his head and hid it beneath his blanket.

A little while later the messengers returned and this time the captain himself came with them, as he said to greet me, for I knew him slightly and once we had dealt together about some cattle. After a friendly chat he turned to the matter of Umslopogaas, explaining the case at some length. I said that I quite understood his position but that it was a *very* awkward thing to interfere with a man who was the actual wearer of the Great Medicine of Zikali itself. When the captain heard this his eyes almost started out of his head.

"The Great Medicine of the Opener-of-Roads!" he exclaimed. "Oh, now I understand why this Chief of the People of the Axe is unconquerable—such a wizard that no one is able to kill him."

"Yes," I replied, "and you remember, do you not, that he who offends the Great Medicine, or offers violence to him who wears it, dies horribly within three moons, he and his household and all those with him?"

"I have heard it," he said with a sickly smile.

"And now you are about to learn whether the tale is true," I added cheerfully.

Then he asked to see Umslopogaas alone.

I did not overhear their conversation, but the end of it was that Umslopogaas came and said in a loud voice so that no one could miss a single word, that as resistance was useless and he did not wish me, his friend, to be involved in any trouble, together with his men he had agreed to accompany this King's captain to the royal kraal where he had been guaranteed a fair trial as to certain false charges which had been brought against him. He added that the King's captain had sworn upon the Great Medicine of the Opener-of-Roads to give him safe conduct and attempt no mischief against him which, as was well known throughout the land, was an oath that could not be broken by anyone who wished to continue to look upon the sun.

I asked the captain if these things were so, also speaking in a loud voice. He replied, Yes, since his orders were to take Umslopogaas alive if he might. He was only to kill him if he would not come.

Afterwards, while pretending to give him certain articles out of the waggon, I had a few private words with Umslopogaas, who told me that the arrangement was that he should be allowed to escape at night with his people.

"Be sure of this, Macumazahn," he said, "that if I do not escape, neither will that captain, since I walk at his side and keep my axe, and at the first sign of treachery the axe will enter the house of that thick head of his and make friends with the brain inside."

"Macumazahn," he added, "we have made a strange journey together and seen such things as I did not think the world had to show. Also I have fought and killed Rezu in a mad battle of ghosts and men which alone was worth all the trouble of the journey. Now it has come to an end as everything must, and we part, but as I believe, not for always. I do not think that I shall die on this journey with the captain, though I do think that others will die at the end of it," he added grimly, a saying which at the time I did not understand.

"It comes into my heart, Macumazahn, that in yonder land of witches and wizards, the spirit of prophecy got caught in my moocha and crept into my bowels. Now that spirit tells me that we shall meet again in the after-years and stand together in a great fray which will be our last, as I believe that the White Witch said. Or perhaps the spirit lives in Zikali's Medicine which has gone down my throat and comes out of it in words. I cannot say, but I pray that it is a true spirit, since although you are white and I am black and you are small and I am big, and you are gentle and cunning, whereas I am fierce and as open as the blade of my own axe, yet I love you as well, Macumazahn, as though we were born of the same mother and had been brought up in the same kraal. Now that captain waits and grows doubtful of our talk, so farewell. I will return the Great Medicine to Zikali, if I live, and if I die he must send one of the ghosts that serve him, to fetch it from among my bones."

"Farewell to you also, Yellow Man," he went on to Hans, who had appeared, hovering about like a dog that is doubtful of its welcome; "well are you named Light-in-Darkness, and glad am I to have met you, who have learned from you how a snake moves and strikes, and how a jackal thinks and avoids the snare. Yes, farewell, for the spirit within me does not tell me that you and I shall meet again."

Then he lifted the great axe, and gave me a formal salute, naming me "Chief and Father, Great Chief and Father, from of old" (*Baba! Koos y umcool! Koos y pagate!*), thereby acknowledging my superiority over him, a thing that he had never done before, and as he did, so did Goroko and the other Zulus, adding to their salute many titles of praise. In another minute he had gone with the King's captain, to whose side I noted he clung lovingly, his long, thin fingers playing about the horn handle of the axe that was named *Inkosikaas* and Groan-maker.

"I am glad we have seen the last of him and his axe, Baas," remarked Hans, spitting reflectively. "It is very well to sleep in the same hut with a tame lion sometimes, but after you have done so for many moons, you begin to wonder when you will wake up at night to find him pulling the blankets off you and combing your hair with his claws. Yes, I am very glad that this half-tame lion is gone, since sometimes I have thought that I should be obliged to poison it that we might sleep in peace. You know he called me a snake, Baas, and poison is a snake's only spear. Shall I tell the boys to inspan the oxen, Baas? I think the further we get from that King's captain and his men, the more comfortably shall we travel, especially now when we no longer have the Great Medicine to protect us."

"You suggested giving it to him, Hans," I said.

"Yes, Baas, I had rather that Umslopogaas went away with the Great Medicine, than that you kept the Great Medicine and he stopped with us here. Never travel with a traitor, Baas, at any rate in the land of the king whom he wishes to kill. Kings are very selfish people, Baas, and do not like being killed, especially by someone who wants to sit upon their stool and to take the royal salute. No one gives the royal salute to a dead king, Baas, however great he was before he died, and no one thinks the worse of a king who was a traitor before he became a king."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### ALLAN DELIVERS THE MESSAGE

Once more I sat in the Black Kloof face to face with old Zikali.

“So you have got back safely, Macumazahn,” he said. “Well, I told you you would, did I not? As for what happened to you upon the journey, let it be, for now that I am old long stories tire me and I daresay that there is nothing wonderful about this one. Where is the charm I lent you? Give it back now that it has served its turn.”

“I have not got it, Zikali. I passed it on to Umslopogaas of the Axe to save his life from the King’s men.”

“Oh! yes, so you did. I had forgotten. Here it is,” and opening his robe of fur, he showed me the hideous little talisman hanging about his neck, then added, “Would you like a copy of it, Macumazahn, to keep as a memory? If so, I will carve one for you.”

“No,” I answered, “I should not. Has Umslopogaas been here?”

“Yes, he has been and gone again, which is one of the reasons why I do not wish to hear your tale a second time.”

“Where to? The Town of the People of the Axe?”

“No, Macumazahn, he came thence, or so I understood, but thither he will return no more.”

“Why not, Zikali?”

“Because after his fashion he made trouble there and left some dead behind him; one Lousta, I believe, whom he had appointed to sit on his stool as chief while he was away, and a woman called Monazi, who was his wife, or Lousta’s wife, or the wife of both of them, I forget which. It is said that having heard stories of her—and the ears of jealousy are long, Macumazahn—he cut off this woman’s head with a sweep of the axe and made Lousta fight him till he fell, which the fool did almost before he had lifted his shield. It served him right who should have made sure that Umslopogaas was dead before he wrapped himself in his blanket and took the woman to cook his porridge.”

“Where has the Axe-bearer gone?” I asked without surprise, for this news did not astonish me.

“I neither know nor care, Macumazahn. To become a wanderer, I suppose. He will tell you the tale when you meet again in the after-days, as I understand he thinks that you will do.<sup>[1]</sup> Hearken! I have done with this lion’s whelp, who is Chaka over again, but without Chaka’s wit. Yes, he is just a fighting man with a long reach, a sure eye and the trick of handling an axe, and such are of little use to me who know too many of them. Thrice have I tried to make him till my garden, but each time he has broken the hoe, although the wage I promised him was a royal *kaross* and nothing less. So enough of Umslopogaas, the Woodpecker. Almost I wish that you had not lent him the charm, for then the King’s men would have made an end of him, who knows too much and like some silly boaster, may shout out the truth when his axe is aloft and he is full of the beer of battle. For in battle he will live and in battle he will die, Macumazahn, as perhaps you may see one day.”

[1] For the tale of this meeting see the book called “Allan Quatermain.”—Editor.

“The fate of your friends does not trouble you over much, Opener-of-Roads,” I said with sarcasm.

“Not at all, Macumazahn, because I have none. The only friends of the old are those whom they can turn to their own ends, and if these fail them they find others.”

“I understand, Zikali, and know now what to expect from you.”

He laughed in his strange way and answered,

“Aye, and it is good that you must expect, good in the future as in the past, for *you*, Macumazahn, who are brave in your own fashion, without being a fool like Umslopogaas, and, although you know it not, like some master-smith, forge my assegais out of the red ore I give you, tempering them in the blood of men, and yet keep your mind innocent and your hands clean. Friends like you are useful to such as I, Macumazahn, and must be well paid in those wares that please them.”

The old wizard brooded for a space, while I reflected upon his amazing cynicism, which interested me in a way, for the extreme of immorality is as fascinating to study as the extreme of virtue and often more so. Then jerking up his great head, he asked suddenly,

“What message had the White Queen for me?”

“She said that you troubled her too much at night in dreams, Zikali.”

“Aye, but if I cease to do so, ever she desires to know the reason why, for I hear her asking me in the voices of the wind, or in the twittering of bats. After all, she is a woman, Macumazahn, and it must be dull sitting alone from year to year with naught to stay her appetite save the ashes of the past and dreams of the future, so dull that I wonder, having once meshed you in her web, how she found the heart to let you go before she had sucked out your life and spirit. I suppose that having made a mock of you and drained you dry, she was content to throw you aside like an empty gourd. Perchance, had she kept you at her side, you would have been a stone in her path in days to come. Perchance, Macumazahn, she waits for other travellers and would welcome them, or one of them alone, saying nothing of a certain Watcher-by-Night who has served her turn and vanished into the night.

“But what other message had the White Queen for the poor old savage witch-doctor whose talk wearies her so much in her haunted sleep?”

Then I told him of the picture that Ayesha had shown me in the water; the picture of a king dying in a hut and of two who watched his end.

Zikali listened intently to every word, then broke into a peal of his unholy laughter.

*"Oho-ho!"* he laughed, "so all goes well, though the road be long, since whatever this White One may have shown you in the fire of the heavens above, she could show you nothing but truth in the water of the earth below, for that is the law of our company of seers. You have worked well for me, Macumazahn, and you have had your fee, the fee of the vision of the dead which you desired above all mortal things."

"Aye," I answered indignantly, "a fee of bitter fruits whereof the juice burns and twists the mouth and the stones still stick fast within the gizzard. I tell you, Zikali, that she stuffed my heart with lies."

"I daresay, Macumazahn, I daresay, but they were very pretty lies, were they not? And after all I am sure that there was wisdom in them, as you will discover when you have thought them over for a score of years.

"Lies, lies, all is lies! But beyond the lie stands Truth, as the White Witch stands behind her veil. You drew the veil, Macumazahn, and saw that beneath which brought you to your knees. Why, it is a parable. Wander on through the Valley of Lies till at last it takes a turn, and, glittering in the sunshine, glittering like gold, you perceive the Mountain of everlasting Truth, sought of all men but found by few.

"Lies, lies, all is lies! Yet beyond I tell you, beauteous and eternal stands the Truth, Macumazahn. *Oho-ho! Oho-ho!* Fare you well, Watcher-by-Night, fare you well, Seeker after Truth. After the Night comes Dawn and after Death comes what—Macumazahn? Well, you will learn one day, for always the veil is lifted, at last, as the White Witch shewed you yonder, Macumazahn."

BOOK XVI  
THE TREASURE OF THE LAKE  
PREFACE BY ALLAN QUATERMAIN

I cannot remember that anywhere in this book I have stated what it was that first gave me the idea of attempting to visit Mone, the Holy Lake, and the Dabanda who live upon, or, to be precise, at some distance from its shores. Therefore I will do so now.

There is a certain monastery in Natal where I have been made welcome from time to time, among whose brethren was a very learned monk, now “gone down”, as the Zulus say, who, although our faiths were different, honoured me with his confidence upon many matters, and I think I may add with his friendship. Brother Ambrose, as he was called in religion—what his real name may have been I do not know—a Swede by birth, would have been an archaeologist, also an anthropologist pure and simple, had he not chanced to be a saint. As it was he managed to combine much knowledge of these sciences with his noted and singular holiness. For example, he was the greatest authority upon Bushmen’s paintings that I have ever met, and knew more of the history, religions, customs, and habits of the inhabitants of Southern, Eastern, and South-central Africa—well, than I did myself. Thus it came about, our tastes being so similar on these and other subjects, that when we could not meet and talk, often we corresponded.

One of his learned letters, which I still preserve, was written to me many years ago from Mozambique, whither he had gone upon a journey connected with the missionary enterprises of his order. From it, for the sake of accuracy, I will quote some passages.

Brother Ambrose says:

*In this island I have come into touch with a man, a rescued slave whom it was my privilege to baptize and to attend through his last illness, during which he made many confidences to me. Peter, as he was called because he was received into the Church upon the feast day of that saint, was a man of unusual appearance. His general cast of countenance and physique were Arab, and his native language was a somewhat archaic dialect of Arabic. His eyes, however, were large and round, almost owl-like, indeed—by the way, he had a singular faculty of seeing in the dark—and his handsome features were remarkable for a melancholy, which I think must have been inherited and not due to his experiences of life. He told me that he belonged to a small tribe dwelling in the neighbourhood of mountains called Ruga, far beyond a great lake—I am not sure what lake—which mountains I gathered are not far distant from some branch of the Congo River in the remote interior. The home of his tribe, if I understood him aright, was a large hollow of land enclosed by cliffs. In the centre of this hollow lies a big sheet of water surrounded by forest which, he said, is considered holy. When I asked him why it was holy, he replied because on an island in this water dwelt a priestess who is a Shadow of God, or of the gods, a beautiful woman with many magical powers, who utters oracles and bestows blessings on her worshippers (which, being interpreted, means, I take it, a fetish or rather the head servant of a fetish credited with the power of making rain and of averting misfortunes). About this person he told me many legends too absurd to record, amongst others that she and her husband, who is the chief of the tribe—for she has a husband—are sacrificed at a certain age, when her place is taken by another ‘Shadow’, who is reputed to be her daughter. One other thing he told me which I am sure will interest*

*you very much; indeed, although I am very busy, I write this letter chiefly in order to pass on the superstition, or legend, or whatever it may be, before I forget exactly what he said. You and I have often discussed the mysteries of the African forms of taboo. Well, Peter described a variety of it that was quite new to me. He declared that to his tribe ALL wild game are taboo and may not be killed or eaten by any member of the tribe, who, it seems, are largely vegetarians, but supplement this diet with the flesh of goats and cattle, of which they possess many herds. Nor is this all, for he assured me further that his people exercised great power over these untamed beasts, living with them on the same terms of familiarity as we do with dogs and horses and other domestic animals. Thus he asserted positively that they can send them away to or call them back from any given spot, and make them do their bidding in various other fashions, even to the extent of being able to cause them to attack anyone they choose. I tried to extract from him what he believed to be the reason for this alleged remarkable authority over the wild fauna of his country, but all I could make out was that the priests taught some form of the old Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis (as you know, not uncommon in Africa, especially when tyrannical chiefs are concerned); I mean that the souls of men, particularly of those who had led evil lives, are reborn in the bodies of beasts, which beasts are therefore, in a sense, their kin, and on this account feared and venerated. It was extremely curious to hear these pre-Christian delusions from the mouth of a modern African native, and I wonder very much if his story has any faint foundation in fact. Probably not, but, my dear friend, if ever you get the chance in the course of your explorations, DO try to find out. You know that, like you, I hold that scattered here and there through the vast expanse of Africa are the remains of peoples who still preserve fragments of ancient systems and religions, such as the Babylonian star-worship or that of the gods of old Egypt."*

Then the letter goes on to tell of the decease of Peter, before Brother Ambrose could further pursue his inquiries about a carving that he had discovered somewhere on the East Coast, which he thought must have been executed by Bushmen in the remote past; although there is, or was, no other evidence that they ever lived so far north.

This incident of the strange story told to Father Ambrose by the dying native, Peter, remained fixed in my mind, and in the end was the real cause of the journey described in the following pages.

I should like to take this opportunity to say that on re-reading this record, which is an expanded version of a diary I kept at the time, I am not sure that I have succeeded in conveying an adequate sense of the eeriness that pervaded the Dabanda people and their country. No wonder that added to the various humiliations which I suffered in their land, this unearthly atmosphere, whereof dwellers in the fetish-ridden districts of Africa have often had experience, at last got upon my nerves to such an extent that if I had stopped there much longer I believe I should have gone crazy.

Another thing that I wish to state is that on weighing the evidence, whatever reasons old Kumpana and others may have given, I am now convinced that Hans was right and that the real cause which led them to procure the return of Kaneke to Mone-land, was that they might execute him in punishment for his crime of sacrilege in earlier life. On this I believe they were determined both from vindictiveness and because, under their iron law, while he lived it was

impossible for the mysterious “Treasure of the Lake” to take another man to husband, as for their own secret reasons they desired that she should do.

Lastly, it might be asked why I do not more accurately indicate the exact geographic position of Mone-land and its holy hidden lake. I will face ridicule—especially as I shall never live to feel its shafts —and make a confession. Before I left his country, as Arkle had done in his letter, Kumpana assured me with much quiet emphasis that if I revealed its exact locality and explained how it could be reached by any other white man, the results to them, also to myself and Hans in this or later lives, would be most unpleasant. I did not and do not believe him; still, in view of my experience of the uncanny powers of the Dabanda priests, I thought it wise —well, to keep on the safe side and on this point to remain a little indefinite.

Allan Quatermain.

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## KANEKE'S TALE

Now when I grow old it becomes every day more clear to me, Allan Quatermain, that each of us is a mystery living in the midst of mysteries, bringing these with us when we are born and taking them away with us when we die; doubtless into a land of other and yet deeper mysteries. At first, while we are quite young, everything seems very clear and simple. There is a male individual called Father and a female called Mother who, between them, have made us a present to the world, or of the world to us, whichever way you like to put it, apparently by arrangement with the kingdom of heaven; at least that is what we are taught. There are the sun, the moon, and the stars above us and the solid earth beneath, there are lessons and dinner and a time to get up and a time to go to bed—in short there are a multitude of things, all quite obvious and commonplace, which may be summed up in three words, the established order, in which, by the decree of Papa and Mamma and the heavens above, we live and move and have our being.

Then the years go by, the terrible, remorseless years that bear us as steadily from the cradle to the grave as a creeping glacier bears a stone. With every one of them, after the first fifteen or so when we become adult, or in some instances earlier if we chance to be what is called "rather unusual", a little piece of the curtain is rolled up or a little hole is widened in the veil, and beneath that curtain, or through that enlarging hole, we see the mysteries moving in the dusk beyond. So swiftly do they come and go, and so dark is the background, that we never discern them clearly. There, if time is given to us to fix them in our minds, they appear; for a moment they are seen, then they are gone, to be succeeded by others even yet more wondrous, or perhaps more awful.

But why go on talking of what is endless and unfathomable? Amidst this wondrous multitude of enigmas we poor, purblind, slow-witted creatures must make our choice of those we wish to study. Long ago I made mine, one local and terrestrial, namely the land with which I have been connected all my life—Africa—and the other universal and spiritual, namely human nature. What! some may ask, do you call human nature spiritual? The very words belie you. What is there spiritual about that which is human?

My friend, I answer, in my opinion, my most humble and fallible opinion, almost everything. More and more do I become convinced that we are nearly all spirit, notwithstanding our gross apparent bodies with their deeds and longings. You have seen those coloured globes that pedlars sell—I mean the floating things tinted to this hue or that, that are the delight of children. The children buy these balls and toss them into the air, where they travel one way or the other, blown by winds we cannot see, till in the end they burst and of each there remains nothing but a little shrivelled skin, a shred of substance, which they are told is made from the gum of a tree. Well, to my fancy that expanded skin or shred is a good symbol of the human body, so large and obvious to the sight, yet driven here and there by the breath of circumstance and in the end destroyed. But what was within it which escapes at last and is no more seen? To my mind the gas with which the globe was filled represents the spirit of man, imprisoned for a while; then to all appearance lost.

I dare say that the example is faulty; still, I use it because it conveys something of my idea. So, good or bad, I let it stand and pass on to an easier theme, or at any rate one easier to handle, namely that of the mysteries of the great continent of Africa.

Now all the world is wonderful, but surely among its countries there is none more so than Africa; no, not even China the unchanging, or India the ancient. For this reason, I think: those great lands have always been more or less known to their own inhabitants, whereas Africa, as a whole, from the beginning was and still remains unknown.

To this day great sections of its denizens are quite ignorant of other sections, as much so as was mighty Egypt of the millions of the neighbouring peoples in the time when a voyage to the Land of Punt, which I take to have been the country that we now know as Uganda, was looked upon as a marvellous adventure. Again, there is the instance of Solomon, or rather Hiram and his gold traffic with Ophir, the dim and undefined, that doubtless was the district lying at the back of Sofala. But why multiply such examples, of which there are many? And if this is true of Africa, the Libya of the early world, as a country, is it not still more true of its inhabitants, divided as these are into countless races, peoples, and tribes, each of them with its own gods or ancestral spirits, language, customs, traditions, and mental outlook established in the passage of innumerable ages?

So far as my small experience goes, for though many might think it large it is still small, these are my opinions which I venture to state as an opening to what I have always considered a very curious history, in which it was my fortune to play some small and humble part. For let it be understood at once that I was by no means the chief actor in this business. Indeed, I was never more than an agent, a kind of connecting wire between the parties concerned, an insignificant bridge over which their feet travelled to certain ends that I presume to have been appointed by Fate. Still, I saw much of the play and now, when the curtain has been long rung down, by help of the diary I kept at the time and have preserved, I will try to record such memories of it as remain to me—well, because rightly or wrongly I think that they are worth recording.

Years ago, accompanied by my servant Hans, the old and faithful Hottentot with whom I have experienced so many adventures, I made a great journey to what I may almost call Central Africa, starting in from the East Coast. It was a hazardous adventure into which I had been led by tales that had reached me of the enormous herds of elephants

to be found in what I suppose must now be the north of the Belgian Congo. Or perhaps it is still No Man's Land as it was in those days—really, I do not know. Nor is this wonderful, seeing that with a single exception I believe that I was the first white man to set foot in that particular district which lies beyond the Lado mountains north of Jissa and of the Denbo River.

To be truthful, however, it was not only the elephants that took me to these parts, guessing, as I did, that if I found them it might be of little avail, since probably ivory in bulk would prove impossible to carry. No, it was rather the desire to look upon new things, to discover the Unknown which is so strong a part of my nature, that at times it half reconciles me to the prospect of death which I, who believe that we do not go out, believe also must be a land or a state full of all that is strange and wonderful.

I had heard from natives in the neighbourhood of the great lake Victoria Nyanza that there was a marvellous country between two rivers known as M'bomu and Balo, where dwelt strange tribes who were said to dress like Arabs and to talk a sort of Arabic; also that somewhere in this country was a holy lake, a big sheet of water that none was allowed to approach. Further, that in this lake, which was called Mone (pronounced like groan), a word of unknown meaning, was an island "where dwelt the gods", or the spirits, for the term used was capable of either interpretation.

Now, when I heard of this Holy Lake called Mone, "where dwelt the gods", at once my mind went back to the letter of which I have spoken in the preface of this book, that long years before I had received from my late friend, Brother Ambrose, telling me what he had learned from a slave whom he had christened.

Could it be the same, I wondered, as that of which the slave had told Brother Ambrose? Instantly, and with much suppressed excitement, I set to work to make further inquiries, and was informed that a certain Kaneke, a stranger who had been a slave and was now the chief or captain of an Arab settlement some fifty miles away from where I met these natives, could give me information about the lake, inasmuch as he was reported to be born of the people who dwelt upon its borders.

Then and there I changed my plans, as indeed was convenient to me because of the suddenly developed hostility of a chief through whose territory I had intended to pass, and in order to seek out this Kaneke, took a road running in another direction to that which I had designed to travel. Little did I guess at the time that Kaneke was seeking ME out and that the natives who told me the legend of the lake were, in fact, his emissaries sent to tempt me to visit him, or that it was he who had incited the chief against me in order to block my path.

Well, in due course I reached Kaneke-town, as it was called, without accident, for although between me and it dwelt a very dangerous tribe whom at first I had purposed to avoid, all at once their chief and headman became friendly and helped me in every way upon my journey. Kaneke, a remarkable person whom I will describe later, received me well, giving me a place to camp outside his village and all the food that we required. Also he proved extraordinarily communicative, telling me directly that he belonged to a tribe called Dabanda, which had its home in the wild parts whereof I have spoken. He added that he was the "high-born" son of a great doctor or medicine-man, a calling which all his family had followed for generations. In some curious way, of which I did not at first learn the details, while undergoing his novitiate as a doctor or magician, this man had been seized by a rival tribe, the Abanda, and ultimately sold as a slave to an Arab trader, one Hassan, who brought him down to the neighbourhood of the great lake.

Here also, according to his own story, it seemed that one night this Kaneke succeeded in murdering Hassan.

"I crept on him in the night. I got him by the throat. I choked the life out of him," he said, twitching his big hands, "and as he died I whispered in his ear of all the cruel things he had done to me. He made signs to me, praying for mercy, but I went on till I had killed him, whispering to him all the while. When he was dead I took his body and threw it out into the bush, having first stripped him. There a lion found it and bore it away, for in the morning it was gone. Then, Macumazahn" (that is the native name by which I, Allan Quatermain, am known in Africa, and which had come with me to these parts), "I played a great game, such as you might have done, O Watcher-by-Night. I returned to the tent of Hassan and sat there thinking.

"I heard the lion, or lions come, for I think there was more than one of them, as I was sure that they would come who had called them by a charm, and guessed that they had eaten or carried away Hassan the evil. When all was quiet I dressed myself in the robes of Hassan. I found his gun, which on the journey he had taught me to use, that I might shoot the slaves who could travel no farther for him; his pistol also, and saw that they were loaded. Then I sat myself upon his stool and waited for the light.

"At the dawn one of his women crept into the tent to visit him. I seized her. She stared at me, saying:

"You are not my master. You are not Hassan."

"I answered, 'I am your master. I am Hassan, whose face the spirits have changed in the night.'

"She opened her mouth to cry out. I said:

"Woman, if you try to scream, I will kill you. If you are quiet I will take you. Look on me. I am young. Hassan was old. I am a finer man, you will be happier with me. Choose now. Will you die, or live?"

"I will live," she said, she who was no fool.

"Then I am Hassan, am I not?" I asked.

“‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you are Hassan and my lord. I am sure of it now.’

“For I tell you, that woman had wit, Macumazahn, and I was sorry when, two years afterwards, she died.

“‘Good,’ I said. ‘Now, when the servants of Hassan come you will swear that I am he and no other, remembering that if you do not swear you die.’

“‘I will swear,’ she answered.

“Presently the headman of Hassan came, a big fat fellow who was half an Arab, to bring him his morning drink. I took it and drank. The light of the rising sun struck into the tent. He saw and started back.

“‘You are not Hassan,’ he said. ‘You are the slave Kaneke, whom we bought.’

“‘I am Hassan,’ I answered. ‘Ask my wife here, whom you know, if I am not Hassan. Also, if I am not, where is Hassan?’

“‘Yes, he is Hassan, my husband,’ broke in the woman.

“‘This is witchcraft!’ he cried, and ran away.

“‘Now he is gone to fetch the others,’ I said to the woman. ‘Fasten back the sides of the tent that I may see, and give me the guns.’

“She obeyed, though then she sat exposed, and I took the double-barrelled gun and held it ready.

“Presently, they all came, five or six Arabs, or half Arabs, and a score or so of black soldiers. Even the slaves came, dragging their yokes, fifty or more of them of whom perhaps thirty were men, all known to me, for had we not shared the yoke? There they stood huddled together behind the Arabs, staring.

“‘Take a knife,’ I whispered to the woman; ‘slip out, get among the slaves and cut the thongs of the yokes.’

“She nodded—have I not told you that girl had wits, Macumazahn? —and slipped away.

“Cried the fat one, the captain:

“‘This fellow, whom we all know for Kaneke, the slave whom we bought, says that he is Hassan our lord. Yes, there he sits in Hassan’s robes and says that he is Hassan. Dog, where is Hassan?’

“‘Inside this garment,’ I answered. ‘Listen. I made a bargain with Hassan, I who am a wizard. I forgave him his sins against me, and in return he gave me his soul while his body flew away to Paradise.’

“‘The liar!’ shouted the captain. ‘Kill him!’ and he brandished a spear.

“‘Admit that I am Hassan or I will send you to where you will learn that I am no liar,’ I said quietly.

“In answer he lifted the spear to stab me. Then I shot him dead.

“‘Now am I Hassan?’ I asked, while the rest stared at him.

“One or two who were frightened said ‘Yes’. Others stood silent, and a big fellow began to put a cap upon his gun. I shot him with the other barrel, then, rising, roared in a great voice:

“‘On to them, slaves, if you would be free!’ for by now I saw that the woman had cut many of the thongs.

“Those men were brave, they came of good stock. They heard, and leapt on to the Arabs with a shout, knocking them down with the yokes and throttling them with their hands. Soon it was over. Most of them were killed, but two or three crawled before me crying that I was certainly Hassan.

“‘Very well,’ I said. ‘Take away these’—here I pointed to the dead men—‘and throw them into yonder ravine, and bid the women prepare food while I make prayer according to my custom.’

“Then I took Hassan’s beautiful prayer-rug, spread it and made obeisance in the proper fashion, muttering with my lips as I had often watched him do; after which everything went smoothly. That is all the story, Macumazahn.”

When he had finished this tale, which, true or false, of its sort was remarkable even in equatorial Africa, where such things happen, or happened, by the score without anybody hearing of them, I sat awhile considering Kaneke.

To tell the truth he was worth study. A giant of a man in size, he was not a negro by any means, for his features had a somewhat Semitic cast and he was yellow-hued rather than black. Moreover, he had hair, not wool, wavy hair that he wore rather long. His eyes were so prominent, round, and lustrous that they gave an owl-like cast to his countenance, his features well cut, although the lips were somewhat coarse and the nose was hooked like a hawk’s beak, while his hands and feet were thin and shapely, and in curious contrast to his great athletic frame and swelling muscles. His age might have been anything between thirty-five and forty, and he carried his years well, moving with the swing and vigour of youth.

It was his face, however, that commanded my attention as a student of character. It was extraordinarily strong and yet dreamy, almost mystical, indeed, when in repose, the face of a thinker, or even of a priest. Contemplating him I could almost believe the strange tale he had told me, which in the case of most natives I should have set down as an outrageous lie. For here, without doubt, was a man who could conceive a plot of the sort and execute it without hesitation. Yet he was one to whom I took a dislike from the moment I set eyes upon him. Instinctively, however attractive he might be in some ways, I felt that at bottom he was dangerous and not to be trusted. Still, he interested me very much, as did his story, especially that part of it in which he said that he called the lions “by a charm”.

"What happened afterwards, Kaneke?" I asked at last.

"Oh, very little, Macumazahn. I became Hassan, though they called me 'the Changeling'; that is all. I did not travel on towards the coast because I thought it safer to stop where I was, not daring to go either forward or back. So I gathered people about me and founded the town in which you are. Once some Arabs came to kill me, but I killed them, and after that I was no more molested, because, you see, I was looked upon as a ghost-man, one who had a great ju-ju, one not to be touched; and all were afraid of me."

"You mean you became a witch-doctor again, Kaneke."

"Yes, Macumazahn. Or, rather, I was that already, a diviner and a master of spells, like my fathers before me. So here I set up as a sort of wise man as well as a warrior, and soon gained a great repute, which caused all the people round about to send to me to give them medicines and charms, or to make rain. Thus, and with the help of trade, I became rich and powerful as I am today."

"Then you are a happy man, Kaneke."

He rolled his big round eyes and looked at me earnestly, asking:

"Is any man happy, Macumazahn, or at least any man who thinks? The beasts are happy; can man be happy like the beasts who never look to tomorrow or to the hour of death?"

"Now that you mention it, Kaneke, I do not suppose that any man is happy, except sometimes for an hour when he forgets himself in drink, or love, or war."

"Or when he talks with the heavens," added Kaneke, which I thought a strange remark. "Yes, then and in sleep he is sometimes happy till he wakes to the sorrow of the day."

He paused a little and went on:

"If this be so with all men, how much more is it so with those who have known the yoke and who must grow old far from their homes, as I do? For such there is no joy, for even their dreams are haunted. In these they see the village where they were born and the distant mountains and the face of their mother, and hear the voices of their playmates and of those they loved, that now are still."

I sighed as the truth of his words came home to me.

"If you feel thus," I answered presently, "why do you not return to your home?"

"I will tell you, Macumazahn. There are many reasons, among them these. Here I rule over people who would not wish to go with me and who, if I forced them, would run away, or perhaps poison me. Indeed, they would not let me go because I am necessary to them, protecting them from their enemies and from wild beasts, and giving them rain, as I can do. Again, the road is long and dangerous, and maybe I should not live to come to its end. Also, if I did, what should I find? I was my father's eldest son, born of his chief wife, and to me he told the secrets of his wisdom that have come down to us through the generations. But I have been absent for years and mayhap another has taken my place. My people would not welcome me, Macumazahn. They might kill me, especially if they who know all, have learned that I have betrayed my own goddess by bending the knee to the Prophet, even though I never bent my heart. Still, it is true that I wish to risk all and return, even if it be to die."

Now I grew deeply interested, for always I have loved to discover the mysteries of these strange African faiths.

"Your own goddess?" I asked. "What goddess?"

All this time we were seated in the shade of a flat-topped, thick-leaved tree of the banyan species, the Tree of Council it was called, that grew upon a little knoll at a distance from Kaneke's town. He rose and walked all round this place, as though to make sure that no one was near us. Then he stared up into its branches, where he discovered a monkey sitting. I knew that it was there, but he did not seem to have noticed it. At this monkey he began to shout out something, as though he were giving it orders, till at last the little beast ran along the boughs of the tree, dropped to the ground and bolted for the bush in the distance.

"Why do you hunt it away?" I asked.

"A monkey can hear and is very like a man. Perhaps a monkey can tell tales, Macumazahn."

I laughed, for of course I understood that this was an African way of indicating that the matter to be discussed was most solemn and private. By driving away that monkey Kaneke was swearing me to the strictest secrecy—or so I thought.

He came back and moved his stool, I noted, into such a position that the light of the westering sun striking through the lower boughs of the tree flickered on my face and left his in shadow. I lit my pipe leisurely, so that for some time there was silence between us. The fact is I was determined that he should be the first to speak. It is a good rule with any native when a subject of importance is concerned.

"You asked me of my goddess, Macumazahn."

"Did I, Kaneke?" I replied, puffing at my pipe to make it burn. "Oh yes, I remember. Well, who is she and where does she live? On earth or in heaven—which is the home of goddesses?"

"Yesterday, Macumazahn, you—or perhaps it was that little yellow man, your servant Hans—asked me if I had ever heard of a lake called Mone which lies in the hidden land where dwell my people, the Dabanda, beyond the Ruga-Ruga Mountains."

"I dare say. I remember having heard of this lake, which interested me because of legends connected with it, though I forget what they were. What about it?"

"Only that it is there my goddess dwells, Macumazahn."

"Indeed. Then I suppose that she is a water-spirit."

"I cannot say, Macumazahn. I only know that she dwells with her women on the island in the lake, and at night, when it is very dark, sometimes she and her companions are heard upon the water, or passing through the forests, singing and laughing."

"Did you ever see her, Kaneke?"

He hesitated like one who seeks time to make up a plausible story, or so I thought, then answered:

"Yes. Once when I was young, I had been sent to look for some goats of ours that had strayed, and following them into the forest which slopes down to the lake, I lost myself there. Night came on and I lay down to sleep under a tree, or rather to watch for the dawn, so that with the light I might escape from that darksome, haunted place, of which I was afraid."

"Well, and what happened?"

"So much that I cannot remember all, Macumazahn. Spirits went by me; I heard them in the tree-tops and above; I heard them pass through the forest, laughing; I felt them gather about me and knew that they were mocking me. At length all those Wood-Dwellers went away, leaving me as terrified as though a lion had come and eaten out of my bowl. The moon rose and her light pierced down through the boughs, a shaft of it here, a shaft of it there, with breadths of blackness between. I shut my eyes, trying to sleep, then hearing sounds, I opened them again. I looked up. There in the heart of one of the pools of light stood a woman, a fair-skinned woman like to one of your people, Macumazahn. She seemed to be young and slender, also beautiful, as I perceived when she turned her head and the moon shone upon her face and showed her soft, dark eyes, which were like those of a buck. For the rest she was clad in grey garments that glimmered like a spider's web filled with dew at dawn. There was a cap upon her head and from beneath it her black hair flowed down upon her shoulders. Oh, she was beautiful—so beautiful..." and he paused.

"That what, Kaneke?" I asked curiously.

"Lord, that I committed a great crime, the greatest in the whole world, the crime of sacrilege against her who is called the Shadow."

"Shadow! Whose shadow?"

"The Shadow of the Engoi, the goddess who dwells in heaven and is shone upon by the star we worship above all other stars." (This, I found afterwards, was the planet Venus.) "Or perhaps she dwells in the star and is shone upon by the moon—I do not know. At least, she who lives upon the island in the lake is the shadow of the Engoi upon earth, and that is why she is called Engoi and Shadow."

"Very interesting," I said, though I understood little of what he said, except that it was a piece of African occultism to which as yet I had not the key. "But what crime did you commit?"

"Lord, I was young and my blood was hot and the beauty of this wanderer in the forest made me mad. Lord, I threw my arms about her and embraced her. Or, rather, I tried to embrace her, but before my lips touched hers all my strength left me, my arms fell down and I became as a man of stone, though I could still see and hear..."

"What did you see and hear, Kaneke?" I asked, for again he paused in his story.

"I saw her lovely face grow terrible and I heard her say, 'Do you know who I am, O man Kaneke, who are not afraid to do me violence in my holy, secret grove where none may set his foot?' Lord, I tried to lie, but I could not who must answer, 'I know that you are the Engoi; I know that your name is Shadow. I pray you to pardon me, O Shadow.'"

"For what you have done there is no pardon. Still, your life is spared, if only for a while. Get you gone and let the Council of the Engoi deal with you as it will."

"And what happened then?"

"Then, Lord, she departed, vanishing away, and I too departed, flying through the forest terribly afraid and pursued by voices that proclaimed my crime and threatened vengeance. Next day the Council seized me and passed judgment on me, driving me from the land so that I fell into the hands of our enemies, the Abanda, who dwell upon the slopes of the mountains, and in the end was sold as a slave."

"And how did this Council know what you had done, Kaneke?"

"What is known to the Shadow is known to her Council, and what is known to her Council is known to the Shadow, Lord."

Now I considered Kaneke and his story, and came to the conclusion, a perfectly correct one, as I think, that he was lying to me. What his exact offence against this priestess may have been I don't know and never learned in detail,

though I believe that it was much worse than what he described. All that was certain is that he had committed some sacrilegious crime of such a character that, notwithstanding his rank, he was forced to fly out of his country in order to save his life, and to become an exile, which he remained.

Leaving that subject without further comment, I asked him who were these Abanda who delivered him into slavery.

"Lord," he replied, "they are a branch of a people from whom we separated ages ago and who live on the plains beyond the mountains. They hate us and are jealous of us because the Engoi gives us rain and fruitful season, whereas often they suffer from drought and scarcity. Therefore they wish to take the land and Lake Mone, so that the Engoi may once more be their goddess also. More, they are a mighty people, whereas we are very few, for from generation to generation our numbers dwindle."

"Then why do they not invade and defeat you, Kaneke?"

"Because they dare not, Lord; because if they set foot within the land of Mone a curse will fall upon them, seeing that it and we who dwell there are protected by the Stars of Heaven. Yet always they hope that the day will come when they can defy the curse and conquer us, who hold them back by wisdom and not by spears. And now, Macumazahn, I must go to make my prayer before the people to that prophet in whom I do not believe. Yet come to me again when the evening star has risen, for I have more to say to you, Macumazahn."

I got up, then said:

"One more question before I go, Kaneke. Is this Engoi of whom you speak, who lives in a lake, a woman or—something more?"

"Lord, how can I answer? Certainly she is a woman, for she is born and dies, leaving behind her a daughter to take her place. Also she is something more, or so we are taught."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the same flesh or Shadow dwells in every Engoi, although the flesh which holds it changes from generation to generation. There is a legend that she is an angel who sinned and fell from heaven."

"What is the legend and how did she sin?"

A cunning look came over the face of Kaneke as he answered:

"The priests' tale runs, Lord, that an Engoi of long ago loved a white man and that when he was forbidden to her, she killed him to take him to heaven with her. Therefore she must return to the world again and again till she finds that white man" (here he glanced at me) "and makes amends to him for her crime. She is looking for him now, and the Stars declare that the time is at hand when she will find him again."

"Do they really?" I remarked. "Well, I hope she won't be disappointed," I added, reflecting to myself that Kaneke was a first-class imaginative liar, for though the idea of the sinful spirit returning to inhabit mortal flesh is as old as the world, his adaptation of it was ingenious.

What, I wondered, as I walked away, did that specious but false-hearted ruffian Kaneke want to get out of me? Whatever his object, certainly the man could not be trusted. According to his own account he was a fugitive outcast who had committed murder, one also who for his personal advantage pretended to profess a faith in which he admitted that he had no belief, showing thereby that he was of a traitorous and contemptible character. So sure was I of this, that but for one thing I would have put an end to my acquaintance with him then and there. He knew the way to Lake Mone and declared that it was his country. And I—well, I burned to find out the truth about this holy lake and the mysterious priestess who dwelt in the midst of its waters, she, without doubt, of whom Brother Ambrose had written to me so many years ago.

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## ALLAN'S BUSINESS INSTINCTS

I went to my camp, which was situated upon the outskirts of Kaneke's village in a deserted garden where bananas, oranges, papaws, and other semi-tropical products fought for existence in a neglected confusion, working out the problem of the survival of the fittest. Here I found Hans the Hottentot, who had been my servant and in his own way friend from my youth up, as he was that of my father before me. He was seated in front of the palm-leaf shelter watching a pot upon the fire made of mealie-cobs from which the corn had been stripped, looking very hot and cross.

"So you have come at last, Baas," he said volubly. "An hour ago that coast cook-boy, Aru, went off, leaving me to watch this stew which he said must be kept upon the simmer, neither boiling nor going cold, or it would be spoiled. He swore that he was going to pray to Allah, for he is a Prophet-worshipper, Baas. But I know what his prophet is like, for I found him kissing her last night; great fat girl with a mouth as wide as that plate and a bold eye that frightens me, Baas, who have always been timid of women."

"Have you?" I said. "Then I wish you would be timid of other things too, gin-bottles, for instance."

"Ah, Baas, a gin-bottle, I mean one that is full, is better than a woman, for of a gin-bottle you know the worst. You swallow the gin, you get drunk and it is very sad, and next morning your head aches and you think of all the sins you ever did. Yes, Baas, and if the gin was at all bad, their number is endless, and their colour so black that you feel that they can never be forgiven, however hard your reverend father, the Predikant, may pray for you up there. But, Baas, as the morning goes on, especially if you have the sense to drink a pint of milk and the luck to get it, and the sun shines, you grow better. Your sins roll away, you feel, or at least I do, that the prayers of your reverend father may have prevailed there in the Place of Fires, and that the slip is overlooked because Life's road is so full of greasy mud, Baas, that few can travel it without sometimes sitting down to think. Now with women, as the Baas knows better perhaps than anyone, the matter is not so simple. You can't wash HER away with a pint of milk and a little sunshine, Baas. She is always waiting round the corner; yes, even if she is dead—in your mind you know, Baas."

"Be silent, Hans," I said, "and give me my supper."

"Yes, Baas; that is what I am trying to do, Baas, but something has gone wrong after all, for the stuff is sticking to the pot and I can't get it out even with this iron spoon. I think that if the Baas would not mind taking the pot and helping himself, it would be much easier," and he thrust that blackened article towards me.

"Hans," I said, "if this place were not Mahommedan where there is no liquor, I should think that you had been drinking."

"Baas, if you believe that Prophet-worshippers do not drink, your head is even softer than I imagined. It is true that they have no gin here, at least at present, because they have finished the last lot and cannot get any more till the traders come. But they make a kind of wine of their own out of palm trees which answers quite well if you can swallow enough of it without being sick, which I am sorry to say I can't, Baas, and therefore this afternoon I have only had two pannikins full. If the Baas would like to try some—"

Here I lifted the first thing that came to hand—it was a three-legged stool—and hurled it at Hans, who slipped cleverly round the corner of the hut, probably because he was expecting its advent.

A while later, after I had tackled the stew—which had stuck to the pot—with unsatisfactory results, and lit my pipe, he returned to clear up, in such a chastened frame of mind that I gathered the palm-wine—well, let that be.

"What has the Baas been doing all the afternoon in this dull place?" he asked humbly, watching me with a furtive eye, for there was another stool within reach, also the pot. "Talking to that giant rain-maker, who looks like an owl in sunlight—I mean Kaneke—or perhaps to one of his wives; she who is so pretty," he added, by an after-thought.

"Yes," I said, "I have—to Kaneke, I mean, not to the wife, whom I do not know; indeed, I never heard that he had any wives."

Then I added suddenly, for now that he had recovered from the palm-wine I wished to surprise the truth out of his keen mind:

"What do you think of Kaneke, Hans?"

Hans twiddled his dirty hat and fixed his little yellow eyes upon the evening sky, then he took the pot and, finding a remaining leg of fowl, ate it reflectively, after which he produced his corn-cob pipe and asked me for some tobacco. This, by the way, I was glad to see, for when Hans could smoke I knew that he was quite sober.

These preliminaries finished, he remarked.

"As to what was it that the Baas wished me to instruct him? Oh, I remember. About that big village headman, Kaneke. Well, Baas, I have made inquiries concerning him from his wife, who says she is jealous of him and therefore in a mood to speak the truth. First of all he is a great liar, Baas, though that is nothing for all these people are liars—not like me and you, Baas, who often speak the truth, or at least I do."

"Stop fooling, and answer my question," I said.

"Yes, Baas. Well, I said that he was a liar, did I not? For instance, I dare say he has told the Baas a fine tale about how he came to settle here, by killing the head of the slave-gang, after which all the other slavers acknowledged him as their chief. The truth is that he and the other slaves murdered the lot of them because he said he was a good Mahommedan and could not bear to see them drinking gin against the law, which for my part I think was clever of him. They surprised them in their sleep, Baas, and dragged them to the top of that cliff over the stream, where they threw them one by one into the water, except two who had beaten Kaneke. These he flogged to death, which I dare say they deserved. After this the people here, who hated the slavers because they robbed them, made Kaneke their chief because he was such a holy man who could not bear to see followers of the Prophet drink gin, also because they were afraid lest he should throw them over the cliff too. That is why he must be so strict about his prayers, because, you see, he must keep his fame for holiness and show that he is as good as he wishes others to be."

Hans stopped to re-light his pipe with an ember, and I asked him impatiently if he had any more to say.

"Yes, Baas, lots. This Kaneke is not one man, he is two. The first Kaneke is a tyrant, one full of plots who would like to rule the world, a lover of liquor too, which he drinks in secret; fierce, cunning, cruel. The second Kaneke is one who dreams, who hears voices and sees things in the sky, who follows after visions, a true witch-doctor, a man who would seek what is afar, but who, living in this soft place, is like a lion in a cage. His mother must have made a mistake, and instead of bearing twins, got two spirits into one body where they must fight together till he dies."

"I dare say. Many men have two spirits in one body. Is that all, Hans?"

"Yes—that is, no, Baas. You know this Kaneke brought you here, don't you, Baas, and that all those troubles which we met with, so that we could not go the road we wanted because that tribe sent to say they would kill us if we did, were made by him so that you might come to his village."

"I know nothing of the sort."

"Well, it was so, Baas. The jealous woman told me all about it."

"Why? What for? There is no big game here that I can shoot, and I am not rich to give him presents. Indeed, he has asked for nothing and feeds us without payment."

"I am not sure, Baas, but I think that he wishes you to go somewhere with him; that the lion wants to come out of the cage and to kill for himself, instead of living on dead meat of which he is tired. Has he spoken to you about that holy lake of which we have heard, Baas? If not, I think he will."

"Yes, Hans. It seems that it is in his country where he was born and that he had an adventure there in his youth, because of which his people drove him away."

"Just so, Baas, and presently you will find that he desires to go back to his country and have more adventures or to pay off old scores, or both. Do you wish to go with him, Baas?"

"Do you, Hans?"

"I think not, Baas. This Kaneke is a spook man, and I am afraid of spooks who always make me feel cold down the back."

Here Hans stared at the sky again, then added:

"And yet, Baas, I'd rather go to the lake or anywhere than stop in this place where there is nothing to do and the palm-wine makes one sick, especially as after all, a good Christian like Hans has nothing to fear from spooks, whom he can tell to go to hell, as your reverend father did, Baas. Lastly, as your reverend father used to say, too, when he stood in the box in a nightshirt, it doesn't matter what I wish to do, or what you wish to do, since we shall go where we must, yes, where it pleases the Great One in the sky to send us, Baas, even if He uses Kaneke to drag us there by the hair of the head. And now, Baas, I must wash up those things before it gets dark, after which I have to meet that jealous wife of Kaneke's yonder in a quiet place, and learn a little more from her, for as you know, Baas, Hans is always a seeker after wisdom."

"Mind that you don't find folly," I remarked sententiously. Then remembering my promise and noting that the evening star was showing brightly in the quiet sky, I rose and went through the gate of the town, for my camp was outside the fence of prickly pears which was planted round the palisade, thinking as I walked that in his ridiculous way Hans had spoken a great truth. It was useless to bother about plans, seeing that we should go where it was fated that we should go, and nowhere else. Doubtless man has free will, but the path of circumstance upon which he is called to exercise it is but narrow.

At the gate I found a white-robed man waiting to guide me to Kaneke's abode, "to keep off the dogs and see that I did not step upon a thorn", as he said.

So I was conducted through the village, a tidy place in its way, to the north end, where outside the fence was that cliff with a stream, now nearly dry, running at the bottom of it over which Hans said Kaneke had thrown the slave-traders.

Round Kaneke's house, that was square, thatched, and built of whitewashed clay, was a strong palisade through which the only entrance was by a double gate, for evidently this chief was one who took no risks. At the inner gate my

guide bowed and left me. As he departed it was opened by Kaneke himself, who, I noted, made it fast behind me with a bar and some kind of primitive lock. Then he bowed before me in almost reverential fashion, saying:

"Enter, my lord Macumazahn, White Lord whose fame has travelled far. Yes, whose fame has reached me even in this dead place where no news comes."

Now I looked at him, thinking to myself for the second time, "I do wonder what it is you want to get out of me, my friend." Then I said:

"Has it indeed? That is very strange, seeing that I am no great one, no Queen's man who wears ribbons and bright stars, nor even rich, but only a humble hunter who shoots and trades for his living."

"It is not at all strange, O Macumazahn. Do you not know that every man of account has two values?—one his public value in the market-place, which may be much or little; and the other his private value, which is written in all minds that have judgment. Nor is it strange that I should be acquainted with this second and higher value of yours that stands apart from wealth, or honours cried by heralds. Have I not told you that I am one of the fraternity of witch-doctors, and do you not know that throughout Africa such doctors communicate with one another by curious and secret ways? I say that before ever you set foot upon our shores I knew that you were coming in a ship, also much concerning you. Amongst others a certain Zikali who dwells in the land of the Zulus, a chief of our brotherhood, sent me a message."

"Oh, did he?" I said. "Well, Zikali's ways are dark and strange, so I can almost believe it. But, friend Kaneke, is it wise to talk thus openly here? Doubtless you have women in your house, and women's ears are long."

"Women," he answered. "Do you suppose that I keep such trash about me in my private place? Not so. Here my servants are men who are sworn to me, and even these leave me at sundown, save for the guard without my gates."

"So you are a hermit, Kaneke."

"At night I am a hermit, for then I commune with heaven. In the day I am as other men are, better than some and worse than others."

Now I bethought me of Hans' definition of this strange fellow whom he described as having two natures and not for the first time marvelled at the little Hottentot's acumen and deductive powers.

Kaneke led me across the courtyard of beaten polished earth to the stoep or verandah of his house, which was more or less square in shape, consisting apparently of two rooms that had doors and windows after the Arab fashion, or rather window-places closed with mats, for there was no glass. On this stoep were two chairs, large string-seated chairs of ebony with high backs, such as are sometimes still to be found upon the East Coast. The view from the place was fine, for beneath at the foot of a precipice lay the river bed, and beyond it stretched a great plain. When I was seated Kaneke went into the house where a lamp was burning, and returned with a bottle of brandy, two glasses, curious old glasses, by the way, and an earthen vessel of water. At his invitation I helped myself, moderately enough; then he did the same—not quite so moderately.

"I thought that you were a Mahommedan," I said, with an affectation of mild surprise.

"Then, Macumazahn, you have a bad memory. Did I not tell you a few hours ago that I am nothing of the sort. In the daytime out yonder I worship the Prophet. Here at night, when I am alone, I worship, not the Moslem crescent, but yonder star," and he pointed to Venus now shining brightly in the sky, lifted his glass, bowed as though to her, and drank.

"You play a risky game," I said.

"Not very," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "There are few zealots in this place, and I think no one who from time to time will not drink a tot. Moreover, am I not a witch-doctor, and although such arts are forbidden, have they not all consulted me and are they not afraid of me?"

"I dare say, Kaneke, but the question is, are you not also afraid of them?"

"Yes, Macumazahn, at times I am," he answered frankly, "for even a 'heaven-herd'" (he meant a rain-maker) "has a stomach, and some of these Great Lake people understand poisons very well, especially the women. You see, Macumazahn, I am a slave who has become a master, and they do not forget it."

"What do you want with me?" I asked suddenly.

"Your help, Lord. Although I am rich here, I wish to get out of this place and to return to my own country."

"Well, what is there to prevent you from doing so?"

"Much, Lord, without an excuse, as I told you before sundown. Indeed, it is impossible. If I tried to go I should be murdered as a traitor and a renegade. That is the tree of Truth; ask me not to count the leaves upon it and tell you why or how they grow."

"Good. I see your tree and that it is large. But what do you want with me, Kaneke?"

"Lord, have I not told you that your repute has reached me and the rest? Now I add something which you will not believe, but yet is another tree of Truth. I am not all a cheat, Lord. Visions come to me, as they did to my fathers; moreover, I have looked upon the face of Engoi, and he who has seen the Engoi partakes of her wisdom. Lord, in a vision, I have been warned to seek your help."

"Is that why you blocked my road by raising that Lake tribe against me, and otherwise, Kaneke, so that I was forced to come to your town?"

"Yes, Lord, though I do not know who betrayed me to you. Some of the women, perhaps, or that little yellow man of yours, who hears in his sleep like a mere-cat—yes, even when he seems to be drunk—and is quick as a snake at pairing-time. Because of the vision, I did bring you here."

"What do you want me to do?" I repeated, growing impatient. "I am tired of talk. Out with it that I may hear and judge, Kaneke."

He rose from his seat, and, stepping to the edge of the verandah, stared at the evening star as though he sought an omen. Then he returned and answered:

"You are a wanderer, athirst for knowledge, a seeker for new things, Lord Macumazahn. You have heard of the holy hidden lake called Mone, on which no white man has looked, and desire to solve its mysteries, and what I have told you of it has whetted your appetite. Without a guide you can never reach that lake. I, who am of the people of its guardians, alone can guide you. Will you take me with you on your journey?"

"Hold hard, my friend," I said. "You are putting the tail of the ox before the horns. I may wish to find that place, or I may not, but it seems that you MUST find it, I don't know why, and that you cannot do so without me."

"It is so," he answered with something like a groan. "I will open the doors of my heart to you. I must seek that lake, for those upon whom the Shadow has fallen must follow the Shadow even though its shape be changed; and it has come to me in a dream, thrice repeated, that if I try to do so without your help, Lord, I shall be killed. Therefore, I pray you, give me that help."

Now my business instincts awoke, for though some do not think so, I am really a very sharp business man, even hard at times, I fear.

"Look here, friend Kaneke," I said, "I came to this country because I have heard that beyond it is a land full of elephants and other game, and you know I am a hunter by trade. I did not come to search for a mysterious lake, though I should be glad enough to see one if it lay in my path. So the point is this: if I were to consent to undertake a journey which according to your own account is most dangerous and difficult, I should require to be paid for it. Yes, to be largely paid," and I looked at him as fiercely as I suppose a usurer does at a minor who requires a loan.

"I understand. Indeed, it is natural. Listen, Lord, I have a hundred sovereigns in English gold that I have saved up coin by coin. When we get to the lake they shall be yours."

I sprang from my chair.

"A hundred sovereigns! When we get to the lake, which probably we shall never do! Man, I see that you wish to insult me. Good night, indeed good-bye, for tomorrow I leave this place," and I lifted my foot to step off the verandah.

"Lord," he said, catching at my coat, "be not offended with your slave. Everything I have is yours."

"That's better," I said. "What have you?"

"Lord, I deal in ivory, of which I have a good store buried."

"How much?"

"Lord, I think about a hundred bull-tusks, which I proposed to send away at next new moon. If you would accept some of them—"

"Some?" I said. "You mean all of them, with the one hundred pounds for immediate expenses."

He rolled his eyes and sighed, then answered:

"Well, if it must be so, so be it. Tomorrow you shall see the ivory."

Next he went into the house and returned presently with a canvas bag, of which he opened the mouth to show me that it was full of gold.

"Take this on account, Lord," he said.

Again my business instincts came to my help. Remembering that if I touched a single coin I should be striking a bargain, whatever the ivory might prove to be worth, I waved the bag away.

"When I have seen the tusks, we will talk," I said; "not before. And now good night."

Next morning a messenger arrived, again inviting me to Kaneke's house.

I went, accompanied this time by Hans to whom I had explained the situation, whereon that worthy gave me some excellent advice.

"Be stiff, Baas," he said; "be very stiff, and get everything you can. It is unfortunate that you do not sell women like these Arabs, for this Kaneke has a nice lot of young girls whom he would give you for the asking, were you not too good a Christian. Listen, Baas, I have learned that you can't ask too much, for yonder Kaneke must get out of this place, and soon, if he wants to go on living. I am sure of it, and without your help he is afraid to move."

"Cease your foolish talk," I answered, though in my heart I had come to the same conclusion.

On reaching the house, as before the gate was opened by Kaneke, who looked rather doubtfully at Hans, but said nothing. Within, for the most part arranged against the fence, was the ivory. My eyes gleamed at the sight of it, for it was a splendid lot though in some cases rather black with age as if it had been hidden away for a long time, and among it were three or four tusks as large as any that I ever shot. Hans, who was a fine judge of ivory, went over it piece by piece, which took a long time. I made a calculation of its value and from market rates then prevailing, allowing twenty-five per cent for transport and other costs, I reckoned that it was worth at least £700, and Hans, I found, put it somewhat higher.

Then we bargained for a long time, and in the end came to the following agreement, which I reduced to writing: I undertook to accompany Kaneke to his own country of the Dabanda tribe, unless, indeed, sickness or disaster of any sort made this impossible, after which I was to be at liberty to return or to go where I would. He, on his part, was to pay me the ivory as a fee, also to deliver it free to my agent at Zanzibar, a man whom I trusted, who was to sell it to the best advantage and to remit the proceeds to my bank at Durban.

Further, the bag which proved to contain one hundred and three sovereigns was handed over to me. At this I rejoiced at the time, though afterwards I regretted it, for what is the use of dragging about gold in wild places where it has no value? Kaneke undertook also to guide me to his country, to arrange that I should be welcome there and generally to protect me in every way in his power.

Such, roughly, was our contract which I concluded with secret exultation while that ivory was before my eyes. I signed it in my large, bold handwriting; Kaneke signed it in crabbed Arabic characters of which he had acquired some knowledge; and Hans signed it as a witness with a mark, or rather a blot, for in making it he split the pen. Thus all was finished and I went away exultant, as I have said, promising to return in the afternoon to make arrangements about the despatch of the ivory and as to our journey.

"Hans," I said, for there was no one else to talk to, "I did that business very well, did I not? Take a lesson from me and learn always to strike when the iron is hot. Tomorrow Kaneke might have changed his mind and offered much less."

"Yes, Baas, very well indeed, though sometimes if the iron is too hot the sparks blind one, Baas. Only I think that tomorrow Kaneke would have offered you double, for I know that he has much more ivory buried. If you had taken a lesson from ME, you would have waited, Baas. Did I not tell you that he MUST get out of this place and would pay all he had for your help?"

"At any rate, Hans," I replied, somewhat staggered, "the pay is good, as much as I could ask."

"That depends upon what price the Baas puts upon his life," said Hans reflectively. "For my part I do not see that all the tusks of all the elephants in the world are of any use when one is dead, for they won't even make a coffin, Baas."

"What do you mean?" I asked angrily.

"Oh, nothing, Baas, except that I believe that we shall both be dead long before this business is finished. Also have you thought, Baas, that probably this ivory will never get to the coast at all? Because you see Kaneke, who, I think, is also good at business, will arrange for it to be stolen on the road and returned to him later, just as you or I would have done, Baas, had we been in his place. However, the Baas has the hundred sovereigns which no doubt will be very useful to eat when we are starving in some wilderness, or as a bribe to Kaneke's fetish, whatever it may be. Or—"

Here, unable to bear any more, I turned upon Hans with intent to do him personal injury, whereon he bolted, grinning, leaving me to wait upon myself at dinner. It was not a cheerful meal, for, as I reflected, the little wretch was probably right. To secure very doubtful advantages I had to let myself in for unknown difficulties and dangers, in company with a native of whom I knew little or nothing, except that he was an odd fish, and whose servant I had practically become in consideration for value received. For even if I never saw that ivory again, or its proceeds, there were the hundred sovereigns weighing down my pocket—and my conscience—like a lump of lead.

Most heartily did I wish that I had never touched the business. I thought of sending back the gold to Kaneke by Hans, but for various reasons dismissed the idea. Of these the chief was that probably it would never reach him, not because Hans was dishonest where money was concerned, but for the reason that it would go against what he called HIS conscience, to return anything to a person of the sort from whom it had been extracted. He might bury it; he might even give it to that jealous wife from whom he acquired so much backstair information; but Kaneke, I was sure, would never see its colour unless I took it myself, which I was too proud to do.

Then suddenly my mood changed, transformed, perhaps, by some semi-spiritual influence, or as is more likely, by that of a good meal, for it is a humiliating fact that our outlook upon life and its affairs depends largely upon our stomach. What a rabbit of a man was I that I should be scared from a great project by the idle chatter and prognostications of Hans, uttered probably to exercise his mischievous mind at my expense. If I were, and on that account turned my face towards the coast again, Hans, who loved adventure even more than I do, would be the first to reproach me, not openly, but by means of the casual arrows of his barbed wit. Moreover, it was useless to run away from anything, for as he himself had said but yesterday, we must go where Fate drives us. Well, Fate had driven me to pocket Kaneke's sovereigns and a kind of note of hand in ivory, so there was an end of the matter. I would start for the home of the Dabanda people, and for the unvisited shores of the Lake Mone, and if I never got there, what did it matter? All our journeyings must end some day, be it next month, or next year, or a decade hence.

I sent for Hans, who came looking pious and aggrieved, perhaps the most aggravating of his many moods.

"Hans," I said, "I have made up my mind to go with Kaneke to the Dabanda country, and if you try to prevent me any more, I shall be angry with you and send you down to the coast with the ivory."

"Yes, Baas," he answered in a meek voice. "The Baas could scarcely do less, could he, after taking that fellow's money, which no doubt he made by selling girls; that is, unless he wished to be called a thief. Moreover, I never tried to stop the Baas. Why should I when I shall be glad to go anywhere out of this place, where, to tell the truth, that jealous little wife of Kaneke who tells me so much, is beginning to think me too handsome and to roll her eyes and to press her hand upon her middle whenever she sees me, which makes me feel ill, Baas."

"You mean you make her feel ill, you little humbug," I suggested.

"No, Baas. I wish it were so, for then I could think better of her. For the rest, Baas, if I pointed out the dangers of this journey, it was not for my own self, but only because the Baas's reverend father left him in my charge and therefore I must do my best to guide him when I see him going astray."

At this I jumped up and Hans went on in a hurry.

"The Baas will not send me away to the coast with the ivory as he threatened to do, will he? He knows that in one way I am weak and perhaps if I was separated from him, grief might cause me to drink too much of that palm- wine and make myself ill." Then, reading in my face that I had no such intention, Hans took my hand, kissed it, and departed.

At the corner of the cook-house he turned and said:

"The Baas has made his will, has he not? So I need only remind him that if he wishes to write any good-bye-we-shall-meet-in-heaven letters, he had better do so at once, so that they can be sent down to the coast with the ivory."

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## THE TRIAL OF KANEKE

I will pass over all the details concerning the dispatch of the ivory on its long road to Zanzibar and our other preparations for departure. Suffice it to say that the stuff went off all right on the shoulders of porters, together with a lot more, for Hans guessed well when he said that Kaneke had plenty of other tusks hidden away, although he declared that these belonged to someone else. What is more, here I will state that, strange as it may seem, in due course the ivory reached Zanzibar in safety and was delivered to my agent, who sold it according to instructions and, minus his commission, remitted the proceeds, which were more than I had expected, to my bank in Durban. So in this matter Kaneke dealt honestly.

What happened to the remainder of the ivory, which I presume to have been his, I do not know, nor can it have interested him, as he never returned to receive its price. Nor do I know what other goods went with that caravan which was led by Arabs, for I was careful not to inquire.

Notwithstanding the insinuations of Hans, I saw no girl slaves, and imagine them to have been apocryphal. Indeed, I believe that what Kaneke really dealt in was guns and powder. Once a year a caravan came up from Zanzibar laden with these and other goods, such as cloth, calico, and beads, returning with the ivory that Kaneke had collected in the interval. The money which he made on these transactions was large and kept in an English bank at Zanzibar, as I learned in after years. I wonder what became of it.

Well, the string of porters, headed by Arabs mounted upon donkeys, departed and were no more seen. We, too, prepared to depart. Here I should explain that my following was limited. I had with me two gun-bearers, skilled hunters both of them, who had been strongly recommended to me in Zanzibar and who, having learned my reputation as a professional big-game shot, which had followed me from the South, were very glad to enter my service. One of these men was, it appeared, an Abyssinian by birth with a name so unpronounceable that I christened him Tom, though the natives called him "Little Holes", because his face was marked with small-pox.

The other was born of a Somali woman and an Arab, or perhaps a European father. To tell the truth he was remarkably British in his appearance with a round, open face and almost straight, reddish hair, although of course—except in certain lights—his skin was dark. His name, he informed me proudly, speaking in excellent English, for he had been educated at one of the first Mission schools and served as gun-bearer to several English sportsmen, was Jeremiah Jackson. Who his father might have been he had no idea, and as his mother died before he was five, she had never told him.

This man I called Jerry, because of the natural association of the name with that of Tom, for who has not heard of Tom and Jerry, the typical "gay dogs" of the Georgian days of whom my father used to tell me? Both of them were of about the same age, somewhere between thirty and forty. Both were Christians of a sort, for Tom belonged to the Abyssinian section of that faith, and both were brave and competent men. Of the two Tom had the more dash, but perhaps owing to a European strain of blood Jerry was the cooler and the more dogged. Soon I became very friendly with them, but Hans looked upon them suspiciously, at any rate at first, I think because he was jealous.

These gun-bearers were well paid, according to the rate of that day; still, as they had come with me to hunt elephants and not to make long journeys of exploration, I thought it right to explain to them my change of plans and to give them the opportunity of returning to the coast with the ivory if they wished.

Tom said at once that he would go on with me to the end of the journey, whatever it might be, for he was a born adventurer with that touch of a mystic in him which I have observed to be not uncommon among such Abyssinians as I have met. Jerry, more cautious, began to talk about his wife, from whom it appeared he was separated, and his little daughter who was at a Mission school, which caused Hans, who was present, to make some sarcastic remark about "family men", who, he said, should stop at home and nurse the babies. This caused Jerry to fire up and say that he would come too and that Hans would see which of them wished to nurse babies before all was done.

When the matter was settled I thanked them both and told them that Kaneke had given me a hundred pounds in gold, a sum that, in view of the dangers of the trip, I proposed to divide into three parts, one for each of them and one for Hans. Now they thanked me warmly, only Jerry remarked that he thought it probable he would never live to earn his third, for which he was sorry as it would have been an endowment for his little daughter.

"You are mistaken," I said. "I propose to give you this money now, trusting to the honour of you both to stick to me to the end, so that if there is anyone in whom you put sufficient faith, among those who are going to the coast with the ivory,"—for this was before the caravan had started—"you can send it to your friends in his charge." They were much astonished and, I could see, touched, swearing, both of them, Tom who was a Protestant by God, and Jerry by the Virgin Mary, that they would never desert me, but would see the business through to the end, whatever it might be. When they had finished their protestations I turned to Hans, who all this while had stood by twirling his hat with a superior smile upon his ugly little face, and asked him if he did not thank me for his share.

"No, Baas. I am not going to take the money, so why should I thank you for nothing? I am not a hired man like these two hunters. I am the Baas's guardian appointed to look after him by his reverend father, and when I want

anything of the Baas, I take it as a guardian has a right to do."

Then as he marched off I called after him in Dutch, which the others did not understand:

"You are a jealous, ill-conditioned little begger, and I shall keep your share for myself." This I did until eventually he drew it a long while afterwards. I should add that besides Tom and Jerry I had about twenty native bearers, who agreed, though very doubtfully, to go on with me and carry the loads.

As the date fixed for our departure drew near, I observed that Kaneke grew more and more nervous, though exactly of what he was afraid I could not understand. He summoned a meeting of the headmen of his village, at which I was present, and explained that he proposed to accompany me upon an elephant-shooting trip whence we should return in due course. This intimation was very ill received, although he had added that they could elect one of their number to act as father of the village during his absence. They said that the time was coming when they expected him to pray for rain, and if he were not there to do so they would get none.

Here I should explain that the religion of these people was a strange mixture between that of Mahomet and the superstitions of the East Coast savages. Indeed a man called Gaika, a truculent, fierce-eyed fellow, not quite an Arab, for he had a dash of negroid blood, leapt up and denounced him venomously, ostensibly because of this proposed journey.

Kaneke, to my astonishment, remained very meek and calm, saying that he would think the matter over and speak with them again, after which the meeting broke up.

"What is at the back of all this?" I asked of Hans, who had been present with me, when we were in our camp again.

"The Baas is very blind," he said. "Does he not see that this Gaika wishes to kill Kaneke and take his place?"

I pointed out that if it were so he ought to be glad to get rid of him out of the town.

"Not so," answered Hans, "for they think he is really going to gather men from other tribes where his name as a witch-doctor is great, with whom he will return and put them all to death. Baas," he added in a whisper, "they have a plan to kill Kaneke, whom they both hate and fear, but they are not quite ready with their plan, which is why they do not want him to go away."

"How do you know all this—through that woman?" I asked.

Hans nodded.

"Some of it, Baas. The rest I picked up here and there when I seemed to be asleep, or when I am asking that old fellow who is called a Mullah to teach me the religion of Mahomet, which he thinks I am going to adopt. Yet, Baas, I sit in that mosque-hut of his listening to his nonsense and telling him that my soul is growing oh! so happy, and all the while I keep my ears open and pick up lots of things. For they think me very wise, Baas, and tell me plenty which they would not trust to you."

I looked at Hans with disgust, mixed with admiration, reflecting that without doubt he had got the hang of the business. But I said no more, for that place was a nest of spies.

That afternoon I had sent our porters on to a certain spot about three miles away, together with the loads. This I did because I was afraid lest they should be corrupted and the goods stolen. So now only Hans, Tom, and Jerry remained with me in the town.

Next morning Hans brought me my coffee as usual and said in a casual fashion:

"Baas, there is trouble. Kaneke was seized while he was asleep last night. They broke into his house and tied him with ropes. It seems that yesterday afternoon he had a quarrel with one of them and killed him with a blow of his fist, or with a stone that he held in his hand, for he is strong as an ox."

I whistled and asked what was going to happen.

"They are going to try him for murder this morning, Baas, according to their law, and they have sent to ask if you will be present at the trial. What shall I say, Baas?"

At first I was inclined to answer that I would have nothing to do with the business, but on reflection I remembered that if I did so it would be set down to fear; also that I had taken Kaneke's ivory and gold and that it would be mean to desert him in his trouble. So I sent an answer to say I would attend the trial with my servants.

At the appointed hour we went accordingly, armed, all four of us, and at the gate of the town were informed that the trial was to take place at the Tree of Council, which, it will be remembered, stood outside the village. So thither we marched and on arrival found all the population of the place, numbering perhaps three or four hundred people, assembled around the tree but outside of its shadow. In that shadow sat about a dozen white-robed men, elders, I suppose, whom I took to be the judges, some of them on the ground and some on stools.

As we advanced through the crowd towards them they stared doubtfully at our rifles, but in the end I was given a seat on the right of the Court, if so it may be called, but at a little distance, while my three retainers stood behind me. We were not spoken to, nor did we speak. Presently the crowd parted, leaving an open lane up which marched Kaneke with his hands bound behind his back, guarded by six men armed with spears. I noted that all looked upon him coldly as he went by. To judge by their faces he had not a friend among them.

Finally he was placed in such a position that he had the judges, who sat with their backs to the trunk of the tree, in front of him, with myself on his right, and the audience on his left. There he stood quietly, a fine and striking figure notwithstanding his bonds, taller by a head than any of that company. Somehow he reminded me of Samson bound and being led in to be mocked by the Philistines, so much so that I wondered where Delilah might be. Then I remembered Hans' tale of the jealous wife and thought that I knew—which I didn't. He rolled his big eyes about him, taking in everything. Presently they fell upon me, to whom he bowed. Of his judges he took no notice at all, or, for the matter of that, of the people either.

The "Mullah man", as Hans called the priest, opened the proceedings with some kind of prayer and many genuflections. Then Gaika, who appeared to act as Attorney General and Chief Justice rolled into one, set out the case at considerable length and with much venom. He narrated that Kaneke was a slave belonging to some strange people, who by murder many years before, and cunning, had acquired authority over them. Then he proceeded to detail all his crimes as a ruler which, if he could be believed, were black indeed. Among them were cruelty, oppression, theft, robbery of women, and I know not what besides.

These were followed by a string of offences of another class: necromancy which was against the law of the Prophet, bewitchments, raising of spirits, breaches of the law of Ramadan, betrayal of the Faith by one who was its secret enemy, worship of strange gods or devils, drinking of spirituous liquors, plottings with their enemies against the people, midnight sacrifice of lambs and infants to the stars, and so forth. Lastly came the immediate charge, that of the murder of an elder on the previous day. For all of these crimes Gaika declared the slave and usurper Kaneke to be worthy of death.

Having settled his hash in this fashion, he sat down and called upon the prisoner to plead.

Kaneke answered in a resonant voice that struck me, and I think all present, as powerful and impressive.

"To what purpose is it that I should plead," he said, "seeing that my chief judge and enemy has already declared me guilty of more crimes than anyone could commit if he lived for a hundred years? Still, letting the rest be, I will say that I am guilty of one thing, namely of killing a man yesterday in a quarrel, in order to prevent him from stabbing me, though it is true that I did not mean to kill him, but only to fell him to the ground; so that it was Allah who killed him, not I. Now I will tell you, O people, why I am put upon my trial here before you, I who have lifted you up from nothingness into a state of wealth and power.

"It is that yonder Gaika may take my place as your headman. Good. He is welcome to my place. Know that I weary of ruling over you and protecting you. What more need I say? It is enough. For a long while you have plotted to kill me. Now let me go my way, and go you yours."

"It is not enough," shouted Gaika. "You, O Kaneke, say that you would accompany the white hunter, Macumazahn yonder, to shoot elephants. It is a lie. You go to raise against us the tribes to the north who have a quarrel with us from our father's time, saying that these seized their young people and sold them as slaves. We know that it is your plan and it is for that reason that for years we have never allowed you to leave our town. Nor shall you leave it now. Nay, you shall stay here for ever while your spirit dwells in hell, where wizards go."

He ceased, and from the audience rose a murmur of applause. Whatever his good qualities might be—if he had any—evidently Kaneke was not popular among his flock. As the prisoner made no answer, Gaika went on, addressing the other judges thus:

"My brothers, you have heard. To call witnesses is needless, since some of you saw this Kaneke murder our brother yesterday. Is he guilty of this and other crimes?"

"He is guilty," they answered, speaking all together.

"Then what should be his punishment?"

"Death," they answered, again speaking all together, while the audience echoed the word "Death".

"Kaneke," shouted Gaika in triumph, "you are doomed to die. Not one among these hundreds asks for mercy on you; no, not even the women. Nor have you any children to plead for you, since doubtless, being a magician, you slew them unborn lest they should grow up to kill you. Yet according to the law it is not lawful that you should be despatched at once. Therefore we send you back to your own house under guard, that there you may pray to Allah and His Prophet for forgiveness of your sins. Tomorrow at the dawn you shall be brought back here and beaten to death with clubs, that we may not shed your blood. Have you heard and do you understand?"

Then at length Kaneke spoke again. Showing no fear, he spoke quietly, almost indifferently, yet in so clear a voice that none could miss a word, saying in the midst of a deep silence:

"O Gaika, son of a dog, and all the rest of you, sons and daughters of dogs, I hear and I understand. So tomorrow you would beat me to death with clubs. It may happen or it may not, but if I know I shall not tell you. Still, listen to the last wisdom that you shall hear from my lips. You are right when you say that I am a magician. It is so, and as such I have foreknowledge of the future. I call down a curse on you all. Let Allah defend you if he can, and will, and Mahomet make prayer for you. This is the curse: a great sickness shall fall on you; I think it will begin tonight. I think that some who are already sick are seated yonder," and he nodded towards the crowd, "although they know it not. Yes, they began to be sick a minute ago, when the words of cursing left my lips" (here there was a sensation among the audience,

every one of them staring at his neighbour). "Most of you will die of this sickness because after I am gone there will be none to doctor you. The rest will flee away. They will scatter like goats without a herd. They will be taken by those whose sons and daughters you used to steal, and become slaves and die as slaves."

Then he turned towards me and added, "Farewell, Lord Macumazahn. If it is fated that in flesh I cannot guide you on your journey to the place whither you would go, yet fear not, for my spirit will guide you and when you are come there safely, then give a message from me to one of whom I have spoken to you, which message shall be delivered to you, perhaps in the night hours when you are asleep. I do not ask you to lift your gun and shoot this rogue," and he nodded towards Gaika, "because you are but one and would be overwhelmed with your servants. Nay, I only ask you to hearken to the message when it comes and to do what it bids you."

Not knowing what to say I made no answer to this peculiar appeal, although Hans, to judge by his mumblings and fidgets, appeared to wish me to say something. As I still declined, with his usual impertinence he took it upon himself to act as my spokesman, saying in his debased Arabic:

"The great lord, my master, bids me inform you, Kaneke, that he is sorry you are going to be killed. He tells me to say also that, if you are killed and become a spook, he begs that you will keep away from him, as spooks, especially of those who are magicians and have been put to death for their evil deeds, are not nice company for anyone."

When I heard this, indignation took away my breath, but before I could speak a word Gaika addressed me fiercely, crying out:

"White Wanderer, we believe that you are in league with this evil-doer and plot mischief against us. Get out of our town at once, lest you share his fate."

Now this unprovoked assault made me furious, and I answered in the first words that came to my tongue:

"Who are you that tell lies and dare to talk to me of Fate? Let my fate be, fellow, and have a care for your own, which perhaps is nearer than you think."

Little did I guess when I spoke thus, at hazard as it seemed, that very soon doom would overtake this ruffian, and by my hand. Are we sometimes filled with the spirit of prophecy, I wonder? Or do we, perhaps, know everything on our inmost souls whence now and again bursts a rush of buried truth?

After this the company broke up in confusion. Kaneke was hustled away by his guards; men who waved their spears in a threatening fashion advanced upon us and were so insolent that at last I looked round and lifted the rifle I carried—I remember that it was one of the first Winchester repeaters of a sort that carried five cartridges. Thereon they fell back and we were allowed to regain our huts in peace.

I did not stop there long. Nearly all our gear had been sent forward with the bearers; indeed, no more of it remained than the four of us could carry ourselves, although the arrangement was that some of Kaneke's men should do us this service on the morrow. As this was now out of the question we loaded ourselves, also a donkey that I possessed, with blankets, guns, cooking-pots, ammunition, and I know not what besides, and started, I riding on the donkey and looking, as I have since reflected, like the White Knight in Alice in Wonderland.

Then, keeping clear of the town, we trekked for the place where our bearers were encamped, reaching it unmolested about an hour later. This spot, chosen by myself, was on the lowest slope of a steep hill covered with thorn trees, through which ran a little stream from a spring higher up the slope. The first thing I did was to cut down a number of these thorns and drag them together into a fence, making what is called a boma in that part of Africa, behind which we could protect ourselves if necessary. By the time that this was done and my tent was pitched, it was late in the afternoon. Feeling tired, more, I think, from anxiety than exertion, I lay down and after musing for a while upon the fate of the unfortunate Kaneke and wishing, much as I disliked the man, that I could save him from a doom I believed to be unjust, which seemed impossible, I fell asleep, as I can do at any time. In my sleep a curious dream came to me, which after all was not wonderful, seeing how my mind was occupied.

I dreamed that Kaneke spoke to me, though I could not see him, but distinctly I heard, or seemed to hear, his voice saying:

"Follow the woman. Do what the woman tells you, and you will save me."

Twice I heard this, and then I do not know how long afterwards, I woke up, or rather was awakened by Hans setting some food upon the camp table near the tent. On going out I saw that it was night, for the full moon was just rising and already giving so clear a light in a cloudless sky, that I could see to eat without the aid of a lamp.

"Hans," I said presently, "what did Kaneke mean when he talked of a great sickness that was about to smite the town?"

"The Baas observes little," answered Hans. "Did he notice nothing among the people of that caravan which took away the ivory?"

"Yes, I noticed that they were a dirty lot and smelt so much that I kept clear of them."

"If the Baas had come a little closer, he would have seen that two or three of them had pimples coming all over their faces."

"Small-pox?" I suggested.

“Yes, Baas, small-pox, for I have seen it before. Also, they had been mixing with the people of the town who have not had small-pox for many years, for Kaneke kept it away by his charms, or stopped it when it broke out. Baas, this time he did not keep it away, and quite a number of the townspeople, as I heard this morning, are feeling bad, with sore throats and headaches, Baas. Kaneke knew all this as well as I do and that is why he talked about a pestilence. It is easy to prophesy when one knows, Baas.”

“Is it easy to send dreams, Hans?” I asked; then before he could answer I told him of the words I had seemed to hear in my sleep.

For a moment I caught sight of a look of astonishment upon Hans’ wrinkled and impassive countenance. Then he answered in an unconcerned fashion:

“I dare say, Baas, if one knows how. Or perhaps Kaneke sent no dream. Perhaps the Baas heard me and the woman talking together, for she is here and waiting to see the Baas after he has eaten.”

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#### CHAPTER 4

#### WHITE-MOUSE

"A woman!" I said, springing up. "What woman?"

"Kaneke's jealous wife who likes me so much, she whom they call White- Mouse because she is so quick and silent, I suppose. She has a plan to save that bull of a man, just as the dream said, or you overheard."

"Then she must be fond of him after all, Hans."

"I suppose so, Baas. Or perhaps she thinks she will get him back again now, because some other woman, of whom she is jealous, has got small-pox, of which she hopes that she will die, or become very ugly. At least that is her tale, Baas."

"I will see her at once," I said.

"Best eat your supper first, Baas; it is always wise to keep women waiting a while, for that makes them think more of you."

Knowing that Hans always had a reason for what he said, even when he seemed to be talking the most arrant nonsense, I took his advice.

When I had finished my food he led me to a patch of bush that grew round a pool at the foot of the slope about two hundred yards from the camp. We entered and presently from beneath a tree a little woman glided out so silently that she might have been a ghost, and stood still with the moonlight falling on her white robes. She threw back a hood that covered her head, revealing her face, which was refined and in its way very pretty; also so fair for an Arab that I thought she must have European blood in her. She looked at me a little while, searching my face with her dark, appealing eyes, then suddenly threw herself on her knees, took my hand, and kissed it.

"That will do," I said, lifting her up. "What do you want with me?"

"Lord," she said in Arabic, speaking in a low, impassioned voice, "I am that slave of Kaneke whom here they call White-Mouse, though elsewhere I have another name. Although he has treated me badly, for he who loves a Shadow cares for no woman, his spell is still upon me. Therefore I would pray you to save him if you can."

"Me!"

"Yes, Lord, you." Then as I said nothing she went on quickly, "I know that you white men do not work without pay, and I have nothing to give you, except myself. I will be a good servant to you and Kaneke will not mind. He has told me to go where I will."

"Don't be frightened, Baas," whispered Hans into my ear in Dutch. "When she says you—she must mean me."

I hit him in the middle with the point of my elbow, which stopped his breath. Then I said:

"Set out your plan, White-Mouse, if you have one. But please understand that I do not want you as a servant."

"Then you can drive me away, Lord, for if you do my will, your slave I shall be till death. Only one thing do I ask, that you do not give me to that little yellow monkey, or to either of your hunters."

"How well she acts!" grunted the unconquered Hans behind me.

"The plan, the plan," I said.

"Lord, it is this: there is a path up the cliff on the crest of which is the house of Kaneke, wherein he lies bound awaiting death at the rising of the morrow's sun. It is known to few; indeed only to Kaneke and myself. I will lead you with your two hunters and this yellow one up that path and into Kaneke's house. There, if it be needful, you can deal with those who guard him— there are but three of them, for the rest watch without the fence—and get him away down the cliff."

"This is nonsense," I said. "I examined that cliff when I visited Kaneke. There is no fence upon its edge because it overhangs in such a fashion that without long ropes, such as we have not got, made fast above, it cannot be climbed or descended."

"It seems to do so, Lord, but beneath its overhanging crest there is a hole, which hole leads into a tunnel. This tunnel ends beneath the pavement of Kaneke's house just in front of where he sits to watch the stars. Do you understand, Lord?"

I nodded, for I knew that she meant the stoep where Kaneke and I had drunk brandy and water together.

"The pavement is solid," I said. "How does one pass through it?"

"A block of the hard floor, which is made of lime and other things so that it is like stone, can be moved from beneath. I have its secret, Lord. That is all. Will you come with me now? The beginning of the gorge is not very far from this place which, as you know, by any other road is a long way from the town. Therefore we need not start yet because I do not wish to reach the house until two hours after midnight, when all men are asleep, except those who watch the sick in the town, where a pestilence has broken out, as Kaneke foretold, and these will take little heed if they hear a noise."

"No, I won't," I answered firmly. "This is a mad business. Why should I give my life and those of my servants to try to save Kaneke, whom I have only known for a week or two and who may be all that his enemies say?"

She considered the point, then answered:

"Because he alone can guide you to that hidden place whither you wish to go."

"I don't wish to go anywhere in particular," I replied testily; "unless it is back to Zanzibar."

Again she considered, and said:

"Because you have taken Kaneke's ivory and gold, Lord."

At this I winced a little and then replied:

"I took the ivory and gold in payment for services to be rendered to Kaneke, if he could accompany me upon a certain journey, and he paid, asking nothing in return if he could not do so. Through no fault of mine he is unable to come, and therefore the bargain is at an end."

"That is well said, Lord, in the white man's merchant-fashion. Now I have another reason to which I think any man will listen. You should help Kaneke because I, your slave, who am a woman young and fair, pray you to do so."

"Ah! she is clever; she knows the Baas," I heard Hans mutter reflectively, words that hardened my heart and caused me to reply:

"Not for the sake of any woman in Africa, nor of all of them put together, would I do what you ask, White-Mouse. Do you take me for a madman?"

She laughed a little in a dreary fashion and answered:

"Indeed I do not, who see that it is I who am mad. Hearken, Lord: like others I have heard tales of Macumazahn. I have heard that he is generous and great-hearted; one who never goes back upon his word, a staff to lean on in the hour of trouble, a man who does not refuse the prayer of those in distress; brave too, and a lover of adventure if a good cause may be served, a great one whom it pleases to pretend to be small. All these things I have heard from that yellow man, and others; yes, and from Kaneke himself, and watching from afar, although you never knew I did so, I have judged these stories to be true. Now I see that I am mistaken. This lord Macumazahn is as are other white traders, neither better nor worse. So it is finished. Unaided I am not able to save Kaneke, as by my spirit I have sworn that I would. Therefore I pray your pardon, Lord, who have put you to trouble, and here before your eyes will end all, that I may go to make report of this business to those I serve far away."

While I stared at her, wondering what she meant, also how much truth there was in all this mysterious tale, suddenly she drew a knife from her girdle, and tearing open her robe, lifted it above her bared breast. I sprang and seized her wrist.

"You must love this man very much!" I exclaimed, more, I think, to myself than to her.

"You are mistaken, Lord," she answered, with her strange little laugh. "I do not love him; indeed I think I hate him who have never found one whom I could love—as yet. Still, for a while he is my master, also I have sworn to hold him safe by certain oaths that may not be broken and—I keep my word, as I must do or perish everlastingly."

For a little while there was silence between us. Never can I forget the strangeness of that scene. The patch of bush by the edge of the pool, the little open space where the bright moonlight fell, and standing full in that moonlight which shone upon the whiteness of her rounded breast, this small, elfin-faced woman with the dark eyes and curling hair, a knife in her raised right hand.

Then myself, much perplexed and agitated, rather a ridiculous figure, as I suspect, clasping her wrist to prevent that knife from falling; and in the background upon the edge of the shadow, sardonic, his face alight with the age-old wisdom of the wild man who had eaten of the tree of Knowledge, interested and yet indifferent, hideous and yet lovable—the Hottentot, Hans. And the look upon that beautiful woman's face, for in its way it was beautiful, or at any rate most attractive, the inscrutable look, suggestive of secrets, of mysteries even—oh! I say I shall never forget it all.

As we stood thus facing each other like people in a scene of a play, a thought came to me, this thought—if that woman was prepared to die because she had failed in an effort to save from death the man whom she declared she hated (why was she prepared to die and why did she hate him? I wondered), ought I not to try to save her even at some personal risk to myself? Also if I could, ought I not to help Kaneke, whose goods I had taken? Certainly it was impossible to allow her to immolate herself in this fashion before my eyes. I might take away her knife, but if I did she could find a second; also there were many other roads to self-destruction by which she might travel.

"Give me that dagger," I said, "and let us talk."

She unclasped her hand and it fell to the ground. I set my foot upon it and loosed her.

"Listen," I went on. "I am minded to do what you wish if I can."

"Yes, Lord, already I have read that in your face," she replied, smiling faintly.

"But, White-Mouse," I continued, "I am not the only one concerned. I cannot undertake this business alone. Others must risk their lives as well. Hans here, for instance, and I suppose the two hunters. I cannot lay any commands upon them in such a matter and I do not know if they will come of their own will."

She turned and looked at the Hottentot, a question in her eyes. Hans fidgeted under her gaze, then he spat upon the ground and said:

"If the Baas goes I think that the Baas will be a fool. Still, where the Baas goes, there I must go also, not to pull Kaneke out of a trap, but because I promised the Baas's reverend father that I would do so. As for those other men I cannot say. I think they will answer, 'No, thank you', but if they reply, 'Oh yes', then I believe that we should be better without them, because they are so stupid and think so much about their souls that they would be sure to grow frightened at the wrong time, or to make a noise and bring us all to trouble. In a hole such as White-Mouse talks of, two men are better than four. Also it would be wiser to send Tom and Jerry on with the porters, for should we drag Kaneke out of this hole, those Arabs will try to follow and drag him back, and the farther off we are with the stores the safer we shall be. Porters go slowly, so we can catch them up, Baas."

"You hear," I said to the woman. "What is your word?"

"This yellow one, whom I thought but a vain fool, is wise—for once, Lord. What has to be done I cannot do alone, for there must be some to deal with the guards and hold the mouth of the hole while I cut Kaneke's bonds. Yet for this business two will serve as well as four; indeed better, for they can get back into the tunnel more quickly. Therefore I say do as the yellow man says. Order your hunters to march on with the porters and the stores as long before the break of day as the men will move. If you escape with Kaneke, you can run upon their spoor and join them much faster than will the Arabs who must go round. Then if the Arabs overtake you, they will be tired and you can beat them off with your guns."

"And what will you do?" I asked curiously, for I noticed that she left herself out of the plan.

"Oh! I do not know," she answered, with another of her strange smiles. "Lord, have I not said that I am your slave? Doubtless in this fashion or in that I shall follow my master as a slave should, or perhaps I shall go before him."

Now I remembered that she had spoken of Kaneke as her "master", and presumed that she alluded to him, although in the hyperbole of her people she spoke of herself as my slave. However, I did not pursue the subject, which at the time interested me little, who had more important matters to consider. Indeed, I set myself to extract details from her which I need not enumerate, and to examine her scheme of rescue.

When I had learned all I could, bidding the woman, White-Mouse, to remain hidden, I went back to the camp with Hans and sent for Tom and Jerry. In as careless a fashion as I could, I told them that with Hans I must return towards the town to speak with a man who had promised to meet me secretly upon a matter of importance. Then I ordered them to rouse the porters two hours before dawn and to march on with them towards a certain hill which we had all visited together upon a little shooting-expedition I had made while we were at Kaneke's town, to kill duiker buck and pauw, as we called bustards, for a change of food.

Although I could see that they were troubled, Tom and Jerry said that they would obey my instructions and, that there should be no mistake, fetched the headman of the porters, that I might repeat them to him, which I did. This done, they went away to sleep, Tom saying, as he bade me good night, that he would have preferred to accompany me back to the town where he thought I might come into danger. I thanked him, remarking that I was quite safe. So we parted; I wondering whether I should ever see them again and what they would do if I returned no more. Travel back to the coast, probably, and become rich according to their ideas by selling the guns and goods.

Then I lay down to rest for a while, making Hans do likewise.

At the appointed time I woke from my doze, as I can always do, and left the tent to find Hans awaiting me without and checking such things as we must carry. These were few—a water-bottle filled with cold tea, a small flask of spirits, a strip or two of biltong or dried meat in case we should need food, and a few yards of thin cord. For arms I took a Winchester repeater and a pocketful of cartridges, also a revolver and a sharp butcher's knife in a sheath. Hans had no rifle, but carried two revolvers and a knife, also a couple of candles and a box of matches.

Having made sure that we had collected everything and packed our other belongings to be cared for by Tom and Jerry as arranged, we slipped away to the patch of bush by the pool, taking with us extra food, for we remembered that White-Mouse must be hungry. We did not find her at once, whereon Hans explained to me that having made fools of us, doubtless she had run away. While he was still talking I saw her leaning against the trunk of a tree. Or rather I saw her eyes, which at first I took for those of some animal, for she was no longer a white figure, but a black, having covered her white robe with a thin dark garment she had brought with her in a bundle. I offered her the food, but she shook her head, saying:

"Nay, I eat no more"—words which frightened me a little.

Indeed, altogether there was something fateful and alarming about this woman. She glanced at the moon, then whispered:

"Lord, it is time to depart. Be pleased to follow me and do not smoke, or make fire, or talk too loud."

So off she went, gliding ahead like a shadow, while we marched after, I with a doubting heart. Our road ran along the bank of a little stream, of which the spring I have spoken of seemed to be the source, that wended its way through thin bush to the mouth of the gorge, which here sloped up to the high lands. Doubtless it was this stream, once a

primeval torrent, that in the course of thousands of years dug out this cleft in the bosom of the earth. As we went Hans murmured his reflections into my ear.

"This is a strange journey, Baas, made at night, when we ought to be asleep. I wonder that the Baas should have undertaken it. I think, although he does not know it, he would never have done so had not White-Mouse been so pretty. Perhaps the Baas has noted that when a woman asks for anything of a man, generally he finds it impossible to give it her if she be old and ugly, and quite possible if she is young and very pretty."

"Rubbish!" I answered. "I gave way because, if I had not, White-Mouse would have killed herself, and for no other reason."

"Yes, but if she had been a hideous old grandmother, with a black face wrinkled like that of the Baas, he would not have cared whether she killed herself or not. For who wants a slave with a skin like the hide of a buck that has lain for three months in the sun and rain?"

"As I have told you, I want no slave, Hans," I answered indignantly.

"Ah! so the Baas says now, but sometimes he changes his mind. Thus a little while ago the Baas swore that never, never would he go up the hole to try to save Kaneke. And yet we are taking this long walk with lions about and God knows what at the end of it, to do what the Baas said could not be done. Why, then, did he change his mind, unless it is because that woman is such a pretty mouse with big eyes and a queer smile and not an ugly old yellow-toothed rat? Also, is he sure that all this story of hers is true? For my part I don't believe it, and even doubt whether she is Kaneke's wife as she pretended to me."

At this moment we began to enter the gorge, and our guide turned and laid her finger on her lips in token that we must be silent. Of this I was very glad, for really Hans' jeers were intolerable.

Very soon we descended into the cleft itself, which proved to be a huge donga with sheer sides quite two hundred feet high where it was deepest. The bottom along which the shrunken river ran was strewn with boulders washed from the cliffs above, that made progress slow and difficult. Especially was this so as we scrambled down the deeps, where often little of the moonlight reached us, and sometimes even the sky was hidden by tropical shrubs and tall palms and grasses which grew along the edge of the torrent bed.

Fortunately the journey was not very long, for after about half an hour of this break-back work White-Mouse halted.

"Here is the place," she whispered. "Listen. You can hear the dogs in the town above."

It was true; I could, and the sound of those brutes howling at the moon, as they do at night in Africa, was eerie enough in our depressing circumstances.

"This is the place," she repeated, then after studying the sky a while, added: "Presently will be the time. Meanwhile let us rest, for we shall need all our strength."

Motioning to Hans to remain where he was, she led me to a flat stone out of his hearing, on which I sat down, while she crouched on the ground at my feet, native fashion, a little black ball in the shadow with the faint light gleaming upon a white patch that I knew to be her face.

"Lord," she said, "you go upon a dangerous business, yet I say to you, fear nothing for yourself or the yellow man."

"Why? I fear much."

"Lord, those who have to do with Kaneke's people, as I have from a child, catch something of their wisdom and mind; also I too have been taught to read the stars he worships."

"So our friend is an astrologer," thought I to myself. That is new to me in Africa, but aloud I said:

"Well, what wisdom have you caught or read in the stars?"

"Only that you are both safe, Lord, now and on the journey you will make with Kaneke; yes, and for many years after."

"I am glad to hear it," I remarked somewhat sarcastically, though in my heart I was cheered, as even the most instructed and civilized of us are when anyone speaks words of good omen. Also in that darksome place at the dead of night, on the edge of a desperate adventure, a little comfort went a long way, for when the bread is dry some butter is better than none at all, as Hans used to observe.

"Lord, a word more and I cease to trouble you. Do you believe in blessings, Lord?"

"Oh yes, White-Mouse, though I don't see any about me just now."

"You are wrong, Lord; I see them. They are thick upon your head, they shall be with you through life, and afterwards thousands shall love you. Among them is that blessing which I lay upon you."

"You are very kind, I am sure, White-Mouse. But as you say you hate this Kaneke I don't understand why you should bless me for what I am trying to do."

"No, Lord, and perhaps while you live you never will. Yet I would have you know one thing. I am not Kaneke's jealous wife as I made yonder yellow one believe, or his wife at all, or any man's, any more than my name is White-

Mouse. Lord, you go to seek a wonderful one whom I serve, and I think that you will find her far away. Perhaps I shall be there in her company, and in helping her you will again help me. Now it is time to be at our work."

Then she took my hand and kissed it. I remember that her kiss felt like a butterfly alighting on my flesh, and that her breath was wonderfully sweet. Next she beckoned to Hans, who, devoured by curiosity, was glowering at us from a distance, and led the pair of us a little way up the cliff which sloped at its bottom because of debris washed up by the torrent in ancient days, or perhaps fallen from above. We came to some bushes, in the midst of which lay a large boulder. Here she halted and spoke to us in a whisper, saying:

"On the farther side of that stone is the mouth of the cleft. If you look you will see that the crest of the cliff overhangs its topmost part by many feet, so that it is impossible for it to be ascended or descended, even with any rope the Arabs have, because the height is too great. As I have told you, this tunnel, or waterway, runs to the top for the most part underground, though here and there it is open to the sky. After it reaches that sheer face of the cliff which the stone lip overhangs, the passage pierces the solid rock and is very steep. Here two lamps are hid which I will light with the little fire sticks that your servant has given to me. One lamp must be left as a guide in the descent when you return; the other I, who go first, will carry to show you where to set your feet. Do you understand, Lord?"

"Yes, but what I want to know is, what happens when we reach the top of the tunnel?"

"Lord, as I have said, at its head the hole is closed with a moving block that seems to be part of the floor of the courtyard of Kaneke's house. I have its secret and can cause it to open, which I will do after I have hidden the lamp. Then we must creep into the courtyard. Kaneke, as I believe, is on the stoep of the house with his hands tied behind him, and bound with a rope round his middle to a post that supports the roof of the stoep. It may be, however, that he is in one of the rooms of the house, in which case our task will be difficult—"

"Very difficult," I interrupted with a groan.

"My hope is," she went on, taking no heed of my words, "that those who guard him will be asleep, or perhaps drunk, for doubtless they will have found the white man's drink that Kaneke keeps in the house, which they love, all of them, although it is forbidden by their law. Or Kaneke himself may have told them where it is and begged them to get him some of it. If so, I shall cut his bonds so that he may come to the mouth of the hole and climb into it and thus escape."

"And if they are awake and sober—as they ought to be?" I said.

"Then, Lord, you and the yellow man must play your part; it is not for me to tell you what it is," she answered dryly. "There will not be many of these men set to keep one who is bound, and the most of the guard watch outside the fence, thinking that if any rescue is attempted, it will be from the town. Now I have told you all, so let us start."

Well, start we did; White-Mouse, going first, went round the boulder and pulled aside some loose stones, revealing an orifice, into which we crept after her, Hans nipping in before me. For some way we crawled in the dark up a slope of rock. Then, as she had said would be the case, light reached us from the sky because here the cleft was open. Indeed, there were two or three of these alternating lengths of darkness and light.

After ten minutes or so of this climbing White-Mouse halted and whispered:

"Now the real tunnel begins. Rest a while, for it is steep."

I obeyed with gratitude. Presently there was the sound of a match being struck. She had found the lamp, an earthenware affair filled with palm-oil such as the Arabs used in those days, and lit it. After the darkness its light seemed dazzling. By it I saw a round hole running upwards almost perpendicularly; it was the tunnel which she had told us pierced the lip of solid cliff that overhung the gorge. To all appearance it had been made by man, though a long while ago. Perhaps it was a mine-shaft, hollowed by primeval metal-workers; after all, these are common in Africa, where I have seen many of them in Matabele Land.

At any rate, on its walls I noted gleaming specks that I took to be ore of some sort, but of course this guess may be quite wrong. Up this shaft ran a kind of ladder with little landing-places at intervals, made by niches cut in the rock to give foot-and hand-holds. There was a rope also that must have been fastened to something above, which, I may add, looked to me rather rotten, as though it had been there a long while. My heart sank as I contemplated it and the niches, and most heartily did I wish myself anywhere else than in that beastly hole. However, it was no use showing fear; there was nothing to be done except go through with the business, so I held my tongue, though I heard Hans praying, or cursing, or both, in front of me.

"Forward now. Have no fear," whispered our guide. "Set your hands and feet in the niches as I do; they will not break away, and the rope is stronger than it looks."

Then she slung or strapped to her back the second lamp, which I forgot to say she had lit also and placed in a kind of basket so made that it could be used in this fashion without setting fire to its bearer, thus giving us light whereby to climb, and sprang at the face of the rock. Up she went with an extraordinary nimbleness, which caused me to reflect in an inconsequent fashion that she was well named Mouse, a creature that can run up a wall.

We followed as best we could, clasping the rotten-looking rope, which seemed to be made of twisted buffalo-hide, with our right hands and the niches in which we must afterwards set our feet with our left. I think that rope was the

greatest terror of this horrible journey; though, as we were destined to prove, White-Mouse was right when she said that it was stronger than it looked—very strong, in truth, though this we did not know at the time.

No, not the greatest, for even worse than the rope, that is when we had ascended a long way, was the lamp which we had left burning at the bottom of the hole, because the spark of light it gave showed what a terrible distance there was to fall if one made a mistake. I only looked at it once, or at most twice; it frightened me too much. Another minor trouble in my case was my Winchester repeater that was slung upon my back, of which the strap cut my shoulder and the lock rubbed my spine. Much did I regret that I had not followed the example of Hans and left it behind.

We reached the first landing-place and rested. After eyeing me with some anxiety, for doubtless my face showed trepidation, Hans, I imagine to divert my mind, took the chance to deliver a little homily.

"The Baas," he said, wiping the sweat from his face with the back of his hand, "is very fond of helping people in trouble, a bad habit of which I hope the Baas will break himself in future. For see what happens to those who are such fools. Not even to help my own father would I come into this hole again, especially as I don't know who he was. However, Baas," he added more cheerfully—for secretly agreeing with Hans, I made no reply—"if this is an old mine-shaft as I suppose, think how much worse it must have been for the miners to climb up it with a hundred-pound bag of ore on their backs, than it is for us; especially as they weren't Christians, like you and me, Baas, and didn't know that they would go to heaven if they tumbled off, like we do. When one is fording a bad river safely, Baas, as we are, it is always nice to remember that lots of other people have been drowned in it."

Will it be believed that even then and there that little beast Hans made me laugh, or at any rate smile, especially as I knew that his cynicism was assumed and therefore could bring no ill luck on us? For really Hans had the warmest of hearts.

Presently, off we went again for another spell of niches and apparently rotten rope, and in due course came safely to the second landing-place. Here White-Mouse bade us wait a little.

Saying that she would return presently, she went up a third flight of niches at great speed, and reaching yet another landing-place, did something—we could not see what.

Then she returned, and her descent was strange to see. Taking the rope in both hands (afterwards we discovered that it was made fast to a point or hook of stone on the third landing-place in such fashion that it hung well clear of the face of the rock below), she came down it hand over—or rather under—hand, sometimes setting her foot into one of the niches, but more often swinging quite clear. She was wonderful to look on; her slight figure illumined by the lantern on her back and surrounded by darkness, appeared more like a spirit floating in mid-air than that of a woman. Presently she stood beside us.

"Lord," she said, when she had rested a minute, "I have been to see whether the catch of the stone which covers the mouth of the hole is in order. It works well and I have loosed it. Now at a push this stone, that like the rest of the courtyard is faced with lime plaster, will swing upwards, for it is hung upon a bar of iron, and remain on edge, leaving a space large enough for any man to climb into the courtyard by the little ladder that is set upon the landing-place. Be careful, however, not to touch the stone when you have passed the opening into the courtyard, for if so much as a finger is laid upon it, it will swing to again and make itself fast, cutting off retreat."

"Cannot it be opened from above?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, Lord, if one knows how, which it is impossible to explain to you except in the courtyard itself, as perhaps I shall have no time or chance to do. Still, do not be afraid, for I will fix it with a wedge so that it cannot shut unless the wedge is pulled away. Nay, ask no more questions, for I have not time to answer them," she went on impatiently, as I opened my mouth to speak. "Have I not told you that all will be well? Follow me with a bold heart."

Then, as though to prevent the possibility of further conversation, she went to the edge of the resting-place and began to climb, Hans and I scrambling after her as before. Of this ascent I remember little, for my mind was so fixed upon what was to happen when we reached the top that, dreadful as it was, it made small impression on me. Also by now I was growing more or less used to this steeplejack work, and since I had seen the woman hanging on to it, gained confidence in the rope. The end of it was that we reached the third landing-place in safety, being now, as I reckoned, quite two hundred feet above the spot where the actual tunnel sprang from the cleft which sometimes went underground and sometimes was open to the sky.

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## CHAPTER 5

### THE RESCUE

When we had recovered breath White-Mouse unfastened the lantern from her back and showed us a stout wooden ladder with broad rungs almost resembling steps, which ran from the edge of the resting-place to what looked like a solid roof, but really was the bottom of the movable stone.

"Examine it well," she said, "and note that this resting-place is not beneath the stone, but to the right of it. Therefore I can leave the lamp burning here that it may be ready for use in the descent; for if the basket is set in front of the flame the light will not show in the courtyard above."

This she proceeded to do, and it was then that I noted how the hide rope was fastened to a hook-shaped point of rock at the edge of the platform, also—which I did not like—that it was somewhat frayed by this edge, although originally that length of it had been bound round with grass and a piece of cloth.

Now we were in semi-darkness and my spirits sank proportionately.

"What are we to do, White-Mouse?" I asked.

"This, Lord. I will go up the ladder and push open the stone, as I told you. Then I will climb into the courtyard and creep to the stoep where I am sure Kaneke lies bound, hoping that there I may be able to cut his cords without awakening those who guard him, who, I trust, will be asleep, or drunk, or both. You and Hans will follow me through the hole and stand or kneel on either side of it with your weapons ready. If there is trouble you will use those weapons, Lord, and kill any who strive to prevent the escape of Kaneke."

Now my patience was exhausted, and I asked her:

"Why should I do this thing? Why should I take the lives of men with whom I have no quarrel in order to rescue Kaneke, and very probably lose my own in the attempt?"

"First, because that is what you came here to do, Lord," she answered quietly. "Secondly, because it is necessary that Kaneke should be saved in order that he may guide you, which he alone can do, to a place where you will save others, and thus serve a certain holy one against whom he has sinned in the past."

Now I remembered the story that this Kaneke had told me about a mysterious woman who lived on an island in a lake whom he had affronted, and answered:

"Oh yes, I have heard of her and believe nothing of the tale."

"Doubtless you are right not to believe the tale as Kaneke told it to you, Lord. Learn that once he tried to work bitter wrong to that holy one, being bewitched by her beauty; yes, to do sacrilege to our goddess." (I remembered that "our" afterwards, though at the time I made no comment.) "Being merciful, she spared him, but because of his crime misfortune overtook him, and for years he must dwell afar. Now the hour has come when for certain reasons he is bidden to return and expiate his evil deeds, and not here must his fate find him, Lord—"

"Baas," broke in Hans, "it is no use talking to this White-Mouse, who stuffs our brains with spiders' webs and talks nonsense. She wants us to save Kaneke for her own ends or those of others of whom she is the voice, and we have said that we will try. Now either we must keep our word or break it and climb down this hole again, if we can—which would be much better. Indeed, Baas, I think we should start—"

Here White-Mouse looked at Hans with remarkable effect, for he stopped suddenly and began to fan himself with his hat.

"Which advice does the Lord Macumazahn desire to take?" she asked of me in a cold and quiet voice.

"Go on," I said, nodding towards the ladder, "we follow you."

Next instant she was running up it with Hans at her heels, for as before, he slipped in before me. I may add that it was quite dark on that ladder, which was very unpleasant.

Soon something above me swung back. I felt a breath of fresh air on my face, and looking upwards, saw a star shining in the sky, for at that moment a cloud had passed over the moon, which star gave me comfort, though I did not know why it should.

I reached the top of the ladder and saw that White-Mouse had vanished and that Hans was scrambling into the courtyard. Then he gave me his hand and dragged me after him. The place was quite quiet and because of the cloud I could only see the house as a dark mass and trace the outlines of the stoep, which I remembered very well. Presently I heard a faint stir upon this stoep and got my rifle ready; Hans, on the other side of the mouth of the pit, already had his revolver in his hand.

A while went by, perhaps a minute—it seemed an hour—and looking upwards, to my dismay, I perceived the edge of the moon appearing beyond the curtain of cloud. Swiftly she emerged and flooded the place with light, as an African moon can do. Now I saw all. Coming down the steps of the stoep, very slowly as though he were cramped by his bonds, was the great form of Kaneke leaning on the shoulder of the frail girl, as a man might upon a stick. Pieces of rope still hung to his arms and legs, and she had a bared knife in her hand. In the shadow of the stoep I made out the dim figures of men, two I saw, but in fact there were three, who appeared to be asleep.

As he reached the courtyard Kaneke stumbled and fell on to his hands and knees with a crash, but recovering himself, plunged towards us. The men on the stoep sat up—then it was that I counted three. White-Mouse flung off her dark cloak and stood there in shining white, looking like a ghost in the moonlight; indeed, I believe her object was to personate a ghost. If so it was successful as far as two of the men were concerned, for they howled aloud with terror, crying out something about Afreets. The third, however, who was bolder or perhaps guessed the truth, rushed at her. I saw the knife flash and down he went, yelling in fear and pain. The others vanished, I think into the house, for I heard them shouting there. Kaneke reached us. The woman flitted after him, saying:

“Into the pit! Into the pit! Help him, Lord!”

We did so and he scrambled down the ladder.

At this moment a terrific hubbub arose. The guard outside the fence were rushing through the gate, a number of them, I do not know how many.

Hans snatched the rifle from my hand and pushed me to the edge of the hole—I noticed that the gallant fellow did not wish to go first this time! I clambered down the ladder with great rapidity, calling to Hans to follow, which he did so fast that he trod upon my fingers.

“Where’s White-Mouse?” I said.

“I don’t know, Baas. Talking with those fellows up there, I think.”

“Out of the way!” I cried. “She can’t be left. They will kill her!”

I climbed past him up the ladder again until I could look over the edge of the hole.

This is what I saw and heard: White-Mouse, the knife in her hand, was haranguing the oncoming Arabs so fiercely that they shrank together before her, invoking curses on them as I imagine, which frightened them very much, and pointing now at one and now at another with the knife. As she called down her maledictions she retreated slowly backwards towards the mouth of the pit, whence she must have rushed to meet the men as they burst through the gateway, I presume in order to give us time to get down the ladder. Suddenly the crowd of them seemed to recover courage. One shouted:

“It is White-Mouse, not a ghost!” Another invoked Allah; a third called out: “Kill the foreign sorceress who has brought the spotted sickness on us and snatched away the star-worshipper.”

They came forward—doubtfully lifting their spears, for they did not seem to have any firearms.

“Give me my rifle,” I called to Hans, for in my hurry I forgot that I had a pistol in my pocket, my purpose being to get on the top step of the ladder, and thence open fire on them, so as to hold them back till White-Mouse could join us.

“Yes, Baas,” called Hans from below as he began to climb the ladder again with the rifle in his hand, a slow job, because it cumbered him. I bent down as far as I could to grasp it, thus lowering my head, although I still managed to watch what was going on in the courtyard.

Just as my fingers touched the barrel of the Winchester, White-Mouse hurled her knife at the first of her attackers. Then she turned, followed by the whole crowd of them, and ran for the pit. One caught hold of her, but she slipped from his grasp and, although another gripped her garment, reached the stone which stood up edgewise some three feet above the level of the pavement of the courtyard.

In a flash I divined her purpose. It was not escape she sought, indeed, now that was impossible, but to let fall the block of rock or cement, and thus make pursuit of us also impossible. Horror filled me and my blood seemed to freeze, for I understood that this meant that she would be left in the hands of her enemies.

It was too late to do anything; indeed, as the thought passed my mind she hurled her weight against the stone (if she had ever wedged it open, as she said she would, which I doubt, she must have knocked away the prop with her foot). I saw it begin to swing downwards, and ducked instinctively, which was fortunate for me, for otherwise it would have struck my head and killed me. As it was it crushed in the top of the soft hat I was wearing. Down it came with a clang, leaving us in the dark.

“Hans,” I cried, “bring that lantern and help me to try to push up this stone!”

He obeyed, although it took a long while, for he had to go back to the resting-place to fetch it. Then, standing side by side upon the ladder, we pushed at the stone, but it would not stir a hair’s breadth. We saw something that looked like a bolt, and worked away at it, but utterly without result. We did not know the trick of the thing, if there was one. Then I bethought me of Kaneke who all this while was on the landing-place beneath, and sent Hans to ask him how to raise the stone. Presently he returned and reported that Kaneke said that if once it had been slammed down in this fashion, it could only be opened from above with much labour, if, indeed, this could be done at all.

I ran down the ladder in a fury and found Kaneke seated on the landing-place, a man bemused.

I reviled him, saying that he must come and move the stone, of which doubtless he knew the secret, so as to enable us to try to rescue the woman who had saved him. He listened with a kind of dull patience, then answered:

“Lord, you ask what cannot be done. Believe me I would help White-Mouse if I could, if indeed she needs help, but the catches that loose this mass of rock are very delicate and doubtless were destroyed by its violent closing. Moreover

by this time of a certainty she is killed, if death can touch her, and even were it possible to lift it, you would be killed also, for those sons of Satan will wait there hoping that this may happen.”

Still I was not satisfied, and made the man come up the ladder with me, which he did very stiffly, threatening to shoot him if he did not. This, to tell the truth, at that moment I would have done without compunction, so enraged and horrified was I at what had happened which, perhaps unjustly, I half attributed to him.

Well, he came and explained certain things to me about the catches whereof I forget the details, after which we pushed with all our might, till the stave of the ladder on which we stood began to crack, in fact; but nothing happened. Evidently in some way the block was jammed on its upper side, or perhaps the pin or hinges upon which it was balanced had broken. I do not know and it matters nothing.

All was finished. We were helpless. And that poor woman—oh, that poor woman!—what of her?

I returned to the landing-place and sat down to rest, almost weeping. Hans, I observed, was in much the same state, without a gibe or an impertinence left in him.

“Baas,” he said, “if we had got out of the hole too, it would have been no better; worse, indeed, for we should have been killed as well as White-Mouse, even if we had managed to shoot some of those Prophet-worshipping dogs before they spotted us. Alas, Baas, I think that White-Mouse meant to get herself killed from the first. Perhaps she had had enough of that man,” and he nodded towards Kaneke, who sat brooding and taking no heed, “or perhaps her job was done and she knew it. Or perhaps she can’t be killed, as this Kaneke seems to think.”

Listening to him, I reflected that he must be right, for now I remembered that White-Mouse had spoken several times of the escape of Hans, Kaneke, and myself, and never of her own, though when she did so I had not quite caught her drift. The woman meant to die, or knew that she would die, it did not matter which, seeing that the end was the same. Or she meant something else that was dark to me.

Presently, Hans spoke again:

“Baas,” he said, “this place is a good grave, but I do not want to be buried in it, and oil in these Arab lamps does not last for ever; they are not like those of the widow, which the old prophet kept burning for years and years to cook meal on, as your reverend father used to tell us. Don’t you think we had better be moving, Baas?”

“I suppose so,” I answered, “but what about Kaneke? He seems in a bad way.”

“Oh, Baas, let him come or let him stay behind. I don’t care which. Now I will strap the basket with the lantern on to my back as White-Mouse did, and go first, and you must follow me, and Kaneke can come when he likes, or stop here and repent of his sins.”

He paused, then added (he was speaking in Dutch all this time):

“No, Baas, I have changed my mind. Kaneke had better go first. He is very heavy, also stiff, and if he came last and fell on to our heads, where should we be, Baas? It is better that we should fall on Kaneke rather than that Kaneke should fall on us.”

Being puzzled what to do, I turned to speak to the man. Hans, who was fixing the basket on his back, had set down the lamp which was to be placed in such a position that its light fell full upon Kaneke. By it I saw that his face had changed. While I was questioning him about the bolts of the stone, it had been that of a man bemused, of one who awakes from a drunken sleep, or has been drugged, or is in the last stage of terror and exhaustion. Now it was very much alive and grown almost spiritual, like to the face of one who is rapt in prayer. The large round eyes were turned upwards as though they saw a vision, the lips were moving as if in speech, yet no word came from them, and from time to time they ceased to move, as though the ears listened for an answer.

I stared at him, then said politely in Arabic:

“Might I ask what you are doing, friend Kaneke?”

He started and a kind of veil seemed to fall over his face; I mean that it changed again and became normal.

“Lord,” he answered, “I was returning thanks for my escape.”

“You take time by the nose, for you haven’t escaped yet,” I replied, adding rather bitterly, “and were you returning thanks for the great deed of another who has not escaped, of the woman who is called White-Mouse?”

“How do you know that she has not escaped?”

“Because you yourself said that she must be dead—if she could die, which of course she can.”

“Yes, I said some such words, but now I think that she has been speaking to me, although it may have been her spirit that was speaking.”

“Look here!” I said, exasperated. “Who and what is, or was, White-Mouse? Your wife, or your daughter?”

“No, Lord, neither,” he answered, with a little shiver.

“Then who? Tell me the truth or I have done with you.”

“Lord, she is a messenger from my own country who came a while ago to command me to return thither. It is because of her that these Arabs hate me so much, for they think she is my familiar through whom I work magic and bring evil upon them.”

"And is she, Kaneke?"

"Baas," broke in Hans, "have you finished chatting, for the oil in that lamp burns low and I have only two candles. Those niches will not be nice in the dark, Baas."

"True," I said.

Then I bid Kaneke go first, suggesting that he knew the road, with Hans following him and I coming last.

"My legs are stiff, Lord," he said, "but my arms are recovered. I go."

He went; he went with the most amazing swiftness. In a few seconds he was over the edge of the pit and descending rapidly, hand over hand, as it seemed to me only occasionally touching the niches with his feet. Not that I had much time to judge of this, for presently he was out of sight and only by the jerking of the hide rope could we tell that he was there at all.

"Will it break, Baas?" asked Hans doubtfully. "That brute Kaneke weighs a lot."

"I don't know and I don't much care," I answered. "White-Mouse said we should get through safely, and I am beginning to believe in White-Mouse. So say your prayers and start."

He obeyed, and I followed.

I will omit the details of that horrible descent. Hans and I reached the second platform and rested. Unfortunately in starting again I looked down, and far, far below saw the lamp we had left burning at the bottom, which gave me such an idea of precipitous death that I grew dizzy. My strength left me and I almost fell, especially as just then my foot slipped in one of the niches, leaving all my weight upon my arms. I think I should have fallen, had not a voice, doubtless that of my subconscious self at work, seemed to say to me:

"Remember, if you fall, you will kill Hans as well as yourself."

Then my brain cleared, I recovered control of my faculties, and slipping down the rope a little way I found the next niche with my left foot. Doubtless this return was even more fearsome than the ascent, perhaps owing to physical weariness, or perhaps because the object of the effort was achieved and there was now nothing left to hope for except personal safety, the thought of which is always the father of fear. I am not sure; all I know is that my spine crept and my brain sickened much more than had been the case on the upward adventure.

At length, thank God, the worst of it was over and we reached the sloping passage or gulley, or whatever it may have been, that in places was open to the sky. By help of the lamps that now were almost spent, we scrambled down this declivity with comparative ease, and so came out of the mouth of the hole into the little clump of bush that concealed it.

I sat down trembling like a jelly; the perspiration pouring off me, for the heat of that place had been awful. Hans, who although so tough, was in little better case than myself, found the water-bottle full of cold tea which, to save weight, we had left hidden with everything else we could spare, including our jackets, and passed it to me. I drank, and the insipid stuff tasted like nectar; then gave it to Hans, although I could gladly have swallowed the whole bottleful.

When he had taken a pull I stopped him, remembering Kaneke, who must also be athirst. But where was Kaneke? We could not see him anywhere. Hans opined that he had bolted into some hiding-place of his own, and being too weary to argue or even to speculate upon the matter, I accepted the explanation.

After this we finished the cold tea and topped it up with a nip of brandy apiece, carefully measured in a little cup. The flask itself, to which the cup was screwed, I did not dare to give to Hans, knowing that temptation would overcome him and he would empty it to the last drop.

Much refreshed and more thankful than I can say at having escaped the perils of that darksome climb, I put the extinguished lamps into poor White-Mouse's basket, thinking that they might come in useful afterwards (or perhaps I wished to keep them as a souvenir, I don't remember which). Then by common consent we started for the bottom of the great gulley, proposing to trek up it back towards the camp. On reaching the stream we stopped to drink water — for our thirst was still unsatisfied—and to wash the sweat from our faces, also to cool our feet bruised by those endless niches of the shaft.

Whilst I was thus engaged, hearing a sound, I peeped round a stone and perceived the lost Kaneke kneeling upon the rock like a man at prayer, and groaning. My first thought was that he must be hurt, perhaps in the course of his remarkably rapid descent, and my second that he was grieving over the death of White-Mouse, or mayhap because of his separation from his wives whom he would see no more. Afterwards, however, I reflected that the latter was improbable, seeing that he was so ready to leave them. Indeed, I doubted whether he had really any wives, or children either. Certainly I never saw any about the house in which he dwelt like a hermit; there was nothing to show that these ever existed. If they did, I was sure that Hans would have discovered them.

However, this might be, not wishing to spy upon the man's private sorrows, I coughed, whereon he rose and came round the rock.

"So you are here before us," I said.

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "and waiting for you. The descent of the shaft is easy to those who know the road."

"Indeed. We found it difficult, also dangerous. However, like the woman called White-Mouse"—here he winced and bowed his head—"that is done with. Might I ask what your plans are now, Kaneke?"

"What they have always been, Lord. To guide you to my people, the Dabanda, who live in the land of the Holy Lake. Only, Lord, I think that we had better leave this place as quickly as we can, seeing it is certain that, thinking we have escaped, the Arabs, my enemies, will follow to your camp to attack you there."

"I agree," I answered. "Let us go at once."

So off we went on our long tramp up the darksome gorge, I, to tell the truth, full of indignation and in the worst of tempers. At length I could control myself no longer.

"Kaneke," I said, for he was walking at my side, Hans being a little ahead engaged in picking our way through the gloom and watching for possible attacks—"Kaneke, it seems that I and my servant are suffering many things on your behalf. This night we have run great risks to save you from death, as has another who is gone, and now you tell me that because of you we are to be attacked by those who hate you. I think it would be better if I repaid to you what I have received, together with whatever money the ivory you gave me may bring, and you went your way, leaving me to go mine."

"It cannot be," he answered vehemently. "Lord, although you do not know it, we are bound together until all is accomplished as may be fated. Yes, it is decreed in the stars, and destiny binds us together. You think that I am ungrateful, but it is not so; my heart is full of thankfulness towards you and I am your slave. Ask me no more, I pray you, for if I told you all you would not believe me."

"Already you have told me a good deal that I do not believe," I replied sharply, "so perhaps you had better keep your stories and promises to yourself. At any rate, I cannot desert you at present, for if I did, I suppose those Arab blackguards would cut your throat."

"Yes, Lord, and yours too. Together we shall best them, as you will see, but separated they will kill us both, and your servants and porters also."

After this we went on in silence and in the end, without molestation except from a lion, emerged from the gorge and came to the knoll where I had camped. We struck this beast in the open bushy country just outside the mouth of the gorge, or rather it struck us and followed us very persistently, which made me think that it must have been in great want of food. Occasionally it growled, but for the most part slunk along not more than thirty or forty paces to our right, taking cover in the high grass or behind bushes. Also twice it went ahead to clumps of thorn trees as though to waylay us. I think I could have shot it then, but Hans begged me not to fire for fear of letting our whereabouts be known to Arabs who might be searching for us. So instead we made detours and avoided those clumps of trees.

This seemed to irritate the lion, which for the third time crept forward and, as I saw clearly by the light of the sinking moon, crouched down on our path about fifty paces in front of us in such a spot that, owing to the nature of the land, it was difficult to circumvent it without going a long way round.

Now I thought that I must accept the challenge of this savage or starving animal, but Hans, who was most anxious that I should not shoot, remarked sarcastically that since the "owl-man", as he called Kaneke, was such a wonderful wizard, perhaps he would exert his powers and send it away.

Kaneke, who had been marching moodily along as fast as his legs, still stiff from the bonds, would allow, paying little or no attention to the matter of the lion, heard him and seemed to wake up.

"Yes," he said, "if you are afraid of the beast I can do that. Bide here, I pray you, Lord, till I call you."

Then, quite unarmed, without so much as a stick in his hand indeed, he walked forward quietly to where the lion, a large one with a somewhat scrubby mane, lay upon a rock between the bank of the stream and a little cliff. I watched him amazed, holding my rifle ready and feeling sure that unless I could shoot it first, which was improbable because he was in my line of fire, there would soon be an end of Kaneke. This, however, did not happen, for the man trudged on and presently was so close to the lion that his body hid it from my sight.

After this I heard a growl which degenerated into a yelp like to that of a beast in pain. The next thing I saw was Kaneke standing on the rock where the lion had been, outlined very clearly against the sky, and beckoning to us to come forward. So we went, not without doubt, and found Kaneke seated on the rock with his face towards us as though to rest his legs, and as it seemed once more lost in reverie.

"The lion has gone," he said shortly, "or rather the lions, for there were two of them, and will return no more to trouble you. Let us walk on, I will go first."

"He is a very good wizard, Baas," said Hans reflectively in Dutch, as we followed. "Or perhaps," he added, "that lion is one of his familiars which he calls and sends away as he likes."

"Bosh!" I grunted. "The brute bolted, that is all."

"Yes, Baas. Still, I think that if you or I had gone forward without a gun it would have bolted us, for as you know, when a lion follows a man like that, its belly has been empty for days. This Kaneke's other name must be Daniel, Baas, who used to like to sleep with lions."

I did not argue with Hans; indeed, I was too tired to talk, but stumped along till presently we came to the site of the camp which we had left early on that eventful night—days ago it seemed to be. Here I found that my orders had been obeyed and that Tom and Jerry had gone forward with the porters, as I judged from various indications, such as the state of the cooking- fire, not much more than an hour before. Therefore there was nothing to do but follow their trail, which was broad and easy, even in the low moonlight.

On we marched accordingly, always uphill, which made our weary progress slow. At length came the dawn, a hot, still dawn, and after it the sunrise. By its bright light we saw two things: our porters camping at the appointed spot about half a mile away among some rocks just above a pool of water that remained in a dry river-bed; and behind us, perhaps two miles off, tracking our spoor up the slope that we had travelled, a party of white-robed Arabs, twenty of them or more.

“Now we are in for it,” I said. “Come on, Hans, there is no time to spare.”

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## KANEKE'S FRIENDS

I know of no greater pick-me-up for a tired man than the sight of a body of enemies running on his spoor with the clear and definite object of putting an end to his mortal existence. On this occasion, for instance, suddenly I felt quite fresh again and covered that half-mile which lay between us and the camp in almost record time. So did the other two, for the three of us arrived there nearly neck and neck.

As we scrambled into the place I observed with joy that Tom and Jerry had taken in the situation, for already the porters were engaged in piling stones into a wall, or in hacking down thorn trees and dragging their prickly boughs together so as to form a boma. More, those excellent men had breakfast cooking for us upon a fire, and coffee ready.

Having given such orders as were necessary, though in truth there was little to be done, I fell upon that breakfast and devoured it, for we were starving. Hot coffee and food are great stimulants, and in ten minutes I felt a new man. Then the four of us, namely, Tom, Jerry, Hans, and I, took counsel together, for at the moment I could not see Kaneke who, having bolted some meat, had gone, as I presumed, to help with the boma-building. It was needful, for the position seemed fairly desperate.

By now the Arabs, who advanced slowly, were about half a mile away, and with the aid of my glasses I saw that there were more of them than I had thought, forty or fifty indeed, of whom quite half carried guns of one sort or another. I surveyed the position and found that it was good for defence. The camp was on the slope of a little koppie, round-topped and thickly strewn with boulders. To our right at the foot of the koppie was the long, broad pool I have mentioned.

Behind lay the river-bed half encircling the koppie, or rather a swamp through which the river ran when it was full, which swamp was so deep with sticky mud that advance over it would be difficult, if not impossible. To our left, however, was a dry vlei overgrown with tall grass and thorn trees, through which wended the native path that we had been following. In front the veld over which we had advanced, was open, but gave no cover, for here the grass had been burned leaving the soil bare. Therefore the Arabs could only advance upon us from this direction, or possibly through the thick grass and trees to our left.

But here came the rub. With a dozen decent shots I should have feared nothing. We, however, had but four upon whom we could rely, and Kaneke, who was an unknown quantity. If these Arabs meant business our case was hopeless, for of course no reliance could be placed on the porters, or at any rate upon most of them, who moreover had no guns. In short there was nothing to be done except trust in Providence and fight our hardest.

We got out the guns, Winchester repeaters all of them, of which I had six with me, and opened a couple of boxes of ammunition. The heavy game rifles we loaded and kept in reserve, also a couple of shot-guns charged with loopers, as we called slugs, for these are very effective in meeting a rush. Then I told Hans to find Kaneke, that I might explain matters and give him a rifle. He went and returned presently saying that Kaneke was not working at the walls or cutting down thorns.

"Baas," he added, "I think that skunk has run away or turned into a snake and slid into the reeds."

"Nonsense," I answered. "Where could he run to? I will look for him myself; those Arabs won't be here yet awhile."

So off I went and climbed to the top of the koppie to get a better view. Presently I thought I heard a sound beneath me, and looking over the edge of the boulder, saw Kaneke standing in a little bay of rock, waving his arms in a most peculiar fashion and talking in a low voice as though he were carrying on a conversation with some unseen person.

"Hi!" I said, exasperated. "Perhaps you are not aware that those friends of yours will be here presently and that you had better come to help to keep them off. Might I ask what you are doing?"

"That will be seen later, Lord," he answered quietly. Then, with a final wave of the hand and a nod of the head, such as a man gives in assent, he turned and climbed up to where I was.

Not one word did he say until we reached the others, nor did I question him. Indeed, I thought it useless as I had made up my mind that the fellow was mad. Still; as he was an able-bodied man who said that he could shoot, I gave him one of the rifles and a supply of cartridges, and hoped for the best.

By now the Arabs had come within four hundred yards, whereon a new trouble developed, for the porters grew frightened and threatened to bolt. I sent Hans to tell them that I would shoot the first man who stirred, and when, notwithstanding this, one of them did begin to run, I fired a shot which purposely missed him by a few inches and flattened on a rock in front of his face. This frightened him so much that he fell down and lay still, which caused me to fear that I had made a mistake and hit him through the head. The effect upon the others was marked, for they squatted on the ground and began to pray to whatever gods or idols they worshipped, or to talk about their mothers, nor did any of them attempt to stir again.

At the sound of this shot the Arabs halted, thinking that it had been fired at them, and began to consult together. After they had talked for some time one man came forward waving a flag of truce made of a white turban cloth tied to a spear. In reply I shook a pocket handkerchief which was far from white, whereon he walked forward to within twenty

yards of the boma. Here I shouted to him to stop, suspecting that he wished to spy upon us, and went out to meet him with Hans, who would not allow me to go alone.

"What do you and your people want?" I said, in a loud voice to the man, whom I recognized as one of the judges who had tried Kaneke.

"White Master," he answered, "we want the wizard Kaneke, whom you have stolen away from us, and whom we have doomed to die. Give him to us, dead or alive, and we will let you and your people go in peace, for against you we have no other quarrel. If you do not, we will kill you, every one."

"That remains to be seen," I answered boldly. "As for the rest, hand over to me the woman called White-Mouse and I will talk with you."

"I cannot," he answered.

"Why not? Have you killed her?"

"By Allah, no!" he exclaimed earnestly. "We have not killed that witch, though it is true we wished to do so. Somehow in the confusion she slipped from our hands, and we cannot find her. We think that she has turned into an owl and flown to Satan, her master."

"Do you? Well, I think that you lie. Now tell me why you wish to kill Kaneke after he has run away from you, leaving you to walk your own road?"

"Because," answered the Arab in a fury, "he has left his curse upon us, which can only be loosed with his blood. Did you not hear him swear to bring a plague upon us, and has not the spotted sickness broken out in the town so that already many are ill and doubtless will die? Also has he not murdered our brother and bewitched us in many other ways, and will he not utterly destroy us by bringing our enemies upon us, as two moons ago he swore that he would do unless we let him go?"

"So you were keeping him a prisoner?"

"Of course, White Man. He has been a prisoner ever since he came among us, though at times it is true that he has been seen outside the town, and now we know how he came there."

"Why did you keep him a prisoner?"

"That in protecting himself he might protect us also by his magic, for we knew that if he should escape he would bring destruction upon us. And now, will you give him up to us, or will you not?"

There was a certain insolence about the way in which the man asked this question that put my back up at once, and I answered on the impulse of the moment:

"I will not. First, I will see all of you in hell. What business have you and your fellow half-breed Arabs to threaten to attack me, a subject of the Queen of England, because I give shelter to a fugitive whom you wish to murder? And what have you done with the woman called White-Mouse who, you say, has changed into an owl? Produce her, lest I hold you all to account for her life. Oh, you think that I am weak because I have but few men with me here. Yet I tell you that before the sun has set, I, Macumazahn, will teach you a lesson, if, indeed, any of you live to learn it."

The man stared at me, frightened by my bold talk. Then, without a word, he turned and ran back towards his people, zigzagging as he went, doubtless because he feared that I would shoot him. I too, turned, and strolled unconcernedly up the slope to the boma, just to show them that I was not afraid.

"Baas," said Hans, as we went, "as usual you are wrong. Why do you not surrender that big-eyed wizard who is putting us to so much trouble?"

"Because, Hans, I should be ashamed of myself if I did, and what is more, you would be ashamed of me."

"Yes, Baas, that is quite true. I should never think the same of you again. But, Baas, when a man's throat's going to be cut, he doesn't remember what he would think afterwards if it wasn't cut. Well, we are all going to be killed, for what we can do against those men I can't see, and when we meet your reverend father presently in the Place of Fires, I shall tell him that I did my best to keep you from coming there so soon. And now Baas, I will bet you that monkey-skin tobacco pouch of mine of which you are so jealous, against a bottle of gin, to be paid when we get back to the coast, that before the day is over I put a bullet through that Arab villain who talked to you so insolently."

We reached the boma, where I told Tom and Jerry, also Kaneke, the gist of what had passed. The dashing Tom seemed not displeased at the prospect of a fight, while Jerry the phlegmatic, shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, after which they both retired behind a rock for a few moments, as Hans informed me, to say their prayers and confess their sins to each other. Kaneke listened and made but one remark.

"You are behaving well to me, Lord Macumazahn, and now I will behave well to you."

"Thank you," I answered. "I shall remind you of that if we meet on the other side of the sun, or in that star you worship. Now please go to your post, shoot as straight as you can, and don't waste cartridges."

Then, when the hunters had returned from their religious exercises, we took our places, each in a little shelter of rocks, so arranged that we could fire over the fence of the boma. I was in the middle, with Hans and Kaneke on either side of me, while Tom and Jerry were at the ends of the line. There we crouched, expecting a frontal attack, but this did not develop. After a long talk the Arabs fired a few shots from a distance of about four hundred yards, which either fell

short or went I know not where. Then suddenly they began to run over the open land where, as I have said, the veld was burned, towards the tall grass with thorn trees growing in it that lay upon our left, evidently with the design of outflanking us.

At the head of their scattered band was a tall man in whom, by the aid of my glasses, I recognized the venomous and evil-tempered Gaika, who had acted as chief-justice at Kaneke's trial, a person who had threatened me and of whom I had conceived an intense dislike. Hans, whose sight was as keen as a vulture's, recognized him also, for he said:

"There goes that hyena Gaika."

"Give me my express," I said, laying down the Winchester, and he handed it to me cocked.

"Let no man fire!" I cried as I took it, and lifted the flap-sight that was marked five hundred yards. Then I stood up, set my left elbow upon a stone, and waited my chance.

It came a few moments later, when Gaika must cross a little ridge of ground where he was outlined against the sky. The shot was a long one for an express, but I knew my rifle and determined to risk it. I got on to him, aiming at his middle, and swung the barrel the merest fraction in front to allow time for the bullet to travel. Then, drawing a long breath to steady myself, I pressed the trigger, of which the pull was very light.

The rifle rang out and I waited anxiously, for, although the best of shots need not have been ashamed to do so, I feared to miss, knowing that if this happened it would be taken as an omen. Well, I did not miss, for two seconds later I saw Gaika plunge to the ground, roll over and over and lie still.

"Oh!" said my people simultaneously, looking at me with admiration and pride. But I was not proud, except a little perhaps at my marksmanship, for I was sorry to have to shoot this disagreeable and to us most dangerous man, so much so that I did not fire the other barrel of the express.

For a moment his nearest companions stopped and stared at Gaika; then they fled on towards the high grass and reeds, leaving him on the ground, which showed me that he must be dead. I hoped that they were merely taking cover and that the sudden end of Gaika would have caused them to change their minds about attacking us, which was why I shot him. This, however, was not the case, for a while later fire was opened on us from a score of places in these reeds. Here and there in the centre of clumps of them and behind the trunks of thorns the Arabs had hidden themselves, singly or in pairs, and the trouble was that we could not see one of them. This made it quite useless to attempt to return their fire because our bullets would only have been wasted, and I had no ammunition to throw away in such a fashion. So there we must lie, doing nothing.

It was true that for the present we were not in any great danger, because we could take shelter behind stones upon which the missiles of the Arabs flattened themselves, if they hit at all, for the shooting being erratic, most of them sang over us harmlessly. The sound of these bullets, which sometimes I think were only pebbles coated with lead, or fragments of iron, terrified our bearers, however, especially after one of them had been slightly wounded by a lead splinter, or a fragment of rock. The wretched men began to jabber and now and again to cry out with fear, nor could all my orders and threats keep them quiet.

At length, after this bombardment had continued for nearly two hours, there came a climax. Suddenly, as though at a word of command, the bearers rose and rushed down the slope like a bunch of startled buck. They ran to the bank of the pool which I have mentioned, following it eastwards towards Kaneke's town, till they came to the bed of the river of which the pool formed a part in the wet season, where they vanished.

Of course we could have shot some of them as they went, as Hans, who was feeling spiteful, wanted to do, but this I would not allow, for what was the use of trying to stop a pack of cowards who, as likely as not, would attack us from behind if a rush came, hoped thus to propitiate the Arabs? What happened to those men I do not know, for they vanished completely, nor did I ever hear of them again. Perhaps some of them escaped back to the coast, but being without arms or food, this I think more than doubtful. The poor wretches must have wandered till they starved or were killed by wild beasts, unless indeed they were captured and enslaved.

Now our position was very serious. Here we were, five men and one donkey; for I think I have said that I possessed this beast, a particularly intelligent creature called Donna after a half-breed Portuguese woman the rest of whose name I forget, who had sold it to me with two others that died on the road. Beneath us, completely hidden, were forty or fifty determined enemies who probably were waiting for nightfall to creep up the koppie and cut our throats. What could we do?

Hans, whose imagination was fertile, suggested various expedients. His first was that we should try to fire the reeds and long grass in which the Arabs had taken cover, which was quite impracticable, because first we had to get there without being shot; also they were still too green to burn and the wind was blowing the wrong way. His next idea was that we should follow the example of the porters and bolt. This, I pointed out, was foolish, for we should only be run down and killed. Even if we waited till dark, almost certainly the end would be disaster; moreover we should be obliged to leave most of our gear and ammunition behind. Then he made a third proposal in a mixture of Dutch and English, which was but an old one in a new form, namely, that we should try to buy off the Arabs by surrendering Kaneke.

"I have already told you that I will do nothing of the sort. I promised White-Mouse to try to save this man, and there's an end."

"Yes, Baas, I know you did. Oh, what bad luck it is that White-Mouse was so pretty. If only her face had been like a squashed pumpkin, or if she had been dirty, with creatures in her hair, we shouldn't be looking at our last sun, Baas. Well, no doubt soon we shall be talking over the business with her in the Place of Fires, where I am sure she has gone, whatever that liar of a messenger may have said. Now I have finished who can think of nothing more, except to pray to your reverend father, who doubtless can help us if he chooses, which perhaps he doesn't, because he is so anxious to see me again."

Having delivered himself thus, Hans squatted a little more closely beneath his stone, over which a bullet had just passed with a most vicious whiz, and lit a pipe.

Next I tried the two hunters, only to find that they were quite barren of ideas, for they shook their heads and went on murmuring prayers. There remained Kaneke, at whom I glanced in despair. There he sat silent, with a face like a brickbat so impassive was it, giving me the idea of a man who is listening intently for something. For what? I wondered.

"Kaneke," I said, "by you, or on your behalf by another whom I think is dead, we have been led into a deep hole. Here we are who can be counted on the fingers of one hand, under fire from those who hate you, but against whom we have no quarrel, except on your account. The porters have fled away and our enemies, whom we cannot shoot because they are invisible in the reeds and grass of that pan, only await darkness to attack and make an end of us. Now if you have any word of comfort, speak, for it is needed, remembering that if we die, you die also."

"Comfort!" he answered in his dreamy fashion. "Oh yes, it is at hand. I am waiting for it now, my Lord Macumazahn," and he went on listening like one who has been interrupted in a serious matter by some babbler of trivialities.

This was too much for me; my patience gave way, and I addressed Kaneke in language which I will not record, saying amongst other forcible things that I was sorry I had not followed Hans' advice and abandoned him or surrendered him to the Arabs.

"You could not do that, my Lord Macumazahn," he answered mildly, "seeing that you had promised White-Mouse to save me. No one could break his word to White-Mouse, could he?"

"White-Mouse!" I ejaculated. "Where is she? Poor woman, she is dead, and for you, as the rest of us soon will be. And now you talk to me about my promises to her. How do you know what I promised her, you anathema'd bag of mysteries?"

"I do know, Lord," he replied, still more vaguely and gently. Then suddenly he added, "Hark! I hear the comfort coming," and lifted his hand in an impressive manner, only to drop it again in haste, because a passing bullet had scraped the skin off his finger.

Something caught my ear and I listened. From far away came a sound which reminded me of that made by a pack of wild dogs hunting a buck at night, a kind of surging, barbarous music.

"What is it?" I asked.

Kaneke, who was sucking the scraped finger, removed it from his mouth and replied that it was "the comfort", and that if I would look perhaps I should see.

So I did look through a crack between two stones towards the direction from which the sound seemed to come, namely eastward beyond the dry swamp where the veld was formed of great waves of land spotted with a sparse growth of thorn trees, swelling undulations like to those of the deep ocean, only on a larger scale. Presently, coming over the crest of one of these waves, now seen and now lost among the thorns, appeared a vast number of men, savage-looking fellows who wore feathers in their hair and very little else, and carried broad, long-handled spears.

"Who the deuce are these?" I asked, but Kaneke made no answer.

There he sat behind his stone, pointing towards the reeds in which the Arabs were hidden with his bleeding finger and muttering to himself.

Hans who, wild with curiosity, had thrust his sticky face against mine in order to share the view through the chink, whispered into my ear:

"Don't disturb him, Baas. These are his friends and he is telling them where those Arabs are."

"How can he tell people half a mile away anything, you idiot?" I asked.

"Oh, quite easily, Baas. You see, he is a magician, and magicians talk with their minds. It is their way of sending telegrams, as you do in Natal, Baas. Well, things look better now. As your reverend father used to say, if only you wait long enough the devil always helps you at last."

"Rot!" I ejaculated, though I agreed that things did look better, that is, unless these black scoundrels intended to attack us and not the Arabs. Then I set myself to watch events with the greatest interest.

The horde of savages, advancing at a great pace—there must have been two or three hundred of them—made for the dry pan like bees for their hive. Whether Kaneke instructed them or not, evidently their intelligence department

was excellent, for they knew exactly what they had to do. Reaching the edge of it, they halted for a while and ceased their weird song, I suppose to get their breath and to form up. Then at some signal the song began again and they plunged into those reeds like dogs after an otter.

Up to this moment the Arabs hidden there did not seem to be aware of their approach, I suppose because their attention was too firmly fixed upon us, for they kept on firing at the koppie in a desultory fashion. Now of a sudden this firing ceased, and from the thicket below arose yells of fear, surprise, and anger. Next at its further end, that which lay towards Kaneke's town, appeared the Arabs running for all they were worth, and presently, after them, their savage attackers.

Heavens, what a race was that! Never have I seen men go faster than did those Arabs across the plain with the wild pursuers at their heels. Some were caught and killed, but when at last they vanished out of sight, most of them were still well ahead. Hans wanted to shoot at them, but I would not allow it, for what was the use of trying to kill the poor wretches while others were fighting our battle? So it came about that the only shot we fired that day, I mean in earnest, was that which I had aimed at Gaika, which was strange when I had prepared for a desperate battle against overwhelming odds.

All having vanished behind the irregularities of the ground, except a few who had been caught and speared, in the silence which followed the war-song and the shoutings, I turned to Kaneke and asked for explanations. He replied quite pleasantly and briefly, that these black men were some of his "friends" whom the Arabs had always feared he would bring upon them, which was why they kept him prisoner and wished to kill him.

"I had no intention of doing anything of the sort, Lord," he added, "until it became necessary in order to save our lives. Then, of course I asked them for help, whereon they came at once and did what was wanted, as you have seen."

"And pray how did you ask them, Kaneke?"

"Oh, Lord, by messengers as one always asks people at a distance, though they were so long coming I feared lest the messengers might not have reached them."

"He lies, Baas," said Hans, in Dutch. "It is no good trying to pump the truth out of his heart, for you will only tire yourself bringing up more lies."

As I agreed, I dropped the subject and inquired of Kaneke whether his friends were coming back again. He said he thought so and before very long, as he had told them not to attack the town in which dwelt many innocent women and children.

"But, Lord," he went on, with unusual emphasis, "when they do return I think it will be well that you should not go to speak to them. To tell the truth, they are savage people, and being very naked, might take a fancy to your clothes, also to your guns and ammunition. I will just go down to give them a word of thanks and bring back some porters to take the place of those who have run away, whom, by the way, I hope they have not met. Foreseeing something of the sort, I asked them to bring a number of suitable men."

"Did you?" I gasped. "You are indeed a provident person. And now may I ask you whether you intend to return to your town, or what you mean to do?"

"Certainly I do not intend to return, Lord, in order to care for people who have been so ungrateful. Also, that spotted sickness is most unpleasant to see. No, Lord, I intend to accompany you to the country of the Lake Mone."

"The Lake Mone!" I said. "I have had enough of that lake, or rather of the journey to it, and I have made up my mind not to go there."

He looked at me, and under the assumed mildness of that look I read intense determination as he answered:

"I think you will go to the Lake Mone, Lord Macumazahn."

"And I think I will not, Kaneke."

"Indeed. In that case, Lord, I must talk to my friends when they return, and make certain arrangements with them."

We stared at each other for what seemed quite a long time, though I dare say it was only a few seconds. I don't know what Kaneke read of my mind, but what I read of his was a full intention that I should accompany him to the Lake Mone, or be left to the tender mercies of his "friends", at present engaged in Arab-hunting who, it seemed, had so great a passion for European guns and garments.

Now there are times when it is well to give way, and the knowledge of those times, to my mind, often marks the difference between a wise man and a fool. As we all know, wisdom and folly are contiguous states, and the line dividing them is very thin and crooked, which makes it difficult not to blunder across its borders, I mean from the land of wisdom into that of folly, for the other step is rarely taken, save by one inspired by the best of angels.

In this instance, although I do not pretend to any exceptional sagacity, I felt strongly that it would be well to stick on my own side of the line and not defy the Fates as represented by that queer person Kaneke, and his black "friends" whom he seemed to have summoned from nowhere in particular. After all, I was in a tight place. To travel back without porters, even if I escaped the "friends" and the Arabs who now had a quarrel against me, was almost

impossible, and the same might be said of a journey in any other direction. It seemed, therefore, that it would be best to continue to suffer those ills I knew of, namely the fellowship of Kaneke on an expedition into the unknown.

“Very well,” I remarked casually, after a swift weighing of these matters and a still swifter remembrance of the prophecy of White-Mouse that I should come safely through the business. (Why this should have struck me at that moment I could not say.)—“Very well, it does not much matter to me whether I turn east or west. So let us go to Lake Mone, if there be such a place, though I wonder what will be the end of that journey.”

“So do I,” replied Kaneke dryly.

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## THE JOURNEY

Now, for sundry reasons, I am going to follow the example of a lady of my acquaintance who makes it a rule to read two three-volume novels a week, and skip, by which I mean that I will compress the tale of our journey to the land of the mysterious Lake Mone into the smallest possible compass. If set out in full the details of such a trek as this through country that at the time was practically unknown to white men—it took between two and three months — would suffice to fill a volume. It might be an interesting volume in its way, to a few who care for descriptions of African races and scenery, but to the many I fear that its chapters would present a certain sameness. So I shall leave them untold and practise the art of *précis*-writing until I come to the heart of the story.

After the conversation of which I have spoken, we cooked and ate food, which all of us needed badly. Then, being very tired and worn with many emotions, Hans and I went to sleep in the shade of some rocks, leaving Tom and Jerry to keep watch. About three o'clock in the afternoon one of them woke us up, or rather woke me up, for Hans, who could do with very little sleep, was already astir and engaged in overhauling the rifles. They told me that the black men were returning. I asked where Kaneke was, and learned that he had gone to meet them. Then I took my glasses and from a point of vantage kept watch upon what happened.

The savages, impressive-looking fellows in their plume-crowned nakedness, came streaming across the veld, some of them carrying in their hands objects which I believe to have been the heads of Arabs, though of this I cannot be sure because they were so far away. They were no longer singing or in haste but walked quietly, with the contented air of men filled with a sense of duty done. Appeared Kaneke marching towards them, whereon they halted and saluted by raising their spears, thus showing me that in their opinion he was a man of great position and dignity. They formed a ring round Kaneke, from the centre of which he seemed to address them. When this ring opened out again, which it did after a while, I observed that a fire had been lit, how, or fed with what fuel, I do not know, and that on it the savages were laying the objects which I took to be the heads of Arabs.

"Kaneke is their great devil, and they are sacrificing to him, Baas," whispered Hans.

"At any rate, on this occasion he has been a useful devil," I answered, "or, rather, his worshippers have been useful."

A while later, when the rite, or sacrifice, or whatever it may have been, was completed, the savages started forward again, leaving the fire still burning on the veld, and marched almost to the foot of the koppie, which caused me some alarm, as I thought they might be coming to the camp. This was not so, however, for when they were within a few hundred yards, of a sudden they broke into a chant, not the same which they had used when advancing, but one which had in it a kind of note of farewell, and departing at a run past the outer edge of the dry vlei from which they had driven the Arabs, soon were lost to sight. Yes, their song grew fainter and fainter, till at length it was swallowed up in silence and the singers vanished into the vast depths of distance whence they came.

Where did they come from and who were they? I know not, for on this matter Kaneke preserved a silence so impenetrable that at length the mystery of their appearance and disappearance began, to my mind, to take the character of an episode in a dream. Or, rather, it would have done so had it not been for the circumstance that they did not all go. On the contrary, about twenty were left, who stood before Kaneke with folded arms and bent heads, their spears thrust into the ground in front of them, blade upwards, by means of the iron spikes that were fixed to the handles. Also at the feet of each man was a bundle wrapped round with a mat.

"Hullo!" I said. "What do those men want? Do they mean mischief?"

"Oh no, Baas," answered Hans. "The Baas will remember that Kaneke promised us some more porters, and these are the men. Doubtless he is a great wizard, and for aught I know, may have made them and all the rest out of mud; like Adam and Eve, Baas. Still, I am beginning to think better of Kaneke, who is not just a humbug, as I thought, but one who can do things."

Meanwhile at some sign the men picked up the bundles and slung them over their shoulders, drew their spears from the ground and followed Kaneke towards the camp, where we waited for them with our rifles ready in case of accidents.

"Baas," said Hans, as they approached, "I do not think that these men are the brothers of those who attacked the Arabs just now; I think that they are different."

I studied them and came to the same conclusion. To begin with, so far as I could judge who had only seen our wild rescuers from a distance, these were lighter in colour, brown rather than black, indeed, also they were taller and their hair was much less woolly, only curling up at the ends which hung down upon their shoulders. For the rest, they were magnificently built, with large brown eyes not unlike those of Kaneke, and well-cut features with nothing negroid about them. Nor, in truth, were they of Arab type who seemed rather to belong to some race that was new to me, and yet of very ancient and unmixed blood.

Could they, I wondered, belong to the same people as Kaneke himself? No; although so like him, it seemed impossible, for how would they have got here?

Very quietly and solemnly the men approached to where I was sitting on a stone, walking in as good a double line as the nature of the ground would allow, as though they had been accustomed to discipline, and laying their right hands upon their hearts, bowed to me in a courtly fashion that was almost European; so courtly, indeed, that I felt bound to stand up, take off my hat, and return the bow. To Hans they did not bow, but only regarded him with a mild curiosity, or to the hunters either, for these they seemed to recognize were servants.

The sight of the donkey, Donna, however, appeared to astonish them, and when at that moment she broke into her loudest bray, intimating that she wished to be fed, they looked downright frightened, thinking, I suppose, that she was some strange wild beast.

Kaneke spoke a word or two to them in a tongue I did not know, whereon they smiled as though in apology. Then he said:

“Lord Macumazahn, you, and still more your servant Hans, have mistrusted me, thinking either that I was mad or leading you into some trap. Nor do I wonder at this, seeing that much has happened since yesterday which you must find it hard to understand. Still, Lord, as you will admit, all has gone well. Those whom I summoned to aid us have done their work and departed, to be seen of you no more; the Arabs over whom I ruled and who went near to murdering me, and would have murdered you because you refused to deliver me to them, as Hans wished that you should do, have learned their lesson and will not trouble you again. These men”—and he pointed to his companions—“you will find brave and trustworthy, nor will they be a burden to you in any way; nay, rather they will bear your burdens. Only, I pray you, do not question them as to who they are or whence they come, for they are under a vow of silence. Have I your promise?”

“Oh, certainly,” I answered, adding with inward doubt, “and that of Hans and the hunters also. And now as I understand nothing of all this business, which I do not consider has gone as well as you say, seeing that White-Mouse, the woman who saved your life, although, as she told me, she was not your wife - “

“That is true, as I have said already,” interrupted Kaneke, bowing his head in a way that struck me as almost reverential.

“—Seeing that White-Mouse,” I repeated, “doubtless is dead at the hands of those Arabs of yours who hated you, which blackens everything, perhaps you will be so good as to tell me, Kaneke, what is to happen next.”

“Our journey, Lord,” he replied, with a stare of surprise. “What else? Moreover, Lord, be sure that about this journey you need not trouble any more. Henceforward, until we reach the land of my people I will take command and arrange for everything. All that you need do is to follow where I lead and amuse yourself, resting or stopping to shoot when you will, and giving me your orders as to every matter of the sort, which shall be obeyed. This you can do without fear seeing that, as White-Mouse told you, all shall go well with you.”

Now once more I was tempted to question him as to the source of his information about what passed between me and White-Mouse, but refrained, remarking only that he was very good at guessing.

“Yes, Lord,” he replied. “I have always had a gift that way, as you may have noticed when I guessed that those savages would come to help us, and bring with them men to take the place of the porters who have fled. Well, I notice that you do not contradict my guess and again I assure you that White-Mouse spoke true words.”

Now for a minute I was indignant at Kaneke’s impudence. It seemed outrageous that he, or any native African, should presume to put me, Allan Quatermain, under his orders, to go where HE liked and to do what HE chose. Indeed, I was about to refuse such a position with the greatest emphasis when suddenly it occurred to me that there was another side to the question.

Although I had never travelled there, I had heard from friends how people touring in the East place themselves in charge of a dragoman, a splendid but obsequious individual who dry-nurses them day and night, arranges, commands, feeds, masters difficulties, wrangles with extortioners or obstructionists, and finally gently leads his employers whither they would go and back again. It is true I had heard, too, that these skilled and professional persons are rather apt to melt away in times of real danger or trouble, leaving their masters to do the fighting, also that their bills are invariably large. For every system has its drawbacks and these are chances which must be faced.

Still, this idea of being dragomanned, personally conducted like a Cook’s tourist, through untrodden parts of Africa, had charms. It would be such a thorough change—at any rate to me. Then and there I determined to accept the offer, reflecting that if the worst came to the worst, I could always take command again. It was obvious that I must accompany Kaneke or run the risk of strange things happening to me at his hands and those of his followers whom he had collected out of nowhere. Therefore the responsibilities of the expedition might as well be his as mine.

So I answered mildly:

“Agreed, Kaneke. You shall lead and I will follow. I place myself and my servants in your hands, trusting to you to guide us safely and to protect us against every danger. Though,” I added in a sterner voice, “I warn you that at the first sign of treachery I will shoot you dead. And now tell me, when are we to start?”

“At moonrise, I think, Lord, for then it will be cooler. Meanwhile you and your servants can sleep who need rest after so many labours. Fear nothing; I and my men will watch.”

"Baas," said Hans as we went away to act upon this advice, "I never thought you and I, who are getting old, would live to find a new mammy, and such a one with eye and beak of an owl who, like an owl, loves to stare at the stars and to fly at night. However, if the Baas does not mind, I don't."

I made no answer, though I thought to myself that Kaneke's great sleepy eyes were really not unlike those of an owl, that mysterious bird which in the native mind is always connected with omens and magic. Yes, in calling him an owl Hans showed his usual aptitude, especially as he believed that he was the destroyer of that strange and beautiful woman, White-Mouse.

Well, we rested, and ate on waking, and at moonrise departed upon our journey, heading nor'-west. Everything was prepared, even the loads were apportioned among the new porters. Indeed, there was nothing left for us to do except roll up the little tent and tie it, together with my personal belongings, on to the back of Donna, whom Hans fed and Tom and Jerry led alternately. We met with no adventures. The lion or lions, on whom, according to Hans, Kaneke had thrown a charm, did not trouble us; we saw nothing of the Arabs or the savages whom that strange person called his "friends". In short, we just walked forward where Kaneke guided as safely as though we had been upon an English road, till we came to the place where he said we were to halt.

Such was our first march which in the weeks that followed was typical of scores of others. Nothing happened to us upon that prolonged trek; at least, nothing out of the way. It was as though a charm had been laid upon us, protecting us from all evils and difficulties. A great deal of the country through which we passed was practically uninhabited. I suppose that the slave- traders had desolated it in bygone years, for often we saw ruined villages with no one in them. When they were inhabited, however, Kaneke would go in advance and speak to their headman. What he said to them I do not know, but in the issue we always found the people friendly and ready to supply us with such provisions as they had, generally without payment.

One thing I noted: that they looked on me with awe. At first I put this down to the fact that most of them had never before seen a real white man, but by degrees I came to the conclusion that there was more behind, namely that for some reason or another I was regarded as a most powerful fetish, or even as a kind of god. Thus they would abase themselves upon their faces before me and even make offerings to me of whatever they had, generally grain or fruits.

While they confined themselves to these I took no notice, but when at one village the chief, who could talk a little Arabic, having mixed with slave- traders in his youth, brought a white cock and proceeded to cut its throat and sprinkle my feet with the blood, I thought it time to draw the line. Snatching the dead bird from his hand, I threw it away and asked him why he had done this thing. At first he was too terrified to answer, imagining that his offering was rejected because I was angry with him.

Presently, however, he fell upon his knees and mumbled something to the effect that he was only doing me honour, as the "messenger", or "my messenger", had commended him. For the life of me I could not understand what he meant, unless he alluded to Kaneke. While I was trying to find out, that worthy arrived and gave the chief one look which caused him to rise and run away.

Then I cross-examined Kaneke without result, for he only shrugged his shoulders and said that all these people were very simple and wished to do honour to a white man. Hans took a different view.

"How is it, Baas," he asked, "that they are always prepared to receive us at these places and waiting with gifts? None of those men of the Owl's" (he often called Kaneke the "Owl") "go forward to warn them, for I count them continually, especially at night and in the morning, to find if one is missing. Nor when we are travelling through bush can they see us coming from far away. How, then, do they know?"

"I can't tell you."

"Then I will tell the Baas. The owl-man sends his spirit ahead to give them notice." He paused, then added, "Or perhaps—" Here he stopped, saying that he had left his pipe on the ground, or something of the sort, and departed.

So this mystery remained unsolved, like others.

In every way our good luck was so phenomenal that with the superstition of a hunter, which infects all of our trade, I began to fear that we must have some awful time ahead of us. When we came to rivers they were invariably fordable. When we wanted meat, there was always game at hand that could be shot without trouble by Tom and Jerry—Kaneke, I observed, would never fire at any beast even when I offered to lend him my rifle. The weather was most propitious, or if a bad storm came up we were under shelter. No one fell sick of fever or any other complaint; no one met with an accident. No lion troubled us, no snake bit us, and so forth. At last this unnatural state of affairs began to get upon our nerves, especially upon those of Tom and Jerry, who came to me one evening almost weeping, and declared that we were bewitched and going to our deaths.

"Nonsense," I answered, "you ought to be glad that we have so much good luck."

"Sugar is good," replied Tom, who loved sweet things, "but one cannot live on nothing but sugar; it makes one sick, and I have had bad dreams at night."

"I never expect to see my little daughter again, but if it is the will of Heaven that cannot be helped," remarked the more phlegmatic Jerry, adding, "Master, we do not like this Kaneke whom Hans calls the Owl, and we wish that you would take command, as we do not know where he is leading us."

"Nor do I, so I should be of no use as a guide. But be at ease, for I am making a map of the road for our return journey."

"When we return we shall need no map," said Tom in a hollow voice. "We have heard from Hans that the lady or the witch called White-Mouse promised safety and good fortune to him, and to you, Lord, but it seems that about us she said nothing—"

"Look here," I broke in, exasperated, "if you two men are so frightened for no cause that I can see, except that everything goes well with us, you had better follow the example of the porters at our first camp, and run away. I will give you your rifles and as many cartridges as you want, also the donkey Donna to carry them. I can see no reason why you should not get back to the coast safely, especially as you have money in your pockets."

Tom shook his head, remarking that he thought it probable that they would be murdered before they had completed the first day's journey. Then Jerry, the phlegmatic, showed his real quality, or perhaps the English blood, which I am sure ran in his veins, manifested itself.

"Listen, Little Holes," he said to Tom. "If we go on like this, our master Macumazahn will learn to despise us, and we shall be the laughing stock of the yellow man Hans, and perhaps of Kaneke and his people also. We undertook this journey; let us play the man and go through with it to the end. We can only die once, and because we are Christians, should we also be cowards? You have none to mourn for you, and I have but one daughter, who has seen little of me and who will be well looked after if I return no more. Therefore I say let us put aside our fears, which after all are built on water, and cease to trouble the master with them."

"That is well said," replied Tom, alias Little Holes, "and if it were not for the accursed wizard, one of those who is spoken against in the Holy Book, I should be quite happy. But while he is our guide, he who with his people, as I have seen at night, makes incantations to the stars—"

Here Tom chanced to look up and to perceive Kaneke standing at a distance, apparently out of hearing, with his large eyes fixed upon us. The effect was wonderful. "Be careful. Here is the wizard himself," he whispered to Jerry, whereon they both turned and went away.

Kaneke came up to me.

"Those hunters are afraid of something, Lord," he said quietly. "For days past I have read it in their faces. What is it that they fear?"

"You," I answered bluntly—"you and the future."

"All men should hold the future in awe, Lord, so there they are wise. But why should they dread me?"

"Because they think you are a wizard, Kaneke."

He smiled in his slow fashion, and answered:

"As others have done and do. If a man has more foresight or sees deeper into hearts, or turns from women, or worships that which most men do not worship, or is different from the rest in other ways, then he is always called a wizard, as I am. Lord, what your servants need is that which will change their minds so that they cease to think about themselves. I have come to tell you that tomorrow we enter into forest lands, which at this season are haunted by vast herds of elephants that travel from different quarters and meet here for the purposes of which we men know nothing. It might please you and those brave hunters of yours to see this meeting and to shoot one or two of those elephants, for among them are their kings, mighty bulls."

"I should like to see such a sight," I answered, "but there is little use in shooting the beasts when one cannot carry the ivory."

"It might be buried till you return, Lord; at any rate it will give the hunters occupation for a while."

"Very well," I answered indifferently, for to tell the truth I did not believe in Kaneke's tale of vast herds of elephants that held a kind of parliament in a particular forest.

Next night we camped on the outskirts of this forest of which Kaneke had spoken. It was a very strange place, different from any other that I have seen. In it grew great and solemn trees of a species that was new to me; huge, clean-boiled trees with leafy tops that met together and shut out the sun, so that where they were thickest there was twilight even at midday, nor could any undergrowth live beneath them. But the trees did not grow everywhere, for here and there were wide open spaces in which, for some unknown reason, they refused to flourish. These spaces, that sometimes were as much as a mile across, were covered with scanty bush and grasses.

All that night we heard elephants trumpeting around us, and when morning came found that a great herd of them must have passed within a quarter of a mile of our camp. The sight of their spoor excited the professional instincts of Tom and Jerry, who, forgetting their gloom, prayed me to follow the herd. I objected, for the reason I have given, namely that if we killed any of them it would be difficult to deal with the ivory. Kaneke, however, hearing our talk, declared that the porters needed rest and that he would be very glad if it could be given to them for a day or two, while we amused ourselves with hunting.

Then I gave way, being anxious to learn if there was any truth in Kaneke's story about the meeting-place of elephants that was supposed to exist in this forest. Also I was desirous that the two hunters should find something to

do which would take their thoughts into a more cheerful channel. Personally, too, I felt that I should be glad of a change from this continuous marching unmarked by any incident.

So, after we had eaten and made our preparations, the four of us, that is Tom, Jerry, Hans, and I, started—Kaneke would not come— carrying large-bore rifles, a good supply of cartridges and some food and water. All the rest of that day we followed the spoor of the elephants, that had not stopped to feed in the glades I have described, as I had hoped that they would do, but appeared to be pushing forward at a great rate towards some definite objective. With one halt we marched on steadily in the shadow of those huge trees, noticing that the elephant-spoor seemed to follow a kind of road which wound in and out between their trunks or struck in a straight line across the stretches of thin bushes and grass.

More than once I wished to return, as did Hans who, like myself saw no use in this adventure. Always, however, Tom and Jerry prayed to be allowed to proceed, so on we went. Towards sunset we lost the spoor in a thick patch of forest. Pushing on to find it again while there was still light, we came suddenly to one of the open spaces that I have mentioned which seemed to be much larger than any other we had seen, also more bare of vegetation. It must have covered at least a thousand acres of ground, and perfectly flat; indeed, I thought that at some faraway epoch it had formed the bottom of a lake.

Near the centre of this oasis in the forest was a mound which, if I may judge from pictures I have seen of them, resembled one of those great tumuli that in certain parts of Europe the wild tribes of thousands of years ago reared over the bones of their chieftains. Or, as I afterwards discovered, more probably it was the natural foundation of some lake-town where a tribe dwelt for safety when all this place was under water. At any rate there it stood, a low, round eminence covered with a scanty growth of flowering bushes and small trees.

Thinking that from this mound we might be able to see the elephants, or at least which way they had gone, we marched thither, I reflecting that at the worst it would be a better place for camping than the gloomy and depressing forest. Having climbed its sloping side, we found that on the top it was flat except for a large depression in the centre, where perhaps once had stood the huts of its primeval inhabitants. What was of more interest to us, however, than the past history of the place, was that at the bottom of this depression lay a pool of water supplied by some spring, or by rain that had fallen recently.

Seeing this water, which we needed who had drunk all our own, I determined that we would pass the night on the mound, although the most careful search from its top failed to show any sign of the elephants we had been spooring.

“Yes, Baas,” said Hans, when I gave my orders, “but, all the same, I don’t like this place, Baas, and should prefer to get back to the forest after we have drunk and filled our bottles.”

I inquired why.

“I don’t know, Baas. Perhaps the spooks of those who once lived here are all about, though we can’t see them. Or— but tell me, Bass, why did that Owl-man, Kaneke, send us after those elephants?”

“To give Tom and Jerry something to think about, Hans.”

He grinned and answered:

“Kaneke does not care whether those fellows have anything to think about or not. I should believe that he did it to give us the slip, only I am sure that he does not want to go on alone. So, Baas, it must be to teach us some lesson and show us how powerful he is, so powerful that he makes the Baas do what he wants, which no one has done before.”

I reflected that Hans was right. I had not desired to come upon this absurd hunt, yet somehow Kaneke had pushed me into it.

“I don’t believe there are any elephants,” went on Hans with conviction. “The spoor? Oh, a magician like Kaneke can make spoor, Baas. Or if there seem to be elephants, then I believe that they are really ghosts that put on that shape. Let us go back to the forest, Baas—if the Owl-man will give you leave.”

Now I felt that the time had come for me to put my foot down, and I did so with firmness.

“Stop talking nonsense, Hans,” I said. “I don’t know what’s the matter with all you fellows. Is your brain going soft as a rotten coconut, like those of Tom and Jerry? We will sleep here tonight and return tomorrow to the camp.”

“Oh, the Baas thinks he is going to sleep tonight. Yes, he thinks he is going to sleep,” sniggered Hans. “Well, we shall see,” and he bolted, still sniggering, before my wrath could descend upon him.

The sun set and presently the big moon came up. We ate of the food we had with us; as we had nothing to cook it was needless to light a fire, nor indeed did I wish to do so, for in such a spot a fire was a dangerous advertisement. So, as it seemed foolish to set a watch in the middle of that open space, where there being no buck there would be no lions—for lions do not hunt elephants—we just lay down and went to sleep, as tired men should do. I remember thinking, as I dropped off, how extraordinarily quiet the place was. No beast called, no night-bird cried, nothing stirred on that dead and windless calm. Indeed, the silence was so oppressive that for once I should have welcomed the familiar ping! of a mosquito, but here there were none.

So off I went and at some time unknown, to judge by the moon it was towards the middle of the night, was awakened by a sense of oppression. I dreamed that a great vampire bat was hanging over me and sucking my toe. Now

I was lying on my face, as I often do when camping out to avoid the risk of moon blindness, just at the edge of that hole where, as I have told, water had collected, in such a position that I could look down into the pool. This water was very still and clear and thus formed a perfect mirror.

As it happened there was something remarkable for it to reflect, namely the head, trunk, and tusks of one of the hugest elephants I ever saw— not Jana himself could have been much bigger! As my mirror showed, he was standing over me; yes, I lay between his fore-legs, while he was engaged in sniffing at the back of my head with the tip of his trunk which, however, never actually touched me.

Talk of a nightmare, or of a night-elephant for the matter of that, never did I know of one to touch it. Of course I thought it was a dream of a particularly vivid order arising from undigested biltong, or something of the sort. But that did not make it any better, for although I had wakened the vision did not go away, as every decent nightmare does. Moreover, if it were a dream, what was the hideous stabbing pain in my leg? (Afterwards this was explained: Hans was trying to arouse me without calling the elephant's attention to himself by driving into my thigh the point of a "wait-a-bit" thorn which he used to pin up his trousers.) Also was it possible that in a dream an elephant could blow so hard upon the back of one's neck that it sent dust and bits of dry grass up one's nostrils, inducing a terrible desire to sneeze?

While I was pondering the question in a perfect agony and staring at the alarming picture in the water, the gigantic beast ceased its investigation of my person and stepping over me with calculated gentleness, went to where Tom and Jerry were lying at a little distance. Whether these worthies were awake or asleep I do not know, for what happened terrified them so much that it produced aphasia on this and some other points, so that they could never tell me. The beast sniffed, first at Tom and then at Jerry; one sniff each was all it vouchsafed to them. Then with its trunk it seized, first Tom and next Jerry, and with an easy motion flung them one after the other into the pool of water. This done, avoiding Hans as though it disliked his odour, it walked away over the crest of the cup or depression in the mound, and vanished.

Instantly I sat up, boxed the ears of Hans, who was still stabbing at me idiotically with his wait-a-bit thorn and giving me great pain, for speak to him I dared not, and slipped down the slope to the lip of the pool to save Tom and Jerry from drowning, if indeed they were not already dead. As it happened, my attentions were needless, for the pool was quite shallow and this pair, whom the elephant had not hurt at all, were seated on its bottom and indulging in suppressed hysterics, their heads appearing above the surface of the water.

A more ridiculous sight than they presented, even in the terror of that occurrence, cannot be imagined. In all my life I never saw its like. Think of two men of whom nothing was visible except the heads, seated in the water and gibbering at each other in a dumb paroxysm of fear.

I whispered to them to come out, also that if they made a noise I would kill them both, whereupon somewhat reassured at my appearance, they crawled to the bank of the pool, which proved that none of their bones were broken, and emerged wreathed in water-cresses. Then leaving them to recover as best they could, followed by Hans and carrying my heavy rifle, I crept to the edge of the depression and peeped over.

There, as the bright moonlight showed me, not twenty yards away stood the enormous bull upon a little promontory or platform which projected from the side of the mound, reminding one of a rostrum erected for the convenience of the speaker at an open-air meeting. Yes, there it stood as though it were carved in stone.

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## THE ELEPHANT DANCE

Never shall I forget that amazing scene, bitten as it is into the tablets of my mind by the acids of fear and wonder. Imagine it! The wide plain or lake bottom surrounded upon all sides by the black ring of the forest and plunged in a silence so complete that it seemed almost audible. Then there, just beneath us, the gigantic and ancient elephant—for it was ancient, as I could see by various signs, standing motionless and in an attitude which gave a strange impression of melancholy, such melancholy as might possess an aged man who, revisiting the home of his youth, finds it a desolation.

“Baas,” whispered Hans, “if you shift a little more to the left you might get him behind the ear and shoot him dead.”

“I don’t want to shoot him,” I replied, “and if you fire I will break your neck.”

Hans, I know, thought I made this answer because my nerve was shaken and I feared lest I should bungle the job. But as a matter of fact, it was nothing of the sort. For some unexplained reason I would as soon have committed a murder as shoot that elephant, which had just spared my life when I lay at its mercy.

Low as we spoke, I suppose that the bull must have heard us. At any rate it turned its head and looked in our direction, which caused me to fear lest I should be obliged to fire after all. It was not so, however, for having apparently satisfied itself that we were harmless, once more it fell into contemplation, which must have lasted for another two minutes.

Then suddenly it lifted its trunk and emitted a call or cry louder and more piercing than that of any trumpet. Thrice it repeated this call, and for the third time as its echoes died the silence of the night was broken by a terrifying response. From every part of the surrounding ring of forest rose the sound of elephants trumpeting in unison, hundreds of elephants, or so it seemed.

“Allemagter! Baas,” whispered Hans in a shaky voice, “that old spook beast is sending for his friends to kill us. Let us run, Baas.”

“Where to, seeing that they are all round us?” I asked faintly, adding: “If he wanted to kill us he could do so for himself. Lie still. It is our only chance; and tell those hunters behind to stop praying so loudly and to unload their rifles, lest they should be tempted to fire.”

Hans crept away to the edge of the pool, where the dripping Tom and Jerry were putting up audible petitions in the extremity of their terror. Then watching, I saw the most marvellous sight in my hunting experience. As though they were the trained beasts of India or of the ancient kings, marching in endless lines and ordered ranks, appeared three vast herds of elephants. From the forest in front of us, from that to our right and that to our left, and from aught I know from behind also, though these I could not see, they came out into the moonlit open space, and marched towards the mound with their regulated tread, which shook the earth.

Perhaps I saw double. Perhaps my nerves were so shaken that I could not estimate numbers, but I should be prepared to swear that there were at least a thousand of them, and afterwards the others declared that there were many more. In each troop the bulls marched first, the moonlight shining on their white tusks. Then came the cows with calves running at their side, and last of all the half-grown beasts, sorted seemingly according to their size.

So Kaneke had not lied. This was the meeting of the elephants which he had prophesied we should see. Only how in Heaven’s name did he know anything about it? For a few moments I began to think that he was really what Hans and the hunters believed him to be—some kind of magician who perhaps had sent us hither that we might be torn to pieces or trampled to death.

Then I forgot all about Kaneke in the immediate interest of that wild and wonderful spectacle. The herds arrived. They arranged themselves in a semicircle, deep, curved lines of them, in front to the mound upon which stood the ancient bull. For a while they were still, then as though at a signal, they knelt down. Yes, even the calves knelt, with their trunks stretched out straight upon the ground in front of them.

“They do homage to their king, Baas,” whispered Hans, and so in truth it seemed to be.

The giant bull trumpeted once, as though in acknowledgment of the salute. The herds rose, and there followed a marvellous performance that might have been taken for a dream. The bulls massed themselves together in squadrons, as it were, and charged past the mound from right to left, trumpeting as they charged. After them came the regiments of the cows, and lastly those of the partly grown beasts, all trumpeting; even the little calves set up piercing squeals. They re-formed, but not as they were before. For now the bulls faced the cows and the rest. Then began a kind of dance, so swift and intricate that I could not follow it, a kind of unearthly quadrille it seemed to be, in which the males sought out the females, or it may have been the other way about, and they caressed each other with their trunks. Perhaps it was some kind of ceremony of betrothal, I do not know.

It ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The herds massed themselves as at first, then wheeled and marched off in their three divisions back to the forest whence they came. Soon all were gone except the old king-bull, who still stood silent just beneath us, majesty and loneliness personified.

"Do you think he is going to stop here always, Baas?" whispered Hans. "Because if so, really it might be best to shoot him now that the others have gone away."

"Be silent," I answered; "he may understand you."

Yes, my nerves were so upset by what I had seen that I was fool enough to talk thus.

"Yes, Baas," assented Hans in his hoarse whisper, "I forgot that; he may, so I didn't really mean what I seemed to say about shooting him. It was only a joke. Also it might bring the others back."

At that moment, to my horror, the king-bull turned and walked straight up to us. I couldn't have shot him if I had wished, because as I had made the others do, I had unloaded my rifle to keep myself out of temptation. Also I did not wish; I was too much afraid. He stood still, contemplating us, a giant of a creature with a mild and meditative eye. Then he lifted his trunk and I muttered a prayer, thinking that all was over. But no, he only placed the tip of it against the middle of Hans, who somehow had got to his knees, and let off one fearful scream accompanied by such a blast of air that it blew Hans backwards down the slope on to the recumbent forms of Tom and Jerry.

This done, the bull turned again, walked down the mound and out across the plain, a picture of stately solitude till at last he vanished in the dark shadow of the forest.

When he was lost to sight I went down to the pool and drank, for the perspiration induced by terror seemed to have dried me up. Then I looked at my three retainers, who were huddled in a heap on the edge of the pool.

"I am dead," muttered Hans, who was lying on the other two. "That Satan of an elephant has blown out my inside. It has gone; there is nothing left but my backbone."

"No wonder, as you cursed him and wanted Macumazahn to shoot him," muttered Tom. "For did not that afreet of a beast cast us into the pool for nothing at all?"

"Whether you have a stomach or not, be pleased to cease sitting on my face, yellow man, or I will make my teeth meet in you," gurgled Jerry.

Thus they went on, and so ridiculous were the aspect and the talk of the three of them, that at last I burst out laughing, which relieved my nerves and did me good. Then I lit my pipe, hoping that those elephants would not see the light or smell the tobacco down in that hole, and not caring much if they did, for I seemed to desire a smoke more than anything on earth.

"Let us talk," I said to the others. "What are we to do?"

"Get out of this, master, and at once," said Tom. "That beast is not an elephant, it is an evil spirit in the shape of one. Yes, I who am a Christian and have renounced all superstitions, say that it is an evil spirit."

"Little Holes is quite right," broke in Jerry. "If it had been an elephant, it would have killed us, but being an evil spirit it threw us into the water."

"Fool!" grunted Hans, rubbing his middle, "do you make an evil spirit better than an elephant? In truth, as the Baas knows, the bull is neither; it is a chief or a king who once lived in this place as a man, and now had turned into an elephant, and all those other beasts whom you did not see, being so much afraid, were once his people, but now also are elephants. That is quite clear to the Baas, and to me who am a better Christian than either of you. Still, I agree with you that the sooner we see the last of this haunted place, the better it will be."

Thus they wrangled on till they were tired. When they had finished I said:

"Here we stop till dawn breaks. Do you three climb to the top of this hole and keep watch. I am tired and am going to sleep. Wake me if you see the elephants coming back."

So I lay down and slept, or at any rate dozed, which, as I have said—thank Heaven!—I can do at any time after any experience. I am a fatalist, one who does not trouble as to what is to happen in the future, because I know it must happen and that worry is therefore useless. If the elephants were going to kill me, I could not help it; meanwhile I would get some rest.

So I slept, and dreamed that I saw this place standing in the middle of a lake and full of people. They were tall, dark men and women, the latter decently dressed in garments that were dyed with various colours. The mound was covered with huts that were thatched with reeds, and wooden jetties, to which canoes were tied, ran out into the surrounding shallow water. On the broad surface of the lake were other canoes, each containing one or two men who were engaged in fishing, while round this lake lay the dense forest, as it did today. In my dream the hollow in which now was the pool by which I lay, was thatched over, the roof being supported by carved posts of black wood. They were very curious carvings, but when I woke up I could not remember their details.

There was a meeting going on in this large public gathering place, and a man who wore a cloak and cap made of feathers, the chief, I take it, had risen from a chair fashioned of four tusks of ivory with a seat of twisted rushes, and was addressing the assembly, apparently upon some important subject, for his audience of old men seemed to be much impressed. He beat his breast and put some question to them. Then, while they debated in low tones as to their answer, I woke up to find that it was light.

Of course this dream was all nonsense born of imaginings as to what might have been the previous history of that place, and I paid no attention to it. Still, it fitted in well enough with the surroundings, so well that had I been

mystically minded, I might have been inclined to believe that it did really portray some incident of past history that had happened when this mound was an island in a lake inhabited by a primeval people who dwelt there in order to be safe from the attacks of enemies.

Hans, like myself, had been asleep, but the hunters, who were far too frightened to think of shutting their eyes, reported that they had neither seen nor heard any elephants.

"Then let's go off home, before they come back," I said cheerfully.

So I took a drink of water, ate a handful of watercress, which I have always found a very sustaining herb, and away we started; glad enough to see the last of that haunted mount, as Hans called it. While we were on the plain we felt quite merry, at least Hans and I did, although it was strange to look at that lonesome lake bottom and think of the scene that had been enacted within a few hours, so strange, indeed, that I was almost tempted to believe we had been the victims of a vision of the night, induced by Kaneke's tale as to the great herds of elephants which came together in this district.

When we entered the forest, however, our mood changed, for about this place with its endless giant trees that shut out the light of the sun, there was an air of gloom which was most depressing. On we marched into the depths, following our own trail backwards, for I had been careful to mark the trunk of a tree here and there, Red Indian fashion, so that we might make no mistake upon our return. To lose oneself in that forest would indeed be a dreadful fate. When we had tramped for a good while and reached the spot where we had missed the spoor on the previous day, I observed that Hans was growing anxious, for he kept glancing over his shoulder.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"If the Baas will look back the Baas will see; that is, unless I have become drunk upon water and stream grasses," he replied in a weak voice.

I did look back and I did see. There, about a hundred yards behind, standing between two tree-trunks, exactly on our spoor, was our friend the king- elephant!

I halted, for I confess that for a moment my knees grew weak.

"Perhaps it is only a shadow—or a fancy," I said.

"Oh no, Baas. It's him right enough. I have felt him in the small of my back for the last half-mile, but did not dare to look. Still, if the Baas has any doubts, perhaps he would like to go and see."

At this moment, Tom and Jerry, who were well ahead, came tearing up to announce that they had caught sight of elephants to their right and left, and that we must go back.

"Oh yes," said Hans, "you are both very brave men, as you have always told me, so please go back," and he pointed with his finger at the apparition behind us, that seemed to have come nearer as we were talking, although, if so, it was once more standing still.

They saw it, and really I thought that one or both of them would collapse in a fit, for they were horribly frightened, as indeed I was myself. However, I pulled myself together and spoke to them severely, ending with an order to advance.

"Oh yes," repeated Hans who, in this extremity seemed to be moved to a kind of grim humour.

"Advance, you brave hunters, for that is your trade, isn't it? and please protect me, the poor little yellow man. No, don't look at those trees, because we are not lizards or woodpeckers and nothing else could run up them. And if we could, what would be the use, seeing that those spook elephants would only wait till we came down again. Advance, brave hunters, who told me only the other night that all elephants will run away from a man."

So he went on till at last I cut his drivel short.

"Come on," I said, "and keep together, for there is nothing else to be done. Remember that if anyone fires unless we are actually charged, probably it will mean the death of all of us. Now follow me."

They obeyed; indeed they followed uncommonly close, so close that when I halted for a moment, the barrel of the rifle of one of them, which I observed was at full cock, poked me in the back.

Soon I became aware that we were absolutely surrounded by elephants. That is to say, the great bull was behind, while unnumbered other beasts were on our right and left, though in front I could detect none. It was as though they were seeing us off the premises and politely leaving a road by which we might depart as quickly as possible. They saw us, there was no doubt of that, for occasionally one of them would stretch out its trunk and sniff as we passed within twenty or thirty yards of it. Moreover there was another thing. All these elephants were standing at intervals head on to our trail, forcing us as it were to keep to a straight and narrow road.

But each of them, when we had passed it, fell in behind the big bull and marched after it. Of this there could be no question, for when we were crossing one of the open glades that I have described, I looked back and saw an enormous number of them, hundreds there seemed to be, stretching along in a solemn and purposeful procession. Yet to right and left there were more ahead. It was as though all the elephants in Central Africa were gathered in that forest!

Well, it is useless to continue the description, because to do so would only be to say the same thing over and over again. For hours this went on, till we got near the camp, indeed, towards which we were travelling much faster than

when we left it. Here the forest thinned and the glades were more frequent. I counted them one by one until I knew that we were close to the last of them and about a mile from the boma, or perhaps a little more. Just then one of the hunters looked back and gasped out:

“Lord, the elephants are beginning to run.”

I verified the statement. It was true. The king-bull was breaking into a dignified trot, and all his subjects were following his example. Needless to say, we began to run too.

Oh, that last mile! Seldom have I done such time since I was a boy in the long-distance race at school, and fast as I went, the others kept pace with me, or went faster. We streaked across that glade and after us thundered the elephants, the ground shaking beneath their ponderous footfall. They were gaining, they were quite close, I could hear their deep breathing just behind. There ahead was the camp, and there, standing on a great ant-hill just in front of it, conspicuous in his white robe, was Kaneke watching the chase.

Suddenly the elephants seemed to catch sight of him, or perhaps they saw the smoke from the fire. At any rate they stopped dead, turned, and without a sound melted away into the depths of the forest, the king-bull going last as though he were loth to leave us.

I staggered on to the camp, dishevelled, breathless, ridiculous in my humiliation, as I was well aware. For was I not supposed throughout much of Africa to be one of the greatest elephant-hunters of my day?—and here I appeared running away from elephants with never a shot fired. It is true that the audience was small, a mysterious person called Kaneke, a very spider of a man that seemed to have got me into his web, and a score of porters, probably his tribesmen. But that made the matter no better; indeed, if there had been no one at all to see my disgrace, I should have felt almost equally shamed. I was furious, especially with Kaneke, whom I suspected, I dare say unjustly, of being at the bottom of the business. Also I had lost my hat, and what is an Englishman without his hat?

Kaneke descended from his ant-heap to meet me, all smiles and bows.

“I trust that your hunting has been good, Lord, for you seem to have found plenty of elephants,” he said.

“You are laughing at me,” I replied. “As you know, I have not been hunting; I have been hunted. Well, perhaps one day you will be hunted and I shall laugh at you.”

Then I waved him aside and went into my tent to recover breath and composure.

Throwing myself down on the little folding canvas stretcher-bed which, whenever it was possible, I carried with me upon my various expeditions, I watched the arrival of the others who, after the elephants turned, had come on more slowly. Tom and Jerry were almost speechless with rage. They shook their fists at Kaneke; indeed, if their rifles had been at hand, which was not the case for these were dropped in their last desperate race for life (they were recovered afterwards, unhurt, together with my hat), I think it very likely that they would have shot him, or tried to do so.

“You have made us cowards before our master’s eyes,” gasped one of them, I forget which. Then they passed on out of my range of vision.

Lastly Hans arrived (HE had not dropped his rifle), who squatted on the ground and began to fan himself with his hat.

“Why is everybody so angry with me, Hans?” said Kaneke.

“I don’t know,” answered Hans, “but perhaps if you gave me a drop out of that bottle which you keep under your blanket I might be able to remember—I mean the one the Baas gave you when you had the toothache.”

Kaneke went into the shelter made of boughs where he slept, and returning with a flask of square-face gin, poured a stiff tot of it in to a pannikin, which he gave to Hans, who gulped it down.

“Now I am beginning to remember,” said Hans, licking the edge of the empty tin. “They are angry with you, Kaneke, because they think that you have played a great trick upon them who being a wizard, have clothed a lot of spooks that serve you in the shapes of elephants and caused them to hunt us that you might laugh.”

“Yet I have done nothing of the sort, Hans,” answered Kaneke indignantly. “Am I a god that I can make elephants?”

“Oh no, Kaneke, certainly whatever you may be you are not a god. Nor indeed do I believe anything of this story, like those silly hunters. Yet for your own sake I hope that the next time you send us out hunting, nothing of this sort will happen, because, Kaneke, we can still shoot, and those hunters might be tempted to learn whether a wizard’s skin can turn bullets. And now, as your toothache has gone, I will take that gin and give it back to the Baas, because he has not much of it, and even a wizard cannot make good gin.”

Then Hans rose and snatched the bottle out of Kaneke’s hand. I must add that to his credit he returned it to me undiminished, which—in Hans—was an act of great virtue.

Such was the end of that elephant-hunt, by means of which I had hoped to relieve the tedium of that strangely uneventful journey and to restore the moral tone of Tom and Jerry, also, to a lesser degree, that of Hans and myself. Certainly the first end was achieved, for whatever may be thought of our experiences at the meeting-place of elephants,

and afterwards, they were not tedious. But of the second as much could not be said. Indeed, it left the hunters thoroughly frightened, the more so because they did not know exactly of what they were afraid.

All the circumstances of the business were unnatural. None of us had seen elephants behave as did those great herds, and the very mercy that the beasts showed to us was beyond experience.

Why did not the old king-bull either run away or kill us there upon the ground? Why did it and the rest of them hunt us back to the camp in that fashion, yet without doing us any actual harm? No wonder that these uneducated men saw magic at work and were scared.

Thrusting such nonsense from my mind, for nonsense I knew it to be, I could not help remembering the odd coincidence that on this prolonged adventure of our expedition, nothing seemed to materialize. So far it had the inconsequence of a dream. Thus, at the beginning of it, when we expected a desperate fight for our lives, there was no fight, at least on our part. Only one shot was fired, that with which I killed the Arab Gaika, who, be it noted, was Kaneke's particular foe, whose death he ardently desired. In the same way when we went out with much preparation to slay elephants and found them in enormous numbers no shot was fired and the beasts chased us ignominiously back to our camp. Further, there were more incidents of the same kind which I need not particularize.

I was sick of the whole job and longed to escape. Indeed, that night I went to Kaneke and told him so, pointing out that the hunters were off their balance and that as I could not send them back alone I thought it would be well if he parted company with me and my men, as I proposed to retrace my steps towards the coast. Kaneke was much disturbed and argued with me, very politely at first, pointing out the many dangers of such a course. As I would not give way, he changed his tone, and told me flatly that what I proposed would mean the death of all four of us.

"At whose hands? Yours, Kaneke?" I asked.

"Certainly not, Lord," he answered. "However cruelly you break your bargain with me, and this after taking my pay," (here he was alluding to the cash and ivory which, like a fool, I had accepted), "I should not be base enough to lift a hand against one who saved my life at what he believed to be the risk of his own, although in truth no risk was run."

"What do you mean? How do you know that, Kaneke?"

"I mean what I say, and I do know it, Lord. Even in that pit which you thought so dangerous you were quite safe, as you were when the Arabs attacked you and the elephants chased you, and as you will be to the end of this adventure, if only you keep your promises. For was this not vowed to you at the beginning?"

"Yes, Kaneke, by an unhappy woman whom I see no more."

"Those who are not seen may still be present, Lord, or their strength may remain behind them. But if you turn back before your mission is ended, it will depart. Those tribes who have welcomed you upon your outward journey will one and all fight against you on your return, until in this way or in that you are brought to your deaths. Never again will you look upon the sea, Lord."

"That's pleasant!" I exclaimed, controlling my temper as best I could. "Listen. You talk of my mission. Be so good as to tell me what it is. The only mission that I have, or had, was to visit a certain lake called Mone, if it exists, in order to satisfy my curiosity and love of seeing new things. Well, I have changed my mind; I no longer desire to travel to the Lake Mone."

"Yet I think you must go there, Lord, as I must, for that which is stronger than we are draws us both. In this world, Lord, we do not serve ourselves, we serve something else; I cannot tell what it is. Everything we do or seem to do, good and bad together, is done to carry out the purpose of what we cannot see. Like that beast Donna of yours, we travel our road, sometimes willingly, sometimes to satisfy our appetites, sometimes driven forward with strokes. Each of us has his powers, which are given to him, not that he may gain what he desires, but that he may fulfil an invisible purpose. Thus you have yours and I have mine. I know that your servants and others hold me to be a magician, and now and again you are tempted to believe them. Well, perhaps in a certain way I am something of a magician, that is to say, strength works through me, though whence that strength comes I cannot say."

"All this does not leave me much wiser, Kaneke."

"How can we who have no wisdom at all ever grow wiser, Lord? To do so, first we must be wise, and that will not happen to us until we are dead. All our lives we toil that we may grow wise—in death, when we may learn that wisdom is nothingness, or nothingness wisdom."

"Oh, have done!" I said in a rage. "Your talk goes round and round, and ends nowhere. You are fooling me with words, but I suppose that what you mean is, that we must go on with you."

"Yes, Lord, I mean that, amongst other things, unless indeed you wish to stop altogether and go to seek wisdom in the stars, or wherever she may dwell. Safety and good fortune have been promised to you and to the yellow man your servant, knowledge also such as you love. These lie in front of you, but behind lies that which all men shun, or so I read what is written."

"Where do you read it, Kaneke?"

"Yonder," he answered, pointing to the sky that was thick with stars, though the moon had not yet risen.

I stared at this solemn-faced, big-eyed man. Of all that he said I believed nothing, holding that if not merely a clever cheat, like others of his kind, he was a self-deluder. Yet of one thing I was sure, that if I tried to cross his will and deserted him, his prophecies would certainly be fulfilled, so far as we were concerned. Evidently this Kaneke was one who had authority among natives. It would be easy for him to pass a word back over the road that we had travelled, or in any direction that we might go, which word would mean what he foretold for us, four men only who must be at the mercy of a mob of savages, namely—death. On the other hand, if we went forward, his vanity would see to it that what he had asserted should come true, namely that we should be safe. Not till afterwards did I remember that only Hans and I were included in that assertion. Nothing was said about the two hunters.

On the whole, after this talk I hated Kaneke more than ever. Something told me that however plausible and smooth-tongued he might be, at heart the man was deceitful, one, too, whose ends were not good.

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## EXPLANATIONS

Next morning early I laid all this matter before Tom and Jerry, telling them that I had made up my mind to go forward with Kaneke and that Hans would accompany me, as I considered on the whole that this would be the safer course. If, however, they wished to return, I would give them rifles with a fair share of our ammunition, also the donkey Donna to take the place of porters. In fact, only in more detail, I repeated the offer which I made before we went out to hunt, or rather to be hunted by, elephants, explaining that I did so because after that experience they might have changed their mind about its acceptance.

They consulted together, then Tom the Abyssinian, who was always the spokesman, said:

"Master, after what we went through on the mound in the midst of the plain and in the forest with those elephants, which we believe to have been creatures bewitched, it is true that we are much more frightened even than we were before. So frightened are we that were it not for one matter, we would now do what we said we would not do, and attempt to work our way towards the coast, even though we must go alone."

"What matter?" I asked.

"This, Macumazahn. We are men disgraced; not only did we show fear and run when on duty, we did worse, we threw away our guns that we might run more quickly, and therefore, although they have been found and brought back by Kaneke's people, I say that we are men disgraced."

"Oh!" I said, trying to soothe their pride. "Hans and I ran also. Who would not have run with all those elephants thundering after him? It was the only thing to do."

"Yes, Macumazahn, you ran also, and it was the only thing to do. But, Lord, neither you nor Hans threw away your rifle against the hunter's law—"

"No, we should never do that," I said, trying to interrupt, but he went on rapidly:

"—So ashamed are we, Macumazahn, that I tell you, were it not that we are Christians, both of us, we should have hung ourselves or otherwise have put an end to our lives. But being Christians, this we cannot do, for then we should go to answer for that crime to a greater Master than you are. For this reason, Macumazahn, seeing that we may not wipe out our shame as savages would do, we propose to redeem our honour in another fashion. We hold that if we go forward with Kaneke we shall die, for we believe ourselves to be men bewitched, yes, men doomed by that wizard, whatever may be the fate of you, master, and of Hans. If so, thus let it be, for we are determined that if we must die, we will do so in some great fashion which will cause you to forget that we are men who broke the hunter's law and threw away our guns, with which it was our duty to defend you, and to remember us only as two faithful servants who knew how to give their lives to save that of their master."

I was so astonished at this solemn speech that I began to wonder whether Tom, in order to console himself for the slur upon his honour, the breach of the "hunter's law", as he called it, had got at my scanty stock of spirits.

"What do you say?" I asked, looking hard at Jerry.

"Oh, Macumazahn," answered that phlegmatic person, "I say that Little Holes is quite right. We two who have always had a good name—as the writings about us told you—when trouble came have shown ourselves to be not watch-dogs, but jackals. Yes, we are fellows who in the hour of danger have thrown away our rifles, which we should have kept to the last to protect the white lord who paid us. Therefore we will not go back, although we believe that we walk to our deaths, being under a curse. No, we will go on hoping that before the end you may learn that we are not really jackals but stout watch-dogs; yes, if God is good to us, that we are more, that we are bull-buffaloes, that we are lions."

"Stuff and rubbish!" I exclaimed. "You make trees of grass stalks. I never thought you jackals, who know you to be great-hearted. I dare say if I had remembered to do so when those elephants were at my heels, I should have thrown away my own rifle that I might run the faster. Still, I think that on the whole you are wiser to come on than to try to return alone, for reasons that I have told you. If there are dangers in front of us there are worse behind, because, although he is no wizard, as you think, Kaneke is better as a friend than as an enemy. So I pray you to cease from dreams and quakings born of superstitions at which Christians should mock, and to go on with bold hearts." Then, as I thought we had talked enough, I shook them both by the hand, to show that I was not angry with them, and sent them away.

Afterwards very diplomatically I began to tell Hans something of this conversation, hoping to learn from him of what these hunters really were afraid.

"Oh, Baas," he broke in, "it is no use to speak to me about what passed between you and those fellows with half your tongue and your head turned aside"—by which he meant telling only a part of the truth—"because I was on the other side of that bush and heard every word."

"You are a dirty little spy," I said indignantly.

"Yes, Baas, that's it, because if one wants to know the truth, one must sometimes be a spy. Well, there's nothing to be said. No doubt Little Holes and Jerry are quite right; they are bewitched, or at least the Owl-man while he is flitting

about at night has read their deaths written in the stars, which they know. But they know also that, as they have got to die, it doesn't matter whether they go with us or by themselves. So, if coming on will make them depart to the place of Fires happy and singing instead of sad and ashamed, thinking themselves lions instead of jackals, as they said—why, Baas, let them come on and don't trouble your head any more about them. For my part, however much I love them, I am quite content that it should be they who have to die, and not you and me. So cheer up, Baas, and take things as they happen.”

“Get out, you heartless little beast,” I said, and Hans got out. But all the while I knew that he was not really heartless, and, what is more, he knew that I knew it. Hans in his own way was, on the outside, just a rather cynical and half-savage philosopher, but within, a very warm-natured person.

The end of it all was that we marched on as before, and, as before, nothing particular happened. Kaneke, our guide, for I had not the faintest idea where we were going, led us through every variety of African country. We forded rivers, or if they were too deep and wide, were conveyed across them by friendly natives on rafts or in canoes, for when Kaneke had spoken to their chiefs, all the natives became most helpful. On one occasion, it is true, as there were no natives, or such as there were had no boats or rafts, we were obliged to swim, which I did with trembling, being afraid of crocodiles. However, the crocodiles, if there were any, politely left us alone, so that as usual we came over safely.

After passing the last of these rivers our path ran through a dense forest for two days. On the afternoon of the second day the forest grew thinner and at length changed to a plain, or rather barren land that was covered with small timber, bush-veld in short. This place was intensely hot, filled with game of every kind and, as we soon discovered from numerous bites, infested with tsetse-fly which lived upon the game. As tsetse, except for the irritation of their bites, are harmless to man and we had no horses or cattle, they did not alarm us, for up to that time I shared the belief that donkeys were immune as men and buck to their poison. This, however, proved not to be the case, at any rate in the case of Donna that I was riding a good deal because the heat made walking a most laborious business.

One day I noticed that she seemed suddenly to have grown weak and stumbled so frequently that at length I dismounted. Relieved of my weight she came on well enough without being led, for the intelligent and affectionate beast would follow me or Hans, who fed her, like a dog. When we camped that night she would not eat and was seized with a fit of staggering.

At once I guessed what must be the matter. Probably she had been infected a long while before and the added doses of the poison in this fly-haunted plain had brought matters to a crisis, helped by a shower of rain, which often develops the illness. There was nothing to be done, for this venom has no known antidote. So we lay down and went to sleep as usual. In the middle of the night I was awakened by feeling something pushing at me. At first I was frightened, thinking it must be a lion or some other beast, until I discovered that poor Donna had managed to thrust her way through the thorn fence we had built and even into my tent, of which the flaps were open because of the heat, and by prodding at me with her nose, was calling attention to her state and asking my assistance.

Of course I could do nothing except lead her out of the tent and offer her water, which she would not drink. I tried to go away, but whenever I moved she made piteous efforts to follow me, for the poor thing was growing weaker every minute, till at last she tumbled down. I sat myself at her side and presently she rolled over, laying her head, whether by accident or design, upon my knee and died.

I have told of her end in some detail, because with the single exception, that of a dog named Stump which once I owned when I was young, it was the most touching and piteous that I have known where an animal is concerned. Surely if there is any other life for us men, there must be one also for creatures which are capable of so much affection; at least I do not think I should care for a heaven where these were not.

When it was all over I went back to my tent and slept as best I could, to be awakened at the first dawn by a sound of lamentation. Rising, I peeped over the fence to discover its origin and in the faint light saw—what do you think?—Hans, whom it pleased to seem so callous and hard-hearted, seated on the ground blubbering—there is no other word for it— and kissing poor Donna's nose. Then I went back to bed, where in due course he brought me my coffee, as was his custom at sunrise.

“Baas,” he said in a cheerful voice, “there is good news this morning. Those tsetse-flies have finished off Donna.”

“Why is that good news?” I asked.

“Oh, Baas, because the Owl-man, Kaneke, says there are mountains ahead of us which she could not have climbed. He told me only the other day that we should have to shoot her there, or leave her to be eaten by lions, which would have been a pity. Also she was growing weak and really was of very little use, so I am glad that she is dead, as now I shall be saved the trouble of feeding her.”

“Yes, Hans,” I answered, “I saw how glad you were when I looked over the fence just as the light began to glint upon the spears of Kaneke's porters.”

At this Hans put down the coffee in a hurry and departed, apparently much ashamed of himself, because, as he said after I had told him the story, he did not like being spied upon when his stomach was upset and made him behave like a fool. I should add that the hunters were depressed at this incident, not that they cared particularly for Donna, but because they said that now our luck had changed and that death was “a hungry lion”, who, having tasted beast's flesh, would long for that of men.

They were right. Our luck had changed. The decease of poor Donna marked the end of our peaceful progress.

A few days later we came to mountains which for a long time past we had seen in the distance, bold hills upon which at nightfall a wonderful and mysterious blue light seemed to gather—the Ruga Mountains, I believe they were called. It was quite true that here we should have been obliged to leave Donna, dead or alive, for their ascent proved to be a most precipitous business. Indeed, had not Kaneke known the path, never could we have climbed them, because of certain precipices that rose in tiers of terraces and must be circumvented, since to scramble up the faces of them was impossible.

However he did know it, though to call it a path is a misnomer, because there was nothing to show that it was used by man. For three or four days we crept along the base of those great bare cliffs, always at length finding some crack by which their flanks could be turned. So it went on, an exhausting business, and as we mounted higher, very cold at night, for although there was no snow, the air grew thin and piercing.

At length we reached the summit of the mountains, which I found to be table-topped, a very common African formation. (What caused it? I wonder. Were the crests shorn off by ice in some remote era of the world's history, say, a few hundred million years ago?) As it was nightfall I could see no more, especially as a sort of blinding Scotch mist, the fog called the "table-cloth" which so often hangs about these flat-topped mountains, came up and obscured everything.

Next morning before the dawn Hans woke me up saying that Kaneke wished to speak with me. I went grumbling in all the clothes I had, with a blanket on the top of them and an old otter-skin kaross, that I used above the thin cork mattress of my portable bedstead, thrown over that, for the cold was bitter, or seemed so, after those hot tsetse-haunted lowlands. I found Kaneke seated on a stone near to the edge of the tableland. He rose and greeted me in his ceremonious fashion, saying:

"Lord, you should not have slept so long, for after midnight the mist melted or was blown away, and the stars were more beautiful and brighter than I have seen them since last I stood upon this place a long while ago. Indeed, so clear were they that in them I read many things which hitherto had been hidden from me."

"Did you?" I exclaimed. "I hope that among them you read that we shall soon escape from this cold which is gnawing my bones."

"Yes, Lord, I can promise you that before long you will be hot enough. Hearken," he went on with a change of tone, "the time has come when I must tell you something of my country and of what lies before us. Look! The sun rises in the east. The sight is fine, is it not?"

I nodded. It was very fine. The rays of the morning light revealed a vast plain lying some thousands of feet beneath us, and far away, set apparently in the centre of this plain, other mountains shaped like a flattened ring. Or perhaps it was a single mountain; at that distance I could not be sure.

"See," went on Kaneke, pointing to this mass, "yonder within that wall of cliff is the home of my people, the Dabanda, and there too is the holy lake, Mone. From here the place looks small, but it is not small. For a whole day a swift-footed man might run and not cross it from side to side."

"What is it?" I asked. "A valley?"

"I think not, Lord. I think that it is the cup of one or more of those great mountains that once vomited out fire; a huge basin with steep walls that cannot be climbed, and slopes within that run down to the forest at its base, which forest surrounds the Holy Lake."

"How large is this lake, Kaneke?"

"I do not know. Perhaps if a man could walk on water it would take him two hours to reach the island in its centre; one hour to cross that island and another two hours to come to the farther shore."

"That is a big piece of water, Kaneke, which means that the whole space within the lip of the rock must be large. Are your people who dwell in it also large?"

"Nay, Lord. Perhaps they can count five hundred men of an age to bear arms; not more. Still, they are strong because they are holy, and for another reason."

"What other reason?"

He dropped his voice as he answered:

"Did I not tell you the story of the goddess who dwells in my country, she whose title is Engoi the Divine, and whose name is Shadow?"

"You told me a story of which I remember something, as I remember also that I did not believe a word of it."

"There you are both right and wrong, Lord Macumazahn, because some of that story was lies with which I filled your ears for my own purposes, and some was true. For instance, what I said about the Engoi waiting for a white man was a lie. It was a bait in my trap. Lord, it was necessary that you should come with me; why, I do not quite know, but so I was commanded."

"Who commanded you?"

"That is my secret, Lord."

Now I bethought me of the deceased White-Mouse, and did not pursue the matter, but asked:

“What do you mean by telling me that this lie was a bait?”

“What I say, Lord. I have learned through your servant, the yellow man, who told it not to me but to another, that you worship all that is beautiful, especially beautiful women, who when they see you, so you announce, fall in love with you at once. Now you will understand, Lord, why I baited my trap with this story of one who was very lovely and waited for a white man, namely because I knew that you would believe yourself to be that man and come with me upon that journey, being sure that she who is named Shadow would reward you by kissing your feet and redeeming you from your sins towards the other beautiful women, whom the yellow man says you throw aside one after another as soon as you are tired of them.”

Now when I heard this preposterous and most shameless yarn, it is true that, cold as it was, I nearly burst with heat and rage. If that mischievous and romancing little Hans had been there, which he was not, I declare that it would have gone ill with him; indeed, so angry was I with Kaneke for repeating his calumnies, that I nearly made a physical attack upon him. On second thoughts, however, I refrained—first, because he was a much larger and stronger man than myself, and, secondly, because I wished to get at the kernel of this mystery, for I felt that, divested of the trappings invented by Kaneke, there remained something most unusual to be elucidated. So I put the brake upon my temper and answered:

“I thought that in your way you were a wise man, Kaneke, but now I see that after all you are but a fool, who otherwise would have known that Hans is an even bigger liar than you announce yourself to be, and that the last thing I wish is to run after beautiful women, or any woman, which always ends like our adventures with the elephants, in the hunter being hunted. But let that be. Was any of your story true?”

“Yes, Lord, much. We have a goddess who is called Shadow, and who, as we believe and not we alone, controls the gifts of heaven, sending rain or withholding it, causing women to bear children or making them barren, and doing many such things that bring happiness or misery to men, though this goddess I have never seen, except once, as I told you.”

“A goddess! Do you mean that she is immortal?”

“No, Lord, but I mean that her power is immortal, or at least that it goes on from generation to generation. The goddess, as I think, when her office is fulfilled, dies or perhaps is killed.”

“What office?”

“Lord, the Chief of my tribe, the Dabanda, is her head-priest. When the goddess is of ripe age he is married to her, and in due time becomes the father of a daughter, of which she is the mother. Perhaps he is also the father of male children, but if so they are never heard of, so I suppose that they are killed. When this daughter, the Engoi-to-be, grows up, her mother, the Engoi- that-was, vanishes away.”

“Vanishes! How does she vanish?”

“I do not know, Lord. Some say that she who is called Shadow is drawn up to heaven, some that she who is also called the Lake-dweller, or Treasure of the Lake, swims out into the lake and is lost beneath its waters, and some that the virgins who attend her, poison her with the scent of certain flowers that bloom upon the island. At least she departs, and her daughter, the new Engoi, reigns in her place and, like her mothers before her, is married to her high-priest, the Chief of the Dabanda.”

“What!” I asked, horrified. “Do you mean to say that this chief marries his own daughter?”

“Oh no, Lord. The chief never outlives the Shadow. He knows when she is going to fade, and he fades at the same time, or earlier.”

“How does he ‘fade’, as you call it?”

“That is a matter for him to choose, Lord. Generally, if he seeks honour, in fighting our enemies the Abanda, among whom he will rush alone until he is cut down. Or sometimes he chooses other roads to darkness. At least he must walk one of them, because if he does not he is seized and burnt alive; as the end is the same it does not matter how it is reached.”

“My word,” I exclaimed, “it is strange that this goddess finds it easy to get a husband!”

“It is not at all strange, Lord,” answered Kaneke haughtily, “seeing that to wed the Engoi is the greatest honour that can befall any man in the world. Moreover, he knows that when his life here is over he will dwell with her for ever in joy in heaven. Yes, they will be twin stars shining to all eternity. Therefore before the Chief marries the Shadow, he names some child he loves to be the husband of the Shadow which shall appear.”

“Thus it came about, Lord, that when I was but little, I was named by the Chief, the half-brother of my mother, to wed the Engoi-to-be. But I committed the great crime. I entered the sacred forest, hoping to look upon the Engoi, of whose beauty I had heard, not her whom I should wed, for as yet she did not live, but one who went before her. It was for this crime that misfortunes fell upon me, as I have told you, and I was driven from the land to atone my sins. Now I have been called back again to become the husband of the new Engoi, for such is my glorious destiny.”

"Oh," I said, "now at last I get the hang of the thing. Well, every man to his taste, but after what you have told me, I am glad that no one nominated me to marry an Engoi or Shadow, or whatever you call her."

"Strange are the varying ways of men! That which you, White Lord, think of small account, we hold to be the greatest honour which can befall one born of woman. It is true that death lies beyond the honour, but what of this, seeing that soon or late death must come? It is true also that he who is named and consecrated the spouse of the Engoi of days to come, must look upon no other woman."

Here I could not help remarking:

"But surely, Kaneke, you told me a story of a woman who helped you to become chief of the Arabs in your town yonder, saying that you grieved much when she died; also I think you spoke to me of your wives who dwelt without your fence."

"Very likely, Lord, for have I not told you many things? Also, did I say that the child that brought the woman to her death was mine, or show you the wives who dwelt without my fence? Learn that I had not, nor ever had a wife, which is one of the reasons why those Arabs held me a magician. What does a man want with wives who is sealed as the husband of the Engoi, yes of the Shadow herself, if only for a year, or even for an hour?"

"Nothing. Of course, nothing," I answered with enthusiasm. Then a thought struck me, and I added, "But supposing that when at last he sees this Engoi, he does not like her, or that she does not like him, having met some other man whom she prefers?"

"Lord Macumazahn, you speak in ignorance, therefore I forgive you what might otherwise be considered insult, or even blasphemy. It is not possible that her appointed husband should not like the Engoi. Even were she hideous he would adore her, seeing the soul within. How much more, then, will he do so, since she is always the loveliest woman on the earth, filled with light like a star and crowned with wisdom from above."

"Indeed! In that case there is nothing more to be said. Only then, Kaneke, why do her adoring people drown or otherwise make away with such divine beauty and wisdom as soon as her daughter begins to grow up?"

"As regards your second question," went on Kaneke, taking no notice of an interruption which doubtless he considered irreverent and trivial, "still less is it possible that the Engoi should prefer any other man to him to whom she is vowed, for the reason that she never sees one."

"Oh," I said, "now I understand. That accounts for everything, including your banishment from your home. A woman who never sees any man except the one she must marry is of course easily pleased, even if she is called a goddess."

"Lord Macumazahn," replied Kaneke, much offended, "I see that you wish to make a mock of me and my faith."

"As you did of that of the Mahomedans," I suggested mildly.

"I see also," he went on, "that you think I tell you lies."

"As you have just admitted you did in the past."

He waved his hand, as though to thrust this trifle aside, and went on;

"Yet you will learn that as to the Lady Shadow, Treasure of the Lake, and her husband, who is called 'Shield of the Shadow', I speak the truth. Indeed, you should have learnt it already, for have I not told you that amongst other powers, he who is affianced to her whose title is Engoi, yes, even before he has married her, has command over wild beasts and men. What of the lion that I turned aside on that night when you climbed the pit? What of those whom I called to rescue you when the Arabs came up against you? What of the elephants which hunted you when you went out to hunt them, and ceased when they saw me?"

"What indeed?" I echoed. "Perhaps when you have time you will answer your own questions. Meanwhile I will put one more to you. Why have you plotted and planned and so brought it about that I should be your companion upon this very mysterious business?"

"Because it was conveyed to me that I must do so, Lord Macumazahn, for reasons that as yet are not made clear to me. Doubtless you are appointed to be of service to the Engoi and therefore to me. Also I know that there will be a great war between my people, the Dabanda, and the Abanda, who dwell in their thousands upon the farther side of yonder mountain and who desire—as they have always done—that their chief should wed the Shadow and thus bring rain and prosperity upon them, and in this war you, who are a great general or so I have heard, and who are so skilled with a rifle as I have seen, may be of use to me."

"I see," I said. "As I was when I rescued you from your house and afterwards when I shot that fellow Gaika. Well, perhaps I may and perhaps I mayn't, since no one knows to whom he will be of use. Meanwhile I thank you for telling me many things, some of which may be true. And now I will go to breakfast, so good-bye for the present," and I departed, aware that if I had disliked Kaneke before, now I positively detested him.

To me the man seemed to be a mixture of a liar, a braggart, a self-seeker, and a mystic, a most unpleasant compound, or so I thought. Yet I had taken his money and was bound to serve him, or at any rate to serve this wonderful Engoi, whose personal name was Shadow, if such a woman existed. Possibly she might be better than Kaneke; at any rate I hoped so.

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## THE WANDERER

By evening that day we had reached the plain at the foot of the mountain and advanced some little way into its desolation. I use this word advisedly, for when once we had got away from the foothills where there was water, we entered most unpromising country upon which it was evident rain fell but seldom.

The vegetation here was almost entirely of the cactus order, grey or green prickly growths that stored up moisture within themselves. Some of these were enormous, thick and tall as moderate-sized trees, and, as I should judge, of great antiquity, their form suggesting huge candelabra (for they had no proper leaves) or straight fingers pointing up to heaven from flat bases, shaped like to the palm of the hand. Others again were round green lumps, ranging from the size of a football down to that of a pin-cushion, all of them, big or little, being covered with sharp spikes, which made progress among them difficult and, indeed, dangerous, for the prick of some of the species is poisonous. These cacti, I should add, or a large proportion of them, bore the most beautiful but unnatural-looking flowers of every size and brilliant hue.

Another feature of this strange semi-desert area was the outcrop here and there of columns of stone that from a distance looked like obelisks, monoliths sometimes, but generally formed of round, water-worn rocks resting one upon another. How they came here I cannot imagine; it is a matter for geologists, but I noticed that they seemed to be composed of hard rock left, perhaps, when millions of years ago the lava from the great extinct volcanic area towards which we were heading, was washed away by floods.

Through this curious country we travelled for three days, coming on the second day to a small oasis where there was a spring of water, which I was glad to see for our bottles were empty and we had begun to thirst. I must add that we went at a great rate. Two or three of the porters, relieved of their loads, which the others added to their own, marched ahead, quite five hundred yards ahead, which, as Hans remarked, showed that they knew the way and were scouts sent out to guard against surprise. Kaneke followed, in the midst of the remaining porters, who acted as his bodyguard. Then came Hans and I, the two hunters bringing up the rear.

"Now I begin to believe, Baas," said Hans to me, "that something of all that story which Kaneke has told is true, for though they will never say so, it is evident that these men who know the road so well belong to his people, also that they are afraid of being attacked. Otherwise they would not go so fast through this wilderness of thorns, or look so frightened."

"How do you know what tale Kaneke told me? Were you listening behind a stone?" I asked, but got no answer, for at that moment Hans pricked, or pretended to prick, his foot upon a cactus, and dropped behind to dig out the thorn.

I pass on to the evening of the third day. We were at length getting clear of the cactus scrub and reaching the foot of the westernmost slope of the huge and massive mountain, which Kaneke had told me was the shell of an extinct volcano within whose crater dwelt his people, the Dabanda. There was but an hour to sunset, and though much distressed by the heat and the lack of water, we were marching at a great rate to reach a point where Kaneke said we should find a spring. This he was anxious to do before dark, for now the nights were almost moonless. Presently as we trudged forward, begrimed with dust and gasping from the still heat, Hans, who was at my side, poked me in the ribs, exclaiming in Dutch:

"Kek!" (that is, "Look!")

I did look in the direction to which he pointed, and saw so strange a sight that at first I thought I must be suffering from delusions. There, running towards us down the slope of a low ridge of the mountain mass where it merged into the plain, appeared a man, a very exhausted man, who came or rather staggered forward in short rushes, halting after every few paces as though to get his breath. This much I could see with my eyes, but when I took my glasses, which I always carry with me, I saw more, namely that this man was white! Yes, there could be no mistake, for his garments, which seemed to have been torn from his shoulders, showed the white skin beneath. Moreover his beard and hair were red, or even golden, and his height and breadth were greater than are those of most natives.

Next moment I saw something else also, for on that ridge of ground which he had crossed, appeared a number of black spearmen, who evidently were hunting him. Dropping the glasses into my pocket, I sang out to Tom and Jerry to give me my Winchester, which one of them carried as well as his own, the heavy rifles and ammunition being in charge of the bearers. In a minute it was in my hands, with a bagful of cartridges.

"Now follow me," I said, and the four of us ran forward, passing through the bearers.

By this time the exhausted white man was within about fifty paces of us, while his pursuers, not more than six yards or so behind, were beginning to throw spears at him as though they were determined to kill him before he could reach us. As it chanced it was some of them who were killed, for at my word we opened fire, and being decent shots, all four of us, down they went. The man arrived, unhurt, and sank to the ground, gasping out:

"My God! you are white! Give me a rifle."

I didn't, because I hadn't one at hand, nor, indeed, was he in a fit state to handle a gun. Also, next minute there began a general engagement on a small scale.

More spearmen—tall, shapely fellows—appeared over the ridge, thirty of forty of them perhaps. Our bearers threw down their loads and came into action with great vigour, uttering a war-cry of “Engoi!— Engoi!” We fired away with the repeating rifles.

It was all over in a few minutes, for a good many of the attackers were down and the rest had bolted back across the ridge, while our losses were nil, except for one man who had received a spear-cut in the shoulder. They had gone, pursued by the porters who, from peaceful bearers of baggage suddenly were turned into perfect tigers, furious fighting-men who, weary as they were, rushed into battle like the best of Zulu veterans. The transformation was so marked and instantaneous that it astonished me, as it did Hans, who said:

“Look at those fellows, Baas. They are fighting, not strangers, but old enemies whom they have hated from their mothers’ breasts. And look at Kaneke. He bristles with rage like a porcupine.” (This was quite true; the man’s hair and beard seemed to be standing on end and his eyes, usually so sleepy, flashed fire.)

“Did you see him tackle that tall one whom you missed,” (this was a lie. I never shot at the man), “the warrior who threw a knife at you— snatching the spear from his hand and driving it through him? I think they must be Abandas whom, as we have heard, the Dabandas hate.”

“I dare say,” I answered, “but if so they are uncommonly like Kaneke’s crowd; of the same blood perhaps.”

Then I bethought me of the white man, whom I had forgotten in the excitement of the scrap, and went to look for him. I found him seated on the ground, having just emptied a water-bottle that Jerry had given him.

“There is something in horoscopes, after all,” he panted out, for he had not yet recovered his breath.

“Horoscopes! What the devil do you mean?” I asked, thinking that he must be crazy.

“What I say,” he answered. “My father was cracked on astrology and cast mine when I was born. I remember that it foretold that I should meet a white man in a desert and that he would save me from being killed by savages.”

“Did it indeed? To change the subject, might I ask your name?”

“John Taurus Arkle,” he murmured. “Taurus from the constellation under which I was born, or so I understand,” he added with a little smile and in the voice of one whose mind wandered; then shut his eyes and began to faint.

Faint he did; so thoroughly that he had to be revived from my scanty store of spirits. While he was recovering I took stock of the man, who evidently was off his head from exhaustion. That he was an Englishman of good birth was clear from that unfailing guide, his voice and manner of speaking. Also he was well named John Taurus, i.e. John Bull, though perhaps if the constellation Leo had been in the ascendant or whatever it is called when he was born, that of Lion would have suited him even better.

To tell the truth his physical qualities partook of both a taurine and a leonine character. The wide breast, the strong limbs and the massive brow were distinctly bull-like, while the yellow beard and hair which, having been neglected, hung down on to his shoulders like a mane, also the eyes which, when the sun shone on them, gleamed with a sort of golden hue, as do those of lions, did suggest something leonine.

In short, although not handsome, he was a most striking person, like to no one else I had ever seen; aged, as I guessed, anything between thirty and thirty-five years. Much did I wonder how he came to be in this strange place where, as I believe from what Kaneke had told me, at that time I was the first white man to set foot.

The gin did its work, and in due course John Taurus Arkle—a strange name enough—regained his wits. While he was still unconscious Kaneke, looking both disturbed and fierce, the spear with which he had killed its owner still in his hand, came up and stared at him.

“It’s all right,” I said; “only a swoon. He will recover presently.”

“Is it so, Lord?” he answered, staring at Arkle with evident disapproval and, I thought, dislike. “I hoped that he was dead.”

“And why, pray?” I inquired shortly.

“Because this white man will bring trouble on us, as I always feared.”

“As you feared! What do you mean?”

“Oh, only that the stars told me something about him; as I read them, that we should find his body.”

Stars, I thought to myself; more stars. But aloud I said:

“Well, you read them wrongly—if at all, for he is alive, and please understand that I mean to keep him so. But what is this talk of trouble?”

“Talk,” said Kaneke, pointing with the spear to certain silent forms that lay around. “Is there not already trouble here? Moreover I learned something from one of those Abanda fellows before he died, namely that this white man had forced his way over the mountain crest into my country of the Dabanda; that he had been driven out into that of the Abanda; that he was forced to fly before them who wished to kill him, as they do all strangers; that he fled, and being very strong and swift of foot, outran them, till at last, when he was being hunted down like a tired buck by wild dogs, he met us, and that happened which was decreed.”

"Yes," I repeated after him, "that happened which was decreed, whether in your stars or elsewhere. But I want to know what is to happen next. It appears that neither the Dabanda nor the Abanda like this white lord, who henceforth must be our companion."

"Why must he be our companion, Macumazahn? See, he is senseless. One tap on the head and he so will remain for ever, who, if he comes on with us among peoples whom he has offended—I know not how—may cost us our lives."

In an absent-minded fashion I took the revolver from my belt and began to examine it as though to see whether it were loaded.

"Look here, Kaneke," I said, "let us come to an understanding. You have just been suggesting to me that to suit some purpose of your own I should murder, or allow you to murder, one of my own countrymen who has been attacked by your people and other savages, and escaped. Perhaps you do not understand what that means to a white man, so I am going to tell you."

Here suddenly I lifted the revolver and held it within a few inches of his eyes. Then I said in a quiet voice:

"Look here, my friend, in your country when you take an oath that may not be broken, by whom do you swear?"

"By the Engoi, Lord," he answered in a startled voice. "To break an oath sworn by the Engoi is death, and more than death."

"Good. Now swear to me by the Engoi that you will not harm this white lord or cause him to be harmed."

"And if I refuse?" he asked sullenly.

"If you refuse, Kaneke, then I will give you time to change your mind, while I count fifty between my teeth. If, after I have counted fifty, you still refuse, or are silent, then I will send a bullet through your head, because, friend Kaneke, it is time to settle which of us two is master."

"If you kill me, my people will kill you, Macumazahn."

"Oh no, they won't, Kaneke. Have you forgotten that a certain lady called White-Mouse, in whom I put much faith, promised me that I should come quite safe out of this journey. Don't trouble yourself about that matter, for I will settle with your people after you are dead. Now I am going to begin to count."

So I counted, pausing at ten and at twenty. At thirty I saw Kaneke's fingers tighten on the handle of the spear with which he had killed the Abanda man.

"Be pleased to drop that spear," I said, "or I shall stop counting."

He opened his hand and it fell to the ground.

Then I counted on to forty, and pausing once more, remarked that time was short, but that perhaps he was right to have done with it and to take his chance of what awaited him in or beyond the stars he worshipped, seeing that this world was full of sorrows.

I counted on to forty-five, at which number I aligned the pistol very carefully on a spot just above Kaneke's nose.

"Forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight," I said, and began to press upon the trigger.

Then came the collapse, for Kaneke threw himself down and in truly Eastern fashion began to kiss the ground before my feet. As he did so I fired, the bullet of course passing over his head.

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, "how fortunate that you made up your mind. This pistol is much lighter triggered than I thought or perhaps the heat has affected the spring. Well, do you swear?"

"Yes, Lord," he said hoarsely. "I swear by the Engoi that I will not harm yonder white man, or cause him to be harmed. That was the oath you asked, but I know that in it lies one that is wider, namely that henceforth, instead of your serving me, I must serve you, who have conquered me."

"That's it. You have put it very well," I replied cheerfully. "And now—a gift for a gift. I am quite ready to renounce my new-won lordship over you, and taking this white wanderer with me if he will come, to leave you to go your own ways, while I and my servants go mine, you promising not to follow or molest me in any manner. Is that your wish?"

"No, Lord," he answered sullenly. "You must accompany me to the Lake Mone."

"Very good, Kaneke, so be it. Tell me how matters stand and I will give you my orders. But remember that if you disobey one of them or try to trick me, or to injure this white lord, I who have only counted forty-eight, shall count forty-nine and fifty. It is agreed?"

"It is agreed, Lord," he replied humbly. "Hearken. Yonder," and he pointed to some rocks upon a slope not more than a few hundred yards away, where grew trees of a different and more vigorous character from any about us—"yonder, I say, is the spring we seek. Lord, we must reach it at once, for our water is done, the white man has drank the last, and very soon it will be quite dark and impossible to travel."

"Good," I said. "Go on with your men and prepare the camp. I will follow with the wanderer as soon as he can walk. Afterwards we can talk."

He looked at me doubtfully, wondering, I was sure, whether I had it in my mind to give him the slip. If so, probably he concluded that without water and with a sick man it would not be possible for me to do so. At least he went to collect his people, and presently I saw them march with the loads up to the rocks where grew the green trees.

To make certain of his movements I sent Hans with them, telling him to return at once and report if there was a spring and if so whether Kaneke was preparing to camp.

To tell the truth I was by no means certain as to his intentions. Possibly he meant to melt away in the darkness, leaving us in the wilderness to our fate. This would not have troubled me very much had it not been for the fact that nearly all the ammunition and food, also some of my rifles, were among the loads. Otherwise, indeed, I should have been glad to see the last of Kaneke, for I was filled with doubts of him and of the business into which he was dragging me. However, I must take my chance; amongst so many risks what was one more?

When he had gone I went to where the stranger lay behind some stones, and to my joy found that he was coming out of his swoon, for he had sat up and was staring about him.

"Who are you and where am I? Oh, wasn't there a fight? Give me water."

"Keep quiet a little, Mr. Arkle," I said. "I hope to have some water presently." (I had given Hans a bottle to fill.) "There has been a fight. By God's mercy we managed to save you. You shall tell me about your adventures afterwards."

He nodded, fixing his attractive eyes, which reminded me of those of a retriever, on my face. Then, doubtless unaware that he was speaking out loud, he said something rather rude, namely:

"Queer-looking little chap; hair like that of a half-clipped poodle; skin like an old parchment, but tough as nails; and straight. Yes, I am sure, straight. John Taurus, you are in luck. Well, it's time."

Of course I took no notice, but went to speak to Tom and Jerry, who were standing close by bewildered and whispering, asking them how many cartridges they had fired in the scrap, and answering their questions as best I could, till presently in the waning light I caught sight of Hans returning.

"It is all right, Baas," he said. "There's a good spring yonder, as the Owl-man said, and he is camping by it. Here's water."

I took the bottle and handed it to Arkle, who seized it eagerly. Then suddenly a thought struck him and he held it out to me, saying in his pleasant, cultivated voice:

"You too look thirsty, sir. Drink first," words that showed me that I had to deal with a gentleman.

To tell the truth I was dry, perished with thirst, indeed. But not to be outdone I made him take the first pull. Then I drank and gave some to Tom and Jerry. Between us those two quarts did not go far; still, a pint apiece was something.

"Can you walk a little?" I asked Arkle.

"Rather," he said. "I'm a new man, and thank God those scoundrels didn't get my boots. But where are we going?"

"To the camp yonder first. Afterwards to the Lake Mone if we can."

A flash of joy passed across his face.

"That will suit me very well," he said. Then it fell, and he added: "You are very good to me, and it is my duty to warn you that the journey is dangerous, and if we get there, that the place and people are—well, not canny. Indeed, you would be wise to turn back, for I think that death is very fond of Lake Mone."

"I guessed as much," I said. "Have you been there, Mr. Arkle?"

He nodded.

"Then take my advice and say nothing of your experiences to those with whom we are going to camp, for I suppose you talk Arabic. I will explain why afterwards."

He nodded again, then asked:

"What is your name, sir?"

I told him.

"Allan Quatermain," he said. "Seems familiar to me somehow. Oh, I remember, a man I knew—Lord Ragnall—told me about you. Indeed, he gave me a letter of introduction in case I went south. But that's gone with the rest. Odd to have met you in this fashion, but so is everything in this place. Now, Mr. Quatermain, if I may put my hand on your shoulder, for my head still swims a bit, I am ready to walk."

"Right," I answered, "but again I beg you not to be ready to talk, at any rate in any language but our own, for except Hans, who can be trusted on all important matters"—and I pointed to the Hottentot—"none of these people understand English."

"I see," he said, and we started, Arkle, who limped badly, towering above me, for he was a very big man, and leaning on me as though I were a stick.

We reached the camp without difficulty just as darkness fell. While the hunters pitched my tent which, although low, was large enough to cover two men, Arkle lay down by the stream and drank until I begged him to stop. Then he poured water over his head, and thrust his arms into it to the shoulders, as though to take up moisture like a dry sponge, after which he asked for food. Fortunately, we had still plenty to eat—of a kind, hard cakes made of crushed corn that we had obtained from the last natives we had met, and sliced biltong, that is buck's flesh dried in the sun.

These he devoured ravenously, as though they were delicious, which showed me that he was almost starved. Then he lay down in the tent and fell at once into a profound sleep.

For a while I sat listening to his breathing, which sounded quite loud in the intense stillness of the place, and staring at the stars that in the clear sky shone with wonderful brilliance. By their light I saw Kaneke glide past me and, taking his stand upon a flat stone at a little distance, make strange motions with his arms, which he held up above his head.

"The Owl-Man is talking to his star, Baas; that bright one up there," whispered Hans at my side, pointing to the planet Venus. "He does that every night, Baas, and it tells him what to do next day."

"I am glad to hear it," I answered, "for I am sure I do not know what we are to do."

"Oh, just go on, Baas," said Hans. "If you only go on long enough you always come out the other side," a remark which I thought contained a deal of true philosophy, though it left the question of what one would find on the other side quite unsolved.

After this, having arranged that Hans and the two hunters were to keep watch alternately, which was unnecessary where Hans was concerned, seeing that he always slept with one eye open, I lay down in the tent, and having said a short prayer, as I am not ashamed to confess I have always done since boyhood, or at any rate nearly always, fell instantly into a profound slumber.

While it was still dark—although, as I could tell by the stars and the smell of the air, the night drew towards morning, I was awakened by Arkle creeping into the tent.

"Been to get a bathe in that spring," he said, when he found that I was awake. "Needed it when one hasn't washed for a week. I feel all right again now."

I remarked that I was glad to hear it, and that he seemed to have had a squeak for his life.

"Yes," he added thoughtfully, "it was a very close thing. Lucky that I am a good runner. I won the three-mile race two years in succession at the Oxford and Cambridge sports. Look here, Mr. Quatermain, you must be wondering who I am and how I came here. I will tell you while it's quiet, if you care to listen.

"The Arkles, though that isn't the name of the firm, for some generations have been in a big way of business in Manchester and London; colonial merchants they call themselves. They deal all over the world, with West Africa among other places. My father, who has been dead some years, struck out a line of his own, however. He was a dreamy kind of a man, a crank his relatives called him, who studied all sorts of odd subjects, astrology among them, as I think I told you. Also he refused to have anything to do with trade, and insisted upon becoming a doctor, or rather a surgeon. He met with great success in his profession, for notwithstanding his fads, he was a wonderful operator. Being well-off he took little private practice, but worked almost entirely at hospitals for nothing.

"When I left college, by his wish I became a doctor too, but shortly after I qualified at Bart's my father, whose only child I was, died. Also my cousin, the only son of my uncle, Sir Thomas Arkle the baronet, was killed in an accident, and my uncle begged me to enter the business. In the end I did so, very unwillingly, to please my relations. To cut the story short, I did not care for business, and when there was so much property entailed upon me with the baronetcy, I could not see why it was necessary that I should remain in an office. On the other hand my uncle did not wish me to return to practice.

"So we compromised; I agreed to travel for some years in the interests of the firm, specially in West Africa, where they wanted to develop their trade, and incidentally in my own interest, because I wanted as a physician to observe man in his primitive state and to study his indigenous diseases. When the tour was finished I was to return and put up for Parliament and in due course inherit the Arkle fortunes, which are large, and advance the Arkle dignity, which is nothing in particular, by the judicious purchase of a peerage, for that is what it came to. That, more or less, was the arrangement."

"Quite so," I said, "or as much of it as you choose to tell me, though perhaps there is a good deal more behind which, quite properly, you prefer to keep to yourself."

"Perfectly true, Mr. Quatermain. By the way, as I am telling you about myself, would you mind telling me who and what you are?"

"Not in the least. I was born in England of a good family, and received a decent education from my father, who was a scholar, a gentleman, and something of a saint. For the rest I am nobody and nothing in particular, only a hunter with some skill at his trade, an observer, like you, of mankind in the rough, and one cursed with a curiosity and a desire to learn new things which, in the end, will no doubt put a stop to all my foolishness."

"Oh no, it won't," he answered cheerfully, "that is, not until the time appointed. I'll cast your horoscope for you, if you like—my father taught me the trick—and tell you when it will happen."

"No, you won't," I answered firmly.

At this moment Hans arrived with the coffee and informed me that Kaneke was anxious that we should march at sunrise, as here we were in danger.

Then followed anxious consultations. Arkle had a coat, or rather a Norfolk jacket, but no shirt; and one of my spares, a flannel garment that had cost me fifteen shillings at Durban and had never been used, must be provided for him. Luckily it was over-size, so he managed to drag it on to his great frame. Then a hat must be found, and so forth. Lastly it was necessary to provide him with one of the spare Winchester rifles and some cartridges.

Even before we were ready Kaneke arrived, not a little agitated, as I could see, and prayed us to hasten.

"Where to, Kaneke?" I asked.

"Up the side of the mountain and over its lip, Lord, that we may take shelter among my people the Dabanda. For be sure that after what happened yesterday, the Abanda will kill us if they can. If this white wanderer whom your servants call Red-Bull cannot march, he must be left behind."

Here Arkle, who it seemed understood and could speak Arabic perfectly, looked Kaneke up and down and replied that this was unnecessary, as he believed that he could get along.

So, having swallowed some food, presently off we went, guided by Kaneke up the steep mountain side.

"Did you call that man, Kaneke?" Arkle inquired when that worthy was out of earshot.

"Yes," I answered; "but why do you ask?"

"Oh, only because of late I have heard a good deal of a person named Kaneke from a native I know. But perhaps there are two Kanekes. The one he spoke of was a young fellow who committed a great crime."

Then rather abruptly he changed the subject, leaving me wondering.

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## ARKLE'S STORY

At first Arkle walked rather lamely, being troubled with stiffness and his sore heel, but soon these wore off for the time, and in the fresh air of the morning his vigour returned to him. Certainly he was a splendid-looking man, I reflected, as I marched at his side, a perfect specimen of the finest stamp of the Anglo-Saxon race.

While we went he continued his story.

"You were quite right in supposing that there were other reasons which induced me to come to Africa besides those I mentioned. I will tell them to you, if you care to hear them, for I may as well put my cards on the table. If not, please say so, for I do not wish to bore anybody with my affairs."

I replied that nothing would please me better, for to tell the truth my curiosity was much excited.

"Here goes, then," he said, "though I expect that the tale won't raise your opinion of me and my intelligence. As I have said, I am what is called a man with prospects or rather I was, for these seem far enough off today, and as such, having plenty of money to spend, I was exposed to many temptations. Mr. Quatermain, I cannot pretend that these were always resisted. I will pass over my follies, of which I am ashamed, with the remark that they were such as are common to impetuous young men.

"In short, I lived fast, so fast that my uncle and connections— my mother, by the way, died when I was young—being nonconformist of that puritanical stamp which often combines piety with a continual thirst for worldly advancement, were quite properly scandalized, and remonstrated. They said that I must change my mode of life, and as a first step, get married. This my uncle desired above all things, for there was no other heir, and as he often used to remark in a solemn voice, life is uncertain.

"At length I gave way and became engaged to a lady very well born indeed and very handsome, but without means, which, as I would have plenty, did not matter. To be honest, I did not greatly care for this lady, nor did she care for me, being, as I discovered afterwards, in love with somebody else. In fact the marriage would have been one of mutual convenience, nothing more. Now I am going to make you laugh.

"Although no one knew it and I scarcely expect you to believe it, I, a man who, as I have said, could and did plunge into dissipations, have another side to my nature. At times, Mr. Quatermain, I am a dreamer and what is called a mystic. I suppose I inherited it from my father, at any rate there it is."

"There is nothing wonderful in that," I remarked; "the old story of the flesh and the spirit, nothing more."

"Perhaps. At least I put faith in queer and unprovable things, for instance in what are called 'soul affinities', and even in the theory that we have lived before. Would you believe that the great lump of British flesh and blood which you see before you developed a 'soul affinity', if that is the right term, with someone I had never met?"

I looked at him doubtfully, reflecting that the hardships through which he had passed had probably touched his brain. He read my mind, for he went on:

"Sounds as though I were a bit cracked, doesn't it? So I thought myself, and should still think, were it not for the fact that I have found this affinity in Africa."

"Where?" I asked lightly. "At Lake Mone?"

"Yes," he replied, "at Lake Mone, where I always expected that I should find her."

I gasped, and felt as though I should like to sit down, which, owing to our hurry, was impossible. Evidently the poor man was rather mad.

"As I have begun it I had better go on with my story, taking things as they happened," he continued in a matter-of-fact voice. "I tell you that in the midst of my wild and rather unedifying career I began to be haunted by visions which came upon me at night."

"Dreams?" I suggested.

"No, always when I was awake and looking at the stars, and generally when I was in the open air. The first, I remember, developed in Trafalgar Square at three in the morning after I had been to a dance."

"The wine is not always very good at those dances, I have been told, or if it is, sometimes one drinks too much of it," I suggested again.

"Quite true, but as it happened this one was given by a relative of mine who is a strict teetotaler and never allows anything spirituous in her house. I had to go to meet my fiancée; it was a terrible affair. When it was over I went for a walk and came to Trafalgar Square, which at that hour was very quiet and lonely. There I stood staring at the Nelson Column, or rather at the stars above it, for it was frosty and they were beautiful that night. Then the thing came. I saw a desolate sheet of water lit up by the moon, an eerie kind of a place. Presently a form, that of a woman draped in white, appeared gliding over the water towards me, floating, not walking. It reached the shore and advanced to where I stood, and I saw that this woman was young and very beautiful, with large, tender eyes.

"She stopped opposite to me, considering me, and a change came over her face as though after long search she had found that which she sought. Looking at her, I too seemed to have found that which I sought. She held out her arms, she spoke to me; distinctly I heard her words, not with my ears but through some inner sense. What is more, I understood one or two of them, though they were in Arabic.

"I have always had a taste for studying out-of-the-way subjects, and it happened that in my medical reading I had become interested in the works of some of the old Arabian physicians, and in order to understand them had found it necessary to master something of the language in which they were written. This was some years before, and I had forgotten most of what I had learned, but not everything. So it came about that I caught the meaning of a sentence here and there—such as these:

"At last, O long sought. At last upon the earth.'... 'Not in dreams.'... 'Follow, follow.'... 'Far away you will find and remember.'... 'Yes, there the gates will be opened, the gates of the past and the future.'

"At this point the vision, or whatever you like to call it, came to a prosaic end, for a policeman arrived, eyed me suspiciously, and said:

"Move on, young gentleman. This ain't no place for the likes of you on a cold night. Go home and sleep it off.'

"I remember that I burst out laughing; the contrast was so ridiculous. Then because my heart was full of a strange joy, such as is described by the old mystics who think that they have been in communication with things Divine, I presented that policeman with half a sovereign, wished him good night, walked away quietly to my rooms in St. James's Place, and went to bed a changed man."

"What do you mean by 'a changed man'?" I asked.

"Oh, only that I seemed different in every way. It was as though something had been torn, or a veil had been lifted from my eyes, so that now I saw all sorts of new things; at least the old things took on new aspects. From that moment, for example, I hated the dissipations which had attracted me. I acquired different and higher objectives; I came to know, what doubtless is true, that here in the world we are but wanderers lost in a fog which shuts off glorious prospects, divine realities, so that we can see little except dank weeds hanging from the rocks by which we feel our way, and pebbles shining in the wet beneath our feet. We make crowns of the weeds and fight for the bright pebbles, but the weeds wither, and the pebbles when they are dry prove to be but common slate. The dream woman that I had seen in Trafalgar Square showed me all this, and a great deal more. I was changed! I who had been a greedy caterpillar, devouring all that I could find, in that half-hour in Trafalgar Square became a chrysalis, and then was transformed into a butterfly."

"Most interesting!" I exclaimed, and with sincerity, for notwithstanding Arkle's fine words and metaphors which I found rather difficult to follow, this story did interest me very much. I didn't believe in the Trafalgar Square vision, but, as an American would say, I did hitch on to that transformation which, in our degree, most of us have experienced at one time or another, however impermanent its results may have proved. In some private Trafalgar Square of their own, nearly all have met the Ideal, or the Divine, and in its unearthly light have seen things high and strange; have seen also how petty and how foul are the objects of their temporal desire.

Half an hour later it is probable that they will have forgotten the former, and be hunting the latter even more fiercely than before. Still, they have had the vision, and those to whom such visions came may always hope. They have learned that there are gates in the gross wall that is built about their souls...

"Most interesting," I repeated, "but how about the lady to whom you were engaged? Did you tell her what you had seen and heard in Trafalgar Square?"

"No, I didn't, at least not all of it. The only difference was that whereas I had merely disliked her before, afterwards I detested her, that is, as a prospective matrimonial partner. However, I may add at once that this engagement affair cleared itself up in a most satisfactory fashion. The lady's aversion to me was even more real than mine to her. Also she was rude enough to believe and to tell me she believed that I was mad."

"That was pretty straight, though if you talked to her—well, as you are doing now, not altogether surprising," I said.

"Quite straight, but I respected her for it. Lastly, as I have said, there was a gentleman in the case. Now can you guess what happened?"

"Of course. You broke it off, that's all."

"Not a bit. We didn't dare, for the row in both families would have been too terrific. No, my hated rival was impecunious like my beloved betrothed, whereas I had a good lump of cash at call, which my father had left me. So I lent him £5000—it's more polite to call it lent—and they bolted to Florida to start orange-farming. I need not say that I proclaimed myself broken-hearted and everyone sympathized with me to my face and laughed at me behind my back, almost as heartily as I laughed myself behind their backs. Meanwhile, I studied Arabic like anything, which amused me, as I am rather quick at languages, and took long midnight walks to develop my spiritual side."

"I say," I said doubtfully, "you are not making fun of me, are you, Mr. Arkle?"

"Certainly not. At least I think I am not, for those Abanda have killed my sense of humour. But you shall judge by the sequel. To cut it short, I did seem to come more and more in touch with that lady of the lake. Yes, in those starlit

midnight hours she appeared to talk to me more and more as my Arabic improved, and to tell me all sorts of curious things about the past, the very distant past, I gathered, in which we had been intimately connected and taken part in various adventures, some of them tragic and all in their way striking and even beautiful. I will skip these, for what is the use of repeating a lot of old love-affairs that apparently took place in remote ages, only saying that in the last of them at some indefinite date she brought about my death and her own, that we might go to heaven together or rather to a certain star, a crime for which, according to the visions, she is most anxious to make amends. That is why, still according to the visions, she must live in the distant spot where it happened, for as I understand, the experiment did not succeed—I mean that we never got to that star.”

“Look here,” I said, “all this sounds rather like a nightmare, doesn’t it?”

Yet as the words passed my lips, I remembered Kaneke’s yarn about his goddess in the lake who was supposed to have descended from heaven and fallen in love with a man. Surely he said that she had killed this man to take him back to heaven with her, which was not allowed. Therefore she waited in the lake until he appeared again, after which I did not gather what was to happen. The legend was of a sort that is not unknown in Central and West Africa, but really it was odd to hear another version of it from Arkle’s lips.

“Very much like a nightmare,” he assented cheerfully. “Being a doctor I came to the same conclusion, as did some of the most eminent of my profession whom I consulted. One of them asked me if I had spotted the locale of these strange happenings. I replied, yes, somewhere near some mountains in the central parts of Africa that were called Ruga, where, as I believed, no white man had ever been, though I had found them marked on an old map. ‘Well,’ he replied, with a twinkle in his eye, ‘if I were you I should go and look for the lady there. At the worst you will get some good big-game shooting, and I have noticed that people with hallucinations never come to any harm.’

“I thought this an excellent idea, and shortly afterwards I began to work upon my uncle to send me out to Africa to advance the trade interests of the firm. In the end he and the other partners agreed; you see they sympathized with me very much on my matrimonial fiasco and thought that a change would do me good.

“‘In such a case,’ said my uncle, who has a gift for platitude, ‘new countries, new customs, and new faces are most helpful.’ I sighed and shook my head, but said that I hoped so.”

“How long have you been here?” I asked.

“Oh, I landed on the West Coast about three years ago. It took me a long while to find those confounded Ruga Mountains, and I met with many adventures on the way. However, at last I fetched up all right with about half a dozen coast servants, good men all of them, for the rest of the crowd had bolted at one time or another. And now I come to the interesting part of the story, if you care to hear it.”

“Of course I do. Who wouldn’t?” I answered. “Go on.”

“Well, I had heard of Lake Mone, the holy lake as it is called; right away from the Congo and beyond it, indeed, rumours of this place had reached me. I have told you that I am not bad at languages, and during my first year in Africa, while I was attending to the business of the firm, I also studied local tongues and customs on every possible occasion. Thus I would get servants who could not talk a word of English, and learn from them. Then I began to work my way up country and at every tribe I came to, or rather at every village, I always made a friend of the chief witch-doctor, for the African witch-doctors know everything that is passing for hundreds of miles around them. Indeed often they seem to know more than this, how or why I can’t tell.”

“That’s quite true,” I said, thinking of Zikali, “Opener of Roads”, the great wizard of Zululand of whom I have told some tales.

“Now,” went on Arkle, “I must explain that I was not certain for what I was searching. The visions which I had experienced in England had shown me the desolate lake and a beautiful woman who spoke about the past and our relations together in that past. But beyond saying, or conveying, that it was in Central Africa she had never mentioned the name of the lake, or told me how to get there, and from the moment that I sailed from Liverpool the visions, or whatever they may have been, ceased. In short I was left without any guidance whatsoever.

“It was here that the witch-doctors came in. I explained my case to several of them, and when their mouths were opened by gifts, also by a belief that although my skin was white I was one of their fraternity, they became communicative. They had heard something of a sacred lake that was inhabited by a great fetish, they believed this fetish was a woman; they would inquire. That was the burden of their song. What is more, they DID inquire, once or twice by means of drum messages which, as you know, the natives can send over hundreds of miles, but generally in fashions that were dark to me. Also answers came, from which in the end I learned that the lake where the great rain-doctor dwelt was named Mone, that her title was the Engoi, and that she was known among the people round her as Shadow, or The Shadow.

“Following these clues, such as they were, though of course all the while I understood that this Engoi, or Shadow, might be quite different from her of whom I had dreamed, I worked my way slowly eastwards and southwards, till at last I came to certain mountains which I was told bordered the country where the Engoi lived. Indeed, from the crest of them I was shown this great volcano, or whatever it may be, that we are climbing now, which was declared to be her home. Also, I was informed that between it and me dwelt a fierce and numerous tribe called the Abanda, whose habit it was to kill anyone who set foot within their borders.

"It was here that the last six men who had clung to me struck. They were good fellows, faithful and brave; I never had to do with better. Still, they came in a body and explained that although they feared no man, they did fear wizards and ghosts. The country of the Abanda, and more especially that of the Dabanda beyond it was, they had sure information, full of both, and the stranger who entered there never came out alive, 'even his spirit remained captive after he was dead'. For these reasons they would not go one step farther.

"I saw that it was quite useless to argue, and therefore I made a bargain. The village where this talk took place was inhabited by some very friendly and peaceful agriculturists in country that the Abanda never visited. This was my bargain: that those men should rest here for one year awaiting my return. If at the end of that time I did not appear again or send them further orders, they were to be at liberty to divide my goods and go wherever they liked. These goods, I should explain, are, or were, of some value, trade-stuff of all kinds for presents or barter, rifles, ammunition, clothes, etcetera."

"How did six men manage to carry all these things?" I asked.

"They didn't. After most of my people deserted, by the help of the witch- doctors and chiefs I arranged for their transport from town to town or from tribe to tribe, letting the bearers go back and procuring others when I moved forward. So if I appear no more those six coast men, old soldiers most of them, will be rich, that is if they can get the stuff away."

"Unless they are more honest than most of their kind, I expect that they have done that already," I said, smiling.

"Possibly. I don't know, and to tell the truth I do not much care, because it is improbable that we shall ever meet again. I realized this when I made up my mind to continue the journey to Lake Mone alone."

"Do you mean to say that you tried to do that, Mr. Arkle?"

"Yes, and what is more, I succeeded. No, that isn't true; I did not go quite alone. At the last moment, when I was about to start, a sharp-eyed, wrinkled old fellow turned up, where from no one seemed to know, who said that he was one of the people who lived in the Land of the Holy Lake, whither he wished to return. He said that his name was Kumpana, and that he wanted no reward except my companionship upon the journey. That was all I could get out of him. Of course this sounded fishy enough, but as I was going on anyhow, it did not matter, although my hunters and the chief of the tribe—which, by the way was called Ruga-Ruga, I suppose after the mountains— implored me not to trust myself to such a guide. You see, I knew I should arrive and therefore I wasn't anxious."

"Now I understand what faith is," I said.

"Yes, faith is everything. We are taught that in the Bible, you remember. Well, I started; by the state of the moon it must be a month ago. I took a gun and as much ammunition as I could carry, also a pistol, a hunting-knife, and a few other necessities, including an extra pair of boots, while the mysterious old fellow, Kumpana, carried the food. I say that he was old, for he looked so, but I should add that he was one of the finest walkers and the best guide that I ever knew.

"In three days, travelling down hill, we came to the country of the Abanda, or rather to its outskirts. They are a numerous people who live on a great plain upon the other side of this mountain, also on its western slope, in a number of unfortified villages, with one central town, which is much bigger than the rest. Their land, consisting chiefly of decomposed lava, is extremely fertile when there is rain, but just now it is suffering from a severe drought which, Kumpana said, though how he knew it I can't tell you, has endured for three years, so that they are almost starving, and consequently in a state of great excitement.

"This drought, he said also, they attribute to the magic of the Dabanda who live over the rim of the mountain, that is in the great crater of the extinct volcano or group of volcanoes. Therefore—if they dared—they would attack these Dabanda and destroy them, in order to occupy their country and become the subjects of their goddess the Engoi. But for some strange reason, which Kumpana could not or would not explain, they do not dare."

"I have heard something of that tale—with differences," I said. "Did you meet any of these Abanda?"

"No, not at that time, thanks to Kumpana. But you know what they are like, for yesterday you saw some of them. In point of fact they almost exactly resemble those bearers of yours, who from the look of them might be either Abanda or Dabanda, for the two people are doubtless of one blood and even speak the same dialect of Arabic."

"How did you avoid them?" I asked, making no comment on this statement.

"By lying hidden during the day and travelling at night. As there was no moon visible we must journey by starlight, and even that failed sometimes when mist or cloud came up. But it seemed to make no difference to old Kumpana, who must know the country like a book. On he went up the steep mountain paths, seeing and climbing like a cat in the dark, and leading me by a string tied to his wrist, for we were afraid to speak except in the lowest whisper. Once or twice we passed quite close to villages, so close that we could see the people gathered round the fires. Here our danger was from the dogs, which smelt us and rushed out barking, but fortunately their masters took no notice, thinking, I suppose, that they smelt jackals or hyenas.

"On the third morning we came to the lip of the crater and had no more to fear from the Abanda. Now another danger arose, for the pass, which was nothing but a cleft in the rock, only large enough in places for one man to squeeze through at a time, was occupied by Dabanda watchmen, who of course challenged us, and were much

astonished at my appearance, for I think they had never seen a white man. Kumpana they seemed to know (indeed, I believe that they were waiting for him there), for they talked with him in a friendly and deferential fashion, though I was not allowed to hear what they said. The end of it was that we were detained here for a day and a night while messengers were sent to a body of priests who are called 'The Council of the Engoi'.

"At dawn of the following day, that is twenty-four hours after our arrival, these messengers returned, saying that we were to proceed to the chief town upon the edge of the forest that surrounds the lake. So off we went, escorted by some of the Dabandas, through a lovely country, rich beyond imagining, for there had been plenty of rain here. It reminded me of some of the lands that border on the Rhine, and lower down, of those about Naples, and lower still of the South Sea Islands. That is until I came to the deep belt of forest which surrounds the Holy Lake where no man may set his foot."

"Did you see that lake?" I asked.

"Later I saw it and once or twice on the journey I caught a glimpse of it, a black and gloomy sheet of water with an island in its midst. In the evening we came to a large village where the huts or houses, some of them round and some square, were white and stood in gardens. I was taken to a large one of the square variety with a courtyard outside of it, where soon I found I was a prisoner.

"After dark a man visited me. As there was no light in the hut I could not see his face, but he told me that he was a priest of the Engoi. Then, in the presence of Kumpana, he cross-examined me sharply as to the reason of my visit, and affected surprise when I answered him in his own tongue— Arabic. I told him all sorts of lies; that I wished to see his country; that I was a white merchant and wanted to open trade; that I desired to learn the wisdom of the Dabanda; and I know not what besides. He replied that by rights I should be burnt alive for sacrilege, but as a white man was expected in the country and possibly I might be that man, the matter must be referred to the Engoi. Meanwhile I was to remain a prisoner. If I left the courtyard of the hut I should be seized and burned.

"A prisoner I did remain accordingly. For ten long days I sat about in that horrible hut and high-fenced courtyard, overeating myself, for I was supplied with plenty of excellent food, and driven nearly frantic by doubts and anxieties. I felt that I was close to her whom I had come to see, and yet in a sense farther away than I had been in London years before. No more visitors reached me, nothing happened. At last I drew near to madness. I even thought of suicide— anything to get out of that intolerable hut and courtyard, for I saw, or thought I saw, that I had been the victim of delusions.

"One evening when I was at my worst, Kumpana, my old guide, who from something the priest said was, I discovered, a person of great importance, came to visit me for the first time for days. He asked me if I had a bold heart and was one who would dare much to satisfy the desire of his heart, and if so, what was that desire. I replied that it was to speak with a certain holy one whom already I had met in dreams, she who was called Shadow and dwelt in a lake. He did not seem in the least surprised, indeed he said he knew that this was so. Then he added:

"When the moon appears, walk out of the hut boldly towards the darkness of the forest. There you will find those who will guide you. Go with them to the borders of the lake, where perchance 'one' will meet you. After that I do not know what may happen. It may be death— understand that it may be death. If you fear this adventure I will guide you back out of the country of the Dabanda, but, then, know that never more, in dreams or otherwise, at least during this life, will you meet her whom you seek. Now choose."

"I have chosen," I answered. "I go into the forest."

"A certain holy one has judged you well. Speak with her if you will, yet beware that you touch her not. Again I warn you to beware," he said, and bowing left me.

"At the appointed time I walked out of the door of the hut, my rifle in my hand, for my arms had been left to me, perhaps because my captors did not understand their use. The gate of the fence was open and the guards had gone. I went through it and, following a path, came to the edge of the forest. Here beneath the trees the darkness was intense and I stood still, not knowing which way to turn. Shadows glided up to me. Who or what they were I could not see, nor did they speak. They did not touch me, so far as I could feel, yet they seemed to push me along. Surrounded by them I walked forward.

"I confess that I was afraid. It came into my mind that my companions were not human, that they were the spirits of the forest, or ghosts of those long dead returned to their earthly habitations. Their company frightened me; I spoke to them, but there was no answer, only I thought that cold hands were laid upon my lips as though to enjoin silence. Whither was I going in pursuit of a dream that had haunted me for years? Perhaps not to find the lovely woman of that dream, but in her place some blood-stained African fetish, some evil- haunted symbol to which I should be offered as a sacrifice. My blood ran cold at the thought, and I tell you, Mr. Quatermain, that had I known which way to go, I would have turned and fled, for in this last trial my faith failed me.

"But it was too late, and now I must face that risk of death of which the old messenger had warned me.

"In dead silence I went on and on through the endless trees. My hands brushed their trunks, I stumbled over their roots, but I never struck them and I never fell. I could see nothing, could hear nothing except my own footfall. Yes, by a pressure like to that of wind, I was guided and sustained for hour after hour.

"At length we were out of the forest, for I saw the stars and the faint effulgence of the hidden moon, also the gleam of water at my feet. My guides seemed to have left me as though their task was done. I was utterly alone, and the sense of that great solitude appalled my soul.

"What was that upon the waters, just discernible, or perhaps imagined? No, for it glided forward as a canoe glides that drifts in a current, since of oars I heard no sound. It drew near, a magic boat; a white veiled figure stepped upon the shore and stood before me. The veil was drawn, I saw the outline of a face, I saw the starlight mirrored in eyes that gleamed like stars.

"You have dared much to come, O friend of my heart," said a sweet voice, speaking in Arabic, "and I have dared much to bring you here that I might talk with you a little while."

"Who and what are you, lady?" I asked.

"I am one whose soul spoke with you in your great city far away. Ay, and afterwards until I drew you to this land to find me in the flesh. For I know that from of old your destiny and mine have been intertwined, and so it must be till that end which is the real beginning."

"Yes, perhaps. Indeed, I think I feel that this is so," I answered. "Yet what is your office here, you who live upon a lake surrounded by savages?"

"For my sins, O Friend, I must play the queen to these savages, and be their oracle."

"Are you, then, divine?"

"Are we not all divine, spirits fallen from on high to expiate our sins and to draw upwards those against whom we have sinned?"

"I do not know, Lady Shadow—for I suppose that you are she who in this land is known as Shadow—since on this matter the different faiths teach differently. Yet it may well be so, seeing that this world is no happy home for man, but rather a place of bondage and of tears. But let such questions be and tell me first—are you woman?"

"I am woman," she answered very softly.

"Then being woman, why have you called me—a man—to your side from half across the earth?"

"Because it was so fated, and for the sake of ancient love."

"And now having heard your call and come and found you in the place of which I dreamed, what must I do to win you?"

"Look on me," she said, "and having looked, say whether you still wish to win me, and if it is between us as it was in days you have forgotten."

"She came a little nearer; she loosened that enveloping veil and stood before me, perfect and entrancing. The starlight gathered upon her pure and lovely face; to my fancy it was as though she herself radiated light. She was human and yet a mystery. She was a woman and yet half spirit.

"Of the past I know nothing," I said, hiding my eyes with my hand, "and of the present only that I desire you more than life and all it has to give."

"I thank you, and I am glad," she replied humbly. "Yet know that I may not be lightly won. Great dangers threaten me and those over whom I rule and whom I must save before I satisfy my soul—and yours. How are you now named in the world?"

"John Arkle," I answered.

"Is it so? Then, O Arkle, you must return over the lip of this mountain, and there find a white man who comes to help us and my people in the war that is at hand. When you have found him and that war is won, we will talk again. Go now. Your guides await you."

"I do not wish to go," I said. "Let me return with you to where you dwell."

"She became agitated. I saw her tremble as she answered hurriedly:

"It is not lawful; first all must be accomplished; that is the price. No, lay no hand upon me, for I tell you we are watched by those you cannot see, and if you touch me I shall find it hard to save you."

"I heard, but took no heed who was seized with a kind of madness, and forgot Kumpana's warning. I had found one whom I had sought for years. Was I to lose her thus, perhaps for ever? I stretched out my arms and swept her to my breast. I kissed her brow.

"Then came a tumult; it was as though some frightful tempest had broken over us. She was wrenched away and vanished. I was seized and shaken as though by the hands of giants; my senses left me.

"When they returned again—it must have been long afterwards—I was running on the mountain side, hunted by those savages whom you met and drove away."

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## KANEKE SWEARS AN OATH

Arkle's story came to an end, and I said nothing. Luckily, he did not appear to expect me to speak, for, glancing at him, I saw that he was limping on like one in a dream, his eyes set upon the mountain lip above us as though he were looking over, or rather through it at some vision beyond, and that on his face was a faint, fixed smile such as I have seen upon those of persons under hypnotic influence while they go about the behests of the master of their will.

Evidently the man was not with me. He, or rather his mind, was fixed upon that lake and its mysterious lady, if such a woman lived. Contemplating him I came to the conclusion that he was the victim of hallucination, or to put it bluntly—mad. For years he had been haunted by this dream of a spiritualized maiden who was his twin soul, a very ancient fantasy after all, and one still believed in by thousands.

For it is interesting to imagine that somewhere, in the universe or beyond it, is hidden a counterpart, or rather a complement, of the other sex who exists for us alone and thinks of us alone, he or she from whom Fate has separated us for a while and laid upon us the need to find again in life or death.

Such a dream is always popular because it flatters our human vanity to believe that however lonesome and unappreciated we may seem to be, always somewhere waits that adoring and desiring mate who burns to welcome and to hold us everlastingly.

Without doubt Arkle was subject to this common craze, only in his case, instead of keeping it to himself, as do the more modest, he proclaimed it aloud, as might be expected of one of his robust and sanguine temperament, streaked as it was with veins of inherited mysticism. He had followed his clues, such as they were; he who had dreamed of a lake-goddess, had heard of a holy lake supposed to be presided over by some local and female spirit, and with wonderful courage and resistance he had fought his way half across Africa to the neighbourhood of this place.

Here he had fallen into the hands of a tribe hostile to those who worshipped the water-fetish, or witch-doctress, or rainmaker (nearly all these African superstitions are connected with rain). Naturally, never having seen a white man before, they seized him and kept him prisoner. Ultimately they determined to kill him, but getting warning of their kind intentions, he made a run for it, and so blundered on to us with his would-be assassins at his heels.

This, I doubted not, was the whole story, all the rest about the visit to the lady who met him on the shores of the lake being pure imagination, or rather dementia. Still it was true that Kaneke told somewhat similar tales—a puzzling fact. Oh, how I wished to heaven that I had never tied myself to this Kaneke by accepting his ivory and cash! But there it was: I had, as it were, signed the note of hand, and must honour the bill.

As a matter of fact, at this very moment an instalment was ripe for discharge.

We had stopped for a few minutes to rest and drink some water from a mountain stream, and eat a few mouthfuls of food. Just as we had finished our hasty meal, Kaneke, who was seated on higher ground fifty yards ahead, turned and beckoned to me to come to him. I went, and when I reached him, without a word he pointed to our left.

I looked, and there, advancing along a fold of the mountain at a considerably higher level than ourselves, just at the foot of the precipitous crater cliff a mile and a half, or perhaps two miles away, I caught sight of glittering specks which I knew must be the points of spears shining in the sun.

"What is it?" I said.

"The Abanda, Lord, coming to block our road, two or three hundred of them. Listen, now. There in that cliff far above us is the only pass on this side of the mountain which runs through the cleft to the crater. The Abanda know that if they can reach the cliff before us we shall be cut off and killed, every one. But if we can reach it before them, we shall win through in safety to my own country, for there they will not follow us. Now it is a race between us as to which of us will first gain the mouth of the pass. See, already I have sent on the bearers," and he pointed to the line of them scrambling up the mountain-side several hundred yards ahead of us. "Let us follow them if you would continue to live."

By this time Arkle, Hans, and the two hunters had joined me. A few words sufficed to explain the situation, and off we went. Then ensued a struggle that I can only describe as fearsome. We who had marched far with little rest were tired; moreover we must climb uphill, whereas the Abanda savages were comparatively fresh and their path though rough lay more or less upon the flat; therefore they could cover twice the distance in the same time. Lastly, Arkle, although so strong, was still stiff and footsore after his race for life upon the yesterday, which delayed his progress. The bearers who, it will be remembered, had the start of us, made wonderful time, notwithstanding their loads; doubtless too they knew the Abanda and what would happen to them if they were overtaken. As we clambered up the mountain-side—heavens! how the sun-scorched lava burned my feet—Hans gasped out:

"A lot of those fellows who were hunting the Bull-Baas, whom I wish we had never met, got away yesterday evening, Baas, and told their brothers, who have come to make us pay for those who didn't get away."

"No doubt," I grunted, "and what's more, I think they will reach the mouth of the pass—if there is one—before us."

"Yes, Baas, I think so too, for the Bull-Baas has a sore heel and walks slowly and that cliff is still some way ahead. But, Baas, the ones who escaped yesterday have told these fellows about what happened to those who didn't escape and what bullets are like. Perhaps we can hold them back with the rifles, Baas."

"Perhaps. At any rate we'll try. Look how fast Kaneke is going."

"Yes, Baas, he climbs like a baboon or a rock-rabbit. HE doesn't mean to be caught by the Abanda, Baas, or his porters either, whatever happens to us. Suppose I sent a bullet after him, Baas, before he is out of shot, aiming at his legs to make him go a bit slower."

"No," I answered. "Let the brute run. We must take our chance."

At this moment Arkle, who was growing lamer, called out:

"Quatermain, get on with your servants. I'll look after myself."

"No, you won't," I replied. "We will sink or swim together."

Then I looked at Tom and Jerry and saw that they were alarmed, as well they might be. Hans saw it too, and began to fire sarcasms at them.

"Why don't you run, you brave hunters?" he asked. "Will you let yourselves be beaten by the Owl-man? If the rifles are heavy, you might leave them behind, as you remember you did when the elephants were after us."

Such were his rather bitter jests, for Hans would crack jokes at Death itself. I know that afterwards he regretted them earnestly enough, as we often regret unkind words which it is too late to recall. They stung Tom to fury, for I heard him mutter:

"I'll kill you for this afterwards, yellow man," a threat at which Hans grinned.

The more phlegmatic Jerry, however, only smiled in a sickly fashion and made no reply.

At length we were quite close to the face of the cliff, into which we saw the porters vanishing, showing us where the pass or cleft began. Unfortunately, too, the Abanda were quite close to us; indeed, their leading spearsmen had emerged from the fold in the mountain-side about three hundred yards away on to the open slope of lava, and were racing to cut off Kaneke. That active person, however, was too quick for them, as before they came within spear-cast of him he bolted into the cliff-face like a meerkat into its hole—perhaps a snake would be a better simile.

"Now we are done," I said. "We can't get there before those brutes and it's no use trying to run down the hill, for they would overtake us. So we had better stay where we are to get our breath and make the best end we can."

"No, Baas," puffed Hans, who had been searching the scene with his hawk-like eyes. "Look. The Abanda are halting. They want to kill us, Baas, but there is a donga between them and the hole in the cliff. See, one of them is beginning to climb down it."

I looked. Although I had not observed it before, because it curved away from us, on our left there was a donga, that is a gully or crack, formed no doubt when the hot lava contracted ages before, which crack the Abanda must cross to reach us.

"Push on!" I cried. "We may beat them yet."

Forward we went, the lame Arkle resting his hand upon my shoulder. Now at last we were near the face of the cliff and, not more than sixty or seventy yards ahead of us, could see the crevice into which Kaneke and his crowd had vanished. Could we reach it? As I wondered an Abanda appeared on this side of the donga. I halted, lifted my rifle, fired, and, so blown was I, missed him. Yes, I missed him clean, for I saw the bullet strike the spear-blade three feet above his head and shatter it to pieces. This seemed to frighten him, however, for he dropped back into the donga, and we pressed on.

When we had all but reached the cleft in the precipice that once had been the lip of the extinct volcano, whence I trusted, quite vainly as it proved, that Kaneke and his people would sally forth to help us, out of the donga appeared six or seven men who rushed between us and the cliff face in which we hoped to refuge.

There they stood preparing to attack us with their spears. We opened fire on them and this time did not miss. They went down, but as they fell more appeared, brave and terrible-looking fellows, furious at the death of their companions. We fired rapidly, forcing our way forward all the while, but I saw that the game was almost hopeless, for every moment more of these Abanda crawled up some narrow ladder or pathway from the bottom of the donga.

Then it was that I heard the Abyssinian hunter Tom call out:

"Run on, Macumazahn, with the lame master. Run on. I see how to stop them."

Without waiting to reflect how he proposed to do this, for at such moments one has little time to think; with Arkle leaning on my shoulder and Hans at my side, I charged forward to the mouth of the cleft. Certain of the Abanda were between us and it, but with this we managed to deal with the help of our revolvers before they could stab us. Thus we reached the cleft and plunged into it, for, to my relief, no more Abanda appeared. Once in the mouth of the place, which was very narrow, so narrow and twisted that a few men could have held it against a thousand, as Horatius and his two companions held the bridge in the old Roman days, I stopped, for I heard firing still going on outside.

"Who is shooting?" I asked, peering about me in the gloom of that hole, and as I spoke the echoes of the last shot died away and were followed by a savage yell of triumph.

"Little Holes and Jerry, I believe, Baas," answered Hans, wiping his brow with his sleeve, "though I do not think they will shoot any more. You see, Baas, for once in their lives they behaved very nicely. Yes, they ran to the edge of that donga and stuffed themselves into the mouths of the two paths by which these Abanda are climbing up it, firing away until they were speared, thus giving you and the Bull-Baas time to get into this hole, for of course they did not care what happened to me who was their friend. So I suppose that they are now dead, although perhaps they may have been taken alive."

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed. Then after a moment's reflection, in spite of the remonstrances of Hans (at the moment Arkle was ahead of us), I crept back to the mouth of the cleft and looked out, taking the risk of being speared.

He was right. Yonder on the lava plateau lay the bodies of Tom and Jerry, dragged there by the Abanda, one of whom was engaged in cutting off poor Jerry's head with a spear.

Filled with grief and fury, I put a bullet through that savage, which caused them all to scuttle back into their donga. Then, before they could recover from their surprise, followed by Hans I rushed out, seized Tom's rifle which one of them had been carrying and let fall in his fright, and bolted back with it into the mouth of the cleft. That of Jerry unfortunately we could not recover. I suppose it was carried away.

That was the end of those two brave but ill-fated hunters who, from the first day of our journey, had seemed to walk in the shadow of approaching doom. It was a very gallant end, for without doubt they had given their lives to save us, or rather to save me.

This indeed they had done, for by blocking the two exits of the steep-sided donga for a few minutes, they had enabled us to fight our way through into the cleft. Whether their courage was spontaneous, or whether it was induced by a sense of their previous failure when they had thrown away their guns, a trivial incident that seemed to prey upon their minds, and by the gibes of Hans, I do not know. At least in this moment of trial it asserted itself, with the result that they died and we lived. All honour to their memory! One of my hopes is that in some place and time unknown I may be able to thank them face to face.

I returned into the cleft filled with sorrow and told the others what had happened. Hans, to do him justice, when he saw that his guess—it was nothing more—had come true and that Tom and Jerry were really dead, was also much distressed. He began to talk of their many virtues and to rejoice that they, like himself, were "good Christians", and therefore had nothing to fear in the "Place of Fires", his synonym for heaven, which doubtless they were now inhabiting. Perhaps also his conscience smote him a little for all the sharp things which jealousy had caused him to say about them while they remained upon earth.

Arkle's attitude was different.

"These hunters," he said, "have died doing their duty, and therefore are not to be pitied, for how can one make a better end? But what of that fellow Kaneke, who ran ahead with his men and deserted you, his companions? I say nothing of myself, for I am a stranger towards whom he had no obligations. Why did he bolt?"

"I don't know," I answered wearily, "to save his skin, I suppose. You had better ask him if we ever meet again."

"I will!" exclaimed Arkle, and as he spoke I noted that his face was white with rage.

Soon the opportunity came. We thought it unwise to remain so near to the mouth of the cleft, although none of the Abanda so far had attempted to follow us, why, I could not imagine at the time, though it is true Kaneke had said it would be so. Therefore I suggested that we had better go on and find out whither the road led.

On we went accordingly, a darksome journey at first, for little light reached us in that deep and narrow hole. Presently, however, it widened and we found ourselves upon a kind of plateau bordered by cliffs.

Here Kaneke was waiting for us seated on a rock, the bearers having gone on; at any rate I could see nothing of them. He stared at us with his sombre eyes and said to me:

"Knowing that you would be safe, Lord, I entered this passage before you and have waited for you here, where the Abanda will not follow us."

"So I see," I said sarcastically, "but pray, how did you know that we should be safe?"

"I knew it, Lord, because it is written in your stars, as I knew that the two hunters would die because I saw death in their stars; and they are dead, are they not? As for the fate of the strange white man," and he looked at Arkle — malevolently, I thought—"I knew nothing, for I have not yet had time to study it in the heavens."

Before I could answer Arkle broke in, speaking very quietly in a low, fierce voice.

"No, you knew nothing, dog that you are, but I think that you hoped much, for you believed that to save himself this white lord would desert me who am lame, as you did, and that I should be speared. Well, I can read stars better than you, and I tell you that you will die before I shall and that what you lose I shall gain. Do you understand me?—you who hope to be Chief of the Dabanda and Lord of the Lake with its Treasure, as I learned before ever I set eyes on you."

How had he learned this? I wondered. At the moment I could not guess, but it was quite obvious to me, watching him, that Kaneke understood these dark words better than I did, for their effect upon him was remarkable. First he

turned pale, or rather a kind of dirty white, as though with fear, a mood that was followed at once by one of fury. His big eyes rolled, foam appeared at the corners of his mouth, the hair of his face seemed to bristle.

"I know you," he cried, pointing to Arkle, "and why you have come here. Long ago my spirit warned me concerning you and your purpose. You hope to rob me again, as once you robbed me in the past, though that you have forgotten. For this reason I bribed the white hunter Macumazahn to accompany me here, knowing that without his help I was doomed to perish. But Fate has played me an evil trick. It was revealed to me that I should reach the land before you and be ready to make an end of you; revealed falsely, for while I tarried you came—you, the white thief. Still there is time. Never again shall you look upon the Treasure of the Lake."

As he hissed out these last words, suddenly Kaneke drew knife, a hideous curved knife of the Somali sort, and sprang at Arkle. He sprang swiftly as a lion on a drinking buck, and it flashed through my mind that all was over. Standing at a little distance with Hans, I could do nothing; there was no time, not even to draw a pistol; nothing except watch the end. It came, but in a strange fashion.

Arkle must have been waiting and ready. He did not move; he only stretched out his arms. Next instant, with his left hand he gripped the right arm of Kaneke, which was raised for the blow, and twisted it with such a grasp of iron that the knife fell to the ground. With his right he seized him by the throat and shook him as a mongoose shakes a snake. Then, putting out all his strength which in truth was that of a bull, Arkle loosed Kaneke's throat, gripped him in his arms, lifted him from his feet, and hurled him away so that he fell to the rocky ground, striking it with his back, and lay there senseless.

At this moment a little withered, keen-eyed man whom I had never seen before appeared from round a corner and, running across the open space to Arkle, whispered rapidly into his ear after the fashion of one who gives instructions. For quite a long time, or so it seemed to me, he whispered thus, while now and again Arkle nodded, showing that he understood the meaning of what he heard. At last the old fellow uttered a warning exclamation and pointed to Kaneke who, I saw, was recovering from his swoon. Then he ran back across the open space towards the corner of the cleft whence he had appeared, and for a minute I lost sight of him in its shadow.

Arkle picked up the knife, and, springing forward, set his foot upon the breast of Kaneke, who was trying to rise.

"Now, dog," he said, "shall I treat you as you would have treated me? I think it would be wisest. Or will you swear an oath?"

"I will swear," muttered Kaneke, fixing his eyes upon the knife.

"Good. Kneel before me."

Kaneke scrambled stiffly to his knees, and at this moment Hans nudged me and pointed. I looked and saw that from the corner of the cleft where the old man had vanished on the farther side of the open space, were advancing a number of the Dabanda, led, I think, by some of our bearers who no doubt had summoned them. They were tall, big-eyed men of the same type as Kaneke and the Abanda who had attacked us; by no means naked savages, however, as every one of them wore a long garment, apparently of linen, for the most part white in colour, though in some instances these robes had been dyed blue.

"Keep your rifle ready," I said to Hans, and waited developments.

If these men had meant to attack us—which I do not think—the strange sight before them caused them to abandon the idea, for all their attention seemed to be concentrated upon Kaneke kneeling at the white man's feet.

Arkle saw them also and called out in his big, booming voice:

"Welcome, Kumpana, and you, men of the Dabanda, guardians of the Treasure of the Lake. You come in a good hour. Listen now, while this Kaneke who I hear is a great one among you swears an oath of allegiance to me, the white wanderer from beyond the seas. Learn that but now he tried to murder me, springing at me with this knife to take me unaware, and that I overthrew him and spared his life. I say listen to the oath—and do you, O Snake Kaneke, repeat in a loud voice the words that I shall speak, so that all may hear them and make them known to the people of the Dabanda, the guardians of the Treasure of the Lake. Repeat them, I say, for if you refuse, you die."

Then he began thus, doubtless as Kumpana had taught him, and sentence by sentence Kaneke echoed his words:

"I, Kaneke, of the people of the Dabanda, tried teacherously to murder you, the white man from beyond the seas, but, being strong, you overcame me and gave me my life. Therefore I, Kaneke, bow myself to you henceforth, as your servant. All my rights and place among the Dabanda I give over to you. Where I stood, there you stand; henceforward my blood is in your body and all that comes to me with this blood is yours. So I swear by the Engoi, the Shadow that rests upon the holy lake, and if I break the oath in word or deed, may the curse of the Engoi fall upon me."

All of this Kaneke repeated readily enough until he came to the words "So I swear by the Engoi", at which he jibbed, and indeed slipped dead.

"Continue," said Arkle, but he would not.

"As you will," went on Arkle, "but understand that if you refuse, you die, as a murderer deserves to do," and, bending down, he seized Kaneke by the hair with his left hand, preparing to cut off his head with the curved Somali knife.

Now Kaneke, evidently in a great fright, appealed to me.

"O Lord Macumazahn," he cried, "save my life, I pray you!"

"Why should I?" I answered. "Just now you deserted me and my people, so that my two brave hunters are dead. Had you with the bearers stayed behind to fight with us, I think that they would not have been dead—but this you can talk over with them in that land whither you are going. Again, you tried to murder the white lord for reasons which I do not understand, and after you had sworn to me that you would not harm him. By his strength he overthrew you, and now your life is justly forfeit to him. Yet out of the greatness of his heart he offers to spare you if you will swear a certain oath to him upon a certain name. You refuse to swear that oath upon that name. So what more is there to be said?"

By this time, although he had not seen them, for his back was towards them and they remained silent, watching these proceedings with a kind of fascinated stare, evidently Kaneke remembered that Arkle had addressed some of the Dabanda people, who must therefore be present. To these he made his next appeal, calling out:

"Help me, O my brothers, you over whom I have been appointed to rule. Would you see me done to death by this white wanderer who comes to our land for no good purpose? Help me, O Guardians of the Holy Lake and of the Shadow that rests upon the lake."

"Yes," said Arkle. "Come forward, you Dabanda, laying down your spears, for know that he who first lifts a spear shall be dealt with by the Lord Macumazahn. Come forward, I say, and judge between me and this man."

To my astonishment those Dabanda obeyed. They laid down their spears, every one of them, and advanced to within a few paces of us, led by the little withered old man with keen eyes, who moved as lightly and silently as does a cat, the same man who had whispered into Arkle's ear. Arkle looked at this man and said:

"Greeting, Kumpana, my friend and guide. I thank you for the counsel you gave to me but now, for I know you to be wise and great among your people and it was you who taught me all that I have learned of them and of this Kaneke. Judge now between me and him. You have heard the story. According to your custom, is not this man's life forfeit to me whom he strove to murder?"

"It is forfeit," answered Kumpana, "unless he buys it back with the oath which you have demanded of him."

"And if he swears that oath, must he not, under it, become my servant and give to me his place, his power, and his rights among the Dabanda?"

"That is so, White Lord."

"And if he swears it and breaks the oath, what then, Kumpana?"

"Then, Lord, you can loose upon him the curse of the Engoi, and it will surely be fulfilled. Is it not so, Dabanda?"

"It is so," they assented.

"You have heard, Kaneke; yes, out of the lips of your own people you have learned their law. Choose now. Will you swear, or will you die?"

"I swear," said Kaneke hoarsely, as the sharp knife—his own—approached his neck. "I swear," and slowly he repeated those words which before he had refused to speak, transferring all his rights and privileges to Arkle and calling down upon his own head the curse of the Engoi if he should break the oath. I noticed that as he invoked this fate upon himself, the man shivered, and reflected that after all there might be something in the curse of the Engoi, or that he believed there was. Indeed, sceptical as I am, I began to feel that all this queer story had more in it than I had hitherto imagined, and that I was coming to the heart of one of those Central African mysteries of which most white men only learn in the vaguest fashion, perhaps from prejudiced and unsympathetic sources, and then often enough but by obscure hints and symbolical fables.

The oath finished, Kaneke kissed the white man's foot, which I suppose was part of the ceremony, and strove to rise. But forcing him to his knees again, Arkle addressed the little withered old man who stood watching all.

"Tell me," he said, "who and what are you, Kumpana?"

"Lord, though I until now have hid it from you, I am the head of the Council of the Shadow, he who rules in this land when the Shadow has passed from the world and before she returns again."

"Are you then he who weds the Shadow, Kumpana?"

"Nay, Lord. He who is called Shield of the Shadow dies when the Shadow passes. I am but a minister, an executor of decrees. As such I led you to this land, whence you were hunted because you would not be obedient, but broke the law. Mighty must be the strength that guards you, or by now you would be dead."

"If I have erred, O Kumpana, I have paid the price of error. Am I, then, forgiven?"

"Lord, I think that you are forgiven, as this Kaneke, who also erred in his youth in a worse fashion, was forgiven, or rather," he added, correcting himself, "suffered to go unpunished."

"Who and what is Kaneke?" Arkle asked again.

"Kaneke is he who was destined to be the Shield of the Shadow when she appears to rule for her appointed day. For his sin against the Engoi he was driven from the land and lived far off, where the white lord who is called Watcher-

by-Night found him. At the proper time he was ordered back that his fate might be fulfilled, and returned bringing the white lord, Watcher-by-Night, with him, as also was decreed. The rest you know."

"Kaneke tried to murder me and bought his life by a certain oath, selling to me his place and rights. Shall I then be known and named Shield of the Shadow in place of this Kaneke?"

"It would seem so, Lord," answered Kumpana, a little doubtfully as I thought. "But first the matter must be submitted to the Council of the Shadow, of which I am only one. It may be," he added after a pause, "that the Council will call upon you to buy the Shadow at a great price."

Then I, Allan, took up my parable, saying:

"Kumpana and men of the Dabanda, I, a white hunter, have been led, or trapped, into a land that is full of mysteries which as yet I do not understand. I have rescued this white lord when he was about to be killed. I have brought him here, fighting my way through warriors who seemed to be your enemies. In so doing I have lost two servants of mine, brave men whom I loved, who came to their deaths by the treachery of yonder Kaneke and therefore my heart is sore. He deserted us, hoping that in like fashion I should desert the other white lord who is lame, that thereby I might save my life. I did not desert him, and you have seen the end of that story. Now we are all weary, and sad because of the death of the two hunters who sacrificed themselves for us; hungry also, needing food and rest and sleep. The white lord whom you name Wanderer has made his bargain with you, a strange bargain which bewilders me. I would make mine, which is simpler. If I and my servant here, the yellow man, come on into your country, have we peace? Do you swear by the Engoi, who seems to be your goddess, and by the Shadow her priestess, that no harm shall come to us and that when I desire it in the future, I shall be helped to leave your country again, you giving me all that I may need for my journey? If you do not swear, then I turn and go back whence I came, if Heaven permits me to do so."

Kumpana spoke with some of his companions. Then he said:

"O Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, we swear these things to you by the Engoi. At least we swear that after you have finished the service, to work which we caused you to be brought hither, then you shall be sent hence in safety as you demand."

I reflected to myself that this promise was vague and qualified. Yet remembering that I should certainly extract none more favourable and being thoroughly worn out and quite unfit to face the Abanda who probably were waiting outside, I accepted it for what it was worth, and requested Kumpana to lead us to where we could eat and rest in safety.

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## BEFORE THE ALTAR

By the time that we emerged from the pass, that really was nothing but a cleft or crack zig-zagging through the lava rock of the volcano's lips, which we did in complete safety, seeing no more of the Abanda, it was drawing towards evening and the plain beneath us was flooded with the light of the westering sun. It was a very wonderful plain, though, except for its size, of a sort not uncommon in the immense wilds of Africa. Looking at it stretching away for miles and miles, it was difficult to realize that it was nothing but the crater of some huge volcano, or group of volcanoes, which millions of years ago had been a lake of seething fire. Yet undoubtedly this was the case, for all round ran the precipice of rock that once had formed the wall of the outer crater. Now this wall enclosed a vast expanse of fertile land that sloped gently down to the confines of a forest.

Nor was that all, for from this height we could see that within the ring of forest, at the bottom of the crater-pit as it were, lay a great sheet of water, the holy lake that was named Mone. It looked handsome and terrifying enough at this hour when the tall forest trees that grew around cut off from its surface the light of the sinking sun, such a place as might well be the home of mysteries.

At that time, however, I was too tired to study scenery or indulge in speculations, and glad enough I felt when we were led to a kind of rest-house, or perhaps it was a watchman's shelter, that was hidden away in a grove of mountain palms. This place consisted of a thatched roof supported upon tree-trunks and enclosed with a fence of what looked like dried bulrushes, which formed the walls of the house. It was clean, comfortable, and airy; moreover there must have been a cooking-place outside, for hot food was brought to us, of which I ate thankfully, being too exhausted to inquire its nature or whence it came.

Only one thing did I ask of Kumpuna—whether it was necessary to set a guard. When he assured me that we were absolutely safe, I took him at his word and went to sleep, hoping for the best. I remember reflecting as my eyes closed that for some reason or other, humble individual as I was, I seemed too valuable to these people for them to wish to make away with me. So having ascertained that Kaneke was elsewhere, I just turned in and slept like a dog that has hunted all day, and I believe that Arkle did likewise.

When I woke the sun was high and Arkle had gone. I asked Hans what had become of him, saying that I feared foul play.

"Oh no, Baas," answered Hans. "You see that Baas Red-Bull, having conquered Kaneke, and bought his birthright from him in exchange for not sticking him like a pig—just like the man in the Bible, Baas—is now a great chief. So because he is lame those Dabanda brought a litter in which they set him and have carried him off. He told me to tell you that he did not wake you up because you were so tired, but that you would meet again at their head place, which is called Dabanda-town, Baas. Meanwhile you were to fear nothing."

"Which means that he has deserted us," I said.

"Oh no, Baas, I think not; I think he went because he was obliged, and that we shall find him later on. You see, Baas, the Baas Red-Bull has become a priest and a chief, and such people are never their own masters. They seem to rule spirits and men, but really these rule them and order them about as they like. For the rest, Kumpuna stays here to guard us, and breakfast is coming, so let us eat and be happy while we may, Baas."

The advice was good and I acted upon it at once. After a wash at the spring by which the rest-house was built, I ate an excellent breakfast, a stew of kid's flesh with quails in it, I remember it was, made memorable by the fact that after it Hans produced a skin bag full of excellent tobacco. On inquiry it appeared that the Dabanda grew this herb, and what is more, smoked it in cigarettes made of the soft sheath which covers the mealie cobs. Also, like the Bantu, they took it in the form of snuff.

By the way, what an interesting study would be that of the history of tobacco in Africa. Is it indigenous there, or was it perhaps introduced from some other land by the Arabs, or later by the Portuguese? I don't know, but I remember how delighted I was to see it upon this occasion, when ours was exhausted and the spare supply a bearer carried in a box was discovered to have got wet in crossing a river and to be nothing but a mass of stinking mould. Some people inveigh against the use of tobacco, but to my mind it is one of the best gifts that Heaven has given to man.

Just as I had lit my pipe with delight and was testing the sample, which proved to be sweet and cool though rather strong, Kumpuna arrived and asked if I was ready to start. I said yes, and off we went with a guard of ten Dabandas, marching downhill in the direction of the forest.

Now I saw that this vast crater was a wondrous and a most beautiful place, though it is true that its climate is hot. For the most part it was lightly timbered with large trees, a species of mahogany, many of them, mixed with cedars, growing in groups or singly, and interspersed with grassy glades after the fashion of some enormous park. Among these trees wandered great quantities of game; thus I saw eland, koodoo, sable-antelope of a very large variety, and blue wildebeest, to mention a few of them, also bush-buck of a bigger kind than I had ever found anywhere in Africa.

It seemed, however, that the elephant and the rhinoceros did not live here; nor, strange to say, were there any lions, which perhaps accounted for the great number of the various species of buck. The birds, too, were numerous and

beautiful; and everywhere I noted lovely butterflies, some of which, of a brilliant blue colour, were of great size and flew high and as fast as swallows. In short, so far as its natural conditions were concerned, after the arid plains beyond the mountains, the place was a kind of earthly paradise; well watered, also, by little streams that came from springs and ran down fern-clad ravines towards the lake.

As we went I talked with Kumpana, who, outwardly at any rate, proved to be a most agreeable and candid old gentleman. From him I gathered much information, true or false. Thus I learned that his people were really star-worshippers, as were the Abanda who lived without the mountain, and knew a good deal of crude astronomy.

It seemed that originally the Abanda and the Dabanda were one race, but that "thousands of years ago", as he put it, they were ruled by two brothers, twins, who quarrelled. Then ensued a civil war, in the course of which one brother murdered the other treacherously. This angered the Engoi of that day, whom both of them aspired to wed; indeed, this was the cause of their difference. She called down the curse of heaven upon the murderer and those who clung to him, divorcing them from her worship and causing them to be driven (whether by force of arms or by supernatural means, I could not discover) out of the earthly paradise of the crater on to the mountain slopes and plains beyond.

From that time forward, Kumpana explained, the Abanda had sought reunion with the goddess, both because of the material benefits they believed to be in her gift, such as rain and plenty, and for some spiritual reason that had to do with the fate of their souls after death. This, however, they had never achieved, since the curse upon them continued from age to age. Indeed, the prophecy was that their desire could not be fulfilled until a high priest of the Engoi, the husband or the affianced of the Shadow, she who was also called "the Treasure of the Lake" came to lead them back into the land of the Dabanda and made peace between them and the Engoi incarnate in the priestess known from generation to generation by the name of "Shadow", who, from birth till death, dwelt on the island in the holy Lake Mone. Until that hour, went on Kumpana, none of the Abanda dared to attempt to re-enter Mone-land, as the country encircled by the crater's walls was called.

"Why not, if they are so brave and numerous?" I asked, astonished.

"Because, Lord, if they did the curse would fall upon them and they would perish miserably, I know not how. At least, so they believe, as we do; and it is for this reason that from the moment you entered the pass of the cliff yesterday, you were safe. Had it been otherwise the Abanda would have followed you and killed you in the pass, for they were many and you were few. For this reason, too, we do not so much as guard that path and certain others."

Hearing this I reflected, first that I liked not the security. For what was the sum of it? That a vast horde of savages, or semi-savages, who believed themselves to have been driven out of a kind of Garden of Eden by the flaming sword of a heavenly curse, although they were much more numerous and stronger than those who still dwelt in the Garden, and although the gates of that garden stood open, dared not enter them because they were sure that if they did so, the invisible sword of the curse that always hung over them would smite and destroy them.

Still, there seemed to be truth in the story, for otherwise why were we not followed into the unguarded cleft? Doubtless the Abanda were frightened of our firearms, but seeing that we were but three men against hundreds, this was not enough to have held them back. No, the mighty hand which restrained them must, as Kumpana declared, have been that of spiritual fear.

Oh, what a force is superstition; as I sometimes think, the greatest in the whole world, or at any rate in Africa. So mighty is it that when I contemplate its amazing power, at times I wonder whether in many of its developments it is not rooted deep in the soil of unappreciated and unknown truths.

Of these reflections of mine, however, I said nothing to my companion, because I thought it wiser to be silent. Yet I did ask him—if he felt at liberty to tell me and had the necessary knowledge—what part I and Arkle, whom he called "The Wanderer", had in all this business.

To my astonishment, instead of refusing to answer the question or thrusting it aside as natives can, he replied quite frankly that he did not know, or at any rate knew very little.

"The stars guide us, Lord," he said. "We consult them, as our fathers have done from the beginning; we read their messages and obey their commands. Long ago the stars told us, speaking through the mouth of her who is named Shadow, not she who rules today, but she who went before her and has been gathered to the heavens, that in this year a great war would fall upon us—we do not know what war. More recently we were told, through the mouth of that Shadow who has faded, to call back Kaneke from the land where he dwelt because of his crime against her, that he might bring with him a certain white man whose name was your name, namely Watcher-by-Night. This command was sent to Kaneke and he obeyed it, as he must do or die; for if he disobeyed, the messenger was commanded to bring death upon him, as she was commanded, if he obeyed, to protect him from all dangers. That is all we know of the reason of your coming, though now I see that if you had not come the other white lord would have been killed."

Reflecting that this tale about myself was, with variations, much the same as that told by Kaneke, something real enough to these people, but to me a mystery, and wondering if by any chance this fate-dealing messenger was White-Mouse, I left the subject and attacked one of more immediate interest, namely that of Arkle, saying outright:

"The white lord Wanderer told me that you, Kumpana, met him beyond the country of the Abanda and guided him into your own land. Why did you do this?"

Kumpana's face changed; it was as though a veil fell over his eyes and mild, intelligent features, a veil of secrecy.

"Lord," he answered, "there are matters of which it is scarcely lawful that I should speak, even to you who have come here to be our friend. I would have you understand that we Dabanda are not as other folk. We are a small people and an ancient who live by wisdom, not by strength, and this wisdom comes to us from heaven. We worship the stars, or rather the Strength beyond the stars, and from them come spirits who teach us through the mouth of the Lake-Dweller, Shadow, or otherwise, much that is not known even to the wise of the earth, such as yourself, Lord. They give us gifts of vision also, so that at times we can see into the darkness of the past, and even look beneath its curtain into the light of the future that blinds the eyes of other men.

"Moreover we, or some of us, have certain powers over Nature. Death indeed we must suffer like all who live. Yet we know that it is not death; that it is but a door of darkness through which we pass to another house of flesh, a better or a worse house according to our deserts, that is yet inhabited by the same spirit. So, too, we have strength over beasts" (here I bethought me of Kaneke and the elephants), "which we can cause to obey us as though they were our dogs. You smile. Then, look upon those buck," and he pointed to a bunch of blue wildebeests, which I have always found wild and savage creatures, that were staring at us from among some trees about a hundred and fifty yards away. "Now I will call them, that you may believe."

Well, stepping a few paces to my right, call them he did, uttering cries in a kind of sing-song voice. The wildebeests seemed to listen. Then presently they moved slowly towards us, and soon were standing within a few yards of Kumpana, as cows might do that are waiting to be milked. There they stood, patient and submissive, until they caught my wind, when they snorted, whisked their tails, put down their heads and, to my great alarm, prepared to charge me. Just as Hans and I were about to fire to keep them off, Kumpana said something and waved his hands, as a beast-tamer does to his performing animals, whereon those gnus turned and gambolled off in their well-known lumbering fashion.

"They are no wildebeests, Baas," whispered Hans to me. "Like the elephants, they are men wearing the shape of brutes."

"Perhaps," I answered, for I was too mystified to argue; also Kumpana was speaking again, saying:

"Now mayhap you will believe me when I tell you that we have power over the animals, who are as our brothers and not to be harmed by us; so much power that we have driven those of them that can hurt men, such as lions, from our land; yes, and evil reptiles also. Search where you will here, Lord, you will find no snakes," a statement which caused me to reflect that St. Patrick must have bequeathed his mantle to the Dabanda. "Thus, too," he went on, "we control sicknesses, summon rain, and hold off tempests, which is why we are reported to be a people of wizards."

"If so," I replied, "all this does not tell me why the white man Wanderer was guided by you and why afterwards he was driven away, as it seemed, to death."

"I guided him, Macumazahn, because I was so commanded, and because he is appointed to play a great part in our history, as once before he did in the past. He was driven away because he was disobedient and suffered folly to master him, for which causes he must be punished and learn the taste of terror. Ask me no more concerning this lord, for I cannot answer you. Yet it may happen that before all is done you will learn the answer for yourself."

Now I proposed, in my thirst for information, to put some questions to him concerning the wondrous woman, or sacred personage who was said to dwell in the lake, and who, as I suspected, was an African version of the old legend of the Water-Spirit which is to be found in many lands. But when I mentioned her name of Shadow, Kumpana turned upon me with so fierce a look in his eyes, hitherto mild enough, that I grew silent.

"Lord Macumazahn," he said, "I see that you do not believe in our priestess, the Shadow of the Engoi whom we worship. Though you have never said so to me, it is written on your face. That is to be understood, for white men, I have heard, can be very ignorant and scornful of faiths that are not their own. Yet I pray you do not make a mock of her to me, as I am sure you were about to do. I have answered all your other questions as best I might, but as to her I answer none. Nay, of her you must learn for yourself;" and before I could reply or explain, he departed to join the guard, leaving me alone with Hans.

"Baas," said that worthy, "you are always seeking new adventures and strange peoples, and this time I think you have found both. These folk are all wizards, Baas, like Kaneke, and we are caught in their web, where I expect they will suck us dry. I think the Baas Red-Bull is a wizard also, for otherwise why was he not killed; and unless he is one of their brothers, why are these Dabandas so glad to see him? Also, how did he learn so quickly all that oath which he made Kaneke swear? Then there was White-Mouse who, I am sure, was a witch, though a very pretty one, for otherwise how could she have deceived ME, Hans, as she did, making me believe all sorts of things that were not true, such as that she was a jealous wife of Kaneke who liked me for myself? Oh, we have come into a land of spells where the fierce wildebeests are as dogs and the passes are held by ghosts, and I do not think we shall ever get out of it alive, Baas, unless indeed, for their sport they turn us into animals, like elephants and the wildebeests and hunt us hence."

Now I remembered that Tom and Jerry had talked in this fashion, with good reason in their case; and looked at Hans doubtfully, fearing lest he might have caught the infection. However, this was not so, for as is common with primitive men of mercurial nature, suddenly his mood changed, and, grinning, he said:

"Yet, Baas, though White-Mouse did blind me for a little while, these wizards will have to be very clever if they hope to deceive Hans, who is such a good Christian that he can defy the devil and who, moreover, has the reverend predicant, your father, for his friend and guide. Cheer up, Baas, for I think I shall bring you through safely, if only you will be guided by me and not let that Shadow woman make a fool of you, as White-Mouse did. Yes, yes, everything may still be well, and after all, perhaps those wildebeests were just tame buck like some that the Scotchman kept on his farm near Durban which used to come and feed out of his hand."

"Yes," I said, "no doubt they were tame, and I don't believe in the magic. Still, I should like to know what has become of the Baas Arkle."

Well, we walked on all day through that most lovely land, until towards evening we came upon patches of cultivated ground and drew near to the edge of the forest, where I saw that there was a town.

It was a straggling place and quite unprotected; just a number of neat houses built of whitened clay and thatched with palm-leaves, or in some cases, having flat roofs of lime cement, standing, each of them, in a garden of its own on the borders of wide roads or streets. In short, this Dabanda town had nothing in common with the crowded cities, if they may be so called, which exist in Nigeria and elsewhere. It was just a sparsely populated village, such as may be seen by scores in certain districts of Eastern and Central Africa.

"If this is their big kraal, these Dabanda are but a little people, Baas," said the observant Hans.

I agreed with him. As I had noted during our march, their crater-land was wide and most fertile, but until we approached the town I saw few signs of cultivation. Here and there on the track that ran to the pass were two or three huts surrounded by gardens. Nor in these outlying districts were there many domestic animals; they were almost entirely occupied by wild game. Near the town, however, we did see herds of cattle of a small breed, also flocks of long-haired goats. Clearly the Dabanda, so far as numbers were concerned, must have been but an insignificant tribe, relying for their protection upon moral forces rather than those of arms, a fact that seemed to bear out some of Kumpana's statements as to the reason why the passes were left unfortified.

We entered the main street of the town which began nowhere in particular, and walked down it without exciting much attention. Occasionally a woman stared at us from the door-way of her house, or an old man stopped his work in a garden to see who the passers-by might be. Also from time to time a few grave-faced children, three or four perhaps, followed us for a little way, then stopped and returned whence they came. This I thought strange, for they could never before have seen a white man, except perhaps Arkle. But then everything about the Dabanda was strange; evidently they were a folk apart, one of whose characteristics was a lack of curiosity.

To tell the truth, they gave me the impression of people living in a dream, or under a spell, human in form and mind, yet lacking some of the human attributes; lotus-eaters who felt no need for energy or effort, because Nature fed them and they were, or considered themselves to be, god-guarded. Such was my first impression of these Dabanda, which in the main was confirmed by what I saw and learned of them in after days. I should add that they were all extremely good-looking, men and women together, but very like one another, as though from continual in-breeding; remarkable, too, for their fine-cut features, light-coloured skin like to that of half-castes or Persians, straight hair and large, sleepy, owl-like eyes, of which I observed the pupils seemed to grow bigger after nightfall, as do those of certain animals that seek their food by night.

The long, wide street ended in an open area that for want of a better name I will call a market-place, where the ground was levelled and trodden hard. At intervals round half this area stood houses of a larger size than those that we had passed, occupied, as I guessed rightly, by the chief men of the tribe, with their wives and children, if they had any. The other half of the area was bounded by a dense forest formed of tall and solemn trees, which forest ran down to the borders of the lake that, as I had judged from my view of it from the higher land, lay at a distance of several miles from the town. In the centre of this open space stood three curious erections; two pointed towers of rough stone, fifty or sixty feet high perhaps, with spiral stairways winding round them to their tops, and between these a large platform twenty feet or so in height, that looked like the base of an uncompleted pyramid, on which platform burned a fire.

"What are those, Baas?" asked Hans.

"Watch-towers," I answered.

"What is the good of towers whence one can see nothing except the sky?" asked Hans again.

Then I guessed their real object. They were observatories, and the truncated pyramid was a great altar where priests gathered and offered sacrifices. Of this I had little doubt, though I wondered what they sacrificed.

At the moment I had no time to make further observations, for just then we reached a house where Kumpana, who had rejoined us on the outskirts of the town, informed me I was to lodge. Though flat-roofed and somewhat larger than the rest, except one adjoining which I took to be that of the chief, like the others it was situated in a garden and had a veranda, from which a door-way led into the building. It consisted of one big, white-washed room, without windows. Such light as there was came through the open door-way, over which a mat was hung, to be used at night, for there was no door. Like the passes, the houses were undefended against attack or thieves; indeed I learned afterwards that such a crime as theft was quite unknown in Mone-land.

In this room, to my delight, I found all our goods which had been carried by the Dabanda porters for so many weary marches. There were the spare rifles, the ammunition, the medicines, the cooking-pots, the clothes, the beads and cloth for presents—everything; even the suspicious Hans could not discover that a single article was missing. While we were checking them, food that had been prepared in a cook-hut in the garden at the back of the house, was brought to us by a decently clothed old woman, who seemed to accept our presence without curiosity, also earthenware jars full of water and a tub burnt out of a block of wood in which to wash. This we did on the veranda, for the surrounding fence made the place quite private, and afterwards sat ourselves upon wooden stools which we found in the room, and ate a good meal.

By the time we had finished our food it was dark, and the old woman appeared again carrying two lighted earthenware lamps of an elegant boat-shaped pattern, filled with some kind of sweet-smelling vegetable oil in which floated wicks made of pith or fibre.

As there seemed nothing else to do and no one came near us, I began to take off my clothes in order to turn in upon one of the very comfortable-looking wooden bedsteads that had been provided for us. This bedstead was of the kind that is common in Eastern Africa, having a cartel, as the Boers call it, strung with green hide and a mattress stiffed with dried grasses that gave a scent of hay. Already my boots were off when Kumpana appeared and said that he had come to conduct us to a ceremony where we should see the other white lord who was called Wanderer. This being what I most desired, I put them on again in a hurry and away we went.

Kumpana led us to the market-or gathering-place that I have described. Here we found what I suppose was the entire adult population of the town, seated on the ground in front of the truncated pyramid of which I have spoken, the men upon one side and the women upon the other, as they might be in some high churches. They were very quiet and orderly and for the most part engaged in smoking their native cigarettes. We were conducted along a broad passage which was left between the men and the women, to the foot of the pyramid and up some twenty rough steps to the platform that proved to be quite a large place.

Here in front of a low altar, a primitive erection about twelve feet square built of blocks of black lava, upon which altar burned the fire that I have mentioned, stood three white-robed men facing the fire, whom I took to be priests, for their heads were shaved and they seemed to be engaged in prayer. To the right of this altar, seated on a stool and clothed in a white robe like a Dabanda, was none other than Arkle, who, I am bound to say, so far as the firelight revealed him to me, looked very imposing in this costume. Opposite to him, also clad in white and seated on a stool, was his enemy Kaneke. Very fierce and sullen did he appear as he glowed at Arkle with his great, round eyes. I noted at once that he was guarded, probably to prevent him from making another attack upon his rival, for behind him stood three tall men armed with spears.

A second stool was set by that of Arkle and to this I was conducted, Hans, who seemed rather uncomfortable and kept his hand upon the hilt of his revolver, being directed to stand behind me. Then Kumpana left us and took up a position facing the audience midway between Arkle and Kaneke, with his back to the altar and the priests. Here he stood silent; indeed, everyone was silent, and when I tried to whisper something to Arkle, he shook his head and laid his finger on his lips.

Very impressive was that silence. Never shall I forget the scene as I saw it by the light of the young moon which changed its quarter that day, and of the bright stars burning in the deep-blue sky. Not a breath of air was stirring. To my left the great trees of the forest stood motionless in endless rows. To my right were the dim grey roofs of the town, and between them the crouching audience of robed Dabandas, looking few and small upon that wide expanse, the glowing tips of their cigarettes marking the ordered lines in which they sat, like men and women stricken with dumbness. Then, within a few paces, the primeval altar upon which even the fire seemed to be subject to the general spell, for it burned brightly without a sound, and the three shaven priests bowing and waving their hands, but uttering no word.

I felt like one under a charm, which was not strange; for so deep was this quiet that when I shifted my foot, causing the nails in my boot to grate upon the stone platform, the noise seemed quite loud, so loud that all turned their heads and looked at me as though I had done something outrageous and indecorous. This went on for quite a long time, till at length I felt an hysterical desire to rise and make a speech, just to show that I was still alive. Indeed, I think that very soon our strained nerves would have caused either Hans or me to commit some indiscretion involving sound, when suddenly the chain of silence was broken by a melodious voice above us.

I stared to see whence it came, and for the first time observed that on the top of each of the tall columns which rose in front of the platform stood a white-robed figure, evidently engaged in observing the stars. Instantly the chanting voice on the right-hand column was answered by a similar voice upon the left-hand column. Then both of them sang something in unison, something sweet and solemn, though what it meant I could not understand, and as they sang, pointed with wands they held upwards to the heavens.

At this signal all present seemed to come to life, as in the story did the Sleeping Beauty and her court at the kiss of the Fairy Prince. The audience or congregation below us began to talk with some eagerness, men calling across the passage to women, and vice versa. Evidently they were discussing the message conveyed to them in the chant of the astrologers on the towers, telling them, I suppose, what those astrologers had read in the stars. In the same way the

three priests, ceasing from dumb show, broke into open prayer, which again I could not understand, because the language was probably archaic. At any rate it differed so much from the dialect of Arabic used by these people that I could only distinguish one word, "Engoi", which was their name for the Divine.

Encouraged by this change of demeanour, I asked Arkle in English what it all meant and what he was doing there dressed up like a Dabanda.

"You forget, Quatermain," he answered, "that I have become a chief or a priest, or both, by virtue of what happened yesterday between me and the gentleman opposite. At least, I fill these offices on probation, for my true position is about to be settled at this meeting. For the rest, those men on the towers have been reading omens in the stars, though exactly what they read I cannot tell you. Now I think that they are about to make prayers or offerings to the planet Venus, which you can see blazing away up there near the moon, after which my case will be tried."

He was right. Having thrown something on to the fire, what it was I could not see, the three priests turned so as to face the congregation below and, pointing to Venus, began a hymn in which the whole audience joined, also pointing at the planet with their right hands. Even the astrologers on the towers pointed with their wands and took part in this chant, which was really very fine and moving, a great volume of rhythmical sound.

Presently Kumpana, who now stood in front of the three priests, acting apparently as a master of ceremonies, waved his arms, whereon the song ceased with a crash of sound. In the silence that ensued he began to speak, but so rapidly that I could make out very little of what he said. He may have been reciting ritual, as was suggested by the strange words and forms he used. Or perhaps he was repeating passages from ancient history. At length his address became less impetuous. He spoke more slowly, and in language that was easier to understand, so that I had no difficulty in discovering that he was telling the story of what had happened between Arkle and Kaneke in the pass; of the attempted assassination of Arkle, of the overthrow of Kaneke, and of the oath that he had sworn to the victor. Finally he said:

"The stars, having been consulted by those who can read them, declare that Kaneke, who by the choice of that chief who went before him, was appointed to follow him as Chief of the Dabanda, the Holy People of the Lake and the Guardian of the Treasure of the Lake, and, after long punishment and exile, was named to be the Lord and Shield of the Shadow, is rejected from his place and stripped of his offices. They declare also that the stranger, who in this land is named Wanderer, he whom Kaneke tried to murder and to whom he swore the oath of submission and fidelity, giving up to him all rights and power in exchange for life, henceforward stands where Kaneke stood. Do you, O People of the Dabanda, to whom is revealed the secret mystery of the stranger that for ages has been hidden, accept the decree of the stars and depose Kaneke, setting up in his place the white lord, his conqueror?"

"We do," answered the audience, with such singular unanimity that I guessed all this scene to be formal and arranged.

"Kaneke," cried Kumpana, "you have heard the decrees of the stars and of the Holy People confirming your own oath. Do you obey?"

Now Kaneke sprang to his feet and answered in a great voice that seemed alive with rage:

"I do not obey. What I swore was to save my life and such oaths are binding upon no man. As for the decrees of the stars and of the people of the Dabanda, these are but tricks. I, too, am a master of the stars, and I read their writing otherwise, while the people are in the hands of the priests, who in their turn are in the hands of Kumpana and the Council who plot against me. The sin that I sinned in my youth against the Shadow, who has passed back to the Light which cast it, is purged by punishment. Moreover, was it half as great as that of this white thief, whom most justly I would have killed, he who, as I have heard, strove to do violence to the Treasure of the Lake, and for that cause was hunted from the land? But let that matter be. Who is this foreign man that you name Wanderer? What does he in our country? I know what the magicians declare, namely that, like myself, he is one long dead who has returned again; that he is the very king who fought with his brother to win the Treasure of the Lake, and drove his brother and those who clung to him over the mountain edge, where they became exiles and the fathers of the people of the Abanda. Yes, that king who, being wed to the Treasure of the Lake, was so beloved of her that when she knew death was near to her, she killed him that he might accompany her to heaven, a crime for which heaven brought woe upon her.

"So runs the tale, but I say that it is a lie told by the Council of the Shadow to favour this white wanderer, who has made great promises to them if they will give the Shadow into his keeping that he may steal her away, leaving them to rule the land."

This statement, I noticed, seemed to disturb the audience below, among whom, it appeared afterwards, Kaneke had many friends, members of his family and others who desired that he should be chief and wed the Shadow. These stirred impatiently as the meaning of the sacrilege came home to them and whispered to one another.

"Yes," went on Kaneke, "such is the accursed plot of the white stranger who is named Wanderer which has been revealed to me, a plot so wicked that the guardian spirits of the Lake and Forest cast him from our land that he might die by the spears of the Abanda. Yet he did not die, because he was saved by the other white man, the Lord Macumazahn whom I was commanded to lead to our country, doubtless that he might play his part in the plot and be rewarded of the thief his friend."

Here I remarked in a loud voice to Kaneke that he was a liar as well as a traitor, for I knew nothing of any plots, but he took no heed of me and continued:

“Therefore it was that I sought to execute justice upon this red-bearded lord who had escaped from the Abanda. Yet I was overcome not by strength, but by evil magic, and swore an oath to save my life who desired to live on that I might avenge you, the Holy People, upon him who would rob you of your Treasure and your Oracle.”

At this point Arkle intervened in a businesslike and British fashion.

“You dirty dog!” he said. “You snake who spits poison at me whom you have failed to reach with your fangs. You traitor who deserted the lord Watcher-by-Night and brought about the death of his servants, because you hoped that it would mean my own death also, and afterwards tried to stab me whom you had sworn not to harm. You oath-breaker. I will not reason with you as to your falsehoods, but I am ready to fight you again, here and now and to the death. Yes, weary and lame as I am, I am ready to fight you under the stars you worship, before their altar and in the presence of your people and thus let Fate judge between us. Answer. Will you fight me again?”

“I will not fight you, Red Wanderer, that I may once more be overcome by magic and butchered,” shouted Kaneke. “Nay, I appeal from you and from your fellow plotters to our Lady, the Voice of the Engoi. If I am justly judged, if I have spoken what is not true, let her appear here and now and pass sentence on me with her own lips. Ay, Kumpana, chief of the Council of the Shadow, summon the Shadow if you can, and let the people see her and hear her voice.”

Thus he spoke in tones of triumph who, as I learned afterwards, knew well that never in their history had the Lake-dweller who was named Shadow come from the lake to the town to judge of any matter, and having spoken, sat himself down and waited.

Then in quiet tones Kumpana answered:

“O Kaneke, I will make prayer to the Shadow. Perchance she may be pleased to do as you desire, and come hither to give judgment in this cause in the presence of her people.”

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## SHADOW

"Will she come?" I whispered to Arkle.

"Yes, I think so—that is, I hope so," he replied.

Then I guessed it was arranged that on one pretext or another the holy personage called Shadow or the Lake-Dweller, should make a public appearance that night. It might well be, and indeed probably was the case, that Kaneke's appeal to the head and source of the local law was but a happy accident which chanced to fit in with a preconceived plan. But, putting two and two together, that such a plan existed seemed to me more probable. After all there might be something in Arkle's story, which up till now I had held to spring from the illusions of a man who had suffered great hardships and had been hunted almost to death. I allude not to his dreams of a twin-soul awaiting him in some far-off place, which were of a character that has been heard of before in the case of young men and women of strong imagination and romantic nature, but to his tale of having actually met this lady on the shore of the sacred lake, after which he remembered no more until he found himself running for dear life from the spears of the Abanda.

According to this tale on that occasion his love-affair had made most satisfactory progress. The lady, it seemed, was a thorough convert to the twin-soul theory and alleged that what he had experienced were no myths but spiritual realities, or in other words that for years the two of them had been in some kind of mystical communion. Moreover the not unnatural conclusion of the matter was that he had embraced her. It was true that she protested, yet why? Not because she was personally offended, and much less shocked or pained; but for the reason that he was violating the sacred law of her country and thereby exposing himself, and possibly her also, to very terrible risks and danger, even of death—which in fact, whether from this or some other cause, nearly overtook him.

Well, always presuming that some such event took place, what was more natural than that these two young people should wish to meet again and to, so to speak, regularize their relationship? Nothing can be more dangerous to either party among savage or semi-savage peoples, than that a stranger should become extremely intimate with a sanctified lady who by the custom of ages is vowed and sealed to the ruler of her tribe. But if that stranger himself becomes the ruler, the face of the problem changes.

Now it appeared that, for reasons which I could not pretend to fathom, this was exactly what was desired by the priestess herself and by some of her most important adherents. Otherwise why did Kumpana, the Prime Minister or head of the Council of the Shadow, go to meet Arkle far away and guide him through the Abanda and into the hidden country at great risk to himself? And having done this and other things, would it be surprising if he had arranged a dramatic public appearance of that priestess, at which she was to recognize the stranger as the man of the prophecy, as chief, too, in place of one who had been given his life in exchange for his abdication of that and other offices, and consequently as her future husband? Oh, the whole business was as clear as the tall observation tower in front of me; such obvious manoeuvres could not deceive a person of my acumen for a moment—or so I thought.

Now while I was reflecting thus, Kumpana had passed between the priests and, standing with his face to the fire upon the altar, was engaged in uttering some petition in a voice which I could not hear because he spoke very low and his back was towards me. Nor could I see much of him or anything else, for the reason that the observation tower I have just spoken of as so plainly visible, vanished from my sight, being suddenly obscured by clouds which appeared upon the face of the sky. They were thick tempest clouds, for I heard the muttering of distant thunder, and a breath of cold wind passed through the forest with a moaning noise. Indeed, everything became so dark that I whispered to Arkle to look out lest Kaneke should take advantage of the gloom to attack him. He made no answer; his attention was so fixed upon other matters that he did not seem to hear me. He leaned forward, breathing heavily like a man under the stress of emotion, and stared at the fire upon the altar. I, too, stared at this fire, because in that gloom I could see little else except figures moving dimly against the background of the fire, which I took to be those of Kumpana and the priests.

The heart of the distant storm rolled away over the western cliffs of the crater, drawing the clouds after it and the half-moon appeared again. Its light falling direct upon the platform revealed a single figure standing in front of the altar, the tall figure of a woman arrayed in glittering robes, green they seemed to be, sewn with silver. Of her face I could only see that it was young, and fair-skinned like to that of a white woman, for it was shadowed by a dark veil which hung from her head, unless indeed what I took to be a veil was the mass of her black hair flowing over her shoulders. Her arms were bare except for bracelets of what looked like pearls fastened upon the wrists and above the elbows, and on her head she wore some kind of crown or fillet which added to her height and shone, but of what it was made I do not know.

The whole effect of this figure seen thus in the half-light and against a background of the altar with its flickering fire, was strangely impressive, mystic, and beautiful; so much so that I remember catching my breath at its first appearance. If I had any doubt as to who this woman might be, it was removed by the audience on the plain who, with one voice cried:

"Engoi! Engoi!" (a word that among them means, it seems, "Spirit" as well as "Divinity") and prostrated themselves.

Arkle, too, muttered something about "Shadow" and half rose as though to go to her, when an instinct warned me to catch him by the arm, whereon he sat down again and waited.

She fixed her fine eyes upon the face of old Kumpana, who stood in front of her but to her left, and began to speak in a very sweet low voice, that gave the suggestion of a chant learnt by heart rather than of ordinary talk, for in it was something dreamlike and rather unearthly. Indeed, it was unlike the voice and speech of any woman that I had ever heard, except one—and she was in an hypnotic trance. In fact, it reminded me forcibly of what the prophet Isaiah describes as the voice "of one that hath a familiar spirit" speaking "low out of the dust". Hearing it for the first time I felt rather frightened, because it suggested to my mind that this fair creature might be under an unholy spell, or even something more or less than mortal. Evidently Hans thought the same, for he muttered into my ear:

"Keep clear of that one, Baas, or she will bewitch you worse than White- Mouse. She is not a maiden but a spook. Yes, she is the queen of the spooks."

I hit him in the face with my elbow as a sign to be silent, though the thought did pass through my mind that there was an air about this lady which reminded me of White-Mouse, White-Mouse grown taller and more imposing. To my fancy they might well have been sisters.

Then in the midst of the deep quiet she spoke, or chanted as an oracle might do.

"I have been called. I come from where I dwell upon the water. In my secret place where I dwell with my maidens and no man may set his foot save he who is appointed to be my lord; yes, there in the ancient halls built by a people that is no more, the swift messenger has brought me the message of my priests, and I have considered of their riddle. To it I, the Oracle inspired, give answer in the hearing of my people that all may learn my will and the will of That I serve:

"One," and she pointed to Kaneke with something in her hand, it looked like a little wand or sceptre of ivory, "who sinned against the Shadow that has faded, and was driven from the land, has returned again to take the place that was sworn to him according to the ancient law and to wed the Shadow that has risen from the House of Shadows. One," and she pointed to Arkle, "called hither by the decree of Fate, a wanderer from far, has come to the hidden land and suffered many things because in ignorance he broke its customs. One," and she pointed to me, "who, like the Wanderer also called hither by the decree of Fate, rescued him, the Wanderer, from death at the hands of the Abanda, my enemies. He who should be chief of the people and Shelter of the Shadow, foully strove to murder the white Wanderer, but was overthrown of him, and to save his life swore an oath upon my name and upon that whereof I am the Voice, that in return for breath he would sell his lordship and its rights. So he was spared and not slain, and became the servant of the Wanderer whom he would have murdered. Now, the message tells me, he takes back his oath and claims the chieftainship that was his heritage, and with it the Holy Bride. Is the case thus, O Priests and Ministers and People?"

"It is thus," all answered with one voice, for even Kaneke attempted no denial.

Now she stared hard at Kumpana, as an actor might at the prompter in the wings, then seemed to catch her cue and went on:

"I, the Voice, speak the judgment that is set within my lips. Hearken. It is told, ay, and written in the secret records which are hidden yonder where I dwell, that once in a far age it chanced that he who was appointed to be the Shield of the Shadow, sought to slay another foully. But this other conquered that murderer, and in exchange for the gift of life bought from him his place and power and the Shadow of his day herself. Thence came a great war and the division of the people which endures until this hour. As it was, so let it be. I, the Voice, decree and declare that Kaneke, the murderer at heart and the oath-breaker, is no longer chief of the Dabanda and that never shall he be the Shield of the Shadow and her spouse. I decree and declare that his chieftainship has passed to the Wanderer lord whom he would have slain, and that with it passes the Shadow herself, should the Wanderer desire to clasp her for his hour. The Voice has spoken. Is the decree accepted, O Priests and Ministers and People?"

The dreamy, mysterious tones died in the silence and again in a great volume of sound came the answer:

"It is accepted!" and a priest speaking out of the darkness added, "Kaneke called upon the Shadow to appear and give the judgment of the Engoi. The judgment has been given; the Engoi has spoken by its oracle; it is finished."

"It is not finished; it is but begun," shouted Kaneke. "You who have bewitched the Shadow, call down a curse upon your souls and on her the curse of war."

Here his words came to a sudden end, for what reason I could not see, but I think that the guards threatened him with their spears, commanding his silence. Nor did she who was called Shadow seem to hear them, for once more she spoke in her cold, chirping voice like one who repeats a lesson in her sleep.

"Come hither, O Wanderer," she said, "to do me homage, and take from me the lordship of the Land of the Holy Lake, and if it be your pleasure, swear yourself to me, as I will swear myself to you. Or, do not come, if such be your will. For know, O Wanderer, that with this rule goes trouble and the dread of death. Yonder man who would have murdered you spoke truth. War is at hand, and of that war the end is not shown to me. Mayhap in it you will find nothing save doom and loss. Choose, then."

"I have chosen," said Arkle, and rising, strove to walk to her, only to find that his hurts had stiffened so that now he could scarcely stand unaided.

"Help me!" he said, and a few seconds later was limping towards the altar supporting himself upon my shoulder. It was but a little way, yet that journey seemed long to me, perhaps because of its strangeness, perhaps because the concentrated interest of every watching man and woman beat upon me with such intensity that it hampered my physical powers. At length we reached the altar and the big, golden-bearded Arkle sank on to his knees before the goddess, for so they held her.

For the first time I could see her face, though even now not too clearly because her back was to the fire. Certainly it was beautiful; the fine features, the curving lips, the large eyes, dark and tender, shining under the ivory pallor of her brows, the masses of the black hair flowing from beneath her coronal—all were beautiful, as were her arms and shapely, tapering hands. Her tall figure, too, was full of girlish grace and yet of dignity, that of one born to command, while her shimmering robes, how fashioned or of what stuff I know not, were such as might have been worn by the creature of a dream and even suggested something unfamiliar to our world.

What could this woman be, I wondered, and from what blood did she spring? Arab, Egyptian, Eastern? I never learned the answer. One thing, however, I did learn then and there, namely that when the shell was off her, at heart she was very human. Her face showed it as she bent down over this man whom in some strange fashion she had drawn to her from half across the world. It was not the face of the priestess of some ancient, secret faith welcoming a worshipper, but rather that of a woman greeting her lover won at last. The lips trembled, the eyes filled with happy tears, her figure drooped; she grew languid as though with an access of passion, her arms opened as if they would clasp him, then fell again when she remembered that eyes were on her—oh, that this man was everything to her I could not doubt!

With an evident effort of the will she recovered herself and began to speak again, but in a fuller and more natural voice than she had used when she played her part of oracle. Indeed it was so different that if her face had been hidden from me, I should not have thought the speaker to be the same.

"Wilt thou serve my people and accept lordship over them, O Wanderer?" she asked, probably in the adapted words of some ancient ritual.

"The lordship I have bought already, and I will serve them as best I may," he answered.

"Wilt thou do homage, O Wanderer, to me, Shadow, the Dweller in the Lake, the Oracle, the Priestess of the Engoi?"

"I will do you homage, O Shadow," he answered, and bent his head as though to kiss her sandalled feet or the hem of her robe.

She saw it and swiftly stretched out her arm, murmuring so low that only he and I could hear.

"Not my foot, my hand."

He took it and pressed it to his lips. Then with her little ivory sceptre she touched him on the brow twice, once to accept the homage, and next to give him all authority. Now she spoke for a third time, asking,

"Wilt thou swear thyself to me, that at the time appointed thou mayest take the Shadow to thee and for thine hour protect her on the path of Fate?"

This she said out loud so that all should hear, then before he could answer, made a sign to him to be silent, and added in a whisper,

"Bethink thee, O Beloved, before thou dost answer. Thou knowest the mystery and that our hearts have spoken together across the empty air, as once they spoke in an age bygone. Yet remember that I am not of thy land and race, that I am strange and secret, full of a wisdom that thou dost not understand, that my day is short and that when I die it is the law that thou diest also, so that together we may pass to another home of which thou dost not know and in which thou mayest not believe. Remember also that dangers are many, and it may be that never wilt thou hold me to thy heart. Therefore be warned ere thou tiest a cord that cannot be undone save by the sword of death. Dost thou understand?"

"I understand," he whispered back, "and on the chance that thou mayest be mine if only for an hour, I, who have risked much already, will risk the rest, I who love thee, and if need be, for love will die."

She sighed, so deeply that her whole frame shook as though with the joy of an intense relief, saying, still beneath her breath,

"So be it. Now take the oath."

Then in a loud voice he said,

"I swear myself to thee, O Shadow. Dost thou swear thyself to me?"

"I swear myself," she began, but said no more, for at that moment Kaneke leapt upon her, swiftly as a leopard leaps upon a buck. I suppose that while all watched the remarkable scene I have described, he had slipped from his guards. What he meant to do I am not sure, but I imagine that trusting to his great strength, he intended to carry her

off with the help of confederates among the people. Or perhaps it was in his mind to kill her out of jealousy rather than see her give herself to another man.

The sequel was both swift and most amazing. I did nothing, to my shame be it said; I was taken too much by surprise, and before I recovered myself that sequel was accomplished. The priests did nothing either, being like myself overcome with astonishment. Arkle was on his knees and even if he understood what was passing, being lame and stiff, could not rise from them without assistance. Only from either side of the altar, or from behind it, white-draped figures seemed to flit forward. I suppose these were the virgins of the Shadow, but really I cannot say, for their appearance was so quick, so mysterious and so vague that in that light they might quite well have been shades born of imagination, or even large white-winged birds seen for a moment in the light of the fire. Nor, whatever they were, did they take any action that I could discern; they just came and presently were gone again. Further, my attention was not fixed upon these appearances which I only saw out of the corner of my eye, as it were, but on the central figures, the lady called Shadow, and on her assailant, the owl-eyed Kaneke.

Evidently she saw him come, for her face grew frightened and she uttered a little cry. Then in a twinkling her aspect changed, or so I fancied. She drew herself up to her full height, her face hardened and became stern, the fear passed from it and was replaced by a cold anger. As the man leapt on her she stretched out her arm, that in which she held the little sceptre and exclaimed.

“BE ACCURSED!”

The effect upon Kaneke of these words, or of her mien, or of both, or of something that I could not see or appreciate, unless it were the flitting white figures, was wonderful. I have compared his rush with that of a leopard. Well, have you ever seen such a beast stopped by a bullet, not a bullet that killed it dead, but one that paralysed its nervous system with the shock of its impact, taking all the courage out of it, causing it to stop, to tremble, and finally to turn and flee for shelter? If so, you will understand what happened to Kaneke better than I can describe it in writing.

He came to a standstill, so sudden that the weight of his charge caused him to slide forward for a foot or two upon the pavement. Then he appeared to collapse; at least to my sight he looked actually smaller, I suppose because his breath left him, causing his body to shrink. Next he uttered a low cry of fear and, turning, fled like a flash, bounding down the steps that led to the altar and vanishing into the gloom.

I think that some ran after him, but of this I am not sure. If so, perhaps it was the faint indefinite figures that I have described, for I lost him in a kind of white mist that may of course have been an effect caused by the robes of those who followed.

To tell the truth I did not look long, because Arkle, who was struggling to his feet, uttered an exclamation which caused me to turn my head and perceive that the Shadow lady was no longer there.

“Where is she?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “I think women came and took her away, but it was all so confused I cannot swear.”

Then the gathering broke up in tumult. Kumpana and others escorted us down the steps, Arkle still leaning on my shoulder and expostulating, for naturally enough he wished to follow the Shadow, which he was not allowed to do. At the foot of the steps we were separated, he being helped off I knew not where, while I was taken back to the guest-house.

“We will meet tomorrow,” he called after me, and I replied that I hoped so. Then he and his escort vanished into the darkness.

“Baas,” said Hans, as I began to undress, “it is almost a pity that those Abanda did not catch the Baas Red-Bull.”

“Why?” I asked wearily.

“For two reasons, Baas. If he had been killed he would have been saved a great deal of trouble, who now is caught like a fly in a spider’s web. You know the sort of spider, Baas, which bites the fly and sends it to sleep for days or weeks, until it wants to eat it. The fly looks quite happy and so it is until the eating begins, when it wakes up and kicks because it can’t buzz as its wings have been pulled off. Well, that is what will happen to the Red Baas. The pretty-painted spider has got him and made him drunk and he will be quite happy, not knowing that his wings have been pulled off until the time comes when he wakes up to be sacrificed, or something of that sort, Baas. That’s the first reason.”

Now I bethought me that as usual there was wisdom in Hans’ cynical remarks and metaphors. Undoubtedly Arkle was entangled in an evil web, and what was the fate which lay before him, a white man of good birth and education and presumably a Christian? He was beloved of a beautiful and mystic woman whom he in turn adored and probably in due course would marry.

This seemed pleasant enough, and natural—if bizarre. Could he have taken the lady away to his own land perhaps the adventure might even have proved successful in a matrimonial sense. But what were the facts? Departure was impossible for her and for him also. Once he was wed to her, here he must remain to the end of the chapter.

Moreover for a bridal dower he took with her a mass of obscure and dangerous superstitions, as to which only one thing was clear, namely that, as I had heard her declare with her own lips, these would involve the pair of them in certain death, possibly quite soon, and surely at no very distant date. Of course he might maintain that he had been given fair warning and that the price he must pay was not too high for what he won. But then he was not in a state to

judge with an even mind, and as an individual of his own race and standing with some experience of the world, I could not agree with this view of his case.

Such were some of the thoughts that passed through my mind but of these I said nothing to Hans, contenting myself with asking his second reason.

"Oh, Baas, it is this," he answered. "If the Red Baas were out of the way, you would have been put in his place, as I dare say will happen after all if Kaneke manages to murder him, or those priests change their minds about him."

"Thank you," I said, "and what then?"

"Then, Baas, as happy married pair always does, you would set up house on that island, which otherwise we shall never see, and find out where they keep their gold and other things that are worth money, of which I learn they have plenty hidden away on the island, although this silly people does not use them because they are a holy, ancient treasure, Baas, that has been there for hundreds or thousands of years."

"And if this treasure exists and I found it, what next Hans?"

"Why, then, Baas, of course you would steal it and get away, leaving the lady to look at the empty boxes, Baas. Perhaps you think it would be difficult, but Hans would manage it all for you. Priests can always be bought, Baas, and as for oaths and the rest," he added, springing to a very pinnacle of immorality, "good Christians like you and me wouldn't need to bother about THEM, Baas, because you see they have all to do with the devil. So we should get away very rich and be happy to the end of our lives. But," he went on with a sigh, "it is nothing but a nice dream, because the Red Baas stands in our way. Unless indeed"—here he brightened up—"we can make a bargain with him and go shares in everything that he gets."

I did not try to argue with Hans because his lack of moral sense, real or assumed, was, so to speak, quite out of shot of argument. So I only said:

"I should be glad enough to get out of this place without any treasure, if only I could do so with a whole skin. Did you hear all the talk about war?"

"Oh yes, Baas. From the beginning that owl-man Kaneke has said that there would be war, which was why he brought you here."

"Well, Hans, if it is to be with the Abanda, I don't see what chance these Dabanda will have, for they are but a handful."

"None, Baas, if the fight were with spears. But they don't trust to spears; they trust to magic of which there is plenty in this land. Didn't you see when the Engoi woman cursed Kaneke, how he curled up, just as though she had kicked him in the stomach, Baas, and ran away, although a minute before he had meant to carry her off with the help of his friends, of whom no doubt he has plenty? That was magic, Baas."

I shrugged my shoulders and answered:

"I think it was scare and a guilty conscience. But I don't understand about this Kaneke. Why, if they don't like him, was he ever brought away from the place where he was living? Why did White-Mouse insist upon our rescuing him, and a dozen other things?"

"Oh, for lots of reasons, Baas. While he was named as the Chief-to-be, no one else could take his place according to their law. That is one. Also no one else could guide you to this country. That is another. Also he had to come because the Shadow Lady said so, something to do with their fetish business, or prophecies, Baas; you will never learn what makes the minds of spook-people like these Dabanda turn this way or that."

"I dare say not. What I should like to learn is whether our friend Kaneke is alive or dead."

"Alive, I think, Baas; yes, I am almost sure that he got away by the help of his friends in the crowd below, though I dare say that the curses of the Shadow Queen went with him; indeed I thought I saw them following him like white owls. I expect we shall see and hear plenty more of Kaneke, Baas."

As usual Hans was quite right; we did.

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## LAKE MONE AND THE FOREST

After this tumultuous and exciting night I spent a very quiet time at Dabanda-town, where for the next ten days or so nothing happened that could be called remarkable.

Grateful enough I was to rest thus awhile, because our long journey had tired me out and I found it delightful to enjoy repose and leisure in a climate which although hot, was on the whole delicious. Still as I am an active-minded person, I took advantage of this pause to learn all I could about the Dabanda and their enemies, the Abanda, only to find that in the end I had really learned very little. Kumpana and other members of the Council came to see me frequently and talked with great openness upon many matters, but when I came to boil down their conversation, the residuum was small enough.

I was told that Kaneke had escaped, as they said, "by making himself invisible", a feat in which no doubt the darkness helped him. Where he had gone, they were not sure. Possibly, they said, he had turned traitor and run away to the Abanda, though such a crime had never been heard of in their history. Or he might have returned towards the country where I had met him. Or possibly he was dead, killed by the curse of the Engoi, though they did not think this probable, for being himself a magician and one of the initiated, he knew how to fashion shields which would turn aside or delay the deadliest curses.

My inquiries upon other matters were almost equally unfruitful. I asked when the promised war would come and was informed that they did not know, but that no doubt it "would happen at the time appointed".

Nor would they tell me anything definite about the lady called Shadow, whom I had seen upon the altar platform. They were, they asserted, ignorant of what caused her to be fairer-skinned and more beautiful than other women; they only knew that for many generations the Lake-Dweller always had been so; it was a family gift. They admitted that she lived upon an island in the waters of Mone, in the company of certain virgins who dwelt with her in ancient buildings erected by an unknown and forgotten people, but of these buildings and the fashion of her life there they could say nothing, as none of them had ever visited the place, upon which it was unlawful for any man to set foot except the husband of the Engoi after marriage, and so on.

Thus it came about that at last I abandoned inquiries, which led to no result, for the very good reason that those whom I questioned were determined to tell me nothing, and fell back upon my own powers of observation, assisted by those of Hans. Being allowed to do so with an escort, I walked about the country, but saw nothing worthy of note.

Here and there were little villages inhabited by a handful of people, and round these some cultivated fields, also grazing grounds on which were herded cattle of a small breed and goats, but no true woolled sheep, creatures that would not thrive in so hot a district. The rest of the land, which was of extraordinary richness and could have supported ten times as many people, was given up to game of every variety except, as I have said, those that are harmful to man, which did not exist there.

The animals were wonderfully tame; indeed one could walk among them as Adam and Eve are reported to have done in the Garden of Eden. Again I asked Kumpana and others how this came about and was answered—because of the spell laid upon them, also because they were never molested or killed for food. I inquired why and was informed because they were holy, taboo in short, as Father Ambrose had heard from the slave in bygone years. Then for the first time I discovered that the Dabanda believed that after death the spirits of men, or those of certain men of their race, passed into the bodies of animals; also that sometimes this happened before birth.

It was for this reason that the beasts were not touched, since nobody likes to put a spear through his grandmother or his future child.

Next I referred to the elephants we had met outside their country, over which Kaneke seemed to have control, and inquired how this happened. The reply was that these beasts or their progenitors had once lived in Mone-land, whence they were driven, or "requested to leave" as Kumpana put it, because they did so much mischief, which accounted for the mystery.

My own view, of course, is (or, perhaps I should say, was) that the creatures were tame because no man ever harmed them, but I quote the story as an example of the superstitions of these star-worshippers. To many African tribes certain creatures are taboo, but never before or since have I heard of one to which all game was sacred, perchance because no other of small numbers has so rich a food supply that it needs to be supplemented by the flesh of wild animals. Among the Dabanda, however, this was so.

Their fertile soil, amply watered by rain and streams, needed but to be scratched to yield abundantly of corn and various roots and vegetables, while their numerous flocks and herds furnished all the milk and meat they required. Therefore there was no necessity for them to undertake the risk and toil of hunting, with the result that those beasts which they never killed, in the course of time naturally became both tame and sacred.

Having finished such investigation of the country as I was allowed to make—all approach to the lip of the crater was, I should explain, forbidden to me—I was seized with a great desire to explore the forest land and to look upon the sacred waters of the Lake Mone.

At first, when I mentioned this matter, Kumpana always turned the subject, but ultimately on the day of full moon, he said that if I so desired, he was ready to conduct me through the forest so that I might look upon the lake by moonlight, adding that it was not lawful for any man to enter this forest, much less to see the lake, in the daytime.

Of course I jumped at the offer, and shortly after moonrise we started, three of us, Kumpana, I, and Hans, whom at first Kumpana wished to leave behind. Indeed he only gave way on the point when I refused to go without him, while Hans on his part remarked, in infamous Arabic, that it has always been his custom to shoot anyone who tried to separate him from his master.

Within five minutes we found ourselves in a pit of blackness. That forest must have been dark at noonday, and at night, even when there was a full moon, it was like a coal-mine. We could only get along at all by help of some yards of the stem of a creeper of which Kumpana held one end. Then I grasped it at a distance of a few feet, and lastly came Hans holding to the other end.

It may be asked how Kumpana could see his way.

The answer is—that I do not know, but he led us quite briskly along some path that I was unable to perceive, which wound in and out through the trunks of giant trees, and skirted some that had fallen. Thus we walked for some hours, only seeing a ray of light now and then where a tree, dead and devoid of leaf, allowed it to reach the ground.

At length this forest ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and we stood upon the broad beach of the lake, most of which doubtless was covered in times of heavy rain.

Oh, how desolate was that great sheet of water glimmering in the bright moonlight, and yet how beautiful, set in its ring of forest land. Save for the soughing sound of wildfowl flighting far out of sight, and the occasional croak of a frog, it was utterly silent. Its lonesomeness was oppressive, almost terrible, for no beasts seemed to frequent it; nor did I see or hear so much as a fish stirring; well could I understand that a semi-savage race should deem it to be holy and haunted. Far away I could see the island on which the priestess Shadow was said to dwell, and noted that it was large, over a mile long as I judged, though how wide it may have been of course I did not know. What is more, I could distinguish buildings amidst the palms which grew upon this island.

Taking my glasses, very good ones of a German make which were fitted with a lens for use at night, I studied the place and saw at once that these buildings were large, massive, and apparently covered with sculpture. They seemed to be constructed of limestone or alabaster, or some other white rock such as marble, and before them stood gateways and towers, certain of which looked as though they were half in ruins. In architecture and style they were totally different from any that I knew of in Africa, not excepting the Zimbabwe ruins.

They had, however, a distinct resemblance to the remains of the temples of Old Egypt which at that time I had never seen except in pictures. There were what might be pylon gates; there were walls covered with great carvings; there were courts with pillars in them, for the end of one of these had fallen down or never been completed, and with the glasses I could see the columns.

The sight thrilled me. Was it possible that these mysterious buildings had been erected by people from Ancient Egypt, or even by some race that afterwards had migrated to Egypt, taking their architecture with them? Now that I come to think of it, the truncated pyramid outside the town where stood the stone altar upon which the fire burned, suggested that this might be so.

I turned to Kumpana and questioned him closely, but he could, or would, tell me very little. He repeated that he had never been on the island “in the flesh” for the reasons that he had already explained, but that he understood the buildings there to be tremendous, of a sort indeed to defy time for thousands upon thousands of years. There was no record of their construction, or of the people who had accomplished this mighty work and dwelt there. Not so much as a tradition survived. Time had eaten up their name and race, though perhaps the sculptures might tell something to anyone who learned enough to understand them. For the rest from generation to generation they had always been sacred to the Engoi and the home of her who for her day was known as Shadow, and her virgins.

“Can I not visit them?” I asked.

I saw a sarcastic smile upon Kumpana’s wrinkled old face as he answered.

“Oh yes, Lord, if you are a very good swimmer. Only should you live to reach the island the women there will tear you to pieces.”

Now since then I have often thought that this was rubbish, for surely women who lived in such an unnatural state would be glad to satisfy their curiosity by inspecting even so unfavourable a specimen of the male sex as myself, that is, if there were any truth at all in this tale of an African nunnery or Order of Virgins, like those of the Sun in Old Peru or the Vestals of Rome. At the time, however, all I thought of was the fate of the men who intruded upon the women’s mysteries in ancient Greece, which was not one that I wished to share.

Today I am sorry that I did not show more pluck and have a try to reach that island, but then the adventure appalled me and our lost chances never return again. Not that I believed the story about the nuns, for I felt quite sure that if no one ever visited the island, these sometimes made a trip to the lake shore, as, according to Arkle, the Shadow herself had done. Kumpana’s tale, however, was that their numbers were kept up by votaries who joined them every year from the mainland, picked girls of the age of twelve who were called “slaves of the Engoi”.

While I was talking to him Hans, who had the sight of a vulture, said in Dutch,

“Look, Baas. The women are coming out of that big house.”

Raising my glasses I saw that he was right, for a procession of white-robed figures emerged from under a gateway and walked in procession down to the water's edge. Here they must have entered boats, though, owing to the shadow of palms which grew upon the island shore, I could not see them do so, for presently three large canoes, each containing five or six women, appeared upon the tranquil bosom of the lake and were paddled slowly towards us. (Who made the canoes if no man ever visited the island? I wondered.) In much excitement I asked if they were coming to see me as I might not go to see them; but again Kumpana smiled and shook his head.

On they glided till they were within about two hundred yards from where we stood. Then they halted in a line and began a sweet and plaintive chant, of which in that great stillness the sound reached us clearly.

“What are they doing?” I asked. “Making an offering to the full moon?”

“Yes, Lord,” Kumpana answered, “and I think something more.”

He was right. There was “something more”, for presently the women in the central canoe bent down and lifted a white draped form which they cast over the prow, so that it fell into the water with a large splash and vanished there.

“Is it a funeral?” I asked again.

“No doubt, Lord. See, they throw flowers on to the water where the body sank.”

That was his reply, but something in his tone caused uncomfortable doubts to rise in my mind. What if the form wrapped in those white veils was quick—not dead? What if this rite was not one of burial but of sacrifice or execution? Here I may state that afterwards Hans swore that he saw the draped shape struggle, but as I did not, this may have been his imagination.

Still the business was eerie and made me shiver; so much so that I was not sorry when the women turned the canoe-heads islandwards, and departed still singing, or even when Kumpana said it was time for us to follow their example and go home. To my mind there was something weird, even unholy, about this sacred lake and island, where rose fantastic buildings of unknown age inhabited by night-haunting women who made offerings to the full moon, as the old Egyptians might have done, and I believe did to Nut or Hathor, ominous offerings shaped like a human corpse. And if this was so with these, the forest was even worse, as I have now to tell.

We entered its shapes guided as before by Kumpana with the help of the creeper-stem. Somehow it depressed me more even than it had done upon our journey lakewards, perhaps because my nerves were jangled by all that I have described. At any rate, I suppose in an instinctive endeavour to keep up my spirits, I entered into conversation with Hans behind me, speaking perhaps rather more loudly than was necessary as a kind of challenge to that overpowering silence.

I need not repeat our conversation in detail, or further than to say that it had to do with the Dabandas, their superstitions, and their pretensions to magical powers. Speaking in Dutch, and sometimes in English, so that Kumpana might not understand me, I criticized these in no measured terms, announcing my belief that they were rubbish and that the Dabanda priests and magicians were a set of infernal humbugs. Hans, always argumentative, combated this view and gave it as his opinion that the Dabanda, from Kaneke and Kumpana down, were particular favourites of the devil.

At this point Kumpana looked back and remarked somewhat sternly that it was well not to talk so loudly in the forest lest the spirits who had their home there should be angered.

Then I lost my temper and expressed entire disbelief in these spirits, asking him too well what he meant by trying to fool a white man with talk of tree-dwelling spirits, and whether he was referring to monkeys which we knew lived in such places and were reported sometimes to pelt travellers through them with sticks or nuts.

Apparently Kumpana did not appreciate the joke, for he looked back at me (I could see him because at the moment we were wading through a little swamp where no trees grew), with an expression on his face that I thought threatening, and said with cold courtesy:

“I pray you to be silent, Lord Macumazahn, and above all not to offer insults to the masters of this place.”

This made me angrier than ever. Was I, a more or less educated Christian man, to have my mouth stopped with the mud of such heathen mumbo-jumbo stuff? Certainly not. Therefore I continued my argument with Hans, speaking more loudly than before. Hans replied with sarcasm which was the more irritating because it contained a grain of truth, that the real reason I talked thus was that I was afraid and therefore made a noise to shout down my fear, as children do. Then he went on with a garbled version of the story of the Witch of Endor who, he declared, I think erroneously, also lived in a wood, and to quote absurd remarks about witchcraft, which he attributed to my poor old father, adding his devout hope that he, “the reverend Predikant” as he called him, was keeping an eye upon us at that moment.

Truly I believe that there must have been some exciting quality in the air of that forest, exhaled perhaps by the foliage or flowers of certain trees or creepers that grew there, for at this point a kind of rage possessed me which

caused me to rate and objurgate Hans, begging him to be good enough not to take my father's name in vain and put words in his mouth that he had never spoken, in order to justify his low, savage beliefs in ghosts and magic.

Just then we came to a spot where a great tree had fallen, breaking down others in its descent and allowing the moonlight to reach us for a few paces. As we went round the stump of this prostrate tree Kumpana turned again, saying:

"I have warned you and you will not listen. White stranger, I shall warn you no more."

I looked at the man and it struck me that his aspect had changed. No longer did he seem the little withered old fellow with shrewd eyes and a wrinkled, rather kindly, if cunning, face to whom I was accustomed. He appeared to have grown taller and to have acquired a fierce cast of countenance, while his eyes glowed like those of a lion in a cave.

Remembering that moonlight plays strange tricks and that his added height must be due to the fact that he was standing on a root of the fallen tree, I took no heed, but continued to wrangle with Hans like one who has had too much to drink, or is half under the influence of laughing-gas. Then we proceeded as before and presently were again enveloped in the utter gloom of the forest. Suddenly I was brought to a standstill by butting into the trunk of a tree, while Hans behind ran the muzzle of his rifle into my back.

"Where are you going, Kumpana?" I asked indignantly, but there was no answer.

Then to call his attention I pulled at the vine-like creeper that served us as a rope. It flew back and flicked me in the face; no one was holding it!

"Hans!" I exclaimed. "Kumpana has given us the slip."

"Yes, Baas," he answered. "I thought something of that sort would happen, Baas, if you would keep on spitting in the faces of the forest spirits, of which probably he is one himself."

I reflected a while and had an idea.

"Let us get back to the place where there is light, and think things over," I said.

"Yes, Baas," he answered. "Lead on, Baas, for I don't know the way and can't see our spoor in the dark."

I turned and started, with the most disastrous results. Before we had gone ten paces I crashed into another tree-trunk and hurt myself considerably. Circumventing this, presently I plunged into a piece of swampy ground and sank over my knees in tenacious mud, out of which Hans pulled me with difficulty. Once more we started with my boots full of water, but before I had taken five steps I became entangled in some thorny creeper which pricked me horribly. Freeing myself at length I stepped forward again, only to catch my foot in a root and fall on my face. Then I sat down and said things which I prefer not to record.

"It is very difficult, Baas, to find one's way in a big wood when it is quite dark," remarked Hans blandly. "What does the Baas wish to do now?"

"Stop here till it grows lighter, I suppose, if it ever does in this infernal place," I answered. Then I filled my pipe and finding that I had lost my matches, probably when I fell, I asked Hans for one.

He produced his cherished box, of which we had not too many left, and having first filled his own pipe, struck a match and handed it to me. As I took it I remembered noticing how steadily the flame burned in that utterly still air. Then I lifted the match to my pipe and as I did so something blew it out.

"Why did you do that?" I asked angrily of Hans. "Are you afraid of setting the forest on fire?"

"Yes, Baas—I mean no, Baas. I mean I didn't blow it out, Baas. A monkey blew it out; I saw its ugly face," replied Hans in a voice that suggested to me that he was frightened.

"Rubbish!" I exclaimed. "Give me another match."

He obeyed rather unwillingly and the same thing happened, no doubt because there was a current of air which passed between the tree-trunks in puffs.

Well, my desire to smoke suddenly departed and I told Hans that we must not waste any more matches in such a draughty spot. He agreed and set his back firmly against mine, explaining that he was cold, a palpable lie as the heat in that stifling place was so great that we both ran with perspiration.

"Now be still and don't talk; I am going to sleep. You can wake me up at dawn," I said.

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth, when distinctly I heard laughter, of a queer sort it is true, for it was singularly mirthless, but still eerie laughter which appeared to come first from one quarter and then another.

"That old fool, Kumpana, is making fun of us all the time," I said. "He shall laugh the wrong side of his mouth—if I catch him."

"Yes, Baas, only now he seems to be laughing on all sides of his face and from everywhere at once—" Hans began, but the rest of his remarks were lost in a peal of unholy merriment.

It came, as he said, "from everywhere at once", and seemingly even from above our heads.

"What the deuce is it—hyenas?" I asked.

"No, Baas, it's spooks, very bad spooks. Oh, Baas, why would you come into this accursed forest to look at a lake where they drown people at midnight, and then sneer at the devils of the place and call them monkeys? I am going to

pray to your reverend father, Baas, hoping that he will hear me in the Place of Fires. For if he can't help us, no one can."

I did not answer him, for when Hans was in this superstitious mood argument was useless. Moreover I was trying to remember a very interesting lecture I had once heard about echoes and how these are multiplied by natural causes. The laughter had died away and I was just recovering the thread of the lecture when something else happened. A great stone or clod of earth fell with a thud close to me, and was followed presently by scores of similar missiles. None of these touched us, it is true, but they struck everywhere around and even against the trees above our heads.

After that I really cannot recall what followed, for between weariness, bewilderment, and exhaustion I grew confused, so that my mind became torpid. I remember all kinds of sounds, some of them very loud as though trees were crashing at a distance, and some of them small and sharp and close at hand, like the agonizing squeals idle children can produce with a slate-pencil. I remember a feeling on my face which suggested that my ears and nose were being pulled by tiny hands.

I remember, too, Hans announcing in a voice which was full of fear that gorillas with eyes of fire were dancing round us, though if so I never saw them. Lastly I remember that he fired his rifle, I suppose at one of the nightmare gorillas, or some other dream-beast, for the sound of it reverberated through the forest as though it had been a cannon-shot. Also in its blinding flash I thought I saw queer figures round us with fantastic faces.

Then I remember nothing more of all those noises and visions, which were more appropriate to a victim of delirium tremens, than to a strictly sober man lost in a wood, till at length I heard a gentle voice say in Arabic:

"Rise, Macumazah. You have wandered from your path and the air beneath these trees is poisonous and gives bad dreams. I have been sent to guide you and your servant back to Dabanda-town."

I obeyed in a great hurry and presently felt a soft hand leading me I knew not where. Or perhaps I should say that I thought I felt it, for I dare say this was part of the nightmare from which doubtless I was suffering, and seemed to be led forward, Hans clinging to my coat-tails like a child to its mother's skirts, for how long I cannot tell. All I know is that just as the dawn was breaking we found ourselves upon the edge of the forest, for there in front of us was the truncated pyramid upon which burned the altar fire, and beyond it the town. Here in the shadow of the last trees our guide departed, or seemed to depart. I noted vaguely in the gloom that she was a woman wrapped in white and of a graceful figure.

"Farewell," she said with a suspicion of mockery in her voice that somehow I thought familiar, adding:

"You are very wise, Macumazah, yet, I pray you, grow a little wiser, for then you will not mock at what you do not understand, and will learn that there are powers in the world known to its ancient peoples of which even white men have not heard."

As she spoke she stepped backwards and before I could answer her had vanished, although still out of the darkness of that accursed forest I could hear her musical voice repeating:

"Farewell, Macumazah, and mock no more at the powers of the ancient peoples."

"Baas," said Hans as we staggered into our house, "I think that missie must have been White-Mouse come to life again."

"I don't want to know if she was White-Mouse, or Black-Mouse, or Piebald-Mouse, or no Mouse at all. What I want is to get out of this accursed country," I replied savagely, as I kicked off my boots and threw myself down upon the bed.

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## KANEKE'S MESSAGE

It may be wondered why I have said so little about Arkle, the real hero of this story, whom Hans and the natives named Red-Bull because of his taurine build and great strength. The reason is that I saw little of the man. After the appearance of Shadow, "the Treasure of the Lake", that night before the altar and the disappearance of Kaneke laden with curses like the scapegoat of the ancient Jews, he was laid up for a while in the Chief's big house or hut with a sore heel. Notwithstanding their alleged mastery over diseases, this heel, which resulted from his race for life before the Abanda and his subsequent tramp to the Lake-town, defied all the skill and spells of the Dabanda doctors or magicians, for they had but one word to describe the followers of both these trades.

So I was called in and tackled the case with the help of a pot of antiseptic ointment bought originally in some chemist's shop, and lint that I made by picking a rag of linen to pieces. While visiting him for this purpose of course I talked to him, but even then with a sense of restraint. The truth was that already the man was hedged round with ceremonial. Yes, this English gentleman was, as it were, guarded by a pack of heathen priests; white-robed mystics who never left us alone. Of course they could not understand our language, but on the other hand they were preternaturally shrewd at reading our faces and what was passing in our minds, as I found out from remarks that they made now and again.

Thus I always had a sense of being spied on, and so, I think, did Arkle. If I tried to talk to him about the lady Shadow, I saw their large eyes fixed upon me and their ears, as it were, stretched out towards me, till at length I came almost to believe that after all they understood or guessed the meaning of every word I uttered. This did not tend to promote candid conversation, indeed it was paralysing, and at last reduced me to prattling about the weather or other trivial subjects.

At last I could bear no more, and taking advantage of the temporary absence of the priest on guard, for I guessed that he had only retired behind a mat curtain, I said outright, "Tell me, Mr. Arkle, if you like this kind of life. You seem to me to be a prisoner in all except name, though they call you a chief. Do you think such a position right for a white man of your upbringing?"

"No, I don't, Quatermain," he answered with vigour. "I hate the business, but I tell you that I am a man under a spell. I see you smile, yet it is true. Years ago it began with those dreams in London. Then I kissed, you know whom, down by that lake, and the spell became a madness. Lastly I swore allegiance to her and all the rest of it that night upon the platform yonder, and the madness became a fate. I am bound by chains that cannot be broken, this chieftainship is one that you can see; but there are others—and that's the end—or the beginning."

"Do you wish to break them?" I asked.

"My reason does, but my spirit, or my heart, or whatever you choose to call it, does not. I must win that woman, even if it costs me my life; if I do not I shall go mad."

"Forgive me," I answered, "but don't you think that in a way it may cost you more than your life: that is, your honour?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that like all of us you were brought up with certain traditions and, as you have told me, in a certain faith; in short, you are a white man. Now a love-affair with a woman who has other traditions and who is of another faith, or even a marriage is well enough sometimes—as Saint Paul points out. But this business is bigger than that, for in practice you must adopt HER traditions and HER faith and give the lie to your own. Further, you don't know what these are or where they will lead you. Remember, she warned you herself, for I heard her before that altar."

"No, Quatermain, I don't know, and she did warn me. But I took the oath all the same and I've got to keep it; moreover, I wish to keep it, for love sanctifies everything, doesn't it? And if ever a man was in love, I am."

"That's an old argument," I said, "and I am not sure. For love means passion and passion is a blind leader of the blind."

Here my wise remarks were cut short by the re-entry of the priest, who I was quite sure had been listening through the mat curtain and making out all he could from the tone of our voices. He was accompanied by Kumpana whom I had not seen since we parted in the forest. Remembering the trick he had played me there, and all that followed, the sight of this old fellow looking more bland and amiable than usual made me indignant, especially when he asked me how I was and if I and my servant had been taking any more walks in the dark.

"Listen, Kumpana," I said. "You played me an evil trick when you left us alone the other night in that thick wood, and still worse ones afterwards, of which I will not speak. You should be ashamed of yourself, Kumpana, seeing that I am a stranger whom you are bound to help and not to desert as you did."

"I ask your pardon," he replied very courteously, "if I say that I think it is you who should be ashamed, Lord Macumazahn, for although I prayed you not to do so, you reviled what I hold to be holy until I was forced to leave you to your punishment, which might have ended worse than it did. However, you are not at all to blame, because the air of

that forest sometimes goes to the head, like strong drink, and takes away the judgment. Therefore let us forgive each other and say no more."

He spoke so courteously that I felt abashed and even humbled, for after all he had some reason on his side; acting under influences which I did not understand, I HAD offered insult to the spirits or elementals, or natural forces, which he revered. So I turned the subject by saying that Hans and I were now rested from our journey and should be glad to say good-bye to him as soon as possible, if the Council of the Shadow would be so kind as to help us to leave the country.

"You are free to go when you will, Macumazahn," he answered, "but if you attempt to do so before the time appointed, I warn you that it will be at great risk to yourself."

"I am not afraid of risks -!" I exclaimed, and that moment Arkle broke in, saying:

"For God's sake don't go, Quatermain. Stop here as long as you can, that is, until I vanish from your sight, I mean until we are separated, as I gather that we must be. For when this business is finished I have to begin a new life, but until then, don't leave me to deal with war and trouble alone."

Anxious as I had become now that my curiosity about Lake Mone was satisfied by an actual sight of its waters, to get clear of these eerie people who depressed me and of the land where even the air was so strange and unnatural that it affected the nerves and made one behave like a drunkard, I was touched by this appeal. I felt that there was a struggle in the heart of Arkle between his inherited convictions, or perhaps I should say all the impulses and associations of a man of his race and class, and the devouring passion which possessed him for a lovely and mystical woman, a priestess of some faith with which it was not healthy for one of white blood to have to do.

Perhaps if I stayed I might yet be able to save him from this snare; or circumstances might arise which would cut its claims. Whereas if I went his fate was sure. One by one the barriers of civilization and Christianity, which protected him from the inroads of primeval instincts and engulfment in the dark superstitions surviving from the ancient world that flourished here untouched by time, would be broken down. He would become in fact what already he was in name, the chief of these star-worshipping Dabanda. He would dwell upon the island with their priestess, his country would see him no more, and at last, when his part was played, there would be some unholy scene of sacrifice, mayhap such a one, if Hans were right, as we had been shown beneath the midnight moon on the waters of that lonesome mere beyond the forest.

I shuddered as a vision of it rose in my mind: the drugged man, helpless in his encircling ceremonies, being cast with songs and offerings of flowers into the bottomless crater-lake, there to seek the woman who, her day of power done, had preceded him to doom. Or there might be other fates yet more awful, such as madness induced by disillusionment, despair, and the impossibility of escape, or even by long-continued terrors like those of which we had tasted in the forest. Oh, the bait was rose-scented and set with jewels, but what of the hook within, I wondered, I before whose eyes it did not dangle.

All this and more that I do not remember passed swiftly through my mind with the result that I was about to say that I would stop and see the business through, when suddenly the mat which hung in the door-way of the room was thrust aside and there entered a priest conducting two men. These men, whom I recognized at once as belonging to the farming class of the Dabanda, prostrated themselves before Arkle, showing me that he was now acknowledged as Chief by all the people. Then the priest, bowing, informed him that they had a tale to tell and a message to deliver.

He bade them speak, whereon the elder of the two husbandmen said:

"Last evening towards sunset, O Chief and Father of the Dabanda, to whom it is promised that he shall be the Shield of the holy Shadow and father of the Shadow that is to be, I and my son here were tracking a lost goat. We followed this goat into the western pass that leads through the lip of the mountain from the holy Land to that of the Abanda on the slopes and plains beyond.

"At length we caught sight of the goat near to the farther mouth of the cleft, and ran fast to catch it before it strayed into the country of the Abanda, whither we might not follow. The goat heard us and, being wilful, leaped ahead, so that before we could reach it, it was out of the mouth of the pass and into Abanda-land.

"Here, then, we sat on the border line, since we dared not pursue farther, and called to the goat to return to us. It knew our voices and was coming, when suddenly between us and it appeared armed men out of the bushes, and at the head of them no other than Kaneke, he who has forfeited the chieftainship and been cursed of the Engoi.

"Stay still and listen," he said, "for if you stir we will throw spears and kill you." So we stood still and he went on:

"I, Kaneke, of the pure blood, the Chief of the Dabanda and the Shield of the Shadow, am now Chief of the Abanda also. Yes, I have brought together under one rule the two peoples who were divided long ago. Go you therefore to Kumpana, the first of the Council of the Shadow, and say to him that he may tell it to the Shadow, that the Abanda perish for the want of rain, which is withheld from them by the witchcraft of the priests and Council of the Dabanda. Their crops wither, their cows and goats give no milk, their springs dry up, and their children are in want and like to die."

"Therefore if within six days no rain falls upon their land, I, their chief and yours, will lead them in their thousands through the passes of the mountain-lip, fearing no curses such as of old have held them back, now that I,

Shield to be of the Shadow, am their captain. We will kill any that oppose us; we will kill Kumpana and the Council of the Shadow who guide her ill; we will kill the priests of the Shadow who are evil wizards, practisers of black magic; we will pass the forest, not fearing the wood-dwellers; we will cross the lake, and I will take the Shadow and make her mine, and thenceforward rule over the two people become one again. Lastly, we will kill the white thief who is named Wanderer, and by the people Red-Bull. Yes, we will kill him by torture as an offering to the moon and the host of heaven, that henceforth rain may fall without the mountain as well as within its circle, giving plenty, so that all the people may increase and grow fat.'

"With him we will kill the white hunter named Macumazahn, because now I know that I was made to buy him to come to this land, not to give me help as I believed, but to work me evil and to set in my place the thief Red-Bull; and the yellow man his servant we will also kill, burying them alive or burning them upon the altar. None of them shall escape us, for night and day all the passes are watched and any that set foot outside of them shall be hunted to death for our sport, as the thief Red-Bull would have been, had he not been saved by Macumazahn. Now go and at this same hour on the second day return with the answer to my message.'

"Then, Lords, Kaneke and those with him went away laughing together, killing our goat as they went, and my son and I came here to deliver the message."

For a while there was silence in that room. Kumpana seemed to be perplexed; the priests were speechless with indignation; I was horribly frightened at the prospect of the fate promised to me, and so was Hans who all this while had been sitting on the ground behind me, smoking and pretending to hear nothing, for he whispered:

"Oh, Baas, why did you ever come to this land of spooks? Why did you not run away after you had got Kaneke's ivory? Now we shall be buried alive. Or be grilled on that altar fire—just like buck's flesh, Baas."

"If so, it won't be Kaneke who will do the grilling, that is if ever he comes within three hundred yards of me," I answered savagely in Dutch.

Then I stopped short to consider Arkle in whom I noticed a curious change. A few minutes before he was looking troubled and unhappy, for reasons that may be guessed. Now he had brisked up and seemed quite cheerful, as is the way of some Anglo-Saxons (I am not one of them) when there is the prospect of a fight.

"When did you say I should be able to get about as usual, Quatermain? Was it tomorrow?"

"Yes, I think so, if you will keep a bandage on your heel," I said, then was silent, for Kumpana was speaking to the peasants, telling them to go away and rest until he sent for them.

When they had departed he bade the priests summon the Council of the Shadow, which they did with marvellous rapidity, for within five minutes they arrived in the room, six or seven old fellows. I suppose they were hanging about outside, having scented trouble. At any rate they appeared, bowed to Arkle and to me and sat down upon the ground. Kumpana repeated to them the tale of the two peasants which did not seem to surprise them; indeed they appeared to know it already. Next he asked them what they thought should be done, and they gave various replies which I scarcely understood, because they all talked together and very fast, using terms that were not familiar to me. Nor in fact did Kumpana appear to pay much attention to what they said, which gave me the idea that this asking of their advice was more or less of a formality. When they had finished he turned to Arkle and with much deference inquired his views.

"Oh, fight the beast—I mean Kaneke," answered Arkle with emphasis, adding, "but first ask Macumazahn there; he is a wise man and has seen many things."

So Kumpana repeated his question, inquiring of me whether I also held that we should fight.

"Certainly not, if you can do anything else," I replied, "for you are few and the Abanda are many. They say that they want rain and I have heard you declare that you, or some of you, can cause rain to fall. If this is true, do so. Give the Abanda as much water as they want and there will be no war."

This I said not because I believed that the priests or the Shadow, or anyone else, could break the drought and bring rain from the heavens upon the parched fields of the Abanda, but because I wanted to hear Kumpana's views upon the suggestion. To my surprise he accepted it with great respect, saying that the plan was good and worthy of consideration and that it should be submitted to the Engoi—that is to the Lady Shadow—for her decision.

"Do you mean that she can give the Abanda rain if she chooses?"

"Certainly," he answered with an air of mild astonishment, "at any time and in any quantity."

Then I collapsed, for what is the use of arguing with cranks or lunatics, although of course I knew that many natives hold similar beliefs as to the powers of their rain-makers.

Now, to my surprise Hans took up his parable. Squatted there upon the floor, he said in a brazen fashion:

"The Baas thinks himself wise, you all think yourselves wise, but Hans is much wiser than any of you. This is what you should do. Kaneke is the post that holds up the roof of the Abanda house. They dare to offer to fight you and to say that they will take away your priestess who lives in the lake, because Kaneke, whom they believe to be your real chief and high-priest with a right to the Lake Lady, has become their captain, so they are no longer afraid of you or of the curses of your Engoi. Kill Kaneke and once more they will be afraid of you, for without him they dare not invade your land which they have always held to be holy."

“And how are we to kill Kaneke?” asked Kumpana.

“Oh, that is easy. When those two men take your answer—unless the Baas would rather do it himself—I will go with them and hide behind a stone, or disguise myself as a Dabanda...”

Here Kumpana looked at Hans and shook his head.

“... then when Kaneke comes to listen I will shoot him dead; that is all and there will be no more trouble.”

On hearing this cold-blooded proposition Kumpana expressed doubts as to whether Kaneke could be disposed of in this way. It seemed to be his idea that a priest of the Engoi could only meet his end in certain fashions which he did not specify, and he added that had it been possible for him to die otherwise, Kaneke would have done so before, especially not long ago when he had tried to seize the Shadow, and afterwards. However, he was prepared to consider Hans' suggestion which did not seem to shock him in the least.

Having collected all our views Kumpana announced coolly that he would now lay them before the Engoi and learn that celestial potentate's will through the mouth of its earthly incarnation and minister, the Shadow. Of course, I thought that he meant to pay a visit to the island in the lake and remembering the riddle of those ancient buildings which I yearned to explore, I began to wonder if I could not persuade him to allow me to be his companion on the trip, though it is true that I had no liking for another midnight journey through that forest.

But not a bit of it. His methods were very different. Suddenly he commanded silence and ordered extra mats to be hung over the door-way and window-places, so that the room became almost dark. Then he sat down on the floor, the two priests kneeling on either side of him, while the Council of the Shadow, also sitting on the ground and holding one another's hands made a circle round the three of them. Hans, who, scenting spooks showed a strong disposition to bolt. I and—as I was relieved to observe—Arkle remained outside this circle playing the part for audience.

“By Jove,” thought I to myself, for I did not dare open my lips, “we are in for a séance.”

A séance it was. Yes, there in Central Africa a séance, or something uncommonly like it, which once more caused me to remember the saying of wise old Solomon, that there is no new thing under the sun. Doubtless for tens of thousands of years there have been séances among almost every people of the earth, civilized and savage, or at any rate similar gatherings having for their object consultation with spirits or other powers of which ordinary men know nothing.

The priests said some prayer in archaic language which I did not understand, if indeed they understood it themselves. I gathered, however, that it was an invocation. Then the circle began to sing a low and solemn hymn, Kumpana seated in the centre keeping time to the chant with motions of his hands and head. By degrees these motions grew fainter, till at last his chin sank upon his breast and he went into a deep trance or sleep.

Then I understood. Kumpana was what in spiritualistic parlance is called a medium. Doubtless, I reflected, it was because of this gift of his which enabled him to put himself in communication, real or fancied, with intelligences that are not of the earth and with human beings at a distance, also to exercise clairvoyant faculties, that he had risen to the high estate of President of the Council of the Shadow, the real governing body of the land. Afterwards I found that I was quite right in this supposition, for Kumpana was humble by birth and not a member of one of the priestly families; yet owing to his uncanny powers he outdistanced them all and in fact was the ruler of the Dabanda. The chief of the tribe was but an executive officer who acted upon the advice of the Council and in due course became the husband of the Shadow of the day, destined to the dreadful fate of dying with her when the Council so decreed.

As for the Shadow herself, she was nothing but an oracle, the Voice of some dim divinity through whom the commands of that divinity were made known to the Council, which interpreted them as it pleased, if indeed it did not inspire them as even then I suspected. The priests, by comparison, played a small part in the constitution of this State. For it was a State in miniature, the survival and remnant, I imagine, of what once had been a strong and in its way highly civilized community, whose principal gods were the moon and the planets (not the sun, so far as I could learn), one that had owed any greatness it might possess to its religious reputation and alleged magical powers, rather than to strength in war.

Therefore in the end it had gone down before the fighting peoples, as in this carnal world the spirit so often does in its struggle with the flesh, for as someone remarked, I think it was Napoleon, Providence is, or seems to be, on the side of the big battalions. These priests, I should add, in addition to attending to the religious rites and offerings before the altar, were the learned men and doctors of the tribe. It was they who studied the stars, drawing horoscopes and reading omens in them, not without some knowledge; for I have reason to believe that they could predict eclipses with tolerable accuracy. Also they kept records, though whether these were in any kind of writing, or merely by means of signs, I am sorry to say I was never able to ascertain, because on this point their secrecy was strict.

This is all I could discover, during my brief sojourn among them, as to the mystical religion of the Dabanda, if religion it can be called, of which I was now witnessing one of the manifestations.

After Kumpana had sunk into his trace the chant continued for a considerable time, growing fainter by degrees till at length it seemed to come from very far away like distant music heard across the sea. At least that was the effect it produced upon me, one as I think, of a semi-hypnotic character, for undoubtedly this hymn had a mesmeric power. At

any rate, either owing to it or to the gloom and closeness of that room, I fell into a kind of bodily torpor which left my mind extremely active, as happens to us when we dream.

In my imagination I seemed to see a shadowy Kumpana standing before the beautiful woman upon whom I had looked on the altar platform, and speaking to her in some great dim hall.

She listened; then stood a while with outstretched hands and upturned eyes, like one who waits for inspiration. At last it came, for tremblings ran up and down her limbs, a slight convulsion shook her face, her eyes rolled and grew wild; the pythoness was possessed of her spirit or familiar. Then her lips moved rapidly as though from them were pouring a flood of words, and the fancy faded.

Of course it was nothing but a dream induced by my surroundings and some heavy perfume, which I forgot to say, unseen by me, evidently the priests had sprinkled or scattered about the room. Yet probably this dream represented faithfully enough what took place when the oracle was consulted, for whether such ceremonies occurred in ancient Greece or are practised by the witch-doctors or diviners of Africa, there is much similarity in their methods.

I woke up, Kumpana woke up, everybody woke up. (Both Arkle and Hans told me afterwards that, like myself, they went to sleep and dreamed dreams.) The old seer yawned, rubbed his eyes, stretched himself and said quietly that he had received full directions from the Engoi as to what was to be done to meet the danger which threatened the Dabanda, but what those directions might be he declined to reveal. Then he sent for the two husbandmen and, pointing to one of the priests, said to them:

“Return to the Western pass with this man, and tomorrow at sunset, be at that spot where Kaneke spoke with you. If he comes again or sends messengers, as he will, say that his words have been delivered to the Engoi, and that this is the answer: ‘Remember that you are accursed, O traitor Kaneke. Take what road you will, but learn that every one of them leads you to the grave.’ Say also that the rain which the people of the Abanda demand shall fall upon them in plenty, for the time of drought is done. Let them be content therewith and know that if any of them dare to follow Kaneke into the land of the Holy Lake, a curse shall fall upon them also, such a curse as has not been told of among them or their fathers. Add these words: ‘O Kaneke, the Engoi reads your heart. You do not seek rain to make fruitful the fields of the Abanda. You seek the Shadow. Kaneke, for you that Shadow has faded; for you she is dead. She whom you strove to bear away is dead and there awaits you only the fate of one who has slain the Shadow.’”

This cryptic message Kumpana caused the two peasants, also the priest who was to accompany them, to repeat twice. When he was sure that they had it by heart to the last word, he sent them away without any ceremony, as though he attached no particular importance to their mission.

Now I could no longer suppress my irritation, or rather my wrath. I was most heartily sick of the whole affair. I saw that there was going to be fighting of some sort in which no doubt I should be expected to take part, and I did not want to fight. What had I to do with this ancient quarrel between two long-separated sections of a tribe, who were at loggerheads over the possession of a priestess supposed to be gifted with powers as a rainmaker?

Moreover, the moral atmosphere of the place was unwholesome and jarred upon me. African customs of the more recondite sort and ancient superstitions are very interesting, but I could have too much of them, especially if certain, as I was, that behind their outward harmlessness, lies hid some red heart of secret cruelty. I wanted to get out of the place before that cruelty became manifest, or before something horrible happened to me—with Arkle if possible, but if he would not come, without him.

To tell the truth I was frightened. I suppose that my dreams in the forest and the occurrences of this séance, if I may so call it, had got upon my nerves, just as old Zikali used to do in the Black Kloof. I have always believed that there are forces round us which our senses do not appreciate, secret doors in the natural boundary wall of life that most of us never find, though to them some may have the key. But I also believe that it is most dangerous and unwholesome to come into touch with those forces, or to peep through those doors when they are opened by others. Here in Dabandaland, however, they always stood ajar, or so I imagined, and through them came experiences and what Hans called “spooks”, which thrust themselves upon the attention of those who did not desire their company. In short I wished to be gone back to a wholesome, everyday existence and never to see or hear anything more of Lake Mone, its priestess, or her votaries.

“Kumpana,” I said, “is there to be a war between your people and the Abanda?”

“Yes,” he answered with a slow and rather creepy smile, “there is to be war—of a sort.”

“Then I want to have nothing to do with it. Kumpana, I want to get out of your country at once; risks or no risks, I wish to be off.”

“I fear that is impossible, Lord Macumazahn,” he answered. “Have you not heard the word of the Engoi that the drought which has endured beyond the mountain for three years is at an end? That word is true; great storms are coming up through which you could not travel. The rain would stop you even if you escaped the spears of the Abanda. Moreover,” he added quickly before I could express disbelief in the arrival of these storms, and with a faint sneer, “we have been told that the Lord Macumazahn is a very brave man, one who loves fighting.”

“Then you have been told a lie. Also, who told you?”

"That does not matter. We know more about you than you think, Macumazahn. Also we have been told that you accepted payment from Kaneke to come to this country and not to leave it until the object of your coming was accomplished, payment in ivory and gold; and we believed, Lord Macumazahn, that you were a very honest man who always fulfilled your promises, especially when your services had been bought."

Here Arkle, to his credit, intervened sharply, saying:

"Be silent, Kumpana. Would you insult your guest -?"

"Thank you, Arkle," I broke in in English, "but I can look after myself. He will only tell you that you are now the Chief of his people and that I am your guest, not his."

Then addressing Kumpana in his own language, I went on.

"You have been misinformed. I never pretended to great courage, especially in wars that do not concern me. For the rest my bargain was to accompany Kaneke to his country, not to fight battles there, as I could prove to you if you were able to read my language. This Kaneke who was to be your chief, said that he could not travel here without me, which is true, for had it not been for me and Hans he would never have started. Further, had it not been for us he would have been killed by the Abanda who were hunting the white lord who is now your chief. So I came, not for that reason but because he paid me, for in such fashions I earn my living. Yet I should not have come for this cause alone. I had another. It was that I had heard of your holy lake and a little of your people and their customs, and being curious in such matters I desired to look upon the one and to study the others for myself—"

"Which things you have done to your heart's content," broke in Kumpana.

"Still," I went on not heeding him, "never shall it be said that I, Macumazahn, took pay that I did not earn to the full. Therefore I will take my share in your war, doing all that is asked of me as best I can, especially as I have a score to settle with this Kaneke, who by his treachery brought my two servants to their death. Only I demand your promise and that of the Council of the Shadow and that of the white lord who has now become your chief against my counsel, that when this war is finished, I and my servant shall be allowed to depart at once in peace and with such help as you can give me."

"It is yours, Lord, we swear it by the Engoi!" exclaimed Kumpana in a humble voice and with the air of one who is ashamed of himself. "Pardon my words if they offended you, for know that as to your love of fighting I have but repeated what your servant Hans told me, and for the rest I learned it from Kaneke."

"Whom you have proved to be a traitor and a liar," I said angrily.

Then I turned to Arkle and asked him whether he also gave me his promise that I should be allowed to go when the war was ended.

"Of course, if you wish it," he answered in English, "though I hoped that you would stop here with us a while. The truth is, Quatermain, that I shall be very lonely without you," he added with a sigh, which I thought pathetic, knowing all it meant.

"Then why do you stay here?" I asked bluntly.

"Because I must; because it is my fate; because I am under a charm that may not be broken. Also, Quatermain, do you not understand" (this he said rapidly and in a low voice) "that if I were to break my oaths, or try to —which I cannot—I should not live another day?"

"Yes, Arkle, I understand and I am sorry," I replied, and, bowing to them all, left the house.

"Baas," said Hans outside, "do you remember that trap of willow-rods I made once to catch eels" (he meant barbel mudfish) "down on the Tugela when we could get nothing else to eat? It was a very good trap, Baas, for when the eel had pushed its way in, the willow rods shut up behind it, so that it could not get out again, and afterwards we ate it. This land is a trap like that, and the Baas Red-Bull is the eel and the Shadow lady is the bait, and by and by I think these spook people will cook and eat him."

I shivered at Hans' suggestive illustrations, and answered:

"Look out that they do not cook and eat us too."

"Oh no, Baas, they won't do that because they haven't found the right bait to catch you. Luckily there are not two Shadow-ladies, Baas, and the trap is no good without the right bait."

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## THE GREAT STORM

That evening clouds like to those of a monsoon began to bank up over lake- land and all the country round so far as the eye could see.

"That Shadow-lady is a very good rain-doctress, Baas," said Hans. "You remember Kumpana said that she promised rain to those Abanda who have had none for three years, or very little. Now I think that they are going to get plenty."

"Then perhaps they won't make war," I answered indifferently.

Certainly the weather was very peculiar. The heat, which had been considerable for some days before, now grew intense; I should imagine that on this particular evening it must have risen to 108 or 110 degrees in the shade. Moreover it was of a most oppressive character; the air was so thick that I felt as though I were breathing cream and I could not make the slightest effort without bursting into profuse perspiration.

There I lay upon my bed stripped to the shirt in the best draught that I could find, which was none at all, and gasped like a fish out of water, praying that the storm would burst and bring coolness. In the lady Shadow's powers I had no faith. I was quite certain, however, that Kumpana and the other old men were well acquainted with the signs of the local weather, and knew that it was about to undergo a general break after the long drought. Hence the prophecy so confidently announced by the Council. This drought, for some reason which I cannot explain, never affected the crater area unduly, for the Dabanda had just gathered in an excellent harvest.

Hans, who like most Hottentots was quite indifferent to heat, went out into the town to prospect and returned saying that the people showed considerable alarm. Some were looking to the roofs of their houses, while others were driving their stock into caves and sheltered places, or carrying home the last of the harvest in baskets, even the children, of whom there were not many, being pressed into this service. The priests, too, he said, were engaged in building a kind of palm-leaf tent over the altar on the stone platform, presumably to prevent the rain from putting out the fire, which it seemed had always burned there from time immemorial.

The night came, a night of dreadful heat in which I could not sleep a wink, or do anything except swallow quantities of water mixed with the juice of a sub-acid, plum-like fruit that grew wild in the crater, which made an astringent and most refreshing drink. The dawn that followed was as dark as that of a November day in London, but as yet there was no rain nor any lifting of the heavy silence.

After eating, or pretending to eat, I crept across to the Chief's house, to be informed by a priest outside that I could not be admitted, as the lord Wanderer was engaged with the Council. I took the hint and went home again, feeling sure that the plan was to cut me off from Arkle over whom my influence was feared. It almost seemed as though Kumpana and his companions were psychological experts, if that is the right description, who could read what was passing in the minds of others. Indeed, I began to believe that although they could not understand our words when we spoke in English in their presence, they understood the drift of them, also that I wished to persuade him to shake off their shackles and get out of their clutches.

Why were they so anxious to keep him here? I wondered. I wonder still. Doubtless there was some overwhelming reason which they would not reveal. As I do today, I inclined to the view that mainly they were actuated by ambition. They, a dwindling, superstition-ridden race, desired once more to become a power in their world. To accomplish this they must add to their number, which could only be done by incorporating the thousands of the virile Abanda under the rule of a man of force and ability who understood the arts of civilization. This to my mind is why Arkle was brought to Mone-land, tempted by the bait of the beautiful woman called Shadow to whom he had been so mysteriously drawn.

That is the best explanation which I can offer; not a very satisfactory one, I admit, because it presupposes that this lady Shadow could impress her personality upon him from a great distance, as he alleged that she had done, and also some knowledge of the future on the part of her priests and advisers. Or mayhap these were only acting upon the dictates of some ancient prophecy of a sort that is common enough among the more mystical of the African peoples, although such prophecies rarely come to the knowledge of Europeans, save in forms too obscure and tangled to be understood by them. The same reason, if to a less degree, made them so anxious that I should visit their country for a while. They wanted to pick my brains as to our system of government and the rest, which indeed they did upon every opportunity, although I have not recorded their questions. They were a little, buried folk, which its astute rulers, especially that very clever man Kumpana, desired to build up again into a nation. This, I believe, was the true key to the secret of all their plottings.

When I got back I found men strengthening the roof of my house and others digging a trench round it, connecting it with a sluice or water-course not far away, which showed me what they expected in the way of a storm. I went indoors and tried to take a nap, but could not because of curious noises that I was unable to explain and felt too languid to investigate.

Towards sunset Kumpana came to see me. Although I received him somewhat coldly he was very polite. Having inspected the arrangements for the protection of the house, he apologized for having sneered at me on the previous

day, saying that he did it for a reason and not because he believed that I was a coward or had taken pay for which I did not intend to give consideration. This reason, he explained frankly, was that he knew I should get angry and promise to stop with them till the end of the war, and that having once given my word I should not break it.

I sat amazed at his cunning, which showed so deep a knowledge of human nature and such insight into my character, but I really was too hot to argue with him. Then, leaving the subject quickly, he begged me not to go out, as the storm might begin at any minute, and also for another cause.

"You are wondering what the strange sounds you hear may mean," he said. "Come up to the roof of the house and I will show you."

As I have said I had heard such sounds, which I thought were like to those of the galloping of herds of cattle, mixed with grunts and bellowings. When I reached the roof I saw whence they came. On either side of the town enormous numbers of every kind of game were rushing towards the forest, doubtless to shelter there from the approaching tempest. There were elands, hartebeest, gnus, sable-antelope, oryx, buffaloes, quaggas, and a host of smaller animals, all possessed by fear and all galloping towards the trees.

"These beasts understand what is coming," said Kumpana, "and are mad with terror. They will not hurt us Dabanda because they know us, and, as you have seen, we have power over them; but if they smelt you, a stranger, they would toss and trample you."

I admitted that it was very probable, and stood a while staring at this, the strangest sight, perhaps, that I have seen in all my experience as a hunter. Presently I turned to descend, but Kumpana bade me wait a while if I would see something still more strange.

As he spoke I heard a sound which I could not mistake: that of an elephant trumpeting shrilly.

"I thought you told me that all the elephants had been driven out of Mone-land," I said, astonished.

"So I did, Lord," answered Kumpana, "but it seems that they have come back again, flying before the great storm or earthquakes for shelter to the country where some of them were bred generations ago, before we sent them away."

As he spoke, emerging from a cloud of dust to the right of the town there appeared an enormous bull elephant running rapidly, and behind it many others. I knew the beast at once by its size, the grey markings on its trunk and forehead, and certain peculiarities of its huge tusks. It was the king-elephant with which we had experienced so curious an adventure upon the mound in the midst of the plain that Kaneke had called the gathering-place of elephants; the very beast which we had seen being greeted by the countless company of its fellows, which, too, with them, had afterwards pursued us back to our camp. Its appearance here was so marvellous, so utterly unexpected even in that eerie land of strange happenings, that really I turned quite faint. As for Hans, who was beside me, he sank down in a heap, muttering:

"Allemagter! Baas, here is that ugly old devil which threw Little Holes and Jerry into the pool and nearly blew my stomach out. He has come after us, Baas, and all is finished."

"Not yet," I answered as quietly as I could. "Also perhaps he has come after someone else."

Then I turned and watched the majestic creature rush past the town, followed by a great number of others, between fifty and seventy, I should say; all of them, I noted, mature bulls, for not a cow or a half-grown beast could I see among them.

Kumpana seemed to understand my wonder at this circumstance and without its being explained to him, for he said:

"These elephants are the bulls that were bred in this country long years ago in our fathers' days, and have now returned to their home. The cows and all their progeny have gone elsewhere, and indeed we did not need them."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked sharply, but he pretended not to hear me, or at any rate he made no answer.

When the herd of elephants had thundered past and, following all the other creatures, had vanished into the forest, we descended from the roof into the house, where Kumpana began to say farewell, cautioning me not to leave its shelter until the coming storm was over.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Where is the white lord, your new Chief?"

"In his own place where he must stay, Macumazahn," he answered.

"I perceive that you wish to separate us," I said again.

"Perhaps for a while, Macumazahn, for the good of both of you. You, for your part, wish to separate him from us which, though it is natural enough, may not be. The white lord has sworn himself to the Dweller in the Lake and must abide with her and us. Should he try to break his oath, he would be slain; and should you tempt him to do so, you would be slain also. Therefore it is best that you should remain apart till this war is accomplished."

"Is it certain that there will be a war?" I asked, "and, if so, when?"

"Yes, Lord, I think there will be a war of men after that of heaven is finished," and he pointed towards the sky, "for Kaneke will surely strive to win back all that he has lost. In that war, Lord, you will be called upon to take your share, though perhaps it will not be such a one as you expect. When the time comes I will wait upon you, and now farewell, for the great storm is at hand and I must seek shelter while it rages."

When he had gone I talked to Hans about the arrival of the mysterious old elephant and its herd, which upset him very much, for he answered:

"I tell you, Baas, that these beasts are not elephants; they are men bewitched by the Dabanda wizards, and, Baas, there is something terrible going to happen in this accursed land."

As he spoke "something terrible" began to happen, for the dense air was filled with a moaning sound, the exact like of which I had never heard before, caused, I suppose, by wind that as yet we did not feel, stirring in the tops of the trees of the vast forest. It was as though all the misery in the wide world had gathered and was giving utterance to its pain and sorrows in prolonged, half-stifled groans.

"The ghosts are flying over us, Baas," began Hans, but he did not finish his sentence, for at that moment the solid ground began to heave beneath our feet. It heaved slowly in a sickening fashion that made my vitals writhe within me and threw to the floor articles from some rough shelves which Hans had made.

"Earthquake! Out you go before the roof comes down!" I exclaimed to Hans, quite unnecessary advice in his case, for he was already through the door-way. I followed, running across the little garden to the open space where there was nothing to fall upon us. Here I was brought to a standstill, for another prolonged heave threw me to the ground where I thought it safer to remain, praying that it would not open and swallow me.

"Look!" said Hans at my side, pointing to one of the two column-like towers whence the Dabanda astrologers observed the stars, or rather at what had been the tower, for as he spoke it bowed gracefully towards us, as did the forest trees, as though they were making an obeisance. Then down it fell with a crash—which, however, we could not hear because of the moaning sound that I have described.

The heaving ceased; that earthquake went by, and with it the moaning, which was succeeded by an intense and awful silence. It was now the hour of sunset and the air seemed to be alight with a red glow like to that of molten iron, though the sun itself could not be seen. This glow, in which everything appeared monstrous and distorted, suddenly broke up into great flakes of furious colour, which to my fancy resembled wide-winged and fantastic creatures, such as haunted the earth in the reptile age, only infinitely larger, flitting away into the darkness overhead.

These shapes departed on rainbow-tinted wings and the darkness fell, a palpable thing, a mass of solid night stretching from earth to heaven. A minute later this inky blackness ceased to be, for it was changed to fire. All space was filled with lightnings, not here and there only, but everywhere those lightnings blazed, and in the glare of them we could see for miles and miles. They seemed to be striking all about us. Thus I saw trees collapse and vanish in clouds of dust, and a great rock that lay not far off shatter to pieces. By common consent we rose and ran back to the house, and as we passed its door came the thunder.

I have listened to much thunder of the African brand during my roving life, but over it all that of Lake Mone can claim supremacy. Never have I heard its equal. Some thunder cracks, like a million rifle shots, some roars like the greatest guns, and some rolls and mutters. This did all three, and at once; moreover, the cliffs of the huge crater in which the Dabanda lived caused it to echo backwards and forwards, multiplying the volume of its sound. The general effect was fearsome and overwhelming; combined with that of simultaneous and continual lightnings it crushed the mind.

Through the tumult I was aware of Hans staring at me with a terrified countenance which the blue gleam of the flashes had turned livid, and heard him shouting out something about Judgment Day, a quite unnecessary reminder, as my own thoughts were already fixed upon that event, which almost I believed to be at hand. I do not know for how long we endured this awful demonstration of Nature at her worst, because I grew bewildered and could take no count of time, but at length the turmoil lessened somewhat and the flashes blazed at longer intervals. Then, just as I hoped that the storm was passing, the rain, or rather the water-spout, began. Seldom have I seen such rain; it fell in a sheet and with an incessant roar for hours.

Our house had stood the shakings of the earthquake, which still continued at intervals, because its walls were made of tree-trunks plastered over, and therefore being non-rigid, gave to the shock. But these had cracked the roof in two places, with the result, of course, that the water poured into the building, so that soon we were half flooded. Indeed had not the cement-like mixture, as yet not firmly set, which had been poured on to the roof that day to strengthen it, been driven into those cracks, and closed them, I think that we should have been washed out of the house. But luckily this happened and we only experienced great discomfort. Luckily, too, our beds stood upon a kind of raised platform, so that the water did not reach them and we were able to lie down, and after the earth-tremors ceased, at last to sleep.

When I woke daylight, of a sort, had come and it was raining less heavily. Throwing a skin rug over my head, I climbed to the roof, and beheld a scene of desolation. All the country was more or less under water, some of the houses of the town had been shaken down by the earthquake or washed away, and many of the forest trees were shattered by lightning.

The open place on which stood the stone platform was a lake, and the shelter which had been erected to protect the fire upon the altar was crushed or shaken flat, having as we learned afterwards, extinguished the fire, to the great consternation of the Dabanda people and especially of their priests. Moreover, although there was less rain falling

within the crater-ring, over the country beyond, as the sky there showed, it was pouring as heavily as ever. Also new thunderstorms were in progress far away.

For three days this miserable weather continued, marked by constantly recurring tempests beyond the borders of Mone-land, and a few more slight shocks of earthquake. During all this time Hans and I scarcely left the house, nor were we visited by anyone, except the women who waited on us and brought us food. With great courage these women stuck to their duty through everything, and from them we learned that all the people were terrified, for no such tempest was told of in their annals.

On the fourth morning old Kumpana appeared, looking as calm as ever. He told us that, so far as they could learn, no one had been killed in Mone-land which, as the crops had been harvested, had taken little harm. Reports reached them, however, that the Abanda who lived on the outer slopes of the mountains and plains beyond had suffered terribly. Some had been drowned by the torrents which rushed down the hillsides, and some crushed in their houses that, owing to their lack of timber, were largely built of stone, and therefore were overthrown by the earthquake. Also such crops as they had, which ripened later than those in Mone-land, were flattened and destroyed.

I remarked that all these misfortunes must have taken the heart out of them, with the result that they would probably give up the idea of making war, especially as they had now got all the rain they wanted.

"Not so," answered Kumpana, "for they need food of which they know there is plenty in our country and nowhere else. Tomorrow, Lord, we shall ask you to march with us to fight them."

"Where?" I inquired.

"I am not sure, Lord. The order that we have received is that we should march to the western pass. Doubtless when we come to it, other orders will reach us, telling us what we must do."

"Whose orders?" I asked, exasperated. "Those of your new Chief?"

"No, Lord, those of the Engoi which come to us through the air."

"Oh," I exclaimed, "do they? And does your Chief, the Wanderer, come with us to this battle?"

"No, Lord, he stays to guard the town. Now I must bid you farewell as there is much to do. Tomorrow, when it is time to march, I will send for you."

"Well, I'm blessed!" I said as the door closed behind him.

"No, Baas," said Hans, "not blessed; another word, Baas, which your reverend father would never let me speak. As he used to say, Baas, the world is full of wonders and it is nice to see as many of them as one can before we go to the place where there is nothing but fire, like there was here the other night when the storm burst. This will be a very funny war, Baas, in which the orders reach the generals through the air and they don't know what they are going to do until they get them. That war will be a fine thing to think about afterwards, Baas, when we are back in Durban or in the Place of Fires, whichever it may be."

"Stop your ugly mouth and listen," I said. "I mean to get out of this hole. We are going to march to the western pass; well, I shall run through it and desert."

"Yes, Baas, and leave the guns and everything else behind, and be killed by the Abanda on the other side, or lose our way and starve if we escape them. Well, it will be soon over, Baas, and we shan't have a long journey to make this time."

So he went on, talking sound enough sense in his silly, topsy-turvy idioms, but I paid no more heed to him.

So sick and tired was I of the whole business that I did not care what happened. I would just go as the wind took me, hoping that it would blow me out of Mone-land as soon as possible. If it were fated otherwise I could not help it and there was nothing more to be said.

That day I made yet another effort to see Arkle, but when we had tramped through the mud to the Chief's house, it was only to find it guarded by soldiers, who politely turned us back. Then understanding that a wall had been built between him and me which I could not climb, I returned and wrote up my diary. Those pages of smudged pencil, by help of which I indite this record, are before me now and their language is so lurid that it is difficult to believe they were written by a man as temperate in all things, and especially on paper, as myself.

That night some solemn ceremony took place on the altar platform, to which I was not asked and, I think, should not have attended if I had been. I believe that it had to do with the relighting of the fire, for from our roof we saw this blaze up suddenly. It was witnessed by a great number of people, Arkle among them, for Hans caught sight of him arrayed in Dabanda dress and escorted by priests with torches.

It distressed me to think of him playing the part of a high-priest among these uncanny other-world kind of folk, but like the rest, there it was and could not be helped.

The religious function, for I supposed it to be religious, was accompanied by much melancholy music and many songs, also by drum-beating, which I had not heard before. It went on for a long while and ended with a torchlight procession back to the town.

After we had breakfasted next morning, Kumpana arrived, accompanied by a guard of thirty spearmen, and remarked casually, just as though an evening party were concerned, that if we were ready, it was time to start to the

war. I replied in an airy fashion that, being impatient for battle, I had been waiting for him, for I wished to give him the impression that I was pawing the ground with eagerness, like the warhorse in the Book of Job.

He smiled and said he was glad to hear it and that he hoped I should remain in the same mind, adding that he knew I could run fast from the rate at which I entered Mone-land.

I reflected to myself that this would be nothing compared with the rate at which I should leave it, if I got the chance, but contented myself with inquiring who would look after our possessions while we were away. He replied that they would be removed to a hiding-place and well cared for; which left me wondering whether they would ever come out of it again.

So off we went, closely surrounded by the guard, two soldiers carrying our spare rifles, ammunition, and necessary kit. As we marched through the town where I saw women, but no men, repairing the damage done to the houses and gardens by the storm, a girl pushed through the soldiers and gave me a note. It was from Arkle and read:

My Dear Quatermain,

Don't misjudge me, as I fear you must. I cannot go with you. It is impossible, for reasons you would scarcely understand. Also if I could, my foot is not well enough yet. Whatever you see, do not be astonished, for these Dabanda are not as other people and play their own game, which is dark and difficult to follow. Above all, don't try to escape. It would only mean your death and that of Hans.

That was all, except his initials, and quite enough too, as I thought. Evidently Arkle was an eel in a trap, as Hans put it, or a bull in a net, a better simile in his case. Also he or some of his confounded councillors had guessed my desire to escape, for in this country a bird of the air seemed to carry the matter even faster than it does in others, and he warned me against it, having been told what the result would be. Well, the idea must be abandoned; from the first it was madness to think that such an attempt could succeed.

About three miles away at a village, or what remained of it after the storm, we met the "army", to give it Kumpana's imposing name. It consisted of some two hundred and fifty spearmen! I asked him where the rest of it was and he replied, with his odd little smile, that it did not exist, for all the other able-bodied men had been left to defend the town and the Chief. Then I asked him what strength the Abanda could put into the field. He replied that he was not sure, but he thought from ten to twelve thousand warriors, for they were a large people accustomed to the use of arms, and sometimes they warred with other tribes and, always conquering, absorbed those who were left of them.

Lastly I inquired in mild exasperation how he expected to fight ten thousand men with two hundred and fifty. He replied blandly that he did not know, being himself a councillor and seer, not a soldier, but that doubtless it would be done somehow according to the directions he might receive; adding, I presume in a sarcastic spirit, that my presence would be worth many regiments, because Kaneke and the Abanda were afraid of me and my white man's wisdom and weapons. Then I gave up, fearing lest more of such gibes should cause me to lose my temper and say things I might regret.

We marched on for the most of that day through the beautiful crater country where flooded rivulets—for it had no large streams, some of which we forded with difficulty—gave evidence of the great tempest, as did landslides on the slopes and lightning-shattered trees. But not one soul did we meet, although I saw a few cattle grazing, apparently unherded. The land seemed to be quite deserted, even by the game which I presumed was still hiding in the forest, and when I asked Kumpana where the people had gone, he said he did not know, but he supposed that they were in hiding fearing a return of the storm. Or perhaps, he added, as though by an after-thought, it was the Abanda that they feared, knowing that now they were under the command of Kaneke who might dare to enter the land.

At length in the afternoon we came to a village, to reach which we had to march round some deep clefts that, from their fresh appearance and great depth must, I saw, have been caused by the recent earthquakes. Here a few old men, and some women, also old, were engaged in cooking large quantities of food, evidently in preparation for our arrival.

We were now within five or six miles of the wall of cliff which surrounded the whole crater, although we could scarcely see this cliff, because the village lay in a hollow and for some time we had been passing through park-like country where tall trees grew so thickly that they cut off the view.

We ate of the food, which was excellent, and rested, because Kumpana told us that we should remain at this place until far on into the night, when we must march again, so as to reach the cliff by dawn. I asked what we were to do when we did reach it. Again he replied that he did not know; perhaps we should go through the pass and attack the Abanda, or perhaps we should wait for them to attack us, or perhaps we should retire. Then he hurried off before I could put more questions.

The last thing I saw as the sun set was the party of old men and women who had cooked the food tramping off eastwards with their bundles on their backs, which suggested that they did not mean to return. Then, in order that I might be fresh in the face of emergencies, I went to sleep, and so remained till about three on the following morning when Kumpana woke us and suggested that we should breakfast, as the army was about to start.

Having swallowed something, presently off we went, travelling by the light of the waning moon and the stars. It was so dark among those trees that had not a man led me by the hand I should not have been able to see where to go, but the gloom did not seem to incommode the Dabanda, a people who must have had the eyes of cats. On we travelled,

always uphill, for we were now climbing the slope of the cliff, till at length the sky grew grey with dawn. Then we halted, waiting for the sun.

Presently with startling suddenness it appeared over the eastern edge of the crater far away, its level beams striking upon the western cliffs, although the crater itself was still shrouded in mist and gloom. Or rather, immediately in front of us, they struck upon where the cliff should have been and showed us a strange and terrible sight, which caused a gasp of astonishment to burst from the lips of even those cold, silent men. For behold, it was riven from crest to foot by the shock of earthquake, and in place of the narrow pass a few yards wide, was a vast gulf that could not have measured less than a quarter of a mile across!

The great mass of the precipice was torn asunder and hurled, I suppose, down the outer slopes; at any rate there was but little debris in the cleft itself, which suggested that the earth-waves that did the damage must have rolled from within the crater outwards towards the plain. Why it should have concentrated its terrific strength and centre of disturbance upon this particular spot I cannot say who am ignorant of the ways of earthquakes, unless it was because here the wall of cliff was thinner and weaker than elsewhere; also it may have been destroyed in other sections of the gigantic ring of precipice upon which I never looked.

The result of the cataclysm, so far as the Dabanda and their country were concerned, was obvious. They were no longer protected by a mighty natural wall pierced only with a few narrow clefts that could be held by a handful of men, for there was now, as Hans remarked, a fine open road between them and the rest of Africa, on which an army could march in safety without breaking its ranks. Their seclusion was gone and their secret land lay open to the world.

Did Kumpana understand this and all it meant? I wondered as I gazed at his impassive face. More, did he know what had happened before we reached the place, and, if so, why did he come there with his beggarly little force? Was it with some subtle hidden object? I cannot tell, though in view of what happened afterwards I have my own opinion of the matter.

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## ALLAN RUNS AWAY

"If you intended to hold the pass with these, Kumpana," I said, pointing to the redoubtable two hundred and fifty, "now that it has grown so wide, that cannot be done."

"No, Lord," he answered, "it is not possible by strength alone; even charging cattle could sweep us away with their horns if there were enough of them."

"Then what do you mean to do, Kumpana? Return home again?"

"I cannot say, Lord. Let us go forward and look through the gap in the cliff, for then perhaps we shall learn what we must do. It may be that the Abanda, frightened by its fall, have run away, or that they are afraid to enter lest another earthquake should come out of Mone-land and swallow them up living."

"Perhaps," I answered, but to myself I thought that unless I were mistaken, it would take more than this to frighten the furious and desperate Kaneke.

Kumpana issued an order to his men who, with a kind of stolid indifference which suggested fatalism or a knowledge that they were protected by unseen forces, instantly marched forward towards the new pass.

"Baas," said Hans to me, "we are not captains here, but only 'luck- charms', so let us keep behind. I don't like the look of that place, Baas."

As usual there was practical wisdom in Hans' suggestion, for if there should happen to be an ambush, or anything of the sort, I did not see why we should be its first victims. So, taking my chance of again being sneered at by Kumpana, I kept well to the rear of the little column, among the carriers indeed.

Well, there WAS an ambush, in fact a first-class specimen of that stratagem of war. In one of Scott's poems I remember a description of how a highland hillside which seemed to be quite deserted, suddenly bristled with men springing up from behind every bush and fern-brake. Substituting rocks, of which thousands lay about in the newly opened pass, for bushes and bracken, the scene repeated itself in that Central African gorge.

Indeed, unless their Engoi had developed wonderful spiritual activity for their protection, I suppose that every Dabanda spears-man would have been killed, had not some donkey among their enemies made the mistake of blowing a horn before they had advanced into the mouth of the pass, thereby giving a premature signal to attack. At the sound of this horn the rocks became alive with Abanda warriors who rushed to the onslaught with a savage yell. Our heroes gave one look, then turned and bolted in a solid mass, I presume without waiting for orders. Or perhaps their orders were to bolt at this critical moment, which had been foreseen. Really I neither know nor care.

"Run, Baas," said Hans, wheeling round and giving me the example, and off I went back upon our spoor. Never a shot did I fire, or do anything except foot it as hard as I was able.

I think I have told how Kumpana remarked at the beginning of this expedition that he believed I was a good runner, which is, or was, true, for in those days I was very light and wiry with an excellent pair of lungs. Now I determined to show him that he had not over-estimated my powers. In fact, for quite a long way I led the field with Hans, who also knew how to step out when needful, immediately at my heels.

"Baas," puffed that worthy when we had done a mile or two down the slope, "if we did not lead these dogs to battle, at least we are leading them out of it."

So we were, but just then some of the most active of them got ahead of us.

Well, to cut a long story short, we ran all day, with short intervals for repose and refreshment. Looking back just as we entered the more densely wooded country where we had camped the night before, I saw that this strategical retreat was quite necessary, for at a distance followed the Abanda army by the hundred, or, unless my fears multiplied their number, by the thousand. But they could not run as we did, though once they made a spurt and pressed us hard. Or perhaps they feared lest they too were being led into an ambush and therefore advanced with caution, sending scouts ahead. At any rate, after this rush from which we escaped with difficulty, they fell back again, and when we reached Dabanda-town, which we did before evening, for we returned at about twice the rate of our outward journey, they were not in sight.

Some of the Council and a few others were waiting for us in the town. Evidently they knew we were coming, how I cannot say, but there they were with watchmen set upon the altar platform. Also most fortunately they had prepared food and native beer for the consumption of their retiring heroes. Good heavens! how we fell upon it, especially upon the drink, of which Hans swallowed so much that at last I was obliged to knock the pot out of his hand.

Whilst we were devouring this meal, with anxious eyes fixed upon the route we had followed, I realized the fact that except for the few people I have mentioned, the town was quite deserted; nobody could be seen.

"Where have they gone?" I said to Hans.

"Into the forest to join the spook-elephants, I expect, Baas," he replied, stuffing a lump of meat into his mouth, "and that is where we shall have to follow them."

So it was, for just then Kumpana arrived, quite calm but looking a little the worse for wear. Having congratulated me upon "the strength of my legs", he remarked that we must take refuge by the lake at once, and that as the forest was a difficult place in which to find one's way, "we should do well to keep close to him."

"Certainly," I replied, "and I hope that this time you, Kumpana, will keep close to us."

So we started, wearily enough, and without an opportunity being given to us to visit our house, as I wished to do. As we reached the first of the trees, looking back I saw the Abanda hordes running into the town, which was quite undefended. They did not stay to plunder or to burn it; they simply ran through it on our tracks. When they reached the stone platform, however, they stopped, and one of them, I think it was Kaneke himself, rushed up the steps followed by some others, and scattered the sacred fire, extinguishing it for the second time.

Kumpana, at my side, shuddered at the sight.

"He shall pay. Oh, certainly he shall pay!" he muttered, adding, "Come on, you fools, come on. The Engoi awaits you!"

Then we plunged into the thick of the forest and lost sight of them.

This happened while it was still afternoon, some time before night-fall, so that light of a sort befriended us until we were well into the wood. Just before the perennial gloom of the place, deepened by the advance of evening, turned to darkness, we reached a spot where few trees grew because of the swampy nature of the soil. Here, on the shore of a shallow lake formed by flood water, Kumpana announced that we must camp till the following morning, as so many men ignorant of its paths could not travel through the forest before the sun rose.

"What if the Abanda overtake us here?" I asked.

"They will not overtake us," he answered. "They dare not enter the trees until there is light, and then I think that only the boldest will come, because they know this place to be holy, one forbidden to them."

As I was too tired to inquire further about this or any other matter, I accepted the explanation and just lay down to sleep, hoping that Kumpana would not give us the slip for the second time. To tell the truth I was so exhausted after racing along all day in a hot climate, that I was ready to trust to luck, not caring much what happened.

On the whole I rested well, which is not always the case when one is over- weary with mental and physical exertion, and without suffering from any of the unpleasant experiences which had afflicted Hans and myself on our return from our visit to the lake. Once I did wake up, however; I think it was after midnight, for the moon, now in its last quarter, shone brightly overhead and was reflected in the flood-water. By its light I saw a long line of shadowy and gigantic forms marching between the trees upon the farther side of this water, and for a moment wondered what they were, or whether I was dreaming. Then I remembered the elephants that we had seen fleeing before the storm and earth- tremblings to refuge in this forest, where doubtless they still remained with the other wild beasts.

After this I went to sleep again, nor did I wake until the sun was up. We rose and ate of food that was given to us. Whether the soldiers carried it with them from the town, or whether it was brought to them during the night, I do not know, but both then and afterwards there was plenty for us all.

Our meal finished, Kumpana gave the order to march, and off we went, walking slowly round the stretch of flood-water which I have mentioned into the dense woodland beyond. While we crossed this patch of comparatively open ground, I observed that our numbers were now much diminished. We had entered the forest over two hundred and fifty strong. Now I could not count more than five and twenty men, the rest had vanished.

I asked Kumpana where they had gone.

"Oh," he answered, "this way and that to talk to the wild beasts, of which the wood is full after the storm, and tell them that we are friends whom they must not harm," a reply I thought so crazy that I did not continue the conversation.

When I discussed the matter with Hans, however, he took another view.

"They are spook-beasts, as I have told you before, Baas," he said, "especially the elephants. These wizards have command over them, as we have seen with our eyes, and doubtless have gone to order them out of our path, as Kumpana says. It is as well, Baas," he added meaningly, "seeing that we are without rifles."

"Have you not been able to find that man to whom I gave mine to carry?" I asked, colouring.

"No, Baas. He is not to be found; perhaps he is dead or perhaps he has stolen it, or hidden it away. Nor are those who carried the spare guns to be found."

"And where is yours?" I asked sharply.

"Baas," he answered in a dejected voice, "I threw it away. Yes, when I thought those Abanda were going to catch us, I threw it away that I might run the faster."

We looked at each other.

"Hans," I said, "do you remember that Tom and Jerry did this same thing when we were hunted by the elephants, and how I told them that this WE should never do, whereon they said that if they were not Christians they would hang themselves for very shame? And do you remember that only just before they died so bravely to save us, you taunted them about that business, bidding them throw away their guns again if they were too heavy to carry?"

"Yes, Baas, I have been thinking of it all night."

"And yet, Hans, we have done worse than they did, for they were only being hunted by beasts, while we fled from men, so that now when presently we may have to fight, we have no rifles."

"I know it all, Baas, and I am so ashamed that almost I could hang myself as Little Holes and Jerry wished to do."

"Then we ought to hang together, for what you did I did. At least I gave my rifle to a savage, knowing that very likely I should never see it again, so that we shall be defenceless before the enemy and these Dabanda will make a mock of me, the white man who has promised to serve them."

Here Hans became so deeply affected that I saw him draw the back of his hand over his flat little face to wipe away the tears of shame.

For a while we trudged on in silence, then he said in a broken voice:

"Baas, it was quite right of you to give your rifle to a black man to carry, as it is the custom of white masters to do, and if he stole it or was killed, it cannot be helped. But it is different with me. Baas, I am a yellow cur, but even curs can learn a lesson, as I have."

"What lesson, Hans?"

"That we shouldn't judge each other, Baas, as I did when I mocked Tom and Jerry, because you see we may always do the same things or worse ones. Baas, if ever we get back to Zanzibar I will give all the money I earn upon this journey to Jerry's daughter, who is in a school; yes, and my share of that which Kaneke gave you, and not spend one shilling upon gin or new clothes."

"That shows a good spirit," I said, "but what should I do?"

Now all this requires a little explanation. When writing about our flight before the Abanda hordes, I was ashamed to tell what after all I have been obliged to record because of this talk between Hans and myself, and what happened afterwards. As I have said, there was a time during that flight when the Abanda, rushing forward, pressed us very hard, and because of the heavy rifles and ammunition which we carried, Hans and I were dropping behind and likely to be speared. Then it was that I gave my gun and cartridges to a long-legged soldier who bore nothing except his spear, and Hans, seeing me do so, bettered my bad example by throwing his away, which enabled us to put on the pace and again draw out of danger.

It may be argued that we were justified by the circumstances, and, so far as Hans was concerned, doubtless this is true. But I was not justified, I, the white man to whom all these people looked up as one braver and superior to themselves, and at whom now doubtless they jeered as Hans had done at Tom and Jerry. There is nothing more to say, except that I look upon this incident as one of the greatest humiliations of my career. Not only to Hans did it teach a lesson as to loose and easy criticism of others, for from it I learned one which I shall never forget throughout my life.

For most of that day, stopping now and again at the command of Kumpana, we marched on slowly and with caution through the forest, of which the dense gloom did not tend to raise our spirits, that were already low enough. From time to time I caught sight of elephants and other wild game, which stared at us as we went by, but neither ran away nor attempted to attack. It was as though they knew these Dabanda, to whom they were taboo, to be their friends. Indeed, during that march I grew quite convinced that Kumpana's story as to the mastery of his people over the beasts of the field was true, for, as will be seen, they were savage enough where others were concerned, whom, I suppose, they recognized to be different by their smell. Of course, as I have said, Hans had another explanation, for he was, and always remained, convinced that these animals had the spirits of men in them, which is absurd.

At length towards evening we emerged from the forest and saw the great lake in front of us. Also we saw that on its shores were gathered several hundreds of the Dabanda, a sight that gladdened my eyes, and in the midst of them Arkle himself, easy to recognize by his great height and size and red beard, although he wore Dabanda dress and carried a long spear.

Presently we were among them and I was shaking Arkle by the hand.

"I see that you look depressed," he said, "and I fear that you have had a bad time."

"Very bad," I answered. "I have run from enemies faster than ever I ran before, and I have lost my arms, which a soldier should not do—they were heavy to carry, you see. Nor indeed did I want to shoot people with whom I had no quarrel."

"I don't wonder you threw them away, Quatermain. I did the same when the Abanda hunted me. I had rather live without a rifle than stick to it and die."

"The point could be argued," I answered, "but there isn't time. Tell me, what the devil does all this play-acting mean? Why was I dragged out with two hundred and fifty men to fight thousands of Abanda, which, of course, was impossible?"

"I am not sure. You see, Quatermain, I am only a figurehead in this country, and figureheads are not told everything. But if you ask me, I believe you were sent to be a bait. You see, Kaneke thinks you a very great man, and it seems he had announced that if he could capture you, or, failing this, if he could kill you, the Abandas must win, he would get all he wanted—you know what it is—and they would grow into a mighty people, never lacking rain or

anything else. Also the Dabanda would become their slaves and the power and wisdom of the Engoi would go with them ever more."

"Still I don't understand why we went out to fight," I said, "without the ghost of a chance of winning, or doing anything except run away."

"Because you were meant to run away, Quatermain, in order that you might draw the Abanda after you. Unless you had run they would not have followed, for not even Kaneke could make them enter the Land of the Holy Lake. You see the ruse has succeeded, for presently they will be here. Don't look at me angrily, for on my honour I had nothing to do with the business."

"I should hope not!" I exclaimed. "For if I thought you could play such a trick upon a white man who has done his best to help you, I would never speak to you again. Besides, what is the object of it all? Why have the Abanda been tempted to take possession of this country, from which you will never be able to drive them out again?"

"I cannot tell you," he answered in a low voice, "but I think in order that their fighting men may be destroyed. Quatermain, I believe that something terrible awaits those unfortunate people, but I swear to you that I do not know what it is; those priests will not tell me."

At this moment Hans nudged me.

"Look," he said, pointing towards the edge of the forest.

I did so and perceived a great body of men, a thousand or more of them, emerging from its shadows, drawn up in companies. The Abanda were upon us with Kaneke at the head of them. Arkle saw them also, for I heard him utter an exclamation.

"Well," I said, "we can't run away this time, so I suppose that we must fight until we are killed. Have you your rifle? If so, give it me and I will shoot that Kaneke."

"It has been taken from me," he answered, shaking his head. "When I protested they told me that the white man's weapons were unlawful for me, and would not be needed."

As he spoke a number of Dabanda priests ran up and surrounded Arkle, so that for the time I saw no more of him. Confusion ensued while Kumpana and other officers tried to marshal their men into a double rank. Hans and I found ourselves pushed into a place in the centre of the first line. There we stood, unarmed, except for our revolvers and a few cartridges, which fortunately we had preserved. Arkle, still surrounded by priests and others, was kept at the back of the second rank in such a position and with such precautions as to give me the idea that the business of this force was to act as a bodyguard and safeguard him, rather than to fight the Abanda. Yet it seemed that fight it must, for the lake, into which retreat was impossible, was behind it and the enemy was in front.

The Abanda marched on. Scrutinizing their faces as they came, it struck me that there was something the matter with these men. Of course they were tired, which was not strange, seeing that after enduring the terror of the earthquake and the storm, they had pursued us all the way from their own boundary and through the forest. But their aspect suggested more than weariness; terror was written on their faces. Why? I wondered; since although they must have left most of their army behind, perhaps in occupation of Dabanda- town, they still outnumbered our force by three or four to one.

Had they perhaps met with strange adventures in the forest, as once Hans and I had done? Or were they overcome by a sense of their sacrilege in violating the forbidden land, upon whose soil for generations none of them had set a foot, except their leader, the renegade Kaneke, and were fearful of some supernatural vengeance? I could not tell, but certainly they had a frightened air, very different from that of the bold fellows whom we had met hunting Arkle and who had tried to cut us off from the mountain pass.

Still they advanced in good order, as I supposed to attack and make an end of us. Yet this was not so, for at a little distance they formed themselves into three sides of a square and halted. Now, while I marvelled what was going to happen (had I been in command of the Dabanda I should have rushed at them), Kaneke emerged from their ranks and walked to within fifty paces of us, which he was quite safe in doing, for the Dabanda had no bows, being armed only with long and heavy spears that could not be thrown.

"Men of the Dabanda," he cried in his big voice, "though you ran fast, I have caught you at length, and with nothing but water behind you, you are in my power, for I see that the white man, Macumazahn, has lost the weapon with which he is so skilled." (Here I was minded to see whether I could not reach him with a pistol shot, but remembering that the quarrel was none of mine and that I had very few cartridges, I refrained from trying.)

"Yet, men of the Dabanda," went on Kaneke, "I do not wish to kill you among whom I was bred and who I hope will live on to be my subjects. I do not even wish to kill Macumazahn and his servant, because once they saved me from murderers, and we have been companions upon a long journey. There is only one whom I will kill, and that is the white thief, whom I see skulking yonder behind your lines, who has stolen my place and heritage, and would steal the Shadow, my appointed wife. Therefore give him up to me that I may make an end of him before your faces and submit yourselves to me, who will harm no other man among you; no, not even that cunning jackal, Kumpana."

Now Kumpana stepped forward and said clearly but quietly:

"Cease from your boastful talk, Kaneke, wizard and traitor, who sold your birthright to save your life, you who did violence to the Engoi before her altar, you who but yesterday scattered the holy fire of the altar and stamped it out, you who are accursed. Hear me, men of the Abanda," he went on, raising his voice, "what is the quarrel with us? You asked for rain. Has not rain been sent to you in plenty? Do not your lands run with water? Give us this man who has beguiled you and depart in peace—or keep him and be destroyed.

"Has not the ancient prophecy been handed down to you by your fathers, that the very rocks will hurl themselves upon those of your people who dare to set foot within the forest and to look upon the holy lake, and that the wild beasts will rend them, and that those who escape the rocks and the beasts will be seized with madness? And have not the rocks already hurled themselves upon you, killing many who dwelt beneath them? Will you wait till all the curse fulfils itself, or will you give up this man and depart in peace unharmed? Answer while you may, for by sunset it will be too late."

Now I could see that the Abanda soldiers were much disturbed. They whispered one to another, and some of their captains began to consult together. How it would have ended I do not know, though I doubt whether these Abanda, who seemed to me to be brave and loyal savages, would have consented to surrender the man whom they had chosen as their general in the attempt to possess themselves of Dabanda-land, with its material riches and the boon of what they believed to be an especial spiritual protection. This matter, however, remained undecided, for Kaneke, who doubtless feared the worst, cried out:

"Men of the Abanda, am I not the appointed Shield of the Shadow, a greater wizard than yonder low-born Kumpana, the son of a slave? When the mountain heaved did I not open a roadway through it, making the two lands one, and as for the beasts, are they not also at my command? If you doubt it, ask the white lord, Watcher-by-Night, and the yellow man, his servant, to whom I showed my power over them. And remember that but now I have led you unharmed through a host of elephants that fled at my word. Ho! you white thief"—and he pointed at Arkle with his spear—"I have an offer to make to you. If you are not a coward, come out and fight me man to man, and let the conqueror take the Shadow. Come out and fight me, I say! Or go tell the Shadow that he who woos her and has come from far to win her, is but a coward with a heart whiter than his face."

Arkle heard him; with a roar of rage he shook off the priests who held him and charged through our lines straight at Kaneke. To my horror I saw as he passed me that he was quite unarmed, for either he had dropped his spear or it had been taken from him by the priests; yes, he was attacking the man with nothing but his naked hands.

"Let none come between us!" he shouted as he went.

Kaneke lifted his spear to pierce him, but somehow Arkle avoided the thrust and, rushing in, gripped its haft and snapped it like a twig, so that the broad blade fell between them. Then he threw his arms round Kaneke and they wrestled. They were mighty men, both of them, but once that spear was gone I had little doubt of the issue. Still, the end came sooner than I expected, for Arkle seemed to lift Kaneke from his feet and dash him to the ground, where he lay half stunned. Then, before the Abanda could come to the help of their captain, he picked him up as though he were a child, carried him to the ranks of the Dabanda and through them, and cast him down at the feet of the priests!

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## THE BRIDAL AND THE CURSE

The torrential rains which fell during the storm had reached the lake by many streams, with the result that its waters had enlarged themselves. The old shore-line, fringed with tall reeds, where I had stood on my first visit, was quite a hundred yards away. Thus the reeds, or rather the upper halves of them, now stood like a thicket at that distance from the shore, cutting off the view from the stretch of water that was beyond but near to them, while the rest of the lake and the distant island were turned to a dazzle of gold by the fierce rays of the sinking sun.

Out of these reeds, at the exact moment when Arkle cast down the great form of Kaneke before the priests, suddenly emerged a large canoe, or rather a barge, for its stern was square. It was paddled by white-robed women, quite thirty of them, I should say, seated upon either side of the craft, which had a gangway running down its centre. Upon the broad poop was a curious carved seat, large enough, I noted, to accommodate two persons, and in the centre of this seat sat a woman whom I knew must be she who was called the Engoi, or Shadow, a tall and beautiful young woman whose gauzy robes glittered in the sunlight as though they were sewn with gold and gems, which perhaps they were. She wore a high head-dress with wings, not unlike to those of a viking's helm, from which, half hiding her face, flowed down a veil spangled with stars.

On came the boat, so gently that one could not hear the paddles' dip, and as its prow touched the shore, priests sprang forward and held it fast. The regal-looking woman rose to her feet, while there went up a great shout of:

"ENGOI! ENGOI!"

Clothed, as it were, with burning light, she stood above us on the high poop, gazing at the prostrate form of Kaneke, at the man who had cast him there, at the tall, white-robed, large-eyed Dabanda spearsmen, and at the Abanda warriors beyond. Then she spoke in a clear, flute-like voice, which in that silence could be heard by all.

"I, the Treasure of the Lake, greet you, servants of the Engoi; I greet you, White Lord from far away" (this was addressed to Arkle; of me she took no notice). "I greet you all. Tell me, O Kumpana, Father of my Council, what host is this that threatens you with spears?"

"That of the Abanda, O Engoi, who, breaking the oath sworn by their forefathers and braving the curse, have dared to enter the holy land of Mone to slay us and to give you, the divine Shadow, to be the wife of this dog." Here he pointed to Kaneke, who, I noted, had recovered his senses, for he raised himself upon his arm and listened.

"Take him and judge him, the accursed, according to your law," she said, "for on him I will never look again." Then added in louder tones that trembled with cold anger: "Men of the Abanda, the curse with which Kaneke is cursed, clings to you also and the mercy that you would not take departs from you. BEGONE TO THE BEASTS FOR JUDGMENT AND BECOME AS BEASTS, till Heaven lifts its wrath from off you and creep to my feet as slaves to pray pardon for your sins."

The Abanda heard. They stared at the priestess clothed with light, they spoke together, as I supposed making ready to attack us. But it was not so, for, of a sudden, panic seemed to seize them. I saw it pass from face to face, I saw them tremble and cover their eyes with their hands. Then without a word they turned and ran back to the shelter of the forest, an army that had become a terror-stricken mob.

They were gone, the thunder of a thousand feet died away into silence; not one of them could be seen; they were lost among the darksome trees.

The beautiful maiden called Shadow, whose eyes had been fixed upon the water, lifted her head and looked at Arkle, saying softly:

"White Lord from afar, our dream is fulfilled and once more we meet, as was foretold, and I am yours and you are mine. Yet if you would depart with your companion"—here for the first time she glanced at me—"still the road lies open. Go, then, if it pleases you; only if you go, learn that henceforth for this life and all that are to come we separate for ever. Learn, too, that if you stay, there is no power in heaven or in earth that shall part us while time endures and the star we follow shines in the sky. Choose, then, and have done."

Arkle stared at the ground, like to one who is lost in doubt. Then he lifted his eyes and met hers that were fixed upon him, till the radiance which shone upon her face seemed to pass to his, and I knew that she had conquered. He turned and spoke to me, saying:

"Farewell, my friend whom I shall see no more. I know you believe me mad, even wicked perhaps, and so I am according to your judgment and that of the world we know. Yet my heart tells me that love can do no wrong and that in my madness is the truest wisdom, for yonder stands my destiny, she whom I was born to win, she who was lost and is found again. Farewell once more, and think of me at times as we shall of you, until perchance elsewhere"—and he pointed upwards—"we meet again, and you too understand all that I cannot speak."

He took my hand and pressed it, then very slowly stepped on to the prow of the boat, and passing down its length between the two lines of women who sat like statues, came to her who stood upon its poop. As he came she opened her arms and received him in her arms, and there they kissed before us all. For thus was the shadow wed in the presence of her people.

Side by side they sat themselves upon the throne-like seat. The priests thrust the boat out into the water, the paddlers turned its prow towards the reeds and the island that lay beyond them, and the sun sank.

The sun sank, the waters of the holy lake grew dark, and these strange travellers departed into gloom. Once more only did I see them after they had passed through the reeds out on to the darkened bosom of the lake. Some cloud above caught the last rays of the sun that had vanished behind the crater cliffs, and reflected them in a shaft of light on to the water and the boat that floated there, turning those it bore to shapes of glory. Then the ray passed and the shadows hid them.

"That's a good omen for the Red Baas and the pretty spook-lady who has carried him off," remarked Hans reflectively, "for you see after the sun seemed to be dead, it came to life again to wish them luck, Baas."

"I hope so," I replied, turning my back upon that melancholy lake and not in the best of spirits. Arkle at least had won the lady whom he so passionately desired, but I, who had won nothing and nobody, felt very much alone. My part in all this business had been to do everybody's dirty work—that of White-Mouse, of Kaneke, of Arkle, and of Kumpana—and to tell the truth I did not like it. No one really enjoys the humble office of a tool which is thrown aside when done with.

That night we camped by the lake, and I have seldom passed one that was more disturbed. From its solemn and mysterious depths came the mournful cries of wildfowl and the drear sighing of the wind among the reeds. But these were as nothing compared with the sounds which proceeded from the forest. Fierce trumpeting of infuriated elephants, bellowing of other beasts, and, worst of all, what sounded like the screams of terrified and tortured men, which were so loud and persistent that if I had known where he was sleeping I would have gone to Kumpana and asked their cause. But I did not know and probably if I had found him he would have told me nothing. At length, too, these noises ceased, and I got some rest.

Before sunrise, when the sky grew grey and the night mist still hid the face of the lonesome lake, Kumpana appeared, bringing us some food and saying that we must eat it as we marched, because it was time to be gone. So off we went, and entered that hateful forest just as the sun rose. Before I had gone three hundred paces between the trees, I stumbled over something soft and, looking down, to my horror discovered that it was the mutilated body of an Abanda warrior, who from various signs I knew must have been killed by an elephant.

"See here, Hans!" I said, pointing to the dreadful thing.

"I have seen, Baas," he answered, "and there are plenty more of them about. Didn't you hear those spook elephants hunting them last night as the Dabanda wizards brought them here to do?"

"I heard something," I answered faintly, remembering as I spoke the words of Shadow when she told the Abanda "to begone to the beasts for judgment"! Great God, this was the judgment!

Hans was quite right. There were plenty more of the poor creatures lying about, indeed I imagine that some hundreds of them must have been killed. What an end! To be hunted in the darkness of night and when caught, stamped flat or torn to pieces by these maddened animals which probably tracked them by their scent. If this were the fate of his tools, what, I wondered, was that reserved for Kaneke, who by the way, as I supposed, had been taken on ahead of us for I saw nothing of him?

Until then I had merely disliked the Dabanda, now I hated them and desired nothing so much as to get out of this land of cruelty and African witchcraft. For although I had tried to find other explanations, such as the fact that all game was taboo to them, what but witchcraft or some force which we white men do not understand, could account for the dominion of these people over wild animals? It may be thought that the attack upon these Abanda by the elephants was an accident resulting from their breaking into the herd in their terrified retreat after they fled from the presence of one whom they believed to be almost a goddess. But this could scarcely be so seeing that when, following on our footsteps, the Abanda passed through the forest to the lake, the elephants must have been all round them, for as I have said, I saw the great beasts watching us from between the trees.

Why, then, were they not attacked upon this outward journey? I can only suggest one explanation. At that time Kaneke was with them whom the beasts knew and obeyed, as they did other leaders of his tribe, for had he not shown his power over these very elephants long before we entered Dabanda-land? When the Abanda soldiers were deprived of his protection the case was different, for then they were fallen upon, trampled and torn to pieces as Hans and I should have been if we had been alone.

As a matter of fact, however, we should have had nothing to fear on this return journey, for we never saw these beasts again. Indeed, I heard afterwards that when they had wreaked vengeance on the Abanda, led by the ancient bull, they marched solemnly out of the forest and across the crater-land to the pass through which they had appeared. What became of them I do not know, but I suppose that they departed back to their own haunts where we had first met them.

After sundry halts, of which I was not told the reason, towards evening we emerged from that awful forest, only to be confronted with more terrors. On the open space which surrounded the altar platform and in the streets of the town beyond, hundreds of men of the Abanda army were running to and fro, some with torn robes and some stark naked, shrieking and staring about them with eyes that were full of fear. A mob of raving maniacs who seemed hardly human, they foamed at the mouth, they rolled upon the ground, they tore their hair and bit each other's flesh.

"They are all mad, Baas," said Hans, getting behind me, for as is common with African natives, he had a great horror of the insane and supposed them to be inspired by heaven. "Don't touch them, Baas, or we shall go mad too."

His exhortation was needless, for my one desire was to get as far as possible from the hideous sight of these poor creatures. What could have brought them to such a pass, I marvelled, as I do today. I can only suppose that when the survivors of the regiments which had followed us to the lake arrived among the army that awaited them at the town, they communicated to their brothers the terror which had driven them crazy.

Or perhaps now that Kaneke had disappeared, the superstitions he had kept in check broke out among them with a force so irresistible that they lost their minds, remembering the ancient curse which was said to overtake any of their people who set foot in the land of Lake Mone, whence they had been driven in past ages. I cannot tell, but certainly they had "become as beasts", as the priestess Shadow foretold. It was shocking, it was terrible, and thankful indeed was I when, on catching sight of us, with howls and lamentations they drew together and fled away, I suppose back to their own land.

Soon they were gone into the gathering darkness, thousands of them, and quiet fell upon the town, which was quite unharmed. Hans and I made our way to our own house where we found a lamp lit and food prepared, I presume by the women who waited upon us, who all this while had remained faithfully at their post. The first thing that we saw were our lost rifles and ammunition, carefully laid upon our beds.

"Allemagter!" exclaimed Hans, pointing first to the lamp and food next to the rifles. "We have met many strange peoples in our journeys, Baas, but never any like these. But, Baas, they are not men and women, they are witches and wizards, every one of them, whose master is the devil, as those Abanda will think when they get their minds again."

Then, quite overcome, he sank on to a stool and began to devour his meal in silence. I, too, collapsed; no other word describes my state, brought about by physical fatigue and mental astonishment. At that moment I was almost inclined to agree with Hans, though now of course I know that these events which at the time seemed so strange were quite susceptible of a natural interpretation. It was not wonderful that the Abanda soldier should have been attacked in the forest by a herd of elephants whose tempers were upset by storm and earthquake, or that the survivors of them and their fellows should have been crazed by the experience, added to the effect of their inherited superstitions.

Nor was it wonderful that an ardent man like Arkle should have succumbed to the charm of a beautiful priestess, whose personal attractions were enhanced by the mystery with which she was surrounded, though I admit that I do not understand the tale of his previous telepathic intercourse with her, if it may be so described. Very possibly, however, this existed only in his imagination, and the real romance began, on his part at any rate, when he first saw her upon the borders of the lake.

Still, the cumulative effect of so many eerie happenings, reinforced by the legends with which my ears were filled, and the constant ceremonies and experiences of an abnormal and unwholesome nature in which I had been forced to take a part, together with the vanishing away of Arkle into what I understood to be a kind of Eastern houri paradise, was crushing; at least this was its effect upon a tired and puzzled man.

So I went to bed with an attack of fever and low spirits that kept me there for a week, after which I took another week to recover my strength.

During all this time very little happened, for Hans reported that everything in the town went on as it used to do before the great storm. The people were cultivating their gardens; the sacred fire was re-lit upon the altar and the priests had rebuilt their fallen observation tower, whence they watched the stars nightly as of old. To judge from the aspect of the people, indeed one might have thought that nothing unusual had occurred, or at any rate that it was quite forgotten.

Now, being filled with nervous apprehensions and extremely anxious to escape from this country as soon as I was well enough to face the journey, I tried several times to get into touch with Kumpana, the only man in the place who seemed to have any real authority, but was always told that he was absent.

At length he came, bland and smiling as ever, and apologized for not having done so before, "For then," he added, "I, who am a doctor, should have been able to cure you more quickly."

I replied that it did not matter, as I was now quite recovered who never suffered from serious illness. Then I asked him the news.

"There is little, Lord," he answered. "From the lake we hear that the Engoi and her husband, the Shield of the Shadow, are well and most happy. The Abanda, now that they have reached their own land and found their wits again—for only about two hundred of them were killed by the elephants—are very humble and have sent to make their submission, promising henceforth to be our faithful servants and to live with us as one people."

"So you have got what you want," I said.

"Yes, Lord, for now we shall become a great tribe, a nation, indeed, as once we were hundreds of years ago, because these Abanda are brave fighting men and their women have many children, whereas ours bear few or none at all. Never again will they threaten us, but, directed by our wisdom, will do all that we command."

"Which was your object throughout, I suppose, Kumpana?"

"Yes, Lord, it was our object, which explains much that you have never been able to understand, amongst other things, why you were brought to Mone- land. Without you Kaneke could not have been saved from the Arabs, and the White Lord, Shield of the Shadow, could not have been saved from the Abanda after his madness had caused him to be cast out of our country, which even I was unable to prevent."

"But why did you want Kaneke back, Kumpana, seeing that at once you took away his chieftainship and made him an outlaw?"

"Because, amongst other reasons, if he had not returned and been driven out again, he would not have fled to the Abanda and led them to attack us, as we wished that he should do, knowing the fate that would overtake them. Even then I do not think that the Abanda, who fear the Engoi and her servants, would have followed him, had they not seen you, the great white lord whose fame is everywhere, running before them like a hunted jackal, which was why we took you with us to the pass, telling you that it was to fight them."

Now controlling my wrath as best I could, for it was useless to argue with Kumpana about this disgraceful episode of my career, I said with sarcasm:

"So you foresaw all these things, Kumpana, and arranged accordingly?"

"Of course, Lord, for we have that gift," he replied in the mild, protesting voice of one who humours an ignorant fool.

This amazing lie took away my breath, but again feeling it useless to argue, I changed the subject, by asking:

"And why did you bring him who is now her husband here to marry the Shadow, instead of giving her to Kaneke, to whom she was promised, or to some other man of your people?"

"Because, Lord, our men are—" and he used an Arabic word which I can only translate by the English phrase 'played out'. "The race has grown too ancient and too interbred. Therefore it was necessary that she who is now the Engoi upon earth should wed one of a different stock who has knowledge of the arts and laws of the great white races. For, Lord, from this marriage will spring a woman, the Engoi to be, who will be very great of heart. It is she," he went on with a ring of triumph in his voice, "who will once more make the Dabanda mighty among the peoples of Africa, not the lady who now rules over us, or the white wanderer who is her spouse."

"So that is another of your prophecies, Kumpana?"

"Yes, Lord, and one which most certainly will be fulfilled," he answered in the same triumphant tone. Then, as though the matter were one which he declined to discuss, he said in his ordinary voice:

"This is the night of full moon, and there is a ceremony before the altar which we pray you to attend. For tomorrow doubtless you will wish to bid us farewell as it has been arranged that you should do."

"I am glad to hear that," I exclaimed, "but I don't want to be present at any more of your ceremonies."

"Yet, Lord," he answered with his queer little smile, "I am sure you will do what we wish, now, as always before."

"Which means that I must come."

"Oh, Lord, I never said so. Still I am certain that you will come and shall send an escort to attend upon you, that you may fear no harm."

Then he rose and bowed himself out.

Not until he was gone did I remember that I had never asked him what had become of Kaneke.

"Baas," said Hans, "I always thought you clever in your way, but this Kumpana is much cleverer than you, or even than I am, because you see in the end he always makes us do, not what we want but what he wants, and then laughs at us about it afterwards. We shall have to go to that fetish business tonight, because if we won't walk, we shall be carried there, quite nicely, of course, by the men he is sending to protect us. I wonder what we shall see, Baas."

"How do I know?" I snapped, for the gibes of Hans irritated me. "Perhaps the lady Shadow and her husband will come to visit us."

"I don't think so, Baas. I think that they are sitting holding each other's hands and making faces at each other, and saying silly things about the moon. If it were six months later when they want to hold other people's hands and to look into new faces and have forgotten all about the moon, then they would come, Baas, but not now. But perhaps Kaneke will visit us, unless he is dead, which we haven't heard, and I'd much rather see him, Baas, than two people who keep saying 'Sweetie-Sweet' and 'there's no one else in the world, Pretty'."

"Would you, you ugly little sinner?" I replied, and walked away.

As it happened, Hans, who could smell out the truth like any witch- doctor, had made no mistake, for when, conducted by our promised escort, a strong one by the way, we reached the altar platform that night, it was to find that the centre of interest proved to be Kaneke and no one else, and that for the second time it was our lot to see him tried for his life. What is more, even among that undemonstrative people, made apathetic by the passage of many ages of plenty, and by iron priestly rule, the event excited keen and universal interest.

This might be seen from the fact that every creature from the town who could walk or be carried, was gathered upon the marketplace beneath the platform, and with them a great number of people from the villages and farms

beyond its borders. The priests too were present in force; the astrologers watched the heavens from their towers and shouted out the messages of the stars; a choir hidden behind the altar sang solemn chants at intervals; and the sacred fire blazed like a signal beacon upon a mountain, as though to make up for the fact that very recently it had twice been extinguished. Indeed it was a veritable furnace.

In front of it, its fierce light playing on him, stood Kaneke, bound and closely guarded, while on either side sat the white-robed Council of the Shadow, whose office seemed to be that of judge or jury, or both. Near to them, so placed that he could be heard from the audience below as well as by all upon the platform, stood Kumpana, who in this drama played the part of the prosecuting counsel.

When I arrived with Hans and had been given a seat not far from Kumpana and facing Kaneke, the proceedings began. I need not detail them further than to say that they consisted of a recitation of all his crimes, starting with a long account of the act of sacrilege he had committed in his youth against a former Engoi, that apparently was much worse than he had intimated to me, and had resulted in his banishment or flight, and going on to those offences with which I had some acquaintance.

At length the tale was finished, and Kaneke was called upon to answer. This he did with a certain dignity, pleading that his judges had no jurisdiction over him, that he was their lawful chief and could not be tried by any court. The crimes alleged against him he made no attempt to deny or explain, perhaps because they were too flagrant to admit of defence.

When he had finished speaking, Kumpana said to the Council and the priests:

“What say you?”

Whereupon they answered all together:

“We say that he is guilty!” and the people gathered in the market-place beneath echoed the words in a roar of sounds.

Then Kumpana cried aloud to the astrologers upon their towers, asking:

“What reward is appointed to this traitor Kaneke, the accursed of the Engoi, for his sins against the Shadow and against the people?”

The diviners on the towers stared at the stars, making a pretence of consulting them, then spoke together in a secret language I did not understand. At last one of them, he on the right, called out:

“Hear the voice of Heaven! Let him who quenched the fire, feed the fire.”

I contemplated the leaping flames upon which the priests had just hurled more wood, and not understanding all that these words meant, remarked to Hans that it did not seem to want feeding.

“Oh, Baas,” he replied, “why are you so stupid? Don’t you see that they are going to burn this owl-man as an offering? The woman in the hut told me that it is what they always do to anyone who has tried to lay hands upon the Shadow of the Engoi, and sometimes to her husband also if she gets tired of him.”

“Great heavens!” I exclaimed, turning quite faint. Then, before I could get out another word, Kaneke, who was a coward at heart, as he had shown when he bartered his birthright to Arkle in exchange for his life, with ashen face and bulging eyes began an impassioned appeal to me to save him.

I did try to say something on his behalf, I forget what it was, but at once Kumpana cut me short with the remark that there was plenty of room for two upon that altar. He added in explanation that in his country under an ancient law, he who tried to save a criminal condemned to death must share his punishment.

Hearing this, as I was helpless and could not stop there to see a man burned alive, however great a blackguard he might be, I rose and with the best dignity I could command, walked down the platform steps and through the people at the foot of them, back to our house. As I passed him Kaneke shouted out:

“Farewell, Macumazah, whom I met in an evil hour. If, before you leave this land, you see your friend, the white thief who has stolen her that was mine, tell him that in a day to come, instead of her lips he too shall kiss the altar flames.”

Now all my pity departed, for I knew well that these cruel words had been spoken to create baseless fears and doubts in my mind and in that of Arkle also, should they reach him.

“Cease from lying and die like a man,” I said.

If he answered me I did not hear him, for just then the priests set up a song, a very savage song, which prevented his words from reaching me. At the edge of the market-place some impulse caused me to look back, just in time to see the great shape of Kaneke outlined against the flames into which he was being tossed whilst the people around, who till now had remained silent, uttered a shout of joy.

A while later Hans joined me.

“Baas,” he said, “I am glad they burned that beast Kaneke.”

“Why?” I asked, for I thought the remark pitiless.

"For two reasons, Baas. First because he left Little Holes and Jerry to be killed when we were running for the pass, being a coward who could desert his friends; and secondly because he called out after you that if he had won, he would have burned you and the Red Baas and me, Hans, as well. That is why I stopped to see the end of him, Baas."

"Let us pack up," I said, "for tomorrow we start."

"Yes, Baas, but where to, Baas?"

"I don't know and I don't care," I answered, "so long as it is out of this accursed country. Why on earth they ever brought me into it I can't understand even now."

"That you might bring Kaneke, Baas."

"But why did they want Kaneke? They would have got on quite as well without him."

"To burn him, Baas. He had sinned against another Shadow who is dead and ran away, and the priests, who never forget, brought him back that he might be killed for his sin. That is why White-Mouse was sent to tempt him from home, telling him that he was to marry the new Shadow, and that is why she was so much afraid lest he should be killed by the Arabs and cheat the fire on the altar. Oh, they had thought it all out quite nicely, Baas, as Kaneke has learned."

"Perhaps. Well, they won't tempt ME back," I said.

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## FAREWELL

Now with the execution of Kaneke in the savage fashion that I have described, the story of my visit to the sacred lake called Mone, and the people who dwelt there comes to an end. Perhaps, however, there are one or two things that I should mention.

All the day following the horrible scene upon the altar platform, Hans and I spent in getting ready, tying up loads for the bearers who, we were informed, would be provided on the next morning, superintending the cooking of food to take with us, seeing to our boots that were much the worse for wear, and so forth. In our spare time I tried also to think out the great problem as to the route that we should take. Were we to return by that which we had followed into the Lake-country, or to strike out on a desperate journey for the West Coast? Upon my soul I did not know, and all that Hans would do was to point out the difficulties and dangers of either course.

When I lay down that night I was still quite unable to make up my mind, and went to sleep determined to postpone further consideration till the morrow, hoping that meanwhile some inspiration might come to me. As a matter of fact it did, and in a curious fashion.

About midnight I woke up and saw, by the light of the lamp which I kept burning, the white-draped form of a woman, standing at the foot of the bed, who appeared to be looking at me.

"What the dickens—" I began in a hurry, when she stopped me with a motion of her hand.

Then she drew her veil aside so that I could see her face. It was that of White-Mouse!

Surely I could not be mistaken, although I had only seen her twice or thrice upon a single night. There was the same delicate shape, the same pleading, dark eyes, the same curling hair, and the same sweet, plaintive face so suggestive of mystery and acquaintance with secret things.

"White-Mouse!" I murmured beneath my breath, for to tell the truth I was half afraid to speak aloud, fearing lest what I saw before me was a ghost, or at the best a dream.

"Yes, Lord Macumazahn; at least once I bore that name far away among the Arabs."

"But you are dead! They killed you there in the courtyard of Kaneke's house."

"No, Lord, they could not kill me. I escaped out of their hands and returned to this country before you, making your road smooth and easy."

"Before us! How did you do that?"

"It is one of the secrets which I may not reveal, Lord, nor does it matter. Also we have met since then when you were in trouble yonder with the 'dwellers in the forest' and one came to guide you."

"I thought it!" I exclaimed; "but before I could make sure you were gone, so that almost I believed you to be—not a woman but—well—one of the dwellers in the forest."

"I knew it," she replied with a sweet little smile, "and for the rest, even now are you sure that I am a woman?"

"No, I am not," I answered.

"Nor am I quite sure, Lord Macumazahn, but that is another of the secrets, and it does not matter. See, I am a messenger tonight whatever else I may be and I have brought you a letter which you can read when I am gone, for I think that to it there is no answer. Or if there should be an answer, shape it in your mind and I shall learn it there and deliver it word for word."

"Again I begin to think that you are a ghost, White-Mouse, for women do not talk thus," I said as I took the little roll of paper which she handed to me and laid it down upon the bed.

The truth was that at the moment I was more interested in White-Mouse than in what might be written in the roll.

"Although some do not know it, we are all of us ghosts, are we not, Lord Macumazahn? Though often if the veil of flesh be gross, the light of the ghost-lamp that shines within you cannot be seen. Lord, my time is short and I have something to say to you. Will it please you to listen?"

"When you speak, what could please me better, especially in this land, White-Mouse?"

Again there flitted across her face a quick smile so strangely sweet that it thrilled the nerves, as do certain notes of music we hear upon a violin. At least for some indefinable reason I always connect that smile of hers with such vibrating notes.

"Yet it would not please you in other lands, Lord, for there among your own people nothing would delight you less than to hear the voice of a ghost-woman, the dweller in a spell-bound, haunted place. Were it otherwise, perchance I should accompany you, as, although you will not see me, I may do yet."

"What do you mean?" I asked rather anxiously.

"Nothing that you need fear, Lord, except that I like you well, and both ghosts and women are pleased to be with those whom they like. Oh, I have watched you from the first and noted how you have borne many troubles that were not of your seeking, and read your heart and found it worthy to be praised. In this land, Lord, such are not found."

"I am glad to hear it," I said, who had little admiration for the Dabanda. Then to change the subject which I found somewhat personal and embarrassing, especially to a modest man who could neither rise nor escape, I added, "Will you do something for me, White-Mouse, and before you go? Tell me, why I was ever brought to your land?"

"You wished to come, Lord; and if they be real, wishes always fulfil themselves soon or late. Moreover, besides those you know which Kumpana has set out to you, there are other reasons, which, even if I might explain them, you would not understand."

"Why not?"

"Because they have to do with things which you have forgotten; yes, with other lives that lie buried in the past, when you and I and two great ones who dwell in the midst of Lake Mone, and Kumpana and Kaneke knew each other, as we do today. Man's life is a long story, Lord, of which we read but one mad chapter at a time, thinking that it is all the book, and not knowing what went before, nor what shall follow after."

Now I reflected that many wise men, of all epochs, such as Plato and others, as I have heard, were of this opinion—one that it is not impossible though difficult to accept at any rate in the West, whatever the East may hold. Not wishing, however, to enter upon so vast a subject, I merely said:

"And do YOU know, White-Mouse?"

"I know something, Lord, and I guess more. For the Dwellers in the Lake, whom doubtless you believe to be savages blinded by the teachings of a false faith, yet have the wisdom of our race."

"Yes," I answered sharply, "wisdom of which I saw the fruits last night when a man was burned living upon your altar fire."

"You are wrong, Lord. In our wisdom of the Lake, cruelty has no place, and with it she who rules the Lake has naught to do, though the Dabanda be given to her for servants, and in a fashion, for masters. When she learned what had chanced to Kaneke and to those whom he led astray, she wept, though she knew that these things must come and uttered the decree of death. Yes, we women of the Lake renounce the world and fix our thoughts on heaven, which is our home. Therefore do not judge us hardly, Lord, or measure us with the Dabanda rule. Now I have done, who may say no more, save this: Have no fear upon your journey, for we know that you will accomplish it safely and live on for many years. Go where fortune seems to lead you and all will succeed with you. So farewell, Lord Macumazahn. Think kindly of us of the Lake, although we be women, for as you have learned, or will learn, women, with all their faults, are better and wiser than men, for sometimes to them is shown the light that is hidden from the eyes of men."

Then she bent down, took my hand, kissed it, and turning lifted the curtain of the door-way of the house and glided away into the darkness, leaving me glad that I had found one person whom I could like in Mone-land, one, too, who liked me!

From the bed on the other side of the room came the stifled voice of Hans, whom all this while I had quite forgotten, saying:

"Is that the last kiss, Baas, and if so, may I put out my head? It is very hot here under this skin rug, where I have hidden my eyes for so long without being able to breathe, Baas."

"Well, you haven't hidden your ears," I said, "so stop talking rubbish and tell me what you think of White-Mouse."

"Oh, Baas," he said, sitting up, "I think that she is a spook, more so than all the rest of them. But I think also that she is a nice spook, although she did deceive me yonder in the Arab town, making me believe that she was a jealous wife of the Owl-man Kaneke, and that she liked me much more than she did him. Also I am happy now, Baas, because she, who being a spook knows all about it, said that we shall come safely to the end of our journey. But of course you are very unhappy because you have seen the last of one of whom you think so much, that you have even forgotten to read the letter she brought you, for reading letters is much duller than being kissed, Baas."

"Bring me the lamp," I said as I loosened the string of scented grass with which it was bound and undid the little roll.

It was of paper cut from a note-book, and, as I expected, from Arkle. It ran thus:

*"Dear Quatermain,*

*"We know that you are going, and I send you this by a sure hand to bid you farewell. Do not think badly of me, Quatermain, because I have forsaken my country and put aside all the traditions in which I was brought up, in order to marry the priestess of a strange faith, here in Central Africa. Love is stronger than are the ties of country or of tradition, and in our case it is a force which will not be denied: a destiny indeed. Probably you put little faith in the stories I have told you of how I came to be drawn to my wife, thinking them the harmless imaginations of a romantic mind. Therefore of them I will only say that to me they seemed real enough and to be justified by the event, though of course here coincidence might have played its part. Probably, too, you set little store by the occult powers and superstitions of this secret and ancient people, finding for all, or most of them, a natural explanation.*

*“For many reasons I wish that I could share this view, but alas! I believe those powers to be very real. And here I want to make one thing clear: they do not reside in the spirit of her who amongst other titles is given that of the Engoi or rather of the Shadow of the Engoi! She is but the medium. The strength lies with others, in the present case principally with the head of the Council, Kumpana. “Did you notice the voice with which she spoke when first you saw her upon the altar platform, and again in the boat on the day of our marriage, and that it was not natural? At least to me it seemed very different from that which she used when addressing me directly, as a woman addresses the man she loves. For example she seemed to pass sentence upon the Abanda giving them into the power of the beasts, over which undoubtedly the Dabanda have command, and to the fate of madness, which I learn fell upon them afterwards.*

*“Yet I assure you that she never knew she had spoken these words, any more than she knew that the rascal, Kaneke, was doomed to be burned alive, in short they were uttered by her under an obscure, hypnotic influence. Further, it seems that these mediumistic gifts pass away in the course of years, and that is why the Dabanda priests kill their Engoi at a certain age, and her husband with her and choose another Shadow to fill her place.*

*“You will say that for her and for me the prospect therefore is terrible enough. But I want you to understand, Quatermain, that I have no intention of sitting still and allowing such a fate to overtake us. I mean to match myself against those priests and the Council and to overthrow them—how I do not know—and to establish in their place a pure and kindly rule. If I find that this is not possible, then I mean to escape from this country with my wife. So do not look upon us as lost, or on me as wholly a renegade and an apostate, but rather as one who is hidden for awhile.*

*“Meanwhile, I assure you that I am intensely happy and that the book of an ancient wisdom which I thought lost to the world, is being opened to my eyes. I would that you could see this place and the buildings on it, and the old writings it contains in a language I have not yet learned to decipher. But that cannot be, for any such attempt would certainly cost you your life. So you must go your way while I go mine, hoping that our paths may cross again, even in this world.*

*Meanwhile, I thank you for all you have done for me, and trust that your strange experiences may bring you some reward for your work and the dangers you have run. God bless you, my friend, if I may call you so, and farewell! I beg you and Hans to talk as little as possible about me or the Dabanda and Mone, the Holy Lake. Above all, do not try to return, or to send other white men to explore, or to search me out, for such attempts would certainly end in death. Let me vanish away as many a white man does in Africa, and my story with me.*

*Again farewell,*

*“J. T. Arkle.*

*“P.S.—I enclose a note addressed to the captain of the hunters whom I left in charge of stores and equipment at a place to which you will be guided. He can read more or less, and it commands him to hand these over to you absolutely, and with them a sealed box that contains a sum in gold, which I hope you will find useful. I recommend you to head for the West Coast, as the hunters can guide you on that road, at any rate for part of the way till you come into touch with white men.*

*“J. T. A.”*

Such was this strange letter, which I was most glad to receive. For did it not give me hope that one day Arkle would escape from this accursed country, either with or without the woman whom fate had appointed to him as his wife? Further, did it not explain much, or at any rate something, of mysteries that hitherto had been as black as night to me? I think so.

Here I will stop this tale, for to describe all my adventures and experiences on my way to the West Coast would take another book, which I have neither the time nor the inclination to write. Suffice it to say that all went well. I was guided to Arkle's camp, and by help of the outfit I found there, to say nothing of the money, of which there was much, ultimately I came to the sea and took ship back to South Africa, where I gave it out that I had been for a long hunting-trip in Portuguese territory.

“Baas,” said Hans to me one day when we had been talking over Arkle and his great passion, “what are the ‘twin hearts’ of which you talk?”

I explained as best I could, and he replied:

“Baas, you remember that Kaneke said just before they put him on the fire, that the Red Baas would follow him there one day. If that is what must be paid for having a ‘twin heart’, I am glad I haven’t got one—unless it is for you, Baas!”

I should add that of Arkle, if this was his real name (which I doubt), I have heard no more. Nor until now, when after many years I write it down, have I ever told his story.

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# BOOK XVII

## THE IVORY CHILD

### I

## ALLAN GIVES A SHOOTING LESSON

Now I, Allan Quatermain, come to the story of what was, perhaps, one of the strangest of all the adventures which have befallen me in the course of a life that so far can scarcely be called tame or humdrum.

Amongst many other things it tells of the war against the Black Kendah people and the death of Jana, their elephant god. Often since then I have wondered if this creature was or was not anything more than a mere gigantic beast of the forest. It seems improbable, even impossible, but the reader of future days may judge of this matter for himself.

Also he can form his opinion as to the religion of the White Kendah and their pretensions to a certain degree of magical skill. Of this magic I will make only one remark: If it existed at all, it was by no means infallible. To take a single instance, Harût and Marût were convinced by divination that I, and I only, could kill Jana, which was why they invited me to Kendahland. Yet in the end it was Hans who killed him. Jana nearly killed me!

Now to my tale.

In another history, called "The Holy Flower," I have told how I came to England with a young gentleman of the name of Scroope, partly to see him safely home after a hunting accident, and partly to try to dispose of a unique orchid for a friend of mine called Brother John by the white people, and Dogeetah by the natives, who was popularly supposed to be mad, but, in fact, was very sane indeed. So sane was he that he pursued what seemed to be an absolutely desperate quest for over twenty years, until, with some humble assistance on my part, he brought it to a curiously successful issue. But all this tale is told in "The Holy Flower," and I only allude to it here, that is at present, to explain how I came to be in England.

While in this country I stayed for a few days with Scroope, or, rather, with his fiancée and her people, at a fine house in Essex. (I called it Essex to avoid the place being identified, but really it was one of the neighbouring counties.) During my visit I was taken to see a much finer place, a splendid old castle with brick gateway towers, that had been wonderfully well restored and turned into a most luxurious modern dwelling. Let us call it "Ragnall," the seat of a baron of that name.

I had heard a good deal about Lord Ragnall, who, according to all accounts, seemed a kind of Admirable Crichton. He was said to be wonderfully handsome, a great scholar—he had taken a double first at college; a great athlete—he had been captain of the Oxford boat at the University race; a very promising speaker who had already made his mark in the House of Lords; a sportsman who had shot tigers and other large game in India; a poet who had published a successful volume of verse under a pseudonym; a good soldier until he left the Service; and lastly, a man of enormous wealth, owning, in addition to his estates, several coal mines and an entire town in the north of England.

"Dear me!" I said when the list was finished, "he seems to have been born with a whole case of gold spoons in his mouth. I hope one of them will not choke him," adding: "Perhaps he will be unlucky in love."

"That's just where he is most lucky of all," answered the young lady to whom I was talking—it was Scroope's fiancée, Miss Manners—"for he is engaged to a lady that, I am told, is the loveliest, sweetest, cleverest girl in all England, and they absolutely adore each other."

"Dear me!" I repeated. "I wonder what Fate *has* got up its sleeve for Lord Ragnall and his perfect lady-love?"

I was doomed to find out one day.

So it came about that when, on the following morning, I was asked if I would like to see the wonders of Ragnall Castle, I answered "Yes." Really, however, I wanted to have a look at Lord Ragnall himself, if possible, for the account of his many perfections had impressed the imagination of a poor colonist like myself, who had never found an opportunity of setting his eyes upon a kind of human angel. Human devils I had met in plenty, but never a single angel—at least, of the male sex. Also there was always the possibility that I might get a glimpse of the still more angelic lady to whom he was engaged, whose name, I understood, was the Hon. Miss Holmes. So I said that nothing would please me more than to see this castle.

Thither we drove accordingly through the fine, frosty air, for the month was December. On reaching the castle, Mr. Scroope was told that Lord Ragnall, whom he knew well, was out shooting somewhere in the park, but that, of course, he could show his friend over the place. So we went in, the three of us, for Miss Manners, to whom Scroope was to be married very shortly, had driven us over in her pony carriage. The porter at the gateway towers took us to the main door of the castle and handed us over to another man, whom he addressed as Mr. Savage, whispering to me that he was his lordship's personal attendant.

I remember the name, because it seemed to me that I had never seen anyone who looked much less savage. In truth, his appearance was that of a duke in disguise, as I imagine dukes to be, for I never set eyes on one. His dress—he wore a black morning cut-away coat—was faultless. His manners were exquisite, polite to the verge of irony, but with a hint of haughty pride in the background. He was handsome also, with a fine nose and a hawk-like eye, while a touch of baldness added to the general effect. His age may have been anything between thirty-five and forty, and the way he deprived me of my hat and stick, to which I strove to cling, showed, I thought, resolution of character. Probably, I reflected to myself, he considers me an unusual sort of person who might damage the pictures and other objects of art with the stick, and not seeing his way how to ask me to give it up without suggesting suspicion, has hit upon the expedient of taking my hat also.

In after days Mr. Samuel Savage informed me that I was quite right in this surmise. He said he thought that, judging from my somewhat unconventional appearance, I might be one of the dangerous class of whom he had been reading in the papers, namely, a "hanarchist." I write the word as he pronounced it, for here comes the curious thing. This man, so flawless, so well instructed in some

respects, had a fault which gave everything away. His h's were uncertain. Three of them would come quite right, but the fourth, let us say, would be conspicuous either by its utter absence or by its unwanted appearance. He could speak, when describing the Ragnall pictures, in rotund and flowing periods that would scarcely have disgraced the pen of Gibbon. Then suddenly that "h" would appear or disappear, and the illusion was over. It was like a sudden shock of cold water down the back. I never discovered the origin of his family; it was a matter of which he did not speak, perhaps because he was vague about it himself; but if an earl of Norman blood had married a handsome Cockney kitchenmaid of native ability, I can quite imagine that Samuel Savage might have been a child of the union. For the rest he was a good man and a faithful one, for whom I have a high respect.

On this occasion he conducted us round the castle, or, rather, its more public rooms, showing us many treasures and, I should think, at least two hundred pictures by eminent and departed artists, which gave him an opportunity of exhibiting a peculiar, if somewhat erratic, knowledge of history. To tell the truth, I began to wish that it were a little less full in detail, since on a December day those large apartments felt uncommonly cold. Scroope and Miss Manners seemed to keep warm, perhaps with the inward fires of mutual admiration, but as I had no one to admire except Mr. Savage, a temperature of about 35 degrees produced its natural effect upon me.

At length we took a short cut from the large to the little gallery through a warmed and comfortable room, which I understood was Lord Ragnall's study. Halting for a moment by one of the fires, I observed a picture on the wall, over which a curtain was drawn, and asked Mr. Savage what it might be.

"That, sir," he replied with a kind of haughty reserve, "is the portrait of her future ladyship, which his lordship keeps for his private heyec."

Miss Manners sniggered, and I said:

"Oh, thank you. What an ill-omened kind of thing to do!"

Then, observing through an open door the hall in which my hat had been taken from me, I lingered and as the others vanished in the little gallery, slipped into it, recovered my belongings, and passed out to the garden, purposing to walk there till I was warm again and Scroope reappeared. While I marched up and down a terrace, on which, I remember, several very cold-looking peacocks were seated, like conscientious birds that knew it was their duty to be ornamental, however low the temperature, I heard some shots fired, apparently in a clump of ilex oaks which grew about five hundred yards away, and reflected to myself that they seemed to be those of a small rifle, not of a shotgun.

My curiosity being excited as to what was to be an almost professional matter, I walked towards the grove, making a circuit through a shrubbery. At length I found myself near to the edge of a glade, and perceived, standing behind the shelter of a magnificent ilex, two men. One of these was a young keeper, and the other, from his appearance, I felt sure must be Lord Ragnall himself. Certainly he was a splendid-looking man, very tall, very broad, very handsome, with a peaked beard, a kind and charming face, and large dark eyes. He wore a cloak upon his shoulders, which was thrown back from over a velvet coat, and, except for the light double-barrelled rifle in his hand, looked exactly like a picture by Van Dyck which Mr. Savage had just informed me was that of one of his lordship's ancestors of the time of Charles I.

Standing behind another oak, I observed that he was trying to shoot wood-pigeons as they descended to feed upon the acorns, for which the hard weather had made them greedy. From time to time these beautiful blue birds appeared and hovered a moment before they settled, whereon the sportsman fired and—they flew away. *Bang! Bang!* went the double-barrelled rifle, and off fled the pigeon.

"Damn!" said the sportsman in a pleasant, laughing voice; "that's the twelfth I have missed, Charles."

"You hit his tail, my lord. I saw a feather come out. But, my lord, as I told you, there ain't no man living what can kill pigeons on the wing with a bullet, even when they seem to sit still in the air."

"I have heard of one, Charles. Mr. Scroope has a friend from Africa staying with him who, he swears, could knock over four out of six."

"Then, my lord, Mr. Scroope has a friend what lies," replied Charles as he handed him the second rifle.

This was too much for me. I stepped forward, raising my hat politely, and said:

"Sir, forgive me for interrupting you, but you are not shooting at those wood-pigeons in the right way. Although they seem to hover just before they settle, they are dropping much faster than you think. Your keeper was mistaken when he said that you knocked a feather out of the tail of that last bird at which you fired two barrels. In both cases you shot at least a foot above it, and what fell was a leaf from the ilex tree."

There was a moment's silence, which was broken by Charles, who ejaculated in a thick voice:

"Well, of all the cheek!"

Lord Ragnall, however, for it was he, looked first angry and then amused.

"Sir," he said, "I thank you for your advice, which no doubt is excellent, for it is certainly true that I have missed every pigeon which I tried to shoot with these confounded little rifles. But if you could demonstrate in practice what you so kindly set out in precept, the value of your counsel would be enhanced."

Thus he spoke, mimicking, I have no doubt (for he had a sense of humour), the manner of my address, which nervousness had made somewhat pompous.

"Give me the rifle," I answered, taking off my greatcoat.

He handed it me with a bow.

"Mind what you are about," growled Charles. "That there thing is full cocked and 'air-triggered."

I withered, or, rather, tried to wither him with a glance, but this unbelieving keeper only stared back at me with insolence in his round and bird-like eyes. Never before had I felt quite so angry with a menial. Then a horrible doubt struck me. Supposing I should miss! I knew very little of the manner of flight of English wood-pigeons, which are not difficult to miss with a bullet, and nothing at all of these particular rifles, though a glance at them showed me that they were exquisite weapons of their sort and by a great maker. If I muffed the thing now, how should I bear the scorn of Charles and the polite amusement of his noble master? Almost I prayed that no more pigeons would put in an appearance, and thus that the issue of my supposed skill might be left in doubt.

But this was not to be. These birds came from far in ones or twos to search for their favourite food, and the fact that others had been scared away did not cause them to cease from coming. Presently I heard Charles mutter:

"Now, then, look out, guv'nor. Here's your chance of teaching his lordship how to do it, though he does happen to be the best shot in these counties."

While he spoke two pigeons appeared, one a little behind the other, coming down very straight. As they reached the opening in the ilex grove they hovered, preparing to alight, for of us they could see nothing, one at a distance of about fifty and the other of, say, seventy yards away. I took the nearest, got on to it, allowing for the drop and the angle, and touched the trigger of the rifle, which fell to my shoulder very sweetly. The bullet struck that pigeon on the crop, out of which fell a shower of acorns that it had been eating, as it sank to the ground stone dead. Number two pigeon, realizing danger, began to mount upwards almost straight. I fired the second barrel, and by good luck shot its head off. Then I snatched the other rifle, which Charles had been loading automatically, from his outstretched hand, for at that moment I saw two more pigeons coming. At the first I risked a difficult shot and hit it far back, knocking out its tail, but bringing it, still fluttering, to the ground. The other, too, I covered, but when I touched the trigger there was a click, no more.

This was my opportunity of coming even with Charles, and I availed myself of it.

"Young man," I said, while he gaped at me open-mouthed, "you should learn to be careful with rifles, which are dangerous weapons. If you give one to a shooter that is not loaded, it shows that you are capable of anything."

Then I turned, and addressing Lord Ragnall, added:

"I must apologize for that third shot of mine, which was infamous, for I committed a similar fault to that against which I warned you, sir, and did not fire far enough ahead. However, it may serve to show your attendant the difference between the tail of a pigeon and an oak leaf," and I pointed to one of the feathers of the poor bird, which was still drifting to the ground.

"Well, if this here snipe of a chap ain't the devil in boots!" exclaimed Charles to himself.

But his master cut him short with a look, then lifted his hat to me and said:

"Sir, the practice much surpasses the precept, which is unusual. I congratulate you upon a skill that almost partakes of the marvellous, unless, indeed, chance——" And he stopped.

"It is natural that you should think so," I replied; "but if more pigeons come, and Mr. Charles will make sure that he loads the rifle, I hope to undeceive you."

At this moment, however, a loud shout from Scroope, who was looking for me, reinforced by a shrill cry uttered by Miss Manners, banished every pigeon within half a mile, a fact of which I was not sorry, since who knows whether I should have hit all, or any, of the next three birds?

"I think my friends are calling me, so I will bid you good morning," I said awkwardly.

"One moment, sir," he exclaimed. "Might I first ask you your name? Mine is Ragnall—Lord Ragnall."

"And mine is Allan Quatermain," I said.

"Oh!" he answered, "that explains matters. Charles, this is Mr. Scroope's friend, the gentleman that you said—exaggerated. I think you had better apologize."

But Charles was gone, to pick up the pigeons, I suppose.

At this moment Scroope and the young lady appeared, having heard our voices, and a general explanation ensued.

"Mr. Quatermain has been giving me a lesson in shooting pigeons on the wing with a small-bore rifle," said Lord Ragnall, pointing to the dead birds that still lay upon the ground.

"He is competent to do that," said Scroope.

"Painfully competent," replied his lordship. "If you don't believe me, ask the under-keeper."

"It is the only thing I can do," I explained modestly. "Rifle-shooting is my trade, and I have made a habit of practising at birds on the wing with ball. I have no doubt that with a shot-gun your lordship would leave me nowhere, for that is a game at which I have had little practice, except when shooting for the pot in Africa."

"Yes," interrupted Scroope, "you wouldn't have any chance at that, Allan, against one of the finest shots in England."

"I'm not so sure," said Lord Ragnall, laughing pleasantly. "I have an idea that Mr. Quatermain is full of surprises. However, with his leave, we'll see. If you have a day to spare, Mr. Quatermain, we are going to shoot through the home coverts to-morrow, which haven't been touched till now, and I hope you will join us."

"It is most kind of you, but that is impossible," I answered with firmness. "I have no gun here."

"Oh, never mind that, Mr. Quatermain. I have a pair of breech-loaders"—these were new things at that date—"which have been sent down to me to try. I am going to return them, because they are much too short in the stock for me. I think they would just suit you, and you are quite welcome to the use of them."

Again I excused myself, guessing that the discomfited Charles would put all sorts of stories about concerning me, and not wishing to look foolish before a party of grand strangers, no doubt chosen for their skill at this particular form of sport.

"Well, Allan," exclaimed Scroope, who always had a talent for saying the wrong thing, "you are quite right not to go into a competition with Lord Ragnall over high pheasants."

I flushed, for there was some truth in his blundering remark, whereon Lord Ragnall said with ready tact:

"I asked Mr. Quatermain to shoot, not to a shooting match, Scroope, and I hope he'll come."

This left me no option, and with a sinking heart I had to accept.

"Sorry I can't ask you too, Scroope," said his lordship, when details had been arranged, "but we can only manage seven guns at this shoot. But will you and Miss Manners come to dine and sleep to-morrow evening? I should like to introduce your future wife to my future wife," he added, colouring a little.

Miss Manners being devoured with curiosity as to the wonderful Miss Holmes, of whom she had heard so much but never actually seen, accepted at once, before her lover could get out a word, whereon Scroope volunteered to bring me over in the morning and load for me. Being possessed by a terror that I should be handed over to the care of the unsympathetic Charles, I replied that I should be very grateful, and so the thing was settled.

On our way home we passed through a country town, of which I forget the name, and the sight of a gunsmith's shop there reminded me that I had no cartridges. So I stopped to order some, as, fortunately, Lord Ragnall had mentioned that the guns he was going to lend me were twelve-bores. The tradesman asked me how many cartridges I wanted, and when I replied "a hundred," stared at me and said:

"If, as I understood, sir, you are going to the big winter shoot at Ragnall to-morrow, you had better make it three hundred and fifty at least. I shall be there to watch, like lots of others, and I expect to see nearly two hundred fired by each gun at the last Lake stand."

"Very well," I answered, fearing to show more ignorance by further discussion. "I will call for the cartridges on my way to-morrow morning. Please load them with three drachms of powder."

"Yes, sir, and an ounce and an eighth of No. 5 shot, sir? That's what all the gentlemen use."

"No," I answered, "No. 3; please be sure as to that. Good evening."

The gunsmith stared at me, and as I left the shop I heard him remark to his assistant:

"That African gent must think he's going out to shoot ostriches with buck shot. I expect he ain't no good, whatever they may say about him."

## CHAPTER II.

### ALLAN MAKES A BET

On the following morning Scroope and I arrived at Castle Ragnall at or about a quarter to ten. On our way we stopped to pick up my three hundred and fifty cartridges. I had to pay something over three solid sovereigns for them, as in those days such things were dear, which showed me that I was not going to get my lesson in English pheasant shooting for nothing. The gunsmith, however, to whom Scroope gave a lift in his cart to the castle, impressed upon me that they were dirt cheap, since he and his assistant had sat up most of the night loading them with my special No. 3 shot.

As I climbed out of the vehicle a splendid-looking and portly person, arrayed in a velvet coat and a scarlet waistcoat, approached with the air of an emperor, followed by an individual in whom I recognized Charles, carrying a gun under each arm.

"That's the head-keeper," whispered Scroope; "mind you treat him respectfully."

Much alarmed, I took off my hat and waited.

"Do I speak to Mr. Allan Quatermain?" said his majesty in a deep and rumbling voice, surveying me the while with a cold and disapproving eye.

I intimated that he did.

"Then, sir," he went on, pausing a little at the "sir," as though he suspected me of being no more than an African colleague of his own, "I have been ordered by his lordship to bring you these guns, and I hope, sir, that you will be careful of them, as they are here on sale or return. Charles, explain the working of them there guns to this foreign gentleman, and in doing so keep the muzzles up or down. They ain't loaded, it's true, but the example is always useful."

"Thank you, Mr. Keeper," I replied, growing somewhat nettled, "but I think that I am already acquainted with most that there is to learn about guns."

"I am glad to hear it, sir," said his majesty with evident disbelief. "Charles, I understand that Squire Scroope is going to load for the gentleman, which I hope he knows how to do with safety. His lordship's orders are that you accompany them and carry the cartridges. And, Charles, you will please keep count of the number fired and what is killed dead, not reckoning runners. I'm sick of them stories of runners."

These directions were given in a portentous stage aside which we were not supposed to hear. They caused Scroope to snigger and Charles to grin, but in me they raised a feeling of indignation.

I took one of the guns and looked at it. It was a costly and beautifully made weapon of the period, with an under-lever action.

"There's nothing wrong with the gun, sir," rumbled Red Waistcoat. "If you hold it straight it will do the rest. But keep the muzzle up, sir, keep it up, for I know what the bore is without studying the same with my eye. Also perhaps you won't take it amiss if I tell you that here at Ragnall we hates a low pheasant. I mention it because the last gentleman who came from foreign parts—he was French, he was—shot nothing all day but one hen bird sitting just on the top of the brush, two beaters, his lordship's hat, and a starling."

At this point Scroope broke into a roar of idiotic laughter. Charles, from whom Fortune decreed that I was not to escape, after all, turned his back and doubled up as though seized with sudden pain in the stomach, and I grew absolutely furious.

"Confound it, Mr. Keeper," I explained, "what do you mean by lecturing me? Attend to your business, and I'll attend to mine."

At this moment who should appear from behind the angle of some building—we were talking in the stableyard, near the gun-room—but Lord Ragnall himself. I could see that he had overheard the conversation, for he looked angry.

"Jenkins," he said, addressing the keeper, "do what Mr. Quatermain has said and attend to your own business. Perhaps you are not aware that he has shot more lions, elephants, and other big game than you have cats. But, however that may be, it is not your place to try to instruct him or any of my guests. Now go and see to the beaters."

"Beg pardon, my lord," ejaculated Jenkins, his face, that was as florid as his waistcoat, turning quite pale; "no offence meant, my lord, but elephants and lions don't fly, my lord, and those accustomed to such ground varmin are apt to shoot low, my lord. Beaters all ready at the Hunt Copse, my lord."

Thus speaking he backed himself out of sight. Lord Ragnall watched him go, then said with a laugh:

"I apologize to you, Mr. Quatermain. That silly old fool was part of my inheritance, so to speak; and the joke of it is that he is himself the worst and most dangerous shot I ever saw. However, on the other hand, he is the best rearer of pheasants in the county, so I put up with him. Come in, now, won't you? Charles will look after your guns and cartridges."

So Scroope and I were taken through a side entrance into the big hall and there introduced to the other members of the shooting party, most of whom were staying at the castle. They were famous shots. Indeed, I had read of the prowess of some of them in *The Field*, a paper that I always took in Africa, although often enough, when I was on my distant expeditions, I did not see a copy of it for a year at a time.

To my astonishment I found that I knew one of these gentlemen. We had not, it is true, met for a dozen years; but I seldom forget a face, and I was sure that I could not be mistaken in this instance. That mean appearance, those small, shifty grey eyes, that red, pointed nose could belong to nobody except Van Koop, so famous in his day in South Africa in connexion with certain gigantic and

most successful frauds that the law seemed quite unable to touch, of which frauds I had been one of the many victims to the extent of £250, a large sum for me.

The last time we met there had been a stormy scene between us, which ended in my declaring in my wrath that if I came across him on the veld I should shoot him at sight. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Mr. van Koop vanished from South Africa, for I may add that he was a cur of the first water. I believe that he had only just entered the room, having driven over from wherever he lived at some distance from Ragnall. At any rate, he knew nothing of my presence at this shoot. Had he known I am quite sure that he would have been absent. He turned, and seeing me, ejaculated: "Allan Quatermain, by heaven!" beneath his breath, but in such a tone of astonishment that it attracted the attention of Lord Ragnall, who was standing near.

"Yes, Mr. van Koop," I answered in a cheerful voice, "Allan Quatermain, no other, and I hope you are as glad to see me as I am to see you."

"I think there is some mistake," said Lord Ragnall, staring at us. "This is Sir Junius Fortescue, who used to be Mr. Fortescue."

"Indeed," I replied. "I don't know that I ever remember his being called by that particular name, but I do know that we are old—friends."

Lord Ragnall moved away as though he did not wish to continue the conversation, which no one else had overheard, and Van Koop sidled up to me.

"Mr. Quatermain," he said in a low voice, "circumstances have changed with me since last we met."

"So I gather," I replied; "but mine have remained much the same, and if it is convenient to you to repay me that £250 you owe me, with interest, I shall be much obliged. If not, I think I have a good story to tell about you."

"Oh, Mr. Quatermain," he answered with a sort of smile which made me feel inclined to kick him, "you know I dispute that debt."

"Do you?" I exclaimed. "Well, perhaps you will dispute the story also. But the question is, will you be believed when I give the proofs?"

"Ever heard of the Statute of Limitations, Mr. Quatermain?" he asked with a sneer.

"Not where character is concerned," I replied stoutly. "Now, what are you going to do?"

He reflected for a moment, and answered:

"Look here, Mr. Quatermain, you were always a bit of a sportsman, and I'll make you an offer. If I kill more birds than you do to-day, you shall promise to hold your tongue about my affairs in South Africa; and if you kill more than I do, you shall still hold your tongue, but I will pay you that £250 and interest for six years."

I also reflected for a moment, knowing that the man had something up his sleeve. Of course, I could refuse and make a scandal. But that was not in my line, and would not bring me nearer my £250, which, if I chanced to win, might find its way back to me.

"All right, done!" I said.

"What is your bet, Sir Junius?" asked Lord Ragnall, who was approaching again.

"It is rather a long story," he answered, "but, to put it shortly, years ago, when I was travelling in Africa, Mr. Quatermain and I had a dispute as to a sum of £5 which he thought I owed him, and to save argument about a trifle we have agreed that I should shoot against him for it to-day."

"Indeed," said Lord Ragnall rather seriously, for I could see that he did not believe Van Koop's statement as to the amount of the bet; perhaps he had heard more than we thought. "To be frank, Sir Junius, I don't much care for betting—for that's what it comes to—here. Also I think Mr. Quatermain said yesterday that he had never shot pheasants in England, so the match seems scarcely fair. However, you gentlemen know your own business best. Only I must tell you both that if money is concerned, I shall have to set someone whose decision will be final to count your birds and report the number to me."

"Agreed," said Van Koop, or, rather, Sir Junius; but I answered nothing, for, to tell the truth, already I felt ashamed of the whole affair.

As it happened, Lord Ragnall and I walked together ahead of the others, to the first covert, which was half a mile or more away.

"You have met Sir Junius before?" he said to me interrogatively.

"I have met Mr. van Koop before," I answered, "about twelve years since, shortly after which he vanished from South Africa, where he was a well-known and very successful—speculator."

"To reappear here. Ten years ago he bought a large property in this neighbourhood. Three years ago he became a baronet."

"How did a man like Van Koop become a baronet?" I inquired.

"By purchase, I believe."

"By purchase! Are honours in England purchased?"

"You are delightfully innocent, Mr. Quatermain, as a hunter from Africa should be," said Lord Ragnall, laughing. "Your friend \_\_\_\_\_"

"Excuse me, Lord Ragnall, I am a very humble person, not so elevated, indeed, as that gamekeeper of yours; therefore I should not venture to call Sir Junius, late Mr. van Koop, my friend, at least in earnest."

He laughed again.

"Well, the individual with whom you make bets subscribed largely to the funds of his party. I am telling you what I know to be true, though the amount I do not know. It has been variously stated to be from fifteen to fifty thousand pounds, and, perhaps by coincidence, subsequently was somehow created a baronet."

I stared at him.

"That's all the story," he went on. "I don't like the man myself, but he is a wonderful pheasant shot, which passes him everywhere. Shooting has become a kind of fetish in these parts, Mr. Quatermain. For instance, it is a tradition on this estate that we must kill more pheasants than on any other in the country, and therefore I have to ask the best guns, who are not always the best fellows. It annoys me, but it seems that I must do what was done before me."

"Under those circumstances I should be inclined to give up the thing altogether, Lord Ragnall. Sport as sport is good, but when it becomes a business it grows hateful. I know, who have had to follow it as a trade for many years."

"That's an idea," he replied reflectively. "Meanwhile, I do hope that you will win back your—£5 from Sir Junius. He is so vain that I would gladly give £50 to see you do so."

"There is little chance of that," I said, "for, as I told you, I have never shot pheasants before. Still, I'll try, as you wish it."

"That's right. And look here, Mr. Quatermain, shoot well forward of them. You see, I am venturing to advise you now, as you advised me yesterday. Shot does not travel so fast as ball, and the pheasant is a bird that is generally going much quicker than you think. Now, here we are. Charles will show you your stand. Good luck to you."

Ten minutes later the game began outside of a long covert, all the seven guns being posted within sight of each other. So occupied was I in watching the preliminaries, which were quite new to me, that I allowed first a hare and then a hen pheasant to depart without firing at them, which hen pheasant, by the way, curved round and was beautifully killed by Van Koop, who stood two guns off upon my right.

"Look here, Allan," said Scroope, "if you are going to beat your African friend you had better wake up, for you won't do it by admiring the scenery or that squirrel on a tree."

So I woke up. Just at that moment there was a cry of "cock forward." I thought it meant a cock pheasant, and was astonished when I saw a beautiful brown bird with a long beak flitting towards me through the tops of the oak trees.

"Am I to shoot at that?" I asked.

"Of course. It is a woodcock," answered Scroope.

By this time the brown bird was rocking past me within ten yards. I fired and killed it, for where it had been appeared nothing but a cloud of feathers. It was a quick and clever shot, or so I thought. But when Charles stepped out and picked from the ground only a beak and a head, a titter of laughter went down the whole line of guns and loaders.

"I say, old chap," said Scroope, "if you will use No. 3 shot, let your birds get a little farther off you."

The incident upset me so much that immediately afterwards I missed three easy pheasants in succession, while Van Koop added two to his bag.

Scroope shook his head and Charles groaned audibly. Now that I was not in competition with his master he had become suddenly anxious that I should win, for in some mysterious way the news of that bet had spread, and my adversary was not popular amongst the keeper class.

"Here you come again," said Scroope, pointing to an advancing pheasant.

It was an extraordinarily high pheasant, flushed, I think, outside the covert by a stop, so high that, as it travelled down the line, although three guns fired at it, including Van Koop, none of them seemed to touch it. Then I fired, and remembering Lord Ragnall's advice, far in front. Its flight changed. Still it travelled through the air, but with the momentum of a stone to fall fifty yards to my right, dead.

"That's better!" said Scroope, while Charles grinned all over his round face, muttering:

"Wiped his eye that time."

This shot seemed to give me confidence, and I improved considerably, though, oddly enough, I found that it was the high and difficult pheasants which I killed and the easy ones that I was apt to miff. But Van Koop, who was certainly a finished artist, killed both.

At the next stand Lord Ragnall, who had been observing my somewhat indifferent performance, asked me to stand back with him behind the other guns.

"I see the tall ones are your line, Mr. Quatermain," he said, "and you will get some here."

On this occasion we were placed in a dip between two long coverts which lay about three hundred yards apart. That which was being beaten proved full of pheasants, and the shooting of those picked guns was really a thing to see. I did quite well here, nearly, but not altogether, as well as Lord Ragnall himself, though that is saying a great deal, for he was a lovely shot.

"Bravo!" he said at the end of the beat. "I believe you have got a chance of winning your £5, after all."

When, however, at luncheon, more than an hour later, I found that I was thirty pheasants behind my adversary, I shook my head, and so did everybody else. On the whole, that luncheon, of which we partook in a keeper's house, was a very pleasant meal, though Van Koop talked so continuously and in such a boastful strain that I saw it irritated our host and some of the other gentlemen, who were very pleasant people. At last he began to patronize me, asking me how I had been getting on with my "elephant-potting" of late years.

I replied, "Fairly well."

"Then you should tell our friends some of your famous stories, which I promise I won't contradict," he said, adding: "You see, they are different from us, and have no experience of big-game shooting."

"I did not know that you had any, either, Sir Junius," I answered, nettled. "Indeed, I thought I remembered your telling me in Africa that the only big game you had ever shot was an ox sick with the red-water. Anyway, shooting is a business with me, not an amusement, as it is to you, and I do not talk shop."

At this he collapsed amid some laughter, after which Scroope, the most loyal of friends, began to repeat exploits of mine till my ears tingled, and I rose and went outside to look at the weather.

It had changed very much during luncheon. The fair promise of the morning had departed, the sky was overcast, and a wind, blowing in strong gusts, was rising rapidly, driving before it occasional scurries of snow.

"My word," said Lord Ragnall, who had joined me, "the Lake covert—that's our great stand here, you know—will take some shooting this afternoon. We ought to kill seven hundred pheasants in it with this team, but I doubt if we shall get five. Now, Mr. Quatermain, I am going to stand Sir Junius Fortescue and you back in the covert, where you will have the best of it, as a lot of pheasants will never face the lake against this wind. What is more, I am coming with you, if I may, as six guns are enough for this beat, and I don't mean to shoot any more to-day."

"I fear that you will be disappointed," I said nervously.

"Oh, no, I sha'n't," he answered. "I tell you frankly that if only you could have a season's practice, in my opinion you would make the best pheasant shot of the lot of us. At present you don't quite understand the ways of the birds, that's all; also those guns are strange to you. Have a glass of cherry brandy; it will steady your nerves."

I drank the cherry brandy, and presently off we went. The covert we were going to shoot, into which we had been driving pheasants all the morning, must have been nearly a mile long. At the top end it was broad, narrowing at the bottom to a width of about two hundred yards. Here it ran into a horse-shoe shaped piece of water that was about fifty yards in breadth. Four of the guns were placed round the bow of this water, but on its farther side, in such a position that the pheasants should stream over them to yet another covert behind at the top of a slope, Van Koop and I, however, were ordered to take our places, he to the right and I to the left, about seventy yards up the tongue in little glades in the woodland, having the lake to our right and our left respectively. I noticed with dismay that we were so set that the guns below us on its farther side could note all that we did or did not do; also that a little band of watchers, among whom I recognized my friend the gunsmith, were gathered in a place where, without interfering with us, they could see the sport. On our way to the boat, however, which was to row us across the water, an incident happened that put me in very good spirits and earned some applause.

I was walking with Lord Ragnall, Scroope and Charles, about sixty yards clear of a belt of tall trees, when from far away on the other side of the trees came a cry of "Partridges over!" in the hoarse voice of the red-waistcoated Jenkins, who was engaged in superintending the driving in of some low scrub before he joined his army at the top of the covert.

"Look out, Mr. Quatermain, they are coming this way," said Lord Ragnall, while Charles thrust a loaded gun into my hand.

Another moment and they appeared over the tree-tops, a big covey of them in a long, straggling line, travelling at I know not what speed, for a fierce gust from the rising gale had caught them. I fired at the first bird, which fell at my feet. I fired again, and another fell behind me. I snatched up the second gun and killed a third as it passed over me high up. Then, wheeling round, I covered the last retreating bird, and lo! it too fell, a very long shot indeed.

"By George!" said Scroope, "I never saw that done before," while Ragnall stared and Charles whistled.

But now I will tell the truth and expose all my weakness. The second bird was not the one I aimed at. I was behind it and caught that which followed. And in my vanity I did not own up, at least not till that evening.

The four dead partridges—there was not a runner among them—having been collected amidst many congratulations, we went on and were punted across the lake to the covert. As we entered the boat I observed that, in addition to the great bags, Charles was carrying a box of cartridges under his arm, and asked him where he got it from.

He replied, from Mr. Popham—that was the gunsmith's name—who had brought it with him in case I should not have enough. I made no remark, but as I knew I had quite half of my cartridges left out of the three hundred and fifty that I had bought, I wondered to myself what kind of a shoot this was going to be.

Well, we took up our stands, and while we were doing so, suddenly the wind increased to a tearing gale, which seemed to me to blow from all points of the compass in turn. Rooks flying homewards, and pigeons disturbed by the beaters were swept over us like drifting leaves; wild duck, of which I got one, went by like arrows; the great bare oaks tossed their boughs and groaned; while not far off a fir tree was blown down, falling with a splash into the water.

"It's a wild afternoon," said Lord Ragnall, and as he spoke Van Koop came from his stand, looking rather scared, and suggested that the shoot should be given up.

Lord Ragnall asked me what I wished to do. I replied that I would rather go on, but that I was in his hands.

"I think we are fairly safe in these open places, Sir Junius," he said; "and as the pheasants have been so much disturbed already, it does not much matter if they are blown about a bit. But if you are of another opinion, perhaps you had better get out of it and stand with the others over the lake. I'll send for my guns and take your place."

On hearing this Van Koop changed his mind and said that he would go on.

So the beat began. At first the wind blew from behind us, and pheasants in increasing numbers passed over our heads, most of them rather low, to the guns on the farther side of the water, who, skilled though they were, did not make very good work with them. We had been instructed not to fire at birds going forward, so I let these be. Van Koop, however, did not interpret the order in the same spirit, for he loosed at several, killing one or two and missing others.

"That fellow is no sportsman," I heard Lord Ragnall remark. "I suppose it is the bet."

Then he sent Charles to ask him to desist.

Shortly after this the gale worked round to the north and settled there, blowing with ever-increasing violence. The pheasants, however, still flew forward in the shelter of the trees, for they were making for the covert on the hill, where they had been bred. But when they got into the open and felt the full force of the wind, quite four out of six of them turned and came back at a most fearful pace, many so high as to be almost out of shot.

For the next three-quarters of an hour or more—as I think I have explained, the beat was a very long one—I had such covert shooting as I suppose I shall never see again. High above those shrieking trees, or over the lake to my left, flashed the wind-driven pheasants in an endless procession. Oddly enough, I found that this wild work suited me, for as time went on and the pheasants grew more and more impossible, I shot better and better. One after another down they came far behind me with a crash in the brushwood or a splash in the lake, till the guns grew almost too hot to hold. There were so many of them that I discovered I could pick my shots; also that nine out of ten were caught by the wind and curved at a certain angle, and that the time to fire was just before they took the curve. The excitement was great and the sport splendid, as anyone will testify who has shot December pheasants breaking back over the covert and in a tearing gale. Van Koop also was doing very well, but the guns in front got comparatively little shooting. They were forced to stand there, poor fellows, and watch our performance from afar.

As the thing drew towards an end the birds came thicker and thicker, and I shot, as I have said, better and better. This may be judged from the fact that, notwithstanding their height and tremendous pace, I killed my last thirty pheasants with thirty-five cartridges. The final bird of all, a splendid cock, appeared by himself out of nothingness when we thought that all was done. I think it must have been flushed from the covert on the hill, or been turned back just as it reached it by the resistless strength of the storm. Over it came, so high above us that it looked quite small in the dark snow-scud.

"Too far—no use!" said Lord Ragnall, as I lifted the gun.

Still, I fired, holding I know not how much in front, and lo! that pheasant died in mid air, falling with a mighty splash near the bank of the lake, but at a great distance behind us. The shot was so remarkable that everyone who saw it, including most of the beaters, who had passed us by now, uttered a cheer, and the red-waistcoated old Jenkins, who had stopped by us, remarked: "Well, bust me if that bain't a master one!"

Scroope made me angry by slapping me so hard upon the back that it hurt, and nearly caused me to let off the other barrel of the gun. Charles seemed to become one great grin, and Lord Ragnall, with a brief congratulatory "Never enjoyed a shoot so much in my life," called to the men who were posted behind us to pick up all the dead pheasants, being careful to keep mine apart from those of Sir Junius Fortescue.

"You should have a hundred and forty-three at this stand," he said, "allowing for every possible runner. Charles and I make the same total."

I remarked that I did not think there were many runners, as the No. 3 shot had served me very well, and getting into the boat was rowed to the other side, where I received more congratulations. Then, as all further shooting was out of the question because of the weather, we walked back to the castle to tea.

As I emptied my cup Lord Ragnall, who had left the room, returned and asked us to come and see the game. So we went, to find it laid out in endless lines upon the snow-powdered grass in the quadrangle of the castle, arranged in one main and two separate lots.

"Those are yours and Sir Junius's," said Scroope. "I wonder which of you has won. I'll put a sovereign on you, old fellow."

"Then you're a donkey for your pains," I answered, feeling vexed, for at that moment I had forgotten all about the bet.

I do not remember how many pheasants were killed altogether, but the total was much smaller than had been hoped for, because of the gale.

"Jenkins," said Lord Ragnall presently to Red Waistcoat, "how many have you to the credit of Sir Junius Fortescue?"

"Two hundred and seventy-seven, my lord, twelve hares, two woodcocks, and three pigeons."

"And how many to that of Mr. Quatermain?" adding: "I must remind you both, gentlemen, that the birds have been picked as carefully as possible and kept unmixed, and therefore that the figures given by Jenkins must be considered as final."

"Quite so," I answered, but Van Koop said nothing. Then, while we all waited anxiously, came the amazing answer:

"Two hundred and seventy-seven pheasants, my lord, same number as those of Sir Junius, Bart., fifteen hares, three pigeons, four partridges, one duck, and a beak—I mean a woodcock."

"Then it seems you have won your £5, Mr. Quatermain, upon which I congratulate you," said Lord Ragnall.

"Stop a minute," broke in Van Koop. "The bet was as to pheasants; the other things don't count."

"I think the term used was 'birds,'" I remarked. "But to be frank, when I made it I was thinking of pheasants, as no doubt Sir Junius was also. Therefore, if the counting is correct, there is a dead heat and the wager falls through."

"I am sure we all appreciate the view you take of the matter," said Lord Ragnall, "for it might be argued another way. In these circumstances Sir Junius keeps his £5 in his pocket. It is unlucky for you, Quatermain," he added, dropping the "mister," "that the last high pheasant you shot can't be found. It fell into the lake, you remember, and, I suppose, swam ashore and ran."

"Yes," I replied, "especially as I could have sworn that it was quite dead."

"So could I, Quatermain; but the fact remains that it isn't there."

"If we had all the pheasants that we think fall dead our bags would be much bigger than they are," remarked Van Koop, with a look of great relief upon his face, adding in his horrid, patronizing way: "Still, you shot uncommonly well, Quatermain. I'd no idea you would run me so close."

I felt inclined to answer, but didn't. Only Lord Ragnall said:

"Mr. Quatermain shot more than well. His performance in the Lake covert was the most brilliant that I have ever seen. When you went in there together, Sir Junius, you were thirty ahead of him, and you fired seventeen more cartridges at the stand."

Then, just as we turned to go, something happened. The round-eyed Charles ran puffing into the quadrangle, followed by another man with a dog, who had been specially set to pick my birds, and carrying in his hand a much-bedraggled cock pheasant without a tail.

"I've got him, my lord," he gasped, for he had run very fast; "the little gent's—I mean that which he killed in the clouds with the last shot he fired. It had gone right down into the mud and stuck there. Tom and me fished him up with a pole."

Lord Ragnall took the bird and looked at it. It was almost cold, but evidently freshly killed, for the limbs were quite flexible.

"That turns the scale in favour of Mr. Quatermain," he said, "so, Sir Junius, you had better pay your money and congratulate him, as I do."

"I protest," exclaimed Van Koop, looking very angry and meaner than usual. "How am I to know that this was Mr. Quatermain's pheasant? The sum involved is more than £5 and I feel it is my duty to protest."

"Because my men say so, Sir Junius; moreover, seeing the height from which the bird fell, their story is obviously true."

Then he examined the pheasant further, pointing out that it appeared to have only one wound—a shot through the throat almost exactly at the root of the beak, of which shot there was no mark of exit. "What sized shot were you using, Sir Junius?" he asked.

"No. 4 at the last stand."

"And you were using No. 3, Mr. Quatermain. Now, was any other gun using No. 3?"

All shook their heads.

"Jenkins, open that bird's head. I think the shot that killed it will be found in the brain."

Jenkins obeyed, using a penknife cleverly enough. Pressed against the bone of the skull he found the shot.

"No. 3 it is, sure enough, my lord," he said.

"You will agree that settles the matter, Sir Junius," said Lord Ragnall. "And now, as a bet has been made here it had better be paid."

"I have not enough money on me," said Van Koop sulkily.

"I think your banker is mine," said Lord Ragnall quietly, "so you can write a cheque in the house. Come in, all of you, it is cold in this wind."

So we went into the smoking-room, and Lord Ragnall, who, I could see, was annoyed, instantly fetched a blank cheque from his study and handed it to Van Koop in rather a pointed manner.

He took it, and turning to me, said:

"I remember the capital sum, but how much is the interest? Sorry to trouble you, but I am not very good at figures."

"Then you must have changed a good deal during the last twelve years, Sir Junius," I could not help saying. "Still, never mind the interest, I shall be quite satisfied with the principal."

So he filled up the cheque for £250 and threw it down on the table before me, saying something about its being a bother to mix up business with pleasure.

I took the draft, saw that it was correct though rather illegible, and proceeded to dry it by waving it in the air. As I did so it came into my mind that I would not touch the money of this successful scam, won back from him in such a way.

Yielding to a perhaps foolish impulse, I said:

"Lord Ragnall, this cheque is for a debt which years ago I wrote off as lost. At luncheon to-day you were talking of a Cottage Hospital for which you are trying to get up an endowment fund in this neighbourhood, and in answer to a question from you Sir Junius Fortescue said that he had not as yet made any subscription to its fund. Will you allow me to hand you Sir Junius's subscription—to be entered in his name, if you please?" And I passed him the cheque, which was drawn to myself or bearer.

He looked at the amount, and seeing that it was not £5, but £250, flushed, then asked:

"What do you say to this act of generosity on the part of Mr. Quatermain, Sir Junius?"

There was no answer, because Sir Junius had gone. I never saw him again, for years ago the poor man died quite disgraced. His passion for semi-fraudulent speculations reasserted itself, and he became a bankrupt in conditions which caused him to leave the country for America, where he was killed in a railway accident while travelling as an immigrant. I have heard, however, that he was not asked to shoot at Ragnall any more.

The cheque was passed to the credit of the Cottage Hospital, but not, as I had requested, as a subscription from Sir Junius Fortescue. A couple of years later, indeed, I learned that this sum of money was used to build a little room in that institution to accommodate sick children, which room was named the Allan Quatermain ward.

Now, I have told this story of that December shoot because it was the beginning of my long and close friendship with Ragnall.

When he found that Van Koop had gone away without saying good-bye, Lord Ragnall made no remark. Only he took my hand and shook it.

I have only to add that, although, except for the element of competition which entered into it, I enjoyed this day's shooting very much indeed, when I came to count up its cost I felt glad that I had not been asked to any more such entertainments. Here it is, taken from an old note-book:

Cartridges, including those not used and given to Charles	£4	0	0	
Game Licence		3	0	0
Tip to Red Waistcoat (keeper)		2	0	0
Tip to Charles		0	10	0
Tip to man who helped Charles to find pheasant		0	5	0
Tip to man who collected pheasants behind me		0	10	0
	£10	5	0	

Truly pheasant shooting in England is, or was, a sport for the rich!

## CHAPTER III.

### MISS HOLMES

Two and a half hours passed by, most of which time I spent lying down to rest and get rid of a headache caused by the continual, rapid firing and the roar of the gale, or both; also in rubbing my shoulder with ointment, for it was sore from the recoil of the guns. Then Scroope appeared, as, being unable to find my way about the long passages of that great old castle, I had asked him to do, and we descended together to the large drawing-room.

It was a splendid apartment, only used upon state occasions, lighted, I should think, with at least two or three hundred wax candles, which threw a soft glow over the panelled and pictured walls, the priceless antique furniture, and the bejewelled ladies who were gathered there. To my mind there never was and never will be any artificial light to equal that of wax candles in sufficient quantity. The company was large; I think thirty sat down to dinner that night, which was given to introduce Lord Ragnall's future wife to the neighbourhood, whereof she was destined to be the leader.

Miss Manners, who was looking very happy and charming in her jewels and fine clothes, joined us at once, and informed Scroope that "she" was just coming; the maid in the cloakroom had told her so.

"Is she?" replied Scroope indifferently. "Well, so long as you have come I don't care about anyone else."

Then he told her she was looking beautiful, and stared at her with such affection that I fell back a step or two and contemplated a picture of Judith vigorously engaged in cutting off the head of Holofernes.

Presently the large door at the end of the room was thrown open and the immaculate Savage, who was acting as a kind of master of the ceremonies, announced in well-bred but penetrating tones, "Lady Longden and the Honourable Miss Holmes." I stared, like everybody else, but for a while her ladyship filled my eye. She was an ample and, to my mind, rather awful-looking person, clad in black satin—she was a widow—and very large diamonds. Her hair was white, her nose was hooked, her dark eyes were penetrating, and she had a bad cold in her head. That was all I found time to notice about her, for suddenly her daughter came into my line of vision.

Truly she was a lovely girl, or rather, young woman, for she must have been two or three-and-twenty. Not very tall, her proportions were rounded and exquisite, and her movements as graceful as those of a doe. Altogether she was doe-like, especially in the fineness of her lines and her large and liquid eyes. She was a dark beauty, with rich brown, waving hair, a clear olive complexion, a perfectly shaped mouth and very red lips. To me she looked more Italian or Spanish than Anglo-Saxon, and I believe that, as a matter of fact, she had some southern blood in her on her father's side. She wore a dress of soft rose colour, and her only ornaments were a string of pearls and a single red camellia. I could see but one blemish, if it were a blemish, in her perfect person, and that was a curious white mark upon her breast, which in its shape exactly resembled the crescent moon.

The face, however, impressed me with other than its physical qualities. It was bright, intelligent, sympathetic and, just now, happy. But I thought it more, I thought it mystical. Something that her mother said to her, probably about her dress, caused her smile to vanish for a moment, and then, from beneath it as it were, appeared this shadow of innate mysticism. In a second it was gone and she was laughing again; but I, who am accustomed to observe, had caught it, perhaps alone of all that company. Moreover, it reminded me of something.

What was it? Ah! I knew. A look that sometimes I had seen upon the face of a certain Zulu lady named Mameena, especially at the moment of her wonderful and tragic death. The thought made me shiver a little; I could not tell why, for certainly, I reflected, this high-placed and fortunate English girl had nothing in common with that fate-driven Child of Storm, whose dark and imperial spirit dwelt in the woman called Mameena. They were as far apart as Zululand is from Essex. Yet it was quite sure that both of them had touch with hidden things.

Lord Ragnall, looking more like a splendid Van Dyck than ever in his evening dress, stepped forward to greet his fiancée and her mother with a courtly bow, and I turned again to continue my contemplation of the stalwart Judith and the very ugly head of Holofernes. Presently I was aware of a soft voice—a very rich and thrilling voice—asking quite close to me:

"Which is he? Oh! you need not answer, dear. I know him from the description."

"Yes," replied Lord Ragnall to Miss Holmes—for it was she—"you are quite right. I will introduce you to him presently. But, love, whom do you wish to take you in to dinner? I can't—your mother, you know; and as there are no titles here to-night, you may make your choice. Would you like old Dr. Jeffreys, the clergyman?"

"No," she replied, with quiet firmness, "I know him; he took me in once before. I wish Mr. Allan Quatermain to take me in. He is interesting, and I want to hear about Africa."

"Very well," he answered, "and he is more interesting than all the rest put together. But, Luna, why are you always thinking and talking about Africa? One might imagine that you were going to live there."

"So I may one day," she answered dreamily. "Who knows where one has lived, or where one will live!" And again I saw that mystic look come into her face.

I heard no more of that conversation, which it is improbable that anyone whose ears had not been sharpened by a lifetime of listening in great silences would have caught at all. To tell the truth, I made myself scarce, slipping off to the other end of the big room in the hope of evading the kind intentions of Miss Holmes. I have a great dislike of being put out of my place, and I felt that among all these local celebrities it was not fitting that I should be selected to take in the future bride on an occasion of this sort. But it was of no use, for presently Lord Ragnall hunted me up, bringing the young lady with him.

"Let me introduce you to Miss Holmes, Quatermain," he said. "She is anxious that you should take her in to dinner, if you will be so kind. She is very interested in—in——"

"Africa," I suggested.

"In Mr. Quatermain, who, I am told, is one of the greatest hunters in Africa," she corrected me, with a dazzling smile.

I bowed, not knowing what to say. Lord Ragnall laughed and vanished, leaving us together. Dinner was announced. Presently we were wending in the centre of a long and glittering procession across the central hall to the banqueting chamber, a splendid room with a roof like a church that was said to have been built in the times of the Plantagenets. Here Mr. Savage, who evidently had been looking out for her future ladyship, conducted us to our places, which were upon the left of Lord Ragnall, who sat at the head of the broad table with Lady Longden on his right. Then the old clergyman, Dr. Jeffreys, a pompous and rather frowsy ecclesiastic, said grace, for grace was still in fashion at such feasts in those days, asking Heaven to make us truly thankful for the dinner we were about to consume.

Certainly there was a great deal to be thankful for in the eating and drinking line, but of all I remember little, except a general vision of silver dishes, champagne, splendour, and things I did not want to eat being constantly handed to me. What I do remember is Miss Holmes, and nothing but Miss Holmes; the charm of her conversation, the light of her beautiful eyes, the fragrance of her hair, her most flattering interest in my unworthy self. To tell the truth, we got on "like fire in the winter grass," as the Zulus say, and when that dinner was over the grass was still burning.

I don't think that Lord Ragnall quite liked it, but fortunately Lady Longden was a talkative person. First she conversed about her cold in the head, sneezing at intervals, poor soul, and being reduced to send for another handkerchief after the entrées. Then she got off upon business matters; to judge from the look of boredom on her host's face, I think it must have been of settlements. Three times did I hear him refer her to the lawyers—without avail. Lastly, when he thought he had escaped, she embarked upon a quite vigorous argument with Dr. Jeffreys about church matters—I gathered that she was "low" and he was "high"—in which she insisted upon his lordship acting as referee.

"Do try and keep your attention fixed, George," I heard her say severely. "To allow it to wander when high spiritual affairs are under discussion (sneeze) is scarcely reverent. Could you tell the man to shut that door? The draught is dreadful. It is quite impossible for you to agree with both of us, as you say you do, seeing that metaphorically Dr. Jeffreys is at one pole and I am at the other." (Sneeze.)

"Then I wish I were at the Tropic of Cancer," I heard him mutter with a groan.

In vain; he had to keep his "attention fixed" on this point for the next three-quarters of an hour. So as Miss Manners was at the other side of me, and Scroope, unhampered by the presence of any prospective mother-in-law, was at the other side of her, for all practical purposes Miss Holmes and I were left alone.

She began by saying:

"I hear you beat Sir Junius Fortescue out shooting to-day, and won a lot of money from him which you gave to the Cottage Hospital. I don't like shooting, and I don't like betting; and it's strange, because you don't look like a man who bets. But I detest Sir Junius Fortescue, and that is a bond of union between us."

"I never said I detested him."

"No, but I am sure you do. Your face changed when I mentioned his name."

"As it happens, you are right. But, Miss Holmes, I should like you to understand that you were also right when you said I did not look like a betting man." And I told her some of the story of Van Koop and the £250.

"Ah!" she said, when I had finished, "I always felt sure he was a horror. And my mother wanted me, just because he pretended to be low church—but that's a secret."

Then I congratulated her upon her approaching marriage, saying what a joyful thing it was now and again to see everything going in real, happy, storybook fashion: beauty, male and female, united by love, high rank, wealth, troops of friends, health of body, a lovely and an ancient home in a settled land where dangers do not come—at present—respect and affection of crowds of dependents, the prospect of a high and useful career of a sort whereof the door is shut to most people, everything in short that human beings who are not actually royalty could desire or deserve. Indeed after my second glass of champagne I grew quite eloquent on these and kindred points, being moved thereto by memories of the misery that is in the world which formed so great a contrast to the lot of this striking and brilliant pair.

She listened to me attentively and answered:

"Thank you for your kind thoughts and wishes. But does it not strike you, Mr. Quatermain, that there is something ill-omened in such talk? I believe that it does; that as you finished speaking it occurred to you that after all the future is as much veiled from all of us as—as the picture which hangs behind its curtain of rose-coloured silk in Lord Ragnall's study is from you."

"How did you know that?" I asked sharply in a low voice. For by the strangest of coincidences, as I concluded my somewhat old-fashioned little speech of compliments, this very reflection had entered my mind, and with it the memory of the veiled picture which Mr. Savage had pointed out to me on the previous morning.

"I can't say, Mr. Quatermain, but I did know it. You were thinking of the picture, were you not?"

"And if I was," I said, avoiding a direct reply, "what of it? Though it is hidden from everybody else, he has only to draw the curtain and see—you."

"Supposing he should draw the curtain one day and see nothing, Mr. Quatermain?"

"Then the picture would have been stolen, that is all, and he would have to search for it till he found it again, which doubtless sooner or later he would do."

"Yes, sooner or later. But where? Perhaps you have lost a picture or two in your time, Mr. Quatermain, and are better able to answer the question than I am."

There was silence for a few moments, for this talk of lost pictures brought back memories which choked me.

Then she began to speak again, low, quickly, and with suppressed passion, but acting wonderfully all the while. Knowing that eyes were on her, her gestures and the expression of her face were such as might have been those of any young lady of fashion who was

talking of everyday affairs, such as dancing, or flowers, or jewels. She smiled and even laughed occasionally. She played with the golden salt-cellar in front of her and, upsetting a little of the salt, threw it over her left shoulder, appearing to ask me if I were a victim of that ancient habit, and so on.

But all the while she was talking deeply of deep things, such as I should never have thought would pass her mind. This was the substance of what she said, for I cannot set it all down verbatim; after so many years my memory fails me.

"I am not like other women. Something moves me to tell you so, something very real and powerful which pushes me as a strong man might. It is odd, because I have never spoken to anyone else like that, not to my mother for instance, or even to Lord Ragnall. They would neither of them understand, although they would misunderstand differently. My mother would think I ought to see a doctor—and if you knew that doctor! He," and she nodded towards Lord Ragnall, "would think that my engagement had upset me, or that I had grown rather more religious than I ought to be at my age, and been reflecting too much—well, on the end of all things. From a child I have understood that I am a mystery set in the midst of many other mysteries. It all came to me one night when I was about nine years old. I seemed to see the past and the future, although I could grasp neither. Such a long, long past and such an infinite future. I don't know what I saw, and still see sometimes. It comes in a flash, and is in a flash forgotten. My mind cannot hold it. It is too big for my mind; you might as well try to pack Dr. Jeffreys there into this wineglass. Only two facts remain written on my heart. The first is that there is trouble ahead of me, curious and unusual trouble; and the second, that permanently, continually, I, or a part of me, have something to do with Africa, a country of which I know nothing except from a few very dull books. Also, by the way—this is a new thought—that I have a great deal to do with *you*. That is why I am so interested in Africa and you. Tell me about Africa and yourself now, while we have the chance." And she ended rather abruptly, adding in a louder voice, "You have lived there all your life, have you not, Mr. Quatermain?"

"I rather think your mother would be right—about the doctor, I mean," I said.

"You *say* that, but you don't *believe* it. Oh! you are very transparent, Mr. Quatermain—at least, to me."

So, hurriedly enough, for these subjects seemed to be uncomfortable, even dangerous in a sense, I began to talk of the first thing about Africa that I remembered—namely, of the legend of the Holy Flower that was guarded by a huge ape, of which I had heard from a white man who was supposed to be rather mad, who went by the name of Brother John. Also I told her that there was something in it, as I had with me a specimen of the flower.

"Oh! show it me," she said.

I replied that I feared I could not, as it was locked away in a safe in London, whither I was returning on the morrow. I promised, however, to send her a life-sized water-colour drawing of which I had caused several to be made. She asked me if I were going to look for this flower, and I said that I hoped so if I could make the necessary arrangements. Next she asked me if there chanced to be any other African quests upon which I had set my mind. I replied that there were several. For instance, I had heard vaguely through Brother John, and indirectly from one or two other sources, of the existence of a certain tribe in East Central Africa—Arabs or semi-Arabs—who were reported to worship a child that always remained a child. This child, I took it, was a dwarf; but as I was interested in native religious customs which were infinite in their variety, I should much like to find out the truth of the matter.

"Talking of Arabs," she broke in, "I will tell you a curious story. Once when I was a little girl, eight or nine years of age—it was just before that kind of awakening of which I have spoken to you—I was playing in Kensington Gardens, for we lived in London at the time, in the charge of my nurse-governess. She was talking to some young man who she said was her cousin, and told me to run about with my hoop and not to bother. I drove the hoop across the grass to some elm trees. From behind one of the trees came out two tall men dressed in white robes and turbans, who looked to me like scriptural characters in a picture-book. One was an elderly man with flashing, black eyes, hooked nose, and a long grey beard. The other was much younger, but I do not remember him so well. They were both brown in colour, but otherwise almost like white men; not Negroes by any means. My hoop hit the elder man, and I stood still, not knowing what to say. He bowed politely and picked it up, but did not offer to return it to me. They talked together rapidly, and one of them pointed to the moon-shaped birthmark which you see I have upon my neck, for it was hot weather, and I was wearing a low-cut frock. It was because of this mark that my father named me Luna. The elder of the two said in broken English:

"What is your name, pretty little girl?"

"I told him it was Luna Holmes. Then he drew from his robe a box made of scented wood, and, opening it, took out some sweetmeat which looked as if it had been frozen, and gave me a piece that, being very fond of sweet, I put into my mouth. Next, he bowled the hoop along the ground into the shadow of the trees—it was evening time and beginning to grow dark—saying, 'Run, catch it, little girl!'

"I began to run, but something in the taste of that sweet caused me to drop it from my lips. Then all grew misty, and the next thing I remember was finding myself in the arms of the younger Eastern, with the nurse and her 'cousin,' a stalwart person like a soldier, standing in front of us.

"Little girl go ill," said the elder Arab. 'We seek policeman.'

"You drop that child," answered the 'cousin,' doubling his fists. Then I grew faint again, and when I came to myself the two white-robed men had gone. All the way home my governess scolded me for accepting sweets from strangers, saying that if my parents came to know of it, I should be whipped and sent to bed. Of course, I begged her not to tell them, and at last she consented. Do you know, I think you are the first to whom I have ever mentioned the matter, of which I am sure the governess never breathed a word, though after that, whenever we walked in the gardens, her 'cousin' always came to look after us. In the end I think she married him."

"You believe the sweet was drugged?" I asked.

She nodded. "There was something very strange in it. It was a night or two after I had tasted it that I had what just now I called my awakening, and began to think about Africa."

"Have you ever seen these men again, Miss Holmes?"

"No, never."

At this moment I heard Lady Longden say, in a severe voice:

"My dear Luna, I am sorry to interrupt your absorbing conversation, but we are all waiting for you."

So they were, for to my horror I saw that everyone was standing up except ourselves.

Miss Holmes departed in a hurry, while Scroope whispered in my ear with a snigger:

"I say, Allan, if you carry on like that with his young lady, his lordship will be growing jealous of you."

"Don't be a fool," I said sharply. But there was something in his remark, for as Lord Ragnall passed on his way to the other end of the table, he said in a low voice and with rather a forced smile:

"Well, Quatermain, I hope your dinner has not been as dull as mine, although your appetite seemed so poor."

Then I reflected that I could not remember having eaten a thing since the first entrée. So overcome was I that, rejecting all Scroope's attempts at conversation, I sat silent, drinking port and filling up with dates, until not long afterwards we went into the drawing-room, where I sat down as far from Miss Holmes as possible, and looked at a book of views of Jerusalem.

While I was thus engaged, Lord Ragnall, pitying my lonely condition, or being instigated thereto by Miss Holmes, I know not which, came up and began to chat with me about African big-game shooting. Also he asked me what was my permanent address in that country. I told him Durban, and in my turn asked why he wanted to know.

"Because Miss Holmes seems quite crazy about the place, and I expect I shall be dragged out there one day," he replied, quite gloomily. It was a prophetic remark.

At this moment our conversation was interrupted by Lady Longden, who came to bid her future son-in-law good night. She said that she must go to bed, and put her feet in mustard and water as her cold was so bad, which left me wondering whether she meant to carry out this operation in bed. I recommended her to take quinine, a suggestion she acknowledged rather inconsequently by remarking in somewhat icy tones that she supposed I sat up to all hours of the night in Africa. I replied that frequently I did, waiting for the sun to rise next day, for that member of the British aristocracy irritated me.

Thus we parted, and I never saw her again. She died many years ago, poor soul, and I suppose is now freezing her former acquaintances in the Shades, for I cannot imagine that she ever had a friend. They talk a great deal about the influences of heredity nowadays, but I don't believe very much in them myself. Who, for instance, could conceive that persons so utterly different in every way as Lady Longden and her daughter, Miss Holmes, could be mother and child? Our bodies, no doubt, we do inherit from our ancestors, but not our individualities. These come from far away.

A good many of the guests went at the same time, having long distances to drive on that cold frosty night, although it was only just ten o'clock. For as was usual at that period even in fashionable houses, we had dined at seven.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HARÛT AND MARÛT

After Lord Ragnall had seen his guests to the door in the old-fashioned manner, he returned and asked me if I played cards, or whether I preferred music. I was assuring him that I hated the sight of a card when Mr. Savage appeared in his silent way and respectfully inquired of his lordship whether any gentleman was staying in the house whose Christian name was *Here-come-a-zany*. Lord Ragnall looked at him with a searching eye as though he suspected him of being drunk, and then asked what he meant by such a ridiculous question.

"I mean, my lord," replied Mr. Savage with a touch of offence in his tone, "that two foreign individuals in white clothes have arrived at the castle, stating that they wish to speak at once with a *Mr. Here-come-a-zany* who is staying here. I told them to go away as the butler said he could make nothing of their talk, but they only sat down in the snow and said they would wait for *Here-come-a-zany*."

"Then you had better put them in the old guardroom, lock them up with something to eat, and send the stable-boy for the policeman, who is a zany if ever anybody was. I expect they are after the pheasants."

"Stop a bit," I said, for an idea had occurred to me. "The message may be meant for me, though I can't conceive who sent it. My native name is Macumazana, which possibly Mr. Savage has not caught quite correctly. Shall I go to see these men?"

"I wouldn't do that in this cold, Quatermain," Lord Ragnall answered. "Did they say what they are, Savage?"

"I made out that they were conjurers, my lord. At least when I told them to go away one of them said, 'You will go first, gentleman.' Then, my lord, I heard a hissing sound in my coat-tail pocket and, putting my hand into it, I found a large snake which dropped on the ground and vanished. It quite paralysed me, my lord, and while I stood there wondering whether I was bitten, a mouse jumped out of the kitchenmaid's hair. She had been laughing at their dress, my lord, but *now* she's screaming in hysterics."

The solemn aspect of Mr. Savage as he narrated these unholy marvels was such that, like the kitchenmaid, we both burst into ill-timed merriment. Attracted by our laughter, Miss Holmes, Miss Manners, with whom she was talking, and some of the other guests, approached and asked what was the matter.

"Savage here declares that there are two conjurers in the kitchen premises, who have been producing snakes out of his pocket and mice from the hair of one of the maids, and who want to see Mr. Quatermain," Lord Ragnall answered.

"Conjurers! Oh, do have them in, George," exclaimed Miss Holmes; while Miss Manners and the others, who were getting a little tired of promiscuous conversation, echoed her request.

"By all means," he answered, "though we have enough mice here without their bringing any more. Savage, go and tell your two friends that *Mr. Here-come-a-zany* is waiting for them in the drawing-room, and that the company would like to see some of their tricks."

Savage bowed and departed, like a hero to execution, for by his pallor I could see that he was in a great fright. When he had gone we set to work and cleared a space in the middle of the room, in front of which we arranged chairs for the company to sit on.

"No doubt they are Indian jugglers," said Lord Ragnall, "and will want a place to grow their mango-tree, as I remember seeing them do in Kashmir."

As he spoke the door opened and Mr. Savage appeared through it, walking much faster than was his wont. I noted also that he gripped the pockets of his swallow-tail coat firmly in his hand.

"Mr. Hare-root and Mr. Mare-root," he announced.

"Hare-root and Mare-root!" repeated Lord Ragnall.

"Harût and Marût, I expect," I said. "I think I have read somewhere that they were great magicians, whose names these conjurers have taken." (Since then I have discovered that they are mentioned in the Koran as masters of the Black Art.)

A moment later two men followed him through the doorway. The first was a tall, Eastern-looking person with a grave countenance, a long, white beard, a hooked nose, and flashing, hawk-like eyes. The second was shorter and rather stout, also much younger. He had a genial, smiling face, small, beady-black eyes, and was clean-shaven. They were very light in colour; indeed I have seen Italians who are much darker; and there was about their whole aspect a certain air of power.

Instantly I remembered the story that Miss Holmes had told me at dinner and looked at her covertly, to see that she had turned quite pale and was trembling a little. I do not think that anyone else noticed this, however, as all were staring at the strangers. Moreover she recovered herself in a moment, and, catching my eye, laid her finger on her lips in token of silence.

The men were clothed in thick, fur-lined cloaks, which they took off and, folding them neatly, laid upon the floor, standing revealed in robes of a beautiful whiteness and in large plain turbans, also white.

"High-class Somali Arabs," thought I to myself, noting the while that as they arranged the robes they were taking in every one of us with their quick eyes. One of them shut the door, leaving Savage on this side of it as though they meant him to be present. Then they walked towards us, each of them carrying an ornamental basket made apparently of split reeds, that contained doubtless their conjuring outfit and probably the snake which Savage had found in his pocket. To my surprise they came straight to me, and, having set down the baskets, lifted their hands above their heads, as a person about to dive might do, and bowed till the points of their fingers touched the floor. Next they spoke, not in Arabic as I had expected that they would, but in Bantu, which of course I understood perfectly well.

"I, Harût, head priest and doctor of the White Kendah People, greet you, O Macumazana," said the elder man.

"I, Marût, a priest and doctor of the People of the White Kendah, greet you, O Watcher-by-night, whom we have travelled far to find," said the younger man. Then together,

"We both greet you, O Lord, who seem small but are great, O Chief with a troubled past and with a mighty future, O Beloved of Mameena who has 'gone down' but still speaks from beneath, Mameena who was and is of our company."

At this point it was my turn to shiver and become pale, as any may guess who may have chanced to read the history of Mameena, and the turn of Miss Holmes to watch *me* with animated interest.

"O Slayer of evil men and beasts!" they went on, in their rich-voiced, monotonous chant, "who, as our magic tells us, are destined to deliver our land from the terrible scourge, we greet you, we bow before you, we acknowledge you as our lord and brother, to whom we vow safety among us and in the desert, to whom we promise a great reward."

Again they bowed, once, twice, thrice; then stood silent before me with folded arms.

"What on earth are they saying?" asked Scroope. "I could catch a few words"—he knew a little kitchen Zulu—"but not much."

I told him briefly while the others listened.

"What does Mameena mean?" asked Miss Holmes, with a horrible acuteness. "Is it a woman's name?"

Hearing her, Harût and Marût bowed as though doing reverence to that name. I am sorry to say that at this point I grew confused, though really there was no reason why I should, and muttered something about a native girl who had made trouble in her day.

Miss Holmes and the other ladies looked at me with amused disbelief, and to my dismay the venerable Harût turned to Miss Holmes, and with his inevitable bow, said in broken English:

"Mameena very beautiful woman, perhaps more beautiful than you, lady. Mameena love the white lord Macumazana. She love him while she live, she love him now she dead. She tell me so again just now. You ask white lord tell you pretty story of how he kiss her before she kill herself."

Needless to say all this very misleading information was received by the audience with an attention that I can but call rapt, and in a kind of holy silence which was broken only by a sudden burst of sniggering on the part of Scroope. I favoured him with my fiercest frown. Then I fell upon that venerable villain Harût, and belaboured him in Bantu, while the audience listened as intently as though they understood.

I asked him what he meant by coming here to asperse my character. I asked him who the deuce he was. I asked him how he came to know anything about Mameena, and finally I told him that soon or late I would be even with him, and paused exhausted.

He stood there looking for all the world like a statue of the patriarch Job as I imagine him, and when I had done, replied without moving a muscle and in English:

"O Lord, Zikali, Zulu wizard, friend of mine! All great wizard friend just like all elephant and all snake. Zikali make me know Mameena, and she tell me story and send you much love, and say she wait for you always." (More sniggers from Scroope, and still intenser interest evinced by Miss Holmes and others.) "If you like, I show you Mameena 'fore I go." (Murmurs from Miss Holmes and Miss Manners of "Oh, *please* do!") "But that very little business, for what one long-ago lady out of so many?"

Then suddenly he broke into Bantu, and added: "A jest is a jest, Macumazana, though often there is meaning in a jest, and you shall see Mameena if you will. I come here to ask you to do my people a service for which you shall not lack reward. We, the White Kendah, the People of the Child, are at war with the Black Kendah, our subjects who outnumber us. The Black Kendah have an evil spirit for a god, which spirit from the beginning has dwelt in the largest elephant in all the world, a beast that none can kill, but which kills many and bewitches more. While that elephant, which is named Jana, lives we, the People of the Child, go in terror, for day by day it destroys us. We have learned—how it does not matter—that you alone can kill that elephant. If you will come and kill it, we will show you the place where all the elephants go to die, and you shall take their ivory, many wagon-loads, and grow rich. Soon you are going on a journey that has to do with a flower, and you will visit peoples named the Mazitu and the Pongo who live on an island in a lake. Far beyond the Pongo and across the desert dwell my people, the Kendah, in a secret land. When you wish to visit us, as you will do, journey to the north of that lake where the Pongo dwell, and stay there on the edge of the desert shooting till we come. Now mock me if you will, but do not forget, for these things shall befall in their season, though that time be far. If we meet no more for a while, still do not forget. When you have need of gold or of the ivory that is gold, then journey to the north of the lake where the Pongo dwell, and call on the names of Harût and Marût."

"And call on the names of Harût and Marût," repeated the younger man, who hitherto appeared to take no interest in our talk.

Next, before I could answer, before I could think the thing out indeed, for all this breath from savage and mystical Africa blowing on me suddenly here in an Essex drawing-room, seemed to overwhelm me, the ineffable Harût proceeded in his English conjurer's patter:

"Rich ladies and gentlemen want see trick by poor old wizard from centre Africa. Well, we show them, but please 'member no magic, all quite simple trick. Teach it you if you pay. Please not look too hard, no want you learn how it done. What you like see? Tree grow out of nothing, eh? Good! Please lend me that plate—what you call him—china."

Then the performance began. The tree grew admirably upon the china plate under the cover of an antimacassar. A number of bits of stick danced together on the said plate, apparently without being touched. At a whistle from Marût a second snake crawled out of the pocket of the horrified Mr. Savage, who stood observing these proceedings at a respectful distance, erected itself on its tail upon the plate and took fire till it was consumed to ashes, and so forth.

The show was very good, but to tell the truth I did not take much notice of it, for I had seen similar things before and was engaged in thoughts much excited by what Harût had said to me. At length the pair paused amidst the clapping of the audience, and Marût began to pack up the properties as though all were done. Then Harût observed casually:

"The Lord Macumazana think this poor business and he right. Very poor business, any conjurer do better. All common trick"—here his eye fell upon Mr. Savage who was wriggling uneasily in the background. "What matter with that gentleman? Brother Marût, go see."

Brother Marût went and freed Mr. Savage from two more snakes which seemed to have taken possession of various parts of his garments. Also, amidst shouts of laughter, from a large dead rat which he appeared to draw from his well-oiled hair.

"Ah!" said Harût, as his confederate returned with these prizes, leaving Savage collapsed in a chair, "snake love that gentleman much. He earn great money in Africa. Well, he keep rat in hair; hungry snake always want rat. But as I say, this poor business. Now you like to see some better, eh? Mameena, eh?"

"No," I replied firmly, whereat everyone laughed.

"Elephant Jana we want you kill, eh? Just as he look this minute."

"Yes," I said, "very much indeed, only how will you show it me?"

"That quite easy, Macumazana. You just smoke little Kendah 'bacco and see many things, if you have gift, as I *think* you got, and as I almost *sure* that lady got," and he pointed to Miss Holmes. "Sometimes they things people want see, and sometimes they things people not want see."

"Dakka," I said contemptuously, alluding to the Indian hemp on which natives make themselves drunk throughout great districts of Africa.

"Oh! no, not dakka, that common stuff; this 'bacco much better than dakka, only grow in Kendah-land. You think all nonsense? Well, you see. Give me match please."

Then while we watched he placed some tobacco, at least it looked like tobacco, in a little wooden bowl that he also produced from his basket. Next he said something to his companion, Marût, who drew a flute from his robe made out of a thick reed, and began to play on it a wild and melancholy music, the sound of which seemed to affect my backbone as standing on a great height often does. Presently too Harût broke into a low song whereof I could not understand a word, that rose and fell with the music of the flute. Now he struck a match, which seemed incongruous in the midst of this semi-magical ceremony, and taking a pinch of the tobacco, lit it and dropped it among the rest. A pale, blue smoke arose from the bowl and with it a very sweet odour not unlike that of the tuberose gardeners grow in hot-houses, but more searching.

"Now you breathe smoke, Macumazana," he said, "and tell us what you see. Oh! no fear, that not hurt you. Just like cigarette. Look," and he inhaled some of the vapour and blew it out through his nostrils, after which his face seemed to change to me, though what the change was I could not define.

I hesitated till Scroope said:

"Come, Allan, don't shirk this Central African adventure. I'll try if you like."

"No," said Harût brusquely, "*you* no good."

Then curiosity and perhaps the fear of being laughed at overcame me. I took the bowl and held it under my nose, while Harût threw over my head the antimacassar which he had used in the mango trick, to keep in the fumes I suppose.

At first these fumes were unpleasant, but just as I was about to drop the bowl they seemed to become agreeable and to penetrate to the inmost recesses of my being. The general effect of them was not unlike that of the laughing gas which dentists give, with this difference, that whereas the gas produces insensibility, these fumes seemed to set the mind on fire and to burn away all limitations of time and distance. Things shifted before me. It was as though I were no longer in that room but travelling with inconceivable rapidity.

Suddenly I appeared to stop before a curtain of mist. The mist rolled up in front of me and I saw a wild and wonderful scene. There lay a lake surrounded by dense African forest. The sky above was still red with the last lights of sunset and in it floated the full moon. On the eastern side of the lake was a great open space where nothing seemed to grow and all about this space were the skeletons of hundreds of dead elephants. There they lay, some of them almost covered with grey mosses hanging to their bones, through which their yellow tusks projected as though they had been dead for centuries; others with the rotting hide still on them. I knew that I was looking on a cemetery of elephants, the place where these great beasts went to die, as I have since been told the extinct moas did in New Zealand. All my life as a hunter had I heard rumours of these cemeteries, but never before did I see such a spot even in a dream.

See! There was one dying now, a huge gaunt bull that looked as though it were several hundred years old. It stood there swaying to and fro. Then it lifted its trunk, I suppose to trumpet, though of course I could hear nothing, and slowly sank upon its knees and so remained in the last relaxation of death.

Almost in the centre of this cemetery was a little mound of water-washed rock that had endured when the rest of the stony plain was denuded in past epochs. Suddenly upon that rock appeared the shape of the most gigantic elephant that ever I beheld in all my long experience. It had one enormous tusk, but the other was deformed and broken off short. Its sides were scarred as though with fighting and its eyes shone red and wickedly. Held in its trunk was the body of a woman whose hair hung down upon one side and whose feet hung down upon the other. Clapsed in her arms was a child that seemed to be still living.

The rogue, as a brute of this sort is called, for evidently such it was, dropped the corpse to the ground and stood a while, flapping its ears. Then it felt for and picked up the child with its trunk, swung it to and fro and finally tossed it high into the air, hurling it far away. After this it walked to the elephant that I had just seen die, and charged the carcass, knocking it over. Then having lifted its trunk as though to trumpet in triumph, it shambled off towards the forest and vanished.

The curtain of mist fell again and in it, dimly, I thought I saw—well, never mind who or what I saw. Then I awoke.

"Well, did you see anything?" asked a chorus of voices.

I told them what I had seen, leaving out the last part.

"I say, old fellow," said Scroope, "you must have been pretty clever to get all that in, for your eyes weren't shut for more than ten seconds."

"Then I wonder what you would say if I repeated everything," I answered, for I still felt dreamy and not quite myself.

"You see elephant Jana?" asked Harût. "He kill woman and child, eh? Well, he do that every night. Well, that why people of White Kendah want you to kill *him* and take all that ivory which they no dare touch because it in holy place and Black Kendah not let them. So he live still. That what we wish know. Thank you much, Macumazana. You very good look-through-distance man. Just what I think. Kendah 'bacco smoke work very well in you. Now, beautiful lady," he added turning to Miss Holmes, "you like look too? Better look. Who knows what you see?"

Miss Holmes hesitated a moment, studying me with an inquiring eye. But I made no sign, being in truth very curious to hear *her* experience.

"Yes," she said.

"I would prefer, Luna, that you left this business alone," remarked Lord Ragnall uneasily. "I think it is time that you ladies went to bed."

"Here is a match," said Miss Holmes to Harût who was engaged in putting more tobacco into the bowl, the suspicion of a smile upon his grave and statuesque countenance. Harût received the match with a low bow and fired the stuff as before. Then he handed the bowl, from which once again the blue smoke curled upwards, to Miss Holmes, and gently and gracefully let the antimacassar fall over it and her head, which it draped as a wedding veil might do. A few seconds later she threw off the antimacassar and cast the bowl, in which the fire was now out, on to the floor. Then she stood up with wide eyes, looking wondrous lovely and, notwithstanding her lack of height, majestic.

"I have been in another world," she said in a low voice as though she spoke to the air, "I have travelled a great way. I found myself in a small place made of stone. It was dark in the place, the fire in that bowl lit it up. There was nothing there except a beautiful statue of a naked baby which seemed to be carved in yellow ivory, and a chair made of ebony inlaid with ivory and seated with string. I stood in front of the statue of the Ivory Child. It seemed to come to life and smile at me. Round its neck was a string of red stones. It took them from its neck and set them upon mine. Then it pointed to the chair, and I sat down in the chair. That was all."

Harût followed her words with an interest that I could see was intense, although he attempted to hide it. Then he asked me to translate them, which I did.

As their full sense came home to him, although his face remained impassive, I saw his dark eyes shine with the light of triumph. Moreover I heard him whisper to Marût words that seemed to mean,

"The Sacred Child accepts the Guardian. The Spirit of the White Kendah finds a voice again."

Then as though involuntarily, but with the utmost reverence, both of them bowed deeply towards Miss Holmes.

A babel of conversation broke out.

"What a ridiculous dream," I heard Lord Ragnall say in a vexed voice. "An ivory child that seemed to come to life and to give you a necklace. Whoever heard such nonsense?"

"Whoever heard such nonsense?" repeated Miss Holmes after him, as though in polite acquiescence, but speaking as an automaton might speak.

"I say," interrupted Scroope, addressing Miss Manners, "this is a drawing-room entertainment and a half, isn't it, dear?"

"I don't know," answered Miss Manners, doubtfully, "it is rather too queer for my taste. Tricks are all very well, but when it comes to magic and visions I get frightened."

"Well, I suppose the show is over," said Lord Ragnall. "Quatermain, would you mind asking your conjurer friends what I owe them?"

Here Harût, who had understood, paused from packing up his properties and answered,

"Nothing, O great Lord, nothing. It is we owe you much. Here we learn what we want know long time. I mean if elephant Jana still kill people of Kendah. Kendah 'bacco no speak to us. Only speak to new spirit. You got great gift, lady, and you too, Macumazana. You not like smoke more Kendah 'bacco and look into past, eh? Better look! Very full, past, learn much there about all us; learn how things begin. Make you understand lot what seem odd to-day. No! Well, one day you look p'raps, 'cause past pull hard and call loud, only no one hear what it say. Good night, O great Lord. Good night, O beautiful lady. Good night, O Macumazana, till we meet again when you come kill elephant Jana. Blessing of the Heaven-Child, who give rain, who protect all danger, who give food, who give health, on you all."

Then making many obeisances they walked backwards to the door where they put on their long cloaks.

At a sign from Lord Ragnall I accompanied them, an office which, fearing more snakes, Mr. Savage was very glad to resign to me. Presently we stood outside the house amidst the moaning trees, and very cold it was there.

"What does all this mean, O men of Africa?" I asked.

"Answer the question yourself when you stand face to face with the great elephant Jana that has in it an evil spirit, O Macumazana," replied Harût. "Nay, listen. We are far from our home and we sought tidings through those who could give it to us, and we have won those tidings, that is all. We are worshippers of the Heavenly Child that is eternal youth and all good things, but of late the Child has lacked a tongue. Yet to-night it spoke again. Seek to know no more, you who in due season will know all things."

"Seek to know no more," echoed Marût, "who already, perhaps, know too much, lest harm should come to you, Macumazana."

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?" I asked.

"We do not sleep here," answered Harût, "we walk to the great city and thence find our way to Africa, where we shall meet you again. You know that we are no liars, common readers of thought and makers of tricks, for did not Dogeetah, the wandering white man, speak to you of the people of whom he had heard who worshipped the Child of Heaven? Go in, Macumazana, ere you take harm in this horrible cold, and take with you this as a marriage gift from the Child of Heaven whom she met to-night, to the beautiful lady stamped with the sign of the young moon who is about to marry the great lord she loves."

Then he thrust a little linen-wrapped parcel into my hand and with his companion vanished into the darkness.

I returned to the drawing-room where the others were still discussing the remarkable performance of the two native conjurers.

"They have gone," I said in answer to Lord Ragnall, "to walk to London as they said. But they have sent a wedding-present to Miss Holmes," and I showed the parcel.

"Open it, Quatermain," he said again.

"No, George," interrupted Miss Holmes, laughing, for by now she seemed to have quite recovered herself, "I like to open my own presents."

He shrugged his shoulders and I handed her the parcel, which was neatly sewn up. Somebody produced scissors and the stitches were cut. Within the linen was a necklace of beautiful red stones, oval-shaped like amber beads and of the size of a robin's egg. They were roughly polished and threaded on what I recognized at once to be hair from an elephant's tail. From certain indications I judged these stones, which might have been spinels or carbuncles, or even rubies, to be very ancient. Possibly they had once hung round the neck of some lady in old Egypt. Indeed a beautiful little statuette, also of red stone, which was suspended from the centre of the necklace, suggested that this was so, for it may well have been a likeness of one of the great gods of the Egyptians, the infant Horus, the son of Isis. "That is the necklace I saw which the Ivory Child gave me in my dream," said Miss Holmes quietly. Then with much deliberation she clasped it round her throat.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PLOT

The sequel to the events of this evening may be told very briefly and of it the reader can form his own judgment. I narrate it as it happened.

That night I did not sleep at all well. It may have been because of the excitement of the great shoot in which I found myself in competition with another man whom I disliked and who had defrauded me in the past, to say nothing of its physical strain in cold and heavy weather. Or it may have been that my imagination was stirred by the arrival of that strange pair, Harût and Marût, apparently in search of myself, seven thousand miles away from any place where they can have known aught of an insignificant individual with a purely local repute. Or it may have been that the pictures which they showed me when under the influence of the fumes of their "tobacco"—or of their hypnotism—took an undue possession of my brain.

Or lastly, the strange coincidence that the beautiful betrothed of my host should have related to me a tale of her childhood of which she declared she had never spoken before, and that within an hour the two principal actors in that tale should have appeared before my eyes and hers (for I may state that from the beginning I had no doubt that they were the same men), moved me and filled me with quite natural foreboding. Or all these things together may have tended to a concomitant effect. At any rate the issue was that I could not sleep.

For hour after hour I lay thinking and in an irritated way listening for the chimes of the Ragnall stable-clock which once had adorned the tower of the church and struck the quarters with a damnable reiteration. I concluded that Messrs. Harût and Marût were a couple of common Arab rogues such as I had seen performing at the African ports. Then a quarter struck and I concluded that the elephants' cemetery which I beheld in the smoke undoubtedly existed and that I meant to collar those thousands of pounds' worth of ivory before I died. Then after another quarter I concluded that there was no elephants' cemetery—although by the way my old friend, Dogeetah or Brother John, had mentioned such a thing to me—but that probably there was a tribe, as he had also mentioned, called the Kendah, who worshipped a baby, or rather its effigy.

Well now, as had already occurred to me, the old Egyptians, of whom I was always fond of reading when I got a chance, also worshipped a child, Horus the Saviour. And that child had a mother called Isis symbolised in the crescent moon, the great Nature goddess, the mistress of mysteries to whose cult ten thousand priests were sworn—do not Herodotus and others, especially Apuleius, tell us all about her? And by a queer coincidence Miss Holmes had the mark of a crescent moon upon her breast. And when she was a child those two men, or others very like them, had pointed out that mark to each other. And I had seen them staring hard at it that night. And in her vapour-invoked dream the "Heavenly Child," *alias* Horus, or the double of Horus, the *Ka*, I think the Egyptians called it, had awakened at the sight of her and kissed her and given her the necklace of the goddess, and—all the rest. What did it mean?

I went to sleep at last wondering what on earth it *could* mean, till presently that confounded clock woke me up again and I must go through the whole business once more.

By degrees, this was towards dawn, I became aware that all hope of rest had vanished from me utterly; that I was most painfully awake, and what is more, oppressed by a curious fear to the effect that something was going to happen to Miss Holmes. So vivid did this fear become that at length I arose, lit a candle and dressed myself. As it happened I knew where Miss Holmes slept. Her room, which I had seen her enter, was on the same corridor as mine though at the other end of it near the head of a stair that ran I knew not whither. In my portmanteau that had been sent over from Miss Manners's house, amongst other things was a small double-barrelled pistol which from long habit I always carried with me loaded, except for the caps that were in a little leather case with some spare ammunition attached to the pistol belt. I took it out, capped it and thrust it into my pocket. Then I slipped from the room and stood behind a tall clock in the corridor, watching Miss Holmes's door and reflecting what a fool I should look if anyone chanced to find me.

Half an hour or so later by the light of the setting moon which struggled through a window, I saw the door open and Miss Holmes emerge in a kind of dressing-gown and still wearing the necklace which Harût and Marût had given her. Of this I was sure for the light gleamed upon the red stones.

Also it shone upon her face and showed me without doubt that she was walking in her sleep.

Gliding as silently as a ghost she crossed the corridor and vanished. I followed and saw that she had descended an ancient, twisting stairway which I had noted in the castle wall. I went after her, my stockinged feet making no noise, feeling my way carefully in the darkness of the stair, for I did not dare to strike a match. Beneath me I heard a noise as of someone fumbling with bolts. Then a door creaked on its hinges and there was some light. When I reached the doorway I caught sight of the figure of Miss Holmes flitting across a hollow garden that was laid out in the bottom of the castle moat which had been drained. The garden, as I had observed when we walked through it on the previous day on our way to the first covert that we shot, was bordered by a shrubbery through which ran paths that led to the back drive of the castle.

Across the garden glided the figure of Miss Holmes and after it went I, crouching and taking cover behind every bush as though I were stalking big game, which indeed I was. She entered the shrubbery, moving much more swiftly now, for as she went she seemed to gather speed, like a stone which is rolled down a hill. It was as though whatever might be attracting her, for I felt sure that she was being drawn by something, acted more strongly upon her sleeping will as she drew nearer to it. For a while I lost sight of her in the shadow of the tall trees. Then suddenly I saw her again, standing quite still in an opening caused by the blowing down in the gale of

one of the avenue of elms that bordered the back drive. But now she was no longer alone, for advancing towards her were two cloaked figures in whom I recognized Harût and Marût.

There she stood with outstretched arms, and towards her, stealthily as lions stalking a buck, came Harût and Marût. Moreover, between the naked boughs of the fallen elm I caught sight of what looked like the outline of a closed carriage standing upon the drive. Also I heard a horse stamp upon the frosty ground. Round the edge of the little glade I ran, keeping in the dark shadow, as I went cocking the pistol that was in my pocket. Then suddenly I darted out and stood between Harût and Marût and Miss Holmes.

Not a word passed between us. I think that all three of us subconsciously were anxious not to awake the sleeping woman, knowing that if we did so there would be a terrible scene. Only after motioning to me to stand aside, of course in vain, Harût and Marût drew from their robes curved and cruel-looking knives and bowed, for even now their politeness did not forsake them. I bowed back and when I straightened myself those enterprising Easterns found that I was covering the heart of Harût with my pistol. Then with that perception which is part of the mental outfit of the great, they saw that the game was up since I could have shot them both before a knife touched me.

"You have won this time, O Watcher-by-Night," whispered Harût softly, "but another time you will lose. That beautiful lady belongs to us and the People of the White Këndah, for she is marked with the holy mark of the young moon. The call of the Child of Heaven is heard in her heart, and will bring her home to the Child as it has brought her to us to-night. Now lead her hence still sleeping, O brave and clever one, so well named Watcher-by-Night."

Then they were gone and presently I heard the sound of horses being driven rapidly along the drive.

For a moment I hesitated as to whether I would or would not run in and shoot those horses. Two considerations stayed me. The first was that if I did so my pistol would be empty, or even if I shot one horse and retained a barrel loaded, with it I could only kill a single man, leaving myself defenceless against the knife of the other. The second consideration was that now as before I did not wish to wake up Miss Holmes.

I crept to her and not knowing what else to do, took hold of one of her outstretched hands. She turned and came with me at once as though she knew me, remaining all the while fast asleep. Thus we went back to the house, through the still open door, up the stairway straight to her own room, on the threshold of which I loosed her hand. The room was dark and I could see nothing, but I listened until I heard a sound as of a person throwing herself upon the bed and drawing up the blankets. Then knowing that she was safe for a while, I shut the door, which opened outwards as doors of ancient make sometimes do, and set against it a little table that stood in the passage.

Next, after reflecting for a minute, the circumstances being awkward in many ways, I went to my room and lit a candle. Obviously it was my duty to inform Lord Ragnall of what had happened and that as soon as possible. But I had no idea in what part of that huge building his sleeping place might be, nor, for patent reasons, was it desirable that I should disturb the house and so create talk. In this dilemma I remembered that Lord Ragnall's confidential servant, Mr. Savage, when he conducted me to my room on the previous night, which he made a point of doing perhaps because he wished to talk over the matter of the snakes that had found their way into his pockets, had shown me a bell in it which he said rang outside his door. He called it an "emergency bell." I remarked idly that it was improbable that I should have any occasion for its use.

"Who knows, sir?" said Mr. Savage prophetically. "There are folk who say that this old castle is haunted, which after what I have seen to-night I can well believe. If you should chance to meet a ghost looking, let us say, like those black villains, Harum and Scarum, or whatever they call themselves—well, sir, two's better company than one."

I considered that bell but was loath to ring it for the reasons I have given. Then I went outside the room and looked. As I had hoped might be the case, there ran the wire on the face of the wall connected along its length by other wires with the various rooms it passed.

I set to work and followed that wire. It was not an easy job; indeed once or twice it reminded me of that story of the old Greek hero who found his way through a labyrinth by means of a silken thread. I forget whether it were a bull or a lady he was looking for, but with care and perseverance he found one or the other, or it may have been both.

Down staircases and various passages I went with my eye glued upon the wire, which occasionally got mixed up with other wires, till at length it led me through a swing door covered with red baize into what appeared to be a modern annexe to the castle. Here at last it terminated on the spring of an alarming-looking and deep-throated bell that hung immediately over a certain door.

On this door I knocked, hoping that it might be that of Mr. Savage and praying earnestly that it did not enclose the chaste resting-place of the cook or any other female. Too late, I mean after I had knocked, it occurred to me that if so my position would be painful to a degree. However in this particular Fortune stood my friend, which does not always happen to the virtuous. For presently I heard a voice which I recognized as that of Mr. Savage, asking, not without a certain quaver in its tone,

"Who the devil is that?"

"Me," I replied, being flustered.

"Me' won't do," said the voice. "'Me' might be Harum or it might be Scarum, or it might be someone worse. Who's 'Me'?"

"Allan Quatermain, you idiot," I whispered through the keyhole.

"Anna who? Well, never mind. Go away, Hanna. I'll talk to you in the morning."

Then I kicked the door, and at length, very cautiously, Mr. Savage opened it.

"Good heavens, sir," he said, "what are you doing here, sir? Dressed too, at this hour, and with the handle of a pistol sticking out of your pocket—or is it—the head of a snake?" and he jumped back, a strange and stately figure in a long white nightshirt which apparently he wore over his underclothing.

I entered the room and shut the door, whereon he politely handed me a chair, remarking,

"Is it ghosts, sir, or are you ill, or is it Harum and Scarum, of whom I have been thinking all night? Very cold too, sir, being afraid to pull up the bedclothes for fear lest there might be more reptiles in them." He pointed to his dress-coat hanging on the back of another chair with both the pockets turned inside out, adding tragically, "To think, sir, that this new coat has been a nest of snakes, which I have hated like poison from a child, and me almost a teetotaler!"

"Yes," I said impatiently, "it's Harum and Scarum as you call them. Take me to Lord Ragnall's bedroom at once."

"Ah! sir, burgling, I suppose, or mayhap worse," he exclaimed as he threw on some miscellaneous garments and seized a life-preserver which hung upon a hook. "Now I'm ready, only I hope they have left their snakes behind. I never could bear the sight of a snake, and they seem to know it—the brutes."

In due course we reached Lord Ragnall's room, which Mr. Savage entered, and in answer to a stifled inquiry exclaimed,

"Mr. Allan Quatermain to see you, my lord."

"What is it, Quatermain?" he asked, sitting up in bed and yawning. "Have you had a nightmare?"

"Yes," I answered, and Savage having left us and shut the door, I told him everything as it is written down.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed when I had finished. "If it had not been for you and your intuition and courage——"

"Never mind me," I interrupted. "The question is—what should be done now? Are you going to try to arrest these men, or will you—hold your tongue and merely cause them to be watched?"

"Really I don't know. Even if we can catch them the whole story would sound so strange in a law-court, and all sorts of things might be suggested."

"Yes, Lord Ragnall, it would sound so strange that I beg you will come at once to see the evidences of what I tell you, before rain or snow obliterates them, bringing another witness with you. Lady Longden, perhaps."

"Lady Longden! Why one might as well write to *The Times*. I have it! There's Savage. He is faithful and can be silent."

So Savage was called in and, while Lord Ragnall dressed himself hurriedly, told the outline of his story under pain of instant dismissal if he breathed a word. Really to watch his face was as good as a play. So astonished was he that all he could ejaculate was—

"The black-hearted villains! Well, they ain't friendly with snakes for nothing."

Then having made sure that Miss Holmes was still in her room, we went down the twisting stair and through the side doorway, locking the door after us. By now the dawn was breaking and there was enough light to enable me in certain places where the snow that fell after the gale remained, to show Lord Ragnall and Savage the impress of the little bedroom slippers which Miss Holmes wore, and of my stocking feet following after.

In the plantation things were still easier, for every detail of the movements of the four of us could be traced. Moreover, on the back drive was the spoor of the horses and the marks of the wheels of the carriage that had been brought for the purposes of the abduction. Also my great good fortune, for this seemed to prove my theory, we found a parcel wrapped in native linen that appeared to have fallen out of the carriage when Harût and Marût made their hurried escape, as one of the wheels had gone over it. It contained an Eastern woman's dress and veil, intended, I suppose, to be used in disguising Miss Holmes, who thence-forward would have appeared to be the wife or daughter of one of the abductors.

Savage discovered this parcel, which he lifted only to drop it with a yell, for underneath it lay a torpid snake, doubtless one of those that had been used in the performance.

Of these discoveries and many other details, on our return to the house, Lord Ragnall made full notes in a pocket-book, that when completed were signed by all three of us.

There is not much more to tell, that is of this part of the story. The matter was put into the hands of detectives who discovered that the Easterns had driven to London, where all traces of the carriage which conveyed them was lost. They, however, embarked upon a steamer called the *Antelope*, together with two native women, who probably had been provided to look after Miss Holmes, and sailed that very afternoon for Egypt. Thither, of course, it was useless to follow them in those days, even if it had been advisable to do so.

To return to Miss Holmes. She came down to breakfast looking very charming but rather pale. Again I sat next to her and took some opportunity to ask her how she had rested that night.

She replied, Very well and yet very ill, since, although she never remembered sleeping more soundly in her life, she had experienced all sorts of queer dreams of which she could remember nothing at all, a circumstance that annoyed her much, as she was sure that they were most interesting. Then she added,

"Do you know, Mr. Quatermain, I found a lot of mud on my dressing-gown this morning, and my bedroom slippers were also a mass of mud and wet through. How do you account for that? It is just as though I had been walking about outside in my sleep, which is absurd, as I never did such a thing in my life."

Not feeling equal to the invention of any convincing explanation of these phenomena, I upset the marmalade pot on to the table in such a way that some of it fell upon her dress, and then covered my retreat with profuse apologies. Understanding my dilemma, for he had heard something of this talk, Lord Ragnall came to my aid with a startling statement of which I forget the purport, and thus that crisis passed.

Shortly after breakfast Scroope announced to Miss Manners that her carriage was waiting, and we departed. Before I went, as it chanced, I had a few private words with my host, with Miss Holmes, and with the magnificent Mr. Savage. To the last, by the way, I offered a tip which he refused, saying that after all we had gone through together he could not allow "money to come between us," by which he meant, to pass from my pocket to his. Lord Ragnall asked me for both my English and my African addresses, which he noted in his pocket-book. Then he said,

"Really, Quatermain, I feel as though I had known you for years instead of three days; if you will allow me I will add that I should like to know a great deal more of you." (He was destined to do so, poor fellow, though neither of us knew it at the time.) "If ever you come to England again I hope you will make this house your headquarters."

"And if ever you come to South Africa, Lord Ragnall, I hope you will make my four-roomed shanty on the Berea at Durban your headquarters. You will get a hearty welcome there and something to eat, but little more."

"There is nothing I should like better, Quatermain. Circumstances have put me in a certain position in this country, still to tell you the truth there is a great deal about the life of which I grow very tired. But you see I am going to be married, and that I fear means an end of travelling, since naturally my wife will wish to take her place in society and the rest."

"Of course," I replied, "for it is not every young lady who has the luck to become an English peeress with all the etceteras, is it? Still I am not so sure but that Miss Holmes will take to travelling some day, although I *am* sure that she would do better to stay at home."

He looked at me curiously, then asked,

"You don't think there is anything really serious in all this business, do you?"

"I don't know what to think," I answered, "except that you will do well to keep a good eye upon your wife. What those Easterns tried to do last night and, I think, years ago, they may try again soon, or years hence, for evidently they are patient and determined men with much to win. Also it is a curious coincidence that she should have that mark upon her which appeals so strongly to Messrs. Harût and Marût, and, to be brief, she is in some ways different from most young women. As she said to me herself last night, Lord Ragnall, we are surrounded by mysteries; mysteries of blood, of inherited spirit, of this world generally in which it is probable that we all descended from quite a few common ancestors. And beyond these are other mysteries of the measureless universe to which we belong, that may already be exercising their strong and secret influences upon us, as perhaps, did we know it, they have done for millions of years in the Infinite whence we came and whither we go."

I suppose I spoke somewhat solemnly, for he said,

"Do you know you frighten me a little, though I don't quite understand what you mean." Then we parted.

With Miss Holmes my conversation was shorter. She remarked,

"It has been a great pleasure to me to meet you. I do not remember anybody with whom I have found myself in so much sympathy—except one of course. It is strange to think that when we meet again I shall be a married woman."

"I do not suppose we shall ever meet again, Miss Holmes. Your life is here, mine is in the wildest places of a wild land far away."

"Oh! yes, we shall," she answered. "I learned this and lots of other things when I held my head in that smoke last night."

Then we also parted.

Lastly Mr. Savage arrived with my coat. "Goodbye, Mr. Quatermain," he said. "If I forget everything else I shall never forget you and those villains, Harum and Scarum and their snakes. I hope it won't be my lot ever to clap eyes on them again, Mr. Quatermain, and yet somehow I don't feel so sure of that."

"Nor do I," I replied, with a kind of inspiration, after which followed the episode of the rejected tip.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BONA FIDE GOLD MINE

Fully two years had gone by since I bade farewell to Lord Ragnall and Miss Holmes, and when the curtain draws up again behold me seated on the stoep of my little house at Durban, plunged in reflection and very sad indeed. Why I was sad I will explain presently.

In that interval of time I had heard once or twice about Lord Ragnall. Thus I received from Scroope a letter telling of his lordship's marriage with Miss Holmes, which, it appeared, had been a very fine affair indeed, quite one of the events of the London season. Two Royalties attended the ceremony, a duke was the best man, and the presents according to all accounts were superb and of great value, including a priceless pearl necklace given by the bridegroom to the bride. A cutting from a society paper which Scroope enclosed dwelt at length upon the splendid appearance of the bridegroom and the sweet loveliness of the bride. Also it described her dress in language which was Greek to me. One sentence, however, interested me intensely.

It ran: "The bride occasioned some comment by wearing only one ornament, although the Ragnall family diamonds, which have not seen the light for many years, are known to be some of the finest in the country. It was a necklace of what appeared to be large but rather roughly polished rubies, to which hung a small effigy of an Egyptian god also fashioned from a ruby. It must be added that although of an unusual nature on such an occasion this jewel suited her dark beauty well. Lady Ragnall's selection of it, however, from the many she possesses was the cause of much speculation. When asked by a friend why she had chosen it, she is reported to have said that it was to bring her good fortune."

Now why did she wear the barbaric marriage gift of Harût and Marût in preference to all the other gems at her disposal, I wondered. The thing was so strange as to be almost uncanny.

The second piece of information concerning this pair reached me through the medium of an old *Times* newspaper which I received over a year later. It was to the effect that a son and heir had been born to Lord Ragnall and that both mother and child were doing well.

So there's the end to a very curious little story, thought I to myself.

Well, during those two years many things befell me. First of all, in company with my old friend Sir Stephen Somers, I made the expedition to Pongoland in search of the wonderful orchid which he desired to add to his collection. I have already written of that journey and our extraordinary adventures, and need therefore allude to it no more here, except to say that during the course of it I was sorely tempted to travel to the territory north of the lake in which the Pongos dwelt. Much did I desire to see whether Messrs. Harût and Marût would in truth appear to conduct me to the land where the wonderful elephant which was supposed to be animated by an evil spirit was waiting to be killed by my rifle. However, I resisted the impulse, as indeed our circumstances obliged me to do. In the end we returned safely to Durban, and here I came to the conclusion that never again would I risk my life on such mad expeditions.

Owing to circumstances which I have detailed elsewhere I was now in possession of a considerable sum of cash, and this I determined to lay out in such a fashion as to make me independent of hunting and trading in the wilder regions of Africa. As usual when money is forthcoming, an opportunity soon presented itself in the shape of a gold mine which had been discovered on the borders of Zululand, one of the first that was ever found in those districts. A Jew trader named Jacob brought it to my notice and offered me a half share if I would put up the capital necessary to work the mine. I made a journey of inspection and convinced myself that it was indeed a wonderful proposition. I need not enter into the particulars nor, to tell the truth, have I any desire to do so, for the subject is still painful to me, further than to say that this Jew and some friends of his panned out visible gold before my eyes and then revealed to me the magnificent quartz reef from which, as they demonstrated, it had been washed in the bygone ages of the world. The news of our discovery spread like wildfire, and as, whatever else I might be, everyone knew that I was honest, in the end a small company was formed with Allan Quatermain, Esq., as the chairman of the Bona Fide Gold Mine, Limited.

Oh! that company! Often to this day I dream of it when I have indigestion.

Our capital was small, £10,000, of which the Jew, who was well named Jacob, and his friends, took half (for nothing of course) as the purchase price of their rights. I thought the proportion large and said so, especially after I had ascertained that these rights had cost them exactly three dozen of square-face gin, a broken-down wagon, four cows past the bearing age and £5 in cash. However, when it was pointed out to me that by their peculiar knowledge and genius they had located and proved the value of a property of enormous potential worth, moreover that this sum was to be paid to them in scrip which would only be realizable when success was assured and not in money, after a night of anxious consideration I gave way.

Personally, before I consented to accept the chairmanship, which carried with it a salary of £100 a year (which I never got), I bought and paid for in cash, shares to the value of £1,000 sterling. I remember that Jacob and his friends seemed surprised at this act of mine, as they had offered to give me five hundred of their shares for nothing "in consideration of the guarantee of my name." These I refused, saying that I would not ask others to invest in a venture in which I had no actual money stake; whereon they accepted my decision, not without enthusiasm. In the end the balance of £4,000 was subscribed and we got to work. Work is a good name for it so far as I was concerned, for never in all my days have I gone through so harrowing a time.

We began by washing a certain patch of gravel and obtained results which seemed really astonishing. So remarkable were they that on publication the shares rose to 10s. premium. Jacob and Co. took advantage of this opportunity to sell quite half of their bonus

holding to eager applicants, explaining to me that they did so not for personal profit, which they scorned, but “to broaden the basis of the undertaking by admitting fresh blood.”

It was shortly after this boom that the gravel surrounding the rich patch became very gravelly indeed, and it was determined that we should buy a small battery and begin to crush the quartz from which the gold was supposed to flow in a Pactolian stream. We negotiated for that battery through a Cape Town firm of engineers—but why follow the melancholy business in all its details? The shares began to decrease in value. They shrank to their original price of £1, then to 15s., then to 10s. Jacob, he was managing director, explained to me that it was necessary to “support the market,” as he was already doing to an enormous extent, and that I as chairman ought to take a “lead in this good work” in order to show my faith in the concern.

I took a lead to the extent of another £500, which was all that I could afford. I admit that it was a shock to such trust in human nature as remained to me when I discovered subsequently that the 1,000 shares which I bought for my £500 had really been the property of Jacob, although they appeared to be sold to me in various other names.

The crisis came at last, for before that battery was delivered our available funds were exhausted, and no one would subscribe another halfpenny. Debentures, it is true, had been issued and taken up to the extent of about £1,000 out of the £5,000 offered, though who bought them remained at the time a mystery to me. Ultimately a meeting was called to consider the question of liquidating the company, and at this meeting, after three sleepless nights, I occupied the chair.

When I entered the room, to my amazement I found that of the five directors only one was present besides myself, an honest old retired sea captain who had bought and paid for 300 shares. Jacob and the two friends who represented his interests had, it appeared, taken ship that morning for Cape Town, whither they were summoned to attend various relatives who had been seized with illness.

It was a stormy meeting at first. I explained the position to the best of my ability, and when I had finished was assailed with a number of questions which I could not answer to the satisfaction of myself or of anybody else. Then a gentleman, the owner of ten shares, who had evidently been drinking, suggested in plain language that I had cheated the shareholders by issuing false reports.

I jumped up in a fury and, although he was twice my size, asked him to come and argue the question outside, whereon he promptly went away. This incident excited a laugh, and then the whole truth came out. A man with coloured blood in him stood up and told a story which was subsequently proved to be true. Jacob had employed him to “salt” the mine by mixing a heavy sprinkling of gold in the gravel we had first washed (which the coloured man swore he did in innocence), and subsequently had defrauded him of his wages. That was all. I sank back in my chair overcome. Then some good fellow in the audience, who had lost money himself in the affair and whom I scarcely knew, got up and made a noble speech which went far to restore my belief in human nature.

He said in effect that it was well known that I, Allan Quatermain, after working like a horse in the interests of the shareholders, had practically ruined myself over this enterprise, and that the real thief was Jacob, who had made tracks for the Cape, taking with him a large cash profit resulting from the sale of shares. Finally he concluded by calling for “three cheers for our honest friend and fellow sufferer, Mr. Allan Quatermain.”

Strange to say the audience gave them very heartily indeed. I thanked them with tears in my eyes, saying that I was glad to leave the room as poor as I had ever been, but with a reputation which my conscience as well as their kindness assured me was quite unblemished.

Thus the winding-up resolution was passed and that meeting came to an end. After shaking hands with my deliverer from a most unpleasant situation, I walked homewards with the lightest heart in the world. My money was gone, it was true; also my over-confidence in others had led me to make a fool of myself by accepting as fact, on what I believed to be the evidence of my eyes, that which I had not sufficient expert knowledge to verify. But my honour was saved, and as I have again and again seen in the course of life, money is nothing when compared with honour, a remark which Shakespeare made long ago, though like many other truths this is one of which a full appreciation can only be gained by personal experience.

Not very far from the place where our meeting had been held I passed a side street then in embryo, for it had only one or two houses situated in their gardens and a rather large and muddy sluic of water running down one side at the edge of the footpath. Save for two people this street was empty, but that pair attracted my attention. They were a white man, in whom I recognized the stout and half-intoxicated individual who had accused me of cheating the company and then departed, and a withered old Hottentot who at that distance, nearly a hundred yards away, much reminded me of a certain Hans.

This Hans, I must explain, was originally a servant of my father, who was a missionary in the Cape Colony, and had been my companion in many adventures. Thus in my youth he and I alone escaped when Dingaan murdered Retief and his party of Boers,<sup>[1]</sup> and he had been one of my party in our quest for the wonderful orchid, the record of which I have written down in “The Holy Flower.”

[1] See the book called “Marie.”—EDITOR.

Hans had his weak points, among which must be counted his love of liquor, but he was a gallant and resourceful old fellow as indeed he had amply proved upon that orchid-seeking expedition. Moreover he loved me with a love passing the love of women. Now, having acquired some money in a way I need not stop to describe—for is it not written elsewhere?—he was settled as a kind of little chief on a farm not very far from Durban, where he lived in great honour because of the fame of his deeds.

The white man and Hans, if Hans it was, were engaged in violent altercation whereof snatches floated to me on the breeze, spoken in the Dutch tongue.

“You dirty little Hottentot!” shouted the white man, waving a stick, “I’ll cut the liver out of you. What do you mean by nosing about after me like a jackal?” And he struck at Hans, who jumped aside.

“Son of a fat white sow,” screamed Hans in answer (for the moment I heard his voice I knew that it was Hans), “did you dare to call the Baas a thief? Yes, a thief, O Rooter in the mud, O Feeder on filth and worms, O Hog of the gutter—the Baas, the clipping of whose nail is worth more than you and all your family, he whose honour is as clear as the sunlight and whose heart is cleaner than the white sand of the sea.”

“Yes, I did,” roared the white man; “for he got my money in the gold mine.”

“Then, hog, why did you run away. Why did you not wait to tell him so outside that house?”

“I’ll teach you about running away, you little yellow dog,” replied the other, catching Hans a cut across the ribs.

“Oh! you want to see me run, do you?” said Hans, skipping back a few yards with wonderful agility. “Then look!”

Thus speaking he lowered his head and charged like a buffalo. Fair in the middle he caught that white man, causing him to double up, fly backwards and land with a most resounding splash in the deepest part of the muddy sluit. Here I may remark that, as his shins are the weakest, a Hottentot's head is by far the hardest and most dangerous part of him. Indeed it seems to partake of the nature of a cannon ball, for, without more than temporary disturbance to its possessor, I have seen a half-loaded wagon go over one of them on a muddy road.

Having delivered this home thrust Hans bolted round a corner and disappeared, while I waited trembling to see what happened to his adversary. To my relief nearly a minute later he crept out of the sluit covered with mud and dripping with water and hobbled off slowly down the street, his head so near his feet that he looked as though he had been folded in two, and his hands pressed upon what I believe is medically known as the diaphragm. Then I also went upon my way roaring with laughter. Often I have heard Hottentots called the lowest of mankind, but, reflected I, they can at any rate be good friends to those who treat them well—a fact of which I was to have further proof ere long.

By the time I reached my house and had filled my pipe and sat myself down in the dilapidated cane chair on the veranda, that natural reaction set in which so often follows rejoicing at the escape from a great danger. It was true that no one believed I had cheated them over that thrice-cursed gold mine, but how about other matters?

I mused upon the Bible narrative of Jacob and Esau with a new and very poignant sympathy for Esau. I wondered what would become of my Jacob. Jacob, I mean the original, prospered exceedingly as a result of his deal in porridge, and, as thought I, probably would his artful descendant who so appropriately bore his name. As a matter of fact I do not know what became of him, but bearing his talents in mind I think it probable that, like Van Koop, under some other patronymic he has now been rewarded with a title by the British Government. At any rate I had eaten the porridge in the shape of worthless but dearly purchased shares, after labouring hard at the chase of the golden calf, while brother Jacob had got my inheritance, or rather my money. Probably he was now counting it over in sovereigns upon the ship and sniggering as he thought of the shareholders' meeting with me in the chair. Well, he was a thief and would run his road to whatever end is appointed for thieves, so why should I bother my head more about him? As I had kept my honour—let him take my savings.

But I had a son to support, and now what was I to do with scarcely three hundred pounds, a good stock of guns and this little Durban property left to me in the world? Commerce in all its shapes I renounced once and for ever. It was too high—or too low—for me; so it would seem that there remained to me only my old business of professional hunting. Once again I must seek those adventures which I had forsworn when my evil star shone so brightly over a gold mine. What was it to be? Elephants, I supposed, since these are the only creatures worth killing from a money point of view. But most of my old haunts had been more or less shot out. The competition of younger professionals, of wandering backveld Boers and even of poaching natives who had obtained guns, was growing severe. If I went at all I should have to travel farther afield.

Whilst I meditated thus, turning over the comparative advantages or disadvantages of various possible hunting grounds in my mind, my attention was caught by a kind of cough that seemed to proceed from the farther side of a large gardenia bush. It was not a human cough, but rather resembled that made by a certain small buck at night, probably to signal to its mate, which of course it could not be as there were no buck within several miles. Yet I knew it came from a human throat, for had I not heard it before in many an hour of difficulty and danger?

"Draw near, Hans," I said in Dutch, and instantly out of a clump of aloes that grew in front of the pomegranate hedge, crept the withered shape of the old Hottentot, as a big yellow snake might do. Why he should choose this method of advance instead of that offered by the garden path I did not know, but it was quite in accordance with his secretive nature, inherited from a hundred generations of ancestors who spent their lives avoiding the observation of murderous foes.

He squatted down in front of me, staring in a vacant way at the fierce ball of the westering sun without blinking an eyelid, just as a vulture does.

"You look to me as though you had been fighting, Hans," I said. "The crown of your hat is knocked out; you are splashed with mud and there is the mark of a stick upon your left side."

"Yes, Baas. You are right as usual, Baas. I had a quarrel with a man about sixpence that he owed me, and knocked him over with my head, forgetting to take my hat off first. Therefore it is spoiled, for which I am sorry, as it was quite a new hat, not two years old. The Baas gave it me. He bought it in a store at Utrecht when we were coming back from Pongoland."

"Why do you lie to me?" I asked. "You have been fighting a white man and for more than sixpence. You knocked him into a sluit and the mud splashed up over you."

"Yes, Baas, that is so. Your spirit speaks truly to you of the matter. Yet it wanders a little from the path, since I fought the white man for less than sixpence. I fought him for love, which is nothing at all."

"Then you are even a bigger fool than I took you for, Hans. What do you want now?"

"I want to borrow a pound, Baas. The white man will take me before the magistrate, and I shall be fined a pound, or fourteen days in the *trunk* (i.e. jail). It is true that the white man struck me first, but the magistrate will not believe the word of a poor old Hottentot against his, and I have no witness. He will say, 'Hans, you were drunk again. Hans, you are a liar and deserve to be flogged, which you will be next time. Pay a pound and ten shillings more, which is the price of good white justice, or go to the *trunk* for fourteen days and make baskets there for the great Queen to use.' Baas, I have the price of the justice which is ten shillings, but I want to borrow the pound for the fine."

"Hans, I think that just now you are better able to lend me a pound than I am to lend one to you. My bag is empty, Hans."

"Is it so, Baas? Well, it does not matter. If necessary I can make baskets for the great white Queen to put her food in, for fourteen days, or mats on which she will wipe her feet. The *trunk* is not such a bad place, Baas. It gives time to think of the white man's justice and to thank the Great One in the Sky, because the little sins one did not do have been found out and punished, while the big sins one did do, such as—well, never mind, Baas—have not been found out at all. Your reverend father, the Predikant, always taught me to have a thankful heart, Baas, and when I remember that I have only been in the *trunk* for three months altogether who, if all were known, ought to have been there for years, I remember his words, Baas."

"Why should you go to the *trunk* at all, Hans, when you are rich and can pay a fine, even if it were a hundred pounds?"

"A month or two ago it is true I was rich, Baas, but now I am poor. I have nothing left except ten shillings."

"Hans," I said severely, "you have been gambling again; you have been drinking again. You have sold your property and your cattle to pay your gambling debts and to buy square-face gin."

"Yes, Baas, and for no good it seems; though it is not true that I have been drinking. I sold the land and the cattle for £650, Baas, and with the money I bought other things."

"What did you buy?" I said.

He fumbled first in one pocket of his coat and then in the other, and ultimately produced a crumpled and dirty-looking piece of paper that resembled a bank-note. I took and examined this document and next minute nearly fainted. It certified that Hans was the proprietor of I know not how many debentures or shares, I forget which they were, in the Bona Fide Gold Mine, Limited, that same company of which I was the unlucky chairman, in consideration for which he had paid a sum of over six hundred and fifty pounds.

"Hans," I said feebly, "from whom did you buy this?"

"From the baas with the hooked nose, Baas. He who was named Jacob, after the great man in the Bible of whom your father, the Predikant, used to tell us, that one who was so slim and dressed himself up in a goatskin and gave his brother mealie porridge when he was hungry, after he had come in from shooting buck, Baas, and got his farm and cattle, Baas, and then went to Heaven up a ladder, Baas."

"And who told you to buy them, Hans?"

"Sammy, Baas, he who was your cook when we went to Pongoland, he who hid in the mealie-pit when the slavers burned Beza-Town and came out half cooked like a fowl from the oven. The Baas Jacob stopped at Sammy's hotel, Baas, and told him that unless he bought bits of paper like this, of which he had plenty, you would be brought before the magistrate and sent to the *trunk*, Baas. So Sammy bought some, Baas, but not many for he had only a little money, and the Baas Jacob paid him for all he ate and drank with other bits of paper. Then Sammy came to me and showed me what it was my duty to do, reminding me that your reverend father, the Predikant, had left you in my charge till one of us dies, whether you were well or ill and whether you got better or got worse—just like a white wife, Baas. So I sold the farm and the cattle to a friend of the Baas Jacob's, at a very low price, Baas, and that is all the story."

I heard and, to tell the honest truth, almost I wept, since the thought of the sacrifice which this poor old Hottentot had made for my sake on the instigation of a rogue utterly overwhelmed me.

"Hans," I asked recovering myself, "tell me what was that new name which the Zulu captain Mavovo gave you before he died, I mean after you had fired Beza-Town and caught Hassan and his slavers in their own trap?"

Hans, who had suddenly found something that interested him extremely out at sea, perhaps because he did not wish to witness my grief, turned round slowly and answered:

"Mavovo named me Light-in-Darkness, and by that name the Kafirs know me now, Baas, though some of them call me Lord-of-the-Fire."

"Then Mavovo named you well, for indeed, Hans, you shine like a light in the darkness of my heart. I whom you think wise am but a fool, Hans, who has been tricked by a *vernuker*, a common cheat, and he has tricked you and Sammy as well. But as he has shown me that man can be very vile, you have shown me that he can be very noble; and, setting the one against the other, my spirit that was in the dust rises up once more like a withered flower after rain. Light-in-Darkness, although if I had ten thousand pounds I could never pay you back—since what you have given me is more than all the gold in the world and all the land and all the cattle—yet with honour and with love I will try to pay you," and I held out my hand to him.

He took it and pressed it against his wrinkled old forehead, then answered:

"Talk no more of that, Baas, for it makes me sad, who am so happy. How often have you forgiven me when I have done wrong? How often have you not flogged me when I should have been flogged for being drunk and other things—yes, even when once I stole some of your powder and sold it to buy square-face gin, though it is true I knew it was bad powder, not fit for you to use? Did I thank you then overmuch? Why therefore should you thank me who have done but a little thing, not really to help you but because, as you know, I love gambling, and was told that this bit of paper would soon be worth much more than I gave for it. If it had proved so, should I have given you that money? No, I should have kept it myself and bought a bigger farm and more cattle."

"Hans," I said sternly, "if you lie so hard, you will certainly go to hell, as the Predikant, my father, often told you."

"Not if I lie for you, Baas, or if I do it doesn't matter, except that then we should be separated by the big kloof written of in the Book, especially as there I should meet the Baas Jacob, as I very much want to do for a reason of my own."

Not wishing to pursue this somewhat unchristian line of thought, I inquired of him why he felt happy.

"Oh! Baas," he answered with a twinkle in his little black eyes, "can't you guess why? Now you have very little money left and I have none at all. Therefore it is plain that we must go somewhere to earn money, and I am glad of that, Baas, for I am tired of sitting on that farm out there and growing mealies and milking cows, especially as I am too old to marry, Baas, as you are tired of looking for gold where there isn't any and singing sad songs in that house of meeting yonder like you did this afternoon. Oh! the Great Father in the skies knew what He was about when He sent the Baas Jacob our way. He beat us for our good, Baas, as He does always if we could only understand."

I reflected to myself that I had not often heard the doctrine of the Church better or more concisely put, but I only said:

"That is true, Hans, and I thank you for the lesson, the second you have taught me to-day. But where are we to go to, Hans? Remember, it must be elephants."

He suggested some places; indeed he seemed to have come provided with a list of them, and I sat silent making no comment. At length he finished and squatted there before me, chewing a bit of tobacco I had given him, and looking up at me interrogatively with his head on one side, for all the world like a dilapidated and inquisitive bird.

"Hans," I said, "do you remember a story I told you when you came to see me a year or more ago, about a tribe called the Kendah in whose country there is said to be a great cemetery of elephants which travel there to die from all the land about? A country that lies somewhere to the north-east of the lake island on which the Pongo used to dwell?"

"Yes, Baas."

"And you said, I think, that you had never heard of such a people."

"No, Baas, I never said anything at all. I have heard a good deal about them."

"Then why did you not tell me so before, you little idiot?" I asked indignantly.

"What was the good, Baas? You were hunting gold then, not ivory. Why should I make you unhappy, and waste my own breath by talking about beautiful things which were far beyond the reach of either of us, far as that sky?"

"Don't ask fool's questions but tell me what you know, Hans. Tell me at once."

"This, Baas: When we were up at Beza-Town after we came back from killing the gorilla-god, and the Baas Stephen your friend lay sick, and there was nothing else to do, I talked with everyone I could find worth talking to, and they were not many, Baas. But there was one very old woman who was not of the Mazitu race and whose husband and children were all dead, but whom the people in the town looked up to and feared because she was wise and made medicines out of herbs, and told fortunes. I used to go to see her. She was quite blind, Baas, and fond of talking with me—which shows how wise she was. I told her all about the Pongo gorilla-god, of which already she knew something. When I had done she said that he was as nothing compared with a certain god that she had seen in her youth, seven tens of years ago, when she became marriageable. I asked her for that story, and she spoke it thus:

"Far away to the north and east live a people called the Kendah, who are ruled over by a sultan. They are a very great people and inhabit a most fertile country. But all round their country the land is desolate and manless, peopled only by game, for the reason that they will suffer none to dwell there. That is why nobody knows anything about them: he that comes across the wilderness into that land is killed and never returns to tell of it.

"She told me also that she was born of this people, but fled because their sultan wished to place her in his house of women, which she did not desire. For a long while she wandered southwards, living on roots and berries, till she came to desert land and at last, worn out, lay down to die. Then she was found by some of the Mazitu who were on an expedition seeking ostrich feathers for war-plumes. They gave her food and, seeing that she was fair, brought her back to their country, where one of them married her. But of her own land she uttered only lying words to them because she feared that if she told the truth the gods who guard its secrets would be avenged on her, though now when she was near to death she dreaded them no more, since even the Kendah gods cannot swim through the waters of death. That is all she said about her journey because she had forgotten the rest."

"Bother her journey, Hans. What did she say about her god and the Kendah people?"

"This, Baas: that the Kendah have not one god but two, and not one ruler but two. They have a good god who is a child-fetish" (here I started) "that speaks through the mouth of an oracle who is always a woman. If that woman dies the god does not speak until they find another woman bearing certain marks which show that she holds the spirit of the god. Before the woman dies she always tells the priests in what land they are to look for her who is to come after her; but sometimes they cannot find her and then trouble falls because 'the Child has lost its tongue,' and the people become the prey of the other god that never dies."

"And what is that god, Hans?"

"That god, Baas, is an elephant" (here I started again), "a very bad elephant to which human sacrifice is offered. I think, Baas, that it is the devil wearing the shape of an elephant, at least that is what she said. Now the sultan is a worshipper of the god that dwells in the elephant Jana" (here I positively whistled) "and so are most of the people, indeed all those among them who are black. For once far away in the beginning the Kendah were two peoples, but the lighter-coloured people who worshipped the Child came down from the north and conquered the black people, bringing the Child with them, or so I understood her, Baas, thousands and thousands of years ago when the world was young. Since then they have flowed on side by side like two streams in the same channel, never mixing, for each keeps its own colour. Only, she said, that stream which comes from the north grows weaker and that from the south more strong."

"Then why does not the strong swallow up the weak?"

"Because the weak are still the pure and the wise, Baas, or so the old vrouw declared. Because they worship the good while the others worship the devil, and as your father the Predikant used to say, Good is the cock which always wins the fight at the last, Baas. Yes, when he seems to be dead he gets up again and kicks the devil in the stomach and stands on him and crows, Baas. Also these northern folk are mighty magicians. Through their Child-fetish they give rain and fat seasons and keep away sickness, whereas Jana gives only evil gifts that have to do with cruelty and war and so forth. Lastly, the priests who rule through the Child have the secrets of wealth and ancient knowledge, whereas the sultan and his followers have only the might of the spear. This was the song which the old woman sang to me, Baas."

"Why did you not tell me of these matters when we were at Beza-Town and I could have talked with her myself, Hans?"

"For two reasons, Baas. The first was that I feared, if I told you, you would wish to go on to find these people, whereas I was tired of travelling and wanted to come to Natal to rest. The second was that on the night when the old woman finished telling me her story, she was taken sick and died, and therefore it would have been no use to bring you to see her. So I saved it up in my head until it was wanted. Moreover, Baas, all the Mazitu declared that old woman to be the greatest of liars."

"She was not altogether a liar, Hans. Hear what I have learned," and I told him of the magic of Harût and Marût and of the picture that I had seemed to see of the elephant Jana and of the prayer that Harût and Marût had made to me, to all of which he listened quite stolidly. It is not easy to astonish a Hottentot's brain, which often draws no accurate dividing-line between the possible and what the modern world holds to be impossible.

"Yes, Baas," he said when I had finished, "then it seems that the old woman was not such a liar after all. Baas, when shall we start after that hoard of dead ivory, and which way will you go? By Kilwa or through Zululand? It should be settled soon because of the seasons."

After this we talked together for a long while, for with pockets as empty as mine were then, the problem seemed difficult, if not insoluble.

## CHAPTER VII.

### LORD RAGNALL'S STORY

That night Hans slept at my house, or rather outside of it in the garden, or upon the stoep, saying that he feared arrest if he went to the town, because of his quarrel with the white man. As it happened, however, the other party concerned never stirred further in the business, probably because he was too drunk to remember who had knocked him into the sluit or whether he had gravitated thither by accident.

On the following morning we renewed our discussion, debating in detail every possible method of reaching the Kendah people by help of such means as we could command. Like that of the previous night it proved somewhat abortive. Obviously such a long and hazardous expedition ought to be properly financed and—where was the money? At length I came to the conclusion that if we went at all it would be best, in the circumstances, for Hans and myself to start alone with a Scotch cart drawn by oxen and driven by a couple of Zulu hunters, which we could lade with ammunition and a few necessities.

Thus lightly equipped we might work through Zululand and thence northward to Beza-Town, the capital of the Mazitu, where we were sure of a welcome. After that we must take our chance. It was probable that we should never reach the district where these Kendah were supposed to dwell, but at least I might be able to kill some elephants in the wild country beyond Zululand.

While we were talking I heard the gun fired which announced the arrival of the English mail, and stepping to the end of the garden, saw the steamer lying at anchor outside the bar. Then I went indoors to write a few business letters which, since I had become immersed in the affairs of that unlucky gold mine, had grown to be almost a daily task with me. I had got through several with many groanings, for none were agreeable in their tenor, when Hans poked his head through the window in a silent kind of a way as a big snake might do, and said: "Baas, I think there are two baases out on the road there who are looking for you. Very fine baases whom I don't know."

"Shareholders in the Bona Fide Gold Mine," thought I to myself, then added as I prepared to leave through the back door: "If they come here tell them I am not at home. Tell them I left early this morning for the Congo River to look for the sources of the Nile."

"Yes, Baas," said Hans, collapsing on to the stoep.

I went out through the back door, sorrowing that I, Allan Quatermain, should have reached a rung in the ladder of life whence I shrank from looking any stranger in the face, for fear of what he might have to say to me. Then suddenly my pride asserted itself. After all what was there of which I should be ashamed? I would face these irate shareholders as I had faced the others yesterday.

I walked round the little house to the front garden which was planted with orange trees, and up to a big moonflower bush, I believe *datūra* is its right name, that grew near the pomegranate hedge which separated my domain from the road. There a conversation was in progress, if so it may be called.

"*Ikona*" (that is: "I don't know"), "*Inkoosi*" (i.e. "Chief"), said some Kafir in a stupid drawl.

Thereon a voice that instantly struck me as familiar, answered:

"We want to know where the great hunter lives."

"*Ikona*," said the Kafir.

"Can't you remember his native name?" asked another voice which was also familiar to me, for I never forget voices though I am unable to place them at once.

"The great hunter, Here-come-a-zany," said the first voice triumphantly, and instantly there flashed back upon my mind a vision of the splendid drawing-room at Ragnall Castle and of an imposing majordomo introducing into it two white-robed, Arab-looking men.

"Mr. Savage, by the Heavens!" I muttered. "What in the name of goodness is he doing here?"

"There," said the second voice, "your black friend has bolted, and no wonder, for who can be called by such a name? If you had done what I told you, Savage, and hired a white guide, it would have saved us a lot of trouble. Why will you always think that you know better than anyone else?"

"Seemed an unnecessary expense, my lord, considering we are travelling incog., my lord."

"How long shall we travel 'incog.' if you persist in calling me my lord at the top of your voice, Savage? There is a house beyond those trees; go in and ask where——"

By this time I had reached the gate which I opened, remarking quietly,

"How do you do, Lord Ragnall? How do you do, Mr. Savage? I thought that I recognized your voices on the road and came to see if I was right. Please walk in; that is, if it is I whom you wish to visit."

As I spoke I studied them both, and observed that while Savage looked much the same, although slightly out of place in these strange surroundings, the time that had passed since we met had changed Lord Ragnall a good deal. He was still a magnificent-looking man, one of those whom no one that had seen him would ever forget, but now his handsome face was stamped with some new seal of suffering. I felt at once that he had become acquainted with grief. The shadow in his dark eyes and a certain worn expression about the mouth told me that this was so.

"Yes, Quatermain," he said as he took my hand, "it is you whom I have travelled seven thousand miles to visit, and I thank God that I have been so fortunate as to find you. I feared lest you might be dead, or perhaps far away in the centre of Africa where I should never be able to track you down."

"A week later perhaps you would not have found me, Lord Ragnall," I answered, "but as it happens misfortune has kept me here."

"And misfortune has brought me here, Quatermain."

Then before I had time to answer Savage came up and we went into the house.

"You are just in time for lunch," I said, "and as luck will have it there is a good rock cod and a leg of oribé buck for you to eat. Boy, set two more places."

"One more place, if you please, sir," said Savage. "I should prefer to take my food afterwards."

"You will have to get over that in Africa," I muttered. Still I let him have his way, with the result that presently the strange sight was seen of the magnificent English majordomo standing behind my chair in the little room and handing round the square-face as though it were champagne. It was a spectacle that excited the greatest interest in my primitive establishment and caused Hans with some native hangers-on to gather at the window. However, Lord Ragnall took it as a matter of course and I thought it better not to interfere.

When we had finished we went on to the stoep to smoke, leaving Savage to eat his dinner, and I asked Lord Ragnall where his luggage was. He replied that he had left it at the Customs. "Then," I said, "I will send a native with Savage to arrange about getting it up here. If you do not mind my rough accommodation there is a room for you, and your man can pitch a tent in the garden."

After some demur he accepted with gratitude, and a little later Savage and the native were sent off with a note to a man who hired out a mule-cart.

"Now," I said when the gate had shut behind them, "will you tell me why you have come to Africa?"

"Disaster," he replied. "Disaster of the worst sort."

"Is your wife dead, Lord Ragnall?"

"I do not know. I almost hope that she is. At any rate she is lost to me."

An idea leapt to my mind to the effect that she might have run away with somebody else, a thing which often happens in the world. But fortunately I kept it to myself and only said,

"She was nearly lost once before, was she not?"

"Yes, when you saved her. Oh! if only you had been with us, Quatermain, this would never have happened. Listen: About eighteen months ago she had a son, a very beautiful child. She recovered well from the business and we were as happy as two mortals could be, for we loved each other, Quatermain, and God has blessed us in every way; we were so happy that I remember her telling me that our great good fortune made her feel afraid. One day last September when I was out shooting, she drove in a little pony cart we had, with the nurse, and the child but no man, to call on Mrs. Scroope who also had been recently confined. She often went out thus, for the pony was an old animal and quiet as a sheep.

"By some cursed trick of fate it chanced that when they were passing through the little town which you may remember near Ragnall, they met a travelling menagerie that was going to some new encampment. At the head of the procession marched a large bull elephant, which I discovered afterwards was an ill-tempered brute that had already killed a man and should never have been allowed upon the roads. The sight of the pony cart, or perhaps a red cloak which my wife was wearing, as she always liked bright colours, for some unknown reason seems to have infuriated this beast, which trumpeted. The pony becoming frightened wheeled round and overturned the cart right in front of the animal, but apparently without hurting anybody. Then"—here he paused a moment and with an effort continued—"that devil in beast's shape cocked its ears, stretched out its long trunk, dragged the baby from the nurse's arms, whirled it round and threw it high into the air, to fall crushed upon the kerb. It sniffed at the body of the child, feeling it over with the tip of its trunk, as though to make sure that it was dead. Next, once more it trumpeted triumphantly, and without attempting to harm my wife or anybody else, walked quietly past the broken cart and continued its journey, until outside the town it was made fast and shot."

"What an awful story!" I said with a gasp.

"Yes, but there is worse to follow. My poor wife went off her head, with the shock I suppose, for no physical injury could be found upon her. She did not suffer in health or become violent, quite the reverse indeed for her gentleness increased. She just went off her head. For hours at a time she would sit silent and smiling, playing with the stones of that red necklace which those conjurers gave her, or rather counting them, as a nun might do with the beads of her rosary. At times, however, she would talk, but always to the baby, as though it lay before her or she were nursing it. Oh! Quatermain, it was pitiful, pitiful!

"I did everything I could. She was seen by three of the greatest brain-doctors in England, but none of them was able to help. The only hope they gave was that the fit might pass off as suddenly as it had come. They said too that a thorough change of scene would perhaps be beneficial, and suggested Egypt; that was in October. I did not take much to the idea, I don't know why, and personally should not have acceded to it had it not been for a curious circumstance. The last consultation took place in the big drawing-room at Ragnall. When it was over my wife remained with her mother at one end of the room while I and the doctors talked together at the other, as I thought quite out of her earshot. Presently, however, she called to me, saying in a perfectly clear and natural voice:

"Yes, George, I will go to Egypt. I should like to go to Egypt." Then she went on playing with the necklace and talking to the imaginary child.

"Again on the following morning as I came into her room to kiss her, she exclaimed,

"When do we start for Egypt? Let it be soon."

"With these sayings the doctors were very pleased, declaring that they showed signs of a returning interest in life and begging me not to thwart her wish.

"So I gave way and in the end we went to Egypt together with Lady Longden, who insisted upon accompanying us although she is a wretched sailor. At Cairo a large dahabeeyah that I had hired in advance, manned by an excellent crew and a guard of four soldiers, was awaiting us. In it we started up the Nile. For a month or more all went well; also to my delight my wife seemed now and again to show signs of returning intelligence. Thus she took some interest in the sculptures on the walls of the temples, about which she had been very fond of reading when in health. I remember that only a few days before the—the catastrophe, she pointed out one of them to me, it was of Isis and the infant Horus, saying, 'Look, George, the holy Mother and the holy Child,' and then bowed to it reverently as she might have done to an altar. At length after passing the First Cataract and the Island of Philæ we came to the temple of Abu Simbel, opposite to which our boat was moored. On the following morning we explored the temple at daybreak and saw the sun strike

upon the four statues which sit at its farther end, spending the rest of that day studying the colossal figures of Rameses that are carved upon its face and watching some cavalcades of Arabs mounted upon camels travelling along the banks of the Nile.

"My wife was unusually quiet that afternoon. For hour after hour she sat still upon the deck, gazing first at the mouth of the rock-hewn temple and the mighty figures which guard it and then at the surrounding desert. Only once did I hear her speak and then she said, 'Beautiful, beautiful! Now I am at home.' We dined and as there was no moon, went to bed rather early after listening to the Sudanese singers as they sang one of their weird chanties.

"My wife and her mother slept together in the state cabin of the dahabeeyah, which was at the stern of the boat. My cabin, a small one, was on one side of this, and that of the trained nurse on the other. The crew and the guard were forward of the saloon. A gangway was fixed from the side to the shore and over it a sentry stood, or was supposed to stand. During the night a Khamsin wind began to blow, though lightly as was to be expected at this season of the year. I did not hear it for, as a matter of fact, I slept very soundly, as it appears did everyone else upon the dahabeeyah, including the sentry as I suspect.

"The first thing I remember was the appearance of Lady Longden just at daybreak at the doorway of my cabin and the frightened sound of her voice asking if Luna, that is my wife, was with me. Then it transpired that she had left her cabin clad in a fur cloak, evidently some time before, as the bed in which she had been lying was quite cold. Quatermain, we searched everywhere; we searched for four days, but from that hour to this no trace whatever of her has been found."

"Have you any theory?" I asked.

"Yes, or at least all the experts whom we consulted have a theory. It is that she slipped down the saloon in the dark, gained the deck and thence fell or threw herself into the Nile, which of course would have carried her body away. As you may have heard, the Nile is full of bodies. I myself saw two of them during that journey. The Egyptian police and others were so convinced that this was what had happened that, notwithstanding the reward of a thousand pounds which I offered for any valuable information, they could scarcely be persuaded to continue the search."

"You said that a wind was blowing and I understand that the shores are sandy, so I suppose that all footprints would have been filled in?"

He nodded and I went on. "What is your own belief? Do you think she was drowned?"

He countered my query with another of:

"What do *you* think?"

"I? Oh! although I have no right to say so, I don't think at all. I am quite sure that she was *not* drowned; that she is living at this moment."

"Where?"

"As to that you had better inquire of our friends, Harût and Marût," I answered dryly.

"What have you to go on, Quatermain? There is no clue."

"On the contrary I hold that there are a good many clues. The whole English part of the story in which we were concerned, and the threats those mysterious persons uttered are the first and greatest of these clues. The second is the fact that your hiring of the dahabeeyah regardless of expense was known a long time before your arrival in Egypt, for I suppose you did so in your own name, which is not exactly that of Smith or Brown. The third is your wife's sleep-walking propensities, which would have made it quite easy for her to be drawn ashore under some kind of mesmeric influence. The fourth is that you had seen Arabs mounted on camels upon the banks of the Nile. The fifth is the heavy sleep you say held everybody on board that particular night, which suggests to me that your food may have been drugged. The sixth is the apathy displayed by those employed in the search, which suggests to me that some person or persons in authority may have been bribed, as is common in the East, or perhaps frightened with threats of bewitchment. The seventh is that a night was chosen when a wind blew which would obliterate all spoor whether of men or of swiftly travelling camels. These are enough to begin with, though doubtless if I had time to think I could find others. You must remember too that although the journey would be long, this country of the Kendah can doubtless be reached from the Sudan by those who know the road, as well as from southern or eastern Africa."

"Then you think that my wife has been kidnapped by those villains, Harût and Marût?"

"Of course, though villains is a strong term to apply to them. They might be quite honest men according to their peculiar lights, as indeed I expect they are. Remember that they serve a god or a fetish, or rather, as they believe, a god *in* a fetish, who to them doubtless is a very terrible master, especially when, as I understand, that god is threatened by a rival god."

"Why do you say that, Quatermain?"

By way of answer I repeated to him the story which Hans said he had heard from the old woman at Beza, the town of the Mazitu. Lord Ragnall listened with the deepest interest, then said in an agitated voice:

"That is a very strange tale, but has it struck you, Quatermain, that if your suppositions are correct, one of the most terrible circumstances connected with my case is that our child should have chanced to come to its dreadful death through the wickedness of an elephant?"

"That curious coincidence has struck me most forcibly, Lord Ragnall. At the same time I do not see how it can be set down as more than a coincidence, since the elephant which slaughtered your child was certainly not that called Jana. To suppose because there is a war between an elephant-god and a child-god somewhere in the heart of Africa, that therefore another elephant can be so influenced that it kills a child in England, is to my mind out of all reason."

That is what I said to him, as I did not wish to introduce a new horror into an affair that was already horrible enough. But, recollecting that these priests, Harût and Marût, believed the mother of this murdered infant to be none other than the oracle of their worship (though how this chanced passed my comprehension), and therefore the great enemy of the evil elephant-god, I confess that at heart I felt afraid. If any powers of magic, black or white or both, were mixed up with the matter as my experiences in England seemed to suggest, who could say what might be their exact limits? As, however, it has been demonstrated again and again by the learned that no such thing as African magic exists, this line of thought appeared to be too foolish to follow. So passing it by I asked Lord Ragnall to continue.

"For over a month," he went on, "I stopped in Egypt waiting till emissaries who had been sent to the chiefs of various tribes in the Sudan and elsewhere, returned with the news that nothing whatsoever had been seen of a white woman travelling in the company of

natives, nor had they heard of any such woman being sold as a slave. Also through the Khedive, on whom I was able to bring influence to bear by help of the British Government, I caused many harems in Egypt to be visited, entirely without result. After this, leaving the inquiry in the hands of the British Consul and a firm of French lawyers, although in truth all hope had gone, I returned to England whither I had already sent Lady Longden, broken-hearted, for it occurred to me as possible that my wife might have drifted or been taken thither. But here, too, there was no trace of her or of anybody who could possibly answer to her description. So at last I came to the conclusion that her bones must lie somewhere at the bottom of the Nile, and gave way to despair."

"Always a foolish thing to do," I remarked.

"You will say so indeed when you hear the end, Quatermain. My bereavement and the sleeplessness which it caused preyed upon me so much, for now that the child was dead my wife was everything to me, that, I will tell you the truth, my brain became affected and like Job I cursed God in my heart and determined to die. Indeed I should have died by my own hand, had it not been for Savage. I had procured the laudanum and loaded the pistol with which I proposed to shoot myself immediately after it was swallowed so that there might be no mistake. One night only a couple of months or so ago, Quatermain, I sat in my study at Ragnall, with the doors locked as I thought, writing a few final letters before I did the deed. The last of them was just finished about twelve when hearing a noise, I looked up and saw Savage standing before me. I asked him angrily how he came there (I suppose he must have had another key to one of the other doors) and what he wanted. Ignoring the first part of the question he replied:

"My lord, I have been thinking over our trouble—he was with us in Egypt—I have been thinking so much that it has got a hold of my sleep. To-night as you said you did not want me any more and I was tired, I went to bed early and had a dream. I dreamed that we were once more in the shrubbery, as happened some years ago, and that the little African gent who shot like a book, was showing us the traces of those two black men, just as he did when they tried to steal her ladyship. Then in my dream I seemed to go back to bed and that beastly snake which we found lying under the parcel in the road seemed to follow me. When I had got to sleep again, all in the dream, there it was standing on its tail at the end of the bed, hissing till it woke me. Then it spoke in good English and not in African as might have been expected.

"Savage," it said, "get up and dress yourself and go at once and tell his lordship to travel to Natal and find Mr. Allan Quatermain" (you may remember that was the African gentleman's name, my lord, which, with so many coming and going in this great house, I had quite forgotten, until I had the dream). "Find Mr. Allan Quatermain," that slimy reptile went on, opening and shutting its mouth for all the world like a Christian making a speech, "for he will have something to tell him as to that which has made a hole in his heart that is now filled with the seven devils. Be quick, Savage, and don't stop to put on your shirt or your tie"—I have not, my lord, as you may see. "He is shut up in the study, but you know how to get into it. If he will not listen to you let him look round the study and he will see something which will tell him that this is a true dream."

"Then the snake vanished, seeming to wriggle down the left bottom bed-post, and I woke up in a cold sweat, my lord, and did what it had told me."

"Those were his very words, Quatermain, for I wrote them down afterwards while they were fresh in my memory, and you see here they are in my pocket-book.

"Well, I answered him, rather brusquely I am afraid, for a crazed man who is about to leave the world under such circumstances does not show at his best when disturbed almost in the very act, to the edge of which long agony has brought him. I told him that all his dream of snakes seemed ridiculous, which obviously it was, and was about to send him away, when it occurred to me that the suggestion it conveyed that I should put myself in communication with you was not ridiculous in view of the part you had already played in the story."

"Very far from ridiculous," I interpolated.

"To tell the truth," went on Lord Ragnall, "I had already thought of doing the same thing, but somehow beneath the pressure of my imminent grief the idea was squeezed out of my mind, perhaps because you were so far away and I did not know if I could find you even if I tried. Pausing for a moment before I dismissed Savage, I rose from the desk at which I was writing and began to walk up and down the room thinking what I would do. I am not certain if you saw it when you were at Ragnall, but it is a large room, fifty feet long or so though not very broad. It has two fireplaces, in both of which fires were burning on this night, and it was lit by four standing lamps besides that upon my desk. Now between these fireplaces, in a kind of niche in the wall, and a little in the shadow because none of the lamps was exactly opposite to it, hung a portrait of my wife which I had caused to be painted by a fashionable artist when first we became engaged."

"I remember it," I said. "Or rather, I remember its existence. I did not see it because a curtain hung over the picture, which Savage told me you did not wish to be looked at by anybody but yourself. At the time I remarked to him, or rather to myself, that to veil the likeness of a living woman in such a way seemed to me rather an ill-omened thing to do, though why I should have thought it so I do not quite know."

"You are quite right, Quatermain. I had that foolish fancy, a lover's freak, I suppose. When we married the curtain was removed although the brass rod on which it hung was left by some oversight. On my return to England after my loss, however, I found that I could not bear to look upon this lifeless likeness of one who had been taken from me so cruelly, and I caused it to be replaced. I did more. In order that it might not be disturbed by some dusting housemaid, I myself made it fast with three or four tin-tacks which I remember I drove through the velvet stuff into the panelling, using a fireiron as a hammer. At the time I thought it a good job although by accident I struck the nail of the third finger of my left hand so hard that it came off. Look, it has not quite finished growing again," and he showed the finger on which the new nail was still in process of formation.

"Well, as I walked up and down the room some impulse caused me to look towards the picture. To my astonishment I saw that it was no longer veiled, although to the best of my belief the curtain had been drawn over it as lately as that afternoon; indeed I could have sworn that this was so. I called to Savage to bring the lamp that stood upon my table, and by its light made an examination. The curtain was drawn back, very tidily, being fastened in its place clear of the little alcove by means of a thin brass chain. Also along one edge of it, that which I had nailed to the panelling, the tin-tacks were still in their places; that is, three of them were, the fourth I found afterwards upon the floor.

"She looks beautiful, doesn't she, my lord," said Savage, "and please God so we shall still find her somewhere in the world."

"I did not answer him, or even remark upon the withdrawal of the curtain, as to which indeed I never made an inquiry. I suppose that it was done by some zealous servant while I was pretending to eat my dinner—there were one or two new ones in the house whose names and appearance I did not know. What impressed itself upon my mind was that the face which I had never expected to

see again on the earth, even in a picture, was once more given to my eyes, it mattered not how. This, in my excited state, for laudanum waiting to be swallowed and a pistol at full cock for firing do not induce calmness in a man already almost mad, at any rate until they have fulfilled their offices, did in truth appear to me to be something of the nature of a sign such as that spoken of in Savage's idiotic dream, which I was to find if 'I looked round the study.'

"'Savage,' I said, 'I don't think much of your dreams about snakes that talk to you, but I do think that it might be well to see Mr. Quatermain. To-day is Sunday and I believe that the African mail sails on Friday. Go to town early to-morrow and book passages.'

"Also I told him to see various gunsmiths and bid them send down a selection of rifles and other weapons for me to choose from, as I did not know whither we might wander in Africa, and to make further necessary arrangements. All of these things he did, and—here we are."

"Yes," I answered reflectively, "here you are. What is more, here is your luggage of which there seems to be enough for a regiment," and I pointed to a Scotch cart piled up with baggage and followed by a long line of Kafirs carrying sundry packages upon their heads that, marshalled by Savage, had halted at my gate.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE START

That evening when the baggage had been disposed of and locked up in my little stable and arrangements were made for the delivery of some cases containing tinned foods, etc., which had proved too heavy for the Scotch cart, Lord Ragnall and I continued our conversation. First, however, we unpacked the guns and checked the ammunition, of which there was a large supply, with more to follow.

A beautiful battery they were of all sorts from elephant guns down, the most costly and best finished that money could buy at the time. It made me shiver to think what the bill for them must have been, while their appearance when they were put together and stood in a long line against the wall of my sitting-room, moved old Hans to a kind of ecstasy. For a long while he contemplated them, patting the stocks one after the other and giving to each a name as though they were all alive, then exclaimed:

"With such weapons as these the Baas could kill the devil himself. Still, let the Baas bring Intombi with him"—a favourite old rifle of mine and a mere toy in size, that had however done me good service in the past, as those who have read what I have written in "Marie" and "The Holy Flower" may remember. "For, Baas, after all, the wife of one's youth often proves more to be trusted than the fine young ones a man buys in his age. Also one knows all her faults, but who can say how many there may be hidden up in new women however beautifully they are tattooed?" and he pointed to the elaborate engraving upon the guns.

I translated this speech to Lord Ragnall. It made him laugh, at which I was glad for up till then I had not seen him even smile. I should add that in addition to these sporting weapons there were no fewer than fifty military rifles of the best make, they were large-bore Sniders that had just then been put upon the market, and with them, packed in tin cases, a great quantity of ammunition. Although the regulations were not so strict then as they are now, I met with a great deal of difficulty in getting all this armament through the Customs. Lord Ragnall however had letters from the Colonial Office to such authorities as ruled in Natal, and on our giving a joint undertaking that they were for defensive purposes only in unexplored territory and not for sale, they were allowed through. Fortunate did it prove for us in after days that this matter was arranged.

That night before we went to bed I narrated to Lord Ragnall all the history of our search for the Holy Flower, which he seemed to find very entertaining. Also I told him of my adventures, to me far more terrible, as chairman of the Bona Fide Gold Mine and of their melancholy end.

"The lesson of which is," he remarked when I had finished, "that because a man is master of one trade, it does not follow that he is master of another. You are, I should judge, one of the finest shots in the world, you are also a great hunter and explorer. But when it comes to companies, Quatermain—! Still," he went on, "I ought to be grateful to that Bona Fide Gold Mine, since I gather that had it not been for it and for your rascally friend, Mr. Jacob, I should not have found you here."

"No," I answered, "it is probable that you would not, as by this time I might have been far in the interior where a man cannot be traced and letters do not reach him."

Then he made a few pointed inquiries about the affairs of the mine, noting my answers down in his pocket-book. I thought this odd but concluded that he wished to verify my statements before entering into a close companionship with me, since for aught he knew I might be the largest liar in the world and a swindler to boot. So I said nothing, even when I heard through a roundabout channel on the morrow that he had sought an interview with the late secretary of the defunct company.

A few days later, for I may as well finish with this matter at once, the astonishing object of these inquiries was made clear to me. One morning I found upon my table a whole pile of correspondence, at the sight of which I groaned, feeling sure that it must come from duns and be connected with that infernal mine. Curiosity and a desire to face the worst, however, led me to open the first letter which as it happened proved to be from that very shareholder who had proposed a vote of confidence in me at the winding-up meeting. By the time that it was finished my eyes were swimming and really I felt quite faint. It ran:

"HONOURED SIR,—I knew that I was putting my money on the right horse when I said the other day that you were one of the straightest that ever ran. Well, I have got the cheque sent me by the lawyer on your account, being payment in full for every farthing I invested in the Bona Fide Gold Mine, and I can only say that it is uncommonly useful, for that business had pretty well cleaned me out. God bless you, Mr. Quatermain."

I opened another letter, and another, and another. They were all to the same effect. Bewildered I went on to the stoep, where I found Hans with an epistle in his hand which he requested me to be good enough to read. I read it. It was from a well-known firm of local lawyers and said:

"On behalf of Allan Quatermain, Esq., we beg to enclose a draft for the sum of £650, being the value of the interest in the Bona Fide Gold Company, Limited (in liquidation), which stands in your name on the books of the company. Please sign enclosed receipt and return same to us."

Yes, and there was the draft for £650 sterling!

I explained the matter to Hans, or rather I translated the document, adding:

"You see you have got your money back again. But Hans, I never sent it; I don't know where it comes from."

"Is it money, Baas?" asked Hans, surveying the draft with suspicion. "It looks very much like the other bit of paper for which I paid money."

Again I explained, reiterating that I knew nothing of the transaction.

"Well, Baas," he said, "if you did not send it someone did—perhaps your father the reverend Predikant, who sees that you are in trouble and wishes to wash your name white again. Meanwhile, Baas, please put that bit of paper in your pocket-book and keep it for me, for otherwise I might be tempted to buy square-face with it."

"No," I answered, "you can now buy your land back, or some other land, and there will be no need for you to come with me to the country of the Kendah."

Hans thought a moment and then very deliberately began to tear up the draft; indeed I was only just in time to save it from destruction.

"If the Baas is going to turn me off because of this paper," he said, "I will make it small and eat it."

"You silly old fool," I said as I possessed myself of the cheque.

Then the conversation was interrupted, for who should appear but Sammy, my old cook, who began in his pompous language:

"The perfect rectitude of your conduct, Mr. Quatermain, moves me to the deepest gratitude, though indeed I wish that I had put something into the food of the knave Jacob who beguiled us all, that would have caused him internal pangs of a severe if not of a dangerous order. My holding in the gold mine was not extensive, but the unpaid bill of the said Jacob and his friends——"

Here I cut him short and fled, since I saw yet another shareholder galloping to the gate, and behind him two more in a spider. First I took refuge in my room, my idea being to put away that pile of letters. In so doing I observed that there was one still unopened. Half mechanically I took it from the envelope and glanced at its contents. They were word for word identical with those of that addressed to "Mr. Hans, Hottentot," only my name was at the bottom of it instead of that of Hans and the cheque was for £1,500, the amount I had paid for the shares I held in the venture.

Feeling as though my brain were in a melting-pot, I departed from the house into a patch of native bush that in those days still grew upon the slope of the hill behind. Here I sat myself down, as I had often done before when there was a knotty point to be considered, aimlessly watching a lovely emerald cuckoo flashing, a jewel of light, from tree to tree, while I turned all this fairy-godmother business over in my mind.

Of course it soon became clear to me. Lord Ragnall in this case was the little old lady with the wand, the touch of which could convert worthless share certificates into bank-notes of their face value. I remembered now that his wealth was said to be phenomenal and after all the cash capital of the company was quite small. But the question was—could I accept his bounty?

I returned to the house where the first person whom I met was Lord Ragnall himself, just arrived from some interview about the fifty Snider rifles, which were still in bond. I told him solemnly that I wished to speak to him, whereon he remarked in a cheerful voice,

"Advance, friend, and all's well!"

I don't know that I need set out the details of the interview. He waited till I had got through my halting speech of mingled gratitude and expostulation, then remarked:

"My friend, if you will allow me to call you so, it is quite true that I have done this because I wished to do it. But it is equally true that to me it is a small thing—to be frank, scarcely a month's income; what I have saved travelling on that ship to Natal would pay for it all. Also I have weighed my own interest in the matter, for I am anxious that you should start upon this hazardous journey of ours up country with a mind absolutely free from self-reproach or any money care, for thus you will be able to do me better service. Therefore I beg that you will say no more of the episode. I have only one thing to add, namely that I have myself bought up at par value a few of the debentures. The price of them will pay the lawyers and the liquidation fees; moreover they give me a status as a shareholder which will enable me to sue Mr. Jacob for his fraud, to which business I have already issued instructions. For please understand that I have not paid off any shares still standing in his name or in those of his friends."

Here I may add that nothing ever came of this action, for the lawyers found themselves unable to serve any writ upon that elusive person, Mr. Jacob, who by then had probably adopted the name of some other patriarch.

"Please put it all down as a rich man's whim," he concluded.

"I can't call that a whim which has returned £1,500 odd to my pocket that I had lost upon a gamble, Lord Ragnall."

"Do you remember, Quatermain, how you won £250 upon a gamble at my place and what you did with it, which sum probably represented to you twenty or fifty times what it would to me? Also if that argument does not appeal to you, may I remark that I do not expect you to give me your services as a professional hunter and guide for nothing."

"Ah!" I answered, fixing on this point and ignoring the rest, "now we come to business. If I may look upon this amount as salary, a very handsome salary by the way, paid in advance, you taking the risks of my dying or becoming incapacitated before it is earned, I will say no more of the matter. If not I must refuse to accept what is an unearned gift."

"I confess, Quatermain, that I did not regard it in that light, though I might have been willing to call it a retaining fee. However, do not let us wrangle about money any more. We can always settle our accounts when the bill is added up, if ever we reach so far. Now let us come to more important details."

So we fell to discussing the scheme, route and details of our proposed journey. Expenditure being practically no object, there were several plans open to us. We might sail up the coast and go by Kilwa, as I had done on the search for the Holy Flower, or we might retrace the line of our retreat from the Mazitu country which ran through Zululand. Again, we might advance by whatever road we selected with a small army of drilled and disciplined retainers, trusting to force to break a way through to the Kendah. Or we might go practically unaccompanied, relying on our native wit and good fortune to attain our ends. Each of these alternatives had so much to recommend it and yet presented so many difficulties, that after long hours of discussion, for this talk was renewed again and again, I found it quite impossible to decide upon any one of them, especially as in the end Lord Ragnall always left the choice with its heavy responsibilities to me.

At length in despair I opened the window and whistled twice on a certain low note. A minute later Hans shuffled in, shaking the wet off the new corduroy clothes which he had bought upon the strength of his return to affluence, for it was raining outside, and squatted himself down upon the floor at a little distance. In the shadow of the table which cut off the light from the hanging lamp he

looked, I remember, exactly like an enormous and antique toad. I threw him a piece of tobacco which he thrust into his corn-cob pipe and lit with a match.

"The Baas called me," he said when it was drawing to his satisfaction, "what does Baas want of Hans?"

"Light in darkness!" I replied, playing on his native name, and proceeded to set out the whole case to him.

He listened without a word, then asked for a small glass of gin, which I gave him doubtfully. Having swallowed this at a gulp as though it were water, he delivered himself briefly to this effect:

"I think the Baas will do well not to go to Kilwa, since it means waiting for a ship, or hiring one; also there may be more slave-traders there by now who will bear him no love because of a lesson he taught them a while ago. On the other hand the road through Zululand is open, though it be long, and there the name of Macumazana is one well known. I think also that the Baas would do well not to take too many men, who make marching slow, only a wagon or two and some drivers which might be sent back when they can go no farther. From Zululand messengers can be dispatched to the Mazitu, who love you, and Bausi or whoever is king there to-day will order bearers to meet us on the road, until which time we can hire other bearers in Zululand. The old woman at Beza-Town told me, moreover, as you will remember, that the Kendah are a very great people who live by themselves and will allow none to enter their land, which is bordered by deserts. Therefore no force that you could take with you and feed upon a road without water would be strong enough to knock down their gates like an elephant, and it seems better that you should try to creep through them like a wise snake, although they appear to be shut in your face. Perhaps also they will not be shut since did you not say that two of their great doctors promised to meet you and guide you through them?"

"Yes," I interrupted, "I dare say it will be easier to get in than to get out of Kendahland."

"Last of all, Baas, if you take many men armed with guns, the black part of the Kendah people of whom I told you will perhaps think you come to make war, whatever the white Kendah may say, and kill us all, whereas if we be but a few perchance they will let us pass in peace. I think that is all, Baas. Let the Baas and the Lord Igeza forgive me if my words are foolish."

Here I should explain that "Igeza" was the name which the natives had given to Lord Ragnall because of his appearance. The word means a handsome person in the Zulu tongue. Savage they called "Bena," I don't know why. "Bena" in Zulu means to push out the breast and it may be that the name was a round-about allusion to the proud appearance of the dignified Savage, or possibly it had some other recondite signification. At any rate Lord Ragnall, Hans and myself knew the splendid Savage thenceforward by the homely appellation of Beans. His master said it suited him very well because he was so green.

"The advice seems wise, Hans. Go now. No, no more gin," I answered.

As a matter of fact careful consideration convinced us it was so wise that we acted on it down to the last detail.

So it came about that one fine afternoon about a fortnight later, for hurry as we would our preparations took a little time, we trekked for Zululand over the sandy roads that ran from the outskirts of Durban. Our baggage and stores were stowed in two half-tented wagons, very good wagons since everything we had with us was the best that money could buy, the after-part of which served us as sleeping-places at night. Hans sat on the *voor-kisse* or driving-seat of one of the wagons; Lord Ragnall, Savage and I were mounted upon "salted" horses, that is, horses which had recovered from and were therefore supposed to be proof against the dreadful sickness, valuable and docile animals which were trained to shooting.

At our start a little contretemps occurred. To my amazement I saw Savage, who insisted upon continuing to wear his funereal upper servant's cut-away coat, engaged with grim determination in mounting his steed from the wrong side. He got into the saddle somehow, but there was worse to follow. The horse, astonished at such treatment, bolted a little way, Savage sawing at its mouth. Lord Ragnall and I cantered after it past the wagons, fearing disaster. All of a sudden it swerved violently and Savage flew into the air, landing heavily in a sitting posture.

"Poor Beans!" ejaculated Lord Ragnall as we sped forward. "I expect there is an end of his journeyings."

To our surprise, however, we saw him leap from the ground with the most marvellous agility and begin to dance about slapping at his posterior parts and shouting,

"Take it off! Kill it!"

A few seconds later we discovered the reason. The horse had shied at a sleeping puff adder which was curled up in the sand of that little frequented road, and on this puff adder Savage had descended with so much force, for he weighed thirteen stone, that the creature was squashed quite flat and never stirred again. This, however, he did not notice in his agitation, being convinced indeed that it was hanging to him behind like a bulldog.

"Snakes! my lord," he exclaimed, when at last after careful search we demonstrated to him that the adder had died before it could come into action.

"I hate 'em, my lord, and they haunts" (he said 'aunts') "me. If ever I get out of this I'll go and live in Ireland, my lord, where they say there ain't none. But it isn't likely that I shall," he added mournfully, "for the omen is horrid."

"On the contrary," I answered, "it is splendid, for you have killed the snake and not the snake you. 'The dog it was that died,' Savage."

After this the Kafirs gave Savage a second very long name which meant "He-who-sits-down-on-snakes-and-makes-them-flat." Having remounted him on his horse, which was standing patiently a few yards away, at length we got off. I lingered a minute behind the others to give some directions to my old Griqua gardener, Jack, who snivelled at parting with me, and to take a last look at my little home. Alack! I feared it might be the last indeed, knowing as I did that this was a dangerous enterprise upon which I found myself embarked, I who had vowed that I would be done with danger.

With a lump in my throat I turned from the contemplation of that peaceful dwelling and happy garden in which each tree and plant was dear to me, and waving a good-bye to Jack, cantered on to where Ragnall was waiting for me.

"I am afraid this is rather a sad hour for you, who are leaving your little boy and your home," he said gently, "to face unknown perils."

"Not so sad as others I've passed," I answered, "and perils are my daily bread in every sense of the word. Moreover, whatever it's for me it's for you also."

"No, Quatermain. For me it is an hour of hope; a faint hope, I admit, but the only one left, for the letters I got last night from Egypt and England report that no clue whatsoever has been found, and indeed that the search for any has been abandoned. Yes, I follow the last star left in my sky and if it sets I hope that I may set also, at any rate to this world. Therefore I am happier than I have been for months, thanks to you," and he stretched out his hand, which I shook. It was a token of friendship and mutual confidence which I am glad to say nothing that happened afterwards ever disturbed for a moment.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MEETING IN THE DESERT

Now I do not propose to describe all our journey to Kendahland, or at any rate the first part thereof. It was interesting enough in its way and we met with a few hunting adventures, also some others. But there is so much to tell of what happened to us after we reached the place that I have not the time, even if I had the inclination to set all these matters down. Let it be sufficient, then, to say that although owing to political events the country happened to be rather disturbed at the time, we trekked through Zululand without any great difficulty. For here my name was a power in the land and all parties united to help me. Thence, too, I managed to dispatch three messengers, half-bred border men, lean fellows and swift of foot, forward to the king of the Mazitu, as Hans had suggested that I should do, advising him that his old friends, Macumazana, Watcher-by-Night, and the yellow man who was named Light-in-Darkness and Lord-of-the-Fire, were about to visit him again.

As I knew we could not take the wagons beyond a certain point where there was a river called the Luba, unfordable by anything on wheels, I requested him, moreover, to send a hundred bearers with whatever escort might be necessary, to meet us on the banks of that river at a spot which was known to both of us. These words the messengers promised to deliver for a fee of five head of cattle apiece, to be paid on their return, or to their families if they died on the road, which cattle we purchased and left in charge of a chief, who was their kinsman. As it happened two of the poor fellows did die, one of them of cold in a swamp through which they took a short cut, and the other at the teeth of a hungry lion. The third, however, won through and delivered the message.

After resting for a fortnight in the northern parts of Zululand, to give time to our wayworn oxen to get some flesh on their bones in the warm bushveld where grass was plentiful even in the dry season, we trekked forward by a route known to Hans and myself. Indeed it was the same which we had followed on our journey from Mazituland after our expedition in search for the Holy Flower.

We took with us a small army of Zulu bearers. This, although they were difficult to feed in a country where no corn could be bought, proved fortunate in the end, since so many of our cattle died from tsetse bite that we were obliged to abandon one of the wagons, which meant that the goods it contained must be carried by men. At length we reached the banks of the river, and camped there one night by three tall peaks of rock which the natives called "The Three Doctors," where I had instructed the messengers to tell the Mazitu to meet us. For four days we remained here, since rains in the interior had made the river quite impassable. Every morning I climbed the tallest of the "Doctors" and with my glasses looked over its broad yellow flood, searching the wide, bush-clad land beyond in the hope of discovering the Mazitu advancing to meet us. Not a man was to be seen, however, and on the fourth evening, as the river had now become fordable, we determined that we would cross on the morrow, leaving the remaining wagon, which it was impossible to drag over its rocky bottom, to be taken back to Natal by our drivers.

Here a difficulty arose. No promise of reward would induce any of our Zulu bearers even to wet their feet in the waters of this River Luba, which for some reason that I could not extract from them they declared to be *tagati*, that is, bewitched, to people of their blood. When I pointed out that three Zulus had already undertaken to cross it, they answered that those men were half-breeds, so that for them it was only half bewitched, but they thought that even so one or more of them would pay the penalty of death for this rash crime.

It chanced that this happened, for, as I have said, two of the poor fellows did die, though not, I think, owing to the magical properties of the waters of the Luba. This is how African superstitions are kept alive. Sooner or later some saying of the sort fulfils itself and then the instance is remembered and handed down for generations, while other instances in which nothing out of the common has occurred are not heeded, or are forgotten.

This decision on the part of those stupid Zulus put us in an awkward fix, since it was impossible for us to carry over all our baggage and ammunition without help. Therefore glad was I when before dawn on the fifth morning the nocturnal Hans crept into the wagon, in the after part of which Ragnall and I were sleeping, and informed us that he heard men's voices on the farther side of the river, though how he could hear anything above that roar of water passed my comprehension.

At the first break of dawn again we climbed the tallest of the "Doctor" rocks and stared into the mist. At length it rolled away and there on the farther side of the river I saw quite a hundred men who by their dress and spears I knew to be Mazitu. They saw me also and raising a cheer, dashed into the water, groups of them holding each other round the middle to prevent their being swept away. Thereupon our silly Zulus seized their spears and formed up upon the bank. I slid down the steep side of the "Great Doctor" and ran forward, calling out that these were friends who came.

"Friends or foes," answered their captain sullenly, "it is a pity that we should walk so far and not have a fight with those Mazitu dogs."

Well, I drove them off to a distance, not knowing what might happen if the two peoples met, and then went down to the bank. By now the Mazitu were near, and to my delight at the head of them I perceived no other than my old friend, their chief general, Babemba, a one-eyed man with whom Hans and I had shared many adventures. Through the water he plunged with great bounds and reaching the shore, greeted me literally with rapture.

"O Macumazana," he said, "little did I hope that ever again I should look upon your face. Welcome to you, a thousand welcomes, and to you too, Light-in-Darkness, Lord-of-the-Fire, Cunning-one whose wit saved us in the battle of the Gate. But where is Dogeetah, where is Wazeela, and where are the Mother and the Child of the Flower?"

"Far away across the Black Water, Babemba," I answered. "But here are two others in place of them," and I introduced him to Ragnall and Savage by their native names of Igeza and Bena.

He contemplated them for a moment, then said:

"This," pointing to Ragnall, "is a great lord, but this," pointing to Savage, who was much the better dressed of the two, "is a cock of the ashpit arrayed in an eagle's feathers," a remark I did not translate, but one which caused Hans to snigger vacuously.

While we breakfasted on food prepared by the "Cock of the Ashpit," who amongst many other merits had that of being an excellent cook, I heard all the news. Bausi the king was dead but had been succeeded by one of his sons, also named Bausi, whom I remembered. Beza-Town had been rebuilt after the great fire that destroyed the slavers, and much more strongly fortified than before. Of the slavers themselves nothing more had been seen, or of the Pongo either, though the Mazitu declared that their ghosts, or those of their victims, still haunted the island in the lake. That was all, except the ill tidings as to two of our messengers which the third, who had returned with the Mazitu, reported to us.

After breakfast I addressed and sent away our Zulus, each with a handsome present from the trade goods, giving into their charge the remaining wagon and our servants, none of whom, somewhat to my relief, wished to accompany us farther. They sang their song of good-bye, saluted and departed over the rise, still looking hungrily behind them at the Mazitu, and we were very pleased to see the last of them without bloodshed or trouble.

When we had watched the white tilt of the wagon vanish, we set to work to get ourselves and our goods across the river. This we accomplished safely, for the Mazitu worked for us like friends and not as do hired men. On the farther bank, however, it took us two full days so to divide up the loads that the bearers could carry them without being overladen.

At length all was arranged and we started. Of the month's trek that followed there is nothing to tell, except that we completed it without notable accidents and at last reached the new Beza-Town, which much resembled the old, where we were accorded a great public reception. Bausi II himself headed the procession which met us outside the south gate on that very mound which we had occupied in the great fight, where the bones of the gallant Mavovo and my other hunters lay buried. Almost did it seem to me as though I could hear their deep voices joining in the shouts of welcome.

That night, while the Mazitu feasted in our honour, we held an *indaba* in the big new guest house with Bausi II, a pleasant-faced young man, and old Babemba. The king asked us how long we meant to stay at Beza-Town, intimating his hope that the visit would be prolonged. I replied, but a few days, as we were travelling far to the north to find a people called the Kendah whom we wished to see, and hoped that he would give us bearers to carry our goods as far as the confines of their country. At the name of Kendah a look of astonishment appeared upon their faces and Babemba said:

"Has madness seized you, Macumazana, that you would attempt this thing? Oh surely you must be mad."

"You thought us mad, Babemba, when we crossed the lake to Rica Town, yet we came back safely."

"True, Macumazana, but compared to the Kendah the Pongo were but as the smallest star before the face of the sun."

"What do you know of them then?" I asked. "But stay—before you answer, I will speak what I know," and I repeated what I had learned from Hans, who confirmed my words, and from Harût and Marût, leaving out, however, any mention of their dealings with Lady Ragnall.

"It is all true," said Babemba when I had finished, "for that old woman of whom Light-in-the-Darkness speaks, was one of the wives of my uncle and I knew her well. Harken! These Kendah are a terrible nation and countless in number and of all the people the fiercest. Their king is called Simba, which means Lion. He who rules is always called Simba, and has been so called for hundreds of years. He is of the Black Kendah whose god is the elephant Jana, but as Light-in-Darkness has said, there are also the White Kendah who are Arab men, the priests and traders of the people. The Kendah will allow no stranger within their doors; if one comes they kill him by torment, or blind him and turn him out into the desert which surrounds their country, there to die. These things the old woman who married my uncle told me, as she told them to Light-in-Darkness, also I have heard them from others, and what she did not tell me, that the White Kendah are great breeders of the beasts called camels which they sell to the Arabs of the north. Go not near them, for if you pass the desert the Black Kendah will kill you; and if you escape these, then their king, Simba, will kill you; and if you escape him, then their god Jana will kill you; and if you escape him, then their white priests will kill you with their magic. Oh! long before you look upon the faces of those priests you will be dead many times over."

"Then why did they ask me to visit them, Babemba?"

"I know not, Macumazana, but perhaps because they wished to make an offering of you to the god Jana, whom no spear can harm; no, nor even your bullets that pierce a tree."

"I am willing to make trial of that matter," I answered confidently, "and any way we must go to see these things for ourselves."

"Yes," echoed Ragnall, "we must certainly go," while even Savage, for I had been translating to them all this while, nodded his head although he looked as though he would much rather stay behind.

"Ask him if there are any snakes there, sir," he said, and foolishly enough I put the question to give me time to think of other things.

"Yes, O Bena. Yes, O Cock of the Ashpit," replied Babemba. "My uncle's Kendah wife told me that one of the guardians of the shrine of the White Kendah is such a snake as was never seen elsewhere in the world."

"Then say to him, sir," said Savage, when I had translated almost automatically, "that shrine ain't a church where I shall go to say my prayers."

Alas! poor Savage little knew the future and its gifts.

Then we came to the question of bearers. The end of it was that after some hesitation Bausi II, because of his great affection for us, promised to provide us with these upon our solemnly undertaking to dismiss them at the borders of the desert, "so that they might escape our doom," as he remarked cheerfully.

Four days later we started, accompanied by about one hundred and twenty picked men under the command of old Babemba himself, who, he explained, wished to be the last to see us alive in the world. This was depressing, but other circumstances connected with our start were calculated to weigh even more upon my spirit. Thus the night before we left Hans arrived and asked me to "write a paper" for him. I inquired what he wanted me to put in the paper. He replied that as he was going to his death and had property, namely the £650 that had been left in a bank to his credit, he desired to make a "white man's will" to be left in the charge of Babemba. The only provision of the said will was that I was to inherit his property, if I lived. If I died, which, he added, "of course you must, Baas, like the rest of us," it was to be devoted to furnishing poor black people in hospital with something comforting to

drink instead of the "cow's water" that was given to them there. Needless to say I turned him out at once, and that testamentary deposition remained unrecorded. Indeed it was unnecessary, since, as I reminded him, on my advice he had already made a will before we left Durban, a circumstance that he had quite forgotten.

The second event, which occurred about an hour before our departure, was, that hearing a mighty wailing in the market-place where once Hans and I had been tied to stakes to be shot to death with arrows, I went out to see what was the matter. At the gateway I was greeted by the sight of about a hundred old women plastered all over with ashes, engaged in howling their loudest in a melancholy unison. Behind these stood the entire population of Beza-Town, who chanted a kind of chorus.

"What the devil are they doing?" I asked of Hans.

"Singing our death-song, Baas," he replied stolidly, "as they say that where we are going no one will take the trouble to do so, and it is not right that great lords should die and the heavens above remain uninformed that they are coming."

"That's cheerful," I remarked, and wheeling round, asked Ragnall straight out if he wished to persevere in this business, for to tell the truth my nerve was shaken.

"I must," he answered simply, "but there is no reason why you and Hans should, or Savage either for the matter of that."

"Oh! I'm going where you go," I said, "and where I go Hans will go. Savage must speak for himself."

This he did and to the same effect, being a very honest and faithful man. It was the more to his credit since, as he informed me in private, he did not enjoy African adventure and often dreamed at nights of his comfortable room at Ragnall whence he superintended the social activities of that great establishment.

So we departed and marched for the matter of a month or more through every kind of country. After we had passed the head of the great lake wherein lay the island, if it really was an island, where the Pongo used to dwell (one clear morning through my glasses I discerned the mountain top that marked the former residence of the Mother of the Flower, and by contrast it made me feel quite homesick), we struck up north, following a route known to Babemba and our guides. After this we steered by the stars through a land with very few inhabitants, timid and nondescript folk who dwelt in scattered villages and scarcely understood the art of cultivating the soil, even in its most primitive form.

A hundred miles or so farther on these villages ceased and thenceforward we only encountered some nomads, little bushmen who lived on game which they shot with poisoned arrows. Once they attacked us and killed two of the Mazitu with those horrid arrows, against the venom of which no remedy that we had in our medicine chest proved of any avail. On this occasion Savage exhibited his courage if not his discretion, for rushing out of our thorn fence, after missing a bushman with both barrels at a distance of five yards—he was, I think, the worst shot I ever saw—he seized the little viper with his hands and dragged him back to camp. How Savage escaped with his life I do not know, for one poisoned arrow went through his hat and stuck in his hair and another just grazed his leg without drawing blood.

This valorous deed was of great service to us, since we were able through Hans, who knew something of the bushmen's language, to explain to our prisoner that if we were shot at again he would be hung. This information he contrived to shout, or rather to squeak and grunt, to his amiable tribe, of which it appeared he was a kind of chief, with the result that we were no more molested. Later, when we were clear of the bushmen country, we let him depart, which he did with great rapidity.

By degrees the land grew more and more barren and utterly devoid of inhabitants, till at last it merged into desert. At the edge of this desert which rolled away without apparent limit we came, however, to a kind of oasis where there was a strong and beautiful spring of water that formed a stream which soon lost itself in the surrounding sand. As we could go no farther, for even if we had wished to do so, and were able to find water there, the Mazitu refused to accompany us into the desert, not knowing what else to do, we camped in the oasis and waited.

As it happened, the place was a kind of hunter's paradise, since every kind of game, large and small, came to the water to drink at night, and in the daytime browsed upon the saltish grass that at this season of the year grew plentifully upon the edge of the wilderness.

Amongst other creatures there were elephants in plenty that travelled hither out of the bushlands we had passed, or sometimes emerged from the desert itself, suggesting that beyond this waste there lay fertile country. So numerous were these great beasts indeed that for my part I hoped earnestly that it would prove impossible for us to continue our journey, since I saw that in a few months I could collect an enormous amount of ivory, enough to make me comparatively rich, if only I were able to get it away. As it was we only killed a few of them, ten in all to be accurate, that we might send back the tusks as presents to Bausi II. To slaughter the poor animals uselessly was cruel, especially as being unaccustomed to the sight of man, they were as easy to approach as cows. Even Savage slew one—by carefully aiming at another five paces to its left.

For the rest we lived on the fat of the land and, as meat was necessary to us, had as much sport as we could desire among the various antelope.

For fourteen days or so this went on, till at length we grew thoroughly tired of the business, as did the Mazitu, who were so gorged with flesh that they began to desire vegetable food. Twice we rode as far into the desert as we dared, for our horses remained to us and had grown fresh again after the rest, but only to return without information. The place was just a vast wilderness strewn with brown stones beautifully polished by the wind-driven sand of ages, and quite devoid of water.

After our second trip, on which we suffered severely from thirst, we held a consultation. Old Babemba said that he could keep his men no longer, even for us, as they insisted upon returning home, and inquired what we meant to do and why we sat here "like a stone." I answered that we were waiting for some of the Kendah who had bid me to shoot game hereabouts until they arrived to be our guides. He remarked that the Kendah to the best of his belief lived in a country that was still hundreds of miles away and that, as they did not know of our presence, any communication across the desert being impossible, our proceedings seemed to be foolish.

I retorted that I was not quite so sure of this, since the Kendah seemed to have remarkable ways of acquiring information.

"Then, Macumazana, I fear that you will have to wait by yourselves until you discover which of us is right," he said stolidly.

Turning to Ragnall, I asked him what he would do, pointing out that to journey into the desert meant death, especially as we did not know whither we were going, and that to return alone, without the stores which we must abandon, through the country of the bushmen to Mazituland, would also be a risky proceeding. However, it was for him to decide.

Now he grew much perturbed. Taking me apart again he dwelt earnestly upon his secret reasons for wishing to visit these Kendah, with which of course I was already acquainted, as indeed was Savage.

"I desire to stay here," he ended.

"Which means that we must all stay, Ragnall, since Savage will not desert you. Nor will Hans desert me although he thinks us mad. He points out that I came to seek ivory and here about is ivory in plenty for the trouble of taking."

"I might remain alone, Quatermain——" he began, but I looked at him in such a way that he never finished the sentence.

Ultimately we came to a compromise. Babemba, on behalf of the Mazitu, agreed to wait three more days. If nothing happened during that period we on our part agreed to return with them to a stretch of well-watered bush about fifty miles behind us, which we knew swarmed with elephants, that by now were growing shy of approaching our oasis where there was so much noise and shooting. There we would kill as much ivory as we could carry, an operation in which they were willing to assist for the fun of it, and then go back with them to Mazituland.

The three days went by and with every hour that passed my spirits rose, as did those of Savage and Hans, while Lord Ragnall became more and more depressed. The third afternoon was devoted to a jubilant packing of loads, for in accordance with the terms of our bargain we were to start backwards on our spoor at dawn upon the morrow. Most happily did I lay myself down to sleep in my little bough shelter that night, feeling that at last I was rid of an uncommonly awkward adventure. If I thought that we could do any good by staying on, it would have been another matter. But as I was certain that there was no earthly chance of our finding among the Kendah—if ever we reached them—the lady who had tumbled in the Nile in Egypt, well, I was glad that Providence had been so good as to make it impossible for us to commit suicide by thirst in a desert, or otherwise. For, notwithstanding my former reasonings to the contrary, I was now convinced that this was what had happened to poor Ragnall's wife.

That, however, was just what Providence had not done. In the middle of the night, to be precise, at exactly two in the morning, I was awakened by Hans, who slept at the back of my shanty, into which he had crept through a hole in the faggots, exclaiming in a frightened voice,

"Open your eyes and look, Baas. There are two *spooks* waiting to see you outside, Baas."

Very cautiously I lifted myself a little and stared out into the moonlight. There, seated about five paces from the open end of the hut were the "spooks" sure enough, two white-robed figures squatting silent and immovable on the ground. At first I was frightened. Then I bethought me of thieves and felt for my Colt pistol under the rug that served me as a pillow. As I got hold of the handle, however, a deep voice said:

"Is it your custom, O Macumazana, Watcher-by-Night, to receive guests with bullets?"

Now thought I to myself, who is there in the world who could see a man catch hold of the handle of a pistol in the recesses of a dark place and under a blanket at night, except the owner of that voice which I seemed to remember hearing in a certain drawing-room in England?

"Yes, Harût," I answered with an unconcerned yawn, "when the guests come in such a doubtful fashion and in the middle of the night. But as you are here at last, will you be so good as to tell us why you have kept us waiting all this time? Is that your way of fulfilling an engagement?"

"O Lord Macumazana," answered Harût, for of course it was he, in quite a perturbed tone, "I offer to you our humble apologies. The truth is that when we heard of your arrival at Beza-Town we started, or tried to start, from hundreds of miles away to keep our tryst with you here as we promised we would do. But we are mortal, Macumazana, and accidents intervened. Thus, when we had ascertained the weight of your baggage, camels had to be collected to carry it, which were grazing at a distance. Also it was necessary to send forward to dig out a certain well in the desert where they must drink. Hence the delay. Still, you will admit that we have arrived in time, five, or at any rate four hours before the rising of that sun which was to light you on your homeward way."

"Yes, you have, O Prophets, or O Liars, whichever you may be," I exclaimed with pardonable exasperation, for really their knowledge of my private affairs, however obtained, was enough to anger a saint. "So as you are here at last, come in and have a drink, for whether you are men or devils, you must be cold out there in the damp."

In they came accordingly, and, not being Mohammedans, partook of a tot of square-face from a bottle which I kept locked in a box to put Hans beyond the reach of temptation.

"To your health, Harût and Marût," I said, drinking a little out of the pannikin and giving the rest to Hans, who gulped the fiery liquor down with a smack of his lips. For I will admit that I joined in this unholy midnight potation to gain time for thought and to steady my nerve.

"To your health, O Lord Macumazana," the pair answered as they swallowed their tots, which I had made pretty stiff, and set down their pannikins in front of them with as much reverence as though these had been holy vessels.

"Now," I said, throwing a blanket over my shoulders, for the air was chilly, "now let us talk," and taking the lantern which Hans had thoughtfully lighted, I held it up and contemplated them.

There they were, Harût and Marût without doubt, to all appearance totally unchanged since some years before I had seen them at Ragnall in England. "What are you doing here?" I asked in a kind of fiery indignation inspired by my intense curiosity. "How did you get out of England after you had tried to steal away the lady to whom you sent the necklace? What did you do with that lady after you had beguiled her from the boat at Abu-Simbel? In the name of your Holy Child, or of Shaitan of the Mohammedans, or of Set of the Egyptians, answer me, lest I should make an end of both of you, which I can do here without any questions being asked," and I whipped out my pistol.

"Pardon us," said Harût with a grave smile, "but if you were to do as you say, Lord Macumazana, many questions would be asked which *you* might find it hard to answer. So be pleased to put that death-dealer back into its place, and to tell us before we reply to you, what you know of Set of the Egyptians."

"As much or as little as you do," I replied.

Both bowed as though this information were of the most satisfactory order. Then Harût went on: "In reply to your requests, O Macumazana, we left England by a steamboat and in due course after long journeyings we reached our own country. We do not understand your allusions to a place called Abu-Simbel on the Nile, whence, never having been there, we have taken no lady. Indeed, we never meant to take that lady to whom we sent a necklace in England. We only meant to ask certain questions of her, as she had

the gift of vision, when you appeared and interrupted us. What should we want with white ladies, who have already far too many of our own?"

"I don't know," I replied, "but I do know that you are the biggest liars I ever met."

At these words, which some might have thought insulting, Harût and Marût bowed again as though to acknowledge a great compliment. Then Harût said:

"Let us leave the question of ladies and come to matters that have to do with men. You are here as we told you that you would be at a time when you did not believe us, and we here to meet *you*, as we told you that we would be. How we knew that you were coming and how we came do not matter at all. Believe what you will. Are you ready to start with us, O Lord Macumazana, that you may bring to its death the wicked elephant Jana which ravages our land, and receive the great reward of ivory? If so, your camel waits."

"One camel cannot carry four men," I answered, avoiding the question.

"In courage and skill you are more than many men, O Macumazana, yet in body you are but one and not four."

"If you think that I am going with you alone, you are much mistaken, Harût and Marût," I exclaimed. "Here with me is my servant without whom I do not stir," and I pointed to Hans, whom they contemplated gravely. "Also there is the Lord Ragnall, who in this land is named Igeza, and his servant who here is named Bena, the man out of whom you drew snakes in the room in England. They also must accompany us."

At this news the impassive countenances of Harût and Marût showed, I thought, some signs of disturbance. They muttered together in an unknown tongue. Then Harût said:

"Our secret land is open to you alone, O Macumazana, for one purpose only—to kill the elephant Jana, for which deed we promise you a great reward. We do not wish to see the others there."

"Then you can kill your own elephant, Harût and Marût, for not one step do I go with you. Why should I when there is as much ivory here as I want, to be had for the shooting?"

"How if we take you, O Macumazana?"

"How if I kill you both, O Harût and Marût? Fools, here are many brave men at my command, and if you or any with you want fighting it shall be given you in plenty. Hans, bid the Mazitu stand to their arms and summon Igeza and Bena."

"Stay, Lord," said Harût, "and put down that weapon," for once more I had produced the pistol. "We would not begin our fellowship by shedding blood, though we are safer from you than you think. Your companions shall accompany you to the land of the Kendah, but let them know that they do so at their own risk. Learn that it is revealed to us that if they go in there some of them will pass out again as spirits but not as men."

"Do you mean that you will murder them?"

"No. We mean that yonder are some stronger than us or any men, who will take their lives in sacrifice. Not yours, Macumazana, for that, it is decreed, is safe, but those of two of the others, which two we do not know."

"Indeed, Harût and Marût, and how am I to be sure that any of us are safe, or that you do not but trick us to your country, there to kill us with treachery and steal our goods?"

"Because we swear it by the oath that may not be broken; we swear it by the Heavenly Child," both of them exclaimed solemnly, speaking with one voice and bowing till their foreheads almost touched the ground.

I shrugged my shoulders and laughed a little.

"You do not believe us," went on Harût, "who have not heard what happens to those who break this oath. Come now and see something. Within five paces of your hut is a tall ant-heap upon which doubtless you have been accustomed to stand and overlook the desert." (This was true, but how did they guess it, I wondered.) "Go climb that ant-heap once more."

Perhaps it was rash, but my curiosity led me to accept this invitation. Out I went, followed by Hans with a loaded double-barrelled rifle, and scrambled up the ant-heap which, as it was twenty feet high and there were no trees just here, commanded a very fine view of the desert beyond.

"Look to the north," said Harût from its foot.

I looked, and there in the bright moonlight five or six hundred yards away, ranged rank by rank upon a slope of sand and along the crest of the ridge beyond, I saw quite two hundred kneeling camels, and by each camel a tall, white-robed figure who held in his hand a long lance to the shaft of which, not far beneath the blade, was attached a little flag. For a while I stared to make sure that I was not the victim of an illusion or a mirage. Then when I had satisfied myself that these were indeed men and camels I descended from the ant-heap.

"You will admit, Macumazana," said Harût politely, "that if we had meant you any ill, with such a force it would have been easy for us to take a sleeping camp at night. But these men come here to be your escort, not to kill or enslave you or yours. And, Macumazana, we have sworn to you the oath that may not be broken. Now we go to our people. In the morning, after you have eaten, we will return again unarmed and alone."

Then like shadows they slipped away.

## CHAPTER X.

### CHARGE!

Ten minutes later the truth was known and every man in the camp was up and armed. At first there were some signs of panic, but these with the help of Babemba we managed to control, setting the men to make the best preparations for defence that circumstances would allow, and thus occupying their minds. For from the first we saw that, except for the three of us who had horses, escape was impossible. That great camel corps could catch us within a mile.

Leaving old Babemba in charge of his soldiers, we three white men and Hans held a council at which I repeated every word that had passed between Harût and Marût and myself, including their absolute denial of their having had anything to do with the disappearance of Lady Ragnall on the Nile.

"Now," I asked, "what is to be done? My fate is sealed, since for purposes of their own, of which probably we know nothing, these people intend to take me with them to their country, as indeed they are justified in doing, since I have been fool enough to keep a kind of assignation with them here. But they don't want anybody else. Therefore there is nothing to prevent you Ragnall, and you Savage, and you Hans, from returning with the Mazitu."

"Oh! Baas," said Hans, who could understand English well enough although he seldom spoke it, "why are you always bothering me with such *praatjes*?"—(that is, chatter). "Whatever you do I will do, and I don't care what you do, except for your own sake, Baas. If I am going to die, let me die; it doesn't at all matter how, since I must go soon and make report to your reverend father, the Predikant. And now, Baas, I have been awake all night, for I heard those camels coming a long while before the two spook men appeared, and as I have never heard camels before, could not make out what they were, for they don't walk like giraffes. So I am going to sleep, Baas, there in the sun. When you have settled things, you can wake me up and give me your orders," and he suited the action to the word, for when I glanced at him again he was, or appeared to be, slumbering, just like a dog at its master's feet.

I looked at Ragnall in interrogation.

"I am going on," he said briefly.

"Despite the denial of these men of any complicity in your wife's fate?" I asked. "If their words are true, what have you to gain by this journey, Ragnall?"

"An interesting experience while it lasts; that is all. Like Hans there, if what they say *is* true, my future is a matter of complete indifference to me. But I do not believe a word of what they say. Something tells me that they know a great deal which they do not choose to repeat—about my wife I mean. That is why they are so anxious that I should not accompany you."

"You must judge for yourself," I answered doubtfully, "and I hope to Heaven that you are judging right. Now, Savage, what have you decided? Remember before you reply that these uncanny fellows declare that if we four go, two of us will never return. It seems impossible that they can read the future, still, without doubt, they *are* most uncanny."

"Sir," said Savage, "I will take my chance. Before I left England his lordship made a provision for my old mother and my widowed sister and her children, and I have none other dependent upon me. Moreover, I won't return alone with those Mazitu to become a barbarian, for how could I find my way back to the coast without anyone to guide me? So I'll go on and leave the rest to God."

"Which is just what we have all got to do," I remarked. "Well, as that is settled, let us send for Babemba and tell him."

This we did accordingly. The old fellow received the news with more resignation than I had anticipated. Fixing his one eye upon me, he said:

"Macumazana, these words are what I expected from you. Had any other man spoken them I should have declared that he was quite mad. But I remember that I said this when you determined to visit the Pongo, and that you came back from their country safe and sound, having done wonderful things there, and that it was the Pongo who suffered, not you. So I believe it will be again, so far as you are concerned, Macumazana, for I think that some devil goes with you who looks after his own. For the others I do not know. They must settle the matter with their own devils, or with those of the Kendah people. Now farewell, Macumazana, for it comes to me that we shall meet no more. Well, that happens to all at last, and it is good to have known you who are so great in your own way. Often I shall think of you as you will think of me, and hope that in a country beyond that of the Kendah I may hear from your lips all that has befallen you on this and other journeys. Now I go to withdraw my men before these white-robed Arabs come on their strange beasts to seize you, lest they should take us also and there should be a fight in which we, being the fewer, must die. The loads are all in order ready to be laden on their strange beasts. If they declare that the horses cannot cross the desert, leave them loose and we will catch them and take them home with us, and since they are male and female, breed young ones from them which shall be yours when you send for them, or Bausi the king's if you never send. Nay, I want no more presents who have the gun and the powder and the bullets you gave me, and the tusks of ivory for Bausi the king, and what is best of all, the memory of you and of your courage and wisdom. May these and the gods you worship befriend you. From yonder hill we will watch till we see that you have gone. Farewell," and waiting for no answer, he departed with the tears running from his solitary eye.

Ten minutes later the Mazitu bearers had also saluted us and gone, leaving us seated in that deserted camp surrounded by our baggage, and so far as I was concerned, feeling most lonely. Another ten minutes went by which we occupied in packing our personal belongings. Then Hans, who was now washing out the coffee kettle at a little distance, looked up and said:

"Here come the spook-men, Baas, the whole regiment of them." We ran and looked. It was true. Marshalled in orderly squadrons, the camels with their riders were sweeping towards us, and a fine sight the beasts made with their swaying necks and long, lurching gait. About fifty yards away they halted just where the stream from our spring entered the desert, and there proceeded to water the

camels, twenty of them at a time. Two men, however, in whom I recognized Harût and Marût, walked forward and presently were standing before us, bowing obsequiously.

"Good morning, Lord," said Harût to Ragnall in his broken English. "So you come with Macumazana to call at our poor house, as we call at your fine one in England. You think we got the beautiful lady you marry, she we give old necklace. That is not so. No white lady ever in Kendahland. We hear story from Macumazana and believe that lady drowned in Nile, for you 'member she walk much in her sleep. We very sorry for you, but gods know their business. They leave when they will leave, and take when they will take. You find her again some day more beautiful still and with her soul come back."

Here I looked at him sharply. I had told him nothing about Lady Ragnall having lost her wits. How then did he know of the matter? Still I thought it best to hold my peace. I think that Harût saw he had made some mistake, for leaving the subject of Lady Ragnall, he went on:

"You very welcome, O Lord, but it right tell you this most dangerous journey, since elephant Jana not like strangers, and," he continued slowly, "think no elephant like your blood, and all elephants brothers. What one hate rest hate everywhere in world. See it in your face that you already suffer great hurt from elephant, you or someone near you. Also some of Kendah very fierce people and love fighting, and p'raps there war in the land while you there, and in war people get killed."

"Very good, my friend," said Ragnall, "I am prepared to take my chance of these things. Either we all go to your country together, as Macumazana has explained to you, or none of us go."

"We understand. That is our bargain and we no break word," replied Harût.

Then he turned his benevolent gaze upon Savage, and said: "So you come too, Mr. Bena. That your name here, eh? Well, you learn lot things in Kendahland, about snakes and all rest."

Here the jovial-looking Marût whispered something into the ear of his companion, smiling all over his face and showing his white teeth as he did so. "Oh!" went on Harût, "my brother tells me you meet one snake already, down in country called Natal, but sit on him so hard, that he grow quite flat and no bite."

"Who told him that?" gasped Savage.

"Oh! forget. Think Macumazana. No? Then p'raps you tell him in sleep, for people talk much in sleep, you know, and some other people got good ears and hear long way. Or p'raps little joke Harût. You 'member, he first-rate conjurer. P'raps he send that snake. No trouble if know how. Well, we show you much better snake Kendahland. But you no sit on *him*, Mr. Bena."

To me, I know not why, there was something horrible in all this jocosity, something that gave me the creeps as always does the sight of a cat playing with a mouse. I felt even then that it foreshadowed terrible things. How *could* these men know the details of occurrences at which they were not present and of which no one had told them? Did that strange "tobacco" of theirs really give them some clairvoyant power, I wondered, or had they other secret methods of obtaining news? I glanced at poor Savage and perceived that he too felt as I did, for he had turned quite pale beneath his tan. Even Hans was affected, for he whispered to me in Dutch: "These are not men; these are devils, Baas, and this journey of ours is one into hell."

Only Ragnall sat stern, silent, and apparently quite unmoved. Indeed there was something almost sphinx-like about the set and expression of his handsome face. Moreover, I felt sure that Harût and Marût recognized the man's strength and determination and that he was one with whom they must reckon seriously. Beneath all their smiles and courtesies I could read this knowledge in their eyes; also that it was causing them grave anxiety. It was as though they knew that here was one against whom their power had no avail, whose fate was the master of their fate. In a sense Harût admitted this to me, for suddenly he looked up and said in a changed voice and in Bantu:

"You are a good reader of hearts, O Macumazana, almost as good as I am. But remember that there is One Who writes upon the book of the heart, Who is the Lord of us who do but read, and that what He writes, that will befall, strive as we may, for in His hands is the future."

"Quite so," I replied coolly, "and that is why I am going with you to Kendahland and fear you not at all."

"So it is and so let it be," he answered. "And now, Lords, are you ready to start? For long is the road and who knows what awaits us ere we see its end?"

"Yes," I replied, "long is the road of life and who knows what awaits us ere we see its end—and after?"

Three hours later I halted the splendid white riding-camel upon which I was mounted, and looked back from the crest of a wave of the desert. There far behind us on the horizon, by the help of my glasses, I could make out the site of the camp we had left and even the tall ant-hill whence I had gazed in the moonlight at our mysterious escort which seemed to have sprung from the desert as though by magic.

This was the manner of our march: A mile or so ahead of us went a picket of eight or ten men mounted on the swiftest beasts, doubtless to give warning of any danger. Next, three or four hundred yards away, followed a body of about fifty Kendah, travelling in a double line, and behind these the baggage men, mounted like everyone else, and leading behind them strings of camels laden with water, provisions, tents of skin and all our goods, including the fifty rifles and the ammunition that Ragnall had brought from England. Then came we three white men and Hans, each of us riding as swift and fine a camel as Africa can breed. On our right at a distance of about half a mile, and also on our left, travelled other bodies of the Kendah of the same numerical strength as that ahead, while the rear was brought up by the remainder of the company who drove a number of spare camels.

Thus we journeyed in the centre of a square whence any escape would have been impossible, for I forgot to say that our keepers Harût and Marût rode exactly behind us, at such a distance that we could call to them if we wished.

At first I found this method of travelling very tiring, as does everyone who is quite unaccustomed to camel-back. Indeed the swing and the jolt of the swift creature beneath me seemed to wrench my bones asunder to such an extent that at the beginning I had once or twice to be lifted from the saddle when, after hours of torture, at length we camped for the night. Poor Savage suffered even more than I did, for the motion reduced him to a kind of jelly. Ragnall, however, who I think had ridden camels before, felt little inconvenience, and the same may be said of Hans, who rode in all sorts of positions, sometimes sideways like a lady, and at others kneeling on the saddle like a monkey on a barrel-organ. Also, being very light and tough as rimpis, the swaying motion did not seem to affect him.

By degrees all these troubles left us to such an extent that I could cover my fifty miles a day, more or less, without even feeling tired. Indeed I grew to like the life in that pure and sparkling desert air, perhaps because it was so restful. Day after day we journeyed on across the endless, sandy plain, watching the sun rise, watching it grow high, watching it sink again. Night after night we ate our simple food with appetite and slept beneath the glittering stars till the new dawn broke in glory from the bosom of the immeasurable East.

We spoke but little during all this time. It was as though the silence of the wilderness had got hold of us and sealed our lips. Or perhaps each of us was occupied with his own thoughts. At any rate I know that for my part I seemed to live in a kind of dreamland, thinking of the past, reflecting much upon the innumerable problems of this passing show called life, but not paying much heed to the future. What did the future matter to me, who did not know whether I should have a share of it even for another month, or week, or day, surrounded as I was by the shadow of death? No, I troubled little as to any earthly future, although I admit that in this oasis of calm I reflected upon that state where past, present and future will all be one; also that those reflections, which were in their essence a kind of unshaped prayer, brought much calm to my spirit.

With the regiment of escort we had practically no communication; I think that they had been forbidden to talk to us. They were a very silent set of men, finely-made, capable persons, of an Arab type, light rather than dark in colour, who seemed for the most part to communicate with each other by signs or in low-muttered words. Evidently they looked upon Harût and Marût with great veneration, for any order which either of these brethren gave, if they were brethren, was obeyed without dispute or delay. Thus, when I happened to mention that I had lost a pocket-knife at one of our camping-places two days' journey back, three of them, much against my wish, were ordered to return to look for it, and did so, making no question. Eight days later they rejoined us much exhausted and having lost a camel, but with the knife, which they handed to me with a low bow; and I confess that I felt ashamed to take the thing.

Nor did we exchange many further confidences with Harût and Marût. Up to the time of our arrival at the boundaries of the Kendah country, our only talk with them was of the incidents of travel, of where we should camp, of how far it might be to the next water, for water-holes or old wells existed in this desert, of such birds as we saw, and so forth. As to other and more important matters a kind of truce seemed to prevail. Still, I observed that they were always studying us, and especially Lord Ragnall, who rode on day after day, self-absorbed and staring straight in front of him as though he looked at something we could not see.

Thus we covered hundreds of miles, not less than five hundred at the least, reckoning our progress at only thirty miles a day, including stoppages. For occasionally we stopped at the water-holes or small oases, where the camels drank and rested. Indeed, these were so conveniently arranged that I came to the conclusion that once there must have been some established route running across these wastelands to the south, of which the traditional knowledge remained with the Kendah people. If so, it had not been used for generations, for save those of one or two that had died on the outward march, we saw no skeletons of camels or other beasts, or indeed any sign of man. The place was an absolute wilderness where nothing lived except a few small mammals at the oases and the birds that passed over it in the air on their way to more fertile regions. Of these, by the way, I saw many that are known both to Europe and Africa, especially ducks and cranes; also storks that, for aught I can say, may have come from far-off, homely Holland.

At last the character of the country began to change. Grass appeared on its lower-lying stretches, then bushes, then occasional trees and among the trees a few buck. Halting the caravan I crept out and shot two of these buck with a right and left, a feat that caused our grave escort to stare in a fashion which showed me that they had never seen anything of the sort done before.

That night, while we were eating the venison with relish, since it was the first fresh meat that we had tasted for many a day, I observed that the disposition of our camp was different from its common form. Thus it was smaller and placed on an eminence. Also the camels were not allowed to graze where they would as usual, but were kept within a limited area while their riders were arranged in groups outside of them. Further, the stores were piled near our tents, in the centre, with guards set over them. I asked Harût and Marût, who were sharing our meal, the reason of these alterations.

"It is because we are on the borders of the Kendah country," answered old Harût. "Four days' more march will bring us there, Macumazana."

"Then why should you take precautions against your own people? Surely they will welcome you."

"With spears perhaps. Macumazana, learn that the Kendah are not one but two people. As you may have heard before, we are the White Kendah, but there are also Black Kendah who outnumber us many times over, though in the beginning we from the north conquered them, or so says our history. The White Kendah have their own territory; but as there is no other road, to reach it we must pass through that of the Black Kendah, where it is always possible that we may be attacked, especially as we bring strangers into the land."

"How is it then that the Black Kendah allow you to live at all, Harût, if they are so much the more numerous?"

"Because of fear, Macumazana. They fear our wisdom and the decrees of the Heavenly Child spoken through the mouth of its oracle, which, if it is offended, can bring a curse upon them. Still, if they find us outside our borders they may kill us, if they can, as we may kill them if we find them within our borders."

"Indeed, Harût. Then it looks to me as though there were a war breeding between you."

"A war is breeding, Macumazana, the last great war in which either the White Kendah or the Black Kendah must perish. Or perhaps both will die together. Maybe that is the real reason why we have asked you to be our guest, Macumazana," and with their usual courteous bows, both of them rose and departed before I could reply.

"You see how it stands," I said to Ragnall. "We have been brought here to fight for our friends, Harût, Marût and Co., against their rebellious subjects, or rather the king who reigns jointly with them."

"It looks like it," he replied quietly, "but doubtless we shall find out the truth in time and meanwhile speculation is no good. Do you go to bed, Quatermain, I will watch till midnight and then wake you."

That night passed in safety. Next day we marched before the dawn, passing through country that grew continually better watered and more fertile, though it was still open plain but sloping upwards ever more steeply. On this plain I saw herds of antelopes and what in the distance looked like cattle, but no human being. Before evening we camped where there was good water and plenty of food for the camels.

While the camp was being set Harût came and invited us to follow him to the outposts, whence he said we should see a view. We walked with him, a matter of not more than a quarter of a mile to the head of that rise up which we had been travelling all day, and

thence perceived one of the most glorious prospects on which my eyes have fallen in all great Africa. From where we stood the land sloped steeply for a matter of ten or fifteen miles, till finally the fall ended in a vast plain like to the bottom of a gigantic saucer, that I presume in some far time of the world's history was once an enormous lake. A river ran east and west across this plain and into it fell tributaries. Far beyond this river the contours of the country rose again till, many, many miles away, there appeared a solitary hill, tumulus-shaped, which seemed to be covered with bush.

Beyond and surrounding this hill was more plain which with the aid of my powerful glasses was, we could see, bordered at last by a range of great mountains, looking like a blue line pencilled across the northern distance. To the east and west the plain seemed to be illimitable. Obviously its soil was of a most fertile character and supported numbers of inhabitants, for everywhere we could see their kraals or villages. Much of it to the west, however, was covered with dense forest with, to all appearance, a clearing in its midst.

"Behold the land of the Kendah," said Harût. "On this side of the River Tava live the Black Kendah, on the farther side, the White Kendah."

"And what is that hill?"

"That is the Holy Mount, the Home of the Heavenly Child, where no man may set foot"—here he looked at us meaningly—"save the priests of the Child."

"What happens to him if he does?" I asked.

"He dies, my Lord Macumazana."

"Then it is guarded, Harût?"

"It is guarded, not with mortal weapons, Macumazana, but by the spirits that watch over the Child."

As he would say no more on this interesting matter, I asked him as to the numbers of the Kendah people, to which he replied that the Black Kendah might number twenty thousand men of arm-bearing age, but the White Kendah not more than two thousand.

"Then no wonder you want spirits to guard your Heavenly Child," I remarked, "since the Black Kendah are your foes and with you warriors are few."

At this moment our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a picket on a camel, who reported something to Harût which appeared to disturb him. I asked him what was the matter.

"That is the matter," he said, pointing to a man mounted on a rough pony who just then appeared from behind some bushes about half a mile away, galloping down the slope towards the plain. "He is one of the scouts of Simba, King of the Black Kendah, and he goes to Simba's town in yonder forest to make report of our arrival. Return to camp, Macumazana, and eat, for we must march with the rising of the moon."

As soon as the moon rose we marched accordingly, although the camels, many of which were much worn with the long journey, scarcely had been given time to fill themselves and none to rest. All night we marched down the long slope, only halting for half an hour before daylight to eat something and rearrange the loads on the baggage beasts, which now, I noticed, were guarded with extra care. When we were starting again Marût came to us and remarked with his usual smile, on behalf of his brother Harût, who was otherwise engaged, that it might be well if we had our guns ready, since we were entering the land of the elephant Jana and "who knew but that we might meet him?"

"Or his worshippers on two legs," I suggested, to which his only reply was a nod.

So we got our repeating rifles, some of the first that were ever made, serviceable but rather complicated weapons that fired five cartridges. Hans, however, with my permission, armed himself with the little Purdey piece that was named "Intombi," the singe-barrelled, muzzle-loading gun which had done me so much service in earlier days, and even on my last journey to Pongoland. He said that he was accustomed to it and did not understand these new-fangled breechloaders, also that it was "lucky." I consented as I did not think that it made much difference with what kind of rifle Hans was provided. As a marksman he had this peculiarity: up to a hundred yards or so he was an excellent shot, but beyond that distance no good at all.

A quarter of an hour later, as the dawn was breaking, we passed through a kind of *nek* of rough stones bordering the flat land, and emerged into a compact body on to the edge of the grassy plain. Here the word was given to halt for a reason that became clear to me so soon as I was out of the rocks. For there, marching rapidly, not half a mile away, were some five hundred white-robed men. A large proportion of these were mounted, the best being foot-soldiers, of whom more were running up every minute, appearing out of bush that grew upon the hill-side, apparently to dispute our passage. These people, who were black-faced with fuzzy hair upon which they wore no head-dress, all seemed to be armed with spears.

Presently from out of the mass of them two horsemen dashed forward, one of whom bore a white flag in token that they came to parley. Our advance guard allowed them to pass and they galloped on, dodging in and out between the camels with wonderful skill till at length they came to where we were with Harût and Marût, and pulling up their horses so sharply that the animals almost sat down on their haunches, saluted by raising their spears. They were very fine-looking fellows, perfectly black in colour with a negroid cast of countenance and long frizzled hair which hung down on to their shoulders. Their clothing was light, consisting of hide riding breeches that resembled bathing drawers, sandals, and an arrangement of triple chains which seemed to be made of some silvery metal that hung from their necks across the breast and back. Their arms consisted of a long lance similar to that carried by the White Kendah, and a straight, cross-handled sword suspended from a belt. This, as I ascertained afterwards, was the regulation cavalry equipment among these people. The footmen carried a shorter spear, a round leather shield, two throwing javelins or assegais, and a curved knife with a horn handle.

"Greeting, Prophets of the Child!" cried one of them. "We are messengers from the god Jana who speaks through the mouth of Simba the King."

"Say on, worshippers of the devil Jana. What word has Simba the King for us?" answered Harût.

"The word of war, Prophet. What do you beyond your southern boundary of the Tava river in the territory of the Black Kendah, that was sealed to them by pact after the battle of a hundred years ago? Is not all the land to the north as far as the mountains and beyond the mountains enough for you? Simba the King let you go out, hoping that the desert would swallow you, but return you shall not."

"That we shall know presently," replied Harût in a suave voice. "It depends upon whether the Heavenly Child or the devil Jana is the more powerful in the land. Still, as we would avoid bloodshed if we may, we desire to explain to you, messengers of King Simba,

that we are here upon a peaceful errand. It was necessary that we should convey the white lords to make an offering to the Child, and this was the only road by which we could lead them to the Holy Mount, since they come from the south. Through the forests and the swamps that lie to the east and west camels cannot travel."

"And what is the offering that the white men would make to the Child, Prophet? Oh! we know well, for like you we have our magic. The offering that they must make is the blood of Jana our god, which you have brought them here to kill with their strange weapons, as though any weapon could prevail against Jana the god. Now, give to us these white men that we may offer them to the god, and perchance Simba the King will let you go through."

"Why?" asked Harût, "seeing that you declare that the white men cannot harm Jana, to whom indeed they wish no harm. To surrender them to you that they may be torn to pieces by the devil Jana would be to break the law of hospitality, for they are our guests. Now return to Simba the King, and say to Simba that if he lifts a spear against us the threefold curse of the Child shall fall upon him and upon you his people: The curse of Heaven by storm or by drought. The curse of famine. The curse of war. I the prophet have spoken. Depart."

Watching, I could see that this ultimatum delivered by Harût in a most impressive voice, and seconded as it was by the sudden and simultaneous lifting of the spears of all our escort that were within hearing, produced a considerable effect upon the messengers. Their faces grew afraid and they shrank a little. Evidently the "threefold curse of the Child" suggested calamities which they dreaded. Making no answer, they wheeled their horses about and galloped back to the force that was gathering below as swiftly as they had come.

"We must fight, my Lord Macumazana," said Harût, "and if we would live, conquer, as I know that we shall do."

Then he issued some orders, of which the result was that the caravan adopted a wedge-shaped formation like to that of a great flock of wildfowl on the wing. Harût stationed himself almost at the apex of the triangle. I with Hans and Marût were about the centre of the line, while Ragnall and Savage were placed opposite to us in the right line, the whole width of the wedge being between us. The baggage camels and their leaders occupied the middle space between the lines and were followed by a small rear-guard.

At first we white men were inclined to protest at this separation, but when Marût explained to us that its object was to give confidence to the two divisions of the force and also to minimize the risk of destruction or capture of all three of us, of course we had nothing more to say. So we just shook hands, and with as much assurance as we could command wished each other well through the job.

Then we parted, poor Savage looking very limp indeed, for this was his first experience of war. Ragnall, however, who came of an old fighting stock, seemed to be happy as a king. I who had known so many battles, was the reverse of happy, for inconveniently enough there flashed into my mind at this juncture the dying words of the Zulu captain and seer, Mavovo, which foretold that I too should fall far away in war; and I wondered whether this were the occasion that had been present to his foreseeing mind.

Only Hans seemed quite unconcerned. Indeed I noted that he took the opportunity of the halt to fill and light his large corn-cob pipe, a bit of bravado in the face of Providence for which I could have kicked him had he not been perched in his usual monkey fashion on the top of a very tall camel. The act, however, excited the admiration of the Kendah, for I heard one of them call to the others:

"Look! He is not a monkey after all, but a man—more of a man than his master."

The arrangements were soon made. Within a quarter of an hour of the departure of the messengers Harût, after bowing thrice towards the Holy Mountain, rose in his stirrups and shaking a long spear above his head, shouted a single word:

"Charge!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### ALLAN IS CAPTURED

The ride that followed was really quite exhilarating. The camels, notwithstanding their long journey, seemed to have caught some of the enthusiasm of the war-horse as described in the Book of Job; indeed I had no idea that they could travel at such a rate. On we swung down the slope, keeping excellent order, the forest of tall spears shining and the little lancer-like pennons fluttering on the breeze in a very gallant way. In silence we went save for the thudding of the hoofs of the camels and an occasional squeal of anger as some rider drove his lance handle into their ribs. Not until we actually joined battle did a single man open his lips. Then, it is true, there went up one simultaneous and mighty roar of:

“The Child! Death to Jana! The Child! The Child!”

But this happened a few minutes later.

As we drew near the enemy I saw that they had massed their footmen in a dense body, six or eight lines thick. There they stood to receive the impact of our charge, or rather they did not all stand, for the first two ranks were kneeling with long spears stretched out in front of them. I imagine that their appearance must have greatly resembled that of the Greek phalanx, or that of the Swiss prepared to receive cavalry in the Middle Ages. On either side of this formidable body, which by now must have numbered four or five hundred men, and at a distance perhaps of a quarter of a mile from them, were gathered the horsemen of the Black Kendah, divided into two bodies of nearly equal strength, say about a hundred horse in each body.

As we approached, our triangle curved a little, no doubt under the direction of Harût. A minute or so later I saw the reason. It was that we might strike the foot-soldiers not full in front but at an angle. It was an admirable manoeuvre, for when presently we did strike, we caught them swiftly on the flank and crumpled them up. My word! we went through those fellows like a knife through butter; they had as much chance against the rush of our camels as a brown-paper screen has against a typhoon. Over they rolled in heaps while the White Kendah spitted them with their lances.

“The Child is top dog! My money on the Child,” reflected I in irreverent ecstasy. But that exultation was premature, for those Black Kendah were by no means all dead. Presently I saw that scores of them had appeared among the camels, which they were engaged in stabbing, or trying to stab, in the stomach with their spears. Also I had forgotten the horsemen. As our charge slackened owing to the complication in front, these arrived on our flanks like two thunderbolts. We faced about and did our best to meet the onslaught, of which the net result was that both our left and right lines were pierced through about fifty yards behind the baggage camels. Luckily for us the very impetuosity of the Black Kendah rush deprived it of most of the fruits of victory, since the two squadrons, being unable to check their horses, ended by charging into each other and becoming mixed in inextricable confusion. Then, I do not know who gave the order, we wheeled our camels in and fell upon them, a struggling, stationary mass, with the result that many of them were speared, or overthrown and trampled.

I have said we, but that is not quite correct, at any rate so far as Marût, Hans, I and about fifteen camelmen were concerned. How it happened I could not tell in that dust and confusion, but we were cut off from the main body and presently found ourselves fighting desperately in a group at which Black Kendah horsemen were charging again and again. We made the best stand we could. By degrees the bewildered camels sank under the repeated spear-thrusts of the enemy, all except one, oddly enough that ridden by Hans, which by some strange chance was never touched. The rest of us were thrown or tumbled off the camels and continued the fight from behind their struggling bodies.

That is where I came in. Up to this time I had not fired a single shot, partly because I do not like missing, which it is so easy to do from the back of a swaying camel, and still more for the reason that I had not the slightest desire to kill any of these savage men unless I was obliged to do so in self-defence. Now, however, the thing was different, as I was fighting for my life. Leaning against my camel, which was dying and beating its head upon the ground, groaning horribly the while, I emptied the five cartridges of the repeater into those Black Kendah, pausing between each shot to take aim, with the result that presently five riderless horses were galloping loose about the veld.

The effect was electrical, since our attackers had never seen anything of the kind before. For a while they all drew off, which gave me time to reload. Then they came on again and I repeated the process. For a second time they retreated and after consultation which lasted for a minute or more, made a third attack. Once more I saluted them to the best of my ability, though on this occasion only three men and a horse fell. The fifth shot was a clean miss because they came on in such a scattered formation that I had to turn from side to side to fire.

Now at last the game was up, for the simple reason that I had no more cartridges save two in my double-barrelled pistol. It may be asked why. The answer is, want of foresight. Too many cartridges in one's pocket are apt to chafe on camel-back and so is a belt full of them. In those days also the engagements were few in which a man fired over fifteen. I had forty or fifty more in a bag, which bag Savage with his usual politeness had taken and hung upon his saddle without saying a word to me. At the beginning of the action I found this out, but could not then get them from him as he was separated from me. Hans, always careless in small matters, was really to blame as he ought to have seen that I had the cartridges, or at any rate to have carried them himself. In short, it was one of those accidents that will happen. There is nothing more to be said.

After a still longer consultation our enemies advanced on us for the fourth time, but very slowly. Meanwhile I had been taking stock of the position. The camel corps, or what was left of it, oblivious of our plight which the dust of conflict had hidden from them, was travelling on to the north, more or less victorious. That is to say, it had cut its way through the Black Kendah and was escaping unpursued, huddled up in a mob with the baggage animals safe in its centre. The Black Kendah themselves were engaged in killing

our wounded and succouring their own; also in collecting the bodies of the dead. In short, quite unintentionally, we were deserted. Probably, if anybody thought about us at all in the turmoil of desperate battle, they concluded that we were among the slain.

Marût came up to me, unhurt, still smiling and waving a bloody spear.

"Lord Macumazana," he said, "the end is at hand. The Child has saved the others, or most of them, but us it has abandoned. Now what will you do? Kill yourself, or if that does not please you, suffer me to kill you? Or shoot on until you must surrender?"

"I have nothing to shoot with any more," I answered. "But if we surrender, what will happen to us?"

"We shall be taken to Simba's town and there sacrificed to the devil Jana—I have not time to tell you how. Therefore I propose to kill myself."

"Then I think you are foolish, Marût, since once we are dead, we are dead; but while we are alive it is always possible that we may escape from Jana. If the worst comes to the worst I have a pistol with two bullets in it, one for you and one for me."

"The wisdom of the Child is in you," he replied. "I shall surrender with you, Macumazana, and take my chance."

Then he turned and explained things to his followers, who spoke together for a moment. In the end these took a strange and, to my mind, a very heroic decision. Waiting till the attacking Kendah were quite close to us, with the exception of three men, who either because they lacked courage or for some other reason, stayed with us, they advanced humbly as though to make submission. A number of the Black Kendah dismounted and ran up, I suppose to take them prisoners. The men waited till these were all round them. Then with a yell of "The Child!" they sprang forward, taking the enemy unawares and fighting like demons, inflicted great loss upon them before they fell themselves covered with wounds.

"Brave men indeed!" said Marût approvingly. "Well, now they are all at peace with the Child, where doubtless we shall find them ere long."

I nodded but answered nothing. To tell the truth, I was too much engaged in nursing the remains of my own courage to enter into conversation about that of other people.

This fierce and cunning stratagem of desperate men which had cost their enemies so dear, seemed to infuriate the Black Kendah.

At us came the whole mob of them—we were but six now—roaring "Jana! Jana!" and led by a grey-beard who, to judge from the number of silver chains upon his breast and his other trappings, seemed to be a great man among them. When they were about fifty yards away and I was preparing for the worst, a shot rang out from above and behind me. At the same instant Greybeard threw his arms wide and letting fall the spear he held, pitched from his horse, evidently stone dead. I glanced back and saw Hans, the corn-cob pipe still in his mouth and the little rifle, "Intombi," still at his shoulder. He had fired from the back of the camel, I think for the first time that day, and whether by chance or through good marksmanship, I do not know, had killed this man.

His sudden and unexpected end seemed to fill the Black Kendah with grief and dismay. Halting in their charge they gathered round him, while a fierce-looking middle-aged man, also adorned with much barbaric finery, dismounted to examine him.

"That is Simba the King," said Marût, "and the slain one is his uncle, Goru, the great general who brought him up from a babe."

"Then I wish I had another cartridge left for the nephew," I began and stopped, for Hans was speaking to me.

"Good-bye, Baas," he said, "I must go, for I cannot load 'Intombi' on the back of this beast. If you meet your reverend father the Predikant before I do, tell him to make a nice place ready for me among the fires."

Then before I could get out an answer, Hans dragged his camel round; as I have said, it was quite uninjured. Urging it to a shambling gallop with blows of the rifle stock, he departed at a great rate, not towards the home of the Child but up the hill into a brake of giant grass mingled with thorn trees that grew quite close at hand. Here with startling suddenness both he and the camel vanished away.

If the Black Kendah saw him go, of which I am doubtful, for they all seemed to be lost in consultation round their king and the dead general, Goru, they made no attempt to follow him. Another possibility is that they thought he was trying to lead them into some snare or ambush.

I do not know what they thought because I never heard them mention Hans or the matter of his disappearance, if indeed they ever realized that there was such a person. Curiously enough in the case of men who had just shown themselves so brave, this last accident of the decease of Goru coming on the top of all their other casualties, seemed to take the courage out of them. It was as though they had come to the conclusion that we with our guns were something more than mortal.

For several minutes they debated in evident hesitation. At last from out of their array rode a single man, in whom I recognized one of the envoys who had met us in the morning, carrying in his hand a white flag as he had done before. Thereon I laid down my rifle in token that I would not fire at him, which indeed I could not do having nothing to fire. Seeing this he came to within a few yards and halting, addressed Marût.

"O second Prophet of the Child," he said, "these are the words of Simba the King: Your god has been too strong for us to-day, though in a day to come it may be otherwise. I thought I had you in a pit; that you were the bucks and I the hunter. But, though with loss, you have escaped out of the pit," and the speaker glanced towards our retreating force which was now but a cloud of dust in the far distance, "while I the hunter have been gored by your horns," and again he glanced at the dead that were scattered about the plain. "The noblest of the buck, the white bull of the herd," and he looked at me, who in any other circumstances would have felt complimented, "and you, O Prophet Marût, and one or two others, besides those that I have slain, are however still in the pit and your horn is a magic horn," here he pointed to my rifle, "which pierces from afar and kills dead all by whom it is touched."

"So I caught those gentry well in the middle," thought I to myself, "and with soft-nosed bullets!"

"Therefore I, Simba the King, make you an offer. Yield yourselves and I swear that no spear shall be driven through your hearts and no knife come near your throats. You shall only be taken to my town and there be fed on the best and kept as prisoners, till once more there is peace between the Black Kendah and the White. If you refuse, then I will ring you round and perhaps in the dark rush on you and kill you all. Or perhaps I will watch you from day to day till you, who have no water, die of thirst in the heat of the sun. These are my words to which nothing may be added and from which nothing shall be taken away."

Having finished this speech he rode back a few yards out of earshot, and waited.

"What will you answer, Lord Macumazana?" asked Marût.

I replied by another question. "Is there any chance of our being rescued by your people?"

He shook his head. "None. What we have seen to-day is but a small part of the army of the Black Kendah, one regiment of foot and one of horse, that are always ready. By to-morrow thousands will be gathered, many more than we can hope to deal with in the open and still less in their strongholds, also Harût will believe that we are dead. Unless the Child saves us we shall be left to our fate."

"Then it seems that we are indeed in a pit, as that black brute of a king puts it, Marût, and if he does what he says and rushes us at sundown, everyone of us will be killed. Also I am thirsty already and there is nothing to drink. But will this king keep his word? There are other ways of dying besides by steel."

"I think that he will keep his word, but as that messenger said, he will not add to his word. Choose now, for see, they are beginning to hedge us round."

"What do you say, men?" I asked of the three who had remained with us.

"We say, Lord, that we are in the hands of the Child, though we wish now that we had died with our brothers," answered their spokesman fatalistically.

So after Marût and I had consulted together for a little as to the form of his reply, he beckoned to the messenger and said:

"We accept the offer of Simba, although it would be easy for this lord to kill him now where he stands, namely, to yield ourselves as prisoners on his oath that no harm shall come to us. For know that if harm does come, the vengeance will be terrible. Now in proof of his good faith, let Simba draw near and drink the cup of peace with us, for we thirst."

"Not so," said the messenger, "for then that white lord might kill him with his tube. Give me the tube and Simba shall come."

"Take it," I said magnanimously, handing him the rifle, which he received in a very gingerly fashion. After all, I reflected, there is nothing much more useless than a rifle without ammunition.

Off he went holding the weapon at arm's length, and presently Simba himself, accompanied by some of his men, one of whom carried a skin of water and another a large cup hollowed from an elephant's tusk, rode up to us. This Simba was a fine and rather terrifying person with a large moustache and a chin shaved except for a little tuft of hair which he wore at its point like an Italian. His eyes were big and dark, frank-looking, yet now and again with sinister expression in the corners of them. He was not nearly so black as most of his followers; probably in bygone generations his blood had been crossed with that of the White Kendah. He wore his hair long without any head-dress, held in place by a band of gold which I suppose represented a crown. On his forehead was a large white scar, probably received in some battle. Such was his appearance.

He looked at me with great curiosity, and I have often wondered since what kind of an impression I produced upon him. My hat had fallen off, or I had knocked it off when I fired my last cartridge into his people, and forgotten to replace it, and my intractable hair, which was longer than usual, had not been recently brushed. My worn Norfolk jacket was dyed with blood from a wounded or dying man who had tumbled against me in the scrimmage when the cavalry charged us, and my right leg and boot were stained in a similar fashion from having rubbed against my camel where a spear had entered it. Altogether I must have appeared a most disreputable object.

Some indication of his opinion was given, however, in a remark, which of course I pretended not to understand, that I overheard him make to one of his officers:

"Truly," he said, "we must not always look to the strong for strength. And yet this little white porcupine is strength itself, for see how much damage he has wrought us. Also consider his eyes that appear to pierce everything. Jana himself might fear those eyes. Well, time that grinds the rocks will tell us all."

All of this I caught perfectly, my ears being very sharp, although he thought that he spoke out of my hearing, for after spending a month in their company I understood the Kendah dialect of Bantu very well.

Having delivered himself thus he rode nearer and said:

"You, Prophet Marût, my enemy, have heard the terms of me, Simba the King, and have accepted them. Therefore discuss them no more. What I have promised I will keep. What I have given I give, neither greater nor less by the weight of a hair."

"So be it, O King," answered Marût with his usual smile, which nothing ever seemed to disturb. "Only remember that if those terms are broken either in the letter or in the spirit, especially the spirit" (that is the best rendering I can give of his word), "the manifold curses of the Child will fall upon you and yours. Yes, though you kill us all by treachery, still those curses will fall."

"May Jana take the Child and all who worship it," exclaimed the king with evident irritation.

"In the end, O King, Jana will take the Child and its followers—or the Child will take Jana and his followers. Which of these things must happen is known to the Child alone, and perchance to its prophets. Meanwhile, for every one of those of the Child I think that three of the followers of Jana, or more, lie dead upon this field. Also the caravan is now out of your reach with two of the white lords and many of such tubes which deal death, like that which we have surrendered to you. Therefore because we are helpless, do not think that the Child is helpless. Jana must have been asleep, O King, or you would have set your trap better."

I thought that this coolly insolent speech would have produced some outburst, but in fact it seemed to have an opposite effect. Making no reply to it, Simba said almost humbly:

"I come to drink the cup of peace with you and the white lord, O Prophet. Afterwards we can talk. Give me water, slave."

Then a man filled the great ivory cup with water from the skin he carried. Simba took it and having sprinkled a little upon the ground, I suppose as an offering, drank from the cup, doubtless to show that it was not poisoned. Watching carefully, I made sure that he swallowed what he drank by studying the motions of his throat. Then he handed the cup with a bow to Marût, who with a still deeper bow passed it to me. Being absolutely parched I absorbed about a pint of it, and feeling a new man, passed the horn to Marût, who swallowed the rest. Then it was filled again for our three White Kendah, the King first tasting the water as before, after which Marût and I had a second pull.

When at length our thirst was satisfied, horses were brought to us, serviceable and docile little beasts with sheepskins for saddles and loops of hide for stirrups. On these we mounted and for the next three hours rode across the plain, surrounded by a strong escort and with an armed Black Kendah running on each side of our horses and holding in his hand a thong attached to the ring of the bridle, no doubt to prevent any attempt to escape.

Our road ran past but not through some villages whence we saw many women and children staring at us, and through beautiful crops of mealies and other sorts of grain that in this country were now just ripening. The luxuriant appearance of these crops suggested that the rains must have been plentiful and the season all that could be desired. From some of the villages by the track

arose a miserable sound of wailing. Evidently their inhabitants had already heard that certain of their menkind had fallen in that morning's fight.

At the end of the third hour we began to enter the great forest which I had seen when first we looked down on Kendahland. It was filled with splendid trees, most of them quite strange to me, but perhaps because of the denseness of their overshadowing crowns there was comparatively no undergrowth. The general effect of the place was very gloomy, since little light could pass through the interlacing foliage of the tops of those mighty trees.

Towards evening we came to a clearing in this forest, it may have been four or five miles in diameter, but whether it was natural or artificial I am not sure. I think, however, that it was probably the former for two reasons: the hollow nature of the ground, which lay a good many feet lower than the surrounding forest, and the wonderful fertility of the soil, which suggested that it had once been deposited upon an old lake bottom. Never did I see such crops as those that grew upon that clearing; they were magnificent.

Wending our way along the road that ran through the tall corn, for here every inch was cultivated, we came suddenly upon the capital of the Black Kendah, which was known as Simba Town. It was a large place, somewhat different from any other African settlement with which I am acquainted, inasmuch as it was not only stockaded but completely surrounded by a broad artificial moat filled with water from a stream that ran through the centre of the town, over which moat there were four timber bridges placed at the cardinal points of the compass. These bridges were strong enough to bear horses or stock, but so made that in the event of attack they could be destroyed in a few minutes.

Riding through the eastern gate, a stout timber structure on the farther side of the corresponding bridge, where the king was received with salutes by an armed guard, we entered one of the main streets of the town which ran from north to south and from east to west. It was broad and on either side of it were the dwellings of the inhabitants set close together because the space within the stockade was limited. These were not huts but square buildings of mud with flat roofs of some kind of cement. Evidently they were built upon the model of Oriental and North African houses of which some debased tradition remained with these people. Thus a stairway or ladder ran from the interior to the roof of each house, whereon its inhabitants were accustomed, as I discovered afterwards, to sleep during a good part of the year, also to eat in the cool of the day. Many of them were gathered there now to watch us pass, men, women, and children, all except the little ones decently clothed in long garments of various colours, the women for the most part in white and the men in a kind of bluish linen.

I saw at once that they had already heard of the fight and of the considerable losses which their people had sustained, for their reception of us prisoners was most unfriendly. Indeed the men shook their fists at us, the women screamed out curses, while the children stuck out their tongues in token of derision or defiance. Most of these demonstrations, however, were directed at Marût and his followers, who only smiled indifferently. At me they stared in wonder not unmixed with fear.

A quarter of a mile or so from the gate we came to an inner enclosure, that answered to the South African cattle kraal, surrounded by a dry ditch and a timber palisade outside of which was planted a green fence of some shrub with long white thorns. Here we passed through more gates, to find ourselves in an oval space, perhaps five acres in extent. Evidently this served as a market ground, but all around it were open sheds where hundreds of horses were stabled. No cattle seemed to be kept there, except a few that with sheep and goats were driven in every day for slaughter purposes at a shambles at the north end, from the great stock kraals built beyond the forest to the south, where they were safe from possible raiding by the White Kendah.

A tall reed fence cut off the southern end of this marketplace, outside of which we were ordered to dismount. Passing through yet another gate we found within the fence a large hut or house built on the same model as the others in the town, which Marût whispered to me was that of the king. Behind it were smaller houses in which lived his queen and women, good-looking females, who advanced to meet him with obsequious bows. To the right and left were two more buildings of about equal size, one of which was occupied by the royal guard and the other was the guest-house whither we were conducted.

It proved to be a comfortable dwelling about thirty feet square but containing only one room, with various huts behind it that served for cooking and other purposes. In one of these the three camelmen were placed. Immediately on our arrival food was brought to us, a lamb or kid roasted whole upon a wooden platter, and some green mealie-cobs boiled upon another platter; also water to drink and wash with in earthenware jars of sun-dried clay.

I ate heartily, for I was starving. Then, as it was useless to attempt precautions against murder, without any talk to my fellow prisoner, for which we were both too tired, I threw myself down on a mattress stuffed with corn husks in a corner of the hut, drew a skin rug over me and, having commended myself to the protection of the Power above, fell fast asleep.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FIRST CURSE

The next thing I remember was feeling upon my face the sunlight that poured through a window-place which was protected by immovable wooden bars. For a while I lay still, reflecting as memory returned to me upon all the events of the previous day and upon my present unhappy position. Here I was a prisoner in the hands of a horde of fierce savages who had every reason to hate me, for though this was done in self-defence, had I not killed a number of their people against whom personally I had no quarrel? It was true that their king had promised me safety, but what reliance could be put upon the word of such a man? Unless something occurred to save me, without doubt my days were numbered. In this way or in that I should be murdered, which served me right for ever entering upon such a business.

The only satisfactory point in the story was that, for the present at any rate, Ragnall and Savage had escaped, though doubtless sooner or later fate would overtake them also. I was sure that they had escaped, since two of the camelmen with us had informed Marût that they saw them swept away surrounded by our people and quite unharmed. Now they would be grieving over my death, since none survived who could tell them of our capture, unless the Black Kendah chose to do so, which was not likely. I wondered what course they would take when Ragnall found that his quest was vain, as of course must happen. Try to get out of the country, I suppose, as I prayed they might succeed in doing, though this was most improbable.

Then there was Hans. He of course would attempt to retrace our road across the desert, if he had got clear away. Having a good camel, a rifle and some ammunition, it was just possible that he might win through, as he never forgot a path which he had once travelled, though probably in a week's time a few bones upon the desert would be all that remained of him. Well, as he had suggested, perhaps we should soon be talking the event over in some far sphere with my father—and others. Poor old Hans!

I opened my eyes and looked about me. The first thing I noticed was that my double-barrelled pistol, which I had placed at full cock beside me before I went to sleep, was gone, also my large clasp-knife. This discovery did not tend to raise my spirits, since I was now quite weaponless. Then I observed Marût seated on the floor of the hut staring straight in front of him, and noted that at length even he had ceased to smile, but that his lips were moving as though he were engaged in prayer or meditation.

"Marût," I said, "someone has been in this place while we were asleep and stolen my pistol and knife."

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "and my knife also. I saw them come in the middle of the night, two men who walked softly as cats, and searched everything."

"Then why did you not wake me?"

"What would have been the use, Lord? If we had caught hold of the men, they would have called out and we should have been murdered at once. It was best to let them take the things, which after all are of no good to us here."

"The pistol might have been of some good," I replied significantly.

"Yes," he said, nodding, "but at the worst death is easy to find."

"Do you think, Marût, that we could manage to let Harût and the others know our plight? That smoke which I breathed in England, for instance, seemed to show me far-off things—if we could get any of it."

"The smoke was nothing, Lord, but some harmless burning powder which clouded your mind for a minute, and enabled you to see the thoughts that were in *our* minds. *We* drew the pictures at which you looked. Also here there is none."

"Oh!" I said, "the old trick of suggestion; just what I imagined. Then there's an end of that, and as the others will think that we are dead and we cannot communicate with them, we have no hope except in ourselves."

"Or the Child," suggested Marût gently.

"Look here!" I said with irritation. "After you have just told me that your smoke vision was a mere conjurer's trick, how do you expect me to believe in your blessed Child? Who is the Child? What is the Child, and—this is more important—what can it do? As your throat is going to be cut shortly you may as well tell me the truth."

"Lord Macumazana, I will. Who and what the Child is I cannot say because I do not know. But it has been our god for thousands of years, and we believe that our remote forefathers brought it with them when they were driven out of Egypt at some time unknown. We have writings concerning it done up in little rolls, but as we cannot read them they are of no use to us. It has an hereditary priesthood, of which Harût my uncle, for he is my uncle, is the head. We believe that the Child is God, or rather a symbol in which God dwells, and that it can save us in this world and the next, for we hold that man is an immortal spirit. We believe also that through its Oracle—a priestess who is called Guardian of the Child—it can declare the future and bring blessings or curses upon men, especially upon our enemies. When the Oracle dies we are helpless since the Child has no 'mouth' and our enemies prevail against us. This happened a long while ago, and the last Oracle having declared before her death that her successor was to be found in England, my uncle and I travelled thither disguised as conjurers and made search for many years. We thought that we had found the new Oracle in the lady who married the Lord Igeza, because of that mark of the new moon upon her neck. After our return to Africa, however, for as I have spoken of this matter I may as well tell you all," here he stared me full in the eyes and spoke in a clear metallic voice which somehow no longer convinced me, "we found that we had made a mistake, for the real Oracle, a mere girl, was discovered among our own people, and has now been for two years installed in her office. Without doubt the last Guardian of the Child was wandering in her mind when she told us that story before her death as to a woman in England, a country of which she had heard through Arabs. That is all."

"Thank you," I replied, feeling that it would be useless to show any suspicion of his story. "Now will you be so good as to tell me who and what is the god, or the elephant Jana, whom you have brought me here to kill? Is the elephant a god, or is the god an elephant? In either case what has it to do with the Child?"

"Lord, Jana among us Kendah represents the evil in the world, as the Child represents the good. Jana is he whom the Mohammedans call Shaitan and the Christians call Satan, and our forefathers, the old Egyptians, called Set."

"Ah!" thought I to myself, "now we have got it. Horus the Divine Child, and Set the evil monster, with whom it strives everlastingly."

"Always," went on Marût, "there has been war between the Child and Jana, that is, between Good and Evil, and we know that in the end one of them must conquer the other."

"The whole world has known that from the beginning," I interrupted. "But who and what is this Jana?"

"Among the Black Kendah, Lord, Jana is an elephant, or at any rate his symbol is an elephant, a very terrible beast to which sacrifices are made, that kills all who do not worship him if he chances to meet them. He lives farther on in the forest yonder, and the Black Kendah make use of him in war, for the devil in him obeys their priests."

"Indeed, and is this elephant always the same?"

"I cannot tell you, but for many generations it has been the same, for it is known by its size and by the fact that one of its tusks is twisted downwards."

"Well," I remarked, "all this proves nothing, since elephants certainly live for at least two hundred years, and perhaps much longer. Also, after they become 'rogues' they acquire every kind of wicked and unnatural habit, as to which I could tell you lots of stories. Have you seen this elephant?"

"No, Macumazana," he answered with a shiver. "If I had seen it should I have been alive to-day? Yet I fear I am fated to see it ere long, not alone," and again he shivered, looking at me in a very suggestive manner.

At this moment our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of two Black Kendahs who brought us our breakfast of porridge and a boiled fowl, and stood there while we ate it. For my part I was not sorry, as I had learned all I wanted to know of the theological opinions and practice of the land, and had come to the conclusion that the terrible devil-god of the Black Kendah was merely a rogue elephant of unusual size and ferocity, which under other circumstances it would have given me the greatest pleasure to try to shoot.

When we had finished eating, that is soon, for neither of our appetites was good that morning, we walked out of the house into the surrounding compound and visited the camelmén in their hut. Here we found them squatted on the ground looking very depressed indeed. When I asked them what was the matter they replied, "Nothing," except that they were men about to die and life was pleasant. Also they had wives and children whom they would never see again.

Having tried to cheer them up to the best of my ability, which I fear I did without conviction, for in my heart I agreed with their view of the case, we returned to the guest-house and mounted the stair which led to the flat roof. Hence we saw that some curious ceremony was in progress in the centre of the market-place. At that distance we could not make out the details, for I forgot to say that my glasses had been stolen with the pistol and knife, probably because they were supposed to be lethal weapons or instruments of magic.

A rough altar had been erected, on which a fire burned. Behind it the king, Simba, was seated on a stool with various councillors about him. In front of the altar was a stout wooden table, on which lay what looked like the body of a goat or a sheep. A fantastically dressed man, assisted by other men, appeared to be engaged in inspecting the inside of this animal with, we gathered, unsatisfactory results, for presently he raised his arms and uttered a loud wail. Then the creature's viscera were removed from it and thrown upon the fire, while the rest of the carcass was carried off.

I asked Marût what he thought they were doing. He replied dejectedly:

"Consulting their Oracle; perhaps as to whether we should live or die, Macumazana."

Just then the priest in the strange, feathered attire approached the king, carrying some small object in his hand. I wondered what it could be, till the sound of a report reached my ears and I saw the man begin to jump round upon one leg, holding the other with both his hands at the knee and howling loudly.

"Ah!" I said, "that pistol was full cocked, and the bullet got him in the foot."

Simba shouted out something, whereon a man picked up the pistol and threw it into the fire, round which the others gathered to watch it burn.

"You wait," I said to Marût, and as I spoke the words the inevitable happened.

Off went the other barrel of the pistol, which hopped out of the fire with the recoil like a living thing. But as it happened one of the assistant priests was standing in front of the mouth of that barrel, and he also hopped once, but never again, for the heavy bullet struck him somewhere in the body and killed him. Now there was consternation. Everyone ran away, leaving the dead man lying on the ground. Simba led the rout and the head-priest brought up the rear, skipping along upon one leg.

Having observed these events, which filled me with an unholy joy, we descended into the house again as there was nothing more to see, also because it occurred to me that our presence on the roof, watching their discomfiture, might irritate these savages. About ten minutes later the gate of the fence round the guest-house was thrown open, and through it came four men carrying on a stretcher the body of the priest whom the bullet had killed, which they laid down in front of our door. Then followed the king with an armed guard, and after him the befeathered diviner with his foot bound up, who supported himself upon the shoulders of two of his colleagues. This man, I now perceived, wore a hideous mask, from which projected two tusks in imitation of those of an elephant. Also there were others, as many as the space would hold.

The king called to us to come out of the house, which, having no choice, we did. One glance at him showed me that the man was frantic with fear, or rage, or both.

"Look upon your work, magicians!" he said in a terrible voice, pointing first to the dead priest, then to the diviner's wounded foot.

"It is no work of ours, King Simba," answered Marût. "It is your own work. You stole the magic weapon of the white lord and made it angry, so that it has revenged itself upon you."

"It is true," said Simba, "that the tube has killed one of those who took it away from you and wounded the other" (here was luck indeed). "But it was you who ordered it to do so, magicians. Now, hark! Yesterday I promised you safety, that no spear should pierce your hearts and no knife come near your throats, and drank the cup of peace with you. But you have broken the pact, working us more harm, and therefore it no longer holds, since there are many other ways in which men can die. Listen again! This is my decree. By your magic you have taken away the life of one of my servants and hurt another of my servants, destroying the middle toe of his left foot. If within three days you do not give back the life to him who seems to be dead, and give back the toe to him who seems to be hurt, as you well can do, then you shall join those whom you have slain in the land of death, how I will not tell you."

Now when I heard this amazing sentence I gasped within myself, but thinking it better to keep up my rôle of understanding nothing of their talk, I preserved an immovable countenance and left Marût to answer. This, to his credit be it recorded, he did with his customary pleasant smile.

"O King," he said, "who can bring the dead back to life? Not even the Child itself, at any rate in this world, for there is no way."

"Then, Prophet of the Child, you had better find a way, or, I repeat, I send you to join them," he shouted, rolling his eyes.

"What did my brother, the great Prophet, promise to you but yesterday, O King, if you harmed us?" asked Marût. "Was it not that the three great curses should fall upon your people? Learn now that if so much as one of us is murdered by you, these things shall swiftly come to pass. I, Marût, who am also a Prophet of the Child, have said it."

Now Simba seemed to go quite mad, so mad that I thought all was over. He waved his spear and danced about in front of us, till the silver chains clanked upon his breast. He vituperated the Child and its worshippers, who, he declared, had worked evil on the Black Kendah for generations. He appealed to his god Jana to avenge these evils, "to pierce the Child with his tusks, to tear it with his trunk, and to trample it with his feet," all of which the wounded diviner ably seconded through his horrid mask.

There we stood before him, I leaning against the wall of the house with an air of studied nonchalance mingled with mild interest, at least that is what I meant to do, and Marût smiling sweetly and staring at the heavens. Whilst I was wondering what exact portion of my frame was destined to become acquainted with that spear, of a sudden Simba gave it up. Turning to his followers, he bade them dig a hole in the corner of our little enclosure and set the dead man in it, "with his head out so that he may breathe," an order which they promptly executed.

Then he issued a command that we should be well fed and tended, and remarking that if the departed was not alive and healthy on the third morning from that day, we should hear from him again, he and his company stalked off, except those men who were occupied with the interment.

Soon this was finished also. There sat the deceased buried to the neck with his face looking towards the house, a most disagreeable sight. Presently, however, matters were improved in this respect by one of the sextons fetching a large earthenware pot and several smaller pots full of food and water. The latter they set round the head, I suppose for the sustenance of the body beneath, and then placed the big vessel inverted over all, "to keep the sun off our sleeping brother," as I heard one say to the other.

This pot looked innocent enough when all was done, like one of those that gardeners in England put over forced rhubarb, no more. And yet, such is the strength of the imagination, I think that on the whole I should have preferred the object underneath naked and unadorned. For instance, I have forgotten to say that the heads of those of the White Kendah who had fallen in the fight had been set up on poles in front of Simba's house. They were unpleasant to contemplate, but to my mind not so unpleasant as that pot.

As a matter of fact, this precaution against injury from the sun to the late diviner proved unnecessary, since by some strange chance from that moment the sun ceased to shine. Quite suddenly clouds arose which gradually covered the whole sky and the weather began to turn very cold, unprecedentedly so, Marût informed me, for the time of year, which, it will be remembered, in this country was the season just before harvest. Obviously the Black Kendah thought so also, since from our seats on the roof, whither we had retreated to be as far as possible from the pot, we saw them gathered in the market-place, staring at the sky and talking to each other.

The day passed without any further event, except the arrival of our meals, for which we had no great appetite. The night came, earlier than usual because of the clouds, and we fell asleep, or rather into a series of dozes. Once I thought that I heard someone stirring in the huts behind us, but as it was followed by silence I took no more notice. At length the light broke very slowly, for now the clouds were denser than ever. Shivering with the cold, Marût and I made a visit to the camel-drivers, who were not allowed to enter our house. On going into their hut we saw to our horror that only two of them remained, seated stonily upon the floor. We asked where the third was. They replied they did not know. In the middle of the night, they said, men had crept in, who seized, bound and gagged him, then dragged him away. As there was nothing to be said or done, we returned to breakfast filled with horrid fears.

Nothing happened that day except that some priests arrived, lifted the earthenware pot, examined their departed colleague, who by now had become an unencouraging spectacle, removed old dishes of food, arranged more about him, and went off. Also the clouds grew thicker and thicker, and the air more and more chilly, till, had we been in any northern latitude, I should have said that snow was pending. From our perch on the roof-top I observed the population of Simba Town discussing the weather with ever-increasing eagerness; also that the people who were going out to work in the fields wore mats over their shoulders.

Once more darkness came, and this night, notwithstanding the cold, we spent wrapped in rugs, on the roof of the house. It had occurred to us that kidnapping would be less easy there, as we could make some sort of a fight at the head of the stairway, or, if the worst came to the worst, dive from the parapet and break our necks. We kept watch turn and turn about. During my watch about midnight I heard a noise going on in the hut behind us; scuffling and a stifled cry which turned my blood cold. About an hour later a fire was lighted in the centre of the market-place where the sheep had been sacrificed, and by the flare of it I could see people moving. But what they did I could not see, which was perhaps as well.

Next morning only one of the camelmen was left. This remaining man was now almost crazy with fear, and could give no clear account of what had happened to his companion.

The poor fellow implored us to take him away to our house, as he feared to be left alone with "the black devils." We tried to do so, but armed guards appeared mysteriously and thrust him back into his own hut.

This day was an exact repetition of the others. The same inspection of the deceased and renewal of his food; the same cold, clouded sky, the same agitated conferences in the market-place.

For the third time darkness fell upon us in that horrible place. Once more we took refuge on the roof, but this night neither of us slept. We were too cold, too physically miserable, and too filled with mental apprehensions. All nature seemed to be big with

impending disaster. The sky appeared to be sinking down upon the earth. The moon was hidden, yet a faint and lurid light shone now in one quarter of the horizon, now in another. There was no wind, but the air moaned audibly. It was as though the end of the world were near as, I reflected, probably might be the case so far as we were concerned. Never, perhaps, have I felt so spiritually terrified as I was during the dreadful inaction of that night. Even if I had known that I was going to be executed at dawn, I think that by comparison I should have been light-hearted. But the worst part of the business was that I knew nothing. I was like a man forced to walk through dense darkness among precipices, quite unable to guess when my journey would end in space, but enduring all the agonies of death at every step.

About midnight again we heard that scuffle and stifled cry in the hut behind us.

"He's gone," I whispered to Marût, wiping the cold sweat from my brow.

"Yes," answered Marût, "and very soon we shall follow him, Macumazana."

I wished that his face were visible so that I could see if he still smiled when he uttered those words.

An hour or so later the usual fire appeared in the marketplace, round which the usual figures flitted dimly. The sight of them fascinated me, although I did not want to look, fearing what I might see. Luckily, however, we were too far off to discern anything at night.

While these unholy ceremonies were in progress the climax came, that is so far as the weather was concerned. Of a sudden a great gale sprang up, a gale of icy wind such as in Southern Africa sometimes precedes a thunderstorm. It blew for half an hour or more, then lulled. Now lightning flashed across the heavens, and by the glare of it we perceived that all the population of Simba Town seemed to be gathered in the market-place. At least there were some thousands of them, talking, gesticulating, pointing at the sky.

A few minutes later there came a great crash of thunder, of which it was impossible to locate the sound, for it rolled from everywhere. Then suddenly something hard struck the roof by my side and rebounded, to be followed next moment by a blow upon my shoulder which nearly knocked me flat, although I was well protected by the skin rugs.

"Down the stair!" I called. "They are stoning us," and suited the action to the word.

Ten seconds later we were both in the room, crouched in its farther corner, for the stones or whatever they were seemed to be following us. I struck a match, of which fortunately I had some, together with my pipe and a good pocketful of tobacco—my only solace in those days—and, as it burned up, saw first that blood was running down Marût's face, and secondly, that these stones were great lumps of ice, some of them weighing several ounces, which hopped about the floor like live things.

"Hailstorm!" remarked Marût with his accustomed smile.

"Hell storm!" I replied, "for whoever saw hail like that before?"

Then the match burnt out and conversation came to an end for the reason that we could no longer hear each other speak. The hail came down with a perpetual, rattling roar, that in its sum was one of the most terrible sounds to which I ever listened. And yet above it I thought that I could catch another, still more terrible, the wail of hundreds of people in agony. After the first few minutes I began to be afraid that the roof would be battered in, or that the walls would crumble beneath this perpetual fire of the musketry of heaven. But the cement was good and the place well built.

So it came about that the house stood the tempest, which had it been roofed with tiles or galvanized iron I am sure it would never have done, since the lumps of ice must have shattered one and pierced the other like paper. Indeed I have seen this happen in a bad hailstorm in Natal which killed my best horse. But even that hail was as snowflakes compared to this.

I suppose that this natural phenomenon continued for about twenty minutes, not more, during ten of which it was at its worst. Then by degrees it ceased, the sky cleared and the moon shone out beautifully. We climbed to the roof again and looked. It was several inches deep in jagged ice, while the market-place and all the country round appeared in the bright moonlight to be buried beneath a veil of snow.

Very rapidly, as the normal temperature of that warm land reasserted itself, this snow or rather hail melted, causing a flood of water which, where there was any fall, began to rush away with a gurgling sound. Also we heard other sounds, such as that from the galloping hoofs of many of the horses which had broken loose from their wrecked stables at the north end of the market-place, where in great number they had been killed by the falling roofs or had kicked each other to death, and a wild universal wail that rose from every quarter of the big town, in which quantities of the worst-built houses had collapsed. Further, lying here and there about the market-place we could see scores of dark shapes that we knew to be those of men, women and children, whom those sharp missiles hurled from heaven had caught before they could escape and slain or wounded almost to death. For it will be remembered that perhaps not fewer than two thousand people were gathered on this market-place, attending the horrid midnight sacrifice and discussing the unnatural weather when the storm burst upon them suddenly as an avalanche.

"The Child is small, yet its strength is great. Behold the first curse!" said Marût solemnly.

I stared at him, but as he chose to believe that a very unusual hailstorm was a visitation from heaven I did not think it worth while arguing the point. Only I wondered if he really did believe this. Then I remembered that such an event was said to have afflicted the old Egyptians in the hour of their pride because they would not "let the people go." Well, these blackguardedly Black Kendah were certainly worse than the Egyptians can ever have been; also they would not let *us* go. It was not wonderful therefore that Marût should be the victim of phantasies on the matter.

Not until the following morning did we come to understand the full extent of the calamity which had overtaken the Black Kendah. I think I have said that their crops this year were magnificent and just ripening to harvest. From our roof on previous days we could see a great area of them stretching to the edge of the forest. When the sun rose that morning this area had vanished, and the ground was covered with a carpet of green pulp. Also the forest itself appeared suddenly to have experienced the full effects of a northern winter. Not a leaf was left upon the trees, which stood there pointing their naked boughs to heaven.

No one who had not seen it could imagine the devastating fury of that storm. For example, the head of the diviner who was buried in the court-yard awaiting resurrection through our magic was, it may be recalled, covered with a stout earthenware pot. Now that pot had shattered into sherds and the head beneath was nothing but bits of broken bone which it would have been impossible for the very best magic to reconstruct to the likeness of a human being.

Calamity indeed stalked naked through the land.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### JANA

No breakfast was brought to us that morning, probably for the reason that there was none to bring. This did not matter, however, seeing that plenty of food accumulated from supper and other meals stood in a corner of the house practically untouched. So we ate what we could and then paid our usual visit to the hut in which the camelmen had been confined. I say had been, for now it was quite empty, the last poor fellow having vanished away like his companions.

The sight of this vacuum filled me with a kind of fury.

"They have all been murdered!" I said to Marût.

"No," he replied with gentle accuracy. "They have been sacrificed to Jana. What we have seen on the market-place at night was the rite of their sacrifice. Now it will be our turn, Lord Macumazana."

"Well," I exclaimed, "I hope these devils are satisfied with Jana's answer to their accursed offerings, and if they try their fiendish pranks on us——"

"Doubtless there will be another answer. But, Lord, the question is, will that help us?"

Dumb with impotent rage I returned to the house, where presently the remains of the reed gate opened. Through it appeared Simba the King, the diviner with the injured foot walking upon crutches, and others of whom the most were more or less wounded, presumably by the hailstones. Then it was that in my wrath I put off the pretence of not understanding their language and went for them before they could utter a single word.

"Where are our servants, you murderers?" I asked, shaking my fist at them. "Have you sacrificed them to your devil-god? If so, behold the fruits of sacrifice!" and I swept my arm towards the country beyond. "Where are your crops?" I went on. "Tell me on what you will live this winter?" (At these words they quailed. In their imagination already they saw famine stalking towards them.) "Why do you keep us here? Is it that you wait for a worse thing to befall you? Why do you visit us here now?" and I paused, gasping with indignation.

"We came to look whether you had brought back to life that doctor whom you killed with your magic, white man," answered the king heavily.

I stepped to the corner of the court-yard and, drawing aside a mat that I had thrown there, showed them what lay beneath.

"Look then," I said, "and be sure that if you do not let us go, as yonder thing is, so shall all of you be before another moon has been born and died. Such is the life we shall give to evil men like you."

Now they grew positively terrified.

"Lord," said Simba, for the first time addressing me by a title of respect, "your magic is too strong for us. Great misfortune has fallen upon our land. Hundreds of people are dead, killed by the ice-stones that you have called down. Our harvest is ruined, and there is but little corn left in the storepits now when we looked to gather the new grain. Messengers come in from the outlying land telling us that nearly all the sheep and goats and very many of the cattle are slain. Soon we shall starve."

"As you deserve to starve," I answered. "Now—will you let us go?"

Simba stared at me doubtfully, then began to whisper into the ear of the lamed diviner. I could not catch what they said, so I watched their faces. That of the diviner whose head I was glad to see had been cut by a hailstone so that both ends of him were now injured, told me a good deal. His mask had been ugly, but now that it was off the countenance beneath was far uglier. Of a negroid type, pendulous-lipped, sensuous and loose-eyed, he was indeed a hideous fellow, yet very cunning and cruel-looking, as men of his class are apt to be. Humbled as he was for the moment, I felt sure that he was still plotting evil against us, somewhat against the will of his master. The issue showed that I was right. At length Simba spoke, saying:

"We had intended, Lord, to keep you and the priest of the Child here as hostages against mischief that might be worked on us by the followers of the Child, who have always been our bitter enemies and done us much undeserved wrong, although on our part we have faithfully kept the pact concluded in the days of our grandfathers. It seems, however, that fate, or your magic, is too strong for us, and therefore I have determined to let you go. To-night at sundown we will set you on the road which leads to the ford of the River Tava, which divides our territory from that of the White Kendah, and you may depart where you will, since our wish is that never again may we see your ill-omened faces."

At this intelligence my heart leapt in joy that was altogether premature. But, preserving my indignant air, I exclaimed:

"To-night! Why to-night? Why not at once? It is hard for us to cross unknown rivers in the dark."

"The water is low, Lord, and the ford easy. Moreover, if you started now you would reach it in the dark; whereas if you start at sundown, you will reach it in the morning. Lastly, we cannot conduct you hence until we have buried our dead."

Then, without giving me time to answer, he turned and left the place, followed by the others. Only at the gateway the diviner wheeled round on his crutches and glared at us both, muttering something with his thick lips; probably it was curses.

"At any rate they are going to set us free," I said to Marût, not without exultation, when they had all vanished.

"Yes, Lord," he replied, "but *where* are they going to set us free? The demon Jana lives in the forests and the swamps by the banks of the Tava River, and it is said that he ravages at night."

I did not pursue the subject, but reflected to myself cheerfully that this mystic rogue-elephant was a long way off and might be circumvented, whereas that altar of sacrifice was extremely near and very difficult to avoid.

Never did a thief with a rich booty in view, or a wooer having an assignation with his lady, wait for sundown more eagerly than I did that day. Hour after hour I sat upon the house-top, watching the Black Kendah carrying off the dead killed by the hailstones and generally trying to repair the damage done by the terrific tempest. Watching the sun also as it climbed down the cloudless sky, and literally counting the minutes till it should reach the horizon, although I knew well that it would have been wiser after such a night to prepare for our journey by lying down to sleep.

At length the great orb began to sink in majesty behind the tattered western forest, and, punctual to the minute, Simba, with a mounted escort of some twenty men and two led horses, appeared at our gate. As our preparations, which consisted only of Marût stuffing such food as was available into the breast of his robe, were already made, we walked out of that accursed guest-house and, at a sign from the king, mounted the horses. Riding across the empty market-place and past the spot where the rough stone altar still stood with charred bones protruding from the ashes of its extinguished fire—were they those of our friends the camel-drivers? I wondered—we entered the north street of the town.

Here, standing at the doors of their houses, were many of the inhabitants who had gathered to watch us pass. Never did I see hate more savage than was written on those faces as they shook their fists at us and muttered curses not loud but deep.

No wonder! for they were all ruined, poor folk, with nothing to look forward to but starvation until long months hence the harvest came again for those who would live to gather it. Also they were convinced that we, the white magician and the prophet of their enemy the Child, had brought this disaster on them. Had it not been for the escort I believe they would have fallen on us and torn us to pieces. Considering them I understood for the first time how disagreeable real unpopularity *can be*. But when I saw the actual condition of the fruitful gardens without in the waning daylight, I confess that I was moved to some sympathy with their owners. It was appalling. Not a handful of grain was there left to gather, for the corn had been not only “laid” but literally cut to ribbons by the hail.

After running for some miles through the cultivated land the road entered the forest. Here it was dark as pitch, so dark that I wondered how our guides found their way. In that blackness dreadful apprehensions seized me, for I became convinced that we had been brought here to be murdered. Every minute I expected to feel a knife-thrust in my back. I thought of digging my heels into the horse’s sides and trying to gallop off anywhere, but abandoned the idea, first because I could not desert Marût, of whom I had lost touch in the gloom, and secondly because I was hemmed in by the escort. For the same reason I did not try to slip from the horse and glide away into the forest. There was nothing to be done save to go on and await the end.

It came at last some hours later. We were out of the forest now, and there was the moon rising, past her full but still very bright. Her light showed me that we were on a wild moorland, swampy, with scattered trees growing here and there, across which what seemed to be a game track ran down hill. That was all I could make out. Here the escort halted, and Simba the King said in a sullen voice:

“Dismount and go your ways, evil spirits, for we travel no farther across this place which is haunted. Follow the track and it will lead you to a lake. Pass the lake and by morning you will come to the river beyond which lies the country of your friends. May its waters swallow you if you reach them. For learn, there is one who watches on this road whom few care to meet.”

As he finished speaking men sprang at us and, pulling us from the horses, thrust us out of their company. Then they turned and in another minute were lost in the darkness, leaving us alone.

“What now, friend Marût?” I asked.

“Now, Lord, all we can do is to go forward, for if we stay here Simba and his people will return and kill us at the daylight. One of them said so to me.”

“Then, ‘come on, Macduff,’” I exclaimed, stepping out briskly, and though he had never read Shakespeare, Marût understood and followed.

“What did Simba mean about ‘one on the road whom few care to meet?’” I asked over my shoulder when we had done half a mile or so.

“I think he meant the elephant Jana,” replied Marût with a groan.

“Then I hope Jana isn’t at home. Cheer up, Marût. The chances are that we shall never meet a single elephant in this big place.”

“Yet many elephants have been here, Lord,” and he pointed to the ground. “It is said that they come to die by the waters of the lake and this is one of the roads they follow on their death journey, a road that no other living thing dare travel.”

“Oh!” I exclaimed. “Then after all that was a true dream I had in the house in England.”

“Yes, Lord, because my brother Harût once lost his way out hunting when he was young and saw what his mind showed you in the dream, and what we shall see presently, if we live to come so far.”

I made no reply, both because what he said was either true or false, which I should ascertain presently, and because I was engaged in searching the ground with my eyes. He was right; many elephants had travelled this path—one quite recently. I, a hunter of those brutes, could not be deceived on this point. Once or twice also I thought that I caught sight of the outline of some tall creature moving silently through the scattered thorns a couple of hundred yards or so to our right. It might have been an elephant or a giraffe, or perhaps nothing but a shadow, so I said nothing. As I heard no noise I was inclined to believe the latter explanation. In any case, what was the good of speaking? Unarmed and solitary amidst unknown dangers, our position was desperate, and as Marût’s nerve was already giving out, to emphasize its horrors to him would be mere foolishness.

On we trudged for another two hours, during which time the only living thing that I saw was a large owl which sailed round our heads as though to look at us, and then flew away ahead.

This owl, Marût informed me, was one of “Jana’s spies” that kept him advised of all that was passing in his territory. I muttered “Bosh” and tramped on. Still I was glad that we saw no more of the owl, for in certain circumstances such dark fears are catching.

We reached the top of a rise, and there beneath us lay the most desolate scene that ever I have seen. At least it would have been the most desolate if I did not chance to have looked on it before, in the drawing-room of Ragnall Castle! There was no doubt about it. Below was the black, melancholy lake, a large sheet of water surrounded by reeds. Around, but at a considerable distance, appeared

the tropical forest. To the east of the lake stretched a stony plain. At the time I could make out no more because of the uncertain light and the distance, for we had still over a mile to go before we reached the edge of the lake.

The aspect of the place filled me with tremblings, both because of its utter uncanniness and because of the inexplicable truth that I had seen it before. Most people will have experienced this kind of moral shock when on going to some new land they recognize a locality as being quite familiar to them in all its details. Or it may be the rooms of a house hitherto unvisited by them. Or it may be a conversation of which, when it begins, they already foreknow the sequence and the end, because in some dim state, when or how who can say, they have taken part in that talk with those same speakers. If this be so even in cheerful surroundings and among our friends or acquaintances, it is easy to imagine how much greater was the shock to me, a traveller on such a journey and in such a night.

I shrank from approaching the shores of this lake, remembering that as yet all the vision was not unrolled. I looked about me. If we went to the left we should either strike the water, or if we followed its edge, still bearing to the left, must ultimately reach the forest, where probably we should be lost. I looked to the right. The ground was strewn with boulders, among which grew thorns and rank grass, impracticable for men on foot at night. I looked behind me, meditating retreat, and there, some hundreds of yards away behind low, scrubby mimosas mixed with aloe-like plants, I saw something brown toss up and disappear again that might very well have been the trunk of an elephant. Then, animated by the courage of despair and a desire to know the worst, I began to descend the elephant track towards the lake almost at a run.

Ten minutes or so more brought us to the eastern head of the lake, where the reeds whispered in the breath of the night wind like things alive. As I expected, it proved to be a bare, open space where nothing seemed to grow. Yes, and all about me were the decaying remains of elephants, hundreds of them, some with their bones covered in moss, that may have lain here for generations, and others more newly dead. They were all old beasts as I could tell by the tusks, whether male or female. Indeed about me within a radius of a quarter of a mile lay enough ivory to make a man very rich for life, since although discoloured, much of it seemed to have kept quite sound, like human teeth in a mummy case. The sight gave me a new zest for life. If only I could manage to survive and carry off that ivory! I would. In this way or in that I swore that I would! Who could possibly die with so much ivory to be had for the taking? Not that old hunter, Allan Quatermain.

Then I forgot about the ivory, for there in front of me, just where it should be, just as I had seen it in the dream-picture, was the bull elephant dying, a thin and ancient brute that had lived its long life to the last hour. It searched about as though to find a convenient resting-place, and when this was discovered, stood over it, swaying to and fro for a full minute. Then it lifted its trunk and trumpeted shrilly thrice, singing its swan-song, after which it sank slowly to its knees, its trunk outstretched and the points of its worn tusks resting on the ground. Evidently it was dead.

I let my eyes travel on, and behold! about fifty yards beyond the dead bull was a mound of hard rock. I watched it with gasping expectation and—yes, on the top of the mound something slowly materialized. Although I knew what it must be well enough, for a while I could not see quite clearly because there were certain little clouds about and one of them had floated over the face of the moon. It passed, and before me, perhaps a hundred and forty paces away, outlined clearly against the sky, I perceived the devilish elephant of my vision.

Oh! what a brute was that! In bulk and height it appeared to be half as big again as any of its tribe which I had known in all my life's experience. It was enormous, unearthly; a survivor perhaps of some ancient species that lived before the Flood, or at least a very giant of its kind. Its grey-black sides were scarred as though with fighting. One of its huge tusks, much worn at the end, for evidently it was very old, gleamed white in the moonlight. The other was broken off about halfway down its length. When perfect it had been malformed, for it curved downwards and not upwards, also rather out to the right.

There stood this mammoth, this leviathan, this *monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens*, as I remember my old father used to call a certain gigantic and misshapen bull that we had on the Station, flapping a pair of ears that looked like the sides of a Kafir hut, and waving a trunk as big as a weaver's beam—whatever a weaver's beam may be—an appalling and a petrifying sight.

I squatted behind the skeleton of an elephant which happened to be handy and well covered with moss and ferns and watched the beast, fascinated, wishing that I had a large-bore rifle in my hand. What became of Marût I do not exactly know, but I think that he lay down on the ground.

During the minute or so that followed I reflected a good deal, as we do in times of emergency, often after a useless sort of a fashion. For instance, I wondered why the brute appeared thus upon yonder mound, and the thought suggested itself to me that it was summoned thither from some neighbouring lair by the trumpet call of the dying elephant. It occurred to me even that it was a kind of king of the elephants, to which they felt bound to report themselves, as it were, in the hour of their decease. Certainly what followed gave some credence to my fantastical notion which, if there were anything in it, might account for this great graveyard at that particular spot.

After standing for a while in the attitude that I have described, testing the air with its trunk, Jana, for I will call him so, lumbered down the mound and advanced straight to where the elephant that I had thought to be dead was kneeling. As a matter of fact it was not quite dead, for when Jana arrived it lifted its trunk and curled it round that of Jana as though in affectionate greeting, then let it fall to the ground again. Thereon Jana did what I had seen it do in my dream or vision at Ragnall, namely, attacked it, knocking it over on to its side, where it lay motionless; quite dead this time.

Now I remembered that the vision was not accurate after all, since in it I had seen Jana destroy a woman and a child, who on the present occasion were wanting. Since then I have thought that this was because Harût, clairvoyantly or telepathically, had conveyed to me, as indeed Marût declared, a scene which he had witnessed similar to that which I was witnessing, but not identical in its incidents. Thus it happened, perhaps, that while the act of the woman and the child was omitted, in our case there was another act of the play to follow of which I had received no inkling in my Ragnall experience. Indeed, if I had received it, I should not have been there that night, for no inducement on earth would have brought me to Kendahland.

This was the act. Jana, having prodded his dead brother to his satisfaction, whether from viciousness or to put it out of pain, I cannot say, stood over the carcass in an attitude of grief or pious meditation. At this time, I should mention, the wind, which had been rustling the hail-stripped reeds at the lake border, had died away almost, but not completely; that is to say, only a very faint gust blew now and again, which, with a hunter's instinct, I observed with satisfaction drew *from* the direction of Jana towards ourselves. This I knew, because it struck on my forehead, which was wet with perspiration, and cooled the skin.

Presently, however, by a cursed spite of fate, one of these gusts—a very little one—came from some quarter behind us, for I felt it in my back hair, that was as damp as the rest of me. Just then I was glancing to my right, where it seemed to me that out of the corner

of my eye I had caught sight of something passing among the stones at a distance of a hundred yards or so, possibly the shadow of a cloud or another elephant. At the time I did not ascertain which it was, since a faint rattle from Jana's trunk reconcentrated all my faculties on him in a painfully vivid fashion.

I looked to see that all the contemplation had departed from his attitude, now as alert as that of a fox-terrier which imagines he has seen a rat. His vast ears were cocked, his huge bulk trembled, his enormous trunk sniffed the air.

"Great Heavens!" thought I to myself, "he has winded us!" Then I took such consolation as I could from the fact that the next gust once more struck upon my forehead, for I hoped he would conclude that he had made a mistake.

Not a bit of it! Jana was far too old a bird—or beast—to make any mistake. He grunted, got himself going like a luggage train, and with great deliberation walked towards us, smelling at the ground, smelling at the air, smelling to the right, to the left, and even towards heaven above, as though he expected that thence might fall upon him vengeance for his many sins. A dozen times as he came did I cover him with an imaginary rifle, marking the exact spots where I might have hoped to send a bullet to his vitals, in a kind of automatic fashion, for all my real brain was contemplating my own approaching end.

I wondered how it would happen. Would he drive that great tusk through me, would he throw me into the air, or would he kneel upon my poor little body, and avenge the deaths of his kin that had fallen at my hands? Marût was speaking in a rattling whisper:

"His priests have told Jana to kill us; we are about to die," he said. "Before I die I want to say that the lady, the wife of the lord \_\_\_\_\_"

"Silence!" I hissed. "He will hear you," for at that instant I took not the slightest interest in any lady on the earth. Fiercely I glared at Marût and noted even then how pitiful was his countenance. There was no smile there now. All its jovial roundness had vanished. It had sunk in; it was blue and ghastly with large, protruding eyes, like to that of a man who had been three days dead.

I was right—Jana *had* heard. Low as the whisper was, through that intense silence it had penetrated to his almost preternatural senses. Forward he came at a run for twenty paces or more with his trunk held straight out in front of him. Then he halted again, perhaps the length of a cricket pitch away, and smelt as before.

The sight was too much for Marût. He sprang up and ran for his life towards the lake, purposing, I suppose, to take refuge in the water. Oh! how he ran. After him went Jana like a railway engine—express this time—trumpeting as he charged. Marût reached the lake, which was quite close, about ten yards ahead, and plunging into it with a bound, began to swim.

Now, I thought, he may get away if the crocodiles don't have him, for that devil will scarcely take to the water. But this was just where I made a mistake, for with a mighty splash in went Jana too. Also he was the better swimmer. Marût soon saw this and swung round to the shore, by which manoeuvre he gained a little as he could turn quicker than Jana.

Back they came, Jana just behind Marût, striking at him with his great trunk. They landed, Marût flew a few yards ahead doubling in and out among the rocks like a hare and, to my horror, making for where I lay, whether by accident or in a mad hope of obtaining protection, I do not know.

It may be asked why I had not taken the opportunity to run also in the opposite direction. There are several answers. The first was that there seemed to be nowhere to run; the second, that I felt sure, if I did run, I should trip up over the skeletons of those elephants or the stones; the third, that I did not think of it at once; the fourth, that Jana had not yet seen me, and I had no craving to introduce myself to him personally; and the fifth and greatest, that I was so paralysed with fear that I did not feel as though I could lift myself from the ground. Everything about me seemed to be dead, except my powers of observation, which were painfully alive.

Of a sudden Marût gave up. Less than a stone's throw from me he wheeled round and, facing Jana, hurled at him some fearful and concentrated curse, of which all that I could distinguish were the words: "The Child!"

Oddly enough it seemed to have an effect upon the furious rogue, which halted in its rush and, putting its four feet together, slid a few paces nearer and stood still. It was just as though the beast had understood the words and were considering them. If so, their effect was to rouse him to perfect madness. He screamed terribly; he lashed his sides with his trunk; his red and wicked eyes rolled; foam flew from the cavern of his open mouth; he danced upon his great feet, a sort of hideous Scottish reel. Then he charged!

I shut my eyes for a moment. When I opened them again it was to see poor Marût higher in the air than ever he flew before. I thought that he would never come down, but he did at last with an awesome thud. Jana went to him and very gently, now that he was dead, picked him up in his trunk. I prayed that he might carry him away to some hiding-place and leave me in peace. But not so. With slow and stately strides, rocking the deceased Marût up and down in his trunk, as a nurse might rock a baby, he marched on to the very stone where I lay, behind which I suppose he had seen or smelt me all the time.

For quite a long while, it seemed more than a century, he stood over me, studying me as though I interested him very much, the water of the lake trickling in a refreshing stream from his great ears on to my back. Had it not been for that water I think I should have fainted, but as it was I did the next best thing—pretended to be dead. Perhaps this monster would scorn to touch a dead man. Watching out of the corner of my eye, I saw him lift one vast paw that was the size of an arm-chair and hold it over me.

Now good-bye to the world, thought I. Then the foot descended as a steam-hammer does, but also as a steam-hammer sometimes does when used to crack nuts, stopped as it touched my back, and presently came to earth again alongside of me, perhaps because Jana thought the foothold dangerous. At any rate, he took another and better way. Depositing the remains of Marût with the most tender care beside me, as though the nurse were putting the child to bed, he unwound his yards of trunk and began to feel me all over with its tip, commencing at the back of my neck. Oh! the sensation of that clammy, wriggling tip upon my spinal column!

Down it went till it reached the seat of my trousers. There it pinched, presumably to ascertain whether or no I were malingering, a most agonizing pinch like to that of a pair of blacksmith's tongs. So sharp was it that, although I did not stir, who was aware that the slightest movement meant death, it tore a piece out of the stout cloth of my breeches, to say nothing of a portion of the skin beneath. This seemed to astonish the beast, for it lifted the tip of its trunk and shifted its head, as though to examine the fragment by the light of the moon.

Now indeed all was over, for when it saw blood upon that cloth——! I put up one short, piteous prayer to Heaven to save me from this terrible end, and lo, it was answered!

For just as Jana, the results of the inspection being unsatisfactory, was cocking his ears and making ready to slay me, there rang out the short, sharp report of a rifle fired within a few yards. Glancing up at the instant, I saw blood spurt from the monster's left eye, where evidently the bullet had found a home.

He felt at his eye with his trunk; then, uttering a scream of pain, wheeled round and rushed away.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CHASE

I suppose that I swooned for a minute or two. At any rate I remember a long and very curious dream, such a dream as is evolved by a patient under laughing gas, that is very clear and vivid at the time but immediately afterwards slips from the mind's grasp as water does from the clenched hand. It was something to the effect that all those hundreds of skeleton elephants rose and marshalled themselves before me, making obeisance to me by bending their bony knees, because, as I quite understood, I was the only human being that had ever escaped from Jana. Moreover, on the foremost elephant's skull Hans was perched like a mahout, giving words of command to their serried ranks and explaining to them that it would be very convenient if they would carry their tusks, for which they had no further use, and pile them in a certain place—I forget where—that must be near a good road to facilitate their subsequent transport to a land where they would be made into billiard balls and the backs of ladies' hair-brushes. Next, through the figments of that retreating dream, I heard the undoubted voice of Hans himself, which of course I knew to be absurd as Hans was lost and doubtless dead, saying:

"If you are alive, Baas, please wake up soon, as I have finished reloading Intombi, and it is time to be going. I think I hit Jana in the eye, but so big a beast will soon get over so little a thing as that and look for us, and the bullet from Intombi is too small to kill him, Baas, especially as it is not likely that either of us could hit him in the other eye."

Now I sat up and stared. Yes, there was Hans himself looking just the same as usual, only perhaps rather dirtier, engaged in setting a cap on to the nipple of the little rifle Intombi.

"Hans," I said in a hollow voice, "why the devil are you here?"

"To save you from the devil, of course, Baas," he replied aptly. Then, resting the gun against the stone, the old fellow knelt down by my side and, throwing his arms around me, began to blubber over me, exclaiming:

"Just in time, Baas! Only just in time, for as usual Hans made a mess of things and judged badly—I'll tell you afterwards. Still, just in time, thanks be to your reverend father, the Predikant. Oh! if he had delayed me for one more minute you would have been as flat as my nose, Baas. Now come quickly. I've got the camel tied up there, and he can carry two, being fat and strong after four days' rest with plenty to eat. This place is haunted, Baas, and that king of the devils, Jana, will be back after us presently, as soon as he has wiped the blood out of his eye."

I didn't make any remark, having no taste for conversation just then, but only looked at poor Marût, who lay by me as though he was sleeping.

"Oh, Baas," said Hans, "there is no need to trouble about him, for his neck is broken and he's quite dead. Also it is as well," he added cheerfully. "For, as your reverend father doubtless remembered, the camel could never carry three. Moreover, if he stops here, perhaps Jana will come back to play with him instead of following us."

Poor Marût! This was his requiem as sung by Hans.

With a last glance at the unhappy man to whom I had grown attached in a way during our time of joint captivity and trial, I took the arm of the old Hottentot, or rather leant upon his shoulder, for at first I felt too weak to walk by myself, and picked my path with him through the stones and skeletons of elephants across the plateau eastwards, that is, away from the lake. About two hundred yards from the scene of our tragedy was a mound of rock similar to that on which Jana had appeared, but much smaller, behind which we found the camel, kneeling as a well-trained beast of the sort should do and tethered to a stone.

As we went, in brief but sufficient language Hans told me his story. It seemed that after he had shot the Kendah general it came into his cunning, foreseeing mind that he might be of more use to me free than as a companion in captivity, or that if I were killed he might in that case live to bring vengeance on my slayers. So he broke away, as has been described, and hid till nightfall on the hill-side. Then by the light of the moon he tracked us, avoiding the villages, and ultimately found a place of shelter in a kind of cave in the forest near to Simba Town, where no people lived. Here he fed the camel at night, concealing it at dawn in the cave. The days he spent up a tall tree, whence he could watch all that went on in the town beneath, living meanwhile on some food which he carried in a bag tied to the saddle, helped out by green mealies which he stole from a neighbouring field.

Thus he saw most of what passed in the town, including the desolation wrought by the fearful tempest of hail, which, being in their cave, both he and the camel escaped without harm. On the next evening from his post of outlook up the tree, where he had now some difficulty in hiding himself because the hail had stripped off all its leaves, he saw Marût and myself brought from the guest-house and taken away by the escort. Descending and running to the cave, he saddled the camel and started in pursuit, plunging into the forest and hiding there when he perceived that the escort were leaving us.

Here he waited until they had gone by on their return journey. So close did they pass to him that he could overhear their talk, which told him they expected, or rather were sure, that we should be destroyed by the elephant Jana, their devil god, to whom the camelmen had been already sacrificed. After they had departed he remounted and followed us. Here I asked him why he had not overtaken us before we came to the cemetery of elephants, as I presumed he might have done, since he stated that he was close in our rear. This indeed was the case, for it was the head of the camel I saw behind the thorn trees when I looked back, and not the trunk of an elephant as I had supposed.

At the time he would give me no direct answer, except that he grew muddled as he had already suggested, and thought it best to keep in the background and see what happened. Long afterwards, however, he admitted to me that he acted on a presentiment.

"It seemed to me, Baas," he said, "that your reverend father was telling me that I should do best to let you two go on and not show myself, since if I did so we should all three be killed, as one of us must walk whom the other two could not desert. Whereas if I left you as you were, one of you would be killed and the other escape, and that the one to be killed would not be *you*, Baas. All of which came about as the Spirit spoke in my head, for Marût was killed, who did not matter, and—you know the rest, Baas."

To return to Hans' story. He saw us march down to the borders of the lake, and, keeping to our right, took cover behind the knoll of rock, whence he watched also all that followed. When Jana advanced to attack us Hans crept forward in the hope, a very wild one, of crippling him with the little Purdey rifle. Indeed, he was about to fire at the hind leg when Marût made his run for life and plunged into the lake. Then he crawled on to lead me away to the camel, but when he was within a few yards the chase returned our way and Marût was killed.

From that moment he waited for an opportunity to shoot Jana in the only spot where so soft a bullet would, as he knew, have the faintest chance of injuring him vitally—namely, in the eye—for he was sure that its penetration would not be sufficient to reach the vitals through that thick hide and the mass of flesh behind. With an infinite and wonderful patience he waited, knowing that my life or death hung in the balance. While Jana held his foot over me, while he felt me with his trunk, still Hans waited, balancing the arguments for and against firing upon the scales of experience in his clever old mind, and in the end coming to a right and wise conclusion.

At length his chance came, the brute exposed his eye, and by the light of the clear moon Hans, always a very good shot at a distance when it was not necessary to allow for trajectory and wind, let drive and *hit*. The bullet did not get to the brain as he had hoped; it had not strength for that, but it destroyed this left eye and gave Jana such pain that for a while he forgot all about me and everything else except escape.

Such was the Hottentot's tale as I picked it up from his laconic, colourless, Dutch *patois* sentences, then and afterwards; a very wonderful tale I thought. But for him, his fidelity and his bushman's cunning, where should I have found myself before that moon set?

We mounted the camel after I had paused a minute to take a pull from a flask of brandy which remained in the saddlebags. Although he loved strong drink so well Hans had saved it untouched on the mere chance that it might some time be of service to me, his master. The monkey-like Hottentot sat in front and directed the camel, while I accommodated myself as best I could on the sheepskins behind. Luckily they were thick and soft, for Jana's pinch was not exactly that of a lover.

Off we went, picking our way carefully till we reached the elephant track beyond the mound where Jana had appeared, which, in the light of faith, we hoped would lead us to the River Tava. Here we made better progress, but still could not go very fast because of the holes made by the feet of Jana and his company. Soon we had left the cemetery behind us, and lost sight of the lake which I devoutly trusted I might never see again.

Now the track ran upwards from the hollow to a ridge two or three miles away. We reached the crest of this ridge without accident, except that on our road we met another aged elephant, a cow with very poor tusks, travelling to its last resting place, or so I suppose. I don't know which was the more frightened, the sick cow or the camel, for camels hate elephants as horses hate camels until they get used to them. The cow bolted to the right as quickly as it could, which was not very fast, and the camel bolted to the left with such convulsive bounds that we were nearly thrown off its back. However, being an equable brute, it soon recovered its balance, and we got back to the track beyond the cow.

From the top of the rise we saw that before us lay a sandy plain lightly clothed in grass, and, to our joy, about ten miles away at the foot of a very gentle slope, the moonlight gleamed upon the waters of a broad river. It was not easy to make out, but it was there, we were both sure it was there; we could not mistake the wavering, silver flash. On we went for another quarter of a mile, when something caused me to turn round on the sheepskin and look back.

Oh Heavens! At the very top of the rise, clearly outlined against the sky, stood Jana himself with his trunk lifted. Next instant he trumpeted, a furious, rattling challenge of rage and defiance.

"Allemagte! Baas," said Hans, "the old devil is coming to look for his lost eye, and has seen us with that which remains. He has been travelling on our spoor."

"Forward!" I answered, bringing my heels into the camel's ribs.

Then the race began. The camel was a very good camel, one of the real running breed; also, as Hans said, it was comparatively fresh, and may, moreover, have been aware that it was near to the plains where it had been bred. Lastly, the going was now excellent, soft to its spongy feet but not too deep in sand, nor were there any rocks over which it could fall. It went off like the wind, making nothing of our united weights which did not come to more than two hundred pounds, or a half of what it could carry with ease, being perhaps urged to its top speed by the knowledge that the elephant was behind. For mile after mile we rushed down the plain. But we did not go alone, for Jana came after us like a cruiser after a gunboat. Moreover, swiftly as we travelled, he travelled just a little swifter, gaining say a few yards in every hundred. For the last mile before we came to the river bank, half an hour later perhaps, though it seemed to be a week, he was not more than fifty paces to our rear. I glanced back at him, and in the light of the moon, which was growing low, he bore a strange resemblance to a mud cottage with broken chimneys (which were his ears flapping on each side of him), and the yard pump projecting from the upper window.

"We shall beat him now, Hans," I said looking at the broad river which was now close at hand.

"Yes, Baas," answered Hans doubtfully and in jerks. "This is very good camel, Baas. He runs so fast that I have no inside left, I suppose because he smells his wife over that river, to say nothing of death behind him. But, Baas, I am not sure; that devil Jana is still faster than the camel, and he wants to settle for his lost eye, which makes him lively. Also I see stones ahead, which are bad for camels. Then there is the river, and I don't know if camels can swim, but Jana can as Marût learned. Do you think, Baas, that you could manage to sting him up with a bullet in his knee or that great trunk of his, just to give him something to think about besides ourselves?"

Thus he prattled on, I believe to occupy my mind and his own, till at length, growing impatient, I replied:

"Be silent, donkey. Can I shoot an elephant backwards over my shoulder with a rifle meant for springbuck? Hit the camel! Hit it hard!"

Alas! Hans was right! There *were* stones at the verge of the river, which doubtless it had washed out in periods of past flood, and presently we were among them. Now a camel, so good on sand that is its native heath, is a worthless brute among stones, over which

it slips and flounders. But to Jana these appeared to offer little or no obstacle. At any rate he came over them almost if not quite as fast as before. By the time that we reached the brink of the water he was not more than ten yards behind. I could even see the blood running down from the socket of his ruined eye.

Moreover, at the sight of the foaming but shallow torrent, the camel, a creature unaccustomed to water, pulled up in a mulish kind of way and for a moment refused to stir. Luckily at this instant Jana let off one of his archangel kind of trumpetings which started our beast again, since it was more afraid of elephants than it was of water.

In we went and were presently floundering among the loose stones at the bottom of the river, which was nowhere over four feet deep, with Jana splashing after us not more than five yards behind. I twisted myself round and fired at him with the rifle. Whether I hit him or no I could not say, but he stopped for a few seconds, perhaps because he remembered the effect of a similar explosion upon his eye, which gave us a trifling start. Then he came on again in his steam-engine fashion.

When we were about in the middle of the river the inevitable happened. The camel fell, pitching us over its head into the stream. Still clinging to the rifle I picked myself up and began half to swim half to wade towards the farther shore, catching hold of Hans with my free hand. In a moment Jana was on to that camel. He gored it with his tusks, he trampled it with his feet, he got it round the neck with his trunk, dragging nearly the whole bulk of it out of the water. Then he set to work to pound it down into the mud and stones at the bottom of the river with such a persistent thoroughness, that he gave us time to reach the other bank and climb up a stout tree which grew there, a sloping, flat-topped kind of tree that was fortunately easy to ascend, at least for a man. Here we sat gasping, perhaps about thirty feet above the ground level, and waited.

Presently Jana, having finished with the camel, followed us, and without any difficulty located us in that tree. He walked all round it considering the situation. Then he wound his huge trunk about the bole of the tree and, putting out his strength, tried to pull it over. It was an anxious moment, but this particular child of the forest had not grown there for some hundreds of years, withstanding all the shocks of wind, weather and water, in order to be laid low by an elephant, however enormous. It shook a little—no more. Abandoning this attempt as futile, Jana next began to try to dig it up by driving his tusk under its roots. Here, too, he failed because they grew among stones which evidently jarred him.

Ceasing from these agricultural efforts with a deep rumble of rage, he adopted yet a third expedient. Rearing his huge bulk into the air he brought down his forefeet with all the tremendous weight of his great body behind them on to the sloping trunk of the tree just below where the branches sprang, perhaps twelve or thirteen feet above the ground. The shock was so heavy that for a moment I thought the tree would be uprooted or snapped in two. Thank Heaven! it held, but the vibration was such that Hans and I were nearly shaken out of the upper branches, like autumn apples from a bough. Indeed, I think I should have gone had not the monkey-like Hans, who had toes to cling with as well as fingers, gripped me by the collar.

Thrice did Jana repeat this manoeuvre, and at the third onslaught I saw to my horror that the roots were loosening. I heard some of them snap, and a crack appeared in the ground not far from the bole. Fortunately Jana never noted these symptoms, for abandoning a plan which he considered unavailing, he stood for a while swaying his trunk and lost in gentle thought.

"Hans," I whispered, "load the rifle quick! I can get him in the spine or the other eye."

"Wet powder won't go off, Baas," groaned Hans. "The water got to it in the river."

"No," I answered, "and it is all your fault for making me shoot at him when I could take no aim."

"It would have been just the same, Baas, for the rifle went under water also when we fell from the camel, and the cap would have been damp, and perhaps the powder too. Also the shot made Jana stop for a moment."

This was true, but it was maddening to be obliged to sit there with an empty gun, when if I had but one charge, or even my pistol, I was sure that I could have blinded or crippled this satanic pachyderm.

A few minutes later Jana played his last card. Coming quite close to the trunk of the tree he reared himself up as before, but this time stretched out his forelegs so that these and his body were supported on the broad bole. Then he elongated his trunk and with it began to break off boughs which grew between us and him.

"I don't think he can reach us," I said doubtfully to Hans, "that is, unless he brings a stone to stand on."

"Oh! Baas, pray be silent," answered Hans, "or he will understand and fetch one."

Although the idea seemed absurd, on the whole I thought it well to take the hint, for who knew how much this experienced beast did or did not understand? Then, as we could go no higher, we wriggled as far as we dared along our boughs and waited.

Presently Jana, having finished his clearing operations, began to lengthen his trunk to its full measure. Literally, it seemed to expand like a telescope or an indiarubber ring. Out it came, foot after foot, till its snapping tip was waving within a few inches of us, just short of my foot and Hans's head, or rather felt hat. One final stretch and he reached the hat, which he removed with a flourish and thrust into the red cavern of his mouth. As it appeared no more I suppose he ate it. This loss of his hat moved Hans to fury. Hurling horrible curses at Jana he drew his butcher's knife and made ready.

Once more the sinuous brown trunk elongated itself. Evidently Jana had got a better hold with his hind legs this time, or perhaps had actually wriggled himself a few inches up the tree. At any rate I saw to my dismay that there was every prospect of my making a second acquaintance with that snapping tip. The end of the trunk was lying along my bough like a huge brown snake and creeping up, up, up.

"He'll get us," I muttered.

Hans said nothing but leaned forward a little, holding on with his left hand. Next instant in the light of the rising sun I saw a knife flash, saw also that the point of it had been driven through the lower lip of Jana's trunk, pinning it to the bough like a butterfly to a board.

My word! what a commotion ensued! Up the trunk came a scream which nearly blew me away. Then Jana, with a wriggling motion, tried to unnailed himself as gently as possible, for it was clear that the knife point hurt him, but could not do so because Hans still held the handle and had driven the blade deep into the wood. Lastly he dragged himself downwards with such energy that something had to go, that something being the skin and muscle of the lower lip, which was cut clean through, leaving the knife erect in the bough.

Over he went backwards, a most imperial cropper. Then he picked himself up, thrust the tip of his trunk into his mouth, sucked it as one does a cut finger, and finally, roaring in defeated rage, fled into the river, which he waded, and back upon his tracks towards

his own home. Yes, off he went, Hans screaming curses and demands that he should restore his hat to him, and very seldom in all my life have I seen a sight that I thought more beautiful than that of his whisking tail.

"Now, Baas," chuckled Hans, "the old devil has got a sore nose as well as a sore eye by which to remember us. And, Baas, I think we had better be going before he has time to think and comes back with a long stick to knock us out of this tree."

So we went, in double-quick time I can assure you, or at any rate as fast as my stiff limbs and general condition would allow. Fortunately we had now no doubt as to our direction, since standing up through the mists of dawn with the sunbeams resting on its forest-clad crest, we could clearly see the strange, tumulus-shaped hill which the White Kendah called the Holy Mount, the Home of the Child. It appeared to be about twenty miles away, but in reality was a good deal farther, for when we had walked for several hours it seemed almost as distant as ever.

In truth that was a dreadful trudge. Not only was I exhausted with all the terrors I had passed and our long midnight flight, but the wound where Jana had pinched out a portion of my frame, inflamed by the riding, had now grown stiff and intolerably sore, so that every step gave me pain which sometimes culminated in agony. Moreover, it was no use giving in, foodless as we were, for Marût had carried the provisions, and with the chance of Jana returning to look us up. So I stuck to it and said nothing.

For the first ten miles the country seemed uninhabited; doubtless it was too near the borders of the Black Kendah to be popular as a place of residence. After this we saw herds of cattle and a few camels, apparently untended; perhaps their guards were hidden away in the long grass. Then we came to some fields of mealies that were, I noticed, quite untouched by the hailstorm, which, it would seem, had confined its attentions to the land of the Black Kendah. Of these we ate thankfully enough. A little farther on we perceived huts perched on an inaccessible place in a kloof. Also their inhabitants perceived us, for they ran away as though in a great fright.

Still we did not try to approach the huts, not knowing how we should be received. After my sojourn in Simba Town I had become possessed of a love of life in the open.

For another two hours I limped forward with pain and grief—by now I was leaning on Hans' shoulder—up an endless, uncultivated rise clothed with euphorbias and fern-like cycads. At length we reached its top and found ourselves within a rifle shot of a fenced native village. I suppose that its inhabitants had been warned of our coming by runners from the huts I have mentioned. At any rate the moment we appeared the men, to the number of thirty or more, poured out of the south gate armed with spears and other weapons and proceeded to ring us round and behave in a very threatening manner. I noticed at once that, although most of them were comparatively light in colour, some of these men partook of the negro characteristics of the Black Kendah from whom we had escaped, to such an extent indeed that this blood was clearly predominant in them. Still, it was also clear that they were deadly foes of this people, for when I shouted out to them that we were the friends of Harût and those who worshipped the Child, they yelled back that we were liars. No friends of the Child, they said, came from the country of the Black Kendah, who worshipped the devil Jana. I tried to explain that least of all men in the world did we worship Jana, who had been hunting us for hours, but they would not listen.

"You are spies of Simba's, the smell of Jana is upon you" (this may have been true enough), they yelled, adding: "We will kill you, white-faced goat. We will kill you, little yellow monkey, for none who are not enemies come here from the land of the Black Kendah."

"Kill us then," I answered, "and bring the curse of the Child upon you. Bring famine, bring hail, bring war!"

These words were, I think, well chosen; at any rate they induced a pause in their murderous intentions. For a while they hesitated, all talking together at once. At last the advocates of violence appeared to get the upper hand, and once more a number of the men began to dance about us, waving their spears and crying out that we must die who came from the Black Kendah.

I sat down upon the ground, for I was so exhausted that at the time I did not greatly care whether I died or lived, while Hans drew his knife and stood over me, cursing them as he had cursed at Jana. By slow degrees they drew nearer and nearer. I watched them with a kind of idle curiosity, believing that the moment when they came within actual spear-thrust would be our last, but, as I have said, not greatly caring because of my mental and physical exhaustion.

I had already closed my eyes that I might not see the flash of the falling steel, when an exclamation from Hans caused me to open them again. Following the line of the knife with which he pointed, I perceived a troop of men on camels emerging from the gates of the village at full speed. In front of these, his white garments fluttering on the wind, rode a bearded and dignified person in whom I recognized Harût, Harût himself, waving a spear and shouting as he came. Our assailants heard and saw him also, then flung down their weapons as though in dismay either at his appearance or his words, which I could not catch. Harût guided his rushing camel straight at the man who I presume was their leader, and struck at him with his spear, as though in fury, wounding him in the shoulder and causing him to fall to the ground. As he struck he called out:

"Dog! Would you harm the guests of the Child?"

Then I heard no more because I fainted away.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DWELLER IN THE CAVE

After this it seemed to me that I dreamed a long and very troubled dream concerning all sorts of curious things which I cannot remember. At last I opened my eyes and observed that I lay on a low bed raised about three inches above the floor, in an Eastern-looking room, large and cool. It had window-places in it but no windows, only grass mats hung upon a rod which, I noted inconsequently, worked on a rough, wooden hinge, or rather pin, that enabled the curtain to be turned back against the wall.

Through one of these window-places I saw at a little distance the slope of the forest-covered hill, which reminded me of something to do with a child—for the life of me I could not remember what. As I lay wondering over the matter I heard a shuffling step which I recognized, and, turning, saw Hans twiddling a new hat made of straw in his fingers.

"Hans," I said, "where did you get that new hat?"

"They gave it me here, Baas," he answered. "The Baas will remember that the devil Jana ate the other."

Then I did remember more or less, while Hans continued to twiddle the hat. I begged him to put it on his head because it fidgeted me, and then inquired where we were.

"In the Town of the Child, Baas, where they carried you after you had seemed to die down yonder. A very nice town, where there is plenty to eat, though, having been asleep for three days, you have had nothing except a little milk and soup, which was poured down your throat with a spoon whenever you seemed to half wake up for a while."

"I was tired and wanted a long rest, Hans, and now I feel hungry. Tell me, are the lord and Bena here also, or were they killed after all?"

"Yes, Baas, they are safe enough, and so are all our goods. They were both with Harût when he saved us down by the village yonder, but you went to sleep and did not see them. They have been nursing you ever since, Baas."

Just then Savage himself entered, carrying some soup upon a wooden tray and looking almost as smart as he used to do at Ragnall Castle.

"Good day, sir," he said in his best professional manner. "Very glad to see you back with us, sir, and getting well, I trust, especially after we had given you and Mr. Hans up as dead."

I thanked him and drank the soup, asking him to cook me something more substantial as I was starving, which he departed to do. Then I sent Hans to find Lord Ragnall, who it appeared was out walking in the town. No sooner had they gone than Harût entered looking more dignified than ever and, bowing gravely, seated himself upon the mat in the Eastern fashion.

"Some strong spirit must go with you, Lord Macumazana," he said, "that you should live today, after we were sure that you had been slain."

"That's where you made a mistake. Your magic was not of much service to you there, friend Harût."

"Yet my magic, as you call it, though I have none, was of some service after all, Macumazana. As it chanced I had no opportunity of breathing in the wisdom of the Child for two days from the hour of our arrival here, because I was hurt on the knee in the fight and so weary that I could not travel up the mountain and seek light from the eyes of the Child. On the third day, however, I went and the Oracle told me all. Then I descended swiftly, gathered men and reached those fools in time to keep you from harm. They have paid for what they did, Lord."

"I am sorry, Harût, for they knew no better; and, Harût, although I saved myself, or rather Hans saved me, we have left your brother behind, and with him the others."

"I know. Jana was too strong for them; you and your servant alone could prevail against him."

"Not so, Harût. He prevailed against us; all we could do was to injure his eye and the tip of his trunk and escape from him."

"Which is more than any others have done for many generations, Lord. But doubtless as the beginning was, so shall the end be. Jana, I think, is near his death and through you."

"I don't know," I repeated. "Who and what is Jana?"

"Have I not told you that he is an evil spirit who inhabits the body of a huge elephant?"

"Yes, and so did Marût; but I think that he is just a huge elephant with a very bad temper of his own. Still, whatever he is, he will take some killing, and I don't want to meet him again by that horrible lake."

"Then you will meet him elsewhere, Lord. For if you do not go to look for Jana, Jana will come to look for you who have hurt him so sorely. Remember that henceforth, wherever you go in all this land, it may happen that you will meet Jana."

"Do you mean to say that the brute comes into the territory of the White Kendah?"

"Yes, Macumazana, at times he comes, or a spirit wearing his shape comes; I know not which. What I do know is that twice in my life I myself have seen him upon the Holy Mount, though how he came or how he went none can tell."

"Why was he wandering there, Harût?"

"Who can say, Lord? Tell me why evil wanders through the world and I will answer your question. Only I repeat—let those who have harmed Jana beware of Jana."

"And let Jana beware of me if I can meet him with a decent gun in my hand, for I have a score to settle with the beast. Now, Harût, there is another matter. Just before he was killed Marût, your brother, began to tell me something about the wife of the Lord Ragnall. I had no time to listen to the end of his words, though I thought he said that she was upon yonder Holy Mount. Did I hear aright?"

Instantly Harût's face became like that of a stone idol, impenetrable, impassive.

"Either you misunderstood, Lord," he answered, "or my brother raved in his fear. Wherever she may be, that beautiful lady is not upon the Holy Mount, unless there is another Holy Mount in the Land of Death. Moreover, Lord, as we are speaking of this matter, let me tell you the forest upon that Mount must be trodden by none save the priest of the Child. If others set foot there they die, for it is watched by a guardian more terrible even than Jana, nor is he the only one. Ask me nothing of that guardian, for I will not answer, and, above all, if you or your comrades value life, let them not seek to look upon him."

Understanding that it was quite useless to pursue this subject farther at the moment, I turned to another, remarking that the hailstorm which had smitten the country of the Black Kendah was the worst that I had ever experienced.

"Yes," answered Harût, "so I have learned. That was the first of the curses which the Child, through my mouth, promised to Simba and his people if they molested us upon our road. The second, you will remember, was famine, which for them is near at hand, seeing that they have little corn in store and none left to gather, and that most of their cattle are dead of the hail."

"If they have no corn while, as I noted, you have plenty which the storm spared, will not they, who are many in number but near to starving, attack you and take your corn, Harût?"

"Certainly they will do so, Lord, and then will fall the third curse, the curse of war. All this was foreseen long ago, Macumazana, and you are here to help us in that war. Among your goods you have many guns and much powder and lead. You shall teach our people how to use those guns, that with them we may destroy the Black Kendah."

"I think not," I replied quietly. "I came here to kill a certain elephant, and to receive payment for my service in ivory, not to fight the Black Kendah, of whom I have already seen enough. Moreover, the guns are not my property but that of the Lord Ragnall, who perhaps will ask his own price for the use of them."

"And the Lord Ragnall, who came here against our will, is, as it chanced, our property and we may ask your own price for his life. Now, farewell for a while, since you, who are still sick and weak, have talked enough. Only before I go, as your friend and that of those with you, I will add one word. If you would continue to look upon the sun, let none of you try to set foot in the forest upon the Holy Mount. Wander where you will upon its southern slopes, but strive not to pass the wall of rock which rings the forest round."

Then he rose, bowed gravely and departed, leaving me full of reflections.

Shortly afterwards Savage and Hans returned, bringing me some meat which the former had cooked in an admirable fashion. I ate of it heartily, and just as they were carrying off the remains of the meal Ragnall himself arrived. Our greeting was very warm, as might be expected in the case of two comrades who never thought to speak to each other again on this side of the grave. As I had supposed, he was certain that Hans and I had been cut off and killed by the Black Kendah, as, after we were missed, some of the camelmen asserted that they had actually seen us fall. So he went on, or rather was carried on by the rush of the camels, grieving, since, it being impossible to attempt to recover our bodies or even to return, that was the only thing to do, and in due course reached the Town of the Child without further accident. Here they rested and mourned for us, till some days later Harût suddenly announced that we still lived, though how he knew this they could not ascertain. Then they sallied out and found us, as has been told, in great danger from the ignorant villagers who, until we appeared, had not even heard of our existence.

I asked what they had done and what information they had obtained since their arrival at this place. His answer was: Nothing and none worth mentioning. The town appeared to be a small one of not much over two thousand inhabitants, all of whom were engaged in agricultural pursuits and in camel-breeding. The herds of camels, however, they gathered, for the most part were kept at outlying settlements on the farther side of the cone-shaped mountain. As they were unable to talk the language the only person from whom they could gain knowledge was Harût, who spoke to them in his broken English and told them much what he had told me, namely that the upper mountain was a sacred place that might only be visited by the priests, since any uninitiated person who set foot there came to a bad end. They had not seen any of these priests in the town, where no form of worship appeared to be practised, but they had observed men driving small numbers of sheep or goats up the flanks of the mountain towards the forest.

Of what went on upon this mountain and who lived there they remained in complete ignorance. It was a case of stalemate. Harût would not tell them anything nor could they learn anything for themselves. He added in a depressed way that the whole business seemed very hopeless, and that he had begun to doubt whether there was any tidings of his lost wife to be gained among the Kendah, White or Black.

Now I repeated to him Marût's dying words, of which most unhappily I had never heard the end. These seemed to give him new life since they showed that tidings there was of some sort, if only it could be extracted. But how might this be done? How? How?

For a whole week things went on thus. During this time I recovered my strength completely, except in one particular which reduced me to helplessness. The place on my thigh where Jana had pinched out a bit of the skin healed up well enough, but the inflammation struck inwards to the nerve of my left leg, where once I had been injured by a lion, with the result that whenever I tried to move I was tortured by pains of a sciatic nature. So I was obliged to lie still and to content myself with being carried on the bed into a little garden which surrounded the mud-built and white-washed house that had been allotted to us as a dwelling-place.

There I lay hour after hour, staring at the Holy Mount which began to spring from the plain within a few hundred yards of the scattered township. For a mile or so its slopes were bare except for grass on which sheep and goats were grazed, and a few scattered trees. Studying the place through glasses I observed that these slopes were crowned by a vertical precipice of what looked like lava rock, which seemed to surround the whole mountain and must have been quite a hundred feet high. Beyond this precipice, which to all appearance was of an unclimbable nature, began a dense forest of large trees, cedars I thought, clothing it to the very top, that is so far as I could see.

One day when I was considering the place, Harût entered the garden suddenly and caught me in the act.

"The House of the god is beautiful," he said, "is it not?"

"Very," I answered, "and of a strange formation. But how do those who dwell on it climb that precipice?"

"It cannot be climbed," he answered, "but there is a road which I am about to travel who go to worship the Child. Yet I have told you, Macumazana, that any strangers who seek to walk that road find death. If they do not believe me, let them try," he added meaningly.

Then, after many inquiries about my health, he informed me that news had reached him to the effect that the Black Kendah were mad at the loss of their crops which the hail had destroyed and because of the near prospect of starvation.

"Then soon they will be wishing to reap yours with spears," I said.

"That is so. Therefore, my Lord Macumazana, get well quickly that you may be able to scare away these crows with guns, for in fourteen days the harvest should begin upon our uplands. Farewell and have no fears, for during my absence my people will feed and watch you and on the third night I shall return again."

After Harût's departure a deep depression fell upon all of us. Even Hans was depressed, while Savage became like a man under sentence of execution at a near but uncertain date. I tried to cheer him up and asked him what was the matter.

"I don't know, Mr. Quatermain," he answered, "but the fact is this is a 'ateful and un'oly 'ole" (in his agitation he quite lost grip of his h's, which was always weak), "and I am sure that it is the last I shall ever see, except one."

"Well, Savage," I said jokingly, "at any rate there don't seem to be any snakes here."

"No, Mr. Quatermain. That is, I haven't met any, but they crawl about me all night, and whenever I see that prophet man he talks of them to me. Yes, he talks of them and nothing else with a sort of cold look in his eyes that makes my back creep. I wish it was over, I do, who shall never see old England again," and he went away, I think to hide his very painful and evident emotion.

That evening Hans returned from an expedition on which I had sent him with instructions to try to get round the mountain and report what was on its other side. It had been a complete failure, as after he had gone a few miles men appeared who ordered him back. They were so threatening in their demeanour that had it not been for the little rifle, Intombi, which he carried under pretence of shooting buck, a weapon that they regarded with great awe, they would, he thought, have killed him. He added that he had been quite unsuccessful in his efforts to collect any news of value from man, woman or child, all of whom, although very polite, appeared to have orders to tell him nothing, concluding with the remark that he considered the White Kendah bigger devils than the Black Kendah, inasmuch as they were more clever.

Shortly after this abortive attempt we debated our position with earnestness and came to a certain conclusion, of which I will speak in its place.

If I remember right it was on this same night of our debate, after Harût's return from the mountain, that the first incident of interest happened. There were two rooms in our house divided by a partition which ran almost up to the roof. In the left-hand room slept Ragnall and Savage, and in that to the right Hans and I. Just at the breaking of dawn I was awakened by hearing some agitated conversation between Savage and his master. A minute later they both entered my sleeping place, and I saw in the faint light that Ragnall looked very disturbed and Savage very frightened.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"We have seen my wife," answered Ragnall.

I stared at him and he went on:

"Savage woke me by saying that there was someone in the room. I sat up and looked and, as I live, Quatermain, standing gazing at me in such a position that the light of dawn from the window-place fell upon her, was my wife."

"How was she dressed?" I asked at once.

"In a kind of white robe cut rather low, with her hair loose hanging to her waist, but carefully combed and held outspread by what appeared to be a bent piece of ivory about a foot and a half long, to which it was fastened by a thread of gold."

"Is that all?"

"No. Upon her breast was that necklace of red stones with the little image hanging from its centre which those rascals gave her and she always wore."

"Anything more?"

"Yes. In her arms she carried what looked like a veiled child. It was so still that I think it must have been dead."

"Well. What happened?"

"I was so overcome I could not speak, and she stood gazing at me with wide-opened eyes, looking more beautiful than I can tell you. She never stirred, and her lips never moved—that I will swear. And yet both of us heard her say, very low but quite clearly: 'The mountain, George! Don't desert me. Seek me on the mountain, my dear, my husband.'"

"Well, what next?"

"I sprang up and she was gone. That's all."

"Now tell me what *you* saw and heard, Savage."

"What his lordship saw and heard, Mr. Quatermain, neither more nor less. Except that I was awake, having had one of my bad dreams about snakes, and saw her come through the door."

"Through the door! Was it open then?"

"No, sir, it was shut and bolted. She just came through it as if it wasn't there. Then I called to his lordship after she had been looking at him for half a minute or so, for I couldn't speak at first. There's one more thing, or rather two. On her head was a little cap that looked as though it had been made from the skin of a bird, with a gold snake rising up in front, which snake was the first thing I caught sight of, as of course it would be, sir. Also the dress she wore was so thin that through it I could see her shape and the sandals on her feet, which were fastened at the instep with studs of gold."

"I saw no feather cap or snake," said Ragnall.

"Then that's the oddest part of the whole business," I remarked. "Go back to your room, both of you, and if you see anything more, call me. I want to think things over."

They went, in a bewildered sort of fashion, and I called Hans and spoke with him in a whisper, repeating to him the little that he had not understood of our talk, for as I have said, although he never spoke it, Hans knew a great deal of English.

"Now, Hans," I said to him, "what is the use of you? You are no better than a fraud. You pretend to be the best watchdog in Africa, and yet a woman comes into this house under your nose and in the grey of the morning, and you do not see her. Where is your reputation, Hans?"

The old fellow grew almost speechless with indignation, then he spluttered his answer:

"It was not a woman, Baas, but a spook. Who am I that I should be expected to catch spooks as though they were thieves or rats? As it happens I was wide awake half an hour before the dawn and lay with my eyes fixed upon that door, which I bolted myself last night. It never opened, Baas; moreover, since this talk began I have been to look at it. During the night a spider has made its web from door-post to door-post, and that web is unbroken. If you do not believe me, come and see for yourself. Yet they say the woman came through the doorway and therefore through the spider's web. Oh! Baas, what is the use of wasting thought upon the ways of spooks which, like the wind, come and go as they will, especially in this haunted land from which, as we have all agreed, we should do well to get away."

I went and examined the door for myself, for by now my sciatica, or whatever it may have been, was so much better that I could walk a little. What Hans said was true. There was the spider's web with the spider sitting in the middle. Also some of the threads of the web were fixed from post to post, so that it was impossible that the door could have been opened or, if opened, that anyone could have passed through the doorway without breaking them. Therefore, unless the woman came through one of the little window-places, which was almost incredible as they were high above the ground, or dropped from the smoke-hole in the roof, or had been shut into the place when the door was closed on the previous night, I could not see how she had arrived there. And if any one of these incredible suppositions was correct, then how did she get out again with two men watching her?

There were only two solutions to the problem—namely, that the whole occurrence was hallucination, or that, in fact, Ragnall and Savage had seen something unnatural and uncanny. If the latter were correct I only wished that I had shared the experience, as I have always longed to see a ghost. A real, indisputable ghost would be a great support to our doubting minds, that is if we *knew* its owner to be dead.

But—this was another thought—if by any chance Lady Ragnall were still alive and a prisoner upon that mountain, what they had seen was no ghost, but a shadow or *simulacrum* of a living person projected consciously or unconsciously by that person for some unknown purpose. What could the purpose be? As it chanced the answer was not difficult, and to it the words she was reported to have uttered gave a cue. Only a few hours ago, just before we turned in indeed, as I have said, we had been discussing matters. What I have not said is that in the end we arrived at the conclusion that our quest here was wild and useless and that we should do well to try to escape from the place before we became involved in a war of extermination between two branches of an obscure tribe, one of which was quite and the other semi-savage.

Indeed, although Ragnall still hung back a little, it had been arranged that I should try to purchase camels in exchange for guns, unless I could get them for nothing which might be less suspicious, and that we should attempt such an escape under cover of an expedition to kill the elephant Jana.

Supposing such a vision to be possible, then might it not have come, or been sent to deter us from this plan? It would seem so.

Thus reflecting I went to sleep worn out with useless wonderment, and did not wake again till breakfast time. That morning, when we were alone together, Ragnall said to me:

"I have been thinking over what happened, or seemed to happen last night. I am not at all a superstitious man, or one given to vain imaginings, but I am sure that Savage and I really did see and hear the spirit or the shadow of my wife. Her body it could not have been as you will admit, though how she could utter, or seem to utter, audible speech without one is more than I can tell. Also I am sure that she is captive upon yonder mountain and came to call me to rescue her. Under these circumstances I feel that it is my duty, as well as my desire, to give up any idea of leaving the country and try to find out the truth."

"And how will you do that," I asked, "seeing that no one will tell us anything?"

"By going to see for myself."

"It is impossible, Ragnall. I am too lame at present to walk half a mile, much less to climb precipices."

"I know, and that is one of the reasons why I did not suggest that you should accompany me. The other is that there is no object in all of us risking our lives. I wished to face the thing alone, but that good fellow Savage says that he will go where I go, leaving you and Hans here to make further attempts if we do not return. Our plan is to slip out of the town during the night, wearing white dresses like the Kendah, of which I have bought some for tobacco, and make the best of our way up the slope by starlight that is very bright now. When dawn comes we will try to find the road through that precipice, or over it, and for the rest trust to Providence."

Dismayed at this intelligence, I did all I could to dissuade him from such a mad venture, but quite without avail, for never did I know a more determined or more fearless man than Lord Ragnall. He had made up his mind and there was an end of the matter. Afterwards I talked with Savage, pointing out to him all the perils involved in the attempt, but likewise without avail. He was more depressed than usual, apparently on the ground that "having seen the ghost of her ladyship" he was sure he had not long to live. Still, he declared that where his master went he would go, as he preferred to die with him rather than alone.

So I was obliged to give in and with a melancholy heart to do what I could to help in the simple preparations for this crazy undertaking, realizing all the while that the only real help must come from above, since in such a case man was powerless. I should add that after consultation, Ragnall gave up the idea of adopting a Kendah disguise which was certain to be discovered, also of starting at night when the town was guarded.

That very afternoon they went, going out of the town quite openly on the pretext of shooting partridges and small buck on the lower slopes of the mountain, where both were numerous, as Harût had informed us we were quite at liberty to do. The farewell was somewhat sad, especially with Savage, who gave me a letter he had written for his old mother in England, requesting me to post it if ever again I came to a civilized land.

I did my best to put a better spirit in him but without avail. He only wrung my hand warmly, said that it was a pleasure to have known such a "real gentleman" as myself, and expressed a hope that I might get out of this hell and live to a green old age amongst Christians. Then he wiped away a tear with the cuff of his coat, touched his hat in the orthodox fashion and departed. Their outfit, I

should add, was very simple: some food in bags, a flask of spirits, two double-barrelled guns that would shoot either shot or ball, a bull's-eye lantern, matches and their pistols.

Hans walked with them a little way and, leaving them outside the town, returned.

"Why do you look so gloomy, Hans?" I asked.

"Because, Baas," he answered, twiddling his hat, "I had grown to be fond of the white man, Bena, who was always very kind to me and did not treat me like dirt as low-born whites are apt to do. Also he cooked well, and now I shall have to do that work which I do not like."

"What do you mean, Hans? The man isn't dead, is he?"

"No, Baas, but soon he will be, for the shadow of death is in his eyes."

"Then how about Lord Ragnall?"

"I saw no shadow in his eyes; I think that he will live, Baas."

I tried to get some explanation of these dark sayings out of the Hottentot, but he would add nothing to his words.

All the following night I lay awake filled with heavy fears which deepened as the hours went on. Just before dawn we heard a knocking on our door and Ragnall's voice whispering to us to open. Hans did so while I lit a candle, of which we had a good supply. As it burned up Ragnall entered, and from his face I saw at once that something terrible had happened. He went to the jar where we kept our water and drank three pannikin-fuls, one after the other. Then without waiting to be asked, he said:

"Savage is dead," and paused a while as though some awful recollection overcame him. "Listen," he went on presently. "We worked up the hill-side without firing, although we saw plenty of partridges and one buck, till just as twilight was closing in, we came to the cliff face. Here we perceived a track that ran to the mouth of a narrow cave or tunnel in the lava rock of the precipice, which looked quite unclimbable. While we were wondering what to do, eight or ten white-robed men appeared out of the shadows and seized us before we could make any resistance. After talking together for a little they took away our guns and pistols, with which some of them disappeared. Then their leader, with many bows, indicated that we were at liberty to proceed by pointing first to the mouth of the cave, and next to the top of the precipice, saying something about '*ingane*,' which I believe means a little child, does it not?"

I nodded, and he went on:

"After this they all departed down the hill, smiling in a fashion that disturbed me. We stood for a while irresolute, until it became quite dark. I asked Savage what he thought we had better do, expecting that he would say 'Return to the town.' To my surprise, he answered:

"Go on, of course, my lord. Don't let those brutes say that we white men daren't walk a step without our guns. Indeed, in any case I mean to go on, even if your lordship won't."

"Whilst he spoke he took a bull's-eye lantern from his foodbag, which had not been interfered with by the Kendah, and lit it. I stared at him amazed, for the man seemed to be animated by some tremendous purpose. Or rather it was as though a force from without had got hold of his will and were pushing him on to an unknown end. Indeed his next words showed that this was so, for he exclaimed:

"There is something drawing me into that cave, my lord. It may be death; I think it is death, but whatever it be, go I must. Perhaps you would do well to stop outside till I have seen."

"I stepped forward to catch hold of the man, who I thought had gone mad, as perhaps was the case. Before I could lay my hands on him he had run rapidly to the mouth of the cave. Of course I followed, but when I reached its entrance the star of light thrown forward by the bull's-eye lantern showed me that he was already about eight yards down the tunnel. Then I heard a terrible hissing noise and Savage exclaiming: 'Oh! my God!' twice over. As he spoke the lantern fell from his hand, but did not go out, because, as you know, it is made to burn in any position. I leapt forward and picked it from the ground, and while I was doing so became aware that Savage was running still farther into the depths of the cave. I lifted the lantern above my head and looked.

"This was what I saw: About ten paces from me was Savage with his arms outstretched and dancing—yes, dancing—first to the right and then to the left, with a kind of horrible grace and to the tune of a hideous hissing music. I held the lantern higher and perceived that beyond him, lifted eight or nine feet into the air, nearly to the roof of the tunnel in fact, was the head of the hugest snake of which I have ever heard. It was as broad as the bottom of a wheelbarrow—were it cut off I think it would fill a large wheelbarrow—while the neck upon which it was supported was quite as thick as my middle, and the undulating body behind it, which stretched far away into the darkness, was the size of an eighteen-gallon cask and glittered green and grey, lined and splashed with silver and with gold.

"It hissed and swayed its great head to the right, holding Savage with cold eyes that yet seemed to be on fire, whereon he danced to the right. It hissed again and swayed its head to the left, whereon he danced to the left. Then suddenly it reared its head right to the top of the cave and so remained for a few seconds, whereon Savage stood still, bending a little forward, as though he were bowing to the reptile. Next instant, like a flash it struck, for I saw its white fangs bury themselves in the back of Savage, who with a kind of sigh fell forward on to his face. Then there was a convulsion of those shining folds, followed by a sound as of bones being ground up in a steam-driven mortar.

"I staggered against the wall of the cave and shut my eyes for a moment, for I felt faint. When I opened them again it was to see something flat, misshapen, elongated like a reflection in a spoon, something that had been Savage lying on the floor, and stretched out over it the huge serpent studying me with its steely eyes. Then I ran; I am not ashamed to say I ran out of that horrible hole and far into the night."

"Small blame to you," I said, adding: "Hans, give me some square-face neat." For I felt as queer as though I also had been in that cave with its guardian.

"There's very little more to tell," went on Ragnall after I'd drunk the hollands. "I lost my way on the mountain-side and wandered for many hours till at last I blundered up against one of the outermost houses of the town after which things were easy. Perhaps I'd add that wherever I went on my way down the mountain it seemed to me that I heard people laughing at me in an unnatural kind of voice. That's all." After this we sat silent for a long while till at length Hans said in his unmoved tone: "The light's come, Baas. Shall I blow out the candle that it's a pity to waste? Also does the Baas wish me to cook the breakfast, now that the snake devil's making his o Bena as I hope to make mine o him before all's done. Snakes are very good to eat, Baas, if you know how to dress them in the Hottentot way."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HANS STEALS THE KEYS

A few hours later some of the White Kendah arrived at the house and very politely delivered to us Ragnall's and poor Savage's guns and pistols, which they said they had found lying in the grass on the mountain-side, and with them the bull's-eye lantern that Ragnall had thrown away in his flight; all of which articles I accepted without comment. That evening also Harût called and, after salutations, asked where Bena was as he did not see him. Then my indignation broke out:

"Oh! white-bearded father of liars," I said, "you know well that he is in the belly of the serpent which lives in the cave of the mountain."

"What, Lord!" exclaimed Harût addressing Ragnall in his peculiar English, "have you been for walk up to hole in hill? Suppose Bena want see big snake. He always very fond of snake, you know, and they very fond of him. You 'member how they come out of his pocket in your house in England? Well, he know all about snake now."

"You villain!" exclaimed Ragnall, "you murderer! I have a mind to kill you where you are."

"Why you choke me, Lord, because snake choke your man? Poor snake, he only want dinner. If you go where lion live, lion kill you. If you go where snake live, snake kill you. I tell you not to. You take no notice. Now I tell you all—go if you wish, no one stop you. Perhaps you kill snake, who knows? Only you no take gun there, please. That not allowed. When you tired of this town, go see snake. Only, 'member that not right way to House of Child. There another way which you never find."

"Look here," said Ragnall, "what is the use of all this foolery? You know very well why we are in your devilish country. It is because I believe you have stolen my wife to make her the priestess of your evil religion whatever it may be, and I want her back."

"All this great mistake," replied Harût blandly. "We no steal beautiful lady you marry because we find she not right priestess. Also Macumazana here not to look for lady but to kill elephant Jana and get pay in ivory like good business man. You, Lord, come with him as friend though we no ask you, that all. Then you try find temple of our god and snake which watch door kill your servant. Why we not kill *you*, eh?"

"Because you are afraid to," answered Ragnall boldly. "Kill me if you can and take the consequences. I am ready."

Harût studied him not without admiration.

"You very brave man," he said, "and we no wish kill you and p'raps after all everything come right in end. Only Child know about that. Also you help us fight Black Kendah by and by. So, Lord, you quite safe unless you big fool and go call on snake in cave. He very hungry snake and soon want more dinner. You hear, Light-in-Darkness, Lord-of-the-Fire," he added suddenly turning on Hans who was squatted near by twiddling his hat with a face that for absolute impassiveness resembled a deal board. "You hear, he very hungry snake, and you make nice tea for him."

Hans rolled his little yellow eyes without even turning his head until they rested on the stately countenance of Harût, and answered in Bantu:

"I hear, Liar-with-the-White-Beard, but what have I to do with this matter? Jana is my enemy who would have killed Macumazana, my master, not your dirty snake. What is the good of this snake of yours? If it were any good, why does it not kill Jana whom you hate? And if it is no good, why do you not take a stick and knock it on the head? If you are afraid I will do so for you if you pay me. That for your snake," and very energetically he spat upon the floor.

"All right," said Harût, still speaking in English, "you go kill snake. Go when you like, no one say no. Then we give you new name. Then we call you Lord-of-the-Snake."

As Hans, who now was engaged in lighting his corn-cob pipe, did not deign to answer these remarks, Harût turned to me and said:

"Lord Macumazana, your leg still bad, eh? Well, I bring you some ointment what make it quite well; it holy ointment come from the Child. We want you get well quick."

Then suddenly he broke into Bantu. "My Lord, war draws near. The Black Kendah are gathering all their strength to attack us and we must have your aid. I go down to the River Tava to see to certain matters, as to the reaping of the outlying crops and other things. Within a week I will be back; then we must talk again, for by that time, if you will use the ointment that I have given you, you will be as well as ever you were in your life. Rub it on your leg, and mix a piece as large as a mealie grain in water and swallow it at night. It is not poison, see," and taking the cover off a little earthenware pot which he produced he scooped from it with his finger some of the contents, which looked like lard, put it on his tongue and swallowed it.

Then he rose and departed with his usual bows.

Here I may state that I used Harût's prescription with the most excellent results. That night I took a dose in water, very nasty it was, and rubbed my leg with the stuff, to find that next morning all pain had left me and that, except for some local weakness, I was practically quite well. I kept the rest of the salve for years, and it proved a perfect specific in cases of sciatica and rheumatism. Now, alas! it is all used and no recipe is available from which it can be made up again.

The next few days passed uneventfully. As soon as I could walk I began to go about the town, which was nothing but a scattered village much resembling those to be seen on the eastern coasts of Africa. Nearly all the men seemed to be away, making preparations for the harvest, I suppose, and as the women shut themselves up in their houses after the Oriental fashion, though the few that I saw about were unveiled and rather good-looking, I did not gather any intelligence worth noting.

To tell the truth I cannot remember being in a more uninteresting place than this little town with its extremely uncommunicative population which, it seemed to me, lived under a shadow of fear that prevented all gaiety. Even the children, of whom there were not many, crept about in a depressed fashion and talked in a low voice. I never saw any of them playing games or heard them shouting and laughing, as young people do in most parts of the world. For the rest we were very well looked after. Plenty of food was provided for us and every thought taken for our comfort. Thus a strong and quiet pony was brought for me to ride because of my lameness. I had only to go out of the house and call and it arrived from somewhere, all ready saddled and bridled, in charge of a lad who appeared to be dumb. At any rate when I spoke to him he would not answer.

Mounted on this pony I took one or two rides along the southern slopes of the mountain on the old pretext of shooting for the pot. Hans accompanied me on these occasions, but was, I noted, very silent and thoughtful, as though he were hunting something up and down his tortuous intelligence. Once we got quite near to the mouth of the cave or tunnel where poor Savage had met his horrid end. As we stood studying it a white-robed man whose head was shaved, which made me think he must be a priest, came up and asked me mockingly why we did not go through the tunnel and see what lay beyond, adding, almost in the words of Harût himself, that none would attempt to interfere with us as the road was open to any who could travel it. By way of answer I only smiled and put him a few questions about a very beautiful breed of goats with long silky hair, some of which he seemed to be engaged in herding. He replied that these goats were sacred, being the food of "one who dwelt in the Mountain who only ate when the moon changed."

When I inquired who this person was he said with his unpleasant smile that I had better go through the tunnel and see for myself, an invitation which I did not accept.

That evening Harût appeared unexpectedly, looking very grave and troubled. He was in a great hurry and only stayed long enough to congratulate me upon the excellent effects of his ointment, since "no man could fight Jana on one leg."

I asked him when the fight with Jana was to come off. He replied:

"Lord, I go up to the Mountain to attend the Feast of the First-fruits, which is held at sunrise on the day of the new moon. After the offering the Oracle will speak and we shall learn when there will be war with Jana, and perchance other things."

"May we not attend this feast, Harût, who are weary of doing nothing here?"

"Certainly," he answered with his grave bow. "That is, if you come unarmed; for to appear before the Child with arms is death. You know the road; it runs through yonder cave and the forest beyond the cave. Take it when you will, Lord."

"Then if we can pass the cave we shall be welcome at the feast?"

"You will be very welcome. None shall hurt you there, going or returning. I swear it by the Child. Oh! Macumazana," he added, smiling a little, "why do you talk folly, who know well that one lives in yonder cave whom none may look upon and love, as Bena learned not long ago? You are thinking that perhaps you might kill this Dweller in the cave with your weapons. Put away that dream, seeing that henceforth those who watch you have orders to see that none of you leave this house carrying so much as a knife. Indeed, unless you promise me that this shall be so you will not be suffered to set foot outside its garden until I return again. Now do you promise?"

I thought a while and, drawing the two others aside out of hearing, asked them their opinion.

Ragnall was at first unwilling to give any such promise, but Hans said:

"Baas, it is better to go free and unhurt without guns and knives than to become a prisoner once, as you were among the Black Kendah. Often there is but a short step between the prison and the grave."

Both Ragnall and I acknowledged the force of this argument and in the end we gave the promise, speaking one by one.

"It is enough," said Harût; "moreover, know, Lord, that among us White Kendah he who breaks an oath is put across the River Tava unarmed to make report thereof to Jana, Father of Lies. Now farewell. If we do not meet at the Feast of the First-fruits on the day of the new moon, whither once more I invite you, we can talk together here after I have heard the voice of the Oracle."

Then he mounted a camel which awaited him outside the gate and departed with an escort of twelve men, also riding camels.

"There is some other road up that mountain, Quatermain," said Ragnall. "A camel could sooner pass through the eye of a needle than through that dreadful cave, even if it were empty."

"Probably," I answered, "but as we don't know where it is and I dare say it lies miles from here, we need not trouble our heads on the matter. The cave is *our* only road, which means that there is *no* road."

That evening at supper we discovered that Hans was missing; also that he had got possession of my keys and broken into a box containing liquor, for there it stood open in the cooking-hut with the keys in the lock.

"He has gone on the drink," I said to Ragnall, "and upon my soul I don't wonder at it; for sixpence I would follow his example."

Then we went to bed. Next morning we breakfasted rather late, since when one has nothing to do there is no object in getting up early. As I was preparing to go to the cook-house to boil some eggs, to our astonishment Hans appeared with a kettle of coffee.

"Hans," I said, "you are a thief."

"Yes, Baas," answered Hans.

"You have been at the gin box and taking that poison."

"Yes, Baas, I have been taking poison. Also I took a walk and all is right now. The Baas must not be angry, for it is very dull doing nothing here. Will the Baases eat porridge as well as eggs?"

As it was no use scolding him I said that we would. Moreover, there was something about his manner which made me suspicious, for really he did not look like a person who has just been very drunk.

After we had finished breakfast he came and squatted down before me. Having lit his pipe he asked suddenly:

"Would the Baases like to walk through that cave to-night? If so, there will be no trouble."

"What do you mean?" I asked, suspecting that he was still drunk.

"I mean, Baas, that the Dweller-in-the-cave is fast asleep."

"How do you know that, Hans?"

"Because I am the nurse who put him to sleep, Baas, though he kicked and cried a great deal. He is asleep; he will wake no more. Baas, I have killed the Father of Serpents."

"Hans," I said, "now I am sure that you are still drunk, although you do not show it outside."

"Hans," added Ragnall, to whom I had translated as much of this as he did not understand, "it is too early in the day to tell good stories. How could you possibly have killed that serpent without a gun—for you took none with you—or with it either for that matter?"

"Will the Baases come and take a walk through the cave?" asked Hans with a snigger.

"Not till I am quite sure that you are sober," I replied; then, remembering certain other events in this worthy's career, added, "Hans, if you do not tell us the story at once I will beat you."

"There isn't much story, Baas," replied Hans between long sucks at his pipe, which had nearly gone out, "because the thing was so easy. The Baas is very clever and so is the Lord Baas, why then can they never see the stones that lie under their noses? It is because their eyes are always fixed upon the mountains between this world and the next. But the poor Hottentot, who looks at the ground to be sure that he does not stumble, ah! he sees the stones. Now, Baas, did you not hear that man in a night shirt with his head shaved say that those goats were food for One who dwelt in the mountain?"

"I did. What of it, Hans?"

"Who would be the One who dwelt in the mountain except the Father of Snakes in the cave, Baas? Ah, now for the first time you see the stone that lay at your feet all the while. And, Baas, did not the bald man add that this One in the mountain was only fed at new and full moon, and is not to-morrow the day of new moon, and therefore would he not be very hungry on the day before new moon, that is, last night?"

"No doubt, Hans; but how can you kill a snake by feeding it?"

"Oh! Baas, you may eat things that make you ill, and so can a snake. Now you will guess the rest, so I had better go to wash the dishes."

"Whether I guess or do not guess," I replied sagely, the latter being the right hypothesis, "the dishes can wait, Hans, since the Lord there has not guessed; so continue."

"Very well, Baas. In one of those boxes are some pounds of stuff which, when mixed with water, is used for preserving skins and skulls."

"You mean the arsenic crystals," I said with a flash of inspiration.

"I don't know what you call them, Baas. At first I thought they were hard sugar and stole some once, when the real sugar was left behind, to put into the coffee—without telling the Baas, because it was my fault that the sugar was left behind."

"Great Heavens!" I ejaculated, "then why aren't we all dead?"

"Because at the last moment, Baas, I thought I would make sure, so I put some of the hard sugar into hot milk and, when it had melted, I gave it to that yellow dog which once bit me in the leg, the one that came from Beza-Town, Baas, that I told you had run away. He was a very greedy dog, Baas, and drank up the milk at once. Then he gave a howl, twisted about, foamed at the mouth and died and I buried him at once. After that I threw some more of the large sugar mixed with mealies to the fowls that we brought with us for cooking. Two cocks and a hen swallowed them by mistake for the corn. Presently they fell on their backs, kicked a little and died. Some of the Mazitu, who were great thieves, stole those dead fowls, Baas. After this, Baas, I thought it best not to use that sugar in the coffee, and later on Bena told me that it was deadly poison. Well, Baas, it came into my mind that if I could make that great snake swallow enough of this poison, he, too, might die.

"So I stole your keys, as I often do, Baas, when I want anything, because you leave them lying about everywhere, and to deceive you first opened one of the boxes that are full of square-face and brandy and left it open, for I wished you to think that I had just gone to get drunk like anybody else. Then I opened another box and got out two one-pound tins of the sugar which kills dogs and fowls. Half a pound of it I melted in boiling water with some real sugar to make the stuff sweet, and put it into a bottle. The rest I tied with string in twelve little packets in the soft paper which is in one of the boxes, and put them in my pocket. Then I went up the hill, Baas, to the place where I saw those goats are kraaled at night behind a reed fence. As I had hoped, no one was watching them because there are no tigers so near this town, and man does not steal the goats that are sacred. I went into the kraal and found a fat young ewe which had a kid. I dragged it out and, taking it behind some stones, I made its leg fast with a bit of cord and poured this stuff out of the bottle all over its skin, rubbing it in well. Then I tied the twelve packets of hard poison-sugar everywhere about its body, making them very fast deep in the long hair so that they could not tumble or rub off.

"After this I untied the goat, led it near to the mouth of the cave and held it there for a time while it kept on bleating for its kid. Next I took it almost up to the cave, wondering how I should drive it in, for I did not wish to enter there myself, Baas. As it happened I need not have troubled about that. When the goat was within five yards of the cave, it stopped bleating, stood still and shivered. Then it began to go forward with little jumps, as though it did not want to go, yet must do so. Also, Baas, I felt as though I wished to go with it. So I lay down and put my heels against a rock, leaving go of the goat.

"For now, Baas, I did not care where that goat went so long as I could keep out of the hole where dwelt the Father of Serpents that had eaten Bena. But it was all right, Baas; the goat knew what it had to do and did it, jumping straight into the cave. As it entered it turned its head and looked at me. I could see its eyes in the starlight, and, Baas, they were dreadful. I think it knew what was coming and did not like it at all. And yet it had to walk on because it could not help it. Just like a man going to the devil, Baas!

"Holding on to the stone I peered after it, for I had heard something stirring in the cave making a soft noise like a white lady's dress upon the floor. There in the blackness I saw two little sparks of fire, which were the eyes of the serpent, Baas. Then I heard a sound of hissing like four big kettles boiling all at once, and a little bleat from the goat. After this there was a noise as of men wrestling, followed by another noise as of bones breaking, and lastly, yet another sucking noise as of a pump that won't draw up the water. Then everything grew nice and quiet and I went some way off, sat down a little to one side of the cave, and waited to see if anything happened.

"It must have been nearly an hour later that something did begin to happen, Baas. It was as though sacks filled with chaff were being beaten against stone walls there in the cave. Ah! thought I to myself, your stomach is beginning to ache, Eater-up-of-Bena, and, as that goat had little horns on its head—to which I tied two of the bags of the poison, Baas—and, like all snakes, no doubt you have spikes in your throat pointing downwards, you won't be able to get it up again. Then—I expect this was after the poison-sugar had begun to melt nicely in the serpent's stomach, Baas—there was a noise as though a whole company of girls were dancing a war-dance in the cave to a music of hisses.

“And then—oh! then, Baas, of a sudden that Father of Serpents came out. I tell you, Baas, that when I saw him in the bright starlight my hair stood up upon my head, for never has there been such another snake in the whole world. Those that live in trees and eat bucks in Zululand, of whose skins men make waistcoats and slippers, are but babies compared to this one. He came out, yard after yard of him. He wriggled about, he stood upon his tail with his head where the top of a tree might be, he made himself into a ring, he bit at stones and at his own stomach, while I hid behind my rock praying to your reverend father that he might not see me. Then at last he rushed away down the hill, faster than any horse could gallop.

“Now I hoped that he had gone for good and thought of going myself. Still I feared to do so lest I should meet him somewhere, so I made up my mind to wait till daylight. It was as well, Baas, for about half an hour later he came back again. Only now he could not jump, he could only crawl. Never in my life did I see a snake look so sick, Baas. Into the cave he went and lay there hissing. By degrees the hissing grew very faint, till at length they died away altogether. I waited another half-hour, Baas, and then I grew so curious that I thought that I would go to look in the cave.

“I lit the little lantern I had with me and, holding it in one hand and my stick in the other, I crept into the hole. Before I had crawled ten paces I saw something white stretched along the ground. It was the belly of the great snake, Baas, which lay upon its back quite dead.

“I know that it was dead, for I lit three wax matches, setting them to burn upon its tail and it never stirred, as any live snake will do when it feels fire. Then I came home, Baas, feeling very proud because I had outwitted that great-grandfather of all snakes who killed Bena my friend, and had made the way clear for us to walk through the cave.

“That is all the story, Baas. Now I must go to wash those dishes,” and without waiting for any comment off he went, leaving us marvelling at his wit, resource and courage.

“What next?” I asked presently.

“Nothing till to-night,” answered Ragnall with determination, “when I am going to look at the snake which the noble Hans has killed and whatever lies beyond the cave, as you will remember Harût invited us to do unmolested, if we could.”

“Do you think Harût will keep his word, Ragnall?”

“On the whole, yes, and if he doesn’t I don’t care. Anything is better than sitting here in this suspense.”

“I agree as to Harût, because we are too valuable to be killed just now, if for no other reason; also as to the suspense, which is unendurable. Therefore I will walk with you to look at that snake, Ragnall, and so no doubt will Hans. The exercise will do my leg good.”

“Do you think it wise?” he asked doubtfully; “in your case, I mean.”

“I think it most unwise that we should separate any more. We had better stand or fall altogether; further, we do not seem to have any luck apart.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE SANCTUARY AND THE OATH

That evening shortly after sundown the three of us started boldly from our house wearing over our clothes the Kendah dresses which Ragnall had bought, and carrying nothing save sticks in our hands, some food and the lantern in our pockets. On the outskirts of the town we were met by certain Kendah, one of whom I knew, for I had often ridden by his side on our march across the desert.

"Have any of you arms upon you, Lord Macumazana?" he asked, looking curiously at us and our white robes.

"None," I answered. "Search us if you will."

"Your word is sufficient," he replied with the grave courtesy of his people. "If you are unarmed we have orders to let you go where you wish however you may be dressed. Yet, Lord," he whispered to me, "I pray you do not enter the cave, since One lives there who strikes and does not miss, One whose kiss is death. I pray it for your own sakes, also for ours who need you."

"We shall not wake him who sleeps in the cave," I answered enigmatically, as we departed rejoicing, for now we had learned that the Kendah did not yet know of the death of the serpent.

An hour's walk up the hill, guided by Hans, brought us to the mouth of the tunnel. To tell the truth I could have wished it had been longer, for as we drew near all sorts of doubts assailed me. What if Hans really had been drinking and invented this story to account for his absence? What if the snake had recovered from a merely temporary indisposition? What if it had a wife and family living in that cave, every one of them thirsting for vengeance?

Well, it was too late to hesitate now, but secretly I hoped that one of the others would prefer to lead the way. We reached the place and listened. It was silent as a tomb. Then that brave fellow Hans lit the lantern and said:

"Do you stop here, Baases, while I go to look. If you hear anything happen to me, you will have time to run away," words that made me feel somewhat ashamed of myself.

However, knowing that he was quick as a weasel and silent as a cat, we let him go. A minute or two later suddenly he reappeared out of the darkness, for he had turned the metal shield over the bull's-eye of the lantern, and even in that light I could see that he was grinning.

"It is all right, Baas," he said. "The Father of Serpents has really gone to that land whither he sent Bena, where no doubt he is now roasting in the fires of hell, and I don't see any others. Come and look at him."

So in we went and there, true enough, upon the floor of the cave lay the huge reptile stone dead and already much swollen. I don't know how long it was, for part of its body was twisted into coils, so I will only say that it was by far the most enormous snake that I have ever seen. It is true that I have heard of such reptiles in different parts of Africa, but hitherto I had always put them down as fabulous creatures transformed into and worshipped as local gods. Also this particular specimen was, I presume, of a new variety, since, according to Ragnall, it both struck like the cobra or the adder, and crushed like the boa-constrictor. It is possible, however, that he was mistaken on this point; I do not know, since I had no time, or indeed inclination, to examine its head for the poison fangs, and when next I passed that way it was gone.

I shall never forget the stench of that cave. It was horrible, which is not to be wondered at seeing that probably this creature had dwelt there for centuries, since these large snakes are said to be as long lived as tortoises, and, being sacred, of course it had never lacked for food. Everywhere lay piles of cast bones, amongst one of which I noticed fragments of a human skull, perhaps that of poor Savage. Also the projecting rocks in the place were covered with great pieces of snake skin, doubtless rubbed off by the reptile when once a year it changed its coat.

For a while we gazed at the loathsome and still glittering creature, then pushed on fearful lest we should stumble upon more of its kind. I suppose that it must have been solitary, a kind of serpent rogue, as Jana was an elephant rogue, for we met none and, if the information which I obtained afterwards may be believed, there was no species at all resembling it in the country. What its origin may have been I never learned. All the Kendah could or would say about it was that it had lived in this hole from the beginning and that Black Kendah prisoners, or malefactors, were sometimes given to it to kill, as White Kendah prisoners were given to Jana.

The cave itself proved to be not very long, perhaps one hundred and fifty feet, no more. It was not an artificial but a natural hollow in the lava rock, which I suppose had once been blown through it by an outburst of steam. Towards the farther end it narrowed so much that I began to fear there might be no exit. In this I was mistaken, however, for at its termination we found a hole just large enough for a man to walk in upright and so difficult to climb through that it became clear to us that certainly this was not the path by which the White Kendah approached their sanctuary.

Scrambling out of this aperture with thankfulness, we found ourselves upon the slope of a kind of huge ditch of lava which ran first downwards for about eighty paces, then up again to the base of the great cone of the inner mountain which was covered with dense forest.

I presume that the whole formation of this peculiar hill was the result of a violent volcanic action in the early ages of the earth. But as I do not understand such matters I will not dilate upon them further than to say that, although comparatively small, it bore a certain resemblance to other extinct volcanoes which I had met with in different parts of Africa.

We climbed down to the bottom of the ditch that from its general appearance might have been dug out by some giant race as a protection to their stronghold, and up its farther side to where the forest began on deep and fertile soil. Why there should have been

rich earth here and none in the ditch is more than we could guess, but perhaps the presence of springs of water in this part of the mount may have been a cause. At any rate it was so.

The trees in this forest were huge and of a variety of cedar, but did not grow closely together; also there was practically no undergrowth, perhaps for the reason that their dense, spreading tops shut out the light. As I saw afterwards both trunks and boughs were clothed with long grey moss, which even at midday gave the place a very ghostly appearance. The darkness beneath those trees was intense, literally we could not see an inch before our faces. Yet rather than stand still we struggled on, Hans leading the way, for his instincts were quicker than ours. The steep rise of the ground beneath our feet told us that we were going uphill, as we wished to do, and from time to time I consulted a pocket compass I carried by the light of a match, knowing from previous observations that the top of the Holy Mount lay due north.

Thus for hour after hour we crept up and on, occasionally butting into the trunk of a tree or stumbling over a fallen bough, but meeting with no other adventures or obstacles of a physical kind. Of moral, or rather mental, obstacles there were many, since to all of us the atmosphere of this forest was as that of a haunted house. It may have been the embracing darkness, or the sigh of the night wind amongst the boughs and mosses, or the sense of the imminent dangers that we had passed and that still awaited us. Or it may have been unknown horrors connected with this place of which some spiritual essence still survived, for without doubt localities preserve such influences, which can be felt by the sensitive among living things, especially in favouring conditions of fear and gloom. At any rate I never experienced more subtle and yet more penetrating terrors than I did upon that night, and afterwards Ragnall confessed to me that my case was his own. Black as it was I thought that I saw apparitions, among them glaring eyes and that of the elephant Jana standing in front of me with his trunk raised against the bole of a cedar. I could have sworn that I saw him, nor was I reassured when Hans whispered to me below his breath, for here we did not seem to dare to raise our voices:

"Look, Baas. Is it Jana glowing like hot iron who stands yonder?"

"Don't be a fool," I answered. "How can Jana be here and, if he were here, how could we see him in the night?" But as I said the words I remembered Harût had told us that Jana had been met with on the Holy Mount "in the spirit or in the flesh." However this may be, next instant he was gone and we beheld him or his shadow no more. Also we thought that from time to time we heard voices speaking all around us, now here, now there and now in the tree tops above our heads, though what they said we could not catch or understand.

Thus the long night wore away. Our progress was very slow, but guided by occasional glimpses at the compass we never stopped but twice, once when we found ourselves apparently surrounded by tree boles and fallen boughs, and once when we got into swampy ground. Then we took the risk of lighting the lantern, and by its aid picked our way through these difficult places. By degrees the trees grew fewer so that we could see the stars between their tops. This was a help to us as I knew that one of them, which I had carefully noted, shone at this season of the year directly over the cone of the mountain, and we were enabled to steer thereby.

It must have been not more than half an hour before the dawn that Hans, who was leading—we were pushing our way through thick bushes at the time—halted hurriedly, saying:

"Stop, Baas, we are on the edge of a cliff. When I thrust my stick forward it stands on nothing."

Needless to say we pulled up dead and so remained without stirring an inch, for who could say what might be beyond us? Ragnall wished to examine the ground with the lantern. I was about to consent, though doubtfully, when suddenly I heard voices murmuring and through the screen of bushes saw lights moving at a little distance, forty feet or more below us. Then we gave up all idea of making further use of the lantern and crouched still as mice in our bushes, waiting for the dawn.

It came at last. In the east appeared a faint pearly flush that by degrees spread itself over the whole arch of the sky and was welcomed by the barking of monkeys and the call of birds in the depths of the dew-steeped forest. Next a ray from the unrisen sun, a single spear of light shot suddenly across the sky, and as it appeared, from the darkness below us arose a sound of chanting, very low and sweet to hear. It died away and for a little while there was silence broken only by a rustling sound like to that of people taking their seats in a dark theatre. Then a woman began to sing in a beautiful, contralto voice, but in what language I do not know, for I could not catch the words, if these were words and not only musical notes.

I felt Ragnall trembling beside me and in a whisper asked him what was the matter. He answered, also in a whisper:

"I believe that is my wife's voice."

"If so, I beg you to control yourself," I replied.

Now the skies began to flame and the light to pour itself into a misty hollow beneath us like streams of many-coloured gems into a bowl, driving away the shadows. By degrees these vanished; by degrees we saw everything. Beneath us was an amphitheatre, on the southern wall of which we were seated, though it was not a wall but a lava cliff between forty and fifty feet high which served as a wall. The amphitheatre itself, however, almost exactly resembled those of the ancients which I had seen in pictures and Ragnall had visited in Italy, Greece, and Southern France. It was oval in shape and not very large, perhaps the flat space at the bottom may have covered something over an acre, but all round this oval ran tiers of seats cut in the lava of the crater. For without doubt this was the crater of an extinct volcano.

Moreover, in what I will call the arena, stood a temple that in its main outlines, although small, exactly resembled those still to be seen in Egypt. There was the gateway or pylon; there the open outer court with columns round it supporting roofed cloisters, which, as we ascertained afterwards, were used as dwelling-places by the priests. There beyond and connected with the first by a short passage was a second rather smaller court, also open to the sky, and beyond this again, built like all the rest of the temple of lava blocks, a roofed erection measuring about twelve feet square, which I guessed at once must be the sanctuary.

This temple was, as I have said, small, but extremely well proportioned, every detail of it being in the most excellent taste though unornamented by sculpture or painting. I have to add that in front of the sanctuary door stood a large block of lava, which I concluded was an altar, and in front of this a stone seat and a basin, also of stone, supported upon a very low tripod. Further, behind the sanctuary was a square house with window-places.

At the moment of our first sight of this place the courts were empty, but on the benches of the amphitheatre were seated about three hundred persons, male and female, the men to the north and the women to the south. They were all clad in pure white robes, the heads of the men being shaved and those of the women veiled, but leaving the face exposed. Lastly, there were two roadways into the amphitheatre, one running east and one west through tunnels hollowed in the encircling rock of the crater, both of which roads were closed at the mouths of the tunnels by massive wooden double doors, seventeen or eighteen feet in height. From these roadways and their doors we learned two things. First, that the cave where had lived the Father of Serpents was, as I had suspected, not the real

approach to the shrine of the Child, but only a blind; and, secondly, that the ceremony we were about to witness was secret and might only be attended by the priestly class or families of this strange tribe.

Scarcely was it full daylight when from the cells of the cloisters round the outer court issued twelve priests headed by Harût himself, who looked very dignified in his white garment, each of whom carried on a wooden platter ears of different kinds of corn. Then from the cells of the southern cloister issued twelve women, or rather girls, for all were young and very comely, who ranged themselves alongside of the men. These also carried wooden platters, and on them blooming flowers.

At a sign they struck up a religious chant and began to walk forward through the passage that led from the first court to the second. Arriving in front of the altar they halted and one by one, first a priest and then a priestess, set down the platters of offerings, piling them above each other into a cone. Next the priests and the priestesses ranged themselves in lines on either side of the altar, and Harût took a platter of corn and a platter of flowers in his hands. These he held first towards that quarter of the sky in which swam the invisible new moon, secondly towards the rising sun, and thirdly towards the doors of the sanctuary, making genuflections and uttering some chanted prayer, the words of which we could not hear.

A pause followed, that was succeeded by a sudden outburst of song wherein all the audience took part. It was a very sonorous and beautiful song or hymn in some language which I did not understand, divided into four verses, the end of each verse being marked by the bowing of every one of those many singers towards the east, towards the west, and finally towards the altar.

Another pause till suddenly the doors of the sanctuary were thrown wide and from between them issued—the goddess Isis of the Egyptians as I have seen her in pictures! She was wrapped in closely clinging draperies of material so thin that the whiteness of her body could be seen beneath. Her hair was outspread before her, and she wore a head-dress or bonnet of glittering feathers from the front of which rose a little golden snake. In her arms she bore what at that distance seemed to be a naked child. With her came two women, walking a little behind her and supporting her arms, who also wore feather bonnets but without the golden snake, and were clad in tight-fitting, transparent garments.

“My God!” whispered Ragnall, “it is my wife!”

“Then be silent and thank Him that she is alive and well,” I answered.

The goddess Isis, or the English lady—in that excitement I did not reck which—stood still while the priests and priestesses and all the audience, who, gathered on the upper benches of the amphitheatre, could see her above the wall of the inner court, raised a thrice-repeated and triumphant cry of welcome. Then Harût and the first priestess lifted respectively an ear of corn and a flower from the two topmost platters and held these first to the lips of the child in her arms and secondly to her lips.

This ceremony concluded, the two attendant women led her round the altar to the stone chair, upon which she seated herself. Next fire was kindled in the bowl on the tripod in front of the chair, how I could not see; but perhaps it was already smouldering there. At any rate it burnt up in a thin blue flame, on to which Harût and the head priestess threw something that caused the flame to turn to smoke. Then Isis, for I prefer to call her so while describing this ceremony, was caused to bend her head forward, so that it was enveloped in the smoke exactly as she and I had done some years before in the drawing-room at Ragnall Castle. Presently the smoke died away and the two attendants with the feathered head-dresses straightened her in the chair where she sat still holding the babe against her breast as she might have done to nurse it, but with her head bent forward like that of a person in a swoon.

Now Harût stepped forward and appeared to speak to the goddess at some length, then fell back again and waited, till in the midst of an intense silence she rose from her seat and, fixing her wide eyes on the heavens, spoke in her turn, for although we heard nothing of what she said, in that clear, morning light we could see her lips moving. For some minutes she spoke, then sat down again upon the chair and remained motionless, staring straight in front of her. Harût advanced again, this time to the front of the altar, and, taking his stand upon a kind of stone step, addressed the priests and priestesses and all the encircling audience in a voice so loud and clear that I could distinguish and understand every word he said.

“The Guardian of the heavenly Child, the Nurse decreed, the appointed Nurturer, She who is the shadow of her that bore the Child, She who in her day bears the symbol of the Child and is consecrated to its service from of old, She whose heart is filled with the wisdom of the Child and who utters the decrees of Heaven, has spoken. Harken now to the voice of the Oracle uttered in answer to the questions of me, Harût, the head priest of the Eternal Child during my life-days. Thus says the Oracle, the Guardian, the Nurturer, marked like all who went before her with the holy mark of the new moon. She on whom the spirit, flitting from generation to generation, has alighted for a while. ‘O people of the White Kendah, worshippers of the Child in this land and descendants of those who for thousands of years worshipped the Child in a more ancient land until the barbarians drove it thence with the remnant that remained. War is upon you, O people of the White Kendah. Jana the evil one; he whose other name is Set, he whose other name is Satan, he who for this while lives in the shape of an elephant, he who is worshipped by the thousands whom once you conquered, and whom still you bridle by my might, comes up against you. The Darkness wars against the Daylight, the Evil wars against the Good. My curse has fallen upon the people of Jana, my hail has smitten them, their corn and their cattle; they have no food to eat. But they are still strong for war and there is food in your land. They come to take your corn; Jana comes to trample your god. The Evil comes to destroy the Good, the Night to Devour the Day. It is the last of many battles. How shall you conquer, O People of the Child? Not by your own strength, for you are few in number and Jana is very strong. Not by the strength of the Child, for the Child grows weak and old, the days of its dominion are almost done, and its worship is almost outworn. Here alone that worship lingers, but new gods, who are still the old gods, press on to take its place and to lead it to its rest.’

“How then shall you conquer that, when the Child has departed to its own place, a remnant of you may still remain? In one way only—so says the Guardian, the Nurturer of the Child speaking with the voice of the Child; by the help of those whom you have summoned to your aid from far. There were four of them, but one you have suffered to be slain in the maw of the Watcher in the cave. It was an evil deed, O sons and daughters of the Child, for as the Watcher is now dead, so ere long many of you who planned this deed must die who, had it not been for that man’s blood, would have lived on a while. Why did you do this thing? That you might keep a secret, the secret of the theft of a woman, that you might continue to act a lie which falls upon your head like a stone from heaven.

“Thus saith the Child: ‘Lift no hand against the three who remain, and what they shall ask, that give, for thus alone shall some of you be saved from Jana and those who serve him, even though the Guardian and the Child be taken away and the Child itself returned to its own place.’ These are the words of the Oracle uttered at the Feast of the First-fruits, the words that cannot be changed and mayhap its last.”

Harût ceased, and there was silence while this portentous message sank into the minds of his audience. At length they seemed to understand its ominous nature and from them all there arose a universal, simultaneous groan. As it died away the two attendants dressed as goddesses assisted the personification of the Lady Isis to rise from her seat and, opening the robes upon her breast, pointed to something beneath her throat, doubtless that birthmark shaped like the new moon which made her so sacred in their eyes since she who bore it and she alone could fill her holy office.

All the audience and with them the priests and priestesses bowed before her. She lifted the symbol of the Child, holding it high above her head, whereon once more they bowed with the deepest veneration. Then still holding the effigy aloft, she turned and with her two attendants passed into the sanctuary and doubtless thence by a covered way into the house beyond. At any rate we saw her no more.

As soon as she was gone the congregation, if I may call it so, leaving their seats, swarmed down into the outer court of the temple through its eastern gate, which was now opened. Here the priests proceeded to distribute among them the offerings taken from the altar, giving a grain of corn to each of the men to eat and a flower to each of the women, which flower she kissed and hid in the bosom of her robe. Evidently it was a kind of sacrament.

Ragnall lifted himself a little upon his hands and knees, and I saw that his eyes glowed and his face was very pale.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Demand that those people give me back my wife, whom they have stolen. Don't try to stop me, Quatermain, I mean what I say."

"But, but," I stammered, "they never will and we are but three unarmed men."

Hans lifted up his little yellow face between us.

"Baas," he hissed, "I have a thought. The Lord Baas wishes to get the lady dressed like a bird as to her head and like one for burial as to her body, who is, he says, his wife. But for us to take her from among so many is impossible. Now what did that old witch-doctor Harût declare just now? He declared, speaking for his fetish, that by our help alone the White Kendah can resist the hosts of the Black Kendah and that no harm must be done to us if the White Kendah would continue to live. So it seems, Baas, that we have something to sell which the White Kendah must buy, namely our help against the Black Kendah, for if we will not fight for them, they believe that they cannot conquer their enemies and kill the devil Jana. Well now, supposing that the Baas says that our price is the white woman dressed like a bird, to be delivered over to us when we have defeated the Black Kendah and killed Jana—after which they will have no more use for her. And supposing that the Baas says that if they refuse to pay that price we will burn all our powder and cartridges so that the rifles are no use? Is there not a path to walk on here?"

"Perhaps," I answered. "Something of the sort was working in my mind but I had no time to think it out."

Turning, I explained the idea to Ragnall, adding:

"I pray you not to be rash. If you are, not only may we be killed, which does not so much matter, but it is very probable that even if they spare us they will put an end to your wife rather than suffer one whom they look upon as holy and who is necessary to their faith in its last struggle to be separated from her charge of the Child."

This was a fortunate argument of mine and one which went home.

"To lose her now would be more than I could bear," he muttered.

"Then will you promise to let me try to manage this affair and not to interfere with me and show violence?"

He hesitated a moment and answered:

"Yes, I promise, for you two are cleverer than I am and—I cannot trust my judgment."

"Good," I said, assuming an air of confidence which I did not feel. "Now we will go down to call upon Harût and his friends. I want to have a closer look at that temple."

So behind our screen of bushes we wriggled back a little distance till we knew that the slope of the ground would hide us when we stood up. Then as quickly as we could we made our way eastwards for something over a quarter of a mile and after this turned to the north. As I expected, beyond the ring of the crater we found ourselves on the rising, tree-clad bosom of the mountain and, threading our path through the cedars, came presently to that track or roadway which led to the eastern gate of the amphitheatre. This road we followed unseen until presently the gateway appeared before us. We walked through it without attracting any attention, perhaps because all the people were either talking together, or praying, or perhaps because like themselves we were wrapped in white robes. At the mouth of the tunnel we stopped and I called out in a loud voice:

"The white lords and their servant have come to visit Harût, as he invited them to do. Bring us, we pray you, into the presence of Harût."

Everyone wheeled round and stared at us standing there in the shadow of the gateway tunnel, for the sun behind us was still low. My word, how they did stare! A voice cried:

"Kill them! Kill these strangers who desecrate our temple."

"What!" I answered. "Would you kill those to whom your high-priest has given safe-conduct; those moreover by whose help alone, as your Oracle has just declared, you can hope to slay Jana and destroy his hosts?"

"How do they know that?" shouted another voice. "They are magicians!"

"Yes," I remarked, "all magic does not dwell in the hearts of the White Kendah. If you doubt it, go to look at the Watcher in the Cave whom your Oracle told you is dead. You will find that it did not lie."

As I spoke a man rushed through the gates, his white robe streaming on the wind, shouting as he emerged from the tunnel:

"O Priests and Priestesses of the Child, the ancient serpent is dead. I whose office it is to feed the serpent on the day of the new moon have found him dead in his house."

"You hear," I interpolated calmly. "The Father of Snakes is dead. If you want to know how, I will tell you. We looked on it and it died."

They might have answered that poor Savage also looked on it with the result that *he* died, but luckily it did not occur to them to do so. On the contrary, they just stood still and stared at us like a flock of startled sheep.

Presently the sheep parted and the shepherd in the shape of Harût appeared looking, I reflected, the very picture of Abraham softened by a touch of the melancholia of Job, that is, as I have always imagined those patriarchs. He bowed to us with his usual Oriental courtesy, and we bowed back to him. Hans' bow, I may explain, was of the most peculiar nature, more like a *skulpat*, as the Boers call a land-tortoise, drawing its wrinkled head into its shell and putting it out again than anything else. Then Harût remarked in his peculiar English, which I suppose the White Kendah took for some tongue known only to magicians:

"So you get here, eh? Why you get here, how the devil you get here, eh?"

"We got here because you asked us to do so if we could," I answered, "and we thought it rude not to accept your invitation. For the rest, we came through a cave where you kept a tame snake, an ugly-looking reptile but very harmless to those who know how to deal with snakes and are not afraid of them as poor Bena was. If you can spare the skin I should like to have it to make myself a robe."

Harût looked at me with evident respect, muttering:

"Oh, Macumazana, you what you English call cool, quite cool! Is that all?"

"No," I answered. "Although you did not happen to notice us, we have been present at your church service, and heard and seen everything. For instance, we saw the wife of the lord here whom you stole away in Egypt, her that, being a liar, Harût, you swore you never stole. Also we heard her words after you had made her drunk with your tobacco smoke."

Now for once in his life Harût was, in sporting parlance, knocked out. He looked at us, then turning quite pale, lifted his eyes to heaven and rocked upon his feet as though he were about to fall.

"How you do it? How you do it, eh?" he queried in a weak voice.

"Never you mind how we did it, my friend," I answered loftily. "What we want to know is when you are going to hand over that lady to her husband."

"Not possible," he answered, recovering some of his tone. "First we kill you, first we kill her, she Nurse of the Child. While Child there, she stop there till she die."

"See here," broke in Ragnall. "Either you give me my wife or someone else will die. You will die, Harût. I am a stronger man than you are and unless you promise to give me my wife I will kill you now with this stick and my hands. Do not move or call out if you want to live."

"Lord," answered the old man with some dignity, "I know you can kill me, and if you kill me, I think I say thank you who no wish to live in so much trouble. But what good that, since in one minute then you die too, all of you, and lady she stop here till Black Kendah king take her to wife or she too die?"

"Let us talk," I broke in, treading warningly upon Ragnall's foot. "We have heard your Oracle and we know that you believe its words. It is said that we alone can help you to conquer the Black Kendah. If you will not promise what we ask, we will not help you. We will burn our powder and melt our lead, so that the guns we have cannot speak with Jana and with Simba, and after that we will do other things that I need not tell you. But if you promise what we ask, then we will fight for you against Jana and Simba and teach your men to use the fifty rifles which we have here with us, and by our help you shall conquer. Do you understand?"

He nodded and stroking his long beard, asked:

"What you want us promise, eh?"

"We want you to promise that after Jana is dead and the Black Kendah are driven away, you will give up to us unharmed that lady whom you have stolen. Also that you will bring her and us safely out of your country by the roads you know, and meanwhile that you will let this lord see his wife."

"Not last, no," replied Harût, "that not possible. That bring us all to grave. Also no good, 'cause her mind empty. For rest, you come to other place, sit down and eat while I talk with priests. Be afraid nothing; you quite safe."

"Why should we be afraid? It is you who should be afraid, you who stole the lady and brought Bena to his death. Do you not remember the words of your own Oracle, Harût?"

"Yes, I know words, but how *you* know them *that* I not know," he replied.

Then he issued some orders, as a result of which a guard formed itself about us and conducted us through the crowd and along the passage to the second court of the temple, which was now empty. Here the guard left us but remained at the mouth of the passage, keeping watch. Presently women brought us food and drink, of which Hans and I partook heartily though Ragnall, who was so near to his lost wife and yet so far away, could eat but little. Mingled joy because after these months of arduous search he found her yet alive, and fear lest she should again be taken from him for ever, deprived him of all appetite.

While we ate, priests to the number of about a dozen, who I suppose had been summoned by Harût, were admitted by the guard and, gathering out of earshot of us between the altar and the sanctuary, entered on an earnest discussion with him. Watching their faces I could see that there was a strong difference of opinion between them, about half taking one view on the matter of which they disputed, and half another. At length Harût made some proposition to which they all agreed. Then the door of the sanctuary was opened with a strange sort of key which one of the priests produced, showing a dark interior in which gleamed a white object, I suppose the statue of the Child. Harût and two others entered, the door being closed behind them. About five minutes later they appeared again and others, who listened earnestly and after renewed consultation signified assent by holding up the right hand. Now one of the priests walked to where we were and, bowing, begged us to advance to the altar. This we did, and were stood in a line in front of it, Hans being set in the middle place, while the priests ranged themselves on either side. Next Harût, having once more opened the door of the sanctuary, took his stand a little to the right of it and addressed us, not in English but in his own language, pausing at the end of each sentence that I might translate to Ragnall.

"Lords Macumazana and Igeza, and yellow man who is named Light-in-Darkness," he said, "we, the head priests of the Child, speaking on behalf of the White Kendah people with full authority so to do, have taken counsel together and of the wisdom of the Child as to the demands which you make of us. Those demands are: First, that after you have killed Jana and defeated the Black Kendah we should give over to you the white lady who was born in a far land to fill the office of Guardian of the Child, as is shown by the mark of the new moon upon her breast, but who, because for the second time we could not take her, became the wife of you, the Lord Igeza. Secondly, that we should conduct you and her safely out of our land to some place whence you can return to your own country. Both of these things we will do, because we know from of old that if once Jana is dead we shall have no cause to fear the Black Kendah any more, since we believe that then they will leave their home and go elsewhere, and therefore that we shall no longer

need an Oracle to declare to us in what way Heaven will protect us from Jana and from them. Or if another Oracle should become necessary to us, doubtless in due season she will be found. Also we admit that we stole away this lady because we must, although she was the wife of one of you. But if we swear this, you on your part must also swear that you will stay with us till the end of the war, making our cause your cause and, if need be, giving your lives for us in battle. You must swear further that none of you will attempt to see or to take hence that lady who is named Guardian of the Child until we hand her over to you unharmed. If you will not swear these things, then since no blood may be shed in this holy place, here we will ring you round until you die of hunger and of thirst, or if you escape from this temple, then we will fall upon you and put you to death and fight our own battle with Jana as best we may."

"And if we make these promises how are we to know that you will keep yours?" I interrupted.

"Because the oath that we shall give you will be the oath of the Child that may not be broken."

"Then give it," I said, for although I did not altogether like the security, obviously it was the best to be had.

So very solemnly they laid their right hands upon the altar and "in the presence of the Child and the name of the Child and of all the White Kendah people," repeated after Harût a most solemn oath of which I have already given the substance. It called down on their heads a very dreadful doom in this world and the next, should it be broken either in the spirit or the letter; the said oath, however, to be only binding if we, on our part, swore to observe their terms and kept our engagement also in the spirit and the letter.

Then they asked us to fulfil our share of the pact and very considerably drew out of hearing while we discussed the matter; Harût, the only one of them who understood a word of English, retiring behind the sanctuary. At first I had difficulties with Ragnall, who was most unwilling to bind himself in any way. In the end, on my pointing out that nothing less than our lives were involved and probably that of his wife as well, also that no other course was open to us, he gave way, to my great relief.

Hans announced himself ready to swear anything, adding blandly that words mattered nothing, as afterwards we could do whatever seemed best in our own interests, whereon I read him a short moral lecture on the heinousness of perjury, which did not seem to impress him very much.

This matter settled, we called back the priests and informed them of our decision. Harût demanded that we should affirm it "by the Child," which we declined to do, saying that it was our custom to swear only in the name of our own God. Being a liberal-minded man who had travelled, Harût gave way on the point. So I swore first to the effect that I would fight for the White Kendah to the finish in consideration of the promises that they had made to us. I added that I would not attempt either to see or to interfere with the lady here known as the Guardian of the Child until the war was over or even to bring our existence to her knowledge, ending up, "so help me God," as I had done several times when giving evidence in a court of law.

Next Ragnall with a great effort repeated my oath in English, Harût listening carefully to every word and once or twice asking me to explain the exact meaning of some of them.

Lastly Hans, who seemed very bored with the whole affair, swore, also repeating the words after me and finishing on his own account with "so help me the reverend Predikant, the Baas's father," a form that he utterly declined to vary although it involved more explanations. When pressed, indeed, he showed considerable ingenuity by pointing out to the priests that to his mind my poor father stood in exactly the same relation to the Power above us as their Oracle did to the Child. He offered generously, however, to throw in the spirits of his grandfather and grandmother and some extraordinary divinity they worshipped, I think it was a hare, as an additional guarantee of good faith. This proposal the priests accepted gravely, whereon Hans whispered into my ear in Dutch:

"Those fools do not remember that when pressed by dogs the hare often doubles on its own spoor, and that your reverend father will be very pleased if I can play them the same trick with the white lady that they played with the Lord Igeza."

I only looked at him in reply, since the morality of Hans was past argument. It might perhaps be summed up in one sentence: To get the better of his neighbour in his master's service, honestly if possible; if not, by any means that came to his hand down to that of murder. At the bottom of his dark and mysterious heart Hans worshipped only one god, named Love, not of woman or child, but of my humble self. His principles were those of a rather sly but very high-class and exclusive dog, neither better nor worse. Still, when all is said and done, there are lower creatures in the world than high-class dogs. At least so the masters whom they adore are apt to think, especially if their watchfulness and courage have often saved them from death or disaster.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE EMBASSY

The ceremonies were over and the priests, with the exception of Harût and two who remained to attend upon him, vanished, probably to inform the male and female hierophants of their result, and through these the whole people of the White Kendah. Old Harût stared at us for a little while, then said in English, which he always liked to talk when Ragnall was present, perhaps for the sake of practice:

"What you like do now, eh? P'r'aps wish fly back to Town of Child, for suppose this how you come. If so, please take me with you, because that save long ride."

"Oh! no," I answered. "We walked here through that hole where lived the Father of Snakes who died of fear when he saw us, and just mixed with the rest of you in the court of the temple."

"Good lie," said Harût admiringly, "very first-class lie! Wonder how you kill great snake, which we all think never die, for he live there hundred, hundred years; our people find him there when first they come to this country, and make him kind of god. Well, he nasty beast and best dead. I say, you like see Child? If so, come, for you our brothers now, only please take off hat and not speak."

I intimated that we should "like see Child," and led by Harût we entered the little sanctuary which was barely large enough to hold all of us. In a niche of the end wall stood the sacred effigy which Ragnall and I examined with a kind of reverent interest. It proved to be the statue of an infant about two feet high, cut, I imagine, from the base of a single but very large elephant's tusk, so ancient that the yellowish ivory had become rotten and was covered with a multitude of tiny fissures. Indeed, for its appearance I made up my mind that several thousands of years must have passed since the beast died from which this ivory was taken, especially as it had, I presume, always been carefully preserved under cover.

The workmanship of the object was excellent, that of a fine artist who, I should think, had taken some living infant for his model, perhaps a child of the Pharaoh of the day. Here I may say at once that there could be no doubt of its Egyptian origin, since on one side of the head was a single lock of hair, while the fourth finger of the right hand was held before the lips as though to enjoin silence. Both of these peculiarities, it will be remembered, are characteristic of the infant Horus, the child of Osiris and Isis, as portrayed in bronzes and temple carvings. So at least Ragnall, who recently had studied many such effigies in Egypt, informed me later. There was nothing else in the place except an ancient, string-seated chair of ebony, adorned with inlaid ivory patterns; an effigy of a snake in porcelain, showing that serpent worship was in some way mixed up with their religion; and two rolls of papyrus, at least that is what they looked like, which were laid in the niche with the statue. These rolls, to my disappointment, Harût refused to allow us to examine or even to touch.

After we had left the sanctuary I asked Harût when this figure was brought to their land. He replied that it came when they came, at what date he could not tell us as it was so long ago, and that with it came the worship and the ceremonies of their religion.

In answer to further questions he added that this figure, which seemed to be of ivory, contained the spirits which ruled the sun and the moon, and through them the world. This, said Ragnall, was just a piece of Egyptian theology, preserved down to our own times in a remote corner of Africa, doubtless by descendants of dwellers on the Nile who had been driven thence in some national catastrophe, and brought away with them their faith and one of the effigies of their gods. Perhaps they fled at the time of the Persian invasion by Cambyses.

After we had emerged from this deeply interesting shrine, which was locked behind us, Harût led us, not through the passage connecting it with the stone house that we knew was occupied by Ragnall's wife in her capacity as Guardian of the Child, or a latter-day personification of Isis, Lady of the Moon, at which house he cast many longing glances, but back through the two courts and the pylon to the gateway of the temple. Here on the road by which we had entered the place, a fact which we did not mention to him, he paused and addressed us.

"Lords," he said, "now you and the People of the White Kendah are one; your ends are their ends, your fate is their fate, their secrets are your secrets. You, Lord Igeza, work for a reward, namely the person of that lady whom we took from you on the Nile."

"How did you do that?" interrupted Ragnall when I had interpreted.

"Lord, we watched you. We knew when you came to Egypt; we followed you in Egypt, whither we had journeyed on our road to England once more to seek our Oracles, till the day of our opportunity dawned. Then at night we called her and she obeyed the call, as she must do whose mind we have taken away—ask me not how—and brought her to dwell with us, she who is marked from her birth with the holy sign and wears upon her breast certain charmed stones and a symbol that for thousands of years have adorned the body of the Child and those of its Oracles. Do you remember a company of Arabs whom you saw riding on the banks of the Great River on the day before the night when she was lost to you? We were with that company and on our camels we bore her thence, happy and unharmed to this our land, as I trust, when all is done, we shall bear her back again and you with her."

"I trust so also, for you have wrought me a great wrong," said Ragnall briefly, "perhaps a greater wrong than I know at present, for how came it that my boy was killed by an elephant?"

"Ask that question of Jana and not of me," Harût answered darkly. Then he went on: "You also, Lord Macumazana, work for a reward, the countless store of ivory which your eyes have beheld lying in the burial place of elephants beyond the Tava River. When you have slain Jana who watches the store, and defeated the Black Kendah who serve him, it is yours and we will give you camels to bear it, or some of it, for all cannot be carried, to the sea where it can be taken away in ships. As for the yellow man, I think that he seeks no reward who soon will inherit all things."

"The old witch-doctor means that I am going to die," remarked Hans expectorating reflectively. "Well, Baas, I am quite ready, if only Jana and certain others die first. Indeed I grow too old to fight and travel as I used to do, and therefore shall be glad to pass to some land where I become young again."

"Stuff and rubbish!" I exclaimed, then turned and listened to Harût who, not understanding our Dutch conversation, was speaking once more.

"Lords," he said, "these paths which run east and west are the real approach to the mountain top and the temple, not that which, as I suppose, led you through the cave of the old serpent. The road to the west, which wanders round the base of the hill to a pass in those distant mountains and thence across the deserts to the north, is so easy to stop that by it we need fear no attack. With this eastern road the case is, however, different, as I shall now show you, if you will ride with me."

Then he gave some orders to two attendant priests who departed at a run and presently reappeared at the head of a small train of camels which had been hidden, I know not where. We mounted and, following the road across a flat piece of ground, found that not more than half a mile away was another precipitous ridge of rock which had presumably once formed the lip of an outer crater. This ridge, however, was broken away for a width of two or three hundred yards, perhaps by some outrush of lava, the road running through the centre of the gap on which schanzes had been built here and there for purposes of defence. Looking at these I saw that they were very old and inefficient and asked when they had been erected. Harût replied about a century before when the last war took place with the Black Kendah, who had been finally driven off at this spot, for then the White Kendah were more numerous than at present.

"So Simba knows this road?" I said.

"Yes, Lord, and Jana knows it also, for he fought in that war and still at times visits us here and kills any whom he may meet. Only to the temple he has never dared to come."

Now I wondered whether we had really seen Jana in the forest on the previous night, but coming to the conclusion that it was useless to investigate the matter, made no inquiries, especially as these would have revealed to Harût the route by which we approached the temple. Only I pointed out to him that proper defences should be put up here without delay, that is if they meant to make a stronghold of the mountain.

"We do, Lord," he answered, "since we are not strong enough to attack the Black Kendah in their own country or to meet them in pitched battle on the plain. Here and in no other place must be fought the last fight between Jana and the Child. Therefore it will be your task to build walls cunningly, so that when they come we may defeat Jana and the hosts of the Black Kendah."

"Do you mean that this elephant will accompany Simba and his soldiers, Harût?"

"Without doubt, Lord, since he has always done so from the beginning. Jana is tame to the king and certain priests of the Black Kendah, whose forefathers have fed him for generations, and will obey their orders. Also he can think for himself, being an evil spirit and invulnerable."

"His left eye and the tip of his trunk are not invulnerable," I remarked, "though from what I saw of him I should say there is no doubt about his being able to think for himself. Well, I am glad the brute is coming as I have an account to settle with him."

"As he, Lord, who does not forget, has an account to settle with you and your servant, Light-in-Darkness," commented Harût in an unpleasant and suggestive tone.

Then after we had taken a few measurements and Ragnall, who understands such matters, had drawn a rough sketch of the place in his pocket-book to serve as data for our proposed scheme of fortifications, we pursued our journey back to the town, where we had left all our stores and there were many things to be arranged. It proved to be quite a long ride, down the eastern slope of the mountain which was easy to negotiate, although like the rest of this strange hill it was covered with dense cedar forests that also seemed to me to have defensive possibilities. Reaching its foot at length we were obliged to make a detour by certain winding paths to avoid ground that was too rough for the camels, so that in the end we did not come to our own house in the Town of the Child till about midday.

Glad enough were we to reach it, since all three of us were tired out with our terrible night journey and the anxious emotions that we had undergone. Indeed, after we had eaten we lay down and I rejoiced to see that, notwithstanding the state of mental excitement into which the discovery of his wife had plunged him, Ragnall was the first of us to fall asleep.

About five o'clock we were awakened by a messenger from Harût, who requested our attendance on important business at a kind of meeting-house which stood at a little distance on an open place where the White Kendah bartered produce. Here we found Harût and about twenty of the headmen seated in the shade of a thatched roof, while behind them, at a respectful distance, stood quite a hundred of the White Kendah. Most of these, however, were women and children, for as I have said the greater part of the male population was absent from the town because of the commencement of the harvest.

We were conducted to chairs, or rather stools of honour, and when we two had seated ourselves, Hans taking his stand behind us, Harût rose and informed us that an embassy had arrived from the Black Kendah which was about to be admitted.

Presently they came, five of them, great, truculent-looking fellows of a surprising blackness, unarmed, for they had not been allowed to bring their weapons into the town, but adorned with the usual silver chains across their breasts to show their rank, and other savage finery. In the man who was their leader I recognized one of those messengers who had accosted us when first we entered their territory on our way from the south, before that fight in which I was taken prisoner. Stepping forward and addressing himself to Harût, he said:

"A while ago, O Prophet of the Child, I, the messenger of the god Jana, speaking through the mouth of Simba the King, gave to you and your brother Marût a certain warning to which you did not listen. Now Jana has Marût, and again I come to warn you, Harût."

"If I remember right," interrupted Harût blandly, "I think that on that occasion two of you delivered the message and that the Child marked one of you upon the brow. If Jana has my brother, say, where is yours?"

"We warned you," went on the messenger, "and you cursed us in the name of the Child."

"Yes," interrupted Harût again, "we cursed you with three curses. The first was the curse of Heaven by storm or drought, which has fallen upon you. The second was the curse of famine, which is falling upon you; and the third was the curse of war, which is yet to fall on you."

"It is of war that we come to speak," replied the messenger, diplomatically avoiding the other two topics which perhaps he found it awkward to discuss.

"That is foolish of you," replied the bland Harût, "seeing that the other day you matched yourselves against us with but small success. Many of you were killed but only a very few of us, and the white lord whom you took captive escaped out of your hands and from the tusks of Jana who, I think, now lacks an eye. If he is a god, how comes it that he lacks an eye and could not kill an unarmed white man?"

"Let Jana answer for himself, as he will do ere long, O Harût. Meanwhile, these are the words of Jana spoken through the mouth of Simba the King: The Child has destroyed my harvest and therefore I demand this of the people of the Child—that they give me three-fourths of their harvest, reaping the same and delivering it on the south bank of the River Tava. That they give me the two white lords to be sacrificed to me. That they give the white lady who is Guardian of the Child to be a wife of Simba the King, and with her a hundred virgins of your people. That the image of the Child be brought to the god Jana in the presence of his priests and Simba the King. These are the demands of Jana spoken through the mouth of Simba the King."

Watching, I saw a thrill of horror shake the forms of Harût and of all those with him as the full meaning of these, to them, most impious requests sank into their minds. But he only asked very quietly:

"And if we refuse the demands, what then?"

"Then," shouted the messenger insolently, "then Jana declares war upon you, the last war of all, war till every one of your men be dead and the Child you worship is burnt to grey ashes with fire. War till your women are taken as slaves and the corn which you refuse is stored in our grain pits and your land is a waste and your name forgotten. Already the hosts of Jana are gathered and the trumpet of Jana calls them to the fight. To-morrow or the next day they advance upon you, and ere the moon is full not one of you will be left to look upon her."

Harût rose, and walking from under the shed, turned his back upon the envoys and stared at the distant line of great mountains which stood out far away against the sky. Out of curiosity I followed him and observed that these mountains were no longer visible. Where they had been was nothing but a line of black and heavy cloud. After looking for a while he returned and addressing the envoys, said quite casually:

"If you will be advised by me, friends, you will ride hard for the river. There is such rain upon the mountains as I have never seen before, and you will be fortunate if you cross it before the flood comes down, the greatest flood that has happened in our day."

This intelligence seemed to disturb the messengers, for they too stepped out of the shed and stared at the mountains, muttering to each other something that I could not understand. Then they returned and with a fine appearance of indifference demanded an immediate answer to their challenge.

"Can you not guess it?" answered Harût. Then changing his tone he drew himself to his full height and thundered out at them: "Get you back to your evil spirit of a god that hides in the shape of a beast of the forest and to his slave who calls himself a king, and say to them: 'Thus speaks the Child to his rebellious servants, the Black Kendah dogs: Swim my river when you can, which will not be yet, and come up against me when you will; for whenever you come I shall be ready for you. You are already dead, O Jana. You are already dead, O Simba the slave. You are scattered and lost, O dogs of the Black Kendah, and the home of such of you as remain shall be far away in a barren land, where you must dig deep for water and live upon the wild game because there little corn will grow.' Now begone, and swiftly, lest you stop here for ever."

So they turned and went, leaving me full of admiration for the histrionic powers of Harût.

I must add, however, that being without doubt a keen observer of the weather conditions of the neighbourhood, he was quite right about the rain upon the mountains, which by the way never extended to the territory of the People of the Child. As we heard afterwards, the flood came down just as the envoys reached the river; indeed, one of them was drowned in attempting its crossing, and for fourteen days after this it remained impassable to an army.

That very evening we began our preparations to meet an attack which was now inevitable. Putting aside the supposed rival powers of the tribal divinities worshipped under the names of the Child and Jana, which, while they added a kind of Homeric interest to the contest, could, we felt, scarcely affect an issue that must be decided with cold steel and other mortal weapons, the position of the White Kendah was serious indeed. As I think I have said, in all they did not number more than about two thousand men between the ages of twenty and fifty-five, or, including lads between fourteen and twenty and old men still able-bodied between fifty-five and seventy, say two thousand seven hundred capable of some sort of martial service. To these might be added something under two thousand women, since among this dwindling folk, oddly enough, from causes that I never ascertained, the males out-numbered the females, which accounted for their marriage customs that were, by comparison with those of most African peoples, monogamous. At any rate only the rich among them had more than one wife, while the poor or otherwise ineligible often had none at all, since inter-marriage with other races and above all with the Black Kendah dwelling beyond the river was so strictly taboo that it was punishable with death or expulsion.

Against this little band the Black Kendah could bring up twenty thousand men, besides boys and aged persons who with the women would probably be left to defend their own country, that is, not less than ten to one. Moreover, all of these enemies would be fighting with the courage of despair, since quite three-fourths of their crops with many of their cattle and sheep had been destroyed by the terrific hail-burst that I have described. Therefore, since no other corn was available in the surrounding land, where they dwelt alone encircled by deserts, either they must capture that of the White Kendah, or suffer terribly from starvation until a year later when another harvest ripened.

The only points I could see in favour of the People of the Child were that they would fight on the vantage ground of their mountain stronghold, a formidable position if properly defended. Also they would have the benefit of the skill and knowledge of Ragnall and myself. Lastly, the enemy must face our rifles. Neither the White nor the Black Kendah, I should say, possessed any guns, except a few antiquated flintlock weapons that the former had captured from some nomadic tribe and kept as curiosities. Why this was the case I do not know, since undoubtedly at times the White Kendah traded in camels and corn with Arabs who wandered as far as the Sudan, or Egypt, nomadic tribes to whom even then firearms were known, although perhaps rarely used by them. But so it was, possibly because of some old law or prejudice which forbade their introduction into the country, or mayhap of the difficulty of procuring powder and lead, or for the reason that they had none to teach them the use of such new-fangled weapons.

Now it will be remembered that, on the chance of their proving useful, Ragnall, in addition to our own sporting rifles, had brought with him to Africa fifty Snider rifles with an ample supply of ammunition, the same that I had trouble in passing through the Customs at Durban, all of which had arrived safely at the Town of the Child. Clearly our first duty was to make the best possible use of this invaluable store. To that end I asked Harût to select seventy-five of the boldest and most intelligent young men among his people, and to hand them over to me and Hans for instruction in musketry. We had only fifty rifles but I drilled seventy-five men, or fifty per cent. more, that some might be ready to replace any who fell.

From dawn to dark each day Hans and I worked at trying to convert these Kendah into sharpshooters. It was no easy task with men, however willing, who till then had never held a gun, especially as I must be very sparing of the ammunition necessary to practice, of which of course our supply was limited. Still we taught them how to take cover, how to fire and to cease from firing at a word of command, also to hold the rifles low and waste no shot. To make marksmen of them was more than I could hope to do under the circumstances.

With the exception of these men nearly the entire male population were working day and night to get in the harvest. This proved a very difficult business, both because some of the crops were scarcely fit and because all the grain had to be carried on camels to be stored in and at the back of the second court of the temple, the only place where it was likely to be safe. Indeed in the end a great deal was left unreaped. Then the herds of cattle and breeding camels which grazed on the farther sides of the Holy Mount must be brought into places of safety, glens in the forest on its slope, and forage stacked to feed them. Also it was necessary to provide scouts to keep watch along the river.

Lastly, the fortifications in the mountain pass required unceasing labour and attention. This was the task of Ragnall, who fortunately in his youth, before he succeeded unexpectedly to the title, was for some years an officer in the Royal Engineers and therefore thoroughly understood that business. Indeed he understood it rather too well, since the result of his somewhat complicated and scientific scheme of defence was a little confusing to the simple native mind. However, with the assistance of all the priests and of all the women and children who were not engaged in provisioning the Mount, he built wall after wall and redoubt after redoubt, if that is the right word, to say nothing of the shelter trenches he dug and many pitfalls, furnished at the bottom with sharp stakes, which he hollowed out wherever the soil could be easily moved, to discomfit a charging enemy.

Indeed, when I saw the amount of work he had concluded in ten days, which was not until I joined him on the mountain, I was quite astonished.

About this time a dispute arose as to whether we should attempt to prevent the Black Kendah from crossing the river which was now running down, a plan that some of the elders favoured. At last the controversy was referred to me as head general and I decided against anything of the sort. It seemed to me that our force was too small, and that if I took the rifle-men a great deal of ammunition might be expended with poor result. Also in the event of any reverse or when we were finally driven back, which must happen, there might be difficulty about remounting the camels, our only means of escape from the horsemen who would possibly gallop us down. Moreover the Tava had several fords, any one of which might be selected by the enemy. So it was arranged that we should make our first and last stand upon the Holy Mount.

On the fourteenth night from new moon our swift camel-scouts who were posted in relays between the Tava and the Mount reported that the Black Kendah were gathered in thousands upon the farther side of the river, where they were engaged in celebrating magical ceremonies. On the fifteenth night the scouts reported that they were crossing the river, about five thousand horsemen and fifteen thousand foot soldiers, and that at the head of them marched the huge god-elephant Jana, on which rode Simba the King and a lame priest (evidently my friend whose foot had been injured by the pistol), who acted as a mahout. This part of the story I confess I did not believe, since it seemed to me impossible that anyone could ride upon that mad rogue, Jana. Yet, as subsequent events showed, it was in fact true. I suppose that in certain hands the beast became tame. Or perhaps it was drugged.

Two nights later, for the Black Kendah advanced but slowly, spreading themselves over the country in order to collect such crops as had not been gathered through lack of time or because they were still unripe, we saw flames and smoke arising from the Town of the Child beneath us, which they had fired. Now we knew that the time of trial had come and until near midnight men, women and children worked feverishly finishing or trying to finish the fortifications and making every preparation in our power.

Our position was that we held a very strong post, that is, strong against an enemy unprovided with big guns or even firearms, which, as all other possible approaches had been blocked, was only assailable by direct frontal attack from the east. In the pass we had three main lines of defence, one arranged behind the other and separated by distances of a few hundred yards. Our last refuge was furnished by the walls of the temple itself, in the rear of which were camped the whole White Kendah tribe, save a few hundred who were employed in watching the herds of camels and stock in almost inaccessible positions on the northern slopes of the Mount.

There were perhaps five thousand people of both sexes and every age gathered in this camp, which was so well provided with food and water that it could have stood a siege of several months. If, however, our defences should be carried there was no possibility of escape, since we learned from our scouts that the Black Kendah, who by tradition and through spies were well acquainted with every feature of the country, had detached a party of several thousand men to watch the western road and the slopes of the mountain, in case we should try to break out by that route. The only one remaining, that which ran through the cave of the serpent, we had taken the precaution of blocking up with great stones, lest through it our flank should be turned.

In short, we were rats in a trap and where we were there we must either conquer or die—unless indeed we chose to surrender, which for most of us would mean a fate worse than death.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### ALLAN QUATERMAIN MISSES

I had made my last round of the little corps that I facetiously named "The Sharpshooters," though to tell the truth at shooting they were anything but sharp, and seen that each man was in his place behind a wall with a reserve man squatted at the rear of every pair of them, waiting to take his rifle if either of these should fall. Also I had made sure that all of them had twenty rounds of ammunition in their skin pouches. More I would not serve out, fearing lest in excitement or in panic they might fire away to the last cartridge uselessly, as before now even disciplined white troops have been known to do. Therefore I had arranged that certain old men of standing who could be trusted should wait in a place of comparative safety behind the line, carrying all our reserve ammunition, which amounted, allowing for what had been expended in practice, to nearly sixty rounds per rifle. This they were instructed to deliver from their wallets to the firing line in small lots when they saw that it was necessary and not before.

It was, I admit, an arrangement apt to miscarry in the heat of desperate battle, but I could think of none better, since it was absolutely necessary that no shot should be wasted.

After a few words of exhortation and caution to the natives who acted as sergeants to the corps, I returned to a bough shelter that had been built for us behind a rock to get a few hours' sleep, if that were possible, before the fight began.

Here I found Ragnall, who had just come in from his inspection. This was of a much more extensive nature than my own, since it involved going round some furlongs of the rough walls and trenches that he had prepared with so much thought and care, and seeing that the various companies of the White Kendah were ready to play their part in the defence of them.

He was tired and rather excited, too much so to sleep at once. So we talked a little while, first about the prospects of the morrow's battle, as to which we were, to say the least of it, dubious, and afterwards of other things. I asked him if during his stay in this place, while I was below at the town or later, he had heard or seen anything of his wife.

"Nothing," he answered. "These priests never speak of her, and if they did Harût is the only one of them that I can really understand. Moreover, I have kept my word strictly and, even when I had occasion to see to the blocking of the western road, made a circuit on the mountain-top in order to avoid the neighbourhood of that house where I suppose she lives. Oh! Quatermain, my friend, my case is a hard one, as you would think if the woman you loved with your whole heart were shut up within a few hundred yards of you and no communication with her possible after all this time of separation and agony. What makes it worse is, as I gathered from what Harût said the other day, that she is still out of her mind."

"That has some consolations," I replied, "since the mindless do not suffer. But if such is the case, how do you account for what you and poor Savage saw that night in the Town of the Child? It was not altogether a phantasy, for the dress you described was the same we saw her wearing at the Feast of the First-fruits."

"I don't know what to make of it, Quatermain, except that many strange things happen in the world which we mock at as insults to our limited intelligence because we cannot understand them." (Very soon I was to have another proof of this remark.) "But what are you driving at? You are keeping something back."

"Only this, Ragnall. If your wife were utterly mad I cannot conceive how it came about that she searched you out and spoke to you even in a vision—for the thing was not an individual dream since both you and Savage saw her. Nor did she actually visit you in the flesh, as the door never opened and the spider's web across it was not broken. So it comes to this: either some part of her is not mad but can still exercise sufficient will to project itself upon your senses, or she is dead and her disembodied spirit did this thing. Now we know that she is not dead, for we have seen her and Harût has confessed as much. Therefore I maintain that, whatever may be her temporary state, she must still be fundamentally of a reasonable mind, as she is of a natural body. For instance, she may only be hypnotized, in which case the spell will break one day."

"Thank you for that thought, old fellow. It never occurred to me and it gives me new hope. Now listen! If I should come to grief in this business, which is very likely, and you should survive, you will do your best to get her home; will you not? Here is a codicil to my will which I drew up after that night of dream, duly witnessed by Savage and Hans. It leaves to you whatever sums may be necessary in this connexion and something over for yourself. Take it, it is best in your keeping, especially as if you should be killed it has no value."

"Of course I will do my best," I answered as I put away the paper in my pocket. "And now don't let us take any more thought of being killed, which may prevent us from getting the sleep we want. I don't mean to be killed if I can help it. I mean to give those beggars, the Black Kendah, such a doing as they never had before, and then start for the coast with you and Lady Ragnall, as, God willing, we shall do. Good night."

After this I slept like a top for some hours, as I believe Ragnall did also. When I awoke, which happened suddenly and completely, the first thing that I saw was Hans seated at the entrance to my little shelter smoking his corn-cob pipe, and nursing the single-barrelled rifle, Intombi, on his knee. I asked him what the time was, to which he replied that it lacked two hours to dawn. Then I asked him why he had not been sleeping. He replied that he had been asleep and dreamed a dream. Idly enough I inquired what dream, to which he replied:

"Rather a strange one, Baas, for a man who is about to go into battle. I dreamed that I was in a large place that was full of quiet. It was light there, but I could not see any sun or moon, and the air was very soft and tasted like food and drink, so much so, Baas, that if anyone had offered me a cup quite full of the best 'Cape smoke' I should have told him to take it away. Then, Baas, suddenly I saw your reverend father, the Predikant, standing beside me and looking just as he used to look, only younger and stronger and very

happy, and so of course knew at once that I was dead and in hell. Only I wondered where the fire that does not go out might be, for I could not see it. Presently your reverend father said to me: 'Good day, Hans. So you have come here at last. Now tell me, how has it gone with my son, the Baas Allan? Have you looked after him as I told you to do?'

"I answered: 'I have looked after him as well as I could, O reverend sir. Little enough have I done; still, not once or twice or three times only have I offered up my life for him as was my duty, and yet we both have lived.' And that I might be sure he heard the best of me, as was but natural, I told him the times, Baas, making a big story out of small things, although all the while I could see that he knew exactly just where I began to lie and just where I stopped from lying. Still he did not scold me, Baas; indeed, when I had finished, he said:

"Well done, O good and faithful servant,' words that I think I have heard him use before when he was alive, Baas, and used to preach to us for such a long time on Sunday afternoons. Then he asked: 'And how goes it with Baas Allan, my son, now, Hans?' to which I replied:

"The Baas Allan is going to fight a very great battle in which he may well fall, and if I could feel sorry here, which I can't, I should weep. O reverend sir, because I have died before that battle began and therefore cannot stand at his side in the battle and be killed for him as a servant should for his master!"

"You will stand at his side in the battle,' said your reverend father, 'and those things which you desire you will do, as it is fitting that you should. And afterwards, Hans, you will make report to me of how the battle went and of what honour my son has won therein. Moreover, know this, Hans, that though while you live in the world you seem to see many other things, they are but dreams, since in all the world there is but one real thing, and its name is Love, which if it be but strong enough, the stars themselves must obey, for it is the king of every one of them, and all who dwell in them worship it day and night under many names for ever and for ever, Amen.'

"What he meant by that I am sure I don't know, Baas, seeing that I have never thought much of women, at least not for many years since my last old vrouw went and drank herself to death after lying in her sleep on the baby which I loved much better than I did her, Baas.

"Well, before I could ask him, or about hell either, he was gone like a whiff of smoke from a rifle mouth in a strong wind."

Hans paused, puffed at his pipe, spat upon the ground in his usual reflective way and asked:

"Is the Baas tired of the dream or would he like to hear the rest?"

"I should like to hear the rest," I said in a low voice, for I was strangely moved.

"Well, Baas, while I was standing in that place which was so full of quiet, turning my hat in my hands and wondering what work they would set me to there among the devils, I looked up. There I saw coming towards me two very beautiful women, Baas, who had their arms round each other's necks. They were dressed in white, with the little hard things that are found in shells hanging about them, and bright stones in their hair. And as they came, Baas, wherever they set a foot flowers sprang up, very pretty flowers, so that all their path across the quiet place was marked with flowers. Birds too sang as they passed, at least I think they were birds though I could not see them."

"What were they like, Hans?" I whispered.

"One of them, Baas, the taller I did not know. But the other I knew well enough; it was she whose name is holy, not to be mentioned. Yet I must mention that name; it was the Missie Marie herself as last we saw her alive many, many years ago, only grown a hundred times more beautiful."<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[2]</sup> See the book called *Marie* by H. Rider Haggard.

Now I groaned, and Hans went on:

"The two White Ones came up to me, and stood looking at me with eyes that were more soft than those of bucks. Then the Missie Marie said to the other: 'This is Hans of whom I have so often told you, O Star.'"

Here I groaned again, for how did this Hottentot know that name, or rather its sweet rendering?

"Then she who was called Star asked, 'How goes it with one who is the heart of all three of us, O Hans?' Yes, Baas, those Shining Ones joined *me*, the dirty little Hottentot in my old clothes and smelling of tobacco, with themselves when they spoke of you, for I knew they were speaking of you, Baas, which made me think I must be drunk, even there in the quiet place. So I told them all that I had told your reverend father, and a very great deal more, for they seemed never to be tired of listening. And once, when I mentioned that sometimes, while pretending to be asleep, I had heard you praying aloud at night for the Missie Marie who died for you, and for another who had been your wife whose name I did not remember but who had also died, they both cried a little, Baas. Their tears shone like crystals and smelt like that stuff in a little glass tube which Harût said that he brought from some far land when he put a drop or two on your handkerchief, after you were faint from the pain in your leg at the house yonder. Or perhaps it was the flowers that smelt, for where the tears fell there sprang up white lilies shaped like two babes' hands held together in prayer."

Hearing this, I hid my face in my hands lest Hans should see human tears unscented with attar of roses, and bade him continue.

"Baas, the White One who was called Star, asked me of your son, the young Baas Harry, and I told her that when last I had seen him he was strong and well and would make a bigger man than you were, whereat she sighed and shook her head. Then the Missie Marie said: 'Tell the Baas, Hans, that I also have a child which he will see one day, but it is not a son.'

"After this they, too, said something about Love, but what it was I cannot remember, since even as I repeat this dream to you it is beginning to slip away from me fast as a swallow skimming the water. Their last words, however, I do remember. They were: 'Say to the Baas that we who never met in life, but who here are as twin sisters, wait and count the years and count the months and count the days and count the hours and count the minutes and count the seconds until once more he shall hear our voices calling to him across the night.' That's what they said, Baas. Then they were gone and only the flowers remained to show that they had been standing there.

"Now I set off to bring you the message and travelled a very long way at a great rate; if Jana himself had been after me I could not have gone more fast. At last I got out of that quiet place and among mountains where there were dark kloofs, and there in the kloofs I heard Zulu impis singing their war-song; yes, they sang the *ingoma* or something very like it. Now suddenly in the pass of the mountains along which I sped, there appeared before me a very beautiful woman whose skin shone like the best copper coffee kettle after I have polished it, Baas. She was dressed in a leopard-like moocha and wore on her shoulders a fur kaross, and about her neck a circlet of blue beads, and from her hair there rose one crane's feather tall as a walking-stick, and in her hand she held a little spear.

No flowers sprang beneath her feet when she walked towards me and no birds sang, only the air was filled with the sound of a royal salute which rolled among the mountains like the roar of thunder, and her eyes flashed like summer lightning."

Now I let my hands fall and stared at him, for well I knew what was coming.

"Stand, yellow man!" she said, "and give me the royal salute."

"So I gave her the *Bayéte*, though who she might be I did not know, since I did not think it wise to stay to ask her if it were hers of right, although I should have liked to do so. Then she said: 'The Old Man on the plain yonder and those two pale White Ones have talked to you of their love for your master, the Lord Macumazana. I tell you, little Yellow Dog, that they do not know what love can be. There is more love for him in my eyes alone than they have in all that makes them fair. Say it to the Lord Macumazana that, as I know well, he goes down to battle and that the Lady Mameena will be with him in the battle as, though he saw her not, she has been with him in other battles, and will be with him till the River of Time has run over the edge of the world and is lost beyond the sun. Let him remember this when Jana rushes on and death is very near to him to-day, and let him look—for then perchance he shall see me. Begone now, Yellow Dog, to the heels of your master, and play your part well in the battle, for of what you do or leave undone you shall give account to me. Say that Mameena sends her greetings to the Lord Macumazana and that she adds this, that when the Old Man and the White ones told you that Love is the secret blood of the worlds which makes them to be they did not lie. Love reigns and I, Mameena, am its priestess, and the heart of Macumazana is my holy house.'

"Then, Baas, I tumbled off a precipice and woke up here; and, Baas, as we may not light a fire I have kept some coffee hot for you buried in warm ashes," and without another word he went to fetch that coffee, leaving me shaken and amazed.

For what kind of a dream was it which revealed to an old Hottentot all these mysteries and hidden things about persons whom he had never seen and of whom I had never spoken to him? My father and my wife Marie might be explained, for with these he had been mixed up, but how about Stella and above all Mameena, although of course it was possible that he had heard of the latter, who made some stir in her time? But to hit her off as he had done in all her pride, splendour, and dominion of desire!

Well, that was his story which, perhaps fortunately, I lacked time to analyse or brood upon, since there was much in it calculated to unnerve a man just entering the crisis of a desperate fray. Indeed a minute or so later, as I was swallowing the last of the coffee, messengers arrived about some business, I forget what, sent by Ragnall I think, who had risen before I woke. I turned to give the pannikin to Hans, but he had vanished in his snake-like fashion, so I threw it down upon the ground and devoted my mind to the question raised in Ragnall's message.

Next minute scouts came in who had been watching the camp of the Black Kendah all night.

These were sleeping not more than half a mile away, in an open place on the slope of the hill with pickets thrown out round them, intending to advance upon us, it was said, as soon as the sun rose, since because of their number they feared lest to march at night should throw them into confusion and, in case of their falling into an ambush, bring about a disaster. Such at least was the story of two spies whom our people had captured.

There had been some question as to whether we should not attempt a night attack upon their camp, of which I was rather in favour. After full debate, however, the idea had been abandoned, owing to the fewness of our numbers, the dislike which the White Kendah shared with the Black of attempting to operate in the dark, and the well chosen position of our enemy, whom it would be impossible to rush before we were discovered by their outposts. What I hoped in my heart was that they might try to rush us, notwithstanding the story of the two captured spies, and in the gloom, after the moon had sunk low and before the dawn came, become entangled in our pitfalls and outlying entrenchments, where we should be able to destroy a great number of them. Only on the previous afternoon that cunning old fellow, Hans, had pointed out to me how advantageous such an event would be to our cause and, while agreeing with him, I suggested that probably the Black Kendah knew this as well as we did, as the prisoners had told us.

Yet that very thing happened, and through Hans himself. Thus: Old Harût had come to me just one hour before the dawn to inform me that all our people were awake and at their stations, and to make some last arrangements as to the course of the defence, also about our final concentration behind the last line of walls and in the first court of the temple, if we should be driven from the outer entrenchments. He was telling me that the Oracle of the Child had uttered words at the ceremony that night which he and all the priests considered were of the most favourable import, news to which I listened with some impatience, feeling as I did that this business had passed out of the range of the Child and its Oracle. As he spoke, suddenly through the silence that precedes the dawn, there floated to our ears the unmistakable sound of a rifle. Yes, a rifle shot, half a mile or so away, followed by the roaring murmur of a great camp unexpectedly alarmed at night.

"Who can have fired that?" I asked. "The Black Kendah have no guns."

He replied that he did not know, unless some of my fifty men had left their posts.

While we were investigating the matter, scouts rushed in with the intelligence that the Black Kendah, thinking apparently that they were being attacked, had broken camp and were advancing towards us. We passed a warning all down the lines and stood to arms. Five minutes later, as I stood listening to that approaching roar, filled with every kind of fear and melancholy foreboding such as the hour and the occasion might well have evoked, through the gloom, which was dense, the moon being hidden behind the hill, I thought I caught sight of something running towards me like a crouching man. I lifted my rifle to fire but, reflecting that it might be no more than a hyena and fearing to provoke a fusillade from my half-trained company, did not do so.

Next instant I was glad indeed, for immediately on the other side of the wall behind which I was standing I heard a well-known voice gasp out:

"Don't shoot, Baas, it is I."

"What have you been doing, Hans?" I said as he scrambled over the wall to my side, limping a little as I fancied.

"Baas," he puffed, "I have been paying the Black Kendah a visit. I crept down between their stupid outposts, who are as blind in the dark as a bat in daytime, hoping to find Jana and put a bullet into his leg or trunk. I didn't find him, Baas, although I heard him. But one of their captains stood up in front of a watchfire, giving a good shot. My bullet found *him*, Baas, for he tumbled back into the fire making the sparks fly this way and that. Then I ran and, as you see, got here quite safely."

"Why did you play that fool's trick?" I asked, "seeing that it ought to have cost you your life?"

"I shall die just when I have to die, not before, Baas," he replied in the intervals of reloading the little rifle. "Also it was the trick of a wise man, not of a fool, seeing that it has made the Black Kendah think that we were attacking them and caused them to hurry on to attack *us* in the dark over ground that they do not know. Listen to them coming!"

As he spoke a roar of sound told us that the great charge had swept round a turn there was in the pass and was heading towards us up the straight. Ivory horns brayed, captains shouted orders, the very mountains shook beneath the beating of thousands of feet of men and horses, while in one great yell that echoed from the cliffs and forests went up the battle-cry of "*Jana! Jana!*"—a mixed tumult of noise which contrasted very strangely with the utter silence in our ranks.

"They will be among the pitfalls presently," sniggered Hans, shifting his weight nervously from one leg on to the other. "Hark! they are going into them."

It was true. Screams of fear and pain told me that the front ranks had begun to fall, horse and foot together, into the cunningly devised snares of which with so much labour we had dug many, concealing them with earth spread over thin wickerwork, or rather interlaced boughs. Into them went the forerunners, to be pierced by the sharp, fire-hardened stakes set at the bottom of each pit. Vainly did those who were near enough to understand their danger call to the ranks behind to stop. They could not or would not comprehend, and had no room to extend their front. Forward surged the human torrent, thrusting all in front of it to death by wounds or suffocation in those deadly holes, till one by one they were filled level with the ground by struggling men and horses, over whom the army still rushed on.

How many perished there I do not know, but after the battle was over we found scarcely a pit that was not crowded to the brim with dead. Truly this device of Ragnall's, for if I had conceived the idea, which was unfamiliar to the Kendah, it was he who had carried it out in so masterly a fashion, had served us well.

Still the enemy surged on, since the pits were only large enough to hold a tithe of them, till at length, horsemen and footmen mixed up together in inextricable confusion, their mighty mass became faintly visible quite close to us, a blacker blot upon the gloom.

Then my turn came. When they were not more than fifty yards away from the first wall, I shouted an order to my riflemen to fire, aiming low, and set the example by loosing both barrels of an elephant gun at the thickest of the mob. At that distance even the most inexperienced shots could not miss such a mark, especially as those bullets that went high struck among the oncoming troops behind, or caught the horsemen lifted above their fellows. Indeed, of the first few rounds I do not think that one was wasted, while often single balls killed or injured several men.

The result was instantaneous. The Black Kendah who, be it remembered, were totally unaccustomed to the effects of rifle fire and imagined that we only possessed two or three guns in all, stopped their advance as though paralyzed. For a few seconds there was silence, except for the intermittent crackle of the rifles as my men loaded and fired. Next came the cries of the smitten men and horses that were falling everywhere, and then—the unmistakable sound of a stampede.

"They have gone. That was too warm for them, Baas," chuckled Hans exultingly.

"Yes," I answered, when I had at length succeeded in stopping the firing, "but I expect they will come back with the light. Still, that trick of yours has cost them dear, Hans."

By degrees the dawn began to break. It was, I remember, a particularly beautiful dawn, resembling a gigantic and vivid rose opening in the east, or a cup of brightness from which many coloured wines were poured all athwart the firmament. Very peaceful also, for not a breath of wind was stirring. But what a scene the first rays of the sun revealed upon that narrow stretch of pass in front of us. Everywhere the pitfalls and trenches were filled with still surging heaps of men and horses, while all about lay dead and wounded men, the red harvest of our rifle fire. It was dreadful to contrast the heavenly peace above and the hellish horror beneath.

We took count and found that up to this moment we had not lost a single man, one only having been slightly wounded by a thrown spear. As is common among semi-savages, this fact filled the White Kendah with an undue exultation. Thinking that as the beginning was so the end must be, they cheered and shouted, shaking each other's hands, then fell to eating the food which the women brought them with appetite, chattering incessantly, although as a general rule they were a very silent people. Even the grave Harût, who arrived full of congratulations, seemed as high-spirited as a boy, till I reminded him that the real battle had not yet commenced.

The Black Kendah had fallen into a trap and lost some of their number, that was all, which was fortunate for us but could scarcely affect the issue of the struggle, since they had many thousands left. Ragnall, who had come up from his lines, agreed with me. As he said, these people were fighting for life as well as honour, seeing that most of the corn which they needed for their sustenance was stored in great heaps either in or to the rear of the temple behind us. Therefore they must come on until they won or were destroyed. How with our small force could we hope to destroy this multitude? That was the problem which weighed upon our hearts.

About a quarter of an hour later two spies that we had set upon the top of the precipitous cliffs, whence they had a good view of the pass beyond the bend, came scrambling down the rocks like monkeys by a route that was known to them. These boys, for they were no more, reported that the Black Kendah were reforming their army beyond the bend of the pass, and that the cavalry were dismounting and sending their horses to the rear, evidently because they found them useless in such a place. A little later solitary men appeared from behind the bend, carrying bundles of long sticks to each of which was attached a piece of white cloth, a proceeding that excited my curiosity.

Soon its object became apparent. Swiftly these men, of whom in the end there may have been thirty or forty, ran to and fro, testing the ground with spears in search for pitfalls. I think they only found a very few that had not been broken into, but in front of these and also of those that were already full of men and horses they set up the flags as a warning that they should be avoided in the advance. Also they removed a number of their wounded.

We had great difficulty in restraining the White Kendah from rushing out to attack them, which of course would only have led us into a trap in our turn, since they would have fled and conducted their pursuers into the arms of the enemy. Nor would I allow my riflemen to fire, as the result must have been many misses and a great waste of ammunition which ere long would be badly wanted. I, however, did shoot two or three, then gave it up as the remainder took no notice whatever.

When they had thoroughly explored the ground they retired until, a little later, the Black Kendah army began to appear, marching in serried regiments and excellent order round the bend, till perhaps eight or ten thousand of them were visible, a very fierce and awe-inspiring *impi*. Their front ranks halted between three and four hundred yards away, which I thought farther off than it was advisable to open fire on them with Snider rifles held by unskilled troops. Then came a pause, which at length was broken by the blowing of horns and a sound of exultant shouting beyond the turn of the pass.

Now from round this turn appeared the strangest sight that I think my eyes had ever seen. Yes, there came the huge elephant, Jana, at a slow, shambling trot. On his back and head were two men in whom, with my glasses, I recognized the lame priest whom I already knew too well and Simba, the king of the Black Kendah, himself, gorgeously apparelled and waving a long spear, seated in a kind of wooden chair. Round the brute's neck were a number of bright metal chains, twelve in all, and each of these chains was held by a spearman who ran alongside, six on one side and six on the other. Lastly, ingeniously fastened to the end of his trunk were three other chains to which were attached spiked knobs of metal.

On he came as docilely as any Indian elephant used for carrying teak logs, passing through the centre of the host up a wide lane which had been left, I suppose for his convenience, and intelligently avoiding the pitfalls filled with dead. I thought that he would stop among the first ranks. But not so. Slackening his pace to a walk he marched forwards towards our fortifications. Now, of course, I saw my chance and made sure that my double-barrelled elephant rifle was ready and that Hans held a second rifle, also double-barrelled and of similar calibre, full-cocked in such a position that I could snatch it from him in a moment.

"I am going to kill that elephant," I said. "Let no one else fire. Stand still and you shall see the god Jana die."

Still the enormous beast floundered forward; up to that moment I had never realized how truly huge it was, not even when it stood over me in the moonlight about to crush me with its foot. Of this I am sure, that none to equal it ever lived in Africa, at least in any times of which I have knowledge.

"Fire, Baas," whispered Hans, "it is near enough."

But like the Frenchman and the cock pheasant, I determined to wait until it stopped, wishing to finish it with a single ball, if only for the prestige of the thing.

At length it did stop and, opening its cavern of a mouth, lifted its great trunk and trumpeted, while Simba, standing up in his chair, began to shout out some command to us to surrender to the god Jana, "the Invincible, the Invulnerable."

"I will show you if you are invulnerable, my boy," said I to myself, glancing round to make sure that Hans had the second rifle ready and catching sight of Ragnall and Harût and all the White Kendah standing up in their trenches, breathlessly awaiting the end, as were the Black Kendah a few hundred yards away. Never could there have been a fairer shot and one more certain to result in a fatal wound. The brute's head was up and its mouth was open. All I had to do was to send a hard-tipped bullet crashing through the palate to the brain behind. It was so easy that I would have made a bet that I could have finished him with one hand tied behind me.

I lifted the heavy rifle. I got the sights dead on to a certain spot at the back of that red cave. I pressed the trigger; the charge boomed—and nothing happened! I heard no bullet strike and Jana did not even take the trouble to close his mouth.

An exclamation of "O-oh!" went up from the watchers. Before it had died away the second bullet followed the first, with the same result or rather lack of result, and another louder "O-oh!" arose. Then Jana tranquilly shut his mouth, having finished trumpeting, and as though to give me a still better target, turned broadside on and stood quite still.

With an inward curse I snatched the second rifle and aiming behind the ear at a spot which long experience told me covered the heart let drive again, first one barrel and then the other.

Jana never stirred. No bullet thudded. No mark of blood appeared upon his hide. The horrible thought overcame me that I, Allan Quatermain, I the famous shot, the renowned elephant-hunter, had four times missed this haystack of a brute from a distance of forty yards. So great was my shame that I think I almost fainted. Through a kind of mist I heard various ejaculations:

"Great Heavens!" said Ragnall.

"*Allemagte!*" remarked Hans.

"The Child help us!" muttered Harût.

All the rest of them stared at me as though I were a freak or a lunatic. Then somebody laughed nervously, and immediately everybody began to laugh. Even the distant army of the Black Kendah became convulsed with roars of unholy merriment and I, Allan Quatermain, was the centre of all this mockery, till I felt as though I were going mad. Suddenly the laughter ceased and once more Simba the King began to roar out something about "Jana the Invincible and Invulnerable," to which the White Kendah replied with cries of "Magic" and "Bewitched! Bewitched!"

"Yes," yelled Simba, "no bullet can touch Jana the god, not even those of the white lord who was brought from far to kill him."

Hans leaped on to the top of the wall, where he danced up and down like an intoxicated monkey, and screamed:

"Then where is Jana's left eye? Did not my bullet put it out like a lamp? If Jana is invulnerable, why did my bullet put out his left eye?"

Hans ceased from dancing on the wall and steadying himself, lifted the little rifle Intombi, shouting:

"Let us see whether after all this beast is a god or an elephant."

Then he touched the trigger, and simultaneously with the report, I heard the bullet clap and saw blood appear on Jana's hide just by the very spot over the heart at which I had aimed without result. Of course, the soft ball driven from a small-bore rifle with a light charge of powder was far too weak to penetrate to the vitals. Probably it did not do much more than pierce through the skin and an inch or two of flesh behind it.

Still, its effects upon this "invulnerable" god were of a marked order. He whipped round; he lifted his trunk and screamed with rage and pain. Then off he lumbered back towards his own people, at such a pace that the attendants who held the chains on either side of him were thrown over and forced to leave go of him, while the king and the priest upon his back could only retain their seats by clinging to the chair and the rope about his neck.

The result was satisfactory so far as the dispelling of magical illusions went, but it left me in a worse position than before, since it now became evident that what had protected Jana from my bullets was nothing more supernatural than my own lack of skill. Oh! never in my life did I drink of such a cup of humiliation as it was my lot to drain to the dregs in this most unhappy hour. Almost did I hope that I might be killed at once.

And yet, and yet, how was it possible that with all my skill I should have missed this towering mountain of flesh four times in succession. The question is one to which I have never discovered any answer, especially as Hans hit it easily enough, which at the time I wished heartily he had not done, since his success only served to emphasize my miserable failure. Fortunately, just then a diversion occurred which freed my unhappy self from further public attention. With a shout and a roar the great army of the Black Kendah woke into life. The advance had begun.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ALLAN WEEPS

On they came, slowly and steadily, preceded by a cloud of skirmishers—a thousand or more of these—who kept as open an order as the narrow ground would allow and carried, each of them, a bundle of throwing spears arranged in loops or sockets at the back of the shield. When these men were about a hundred yards away we opened fire and killed a great number of them, also some of the marshalled troops behind. But this did not stop them in the least, for what could fifty rifles do against a horde of brave barbarians who, it seemed, had no fear of death? Presently their spears were falling among us and a few casualties began to occur, not many, because of the protecting wall, but still some. Again and again we loaded and fired, sweeping away those in front of us, but always others came to take their places. Finally at some word of command these light skirmishers vanished, except whose who were dead or wounded, taking shelter behind the advancing regiments which now were within fifty yards of us.

Then, after a momentary pause another command was shouted out and the first regiment charged in three solid ranks. We fired a volley point blank into them and, as it was hopeless for fifty men to withstand such an onslaught, bolted during the temporary confusion that ensued, taking refuge, as it had been arranged that we should do, at a point of vantage farther down the line of fortifications, whence we maintained our galling fire.

Now it was that the main body of the White Kendah came into action under the leadership of Ragnall and Harût. The enemy scrambled over the first wall, which we had just vacated, to find themselves in a network of other walls held by our spearmen in a narrow place where numbers gave no great advantage.

Here the fighting was terrible and the loss of the attackers great, for always as they carried one entrenchment they found another a few yards in front of them, out of which the defenders could only be driven at much cost of life.

Two hours or more the battle went on thus. In spite of the desperate resistance which we offered, the multitude of the Black Kendah, who I must say fought magnificently, stormed wall after wall, leaving hundreds of dead and wounded to mark their difficult progress. Meanwhile I and my riflemen rained bullets on them from certain positions which we had selected beforehand, until at length our ammunition began to run low.

At half-past eight in the morning we were driven back over the open ground to our last entrenchment, a very strong one just outside of the eastern gate of the temple which, it will be remembered, was set in a tunnel pierced through the natural lava rock. Thrice did the Black Kendah come on and thrice we beat them off, till the ditch in front of the wall was almost full of fallen. As fast as they climbed to the top of it the White Kendah thrust them through with their long spears, or we shot them with our rifles, the nature of the ground being such that only a direct frontal attack was possible.

In the end they drew back sullenly, having, as we hoped, given up the assault. As it turned out, this was not so. They were only resting and waiting for the arrival of their reserve. It came up shouting and singing a war-song, two thousand strong or more, and presently once more they charged like a flood of water. We beat them back. They reformed and charged a second time and we beat them back.

Then they took another counsel. Standing among the dead and dying at the base of the wall, which was built of loose stones and earth, where we could not easily get at them because of the showers of spears which were rained at anyone who showed himself, they began to undermine it, levering out the bottom stones with stakes and battering them with poles.

In five minutes a breach appeared, through which they poured tumultuously. It was hopeless to withstand that onslaught of so vast a number. Fighting desperately, we were driven down the tunnel and through the doors that were opened to us, into the first court of the temple. By furious efforts we managed to close these doors and block them with stones and earth. But this did not avail us long, for, bringing brushwood and dry grass, they built a fire against them that soon caught the thick cedar wood of which they were made.

While they burned we consulted together. Further retreat seemed impossible, since the second court of the temple, save for a narrow passage, was filled with corn which allowed no room for fighting, while behind it were gathered all the women and children, more than two thousand of them. Here, or nowhere, we must make our stand and conquer or die. Up to this time, compared with what which we had inflicted upon the Black Kendah, of whom a couple of thousand or more had fallen, our loss was comparatively slight, say two hundred killed and as many more wounded. Most of such of the latter as could not walk we had managed to carry into the first court of the temple, laying them close against the cloister walls, whence they watched us in a grisly ring.

This left us about sixteen hundred able-bodied men or many more than we could employ with effect in that narrow place. Therefore we determined to act upon a plan which we had already designed in case such an emergency as ours should arise. About three hundred and fifty of the best men were to remain to defend the temple till all were slain. The rest, to the number of over a thousand, were to withdraw through the second court and the gates beyond to the camp of the women and children. These they were to conduct by secret paths that were known to them to where the camels were kraaled, and mounting as many as possible of them on the camels to fly whither they could. Our hope was that the victorious Black Kendah would be too exhausted to follow them across the plain to the distant mountains. It was a dreadful determination, but we had no choice.

"What of my wife?" Ragnall asked hoarsely.

"While the temple stands she must remain in the temple," replied Harût. "But when all is lost, if I have fallen, do you, White Lord, go to the sanctuary with those who remain and take her and the Ivory Child and flee after the others. Only I lay this charge on you under pain of the curse of Heaven, that you do not suffer the Ivory Child to fall into the hands of the Black Kendah. First must you burn it with fire or grind it to dust with stones. Moreover, I give this command to all in case the priests in charge of it should fail me,

that they set flame to the brushwood that is built up with the stacks of corn, so that, after all, those of our enemies who escape may die of famine."

Instantly and without murmuring, for never did I see more perfect discipline than that which prevailed among these poor people, the orders given by Harût, who in addition to his office as head priest was a kind of president of what was in fact a republic, were put in the way of execution. Company by company the men appointed to escort the women and children departed through the gateway of the second court, each company turning in the gateway to salute us who remained, by raising their spears, till all were gone. Then we, the three hundred and fifty who were left, marshalled ourselves as the Greeks may have done in the Pass of Thermopylae.

First stood I and my riflemen, to whom all the remaining ammunition was served out; it amounted to eight rounds per man. Then, ranged across the court in four lines, came the spearmen armed with lances and swords under the immediate command of Harût. Behind these, near the gate of the second court so that at the last they might attempt the rescue of the priestess, were fifty picked men, captained by Ragnall, who, I forgot to say, was wounded in two places, though not badly, having received a spear thrust in the left shoulder and a sword cut to the left thigh during his desperate defence of the entrenchment.

By the time that all was ready and every man had been given to drink from the great jars of water which stood along the walls, the massive wooden doors began to burn through, though this did not happen for quite half an hour after the enemy had begun to attempt to fire them. They fell at length beneath the battering of poles, leaving only the mound of earth and stones which we had piled up in the gateway after the closing of the doors. This the Black Kendah, who had raked out the burning embers, set themselves to dig away with hands and sticks and spears, a task that was made very difficult to them by about a score of our people who stabbed at them with their long lances or dashed them down with stones, killing and disabling many. But always the dead and wounded were dragged off while others took their places, so that at last the gateway was practically cleared. Then I called back the spearmen who passed into the ranks behind us, and made ready to play my part.

I had not long to wait. With a rush and a roar a great company of the Black Kendah charged the gateway. Just as they began to emerge into the court I gave the word to fire, sending fifty Snider bullets tearing into them from a distance of a few yards. They fell in a heap; they fell like corn before the scythe, not a man won through. Quickly we reloaded and waited for the next rush. In due course it came and the dreadful scene repeated itself. Now the gateway and the tunnel beyond were so choked with fallen men that the enemy must drag these out before they could charge any more. It was done under the fire of myself, Hans and a few picked shots—somehow it was done.

Once more they charged, and once more were mown down. So it went on till our last cartridge was spent, for never did I see more magnificent courage than was shown by those Black Kendah in the face of terrific loss. Then my people threw aside their useless rifles and arming themselves with spears and swords fell back to rest, leaving Harût and his company to take their place. For half an hour or more raged that awful struggle, since the spot being so narrow, charge as they would, the Black Kendah could not win through the spears of despairing warriors defending their lives and the sanctuary of their god. Nor, the encircling cliffs being so sheer, could they get round any other way.

At length the enemy drew back as though defeated, giving us time to drag aside our dead and wounded and drink more water, for the heat in the place was now overwhelming. We hoped against hope that they had given up the attack. But this was far from the case; they were but making a new plan.

Suddenly in the gateway there appeared the huge bulk of the elephant Jana, rushing forward at speed and being urged on by men who pricked it with spears behind. It swept through the defenders as though they were but dry grass, battering those in front of it with its great trunk from which swung the iron balls that crushed all on whom they fell, and paying no more heed to the lance thrusts than it might have done to the bites of gnats. On it came, trumpeting and trampling, and after it in a flood flowed the Black Kendah, upon whom our spearmen flung themselves from either side.

At the time I, followed by Hans, was just returning from speaking with Ragnall at the gate of the second court. A little before I had retired exhausted from the fierce and fearful fighting, whereon he took my place and repelled several of the Black Kendah charges, including the last. In this fray he received a further injury, a knock on the head from a stick or stone which stunned him for a few minutes, whereon some of our people had carried him off and set him on the ground with his back against one of the pillars of the second gate. Being told that he was hurt I ran to see what was the matter. Finding to my joy that it was nothing very serious, I was hurrying to the front again when I looked up and saw that devil Jana charging straight towards me, the throng of armed men parting on each side of him, as rough water does before the leaping prow of a storm-driven ship.

To tell the truth, although I was never fond of unnecessary risks, I rejoiced at the sight. Not even all the excitement of that hideous and prolonged battle had obliterated from my mind the burning sense of shame at the exhibition which I had made of myself by missing this beast with four barrels at forty yards.

Now, thought I to myself with a kind of exultant thrill, now, Jana, I will wipe out both my disgrace and you. This time there shall be no mistake, or if there is, let it be my last.

On thundered Jana, whirling the iron balls among the soldiers, who fled to right and left leaving a clear path between me and him. To make quite sure of things, for I was trembling a little with fatigue and somewhat sick from the continuous sight of bloodshed, I knelt down upon my right knee, using the other as a prop for my left elbow, and since I could not make certain of a head shot because of the continual whirling of the huge trunk, got the sight of my big-game rifle dead on to the beast where the throat joins the chest. I hoped that the heavy conical bullet would either pierce through to the spine or cut one of the large arteries in the neck, or at least that the tremendous shock of its impact would bring him down.

At about twenty paces I fired and hit—not Jana but the lame priest who was fulfilling the office of mahout, perched upon his shoulders many feet above the point at which I had aimed. Yes! I hit him in the head, which was shattered like an eggshell, so that he fell lifeless to the ground.

In perfect desperation again I aimed, and fired when Jana was not more than thirty feet away. This time the bullet must have gone wide to the left, for I saw a chip fly from the end of the animal's broken and deformed tusk, which stuck out in that direction several feet clear of its side.

Then I gave up all hope. There was no time to gain my feet and escape; indeed I did not wish to do so, who felt that there are some failures which can only be absolved by death. I just knelt there, waiting for the end.

In an instant the giant creature was almost over me. I remember looking up at it and thinking in a queer sort of a way—perhaps it was some ancestral memory—that I was a little ape-like child about to be slain by a primordial elephant, thrice as big as any that now

inhabit the earth. Then something appeared to happen which I only repeat to show how at such moments absurd and impossible things seem real to us.

The reader may remember the strange dream which Hans had related to me that morning.

One incident of this phantasy was that he had met the spirit of the Zulu lady Mameena, whom I knew in bygone years, and that she bade him tell me she would be with me in the battle and that I was to look for her when death drew near to me and "Jana thundered on," for then perchance I should see her.

Well, no doubt in some lightning flash of thought the memory of these words occurred to me at this juncture, with the ridiculous result that my subjective intelligence, if that is the right term, actually created the scene which they described. As clearly, or perhaps more clearly than ever I saw anything else in my life, I appeared to behold the beautiful Mameena in her fur cloak and her blue beads, standing between Jana and myself with her arms folded upon her breast and looking exactly as she did in the tremendous moment of her death before King Panda. I even noted how the faint breeze stirred a loose end of her outspread hair and how the sunlight caught a particular point of a copper bangle on her upper arm.

So she stood, or rather seemed to stand, quite still; and as it happened, at that moment the giant Jana, either because something had frightened him, or perhaps owing to the shock of my bullet striking on his tusk having jarred the brain, suddenly pulled up, sliding along a little with all his four feet together, till I thought he was going to sit down like a performing elephant. Then it appeared to me as though Mameena turned round very slowly, bent towards me, whispering something which I could not hear although her lips moved, looked at me sweetly with those wonderful eyes of hers and vanished away.

A fraction of a second later all this vision had gone and something that was no vision took its place. Jana had recovered himself and was at me again with open mouth and lifted trunk. I heard a Dutch curse and saw a little yellow form; saw Hans, for it was he, thrust the barrels of my second elephant rifle almost into that red cave of a mouth, which however they could not reach, and fire, first one barrel, then the other.

Another moment, and the mighty trunk had wrapped itself about Hans and hurled him through the air to fall on to his head and arms thirty or forty feet away.

Jana staggered as though he too were about to fall; recovered himself, swerved to the right, perhaps to follow Hans, stumbled on a few paces, missing me altogether, then again came to a standstill. I wriggled myself round and, seated on the pavement of the court, watched what followed, and glad am I that I was able to do so, for never shall I behold such another scene.

First I saw Ragnall run up with a rifle and fire two barrels at the brute's head, of which he took no notice whatsoever. Then I saw his wife, who in this land was known as the Guardian of the Child, issuing from the portals of the second court, dressed in her goddess robes, wearing the cap of bird's feathers, attended by the two priestesses also dressed as goddesses, as we had seen her on the morning of sacrifice, and holding in front of her the statue of the Ivory Child.

On she came quite quietly, her wide, empty eyes fixed upon Jana. As she advanced the monster seemed to grow uneasy. Turning his head, he lifted his trunk and thrust it along his back until it gripped the ankle of the King Simba, who all this while was seated there in his chair making no movement.

With a slow, steady pull he dragged Simba from the chair so that he fell upon the ground near his left foreleg. Next very composedly he wound his trunk about the body of the helpless man, whose horrified eyes I can see to this day, and began to whirl him round and round in the air, gently at first but with a motion that grew ever more rapid, until the bright chains on the victim's breast flashed in the sunlight like a silver wheel. Then he hurled him to the ground, where the poor king lay a mere shattered pulp that had been human.

Now the priestess was standing in front of the beast-god, apparently quite without fear, though her two attendants had fallen back. Ragnall sprang forward as though to drag her away, but a dozen men leapt on to him and held him fast, either to save his life or for some secret reason of their own which I never learned.

Jana looked down at her and she looked up at Jana. Then he screamed furiously and, shooting out his trunk, snatched the Ivory Child from her hands, whirled it round as he had whirled Simba, and at last dashed it to the stone pavement as he had dashed Simba, so that its substance, grown brittle in the passage of the ages, shattered into ten thousand fragments.

At this sight a great groan went up from the men of the White Kendah, the women dressed as goddesses shrieked and tore their robes, and Harût, who stood near, fell down in a fit or faint.

Once more Jana screamed. Then slowly he knelt down, beat his trunk and the clattering metal balls upon the ground thrice, as though he were making obeisance to the beautiful priestess who stood before him, shivered throughout his mighty bulk, and rolled over—dead!

The fighting ceased. The Black Kendah, who all this while had been pressing into the court of the temple, saw and stood stupefied. It was as though in the presence of events to them so pregnant and terrible men could no longer lift their swords in war.

A voice called: "The god is dead! The king is dead! Jana has slain Simba and has himself been slain! Shattered is the Child; spilt is the blood of Jana! Fly, People of the Black Kendah; fly, for the gods are dead and your land is a land of ghosts!"

From every side was this wail echoed: "Fly, People of the Black Kendah, for the gods are dead!"

They turned; they sped away like shadows, carrying their wounded with them, nor did any attempt to stay them. Thirty minutes later, save for some desperately hurt or dying men, not one of them was left in the temple or the pass beyond. They had all gone, leaving none but the dead behind them.

The fight was finished! The fight that had seemed lost was won!

I dragged myself from the ground. As I gained my tottering feet, for now that all was over I felt as if I were made of running water, I saw the men who held Ragnall loose their grip of him. He sprang to where his wife was and stood before her as though confused, much as Jana had stood, Jana against whose head he rested, his left hand holding to the brute's gigantic tusk, for I think that he also was weak with toil, terror, loss of blood and emotion.

"Luna," he gasped, "Luna!"

Leaning on the shoulder of a Kendah man, I drew nearer to see what passed between them, for my curiosity overcame my faintness. For quite a long while she stared at him, till suddenly her eyes began to change. It was as though a soul were arising in their emptiness as the moon arises in the quiet evening sky, giving them light and life. At length she spoke in a slow, hesitating voice, the tones of which I remembered well enough, saying:

"Oh! George, that dreadful brute," and she pointed to the dead elephant, "has killed our baby. Look at it! Look at it! We must be everything to each other now, dear, as we were before it came—unless God sends us another."

Then she burst into a flood of weeping and fell into his arms, after which I turned away. So, to their honour be it said, did the Kendah, leaving the pair alone behind the bulk of dead Jana.

Here I may state two things: first, that Lady Ragnall, whose bodily health had remained perfect throughout, entirely recovered her reason from that moment. It was as though on the shattering of the Ivory Child some spell had been lifted off her. What this spell may have been I am quite unable to explain, but I presume that in a dim and unknown way she connected this effigy with her own lost infant and that while she held and tended it her intellect remained in abeyance. If so, she must also have connected its destruction with the death of her own child which, strangely enough, it will be remembered, was likewise killed by an elephant. The first death that occurred in her presence took away her reason, the second seeming death, which also occurred in her presence, brought it back again!

Secondly, from the moment of the destruction of her boy in the streets of the English country town to that of the shattering of the Ivory Child in Central Africa her memory was an utter blank, with one exception. This exception was a dream which a few days later she narrated to Ragnall in my presence. That dream was that she had seen him and Savage sleeping together in a native house one night. In view of a certain incident recorded in this history I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions as to this curious incident. I have none to offer, or if I have I prefer to keep them to myself.

Leaving Ragnall and his wife, I staggered off to look for Hans and found him lying senseless near the north wall of the temple. Evidently he was beyond human help, for Jana seemed to have crushed most of his ribs in his iron trunk. We carried him to one of the priest's cells and there I watched him till the end, which came at sundown.

Before he died he became quite conscious and talked with me a good deal.

"Don't grieve about missing Jana, Baas," he said, "for it wasn't you who missed him but some devil that turned your bullets. You see, Baas, he was bewitched against you white men. When you look at him closely you will find that the Lord Igeza missed him also" (strange as it may seem, this proved to be the case), "and when you managed to hit the tip of his tusk with the last ball the magic was wearing off him, that's all. But, Baas, those Black Kendah wizards forgot to bewitch him against the little yellow man, of whom they took no account. So I hit him sure enough every time I fired at him, and I hope he liked the taste of my bullets in that great mouth of his. He knew who had sent them there very well. That's why he left you alone and made for me, as I had hoped he would. Oh! Baas, I die happy, quite happy since I have killed Jana and he caught me and not you, me who was nearly finished anyhow. For, Baas, though I didn't say anything about it, a thrown spear struck my groin when I went down among the Black Kendah this morning. It was only a small cut, which bled little, but as the fighting went on something gave way and my inside began to come through it, though I tied it up with a bit of cloth, which of course means death in a day or two." (Subsequent examination showed me that Hans's story of this wound was perfectly true. He could not have lived for very long.)

"Baas," he went on after a pause, "no doubt I shall meet that Zulu lady Mameena to-night. Tell me, is she really entitled to the royal salute? Because if not, when I am as much a spook as she is I will not give it to her again. She never gave me my titles, which are good ones in their way, so why should I give her the *Bayéte*, unless it is hers by right of blood, although I am only a little 'yellow dog' as she chose to call me?"

As this ridiculous point seemed to weigh upon his mind I told him that Mameena was not even of royal blood and in nowise entitled to the salute of kings.

"Ah!" he said with a feeble grin, "then now I shall know how to deal with her, especially as she cannot pretend that I did not play my part in the battle, as she bade me do. Did you see anything of her when Jana charged, Baas, because I thought I did?"

"I seemed to see something, but no doubt it was only a fancy."

"A fancy? Explain to me, Baas, where truths end and fancies begin and whether what we think are fancies are not sometimes the real truths. Once or twice I have thought so of late, Baas."

I could not answer this riddle, so instead I gave him some water which he asked for, and he continued:

"Baas, have you any messages for the two Shining ones, for her whose name is holy and her sister, and for the child of her whose name is holy, the Missie Marie, and for your reverend father, the Predikant? If so, tell it quickly before my head grows too empty to hold the words."

I will confess, however foolish it may seem, that I gave him certain messages, but what they were I shall not write down. Let them remain secret between me and him. Yes, between me and him and perhaps those to whom they were to be delivered. For after all, in his own words, who can know exactly where fancies end and truths begin, and whether at times fancies are not the veritable truths in this universal mystery of which the individual life of each of us is so small a part?

Hans repeated what I had spoken to him word for word, as a native does, repeated it twice over, after which he said he knew it by heart and remained silent for a long while. Then he asked me to lift him up in the doorway of the cell so that he might look at the sun setting for the last time, "for, Baas," he added, "I think I am going far beyond the sun."

He stared at it for a while, remarking that from the look of the sky there should be fine weather coming, "which will be good for your journey towards the Black Water, Baas, with all that ivory to carry."

I answered that perhaps I should never get the ivory from the graveyard of the elephants, as the Black Kendah might prevent this.

"No, no, Baas," he replied, "now that Jana is dead the Black Kendah will go away. I know it, I know it!"

Then he wandered for a space, speaking of sundry adventures we had shared together, till quite before the last indeed, when his mind returned to him.

"Bas," he said, "didn't the captain Mavovo name me Light-in-Darkness and isn't that my name? When you too enter the Darkness, look for that Light; it will be shining very close to you." He only spoke once more. His words were: "Baas, I understand now what your reverend father, the Predikant, meant when he spoke to me about Love last night. It had nothing to do with women, Baas, at least not much. It was something a great deal bigger, Baas, something as big as what I feel for you!" Then Hans died with a smile on his wrinkled face. I wept!

## CHAPTER XXI.

### HOMEWARDS

There is not much more to write of this expedition, or if that statement be not strictly true, not much more that I wish to write, though I have no doubt that Ragnall, if he had a mind that way, could make a good and valuable book concerning many matters on which, confining myself to the history of our adventure, I have scarcely touched. All the affinities between this Central African Worship of the Heavenly Child and its Guardian and that of Horus and Isis in Egypt from which it was undoubtedly descended, for instance. Also the part which the great serpent played therein, as it may be seen playing a part in every tomb upon the Nile, and indeed plays a part in our own and other religions. Further, our journey across the desert to the Red Sea was very interesting, but I am tired of describing journeys—and of making them.

The truth is that after the death of Hans, like to Queen Sheba when she had surveyed the wonders of Solomon's court, there was no more spirit in me. For quite a long while I did not seem to care at all what happened to me or to anybody else. We buried him in a place of honour, exactly where he shot Jana before the gateway of the second court, and when the earth was thrown over his little yellow face I felt as though half my past had departed with him into that hole. Poor drunken old Hans, where in the world shall I find such another man as you were? Where in the world shall I find so much love as filled the cup of that strange heart of yours?

I dare say it is a form of selfishness, but what every man desires is something that cares for him *alone*, which is just why we are so fond of dogs. Now Hans was a dog with a human brain and he cared for me alone. Often our vanity makes us think that this has happened to some of us in the instance of one or more women. But honest and quiet reflection may well cause us to doubt the truth of such supposings. The woman who as we believed adored us solely has probably in the course of her career adored others, or at any rate other things.

To take but one instance, that of Mameena, the Zulu lady whom Hans thought he saw in the Shades. She, I believe, did me the honour to be very fond of me, but I am convinced that she was fonder still of her ambition. Now Hans never cared for any living creature, or for any human hope or object, as he cared for me. There was no man or woman whom he would not have cheated, or even murdered for my sake. There was no earthly advantage, down to that of life itself, that he would not, and in the end did not forgo for my sake; witness the case of his little fortune which he invested in my rotten gold mine and thought nothing of losing—for my sake.

That is love *in excelsis*, and the man who has succeeded in inspiring it in any creature, even in a low, bibulous, old Hottentot, may feel proud indeed. At least I am proud and as the years go by the pride increases, as the hope grows that somewhere in the quiet of that great plain which he saw in his dream, I may find the light of Hans's love burning like a beacon in the darkness, as he promised I should do, and that it may guide and warm my shivering, new-born soul before I dare the adventure of the Infinite.

Meanwhile, since the sublime and the ridiculous are so very near akin, I often wonder how he and Mameena settled that question of her right to the royal salute. Perhaps I shall learn one day—indeed already I have had a hint of it. If so, even in the blaze of a new and universal Truth, I am certain that their stories will differ wildly.

Hans was quite right about the Black Kendah. They cleared out, probably in search of food, where I do not know and I do not care, though whether this were a temporary or permanent move on their part remains, and so far as I am concerned is likely to remain, veiled in obscurity. They were great blackguards, though extraordinarily fine soldiers, and what became of them is a matter of complete indifference to me. One thing is certain, however, a very large percentage of them never migrated at all, for something over three thousand of their bodies did our people have to bury in the pass and about the temple, a purpose for which all the pits and trenches we had dug came in very useful. Our loss, by the way, was five hundred and three, including those who died of wounds. It was a great fight and, except for those who perished in the pitfalls during the first rush, all practically hand to hand.

Jana we interred where he fell because we could not move him, within a few feet of the body of his slayer Hans. I have always regretted that I did not take the exact measurements of this brute, as I believe the record elephant of the world, but I had no time to do so and no rule or tape at hand. I only saw him for a minute on the following morning, just as he was being tumbled into a huge hole, together with the remains of his master, Simba the King. I found, however, that the sole wounds upon him, save some cuts and scratches from spears, were those inflicted by Hans—namely, the loss of one eye, the puncture through the skin over the heart made when he shot at him for the second time with the little rifle Intombi, and two neat holes at the back of the mouth through which the bullets from the elephant gun had driven upwards to the base of the brain, causing his death from hæmorrhage on that organ.

I asked the White Kendah to give me his two enormous tusks, unequalled, I suppose, in size and weight in Africa, although one was deformed and broken. But they refused. These, I presume, they wished to keep, together with the chains off his breast and trunk, as mementoes of their victory over the god of their foes. At any rate they hewed the former out with axes and removed the latter before tumbling the carcass into the grave. From the worn-down state of the teeth I concluded that this beast must have been extraordinarily old, how old it is impossible to say.

That is all I have to tell of Jana. May he rest in peace, which certainly he will not do if Hans dwells anywhere in his neighbourhood, in the region which the old boy used to call that of the "fires that do not go out." Because of my horrible failure in connection with this beast, the very memory of which humiliates me, I do not like to think of it more than I can help.

For the rest the White Kendah kept faith with us in every particular. In a curious and semi-religious ceremony, at which I was not present, Lady Ragnall was absolved from her high office of Guardian or Nurse to a god whereof the symbol no longer existed, though

I believe that the priests collected the tiny fragments of ivory, or as many of them as could be found, and preserved them in a jar in the sanctuary. After this had been done women stripped the Nurse of her hallowed robes, of the ancient origin of which, by the way, I believe that none of them, except perhaps Harût, had any idea, any more than they knew that the Child represented the Egyptian Horus and his lady Guardian the moon-goddess Isis. Then, dressed in some native garments, she was handed over to Ragnall and thenceforth treated as a stranger-guest, like ourselves, being allowed, however, to live with her husband in the same house that she had occupied during all the period of her strange captivity. Here they abode together, lost in the mutual bliss of this wonderful reunion to which they had attained through so much bodily and spiritual darkness and misery, until a month or so later we started upon our journey across the mountains and the great desert that lay beyond them.

Only once did I find any real opportunity of private conversation with Lady Ragnall.

This happened after her husband had recovered from the hurts he received in the battle, on an occasion when he was obliged to separate from her for a day in order to attend to some matter in the Town of the Child. I think it had to do with the rifles used in the battle, which he had presented to the White Kendah. So, leaving me to look after her, he went, unwillingly enough, who seemed to hate losing sight of his wife even for an hour.

I took her for a walk in the wood, to that very point indeed on the lip of the crater whence we had watched her play her part as priestess at the Feast of the First-fruits. After we had stood there a while we went down among the great cedars, trying to retrace the last part of our march through the darkness of that anxious night, whereof now for the first time I told her all the story.

Growing tired of scrambling among the fallen boughs, at length Lady Ragnall sat down and said:

"Do you know, Mr. Quatermain, these are the first words we have really had since that party at Ragnall before I was married, when, as you may have forgotten, you took me in to dinner."

I replied that there was nothing I recollected much more clearly, which was both true and the right thing to say, or so I supposed.

"Well," she said slowly, "you see that after all there was something in those fancies of mine which at the time you thought would best be dealt with by a doctor—about Africa and the rest, I mean."

"Yes, Lady Ragnall, though of course we should always remember that coincidence accounts for many things. In any case they are done with now."

"Not quite, Mr. Quatermain, even as you mean, since we have still a long way to go. Also in another sense I believe that they are but begun."

"I do not understand, Lady Ragnall."

"Nor do I, but listen. You know that of anything which happened during those months I have no memory at all, except of that one dream when I seemed to see George and Savage in the hut. I remember my baby being killed by that horrible circus elephant, just as the Ivory Child was killed or rather destroyed by Jana, which I suppose is another of your coincidences, Mr. Quatermain. After that I remember nothing until I woke up and saw George standing in front of me covered with blood, and you, and Jana dead, and the rest."

"Because during that time your mind was gone, Lady Ragnall."

"Yes, but where had it gone? I tell you, Mr. Quatermain, that although I remember nothing of what was passing about me then, I do remember a great deal of what seemed to be passing either long ago or in some time to come, though I have said nothing of it to George, as I hope you will not either. It might upset him."

"What do you remember?" I asked.

"That's the trouble; I can't tell you. What was once very clear to me has for the most part become vague and formless. When my mind tries to grasp it, it slips away. It was another life to this, quite a different life; and there was a great story in it of which I think what we have been going through is either a sequel or a prologue. I see, or saw, cities and temples with people moving about them, George and you among them, also that old priest, Harût. You will laugh, but my recollection is that you stood in some relationship to me, either that of father or brother."

"Or perhaps a cousin," I suggested.

"Or perhaps a cousin," she repeated, smiling, "or a great friend; at any rate something very intimate. As for George, I don't know what he was, or Harût either. But the odd thing is that little yellow man, Hans, whom I only saw once living for a few minutes that I can remember, comes more clearly back to my mind than any of you. He was a dwarf, much stouter than when I saw him the other day, but very like. I recall him curiously dressed with feathers and holding an ivory rod, seated upon a stool at the feet of a great personage—a king, I think. The king asked him questions, and everyone listened to his answers. That is all, except that the scenes seemed to be flooded with sunlight."

"Which is more than this place is. I think we had better be moving, Lady Ragnall, or you will catch a chill under these damp cedars."

I said this because I did not wish to pursue the conversation. I considered it too exciting under all her circumstances, especially as I perceived that mystical look gathering on her face and in her beautiful eyes, which I remembered noting before she was married.

She read my thoughts and answered with a laugh:

"Yes, it is damp; but you know I am very strong and damp will not hurt me. For the rest you need not be afraid, Mr. Quatermain. I did not lose my mind. It was taken from me by some power and sent to live elsewhere. Now it has been given back and I do not think it will be taken again in that way."

"Of course it won't," I exclaimed confidently. "Whoever dreamed of such a thing?"

"You did," she answered, looking me in the eyes. "Now before we go I want to say one more thing. Harût and the head priestess have made me a present. They have given me a box full of that herb they called tobacco, but of which I have discovered the real name is Taduki. It is the same that they burned in the bowl when you and I saw visions at Ragnall Castle, which visions, Mr. Quatermain, by another of your coincidences, have since been translated into facts."

"I know. We saw you breathe that smoke again as priestess when you uttered the prophecy as Oracle of the Child at the Feast of the First-fruits. But what are you going to do with this stuff, Lady Ragnall? I think you have had enough of visions just at present."

"So do I, though to tell you the truth I like them. I am going to keep it and do nothing—as yet. Still, I want you always to remember one thing—don't laugh at me"—here again she looked me in the eyes—"that there is a time coming, some way off I think, when I and you—no one else, Mr. Quatermain—will breathe that smoke again together and see strange things."

"No, no!" I replied, "I have given up tobacco of the Kendah variety; it is too strong for me."

"Yes, yes!" she said, "for something that is stronger than the Kendah tobacco will make you do it—when I wish."

"Did Harût tell you that, Lady Ragnall?"

"I don't know," she answered confusedly. "I think the Ivory Child told me; it used to talk to me often. You know that Child isn't really destroyed. Like my reason that seemed to be lost, it has only gone backwards or forwards where you and I shall see it again. You and I and no others—unless it be the little yellow man. I repeat that I do not know when that will be. Perhaps it is written in those rolls of papyrus, which they have given me also, because they said they belonged to me who am 'the first priestess and the last.' They told me, however, or perhaps," she added, passing her hand across her forehead, "it was the Child who told me, that I was not to attempt to read them or have them read, until after a great change in my life. What the change will be I do not know."

"And had better not inquire, Lady Ragnall, since in this world most changes are for the worse."

"I agree, and shall not inquire. Now I have spoken to you like this because I felt that I must do so. Also I want to thank you for all you have done for me and George. Probably we shall not talk in such a way again; as I am situated the opportunity will be lacking, even if the wish is present. So once more I thank you from my heart. Until we meet again—I mean really meet—good-bye," and she held her right hand to me in such a fashion that I knew she meant me to kiss it.

This I did very reverently and we walked back to the temple almost in silence.

That month of rest, or rather the last three weeks of it, since for the first few days after the battle I was quite prostrate, I occupied in various ways, amongst others in a journey with Harût to Simba Town. This we made after our spies had assured us that the Black Kendah were really gone somewhere to the south-west, in which direction fertile and unoccupied lands were said to exist about three hundred miles away. It was with very strange feelings that I retraced our road and looked once more upon that wind-bent tree still scored with the marks of Jana's huge tusk, in the boughs of which Hans and I had taken refuge from the monster's fury. Crossing the river, quite low now, I travelled up the slope down which we raced for our lives and came to the melancholy lake and the cemetery of dead elephants.

Here all was unchanged. There was the little mount worn by his feet, on which Jana was wont to stand. There were the rocks behind which I had tried to hide, and near to them some crushed human bones which I knew to be those of the unfortunate Marût. These we buried with due reverence on the spot where he had fallen, I meanwhile thanking God that my own bones were not being interred at their side, as but for Hans would have been the case—if they were ever interred at all. All about lay the skeletons of dead elephants, and from among these we collected as much of the best ivory as we could carry, namely about fifty camel loads. Of course there was much more, but a great deal of the stuff had been exposed for so long to sun and weather that it was almost worthless.

Having sent this ivory back to the Town of the Child, which was being rebuilt after a fashion, we went on to Simba Town through the forest, dispatching pickets ahead of us to search and make sure that it was empty. Empty it was indeed; never did I see such a place of desolation.

The Black Kendah had left it just as it stood, except for a pile of corpses which lay around and over the altar in the market-place, where the three poor camelmen were sacrificed to Jana, doubtless those of wounded men who had died during or after the retreat. The doors of the houses stood open, many domestic articles, such as great jars resembling that which had been set over the head of the dead man whom we were commanded to restore life, and other furniture lay about because they could not be carried away. So did a great quantity of spears and various weapons of war, whose owners being killed would never want them again. Except a few starved dogs and jackals no living creature remained in the town. It was in its own way as waste and even more impressive than the graveyard of elephants by the lonely lake.

"The curse of the Child worked well," said Harût to me grimly. "First, the storm; the hunger; then the battle; and now the misery of flight and ruin."

"It seems so," I answered. "Yet that curse, like others, came back to roost, for if Jana is dead and his people fled, where are the Child and many of its people? What will you do without your god, Harût?"

"Repent us of our sins and wait till the Heavens send us another, as doubtless they will in their own season," he replied very sadly.

I wonder whether they ever did and, if so, what form that new divinity put on.

I slept, or rather they did not sleep, that night in the same guest-house in which Marût and I had been imprisoned during our dreadful days of fear, reconstructing in my mind every event connected with them. Once more I saw the fires of sacrifice flaring upon the altar and heard the roar of the dancing hail that proclaimed the ruin of the Black Kendah as loudly as the trumpet of a destroying angel. Very glad was I when the morning came at length and, having looked my last upon Simba Town, I crossed the moats and set out homewards through the forest whereof the stripped boughs also spoke of death, though in the spring these would grow green again.

Ten days later we started from the Holy Mount, a caravan of about a hundred camels, of which fifty were laden with the ivory and the rest ridden by our escort under the command of Harût and our three selves. But there was an evil fate upon this ivory, as on everything else that had to do with Jana. Some weeks later in the desert a great sandstorm overtook us in which we barely escaped with our lives. At the height of the storm the ivory-laden camels broke loose, flying before it. Probably they fell and were buried beneath the sand; at any rate of the fifty we only recovered ten.

Ragnall wished to pay me the value of the remaining loads, which ran into thousands of pounds, but I would not take the money, saying it was outside our bargain. Sometimes since then I have thought that I was foolish, especially when on glancing at that codicil to his will in after days, the same which he had given me before the battle, I found that he had set me down for a legacy of £10,000. But in such matters every man must follow his own instinct.

The White Kendah, an unemotional people especially now when they were mourning for their lost god and their dead, watched us go without any demonstration of affection, or even of farewell. Only those priestesses who had attended upon the person of Lady

Ragnall while she played a divine part among them wept when they parted from her, and uttered prayers that they might meet her again "in the presence of the Child."

The pass through the great mountains proved hard to climb, as the foothold for the camels was bad. But we managed it at last, most of the way on foot, pausing a little while on their crest to look our last for ever at the land which we had left, where the Mount of the Child was still dimly visible. Then we descended their farther slope and entered the northern desert.

Day after day and week after week we travelled across that endless desert by a way known to Harût on which water could be found, the only living things in all its vastness, meeting with no accidents save that of the sandstorm in which the ivory was lost. I was much alone during that time, since Harût spoke little and Ragnall and his wife were wrapped up in each other.

At length, months later, we struck a little port on the Red Sea, of which I forget the Arab name, a place as hot as the infernal regions. Shortly afterwards, by great good luck, two trading vessels put in for water, one bound for Aden, in which I embarked en route for Natal, and the other for the port of Suez, whence Ragnall and his wife could travel overland to Alexandria.

Our parting was so hurried at the last, as is often the way after long fellowship, that beyond mutual thanks and good wishes we said little to one another. I can see them now standing with their arms about each other watching me disappear. Concerning their future there is so much to tell that of it I shall say nothing; at any rate here and now, except that Lady Ragnall was right. We did not part for the last time.

As I shook old Harût's hand in farewell he told me that he was going on to Egypt, and I asked him why.

"Perchance to look for another god, Lord Macumazana," he answered gravely, "whom now there is no Jana to destroy. We may speak of that matter if we should meet again."

Such are some of the things that I remember about this journey, but to tell truth I paid little attention to them and many others.

For oh! my heart was sore because of Hans.

## BLACK HEART & WHITE HEART - A ZULU IDYLL

### I

#### PHILIP HADDEN & KING CETYWAYO

At the date of our introduction to him, Philip Hadden was a transport-rider and trader in "the Zulu." Still on the right side of forty, in appearance he was singularly handsome; tall, dark, upright, with keen eyes, short-pointed beard, curling hair and clear-cut features. His life had been varied, and there were passages in it which he did not narrate even to his most intimate friends. He was of gentle birth, however, and it was said that he had received a public school and university education in England. At any rate he could quote the classics with aptitude on occasion, an accomplishment which, coupled with his refined voice and a bearing not altogether common in the wild places of the world, had earned for him among his rough companions the *soubriquet* of "The Prince."

However these things may have been, it is certain that he had emigrated to Natal under a cloud, and equally certain that his relatives at home were content to take no further interest in his fortunes. During the fifteen or sixteen years which he had spent in or about the colony, Hadden followed many trades, and did no good at any of them. A clever man, of agreeable and prepossessing manner, he always found it easy to form friendships and to secure a fresh start in life. But, by degrees, the friends were seized with a vague distrust of him; and, after a period of more or less application, he himself would close the opening that he had made by a sudden disappearance from the locality, leaving behind him a doubtful reputation and some bad debts.

Before the beginning of this story of the most remarkable episodes in his life, Philip Hadden was engaged for several years in transport-riding—that is, in carrying goods on ox waggons from Durban or Maritzburg to various points in the interior. A difficulty such as had more than once confronted him in the course of his career, led to his temporary abandonment of this means of earning a livelihood. On arriving at the little frontier town of Utrecht in the Transvaal, in charge of two waggon loads of mixed goods consigned to a storekeeper there, it was discovered that out of six cases of brandy five were missing from his waggon. Hadden explained the matter by throwing the blame upon his Kaffir "boys," but the storekeeper, a rough-tongued man, openly called him a thief and refused to pay the freight on any of the load. From words the two men came to blows, knives were drawn, and before anybody could interfere the storekeeper received a nasty wound in his side. That night, without waiting till the matter could be inquired into by the landdrost or magistrate, Hadden slipped away, and trekked back into Natal as quickly as his oxen would travel. Feeling that even here he was not safe, he left one of his waggons at Newcastle, loaded up the other with Kaffir goods—such as blankets, calico, and hardware—and crossed into Zululand, where in those days no sheriff's officer would be likely to follow him.

Being well acquainted with the language and customs of the natives, he did good trade with them, and soon found himself possessed of some cash and a small herd of cattle, which he received in exchange for his wares. Meanwhile news reached him that the man whom he had injured still vowed vengeance against him, and was in communication with the authorities in Natal. These reasons making his return to civilisation undesirable for the moment, and further business being impossible until he could receive a fresh supply of trade stuff, Hadden like a wise man turned his thoughts to pleasure. Sending his cattle and waggon over the border to be left in charge of a native headman with whom he was friendly, he went on foot to Ulundi to obtain permission from the king, Cetywayo, to hunt game in his country. Somewhat to his surprise, the Indunas or headmen, received him courteously—for Hadden's visit took place within a few months of the outbreak of the Zulu war in 1878, when Cetywayo was already showing unfriendliness to the English traders and others, though why the king did so they knew not.

On the occasion of his first and last interview with Cetywayo, Hadden got a hint of the reason. It happened thus. On the second morning after his arrival at the royal kraal, a messenger came to inform him that "the Elephant whose tread shook the earth" had signified that it was his pleasure to see him. Accordingly he was led through the thousands of huts and across the Great Place to the little enclosure where Cetywayo, a royal-looking Zulu seated on a stool, and wearing a kaross of leopard skins, was holding an *indaba*, or conference, surrounded by his counsellors. The Induna who had conducted him to the august presence went down upon his hands and knees, and, uttering the royal salute of *Bayéte*, crawled forward to announce that the white man was waiting.

"Let him wait," said the king angrily; and, turning, he continued the discussion with his counsellors.

Now, as has been said, Hadden thoroughly understood Zulu; and, when from time to time the king raised his voice, some of the words he spoke reached his ear.

"What!" Cetywayo said, to a wizened and aged man who seemed to be pleading with him earnestly; "am I a dog that these white hyenas should hunt me thus? Is not the land mine, and was it not my father's before me? Are not the people mine to save or to slay? I tell you that I will stamp out these little white men; my *impis* shall eat them up. I have said!"

Again the withered aged man interposed, evidently in the character of a peacemaker. Hadden could not hear his talk, but he rose and pointed towards the sea, while from his expressive gestures and sorrowful mien, he seemed to be prophesying disaster should a certain course of action be followed.

For a while the king listened to him, then he sprang from his seat, his eyes literally ablaze with rage.

"Hearken," he cried to the counsellor; "I have guessed it for long, and now I am sure of it. You are a traitor. You are Sompseu's[\*] dog, and the dog of the Natal Government, and I will not keep another man's dog to bite me in my own house. Take him away!"

[\*] Sir Theophilus Shepstone's.

A slight involuntary murmur rose from the ring of *indunas*, but the old man never flinched, not even when the soldiers, who presently would murder him, came and seized him roughly. For a few seconds, perhaps five, he covered his face with the corner of the kaross he wore, then he looked up and spoke to the king in a clear voice.

"O King," he said, "I am a very old man; as a youth I served under Chaka the Lion, and I heard his dying prophecy of the coming of the white man. Then the white men came, and I fought for Dingaan at the battle of the Blood River. They slew Dingaan, and for many years I was the counsellor of Panda, your father. I stood by you, O King, at the battle of the Tugela, when its grey waters were turned to red with the blood of Umbulazi your brother, and of the tens of thousands of his people. Afterwards I became your counsellor, O King, and I was with you when Sompseu set the crown upon your head and you made promises to Sompseu—promises that you have not kept. Now you are weary of me, and it is well; for I am very old, and doubtless my talk is foolish, as it chances to the old. Yet I think that the prophecy of Chaka, your great-uncle, will come true, and that the white men will prevail against you and that through them you shall find your death. I would that I might have stood in one more battle and fought for you, O King, since fight you will, but the end which you choose is for me the best end. Sleep in peace, O King, and farewell. *Bayéte!*"[\*]

[\*] The royal salute of the Zulus.

For a space there was silence, a silence of expectation while men waited to hear the tyrant reverse his judgment. But it did not please him to be merciful, or the needs of policy outweighed his pity.

"Take him away," he repeated. Then, with a slow smile on his face and one word, "Good-night," upon his lips, supported by the arm of a soldier, the old warrior and statesman shuffled forth to the place of death.

Hadden watched and listened in amazement not unmixed with fear. "If he treats his own servants like this, what will happen to me?" he reflected. "We English must have fallen out of favour since I left Natal. I wonder whether he means to make war on us or what? If so, this isn't my place."

Just then the king, who had been gazing moodily at the ground, chanced to look up. "Bring the stranger here," he said.

Hadden heard him, and coming forward offered Cetywayo his hand in as cool and nonchalant a manner as he could command.

Somewhat to his surprise it was accepted. "At least, White Man," said the king, glancing at his visitor's tall spare form and cleanly cut face, "you are no *'umfagozan'* (low fellow); you are of the blood of chiefs."

"Yes, King," answered Hadden, with a little sigh, "I am of the blood of chiefs."

"What do you want in my country, White Man?"

"Very little, King. I have been trading here, as I daresay you have heard, and have sold all my goods. Now I ask your leave to hunt buffalo, and other big game, for a while before I return to Natal."

"I cannot grant it," answered Cetywayo, "you are a spy sent by Sompseu, or by the Queen's Induna in Natal. Get you gone."

"Indeed," said Hadden, with a shrug of his shoulders; "then I hope that Sompseu, or the Queen's Induna, or both of them, will pay me when I return to my own country. Meanwhile I will obey you because I must, but I should first like to make you a present."

"What present?" asked the king. "I want no presents. We are rich here, White Man."

"So be it, King. It was nothing worthy of your taking, only a rifle."

"A rifle, White Man? Where is it?"

"Without. I would have brought it, but your servants told me that it is death to come armed before the 'Elephant who shakes the Earth.'"

Cetywayo frowned, for the note of sarcasm did not escape his quick ear.

"Let this white man's offering be brought; I will consider the thing."

Instantly the Induna who had accompanied Hadden darted to the gateway, running with his body bent so low that it seemed as though at every step he must fall upon his face. Presently he returned with the weapon in his hand and presented it to the king, holding it so that the muzzle was pointed straight at the royal breast.

"I crave leave to say, O Elephant," remarked Hadden in a drawling voice, "that it might be well to command your servant to lift the mouth of that gun from your heart."

"Why?" asked the king.

"Only because it is loaded, and at full cock, O Elephant, who probably desires to continue to shake the Earth."

At these words the "Elephant" uttered a sharp exclamation, and rolled from his stool in a most unkingly manner, whilst the terrified Induna, springing backwards, contrived to touch the trigger of the rifle and discharge a bullet through the exact spot that a second before had been occupied by his monarch's head.

"Let him be taken away," shouted the incensed king from the ground, but long before the words had passed his lips the Induna, with a cry that the gun was bewitched, had cast it down and fled at full speed through the gate.

"He has already taken himself away," suggested Hadden, while the audience tittered. "No, King, do not touch it rashly; it is a repeating rifle. Look——" and lifting the Winchester, he fired the four remaining shots in quick succession into the air, striking the top of a tree at which he aimed with every one of them.

"Wow, it is wonderful!" said the company in astonishment.

"Has the thing finished?" asked the king.

"For the present it has," answered Hadden. "Look at it."

Cetywayo took the repeater in his hand, and examined it with caution, swinging the muzzle horizontally in an exact line with the stomachs of some of his most eminent Indunas, who shrank to this side and that as the barrel was brought to bear on them.

"See what cowards they are, White Man," said the king with indignation; "they fear lest there should be another bullet in this gun."

"Yes," answered Hadden, "they are cowards indeed. I believe that if they were seated on stools they would tumble off them just as it chanced to your Majesty to do just now."

"Do you understand the making of guns, White Man?" asked the king hastily, while the Indunas one and all turned their heads, and contemplated the fence behind them.

"No, King, I cannot make guns, but I can mend them."

"If I paid you well, White Man, would you stop here at my kraal, and mend guns for me?" asked Cetywayo anxiously.

"It might depend on the pay," answered Hadden; "but for awhile I am tired of work, and wish to rest. If the king gives me the permission to hunt for which I asked, and men to go with me, then when I return perhaps we can bargain on the matter. If not, I will bid the king farewell, and journey to Natal."

"In order to make report of what he has seen and learned here," muttered Cetywayo.

At this moment the talk was interrupted, for the soldiers who had led away the old Induna returned at speed, and prostrated themselves before the king.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"He has travelled the king's bridge," they answered grimly; "he died singing a song of praise of the king."

"Good," said Cetywayo, "that stone shall hurt my feet no more. Go, tell the tale of its casting away to Sompseu and to the Queen's Induna in Natal," he added with bitter emphasis.

"*Baba!* Hear our Father speak. Listen to the rumbling of the Elephant," said the Indunas taking the point, while one bolder than the rest added: "Soon we will tell them another tale, the white Talking Ones, a red tale, a tale of spears, and the regiments shall sing it in their ears."

At the words an enthusiasm caught hold of the listeners, as the sudden flame catches hold of dry grass. They sprang up, for the most of them were seated on their haunches, and stamping their feet upon the ground in unison, repeated:—

*Indaba ibomwu—indaba ye mikonto  
Lizo danyiswa nge impi ndhlebeni yaho.  
(A red tale! A red tale! A tale of spears,  
And the impi shall sing it in their ears.)*

One of them, indeed, a great fierce-faced fellow, drew near to Hadden and shaking his fist before his eyes—fortunately being in the royal presence he had no assegai—shouted the sentences at him.

The king saw that the fire he had lit was burning too fiercely.

"Silence," he thundered in the deep voice for which he was remarkable, and instantly each man became as if he were turned to stone, only the echoes still answered back: "And the *impis* shall sing it in their ears—in their ears."

"I am growing certain that this is no place for me," thought Hadden; "if that scoundrel had been armed he might have temporarily forgotten himself. Hullo! who's this?"

Just then there appeared through the gate of the fence a splendid specimen of the Zulu race. The man, who was about thirty-five years of age, was arrayed in a full war dress of a captain of the Umcityu regiment. From the circlet of otter skin on his brow rose his crest of plumes, round his middle, arms and knees hung the long fringes of black oxtails, and in one hand he bore a little dancing shield, also black in colour. The other was empty, since he might not appear before the king bearing arms. In countenance the man was handsome, and though just now they betrayed some anxiety, his eyes were genial and honest, and his mouth sensitive. In height he must have measured six foot two inches, yet he did not strike the observer as being tall, perhaps because of his width of chest and the solidity of his limbs, that were in curious contrast to the delicate and almost womanish hands and feet which so often mark the Zulu of noble blood. In short the man was what he seemed to be, a savage gentleman of birth, dignity and courage.

In company with him was another man plainly dressed in a moocha and a blanket, whose grizzled hair showed him to be over fifty years of age. His face also was pleasant and even refined, but the eyes were timorous, and the mouth lacked character.

"Who are these?" asked the king.

The two men fell on their knees before him, and bowed till their foreheads touched the ground—the while giving him his *sibonga* or titles of praise.

"Speak," he said impatiently.

"O King," said the young warrior, seating himself Zulu fashion, "I am Nahoon, the son of Zomba, a captain of the Umcityu, and this is my uncle Umgona, the brother of one of my mothers, my father's youngest wife."

Cetywayo frowned. "What do you here away from your regiment, Nahoon?"

"May it please the king, I have leave of absence from the head captains, and I come to ask a boon of the king's bounty."

"Be swift, then, Nahoon."

"It is this, O King," said the captain with some embarrassment: "A while ago the king was pleased to make a *keshla* of me because of certain service that I did out yonder——" and he touched the black ring which he wore in the hair of his head. "Being now a ringed man and a captain, I crave the right of a man at the hands of the king—the right to marry."

"Right? Speak more humbly, son of Zomba; my soldiers and my cattle have no rights."

Nahoon bit his lip, for he had made a serious mistake.

"Pardon, O King. The matter stands thus: My uncle Umgona here has a fair daughter named Nanea, whom I desire to wife, and who desires me to husband. Awaiting the king's leave I am betrothed to her and in earnest of it I have paid to Umgona a *lobola* of fifteen head of cattle, cows and calves together. But Umgona has a powerful neighbour, an old chief named Maputa, the warden of the Crocodile Drift, who doubtless is known to the king, and this chief also seeks Nanea in marriage and harries Umgona, threatening him with many evils if he will not give the girl to him. But Umgona's heart is white towards me, and towards Maputa it is black, therefore together we come to crave this boon of the king."

"It is so; he speaks the truth," said Umgona.

"Cease," answered Cetywayo angrily. "Is this a time that my soldiers should seek wives in marriage, wives to turn their hearts to water? Know that but yesterday for this crime I commanded that twenty girls who had dared without my leave to marry men of the Undi regiment, should be strangled and their bodies laid upon the cross-roads and with them the bodies of their fathers, that all might know their sin and be warned thereby. Ay, Umgona, it is well for you and for your daughter that you sought my word before she was given in marriage to this man. Now this is my award: I refuse your prayer, Nahoon, and since you, Umgona, are troubled with one whom you would not take as son-in-law, the old chief Maputa, I will free you from his importunity. The girl, says Nahoon, is fair—good, I myself will be gracious to her, and she shall be numbered among the wives of the royal house. Within thirty days from now, in the week of the next new moon, let her be delivered to the Sigodhla, the royal house of the women, and with her those cattle, the cows and the calves together, that Nahoon has given you, of which I fine him because he has dared to think of marriage without the leave of the king."

## CHAPTER II

### THE BEE PROPHECIES

"'A Daniel come to judgment' indeed," reflected Hadden, who had been watching this savage comedy with interest; "our love-sick friend has got more than he bargained for. Well, that comes of appealing to Cæsar," and he turned to look at the two suppliants.

The old man, Umgona, merely started, then began to pour out sentences of conventional thanks and praise to the king for his goodness and condescension. Cetywayo listened to his talk in silence, and when he had done answered by reminding him tersely that if Nanea did not appear at the date named, both she and he, her father, would in due course certainly decorate a cross-road in their own immediate neighbourhood.

The captain, Nahoon, afforded a more curious study. As the fatal words crossed the king's lips, his face took an expression of absolute astonishment, which was presently replaced by one of fury—the just fury of a man who suddenly has suffered an unutterable wrong. His whole frame quivered, the veins stood out in knots on his neck and forehead, and his fingers closed convulsively as though they were grasping the handle of a spear. Presently the rage passed away—for as well might a man be wroth with fate as with a Zulu despot—to be succeeded by a look of the most hopeless misery. The proud dark eyes grew dull, the copper-coloured face sank in and turned ashen, the mouth drooped, and down one corner of it there trickled a little line of blood springing from the lip bitten through in the effort to keep silence. Lifting his hand in salute to the king, the great man rose and staggered rather than walked towards the gate.

As he reached it, the voice of Cetywayo commanded him to stop. "Stay," he said, "I have a service for you, Nahoon, that shall drive out of your head these thoughts of wives and marriage. You see this white man here; he is my guest, and would hunt buffalo and big game in the bush country. I put him in your charge; take men with you, and see that he comes to no hurt. See also that you bring him before me within a month, or your life shall answer for it. Let him be here at my royal kraal in the first week of the new moon—when Nanea comes—and then I will tell you whether or no I agree with you that she is fair. Go now, my child, and you, White Man, go also; those who are to accompany you shall be with you at the dawn. Farewell, but remember we meet again at the new moon, when we will settle what pay you shall receive as keeper of my guns. Do not fail me, White Man, or I shall send after you, and my messengers are sometimes rough."

"This means that I am a prisoner," thought Hadden, "but it will go hard if I cannot manage to give them the slip somehow. I don't intend to stay in this country if war is declared, to be pounded into *mouti* (medicine), or have my eyes put out, or any little joke of that sort."

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Ten days had passed, and one evening Hadden and his escort were encamped in a wild stretch of mountainous country lying between the Blood and Unvunyana Rivers, not more than eight miles from that "Place of the Little Hand" which within a few weeks was to become famous throughout the world by its native name of Isandhlwana. For three days they had been tracking the spoor of a small herd of buffalo that still inhabited the district, but as yet they had not come up with them. The Zulu hunters had suggested that they should follow the Unvunyana down towards the sea where game was more plentiful, but this neither Hadden, nor the captain, Nahoon, had been anxious to do, for reasons which each of them kept secret to himself. Hadden's object was to work gradually down to the Buffalo River across which he hoped to effect a retreat into Natal. That of Nahoon was to linger in the neighbourhood of the kraal of Umgona, which was situated not very far from their present camping place, in the vague hope that he might find an opportunity of speaking with or at least of seeing Nanea, the girl to whom he was affianced, who within a few weeks must be taken from him, and given over to the king.

A more eerie-looking spot than that where they were encamped Hadden had never seen. Behind them lay a tract of land—half-swamp and half-bush—in which the buffalo were supposed to be hiding. Beyond, in lonely grandeur, rose the mountain of Isandhlwana, while in front was an amphitheatre of the most gloomy forest, ringed round in the distance by sheer-sided hills. Into this forest there ran a river which drained the swamp, placidly enough upon the level. But it was not always level, for within three hundred yards of them it dashed suddenly over a precipice, of no great height but very steep, falling into a boiling rock-bound pool that the light of the sun never seemed to reach.

"What is the name of that forest, Nahoon?" asked Hadden.

"It is named *Emagudu*, The Home of the Dead," the Zulu replied absently, for he was looking towards the kraal of Nanea, which was situated at an hour's walk away over the ridge to the right.

"The Home of the Dead! Why?"

"Because the dead live there, those whom we name the *Esemkofu*, the Speechless Ones, and with them other Spirits, the *Amahlosi*, from whom the breath of life has passed away, and who yet live on."

"Indeed," said Hadden, "and have you ever seen these ghosts?"

"Am I mad that I should go to look for them, White Man? Only the dead enter that forest, and it is on the borders of it that our people make offerings to the dead."

Followed by Nahoon, Hadden walked to the edge of the cliff and looked over it. To the left lay the deep and dreadful-looking pool, while close to the bank of it, placed upon a narrow strip of turf between the cliff and the commencement of the forest, was a hut.

"Who lives there?" asked Hadden.

"The great *Isanusi*—she who is named *Inyanga* or Doctress; she who is named *Inyosi* (the Bee), because she gathers wisdom from the dead who grow in the forest."

"Do you think that she could gather enough wisdom to tell me whether I am going to kill any buffalo, Nahoon?"

"Mayhap, White Man, but," he added with a little smile, "those who visit the Bee's hive may hear nothing, or they may hear more than they wish for. The words of that Bee have a sting."

"Good; I will see if she can sting me."

"So be it," said Nahoon; and turning, he led the way along the cliff till he reached a native path which zig-zagged down its face.

By this path they climbed till they came to the sward at the foot of the descent, and walked up it to the hut which was surrounded by a low fence of reeds, enclosing a small court-yard paved with ant-heap earth beaten hard and polished. In this court-yard sat the Bee, her stool being placed almost at the mouth of the round opening that served as a doorway to the hut. At first all that Hadden could see of her, crouched as she was in the shadow, was a huddled shape wrapped round with a greasy and tattered catskin kaross, above the edge of which appeared two eyes, fierce and quick as those of a leopard. At her feet smouldered a little fire, and ranged around it in a semi-circle were a number of human skulls, placed in pairs as though they were talking together, whilst other bones, to all appearance also human, were festooned about the hut and the fence of the courtyard.

"I see that the old lady is set up with the usual properties," thought Hadden, but he said nothing.

Nor did the witch-doctress say anything; she only fixed her beady eyes upon his face. Hadden returned the compliment, staring at her with all his might, till suddenly he became aware that he was vanquished in this curious duel. His brain grew confused, and to his fancy it seemed that the woman before him had shifted shape into the likeness of a colossal and horrid spider sitting at the mouth of her trap, and that these bones were the relics of her victims.

"Why do you not speak, White Man?" she said at last in a slow clear voice. "Well, there is no need, since I can read your thoughts. You are thinking that I who am called the Bee should be better named the Spider. Have no fear; I did not kill these men. What would it profit me when the dead are so many? I suck the souls of men, not their bodies, White Man. It is their living hearts I love to look on, for therein I read much and thereby I grow wise. Now what would you of the Bee, White Man, the Bee that labours in this Garden of Death, and—what brings *you* here, son of Zomba? Why are you not with the *Umcityu* now that they doctor themselves for the great war—the last war—the war of the white and the black—or if you have no stomach for fighting, why are you not at the side of Nanea the tall, Nanea the fair?"

Nahoon made no answer, but Hadden said:—

"A small thing, mother. I would know if I shall prosper in my hunting."

"In your hunting, White Man; what hunting? The hunting of game, of money, or of women? Well, one of them, for a-hunting you must ever be; that is your nature, to hunt and be hunted. Tell me now, how goes the wound of that trader who tasted of your steel yonder in the town of the Maboon (Boers)? No need to answer, White Man, but what fee, Chief, for the poor witch-doctress whose skill you seek," she added in a whining voice. "Surely you would not that an old woman should work without a fee?"

"I have none to offer you, mother, so I will be going," said Hadden, who began to feel himself satisfied with this display of the Bee's powers of observation and thought-reading.

"Nay," she answered with an unpleasant laugh, "would you ask a question, and not wait for the answer? I will take no fee from you at present, White Man; you shall pay me later on when we meet again," and once more she laughed. "Let me look in your face, let me look in your face," she continued, rising and standing before him.

Then of a sudden Hadden felt something cold at the back of his neck, and the next instant the Bee had sprung from him, holding between her thumb and finger a curl of dark hair which she had cut from his head. The action was so instantaneous that he had neither time to avoid nor to resent it, but stood still staring at her stupidly.

"That is all I need," she cried, "for like my heart my magic is white. Stay—son of Zomba, give me also of your hair, for those who visit the Bee must listen to her humming."

Nahoon obeyed, cutting a little lock from his head with the sharp edge of his assegai, though it was very evident that he did this not because he wished to do so, but because he feared to refuse.

Then the Bee slipped back her kaross, and stood bending over the fire before them, into which she threw herbs taken from a pouch that was bound about her middle. She was still a finely-shaped woman, and she wore none of the abominations which Hadden had been accustomed to see upon the persons of witch-doctresses. About her neck, however, was a curious ornament, a small live snake, red and grey in hue, which her visitors recognised as one of the most deadly to be found in that part of the country. It is not unusual for Bantu witch-doctors thus to decorate themselves with snakes, though whether or not their fangs have first been extracted no one seems to know.

Presently the herbs began to smoulder, and the smoke of them rose up in a thin, straight stream, that, striking upon the face of the Bee, clung about her head enveloping it as though with a strange blue veil. Then of a sudden she stretched out her hands, and let fall the two locks of hair upon the burning herbs, where they writhed themselves to ashes like things alive. Next she opened her mouth, and began to draw the fumes of the hair and herbs into her lungs in great gulps; while the snake, feeling the influence of the medicine, hissed and, uncoiling itself from about her neck, crept upwards and took refuge among the black *saccaboola* feathers of her head-dress.

Soon the vapours began to do their work; she swayed to and fro muttering, then sank back against the hut, upon the straw of which her head rested. Now the Bee's face was turned upwards towards the light, and it was ghastly to behold, for it had become blue in colour, and the open eyes were sunken like the eyes of one dead, whilst above her forehead the red snake wavered and hissed, reminding Hadden of the *Uraeus* crest on the brow of statues of Egyptian kings. For ten seconds or more she remained thus, then she spoke in a hollow and unnatural voice:—

"O Black Heart and body that is white and beautiful, I look into your heart, and it is black as blood, and it shall be black with blood. Beautiful white body with black heart, you shall find your game and hunt it, and it shall lead you into the House of the

Homeless, into the Home of the Dead, and it shall be shaped as a bull, it shall be shaped as a tiger, it shall be shaped as a woman whom kings and waters cannot harm. Beautiful white body and black heart, you shall be paid your wages, money for money, and blow for blow. Think of my word when the spotted cat purrs above your breast; think of it when the battle roars about you; think of it when you grasp your great reward, and for the last time stand face to face with the ghost of the dead in the Home of the Dead.

"O White Heart and black body, I look into your heart and it is white as milk, and the milk of innocence shall save it. Fool, why do you strike that blow? Let him be who is loved of the tiger, and whose love is as the love of a tiger. Ah! what face is that in the battle? Follow it, follow it, O swift of foot; but follow warily, for the tongue that has lied will never plead for mercy, and the hand that can betray is strong in war. White Heart, what is death? In death life lives, and among the dead you shall find the life you lost, for there awaits you she whom kings and waters cannot harm."

As the Bee spoke, by degrees her voice sank lower and lower till it was almost inaudible. Then it ceased altogether and she seemed to pass from trance to sleep. Hadden, who had been listening to her with an amused and cynical smile, now laughed aloud.

"Why do you laugh, White Man?" asked Nahoon angrily.

"I laugh at my own folly in wasting time listening to the nonsense of that lying fraud."

"It is no nonsense, White Man."

"Indeed? Then will you tell me what it means?"

"I cannot tell you what it means yet, but her words have to do with a woman and a leopard, and with your fate and my fate."

Hadden shrugged his shoulders, not thinking the matter worth further argument, and at that moment the Bee woke up shivering, drew the red snake from her head-dress and coiling it about her throat wrapped herself again in the greasy kaross.

"Are you satisfied with my wisdom, *Inkoos*?" she asked of Hadden.

"I am satisfied that you are one of the cleverest cheats in Zululand, mother," he answered coolly. "Now, what is there to pay?"

The Bee took no offence at this rude speech, though for a second or two the look in her eyes grew strangely like that which they had seen in those of the snake when the fumes of the fire made it angry.

"If the white lord says I am a cheat, it must be so," she answered, "for he of all men should be able to discern a cheat. I have said that I ask no fee;—yes, give me a little tobacco from your pouch."

Hadden opened the bag of antelope hide and drawing some tobacco from it, gave it to her. In taking it she clasped his hand and examined the gold ring that was upon the third finger, a ring fashioned like a snake with two little rubies set in the head to represent the eyes.

"I wear a snake about my neck, and you wear one upon your hand, *Inkoos*. I should like to have this ring to wear upon my hand, so that the snake about my neck may be less lonely there."

"Then I am afraid you will have to wait till I am dead," said Hadden.

"Yes, yes," she answered in a pleased voice, "it is a good word. I will wait till you are dead and then I will take the ring, and none can say that I have stolen it, for Nahoon there will bear me witness that you gave me permission to do so."

For the first time Hadden started, since there was something about the Bee's tone that jarred upon him. Had she addressed him in her professional manner, he would have thought nothing of it; but in her cupidity she had become natural, and it was evident that she spoke from conviction, believing her own words.

She saw him start, and instantly changed her note.

"Let the white lord forgive the jest of a poor old witch-doctress," she said in a whining voice. "I have so much to do with Death that his name leaps to my lips," and she glanced first at the circle of skulls about her, then towards the waterfall that fed the gloomy pool upon whose banks her hut was placed.

"Look," she said simply.

Following the line of her outstretched hand Hadden's eyes fell upon two withered mimosa trees which grew over the fall almost at right angles to its rocky edge. These trees were joined together by a rude platform made of logs of wood lashed down with *riems* of hide. Upon this platform stood three figures; notwithstanding the distance and the spray of the fall, he could see that they were those of two men and a girl, for their shapes stood out distinctly against the fiery red of the sunset sky. One instant there were three, the next there were two—for the girl had gone, and something dark rushing down the face of the fall, struck the surface of the pool with a heavy thud, while a faint and piteous cry broke upon his ear.

"What is the meaning of that?" he asked, horrified and amazed.

"Nothing," answered the Bee with a laugh. "Do you not know, then, that this is the place where faithless women, or girls who have loved without the leave of the king, are brought to meet their death, and with them their accomplices. Oh! they die here thus each day, and I watch them die and keep the count of the number of them," and drawing a tally-stick from the thatch of the hut, she took a knife and added a notch to the many that appeared upon it, looking at Nahoon the while with a half-questioning, half-warning gaze.

"Yes, yes, it is a place of death," she muttered. "Up yonder the quick die day by day and down there"—and she pointed along the course of the river beyond the pool to where the forest began some two hundred yards from her hut—"the ghosts of them have their home. Listen!"

As she spoke, a sound reached their ears that seemed to swell from the dim skirts of the forests, a peculiar and unholy sound which it is impossible to define more accurately than by saying that it seemed beastlike, and almost inarticulate.

"Listen," repeated the Bee, "they are merry yonder."

"Who?" asked Hadden; "the baboons?"

"No, *Inkoos*, the *Amatongo*—the ghosts that welcome her who has just become of their number."

"Ghosts," said Hadden roughly, for he was angry at his own tremors, "I should like to see those ghosts. Do you think that I have never heard a troop of monkeys in the bush before, mother? Come, Nahoon, let us be going while there is light to climb the cliff. Farewell."

"Farewell *Inkoos*, and doubt not that your wish will be fulfilled. Go in peace *Inkoos*—to sleep in peace."

## CHAPTER III

### THE END OF THE HUNT

The prayer of the Bee notwithstanding, Philip Hadden slept ill that night. He felt in the best of health, and his conscience was not troubling him more than usual, but rest he could not. Whenever he closed his eyes, his mind conjured up a picture of the grim witch-doctress, so strangely named the Bee, and the sound of her evil-omened words as he had heard them that afternoon. He was neither a superstitious nor a timid man, and any supernatural beliefs that might linger in his mind were, to say the least of it, dormant. But do what he might, he could not shake off a certain eerie sensation of fear, lest there should be some grains of truth in the prophesyings of this hag. What if it were a fact that he was near his death, and that the heart which beat so strongly in his breast must soon be still for ever—no, he would not think of it. This gloomy place, and the dreadful sight which he saw that day, had upset his nerves. The domestic customs of these Zulus were not pleasant, and for his part he was determined to be clear of them so soon as he was able to escape the country.

In fact, if he could in any way manage it, it was his intention to make a dash for the border on the following night. To do this with a good prospect of success, however, it was necessary that he should kill a buffalo, or some other head of game. Then, as he knew well, the hunters with him would feast upon meat until they could scarcely stir, and that would be his opportunity. Nahoon, however, might not succumb to this temptation; therefore he must trust to luck to be rid of him. If it came to the worst, he could put a bullet through him, which he considered he would be justified in doing, seeing that in reality the man was his jailor. Should this necessity arise, he felt indeed that he could face it without undue compunction, for in truth he disliked Nahoon; at times he even hated him. Their natures were antagonistic, and he knew that the great Zulu distrusted and looked down upon him, and to be looked down upon by a savage “nigger” was more than his pride could stomach.

At the first break of dawn Hadden rose and roused his escort, who were still stretched in sleep around the dying fire, each man wrapped in his kaross or blanket. Nahoon stood up and shook himself, looking gigantic in the shadows of the morning.

“What is your will, *Umlungu* (white man), that you are up before the sun?”

“My will, *Muntumpofu* (yellow man), is to hunt buffalo,” answered Hadden coolly. It irritated him that this savage should give him no title of any sort.

“Your pardon,” said the Zulu reading his thoughts, “but I cannot call you *Inkoos* because you are not my chief, or any man’s; still if the title ‘white man’ offends you, we will give you a name.”

“As you wish,” answered Hadden briefly.

Accordingly they gave him a name, *Inhlizin-mgama*, by which he was known among them thereafter, but Hadden was not best pleased when he found that the meaning of those soft-sounding syllables was “Black Heart.” That was how the *inyanga* had addressed him—only she used different words.

An hour later, and they were in the swampy bush country that lay behind the encampment searching for their game. Within a very little while Nahoon held up his hand, then pointed to the ground. Hadden looked; there, pressed deep in the marshy soil, and to all appearance not ten minutes old, was the spoor of a small herd of buffalo.

“I knew that we should find game to-day,” whispered Nahoon, “because the Bee said so.”

“Curse the Bee,” answered Hadden below his breath. “Come on.”

For a quarter of an hour or more they followed the spoor through thick reeds, till suddenly Nahoon whistled very softly and touched Hadden’s arm. He looked up, and there, about two hundred yards away, feeding on some higher ground among a patch of mimosa trees, were the buffaloes—six of them—an old bull with a splendid head, three cows, a heifer and a calf about four months old. Neither the wind nor the nature of the veldt were favourable for them to stalk the game from their present position, so they made a detour of half a mile and very carefully crept towards them up the wind, slipping from trunk to trunk of the mimosas and when these failed them, crawling on their stomachs under cover of the tall *tambuti* grass. At last they were within forty yards, and a further advance seemed impracticable; for although he could not smell them, it was evident from his movements that the old bull heard some unusual sound and was growing suspicious. Nearest to Hadden, who alone of the party had a rifle, stood the heifer broadside on—a beautiful shot. Remembering that she would make the best beef, he lifted his Martini, and aiming at her immediately behind the shoulder, gently squeezed the trigger. The rifle exploded, and the heifer fell dead, shot through the heart. Strangely enough the other buffaloes did not at once run away. On the contrary, they seemed puzzled to account for the sudden noise; and, not being able to wind anything, lifted their heads and stared round them.

The pause gave Hadden space to get in a fresh cartridge and to aim again, this time at the old bull. The bullet struck him somewhere in the neck or shoulder, for he came to his knees, but in another second was up and having caught sight of the cloud of smoke he charged straight at it. Because of this smoke, or for some other reason, Hadden did not see him coming, and in consequence would most certainly have been trampled or gored, had not Nahoon sprung forward, at the imminent risk of his own life, and dragged him down behind an ant-heap. A moment more and the great beast had thundered by, taking no further notice of them.

“Forward,” said Hadden, and leaving most of the men to cut up the heifer and carry the best of her meat to camp, they started on the blood spoor.

For some hours they followed the bull, till at last they lost the trail on a patch of stony ground thickly covered with bush, and exhausted by the heat, sat down to rest and to eat some *biltong* or sun-dried flesh which they had with them. They finished their meal,

and were preparing to return to the camp, when one of the four Zulus who were with them went to drink at a little stream that ran at a distance of not more than ten paces away. Half a minute later they heard a hideous grunting noise and a splashing of water, and saw the Zulu fly into the air. All the while that they were eating, the wounded buffalo had been lying in wait for them under a thick bush on the banks of the streamlet, knowing—cunning brute that he was—that sooner or later his turn would come. With a shout of consternation they rushed forward to see the bull vanish over the rise before Hadden could get a chance of firing at him, and to find their companion dying, for the great horn had pierced his lung.

"It is not a buffalo, it is a devil," the poor fellow gasped, and expired.

"Devil or not, I mean to kill it," exclaimed Hadden. So leaving the others to carry the body of their comrade to camp, he started on accompanied by Nahoon only. Now the ground was more open and the chase easier, for they sighted their quarry frequently, though they could not come near enough to fire. Presently they travelled down a steep cliff.

"Do you know where we are?" asked Nahoon, pointing to a belt of forest opposite. "That is *Emagudu*, the Home of the Dead—and look, the bull heads thither."

Hadden glanced round him. It was true; yonder to the left were the Fall, the Pool of Doom, and the hut of the Bee.

"Very well," he answered; "then we must head for it too."

Nahoon halted. "Surely you would not enter there," he exclaimed.

"Surely I will," replied Hadden, "but there is no need for you to do so if you are afraid."

"I am afraid—of ghosts," said the Zulu, "but I will come."

So they crossed the strip of turf, and entered the haunted wood. It was a gloomy place indeed; the great wide-topped trees grew thick there shutting out the sight of the sky; moreover, the air in it which no breeze stirred, was heavy with the exhalations of rotting foliage. There seemed to be no life here and no sound—only now and again a loathsome spotted snake would uncoil itself and glide away, and now and again a heavy rotten bough fell with a crash.

Hadden was too intent upon the buffalo, however, to be much impressed by his surroundings. He only remarked that the light would be bad for shooting, and went on.

They must have penetrated a mile or more into the forest when the sudden increase of blood upon the spoor told them that the bull's wound was proving fatal to him.

"Run now," said Hadden cheerfully.

"Nay, *hamba gachle*—go softly—" answered Nahoon, "the devil is dying, but he will try to play us another trick before he dies." And he went on peering ahead of him cautiously.

"It is all right here, anyway," said Hadden, pointing to the spoor that ran straight forward printed deep in the marshy ground.

Nahoon did not answer, but stared steadily at the trunks of two trees a few paces in front of them and to their right. "Look," he whispered.

Hadden did so, and at length made out the outline of something brown that was crouched behind the trees.

"He is dead," he exclaimed.

"No," answered Nahoon, "he has come back on his own path and is waiting for us. He knows that we are following his spoor. Now if you stand there, I think that you can shoot him through the back between the tree trunks."

Hadden knelt down, and aiming very carefully at a point just below the bull's spine, he fired. There was an awful bellow, and the next instant the brute was up and at them. Nahoon flung his broad spear, which sank deep into its chest, then they fled this way and that. The buffalo stood still for a moment, its fore legs straddled wide and its head down, looking first after the one and then the other, till of a sudden it uttered a low moaning sound and rolled over dead, smashing Nahoon's assegai to fragments as it fell.

"There! he's finished," said Hadden, "and I believe it was your assegai that killed him. Hullo! what's that noise?"

Nahoon listened. In several quarters of the forest, but from how far away it was impossible to tell, there rose a curious sound, as of people calling to each other in fear but in no articulate language. Nahoon shivered.

"It is the *Esemkofu*," he said, "the ghosts who have no tongue, and who can only wail like infants. Let us be going; this place is bad for mortals."

"And worse for buffaloes," said Hadden, giving the dead bull a kick, "but I suppose that we must leave him here for your friends, the *Esemkofu*, as we have got meat enough, and can't carry his head."

So they started back towards the open country. As they threaded their way slowly through the tree trunks, a new idea came into Hadden's head. Once out of this forest, he was within an hour's run of the Zulu border, and once over the Zulu border, he would feel a happier man than he did at that moment. As has been said, he had intended to attempt to escape in the darkness, but the plan was risky. All the Zulus might not over-eat themselves and go to sleep, especially after the death of their comrade; Nahoon, who watched him day and night, certainly would not. This was his opportunity—there remained the question of Nahoon.

Well, if it came to the worst, Nahoon must die: it would be easy—he had a loaded rifle, and now that his assegai was gone, Nahoon had only a kerry. He did not wish to kill the man, though it was clear to him, seeing that his own safety was at stake, that he would be amply justified in so doing. Why should he not put it to him—and then be guided by circumstances?

Nahoon was walking across a little open space about ten paces ahead of him where Hadden could see him very well, whilst he himself was under the shadow of a large tree with low horizontal branches running out from the trunk.

"Nahoon," he said.

The Zulu turned round, and took a step towards him.

"No, do not move, I pray. Stand where you are, or I shall be obliged to shoot you. Listen now: do not be afraid for I shall not fire without warning. I am your prisoner, and you are charged to take me back to the king to be his servant. But I believe that a war is going to break out between your people and mine; and this being so, you will understand that I do not wish to go to Cetywayo's kraal, because I should either come to a violent death there, or my own brothers will believe that I am a traitor and treat me accordingly. The Zulu border is not much more than an hour's journey away—let us say an hour and a half's: I mean to be across it before the

moon is up. Now, Nahoon, will you lose me in the forest and give me this hour and a half's start—or will you stop here with that ghost people of whom you talk? Do you understand? No, please do not move."

"I understand you," answered the Zulu, in a perfectly composed voice, "and I think that was a good name which we gave you this morning, though, Black Heart, there is some justice in your words and more wisdom. Your opportunity is good, and one which a man named as you are should not let fall."

"I am glad to find that you take this view of the matter, Nahoon. And now will you be so kind as to lose me, and to promise not to look for me till the moon is up?"

"What do you mean, Black Heart?"

"What I say. Come, I have no time to spare."

"You are a strange man," said the Zulu reflectively. "You heard the king's order to me: would you have me disobey the order of the king?"

"Certainly, I would. You have no reason to love Cetywayo, and it does not matter to you whether or no I return to his kraal to mend guns there. If you think that he will be angry because I am missing, you had better cross the border also; we can go together."

"And leave my father and all my brethren to his vengeance? Black Heart, you do not understand. How can you, being so named? I am a soldier, and the king's word is the king's word. I hoped to have died fighting, but I am the bird in your noose. Come, shoot, or you will not reach the border before moonrise," and he opened his arms and smiled.

"If it must be, so let it be. Farewell, Nahoon, at least you are a brave man, but every one of us must cherish his own life," answered Hadden calmly.

Then with much deliberation he raised his rifle and covered the Zulu's breast.

Already—whilst his victim stood there still smiling, although a twitching of his lips betrayed the natural terrors that no bravery can banish—already his finger was contracting on the trigger, when of a sudden, as instantly as though he had been struck by lightning, Hadden went down backwards, and behold! there stood upon him a great spotted beast that waved its long tail to and fro and glared down into his eyes.

It was a leopard—a tiger as they call it in Africa—which, crouched upon a bough of the tree above, had been unable to resist the temptation of satisfying its savage appetite on the man below. For a second or two there was silence, broken only by the purring, or rather the snoring sound made by the leopard. In those seconds, strangely enough, there sprang up before Hadden's mental vision a picture of the *inyanga* called *Inyosi* or the Bee, her death-like head resting against the thatch of the hut, and her death-like lips muttering "think of my word when the great cat purrs above your face."

Then the brute put out its strength. The claws of one paw it drove deep into the muscles of his left thigh, while with another it scratched at his breast, tearing the clothes from it and furrowing the flesh beneath. The sight of the white skin seemed to madden it, and in its fierce desire for blood it drooped its square muzzle and buried its fangs in its victim's shoulder. Next moment there was a sound of running feet and of a club falling heavily. Up reared the leopard with an angry snarl, up till it stood as high as the attacking Zulu. At him it came, striking out savagely and tearing the black man as it had torn the white. Again the kerry fell full on its jaws, and down it went backwards. Before it could rise again, or rather as it was in the act of rising, the heavy knob-stick struck it once more, and with fearful force, this time as it chanced, full on the nape of the neck, and paralysing the brute. It writhed and bit and twisted, throwing up the earth and leaves, while blow after blow was rained upon it, till at length with a convulsive struggle and a stifled roar it lay still—the brains oozing from its shattered skull.

Hadden sat up, the blood running from his wounds.

"You have saved my life, Nahoon," he said faintly, "and I thank you."

"Do not thank me, Black Heart," answered the Zulu, "it was the king's word that I should keep you safely. Still this tiger has been hardly dealt with, for certainly *he* has saved *my* life," and lifting the Martini he unloaded the rifle.

At this juncture Hadden swooned away.

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Twenty-four hours had gone by when, after what seemed to him to be but a little time of troubled and dreamful sleep, through which he could hear voices without understanding what they said, and feel himself borne he knew not whither, Hadden awoke to find himself lying upon a kaross in a large and beautifully clean Kaffir hut with a bundle of furs for a pillow. There was a bowl of milk at his side and tortured as he was by thirst, he tried to stretch out his arm to lift it to his lips, only to find to his astonishment that his hand fell back to his side like that of a dead man. Looking round the hut impatiently, he found that there was nobody in it to assist him, so he did the only thing which remained for him to do—he lay still. He did not fall asleep, but his eyes closed, and a kind of gentle torpor crept over him, half obscuring his recovered senses. Presently he heard a soft voice speaking; it seemed far away, but he could clearly distinguish the words.

"Black Heart still sleeps," the voice said, "but there is colour in his face; I think that he will wake soon, and find his thoughts again."

"Have no fear, Nanea, he will surely wake, his hurts are not dangerous," answered another voice, that of Nahoon. "He fell heavily with the weight of the tiger on top of him, and that is why his senses have been shaken for so long. He went near to death, but certainly he will not die."

"It would have been a pity if he had died," answered the soft voice, "he is so beautiful; never have I seen a white man who was so beautiful."

"I did not think him beautiful when he stood with his rifle pointed at my heart," answered Nahoon sulkily.

"Well, there is this to be said," she replied, "he wished to escape from Cetywayo, and that is not to be wondered at," and she sighed. "Moreover he asked you to come with him, and it might have been well if you had done so, that is, if you would have taken me with you!"

"How could I have done it, girl?" he asked angrily. "Would you have me set at nothing the order of the king?"

“The king!” she replied raising her voice. “What do you owe to this king? You have served him faithfully, and your reward is that within a few days he will take me from you—me, who should have been your wife, and I must—I must——” And she began to weep softly, adding between her sobs, “if you loved me truly, you would think more of me and of yourself, and less of the Black One and his orders. Oh! let us fly, Nahoon, let us fly to Natal before this spear pierces me.”

“Weep not, Nanea,” he said; “why do you tear my heart in two between my duty and my love? You know that I am a soldier, and that I must walk the path whereon the king has set my feet. Soon I think I shall be dead, for I seek death, and then it will matter nothing.”

“Nothing to you, Nahoon, who are at peace, but to me? Yet, you are right, and I know it, therefore forgive me, who am no warrior, but a woman who must also obey—the will of the king.” And she cast her arms about his neck, sobbing her fill upon his breast.

## CHAPTER IV

### NANEA

Presently, muttering something that the listener could not catch, Nahoon left Nanea, and crept out of the hut by its bee-hole entrance. Then Hadden opened his eyes and looked round him. The sun was sinking and a ray of its red light streaming through the little opening filled the place with a soft and crimson glow. In the centre of the hut—supporting it—stood a thorn-wood roof-tree coloured black by the smoke of the fire; and against this, the rich light falling full upon her, leaned the girl Nanea—a very picture of gentle despair.

As is occasionally the case among Zulu women, she was beautiful—so beautiful that the sight of her went straight to the white man's heart, for a moment causing the breath to catch in his throat. Her dress was very simple. On her shoulders, hanging open in front, lay a mantle of soft white stuff edged with blue beads, about her middle was a buck-skin moocha, also embroidered with blue beads, while round her forehead and left knee were strips of grey fur, and on her right wrist a shining bangle of copper. Her naked bronze-hued figure was tall and perfect in its proportions; while her face had little in common with that of the ordinary native girl, showing as it did strong traces of the ancestral Arabian or Semitic blood. It was oval in shape, with delicate aquiline features, arched eyebrows, a full mouth, that drooped a little at the corners, tiny ears, behind which the wavy coal-black hair hung down to the shoulders, and the very loveliest pair of dark and liquid eyes that it is possible to imagine.

For a minute or more Nanea stood thus, her sweet face bathed in the sunbeam, while Hadden feasted his eyes upon its beauty. Then sighing heavily, she turned, and seeing that he was awake, started, drew her mantle over her breast and came, or rather glided, towards him.

"The chief is awake," she said in her soft Zulu accents. "Does he need aught?"

"Yes, Lady," he answered; "I need to drink, but alas! I am too weak."

She knelt down beside him, and supporting him with her left arm, with her right held the gourd to his lips.

How it came about Hadden never knew, but before that draught was finished a change passed over him. Whether it was the savage girl's touch, or her strange and fawn-like loveliness, or the tender pity in her eyes, matters not—the issue was the same. She struck some cord in his turbulent uncurbed nature, and of a sudden it was filled full with passion for her—a passion which if, not elevated, at least was real. He did not for a moment mistake the significance of the flood of feeling that surged through his veins. Hadden never shirked facts.

"By Heaven!" he said to himself, "I have fallen in love with a black beauty at first sight—more in love than I have ever been before. It's awkward, but there will be compensations. So much the worse for Nahoon, or for Cetywayo, or for both of them. After all, I can always get rid of her if she becomes a nuisance."

Then, in a fit of renewed weakness, brought about by the turmoil of his blood, he lay back upon the pillow of furs, watching Nanea's face while with a native salve of pounded leaves she busied herself dressing the wounds that the leopard had made.

It almost seemed as though something of what was passing in his mind communicated itself to that of the girl. At least, her hand shook a little at her task, and getting done with it as quickly as she could, she rose from her knees with a courteous "It is finished, *Inkoos*," and once more took up her position by the roof-tree.

"I thank you, Lady," he said; "your hand is kind."

"You must not call me lady, *Inkoos*," she answered, "I am no chieftainess, but only the daughter of a headman, Umgona."

"And named Nanea," he said. "Nay, do not be surprised, I have heard of you. Well, Nanea, perhaps you will soon become a chieftainess—up at the king's kraal yonder."

"Alas! and alas!" she said, covering her face with her hands.

"Do not grieve, Nanea, a hedge is never so tall and thick but that it cannot be climbed or crept through."

She let fall her hands and looked at him eagerly, but he did not pursue the subject.

"Tell me, how did I come here, Nanea?"

"Nahoon and his companions carried you, *Inkoos*."

"Indeed, I begin to be thankful to the leopard that struck me down. Well, Nahoon is a brave man, and he has done me a great service. I trust that I may be able to repay it—to you, Nanea."

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This was the first meeting of Nanea and Hadden; but, although she did not seek them, the necessities of his sickness and of the situation brought about many another. Never for a moment did the white man waver in his determination to get into his keeping the native girl who had captivated him, and to attain his end he brought to bear all his powers and charm to detach her from Nahoon, and win her affections for himself. He was no rough wooer, however, but proceeded warily, weaving her about with a web of flattery and attention that must, he thought, produce the desired effect upon her mind. Without a doubt, indeed, it would have done so—for she was but a woman, and an untutored one—had it not been for a simple fact which dominated her whole nature. She loved Nahoon, and there was no room in her heart for any other man, white or black. To Hadden she was courteous and kindly but no more, nor did she

appear to notice any of the subtle advances by which he attempted to win a foothold in her heart. For a while this puzzled him, but he remembered that the Zulu women do not usually permit themselves to show feeling towards an undeclared suitor. Therefore it became necessary that he should speak out.

His mind once made up, he had not to wait long for an opportunity. He was now quite recovered from his hurts, and accustomed to walk in the neighbourhood of the kraal. About two hundred yards from Umgona's huts rose a spring, and thither it was Nanea's habit to resort in the evening to bring back drinking-water for the use of her father's household. The path between this spring and the kraal ran through a patch of bush, where on a certain afternoon towards sundown Hadden took his seat under a tree, having first seen Nanea go down to the little stream as was her custom. A quarter of an hour later she reappeared carrying a large gourd upon her head. She wore no garment now except her moocha, for she had but one mantle and was afraid lest the water should splash it. He watched her advancing along the path, her hands resting on her hips, her splendid naked figure outlined against the westering sun, and wondered what excuse he could make to talk with her. As it chanced fortune favoured him, for when she was near him a snake glided across the path in front of the girl's feet, causing her to spring backwards in alarm and overset the gourd of water. He came forward, and picked it up.

"Wait here," he said laughing; "I will bring it to you full."

"Nay, *Inkoos*," she remonstrated, "that is a woman's work."

"Among my people," he said, "the men love to work for the women," and he started for the spring, leaving her wondering.

Before he reached her again, he regretted his gallantry, for it was necessary to carry the handleless gourd upon his shoulder, and the contents of it spilling over the edge soaked him. Of this, however, he said nothing to Nanea.

"There is your water, Nanea, shall I carry it for you to the kraal?"

"Nay, *Inkoos*, I thank you, but give it to me, you are weary with its weight."

"Stay awhile, and I will accompany you. Ah! Nanea, I am still weak, and had it not been for you I think that I should be dead."

"It was Nahoon who saved you—not I, *Inkoos*."

"Nahoon saved my body, but you, Nanea, you alone can save my heart."

"You talk darkly, *Inkoos*."

"Then I must make my meaning clear, Nanea. I love you."

She opened her brown eyes wide.

"You, a white lord, love me, a Zulu girl? How can that be?"

"I do not know, Nanea, but it is so, and were you not blind you would have seen it. I love you, and I wish to take you to wife."

"Nay, *Inkoos*, it is impossible. I am already betrothed."

"Ay," he answered, "betrothed to the king."

"No, betrothed to Nahoon."

"But it is the king who will take you within a week; is it not so? And would you not rather that I should take you than the king?"

"It seems to be so, *Inkoos*, and I would rather go with you than with the king, but most of all I desire to marry Nahoon. It may be that I shall not be able to marry him, but if that is so, at least I will never become one of the king's women."

"How will you prevent it, Nanea?"

"There are waters in which a maid may drown, and trees upon which she can hang," she answered with a quick setting of the mouth.

"That were a pity, Nanea, you are too fair to die."

"Fair or foul, yet I die, *Inkoos*."

"No, no, come with me—I will find a way—and be my wife," and he put his arm about her waist, and strove to draw her to him.

Without any violence of movement, and with the most perfect dignity, the girl disengaged herself from his embrace.

"You have honoured me, and I thank you, *Inkoos*," she said quietly, "but you do not understand. I am the wife of Nahoon—I belong to Nahoon; therefore, I cannot look on any other man while Nahoon lives. It is not our custom, *Inkoos*, for we are not as the white women, but ignorant and simple, and when we vow ourselves to a man, we abide by that vow till death."

"Indeed," said Hadden; "and so now you go to tell Nahoon that I have offered to make you my wife."

"No, *Inkoos*, why should I tell Nahoon your secrets? I have said 'nay' to you, not 'yea,' therefore he has no right to know," and she stooped to lift the gourd of water.

Hadden considered the situation rapidly, for his repulse only made him the more determined to succeed. Of a sudden under the emergency he conceived a scheme, or rather its rough outline. It was not a nice scheme, and some men might have shrunk from it, but as he had no intention of suffering himself to be defeated by a Zulu girl, he decided—with regret, it is true—that having failed to attain his ends by means which he considered fair, he must resort to others of more doubtful character.

"Nanea," he said, "you are a good and honest woman, and I respect you. As I have told you, I love you also, but if you refuse to listen to me there is nothing more to be said, and after all, perhaps it would be better that you should marry one of your own people. But, Nanea, you will never marry him, for the king will take you; and, if he does not give you to some other man, either you will become one of his 'sisters,' or to be free of him, as you say, you will die. Now hear me, for it is because I love you and wish your welfare that I speak thus. Why do you not escape into Natal, taking Nahoon with you, for there as you know you may live in peace out of reach of the arm of Cetwayo?"

"That is my desire, *Inkoos*, but Nahoon will not consent. He says that there is to be war between us and you white men, and he will not break the command of the king and desert from his army."

"Then he cannot love you much, Nanea, and at least you have to think of yourself. Whisper into the ear of your father and fly together, for be sure that Nahoon will soon follow you. Ay! and I myself will fly with you, for I too believe that there must be war, and then a white man in this country will be as a lamb among the eagles."

"If Nahoon will come, I will go, *Inkoos*, but I cannot fly without Nahoon; it is better I should stay here and kill myself."

"Surely then being so fair and loving him so well, you can teach him to forget his folly and to escape with you. In four days' time we must start for the king's kraal, and if you win over Nahoon, it will be easy for us to turn our faces southwards and across the river that lies between the land of the Amazulu and Natal. For the sake of all of us, but most of all for your own sake, try to do this, Nanea, whom I have loved and whom I now would save. See him and plead with him as you know how, but as yet do not tell him that I dream of flight, for then I should be watched."

"In truth, I will, *Inkoos*," she answered earnestly, "and oh! I thank you for your goodness. Fear not that I will betray you—first would I die. Farewell."

"Farewell, Nanea," and taking her hand he raised it to his lips.

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Late that night, just as Hadden was beginning to prepare himself for sleep, he heard a gentle tapping at the board which closed the entrance to his hut.

"Enter," he said, unfastening the door, and presently by the light of the little lantern that he had with him, he saw Nanea creep into the hut, followed by the great form of Nahoon.

"*Inkoos*," she said in a whisper when the door was closed again, "I have pleaded with Nahoon, and he has consented to fly; moreover, my father will come also."

"Is it so, Nahoon?" asked Hadden.

"It is so," answered the Zulu, looking down shamefacedly; "to save this girl from the king, and because the love of her eats out my heart, I have bartered away my honour. But I tell you, Nanea, and you, White Man, as I told Umgona just now, that I think no good will come of this flight, and if we are caught or betrayed, we shall be killed every one of us."

"Caught we can scarcely be," broke in Nanea anxiously, "for who could betray us, except the *Inkoos* here——"

"Which he is not likely to do," said Hadden quietly, "seeing that he desires to escape with you, and that his life is also at stake."

"That is so, Black Heart," said Nahoon, "otherwise I tell you that I should not have trusted you."

Hadden took no notice of this outspoken saying, but until very late that night they sat there together making their plans.

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On the following morning Hadden was awakened by sounds of violent altercation. Going out of his hut he found that the disputants were Umgona and a fat and evil-looking Kaffir chief who had arrived at the kraal on a pony. This chief, he soon discovered, was named Maputa, being none other than the man who had sought Nanea in marriage and brought about Nahoon's and Umgona's unfortunate appeal to the king. At present he was engaged in abusing Umgona furiously, charging him with having stolen certain of his oxen and bewitched his cows so that they would not give milk. The alleged theft it was comparatively easy to disprove, but the wizardry remained a matter of argument.

"You are a dog, and a son of a dog," shouted Maputa, shaking his fat fist in the face of the trembling but indignant Umgona. "You promised me your daughter in marriage, then having vowed her to that *umfagozan*—that low lout of a soldier, Nahoon, the son of Zomba—you went, the two of you, and poisoned the king's ear against me, bringing me into trouble with the king, and now you have bewitched my cattle. Well, wait, I will be even with you, Wizard; wait till you wake up in the cold morning to find your fence red with fire, and the slayers standing outside your gates to eat up you and yours with spears——"

At this juncture Nahoon, who till now had been listening in silence, intervened with effect.

"Good," he said, "we will wait, but not in your company, Chief Maputa. *Hamba!* (go)——" and seizing the fat old ruffian by the scruff of his neck, he flung him backwards with such violence that he rolled over and over down the little slope.

Hadden laughed, and passed on towards the stream where he proposed to bathe. Just as he reached it, he caught sight of Maputa riding along the footpath, his head-ring covered with mud, his lips purple and his black face livid with rage.

"There goes an angry man," he said to himself. "Now, how would it be——" and he looked upwards like one seeking an inspiration. It seemed to come; perhaps the devil finding it open whispered in his ear, at any rate—in a few seconds his plan was formed, and he was walking through the bush to meet Maputa.

"Go in peace, Chief," he said; "they seem to have treated you roughly up yonder. Having no power to interfere, I came away for I could not bear the sight. It is indeed shameful that an old and venerable man of rank should be struck into the dirt, and beaten by a soldier drunk with beer."

"Shameful, White Man!" gasped Maputa; "your words are true indeed. But wait a while. I, Maputa, will roll that stone over, I will throw that bull upon its back. When next the harvest ripens, this I promise, that neither Nahoon nor Umgona, nor any of his kraal shall be left to gather it."

"And how will you manage that, Maputa?"

"I do not know, but I will find a way. Oh! I tell you, a way shall be found."

Hadden patted the pony's neck meditatively, then leaning forward, he looked the chief in the eyes and said:—

"What will you give me, Maputa, if I show you that way, a sure and certain one, whereby you may be avenged to the death upon Nahoon, whose violence I also have seen, and upon Umgona, whose witchcraft brought sore sickness upon me?"

"What reward do you seek, White Man?" asked Maputa eagerly.

"A little thing, Chief, a thing of no account, only the girl Nanea, to whom as it chances I have taken a fancy."

"I wanted her for myself, White Man, but he who sits at Ulundi has laid his hand upon her."

"That is nothing, Chief; I can arrange with him who 'sits at Ulundi.' It is with you who are great here that I wish to come to terms. Listen: if you grant my desire, not only will I fulfil yours upon your foes, but when the girl is delivered into my hands I will give you

this rifle and a hundred rounds of cartridges.”

Maputa looked at the sporting Martini, and his eyes glistened.

“It is good,” he said; “it is very good. Often have I wished for such a gun that will enable me to shoot game, and to talk with my enemies from far away. Promise it to me, White Man, and you shall take the girl if I can give her to you.”

“You swear it, Maputa?”

“I swear it by the head of Chaka, and the spirits of my fathers.”

“Good. At dawn on the fourth day from now it is the purpose of Umgona, his daughter Nanea, and Nahoon, to cross the river into Natal by the drift that is called Crocodile Drift, taking their cattle with them and flying from the king. I also shall be of their company, for they know that I have learned their secret, and would murder me if I tried to leave them. Now you who are chief of the border and guardian of that drift, must hide at night with some men among the rocks in the shallows of the drift and await our coming. First Nanea will cross driving the cows and calves, for so it is arranged, and I shall help her; then will follow Umgona and Nahoon with the oxen and heifers. On these two you must fall, killing them and capturing the cattle, and afterwards I will give you the rifle.”

“What if the king should ask for the girl, White Man?”

“Then you shall answer that in the uncertain light you did not recognise her and so she slipped away from you; moreover, that at first you feared to seize the girl lest her cries should alarm the men and they should escape you.”

“Good, but how can I be sure that you will give me the gun once you are across the river?”

“Thus: before I enter the ford I will lay the rifle and cartridges upon a stone by the bank, telling Nanea that I shall return to fetch them when I have driven over the cattle.”

“It is well, White Man; I will not fail you.”

So the plot was made, and after some further conversation upon points of detail, the two conspirators shook hands and parted.

“That ought to come off all right,” reflected Hadden to himself as he plunged and floated in the waters of the stream, “but somehow I don’t quite trust our friend Maputa. It would have been better if I could have relied upon myself to get rid of Nahoon and his respected uncle—a couple of shots would do it in the water. But then that would be murder and murder is unpleasant; whereas the other thing is only the delivery to justice of two base deserters, a laudable action in a military country. Also personal interference upon my part might turn the girl against me; while after Umgona and Nahoon have been wiped out by Maputa, she *must* accept my escort. Of course there is a risk, but in every walk of life the most cautious have to take risks at times.”

As it chanced, Philip Hadden was correct in his suspicions of his coadjutor, Maputa. Even before that worthy chief reached his own kraal, he had come to the conclusion that the white man’s plan, though attractive in some ways, was too dangerous, since it was certain that if the girl Nanea escaped, the king would be indignant. Moreover, the men he took with him to do the killing in the drift would suspect something and talk. On the other hand he would earn much credit with his majesty by revealing the plot, saying that he had learned it from the lips of the white hunter, whom Umgona and Nahoon had forced to participate in it, and of whose coveted rifle he must trust to chance to possess himself.

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An hour later two discreet messengers were bounding across the plains, bearing words from the Chief Maputa, the Warden of the Border, to the “great Black Elephant” at Ulundi.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DOOM POOL

Fortune showed itself strangely favourable to the plans of Nahoon and Nanea. One of the Zulu captain's perplexities was as to how he should lull the suspicions and evade the vigilance of his own companions, who together with himself had been detailed by the king to assist Hadden in his hunting and to guard against his escape. As it chanced, however, on the day after the incident of the visit of Maputa, a messenger arrived from no less a person than the great military Induna, Tvingwayo ka Marolo, who afterwards commanded the Zulu army at Isandhlwana, ordering these men to return to their regiment, the Umcityu Corps, which was to be placed upon full war footing. Accordingly Nahoon sent them, saying that he himself would follow with Black Heart in the course of a few days, as at present the white man was not sufficiently recovered from his hurts to allow of his travelling fast and far. So the soldiers went, doubting nothing.

Then Umgona gave it out that in obedience to the command of the king he was about to start for Ulundi, taking with him his daughter Nanea to be delivered over into the *Sigodhla*, and also those fifteen head of cattle that had been *lobola'd* by Nahoon in consideration of his forthcoming marriage, whereof he had been fined by Cetywayo. Under pretence that they required a change of veldt, the rest of his cattle he sent away in charge of a Basuto herd who knew nothing of their plans, telling him to keep them by the Crocodile Drift, as there the grass was good and sweet.

All preparations being completed, on the third day the party started, heading straight for Ulundi. After they had travelled some miles, however, they left the road and turning sharp to the right, passed unobserved of any through a great stretch of uninhabited bush. Their path now lay not far from the Pool of Doom, which, indeed, was close to Umgona's kraal, and the forest that was called Home of the Dead, but out of sight of these. It was their plan to travel by night, reaching the broken country near the Crocodile Drift on the following morning. Here they proposed to lie hid that day and through the night; then, having first collected the cattle which had preceded them, to cross the river at the break of dawn and escape into Natal. At least this was the plan of his companions; but, as we know, Hadden had another programme, whereon after one last appearance two of the party would play no part.

During that long afternoon's journey Umgona, who knew every inch of the country, walked ahead driving the fifteen cattle and carrying in his hand a long travelling stick of black and white *umzimbeet* wood, for in truth the old man was in a hurry to reach his journey's end. Next came Nahoon, armed with a broad assegai, but naked except for his moocha and necklet of baboon's teeth, and with him Nanea in her white bead-bordered mantle. Hadden, who brought up the rear, noticed that the girl seemed to be under the spell of an imminent apprehension, for from time to time she clasped her lover's arm, and looking up into his face, addressed him with vehemence, almost with passion.

Curiously enough, the sight touched Hadden, and once or twice he was shaken by so sharp a pang of remorse at the thought of his share in this tragedy, that he cast about in his mind seeking a means to unravel the web of death which he himself had woven. But ever that evil voice was whispering at his ear. It reminded him that he, the white *Inkoos*, had been refused by this dusky beauty, and that if he found a way to save him, within some few hours she would be the wife of the savage gentleman at her side, the man who had named him Black Heart and who despised him, the man whom he had meant to murder and who immediately repaid his treachery by rescuing him from the jaws of the leopard at the risk of his own life. Moreover, it was a law of Hadden's existence never to deny himself of anything that he desired if it lay within his power to take it—a law which had led him always deeper into sin. In other respects, indeed, it had not carried him far, for in the past he had not desired much, and he had won little; but this particular flower was to his hand, and he would pluck it. If Nahoon stood between him and the flower, so much the worse for Nahoon, and if it should wither in his grasp, so much the worse for the flower; it could always be thrown away. Thus it came about that, not for the first time in his life, Philip Hadden discarded the somewhat spasmodic prickings of conscience and listened to that evil whispering at his ear.

About half-past five o'clock in the afternoon the four refugees passed the stream that a mile or so down fell over the little precipice into the Doom Pool; and, entering a patch of thorn trees on the further side, walked straight into the midst of two-and-twenty soldiers, who were beguiling the tedium of expectancy by the taking of snuff and the smoking of *dakka* or native hemp. With these soldiers, seated on his pony, for he was too fat to walk, waited the Chief Maputa.

Observing that their expected guests had arrived, the men knocked out the *dakka* pipe, replaced the snuff boxes in the slits made in the lobes of their ears, and secured the four of them.

"What is the meaning of this, O King's soldiers?" asked Umgona in a quavering voice. "We journey to the kraal of U'Cetywayo; why do you molest us?"

"Indeed. Wherefore then are your faces set towards the south? Does the Black One live in the south? Well, you will journey to another kraal presently," answered the jovial-looking captain of the party with a callous laugh.

"I do not understand," stammered Umgona.

"Then I will explain while you rest," said the captain. "The Chief Maputa yonder sent word to the Black One at Ulundi that he had learned of your intended flight to Natal from the lips of this white man, who had warned him of it. The Black One was angry, and despatched us to catch you and make an end of you. That is all. Come on now, quietly, and let us finish the matter. As the Doom Pool is near, your deaths will be easy."

Nahoon heard the words, and sprang straight at the throat of Hadden; but he did not reach it, for the soldiers pulled him down. Nanea heard them also, and turning, looked the traitor in the eyes; she said nothing, she only looked, but he could never forget that look. The white man for his part was filled with a fiery indignation against Maputa.

"You wicked villain," he gasped, whereat the chief smiled in a sickly fashion, and turned away.

Then they were marched along the banks of the stream till they reached the waterfall that fell into the Pool of Doom.

Hadden was a brave man after his fashion, but his heart quailed as he gazed into that abyss.

"Are you going to throw me in there?" he asked of the Zulu captain in a thick voice.

"You, White Man?" replied the soldier unconcernedly. "No, our orders are to take you to the king, but what he will do with you I do not know. There is to be war between your people and ours, so perhaps he means to pound you into medicine for the use of the witch-doctors, or to peg you over an ant-heap as a warning to other white men."

Hadden received this information in silence, but its effect upon his brain was bracing, for instantly he began to search out some means of escape.

By now the party had halted near the two thorn trees that hung over the waters of the pool.

"Who dives first," asked the captain of the Chief Maputa.

"The old wizard," he replied, nodding at Umgona; "then his daughter after him, and last of all this fellow," and he struck Nahoon in the face with his open hand.

"Come on, Wizard," said the captain, grasping Umgona by the arm, "and let us see how you can swim."

At the words of doom Umgona seemed to recover his self-command, after the fashion of his race.

"No need to lead me, soldier," he said, shaking himself loose, "who am old and ready to die." Then he kissed his daughter at his side, wrung Nahoon by the hand, and turning from Hadden with a gesture of contempt walked out upon the platform that joined the two thorn trunks. Here he stood for a moment looking at the setting sun, then suddenly, and without a sound, he hurled himself into the abyss below and vanished.

"That was a brave one," said the captain with admiration. "Can you spring too, girl, or must we throw you?"

"I can walk my father's path," Nanea answered faintly, "but first I crave leave to say one word. It is true that we were escaping from the king, and therefore by the law we must die; but it was Black Heart here who made the plot, and he who has betrayed us. Would you know why he has betrayed us? Because he sought my favour, and I refused him, and this is the vengeance that he takes—a white man's vengeance."

"Wow!" broke in the chief Maputa, "this pretty one speaks truth, for the white man would have made a bargain with me under which Umgona, the wizard, and Nahoon, the soldier, were to be killed at the Crocodile Drift, and he himself suffered to escape with the girl. I spoke him softly and said 'yes,' and then like a loyal man I reported to the king."

"You hear," sighed Nanea. "Nahoon, fare you well, though presently perhaps we shall be together again. It was I who tempted you from your duty. For my sake you forgot your honour, and I am repaid. Farewell, my husband, it is better to die with you than to enter the house of the king's women," and Nanea stepped on to the platform.

Here, holding to a bough of one of the thorn trees, she turned and addressed Hadden, saying:—

"Black Heart, you seem to have won the day, but me at least you lose and—the sun is not yet set. After sunset comes the night, Black Heart, and in that night I pray that you may wander eternally, and be given to drink of my blood and the blood of Umgona my father, and the blood of Nahoon my husband, who saved your life, and whom you have murdered. Perchance, Black Heart, we may yet meet yonder—in the House of the Dead."

Then uttering a low cry Nanea clasped her hands and sprang upwards and outwards from the platform. The watchers bent their heads forward to look. They saw her rush headlong down the face of the fall to strike the water fifty feet below. A few seconds, and for the last time, they caught sight of her white garment glimmering on the surface of the gloomy pool. Then the shadows and mist-wreaths hid it, and she was gone.

"Now, husband," cried the cheerful voice of the captain, "yonder is your marriage bed, so be swift to follow a bride who is so ready to lead the way. *Wow!* but you are good people to kill; never have I had to do with any who gave less trouble. You——" and he stopped, for mental agony had done its work, and suddenly Nahoon went mad before his eyes.

With a roar like that of a lion the great man cast off those who held him and seizing one of them round the waist and thigh, he put out all his terrible strength. Lifting him as though he had been an infant, he hurled him over the edge of the cliff to find his death on the rocks of the Pool of Doom. Then crying:—

"Black Heart! your turn, Black Heart the traitor!" he rushed at Hadden, his eyes rolling and foam flying from his lips, as he passed striking the chief Maputa from his horse with a backward blow of his hand. Ill would it have gone with the white man if Nahoon had caught him. But he could not come at him, for the soldiers sprang upon him and notwithstanding his fearful struggles they pulled him to the ground, as at certain festivals the Zulu regiments with their naked hands pull down a bull in the presence of the king.

"Cast him over before he can work more mischief," said a voice. But the captain cried out, "Nay, nay, he is sacred; the fire from Heaven has fallen on his brain, and we may not harm him, else evil would overtake us all. Bind him hand and foot, and bear him tenderly to where he can be cared for. Surely I thought that these evil-doers were giving us too little trouble, and thus it has proved."

So they set themselves to make fast Nahoon's hands and wrists, using as much gentleness as they might, for among the Zulus a lunatic is accounted holy. It was no easy task, and it took time.

Hadden glanced around him, and saw his opportunity. On the ground close beside him lay his rifle, where one of the soldiers had placed it, and about a dozen yards away Maputa's pony was grazing. With a swift movement, he seized the Martini and five seconds later he was on the back of the pony, heading for the Crocodile Drift at a gallop. So quickly indeed did he execute this masterly retreat, that occupied as they all were in binding Nahoon, for half a minute or more none of the soldiers noticed what had happened. Then Maputa chanced to see, and waddled after him to the top of the rise, screaming:—

"The white thief, he has stolen my horse, and the gun too, the gun that he promised to give me."

Hadden, who by this time was a hundred yards away, heard him clearly, and a rage filled his heart. This man had made an open murderer of him; more, he had been the means of robbing him of the girl for whose sake he had dipped his hands in these iniquities. He glanced over his shoulder; Maputa was still running, and alone. Yes, there was time; at any rate he would risk it.

Pulling up the pony with a jerk, he leapt from its back slipping his arm through the rein with an almost simultaneous movement. As it chanced, and as he had hoped would be the case, the animal was a trained shooting horse, and stood still. Hadden planted his feet firmly on the ground and drawing a deep breath, he cocked the rifle and covered the advancing chief. Now Maputa saw his purpose and with a yell of terror turned to fly. Hadden waited a second to get the sight fair on his broad back, then just as the soldiers appeared above the rise he pressed the trigger. He was a noted shot, and in this instance his skill did not fail him; for, before he heard the bullet tell, Maputa flung his arms wide and plunged to the ground dead. Three seconds more, and with a savage curse, Hadden had remounted the pony and was riding for his life towards the river, which a while later he crossed in safety.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GHOST OF THE DEAD

When Nanea leapt from the dizzy platform that overhung the Pool of Doom, a strange fortune befell her. Close in to the precipice were many jagged rocks, and on these the waters of the fall fell and thundered, bounding from them in spouts of spray into the troubled depths of the foss beyond. It was on these stones that the life was dashed out from the bodies of the wretched victims who were hurled from above. But Nanea, it will be remembered, had not waited to be treated thus, and as it chanced the strong spring with which she had leapt to death carried her clear of the rocks. By a very little she missed the edge of them and striking the deep water head first like some practised diver, she sank down and down till she thought that she would never rise again. Yet she did rise, at the end of the pool in the mouth of the rapid, along which she sped swiftly, carried down by the rush of the water. Fortunately there were no rocks here; and, since she was a skilful swimmer, she escaped the danger of being thrown against the banks.

For a long distance she was borne thus till at length she saw that she was in a forest, for trees cut off the light from the water, and their drooping branches swept its surface. One of these Nanea caught with her hand, and by the help of it she dragged herself from the River of Death whence none had escaped before. Now she stood upon the bank gasping but quite unharmed; there was not a scratch on her body; even her white garment was still fast about her neck.

But though she had suffered no hurt in her terrible voyage, so exhausted was Nanea that she could scarcely stand. Here the gloom was that of night, and shivering with cold she looked helplessly to find some refuge. Close to the water's edge grew an enormous yellow-wood tree, and to this she staggered—thinking to climb it, and seek shelter in its boughs where, as she hoped, she would be safe from wild beasts. Again fortune befriended her, for at a distance of a few feet from the ground there was a great hole in the tree which, she discovered, was hollow. Into this hole she crept, taking her chance of its being the home of snakes or other evil creatures, to find that the interior was wide and warm. It was dry also, for at the bottom of the cavity lay a foot or more of rotten tinder and moss brought there by rats or birds. Upon this tinder she lay down, and covering herself with the moss and leaves soon sank into sleep or stupor.

How long Nanea slept she did not know, but at length she was awakened by a sound as of guttural human voices talking in a language that she could not understand. Rising to her knees she peered out of the hole in the tree. It was night, but the stars shone brilliantly, and their light fell upon an open circle of ground close by the edge of the river. In this circle there burned a great fire, and at a little distance from the fire were gathered eight or ten horrible-looking beings, who appeared to be rejoicing over something that lay upon the ground. They were small in stature, men and women together, but no children, and all of them were nearly naked. Their hair was long and thin, growing down almost to the eyes, their jaws and teeth protruded and the girth of their black bodies was out of all proportion to their height. In their hands they held sticks with sharp stones lashed on to them, or rude hatchet-like knives of the same material.

Now Nanea's heart shrank within her, and she nearly fainted with fear, for she knew that she was in the haunted forest, and without a doubt these were the *Esemkofu*, the evil ghosts that dwelt therein. Yes, that was what they were, and yet she could not take her eyes off them—the sight of them held her with a horrible fascination. But if they were ghosts, why did they sing and dance like men? Why did they wave those sharp stones aloft, and quarrel and strike each other? And why did they make a fire as men do when they wish to cook food? More, what was it that they rejoiced over, that long dark thing which lay so quiet upon the ground? It did not look like a head of game, and it could scarcely be a crocodile, yet clearly it was food of some sort, for they were sharpening the stone knives in order to cut it up.

While she wondered thus, one of the dreadful-looking little creatures advanced to the fire, and taking from it a burning bough, held it over the thing that lay upon the ground, to give light to a companion who was about to do something to it with the stone knife. Next instant Nanea drew back her head from the hole, a stifled shriek upon her lips. She saw what it was now—it was the body of a man. Yes, and these were no ghosts; they were cannibals of whom when she was little, her mother had told her tales to keep her from wandering away from home.

But who was the man they were about to eat? It could not be one of themselves, for his stature was much greater. Oh! now she knew; it must be Nahoon, who had been killed up yonder, and whose dead body the waters had brought down to the haunted forest as they had brought her alive. Yes, it must be Nahoon, and she would be forced to see her husband devoured before her eyes. The thought of it overwhelmed her. That he should die by order of the king was natural, but that he should be buried thus! Yet what could she do to prevent it? Well, if it cost her her life, it should be prevented. At the worst they could only kill and eat her also, and now that Nahoon and her father were gone, being untroubled by any religious or spiritual hopes and fears, she was not greatly concerned to keep her own breath in her.

Slipping through the hole in the tree, Nanea walked quietly towards the cannibals—not knowing in the least what she should do when she reached them. As she arrived in line with the fire this lack of programme came home to her mind forcibly, and she paused to reflect. Just then one of the cannibals looked up to see a tall and stately figure wrapped in a white garment which, as the flame-light flickered on it, seemed now to advance from the dense background of shadow, and now to recede into it. The poor savage wretch was holding a stone knife in his teeth when he beheld her, but it did not remain there long, for opening his great jaws he uttered the most terrified and piercing yell that Nanea had ever heard. Then the others saw her also, and presently the forest was ringing with shrieks of fear. For a few seconds the outcasts stood and gazed, then they were gone this way and that, bursting their path through the undergrowth like startled jackals. The *Esemkofu* of Zulu tradition had been routed in their own haunted home by what they took to be a spirit.

Poor *Esemkofu*! they were but miserable and starving bushmen who, driven into that place of ill omen many years ago, had adopted this means, the only one open to them, to keep the life in their wretched bodies. Here at least they were unmolested, and as there was little other food to be found amid that wilderness of trees, they took what the river brought them. When executions were few in the Pool of Doom, times were hard for them indeed—for then they were driven to eat each other. That is why there were no children.

As their inarticulate outcry died away in the distance, Nanea ran forward to look at the body that lay on the ground, and staggered back with a sigh of relief. It was not Nahoon, but she recognised the face for that of one of the party of executioners. How did he come here? Had Nahoon killed him? Had Nahoon escaped? She could not tell, and at the best it was improbable, but still the sight of this dead soldier lit her heart with a faint ray of hope, for how did he come to be dead if Nahoon had no hand in his death? She could not bear to leave him lying so near her hiding-place, however; therefore, with no small toil, she rolled the corpse back into the water, which carried it swiftly away. Then she returned to the tree, having first replenished the fire, and awaited the light.

At last it came—so much of it as ever penetrated this darksome den—and Nanea, becoming aware that she was hungry, descended from the tree to search for food. All day long she searched, finding nothing, till towards sunset she remembered that on the outskirts of the forest there was a flat rock where it was the custom of those who had been in any way afflicted, or who considered themselves or their belongings to be bewitched, to place propitiatory offerings of food wherewith the *Esemkofu* and *Amalhosi* were supposed to satisfy their spiritual cravings. Urged by the pinch of starvation, to this spot Nanea journeyed rapidly, and found to her joy that some neighbouring kraal had evidently been in recent trouble, for the Rock of Offering was laden with cobs of corn, gourds of milk, porridge and even meat. Helping herself to as much as she could carry, she returned to her lair, where she drank of the milk and cooked meat and mealies at the fire. Then she crept back into the tree, and slept.

For nearly two months Nanea lived thus in the forest, since she could not venture out of it—fearing lest she should be seized, and for a second time taste of the judgment of the king. In the forest at least she was safe, for none dared enter there, nor did the *Esemkofu* give her further trouble. Once or twice she saw them, but on each occasion they fled from her presence—seeking some distant retreat, where they hid themselves or perished. Nor did food fail her, for finding that it was taken, the pious givers brought it in plenty to the Rock of Offering.

But, oh! the life was dreadful, and the gloom and loneliness coupled with her sorrows at times drove her almost to insanity. Still she lived on, though often she desired to die, for if her father was dead, the corpse she had found was not the corpse of Nahoon, and in her heart there still shone that spark of hope. Yet what she hoped for she could not tell.

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When Philip Hadden reached civilised regions, he found that war was about to be declared between the Queen and Cetywayo, King of the Amazulu; also that in the prevailing excitement his little adventure with the Utrecht store-keeper had been overlooked or forgotten. He was the owner of two good buck-waggon with spans of salted oxen, and at that time vehicles were much in request to carry military stores for the columns which were to advance into Zululand; indeed the transport authorities were glad to pay £90 a month for the hire of each waggon and to guarantee the owners against all loss of cattle. Although he was not desirous of returning to Zululand, this bait proved too much for Hadden, who accordingly leased out his waggons to the Commissariat, together with his own services as conductor and interpreter.

He was attached to No. 3 column of the invading force, which it may be remembered was under the immediate command of Lord Chelmsford, and on the 20th of January, 1879, he marched with it by the road that runs from Rorke's Drift to the Indeni forest, and encamped that night beneath the shadow of the steep and desolate mountain known as Isandhlwana.

That day also a great army of King Cetywayo's, numbering twenty thousand men and more, moved down from the Upindo Hill and camped upon the stony plain that lies a mile and a half to the east of Isandhlwana. No fires were lit, and it lay there in utter silence, for the warriors were "sleeping on their spears."

With that *impi* was the Umcityu regiment, three thousand five hundred strong. At the first break of dawn the Induna in command of the Umcityu looked up from beneath the shelter of the black shield with which he had covered his body, and through the thick mist he saw a great man standing before him, clothed only in a moocha, a gaunt wild-eyed man who held a rough club in his hand. When he was spoken to, the man made no answer; he only leaned upon his club looking from left to right along the dense array of innumerable shields.

"Who is this *Silwana* (wild creature)?" asked the Induna of his captains wondering.

The captains stared at the wanderer, and one of them replied, "This is Nahoon-ka-Zomba, it is the son of Zomba who not long ago held rank in this regiment of the Umcityu. His betrothed, Nanea, daughter of Umgona, was killed together with her father by order of the Black One, and Nahoon went mad with grief at the sight of it, for the fire of Heaven entered his brain, and mad he has wandered ever since."

"What would you here, Nahoon-ka-Zomba?" asked the Induna.

Then Nahoon spoke slowly. "My regiment goes down to war against the white men; give me a shield and a spear, O Captain of the king, that I may fight with my regiment, for I seek a face in the battle."

So they gave him a shield and a spear, for they dared not turn away one whose brain was alight with the fire of Heaven.

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When the sun was high that day, bullets began to fall among the ranks of the Umcityu. Then the black-shielded, black-plumed Umcityu arose, company by company, and after them arose the whole vast Zulu army, breast and horns together, and swept down in silence upon the doomed British camp, a moving sheen of spears. The bullets pattered on the shields, the shells tore long lines through their array, but they never halted or wavered. Forward on either side shot out the horns of armed men, clasping the camp in an embrace of steel. Then as these began to close, out burst the war cry of the Zulus, and with the roar of a torrent and the rush of a storm, with a sound like the humming of a billion bees, wave after wave the deep breast of the *impi* rolled down upon the white men.

With it went the black-shielded Umcityu and with them went Nahoon, the son of Zomba. A bullet struck him in the side, glancing from his ribs, he did not heed; a white man fell from his horse before him, he did not stab, for he sought but one face in the battle.

He sought—and at last he found. There, among the waggons where the spears were busiest, there standing by his horse and firing rapidly was Black Heart, he who had given Nanea his betrothed to death. Three soldiers stood between them, one of them Nahoon stabbed, and two he brushed aside; then he rushed straight at Hadden.

But the white man saw him come, and even through the mask of his madness he knew Nahoon again, and terror took hold of him. Throwing away his empty rifle, for his ammunition was spent, he leaped upon his horse and drove his spurs into its flanks. Away it went among the carnage, springing over the dead and bursting through the lines of shields, and after it came Nahoon, running long and low with head stretched forward and trailing spear, running as a hound runs when the buck is at view.

Hadden's first plan was to head for Rorke's Drift, but a glance to the left showed him that the masses of the Undi barred that way, so he fled straight on, leaving his path to fortune. In five minutes he was over a ridge, and there was nothing of the battle to be seen, in ten all sounds of it had died away, for few guns were fired in the dread race to Fugitive's Drift, and the assegai makes no noise. In some strange fashion, even at this moment, the contrast between the dreadful scene of blood and turmoil that he had left, and the peaceful face of Nature over which he was passing, came home to his brain vividly. Here birds sang and cattle grazed; here the sun shone undimmed by the smoke of cannon, only high up in the blue and silent air long streams of vultures could be seen winging their way to the Plain of Isandhlwana.

The ground was very rough, and Hadden's horse began to tire. He looked over his shoulder—there some two hundred yards behind came the Zulu, grim as Death, unswerving as Fate. He examined the pistol in his belt; there was but one undischarged cartridge left, all the rest had been fired and the pouch was empty. Well, one bullet should be enough for one savage: the question was should he stop and use it now? No, he might miss or fail to kill the man; he was on horseback and his foe on foot, surely he could tire him out.

A while passed, and they dashed through a little stream. It seemed familiar to Hadden. Yes, that was the pool where he used to bathe when he was the guest of Umgona, the father of Nanea; and there on the knoll to his right were the huts, or rather the remains of them, for they had been burnt with fire. What chance had brought him to this place, he wondered; then again he looked behind him at Nahoon, who seemed to read his thoughts, for he shook his spear and pointed to the ruined kraal.

On he went at speed for here the land was level, and to his joy he lost sight of his pursuer. But presently there came a mile of rocky ground, and when it was past, glancing back he saw that Nahoon was once more in his old place. His horse's strength was almost spent, but Hadden spurred it forward blindly, whither he knew not. Now he was travelling along a strip of turf and ahead of him he heard the music of a river, while to his left rose a high bank. Presently the turf bent inwards and there, not twenty yards away from him, was a Kaffir hut standing on the brink of a river. He looked at it, yes, it was the hut of that accursed *inyanga*, the Bee, and standing by the fence of it was none other than the Bee herself. At the sight of her the exhausted horse swerved violently, stumbled and came to the ground, where it lay panting. Hadden was thrown from the saddle but sprang to his feet unhurt.

"Ah! Black Heart, is it you? What news of the battle, Black Heart?" cried the Bee in a mocking voice.

"Help me, mother, I am pursued," he gasped.

"What of it, Black Heart, it is but by one tired man. Stand then and face him, for now Black Heart and White Heart are together again. You will not? Then away to the forest and seek shelter among the dead who await you there. Tell me, tell me, was it the face of Nanea that I saw beneath the waters a while ago? Good! bear my greetings to her when you two meet in the House of the Dead."

Hadden looked at the stream; it was in flood. He could not swim it, so followed by the evil laugh of the prophetess, he sped towards the forest. After him came Nahoon, his tongue hanging from his jaws like the tongue of a wolf.

Now he was in the shadow of the forest, but still he sped on following the course of the river, till at length his breath failed, and he halted on the further side of a little glade, beyond which a great tree grew. Nahoon was more than a spear's throw behind him; therefore he had time to draw his pistol and make ready.

"Halt, Nahoon," he cried, as once before he had cried; "I would speak with you."

The Zulu heard his voice, and obeyed.

"Listen," said Hadden. "We have run a long race and fought a long fight, you and I, and we are still alive both of us. Very soon, if you come on, one of us must be dead, and it will be you, Nahoon, for I am armed and as you know I can shoot straight. What do you say?"

Nahoon made no answer, but stood still at the edge of the glade, his wild and glowering eyes fixed on the white man's face and his breath coming in short gasps.

"Will you let me go, if I let you go?" Hadden asked once more. "I know why you hate me, but the past cannot be undone, nor can the dead be brought to earth again."

Still Nahoon made no answer, and his silence seemed more fateful and more crushing than any speech; no spoken accusation would have been so terrible in Hadden's ear. He made no answer, but lifting his assegai he stalked grimly toward his foe.

When he was within five paces Hadden covered him and fired. Nahoon sprang aside, but the bullet struck him somewhere, for his right arm dropped, and the stabbing spear that he held was jerked from it harmlessly over the white man's head. But still making no sound, the Zulu came on and gripped him by the throat with his left hand. For a space they struggled terribly, swaying to and fro, but Hadden was unhurt and fought with the fury of despair, while Nahoon had been twice wounded, and there remained to him but one sound arm wherewith to strike. Presently forced to earth by the white man's iron strength, the soldier was down, nor could he rise again.

"Now we will make an end," muttered Hadden savagely, and he turned to seek the assegai, then staggered slowly back with starting eyes and reeling gait. For there before him, still clad in her white robe, a spear in her hand, stood the spirit of Nanea!

"Think of it," he said to himself, dimly remembering the words of the *inyanga*, "when you stand face to face with the ghost of the dead in the Home of the Dead."

There was a cry and a flash of steel; the broad spear leapt towards him to bury itself in his breast. He swayed, he fell, and presently Black Heart clasped that great reward which the word of the Bee had promised him.

“Nahoon! Nahoon!” murmured a soft voice, “awake, it is no ghost, but I—Nanea—I, your living wife, to whom my *Ehlose*[\*] has given it me to save you.”

[\*] Guardian Spirit.

Nahoon heard and opened his eyes to look and his madness left him.

“Welcome, wife,” he said faintly, “now I will live since Death has brought you back to me in the House of the Dead.”

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To-day Nahoon is one of the Indunas of the English Government in Zululand, and there are children about his kraal. It was from the lips of none other than Nanea his wife that the teller of this tale heard its substance.

The Bee also lives and practises as much magic as she dares under the white man’s rule. On her black hand shines a golden ring shaped like a snake with ruby eyes, and of this trinket the Bee is very proud.

## BOOK XIX

### MAGEPA THE BUCK

In a preface to a story of the early life of the late Allan Quatermain, known in Africa as Macumazahn, which has been published under the name of "Marie," Mr. Curtis, the brother of Sir Henry Curtis, tells of how he found a number of manuscripts that were left by Mr. Quatermain in his house in Yorkshire. Of these "Marie" was one, but in addition to it and sundry other completed records I, the Editor to whom it was directed that these manuscripts should be handed for publication, have found a quantity of unclassified notes and papers. Some of these deal with matters that have to do with sport and game, or with historical events, and some are memoranda of incidents connected with the career of the writer, or with remarkable occurrences that he had witnessed of which he does not speak elsewhere.

One of these notes—it is contained in a book much soiled and worn that evidently its owner had carried about with him for years—reminds me of a conversation that I had with Mr. Quatermain long ago when I was his guest in Yorkshire. The note itself is short; I think that he must have jotted it down within an hour or two of the event to which it refers. It runs thus:—

"I wonder whether in the 'Land Beyond' any recognition is granted for acts of great courage and unselfish devotion—a kind of spiritual Victoria Cross. If so I think it ought to be accorded to that poor old savage, Magepa, as it would be if I had any voice in the matter. Upon my word he has made me feel proud of humanity. And yet he was nothing but a 'nigger,' as so many call the Kaffirs."

For a while I, the Editor, wondered to what this entry could allude. Then of a sudden it all came back to me. I saw myself, as a young man, seated in the hall of Quatermain's house one evening after dinner. With me were Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good. We were smoking, and the conversation had turned upon deeds of heroism. Each of us detailed such acts as he could remember which had made the most impression on him. When we had finished, old Allan said:—

"With your leave I'll tell you a story of what I think was one of the bravest things I ever saw. It happened at the beginning of the Zulu War, when the troops were marching into Zululand. Now at that time, as you know, I was turning an honest penny transport-riding for the Government, or rather for the military authorities. I hired them three wagons with the necessary voorloopers and drivers, sixteen good salted oxen to each wagon, and myself in charge of the lot. They paid me, well, never mind how much—I am rather ashamed to mention the amount. The truth is that the Imperial officers bought in a dear market during that Zulu War; moreover, things were not always straight. I could tell you stories of folk, not all of them Colonials, who got rich quicker than they ought, commissions and that kind of thing. But perhaps these are better forgotten. As for me, I asked a good price for my wagons, or rather for the hire of them, of a very well-satisfied young gentleman in uniform who had been exactly three weeks in the country, and to my surprise, got it. But when I went to those in command and warned them what would happen if they persisted in their way of advance, then in their pride they would not listen to the old hunter and transport-rider, but politely bowed me out. If they had, there would have been no Isandhlwana disaster."

He brooded awhile, for, as I knew, this was a sore subject with him, one on which he would rarely talk. Although he escaped himself, Quatermain had lost friends on that fatal field. He went on:—

"To return to old Magepa. I had known him for many years. The first time we met was in the battle of the Tugela. I was fighting for the king's son, Umbelazi the Handsome, in the ranks of the Tulwana regiment—I mean to write all that story, for it should not be lost. Well, as I have told you before, the Tulwana were wiped out; of the three thousand or so of them I think only about fifty remained alive after they had annihilated the three of Cetewayo's regiments that set upon them. But as it chanced Magepa was one who survived.

"I met him afterwards at old King Panda's kraal and recognised him as having fought by my side. Whilst I was talking to him the Prince Cetewayo came by; to me he was civil enough, for he knew how I chanced to be in the battle, but he glared at Magepa, and said:

"'Why, Macumazahn, is not this man one of the dogs with which you tried to bite me by the Tugela not long ago? He must be a cunning dog also, one who can run fast, for how comes it that he lives to snarl when so many will never bark again? *Ow!* if I had my way I would find a strip of hide to fit his neck.'

"'Not so,' I answered, 'he has the King's peace and he is a brave man—braver than I am, anyway, Prince, seeing that I ran from the ranks of the Tulwana, while he stood where he was.'

"'You mean that your horse ran, Macumazahn. Well, since you like this dog, I will not hurt him,' and with a shrug he went his way.

"'Yet soon or late he *will* hurt me,' said Magepa, when the Prince had gone. 'U'Cetewayo has a memory long as the shadow thrown by a tree at sunset. Moreover, as he knows well, it is true that I ran, Macumazahn, though not till all was finished and I could do no more by standing still. You remember how, after we had eaten up the first of Cetewayo's regiments, the second charged us and we ate that up also. Well, in that fight I got a tap on the head from a kerry. It struck me on my man's ring which I had just put on, for I think I was the youngest soldier in that regiment of veterans. The ring saved me; still, for a while I lost my mind and lay like one dead. When I found it again the fight was over and Cetewayo's people were searching for our wounded that they might kill them. Presently they found me and saw that there was no hurt on me.

"'Here is one who shams dead like a stink-cat,' said a big fellow, lifting his spear.

"'Then it was that I sprang up and ran, who was but just married and desired to live. He struck at me, but I jumped over the spear, and the others that they threw missed me. Then they began to hunt me, but, Macumazahn, I who am named "The Buck," because I am swifter of foot than any man in Zululand, outpaced them all and got away safe.'

"'Well done, Magepa,' I said. 'Still, remember the saying of your people, "At last the strong swimmer goes with the stream and the swift runner is run down."'

"I know it, Macumazahn," he answered, with a nod, "and perhaps in a day to come I shall know it better."

"I took little heed of his words at the time, but more than thirty years afterwards I remembered them."

"Such was my first acquaintance with Magepa. Now, friends, I will tell you how it was renewed at the time of the Zulu War."

"As you know, I was attached to the centre column that advanced into Zululand by Rorke's Drift on the Buffalo River. Before war was declared, or at any rate before the advance began, while it might have been and many thought it would be averted, I was employed transport-riding goods to the little Rorke's Drift Station, that which became so famous afterwards, and incidentally in collecting what information I could of Cetewayo's intentions. Hearing that there was a kraal a mile or so the other side of the river, of which the people were said to be very friendly to the English, I determined to visit it. You may think this was rash, but I was so well known in Zululand, where for many years, by special leave of the king, I was allowed to go whither I would quite unmolested and, indeed, under the royal protection, that I felt no fear for myself so long as I went alone."

"Accordingly one evening I crossed the drift and headed for a kloof in which I was told the kraal stood. Ten minutes' ride brought me in sight of it. It was not a large kraal; there may have been six or eight huts and a cattle enclosure surrounded by the usual fence. The situation, however, was very pretty, a knoll of rising ground backed by the wooded slopes of the kloof. As I approached, I saw women and children running to the kraal to hide, and when I reached the gateway for some time no one would come out to meet me. At length a small boy appeared who informed me that the kraal was 'empty as a gourd.'"

"Quite so," I answered; "still, go and tell the headman that Macumazahn wishes to speak with him."

"The boy departed, and presently I saw a face that seemed familiar to me peeping round the edge of the gateway. After a careful inspection its owner emerged."

"He was a tall, thin man of indefinite age, perhaps between sixty and seventy, with a finely-cut face, a little grey beard, kind eyes and very well-shaped hands and feet, the fingers, which twitched incessantly, being remarkably long."

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said, "I see you do not remember me. Well, think of the battle of the Tugela, and of the last stand of the Tswana, and of a certain talk at the kraal of our Father-who-is-dead" (that is King Panda), "and of how he who sits in his place" (he meant Cetewayo), "told you that if he had his way he would find a hide rope to fit the neck of a certain one."

"Ah!" I said, "I know you now, you are Magepa the Buck. So the Runner has not yet been run down."

"No, Macumazahn, not yet, but there is still time. I think that many swift feet will be at work ere long."

"How have you prospered?" I asked him.

"Well enough, Macumazahn, in all ways except one. I have three wives, but my children have been few and are dead, except one daughter, who is married and lives with me, for her husband, too, is dead. He was killed by a buffalo, and she has not yet married again. But enter and see."

"So I went in and saw Magepa's wives, old women all of them. Also, at his bidding, his daughter, whose name was Gita, brought me some *maas*, or curdled milk, to drink. She was a well-formed woman, very like her father, but sad-faced, perhaps with a prescience of evil to come. Clinging to her finger was a beautiful boy of something under two years of age, who, when he saw Magepa, ran to him and threw his little arms about his legs. The old man lifted the child and kissed him tenderly, saying:

"It is well that this toddler and I should love one another, Macumazahn, seeing that he is the last of my race. All the other children here are those of the people who have come to live in my shadow."

"Where are their fathers?" I asked, patting the little boy who, his mother told me, was named Sinala, upon the cheek, an attention that he resented."

"They have been called away on duty," answered Magepa shortly; and I changed the subject."

"Then we began to talk about old times, and I asked him if he had any oxen to sell, saying that this was my reason for visiting the kraal."

"Nay, Macumazahn," he answered in a meaning voice. "This year all the cattle are the king's."

"I nodded and replied that, as it was so, I had better be going, whereon, as I half expected, Magepa announced that he would see me safe to the drift. So I bade farewell to the wives and the widowed daughter, and we started."

"As soon as we were clear of the kraal Magepa began to open his heart to me."

"Macumazahn," he said, looking up at me earnestly, for I was mounted, and he walked beside my horse, "there is to be war. Cetewayo will not consent to the demands of the great White Chief from the Cape,"—he meant Sir Bartle Frere—"he will fight with the English; only he will let them begin the fighting. He will draw them on into Zululand and then overwhelm them with his impis and stamp them flat, and eat them up; and I, who love the English, am very sorry. Yes, it makes my heart bleed. If it were the Boers now, I should be glad, for we Zulus hate the Boers; but the English we do not hate; even Cetewayo likes them; still, he will eat them up if they attack him."

"Indeed," I answered; and then as in duty bound I proceeded to get what I could out of him, and that was not a little. Of course, however, I did not swallow it all, since that I suspected that Magepa was feeding me with news that he had been ordered to disseminate."

"Presently we came to the mouth of the kloof in which the kraal stood, and here, for greater convenience of conversation, we halted, for I thought it as well that we should not be seen in close talk on the open plain beyond. The path here, I should add, ran past a clump of green bushes; I remember they bore a white flower that smelt sweet, and were backed by some tall grass, elephant-grass I think it was, among which grew mimosa trees."

"Magepa," I said, "if in truth there is to be fighting, why don't you move over the river one night with your people and cattle, and get into Natal?"

"I would if I could, Macumazahn, who have no stomach for this war against the English. But there I should not be safe, since presently the king will come into Natal too, or send thirty thousand assegais as his messengers. Then what will happen to those who have left him?"

"Oh! if you think that," I answered, laughing, "you had better stay where you are."

"Also, Macumazahn, the husbands of those women at my kraal have been called up to their regiments and if their wives fled to the English they would be killed. Again, the king has sent for nearly all our cattle "to keep them safe." He fears lest we Border Zulus

might join our people in Natal, and that is why he is keeping our cattle "safe."

"Life is more than cattle, Magepa. At least you might come."

"What! And leave my people to be killed? Macumazahn, you did not use to talk so. Still, hearken. Macumazahn, will you do me a service? I will pay you well for it. I would get my daughter Gita and my little grandson Sinala into safety. If I and my wives are wiped out it does not matter, for we are old. But her I would save, and the boy I would save, so that one may live who will remember my name. Now if I were to send them across the drift, say at the dawn, not to-morrow and not the next day, but the day after, would you receive them into your wagon and deliver them safe to some place in Natal? I have money hidden, fifty pieces of gold, and you may take half of these and also half of the cattle if ever I live to get them back out of the keeping of the king."

"Never mind about the money, and we will speak of the cattle afterwards," I said. "I understand that you wish to send your daughter and your little grandson out of danger; and I think you wise, very wise. When once the advance begins, if there is an advance, who knows what may happen? War is a rough game, Magepa. It is not the custom of you black people to spare women and children; and there will be Zulus fighting on our side as well as on yours; do you understand?"

"Ow! I understand, Macumazahn. I have known the face of war and seen many a little one like my grandson Sinala assegaied upon his mother's back."

"Very good. But if I do this for you, you must do something for me. Say, Magepa, does Cetewayo *really* mean to fight, and if so, how? Oh yes, I know all you have been telling me, but I want not words but truth from the heart?"

"You ask secrets," said the old fellow, peering about him into the gathering gloom. "Still, 'a spear for a spear and a shield for a shield,' as our saying runs. I have spoken no lie. The king *does* mean to fight, not because he wants to, but because the regiments swear that they will wash their assegais; they who have never seen blood since that battle of the Tugela in which we two played a part, and if he will not suffer it, well, there are more of his race! Also he means to fight thus," and he gave me some very useful information, that is, information which would have been useful if those in authority had deigned to pay any attention to it when I passed it on.

"Just as he had finished speaking I thought that I heard a sound in the dense green bush behind us. It reminded me of the noise a man makes when he tries to stifle a cough, and frightened me. For if we had been overheard by a spy, Magepa was as good as dead, and the sooner I was across the river the better."

"What's that?" I asked.

"A bush buck, Macumazahn. There are lots of them about here."

"Not being satisfied, though it is true that buck do cough like this, I turned my horse to the bush, seeking an opening. Thereon something crashed away and vanished into the long grass. In those shadows, of course, I could not see what it was, but such light as remained glinted on what might have been the polished tip of the horn of an antelope or—an assegai."

"I told you it was a buck, Macumazahn," said Magepa. "Still, if you smell danger, let us come away from the bush, though the orders are that no white man is to be touched as yet."

"Then, while we walked on towards the ford, he set out with great detail, as Kaffirs do, the exact arrangements that he proposed to make for the handing over of his daughter and her child into my care. I remember that I asked him why he would not send her on the following morning, instead of two mornings later. He answered because he expected an outpost of scouts from one of the regiments at his kraal that night, who would probably remain there over the morrow and perhaps longer. While they were in the place it would be difficult, if not impossible, for him to send away Gita and her son without exciting suspicion."

"Near the drift we parted, and I returned to our provisional camp and wrote a beautiful report of all that I had learned, of which report, I may add, no one took the slightest notice."

"I think it was the morning before that whereon I had arranged to meet Gita and the little boy at the drift that just about dawn I went down to the river for a wash. Having taken my dip, I climbed on to a flat rock to dress myself, and looked at the billows of beautiful, pearly mist which hid the face of the water, and considered—I almost said listened to—the great silence, for as yet no live thing was stirring."

"Ah! if I had known of the hideous sights and sounds that were destined to be heard ere long in this same haunt of perfect peace! Indeed, at that moment there came a kind of hint or premonition of them, since suddenly through the utter quiet broke the blood-curdling wail of a woman. It was followed by other wails and shouts, distant and yet distinct. Then the silence fell again."

"Now, I thought to myself, that noise might very well have come from old Magepa's kraal; luckily, however, sounds are deceptive in mist."

"Well, the end of it was that I waited there till the sun rose. The first thing on which its bright beams struck was a mighty column of smoke rising to heaven from where Magepa's kraal had stood!"

"I went back to my wagons very sad—so sad that I could scarcely eat my breakfast. While I walked I wondered hard whether the light had glinted upon the tip of a buck's horn in that patch of green bush with the sweet-smelling white flowers a night or two ago. Or had it perchance fallen upon the point of the assegai of some spy who was watching my movements! In that event yonder column of smoke and the horrible cries that preceded it were easy to explain. For had not Magepa and I talked secrets together, and in Zulu?"

"On the following morning at dawn I attended at the drift in the faint hope that Gita and her boy might arrive there as arranged. But nobody came, which was not wonderful, seeing that Gita lay dead, stabbed through and through, as I saw afterwards, (she made a good fight for the child), and that her spirit had gone to wherever go the souls of the brave-hearted, be they white or black. Only on the farther bank of the river I saw some Zulu scouts who seemed to know my errand, for they called to me, asking mockingly where was the pretty woman I had come to meet?"

"After that I tried to put the matter out of my head, which indeed was full enough of other things, since now definite orders had arrived as to the advance, and with these many troops and officers."

"It was just then that the Zulus began to fire across the river at such of our people as they saw upon the bank. At these they took aim, and, as a result, hit nobody. A raw Kaffir with a rifle, in my experience, is only dangerous when he aims at nothing, for then the bullet looks after itself and may catch you. To put a stop to this nuisance a regiment of the friendly natives—there may have been several hundred of them—was directed to cross the river and clear the kloofs and rocks of the Zulu skirmishers who were hidden

among them. I watched them go off in fine style, and in the course of the afternoon heard a good deal of shouting and banging of guns on the farther side of the river.

"Towards evening someone told me that our *impi*, as he called it grandiloquently, was returning victorious. Having at the moment nothing else to do, I walked down to the river at a point where the water was deep and the banks were high. Here I climbed to the top of a pile of boulders, whence with my field-glasses I could sweep a great extent of plain which stretched away on the Zululand side till at length it merged into hills and bush.

"Presently I saw some of our natives marching homewards in a scattered and disorganised fashion, but evidently very proud of themselves, for they were waving their assegais and singing scraps of war-songs. A few minutes later, a mile or more away, I caught sight of a man running.

"Watching him through the glasses I noted three things: First, that he was tall; secondly, that he ran with extraordinary swiftness; and, thirdly, that he had something tied upon his back. It was evident, further, that he had good reason to run, since he was being hunted by a number of our Kaffirs, of whom more and more continually joined the chase. From every side they poured down upon him, trying to cut him off and kill him, for as they got nearer I could see the assegais which they threw at him flash in the sunlight.

"Very soon I understood that the man was running with a definite object and to a definite point; he was trying to reach the river. I thought the sight very pitiful, this one poor creature being hunted to death by so many. Also I wondered why he did not free himself from the bundle on his back, and came to the conclusion that he must be a witch-doctor, and that the bundle contained his precious charms or medicines.

"This was while he was yet a long way off, but when he came nearer, within three or four hundred yards, of a sudden I caught the outline of his face against a good background, and knew it for that of Magepa.

"My God!" I said to myself, 'it is old Magepa the Buck, and the bundle in the mat will be his grandson, Sinala!'

"Yes, even then I felt certain that he was carrying the child upon his back.

"What was I to do? It was impossible for me to cross the river at that place, and long before I could get round by the ford all would be finished. I stood up on my rock and shouted to those brutes of Kaffirs to let the man alone. They were so excited that they did not hear my words; at least, they swore afterwards that they thought I was encouraging them to hunt him down.

"But Magepa heard me. At the moment he seemed to be failing, but the sight of me appeared to give him fresh strength. He gathered himself together and leapt forward at a really surprising speed. Now the river was not more than three hundred yards away from him, and for the first two hundred of these he quite outdistanced his pursuers, although they were most of them young men and comparatively fresh. Then once more his strength began to fail.

"Watching through the glasses, I could see that his mouth was wide open, and that there was red foam upon his lips. The burden on his back was dragging him down. Once he lifted his hands as though to loose it; then with a wild gesture let them fall again.

"Two of the pursuers who had outpaced the others crept up to him—lank, lean men of not more than thirty years of age. They had stabbing spears in their hands, such as are used at close quarters, and these of course they did not throw. One of them gained a little on the other.

"Now Magepa was not more than fifty yards from the bank, with the first hunter about ten paces behind him and coming up rapidly. Magepa glanced over his shoulder and saw, then put out his last strength. For forty yards he went like an arrow, running straight away from his pursuers, until he was within a few feet of the bank, when he stumbled and fell.

"He's done," I said, and, upon my word, if I had had a rifle in my hand I think I would have stopped one or both of those bloodhounds and taken the consequences.

"But no! Just as the first man lifted his broad spear to stab him through the back on which the bundle lay, Magepa leapt up and wheeled round to take the thrust in the chest. Evidently he did not wish to be speared in the back—for a certain reason. He took it sure enough, for the assegai was wrenched out of the hand of the striker. Still, as he was reeling backwards, it did not go through Magepa, or perhaps it hit a bone. He drew out the spear and threw it at the man, wounding him. Then he staggered on, back and back, to the edge of the little cliff.

"It was reached at last. With a cry of 'Help me, Macumazahn!' Magepa turned, and before the other man could spear him, leapt straight into the deep water. He rose. Yes, the brave old fellow rose and struck out for the other bank, leaving a little line of red behind him.

"I rushed, or rather sprang and rolled down to the edge of the stream to where a point of shingle ran out into the water. Along this I clambered, and beyond it up to my middle. Now Magepa was being swept past me. I caught his outstretched hand and pulled him ashore.

"The boy!" he gasped; 'the boy! Is he dead?'

"I severed the lashings of the mat that had cut right into the old fellow's shoulders. Inside of it was little Sinala, spluttering out water, but very evidently alive and unhurt, for presently he set up a yell.

"No," I said, 'he lives, and will live.'

"Then all is well, Macumazahn.' (*A pause.*) 'It was a spy in the bush, not a buck. He overheard our talk. The King's slayers came. Gita held the door of the hut while I took the child, cut a hole through the straw with my assegai, and crept out at the back. She was full of spears before she died, but I got away with the boy. Till your Kaffirs found me I lay hid in the bush, hoping to escape to Natal. Then I ran for the river, and saw you on the farther bank. I might have got away, but that child is heavy.' (*A pause.*) 'Give him food, Macumazahn, he must be hungry.' (*A pause.*) 'Farewell. That was a good saying of yours—the swift runner is outrun at last. Ah! yet I did not run in vain.' (*Another pause, the last.*) Then he lifted himself upon one arm and with the other saluted, first the boy Sinala and next me, muttering, 'Remember your promise, Macumazahn.'

"That is how Magepa the Buck died. I never saw anyone carrying weight who could run quite so well as he," and Quatermain turned his head away as though the memory of this incident affected him somewhat.

"What became of the child Sinala?" I asked presently.

"Oh! I sent him to an institution in Natal, and afterwards was able to get some of his property back for him. I believe that he is being trained as an interpreter."

## BOOK XX

## FINISHED

### I

## ALLAN QUATERMAIN MEETS ANSCOMBE

You, my friend, into whose hand, if you live, I hope these scribblings of mine will pass one day, must well remember the 12th of April of the year 1877 at Pretoria. Sir Theophilus Shepstone, or Sompseu, for I prefer to call him by his native name, having investigated the affairs of the Transvaal for a couple of months or so, had made up his mind to annex that country to the British Crown. It so happened that I, Allan Quatermain, had been on a shooting and trading expedition at the back of the Lydenburg district where there was plenty of game to be killed in those times. Hearing that great events were toward I made up my mind, curiosity being one of my weaknesses, to come round by Pretoria, which after all was not very far out of my way, instead of striking straight back to Natal. As it chanced I reached the town about eleven o'clock on this very morning of the 12th of April and, trekking to the Church Square, proceeded to outspan there, as was usual in the Seventies. The place was full of people, English and Dutch together, and I noted that the former seemed very elated and were talking excitedly, while the latter for the most part appeared to be sullen and depressed.

Presently I saw a man I knew, a tall, dark man, a very good fellow and an excellent shot, named Robinson. By the way you knew him also, for afterwards he was an officer in the Pretoria Horse at the time of the Zulu war, the corps in which you held a commission. I called to him and asked what was up.

"A good deal, Allan," he said as he shook my hand. "Indeed we shall be lucky if all isn't up, or something like it, before the day is over. Shepstone's Proclamation annexing the Transvaal is going to be read presently."

I whistled and asked,

"How will our Boer friends take it? They don't look very pleased."

"That's just what no one knows, Allan. Burgers the President is squared, they say. He is to have a pension; also he thinks it the only thing to be done. Most of the Hollanders up here don't like it, but I doubt whether they will put out their hands further than they can draw them back. The question is—what will be the line of the Boers themselves? There are a lot of them about, all armed, you see, and more outside the town."

"What do you think?"

"Can't tell you. Anything may happen. They may shoot Shepstone and his staff and the twenty-five policemen, or they may just grumble and go home. Probably they have no fixed plan."

"How about the English?"

"Oh! we are all crazy with joy, but of course there is no organization and many have no arms. Also there are only a few of us."

"Well," I answered, "I came here to look for excitement, life having been dull for me of late, and it seems that I have found it. Still I bet you those Dutchmen do nothing, except protest. They are slim and know that the shooting of an unarmed mission would bring England on their heads."

"Can't say, I am sure. They like Shepstone who understands them, and the move is so bold that it takes their breath away. But as the Kaffirs say, when a strong wind blows a small spark will make the whole veld burn. It just depends upon whether the spark is there. If an Englishman and a Boer began to fight for instance, anything might happen. Goodbye, I have got a message to deliver. If things go right we might dine at the European tonight, and if they don't, goodness knows where we shall dine."

I nodded sagely and he departed. Then I went to my wagon to tell the boys not to send the oxen off to graze at present, for I feared lest they should be stolen if there were trouble, but to keep them tied to the trek-tow. After this I put on the best coat and hat I had, feeling that as an Englishman it was my duty to look decent on such an occasion, washed, brushed my hair—with me a ceremony without meaning, for it always sticks up—and slipped a loaded Smith & Wesson revolver into my inner poacher pocket. Then I started out to see the fun, and avoiding the groups of surly-looking Boers, mingled with the crowd that I saw was gathering in front of a long, low building with a broad stoep, which I supposed, rightly, to be one of the Government offices.

Presently I found myself standing by a tall, rather loosely-built man whose face attracted me. It was clean-shaven and much bronzed by the sun, but not in any way good-looking; the features were too irregular and the nose was a trifle too long for good looks. Still the impression it gave was pleasant and the steady blue eyes had that twinkle in them which suggests humour. He might have been thirty or thirty-five years of age, and notwithstanding his rough dress that consisted mainly of a pair of trousers held up by a belt to which hung a pistol, and a common flannel shirt, for he wore no coat, I guessed at once that he was English-born.

For a while neither of us said anything after the taciturn habit of our people even on the veld, and indeed I was fully occupied in listening to the truculent talk of a little party of mounted Boers behind us. I put my pipe into my mouth and began to hunt for my tobacco, taking the opportunity to show the hilt of my revolver, so that these men might see that I was armed. It was not to be found, I had left it in the wagon.

"If you smoke Boer tobacco," said the stranger, "I can help you," and I noted that the voice was as pleasant as the face, and knew at once that the owner of it was a gentleman.

"Thank you, Sir. I never smoke anything else," I answered, whereon he produced from his trousers pocket a pouch made of lion skin of unusually dark colour.

"I never saw a lion as black as this, except once beyond Buluwayo on the borders of Lobengula's country," I said by way of making conversation.

"Curious," answered the stranger, "for that's where I shot the brute a few months ago. I tried to keep the whole skin but the white ants got at it."

"Been trading up there?" I asked.

"Nothing so useful," he said. "Just idling and shooting. Came to this country because it was one of the very few I had never seen, and have only been here a year. I think I have had about enough of it, though. Can you tell me of any boats running from Durban to India? I should like to see those wild sheep in Kashmir."

I told him that I did not know for certain as I had never taken any interest in India, being an African elephant-hunter and trader, but I thought they did occasionally. Just then Robinson passed by and called to me—

"They'll be here presently, Quatermain, but Sompseu isn't coming himself."

"Does your name happen to be Allan Quatermain?" asked the stranger. "If so I have heard plenty about you up in Lobengula's country, and of your wonderful shooting."

"Yes," I replied, "but as for the shooting, natives always exaggerate."

"They never exaggerated about mine," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Anyhow I am very glad to see you in the flesh, though in the spirit you rather bored me because I heard too much of you. Whenever I made a particularly bad miss, my gun-bearer, who at some time seems to have been yours, would say, 'Ah! if only it had been the Inkosi Macumazahn, how different would have been the end!' My name is Anscombe, Maurice Anscombe," he added rather shyly. (Afterwards I discovered from a book of reference that he was a younger son of Lord Mountford, one of the richest peers in England.)

Then we both laughed and he said—

"Tell me, Mr. Quatermain, if you will, what those Boers are saying behind us. I am sure it is something unpleasant, but as the only Dutch I know is 'Guten Tag' and 'Vootsack' (Good-day and Get out) that takes me no forwarder."

"It ought to," I answered, "for the substance of their talk is that they object to be 'vootsacked' by the British Government as represented by Sir Theophilus Shepstone. They are declaring that they won the land 'with their blood' and want to keep their own flag flying over it."

"A very natural sentiment," broke in Anscombe.

"They say that they wish to shoot all damned Englishmen, especially Shepstone and his people, and that they would make a beginning now were they not afraid that the damned English Government, being angered, would send thousands of damned English rooibattjes, that is, red-coats, and shoot *them* out of evil revenge."

"A very natural conclusion," laughed Anscombe again, "which I should advise them to leave untested. Hush! Here comes the show."

I looked and saw a body of blackcoated gentlemen with one officer in the uniform of a Colonel of Engineers, advancing slowly. I remember that it reminded me of a funeral procession following the corpse of the Republic that had gone on ahead out of sight. The procession arrived upon the stoep opposite to us and began to sort itself out, whereon the English present raised a cheer and the Boers behind us cursed audibly. In the middle appeared an elderly gentleman with whiskers and a stoop, in whom I recognized Mr. Osborn, known by the Kaffirs as Malimati, the Chief of the Staff. By his side was a tall young fellow, yourself, my friend, scarcely more than a lad then, carrying papers. The rest stood to right and left in a formal line. *You* gave a printed document to Mr. Osborn who put on his glasses and began to read in a low voice which few could hear, and I noticed that his hand trembled. Presently he grew confused, lost his place, found it, lost it again and came to a full stop.

"A nervous-natured man," remarked Mr. Anscombe. "Perhaps he thinks that those gentlemen are going to shoot."

"That wouldn't trouble him," I answered, who knew him well. "His fears are purely mental."

That was true since I know that this same Sir Melmoth Osborn as he is now, as I have told in the book I called *Child of Storm*, swam the Tugela alone to watch the battle of Indondakasuka raging round him, and on another occasion killed two Kaffirs rushing at him with a right and left shot without turning a hair. It was reading this paper that paralyzed him, not any fear of what might happen.

There followed a very awkward pause such as occurs when a man breaks down in a speech. The members of the Staff looked at him and at each other, then behold! you, my friend, grabbed the paper from his hand and went on reading it in a loud clear voice.

"That young man has plenty of nerve," said Mr. Anscombe.

"Yes," I replied in a whisper. "Quite right though. Would have been a bad omen if the thing had come to a stop."

Well, there were no more breakdowns, and at last the long document was finished and the Transvaal annexed. The Britishers began to cheer but stopped to listen to the formal protest of the Boer Government, if it could be called a government when everything had collapsed and the officials were being paid in postage stamps. I can't remember whether this was read by President Burgers himself or by the officer who was called State Secretary. Anyway, it was read, after which there came an awkward pause as though people were waiting to see something happen. I looked round at the Boers who were muttering and handling their rifles uneasily. Had they found a leader I really think that some of the wilder spirits among them would have begun to shoot, but none appeared and the crisis passed.

The crowd began to disperse, the English among them cheering and throwing up their hats, the Dutch with very sullen faces. The Commissioner's staff went away as it had come, back to the building with blue gums in front of it, which afterwards became Government House, that is all except you. You started across the square alone with a bundle of printed proclamations in your hand which evidently you had been charged to leave at the various public offices.

"Let us follow him," I said to Mr. Anscombe. "He might get into trouble and want a friend."

He nodded and we strolled after you unostentatiously. Sure enough you nearly did get into trouble. In front of the first office door to which you came, stood a group of Boers, two of whom, big fellows, drew together with the evident intention of barring your way.

"Mynheeren," you said, "I pray you to let me pass on the Queen's business."

They took no heed except to draw closer together and laugh insolently. Again you made your request and again they laughed. Then I saw you lift your leg and deliberately stamp upon the foot of one of the Boers. He drew back with an exclamation, and for a moment I believed that he or his fellow was going to do something violent. Perhaps they thought better of it, or perhaps they saw us two Englishmen behind and noticed Anscombe's pistol. At any rate you marched into the office triumphant and delivered your document.

"Neatly done," said Mr. Anscombe.

"Rash," I said, shaking my head, "very rash. Well, he's young and must be excused."

But from that moment I took a great liking to you, my friend, perhaps because I wondered whether in your place I should have been daredevil enough to act in the same way. For you see I am English, and I like to see an Englishman hold his own against odds and keep up the credit of the country. Although, of course, I sympathized with the Boers who, through their own fault, were losing their land without a blow struck. As you know well, for you were living near Majuba at the time, plenty of blows were struck afterwards, but of that business I cannot bear to write. I wonder how it will all work out after I am dead and if I shall ever learn what happens in the end.

Now I have only mentioned this business of the Annexation and the part you played in it, because it was on that occasion that I became acquainted with Anscombe. For you have nothing to do with this story which is about the destruction of the Zulus, the accomplishment of the vengeance of Zikali the wizard at the kraal named Finished, and incidentally, the love affairs of two people in which that old wizard took a hand, as I did to my sorrow.

It happened that Mr. Anscombe had ridden on ahead of his wagons which could not arrive at Pretoria for a day or two, and as he found it impossible to get accommodation at the *European* or elsewhere, I offered to let him sleep in mine, or rather alongside in a tent I had. He accepted and soon we became very good friends. Before the day was out I discovered that he had served in a crack cavalry regiment, but resigned his commission some years before. I asked him why.

"Well," he said, "I came into a good lot of money on my mother's death and could not see a prospect of any active service. While the regiment was abroad I liked the life well enough, but at home it bored me. Too much society for my taste, and that sort of thing. Also I wanted to travel; nothing else really amuses me."

"You will soon get tired of it," I answered, "and as you are well off, marry some fine lady and settle down at home."

"Don't think so. I doubt if I should ever be happily married, I want too much. One doesn't pick up an earthly angel with a cast-iron constitution who adores you, which are the bare necessities of marriage, under every bush." Here I laughed. "Also," he added, the laughter going out of his eyes, "I have had enough of fine ladies and their ways."

"Marriage is better than scrapes," I remarked sententiously.

"Quite so, but one might get them both together. No, I shall never marry, although I suppose I ought as my brothers have no children."

"Won't you, my friend," thought I to myself, "when the skin grows again on your burnt fingers."

For I was sure they had been burnt, perhaps more than once. How, I never learned, for which I am rather sorry for it interests me to study burnt fingers, if they do not happen to be my own. Then we changed the subject.

Anscombe's wagons were delayed for a day or two by a broken axle or a bog hole, I forget which. So, as I had nothing particular to do until the Natal post-cart left, we spent the time in wandering about Pretoria, which did not take us long as it was but a little dorp in those days, and chatting with all and sundry. Also we went up to Government House as it was now called, and left cards, or rather wrote our names in a book for we had no cards, being told by one of the Staff whom we met that we should do so. An hour later a note arrived asking us both to dinner that night and telling us very nicely not to mind if we had no dress things. Of course we had to go, Anscombe rigged up in my second best clothes that did not fit him in the least, as he was a much taller man than I am, and a black satin bow that he had bought at Becket's Store together with a pair of shiny pumps.

I actually met you, my friend, for the first time that evening, and in trouble too, though you may have forgotten the incident. We had made a mistake about the time of dinner, and arriving half an hour too soon, were shown into a long room that opened on to the verandah. You were working there, being I believe a private secretary at the time, copying some despatch; I think you said that which gave an account of the Annexation. The room was lit by a paraffin lamp behind you, for it was quite dark and the window was open, or at any rate unshuttered. The gentleman who showed us in, seeing that you were very busy, took us to the far end of the room, where we stood talking in the shadow. Just then a door opened opposite to that which led to the verandah, and through it came His Excellency the Administrator, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, a stout man of medium height with a very clever, thoughtful face, as I have always thought, one of the greatest of African statesmen. He did not see us, but he caught sight of you and said testily—

"Are you mad?" To which you answered with a laugh—

"I hope not more than usual, Sir, but why?"

"Have I not told you always to let down the blinds after dark? Yet there you sit with your head against the light, about the best target for a bullet that could be imagined."

"I don't think the Boers would trouble to shoot me, Sir. If you had been here I would have drawn the blinds and shut the shutters too," you answered, laughing again.

"Go to dress or you will be late for dinner," he said still rather sternly, and you went. But when you had gone and after we had been announced to him, he smiled and added something which I will not repeat to you even now. I think it was about what you did on the

Annexation day of which the story had come to him.

I mention this incident because whenever I think of Shepstone, whom I had known off and on for years in the way that a hunter knows a prominent Government official, it always recurs to my mind, embodying as it does his caution and appreciation of danger derived from long experience of the country, and the sternness he sometimes affected which could never conceal his love towards his friends. Oh! there was greatness in this man, although they did call him an "African Talleyrand." If it had not been so would every native from the Cape to the Zambesi have known and revered his name, as perhaps that of no other white man has been revered? But I must get on with my tale and leave historical discussions to others more fitted to deal with them.

We had a very pleasant dinner that night, although I was so ashamed of my clothes with smart uniforms and white ties all about me, and Anscombe kept fidgeting his feet because he was suffering agony from his new pumps which were a size too small. Everybody was in the best of spirits, for from all directions came the news that the Annexation was well received and that the danger of any trouble had passed away. Ah! if we had only known what the end of it would be!

It was on our way back to the wagon that I chanced to mention to Anscombe that there was still a herd of buffalo within a few days' trek of Lydenburg, of which I had shot two not a month before.

"Are there, by Jove!" he said. "As it happens I never got a buffalo; always I just missed them in one sense or another, and I can't leave Africa with a pair of bought horns. Let's go there and shoot some."

I shook my head and replied that I had been idling long enough and must try to make some money, news at which he seemed very disappointed.

"Look here," he said, "forgive me for mentioning it, but business is business. If you'll come you shan't be a loser."

Again I shook my head, whereat he looked more disappointed than before.

"Very well," he exclaimed, "then I must go alone. For kill a buffalo I will; that is unless the buffalo kills me, in which case my blood will be on your hands."

I don't know why, but at that moment there came into my mind a conviction that if he did go alone a buffalo or something would kill him and that then I should be sorry all my life.

"They are dangerous brutes, much worse than lions," I said.

"And yet you, who pretend to have a conscience, would expose me to their rage unprotected and alone," he replied with a twinkle in his eye which I could see even by moonlight. "Oh! Quatermain, how I have been mistaken in your character."

"Look here, Mr. Anscombe," I said, "it's no use. I cannot possibly go on a shooting expedition with you just now. Only to-day I have heard from Natal that my boy is not well and must undergo an operation which will lay him up for quite six weeks, and may be dangerous. So I must get down to Durban before it takes place. After that I have a contract in Matabeleland whence you have just come, to take charge of a trading store there for a year; also perhaps to try to shoot a little ivory for myself. So I am fully booked up till, let us say, October, 1878, that is for about eighteen months, by which time I daresay I shall be dead."

"Eighteen months," replied this cool young man. "That will suit me very well. I will go on to India as I intended, then home for a bit and will meet you on the 1st of October, 1878, after which we will proceed to the Lydenburg district and shoot those buffalo, or if they have departed, other buffalo. Is it a bargain?"

I stared at him, thinking that the Administrator's champagne had got into his head.

"Nonsense," I exclaimed. "Who knows where you will be in eighteen months? Why, by that time you will have forgotten all about me."

"If I am alive and well, on the 1st of October, 1878, I shall be exactly where I am now, upon this very square in Pretoria, with a wagon, or wagons, prepared for a hunting trip. But as not unnaturally you have doubts upon that point, I am prepared to pay forfeit if I fail, or even if circumstances cause you to fail."

Here he took a cheque-book from his letter-case and spread it out on the little table in the tent, on which there were ink and a pen, adding—

"Now, Mr. Quatermain, will it meet your views if I fill this up for £250?"

"No," I answered; "taking everything into consideration the sum is excessive. But if you do not mind facing the risks of my non-appearance, to say nothing of your own, you may make it £50."

"You are very moderate in your demands," he said as he handed me the cheque which I put in my pocket, reflecting that it would just pay for my son's operation.

"And you are very foolish in your offers," I replied. "Tell me, why do you make such crack-brained arrangements?"

"I don't quite know. Something in me seems to say that we *shall* make this expedition and that it will have a very important effect upon my life. Mind you, it is to be to the Lydenburg district and nowhere else. And now I am tired, so let's turn in."

Next morning we parted and went our separate ways.

## CHAPTER II.

### MR. MARNHAM

So much for preliminaries, now for the story.

The eighteen months had gone by, bringing with them to me their share of adventure, weal and woe, with all of which at present I have no concern. Behold me arriving very hot and tired in the post-cart from Kimberley, whither I had gone to invest what I had saved out of my Matabeleland contract in a very promising speculation whereof, today, the promise remains and no more. I had been obliged to leave Kimberley in a great hurry, before I ought indeed, because of the silly bargain which I have just recorded. Of course I was sure that I should never see Mr. Anscombe again, especially as I had heard nothing of him during all this while, and had no reason to suppose that he was in Africa. Still I had taken his £50 and he *might* come. Also I have always prided myself upon keeping an appointment.

The post-cart halted with a jerk in front of the *European Hotel*, and I crawled, dusty and tired, from its interior, to find myself face to face with Anscombe, who was smoking a pipe upon the stoep!

"Hullo, Quatermain," he said in his pleasant, drawling voice, "here you are, up to time. I have been making bets with these five gentlemen," and he nodded at a group of loungers on the stoep, "as to whether you would or would not appear, I putting ten to one on you in drinks. Therefore you must now consume five whiskies and sodas, which will save them from consuming fifty and a subsequent appearance at the Police Court."

I laughed and said I would be their debtor to the extent of one, which was duly produced.

After it was drunk Anscombe and I had a chat. He said that he had been to India, shot, or shot at whatever game he meant to kill there, visited his relations in England and thence proceeded to keep his appointment with me in Africa. At Durban he had fitted himself out in a regal way with two wagons, full teams, and some spare oxen, and trekked to Pretoria where he had arrived a few days before. Now he was ready to start for the Lydenburg district and look for those buffalo.

"But," I said, "the buffalo probably long ago departed. Also there has been a war with Sekukuni, the Basuto chief who rules all that country, which remains undecided, although I believe some kind of a peace has been patched up. This may make hunting in this neighborhood dangerous. Why not try some other ground, to the north of the Transvaal, for instance?"

"Quatermain," he answered, "I have come all the way from England, I will not say to kill, but to try to kill buffalo in the Lydenburg district, with you if possible, if not, without you, and thither I am going. If you think it unsafe to accompany me, don't come; I will get on as best I can alone, or with some other skilled person if I can find one."

"If you put it like that I shall certainly come," I replied, "with the proviso that should the buffalo prove to be non-existent or the pursuit of them impossible, we either give up the trip, or go somewhere else, perhaps to the country at the back of Delagoa Bay."

"Agreed," he said; after which we discussed terms, he paying me my salary in advance.

On further consideration we determined, as two were quite unnecessary for a trip of the sort, to leave one of my wagons and half the cattle in charge of a very respectable man, a farmer who lived about five miles from Pretoria just over the pass near to the famous Wonder-boom tree which is one of the sights of the place. Should we need this wagon it could always be sent for; or, if we found the Lydenburg hunting-ground, which he was so set upon visiting, unproductive or impossible, we could return to Pretoria over the highveld and pick it up before proceeding elsewhere.

These arrangements took us a couple of days or so. On the third we started, without seeing you, my friend, or any one else that I knew, since just at that time every one seemed to be away from Pretoria. You, I remember, had by now become the Master of the High Court and were, they informed me at your office, absent on circuit.

The morning of our departure was particularly lovely and we trekked away in the best of spirits, as so often happens to people who are marching into trouble. Of our journey there is little to say as everything went smoothly, so that we arrived at the edge of the highveld feeling as happy as the country which has no history is reported to do. Our road led us past the little mining settlement of Pilgrim's Rest where a number of adventurous spirits, most of them English, were engaged in washing for gold, a job at which I once took a turn near this very place without any startling success. Of the locality I need only say that the mountainous scenery is among the most beautiful, the hills are the steepest and the roads are, or were, the worst that I have ever travelled over in a wagon.

However, "going softly" as the natives say, we negotiated them without accident and, leaving Pilgrim's Rest behind us, began to descend towards the lowveld where I was informed a herd of buffalo could still be found, since, owing to the war with Sekukuni, no one had shot at them of late. This war had been suspended for a while, and the Land-drost at Pilgrim's Rest told me he thought it would be safe to hunt on the borders of that Chief's country, though he should not care to do so himself.

Game of the smaller sort began to be plentiful about here, so not more than a dozen miles from Pilgrim's Rest we outspanned early in the afternoon to try to get a blue wildebeeste or two, for I had seen the spoor of these creatures in a patch of soft ground, or failing them some other buck. Accordingly, leaving the wagon by a charming stream that wound and gurgled over a bed of granite, we mounted our salted horses, which were part of Anscombe's outfit, and set forth rejoicing. Riding through the scattered thorns and following the spoor where I could, within half an hour we came to a little glade. There, not fifty yards away, I caught sight of a single

blue wildebeeste bull standing in the shadow of the trees on the further side of the glade, and pointed out the ugly beast, for it is the most grotesque of all the antelopes, to Anscombe.

"Off you get," I whispered. "It's a lovely shot, you can't miss it."

"Oh, can't I!" replied Anscombe. "Do you shoot."

I refused, so he dismounted, giving me his horse to hold, and kneeling down solemnly and slowly covered the bull. Bang went his rifle, and I saw a bough about a yard above the wildebeeste fall on to its back. Off it went like lightning, whereon Anscombe let drive with the left barrel of the Express, almost at hazard as it seemed to me, and by some chance hit it above the near fore-knee, breaking its leg.

"That was a good shot," he cried, jumping on to his horse.

"Excellent," I answered. "But what are you going to do?"

"Catch it. It is cruel to leave a wounded animal," and off he started.

Of course I had to follow, but the ensuing ride remains among the more painful of my hunting memories. We tore through thorn trees that scratched my face and damaged my clothes; we struck a patch of antbear holes, into one of which my horse fell so that my stomach bumped against its head; we slithered down granite koppies, and this was the worst of it, at the end of each chapter, so to speak, always caught sight of that accursed bull which I fondly hoped would have vanished into space. At length after half an hour or so of this game we reached a stretch of open, rolling ground, and there not fifty yards ahead of us was the animal still going like a hare, though how it could do so on three legs I am sure I do not know. We coursed it like greyhounds, till at last Anscombe, whose horse was the faster, came alongside of the exhausted creature, whereon it turned suddenly and charged.

Anscombe held out his rifle in his right hand and pulled the trigger, which, as he had forgotten to reload it, was a mere theatrical performance. Next second there was such a mix-up that for a while I could not distinguish which was Anscombe, which was the wildebeeste, and which the horse. They all seemed to be going round and round in a cloud of dust. When things settled themselves a little I discovered the horse rolling on the ground, Anscombe on his back with his hands up in an attitude of prayer and the wildebeeste trying to make up its mind which of them it should finish first. I settled the poor thing's doubts by shooting it through the heart, which I flatter myself was rather clever of me under the circumstances. Then I dismounted to examine Anscombe, who, I presumed, was done for. Not a bit of it. There he sat upon the ground blowing like a blacksmith's bellows and panting out—

"What a glorious gallop. I finished it very well, didn't I? You couldn't have made a better shot yourself."

"Yes," I answered, "you finished it very well as you will find out if you will take the trouble to open your rifle and count your cartridges. I may add that if we are going to hunt together I hope you will never lead me such a fool's chase again."

He rose, opened the rifle and saw that it was empty, for although he had never re-loaded he had thrown out the two cartridges which he had discharged in the glen.

"By Jingo," he said, "you must have shot it, though I could have sworn that it was I. Quatermain, has it ever struck you what a strange thing is the human imagination?"

"Drat the human imagination," I answered, wiping away the blood that was trickling into my eye from a thorn scratch. "Let's look at your horse. If it is lamed you will have to ride Imagination back to the wagon which must be six miles away, that is if we can find it before dark."

Sighing out something about a painfully practical mind, he obeyed, and when the beast was proved to be nothing more than blown and a little bruised, made remarks as to the inadvisability of dwelling on future evil events, which I reminded him had already been better summed up in the New Testament.

After this we contemplated the carcase of the wildebeeste which it seemed a pity to leave to rot. Just then Anscombe, who had moved a few yards to the right out of the shadow of an obstructing tree, exclaimed—

"I say, Quatermain, come here and tell me if I have been knocked silly, or if I really see a quite uncommon kind of house built in ancient Greek style set in a divine landscape."

"Temple to Diana, I expect," I remarked as I joined him on the further side of the tree.

I looked and rubbed my eyes. There, about half a mile away, situated in a bay of the sweeping hills and overlooking the measureless expanse of bush-veld beneath, was a remarkable house, at least for those days and that part of Africa. To begin with the situation was superb. It stood on a green and swelling mound behind which was a wooded kloof where ran a stream that at last precipitated itself in a waterfall over a great cliff. Then in front was that glorious view of the bush-veld, at which a man might look for a lifetime and not grow tired, stretching away to the Oliphant's river and melting at last into the dim line of the horizon.

The house itself also, although not large, was of a kind new to me. It was deep, but narrow fronted, and before it were four columns that carried the roof which projected so as to form a wide verandah. Moreover it seemed to be built of marble which glistened like snow in the setting sun. In short in that lonely wilderness, at any rate from this distance, it did look like the deserted shrine of some forgotten god.

"Well, I'm bothered!" I said.

"So am I," answered Anscombe, "to know the name of the Lydenburg district architect whom I should like to employ; though I suspect it is the surroundings that make the place look so beautiful. Hullo! here comes somebody, but he doesn't look like an architect; he looks like a wicked baronet disguised as a Boer."

True enough, round a clump of bush appeared an unusual looking person, mounted on a very good horse. He was tall, thin and old, at least he had a long white beard which suggested age, although his figure, so far as it could be seen beneath his rough clothes, seemed vigorous. His face was clean cut and handsome, with a rather hooked nose, and his eyes were grey, but as I saw when he came up to us, somewhat bloodshot at the corners. His general aspect was refined and benevolent, and as soon as he opened his mouth I perceived that he was a person of gentle breeding.

And yet there was something about him, something in his atmosphere, so to speak, that I did not like. Before we parted that evening I felt sure that in one way or another he was a wrong-doer, not straight; also that he had a violent temper.

He rode up to us and asked in a pleasant voice, although the manner of his question, which was put in bad Dutch, was not pleasant, "Who gave you leave to shoot on our land?"

"I did not know that any leave was required; it is not customary in these parts," I answered politely in English. "Moreover, this buck was wounded miles away."

"Oh!" he exclaimed in the same tongue, "that makes a difference, though I expect it was still on our land, for we have a lot; it is cheap about here." Then after studying a little, he added apologetically, "You mustn't think me strange, but the fact is my daughter hates things to be killed near the house, which is why there's so much game about."

"Then pray make her our apologies," said Anscombe, "and say that it shall not happen again."

He stroked his long beard and looked at us, for by now he had dismounted, then said—

"Might I ask you gentlemen your names?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I am Allan Quatermain and my friend is the Hon. Maurice Anscombe."

He started and said—

"Of Allan Quatermain of course I have heard. The natives told me that you were trekking to those parts; and if you, sir, are one of Lord Mountford's sons, oddly enough I think I must have known your father in my youth. Indeed I served with him in the Guards."

"How very strange," said Anscombe. "He's dead now and my brother is Lord Mountford. Do you like life here better than that in the Guards? I am sure I should."

"Both of them have their advantages," he answered evasively, "of which, if, as I think, you are also a soldier, you can judge for yourself. But won't you come up to the house? My daughter Heda is away, and my partner Mr. Rodd" (as he mentioned this name I saw a blue vein, which showed above his cheek bone, swell as though under pressure of some secret emotion) "is a retiring sort of a man—indeed some might think him sulky until they came to know him. Still, we can make you comfortable and even give you a decent bottle of wine."

"No, thank you very much," I answered, "we must get back to the wagon or our servants will think that we have come to grief. Perhaps you will accept the wildebeeste if it is of any use to you."

"Very well," he said in a voice that suggested regret struggling with relief. To the buck he made no allusion, perhaps because he considered that it was already his own property. "Do you know your way? I believe your wagon is camped out there to the east by what we call the Granite stream. If you follow this Kaffir path," and he pointed to a track near by, "it will take you quite close."

"Where does the path run to?" I asked. "There are no kraals about, are there?"

"Oh! to the Temple, as my daughter calls our house. My partner and I are labour agents, we recruit natives for the Kimberley Mines," he said in explanation, adding, "Where do you propose to shoot?"

I told him.

"Isn't that rather a risky district?" he said. "I think that Sekukuni will soon be giving more trouble, although there is a truce between him and the English. Still he might send a regiment to raid that way."

I wondered how our friend knew so much of Sekukuni's possible intentions, but only answered that I was accustomed to deal with natives and did not fear them.

"Ah!" he said, "well, you know your own business best. But if you should get into any difficulty, make straight for this place. The Basutos will not interfere with you here."

Again I wondered why the Basutos should look upon this particular spot as sacred, but thinking it wisest to ask no questions, I only answered—

"Thank you very much. We'll bear your invitation in mind, Mr.—"

"Marnham."

"Marnham," I repeated after him. "Good-bye and many thanks for your kindness."

"One question," broke in Anscombe, "if you will not think me rude. What is the name of the architect who designed that most romantic-looking house of yours which seems to be built of marble?"

"My daughter designed it, or at least I think she copied it from some old drawing of a ruin. Also it *is* marble; there's a whole hill of the stuff not a hundred yards from the door, so it was cheaper to use than anything else. I hope you will come and see it on your way back, though it is not as fine as it appears from a distance. It would be very pleasant after all these years to talk to an English gentleman again."

Then we parted, I rather offended because he did not seem to include me in the description, he calling after us—

"Stick close to the path through the patch of big trees, for the ground is rather swampy there and it's getting dark."

Presently we came to the place he mentioned where the timber, although scattered, was quite large for South Africa, of the yellow-wood species, and interspersed wherever the ground was dry with huge euphorbias, of which the tall finger-like growths and sad grey colouring looked unreal and ghostlike in the waning light. Following the advice given to us, we rode in single file along the narrow path, fearing lest otherwise we should tumble into some bog hole, until we came to higher land covered with the scattered thorns of the country.

"Did that bush give you any particular impression?" asked Anscombe a minute or two later.

"Yes," I answered, "it gave me the impression that we might catch fever there. See the mist that lies over it," and turning in my saddle I pointed with the rifle in my hand to what looked like a mass of cotton wool over which, without permeating it, hung the last

red glow of sunset, producing a curious and indeed rather unearthly effect. "I expect that thousands of years ago there was a lake yonder, which is why trees grow so big in the rich soil."

"You are curiously mundane, Quatermain," he answered. "I ask you of spiritual impressions and you dilate to me of geological formations and the growth of timber. You felt nothing in the spiritual line?"

"I felt nothing except a chill," I answered, for I was tired and hungry. "What the devil are you driving at?"

"Have you got that flask of Hollands about you, Quatermain?"

"Oh! those are the spirits you are referring to," I remarked with sarcasm as I handed it to him.

He took a good pull and replied—

"Not at all, except in the sense that bad spirits require good spirits to correct them, as the Bible teaches. To come to facts," he added in a changed voice, "I have never been in a place that depressed me more than that thrice accursed patch of bush."

"Why did it depress you?" I asked, studying him as well as I could in the fading light. To tell the truth I feared lest he had knocked his head when the wildebeeste upset him, and was suffering from delayed concussion.

"Can't tell you, Quatermain. I don't look like a criminal, do I? Well, I entered those trees feeling a fairly honest man, and I came out of them feeling like a murderer. It was as though something terrible had happened to me there; it was as though I had killed someone there. Ugh!" and he shivered and took another pull at the Hollands.

"What bosh!" I said. "Besides, even if it were to come true, I am sorry to say I've killed lots of men in the way of business and they don't bother me overmuch."

"Did you ever kill one to win a woman?"

"Certainly not. Why, that would be murder. How can you ask me such a thing? But I have killed several to win cattle," I reflected aloud, remembering my expedition with Saduko against the chief Bangu, and some other incidents in my career.

"I appreciate the difference, Quatermain. If you kill for cows, it is justifiable homicide; if you kill for women, it is murder."

"Yes," I replied, "that is how it seems to work out in Africa. You see, women are higher in the scale of creation than cows, therefore crimes committed for their sake are enormously greater than those committed for cows, which just makes the difference between justifiable homicide and murder."

"Good lord! what an argument," he exclaimed and relapsed into silence. Had he been accustomed to natives and their ways he would have understood the point much better than he did, though I admit it is difficult to explain.

In due course we reached the wagon without further trouble. While we were shielding our pipes after an excellent supper I asked Anscombe his impressions of Mr. Marnham.

"Queer cove, I think," he answered. "Been a gentleman, too, and still keeps the manners, which isn't strange if he is one of the Marnhams, for they are a good family. I wonder he mentioned having served with my father."

"It slipped out of him. Men who live a lot alone are apt to be surprised into saying things they regret afterwards, as I noticed he did. But why do you wonder?"

"Because as it happens, although I have only just recalled it, my father used to tell some story about a man named Marnham in his regiment. I can't remember the details, but it had to do with cards when high stakes were being played for, and with the striking of a superior officer in the quarrel that ensued, as a result of which the striker was requested to send in his papers."

"It may not have been the same man."

"Perhaps not, for I believe that more than one Marnham served in that regiment. But I remember my father saying, by way of excuse for the person concerned, that he had a most ungovernable temper. I think he added, that he left the country and took service in some army on the Continent. I should rather like to clear the thing up."

"It isn't probable that you will, for even if you should ever meet this Marnham again, I fancy you would find he held his tongue about his acquaintance with your father."

"I wonder what Miss Heda is like," went on Anscombe after a pause. "I am curious to see a girl who designs a house on the model of an ancient ruin."

"Well, you won't, for she's away somewhere. Besides we are looking for buffalo, not girls, which is a good thing as they are less dangerous."

I spoke thus decisively because I had taken a dislike to Mr. Marnham and everything to do with him, and did not wish to encourage the idea of further meetings.

"No, never, I suppose. And yet I feel as though I were certainly destined to see that accursed yellow-wood swamp again."

"Nonsense," I replied as I rose to turn in. Ah! if I had but known!

## CHAPTER III.

### THE HUNTERS HUNTED

While I was taking off my boots I heard a noise of jabbering in some native tongue which I took to be Sisutu, and not wishing to go to the trouble of putting them on again, called to the driver of the wagon to find out what it was. This man was a Cape Colony Kaffir, a Fingo I think, with a touch of Hottentot in him. He was an excellent driver, indeed I do not think I have ever seen a better, and by no means a bad shot. Among Europeans he rejoiced in the name of Footsack, a Boer Dutch term which is generally addressed to troublesome dogs and means "Get out." To tell the truth, had I been his master he would have got out, as I suspected him of drinking, and generally did not altogether trust him. Anscombe, however, was fond of him because he had shown courage in some hunting adventure in Matabeleland, I think it was at the shooting of that very dark-coloured lion whose skin had been the means of making us acquainted nearly two years before. Indeed he said that on this occasion Footsack had saved his life, though from all that I could gather I do not think this was quite the case. Also the man, who had been on many hunting trips with sportsmen, could talk Dutch well and English enough to make himself understood, and therefore was useful.

He went as I bade him, and coming back presently, told me that a party of Basutos, about thirty in number, who were returning from Kimberley, where they had been at work in the mines, under the leadership of a Bastard named Karl, asked leave to camp by the wagon for the night, as they were afraid to go on to "Tampel" in the dark.

At first I could not make out what "Tampel" was, as it did not sound like a native name. Then I remembered that Mr. Marnham had spoken of his house as being called the Temple, of which, of course, Tampel was a corruption; also that he said he and his partner were labour agents.

"Why are they afraid?" I asked.

"Because, Baas, they say that they must go through a wood in a swamp, which they think is haunted by spooks, and they much afraid of spooks;" that is of ghosts.

"What spooks?" I asked.

"Don't know, Baas. They say spook of some one who has been killed."

"Rubbish," I replied. "Tell them to go and catch the spook; we don't want a lot of noisy fellows howling chanties here all night."

Then it was that Anscombe broke in in his humorous, rather drawling voice.

"How can you be so hard-hearted, Quatermain? After the supernatural terror which, as I told you, I experienced in that very place, I wouldn't condemn a kicking mule to go through it in this darkness. Let the poor devils stay; I daresay they are tired."

So I gave in, and presently saw their fires beginning to burn through the end canvas of the wagon which was unlaced because the night was hot. Also later on I woke up, about midnight I think, and heard voices talking, one of which I reflected sleepily, sounded very like that of Footsack.

Waking very early, as is my habit, I peeped out of the wagon, and through the morning mist perceived Footsack in converse with a particularly villainous-looking person. I at once concluded this must be Karl, evidently a Bastard compounded of about fifteen parts of various native bloods to one of white, who, to add to his attractions, was deeply scarred with smallpox and possessed a really alarming squint. It seemed to me that Footsack handed to this man something that looked suspiciously like a bottle of squareface gin wrapped up in dried grass, and that the man handed back to Footsack some small object which he put in his mouth.

Now, I wondered to myself, what is there of value that one who does not eat sweets would stow away in his mouth. Gold coin perhaps, or a quid of tobacco, or a stone. Gold was too much to pay for a bottle of gin, tobacco was too little, but how about the stone? What stone? Who wanted stones? Then suddenly I remembered that these people were said to come from Kimberley, and whistled to myself. Still I did nothing, principally because the mist was still so dense that although I could see the men's faces, I could not clearly see the articles which they passed to each other about two feet lower, where it still lay very thickly, and to bring any accusation against a native which he can prove to be false is apt to destroy authority. So I held my tongue and waited my chance. It did not come at once, for before I was dressed those Basutos had departed together with their leader Karl, for now that the sun was up they no longer feared the haunted bush.

It came later, thus: We were trekking along between the thorns upon a level and easy track which enabled the driver Footsack to sit upon the "voorkisse" or driving box of the wagon, leaving the lad who is called the voorlooper to lead the oxen. Anscombe was riding parallel to the wagon in the hope of killing some guineafowl for the pot (though a very poor shot with a rifle he was good with a shot-gun). I, who did not care for this small game, was seated smoking by the side of Footsack who, I noted, smelt of gin and generally showed signs of dissipation. Suddenly I said to him—

"Show me that diamond which the Bastard Karl gave you this morning in payment for the bottle of your master's drink."

It was a bow drawn at a venture, but the effect of the shot was remarkable. Had I not caught it, the long bamboo whip Footsack held would have fallen to the ground, while he collapsed in his seat like a man who has received a bullet in his stomach.

"Baas," he gasped, "Baas, how did you know?"

"I knew," I replied grandly, "in the same way that I know everything. Show me the diamond."

"Baas," he said, "it was not the Baas Anscombe's gin, it was some I bought in Pilgrim's Rest."

"I have counted the bottles in the case and know very well whose gin it was," I replied ambiguously, for the reason that I had done nothing of the sort. "Show me the diamond."

Footsack fumbled about his person, his hair, his waistcoat pockets and even his moocha, and ultimately from somewhere produced a stone which he handed to me. I looked at it, and from the purity of colour and size, judged it to be a diamond worth £200, or possibly more. After careful examination I put it into my pocket, saying,

"This is the price of your master's gin and therefore belongs to him as much as it does to anybody. Now if you want to keep out of trouble, tell me—whence came it into the hands of that man, Karl?"

"Baas," replied Footsack, trembling all over, "how do I know? He and the rest have been working at the mines; I suppose he found it there."

"Indeed! And did he find others of the same sort?"

"I think so, Baas. At least he said that he had been buying bottles of gin with such stones all the way down from Kimberley. Karl is a great drunkard, Baas, as I am sure, who have known him for years."

"That is not all," I remarked, keeping my eyes fixed on him. "What else did he say?"

"He said, Baas, that he was very much afraid of returning to the Baas Marnham whom the Kaffirs call White-beard, with only a few stones left."

"Why was he afraid?"

"Because the Baas Whitebeard, he who dwells at Tappel, is, he says, a very angry man if he thinks himself cheated, and Karl is afraid lest he should kill him as another was killed, he whose spook haunts the wood through which those silly people feared to pass last night."

"Who was killed and who killed him?" I asked.

"Baas, I don't know," replied Footsack, collapsing into sullen silence in a way that Kaffirs have when suddenly they realize that they have said too much. Nor did I press the matter further, having learned enough.

What had I learned? This: that Messrs. Marnham & Rodd were illicit diamond buyers, I.D.B.'s as they are called, who had cunningly situated themselves at a great distance from the scene of operations practically beyond the reach of civilized law. Probably they were engaged also in other nefarious dealings with Kaffirs, such as supplying them with guns wherewith to make war upon the Whites. Sekukuni had been fighting us recently, so that there would be a very brisk market for rifles. This, too, would account for Marnham's apparent knowledge of that Chief's plans. Possibly, however, he had no knowledge and only made a pretence of it to keep us out of the country.

Later on I confided the whole story and my suspicions to Anscombe, who was much interested.

"What picturesque scoundrels!" he exclaimed, "We really ought to go back to the Temple. I have always longed to meet some real live I.D.B.'s."

"It is probable that you have done that already without knowing it. For the rest, if you wish to visit that den of iniquity, you must do so alone."

"Wouldn't whited sepulchre be a better term, especially as it seems to cover dead men's bones?" he replied in his frivolous manner.

Then I asked him what he was going to do about Footsack and the bottle of gin, which he countered by asking me what I was going to do with that diamond.

"Give it to you as Footsack's master," I said, suiting the action to the word. "I don't wish to be mixed up in doubtful transactions."

Then followed a long argument as to who was the real owner of the stone, which ended in its being hidden away to be produced if called for, and in Footsack, who ought have had a round dozen, receiving a scolding from his master, coupled with the threat that if he stole more gin he would be handed over to a magistrate—when we met one.

On the following day we reached the hot, low-lying veld which the herd of buffalo was said to inhabit. Next morning, however, when we were making ready to begin hunting, a Basuto Kaffir appeared who, on being questioned, said that he was one of Sekukuni's people sent to this district to look for two lost oxen. I did not believe this story, thinking it more probable that he was a spy, but asked him whether in his hunt for oxen he had come across buffalo.

He replied that he had, a herd of thirty-two of them, counting the calves, but that they were over the Oliphant's River about five-and-twenty miles away, in a valley between some outlying hills and the rugged range of mountains, beyond which was situated Sekukuni's town. Moreover, in proof of his story he showed me spoor of the beasts heading in that direction which was quite a week old.

Now for my part, as I did not think it wise to get too near to Sekukuni, I should have given them up and gone to hunt something else. Anscombe, however, was of a different opinion and pleaded hard that we should follow them. They were the only herd within a hundred miles, he said, if indeed there were any others this side of the Lebombo Mountains. As I still demurred, he suggested, in the nicest possible manner, that if I thought the business risky, I should camp somewhere with the wagon, while he went on with Footsack to look for the buffalo. I answered that I was well used to risks, which in a sense were my trade, and that as he was more or less in my charge I was thinking of him, not of myself, who was quite prepared to follow the buffalo, not only to Sekukuni's Mountains but over them. Then fearing that he had hurt my feelings, he apologized, and offered to go elsewhere if I liked. The upshot was that we decided to trek to the Oliphant's River, camp there and explore the bush on the other side on horseback, never going so far from the wagon that we could not reach it again before nightfall.

This, then, we did, outspanning that evening by the hot but beautiful river which was still haunted by a few hippopotamus and many crocodiles, one of which we shot before turning in. Next morning, having breakfasted off cold guineafowl, we mounted, crossed the river by a ford that was quite as deep as I liked, to which the Kaffir path led us, and, leaving Footsack with the two other boys in charge of the wagon, began to hunt for the buffalo in the rather swampy bush that stretched from the further bank to the slope of the first hills, eight or ten miles away. I did not much expect to find them, as the Basuto had said that they had gone over these hills, but either he lied or they had moved back again.

Not half a mile from the river bank, just as I was about to dismount to stalk a fine waterbuck of which I caught sight standing among some coarse grass and bushes, my eye fell upon buffalo spoor that from its appearance I knew could not be more than a few hours old. Evidently the beasts had been feeding here during the night and at dawn had moved away to sleep in the dry bush nearer the hills. Beckoning to Anscombe, who fortunately had not seen the waterbuck, at which he would certainly have fired, thereby perhaps frightening the buffalo, I showed him the spoor that we at once started to follow.

Soon it led us into other spoor, that of a whole herd of thirty or forty beasts indeed, which made our task quite easy, at least till we came to harder ground, for the animals had gone a long way. An hour or more later, when we were about seven miles from the river, I perceived ahead of us, for we were now almost at the foot of the hills, a cool and densely-wooded kloof.

"That is where they will be," I said. "Now come on carefully and make no noise."

We rode to the wide mouth of the kloof where the signs of the buffalo were numerous and fresh, dismounted and tied our horses to a thorn, so as to approach them silently on foot. We had not gone two hundred yards through the bush when suddenly about fifty paces away, standing broadside on in the shadow between two trees, I saw a splendid old bull with a tremendous pair of horns.

"Shoot," I whispered to Anscombe, "you will never get a better chance. It is the sentinel of the herd."

He knelt down, his face quite white with excitement, and covered the bull with his Express.

"Keep cool," I whispered again, "and aim behind the shoulder, half-way down."

I don't think he understood me, for at that moment off went the rifle. He hit the beast somewhere, as I heard the bullet clap, but not fatally, for it turned and lumbered off up the kloof, apparently unhurt, whereon he sent the second barrel after it, a clean miss this time. Then of a sudden all about us appeared buffaloes that had, I suppose, been sleeping invisible to us. These, with snorts and bellows, rushed off towards the river, for having their senses about them, they had no mind to be trapped in the kloof. I could only manage a shot at one of them, a large and long-horned cow which I knocked over quite dead. If I had fired again it would have been but to wound, a thing I hate. The whole business was over in a minute. We went and looked at my dead cow which I had caught through the heart.

"It's cruel to kill these things," I said, "for I don't know what use we are going to make of them, and they must love life as much as we do."

"We'll cut the horns off," said Anscombe.

"You may if you like," I answered, "but you will find it a tough job with a sheath knife."

"Yes, I think that shall be the task of the worthy Footsack to-morrow," he replied. "Meanwhile let us go and finish off my bull, as Footsack & Co. may as well bring home two pair of horns as one."

I looked at the dense bush, and knowing something of the habits of wounded buffaloes, reflected that it would be a nasty job. Still I said nothing, because if I hesitated, I knew he would want to go alone. So we started. Evidently the beast had been badly hit, for the blood spoor was easy to follow. Yet it had been able to retreat up to the end of the kloof that terminated in a cliff over which trickled a stream of water. Here it was not more than a hundred paces wide, and on either side of it were other precipitous cliffs. As we went from one of these a war-horn, such as the Basutos use, was blown. Although I heard it, oddly enough, I paid no attention to it at the time, being utterly intent upon the business in hand.

Following a wounded buffalo bull up a tree-clad and stony kloof is no game for children, as these beasts have a habit of returning on their tracks and then rushing out to gore you. So I went on with every sense alert, keeping Anscombe well behind me. As it happened our bull had either been knocked silly or inherited no guile from his parents. When he found he could go no further he stopped, waited behind a bush, and when he saw us he charged in a simple and primitive fashion. I let Anscombe fire, as I wished him to have the credit of killing it all to himself, but somehow or other he managed to miss both barrels. Then, trouble being imminent, I let drive as the beast lowered its head, and was lucky enough to break its spine (to shoot at the head of a buffalo is useless), so that it rolled over quite dead at our feet.

"You have got a magnificent pair of horns," I said, contemplating the fallen giant.

"Yes," answered Anscombe, with a twinkle of his humorous eyes, "and if it hadn't been for you I think that I should have got them in more senses than one."

As the words passed his lips some missile, from its peculiar sound I judged it was the leg off an iron pot, hurtled past my head, fired evidently from a smoothbore gun with a large charge of bad powder. Then I remembered the war-horn and all that it meant.

"Off you go," I said, "we are ambushed by Kaffirs."

We were indeed, for as we tailed down that kloof, from the top of both cliffs above us came a continuous but luckily ill-directed fire. Lead-coated stones, pot legs and bullets whirled and whistled all round us, yet until the last, just when we were reaching the tree to which we had tied our horses, quite harmlessly. Then suddenly I saw Anscombe begin to limp. Still he managed to run on and mount, though I observed that he did not put his right foot into the stirrup.

"What's the matter?" I asked as we galloped off.

"Shot through the instep, I think," he answered with a laugh, "but it doesn't hurt a bit."

"I expect it will later," I replied. "Meanwhile, thank God it wasn't at the top of the kloof. They won't catch us on the horses, which they never thought of killing first."

"They are going to try though. Look behind you."

I looked and saw twenty or thirty men emerging from the mouth of the kloof in pursuit.

"No time to stop to get those horns," he said with a sigh.

"No," I answered, "unless you are particularly anxious to say good-bye to the world pinned over a broken ant-heap in the sun, or something pleasant of the sort."

Then we rode on in silence, I thinking what a fool I had been first to allow myself to be overruled by Anscombe and cross the river, and secondly not to have taken warning from that war-horn. We could not go very fast because of the difficult and swampy nature of the ground; also the great heat of the day told on the horses. Thus it came about that when we reached the ford we were not more than ten minutes ahead of our active pursuers, good runners every one of them, and accustomed to the country. I suppose that they had orders to kill or capture us at any cost, for instead of giving up the chase, as I hoped they would, they stuck to us in surprising fashion.

We splashed through the river, and luckily on the further bank were met by Footsack who had seen us coming and guessed that something was wrong.

"Inspan!" I shouted to him, "and be quick about it if you want to see tomorrow's light. The Basutos are after us."

Off he went like a shot, his face quite green with fear.

"Now," I said to Anscombe, as we let our horses take a drink for which they were mad, "we have got to hold this ford until the wagon is ready, or those devils will get us after all. Dismount and I'll tie up the horses."

He did so with some difficulty, and at my suggestion, while I made the beasts fast, cut the lace of his boot which was full of blood, and soaked his wounded foot, that I had no time to examine, in the cool water. These things done, I helped him to the rear of a thorn tree which was thick enough to shield most of his body, and took my own stand behind a similar thorn at a distance of a few paces.

Presently the Basutos appeared, trotting along close together whereon Anscombe, who was seated behind the tree, fired both barrels of his Express at them at a range of about two hundred yards. It was a foolish thing to do, first because he missed them clean, for he had over-estimated the range and the bullets went above their heads, and secondly because it caused them to scatter and made them careful, whereas had they come on in a lump we could have taught them a lesson. However I said nothing, as I knew that reproaches would only make him nervous. Down went those scoundrels on to their hands and knees and, taking cover behind stones and bushes on the further bank, began to fire at us, for they were all armed with guns of one sort and another, and there was only about a hundred yards of water between us. As they effected this manoeuvre I am glad to say I was able to get two of them, while Anscombe, I think, wounded another.

After this our position grew quite warm, for as I have said the thorn trunks were not very broad, and three or four of the natives, who had probably been hunters, were by no means bad shots, though the rest of them fired wildly. Anscombe, in poking his head round the tree to shoot, had his hat knocked off by a bullet, while a slug went through the lappet of my coat. Then a worse thing happened. Either by chance or design Anscombe's horse was struck in the neck and fell struggling, whereon my beast, growing frightened, broke its riem and galloped to the wagon. That is where I ought to have left them at first, only I thought that we might need them to make a bolt on, or to carry Anscombe if he could not walk.

Quite a long while went by before, glancing behind me, I saw that the oxen that had been grazing at a little distance had at length arrived and were being inspanned in furious haste. The Basutos saw it also, and fearing lest we should escape, determined to try to end the business. Suddenly they leapt from their cover, and with more courage than I should have expected of them, rushed into the river, proposing to storm us, which, to speak truth, I think they would have done had I not been a fairly quick shot.

As it was, finding that they were losing too heavily from our fire, they retreated in a hurry, leaving their dead behind them, and even a wounded man who was clinging to a rock. He, poor wretch, was in mortal terror lest we should shoot him again, which I had not the heart to do, although as his leg was shattered above the knee by an Express bullet, it might have been true kindness. Again and again he called out for mercy, saying that he only attacked us because his chief, who had been warned of our coming "by the White Man," ordered him to take our guns and cattle.

"What white man?" I shouted. "Speak or I shoot."

There was no answer, for at this moment he fainted from loss of blood and vanished beneath the water. Then another Basuto, I suppose he was their captain, but they did not know for he was hidden in some bushes, called out—

"Do not think that you shall escape, White Men. There are many more of our people coming, and we will kill you in the night when you cannot see to shoot us."

At this moment, too, Footsack shouted that the wagon was inspanned and ready. Now I hesitated what to do. If we made for the wagon, which must be very slowly because of Anscombe's wounded foot, we had to cross seventy or eighty yards of rising ground almost devoid of cover. If, on the other hand, we stayed where we were till nightfall a shot might catch one of us, or other Basutos might arrive and rush us. There was also a third possibility, that our terrified servants might trek off and leave us in order to save their own lives, which verily I believe they would have done, not being of Zulu blood. I put the problem to Anscombe, who shook his head and looked at his foot. Then he produced a lucky penny which he carried in his pocket and said—

"Let us invoke the Fates. Heads we run like heroes; tails we stay here like heroes," and he spun the penny, while I stared at him open-mouthed and not without admiration.

Never, I thought to myself, had this primitive method of cutting a gordian knot been resorted to in such strange and urgent circumstances.

"Heads it is!" he said coolly. "Now, my boy, do you run and I'll crawl after you. If I don't arrive, you know my people's address, and I bequeath to you all my African belongings in memory of a most pleasant trip."

"Don't play the fool," I replied sternly. "Come, put your right arm round my neck and hop on your left leg as you never hopped before."

Then we started, and really our transit was quite lively, for all those Basutos began what for them was rapid firing. I think, however, that their best shots must have fallen, for not a bullet touched us, although before we got out of their range one or two went very near.

"There," said Anscombe, as a last amazing hop brought him to the wagon rail, "there, you see how wise it is to give Providence a chance sometimes."

"In the shape of a lucky penny," I grumbled as I hoisted him up.

"Certainly, for why should not Providence inhabit a penny as much as it does any other mundane thing? Oh, my dear Quatermain, have you never been taught to look to the pence and let the rest take care of itself?"

"Stop talking rubbish and look to your foot, for the wagon is starting," I replied.

Then off we went at a good round trot, for never have I seen oxen more scientifically driven than they were by Foolsack and his friends on this occasion, or a greater pace got out of them. As soon as we reached a fairly level piece of ground I made Anscombe lie down on the cartel of the wagon and examined his wound as well as circumstances would allow. I found that the bullet or whatever the missile may have been, had gone through his right instep just beneath the big sinew, but so far as I could judge without injuring any bone. There was nothing to be done except rub in some carbolic ointment, which fortunately he had in his medicine chest, and bind up the wound as best I could with a clean handkerchief, after which I tied a towel, that was *not* clean, over the whole foot.

By this time evening was coming on, so we ate of such as we had with us, which we needed badly enough, without stopping the wagon. I remember that it consisted of cheese and hard biscuits. At dark we were obliged to halt a little by a stream until the moon rose, which fortunately she did very soon, as she was only just past her full. As soon as she was up we started again, and with a breathing space or two, trekked all that night, which I spent seated on the after part of the wagon and keeping a sharp look out, while, notwithstanding the roughness of the road and his hurt, Anscombe slept like a child upon the cartel inside.

I was very tired, so tired that the fear of surprise was the only thing that kept me awake, and I recall reflecting in a stupid kind of way, that it seemed always to have been my lot in life to watch thus, in one sense or another, while others slept.

The night passed somehow without anything happening, and at dawn we halted for a while to water the oxen, which we did with buckets, and let them eat what grass they could reach from their yokes, since we did not dare to outspan them. Just as we were starting on again the voortrekker, whom I had set to watch at a little distance, ran up with his eyes bulging out of his head, and reported that he had seen a Basuto with an assegai hanging about in the bush, as though to keep touch with us, after which we delayed no more.

All that day we blundered on, thrashing the weary cattle that at every halt tried to lie down, and by nightfall came to the outspan near to the house called the Temple, where we had met the Kaffirs returning from the diamond fields. This journey we had accomplished in exactly half the time it had taken on the outward trip. Here we were obliged to stop, as our team must have rest and food. So we outspanned and slept that night without much fear, since I thought it most improbable that the Basutos would attempt to follow us so far, as we were now within a day's trek of Pilgrim's Rest, whither we proposed to proceed on the morrow. But that is just where I made a mistake.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DOCTOR RODD

I did get a little sleep that night, with one eye open, but before dawn I was up again seeing to the feeding of our remaining horse with some mealies that we carried, and other matters. The oxen we had been obliged to unyoke that they might fill themselves with grass and water, since otherwise I feared that we should never get them on to their feet again. As it was, the poor brutes were so tired that some of them could scarcely eat, and all lay down at the first opportunity.

Having awakened Footsack and the other boys that they might be ready to take advantage of the light when it came, for I was anxious to be away, I drank a nip of Hollands and water and ate a biscuit, making Anscombe do the same. Coffee would have been more acceptable, but I thought it wiser not to light a fire for fear of showing our whereabouts.

Now a faint glimmer in the east told me that the dawn was coming. Just by the wagon grew a fair-sized, green-leaved tree, and as it was quite easy to climb even by starlight, up it I went so as to get above the ground mist and take a look round before we trekked. Presently the sky grew pearly and light began to gather; then the edge of the sun appeared, throwing long level rays across the world. Everywhere the mist lay dense as cotton wool, except at one spot about a mile behind us where there was a little hill or rather a wave of the ground, over which we had trekked upon the preceding evening. The top of this rise was above mist level, and on it no trees grew because the granite came to the surface. Having discovered nothing, I called to the boys to drive up the oxen, some of which had risen and were eating again, and prepared to descend from my tree.

As I did so, out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of something that glittered far away, so far that it would only have attracted the notice of a trained hunter. Yes, something was shining on the brow of the rise of which I have spoken. I stared at it through my glasses and saw what I had feared to see. A body of natives was crossing the rise and the glitter was caused by the rays of dawn striking on their spears and gun-barrels.

I came down out of that tree like a frightened wild cat and ran to the wagon, thinking hard as I went. The Basutos were after us, meaning to attack as soon as there was sufficient light. In ten minutes or less they would be here. There was no time to inspan the oxen, and even if there had been, stiff and weary as the beasts were, we should be overtaken before we had gone a hundred yards on that bad road. What then was to be done? Run for it? It was impossible, Anscombe could not run. My eye fell upon the horse munching the last of his mealies.

"Footsack," I said as quietly as I could, "never mind about inspanning yet, but saddle up the horse. Be quick now."

He looked at me doubtfully, but obeyed, having seen nothing. If he had seen I knew that he would have been off. I nipped round to the end of the wagon, calling to the other two boys to let the oxen be a while and come to me.

"Now, Anscombe," I said, "hand out the rifles and cartridges. Don't stop to ask questions, but do what I tell you. They are on the rack by your side. So. Now put on your revolver and let me help you down. Man, don't forget your hat."

He obeyed quickly enough, and presently was standing on one leg by my side, looking cramped and tottery.

"The Basutos are on us," I said.

He whistled and remarked something about Chapter No. 2.

"Footsack," I called, "bring the horse here; the Baas wishes to ride a little to ease his leg."

He did so, stopping a moment to pull the second girth tight. Then we helped Anscombe into the saddle.

"Which way?" he asked.

I looked at the long slope in front of us. It was steep and bad going. Anscombe might get up it on the horse before the Kaffirs overtook us, but it was extremely problematical if we could do so. I might perhaps if I mounted behind him and the horse could bear us both, which was doubtful, but how about our poor servants? He saw the doubt upon my face and said in his quiet way,

"You may remember that our white-bearded friend told us to make straight for his place in case of any difficulty with the Basutos. It seems to have arisen."

"I know he did," I answered, "but I cannot make up my mind which is the more dangerous, Marnham or the Basutos. I rather think that he set them on to us."

"It is impossible to solve problems at this hour of the morning, Quatermain, and there is no time to toss. So I vote for the Temple."

"It seems our best chance. At any rate that's your choice, so let's go."

Then I sang out to the Kaffirs, "The Basutos are on us. We go to Tampel for refuge. Run!"

My word! they did run. I never saw athletes make better time over the first quarter of a mile. We ran, too, or at least the horse did, I hanging on to the stirrup and Anscombe holding both the rifles beneath his arm. But the beast was tired, also blown out with that morning feed of mealies, so our progress was not very fast. When we were about two hundred yards from the wagon I looked back and saw the Basutos beginning to arrive. They saw us also, and uttering a sort of whistling war cry, started in pursuit.

After this we had quite an interesting time. I scrambled on to the horse behind Anscombe, whereon that intelligent animal, feeling the double weight, reduced its pace proportionately, to a slow tripple, indeed, out of which it could not be persuaded to move. So I slipped off again over its tail and we went on as before. Meanwhile the Basutos, very active fellows, were coming up. By this time the yellow-wood grove in the swamp, of which I have already written, was close to us, and it became quite a question which of us would get there first (I may mention that Footsack & Co. had already attained its friendly shelter). Anscombe kicked the horse with his sound heel and I thumped it with my fist, thereby persuading it to a hand gallop.

As we reached the outlying trees of the wood the first Basuto, a lank fellow with a mouth like a rat trap, arrived and threw an assegai at us which passed between Anscombe's back and my nose. Then he closed and tried to stab with another assegai. I could do nothing, but Anscombe showed himself cleverer than I expected. Dropping the reins, he drew his pistol and managed to send a bullet through that child of nature's head, so that he went down like a stone.

"And you tell me I am a bad shot," he drawled.

"It was a fluke," I gasped, for even in these circumstances truth would prevail.

"Wait and you'll see," he replied, re-cocking the revolver.

As a matter of fact there was no need for more shooting, since at the verge of the swamp the Basutos pulled up. I do not think that the death of their companion caused them to do this, for they seemed to take no notice of him. It was as though they had reached some boundary which they knew it would not be lawful for them to pass. They simply stopped, took the dead man's assegai and shield from the body and walked quietly back towards the wagon, leaving him where he lay. The horse stopped also, or rather proceeded at a walk.

"There!" exclaimed Anscombe. "Did I not tell you I had a presentiment that I should kill a man in this accursed wood?"

"Yes," I said as soon as I had recovered my breath, "but you mixed up a woman with the matter and I don't see one."

"That's true," he replied, "I hope we shan't meet her later."

Then we went on as quickly as we could, which was not very fast, for I feared lest the Basutos should change their minds and follow us. As the risk of this became less our spirits rose, since if we had lost the wagon and the oxen, at least we had saved our lives, which was almost more than we could have expected in the circumstances. At last we came to that glade where we had killed the wildebeeste not a week before. There lay its skeleton picked clean by the great brown kites that frequent the bush-veld, some of which still sat about in the trees.

"Well, I suppose we must go on to Tampil," said Anscombe rather faintly, for I could see that his wound was giving him a good deal of pain.

As he spoke from round the tree whence he had first emerged, appeared Mr. Marnham, riding the same horse and wearing the same clothes. The only difference between his two entries was that the first took place in the late evening and the second in the early morning.

"So here you are again," he said cheerfully.

"Yes," I answered, "and it is strange to meet you at the same spot. Were you expecting us?"

"Not more than I expect many things," he replied with a shrewd glance at me, adding, "I always rise with the sun, and thinking that I heard a shot fired in the distance, came to see what was happening. The Basutos attacked you at daybreak, did they not?"

"They did, but how did you know that, Mr. Marnham?"

"Your servants told me. I met them running to the house looking very frightened. You are wounded, Mr. Anscombe?"

"Yes, a couple of days ago on the border of Sekukuni's country where the natives tried to murder us."

"Ah!" he replied without surprise. "I warned you the trip was dangerous, did I not? Well, come on home where my partner, Rodd, who luckily has had medical experience, will attend to you. Mr. Quatermain can tell me the story as we go."

So we went on up the long slope, I relating our adventures, to which Mr. Marnham listened without comment.

"I expect that the Kaffirs will have looted the wagon and be on the way home with your oxen by now," he said when I had finished.

"Are you not afraid that they will follow us here?" I asked.

"Oh no, Mr. Quatermain. We do business with these people, also they sometimes come to be doctored by Rodd when they are sick, so this place is sacred ground to them. They stopped hunting you when they got to the Yellow-wood swamp where our land begins, did they not?"

"Yes, but now I want to hunt them. Can you give me any help? Those oxen are tired out and footsore, so we might be able to catch them up."

He shook his head. "We have very few people here, and by the time that you could get assistance from the Camp at Barberton, if the Commandant is able and willing to give you any, which I rather doubt, they will be far away. Moreover," he added, dropping his voice, "let us come to an understanding. You are most welcome to any help or hospitality that I can offer, but if you wish to do more fighting I must ask you to go elsewhere. As I have told you, we are peaceful men who trade with these people, and do not wish to be involved in a quarrel with them, which might expose us to attack or bring us into trouble with the British Government which has annexed but not conquered their country. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly. While we are with you we will do nothing, but afterwards we hold ourselves at liberty to act as we think best."

"Quite so. Meanwhile I hope that you and Mr. Anscombe will make yourselves comfortable with us for as long as you like."

In my own mind I came to the conclusion that this would be for the shortest time possible, but I only said—

"It is most kind of you to take in complete strangers thus. No, not complete," I added, looking towards Anscombe who was following on the tired horse a few paces behind, "for you knew his father, did you not?"

"His father?" he said, lifting his eyebrows. "No. Oh! I remember, I said something to that effect the other night, but it was a mistake. I mixed up two names, as one often does after a lapse of many years."

"I understand," I answered, but remembering Anscombe's story I reflected to myself that our venerable host was an excellent liar. Or more probably he meant to convey that he wished the subject of his youthful reminiscences to be taboo.

Just then we reached the house which had a pretty patch of well-kept flower-garden in front of it, surrounded by a fence covered with wire netting to keep out buck. By the gate squatted our three retainers, looking very blown and rather ashamed of themselves.

"Your master wishes to thank you for your help in a dark hour, Footsack, and I wish to congratulate you all upon the swiftness of your feet," I said in Dutch.

"Oh! Baas, the Basutos were many and their spears are sharp," he began apologetically.

"Be silent, you running dog," I said, "and go help your master to dismount."

Then we went through the gate, Anscombe leaning on my shoulder and on that of Mr. Marnham, and up the path which was bordered with fences of the monthly rose, towards the house. Really this was almost as charming to look at near at hand as it had been from far away. Of course the whole thing was crude in detail. Rough, half-shaped blocks of marble from the neighbouring quarry had been built into walls and columns. Nothing was finished, and considered bit by bit all was coarse and ugly. Yet the general effect was beautiful because it was an effect of design, the picture of an artist who did not fully understand the technicalities of painting, the work of a great writer who had as yet no proper skill in words. Never did I see a small building that struck me more. But then what experience have I of buildings, and, as Anscombe reminded me afterwards, it was but a copy of something designed when the world was young, or rather when civilization was young, and man new risen from the infinite ages of savagery, saw beauty in his dreams and tried to symbolize it in shapes of stone.

We came to the broad stoep, to which several rough blocks of marble served as steps. On it in a long chair made of native wood and seated with hide rimpis, sat or rather lolled a man in a dressing-gown who was reading a book. He raised himself as we came and the light of the sun, for the verandah faced to the east, shone full upon his face, so that I saw him well. It was that of a man of something under forty years of age, dark, powerful, and weary—not a good face, I thought. Indeed, it gave me the impression of one who had allowed the evil which exists in the nature of all of us to become his master, or had even encouraged it to do so.

In the Psalms and elsewhere we are always reading of the righteous and the unrighteous until those terms grow wearisome. It is only of late years that I have discovered, or think that I have discovered, what they mean. Our lives cannot be judged by our deeds; they must be judged by our desires or rather by our moral attitude. It is not what we do so much as what we try to do that counts in the formation of character. All fall short, all fail, but in the end those who seek to climb out of the pit, those who strive, however vainly, to fashion failure to success, are, by comparison, the righteous, while those who are content to wallow in our native mire and to glut themselves with the daily bread of vice, are the unrighteous. To turn our backs thereon wilfully and without cause, is the real unforgivable sin against the Spirit. At least that is the best definition of the problem at which I in my simplicity can arrive.

Such thoughts have often occurred to me in considering the character of Dr. Rodd and some others whom I have known; indeed the germ of them arose in my mind which, being wearied at the time and therefore somewhat vacant, was perhaps the more open to external impressions, as I looked upon the face of this stranger on the stoep. Moreover, as I am proud to record, I did not judge him altogether wrongly. He was a blackguard who, under other influences or with a few added grains of self-restraint and of the power of recovery, might have become a good or even a saintly man. But by some malice of Fate or some evil inheritance from an unknown past, those grains were lacking, and therefore he went not up but down the hill.

"Case for you, Rodd," called out Marnham.

"Indeed," he answered, getting to his feet and speaking in a full voice, which, like his partner's, was that of an educated Englishman. "What's the matter. Horse accident?"

Then we were introduced, and Anscombe began to explain his injury.

"Um!" said the doctor, studying him with dark eyes. "Kafir bullet through the foot some days ago. Ought to be attended to at once. Also you look pretty done, so don't tire yourself with the story, which I can get from Mr. Quatermain. Come and lie down and I'll have a look at you while they are cooking breakfast."

Then he guided us to a room of which the double French windows opened on to the stoep, a very pretty room with two beds in it. Making Anscombe lie down on one of these he turned up his trouser, undid my rough bandage and examined the wound.

"Painful?" he asked.

"Very," answered Anscombe, "right up to the thigh."

After this he drew off the nether garments and made a further examination.

"Um," he said again, "I must syringe this out. Stay still while I get some stuff."

I followed him from the room, and when we were out of hearing on the stoep inquired what he thought. I did not like the look of that leg.

"It is very bad," he answered, "so bad that I am wondering if it wouldn't be best to remove the limb below the knee and make it a job. You can see for yourself that it is septic and the inflammation is spreading up rapidly."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "do you fear mortification?"

He nodded. "Can't say what was on that slug or bit of old iron and he hasn't had the best chance since. Mortification, or tetanus, or both, are more than possible. Is he a temperate man?"

"So far as I know," I answered, and stared at him while he thought. Then he said with decision,

"That makes a difference. To lose a foot is a serious thing; some might think almost as bad as death. I'll give him a chance, but if those symptoms do not abate in twenty-four hours, I must operate. You needn't be afraid, I was house surgeon at a London Hospital—once, and I keep my hand in. Lucky you came straight here."

Having made his preparations and washed his hands, he returned, syringed the wound with some antiseptic stuff, and dressed and bandaged the leg up to the knee. After this he gave Anscombe hot milk to drink, with two eggs broken into it, and told him to rest a while as he must not eat anything solid at present. Then he threw a blanket over him, and, signing to me to come away, let down a mat over the window.

"I put a little something into that milk," he said outside, "which will send him to sleep for a few hours. So we will leave him quiet. Now you'll want a wash."

"Where are you going to take Mr. Quatermain?" asked Marnham who was seated on the stoep.

"Into my room," he answered.

"Why? There's Heda's ready."

"Heda might return at any moment," replied the doctor. "Also Mr. Quatermain had better sleep in Mr. Anscombe's room. He will very likely want some one to look after him at night."

Marnham opened his mouth to speak again, then changed his mind and was silent, as a servant is silent under rebuke. The incident was quite trifling, yet it revealed to me the relative attitude of these two men. Without a doubt Rodd was the master of his partner, who did not even care to dispute with him about the matter of the use of his daughter's bedroom. They were a queer couple who, had it not been for my anxiety as to Anscombe's illness, would have interested me very much, as indeed they were destined to do.

Well, I went to tidy up in the doctor's room, and as he left me alone while I washed, had the opportunity of studying it a little. Like the rest of the house it was lined with native wood which was made to serve as the backs of bookshelves and of cupboards filled with medicines and instruments. The books formed a queer collection. There were medical works, philosophical works, histories, novels, most of them French, and other volumes of a sort that I imagine are generally kept under lock and key; also some that had to do with occult matters. There was even a Bible. I opened it thoughtlessly, half in idle curiosity, to see whether it was ever used, only to replace it in haste. For at the very page that my eye fell on, I remember it was one of my favourite chapters in Isaiah, was a stamp in violet ink marked H. M.'s Prison—well, I won't say where.

I may state, however, that the clue enabled me in after years to learn an episode in this man's life which had brought about his ruin. There is no need to repeat it or to say more than that gambling and an evil use of his medical knowledge to provide the money to pay his debts, were the cause of his fall. The strange thing is that he should have kept the book which had probably been given to him by the prison chaplain. Still everybody makes mistakes sometimes. Or it may have had associations for him, and of course he had never seen this stamp upon an unread page, which happened to leap to my eye.

Now I was able to make a shrewd guess at his later career. After his trouble he had emigrated and began to practise in South Africa. Somehow his identity had been discovered; his past was dragged up against him, possibly by rivals jealous of his skill; his business went and he found it advisable to retire to the Transvaal before the Annexation, at that time the home of sundry people of broken repute. Even there he did not stop in a town, but hid himself upon the edge of savagery. Here he foregathered with another man of queer character, Marnham, and in his company entered upon some doubtful but lucrative form of trade while still indulging his love of medicine by doctoring and operating upon natives, over whom he would in this way acquire great influence. Indeed, as I discovered before the day was over, he had quite a little hospital at the back of the house in which were four or five beds occupied by Kaffirs and served by two male native nurses whom he had trained. Also numbers of out-patients visited him, some of whom travelled from great distances, and occasionally, but not often, he attended white people who chanced to be in the neighbourhood.

The three of us breakfasted in a really charming room from the window of which could be studied a view as beautiful as any I know. The Kaffirs who waited were well trained and dressed in neat linen uniforms. The cooking was good; there was real silver on the table, then a strange sight in that part of Africa, and amongst engravings and other pictures upon the walls, hung an oil portrait of a very beautiful young woman with dark hair and eyes.

"Is that your daughter, Mr. Marnham?" I asked.

"No," he replied rather shortly, "it is her mother."

Immediately afterwards he was called from the room to speak to some one, whereon the doctor said—

"A foreigner as you see, a Hungarian; the Hungarian women are very good looking and very charming."

"So I have understood," I answered, "but does this lady live here?"

"Oh, no. She is dead, or I believe that she is dead. I am not sure, because I make it a rule never to pry into people's private affairs. All I know about her is that she was a beauty whom Marnham married late in life upon the Continent when she was but eighteen. As is common in such cases he was very jealous of her, but it didn't last long, as she died, or I understand that she died, within a year of her daughter's birth. The loss affected him so much that he emigrated to South Africa with the child and began life anew. I do not think that they correspond with Hungary, and he never speaks of her even to his daughter, which suggests that she is dead."

I reflected that all these circumstances might equally well suggest several other things, but said nothing, thinking it wisest not to pursue the subject. Presently Marnham returned and informed me that a native had just brought him word that the Basutos had made off homeward with our cattle, but had left the wagon and its contents quite untouched, not even stealing the spare guns and ammunition.

"That's luck," I said, astonished, "but extremely strange. How do you explain it, Mr. Marnham?"

He shrugged his shoulders and answered—

"As every one knows, you are a much greater expert in native habits and customs than I am, Mr. Quatermain."

"There are only two things that I can think of," I said. "One is that for some reason or other they thought the wagon tagati, bewitched you know, and that it would bring evil on them to touch it, though this did not apply to the oxen. The other is that they supposed it, but not the oxen, to belong to some friend of their own whose property they did not wish to injure."

He looked at me sharply but said nothing, and I went on to tell them the details of the attack that had been made upon us, adding

—  
“The odd part of the affair is that one of those Basutos called out to us that some infernal scoundrel of a white had warned Sekukuni of our coming and that he had ordered them to take our guns and cattle. This Basuto, who was wounded and praying for mercy, was drowned before he could tell me who the white man was.”

“A Boer, I expect,” said Marnham quietly. “As you know they are not particularly well affected towards us English just now. Also I happen to be aware that some of them are intriguing with Sekukuni against the British through Makurupiji, his ‘Mouth’ or prime-minister, a very clever old scamp who likes to have two stools to sit on.”

“And doubtless will end by falling between them. Well, you see, now that I think of it, the wounded Kaffir only said that they were ordered to take our guns and oxen, and incidentally our lives. The wagon was not mentioned.”

“Quite so, Mr. Quatermain. I will send some of our boys to help your servants to bring everything it contains up here.”

“Can’t you lend me a team of oxen,” I asked, “to drag it to the house?”

“No, we have nothing but young cattle left. Both red-water and lung-sickness have been so bad this season that all the horned stock have been swept out of the country. I doubt whether you could beg, borrow or steal a team of oxen this side of Pretoria, except from some of the Dutchmen who won’t part.”

“That’s awkward. I hoped to be able to trek in a day or two.”

“Your friend won’t be able to trek for a good many days at the best,” broke in the doctor, who had been listening unconcernedly, “but of course you could get away on the horse after it has rested.”

“You told me you left a span of oxen at Pretoria,” said Marnham. “Why not go and fetch them here, or if you don’t like to leave Mr. Anscombe, send your driver and the boys.”

“Thanks for the idea. I will think it over,” I answered.

That morning after Footsack and the voorlooper had been sent with some of the servants from the Temple to fetch up the contents of the wagon, for I was too tired to accompany them, having found that Anscombe was still asleep, I determined to follow his example. Finding a long chair on the stoep, I sat down and slumbered in it sweetly for hours. I dreamt of all sorts of things, then through my dreams it seemed to me that I heard two voices talking, those of our Marnham and Rodd, not on the stoep, but at a distance from it. As a matter of fact they were talking, but so far away that in my ordinary waking state I could never have heard them. My own belief is that the senses, and I may add the semi-spiritual part of us, are much more acute when we lie half bound in the bonds of sleep, than when we are what is called wide awake. Doubtless when we are quite bound they attain the limits of their power and, I think, sail at times to the uttermost ends of being. But unhappily of their experiences we remember nothing when we awake. In half sleep it is different; then we do retain some recollection.

In this curious condition of mind it seemed to me that Rodd said to Marnham—

“Why have you brought these men here?”

“I did not bring them here,” he answered. “Luck, Fate, Fortune, God or the Devil, call it what you will, brought them here, though if you had your wish, it is true they would never have come. Still, as they have come, I am glad. It is something to me, living in this hell, to get a chance of talking to English gentlemen again before I die.”

“English gentlemen,” remarked Rodd reflectively, “Well, Anscombe is of course, but how about that other hunter? After all, in what way is he better than the scores of other hunters and Kaffir traders and wanderers whom one meets in this strange land?”

“In what way indeed?” thought I to myself, in my dream.

“If you can’t see, I can’t explain to you. But as I happen to know, the man is of blood as good as mine—and a great deal better than yours,” he added with a touch of insolence. “Moreover, he has an honest name among white and black, which is much in this country.”

“Yes,” replied the doctor in the same reflective voice, “I agree with you, I let him pass as a gentleman. But I repeat, Why did you bring them here when with one more word it would have been so easy—” and he stopped.

“I have told you, it was not I. What are you driving at?”

“Do you think it is exactly convenient, especially when we are under the British flag again, to have two people who, we both admit, are English gentlemen, that is, clean, clear-eyed men, considering us and our affairs for an indefinite period, just because you wish for the pleasure of their society? Would it not have been better to tell those Basutos to let them trek on to Pretoria?”

“I don’t know what would have been better. I repeat, what are you driving at?”

“Heda is coming home in a day or two; she might be here any time,” remarked Rodd as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

“Yes, because you made me write and say that I wanted her. But what of that?”

“Nothing in particular, except that I am not sure that I wish her to associate with ‘an English gentleman’ like this Anscombe.”

Marnham laughed scornfully. “Ah! I understand,” he said. “Too clean and straight. Complications might ensue and the rest of it. Well, I wish to God they would, for I know the Anscombes, or used to, and I know the genus called Rodd.”

“Don’t be insulting; you may carry the thing too far one day, and whatever I have done I have paid for. But you’ve not paid—yet.”

“The man is very ill. You are a skilled doctor. If you’re afraid of him, why don’t you kill him?” asked Marnham with bitter scorn.

“There you’ve me,” replied Rodd. “Men may shed much but most of them never shed their professional honour. I’ll do my honest best to cure Mr. Anscombe, and I tell you that he will take some curing.”

## CHAPTER V.

### A GAME OF CARDS

I slept in Anscombe's room that night and looked after him. He was very feverish and the pain in his leg kept him awake a good deal. He told me that he could not bear Dr. Rodd and wished to get away at once. I had to explain to him that this was impossible until his spare oxen arrived which I was going to send for to Pretoria, but of other matters, including that of the dangerous state of his foot, I said nothing. I was thankful when towards two in the morning, he fell into a sound sleep and allowed me to do the same.

Before breakfast time, just as I had finished dressing myself in some of the clean things which had been brought from the wagon, Rodd came and made a thorough and business-like examination of his patient, while I awaited the result with anxiety on the stoep. At length he appeared and said—

“Well, I think that we shall be able to save the foot, though I can't be quite sure for another twenty-four hours. The worst symptoms have abated and his temperature is down by two degrees. Anyway he will have to stay in bed and live on light food till it is normal, after which he might lie in a long chair on the stoep. On no account must he attempt to stand.”

I thanked him for his information heartily enough and asked him if he knew where Marnham was, as I wanted to speak to him with reference to the despatch of Footsack to fetch the oxen from Pretoria.

“Not up yet, I think,” he answered. “I fancy that yesterday was one of his ‘wet’ nights, excitement of meeting strangers and so on.”

“Wet nights?” I queried, wishing for a clearer explanation.

“Yes, he is a grand old fellow, one of the best, but like most other people he has his little weaknesses, and when the fit is on him he can put away a surprising amount of liquor. I tell you so that you should not be astonished if you notice anything, or try to argue with him when he is in that state, as then his temper is apt to be—well, lively. Now I must go and give him a pint of warm milk; that is his favourite antidote, and in fact the best there is.”

I thought to myself that we had struck a nice establishment in which to be tied, literally by the leg, for an indefinite period. I was not particularly flush at the time, but I know I would have paid a £100 to be out of it; before the end I should have been glad to throw in everything that I had. But mercifully that was hidden from me.

Rodd and I breakfasted together and discoursed of Kaffir customs, as to which he was singularly well informed. Then I accompanied him to see his native patients in the little hospital of which I have spoken. Believing the man to be a thorough scamp as I did, it was astonishing to me to note how gentle and forbearing he was to these people. Of his skill I need say nothing, as that was evident. He was going to perform an internal operation upon a burly old savage, rather a serious one I believe; at any rate it necessitated chloroform. He asked me if I would like to assist, but I declined respectfully, having no taste for such things. So I left him boiling his instruments and putting on what looked like a clean nightgown over his clothes, and returned to the stoep.

Here I found Marnham, whose eyes were rather bloodshot, though otherwise, except for a shaky hand, he seemed right enough. He murmured something about having overslept himself and inquired very politely, for his manners were beautiful, after Anscombe and as to whether we were quite comfortable and so forth. After this I consulted him as to the best road for our servants to travel by to Pretoria, and later on despatched them, giving Footsack various notes to ensure the delivery of the oxen to him. Also I gave him some money to pay for their keep and told him with many threats to get back with the beasts as quick as he could travel. Then I sent him and the two other boys off, not without misgivings, although he was an experienced man in his way and promised faithfully to fulfil every injunction to the letter. To me he seemed so curiously glad to go that I inquired the reason, since after a journey like ours, it would have been more natural if he had wished to rest.

“Oh! Baas,” he said, “I don't think this Tappel very healthy for coloured people. I am told of some who have died here. That man Karl who gave me the diamond, I think he must have died also, at least I saw his spook last night standing over me and shaking his head, and the boys saw it too.”

“Oh! be off with your talk of spooks,” I said, “and come back quickly with those oxen, or I promise you that you will die and be a spook yourself.”

“I will, Baas, I will!” he ejaculated and departed almost at a run, leaving me rather uncomfortable.

I believed nothing of the tale of the spook of Karl, but I saw that Footsack believed in it, and was afraid lest he might be thereby prevented from returning. I would much rather have gone myself, but it was impossible for me to leave Anscombe so ill in the hands of our strange hosts. And there was no one else whom I could send. I might perhaps have ridden to Pilgrim's Rest and tried to find a white messenger there; indeed afterwards I regretted not having done so, although it would have involved at least a day's absence at a very critical time. But the truth is I never thought of it until too late, and probably if I had, I should not have been able to discover anyone whom I could trust.

As I walked back to the house, having parted from Footsack on the top of a neighbouring ridge whence I could point out his path to him, I met Marnham riding away. He pulled up and said that he was going down to the Granite stream to arrange about setting some one up to watch the wagon. I expressed sorrow that he should have the trouble, which should have been mine if I could have got away, whereon he answered that he was glad of the opportunity for a ride, as it was something to do.

"How do you fill in your time here," I asked carelessly, "as you don't farm?"

"Oh! by trading," he replied, and with a nod set his horse to a canter.

A queer sort of trading, thought I to myself, where there is no store. Now what exactly does he trade in, I wonder?

As it happened I was destined to find out before I was an hour older. Having given Anscombe a look and found that he was comfortable, I thought that I would inspect the quarry whence the marble came of which the house was built, as it had occurred to me that if there was plenty of it, it might be worth exploiting some time in the future. It had been pointed out to me in the midst of some thorns in a gully that ran at right angles to the main kloof not more than a few hundred yards from the house. Following a path over which the stones had been dragged originally, I came to the spot and discovered that a little cavity had been quarried in what seemed to me to be a positive mountain of pure white marble. I examined the place as thoroughly as I could, climbing among some bushes that grew in surface earth which had been washed down from the top, in order to do so.

At the back of these bushes there was a hole large enough for a man to creep through. I crept through with the object of ascertaining whether the marble veins continued. To my surprise I found a stout yellow-wood door within feet of the mouth of the hole. Reflecting that no doubt it was here that the quarrymen kept, or had kept tools and explosives, I gave it a push. I suppose it had been left unfastened accidentally, or that something had gone wrong with the lock; at any rate it swung open. Pursuing my researches as to the depth of the marble I advanced boldly and, the place being dark, struck a match. Evidently the marble did continue, as I could see by the glittering roof of a cavern, for such it was. But the floor attracted my attention as well as the roof, for on it were numerous cases not unlike coffins, bearing the stamp of a well-known Birmingham firm, labelled "fencing iron" and addressed to Messrs. Marnham & Rodd, Transvaal, *via* Delagoa Bay.

I knew at once what they were, having seen the like before, but if any doubt remained in my mind it was easy to solve, for as it chanced one of the cases was open and half emptied. I slipped my hand into it. As I thought it contained the ordinary Kaffir gun of commerce, cost delivered in Africa, say 35s.; cost delivered to native chief in cash or cattle, say £10, which, when the market is eager, allows for a decent profit. Contemplating those cases, survivors probably of a much larger stock, I understood how it came about that Sekukuni had dared to show fight against the Government. Doubtless it was hence that the guns had come which sent a bullet through Anscombe's foot and nearly polished off both of us.

Moreover, as further matches showed me, that cave contained other stores—item, kegs of gunpowder; item, casks of cheap spirit; item, bars of lead, also a box marked "bullet moulds" and another marked "Percussion caps." I think, too, there were some innocent bags full of beads and a few packages of Birmingham-made assegai blades. There may have been other things, but if so I did not wait to investigate them. Gathering up the ends of my matches and, in case there should be any dust in the place that would show footmarks, flapping the stone floor behind me with my pocket handkerchief, I retired and continued my investigations of that wonderful marble deposit from the bottom of the quarry, to which, having re-arranged the bushes, I descended by another route, leaping like a buck from stone to stone.

It was just as well that I did so, for a few minutes later Dr. Rodd appeared.

"Made a good job of your operation?" I asked cheerfully.

"Pretty fair, thanks," he answered, "although that Kaffir tried to brain the nurse-man when he was coming out of the anæsthetic. But are you interested in geology?"

"A little," I replied, "that is if there is any chance of making money out of it, which there ought to be here, as this marble looks almost as good as that of Carrara. But flint instruments are more my line, that is in an ignorant and amateur way, as I think they are in yours, for I saw some in your room. Tell me, what do you think of this. Is it a scraper?" and I produced a stone out of my pocket which I had found a week before in the bush-veld.

At once he forgot his suspicions, of which I could see he arrived very full indeed. This curious man, as it happened, was really fond of flint instruments, of which he knew a great deal.

"Did you find this here?" he asked.

I led him several yards further from the mouth of the cave and pointed out the exact spot where I said I had picked it up amongst some quarry debris. Then followed a most learned discussion, for it appeared that this was a flint instrument of the rarest and most valuable type, one that Noah might have used, or Job might have scraped himself with, and the question was how the dickens had it come among that quarry debris. In the end we left the problem undecided, and having presented the article to Dr. Rodd, a gift for which he thanked me with real warmth, I returned to the house filled with the glow that rewards one who has made a valuable discovery.

Of the following three days I have nothing particular to say, except that during them I was perhaps more acutely bored than ever I had been in my life before. The house was beautiful in its own fashion; the food was excellent; there was everything I could want to drink, and Rodd announced that he no longer feared the necessity of operation upon Anscombe's leg. His recovery was now a mere matter of time, and meanwhile he must not use his foot or let the blood run into it more than could be helped, which meant that he must keep himself in a recumbent position. The trouble was that I had nothing on earth to do except study the characters of our hosts, which I found disagreeable and depressing. I might have gone out shooting, but nothing of the sort was allowed upon the property in obedience to the wish of Miss Heda, a mysterious young person who was always expected and never appeared, and beyond it I was afraid to travel for fear of Basutos. I might have gone to Pilgrim's Rest or Lydenburg to make report of the nefarious deeds of the said Basutos, but at best it would have taken one or two days, and possibly I should have been detained by officials who never consider any one's time except their own.

This meant that I should have been obliged to leave Anscombe alone, which I did not wish to do, so I just sat still and, as I have said, was intensely bored, hanging about the place and smoking more than was good for me.

In due course Anscombe emerged on to the stoep, where he lay with his leg up, and was also bored, especially after he had tried to pump old Marnham about his past in the Guards and completely failed. It was in this mood of utter dejection that we agreed to play a

game of cards one evening. Not that either of us cared for cards; indeed, personally, I have always detested them because, with various-coloured counters to represent money which never passed, they had formed one of the afflictions of my youth.

It was so annoying if you won, to be handed a number of green counters and be informed that they represented so many hundreds or thousands of pounds, or vice-versa if you lost, for as it cost no one anything, my dear father insisted upon playing for enormous stakes. Never in any aspect of life have I cared for fooling. Anscombe also disliked cards, I think because his ancestors too had played with counters, such as some that I have seen belonging to the Cocoa-Tree Club and other gambling places of a past generation, marked as high as a thousand guineas, which counters must next morning be redeemed in hard cash, whereby his family had been not a little impoverished.

"I fancy you will find they are high-fliers," he said when the pair had left to fetch a suitable table, for the night being very hot we were going to play on the stoep by the light of the hanging paraffin lamp and some candles. I replied to the effect that I could not afford to lose large sums of money, especially to men who for aught I knew might then be engaged in marking the cards.

"I understand," he answered. "Don't you bother about that, old fellow. This is my affair, arranged for my special amusement. I shan't grumble if the fun costs something, for I am sure there will be fun."

"All right," I said, "only if we should happen to win money, it's yours, not mine."

To myself I reflected, however, that with these two opponents we had about as much chance of winning as a snowflake has of resisting the atmosphere of the lower regions.

Presently they returned with the table, which had a green cloth over it that hung down half-way to the ground. Also one of the native boys brought a tray with spirits, from which I judged by various signs, old Marnham, who had already drunk his share at dinner, had helped himself freely on the way. Soon we were arranged, Anscombe, who was to be my partner, opposite to me in his long chair, and the game began.

I forget what particular variant of cards it was we played, though I know it admitted of high and progressive stakes. At first, however, these were quite moderate and we won, as I suppose we were meant to do. After half an hour or so Marnham rose to help himself to brandy and water, a great deal of brandy and very little water, while I took a nip of Hollands, and Anscombe and Rodd filled their pipes.

"I think this is getting rather slow," said Rodd to Anscombe. "I vote we put a bit more on."

"As much as you like," answered Anscombe with a little drawl and twinkle of the eye, which always showed that he was amused. "Both Quatermain and I are born gamblers. Don't look angry, Quatermain, you know you are. Only if we lose you will have to take a cheque, for I have precious little cash."

"I think that will be good enough," replied the doctor quietly—"if you lose."

So the stakes were increased to an amount that made my hair stand up stiffer even than usual, and the game went on. Behold! a marvel came to pass. How it happened I do not know, unless Marnham had brought the wrong cards by mistake or had grown too fuddled to understand his partner's telegraphic signals, which I, being accustomed to observe, saw him make, not once but often, still we won! What is more, with a few set-backs, we went on winning, till presently the sums written down to our credit, for no actual cash passed, were considerable. And all the while, at the end of each bout Marnham helped himself to more brandy, while the doctor grew more mad in a suppressed-thunder kind of a way. For my part I became alarmed, especially as I perceived that Anscombe was on the verge of breaking into open merriment, and his legs being up I could not kick him under the table.

"My partner ought to go to bed. Don't you think we should stop?" I said.

"On the whole I do," replied Rodd, glowering at Marnham, who, somewhat unsteadily, was engaged in wiping drops of brandy from his long beard.

"D——d if I do," exclaimed that worthy. "When I was young and played with gentlemen they always gave losers an opportunity of revenge."

"Then," replied Anscombe with a flash of his eyes, "let us try to follow in the footsteps of the gentlemen with whom you played in your youth. I suggest that we double the stakes."

"That's right! That's the old form!" said Marnham.

The doctor half rose from his chair, then sat down again. Watching him, I concluded that he believed his partner, a seasoned vessel, was not so drunk as he pretended to be, and either in an actual or a figurative sense, had a card up his sleeve. If so, it remained there, for again we won; all the luck was with us.

"I am getting tired," drawled Anscombe. "Lemon and water are not sustaining. Shall we stop?"

"By Heaven! no," shouted Marnham, to which Anscombe replied that if it was wished, he would play another hand, but no more.

"All right," said Marnham, "but let it be for double or quits."

He spoke quite quietly and seemed suddenly to have grown sober. Now I think that Rodd made up his mind that he really was acting and that he really had that card up his sleeve. At any rate he did not object. I, however, was of a different opinion, having often seen drunken men succumb to an access of sobriety under the stress of excitement and remarked that it did not last long.

"Do you really mean that?" I said, speaking for the first time and addressing myself to the doctor. "I don't quite know what the sum involved is, but it must be large."

"Of course," he answered.

Then remembering that at the worst Anscombe stood to lose nothing, I shrugged my shoulders and held my tongue. It was Marnham's deal, and although he was somewhat in the shadow of the hanging lamp and the candles had guttered out, I distinctly saw him play some hocus-pocus with the cards, but in the circumstances made no protest. As it chanced he must have hocus-focussed them wrong, for though *his* hand was full of trumps, Rodd held nothing at all. The battle that ensued was quite exciting, but the end of it was that an ace in the hand of Anscombe, who really was quite a good player, did the business, and we won again.

In the rather awful silence that followed Anscombe remarked in his cheerful drawl—

“I’m not sure that my addition is quite right; we’ll check that in the morning, but I make out that you two gentlemen owe Quatermain and myself £749 10s.”

Then the doctor broke out.

“You accursed old fool,” he hissed—there is no other word for it—at Marnham. “How are you going to pay all this money that you have gambled away, drunken beast that you are!”

“Easily enough, you felon,” shouted Marnham. “So,” and thrusting his hand into his pocket he pulled out a number of diamonds which he threw upon the table, adding, “there’s what will cover it twice over, and there are more where they came from, as you know well enough, my medical jailbird.”

“You dare to call me that,” gasped the doctor in a voice laden with fury, so intense that it had deprived him of his reason, “you—you—murderer! Oh! why don’t I kill you as I shall some day?” and lifting his glass, which was half full, he threw the contents into Marnham’s face.

“That’s a nice man for a prospective son-in-law, isn’t he?” exclaimed the old scamp, as, seizing the brandy decanter, he hurled it straight at Rodd’s head, only missing him by an inch.

“Don’t you think you had both better go to bed, gentlemen?” I inquired. “You are saying things you might regret in the morning.”

Apparently they did think it, for without another word they rose and marched off in different directions to their respective rooms, which I heard both of them lock. For my part I collected the I.O.U.’s; also the diamonds which still lay upon the table, while Anscombe examined the cards.

“Marked, by Jove!” he said. “Oh! my dear Quatermain, never have I had such an amusing evening in all my life.”

“Shut up, you silly idiot,” I answered. “There’ll be murder done over this business, and I only hope it won’t be on us.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### MISS HEDA

It might be thought that after all this there would have been a painful explanation on the following morning, but nothing of the sort happened. After all the greatest art is the art of ignoring things, without which the world could scarcely go on, even among the savage races. Thus on this occasion the two chief actors in the scene of the previous night pretended that they had forgotten what took place, as I believe, to a large extent truly. The fierce flame of drink in the one and of passion in the other had burnt the web of remembrance to ashes. They knew that something unpleasant had occurred and its main outlines; the rest had vanished away; perhaps because they knew also that they were not responsible for what they said and did, and therefore that what occurred had no right to a permanent niche in their memories. It was, as it were, something outside of their normal selves. At least so I conjectured, and their conduct seemed to give colour to my guess.

The doctor spoke to me of the matter first.

"I fear there was a row last night," he said; "it has happened here before over cards, and will no doubt happen again until matters clear themselves up somehow. Marnham, as you see, drinks, and when drunk is the biggest liar in the world, and I, I am sorry to say, am cursed with a violent temper. Don't judge either of us too harshly. If you were a doctor you would know that all these things come to us with our blood, and we didn't fashion our own clay, did we? Have some coffee, won't you?"

Subsequently when Rodd wasn't there, Marnham spoke also and with that fine air of courtesy which was peculiar to him.

"I owe a deep apology," he said, "to yourself and Mr. Anscombe. I do not recall much about it, but I know there was a scene last night over those cursed cards. A weakness overtakes me sometimes. I will say no more, except that you, who are also a man who perhaps have felt weaknesses of one sort or another, will, I hope, make allowances for me and pay no attention to anything that I may have said or done in the presence of guests; yes, that is what pains me—in the presence of guests."

Something in his distinguished manner caused me to reflect upon every peccadillo that I had ever committed, setting it in its very worst light.

"Quite so," I answered, "quite so. Pray do not mention the matter any more, although—" These words seemed to jerk themselves out of my throat, "you did call each other by such very hard names."

"I daresay," he answered with a vacant smile, "but if so they meant nothing."

"No, I understand, just like a lovers' quarrel. But look here, you left some diamonds on the table which I took to keep the Kaffirs out of temptation. I will fetch them."

"Did I? Well, probably I left some I.O.U.'s also which might serve for pipelights. So suppose we set the one against the other. I don't know the value of either the diamonds or the pipelights, it may be less or more, but for God's sake don't let me see the beastly things again. There's no need, I have plenty."

"I must speak to Anscombe," I answered. "The money at stake was his, not mine."

"Speak to whom you will," he replied, and I noted that the throbbing vein upon his forehead indicated a rising temper. "But never let me see those diamonds again. Throw them into the gutter if you wish, but never let me see them again, or there will be trouble."

Then he flung out of the room, leaving his breakfast almost untasted.

Reflecting that this queer old bird probably did not wish to be cross-questioned as to his possession of so many uncut diamonds, or that they were worth much less than the sum he had lost, or possibly that they were not diamonds at all but glass, I went to report the matter to Anscombe. He only laughed and said that as I had got the things I had better keep them until something happened, for we had both got it into our heads that something would happen before we had done with that establishment.

So I went to put the stones away as safely as I could. While I was doing so I heard the rumble of wheels, and came out just in time to see a Cape cart, drawn by four very good horses and driven by a Hottentot in a smart hat and a red waistband, pull up at the garden gate. Out of this cart presently emerged a neatly dressed lady, of whom all I could see was that she was young, slender and rather tall; also, as her back was towards me, that she had a great deal of auburn hair.

"There!" said Anscombe. "I knew that something would happen. Heda has happened. Quatermain, as neither her venerated parent nor her loving fiance, for such I gather he is, seems to be about, you had better go and give her a hand."

I obeyed with a groan, heartily wishing that Heda hadn't happened, since some sense warned me that she would only add to the present complications. At the gate, having given some instructions to a very stout young coloured woman who, I took it, was her maid, about a basket of flower roots in the cart, she turned round suddenly and we came face to face with the gate between us. For a moment we stared at each other, I reflecting that she really was very pretty with her delicately-shaped features, her fresh, healthy-looking complexion, her long dark eyelashes and her lithe and charming figure. What she reflected about me I don't know, probably nothing half so complimentary. Suddenly, however, her large greyish eyes grew troubled and a look of alarm appeared upon her face.

"Is anything wrong with my father?" she asked. "I don't see him."

"If you mean Mr. Marnham," I replied, lifting my hat, "I believe that Dr. Rodd and he—"

"Never mind about Dr. Rodd," she broke in with a contemptuous little jerk of her chin, "how is my father?"

"I imagine much as usual. He and Dr. Rodd were here a little while ago, I suppose that they have gone out" (as a matter of fact they had, but in different directions).

"Then that's all right," she said with a sigh of relief. "You see, I heard that he was very ill, which is why I have come back."

So, thought I to myself, she loves that old scamp and she—doesn't love the doctor. There will be more trouble as sure as five and two are seven. All we wanted was a woman to make the pot boil over.

Then I opened the gate and took a travelling bag from her hand with my politest bow.

"My name is Quatermain and that of my friend Anscombe. We are staying here, you know," I said rather awkwardly.

"Indeed," she answered with a delightful smile, "what a very strange place to choose to stay in."

"It is a beautiful house," I remarked.

"Not bad, although I designed it, more or less. But I was alluding to its inhabitants."

This finished me, and I am sure she felt that I could think of nothing nice to say about those inhabitants, for I heard her sigh. We walked side by side up the rose-fringed path and presently arrived at the stoep, where Anscombe, whose hair I had cut very nicely on the previous day, was watching us from his long chair. They looked at each other, and I saw both of them colour a little, out of mere foolishness, I suppose.

"Anscombe," I said, "this is—" and I paused, not being quite certain whether she also was called Marnham. "Heda Marnham," she interrupted.

"Yes—Miss Heda Marnham, and this is the Honourable Maurice Anscombe."

"Forgive me for not rising, Miss Marnham," said Anscombe in his pleasant voice (by the way hers was pleasant too, full and rather low, with just a suggestion of something foreign about it). "A shot through the foot prevents me at present."

"Who shot you?" she asked quickly.

"Oh! only a Kaffir."

"I am so sorry, I hope you will get well soon. Forgive me now, I must go to look for my father."

"She is uncommonly pretty," remarked Anscombe, "and a lady into the bargain. In reflecting on old Marnham's sins we must put it to his credit that he has produced a charming daughter."

"Too pretty and charming by half," I grunted.

"Perhaps Dr. Rodd is of the same way of thinking. Great shame that such a girl should be handed over to a medical scoundrel like Dr. Rodd. I wonder if she cares for him?"

"Just about as much as a canary cares for a tom-cat. I have found that out already."

"Really, Quatermain, you are admirable. I never knew anyone who could make a better use of the briefest opportunity."

Then we were silent, waiting, not without a certain impatience, for the return of Miss Heda. She did return with surprising quickness considering that she had found time to search for her parent, to change into a clean white dress, and to pin a single hibiscus flower on to her bodice which gave just the touch of colour that was necessary to complete her costume.

"I can't find my father," she said, "but the boys say he has gone out riding. I can't find anybody. When you have been summoned from a long way off and travelled post-haste, rather to your own inconvenience, it is amusing, isn't it?"

"Wagons and carts in South Africa don't arrive like express trains, Miss Marnham," said Anscombe, "so you shouldn't be offended."

"I am not at all offended, Mr. Anscombe. Now that I know there is nothing the matter with my father I'm—But, tell me, how did you get your wound?"

So he told her with much amusing detail after his fashion. She listened quietly with a puckered up brow and only made one comment. It was,—

"I wonder what white man told those Sekukuni Kaffirs that you were coming."

"I don't know," he answered, "but he deserves a bullet through him somewhere above the ankle."

"Yes, though few people get what they deserve in this wicked world."

"So I have often thought. Had it been otherwise, for example, I should have been—"

"What would you have been?" she asked, considering him curiously.

"Oh! a better shot than Mr. Allan Quatermain, and as beautiful as a lady I once saw in my youth."

"Don't talk rubbish before luncheon," I remarked sternly, and we all laughed, the first wholesome laughter that I had heard at the Temple. For this young lady seemed to bring happiness and merriment with her. I remember wondering what it was of which her coming reminded me, and concluding that it was like the sight and smell of a peach orchard in full bloom stumbled on suddenly in the black desert of the burnt winter veld.

After this we became quite friendly. She dilated on her skill in having produced the Temple from an old engraving, which she fetched and showed to us, at no greater an expense than it would have cost to build an ordinary house.

"That is because the marble was at hand," said Anscombe.

"Quite so," she replied demurely. "Speaking in a general sense one can do many things in life—if the marble is at hand. Only most of us when we look for marble find sandstone or mud."

"Bravo!" said Anscombe, "I have generally lit upon the sandstone."

"And I on the mud," she mused.

"And I on all three, for the earth contains marble and mud and sandstone, to say nothing of gold and jewels," I broke in, being tired of silence.

But neither of them paid much attention to me. Anscombe did say, out of politeness, I suppose, that pitch and subterranean fires should be added, or some such nonsense.

Then she began to tell him of her infantile memories of Hungary, which were extremely faint; of how they came to this place and lived first of all in two large Kaffir huts, until suddenly they began to grow rich; of her school days at Maritzburg; of the friends with whom she had been staying, and I know not what, until at last I got up and went out for a walk.

When I returned an hour or so later they were still talking, and so continued to do until Dr. Rodd arrived upon the scene. At first they did not see him, for he stood at an angle to them, but I saw him and watched his face with a great deal of interest. It, or rather its expression, was not pleasant; before now I have seen something like it on that of a wild beast which thinks that it is about to be robbed of its prey by a stronger wild beast, in short, a mixture of hate, fear and jealousy—especially jealousy. At the last I did not wonder, for these two seemed to be getting on uncommonly well.

They were, so to speak, well matched. She, of course, was the better looking of the two, a really pretty and attractive young woman indeed, but the vivacity of Anscombe's face, the twinkle of his merry blue eyes and its general refinement made up for what he lacked—regularity of feature. I think he had just told her one of his good stories which he always managed to make so humorous by a trick of pleasing and harmless exaggeration, and they were both laughing merrily. Then she caught sight of the doctor and her merriment evaporated like a drop of water on a hot shovel. Distinctly I saw her pull herself together and prepare for something.

"How do you do?" she said rapidly, rising and holding out her slim sun-browned hand. "But I need not ask, you look so well."

"How do you do, my dear," with a heavy emphasis on the "dear" he answered slowly. "But I needn't ask, for I see that you are in perfect health and spirits," and he bent forward as though to kiss her.

Somehow or other she avoided that endearment or seal of possession. I don't quite know how, as I turned my head away, not wishing to witness what I felt to be unpleasant. When I looked up again, however, I saw that she had avoided it, the scowl on his face, the demureness of hers and Anscombe's evident amusement assured me of this. She was asking about her father; he answered that he also seemed quite well.

"Then why did you write to tell me that I ought to come as he was not at all well?" she inquired, with a lifting of her delicate eyebrows.

The question was never answered, for at that moment Marnham himself appeared.

"Oh! father," she said, and rushed into his arms, while he kissed her tenderly on both cheeks.

So I was not mistaken, thought I to myself, she does really love this moral wreck, and what is more, he loves her, which shows that there must be good in him. Is anyone truly bad, I wondered, or for the matter of that, truly good either? Is it not all a question of circumstance and blood?

Neither then or at any other time have I found an answer to the problem. At any rate to me there seemed something beautiful about the meeting of these two.

The influence of Miss Heda in the house was felt at once. The boys became smarter and put on clean clothes. Vases of flowers appeared in the various rooms; ours was turned out and cleaned, a disagreeable process so far as we were concerned. Moreover, at dinner both Marnham and Rodd wore dress clothes with short jackets, a circumstance that put Anscombe and myself to shame since we had none. It was curious to see how with those dress clothes, which doubtless awoke old associations within him, Marnham changed his colour like a chameleon. Really he might have been the colonel of a cavalry regiment rising to toast the Queen after he had sent round the wine, so polite and polished was his talk. Who could have identified the man with the dry old ruffian of twenty-four hours before, he who was drinking claret (and very good claret too) mixed with water and listening with a polite interest to all the details of his daughter's journey? Even the doctor looked a gentleman, which doubtless he was once upon a time, in evening dress. Moreover, some kind of truce had been arranged. He no longer called Miss Heda "My dear" or attempted any familiarities, while she on more than one occasion very distinctly called him Dr. Rodd.

So much for that night and for several others that followed. As for the days they went by pleasantly and idly. Heda walked about on her father's arm, conversed in friendly fashion with the doctor, always watching him, I noticed, as a cat watches a dog that she knows is waiting an opportunity to spring, and for the rest associated with us as much as she could. Particularly did she seem to take refuge behind my own insignificance, having, I suppose, come to the conclusion that I was a harmless person who might possibly prove useful. But all the while I felt that the storm was banking up. Indeed Marnham himself, at any rate to a great extent, played the part of the cloud-compelling Jove, for soon it became evident to me, and without doubt to Dr. Rodd also, that he was encouraging the intimacy between his daughter and Anscombe by every means in his power.

In one way and another he had fully informed himself as to Anscombe's prospects in life, which were brilliant enough. Moreover he liked the man who, as the remnant of the better perceptions of his youth told him, was one of the best class of Englishmen, and what is more, he saw that Heda liked him also, as much indeed as she disliked Rodd. He even spoke to me of the matter in a round-about kind of fashion, saying that the young woman who married Anscombe would be lucky and that the father who had him for a son-in-law might go to his grave confident of his child's happiness. I answered that I agreed with him, unless the lady's affections had already caused her to form other ties.

"Affections!" he exclaimed, dropping all pretence, "there are none involved in this accursed business, as you are quite sharp enough to have seen for yourself."

"I understood that an engagement was involved," I remarked.

"On my part, perhaps, not on hers," he answered. "Oh! can't you understand, Quatermain, that sometimes men find themselves forced into strange situations against their will?"

Remembering the very ugly name that I had heard Rodd call Marnham on the night of the card party, I reflected that I could understand well enough, but I only said—

“After all marriage is a matter that concerns a woman even more than it does her father, one, in short, of which she must be the judge.”

“Quite so, Quatermain, but there are some daughters who are prepared to make great sacrifices for their fathers. Well, she will be of age ere long, if only I can stave it off till then. But how, how?” and with a groan he turned and left me.

That old gentleman’s neck is in some kind of a noose, thought I to myself, and his difficulty is to prevent the rope from being drawn tight. Meanwhile this poor girl’s happiness and future are at stake.

“Allan,” said Anscombe to me a little later, for by now he called me by my Christian name, “I suppose you haven’t heard anything about those oxen, have you?”

“No, I could scarcely expect to yet, but why do you ask?”

He smiled in his droll fashion and replied, “Because, interesting as this household is in sundry ways, I think it is about time that we, or at any rate that I, got out of it.”

“Your leg isn’t fit to travel yet, Anscombe, although Rodd says that all the symptoms are very satisfactory.”

“Yes, but to tell you the truth I am experiencing other symptoms quite unknown to that beloved physician and so unfamiliar to myself that I attribute them to the influences of the locality. Altitude affects the heart, does it not, and this house stands high.”

“Don’t play off your jokes on me,” I said sternly. “What do you mean?”

“I wonder if you find Miss Heda attractive, Allan, or if you are too old. I believe there comes an age when the only beauties that can move a man are those of architecture, or scenery, or properly cooked food.”

“Hang it all! I am not Methusaleh,” I replied; “but if you mean that you are falling in love with Heda, why the deuce don’t you say so, instead of wasting my time and your own?”

“Because time was given to us to waste. Properly considered it is the best use to which it can be put, or at any rate the one that does least mischief. Also because I wished to make you say it for me that I might judge from the effect of your words whether it is or is not true. I may add that I fear the former to be the case.”

“Well, if you are in love with the girl you can’t expect one so ancient as myself, who is quite out of touch with such follies, to teach you how to act.”

“No, Allan. Unfortunately there are occasions when one must rely upon one’s own wisdom, and mine, what there is of it, tells me I had better get out of this. But I can’t ride even if I took the horse and you ran behind, and the oxen haven’t come.”

“Perhaps you could borrow Miss Marnham’s cart in which to run away from her,” I suggested sarcastically.

“Perhaps, though I believe it would be fatal to my foot to sit up in a cart for the next few days, and the horses seem to have been sent off somewhere. Look here, old fellow,” he went on, dropping his bantering tone, “it’s rather awkward to make a fool of oneself over a lady who is engaged to some one else, especially if one suspects that with a little encouragement she might begin to walk the same road. The truth is I have taken the fever pretty bad, worse than ever I did before, and if it isn’t stopped soon it will become chronic.”

“Oh no, Anscombe, only intermittent at the worst, and African malaria nearly always yields to a change of climate.”

“How can I expect a cynic and a misogynist to understand the simple fervour of an inexperienced soul—Oh! drat it all, Quatermain, stop your acid chaff and tell me what is to be done. Really I am in a tight place.”

“Very; so tight that I rejoice to think, as you were kind enough to point out, that my years protect me from anything of the sort. I have no advice to give; I think you had better ask it of the lady.”

“Well, we did have a little conversation, hypothetical of course, about some friends of ours who found themselves similarly situated, and I regret to say without result.”

“Indeed. I did not know you had any mutual acquaintances. What did she say and do?”

“She said nothing, only sighed and looked as though she were going to burst into tears, and all she did was to walk away. I’d have followed her if I could, but as my crutch wasn’t there it was impossible. It seemed to me that suddenly I had come up against a brick wall, that there was something on her mind which she could not or would not let out.”

“Yes, and if you want to know, I will tell you what it is. Rodd has got a hold over Marnham of a sort that would bring him somewhere near the gallows. As the price of his silence Marnham has promised him his daughter. The daughter knows that her father is in this man’s power, though I think she does not know in what way, and being a good girl—”

“An angel you mean—do call her by her right name, especially in a place where angels are so much wanted.”

“Well, an angel if you like—she has promised on her part to marry a man she loathes in order to save her parent’s bacon.”

“Just what I concluded, from what we heard in the row. I wonder which of that pair is the bigger blackguard. Well, Allan, that settles it. You and I are on the side of the angel. You will have to get her out of this scrape and—if she’ll have me, I’ll marry her; and if she won’t, why it can’t be helped. Now that’s a fair division of labour. How are you going to do it? I haven’t an idea, and if I had, I should not presume to interfere with one so much older and wiser than myself.”

“I suppose that by the time you appeared in it, the game of heads I win and tails you lose had died out of the world,” I replied with an indignant snort. “I think the best thing I can do will be to take the horse and look for those oxen. Meanwhile you can settle your business by the light of your native genius, and I only hope you’ll finish it without murder and sudden death.”

“I say, old fellow,” said Anscombe earnestly, “you don’t really mean to go on and leave me in this hideousness? I haven’t bothered much up to the present because I was sure that you’d find a way out that’d be nothing to a man of your intellect and experience. I mean it honestly, I do indeed.”

“Do you? Well, I can only say that my mind’s a perfect blank but if you’ll stop talking I’ll try to think the matter over. There’s Miss Heda in the garden cutting flowers. I’ll go to help her that’ll be a very pleasant change.” And I went, leaving him to stare after me jealously.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE STOEP

When I reached Miss Heda she was collecting half-opened monthly roses from the hedge, and not quite knowing what to say I made the appropriate quotation. At least it was appropriate to my thought, and, from her answer, to hers also.

"Yes," she said, "I am gathering them while I may," and she sighed and, as I thought, glanced towards the verandah, though of this I could not be sure because of the wide brim of the hat she was wearing.

Then we talked a little on indifferent matters, while I pricked my fingers helping to pluck the roses. She asked me if I thought that Anscombe was getting on well, and how long it would be before he could travel. I replied that Dr. Rodd could tell her better than myself, but that I hoped in about a week.

"In a week!" she said, and although she tried to speak lightly there was dismay in her voice.

"I hope you don't think it too long," I answered; "but even if he is fit to go, the oxen have not come yet, and I don't quite know when they will."

"Too long!" she exclaimed. "Too long! Oh! if you only knew what it is to me to have such guests as you are in this place," and her dark eyes filled with tears.

By now we had passed to the side of the house in search of some other flower that grew in the shade, I think it was mignonette, and were out of sight of the verandah and quite alone.

"Mr. Quatermain," she said hurriedly, "I am wondering whether to ask your advice about something, if you would give it. I have no one to consult here," she added rather piteously.

"That is for you to decide. If you wish to do so I am old enough to be your father, and will do my best to help."

We walked on to an orange grove that stood about forty yards away, ostensibly to pick some fruit, but really because we knew that there we should be out of hearing and could see any one who approached.

"Mr. Quatermain," she said presently in a low voice, "I am in great trouble, almost the greatest a woman can have. I am engaged to be married to a man whom I do not care for."

"Then why not break it off? It may be unpleasant, but it is generally best to face unpleasant things, and nothing can be so bad as marrying a man whom you do not—care for."

"Because I cannot—I dare not. I have to obey."

"How old are you, Miss Marnham?"

"I shall be of age in three months' time. You may guess that I did not intend to return here until they were over, but I was, well—trapped. He wrote to me that my father was ill and I came."

"At any rate when they are over you will not have to obey any one. It is not long to wait."

"It is an eternity. Besides this is not so much a question of obedience as of duty and of love. I love my father who, whatever his faults, has always been very kind to me."

"And I am sure he loves you. Why not go to him and tell him your trouble?"

"He knows it already, Mr. Quatermain, and hates this marriage even more than I do, if that is possible. But he is driven to it, as I am. Oh! I must tell the truth. The doctor has some hold over him. My father has done something dreadful; I don't know what and I don't want to know, but if it came out it would ruin my father, or worse, worse. I am the price of his silence. On the day of our marriage he will destroy the proofs. If I refuse to marry him, they will be produced and then—"

"It is difficult," I said.

"It is more than difficult, it is terrible. If you could see all there is in my heart, you would know how terrible."

"I think I can see, Miss Heda. Don't say any more now. Give me time to consider. In case of necessity come to me again, and be sure that I will protect you."

"But you are going in a week."

"Many things happen in a week. Sufficient to the day is its evil. At the end of the week we will come to some decision unless everything is already decided."

For the next twenty-four hours I reflected on this pretty problem as hard as ever I did on anything in all my life. Here was a young woman who must somehow be protected from a scoundrel, but who could not be protected because she herself had to protect another scoundrel—to wit, her own father. Could the thing be faced out? Impossible, for I was sure that Marnham had committed a murder, or murders, of which Rodd possessed evidence that would hang him. Could Heda be married to Anscombe at once? Yes, if both were willing, but then Marnham would still be hung. Could they elope? Possibly, but with the same result. Could I take her away and put her under the protection of the Court at Pretoria? Yes, but with the same result. I wondered what my Hottentot retainer, Hans,

would have advised, he who was named Light-in-Darkness, and in his own savage way was the cleverest and most cunning man that I have met. Alas! I could not raise him from the grave to tell me, and yet I knew well what he would have answered.

“Baas,” he would have said, “this is a rope which only the pale old man (i.e., death) can cut. Let this doctor die or let the father die, and the maiden will be free. Surely heaven is longing for one or both of them, and if necessary, Baas, I believe that I can point out a path to heaven!”

I laughed to myself at the thought, which was one that a white man could not entertain even as a thought. And I felt that the hypothetical Hans was right, death alone could cut this knot, and the reflection made me shiver.

That night I slept uneasily and dreamed. I dreamed that once more I was in the Black Kloof in Zululand, seated in front of the huts at the end of the kloof. Before me squatted the old wizard, Zikali, wrapped up in his kaross—Zikali, the “Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born,” whom I had not seen for years. Near him were the ashes of a fire, by the help of which I knew he had been practising divination. He looked up and laughed one of his terrible laughs.

“So you are here again, Macumazahn,” he said, “grown older, but still the same; here at the appointed hour. What do you come to seek from the Opener of Roads? Not Mameena as I think this time. No, no, it is she who seeks you this time, Macumazahn. She found you once, did she not? Far away to the north among a strange people who worshipped an Ivory Child, a people of whom I knew in my youth, and afterwards, for was not their prophet, Harut, a friend of mine and one of our brotherhood? She found you beneath the tusks of the elephant, Jana, whom Macumazahn the skilful could not hit. Oh! do not look astonished.”

“How do you know?” I asked in my dream.

“Very simply, Macumazahn. A little yellow man named Hans has been with me and told me all the story not an hour ago, after which I sent for Mameena to learn if it were true. She will be glad to meet you, Macumazahn, she who has a hungry heart that does not forget. Oh! don’t be afraid. I mean here beneath the sun, in the land beyond there will be no need for her to meet you since she will dwell ever at your side.”

“Why do you lie to me, Zikali?” I seemed to ask. “How can a dead man speak to you and how can I meet a woman who is dead?”

“Seek the answer to that question in the hour of the battle when the white men, your brothers, fall beneath assegai as weeds fall before the hoe—or perhaps before it. But have done with Mameena, since she who never grows more old can well afford to wait. It is not of Mameena that you came to speak to me; it is of a fair white woman named Heddana you would speak, and of the man she loves, you, who will ever be mixing yourself up in affairs of others, and therefore must bear their burdens with no pay save that of honour. Harken, for the time is short. When the storm bursts upon them bring hither the fair maiden, Heddana, and the white lord, Mauriti, and I will shelter them for your sake. Take them nowhere else. Bring them hither if they would escape trouble. I shall be glad to see you, Macumazahn, for at last I am about to smite the Zulu House of Senzangacona, my foes, with a bladder full of blood, and oh! it stains their doorposts red.”

Then I woke up, feeling afraid, as one does after a nightmare, and was comforted to hear Anscombe sleeping quietly on the other side of the room.

“Mauriti. Why did Zikali call him Mauriti?” I wondered drowsily to myself. “Oh! of course his name is Maurice, and it was a Zulu corruption of a common sort as was Heddana of Heda.” Then I dozed off again, and by the morning had forgotten all about my dream until it was brought back to me by subsequent events. Still it was this and nothing else that put it into my head to fly to Zululand on an emergency that was to arise ere long.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] For the history of Zikali and Mameena see the book called *Child of Storm* by H. Rider Haggard.

That evening Rodd was absent from dinner, and on inquiring where he might be, I was informed that he had ridden to visit a Kaffir headman, a patient of his who lived at a distance, and would very probably sleep at the kraal, returning early next day. One of the topics of conversation during dinner was as to where the exact boundary line used to run between the Transvaal and the country over which the Basuto chief, Sekukuni, claimed ownership and jurisdiction. Marnham said that it passed within a couple of miles of his house, and when we rose, the moon being very bright, offered to show me where the beacons had been placed years before by a Boer Commission. I accepted, as the night was lovely for a stroll after the hot day. Also I was half conscious of another undefined purpose in my mind, which perhaps may have spread to that of Marnham. Those two young people looked very happy together there on the stoep, and as they must part so soon it would, I thought, be kind to give them the opportunity of a quiet chat.

So off we went to the brow of the hill on which the Temple stood, whence old Marnham pointed out to me a beacon, which I could not see in the dim, silvery bush-veld below, and how the line ran from it to another beacon somewhere else.

“You know the Yellow-wood swamp,” he said. “It passes straight through that. That is why those Basutos who were following you pulled up upon the edge of the swamp, though as a matter of fact, according to their ideas, they had a perfect right to kill you on their side of the line which cuts through the middle.”

I made some remark to the effect that I presumed that the line had in fact ceased to exist at all, as the Basuto territory had practically become British; after which we strolled back to the house. Walking quietly between the tall rose hedges and without speaking, for each of us was preoccupied with his own thoughts, suddenly we came upon a very pretty scene.

We had left Anscombe and Heda seated side by side on the stoep. They were still there, but much closer together. In fact his arms were round her, and they were kissing each other in a remarkably whole-hearted way. About this there could be no mistake, since the rimpi-strung couch on which they sat was immediately under the hanging lamp—a somewhat unfortunate situation for such endearments. But what did they think of hanging lamps or any other lights, save those of their own eyes, they who were content to kiss and murmur words of passion as though they were as much alone as Adam and Eve in Eden? What did they think either of the serpent coiled about the bole of this tree of knowledge whereof they had just plucked the ripe and maddening fruit?

By a mutual instinct Marnham and I withdrew ourselves, very gently indeed, purposing to skirt round the house and enter it from behind, or to be seized with a fit of coughing at the gate, or to do something to announce our presence at a convenient distance. When we had gone a little way we heard a crash in the bushes.

"Another of those cursed baboons robbing the garden," remarked Marnham reflectively.

"I think he is going to rob the house also," I replied, turning to point to something dark that seemed to be leaping up on to the verandah.

Next moment we heard Heda utter a little cry of alarm, and a man say in a low fierce voice—

"So I have caught you at last, have I!"

"The doctor has returned from his business rounds sooner than was expected, and I think that we had better join the party," I remarked, and made a bee line for the stoep, Marnham following me.

I think that I arrived just in time to prevent mischief. There, with a revolver in his hand, stood Rodd, tall and formidable, his dark face looking like that of Satan himself, a very monument of rage and jealousy. There in front of him on the couch sat Heda, grasping its edge with her fingers, her cheeks as pale as a sheet and her eyes shining. By her side was Anscombe, cool and collected as usual, I noticed, but evidently perplexed.

"If there is any shooting to be done," he was saying, "I think you had better begin with me."

His calmness seemed to exasperate Rodd, who lifted the revolver. But I too was prepared, for in that house I always went armed. There was no time to get at the man, who was perhaps fifteen feet away, and I did not want to hurt him. So I did the best I could; that is, I fired at the pistol in his hand, and the light being good, struck it near the hilt and knocked it off the barrel before he could press the trigger, if he really meant to shoot.

"That's a good shot," remarked Anscombe who had seen me, while Rodd stared at the hilt which he still held.

"A lucky one," I answered, walking forward. "And now, Dr. Rodd, will you be so good as to tell me what you mean by flourishing a revolver, presumably loaded, in the faces of a lady and an unarmed man?"

"What the devil is that to you," he asked furiously, "and what do you mean by firing at me?"

"A great deal," I answered, "seeing that a young woman and my friend are concerned. As for firing at you, had I done so you would not be asking questions now. I fired at the pistol in your hand, but if there is more trouble next time it shall be at the holder," and I glanced at my revolver.

Seeing that I meant business he made no reply, but turned upon Marnham who had followed me.

"This is your work, you old villain," he said in a low voice that was heavy with hate. "You promised your daughter to me. She is engaged to me, and now I find her in this wanderer's arms."

"What have I to do with it?" said Marnham. "Perhaps she has changed her mind. You had better ask her."

"There is no need to ask me," interrupted Heda, who now seemed to have got her nerve again. "I *have* changed my mind. I never loved you, Dr. Rodd, and I will not marry you. I love Mr. Anscombe here, and as he has asked me to be his wife I mean to marry him."

"I see," he sneered, "you want to be a peeress one day, no doubt. Well, you never shall if I can help it. Perhaps, too, this fine gentleman of yours will not be so particularly anxious to marry you when he learns that you are the daughter of a murderer."

That word was like a bombshell bursting among us. We looked at each other as people, yet dazed with the shock, might on a battlefield when the noise of the explosion has died and the smoke cleared away, to see who is still alive. Anscombe spoke the first.

"I don't know what you mean or to what you refer," he said quietly. "But at any rate this lady who has promised to marry me is innocent, and therefore if all her ancestors had been murderers it would not in the slightest turn me from my purpose of marrying her."

She looked at him, and all the gratitude in the world shone in her frightened eyes. Marnham stepped, or rather staggered forward, the blue vein throbbing on his forehead.

"He lies," he said hoarsely, tugging at his long beard. "Listen now and I will tell you the truth. Once, more than a year ago, I was drunk and in a rage. In this state I fired at a Kaffir to frighten him, and by some devil's chance shot him dead. That's what he calls being a murderer."

"I have another tale," said Rodd, "with which I will not trouble this company just now. Look here, Heda, either you fulfil your promise and marry me, or your father swings."

She gasped and sank together on the seat as though she had been shot. Then I took up my parable.

"Are you the man," I asked, "to accuse others of crime? Let us see. You have spent several months in an English prison (I gave the name) for a crime I won't mention."

"How do you know—" he began.

"Never mind, I do know and the prison books will show it. Further, your business is that of selling guns and ammunition to the Basutos of Sekukuni's tribe, who, although the expedition against them has been temporarily recalled, are still the Queen's enemies. Don't deny it, for I have the proofs. Further, it was you who advised Sekukuni to kill us when we went down to his country to shoot the other day, because you were afraid that we should discover whence he got his guns." (This was a bow drawn at a venture, but the arrow went home, for I saw his jaw drop.) "Further, I believe you to be an illicit diamond buyer, and I believe also that you have again been arranging with the Basutos to make an end of us, though of these last two items at present I lack positive proof. Now, Dr. Rodd, I ask you for the second time whether you are a person to accuse others of crimes and whether, should you do so, you will be considered a credible witness when your own are brought to light?"

"If I had been guilty of any of these things, which I am not, it is obvious that my partner must have shared in all of them, except the first. So if you inform against me, you inform against him, and the father of Heda, whom your friend wishes to marry, will, according to your showing, be proved a gun-runner, a thief and a would-be murderer of his guests. I should advise you to leave that business alone, Mr. Quatermain."

The reply was bold and clever, so much so that I regarded this blackguard with a certain amount of admiration, as I answered—

“I shall take your advice if you take mine to leave another business alone, that of this young lady and her father, but not otherwise.”

“Then spare your breath and do your worst; only careful, sharp as you think yourself, that your meddling does not recoil on your own head. Listen, Heda, either you make up your mind to marry me at once and arrange that this young gentleman, who as a doctor I assure you is now quite fit to travel without injury to his health, leaves this house to-morrow with the spy Quatermain—you might lend him the Cape cart to go in—or I start with the proofs to lay a charge of murder against your father. I give you till to-morrow morning to have a family council to think it over. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” I answered as he passed me, “and please be careful that none of us see your face again before to-morrow morning. As you may happen to have heard, my native name means Watcher-by-Night,” and I looked at the revolver in my hand.

When he had vanished I remarked in as cheerful voice as I could command, that I thought it was bedtime, and as nobody stirred, added, “Don’t be afraid, young lady. If you feel lonely, you must tell that stout maid of yours to sleep in your room. Also, as the night is so hot I shall take my nap on the stoep, there, just opposite your window. No, don’t let us talk any more now. There will be plenty of time for that to-morrow.”

She rose, looked at Anscombe, looked at me, looked at her father very pitifully; then with a little exclamation of despair passed into her room by the French window, where presently I heard her call the native maid and tell her that she was to sleep with her.

Marnham watched her depart. Then he too went with his head bowed and staggering a little in his walk. Next Anscombe rose and limped off into his room, I following him.

“Well, young man,” I said, “you have put us all in the soup now and no mistake.”

“Yes, Allan, I am afraid I have. But on the whole don’t you think it rather interesting soup—so many unexpected ingredients, you see!”

“Interesting soup! Unexpected ingredients!” I repeated after him, adding, “Why not call it hell’s broth at once?”

Then he became serious, dreadfully serious.

“Look here,” he said, “I love Heda, and whatever her family history may be I mean to marry her and face the row at home.”

“You could scarcely do less in all the circumstances, and as for rows, that young lady would soon fit herself into any place that you can give her. But the question is, how can you marry her?”

“Oh! something will happen,” he replied optimistically.

“You are quite right there. Something will certainly happen, but the point is—what? Something was very near happening when I turned up on that stoep, so near that I think it was lucky for you, or for Miss Heda, or both, that I have learned how to handle a pistol. Now let me see your foot, and don’t speak another word to me about all this business to-night. I’d rather tackle it when I am clear-headed in the morning.”

Well, I examined his instep and leg very carefully and found that Rodd was right. Although it still hurt him to walk, the wound was quite healed and all inflammation had gone from the limb. Now it was only a question of time for the sinews to right themselves. While I was thus engaged he held forth on the virtues and charms of Heda, I making no comment.

“Lie down and get to sleep, if you can,” I said when I had finished. “The door is locked and I am going on to the stoep, so you needn’t be afraid of the windows. Good-night.”

I went out and sat myself down in such a position that by the light of the hanging lamp, which still burned, I could make sure that no one could approach either Heda’s or my room without my seeing him. For the rest, all my life I have been accustomed to night vigils, and the loaded revolver hung from my wrist by a loop of hide. Moreover, never had I felt less sleepy. There I sat hour after hour, thinking.

The substance of my thoughts does not matter, since the events that followed make them superfluous to the story. I will merely record, therefore, that towards dawn a great horror took hold of me. I did not know of what I was afraid, but I was much afraid of something. Nothing was passing in either Heda’s or our room, of that I made sure by personal examination. Therefore it would seem that my terrors were unnecessary, and yet they grew and grew. I felt sure that something was happening somewhere, a dread occurrence which it was beyond my power to prevent, though whether it were in this house or at the other end of Africa I did not know.

The mental depression increased and culminated. Then of a sudden it passed completely away, and as I mopped the sweat from off my brow I noticed that dawn was breaking. It was a tender and beautiful dawn, and in a dim way I took it as a good omen. Of course it was nothing but the daily resurrection of the sun, and yet it brought to me comfort and hope. The night was past with all its fears; the light had come with all its joys. From that moment I was certain that we should triumph over these difficulties and that the end of them would be peace.

So sure was I that I ventured to take a nap, knowing that the slightest movement or sound would wake me. I suppose I slept until six o’clock, when I was aroused by a footfall. I sprang up, and saw before me one of our native servants. He was trembling and his face was ashen beneath the black. Moreover he could not speak. All he did was to put his head on one side, like a dead man, and keep on pointing downwards. Then with his mouth open and starting eyes he beckoned to me to follow him.

I followed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### RODD'S LAST CARD

The man led me to Marnham's room, which I had never entered before. All I could see at first, for the shutters were closed, was that the place seemed large, as bedchambers go in South Africa. When my eyes grew accustomed to the light, I made out the figure of a man seated in a chair with his head bent forward over a table that was placed at the foot of the bed almost in the centre of the room. I threw open the shutters and the morning light poured in. The man was Marnham. On the table were writing materials, also a brandy bottle with only a dreg of spirit in it. I looked for the glass and found it by his side on the floor, shattered, not merely broken.

"Drunk," I said aloud, whereon the servant, who understood me, spoke for the first time, saying in a frightened voice in Dutch—

"No, Baas, dead, half cold. I found him so just now."

I bent down and examined Marnham, also felt his face. Sure enough, he was dead, for his jaw had fallen; also his flesh was chill, and from him came a horrible smell of brandy. I thought for a moment, then bade the boy fetch Dr. Rodd and say nothing to any one else. He went, and now for the first time I noticed a large envelope addressed "Allan Quatermain, Esq." in a somewhat shaky hand. This I picked up and slipped into my pocket.

Rodd arrived half dressed.

"What's the matter now?" he growled.

I pointed to Marnham, saying—

"That is a question for you to answer.

"Oh! drunk again, I suppose," he said. Then he did as I had done, bent down and examined him. A few seconds later he stepped or reeled back, looking as frightened as a man could be, and exclaiming—

"Dead as a stone, by God! Dead these three hours or more."

"Quite so," I answered, "but what killed him?"

"How should I know?" he asked savagely. "Do you suspect me of poisoning him?"

"My mind is open," I replied; "but as you quarrelled so bitterly last night, others might."

The bolt went home; he saw his danger.

"Probably the old sot died in a fit, or of too much brandy. How can one know without a post-mortem? But that mustn't be made by me. I'm off to inform the magistrate and get hold of another doctor. Let the body remain as it is until I return."

I reflected quickly. Ought I to let him go or not? If he had any hand in this business, doubtless he intended to escape. Well, supposing this were so and he did escape, that would be a good thing for Heda, and really it was no affair of mine to bring the fellow to justice. Moreover there was nothing to show that he was guilty; his whole manner seemed to point another way, though of course he might be acting.

"Very well," I replied, "but return as quickly as possible."

He stood for a few seconds like a man who is dazed. It occurred to me that it might have come into his mind with Marnham's death that he had lost his hold over Heda. But if so he said nothing of it, but only asked—

"Will you go instead of me?"

"On the whole I think not," I replied, "and if I did, the story I should have to tell might not tend to your advantage."

"That's true, damn you!" he exclaimed and left the room.

Ten minutes later he was galloping towards Pilgrim's Rest. Before I departed from the death chamber I examined the place carefully to see if I could find any poison or other deadly thing, but without success. One thing I did discover, however. Turning the leaf of a blotting-book that was by Marnham's elbow, I came upon a sheet of paper on which were written these words in his hand, "Greater love hath no man than this—" that was all.

Either he had forgotten the end of the quotation or changed his mind, or was unable through weakness to finish the sentence. This paper also I put in my pocket. Bolting the shutters and locking the door I returned to the stoep, where I was alone, for as yet no one else was stirring. Then I remembered the letter in my pocket and opened it. It ran—

"DEAR MR. QUATERMAIN,—

"I have remembered that those who quarrel with Dr. Rodd are apt to die soon and suddenly; at any rate life at my age is always uncertain. Therefore, as I know you to be an honest man, I am enclosing my will that it may be in safe keeping and purpose to send it to your room to-morrow morning. Perhaps when you return to Pretoria you will deposit it in the Standard Bank there, and if I am still alive, forward me the receipt. You will see that I leave everything to my daughter whom I dearly love, and that there is enough to

keep the wolf from her door, besides my share in this property, if it is ever realized.

"After all that has passed to-night I do not feel up to writing a long letter, so

"Remain sincerely yours,  
"H. A. MARNHAM."

"PS.—I should like to state clearly upon paper that my earnest hope and wish are that Heda may get clear of that black-hearted, murderous, scoundrel Rodd and marry Mr. Anscombe, whom I like and who, I am sure, would make her a good husband."

Thinking to myself this did not look very like the letter of a suicide, I glanced through the will, as the testator seemed to have wished that I should do so. It was short, but properly drawn, signed, and witnessed, and bequeathed a sum of £9,000, which was on deposit at the Standard Bank, together with all his other property, real and personal, to Heda for her own sole use, free from the debts and engagements of her husband, should she marry. Also she was forbidden to spend more than £1,000 of the capital. In short the money was strictly tied up. With the will were some other papers that apparently referred to certain property in Hungary to which Heda might become entitled, but about these I did not trouble.

Replacing these documents in a safe inner pocket in the lining of my waistcoat, I went into our room and woke up Anscombe who was sleeping soundly, a fact that caused an unreasonable irritation in my mind. When at length he was thoroughly aroused I said to him—

"You are in luck's way, my friend. Marnham is dead."

"Oh! poor Heda," he exclaimed, "she loved him. It will half break her heart."

"If it breaks half of her heart," I replied, "it will mend the other half, for now her filial affection can't force her to marry Rodd, and that is where you are in luck's way."

Then I told him all the story.

"Was he murdered or did he commit suicide?" he asked when I had finished.

"I don't know, and to tell you the truth I don't want to know; nor will you if you are wise, unless knowledge is forced upon you. It is enough that he is dead, and for his daughter's sake the less the circumstances of his end are examined into the better."

"Poor Heda!" he said again, "who will tell her? I can't. *You* found him, Allan."

"I expected that job would be my share of the business, Anscombe. Well, the sooner it is over the better. Now dress yourself and come on to the stoep."

Then I left him and next minute met Heda's fat, half-breed maid, a stupid but good sort of a woman who was called Kaatje, emerging from her mistress's room with a jug, to fetch hot water, I suppose.

"Kaatje," I said, "go back and tell the Missie Heda that I want to speak to her as soon as I can. Never mind the hot water, but stop and help her to dress."

She began to grumble a little in a good-natured way, but something in my eye stopped her and she went back into the room. Ten minutes later Heda was by my side.

"What is it, Mr. Quatermain?" she asked. "I feel sure that something dreadful has happened."

"It has, my dear," I answered, "that is, if death is dreadful. Your father died last night."

"Oh!" she said, "oh!" and sank back on to the seat.

"Bear up," I went on, "we must all die one day, and he had reached the full age of man."

"But I loved him," she moaned. "He had many faults I know, still I loved him."

"It is the lot of life, Heda, that we should lose what we love. Be thankful, therefore, that you have some one left to love."

"Yes, thank God! that's true. If it had been him—no, it's wicked to say that."

Then I told her the story, and while I was doing so, Anscombe joined us, walking by aid of his stick. Also I showed them both Marnham's letter to me and the will, but the other bit of paper I did not speak of or show.

She sat very pale and quiet and listened till I had done. Then she said—

"I should like to see him."

"Perhaps it is as well," I answered. "If you can bear it, come at once, and do you come also, Anscombe."

We went to the room, Anscombe and Heda holding each other by the hand. I unlocked the door and, entering, threw open a shutter. There sat the dead man as I had left him, only his head had fallen over a little. She gazed at him, trembling, then advanced and kissed his cold forehead, muttering,

"Good-bye, father. Oh! good-bye, father."

A thought struck me, and I asked—

"Is there any place here where your father locked up things? As I have shown you, you are his heiress, and if so it might be as well in this house that you should possess yourself of his property."

"There is a safe in the corner," she answered, "of which he always kept the key in his trouser pocket."

"Then with your leave I will open it in your presence."

Going to the dead man I searched his pocket and found in it a bunch of keys. These I withdrew and went to the safe over which a skin rug was thrown. I unlocked it easily enough. Within were two bags of gold, each marked £100; also another larger bag marked

"My wife's jewelry. For Heda"; also some papers and a miniature of the lady whose portrait hung in the sitting-room; also some loose gold.

"Now who will take charge of these?" I asked. "I do not think it safe to leave them here."

"You, of course," said Anscombe, while Heda nodded.

So with a groan I consigned all these valuables to my capacious pockets. Then I locked up the empty safe, replaced the keys where I had found them on Marnham, fastened the shutter and left the room with Anscombe, waiting for a while outside till Heda joined us, sobbing a little. After this we got something to eat, insisting on Heda doing the same.

On leaving the table I saw a curious sight, namely, the patients whom Rodd was attending in the little hospital of which I have spoken, departing towards the bush-veld, those of them who could walk well and the attendants assisting the others. They were already some distance away, too far indeed for me to follow, as I did not wish to leave the house. The incident filled me with suspicion, and I went round to the back to make inquiries, but could find no one. As I passed the hospital door, however, I heard a voice calling in Sisutu—

"Do not leave me behind, my brothers."

I entered and saw the man on whom Rodd had operated the day of our arrival, lying in bed and quite alone. I asked him where the others had gone. At first he would not answer, but when I pretended to leave him, called out that it was back to their own country. Finally, to cut the story short, I extracted from him that they had left because they had news that the Temple was going to be attacked by Sekukuni and did not wish to be here when I and Anscombe were killed. How the news reached him he refused, or could not, say; nor did he seem to know anything of the death of Marnham. When I pressed him on the former point, he only groaned and cried for water, for he was in pain and thirsty. I asked him who had told Sekukuni's people to kill us, but he refused to speak.

"Very well," I said, "then you shall lie here alone and die of thirst," and again I turned towards the door.

At this he cried out—

"I will tell you. It was the white medicine-man who lives here; he who cut me open. He arranged it all a few days ago because he hates you. Last night he rode to tell the impi when to come."

"When is it to come?" I asked, holding the jug of water towards him.

"To-night at the rising of the moon, so that it may get far away before the dawn. My people are thirsty for your blood and for that of the other white chief, because you killed so many of them by the river. The others they will not harm."

"How did you learn all this?" I asked him again, but without result, for he became incoherent and only muttered something about being left alone because the others could not carry him. So I gave him some water, after which he fell asleep, or pretended to do so, and I left him, wondering whether he was delirious, or spoke truth. As I passed the stables I saw that my own horse was there, for in this district horses are always shut up at night to keep them from catching sickness, but that the four beasts that had brought Heda from Natal in the Cape cart were gone, though it was evident that they had been kraaled here till within an hour or two. I threw my horse a bundle of forage and returned to the house by the back entrance. The kitchen was empty, but crouched by the door of Marnham's room sat the boy who had found him dead. He had been attached to his master and seemed half dazed. I asked him where the other servants were, to which he replied that they had all run away. Then I asked him where the horses were. He answered that the Baas Rodd had ordered them to be turned out before he rode off that morning. I bade him accompany me to the stoep, as I dared not let him out of my sight, which he did unwillingly enough.

There I found Anscombe and Heda. They were seated side by side upon the couch. Tears were running down her face and he, looking very troubled, held her by the hand. Somehow that picture of Heda has always remained fixed in my mind. Sorrow becomes some women and she was one of them. Her beautiful dark grey eyes did not grow red with weeping; the tears just welled up in them and fell like dewdrops from the heart of a flower.

She sat very upright and very still, as he did, looking straight in front of her, while a ray of sunshine, falling on her head, showed the chestnut-hued lights in her waving hair, of which she had a great abundance.

Indeed the pair of them, thus seated side by side, reminded me of an engraving I had seen somewhere of the statues of a husband and wife in an old Egyptian tomb. With just such a look did the woman of thousands of years ago sit gazing in patient hope into the darkness of the future. Death had made her sad, but it was gone by, and the little wistful smile about her lips seemed to suggest that in this darkness her sorrowful eyes already saw the stirring of the new life to be. Moreover, was not the man she loved the companion of her hopes as he had been of her woes. Such was the fanciful thought that sprang up in my mind, even in the midst of those great anxieties, like a single flower in a stony wilderness of thorns or one star on the blackness of the night.

In a moment it had gone and I was telling them of what I had learned. They listened till I had finished. Then Anscombe said slowly—

"Two of us can't hold this house against an impi. We must get out of it."

"Both your conclusions seem quite sound," I remarked, "that is if yonder old Kaffir is telling the truth. But the question is—how? We can't all three of us ride on one nag, as you are still a cripple."

"There is the Cape cart," suggested Heda.

"Yes, but the horses have been turned out, and I don't know where to look for them. Nor dare I send that boy alone, for probably he would bolt like the others. I think that you had better get on my horse and ride for it, leaving us to take our chance. I daresay the whole thing is a lie and that we shall be in no danger," I added by way of softening the suggestion.

"That I will never do," she replied with so much quiet conviction that I saw it was useless to pursue the argument.

I thought for a moment, as the position was very difficult. The boy was not to be trusted, and if I went with him I should be leaving these two alone and, in Anscombe's state, almost defenceless. Still it seemed as though I must. Just then I looked up, and there at the

garden gate saw Anscombe's driver, Footsack, the man whom I had despatched to Pretoria to fetch his oxen. I noted that he looked frightened and was breathless, for his eyes started out of his head. Also his hat was gone and he bled a little from his face.

Seeing us he ran up the path and sat down as though he were tired.

"Where are the oxen?" I asked.

"Oh! Baas," he answered, "the Basutos have got them. We heard from an old black woman that Sekukuni had an impi out, so we waited on the top of that hill about an hour's ride away to see if it was true. Then suddenly the doctor Baas appeared riding, and I ran out and asked him if it were safe to go on. He knew me again and answered—

"Yes, quite safe, for have I not just ridden this road without meeting so much as a black child. Go on, man; your masters will be glad to have their oxen, as they wish to trek, or will by nightfall.' Then he laughed and rode away.

"So we went on, driving the oxen. But when we came to the belt of thorns at the bottom of the hill, we found that the doctor Baas had either lied to us or he had not seen. For there suddenly the tall grass on either side of the path grew spears; yes, everywhere were spears. In a minute the two voo-loopers were assegaid. As for me, I ran forward, not back, since the Kaffirs were behind me, across the path, Baas, driving off the oxen. They sprang at me, but I jumped this way and that way and avoided them. Then they threw assegais—see, one of them cut my cheek, but the rest missed. They had guns in their hands also, but none shot. I think they did not wish to make a noise. Only one of them shouted after me—

"Tell Macumazahn that we are going to call on him tonight when he cannot see to shoot. We have a message for him from our brothers whom he killed at the drift of the Oliphant's River.'

"Then I ran on here without stopping, but I saw no more Kaffirs. That is all, Baas."

Now I did not delay to cross-examine the man or to sift the true from the false in his story, since it was clear to me that he had run into a company of Basutos, or rather been beguiled thereto by Rodd, and lost our cattle, also his companions, who were either killed as he said, or had escaped some other way.

"Listen, man," I said. "I am going to fetch some horses. Do you stay here and help the Missie to pack the cart and make the harness ready. If you disobey me or run away, then I will find you and you will never run again. Do you understand?"

He vowed that he did and went to get some water, while I explained everything to Anscombe and Heda, pointing out that all the information we could gather seemed to show that no attack was to be made upon the house before nightfall, and that therefore we had the day before us. As this was so I proposed to go to look for the horses myself, since otherwise I was sure we should never find them. Meanwhile Heda must pack and make ready the cart with the help of Footsack, Anscombe superintending everything, as he could very well do since he was now able to walk leaning on a stick.

Of course neither of them liked my leaving them, but in view of our necessities they raised no objection. So off I went, taking the boy with me. He did not want to go, being, as I have said, half dazed with grief or fear, or both, but when I had pointed out to him clearly that I was quite prepared to shoot him if he played tricks, he changed his mind. Having saddled my mare that was now fresh and fat, we started, the boy guiding me to a certain kloof at the foot of which there was a small plain of good grass where he said the horses were accustomed to graze.

Here sure enough we found two of them, and as they had been turned out with their headstalls on, were able to tie them to trees with the riems which were attached to the headstalls. But the others were not there, and as two horses could not drag a heavy Cape cart, I was obliged to continue the search. Oh! what a hunt those beasts gave me. Finding themselves free, for as Rodd's object was that they should stray, he had ordered the stable-boy not to kneel-halter them, after filling themselves with grass they had started off for the farm where they were bred, which, it seemed, was about fifty miles away, grazing as they went. Of course I did not know this at the time, so for several hours I rode up and down the neighbouring kloofs, as the ground was too hard for me to hope to follow them by their spoor.

It occurred to me to ask the boy where the horses came from, a question that he happened to be able to answer, as he had brought them home when they were bought the year before. Having learned in what direction the place lay I rode for it at an angle, or rather for the path that led to it, making the boy run alongside, holding to my stirrup leather. About three o'clock in the afternoon I struck this path, or rather track, at a point ten or twelve miles away from the Temple, and there, just mounting a rise, met the two horses quietly walking towards me. Had I been a quarter of an hour later they would have passed and vanished into a sea of thorn-veld. We caught them without trouble and once more headed homewards, leading them by their riems.

Reaching the glade where the other two were tied up, we collected them also and returned to the house, where we arrived at five o'clock. As everything seemed quiet I put my mare into the stable, slipped its bit and gave it some forage. Then I went round the house, and to my great joy found Anscombe and Heda waiting anxiously, but with nothing to report, and with them Footsack. Very hastily I swallowed some food, while Footsack inspanned the horses. In a quarter of an hour all was ready. Then suddenly, in an inconsequent female fashion, Heda developed a dislike to leaving her father unburied.

"My dear young lady," I said, "it seems that you must choose between that and our all stopping to be buried with him."

She saw the point and compromised upon paying him a visit of farewell, which I left her to do in Anscombe's company, while I fetched my mare. To tell the truth I felt as though I had seen enough of the unhappy Marnham, and not for £50 would I have entered that room again. As I passed the door of the hospital, leading my horse, I heard the old Kaffir screaming within and sent the boy who was with me to find out what was the matter with him. That was the last I saw of either of them, or ever shall see this side of kingdom come. I wonder what became of them?

When I got back to the front of the house I found the cart standing ready at the gate, Footsack at the head of the horses and Heda with Anscombe at her side. It had been neatly packed during the day by Heda with such of her and our belongings as it would hold, including our arms and ammunition. The rest, of course, we were obliged to abandon. Also there were two baskets full of food, some bottles of brandy and a good supply of overcoats and wraps. I told Footsack to take the reins, as I knew him to be a good driver, and

helped Anscombe to a seat at his side, while Heda and the maid Kaatje got in behind in order to balance the vehicle. I determined to ride, at any rate for the present.

"Which way, Baas?" asked Footsack.

"Down to the Granite Stream where the wagon stands," I answered.

"That will be through the Yellow-wood Swamp. Can't we take the other road to Pilgrim's Rest and Lydenburg, or to Barberton?" asked Anscombe in a vague way, and as I thought, rather nervously.

"No," I answered, "that is unless you wish to meet those Basutos who stole the oxen and Dr. Rodd returning, if he means to return."

"Oh! let us go through the Yellow-wood," exclaimed Heda, who, I think, would rather have met the devil than Dr. Rodd.

Ah! if I had but known that we were heading straight for that person, sooner would I have faced the Basutos twice over. But I did what seemed wisest, thinking that he would be sure to return with another doctor or a magistrate by the shorter and easier path which he had followed in the morning. It just shows once more how useless are all our care and foresight, or how strong is Fate, have it which way you will.

So we started down the slope, and I, riding behind, noted poor Heda staring at the marble house, which grew ever more beautiful as it receded and the roughness of its building disappeared, especially at that part of it which hid the body of her old scamp of a father whom still she loved. We came down to the glen and once more saw the bones of the blue wildebeeste that we had shot—oh! years and years ago, or so it seemed. Then we struck out for the Granite Stream.

Before we reached the patch of Yellow-wood forest where I knew that the cart must travel very slowly because of the trees and the swampy nature of the ground, I pushed on ahead to reconnoitre, fearing lest there might be Basutos hidden in this cover. Riding straight through it I went as far as the deserted wagon at a sharp canter, seeing nothing and no one. Once indeed, towards the end of the wood where it was more dense, I thought that I heard a man cough and peered about me through the gloom, for here the rays of the sun, which was getting low in the heavens, scarcely penetrated. As I could perceive no one I came to the conclusion that I must have been deceived by my fancy. Or perhaps it was some baboon that coughed, though it was strange that a baboon should have come to such a low-lying spot where there was nothing for it to eat.

The place was eerie, so much so that I bethought me of tales of the ghosts whereby it was supposed to be haunted. Also, oddly enough, of Anscombe's presentiment which he had fulfilled by killing a Basuto. Look! There lay his grinning skull with some patches of hair still on it, dragged away from the rest of the bones by a hyena. I cantered on down the slope beyond the wood and through the scattered thorns to the stream on the banks of which the wagon should be. It had gone, and by the freshness of the trail, within an hour or two. A moment's reflection told me what had happened. Having stolen our oxen the Basutos drove them to the wagon, inspanned them and departed with their loot. On the whole I was glad to see this, since it suggested that they had retired towards their own country, leaving our road open.

Turning my horse I rode back again to meet the cart. As I reached the edge of the wood at the top of the slope I heard a whistle blown, a very shrill whistle, of which the sound would travel for a mile or two on that still air. Also I heard the sound of men's voices in altercation and caught words, such as—"Let go, or by Heaven—!" then a furious laugh and other words which seemed to be—"In five minutes the Kaffirs will be here. In ten you will be dead. Can I help it if they kill you after I have warned you to turn back?" Then a woman's scream.

Rodd's voice, Anscombe's voice and Kaatje's scream—not Heda's but Kaatje's!

Then as I rode furiously round the last patch of intervening trees the sound of a pistol shot. I was out of them now and saw everything. There was the cart on the further side of a swamp. The horses were standing still and snorting. Holding the rein of one of the leaders was Rodd, whose horse also stood close by. He was rocking on his feet and as I leapt from my mare and ran up, I saw his face. It was horrible, full of pain and devilish rage. With his disengaged hand he pointed to Anscombe sitting in the cart and grasping a pistol that still smoked.

"You've killed me," he said in a hoarse, choking voice, for he was shot through the lung, "to get her," and he waved his hand towards Heda who was peering at him between the heads of the two men. "You are a murderer, as her father was, and as David was before you. Well, I hope you won't keep her long. I hope you'll die as I do and break her false heart, you damned thief."

All of this he said in a slow voice, pausing between the words and speaking ever more thickly as the blood from his wound choked him. Then of a sudden it burst in a stream from his lips, and still pointing with an accusing finger at Anscombe, he fell backwards into the slimy pool behind him and there vanished without a struggle.

So horrible was the sight that the driver, Footsack, leapt from the cart, uttering a kind of low howl, ran to Rodd's horse, scrambled into the saddle and galloped off, striking it with his fist, where to I do not know. Anscombe put his hand before his eyes, Heda sank down on the seat in a heap, and the coloured woman, Kaatje, beat her breast and said something in Dutch about being accused or bewitched. Luckily I kept my wits and went to the horses' heads, fearing lest they should start and drag the trap into the pool. "Wake up," I said. "That fellow has only got what he deserved, and you were quite right to shoot him."

"I am glad you think so," answered Anscombe absently. "It was so like murder. Don't you remember I told you I should kill a man in this place and about a woman?"

"I remember nothing," I answered boldly, "except that if we stop here much longer we shall have those Basutos on us. That brute was whistling to them and holding the horses till they came to kill us. Pull yourself together, take the reins and follow me."

He obeyed, being a skilful whip enough who, as he informed me afterwards, had been accustomed to drive a four-in-hand at home. Mounting my horse, which stood by, I guided the cart out of the wood and down the slope beyond, till at length we came to our old outspan where I proposed to turn on to the wagon track which ran to Pilgrim's Rest. I say proposed, for when I looked up it I perceived about five hundred yards away a number of armed Basutos running towards us, the red light of the sunset shining on their

spears. Evidently the scout or spy to whom Rodd whistled, had called them out of their ambush which they had set for us on the Pilgrim's Rest road in order that they might catch us if we tried to escape that way.

Now there was only one thing to be done. At this spot a native track ran across the little stream and up a steepish slope beyond. On the first occasion of our outspanning here I had the curiosity to mount this slope, reflecting as I did so that although rough it would be quite practicable for a wagon. At the top of it I found a wide flat plain, almost high-veld, for the bushes were very few, across which the track ran on. On subsequent inquiry I discovered that it was one used by the Swazis and other natives when they made their raids upon the Basutos, or when bodies of them went to work in the mines.

"Follow me," I shouted and crossed the stream which was shallow between the little pools, then led the way up the stony slope. The four horses negotiated it very well and the Cape cart, being splendidly built, took no harm. At the top I looked back and saw that the Basutos were following us.

"Flog the horses!" I cried to Anscombe, and off we went at a hand gallop along the native track, the cart swaying and bumping upon the rough veld. The sun was setting now, in half an hour it would be quite dark.

Could we keep ahead of them for that half hour?

## CHAPTER IX.

### FLIGHT

The sun sank in a blaze of glory. Looking back by the light of its last rays I saw a single native silhouetted against the red sky. He was standing on a mound that we had passed a mile or more behind us, doubtless waiting for his companions whom he had outrun. So they had not given up the chase. What was to be done? Once it was completely dark we could not go on. We should lose our way; the horses would get into ant-bear holes and break their legs. Perhaps we might become bogged in some hollow, therefore we must wait till the moon rose, which would not be for a couple of hours.

Meanwhile those accursed Basutos would be following us even in the dark. This would hamper them, no doubt, but they would keep the path, with which they were probably familiar, beneath their feet, and what is more, the ground being soft with recent rain, they could feel the wheel spoor with their fingers. I looked about me. Just here another track started off in a nor'-westerly direction from that which we were following. Perhaps it ran to Lydenburg; I do not know. To our left, not more than a hundred yards or so away, the higher veld came to an end and sloped in an easterly direction down to bush-land below.

Should I take the westerly road which ran over a great plain? No, for then we might be seen for miles and cut off. Moreover, even if we escaped the natives, was it desirable we should plunge into civilization just now and tell all our story, as in that case we must do. Rodd's death was quite justified, but it had happened on Transvaal territory and would require a deal of explanation. Fortunately there was no witness of it, except ourselves. Yes, there was though—the driver Footsack, if he had got away, which, being mounted, would seem probable, a man who, for my part, I would not trust for a moment. It would be an ugly thing to see Anscombe in the dock charged with murder and possibly myself, with Footsack giving evidence against us before a Boer jury who might be hard on Englishmen. Also there was the body with a bullet in it.

Suddenly there came into my mind a recollection of the very vivid dream of Zikali which had visited me, and I reflected that in Zululand there would be little need to trouble about the death of Rodd. But Zululand was a long way off, and if we were to avoid the Transvaal, there was only one way of going there, namely through Swaziland. Well, among the Swazis we should be quite safe from the Basutos, since the two peoples were at fierce enmity. Moreover I knew the Swazi chiefs and king very well, having traded there, and could explain that I came to collect debts owing to me.

There was another difficulty. I had heard that the trouble between the English Government and Cetewayo, the Zulu king, was coming to a head, and that the High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere, talked of presenting him with an ultimatum. It would be awkward if this arrived while we were in the country, though even so, being on such friendly terms with the Zulus of all classes, I did not think that I, or any with me, would run great risks.

All these thoughts rushed through my brain while I considered what to do. At the moment it was useless to ask the opinion of the others who were but children in native matters. I and I alone must take the responsibility and act, praying that I might do so aright. Another moment and I had made up my mind.

Signing to Anscombe to follow me, I rode about a hundred yards or more down the nor'-westerly path. Then I turned sharply along a rather stony ridge of ground, the cart following me all the time, and came back across our own track, my object being of course to puzzle any Kaffirs who might spoor us. Now we were on the edge of the gentle slope that led down to the bush-veld. Over this I rode towards a deserted cattle kraal built of stones, in the rich soil of which grew sundry trees; doubtless one of those which had been abandoned when Mosilikatze swept all this country on his way north about the year 1838. The way to it was easy, since the surrounding stones had been collected to build the kraal generations before. As we passed over the edge of the slope in the gathering gloom, Heda cried—

"Look!" and pointed in the direction whence we came. Far away a sheet of flame shot upwards.

"The house is burning," she exclaimed.

"Yes," I said, "it can be nothing else;" adding to myself, "a good job too, for now there will be no postmortem on old Marnham."

Who fired the place I never learnt. It may have been the Basutos, or Marnham's body-servant, or Footsack, or a spark from the kitchen fire. At any rate it blazed merrily enough notwithstanding the marble walls, as a wood-lined and thatched building of course would do. On the whole I suspected the boy, who may very well have feared lest he should be accused of having had a hand in his master's death. At least it was gone, and watching the distant flames I bethought me that with it went all Heda's past. Twenty-four hours before her father was alive, the bondservant of Rodd and a criminal. Now he was ashes and Rodd was dead, while she and the man she loved were free, with all the world before them. I wished that I could have added that they were safe. Afterwards she told me that much the same ideas passed through her own mind.

Dismounting I led the horses into the old kraal through the gap in the wall which once had been the gateway. It was a large kraal that probably in bygone days had held the cattle of some forgotten head chief whose town would have stood on the brow of the rise; so large that notwithstanding the trees I have mentioned, there was plenty of room for the cart and horses in its centre. Moreover, on such soil the grass grew so richly that after we had slipped their bits, the horses were able to fill themselves without being unharnessed. Also a little stream from a spring on the brow ran within a few yards whence, with the help of Kaatje, a strong woman, I

watered them with the bucket which hung underneath the cart. Next we drank ourselves and ate some food in the darkness that was now complete. Then leaving Kaatje to stand at the head of the horses in case they should attempt any sudden movement, I climbed into the cart, and we discussed things in low whispers.

It was a curious debate in that intense gloom which, close as our faces were together, prevented us from seeing anything of each other, except once when a sudden flare of summer lightning revealed them, white and unnatural as those of ghosts. On our present dangers I did not dwell, putting them aside lightly, though I knew they were not light. But of the alternative as to whether we should try to escape to Lydenburg and civilization, or to Zululand and savagery, I felt it to be my duty to speak.

"To put it plainly," said Anscombe in his slow way when I had finished, "you mean that in the Transvaal I might be tried as a murderer and perhaps convicted, whereas if we vanish into Zululand the probability is that this would not happen."

"I mean," I whispered back, "that we might both be tried and, if Footsack should chance to appear and give evidence, find ourselves in an awkward position. Also there is another witness—Kaatje, and for the matter of that, Heda herself. Of course her evidence would be in our favour, but to make it understood by a jury she would have to explain a great deal of which she might prefer not to speak. Further, at the best, the whole business would get into the English papers, which you and your relatives might think disagreeable, especially in view of the fact that, as I understand, you and Heda intend to marry."

"Still I think that I would rather face it out," he said in his outspoken way, "even if it should mean that I could never return to England. After all, of what have I to be afraid? I shot this scoundrel because I was obliged to do so."

"Yes, but it is of this that you may have to convince a jury who might possibly find a motive in Rodd's past, and your present, relationship to the same lady. But what has she to say?"

"I have to say," whispered Heda, "that for myself I care nothing, but that I could never bear to see all these stories about my poor father raked up. Also there is Maurice to be considered. It would be terrible if they put him in prison—or worse. Let us go to Zululand, Mr. Quatermain, and afterwards get out of Africa. Don't you agree, Maurice?"

"What does Mr. Quatermain think himself?" he answered. "He is the oldest and by far the wisest of us and I will be guided by him."

Now I considered and said—

"There is such a thing as flying from present troubles to others that may be worse, the 'ills we know not of.' Zululand is disturbed. If war broke out there we might all be killed. On the other hand we might not, and it ought to be possible for you to work up to Delagoa Bay and there get some ship home, that is if you wish to keep clear of British law. I cannot do so, as I must stay in Africa. Nor can I take the responsibility of settling what you are to do, since if things went wrong, it would be on my head. However, if you decide for the Transvaal or Natal and we escape, I must tell you that I shall go to the first magistrate we find and make a full deposition of all that has happened. It is not possible for me to live with the charge of having been concerned in the shooting of a white man hanging over me that might be brought up at any time, perhaps when no one was left in the country to give evidence on my behalf, for then, even if I were acquitted my name would always be tarnished. In Zululand, on the other hand, there are no magistrates before whom I could depose, and if this business should come out, I can always say that we went there to escape from the Basutos. Now I am going to get down to see if the horses are all right. Do you two talk the thing over and make up your minds. Whatever you agree on, I shall accept and do my best to carry through." Then, without waiting for an answer, I slipped from the cart.

Having examined the horses, who were cropping all the grass within reach of them, I crept to the wall of the kraal so as to be quite out of earshot. The night was now pitch dark, dark as it only knows how to be in Africa. More, a thunderstorm was coming up of which that flash of sheet lightning had been a presage. The air was electric. From the vast bush-clad valley beneath us came a wild, moaning sound caused, I suppose, by wind among the trees, though here I felt none; far away a sudden spear of lightning stabbed the sky. The brooding trouble of nature spread to my own heart. I was afraid, and not of our present dangers, though these were real enough, so real that in a few hours we might all be dead.

To dangers I was accustomed; for years they had been my daily food by day and by night, and, as I think I have said elsewhere, I am a fatalist, one who knows full well that when God wants me He will take me; that is if He can want such a poor, erring creature. Nothing that I did or left undone could postpone or hasten His summons for a moment, though of course I knew it to be my duty to fight against death and to avoid it for as long as I might, because that I should do so was a portion of His plan. For we are all part of a great pattern, and the continuance or cessation of our lives re-acts upon other lives, and therefore life is a trust.

No, it was of greater things that I felt afraid, things terrible and imminent which I could not grasp and much less understand. I understand them now, but who would have guessed that on the issue of that whispered colloquy in the cart behind me, depended the fate of a people and many thousands of lives? As I was to learn in days to come, if Anscombe and Heda had determined upon heading for the Transvaal, there would, as I believe, have been no Zulu war, which in its turn meant that there would have been no Boer Rebellion and that the mysterious course of history would have been changed.

I shook myself together and returned to the cart.

"Well," I whispered, but there was no answer. A moment later there came another flash of lightning.

"There," said Heda, "how many do you make it?"

"Ninety-eight," he answered.

"I counted ninety-nine," she said, "but anyway it was within the hundred. Mr. Quatermain, we will go to Zululand, if you please, if you will show us the way there."

"Right," I answered, "but might I ask what that has to do with your both counting a hundred?"

"Only this," she said, "we could not make up our minds. Maurice was for the Transvaal, I was for Zululand. So you see we agreed that if another flash came before we counted a hundred, we would go to Zululand, and if it didn't, to Pretoria. A very good way of settling, wasn't it?"

"Excellent!" I replied, "quite excellent for those who could think of such a thing."

As a matter of fact I don't know which of them thought of it because I never inquired. But I did remember afterwards how Anscombe had tossed with a lucky penny when it was a question whether we should or should not run for the wagon during our difficulty by the Oliphant's River; also when I asked him the reason for this strange proceeding he answered that Providence might inhabit a penny as well as anything else, and that he wished to give it—I mean Providence—a chance. How much more then, he may have argued, could it inhabit a flash of lightning which has always been considered a divine manifestation from the time of the Roman Jove, and no doubt far before him.

Forty or fifty generations ago, which is not long, our ancestors set great store by the behaviour of lightning and thunder, and doubtless the instinct is still in our blood, in the same way that all our existing superstitions about the moon come down to us from the time when our forefathers worshipped her. They did this for tens of hundreds or thousands of years, and can we expect a few coatings of the veneer that we politely call civilization, which after all is only one of our conventions that vanish in any human stress such as war, to kill out the human impulse it seems to hide? I do not know, though I have my own opinion, and probably these young people never reasoned the matter out. They just acted on an intuition as ancient as that which had attracted them to each other, namely a desire to consult the ruling fates by omens or symbols. Or perhaps Anscombe thought that as his experience with the penny had proved so successful, he would give Providence another "chance." If so it took it and no mistake. Confound it! I don't know what he thought; I only dwell on the matter because of the great results which followed this consultation of the Sybilline books of heaven.

As it happened my speculations, if I really indulged in any at that time, were suddenly extinguished by the bursting of the storm. It was of the usual character, short but very violent. Of a sudden the sky became alive with lightnings and the atmosphere with the roar of winds. One flash struck a tree quite near the kraal, and I saw that tree seem to melt in its fiery embrace, while about where it had been, rose a column of dust from the ground beneath. The horses were so frightened that luckily they stood quite quiet, as I have often known animals to do in such circumstances. Then came the rain, a torrential rain as I, who was out in it holding the horses, became painfully aware. It thinned after a while, however, as the storm rolled away.

Suddenly in a silence between the tremendous echoes of the passing thunder I thought that I heard voices somewhere on the brow of the slope, and as the horses were now quite calm, I crept through the trees to that part of the enclosure which I judged to be nearest to them.

Voices they were sure enough, and of the Basutos who were pursuing us. What was more, they were coming down the slope. The top of the old wall reached almost to my chin. Taking off my hat I thrust my head forward between two loose stones, that I might hear the better.

The men were talking together in Sisutu. One, whom I took to be their captain, said to the others—

"That white-headed old jackal, Macumazahn, has given us the slip again. He doubled on his tracks and drove the horses down the hillside to the lower path in the valley. I could feel where the wheels went over the edge."

"It is so, Father," answered another voice, "but we shall catch him and the others at the bottom if we get there before the moon rises, since they cannot have moved far in this rain and darkness. Let me go first and guide you who know every tree and stone upon this slope where I used to herd cattle when I was a child."

"Do so," said the captain. "I can see nothing now the lightning has gone, and were it not that I have sworn to dip my spear in the blood of Macumazahn who has fooled us again, I would give up the hunt."

"I think it would be better to give it up in any case," said a third voice, "since it is known throughout the land that no luck has ever come to those who tried to trap the Watcher-by-Night. Oh! he is a leopard who springs and is gone again. How many are the throats in which his fangs have met. Leave him alone, I say, lest our fate should be that of the white doctor in the Yellow-wood Swamp, he who set us on this hunt. We have his wagon and his cattle; let us be satisfied."

"I will leave him alone when he sleeps for the last time, and not before," answered the captain, "he who shot my brother in the drift the other day. What would Sekukuni say if we let him escape to bring the Swazis on us? Moreover, we want that white maiden for a hostage in case the English should attack us again. Come, you who know the road, and lead us."

There was some disturbance as this man passed to the front. Then I heard the line move forward. Presently they were going by the wall within a foot or two of me. Indeed by ill-luck just as we were opposite to each other the captain stumbled and fell against the wall.

"There is an old cattle kraal here," he said. "What if those white rats have hidden in it?"

I trembled as I heard the words. If a horse should neigh or make any noise that could be heard above the hiss of the rain! I did not dare to move for fear lest I should betray myself. There I stood so close to the Kaffirs that I could smell them and hear the rain pattering on their bodies. Only very stealthily I drew my hunting knife with my right hand. At that moment the lightning, which I thought had quite gone by, flashed again for the last time, revealing the fat face of the Basuto captain within a foot of my own, for he was turned towards the wall on which one of his hands rested. Moreover, the blue and ghastly light revealed mine to him thrust forward between the two stones, my eyes glaring at him.

"The head of a dead man is set upon the wall!" he cried in terror. "It is the ghost of—"

He got no further, for as the last word passed his lips I drove the knife at him with all my strength deep into his throat. He fell back into the arms of his followers, and next instant I heard the sound of many feet rushing in terror down the hill. What became of him I do not know, but if he still lives, probably he agrees with his tribesman that Macumazahn—Watcher-by-Night, or his ghost "is a leopard who springs and kills and is gone again"; also, that those who try to trap him meet with no luck. I say, or his ghost—because I am sure he thought that I was a spirit of the dead; doubtless I must have looked like one with my white, rain-drowned face appearing there between the stones and made ghastly and livid by the lightning.

Well, they had gone, the whole band of them, not less than thirty or forty men, so I went also, back to the cart where I found the others very comfortable indeed beneath the rainproof tilt. Saying nothing of what had happened, of which they were as innocent as

babes, I took a stiff tot of brandy, for I was chilled through by the wet, and while waiting for the moon to rise, busied myself with getting the bits back into the horses' mouths—an awkward job in the dark. At length it appeared in a clear sky, for the storm had quite departed and the rain ceased. As soon as there was light enough I took the near leader by the bridle and led the cart to the brow of the hill, which was not easy under the conditions, making Kaatje follow with my horse.

Then, as there were no signs of any Basutos, we started on again, I riding about a hundred yards ahead, keeping a sharp look-out for a possible ambush. Fortunately, however, the veld was bare and open, consisting of long waves of ground. One start I did get, thinking that I saw men's heads just on the crest of a wave, which turned out to be only a herd of springbuck feeding among the tussocks of grass. I was very glad to see them, since their presence assured me that no human being had recently passed that way.

All night long we trekked, following the Kaffir path for as long as I could see it, and after that going by my compass. I knew whereabouts the drift of the Crocodile River should be, as I had crossed it twice before in my life, and kept my eyes open for a certain tall koppie which stood within half a mile of it on the Swazi side of the river. Ultimately to my joy I caught sight of this hill faintly outlined against the sky and headed for it. Half a mile further on I struck a wagon-track made by Boers trekking into Swazi-Land to trade or shoot. Then I knew that the drift was straight ahead of us, and called to Anscombe to flog up the weary horses.

We reached the river just before the dawn. To my horror it was very full, so full that the drift looked dangerous, for it had been swollen by the thunder-rain of the previous night. Indeed some wandering Swazis on the further bank shouted to us that we should be drowned if we tried to cross.

"Which means that the only thing to do is to stay until the water runs down," I said to Anscombe, for the two women, tired out, were asleep.

"I suppose so," he answered, "unless those Basutos—"

I looked back up the long slope down which we had come and saw no one. Then I raised myself in my stirrups and looked along another track that joined the road just here, leading from the bush-veld, as ours led from the high-veld. The sun was rising now, dispersing the mist that hung about the trees after the wet. Searching among these with my eyes, presently I perceived the light gleaming upon what I knew must be the points of spears projecting above the level of the ground vapour.

"Those devils are after us by the lower road," I said to Anscombe, adding, "I heard them pass the old cattle kraal last night. They followed our spoor over the edge of the hill, but in the dark lost it among the stones."

He whistled and asked what was to be done.

"That is for you to decide," I answered. "For my part I'd rather risk the river than the Basutos," and I looked at the slumbering Heda.

"Can we bolt back the way we came, Allan?"

"The horses are very spent and we might meet more Basutos," and again I looked at Heda.

"A hard choice, Allan. It is wonderful how women complicate everything in life, because they are life, I suppose." He thought a moment and went on, "Let's try the river. If we fail, it will be soon over, and it is better to drown than be speared."

"Or be kept alive by savages who hate us," I exclaimed, with my eyes still fixed upon Heda.

Then I got to business. There were hide riems on the bridles of the leaders. I undid these and knotted their loose ends firmly together. To them I made fast the riem of my own mare, slipping a loop I tied in it, over my right hand and saying—

"Now I will go first, leading the horses. Do you drive after me for all you are worth, even if they are swept off their feet. I can trust my beast to swim straight, and being a mare, I hope that the horses will follow her as they have done all night. Wake up Heda and Kaatje."

He nodded, and looking very pale, said—

"Heda my dear, I am sorry to disturb you, but we have to get over a river with a rough bottom, so you and Kaatje must hang on and sit tight. Don't be frightened, you are as safe as a church."

"God forgive him for that lie," thought I to myself as, having tightened the girths, I mounted my mare. Then gripping the riem I kicked out for a canter, Anscombe flogging up the team as we swung down the bank to the edge of the foaming torrent, on the further side of which the Swazis shouted and gesticulated to us to go back.

We were in it now, for, as I had hoped, the horses followed the mare without hesitation. For the first twenty yards or so all went well, I heading up the stream. Then suddenly I felt that the mare was swimming.

"Flog the horses and don't let them turn," I shouted to Anscombe.

Ten more yards and I glanced over my shoulder. The team was swimming also, and behind them the cart rocked and bobbed like a boat swinging in a heavy sea. There came a strain on the riem; the leaders were trying to turn! I pulled hard and encouraged them with my voice, while Anscombe, who drove splendidly, kept their heads as straight as he could. Mercifully they came round again and struck out for the further shore, the water-logged cart floating after them. Would it turn over? That was the question in my mind. Five seconds; ten seconds and it was still upright. Oh! it was going. No, a fierce back eddy caught it and set it straight again. My mare touched bottom and there was hope. It struggled forward, being swept down the stream all the time. Now the horses in the cart also found their footing and we were saved.

No, the wet had caused the knot of one of the riems to slip beneath the strain, or perhaps it broke—I don't know. Feeling the pull slacken the leaders whipped round on to the wheelers. There they all stood in a heap, their heads and part of their necks above water, while the cart floated behind them on its side. Kaatje screamed and Anscombe gogged. I leapt from my mare and struggled to the leaders, the water up to my chin. Grasping their bits I managed to keep them from turning further. But I could do no more and death came very near to us. Had it not been for some of those brave Swazis on the bank it would have found us, every one. But they plunged in, eight of them, holding each other's hands, and half-swimming, half-wading, reached us. They got the horses by the head and straightened them out, while Anscombe plied his whip. A dash forward and the wheels were on the bottom again. 3 minutes later we were safe on the further bank that my mare had already reached where I lay gasping on my face, ejaculating prayers of thankfulness and spitting out muddy water.

## CHAPTER X.

### NOMBÉ

The Swazis, shivering, for all these people hate cold, and shaking themselves like a dog when he comes to shore, gathered round, examining me.

"Why!" said one of them, an elderly man who seemed to be their leader, "this is none other than Macumazahn, Watcher-by-Night, the old friend of all us black people. Surely the spirits of our fathers have been with us who might have risked our lives to save a Boer or a half-breed." (The Swazis, I may explain, did not like the Boers for reasons they considered sound.)

"Yes," I said, sitting up, "it is I, Macumazahn."

"Then why," asked the man, "did you, whom all know to be wise, show yourself to have suddenly become a fool?" and he pointed to the raging river.

"And why," I asked, "do you show yourself a fool by supposing that I, whom you know to be none, am a fool? Look across the water for your answer."

He looked and saw the Basutos, fifty or more of them, arriving, just too late.

"Who are these?" he asked.

"They are the people of Sekukuni whom you should know well enough. They have hunted us all night, yes, and before, seeking to murder us; also they have stolen our oxen, thirty-two fine oxen which I give to your king if he can take them back. Now perhaps you understand why we dared the Crocodile River in its rage."

At the name of Sekukuni the man, who it seemed was the captain of some border guards, stiffened all over like a terrier which perceives a rat. "What!" he exclaimed, "do these dirty Basuto dogs dare to carry spears so near our country? Have they not yet learned their lesson?"

Then he rushed into the water, shaking an assegai he had snatched up, and shouted,

"Bide a while, you fleas from the kaross of Sekukuni, till I can come across and crack you between my thumb and finger. Or at the least wait until Macumazahn has time to get his rifle. No, put down those guns of yours; for every shot you fire I swear that I will cut ten Basuto throats when we come to storm your koppies, as we shall do ere long."

"Be silent," I said, "and let me speak."

Then I, too, called across the river, asking where was that fat captain of theirs, as I would talk with him. One of the men shouted back that he had stopped behind, very sick, because of a ghost that he had seen.

"Ah!" I answered, "a ghost who pricked him in the throat. Well, I was that ghost, and such are the things that happen to those who would harm Macumazahn and his friends. Did you not say last night that he is a leopard who leaps out in the dark, bites and is gone again?"

"Yes," the man shouted back, "and it is true, though had we known, O Macumazahn, that you were the ghost hiding in those stones, you should never have leapt again. Oh! that white medicine-man who is dead has sent us on a mad errand."

"So you will think when I come to visit you among your koppies. Go home and take a message from Macumazahn to Sekukuni, who believes that the English have run away from him. Tell him that they will return again and these Swazis with them, and that then he will cease to live and his town will be burnt and his tribe will no more be a tribe. Away now, more swiftly than you came, since the water by which you thought to trap us is falling, and a Swazi impi gathers to make an end of every one of you."

The man attempted no answer, nor did his people so much as fire on us. They turned tail and crept off like a pack of frightened jackals—pursued by the mocking of the Swazis.

Still in a way they had the laugh of us, seeing that they gave us a terrible fright and stole our wagon and thirty-two oxen. Well, a year or two later I helped to pay them back for that fright and even recovered some of the oxen.

When they had gone the Swazis led us to a kraal about two miles from the river, sending on a runner with orders to make huts and food ready for us. It was just as much as we could do to reach it, for we were all utterly worn out, as were the horses. Still we did get there at last, the hot sun warming us as we went. Arrived at the kraal I helped Heda and Kaatje from the cart—the former could scarcely walk, poor dear—and into the guest hut which seemed clean, where food of a sort and fur karosses were brought to them in which to wrap themselves while their clothes dried.

Leaving them in charge of two old women, I went to see to Anscombe, who as yet could not do much for himself, also to the outspanning of the horses which were put into a cattle kraal, where they lay down at once without attempting to eat the green forage which was given to them. After this I gave our goods into the charge of the kraal-head, a nice old fellow whom I had never met before, and he led Anscombe to another hut close to that where the women were. Here we drank some maas, that is curdled milk, ate a little mutton, though we were too fatigued to be very hungry, and stripping off our wet clothes, threw them out into the sun to dry.

"That was a close shave," said Anscombe as he wrapped up in the kaross.

"Very," I answered. "So close that I think you must have been started in life with an extra strong guardian angel well accustomed to native ways."

"Yes," he replied, "and, old fellow, I believe that on earth he goes by the name of Allan Quatermain."

After this I remember no more, for I went to sleep, and so remained for about twenty-four hours. This was not wonderful, seeing that for two days and nights practically I had not rested, during which time I went through much fatigue and many emotions.

When at length I did wake up, the first thing I saw was Anscombe already dressed, engaged in cleaning my clothes with a brush from his toilet case. I remember thinking how smart and incongruous that dressing-bag, made appropriately enough of crocodile hide, looked in this Kaffir hut with its silver-topped bottles and its ivory-handled razors.

"Time to get up, Sir. Bath ready, Sir," he said in his jolly, drawling voice, pointing to a calabash full of hot water. "Hope you slept as well as I did, Sir."

"You appear to have recovered your spirits," I remarked as I rose and began to wash myself.

"Yes, Sir, and why not? Heda is quite well, for I have seen her. These Swazis are very good people, and as Kaatje understands their language, bring us all we want. Our troubles seem to be done with. Old Marnham is dead, and doubtless cremated; Rodd is dead and, let us hope, in heaven; the Basutos have melted away, the morning is fine and warm and a whole kid is cooking for breakfast."

"I wish there were two, for I am ravenous," I remarked.

"The horses are getting rested and feeding well, though some of their legs have filled, and the trap is little the worse, for I have walked to look at them, or rather hopped, leaning on the shoulder of a very sniffy Swazi boy. Do you know, old fellow, I believe there never were any Basutos; also that the venerable Marnham and the lurid Rodd had no real existence, that they were but illusions, a prolonged nightmare—no more. Here is your shirt. I am sorry that I have not had time to wash it, but it has cooked well in the sun, which, being flannel, is almost as good."

"At any rate Heda remains," I remarked, cutting his nonsense short, "and I suppose she is not a nightmare or a delusion."

"Yes, thank God! she remains," he replied with earnestness. "Oh! Allan, I thought she must drown in that river, and if I had lost her, I think I should have gone mad. Indeed, at the moment I felt myself going mad while I dragged and flogged at those horses."

"Well, you didn't lose her, and if she had drowned, you would have drowned also. So don't talk any more about it. She is safe, and now we have got to keep her so, for you are not married yet, my boy, and there are generally more trees in a wood than one can see. Still we are alive and well, which is more than we had any right to expect, and, as you say, let us thank God for that."

Then I put on my coat and my boots which Anscombe had greased as he had no blacking, and crept from the hut.

There, only a few yards away, engaged in setting the breakfast in the shadow of another hut on a tanned hide that served for a tablecloth while Kaatje saw to the cooking close by, I found Heda, still a little pale and sorrowful but otherwise quite well and rested. Moreover, she had managed to dress herself very nicely, I suppose by help of spare clothes in the cart, and therefore looked as charming as she always did. I think that her perfect manners were one of her greatest attractions. Thus on this morning her first thought was to thank me very sweetly for all she was good enough to say I had done for her and Anscombe, thereby, as she put it, saving their lives several times over.

"My dear young lady," I answered as roughly as I could, "don't flatter yourself on that point; it was my own life of which I was thinking."

But she only smiled and, shaking her head in a fascinating way that was peculiar to her, remarked that I could not deceive her as I did the Kaffirs. After this the solid Kaatje brought the food and we breakfasted very heartily, or at least I did.

Now I am not going to set out all the details of our journey through Swazi-Land, for though in some ways it was interesting enough, also as comfortable as a stay among savages can be, for everywhere we were kindly received, to do so would be too long, and I must get on with my story. At the king's kraal, which we did not reach for some days as the absence of roads and the flooded state of the rivers, also the need of sparing our horses, caused us to travel very slowly, I met a Boer who I think was concession hunting.

He told me that things were really serious in Zululand, so serious that he thought there was a probability of immediate war between the English and the Zulus. He said also that Cetewayo, the Zulu king, had sent messengers to stir up the Basutos and other tribes against the white men, with the result that Sekukuni had already made a raid towards Pilgrim's Rest and Lydenburg.

I expressed surprise and asked innocently if he had done any harm. The Boer replied he understood that they had stolen some cattle, killed two white men, if not more, and burnt their house. He added, however, that he was not sure whether the white men had been killed by the Kaffirs or by other white men with whom they had quarrelled. There was a rumour to this effect, and he understood that the magistrate of Barberton had gone with some mounted police and armed natives to investigate the matter.

Then we parted, as, having got his concession to which the king Umbandine had put his mark when he was drunk on brandy that the Boer himself had brought with him as a present, he was anxious to be gone before he grew sober and revoked it. Indeed, he was in so great a hurry that he never stopped to inquire what I was doing in Swazi-Land, nor do I think he realized that I was not alone. Certainly he was quite unaware that I had been mixed up in these Basuto troubles. Still his story as to the investigation concerning the deaths of Marnham and Rodd made me uneasy, since I feared lest he should hear something on his journey and put two and two together, though as a matter of fact I don't think he ever did either of these things.

The Swazis told me much the same story as to the brewing Zulu storm. In fact an old Induna or councillor, whom I knew, informed me that Cetewayo had sent messengers to them, asking for their help if it should come to fighting with the white men, but that the king and councillors answered that they had always been the Queen's children (which was not strictly true, as they were never under English rule) and did not wish to "bite her feet if she should have to fight with her hands." I replied that I hoped they would always act up to these fine words, and changed the subject.

Now once more the question arose as to whether we should make for Natal or press on to Zululand. The rumour of coming war suggested that the first would be our better course, while the Boer's story as to the investigation of Rodd's death pointed the other

way. Really I did not know which to do, and as usual Anscombe and Heda seemed inclined to leave the decision to me. I think that after all Natal would have gained the day had it not been for a singular circumstance, not a flash of lightning this time. Indeed, I had almost made up my mind to risk trouble and inquiry as to Rodd's death, remembering that in Natal these two young people could get married, which, being in loco parentis, I thought it desirable they should do as soon as possible, if only to ease me of my responsibilities. Also thence I could attend to the matter of Heda's inheritance and rid myself of her father's will that already had been somewhat damaged in the Crocodile River, though not as much as it might have been since I had taken the precaution to enclose it in Anscombe's sponge bag before we left the house.

The circumstance was this: On emerging from the cart one morning, where I slept to keep an eye upon the valuables, for it will be remembered that we had a considerable sum in gold with us, also Heda's jewels, a Swazi informed me that a messenger wished to see me. I asked what messenger and whence did he come. He replied that the messenger was a witch-doctress named Nombé, and that she came from Zululand and said that I knew her father.

I bade the man bring her to me, wondering who on earth she could be, for it is not usual for the Zulus to send women as messengers, and from whom she came. However, I knew exactly what she would be like, some hideous old hag smelling horribly of grease and other abominations, with a worn snake skin and some human bones tied about her.

Presently she came, escorted by the Swazi who was grinning, for I think he guessed what I expected to see. I stared and rubbed my eyes, thinking that I must still be asleep, for instead of a fat old Isanusi there appeared a tall and graceful young woman, rather light-coloured, with deep and quiet eyes and a by no means ill-favoured face, remarkable for a fixed and somewhat mysterious smile. She was a witch-doctress sure enough, for she wore in her hair the regulation bladders and about her neck the circlet of baboon's teeth, also round her middle a girdle from which hung little bags of medicines.

She contemplated me gravely and I contemplated her, waiting till she should choose to speak. At length, having examined me inch by inch, she saluted by raising her rounded arm and tapering hand, and remarked in a soft, full voice—

"All is as the picture told. I perceive before me the lord Macumazahn."

I thought this a strange saying, seeing that I could not recollect having given my photograph to any one in Zululand.

"You need no magic to tell you that, doctress," I remarked, "but where did you see my picture?"

"In the dust far away," she replied.

"And who showed it to you?"

"One who knew you, O Macumazahn, in the years before I came out of the Darkness, one named Opener of Roads, and with him another who also knew you in those years, one who has gone down to the Darkness."

Now for some occult reason I shrank from asking the name of this "one who had gone down to the Darkness," although I was sure that she was waiting for the question. So I merely remarked, without showing surprise—

"So Zikali still lives, does he? He should have been dead long ago."

"You know well that he lives, Macumazahn, for how could he die till his work was accomplished? Moreover, you will remember that he spoke to you when last moon was but just past her full—in a dream, Macumazahn. I brought that dream, although you did not see me."

"Pish!" I exclaimed. "Have done with your talk of dreams. Who thinks anything of dreams?"

"You do," she replied even more placidly than before, "you whom that dream has brought hither—with others."

"You lie," I said rudely. "The Basutos brought me here."

"The Watcher-by-Night is pleased to say that I lie, so doubtless I do lie," she answered, her fixed smile deepening a little. Then she folded her arms across her breast and remained silent.

"You are a messenger, O seer of pictures in the dust and bearer of the cup of dreams," I said with sarcasm. "Who sends a message by your lips for me, and what are the words of the message?"

"My Lords the Spirits spoke the message by the mouth of the master Zikali. He sends it on to you by the lips of your servant, the doctress Nombé."

"Are you indeed a doctress, being so young?" I asked, for somehow I wished to postpone the hearing of that message.

"O Macumazahn, I have heard the call, I have felt the pain in my back, I have drunk of the black medicine and of the white medicine, yes, for a whole year. I have been visited by the multitude of Spirits and seen the shades of those who live and of those who are dead. I have dived into the river and drawn my snake from its mud; see, its skin is about me now," and opening the mantle she wore she showed what looked like the skin of a black mamba, fastened round her slender body. "I have dwelt in the wilderness alone and listened to its voices. I have sat at the feet of my master, the Opener of Roads, and looked down the road and drunk of his wisdom. Yes, I am in truth a doctress."

"Well, after all this, you should be as wise as you are pretty."

"Once before, Macumazahn, you told a maid of my people that she was pretty and she came to no good end; though to one that was great. Therefore do not say to me that I am pretty, though I am glad that you should think so who can compare me with so many whom you have known," and she dropped her eyes, looking a little shy.

It was the first human touch I had seen about her, and I was glad to have found a weak spot in her armour. Moreover, from that moment she was always my friend.

"As you will, Nombé. Now for your message."

"My Lords the Spirits, speaking through Zikali as one who makes music speak through a pipe of reeds, say—"

"Never mind what the spirits say. Tell me what Zikali says," I interrupted.

“So be it, Macumazahn. These are the words of Zikali: ‘O Watcher-by-Night, the time draws on when the Thing-who-should-never-have-been-born will be as though he never had been born, whereat he rejoices. But first there is much for him to do, and as he told you nearly three hundred moons ago, in what must be done you will have your part. Of that he will speak to you afterwards. Macumazahn, you dreamed a dream, did you not, lying asleep in the house that was built of white stone which now is black with fire? I, Zikali, sent you that dream through the arts of a child of mine who is named Nombé, she to whom I have given a Spirit to guide her feet. You did well to follow it, Macumazahn, for had you tried the other path, which would have led you back to the towns of the white men, you and those with you must have been killed, how it does not matter. Now by the mouth of Nombé I say to you, do not follow the thought that is in your mind as she speaks to you and go to Natal, since if you do so, you and those with you will come to much shame and trouble that to you would be worse than death, over the matter of the killing of a certain white doctor in a swamp where grow yellow-wood trees. For there in Natal you will be taken, all of you, and sent back to the Transvaal to be tried before a man who wears upon his head horse’s hair stained white. But if you come to Zululand this shadow shall pass away from you, since great things are about to happen which will cause so small a matter to be forgot. Moreover, I Zikali, who do not lie, promise this: That however great may be their dangers here in Zululand, those half-fledged ones whom you, the old night-hawk, cover with your wings, shall in the end suffer no harm; those of whom I spoke to you in your dream, the white lord, Mauriti, and the white lady, Heddana, who stretch out their arms one to another. I wait to welcome you, here at the Black Kloof, whither my daughter Nombé will guide you. Cetewayo, the king, also will welcome you, and so will another whose name I do not utter. Now choose. I have spoken.’”

Having delivered her message Nombé stood quite still, smiling as before, and apparently indifferent as to its effect.

“How do I know that you come from Zikali?” I asked. “You may be but the bait set upon a trap.”

From somewhere within her robe she produced a knife and handed it to me, remarking—

“The Master says you will remember this, and by it know that the message comes from him. He bade me add that with it was carved a certain image that once he gave to you at Panda’s kraal, wrapped round with a woman’s hair, which image you still have.”

I looked at the knife and did remember it, for it was one of those of Swedish make with a wooden handle, the first that I had ever seen in Africa. I had made a present of it to Zikali when I returned to Zululand before the war between the Princes. The image, too, I still possessed. It was that of the woman called Mameena who brought about the war, and the wrapping which covered it was of the hair that once grew upon her head.

“The words are Zikali’s,” I said, returning her the knife, “but why do you call yourself the child of one who is too old to be a father?”

“The Master says that my great-grandmother was his daughter and that therefore I am his child. Now, Macumazahn, I go to eat with my people, for I have servants with me. Then I must speak with the Swazi king, for whom I also have a message, which I cannot do at present because he is still drunk with the white man’s liquor. After that I shall be ready to return with you to Zululand.”

“I never said that I was going to Zululand, Nombé.”

“Yet your heart has gone there already, Macumazahn, and you must follow your heart. Does not the image which was carved with the knife you gave, hold a white heart in its hand, and although it seems to be but a bit of Umzimbeete wood, is it not alive and bewitched, which perhaps is why you could never make up your mind to burn it, Macumazahn?”

“I wish I had,” I replied angrily; but having thrown this last spear, with a flash of her unholy eyes Nombé had turned and gone.

A clever woman and thoroughly coached, thought I. Well, Zikali was never one to suffer fools, and doubtless she is another of the pawns whom he uses on his board of policy. Oh! she, or rather he was right; my heart was in Zululand, though not in the way he thought, and I longed to see the end of that great game played by a wizard against a despot and his hosts.

So we went to Zululand because after talking it over we all came to the conclusion that this was the best thing to do, especially as there we seemed to be sure of a welcome. For later in the day Nombé repeated to Anscombe and Heda the invitation which she had delivered to me, assuring them also that in Zululand they would come to no harm.

It was curious to watch the meeting between Heda and Nombé. The doctress appeared just as we had risen from breakfast, and Heda, turning round, came face to face with her.

“Is this your witch, Mr. Quatermain?” she asked me in her vivacious way. “Why, she is different from what I expected, quite good-looking and, yes, impressive. I am not sure that she does not frighten me a little.”

“What does the Inkosikaasi (i.e., the chieftainess) say concerning me, Macumazahn?” asked Nombé.

“Only what I said, that you are young who she thought would be old, and pretty who she thought would be ugly.”

“To grow old we must first be young, Macumazahn, and in due season all of us will become ugly, even the Inkosikaasi. But I thought she said also that she feared me.”

“Do you know English, Nombé?”

“Nay, but I know how to read eyes, and the Inkosikaasi has eyes that talk. Tell her that she has no reason to fear me who would be her friend, though I think that she will bring me little luck.”

It was scarcely necessary, so far as Heda was concerned, but I translated, leaving out the last sentence.

“Say to her that I am grateful who have few friends, and that I will fear her no more,” said Heda.

Again I translated, whereon Nombé stretched out her hand, saying—

“Let her not scorn to take it, it is clean. It has brought no man to his death—” Here she looked at Heda meaningly. “Moreover, though she is white and I am black, I like myself am of high blood and come of a race of warriors who did nothing small, and lastly, we are of an age, and if she is beautiful, I am wise and have gifts great as her own.”

Once more I interpreted for the benefit of Anscombe, for Heda understood Zulu well enough, although she had pretended not to do so, after which the two shook hands, to Anscombe’s amusement and my wonder. For I felt this scene to be strained and one that hid,

or presaged, something I did not comprehend.

“This is the Chief she loves?” said Nombé to me, studying Anscombe with her steady eyes after Heda had gone. “Well, he is no common man and brave, if idle; one, too, who may grow tall in the world, should he live, when he has learned to think. But, Macumazahn, if she met you both at the same time why did she not choose you?”

“Just now you said you were wise, Nombé,” I replied laughing, “but now I see that, like most of your trade, you are but a vain boaster. Is there a hat upon my head that you cannot see the colour of my hair, and is it natural that youth should turn to age?”

“Sometimes if the mind is old, Macumazahn, which is why I love the Spirits only who are more ancient than the mountains, and with them Zikali their servant, who was young before the Zulus were a people, or so he says, and still year by year gathers wisdom as the bee gathers honey. Inspan your horses, Macumazahn, for I have done my business and am ready to start.”

## CHAPTER XI.

### ZIKALI

Ten days had gone by when once more I found myself drawing near to the mouth of the Black Kloof where dwelt Zikali the Wizard. Our journey in Zululand had been tedious and uneventful. It seemed to me that we met extraordinarily few people; it was as though the place had suddenly become depopulated, and I even passed great kraals where there was no one to be seen. I asked Nombé what was the meaning of this, for she and three silent men she had with her were acting as our guides. Once she answered that the people had moved because of lack of food, as the season had been one of great scarcity owing to drought, and once that they had been summoned to a gathering at the king's kraal near Ulundi. At any rate they were not there, and the few who did appear stared at us strangely.

Moreover, I noticed that they were not allowed to speak to us. Also Heda was kept in the cart and Nombé insisted that the rear canvas curtain should be closed and a blanket fastened behind Anscombe who drove, evidently with the object that she should not be seen. Further, on the plea of weariness, from the time that we entered Zulu territory Nombé asked to be allowed to ride in the cart with Kaatje and Heda, her real reason, as I was sure, being that she might keep a watch on them. Lastly we travelled by little-frequented tracks, halting at night in out-of-the-way places, where, however, we always found food awaiting us, doubtless by arrangement.

With one man whom I had known in past days and who recognized me, I did manage to have a short talk. He asked me what I was doing in Zululand at that time. I replied that I was on a visit to Zikali, whereon he said I should be safer with him than with any one else.

Our conversation went no further, for just then one of Nombé's servants appeared and made some remark to the man of which I could not catch the meaning, whereon he promptly turned and departed, leaving me wondering and uneasy.

Evidently we were being isolated, but when I remonstrated with Nombé she only answered with her most unfathomable smile—

"O Macumazahn, you must ask Zikali of all these things. I am no one and know nothing, who only do what the Master tells me is for your good."

"I am minded to turn and depart from Zululand," I said angrily, "for in this low veld whither you have led us there is fever and the horses will catch sickness or be bitten by the tsetse fly and perish."

"I cannot say, Macumazahn, who only travel by the road the Master pointed out. Yet if you will be guided by me, you will not try to leave Zululand."

"You mean that I am in a trap, Nombé."

"I mean that the country is full of soldiers and that all white men have fled from it. Therefore, even if you were allowed to pass because the Zulus love you, Macumazahn, it might well happen that those with you would stay behind, sound asleep, Macumazahn, for which, like you, I should be sorry."

After this I said no more, for I knew that she meant to warn me. We had entered on this business and must see it through to its end, sweet or bitter.

As for Anscombe and Heda their happiness seemed to be complete. The novelty of the life charmed them, and of its dangers they took no thought, being content to leave me, in whom they had a blind faith, to manage everything. Moreover, Heda, who in the joy of her love was beginning to forget the sorrow of her father's death and the other tragic events through which she had just passed, took a great fancy to the young witch-doctress who conversed with her in Zulu, a language of which, having lived so long in Natal, Heda knew much already. Indeed, when I suggested to her that to be over-trusting was not wise, she fired up and replied that she had been accustomed to natives all her life and could judge them, adding that she had every confidence in Nombé.

After this I held my tongue and said no more of my doubts. What was the use since Heda would not listen to them, and at that time Anscombe was nothing but her echo?

So this, for me, very dull journey continued, till at length, after being held up for a couple of days by a flooded river where there was nothing to do but sit and smoke, as Nombé requested me not to make a noise by shooting at the big game that abounded, we began to emerge from the bush-veld on to the lovely uplands in the neighbourhood of Nongoma. Leaving these on our right we headed for a place called Ceza, a natural stronghold consisting of a flat plain on the top of a mountain, which plain is surrounded by bush. It is at the foot of this stronghold that the Black Kloof lies, being one of the ravines that run up into the mountain.

So thither we came at last. It was drawing towards sunset, a tremendous and stormy sunset, as we approached the place, and lo! it looked exactly as it had done when first I saw it more than a score of years before, forbidding as the mouth of hell, vast and lonesome. There stood the columns of boulders fantastically piled one upon another; there grew the sparse trees upon its steep sides, mingled with aloes that looked like the shapes of men; there was the granite bottom swept almost clean by floods in some dim age, and the little stream that flowed along it. There, too, was the spot where once I had outspanned my wagons on the night when my servants swore that they saw the Imikovu, or wizard-raised spectres, floating past them on the air in the shapes of the Princes and others who

were soon to fall at the battle of the Tugela. Up it we went, I riding and Nombé, who had descended from the cart that followed, walking by my side and watching me.

"You seem sad, Macumazahn," she said at length.

"Yes, Nombé, I am sad. This place makes me so."

"Is it the place, Macumazahn, or is it the thought of one whom once you met in the place, one who is dead?"

I looked at her, pretending not to understand, and she went on—

"I have the gift of vision, Macumazahn, which comes at times to those of my trade, and now and again, amongst others, I have seemed to see the spirit of a certain woman haunting this kloof as though she were waiting for some one."

"Indeed, and what may that woman be like?" I inquired carelessly.

"As it chances I can see her now gliding backwards in front of you just there, and therefore am able to answer your question, Macumazahn. She is tall and slender, beautifully made, and light-coloured for one of us black people. She has large eyes like a buck, and those eyes are full of fire that does not come from the sun but from within. Her face is tender yet proud, oh! so proud that she makes me afraid. She wears a cloak of grey fur, and about her neck there is a circlet of big blue beads with which her fingers play. A thought comes from her to me. These are the words of the thought: 'I have waited long in this dark place, watching by day and night till you, the Watcher-by-Night, return to meet me here. At length you have come, and in this enchanted place my hungry spirit can feed upon your spirit for a while. I thank you for coming, who now am no more lonely. Fear nothing, Macumazahn, for by a certain kiss I swear to you that till the appointed hour when you become as I am, I will be a shield upon your arm and a spear in your hand.' Such are the words of her thought, Macumazahn, but she has gone away and I hear no more. It was as though your horse rode over her and she passed through you."

Then, like one who wished to answer no questions, Nombé turned and went back to the cart, where she began to talk indifferently with Heda, for as soon as we entered the kloof her servants had drawn back the curtains and let fall the blanket. As for me, I groaned, for of course I knew that Zikali, who was well acquainted with the appearance of Mameena, had instructed Nombé to say all this to me in order to impress my mind for some reason of his own. Yet he had done it cleverly, for such words as those Mameena might well have uttered could her great spirit have need to walk the earth again. Was such a thing possible, I wondered? No, it was not possible, yet it was true that her atmosphere seemed to cling about this place and that my imagination, excited by memory and Nombé's suggestions, seemed to apprehend her presence.

As I reflected the horse advanced round the little bend in the ever-narrowing cliffs, and there in front of me, under the gigantic mass of overhanging rock, appeared the kraal of Zikali surrounded by its reed fence. The gate of the fence was open, and beyond it, on his stool in front of the large hut, sat Zikali. Even at that distance it was impossible to mistake his figure, which was like no other that I had known in the world. A broad-shouldered dwarf with a huge head, deep, sunken eyes and snowy hair that hung upon his shoulders; the whole frame and face pervaded with an air of great antiquity, and yet owing to the plumpness of the flesh and that freshness of skin which is sometimes seen in the aged, comparatively young-looking.

Such was the great wizard Zikali, known throughout the land for longer than any living man could remember as "Opener of Roads," a title that referred to his powers of spiritual vision, also as the "Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born," a name given to him by Chaka, the first and greatest of the Zulu kings, because of his deformity.

There he sat silent, impassive, staring open-eyed at the red ball of the setting sun, looking more like some unshapely statue than a man. His silent, fierce-faced servants appeared. To me they looked like the same men whom I had seen here three and twenty years before, only grown older. Indeed, I think they were, for they greeted me by name and saluted by raising their broad spears. I dismounted and waited while Anscombe, whose foot was now quite well again, helped Heda from the cart which was led away by the servants. Anscombe, who seemed a little oppressed, remarked that this was a strange place.

"Yes," said Heda, "but it is magnificent. I like it."

Then her eye fell upon Zikali seated before the hut and she turned pale.

"Oh! what a terrible-looking man," she murmured, "if he is a man."

The maid Kaatje saw him also and uttered a little cry.

"Don't be frightened, dear," said Anscombe, "he is only an old dwarf."

"I suppose so," she exclaimed doubtfully, "but to me he is like the devil."

Nombé slid past us. She threw off the kaross she wore and for the first time appeared naked except for the muchu about her middle and her ornaments. Down she went on her hands and knees and in this humble posture crept towards Zikali. Arriving in front of him she touched the ground with her forehead, then lifting her right arm, gave the salute of *Makosi*, to which as a great wizard he was entitled, being supposed to be the home of many spirits. So far as I could see he took no notice of her. Presently she moved and squatted herself down on his right hand, while two of his attendants appeared from behind the hut and took their stand between him and its doorway, holding their spears raised. About a minute later Nombé beckoned to us to approach, and we went forward across the courtyard, I a little ahead of the others. As we drew near Zikali opened his mouth and uttered a loud and terrifying laugh. How well I remembered that laugh which I had first heard at Dingaan's kraal as a boy after the murder of Retief and the Boers.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] See the book called *Marie*, by H. Rider Haggard.

"I begin to think that you are right and that this old gentleman must be the devil," said Anscombe to Heda, then lapsed into silence.

As I was determined not to speak first I took the opportunity to fill my pipe. Zikali, who was watching me, although all the while he seemed to be staring at the setting sun, made a sign. One of the servants dashed away and immediately returned, bearing a flaming brand which he proffered to me as a pipe-lighter. Then he departed again to bring three carved stools of red wood which he placed for us. I looked at mine and knew it again by the carvings. It was the same on which I had sat when first I met Zikali. At length he spoke in his deep, slow voice.

"Many years have gone by, Macumazahn, since you made use of that stool. They are cut in notches upon the leg you hold and you may count them if you will."

I examined the leg. There were the notches, twenty-two or three of them. On the other legs were more notches too numerous to reckon.

"Do not look at those, Macumazahn, for they have nothing to do with you. They tell the years since the first of the House of Senzangaona sat upon that stool, since Chaka sat upon it, since Dingaan and others sat upon it, one Mameena among them. Well, much has happened since it served you for a rest. You have wandered far and seen strange things and lived where others would have died because it was your lot to live, of all of which we will talk afterwards. And now when you are grey you have come back here, as the Opener of Roads told you you would do, bringing with you new companions, you who have the art of making friends even when you are old, which is one given to few men. Where are those with whom you used to company, Macumazahn? Where are Saduko and Mameena and the rest? All gone except the Thing-who-should-never-have-been-born," and again he laughed loudly.

"And who it seems has never learned when to die," I remarked, speaking for the first time.

"Just so, Macumazahn, because I cannot die until my work is finished. But thanks be to the spirits of my fathers and to my own that I live on to glut with vengeance, the end draws near at last, and as I promised you in the dead days, you shall have your share in it, Macumazahn."

He paused, then continued, still staring at the sinking sun, which made his remarks about us, whom he did not seem to see, uncanny—

"That white man with you is brave and well-born, one who loves fighting, I think, and the maiden is fair and sweet, with a high spirit. She is thinking to herself that I am an old wizard whom, if she were not afraid of me, she would ask to tell her her fortune. See, she understands and starts. Well, perhaps I will one day. Meanwhile, here is a little bit of it. She will have five children, of whom two will die and one will give her so much trouble that she will wish it had died also. But who their father will be I do not say. Nombé my child, lead away this White One and her woman to the hut that has been made ready for her, for she is weary and would rest. See, too, that she lacks for nothing which we can give her who is our guest. Let the white lord, Mauriti, accompany her to the hut and be shown that next to it in which he and Macumazahn will sleep, so that he may be sure that she is safe, and attend to the horses if he wills. There is a place to tether them behind the huts, and the men who travelled with you will help him. Afterwards, when I have spoken with him, Macumazahn can join them that they may eat before they sleep."

These directions I translated to Anscombe, who went gladly enough with Heda, for I think they were both afraid of the terrible old dwarf and did not desire his company in the gathering gloom.

"The sun sinks once more, Macumazahn," he said when they were gone, "and the air grows chill. Come with me now into my hut where the fire burns, for I am aged and the cold strikes through me. Also there we can be alone."

So speaking he turned and crawled into the hut, looking like a gigantic white-headed beetle as he did so, a creature, I remembered, to which I had once compared him in the past. I followed, carrying the historic stool, and when he had seated himself on his kaross on the further side of the fire, took up my position opposite to him. This fire was fed with some kind of root or wood that gave a thin clear flame with little or no smoke. Over it he crouched, so closely that his great head seemed to be almost in the flame at which he stared with unblinking eyes as he had done at the sun, circumstances which added to his terrifying appearance and made me think of a certain region and its inhabitants.

"Why do you come here, Macumazahn?" he asked after studying me for a while through that window of fire.

"Because you brought me, Zikali, partly through your messenger, Nombé, and partly by means of a dream which she says you sent."

"Did I, Macumazahn? If so, I have forgotten it. Dreams are as many as gnats by the water; they bite us while we sleep, but when we wake up we forget them. Also it is foolishness to say that one man can send a dream to another."

"Then your messenger lied, Zikali, especially as she added that she brought it."

"Of course she lied, Macumazahn. Is she not my pupil whom I have trained from a child? Moreover, she lied well, it would seem, who guessed what sort of a dream you would have when you thought of turning your steps to Zululand."

"Why do you play at sticks (i.e., fence) with me, Zikali, seeing that neither of us are children?"

"O Macumazahn, that is where you are mistaken, seeing that both of us, old though we be and cunning though we think ourselves, are nothing but babes in the arms of Fate. Well, well, I will tell you the truth, since it would be foolish to try to throw dust into such eyes as yours. I knew that you were down in Sekukuni's country and I was watching you—through my spies. You have been nowhere during all these years that I was not watching you—through my spies. For instance, that Arab-looking man named Harut, whom first you met at a big kraal in a far country, was a spy of mine. He has visited me lately and told me much of your doings. No, don't ask me of him now who would talk to you of other matters—"

"Does Harut still live then, and has he found a new god in place of the Ivory Child?" I interrupted.

"Macumazahn, if he did not live, how could he visit and speak with me? Well, I watched you there by the Oliphant's River where you fought Sekukuni's people, and afterwards in the marble hut where you found the old white man dead in his chair and got the writings that you have in your pocket which concern the maiden Heddana; also afterwards when the white man, your friend, killed the doctor who fell into a mud hole and the Basutos stole his cattle and wagon."

"How do you know all these things, Zikali?"

"Have I not told you—through my spies. Was there not a half-breed driver called Footsack, and do not the Basutos come and go between the Black Kloof and Sekukuni's town, bearing me tidings?"

"Yes, Zikali, and so does the wind and so do the birds."

"True! O Macumazahn, I see that you are one who has watched Nature and its ways as closely as my spies watch you. So I learned these matters and knew that you were in trouble over the death of these white men, and your friends likewise, and as you were always dear to me, I sent that child Nombé to bring you to me, thinking from what I knew of you that you would be more likely to follow a woman who is both wise and good to look at, than a man who might be neither. I told her to say to you that you and the others would be safer here than in Natal at present. It seems that you hearkened and came. That is all."

"Yes, I hearkened and came. But, Zikali, that is not all, for you know well that you sent for me for your own sake, not for mine."

"O Macumazahn, who can prevent a needle from piercing cloth when it is pushed by a finger like yours? Your wits are too sharp for me, Macumazahn; your eyes read through the blanket of cunning with which I would hide my thought. You speak truly. I did send for you for my own sake as well as for yours. I sent for you because I wanted your counsel, Macumazahn, and because Cetewayo the king also wants your counsel, and I wished to see you before you saw Cetewayo. Now you have the whole truth."

"What do you want my counsel about, Zikali?"

He leaned forward till his white locks almost seemed to mingle with the thin flame, through which he glared at me with eyes that were fiercer than the fire.

"Macumazahn, you remember the story that I told you long ago, do you not?"

"Very well, Zikali. It was that you hate the House of Senzangaona which has given all its kings to Zululand. First, because you are one of the Dwandwe tribe whom the Zulus crushed and mocked at. Secondly, because Chaka the Lion named you the 'Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born' and killed your wives, for which crime you brought about the death of Chaka. Thirdly, because you have matched your single wit for many years against all the power of the royal House and yet kept your life in you, notably when Panda threatened you in my presence at the trial of one who has 'gone down,' and you told him to kill you if he dared. Now you would prove that you were right by causing your cunning to triumph over the royal House."

"True, quite true, O Macumazahn. You have a good memory, Macumazahn, especially for anything that has to do with that woman who has 'gone down.' I sent her down, but how was she named, Macumazahn? I forget, I forget, whose mind being old, falls suddenly into black pits of darkness—like her who went down."

He paused and we stared at each other through the veil of fire. Then as I made no answer, he went on—

"Oh! I remember now, she was called Mameena, was she not, a name taken from the wailing of the wind? Hark! It is wailing now."

I listened; it was, and I shivered to hear it, since but a minute before the night had been quite still. Yes, the wind moaned and wailed about the rocks of the Black Kloof.

"Well, enough of her. Why trouble about the dead when there are so many to be sent to join them? Macumazahn, the hour is at hand. The fool Cetewayo has quarrelled with your people, the English, and on my counsel. He has sent and killed women, or allowed others to do so, across the river in Natal. His messengers came to me asking what he should do. I answered, 'Shall a king of the blood of Chaka fear to allow his own wicked ones to be slain because they have stepped across a strip of water, and still call himself king of the Zulus?' So those women were dragged back across the water and killed; and now the Queen's man from the Cape asks many things, great fines of cattle, the giving up of the slayers, and that an end should be made of the Zulu army, which is to lay down its spears and set to hoeing like the old women in the kraals."

"And if the king refuses, what then, Zikali?"

"Then, Macumazahn, the Queen's man will declare war on the Zulus; already he gathers his soldiers for the war."

"Will Cetewayo refuse, Zikali?"

"I do not know. His mind swings this way and that, like a pole balanced on a rock. The ends of the pole are weighted with much counsel, and it hangs so even that if a grasshopper lit on one end or the other, it would turn the scale."

"And do you wish me to be that grasshopper, Zikali?"

"Who else? That is why I brought you to Zululand."

"So you wish me to counsel Cetewayo to lie down in the bed that the English have made for him. If he seeks my advice I will do so gladly, for so I am sure he will sleep well."

"Why do you mock me, Macumazahn? I wish you to counsel Cetewayo to throw back his word into the teeth of the Queen's man and to fight the English."

"And thus bring destruction on the Zulus and death to thousands of them and of my own people, and in return gain nothing but remorse. Do you think me mad or wicked, or both, that I should do this thing?"

"Nay, Macumazahn, you would gain much. I could show you where the king's cattle are hidden. The English will never find them, and after the war you might take as many as you chose. But it would be useless, for knowing you well, I am sure that you would only hand them over to the British Government, as once you handed over the cattle of Bangu, being fashioned that way by the Great-Great, Macumazahn."

"Perhaps I might, but then what should I gain, Zikali?"

"This: you would so bring things about that, being broken by war, the Zulu power could never again menace the white men, which would be a great and good deed, Macumazahn."

"Mayhap—I am not sure. But of this I am sure, that I will not thrust my face into your nest of wasps, that the English hornets may steal the honey when they are disturbed. I leave such matters to the Queen and those who rule under her. So have done with such talk, for you do but waste your breath, Zikali."

"It is as I guessed it would be," he answered, shaking his great head. "You are too honest to prosper in the world, Macumazahn. Well, I must find other means to bring the House of Cetewayo to the end that he deserves, who has been an evil and a cruel king."

All this he said, showing neither surprise nor resentment, which convinced me of what I had suspected throughout, that never for an instant did he believe that I should fall in with his suggestions and try to influence the Zulus to declare war. No, this talk of his was but a blind; there was some deeper scheme at work in his cunning old brain which he was hiding from me. Why exactly had he beguiled me to Zululand? I could not divine, and to ask him would be worse than useless, but then and there I made up my mind that I would get away from the Black Kloof early on the following morning, if that were possible.

He began to speak of other matters in a low, droning voice, like a man who converses with himself. Sad, all of them, such as the haunted death of Saduko who had betrayed his lord, the Prince Umbelazi, because of a woman, every circumstance of which seemed to be familiar to him.

I made no answer, who was waiting for an opportunity to leave the hut, and did not care to dwell on these events. He ceased and brooded for a while, then said suddenly—

“You are hungry and would eat, Macumazahn, and I who eat little would sleep, for in sleep the multitudes of Spirits visit me, bringing tidings from afar. Well, we have spoken together and of that I am glad, for who knows when the chance will come again, though I think that soon we shall meet at Ulundi, Ulundi where Fate spreads its net. What was it I had to say to you? Ah! I remember. There is one who is always in your thoughts and whom you wish to see, one too who wishes to see you. You shall, you shall in payment for the trouble you have taken in coming so far to visit a poor old Zulu doctor whom, as you told me long ago, you know to be nothing but a cheat.”

He paused and, why I could not tell, I grew weak with fear of I knew not what, and bethought me of flight.

“It is cold in this hut, is it not?” he went on. “Burn up, fire, burn up!” and plunging his hand into a catskin bag of medicines which he wore, he drew out some powder which he threw upon the embers that instantly burst into bright flame.

“Look now, Macumazahn,” he said, “look to your right.”

I looked and oh Heaven! there before me with outstretched arms and infinite yearning on her face, stood Mameena, Mameena as I had last seen her after I gave her the promised kiss that she used to cover her taking of the poison. For five seconds, mayhap, she stood thus, living, wonderful, but still as death, the fierce light showing all. Then the flame died down again and she was gone.

I turned and next instant was out of the hut, pursued by the terrible laughter of Zikali.

## CHAPTER XII.

### TRAPPED

Outside in the cool night air I recovered myself, sufficiently at any rate to be able to think, and saw at once that the thing was an illusion for which Zikali had prepared my mind very carefully by means of the young witch-doctress, Nombé. He knew well enough that this remarkable woman, Mameena, had made a deep impression on me nearly a quarter of a century before, as she had done upon other men with whom she had been associated. Therefore it was probable that she would always be present to my thought, since whatever a man forgets, he remembers the women who have shown him favour, true or false, for Nature has decreed it thus.

Moreover, this was one to be remembered for herself, since she was beautiful and most attractive in her wild way. Also she had brought about a great war, causing the death of thousands, and lastly her end might fairly be called majestic. All these impressions Zikali had instructed Nombé to revivify by her continual allusions to Mameena, and lastly by her pretence that she saw her walking in front of me. Then when I was tired and hungry, in that place which for me was so closely connected with this woman, and in his own uncanny company, either by mesmerism or through the action of the drug he threw upon the fire, he had succeeded in calling up the illusion of her presence to my charmed sight. All this was clear enough, what remained obscure was his object.

Possibly he had none beyond an impish desire to frighten me, which is common enough among practitioners of magic in all lands. Well, for a little while he had succeeded, although to speak truth I remained uncertain whether in a sense I was not more thrilled and rejoiced than frightened. Mameena had never been so ill to look upon, and I knew that dead or living I had nothing to fear from her who would have walked through hell fire for my sake, would have done anything, except perhaps sacrifice her ambition. No, even if this were her ghost I should have been glad to see her again.

But it was not a ghost; it was only a fancy reproduced exactly as my mind had photographed her, almost as my eyes last saw her, when her kiss was still warm upon my lips.

Such were my thoughts as I stood outside that hut with the cold perspiration running down my face, for to tell the truth my nerves were upset, although without reason. So upset were they that when suddenly a silent-footed man appeared out of the darkness I jumped as high as though I had set my foot on a puff-adder, and until I recognized him by his voice as one of Nombé's servants who had accompanied us from Swazi-Land, felt quite alarmed. As a matter of fact he had only come to tell me that our meal was ready and that the other "high White Ones" were waiting for me.

He led me round the fence that encircled Zikali's dwelling-place, to two huts that stood nearly behind it, almost against the face of the rock which, overhanging in a curve, formed a kind of natural roof above them. I thought they must have been built since I visited the place, as I, who have a good memory for such things, did not remember them. Indeed, on subsequent examination I found that they were quite new, for the poles that formed their uprights were still green and the grass of the thatch was scarcely dry. It looked to me as if they had been specially constructed for our accommodation.

In one of these huts, that to the right which was allotted to Anscombe and myself, I found the others waiting for me, also the food. It was good of its sort and well cooked, and we ate it by the light of some candles that we had with us, Kaatje serving us. Yet, although a little while before I had been desperately hungry, now my appetite seemed to have left me and I made but a poor meal. Heda and Anscombe also seemed oppressed and ate sparingly. We did not talk much until Kaatje had taken away the tin plates and gone to eat her own supper by a fire that burned outside the hut. Then Heda broke out, saying that she was terrified of this place and especially of its master, the old dwarf, and felt sure that something terrible was going to happen to her. Anscombe did his best to calm her, and I also told her she had nothing to fear.

"If there is nothing to fear, Mr. Quatermain," she answered, turning on me, "why do you look so frightened yourself? By your face you might have seen a ghost."

This sudden and singularly accurate thrust, for after all I had seen something that looked very like a ghost, startled me, and before I could invent any soothing and appropriate fib, Nombé appeared, saying that she had come to lead Heda to her sleeping-place. After this further conversation was impossible since, although Nombé knew but few words of English, she was a great thought-reader and I feared to speak of anything secret in her presence. So we all went out of the hut, Nombé and I drawing back a little to the fire while the lovers said good-night to each other.

"Nombé," I said, "the Inkosikazi Heddana is afraid. The rocks of this kloof lie heavy on her heart; the face of the Opener of Roads is fearful to her and his laughter grates upon her ears. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Macumazahn, and it is as I expected. When you yourself are frightened it is natural that she, an untried maiden, should be frightened also in this home of spirits."

"It is men we fear, not spirits, now when all Zululand is boiling like a pot," I replied angrily.

"Have it as you will, Macumazahn," she said, and at that moment her quiet, searching eyes and fixed smile were hateful to me. "At least you admit that you do fear. Well, for the lady Heddana fear nothing. I sleep across the door of her hut, and while I who have learned to love her, live, I say—for her fear nothing, whatever may chance or whatever you may see or hear."

"I believe you, but, Nombé, you might die."

"Yes, I may die, but be sure of this, that when I die she will be safe, and he who loves her also. Sleep well, Macumazahn, and do not dream too much of what you heard and saw in Zikali's house."

Then before I could speak she turned and left me.

I did *not* sleep well; I slept very badly. To begin with, Maurice Anscombe, generally the most cheerful and nonchalant of mortals with a jest for every woe, was in a most depressed condition, and informed me of it several times, while I was getting ready to turn in. He said he thought the place hateful and felt as if people he could not see were looking at him (I had the same sensation but did not mention the fact to him). When I told him he was talking stuff, he only replied that he could not help it, and pointed out that it was not his general habit to be downcast in any danger, which was quite true. Now, he added, he was enjoying much the same sensations as he did when first he saw the Yellow-wood Swamp and got the idea into his head that he would kill some one there, which happened in due course.

"Do you mean that you think you are going to kill somebody else?" I asked anxiously.

"No," he answered, "I think I am going to be killed, or something like it, probably by that accursed old villain of a witch-doctor, who I don't believe is altogether human."

"Others have thought that before now, Anscombe, and to be plain, I don't know that he is. He lives too much with the dead to be like other people."

"And with Satan, to whom I expect he makes sacrifices. The truth is I'm afraid of his playing some of his tricks with Heda. It is for her I fear, not for myself, Allan. Oh! why on earth did you come here?"

"Because you wished it and it seemed the safest thing to do. Look here, my boy, as usual the trouble comes through a woman. When a man's single—you know the rest. You used to be able to laugh at anything, but now that you are practically double you can't laugh any more. Well, that's the common lot of man and you've got to put up with it. Adam was pretty jolly in his garden until Eve was started, but you know what happened afterwards. The rest of his life was a compound of temptation, anxiety, family troubles, remorse, hard labour with primitive instruments, and a flaming sword behind him. If you had left your Eve alone you would have escaped all this. But you see you didn't, and as a matter of fact, nobody ever does who is worth his salt, for Nature has arranged it so."

"You appear to talk with experience, Allan," he retorted blandly. "By the way, that girl Nombé, when she isn't star-gazing or muttering incantations, is always trying to explain to Heda some tale about you and a lady called Mameena. I gather that you were introduced to her in this neighbourhood where, Nombé says, you were in the habit of kissing her in public, which sounds an odd kind of a thing to do; all of which happened before she, Nombé, was born. She adds, according to Kaatje's interpretation, that you met her again this afternoon, which, as I understand the young woman has been long dead, seems so incomprehensible that I wish you would explain."

"With reference to Heda," I said, ignoring the rest as unworthy of notice, "I think you may make your mind easy. Zikali knows that she is in my charge and I don't believe that he wants to quarrel with me. Still, as you are uncomfortable here, the best thing to do will be to get away as early as possible to-morrow morning, where to we can decide afterwards. And now I am going to sleep, so please stop arguing."

As I have already hinted, my attempts in the sleep line proved a failure, for whenever I did drop off I was pursued by bad dreams, which resulted from lying down so soon after supper. I heard the cries of desperate men in their mortal agony. I saw a rain-swollen river; its waters were red with blood. I beheld a vision of one who I knew by his dress to be a Zulu king, although I could not see his face. He was flying and staggering with weariness as he fled. A great hound followed him. It lifted its head from the spoor; it was that of Zikali set upon the hound's body, Zikali who laughed instead of baying. Then one whose copper ornaments tinkled as she walked, entered beside me, whispering into my ear. "A quarter of a hundred years have gone by since we talked together in this haunted kloof," she seemed to whisper, "and before we talk again face to face there remain to pass of years"—

Here she ceased, though naturally I should have liked to hear the number. But that is just where dreams break down. They tell us only of what we know, or can evolve therefrom. Of what it is impossible for us to know they tell us nothing—at least as a general rule.

I woke up with a start, and feeling stifled in that hot place and aggravated by the sound of Anscombe's peaceful breathing, threw a coat about me and, removing the door-board, crept into the air. The night was still, the stars shone, and at a little distance the embers of the fire still glowed. By it was seated a figure wrapped in a kaross. The end of a piece of wood that the fire had eaten through fell on to the red ashes and flamed up brightly. By its light I saw that the figure was Nombé's. The eternal smile was still upon her face, the smile which suggested a knowledge of hidden things that from moment to moment amused her soul. Her lips moved as though she were talking to an invisible companion, and from time to time, like one who acts upon directions, she took a pinch of ashes and blew them, either towards Heda's hut or ours. Yes, she did this when all decent young women should have been asleep, like one who keeps some unholy, midnight assignation.

Talking with her master, Zikali, or trying to cast spells upon us, confound her! thought I to myself, and very silently crept back into the hut. Afterwards it occurred to me that she might have had another motive, namely of watching to see that none of us left the huts.

The rest of the night went by somehow. Once, listening with all my ears, I thought that I caught the sound of a number of men tramping and of some low word of command, but as I heard no more, concluded that fancy had deceived me. There I lay, puzzling over the situation till my head ached, and wondering how we were to get clear of the Black Kloof and Zikali, and out of Zululand which I gathered was no place for white people at the moment.

It seemed to me that the only thing was to make start for Dundee on the Natal border, and for the rest to trust to fortune. If we got into trouble over the death of Rodd, unpleasant as this would be, the matter must be faced out, that was all. For even if any witness appeared against us, the man had been killed in self-defence whilst trying to bring about our deaths at the hands of Basutos. I could see now that I was foolish not to have taken this line from the first, but as I think I have already explained, what weighed with me was the terror of involving these young people in a scandal which might shadow all their future lives. Also some fate inch by inch had

dragged me into Zululand. Fortunately in life there are few mistakes, and even worse than mistakes that cannot be repaired, if the wish towards reparation is real and earnest. Were it otherwise not many of us would escape destruction in one form or another.

Thus I reflected until at length light flowing faintly through the smoke-hole of the hut told me that dawn was at hand. Seeing it I rose quietly, for I did not wish to wake Anscombe, dressed and left the hut. My object was to find Nombé, who I hoped would be still sitting by the fire, and send her to Zikali with a message that I wished to speak with him at once. Glancing round me in the grey dawn I saw that she was gone and that as yet no one seemed to be stirring. Hearing a horse snort at a little distance, I made my way towards the sound and in a little bay of the overhanging cliff discovered the cart and near by our beasts tied up with a plentiful supply of forage. Since so far as I could judge in that uncertain light, nothing seemed to be wrong with them except weariness, for three of them were still lying down, I walked on to the gate of the fence which surrounded Zikali's big hut, proposing to wait there until some one appeared by whom I could send my message.

I reached the gate which I tried and found to be fastened on its inner side. Then I sat down, lit my pipe and waited. It was extraordinarily lonesome in that place; at least this was the feeling that came over me. No doubt the sun was up behind the Ceza Stronghold that I have mentioned, which towered high behind me, for the sky above grew light with the red rays of its rising. But all the vast Black Kloof with its huge fantastic rocks was still plunged in gloom, whereof the shadows seemed to oppress my heart, weary as I was with my wakeful night and many anxieties. I was horribly nervous also and, as it proved, not without reason. Presently I heard rustlings on the further side of the fence as of people creeping about cautiously, and the sound of whispering. Then of a sudden the gate was thrown open and through it emerged about a dozen Zulu warriors, all of them ringed men, who instantly surrounded me, seated there upon the ground.

I looked at them and they looked at me for quite a long while, since following my usual rule, I determined not to be the first to speak. Moreover, if they meant to kill me there was no use in speaking. At length their leader, an elderly man with thin legs, a large stomach and a rather pleasant countenance, saluted politely, saying—

“Good morning, O Macumazahn.”

“Good morning, O Captain, whose name and business I do not know,” I answered.

“The winds know the mountain on which they blow, but the mountain does not know the winds which it cannot see,” he remarked with poetical courtesy; a Zulu way of saying that more people are acquainted with Tom Fool than Tom Fool is aware of.

“Perhaps, Captain; yet the mountain can feel the winds,” and I might have added, smell them, for the Kloof was close and these Kaffirs had not recently bathed.

“I am named Goza and come on an errand from the king, O Macumazahn.”

“Indeed, Goza, and is your errand to cut my throat?”

“Not at present, Macumazahn, that is, unless you refuse to do what the king wishes.”

“And what does the king wish, Goza?”

“He wishes, Macumazahn, that you, his friend, should visit him.”

“Which is just what I was on my way to do, Goza.” (This was not true, but it didn't matter, for, if a lie, in the words of the schoolgirl's definition, is an abomination to the Lord, it is a very present help in time of trouble.) “After we have eaten I and my friends will accompany you to the king's kraal at Ulundi.”

“Not so, Macumazahn. The king said nothing about your friends, of whom I do not think he has ever heard any more than we have. Moreover, if your friends are white, you will do well not to mention them, since the order is that all white people in Zululand who have not come here by the king's desire, are to be killed at once, except yourself, Macumazahn.”

“Is it so, Goza? Well, as you will have understood, I am quite alone here and have no friends. Only I did not wish to travel so early.”

“Of course we understand that you are quite alone and have no friends, is it not so, my brothers?”

“Yes, yes, we understand,” they exclaimed in chorus, one of them adding, “and shall so report to the King.”

“What kind of blankets do you like; the plain grey ones or the white ones with the blue stripes?” I asked, desiring to confirm them in this determination.

“The grey ones are warmer, Macumazahn, and do not show dirt so much,” answered Goza thoughtfully.

“Good, I will remember when I have the chance.”

“The promise of Macumazahn is known from of old to be as a tree that elephants cannot pull down and white ants will not eat,” said the sententious Goza, thereby intimating his belief that some time or other they would receive those blankets. As a matter of fact the survivors of the party and the families of the others did receive them after the war, for in dealing with natives I have always made a point of trying to fulfil any promise or engagement made for value received.

“And now,” went on Goza, “will the Inkosi be pleased to start, as we have to travel far to-day?”

“Impossible,” I replied. “Before I leave I must eat, for who can journey upon yesterday's food? Also I must saddle my horse, collect what belongs to me, and bid farewell to my host, Zikali.”

“Of meat we have plenty with us, Macumazahn, and therefore you will not hunger on the way. Your horse and everything that is yours shall be brought after you; since were you mounted on that swift beast and minded to escape, how could we catch you with our feet, and did you please to shoot us with your rifle, how could we who have only spears, save ourselves from dying? As for the Opener of Roads, his servants have told us that he means to sleep all to-day that he may talk with spirits in his dreams, and therefore it is useless for you to wait to bid him farewell. Moreover, the orders of the king are that we should bring you to him at once.”

After this for a time there was silence, while I sat immovable revolving the situation, and the Zulus regarded me with a benignant interest. Goza took his snuff-box from his ear, shook out some into the palm of his hand and, after offering it to me in vain, inhaled it

himself.

"The orders of the king are (sneeze) that we should bring you to him alive if possible, and if not (sneeze) dead. Choose which you will, Macumazahn. Perhaps you may prefer to go to Ulundi dead, which would—ah! how strong is this snuff, it makes me weep like a woman—save you the trouble of walking. But if you prefer that we should carry you, be so good, Macumazahn, first to write the words which will cause the grey blankets to be delivered to us, for we know well that even your bones would desire to keep your promise. Is it not a proverb in the land from the time of the slaying of Bangu when you gave the cattle you had earned to Saduko's wanderers?"

I listened and an idea occurred to me, as perhaps it had to Goza.

"I hear you, Goza," I said, "and I will start for Ulundi on my feet—to save *you* the trouble of carrying me. But as the times are rough and accidents may always happen; as, too, I wish to make sure that you should get those blankets, and it may chance that I shall arrive there on my back, first I will write words which, if they are delivered to the witch-doctress Nombé, will, sooner or later, turn into blankets."

"Write the words quickly, Macumazahn, and they will be delivered," said Goza.

So I drew out my pocket-book and wrote—

"DEAR ANSCOMBE,—

"There is treachery afoot and I think that Zikali is at the bottom of it. I am being carried off to Cetewayo at Ulundi, by a party of armed Zulus who will not allow me to communicate with you, probably by Zikali's orders. You must do the best you can for Heda and yourself. Escape to Natal if you are able. Of course I will help if I get the chance, but if war is about to break out Cetewayo may kill me. I think that you can trust Nombé; also that Zikali does not wish to work you any ill unless he is obliged, though I have no doubt that he has trapped us here for some dark purpose of his own. Tell him through Nombé that if harm comes to you I will kill him if I live, and that if I die, I will settle the score with him afterwards. God save and bless you both. Keep up your courage and use your wits.

"Your friend,  
"A. Q."

I tore out the sheet, folded, addressed it and presented it to Goza, remarking that although it seemed to be but paper, it really was fourteen blankets—if given at once to Nombé.

He nodded and handed it to one of his men, who departed in the direction of our huts. So, thought I to myself, Nombé knows all about this business, which means that it is being worked by Zikali. That is why she spoke to me as she did last night.

"It is time to start, Macumazahn, and I think you told us that you would prefer to do so on your feet," said Goza, looking suggestively at his spear.

"I am ready," I said, rising because I must. For a moment I contemplated the door in the kraal fence, wondering whether it would be safe to bolt through it and take refuge with Zikali. No, it was not safe, since Zikali sat there in his hut pulling the strings and probably might refuse to see me. Moreover, it was likely enough that before I could find him one of those broad spears would find my heart. There was nothing to be done except submit. Still I did call out in a loud voice—

"Farewell, Zikali. I leave you without a present against my will who am being taken by soldiers to visit the king at Ulundi. When we meet again I will talk all this matter over with you."

There was no answer, and as Goza took the opportunity to say that he disliked the noise of shouting extremely, which sometimes made him do things that he afterwards regretted, I became silent. Then we departed, I in the exact centre of that guard of Zulus, heavy-hearted and filled with fears both for myself and those I left behind me.

Down the Black Kloof we tramped, emerging on the sunlit plain beyond without meeting any one. A couple of miles further on we came to a small stream where Goza announced we would halt to eat. So we ate of cold toasted meat which one of the men produced from a basket he carried, unpalatable food but better than nothing. Just as we had finished I looked up and saw the soldier to whom my note had been given. He was leading my mare that had been saddled. On it were my large saddle-bags packed with my belongings, also my thick overcoat, mackintosh, waterbottle, and other articles down to a bag of tobacco, a spare pipe and a box of wax matches. Moreover, the man carried my double-barrelled Express rifle and a shot-gun that could be used for ball, together with two bags of cartridges. Practically nothing belonging to me had been forgotten.

I asked him who had collected the things. He replied the doctress Nombé had done so and had brought him the horse saddled to carry them. He did not know who saddled the horse as he had seen no one but Nombé to whom he had given the writing which she hid away. In answer to further questions, he said that Nombé had sent me a message. It was—

"I bid farewell to Macumazahn for a little while and wish him good fortune till we meet again. Let him not be afraid in the battle, for even if he is hurt it will not be to death, since those go with him whom he cannot see, and protect him with their shields. Say to Macumazahn that I, Nombé, remember in the morning what I said in the night and that what seems to be quite lost is oftentimes found again. Wish him good fortune and tell him I am sorry that I had not time to cause his spare garments to be cleansed with water, but that I have been careful to find his little box with the white man's medicines."

I could extract nothing more from this soldier, who was either very stupid, or chose to appear so; nor indeed did I dare to put direct questions about the cart and those who travelled in it.

Soon we marched again, for Goza would not allow me to ride the horse, fearing that I should escape on it. Nor would he let me carry either of the guns lest I should make use of them. All day we travelled, reaching the Nongoma heights in the late afternoon. On this beautiful spot we found a kraal situated where afterwards a magistracy was built when we conquered the country, whence there is

one of the finest views in Zululand. There was no one in the kraal except two old women who appeared to be deaf and dumb for all I could get out of them. These aged dames, however, or others who were hidden, had made ready for our arrival, since a calf lay skinned and prepared for cooking, and by it big gourds filled with Kaffir beer and "maas" or curdled milk.

In due course we ate of these provisions, and after we had finished I gave Goza a stiff tot of brandy, of which Nombé, or perhaps Anscombe, had thoughtfully sent a bottle with my other baggage. The strong liquor made the old fellow talkative and enabled me to get a good deal of information out of him. Thus I learned that certain demands, as to which he was rather vague, had been made upon Cetewayo by the English Government, and that the King was now considering whether he should accede to them or fight. The Great Council of the nation was summoned to attend at Ulundi within a few days, when the matter would be decided. Meanwhile all the regiments were being gathered, or, as we should say, mobilized; an army, said Goza, greater than any that Chaka had ever led.

I asked him what I had to do with this business, that I, a peaceful traveller and an old friend of the Zulus, should be made prisoner and dragged off to Ulundi. He replied he did not know who was not in the council of the High Ones, but he thought that Cetewayo the king wished to see me because I was their friend, perhaps that he might send me as a messenger to the white people. I asked him how the king knew that I was in the country, to which he replied that Zikali had told him I was coming, he did not know how, whereon he, Goza, was sent at once to fetch me. I could get no more out of him.

I wondered if it would be worth while to make him quite drunk and then attempt to escape on the horse, but gave up the idea. To begin with, his men were at hand and there was not enough brandy to make them all drunk. Also even if I succeeded in winning away here in the heart of Zululand, it would not help Anscombe or Heda and I should probably be cut off and killed before I could get out of the country. So I abandoned the plan and went to sleep instead.

Next morning we left Nongoma early in the hope of reaching Ulundi that evening if the Ivuna and Black Umfolozi Rivers proved fordable. As it chanced, although they were high, we were able to cross them, I seated on the horse which two of the Zulus led. Next we tramped for miles through the terrible Bekameezi Valley, a hot and desolate place which the Zulus swear is haunted. So unhealthy is this valley, which is the home of large game, that whole kraals full of people who have tried to cultivate the rich land, have died in it of fever, or fled away leaving their crops unreaped. Now no man dwells there. After this we climbed a terrible mount to the high land of Mahlabatini, and having eaten, pushed on once more.

At length we sighted the great hill-encircled plain of Ulundi which may be called the cradle of the Zulu race as, politically speaking, it was destined to be its coffin. On the ridge to the west once stood the Nobamba kraal where dwelt Senzangacona, the father of Chaka the Lion. Nearer to the White Umfolozi was Panda's dwelling-place, Nodwengu, which once I knew so well, while on the slope of the hills of the north-east stood the town of Ulundi in which Cetewayo dwelt, bathed in the lights of sunset.

Indeed it and all the vast plain were red as though with blood, red as they were destined to be on the coming day of the last battle of the Zulus.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CETEWAYO

It was dark when at last we reached the Ulundi kraal, for the growing moon was obscured by clouds. Therefore I could see nothing and was only aware, by the sound of voices and the continual challenging, that we were passing through great numbers of men. At length we were admitted at the eastern gate and I was taken to a hut where I at once flung myself down to sleep, being so weary that I could not attempt to eat. Next morning as I was finishing my breakfast in the little fenced courtyard of this guest-hut, Goza appeared and said that the king commanded me to be brought to him at once, adding that I must "speak softly" to him, as he was "very angry."

So off we went across the great cattle kraal where a regiment of young men, two thousand strong or so, were drilling with a fierce intensity which showed they knew that they were out for more than exercise. About the sides of the kraal also stood hundreds of soldiers, all of them talking and, it seemed to me, excited, for they stamped upon the ground and even jumped into the air to give point to their arguments. Suddenly some of them caught sight of me, whereon a tall, truculent fellow called out—

"What does a white man at Ulundi at such a time, when even John Dunn dare not come? Let us kill him and send his head as a present to the English general across the Tugela. That will settle this long talk about peace or war."

Others of a like mind echoed this kind proposal, with the result that presently a score or so of them made a rush at me, brandishing their sticks, since they might not carry arms in the royal kraal. Goza did his best to keep them off, but was swept aside like a feather, or rather knocked over, for I saw him on his back with his thin legs in the air.

"You must climb out of this pit by yourself," he began, addressing me in his pompous and figurative way. Then somebody stamped on his face, and fixing his teeth in his assailant's heel, he grew silent for a while.

The truculent blackguard, who was about six feet three high and had a mouth like a wolf's throat, arrived in front of me and, bending down, roared out—

"We are going to kill you, White Man."

I had a pistol in my pocket and could perfectly well have killed him, as I was much tempted to do. A second's reflection showed me, however, that this would be useless, and in a sense put me in the wrong, though when the matter came on for argument it would interest me no more. So I just folded my arms and, looking up at him, said—

"Why, Black Man?"

"Because your face is white," he roared.

"No," I answered, "because your heart is black and your eyes are so full of blood that you do not know Macumazahn when you see him."

"Wow!" said one, "it is Watcher-by-Night whom our fathers knew before us. Leave him alone."

"No," shouted the great fellow, "I will send him to watch where it is always night, I who keep a club for white rats," and he brandished his stick over me.

Now my temper rose. Watching my opportunity, I stretched out my right foot and hooked him round the ankle, at the same time striking up with all my force. My fist caught him beneath the chin and over he went backwards sprawling on the ground.

"Son of a dog!" I said, "if a single stick touches me, at least you shall go first," and whipping out my revolver, I pointed it at him.

He lay quiet enough, but how the matter would have ended I do not know, for passion was running high, had not Goza at this moment risen with a bleeding nose and called out—

"O Fools, would you kill the king's guest to whom the king himself has given safe-conduct. Surely you are pots full of beer, not men."

"Why not?" answered one. "This is the Place of Soldiers. The king's house is yonder. Give the old jackal a start of a length of ten assegaes. If he reaches it first, he can shake hands with his friend, the king. If not we will make him into medicine."

"Yes, yes, run for it, Jackal," clamoured the others, knocking their shields with their sticks, as men do who would frighten a buck, and opening out to make a road for me.

Now while all this was going on, with some kind of sixth sense I had noted a big man whose face was shrouded by a blanket thrown over his head, who very quietly had joined these drunken rioters, and vaguely wondered who he might be.

"I will not run," I said slowly, "that I may be saved by the king. Nay, I will die here, though some of you shall die first. Go to the king, Goza, and tell him how his servants have served his guest," and I lifted my pistol, waiting till the first stick touched me to put a bullet through the bully on the ground.

"There is no need," said a deep voice that proceeded from the draped man of whom I have spoken, "for the king has come to see for himself."

Then the blanket was thrown back, revealing Cetewayo grown fat and much aged since last I saw him, but undoubtedly Cetewayo.

"Bayete!" roared the mob in salute, while some of those who had been most active in the tumult tried to slip away.

"Let no man stir," said Cetewayo, and they stood as though they were rooted to the ground, while I slipped my pistol back into my pocket.

"Who are you, White Man?" he asked, looking at me, "and what do you here?"

"The King should know Macumazahn," I answered, lifting my hat, "whom Dingaan knew, whom Panda knew well, and whom the King knew before he was a king."

"Yes, I know you," he answered, "although since we spoke together you have shrunk like an oxhide in the sun, and time has stained your beard white."

"And the King has grown fat like the ox on summer grass. As for what I do here, did not the King send for me by Goza, and was I not brought like a baby in a blanket?"

"The last time we met," he went on, taking no heed of my words, "was yonder at Nodwengu when the witch Mameena was tried for sorcery, she who made my brother mad and brought about the great battle, in which you fought for him with the Amawombe regiment. Do you not remember how she kissed you, Macumazahn, and took poison between the kisses, and how before she grew silent she spoke evil words to me, saying that I was doomed to pull down my own House and to die as she died, words that have haunted me ever since and now haunt me most of all? I wish to speak to you concerning them, Macumazahn, for it is said in the land that this beautiful witch loved you alone and that you only knew her mind."

I made no reply, who was heartily tired of this subject of Mameena whom no one seemed able to forget.

"Well," he went on, "we will talk of that matter alone, since it is not natural that you should wish to speak of your dead darlings before the world," and with a wave of the hand he put the matter aside. Then suddenly his attitude changed. His face, that had been thoughtful and almost soft, became fierce, his form seemed to swell and he grew terrible.

"What was that dog doing?" he asked of Goza, pointing to the brute whom I had knocked down and who still lay prostrate on his back, afraid to stir.

"O King," answered Goza, "he was trying to kill Macumazahn because he is a white man, although I told him that he was your guest, being brought to you by the royal command. He was trying to kill him by giving him a start of ten spears' length and making him run to the isigodhlo (the king's house) and beating him to death with the sticks of these men if they caught him, which, as he is old and they are young, they must have done. Only the Watcher-by-Night would not run; no, although he is so small he knocked him to the earth with his fist, and there he lies. That is all, O King."

"Rise, dog," said Cetewayo, and the man rose trembling with fear, and, being bidden, gave his name, which I forget.

"Listen, dog," went on the king in the same cold voice. "What Goza says is true, for I saw and heard it all with my eyes and ears. You would have made yourself as the king. You dared to try to kill the king's guest to whom he had given safe-conduct, and to stain the king's doorposts with his blood, thereby defiling his house and showing him to the white people as a murderer of one of them whom he had promised to protect. Macumazahn, do you say how he shall die, and I will have it done."

"I do not wish him to die," I answered, "I think that he and those with him were drunk. Let him go, O King."

"Aye, Macumazahn, I will let him go. See now, we are in the centre of the cattle-kraal, and to the eastern gate is as far as to the isigodhlo. Let this man have a start of ten spears' length and run to the eastern gate, as he would have made Macumazahn run to the king's house, and let his companions, those who would have hunted Macumazahn, hunt him.

"If he wins through to the gate he can go on to the Government in Natal and tell them of the cruelty of the Zulus. Only then, let those who hunted him be brought before me for trial and perhaps we shall see how *they* can run."

Now the poor wretch caught hold of my hand, begging me to intercede for him, but soldiers who had come up dragged him away and, having measured the distance allowed him, set him on a mark made upon the ground. Presently at a word off he sped like an arrow, and after him went his friends, ten or more of them. I think they caught him just by the gate doubling like a hare, or so the shouts of laughter from the watching regiment told me, for myself I would not look.

"That dog ate his own stomach," said Cetewayo grimly, thereby indicating in native fashion that the biter had been bit or the engineer hoist with his petard. "It is long since there has been a war in the land, and some of these young soldiers who have never used an assegai save to skin an ox or cut the head from a chicken, shout too loud and leap too high. Now they will be quieter, and while you stay here you may walk where you will in safety, Macumazahn," he added thoughtfully.

Then dismissing the matter from his mind, as we white people dismiss any trivial incident in a morning stroll, he talked for a few minutes to the commanding officer of the regiment that was drilling, who ran up to make some report to him, and walked back towards the isigodhlo, beckoning me to follow with Goza.

After waiting for a little while outside the gate in the surrounding fence, a body-servant ordered us to enter, which we did to find the king seated on the shady side of his big hut quite alone. At a sign I also sat myself down upon a stool that had been set for me, while Goza, whose nose was still bleeding, squatted at my side.

"Your manners are not so good as they were once, Macumazahn," said Cetewayo presently, "or perhaps you have been so long away from the royal kraal that you have forgotten its customs."

I stared at him, wondering what he could mean, whereon he added with a laugh—

"What is that in your pocket? Is it not a loaded pistol, and do you not remember that it is death to appear before the king armed? Now I might kill you and have no blame, although you are my guest, for who knows that you are not sent by the English Queen to shoot me?"

"I ask the King's pardon," I said humbly enough. "I did not think about the pistol. Let your servants take it away."

"Perhaps it is safer in your pocket, where I saw you place it in the cattle-kraal, Macumazahn, than in their hands, which do not know how to hold such things. Moreover, I know that you are not one who stabs in the dark, even when our peoples growl round each

other like two dogs about to fight, and if you were, in this place your life would have to pay for mine. There is beer by your side; drink and fear nothing. Did you see the Opener of Roads, Goza, and if so, what is his answer to my message?"

"O King, I saw him," answered Goza. "The Father of the doctors, the friend and master of the Spirits, says he has heard the King's word, yes, that he heard it as it passed the King's lips, and that although he is very old, he will travel to Ulundi and be present at the Great Council of the nation which is to be summoned on the eighth day from this, that of the full moon. Yet he makes a prayer of the King. It is that a place may be prepared for him, for his people and for his servants who carry him, away from this town of Ulundi, where he may sojourn quite alone, a decree of death being pronounced against any who attempt to break in upon his privacy, either where he dwells or upon his journey. These are his very words, O King:

"I, who am the most ancient man in Zululand, dwell with the spirits of my fathers, who will not suffer strangers to come nigh them and who, if they are offended, will bring great woes upon the land. Moreover, I have sworn that while there is a king in Zululand and I draw the breath of life, never again will I set foot in a royal kraal, because when last I did so at the slaying of the witch, Mameena, the king who is dead thought it well to utter threats against me, and never more will I, the Opener of Roads, be threatened by a mortal. Therefore if the King and his Council seek to drink of the water of my wisdom, it must be in the place and hour of my own choosing. If this cannot be, let me abide here in my house and let the King seek light from other doctors, since mine shall remain as a lamp to my own heart."

Now I saw that these words greatly disturbed Cetewayo who feared Zikali, as indeed did all the land.

"What does the old wizard mean?" he asked angrily. "He lives alone like a bat in a cave and for years has been seen of none. Yet as a bat flies forth at night, ranging far and wide in search of prey, so does his spirit seem to fly through Zululand. Everywhere I hear the same word. It is—'What says the Opener of Roads?' It is—'How can aught be done unless the Opener of Roads has declared that it shall be done, he who was here before the Black One (Chaka) was born, he who it is said was the friend of Inkosi Umkulu, the father of the Zulus who died before our great-grandfathers could remember; he who has all knowledge and is almost a spirit, if indeed he be not a spirit?' I ask you, Macumazahn, who are his friend, what does he mean, and why should I not kill him and be done?"

"O King," I answered, "in the days of your uncle Dingaan, when Dingaan slew the Boers who were his guests, and thus began the war between the White and the Black, I, who was a lad, heard the laughter of Zikali for the first time yonder at the kraal Ungungundhlovu, I who rode with Retief and escaped the slaughter, but his face I did not see. Many years later, in the days of Panda your father, I saw his face and therefore you name me his friend. Yet this friend who drew me to visit him, perhaps by your will, O King, has now caused me to be brought here to Ulundi doubtless by your will, O King, but against my own, for who wishes to come to a town where he is well-nigh slain by the first brawler he meets in the cattle kraal?"

"Yet you were not slain, Macumazahn, and perhaps you do not know all the story of that brawler," replied Cetewayo almost humbly, like one who begs pardon, though the rest of what I had said he ignored. "But still you are Zikali's friend, for between you and him there is a rope which enabled him to draw you to Zululand, which rope I have heard called by a woman's name. Therefore by the spirit of that woman, which still can draw you like a rope, I charge you, tell me—what does this old wizard mean, and why should I not kill him and be rid of one who haunts my heart like an evil vision of the night and, as I sometimes think, is an *umtakati*, an evil-doer, who would work ill to me and all my House, yes, and to all my people?"

"How should I know what he means, O King?" I answered with indignation, though in fact I could guess well enough. "As for killing him, cannot the King kill whom he will? Yet I remember that once I heard your father ask much the same question and of Zikali himself, saying that he was minded to find out whether or no he were mortal like other men. I remember also Zikali answered that there was a saying that when the Opener of Roads came to the end of his road, there would be no more a king of Zululand, as there was none when first he set foot upon his road. Now I have spoken, who am a white man and do not understand your sayings."

"I remember it also, Macumazahn, who was present at the time," he replied heavily. "My father feared this Zikali and his father feared him, and I have heard that the Black One himself, who feared nothing, feared him also. And I, too, fear him, so much that I dare not make up my mind upon a great matter without his counsel, lest he should bewitch me and the nation and bring us to nothing."

He paused, then turning to Goza, asked, "Did the Opener of Roads tell you where he wished to dwell when he comes to visit me here at Ulundi?"

"O King," answered Goza, "yonder in the hills, not further away than an aged man can walk in the half of an hour, is a place called the Valley of Bones, because there in the days of those who went before the King, and even in the King's day, many evildoers have been led to die. Zikali would dwell in this Valley of Bones, and there and nowhere else would meet the King and the Great Council, not in the daylight but after sunset when the moon has risen."

"Why," said Cetewayo, starting, "the place is ill-omened and, they say, haunted, one that no man dares to approach after the fall of darkness for fear lest the ghosts of the dead should leap upon him gibbering."

"Such were the words of the Opener of Roads, O King," replied Goza. "There and nowhere else will he meet the King, and there he demands that three huts should be built to shelter him and his folk and stored with all things needful. If this be not granted to him, then he refuses to visit the King or to give counsel to the nation."

"So be it then," said Cetewayo. "Send messengers to the Opener of Roads, Goza, saying that what he desires shall be done. Let my command go out that under pain of death none spy upon him while he journeys hither or returns. Let the huts be built forthwith, and when it is known that he is coming, let food in plenty be placed in them and afterwards morning by morning taken to the mouth of the valley. Bid him announce his arrival and the hour he chooses for our meeting by messenger. Begone."

Goza leapt up, gave the royal salute, and retreated backwards from the presence of the king, leaving us alone. I also rose to depart, but Cetewayo motioned to me to be seated.

"Macumazahn," he said, "the Great Queen's man who has come to Natal (Sir Bartle Frere) threatens me with war because two evil-doing women were taken on the Natal side of the Tugela and brought back to Zululand and killed by Mehlokazulu, being the

wives of his father, Sirayo, which was done without my knowledge. Also two white men were driven away from an island in the Tugela River by some of my soldiers."

"Is that all, O King?" I asked.

"No. The Queen's man says I kill my people without trial, which is a lie told him by the missionaries, and that girls have been killed also who refused to marry those to whom they were given and ran away with other men. Also that wizards are smelt out and slain, which happens but rarely now; all of this contrary to the promises I made to Sompseu when he came to recognize me as king upon my father's death, and some other such small matters."

"What is demanded if you would avoid war, O King?"

"Nothing less than this, Macumazahn: That the Zulu army should be abolished and the soldiers allowed to marry whom and when they please, because, says the Queen's man, he fears lest it should be used to attack the English, as though I who love the English, as those have done who went before me, desire to lay a finger on them. Also that another Queen's man should be sent to dwell here in my country, to be the eyes and ears of the English Government and have power with me in the land; yes, and more demands which would destroy the Zulus as a people and make me, their king, but a petty kraal-head."

"And what will the King answer?" I asked.

"I know not what to answer. The fine of two thousand cattle I will pay for the killing of the women. If it may be, I wish no quarrel with the English, though gladly I would have fought the Dutch had not Sompseu stretched out his arm over their land. But how can I disband the army and make an end of the regiments that have conquered in so many wars? Macumazahn, I tell you that if I did this, in a moon I should be dead. Oh! you white people think there is but one will in Zululand, that of the king. But it is not so, for he is but a single man among ten thousand thousand, who lives to work the people's wish. If he beats them with too thick a stick, or if he brings them to shame or does what the most of them do not wish, then where is the king? Then, I say, he goes a road that was trodden by Chaka and Dingaan who were before me, yes, the red road of the assegai. Therefore today, I stand like a man between two falling cliffs. If I run towards the English the Zulu cliff falls upon me. If I run towards my own people, the English cliff falls upon me, and in either case I am crushed and no more seen. Tell me then, Macumazahn, you whose heart is honest, what must I do?"

So he spoke, wringing his hands, with tears starting to his eyes, and upon my word, although I never liked Cetewayo as I had liked his father, Panda, perhaps because I loved his brother, Umbelazi, whom he killed, and had known him do many cruel deeds, my heart bled for him.

"I cannot tell you, King," I answered, thinking that I must say something, "but I pray you do not make war against the queen, for she is the most mighty One in the whole earth, and though her foot, of which you see but the little toe here in Africa, seems small to you, yet if she is angered, it will stamp the Zulus flat, so that they cease to be."

"Many have told me this, Macumazahn. Yes, even Uhamu, the son of my uncle Unzibe, or, as some say, the son of his spirit, to which his mother was married after Unzibe was dead, and others throughout the land, and in truth I think it myself. But who can hold the army which shouts for war? *Ow!* the Council must decide, which means perhaps that Zikali will decide, for now all hang upon his lips."

"Then I am sorry," I exclaimed.

He looked at me shrewdly.

"Are you? So am I. Yet his counsel must be asked, and better that it should be here in my presence than yonder secretly at the Black Kloof. I would kill him if I dared, but I dare not, who am sure—why I may not say—that the same sun will see his death and mine."

He waved his hand to show that the talk on this matter was ended, then added—

"Macumazahn, you are my prisoner for a while, but give me your word that you will not try to escape and you may go where you will within an hour's ride of Ulundi. I would pay you well to stop here with me, but this I know you would never do should there be trouble between us and your people. Therefore I promise you that if war breaks out I will send you safely to Natal, or perhaps sooner, as my messenger, whence doubtless you will return to fight against me. Know that I have given orders that every other white man or woman who is found in Zululand shall be killed as a spy. Even John Dunn has fled or is flying, or so I hear, John Dunn who has fed out of my hand and grown rich on my gifts. You yourself would have been killed as you came from Swazi-Land in your cart, had not command been sent to those chiefs through whose lands you passed that neither they nor their people were so much as to look at you."

Now for one intense moment I thought, as hard as ever I had done in my life. It was evident—unless he were dealing very cunningly with me, which I did not believe—that Cetewayo knew nothing of Anscombe and Heda, but thought that I had come into Zululand alone. Should I or should I not tell him and beg his protection for them? If I did so he might refuse or be unable to give it to them far away in the midst of a savage population aflame with the lust of war. As the incident of the morning showed, it was as much as he could do to protect myself, although the Zulus knew me for their friend. On the other hand no one who dwelt under Zikali's blanket, to use the Kaffir idiom, would be touched, because he was looked on as half divine and therefore everything under it down to the rat in his thatch was sacred. Now Zikali by implication and Nombé with emphasis, had promised to safeguard these two. Surely, therefore, they would run less risk in the Black Kloof than here at Ulundi, if ever they got so far.

All this went through my brain in an instant, with the result that I made up my mind to say nothing. As the issue proved, this was a terrible mistake, but who can always judge rightly? Had I spoken out it seems to me probable that Cetewayo would have granted my prayer and ordered that these two should be escorted out of Zululand before hostilities began, although of course they might have been murdered on the way. Also, for a reason that will become evident later, it is possible that there would never have been any hostilities. All I can plead is, that I acted for the best and Fate would have it so. Another moment and the chance was gone.

The gate opened and a body-servant appeared announcing that one of the great captains with some of his officers waited to see the king. Cetewayo made a sign, whereon the servant called out something, and they entered, three or four of them, saluting loudly.

Seeing me they stopped and stared, whereon Cetewayo shortly, but with much clearness, repeated to them and to an induna who accompanied them, what he had already said to me, namely that I was his guest, sent for by him that he might use me as a messenger if he thought fit. He added that the man who dared to speak a word against me, or even to look at me askance, should pay the price with his life, however high his station, and he commanded that the heralds should proclaim this his decree throughout Ulundi and the neighbouring kraals. Then he held out his hand to me in token of friendship, bidding me to “go softly” and come to see him whenever I wished, and dismissed me in charge of the induna, one of the captains and some soldiers.

Within five minutes of reaching my hut I heard a loud-voiced crier proclaiming the order of the king and knew that I had no more to fear.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE VALLEY OF BONES

The week that followed my interview with Cetewayo was indeed a miserable time for me. For myself, as I have said, I had no fear, for the king's orders were strictly obeyed. Moreover, the tale of what had happened to the brute who wished to hunt me down in the cattle-kraal had travelled far and wide and none sought to share his fate. My hut was inviolate and well supplied with necessary food, as was my mare, and I could wander where I liked and talk with whom I would. I could even ride to exercise the horse, though this I did very sparingly and only in the immediate neighbourhood of the town for fear of exciting suspicion or meeting Zulus whom the king's word had not reached. Indeed on these occasions I was always accompanied by a guard of swift-footed and armed soldiers sent "to protect me," or more probably to kill me if I did anything that seemed suspicious.

In the course of my rambles I met sundry natives whom I had known in the old days, some of them a long while ago. They all seemed glad to see me and were quite ready to talk of past times, but of the present they would say little or nothing, except that they were certain there would be war. Of Anscombe and Heda I could hear nothing, and indeed did not dare to make any direct inquiries concerning them, but several reliable men assured me that the last missionaries and traders having departed, there was not a white man, woman or child left in Zululand except myself. It was "all black" they said, referring to the colour of their people, as it had been before the time of Chaka. So I was forced to eat out my heart with anxiety in silence, hoping and praying that Zikali had played an honest part and sent them away safely.

Why should he not have done so, seeing that it was my presence he had desired, not theirs? They were only taken, or rather snared, because they were with me and could not be separated, or so I believed at the time.

One ray of comfort I did get. About the fifth day after my interview I saw Goza, who told me that the king's messengers were back from the Black Kloof and had brought "a word" for me from Zikali himself. The word was—

"Bid Goza say to Macumazahn that I was sorry not to see him to say good-bye, because that morning I slept heavily. Bid him say that I am glad he has seen the king, since for this purpose I sought his presence in Zululand. Bid him say that he is to fear nothing, and that if his heart is heavy about others whom he loves, he should make it light again, since the Spirits have them in their keeping as they have him, and never were they or he more safe than they are to-day."

Now I looked at Goza and asked if I could see this messenger. He replied, No, as he had already been despatched upon another errand. Then I asked him if the messenger had said anything else. He answered, Yes, one thing that he had forgotten, namely that the writing about blankets should now be in Natal. Then suddenly he changed the subject and asked me if I would like to accompany him to the Valley of Bones where he was ordered to inspect the huts which were being built for Zikali and his people. Of course I said I should, hoping, quite without result, that I might get something more out of him on the road.

Now this town of Cetewayo's stands, or rather stood, for it has long been burnt, on the slope of the hills to the north-east of the plains of Ulundi. Above it these hills grow steeper, and deep in the recesses of one of them is the Valley of Bones. There is nothing particularly imposing about the place; no towering cliffs or pillars of piled granite, as at the Black Kloof. It is just a vale cut out by water, bordered by steep slopes on either side, and a still steeper slope strewn with large rocks at its end. Dotted here and there on these slopes grew tall aloes that from a little distance looked like scattered men, whereof the lower leaves were shrivelled and blackened by veld fires. Also there were a few euphorbias, grey, naked-looking things that end in points like fingers on a hand, and among them some sparse thorn trees, struggling to live in an inhospitable soil.

The place has one peculiarity. Jutting into it from the hillside is a ridge or spur, sixty or seventy yards in length by perhaps twenty broad, that ends in a flat point of rock which stands about forty feet above the level of the rest of the little valley. On this ridge also grew tall aloes until near its extremity the soil ceased, or had been washed away from the water-worn core of rock.

It was, and no doubt still is, a desolate-looking spot, at any rate for most of the day when owing to the shadow of the surrounding hills, it receives but little sun. Everything about it, especially when I was there in a time of rain, seemed dank and miserable, although the flat floor of the kloof was clothed with a growth of tall, coarse grass, and weeds that bore an evil-smelling flower. Perhaps some sense of appropriateness had caused the Zulu kings to choose this lonesome, deathly-looking gorge as one of their execution grounds. At any rate many had been slain here, for skulls and the larger human bones, some of them black with age, lay all about among the grass, as they had been scattered by hyenas and jackals. They were particularly thick beneath and around the table-like rock that I have mentioned.

Goza told me that this was because the King's Slayers made a custom of dragging the victim along the projecting tongue to the edge of this rock and hurling him, either dead or living, to the ground beneath; or, in the case of witches; driving them over after they had been blinded.

Such was the spot that Zikali had selected to abide in during his visit to Ulundi. Certainly where privacy was an object it was well chosen, for, as Cetewayo had said and as Goza emphasized to me, it had the repute of being the most thoroughly haunted place in all Zululand, with the sole exception, perhaps, of the ridge opposite to Dingaan's old kraal where once I shot the vultures for my life and

those of my companions.<sup>[1]</sup> Even in the daytime people gave it a wide berth, and at night nothing would induce them to approach it, at any rate alone.

[1] See the book called *Marie*, by H. Rider Haggard.

Here to one side of and near the root of the tongue of land of which I have spoken, the huts that Zikali had demanded for himself and his company were being rapidly built, close to a spring of water, by a large body of men who laboured as though they wished to be done with their task. Also about half way up the donga, for really it was nothing more, at a distance of perhaps five and twenty paces from its flat point whence the condemned were hurled, a circular space of ground had been cleared and levelled which was large enough to accommodate fifty or sixty men. On this space, Goza told me, the King and the Council were to sit when they came to seek light from Zikali.

In my heart I reflected that the light they were likely to get from him would be such as may be supposed to be thrown by hell fire. For be it remembered I knew what these people never seemed to understand, that Zikali was the most bitter of their enemies. To begin with, he was of Undwandwe blood, one of the people whom the great king Chaka had destroyed. Then this same Chaka had robbed him of his wives and murdered his children, in revenge for which he had plotted the slaying of Chaka, as he did that of his brothers, Umhlangana and Dingaan, the latter of whom he involved in a quarrel with the Boers. Subsequently he brought about the war between the princes Cetewayo and Umbelazi, in which I played a part.

Now I was certain that he intended to bring about another war between the English and the Zulus, knowing well that in the end the latter would be destroyed, and with them the royal House of Senzangacona which he had sworn to level with the dust. Had he not told me as much years ago, and was he one to go back upon his word? Had he not used Mameena with her beauty and ambitions as his tool, and when she was of no further service to him, given her to death, as he had used scores of others and in due season given them to death? Was I not myself perhaps one of those tools destined to be thrown into the pit of doom when my turn came, though in what way I could help his plots was more than I could see, since he knew well that I should do my best to oppose him? Oh! I had half a mind to go to Cetewayo and tell him all I knew about Zikali, even if it involved the breaking of confidences.

But stay! Even if I were believed, this far-seeing wizard held hostages for my good behaviour, and if I betrayed him what would happen to those hostages? He sent me messages saying that they were safe, suggesting that they had escaped to Natal. How was I to know that these were true? I was utterly bewildered; I could not guess why I had been beguiled into Zululand, and I dared not step either this way or that for fear lest I should fall into some pit dug by his cunning hands and, what was worse, drag down others with me.

Moreover, was this man quite human, or perhaps an emissary of Satan upon earth who had knowledge denied to other men and a certain mastery over the Powers of Ill? Again I could not say. His term of life seemed to be extraordinarily prolonged, though none knew how old exactly he might be. Also he had a wonderful knowledge of what was passing in the minds of others, and by his arts, as I had experienced only the other day, could summon up apparitions or illusions before their eyes. Further, he was aware of events which had happened at a distance and could send or read dreams, since otherwise how did Nombé know what I had dreamt at Marnham's house? Lastly he could foretell the future, as once he had done in my own case, prophesying that I should be injured by a buffalo with a split horn.

Yet all of this might be nothing more than a mixture of keen observation, clever spying, trickery and mesmerism. I could not say which it was, nor can I with certainty to this hour.

Such were the thoughts that passed through my mind as I walked back from the Vale of Bones by the side of the big-paunched Goza, whom I caught eyeing me from time to time as a curious crow eyes any object that has attracted his attention.

"Goza," I said at last, "do the Zulus really mean to fight the English?"

He turned and pointed to a spot where the hills ran down into the great plain. Here two regiments were manoeuvring. One of these held the slopes of the hill and the other was attacking them from the plain, so fiercely that at a distance their onslaught looked like that of actual warfare.

"That looks like fighting, does it not, Macumazahn?" he replied.

"Yes, Goza, yet it may be but play."

"Quite so, Macumazahn. It may be fighting or it may be but play. Am I a prophet that I should be able to say which it is? Of that there is but one man in Zululand who knows the truth. It is he for whom the new huts are being built up yonder."

"You think he really knows, Goza?"

"No, Macumazahn, I do not think, I am sure. He is the greatest of all wizards, as he was when my father held on to his mother's apron. He pulls the strings and the Great-ones of the country dance. If he wishes war, there will be war. If he wishes peace, there will be peace."

"And which does he wish, Goza?"

"I thought perhaps you could tell me that, Macumazahn, who, he says, are such an old friend of his; also why he chooses to sojourn in a dark hole among the dead instead of in the sunshine among the living, here at Ulundi."

"Well, I cannot, Goza, since the Opener of Roads does not open his heart to me but keeps his secrets to himself. For the rest, those who talk with the dead may prefer to dwell among the dead."

"Now as always you speak truth, Macumazahn," said Goza, looking at me in a way which suggested to me that he believed I spoke anything but the truth.

Indeed I am convinced he thought that I was in the council of Zikali and acquainted with his plans. Also I am sure he knew that I had not come to Zululand alone, the incident of the blankets, which I had promised to him a bribe to keep silence, showed it, and suspected that my companions were parties to some plot together with myself. And yet at the time I could not be quite sure, and therefore dared not ask anything concerning them lest thus I should reveal their existence and bring them to death.

As a matter of fact I need not have been anxious on this point, since if Goza, who I may state, was a kind of secret service officer as well as a head messenger, knew, as I think probable, he had been commanded by Zikali to hold his tongue under penalty of a curse. Perhaps the same was true of the soldiers who had come with him to take me to Ulundi. The hint of Zikali was as powerful as the word of the king, since they, like thousands of others, believed that whereas Cetewayo could kill them, Zikali, like Satan, could blast their spirits as well as their bodies. But how was I to guess all these things at that time?

During the next two days nothing happened, though I heard that there had been one if not two meetings of the Council at the King's House during which the position of affairs was discussed. Cetewayo I did not see, although twice he sent messengers to me bringing gifts of food, who were charged to inquire whether I was well and happy and if any had offered me hurt or insult. To these I answered that I was well and unmolested but not happy, who grew lonesome, being but a solitary white man among so many thousands of the Zulus.

On the third morning, that of the day of the full moon, Goza came and informed me that Zikali had arrived at the Valley of Bones before dawn. I asked him how he, who was so old and feeble, had walked so far. He answered that he had not walked, or so he understood, but had been carried in a litter, or rather in two litters, one for himself and one for his "spirit." This staggered me even where Zikali was concerned, and I inquired what on earth Goza meant.

"Macumazahn, how can I tell you who only know what I myself am told?" he exclaimed. "Such is the report that the Opener of Roads has made himself by messengers to the king. None have seen him, for he journeys only in the night. Moreover, when Zikali passes all men are blind and even women's tongues grow dumb. Perchance by 'his spirit' he means his medicine or the witch-doctress, Nombé, whom folks say he created, since none have seen her father or her mother, or heard who begat her; or perchance his snake is hid behind the mats of the second litter, if in truth there was one."

"It may be so," I said, feeling that it was useless to pursue the matter. "Now, Goza, I would see Zikali and at once."

"That cannot be, Macumazahn, since he has given out that he will see no one, who rests after his journey, and the king has issued orders that any who attempt to approach the Valley of Bones shall die, even if they be of the royal blood. Yes, if so much as a dog dares to draw near that place, it must die. The soldiers who ring it round have killed one already, so strict are the orders, also a boy who went towards it searching for a calf, which I think a bad omen."

"Then I will send a message to him," I persisted.

"Do so," mocked Goza. "Look, yonder sails a vulture. Ask it to take your message, for nothing else will. Be not foolish, Macumazahn, but have patience, for to-night you shall see the Opener of Roads when he attends the Council of the king in the Valley of Bones. This is the order of the king—that at the rising of the moon I lead you thither, so that you may be present at the Council in case he wishes to ask you any questions about the White People or to give you any message to the Government in Natal. Therefore at sunset I will come for you. Till then, farewell. I have business that cannot wait."

"Can I see the king?" I cried.

"Not so, Macumazahn. All to-day he makes sacrifice to the spirits of his ancestors and must not be approached," Goza called back as he departed.

Availing myself of the permission of the king to go where I would, a little later in the day I walked out of the town towards the Valley of Bones in order to ascertain for myself whether what Goza had told me was true. So it proved, for about three hundred yards from the mouth of the valley, which at that distance looked like a black hole in the hills, I found soldiers stationed about ten paces apart in a great circle which ran right up the hillside and vanished over the crest. Strolling up to one of these, whose face I thought I knew, I asked him if he would let me pass to see my friend, the Opener of Roads.

The man, who was something of a humourist replied—

"Certainly if you wish, Macumazahn. That is to say, I will let your spirit pass, but to do this, if you come one step nearer I must first make a hole in you with my spear out of which it can fly."

I thanked him for his information and gave him some snuff, which he took gratefully, being bored by his long vigil. Then I asked him how many people the great witch-doctor had with him. He said he did not know, but he had seen a number of tall men come to the mouth of the donga to fetch food that had been placed there. Again I inquired if he had seen any women, whereon he replied none, Zikali being, he understood, too old to trouble himself about the other sex. Just then an officer, making his rounds, came up and looked at me so sternly that I thought it well to retreat. Evidently there was no chance of getting through that line.

On my way back I walked as near the fence of the King's House as I dared, and saw witch-doctors passing in and out in their hideous official panoply. This told me that here also Goza had spoken the truth—the king was performing magical ceremonies, which meant that it would be impossible to approach him. In every direction I met with failure. The Fates were against me; it lay over me like a spell. Indeed I grew superstitious and began to think that Zikali had bewitched me, as he was said to have the power to do. Well, perhaps he had, for the mere fact of finding myself opposed by this persistent wall of difficulties and silence convinced me that there was something behind it to be learned.

I went back very dejected to my hut and talked to my mare which whinnied and rubbed its nose against me, for although it was well fed and looked after, the poor beast seemed as lonely as I was myself. No wonder, since like myself it was separated from all its kind and weary of inaction. After this I ate and smoked and finally dozed, no more, for whenever I tried to go to sleep I thought that I heard Zikali laughing at me, as mayhap he was doing yonder in his hut.

At length that wearisome day drew towards its end. The sun began to sink, a huge red ball of fire, now and again veiled by clouds, for the sky was stormy. Its fierce rays, striking upon other clouds, peopled the enormous heavens with fantastic shapes of light which were thickest over the hills wherein was the Valley of Bones. To my strained mind these clouds looked like battling armies, figures of flame warring against figures of darkness. The darkness won; no, the light broke out again and conquered it. And see, there above

them both squatted a strange black presence crowned with fire. It might have been that of Zikali magnified ten thousand times, and hark! it laughed with the low reverberating voice of distant thunder.

Suddenly I felt that I was no longer alone and looking round, saw Goza at my side.

"What do you see up there, Macumazahn, that you stare so hard?" he asked, pointing at the sky with his stick.

"Impis fighting," I answered briefly.

"Then you must be a 'heaven-doctor,' Macumazahn, for I only see black and red clouds. Well, it is time to go to learn whether or no the impis will fight, for Zikali awaits us and the Council has started already. By the way, the king says that you will do well to put your pistol in your pocket in case any should seek to harm you in the dark."

"It is there. But, Goza, I pray you to protect me, since in the dark bullets fly wide, and if I began to shoot, one might hit you, Goza."

He smiled, making no answer, but I noticed that during the rest of that night he was careful to keep behind me as much as possible.

Our way led us through the town where everybody seemed to be standing about doing nothing and speaking very little. There was a curious air of expectancy upon their faces. They knew that the crisis was at hand, that their nation's fate hung upon the scales, and they watched my every look and movement as though in them they expected to read an omen. I too watched them out of the corners of my eyes, wondering whether I should escape from their savage company alive. If once the blood lust broke out among them, it seemed to me that I should have about as much chance as a chopped fox among a pack of hungry hounds.

Once out of the town we saw no one until we came to the circle of guards which I have already mentioned, who stood there like an endless line of black statues. In answer to their challenge Goza gave some complicated password in which my name occurred, whereon they opened out and let us through. Then we marched on to the mouth of the kloof. The place was very dark, for now the sun was down in the west and the moon in the east was cut off from us by the hills and would not be visible here for half an hour or more. Presently I saw a spot of light. It was a small fire burning near the tongue of rock which I have described.

At a distance, in front of the fire on the patch of prepared ground, squatted a number of men, between twenty and thirty of them, in a semicircle. They were wrapped up in karosses and blankets, and in their centre sat a large figure on a chair of wood.

"The King and the Great Council," whispered Goza.

One of them looked round and saw us. At some sign from the king he rose, and against the fire I saw that he was the Prime Minister, Umnyamana. He came to me and, with a nod of recognition, conducted me some paces to the right where a euphorbia tree grew among the rank herbage. Here I found a stool placed ready on which I sat down, Goza, who of course was not of the Council, squatting at my side in the grass.

Now I found that I was so situated that I could not well be seen from the fire, or even from the rock above it, while I, by moving my head a little, could see both quite clearly. After this as the last reflection from the sunk sun faded, the darkness increased until nothing remained visible except the fire and the massive outline of the rock behind. The silence was complete, for none of the Council spoke. They were so still that they might have been dead, so still that a beetle suddenly booming past me made me start as though it had been a bullet. The general impression was almost mesmeric. I felt as though I were going to sleep and yet my mind remained painfully awake, so that I was able to think things out.

I understood clearly that the body of men to my left had come together to decide whether there should be peace or war; that there were divisions of opinion among them; that the king was ready to follow the party which should prove itself the strongest, but that the real voice of decision would speak from behind that fire. It was the case of the Delphic Oracle over again with a priest instead of a priestess, and what a priest!

It was evident to me also that Zikali, who knew human nature, and especially savage human nature, had arranged all this with a view to scenic and indeed supernatural effect. Moreover, he had done it very well, since I knew myself that in this place and hour words and occurrences would affect me deeply at which I should have laughed in the sunlight and open plain. Already the Zulus were affected, for I could hear the teeth of some of them chattering, and Goza began to shiver at my side. He muttered that it was cold, and lied for the donga was extremely hot and stuffy.

At length the silver radiance of the moon spread itself on the high curtain of the dark. Then the edge of her orb appeared above the hill and an arrow of white light fell into the little valley. It struck upon and about the jutting rock, revealing a misshapen, white-headed figure squatted between its base and the fire, the figure of Zikali.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE GREAT COUNCIL

None had seen or heard him come, and though doubtless he had but crept round the rock and taken his place in the darkness, there appeared to be something mysterious about this sudden appearance of Zikali. So the Zulu nobles thought at any rate, for they uttered a low "Ow!" of fear and wonder.

There he sat like a huge ape staring at the sky, for the firelight shone on his deep and burning eyes. The moonlight increased, but now and again it was broken by little clouds which caused strange shadows to appear about the rock. Some of these shadows looked as though veiled figures were approaching the wizard, bending over him and departing again, after giving him their message or counsel.

"His Spirits visit him," whispered Goza, but I made no answer.

This went on for quite a long time, until the full round of the moon appeared above the hill indeed, and, for the while, the clouds had cleared away. Still Zikali sat silent and I, who was acquainted with the habits of this people, knew that I was witnessing a conflict between two they considered to be respectively a spiritual and an earthly king. It is my belief that unless he were first addressed, Zikali would have sat all night without opening his lips. Possibly Cetewayo would have done the same if the impatience of public opinion had allowed him. At any rate it was he who gave way.

"*Makosi*, master of many Spirits, on behalf of the Council and the People of the Zulus I, the King, greet you here in the place that you have chosen," said Cetewayo.

Zikali made no answer.

The silence went on as before, till at length, after a pause and some whispering, Cetewayo repeated his salutation, adding—

"Has age made you deaf, O Opener of Roads, that you cannot hear the voice of the King?"

Then at last Zikali answered in his low voice that yet seemed to fill all the kloof—

"Nay, Child of Senzangacona, age has not made me deaf, but my spirit in these latter days floats far from my body. It is like a bladder filled with air that a child holds by a string, and before I can speak I must draw it from the heavens to earth again. What did you say about the place that I have chosen? Well, what better place could I choose, seeing that it was here in this very Vale of Bones that I met the first king of the Zulus, Chaka the Wild Beast, who was your uncle? Why then should I not choose it to meet the last king of the Zulus?"

Now I, listening, knew at once that this saying might be understood in two ways, namely that Cetewayo was the reigning king, or that he was the last king who would ever reign. But the Council interpreted it in the latter and worse sense, for I saw a quiver of fear go through them.

"Why should I not choose it," went on Zikali, "seeing also that this place is holy to me? Here it was, O Son of Panda, that Chaka brought my children to be killed and forced me, sitting where you sit, to watch their deaths. There on the rock above me they were killed, four of them, three sons and a daughter, and the slayers—they came to an evil end, those slayers, as did Chaka—laughed and cast them down from the rock before me. Yes, and Chaka laughed, and I too laughed, for had not the king the right to kill my children and to steal their mothers, and was I not glad that they should be taken from the world and gathered to that of Spirits whence they always talk to me, yes, even now? That is why I did not hear you at first, King, because they were talking to me."

He paused, turning one ear upwards, then continued in a new and tender voice, "What is it you say to me, Noma, my dear little Noma? Oh! I hear you, I hear you."

Now he shifted himself along the ground on his haunches some paces to the right, and began to search about, groping with his long fingers. "Where, where?" he muttered. "Oh, I understand, further under the root, a jackal buried it, did it? Pah! how hard is this soil. Ah! I have it, but look, Noma, a stone has cut my finger. I have it, I have it," and from beneath the root of some fallen tree he drew out the skull of a child and, holding it in his right hand, softly rubbed the mould off it with his left.

"Yes, Noma, it might be yours, it is of the right size, but how can I be sure? What is it you say? The teeth? Ah! now I remember. Only the day before you were taken I pulled out that front tooth, did I not, and beneath it was another that was strangely split in two. If this skull was yours, it will be there. Come to the fire, Noma, and let us look; the moonlight is faint, is it not?"

Back to the fire he shifted himself, and bending towards the blaze, made an examination.

"True, Noma, true! Here is the split tooth, white as when I saw it all those years ago. Oh! dear child of my body, dear child of my spirit, for we do not beget with the body alone, Noma, as you know better than I do to-day, I greet you," and pressing the skull to his lips, he kissed it, then set it down in front of him between himself and the fire with the face part pointing to the king, and burst into one of his eerie and terrible laughs.

A low moan went up from his audience, and I felt the skin of Goza, who had shrunk against me, break into a profuse sweat. Then suddenly Zikali's voice changed once more and became hard and businesslike, if I may call it so, similar to that of other professional doctors.

"You have sent for me, O King, as those who went before you have sent when great things were about to happen. What is the matter on which you would speak to me?"

"You know well, Opener of Roads," answered Cetewayo, rather shakily I thought. "The matter is one of peace or war. The English threaten me and my people and make great demands on me; amongst others that the army should be disbanded. I can set them all out if you will. If I refuse to do as they bid me, then within a few days they will invade Zululand; indeed their soldiers are already gathered at the drifts."

"It is not needful, King," answered Zikali, "since I know what all know, neither more nor less. The winds whisper the demands of the white men, the birds sing them, the hyenas howl them at night. Let us see how the matter stands. When your father died Sompseu (Sir T. Shepstone), the great white chief, came from the English Government to name you king. This he could not do according to our law, since how can a stranger name the King of the Zulus? Therefore the Council of the Nation and the doctors—I was not among them, King—moved the spirit of Chaka the Lion into the body of Sompseu and made him as Chaka was and gave him power to name you to rule over the Zulus. So it came about that to the English Queen through the spirit of Chaka you swore certain things; that slaying for witchcraft should be abolished; that no man should die without fair and open trial, and other matters."

He paused a while, then went on, "These oaths you have broken, O King, as being of the blood you are and what you are, you must do."

Here there was disturbance among the Council and Cetewayo half rose from his seat, then sat down again. Zikali, gazing at the sky, waited till it had died away, then went on—

"Do any question my words? If so, then let them ask of the white men whether they be true or no. Let them ask also of the spirits of those who have died for witchcraft, and of the spirits of the women who have been slain and whose bodies were laid at the cross-roads because they married the men they chose and not the soldiers to whom the king gave them."

"How can I ask the white men who are far away?" broke out Cetewayo, ignoring the rest.

"Are the white men so far away, King? It is true that I see none and hear none, yet I seem to smell one of them close at hand." Here he took up the skull which he had laid down and whispered to it. "Ah! I thank you, my child. It seems, King, that there is a white man here hidden in this kloof, he who is named Macumazahn, a good man and a truthful, known to many of us from of old, who can tell you what his people think, though he is not one of their indunas. If you question my words, ask him."

"We know what the white men think," said Cetewayo, "so there is no need to ask Macumazahn to sing us an old song. The question is—what must the Zulus do? Must they swallow their spears and, ceasing to be a nation, become servants, or must they strike with them and drive the English into the sea, and after them the Boers?"

"Tell me first, King, who dwell far away and alone, knowing little of what passes in the land of Life, what the Zulus desire to do. Before me sits the Great Council of the Nation. Let it speak."

Then one by one the members of the Council uttered their opinions in order of rank or seniority. I do not remember the names of all who were present, or what each of them said. I recall, however, that Sigananda, a very old chief—he must have been over ninety—spoke the first. He told them that he had been friend of Chaka and one of his captains, and had fought in most of his battles. That afterwards he had been a general of Dingaan's until that king killed the Boers under Retief, when he left him and finally sided with Panda in the civil war in which Dingaan was killed with the help of the Boers. That he had been present at the battle of the Tugela, though he took no actual part in the fighting, and afterwards became a councillor of Panda's and then of Cetewayo his son. It was a long and interesting historical recital covering the whole period of the Zulu monarchy which ended suddenly with these words—

"I have noted, O King and Councillors, that whenever the black vulture of the Zulus was content to attack birds of his own feather, he has conquered. But when it has met the grey eagles of the white men, which come from over the sea, he has been conquered, and my heart tells me that as it was in the past, so it shall be in the future. Chaka was a friend of the English, so was Panda, and so has Cetewayo been until this hour. I say, therefore, let not the King tear the hand which fed him because it seems weak, lest it should grow strong and clutch him by the throat and choke him."

Next spoke Undabuko, Dabulamanzi and Magwenga, brothers of the king, who all favoured war, though the two last were guarded in their speech. After these came Uhamu, the king's uncle—he who was said to be the son of a Spirit—who was strong for peace, urging that the king should submit to the demands of the English, making the best terms he could, that he "should bend like a reed before the storm, so that after the storm had swept by, he might stand up straight again, and with him all the other reeds of the people of the Zulus."

So, too, said Seketwayo, chief of the Umdhlalosi, and more whom I cannot recall, six or seven of them. But Usibebu and the induna Untshingwayo, who afterwards commanded at Isandhlwana, were for fighting, as were Sirayo, the husband of the two women who had been taken on English territory and killed, and Umbilini, the chief of Swazi blood whose surrender was demanded by Sir Bartle Frere and who afterwards commanded the Zulus in the battle at Ihlobane. Last of all spoke the Prime Minister, Umnyamana, who declared fiercely that if the Zulu buffalo hid itself in the swamp like a timid calf when the white bull challenged it on the hills, the spirits of Chaka and all his forefathers would thrust its head into the mud and choke it.

When all had finished Cetewayo spoke, saying—

"That is a bad council which has two voices, for to which of them must the Captain listen when the impis of the foe gather in front of him? Here I have sat while the moon climbs high and counted, and what do I find? That one half of you, men of wisdom and renown, say Yes, and that the other half of you, men of wisdom and renown, say No. Which then is it to be, Yes or No? Are we to fight the English, or are we to sit still?"

"That is for the king to decide," said a voice.

"See what it is to be a king," went on Cetewayo with passion. "If I declare for war and we win, shall I be greater than I am? If victory gives me more land, more subjects, more wives and more cattle, what is the use of these things to me who already have enough of all of them? And if defeat should take everything from me, even my life perhaps, then what shall I have gained? I will tell

you—the curse of the Zulus upon my name from father to son for ever. They will say, ‘Cetewayo, son of Panda, pulled down a House that once was great. Because of some small matter he quarrelled with the English who were always the friends of our people, and brought the Zulus to the dust.’ Sintwangu, my messenger, who brought heavy words from the Queen’s *induna* which we must answer with other words or with spears, says that the English soldiers in Natal are few, so few that we Zulus can swallow them like bits of meat and still be hungry. But are these all the soldiers of the English? I am not sure. You are one of that people, Macumazahn,” he added, turning his massive shape towards me, “tell us now, how many soldiers has your Queen?”

“King,” I answered, “I do not know for certain. But if the Zulus can muster fifty thousand spears, the Queen, if there be need, can send against them ten times fifty thousand, and if she grows angry, another ten times fifty, every one armed with a rifle that will fire five bullets a minute, and to accompany the soldiers, hundreds of cannon whereof a single shot would give Ulundi to the flames. Out of the sea they will come, shipload after shipload, white men from where the sun sets and black men from where the sun rises, so many that Zululand would not hold them.”

Now at these words, which I delivered as grandly as I could, something like a groan burst from the Council, though one man cried

—  
“Do not listen to the white traitor, O King, who is sent here to turn our hearts to water with his lies.”

“Macumazahn may lie to us,” went on Cetewayo, “though in the past none in the land have ever known him to lie, but he was not sent to do so, for I brought him here. For my part I do not believe that he lies. I believe that these English are as many as the pebbles in a river bed, and that to them Natal, yes, and all the Cape is but as a single, outlying cattle kraal, one cattle kraal out of a hundred. Did not Sompseu once tell us that they were countless, on that day when he came many years ago after the battle of the Tugela to name me to succeed my father Panda, the day when my faction, the Usutu, roared round him for hours like a river in flood, and he sat still like a rock in the centre of a river? Also I am minded of the words that Chaka said when Dingaan and Umbopa had stabbed him and he lay dying at the kraal Duguza, that although the dogs of his own House whom his hand fed, had eaten him up, he heard the sound of the running of the feet of a great white people that should stamp them and the Zulus flat.”

He paused; and the silence was so intense that the crackling of Zikali’s fire, which kept on burning brightly although I saw no fuel added to it, sounded quite loud. Presently it was broken, first by a dog near at hand, howling horribly at the moon, and next by the hooting of a great owl that flitted across the donga, the shadow of its wide wings falling for a moment on the king.

“Listen!” exclaimed Cetewayo, “a dog that howls! Methinks that it stands upon the roof of the House of Senzangaona. And an owl that hoots. Methinks that owl has its nest in the world of Spirits! Are these good omens, Councillors? I trow not. I say that I will not decide this matter of peace or war. If there is one of my own blood here who will do so, come, let him take my place and let me go away to my own lordship of Gikazi that I had when I was a prince before the witch Mameena who played with all men and loved but one”—here everybody turned and stared towards me, yes, even Zikali whom nothing else had seemed to move, till I wished that the ground would swallow me up—“caused the war between me and my brother Umbelazi whose blood earth will not swallow nor suns dry—”

“How can that be, O King?” broke in Umnyamana the Prime Minister. “How can any of your race sit in your seat while you still live? Then indeed there would be war, war between tribe and tribe and Zulu and Zulu till none were left, and the white hyenas from Natal would come and chew our bones and with them the Boers that have passed the Vaal. See now. Why is this Nyanga (i.e. witch-doctor) here?” and he pointed to Zikali beyond the fire. “Why has the Opener of Roads been brought from the Black Kloof which he has not left for years? Is it not that he may give us counsel in our need and show us a sign that his counsel is good, whether it be for war or peace? Then when he has made divination and given the counsel and shown the sign, then, O King, do you speak the word of war or peace, and send it to the Queen by yonder white man, and by that word we, the people, will abide.”

At this suggestion, which I had no doubt was made by some secret agreement between Umnyamana and Zikali, Cetewayo seemed to grasp. Perhaps this was because it postponed for a little while the dreadful moment of decision, or perhaps because he hoped that in the eyes of the nation it would shift the responsibility from his shoulders to those of the Spirits speaking through the lips of their prophet. At any rate he nodded and answered—

“It is so. Let the Opener of Roads open us a road through the forests and the swamps and the rocks of doubt, danger and fear. Let him give us a sign that it is a good road on which we may safely travel, and let him tell us whether I shall live to walk that road and what I shall meet thereon. I promise him in return the greatest fee that ever yet was paid to a doctor in Zululand.”

Now Zikali lifted his big head, shook his grey locks, and opening his wide mouth as though he expected manna to fall into it from the sky, he laughed out loud.

“O-ho-ho,” he laughed, “Oho-ho-ho-o, it is worth while to have lived so long when life has brought me to such an hour as this. What is it that my ears hear? That I, the Indwande dwarf, I whom Chaka named ‘The-Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born,’ I, one of the race conquered and despised by the Zulus, am here to speak a word which the Zulus dare not utter, which the King of the Zulus dares not utter. O-ho-ho-ho! And what does the King offer to me? A fee, a great fee for the word that shall paint the Zulus red with blood or white with the slime of shame. Nay, I take no fee that is the price of blood or shame. Before I speak that word unknown—for as yet my heart has not heard it, and what the heart has not heard the lips cannot shape—I ask but one thing. It is an oath that whatever follows on the word, while there is a Zulu left living in the world, I, the Voice of the Spirits, shall be safe from hurt or from reproach, I and those of my House and those over whom I throw my blanket, be they black or be they white. That is my fee, without which I am silent.”

“*Izwa!* We hear you. We swear it on behalf of the people,” said every councillor in the semi-circle in front of him; yes, and the king said it also, stretching out his hand.

“Good,” said Zikali, “it is an oath, it is an oath, sworn here upon the bones of the dead. Evil-doers you call them, but I say to you that many of those who sit before me have more evil in their hearts than had those dead. Well, let it be proclaimed, O King, and with it this—that ill shall it go with him who breaks the oath, with his family, with his kraal and all with whom he has to do.

"Now what is it you ask of me? First of all, counsel as to whether you should fight the English Queen, a matter on which you, the Great Ones, are evenly divided in opinion, as is the nation behind you. O King, Indunas, and Captains, who am I that I should judge of such a matter which is beyond my trade, a matter of the world above and of men's bodies, not of the world below and of men's spirits? Yet there was one who made the Zulu people out of nothing, as a potter fashions a vessel from clay, as a smith fashions an assegai out of the ore of the hills, yes, and tempers it with human blood.<sup>[1]</sup> Chaka the Lion, the Wild Beast, the King among Kings, the Conqueror. I knew Chaka as I knew his father, yes, and *his* father. Others still living knew him also, say you, Sigananda there for instance," and he pointed to the old chief who had spoken first. "Yes, Sigananda knew him as a boy knows a great man, as a soldier knows a general. But I knew his heart, aye, I shaped his heart, I was its thought. Had it not been for me he would never have been great. Then he wronged me"—here Zikali took up the skull which he said was that of his daughter, and stroked it—"and I left him.

[1] The old Zulu smiths dipped their choicest blades in the blood of men.—A. Q.

"He was not wise, he should have killed one whom he had wronged, but perhaps he knew that I could not be killed; perhaps he had tried and found that he was but throwing spears at the moon which fell back on his own head. I forget. It is so long ago, and what does it matter? At least I took away from him the prop of my wisdom, and he fell—to rise no more. And so it has been with others. So it has been with others. Yet while he was great I knew his heart who lived in his heart, and therefore I ask myself, had he been sitting where the King sits to-day, what would Chaka have done? I will tell you. If not only the English but the Boers also and with them the Pondos, the Basutos and all the tribes of Africa had threatened him, he would have fought them—yes, and set his heel upon their necks. Therefore, although I give no counsel upon such a matter, I say to you that the counsel of Chaka is—fight—and conquer. Hearken to it or pass it by—I care not which."

He paused and a loud "Ow" of wonder and admiration rose from his audience. Myself I nearly joined in it, for I thought this one of the cleverest bits of statecraft that ever I had heard of or seen. The old wizard had taken no responsibility and given no answer to the demand for advice. All this he had thrust on to the shoulders of a dead man, and that man one whose name was magical to every Zulu, the king whose memory they adored, the great General who had gorged them with victory and power. Speaking as Chaka, after a long period of peace, he urged them once more to lift their spears and know the joys of triumph, thereby making themselves the greatest nation in Southern Africa. From the moment I heard this cunning appeal, I know what the end would be; all the rest was but of minor and semi-personal interest. I knew also for the first time how truly great was Zikali and wondered what he might have become had Fortune set him in different circumstances among a civilized people.

Now he was speaking again, and quickly before the impression died away.

"Such is the word of Chaka spoken by me who was his secret councillor, the Councillor who was seldom seen, and never heard. Does not Sigananda yonder know the voice which amongst all those present echoes in his ears alone?"

"I know it," cried the old chief. Then with his eyes starting almost from his head, Sigananda leapt up and raising his hand, gave the royal salute, the Bayete, to the spirit of Chaka, as though the dead king stood before him.

I think that most of those there thought that it did stand before him, for some of them also gave the Bayete and even Cetewayo raised his arm.

Sigananda squatted down again and Zikali went on.

"You have heard. This captain of the Lion knows his voice. So, that is done with. Now you ask of me something else—that I who am a doctor, the oldest of all the doctors and, it is thought—I know not—the wisest, should be able to answer. You ask of me—How shall this war prosper, if it is made—and what shall chance to the King during and after the war, and lastly you ask of me a sign. What I tell to you is true, is it not so?"

"It is true," answered the Council.

"Asking is easy," continued Zikali in a grumbling voice, "but answering is another matter. How can I answer without preparation, without the needful medicines also that I have not with me, who did not know what would be sought of me, who thought that my opinion was desired and no more? Go away now and return on the sixth night and I will tell you what I can do."

"Not so," cried the king. "We refuse to go, for the matter is immediate. Speak at once, Opener of Roads, lest it should be said in the land that after all you are but an ancient cheat, a stick that snaps in two when it is leant on."

"Ancient cheat! I remember that is what Macumazahn yonder once told me I am, though afterwards—Perhaps he was right, for who in his heart knows whether or not he be a cheat, a cheat who deceives himself and through himself others. A stick that snaps in two when it is leant on! Some have thought me so and some have thought otherwise. Well, you would have answers which I know not how to give, being without medicine and in face of those who are quite ignorant and therefore cannot lend me their thoughts, as it sometimes happens that men do when workers of evil are sought out in the common fashion. For then, as you may have guessed, it is the evil-doer who himself tells the doctor of his crime, though he may not know that he is telling it. Yet there is another stone that I alone can throw, another plan that I alone can practise, and that not always. But of this I would not make use since it is terrible and might frighten you or even send you back to your huts raving so that your wives, yes, and the very dogs fled, from you."

He stopped and for the first time did something to his fire, for I saw his hands going backwards and forwards, as though he warmed them at the flames.

At length an awed voice, I think it was that of Dabulamanzi, asked—

"What is this plan, Inyanga? Let us hear that we may judge."

"The plan of calling one from the dead and hearkening to the voice of the dead. Is it your desire that I should draw water from this fount of wisdom, O King and Councillors?"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WAR

Now men began to whisper together and Goza groaned at my side.

"Rather would I look down a live lion's throat than see the dead," he murmured. But I, who was anxious to learn how far Zikali would carry his tricks, contemptuously told him to be silent.

Presently the king called me to him and said—

"Macumazahn, you white men are reported to know all things. Tell me now, is it possible for the dead to appear?"

"I am not sure," I answered doubtfully; "some say that it is and some say that it is not possible."

"Well," said the king. "Have you ever seen one you knew in life after death?"

"No," I replied, "that is—yes. That is—I do not know. When you will tell me, King, where waking ends and sleep begins, then I will answer."

"Macumazahn," he exclaimed, "just now I announced that you were no liar, who perceive that after all you are a liar, for how can you both have seen, and not seen, the dead? Indeed I remember that you lied long ago, when you gave it out that the witch Mameena was not your lover, and afterwards showed that she was by kissing her before all men, for who kisses a woman who is not his lover, or his mother? Return, since you will not tell me the truth."

So I went back to my stool, feeling very small and yet indignant, for how was it possible to be definite about ghosts, or to explain the exact facts of the Mameena myth which clung to me like a Wait-a-bit thorn.

Then after a little consultation Cetewayo said—

"It is our desire, O Opener of Roads, that you should draw wisdom from the fount of Death, if indeed you can do so. Now let any who are afraid depart and wait for us who are not afraid, alone and in silence at the mouth of the kloof."

At this some of the audience rose, but after hesitating a little, sat down again. Only Goza actually took a step forward, but on my remarking that he would probably meet the dead coming up that way, collapsed, muttering something about my pistol, for the fool seemed to think I could shoot a spirit.

"If indeed I can do so," repeated Zikali in a careless fashion. "That is to be proved, is it not? Perhaps, too, it may be better for every one of you if I fail than if I succeed. Of one thing I warn you, should the dead appear stir not, and above all touch not, for he who does either of these things will, I think, never live to look upon the sun again. But first let me try an easier fashion."

Then once again he took up the skull that he said had been his daughter's, and whispered to it, only to lay it down presently.

"It will not serve," he said with a sigh and shaking his locks. "Noma tells me that she died a child, one who had no knowledge of war or matters of policy, and that in all these things of the world she still remains a child. She says that I must seek some one who thought much of them; one, too who still lives in the heart of a man who is present here, if that be possible, since from such a heart alone can the strength be drawn to enable the dead to appear and speak. Now let there be silence—Let there be silence, and woe to him that breaks it."

Silence there was indeed, and in it Zikali crouched himself down till his head almost rested on his knee, and seemed to go to sleep. He awoke again and chanted for half a minute or so in some language I could not understand. Then voices began to answer him, as it seemed to me from all over the kloof, also from the sky or rock above. Whether the effect was produced by ventriloquism or whether he had confederates posted at various points, I do not know.

At any rate this lord of "multitudes of spirits" seemed to be engaged in conversation with some of them. What is more, the thing was extremely well done, since each voice differed from the other; also I seemed to recognize some of them, Dingaan's for instance, and Panda's, yes, and that of Umbelazi the Handsome, the brother of the king whose death I witnessed down by the Tugela.

You will ask me what they said. I do not know. Either the words were confused or the events that followed have blotted them from my brain. All I remember is that each of them seemed to be speaking of the Zulus and their fate and to be very anxious to refer further discussion of the matter to some one else. In short they seemed to talk under protest, or that was my impression, although Goza, the only person with whom I had any subsequent debate upon the subject, appeared to have gathered one that was different, though what it was I do not recall. The only words that remained clear to me must, I thought, have come from the spirit of Chaka, or rather from Zikali or one of his myrmidons assuming that character. They were uttered in a deep full voice, spiced with mockery, and received by the wizard with *Sibonga*, or titles of praise, which I who am versed in Zulu history and idiom knew had only been given to the great king, and indeed since his death had become unlawful, not to be used. The words were—

"What, Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born, do you think yourself a Thing-that-should-never-die, that you still sit beneath the moon and weave witchcrafts as of old? Often have I hunted for you in the Under-world who have an account to settle with you, as you have an account to settle with me. So, so, what does it matter since we must meet at last, even if you hide yourself at the back of the furthest star? Why do you bring me up to this place where I see some whom I would forget? Yes, they build bone on bone and taking the red earth, mould it into flesh and stand before me as last I saw them newly dead. Oh! your magic is good, Spell-weaver,

and your hate is deep and your vengeance is keen. No, I have nothing to tell you to-day, who rule a greater people than the Zulus in another land. Who are these little men who sit before you? One of them has a look of Dingaan, my brother who slew me, yes, and wears his armet. Is he the king? Answer not, for I do not care to know. Surely yonder withered thing is Sigananda. I know his eye and the *Iziqu* on his breast. Yes, I gave it to him after the great battle with Zweede in which he killed five men. Does he remember it, I wonder? Greeting, Sigananda; old as you are you have still twenty and one years to live, and then we will talk of the battle with Zweede. Let me begone, this place burns my spirit, and in it there is a stench of mortal blood. Farewell, O Conqueror!"

These were the words that I thought I heard Chaka say, though I daresay that I dreamt them. Indeed had it been otherwise, I mean had they really been spoken by Zikali, there would surely have been more in them, something that might have served his purpose, not mere talk which had all the inconsequence of a dream. Also no one else seemed to pay any particular attention to them, though this may have been because so many voices were sounding from different places at once, for as I have said, Zikali arranged his performance very well, as well as any medium could have done on a prepared stage in London.

In a moment, as though at a signal, the voices died away. Then other things happened. To begin with I felt very faint, as though all the strength were being taken out of me. Some queer fancy got a hold of me. I don't quite know what it was, but it had to do with the Bible story of Adam when he fell asleep and a rib was removed from him and made into a woman. I reflected that I felt as Adam must have done when he came out of his trance after this terrific operation, very weak and empty. Also, as it chanced, presently I saw Eve—or rather a woman. Looking at the fire in a kind of disembodied way, I perceived that dense smoke was rising from it, which smoke spread itself out like a fan. It thinned by degrees, and through the veil of smoke I perceived something else, namely, a woman very like one whom once I had known. There she stood, lightly clad enough, her fingers playing with the blue beads of her necklace, an inscrutable smile upon her face and her large eyes fixed on nothingness.

Oh! Heaven, I knew her, or rather thought I did at the moment, for now I am almost sure that it was Nombé dressed, or undressed, for the part. That knowledge came with reflection, but then I could have sworn, being deceived by the uncertain light, that the long dead Mameena stood before us as she had seemed to stand before me in the hut of Zikali, radiating a kind of supernatural life and beauty.

A little wind arose, shaking the dry leaves of the aloes in the kloof; I thought it whispered—*Hail, Mameena!* Some of the older men, too, among them a few who had seen her die, in trembling voices murmured, "It is Mameena!" whereon Zikali scowled at them and they grew silent.

As for the figure it stood there patient and unmoved, like one who has all time at its disposal, playing with the blue beads. I heard them tinkle against each other, which proves that it was human, for how could a wraith cause beads to tinkle, although it is true that Christmas-story ghosts are said to clank their chains. Her eyes roved idly and without interest over the semi-circle of terrified men before her. Then by degrees they fixed themselves upon the tree behind which I was crouching, whereon Goza sank paralyzed to the ground. She contemplated this tree for a while that seemed to me interminable; it reminded me of a setter pointing game it winded but could not see, for her whole frame grew intent and alert. She ceased playing with the beads and stretched out her slender hand towards me. Her lips moved. She spoke in a sweet, slow voice, saying—

"O Watcher-by-Night, is it thus you greet her to whom you have given strength to stand once more beneath the moon? Come hither and tell me, have you no kiss for one from whom you parted with a kiss?"

I heard. Without doubt the voice was the very voice of Mameena (so well had Nombé been instructed). Still I determined not to obey it, who would not be made a public laughing-stock for a second time in my life. Also I confess this jesting with the dead seemed to me somewhat unholy, and not on any account would I take a part in it.

All the company turned and stared at me, even Goza lifted his head and stared, but I sat still and contemplated the beauties of the night.

"If it is the spirit of Mameena, he will come," whispered Cetewayo to Umnyamana.

"Yes, yes," answered the Prime Minister, "for the rope of his love will draw him. He who has once kissed Mameena, *must* kiss her again when she asks."

Hearing this I grew furiously indignant and was about to break into explanations, when to my horror I found myself rising from that stool. I tried to cling to it, but, as it only came into the air with me, let it go.

"Hold me, Goza," I muttered, and he like a good fellow clutched me by the ankle, whereon I promptly kicked him in the mouth, at least my foot kicked him, not my will. Now I was walking towards that Shape—shadow or woman—like a man in his sleep, and as I came she stretched out her arms and smiled oh! as sweetly as an angel, though I felt quite sure that she was nothing of the sort.

Now I stood opposite to her alongside the fire of which the smoke smelt like roses at the dawn, and she seemed to bend towards me. With shame and humiliation I perceived that in another moment those arms would be about me. But somehow they never touched me; I lost sight of them in the rose-scented smoke, only the sweet, slow voice which I could have sworn was that of Mameena, murmured in my ear—well, words known to her and me alone that I had never breathed to any living being, though of course I am aware now that they must also have been known to somebody else.

"Do you doubt me any longer?" went on the murmuring. "Say, am I Nombé now? Or—or am I in truth that Mameena, whose kiss thrills your lips and soul? Harken, Macumazahn, for the time is short. In the rout of the great battle that shall be, do not fly with the white men, but set your face towards Ulundi. One who was your friend will guard you, and whoever dies, no harm shall come to you now that the fire which burns in my heart has set all Zululand aflame. Harken once more. Hans, the little yellow man who was named Light-in-Darkness, he who died among the Kendah people, sends you salutations and gives you praise. He bids me tell you that now of his own accord he renders to me, Mameena, the royal salute, because royal I must ever be; because also he and I who are so far apart are yet one in the love that is our life."

The smoke blew into my face, causing me to reel back. Cetewayo caught me by the arm, saying—

"Tell us, are the lips of the dead witch warm or cold?"

"I do not know," I groaned, "for I never touched her."

"How he lies! Oh! how he lies even about what our eyes saw," said Cetewayo reflectively as I blundered past him back to my seat, on which I sank half swooning. When I got my wits again the figure that pretended to be Mameena was speaking, I suppose in answer to some question of Zikali's which I had not heard. It said—

"O Lord of the Spirits, you have called me from the land of Spirits to make reply as to two matters which have not yet happened upon the earth. These replies I will give but no others, since the mortal strength that I have borrowed returns whence it came. The first matter is, if there be war between the White and Black, what will happen in that war? I see a plain ringed round with hills and on it a strange-shaped mount. I see a great battle; I see the white men go down like corn before a tempest; I see the spears of the *impis* redden; I see the white soldiers lie like leaves cut from a tree by frost. They are dead, all dead, save a handful that have fled away. I hear the *ingoma* of victory sung here at Ulundi. It is finished.

"The second matter is—what shall chance to the king? I see him tossed on the Black Water; I see him in a land full of houses, talking with a royal woman and her councillors. There, too, he conquers, for they offer him tribute of many gifts. I see him here, back here in Zululand, and hear him greeted with the royal salute. Last of all I see him dead, as men must die, and hear the voice of Zikali and the mourning of the women of his house. It is finished. Farewell, King Cetewayo, I pass to tell Panda, your father, how it fares with you. When last we parted did I not prophesy to you that we should meet again at the bottom of a gulf? Was it this gulf, think you, or another? One day you shall learn. Farewell, or fare ill, as it may happen!"

Once more the smoke spread out like a fan. When it thinned and drew together again, the Shape was gone.

Now I thought that the Zulus would be so impressed by this very queer exhibition, that they would seek no more supernatural guidance, but make up their minds for war at once. This, however, was just what they did not do. As it happened, among the assembled chiefs, was one who himself had a great repute as a witch-doctor, and therefore burned with jealousy of Zikali who appeared to be able to do things that he had never even attempted. This man leapt up and declared that all which they had seemed to hear and see was but cunning trickery, carried out after long preparation by Zikali and his confederates. The voices, he said, came from persons placed in certain spots, or sometimes were produced by Zikali himself. As for the vision, it was not that of a spirit but of a real woman, in proof of which he called attention to certain anatomical details of the figure. Finally, with much sense, he pointed out that the Council would be mad to come to any decision upon such evidence, or to give faith to prophecies, whereof the truth or falsity could only be known in the future.

Now a fierce debate broke out, the war party maintaining that the manifestations were genuine, the peace party that they were a fraud. In the end, as neither side would give way and as Zikali, when appealed to, sat silent as a stone, refusing any explanation, the king said—

"Must we sit here talking, talking, till daylight? There is but one man who can know the truth, that is Macumazahn. Let him deny it as he will, he was the lover of this Mameena while she was alive, for with my own eyes I saw him kiss her before she killed herself. It is certain, therefore, that he knows if the woman we seemed to see was Mameena or another, since there are things which a man never forgets. I propose, therefore, that we should question him and form our own judgment of his answer."

This advice, which seemed to promise a road out of a blind ally, met with instant acceptance.

"Let it be so," they cried with one voice, and in another minute I was once more conducted from behind my tree and set down upon the stool in front of the Council, with my back to the fire and Zikali, "that his eyes might not charm me."

"Now, Watcher-by-Night," said Cetewayo, "although you have lied to us in a certain matter, of this we do not think much, since it is one upon which both men and women always lie, as every judge will know. Therefore we still believe you to be an honest man, as your dealings have proved for many years. As an honest man, therefore, we beg you to give us a true answer to a plain question. Was the Shape we saw before us just now a woman or a spirit, and if a spirit, was it the ghost of Mameena, the beautiful witch who died near this place nearly the quarter of a hundred years ago, she whom you loved, or who loved you, which is just the same thing, since a man always loves a woman who loves him, or thinks that he does?"

Now after reflection I replied in these words and as conscientiously as I could—

"King and Councillors, I do not know if what we all saw was a ghost or a living person, but, as I do not believe in ghosts, or at any rate that they come back to the world on such errands, I conclude that it was a living person. Still it may have been neither, but only a mere picture produced before us by the arts of Zikali. So much for the first question. Your second is—was this spirit or woman or shadow, that of her whom I remember meeting in Zululand many years ago? King and Councillors, I can only say that it was very like her. Still one handsome young woman often greatly resembles another of the same age and colouring. Further, the moon gives an uncertain light, especially when it is tempered by smoke from a fire. Lastly, memory plays strange tricks with all of us, as you will know if you try to think of the face of any one who has been dead for more than twenty years. For the rest, the voice seemed similar, the beads and ornaments seemed similar, and the figure repeated to me certain words which I thought I alone had heard come from the lips of her who is dead. Also she gave me a strange message from another who is dead, referring to a matter which I believed was known only to me and that other. Yet Zikali is very clever and may have learned these things in some way unguessed by me, and what he has learned, others may have learned also. King and Councillors, I do not think that what we saw was the spirit of Mameena. I think it a woman not unlike to her who had been taught her lesson. I have nothing more to say, and therefore I pray you not to ask me any further questions about Mameena of whose name I grow weary."

At this point Zikali seemed to wake out of his indifference, or his torpor, for he looked up and said darkly—

"It is strange that the cleverest are always those who first fall into the trap. They go along, gazing at the stars at night, and forget the pit which they themselves have dug in the morning. *O-ho-ho! Oho-ho!*"

Now the wrangling broke out afresh. The peace party pointed triumphantly to the fact that I, the white man who ought to know, put no faith in this apparition, which was therefore without doubt a fraud. The war party on the other hand declared that I was deceiving them for reasons of my own, one of which would be that I did not wish to see the Zulus eat up my people. So fierce grew

the debate that I thought it would end in blows and perhaps in an attack on myself or Zikali who all the while sat quite careless and unmoved, staring at the moon. At length Cetewayo shouted for silence, spitting, as was his habit when angry.

"Make an end," he cried, "lest I cause some of you to grow quiet for ever," whereon the recriminations ceased. "Opener of Roads," he went on, "many of those who are present think like Macumazahn here, that you are but an old cheat, though whether or no I be one of these I will not say. They demand a sign of you that none can dispute, and I demand it also before I speak the word of peace or war. Give us then that sign or begone to whence you came and show your face no more at Ulundi."

"What sign does the Council require, Son of Panda?" asked Zikali quietly. "Let them agree on one together and tell me now at once, for I who am old grow weary and would sleep. Then if it can be given I will give it; and if I cannot give it, I will get me back to my own house and show my face no more at Ulundi, who do not desire to listen again to fools who babble like contending waters round a stone and yet never stir the stone because they run two ways at once."

Now the Councillors stared at each other, for none knew what sign to ask. At length old Sigananda said—

"O King, it is well known that the Black One who went before you had a certain little assegai handled with the royal red wood, which drank the blood of many. It was with this assegai that Mopo his servant, who vanished from the land after the death of Dingaan, let out the life of the Black One at the kraal Duguza, but what became of it afterwards none have heard for certain. Some say that it was buried with the Black One, some that Mopo stole it. Others that Dingaan and Umhlagana burned it. Still a saying rose like a wind in the land that when that spear shall fall from heaven at the feet of the king who reigns in the place of the Black One, then the Zulus shall make their last great war and win a victory of which all the world shall hear. Now let the Opener of Roads give us this sign of the falling of the Black One's spear and I shall be content."

"Would you know the spear if it fell?" asked Cetewayo.

"I should know it, O King, who have often held it in my hand. The end of the haft is gnawed, for when he was angry the Black One used to bite it. Also a thumb's length from the blade is a black mark made with hot iron. Once the Black One made a bet with one of his captains that at a distance of ten paces he would throw the spear deeper into the body of a chief whom he wished to kill, than the captain could. The captain threw first, for I saw him with my eyes, and the spear sank to that place on the shaft where the mark is, for the Black One burned it there. Then the Black One threw and the spear went through the body of the chief who, as he died, called to him that he too should know the feel of it in his heart, as indeed he did."

I think that Cetewayo was about to assent to this suggestion, since he who desired peace believed it impossible that Zikali should suddenly cause this identical spear to fall from heaven. But Umnyamana, the Prime Induna, interposed hurriedly—

"It is not enough, O King. Zikali may have stolen the spear, for he was living and at the kraal Duguza at that time. Also he may have put about the prophecy whereof Sigananda speaks, or at least so men would say. Let him give us a greater sign than this that all may be content, so that whether we make war or peace it may be with a single mind. Now it is known that we Zulus have a guardian spirit who watches over us from the skies, she who is called Nomkubulwana, or by some the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, the Princess of Heaven. It is known also that this Princess, who is white of skin and ruddy-haired, appears always before great things happen in our land. Thus she appeared before the Black One died. Also she appeared to a number of children before the battle of the Tugela. It is said, too, that but lately she appeared to a woman near the coast and warned her to cross the Tugela because there would be war, though this woman cannot now be found. Let the Opener of Roads call down Nomkubulwana before our eyes from heaven and we will admit, every man of us, that this is a sign which cannot be questioned."

"And if he does this thing, which I hold no doctor in the world can do, what shall it signify?" asked Cetewayo.

"O King," answered Umnyamana, "if he does so, it shall signify war and victory. If he does not do so, it shall signify peace, and we will bow our heads before the *Amalungwana basi bodwe*" (i.e., "the little English," used as a term of derision).

"Do all agree?" asked Cetewayo.

"We agree," answered every man, stretching out his hand.

"Then, Opener of Roads, it stands thus: If you can call Nomkubulwana, should there be such a spirit, to appear before our eyes, the Council will take it as a sign that the Heavens direct us to fight the English."

So spoke Cetewayo, and I noted a tone of triumph in his voice, for his heart shrank from this war, and he was certain that Zikali could do nothing of the sort. Still the opinion of the nation, or rather of the army, was so strong in favour of it that he feared lest his refusal might bring about his deposition, if not his death. From this dilemma the supernatural test suggested by the Prime Minister and approved by the Council that represented the various tribes of people, seemed to offer a path of escape. So I read the situation, as I think rightly.

Upon hearing these words for the first time that night Zikali seemed to grow disturbed.

"What do my ears hear?" he exclaimed excitedly. "Am I the *Umkulukulu*, the Great-Great (i.e., God) himself, that it should be asked of me to draw the Princess of Heaven from beyond the stars, she who comes and goes like the wind, but like the wind cannot be commanded? Do they hear that if she will not come to my beckoning, then the great Zulu people must put a yoke upon their shoulders and be as slaves? Surely the King must have been listening to the doctrines of those English teachers who wear a white ribbon tied about their necks, and tell us of a god who suffered himself to be nailed to a cross of wood, rather than make war upon his foes, one whom they call the Prince of Peace. Times have changed indeed since the days of the Black One. Yes, generals have become like women; the captains of the *impis* are set to milk the cows. Well, what have I to do with all this? What does it matter to me who am so very old that only my head remains above the level of the earth, the rest of me being buried in the grave, who am not even a Zulu to boot, but a Dwandwe, one of the despised Dwandwe whom the Zulus mocked and conquered?"

"Hearken to me, Spirits of the House of Senzangacona"—here he addressed about a dozen of Cetewayo's ancestors by name, going back for many generations. "Hearken to me, O Princess of Heaven, appointed by the Great-Great to be the guardian of the Zulu race. It is asked that you should appear, should it be your wish to signify to these your children that they must stand upon their feet and resist the white men who already gather upon their borders. And should it be your wish that they should lay down their spears and go

home to sleep with their wives and hoe the gardens while the white men count the cattle and set each to his work upon the roads, then that you should not appear. Do what you will, O Spirits of the House of Senzangacona, do what you will, O Princess of Heaven. What does it matter to the Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born, who soon will be as though he never had been born, whether the House of Senzangacona and the Zulu people stand or fall?

"I, the old doctor, was summoned here to give counsel. I gave counsel, but it passed over the heads of these wise ones like a shadow of which none took note. I was asked to prophesy of what would chance if war came. I called the dead from their graves; they came in voices, and one of them put on the flesh again and spoke from the lips of flesh. The white man to whom she spoke denied her who had been his love, and the wise ones said that she was a cheat, yes, a doll that I had dressed up to deceive them. This spirit that had put on flesh, told of what would chance in the war, if war there were, and what would chance to the King, but they mock at the prophecy and now they demand a sign. Come then, Nomkubulwana, and give them the sign if you will and let there be war. Or stay away and give them no sign if you will, and let there be peace. It is nought to me, nought to the Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born."

Thus he rambled on, as it occurred to me who watched and listened, talking against time. For I observed that while he spoke a cloud was passing over the face of the moon, and that when he ceased speaking it was quite obscured by this cloud, so that the Vale of Bones was plunged in a deep twilight that was almost darkness. Further, in a nervous kind of way, he did something more to his wizard's fire which again caused it to throw out a fan of smoke that hid him and the execution rock in front of which he sat.

The cloud floated by and the moon came out as though from an eclipse; the smoke of the fire, too, thinned by degrees. As it melted and the light grew again, I became aware that something was materializing, or had appeared on the point of the rock above us. A few seconds later, to my wonder and amazement, I perceived that this something was the spirit-like form of a white woman which stood quite still upon the very point of the rock. She was clad in some garment of gleaming white cut low upon her breast, that may have been of linen, but from the way it shone, suggested that it was of glittering feathers, egrets' for instance. Her ruddy hair was outspread, and in it, too, something glittered, like mica or jewels. Her feet and milk-hued arms were bare and poised in her right hand was a little spear.

Nor did I see alone, since a moan of fear and worship went up from the Councillors. Then they grew silent and stared and stared.

Suddenly Zikali lifted his head and looked at them through the thin flame of the fire which made his eyes shine like those of a tiger or of a cornered baboon.

"At what do you gaze so hard, King and Councillors?" he asked. "I see nothing. At what then do you gaze so hard?"

"On the rock above you stands a white spirit in her glory. It is the Inkosazana herself," muttered Cetewayo.

"Has she come then?" mocked the old wizard. "Nay, surely it is but a dream, or another of my tricks; some black woman painted white that I have smuggled here in my medicine bag, or rolled up in the blanket on my back. How can I prove to you that this is not another cheat like to that of the spirit of Mameena whom the white man, her lover, did not know again? Go near to her you must not, even if you could, seeing that if by chance she should *not* be a cheat, you would die, every man of you, for woe to him whom Nomkubulwana touches. How then, how? Ah! I have it. Doubtless in his pocket Macumazahn yonder hides a little gun, Macumazahn who with such a gun can cut a reed in two at thirty paces, or shave the hair from the chin of a man, as is well known in the land. Let him then take his little gun and shoot at that which you say stands upon the rock. If it be a black woman painted white, doubtless she will fall down dead, as so many have fallen from that rock. But if it be the Princess of Heaven, then the bullet will pass through her or turn aside and she will take no harm, though whether Macumazahn will take any harm is more than I can say."

Now when they heard this many remained silent, but some of the peace party began to clamour that I should be ordered to shoot at the apparition. At length Cetewayo seemed to give way to this pressure. I say seemed, because I think he wished to give way. Whether or not a spirit stood before him, he knew no more than the rest, but he did know that unless the vision were proved to be mortal he would be driven into war with the English. Therefore he took the only chance that remained to him.

"Macumazahn," he said, "I know you have your pistol on you, for only the other day you brought it into my presence, and through light and darkness you nurse it as a mother does her firstborn. Now since the Opener of Roads desires it, I command you to fire at that which seems to stand above us. If it be a mortal woman, she is a cheat and deserves to die. If it be a spirit from heaven it can take no harm. Nor can you take harm who only do that which you must."

"Woman or spirit, I will not shoot, King," I answered.

"Is it so? What! do you defy me, White Man? Do so if you will, but learn that then your bones shall whiten here in this Vale of Bones. Yes, you shall be the first of the English to go below," and turning, he whispered something to two of the Councillors.

Now I saw that I must either obey or die. For a moment my mind grew confused in face of this awful alternative. I did not believe that I saw a spirit. I believed that what stood above me was Nombé cunningly tricked out with some native pigments which at that distance and in that light made her look like a white woman. For oddly enough at that time the truth did not occur to me, perhaps because I was too surprised. Well, if it were Nombé, she deserved to be shot for playing such a trick, and what is more her death, by revealing the fraud of Zikali, would perhaps avert a great war. But then why did he make the suggestion that I should be commanded to fire at this figure? Slowly I drew out my pistol and brought it to the full cock, for it was loaded.

"I will obey, King," I said, "to save myself from being murdered. But on your head be all that may follow from this deed."

Then it was for the first time that a new idea struck me so clearly that I believe it was conveyed direct from Zikali's brain to my own. *I might shoot, but there was no need for me to hit.* After that everything grew plain.

"King," I said, "if yonder be a mortal, she is about to die. Only a spirit can escape my aim. Watch now the centre of her forehead, for there the bullet will strike!"

I lifted the pistol and appeared to cover the figure with much care. As I did so, even from that distance I thought I saw a look of terror in its eyes. Then I fired, with a little jerk of the wrist sending the ball a good yard above her head.

"She is unharmed," cried a voice. "Macumazahn missed her."

"Macumazahn does not miss," I replied loftily. "If that at which he aimed is unharmed, it is because it cannot be hit."

"*O-ho-o!*" laughed Zikali, "the White Man who does not know the taste of his own love's lips, says that he has fired at that which cannot be hit. Let him try again. No, let him choose another target. The Spirit is the Spirit, but he who summoned her may still be a cheat. There is another bullet in your little gun, White Man; see if it can pierce the heart of Zikali, that the King and Council may learn whether he be a true prophet, the greatest of all the prophets that ever was, or whether he be but a common cheat."

Now a sudden rage filled me against this old rascal. I remembered how he had brought Mameena to her death, when he thought that it would serve him, and since then filled the land with stories concerning her and me, which met me whatever way I turned. I remembered that for years he had plotted to bring about the destruction of the Zulus, and to further his dark ends, was now engaged in causing a fearful war which would cost the lives of thousands. I remembered that he had trapped me into Zululand and then handed me over to Cetewayo, separating me from my friends who were in my charge, and for aught I knew, giving them to death. Surely the world would be well rid of him.

"Have your will," I shouted and covered him with the pistol.

Then there came into my mind a certain saying—"Judge not that ye be not judged." Who and what was I that I should dare to arraign and pass sentence upon this man who after all had suffered many wrongs? As I was about to fire I caught sight of some bright object flashing towards the king from above, and instantaneously shifted my aim and pressed the trigger. The thing, whatever it might be, flew in two. One part of it fell upon Zikali, the other part travelled on and struck Cetewayo upon the knee.

There followed a great confusion and a cry of "The king is stabbed!" I ran forward to look and saw the blade of a little assegai lying on the ground and on Cetewayo's knee a slight cut from which blood trickled.

"It is nothing," I said, "a scratch, no more, though had not the spear been stopped in its course it might have been otherwise."

"Yes," cried Zikali, "but what was it that caused the cut? Take this, Sigamanda, and tell me what it may be," and he threw towards him a piece of red wood.

Sigamanda looked at it. "It is the haft of the Black One's spear," he exclaimed, "which the bullet of Macumazahn has severed from the blade."

"Aye," said Zikali, "and the blade has drawn the blood of the Black One's child. Read me this omen, Sigamanda; or ask it of her who stands above you."

Now all looked to the rock, but it was empty. The figure had vanished.

"Your word, King," said Zikali. "Is it for peace or war?"

Cetewayo looked at the assegai, looked at the blood trickling from his knee, looked at the faces of the councillors.

"Blood calls for blood," he moaned. "My word is—*War!*"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### KAATJE BRINGS NEWS

Zikali burst into one of his peals of laughter, so unholy that it caused the blood in me to run cold.

"The King's word is *war*," he cried. "Let Nomkubulwana take that word back to heaven. Let Macumazahn take it to the White Men. Let the captains cry it to the regiments and let the world grow red. The King has chosen, though mayhap, had I been he, I should have chosen otherwise; yet what am I but a hollow reed stuck in the ground up which the spirits speak to men? It is finished, and I, too, am finished for a while. Farewell, O King! Where shall we meet again, I wonder? On the earth or under it? Farewell, Macumazahn, I know where we shall meet, though you do not. O King, I return to my own place, I pray you to command that none come near me or trouble me with words, for I am spent."

"It is commanded," said Cetewayo.

As he spoke the fire went out mysteriously, and the wizard rose and hobbled off at a surprising pace round the corner of the projecting rock.

"Stay!" I called, "I would speak with you;" but although I am sure he heard me, he did not stop or look round.

I sprang up to follow him, but at some sign from Cetewayo two *indunas* barred my way.

"Did you not hear the King's command, White Man?" one of them asked coldly, and the tone of his question told me that war had been declared, I was now looked upon as a foe. I was about to answer sharply when Cetewayo himself addressed me.

"Macumazahn," he said, "you are now my enemy, like all your people, and from sunrise to-morrow morning your safe-conduct here ends, for if you are found at Ulundi two hours after that time, it will be lawful for any man to kill you. Yet as you are still my guest, I will give you an escort to the borders of the land. Moreover, you shall take a message from me to the Queen's officers and captains. It is—that I will send an answer to their demands upon the point of an assegai. Yet add this, that not I but the English, to whom I have always been a friend, sought this war. If Sompseu had suffered me to fight the Boers as I wished to do, it would never have come about. But he threw the Queen's blanket over the Transvaal and stood upon it, and now he declares that lands which were always the property of the Zulus, belong to the Boers. Therefore I take back all the promises which I made to him when he came hither to call me King in the Queen's name, and no more do I call him my father. As for the disbanding of my *impis*, let the English disband them if they can. I have spoken."

"And I have heard," I answered, "and will deliver your words faithfully, though I hold, King, that they come from the lips of one whom the Heavens have made mad."

At this bold speech some of the Councillors started up with threatening gestures. Cetewayo waved them back and answered quietly, "Perhaps it was the Queen of Heaven who stood on yonder rock who made me mad. Or perhaps she made me wise, as being the Spirit of our people she should surely do. That is a question which the future will decide, and if ever we should meet after it is decided, we will talk it over. Now, *hamba gachle!* (go in peace)."

"I hear the king and I will go, but first I would speak with Zikali."

"Then, White Man, you must wait till this war is finished or till you meet him in the Land of Spirits. Goza, lead Macumazahn back to his hut and set a guard about it. At the dawn a company of soldiers will be waiting with orders to take him to the border. You will go with him and answer for his safety with your life. Let him be well treated on the road as my messenger."

Then Cetewayo rose and stood while all present gave him the royal salute, after which he walked away down the kloof. I remained for a moment, making pretence to examine the blade of the little assegai that had been thrown by the figure on the rock, which I had picked from the ground. This historical piece of iron which I have no doubt is the same that Chaka always carried, wherewith, too, he is said to have killed his mother, Nandie, by the way I still possess, for I slipped it into my pocket and none tried to take it from me.

Really, however, I was wondering whether I could in any way gain access to Zikali, a problem that was settled for me by a sharp request to move on, uttered in a tone which admitted of no further argument.

Well, I trudged back to my hut in the company of Goza, who was so overcome by all the wonders he had seen that he could scarcely speak. Indeed, when I asked him what he thought of the figure that had appeared upon the rock, he replied petulantly that it was not given to him to know whence spirits came or of what stuff they were made, which showed me that he at any rate believed in its supernatural origin and that it had appeared to direct the Zulus to make war. This was all I wanted to find out, so I said nothing more, but gave up my mind to thought of my own position and difficulties.

Here I was, ordered on pain of death to depart from Ulundi at the dawn. And yet how could I obey without seeing Zikali and learning from him what had happened to Anscombe and Heda, or at any rate without communicating with him? Once more only did I break silence, offering to give Goza a gun if he would take a message from me to the great wizard. But with a shake of his big head, he answered that to do so would mean death, and guns were of no good to a dead man since, as I had shown myself that night, they had no power to shoot a spirit.

This closed the business on which I need not have troubled to enter, since an answer to all my questionings was at hand.

We reached the hut where Goza gave me over to the guard of soldiers, telling their officer that none were to be permitted to enter it save myself and that I was not to be permitted to come out of it until he, Goza, came to fetch me a little before the dawn.

The officer asked if any one else was to be permitted to come out, a question that surprised me, though vaguely, for I was thinking of other things. Then Goza departed, remarking that he hoped I should sleep better than he would, who “felt spirits in his bones and did not wish to kiss them as I seemed to like to do.” I replied facetiously, thinking of the bottle of brandy, that ere long I meant to feel them in my stomach, whereat he shook his head again with the air of one whom nothing connected with me could surprise, and vanished.

I crawled into the hut and put the board over the bee-hole-like entrance behind me. Then I began to hunt for the matches in my pocket and pricked my finger with the point of Chaka’s historical assegai. While I was sucking it to my amazement I heard the sound of some one breathing on the further side of the hut. At first I thought of calling the guard, but on reflection found the matches and lit the candle, which stood by the blankets that served me as a bed. As soon as it burned up I looked towards the sound, and to my horror perceived the figure of a sleeping woman, which frightened me so much that I nearly dropped the candle.

To tell the truth, so obsessed was I with Zikali and his ghosts that for a few moments it occurred to me that this might be the Shape with which I had talked an hour or two before. I mean that which had seemed to resemble the long-dead lady Mameena, or rather the person made up to her likeness, come here to continue our conversation. At any rate I was sure, and rightly, that here was more of the handiwork of Zikali who wished to put me in some dreadful position for reasons of his own.

Pulling myself together I advanced upon the lady, only to find myself no wiser, since she was totally covered by a kaross. Now what was to be done? To escape, of which of course I had thought at once, was impossible since it meant an assegai in my ribs. To call to the guard for help seemed indiscreet, for who knew what those fools might say? To kick or shake her would undoubtedly be rude and, if it chanced to be the person who had played Mameena, would certainly provoke remarks that I should not care to face. There seemed to be only one resource, to sit down and wait till she woke up.

This I did for quite a long time, till at last the absurdity of the position and, I will admit, my own curiosity overcame me, especially as I was very tired and wanted to go to sleep. So advancing most gingerly, I turned down the kaross from over the head of the sleeping woman, much wondering whom I should see, for what man is there that a veiled woman does not interest? Indeed, does not half the interest of woman lie in the fact that her nature is veiled from man, in short a mystery which he is always seeking to solve at his peril, and I might add, never succeeds in solving?

Well, I turned down that kaross and next instant stepped back amazed and, to tell the truth, somewhat disappointed, for there, with her mouth open, lay no wondrous and spiritual Mameena, but the stout, earthly and most prosaic—Kaatje!

“Confound the woman!” thought I to myself. “What is she doing here?”

Then I remembered how wrong it was to give way to a sense of romantic disappointment at such a time, though as a matter of fact it is always in a moment of crisis or of strained nerves that we are most open to the insidious advances of romance. Also that there was no one on earth, or beyond it, whom I ought more greatly to have rejoiced to see. I had left Kaatje with Anscombe and Heda; therefore Kaatje could tell me what had become of them. And at this thought my heart sank—why was she here in this most inappropriate meeting-place, alone? Feeling that these were questions which must be answered at once, I prodded Kaatje in the ribs with my toe until, after a good deal of prodding, she awoke, sat up and yawned, revealing an excellent set of teeth in her cavernous, quarter-cast mouth. Then perceiving a man she opened that mouth even wider, as I thought with the idea of screaming for help. But here I was first with her, for before a sound could issue I had filled it full with the corner of the kaross, exclaiming in Dutch as I did so—

“Idiot of a woman, do you not know the Heer Quatermain when you see him?”

“Oh! Baas,” she answered, “I thought you were some wicked Zulu come to do me a mischief.” Then she burst into tears and sobs which I could not stop for at least three minutes.

“Be quiet, you fat fool!” I cried exasperated, “and tell me, where are your mistress and the Heer Anscombe?”

“I don’t know, Baas, but I hope in heaven” (Kaatje was some kind of a Christian), she replied between her sobs.

“In heaven! What do you mean?” I asked, horrified.

“I mean, Baas, that I hope they are in heaven, because when last I saw them they were both dead, and dead people must be either in heaven or hell, and heaven, they say, is better than hell.”

“Dead! Where did you see them dead?”

“In that Black Kloof, Baas, some days after you left us and went away. The old baboon man who is called Zikali gave us leave through the witch-girl, Nombé, to go also. So the Baas Anscombe set to work to inspan the horses, the Missie Heda helping him, while I packed the things. When I had nearly finished Nombé came, smiling like a cat that has caught two mice, and beckoned to me to follow her. I went and saw the cart inspanned with the four horses all looking as though they were asleep, for their heads hung down. Then after she had stared at me for a long while Nombé led me past the horses into the shadow of the overhanging cliff. There I saw my mistress and the Baas Anscombe lying side by side quite dead.”

“How do you know that they were dead?” I gasped. “What had killed them?”

“I know that they were dead because they *were* dead, Baas. Their mouths and eyes were open and they lay upon their backs with their arms stretched out. The witch-girl, Nombé, said some Kaffirs had come and strangled them and then gone away again, or so I understood who cannot speak Zulu so very well. Who the Kaffirs were or why they came she did not say.”

“Then what did you do?” I asked.

I ran back to the hut, Baas, fearing lest I should be strangled also, and wept there till I grew hungry. When I came out of it again they were gone. Nombé showed me a place under a tree where the earth was disturbed. She said that they were buried there by order of her master, Zikali. I don’t know what became of the horses or the cart.”

“And what happened to you afterwards?”

“Baas, I was kept for several days, I cannot remember how many, and only allowed out within the fence round the huts. Nombé came to see me once, bringing this,” and she produced a package sewn up in a skin. “She said that I was to give it to you with a message that those whom you loved were quite safe with One who is greater than any in the land, and therefore that you must not grieve for them whose troubles were over. I think it was two nights after this that four Zulus came, two men and two women, and led me away, as I thought to kill me. But they did not kill me; indeed they were very kind to me, although when I spoke to them they pretended not to understand. They took me a long journey, travelling for the most part in the dark and sleeping in the day. This evening when the sun set they brought me through a Kaffir town and thrust me into the hut where I am without speaking to any one. Here, being very tired, I went to sleep, and that is all.”

And quite enough too, thought I to myself. Then I put her through a cross-examination, but Kaatje was a stupid woman although a good and faithful servant, and all her terrible experiences had not sharpened her intelligence. Indeed, when I pressed her she grew utterly confused, began to cry, thereby taking refuge in the last impregnable female fortification, and snivelled out that she could not bear to talk of her dear mistress any more. So I gave it up, and two minutes later she was literally snoring, being very tired, poor thing.

Now I tried to think matters out as well as this disturbance would allow, for nothing hinders thought so much as snores. But what was the use of thinking? There was her story to take or to leave, and evidently the honest creature believed what she said. Further, how could she be deceived on such a point? She swore that she had seen Anscombe and Heda dead and afterwards had seen their graves.

Moreover, there was confirmation in Nombé’s message which could not well have been invented, that spoke of their being well in the charge of a “Great One,” a term by which the Zulus designate God, with all their troubles finished. The reason and manner of their end were left unrevealed. Zikali might have murdered them for his own purposes, or the Zulus might have killed them in obedience to the king’s order that no white people in the land were to be allowed to live. Or perhaps the Basutos from Sekukuni’s country, with whom the Zulus had some understanding, had followed and done them to death; indeed the strangling sounded more Basuto than Zulu—if they were really strangled.

Almost overcome though I was, I bethought me of the package and opened it, only to find another apparent proof of their end, for it contained Heda’s jewels as I had found them in the bag in the safe; also a spare gold watch belonging to Anscombe with his coat-of-arms engraved upon it. That which he wore was of silver and no doubt was buried with him, since for superstitious reasons the natives would not have touched anything on his person after death. This seemed to me to settle the matter, presumptively at any rate, since to show that robbery was not the cause of their murder, their most valuable possessions which were not upon their persons had been sent to me, their friend.

So this was the end of all my efforts to secure the safety and well-being of that most unlucky pair. I wept when I thought of it there in the darkness of the hut, for the candle had burned out, and going on to my knees, put up an earnest prayer for the welfare of their souls; also that I might be forgiven my folly in leading them into such danger. And yet I did it for the best, trying to judge wisely in the light of such experience of the world as I possessed.

Now alas! when I am old I have come to the conclusion that those things which one tries to do for the best one generally does wrong, because nearly always there is some tricky fate at hand to mar them, which in this instance was named Zikali. The fact is, I suppose, that man who thinks himself a free agent, can scarcely be thus called, at any rate so far as immediate results are concerned. But that is a dangerous doctrine about which I will say no more, for I daresay that he is engaged in weaving a great life-pattern of which he only sees the tiniest piece.

One thing comforted me a little. If these two were dead I could now leave Zululand without qualms. Of course I was obliged to leave in any case, or die, but somehow that fact would not have eased my conscience. Indeed I think that had I believed they still lived, in this way or in that I should have tried not to leave, because I should have thought it for the best to stay to help them, whereby in all human probability I should have brought about my own death without helping them at all. Well, it had fallen out otherwise and there was an end. Now I could only hope that they had gone to some place where there are no more troubles, even if, at the worst, it were a place of rest too deep for dreams.

Musing thus at last I dozed off, for I was so tired that I think I should have slept although execution awaited me at the dawn instead of another journey. I did not sleep well because of that snoring female on the other side of the hut whose presence outraged my sense of propriety and caused me to be invaded by prophetic dreams of the talk that would ensue among those scandalmongering Zulus. Yes, it was of this I dreamed, not of the great dangers that threatened me or of the terrible loss of my friends, perhaps because to many men, of whom I suppose I am one, the fear of scandal or of being the object of public notice, is more than the fear of danger or the smart of sorrow.

So the night wore away, till at length I woke to see the gleam of dawn penetrating the smoke-hole and dimly illuminating the recumbent form of Kaatje, which to me looked most unattractive. Presently I heard a discreet tapping on the doorboard of the hut which I at once removed, wriggling swiftly through the hole, careless in my misery as to whether I met an assegai the other side of it or not. Without a guard of eight soldiers was standing, and with them Goza, who asked me if I were ready to start.

“Quite,” I answered, “as soon as I have saddled my horse,” which by the way had been led up to the hut.

Very soon this was done, for I brought out most of my few belongings with me and the bag of jewels was in my pocket. Then it was that the officer of the guard, a thin and melancholy-looking person, said in a hollow voice, addressing himself to Goza—

“The orders are that the White Man’s wife is to go with him. Where is she?”

“Where a man’s wife should be, in his hut I suppose,” answered Goza sleepily.

Rage filled me at the words. Seldom do I remember being so angry.

"Yes," I said, "if you mean that Half-cast whom someone has thrust upon me, she is in there. So if she is to come with us, perhaps you will get her out."

Thus adjured the melancholy-looking captain, who was named Indudu, perhaps because he or his father had longed to the Dudu regiment, crawled into the hut, whence presently emerged sounds not unlike those which once I heard when a *ringhals* cobra followed a hare that I had wounded into a hole, a muffled sound of struggling and terror. These ended in the sudden and violent appearance of Kaatje's fat and dishevelled form, followed by that of the snakelike Indudu.

Seeing me standing there before a bevy of armed Zulus, she promptly fell upon my neck with a cry for help, for the silly woman thought she was going to be killed by them. Gripping me as an octopus grips its prey, she proceeded to faint, dragging me to my knees beneath the weight of eleven stone of solid flesh.

"Ah!" said one of the Zulus not unkindly, "she is much afraid for her husband whom she loves."

Well, I disentangled myself somehow, and seizing what I took to be a gourd of water in that dim light, poured it over her head, only to discover too late that it was not water but clotted milk. However the result was the same, for presently she sat up, made a dreadful-looking object by this liberal application of curds and whey, whereon I explained matters to her to the best of my power. The end of it was that after Indudu and Goza had wiped her down with tufts of thatch dragged from the hut and I had collected her gear with the rest of my own, we set her on the horse straddlewise, and started, the objects of much interest among such Zulus as were already abroad.

At the gate of the town there was a delay which made me nervous, since in such a case as mine delay might always mean a death-warrant. I knew that it was quite possible Cetewayo had changed, or been persuaded to change his mind and issue a command that I should be killed as one who had seen and knew too much. Indeed this fear was my constant companion during all the long journey to the Drift of the Tugela, causing me to look askance at every man we met or who overtook us, lest he should prove to be a messenger of doom.

Nor were these doubts groundless, for as I learned in the after days, the Prime Minister, Umnyamana, and others had urged Cetewayo strongly to kill me, and what we were waiting for at the gate were his final orders on the subject. However, in this matter, as in more that I could mention, the king played the part of a man of honour, and although he seemed to hesitate for reasons of policy, never had any intention of allowing me to be harmed. On the contrary the command brought was that any one who harmed Macumazahn, the king's guest and messenger, should die with all his House.

Whilst we tarried a number of women gathered round us whose conversation I could not help overhearing. One of them said to another—

"Look at the white man, Watcher-by-Night, who can knock a fly off an ox's horn with a bullet from further away than we could see it. He it was who loved and was loved by the witch Mameena, whose beauty is still famous in the land. They say she killed herself for his sake, because she declared that she would never live to grow old and ugly, so that he turned away from her. My mother told me all about it only last night."

Then you have a liar for a mother, thought I to myself, for to contradict such a one openly would have been undignified.

"Is it so?" asked one of her friends, deeply interested. "Then the lady Mameena must have had a strange taste in men, for this one is an ugly little fellow with hair like the grey ash of stubble and a wrinkled face of the colour of a flayed skin that has lain unstretched in the sun. However, I have been told that witches always love those who look unnatural."

"Yes," said Number one, "but you see now that he is old he has to be satisfied with a different sort of wife. She is not beautiful, is she, although she has dipped her head in milk to make herself look white?"

So it went on till at length a runner arrived and whispered something to Indudu who saluted, showing me that it was a royal message, and ordered us to move. Of this I was glad, for had I stopped there much longer, I think I should have personally assaulted those gossiping female idiots.

Of our journey through Zululand there is nothing particular to say. We saw but few people, since most of the men had been called up to the army, and many of the kraals seemed to be deserted by the women and children who perhaps were hidden away with the cattle. Once, however, we met an impi about five thousand strong, that seemed to cover the hillside like a herd of game. It consisted of the Nodwengu and the Nokenke regiments, both of which afterwards fought at Isandhlwana. Some of their captains with a small guard came to see who we were, fine, fierce-looking men. They stared at me curiously, and with one of them, whom I knew, I had a little talk. He said that I was the last white man in Zululand and that I was lucky to be alive, for soon these, and he pointed to the hordes of warriors who were streaming past, would eat up the English to "the last bone." I answered that this remained to be seen, as the English were also great eaters, whereat he laughed, replying, that it was true that the white men had already taken the first bite—a very little one, from which I gathered that some small engagement had happened.

"Well, farewell, Macumazahn," he said, as he turned to go, "I hope that we shall meet in the battle, for I want to see if you can run as well as you can shoot."

This roused my temper and I answered him—

"I hope for your sake that we shall not meet, for if we do I promise that before I run I will show you what you never saw before, the gateway of the world of Spirits."

I mention this conversation because by some strange chance it happened at Isandhlwana that I killed this man, who was named Simpofu.

During all those days of trudging through hot suns and thunderstorms, for I had to give up the mare to Kaatje who was too fat to walk, or said she was, I was literally haunted by thoughts of my murdered friends. Heaven knows how bitterly I reproached myself for having brought them into Zululand. It seemed so terribly sad that these young people who loved each other and had so bright a future

before them, should have escaped from a tragic past merely to be overwhelmed by such a fate. Again and again I questioned that lump Kaatje as to the details of their end and of all that went before and followed after the murder.

But it was quite useless; indeed, as time went on she seemed to become more nebulous on the point as though a picture were fading from her mind. But as to one thing she was always quite clear, that she had seen them dead and had seen their new-made grave. This she swore "by God in Heaven," completing the oath with an outburst of tears in a way that would have carried conviction to any jury, as it did to me.

And after all, what was more likely in the circumstances? Zikali had killed them, or caused them to be killed; or possibly they were killed in spite of him in obedience to the express, or general, order of the king, if the deed was not done by the Basutos. And yet an idea occurred to me. How about the woman on the rock that the Zulus thought was their Princess of the Heavens? Obviously this must be nonsense, since no such deity existed, therefore the person must either have been a white woman or one painted up to resemble a white woman; seen from a distance in moonlight it was impossible to say which. Now, if it were a white woman, she might, from her shape and height and the colour of her hair, be Heda herself. Yet it seemed incredible that Heda, whom Kaatje had seen dead some days before, could be masquerading in such a part and make no sign of recognition to me, even when I covered her with my pistol, whereas that Nombé would play it was likely enough.

Only then Nombé must be something of a quick-change artist since but a little while before she was beyond doubt personating the dead Mameena. If it were not so I must have been suffering from illusions, for certainly I seemed to see some one who looked like Mameena, and only Zikali, and through him Nombé, had sufficient knowledge to enable her to fill that role with such success. Perhaps the whole business was an illusion, though if so Zikali's powers must be great indeed. But then how about the assegai that Nomkubulwana, or rather her effigy, had seemed to hold and throw, whereof the blade was at present in my saddle-bag. That at any rate was tangible and real, though of course there was nothing to prove that it had really been Chaka's famous weapon.

Another thing that tormented me was my failure to see Zikali. I felt as though I had committed a crime in leaving Zululand without doing this and hearing from his own lips—well, whatever he chose to tell me. I forget if I said that while we were waiting at the gate where those silly women talked so much nonsense about Mameena and Kaatje, that I made another effort through Goza to get into touch with the wizard, but quite without avail. Goza only answered what he said before, that if I wished to die at once I had better take ten steps towards the Valley of Bones, whence, he added parenthetically, the Opener of Roads had already departed on his homeward journey. This might or might not be true; at any rate I could find no possible way of coming face to face with him, or even of getting a message to his ear. No, I was not to blame; I had done all I could, and yet in my heart I felt guilty. But then, as cynics would, say, failure is guilt.

At length we came to the ford of the Tugela, and as fortunately the water was just low enough, bade farewell to our escort before crossing to the Natal side. My parting with Goza was quite touching, for we felt that it partook of the nature of a deathbed adieu, which indeed it did. I told him and the others that I hoped their ends be easy, and that whether they met them by bullets or by bayonet thrusts, the wounds would prove quickly mortal so that they might not linger in discomfort or pain. Recognizing my kind thought for their true welfare they thanked me for it, though with no enthusiasm. Indudu, however, filled with the spirit of repartee, or rather of "tu quoque", said in his melancholy fashion that if he and I came face to face in war, he would be sure to remember my words and to cut me up in the best style, since he could not bear to think of me languishing on a bed of sickness without my wife Kaatje to nurse me (they knew I was touchy about Kaatje). Then we shook hands and parted. Kaatje, hung round with paraphernalia like the White Knight in "Alice through the Looking-glass," clinging to a cooking-pot and weeping tears of terror, faced the foaming flood upon the mare, while I grasped its tail.

When we were as I judged out of assegai shot, I turned, with the water up to my armpits, and shouted some valedictory words.

"Tell your king," I said, "that he is the greatest fool in the world to fight the English, since it will bring his country to destruction and himself to disgrace and death, as at last, in the words of your proverb, 'the swimmer goes down with the stream.'"

Here, as it happened, I slipped off the stone on which I was standing and nearly went down with the stream myself.

Emerging with my mouth full of muddy water I waited till they had done laughing and continued—

"Tell that old rogue, Zikali, that I know he has murdered my friends and that when we meet again he and all who were in the plot shall pay for it with their lives."

Now an irritated Zulu flung an assegai, and as the range proved to be shorter than I thought, for it went through Kaatje's dress, causing her to scream with alarm, I ceased from eloquence, and we struggled on to the further bank, where at length we were safe.

Thus ended this unlucky trip of mine to Zululand.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ISANDHLWANA

We had crossed the Tugela by what is known as the Middle Drift. A mile or so on the further side of it I was challenged by a young fellow in charge of some mounted natives, and found that I had stumbled into what was known as No. 2 Column, which consisted of a rocket battery, three battalions of the Native Contingent and some troops of mounted natives, all under the command of Colonel Durnford, R.E.

After explanations I was taken to this officer's head-quarter tent. He was a tall, nervous-looking man with a fair, handsome face and long side-whiskers. One of his arms, I remember, was supported by a sling. I think it had been injured in some Kaffir fighting. When I was introduced to him he was very busy, having, I understood from some one on his staff, just received orders to "operate against Matshana."

Learning that I had come from Zululand and was acquainted with the Zulus, he at once began to cross-examine me about Matshana, a chief of whom he seemed to know very little indeed. I told him what I could, which was not much, and before I could give him any information of real importance, was shown out and most hospitably entertained at luncheon, a meal of which I partook with gratitude in some garments that I had borrowed from one of the officers, while my own were set in the sun to dry. Well can I recall how much I enjoyed the first whisky and soda that I had tasted since I left "the Temple," and the good English food by which it was accompanied.

Presently I remembered Kaatje, whom I had left outside with some native women, and went to see what had happened to her. I found her finishing a hearty meal and engaged in conversation with a young gentleman who was writing in a notebook. Afterwards I discovered that he was a newspaper correspondent. What she told him and what he imagined, I do not know, but I may as well state the results at once. Within a few days there appeared in one of the Natal papers and, for aught I know, all over the earth, an announcement that Mr. Allan Quatermain, a well-known hunter in Zululand, after many adventures, had escaped from that country, "together with his favourite native wife, the only survivor of his extensive domestic establishment." Then followed some wild details as to the murder of my other wives by a Zulu wizard called "Road Mender, or Sick Ass" (i.e., Opener of Roads, or Zikali), and so on.

I was furious and interviewed the editor, a mild and apologetic little man, who assured me that the despatch was printed exactly as it had been received, as though that bettered the case. After this I commenced an action for libel, but as I was absent through circumstances over which I had no control when it came on for trial, the case was dismissed. I suppose the truth was that they mixed me up with a certain well-known white man in Zululand, who had a large "domestic establishment," but however this may be, it was a long while before I heard the last of that "favourite native wife."

Later in the day I and Kaatje, who stuck to me like a burr, departed from the camp.

The rest of our journey was uneventful, except for more misunderstandings about Kaatje, one of which, wherein a clergyman was concerned, was too painful to relate. At last we reached Maritzburg, where I deposited Kaatje in a boarding-house kept by another half-cast, and with a sigh of relief betook myself to the *Plough Hotel*, which was a long way off her.

Subsequently she obtained a place as a cook at Howick, and for a while I saw her no more.

At Maritzburg, as in duty bound, I called upon various persons in authority and delivered Cetewayo's message, leaving out all Zikali's witchcraft which would have sounded absurd. It did not produce much impression as, hostilities having already occurred, it was superfluous. Also no one was inclined to pay attention to the words of one who was neither an official nor a military officer, but a mere hunter supposed to have brought a native wife out of Zululand.

I did, however, report the murder of Anscombe and Heda, though in such times this caused no excitement, especially as they were not known to the officials concerned with such matters. Indeed the occurrence never so much as got into the papers, any more than did the deaths of Rodd and Marnham on the borders of Sekukuni's country. When people are expecting to be massacred themselves, they do not trouble about the past killing of others far away. Lastly, I posted Marnham's will to the Pretoria bank, advising them that they had better keep it safely until some claim arose, and deposited Heda's jewels and valuables in another branch of the same bank in Maritzburg with a sealed statement as to how they came into my possession.

These things done, I found it necessary to turn myself to the eternal problem of earning my living. I am a very rich man now as I write these reminiscences here in Yorkshire—King Solomon's mines made me that—but up to the time of my journey to Kukuana Land with my friends, Curtis and Good, although plenty of money passed through my hands on one occasion and another, little of it ever seemed to stick. In this way or that it was lost or melted; also I was not born one to make the best of his opportunities in the way of acquiring wealth. Perhaps this was good for me, since if I had gained the cash early I should not have met with the experiences, and during our few transitory years, experience is of more real value than cash. It may prepare us for other things beyond, whereas the mere possession of a bank balance can prepare us for nothing in a land where gold ceases to be an object of worship as it is here. Yet wealth is our god, not knowledge or wisdom, a fact which shows that the real essence of Christianity has not yet permeated human morals. It just runs over their surface, no more, and for every eye that is turned towards the divine Vision, a thousand are fixed night and day upon Mammon's glittering image.

Now I owned certain wagons and oxen, and just then the demand for these was keen. So I hired them out to the military authorities for service in the war, and incidentally myself with them. I drove what I considered a splendid bargain with an officer who wrote as many letters after his name as a Governor-General, but was really something quite humble. At least I thought it splendid until outside his tent I met a certain transport rider of my acquaintance whom I had always looked upon as a perfect fool, who told me that not half an hour before he had got twenty per cent. more for unsalted oxen and very rickety wagons. However, it did not matter much in the end as the whole outfit was lost at Isandhlwana, and owing to the lack of some formality which I had overlooked, I never recovered more than a tithe of their value. I think it was that I neglected to claim within a certain specified time.

At last my wagons were laden with ammunition and other Government goods and I trekked over awful roads to Helpmakaar, a place on the Highlands not far from Rorke's Drift where No. 3 Column was stationed. Here we were delayed awhile, I and my wagons having moved to a ford of the Buffalo, together with many others. It was during this time that I ventured to make very urgent representations to certain highly placed officers, I will not mention which, as to the necessity of laagering, that is, forming fortified camps, as soon as Zululand was entered, since from my intimate knowledge of its people I was sure that they would attack in force. These warnings of mine were received with the most perfect politeness and offers of gin to drink, which all transport riders were supposed to love, but in effect were treated with the contempt that they were held to deserve. The subject is painful and one on which I will not dwell. Why should I complain when I know that cautions from notable persons such as Sir Melmoth Osborn, and J. J. Uys, a member of one of the old Dutch fighting families, met with a like fate.

By the way it was while I was waiting on the banks of the river that I came across an old friend of mine, a Zulu named Magepa, with whom I had fought at the battle of the Tugela. A few days later this man performed an extraordinary feat in saving his grandchild from death by his great swiftness in running, whereof I have preserved a note somewhere or other.

Ultimately on January 11 we received our marching orders and crossed the river by the drift, the general scheme of the campaign being that the various columns were to converge upon Ulundi. The roads, if so they can be called, were in such a fearful state that it took us ten days to cover as many miles. At length we trekked over a stony nek about five hundred yards in width. To the right of us was a stony eminence and to our left, its sheer brown cliffs of rock rising like the walls of some cyclopean fortress, the strange, abrupt mount of Isandhlwana, which reminded me of a huge lion crouching above the hill-encircled plain beyond. At the foot of this isolated mount, whereof the aspect somehow filled me with alarm, we camped on the night of January 21, taking no precautions against attack by way of laagering the wagons. Indeed the last thing that seemed to occur to those in command was that there would be serious fighting; men marched forward to their deaths as though they were going on a shooting-party, or to a picnic. I even saw cricketing bats and wickets occupying some of the scanty space upon the wagons.

Now I am not going to set out all the military details that preceded the massacre of Isandhlwana, for these are written in history. It is enough to say that on the night of January 21, Major Dartnell, who was in command of the Natal Mounted Police and had been sent out to reconnoitre the country beyond Isandhlwana, reported a strong force of Zulus in front of us. Thereon Lord Chelmsford, the General-in-Chief, moved out from the camp at dawn to his support, taking with him six companies of the 24th regiment, together with four guns and the mounted infantry. There were left in the camp two guns and about eight hundred white and nine hundred native troops, also some transport riders such as myself and a number of miscellaneous camp-followers. I saw him go from between the curtains of one of my wagons where I had made my bed on the top of a pile of baggage. Indeed I had already dressed myself at the time, for that night I slept very ill because I knew our danger, and my heart was heavy with fear.

About ten o'clock in the morning Colonel Durnford, whom I have mentioned already, rode up with five hundred Natal Zulus, about half of whom were mounted, and two rocket tubes which, of course, were worked by white men. This was after a patrol had reported that they had come into touch with some Zulus on the left front, who retired before them. As a matter of fact these Zulus were foraging in the mealie fields, since owing to the drought food was very scarce in Zululand that year and the regiments were hungry. I happened to see the meeting between Colonel Pulleine, a short, stout man who was then in command of the camp, and Colonel Durnford who, as his senior officer, took it over from him, and heard Colonel Pulleine say that his orders were "to defend the camp," but what else passed between them I do not know.

Presently Colonel Durnford saw and recognized me.

"Do you think the Zulus will attack us, Mr. Quatermain?" he said.

"I don't think so, Sir," I answered, "as it is the day of the new moon which they hold unlucky. But to-morrow it may be different."

Then he gave certain orders, dispatching Captain George Shepstone with a body of mounted natives along the ridge to the left, where presently they came in contact with the Zulus about three miles away, and making other dispositions. A little later he moved out to the front with a strong escort, followed by the rocket battery, which ultimately advanced to a small conical hill on the left front, round which it passed, never to return again.

Just before he started Colonel Durnford, seeing me still standing there, asked me if I would like to accompany him, adding that as I knew the Zulus so well I might be useful. I answered, Certainly, and called to my head driver, a man named Jan, to bring me my mare, the same that I had ridden out of Zululand, while I slipped into the wagon and, in addition to the beltful that I wore, filled all my available pockets with cartridges for my double-barrelled Express rifle.

As I mounted I gave Jan certain directions about the wagon and oxen, to which he listened, and then to my astonishment held out his hand to me, saying—

"Good-bye, Baas. You have been a kind master to me and I thank you."

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Because, Baas, all the Kaffirs declare that the great Zulu *impi* will be on to us in an hour or two and eat up every man. I can't tell how they know it, but so they swear."

"Nonsense," I answered, "it is the day of new moon when the Zulus don't fight. Still if anything of the sort should happen, you and the other boys had better slip away to Natal, since the Government must pay for the wagons and oxen."

This I said half joking, but it was a lucky jest for Jan and the rest of my servants, since they interpreted it in earnest and with the exception of one of them who went back to get a gun, got off before the Zulu horn closed round the camp, and crossed the river in safety.

Next moment I was cantering away after Colonel Durnford, whom I caught up about a quarter of a mile from the camp.

Now of course I did not see all of the terrible battle that followed and can only tell of that part of it in which I had a share. Colonel Durnford rode out about three and a half miles to the left front, I really don't quite know why, for already we were hearing firing on the top of the Nqutu Hills almost behind us, where Captain Shepstone was engaging the Zulus, or so I believe. Suddenly we met a trooper of the Natal Carabineers whose name was Whitelaw, who had been out scouting. He reported that an enormous *impi* was just ahead of us seated in an *umkumbi*, or semi-circle, as is the fashion of the Zulus before they charge. At least some of them, he said, were so seated, but others were already advancing.

Presently these appeared over the crest of the hill, ten thousand of them I should say, and amongst them I recognized the shields of the Nodwengu, the Dududu, the Nokenke and the Ingoba-makosi regiments. Now there was nothing to be done except retreat, for the *impi* was attacking in earnest. The General Untshingwayo, together with Undabuko, Cetewayo's brother, and the chief Usibebu who commanded the scouts, had agreed not to fight this day for the reason I have given, because it was that of the new moon, but circumstances had forced their hand and the regiments could no longer be restrained. So to the number of twenty thousand or more, say one-third of the total Zulu army, they hurled themselves upon the little English force that, owing to lack of generalship, was scattered here and there over a wide front and had no fortified base upon which to withdraw.

We fell back to a donga which we held for a little while, and then as we saw that there we should presently be overwhelmed, withdrew gradually for another two miles or so, keeping off the Zulus by our fire. In so doing we came upon the remains of the rocket battery near the foot of the conical hill I have mentioned, which had been destroyed by some regiment that passed behind us in its rush on the camp. There lay all the soldiers dead, assegai'd through and through, and I noticed that one young fellow who had been shot through the head, still held a rocket in his hands.

Now somewhat behind and perhaps half a mile to the right of this hill a long, shallow donga runs across the Isandhlwana plain. This we gained, and being there reinforced by about fifty of the Natal Carabineers under Captain Bradstreet, held it for a long while, keeping off the Zulus by our terrible fire which cut down scores of them every time they attempted to advance. At this spot I alone killed from twelve to fifteen of them, for if the big bullet from my Express rifle struck a man, he did not live. Messengers were sent back to the camp for more ammunition, but none arrived, Heaven knows why. My own belief is that the reserve cartridges were packed away in boxes and could not be got at. At last our supply began to run short, so there was nothing to be done except retreat upon the camp which was perhaps half a mile behind us.

Taking advantage of a pause in the Zulu advance which had lain down while waiting for reserves, Colonel Durnford ordered a retirement that was carried out very well. Up to that time we had lost only quite a few men, for the Zulu fire was wild and high and they had not been able to get at us with the assegai. As we rode towards the mount I observed that firing was going on in all directions, especially on the nek that connected it with the Nqutu range where Captain Shepstone and his mounted Basutos were wiped out while trying to hold back the Zulu right horn. The guns, too, were firing heavily and doing great execution.

After this all grew confused. Colonel Durnford gave orders to certain officers who came up to him, Captain Essex was one and Lieutenant Cochrane another. Then his force made for their wagons to get more ammunition. I kept near to the Colonel and a while later found myself with him and a large, mixed body of men a little to the right of the nek which we had crossed in our advance from the river. Not long afterwards there was a cry of "The Zulus are getting round us!" and looking to the left I saw them pouring in hundreds across the ridge that joins Isandhlwana Mountain to the Nqutu Range. Also they were advancing straight on to the camp.

Then the rout began. Already the native auxiliaries were slipping away and now the others followed. Of course this battle was but a small affair, yet I think that few have been more terrible, at any rate in modern times. The aspect of those plumed and shielded Zulus as they charged, shouting their war-cries and waving their spears, was awesome. They were mown down in hundreds by the Martini fire, but still they came on, and I knew that the game was up. A maddened horde of fugitives, mostly natives, began to flow past us over the nek, making for what was afterwards called Fugitives' Drift, nine miles away, and with them went white soldiers, some mounted, some on foot. Mingled with all these people, following them, on either side of them, rushed Zulus, stabbing as they ran. Other groups of soldiers formed themselves into rough squares, on which the savage warriors broke like water on a rock. By degrees ammunition ran out; only the bayonet remained. Still the Zulus could not break those squares. So they took another counsel. Withdrawing a few paces beyond the reach of the bayonets, they overwhelmed the soldiers by throwing assegais, then rushed in and finished them.

This was what happened to us, among whom were men of the 24th, Natal Carabineers and Mounted Police. Some had dismounted, but I sat on my horse, which stood quite still, I think from fright, and fired away so long as I had any ammunition. With my very last cartridge I killed the Captain Indudu who had been in charge of the escort that conducted me to the Tugela. He had caught sight of me and called out—

"Now, Macumazahn, I will cut you up nicely as I promised."

He got no further in his speech, for at that moment I sent an Express bullet through him and his tall, melancholy figure doubled up and collapsed.

All this while Colonel Durnford had been behaving as a British officer should do. Scorning to attempt flight, whenever I looked round I caught sight of his tall form, easy to recognize by the long fair moustaches and his arm in a sling, moving to and fro encouraging us to stand firm and die like men. Then suddenly I saw a Kaffir, who carried a big old smooth-bore gun, aim at him from a distance of about twenty yards, and fire. He went down, as I believe dead, and that was the end of a very gallant officer and gentleman whose military memory has in my opinion been most unjustly attacked. The real blame for that disaster does not rest upon the shoulders of either Colonel Durnford or Colonel Pulleine.

After this things grew very awful. Some fled, but the most stood and died where they were. Oddly enough during all this time I was never touched. Men fell to my right and left and in front of me; bullets and assegais whizzed past me, yet I remained quite unhurt. It was as though some Power protected me, which no doubt it did.

At length when nearly all had fallen and I had nothing left to defend myself with except my revolver, I made up my mind that it was time to go. My first impulse was to ride for the river nine miles away. Looking behind me I saw that the rough road was full of Zulus hunting down those who tried to escape. Still I thought I would try it, when suddenly there flashed across my brain the saying of whoever it was that personated Mameena in the Valley of Bones, to the effect that in the great rout of the battle I was not to join the flying but to set my face towards Ulundi and that if I did so I should be protected and no harm would come to me. I knew that all this prophecy was but a vain thing fondly imagined, although it was true that the battle and the rout had come. And yet I acted on it—why Heaven knows alone.

Setting the spurs to my horse I galloped off past Isandhlwana Mount, on the southern slopes of which a body of the 24th were still fighting their last fight, and heading for the Nqutu Range. The plain was full of Zulus, reserves running up; also to the right of me the Ulundi and Gikazi divisions were streaming forward. These, or some of them, formed the left horn of the impi, but owing to the unprepared nature of the Zulu battle, for it must always be remembered that they did not mean to fight that day, their advance had been delayed until it was too late for them entirely to enclose the camp. Thus the road, if it can so be called, to Fugitives' Drift was left open for a while, and by it some effected their escape. It was this horn, or part of it, that afterwards moved on and attacked Rorke's Drift, with results disastrous to itself.

For some hundreds of yards I rode on thus recklessly, because recklessness seemed my only chance. Thrice I met bodies of Zulus, but on each occasion they scattered before me, calling out words that I could not catch. It was as though they were frightened of something they saw about me. Perhaps they thought that I was mad to ride thus among them. Indeed I must have looked mad, or perhaps there was something else. At any rate I believed that I was going to win right through them when an accident happened.

A bullet struck my mare somewhere in the back. I don't know where it came from, but as I saw no Zulu shoot, I think it must have been one fired by a soldier who was still fighting on the slopes of the mount. The effect of it was to make the poor beast quite ungovernable. Round she wheeled and galloped at headlong speed back towards the peak, leaping over dead and dying and breaking through the living as she went. In two minutes we were rushing up its northern flank, which seemed to be quite untenanted, towards the sheer brown cliff which rose above it, for the fighting was in progress on the other side. Suddenly at the foot of this cliff the mare stopped, shivered and sank down dead, probably from internal bleeding.

I looked about me desperately. To attempt the plain on foot meant death. What then was I to do? Glancing at the cliff I saw that there was a gully in it worn by thousands of years of rainfall, in which grew scanty bushes. Into this I ran, and finding it practicable though difficult, began to climb upwards, quite unnoticed by the Zulus who were all employed upon the further side. The end of it was that I reached the very crest of the mount, a patch of bare, brown rock, except at one spot on its southern front where there was a little hollow in which at this rainy season of the year herbage and ferns grew in the accumulated soil, also a few stunted, aloe-like plants.

Into this patch I crept, having first slaked my thirst from a little pool of rain water that lay in a cup-like depression of the rock, which tasted more delicious than any nectar, and seemed to give me new life. Then covering myself as well as I could with grasses and dried leaves from the aloe plants, I lay still.

Now I was right on the brink of the cliff and had the best view of the Isandhlwana plain and the surrounding country that can be imagined. From my lofty eyrie some hundreds of feet in the air, I could see everything that happened beneath. Thus I witnessed the destruction of the last of the soldiers on the slopes below. They made a gallant end, so gallant that I was proud to be of the same blood with them. One fine young fellow escaped up the peak and reached a plateau about fifty feet beneath me. He was followed by a number of Zulus, but took refuge in a little cave whence he shot three or four of them; then his cartridges were exhausted and I heard the savages speaking in praise of him—dead. I think he was the last to die on the field of Isandhlwana.

The looting of the camp began; it was a terrible scene. The oxen and those of the horses that could be caught were driven away, except certain of the former which were harnessed to the guns and some of the wagons and, as I afterwards learned, taken to Ulundi in proof of victory. Then the slain were stripped and Kaffirs appeared wearing the red coats of the soldiers and carrying their rifles. The stores were broken into and all the spirits drunk. Even the medical drugs were swallowed by these ignorant men, with the result that I saw some of them reeling about in agony and others fall down and go to sleep.

An hour or two later an officer who came from the direction in which the General had marched, cantered right into the camp where the tents were still standing and even the flag was flying. I longed to be able to warn him, but could not. He rode up to the headquarters marquee, whence suddenly issued a Zulu waving a great spear. I saw the officer pull up his horse, remain for a moment as though indecisive, then turn and gallop madly away, quite unharmed, though one or two assegais were thrown and many shots fired at him. After this considerable movements of the Zulus went on, of which the net result was, that they evacuated the place.

Now I hoped that I might escape, but it was not to be, since on every side numbers of them crept up Isandhlwana Mountain and hid behind rocks or among the tall grasses, evidently for purposes of observation. Moreover some captains arrived on the little plateau where was the cave in which the soldier had been killed, and camped there. At least at sundown they unrolled their mats and ate, though they lighted no fire.

The darkness fell and in it escape for me from that guarded place was impossible, since I could not see where to set my feet and one false step on the steep rock would have meant my death. From the direction of Rorke's Drift I could hear continuous firing; evidently some great fight was going on there, I wondered vaguely—with what result. A little later also I heard the distant tramp of horses and the roll of gun wheels. The captains below heard it too and said one to another that it was the English soldiers returning, who had marched out of the camp at dawn. They debated one with another whether it would be possible to collect a force to fall upon them, but abandoned the idea because the regiments who had fought that day were now at a distance and too tired, and the others had rushed forward with orders to attack the white men on and beyond the river.

So they lay still and listened, and I too lay still and listened, for on that cloudy, moonless night I could see nothing. I heard smothered words of command. I heard the force halt because it could not travel further in the gloom. Then they lay down, the living among the dead, wondering doubtless if they themselves would not soon be dead, as of course must have happened had the Zulu generalship been better, for if even five thousand men had been available to attack at dawn not one of them could have escaped. But Providence ordained it otherwise. Some were taken and the others left.

About an hour before daylight I heard them stirring again, and when its first gleams came all of them had vanished over the nek of slaughter, with what thoughts in their hearts, I wondered, and to what fate. The captains on the plateau beneath had gone also, and so had the circle of guards upon the slopes of the mount, for I saw these depart through the grey mist. As the light gathered, however, I observed bodies of men collecting on the nek, or rather on both neks, which made it impossible for me to do what I had hoped, and run to overtake the English troops. From these I was utterly cut off. Nor could I remain longer without food on my point of rock, especially as I was sure that soon some Zulus would climb there to use it as an outlook post. So while I was still more or less hidden by the mist and morning shadows, I climbed down it by the same road that I had climbed up, and thus reached the plain. Not a living man, white or black, was to be seen, only the dead, only the dead. I was the last Englishman to stand upon the plain of Isandhlwana for weeks or rather months to come.

Of all my experiences this was, I think, the strangest, after that night of hell, to find myself alone upon this field of death, staring everywhere at the distorted faces which on the previous morn I had seen so full of life. Yet my physical needs asserted themselves. I was very hungry, who for twenty-four hours had eaten nothing, faint with hunger indeed. I passed a provision wagon that had been looted by the Zulus. Tins of bully beef lay about, also, among a wreck of broken glass, some bottles of Bass's beer which had escaped their notice. I found an assegai, cleaned it in the ground which it needed, and opening one of the tins, lay down in a tuft of grass by a dead man, or rather between him and some Zulus whom he had killed, and devoured its contents. Also I knocked the tops off a couple of the beer bottles and drank my fill. While I was doing this a large rough dog with a silver-mounted collar on its neck, I think of the sort that is called an Airedale terrier, came up to me whining. At first I thought it was an hyena, but discovering my mistake, threw it some bits of meat which it ate greedily. Doubtless it had belonged to some dead officer, though there was no name on the collar. The poor beast, which I named Lost, at once attached itself to me, and here I may say that I kept it till its death, which occurred of jaundice at Durban not long before I started on my journey to King Solomon's Mines. No man ever had a more faithful friend and companion.

When I had eaten and drunk I looked about me, wondering what I should do. Fifty yards away I saw a stout Basuto pony still saddled and bridled, although the saddle was twisted out of its proper position, which was cropping the grass as well as it could with the bit in its mouth. Advancing gently I caught it without trouble, and led it back to the plundered wagon. Evidently from the marks upon the saddlery it had belonged to Captain Shepstone's force of mounted natives.

Here I filled the large saddlebags made of buckskin with tins of beef, a couple more bottles of beer and a packet of *tandstickor* matches which I was fortunate enough to find. Also I took the Martini rifle from a dead soldier, together with a score or so of cartridges that remained in his belt, for apparently he must have been killed rather early in the fight.

Thus equipped I mounted the pony and once more bethought me of escaping to Natal. A look towards the nek cured me of that idea, for coming over it I saw the plumed heads of a whole horde of warriors. Doubtless these were returning from the unsuccessful attack on Rorke's Drift, though of that I knew nothing at the time. So whistling to the dog I bore to the left for the Nqutu Hills, riding as fast as the rough ground would allow, and in half an hour was out of sight of that accursed plain.

One more thing too I did. On its confines I came across a group of dead Zulus who appeared to have been killed by a shell. Dismounting I took the headdress of one of them and put it on, for I forgot to say that I had lost my hat. It was made of a band of otterskin from which rose large tufts of the black feathers of the finch which the natives call *sakabula*. Also I tied his kilt of white oxtails about my middle, precautions to which I have little doubt I owe my life, since from a distance they made me look like a Kaffir mounted on a captured pony.

Then I started on again, whither I knew not.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### ALLAN AWAKES

Now I have no intention of setting down all the details of that dreadful journey through Zululand, even if I could recall them, which, for a reason to be stated, I cannot do. I remember that at first I thought of proceeding to Ulundi with some wild idea of throwing myself on the mercy of Cetewayo under pretence that I brought him a message from Natal. Within a couple of hours, however, from the top of a hill I saw ahead of me an *impi* and with it captured wagons, which was evidently heading for the king's kraal. So as I knew what kind of a greeting these warriors would give me, I bore away in another direction with the hope of reaching the border by a circuitous route. In this too I had no luck, since presently I caught sight of outposts stationed upon rocks, which doubtless belonged to another *impi* or regiment. Indeed one soldier, thinking from my dress that I also was a Zulu, called to me for news from about half a mile away, in that peculiar carrying voice which Kaffirs can command. I shouted back something about victory and that the white men were wiped out, then put an end to the conversation by vanishing into a patch of dense bush.

It is a fact that after this I have only the dimmest recollection of what happened. I remember off-saddling at night on several occasions. I remember being very hungry because all the food was eaten and the dog, Lost, catching a bush buck fawn, some of which I partially cooked on a fire of dead wood, and devoured. Next I remember—I suppose this was a day or two later—riding at night in a thunderstorm and a particularly brilliant flash of lightning which revealed scenery that seemed to be familiar to me, after which came a shock and total unconsciousness.

At length my mind returned to me. It was reborn very slowly and with horrible convulsions, out of the womb of death and terror. I saw blood flowing round me in rivers, I heard the cries of triumph and of agony. I saw myself standing, the sole survivor, on a grey field of death, and the utter loneliness of it ate into my soul, so that with all its strength it prayed that it might be numbered in this harvest. But oh! it was so strong, that soul which could not, would not die or fly away. So strong, that then, for the first time, I understood its immortality and that it could *never* die. This everlasting thing still clung for a while to the body of its humiliation, the mass of clay and nerves and appetites which it was doomed to animate, and yet knew its own separateness and eternal individuality. Striving to be free of earth, still it seemed to walk the earth, a spirit and a shadow, aware of the hatefulness of that to which it was chained, as we might imagine some lovely butterfly to be that is fated by nature to suck its strength from carrion, and remains unable to soar away into the clean air of heaven.

Something touched my hand and I reflected dreamily that if I had been still alive, for in a way I believed that I was dead, I should have thought it was a dog's tongue. With a great effort I lifted my arm, opened my eyes and looked at the hand against the light, for there was light, to see it was so thin that this light shone through between the bones. Then I let it fall again, and lo! it rested on the head of a dog which went on licking it.

A dog! What dog? Now I remembered; one that I had found on the field of Isandhlwana. Then I must be still alive. The thought made me cry, for I could feel the tears run down my cheeks, not with joy but with sorrow. I did not wish to go on living. Life was too full of struggle and of bloodshed and bereavement and fear and all horrible things. I was prepared to exchange my part in it just for rest, for the blessing of deep, unending sleep in which no more dreams could come, no more cups of joy could be held to thirsting lips, only to be snatched away.

I heard something shuffling towards me at which the dog growled, then seemed to slink away as though it were afraid. I opened my eyes again, looked, and closed them once more in terror, for what I saw suggested that perhaps I was dead after all and had reached that hell which a certain class of earnest Christian promises to us as the reward of the failings that Nature and those who begat us have handed on to us as a birth doom. It was something unnatural, grey-headed, terrific—doubtless a devil come to torment me in the inquisition vaults of Hades. Yet I had known the like when I was alive. How had it been called? I remembered, “The-thing-that-never-should-have-been-born.” Hark! It was speaking in that full deep voice which was unlike to any other.

“Greeting, Macumazahn,” it said. “I see that you have come back from among the dead with whom you have been dwelling for a moon and more. It is not wise of you, Macumazahn, yet I am glad who have matched my skill against Death and won, for now you will have much to tell me about his kingdom.”

So it was Zikali—Zikali who had butchered my friends.

“Away from me, murderer!” I said faintly, “and let me die, or kill me as you did the others.”

He laughed, but very softly, not in his usual terrific fashion, repeating the word “murderer” two or three times. Then with his great hand he lifted my head gently as a woman might, saying—

“Look before you, Macumazahn.”

I looked and saw that I was in some kind of a cave. Outside the sun was setting and against its brightness I perceived two figures, a white man and a white woman who were walking hand in hand and gazing into each other's eyes. They were Anscombe and Heda passing the mouth of the cave.

“Behold the murdered, O Macumazahn, dealer of hard words.”

“It is only a trick,” I murmured. “Kaatje saw them dead and buried.”

“Yes, yes, I forgot. The fat fool-woman saw them dead and buried. Well, sometimes the dead come to life again and for good purpose, as you should know, Macumazahn, who followed the counsel of a certain Mameena and wandered here instead of rushing onto the Zulu spears.”

I tried to think the thing out and could not, so only asked—

“How did I come? What happened to me?”

“I think the sun smote you first who had no covering on your head and the lightning smote you afterwards. Yet all the while that reason had left you, One led your horse and after the Heavens had tried to kill you and failed, perhaps because my magic was too strong for them, One sent that beast which you found, yes, sent it here to lead us to where you lay. There you were discovered and brought hither. Now sleep lest you should go further than even I can fetch you back again.”

He held his hands above my head, seeming to grow in stature till his white hair touched the roof of the cave, and in an instant I fancied that I was falling away, deep, deep into a gulf of nothingness.

There followed another period of dreaming, in which dreams I seemed to meet all sorts of people, dead and living, especially Lady Ragnall, a friend of mine with whom I had been concerned in a very strange adventure among the Kendah people<sup>[1]</sup> and with whom in days to come I was destined to be concerned again, although of course I knew nothing of this, in a still stranger adventure of what I may call a spiritual order, which I may or may not try to reduce to writing. It seemed to me that I was constantly dining with her *rête-à-tête* and that she told me all sorts of queer things between the courses. Doubtless these illusions occurred when I was fed.

[1] See the book called *The Ivory Child*.—EDITOR.

At length I woke up again, feeling much stronger, and saw the dog, Lost, watching me with its great tender eyes—oh! they talk of the eyes of women, but are they ever as beautiful as those of a loving dog? It lay by my low bed-stead, a rough affair fashioned of poles and strung with rimpis or strings of raw hide, and by it, stroking its head, sat the witch-doctress, Nombé. I remember how pleasing she looked, a perfect type of the eternal feminine with her graceful, rounded shape and her continual, mysterious smile which suggested so much more than any mortal woman has to give.

“Good-day to you, Macumazahn,” she said in her gentle voice, “you have gone through much since last we met on the night before Goza took you away to Ulundi.”

Now remembering all, I was filled with indignation against this little humbug.

“The last time we met, Nombé,” I said, “was when you played the part of a woman who is dead in the Vale of Bones by the king’s kraal.”

She regarded me with a kindly commiseration, and answered, shaking her head—

“You have been very ill, Macumazahn, and your spirit still tricks you. I played the part of no woman in any valley by the king’s kraal, nor were my eyes rejoiced with the sight of you there or elsewhere till they brought you to this place, so changed that I should scarcely have known you.”

“You little liar!” I said rudely.

“Do the white people always name those liars who tell them true things they cannot understand?” she inquired with a sweet innocence. Then without waiting for an answer, she patted my hand as though I were a fretful child and gave me some soup in a gourd, saying, “Drink it, it is good. The lady Heddana made it herself in the white man’s fashion.”

I drank the soup, which *was* very good, and as I handed back the gourd, answered—

“Kaatje has told me that the lady Heddana is dead. Can the dead make soup?”

She considered the point while she threw some bits of meat out of the bottom of the gourd to the dog, Lost, then replied—

“I do not know, Macumazahn, or indeed whether the dead eat as we do. Next time my Spirit visits me I will make inquiry and tell you the answer. But I do know that it is very strange that you, who always turn your back upon the truth, are so ready to accept falsehoods. Why should you believe that the lady Heddana is dead just because Kaatje told you so, when I who am still alive had sworn to you that I would protect her with my life? Nay, speak no more now. To-morrow if you are well enough you shall see and judge for yourself.”

She drew up the kaross over me, again patted my hand in her motherly fashion and departed, still smiling, after which I went to sleep again, so dreamlessly that I think there was some native soporific in that soup.

On the following day two of Zikali’s servants who did the rougher work of my sick room, if I may so call it, arrived and said that they were going to carry me out of the cave for a while, if that were my will. I who longed to breathe the fresh air again, said that it was very much my will, whereon they grasped the rough bedstead which I have described by either end and very carefully bore me down the cave and through its narrow entrance, where they set the bedstead in the shadow of the overhanging rock without. When I had recovered a little, for even that short journey tired me, I looked about me and perceived that as I had expected, I was in the Black Kloof, for there in front of me were the very huts which we had occupied on our arrival from Swazi-Land.

I lay a while drawing in the sweet air which to me was like a draught of nectar, and wondering whether I were not still in a dream. For instance, I wondered if I had truly seen the figures of Anscombe and Heda pass the mouth of the cave, on that day when I awoke, or if these were but another of Zikali’s illusions imprinted on my weakened mind by his will power. For of what he and Nombé told me I believed nothing. Thus marvelling I fell into a doze and in my doze heard whisperings. I opened my eyes and lo! there before me stood Anscombe and Heda. It was she who spoke the first, for I was tongue-tied; I could not open my lips.

“Dear Mr. Quatermain, dear Mr. Quatermain!” she murmured in her sweet voice, then paused.

Now at last words came to me. “I thought you were both dead,” I said. “Tell me, are you really alive?”

She bent down and kissed my brow, while Anscombe took my hand.

"Now you know," she answered. "We are both of us alive and well."

"Thank God!" I exclaimed. "Kaatje swore that she saw you dead and buried."

"One sees strange things in the Black Kloof," replied Anscombe speaking for the first time, "and much has happened to us since we were parted, to which you are not strong enough to listen now. When you are better, then we will tell you all. So grow well as soon as you can."

After this I think I fainted, for when I came to myself again I was back in the cave.

Another ten days or so went by before I could even leave my bed, for my recovery was very slow. Indeed for weeks I could scarcely walk at all, and six whole months passed before I really got my strength again and became as I used to be. During those days I often saw Anscombe and Heda, but only for a few minutes at a time. Also occasionally Zikali would visit me, speaking a little, generally about past history, or something of the sort, but never of the war, and go away. At length one day he said to me—

"Macumazahn, now I am sure you are going to live, a matter as to which I was doubtful, even after you seemed to recover. For, Macumazahn, you have endured three shocks, of which to-day I am not afraid to talk to you. First there was that of the battle of Isandhlwana where you were the last white man left alive."

"How do you know that, Zikali?" I asked.

"It does not matter. I do know. Did you not ride through the Zulus who parted this way and that before you, shouting what you could not understand? One of them you may remember even saluted with his spear."

"I did, Zikali. Tell me, why did they behave thus, and what did they shout?"

"I shall not tell you, Macumazahn. Think over it for the rest of your life and conclude what you choose; it will not be so wonderful as the truth. At least they did so, as a certain doll I dressed up yonder in the Vale of Bones told you they would, she whose advice you followed in riding towards Ulundi instead of back to the river where you would have met your death, like so many others of the white people."

"Who was that doll, Zikali?"

"Nay, ask me not. Perhaps it was Nombé, perhaps another. I have forgotten. I am very old and my memory begins to play me strange tricks. Still I recollect that she was a good doll, so like a dead woman called Mameena that I could scarcely have known them apart. Ah! that was a great game I played in the Vale of Bones, was it not, Macumazahn?"

"Yes, Zikali, yet I do not understand why it was played."

"Being so young you still have the impatience of youth, Macumazahn, although your hair grows white. Wait a while and you will understand all. Well, you lay that night on the topmost rock of Isandhlwana, and there you saw and heard strange things. You heard the rest of the white soldiers come and lie down to rest among their dead brothers, and depart again unharmed. Oh! what fools are these Zulu generals nowadays. They send out an *impi* to attack men behind walls, spears against rifles, and are defeated. Had they kept that *impi* to fall on the rest of the English when they walked into the trap, not a man of your people would have been left alive. Would that have happened in the time of Chaka?"

"I think not, Zikali. Still I am glad that it did happen."

"I think not too, Macumazahn, but small men, small wit. Also like you I am glad that it did not happen, since it is the Zulus I hate, not the English who have now learned a lesson and will not be caught again. Oh! many a captain in Zululand is to-day flat as a pricked bladder, and even their victory, as they call it, cost them dear. For, mind you, Macumazahn, for every white man they killed two of them died. So, so! In the morning you left the hill—do not look astonished, Macumazahn. Perhaps those captains on the rock beneath you let you go for their own purposes, or because they were commanded, for though weak I can still lift a stone or two, Macumazahn, and afterwards told me all about it. Then you found yourself alone among the dead, like the last man in the world, Macumazahn, and that dog at your side, also a horse came to you. Perhaps I sent them, perhaps it was a chance. Who knows? Not I myself, for as I have said, my memory has grown so bad. That was your first shock, Macumazahn, the shock of standing alone among the dead like the last man in the world. You felt it, did you not?"

"As I hope I shall never feel anything again. It nearly drove me mad," I answered.

"Very nearly indeed, though I have felt worse things and only laughed, as I would tell you, had I the time. Well, then the sun struck you, for at this season of the year it is very hot in those valleys for a white man with no covering to his head, and you went quite mad, though fortunately the dog and the horse remained as Heaven had made them. That was the second shock. Then the storm burst and the lightning fell. It ran down the rifle that you still carried, Macumazahn. I will show it to you and you will see that its stock is shattered. Perhaps I turned the flash aside, for I am a great thunder-herd, or perhaps it was One mightier than I. That was the third shock, Macumazahn. Then you were found, still living—how, the white man, your friend, will tell you. But you should cherish that dog of yours, Macumazahn, for many a man might have served you worse. And being strong, though small, or perhaps because you still have work left to do in the world before you leave it for a while, you have lived through all these things and will in time recover, though not yet."

"I hope so, Zikali, though on the whole I am not sure that I wish to recover."

"Yes, you do, Macumazahn, because the religion of you white men makes you fear death and what may come after it. You think of what you call your sins and are afraid lest you should be tortured because of them, not understanding that the spirit must be judged not by what the flesh has done but by what the spirit desired to do, by *will* not by *deed*, Macumazahn. The evil man is he who wishes to do evil, not he who wishes to do good and falls now and again into evil. Oh! I have hearkened to your white teachers and I know, I know."

"Then by your own standard you are evil, Zikali, since you wished to bring about war, and not in vain."

"Oho! Macumazahn, you think that, do you, who cannot understand that what seems to be evil is often good. I wished to bring about war and brought it about, and maybe what bred the wish was all that I have suffered in the past. But say you, who have seen what the Zulu Power means, who have seen men, women and children killed by the thousand to feed that Power, and who have seen, too, what the English Power means, is it evil that I should wish to destroy the House of the Zulu kings that the English House may take its place and that in a time to come the Black people may be free?"

"You are clever, Zikali, but it is of your own wrongs that you think. How about that skull which you kissed in the Vale of Bones?"

"Mayhap, Macumazahn, but my wrongs are the wrongs of a nation, therefore I think of the nation, and at least I do not fear death like you white men. Now hearken. Presently your friends will tell you a story. The lady Heddana will tell you how I made use of her for a certain purpose, for which purpose indeed I drew the three of you into Zululand, because without her I could not have brought about this war into which Cetewayo did not wish to enter. When you have heard that story, do not judge me too hardly, Macumazahn, who had a great end to gain."

"Yet whatever the story may be, I do judge you hardly, Zikali, who tormented me with a false tale, causing the woman Kaatje to lie to me and swear that she saw these two dead before her—how I know not."

"She did not lie to you, Macumazahn. Has not such a one as I the power to make a fat fool think that she saw what she did not see? As to how! How did I make you think in yonder hut of mine that you saw what you did not see—perhaps."

"But why did you mock me in this fashion, Zikali?"

"Truly, Macumazahn, you are blind as a bat in sunlight. When your friends have told you the story, you will understand why. Yet I admit to you that things went wrong. You should have heard that tale *before* Cetewayo brought you to the Vale of Bones. But the fool-woman delayed and blundered, and when she reached Ulundi the gates were shut against her as a spy, and not opened till too late, so that you only found her when you returned from the Council. I knew this, and that was why I dared to bid you fire at that which stood upon the rock. Had you heard Kaatje's tale you might have aimed straight, as also you would have certainly shot straight at me, out of revenge for the deaths of those you loved, Macumazahn, though whether you could have killed me before all the game is played is another matter. As it was, I was sure that you would not pierce the heart of one who *might* be a certain white woman, sure also that you would not pierce my heart whose death *might* bring about her death and that of another."

"You are very subtle, Zikali," I said in astonishment.

"So you hold because I am very simple, who understand the spirit of man—and some other things. For the rest, had you not believed that these two were dead, you would never have left Zululand. You would have tried to escape to get to them and have been killed. Is it not so?"

"Yes, I think I should have tried, Zikali. But why did you keep them prisoner?"

"For the same reason that I still keep them—and you—to hold them back a while from the world of ghosts. Had I sent them away after that night of the declaration of war, they would have been killed before they had gone an hour's journey. Oh! I am not so bad as you think, Macumazahn, and I never break my word. Now I have done."

"How goes the war?" I asked as he shuffled to his feet.

"As it must go, very ill for the Zulus. They have driven back the white men who gather strength from over the Black Water and will come on presently and wipe them out. Umnyamana would have had Cetewayo invade Natal and sweep it clean, as of course he should have done. But I sent him word that if he did so Nomkubulwana, yes, she and no other, had told me that all the spirits would be against him, and he hearkened. When next you think me wicked, remember that, Macumazahn. Now it is but a matter of time, and here you must bide till all is finished. That will be good for you who need rest, though the other two find it wearisome. Still for them it is good also to watch the fruit ripen on their tree of love. It will be the sweeter when they eat it, Macumazahn, and teach them how to live together. *Oho! Oho-ho!*" and he shambled off.

## CHAPTER XX.

### HEDA'S TALE

That evening when I was lying on my bed outside the cave, I heard the tale of Anscombe and Heda. Up to a certain point he told it, then she went on with the story.

"On the morning after our arrival at this place, Allan," said Anscombe, "I woke up to find you gone from the hut. As you did not come back I concluded that you were with Zikali, and walked about looking for you. Then food was brought to us and Heda and I breakfasted together, after which we went to where we heard the horses neighing and found that yours was gone. Returning, much frightened, we met Nombé, who gave me your note which explained everything, and we inquired of her why this had been done and what was to become of us. She smiled and answered that we had better ask the first question of the king and the second of her master Zikali, and in the meanwhile be at peace since we were quite safe.

"I tried to see Zikali but could not. Then I went to inspan the horses with the idea of following you, only to find that they were gone. Indeed I have not seen them from that day to this. Next we thought of starting on foot, for we were quite desperate. But Nombé intervened and told us that if we ventured out of the Black Kloof we should be killed. In short we were prisoners.

"This went on for some days, during which we were well treated but could not succeed in seeing Zikali. At length one morning he sent for us and we were taken to the enclosure in front of his hut, Kaatje coming with us as interpreter. For a while he sat still, looking very grim and terrible. Then he said—

"White Chief and Lady, you think ill of me because Macumazahn has gone and you are kept prisoners here, and before all is done you will think worse. Yet I counsel you to trust me since everything that happens is for your good."

"At this point Heda, who, as you know, talked Zulu fairly well, though not so well as she does now, broke in, and said some very angry things to him."

"Yes," interrupted Heda. "I told him that he was a liar and I believed that he had murdered you and meant to murder us."

"He listened stonily," continued Anscombe, "and answered, 'I perceive, Lady Heddana, that you understand enough of our tongue to enable me to talk to you; therefore I will send away this half-breed woman, since what I have to say is secret.'

"Then he called servants by clapping his hands and ordered them to remove Kaatje, which was done.

"Now, Lady Heddana," he said, speaking very slowly so that Heda might interpret to me and repeating his words whenever she did not understand, 'I have a proposal to make to you. For my own ends it is necessary that you should play a part and appear before the king and the Council as the goddess of this land who is called the Chieftainess of Heaven, which goddess is always seen as a white woman. Therefore you must travel with me to Ulundi and there do those things which I shall tell you.'

"And if I refuse to play this trick," said Heda, "what then?"

"Then, Lady Heddana, this white lord whom you love and who is to be your husband will—die—and after he is dead you must still do what I desire of you, or—die also."

"Would he come with me to Ulundi?" asked Heda.

"Not so, Lady. He would stay here under guard, but quite safe, and you will be brought back to him, safe. Choose now, with death on the one hand and safety on the other. I would sleep a little. Talk the matter over in your own tongue and when it is settled awaken me again," and he shut his eyes and appeared to go to sleep.

"So we discussed the situation, if you can call it discussion when we were both nearly mad. Heda wished to go. I begged her to let me be killed rather than trust herself into the hands of this old villain. She pointed out that even if I were killed, which she admitted might not happen, she would still be in his hands whence she could only escape by her own death, whereas if she went there was a chance that we might both continue to live, and that after all death was easy to find. So in the end I gave way and we woke up Zikali and told him so.

"He seemed pleased and spoke to us gently, saying, 'I was sure that wisdom dwelt behind those bright eyes of yours, Lady, and again I promise you that neither you nor the lord your lover shall come to any harm. Also that in payment I and my child, Nombé, will protect you even with our lives, and further, that I will bring back your friend, Macumazahn, to you, though not yet. Now go and be happy together. Nombé will tell the lady Heddana when she is to start. Of all this say nothing on your peril to the woman Kaatje, since if you do, it will be necessary that she should be made silent. Indeed, lest she should learn something, to-morrow I shall send her on to await you at Ulundi, therefore be not surprised if you see her go, and take no heed of aught she may say in going. Nombé, my child, will fill her place as servant to the lady Heddana and sleep with her at night that she may not be lonely or afraid.'

"Then he clapped his hands again and servants came and conducted us back to the huts. And now, Allan, Heda will go on with the story."

"Well, Mr. Quatermain," she said, "nothing more happened that day which we spent with bursting hearts. Kaatje did not question us as to what the witch-doctor had said after she was sent away. Indeed I noticed that she was growing very stupid and drowsy, like a person who has been drugged, as I daresay she was, and would insist upon beginning to pack up the things in a foolish kind of way,

muttering something about our trekking on the following day. The night passed as usual, Kaatje sleeping very heavily by my side and snoring so much" (here I groaned sympathetically) "that I could get little rest. On the next morning after breakfast as the huts were very hot, Nombé suggested that we should sit under the shadow of the overhanging rock, just where we are now. Accordingly we went, and being tired out with all our troubles and bad nights, I fell into a doze, and so, I think, did Maurice, Nombé sitting near to us and singing all the while, a very queer kind of song.

"Presently, through my doze as it were, I saw Kaatje approaching. Nombé went to meet her, still singing, and taking her hand, led her to the cart, where they seemed to talk to the horses, which surprised me as there were no horses. Then she brought her round the cart and pointed to us, still singing. Now Kaatje began to weep and throw her hands about, while Nombé patted her on the shoulder. I tried to speak to her but could not. My tongue was tied, why I don't know, but I suppose because I was really asleep, and Maurice also was asleep and did not wake at all."

"Yes," said Anscombe, "I remember nothing of all this business."

"After a while Kaatje went away, still weeping, and then I fell asleep in earnest and did not wake until the sun was going down, when I roused Maurice and we both went back to the hut, where I found that Nombé had cooked our evening meal. I looked for Kaatje, but could not find her. Also in searching through my things I missed the bag of jewels. I called to Nombé and asked where Kaatje was, whereon she smiled and said that she had gone away, taking the bag with her. This pained me, for I had always found Kaatje quite honest—"

"Which she is," I remarked, "for those jewels are now in a bank at Maritzburg."

Heda nodded and went on, "I am glad to hear it; indeed, remembering what Zikali had said, I never really suspected her of being a thief, but thought it was all part of some plan. After this things went on as before, except that Nombé took Kaatje's place and was with me day and night. Of Kaatje's disappearance she would say nothing. Zikali we did not see.

"On the third evening after the vanishing of Kaatje, Nombé came and said that I must make ready for a journey, and while she spoke men arrived with a litter that had grass mats hung round it. Nombé brought out my long cape and put it over me, also a kind of veil of white stuff which she threw over my head, so as to hide my face. I think it was made out of one of our travelling mosquito nets. Then she said I must say good-bye to Maurice for a while. There was a scene as you may imagine. He grew angry and said that he would come with me, whereon armed men appeared, six of them, and pushed him away with the handles of their spears. In another minute I was lifted into the litter which Nombé entered with me, and so we were parted, wondering if we should ever see each other more. At the mouth of the kloof I saw another litter surrounded by a number of Zulus, which Nombé said contained Zikali.

"We travelled all that night and two succeeding nights, resting during the day in deserted kraals that appeared to have been made ready for us. It was a strange journey, for although the armed men flitted about us, neither they nor the bearers ever spoke, nor did I see Zikali, or indeed any one else. Only Nombé comforted me from time to time, telling me there was nothing to fear. Towards dawn on the third night we travelled over some hills and I was put into a new hut and told that my journey was done as we had reached a place near Ulundi.

"I slept most of the following day, but after I had eaten towards evening, Zikali crept into the hut, just as a great toad might do, and squatted down in front of me.

"'Lady,' he said, 'listen. To-night, perhaps one hour after sundown, perhaps two, perhaps three, Nombé will lead you, dressed in a certain fashion, from this hut. See now, outside of it there is a tongue of rock up which you may climb unnoted by the little path that runs between those big stones. Look,' and he showed me the place through the door-hole. 'The path ends on a flat boulder at the end of the rock. There you will take your stand, holding in your right hand a little assegai which will be given to you. Nombé will not accompany you to the rock, but she will crouch between the stones at the head of the path and perhaps from time to time whisper to you what to do. Thus when she tells you, you must throw the little spear into the air, so that it falls among a number of men gathered in debate who will be seated about twenty paces from the rock. For the rest you are to stand quite still, saying nothing and showing no alarm whatever you may hear or see. Among the men before you may be your friend, Macumazahn, but you must not appear to recognize him, and if he speaks to you, you must make no answer. Even if he should seem to shoot at you, do not be afraid. Do you understand? If so, repeat what I have told you.' I obeyed him and asked what would happen if I did not do these things, or some of them.

"He answered, 'You will be killed, Nombé will be killed, the lord Mauriti your lover will be killed, and your friend Macumazahn will be killed. Perhaps even I shall be killed and we will talk the matter over in the land of ghosts.'

"On hearing this I said I would do my best to carry out his orders, and after making me repeat them once more, he went away. Later, Nombé dressed me up as you saw me, Mr. Quatermain, put some glittering powder into my hair and touched me beneath the eyes with a dark kind of pigment. Also she gave me the little spear and made me practise standing quite still with it raised in my right hand, telling me that when I heard her say the word 'Throw,' I was to cast it into the air. Then the moon rose and we heard men talking at a distance. At last some one came to the hut and whispered to Nombé, who led me out to the little path between the rocks.

"This must have been nearly two hours after I heard the men begin to talk—"

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "but where was Nombé all those two hours?"

"With me. She never left my side, Mr. Quatermain, and while I was on the rock she was crouched within three paces of me between two big stones at the mouth of the path."

"Indeed," I replied faintly, "this is very interesting. Please continue—but one word, how was Nombé dressed? Did she wear a necklace of blue beads?"

"Just as she always is, or rather less so, for she had nothing on except her moocha, and certainly no blue beads. But why do you ask?"

"From curiosity merely. I mean, I will tell you afterwards, pray go on."

"Well, I stepped forward on to the rock and at first saw nothing, because at that moment the moon was hid by a cloud; indeed Nombé had waited for the cloud to pass over its face, before she thrust me forward. Also some smoke from a fire below was rising straight in front of me. Presently the cloud passed, the smoke thinned, and I saw the circle of those savage men seated beneath, and in their centre a great chief wearing a leopard's skin cloak who I guessed was the king. You I did not see, Mr. Quatermain, because you were behind a tree, yet I felt that you were there, a friend among all those foes. I stood still, as I had been taught to do, and heard the murmur of astonishment and caught the gleam of the moonlight from the white feathers that were sewn upon my robe.

"Then I heard also the voice of Zikali speaking from beneath. He called on you to come out to shoot at me, and the man whom I took to be the king, ordered you to obey. You appeared from behind the tree, and I was certain from the look upon your face that at that distance you did not know who I was in my strange and glittering raiment. You lifted the pistol and I was terribly afraid, for I had seen you shoot with it before on the verandah of the Temple and knew well that you do not miss. Very nearly I screamed out to you, but remembered and was silent, thinking that after all it did not much matter if I died, except for the sake of Maurice here. Also by now I guessed that I was being used to deceive those men before me into some terrible act, and that if I died, at least they would be undeceived.

"I thought that an age passed between the time you pointed the pistol and I saw the flash for which I was waiting."

"You need not have waited, Heda," I interposed, "for if I had really aimed at you you would never have seen that flash, at least so it is said. I too guessed enough to shoot above you, although at the time I did not know that it was you on the rock; indeed I thought it was Nombé painted up."

"Yes, I heard the bullet sing over me. Then I heard the voice of Zikali challenging you to shoot him, and to tell the truth, hoped that you would do so. Just before you fired for the second time, Nombé whispered to me—'Throw' and I threw the little red-handled spear into the air. Then as the pistol went off Nombé whispered—'Come.' I slipped away down the path and back with her into the hut, where she kissed me and said that I had done well indeed, after which she took off my strange robe and helped me to put on my own dress.

"That is all I know, except that some hours later I was awakened from sleep and put into the litter where I went to sleep again, for what I had gone through tired me very much. I need not trouble you with the rest, for we journeyed here in the same way that we had journeyed to Ulundi—by night. I did not see Zikali, but in answer to my questions, Nombé told me that the Zulus had declared war against the English. What part in the business I had played, she would not tell me, and I do not know to this hour, but I am sure that it was a great one.

"So we came back to the Black Kloof, where I found Maurice quite well, and now he had better go on with the tale, for if I begin to tell you of our meeting I shall become foolish."

"There isn't much more to tell," said Anscombe, "except about yourself. While Heda was away I was kept a prisoner and watched day and night by Zikali's people who would not let me stir a yard, but otherwise treated me kindly. Then one day at sunrise, or shortly after it, Heda re-appeared and told me all this story, for the end of which, as you may imagine, I thanked God.

"After that we just lived on here, happily enough since we were together, until one day Nombé told us that there had been a great battle in which the Zulus had wiped out the English, killing hundreds and hundreds of them, although for every soldier that they killed, they had lost two. Of course this made us very sad, especially as we were afraid you might be with our troops. We asked Nombé if you were present at the battle. She answered that she would inquire of her Spirit and went through some very strange performances with ashes and knuckle bones, after which she announced that you had been in the battle but were alive and coming this way with a dog that had silver on it. We laughed at her, saying that she could not possibly know anything of the sort, also that dogs as a rule did not carry silver. Whereon she only smiled and said—'Wait.'

"I think it was three days later that one night towards dawn I was awakened by hearing a dog barking outside my hut, as though it wished to call attention to its presence. It barked so persistently and in a way so unlike a Kaffir dog, that at length about dawn I went out of the hut to see what was the matter. There, standing a few yards away surrounded by some of Zikali's people, I saw Lost and knew at once that it was an English Airedale, for I have had several of the breed. It looked very tired and frightened, and while I was wondering whence on earth it could have come, I noticed that it had a silver-mounted collar and remembered Nombé and her talk about you and a dog that carried silver on it. From that moment, Allan, I was certain that you were somewhere near, especially as the beast ran up to me—it would take no notice of the Kaffirs—and kept looking towards the mouth of the kloof, as though it wished me to follow it. Just then Nombé arrived, and on seeing the dog looked at me oddly.

"'I have a message for you from my master, Mauriti,' she said to me through Heda, who by now had arrived upon the scene, having also been aroused by Lost's barking. 'It is that if you wish to take a walk with a strange dog you can do so, and bring back anything you may find.'"

"The end of it was that after we had fed Lost with milk and meat, I and six of Zikali's men started down the kloof, Lost going ahead of us and now and again running back and whining. At the mouth of the kloof it led us over a hill and down into a bush-veld valley where the thorns grew very thick. When we had gone along the valley for about two miles, one of the Kaffirs saw a Basuto pony still saddled, and caught it. The dog went on past the pony to a tree that had been shattered by lightning, and there within a few yards of the tree we found you lying senseless, Allan, or, as I thought at first, dead, and by your side a Martini rifle of which the stock also seemed to have been broken by lightning.

"Well, we put you on a shield and carried you here, meeting no one, and that is all the story, Allan."

He stopped and we stared at each other. Then I called Lost and patted its head, and the dear beast licked my hand as though it understood that it was being thanked.

"A strange tale," I said, "but God Almighty has put much wisdom into His creatures of which we know nothing. Let us thank Him," and in our hearts we did.

Thus was I rescued from death by the intelligence and fidelity of a four-footed creature. Doubtless in my semi-conscious state that resulted from shock, weariness and sun-stroke, I had all the while headed sub-consciously and without any definite object for the

Black Kloof. When I was within a few miles of it I was stunned by the lightning which ran down the rifle to the ground, though not actually struck. Then the dog, which had escaped, played its part, wandering about the country to find help for me, and so I was saved.

Now of the long months that followed I have little to tell. They were not unhappy in their way, for week by week I felt myself growing stronger, though very slowly. There was a path, steep, difficult and secret, which could be gained through one of the caves in the precipice, not that in which I slept. This path ran up a water-cut kloof through a patch of thorns to a flat tableland that was part of the Ceza stronghold. By it, when I had gained sufficient strength, sometimes we used to climb to the plateau, and there take exercise. It was an agreeable change from the stifling atmosphere of the Black Kloof. The days were very dull, for we were as much out of the world as though we had been marooned on a desert island. Still from time to time we heard of the progress of the war through Nombé, for Zikali I saw but seldom.

She told of disasters to the English, of the death of a great young Chief who was deserted by his companions and died fighting bravely—afterwards I discovered that this was the Prince Imperial of France—of the advance of our armies, of defeats inflicted upon Cetewayo's impis, and finally of the destruction of the Zulus on the battlefield of Ulundi, where they hurled themselves by thousands upon the British square, to be swept away by case-shot and the hail of bullets. This battle, by the way, the Zulus call, not Ulundi or Nodwengu, for it was fought in front of Panda's old kraal of that name, but Owecweni, which means—"the fight of the sheet-iron fortress." I suppose they give it this name because the hedge of bayonets, flashing in the sunlight, reminded them of sheet-iron. Or it may be because these proved as impenetrable as would have done walls of iron. At any rate they dashed their naked bodies against the storm of lead and fell in heaps, only about a dozen of our men being killed, as the little graveyard in the centre of the square entrenchment, about which still lie the empty cartridge cases, records to-day.

There, then, on that plain perished the Zulu kingdom which was built up by Chaka.

Now it was after this event that I saw Zikali and begged him to let us go. I found him triumphant and yet strangely disturbed and, as I thought, more apprehensive than I had ever seen him.

"So, Zikali," I said, "if what I hear is true, you have had your way and destroyed the Zulu people. Now you should be happy."

"Is man ever happy, Macumazahn, when he has gained that which he sought for years? The two out there sigh and are sad because they cannot be married after their own white fashion, though what there is to keep them apart I do not know. Well, in time they will be married, only to find that they are not so happy as they thought they would be. Oh! a day will come when they will talk to each other and say—'Those moons which we spent waiting together in the Black Kloof were the true moons of sweetness, for then we had something to gain; now we have gained all—and what is it?'"

"So it is with me, Macumazahn. Since the Zulus under Chaka killed out my people, the Ndwandwe, year by year I have plotted and waited to see them wedded to the assegai. Now it has come about. You white men have stamped them flat upon the plain of Ulundi; they are no more a nation. And yet I am not happy, for after all it was the House of Senzangacona and not the people of the Zulus, that harmed me and mine, and Cetewayo still lives. While the queen bee remains there may be a hive again. While an ember still glows in the dead ashes, the forest may yet be fired. Perhaps when Cetewayo is dead, then I shall be happy. Only his death and mine are set by Fate as close together as two sister grains of corn upon the cob."

I turned the subject, again asking his leave to depart to Natal or to join the English army.

"You cannot go yet," he answered sternly, "so trouble me no more. The land is full of wandering bands of Zulus who would kill you and your blood would be on my head. Moreover, if they saw a white woman who had sheltered with me, might they not guess something? To dress a doll for the part of the Inkosazana-y-Zulu is the greatest crime in the world, Macumazahn, and what would happen to the Opener of Roads and all his House if it were even breathed that he had dressed that doll and thus brought about the war which ruined them? When Cetewayo is killed and the dead are buried and peace falls upon the land, the peace of death, then you shall go, Macumazahn, and not before."

"At least, Zikali, send a message to the captains of the English army and tell them that we are here."

"Send a message to the hyenas and tell them where the carcass is; send a message to the hunters and tell them where the buck Zikali crouches on its form! Hearken, Macumazahn, if you do this, or even urge me again to do it, neither you nor your friends shall ever leave the Black Kloof. I have spoken."

Then understanding that the case was hopeless, I left him and he glowered after me, for fear had made him cruel. He had won the long game and success had turned to ashes in his mouth. Or rather, he had not won—yet—since his war was against the House of Senzangacona from which he and his tribe had suffered cruel wrong. To pull it down he must pull down the Zulu nation; it was like burning a city to destroy a compromising letter. He had burnt the city, but the letter still remained intact and might be produced in evidence against him. In other words Cetewayo yet lived. Therefore his vengeance remained quite unslaked and his danger was as great, or perhaps greater than it had ever been before. For was he not the prophet who by producing the Princess of Heaven, the traditional goddess of the Zulus, before the eyes of the king and Council, had caused them to decide for war? And supposing it were so much as breathed that this spirit which they seemed to see, had been but a trick and a fraud, what then? He would be tortured to death if his dupes had time, or torn limb from limb if they had not, that is if he could die like other men—a matter as to which personally I had no doubts.

Shortly after I left Zikali Heda and I ate our evening meal together. Anscombe, as it chanced, had gone by the secret path to the tableland of which I have spoken, where he amused himself, as of course we were not allowed to fire a gun, by catching partridges, with the help of an ingenious system of grass nets which he had invented. There were springs on this tableland that formed little pools of water, at which the partridges, also occasionally guinea-fowl and bush pheasants, came to drink at sunrise and sunset. Here it was that he set his nets and retired to work them at those hours by means of strings that he pulled from hiding-places. So Heda and I were alone.

I told her of my ill success with Zikali, at which she was much disappointed. Then by an afterthought I suggested that perhaps she might try to do something in the way of getting a message through to the English camp at Ulundi, or elsewhere, by help of the witch-

doctress, Nombé, adding that I would speak to her myself had I not observed that I seemed to be out of favour with her of late. Heda shook her head and answered that she thought it would be useless to try, also too dangerous. Remembering Zikali's threat, on reflection I agreed with her.

"Tell me, Mr. Quatermain," she added, "is it possible for one woman to be in love with another?"

I stared at her and replied that I did not understand what she meant, since women, so far as I had observed them, were generally in love either with a man or with themselves, perhaps more often with the latter than the former. Rather a cheap joke I admit, with just enough truth in it to make it acceptable—in the Black Kloof.

"So I thought," she answered, "but really Nombé behaves in a most peculiar way. As you know she took a fancy to me from the beginning, perhaps because she had never had any other woman with whom to associate, having, so far as I can make out, been brought up here among men from a child. Indeed, her story is that she was one of twins and therefore as the younger, was exposed to die according to the Zulu superstition. Zikali, however, or a servant of his who knew what was happening, rescued and reared her, so practically I am the only female with whom she has ever been intimate. At any rate her affection for me has grown and grown until, although it seems ungrateful to say so, it has become something of a nuisance. She has told me again and again that she would die to protect me, and that if by chance anything happened to me, she would kill herself and follow me into another world. She is continually making divinations about my future, and as these, in which she entirely believes, always show me as living without her, she is much distressed and at times bursts into tears."

"Hysteria! It is very common among the Zulu women, and especially those of them who practise magic arts," I answered.

"Perhaps, but as it results in the most intense jealousy, Nombé's hysteria is awkward. For instance, she is horribly jealous of Maurice."

"The instincts of a chaperone developed early," I suggested again.

"That won't quite do, Mr. Quatermain," answered Heda with a laugh, "since she is even more jealous of you. With reference to Maurice, she explains frankly that if we marry she might, as she puts it, 'continue to sit outside the hut,' but that in your case you live 'in my head,' where she cannot come between you and me."

"Mad," I remarked, "quite mad. Still madness has to be dealt with in this world like other things, and Nombé, being an abnormal person, may suffer from abnormal ideas. It just amounts to this; she has conceived a passionate devotion to you, at which I am sure neither Maurice nor I can wonder."

"Are those the kind of compliments you used to pay in your youth, Mr. Quatermain? I expect so, and now that you are old you cannot stop them. Well, I thank you all the same, because perhaps you mean what you say. But what is to be done about Nombé? Hush! here she comes. I will leave you to reason with her, if you get the chance," and she departed in a hurry.

Nombé arrived, and something in her aspect told me that I was going to get the chance. Her eternal smile was almost gone and her dark, beautiful eyes flashed ominously. Still she began by asking in a mild voice whether the lady Heddana had eaten her supper with appetite. It will be observed that she was not interested in my appetite or whether enough was left for Anscombe when he returned. I replied that so far as I noted she had consumed about half a partridge, with other things.

"I am glad," said Nombé, "since I was not here to attend upon her, having been summoned to speak with the Master."

Then she sat down and looked at me like a thunder storm.

"I nursed you when you were so ill, Macumazahn," she began, "but now I learn that for the milk with which I fed you, you would force me to drink bitter water that will poison me."

I replied I was well aware that without her nursing I should long ago have been dead, which was what caused me to love her like my own daughter. But would she kindly explain? This she did at once.

"You have been plotting to take away from me the lady Heddana who to me is as mother and sister and child. It is useless to lie to me, for the Master has told me all; moreover, I knew it for myself, both through my Spirit and because I had watched you."

"I have no intention of lying to you, Nombé, about this or any other matter, though I think that sometimes in the past you have lied to me. Tell me, do you expect the Inkosi Mauriti, the lady Heddana and myself to pass the rest of our lives in the Black Kloof, when they wish to get married and go across the Black Water to where their home will be, and I wish to attend to my affairs?"

"I do not know what I expect, Macumazahn, but I do know that never while I live will I be parted from the lady Heddana. At last I have found some one to love, and you and the other would steal her away from me."

I studied her for a while, then asked—

"Why do you not marry, Nombé, and have a husband, and children to love?"

"Marry?" she replied. "I am married to my Spirit which does not dwell beneath the sun, and my children are not of earth; moreover, all men are hateful to me," and her eyes added, "especially you."

"That is a calf with a dog's head," I replied in the words of the native proverb, meaning that she said what was not natural. "Well, Nombé, if you are so fond of the lady Heddana, you had better arrange with her and the Inkosi Mauriti to go away with them."

"You know well I cannot, Macumazahn. I am tied to my Master by ropes that are stronger than iron, and if I attempted to break them my Spirit would wither and I should wither with it."

"Dear me! what a dreadful business. That is what comes of taking to magic. Well, Nombé, I am afraid I have nothing to suggest, nor, to tell you the truth, can I see what I have to do with the matter."

Then she sprang up in a rage, saying—

"I understand that not only will you give me no help, but that you also mock at me, Macumazahn. Moreover, as it is with you, so it is with Mauriti, who pretends to love my lady so much, though I love her more with my little finger than he does with all his body and

what he calls his soul. Yes, he too mocks at me. Now if you were both dead," she added with sudden venom, "my lady would not wish to go away. Be careful lest a spell should fall upon you, Macumazahn," and without more words she turned and went.

At first I was inclined to laugh; the whole thing seemed so absurd. On reflection, however, I perceived that in reality it was very serious to people situated as we were. This woman was a savage; more, a mystic savage of considerable powers of mind—a formidable combination. Also there were no restraints upon her, since public opinion had as little authority in the Black Kloof as the Queen's Writ. Lastly, it was not unknown for women to conceive these violent affections which, if thwarted, filled them with something like madness. Thus I remembered a very terrible occurrence of my youth which resulted in the death of one who was most dear to me. I will not dwell on it, but this, too, was the work of a passionate creature, woman I can scarcely call her, who thought she was being robbed of one whom she adored.

The end of it was that I did not enjoy my pipe that night, though luckily Anscombe returned after a successful evening's netting, about which he was so full of talk that there was no need for me to say much. So I put off any discussion of the problem until the morrow.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE KING VISITS ZIKALI

Next morning, as a result of my cogitations, I went to see Zikali. I was admitted after a good deal of trouble and delay, for although his retinue was limited and, with the exception of Nombé, entirely male, this old prophet kept a kind of semi-state and was about as difficult to approach as a European monarch. I found him crouching over a fire in his hut, since at this season of the year even in that hot place the air was chilly until midday.

"What is it, Macumazahn?" he asked. "As to your going away, have patience. I learn that he who was King of the Zulus is in full flight, with the white men tracking him like a wounded buck. When the buck is caught and killed, then you can go."

"It is about Nombé," I answered, and told him all the story, which did not seem to surprise him at all.

"Now see, Macumazahn," he said, taking some snuff, "how hard it is to dam up the stream of nature. This child, Nombé, is of my blood, one whom I saved from death in a strange way, not because she was of my blood but that I might make an experiment with her. Women, as you who are wise and have seen much will know, are in truth superior to men, though, because they are weaker in body, men have the upper hand of them and think themselves their masters, a state they are forced to accept because they must live and cannot defend themselves. Yet their brains are keener, as an assegai is keener than a hoe; they are more in touch with the hidden things that shape out fate for people and for nations; they are more faithful and more patient, and by instinct if not by reason, more far-seeing, or at least the best of them are so, and by their best, like men, they should be judged. Yet this is the hole in their shield. When they love they become the slaves of love, and for love's sake all else is brought to naught, and for this reason they cannot be trusted. With men, as you know, this is otherwise. They, too, love, by Nature's law, but always behind there is something greater than love, although often they do not understand what that may be. To be powerful, therefore, a woman must be one who does not love too much. If she cannot love at all, then she is hated and has no power, but she must not love too much.

"Once I thought that I had found such a woman; she was named Mameena, whom all men worshipped and who played with all men, as I played with her. But what was the end of it? Just as things were going very well she learned to love too much some man of strange notions, who would have thwarted me and brought everything to nothing, and therefore I had to kill her, for which I was sorry."

Here he paused to take some more snuff, watching me over the spoon as he drew it up his great nostrils, but as I said nothing, went on—

"Now after Mameena was dead I bethought me that I would rear up a woman who could still love but should never love a man and therefore never become mad or foolish, because I believed that it was only man who in taking her heart from woman, would take her wits also. This child, Nombé, came to my hand, and as I thought, so I did. Never mind how I did it, by medicine perhaps, by magic perhaps, by watering her pride and making it grow tall perhaps, or by all three. At least it was done, and this I know of Nombé, she will never care for any man except as a woman may care for a brother.

"But now see what happens. She, the wise, the instructed, the man-despiser, meets a woman of another race who is sweet and good, and learns to love her, not as maids and mothers love, but as one loves the Spirit that she worships. Yes, yes, to her she is a goddess to be worshipped, one whom she desires to serve with all her heart and strength, to bow down before, making offerings, and at the end to follow into death. So it comes about that this Nombé, whose mind I thought to make as the wings of a bird floating on the air while it searches for its prey, has become even madder than other women. It is a disappointment to me, Macumazahn."

"It may be a disappointment to you, Zikali, and all that you say is very interesting. But to us it is a danger. Tell me, will you command Nombé to cease from her folly?"

"Will I forbid the mist to rise, or the wind to blow, or the lightning to strike? As she is, she is. Her heart is filled with black jealousy of Mauriti and of you, as a butcher's gourd is filled with blood, for she is not one who desires that her goddess should have other worshippers; she would keep her for herself alone."

"Then in this way or in that the gourd must be emptied, Zikali, lest we should be forced to drink from it and that black blood should poison us."

"How, unless it be broken, Macumazahn? If Heddana departs and leaves her, she will go mad, and accompany her she cannot, for her Spirit dwells here," and he tapped his own breast. "It would pull her back again and she would become a great trouble to me, for then that Spirit of hers would not suffer me to sleep, with its continual startings in search of what it had lost, and its returnings empty-handed. Well, have no fear, for at the worst the bowl can be broken and the blood poured upon the earth, as I have broken finer bowls than this before; had I all the bits of them they would make a heap so high, Macumazahn!" and he held out his hand on a level with his head, a gesture that made my back creep. "I will tell her this and it may keep her quiet for a while. Of poison you need not be afraid, since unlike mine, her Spirit hates it. Poison is not one of its weapons as it is with mine. But of spells, beware, for her Spirit has some which are very powerful."

Now I jumped up, filled with indignation, saying—

"I do not believe in Nombé's spells, and in any case how am I to guard against them?"

"If you do not believe there is no need to guard, and if you do believe, then it is for you to find out how to guard, Macumazahn. Oh! I could tell you the story of a white teacher who did not believe and would not guard—but never mind, never mind. Good-bye, Macumazahn, I will speak with Nombé. Ask her for a lock of her hair to wear upon your heart after she has enchanted it. The charm is good against spells. O-ho—Oho-o! What fools we are, white and black together! That is what Cetewayo is thinking to-day."

After this Nombé became much more agreeable. That is to say she was very polite, her smile was more fixed and her eyes more unfathomable than ever. Evidently Zikali had spoken to her and she had listened. Yet to tell the truth my distrust of this handsome young woman grew deeper day by day. I recognized that there was a great gulf between her and the normal, that she was a creature fashioned by Zikali who had trained her as a gardener trains a tree, nay, who had done more, who had grafted some foreign growth of exotic and unnatural spiritualism on to her primitive nature. The nature remained the same, but the graft or grafts bore strange flowers and fruit, unholy flowers and poisonous fruit. Therefore she was not to blame—sometimes I wonder whether in this curious world, could one see their past and their future, anybody is to blame for anything—but this did not make her the less dangerous.

Some talks I had with her only increased my apprehensions, for I found that in a way she had no conscience. Life, she told me, was but a dream, and all its laws as evolved by man were but illusions. The real life was elsewhere. There was the distant lake on which the flower of our true existence floated. Without this unseen lake of supernatural water the flower could not float; indeed there would be no flower. Moreover, the flower did not matter; sometimes it would have this shape and colour, sometimes that. It was but a thing destined to grow and bloom and rot, and during its day to be ugly or to be beautiful, to smell sweet or ill, as it might chance, and ultimately to be absorbed back into the general water of Life.

I pointed out to her that all flowers had roots which grew in soil. Looking at an orchid-like plant that crept along the bough of a tree, she answered that this was not true as some grew upon air. But however this might be, the soil, or the moisture in the air, was distilled from thousands of other flower lives that had flourished in their day and been forgotten. It did not matter when they died or how many other flowers they choked that they might live. Yet each flower had its own spirit which always had been and always would be.

I asked her of the end and the object of that spirit. She answered darkly that she did not know and if she did, would not say, but that these were very dreadful.

Such were some of her vague and figurative assertions which I only record to indicate their uncomfortable and indeed but half human nature. I forgot to add that she declared that every flower or life had a twin flower or life, which in each successive growth it was bound to find and bloom beside, or wither to the root and spring again and that ultimately these two would become one, and as one flourish eternally. Of all of which I understood and understand little, except that she had grasped the elements of some truth which she could not express in clear and definite language.

One day I was seated in Zikali's hut whither by permission I had come to ask the latest news, when suddenly Nombé appeared and crouched down before him.

"Who gave you leave to enter here, and what is your business?" he asked angrily.

"Home of Spirits," she replied in a humble voice, "be not angry with your servant. Necessity gave me leave, and my business is to tell you that strangers approach."

"Who are they that dare to enter the Black Kloof unannounced?"

"Cetewayo the King is one of them, the others I do not know, but they are many, armed all of them. They approach your gate; before a man can count two hundred they will be here."

"Where are the white chief and the lady Heddana?" asked Zikali.

"By good fortune they have gone by the secret path to the tableland and will not be back till sunset. They wished to be alone, so I did not accompany them, and Macumazahn here said that he was too weary to do so." (This was true. Also like Nombé I thought that they wished to be alone.)

"Good. Go, tell the king that I knew of his coming and am awaiting him. Bid my servants kill the ox which is in the kraal, the fat ox that they thought is sick and therefore fit food for a sick king," he added bitterly.

She glided away like a startled snake. Then Zikali turned to me and said swiftly—

"Macumazahn, you are in great danger. If you are found here you will be killed, and so will the others whom I will send to warn not to return till this king has gone away. Go at once to join them. No, it is too late, I hear the Zulus come. Take that kaross, cover yourself with it and lie among the baskets and beerpots here near the entrance of the hut in the deepest of the shadows, so that if any enter, perchance you will not be found. I too am in danger who shall be held to account for all that has happened. Perhaps they will kill me, if I can be killed. If so, get away with the others as best you can. Nombé will tell you where your horses are hidden. In that case let Heddana take Nombé with her, for when I am dead she will go, and shake her off in Natal if she troubles her. Whatever chances, remember, Macumazahn, that I have done my best to keep my word to you and to protect you and your friends. Now I go to look on this pricked bladder who was once a king."

He scrambled from the hut with slow, toad-like motions, while I with motions that were anything but slow, grabbed the grey catskin kaross and ensconced myself among the beerpots and mats in such a position that my head, over which I set a three-legged carved stool of Zikali's own cutting, was but a few inches to the left of the door-hole and therefore in the deepest of the shadows. Thence by stretching out my neck a little, I could see through the hole, also hear all that passed outside. Unless a deliberate search of the hut should be made I was fairly safe from observation, even if it were entered by strangers. One fear I had, however, it was lest the dog Lost should get into the place and smell me out. I had left him tied to the centre pole in my own hut, because he hated Zikali and always growled at him. But suppose he gnawed through the cord, or any one let him loose!

Scarcely had Zikali seated himself in his accustomed place before the hut, than the gate of the outer fence opened and approaching through it I saw forty or fifty fierce and way-worn men. In front of them, riding on a tired horse that was led by a servant, was Cetewayo himself. He was assisted to dismount, or rather threw his great bulk into the arms that were waiting to receive him.

Then after some words with his following and with one of Zikali's people, followed by three or four indunas and leaning on the arm of Umnyamana, the Prime Minister, he entered the enclosure, the rest remaining without. Zikali, who sat as though asleep, suddenly appeared to wake up and perceive him. Struggling to his feet he lifted his right arm and gave the royal salute of Bayete, and with it titles of praise, such as "Black One!" "Elephant!" "Earth-Shaker!" "Conqueror!" "Eater-up of the White men!" "Child of the Wild Beast (Chaka) whose teeth are sharper than the Wild Beast's ever were!" and so on, until Cetewayo, growing impatient, cried out—

"Be silent, Wizard. Is this a time for fine words? Do you not know my case that you offend my ears with them? Give us food to eat if you have it, after which I would speak with you alone. Be swift also; here I may not stay for long, since the white dogs are at my heels."

"I knew that you were coming, O King, to honour my poor house with a visit," said Zikali slowly, "and therefore the ox is already killed and the meat will soon be on the fire. Meanwhile drink a sup of beer, and rest."

He clapped his hands, whereon Nombé and some servants appeared with pots of beer, of which, after Zikali had tasted it to show that it was not poisoned, the king and his people drank thirstily. Then it was taken to those outside.

"What is this that my ears hear?" asked Zikali when Nombé and the others had gone, "that the White Dogs are on the spoor of the Black Bull?"

Cetewayo nodded heavily, and answered—

"My impis were broken to pieces on the plain of Ulundi; the cowards ran from the bullets as children run from bees. My kraals are burnt and I, the King, with but a faithful remnant fly for my life. The prophecy of the Black One has come true. The people of the Zulus are stamped flat beneath the feet of the great White People."

"I remember that prophecy, O King. Mopo told it to me within an hour of the death of the Black One when he gave me the little red-handled assegai that he snatched from the Black One's hand to do the deed. It makes me almost young again to think of it, although even then I was old," replied Zikali in a dreamy voice like one who speaks to himself.

Hearing him from under my kaross I bethought me that he had really grown old at last, who for the moment evidently forgot the part which this very assegai had played a few months before in the Vale of Bones. Well, even the greatest masters make such slips at times when their minds are full of other things. But if Zikali forgot, Cetewayo and his councillors remembered, as I could see by the look of quick intelligence that flashed from face to face.

"So! Mopo the murderer, he who vanished from the land after the death of my uncle Dingaan, gave you the little red assegai, did he, Opener of Roads! And but a few months ago that assegai, which old Sigananda knew again, thrown by the hand of the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, drew blood from my body after the white man, Macumazahn, had severed its shaft with his bullet. Now tell me, Opener of Roads, how did it pass from your keeping into that of the spirit Nomkubulwana?"

At this question I distinctly saw a shiver shake the frame of Zikali who realized too late the terrible mistake he had made. Yet as only the great can do, he retrieved and even triumphed over his error.

"Oho-ho!" he laughed, "who am I that I can tell how such things happen? Do you not know, O King, that the Spirits leave what they will and take what they will, whether it be but a blade of grass, or the life of a man"—here he looked at Cetewayo—"or even of a people? Sometimes they take the shadow and sometimes the substance, since spirit or matter, all is theirs. As for the little assegai, I lost it years ago. I remember that the last time I saw it was in the hands of a woman named Mameena to whom I showed it as a strange and bloody thing. After her death I found that it was gone, so doubtless she took it with her to the Under-world and there gave it to the Queen Nomkubulwana, with whom you may remember this Mameena returned from that Under-world yonder in the Bones."

"It may be so," said Cetewayo sullenly, "yet it was no spirit iron that cut my thigh, but what do I know of the ways of Spirits? Wizard, I would speak with you in your hut alone where no ear can hear us."

"My hut is the King's," answered Zikali, "yet let the King remember that those Spirits of which he does not know the ways, can always hear, yes, even the thoughts of men, and on them do judgment."

"Fear not," said Cetewayo, "amongst many other things I remember this also."

Then Zikali turned and crept into the hut, whispering as he passed me—

"Lie silent for your life." And Cetewayo having bidden his retinue to depart outside the fence and await him there, followed after him.

They sat them down on either side of the smouldering fire and stared at each other through the thin smoke there in the gloom of the hut. By turning my head that the foot of the king had brushed as he passed, I could watch them both. Cetewayo spoke the first in a hoarse, slow voice, saying—

"Wizard, I am in danger of my life and I have come to you who know all the secrets of this land, that you may tell me in what place I may hide where the white men cannot find me. It must be told into my ear alone, since I dare not trust the matter to any other, at any rate until I must. They are traitors every man of them, yes, even those who seem to be most faithful. The fallen man has no friends, least of all if he chances to be a king. Only the dead will keep his counsel. Tell me of the place I need."

"Dingaan, who was before you, once asked this same thing of me, O King, when he was flying from Panda your father, and the Boers. I gave him advice that he did not take, but sought a refuge of his own upon a certain Ghost-mountain. What happened to him there that Mopo, of whom you spoke a while ago, can tell you if he still lives."<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] See *Nada the Lily*.—EDITOR.

"Surely you are an ill-omened night-bird who thus croak to me continually of the death of kings," broke in Cetewayo with suppressed rage. Then calming himself with an effort added, "Tell me now, where shall I hide?"

"Would you know, King? Then hearken. On the south slope of the Ingome Range west of the Ibululwana River, on the outskirts of the great forest, there is a kloof whereof the entrance, which only one man can pass at a time, is covered by a thicket of thorns and marked by a black rock shaped like a great toad with an open mouth, or, as some say, like myself, 'The-Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born.' Near to this rock dwells an old woman, blind of one eye and lacking a hand, which the Black One cut off shortly before his death, because when he killed her father, she saw the future and prophesied a like death to him, although then she was but a child. This woman is of our company, being a witch-doctress. I will send a Spirit to her, if you so will it, to warn her to watch for you and your company, O King, and show you the mouth of the kloof, where are some old huts and water. There you will never be found unless you are betrayed."

"Who can betray me when none know whither I am going?" asked Cetewayo. "Send the Spirit, send it at once, that this one-armed witch may make ready."

"What is the hurry, King, seeing that the forest is far away? Yet be it as you will. Keep silence now, lest evil should befall you."

Then of a sudden Zikali seemed to go off into one of his trances. His form grew rigid, his eyes closed, his face became fixed as though in death, and foam appeared upon his lips. He was a dreadful sight to look on, there in the gloomy hut.

Cetewayo watched him and shivered. Then he opened his blanket and I perceived that fastened about him by a loop of hide in such a fashion that it could be drawn out in a moment, was the blade of a broad assegai, the shaft of which was shortened to about six inches. His hand grasped this shaft, and I understood that he was contemplating the murder of Zikali. Then it seemed to me that he changed his mind and that his lips shaped the words—"Not yet," though whether he really spoke them I do not know. At least he withdrew his hand and closed the blanket.

Slowly Zikali opened his eyes, staring at the roof of the hut, whence came a curious sound as of squeaking bats. He looked like a dead man coming to life again. For a few moments he turned up his ear as though he listened to the squealing, then said—

"It is well. The Spirit that I summoned has visited her of our company who is named One-hand and returned with the answer. Did you not hear it speaking in the thatch, O King?"

"I heard something, Wizard," answered Cetewayo in an awed voice. "I thought it was a bat."

"A bat it is, O King, one with wide wings and swift. This bat says that my sister, One-hand, will meet you on the third day from now at this hour on the further side of the ford of the Ibululwana, where three milk-trees grow together on a knoll. She will be sitting under the centre milk-tree and will wait for two hours, no more, to show you the secret entrance to the kloof."

"The road is rough and long, I shall have to hurry when worn out with travelling," said Cetewayo.

"That is so, O King. Therefore my counsel is that you begin the journey as soon as possible, especially as I seem to hear the baying of the white dogs not far away."

"By Chaka's head! I will not," growled Cetewayo, "who thought to sleep here in peace this night."

"As the King wills. All that I have is the King's. Only then One-hand will not be waiting and some other place of hiding must be found, since this is known to me only and to her; also that Spirit which I sent will make no second journey, nor can I travel to show it to the King."

"Yes, Wizard, it is known to you and to myself. Methinks it would be better were it known to me alone. I have a spoonful of snuff to share (i.e., a bone to pick) with you, Wizard. It would seem that you set my feet and those of the Zulu people upon a false road, yonder in the Vale of Bones, causing me to declare war upon the white men and thereby bringing us all to ruin."

"Mayhap my memory grows bad, O King, for I do not remember that I did these things. I remember that the spirit of a certain Mameena whom I called up from the dead, prophesied victory to the King, which victory has been his. Also it prophesied other victories to the King in a far land across the water, which victories doubtless shall be his in due season; for myself I gave no 'counsel to the King or to his indunas and generals.'"

"You lie, Wizard," exclaimed Cetewayo hoarsely. "Did you not summon the shape of the Princess of Heaven to be the sign of war, and did she not hold in her hand that assegai of the Black One which you have told me was in your keeping? How did it pass from your keeping into the hand of a spirit?"

"As to that matter I have spoken, O King. For the rest, is Nomkubulwana my servant to come and go at my bidding?"

"I think so," said Cetewayo coldly. "I think also that you who know the place where I purpose to hide, would do well to forget it. Surely you have lived too long, O Opener of Roads, and done enough evil to the House of Senzangacona, which you ever hated."

So he spoke, and once more I saw his hand steal towards the spearhead which was hidden beneath the blanket that he wore.

Zikali saw it also and laughed. "Oho!" he laughed, "forgetting all my warnings, and that the day of my death will be his own, the King thinks to kill me because I am old and feeble and alone and unarmed. He thinks to kill me as the Black One thought, as Dingaan thought, as even Panda thought, yet I live on to this day. Well, I bear no malice since it is natural that the King should wish to kill one who knows the secret of where he would hide himself for his own life's sake. That spearhead which the King is fingering is sharp, so sharp that my bare breast cannot turn its edge. I must find me a shield! I must find me a shield! Fire, you are not yet dead. Awake, make smoke to be my shield!" and he waved his long, monkey-like arms over the embers, from which instantly there sprang up a reek of thin white smoke that appeared to take a vague and indefinite shape which suggested the shadow of a man; for to me it seemed a nebulous and wavering shadow, no more.

"What are you staring at, O King?" went on Zikali in a fierce and thrilling voice. "Who is it that you see? Who has the fire sent to be my shield? Ghosts are so thick here that I do not know. I cannot tell one of them from the other. Who is it? Who, who of all that you have slain and who therefore are your foes?"

"Umbelazi, my brother," groaned Cetewayo. "My brother Umbelazi stands before me with spear raised; he whom I brought to his death at the battle of the Tugela. His eyes flame upon me, his spear is raised to strike. He speaks words I cannot understand. Protect me, O Wizard! Lord of Spirits, protect me from the spirit of Umbelazi."

Zikali laughed wildly and continued to wave his arms above the fire from which smoke poured ever more densely, till the hut was full of it.

When it cleared away again Cetewayo was gone!

"Saw you ever the like of that?" said Zikali, addressing the kaross under which I was sweltering. "Tell me, Macumazahn."

"Yes," I answered, thrusting out my head as a tortoise does, "when in this very hut you seemed to produce the shape, also out of smoke, I think, of one whom I used to know. Say, how do you do it, Zikali?"

"Do it. Who knows? Perchance I do nothing. Perchance I think and you fools see, no more. Or perchance the spirits of the dead who are so near to us, come at my call and take themselves bodies out of the charmed smoke of my fire. You white men are wise, answer your own question, Macumazahn. At least that smoke or that ghost saved me from a spear thrust in the heart, wherewith Cetewayo was minded to pay me for showing him a hiding-place which he desired should be secret to himself alone. Well, well, I can pay as well as Cetewayo and my count is longer. Now lie you still, Macumazahn, for I go out to watch. He will not bide long in this place which he deems haunted and ill-omened. He will be gone ere sunset, that is within an hour, and sleep elsewhere."

Then he crept from the hut and presently, though I could see nothing, for now the gate of the fence was shut, I heard voices debating and finally that of Cetewayo say angrily—

"Have done! It is my will. You can eat your food outside of this place which is bewitched; the girl will show us where are the huts of which the wizard speaks."

A few minutes later Zikali crept back into the hut, laughing to himself.

"All is safe," he said, "and you can come out of your hole, old jackal. He who calls himself a king is gone, taking with him those whom he thinks faithful, most of whom are but waiting a chance to betray him. What did I say, a king? Nay, in all Africa there is no slave so humble or so wretched as this broken man. Oh! feather by feather I have plucked my fowl and by and by I shall cut his throat. You will be there, Macumazahn, you will be there."

"I trust not," I answered as I mopped my brow. "We have been near enough to throat-cutting this afternoon to last me a long while. Where has the king gone?"

"Not far, Macumazahn. I have sent Nombé to guide him to the huts in the little dip five spear throws to the right of the mouth of the kloof where live the old herdsman and his people who guard my cattle. He and all the rest are away with the cattle that are hidden in the Ceza Forest out of reach of the white men, so the huts are empty. Oh! now I read what you are thinking. I do not mean that he should be taken there. It is too near my house and the king still has friends."

"Why did you send Nombé?" I asked.

"Because he would have no other guide, who does not trust my men. He means to keep her with him for some days and then let her go, and thus she will be out of mischief. Meanwhile you and your friends can depart untroubled by her fancies, and join the white men who are near. Tomorrow you shall start."

"That is good," I said with a sigh of relief. Then an idea struck me and I added, "I suppose no harm will come to Nombé, who might be thought to know too much?"

"I hope not," he replied indifferently, "but that is a matter for her Spirit to decide. Now go, Macumazahn, for I am weary."

I also was weary after my prolonged seclusion under that very hot skin rug. For be it remembered I was not yet strong again, and although this was not the real reason why I had stopped behind when the others went to the plateau, I still grew easily tired. My real reason was that of Nombé—that I thought they preferred to be alone. I looked about me and saw with relief that Cetewayo and every man of his retinue were really gone. They had not even waited to eat the ox that had been killed for them, but had carried off the meat with other provisions to their sleeping-place outside the kloof. Having made sure of this I went to my hut and loosed Lost that fortunately enough had been unable to gnaw through the thick buffalo-hide riem with which I had fastened him to the pole.

He greeted me with rapture as though we had been parted for years. Had he belonged to Ulysses himself he could not have been more joyful. When one is despondent and lonesome, how grateful is the whole-hearted welcome of a dog which, we are sometimes tempted to think, is the only creature that really cares for us in the world. Every other living thing has side interests of its own, but that of a dog is centred in its master, though it is true that it also dreams affectionately of dinner and rabbits.

Then with Lost at my feet I sat outside the hut smoking and waiting for the return of Anscombe and Heda. Presently I caught sight of them in the gloaming. Their arms were around one another, and in some remarkable way they had managed to dispose their heads, forgetting that the sky was still light behind them, in such fashion that it was difficult to tell one from the other. I reflected that it was a good thing that at last we were escaping from this confounded kloof and country for one where they could marry and make an end, and became afflicted with a sneezing fit.

Heda asked where Nombé was and why supper was not ready, for Nombé played the part of cook and parlourmaid combined. I told her something of what had happened, whereon Heda, who did not appreciate its importance in the least, remarked that she, Nombé, might as well have put on the pot before she went and done sundry other things which I forget. Ultimately we got something to eat and turned in, Heda grumbling a little because she must sleep alone, for she had grown used to the company of the ever-watchful Nombé, who made her bed across the door-hole of the hut.

Anscombe was soon lost in dreams, if he did dream, but I could not sleep well that night. I was fearful of I knew not what, and so, I think, was Lost, for he fidgeted and kept poking me with his nose. At last, I think it must have been about two hours after midnight, he began to growl. I could hear nothing, although my ears are sharp, but as he went on growling I crept to the door-hole and drew aside the board. Lost slipped out and vanished, while I waited, listening. Presently I thought I heard a soft foot-fall and a whisper, also that I saw the shape of a woman which reminded me of Nombé, shown faintly by the starlight. It vanished in a moment and Lost returned wagging his tail, as he might well have done if it were Nombé who was attached to the dog. As nothing further happened I went back to bed, reflecting that I was probably mistaken, since Nombé had been sent away for some days by Zikali and would scarcely dare to return at once, even if she could do so.

Shortly before daylight Lost began to growl again in a subdued and thunderous fashion. This time I got up and dressed myself more or less. Then I went out. The dawn was just breaking and by its light I saw a strange scene. About fifty yards away in the narrow nek that ran over some boulders to the site of our huts, stood what seemed to be the goddess Nomkubulwana as I had seen her on the point of rock in the Vale of Bones. She wore the same radiant dress and in the dim glow had all the appearance of a white woman. I stood amazed, thinking that I dreamt, when from round the bend emerged a number of Zulus, creeping forward stealthily with raised spears.

They caught sight of the supernatural figure which barred their road, halted and whispered to each other. Then they turned to fly, but before they went one of them, as it seemed to me through sheer terror, hurled his assegai at the figure which remained still and unmoved.

In thirty seconds they were gone; in sixty their footsteps had died away. Then the figure wheeled slowly round and by the strengthening light I perceived that a spear transfixing its breast.

As it sank to the ground I ran up to it. It was Nombé with her face and arms whitened and her life-blood running down the glittering feather robe.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE MADNESS OF NOMBÉ

The dog reached Nombé first and began to lick her face, its tongue removing patches of the white which had not had time to dry. She was lying, her back supported by one of the boulders. With her left hand she patted the dog's head feebly and with her right drew out the assegai from her body, letting it fall upon the ground. Recognizing me she smiled in her usual mysterious fashion and said—

"All is well, Macumazahn, all is very well. I have deserved to die and I do not die in vain."

"Don't talk, let me see your wound," I exclaimed.

She opened her robe and pointed; it was quite a small gash beneath the breast from which blood ebbed slowly.

"Let it be, Macumazahn," she said. "I am bleeding inside and it is mortal. But I shall not die yet. Listen to me while I have my mind. Yesterday when Mauriti and Heddana went up to the plain I wished to go with them because I had news that Zulus were wandering everywhere and thought that I might be able to protect my mistress from danger. Mauriti spoke to me roughly, telling me that I was not wanted. Of that I thought little, for to such words I am accustomed from him; moreover, they are to be forgiven to a man in love. But it did not end there, for my lady Heddana also pierced me with her tongue, which hurt more than this spear thrust does, Macumazahn, for I could see that her speech had been prepared and that she took this chance to throw it at me. She said that I did not know where I should sit; that I was a thorn beneath her nail, and that whenever she wished to talk with Mauriti, or with you, Macumazahn, I was ever there with my ear open like the mouth of a gourd. She commanded me in future to come only when I was called; all of which things I am sure Mauriti had taught her, who in herself is too gentle even to think them—unless you taught her, Macumazahn."

I shook my head and she went on—

"No, it was not you who also are too gentle, and having suffered yourself, can feel for those who suffer, which Mauriti who has never suffered cannot do. Still, you too thought me a trouble, one that sticks in the flesh like a hooked thorn, or a tick from the grass, and cannot be unfastened. You spoke to the Master about it and he spoke to me."

This time I nodded in assent.

"I do not blame you, Macumazahn; indeed now I see that you were wise, for what right has a poor black doctress to seek the love, or even to look upon the face of the great white lady whom for a little while Fate has caused to walk upon the same path with her? But yesterday I forgot that, Macumazahn, for you see we are all of us, not one self, but many selves, and each self has its times of rule. Nombé alive and well was one woman, Nombé dying is another, and doubtless Nombé dead will be a third, unless, as she prays, she should sleep for ever.

"Macumazahn, those words of Heddana's were to me what gall is to sweet milk. My blood clotted and my heart turned sour. It was not against her that I was angry, because that can never happen, but against Mauriti and against you. My Spirit whispered in my ear. It said, 'If Mauriti and Macumazahn were dead the lady Heddana would be left alone in a strange land. Then she would learn to rest upon you as upon a stick, and learn to love the stick on which she rested, though it be so rough and homely.' But how can I kill them, I asked of my Spirit, and myself escape death?"

"Poison is forbidden to you by the pact between us," answered my Spirit, 'yet I will show you a way, who am bound to serve you in all things good or ill.'

"Then we nodded to each other in my breast, Macumazahn, and I waited for what should happen who knew that my Spirit would not lie. Yes, I waited for a chance to kill you both, forgetting, as the wicked forget in their madness, that even if I were not found out, soon or late Heddana would guess the truth and then, even if she had learned to love me a thousand times more than she ever could, would come to hate me as a mother hates a snake that has slain her child. Or even if she never learned or guessed in life, after death she would learn and hunt me and spit on me from world to world as a traitress and a murderer, one who has sinned past pardon."

Here she seemed to grow faint and I turned to seek for help. But she caught hold of my coat and said—

"Hear me out, Macumazahn, or I will run after you till I fall and die."

So thinking it best, I stayed and she went on—

"My Spirit, which must be an evil one since Zikali gave it me when I was made a doctress, dealt truly with me, for presently the king and his people came. Moreover, my Spirit brought it about that the king would have no other guide but me to lead him to the kraal where he slept last night, and I went as though unwillingly. At the kraal the king sent for me and questioned me in a dark hut, pretending to be alone, but I who am a doctress knew that two other men were in that hut, taking note of all my words. He asked me of the Inkosazana-y-Zulu who appeared in the Vale of Bones and of the little assegai she held in her hand, and of the magic of the Opener of Roads, and many other things. I said that I knew nothing of the Inkosazana, but that without doubt my Master was a great magician. He did not believe me. He threatened that I should be tortured very horribly and was about to call his servants to torment me till I told the truth. Then my Spirit spoke in my heart saying, 'Now the door is open to you, as I promised. Tell the king of the two

white men whom the Master hides, and he will send to kill them, leaving the lady Heddana and you alone together.’ So I pretended to be afraid and told him, whereon he laughed and answered—

“For your sake I am glad, girl, that you have spoken the truth; besides it is useless to torture a witch, since then the spirit in her only vomits lies.’

“Next he called aloud and a man came, who it was I could not see in the dark. The king commanded him to take me to one of the other huts and tie me up there to the roof-pole. The man obeyed, but he did not tie me up; he only blocked the hut with the door-board, and sat with me there in the dark alone.

“Now I grew cunning and began to talk with him, spreading a net of sweet words, as the fowler spreads a net for cranes from which he would tear the crests. Soon by his talk I found out that the king and his people knew more than I guessed. Macumazahn, they had seen the cart which still stands under the overhanging rock by the mouth of the cave. I asked him if that were all, pretending that the cart belonged to my Master, to whom it had been brought from the field of Isandhlwana, that he might be drawn about in it, who was too weak to walk.

“The man said that if I would kiss him he would tell me everything. I bade him tell me first, swearing that then I would kiss him. Yes, Macumazahn, I, whom no man’s lips have ever touched, fell as low as this. So he grew foolish and told me. He told me that they had also seen a kappje such as white women wear, hanging on the hut fence, and I remembered that after washing the headdress of my mistress I had set it there to dry in the sun. He told me also that the King suspected that she who wore that kappje was she who had played the part of the Inkosazana in the Vale of Bones. I asked him what the king would do about the matter, at the same time denying that there was any white woman in the Black Kloof. He said that at dawn the king would send and kill these foreign rats, whom the Opener of Roads kept in the thatch of his hut. Now he drew near and asked his pay. I gave it to him—with a knife-point, Macumazahn. Oh! that was a good thrust. He never spoke again. Then I slipped away, for all the others were asleep, and was here a little after midnight.”

“I thought I saw you, Nombé,” I said, “but was not sure, so I did nothing.”

She smiled and answered—

“Ah! I was afraid that the Watcher-by-Night would be watching by night; also the dog ran up to me, but he knew me and I sent him back again. Now while I was coming home, thoughts entered my heart. I saw, as one sees by a lightning flash, all that I had done. The king and his people were not sure that the Master was hiding white folk here and would never have sent back to kill them on the chance. I had made them sure, as indeed, being mad, I meant to do. Moreover, in throwing spears at the kites I had killed my own dove, since it was on the false Inkosazana who had caused them to declare war and brought the land to ruin, that they wished to be avenged, and perchance on him who taught her her part, not on one or two wandering white men. I saw that when Cetewayo’s people came, and there were many more of them outside, several hundreds I think, they would shave the whole head and burn the whole tree. Every one in the kloof would be killed.

“How could I undo the knot that I had tied and stamp out the fire that I had lit? That was the question. I bethought me of coming to you, but without arms how could you help? I bethought me of going to the Master, but I was ashamed. Also, what could he do with but a few servants, for the most of his people are away with the cattle? He is too weak to climb the steep path to the plain above, nor was there time to gather folk to carry him. Lastly, even if there were time which there was not, and we went thither they would track us out and kill us. For the rest I did not care, nor for myself, but that the lady Heddana should be butchered who was more to me than a hundred lives, and through my treachery—ah! for that I cared.

“I called on my Spirit to help me, but it would not come. My Spirit was dead in me because now I would do good and not ill. Yet another Spirit came, that of one Mameena whom once you knew. She came angrily, like a storm, and I shrank before her. She said, ‘Vile witch, you have plotted to murder Macumazahn, and for that you shall answer to me before another sun has set over this earth of yours. Now you seek a way of escape from your own wickedness. Well, it can be had, but at a price.’

“What price, O Lady of Death?” I asked.

“The price of your own life, Witch.’

“I laughed into that ghost face of hers and said—

“Is this all? Be swift and show me the way, O Lady of Death, and afterwards we will balance our account.’

“Then she whispered into the ear of my heart and was gone. I ran on, for the dawn was near. I whitened myself with lime, I put on the glittering cloak and powdered my hair with the sparkling earth. I took a little stick in my hand since I could find no spear and had no time to search, and just as day began to break, I crept out and stood in the bend of the path. The slayers came, twelve or so of them, but behind were many more. They saw the Inkosazana-y-Zulu barring their way and were much afraid. They fled, but out of his fright one of them threw a spear which went home, as I knew it would. He watched to see if I should fall, but I would not fall. Then he fled faster than the rest, knowing himself accursed who had lifted steel against the Queen of Heaven, and oh! I am glad, I am glad!”

She ceased, exhausted, yet with a great exultation in her beautiful eyes; indeed at that moment she looked a most triumphant creature. I stared at her, thrilled through and through. She had been wicked, no doubt, but how splendid was her end; and, thank Heaven! she was troubled with no thought of what might befall her after that end, although I was sure she believed that she would live again to face Mameena.

I knew not what to do. I did not like to leave her, especially as no earthly power could help her case, since slowly but quite surely she was bleeding to death from an internal wound. By now the sun was up and Zikali’s people were about. One of them appeared suddenly and saw, then with a howl of terror turned to fly away.

“Fool! Fool!” I cried, “go summon the lady Heddana and the Inkosi Mauriti. Bid them come swiftly if they would see the doctress Nombé before she dies.”

The man leapt off like a buck, and within a few minutes I saw Heda and Anscombe running towards us, half dressed, and went to meet them.

"What is it?" she gasped.

"I have only time to tell you this," I answered. "Nombé is dying. She gave her life to save you, how I will explain afterwards. The assegai that pierced her was meant for your heart. Go, thank her, and bid her farewell. Anscombe, stop back with me."

We stood still and watched from a little distance. Heda knelt down and put her arms about Nombé. They whispered together into each other's ears. Then they kissed.

It was at this moment that Zikali appeared, leaning on two of his servants. By some occult art or instinct he seemed to know all that had happened, and oh! he looked terrible. He crouched down in front of the dying woman and, toadlike, spat his venom at her.

"You lost your Spirit, did you?" he said. "Well, it came back to me laden with the black honey of your treachery, to me, its home, as a bee comes to its hive. It has told me everything, and well for you, Witch, it is that you are dying. But think not that you shall escape me there in the world below, for thither I will follow you. Curses on you, traitress, who would have betrayed me and brought all my plans to naught. Ow! in a day to come I will pay you back a full harvest for this seed of shame that you have sown."

She opened her eyes and looked at him, then answered quite softly—

"I think your chain is broken, O Zikali, no more my master. I think that love has cut your chain in two and I fear you never more. Keep the spirit you lent to me; it is yours, but the rest of me is my own, and in the house of my heart another comes to dwell."

Then once more she stretched out her arms towards Heda and murmuring, "Sister, forget me not, Sister, who will await you for a thousand years," she passed away.

It was a good ending to a bad business, and I confess I felt glad when it was finished. Only afterwards I regretted very much that I had not found an opportunity to ask her whether or no she had masqueraded as Mameena in the Valley of Bones. Now it is too late.

We buried poor Nombé decently in her own little hut where she used to practise her incantations. Zikali and his people wished apparently to throw her to the vultures for some secret reason that had to do with their superstitions. But Heda, who, now that Nombé was dead, developed a great affection for her not unmixed with a certain amount of compunction for which really she had no cause, withstood him to his face and insisted upon a decent interment. So she was laid to earth still plastered with the white pigment and wrapped in the bloodstained feather robe. I may add that on the following morning one of Zikali's servants informed me solemnly that because of this she had been seen during the night riding up and down the rocks on a baboon as Zulu umtagati are supposed to do. I have small doubt that as soon as we were gone they dug her up again and threw her to the vultures and the jackals according to their first intention.

On this day we at length escaped from the Black Kloof, and in our own cart, for during the night our horses arrived mysteriously from somewhere, in good condition though rather wild. I went to say good-bye to Zikali, who said little, except that we should meet once more after many moons. Anscombe and Heda he would not see at all, but only sent them a message, to the effect that he hoped they would think kindly of him through the long years to come, since he had kept his promise and preserved them safe through many dangers. I might have answered that he had first of all put them into the dangers, but considered it wise to hold my tongue. I think, however, that he guessed my thought, if one can talk of guessing in connection with Zikali, for he said that they had no reason to thank him, since if he had served their turn they had served his, adding—

"It will be strange in the times to be for the lady Heddana to remember that it was she and no other who crumpled up the Zulus like a frostbitten winter reed, since had she not appeared upon the rock in the Valley of Bones, there would have been no war."

"She did not do this, you did it, Zikali," I said, "making her your tool through love and fear."

"Nay, Macumazahn, I did not do it; it was done by what you call God and I call Fate in whose hand I am the tool. Well, say to the lady Heddana that in payment I will hold back the ghost of Nombé from haunting her, if I can. Say also that if I had not brought her and her lover to Zululand they would have been killed."

So we went from that hateful kloof which I have never seen since and hope I shall never see again, two of Zikali's men escorting us until we got into touch with white people. To these we said as little as possible. I think they believed that we were only premature tourists who had made a dash into Zululand to visit some of the battlefields. Indeed none of us ever reported our strange adventures, and after my experience with Kaatje we were particularly careful to say nothing in the hearing of any gentleman connected with the Press. But as a matter of fact there were so many people moving about and such a continual coming and going of soldiers and their belongings, that after we had managed to buy some decent clothes, which we did at the little town of Newcastle, nobody paid any attention to us.

On our way to Maritzburg one amusing thing did happen. We met Kaatje! It was about sunset that we were driving up a steep hill not far from Howick. At least I was driving, but Anscombe and Heda were walking about a hundred yards ahead of the cart, when suddenly Kaatje appeared over a rise and came face to face with them while taking an evening stroll, or as I concluded afterwards, making some journey. She saw, she stared, she uttered one wild yell, and suddenly bundled over the edge of the road. Never would I have believed that such a fat woman could have run so fast. In a minute she was down the slope and had vanished into a dense kloof where, as night was closing in and we were very tired, it was impossible for us to follow her. Nor did subsequent inquiry in Howick tell us where she was living or whence she came, for some months before she had left the place she had taken there as a cook.

Such was the end of Kaatje so far as we were concerned. Doubtless to her dying day she remained, or will remain, a firm believer in ghosts.

Anscombe and Heda were married at Maritzburg as soon as the necessary formalities had been completed. I could not attend the ceremony, which was a disappointment to me and I hope to them, but unfortunately I had a return of my illness and was laid up for a week. Perhaps this was owing to the hot sun that struck me on the neck one afternoon coming down the Town Hill where I was obliged to hang on to the rear of the cart because the brakes had given out. However I was able to send Heda a wedding gift in the

shape of her jewels and money that I recovered from the bank, which she had never expected to see again; also to arrange everything about her property.

They went down to Durban for their honeymoon and, some convenient opportunity arising, sailed thence for England. I received an affectionate letter from them both, which I still treasure, thanking me very much for all I had done for them, that after all was little enough. Also Anscombe enclosed a blank cheque, begging me to fill it in for whatever sum I considered he was indebted to me on the balance of account. I thought this very kind of him and a great mark of confidence, but the cheque remained blank.

I never saw either of them again, and though I believe that they are both living, for the most part abroad—in Hungary I think—I do not suppose that I ever shall. When I came to England some years later after King Solomon's mines had made me rich, I wrote Anscombe a letter. He never answered it, which hurt me at the time. Afterwards I remembered that in their fine position it was very natural that they should not wish to renew acquaintance with an individual who had so intimate a knowledge of certain incidents that they probably regarded as hateful, such as the deaths of Marnham and Dr. Rodd, and all the surrounding circumstances. If so, I daresay that they were wise, but of course it may have been only carelessness. It is so easy for busy and fashionable folk not to answer a rather troublesome letter, or to forget to put that answer in the post. Or, indeed, the letter may never have reached them—such things often go astray, especially when people live abroad. At any rate, perhaps through my own fault, we have drifted apart. I daresay they believe that I am dead, or not to be found somewhere in Africa. However, I always think of them with affection, for Anscombe was one of the best travelling companions I ever had, and his wife a most charming girl, and wonder whether Zikali's prophecy about their children will come true. Good luck go with them!

As it chanced, since then I passed the place where the Temple stood, though at a little distance. I had the curiosity, however, at some inconvenience, to ride round and examine the spot. I suppose that Heda had sold the property, for a back-veld Boer, who was absent at the time, had turned what used to be Rodd's hospital into his house. Close by, grim and gaunt, stood the burnt-out marble walls of the Temple. The verandah was still roofed over, and standing on the spot whence I had shot the pistol out of Rodd's hand, I was filled with many memories.

I could trace the whole plan of the building and visited that part of it which had been Marnham's room. The iron safe that stood in the corner had been taken away, but the legs of the bedstead remained. Also not far from it, overgrown with running plants, was a little heap which I took to be the ashes of his desk, for bits of burnt wood protruded. I grubbed among them with my foot and riding crop and presently came across the remains of a charred human skull. Then I departed in a hurry.

My way took me through the Yellow-wood grove, past the horns of the blue wildebeeste which still lay there, past that mud-hole also into which Rodd had fallen dead. Here, however, I made no more search, who had seen enough of bones. To this day I do not know whether he still lies beneath the slimy ooze, or was removed and buried.

Also I saw the site of our wagon camp where the Basutos attacked us. But I will have done with these reminiscences which induce melancholy, though really there is no reason why they should.

Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe—everything wears out, everything crumbles, everything vanishes—in the words of the French proverb that my friend Sir Henry Curtis is so fond of quoting, that at last I wrote it down in my pocket-book, only to remember afterwards that when I was a boy I had heard it from the lips of an old scamp of a Frenchman, of the name of Leblanc, who once gave me and another lessons in the Gallic tongue. But of him I have already written in *Marie*, which is the first chapter in the Book of the fall of the Zulus. That headed *Child of Storm* is the second. These pages form the third and last.

Ah! indeed, tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE KRAAL JAZI

Now I shall pass over all the Zulu record of the next four years, since after all it has nothing to do with my tale and I do not pretend to be writing a history.

Sir Garnet Wolseley set up his Kilkenny cat Government in Zululand, or the Home Government did it for him, I do not know which. In place of one king, thirteen chiefs were erected who got to work to cut the throats of each other and of the people.

As I expected would be the case, Zikali informed the military authorities of the secret hiding-place in the Ingome Forest where he suggested to Cetewayo that he should refuge. The ex-king was duly captured there and taken first to the Cape and then to England, where, after the disgrace of poor Sir Bartle Frere, an agitation had been set on foot on his behalf. Here he saw the Queen and her ministers, once more conquering, as it had been prophesied that he would by her who wore the shape of Mameena at the memorable scene in the Valley of Bones when I was present. Often I have thought of him dressed in a black coat and seated in that villa in Melbury Road in the suburb of London which I understand is populated by artists. A strange contrast truly to the savage prince receiving the salute of triumph after the Battle of the Tugela in which he won the kingship, or to the royal monarch to whose presence I had been summoned at Ulundi. However, he was brought back to Zululand again by a British man-of-war, re-installed to a limited chieftainship by Sir Theophilus Shepstone, and freed from the strangling embrace of the black coat.

Then of course there was more fighting, as every one knew would happen, except the British Colonial Office; indeed all Zululand ran with blood. For in England Cetewayo and his rights, or wrongs, had, like the Boers and their rights, or wrongs, become a matter of Party politics to which everything else must give way. Often I wonder whether Party politics will not in the end prove the ruin of the British Empire. Well, thank Heaven, I shall not live to learn.

So Cetewayo came back and fought and was defeated by those who once had been his subjects. Now for the last scene, that is all with which I need concern myself.

At the beginning of February, 1884, business took me to Zululand; it had to do with a deal in cattle and blankets. As I was returning towards the Tugela who should I meet but friend Goza, he who had escorted me from the Black Kloof to Ulundi before the outbreak of war, and who afterwards escorted me and that unutterable nuisance, Kaatje, out of the country. At first I thought that we came together by accident, or perhaps that he had journeyed a little way to thank me for the blankets which I had sent to him, remembering my ancient promise, but afterwards I changed my opinion on this point.

Well, we talked over many matters, the war, the disasters that had befallen Zululand, and so forth. Especially did we talk of that night in the Valley of Bones and the things we had seen there side by side. I asked him if the people still believed in the Inkosazana-y-Zulu who then appeared in the moonlight on the rock. He answered that some did and some did not. For his part, he added, looking at me fixedly, he did not, since it was rumoured that Zikali had dressed up a white woman to play the part of the Spirit. Yet he could not be sure of the matter, since it was also said that when some of Cetewayo's people went to kill this white woman in the Black Kloof, Nomkubulwana, the Princess of Heaven herself, rose before them and frightened them away.

I remarked that this was very strange, and then quite casually asked him whom Zikali had dressed up to play the part of the dead Mameena upon that same occasion, since this was a point upon which I always thirsted for definite intelligence. He stared at me and replied that I ought to be able to answer my own question, since I had been much nearer to her who looked like Mameena than any one else, so near indeed that all present distinctly saw her kiss me, as it was well known she had liked to do while still alive. I replied indignantly that they saw wrong and repeated my question. Then he answered straight out—

“O Macumazahn, we Zulus believe that what we saw on that night was not Nombé or another dressed up, but the spirit of the witch Mameena itself. We believe it because we could see the light of Zikali's fire through her, not always, but sometimes; also because all that she said has come true, though everything is not yet finished.”

I could get no more out of him about the matter, for when I tried to speak of it again, he turned the subject, telling me of his wonderful escapes during the war. Presently he rose to go and said casually—

“Surely I grow old in these times of trouble, Macumazahn, for thoughts slip through my head like water through the fingers. Almost I had forgotten what I wished to say to you. The other day I met Zikali, the Opener of Roads. He told me that you were in Zululand and that I should meet you—he did not say where, only that when I did meet you, I was to give you a message. This was the message—that when on your way to Natal you came to the kraal Jazi, you would find him there; also another whom you used to know, and must be sure not to go away without seeing him, since that was about to happen in which you must take your part.”

“Zikali!” I exclaimed. “I have heard nothing of him since the war. I thought that by now he was certainly dead.”

“Oh! no, Macumazahn, he is certainly not dead, but just the same as ever. Indeed it is believed that he and no other has kept all this broth of trouble on the boil, some say for Cetewayo's sake, and some say because he wishes to destroy Cetewayo. But what do I know of such matters who only desire to live in peace under whatever chief the English Queen sends to us, as she has a right to do having conquered us in war? When you meet the Opener of Roads at the kraal Jazi, ask him, Macumazahn.”

“Where the devil is the kraal Jazi?” I inquired with irritation. “I never heard of such a place.”

"Nor did I, therefore I cannot tell you, Macumazahn. For aught I can say it may be down beneath where dead men go. But wherever it is there certainly you will meet the Opener of Roads. Now farewell, Macumazahn. If it should chance that we never look into each other's eyes again, I am sure you will think of me sometimes, as I shall of you, and of all that we have seen together, especially on that night in the Vale of Bones when the ghost of the witch Mameena prophesied to us and kissed you before us all. She must have been very beautiful, Macumazahn, as indeed I have heard from those who remember her, and I don't wonder that you loved her so much. Still for my part I had rather be kissed by a living woman than by one who is dead, though doubtless it is best to be kissed by none at all. Again, farewell, and be sure to tell the Opener of Roads that I gave you his message, lest he should lay some evil charm upon me, who have seen enough evil of late."

Thus talking Goza departed. I never saw him again, and do not know if he is dead or alive. Well, he was a kindly old fellow, if no hero.

I had almost forgotten the incident of this meeting when a while later I found myself in the neighbourhood of the beautiful but semi-tropical place called Eshowe, which since those days has become the official home of the British Resident in Zululand. Indeed, although the house was not then finished, if it had been begun, Sir Melmoth Osborn already had an office there. I wished to see him in order to give him some rather important information, but when I reached a kraal of about fifty huts some five hundred yards from the site of the present Residency, my wagon stuck fast in the boggy ground. While I was trying to get it out a quiet-faced Zulu, whose name, I remember, was Umnikwa, informed me that Malimati, that is Sir Melmoth Osborn's native name, was somewhere at a little distance from Eshowe, too far away for me to get to him that night. I answered, Very well, I would sleep where I was, and asked the name of the kraal.

He replied, Jazi, at which I started, but only said that it was a strange name, seeing that it meant "Finished," or "Finished with joy." Umnikwa answered, Yes, but that it had been so called because the chief Umfokaki, or The Stranger, who married a sister of the king, was killed at this kraal by his brother, Gundane, or the Bat. I remarked that it was an ill-omened kind of name, to which the man replied, Yes, and likely to become more so, since the King Cetewayo who had been sheltering there "beneath the armpit" of Malimati, the white lord, for some months, lay in it dying. I asked him of what he was dying, and he replied that he did not know, but that doubtless the father of the witch-doctors, named Zikali, the Opener of Roads, would be able to tell me, as he was attending on Cetewayo.

"He has sent me to bid you to come at once, O Macumazahn," he added casually, "having had news that you were arriving here."

Showing no surprise, I answered that I would come, although goodness knows I was surprised enough, and leaving my servants to get my wagon out of the bog, I walked into the kraal with the messenger. He took me to a large hut placed within a fence about the gate of which some women were gathered, who all looked very anxious and disturbed. Among them I saw Dabuko the king's brother, whom I knew slightly. He greeted me and told me that Cetewayo was at the point of death within the hut, but like Umnikwa, professed ignorance of the cause of his illness.

For a long while, over an hour I should think, I sat there outside the hut, or walked to and fro. Until darkness came I could occupy myself with contemplating the scenery of the encircling hills, which is among the most beautiful in Zululand with its swelling contours and rich colouring. But after it had set in only my thoughts remained, and these I found depressing.

At length I made up my mind that I would go away, for after all what had I to do with this business of the death of Cetewayo, if in truth he was dying? I wished to see no more of Cetewayo of whom all my recollections were terrific or sorrowful. I rose to depart, when suddenly a woman emerged from the hut. I could not see who she was or even what she was like, because of the gloom; also for the reason that she had the corner of her blanket thrown over her face as though she wished to keep it hidden. For a moment she stopped opposite to me and said—

"The king who is sick desires to see you, Macumazahn." Then she pointed to the door-hole of the hut and vanished, shutting the gate of the fence behind her. Curiosity overcame me and I crawled into the hut, pushing aside the door-board in order to do so and setting it up again when I was through.

Inside burned a single candle fixed in the neck of a bottle, faintly illuminating that big and gloomy place. By its feeble light I saw a low bedstead on the left of the entrance and lying on it a man half covered by a blanket in whom I recognized Cetewayo. His face was shrunken and distorted with pain, and his great bulk seemed less, but still without doubt it was Cetewayo.

"Greeting, Macumazahn," he said feebly, "you find me in evil case, but I heard that you were here and thought that I should like to see you before I die, because I know that you are honest and will report my words faithfully. I wish you to tell the white men that my heart never really was against them; they have always been the friends of my heart, but others forced me down a road I did not wish to travel, of which now I have come to the end."

"What is the matter with you, King?" I asked.

"I do not know, Macumazahn, but I have been sick for some days. The Opener of Roads who came to doctor me, because my wives believed those white medicine-men wished me dead, says that I have been poisoned and must die. If you had been here at first you might perhaps have given me some medicine. But now it is too late," he added with a groan.

"Who then poisoned you, King?"

"I cannot tell you, Macumazahn. Perhaps my enemies, perhaps my brothers, perhaps my wives. All wish to have done with me, and the Great One, who is no longer wanted, is soon dead. Be thankful, Macumazahn, that you never were a king, for sad is the lot of kings."

"Where, then, is the Opener of Roads?" I asked.

"He was here a little while ago. Perhaps he has gone out to take the King's head" (i.e., to announce his death) "to Malimati and the white men," he answered in a faint voice.

Just then I heard a shuffling noise proceeding from that part of the hut where the shadow was deepest, and looking, saw an emaciated arm projected into the circle of the light. It was followed by another arm, then by a vast head covered with long white hair

that trailed upon the ground, then by a big, misshapen body, so wasted that it looked like a skeleton covered with corrugated black skin. Slowly, like a chameleon climbing a bough, the thing crept forward, and I knew it for Zikali. He reached the side of the bed and squatted down in his toad-like fashion, then, again like a chameleon, without moving his head turned his deep and glowing eyes towards me.

"Hail, O Macumazahn," he said in his low voice. "Did I not promise you long ago that you should be with me at the last, and are you not with me and another?"

"It seems so, Zikali," I answered. "But why do you not send for the white doctors to cure the king?"

"All the doctors, white and black, in the whole world cannot cure him, Macumazahn. The Spirits call him and he dies. At his call I came fast and far, but even I cannot cure him—although because of him I myself must die."

"Why?" I asked.

"Look at me, Macumazahn, and say if I am one who should travel. Well, all come to their end at last, even the 'Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born.'"

Cetewayo lifted his head and looked at him, then said heavily—

"Perchance it would have been better for our House if that end had been sooner. Now that I lie dying many sayings concerning you come into my mind that I had forgotten. Moreover, Opener of Roads, I never sent for you, whoever may have done so, and it was not until after you came here that the great pain seized me. How did it happen," he went on with gathering force, "that the white men caught me in the secret place where you told me I should hide? Who pointed out that hidden hole to the white men? But what does it matter now?"

"Nothing at all, O Son of Panda," answered Zikali, "even less than it matters how I escaped the spear-head hidden in your robe, yonder in my hut in the Black Kloof where, had it not been for a certain spirit that stood between you and me, you would have murdered me. Tell me, Son of Panda, during these last three days have you thought at all of your brother Umbelazi, and of certain other brethren of yours whom you killed at the battle of the Tugela, when the white man here led the charge of the Amawombe against your regiments and ate up three of them?"

Cetewayo groaned but said nothing. I think he had become too faint to speak.

"Listen, Son of Panda," went on Zikali in an intense and hissing voice. "Many, many years ago, before Senzangaona, your grandfather, saw the light—who knows how long before—a man was born of high blood in the Dwandwe tribe, which man was a dwarf. Chaka the Black One conquered the Dwandwe, but this man of high blood was spared because he was a dwarf, an abortion, to whom Chaka gave the name of the 'Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born,' keeping him about him to be a mock in times of peace and safety, and because he was wise and learned in magic, to be a counsellor in times of trouble. Moreover, Chaka killed this man's wives and children for his sport, save one whom he kept to be his 'sister.'"

"Therefore for the sake of his people and his butchered wives and children, this wizard swore an oath of vengeance against Chaka and all his House. Working beneath the ground like a rat, he undermined the throne of Chaka and brought him to his death by the spears of his brethren and of Mopo his servant, whom Chaka had wronged. Still working in the dark like a rat, he caused Dingaan, who stabbed Chaka, to murder the Boer Relief and his people, and thus called down upon his head the vengeance of the Whites, and afterwards brought Dingaan to his death. Then Panda, your father, arose, and his life this 'Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born' spared because once Panda had done him a kindness. Only through the witch Mameena he brought sorrow on him, causing war to arise between his children, one of whom was named Cetewayo.

"Then this Cetewayo ruled, first with his father Panda and afterwards in his place, and trouble arose between him and the English. Son of Panda, you will remember that this Cetewayo was in doubt whether to fight the English and demanded a sign of the Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born. He gave the sign, causing the Inkosazana-y-Zulu, the Princess of Heaven, to appear before him and thereby lifting the spear of War. Son of Panda, you know how that war went, how this Cetewayo was defeated and came to the 'Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born' like a hunted hyena, to learn of a hole where he might hide. You know, too, how he strove to murder the poor old doctor who showed him such a hole; how he was taken prisoner and sent across the water and afterwards set up again in the land that had learned to hate him, to bring its children to death by thousands. And you know how at last he took refuge beneath the wing of the white chief, here in the kraal Jazi, and lived, spat upon, an outcast, until at length he fell sick, as such men are apt to do, and the Thing-that-never-should-have-been-born was sent for to doctor him. And you know also how he lies dying, within him an agony as though he had swallowed a red hot spear, and before him a great blackness peopled by the ghosts of those whom he has slain, and of his forefathers whose House he has pulled down and burned."

Zikali ceased, and thrusting his hideous head to within an inch or two of that of the dying man, he glowered at him with his fierce and fiery eyes. Then he began to whisper into the king's ear, who quivered at his words, as the victim quivers beneath the torturer's looks.

At that moment the end of the candle fell into the bottle which was of clear white glass, and there burned for a little while dully before it went out. Never shall I forget the scene illumined by its blue and ghastly light. The dying man lying on the low couch, rocking his head to and fro; the wizard bending over him like some grey vampire bat sucking the life-blood from his helpless throat. The terror in the eyes of the one, the insatiable hate in the eyes of the other. Oh! it was awful!

"Macumazahn," gasped Cetewayo in a rattling whisper, "help me, Macumazahn. I say that I am poisoned by this Zikali, who hates me. Oh! drive away the ghosts! Drive them away!"

I looked at him and at his tormentor squatted by him like a mocking fiend, and as I looked the candle went out.

Then my nerve broke, the cold sweat poured from my face and I fled from the hut as a man might from a scene in hell, followed by the low mocking laugh of Zikali.

Outside the women and others were gathered in the gloom. I told them to go to the king, who was dying, and blundered up the slope to search for some white man. No one was to be found, but a Kaffir messenger by the office told me that Malimati was still

away and had been sent for. So I returned to my wagon and lay down in it exhausted, for what more could I do?

It was a rough night. Thunder muttered and rain fell in driving gusts. I dozed off, only to be awakened by a sound of wailing. Then I knew that the king was dead, for this was the Isililo, the cry of mourning. I wondered whether the murderers—for that he was poisoned I had no doubt—were among those who wailed.

Towards dawn the storm rolled off and the night grew serene and clear, for a waning moon was shining in the sky. The heat of that stifling place oppressed me; my blood seemed to be afire. I knew that there was a stream in a gorge about half a mile away, for it had been pointed out to me. I longed for a swim in cool water, who, to tell truth, had found none for some days, and bethought me that I would bathe in this stream before I trekked from that hateful spot, for to me it had become hateful. Calling my driver, who was awake and talking with the voorloopers, for they knew what was passing at the kraal and were alarmed, I told them to get the oxen ready to start as I would be back presently. Then I set off for the stream and, after a longish walk, scrambled down a steep ravine to its banks, following a path made by Kaffir women going to draw water. Arrived there at last I found that it was in flood and rising rapidly, at least so I judged from the sound, for in that deep, tree-hung place the light was too faint to allow me to see anything. So I sat down waiting for the dawn and wishing that I had not come because of the mosquitoes.

At length it broke and the mists lifted, showing that the spot was one of great beauty. Opposite to me was a waterfall twenty or thirty feet high, over which the torrent rushed into a black pool below. Everywhere grew tall ferns and beyond these graceful trees, from whose leaves hung raindrops. In the centre of the stream on the edge of the fall was a rock not a dozen feet away from me, round which the water foamed. Something was squatted on this rock, at first I could not see what because of the mist, but thought that it was a grey-headed baboon, or some other animal, and regretted that I had not brought a gun with me. Presently I became aware that it must be a man, for, in a chanting voice, it began to speak or pray in Zulu, and hidden behind a flowering bush, I could hear the words. They were to this effect—

“O my Spirit, here where thou foundest me when I was young, hundreds of years ago” (he said hundreds, but I suppose he meant tens), “I come back to thee. In this pool I dived and beneath the waters found thee, my Snake, and thou didst wind thyself about my body and about my heart” (here I understood that the speaker was alluding to his initiation as a witch-doctor which generally includes, or used to include, the finding of a snake in a river that coils itself about the neophyte). “About my body and in my heart thou hast dwelt from that sun to this, giving me wisdom and good and evil counsel, and that which thou hast counselled, I have done. Now I return thee whence thou camest, there to await me in the new birth.

“O Spirits of my fathers, toiling through many years I have avenged you on the House of Senzangacona, and never again will there be a king of the Zulus, for the last of them lies dead by my hand. O my murdered wives and my children, I have offered up to you a mighty sacrifice, a sacrifice of thousands upon thousands.

“O Umkulu-kulu, Great One of the heavens, who sentest me to earth, I have done thy work upon the earth and bring back to thee thy harvest of the seed that thou hast sown, a blood-red harvest, O Umkulu-kulu. Be still, be still, my Snake, the sun arises, and soon, soon shalt thou rest in the water that wast thine from the beginning of the world!”

The voice ceased, and presently a spear of light piercing the mists, lit upon the speaker. It was Zikali and about him was wound a great yellow-bellied snake, of which the black head with flickering tongue waved above his head and seemed from time to time to lick him on the brow. (I suppose it had come to him from the water, for its skin glittered as though with wet.) He stood up on tottering feet, staring at the red eye of the rising sun, then crying, “*Finished, finished with joy!*” with a loud and dreadful laughter, he plunged into the foaming pool beneath.

Such was the end of Zikali the Wizard, Opener of Roads, the “Thing-that-should-never-have-been-born,” and such was the vengeance that he worked upon the great House of Senzangacona, bringing it to naught and with it the nation of the Zulus.

**BOOK XXI**  
**THE MINES OF KING SOLOMON**

DEDICATION

This faithful but unpretending record  
of a remarkable adventure  
is hereby respectfully dedicated  
by the narrator,

ALLAN QUATERMAIN,

to all the big and little boys  
who read it.

# INTRODUCTION

Now that this book is printed, and about to be given to the world, a sense of its shortcomings both in style and contents, weighs very heavily upon me. As regards the latter, I can only say that it does not pretend to be a full account of everything we did and saw. There are many things connected with our journey into Kukuanaaland that I should have liked to dwell upon at length, which, as it is, have been scarcely alluded to. Amongst these are the curious legends which I collected about the chain armour that saved us from destruction in the great battle of Loo, and also about the "Silent Ones" or Colossi at the mouth of the stalactite cave. Again, if I had given way to my own impulses, I should have wished to go into the differences, some of which are to my mind very suggestive, between the Zulu and Kukuana dialects. Also a few pages might have been given up profitably to the consideration of the indigenous flora and fauna of Kukuanaaland.<sup>[1]</sup> Then there remains the most interesting subject—that, as it is, has only been touched on incidentally—of the magnificent system of military organisation in force in that country, which, in my opinion, is much superior to that inaugurated by Chaka in Zululand, inasmuch as it permits of even more rapid mobilisation, and does not necessitate the employment of the pernicious system of enforced celibacy. Lastly, I have scarcely spoken of the domestic and family customs of the Kukuanas, many of which are exceedingly quaint, or of their proficiency in the art of smelting and welding metals. This science they carry to considerable perfection, of which a good example is to be seen in their "tollas," or heavy throwing knives, the backs of these weapons being made of hammered iron, and the edges of beautiful steel welded with great skill on to the iron frames. The fact of the matter is, I thought, with Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, that the best plan would be to tell my story in a plain, straightforward manner, and to leave these matters to be dealt with subsequently in whatever way ultimately may appear to be desirable. In the meanwhile I shall, of course, be delighted to give all information in my power to anybody interested in such things.

And now it only remains for me to offer apologies for my blunt way of writing. I can but say in excuse of it that I am more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot make any pretence to the grand literary flights and flourishes which I see in novels—for sometimes I like to read a novel. I suppose they—the flights and flourishes—are desirable, and I regret not being able to supply them; but at the same time I cannot help thinking that simple things are always the most impressive, and that books are easier to understand when they are written in plain language, though perhaps I have no right to set up an opinion on such a matter. "A sharp spear," runs the Kukuana saying, "needs no polish"; and on the same principle I venture to hope that a true story, however strange it may be, does not require to be decked out in fine words.

ALLAN QUATERMAIN.

[1] I discovered eight varieties of antelope, with which I was previously totally unacquainted, and many new species of plants, for the most part of the bulbous tribe.—A.Q.

# CHAPTER I.

## I MEET SIR HENRY CURTIS

It is a curious thing that at my age—fifty-five last birthday—I should find myself taking up a pen to try to write a history. I wonder what sort of a history it will be when I have finished it, if ever I come to the end of the trip! I have done a good many things in my life, which seems a long one to me, owing to my having begun work so young, perhaps. At an age when other boys are at school I was earning my living as a trader in the old Colony. I have been trading, hunting, fighting, or mining ever since. And yet it is only eight months ago that I made my pile. It is a big pile now that I have got it—I don't yet know how big—but I do not think I would go through the last fifteen or sixteen months again for it; no, not if I knew that I should come out safe at the end, pile and all. But then I am a timid man, and dislike violence; moreover, I am almost sick of adventure. I wonder why I am going to write this book: it is not in my line. I am not a literary man, though very devoted to the Old Testament and also to the "Ingoldsby Legends." Let me try to set down my reasons, just to see if I have any.

First reason: Because Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good asked me.

Second reason: Because I am laid up here at Durban with the pain in my left leg. Ever since that confounded lion got hold of me I have been liable to this trouble, and being rather bad just now, it makes me limp more than ever. There must be some poison in a lion's teeth, otherwise how is it that when your wounds are healed they break out again, generally, mark you, at the same time of year that you got your mauling? It is a hard thing when one has shot sixty-five lions or more, as I have in the course of my life, that the sixty-sixth should chew your leg like a quid of tobacco. It breaks the routine of the thing, and putting other considerations aside, I am an orderly man and don't like that. This is by the way.

Third reason: Because I want my boy Harry, who is over there at the hospital in London studying to become a doctor, to have something to amuse him and keep him out of mischief for a week or so. Hospital work must sometimes pall and grow rather dull, for even of cutting up dead bodies there may come satiety, and as this history will not be dull, whatever else it may be, it will put a little life into things for a day or two while Harry is reading of our adventures.

Fourth reason and last: Because I am going to tell the strangest story that I remember. It may seem a queer thing to say, especially considering that there is no woman in it—except Foulata. Stop, though! there is Gagaoola, if she was a woman, and not a fiend. But she was a hundred at least, and therefore not marriageable, so I don't count her. At any rate, I can safely say that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history.

Well, I had better come to the yoke. It is a stiff place, and I feel as though I were bogged up to the axle. But, "*sutjes, sutjes*," as the Boers say—I am sure I don't know how they spell it—softly does it. A strong team will come through at last, that is, if they are not too poor. You can never do anything with poor oxen. Now to make a start.

I, Allan Quatermain, of Durban, Natal, Gentleman, make oath and say—That's how I headed my deposition before the magistrate about poor Khiva's and Ventvögel's sad deaths; but somehow it doesn't seem quite the right way to begin a book. And, besides, am I a gentleman? What is a gentleman? I don't quite know, and yet I have had to do with niggers—no, I will scratch out that word "niggers," for I do not like it. I've known natives who *are*, and so you will say, Harry, my boy, before you have done with this tale, and I have known mean whites with lots of money and fresh out from home, too, who *are not*.

At any rate, I was born a gentleman, though I have been nothing but a poor travelling trader and hunter all my life. Whether I have remained so I know not, you must judge of that. Heaven knows I've tried. I have killed many men in my time, yet I have never slain wantonly or stained my hand in innocent blood, but only in self-defence. The Almighty gave us our lives, and I suppose He meant us to defend them, at least I have always acted on that, and I hope it will not be brought up against me when my clock strikes. There, there, it is a cruel and a wicked world, and for a timid man I have been mixed up in a great deal of fighting. I cannot tell the rights of it, but at any rate I have never stolen, though once I cheated a Kafir out of a herd of cattle. But then he had done me a dirty turn, and it has troubled me ever since into the bargain.

Well, it is eighteen months or so ago since first I met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good. It was in this way. I had been up elephant hunting beyond Bamangwato, and had met with bad luck. Everything went wrong that trip, and to top up with I got the fever badly. So soon as I was well enough I trekked down to the Diamond Fields, sold such ivory as I had, together with my wagon and oxen, discharged my hunters, and took the post-cart to the Cape. After spending a week in Cape Town, finding that they overcharged me at the hotel, and having seen everything there was to see, including the botanical gardens, which seem to me likely to confer a great benefit on the country, and the new Houses of Parliament, which I expect will do nothing of the sort, I determined to go back to Natal by the *Dunkeld*, then lying at the docks waiting for the *Edinburgh Castle* due in from England. I took my berth and went aboard, and that afternoon the Natal passengers from the *Edinburgh Castle* transhipped, and we weighed and put to sea.

Among these passengers who came on board were two who excited my curiosity. One, a gentleman of about thirty, was perhaps the biggest-chested and longest-armed man I ever saw. He had yellow hair, a thick yellow beard, clear-cut features, and large grey eyes set deep in his head. I never saw a finer-looking man, and somehow he reminded me of an ancient Dane. Not that I know much of ancient Danes, though I knew a modern Dane who did me out of ten pounds; but I remember once seeing a picture of some of those gentry, who, I take it, were a kind of white Zulus. They were drinking out of big horns, and their long hair hung down their backs. As I looked at my friend standing there by the companion-ladder, I thought that if he only let his grow a little, put one of those chain shirts on to his great shoulders, and took hold of a battle-axe and a horn mug, he might have sat as a model for that picture. And

by the way it is a curious thing, and just shows how the blood will out, I discovered afterwards that Sir Henry Curtis, for that was the big man's name, is of Danish blood.<sup>[2]</sup> He also reminded me strongly of somebody else, but at the time I could not remember who it was.

[2] Mr. Quatermain's ideas about ancient Danes seem to be rather confused; we have always understood that they were dark-haired people. Probably he was thinking of Saxons.—Editor.

The other man, who stood talking to Sir Henry, was stout and dark, and of quite a different cut. I suspected at once that he was a naval officer; I don't know why, but it is difficult to mistake a navy man. I have gone shooting trips with several of them in the course of my life, and they have always proved themselves the best and bravest and nicest fellows I ever met, though sadly given, some of them, to the use of profane language. I asked a page or two back, what is a gentleman? I'll answer the question now: A Royal Naval officer is, in a general sort of way, though of course there may be a black sheep among them here and there. I fancy it is just the wide seas and the breath of God's winds that wash their hearts and blow the bitterness out of their minds and make them what men ought to be.

Well, to return, I proved right again; I ascertained that the dark man *was* a naval officer, a lieutenant of thirty-one, who, after seventeen years' service, had been turned out of her Majesty's employ with the barren honour of a commander's rank, because it was impossible that he should be promoted. This is what people who serve the Queen have to expect: to be shot out into the cold world to find a living just when they are beginning really to understand their work, and to reach the prime of life. I suppose they don't mind it, but for my own part I had rather earn my bread as a hunter. One's halfpence are as scarce perhaps, but you do not get so many kicks.

The officer's name I found out—by referring to the passengers' lists—was Good—Captain John Good. He was broad, of medium height, dark, stout, and rather a curious man to look at. He was so very neat and so very clean-shaved, and he always wore an eye-glass in his right eye. It seemed to grow there, for it had no string, and he never took it out except to wipe it. At first I thought he used to sleep in it, but afterwards I found that this was a mistake. He put it in his trousers pocket when he went to bed, together with his false teeth, of which he had two beautiful sets that, my own being none of the best, have often caused me to break the tenth commandment. But I am anticipating.

Soon after we had got under way evening closed in, and brought with it very dirty weather. A keen breeze sprung up off land, and a kind of aggravated Scotch mist soon drove everybody from the deck. As for the *Dunkeld*, she is a flat-bottomed punt, and going up light as she was, she rolled very heavily. It almost seemed as though she would go right over, but she never did. It was quite impossible to walk about, so I stood near the engines where it was warm, and amused myself with watching the pendulum, which was fixed opposite to me, swinging slowly backwards and forwards as the vessel rolled, and marking the angle she touched at each lurch.

"That pendulum's wrong; it is not properly weighted," suddenly said a somewhat testy voice at my shoulder. Looking round I saw the naval officer whom I had noticed when the passengers came aboard.

"Indeed, now what makes you think so?" I asked.

"Think so. I don't think at all. Why there"—as she righted herself after a roll—"if the ship had really rolled to the degree that thing pointed to, then she would never have rolled again, that's all. But it is just like these merchant skippers, they are always so confoundedly careless."

Just then the dinner-bell rang, and I was not sorry, for it is a dreadful thing to have to listen to an officer of the Royal Navy when he gets on to that subject. I only know one worse thing, and that is to hear a merchant skipper express his candid opinion of officers of the Royal Navy.

Captain Good and I went down to dinner together, and there we found Sir Henry Curtis already seated. He and Captain Good were placed together, and I sat opposite to them. The captain and I soon fell into talk about shooting and what not; he asking me many questions, for he is very inquisitive about all sorts of things, and I answering them as well as I could. Presently he got on to elephants.

"Ah, sir," called out somebody who was sitting near me, "you've reached the right man for that; Hunter Quatermain should be able to tell you about elephants if anybody can."

Sir Henry, who had been sitting quite quiet listening to our talk, started visibly.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low deep voice, a very suitable voice, it seemed to me, to come out of those great lungs. "Excuse me, sir, but is your name Allan Quatermain?"

I said that it was.

The big man made no further remark, but I heard him mutter "fortunate" into his beard.

Presently dinner came to an end, and as we were leaving the saloon Sir Henry strolled up and asked me if I would come into his cabin to smoke a pipe. I accepted, and he led the way to the *Dunkeld* deck cabin, and a very good cabin it is. It had been two cabins, but when Sir Garnet Wolseley or one of those big swells went down the coast in the *Dunkeld*, they knocked away the partition and have never put it up again. There was a sofa in the cabin, and a little table in front of it. Sir Henry sent the steward for a bottle of whisky, and the three of us sat down and lit our pipes.

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry Curtis, when the man had brought the whisky and lit the lamp, "the year before last about this time, you were, I believe, at a place called Bamangwato, to the north of the Transvaal."

"I was," I answered, rather surprised that this gentleman should be so well acquainted with my movements, which were not, so far as I was aware, considered of general interest.

"You were trading there, were you not?" put in Captain Good, in his quick way.

"I was. I took up a wagon-load of goods, made a camp outside the settlement, and stopped till I had sold them."

Sir Henry was sitting opposite to me in a Madeira chair, his arms leaning on the table. He now looked up, fixing his large grey eyes full upon my face. There was a curious anxiety in them, I thought.

"Did you happen to meet a man called Neville there?"

"Oh, yes; he outspanned alongside of me for a fortnight to rest his oxen before going on to the interior. I had a letter from a lawyer a few months back, asking me if I knew what had become of him, which I answered to the best of my ability at the time."

"Yes," said Sir Henry, "your letter was forwarded to me. You said in it that the gentleman called Neville left Bamangwato at the beginning of May in a wagon with a driver, a voorlooper, and a Kafir hunter called Jim, announcing his intention of trekking if

possible as far as Inyati, the extreme trading post in the Matabele country, where he would sell his wagon and proceed on foot. You also said that he did sell his wagon, for six months afterwards you saw the wagon in the possession of a Portuguese trader, who told you that he had bought it at Inyati from a white man whose name he had forgotten, and that he believed the white man with the native servant had started off for the interior on a shooting trip."

"Yes."

Then came a pause.

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry suddenly, "I suppose you know or can guess nothing more of the reasons of my—of Mr. Neville's journey to the northward, or as to what point that journey was directed?"

"I heard something," I answered, and stopped. The subject was one which I did not care to discuss.

Sir Henry and Captain Good looked at each other, and Captain Good nodded.

"Mr. Quatermain," went on the former, "I am going to tell you a story, and ask your advice, and perhaps your assistance. The agent who forwarded me your letter told me that I might rely on it implicitly, as you were," he said, "well known and universally respected in Natal, and especially noted for your discretion."

I bowed and drank some whisky and water to hide my confusion, for I am a modest man—and Sir Henry went on.

"Mr. Neville was my brother."

"Oh," I said, starting, for now I knew of whom Sir Henry had reminded me when first I saw him. His brother was a much smaller man and had a dark beard, but now that I thought of it, he possessed eyes of the same shade of grey and with the same keen look in them: the features too were not unlike.

"He was," went on Sir Henry, "my only and younger brother, and till five years ago I do not suppose that we were ever a month away from each other. But just about five years ago a misfortune befell us, as sometimes does happen in families. We quarrelled bitterly, and I behaved unjustly to my brother in my anger."

Here Captain Good nodded his head vigorously to himself. The ship gave a big roll just then, so that the looking-glass, which was fixed opposite us to starboard, was for a moment nearly over our heads, and as I was sitting with my hands in my pockets and staring upwards, I could see him nodding like anything.

"As I daresay you know," went on Sir Henry, "if a man dies intestate, and has no property but land, real property it is called in England, it all descends to his eldest son. It so happened that just at the time when we quarrelled our father died intestate. He had put off making his will until it was too late. The result was that my brother, who had not been brought up to any profession, was left without a penny. Of course it would have been my duty to provide for him, but at the time the quarrel between us was so bitter that I did not—to my shame I say it (and he sighed deeply)—offer to do anything. It was not that I grudged him justice, but I waited for him to make advances, and he made none. I am sorry to trouble you with all this, Mr. Quatermain, but I must to make things clear, eh, Good?"

"Quite so, quite so," said the captain. "Mr. Quatermain will, I am sure, keep this history to himself."

"Of course," said I, for I rather pride myself on my discretion, for which, as Sir Henry had heard, I have some repute.

"Well," went on Sir Henry, "my brother had a few hundred pounds to his account at the time. Without saying anything to me he drew out this paltry sum, and, having adopted the name of Neville, started off for South Africa in the wild hope of making a fortune. This I learned afterwards. Some three years passed, and I heard nothing of my brother, though I wrote several times. Doubtless the letters never reached him. But as time went on I grew more and more troubled about him. I found out, Mr. Quatermain, that blood is thicker than water."

"That's true," said I, thinking of my boy Harry.

"I found out, Mr. Quatermain, that I would have given half my fortune to know that my brother George, the only relation I possess, was safe and well, and that I should see him again."

"But you never did, Curtis," jerked out Captain Good, glancing at the big man's face.

"Well, Mr. Quatermain, as time went on I became more and more anxious to find out if my brother was alive or dead, and if alive to get him home again. I set enquiries on foot, and your letter was one of the results. So far as it went it was satisfactory, for it showed that till lately George was alive, but it did not go far enough. So, to cut a long story short, I made up my mind to come out and look for him myself, and Captain Good was so kind as to come with me."

"Yes," said the captain; "nothing else to do, you see. Turned out by my Lords of the Admiralty to starve on half pay. And now perhaps, sir, you will tell us what you know or have heard of the gentleman called Neville."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LEGEND OF SOLOMON'S MINES

"What was it that you heard about my brother's journey at Bamangwato?" asked Sir Henry, as I paused to fill my pipe before replying to Captain Good.

"I heard this," I answered, "and I have never mentioned it to a soul till to-day. I heard that he was starting for Solomon's Mines."

"Solomon's Mines?" ejaculated both my hearers at once. "Where are they?"

"I don't know," I said; "I know where they are said to be. Once I saw the peaks of the mountains that border them, but there were a hundred and thirty miles of desert between me and them, and I am not aware that any white man ever got across it save one. But perhaps the best thing I can do is to tell you the legend of Solomon's Mines as I know it, you passing your word not to reveal anything I tell you without my permission. Do you agree to that? I have my reasons for asking."

Sir Henry nodded, and Captain Good replied, "Certainly, certainly."

"Well," I began, "as you may guess, generally speaking, elephant hunters are a rough set of men, who do not trouble themselves with much beyond the facts of life and the ways of Kafirs. But here and there you meet a man who takes the trouble to collect traditions from the natives, and tries to make out a little piece of the history of this dark land. It was such a man as this who first told me the legend of Solomon's Mines, now a matter of nearly thirty years ago. That was when I was on my first elephant hunt in the Matabele country. His name was Evans, and he was killed the following year, poor fellow, by a wounded buffalo, and lies buried near the Zambesi Falls. I was telling Evans one night, I remember, of some wonderful workings I had found whilst hunting koodoo and eland in what is now the Lydenburg district of the Transvaal. I see they have come across these workings again lately in prospecting for gold, but I knew of them years ago. There is a great wide wagon road cut out of the solid rock, and leading to the mouth of the working or gallery. Inside the mouth of this gallery are stacks of gold quartz piled up ready for roasting, which shows that the workers, whoever they were, must have left in a hurry. Also, about twenty paces in, the gallery is built across, and a beautiful bit of masonry it is."

"Ay," said Evans, 'but I will spin you a queerer yarn than that'; and he went on to tell me how he had found in the far interior a ruined city, which he believed to be the Ophir of the Bible, and, by the way, other more learned men have said the same long since poor Evans's time. I was, I remember, listening open-eared to all these wonders, for I was young at the time, and this story of an ancient civilisation and of the treasures which those old Jewish or Phoenician adventurers used to extract from a country long since lapsed into the darkest barbarism took a great hold upon my imagination, when suddenly he said to me, 'Lad, did you ever hear of the Suliman Mountains up to the north-west of the Mushakulumbwe country?' I told him I never had. 'Ah, well,' he said, 'that is where Solomon really had his mines, his diamond mines, I mean.'

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"Know it! why, what is "Suliman" but a corruption of Solomon?<sup>[3]</sup> Besides, an old Isanusi or witch doctress up in the Manica country told me all about it. She said that the people who lived across those mountains were a "branch" of the Zulus, speaking a dialect of Zulu, but finer and bigger men even; that there lived among them great wizards, who had learnt their art from white men when "all the world was dark," and who had the secret of a wonderful mine of "bright stones."

<sup>[3]</sup> Suliman is the Arabic form of Solomon.—*Editor*.

"Well, I laughed at this story at the time, though it interested me, for the Diamond Fields were not discovered then, but poor Evans went off and was killed, and for twenty years I never thought any more of the matter. However, just twenty years afterwards—and that is a long time, gentlemen; an elephant hunter does not often live for twenty years at his business—I heard something more definite about Suliman's Mountains and the country which lies beyond them. I was up beyond the Manica country, at a place called Sitanda's Kraal, and a miserable place it was, for a man could get nothing to eat, and there was but little game about. I had an attack of fever, and was in a bad way generally, when one day a Portugee arrived with a single companion—a half-breed. Now I know your low-class Delagoa Portugee well. There is no greater devil unhung in a general way, battenning as he does upon human agony and flesh in the shape of slaves. But this was quite a different type of man to the mean fellows whom I had been accustomed to meet; indeed, in appearance he reminded me more of the polite doms I have read about, for he was tall and thin, with large dark eyes and curling grey mustachios. We talked together for a while, for he could speak broken English, and I understood a little Portugee, and he told me that his name was José Silvestre, and that he had a place near Delagoa Bay. When he went on next day with his half-breed companion, he said 'Good-bye,' taking off his hat quite in the old style.

"Good-bye, señor," he said; 'if ever we meet again I shall be the richest man in the world, and I will remember you.' I laughed a little—I was too weak to laugh much—and watched him strike out for the great desert to the west, wondering if he was mad, or what he thought he was going to find there.

"A week passed, and I got the better of my fever. One evening I was sitting on the ground in front of the little tent I had with me, chewing the last leg of a miserable fowl I had bought from a native for a bit of cloth worth twenty fowls, and staring at the hot red sun sinking down over the desert, when suddenly I saw a figure, apparently that of a European, for it wore a coat, on the slope of the rising ground opposite to me, about three hundred yards away. The figure crept along on its hands and knees, then it got up and staggered forward a few yards on its legs, only to fall and crawl again. Seeing that it must be somebody in distress, I sent one of my hunters to help him, and presently he arrived, and who do you suppose it turned out to be?"

“José Silvestre, of course,” said Captain Good.

“Yes, José Silvestre, or rather his skeleton and a little skin. His face was a bright yellow with bilious fever, and his large dark eyes stood nearly out of his head, for all the flesh had gone. There was nothing but yellow parchment-like skin, white hair, and the gaunt bones sticking up beneath.

“‘Water! for the sake of Christ, water!’ he moaned and I saw that his lips were cracked, and his tongue, which protruded between them, was swollen and blackish.

“I gave him water with a little milk in it, and he drank it in great gulps, two quarts or so, without stopping. I would not let him have any more. Then the fever took him again, and he fell down and began to rave about Suliman’s Mountains, and the diamonds, and the desert. I carried him into the tent and did what I could for him, which was little enough; but I saw how it must end. About eleven o’clock he grew quieter, and I lay down for a little rest and went to sleep. At dawn I woke again, and in the half light saw Silvestre sitting up, a strange, gaunt form, and gazing out towards the desert. Presently the first ray of the sun shot right across the wide plain before us till it reached the faraway crest of one of the tallest of the Suliman Mountains more than a hundred miles away.

“‘There it is!’ cried the dying man in Portuguese, and pointing with his long, thin arm, ‘but I shall never reach it, never. No one will ever reach it!’

“Suddenly, he paused, and seemed to take a resolution. ‘Friend,’ he said, turning towards me, ‘are you there? My eyes grow dark.’

“‘Yes,’ I said; ‘yes, lie down now, and rest.’

“‘Ay,’ he answered, ‘I shall rest soon, I have time to rest—all eternity. Listen, I am dying! You have been good to me. I will give you the writing. Perhaps you will get there if you can live to pass the desert, which has killed my poor servant and me.’

“Then he groped in his shirt and brought out what I thought was a Boer tobacco pouch made of the skin of the Swart-vet-pens or sable antelope. It was fastened with a little strip of hide, what we call a rimpi, and this he tried to loose, but could not. He handed it to me. ‘Untie it,’ he said. I did so, and extracted a bit of torn yellow linen on which something was written in rusty letters. Inside this rag was a paper.

“Then he went on feebly, for he was growing weak: ‘The paper has all that is on the linen. It took me years to read. Listen: my ancestor, a political refugee from Lisbon, and one of the first Portuguese who landed on these shores, wrote that when he was dying on those mountains which no white foot ever pressed before or since. His name was José da Silvestra, and he lived three hundred years ago. His slave, who waited for him on this side of the mountains, found him dead, and brought the writing home to Delagoa. It has been in the family ever since, but none have cared to read it, till at last I did. And I have lost my life over it, but another may succeed, and become the richest man in the world—the richest man in the world. Only give it to no one, señor; go yourself!’

“Then he began to wander again, and in an hour it was all over.

“God rest him! he died very quietly, and I buried him deep, with big boulders on his breast; so I do not think that the jackals can have dug him up. And then I came away.”

“Ay, but the document?” said Sir Henry, in a tone of deep interest.

“Yes, the document; what was in it?” added the captain.

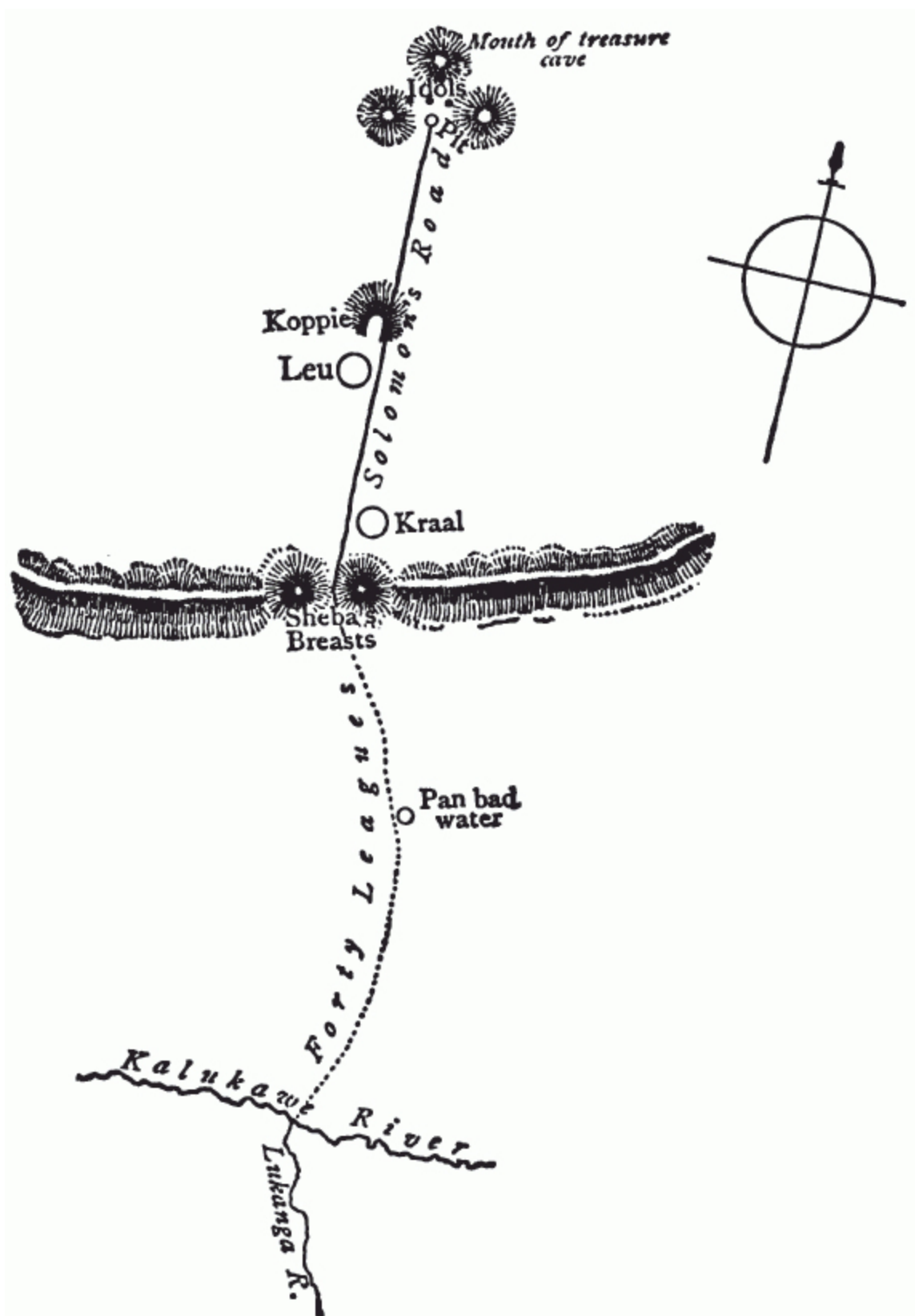
“Well, gentlemen, if you like I will tell you. I have never showed it to anybody yet except to a drunken old Portuguese trader who translated it for me, and had forgotten all about it by the next morning. The original rag is at my home in Durban, together with poor Dom José’s translation, but I have the English rendering in my pocket-book, and a facsimile of the map, if it can be called a map. Here it is.”

“I, José da Silvestra, who am now dying of hunger in the little cave where no snow is on the north side of the nipple of the southernmost of the two mountains I have named Sheba’s Breasts, write this in the year 1590 with a cleft bone upon a remnant of my raiment, my blood being the ink. If my slave should find it when he comes, and should bring it to Delagoa, let my friend (name illegible) bring the matter to the knowledge of the king, that he may send an army which, if they live through the desert and the mountains, and can overcome the brave Kukuanes and their devilish arts, to which end many priests should be brought, will make him the richest king since Solomon. With my own eyes I have seen the countless diamonds stored in Solomon’s treasure chamber behind the white Death; but through the treachery of Gagoool the witch-finder I might bring nought away, scarcely my life. Let him who comes follow the map, and climb the snow of Sheba’s left breast till he reaches the nipple, on the north side of which is the great road Solomon made, from whence three days’ journey to the King’s Palace. Let him kill Gagoool. Pray for my soul. Farewell.

JOSÉ DA SILVESTRA.”[4]

[4] Eu José da Silvestra que estou morrendo de fome ná pequena cova onde não ha neve ao lado norte do bico mais ao sul das duas montanhas que chamei seio de Sheba; escrevo isto no anno 1590; escrevo isto com um pedaço d’osso n’ um farrapo de minha roupa e com sangue meu por tinta; se o meu escravo dêr com isto quando venha ao levar para Lourenço Marquez, que o meu amigo ——— leve a cousa ao conhecimento d’ El Rei, para que possa mandar um exercito que, se desfiler pelo deserto e pelas montanhas e mesmo sobrepujar os bravos Kukuanes e suas artes diabolicas, pelo que se deviam trazer muitos padres Far o Rei mais rico depois de Salomão. Com meus proprios olhos vé os di amantes sem conto guardados nas camaras do thesouro de Salomão a traz da morte branca, mas pela traição de Gagoal a feiticeira achadora, nada poderia levar, e apenas a minha vida. Quem vier siga o mappa e trepe pela neve de Sheba peito à esquerda até chegar ao bica, do lado norte do qual está a grande estrada do Salomão por elle feita, donde ha tres dias de jornada até ao Palacio do Rei. Mate Gagoal. Reze por minha alma. Adeos.

JOSÉ DA SILVESTRA.



SKETCH MAP OF THE ROUTE TO KING SOLOMON'S MINES

When I had finished reading the above, and shown the copy of the map, drawn by the dying hand of the old Dom with his blood for ink, there followed a silence of astonishment.

"Well," said Captain Good, "I have been round the world twice, and put in at most ports, but may I be hung for a mutineer if ever I heard a yarn like this out of a story book, or in it either, for the matter of that."

"It's a queer tale, Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry. "I suppose you are not hoaxing us? It is, I know, sometimes thought allowable to take in a greenhorn."

"If you think that, Sir Henry," I said, much put out, and pocketing my paper—for I do not like to be thought one of those silly fellows who consider it witty to tell lies, and who are for ever boasting to newcomers of extraordinary hunting adventures which never happened—"if you think that, why, there is an end to the matter," and I rose to go.

Sir Henry laid his large hand upon my shoulder. "Sit down, Mr. Quatermain," he said, "I beg your pardon; I see very well you do not wish to deceive us, but the story sounded so strange that I could hardly believe it."

"You shall see the original map and writing when we reach Durban," I answered, somewhat mollified, for really when I came to consider the question it was scarcely wonderful that he should doubt my good faith.

"But," I went on, "I have not told you about your brother. I knew the man Jim who was with him. He was a Bechuana by birth, a good hunter, and for a native a very clever man. That morning on which Mr. Neville was starting I saw Jim standing by my wagon and cutting up tobacco on the disselboom."

"Jim," said I, "where are you off to this trip? It is elephants?"

"No, Baas," he answered, "we are after something worth much more than ivory."

"And what might that be?" I said, for I was curious. "Is it gold?"

"No, Baas, something worth more than gold," and he grinned.

"I asked no more questions, for I did not like to lower my dignity by seeming inquisitive, but I was puzzled. Presently Jim finished cutting his tobacco."

"Baas," said he.

"I took no notice."

"Baas," said he again.

"Eh, boy, what is it?" I asked.

"Baas, we are going after diamonds."

"Diamonds! why, then, you are steering in the wrong direction; you should head for the Fields."

"Baas, have you ever heard of Suliman's Berg?"—that is, Solomon's Mountains, Sir Henry.

"Ay!"

"Have you ever heard of the diamonds there?"

"I have heard a foolish story, Jim."

"It is no story, Baas. Once I knew a woman who came from there, and reached Natal with her child, she told me:—she is dead now."

"Your master will feed the aasvögels—that is, vultures—Jim, if he tries to reach Suliman's country, and so will you if they can get any pickings off your worthless old carcass," said I.

"He grinned. 'Mayhap, Baas. Man must die; I'd rather like to try a new country myself; the elephants are getting worked out about here.'

"Ah! my boy," I said, "you wait till the 'pale old man' gets a grip of your yellow throat, and then we shall hear what sort of a tune you sing."

"Half an hour after that I saw Neville's wagon move off. Presently Jim came back running. 'Good-bye, Baas,' he said. 'I didn't like to start without bidding you good-bye, for I daresay you are right, and that we shall never trek south again.'

"Is your master really going to Suliman's Berg, Jim, or are you lying?"

"No," he answered, "he is going. He told me he was bound to make his fortune somehow, or try to; so he might as well have a fling for the diamonds."

"Oh!" I said; "wait a bit, Jim; will you take a note to your master, Jim, and promise not to give it to him till you reach Inyati?" which was some hundred miles off.

"Yes, Baas."

"So I took a scrap of paper, and wrote on it, 'Let him who comes . . . climb the snow of Sheba's left breast, till he reaches the nipple, on the north side of which is Solomon's great road.'

"Now, Jim," I said, "when you give this to your master, tell him he had better follow the advice on it implicitly. You are not to give it to him now, because I don't want him back asking me questions which I won't answer. Now be off, you idle fellow, the wagon is nearly out of sight."

"Jim took the note and went, and that is all I know about your brother, Sir Henry; but I am much afraid—"

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "I am going to look for my brother; I am going to trace him to Suliman's Mountains, and over them if necessary, till I find him, or until I know that he is dead. Will you come with me?"

I am, as I think I have said, a cautious man, indeed a timid one, and this suggestion frightened me. It seemed to me that to undertake such a journey would be to go to certain death, and putting other considerations aside, as I had a son to support, I could not afford to die just then.

"No, thank you, Sir Henry, I think I had rather not," I answered. "I am too old for wild-goose chases of that sort, and we should only end up like my poor friend Silvestre. I have a son dependent on me, so I cannot afford to risk my life foolishly."

Both Sir Henry and Captain Good looked very disappointed.

"Mr. Quatermain," said the former, "I am well off, and I am bent upon this business. You may put the remuneration for your services at whatever figure you like in reason, and it shall be paid over to you before we start. Moreover, I will arrange in the event of anything untoward happening to us or to you, that your son shall be suitably provided for. You will see from this offer how necessary I think your presence. Also if by chance we should reach this place, and find diamonds, they shall belong to you and Good equally. I do not want them. But of course that promise is worth nothing at all, though the same thing would apply to any ivory we might get. You may pretty well make your own terms with me, Mr. Quatermain; and of course I shall pay all expenses."

"Sir Henry," said I, "this is the most liberal proposal I ever had, and one not to be sneezed at by a poor hunter and trader. But the job is the biggest I have come across, and I must take time to think it over. I will give you my answer before we get to Durban."

"Very good," answered Sir Henry.

Then I said good-night and turned in, and dreamt about poor long-dead Silvestre and the diamonds.

## CHAPTER III.

### UMBOPA ENTERS OUR SERVICE

It takes from four to five days, according to the speed of the vessel and the state of the weather, to run up from the Cape to Durban. Sometimes, if the landing is bad at East London, where they have not yet made that wonderful harbour they talk so much of, and sink such a mint of money in, a ship is delayed for twenty-four hours before the cargo boats can get out to take off the goods. But on this occasion we had not to wait at all, for there were no breakers on the Bar to speak of, and the tugs came out at once with the long strings of ugly flat-bottomed boats behind them, into which the packages were bundled with a crash. It did not matter what they might be, over they went slap-bang; whether they contained china or woollen goods they met with the same treatment. I saw one case holding four dozen of champagne smashed all to bits, and there was the champagne fizzing and boiling about in the bottom of the dirty cargo boat. It was a wicked waste, and evidently so the Kafirs in the boat thought, for they found a couple of unbroken bottles, and knocking off the necks drank the contents. But they had not allowed for the expansion caused by the fizz in the wine, and, feeling themselves swelling, rolled about in the bottom of the boat, calling out that the good liquor was “tagati”—that is, bewitched. I spoke to them from the vessel, and told them it was the white man’s strongest medicine, and that they were as good as dead men. Those Kafirs went to the shore in a very great fright, and I do not think that they will touch champagne again.

Well, all the time that we were steaming up to Natal I was thinking over Sir Henry Curtis’s offer. We did not speak any more on the subject for a day or two, though I told them many hunting yarns, all true ones. There is no need to tell lies about hunting, for so many curious things happen within the knowledge of a man whose business it is to hunt; but this is by the way.

At last, one beautiful evening in January, which is our hottest month, we steamed past the coast of Natal, expecting to make Durban Point by sunset. It is a lovely coast all along from East London, with its red sandhills and wide sweeps of vivid green, dotted here and there with Kafir kraals, and bordered by a ribbon of white surf, which spouts up in pillars of foam where it hits the rocks. But just before you come to Durban there is a peculiar richness about the landscape. There are the sheer kloofs cut in the hills by the rushing rains of centuries, down which the rivers sparkle; there is the deepest green of the bush, growing as God planted it, and the other greens of the mealie gardens and the sugar patches, while now and again a white house, smiling out at the placid sea, puts a finish and gives an air of homeliness to the scene. For to my mind, however beautiful a view may be, it requires the presence of man to make it complete, but perhaps that is because I have lived so much in the wilderness, and therefore know the value of civilisation, though to be sure it drives away the game. The Garden of Eden, no doubt, looked fair before man was, but I always think that it must have been fairer when Eve adorned it.

To return, we had miscalculated a little, and the sun was well down before we dropped anchor off the Point, and heard the gun which told the good folks of Durban that the English Mail was in. It was too late to think of getting over the Bar that night, so we went comfortably to dinner, after seeing the Mails carried off in the life-boat.

When we came up again the moon was out, and shining so brightly over sea and shore that she almost paled the quick, large flashes from the lighthouse. From the shore floated sweet spicy odours that always remind me of hymns and missionaries, and in the windows of the houses on the Berea sparkled a hundred lights. From a large brig lying near also came the music of the sailors as they worked at getting the anchor up in order to be ready for the wind. Altogether it was a perfect night, such a night as you sometimes get in Southern Africa, and it threw a garment of peace over everybody as the moon threw a garment of silver over everything. Even the great bulldog, belonging to a sporting passenger, seemed to yield to its gentle influences, and forgetting his yearning to come to close quarters with the baboon in a cage on the foc’sle, snored happily at the door of the cabin, dreaming no doubt that he had finished him, and happy in his dream.

We three—that is, Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good, and myself—went and sat by the wheel, and were quiet for a while.

“Well, Mr. Quatermain,” said Sir Henry presently, “have you been thinking about my proposals?”

“Ay,” echoed Captain Good, “what do you think of them, Mr. Quatermain? I hope that you are going to give us the pleasure of your company so far as Solomon’s Mines, or wherever the gentleman you knew as Neville may have got to.”

I rose and knocked out my pipe before I answered. I had not made up my mind, and wanted an additional moment to decide. Before the burning tobacco had fallen into the sea I had decided; just that little extra second did the trick. It is often the way when you have been bothering a long time over a thing.

“Yes, gentlemen,” I said, sitting down again, “I will go, and by your leave I will tell you why, and on what conditions. First for the terms which I ask.

“1. You are to pay all expenses, and any ivory or other valuables we may get is to be divided between Captain Good and myself.

“2. That you give me £500 for my services on the trip before we start, I undertaking to serve you faithfully till you choose to abandon the enterprise, or till we succeed, or disaster overtakes us.

“3. That before we trek you execute a deed agreeing, in the event of my death or disablement, to pay my boy Harry, who is studying medicine over there in London, at Guy’s Hospital, a sum of £200 a year for five years, by which time he ought to be able to earn a living for himself if he is worth his salt. That is all, I think, and I daresay you will say quite enough too.”

“No,” answered Sir Henry, “I accept them gladly. I am bent upon this project, and would pay more than that for your help, considering the peculiar and exclusive knowledge which you possess.”

“Pity I did not ask it, then, but I won’t go back on my word. And now that I have got my terms I will tell you my reasons for making up my mind to go. First of all, gentlemen, I have been observing you both for the last few days, and if you will not think me

impertinent I may say that I like you, and believe that we shall come up well to the yoke together. That is something, let me tell you, when one has a long journey like this before one.

"And now as to the journey itself, I tell you flatly, Sir Henry and Captain Good, that I do not think it probable we can come out of it alive, that is, if we attempt to cross the Suliman Mountains. What was the fate of the old Dom da Silvestra three hundred years ago? What was the fate of his descendant twenty years ago? What has been your brother's fate? I tell you frankly, gentlemen, that as your fates were so I believe ours will be."

I paused to watch the effect of my words. Captain Good looked a little uncomfortable, but Sir Henry's face did not change. "We must take our chance," he said.

"You may perhaps wonder," I went on, "why, if I think this, I, who am, as I told you, a timid man, should undertake such a journey. It is for two reasons. First I am a fatalist, and believe that my time is appointed to come quite without reference to my own movements and will, and that if I am to go to Suliman's Mountains to be killed, I shall go there and shall be killed. God Almighty, no doubt, knows His mind about me, so I need not trouble on that point. Secondly, I am a poor man. For nearly forty years I have hunted and traded, but I have never made more than a living. Well, gentlemen, I don't know if you are aware that the average life of an elephant hunter from the time he takes to the trade is between four and five years. So you see I have lived through about seven generations of my class, and I should think that my time cannot be far off, anyway. Now, if anything were to happen to me in the ordinary course of business, by the time my debts are paid there would be nothing left to support my son Harry whilst he was getting in the way of earning a living, whereas now he will be set up for five years. There is the whole affair in a nutshell."

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry, who had been giving me his most serious attention, "your motives for undertaking an enterprise which you believe can only end in disaster reflect a great deal of credit on you. Whether or not you are right, of course time and the event alone can show. But whether you are right or wrong, I may as well tell you at once that I am going through with it to the end, sweet or bitter. If we are to be knocked on the head, all I have to say is, that I hope we get a little shooting first, eh, Good?"

"Yes, yes," put in the captain. "We have all three of us been accustomed to face danger, and to hold our lives in our hands in various ways, so it is no good turning back now. And now I vote we go down to the saloon and take an observation just for luck, you know." And we did—through the bottom of a tumbler.

Next day we went ashore, and I put up Sir Henry and Captain Good at the little shanty I have built on the Berea, and which I call my home. There are only three rooms and a kitchen in it, and it is constructed of green brick with a galvanised iron roof, but there is a good garden with the best loquat trees in it that I know, and some nice young mangoes, of which I hope great things. The curator of the botanical gardens gave them to me. It is looked after by an old hunter of mine named Jack, whose thigh was so badly broken by a buffalo cow in Sikukunis country that he will never hunt again. But he can potter about and garden, being a Griqua by birth. You will never persuade a Zulu to take much interest in gardening. It is a peaceful art, and peaceful arts are not in his line.

Sir Henry and Good slept in a tent pitched in my little grove of orange trees at the end of the garden, for there was no room for them in the house, and what with the smell of the bloom, and the sight of the green and golden fruit—in Durban you will see all three on the tree together—I daresay it is a pleasant place enough, for we have few mosquitos here on the Berea, unless there happens to come an unusually heavy rain.

Well, to get on—for if I do not, Harry, you will be tired of my story before ever we fetch up at Suliman's Mountains—having once made up my mind to go I set about making the necessary preparations. First I secured the deed from Sir Henry, providing for you, my boy, in case of accidents. There was some difficulty about its legal execution, as Sir Henry was a stranger here, and the property to be charged is over the water; but it was ultimately got over with the help of a lawyer, who charged £20 for the job—a price that I thought outrageous. Then I pocketed my cheque for £500.

Having paid this tribute to my bump of caution, I purchased a wagon and a span of oxen on Sir Henry's behalf, and beauties they were. It was a twenty-two-foot wagon with iron axles, very strong, very light, and built throughout of stink wood; not quite a new one, having been to the Diamond Fields and back, but, in my opinion, all the better for that, for I could see that the wood was well seasoned. If anything is going to give in a wagon, or if there is green wood in it, it will show out on the first trip. This particular vehicle was what we call a "half-tented" wagon, that is to say, only covered in over the after twelve feet, leaving all the front part free for the necessities we had to carry with us. In this after part were a hide "cartle," or bed, on which two people could sleep, also racks for rifles, and many other little conveniences. I gave £125 for it, and think that it was cheap at the price.

Then I bought a beautiful team of twenty Zulu oxen, which I had kept my eye on for a year or two. Sixteen oxen is the usual number for a team, but I took four extra to allow for casualties. These Zulu cattle are small and light, not more than half the size of the Africander oxen, which are generally used for transport purposes; but they will live where the Africanders would starve, and with a moderate load can make five miles a day better going, being quicker and not so liable to become footsore. What is more, this lot were thoroughly "salted," that is, they had worked all over South Africa, and so had become proof, comparatively speaking, against red water, which so frequently destroys whole teams of oxen when they get on to strange "veldt" or grass country. As for "lung sick," which is a dreadful form of pneumonia, very prevalent in this country, they had all been inoculated against it. This is done by cutting a slit in the tail of an ox, and binding in a piece of the diseased lung of an animal which has died of the sickness. The result is that the ox sicken, takes the disease in a mild form, which causes its tail to drop off, as a rule about a foot from the root, and becomes proof against future attacks. It seems cruel to rob the animal of his tail, especially in a country where there are so many flies, but it is better to sacrifice the tail and keep the ox than to lose both tail and ox, for a tail without an ox is not much good, except to dust with. Still it does look odd to trek along behind twenty stumps, where there ought to be tails. It seems as though Nature made a trifling mistake, and stuck the stern ornaments of a lot of prize bull-dogs on to the rumps of the oxen.

Next came the question of provisioning and medicines, one which required the most careful consideration, for what we had to do was to avoid lumbering the wagon, and yet to take everything absolutely necessary. Fortunately, it turned out that Good is a bit of a doctor, having at some point in his previous career managed to pass through a course of medical and surgical instruction, which he has more or less kept up. He is not, of course, qualified, but he knows more about it than many a man who can write M.D. after his name, as we found out afterwards, and he had a splendid travelling medicine chest and a set of instruments. Whilst we were at Durban he cut off a Kafir's big toe in a way which it was a pleasure to see. But he was quite nonplussed when the Kafir, who had sat stolidly watching the operation, asked him to put on another, saying that a "white one" would do at a pinch.

There remained, when these questions were satisfactorily settled, two further important points for consideration, namely, that of arms and that of servants. As to the arms I cannot do better than put down a list of those which we finally decided on from among the

ample store that Sir Henry had brought with him from England, and those which I owned. I copy it from my pocket-book, where I made the entry at the time.

“Three heavy breech-loading double-eight elephant guns, weighing about fifteen pounds each, to carry a charge of eleven drachms of black powder.” Two of these were by a well-known London firm, most excellent makers, but I do not know by whom mine, which is not so highly finished, was made. I have used it on several trips, and shot a good many elephants with it, and it has always proved a most superior weapon, thoroughly to be relied on.

“Three double-500 Expresses, constructed to stand a charge of six drachms,” sweet weapons, and admirable for medium-sized game, such as eland or sable antelope, or for men, especially in an open country and with the semi-hollow bullet.

“One double No. 12 central-fire Keeper’s shot-gun, full choke both barrels.” This gun proved of the greatest service to us afterwards in shooting game for the pot.

“Three Winchester repeating rifles (not carbines), spare guns.

“Three single-action Colt’s revolvers, with the heavier, or American pattern of cartridge.”

This was our total armament, and doubtless the reader will observe that the weapons of each class were of the same make and calibre, so that the cartridges were interchangeable, a very important point. I make no apology for detailing it at length, as every experienced hunter will know how vital a proper supply of guns and ammunition is to the success of an expedition.

Now as to the men who were to go with us. After much consultation we decided that their number should be limited to five, namely, a driver, a leader, and three servants.

The driver and leader I found without much difficulty, two Zulus, named respectively Goza and Tom; but to get the servants proved a more difficult matter. It was necessary that they should be thoroughly trustworthy and brave men, as in a business of this sort our lives might depend upon their conduct. At last I secured two, one a Hottentot named Ventvögel, or “windbird,” and one a little Zulu named Khiva, who had the merit of speaking English perfectly. Ventvögel I had known before; he was one of the most perfect “spoorers,” that is, game trackers, I ever had to do with, and tough as whipcord. He never seemed to tire. But he had one failing, so common with his race, drink. Put him within reach of a bottle of gin and you could not trust him. However, as we were going beyond the region of grog-shops this little weakness of his did not so much matter.

Having secured these two men I looked in vain for a third to suit my purpose, so we determined to start without one, trusting to luck to find a suitable man on our way up country. But, as it happened, on the evening before the day we had fixed for our departure the Zulu Khiva informed me that a Kafir was waiting to see me. Accordingly, when we had done dinner, for we were at table at the time, I told Khiva to bring him in. Presently a tall, handsome-looking man, somewhere about thirty years of age, and very light-coloured for a Zulu, entered, and lifting his knob-stick by way of salute, squatted himself down in the corner on his haunches, and sat silent. I did not take any notice of him for a while, for it is a great mistake to do so. If you rush into conversation at once, a Zulu is apt to think you a person of little dignity or consequence. I observed, however, that he was a “Keshla” or ringed man; that is, he wore on his head the black ring, made of a species of gum polished with fat and worked up in the hair, which is usually assumed by Zulus on attaining a certain age or dignity. Also it struck me that his face was familiar to me.

“Well,” I said at last, “What is your name?”

“Umbopa,” answered the man in a slow, deep voice.

“I have seen your face before.”

“Yes; the Inkoosi, the chief, my father, saw my face at the place of the Little Hand”—that is, Isandhlwana—“on the day before the battle.”

Then I remembered. I was one of Lord Chelmsford’s guides in that unlucky Zulu War, and had the good fortune to leave the camp in charge of some wagons on the day before the battle. While I was waiting for the cattle to be inspanned I fell into conversation with this man, who held some small command among the native auxiliaries, and he had expressed to me his doubts as to the safety of the camp. At the time I told him to hold his tongue, and leave such matters to wiser heads; but afterwards I thought of his words.

“I remember,” I said; “what is it you want?”

“It is this, ‘Macumazahn.’” That is my Kafir name, and means the man who gets up in the middle of the night, or, in vulgar English, he who keeps his eyes open. “I hear that you go on a great expedition far into the North with the white chiefs from over the water. Is it a true word?”

“It is.”

“I hear that you go even to the Lukanga River, a moon’s journey beyond the Manica country. Is this so also, ‘Macumazahn?’”

“Why do you ask whither we go? What is it to you?” I answered suspiciously, for the objects of our journey had been kept a dead secret.

“It is this, O white men, that if indeed you travel so far I would travel with you.”

There was a certain assumption of dignity in the man’s mode of speech, and especially in his use of the words “O white men,” instead of “O Inkosis,” or chiefs, which struck me.

“You forget yourself a little,” I said. “Your words run out unawares. That is not the way to speak. What is your name, and where is your kraal? Tell us, that we may know with whom we have to deal.”

“My name is Umbopa. I am of the Zulu people, yet not of them. The house of my tribe is in the far North; it was left behind when the Zulus came down here a ‘thousand years ago,’ long before Chaka reigned in Zululand. I have no kraal. I have wandered for many years. I came from the North as a child to Zululand. I was Cetewayo’s man in the Nkomabakosi Regiment, serving there under the great Captain, Umslopogaasi of the Axe,<sup>[5]</sup> who taught my hands to fight. Afterwards I ran away from Zululand and came to Natal because I wanted to see the white man’s ways. Next I fought against Cetewayo in the war. Since then I have been working in Natal. Now I am tired, and would go North again. Here is not my place. I want no money, but I am a brave man, and am worth my place and meat. I have spoken.”

[5] For the history of Umslopogaasi and his Axe, the reader is referred to the books called “Allan Quatermain” and “Nada the Lily.”—Editor.

I was rather puzzled by this man and his way of speech. It was evident to me from his manner that in the main he was telling the truth, but somehow he seemed different from the ordinary run of Zulus, and I rather mistrusted his offer to come without pay. Being

in a difficulty, I translated his words to Sir Henry and Good, and asked them their opinion.

Sir Henry told me to ask him to stand up. Umbopa did so, at the same time slipping off the long military great coat which he wore, and revealing himself naked except for the moocha round his centre and a necklace of lions' claws. Certainly he was a magnificent-looking man; I never saw a finer native. Standing about six foot three high he was broad in proportion, and very shapely. In that light, too, his skin looked scarcely more than dark, except here and there where deep black scars marked old assegai wounds. Sir Henry walked up to him and looked into his proud, handsome face.

"They make a good pair, don't they?" said Good; "one as big as the other."

"I like your looks, Mr. Umbopa, and I will take you as my servant," said Sir Henry in English.

Umbopa evidently understood him, for he answered in Zulu, "It is well"; and then added, with a glance at the white man's great stature and breadth, "We are men, thou and I."

## CHAPTER IV.

### AN ELEPHANT HUNT

Now I do not propose to narrate at full length all the incidents of our long travel up to Sitanda's Kraal, near the junction of the Lukanga and Kalukwe Rivers. It was a journey of more than a thousand miles from Durban, the last three hundred or so of which we had to make on foot, owing to the frequent presence of the dreadful "tsetse" fly, whose bite is fatal to all animals except donkeys and men.

We left Durban at the end of January, and it was in the second week of May that we camped near Sitanda's Kraal. Our adventures on the way were many and various, but as they are of the sort which befall every African hunter—with one exception to be presently detailed—I shall not set them down here, lest I should render this history too wearisome.

At Inyati, the outlying trading station in the Matabele country, of which Lobengula (a great and cruel scoundrel) is king, with many regrets we parted from our comfortable wagon. Only twelve oxen remained to us out of the beautiful span of twenty which I had bought at Durban. One we lost from the bite of a cobra, three had perished from "poverty" and the want of water, one strayed, and the other three died from eating the poisonous herb called "tulip." Five more sickened from this cause, but we managed to cure them with doses of an infusion made by boiling down the tulip leaves. If administered in time this is a very effective antidote.

The wagon and the oxen we left in the immediate charge of Goza and Tom, our driver and leader, both trustworthy boys, requesting a worthy Scotch missionary who lived in this distant place to keep an eye on them. Then, accompanied by Umbopa, Khiva, Ventvögel, and half a dozen bearers whom we hired on the spot, we started off on foot upon our wild quest. I remember we were all a little silent on the occasion of this departure, and I think that each of us was wondering if we should ever see our wagon again; for my part I never expected to do so. For a while we tramped on in silence, till Umbopa, who was marching in front, broke into a Zulu chant about how some brave men, tired of life and the tameness of things, started off into a vast wilderness to find new things or die, and how, lo and behold! when they had travelled far into the wilderness they found that it was not a wilderness at all, but a beautiful place full of young wives and fat cattle, of game to hunt and enemies to kill.

Then we all laughed and took it for a good omen. Umbopa was a cheerful savage, in a dignified sort of way, when he was not suffering from one of his fits of brooding, and he had a wonderful knack of keeping up our spirits. We all grew very fond of him.

And now for the one adventure to which I am going to treat myself, for I do dearly love a hunting yarn.

About a fortnight's march from Inyati we came across a peculiarly beautiful bit of well-watered woodland country. The kloofs in the hills were covered with dense bush, "idoro" bush as the natives call it, and in some places, with the "wacht-een-beche," or "wait-a-little thorn," and there were great quantities of the lovely "machabell" tree, laden with refreshing yellow fruit having enormous stones. This tree is the elephant's favourite food, and there were not wanting signs that the great brutes had been about, for not only was their spoor frequent, but in many places the trees were broken down and even uprooted. The elephant is a destructive feeder.

One evening, after a long day's march, we came to a spot of great loveliness. At the foot of a bush-clad hill lay a dry river-bed, in which, however, were to be found pools of crystal water all trodden round with the hoof-prints of game. Facing this hill was a park-like plain, where grew clumps of flat-topped mimosa, varied with occasional glossy-leaved machabells, and all round stretched the sea of pathless, silent bush.

As we emerged into this river-bed path suddenly we started a troop of tall giraffes, who galloped, or rather sailed off, in their strange gait, their tails screwed up over their backs, and their hoofs rattling like castanets. They were about three hundred yards from us, and therefore practically out of shot, but Good, who was walking ahead, and who had an express loaded with solid ball in his hand, could not resist temptation. Lifting his gun, he let drive at the last, a young cow. By some extraordinary chance the ball struck it full on the back of the neck, shattering the spinal column, and that giraffe went rolling head over heels just like a rabbit. I never saw a more curious thing.

"Curse it!" said Good—for I am sorry to say he had a habit of using strong language when excited—contracted, no doubt, in the course of his nautical career; "curse it! I've killed him."

"*Ou*, Bougwan," ejaculated the Kafirs; "*ou! ou!*"

They called Good "Bougwan," or Glass Eye, because of his eye-glass.

"Oh, 'Bougwan!'" re-echoed Sir Henry and I, and from that day Good's reputation as a marvellous shot was established, at any rate among the Kafirs. Really he was a bad one, but whenever he missed we overlooked it for the sake of that giraffe.

Having set some of the "boys" to cut off the best of the giraffe's meat, we went to work to build a "schirm" near one of the pools and about a hundred yards to its right. This is done by cutting a quantity of thorn bushes and piling them in the shape of a circular hedge. Then the space enclosed is smoothed, and dry tambouki grass, if obtainable, is made into a bed in the centre, and a fire or fires lighted.

By the time the "schirm" was finished the moon peeped up, and our dinners of giraffe steaks and roasted marrow-bones were ready. How we enjoyed those marrow-bones, though it was rather a job to crack them! I know of no greater luxury than giraffe marrow, unless it is elephant's heart, and we had that on the morrow. We ate our simple meal by the light of the moon, pausing at times to thank Good for his wonderful shot; then we began to smoke and yarn, and a curious picture we must have made squatting there round the fire. I, with my short grizzled hair sticking up straight, and Sir Henry with his yellow locks, which were getting rather long, were rather a contrast, especially as I am thin, and short, and dark, weighing only nine stone and a half, and Sir Henry is tall, and broad, and fair, and weighs fifteen. But perhaps the most curious-looking of the three, taking all the circumstances of the case

into consideration, was Captain John Good, R.N. There he sat upon a leather bag, looking just as though he had come in from a comfortable day's shooting in a civilised country, absolutely clean, tidy, and well dressed. He wore a shooting suit of brown tweed, with a hat to match, and neat gaiters. As usual, he was beautifully shaved, his eye-glass and his false teeth appeared to be in perfect order, and altogether he looked the neatest man I ever had to do with in the wilderness. He even sported a collar, of which he had a supply, made of white gutta-percha.

"You see, they weigh so little," he said to me innocently, when I expressed my astonishment at the fact; "and I always like to turn out like a gentleman." Ah! if he could have foreseen the future and the raiment prepared for him.

Well, there we three sat yarning away in the beautiful moonlight, and watching the Kafirs a few yards off sucking their intoxicating "daccha" from a pipe of which the mouthpiece was made of the horn of an eland, till one by one they rolled themselves up in their blankets and went to sleep by the fire, that is, all except Umbopa, who was a little apart, his chin resting on his hand, and thinking deeply. I noticed that he never mixed much with the other Kafirs.

Presently, from the depths of the bush behind us, came a loud "woof, woof!" "That's a lion," said I, and we all started up to listen. Hardly had we done so, when from the pool, about a hundred yards off, we heard the strident trumpeting of an elephant. "Unkungunklovo! Indlovu!" "Elephant! Elephant!" whispered the Kafirs, and a few minutes afterwards we saw a succession of vast shadowy forms moving slowly from the direction of the water towards the bush.

Up jumped Good, burning for slaughter, and thinking, perhaps, that it was as easy to kill elephant as he had found it to shoot giraffe, but I caught him by the arm and pulled him down.

"It's no good," I whispered, "let them go."

"It seems that we are in a paradise of game. I vote we stop here a day or two, and have a go at them," said Sir Henry, presently.

I was rather surprised, for hitherto Sir Henry had always been for pushing forward as fast as possible, more especially since we ascertained at Inyati that about two years ago an Englishman of the name of Neville *had* sold his wagon there, and gone on up country. But I suppose his hunter instincts got the better of him for a while.

Good jumped at the idea, for he was longing to have a shot at those elephants; and so, to speak the truth, did I, for it went against my conscience to let such a herd as that escape without a pull at them.

"All right, my hearties," said I. "I think we want a little recreation. And now let's turn in, for we ought to be off by dawn, and then perhaps we may catch them feeding before they move on."

The others agreed, and we proceeded to make our preparations. Good took off his clothes, shook them, put his eye-glass and his false teeth into his trousers pocket, and folding each article neatly, placed it out of the dew under a corner of his mackintosh sheet. Sir Henry and I contented ourselves with rougher arrangements, and soon were curled up in our blankets, and dropping off into the dreamless sleep that rewards the traveller.

Going, going, go—What was that?

Suddenly, from the direction of the water came sounds of violent scuffling, and next instant there broke upon our ears a succession of the most awful roars. There was no mistaking their origin; only a lion could make such a noise as that. We all jumped up and looked towards the water, in the direction of which we saw a confused mass, yellow and black in colour, staggering and struggling towards us. We seized our rifles, and slipping on our veldtschoons, that is shoes made of untanned hide, ran out of the scherm. By this time the mass had fallen, and was rolling over and over on the ground, and when we reached the spot it struggled no longer, but lay quite still.

Now we saw what it was. On the grass there lay a sable antelope bull—the most beautiful of all the African antelopes—quite dead, and transfixed by its great curved horns was a magnificent black-maned lion, also dead. Evidently what had happened was this: The sable antelope had come down to drink at the pool where the lion—no doubt the same which we had heard—was lying in wait. While the antelope drank, the lion had sprung upon him, only to be received upon the sharp curved horns and transfixed. Once before I saw a similar thing happen. Then the lion, unable to free himself, had torn and bitten at the back and neck of the bull, which, maddened with fear and pain, had rushed on until it dropped dead.

As soon as we had examined the beasts sufficiently we called the Kafirs, and between us managed to drag their carcasses up to the scherm. After that we went in and lay down, to wake no more till dawn.

With the first light we were up and making ready for the fray. We took with us the three eight-bore rifles, a good supply of ammunition, and our large water-bottles, filled with weak cold tea, which I have always found the best stuff to shoot on. After swallowing a little breakfast we started, Umbopa, Khiva, and Ventvögel accompanying us. The other Kafirs we left with instructions to skin the lion and the sable antelope, and to cut up the latter.

We had no difficulty in finding the broad elephant trail, which Ventvögel, after examination, pronounced to have been made by between twenty and thirty elephants, most of them full-grown bulls. But the herd had moved on some way during the night, and it was nine o'clock, and already very hot, before, by the broken trees, bruised leaves and bark, and smoking droppings, we knew that we could not be far from them.

Presently we caught sight of the herd, which numbered, as Ventvögel had said, between twenty and thirty, standing in a hollow, having finished their morning meal, and flapping their great ears. It was a splendid sight, for they were only about two hundred yards from us. Taking a handful of dry grass, I threw it into the air to see how the wind was; for if once they winded us I knew they would be off before we could get a shot. Finding that, if anything, it blew from the elephants to us, we crept on stealthily, and thanks to the cover managed to get within forty yards or so of the great brutes. Just in front of us, and broadside on, stood three splendid bulls, one of them with enormous tusks. I whispered to the others that I would take the middle one; Sir Henry covering the elephant to the left, and Good the bull with the big tusks.

"Now," I whispered.

Boom! boom! boom! went the three heavy rifles, and down came Sir Henry's elephant dead as a hammer, shot right through the heart. Mine fell on to its knees and I thought that he was going to die, but in another moment he was up and off, tearing along straight past me. As he went I gave him the second barrel in the ribs, and this brought him down in good earnest. Hastily slipping in two fresh cartridges I ran close up to him, and a ball through the brain put an end to the poor brute's struggles. Then I turned to see how Good had fared with the big bull, which I had heard screaming with rage and pain as I gave mine its quietus. On reaching the captain I found him in a great state of excitement. It appeared that on receiving the bullet the bull had turned and come straight for his

assailant, who had barely time to get out of his way, and then charged on blindly past him, in the direction of our encampment. Meanwhile the herd had crashed off in wild alarm in the other direction.

For awhile we debated whether to go after the wounded bull or to follow the herd, and finally deciding for the latter alternative, departed, thinking that we had seen the last of those big tusks. I have often wished since that we had. It was easy work to follow the elephants, for they had left a trail like a carriage road behind them, crushing down the thick bush in their furious flight as though it were tambouki grass.

But to come up with them was another matter, and we had struggled on under the broiling sun for over two hours before we found them. With the exception of one bull, they were standing together, and I could see, from their unquiet way and the manner in which they kept lifting their trunks to test the air, that they were on the look-out for mischief. The solitary bull stood fifty yards or so to this side of the herd, over which he was evidently keeping sentry, and about sixty yards from us. Thinking that he would see or wind us, and that it would probably start them off again if we tried to get nearer, especially as the ground was rather open, we all aimed at this bull, and at my whispered word, we fired. The three shots took effect, and down he went dead. Again the herd started, but unfortunately for them about a hundred yards further on was a nullah, or dried-out water track, with steep banks, a place very much resembling the one where the Prince Imperial was killed in Zululand. Into this the elephants plunged, and when we reached the edge we found them struggling in wild confusion to get up the other bank, filling the air with their screams, and trumpeting as they pushed one another aside in their selfish panic, just like so many human beings. Now was our opportunity, and firing away as quickly as we could load, we killed five of the poor beasts, and no doubt should have bagged the whole herd, had they not suddenly given up their attempts to climb the bank and rushed headlong down the nullah. We were too tired to follow them, and perhaps also a little sick of slaughter, eight elephants being a pretty good bag for one day.

So after we were rested a little, and the Kafirs had cut out the hearts of two of the dead elephants for supper, we started homewards, very well pleased with our day's work, having made up our minds to send the bearers on the morrow to chop away the tusks.

Shortly after we re-passed the spot where Good had wounded the patriarchal bull we came across a herd of eland, but did not shoot at them, as we had plenty of meat. They trotted past us, and then stopped behind a little patch of bush about a hundred yards away, wheeling round to look at us. As Good was anxious to get a near view of them, never having seen an eland close, he handed his rifle to Umbopa, and, followed by Khiva, strolled up to the patch of bush. We sat down and waited for him, not sorry of the excuse for a little rest.

The sun was just going down in its reddest glory, and Sir Henry and I were admiring the lovely scene, when suddenly we heard an elephant scream, and saw its huge and rushing form with uplifted trunk and tail silhouetted against the great fiery globe of the sun. Next second we saw something else, and that was Good and Khiva tearing back towards us with the wounded bull—for it was he—charging after them. For a moment we did not dare to fire—though at that distance it would have been of little use if we had done so—for fear of hitting one of them, and the next a dreadful thing happened—Good fell a victim to his passion for civilised dress. Had he consented to discard his trousers and gaiters like the rest of us, and to hunt in a flannel shirt and a pair of veldt-schoons, it would have been all right. But as it was, his trousers cumbered him in that desperate race, and presently, when he was about sixty yards from us, his boot, polished by the dry grass, slipped, and down he went on his face right in front of the elephant.

We gave a gasp, for we knew that he must die, and ran as hard as we could towards him. In three seconds it had ended, but not as we thought. Khiva, the Zulu boy, saw his master fall, and brave lad as he was, turned and flung his assegai straight into the elephant's face. It stuck in his trunk.

With a scream of pain, the brute seized the poor Zulu, hurled him to the earth, and placing one huge foot on to his body about the middle, twined its trunk round his upper part and *tore him in two*.

We rushed up mad with horror, and fired again and again, till presently the elephant fell upon the fragments of the Zulu.

As for Good, he rose and wrung his hands over the brave man who had given his life to save him, and, though I am an old hand, I felt a lump grow in my throat. Umbopa stood contemplating the huge dead elephant and the mangled remains of poor Khiva.

"Ah, well," he said presently, "he is dead, but he died like a man!"

## CHAPTER V.

### OUR MARCH INTO THE DESERT

We had killed nine elephants, and it took us two days to cut out the tusks, and having brought them into camp, to bury them carefully in the sand under a large tree, which made a conspicuous mark for miles round. It was a wonderfully fine lot of ivory. I never saw a better, averaging as it did between forty and fifty pounds a tusk. The tusks of the great bull that killed poor Khiva scaled one hundred and seventy pounds the pair, so nearly as we could judge.

As for Khiva himself, we buried what remained of him in an ant-bear hole, together with an assegai to protect himself with on his journey to a better world. On the third day we marched again, hoping that we might live to return to dig up our buried ivory, and in due course, after a long and wearisome tramp, and many adventures which I have not space to detail, we reached Sitanda's Kraal, near the Lukanga River, the real starting-point of our expedition. Very well do I recollect our arrival at that place. To the right was a scattered native settlement with a few stone cattle kraals and some cultivated lands down by the water, where these savages grew their scanty supply of grain, and beyond it stretched great tracts of waving "veld" covered with tall grass, over which herds of the smaller game were wandering. To the left lay the vast desert. This spot appears to be the outpost of the fertile country, and it would be difficult to say to what natural causes such an abrupt change in the character of the soil is due. But so it is.

Just below our encampment flowed a little stream, on the farther side of which is a stony slope, the same down which, twenty years before, I had seen poor Silvestre creeping back after his attempt to reach Solomon's Mines, and beyond that slope begins the waterless desert, covered with a species of karoo shrub.

It was evening when we pitched our camp, and the great ball of the sun was sinking into the desert, sending glorious rays of many-coloured light flying all over its vast expanse. Leaving Good to superintend the arrangement of our little camp, I took Sir Henry with me, and walking to the top of the slope opposite, we gazed across the desert. The air was very clear, and far, far away I could distinguish the faint blue outlines, here and there capped with white, of the Suliman Berg.

"There," I said, "there is the wall round Solomon's Mines, but God knows if we shall ever climb it."

"My brother should be there, and if he is, I shall reach him somehow," said Sir Henry, in that tone of quiet confidence which marked the man.

"I hope so," I answered, and turned to go back to the camp, when I saw that we were not alone. Behind us, also gazing earnestly towards the far-off mountains, stood the great Kafir Umbopa.

The Zulu spoke when he saw that I had observed him, addressing Sir Henry, to whom he had attached himself.

"Is it to that land that thou wouldst journey, Incubu?" (a native word meaning, I believe, an elephant, and the name given to Sir Henry by the Kafirs), he said, pointing towards the mountain with his broad assegai.

I asked him sharply what he meant by addressing his master in that familiar way. It is very well for natives to have a name for one among themselves, but it is not decent that they should call a white man by their heathenish appellations to his face. The Zulu laughed a quiet little laugh which angered me.

"How dost thou know that I am not the equal of the Inkosi whom I serve?" he said. "He is of a royal house, no doubt; one can see it in his size and by his mien; so, mayhap, am I. At least, I am as great a man. Be my mouth, O Macumazahn, and say my words to the Inkoos Incubu, my master, for I would speak to him and to thee."

I was angry with the man, for I am not accustomed to be talked to in that way by Kafirs, but somehow he impressed me, and besides I was curious to know what he had to say. So I translated, expressing my opinion at the same time that he was an impudent fellow, and that his swagger was outrageous.

"Yes, Umbopa," answered Sir Henry, "I would journey there."

"The desert is wide and there is no water in it, the mountains are high and covered with snow, and man cannot say what lies beyond them behind the place where the sun sets; how shalt thou come thither, Incubu, and wherefore dost thou go?"

I translated again.

"Tell him," answered Sir Henry, "that I go because I believe that a man of my blood, my brother, has gone there before me, and I journey to seek him."

"That is so, Incubu; a Hottentot I met on the road told me that a white man went out into the desert two years ago towards those mountains with one servant, a hunter. They never came back."

"How do you know it was my brother?" asked Sir Henry.

"Nay, I know not. But the Hottentot, when I asked what the white man was like, said that he had thine eyes and a black beard. He said, too, that the name of the hunter with him was Jim; that he was a Bechuana hunter and wore clothes."

"There is no doubt about it," said I; "I knew Jim well."

Sir Henry nodded. "I was sure of it," he said. "If George set his mind upon a thing he generally did it. It was always so from his boyhood. If he meant to cross the Suliman Berg he has crossed it, unless some accident overtook him, and we must look for him on the other side."

Umbopa understood English, though he rarely spoke it.

"It is a far journey, Incubu," he put in, and I translated his remark.

"Yes," answered Sir Henry, "it is far. But there is no journey upon this earth that a man may not make if he sets his heart to it. There is nothing, Umbopa, that he cannot do, there are no mountains he may not climb, there are no deserts he cannot cross, save a mountain and a desert of which you are spared the knowledge, if love leads him and he holds his life in his hands counting it as nothing, ready to keep it or lose it as Heaven above may order."

I translated.

"Great words, my father," answered the Zulu—I always called him a Zulu, though he was not really one—"great swelling words fit to fill the mouth of a man. Thou art right, my father Incubu. Listen! what is life? It is a feather, it is the seed of the grass, blown hither and thither, sometimes multiplying itself and dying in the act, sometimes carried away into the heavens. But if that seed be good and heavy it may perchance travel a little way on the road it wills. It is well to try and journey one's road and to fight with the air. Man must die. At the worst he can but die a little sooner. I will go with thee across the desert and over the mountains, unless perchance I fall to the ground on the way, my father."

He paused awhile, and then went on with one of those strange bursts of rhetorical eloquence that Zulus sometimes indulge in, which to my mind, full though they are of vain repetitions, show that the race is by no means devoid of poetic instinct and of intellectual power.

"What is life? Tell me, O white men, who are wise, who know the secrets of the world, and of the world of stars, and the world that lies above and around the stars; who flash your words from afar without a voice; tell me, white men, the secret of our life—whither it goes and whence it comes!

"You cannot answer me; you know not. Listen, I will answer. Out of the dark we came, into the dark we go. Like a storm-driven bird at night we fly out of the Nowhere; for a moment our wings are seen in the light of the fire, and, lo! we are gone again into the Nowhere. Life is nothing. Life is all. It is the Hand with which we hold off Death. It is the glow-worm that shines in the night-time and is black in the morning; it is the white breath of the oxen in winter; it is the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself at sunset."

"You are a strange man," said Sir Henry, when he had ceased.

Umbopa laughed. "It seems to me that we are much alike, Incubu. Perhaps I seek a brother over the mountains."

I looked at him suspiciously. "What dost thou mean?" I asked; "what dost thou know of those mountains?"

"A little; a very little. There is a strange land yonder, a land of witchcraft and beautiful things; a land of brave people, and of trees, and streams, and snowy peaks, and of a great white road. I have heard of it. But what is the good of talking? It grows dark. Those who live to see will see."

Again I looked at him doubtfully. The man knew too much.

"You need not fear me, Macumazahn," he said, interpreting my look. "I dig no holes for you to fall in. I make no plots. If ever we cross those mountains behind the sun I will tell what I know. But Death sits upon them. Be wise and turn back. Go and hunt elephants, my masters. I have spoken."

And without another word he lifted his spear in salutation, and returned towards the camp, where shortly afterwards we found him cleaning a gun like any other Kafir.

"That is an odd man," said Sir Henry.

"Yes," answered I, "too odd by half. I don't like his little ways. He knows something, and will not speak out. But I suppose it is no use quarrelling with him. We are in for a curious trip, and a mysterious Zulu won't make much difference one way or another."

Next day we made our arrangements for starting. Of course it was impossible to drag our heavy elephant rifles and other kit with us across the desert, so, dismissing our bearers, we made an arrangement with an old native who had a kraal close by to take care of them till we returned. It went to my heart to leave such things as those sweet tools to the tender mercies of an old thief of a savage whose greedy eyes I could see gloating over them. But I took some precautions.

First of all I loaded all the rifles, placing them at full cock, and informed him that if he touched them they would go off. He tried the experiment instantly with my eight-bore, and it did go off, and blew a hole right through one of his oxen, which were just then being driven up to the kraal, to say nothing of knocking him head over heels with the recoil. He got up considerably startled, and not at all pleased at the loss of the ox, which he had the impudence to ask me to pay for, and nothing would induce him to touch the guns again.

"Put the live devils out of the way up there in the thatch," he said, "or they will murder us all."

Then I told him that, when we came back, if one of those things was missing I would kill him and his people by witchcraft; and if we died and he tried to steal the rifles I would come and haunt him and turn his cattle mad and his milk sour till life was a weariness, and would make the devils in the guns come out and talk to him in a way he did not like, and generally gave him a good idea of judgment to come. After that he promised to look after them as though they were his father's spirit. He was a very superstitious old Kafir and a great villain.

Having thus disposed of our superfluous gear we arranged the kit we five—Sir Henry, Good, myself, Umbopa, and the Hottentot Ventvögel—were to take with us on our journey. It was small enough, but do what we would we could not get its weight down under about forty pounds a man. This is what it consisted of:—

The three express rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition.

The two Winchester repeating rifles (for Umbopa and Ventvögel), with two hundred rounds of cartridge.

Five Cochrane's water-bottles, each holding four pints.

Five blankets.

Twenty-five pounds' weight of biltong—i.e. sun-dried game flesh.

Ten pounds' weight of best mixed beads for gifts.

A selection of medicine, including an ounce of quinine, and one or two small surgical instruments.

Our knives, a few sundries, such as a compass, matches, a pocket filter, tobacco, a trowel, a bottle of brandy, and the clothes we stood in.

This was our total equipment, a small one indeed for such a venture, but we dared not attempt to carry more. Indeed, that load was a heavy one per man with which to travel across the burning desert, for in such places every additional ounce tells. But we could not see our way to reducing the weight. There was nothing taken but what was absolutely necessary.

With great difficulty, and by the promise of a present of a good hunting-knife each, I succeeded in persuading three wretched natives from the village to come with us for the first stage, twenty miles, and to carry a large gourd holding a gallon of water apiece. My object was to enable us to refill our water-bottles after the first night's march, for we determined to start in the cool of the evening. I gave out to these natives that we were going to shoot ostriches, with which the desert abounded. They jabbered and shrugged their shoulders, saying that we were mad and should perish of thirst, which I must say seemed probable; but being desirous of obtaining the knives, which were almost unknown treasures up there, they consented to come, having probably reflected that, after all, our subsequent extinction would be no affair of theirs.

All next day we rested and slept, and at sunset ate a hearty meal of fresh beef washed down with tea, the last, as Good remarked sadly, we were likely to drink for many a long day. Then, having made our final preparations, we lay down and waited for the moon to rise. At last, about nine o'clock, up she came in all her glory, flooding the wild country with light, and throwing a silver sheen on the expanse of rolling desert before us, which looked as solemn and quiet and as alien to man as the star-studded firmament above. We rose up, and in a few minutes were ready, and yet we hesitated a little, as human nature is prone to hesitate on the threshold of an irrevocable step. We three white men stood by ourselves. Umbopa, assegai in hand and a rifle across his shoulders, looked out fixedly across the desert a few paces ahead of us; while the hired natives, with the gourds of water, and Ventvögel, were gathered in a little knot behind.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Henry presently, in his deep voice, "we are going on about as strange a journey as men can make in this world. It is very doubtful if we can succeed in it. But we are three men who will stand together for good or for evil to the last. Now before we start let us for a moment pray to the Power who shapes the destinies of men, and who ages since has marked out our paths, that it may please Him to direct our steps in accordance with His will."

Taking off his hat, for the space of a minute or so, he covered his face with his hands, and Good and I did likewise.

I do not say that I am a first-rate praying man, few hunters are, and as for Sir Henry, I never heard him speak like that before, and only once since, though deep down in his heart I believe that he is very religious. Good too is pious, though apt to swear. Anyhow I do not remember, excepting on one single occasion, ever putting up a better prayer in my life than I did during that minute, and somehow I felt the happier for it. Our future was so completely unknown, and I think that the unknown and the awful always bring a man nearer to his Maker.

"And now," said Sir Henry, "*trek!*"

So we started.

We had nothing to guide ourselves by except the distant mountains and old José da Silvestra's chart, which, considering that it was drawn by a dying and half-distraught man on a fragment of linen three centuries ago, was not a very satisfactory sort of thing to work with. Still, our sole hope of success depended upon it, such as it was. If we failed in finding that pool of bad water which the old Dom marked as being situated in the middle of the desert, about sixty miles from our starting-point, and as far from the mountains, in all probability we must perish miserably of thirst. But to my mind the chances of our finding it in that great sea of sand and karoo scrub seemed almost infinitesimal. Even supposing that da Silvestra had marked the pool correctly, what was there to prevent its having been dried up by the sun generations ago, or trampled in by game, or filled with the drifting sand?

On we tramped silently as shades through the night and in the heavy sand. The karoo bushes caught our feet and retarded us, and the sand worked into our veldtschoons and Good's shooting-boots, so that every few miles we had to stop and empty them; but still the night kept fairly cool, though the atmosphere was thick and heavy, giving a sort of creamy feel to the air, and we made fair progress. It was very silent and lonely there in the desert, oppressively so indeed. Good felt this, and once began to whistle "The Girl I left behind me," but the notes sounded lugubrious in that vast place, and he gave it up.

Shortly afterwards a little incident occurred which, though it startled us at the time, gave rise to a laugh. Good was leading, as the holder of the compass, which, being a sailor, of course he understood thoroughly, and we were toiling along in single file behind him, when suddenly we heard the sound of an exclamation, and he vanished. Next second there arose all around us a most extraordinary hubbub, snorts, groans, and wild sounds of rushing feet. In the faint light, too, we could descry dim galloping forms half hidden by wreaths of sand. The natives threw down their loads and prepared to bolt, but remembering that there was nowhere to run to, they cast themselves upon the ground and howled out that it was ghosts. As for Sir Henry and myself, we stood amazed; nor was our amazement lessened when we perceived the form of Good careering off in the direction of the mountains, apparently mounted on the back of a horse and halloaing wildly. In another second he threw up his arms, and we heard him come to the earth with a thud.

Then I saw what had happened; we had stumbled upon a herd of sleeping quagga, on to the back of one of which Good actually had fallen, and the brute naturally enough got up and made off with him. Calling out to the others that it was all right, I ran towards Good, much afraid lest he should be hurt, but to my great relief I found him sitting in the sand, his eye-glass still fixed firmly in his eye, rather shaken and very much frightened, but not in any way injured.

After this we travelled on without any further misadventure till about one o'clock, when we called a halt, and having drunk a little water, not much, for water was precious, and rested for half an hour, we started again.

On, on we went, till at last the east began to blush like the cheek of a girl. Then there came faint rays of primrose light, that changed presently to golden bars, through which the dawn glided out across the desert. The stars grew pale and paler still, till at last they vanished; the golden moon waxed wan, and her mountain ridges stood out against her sickly face like the bones on the cheek of a dying man. Then came spear upon spear of light flashing far away across the boundless wilderness, piercing and firing the veils of mist, till the desert was draped in a tremulous golden glow, and it was day.

Still we did not halt, though by this time we should have been glad enough to do so, for we knew that when once the sun was fully up it would be almost impossible for us to travel. At length, about an hour later, we spied a little pile of boulders rising out of the plain, and to this we dragged ourselves. As luck would have it, here we found an overhanging slab of rock carpeted beneath with smooth sand, which afforded a most grateful shelter from the heat. Underneath this we crept, and each of us having drunk some water and eaten a bit of biltong, we lay down and soon were sound asleep.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before we woke, to find our bearers preparing to return. They had seen enough of the desert already, and no number of knives would have tempted them to come a step farther. So we took a hearty drink, and having emptied

our water-bottles, filled them up again from the gourds that they had brought with them, and then watched them depart on their twenty miles' tramp home.

At half-past four we also started. It was lonely and desolate work, for with the exception of a few ostriches there was not a single living creature to be seen on all the vast expanse of sandy plain. Evidently it was too dry for game, and with the exception of a deadly-looking cobra or two we saw no reptiles. One insect, however, we found abundant, and that was the common or house fly. There they came, "not as single spies, but in battalions," as I think the Old Testament<sup>[6]</sup> says somewhere. He is an extraordinary insect is the house fly. Go where you will you find him, and so it must have been always. I have seen him enclosed in amber, which is, I was told, quite half a million years old, looking exactly like his descendant of to-day, and I have little doubt but that when the last man lies dying on the earth he will be buzzing round—if this event happens to occur in summer—watching for an opportunity to settle on his nose.

[6] Readers must beware of accepting Mr. Quatermain's references as accurate, as, it has been found, some are prone to do. Although his reading evidently was limited, the impression produced by it upon his mind was mixed. Thus to him the Old Testament and Shakespeare were interchangeable authorities.—*Editor*.

At sunset we halted, waiting for the moon to rise. At last she came up, beautiful and serene as ever, and, with one halt about two o'clock in the morning, we trudged on wearily through the night, till at last the welcome sun put a period to our labours. We drank a little and flung ourselves down on the sand, thoroughly tired out, and soon were all asleep. There was no need to set a watch, for we had nothing to fear from anybody or anything in that vast untenanted plain. Our only enemies were heat, thirst, and flies, but far rather would I have faced any danger from man or beast than that awful trinity. This time we were not so lucky as to find a sheltering rock to guard us from the glare of the sun, with the result that about seven o'clock we woke up experiencing the exact sensations one would attribute to a beefsteak on a gridiron. We were literally being baked through and through. The burning sun seemed to be sucking our very blood out of us. We sat up and gasped.

"Phew," said I, grabbing at the halo of flies which buzzed cheerfully round my head. The heat did not affect *them*.

"My word!" said Sir Henry.

"It is hot!" echoed Good.

It was hot, indeed, and there was not a bit of shelter to be found. Look where we would there was no rock or tree, nothing but an unending glare, rendered dazzling by the heated air that danced over the surface of the desert as it dances over a red-hot stove.

"What is to be done?" asked Sir Henry; "we can't stand this for long."

We looked at each other blankly.

"I have it," said Good, "we must dig a hole, get in it, and cover ourselves with the karoo bushes."

It did not seem a very promising suggestion, but at least it was better than nothing, so we set to work, and, with the trowel we had brought with us and the help of our hands, in about an hour we succeeded in delving out a patch of ground some ten feet long by twelve wide to the depth of two feet. Then we cut a quantity of low scrub with our hunting-knives, and creeping into the hole, pulled it over us all, with the exception of Ventvögel, on whom, being a Hottentot, the heat had no particular effect. This gave us some slight shelter from the burning rays of the sun, but the atmosphere in that amateur grave can be better imagined than described. The Black Hole of Calcutta must have been a fool to it; indeed, to this moment I do not know how we lived through the day. There we lay panting, and every now and again moistening our lips from our scanty supply of water. Had we followed our inclinations we should have finished all we possessed in the first two hours, but we were forced to exercise the most rigid care, for if our water failed us we knew that very soon we must perish miserably.

But everything has an end, if only you live long enough to see it, and somehow that miserable day wore on towards evening. About three o'clock in the afternoon we determined that we could bear it no longer. It would be better to die walking than to be killed slowly by heat and thirst in this dreadful hole. So taking each of us a little drink from our fast diminishing supply of water, now warmed to about the same temperature as a man's blood, we staggered forward.

We had then covered some fifty miles of wilderness. If the reader will refer to the rough copy and translation of old da Silvestra's map, he will see that the desert is marked as measuring forty leagues across, and the "pan bad water" is set down as being about in the middle of it. Now forty leagues is one hundred and twenty miles, consequently we ought at the most to be within twelve or fifteen miles of the water if any should really exist.

Through the afternoon we crept slowly and painfully along, scarcely doing more than a mile and a half in an hour. At sunset we rested again, waiting for the moon, and after drinking a little managed to get some sleep.

Before we lay down, Umbopa pointed out to us a slight and indistinct hillock on the flat surface of the plain about eight miles away. At the distance it looked like an ant-hill, and as I was dropping off to sleep I fell to wondering what it could be.

With the moon we marched again, feeling dreadfully exhausted, and suffering tortures from thirst and prickly heat. Nobody who has not felt it can know what we went through. We walked no longer, we staggered, now and again falling from exhaustion, and being obliged to call a halt every hour or so. We had scarcely energy left in us to speak. Up to this Good had chatted and joked, for he is a merry fellow; but now he had not a joke in him.

At last, about two o'clock, utterly worn out in body and mind, we came to the foot of the queer hill, or sand koppie, which at first sight resembled a gigantic ant-heap about a hundred feet high, and covering at the base nearly two acres of ground.

Here we halted, and driven to it by our desperate thirst, sucked down our last drops of water. We had but half a pint a head, and each of us could have drunk a gallon.

Then we lay down. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I heard Umbopa remark to himself in Zulu—

"If we cannot find water we shall all be dead before the moon rises to-morrow."

I shuddered, hot as it was. The near prospect of such an awful death is not pleasant, but even the thought of it could not keep me from sleeping.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WATER! WATER!

Two hours later, that is, about four o'clock, I woke up, for so soon as the first heavy demand of bodily fatigue had been satisfied, the torturing thirst from which I was suffering asserted itself. I could sleep no more. I had been dreaming that I was bathing in a running stream, with green banks and trees upon them, and I awoke to find myself in this arid wilderness, and to remember, as Umbopa had said, that if we did not find water this day we must perish miserably. No human creature could live long without water in that heat. I sat up and rubbed my grimy face with my dry and horny hands, as my lips and eyelids were stuck together, and it was only after some friction and with an effort that I was able to open them. It was not far from dawn, but there was none of the bright feel of dawn in the air, which was thick with a hot murkiness that I cannot describe. The others were still sleeping.

Presently it began to grow light enough to read, so I drew out a little pocket copy of the "Ingoldsby Legends" which I had brought with me, and read "The Jackdaw of Rheims." When I got to where

"A nice little boy held a golden ewer,  
Embossed, and filled with water as pure  
As any that flows between Rheims and Namur,"

literally I smacked my cracking lips, or rather tried to smack them. The mere thought of that pure water made me mad. If the Cardinal had been there with his bell, book, and candle, I would have whipped in and drunk his water up; yes, even if he had filled it already with the suds of soap "worthy of washing the hands of the Pope," and I knew that the whole consecrated curse of the Catholic Church should fall upon me for so doing. I almost think that I must have been a little light-headed with thirst, weariness and the want of food; for I fell to thinking how astonished the Cardinal and his nice little boy and the jackdaw would have looked to see a burnt up, brown-eyed, grizzly-haired little elephant hunter suddenly bound between them, put his dirty face into the basin, and swallow every drop of the precious water. The idea amused me so much that I laughed or rather cackled aloud, which woke the others, and they began to rub *their* dirty faces and drag *their* gummed-up lips and eyelids apart.

As soon as we were all well awake we began to discuss the situation, which was serious enough. Not a drop of water was left. We turned the bottles upside down, and licked their tops, but it was a failure; they were dry as a bone. Good, who had charge of the flask of brandy, got it out and looked at it longingly; but Sir Henry promptly took it away from him, for to drink raw spirit would only have been to precipitate the end.

"If we do not find water we shall die," he said.

"If we can trust to the old Dom's map there should be some about," I said; but nobody seemed to derive much satisfaction from this remark. It was so evident that no great faith could be put in the map. Now it was gradually growing light, and as we sat staring blankly at each other, I observed the Hottentot Ventvögel rise and begin to walk about with his eyes on the ground. Presently he stopped short, and uttering a guttural exclamation, pointed to the earth.

"What is it?" we exclaimed; and rising simultaneously we went to where he was standing staring at the sand.

"Well," I said, "it is fresh Springbok spoor; what of it?"

"Springbucks do not go far from water," he answered in Dutch.

"No," I answered, "I forgot; and thank God for it."

This little discovery put new life into us; for it is wonderful, when a man is in a desperate position, how he catches at the slightest hope, and feels almost happy. On a dark night a single star is better than nothing.

Meanwhile Ventvögel was lifting his snub nose, and sniffing the hot air for all the world like an old Impala ram who scents danger. Presently he spoke again.

"I *smell* water," he said.

Then we felt quite jubilant, for we knew what a wonderful instinct these wild-bred men possess.

Just at that moment the sun came up gloriously, and revealed so grand a sight to our astonished eyes that for a moment or two we even forgot our thirst.

There, not more than forty or fifty miles from us, glittering like silver in the early rays of the morning sun, soared Sheba's Breasts; and stretching away for hundreds of miles on either side of them ran the great Suliman Berg. Now that, sitting here, I attempt to describe the extraordinary grandeur and beauty of that sight, language seems to fail me. I am impotent even before its memory. Straight before us, rose two enormous mountains, the like of which are not, I believe, to be seen in Africa, if indeed there are any other such in the world, measuring each of them at least fifteen thousand feet in height, standing not more than a dozen miles apart, linked together by a precipitous cliff of rock, and towering in awful white solemnity straight into the sky. These mountains placed thus, like the pillars of a gigantic gateway, are shaped after the fashion of a woman's breasts, and at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form of a recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep. Their bases swell gently from the plain, looking at that distance perfectly round and smooth; and upon the top of each is a vast hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast. The stretch of cliff that connects them appears to be some thousands of feet in height, and perfectly precipitous, and on each flank of them, so far as the eye can reach, extend similar lines of cliff, broken only here and there by flat table-topped mountains, something like the world-famed one at Cape Town; a formation, by the way, that is very common in Africa.

To describe the comprehensive grandeur of that view is beyond my powers. There was something so inexpressibly solemn and overpowering about those huge volcanoes—for doubtless they are extinct volcanoes—that it quite awed us. For a while the morning lights played upon the snow and the brown and swelling masses beneath, and then, as though to veil the majestic sight from our curious eyes, strange vapours and clouds gathered and increased around the mountains, till presently we could only trace their pure and gigantic outlines, showing ghostlike through the fleecy envelope. Indeed, as we afterwards discovered, usually they were wrapped in this gauze-like mist, which doubtless accounted for our not having seen them more clearly before.

Sheba's Breasts had scarcely vanished into cloud-clad privacy, before our thirst—literally a burning question—reasserted itself.

It was all very well for Ventvögel to say that he smelt water, but we could see no signs of it, look which way we would. So far as the eye might reach there was nothing but arid sweltering sand and karoo scrub. We walked round the hillock and gazed about anxiously on the other side, but it was the same story, not a drop of water could be found; there was no indication of a pan, a pool, or a spring.

"You are a fool," I said angrily to Ventvögel; "there is no water."

But still he lifted his ugly snub nose and sniffed.

"I smell it, Baas," he answered; "it is somewhere in the air."

"Yes," I said, "no doubt it is in the clouds, and about two months hence it will fall and wash our bones."

Sir Henry stroked his yellow beard thoughtfully. "Perhaps it is on the top of the hill," he suggested.

"Rot," said Good; "whoever heard of water being found at the top of a hill!"

"Let us go and look," I put in, and hopelessly enough we scrambled up the sandy sides of the hillock, Umbopa leading. Presently he stopped as though he was petrified.

"*Nanzia manziel!*" that is, "Here is water!" he cried with a loud voice.

We rushed up to him, and there, sure enough, in a deep cut or indentation on the very top of the sand koppie, was an undoubted pool of water. How it came to be in such a strange place we did not stop to inquire, nor did we hesitate at its black and unpleasant appearance. It was water, or a good imitation of it, and that was enough for us. We gave a bound and a rush, and in another second we were all down on our stomachs sucking up the uninviting fluid as though it were nectar fit for the gods. Heavens, how we did drink! Then when we had done drinking we tore off our clothes and sat down in the pool, absorbing the moisture through our parched skins. You, Harry, my boy, who have only to turn on a couple of taps to summon "hot" and "cold" from an unseen, vasty cistern, can have little idea of the luxury of that muddy wallow in brackish tepid water.

After a while we rose from it, refreshed indeed, and fell to on our "biltong," of which we had scarcely been able to touch a mouthful for twenty-four hours, and ate our fill. Then we smoked a pipe, and lay down by the side of that blessed pool, under the overhanging shadow of its bank, and slept till noon.

All that day we rested there by the water, thanking our stars that we had been lucky enough to find it, bad as it was, and not forgetting to render a due share of gratitude to the shade of the long-departed da Silvestra, who had set its position down so accurately on the tail of his shirt. The wonderful thing to us was that the pan should have lasted so long, and the only way in which I can account for this is on the supposition that it is fed by some spring deep down in the sand.

Having filled both ourselves and our water-bottles as full as possible, in far better spirits we started off again with the moon. That night we covered nearly five-and-twenty miles; but, needless to say, found no more water, though we were lucky enough the following day to get a little shade behind some ant-heaps. When the sun rose, and, for awhile, cleared away the mysterious mists, Suliman's Berg with the two majestic Breasts, now only about twenty miles off, seemed to be towering right above us, and looked grander than ever. At the approach of evening we marched again, and, to cut a long story short, by daylight next morning found ourselves upon the lowest slopes of Sheba's left breast, for which we had been steadily steering. By this time our water was exhausted once more, and we were suffering severely from thirst, nor indeed could we see any chance of relieving it till we reached the snow line far, far above us. After resting an hour or two, driven to it by our torturing thirst, we went on, toiling painfully in the burning heat up the lava slopes, for we found that the huge base of the mountain was composed entirely of lava beds belched from the bowels of the earth in some far past age.

By eleven o'clock we were utterly exhausted, and, generally speaking, in a very bad state indeed. The lava clinker, over which we must drag ourselves, though smooth compared with some clinker I have heard of, such as that on the Island of Ascension, for instance, was yet rough enough to make our feet very sore, and this, together with our other miseries, had pretty well finished us. A few hundred yards above us were some large lumps of lava, and towards these we steered with the intention of lying down beneath their shade. We reached them, and to our surprise, so far as we had a capacity for surprise left in us, on a little plateau or ridge close by we saw that the clinker was covered with a dense green growth. Evidently soil formed of decomposed lava had rested there, and in due course had become the receptacle of seeds deposited by birds. But we did not take much further interest in the green growth, for one cannot live on grass like Nebuchadnezzar. That requires a special dispensation of Providence and peculiar digestive organs.

So we sat down under the rocks and groaned, and for one I wished heartily that we had never started on this fool's errand. As we were sitting there I saw Umbopa get up and hobble towards the patch of green, and a few minutes afterwards, to my great astonishment, I perceived that usually very dignified individual dancing and shouting like a maniac, and waving something green. Off we all scrambled towards him as fast as our wearied limbs would carry us, hoping that he had found water.

"What is it, Umbopa, son of a fool?" I shouted in Zulu.

"It is food and water, Macumazahn," and again he waved the green thing.

Then I saw what he had found. It was a melon. We had hit upon a patch of wild melons, thousands of them, and dead ripe.

"Melons!" I yelled to Good, who was next me; and in another minute his false teeth were fixed in one of them.

I think we ate about six each before we had done, and poor fruit as they were, I doubt if I ever thought anything nicer.

But melons are not very nutritious, and when we had satisfied our thirst with their pulpy substance, and put a stick to cool by the simple process of cutting them in two and setting them end on in the hot sun to grow cold by evaporation, we began to feel exceedingly hungry. We had still some biltong left, but our stomachs turned from biltong, and besides, we were obliged to be very sparing of it, for we could not say when we should find more food. Just at this moment a lucky thing chanced. Looking across the desert I saw a flock of about ten large birds flying straight towards us.

"*Skit, Baas, skit!*" "Shoot, master, shoot!" whispered the Hottentot, throwing himself on his face, an example which we all followed.

Then I saw that the birds were a flock of *pauw* or bustards, and that they would pass within fifty yards of my head. Taking one of the repeating Winchesters, I waited till they were nearly over us, and then jumped to my feet. On seeing me the *pauw* bunched up together, as I expected that they would, and I fired two shots straight into the thick of them, and, as luck would have it, brought one down, a fine fellow, that weighed about twenty pounds. In half an hour we had a fire made of dry melon stalks, and he was roasting over it, and we made such a feed as we had not tasted for a week. We ate that *pauw*; nothing was left of him but his leg-bones and his beak, and we felt not a little the better afterwards.

That night we went on again with the moon, carrying as many melons as we could with us. As we ascended we found the air grew cooler and cooler, which was a great relief to us, and at dawn, so far as we could judge, we were not more than about a dozen miles from the snow line. Here we discovered more melons, and so had no longer any anxiety about water, for we knew that we should soon get plenty of snow. But the ascent had now become very precipitous, and we made but slow progress, not more than a mile an hour. Also that night we ate our last morsel of biltong. As yet, with the exception of the *pauw*, we had seen no living thing on the mountain, nor had we come across a single spring or stream of water, which struck us as very odd, considering the expanse of snow above us, which must, we thought, melt sometimes. But as we afterwards discovered, owing to a cause which it is quite beyond my power to explain, all the streams flowed down upon the north side of the mountains.

Now we began to grow very anxious about food. We had escaped death by thirst, but it seemed probable that it was only to die of hunger. The events of the next three miserable days are best described by copying the entries made at the time in my note-book.

"21st May.—Started 11 a.m., finding the atmosphere quite cold enough to travel by day, and carrying some water-melons with us. Struggled on all day, but found no more melons, having evidently passed out of their district. Saw no game of any sort. Halted for the night at sundown, having had no food for many hours. Suffered much during the night from cold.

"22nd.—Started at sunrise again, feeling very faint and weak. Only made about five miles all day; found some patches of snow, of which we ate, but nothing else. Camped at night under the edge of a great plateau. Cold bitter. Drank a little brandy each, and huddled ourselves together, each wrapped up in his blanket, to keep ourselves alive. Are now suffering frightfully from starvation and weariness. Thought that Ventvögel would have died during the night.

"23rd.—Struggled forward once more as soon as the sun was well up, and had thawed our limbs a little. We are now in a dreadful plight, and I fear that unless we get food this will be our last day's journey. But little brandy left. Good, Sir Henry, and Umbopa bear up wonderfully, but Ventvögel is in a very bad way. Like most Hottentots, he cannot stand cold. Pangs of hunger not so bad, but have a sort of numb feeling about the stomach. Others say the same. We are now on a level with the precipitous chain, or wall of lava, linking the two Breasts, and the view is glorious. Behind us the glowing desert rolls away to the horizon, and before us lie mile upon mile of smooth hard snow almost level, but swelling gently upwards, out of the centre of which the nipple of the mountain, that appears to be some miles in circumference, rises about four thousand feet into the sky. Not a living thing is to be seen. God help us; I fear that our time has come."

And now I will drop the journal, partly because it is not very interesting reading; also what follows requires telling rather more fully.

All that day—the 23rd May—we struggled slowly up the incline of snow, lying down from time to time to rest. A strange gaunt crew we must have looked, while, laden as we were, we dragged our weary feet over the dazzling plain, glaring round us with hungry eyes. Not that there was much use in glaring, for we could see nothing to eat. We did not accomplish more than seven miles that day. Just before sunset we found ourselves exactly under the nipple of Sheba's left Breast, which towered thousands of feet into the air, a vast smooth hillock of frozen snow. Weak as we were, we could not but appreciate the wonderful scene, made even more splendid by the flying rays of light from the setting sun, which here and there stained the snow blood-red, and crowned the great dome above us with a diadem of glory.

"I say," gasped Good, presently, "we ought to be somewhere near that cave the old gentleman wrote about."

"Yes," said I, "if there is a cave."

"Come, Quatermain," groaned Sir Henry, "don't talk like that; I have every faith in the Dom; remember the water! We shall find the place soon."

"If we don't find it before dark we are dead men, that is all about it," was my consolatory reply.

For the next ten minutes we trudged in silence, when suddenly Umbopa, who was marching along beside me, wrapped in his blanket, and with a leather belt strapped so tightly round his stomach, to "make his hunger small," as he said, that his waist looked like a girl's, caught me by the arm.

"Look!" he said, pointing towards the springing slope of the nipple.

I followed his glance, and some two hundred yards from us perceived what appeared to be a hole in the snow.

"It is the cave," said Umbopa.

We made the best of our way to the spot, and found sure enough that the hole was the mouth of a cavern, no doubt the same as that of which da Silvestra wrote. We were not too soon, for just as we reached shelter the sun went down with startling rapidity, leaving the world nearly dark, for in these latitudes there is but little twilight. So we crept into the cave, which did not appear to be very big, and huddling ourselves together for warmth, swallowed what remained of our brandy—barely a mouthful each—and tried to forget our miseries in sleep. But the cold was too intense to allow us to do so, for I am convinced that at this great altitude the thermometer cannot have marked less than fourteen or fifteen degrees below freezing point. What such a temperature meant to us, enervated as we were by hardship, want of food, and the great heat of the desert, the reader may imagine better than I can describe. Suffice it to say that it was something as near death from exposure as I have ever felt. There we sat hour after hour through the still and bitter night, feeling the frost wander round and nip us now in the finger, now in the foot, now in the face. In vain did we huddle up closer and closer; there was no warmth in our miserable starved carcasses. Sometimes one of us would drop into an uneasy slumber for a few minutes, but we could not sleep much, and perhaps this was fortunate, for if we had I doubt if we should have ever woken again. Indeed, I believe that it was only by force of will that we kept ourselves alive at all.

Not very long before dawn I heard the Hottentot Ventvögel, whose teeth had been chattering all night like castanets, give a deep sigh. Then his teeth stopped chattering. I did not think anything of it at the time, concluding that he had gone to sleep. His back was

resting against mine, and it seemed to grow colder and colder, till at last it felt like ice.

At length the air began to grow grey with light, then golden arrows sped across the snow, and at last the glorious sun peeped above the lava wall and looked in upon our half-frozen forms. Also it looked upon Ventvögel, sitting there amongst us, *stone dead*. No wonder his back felt cold, poor fellow. He had died when I heard him sigh, and was now frozen almost stiff. Shocked beyond measure, we dragged ourselves from the corpse—how strange is that horror we mortals have of the companionship of a dead body—and left it sitting there, its arms clasped about its knees.

By this time the sunlight was pouring its cold rays, for here they were cold, straight into the mouth of the cave. Suddenly I heard an exclamation of fear from someone, and turned my head.

And this is what I saw: Sitting at the end of the cavern—it was not more than twenty feet long—was another form, of which the head rested on its chest and the long arms hung down. I stared at it, and saw that this too was a *dead man*, and, what was more, a white man.

The others saw also, and the sight proved too much for our shattered nerves. One and all we scrambled out of the cave as fast as our half-frozen limbs would carry us.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SOLOMON'S ROAD

Outside the cavern we halted, feeling rather foolish.

"I am going back," said Sir Henry.

"Why?" asked Good.

"Because it has struck me that—what we saw—may be my brother."

This was a new idea, and we re-entered the place to put it to the proof. After the bright light outside, our eyes, weak as they were with staring at the snow, could not pierce the gloom of the cave for a while. Presently, however, they grew accustomed to the semi-darkness, and we advanced towards the dead man.

Sir Henry knelt down and peered into his face.

"Thank God," he said, with a sigh of relief, "it is *not* my brother."

Then I drew near and looked. The body was that of a tall man in middle life with aquiline features, grizzled hair, and a long black moustache. The skin was perfectly yellow, and stretched tightly over the bones. Its clothing, with the exception of what seemed to be the remains of a woollen pair of hose, had been removed, leaving the skeleton-like frame naked. Round the neck of the corpse, which was frozen perfectly stiff, hung a yellow ivory crucifix.

"Who on earth can it be?" said I.

"Can't you guess?" asked Good.

I shook my head.

"Why, the old Dom, José da Silvestra, of course—who else?"

"Impossible," I gasped; "he died three hundred years ago."

"And what is there to prevent him from lasting for three thousand years in this atmosphere, I should like to know?" asked Good. "If only the temperature is sufficiently low, flesh and blood will keep fresh as New Zealand mutton for ever, and Heaven knows it is cold enough here. The sun never gets in here; no animal comes here to tear or destroy. No doubt his slave, of whom he speaks on the writing, took off his clothes and left him. He could not have buried him alone. Look!" he went on, stooping down to pick up a queerly-shaped bone scraped at the end into a sharp point, "here is the 'cleft bone' that Silvestra used to draw the map with."

We gazed for a moment astonished, forgetting our own miseries in this extraordinary and, as it seemed to us, semi-miraculous sight.

"Ay," said Sir Henry, "and this is where he got his ink from," and he pointed to a small wound on the Dom's left arm. "Did ever man see such a thing before?"

There was no longer any doubt about the matter, which for my own part I confess perfectly appalled me. There he sat, the dead man, whose directions, written some ten generations ago, had led us to this spot. Here in my own hand was the rude pen with which he had written them, and about his neck hung the crucifix that his dying lips had kissed. Gazing at him, my imagination could reconstruct the last scene of the drama, the traveller dying of cold and starvation, yet striving to convey to the world the great secret which he had discovered:—the awful loneliness of his death, of which the evidence sat before us. It even seemed to me that I could trace in his strongly-marked features a likeness to those of my poor friend Silvestre his descendant, who had died twenty years before in my arms, but perhaps that was fancy. At any rate, there he sat, a sad memento of the fate that so often overtakes those who would penetrate into the unknown; and there doubtless he will still sit, crowned with the dread majesty of death, for centuries yet unborn, to startle the eyes of wanderers like ourselves, if ever any such should come again to invade his loneliness. The thing overpowered us, already almost perished as we were with cold and hunger.

"Let us go," said Sir Henry in a low voice; "stay, we will give him a companion," and lifting up the dead body of the Hottentot Ventvögel, he placed it near to that of the old Dom. Then he stooped, and with a jerk broke the rotten string of the crucifix which hung round da Silvestra's neck, for his fingers were too cold to attempt to unfasten it. I believe that he has it still. I took the bone pen, and it is before me as I write—sometimes I use it to sign my name.

Then leaving these two, the proud white man of a past age, and the poor Hottentot, to keep their eternal vigil in the midst of the eternal snows, we crept out of the cave into the welcome sunshine and resumed our path, wondering in our hearts how many hours it would be before we were even as they are.

When we had walked about half a mile we came to the edge of the plateau, for the nipple of the mountain does not rise out of its exact centre, though from the desert side it had seemed to do so. What lay below us we could not see, for the landscape was wreathed in billows of morning fog. Presently, however, the higher layers of mist cleared a little, and revealed, at the end of a long slope of snow, a patch of green grass, some five hundred yards beneath us, through which a stream was running. Nor was this all. By the stream, basking in the bright sun, stood and lay a group of from ten to fifteen *large antelopes*—at that distance we could not see of what species.

The sight filled us with an unreasoning joy. If only we could get it, there was food in plenty. But the question was how to do so. The beasts were fully six hundred yards off, a very long shot, and one not to be depended on when our lives hung on the results.

Rapidly we discussed the advisability of trying to stalk the game, but in the end dismissed it reluctantly. To begin with, the wind was not favourable, and further, we must certainly be perceived, however careful we were, against the blinding background of snow, which we should be obliged to traverse.

"Well, we must have a try from where we are," said Sir Henry. "Which shall it be, Quatermain, the repeating rifles or the expresses?"

Here again was a question. The Winchester repeaters—of which we had two, Umbopa carrying poor Ventvögel's as well as his own—were sighted up to a thousand yards, whereas the expresses were only sighted to three hundred and fifty, beyond which distance shooting with them was more or less guess-work. On the other hand, if they did hit, the express bullets, being "expanding," were much more likely to bring the game down. It was a knotty point, but I made up my mind that we must risk it and use the expresses.

"Let each of us take the buck opposite to him. Aim well at the point of the shoulder and high up," said I; "and Umbopa, do you give the word, so that we may all fire together."

Then came a pause, each of us aiming his level best, as indeed a man is likely to do when he knows that life itself depends upon the shot.

"Fire," said Umbopa in Zulu, and at almost the same instant the three rifles rang out loudly; three clouds of smoke hung for a moment before us, and a hundred echoes went flying over the silent snow. Presently the smoke cleared, and revealed—oh, joy!—a great buck lying on its back and kicking furiously in its death agony. We gave a yell of triumph—we were saved—we should not starve. Weak as we were, we rushed down the intervening slope of snow, and in ten minutes from the time of shooting, that animal's heart and liver were lying before us. But now a new difficulty arose, we had no fuel, and therefore could make no fire to cook them. We gazed at each other in dismay.

"Starving men should not be fanciful," said Good; "we must eat raw meat."

There was no other way out of the dilemma, and our gnawing hunger made the proposition less distasteful than it would otherwise have been. So we took the heart and liver and buried them for a few minutes in a patch of snow to cool them. Then we washed them in the ice-cold water of the stream, and lastly ate them greedily. It sounds horrible enough, but honestly, I never tasted anything so good as that raw meat. In a quarter of an hour we were changed men. Our life and vigour came back to us, our feeble pulses grew strong again, and the blood went coursing through our veins. But mindful of the results of over-feeding on starved stomachs, we were careful not to eat too much, stopping whilst we were still hungry.

"Thank Heaven!" said Sir Henry; "that brute has saved our lives. What is it, Quatermain?"

I rose and went to look at the antelope, for I was not certain. It was about the size of a donkey, with large curved horns. I had never seen one like it before; the species was new to me. It was brown in colour, with faint red stripes, and grew a thick coat. I afterwards discovered that the natives of that wonderful country call these bucks "*inco*." They are very rare, and only found at a great altitude where no other game will live. This animal was fairly hit high up in the shoulder, though whose bullet brought it down we could not, of course, discover. I believe that Good, mindful of his marvellous shot at the giraffe, secretly set it down to his own prowess, and we did not contradict him.

We had been so busy satisfying our hunger that hitherto we had not found time to look about us. But now, having set Umbopa to cut off as much of the best meat as we were likely to be able to carry, we began to inspect our surroundings. The mist had cleared away, for it was eight o'clock, and the sun had sucked it up, so we were able to take in all the country before us at a glance. I know not how to describe the glorious panorama which unfolded itself to our gaze. I have never seen anything like it before, nor shall, I suppose, again.

Behind and over us towered Sheba's snowy Breasts, and below, some five thousand feet beneath where we stood, lay league on league of the most lovely champaign country. Here were dense patches of lofty forest, there a great river wound its silvery way. To the left stretched a vast expanse of rich, undulating veld or grass land, whereon we could just make out countless herds of game or cattle, at that distance we could not tell which. This expanse appeared to be ringed in by a wall of distant mountains. To the right the country was more or less mountainous; that is, solitary hills stood up from its level, with stretches of cultivated land between, amongst which we could see groups of dome-shaped huts. The landscape lay before us as a map, wherein rivers flashed like silver snakes, and Alp-like peaks crowned with wildly twisted snow wreaths rose in grandeur, whilst over all was the glad sunlight and the breath of Nature's happy life.

Two curious things struck us as we gazed. First, that the country before us must lie at least three thousand feet higher than the desert we had crossed, and secondly, that all the rivers flowed from south to north. As we had painful reason to know, there was no water upon the southern side of the vast range on which we stood, but on the northern face were many streams, most of which appeared to unite with the great river we could see winding away farther than our eyes could follow.

We sat down for a while and gazed in silence at this wonderful view. Presently Sir Henry spoke.

"Isn't there something on the map about Solomon's Great Road?" he said.

I nodded, for I was still gazing out over the far country.

"Well, look; there it is!" and he pointed a little to our right.

Good and I looked accordingly, and there, winding away towards the plain, was what appeared to be a wide turnpike road. We had not seen it at first because, on reaching the plain, it turned behind some broken country. We did not say anything, at least, not much; we were beginning to lose the sense of wonder. Somehow it did not seem particularly unnatural that we should find a sort of Roman road in this strange land. We accepted the fact, that was all.

"Well," said Good, "it must be quite near us if we cut off to the right. Hadn't we better be making a start?"

This was sound advice, and so soon as we had washed our faces and hands in the stream we acted on it. For a mile or more we made our way over boulders and across patches of snow, till suddenly, on reaching the top of the little rise, we found the road at our feet. It was a splendid road cut out of the solid rock, at least fifty feet wide, and apparently well kept; though the odd thing was that it seemed to begin there. We walked down and stood on it, but one single hundred paces behind us, in the direction of Sheba's Breasts, it vanished, the entire surface of the mountain being strewn with boulders interspersed with patches of snow.

"What do you make of this, Quatermain?" asked Sir Henry.

I shook my head, I could make nothing of the thing.

"I have it!" said Good; "the road no doubt ran right over the range and across the desert on the other side, but the sand there has covered it up, and above us it has been obliterated by some volcanic eruption of molten lava."

This seemed a good suggestion; at any rate, we accepted it, and proceeded down the mountain. It proved a very different business travelling along down hill on that magnificent pathway with full stomachs from what it was travelling uphill over the snow quite starved and almost frozen. Indeed, had it not been for melancholy recollections of poor Ventvögel's sad fate, and of that grim cave where he kept company with the old Dom, we should have felt positively cheerful, notwithstanding the sense of unknown dangers before us. Every mile we walked the atmosphere grew softer and balmier, and the country before us shone with a yet more luminous beauty. As for the road itself, I never saw such an engineering work, though Sir Henry said that the great road over the St. Gothard in Switzerland is very similar. No difficulty had been too great for the Old World engineer who laid it out. At one place we came to a ravine three hundred feet broad and at least a hundred feet deep. This vast gulf was actually filled in with huge blocks of dressed stone, having arches pierced through them at the bottom for a waterway, over which the road went on sublimely. At another place it was cut in zigzags out of the side of a precipice five hundred feet deep, and in a third it tunnelled through the base of an intervening ridge, a space of thirty yards or more.

Here we noticed that the sides of the tunnel were covered with quaint sculptures, mostly of mailed figures driving in chariots. One, which was exceedingly beautiful, represented a whole battle scene with a convoy of captives being marched off in the distance.

"Well," said Sir Henry, after inspecting this ancient work of art, "it is very well to call this Solomon's Road, but my humble opinion is that the Egyptians had been here before Solomon's people ever set a foot on it. If this isn't Egyptian or Phoenician handiwork, I must say that it is very like it."

By midday we had advanced sufficiently down the mountain to search the region where wood was to be met with. First we came to scattered bushes which grew more and more frequent, till at last we found the road winding through a vast grove of silver trees similar to those which are to be seen on the slopes of Table Mountain at Cape Town. I had never before met with them in all my wanderings, except at the Cape, and their appearance here astonished me greatly.

"Ah!" said Good, surveying these shining-leaved trees with evident enthusiasm, "here is lots of wood, let us stop and cook some dinner; I have about digested that raw heart."

Nobody objected to this, so leaving the road we made our way to a stream which was babbling away not far off, and soon had a goodly fire of dry boughs blazing. Cutting off some substantial hunks from the flesh of the *inco* which we had brought with us, we proceeded to toast them on the end of sharp sticks, as one sees the Kafirs do, and ate them with relish. After filling ourselves, we lit our pipes and gave ourselves up to enjoyment that, compared with the hardships we had recently undergone, seemed almost heavenly.

The brook, of which the banks were clothed with dense masses of a gigantic species of maidenhair fern interspersed with feathery tufts of wild asparagus, sung merrily at our side, the soft air murmured through the leaves of the silver trees, doves cooed around, and bright-winged birds flashed like living gems from bough to bough. It was a Paradise.

The magic of the place combined with an overwhelming sense of dangers left behind, and of the promised land reached at last, seemed to charm us into silence. Sir Henry and Umbopa sat conversing in a mixture of broken English and Kitchen Zulu in a low voice, but earnestly enough, and I lay, with my eyes half shut, upon that fragrant bed of fern and watched them.

Presently I missed Good, and I looked to see what had become of him. Soon I observed him sitting by the bank of the stream, in which he had been bathing. He had nothing on but his flannel shirt, and his natural habits of extreme neatness having reasserted themselves, he was actively employed in making a most elaborate toilet. He had washed his gutta-percha collar, had thoroughly shaken out his trousers, coat and waistcoat, and was now folding them up neatly till he was ready to put them on, shaking his head sadly as he scanned the numerous rents and tears in them, which naturally had resulted from our frightful journey. Then he took his boots, scrubbed them with a handful of fern, and finally rubbed them over with a piece of fat, which he had carefully saved from the *inco* meat, till they looked, comparatively speaking, respectable. Having inspected them judiciously through his eye-glass, he put the boots on and began a fresh operation. From a little bag that he carried he produced a pocket-comb in which was fixed a tiny looking-glass, and in this he surveyed himself. Apparently he was not satisfied, for he proceeded to do his hair with great care. Then came a pause whilst he again contemplated the effect; still it was not satisfactory. He felt his chin, on which the accumulated scrub of a ten days' beard was flourishing.

"Surely," thought I, "he is not going to try to shave." But so it was. Taking the piece of fat with which he had greased his boots, Good washed it thoroughly in the stream. Then diving again into the bag he brought out a little pocket razor with a guard to it, such as are bought by people who are afraid of cutting themselves, or by those about to undertake a sea voyage. Then he rubbed his face and chin vigorously with the fat and began. Evidently it proved a painful process, for he groaned very much over it, and I was convulsed with inward laughter as I watched him struggling with that stubbly beard. It seemed so very odd that a man should take the trouble to shave himself with a piece of fat in such a place and in our circumstances. At last he succeeded in getting the hair off the right side of his face and chin, when suddenly I, who was watching, became conscious of a flash of light that passed just by his head.

Good sprang up with a profane exclamation (if it had not been a safety razor he would certainly have cut his throat), and so did I, without the exclamation, and this was what I saw. Standing not more than twenty paces from where I was, and ten from Good, were a group of men. They were very tall and copper-coloured, and some of them wore great plumes of black feathers and short cloaks of leopard skins; this was all I noticed at the moment. In front of them stood a youth of about seventeen, his hand still raised and his body bent forward in the attitude of a Grecian statue of a spear-thrower. Evidently the flash of light had been caused by a weapon which he had hurled.

As I looked an old soldier-like man stepped forward out of the group, and catching the youth by the arm said something to him. Then they advanced upon us.

Sir Henry, Good, and Umbopa by this time had seized their rifles and lifted them threateningly. The party of natives still came on. It struck me that they could not know what rifles were, or they would not have treated them with such contempt.

"Put down your guns!" I halloed to the others, seeing that our only chance of safety lay in conciliation. They obeyed, and walking to the front I addressed the elderly man who had checked the youth.

"Greeting," I said in Zulu, not knowing what language to use. To my surprise I was understood.

"Greeting," answered the old man, not, indeed, in the same tongue, but in a dialect so closely allied to it that neither Umbopa nor myself had any difficulty in understanding him. Indeed, as we afterwards found out, the language spoken by this people is an old-

fashioned form of the Zulu tongue, bearing about the same relationship to it that the English of Chaucer does to the English of the nineteenth century.

"Whence come you?" he went on, "who are you? and why are the faces of three of you white, and the face of the fourth as the face of our mother's sons?" and he pointed to Umbopa. I looked at Umbopa as he said it, and it flashed across me that he was right. The face of Umbopa was like the faces of the men before me, and so was his great form like their forms. But I had not time to reflect on this coincidence.

"We are strangers, and come in peace," I answered, speaking very slowly, so that he might understand me, "and this man is our servant."

"You lie," he answered; "no strangers can cross the mountains where all things perish. But what do your lies matter?—if ye are strangers then ye must die, for no strangers may live in the land of the Kukuanas. It is the king's law. Prepare then to die, O strangers!"

I was slightly staggered at this, more especially as I saw the hands of some of the men steal down to their sides, where hung on each what looked to me like a large and heavy knife.

"What does that beggar say?" asked Good.

"He says we are going to be killed," I answered grimly.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Good; and, as was his way when perplexed, he put his hand to his false teeth, dragging the top set down and allowing them to fly back to his jaw with a snap. It was a most fortunate move, for next second the dignified crowd of Kukuanas uttered a simultaneous yell of horror, and bolted back some yards.

"What's up?" said I.

"It's his teeth," whispered Sir Henry excitedly. "He moved them. Take them out, Good, take them out!"

He obeyed, slipping the set into the sleeve of his flannel shirt.

In another second curiosity had overcome fear, and the men advanced slowly. Apparently they had now forgotten their amiable intention of killing us.

"How is it, O strangers," asked the old man solemnly, "that this fat man (pointing to Good, who was clad in nothing but boots and a flannel shirt, and had only half finished his shaving), whose body is clothed, and whose legs are bare, who grows hair on one side of his sickly face and not on the other, and who wears one shining and transparent eye—how is it, I ask, that he has teeth which move of themselves, coming away from the jaws and returning of their own will?"

"Open your mouth," I said to Good, who promptly curled up his lips and grinned at the old gentleman like an angry dog, revealing to his astonished gaze two thin red lines of gum as utterly innocent of ivories as a new-born elephant. The audience gasped.

"Where are his teeth?" they shouted; "with our eyes we saw them."

Turning his head slowly and with a gesture of ineffable contempt, Good swept his hand across his mouth. Then he grinned again, and lo, there were two rows of lovely teeth.

Now the young man who had flung the knife threw himself down on the grass and gave vent to a prolonged howl of terror; and as for the old gentleman, his knees knocked together with fear.

"I see that ye are spirits," he said falteringly; "did ever man born of woman have hair on one side of his face and not on the other, or a round and transparent eye, or teeth which moved and melted away and grew again? Pardon us, O my lords."

Here was luck indeed, and, needless to say, I jumped at the chance.

"It is granted," I said with an imperial smile. "Nay, ye shall know the truth. We come from another world, though we are men such as ye; we come," I went on, "from the biggest star that shines at night."

"Oh! oh!" groaned the chorus of astonished aborigines.

"Yes," I went on, "we do, indeed"; and again I smiled benignly, as I uttered that amazing lie. "We come to stay with you a little while, and to bless you by our sojourn. Ye will see, O friends, that I have prepared myself for this visit by the learning of your language."

"It is so, it is so," said the chorus.

"Only, my lord," put in the old gentleman, "thou hast learnt it very badly."

I cast an indignant glance at him, and he quailed.

"Now friends," I continued, "ye might think that after so long a journey we should find it in our hearts to avenge such a reception, mayhap to strike cold in death the imperious hand that—that, in short—threw a knife at the head of him whose teeth come and go."

"Spare him, my lords," said the old man in supplication; "he is the king's son, and I am his uncle. If anything befalls him his blood will be required at my hands."

"Yes, that is certainly so," put in the young man with great emphasis.

"Ye may perhaps doubt our power to avenge," I went on, heedless of this by-play. "Stay, I will show you. Here, thou dog and slave (addressing Umbopa in a savage tone), give me the magic tube that speaks"; and I tipped a wink towards my express rifle.

Umbopa rose to the occasion, and with something as nearly resembling a grin as I have ever seen on his dignified face he handed me the gun.

"It is here, O Lord of Lords," he said with a deep obeisance.

Now just before I had asked for the rifle I had perceived a little *klipspringer* antelope standing on a mass of rock about seventy yards away, and determined to risk the shot.

"Ye see that buck," I said, pointing the animal out to the party before me. "Tell me, is it possible for man born of woman to kill it from here with a noise?"

"It is not possible, my lord," answered the old man.

"Yet shall I kill it," I said quietly.

The old man smiled. "That my lord cannot do," he answered.

I raised the rifle and covered the buck. It was a small animal, and one which a man might well be excused for missing, but I knew that it would not do to miss.

I drew a deep breath, and slowly pressed on the trigger. The buck stood still as a stone.

"Bang! thud!" The antelope sprang into the air and fell on the rock dead as a door nail.

A groan of simultaneous terror burst from the group before us.

"If you want meat," I remarked coolly, "go fetch that buck."

The old man made a sign, and one of his followers departed, and presently returned bearing the *klipspringer*. I noticed with satisfaction that I had hit it fairly behind the shoulder. They gathered round the poor creature's body, gazing at the bullet-hole in consternation.

"Ye see," I said, "I do not speak empty words."

There was no answer.

"If ye yet doubt our power," I went on, "let one of you go stand upon that rock that I may make him as this buck."

None of them seemed at all inclined to take the hint, till at last the king's son spoke.

"It is well said. Do thou, my uncle, go stand upon the rock. It is but a buck that the magic has killed. Surely it cannot kill a man."

The old gentleman did not take the suggestion in good part. Indeed, he seemed hurt.

"No! no!" he ejaculated hastily, "my old eyes have seen enough. These are wizards, indeed. Let us bring them to the king. Yet if any should wish a further proof, let *him* stand upon the rock, that the magic tube may speak with him."

There was a most general and hasty expression of dissent.

"Let not good magic be wasted on our poor bodies," said one; "we are satisfied. All the witchcraft of our people cannot show the like of this."

"It is so," remarked the old gentleman, in a tone of intense relief; "without any doubt it is so. Listen, children of the Stars, children of the shining Eye and the movable Teeth, who roar out in thunder, and slay from afar. I am Infadoos, son of Kafa, once king of the Kukuana people. This youth is Scragga."

"He nearly scragged me," murmured Good.

"Scragga, son of Twala, the great king—Twala, husband of a thousand wives, chief and lord paramount of the Kukuanas, keeper of the great Road, terror of his enemies, student of the Black Arts, leader of a hundred thousand warriors, Twala the One-eyed, the Black, the Terrible."

"So," said I superciliously, "lead us then to Twala. We do not talk with low people and underlings."

"It is well, my lords, we will lead you; but the way is long. We are hunting three days' journey from the place of the king. But let my lords have patience, and we will lead them."

"So be it," I said carelessly; "all time is before us, for we do not die. We are ready, lead on. But Infadoos, and thou Scragga, beware! Play us no monkey tricks, set for us no foxes' snares, for before your brains of mud have thought of them we shall know and avenge. The light of the transparent eye of him with the bare legs and the half-haired face shall destroy you, and go through your land; his vanishing teeth shall affix themselves fast in you and eat you up, you and your wives and children; the magic tubes shall argue with you loudly, and make you as sieves. Beware!"

This magnificent address did not fail of its effect; indeed, it might almost have been spared, so deeply were our friends already impressed with our powers.

The old man made a deep obeisance, and murmured the words, "*Koom Koom*," which I afterwards discovered was their royal salute, corresponding to the *Bayéte* of the Zulus, and turning, addressed his followers. These at once proceeded to lay hold of all our goods and chattels, in order to bear them for us, excepting only the guns, which they would on no account touch. They even seized Good's clothes, that, as the reader may remember, were neatly folded up beside him.

He saw and made a dive for them, and a loud altercation ensued.

"Let not my lord of the transparent Eye and the melting Teeth touch them," said the old man. "Surely his slave shall carry the things."

"But I want to put 'em on!" roared Good, in nervous English.

Umbopa translated.

"Nay, my lord," answered Infadoos, "would my lord cover up his beautiful white legs (although he is so dark Good has a singularly white skin) from the eyes of his servants? Have we offended my lord that he should do such a thing?"

Here I nearly exploded with laughing; and meanwhile one of the men started on with the garments.

"Damn it!" roared Good, "that black villain has got my trousers."

"Look here, Good," said Sir Henry; "you have appeared in this country in a certain character, and you must live up to it. It will never do for you to put on trousers again. Henceforth you must exist in a flannel shirt, a pair of boots, and an eye-glass."

"Yes," I said, "and with whiskers on one side of your face and not on the other. If you change any of these things the people will think that we are impostors. I am very sorry for you, but, seriously, you must. If once they begin to suspect us our lives will not be worth a brass farthing."

"Do you really think so?" said Good gloomily.

"I do, indeed. Your 'beautiful white legs' and your eye-glass are now *the* features of our party, and as Sir Henry says, you must live up to them. Be thankful that you have got your boots on, and that the air is warm."

Good sighed, and said no more, but it took him a fortnight to become accustomed to his new and scant attire.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WE ENTER KUKUANALAND

All that afternoon we travelled along the magnificent roadway, which trended steadily in a north-westerly direction. Infadoos and Scragga walked with us, but their followers marched about one hundred paces ahead.

"Infadoos," I said at length, "who made this road?"

"It was made, my lord, of old time, none know how or when, not even the wise woman Gagool, who has lived for generations. We are not old enough to remember its making. None can fashion such roads now, but the king suffers no grass to grow upon it."

"And whose are the writings on the wall of the caves through which we have passed on the road?" I asked, referring to the Egyptian-like sculptures that we had seen.

"My lord, the hands that made the road wrote the wonderful writings. We know not who wrote them."

"When did the Kukuana people come into this country?"

"My lord, the race came down here like the breath of a storm ten thousand thousand moons ago, from the great lands which lie there beyond," and he pointed to the north. "They could travel no further because of the high mountains which ring in the land, so say the old voices of our fathers that have descended to us the children, and so says Gagool, the wise woman, the smellier out of witches," and again he pointed to the snow-clad peaks. "The country, too, was good, so they settled here and grew strong and powerful, and now our numbers are like the sea sand, and when Twala the king calls up his regiments their plumes cover the plain so far as the eye of man can reach."

"And if the land is walled in with mountains, who is there for the regiments to fight with?"

"Nay, my lord, the country is open there towards the north, and now and again warriors sweep down upon us in clouds from a land we know not, and we slay them. It is the third part of the life of a man since there was a war. Many thousands died in it, but we destroyed those who came to eat us up. So since then there has been no war."

"Your warriors must grow weary of resting on their spears, Infadoos."

"My lord, there was one war, just after we destroyed the people that came down upon us, but it was a civil war; dog ate dog."

"How was that?"

"My lord the king, my half-brother, had a brother born at the same birth, and of the same woman. It is not our custom, my lord, to suffer twins to live; the weaker must always die. But the mother of the king hid away the feeblar child, which was born the last, for her heart yearned over it, and that child is Twala the king. I am his younger brother, born of another wife."

"Well?"

"My lord, Kafa, our father, died when we came to manhood, and my brother Imotu was made king in his place, and for a space reigned and had a son by his favourite wife. When the babe was three years old, just after the great war, during which no man could sow or reap, a famine came upon the land, and the people murmured because of the famine, and looked round like a starved lion for something to rend. Then it was that Gagool, the wise and terrible woman, who does not die, made a proclamation to the people, saying, 'The king Imotu is no king.' And at the time Imotu was sick with a wound, and lay in his kraal not able to move.

"Then Gagool went into a hut and led out Twala, my half-brother, and twin brother to the king, whom she had hidden among the caves and rocks since he was born, and stripping the 'moocha' (waist-cloth) off his loins, showed the people of the Kukuanas the mark of the sacred snake coiled round his middle, wherewith the eldest son of the king is marked at birth, and cried out loud, 'Behold your king whom I have saved for you even to this day!'

"Now the people being mad with hunger, and altogether bereft of reason and the knowledge of truth, cried out—'*The king! The king!*' but I knew that it was not so, for Imotu my brother was the elder of the twins, and our lawful king. Then just as the tumult was at its height Imotu the king, though he was very sick, crawled from his hut holding his wife by the hand, and followed by his little son Ignosi—that is, by interpretation, the Lightning.

"What is this noise?" he asked. 'Why cry ye *The king! The king!*'

"Then Twala, his twin brother, born of the same woman, and in the same hour, ran to him, and taking him by the hair, stabbed him through the heart with his knife. And the people being fickle, and ever ready to worship the rising sun, clapped their hands and cried, '*Twala is king!* Now we know that Twala is king!'"

"And what became of Imotu's wife and her son Ignosi? Did Twala kill them too?"

"Nay, my lord. When she saw that her lord was dead the queen seized the child with a cry and ran away. Two days afterward she came to a kraal very hungry, and none would give her milk or food, now that her lord the king was dead, for all men hate the unfortunate. But at nightfall a little child, a girl, crept out and brought her corn to eat, and she blessed the child, and went on towards the mountains with her boy before the sun rose again, and there she must have perished, for none have seen her since, nor the child Ignosi."

"Then if this child Ignosi had lived he would be the true king of the Kukuana people?"

"That is so, my lord; the sacred snake is round his middle. If he lives he is king; but, alas! he is long dead."

"See, my lord," and Infadoos pointed to a vast collection of huts surrounded by a fence, which was in its turn encircled by a great ditch, that lay on the plain beneath us. "That is the kraal where the wife of Imotu was last seen with the child Ignosi. It is there that

we shall sleep to-night, if, indeed," he added doubtfully, "my lords sleep at all upon this earth."

"When we are among the Kukuanas, my good friend Infadoos, we do as the Kukuanas do," I said majestically, and turned round quickly to address Good, who was tramping along sullenly behind, his mind fully occupied with unsatisfactory attempts to prevent his flannel shirt from flapping in the evening breeze. To my astonishment I butted into Umbopa, who was walking along immediately behind me, and very evidently had been listening with the greatest interest to my conversation with Infadoos. The expression on his face was most curious, and gave me the idea of a man who was struggling with partial success to bring something long ago forgotten back into his mind.

All this while we had been pressing on at a good rate towards the undulating plain beneath us. The mountains we had crossed now loomed high above our heads, and Sheba's Breasts were veiled modestly in diaphanous wreaths of mist. As we went the country grew more and more lovely. The vegetation was luxuriant, without being tropical; the sun was bright and warm, but not burning; and a gracious breeze blew softly along the odorous slopes of the mountains. Indeed, this new land was little less than an earthly paradise; in beauty, in natural wealth, and in climate I have never seen its like. The Transvaal is a fine country, but it is nothing to Kukuana-land.

So soon as we started Infadoos had despatched a runner to warn the people of the kraal, which, by the way, was in his military command, of our arrival. This man had departed at an extraordinary speed, which Infadoos informed me he would keep up all the way, as running was an exercise much practised among his people.

The result of this message now became apparent. When we arrived within two miles of the kraal we could see that company after company of men were issuing from its gates and marching towards us.

Sir Henry laid his hand upon my arm, and remarked that it looked as though we were going to meet with a warm reception. Something in his tone attracted Infadoos' attention.

"Let not my lords be afraid," he said hastily, "for in my breast there dwells no guile. This regiment is one under my command, and comes out by my orders to greet you."

I nodded easily, though I was not quite easy in my mind.

About half a mile from the gates of this kraal is a long stretch of rising ground sloping gently upwards from the road, and here the companies formed. It was a splendid sight to see them, each company about three hundred strong, charging swiftly up the rise, with flashing spears and waving plumes, to take their appointed place. By the time we reached the slope twelve such companies, or in all three thousand six hundred men, had passed out and taken up their positions along the road.

Presently we came to the first company, and were able to gaze in astonishment on the most magnificent set of warriors that I have ever seen. They were all men of mature age, mostly veterans of about forty, and not one of them was under six feet in height, whilst many stood six feet three or four. They wore upon their heads heavy black plumes of Sakaboola feathers, like those which adorned our guides. About their waists and beneath the right knees were bound circlets of white ox tails, while in their left hands they carried round shields measuring about twenty inches across. These shields are very curious. The framework is made of an iron plate beaten out thin, over which is stretched milk-white ox-hide.

The weapons that each man bore were simple, but most effective, consisting of a short and very heavy two-edged spear with a wooden shaft, the blade being about six inches across at the widest part. These spears are not used for throwing but like the Zulu "*bangwan*," or stabbing assegai, are for close quarters only, when the wound inflicted by them is terrible. In addition to his *bangwan* every man carried three large and heavy knives, each knife weighing about two pounds. One knife was fixed in the ox-tail girdle, and the other two at the back of the round shield. These knives, which are called "*tollos*" by the Kukuanas, take the place of the throwing assegai of the Zulus. The Kukuana warriors can cast them with great accuracy to a distance of fifty yards, and it is their custom on charging to hurl a volley of them at the enemy as they come to close quarters.

Each company remained still as a collection of bronze statues till we were opposite to it, when at a signal given by its commanding officer, who, distinguished by a leopard skin cloak, stood some paces in front, every spear was raised into the air, and from three hundred throats sprang forth with a sudden roar the royal salute of "*Koom*." Then, so soon as we had passed, the company formed up behind us and followed us towards the kraal, till at last the whole regiment of the "Greys"—so called from their white shields—the crack corps of the Kukuana people, was marching in our rear with a tread that shook the ground.

At length, branching off from Solomon's Great Road, we came to the wide fosse surrounding the kraal, which is at least a mile round, and fenced with a strong palisade of piles formed of the trunks of trees. At the gateway this fosse is spanned by a primitive drawbridge, which was let down by the guard to allow us to pass in. The kraal is exceedingly well laid out. Through the centre runs a wide pathway intersected at right angles by other pathways so arranged as to cut the huts into square blocks, each block being the quarters of a company. The huts are dome-shaped, and built, like those of the Zulus, of a framework of wattle, beautifully thatched with grass; but, unlike the Zulu huts, they have doorways through which men could walk. Also they are much larger, and surrounded by a verandah about six feet wide, beautifully paved with powdered lime trodden hard.

All along each side of this wide pathway that pierces the kraal were ranged hundreds of women, brought out by curiosity to look at us. These women, for a native race, are exceedingly handsome. They are tall and graceful, and their figures are wonderfully fine. The hair, though short, is rather curly than woolly, the features are frequently aquiline, and the lips are not unpleasantly thick, as is the case among most African races. But what struck us most was their exceedingly quiet and dignified air. They were as well-bred in their way as the *habituées* of a fashionable drawing-room, and in this respect they differ from Zulu women and their cousins the Masai who inhabit the district beyond Zanzibar. Their curiosity had brought them out to see us, but they allowed no rude expressions of astonishment or savage criticism to pass their lips as we trudged wearily in front of them. Not even when old Infadoos with a surreptitious motion of the hand pointed out the crowning wonder of poor Good's "beautiful white legs," did they suffer the feeling of intense admiration which evidently mastered their minds to find expression. They fixed their dark eyes upon this new and snowy loveliness, for, as I think I have said, Good's skin is exceedingly white, and that was all. But it was quite enough for Good, who is modest by nature.

When we reached the centre of the kraal, Infadoos halted at the door of a large hut, which was surrounded at a distance by a circle of smaller ones.

"Enter, Sons of the Stars," he said, in a magniloquent voice, "and deign to rest awhile in our humble habitations. A little food shall be brought to you, so that ye may have no need to draw your belts tight from hunger; some honey and some milk, and an ox or two, and a few sheep; not much, my lords, but still a little food."

"It is good," said I. "Infadoos; we are weary with travelling through realms of air; now let us rest."

Accordingly we entered the hut, which we found amply prepared for our comfort. Couches of tanned skins were spread for us to lie on, and water was placed for us to wash in.

Presently we heard a shouting outside, and stepping to the door, saw a line of damsels bearing milk and roasted mealies, and honey in a pot. Behind these were some youths driving a fat young ox. We received the gifts, and then one of the young men drew the knife from his girdle and dexterously cut the ox's throat. In ten minutes it was dead, skinned, and jointed. The best of the meat was then cut off for us, and the rest, in the name of our party, I presented to the warriors round us, who took it and distributed the "white lords' gift."

Umbopa set to work, with the assistance of an extremely prepossessing young woman, to boil our portion in a large earthenware pot over a fire which was built outside the hut, and when it was nearly ready we sent a message to Infadoos, and asked him and Scragga, the king's son, to join us.

Presently they came, and sitting down upon little stools, of which there were several about the hut, for the Kukuanas do not in general squat upon their haunches like the Zulus, they helped us to get through our dinner. The old gentleman was most affable and polite, but it struck me that the young one regarded us with doubt. Together with the rest of the party, he had been overawed by our white appearance and by our magic properties; but it seemed to me that, on discovering that we ate, drank, and slept like other mortals, his awe was beginning to wear off, and to be replaced by a sullen suspicion—which made me feel rather uncomfortable.

In the course of our meal Sir Henry suggested to me that it might be well to try to discover if our hosts knew anything of his brother's fate, or if they had ever seen or heard of him; but, on the whole, I thought that it would be wiser to say nothing of the matter at this time. It was difficult to explain a relative lost from "the Stars."

After supper we produced our pipes and lit them; a proceeding which filled Infadoos and Scragga with astonishment. The Kukuanas were evidently unacquainted with the divine delights of tobacco-smoke. The herb is grown among them extensively; but, like the Zulus, they use it for snuff only, and quite failed to identify it in its new form.

Presently I asked Infadoos when we were to proceed on our journey, and was delighted to learn that preparations had been made for us to leave on the following morning, messengers having already departed to inform Twala the king of our coming.

It appeared that Twala was at his principal place, known as Loo, making ready for the great annual feast which was to be held in the first week of June. At this gathering all the regiments, with the exception of certain detachments left behind for garrison purposes, are brought up and paraded before the king; and the great annual witch-hunt, of which more by-and-by, is held.

We were to start at dawn; and Infadoos, who was to accompany us, expected that we should reach Loo on the night of the second day, unless we were detained by accident or by swollen rivers.

When they had given us this information our visitors bade us good-night; and, having arranged to watch turn and turn about, three of us flung ourselves down and slept the sweet sleep of the weary, whilst the fourth sat up on the look-out for possible treachery.

## CHAPTER IX.

### TWALA THE KING

It will not be necessary for me to detail at length the incidents of our journey to Loo. It took two full days' travelling along Solomon's Great Road, which pursued its even course right into the heart of Kukuanaland. Suffice it to say that as we went the country seemed to grow richer and richer, and the kraals, with their wide surrounding belts of cultivation, more and more numerous. They were all built upon the same principles as the first camp which we had reached, and were guarded by ample garrisons of troops. Indeed, in Kukuanaland, as among the Germans, the Zulus, and the Masai, every able-bodied man is a soldier, so that the whole force of the nation is available for its wars, offensive or defensive. As we travelled we were overtaken by thousands of warriors hurrying up to Loo to be present at the great annual review and festival, and more splendid troops I never saw.

At sunset on the second day, we stopped to rest awhile upon the summit of some heights over which the road ran, and there on a beautiful and fertile plain before us lay Loo itself. For a native town it is an enormous place, quite five miles round, I should say, with outlying kraals projecting from it, that serve on grand occasions as cantonments for the regiments, and a curious horseshoe-shaped hill, with which we were destined to become better acquainted, about two miles to the north. It is beautifully situated, and through the centre of the kraal, dividing it into two portions, runs a river, which appeared to be bridged in several places, the same indeed that we had seen from the slopes of Sheba's Breasts. Sixty or seventy miles away three great snow-capped mountains, placed at the points of a triangle, started out of the level plain. The conformation of these mountains is unlike that of Sheba's Breasts, being sheer and precipitous, instead of smooth and rounded.

Infadoos saw us looking at them, and volunteered a remark.

"The road ends there," he said, pointing to the mountains known among the Kukuanas as the "Three Witches."

"Why does it end?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he answered with a shrug; "the mountains are full of caves, and there is a great pit between them. It is there that the wise men of old time used to go to get whatever it was they came for to this country, and it is there now that our kings are buried in the Place of Death."

"What was it they came for?" I asked eagerly.

"Nay, I know not. My lords who have dropped from the Stars should know," he answered with a quick look. Evidently he knew more than he chose to say.

"Yes," I went on, "you are right, in the Stars we learn many things. I have heard, for instance, that the wise men of old came to these mountains to find bright stones, pretty playthings, and yellow iron."

"My lord is wise," he answered coldly; "I am but a child and cannot talk with my lord on such matters. My lord must speak with Gagool the old, at the king's place, who is wise even as my lord," and he went away.

So soon as he was gone I turned to the others, and pointed out the mountains. "There are Solomon's diamond mines," I said.

Umbopa was standing with them, apparently plunged in one of the fits of abstraction which were common to him, and caught my words.

"Yes, Macumazahn," he put in, in Zulu, "the diamonds are surely there, and you shall have them, since you white men are so fond of toys and money."

"How dost thou know that, Umbopa?" I asked sharply, for I did not like his mysterious ways.

He laughed. "I dreamed it in the night, white men;" then he too turned on his heel and went.

"Now what," said Sir Henry, "is our black friend driving at? He knows more than he chooses to say, that is clear. By the way, Quatermain, has he heard anything of—of my brother?"

"Nothing; he has asked everyone he has become friendly with, but they all declare that no white man has ever been seen in the country before."

"Do you suppose that he got here at all?" suggested Good; "we have only reached the place by a miracle; is it likely he could have reached it without the map?"

"I don't know," said Sir Henry gloomily, "but somehow I think that I shall find him."

Slowly the sun sank, then suddenly darkness rushed down on the land like a tangible thing. There was no breathing-space between the day and night, no soft transformation scene, for in these latitudes twilight does not exist. The change from day to night is as quick and as absolute as the change from life to death. The sun sank and the world was wreathed in shadows. But not for long, for see in the west there is a glow, then come rays of silver light, and at last the full and glorious moon lights up the plain and shoots its gleaming arrows far and wide, filling the earth with a faint refulgence.

We stood and watched the lovely sight, whilst the stars grew pale before this chastened majesty, and felt our hearts lifted up in the presence of a beauty that I cannot describe. Mine has been a rough life, but there are a few things I am thankful to have lived for, and one of them is to have seen that moon shine over Kukuanaland.

Presently our meditations were broken in upon by our polite friend Infadoos.

"If my lords are rested we will journey on to Loo, where a hut is made ready for my lords to-night. The moon is now bright, so that we shall not fall by the way."

We assented, and in an hour's time were at the outskirts of the town, of which the extent, mapped out as it was by thousands of camp fires, appeared absolutely endless. Indeed, Good, who is always fond of a bad joke, christened it "Unlimited Loo." Soon we came to a moat with a drawbridge, where we were met by the rattling of arms and the hoarse challenge of a sentry. Infadoos gave some password that I could not catch, which was met with a salute, and we passed on through the central street of the great grass city. After nearly half an hour's tramp, past endless lines of huts, Infadoos halted at last by the gate of a little group of huts which surrounded a small courtyard of powdered limestone, and informed us that these were to be our "poor" quarters.

We entered, and found that a hut had been assigned to each of us. These huts were superior to any that we had yet seen, and in each was a most comfortable bed made of tanned skins, spread upon mattresses of aromatic grass. Food too was ready for us, and so soon as we had washed ourselves with water, which stood ready in earthenware jars, some young women of handsome appearance brought us roasted meats, and mealie cobs daintily served on wooden platters, and presented them to us with deep obeisances.

We ate and drank, and then, the beds having been all moved into one hut by our request, a precaution at which the amiable young ladies smiled, we flung ourselves down to sleep, thoroughly wearied with our long journey.

When we woke it was to find the sun high in the heavens, and the female attendants, who did not seem to be troubled by any false shame, already standing inside the hut, having been ordered to attend and help us to "make ready."

"Make ready, indeed," growled Good; "when one has only a flannel shirt and a pair of boots, that does not take long. I wish you would ask them for my trousers, Quatermain."

I asked accordingly, but was informed that these sacred relics had already been taken to the king, who would see us in the forenoon.

Somewhat to their astonishment and disappointment, having requested the young ladies to step outside, we proceeded to make the best toilet of which the circumstances admitted. Good even went the length of again shaving the right side of his face; the left, on which now appeared a very fair crop of whiskers, we impressed upon him he must on no account touch. As for ourselves, we were contented with a good wash and combing our hair. Sir Henry's yellow locks were now almost upon his shoulders, and he looked more like an ancient Dane than ever, while my grizzled scrub was fully an inch long, instead of half an inch, which in a general way I considered my maximum length.

By the time that we had eaten our breakfast, and smoked a pipe, a message was brought to us by no less a personage than Infadoos himself that Twala the king was ready to see us, if we would be pleased to come.

We remarked in reply that we should prefer to wait till the sun was a little higher, we were yet weary with our journey, &c., &c. It is always well, when dealing with uncivilised people, not to be in too great a hurry. They are apt to mistake politeness for awe or servility. So, although we were quite as anxious to see Twala as Twala could be to see us, we sat down and waited for an hour, employing the interval in preparing such presents as our slender stock of goods permitted—namely, the Winchester rifle which had been used by poor Ventvögel, and some beads. The rifle and ammunition we determined to present to his royal highness, and the beads were for his wives and courtiers. We had already given a few to Infadoos and Scragga, and found that they were delighted with them, never having seen such things before. At length we declared that we were ready, and guided by Infadoos, started off to the audience, Umbopa carrying the rifle and beads.

After walking a few hundred yards we came to an enclosure, something like that surrounding the huts which had been allotted to us, only fifty times as big, for it could not have covered less than six or seven acres of ground. All round the outside fence stood a row of huts, which were the habitations of the king's wives. Exactly opposite the gateway, on the further side of the open space, was a very large hut, built by itself, in which his majesty resided. All the rest was open ground; that is to say, it would have been open had it not been filled by company after company of warriors, who were mustered there to the number of seven or eight thousand. These men stood still as statues as we advanced through them, and it would be impossible to give an adequate idea of the grandeur of the spectacle which they presented, with their waving plumes, their glancing spears, and iron-backed ox-hide shields.

The space in front of the large hut was empty, but before it were placed several stools. On three of these, at a sign from Infadoos, we seated ourselves, Umbopa standing behind us. As for Infadoos, he took up a position by the door of the hut. So we waited for ten minutes or more in the midst of a dead silence, but conscious that we were the object of the concentrated gaze of some eight thousand pairs of eyes. It was a somewhat trying ordeal, but we carried it off as best we could. At length the door of the hut opened, and a gigantic figure, with a splendid tiger-skin karross flung over its shoulders, stepped out, followed by the boy Scragga, and what appeared to us to be a withered-up monkey, wrapped in a fur cloak. The figure seated itself upon a stool, Scragga took his stand behind it, and the withered-up monkey crept on all fours into the shade of the hut and squatted down.

Still there was silence.

Then the gigantic figure slipped off the karross and stood up before us, a truly alarming spectacle. It was that of an enormous man with the most entirely repulsive countenance we had ever beheld. This man's lips were as thick as a Negro's, the nose was flat, he had but one gleaming black eye, for the other was represented by a hollow in the face, and his whole expression was cruel and sensual to a degree. From the large head rose a magnificent plume of white ostrich feathers, his body was clad in a shirt of shining chain armour, whilst round the waist and right knee were the usual garnishes of white ox-tail. In his right hand was a huge spear, about the neck a thick torque of gold, and bound on the forehead shone dully a single and enormous uncut diamond.

Still there was silence; but not for long. Presently the man, whom we rightly guessed to be the king, raised the great javelin in his hand. Instantly eight thousand spears were lifted in answer, and from eight thousand throats rang out the royal salute of "*Koom*." Three times this was repeated, and each time the earth shook with the noise, that can only be compared to the deepest notes of thunder.

"Be humble, O people," piped out a thin voice which seemed to come from the monkey in the shade, "it is the king."

"*It is the king*," boomed out the eight thousand throats in answer. "*Be humble, O people, it is the king*."

Then there was silence again—dead silence. Presently, however, it was broken. A soldier on our left dropped his shield, which fell with a clatter on to the limestone flooring.

Twala turned his one cold eye in the direction of the noise.

"Come hither, thou," he said, in a cold voice.

A fine young man stepped out of the ranks, and stood before him.

"It was thy shield that fell, thou awkward dog. Wilt thou make me a reproach in the eyes of these strangers from the Stars? What hast thou to say for thyself?"

We saw the poor fellow turn pale under his dusky skin.

"It was by chance, O Calf of the Black Cow," he murmured.

"Then it is a chance for which thou must pay. Thou hast made me foolish; prepare for death."

"I am the king's ox," was the low answer.

"Scragga," roared the king, "let me see how thou canst use thy spear. Kill me this blundering fool."

Scragga stepped forward with an ill-favoured grin, and lifted his spear. The poor victim covered his eyes with his hand and stood still. As for us, we were petrified with horror.

"Once, twice," he waved the spear, and then struck, ah! right home—the spear stood out a foot behind the soldier's back. He flung up his hands and dropped dead. From the multitude about us rose something like a murmur, it rolled round and round, and died away. The tragedy was finished; there lay the corpse, and we had not yet realised that it had been enacted. Sir Henry sprang up and swore a great oath, then, overpowered by the sense of silence, sat down again.

"The thrust was a good one," said the king; "take him away."

Four men stepped out of the ranks, and lifting the body of the murdered man, carried it thence.

"Cover up the blood-stains, cover them up," piped out the thin voice that proceeded from the monkey-like figure; "the king's word is spoken, the king's doom is done!"

Thereupon a girl came forward from behind the hut, bearing a jar filled with powdered lime, which she scattered over the red mark, blotting it from sight.

Sir Henry meanwhile was boiling with rage at what had happened; indeed, it was with difficulty that we could keep him still.

"Sit down, for heaven's sake," I whispered; "our lives depend on it."

He yielded and remained quiet.

Twala sat silent until the traces of the tragedy had been removed, then he addressed us.

"White people," he said, "who come hither, whence I know not, and why I know not, greeting."

"Greeting, Twala, King of the Kukuanas," I answered.

"White people, whence come ye, and what seek ye?"

"We come from the Stars, ask us not how. We come to see this land."

"Ye journey from far to see a little thing. And that man with you," pointing to Umbopa, "does he also come from the Stars?"

"Even so; there are people of thy colour in the heavens above; but ask not of matters too high for thee, Twala the king."

"Ye speak with a loud voice, people of the Stars," Twala answered in a tone which I scarcely liked. "Remember that the Stars are far off, and ye are here. How if I make you as him whom they bore away?"

I laughed out loud, though there was little laughter in my heart.

"O king," I said, "be careful, walk warily over hot stones, lest thou shouldst burn thy feet; hold the spear by the handle, lest thou should cut thy hands. Touch but one hair of our heads, and destruction shall come upon thee. What, have not these"—pointing to Infadoos and Scragga, who, young villain that he was, was employed in cleaning the blood of the soldier off his spear—"told thee what manner of men we are? Hast thou seen the like of us?" and I pointed to Good, feeling quite sure that he had never seen anybody before who looked in the least like *him* as he then appeared.

"It is true, I have not," said the king, surveying Good with interest.

"Have they not told thee how we strike with death from afar?" I went on.

"They have told me, but I believe them not. Let me see you kill. Kill me a man among those who stand yonder"—and he pointed to the opposite side of the kraal—"and I will believe."

"Nay," I answered; "we shed no blood of men except in just punishment; but if thou wilt see, bid thy servants drive in an ox through the kraal gates, and before he has run twenty paces I will strike him dead."

"Nay," laughed the king, "kill me a man and I will believe."

"Good, O king, so be it," I answered coolly; "do thou walk across the open space, and before thy feet reach the gate thou shalt be dead; or if thou wilt not, send thy son Scragga" (whom at that moment it would have given me much pleasure to shoot).

On hearing this suggestion Scragga uttered a sort of howl, and bolted into the hut.

Twala frowned majestically; the suggestion did not please him.

"Let a young ox be driven in," he said.

Two men at once departed, running swiftly.

"Now, Sir Henry," said I, "do you shoot. I want to show this ruffian that I am not the only magician of the party."

Sir Henry accordingly took his "express," and made ready.

"I hope I shall make a good shot," he groaned.

"You must," I answered. "If you miss with the first barrel, let him have the second. Sight for 150 yards, and wait till the beast turns broadside on."

Then came a pause, until presently we caught sight of an ox running straight for the kraal gate. It came on through the gate, then, catching sight of the vast concourse of people, stopped stupidly, turned round, and bellowed.

"Now's your time," I whispered.

Up went the rifle.

Bang! *thud!* and the ox was kicking on his back, shot in the ribs. The semi-hollow bullet had done its work well, and a sigh of astonishment went up from the assembled thousands.

I turned round coolly—

“Have I lied, O king?”

“Nay, white man, it is the truth,” was the somewhat awed answer.

“Listen, Twala,” I went on. “Thou hast seen. Now know we come in peace, not in war. See,” and I held up the Winchester repeater; “here is a hollow staff that shall enable thee to kill even as we kill, only I lay this charm upon it, thou shalt kill no man with it. If thou liftest it against a man, it shall kill thee. Stay, I will show thee. Bid a soldier step forty paces and place the shaft of a spear in the ground so that the flat blade looks towards us.”

In a few seconds it was done.

“Now, see, I will break yonder spear.”

Taking a careful sight I fired. The bullet struck the flat of the spear, and shattered the blade into fragments.

Again the sigh of astonishment went up.

“Now, Twala, we give this magic tube to thee, and by-and-by I will show thee how to use it; but beware how thou turnest the magic of the Stars against a man of earth,” and I handed him the rifle.

The king took it very gingerly, and laid it down at his feet. As he did so I observed the wizened monkey-like figure creeping from the shadow of the hut. It crept on all fours, but when it reached the place where the king sat it rose upon its feet, and throwing the furry covering from its face, revealed a most extraordinary and weird countenance. Apparently it was that of a woman of great age so shrunk that in size it seemed no larger than the face of a year-old child, although made up of a number of deep and yellow wrinkles. Set in these wrinkles was a sunken slit, that represented the mouth, beneath which the chin curved outwards to a point. There was no nose to speak of; indeed, the visage might have been taken for that of a sun-dried corpse had it not been for a pair of large black eyes, still full of fire and intelligence, which gleamed and played under the snow-white eyebrows, and the projecting parchment-coloured skull, like jewels in a charnel-house. As for the head itself, it was perfectly bare, and yellow in hue, while its wrinkled scalp moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra.

The figure to which this fearful countenance belonged, a countenance so fearful indeed that it caused a shiver of fear to pass through us as we gazed on it, stood still for a moment. Then suddenly it projected a skinny claw armed with nails nearly an inch long, and laying it on the shoulder of Twala the king, began to speak in a thin and piercing voice—

“Listen, O king! Listen, O warriors! Listen, O mountains and plains and rivers, home of the Kukuana race! Listen, O skies and sun, O rain and storm and mist! Listen, O men and women, O youths and maidens, and O ye babes unborn! Listen, all things that live and must die! Listen, all dead things that shall live again—again to die! Listen, the spirit of life is in me and I prophesy. I prophesy! I prophesy!”

The words died away in a faint wail, and dread seemed to seize upon the hearts of all who heard them, including our own. This old woman was very terrible.

“*Blood! blood! blood!* rivers of blood; blood everywhere. I see it, I smell it, I taste it—it is salt! it runs red upon the ground, it rains down from the skies.

“*Footsteps! footsteps! footsteps!* the tread of the white man coming from afar. It shakes the earth; the earth trembles before her master.

“Blood is good, the red blood is bright; there is no smell like the smell of new-shed blood. The lions shall lap it and roar, the vultures shall wash their wings in it and shriek with joy.

“I am old! I am old! I have seen much blood; *ha, ha!* but I shall see more ere I die, and be merry. How old am I, think ye? Your fathers knew me, and *their* fathers knew me, and *their* fathers’ fathers’ fathers. I have seen the white man and know his desires. I am old, but the mountains are older than I. Who made the great road, tell me? Who wrote the pictures on the rocks, tell me? Who reared up the three Silent Ones yonder, that gaze across the pit, tell me?” and she pointed towards the three precipitous mountains which we had noticed on the previous night.

“Ye know not, but I know. It was a white people who were before ye are, who shall be when ye are not, who shall eat you up and destroy you. *Yea! yea! yea!*”

“And what came they for, the White Ones, the Terrible Ones, the skilled in magic and all learning, the strong, the unswerving? What is that bright stone upon thy forehead, O king? Whose hands made the iron garments upon thy breast, O king? Ye know not, but I know. I the Old One, I the Wise One, I the *Isanusi*, the witch doctress!”

Then she turned her bald vulture-head towards us.

“What seek ye, white men of the Stars—ah, yes, of the Stars? Do ye seek a lost one? Ye shall not find him here. He is not here. Never for ages upon ages has a white foot pressed this land; never except once, and I remember that he left it but to die. Ye come for bright stones; I know it—I know it; ye shall find them when the blood is dry; but shall ye return whence ye came, or shall ye stop with me? *Ha! ha! ha!*”

“And thou, thou with the dark skin and the proud bearing,” and she pointed her skinny finger at Umbopa, “who art *thou*, and what seekest *thou*? Not stones that shine, not yellow metal that gleams, these thou leavest to ‘white men from the Stars.’ Methinks I know thee; methinks I can smell the smell of the blood in thy heart. Strip off the girdle—”

Here the features of this extraordinary creature became convulsed, and she fell to the ground foaming in an epileptic fit, and was carried into the hut.

The king rose up trembling, and waved his hand. Instantly the regiments began to file off, and in ten minutes, save for ourselves, the king, and a few attendants, the great space was left empty. “White people,” he said, “it passes in my mind to kill you. Gagool’s spoken strange words. What say ye?”

I laughed. “Be careful, O king, we aren’t easy to slay. Thou hast seen the fate of the ox; wouldst thou be as the ox’s?”

The king frowned. “It isn’t well to threaten a king.”

“We threaten not, we speak what is true. Try to kill us, O king, and learn.”

The great savage put his hand to his forehead and thought. “Go in peace,” he said at length. “Tonight’s the great dance. You’ll see it. Fear not that I’ll set a snare for you. Tomorrow I’ll think.”

“It’s well, O king,” I answered unconcernedly and then accompanied by Infadoos, we rose and went back to our kraal.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WITCH-HUNT

On reaching our hut I motioned to Infadoos to enter with us.

"Now, Infadoos," I said, "we would speak with thee."

"Let my lords say on."

"It seems to us, Infadoos, that Twala the king is a cruel man."

"It is so, my lords. Alas! the land cries out because of his cruelties. To-night ye shall see. It is the great witch-hunt, and many will be smelt out as wizards and slain. No man's life is safe. If the king covets a man's cattle, or a man's wife, or if he fears a man that he should excite a rebellion against him, then Gagool, whom ye saw, or some of the witch-finding women whom she has taught, will smell that man out as a wizard, and he will be killed. Many must die before the moon grows pale to-night. It is ever so. Perhaps I too shall be killed. As yet I have been spared because I am skilled in war, and am beloved by the soldiers; but I know not how long I have to live. The land groans at the cruelties of Twala the king; it is wearied of him and his red ways."

"Then why is it, Infadoos, that the people do not cast him down?"

"Nay, my lords, he is the king, and if he were killed Scragga would reign in his place, and the heart of Scragga is blacker than the heart of Twala his father. If Scragga were king his yoke upon our neck would be heavier than the yoke of Twala. If Imotu had never been slain, or if Ignosi his son had lived, it might have been otherwise; but they are both dead."

"How knowest thou that Ignosi is dead?" said a voice behind us. We looked round astonished to see who spoke. It was Umbopa.

"What meanest thou, boy?" asked Infadoos; "who told thee to speak?"

"Listen, Infadoos," was the answer, "and I will tell thee a story. Years ago the king Imotu was killed in this country and his wife fled with the boy Ignosi. Is it not so?"

"It is so."

"It was said that the woman and her son died upon the mountains. Is it not so?"

"It is even so."

"Well, it came to pass that the mother and the boy Ignosi did not die. They crossed the mountains and were led by a tribe of wandering desert men across the sands beyond, till at last they came to water and grass and trees again."

"How knowest thou this?"

"Listen. They travelled on and on, many months' journey, till they reached a land where a people called the Amazulu, who also are of the Kukuana stock, live by war, and with them they tarried many years, till at length the mother died. Then the son Ignosi became a wanderer again, and journeyed into a land of wonders, where white people live, and for many more years he learned the wisdom of the white people."

"It is a pretty story," said Infadoos incredulously.

"For years he lived there working as a servant and a soldier, but holding in his heart all that his mother had told him of his own place, and casting about in his mind to find how he might journey thither to see his people and his father's house before he died. For long years he lived and waited, and at last the time came, as it ever comes to him who can wait for it, and he met some white men who would seek this unknown land, and joined himself to them. The white men started and travelled on and on, seeking for one who is lost. They crossed the burning desert, they crossed the snow-clad mountains, and at last reached the land of the Kukuanas, and there they found *thee*, O Infadoos."

"Surely thou art mad to talk thus," said the astonished old soldier.

"Thou thinkest so; see, I will show thee, O my uncle."

*"I am Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas!"*

Then with a single movement Umbopa slipped off his "moocha" or girdle, and stood naked before us.

"Look," he said; "what is this?" and he pointed to the picture of a great snake tattooed in blue round his middle, its tail disappearing into its open mouth just above where the thighs are set into the body.

Infadoos looked, his eyes starting nearly out of his head. Then he fell upon his knees.

"*Koom! Koom!*" he ejaculated; "it is my brother's son; it is the king."

"Did I not tell thee so, my uncle? Rise; I am not yet the king, but with thy help, and with the help of these brave white men, who are my friends, I shall be. Yet the old witch Gagool was right, the land shall run with blood first, and hers shall run with it, if she has any and can die, for she killed my father with her words, and drove my mother forth. And now, Infadoos, choose thou. Wilt thou put thy hands between my hands and be my man? Wilt thou share the dangers that lie before me, and help me to overthrow this tyrant and murderer, or wilt thou not? Choose thou."

The old man put his hand to his head and thought. Then he rose, and advancing to where Umbopa, or rather Ignosi, stood, he knelt before him, and took his hand.

"Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas, I put my hand between thy hands, and am thy man till death. When thou wast a babe I dandled thee upon my knees, now shall my old arm strike for thee and freedom."

"It is well, Infadoos; if I conquer, thou shalt be the greatest man in the kingdom after its king. If I fail, thou canst only die, and death is not far off from thee. Rise, my uncle."

"And ye, white men, will ye help me? What have I to offer you! The white stones! If I conquer and can find them, ye shall have as many as ye can carry hence. Will that suffice you?"

I translated this remark.

"Tell him," answered Sir Henry, "that he mistakes an Englishman. Wealth is good, and if it comes in our way we will take it; but a gentleman does not sell himself for wealth. Still, speaking for myself, I say this. I have always liked Umbopa, and so far as lies in me I will stand by him in this business. It will be very pleasant to me to try to square matters with that cruel devil Twala. What do you say, Good, and you, Quatermain?"

"Well," said Good, "to adopt the language of hyperbole, in which all these people seem to indulge, you can tell him that a row is surely good, and warms the cockles of the heart, and that so far as I am concerned I'm his boy. My only stipulation is that he allows me to wear trousers."

I translated the substance of these answers.

"It is well, my friends," said Ignosi, late Umbopa; "and what sayest thou, Macumazahn, art thou also with me, old hunter, cleverer than a wounded buffalo?"

I thought awhile and scratched my head.

"Umbopa, or Ignosi," I said, "I don't like revolutions. I am a man of peace and a bit of a coward"—here Umbopa smiled—"but, on the other hand, I stick up for my friends, Ignosi. You have stuck to us and played the part of a man, and I will stick by you. But mind you, I am a trader, and have to make my living, so I accept your offer about those diamonds in case we should ever be in a position to avail ourselves of it. Another thing: we came, as you know, to look for Incubu's (Sir Henry's) lost brother. You must help us to find him."

"That I will do," answered Ignosi. "Stay, Infadoos, by the sign of the snake about my middle, tell me the truth. Has any white man to thy knowledge set his foot within the land?"

"None, O Ignosi."

"If any white man had been seen or heard of, wouldst thou have known?"

"I should certainly have known."

"Thou hearest, Incubu," said Ignosi to Sir Henry; "he has not been here."

"Well, well," said Sir Henry, with a sigh; "there it is; I suppose that he never got so far. Poor fellow, poor fellow! So it has all been for nothing. God's will be done."

"Now for business," I put in, anxious to escape from a painful subject. "It is very well to be a king by right divine, Ignosi, but how dost thou propose to become a king indeed?"

"Nay, I know not. Infadoos, hast thou a plan?"

"Ignosi, Son of the Lightning," answered his uncle, "to-night is the great dance and witch-hunt. Many shall be smelt out and perish, and in the hearts of many others there will be grief and anguish and fury against the king Twala. When the dance is over, then I will speak to some of the great chiefs, who in turn, if I can win them over, will speak to their regiments. I shall speak to the chiefs softly at first, and bring them to see that thou art indeed the king, and I think that by to-morrow's light thou shalt have twenty thousand spears at thy command. And now I must go and think, and hear, and make ready. After the dance is done, if I am yet alive, and we are all alive, I will meet thee here, and we can talk. At the best there must be war."

At this moment our conference was interrupted by the cry that messengers had come from the king. Advancing to the door of the hut we ordered that they should be admitted, and presently three men entered, each bearing a shining shirt of chain armour, and a magnificent battle-axe.

"The gifts of my lord the king to the white men from the Stars!" said a herald who came with them.

"We thank the king," I answered; "withdraw."

The men went, and we examined the armour with great interest. It was the most wonderful chain work that either of us had ever seen. A whole coat fell together so closely that it formed a mass of links scarcely too big to be covered with both hands.

"Do you make these things in this country, Infadoos?" I asked; "they are very beautiful."

"Nay, my lord, they came down to us from our forefathers. We know not who made them, and there are but few left.<sup>[7]</sup> None but those of royal blood may be clad in them. They are magic coats through which no spear can pass, and those who wear them are well-nigh safe in the battle. The king is well pleased or much afraid, or he would not have sent these garments of steel. Clothe yourselves in them to-night, my lords."

[7] In the Soudan swords and coats of mail are still worn by Arabs, whose ancestors must have stripped them from the bodies of Crusaders.—*Editor*.

The remainder of that day we spent quietly, resting and talking over the situation, which was sufficiently exciting. At last the sun went down, the thousand watch fires glowed out, and through the darkness we heard the tramp of many feet and the clashing of hundreds of spears, as the regiments passed to their appointed places to be ready for the great dance. Then the full moon shone out in splendour, and as we stood watching her rays, Infadoos arrived, clad in his war dress, and accompanied by a guard of twenty men to escort us to the dance. As he recommended, we had already donned the shirts of chain armour which the king had sent us, putting them on under our ordinary clothing, and finding to our surprise that they were neither very heavy nor uncomfortable. These steel shirts, which evidently had been made for men of a very large stature, hung somewhat loosely upon Good and myself, but Sir Henry's fitted his magnificent frame like a glove. Then strapping our revolvers round our waists, and taking in our hands the battle-axes which the king had sent with the armour, we started.

On arriving at the great kraal, where we had that morning been received by the king, we found that it was closely packed with some twenty thousand men arranged round it in regiments. These regiments were in turn divided into companies, and between each company ran a little path to allow space for the witch-finders to pass up and down. Anything more imposing than the sight that was presented by this vast and orderly concourse of armed men it is impossible to conceive. There they stood perfectly silent, and the

moon poured her light upon the forest of their raised spears, upon their majestic forms, waving plumes, and the harmonious shading of their various-coloured shields. Wherever we looked were line upon line of dim faces surmounted by range upon range of shimmering spears.

"Surely," I said to Infadoos, "the whole army is here?"

"Nay, Macumazahn," he answered, "but a third of it. One third is present at this dance each year, another third is mustered outside in case there should be trouble when the killing begins, ten thousand more garrison the outposts round Loo, and the rest watch at the kraals in the country. Thou seest it is a great people."

"They are very silent," said Good; and indeed the intense stillness among such a vast concourse of living men was almost overpowering.

"What says Bougwan?" asked Infadoos.

I translated.

"Those over whom the shadow of Death is hovering are silent," he answered grimly.

"Will many be killed?"

"Very many."

"It seems," I said to the others, "that we are going to assist at a gladiatorial show arranged regardless of expense."

Sir Henry shivered, and Good said he wished that we could get out of it.

"Tell me," I asked Infadoos, "are we in danger?"

"I know not, my lords, I trust not; but do not seem afraid. If ye live through the night all may go well with you. The soldiers murmur against the king."

All this while we had been advancing steadily towards the centre of the open space, in the midst of which were placed some stools. As we proceeded we perceived another small party coming from the direction of the royal hut.

"It is the king Twala, Scragga his son, and Gagool the old; and see, with them are those who slay," said Infadoos, pointing to a little group of about a dozen gigantic and savage-looking men, armed with spears in one hand and heavy kerries in the other.

The king seated himself upon the centre stool, Gagool crouched at his feet, and the others stood behind him.

"Greeting, white lords," Twala cried, as we came up; "be seated, waste not precious time—the night is all too short for the deeds that must be done. Ye come in a good hour, and shall see a glorious show. Look round, white lords; look round," and he rolled his one wicked eye from regiment to regiment. "Can the Stars show you such a sight as this? See how they shake in their wickedness, all those who have evil in their hearts and fear the judgment of 'Heaven above.'"

"*Begin! begin!*" piped Gagool, in her thin piercing voice; "the hyænas are hungry, they howl for food. *Begin! begin!*"

Then for a moment there was intense stillness, made horrible by a presage of what was to come.

The king lifted his spear, and suddenly twenty thousand feet were raised, as though they belonged to one man, and brought down with a stamp upon the earth. This was repeated three times, causing the solid ground to shake and tremble. Then from a far point of the circle a solitary voice began a wailing song, of which the refrain ran something as follows:—

"*What is the lot of man born of woman?*"

Back came the answer rolling out from every throat in that vast company—

"*Death!*"

Gradually, however, the song was taken up by company after company, till the whole armed multitude were singing it, and I could no longer follow the words, except in so far as they appeared to represent various phases of human passions, fears, and joys. Now it seemed to be a love song, now a majestic swelling war chant, and last of all a death dirge ending suddenly in one heart-breaking wail that went echoing and rolling away in a volume of blood-curdling sound.

Again silence fell upon the place, and again it was broken by the king lifting his hand. Instantly we heard a pattering of feet, and from out of the masses of warriors strange and awful figures appeared running towards us. As they drew near we saw that these were women, most of them aged, for their white hair, ornamented with small bladders taken from fish, streamed out behind them. Their faces were painted in stripes of white and yellow; down their backs hung snake-skins, and round their waists rattled circlets of human bones, while each held a small forked wand in her shrivelled hand. In all there were ten of them. When they arrived in front of us they halted, and one of them, pointing with her wand towards the crouching figure of Gagool, cried out—

"Mother, old mother, we are here."

"*Good! good! good!*" answered that aged Iniquity. "Are your eyes keen, *Isanusis* [witch doctresses], ye seers in dark places?"

"Mother, they are keen."

"*Good! good! good!* Are your ears open, *Isanusis*, ye who hear words that come not from the tongue?"

"Mother, they are open."

"*Good! good! good!* Are your senses awake, *Isanusis*—can ye smell blood, can ye purge the land of the wicked ones who compass evil against the king and against their neighbours? Are ye ready to do the justice of 'Heaven above,' ye whom I have taught, who have eaten of the bread of my wisdom, and drunk of the water of my magic?"

"Mother, we can."

"Then go! Tarry not, ye vultures; see, the slayers"—pointing to the ominous group of executioners behind—"make sharp their spears; the white men from afar are hungry to see. *Go!*"

With a wild yell Gagool's horrid ministers broke away in every direction, like fragments from a shell, the dry bones round their waists rattling as they ran, and headed for various points of the dense human circle. We could not watch them all, so we fixed our eyes upon the *Isanusi* nearest to us. When she came to within a few paces of the warriors she halted and began to dance wildly, turning round and round with an almost incredible rapidity, and shrieking out sentences such as "I smell him, the evil-doer!" "He is near, he who poisoned his mother!" "I hear the thoughts of him who thought evil of the king!"

Quicker and quicker she danced, till she lashed herself into such a frenzy of excitement that the foam flew in specks from her gnashing jaws, till her eyes seemed to start from her head, and her flesh to quiver visibly. Suddenly she stopped dead and stiffened all over, like a pointer dog when he scents game, and then with outstretched wand she began to creep stealthily towards the soldiers before her. It seemed to us that as she came their stoicism gave way, and that they shrank from her. As for ourselves, we followed her movements with a horrible fascination. Presently, still creeping and crouching like a dog, the *Isanusi* was before them. Then she halted and pointed, and again crept on a pace or two.

Suddenly the end came. With a shriek she sprang in and touched a tall warrior with her forked wand. Instantly two of his comrades, those standing immediately next to him, seized the doomed man, each by one arm, and advanced with him towards the king.

He did not resist, but we saw that he dragged his limbs as though they were paralysed, and that his fingers, from which the spear had fallen, were limp like those of a man newly dead.

As he came, two of the villainous executioners stepped forward to meet him. Presently they met, and the executioners turned round, looking towards the king as though for orders.

"Kill!" said the king.

"Kill!" squeaked Gagool.

"Kill!" re-echoed Scragga, with a hollow chuckle.

Almost before the words were uttered the horrible deed was done. One man had driven his spear into the victim's heart, and to make assurance double sure, the other had dashed out his brains with a great club.

"One," counted Twala the king, just like a black Madame Defarge, as Good said, and the body was dragged a few paces away and stretched out.

Hardly was the thing done before another poor wretch was brought up, like an ox to the slaughter. This time we could see, from the leopard-skin cloak which he wore, that the man was a person of rank. Again the awful syllables were spoken, and the victim fell dead.

"Two," counted the king.

And so the deadly game went on, till about a hundred bodies were stretched in rows behind us. I have heard of the gladiatorial shows of the Cæsars, and of the Spanish bull-fights, but I take the liberty of doubting if either of them could be half so horrible as this Kukuana witch-hunt. Gladiatorial shows and Spanish bull-fights at any rate contributed to the public amusement, which certainly was not the case here. The most confirmed sensation-monger would fight shy of sensation if he knew that it was well on the cards that he would, in his own proper person, be the subject of the next "event."

Once we rose and tried to remonstrate, but were sternly repressed by Twala.

"Let the law take its course, white men. These dogs are magicians and evil-doers; it is well that they should die," was the only answer vouchsafed to us.

About half-past ten there was a pause. The witch-finders gathered themselves together, apparently exhausted with their bloody work, and we thought that the performance was done with. But it was not so, for presently, to our surprise, the ancient woman, Gagool, rose from her crouching position, and supporting herself with a stick, staggered off into the open space. It was an extraordinary sight to see this frightful vulture-headed old creature, bent nearly double with extreme age, gather strength by degrees, until at last she rushed about almost as actively as her ill-omened pupils. To and fro she ran, chanting to herself, till suddenly she made a dash at a tall man standing in front of one of the regiments, and touched him. As she did this a sort of groan went up from the regiment which evidently he commanded. But two of its officers seized him all the same, and brought him up for execution. We learned afterwards that he was a man of great wealth and importance, being indeed a cousin of the king.

He was slain, and Twala counted one hundred and three. Then Gagool again sprang to and fro, gradually drawing nearer and nearer to ourselves.

"Hang me if I don't believe she is going to try her games on us," ejaculated Good in horror.

"Nonsense!" said Sir Henry.

As for myself, when I saw that old fiend dancing nearer and nearer, my heart positively sank into my boots. I glanced behind us at the long rows of corpses, and shivered.

Nearer and nearer waltzed Gagool, looking for all the world like an animated crooked stick or comma, her horrid eyes gleaming and glowing with a most unholy lustre.

Nearer she came, and yet nearer, every creature in that vast assemblage watching her movements with intense anxiety. At last she stood still and pointed.

"Which is it to be?" asked Sir Henry to himself.

In a moment all doubts were at rest, for the old hag had rushed in and touched Umbopa, alias Ignosi, on the shoulder.

"I smell him out," she shrieked. "Kill him, kill him, he is full of evil; kill him, the stranger, before blood flows from him. Slay him, O king."

There was a pause, of which I instantly took advantage.

"O king," I called out, rising from my seat, "this man is the servant of thy guests, he is their dog; whosoever sheds the blood of our dog sheds our blood. By the sacred law of hospitality I claim protection for him."

"Gagool, mother of the witch-finders, has smelt him out; he must die, white men," was the sullen answer.

"Nay, he shall not die," I replied; "he who tries to touch him shall die indeed."

"Seize him!" roared Twala to the executioners; who stood round red to the eyes with the blood of their victims.

They advanced towards us, and then hesitated. As for Ignosi, he clutched his spear, and raised it as though determined to sell his life dearly.

"Stand back, ye dogs!" I shouted, "if ye would see to-morrow's light. Touch one hair of his head and your king dies," and I covered Twala with my revolver. Sir Henry and Good also drew their pistols, Sir Henry pointing his at the leading executioner, who was advancing to carry out the sentence, and Good taking a deliberate aim at Gagool.

Twala winced perceptibly as my barrel came in a line with his broad chest.

"Well," I said, "what is it to be, Twala?"

Then he spoke.

"Put away your magic tubes," he said; "ye have adjured me in the name of hospitality, and for that reason, but not from fear of what ye can do, I spare him. Go in peace."

"It is well," I answered unconcernedly; "we are weary of slaughter, and would sleep. Is the dance ended?"

"It is ended," Twala answered sulkily. "Let these dead dogs," pointing to the long rows of corpses, "be flung out to the hyænas and the vultures," and he lifted his spear.

Instantly the regiments began to defile through the kraal gateway in perfect silence, a fatigue party only remaining behind to drag away the corpses of those who had been sacrificed.

Then we rose also, and making our salaam to his majesty, which he hardly deigned to acknowledge, we departed to our huts.

"Well," said Sir Henry, as we sat down, having first lit a lamp of the sort used by the Kukuanas, of which the wick is made from the fibre of a species of palm leaf, and the oil from clarified hippopotamus fat, "well, I feel uncommonly inclined to be sick."

"If I had any doubts about helping Umbopa to rebel against that infernal blackguard," put in Good, "they are gone now. It was as much as I could do to sit still while that slaughter was going on. I tried to keep my eyes shut, but they would open just at the wrong time. I wonder where Infadoos is. Umbopa, my friend, you ought to be grateful to us; your skin came near to having an air-hole made in it."

"I am grateful, Bougwan," was Umbopa's answer, when I had translated, "and I shall not forget. As for Infadoos, he will be here by-and-by. We must wait."

So we lit our pipes and waited.

## CHAPTER XI.

### WE GIVE A SIGN

For a long while—two hours, I should think—we sat there in silence, being too much overwhelmed by the recollection of the horrors we had seen to talk. At last, just as we were thinking of turning in—for the night drew nigh to dawn—we heard a sound of steps. Then came the challenge of a sentry posted at the kraal gate, which apparently was answered, though not in an audible tone, for the steps still advanced; and in another second Infadoos had entered the hut, followed by some half-dozen stately-looking chiefs.

“My lords,” he said, “I have come according to my word. My lords and Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas, I have brought with me these men,” pointing to the row of chiefs, “who are great men among us, having each one of them the command of three thousand soldiers, that live but to do their bidding, under the king’s. I have told them of what I have seen, and what my ears have heard. Now let them also behold the sacred snake around thee, and hear thy story, Ignosi, that they may say whether or no they will make cause with thee against Twala the king.”

By way of answer Ignosi again stripped off his girdle, and exhibited the snake tattooed about him. Each chief in turn drew near and examined the sign by the dim light of the lamp, and without saying a word passed on to the other side.

Then Ignosi resumed his moocha, and addressing them, repeated the history he had detailed in the morning.

“Now ye have heard, chiefs,” said Infadoos, when he had done, “what say ye: will ye stand by this man and help him to his father’s throne, or will ye not? The land cries out against Twala, and the blood of the people flows like the waters in spring. Ye have seen to-night. Two other chiefs there were with whom I had it in my mind to speak, and where are they now? The hyænas howl over their corpses. Soon shall ye be as they are if ye strike not. Choose then, my brothers.”

The eldest of the six men, a short, thick-set warrior, with white hair, stepped forward a pace and answered—

“Thy words are true, Infadoos; the land cries out. My own brother is among those who died to-night; but this is a great matter, and the thing is hard to believe. How know we that if we lift our spears it may not be for a thief and a liar? It is a great matter, I say, of which none can see the end. For of this be sure, blood will flow in rivers before the deed is done; many will still cleave to the king, for men worship the sun that still shines bright in the heavens, rather than that which has not risen. These white men from the Stars, their magic is great, and Ignosi is under the cover of their wing. If he be indeed the rightful king, let them give us a sign, and let the people have a sign, that all may see. So shall men cleave to us, knowing of a truth that the white man’s magic is with them.”

“Ye have the sign of the snake,” I answered.

“My lord, it is not enough. The snake may have been placed there since the man’s childhood. Show us a sign, and it will suffice. But we will not move without a sign.”

The others gave a decided assent, and I turned in perplexity to Sir Henry and Good, and explained the situation.

“I think that I have it,” said Good exultingly; “ask them to give us a moment to think.”

I did so, and the chiefs withdrew. So soon as they had gone Good went to the little box where he kept his medicines, unlocked it, and took out a note-book, in the fly-leaves of which was an almanack. “Now look here, you fellows, isn’t to-morrow the 4th of June?” he said.

We had kept a careful note of the days, so were able to answer that it was.

“Very good; then here we have it—‘4 June, total eclipse of the moon commences at 8.15 Greenwich time, visible in Teneriffe—*South Africa, &c.*’ There’s a sign for you. Tell them we will darken the moon to-morrow night.”

The idea was a splendid one; indeed, the only weak spot about it was a fear lest Good’s almanack might be incorrect. If we made a false prophecy on such a subject, our prestige would be gone for ever, and so would Ignosi’s chance of the throne of the Kukuanas.

“Suppose that the almanack is wrong,” suggested Sir Henry to Good, who was busily employed in working out something on a blank page of the book.

“I see no reason to suppose anything of the sort,” was his answer. “Eclipses always come up to time; at least that is my experience of them, and it especially states that this one will be visible in South Africa. I have worked out the reckonings as well as I can, without knowing our exact position; and I make out that the eclipse should begin here about ten o’clock tomorrow night, and last till half-past twelve. For an hour and a half or so there should be almost total darkness.”

“Well,” said Sir Henry, “I suppose we had better risk it.”

I acquiesced, though doubtfully, for eclipses are queer cattle to deal with—it might be a cloudy night, for instance, or our dates might be wrong—and sent Umbopa to summon the chiefs back. Presently they came, and I addressed them thus—

“Great men of the Kukuanas, and thou, Infadoos, listen. We love not to show our powers, for to do so is to interfere with the course of nature, and to plunge the world into fear and confusion. But since this matter is a great one, and as we are angered against the king because of the slaughter we have seen, and because of the act of the *Isanusi* Gagool, who would have put our friend Ignosi to death, we have determined to break a rule, and to give such a sign as all men may see. Come hither”; and I led them to the door of the hut and pointed to the red ball of the moon. “What see ye there?”

“We see the sinking moon,” answered the spokesman of the party.

“It is so. Now tell me, can any mortal man put out that moon before her hour of setting, and bring the curtain of black night down upon the land?”

The chief laughed a little at the question. "No, my lord, that no man can do. The moon is stronger than man who looks on her, nor can she vary in her courses."

"Ye say so. Yet I tell you that to-morrow night, about two hours before midnight, we will cause the moon to be eaten up for a space of an hour and half an hour. Yes, deep darkness shall cover the earth, and it shall be for a sign that Ignosi is indeed king of the Kukuanas. If we do this thing, will ye be satisfied?"

"Yea, my lords," answered the old chief with a smile, which was reflected on the faces of his companions; "if ye do this thing, we will be satisfied indeed."

"It shall be done; we three, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn, have said it, and it shall be done. Dost thou hear, Infadoos?"

"I hear, my lord, but it is a wonderful thing that ye promise, to put out the moon, the mother of the world, when she is at her full."

"Yet shall we do it, Infadoos."

"It is well, my lords. To-day, two hours after sunset, Twala will send for my lords to witness the girls dance, and one hour after the dance begins the girl whom Twala thinks the fairest shall be killed by Scragga, the king's son, as a sacrifice to the Silent Ones, who sit and keep watch by the mountains yonder," and he pointed towards the three strange-looking peaks where Solomon's road was supposed to end. "Then let my lords darken the moon, and save the maiden's life, and the people will believe indeed."

"Ay," said the old chief, still smiling a little, "the people will believe indeed."

"Two miles from Loo," went on Infadoos, "there is a hill curved like a new moon, a stronghold, where my regiment, and three other regiments which these chiefs command, are stationed. This morning we will make a plan whereby two or three other regiments may be moved there also. Then, if in truth my lords can darken the moon, in the darkness I will take my lords by the hand and lead them out of Loo to this place, where they shall be safe, and thence we can make war upon Twala the king."

"It is good," said I. "Now leave us to sleep awhile and to make ready our magic."

Infadoos rose, and, having saluted us, departed with the chiefs.

"My friends," said Ignosi, so soon as they were gone, "can ye do this wonderful thing, or were ye speaking empty words to the captains?"

"We believe that we can do it, Umbopa—Ignosi, I mean."

"It is strange," he answered, "and had ye not been Englishmen I would not have believed it; but I have learned that English 'gentlemen' tell no lies. If we live through the matter, be sure that I will repay you."

"Ignosi," said Sir Henry, "promise me one thing."

"I will promise, Incubu, my friend, even before I hear it," answered the big man with a smile. "What is it?"

"This: that if ever you come to be king of this people you will do away with the smelling out of wizards such as we saw last night; and that the killing of men without trial shall no longer take place in the land."

Ignosi thought for a moment after I had translated this request, and then answered—

"The ways of black people are not as the ways of white men, Incubu, nor do we value life so highly. Yet I will promise. If it be in my power to hold them back, the witch-finders shall hunt no more, nor shall any man die the death without trial or judgment."

"That's a bargain, then," said Sir Henry; "and now let us get a little rest."

Thoroughly wearied out, we were soon sound asleep, and slept till Ignosi woke us about eleven o'clock. Then we rose, washed, and ate a hearty breakfast. After that we went outside the hut and walked about, amusing ourselves with examining the structure of the Kukuana huts and observing the customs of the women.

"I hope that eclipse will come off," said Sir Henry presently.

"If it does not it will soon be all up with us," I answered mournfully; "for so sure as we are living men some of those chiefs will tell the whole story to the king, and then there will be another sort of eclipse, and one that we shall certainly not like."

Returning to the hut we ate some dinner, and passed the rest of the day in receiving visits of ceremony and curiosity. At length the sun set, and we enjoyed a couple of hours of such quiet as our melancholy forebodings would allow to us. Finally, about half-past eight, a messenger came from Twala to bid us to the great annual "dance of girls" which was about to be celebrated.

Hastily we put on the chain shirts that the king had sent us, and taking our rifles and ammunition with us, so as to have them handy in case we had to fly, as suggested by Infadoos, we started boldly enough, though with inward fear and trembling. The great space in front of the king's kraal bore a very different appearance from that which it had presented on the previous evening. In place of the grim ranks of serried warriors were company after company of Kukuana girls, not over-dressed, so far as clothing went, but each crowned with a wreath of flowers, and holding a palm leaf in one hand and a white arum lily in the other. In the centre of the open moonlit space sat Twala the king, with old Gagool at his feet, attended by Infadoos, the boy Scragga, and twelve guards. There were also present about a score of chiefs, amongst whom I recognised most of our friends of the night before.

Twala greeted us with much apparent cordiality, though I saw him fix his one eye viciously on Umbopa.

"Welcome, white men from the Stars," he said; "this is another sight from that which your eyes gazed on by the light of last night's moon, but it is not so good a sight. Girls are pleasant, and were it not for such as these," and he pointed round him, "we should none of us be here this day; but men are better. Kisses and the tender words of women are sweet, but the sound of the clashing of the spears of warriors, and the smell of men's blood, are sweeter far! Would ye have wives from among our people, white men? If so, choose the fairest here, and ye shall have them, as many as ye will," and he paused for an answer.

As the prospect did not seem to be without attractions for Good, who, like most sailors, is of a susceptible nature,—being elderly and wise, foreseeing the endless complications that anything of the sort would involve, for women bring trouble so surely as the night follows the day, I put in a hasty answer—

"Thanks to thee, O king, but we white men wed only with white women like ourselves. Your maidens are fair, but they are not for us!"

The king laughed. "It is well. In our land there is a proverb which runs, 'Women's eyes are always bright, whatever the colour,' and another that says, 'Love her who is present, for be sure she who is absent is false to thee;' but perhaps these things are not so in the Stars. In a land where men are white all things are possible. So be it, white men; the girls will not go begging! Welcome again; and

welcome, too, thou black one; if Gagool here had won her way, thou wouldst have been stiff and cold by now. It is lucky for thee that thou too camest from the Stars; ha! ha!"

"I can kill thee before thou killest me, O king," was Ignosi's calm answer, "and thou shalt be stiff before my limbs cease to bend."

Twala started. "Thou speakest boldly, boy," he replied angrily; "presume not too far."

"He may well be bold in whose lips are truth. The truth is a sharp spear which flies home and misses not. It is a message from 'the Stars,' O king."

Twala scowled, and his one eye gleamed fiercely, but he said nothing more.

"Let the dance begin," he cried, and then the flower-crowned girls sprang forward in companies, singing a sweet song and waving the delicate palms and white lilies. On they danced, looking faint and spiritual in the soft, sad light of the risen moon; now whirling round and round, now meeting in mimic warfare, swaying, eddying here and there, coming forward, falling back in an ordered confusion delightful to witness. At last they paused, and a beautiful young woman sprang out of the ranks and began to pirouette in front of us with a grace and vigour which would have put most ballet girls to shame. At length she retired exhausted, and another took her place, then another and another, but none of them, either in grace, skill, or personal attractions, came up to the first.

When the chosen girls had all danced, the king lifted his hand.

"Which deem ye the fairest, white men?" he asked.

"The first," said I unthinkingly. Next second I regretted it, for I remembered that Infadoos had told us that the fairest woman must be offered up as a sacrifice.

"Then is my mind as your minds, and my eyes as your eyes. She is the fairest! and a sorry thing it is for her, for she must die!"

"Ay, *must die!*" piped out Gagool, casting a glance of her quick eyes in the direction of the poor girl, who, as yet ignorant of the awful fate in store for her, was standing some ten yards off in front of a company of maidens, engaged in nervously picking a flower from her wreath to pieces, petal by petal.

"Why, O king?" said I, restraining my indignation with difficulty; "the girl has danced well, and pleased us; she is fair too; it would be hard to reward her with death."

Twala laughed as he answered—

"It is our custom, and the figures who sit in stone yonder," and he pointed towards the three distant peaks, "must have their due. Did I fail to put the fairest girl to death to-day, misfortune would fall upon me and my house. Thus runs the prophecy of my people: 'If the king offer not a sacrifice of a fair girl, on the day of the dance of maidens, to the Old Ones who sit and watch on the mountains, then shall he fall, and his house.' Look ye, white men, my brother who reigned before me offered not the sacrifice, because of the tears of the woman, and he fell, and his house, and I reign in his stead. It is finished; she must die!" Then turning to the guards—"Bring her hither; Scragga, make sharp thy spear."

Two of the men stepped forward, and as they advanced, the girl, for the first time realising her impending fate, screamed aloud and turned to fly. But the strong hands caught her fast, and brought her, struggling and weeping, before us.

"What is thy name, girl?" piped Gagool. "What! wilt thou not answer? Shall the king's son do his work at once?"

At this hint, Scragga, looking more evil than ever, advanced a step and lifted his great spear, and at that moment I saw Good's hand creep to his revolver. The poor girl caught the faint glint of steel through her tears, and it sobered her anguish. She ceased struggling, and clasping her hands convulsively, stood shuddering from head to foot.

"See," cried Scragga in high glee, "she shrinks from the sight of my little plaything even before she has tasted it," and he tapped the broad blade of his spear.

"If ever I get the chance you shall pay for that, you young hound!" I heard Good mutter beneath his breath.

"Now that thou art quiet, give us thy name, my dear. Come, speak out, and fear not," said Gagool in mockery.

"Oh, mother," answered the girl, in trembling accents, "my name is Foulata, of the house of Suko. Oh, mother, why must I die? I have done no wrong!"

"Be comforted," went on the old woman in her hateful tone of mockery. "Thou must die, indeed, as a sacrifice to the Old Ones who sit yonder," and she pointed to the peaks; "but it is better to sleep in the night than to toil in the daytime; it is better to die than to live, and thou shalt die by the royal hand of the king's own son."

The girl Foulata wrung her hands in anguish, and cried out aloud, "Oh, cruel! and I so young! What have I done that I should never again see the sun rise out of the night, or the stars come following on his track in the evening, that I may no more gather the flowers when the dew is heavy, or listen to the laughing of the waters? Woe is me, that I shall never see my father's hut again, nor feel my mother's kiss, nor tend the lamb that is sick! Woe is me, that no lover shall put his arm around me and look into my eyes, nor shall men children be born of me! Oh, cruel, cruel!"

And again she wrung her hands and turned her tear-stained flower-crowned face to Heaven, looking so lovely in her despair—for she was indeed a beautiful woman—that assuredly the sight of her would have melted the hearts of any less cruel than were the three fiends before us. Prince Arthur's appeal to the ruffians who came to blind him was not more touching than that of this savage girl.

But it did not move Gagool or Gagool's master, though I saw signs of pity among the guards behind, and on the faces of the chiefs; and as for Good, he gave a fierce snort of indignation, and made a motion as though to go to her assistance. With all a woman's quickness, the doomed girl interpreted what was passing in his mind, and by a sudden movement flung herself before him, and clasped his "beautiful white legs" with her hands.

"Oh, white father from the Stars!" she cried, "throw over me the mantle of thy protection; let me creep into the shadow of thy strength, that I may be saved. Oh, keep me from these cruel men and from the mercies of Gagool!"

"All right, my hearty, I'll look after you," sang out Good in nervous Saxon. "Come, get up, there's a good girl," and he stooped and caught her hand.

Twala turned and motioned to his son, who advanced with his spear lifted.

"Now's your time," whispered Sir Henry to me; "what are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for that eclipse," I answered; "I have had my eye on the moon for the last half-hour, and I never saw it look healthier."

"Well, you must risk it now, or the girl will be killed. Twala is losing patience."

Recognising the force of the argument, and having cast one more despairing look at the bright face of the moon, for never did the most ardent astronomer with a theory to prove await a celestial event with such anxiety, I stepped with all the dignity that I could command between the prostrate girl and the advancing spear of Scragga.

"King," I said, "it shall not be; we will not endure this thing; let the girl go in safety."

Twala rose from his seat in wrath and astonishment, and from the chiefs and serried ranks of maidens who had closed in slowly upon us in anticipation of the tragedy came a murmur of amazement.

"*Shall not be!* thou white dog, that yapest at the lion in his cave; *shall not be!* art thou mad? Be careful, lest this chicken's fate overtake thee, and those with thee. How canst thou save her or thyself? Who art thou that thou settest thyself between me and my will? Back, I say. Scragga, kill her! Ho, guards! seize these men."

At his cry armed men ran swiftly from behind the hut, where they had evidently been placed beforehand.

Sir Henry, Good, and Umbopa ranged themselves alongside of me, and lifted their rifles.

"Stop!" I shouted boldly, though at the moment my heart was in my boots. "Stop! we, the white men from the Stars, say that it shall not be. Come but one pace nearer, and we will put out the moon like a wind-blown lamp, as we who dwell in her House can do, and plunge the land in darkness. Dare to disobey, and ye shall taste of our magic."

My threat produced an effect; the men halted, and Scragga stood still before us, his spear lifted.

"Hear him! hear him!" piped Gagool; "hear the liar who says that he will put out the moon like a lamp. Let him do it, and the girl shall be spared. Yes, let him do it, or die by the girl, he and those with him."

I glanced up at the moon despairingly, and now to my intense joy and relief saw that we—or rather the almanack—had made no mistake. On the edge of the great orb lay a faint rim of shadow, while a smoky hue grew and gathered upon its bright surface. Never shall I forget that supreme, that superb moment of relief.

Then I lifted my hand solemnly towards the sky, an example which Sir Henry and Good followed, and quoted a line or two from the "Ingoldsby Legends" at it in the most impressive tones that I could command. Sir Henry followed suit with a verse out of the Old Testament, and something about Balbus building a wall, in Latin, whilst Good addressed the Queen of Night in a volume of the most classical bad language which he could think of.

Slowly the penumbra, the shadow of a shadow, crept on over the bright surface, and as it crept I heard deep gasps of fear rising from the multitude around.

"Look, O king!" I cried; "look, Gagool! Look, chiefs and people and women, and see if the white men from the Stars keep their word, or if they be but empty liars!"

"The moon grows black before your eyes; soon there will be darkness—ay, darkness in the hour of the full moon. Ye have asked for a sign; it is given to you. Grow dark, O Moon! withdraw thy light, thou pure and holy One; bring the proud heart of usurping murderers to the dust, and eat up the world with shadows."

A groan of terror burst from the onlookers. Some stood petrified with dread, others threw themselves upon their knees and cried aloud. As for the king, he sat still and turned pale beneath his dusky skin. Only Gagool kept her courage.

"It will pass," she cried; "I have often seen the like before; no man can put out the moon; lose not heart; sit still—the shadow will pass."

"Wait, and ye shall see," I replied, hopping with excitement. "O Moon! Moon! Moon! wherefore art thou so cold and fickle?" This appropriate quotation was from the pages of a popular romance that I chanced to have read recently, though now I come to think of it, it was ungrateful of me to abuse the Lady of the Heavens, who was showing herself to be the truest of friends to us, however she may have behaved to the impassioned lover in the novel. Then I added: "Keep it up, Good, I can't remember any more poetry. Curse away, there's a good fellow."

Good responded nobly to this tax upon his inventive faculties. Never before had I the faintest conception of the breadth and depth and height of a naval officer's objurgatory powers. For ten minutes he went on in several languages without stopping, and he scarcely ever repeated himself.

Meanwhile the dark ring crept on, while all that great assembly fixed their eyes upon the sky and stared and stared in fascinated silence. Strange and unholy shadows encroached upon the moonlight, an ominous quiet filled the place. Everything grew still as death. Slowly and in the midst of this most solemn silence the minutes sped away, and while they sped the full moon passed deeper and deeper into the shadow of the earth, as the inky segment of its circle slid in awful majesty across the lunar craters. The great pale orb seemed to draw near and to grow in size. She turned a coppery hue, then that portion of her surface which was unobscured as yet grew grey and ashen, and at length, as totality approached, her mountains and her plains were to be seen glowing luridly through a crimson gloom.

On, yet on, crept the ring of darkness; it was now more than half across the blood-red orb. The air grew thick, and still more deeply tinged with dusky crimson. On, yet on, till we could scarcely see the fierce faces of the group before us. No sound rose now from the spectators, and at last Good stopped swearing.

"The moon is dying—the white wizards have killed the moon," yelled the prince Scragga at last. "We shall all perish in the dark," and animated by fear or fury, or by both, he lifted his spear and drove it with all his force at Sir Henry's breast. But he forgot the mail shirts that the king had given us, and which we wore beneath our clothing. The steel rebounded harmless, and before he could repeat the blow Curtis had snatched the spear from his hand and sent it straight through him.

Scragga dropped dead.

At the sight, and driven mad with fear of the gathering darkness, and of the unholy shadow which, as they believed, was swallowing the moon, the companies of girls broke up in wild confusion, and ran screeching for the gateways. Nor did the panic stop there. The king himself, followed by his guards, some of the chiefs, and Gagool, who hobbled away after them with marvellous alacrity, fled for the huts, so that in another minute we ourselves, the would-be victim Foulata, Infadoos, and most of the chiefs who had interviewed us on the previous night, were left alone upon the scene, together with the dead body of Scragga, Twala's son.

“Chiefs,” I said, “we have given you the sign. If ye are satisfied, let us fly swiftly to the place of which ye spoke. The charm cannot now be stopped. It will work for an hour and the half of an hour. Let us cover ourselves in the darkness.”

“Come,” said Infadoos, turning to go, an example which was followed by the awed captains, ourselves, and the girl Foulata, whom Good took by the arm.

Before we reached the gate of the kraal the moon went out utterly, and from every quarter of the firmament the stars rushed forth into the inky sky.

Holding each other by the hand we stumbled on through the darkness.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BEFORE THE BATTLE

Luckily for us, Infadoos and the chiefs knew all the paths of the great town perfectly, so that we passed by side-ways unmolested, and notwithstanding the gloom we made fair progress.

For an hour or more we journeyed on, till at length the eclipse began to pass, and that edge of the moon which had disappeared the first became again visible. Suddenly, as we watched, there burst from it a silver streak of light, accompanied by a wondrous ruddy glow, which hung upon the blackness of the sky like a celestial lamp, and a wild and lovely sight it was. In another five minutes the stars began to fade, and there was sufficient light to see our whereabouts. We then discovered that we were clear of the town of Loo, and approaching a large flat-topped hill, measuring some two miles in circumference. This hill, which is of a formation common in South Africa, is not very high; indeed, its greatest elevation is scarcely more than 200 feet, but it is shaped like a horseshoe, and its sides are rather precipitous and strewn with boulders. On the grass table-land at its summit is ample camping-ground, which had been utilised as a military cantonment of no mean strength. Its ordinary garrison was one regiment of three thousand men, but as we toiled up the steep side of the mountain in the returning moonlight we perceived that there were several of such regiments encamped there.

Reaching the table-land at last, we found crowds of men roused from their sleep, shivering with fear and huddled up together in the utmost consternation at the natural phenomenon which they were witnessing. Passing through these without a word, we gained a hut in the centre of the ground, where we were astonished to find two men waiting, laden with our few goods and chattels, which of course we had been obliged to leave behind in our hasty flight.

"I sent for them," explained Infadoos; "and also for these," and he lifted up Good's long-lost trousers.

With an exclamation of rapturous delight Good sprang at them, and instantly proceeded to put them on.

"Surely my lord will not hide his beautiful white legs!" exclaimed Infadoos regretfully.

But Good persisted, and once only did the Kukuana people get the chance of seeing his beautiful legs again. Good is a very modest man. Henceforward they had to satisfy their æsthetic longings with his one whisker, his transparent eye, and his movable teeth.

Still gazing with fond remembrance at Good's trousers, Infadoos next informed us that he had commanded the regiments to muster so soon as the day broke, in order to explain to them fully the origin and circumstances of the rebellion which was decided on by the chiefs, and to introduce to them the rightful heir to the throne, Ignosi.

Accordingly, when the sun was up, the troops—in all some twenty thousand men, and the flower of the Kukuana army—were mustered on a large open space, to which we went. The men were drawn up in three sides of a dense square, and presented a magnificent spectacle. We took our station on the open side of the square, and were speedily surrounded by all the principal chiefs and officers.

These, after silence had been proclaimed, Infadoos proceeded to address. He narrated to them in vigorous and graceful language—for, like most Kukuanas of high rank, he was a born orator—the history of Ignosi's father, and of how he had been basely murdered by Twala the king, and his wife and child driven out to starve. Then he pointed out that the people suffered and groaned under Twala's cruel rule, instancing the proceedings of the previous night, when, under pretence of their being evil-doers, many of the noblest in the land had been dragged forth and wickedly done to death. Next he went on to say that the white lords from the Stars, looking down upon their country, had perceived its trouble, and determined, at great personal inconvenience, to alleviate its lot: That they had accordingly taken the real king of the Kukuanas, Ignosi, who was languishing in exile, by the hand, and led him over the mountains: That they had seen the wickedness of Twala's doings, and for a sign to the wavering, and to save the life of the girl Foulata, actually, by the exercise of their high magic, had put out the moon and slain the young fiend Scragga; and that they were prepared to stand by them, and assist them to overthrow Twala, and set up the rightful king, Ignosi, in his place.

He finished his discourse amidst a murmur of approbation. Then Ignosi stepped forward and began to speak. Having reiterated all that Infadoos his uncle had said, he concluded a powerful speech in these words:—

"O chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people, ye have heard my words. Now must ye make choice between me and him who sits upon my throne, the uncle who killed his brother, and hunted his brother's child forth to die in the cold and the night. That I am indeed the king these"—pointing to the chiefs—"can tell you, for they have seen the snake about my middle. If I were not the king, would these white men be on my side with all their magic? Tremble, chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people! Is not the darkness they have brought upon the land to confound Twala and cover our flight, darkness even in the hour of the full moon, yet before your eyes?"

"It is," answered the soldiers.

"I am the king; I say to you, I am the king," went on Ignosi, drawing up his great stature to its full, and lifting his broad-bladed battle-axe above his head. "If there be any man among you who says that it is not so, let him stand forth and I will fight him now, and his blood shall be a red token that I tell you true. Let him stand forth, I say;" and he shook the great axe till it flashed in the sunlight.

As nobody seemed inclined to respond to this heroic version of "Dilly, Dilly, come and be killed," our late henchman proceeded with his address.

"I am indeed the king, and should ye stand by my side in the battle, if I win the day ye shall go with me to victory and honour. I will give you oxen and wives, and ye shall take place of all the regiments; and if ye fall, I will fall with you.

"And behold, I give you this promise, that when I sit upon the seat of my fathers, bloodshed shall cease in the land. No longer shall ye cry for justice to find slaughter, no longer shall the witch-finder hunt you out so that ye may be slain without a cause. No man shall

die save he who offends against the laws. The 'eating up' of your kraals shall cease; each one of you shall sleep secure in his own hut and fear naught, and justice shall walk blindfold throughout the land. Have ye chosen, chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people?"

"We have chosen, O king," came back the answer.

"It is well. Turn your heads and see how Twala's messengers go forth from the great town, east and west, and north and south, to gather a mighty army to slay me and you, and these my friends and protectors. To-morrow, or perchance the next day, he will come against us with all who are faithful to him. Then I shall see the man who is indeed my man, the man who fears not to die for his cause; and I tell you that he shall not be forgotten in the time of spoil. I have spoken, O chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people. Now go to your huts and make you ready for war."

There was a pause, till presently one of the chiefs lifted his hand, and out rolled the royal salute, "*Koom*." It was a sign that the soldiers accepted Ignosi as their king. Then they marched off in battalions.

Half an hour afterwards we held a council of war, at which all the commanders of regiments were present. It was evident to us that before very long we should be attacked in overwhelming force. Indeed, from our point of vantage on the hill we could see troops mustering, and runners going forth from Loo in every direction, doubtless to summon soldiers to the king's assistance. We had on our side about twenty thousand men, composed of seven of the best regiments in the country. Twala, so Infadoos and the chiefs calculated, had at least thirty to thirty-five thousand on whom he could rely at present assembled in Loo, and they thought that by midday on the morrow he would be able to gather another five thousand or more to his aid. It was, of course, possible that some of his troops would desert and come over to us, but it was not a contingency which could be reckoned on. Meanwhile, it was clear that active preparations were being made by Twala to subdue us. Already strong bodies of armed men were patrolling round and round the foot of the hill, and there were other signs also of coming assault.

Infadoos and the chiefs, however, were of opinion that no attack would take place that day, which would be devoted to preparation and to the removal of every available means of the moral effect produced upon the minds of the soldiery by the supposed magical darkening of the moon. The onslaught would be on the morrow, they said, and they proved to be right.

Meanwhile, we set to work to strengthen the position in all ways possible. Almost every man was turned out, and in the course of the day, which seemed far too short, much was done. The paths up the hill—that was rather a sanatorium than a fortress, being used generally as the camping place of regiments suffering from recent service in unhealthy portions of the country—were carefully blocked with masses of stones, and every other approach was made as impregnable as time would allow. Piles of boulders were collected at various spots to be rolled down upon an advancing enemy, stations were appointed to the different regiments, and all preparation was made which our joint ingenuity could suggest.

Just before sundown, as we rested after our toil, we perceived a small company of men advancing towards us from the direction of Loo, one of whom bore a palm leaf in his hand for a sign that he came as a herald.

As he drew near, Ignosi, Infadoos, one or two chiefs and ourselves, went down to the foot of the mountain to meet him. He was a gallant-looking fellow, wearing the regulation leopard-skin cloak.

"Greeting!" he cried, as he came; "the king's greeting to those who make unholy war against the king; the lion's greeting to the jackals that snarl around his heels."

"Speak," I said.

"These are the king's words. Surrender to the king's mercy ere a worse thing befall you. Already the shoulder has been torn from the black bull, and the king drives him bleeding about the camp."<sup>[8]</sup>

<sup>[8]</sup> This cruel custom is not confined to the Kukuanas, but is by no means uncommon amongst African tribes on the occasion of the outbreak of war or any other important public event.—A. Q.

"What are Twala's terms?" I asked from curiosity.

"His terms are merciful, worthy of a great king. These are the words of Twala, the one-eyed, the mighty, the husband of a thousand wives, lord of the Kukuanas, keeper of the Great Road (Solomon's Road), beloved of the Strange Ones who sit in silence at the mountains yonder (the Three Witches), Calf of the Black Cow, Elephant whose tread shakes the earth, Terror of the evil-doer, Ostrich whose feet devour the desert, huge One, black One, wise One, king from generation to generation! these are the words of Twala: 'I will have mercy and be satisfied with a little blood. One in every ten shall die, the rest shall go free; but the white man Incubu, who slew Scragga my son, and the black man his servant, who pretends to my throne, and Infadoos my brother, who brews rebellion against me, these shall die by torture as an offering to the Silent Ones.' Such are the merciful words of Twala."

After consulting with the others a little, I answered him in a loud voice, so that the soldiers might hear, thus—

"Go back, thou dog, to Twala, who sent thee, and say that we, Ignosi, veritable king of the Kukuanas, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn, the wise ones from the Stars, who make dark the moon, Infadoos, of the royal house, and the chiefs, captains, and people here gathered, make answer and say, 'That we will not surrender; that before the sun has gone down twice, Twala's corpse shall stiffen at Twala's gate, and Ignosi, whose father Twala slew, shall reign in his stead.' Now go, ere we whip thee away, and beware how thou dost lift a hand against such as we are."

The herald laughed loudly. "Ye frighten not men with such swelling words," he cried out. "Show yourselves as bold to-morrow, O ye who darken the moon. Be bold, fight, and be merry, before the crows pick your bones till they are whiter than your faces. Farewell; perhaps we may meet in the fight; fly not to the Stars, but wait for me, I pray, white men." With this shaft of sarcasm he retired, and almost immediately the sun sank.

That night was a busy one, for weary as we were, so far as was possible by the moonlight all preparations for the morrow's fight were continued, and messengers were constantly coming and going from the place where we sat in council. At last, about an hour after midnight, everything that could be done was done, and the camp, save for the occasional challenge of a sentry, sank into silence. Sir Henry and I, accompanied by Ignosi and one of the chiefs, descended the hill and made a round of the pickets. As we went, suddenly, from all sorts of unexpected places, spears gleamed out in the moonlight, only to vanish again when we uttered the password. It was clear to us that none were sleeping at their posts. Then we returned, picking our way warily through thousands of sleeping warriors, many of whom were taking their last earthly rest.

The moonlight flickering along their spears played upon their features and made them ghastly; the chilly night wind tossed their tall and hearse-like plumes. There they lay in wild confusion, with arms outstretched and twisted limbs; their stern, stalwart forms

looking weird and unhuman in the moonlight.

"How many of these do you suppose will be alive at this time to-morrow?" asked Sir Henry.

I shook my head and looked again at the sleeping men, and to my tired and yet excited imagination it seemed as though Death had already touched them. My mind's eye singled out those who were sealed to slaughter, and there rushed in upon my heart a great sense of the mystery of human life, and an overwhelming sorrow at its futility and sadness. To-night these thousands slept their healthy sleep, to-morrow they, and many others with them, ourselves perhaps among them, would be stiffening in the cold; their wives would be widows, their children fatherless, and their place know them no more for ever. Only the old moon would shine on serenely, the night wind would stir the grasses, and the wide earth would take its rest, even as it did æons before we were, and will do æons after we have been forgotten.

Yet man dies not whilst the world, at once his mother and his monument, remains. His name is lost, indeed, but the breath he breathed still stirs the pine-tops on the mountains, the sound of the words he spoke yet echoes on through space; the thoughts his brain gave birth to we have inherited to-day; his passions are our cause of life; the joys and sorrows that he knew are our familiar friends—the end from which he fled aghast will surely overtake us also!

Truly the universe is full of ghosts, not sheeted churchyard spectres, but the inextinguishable elements of individual life, which having once been, can never *die*, though they blend and change, and change again for ever.

All sorts of reflections of this nature passed through my mind—for as I grow older I regret to say that a detestable habit of thinking seems to be getting a hold of me—while I stood and stared at those grim yet fantastic lines of warriors, sleeping, as their saying goes, "upon their spears."

"Curtis," I said, "I am in a condition of pitiable fear."

Sir Henry stroked his yellow beard and laughed, as he answered—

"I have heard you make that sort of remark before, Quatermain."

"Well, I mean it now. Do you know, I very much doubt if one of us will be alive to-morrow night. We shall be attacked in overwhelming force, and it is quite a chance if we can hold this place."

"We'll give a good account of some of them, at any rate. Look here, Quatermain, this business is nasty, and one with which, properly speaking, we ought not to be mixed up, but we are in for it, so we must make the best of our job. Speaking personally, I had rather be killed fighting than any other way, and now that there seems little chance of our finding my poor brother, it makes the idea easier to me. But fortune favours the brave, and we may succeed. Anyway, the battle will be awful, and having a reputation to keep up, we shall need to be in the thick of the thing."

He made this last remark in a mournful voice, but there was a gleam in his eye which belied its melancholy. I have an idea Sir Henry Curtis actually likes fighting.

After this we went to sleep for a couple of hours or so.

Just about dawn we were awakened by Infadoos, who came to say that great activity was to be observed in Loo, and that parties of the king's skirmishers were driving in our outposts.

We rose and dressed ourselves for the fray, each putting on his chain armour shirt, for which garments at the present juncture we felt exceedingly thankful. Sir Henry went the whole length about the matter, and dressed himself like a native warrior. "When you are in Kukuanaaland, do as the Kukuanas do," he remarked, as he drew the shining steel over his broad breast, which it fitted like a glove. Nor did he stop there. At his request Infadoos had provided him with a complete set of native war uniform. Round his throat he fastened the leopard-skin cloak of a commanding officer, on his brows he bound the plume of black ostrich feathers worn only by generals of high rank, and about his middle a magnificent moocha of white ox-tails. A pair of sandals, a leglet of goat's hair, a heavy battle-axe with a rhinoceros-horn handle, a round iron shield covered with white ox-hide, and the regulation number of *tollas*, or throwing-knives, made up his equipment, to which, however, he added his revolver. The dress was, no doubt, a savage one, but I am bound to say that I seldom saw a finer sight than Sir Henry Curtis presented in this guise. It showed off his magnificent physique to the greatest advantage, and when Ignosi arrived presently, arrayed in a similar costume, I thought to myself that I had never before seen two such splendid men.

As for Good and myself, the armour did not suit us nearly so well. To begin with, Good insisted upon keeping on his new-found trousers, and a stout, short gentleman with an eye-glass, and one half of his face shaved, arrayed in a mail shirt, carefully tucked into a very seedy pair of corduroys, looks more remarkable than imposing. In my case, the chain shirt being too big for me, I put it on over all my clothes, which caused it to bulge in a somewhat ungainly fashion. I discarded my trousers, however, retaining only my veldtschoons, having determined to go into battle with bare legs, in order to be the lighter for running, in case it became necessary to retire quickly. The mail coat, a spear, a shield, that I did not know how to use, a couple of *tollas*, a revolver, and a huge plume, which I pinned into the top of my shooting hat, in order to give a bloodthirsty finish to my appearance, completed my modest equipment. In addition to all these articles, of course we had our rifles, but as ammunition was scarce, and as they would be useless in case of a charge, we arranged that they should be carried behind us by bearers.

When at length we had equipped ourselves, we swallowed some food hastily, and then started out to see how things were going on. At one point in the table-land of the mountain, there was a little koppie of brown stone, which served the double purpose of headquarters and of a conning tower. Here we found Infadoos surrounded by his own regiment, the Greys, which was undoubtedly the finest in the Kukuana army, and the same that we had first seen at the outlying kraal. This regiment, now three thousand five hundred strong, was being held in reserve, and the men were lying down on the grass in companies, and watching the king's forces creep out of Loo in long ant-like columns. There seemed to be no end to the length of these columns—three in all, and each of them numbering, as we judged, at least eleven or twelve thousand men.

As soon as they were clear of the town the regiments formed up. Then one body marched off to the right, one to the left, and the third came on slowly towards us.

"Ah," said Infadoos, "they are going to attack us on three sides at once."

This seemed rather serious news, for our position on the top of the mountain, which measured a mile and a half in circumference, being an extended one, it was important to us to concentrate our comparatively small defending force as much as possible. But since it was impossible for us to dictate in what way we should be assailed, we had to make the best of it, and accordingly sent orders to the various regiments to prepare to receive the separate onslaughts.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE ATTACK

Slowly, and without the slightest appearance of haste or excitement, the three columns crept on. When within about five hundred yards of us, the main or centre column halted at the root of a tongue of open plain which ran up into the hill, to give time to the other divisions to circumvent our position, which was shaped more or less in the form of a horse-shoe, with its two points facing towards the town of Loo. The object of this manoeuvre was that the threefold assault should be delivered simultaneously.

"Oh, for a gatling!" groaned Good, as he contemplated the serried phalanxes beneath us. "I would clear that plain in twenty minutes."

"We have not got one, so it is no use yearning for it; but suppose you try a shot, Quatermain," said Sir Henry. "See how near you can go to that tall fellow who appears to be in command. Two to one you miss him, and an even sovereign, to be honestly paid if ever we get out of this, that you don't drop the bullet within five yards."

This piqued me, so, loading the express with solid ball, I waited till my friend walked some ten yards out from his force, in order to get a better view of our position, accompanied only by an orderly; then, lying down and resting the express on a rock, I covered him. The rifle, like all expresses, was only sighted to three hundred and fifty yards, so to allow for the drop in trajectory I took him half-way down the neck, which ought, I calculated, to find him in the chest. He stood quite still and gave me every opportunity, but whether it was the excitement or the wind, or the fact of the man being a long shot, I don't know, but this was what happened. Getting dead on, as I thought, a fine sight, I pressed, and when the puff of smoke had cleared away, to my disgust, I saw my man standing there unharmed, whilst his orderly, who was at least three paces to the left, was stretched upon the ground apparently dead. Turning swiftly, the officer I had aimed at began to run towards his men in evident alarm.

"Bravo, Quatermain!" sang out Good; "you've frightened him."

This made me very angry, for, if possible to avoid it, I hate to miss in public. When a man is master of only one art he likes to keep up his reputation in that art. Moved quite out of myself at my failure, I did a rash thing. Rapidly covering the general as he ran, I let drive with the second barrel. Instantly the poor man threw up his arms, and fell forward on to his face. This time I had made no mistake; and—I say it as a proof of how little we think of others when our own safety, pride, or reputation is in question—I was brute enough to feel delighted at the sight.

The regiments who had seen the feat cheered wildly at this exhibition of the white man's magic, which they took as an omen of success, while the force the general had belonged to—which, indeed, as we ascertained afterwards, he had commanded—fell back in confusion. Sir Henry and Good now took up their rifles and began to fire, the latter industriously "browning" the dense mass before him with another Winchester repeater, and I also had another shot or two, with the result, so far as we could judge, that we put some six or eight men *hors de combat* before they were out of range.

Just as we stopped firing there came an ominous roar from our far right, then a similar roar rose on our left. The two other divisions were engaging us.

At the sound, the mass of men before us opened out a little, and advanced towards the hill and up the spit of bare grass land at a slow trot, singing a deep-throated song as they ran. We kept up a steady fire from our rifles as they came, Ignosi joining in occasionally, and accounted for several men, but of course we produced no more effect upon that mighty rush of armed humanity than he who throws pebbles does on the breaking wave.

On they came, with a shout and the clashing of spears; now they were driving in the pickets we had placed among the rocks at the foot of the hill. After that the advance was a little slower, for though as yet we had offered no serious opposition, the attacking forces must climb up hill, and they came slowly to save their breath. Our first line of defence was about half-way down the side of the slope, our second fifty yards further back, while our third occupied the edge of the plateau.

On they stormed, shouting their war-cry, "*Twala! Twala! Chiele! Chiele!*" (Twala! Twala! Smite! Smite!) "*Ignosi! Ignosi! Chiele! Chiele!*" answered our people. They were quite close now, and the *tollas*, or throwing-knives, began to flash backwards and forwards, and now with an awful yell the battle closed in.

To and fro swayed the mass of struggling warriors, men falling fast as leaves in an autumn wind; but before long the superior weight of the attacking force began to tell, and our first line of defence was slowly pressed back till it merged into the second. Here the struggle was very fierce, but again our people were driven back and up, till at length, within twenty minutes of the commencement of the fight, our third line came into action.

But by this time the assailants were much exhausted, and besides had lost many men killed and wounded, and to break through that third impenetrable hedge of spears proved beyond their powers. For a while the seething lines of savages swung backwards and forwards, in the fierce ebb and flow of battle, and the issue was doubtful. Sir Henry watched the desperate struggle with a kindling eye, and then without a word he rushed off, followed by Good, and flung himself into the hottest of the fray. As for myself, I stopped where I was.

The soldiers caught sight of his tall form as he plunged into battle, and there rose a cry of—

"*Nanzia Incubu! Nanzia Unkungunklovo!*" (Here is the Elephant!) "*Chiele! Chiele!*"

From that moment the end was no longer in doubt. Inch by inch, fighting with splendid gallantry, the attacking force was pressed back down the hillside, till at last it retreated upon its reserves in something like confusion. At that instant, too, a messenger arrived to say that the left attack had been repulsed; and I was just beginning to congratulate myself, believing that the affair was over for the

present, when, to our horror, we perceived our men who had been engaged in the right defence being driven towards us across the plain, followed by swarms of the enemy, who had evidently succeeded at this point.

Ignosi, who was standing by me, took in the situation at a glance, and issued a rapid order. Instantly the reserve regiment around us, the Greys, extended itself.

Again Ignosi gave a word of command, which was taken up and repeated by the captains, and in another second, to my intense disgust, I found myself involved in a furious onslaught upon the advancing foe. Getting as much as I could behind Ignosi's huge frame, I made the best of a bad job, and toddled along to be killed as though I liked it. In a minute or two—we were plunging through the flying groups of our men, who at once began to re-form behind us, and then I am sure I do not know what happened. All I can remember is a dreadful rolling noise of the meeting of shields, and the sudden apparition of a huge ruffian, whose eyes seemed literally to be starting out of his head, making straight at me with a bloody spear. But—I say it with pride—I rose—or rather sank—to the occasion. It was one before which most people would have collapsed once and for all. Seeing that if I stood where I was I must be killed, as the horrid apparition came I flung myself down in front of him so cleverly that, being unable to stop himself, he took a header right over my prostrate form. Before he could rise again, I had risen and settled the matter from behind with my revolver.

Shortly after this somebody knocked me down, and I remember no more of that charge.

When I came to I found myself back at the koppie, with Good bending over me holding some water in a gourd.

"How do you feel, old fellow?" he asked anxiously.

I got up and shook myself before replying.

"Pretty well, thank you," I answered.

"Thank Heaven! When I saw them carry you in, I felt quite sick; I thought you were done for."

"Not this time, my boy. I fancy I only got a rap on the head, which knocked me stupid. How has it ended?"

"They are repulsed at every point for a while. The loss is dreadfully heavy; we have quite two thousand killed and wounded, and they must have lost three. Look, there's a sight!" and he pointed to long lines of men advancing by fours.

In the centre of every group of four, and being borne by it, was a kind of hide tray, of which a Kukuana force always carries a quantity, with a loop for a handle at each corner. On these trays—and their number seemed endless—lay wounded men, who as they arrived were hastily examined by the medicine men, of whom ten were attached to a regiment. If the wound was not of a fatal character the sufferer was taken away and attended to as carefully as circumstances would allow. But if, on the other hand, the injured man's condition proved hopeless, what followed was very dreadful, though doubtless it may have been the truest mercy. One of the doctors, under pretence of carrying out an examination, swiftly opened an artery with a sharp knife, and in a minute or two the sufferer expired painlessly. There were many cases that day in which this was done. In fact, it was done in the majority of cases when the wound was in the body, for the gash made by the entry of the enormously broad spears used by the Kukuanas generally rendered recovery impossible. In most instances the poor sufferers were already unconscious, and in others the fatal "nick" of the artery was inflicted so swiftly and painlessly that they did not seem to notice it. Still it was a ghastly sight, and one from which we were glad to escape; indeed, I never remember anything of the kind that affected me more than seeing those gallant soldiers thus put out of pain by the red-handed medicine men, except, indeed, on one occasion when, after an attack, I saw a force of Swazis burying their hopelessly wounded *alive*.

Hurrying from this dreadful scene to the further side of the koppie, we found Sir Henry, who still held a battle-axe in his hand, Ignosi, Infadoos, and one or two of the chiefs in deep consultation.

"Thank Heaven, here you are, Quatermain! I can't quite make out what Ignosi wants to do. It seems that though we have beaten off the attack, Twala is now receiving large reinforcements, and is showing a disposition to invest us, with the view of starving us out."

"That's awkward."

"Yes; especially as Infadoos says that the water supply has given out."

"My lord, that is so," said Infadoos; "the spring cannot supply the wants of so great a multitude, and it is failing rapidly. Before night we shall all be thirsty. Listen, Macumazahn. Thou art wise, and hast doubtless seen many wars in the lands from whence thou camest—that is if indeed they make wars in the Stars. Now tell us, what shall we do? Twala has brought up many fresh men to take the place of those who have fallen. Yet Twala has learnt his lesson; the hawk did not think to find the heron ready; but our beak has pierced his breast; he fears to strike at us again. We too are wounded, and he will wait for us to die; he will wind himself round us like a snake round a buck, and fight the fight of 'sit down.'"

"I hear thee," I said.

"So, Macumazahn, thou seest we have no water here, and but a little food, and we must choose between these three things—to languish like a starving lion in his den, or to strive to break away towards the north, or"—and here he rose and pointed towards the dense mass of our foes—"to launch ourselves straight at Twala's throat. Incubu, the great warrior—for to-day he fought like a buffalo in a net, and Twala's soldiers went down before his axe like young corn before the hail; with these eyes I saw it—Incubu says 'Charge'; but the Elephant is ever prone to charge. Now what says Macumazahn, the wily old fox, who has seen much, and loves to bite his enemy from behind? The last word is in Ignosi the king, for it is a king's right to speak of war; but let us hear thy voice, O Macumazahn, who watchest by night, and the voice too of him of the transparent eye."

"What sayest thou, Ignosi," I asked.

"Nay, my father," answered our quondam servant, who now, clad as he was in the full panoply of savage war, looked every inch a warrior king, "do thou speak, and let me, who am but a child in wisdom beside thee, hearken to thy words."

Thus adjured, after taking hasty counsel with Good and Sir Henry, I delivered my opinion briefly to the effect that, being trapped, our best chance, especially in view of the failure of our water supply, was to initiate an attack upon Twala's forces. Then I recommended that the attack should be delivered at once, "before our wounds grew stiff," and also before the sight of Twala's overpowering force caused the hearts of our soldiers "to wax small like fat before a fire." Otherwise, I pointed out, some of the captains might change their minds, and, making peace with Twala, desert to him, or even betray us into his hands.

This expression of opinion seemed, on the whole, to be favourably received; indeed, among the Kukuanas my utterances met with a respect which has never been accorded to them before or since. But the real decision as to our plans lay with Ignosi, who, since he

had been recognised as rightful king, could exercise the almost unbounded rights of sovereignty, including, of course, the final decision on matters of generalship, and it was to him that all eyes were now turned.

At length, after a pause, during which he appeared to be thinking deeply, he spoke.

"Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, brave white men, and my friends; Infadoos, my uncle, and chiefs; my heart is fixed. I will strike at Twala this day, and set my fortunes on the blow, ay, and my life—my life and your lives also. Listen; thus will I strike. Ye see how the hill curves round like the half-moon, and how the plain runs like a green tongue towards us within the curve?"

"We see," I answered.

"Good; it is now mid-day, and the men eat and rest after the toil of battle. When the sun has turned and travelled a little way towards the darkness, let thy regiment, my uncle, advance with one other down to the green tongue, and it shall be that when Twala sees it he will hurl his force at it to crush it. But the spot is narrow, and the regiments can come against thee one at a time only; so may they be destroyed one by one, and the eyes of all Twala's army shall be fixed upon a struggle the like of which has not been seen by living man. And with thee, my uncle, shall go Incubu my friend, that when Twala sees his battle-axe flashing in the first rank of the Greys his heart may grow faint. And I will come with the second regiment, that which follows thee, so that if ye are destroyed, as it might happen, there may yet be a king left to fight for; and with me shall come Macumazahn the wise."

"It is well, O king," said Infadoos, apparently contemplating the certainty of the complete annihilation of his regiment with perfect calmness. Truly, these Kukuanas are a wonderful people. Death has no terrors for them when it is incurred in the course of duty.

"And whilst the eyes of the multitude of Twala's soldiers are thus fixed upon the fight," went on Ignosi, "behold, one-third of the men who are left alive to us (i.e. about 6,000) shall creep along the right horn of the hill and fall upon the left flank of Twala's force, and one-third shall creep along the left horn and fall upon Twala's right flank. And when I see that the horns are ready to toss Twala, then will I, with the men who remain to me, charge home in Twala's face, and if fortune goes with us the day will be ours, and before Night drives her black oxen from the mountains to the mountains we shall sit in peace at Loo. And now let us eat and make ready; and, Infadoos, do thou prepare, that the plan be carried out without fail; and stay, let my white father Bougwan go with the right horn, that his shining eye may give courage to the captains."

The arrangements for attack thus briefly indicated were set in motion with a rapidity that spoke well for the perfection of the Kukuana military system. Within little more than an hour rations had been served out and devoured, the divisions were formed, the scheme of onslaught was explained to the leaders, and the whole force, numbering about 18,000 men, was ready to move, with the exception of a guard left in charge of the wounded.

Presently Good came up to Sir Henry and myself.

"Good-bye, you fellows," he said; "I am off with the right wing according to orders; and so I have come to shake hands, in case we should not meet again, you know," he added significantly.

We shook hands in silence, and not without the exhibition of as much emotion as Anglo-Saxons are wont to show.

"It is a queer business," said Sir Henry, his deep voice shaking a little, "and I confess I never expect to see to-morrow's sun. So far as I can make out, the Greys, with whom I am to go, are to fight until they are wiped out in order to enable the wings to slip round unawares and outflank Twala. Well, so be it; at any rate, it will be a man's death. Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you! I hope you will pull through and live to collar the diamonds; but if you do, take my advice and don't have anything more to do with Pretenders!"

In another second Good had wrung us both by the hand and gone; and then Infadoos came up and led off Sir Henry to his place in the forefront of the Greys, whilst, with many misgivings, I departed with Ignosi to my station in the second attacking regiment.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE LAST STAND OF THE GREYS

In a few more minutes the regiments destined to carry out the flanking movements had tramped off in silence, keeping carefully to the lee of the rising ground in order to conceal their advance from the keen eyes of Twala's scouts.

Half an hour or more was allowed to elapse between the setting out of the horns or wings of the army before any stir was made by the Greys and their supporting regiment, known as the Buffaloes, which formed its chest, and were destined to bear the brunt of the battle.

Both of these regiments were almost perfectly fresh, and of full strength, the Greys having been in reserve in the morning, and having lost but a small number of men in sweeping back that part of the attack which had proved successful in breaking the line of defence, on the occasion when I charged with them and was stunned for my pains. As for the Buffaloes, they had formed the third line of defence on the left, and since the attacking force at that point had not succeeded in breaking through the second, they had scarcely come into action at all.

Infadoos, who was a wary old general, and knew the absolute importance of keeping up the spirits of his men on the eve of such a desperate encounter, employed the pause in addressing his own regiment, the Greys, in poetical language: explaining to them the honour that they were receiving in being put thus in the forefront of the battle, and in having the great white warrior from the Stars to fight with them in their ranks; and promising large rewards of cattle and promotion to all who survived in the event of Ignosi's arms being successful.

I looked down the long lines of waving black plumes and stern faces beneath them, and sighed to think that within one short hour most, if not all, of those magnificent veteran warriors, not a man of whom was under forty years of age, would be laid dead or dying in the dust. It could not be otherwise; they were being condemned, with that wise recklessness of human life which marks the great general, and often saves his forces and attains his ends, to certain slaughter, in order to give their cause and the remainder of the army a chance of success. They were foredoomed to die, and they knew the truth. It was to be their task to engage regiment after regiment of Twala's army on the narrow strip of green beneath us, till they were exterminated or till the wings found a favourable opportunity for their onslaught. And yet they never hesitated, nor could I detect a sign of fear upon the face of a single warrior. There they were—going to certain death, about to quit the blessed light of day for ever, and yet able to contemplate their doom without a tremor. Even at that moment I could not help contrasting their state of mind with my own, which was far from comfortable, and breathing a sigh of envy and admiration. Never before had I seen such an absolute devotion to the idea of duty, and such a complete indifference to its bitter fruits.

"Behold your king!" ended old Infadoos, pointing to Ignosi; "go fight and fall for him, as is the duty of brave men, and cursed and shameful for ever be the name of him who shrinks from death for his king, or who turns his back to the foe. Behold your king, chiefs, captains, and soldiers! Now do your homage to the sacred Snake, and then follow on, that Incubu and I may show you a road to the heart of Twala's host."

There was a moment's pause, then suddenly a murmur arose from the serried phalanxes before us, a sound like the distant whisper of the sea, caused by the gentle tapping of the handles of six thousand spears against their holders' shields. Slowly it swelled, till its growing volume deepened and widened into a roar of rolling noise, that echoed like thunder against the mountains, and filled the air with heavy waves of sound. Then it decreased, and by faint degrees died away into nothing, and suddenly out crashed the royal salute.

Ignosi, I thought to myself, might well be a proud man that day, for no Roman emperor ever had such a salutation from gladiators "about to die."

Ignosi acknowledged this magnificent act of homage by lifting his battle-axe, and then the Greys filed off in a triple-line formation, each line containing about one thousand fighting men, exclusive of officers. When the last companies had advanced some five hundred yards, Ignosi put himself at the head of the Buffaloes, which regiment was drawn up in a similar three-fold formation, and gave the word to march, and off we went, I, needless to say, uttering the most heartfelt prayers that I might emerge from that entertainment with a whole skin. Many a queer position have I found myself in, but never before in one quite so unpleasant as the present, or one in which my chance of coming off safe was smaller.

By the time that we reached the edge of the plateau the Greys were already half-way down the slope ending in the tongue of grass land that ran up into the bend of the mountain, something as the frog of a horse's foot runs up into the shoe. The excitement in Twala's camp on the plain beyond was very great, and regiment after regiment was starting forward at a long swinging trot in order to reach the root of the tongue of land before the attacking force could emerge into the plain of Loo.

This tongue, which was some four hundred yards in depth, even at its root or widest part was not more than six hundred and fifty paces across, while at its tip it scarcely measured ninety. The Greys, who, in passing down the side of the hill and on to the tip of the tongue, had formed into a column, on reaching the spot where it broadened out again, reassumed their triple-line formation, and halted dead.

Then we—that is, the Buffaloes—moved down the tip of the tongue and took our stand in reserve, about one hundred yards behind the last line of the Greys, and on slightly higher ground. Meanwhile we had leisure to observe Twala's entire force, which evidently had been reinforced since the morning attack, and could not now, notwithstanding their losses, number less than forty thousand, moving swiftly up towards us. But as they drew near the root of the tongue they hesitated, having discovered that only one regiment could advance into the gorge at a time, and that there, some seventy yards from the mouth of it, unassailable except in front, on

account of the high walls of boulder-strewn ground on each side, stood the famous regiment of Greys, the pride and glory of the Kukuana army, ready to hold the way against their power as the three Romans once held the bridge against thousands.

They hesitated, and finally stopped their advance; there was no eagerness to cross spears with these three grim ranks of warriors who stood so firm and ready. Presently, however, a tall general, wearing the customary head-dress of nodding ostrich plumes, appeared, attended by a group of chiefs and orderlies, being, I thought, none other than Twala himself. He gave an order, and the first regiment, raising a shout, charged up towards the Greys, who remained perfectly still and silent till the attacking troops were within forty yards, and a volley of *tollas*, or throwing-knives, came rattling among their ranks.

Then suddenly with a bound and a roar, they sprang forward with uplifted spears, and the regiment met in deadly strife. Next second the roll of the meeting shields came to our ears like the sound of thunder, and the plain seemed to be alive with flashes of light reflected from the shimmering spears. To and fro swung the surging mass of struggling, stabbing humanity, but not for long. Suddenly the attacking lines began to grow thinner, and then with a slow, long heave the Greys passed over them, just as a great wave heaves up its bulk and passes over a sunken ridge. It was done; that regiment was completely destroyed, but the Greys had but two lines left now; a third of their number were dead.

Closing up shoulder to shoulder, once more they halted in silence and awaited attack; and I was rejoiced to catch sight of Sir Henry's yellow beard as he moved to and fro arranging the ranks. So he was yet alive!

Meanwhile we moved on to the ground of the encounter, which was cumbered by about four thousand prostrate human beings, dead, dying, and wounded, and literally stained red with blood. Ignosi issued an order, which was rapidly passed down the ranks, to the effect that none of the enemy's wounded were to be killed, and so far as we could see this command was scrupulously carried out. It would have been a shocking sight, if we had found time to think of such things.

But now a second regiment, distinguished by white plumes, kilts, and shields, was moving to the attack of the two thousand remaining Greys, who stood waiting in the same ominous silence as before, till the foe was within forty yards or so, when they hurled themselves with irresistible force upon them. Again there came the awful roll of the meeting shields, and as we watched the tragedy repeated itself.

But this time the issue was left longer in doubt; indeed, it seemed for awhile almost impossible that the Greys should again prevail. The attacking regiment, which was formed of young men, fought with the utmost fury, and at first seemed by sheer weight to be driving the veterans back. The slaughter was truly awful, hundreds falling every minute; and from among the shouts of the warriors and the groans of the dying, set to the music of clashing spears, came a continuous hissing undertone of "*S'gee, s'gee*," the note of triumph of each victor as he passed his assegai through and through the body of his fallen foe.

But perfect discipline and steady and unchanging valour can do wonders, and one veteran soldier is worth two young ones, as soon became apparent in the present case. For just when we thought that it was all over with the Greys, and were preparing to take their place so soon as they made room by being destroyed, I heard Sir Henry's deep voice ringing out through the din, and caught a glimpse of his circling battle-axe as he waved it high above his plumes. Then came a change; the Greys ceased to give; they stood still as a rock, against which the furious waves of spearmen broke again and again, only to recoil. Presently they began to move once more—forward this time; as they had no firearms there was no smoke, so we could see it all. Another minute and the onslaught grew fainter.

"Ah, these are *men*, indeed; they will conquer again," called out Ignosi, who was grinding his teeth with excitement at my side. "See, it is done!"

Suddenly, like puffs of smoke from the mouth of a cannon, the attacking regiment broke away in flying groups, their white head-dresses streaming behind them in the wind, and left their opponents victors, indeed, but, alas! no more a regiment. Of the gallant triple line, which forty minutes before had gone into action three thousand strong, there remained at most some six hundred blood-spattered men; the rest were under foot. And yet they cheered and waved their spears in triumph, and then, instead of falling back upon us as we expected, they ran forward, for a hundred yards or so, after the flying groups of foemen, took possession of a rising knoll of ground, and, resuming their triple formation, formed a threefold ring around its base. And there, thanks be to Heaven, standing on the top of the mound for a minute, I saw Sir Henry, apparently unharmed, and with him our old friend Infadoos. Then Twala's regiments rolled down upon the doomed band, and once more the battle closed in.

As those who read this history will probably long ago have gathered, I am, to be honest, a bit of a coward, and certainly in no way given to fighting, though somehow it has often been my lot to get into unpleasant positions, and to be obliged to shed man's blood. But I have always hated it, and kept my own blood as undiminished in quantity as possible, sometimes by a judicious use of my heels. At this moment, however, for the first time in my life, I felt my bosom burn with martial ardour. Warlike fragments from the "*Ingoldsby Legends*," together with numbers of sanguinary verses in the Old Testament, sprang up in my brain like mushrooms in the dark; my blood, which hitherto had been half-frozen with horror, went beating through my veins, and there came upon me a savage desire to kill and spare not. I glanced round at the serried ranks of warriors behind us, and somehow, all in an instant, I began to wonder if my face looked like theirs. There they stood, the hands twitching, the lips apart, the fierce features instinct with the hungry lust of battle, and in the eyes a look like the glare of a bloodhound when after long pursuit he sights his quarry.

Only Ignosi's heart, to judge from his comparative self-possession, seemed, to all appearances, to beat as calmly as ever beneath his leopard-skin cloak, though even *he* still ground his teeth. I could bear it no longer.

"Are we to stand here till we put out roots, Umbopa—Ignosi, I mean—while Twala swallows our brothers yonder?" I asked.

"Nay, Macumazahn," was the answer; "see, now is the ripe moment: let us pluck it."

As he spoke a fresh regiment rushed past the ring upon the little mound, and wheeling round, attacked it from the hither side.

Then, lifting his battle-axe, Ignosi gave the signal to advance, and, screaming the wild Kukuana war-cry, the Buffaloes charged home with a rush like the rush of the sea.

What followed immediately on this it is out of my power to tell. All I can remember is an irregular yet ordered advance, that seemed to shake the ground; a sudden change of front and forming up on the part of the regiment against which the charge was directed; then an awful shock, a dull roar of voices, and a continuous flashing of spears, seen through a red mist of blood.

When my mind cleared I found myself standing inside the remnant of the Greys near the top of the mound, and just behind no less a person than Sir Henry himself. How I got there I had at the moment no idea, but Sir Henry afterwards told me that I was borne up

by the first furious charge of the Buffaloes almost to his feet, and then left, as they in turn were pressed back. Thereon he dashed out of the circle and dragged me into shelter.

As for the fight that followed, who can describe it? Again and again the multitudes surged against our momentarily lessening circle, and again and again we beat them back.

“The stubborn spearmen still made good  
The dark impenetrable wood,  
Each stepping where his comrade stood  
The instant that he fell,”

as someone or other beautifully says.

It was a splendid thing to see those brave battalions come on time after time over the barriers of their dead, sometimes lifting corpses before them to receive our spear-thrusts, only to leave their own corpses to swell the rising piles. It was a gallant sight to see that old warrior, Infadoos, as cool as though he were on parade, shouting out orders, taunts, and even jests, to keep up the spirit of his few remaining men, and then, as each charge rolled on, stepping forward to wherever the fighting was thickest, to bear his share in its repulse. And yet more gallant was the vision of Sir Henry, whose ostrich plumes had been shorn off by a spear thrust, so that his long yellow hair streamed out in the breeze behind him. There he stood, the great Dane, for he was nothing else, his hands, his axe, and his armour all red with blood, and none could live before his stroke. Time after time I saw it sweeping down, as some great warrior ventured to give him battle, and as he struck he shouted “*O-hoy! O-hoy!*” like his Berserkir forefathers, and the blow went crashing through shield and spear, through head-dress, hair, and skull, till at last none would of their own will come near the great white “*umtagati*,” the wizard, who killed and failed not.

But suddenly there rose a cry of “*Twala, y’ Twala*,” and out of the press sprang forward none other than the gigantic one-eyed king himself, also armed with battle-axe and shield, and clad in chain armour.

“Where art thou, Incubu, thou white man, who slewest Scragga my son—see if thou canst slay me!” he shouted, and at the same time hurled a *tolla* straight at Sir Henry, who fortunately saw it coming, and caught it on his shield, which it transfixed, remaining wedged in the iron plate behind the hide.

Then, with a cry, Twala sprang forward straight at him, and with his battle-axe struck him such a blow upon the shield that the mere force and shock of it brought Sir Henry, strong man as he is, down upon his knees.

But at this time the matter went no further, for that instant there rose from the regiments pressing round us something like a shout of dismay, and on looking up I saw the cause.

To the right and to the left the plain was alive with the plumes of charging warriors. The outflanking squadrons had come to our relief. The time could not have been better chosen. All Twala’s army, as Ignosi predicted would be the case, had fixed their attention on the bloody struggle which was raging round the remnant of the Greys and that of the Buffaloes, who were now carrying on a battle of their own at a little distance, which two regiments had formed the chest of our army. It was not until our horns were about to close upon them that they had dreamed of their approach, for they believed these forces to be hidden in reserve upon the crest of the moon-shaped hill. And now, before they could even assume a proper formation for defence, the outflanking *Impis* had leapt, like greyhounds, on their flanks.

In five minutes the fate of the battle was decided. Taken on both flanks, and dismayed at the awful slaughter inflicted upon them by the Greys and Buffaloes, Twala’s regiments broke into flight, and soon the whole plain between us and Loo was scattered with groups of running soldiers making good their retreat. As for the hosts that had so recently surrounded us and the Buffaloes, they melted away as though by magic, and presently we were left standing there like a rock from which the sea has retreated. But what a sight it was! Around us the dead and dying lay in heaped-up masses, and of the gallant Greys there remained but ninety-five men upon their feet. More than three thousand four hundred had fallen in this one regiment, most of them never to rise again.

“Men,” said Infadoos calmly, as between the intervals of binding a wound on his arm he surveyed what remained to him of his corps, “ye have kept up the reputation of your regiment, and this day’s fighting will be well spoken of by your children’s children.” Then he turned round and shook Sir Henry Curtis by the hand. “Thou art a great captain, Incubu,” he said simply; “I have lived a long life among warriors, and have known many a brave one, yet have I never seen a man like unto thee.”

At this moment the Buffaloes began to march past our position on the road to Loo, and as they went a message was brought to us from Ignosi requesting Infadoos, Sir Henry, and myself to join them. Accordingly, orders having been issued to the remaining ninety men of the Greys to employ themselves in collecting the wounded, we joined Ignosi, who informed us that he was pressing on to Loo to complete the victory by capturing Twala, if that should be possible. Before we had gone far, suddenly we discovered the figure of Good sitting on an ant-heap about one hundred paces from us. Close beside him was the body of a Kukuana.

“He must be wounded,” said Sir Henry anxiously. As he made the remark, an untoward thing happened. The dead body of the Kukuana soldier, or rather what had appeared to be his dead body, suddenly sprang up, knocked Good head over heels off the ant-heap, and began to spear him. We rushed forward in terror, and as we drew near we saw the brawny warrior making dig after dig at the prostrate Good, who at each prod jerked all his limbs into the air. Seeing us coming, the Kukuana gave one final and most vicious dig, and with a shout of “Take that, wizard!” bolted away. Good did not move, and we concluded that our poor comrade was done for. Sadly we came towards him, and were astonished to find him pale and faint indeed, but with a serene smile upon his face, and his eyeglass still fixed in his eye.

“Capital armour this,” he murmured, on catching sight of our faces bending over him. “How sold that beggar must have been,” and then he fainted. On examination we discovered that he had been seriously wounded in the leg by a *tolla* in the course of the pursuit, but that the chain armour had prevented his last assailant’s spear from doing anything more than bruise him badly. It was a merciful escape. As nothing could be done for him at the moment, he was placed on one of the wicker shields used for the wounded, and carried along with us.

On arriving before the nearest gate of Loo we found one of our regiments watching it in obedience to orders received from Ignosi. The other regiments were in the same way guarding the different exits to the town. The officer in command of this regiment saluted Ignosi as king, and informed him that Twala’s army had taken refuge in the town, whither Twala himself had also escaped, but he thought that they were thoroughly demoralised, and would surrender. Thereupon Ignosi, after taking counsel with us, sent forward heralds to each gate ordering the defenders to open, and promising on his royal word life and forgiveness to every soldier who laid down his arms, but saying that if they did not do so before nightfall he would certainly burn the town and all within its gates. This

message was not without its effect. Half an hour later, amid the shouts and cheers of the Buffaloes, the bridge was dropped across the fosse, and the gates upon the further side were flung open.

Taking due precautions against treachery, we marched on into the town. All along the roadways stood thousands of dejected warriors, their heads drooping, and their shields and spears at their feet, who, headed by their officers, saluted Ignosi as king as he passed. On we marched, straight to Twala's kraal. When we reached the great space, where a day or two previously we had seen the review and the witch hunt, we found it deserted. No, not quite deserted, for there, on the further side, in front of his hut, sat Twala himself, with but one attendant—Gagool.

It was a melancholy sight to see him seated, his battle-axe and shield by his side, his chin upon his mailed breast, with but one old crone for companion, and notwithstanding his crimes and misdeeds, a pang of compassion shot through me as I looked upon Twala thus "fallen from his high estate." Not a soldier of all his armies, not a courtier out of the hundreds who had cringed round him, not even a solitary wife, remained to share his fate or halve the bitterness of his fall. Poor savage! he was learning the lesson which Fate teaches to most of us who live long enough, that the eyes of mankind are blind to the discredited, and that he who is defenceless and fallen finds few friends and little mercy. Nor, indeed, in this case did he deserve any.

Filing through the kraal gate, we marched across the open space to where the ex-king sat. When within about fifty yards of him the regiment was halted, and accompanied only by a small guard we advanced towards him, Gagool reviling us bitterly as we came. As we drew near, Twala, for the first time, lifted his plumed head, and fixed his one eye, which seemed to flash with suppressed fury almost as brightly as the great diamond bound round his forehead, upon his successful rival—Ignosi.

"Hail, O king!" he said, with bitter mockery; "thou who hast eaten of my bread, and now by the aid of the white man's magic hast seduced my regiments and defeated mine army, hail! What fate hast thou in store for me, O king?"

"The fate thou gavest to my father, whose throne thou hast sat on these many years!" was the stern answer.

"It is good. I will show thee how to die, that thou mayest remember it against thine own time. See, the sun sinks in blood," and he pointed with his battle-axe towards the setting orb; "it is well that my sun should go down in its company. And now, O king! I am ready to die, but I crave the boon of the Kukuana royal House<sup>[9]</sup> to die fighting. Thou canst not refuse it, or even those cowards who fled to-day will hold thee shamed."

[9] It is a law amongst the Kukuanas that no man of the direct royal blood can be put to death, unless by his own consent, which is, however, never refused. He is allowed to choose a succession of antagonists, to be approved by the king, with whom he fights, till one of them kills him.—A.Q.

"It is granted. Choose—with whom wilt thou fight? Myself I cannot fight with thee, for the king fights not except in war."

Twala's sombre eye ran up and down our ranks, and I felt, as for a moment it rested on myself, that the position had developed a new horror. What if he chose to begin by fighting *me*? What chance should I have against a desperate savage six feet five high, and broad in proportion? I might as well commit suicide at once. Hastily I made up my mind to decline the combat, even if I were hooted out of Kukuanaland as a consequence. It is, I think, better to be hooted than to be quartered with a battle-axe.

Presently Twala spoke.

"Incubu, what sayest thou, shall we end what we began to-day, or shall I call thee coward, white—even to the liver?"

"Nay," interposed Ignosi hastily; "thou shalt not fight with Incubu."

"Not if he is afraid," said Twala.

Unfortunately Sir Henry understood this remark, and the blood flamed up into his cheeks.

"I will fight him," he said; "he shall see if I am afraid."

"For Heaven's sake," I entreated, "don't risk your life against that of a desperate man. Anybody who saw you to-day will know that you are brave enough."

"I will fight him," was the sullen answer. "No living man shall call me a coward. I am ready now!" and he stepped forward and lifted his axe.

I wrung my hands over this absurd piece of Quixotism; but if he was determined on this deed, of course I could not stop him.

"Fight not, my white brother," said Ignosi, laying his hand affectionately on Sir Henry's arm; "thou hast fought enough, and if aught befell thee at his hands it would cut my heart in twain."

"I will fight, Ignosi," was Sir Henry's answer.

"It is well, Incubu; thou art a brave man. It will be a good fray. Behold, Twala, the Elephant is ready for thee."

The ex-king laughed savagely, and stepping forward faced Curtis. For a moment they stood thus, and the light of the sinking sun caught their stalwart frames and clothed them both in fire. They were a well-matched pair.

Then they began to circle round each other, their battle-axes raised.

Suddenly Sir Henry sprang forward and struck a fearful blow at Twala, who stepped to one side. So heavy was the stroke that the striker half overbalanced himself, a circumstance of which his antagonist took a prompt advantage. Circling his massive battle-axe round his head, he brought it down with tremendous force. My heart jumped into my mouth; I thought that the affair was already finished. But no; with a quick upward movement of the left arm Sir Henry interposed his shield between himself and the axe, with the result that its outer edge was shorn away, the axe falling on his left shoulder, but not heavily enough to do any serious damage. In another moment Sir Henry got in a second blow, which was also received by Twala upon his shield.

Then followed blow upon blow, that were, in turn, either received upon the shields or avoided. The excitement grew intense; the regiment which was watching the encounter forgot its discipline, and, drawing near, shouted and groaned at every stroke. Just at this time, too, Good, who had been laid upon the ground by me, recovered from his faint, and, sitting up, perceived what was going on. In an instant he was up, and catching hold of my arm, hopped about from place to place on one leg, dragging me after him, and yelling encouragements to Sir Henry—

"Go it, old fellow!" he hallooed. "That was a good one! Give it him amidsthips," and so on.

Presently Sir Henry, having caught a fresh stroke upon his shield, hit out with all his force. The blow cut through Twala's shield and through the tough chain armour behind it, gashing him in the shoulder. With a yell of pain and fury Twala returned the blow with

interest, and, such was his strength, shore right through the rhinoceros' horn handle of his antagonists battle-axe, strengthened as it was with bands of steel, wounding Curtis in the face.

A cry of dismay rose from the Buffaloes as our hero's broad axe-head fell to the ground; and Twala, again raising his weapon, flew at him with a shout. I shut my eyes. When I opened them again it was to see Sir Henry's shield lying on the ground, and Sir Henry himself with his great arms twined round Twala's middle. To and fro they swung, hugging each other like bears, straining with all their mighty muscles for dear life, and dearer honour. With a supreme effort Twala swung the Englishman clean off his feet, and down they came together, rolling over and over on the lime paving, Twala striking out at Curtis' head with the battle-axe, and Sir Henry trying to drive the *tolla* he had drawn from his belt through Twala's armour.

It was a mighty struggle, and an awful thing to see.

"Get his axe!" yelled Good; and perhaps our champion heard him.

At any rate, dropping the *tolla*, he snatched at the axe, which was fastened to Twala's wrist by a strip of buffalo hide, and still rolling over and over, they fought for it like wild cats, drawing their breath in heavy gasps. Suddenly the hide string burst, and then, with a great effort, Sir Henry freed himself, the weapon remaining in his hand. Another second and he was upon his feet, the red blood streaming from the wound in his face, and so was Twala. Drawing the heavy *tolla* from his belt, he reeled straight at Curtis and struck him in the breast. The stab came home true and strong, but whoever it was who made that chain armour, he understood his art, for it withstood the steel. Again Twala struck out with a savage yell, and again the sharp knife rebounded, and Sir Henry went staggering back. Once more Twala came on, and as he came our great Englishman gathered himself together, and swinging the big axe round his head with both hands, hit at him with all his force.

There was a shriek of excitement from a thousand throats, and, behold! Twala's head seemed to spring from his shoulders: then it fell and came rolling and bounding along the ground towards Ignosi, stopping just at his feet. For a second the corpse stood upright; then with a dull crash it came to the earth, and the gold torque from its neck rolled away across the pavement. As it did so Sir Henry, overpowered by faintness and loss of blood, fell heavily across the body of the dead king.

In a second he was lifted up, and eager hands were pouring water on his face. Another minute, and the grey eyes opened wide.

He was not dead.

Then I, just as the sun sank, stepping to where Twala's head lay in the dust, unloosed the diamond from the dead brows, and handed it to Ignosi.

"Take it," I said, "lawful king of the Kukuanas—king by birth and victory."

Ignosi bound the diadem upon his brows. Then advancing, he placed his foot upon the broad chest of his headless foe and broke out into a chant, or rather a pæan of triumph, so beautiful, and yet so utterly savage, that I despair of being able to give an adequate version of his words. Once I heard a scholar with a fine voice read aloud from the Greek poet Homer, and I remember that the sound of the rolling lines seemed to make my blood stand still. Ignosi's chant, uttered as it was in a language as beautiful and sonorous as the old Greek, produced exactly the same effect on me, although I was exhausted with toil and many emotions.

"Now," he began, "now our rebellion is swallowed up in victory, and our evil-doing is justified by strength.

"In the morning the oppressors arose and stretched themselves; they bound on their harness and made them ready to war.

"They rose up and tossed their spears: the soldiers called to the captains, 'Come, lead us'—and the captains cried to the king, 'Direct thou the battle.'

"They laughed in their pride, twenty thousand men, and yet a twenty thousand.

"Their plumes covered the valleys as the plumes of a bird cover her nest; they shook their shields and shouted, yea, they shook their shields in the sunlight; they lusted for battle and were glad.

"They came up against me; their strong ones ran swiftly to slay me; they cried, 'Ha! ha! he is as one already dead.'

"Then breathed I on them, and my breath was as the breath of a wind, and lo! they were not.

"My lightnings pierced them; I licked up their strength with the lightning of my spears; I shook them to the ground with the thunder of my shoutings.

"They broke—they scattered—they were gone as the mists of the morning.

"They are food for the kites and the foxes, and the place of battle is fat with their blood.

"Where are the mighty ones who rose up in the morning?

"Where are the proud ones who tossed their spears and cried, 'He is as a man already dead'?

"They bow their heads, but not in sleep; they are stretched out, but not in sleep.

"They are forgotten; they have gone into the blackness; they dwell in the dead moons; yea, others shall lead away their wives, and their children shall remember them no more.

"And I—! the king—like an eagle I have found my eyrie.

"Behold! far have I flown in the night season, yet have I returned to my young at the daybreak.

"Shelter ye under the shadow of my wings, O people, and I will comfort you, and ye shall not be dismayed.

"Now is the good time, the time of spoil.

"Mine are the cattle on the mountains, mine are the virgins in the kraals.

"The winter is overpast with storms, the summer is come with flowers.

"Now Evil shall cover up her face, now Mercy and Gladness shall dwell in the land.

“Rejoice, rejoice, my people!

“Let all the stars rejoice in that this tyranny is trodden down, in that I am the king.”

Ignosi ceased his song, and out of the gathering gloom came back the deep reply—

*“Thou art the king!”*

Thus was my prophecy to the herald fulfilled, and within the forty-eight hours Twala’s headless corpse was stiffening at Twala’s gate.

## CHAPTER XV.

### GOOD FALLS SICK

After the fight was ended, Sir Henry and Good were carried into Twala's hut, where I joined them. They were both utterly exhausted by exertion and loss of blood, and, indeed, my own condition was little better. I am very wiry, and can stand more fatigue than most men, probably on account of my light weight and long training; but that night I was quite done up, and, as is always the case with me when exhausted, that old wound which the lion gave me began to pain. Also my head was aching violently from the blow I had received in the morning, when I was knocked senseless. Altogether, a more miserable trio than we were that evening it would have been difficult to discover; and our only comfort lay in the reflection that we were exceedingly fortunate to be there to feel miserable, instead of being stretched dead upon the plain, as so many thousands of brave men were that night, who had risen well and strong in the morning.

Somehow, with the assistance of the beautiful Foulata, who, since we had been the means of saving her life, had constituted herself our handmaiden, and especially Good's, we managed to get off the chain shirts, which had certainly saved the lives of two of us that day. As I expected, we found that the flesh underneath was terribly contused, for though the steel links had kept the weapons from entering, they had not prevented them from bruising. Both Sir Henry and Good were a mass of contusions, and I was by no means free. As a remedy Foulata brought us some pounded green leaves, with an aromatic odour, which, when applied as a plaster, gave us considerable relief.

But though the bruises were painful, they did not give us such anxiety as Sir Henry's and Good's wounds. Good had a hole right through the fleshy part of his "beautiful white leg," from which he had lost a great deal of blood; and Sir Henry, with other hurts, had a deep cut over the jaw, inflicted by Twala's battle-axe. Luckily Good is a very decent surgeon, and so soon as his small box of medicines was forthcoming, having thoroughly cleansed the wounds, he managed to stitch up first Sir Henry's and then his own pretty satisfactorily, considering the imperfect light given by the primitive Kukuana lamp in the hut. Afterwards he plentifully smeared the injured places with some antiseptic ointment, of which there was a pot in the little box, and we covered them with the remains of a pocket-handkerchief which we possessed.

Meanwhile Foulata had prepared us some strong broth, for we were too weary to eat. This we swallowed, and then threw ourselves down on the piles of magnificent karrosses, or fur rugs, which were scattered about the dead king's great hut. By a very strange instance of the irony of fate, it was on Twala's own couch, and wrapped in Twala's own particular karross, that Sir Henry, the man who had slain him, slept that night.

I say slept; but after that day's work, sleep was indeed difficult. To begin with, in very truth the air was full

"Of farewells to the dying  
And mournings for the dead."

From every direction came the sound of the wailing of women whose husbands, sons, and brothers had perished in the battle. No wonder that they wailed, for over twelve thousand men, or nearly a fifth of the Kukuana army, had been destroyed in that awful struggle. It was heart-rending to lie and listen to their cries for those who never would return; and it made me understand the full horror of the work done that day to further man's ambition. Towards midnight, however, the ceaseless crying of the women grew less frequent, till at length the silence was only broken at intervals of a few minutes by a long piercing howl that came from a hut in our immediate rear, which, as I afterwards discovered, proceeded from Gagool "keening" over the dead king Twala.

After that I got a little fitful sleep, only to wake from time to time with a start, thinking that I was once more an actor in the terrible events of the last twenty-four hours. Now I seemed to see that warrior whom my hand had sent to his last account charging at me on the mountain-top; now I was once more in that glorious ring of Greys, which made its immortal stand against all Twala's regiments upon the little mound; and now again I saw Twala's plumed and gory head roll past my feet with gnashing teeth and glaring eye.

At last, somehow or other, the night passed away; but when dawn broke I found that my companions had slept no better than myself. Good, indeed, was in a high fever, and very soon afterwards began to grow light-headed, and also, to my alarm, to spit blood, the result, no doubt, of some internal injury, inflicted during the desperate efforts made by the Kukuana warrior on the previous day to force his big spear through the chain armour. Sir Henry, however, seemed pretty fresh, notwithstanding his wound on the face, which made eating difficult and laughter an impossibility, though he was so sore and stiff that he could scarcely stir.

About eight o'clock we had a visit from Infadoos, who appeared but little the worse—tough old warrior that he was—for his exertions in the battle, although he informed us that he had been up all night. He was delighted to see us, but much grieved at Good's condition, and shook our hands cordially. I noticed, however, that he addressed Sir Henry with a kind of reverence, as though he were something more than man; and, indeed, as we afterwards found out, the great Englishman was looked on throughout Kukuana as a supernatural being. No man, the soldiers said, could have fought as he fought or, at the end of a day of such toil and bloodshed, could have slain Twala, who, in addition to being the king, was supposed to be the strongest warrior in the country, in single combat, shearing through his bull-neck at a stroke. Indeed, that stroke became proverbial in Kukuana, and any extraordinary blow or feat of strength was henceforth known as "Incubu's blow."

Infadoos told us also that all Twala's regiments had submitted to Ignosi, and that like submissions were beginning to arrive from chiefs in the outlying country. Twala's death at the hands of Sir Henry had put an end to all further chance of disturbance; for Scragga had been his only legitimate son, so there was no rival claimant to the throne left alive.

I remarked that Ignosi had swum to power through blood. The old chief shrugged his shoulders. "Yes," he answered; "but the Kukuana people can only be kept cool by letting their blood flow sometimes. Many are killed, indeed, but the women are left, and others must soon grow up to take the places of the fallen. After this the land would be quiet for a while."

Afterwards, in the course of the morning, we had a short visit from Ignosi, on whose brows the royal diadem was now bound. As I contemplated him advancing with kingly dignity, an obsequious guard following his steps, I could not help recalling to my mind the tall Zulu who had presented himself to us at Durban some few months back, asking to be taken into our service, and reflecting on the strange revolutions of the wheel of fortune.

"Hail, O king!" I said, rising.

"Yes, Macumazahn. King at last, by the might of your three right hands," was the ready answer.

All was, he said, going well; and he hoped to arrange a great feast in two weeks' time in order to show himself to the people.

I asked him what he had settled to do with Gagool.

"She is the evil genius of the land," he answered, "and I shall kill her, and all the witch doctors with her! She has lived so long that none can remember when she was not very old, and she it is who has always trained the witch-hunters, and made the land wicked in the sight of the heavens above."

"Yet she knows much," I replied; "it is easier to destroy knowledge, Ignosi, than to gather it."

"That is so," he said thoughtfully. "She, and she only, knows the secret of the 'Three Witches,' yonder, whither the great road runs, where the kings are buried, and the Silent Ones sit."

"Yes, and the diamonds are. Forget not thy promise, Ignosi; thou must lead us to the mines, even if thou hast to spare Gagool alive to show the way."

"I will not forget, Macumazahn, and I will think on what thou sayest."

After Ignosi's visit I went to see Good, and found him quite delirious. The fever set up by his wound seemed to have taken a firm hold of his system, and to be complicated with an internal injury. For four or five days his condition was most critical; indeed, I believe firmly that had it not been for Foulata's indefatigable nursing he must have died.

Women are women, all the world over, whatever their colour. Yet somehow it seemed curious to watch this dusky beauty bending night and day over the fevered man's couch, and performing all the merciful errands of a sick-room swiftly, gently, and with as fine an instinct as that of a trained hospital nurse. For the first night or two I tried to help her, and so did Sir Henry as soon as his stiffness allowed him to move, but Foulata bore our interference with impatience, and finally insisted upon our leaving him to her, saying that our movements made him restless, which I think was true. Day and night she watched him and tended him, giving him his only medicine, a native cooling drink made of milk, in which was infused juice from the bulb of a species of tulip, and keeping the flies from settling on him. I can see the whole picture now as it appeared night after night by the light of our primitive lamp; Good tossing to and fro, his features emaciated, his eyes shining large and luminous, and jabbering nonsense by the yard; and seated on the ground by his side, her back resting against the wall of the hut, the soft-eyed, shapely Kukuana beauty, her face, weary as it was with her long vigil, animated by a look of infinite compassion—or was it something more than compassion?

For two days we thought that he must die, and crept about with heavy hearts.

Only Foulata would not believe it.

"He will live," she said.

For three hundred yards or more around Twala's chief hut, where the sufferer lay, there was silence; for by the king's order all who lived in the habitations behind it, except Sir Henry and myself, had been removed, lest any noise should come to the sick man's ears. One night, it was the fifth of Good's illness, as was my habit, I went across to see how he was doing before turning in for a few hours.

I entered the hut carefully. The lamp placed upon the floor showed the figure of Good tossing no more, but lying quite still.

So it had come at last! In the bitterness of my heart I gave something like a sob.

"Hush—h—h!" came from the patch of dark shadow behind Good's head.

Then, creeping closer, I saw that he was not dead, but sleeping soundly, with Foulata's taper fingers clasped tightly in his poor white hand. The crisis had passed, and he would live. He slept like that for eighteen hours; and I scarcely like to say it, for fear I should not be believed, but during the entire period did this devoted girl sit by him, fearing that if she moved and drew away her hand it would wake him. What she must have suffered from cramp and weariness, to say nothing of want of food, nobody will ever know; but it is the fact that, when at last he woke, she had to be carried away—her limbs were so stiff that she could not move them.

After the turn had once been taken, Good's recovery was rapid and complete. It was not till he was nearly well that Sir Henry told him of all he owed to Foulata; and when he came to the story of how she sat by his side for eighteen hours, fearing lest by moving she should wake him, the honest sailor's eyes filled with tears. He turned and went straight to the hut where Foulata was preparing the mid-day meal, for we were back in our old quarters now, taking me with him to interpret in case he could not make his meaning clear to her, though I am bound to say that she understood him marvellously as a rule, considering how extremely limited was his foreign vocabulary.

"Tell her," said Good, "that I owe her my life, and that I will never forget her kindness to my dying day."

I interpreted, and under her dark skin she actually seemed to blush.

Turning to him with one of those swift and graceful motions that in her always reminded me of the flight of a wild bird, Foulata answered softly, glancing at him with her large brown eyes—

"Nay, my lord; my lord forgets! Did he not save *my* life, and am I not my lord's handmaiden?"

It will be observed that the young lady appeared entirely to have forgotten the share which Sir Henry and myself had taken in her preservation from Twala's clutches. But that is the way of women! I remember my dear wife was just the same. Well, I retired from that little interview sad at heart. I did not like Miss Foulata's soft glances, for I knew the fatal amorous propensities of sailors in general, and of Good in particular.

There are two things in the world, as I have found out, which cannot be prevented: you cannot keep a Zulu from fighting, or a sailor from falling in love upon the slightest provocation!

It was a few days after this last occurrence that Ignosi held his great “indaba,” or council, and was formally recognised as king by the “indunas,” or head men, of Kukuanaland. The spectacle was a most imposing one, including as it did a grand review of troops. On this day the remaining fragments of the Greys were formally paraded, and in the face of the army thanked for their splendid conduct in the battle. To each man the king made a large present of cattle, promoting them one and all to the rank of officers in the new corps of Greys which was in process of formation. An order was also promulgated throughout the length and breadth of Kukuanaland that, whilst we honoured the country by our presence, we three were to be greeted with the royal salute, and to be treated with the same ceremony and respect that was by custom accorded to the king. Also the power of life and death was publicly conferred upon us. Ignosi, too, in the presence of his people, reaffirmed the promises which he had made, to the effect that no man’s blood should be shed without trial, and that witch-hunting should cease in the land.

When the ceremony was over we waited upon Ignosi, and informed him that we were now anxious to investigate the mystery of the mines to which Solomon’s Road ran, asking him if he had discovered anything about them.

“My friends,” he answered, “I have discovered this. It is there that the three great figures sit, who here are called the ‘Silent Ones,’ and to whom Twala would have offered the girl Foulata as a sacrifice. It is there, too, in a great cave deep in the mountain, that the kings of the land are buried; there ye shall find Twala’s body, sitting with those who went before him. There, also, is a deep pit, which, at some time, long-dead men dug out, mayhap for the stones ye speak of, such as I have heard men in Natal tell of at Kimberley. There, too, in the Place of Death is a secret chamber, known to none but the king and Gagool. But Twala, who knew it, is dead, and I know it not, nor know I what is in it. Yet there is a legend in the land that once, many generations gone, a white man crossed the mountains, and was led by a woman to the secret chamber and shown the wealth hidden in it. But before he could take it she betrayed him, and he was driven by the king of that day back to the mountains, and since then no man has entered the place.”

“The story is surely true, Ignosi, for on the mountains we found the white man,” I said.

“Yes, we found him. And now I have promised you that if ye can come to that chamber, and the stones are there—”

“The gem upon thy forehead proves that they are there,” I put in, pointing to the great diamond I had taken from Twala’s dead brows.

“Mayhap; if they are there,” he said, “ye shall have as many as ye can take hence—if indeed ye would leave me, my brothers.”

“First we must find the chamber,” said I.

“There is but one who can show it to thee—Gagool.”

“And if she will not?”

“Then she must die,” said Ignosi sternly. “I have saved her alive but for this. Stay, she shall choose,” and calling to a messenger he ordered Gagool to be brought before him.

In a few minutes she came, hurried along by two guards, whom she was cursing as she walked.

“Leave her,” said the king to the guards.

So soon as their support was withdrawn, the withered old bundle—for she looked more like a bundle than anything else, out of which her two bright and wicked eyes gleamed like those of a snake—sank in a heap on to the floor.

“What will ye with me, Ignosi?” she piped. “Ye dare not touch me. If ye touch me I will slay you as ye sit. Beware of my magic.”

“Thy magic could not save Twala, old she-wolf, and it cannot hurt me,” was the answer. “Listen; I will this of thee, that thou reveal to us the chamber where are the shining stones.”

“Ha! ha!” she piped, “none know its secret but I, and I will never tell thee. The white devils shall go hence empty-handed.”

“Thou shalt tell me. I will make thee tell me.”

“How, O king? Thou art great, but can thy power wring the truth from a woman?”

“It is difficult, yet will I do so.”

“How, O king?”

“Nay, thus; if thou tellest not thou shalt slowly die.”

“Die!” she shrieked in terror and fury; “ye dare not touch me—man, ye know not who I am. How old think ye am I? I knew your fathers, and your fathers’ fathers’ fathers. When the country was young I was here; when the country grows old I shall still be here. I cannot die unless I be killed by chance, for none dare slay me.”

“Yet will I slay thee. See, Gagool, mother of evil, thou art so old that thou canst no longer love thy life. What can life be to such a hag as thou, who hast no shape, nor form, nor hair, nor teeth—hast naught, save wickedness and evil eyes? It will be mercy to make an end of thee, Gagool.”

“Thou fool,” shrieked the old fiend, “thou accursed fool, deemest thou that life is sweet only to the young? It is not so, and naught thou knowest of the heart of man to think it. To the young, indeed, death is sometimes welcome, for the young can feel. They love and suffer, and it wrings them to see their beloved pass to the land of shadows. But the old feel not, they love not, and, *ha! ha!* they laugh to see another go out into the dark; *ha! ha!* they laugh to see the evil that is done under the stars. All they love is life, the warm, warm sun, and the sweet, sweet air. They are afraid of the cold, afraid of the cold and the dark, *ha! ha! ha!*” and the old hag writhed in ghastly merriment on the ground.

“Cease thine evil talk and answer me,” said Ignosi angrily. “Wilt thou show the place where the stones are, or wilt thou not? If thou wilt not thou diest, even now,” and he seized a spear and held it over her.

“I will not show it; thou darkest not kill me, darkest not! He who slays me will be accursed for ever.”

Slowly Ignosi brought down the spear till it pricked the prostrate heap of rags.

With a wild yell Gagool sprang to her feet, then fell again and rolled upon the floor.

“Nay, I will show thee. Only let me live, let me sit in the sun and have a bit of meat to suck, and I will show thee.”

“It is well. I thought that I should find a way to reason with thee. To-morrow shalt thou go with Infadoos and my white brothers to the place, and beware how thou failest, for if thou showest it not, then thou shalt slowly die. I have spoken.”

“I’ll not fail, Ignosi. I always keep my word—*ha! ha! ha!* Once before a woman showed the chamber to a white man and behold! evil befell him,” and here her wicked eyes glinted. “Her name was Gagool also. Perchance I was that woman.”

“Thou liest,” I said, “that’s ten generations gone.”

“Mayhap, mayhap; when one lives long one forgets. Perhaps it was my mother’s mother who told me; surely her name was Gagool also. But mark, ye will find in the place where the bright things are a bag of hide full of stones. The man filled that bag, but he never took it away. Evil befell him, I say, evil befell him! Perhaps it was my mother’s mother who told me. It will be a merry journey—we can see the bodies of those who died in the battle as we go. Their eyes will be gone by now, and their ribs will be hollow. *Ha! ha! ha!*”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE PLACE OF DEATH

It was already dark on the third day after the scene described in the previous chapter when we camped in some huts at the foot of the "Three Witches," as the triangle of mountains is called to which Solomon's Great Road runs. Our party consisted of our three selves and Foulata, who waited on us—especially on Good—Infadoos, Gagool, who was borne along in a litter, inside which she could be heard muttering and cursing all day long, and a party of guards and attendants. The mountains, or rather the three peaks of the mountain, for the mass was evidently the result of a solitary upheaval, were, as I have said, in the form of a triangle, of which the base was towards us, one peak being on our right, one on our left, and one straight in front of us. Never shall I forget the sight afforded by those three towering peaks in the early sunlight of the following morning. High, high above us, up into the blue air, soared their twisted snow-wreaths. Beneath the snow-line the peaks were purple with heaths, and so were the wild moors that ran up the slopes towards them. Straight before us the white ribbon of Solomon's Great Road stretched away uphill to the foot of the centre peak, about five miles from us, and there stopped. It was its terminus.

I had better leave the feelings of intense excitement with which we set out on our march that morning to the imagination of those who read this history. At last we were drawing near to the wonderful mines that had been the cause of the miserable death of the old Portuguese Dom three centuries ago, of my poor friend, his ill-starred descendant, and also, as we feared, of George Curtis, Sir Henry's brother. Were we destined, after all that we had gone through, to fare any better? Evil befell them, as that old fiend Gagool said; would it also befall us? Somehow, as we were marching up that last stretch of beautiful road, I could not help feeling a little superstitious about the matter, and so I think did Good and Sir Henry.

For an hour and a half or more we tramped on up the heather-fringed way, going so fast in our excitement that the bearers of Gagool's hammock could scarcely keep pace with us, and its occupant piped out to us to stop.

"Walk more slowly, white men," she said, projecting her hideous shrivelled countenance between the grass curtains, and fixing her gleaming eyes upon us; "why will ye run to meet the evil that shall befall you, ye seekers after treasure?" and she laughed that horrible laugh which always sent a cold shiver down my back, and for a while quite took the enthusiasm out of us.

However, on we went, till we saw before us, and between ourselves and the peak, a vast circular hole with sloping sides, three hundred feet or more in depth, and quite half a mile round.

"Can't you guess what this is?" I said to Sir Henry and Good, who were staring in astonishment at the awful pit before us.

They shook their heads.

"Then it is clear that you have never seen the diamond diggings at Kimberley. You may depend on it that this is Solomon's Diamond Mine. Look there," I said, pointing to the strata of stiff blue clay which were yet to be seen among the grass and bushes that clothed the sides of the pit, "the formation is the same. I'll be bound that if we went down there we should find 'pipes' of soapy brecciated rock. Look, too," and I pointed to a series of worn flat slabs of stone that were placed on a gentle slope below the level of a watercourse which in some past age had been cut out of the solid rock; "if those are not tables once used to wash the 'stuff,' I'm a Dutchman."

At the edge of this vast hole, which was none other than the pit marked on the old Dom's map, the Great Road branched into two and circumvented it. In many places, by the way, this surrounding road was built entirely out of blocks of stone, apparently with the object of supporting the edges of the pit and preventing falls of reef. Along this path we pressed, driven by curiosity to see what were the three towering objects which we could discern from the hither side of the great gulf. As we drew near we perceived that they were Colossi of some sort or another, and rightly conjectured that before us sat the three "Silent Ones" that are held in such awe by the Kukuana people. But it was not until we were quite close to them that we recognised the full majesty of these "Silent Ones."

There, upon huge pedestals of dark rock, sculptured with rude emblems of the Phallic worship, separated from each other by a distance of forty paces, and looking down the road which crossed some sixty miles of plain to Loo, were three colossal seated forms—two male and one female—each measuring about thirty feet from the crown of its head to the pedestal.

The female form, which was nude, was of great though severe beauty, but unfortunately the features had been injured by centuries of exposure to the weather. Rising from either side of her head were the points of a crescent. The two male Colossi, on the contrary, were draped, and presented a terrifying cast of features, especially the one to our right, which had the face of a devil. That to our left was serene in countenance, but the calm upon it seemed dreadful. It was the calm of that inhuman cruelty, Sir Henry remarked, which the ancients attributed to beings potent for good, who could yet watch the sufferings of humanity, if not without rejoicing, at least without sorrow. These three statues form a most awe-inspiring trinity, as they sit there in their solitude, and gaze out across the plain for ever.

Contemplating these "Silent Ones," as the Kukuanas call them, an intense curiosity again seized us to know whose were the hands which had shaped them, who it was that had dug the pit and made the road. Whilst I was gazing and wondering, suddenly it occurred to me—being familiar with the Old Testament—that Solomon went astray after strange gods, the names of three of whom I remembered—"Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Milcom, the god of the children of Ammon"—and I suggested to my companions that the figures before us might represent these false and exploded divinities.

"Hum," said Sir Henry, who is a scholar, having taken a high degree in classics at college, "there may be something in that; Ashtoreth of the Hebrews was the Astarte of the Phoenicians, who were the great traders of Solomon's time. Astarte, who afterwards

became the Aphrodite of the Greeks, was represented with horns like the half-moon, and there on the brow of the female figure are distinct horns. Perhaps these Colossi were designed by some Phoenician official who managed the mines. Who can say?"<sup>[10]</sup>

[10] Compare Milton, "Paradise Lost," Book i.;—

"With these in troop  
Came Ashtoreth, whom the Phoenicians called  
Astarté, Queen of Heaven, with crescent horns;  
To whose bright image nightly by the moon  
Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs."

Before we had finished examining these extraordinary relics of remote antiquity, Infadoos came up, and having saluted the "Silent Ones" by lifting his spear, asked us if we intended entering the "Place of Death" at once, or if we would wait till after we had taken food at mid-day. If we were ready to go at once, Gagool had announced her willingness to guide us. As it was not later than eleven o'clock—driven to it by a burning curiosity—we announced our intention of proceeding instantly, and I suggested that, in case we should be detained in the cave, we should take some food with us. Accordingly Gagool's litter was brought up, and that lady herself assisted out of it. Meanwhile Foulata, at my request, stored some "biltong," or dried game-flesh, together with a couple of gourds of water, in a reed basket with a hinged cover. Straight in front of us, at a distance of some fifty paces from the backs of the Colossi, rose a sheer wall of rock, eighty feet or more in height, that gradually sloped upwards till it formed the base of the lofty snow-wreathed peak, which soared into the air three thousand feet above us. As soon as she was clear of her hammock, Gagool cast one evil grin upon us, and then, leaning on a stick, hobbled off towards the face of this wall. We followed her till we came to a narrow portal solidly arched that looked like the opening of a gallery of a mine.

Here Gagool was waiting for us, still with that evil grin upon her horrid face.

"Now, white men from the Stars," she piped; "great warriors, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn the wise, are ye ready? Behold, I am here to do the bidding of my lord the king, and to show you the store of bright stones. *Ha! ha! ha!*"

"We are ready," I said.

"Good, good! Make strong your hearts to bear what ye shall see. Comest thou too, Infadoos, thou who didst betray thy master?"

Infadoos frowned as he answered—

"Nay, I come not; it is not for me to enter there. But thou, Gagool, curb thy tongue, and beware how thou dealest with my lords. At thy hands will I require them, and if a hair of them be hurt, Gagool, be'st thou fifty times a witch, thou shalt die. Hearest thou?"

"I hear, Infadoos; I know thee, thou didst ever love big words; when thou wast a babe I remember thou didst threaten thine own mother. That was but the other day. But, fear not, fear not, I live only to do the bidding of the king. I have done the bidding of many kings, Infadoos, till in the end they did mine. *Ha! ha!* I go to look upon their faces once more, and Twala's also! Come on, come on, here is the lamp," and she drew a large gourd full of oil, and fitted with a rush wick, from under her fur cloak.

"Art thou coming, Foulata?" asked Good in his villainous Kitchen Kukuana, in which he had been improving himself under that young lady's tuition.

"I fear, my lord," the girl answered timidly.

"Then give me the basket."

"Nay, my lord, whither thou goest there I go also."

"The deuce you will!" thought I to myself; "that may be rather awkward if we ever get out of this."

Without further ado Gagool plunged into the passage, which was wide enough to admit of two walking abreast, and quite dark. We followed the sound of her voice as she piped to us to come on, in some fear and trembling, which was not allayed by the flutter of a sudden rush of wings.

"Hullo! what's that?" halloed Good; "somebody hit me in the face."

"Bats," said I; "on you go."

When, so far as we could judge, we had gone some fifty paces, we perceived that the passage was growing faintly light. Another minute, and we were in perhaps the most wonderful place that the eyes of living man have beheld.

Let the reader picture to himself the hall of the vastest cathedral he ever stood in, windowless indeed, but dimly lighted from above, presumably by shafts connected with the outer air and driven in the roof, which arched away a hundred feet above our heads, and he will get some idea of the size of the enormous cave in which we found ourselves, with the difference that this cathedral designed by nature was loftier and wider than any built by man. But its stupendous size was the least of the wonders of the place, for running in rows adown its length were gigantic pillars of what looked like ice, but were, in reality, huge stalactites. It is impossible for me to convey any idea of the overpowering beauty and grandeur of these pillars of white spar, some of which were not less than twenty feet in diameter at the base, and sprang up in lofty and yet delicate beauty sheer to the distant roof. Others again were in process of formation. On the rock floor there was in these cases what looked, Sir Henry said, exactly like a broken column in an old Grecian temple, whilst high above, depending from the roof, the point of a huge icicle could be dimly seen.

Even as we gazed we could hear the process going on, for presently with a tiny splash a drop of water would fall from the far-off icicle on to the column below. On some columns the drops only fell once in two or three minutes, and in these cases it would be an interesting calculation to discover how long, at that rate of dripping, it would take to form a pillar, say eighty feet by ten in diameter. That the process, in at least one instance, was incalculably slow, the following example will suffice to show. Cut on one of these pillars we discovered the crude likeness of a mummy, by the head of which sat what appeared to be the figure of an Egyptian god, doubtless the handiwork of some old-world labourer in the mine. This work of art was executed at the natural height at which an idle fellow, be he Phoenician workman or British cad, is in the habit of trying to immortalise himself at the expense of nature's masterpieces, namely, about five feet from the ground. Yet at the time that we saw it, which *must* have been nearly three thousand years after the date of the execution of the carving, the column was only eight feet high, and was still in process of formation, which gives a rate of growth of a foot to a thousand years, or an inch and a fraction to a century. This we knew because, as we were standing by it, we heard a drop of water fall.

Sometimes the stalagmites took strange forms, presumably where the dropping of the water had not always been on the same spot. Thus, one huge mass, which must have weighed a hundred tons or so, was in the shape of a pulpit, beautifully fretted over outside

with a design that looked like lace. Others resembled strange beasts, and on the sides of the cave were fanlike ivory tracings, such as the frost leaves upon a pane.

Out of the vast main aisle there opened here and there smaller caves, exactly, Sir Henry said, as chapels open out of great cathedrals. Some were large, but one or two—and this is a wonderful instance of how nature carries out her handiwork by the same unvarying laws, utterly irrespective of size—were tiny. One little nook, for instance, was no larger than an unusually big doll's house, and yet it might have been a model for the whole place, for the water dropped, tiny icicles hung, and spar columns were forming in just the same way.

We had not, however, enough time to examine this beautiful cavern so thoroughly as we should have liked to do, since unfortunately, Gagool seemed to be indifferent as to stalactites, and only anxious to get her business over. This annoyed me the more, as I was particularly anxious to discover, if possible, by what system the light was admitted into the cave, and whether it was by the hand of man or by that of nature that this was done; also if the place had been used in any way in ancient times, as seemed probable. However, we consoled ourselves with the idea that we would investigate it thoroughly on our way back, and followed on at the heels of our uncanny guide.

On she led us, straight to the top of the vast and silent cave, where we found another doorway, not arched as the first was, but square at the top, something like the doorways of Egyptian temples.

"Are ye prepared to enter the Place of Death, white men?" asked Gagool, evidently with a view to making us feel uncomfortable.

"Lead on, Macduff," said Good solemnly, trying to look as though he was not at all alarmed, as indeed we all did except Foulata, who caught Good by the arm for protection.

"This is getting rather ghastly," said Sir Henry, peeping into the dark passageway. "Come on, Quatermain—*seniores priores*. We mustn't keep the old lady waiting!" and he politely made way for me to lead the van, for which inwardly I did not bless him.

*Tap, tap,* went old Gagool's stick down the passage, as she trotted along, chuckling hideously; and still overcome by some unaccountable presentiment of evil, I hung back.

"Come, get on, old fellow," said Good, "or we shall lose our fair guide."

Thus adjured, I started down the passage, and after about twenty paces found myself in a gloomy apartment some forty feet long, by thirty broad, and thirty high, which in some past age evidently had been hollowed, by hand-labour, out of the mountain. This apartment was not nearly so well lighted as the vast stalactite ante-cave, and at the first glance all I could discern was a massive stone table running down its length, with a colossal white figure at its head, and life-sized white figures all round it. Next I discovered a brown thing, seated on the table in the centre, and in another moment my eyes grew accustomed to the light, and I saw what all these things were, and was tailing out of the place as hard as my legs could carry me.

I am not a nervous man in a general way, and very little troubled with superstitions, of which I have lived to see the folly; but I am free to own that this sight quite upset me, and had it not been that Sir Henry caught me by the collar and held me, I do honestly believe that in another five minutes I should have been outside the stalactite cave, and that a promise of all the diamonds in Kimberley would not have induced me to enter it again. But he held me tight, so I stopped because I could not help myself. Next second, however, *his* eyes became accustomed to the light, and he let go of me, and began to mop the perspiration off his forehead. As for Good, he swore feebly, while Foulata threw her arms round his neck and shrieked.

Only Gagool chuckled loud and long.

It was a ghastly sight. There at the end of the long stone table, holding in his skeleton fingers a great white spear, sat *Death* himself, shaped in the form of a colossal human skeleton, fifteen feet or more in height. High above his head he held the spear, as though in the act to strike; one bony hand rested on the stone table before him, in the position a man assumes on rising from his seat, whilst his frame was bent forward so that the vertebræ of the neck and the grinning, gleaming skull projected towards us, and fixed its hollow eye-places upon us, the jaws a little open, as though it were about to speak.

"Great heavens!" said I faintly, at last, "what can it be?"

"And what are *those things*?" asked Good, pointing to the white company round the table.

"And what on earth is *that thing*?" said Sir Henry, pointing to the brown creature seated on the table.

"*Hee! hee! hee!*" laughed Gagool. "To those who enter the Hall of the Dead, evil comes. *Hee! hee! hee! ha! ha!*"

"Come, Incubu, brave in battle, come and see him thou slewest;" and the old creature caught Curtis' coat in her skinny fingers, and led him away towards the table. We followed.

Presently she stopped and pointed at the brown object seated on the table. Sir Henry looked, and started back with an exclamation; and no wonder, for there, quite naked, the head which Curtis' battle-axe had shorn from the body resting on its knees, was the gaunt corpse of Twala, the last king of the Kukuana. Yes, there, the head perched upon the knees, it sat in all its ugliness, the vertebræ projecting a full inch above the level of the shrunken flesh of the neck, for all the world like a black double of Hamilton Tighe.<sup>[11]</sup> Over the surface of the corpse there was gathered a thin glassy film, that made its appearance yet more appalling, for which we were, at the moment, quite unable to account, till presently we observed that from the roof of the chamber the water fell steadily, *drip! drip! drip!* on to the neck of the corpse, whence it ran down over the entire surface, and finally escaped into the rock through a tiny hole in the table. Then I guessed what the film was—*Twala's body was being transformed into a stalactite.*

[11] "Now haste ye, my handmaidens, haste and see  
How he sits there and glowers with his head on his knee."

A look at the white forms seated on the stone bench which ran round that ghastly board confirmed this view. They were human bodies indeed, or rather they had been human; now they were *stalactites*. This was the way in which the Kukuana people had from time immemorial preserved their royal dead. They petrified them. What the exact system might be, if there was any, beyond the placing of them for a long period of years under the drip, I never discovered, but there they sat, iced over and preserved for ever by the siliceous fluid.

Anything more awe-inspiring than the spectacle of this long line of departed royalties (there were twenty-seven of them, the last being Ignosi's father), wrapped, each of them, in a shroud of ice-like spar, through which the features could be dimly discovered, and seated round that inhospitable board, with Death himself for a host, it is impossible to imagine. That the practice of thus preserving their kings must have been an ancient one is evident from the number, which, allowing for an average reign of fifteen years, supposing

that every king who reigned was placed here—an improbable thing, as some are sure to have perished in battle far from home—would fix the date of its commencement at four and a quarter centuries back.

But the colossal Death, who sits at the head of the board, is far older than that, and, unless I am much mistaken, owes his origin to the same artist who designed the three Colossi. He is hewn out of a single stalactite, and, looked at as a work of art, is most admirably conceived and executed. Good, who understands such things, declared that, so far as he could see, the anatomical design of the skeleton is perfect down to the smallest bones.

My own idea is, that this terrific object was a freak of fancy on the part of some old-world sculptor, and that its presence had suggested to the Kukuanas the idea of placing their royal dead under its awful presidency. Or perhaps it was set there to frighten away any marauders who might have designs upon the treasure chamber beyond. I cannot say. All I can do is to describe it as it is, and the reader must form his own conclusion.

Such, at any rate, was the White Death and such were the White Dead!

## CHAPTER XVII.

### SOLOMON'S TREASURE CHAMBER

While we were engaged in recovering from our fright, and in examining the grisly wonders of the Place of Death, Gagool had been differently occupied. Somehow or other—for she was marvellously active when she chose—she had scrambled on to the great table, and made her way to where our departed friend Twala was placed, under the drip, to see, suggested Good, how he was “pickling,” or for some dark purpose of her own. Then, after bending down to kiss his icy lips as though in affectionate greeting, she hobbled back, stopping now and again to address the remark, the tenor of which I could not catch, to one or other of the shrouded forms, just as you or I might welcome an old acquaintance. Having gone through this mysterious and horrible ceremony, she squatted herself down on the table immediately under the White Death, and began, so far as I could make out, to offer up prayers. The spectacle of this wicked creature pouring out supplications, evil ones no doubt, to the arch enemy of mankind, was so uncanny that it caused us to hasten our inspection.

“Now, Gagool,” said I, in a low voice—somehow one did not dare to speak above a whisper in that place—“lead us to the chamber.”

The old witch promptly scrambled down from the table.

“My lords are not afraid?” she said, leering up into my face.

“Lead on.”

“Good, my lords;” and she hobbled round to the back of the great Death. “Here is the chamber; let my lords light the lamp, and enter,” and she placed the gourd full of oil upon the floor, and leaned herself against the side of the cave. I took out a match, of which we had still a few in a box, and lit a rush wick, and then looked for the doorway, but there was nothing before us except the solid rock. Gagool grinned. “The way is there, my lords. *Ha! ha! ha!*”

“Do not jest with us,” I said sternly.

“I jest not, my lords. See!” and she pointed at the rock.

As she did so, on holding up the lamp we perceived that a mass of stone was rising slowly from the floor and vanishing into the rock above, where doubtless there is a cavity prepared to receive it. The mass was of the width of a good-sized door, about ten feet high and not less than five feet thick. It must have weighed at least twenty or thirty tons, and was clearly moved upon some simple balance principle of counter-weights, probably the same as that by which the opening and shutting of an ordinary modern window is arranged. How the principle was set in motion, of course none of us saw; Gagool was careful to avoid this; but I have little doubt that there was some very simple lever, which was moved ever so little by pressure at a secret spot, thereby throwing additional weight on to the hidden counter-balances, and causing the monolith to be lifted from the ground.

Very slowly and gently the great stone raised itself, till at last it had vanished altogether, and a dark hole presented itself to us in the place which the door had filled.

Our excitement was so intense, as we saw the way to Solomon's treasure chamber thrown open at last, that I for one began to tremble and shake. Would it prove a hoax after all, I wondered, or was old Da Silvestra right? Were there vast hoards of wealth hidden in that dark place, hoards which would make us the richest men in the whole world? We should know in a minute or two.

“Enter, white men from the Stars,” said Gagool, advancing into the doorway; “but first hear your servant, Gagool the old. The bright stones that ye will see were dug out of the pit over which the Silent Ones are set, and stored here, I know not by whom, for that was done longer ago than even I remember. But once has this place been entered since the time that those who hid the stones departed in haste, leaving them behind. The report of the treasure went down indeed among the people who lived in the country from age to age, but none knew where the chamber was, nor the secret of the door. But it happened that a white man reached this country from over the mountains—perchance he too came ‘from the Stars’—and was well received by the king of that day. He it is who sits yonder,” and she pointed to the fifth king at the table of the Dead. “And it came to pass that he and a woman of the country who was with him journeyed to this place, and that by chance the woman learnt the secret of the door—a thousand years might ye search, but ye should never find that secret. Then the white man entered with the woman, and found the stones, and filled with stones the skin of a small goat, which the woman had with her to hold food. And as he was going from the chamber he took up one more stone, a large one, and held it in his hand.”

Here she paused.

“Well,” I asked, breathless with interest as we all were, “what happened to Da Silvestra?”

The old hag started at the mention of the name.

“How knowest thou the dead man's name?” she asked sharply; and then, without waiting for an answer, went on—

“None can tell what happened; but it came about that the white man was frightened, for he flung down the goat-skin, with the stones, and fled out with only the one stone in his hand, and that the king took, and it is the stone which thou, Macumazahn, didst take from Twala's brow.”

“Have none entered here since?” I asked, peering again down the dark passage.

“None, my lords. Only the secret of the door has been kept, and every king has opened it, though he has not entered. There is a saying, that those who enter there will die within a moon, even as the white man died in the cave upon the mountain, where ye found him, Macumazahn, and therefore the kings do not enter. *Ha! ha!* mine are true words.”

Our eyes met as she said it, and I turned sick and cold. How did the old hag know all these things?

"Enter, my lords. If I speak truth, the goat-skin with the stones will lie upon the floor; and if there is truth as to whether it is death to enter here, that ye will learn afterwards. *Ha! ha! ha!*" and she hobbled through the doorway, bearing the light with her; but I confess that once more I hesitated about following.

"Oh, confound it all!" said Good; "here goes. I am not going to be frightened by that old devil;" and followed by Foulata, who, however, evidently did not at all like the business, for she was shivering with fear, he plunged into the passage after Gagool—an example which we quickly followed.

A few yards down the passage, in the narrow way hewn out of the living rock, Gagool had paused, and was waiting for us.

"See, my lords," she said, holding the light before her, "those who stored the treasure here fled in haste, and bethought them to guard against any who should find the secret of the door, but had not the time," and she pointed to large square blocks of stone, which, to the height of two courses (about two feet three), had been placed across the passage with a view to walling it up. Along the side of the passage were similar blocks ready for use, and, most curious of all, a heap of mortar and a couple of trowels, which tools, so far as we had time to examine them, appeared to be of a similar shape and make to those used by workmen to this day.

Here Foulata, who had been in a state of great fear and agitation throughout, said that she felt faint and could go no farther, but would wait there. Accordingly we set her down on the unfinished wall, placing the basket of provisions by her side, and left her to recover.

Following the passage for about fifteen paces farther, we came suddenly to an elaborately painted wooden door. It was standing wide open. Whoever was last there had either not found the time to shut it, or had forgotten to do so.

*Across the threshold of this door lay a skin bag, formed of a goat-skin, that appeared to be full of pebbles.*

"*Hee! hee!* white men," sniggered Gagool, as the light from the lamp fell upon it. "What did I tell you, that the white man who came here fled in haste, and dropped the woman's bag—behold it! Look within also and ye will find a water-gourd amongst the stones."

Good stooped down and lifted it. It was heavy and jingled.

"By Jove! I believe it's full of diamonds," he said, in an awed whisper; and, indeed, the idea of a small goat-skin full of diamonds is enough to awe anybody.

"Go on," said Sir Henry impatiently. "Here, old lady, give me the lamp," and taking it from Gagool's hand, he stepped through the doorway and held it high above his head.

We pressed in after him, forgetful for the moment of the bag of diamonds, and found ourselves in King Solomon's treasure chamber.

At first, all that the somewhat faint light given by the lamp revealed was a room hewn out of the living rock, and apparently not more than ten feet square. Next there came into sight, stored one on the other to the arch of the roof, a splendid collection of elephant-tusks. How many of them there were we did not know, for of course we could not see to what depth they went back, but there could not have been less than the ends of four or five hundred tusks of the first quality visible to our eyes. There, alone, was enough ivory to make a man wealthy for life. Perhaps, I thought, it was from this very store that Solomon drew the raw material for his "great throne of ivory," of which "there was not the like made in any kingdom."

On the opposite side of the chamber were about a score of wooden boxes, something like Martini-Henry ammunition boxes, only rather larger, and painted red.

"There are the diamonds," cried I; "bring the light."

Sir Henry did so, holding it close to the top box, of which the lid, rendered rotten by time even in that dry place, appeared to have been smashed in, probably by Da Silvestra himself. Pushing my hand through the hole in the lid I drew it out full, not of diamonds, but of gold pieces, of a shape that none of us had seen before, and with what looked like Hebrew characters stamped upon them.

"Ah!" I said, replacing the coin, "we shan't go back empty-handed, anyhow. There must be a couple of thousand pieces in each box, and there are eighteen boxes. I suppose this was the money to pay the workmen and merchants."

"Well," put in Good, "I think that is the lot; I don't see any diamonds, unless the old Portuguese put them all into his bag."

"Let my lords look yonder where it is darkest, if they would find the stones," said Gagool, interpreting our looks. "There my lords will find a nook, and three stone chests in the nook, two sealed and one open."

Before translating this to Sir Henry, who carried the light, I could not resist asking how she knew these things, if no one had entered the place since the white man, generations ago.

"Ah, Macumazahn, the watcher by night," was the mocking answer, "ye who dwell in the stars, do ye not know that some live long, and that some have eyes which can see through rock? *Ha! ha! ha!*"

"Look in that corner, Curtis," I said, indicating the spot Gagool had pointed out.

"Hullo, you fellows," he cried, "here's a recess. Great heavens! see here."

We hurried up to where he was standing in a nook, shaped something like a small bow window. Against the wall of this recess were placed three stone chests, each about two feet square. Two were fitted with stone lids, the lid of the third rested against the side of the chest, which was open.

"*See!*" he repeated hoarsely, holding the lamp over the open chest. We looked, and for a moment could make nothing out, on account of a silvery sheen which dazzled us. When our eyes grew used to it we saw that the chest was three-parts full of uncut diamonds, most of them of considerable size. Stooping, I picked some up. Yes, there was no doubt of it, there was the unmistakable soapy feel about them.

I fairly gasped as I dropped them.

"We are the richest men in the whole world," I said. "Monte Christo was a fool to us."

"We shall flood the market with diamonds," said Good.

"Got to get them there first," suggested Sir Henry.

We stood still with pale faces and stared at each other, the lantern in the middle and the glimmering gems below, as though we were conspirators about to commit a crime, instead of being, as we thought, the most fortunate men on earth.

"*Hee! hee! hee!*" cackled old Gagool behind us, as she flitted about like a vampire bat. "There are the bright stones ye love, white men, as many as ye will; take them, run them through your fingers, *eat* of them, *hee! hee! drink* of them, *ha! ha!*"

At that moment there was something so ridiculous to my mind at the idea of eating and drinking diamonds, that I began to laugh outrageously, an example which the others followed, without knowing why. There we stood and shrieked with laughter over the gems that were ours, which had been found for *us* thousands of years ago by the patient delvers in the great hole yonder, and stored for *us* by Solomon's long-dead overseer, whose name, perchance, was written in the characters stamped on the faded wax that yet adhered to the lids of the chest. Solomon never got them, nor David, or Da Silvestra, nor anybody else. *We* had got them: there before us were millions of pounds' worth of diamonds, and thousands of pounds' worth of gold and ivory only waiting to be taken away.

Suddenly the fit passed off, and we stopped laughing.

"Open the other chests, white men," croaked Gagool, "there are surely more therein. Take your fill, white lords! *Ha! ha!* take your fill."

Thus adjured, we set to work to pull up the stone lids on the other two, first—not without a feeling of sacrilege—breaking the seals that fastened them.

Hoorah! they were full too, full to the brim; at least, the second one was; no wretched burglarious Da Silvestra had been filling goat-skins out of that. As for the third chest, it was only about a fourth full, but the stones were all picked ones; none less than twenty carats, and some of them as large as pigeon-eggs. A good many of these bigger ones, however, we could see by holding them up to the light, were a little yellow, "off coloured," as they call it at Kimberley.

What we did *not* see, however, was the look of fearful malevolence that old Gagool favoured us with as she crept, crept like a snake, out of the treasure chamber and down the passage towards the door of solid rock.

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Hark! Cry upon cry comes ringing up the vaulted path. It is Foulata's voice!

"*Oh, Bougwan! help! help! the stone falls!*"

"Leave go, girl! Then—"

"*Help! help! she has stabbed me!*"

By now we are running down the passage, and this is what the light from the lamp shows us. The door of the rock is closing down slowly; it is not three feet from the floor. Near it struggle Foulata and Gagool. The red blood of the former runs to her knee, but still the brave girl holds the old witch, who fights like a wild cat. Ah! she is free! Foulata falls, and Gagool throws herself on the ground, to twist like a snake through the crack of the closing stone. She is under—ah! god! too late! too late! The stone nips her, and she yells in agony. Down, down it comes, all the thirty tons of it, slowly pressing her old body against the rock below. Shriek upon shriek, such as we have never heard, then a long sickening *crunch*, and the door was shut just as, rushing down the passage, we hurled ourselves against it.

It was all done in four seconds.

Then we turned to Foulata. The poor girl was stabbed in the body, and I saw that she could not live long.

"Ah! Bougwan, I die!" gasped the beautiful creature. "She crept out—Gagool; I did not see her, I was faint—and the door began to fall; then she came back, and was looking up the path—I saw her come in through the slowly falling door, and caught her and held her, and she stabbed me, and *I die*, Bougwan!"

"Poor girl! poor girl!" Good cried in his distress; and then, as he could do nothing else, he fell to kissing her.

"Bougwan," she said, after a pause, "is Macumazahn there? It grows so dark, I cannot see."

"Here I am, Foulata."

"Macumazahn, be my tongue for a moment, I pray thee, for Bougwan cannot understand me, and before I go into the darkness I would speak to him a word."

"Say on, Foulata, I will render it."

"Say to my lord, Bougwan, that—I love him, and that I am glad to die because I know that he cannot cumber his life with such as I am, for the sun may not mate with the darkness, nor the white with the black."

"Say that, since I saw him, at times I have felt as though there were a bird in my bosom, which would one day fly hence and sing elsewhere. Even now, though I cannot lift my hand, and my brain grows cold, I do not feel as though my heart were dying; it is so full of love that it could live ten thousand years, and yet be young. Say that if I live again, mayhap I shall see him in the Stars, and that—I will search them all, though perchance there I should still be black and he would—still be white. Say—nay, Macumazahn, say no more, save that I love—Oh, hold me closer, Bougwan, I cannot feel thine arms—*oh! oh!*"

"She is dead—she is dead!" muttered Good, rising in grief, the tears running down his honest face.

"You need not let that trouble you, old fellow," said Sir Henry.

"Eh!" exclaimed Good; "what do you mean?"

"I mean that you will soon be in a position to join her. *Man, don't you see that we are buried alive?*"

Until Sir Henry uttered these words I do not think that the full horror of what had happened had come home to us, preoccupied as we were with the sight of poor Foulata's end. But now we understood. The ponderous mass of rock had closed, probably for ever, for the only brain which knew its secret was crushed to powder beneath its weight. This was a door that none could hope to force with anything short of dynamite in large quantities. And we were on the wrong side!

For a few minutes we stood horrified, there over the corpse of Foulata. All the manhood seemed to have gone out of us. The first shock of this idea of the slow and miserable end that awaited us was overpowering. We saw it all now; that fiend Gagool had planned this snare for us from the first.

It would have been just the jest that her evil mind would have rejoiced in, the idea of the three white men, whom, for some reason of her own, she had always hated, slowly perishing of thirst and hunger in the company of the treasure they had coveted. Now I saw the point of that sneer of hers about eating and drinking the diamonds. Probably somebody had tried to serve the poor old Dom in the same way, when he abandoned the skin full of jewels.

"This will never do," said Sir Henry hoarsely; "the lamp will soon go out. Let us see if we can't find the spring that works the rock."

We sprang forward with desperate energy, and, standing in a bloody ooze, began to feel up and down the door and the sides of the passage. But no knob or spring could we discover.

"Depend on it," I said, "it does not work from the inside; if it did Gagool would not have risked trying to crawl underneath the stone. It was the knowledge of this that made her try to escape at all hazards, curse her."

"At all events," said Sir Henry, with a hard little laugh, "retribution was swift; hers was almost as awful an end as ours is likely to be. We can do nothing with the door; let us go back to the treasure room."

We turned and went, and as we passed it I perceived by the unfinished wall across the passage the basket of food which poor Foulata had carried. I took it up, and brought it with me to the accursed treasure chamber that was to be our grave. Then we returned and reverently bore in Foulata's corpse, laying it on the floor by the boxes of coin.

Next we seated ourselves, leaning our backs against the three stone chests which contained the priceless treasure.

"Let us divide the food," said Sir Henry, "so as to make it last as long as possible." Accordingly we did so. It would, we reckoned, make four infinitesimally small meals for each of us, enough, say, to support life for a couple of days. Besides the "biltong," or dried game-flesh, there were two gourds of water, each of which held not more than a quart.

"Now," said Sir Henry grimly, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

We each ate a small portion of the "biltong," and drank a sip of water. Needless to say, we had but little appetite, though we were sadly in need of food, and felt better after swallowing it. Then we got up and made a systematic examination of the walls of our prison-house, in the faint hope of finding some means of exit, sounding them and the floor carefully.

There was none. It was not probable that there would be any to a treasure chamber.

The lamp began to burn dim. The fat was nearly exhausted.

"Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "what is the time—your watch goes?"

I drew it out, and looked at it. It was six o'clock; we had entered the cave at eleven.

"Infadoos will miss us," I suggested. "If we do not return to-night he will search for us in the morning, Curtis."

"He may search in vain. He does not know the secret of the door, nor even where it is. No living person knew it yesterday, except Gagool. To-day no one knows it. Even if he found the door he could not break it down. All the Kukuana army could not break through five feet of living rock. My friends, I see nothing for it but to bow ourselves to the will of the Almighty. The search for treasure has brought many to a bad end; we shall go to swell their number."

The lamp grew dimmer yet.

Presently it flared up and showed the whole scene in strong relief, the great mass of white tusks, the boxes of gold, the corpse of the poor Foulata stretched before them, the goat-skin full of treasure, the dim glimmer of the diamonds, and the wild, wan faces of us three white men seated there awaiting death by starvation.

Then the flame sank and expired.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WE ABANDON HOPE

I can give no adequate description of the horrors of the night which followed. Mercifully they were to some extent mitigated by sleep, for even in such a position as ours wearied nature will sometimes assert itself. But I, at any rate, found it impossible to sleep much. Putting aside the terrifying thought of our impending doom—for the bravest man on earth might well quail from such a fate as awaited us, and I never made any pretensions to be brave—the *silence* itself was too great to allow of it. Reader, you may have lain awake at night and thought the quiet oppressive, but I say with confidence that you can have no idea what a vivid, tangible thing is perfect stillness. On the surface of the earth there is always some sound or motion, and though it may in itself be imperceptible, yet it deadens the sharp edge of absolute silence. But here there was none. We were buried in the bowels of a huge snow-clad peak. Thousands of feet above us the fresh air rushed over the white snow, but no sound of it reached us. We were separated by a long tunnel and five feet of rock even from the awful chamber of the Dead; and the dead make no noise. Did we not know it who lay by poor Foulata's side? The crashing of all the artillery of earth and heaven could not have come to our ears in our living tomb. We were cut off from every echo of the world—we were as men already in the grave.

Then the irony of the situation forced itself upon me. There around us lay treasures enough to pay off a moderate national debt, or to build a fleet of ironclads, and yet we would have bartered them all gladly for the faintest chance of escape. Soon, doubtless, we should be rejoiced to exchange them for a bit of food or a cup of water, and, after that, even for the privilege of a speedy close to our sufferings. Truly wealth, which men spend their lives in acquiring, is a valueless thing at the last.

And so the night wore on.

"Good," said Sir Henry's voice at last, and it sounded awful in the intense stillness, "how many matches have you in the box?"

"Eight, Curtis."

"Strike one and let us see the time."

He did so, and in contrast to the dense darkness the flame nearly blinded us. It was five o'clock by my watch. The beautiful dawn was now blushing on the snow-wreaths far over our heads, and the breeze would be stirring the night mists in the hollows.

"We had better eat something and keep up our strength," I suggested.

"What is the good of eating?" answered Good; "the sooner we die and get it over the better."

"While there is life there is hope," said Sir Henry.

Accordingly we ate and sipped some water, and another period of time elapsed. Then Sir Henry suggested that it might be well to get as near the door as possible and halloa, on the faint chance of somebody catching a sound outside. Accordingly Good, who, from long practice at sea, has a fine piercing note, groped his way down the passage and set to work. I must say that he made a most diabolical noise. I never heard such yells; but it might have been a mosquito buzzing for all the effect they produced.

After a while he gave it up and came back very thirsty, and had to drink. Then we stopped yelling, as it encroached on the supply of water.

So we sat down once more against the chests of useless diamonds in that dreadful inaction which was one of the hardest circumstances of our fate; and I am bound to say that, for my part, I gave way in despair. Laying my head against Sir Henry's broad shoulder I burst into tears; and I think that I heard Good gulping away on the other side, and swearing hoarsely at himself for doing so.

Ah, how good and brave that great man was! Had we been two frightened children, and he our nurse, he could not have treated us more tenderly. Forgetting his own share of miseries, he did all he could to soothe our broken nerves, telling stories of men who had been in somewhat similar circumstances, and miraculously escaped; and when these failed to cheer us, pointing out how, after all, it was only anticipating an end which must come to us all, that it would soon be over, and that death from exhaustion was a merciful one (which is not true). Then, in a diffident sort of way, as once before I had heard him do, he suggested that we should throw ourselves on the mercy of a higher Power, which for my part I did with great vigour.

His is a beautiful character, very quiet, but very strong.

And so somehow the day went as the night had gone, if, indeed, one can use these terms where all was densest night, and when I lit a match to see the time it was seven o'clock.

Once more we ate and drank, and as we did so an idea occurred to me.

"How is it," said I, "that the air in this place keeps fresh? It is thick and heavy, but it is perfectly fresh."

"Great heavens!" said Good, starting up, "I never thought of that. It can't come through the stone door, for it's air-tight, if ever a door was. It must come from somewhere. If there were no current of air in the place we should have been stifled or poisoned when we first came in. Let us have a look."

It was wonderful what a change this mere spark of hope wrought in us. In a moment we were all three groping about on our hands and knees, feeling for the slightest indication of a draught. Presently my ardour received a check. I put my hand on something cold. It was dead Foulata's face.

For an hour or more we went on feeling about, till at last Sir Henry and I gave it up in despair, having been considerably hurt by constantly knocking our heads against tusks, chests, and the sides of the chamber. But Good still persevered, saying, with an approach

to cheerfulness, that it was better than doing nothing.

"I say, you fellows," he said presently, in a constrained sort of voice, "come here."

Needless to say we scrambled towards him quickly enough.

"Quatermain, put your hand here where mine is. Now, do you feel anything?"

"I *think* I feel air coming up."

"Now listen." He rose and stamped upon the place, and a flame of hope shot up in our hearts. *It rang hollow.*

With trembling hands I lit a match. I had only three left, and we saw that we were in the angle of the far corner of the chamber, a fact that accounted for our not having noticed the hollow sound of the place during our former exhaustive examination. As the match burnt we scrutinised the spot. There was a join in the solid rock floor, and, great heavens! there, let in level with the rock, was a stone ring. We said no word, we were too excited, and our hearts beat too wildly with hope to allow us to speak. Good had a knife, at the back of which was one of those hooks that are made to extract stones from horses' hoofs. He opened it, and scratched round the ring with it. Finally he worked it under, and levered away gently for fear of breaking the hook. The ring began to move. Being of stone it had not rusted fast in all the centuries it had lain there, as would have been the case had it been of iron. Presently it was upright. Then he thrust his hands into it and tugged with all his force, but nothing budged.

"Let me try," I said impatiently, for the situation of the stone, right in the angle of the corner, was such that it was impossible for two to pull at once. I took hold and strained away, but no results.

Then Sir Henry tried and failed.

Taking the hook again, Good scratched all round the crack where we felt the air coming up.

"Now, Curtis," he said, "tackle on, and put your back into it; you are as strong as two. Stop," and he took off a stout black silk handkerchief, which, true to his habits of neatness, he still wore, and ran it through the ring. "Quatermain, get Curtis round the middle and pull for dear life when I give the word. *Now.*"

Sir Henry put out all his enormous strength, and Good and I did the same, with such power as nature had given us.

"Heave! heave! it's giving," gasped Sir Henry; and I heard the muscles of his great back cracking. Suddenly there was a grating sound, then a rush of air, and we were all on our backs on the floor with a heavy flag-stone upon the top of us. Sir Henry's strength had done it, and never did muscular power stand a man in better stead.

"Light a match, Quatermain," he said, so soon as we had picked ourselves up and got our breath; "carefully, now."

I did so, and there before us, Heaven be praised! was the *first step of a stone stair.*

"Now what is to be done?" asked Good.

"Follow the stair, of course, and trust to Providence."

"Stop!" said Sir Henry; "Quatermain, get the bit of biltong and the water that are left; we may want them."

I went, creeping back to our place by the chests for that purpose, and as I was coming away an idea struck me. We had not thought much of the diamonds for the last twenty-four hours or so; indeed, the very idea of diamonds was nauseous, seeing what they had entailed upon us; but, reflected I, I may as well pocket some in case we ever should get out of this ghastly hole. So I just put my fist into the first chest and filled all the available pockets of my old shooting-coat and trousers, topping up—this was a happy thought—with a few handfuls of big ones from the third chest. Also, by an afterthought, I stuffed Foulata's basket, which, except for one water-gourd and a little biltong, was empty now, with great quantities of the stones.

"I say, you fellows," I sang out, "won't you take some diamonds with you? I've filled my pockets and the basket."

"Oh, come on, Quatermain! and hang the diamonds!" said Sir Henry. "I hope that I may never see another."

As for Good, he made no answer. He was, I think, taking his last farewell of all that was left of the poor girl who had loved him so well. And curious as it may seem to you, my reader, sitting at home at ease and reflecting on the vast, indeed the immeasurable, wealth which we were thus abandoning, I can assure you that if you had passed some twenty-eight hours with next to nothing to eat and drink in that place, you would not have cared to cumber yourself with diamonds whilst plunging down into the unknown bowels of the earth, in the wild hope of escape from an agonising death. If from the habits of a lifetime, it had not become a sort of second nature with me never to leave anything worth having behind if there was the slightest chance of my being able to carry it away, I am sure that I should not have bothered to fill my pockets and that basket.

"Come on, Quatermain," repeated Sir Henry, who was already standing on the first step of the stone stair. "Steady, I will go first."

"Mind where you put your feet, there may be some awful hole underneath," I answered.

"Much more likely to be another room," said Sir Henry, while he descended slowly, counting the steps as he went.

When he got to "fifteen" he stopped. "Here's the bottom," he said. "Thank goodness! I think it's a passage. Follow me down."

Good went next, and I came last, carrying the basket, and on reaching the bottom lit one of the two remaining matches. By its light we could just see that we were standing in a narrow tunnel, which ran right and left at right angles to the staircase we had descended. Before we could make out any more, the match burnt my fingers and went out. Then arose the delicate question of which way to go. Of course, it was impossible to know what the tunnel was, or where it led to, and yet to turn one way might lead us to safety, and the other to destruction. We were utterly perplexed, till suddenly it struck Good that when I had lit the match the draught of the passage blew the flame to the left.

"Let us go against the draught," he said; "air draws inwards, not outwards."

We took this suggestion, and feeling along the wall with our hands, whilst trying the ground before us at every step, we departed from that accursed treasure chamber on our terrible quest for life. If ever it should be entered again by living man, which I do not think probable, he will find tokens of our visit in the open chests of jewels, the empty lamp, and the white bones of poor Foulata.

When we had groped our way for about a quarter of an hour along the passage, suddenly it took a sharp turn, or else was bisected by another, which we followed, only in course of time to be led into a third. And so it went on for some hours. We seemed to be in a stone labyrinth that led nowhere. What all these passages are, of course I cannot say, but we thought that they must be the ancient workings of a mine, of which the various shafts and adits travelled hither and thither as the ore led them. This is the only way in which we could account for such a multitude of galleries.

At length we halted, thoroughly worn out with fatigue and with that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, and ate up our poor remaining piece of biltong and drank our last sup of water, for our throats were like lime-kilns. It seemed to us that we had escaped Death in the darkness of the treasure chamber only to meet him in the darkness of the tunnels.

As we stood, once more utterly depressed, I thought that I caught a sound, to which I called the attention of the others. It was very faint and very far off, but it *was* a sound, a faint, murmuring sound, for the others heard it too, and no words can describe the blessedness of it after all those hours of utter, awful stillness.

"By heaven! it's running water," said Good. "Come on."

Off we started again in the direction from which the faint murmur seemed to come, groping our way as before along the rocky walls. I remember that I laid down the basket full of diamonds, wishing to be rid of its weight, but on second thoughts took it up again. One might as well die rich as poor, I reflected. As we went the sound became more and more audible, till at last it seemed quite loud in the quiet. On, yet on; now we could distinctly make out the unmistakable swirl of rushing water. And yet how could there be running water in the bowels of the earth? Now we were quite near it, and Good, who was leading, swore that he could smell it.

"Go gently, Good," said Sir Henry, "we must be close." *Splash!* and a cry from Good.

He had fallen in.

"Good! Good! where are you?" we shouted, in terrified distress. To our intense relief an answer came back in a choky voice.

"All right; I've got hold of a rock. Strike a light to show me where you are."

Hastily I lit the last remaining match. Its faint gleam discovered to us a dark mass of water running at our feet. How wide it was we could not see, but there, some way out, was the dark form of our companion hanging on to a projecting rock.

"Stand clear to catch me," sung out Good. "I must swim for it."

Then we heard a splash, and a great struggle. Another minute and he had grabbed at and caught Sir Henry's outstretched hand, and we had pulled him up high and dry into the tunnel.

"My word!" he said, between his gasps, "that was touch and go. If I hadn't managed to catch that rock, and known how to swim, I should have been done. It runs like a mill-race, and I could feel no bottom."

We dared not follow the banks of the subterranean river for fear lest we should fall into it again in the darkness. So after Good had rested a while, and we had drunk our fill of the water, which was sweet and fresh, and washed our faces, that needed it sadly, as well as we could, we started from the banks of this African Styx, and began to retrace our steps along the tunnel, Good dripping unpleasantly in front of us. At length we came to another gallery leading to our right.

"We may as well take it," said Sir Henry wearily; "all roads are alike here; we can only go on till we drop."

Slowly, for a long, long while, we stumbled, utterly exhausted, along this new tunnel, Sir Henry now leading the way. Again I thought of abandoning that basket, but did not.

Suddenly he stopped, and we bumped up against him.

"Look!" he whispered, "is my brain going, or is that light?"

We stared with all our eyes, and there, yes, there, far ahead of us, was a faint, glimmering spot, no larger than a cottage window pane. It was so faint that I doubt if any eyes, except those which, like ours, had for days seen nothing but blackness, could have perceived it at all.

With a gasp of hope we pushed on. In five minutes there was no longer any doubt; it *was* a patch of faint light. A minute more and a breath of real live air was fanning us. On we struggled. All at once the tunnel narrowed. Sir Henry went on his knees. Smaller yet it grew, till it was only the size of a large fox's earth—it was *earth* now, mind you; the rock had ceased.

A squeeze, a struggle, and Sir Henry was out, and so was Good, and so was I, dragging Foulata's basket after me; and there above us were the blessed stars, and in our nostrils was the sweet air. Then suddenly something gave, and we were all rolling over and over and over through grass and bushes and soft, wet soil.

The basket caught in something and I stopped. Sitting up I halloed lustily. An answering shout came from below, where Sir Henry's wild career had been checked by some level ground. I scrambled to him, and found him unhurt, though breathless. Then we looked for Good. A little way off we discovered him also, hammed in a forked root. He was a good deal knocked about, but soon came to himself.

We sat down together, there on the grass, and the revulsion of feeling was so great that really I think we cried with joy. We had escaped from that awful dungeon, which was so near to becoming our grave. Surely some merciful Power guided our footsteps to the jackal hole, for that is what it must have been, at the termination of the tunnel. And see, yonder on the mountains the dawn we had never thought to look upon again was blushing rosy red.

Presently the grey light stole down the slopes, and we saw that we were at the bottom, or rather, nearly at the bottom, of the vast pit in front of the entrance to the cave. Now we could make out the dim forms of the three Colossi who sat upon its verge. Doubtless those awful passages, along which we had wandered the livelong night, had been originally in some way connected with the great diamond mine. As for the subterranean river in the bowels of the mountain, Heaven only knows what it is, or whence it flows, or whither it goes. I, for one, have no anxiety to trace its course.

Lighter it grew, and lighter yet. We could see each other now, and such a spectacle as we presented I have never set eyes on before or since. Gaunt-cheeked, hollow-eyed wretches, smeared all over with dust and mud, bruised, bleeding, the long fear of imminent death yet written on our countenances, we were, indeed, a sight to frighten the daylight. And yet it is a solemn fact that Good's eye-glass was still fixed in Good's eye. I doubt whether he had ever taken it out at all. Neither the darkness, nor the plunge in the subterranean river, nor the roll down the slope, had been able to separate Good and his eye-glass.

Presently we rose, fearing that our limbs would stiffen if we stopped there longer, and commenced with slow and painful steps to struggle up the sloping sides of the great pit. For an hour or more we toiled steadfastly up the blue clay, dragging ourselves on by the help of the roots and grasses with which it was clothed. But now I had no more thought of leaving the basket; indeed, nothing but death should have parted us.

At last it was done, and we stood by the great road, on that side of the pit which is opposite to the Colossi.

At the side of the road, a hundred yards off, a fire was burning in front of some huts, and round the fire were figures. We staggered towards them, supporting one another, and halting every few paces. Presently one of the figures rose, saw us and fell on to the ground, crying out for fear.

“Infadoos, Infadoos! it is we, thy friends.”

He rose; he ran to us, staring wildly, and still shaking with fear.

“Oh, my lords, my lords, it is indeed you come back from the dead!—come back from the dead!”

And the old warrior flung himself down before us, and clasping Sir Henry’s knees, he wept aloud for joy.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### IGNOSI'S FAREWELL

Ten days from that eventful morning found us once more in our old quarters at Loo; and, strange to say, but little the worse for our terrible experience, except that my stubby hair came out of the treasure cave about three shades greyer than it went in, and that Good never was quite the same after Foulata's death, which seemed to move him very greatly. I am bound to say, looking at the thing from the point of view of an oldish man of the world, that I consider her removal was a fortunate occurrence, since, otherwise, complications would have been sure to ensue. The poor creature was no ordinary native girl, but a person of great, I had almost said stately, beauty, and of considerable refinement of mind. But no amount of beauty or refinement could have made an entanglement between Good and herself a desirable occurrence; for, as she herself put it, "Can the sun mate with the darkness, or the white with the black?"

I need hardly state that we never again penetrated into Solomon's treasure chamber. After we had recovered from our fatigues, a process which took us forty-eight hours, we descended into the great pit in the hope of finding the hole by which we had crept out of the mountain, but with no success. To begin with, rain had fallen, and obliterated our spoor; and what is more, the sides of the vast pit were full of ant-bear and other holes. It was impossible to say to which of these we owed our salvation. Also, on the day before we started back to Loo, we made a further examination of the wonders of the stalactite cave, and, drawn by a kind of restless feeling, even penetrated once more into the Chamber of the Dead. Passing beneath the spear of the White Death we gazed, with sensations which it would be quite impossible for me to describe, at the mass of rock that had shut us off from escape, thinking the while of priceless treasures beyond, of the mysterious old hag whose flattened fragments lay crushed beneath it, and of the fair girl of whose tomb it was the portal. I say gazed at the "rock," for, examine as we could, we could find no traces of the join of the sliding door; nor, indeed, could we hit upon the secret, now utterly lost, that worked it, though we tried for an hour or more. It is certainly a marvellous bit of mechanism, characteristic, in its massive and yet inscrutable simplicity, of the age which produced it; and I doubt if the world has such another to show.

At last we gave it up in disgust; though, if the mass had suddenly risen before our eyes, I doubt if we should have screwed up courage to step over Gagool's mangled remains, and once more enter the treasure chamber, even in the sure and certain hope of unlimited diamonds. And yet I could have cried at the idea of leaving all that treasure, the biggest treasure probably that in the world's history has ever been accumulated in one spot. But there was no help for it. Only dynamite could force its way through five feet of solid rock.

So we left it. Perhaps, in some remote unborn century, a more fortunate explorer may hit upon the "Open Sesame," and flood the world with gems. But, myself, I doubt it. Somehow, I seem to feel that the tens of millions of pounds' worth of jewels which lie in the three stone coffers will never shine round the neck of an earthly beauty. They and Foulata's bones will keep cold company till the end of all things.

With a sigh of disappointment we made our way back, and next day started for Loo. And yet it was really very ungrateful of us to be disappointed; for, as the reader will remember, by a lucky thought, I had taken the precaution to fill the wide pockets of my old shooting coat and trousers with gems before we left our prison-house, also Foulata's basket, which held twice as many more, notwithstanding that the water bottle had occupied some of its space. A good many of these fell out in the course of our roll down the side of the pit, including several of the big ones, which I had crammed in on the top in my coat pockets. But, comparatively speaking, an enormous quantity still remained, including ninety-three large stones ranging from over two hundred to seventy carats in weight. My old shooting coat and the basket still held sufficient treasure to make us all, if not millionaires as the term is understood in America, at least exceedingly wealthy men, and yet to keep enough stones each to make the three finest sets of gems in Europe. So we had not done so badly.

On arriving at Loo we were most cordially received by Ignosi, whom we found well, and busily engaged in consolidating his power, and reorganising the regiments which had suffered most in the great struggle with Twala.

He listened with intense interest to our wonderful story; but when we told him of old Gagool's frightful end he grew thoughtful.

"Come hither," he called, to a very old Induna or councillor, who was sitting with others in a circle round the king, but out of ear-shot. The ancient man rose, approached, saluted, and seated himself.

"Thou art aged," said Ignosi.

"Ay, my lord the king! Thy father's father and I were born on the same day."

"Tell me, when thou wast little, didst thou know Gagaoola the witch doctress?"

"Ay, my lord the king!"

"How was she then—young, like thee?"

"Not so, my lord the king! She was even as she is now and as she was in the days of my great grandfather before me; old and dried, very ugly, and full of wickedness."

"She is no more; she is dead."

"So, O king! then is an ancient curse taken from the land."

"Go!"

"*Koom!* I go, Black Puppy, who tore out the old dog's throat. *Koom!*"

"Ye see, my brothers," said Ignosi, "this was a strange woman, and I rejoice that she is dead. She would have let you die in the dark place, and mayhap afterwards she had found a way to slay me, as she found a way to slay my father, and set up Twala, whom her black heart loved, in his place. Now go on with the tale; surely there never was its like!"

After I had narrated all the story of our escape, as we had agreed between ourselves that I should, I took the opportunity to address Ignosi as to our departure from Kukuanaland.

"And now, Ignosi," I said, "the time has come for us to bid thee farewell, and start to see our own land once more. Behold, Ignosi, thou camest with us a servant, and now we leave thee a mighty king. If thou art grateful to us, remember to do even as thou didst promise: to rule justly, to respect the law, and to put none to death without a cause. So shalt thou prosper. To-morrow, at break of day, Ignosi, thou wilt give us an escort who shall lead us across the mountains. Is it not so, O king?"

Ignosi covered his face with his hands for a while before answering.

"My heart is sore," he said at last; "your words split my heart in twain. What have I done to you, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, that ye should leave me desolate? Ye who stood by me in rebellion and in battle, will ye leave me in the day of peace and victory? What will ye—wives? Choose from among the maidens! A place to live in? Behold, the land is yours as far as ye can see. The white man's houses? Ye shall teach my people how to build them. Cattle for beef and milk? Every married man shall bring you an ox or a cow. Wild game to hunt? Does not the elephant walk through my forests, and the river-horse sleep in the reeds? Would ye make war? My Impis wait your word. If there is anything more which I can give, that will I give you."

"Nay, Ignosi, we want none of these things," I answered; "we would seek our own place."

"Now do I learn," said Ignosi bitterly, and with flashing eyes, "that ye love the bright stones more than me, your friend. Ye have the stones; now ye would go to Natal and across the moving black water and sell them, and be rich, as it is the desire of a white man's heart to be. Cursed for your sake be the white stones, and cursed he who seeks them. Death shall it be to him who sets foot in the place of Death to find them. I have spoken. White men, ye can go."

I laid my hand upon his arm. "Ignosi," I said, "tell us, when thou didst wander in Zululand, and among the white people of Natal, did not thine heart turn to the land thy mother told thee of, thy native place, where thou didst see the light, and play when thou wast little, the land where thy place was?"

"It was even so, Macumazahn."

"In like manner, Ignosi, do our hearts turn to our land and to our own place."

Then came a silence. When Ignosi broke it, it was in a different voice.

"I do perceive that now as ever thy words are wise and full of reason, Macumazahn; that which flies in the air loves not to run along the ground; the white man loves not to live on the level of the black or to house among his kraals. Well, ye must go, and leave my heart sore, because ye will be as dead to me, since from where ye are no tidings can come to me.

"But listen, and let all your brothers know my words. No other white man shall cross the mountains, even if any man live to come so far. I will see no traders with their guns and gin. My people shall fight with the spear, and drink water, like their forefathers before them. I will have no praying-men to put a fear of death into men's hearts, to stir them up against the law of the king, and make a path for the white folk who follow to run on. If a white man comes to my gates I will send him back; if a hundred come I will push them back; if armies come, I will make war on them with all my strength, and they shall not prevail against me. None shall ever seek for the shining stones: no, not an army, for if they come I will send a regiment and fill up the pit, and break down the white columns in the caves and choke them with rocks, so that none can reach even to that door of which ye speak, and whereof the way to move it is lost. But for you three, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, the path is always open; for, behold, ye are dearer to me than aught that breathes.

"And ye would go. Infadoos, my uncle, and my Induna, shall take you by the hand and guide you with a regiment. There is, as I have learned, another way across the mountains that he shall show you. Farewell, my brothers, brave white men. See me no more, for I have no heart to bear it. Behold! I make a decree, and it shall be published from the mountains to the mountains; your names, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, shall be "*hlonipa*" even as the names of dead kings, and he who speaks them shall die.<sup>[12]</sup> So shall your memory be preserved in the land for ever.

[12] This extraordinary and negative way of showing intense respect is by no means unknown among African people, and the result is that if, as is usual, the name in question has a significance, the meaning must be expressed by an idiom or other word. In this way a memory is preserved for generations, or until the new word utterly supplants the old one.—A.Q.

"Go now, ere my eyes rain tears like a woman's. At times as ye look back down the path of life, or when ye are old and gather yourselves together to crouch before the fire, because for you the sun has no more heat, ye will think of how we stood shoulder to shoulder, in that great battle which thy wise words planned, Macumazahn; of how thou wast the point of the horn that galled Twala's flank, Bougwan; whilst thou stood in the ring of the Greys, Incubu, and men went down before thine axe like corn before a sickle; ay, and of how thou didst break that wild bull Twala's strength, and bring his pride to dust. Fare ye well for ever, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, my lords and my friends."

Ignosi rose and looked earnestly at us for a few seconds. Then he threw the corner of his karross over his head, so as to cover his face from us.

We went in silence.

Next day at dawn we left Loo, escorted by our old friend Infadoos, who was heart-broken at our departure, and by the regiment of Buffaloes. Early as was the hour, all the main street of the town was lined with multitudes of people, who gave us the royal salute as we passed at the head of the regiment, while the women blessed us for having rid the land of Twala, throwing flowers before us as we went. It was really very affecting, and not the sort of thing one is accustomed to meet with from natives.

One ludicrous incident occurred, however, which I rather welcomed, as it gave us something to laugh at.

Just before we reached the confines of the town, a pretty young girl, with some lovely lilies in her hand, ran forward and presented them to Good—somehow they all seemed to like Good; I think his eye-glass and solitary whisker gave him a fictitious value—and then said that she had a boon to ask.

"Speak on," he answered.

"Let my lord show his servant his beautiful white legs, that his servant may look upon them, and remember them all her days, and tell of them to her children; his servant has travelled four days' journey to see them, for the fame of them has gone throughout the land."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" exclaimed Good excitedly.

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said Sir Henry, "you can't refuse to oblige a lady."

"I won't," replied Good obstinately; "it is positively indecent."

However, in the end he consented to draw up his trousers to the knee, amidst notes of rapturous admiration from all the women present, especially the gratified young lady, and in this guise he had to walk till we got clear of the town.

Good's legs, I fear, will never be so greatly admired again. Of his melting teeth, and even of his "transparent eye," the Kukuanas wearied more or less, but of his legs never.

As we travelled, Infadoos told us that there was another pass over the mountains to the north of the one followed by Solomon's Great Road, or rather that there was a place where it was possible to climb down the wall of cliff which separates Kukuanaland from the desert, and is broken by the towering shapes of Sheba's Breasts. It appeared, also, that rather more than two years previously a party of Kukuana hunters had descended this path into the desert in search of ostriches, whose plumes are much prized among them for war head-dresses, and that in the course of their hunt they had been led far from the mountains and were much troubled by thirst. Seeing trees on the horizon, however, they walked towards them, and discovered a large and fertile oasis some miles in extent, and plentifully watered. It was by way of this oasis that Infadoos suggested we should return, and the idea seemed to us a good one, for it appeared that we should thus escape the rigours of the mountain pass. Also some of the hunters were in attendance to guide us to the oasis, from which, they stated, they could perceive other fertile spots far away in the desert.<sup>[13]</sup>

[13] It often puzzled all of us to understand how it was possible that Ignosi's mother, bearing the child with her, should have survived the dangers of her journey across the mountains and the desert, dangers which so nearly proved fatal to ourselves. It has since occurred to me, and I give the idea to the reader for what it is worth, that she must have taken this second route, and wandered out like Hagar into the wilderness. If she did so, there is no longer anything inexplicable about the story, since, as Ignosi himself related, she may well have been picked up by some ostrich hunters before she or the child was exhausted, was led by them to the oasis, and thence by stages to the fertile country, and so on by slow degrees southwards to Zululand.  
—A.Q.

Travelling easily, on the night of the fourth day's journey we found ourselves once more on the crest of the mountains that separate Kukuanaland from the desert, which rolled away in sandy billows at our feet, and about twenty-five miles to the north of Sheba's Breasts.

At dawn on the following day, we were led to the edge of a very precipitous chasm, by which we were to descend the precipice, and gain the plain two thousand and more feet below.

Here we bade farewell to that true friend and sturdy old warrior, Infadoos, who solemnly wished all good upon us, and nearly wept with grief. "Never, my lords," he said, "shall mine old eyes see the like of you again. Ah! the way that Incubu cut his men down in the battle! Ah! for the sight of that stroke with which he swept off my brother Twala's head! It was beautiful—beautiful! I may never hope to see such another, except perchance in happy dreams."

We were very sorry to part from him; indeed, Good was so moved that he gave him as a souvenir—what do you think?—an *eye-glass*; afterwards we discovered that it was a spare one. Infadoos was delighted, foreseeing that the possession of such an article would increase his prestige enormously, and after several vain attempts he actually succeeded in screwing it into his own eye. Anything more incongruous than the old warrior looked with an eye-glass I never saw. Eye-glasses do not go well with leopard-skin cloaks and black ostrich plumes.

Then, after seeing that our guides were well laden with water and provisions, and having received a thundering farewell salute from the Buffaloes, we wrung Infadoos by the hand, and began our downward climb. A very arduous business it proved to be, but somehow that evening we found ourselves at the bottom without accident.

"Do you know," said Sir Henry that night, as we sat by our fire and gazed up at the beetling cliffs above us, "I think that there are worse places than Kukuanaland in the world, and that I have known unhappier times than the last month or two, though I have never spent such queer ones. Eh! you fellows?"

"I almost wish I were back," said Good, with a sigh.

As for myself, I reflected that all's well that ends well; but in the course of a long life of shaves, I never had such shaves as those which I had recently experienced. The thought of that battle makes me feel cold all over, and as for our experience in the treasure chamber—!

Next morning we started on a toilsome trudge across the desert, having with us a good supply of water carried by our five guides, and camped that night in the open, marching again at dawn on the morrow.

By noon of the third day's journey we could see the trees of the oasis of which the guides spoke, and within an hour of sundown we were walking once more upon grass and listening to the sound of running water.

## CHAPTER XX.

### FOUND

And now I come to perhaps the strangest adventure that happened to us in all this strange business, and one which shows how wonderfully things are brought about.

I was walking along quietly, some way in front of the other two, down the banks of the stream which runs from the oasis till it is swallowed up in the hungry desert sands, when suddenly I stopped and rubbed my eyes, as well I might. There, not twenty yards in front of me, placed in a charming situation, under the shade of a species of fig-tree, and facing to the stream, was a cosy hut, built more or less on the Kafir principle with grass and withes, but having a full-length door instead of a bee-hole.

"What the dickens," said I to myself, "can a hut be doing here?" Even as I said it the door of the hut opened, and there limped out of it a *white man* clothed in skins, and with an enormous black beard. I thought that I must have got a touch of the sun. It was impossible. No hunter ever came to such a place as this. Certainly no hunter would ever settle in it. I stared and stared, and so did the other man, and just at that juncture Sir Henry and Good walked up.

"Look here, you fellows," I said, "is that a white man, or am I mad?"

Sir Henry looked, and Good looked, and then all of a sudden the lame white man with a black beard uttered a great cry, and began hobbling towards us. When he was close he fell down in a sort of faint.

With a spring Sir Henry was by his side.

"Great Powers!" he cried, "*it is my brother George!*"

At the sound of this disturbance, another figure, also clad in skins, emerged from the hut, a gun in his hand, and ran towards us. On seeing me he too gave a cry.

"Macumazahn," he halloed, "don't you know me, Baas? I'm Jim the hunter. I lost the note you gave me to give to the Baas, and we have been here nearly two years." And the fellow fell at my feet, and rolled over and over, weeping for joy.

"You careless scoundrel!" I said; "you ought to be well *sjambocked*"—that is, hidden.

Meanwhile the man with the black beard had recovered and risen, and he and Sir Henry were pump-handling away at each other, apparently without a word to say. But whatever they had quarrelled about in the past—I suspect it was a lady, though I never asked—it was evidently forgotten now.

"My dear old fellow," burst out Sir Henry at last, "I thought you were dead. I have been over Solomon's Mountains to find you. I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again, and now I come across you perched in the desert, like an old *aasvögel*."<sup>[14]</sup>

[14] Vulture.

"I tried to cross Solomon's Mountains nearly two years ago," was the answer, spoken in the hesitating voice of a man who has had little recent opportunity of using his tongue, "but when I reached here a boulder fell on my leg and crushed it, and I have been able to go neither forward nor back."

Then I came up. "How do you do, Mr. Neville?" I said; "do you remember me?"

"Why," he said, "isn't it Hunter Quatermain, eh, and Good too? Hold on a minute, you fellows, I am getting dizzy again. It is all so very strange, and, when a man has ceased to hope, so very happy!"

That evening, over the camp fire, George Curtis told us his story, which, in its way, was almost as eventful as our own, and, put shortly, amounted to this. A little less than two years before, he had started from Sitanda's Kraal, to try to reach Suliman's Berg. As for the note I had sent him by Jim, that worthy lost it, and he had never heard of it till to-day. But, acting upon information he had received from the natives, he headed not for Sheba's Breasts, but for the ladder-like descent of the mountains down which we had just come, which is clearly a better route than that marked out in old Dom Silvestra's plan. In the desert he and Jim had suffered great hardships, but finally they reached this oasis, where a terrible accident befell George Curtis. On the day of their arrival he was sitting by the stream, and Jim was extracting the honey from the nest of a stingless bee which is to be found in the desert, on the top of a bank immediately above him. In so doing he loosened a great boulder of rock, which fell upon George Curtis's right leg, crushing it frightfully. From that day he had been so lame that he found it impossible to go either forward or back, and had preferred to take the chances of dying in the oasis to the certainty of perishing in the desert.

As for food, however, they got on pretty well, for they had a good supply of ammunition, and the oasis was frequented, especially at night, by large quantities of game, which came thither for water. These they shot, or trapped in pitfalls, using the flesh for food, and, after their clothes wore out, the hides for clothing.

"And so," George Curtis ended, "we have lived for nearly two years, like a second Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday, hoping against hope that some natives might come here to help us away, but none have come. Only last night we settled that Jim should leave me, and try to reach Sitanda's Kraal to get assistance. He was to go to-morrow, but I had little hope of ever seeing him back again. And now *you*, of all people in the world, *you*, who, as I fancied, had long ago forgotten all about me, and were living comfortably in old England, turn up in a promiscuous way and find me where you least expected. It is the most wonderful thing that I have ever heard of, and the most merciful too."

Then Sir Henry set to work, and told him the main facts of our adventures, sitting till late into the night to do it.

"By Jove!" said George Curtis, when I showed him some of the diamonds: "well, at least you have got something for your pains, besides my worthless self."

Sir Henry laughed. "They belong to Quatermain and Good. It was a part of the bargain that they should divide any spoils there might be."

This remark set me thinking, and having spoken to Good, I told Sir Henry that it was our joint wish that he should take a third portion of the diamonds, or, if he would not, that his share should be handed to his brother, who had suffered even more than ourselves on the chance of getting them. Finally, we prevailed upon him to consent to this arrangement, but George Curtis did not know of it until some time afterwards.

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Here, at this point, I think that I shall end my history. Our journey across the desert back to Sitanda's Kraal was most arduous, especially as we had to support George Curtis, whose right leg was very weak indeed, and continually threw out splinters of bone. But we did accomplish it somehow, and to give its details would only be to reproduce much of what happened to us on the former occasion.

Six months from the date of our re-arrival at Sitanda's, where we found our guns and other goods quite safe, though the old rascal in charge was much disgusted at our surviving to claim them, saw us all once more safe and sound at my little place on the Berea, near Durban, where I am now writing. Thence I bid farewell to all who have accompanied me through the strangest trip I ever made in the course of a long and varied experience.

P.S.—Just as I had written the last word, a Kafir came up my avenue of orange trees, carrying a letter in a cleft stick, which he had brought from the post. It turned out to be from Sir Henry, and as it speaks for itself I give it in full.

October 1, 1884.  
Brayley Hall, Yorkshire.

My Dear Quatermain,

I send you a line a few mails back to say that the three of us, George, Good, and myself, fetched up all right in England. We got off the boat at Southampton, and went up to town. You should have seen what a swell Good turned out the very next day, beautifully shaved, frock coat fitting like a glove, brand new eye-glass, etc., etc. I went and walked in the park with him, where I met some people I know, and at once told them the story of his "beautiful white legs."

He is furious, especially as some ill-natured person has printed it in a Society paper.

To come to business, Good and I took the diamonds to Streeter's to be valued, as we arranged, and really I am afraid to tell you what they put them at, it seems so enormous. They say that of course it is more or less guess-work, as such stones have never to their knowledge been put on the market in anything like such quantities. It appears that (with the exception of one or two of the largest) they are of the finest water, and equal in every way to the best Brazilian stones. I asked them if they would buy them, but they said that it was beyond their power to do so, and recommended us to sell by degrees, over a period of years indeed, for fear lest we should flood the market. They offer, however, a hundred and eighty thousand for a very small portion of them.

You must come home, Quatermain, and see about these things, especially if you insist upon making the magnificent present of the third share, which does *not* belong to me, to my brother George. As for Good, he is *no good*. His time is too much occupied in shaving, and other matters connected with the vain adorning of the body. But I think he is still down on his luck about Foulata. He told me that since he had been home he hadn't seen a woman to touch her, either as regards her figure or the sweetness of her expression.

I want you to come home, my dear old comrade, and to buy a house near here. You have done your day's work, and have lots of money now, and there is a place for sale quite close which would suit you admirably. Do come; the sooner the better; you can finish writing the story of our adventures on board ship. We have refused to tell the tale till it is written by you, for fear lest we shall not be believed. If you start on receipt of this you will reach here by Christmas, and I book you to stay with me for that. Good is coming, and George; and so, by the way, is your boy Harry (there's a bribe for you). I have had him down for a week's shooting, and like him. He is a cool young hand; he shot me in the leg, cut out the pellets, and then remarked upon the advantages of having a medical student with every shooting party!

Good-bye, old boy; I can't say any more, but I know that you will come, if it is only to oblige

Your sincere friend,  
HENRY CURTIS.

P.S.—The tusks of the great bull that killed poor Khiva have now been put up in the hall here, over the pair of buffalo horns you gave me, and look magnificent; and the axe with which I chopped off Twala's head is fixed above my writing-table. I wish that we could have managed to bring away the coats of chain armour. Don't lose poor Foulata's basket in which you brought away the diamonds.

H.C.

Today is Tuesday. There is a steamer going on Friday and I really think that I must take Curtis at his word, and sail by her for England, if it is only to see you, Harry, my boy and to look after the printing of this history that is a task that I do not like to trust to anybody else.  
All an Quatermain

# BOOK XXII

## SHE

PART I (2 OCTOBER 1886)

### INTRODUCTION

In giving to the world the record of what, looked at from that point of view only, is I suppose one of the most wonderful and mysterious adventures ever experienced by mortal men, I feel it incumbent on me to explain what my exact connection with it is. And so I may as well say at once that I am not the narrator but only the editor of this extraordinary history, and then proceed to tell how it found its way into my hands.

Some years ago I, the editor, was staying with a brother at one of the Universities, which for the purposes of this history we will call Cambridge, and was one day much struck with the appearance of two people whom I saw going arm-in-arm down the street. One of these gentlemen was I think, without exception, the handsomest young fellow I have ever set eyes on. He was very tall, very broad, and had a look of power and a grace of bearing that seemed as native to him as it is to a wild stag. In addition his face was almost without flaw—a good face as well as a beautiful one, and when he lifted his hat, which he did just then to a passing lady, I saw that his head was covered with little golden curls growing close to the scalp.

“Good gracious!” I said to my brother, with whom I was walking, “why, that fellow looks like a statue of Apollo<sup>1</sup> come to life. What a splendid man he is.”

“Yes,” he answered, “he is the handsomest man in the University, and one of the nicest too. They call him ‘the Greek god;’ but look at the other one, he’s Vincey’s (that’s the god’s name) guardian, and supposed to be full of every kind of information. They call him ‘Charon.’”<sup>2</sup> I looked, and found the older man quite as interesting in his way as the glorified specimen of humanity at his side. He appeared to be about forty years of age, and was I think as ugly as his companion was handsome. To begin with, he was shortish, rather bow-legged, very deep chested, and with unusually long arms. He had dark hair and small eyes, and the hair grew right down on his forehead, and his whiskers grew right up to his hair, so that there was uncommonly

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<sup>1</sup> The god of poetry, archery, and sunlight, typically represented as a beautiful young man.

<sup>2</sup> In Greek mythology, the blind, aged boatman who ferries dead souls across the river Styx into Hades.

little of his countenance to be seen. Altogether he reminded me forcibly of a gorilla, and yet there was something very pleasing and genial about the man's eye. I remember saying that I should like to know him.

"All right," answered my brother, "nothing easier. I know Vincey; I'll introduce you," and he did, and for some minutes we stood chatting—about the Zulu people, I think, for I had just returned from the Cape at the time.<sup>1</sup> Presently, however, a stoutish lady, whose name I do not remember, came along the pavement, accompanied by a pretty fair-haired girl, and these two Mr. Vincey, who clearly knew them well, at once joined, and walked off in their company. I remember being rather amused because of the change in the expression of the elder man, whose name I discovered was Holly, when he saw the ladies advancing. He suddenly stopped short in his talk, cast a reproachful look at his companion, and, with an abrupt nod to myself, turned and marched off alone across the street. I heard afterwards that he was popularly supposed to be as much afraid of a woman as most people are of a mad dog, which accounted for his precipitate retreat. I cannot say, however, that young Vincey showed much aversion to feminine society on this occasion. Indeed I remember laughing, and remarking to my brother at the time that he was not the sort of man whom one would care to introduce to the lady one was going to marry, since it is exceedingly probable that the acquaintance would end in a transfer of her affections. He was altogether too good-looking, and, what is more, he had none of that consciousness and conceit about him which usually afflicts handsome men, and makes them deservedly disliked by their fellows.

That evening my visit came to an end, and that was the last I saw or heard of Charon and the Greek god for many a long day. Indeed I have never seen either of them from that hour to this, and do not suppose it likely that I shall. But a month ago I received a letter and two packets, one of manuscript, and on opening the first found that it was signed by "Horace Holly," a name that at the moment was not familiar to me. It ran as follows:—

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<sup>1</sup> As a young man, Haggard had spent six years in southern Africa, working for the British colonial government; see Introduction.

— College, Cambridge,  
“1st May, 18—.

“My dear Sir,

“You will be surprised, considering the very slight nature of our acquaintance, to get a letter from me. Indeed, I think I had better begin by reminding you that we once met, now some five years ago, when your brother introduced me and my ward Leo Vincey to you in the street at Cambridge. To be brief and come to my business. I have recently read with much interest a book of yours describing a Central African adventure.<sup>1</sup> I take it that this book is partly true, and partly an effort of the imagination. However this may be, it has given me an idea. It happens, how you will see in the accompanying manuscript (which together with the Scarab,<sup>2</sup> the “Royal Son of the Sun,” and the original sherd,<sup>3</sup> I am sending to you by hand), that my ward, or rather my adopted son, Leo Vincey and myself have recently passed through a real African adventure, of a nature so much more marvellous than the one which you describe, that to tell the truth I am almost ashamed to submit it to you for fear lest you should disbelieve me. You will see it stated in this manuscript that I, or rather we, had made up our minds not to make this history public during our joint lives. Nor should we alter our determination were it not for a circumstance that has recently arisen. We are, for reasons that you may be able to guess, after perusing this manuscript, going away again, this time to Central Asia, where, if anywhere upon this earth, wisdom is to be found, and anticipate that our sojourn there will be a long one.<sup>4</sup> Possibly we shall not return. Under these altered conditions it has become a question whether we are justified in withholding from the world an account of a phenomenon which we believe to be of unparalleled interest, merely because our private life is involved, or because we are afraid of ridicule and doubt being cast upon our statements. I hold one view about this matter, and Leo holds another, and finally after much discussion, we have come to a compromise, namely, to send the history to you, giving you full leave to publish it if you think fit, the only stipulation being that you shall disguise our real

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to Haggard's previous work of fiction, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885).

<sup>2</sup> Short for scarabaeus, a beetle held sacred by the ancient Egyptians, often represented in carved stone talismans and ornaments.

<sup>3</sup> A fragment of pottery; a potsherd.

<sup>4</sup> Haggard's sequel to *She*, entitled *Ayesha: The Return of She* (1905), takes place in the mountains of Tibet.

names, and as much concerning our identity as is consistent with the maintenance of the *bona fides* of the narrative.

“And now what am I to say further? I really do not know beyond once more repeating that everything described in the accompanying manuscript is exactly as it happened. As regards *She* herself I have nothing to add. Day by day we have greater occasion to regret that we did not better avail ourselves of our opportunities to obtain more information from that marvellous woman. Who was she? How did she first come to the Caves of Kôr, and what was her real religion? We never ascertained, and now alas, we never shall, at least not yet. These and many other questions arise in my mind, but what is the good of asking them now?

“Will you undertake the task? We give you complete freedom, and as a reward you will certainly have the credit of giving to the world the most wonderful history, as distinguished from romance, that its records can show. Read the manuscript (which I have copied out fairly for your benefit), and let me know.

“Believe me,

“Very truly yours,

“L. HORACE HOLLY

“P.S.—Of course, if any profit results from the sale of the writing should you care to undertake it, you can do what you like with it, but if there is a loss I will leave instructions with my lawyers, Messrs. Geoffrey and Jordan, to meet it. We entrust the sherd, the scarab, and the parchment to your keeping till such time as we demand them back again.”—L.H.H.

This letter, as may be imagined, astonished me considerably, but when I came to look at the MS., which the pressure of other work prevented me from doing for a fortnight, I was still more astonished, as I think the reader will be also, and at once made up my mind to press on with the matter. I wrote to this effect to Mr. Holly, but a week afterwards received a letter from that gentleman’s lawyers, returning my own, with the information that their client and Mr. Leo Vincey had already left this country for Thibet, and they did not at present know their address.

Well, that is all I have to say. Of the history itself the reader must judge. I give it him, with the exception of a very few alterations, made with the object of concealing the identity of the actors from the general public, exactly as it has come to me. Personally I have made up my mind

to refrain from comments. At first I was inclined to believe that this history of a woman on whom, clothed in the majesty of her almost endless years, the shadow of Eternity itself lay like the dark wing of Night, was some gigantic allegory of which I could not catch the meaning. Then I thought that it might be a bold attempt to portray the possible results of immortality, grafted on the substance of a mortal who yet drew her strength from the earth, and in whose human bosom passions yet rose and fell and beat as in the undying world around her the winds and the tides rise and fall and beat unceasingly. But as I went on I abandoned that idea also. To me the story seems to bear the stamp of truth upon its face. Its explanation I must leave to others, and with this slight preface which circumstances make necessary, I introduce the world to Ayesha and the Caves of Kôr.

THE EDITOR

P.S.—There is on consideration one circumstance that, after a rehearsal of this history, struck me with so much force that I cannot resist calling the attention of the reader to it. He will observe that so far as we are made acquainted with him there is nothing in the character of Leo Vincey which in the opinion of most people would have been likely to attract an intellect so powerful as that of Ayesha. He is not even, at any rate to my view, particularly interesting. Indeed, one might have imagined that Mr. Holly would under ordinary circumstances have easily outstripped him in the favour of *She*. Can it be that extremes meet, and that the very excess and splendour of her mind led her by means of some strange physical reaction to worship at the shrine of matter? Was that ancient Kallikrates nothing but a splendid animal beloved for his Greek beauty? Or is the true explanation what I believe it to be, namely, that Ayesha, seeing further than we can see, perceived the germ and smouldering spark of greatness that lay hid within her lover's soul, and well knew that under the influence of her gift of life, watered by her wisdom, and shone upon with the sunshine of her presence, it would bloom like a flower and flash out like a star, filling the world with fragrance and with light?

Here also I am not able to answer, but must leave the reader to form his own judgment on the materials before him.

# I

## MY VISITOR

There are some events of which every circumstance and surrounding detail seems to be graven on the memory in such fashion that we cannot forget it, and so it is with the scene that I am about to describe. It rises as clearly before my mind at this moment as though it had happened yesterday.

It was in this very month something over twenty years ago that I, Ludwig Horace Holly, was sitting one night in my rooms at Cambridge, grinding away at some mathematical work, I forget what. I was to go up for my fellowship within a week, and was expected by my tutor and my College generally to distinguish myself. At last, wearied out, I flung my book down, and, going to the mantelpiece, took down a pipe and filled it. There was a candle burning on the mantelpiece, and a long, narrow glass at the back of it; and as I was in the act of lighting the pipe I caught sight of my own countenance in the glass, and paused to reflect. The lighted match burnt away till it scorched my fingers, forcing me to drop it; but still I stood and stared at myself in the glass, and reflected.

"Well," I said aloud, at last, "it is to be hoped that I shall be able to do something with the inside of my head, for I shall certainly never do anything by the help of the outside."

This remark will doubtless strike anybody who reads it as being slightly obscure, but I was in reality alluding to my physical deficiencies. Most men of twenty-two are endowed at any rate with some share of the comeliness of youth, but to me even this was denied. Short, thick-set, and deep-chested almost to deformity, with long sinewy arms, heavy features, deep-set grey eyes, a low brow half overgrown with a mop of thick black hair, like a deserted clearing on which the forest had once more begun to encroach; such was my appearance nearly a quarter of a century ago, and such, with some modification, is it to this day. Like Cain, I was branded<sup>1</sup>—branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness, as I was gifted by Nature with iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers. So ugly was I that the spruce young men of my College, though they were proud enough of my feats of endurance and physical prowess, did not even care to be seen walking

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<sup>1</sup> See Genesis 4:15; Cain kills his brother Abel and is both protected and exiled by God's brand or mark upon him.

with me. Was it wonderful that I was misanthropic and sullen? Was it wonderful that I brooded and worked alone, and had no friends—at least, only one? I was set apart by Nature to live alone, and draw comfort from her breast, and hers only. Women hated the sight of me. Only a week before I had heard one call me a “monster” when she thought I was out of hearing, and say that I had converted her to Darwin’s theory.<sup>1</sup> Once, indeed, a woman pretended to care for me, and I lavished all the pent-up affection of my nature upon her. Then money that was to have come to me went elsewhere, and she discarded me. I pleaded with her as I have never pleaded with any living creature before or since, for I was caught by her sweet face, and loved her; and in the end by way of answer she took me to the glass, and stood side by side with me, and looked into it.

“Now,” she said, “if I am Beauty, who are you?” and I cursed her and fled. That was when I was only twenty.

And so I stood and stared, and felt a sort of grim satisfaction in the sense of my own loneliness; for I had neither father, nor mother, nor brother; and as I did so there came a knock at my door.

I listened before I went to open it, for it was nearly twelve o’clock at night, and I was in no mood to admit any stranger. I had but one friend in the College, or, indeed, in the world—perhaps it was he.

Just then the person outside the door coughed, and I hastened to open it, for I knew the cough.

A tall man of about thirty, with the remains of great personal beauty, came hurrying in, staggering beneath the weight of a massive iron box which he carried by a handle in his right hand. He placed the box upon the table, and then fell into an awful fit of coughing. He coughed and coughed till his face became quite purple, and at last he sank into a chair and began to spit up blood. I poured out some whisky into a tumbler, and gave it to him. He drank it, and seemed better, though his better was very bad indeed.

“Why did you keep me standing there in the cold?” he asked; “you know the draughts are death to me.”

“I did not know who it was,” I answered. “You are a late visitor.”

“Yes; and I verily believe it is my last visit,” he answered, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. “I am done for, Holly. I am done for. I do not believe that I shall see to-morrow!”

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) advanced the theory that humans are descended from apes.

“Nonsense!” I said. “Let me go for a doctor.”

He waved me back imperiously with his hand. “It is sober sense; but I want no doctors. I have studied medicine, and I know all about it. No doctors can help me. My last hour has come! For a year past I have only lived by a miracle. Now listen to me as you never listened to anybody before; for you will not have the opportunity of getting me to repeat my words. We have been friends for two years; now tell me how much do you know about me?”

“I know that you are rich, and have had a fancy to come to College long after the age that most men leave it. I know that you have been married, and that your wife died; and that you have been the best, indeed almost the only, friend I ever had.”

“Did you know that I have a son?”

“No.”

“I have. He is five years old. He cost me his mother’s life, and I have never been able to bear to look upon his face in consequence. Holly, if you will accept the trust, I am going to leave you the boy’s sole guardian.”

I sprang almost out of my chair. “*Me!*” I said.

“Yes, you. I have not studied you for two years for nothing. I have known for some time that I could not last, and since I realised the fact, I have been searching for some one to whom I could confide the boy and this,” and he tapped the iron box. “You are the man, Holly; for, like a rugged tree, you are hard and sound at core. Listen; the boy will be the last survivor of one of the most ancient families in the world, that is, so far as families can be traced. You will laugh at me when I say it, but one day it will be proved to you beyond a doubt, that the founder of the family, my sixty-fifth or sixty-sixth lineal ancestor, was an Egyptian priest of Isis,<sup>1</sup> though he was himself of Grecian extraction, and was called Kallikrates, or the Strong and Beautiful, or, to be still more accurate, the Beautiful in Strength! His father was, I believe, one of the Greek mercenaries raised by Hakor, a Mendesian Prince of the Twenty-ninth Dynasty.<sup>2</sup> In or about the year 339 before Christ, just at the time of the final fall of the Pharaohs, this Kallikrates broke his vows of celibacy, and fled from Egypt with a Princess of Royal blood who had fallen in love with him, and was finally wrecked upon the coast of Africa, somewhere, as I believe, in the neighbourhood of where Delagoa

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Egyptian goddess of fertility, wife and sister of Osiris.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as Achoris, whose family came from the Egyptian city of Mendes. He ruled Egypt from 393–380 BCE.

Bay<sup>1</sup> now is, or rather to the north of it, he and his wife being saved, and all the remainder of their company destroyed in one way or another. Here they endured great hardships, but were at last entertained by the mighty Queen of a savage people, a white woman of peculiar loveliness, who, under circumstances which I cannot enter into, but which you will one day learn, if you live, from the contents of the box, finally murdered my ancestor, Kallikrates. His wife, however, escaped, how, I know not, to Athens, bearing a child with her, whom she named Tisisthenes, or the Mighty Avenger. Five hundred years or more afterwards, the family migrated to Rome under circumstances of which no trace remains, and here, probably with the idea of preserving the idea of vengeance which we find set out in Tisisthenes, they appear to have pretty regularly assumed the cognomen of Vindex, or Avenger. Here, too, they remained for another five centuries or more, till about 770 A.D., when Charlemagne<sup>2</sup> invaded Lombardy, where they were then settled, whereon the head of the family seems to have attached himself to the great Emperor, and to have returned with him across the Alps, and finally to have settled in Brittany. Six generations later his lineal representative crossed to England in the reign of Edward the Confessor,<sup>3</sup> and in the time of William the Conqueror was advanced to great honour and power. From that time till the present day I can trace my descent without a break. Not that the Vinceys—for that was the final corruption of the name after its bearers took root in English soil—have been particularly distinguished—they never came much to the fore. Sometimes they were soldiers, sometimes merchants, but on the whole they have preserved a dead level of respectability, and a still deader level of mediocrity. From the time of Charles II.<sup>4</sup> till the beginning of the present century they were merchants. About 1790 my grandfather made a considerable fortune out of brewing, and retired. In 1821 he died, and my father succeeded him, and dissipated most of the money. Ten years ago he died also, leaving me a net income of about two thousand a year. Then it was that I undertook an expedition in connection with that,” and he pointed to the iron chest, “which ended disastrously enough. On my way back I travelled in the South of

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<sup>1</sup> An inlet on the southeastern coast of Africa in Mozambique, in what was then Portuguese East Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Charles the Great (742–814), king of the Franks, and, after 800, Emperor of the West.

<sup>3</sup> Saxon king of the English from 1042 until 1066, when William the Conqueror of Normandy defeated him at the Battle of Hastings and became king, reigning until 1087.

<sup>4</sup> King of England, 1660–85.

Europe, and finally reached Athens. There I met my beloved wife, who might well also have been called the 'Beautiful,' like my old Greek ancestor. There I married her, and there, a year afterwards, she died."

He paused a while, his head sunk upon his hand, and then continued—

"My marriage had diverted me from a project which I cannot enter into now. I have no time, Holly—I have no time! One day, if you accept my trust, you will learn all about it. After my wife's death I turned my mind to it again. But first it was necessary, or, at least, I conceived that it was necessary, that I should attain to a perfect knowledge of Eastern dialects, especially Arabic. It was to facilitate my studies that I came here. Very soon, however, my disease developed itself, and now there is an end of me." And as though to emphasise his words he burst into another terrible fit of coughing.

I gave him some more whisky, and after resting he went on—

"I have never seen my boy, Leo, since he was a tiny baby. I never could see him, but they tell me that he is a quick and handsome child. In this envelope," and he produced a letter from his pocket addressed to myself, "I have jotted down the course I wish followed in the boy's education. It is a somewhat peculiar one. At any rate, I could not entrust it to a stranger. Once more, will you undertake it?"

"I must first know what I am to undertake," I answered.

"You are to undertake to have the boy, Leo, to live with you till he is twenty-five years of age—not to send him to school, remember. On his twenty-fifth birthday your guardianship will end, and you will then, with the keys that I give you now" (and he placed them on the table) "open the iron box, and let him see and read the contents, and say whether or no he is willing to undertake the quest. There is no obligation on him to do so. Now, as regards terms. My present income is two thousand two hundred a year. Half of that income I have secured to you by will for life contingently on your undertaking the guardianship—that is, one thousand a year remuneration to yourself, for you will have to give up your life to it, and one hundred a year to pay for the board of the boy. The rest is to accumulate till Leo is twenty-five, so that there may be a sum in hand should he wish to undertake the quest of which I spoke."

"And suppose I were to die?" I asked.

"Then the boy must become a ward of Chancery and take his chance. Only be careful that the iron chest is passed on to him by your will. Listen, Holly, don't refuse me. Believe me, this is to your advantage. You are not fit to mix with the world—it would only embitter

you. In a few weeks you will become a Fellow of your College, and the income that you will derive from that combined with what I have left you will enable you to live a life of learned leisure, alternated with the sport of which you are so fond, such as will exactly suit you."

He paused and looked at me anxiously, but I still hesitated. The charge seemed so very strange.

"For my sake, Holly. We have been good friends, and I have no time to make other arrangements."

"Very well," I said, "I will do it, provided there is nothing in this paper to make me change my mind," and I touched the envelope he had put upon the table by the keys.

"Thank you, Holly, thank you. There is nothing at all. Swear to me by God that you will be a father to the boy, and follow my directions to the letter."

"I swear it," I answered solemnly.

"Very well, remember that perhaps one day I shall ask for the account of your oath, for though I am dead and forgotten, yet I shall live. There is no such thing as death, Holly, only a change, and as you may perhaps learn in time to come, I believe that even here that change could under certain circumstances be indefinitely postponed," and here again he broke into one of his dreadful fits of coughing.

"There," he said, "I must go. You have the chest, and my will will be found among my papers, under the authority of which the child will be handed over to you. You will be well paid, Holly, and I know that you are honest, but if you betray my trust, by Heaven I will haunt you."

I said nothing, being, indeed, too bewildered to speak.

He held up the candle, and looked at his own face in the glass. It had been a beautiful face, but disease had wrecked it. "Food for the worms," he said. "Curious to think that in a few hours I shall be stiff and cold—the journey done, the little game played out. Ah me, Holly! life is not worth the trouble of life, except when one is in love—at least, mine has not been; but the boy Leo's may be if he has the courage and the faith. Good-bye, my friend!" and with a sudden access of tenderness he flung his arm about me and kissed me on the forehead, and then turned to go.

"Look here, Vincey," I said, "if you are as ill as you think you had better let me fetch a doctor."

"No, no," he said earnestly. "Promise me that you won't. I am going to die, and, like a poisoned rat, I wish to die alone."

"I don't believe that you are going to do anything of the sort," I answered. He smiled, and with the word "Remember," on his lips, was

gone. As for myself, I sat down and rubbed my eyes, wondering if I had been asleep. As this supposition would not bear investigation I gave it up, and began to think that Vincey must have been drinking. I knew that he was, and had been, very ill, but still it seemed impossible that he could be in such a condition as to be able to know for certain that he would not outlive the night. Had he been so near dissolution surely he would scarcely have been able to walk, and carry a heavy iron box with him. The whole story, on reflection, seemed to me utterly incredible, for I was not then old enough to be aware how many things happen in this world that the common sense of the average man would set down as so improbable as to be absolutely impossible. This is a fact that I have only recently mastered. Was it likely that a man would have a son five years of age whom he had never seen since he was a tiny infant? No. Was it likely that he could foretell his own death so accurately? No. Was it likely that he could trace his pedigree for more than three centuries before Christ, or that he would suddenly confide the absolute guardianship of his child, and leave half his fortune, to a college friend? Most certainly not. Clearly Vincey was either drunk or mad. That being so, what did it mean? and what was in the sealed iron chest?

The whole thing baffled and puzzled me to such an extent that at last I could stand it no longer, and determined to sleep over it. So I jumped up, and having put away into my despatch-box the keys and the letter that Vincey had left and stowed the iron chest in a large portmanteau, I turned in, and was soon fast asleep.

As it seemed to me, I had only been asleep for a few minutes when I was awakened by somebody calling me. I sat up and rubbed my eyes; it was broad daylight—eight o'clock, in fact.

“Why, what is the matter with you, John?” I asked of the gyp<sup>1</sup> who waited on Vincey and myself, “you look as though you had seen a ghost!”

“Yes, sir, and so I have,” he answered; “leastways I’ve seen a corpse, which is worse. I’ve been in to call Mr. Vincey, as usual, and there he lies stark and dead!”

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<sup>1</sup> A servant at Cambridge University (slang).

## PART 2 (9 OCTOBER 1886)

### II

#### THE YEARS ROLL BY

Of course, poor Vincey's sudden death created a great stir in the College; but, as he was known to be very ill, and a satisfactory doctor's certificate was forthcoming, there was no inquest. They were not so particular about inquests in those days as they are now, indeed, they were generally disliked, as causing a scandal. Under all these circumstances, as I was asked no questions, I did not feel called upon to volunteer any information about our interview of the night of Vincey's decease, beyond saying that he had come into my rooms to see me, as he often did. On the day of the funeral a lawyer came down from London and followed my poor friend's remains to the grave, and then went back with his papers and effects, excepting, of course, the iron chest which had been left in my keeping. For a week after this I heard no more of the matter, and, indeed, my attention was amply occupied in other ways, for I was up for my Fellowship, a fact that had prevented me from attending the funeral, or seeing the lawyer. At last, however, the examination was over, and I came back to my rooms and sank into an easy chair with a happy consciousness that I had got through it very fairly. Soon, however, my thoughts, relieved of the pressure that had crushed them into a single groove during the last few days, turned to the events of the night of poor Vincey's death, and again I asked myself what it all meant, and wondered if I should hear anything more of the matter, and, if I did not, what it would be my duty to do with the curious iron chest. I sat there and thought and thought till I began to grow quite disturbed over the whole occurrence: the mysterious midnight visit, the prophecy of death so shortly to be fulfilled, the solemn oath that I had taken, and which he had called on me to answer for in another world to this. Had the man committed suicide? It looked like it. And what was the quest of which he spoke? The circumstances were almost uncanny, so much so that, though I am by no means nervous, or apt to be alarmed at anything that may seem to cross the bounds of the natural, I grew afraid, and began to wish I had had nothing to do with it. How much more do I wish it now over twenty years afterwards!

As I sat and thought there was a knock at the door, and a letter, in a big blue envelope, was brought in to me. I saw at a glance that it was a lawyer's letter, and an instinct told me that it was connected with my trust. The letter—which I still have—runs thus:—

“Sir,—

“Our client, the late M.L.Vincey, Esq., who died on the 9<sup>th</sup> instant in —— College, Cambridge, has left behind him a Will, of which you will please find copy enclosed and of which we are the executors. By this Will you will perceive that you take a life-interest in about half of the late Mr.Vincey's property, now invested in Consols,<sup>1</sup> subject to your acceptance of the guardianship of his only son, Leo Vincey, at present an infant, aged five. Had we not ourselves drawn up the document in question in obedience to Mr.Vincey's clear and precise instructions, both personal and written, and had he not then assured us that he had very good reasons for what he was doing, we are bound to tell you that its provisions seem to us of so unusual a nature, that we should have felt bound to call the attention of the Court of Chancery to them, in order that such steps might be taken as seemed desirable to it, either by contesting the capacity of the testator or otherwise, to safeguard the interests of the infant. As it is, knowing that the testator was a gentleman of the highest intelligence and acumen, and that he has absolutely no relations living to whom he could have confided the guardianship of the child, we do not feel justified in taking this course.

“Awaiting such instructions as you please to send us as regards the delivery of the infant and the payment of the proportion of the dividends due to you,

“We remain, Sir,

“Faithfully yours,

“GEOFFREY AND JORDAN.”

I put down the letter, and ran my eye through the Will, which appeared, from its utter unintelligibility, to have been drawn on the strictest legal principles. So far as I could discover, however, it exactly bore out what my friend had told me on the night of his death. So it was true after all. I must take the boy. Suddenly I remembered the letter which he had left with the chest. I fetched it and opened it. It only contained such directions as he had already given to me as to opening the chest on Leo's

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<sup>1</sup> Annuity bonds issued by the British government.

twenty-fifth birthday, and laid down the outlines of the boy's education, which was to include Greek, the higher Mathematics, and *Arabic*. At the bottom there was a postscript to the effect that if the boy died under the age of twenty-five, which, however, he did not believe would be the case, I was to open the chest, and act on the information I obtained if I saw fit. If I did not see fit, I was to destroy all the contents. On no account was I to pass them on to a stranger.

As this letter added nothing material to my knowledge, and certainly raised no further objection in my mind to undertaking the task I had promised my dead friend to undertake, there was only one course open to me, namely, to write to Messrs. Geoffrey and Jordan, and express my readiness to enter on the trust, stating that I should be willing to undertake the charge of the lad in ten days' time. This done, I proceeded to the authorities of my College, and, having told them as much of the story as I considered desirable, which was not very much, after considerable difficulty succeeded in persuading them to stretch a point, and, in the event of my having obtained a fellowship, which I was pretty certain I had done, allow me to have the child to live with me. Their consent, however, was only granted on the condition that I vacated my rooms in college, and took lodgings. This I did, and with some difficulty succeeded in obtaining very good apartments quite close to the college gates. The next thing was to find a nurse. And on this point I came to a determination. I would have no woman to lord it over me about the child, and steal his affections from me. The boy was old enough to do without female assistance, so I set to work to hunt up a suitable male attendant. With some difficulty I succeeded in hiring a most respectable round-faced young man, who had been a helper in a hunting-stable, but who said that he was one of a family of seventeen and well-accustomed to the ways of children, and professed himself quite willing to undertake the charge of Master Leo when he arrived. Then, having taken the iron box to town, and with my own hands deposited it at my bankers, I bought some books upon the health and management of children, and read them, first to myself, and then aloud to Job—that was the young man's name—and waited.

At length the child arrived in the charge of an elderly person, who wept bitterly at parting with him, and a beautiful boy he was. Indeed, I do not think that I ever saw such a perfect child before or since. His eyes were grey, his forehead was broad, and his face, even at that early age, clean cut as a cameo, without being pinched or thin. But perhaps his most attractive point was his hair, which was pure gold in colour

and tightly curled over his shapely head. He cried a little when his nurse finally tore herself away, and left him with us. Never shall I forget the scene. There he stood, with the sunlight from the window playing upon his golden curls, his fist screwed in one eye, whilst he took us in with the other. I was seated in a chair, and stretched out my hand to him to induce him to come to me, while Job, in the corner, was making a sort of clucking noise, which, arguing from his previous experience, or from the analogy of the hen, he judged would have a soothing effect, and inspire confidence in the youthful mind, and running a wooden horse of peculiar hideousness backwards and forwards in a way that was little short of inane. This went on for some minutes, and then all of a sudden the lad stretched out both his little arms and ran to me.

"I like you," he said: "you is ugly, but you is good."

Ten minutes afterwards he was eating large slices of bread and butter, with every sign of satisfaction; Job wanted to put jam on to them, but I sternly reminded him of the excellent works that we had read, and forbade it.

In a very little while (for, as I expected, I got my fellowship) the boy became the favourite of the whole College—where all orders and regulations to the contrary notwithstanding, he was continually in and out—a sort of chartered libertine, in whose favour all rules were relaxed. The offerings made at his shrine were simply without number, and I had serious difference of opinion with one old resident Fellow, now long dead, who was usually supposed to be the crustiest man in the University, and to abhor the sight of a child. And yet I discovered, when a frequently-recurring fit of sickness had forced Job to keep a strict look-out, that this unprincipled old man was in the habit of enticing the boy to his rooms and there feeding him upon unlimited quantities of brandy-balls, and making him promise to say nothing about it. Job told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, "at his age, too, when he might have been a grandfather if he had done what was right," by which Job understood had got married, and thence arose the row.

But I have no space to dwell upon those delightful years, upon which memory still fondly hovers. One by one they went by, and as they passed we two grew dearer and yet more dear to each other. Few sons have been loved as I love Leo, and few fathers know the deep and continuous affection that Leo bears to me.

The child grew into the boy, and the boy into the young man, as one by one the remorseless years flew by, and as he grew and increased so did his beauty and the beauty of his mind grow with him. When he was

about fifteen they used to call him Beauty about the College, and me they nicknamed the Beast. Beauty and the Beast was what they called us when we went out walking together, as we used to every day. Once Leo attacked a great strapping butcher's-man, twice his size, because he sung it out after us, and thrashed him, too—thrashed him fairly. I walked on and pretended not to see, till the combat got too exciting, when I turned round and cheered him on to victory. It was the chaff of the College at the time, but I could not help it. Then when he was a little older the undergraduates got fresh names for us. They called me Charon, and Leo the Greek god! I will pass over my own appellation with the humble remark that I was never handsome, and did not grow more so as I grew older. As for his, there was no doubt about its fitness. Leo at twenty-one might have stood for a statue of Apollo. I never saw anybody to touch him in looks, or anybody so absolutely unconscious of them. As for his mind, he was brilliant and keen-witted, but not a scholar. He had not the dulness necessary for that result. We followed out his father's instructions as regards his education strictly enough, and on the whole the results, especially so far as the Greek and Arabic went, were satisfactory. I learnt the latter language in order to help to teach it to him, but after five years of it he knew it as well as I did—almost as well as the professor who instructed us both. I always was a great sportsman—it is my one passion—and every autumn we went away somewhere shooting or fishing, sometimes to Scotland, sometimes to Norway, once even to Russia. I am a good shot, but even in this he learnt to excel me. When Leo was eighteen I moved back into my rooms, and entered him at my own College, and at twenty-one he took his degree—a respectable degree, but not a very high one. Then it was that I, for the first time, told him something of his own story, and of the mystery that loomed ahead. Of course he was very curious about it, and of course I explained to him that his curiosity could not be gratified at present. After that, to pass the time away, I suggested that he should get himself called to the Bar; and this he did, reading at Cambridge, and only going up to London to eat his dinners.

I had only one trouble about him, and that was that every young woman who came across him, or, if not every one, nearly so, would insist on falling in love with him. Hence arose difficulties which I need not enter into here, though they were troublesome enough at the time. On the whole, he behaved fairly well; I can't say more than that.

And so the time went by till at last he reached his twenty-fifth birthday, at which date this strange and, in some ways awful, history really begins.

### III

#### THE SHERD OF AMENARTAS

On the day preceding Leo's twenty-fifth birthday we both proceeded to London, and extracted the mysterious chest from the bank where I had deposited it twenty years before. It was, I remember, brought up by the same clerk who had taken it down. He perfectly remembered having hidden it away. Had he not done so, he said, he should have had difficulty in finding it, it was so covered up with cobwebs.

In the evening we returned with our precious burden to Cambridge, and I think that we might both of us have given away all the sleep we got that night and not have been much the poorer. At daybreak Leo arrived in my room in a dressing-gown, and suggested that we should at once proceed to business. I scouted the idea as showing an unworthy curiosity. The chest had waited twenty years I said; it could very well continue to wait until after breakfast. Accordingly at nine—an unusually sharp nine—we breakfasted; and so occupied was I with my own thoughts that I regret to state that I put a piece of bacon into Leo's tea in mistake for a lump of sugar. Job, too, to whom the contagion of excitement had, of course, spread, managed to break the handle off my Sèvres<sup>1</sup> china tea-cup, the identical one I believe that Marat<sup>2</sup> had been drinking from just before he was stabbed in his bath.

At last, however, breakfast was cleared away, and Job, at my request, fetched the chest, and placed it upon the table in a somewhat gingerly fashion, as though he mistrusted it. Then he prepared to leave the room.

"Stop a moment, Job," I said; "If Mr. Leo has no objection, I should prefer to have an independent witness to this business, who can be relied upon to hold his tongue unless he is asked to speak."

"Certainly, Uncle Horace," answered Leo; for I had brought him up to call me uncle—though he varied the appellation somewhat disrespectfully by calling me "old fellow," or even "my avuncular relative."

Job touched his head, not having a hat on.

"Lock the door, Job," I said, "and bring me my despatch-box."

He obeyed, and from the box I took the keys that poor Vincey, Leo's father, had given me on the night of his death. There were three of

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<sup>1</sup> Fine porcelain produced in France from the mid-eighteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Marat (1743–93); radical journalist and political leader of the French Revolution, assassinated in his bathtub by Charlotte Corday.

them: the largest a comparatively modern key, the second an exceedingly ancient one, and the third entirely unlike anything of the sort that we had ever seen before, being fashioned apparently from a strip of solid silver, with a bar placed across to serve as a handle, and some nicks cut in the edge of the bar. It was more like a model of some antediluvian railway key than anything else.

“Now are you both ready?” I said, as people do when they are going to fire a mine. There was no answer, so I took the big key, rubbed some salad oil into the wards, and after one or two bad shots, for my hands were shaking, managed to fit it, and shoot the lock. Leo bent over and caught the massive lid in both his hands, and, with an effort, for the hinges had rusted, leaned it back. Its removal revealed another case covered with dust. This we extracted from the iron chest without any difficulty, and removed the accumulated filth of years from it with a clothes-brush.

It was, or appeared to be, of ebony, or some such close-grained black wood, and was bound in every direction with flat bands of iron. Its antiquity must have been extreme, for the dense heavy wood was actually in parts commencing to crumble away from age.

“Now for it,” I said, inserting the second key.

Job and Leo bent forward in breathless silence. The key turned, and I flung back the lid, and uttered an exclamation, as did the others, and no wonder, for inside the ebony case was a magnificent silver casket, about twelve inches square by eight high. It appeared to be of Egyptian workmanship, for the four legs were formed of Sphinxes, and the dome-shaped cover was also surmounted by a Sphinx. The casket was of course much tarnished and dented with age, but otherwise in almost perfect condition.

I drew it out and set it on the table, and then, in the midst of the most perfect silence, I inserted the strange looking silver key, and pressed this way and that until at last the lock yielded, and the casket stood open before us. It was filled to the brim with some brown shredded material, more like vegetable fibre than paper, the nature of which I have never been able to discover. This I carefully removed to the depth of some three inches, when I came to a letter enclosed in an ordinary modern-looking envelope, and addressed in the handwriting of my dead friend Vincey,

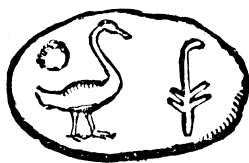
*“To my son Leo, should he live to open this casket.”*

I handed the letter to Leo, who glanced at the envelope, and then put it down upon the table, making a motion to me to go on emptying the casket.

The next thing that I came to was a parchment carefully rolled up. I unrolled it, and seeing that it was also in Vincey's handwriting, and headed "Translation of the Uncial Greek Writing<sup>1</sup> on the Potsherd," put it down by the letter. Then followed another ancient roll of parchment, that had become yellow and crinkled with the passage of years. This I also unrolled. It was likewise a translation of the same Greek original, but into black-letter Latin<sup>2</sup> this time, and appeared to me from the style and character to date from the end of the fifteenth, or perhaps the middle of the sixteenth, century. Immediately beneath this roll was something hard and heavy, wrapped up in yellow linen, and reposing upon another layer of the fibrous material. Slowly and carefully we unrolled the linen, exposing to view a very large but undoubtedly ancient potsherd of a dirty yellow colour! This potsherd had in my judgment, once been a part of an ordinary amphora<sup>3</sup> of medium size. For the rest, it measured eleven inches in length by ten in width, was about a quarter of an inch thick, and densely covered on the convex side that lay towards the bottom of the box with writing in the later uncial Greek character, faded here and there, but for the most part perfectly legible, the inscription having evidently been executed with the greatest care, and by means of a reed pen, such as the ancients often used. I must not forget to mention that in some remote age this wonderful fragment had been broken in two, and rejoined by means of cement and eight long rivets. Also there were numerous inscriptions on the inner side, but these were of the most erratic character, and had clearly been made by different hands and in many different ages, and of them I shall have to speak presently.

"Is there anything more?" asked Leo, in a kind of excited whisper.

I groped about, and produced something hard, done up in a little linen bag. Out of the bag we took first a very beautiful miniature done upon ivory, and secondly, a small chocolate-coloured composition *scarabæus*, marked thus:

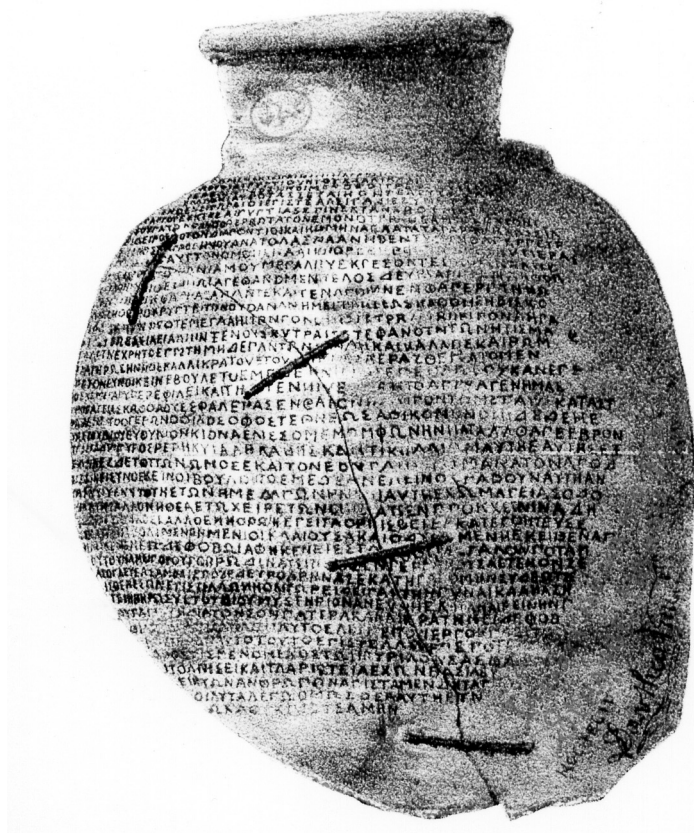


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<sup>1</sup> Rounded script somewhere between block letters and cursive, typically found in medieval Greek and Latin manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> Gothic, heavily-ornamented script used in the medieval period.

<sup>3</sup> Two-handled jar used to carry oil or wine.



FACSIMILE OF THE SHERD OF AMENARTAS



symbols which, we have since ascertained, mean “Suten se Rā,” which is being translated the “Royal Son of Rā<sup>1</sup> or the Sun.” The miniature was a picture of Leo’s Greek mother—a lovely, dark-eyed creature. On the back of it was written, in poor Vincey’s handwriting, “My beloved wife, died May, 1856.”

“That is all,” I said.

“Very well,” answered Leo, putting down the miniature at which he had been gazing affectionately; “and now let us read the letter,” and without further ado he broke the seal, and read aloud as follows:—

“MY SON LEO,—When you open this, if you ever live to do so, you will have attained to manhood, and I shall have been long enough dead to be absolutely forgotten by nearly all who knew me. Yet in reading it remember that I have been, and for anything you know may still be, and that in it, through this link of pen and paper, I stretch out my hand to you across the gulf of death, and my voice speaks to you from the unutterable silence of the grave.<sup>2</sup> Though I am dead, and no memory of me remains in your mind, yet am I with you in this hour that you read. Since your birth to this day I have scarcely seen your face. Forgive me this. Your life supplanted the life of one whom I loved better than women are often loved, and the bitterness of it endureth yet. Had I lived I should in time have conquered this foolish feeling, but I am not destined to live. My sufferings, physical and mental, are more than I can bear, and when such small arrangements as I have to make for your future well-being are completed it is my intention to put a period to them. May God forgive me if I do wrong. At the best I could not live more than another year.”

“So he killed himself,” I exclaimed. “I thought so.”

“And now,” Leo went on, without replying, “enough of myself. What has to be said belongs to you who live, not to me, who am dead, and almost as much forgotten as though I had never been. Holly, my friend (to whom, if he will accept the trust, it is my intention to confide you), will have told you something of the extraordinary antiquity of your race. In the contents of this casket you will find sufficient to prove it. The strange legend that you will find inscribed by your remote

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<sup>1</sup> The ancient Egyptian god of the sun.

<sup>2</sup> Alluding to Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6:313.

ancestress upon the potsherd was communicated to me by my father on his deathbed, and took a strong hold upon my imagination. When I was only nineteen years of age I determined, as, to his misfortune, did one of our ancestors about the time of Elizabeth, to investigate its truth. Into all that befell me I cannot enter now. But this I saw with my own eyes. On the coast of Africa, in a hitherto unexplored region, some distance to the north of where the Zambesi falls into the sea,<sup>1</sup> there is a headland, at the extremity of which a peak towers up, shaped like the head of a negro, similar to that of which the writing speaks. I landed there, and learnt from a wandering native who had been cast out by his people because of some crime which he had committed, that far inland are great mountains, shaped like cups, and caves surrounded by measureless swamps. I learnt also that the people there speak a dialect of Arabic, and are ruled over by a *beautiful white woman* who is seldom seen by them, but who is reported to have power over all things living and dead. Two days after I had ascertained this the man died of fever contracted in crossing the swamps, and I was forced by want of provisions and by symptoms of the illness which afterwards prostrated me to take to my dhow<sup>2</sup> again.

“Of the adventures that befell me after this I need not now speak. I was wrecked upon the coast of Madagascar,<sup>3</sup> and rescued some months afterwards by an English ship that brought me to Aden,<sup>4</sup> whence I started for England, intending to prosecute my search as soon as I had made sufficient preparations. On my way I stopped in Greece, and there, for ‘*Omnia vincit amor*,’<sup>5</sup> I met your beloved mother, and married her, and there you were born and she died. Then it was that my last illness seized me, and I returned hither to die. But still I hoped against hope, and set myself to work to learn Arabic, with the intention, should I ever get better, of returning to the coast of Africa, and solving the mystery of which the tradition has lived so many centuries in our family. But I have not got better, and, so far as I am concerned, the story is at an end.

“For you, however, my son, it is not at an end, and to you I hand on these the results of my labour, together with the hereditary proofs of its origin. It is my intention to provide that they shall not be put into your

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<sup>1</sup> The Zambezi river flows through southeastern Africa towards Delagoa Bay and the Mozambique channel.

<sup>2</sup> An Arab or African sailing boat with a single mast and a triangular sail.

<sup>3</sup> Island off the coast of Mozambique in southeastern Africa.

<sup>4</sup> Port city in southwestern Yemen; it was under British control from 1839 to 1936.

<sup>5</sup> “Love conquers all” (Latin).

hands until you have reached an age when you will be able to judge for yourself whether or no you will choose to investigate what, if it is true, must be the greatest mystery in the world, or to put it by as an idle fable, originating in the first place in a woman's disordered brain.

"I do not believe that it is a fable; I believe that if it can only be re-discovered there is a spot where the vital forces of the world visibly exist. Life exists; why therefore should not the means of preserving it indefinitely exist also? But I have no wish to prejudice your mind about the matter. Read and judge for yourself. If you are inclined to undertake the search I have so provided that you will not lack for means. If, on the other hand, you are satisfied that the whole thing is a chimera, then, I adjure you, destroy the potsherd and the writings, and let a cause of troubling be removed from our race for ever. Perhaps that will be wisest. The unknown is generally taken to be terrible, not as the proverb would infer, from the inherent superstition of man, but because it so often is terrible. He who would tamper with the vast and secret forces that animate the world may well fall a victim to them. And if the end were attained, if at last you emerged from the trial ever beautiful and ever young, defying time and evil, and lifted above the natural decay of flesh and intellect, who shall say that the awesome change would prove a happy one? Choose, my son, and may the Power who rules all things, and who says 'thus far shalt thou go, and thus much shalt thou learn,' direct the choice to your own happiness and the happiness of the world, which, in the event of your success, you would one day certainly rule by the pure force of accumulated experience.—Farewell!"

Thus the letter, which was unsigned and undated, abruptly ended.

"What do you make of that, Uncle Holly?" said Leo, with a sort of gasp, as he replaced it on the table. "We have been looking for a mystery, and we certainly seem to have found one."

"What do I make of it? Why, that your poor dear father was off his head, of course," I answered, testily. "I guessed as much that night, twenty years ago, when he came into my room. You see he evidently hurried his own end, poor man. It is absolute balderdash."

"That's it, sir!" said Job, solemnly. Job was a most matter-of-fact specimen of a matter-of-fact class.

"Well, let's see what the potsherd has to say, at any rate," said Leo, taking up the translation in his father's writing, and commencing to read:—

“I, Amenartas, of the Royal House of Hakor, a Pharaoh of Egypt, wife of Kallikrates (the Strong and Beautiful or the Beautiful in Strength), a Priest of Isis, whom the gods cherish and the demons obey, being about to die, to my little son Tisisthenes (the Mighty Avenger). I fled with thy father from Egypt in the days of Nekht-nebf,\* causing him through love to break the vows that he had vowed. We fled southward, across the waters, and we wandered for twice twelve moons on the coast of Libya (Africa) that looks towards the rising sun, where by a river is a great rock carven like the head of an Ethiopian. Four days on the water from the mouth of a mighty river were we cast away, and some were drowned and some died of sickness. But us wild men took through wastes and marshes, where the sea fowl hid the sky, bearing us ten days’ journey till we came to a hollow mountain, where a great city had been and fallen, and where there are caves of which no man hath seen the end; and they brought us to the Queen of the people who place pots upon the heads of strangers, who is a magician having a knowledge of all things, and life and loveliness that does not die. And she cast eyes of love upon thy father, Kallikrates, and would have slain me, and taken him to husband, but he loved me and feared her, and would not. Then did she take us, and lead us by terrible ways, by means of dark magic, to where the great pit is, in the mouth of which the old philosopher lay dead, and showed to us the rolling Pillar of Life that dies not, whereof the voice is as the voice of thunder, and did stand in the flames, and come forth unharmed, and yet more beautiful. Then did she swear to make thy father undying even as she is, if he would but slay me, and give himself to her, for me she could not slay because of the magic of my own people that I have, and that prevailed thus far against her. And he held his hand before his eyes to hide her beauty, and would not. Then in her rage did she smite him by her magic, and he died, but she wept over him, and bore him thence with lamentations, and being afraid, me she sent to the mouth of the great river where the ships come, and I was carried far away on the ships where I gave thee birth, and hither to Athens I came at last after many wanderings. Now I say to thee, my son, Tisisthenes, seek out the woman, and learn the secret of life, and if thou mayest find a way slay her, because of thy father Kallikrates, and if thou dost fear or fail this I say to all of thy seed who come after thee, till at last a brave man be found among

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\* Nectanebes or Nectanebo II. The last native Pharaoh of Egypt fled from Ochus to Ethiopia, B.C. 339.—EDITOR.

them who shall bathe in the fire and sit in the place of the Pharaohs. I speak of those things, that though they be past belief, yet I have known, and I lie not.”

“May the Lord forgive her for that,” groaned Job, who had been listening to this marvellous composition with his mouth open.

As for myself, I said nothing; my first idea being that my poor friend, being demented, had composed the whole thing, though it scarcely seemed likely that such a story could have been invented by anybody. It was too original. To solve my doubts I took up the potsherd and commenced to read the close uncial Greek writing on it, and beautiful Greek it is to have been written by an Egyptian born. The English translation was, as I discovered on further investigation, both accurate and elegant.

Besides the uncial writing on the convex side of the sherd at the top, painted in dull red, on what had once been the lip of the amphora, was the cartouche<sup>1</sup> already mentioned as being on the *scarabæus*, which we had also found in the casket. The hieroglyphics or symbols, however, were reversed, just as though they had been pressed on wax. Whether this was the cartouche of the original Kallikrates, or of some Prince or Pharaoh from whom his wife Amenartas was descended, I am not sure, nor can I tell if it was drawn upon the sherd at the same time that the uncial Greek was inscribed, or copied on more recently from the Scarab by some other member of the family. Nor was this all. At the foot of the writing, painted in the same dull red, was the outline of a somewhat rude drawing of a Sphinx wearing two feathers, symbols of majesty, which, though common enough upon the effigies of sacred bulls and gods, I have never before met with on a Sphinx.

On the right-hand side of this surface of the sherd, painted obliquely in bright red on the space not covered by the uncial, and signed in blue paint, was the following quaint inscription:—

IN EARTH AND SKIE AND SEA  
STRANGE THYNGES THER BE.  
HOC FECIT  
DOROTHEA VINCEY.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Egyptian oval seal containing the name of a god or pharaoh. As a priest, Kallikrates in fact would not have had his own cartouche.

<sup>2</sup> “Dorothea Vincey made (or wrote) this” (Latin).

Perfectly bewildered, I turned the relic over. It was covered from top to bottom with notes and signatures in Greek, Latin, and English. The first in uncial Greek was by Tisisthenes, the son to whom the writing was addressed. It was, "I cannot go. To thee, my son Kallikrates."

This Kallikrates (probably, in the Greek fashion, so named after his grandfather) evidently made some attempt to start on the quest, for his entry written in very faint and almost illegible uncial is, "I started to seek, but the gods were against me. To thee, my son."

Between these two ancient writings, the second of which was inscribed upside down—that, had it not been for the transcript of them executed by Vincey, I should not have been able to read, since, owing to their having been written on that portion of the tile which had, in the course of ages, undergone the most handling, they were nearly worn out—was the bold, modern-looking signature of one Lionel Vincey, "Ætate sua 17,"<sup>1</sup> which was written thereon, I think, by Leo's grandfather. To the right of this were the initials "J. B.V.," and below came a variety of Greek signatures, in uncial and cursive character, and what appeared to be some repetitions of the sentence "to thee my son," showing that the relic has been passed on from generation to generation.

The next legible thing after the Greek signatures was the word "ROMAE, A.U.C."<sup>2</sup> showing that the family had now migrated to Rome. Unfortunately, however, the date of their settlement there is for ever lost, for just where it had been placed a piece of the potsherd is broken away.

Then followed a dozen or more Latin signatures, jotted about here and there, wherever there was a space upon the tile suitable to their inscription. These signatures were, almost without exception, ended with the name "Vindex" or "the Avenger," which seems to have been adopted by the family after its migration to Rome as a kind of equivalent to the Grecian "Tisisthenes," which also means an avenger. Ultimately, of course, this Latin cognomen of Vindex was transformed first into DeVincey, and then into the plain, modern Vincey. It is very curious to observe how the idea of revenge, inspired by an Egyptian before the time of Christ, is thus, as it were, embalmed in an English family name.

A few of the Roman names inscribed upon the sherd I have actually since found mentioned in history and other records. They were, if I remember right,

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<sup>1</sup> "In his seventeenth year" (Latin).

<sup>2</sup> *Ab urbe conditia*: "from the founding of the city" (Latin).

MVSSIVS.VINDEX  
SEX.VARIVS. MARVLLVS.  
C. FVFIDIVS. C. F.VINDEX.

and

LABERIA POMPEIANA. CONIVX. MACRINI.VINDICIS.

this last being, of course, the name of a Roman lady. After the Roman names there is evidently a gap of very many centuries. Nobody will ever know now what was the history of the relic during those dark ages, or how it came to have been preserved in the family. My poor friend Vincey had, it will be remembered, told me that his Roman ancestors finally settled in Lombardy, and when Charlemagne invaded it returned with him across the Alps, and made their home in Brittany, whence they crossed to England in the reign of Edward the Confessor. How he knew this I am not aware, for there is no reference to Lombardy or Charlemagne upon the tile, though, as will presently be seen, there is a reference to Brittany. To continue: the next entries on the sherd, if I may except a long splash either of blood or red colouring matter of some sort, consist of two crosses drawn in red pigments, and probably representing Crusaders' swords, and an almost obliterated monogram ("D.V.") in scarlet and blue, perhaps executed by that same Dorothea Vincey who wrote, or rather painted, the doggrel couplet.

Then came what was perhaps as curious an entry as anything upon this extraordinary relic of the past. It is executed in black letter, written over the crosses or Crusaders' swords, and dated fourteen hundred and forty-five. As the best plan will be to allow it to speak for itself, I here give the original Latin, of course without the contractions, from which it will be seen that the writer was a fair mediæval Latinist. Also we discovered what is still more curious, a modernised version of a black-letter translation of the Latin which we found inscribed on a second parchment that was in the coffer, apparently older in date than that on which was inscribed the Latin black letter translation of the uncial Greek:—

*Expanded Version of the Black Letter Inscription on the Sherd of Amenartas.*

"Ista reliquia est valde mysticum et myrificum opus, quod majores mei ex Armorica, scilicet Britannia Minore, secum convehant; et quidam sanctus clericus semper patri meo in manu ferebat quod penitus illud destrueret, affirmans quod esset ab ipso Sathana conflatum prestigiosa et

dyabolica arte, quare pater meus confregit illud in duas partes, quas quidem ego Johannes de Vinceto salvas servavi et adaptavi sicut apparet die lune proximo post festum beate Marie Virginis anni gratie MCCCCXLV.”

*Modernised Version of the Black-Letter Translation.*

“Thys rellike ys a ryghte mistycall worke and a marvaylous, the whyche myne aunceteres aforetyme dyd conveigh hider with them from Armoryke<sup>1</sup> which ys to seien Britaine the Lesse and a certayne holye clerke should allweyes beare my fadir on honde that he owghte uttirly for to frusshe<sup>2</sup> ye same, affyrmynge that yt was fourmed and conflatyd of Sathanas hym selfe by arte magike and dyvellysshe wherefore my fadir dyd take the same and to-brast yt yn tweyne,<sup>3</sup> but I, John de Vincey, dyd save whool the tweye partes therof and topeecyd them togydder agayne soe as yee se, on this daye mondaye next followynge after the feeste of Seynte Marye ye Blessed Vyrgyne yn the yeere of Salvacioun fowertene hundreth and fyve and fowerti.”

The next and, save one, last entry was Elizabethan, and dated 1564, “A most strange historie, and one that did cost my father his life; for in seekynge for the place upon the east coast of Africa, his pinnace was sunk by a Portuguese galleon off Lorenzo Marquez,<sup>4</sup> and he himself perished.—JOHN VINCEY.”

Then came the last entry, apparently, to judge by the style of writing, made by some representative of the family in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was the well-known quotation by Hamlet, “There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio.”\*

“Well,” I said, when I had read these paragraphs out, at least those of them

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\* Another thing that makes me fix the date of this entry at the middle of the eighteenth century is that I have an acting copy of “Hamlet,” written about 1740, in which these two lines are misquoted almost exactly in the same way, and I have little doubt that the Vincey who wrote them on the potsherd may have heard them so misquoted at that date. Of course, the lines really run:—

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”—ED.

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<sup>1</sup> Another name for Brittany, in northwestern France.

<sup>2</sup> Smash.

<sup>3</sup> Broke it in half.

<sup>4</sup> Portuguese settlement on Delagoa Bay in Mozambique.

that were still legible, "that is the conclusion of the whole matter, Leo, and now you can form your own opinion on it. I have already formed mine."

"And what is it?" he asked, in his quick way.

"It is this. I believe that potsherd to be perfectly genuine, and that, wonderful as it may seem, it has come down in your family from since the fourth century before Christ. The entries absolutely prove it, and therefore, however improbable it may seem, it must be accepted. But there I stop. That your remote ancestress, the Egyptian princess, or some scribe under her direction, wrote that which we see on the tile I have no doubt, nor have I the slightest doubt but that her sufferings and the loss of her husband had turned her head, and that she was not right in her mind when she did write it."

"How do you account for what my father saw and heard there?" asked Leo.

"Coincidence. No doubt there are bluffs on the coast of Africa that look something like a man's head, and plenty of people who speak bastard Arabic. Also, I believe that there are lots of swamps. Another thing is, Leo, and I am sorry to say it, but I do not believe that your poor father was quite right when he wrote that letter. He had met with a great trouble, and also he had allowed this story to prey on his imagination, and he was a very imaginative man. Anyway, I believe that the whole thing is the most unmitigated rubbish. I know that there are curious things and forces in nature which we rarely meet with, and, when we do meet them, cannot understand. But until I see it with my own eyes, which I am not likely to, I never will believe that there is any means of avoiding death, even for a time, or that there is or was a white sorceress living in the heart of an African swamp. It is bosh, my boy, all bosh!—What do you say, Job?"

"I say, sir, that it is a lie, and, if it is true, I hope Mr. Leo won't meddle with no such things, for no good can't come of it."

"Perhaps you are both right," said Leo, very quietly. "I express no opinion. But I say this. I am going to set the matter at rest once and for all, and if you won't come with me I will go by myself."

I looked at the young man, and saw that he meant what he said. When Leo means what he says he always puts on a curious little look about the mouth. It has been a trick of his from a child. Now, of course, I had no intention of letting Leo go anywhere by himself, for my own sake, if not for his. I was far too much attached to him for that. I am not a man of many ties or affections. Circumstances have been against me in this respect, and men and women shrink from me, or, at least, I fancy they do, which comes to the same thing, thinking, perhaps, that my forbidding exterior is a key

to my character. Rather than endure this, I have, to a great extent, secluded myself from the world, and cut myself off from those opportunities which with most men result in the formation of relations more or less intimate. Therefore Leo was all the world to me—brother, child, and friend—and until he wearied of me, where he went there I should go too. But, of course, it would not do to let him see how great a hold he had over me; so I cast about for some means whereby I might let myself down easy.

“Yes, I shall go, Uncle; and if I don’t find the ‘rolling Pillar of Life,’ at any rate I shall get some first-class shooting.”

Here was my opportunity, and I took it.

“Shooting?” I said. “Ah! yes; I never thought of that. It must be a very wild stretch of country, and full of big game. I have always wanted to kill a buffalo before I die. Do you know, my boy, I don’t believe in the quest, but I do believe in big game, and really, on the whole, if after thinking it over, you make up your mind to go, I will take a holiday, and come with you.”

“Ah,” said Leo, “I thought that you would not lose such a chance. But how about money? We shall want a good lot.”

“You need not trouble about that,” I answered. “There is all your income that has been accumulating for years, and besides that I have saved two-thirds of what your father left to me as I consider in trust for you. There is plenty of cash.”

“Very well, then, we may as well store these things away and go up to town to see about our guns. By the way, Job, are you coming too? It’s time you began to see the world.”

“Well, sir,” answered Job, stolidly, “I don’t hold much with foreign parts, but if both you gentlemen are going you will want somebody to look after you, and I am not the man to stop behind after serving you for twenty years.”

“That’s right, Job,” said I. “You won’t find out anything wonderful, but you’ll get some good shooting. And now look here, both of you. I won’t have a word said to a living soul about this nonsense,” and I pointed to the potsherd. “If it got out, and anything happened to me, my next of kin would dispute my will on the ground of insanity, and I should become the laughing-stock of Cambridge.”

That day three months we were on the ocean, bound for Zanzibar.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Island off the east coast of Africa, held as a British protectorate in the 1880s. The east African coastline was also generally called the Zanzibar Coast.

## PART 3 (16 OCTOBER 1886)

### IV

#### THE SQUALL

How different is the scene that I have now to tell from that which has just been told! Gone are the quiet college rooms, gone the wind-swayed English elms and cawing rooks, and the familiar volumes on the shelves, and in their place there rises a vision of the great calm ocean gleaming in shaded silver lights beneath the beams of the full African moon. A gentle breeze fills the huge sail of our dhow, and draws us through the water that ripples musically against our sides. Most of the men are sleeping forward, for it is near midnight, but a stout swarthy Arab, Mahomed by name, stands at the tiller, lazily steering by the stars. Three miles or more to our starboard is a low dim line. It is the Eastern shore of Central Africa. We are running to the southward, before the North-East monsoon, between the mainland and the reef that for hundreds of miles fringes that perilous coast. The night is quiet—so quiet that a whisper can be heard fore and aft the dhow; so quiet that a faint booming sound rolls across the water to us from the distant land.

The Arab at the tiller holds up his hand, and says one word:—“*Simba* (lion)!”

We all sit up and listen. Then it comes again, a slow, majestic sound, that thrills us to the marrow.

“To-morrow by ten o’clock,” I say, “we ought, if the Captain is not out in his reckoning, which I think very probable, to make this mysterious rock with a man’s head and begin our shooting.”

“And begin our search for the ruined city and the Fire of Life,” corrected Leo, taking his pipe from his mouth, and laughing a little.

“Nonsense!” I answered. “You were airing your Arabic with that man at the tiller this afternoon. What did he tell you? He has been trading (slave-trading probably) up and down these latitudes for half of his iniquitous life, and once landed on this very ‘man’ rock. Did he ever hear anything of the ruined city or the caves?”

“No,” answered Leo. “He says that the country is all swamp behind, and full of snakes, especially pythons, and game, and that no man lives there. But then there is a belt of swamp all along the East African coast, so that does not go for much.”

“Yes,” I said, “it does—it goes for malaria. You see what sort of an opinion these gentry have of the country. Not one of them will go with us. They think that we are mad, and upon my word I believe that they are right. If ever we see old England again I shall be astonished. However, it does not greatly matter to me, at my age, but I am anxious for you, Leo and Job. It’s a Tom Fool’s business, my boy.”

“All right, Uncle Horace. So far as I am concerned, I am willing to take my chance. Look! What is that cloud?” and he pointed to a dark blotch upon the starry sky, some miles astern of us.

“Go and ask the man at the tiller,” I said.

He rose and stretched his long arms, and went. Presently he returned.

“He says it is a squall, but it will pass far on one side of us.”

Just then Job came up, looking very stout and English in his shooting-suit of brown flannel, and with a sort of perplexed appearance upon his honest round face that had been very common with him since he got into these strange waters.

“Please, sir,” he said, touching his sun hat, which was stuck on to the back of his head in a somewhat ludicrous fashion, “as we have got all those guns and things in the whale-boat astern, to say nothing of the provisions in the lockers, I think it would be best if I got down and slept in her. I don’t like the looks” (here he dropped his voice to a portentous whisper) “of these black gentry; they have such a wonderful thievish way about them. Supposing now that some of them were to slip into the boat at night and cut the cable, and make off with her? That would be a pretty go, that would.”

The whale-boat, I may explain, was one that we had had built at Dundee, in the North of England, and brought with us, as we knew that this coast was a network of creeks, and that we might require something to navigate them with. She was a beautiful boat, thirty-feet in length, with a centre-board for sailing, copper-bottomed to keep the worm out of her, and full of water-tight compartments. The captain of the dhow had told us that when we reached the rock, which he knew well, and which appeared to be identical with the one described upon the sherd and by Leo’s father, he would not probably be able to run up to it on account of the shallows and breakers, so we had employed three hours that very morning, whilst we were totally becalmed, the wind having dropped at sunrise, in transferring most of our goods and chattels to the whaleboat, placing the guns, ammunition, and preserved provisions in the watertight lockers specially prepared for them, so that when we did sight the fabled rock, we should have nothing to do but step into the

boat, and run her ashore. Another reason that induced us to take this precautionary step was that Arab captains are apt to run past the point that they are making, either from carelessness or owing to a mistake in its identity. Now, as sailors will know, it is quite impossible for a dhow which is only rigged to run before the monsoon to beat back against it. Therefore we got our boat ready to row for the rock at any moment.

“Well, Job,” I said, “perhaps it would be as well. There are lots of blankets there, only be careful to keep out of the moon, or it may turn your head or blind you.”

“Lord, sir! I don’t think it would much matter if it did; it is that turned already with the sight of these blackamoors and their filthy, thieving ways. They are only fit for muck, they are; and they smell bad enough for it already.”

Job, it will be perceived, was not attached to the manners and customs of our dark-skinned brothers.

Accordingly we hauled up the boat by the tow-rope till it was right under the stern of the dhow, and Job bundled into her about as gracefully as a sack of potatoes. Then we returned and sat down on the deck again, and smoked and talked in little gusts and jerks. The night was so lovely, and our brains were so full of suppressed excitement of one sort and another, that we did not feel inclined to turn in. For nearly an hour we sat thus, and then, I think, we both dozed off. At least I have a faint recollection of Leo sleepily explaining that the head was not a bad place to hit a buffalo, if you could catch him exactly between the horns, or send your bullet down his throat, or some nonsense of the sort.

Then I remember no more; till suddenly—a frightful roar of wind, a shriek of terror from the awakening crew, and a whip-like sting of water in our faces. Some of the men ran to let go the haulyards<sup>1</sup> and lower the sail, but the parrel<sup>2</sup> jammed and the yard would not come down. I sprang to my feet and hung on to a rope. The sky aft was dark as pitch, but the moon still shone brightly ahead of us and lit up the blackness. Beneath its sheen a huge white-topped breaker, twenty feet high or more, was rushing on to us. It was on the break—the moon shone on its crest and tipped its foam with light. On it rushed beneath the inky sky, driven by the awful squall behind it. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, I saw the black shape of the whaleboat cast high into the air on the breaking wave. Then—a shock of water, a wild rush of

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<sup>1</sup> Variant of halyards, ropes controlling the sail.

<sup>2</sup> Loop used to raise or lower the yard, which supports the rigging on the mast.

boiling foam, and I was clinging for my life to the shroud, ay, swept straight out from it like a flag in a gale.

We were pooped.<sup>1</sup>

The wave passed. It seemed to me that I was under water for minutes—really it was seconds. I looked forward. The blast had torn out the great sail, and high in the air it was fluttering away to leeward like a huge wounded bird. Then for a moment there was comparative calm, and in it I heard Job's voice yelling wildly, "Come here to the boat."

Bewildered and half drowned as I was, I had the sense to rush aft. I felt the dhow sinking under me—she was full of water. Under her counter the whale boat was tossing furiously, and I saw the Arab Mahomed, who had been steering, leap into her. I gave one desperate pull at the tow-rope to bring the boat alongside. Wildly I sprang also, and Job caught me with one arm and I rolled into the bottom of the boat. Down went the dhow bodily, and as she did so Mahomed drew his curved knife and severed the fibre-rope by which we were fast to her, and in another second we were driving before the storm over the place where the dhow had been.

"Great God!" I shrieked, "where is Leo? *Leo! Leo!*"

"He's gone, sir, God help him!" roared Job into my ear, and such was the fury of the squall that his voice sounded like a whisper.

I wrung my hands in agony. Leo was drowned, and I was left alive to mourn him.

"Look out!" yelled Job, "here comes another."

I turned; a second huge wave was overtaking us. I hoped it would drown me. With a curious fascination I watched its awful advent. The moon was nearly hidden now by the wreaths of the rushing storm, but a little light still caught the crest of the devouring breaker. There was something dark on it—a piece of wreckage. It was on us now, and the boat was nearly full of water. But she was built in airtight compartments—Heaven bless the man who invented them!—and lifted up through it like a swan. Through the foam and turmoil I saw the black thing on the wave hurrying right at me. I put out my right arm to ward it from me, and my hand closed on another arm, the wrist of which my fingers gripped like a vice. I am a very strong man, and had something to hold to, but my arm was nearly torn from its socket by the strain and weight of the floating body. Had the rush lasted another two seconds I must either have let go or gone with it. But it passed, leaving us up to our knees in water.

"Bail out! bail out!" shouted Job, suiting the action to the word.

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<sup>1</sup> Waves have swamped and submerged the deck astern.

But I could not bail just then, for as the moon went out and left us in total darkness, one faint, flying ray of light lit upon the face of the man I had gripped, who was now half lying half floating in the bottom of the boat.

It was Leo. Leo brought back by the wave—back, dead or alive, from the very jaws of Death.

“Bail out! bail out!” yelled Job, “or we shall founder.”

I seized a large tin bowl with a handle to it, which was fixed under one of the seats, and the three of us bailed away for dear life. The furious tempest drove over and round us, flinging the boat this way and that, the wind and the storm wreaths and the sheets of stinging spray blinded and bewildered us, but through it all we worked like demons with the wild exhilaration of despair, for even despair can exhilarate. One minute! three minutes! six minutes! The boat began to lighten, and no fresh wave swamped us. Five minutes more, and she was fairly clear. Then, suddenly, above the awful shriekings of the hurricane came a duller, deeper roar. Great Heavens! It was the voice of breakers!

At that moment the moon began to shine out again—this time behind the path of the squall. Out far across the torn bosom of the ocean shot the ragged arrows of her light, and there, half-a-mile ahead of us, was a white line of foam, then a little space of open-mouthed blackness, and then another line of white. It was the breakers, and their roar grew clearer and yet more clear as we sped down upon them like a swallow. There they were, boiling up in snowy spouts of spray, smiting and gnashing together like the gleaming teeth of hell.

“Take the tiller, Mahomed!” I roared in Arabic, “we must try and shoot them.” At the same moment I seized an oar, and got it out, motioning to Job to do likewise.

Mahomed clambered aft, and got hold of the tiller, and with some difficulty Job, who had sometimes pulled a tub<sup>1</sup> upon the homely Cam,<sup>2</sup> got out his oar. In another minute her head was straight on to the ever nearing line, towards which she plunged and tore with the speed of a racehorse. Just in front of us the first line seemed a little thinner than to the right or left—there was a gap of rather deeper water. I turned and pointed to it.

“Steer for your life, Mahomed!” I yelled. He was a skilful steersman, and well acquainted with the dangers of this most perilous coast, and I

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<sup>1</sup> Rowed a boat.

<sup>2</sup> The river that runs through Cambridge in England.

saw him grip the tiller and bend his heavy frame forward, and stare at the foaming terror till his big round eyes looked as though they would start out of his head. The send of the sea was driving the boat's head round to starboard. If we struck the line of breakers fifty yards to starboard of the gap we must sink. It was a great field of twisting, spouting waves. Mahomed planted his foot against the seat before him, and, glancing at him, I saw his brown toes spread out like a hand with the weight he put upon them as he took the strain of the tiller. She came round a bit, but not enough. I roared to Job to back water, whilst I dragged and laboured at my oar. She answered now, and none too soon. Heavens, we were in them! And then followed a couple of minutes of heart-breaking excitement such as I cannot hope to describe. All I remember is a shrieking sea of foam, out of which the billows rose here, there, and everywhere like avenging ghosts from their ocean grave. Once we were turned right round, but either by chance, or through Mahomed's skilful steering, the boat's head came straight again before a breaker filled us. One more—a monster. We were through it or over it—more through than over—and then, with a wild yell of exultation from the Arab, we shot out into the comparative smooth water of the mouth of sea between the teeth-like lines of gnashing waves.

But we were half full of water again, and not more than half-a-mile ahead was the second line of breakers. Again we set to and bailed furiously. Fortunately the storm had now quite gone by, and the moon shone brightly, revealing a rocky headland running half-a-mile or more out into the sea, of which the second line of breakers appeared to be a continuation. At any rate, they boiled around its foot. Probably the ridge that made it ran out into the ocean, only at a lower level, and formed the reef. This headland was terminated by a curious peak that seemed not to be more than a mile away from us. Just as we got the boat pretty clear, for the second time, Leo, to my immense relief, opened his eyes and remarked that the clothes had tumbled off the bed, and that he supposed it was time to get up for chapel. I told him to shut his eyes and keep quiet, which he did without in the slightest degree realizing the position. As for myself, his reference to chapel made me reflect, with a sort of sick longing, on my comfortable rooms at Cambridge. Why had I been such a fool as to leave them? This is a reflection that has several times recurred to me since, with ever-increasing force.

But now again we are drifting down on the breakers, though with lessened speed, for the wind had fallen, and only the current or the tide (it afterwards turned out to be the tide) was driving us.

Another minute, and with a sort of howl to Allah from the Arab, a pious ejaculation from myself, and something that was not pious from Job, we were in them. And then the whole scene, down to our final escape, repeated itself, only not quite so violently. Mahomed's skilful steering and the air-tight compartments saved our lives. In five minutes we were through, and drifting—for we were too exhausted to do anything to help ourselves except keep her head straight—with the most startling rapidity round the headland which I have described.

Round we went with the tide, until we got well under the lee of the point, and then suddenly the speed slackened, we ceased to make way, and finally appeared to be in dead water. The storm had entirely passed, leaving a clean-washed sky behind it; the headland intercepted the heavy sea that had been occasioned by the squall, and the tide, which had been running so fiercely up the river (for we were in the mouth of a small river), was sluggish before it turned, so we floated quietly, and before the moon went down managed to bail out the boat thoroughly and get her a little ship-shape. Leo was sleeping profoundly, and on the whole I thought it wise not to wake him. It was true he was in his wet clothes, but the night was now so warm that I thought (and so did Job) that they were not likely to injure a man of his unusually vigorous constitution. Besides, we had no dry ones at hand.

Presently the moon went down, and left us floating on the waters, now only heaving like some troubled woman's breast. This gave us leisure to reflect upon all that we had gone through and all that we had escaped. Job stationed himself at the bow, Mahomed kept his post at the tiller, and I sat on a seat in the middle of the boat close to where Leo was lying.

The moon went slowly down in chastened loveliness; she departed like some sweet bride into her chamber, and long veil-like shadows crept up the sky through which the stars peeped shyly out. Soon, however, they, too, began to pale before a splendour in the east, and then the quivering footsteps of the dawn came rushing across the new-born blue, and shook them from their places. Quieter and more quiet grew the sea, quiet as the soft mists that brooded on her bosom, and covered up her troubling, as the illusive wreaths of sleep brood upon and cover up a pain-racked mind, causing it to forget its sorrow. From the east to the west sped the angels of the dawn, from sea to sea, from mountain top to mountain top, scattering light with both their hands. On they sped out of the darkness, perfect, glorious, like spirits of the just breaking from the tomb; on, over the quiet sea, over the low coast line, and

the swamps beyond, and the mountains beyond them; over those who slept in peace, and over those who woke in sorrow; over the evil and the good; over the living and the dead; over the wide world and all that breathes or has breathed thereon.

It was a wonderfully beautiful sight, and yet sad, perhaps from the very excess of its beauty. The arising sun! the setting sun! There we have the symbol and the type of humanity, and all things with which humanity has to do. The symbol and the type, yes, and the earthly beginning, and the end also. And on that morning this came home to me with a peculiar force. The sun that arose to-day for us had set last night for eighteen of our fellow voyagers!—had set for ever for eighteen whom we knew!

The dhow had gone down with them, they were tossing about now among the rocks and seaweed, so much human drift on the great ocean of death! And we four were saved! But one day a sunrise will come when we shall be among those who are lost, and then others will watch those glorious rays, and grow sad in the midst of beauty, and dream of Death in the full glow of arising Life!

For this is the lot of man.

## V

### THE HEAD OF THE ETHIOPIAN

At length the heralds and forerunners of the Royal sun had done their work, and, searching out the shadows, had caused them to flee away. Then up he came in glory from his ocean-bed, and flooded the earth with warmth and light. I sat there in the boat listening to the gentle lapping of the water and watched him rise, till presently the slight drift of the boat brought the odd-shaped rock, or peak, at the end of the promontory, which we had weathered with so much peril, between me and the majestic sight, and blotted it from my view. I still continued to stare at the rock, however, absently enough, till presently it became edged with the fire of the growing light behind it, and then I started, as well I might, for I perceived that the top of the peak, which was about eighty feet high by one hundred and fifty thick at its base, was shaped like a negro's head and face, on which was stamped a most fiendish and terrifying expression. There was no doubt about it; there were the thick lips, the fat cheeks, and the squat nose standing out with startling clearness against the flaming background. There, too, was the round skull, washed into shape perhaps

by thousands of years of wind and weather, and, to complete the resemblance, there was a scrubby growth of weeds or lichen upon it, which against the sun looked for all the world like the wool on a colossal negro's head. It certainly was very odd; so odd that now I believe it is not a mere freak of nature but a gigantic monument fashioned, like the well-known Egyptian Sphinx, by a forgotten people out of a pile of rock that lent itself to their design, perhaps as an emblem of warning and defiance to any enemies who approached the harbour. Unfortunately we were never able to ascertain whether or not this was the case, inasmuch as the rock was difficult of access both from the land and the water-side, and we had other things to attend to. Myself, considering the matter by the light of what we afterwards saw, I believe that it was fashioned by man, but whether or not this is so, there it stands, and sullenly stares from age to age out across the changing sea—there it stood two thousand years and more ago, when Amenartas, the Egyptian princess, and the wife of Leo's remote ancestor Kallikrates, gazed upon its devilish face—and there I have no doubt it will still stand when as many centuries as are numbered between her day and our own are added to the year that bore us to oblivion.

"What do you think of that, Job," I asked of our retainer, who was sitting on the edge of the boat, trying to get as much sunshine as possible, and generally looking uncommonly wretched, and I pointed to the fiery demoniacal head.

"Oh Lord, sir," answered Job, who now perceived the object for the first time, "I think that the Old Gentleman<sup>1</sup> must have been sitting for his portrait on them rocks."

I laughed, and the laugh woke up Leo.

"Hullo," he said, "what's the matter with me? I am all stiff—where is the dhow?"

"You may be thankful that you are not stiffer, my boy," I answered. "The dhow is sunk, and everybody on board her is drowned, with the exception of us four, and your own life was only saved by a miracle;" and whilst Job, now that it was light enough, searched about in a locker for the brandy, for which Leo asked, I told him the history of our night's adventure.

"Great Heavens!" he said, faintly; "and to think that we should have been chosen to live through it!"

By this time the brandy was forthcoming, and we all had a good pull at it, and thankful enough we were for it. Also the sun was beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Satan.

to get strength, and warm our chilled bones, for we had been wet through for five hours or more.

"Why," said Leo, with a gasp as he put down the brandy bottle, "there is the head the writing talks of, 'the rock shaped like the head of an Ethiopian.'"

"Yes," I said, "there it is."

"Well, then," he answered, "the whole thing is true."

"I don't at all see that that follows," I answered. "We knew this head was here, your father saw it. Very likely it is not the same head that the writing talks of; or if it is, it proves nothing."

Leo smiled at me in a superior way. "You are an unbelieving Jew, Uncle Horace," he said. "Those who live will see."

"Exactly so," I answered, "and now perhaps you observe that we are drifting across a sandbank into the mouth of the river. Get hold of your oar, Job, and we will row in and see if we can't find a place to land."

The river mouth which we were entering did not appear to be a very wide one, though as yet the long banks of steaming mist that clung about its shores had not lifted sufficiently to enable us to see its exact width. There was, as is the case with nearly every East African river, a considerable bar at the mouth, which, no doubt, when the wind was on shore and the tide running out, was absolutely impassable even for a boat drawing only a few inches. But as things were it was manageable enough, and we did not ship a cupful of water. In twenty minutes we were well across it, with but slight assistance from ourselves, and being carried by a strong though somewhat variable breeze well up the harbour. By this time the mist was being sucked up by the sun, which was getting uncomfortably hot, and we saw that the mouth of the little estuary was here about half a mile across, and that the banks were very marshy, and crowded with crocodiles lying about on the mud like logs. About a mile ahead of us, however, was what appeared to be a strip of firm land, and for this we steered. In another quarter of an hour we were there, and making the boat fast to a beautiful tree with broad shining leaves, and flowers of the magnolia species, only they were rose-coloured and not white,\* which hung over the water, we disembarked. This done we undressed, washed ourselves, and spread our clothes and the contents of the boat in the sun to dry, which they very quickly did, and then taking shelter from the sun under some trees, we made a

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\* There is a known species of magnolia with pink flowers. It is indigenous in Sikkim, and known as *Magnolia Campbellii*.—EDITOR.

hearty breakfast off a “Paysandu”<sup>1</sup> potted tongue, of which we had brought a good quantity with us from the Army and Navy Stores,<sup>2</sup> congratulating ourselves enormously on our good fortune in having loaded and provisioned the boat on the previous day before the hurricane destroyed the dhow. By the time that we had finished our meal our clothes were dry, and we hastened to get into them, feeling not a little refreshed. Indeed, with the exception of weariness and a few bruises, none of us were the worse for our terrifying adventure, which had been fatal to all our companions. Leo, it is true, had been half-drowned, but that is no great matter to a vigorous young athlete of five-and-twenty.

After breakfast we started to look about us. We were on a strip of dry land about two hundred yards broad by five hundred long, bordered on one side by the river, and on the other three by endless desolate swamps, that stretched as far as the eye could reach. This strip of land was raised about twenty-five feet above the level of the surrounding swamps and the river level: indeed it had every appearance of having been made by the hand of man.

“This place has been a wharf,” said Leo, dogmatically.

“Nonsense,” I answered. “Who would be fool enough to build a wharf in the middle of these dreadful marshes in a country inhabited by savages, that is if it is inhabited at all?”

“Perhaps it was not always marsh, and perhaps the people were not always savage,” he said drily, looking down the steep bank, for we were standing by the river. “Look there,” he went on, pointing to a spot where the hurricane of the previous night had torn up one of the magnolia trees, which had grown on the extreme edge of the bank just where it sloped down to the water, by the roots, that had lifted a large cake of earth with them. “Is not that stone work? If not, it is very like it?”

“Nonsense,” I said again, and we clambered down to the spot, and got between the upturned roots and the bank.

“Well?” he said.

But I did not answer this time. I only whistled. For there laid bare by the removal of the earth was an undoubted facing of solid stone laid in large blocks and bound together with brown cement, so hard that I could make no impression on it with the file in my shooting knife. Nor was this all; seeing something projecting through the soil at the bottom

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<sup>1</sup> A brand of canned meat.

<sup>2</sup> An English department store.

of the bared patch of walling, I removed the loose earth in my hands, and revealed a huge stone ring, a foot or more in diameter, and about three inches thick. This fairly staggered me.

"Looks rather like a wharf where good-sized vessels have been moored, does it not, Uncle Horace?" said Master Leo, with an excited grin.

I tried to say "Nonsense" again, but the word stuck in my throat—the ring spoke for itself. In some past age vessels had been moored there, and this stone wall was undoubtedly the remains of a solidly-constructed wharf. Probably the city to which it had belonged lay buried beneath the swamp behind it.

"Begins to look as though there were something in the story after all, Uncle Horace," said the exultant Leo; and reflecting on the mysterious negro's head and the equally mysterious stonework I made no direct reply.

"A country like Africa," I said, "is sure to be full of the relics of long dead and forgotten civilisations. Nobody knows the age of the Egyptian civilisation, and very likely it had offshoots. Then there were the Babylonians and the Phœnicians, and the Persians, and all manner of people, all more or less civilised, to say nothing of the Jews whom everybody 'wants' nowadays. It is possible that they, or any one of them, may have had colonies or trading stations about here. Remember those buried Persian cities that the consul showed us at Kilwa."\*

"Quite so," said Leo, "but that is not what you said before."

"Well, what is to be done now?" I asked, turning the conversation.

As no answer was forthcoming we proceeded to the edge of the swamp, and looked over it. It was apparently boundless, and vast flocks of every sort of waterfowl flew from its recesses till it was sometimes difficult to see the sky. Now that the sun was getting high it drew thin sickly-looking clouds of poisonous vapour from the surface of the marsh and from the scummy pools of stagnant water.

"Two things are clear to me," I said, addressing my three companions, who stared at this spectacle in dismay, "first, that we can't go across

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\* Near Kilwa, on the East Coast of Africa, about 400 miles south of Zanzibar, is a cliff which has been recently washed by the waves. On the top of this cliff are Persian tombs known to be at least seven centuries old by the dates still legible on them. Beneath these tombs is a layer of *débris* representing a city. Farther down the cliff is a second layer representing an older city, and farther down yet a third layer, the remains of a still more ancient city of vast and unknown antiquity. Beneath the bottom city were found some specimens of glazed earthenware, such as are occasionally to be met with on that coast to this day. I believe that they are now in the possession of Sir John Kirk.—EDITOR.

there" (I pointed to the swamp), "and, secondly, that if we stop here we shall certainly die of fever."

"That's as clear as a haystack," said Job.

"Very well, then; there are two alternatives before us. One is to 'bout ship, and try and run for some port in the whaleboat, which would be a sufficiently risky proceeding, and the other to sail or row on up the river, and see where we come to."

"I don't know what you are going to do," said Leo, setting his mouth, "but I am going up that river."

Job turned up the whites of his eyes and groaned, and the Arab murmured "Allah," and groaned also. As for me, I remarked sweetly that as we seemed to be between the devil and the deep sea, it did not much matter where we went. But in reality I was as anxious to proceed as Leo. The colossal negro's head and the stone wharf had excited my curiosity to an extent of which I was secretly ashamed, and I was prepared to gratify it at any cost. Accordingly, having carefully fitted the mast, re-stowed the boat, and got out our rifles, we embarked. Fortunately the wind was blowing on shore from the ocean, so we were able to hoist the sail. Indeed, we afterwards found out that as a general rule the wind set on shore from daybreak for some hours, and off shore again at sunset, and the explanation that I offer of this is that, when the earth is cooled by the dew and the night, the hot air rises, and the draught rushes in from the sea till the sun has once more heated it through. At least that appeared to be the rule here.

Taking advantage of this favouring wind, we sailed merrily up the river for three or four hours. Once we came across a school of hippopotami, which rose, and bellowed dreadfully at us within ten or a dozen fathoms of the boat, much to Job's alarm, and, I will confess, to my own. These were the first hippopotami that we had ever seen, and, to judge by their insatiable curiosity, I should judge that we were the first white men that they had ever seen. Upon my word, I once or twice thought that they were coming into the boat to gratify it. Leo wanted to fire at them, but I dissuaded him, fearing the consequences. Also we saw hundreds of crocodiles basking on the muddy banks, and thousands upon thousands of waterfowl. Some of these we shot, and among them was a wild goose, which, in addition to the sharp curved spurs on its wings, had a spur about three-quarters of an inch long growing from the skull just between the eyes. We never shot another like it, so I do not know if it was a freak or a distinct species. In the latter case this incident may interest naturalists. Job named it the Unicorn Goose.

About mid-day the sun grew intensely hot, and the stench drawn up by it from the marshes which the river drains was something too awful, and caused us instantly to swallow precautionary doses of quinine.<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterwards the breeze died away altogether, and as rowing our heavy boat against stream in the heat was out of the question, we were thankful enough to get under the shade of a group of trees—a species of willow—that grew by the edge of the river, and lie there and gasp till at length the approach of sunset put a period to our miseries. Seeing what appeared to be an open space of water straight ahead of us, we determined to row there before settling what to do for the night. Just as we were about to loosen the boat, however, a beautiful water-buck, with great horns curving forward, and a white stripe across the rump, came down to the river to drink without perceiving us hidden away within fifty yards under the willows. Leo was the first to catch sight of it, and being an ardent sportsman, thirsting for the blood of big game, about which he had been dreaming for months, he instantly stiffened all over, and pointed like a setter dog. Seeing what was the matter, I handed him his express rifle, at the same time taking my own.

“Now then,” I whispered, “mind you don’t miss.”

“Miss!” he whispered back contemptuously; “I could not miss it if I tried.”

He lifted the rifle, and the roan-coloured buck, having drunk his fill, raised his head and looked out across the river. He was standing right against the sunset sky on a little eminence, or ridge of ground, that ran across the swamp, evidently a favourite path for game, and there was something very beautiful about him. Indeed, I do not think that if I live to a hundred I shall ever forget that desolate and yet most fascinating scene: it is stamped upon my memory. To the right and left wide stretches of lonely, death-breeding swamp, unbroken and unrelieved so far as the eye could reach, except here and there by ponds of black and peaty water that, mirror-like, flashed up the red rays of the setting sun. Behind us and before the vista of the sluggish river, ending in glimpses of a reed-fringed lagoon, on whose surface the long lights of the evening played as the faint breeze stirred the shadows. To the west the huge red ball of the sinking sun, now vanishing down the vapoury horizon, and filling the great heaven, high across whose arch the cranes and wild fowl streamed in line, square, and triangle, with flashes of flying

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<sup>1</sup> Medicine used to combat malaria, which in Haggard’s day was still thought to be caused by breathing swamp vapour. In reality, the disease is spread through the bite of the mosquito.

gold and the lurid stain of blood. And then ourselves—three modern Englishmen in a modern English boat—seeming to jar upon and looking out of tone with that measureless desolation; and in front of us the noble buck limned out upon a background of ruddy sky.

Bang! Away he goes with a mighty bound. Leo has missed him. Bang! right under him again. Now for a shot. I must have one though he is going like an arrow, and a hundred yards away and more. By Jove! over and over and over! “Well, I think I’ve wiped your eye there, Master Leo,” I say, struggling against the ungenerous exultation that in such a supreme moment of one’s existence will rise in the best-tutored sportsman’s breast.

“Confound you, yes,” growled Leo; and then, with that quick smile that is one of his charms lighting up his handsome face like a ray of light, “I beg your pardon, old fellow. I congratulate you; it was a lovely shot, and mine were vile.”

We got out of the boat and ran to the buck, which was shot through the spine and stone dead. It took us a quarter of an hour or more to clean it and cut off as much of the best meat as we could carry, and, having packed this away, we had barely light enough to row up into the lagoon-like space, into which, there being a hollow in the swamp, the river here expanded. Just as the light vanished we cast anchor about fifty yards from the edge of the lake. We did not dare to go ashore, not knowing if we should find dry ground to camp on, and greatly fearing the poisonous exhalations from the marsh, which we thought we should be freer from on the water. So we lighted a lantern, and made our evening meal off another potted tongue in the best fashion that we could, and then prepared to go to sleep, only, however, to find that sleep was impossible. For, whether they were attracted by the lantern, or by the unaccustomed smell of a white man, for which they had been waiting for the last thousand years or so, I know not; but certainly we were presently attacked by tens of thousands of the most bloodthirsty, pertinacious, and huge mosquitoes that I ever saw or read of. In clouds they came, and pinged and buzzed and bit till we were nearly mad. Tobacco smoke only seemed to stir them into a merrier and more active life, till at length we were driven to covering ourselves with blankets, head and all, and sitting to slowly stew and continually scratch and swear beneath them. And as we sat, suddenly rolling out like thunder through the silence came the deep roar of a lion, and then of a second lion, moving among the reeds within fifty yards of us.

“I say,” said Leo, sticking his head out from under his blanket, “lucky we ain’t on the bank, eh, Avuncular?” (Leo sometimes addressed me in

this disrespectful way.) "Hang it! a mosquito has bitten me on the nose," and the head vanished again.

Shortly after this the moon came up, and notwithstanding every variety of roar that echoed over the water to us from the lions on the banks, we began, thinking ourselves perfectly secure, gradually to doze off.

I do not quite know what it was that made me poke my head out of the friendly shelter of the blanket, perhaps because I found that the mosquitoes were biting right through it. Anyhow, as I did so I heard Job whisper, in a frightened voice,

"Oh, my stars, look there!"

Instantly we all of us looked, and this was what we saw in the moonlight. Near the shore were two wide and ever-widening circles of concentric rings rippling away across the surface of the water, and in the heart and centre of the circles were two dark moving objects.

"What is it?" asked I.

"It is those blessed lions, sir," answered Job, in a tone which was an odd mixture of a sense of personal injury, habitual respect, and acknowledged fear, "and they are swimming here to heat us," he added, nervously picking up an "h" in his agitation.

I looked again: there was no doubt about it; I could catch the glare of their ferocious eyes. Attracted either by the smell of the newly killed water-buck meat or of ourselves, the hungry beasts were actually storming our position.

Leo already had his rifle in his hand. I called to him to wait till they were nearer, and meanwhile grabbed my own. Some fifteen feet from us the water shallowed on a bank to the depth of about fifteen inches, and presently the first of them—it was the lioness—got on to it, and shook herself and roared. At that moment Leo fired, and the bullet went right down her open mouth and out at the back of her neck, and down she dropped, with a splash, dead. The other lion—a full-grown male—was some two paces behind her. At this second he got his forepaws on to the bank, when a strange thing happened. There was a rush and disturbance of the water, such as one sees in a pond in England when a pike takes a little fish, only a thousand times fiercer and larger, and suddenly the lion gave a most terrific snarling roar and sprang forward on to the bank, dragging something black with him.

"Allah!" shouted Mahomed, "a crocodile has got him by the leg!" and sure enough he had. We could see the long snout with its gleaming lines of teeth, and the reptile body behind it.

And then followed a scene that absolutely baffles description. The

lion managed to get well on to the bank, the crocodile half standing and half swimming, still nipping his hind leg. He roared till the air quivered with the sound, and then, with a savage, shrieking snarl, turned round and clawed hold of the crocodile's head. The crocodile shifted his grip, having, as we afterwards discovered, had one of his eyes torn out, and slightly turned over, and instantly the lion got him by the throat and held on, and then over and over they rolled upon the bank struggling hideously. It was impossible to follow their movements, but when next we got a clear view the tables had turned, for the crocodile, whose head seemed to be a mass of gore, had got the lion's body in his iron jaws just above the hips, and was squeezing him and shaking him to and fro. For his part the tortured brute, roaring in agony, was clawing and biting madly at his enemy's scaly head, and fixing his great hind claws in the crocodile's comparatively speaking, soft throat, ripping it open as one would rip a glove.

Then, all of a sudden, the end came. The lion's head fell forward on the crocodile's back, and with an awful groan he died, and the crocodile, after standing for a minute motionless, slowly rolled over on to his side, his jaws still fixed across the carcase of the lion, which we afterwards found he had bitten almost in half.

This duel to the death was a wonderful and a shocking sight, and one that I suppose few men have seen—and thus it ended.

When it was all over, leaving Mahomed to keep a look-out, we managed to spend the rest of the night as quietly as the mosquitoes would let us.

## VI

## AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CEREMONY

Next morning, at the earliest blush of dawn, we rose, and performed such ablutions as circumstances would allow, and generally made ready to start. I am bound to say that when there was sufficient light to enable us to see each other's faces I, for one, burst out in a roar of laughter. Job's fat and comfortable countenance was swollen out to nearly twice its natural size from mosquito bites, and Leo's condition was not much better. Indeed, of the three I had come off much the best, probably owing to the toughness of my dark skin, and to the fact that a good deal of it was covered by hair, for since we started from England I had allowed my naturally luxuriant beard to grow at its own sweet will. But the other two were, comparatively speaking, clean shaven, which of course gave the enemy a larger extent of open country to operate on, though as for Mahomed the mosquitoes, recognising the taste of a true believer, would not touch him at any price. How often, I wonder, during the next week or so did we wish that we were flavoured like an Arab!

By the time that we had done laughing as heartily as our swollen lips would allow it was daylight, and the morning breeze was coming up from the sea, cutting lanes through the dense marsh mists, and here and there rolling them before it in great balls of fleecy vapour. So we set our sail, and having first taken a look at the two dead lions and the dead alligator,<sup>1</sup> which we were of course unable to skin, being destitute of means of curing the pelts, we started, and, sailing through the lagoon, followed the course of the river on the further side. At midday, when the breeze dropped, we were fortunate enough to find a convenient piece of dry land on which to camp and light a fire, and here we cooked some wild duck and some of the waterbuck's flesh—not in a very appetising way, it is true, but still, sufficiently. The rest of the buck's flesh we cut into strips and hung in the sun to dry into "biltong," as I believe the South African Dutch call flesh thus prepared. On this welcome patch of dry land we stopped till the following dawn, and, as before, spent the night in warfare with the mosquitoes, but without other troubles. The next day or two

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<sup>1</sup> Haggard uses this word interchangeably with "crocodile."

passed in similar fashion, and without noticeable adventures, except that we shot a specimen of a peculiarly graceful, hornless buck, and saw many varieties of water-lilies in full bloom, some of them of exquisite beauty, though few of the flowers were perfect, owing to the prevalence of a white water-maggot with a green head that fed upon them.

It was on the fourth day of our journey, when we had travelled, so far as we could reckon, about one hundred and thirty-five to a hundred and forty miles westwards from the coast, that the first event of any real importance occurred. On that morning the usual wind failed us about eleven o'clock, and after pulling a little way we were forced to halt more or less exhausted at what appeared to be the junction of our stream with another of a uniform width of about fifty feet. Some trees grew near at hand—the only trees in all this country were along the banks of the river, and under these we rested, and then, the land being fairly dry just here, walked a little way along the edge of the river to prospect, and shoot a few waterfowl for food. Before we had gone fifty yards we perceived that all hopes of getting further up the stream in the whale-boat were at an end, for not two hundred yards above where we had stopped were a succession of shallows and mudbanks, with not six inches of water over them. It was a watery *cul-de-sac*.

Turning back, we walked some way along the banks of the other river, and soon came to the conclusion, from various indications, that it was not a river at all, but an ancient canal, such as is to be seen above Mombasa,<sup>1</sup> on the Zanzibar coast, connecting the Tana River with the Ozy, in such a way as to enable the shipping coming down the Tana to cross to the other river, and reach the sea by it, and thus avoid the very dangerous bar that blocks the mouth of the Tana. The canal before us had evidently been dug out by man at some remote period of the world's history, and the results of his digging still remained in the shape of the raised banks that had no doubt once formed towing-paths. Except here and there, where they had been hollowed out or fallen in, the banks of stiff, binding clay were at a uniform distance from each other, and the depth also appeared to be uniform. Current there was little or none, and, as a consequence, the surface of the water was choked with vegetable growth, intersected by little paths of clear water, made, I suppose, by the constant passage of waterfowl, iguanas, and other vermin. Now, as it was

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<sup>1</sup> Port city in what is now Kenya in east Africa, north of Zanzibar Island. The Tana flows through Kenya to the Indian Ocean. Haggard has invented the remains of a canal in this location.

evident that we could not proceed up the river, it became equally evident that we must either try the canal or else return to the sea. We could not stop where we were, to be baked by the sun and eaten up by the mosquitoes, till we died of fever in that dreary marsh.

“Well, I suppose that we must try it,” I said; and the others assented in their various ways—Leo, as though it were the best joke in the world; Job, in respectful disgust; and Mahomed, with an invocation to the Prophet, and a comprehensive curse upon all unbelievers and their ways of thought and travel.

Accordingly, as soon as the sun got low, having little or nothing more to hope for from our friendly wind, we started. For the first hour or so we managed to row the boat, though with great labour; but after that the weeds got too thick to allow of it, and we were obliged to resort to the primitive and most exhausting resource of towing her. For two hours we laboured, Mahomed, Job, and myself, who was supposed to be strong enough to pull against the two of them, on the bank, while Leo sat in the bow of the boat, and brushed away the weeds which collected round the cutwater with Mahomed’s sword. At dark we halted till midnight to rest and enjoy the mosquitoes, but when the moon got up we went on again, taking advantage of the comparative cool of the night. At dawn we halted for three hours, and then started once more, and laboured on till about ten o’clock, when a thunderstorm, accompanied by a deluge of rain, overtook us, and we spent the next six hours practically under water.

I do not know that there is any necessity for me to describe the next four days of our voyage in detail, further than to say that they were, on the whole, the most miserable that I ever spent in my life, forming one monotonous record of heavy labour, heat, misery, and mosquitoes. All the way we passed through a region of almost endless swamp, and I can only attribute our escape from fever and death to the constant doses of quinine and purgatives which we took, and the unceasing toil which we were forced to undergo. On the third day of our journey up the canal we had sighted a round hill that loomed dimly through the vapours of the marsh, and on the evening of the fourth night, when we camped, this hill seemed to be within five-and-twenty or thirty miles of us. We were by now utterly exhausted, and felt as though our blistered hands could not pull the boat a yard farther, and that the best thing that we could do would be to lie down and die in that dreadful wilderness of swamp. It was an awful position, and one in which I trust no other white man will ever be placed; and as I threw myself down in the boat to sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion, I bitterly cursed my folly in

ever having been a party to such a mad undertaking, which could, I felt, only end in our death in this ghastly land. I thought, I remember, as I slowly sank into a doze, of what the appearance of the boat and her unhappy crew would be in two or three months' time from that night. There she would lie, with gaping seams and half filled with fœtid water, which, when the mist-laden wind stirred her, would wash backwards and forwards through our mouldering bones, and that would be the end of her, and of those in her who would follow after myths and seek out the secrets of Nature.

Already I seemed to hear the water rippling against the desiccated bones and rattling them together, rolling my skull against Mahomed's, and Mahomed's against mine, till at last Mahomed's stood straight up upon its vertebræ, and glared at me through its empty eyeholes, and cursed me with its grinning jaws, because I, a dog of a Christian, disturbed the last sleep of a true believer. I opened my eyes, and shuddered at the horrid dream, and then shuddered again at something that was not a dream, for two great eyes were gleaming down at me through the misty darkness. I struggled up, and in my terror and confusion shrieked, and shrieked again, so that the others sprang up too, reeling, and drunken with sleep and fright. And then all of a sudden there was a flash of cold steel, and a great spear was held against my throat, and behind it other spears gleamed cruelly.

"Peace," said a voice, speaking in Arabic, or rather in some dialect into which Arabic entered very largely; "who are ye who come hither swimming on the water? Speak, or ye die," and the steel pressed sharply against my throat, sending a cold chill through me.

"We are travellers, and have come hither by chance," I answered in my best Arabic, which appeared to be understood, for the man turned his head, and, addressing a tall form that towered up in the background, said, "Father, shall we slay?"

"What is the colour of the men?" said a deep voice in answer.

"White is their colour."

"Slay not," was the reply. "Four suns since was the word brought to me from '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*,' 'White men come; if white men come, slay them not.' Let them be brought to the land of '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*.' Bring forth the men, and let that which they have with them be brought also."

"Come," said the man, half leading and half dragging me from the boat, and, as he did so I perceived other men doing the same kind office to my companions.

On the bank were gathered a company of some fifty men. In that light all I could make out was that they were armed with huge spears, were very tall, and strongly built, comparatively light in colour, and nude, save for a leopard-skin tied round the middle.

Presently Leo and Job were bundled out and placed beside me.

“What on earth is up?” said Leo, rubbing his eyes.

“Oh, Lord! sir, here’s a rum go,”<sup>1</sup> ejaculated Job; and just at that moment a disturbance ensued, and Mahomed came tumbling between us, followed by a shadowy form with an uplifted spear.

“Allah! Allah!” howled Mahomed, feeling that he had little to hope from man, “protect me! protect me!”

“Father, it is a black one,” said a voice. “What said ‘*She-who-must-be-obeyed*’ about the black one?”

“She said nought; but slay him not. Come hither, my son.”

The man advanced, and the tall shadowy form bent forward.

“Yes, yes,” said the other, and chuckled in a somewhat blood-curdling tone.

“Are the three white men there?” asked the form.

“Yes, they are there.”

“Then bring up that which is made ready for them, and let the men take all that can be brought from the thing that floats.”

Hardly had he spoken when men came running up, carrying on their shoulders neither more nor less than palanquins<sup>2</sup>—four bearers and two spare men to a palanquin—and in these it was promptly indicated we were expected to stow ourselves.

“Well!” said Leo, “it is a blessing to find anybody to carry us after having to carry ourselves so long.”

Leo always takes a cheerful view of things.

There being no help for it, after seeing the others into theirs I tumbled into my own litter, and very comfortable I found it. It appeared to be manufactured of cloth woven from grass-fibre, which stretched and yielded to every motion after the body, and, being bound top and bottom to the bearing pole, gave a grateful support to the head and neck.

Scarcely had I settled myself when, accompanying their steps with a monotonous song, the bearers started at a swinging trot. For half-an-hour or so I lay there reflecting on the very remarkable experiences that we were going through, and wondering if any of my eminently respectable

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<sup>1</sup> A strange and difficult situation.

<sup>2</sup> Enclosed couch supported on poles, carried on the shoulders of bearers.

fossil friends down at Cambridge would believe me if I were to be miraculously set at the familiar dinner-table for the purpose of relating them. I don't want to convey any disrespectful notion or slight when I call those good and learned men fossils, but my experience is that people are apt to fossilise even at a University if they follow the same paths too persistently. I was getting fossilised myself, but of late my stock of ideas has been very much enlarged. Well, I lay, and reflected, and wondered what on earth would be the end of it all, till at last I ceased to wonder, and went to sleep.

I suppose I must have slept for seven or eight hours, getting the first real rest that I had had since the night before the loss of the dhow, for when I woke the sun was high in the heavens. We were still journeying on at a pace of about four miles an hour. Peeping out through the mist-like curtains of the litter, which were ingeniously fixed to the bearing pole, I perceived to my infinite relief that we had passed out of the region of eternal swamp, and were now travelling over swelling grassy plains towards a cup-shaped hill. Whether or not it was the same hill that we had seen from the canal I do not know, and have never since been able to discover, for, as we afterwards found out, these people will give little information upon such points. Next I glanced at the men who were bearing me. They were of a magnificent build, none of them being under six feet in height, and yellowish in colour. Generally their appearance had a good deal in common with that of the East African Somali, but their hair was not frizzed up, but hung in thick black locks upon their shoulders. Their features were aquiline, and in many cases exceedingly handsome, the teeth being especially regular and beautiful. But notwithstanding their beauty, it struck me that, on the whole, I had never seen a more evil-looking set of faces. There was an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty stamped upon them that revolted me, and which in some cases was almost uncanny in its intensity.

Another thing that struck me about them was that they never seemed to smile. Sometimes they sang the monotonous song of which I have spoken, but when they were not singing, they remained almost perfectly silent, and the light of a laugh never came to brighten their sombre and evil faces. Of what race could these people be? Their language was a bastard Arabic, and yet they were not Arabs; I was quite sure of that. For one thing they were too dark, or rather, too yellow. I could not say why, but I knew that their appearance filled me with a sick fear of which I felt ashamed. While I was still wondering another litter came up alongside of mine. In it—for the curtains were drawn—sat an old man, clothed in a whitish robe, made apparently from coarse

linen, that hung loosely about him, who, I at once jumped to the conclusion, was the shadowy figure that had stood on the bank, and been addressed as “Father.” He was a wonderful-looking old man, with a snowy beard, so long that the ends of it hung over the sides of the litter, and he had a hooked nose, above which flashed out a pair of eyes as keen as a snake’s, whilst his whole countenance was instinct with a look of wise and sardonic humour impossible to describe on paper.

“Art thou awake, stranger?” he said, in a deep and low voice.

“Surely, my father,” I answered, courteously, feeling certain that I should do well to conciliate this ancient Mammon<sup>1</sup> of Unrighteousness.

He stroked his beautiful white beard, and smiled faintly.

“From whatever country thou camest,” he said, “and by the way it must be from one where somewhat of our language is known, they teach their children courtesy there, my stranger son. And now wherefore comest thou unto this land, which scarce an alien foot has pressed from the time that man knoweth? Art thou and those with thee aweary of life?”

“We came to find new things,” I answered boldly. “We are tired of the old things; we have come up out of the sea to know that which is unknown. We are of a brave race who fear not death, my very much respected father—that is, if we can get a little fresh information before we die.”

“Humph!” said the old gentleman; “that may be true, it is rash to contradict, otherwise I should say that thou wast lying, my son. However, I daresay that ‘*She-who-must-be-obeyed*’ will meet thy wishes in the matter.”

“Who is ‘*She-who-must-be-obeyed*?’” I asked, curiously.

The old man glanced at the bearers, and then answered, with a little smile that somehow sent my blood to my heart,

“Surely, my stranger son, thou wilt learn soon enough if it be her pleasure to see thee at all in the flesh.”

“In the flesh?” I answered. “What may my father wish to convey?”

But the old man only laughed a dreadful laugh, and made no reply.

“What is the name of my father’s people?” I asked.

“The name of my people is Amahagger” (the People of the Rocks).<sup>2</sup>

“And if a son might ask, what is the name of my father?”

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<sup>1</sup> Greed personified, in the Christian tradition; see Luke 16:9.

<sup>2</sup> “Hajar” is the Arabic word for rocks. In Swahili, an African language that includes words based in Arabic, the plural of “zulu” is “amazulu.” Haggard may also intend to invoke the Koreish, Arabs thought to be descended from Abraham and Hagar the Egyptian, i.e., the “people of Hagar.”

“My name is Billali.”

“And whither go we, my father?”

“That shalt thou see,” and at a sign from him the bearers started forward at a run till they reached the litter in which Job was reposing (with one leg hanging over the side). Apparently, however, he could not make much out of Job, for presently I saw his bearers trot forward to Leo’s litter.

And after that, as nothing fresh occurred, I yielded to the pleasant swaying motion of the litter, and went to sleep again. I was dreadfully tired. When I woke I found that we were passing through a rocky defile of a lava formation with precipitous sides, in which grew many beautiful trees and flowering shrubs.

Presently this defile took a turn, and a lovely sight unfolded itself to my eyes. Before us was a vast cup of green from four to six miles in extent, shaped like a Roman amphitheatre. The sides of this great cup were rocky, and clothed with bush, but the centre was of the richest meadow land, studded with single trees of magnificent growth, and watered by meandering streams. On this rich plain grazed herds of goats and cattle, but I saw no sheep. At first I could not imagine what this strange spot could be, but presently it flashed upon me that it must represent the crater of some long-extinct volcano, which had afterwards been a lake, and was ultimately drained in some unexplained way. And here I may state that from my subsequent experience of this and a much larger, but otherwise similar spot, which I shall have occasion to describe by and by, I have every reason to believe that this conclusion was correct. What puzzled me, however, was that, although there were people moving about herding the goats and cattle, I saw no signs of any human habitation. Where did they all live, I wondered. My curiosity was soon destined to be gratified. Turning to the left the string of litters followed the cliffy sides of the crater for a distance of about half a mile, or perhaps a little less, and then halted. Seeing the old gentleman, my adopted ‘father,’ Billali, emerge from his litter I did the same, and so did Leo and Job. The first thing I saw was our wretched Arab companion, Mahomed, lying exhausted on the ground. It appeared that he had not been provided with a litter, but had been forced to run the entire distance, and, as he was already quite worn out when we started, his condition now was one of great prostration.

On looking round we discovered that the place where we had halted was a platform in front of the mouth of a great cave, and piled upon this platform were the entire contents of the whale-boat, even down to

the oars and sail. Round the cave stood groups of the men who had escorted us, and other men of a similar stamp. They were all tall and all handsome, though they varied in their degree of darkness of skin, some being as dark as Mahomed, and some as yellow as a Chinese. They were naked, except for the leopard skin round the waist, and each of them carried a huge spear.

There were also some women among them, who, instead of the leopard skin, wore a tanned hide of a small red buck, something like that of the oribé,<sup>1</sup> only rather darker in colour. These women were, as a class, exceedingly good-looking, with large, dark eyes, well-cut features, and a thick bush of curling hair—not crisped like a negro’s—and ranging from black to chestnut in hue, with all shades of intermediate colour. Some, but very few of them, wore a yellowish linen garment, such as I have described as worn by Billali, but this, as we afterwards discovered, was a mark of rank, rather than an attempt at clothing. For the rest, their appearance was not quite so terrifying as that of the men, and they sometimes, though rarely, smiled. As soon as we had alighted, they gathered round us and examined us with curiosity, but without excitement. Leo’s tall, athletic form and clear-cut Grecian face, however, evidently excited their attention, and when he politely lifted his hat to them, and showed his curling yellow hair, there was a slight murmur of admiration. Nor did it stop there; for, after regarding him critically from head to foot, the handsomest of the young women—one wearing a robe, and with hair of a shade between brown and chestnut—deliberately advanced to him, and, in a way that would have been winning had it not been so determined, quietly put her arm round his neck, bent forward, and kissed him on the lips.

I gave a gasp, expecting to see Leo instantly speared; and Job ejaculated, “The hussy—well, I never!” As for Leo, he looked slightly astonished; and then remarking that we had got into a country where they clearly followed the customs of the early Christians,<sup>2</sup> deliberately returned the embrace.

Again I gasped, thinking that something would happen; but to my surprise, though some of the young women showed traces of vexation, the older ones and the men only smiled slightly. When we came to understand the customs of this extraordinary people the mystery was explained.

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<sup>1</sup> Antelope native to South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Leo refers to the kiss of charity exchanged by early Christians, as recommended by Peter and Paul in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 16:16).

It then appeared that, in direct opposition to the habits of almost every other savage race in the world, women among the Amahagger are not only upon terms of perfect equality with the men, but are not held to them by any binding ties. Descent is traced only through the line of the mother, and while individuals are as proud of a long and superior female ancestry as we are of our families in Europe, they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known. There is but one titular male parent of each tribe, or, as they call it, "Household," and he is its immediate ruler, with the title of "Father." For instance, the man Billali was the father of this "household," which consisted of about seven thousand individuals all told, and no other man was ever called by that name. When a woman took a fancy to a man she signified her preference by advancing and kissing him publicly, in the same way that this handsome and exceedingly prompt young lady, who was called Ustane, had done to Leo. If he kissed her back it was a token that he accepted her, and the arrangement continued till one of them wearied of it. I am bound, however, to say that the change of husbands was not nearly so frequent as might have been expected. Nor did quarrels arise out of it, at least among the men, who, when their wives deserted them in favour of a rival, accepted the whole thing much as we accept the income-tax or our marriage laws, as something not to be disputed, and as tending to the good of the community, however disagreeable they may in particular instances prove to the individual.

It is very curious to observe how the customs of mankind on this matter vary in different countries, making what is right and proper in one place wrong and improper in another. It must, however, be understood that, as all civilised nations appear to accept it as an axiom that ceremony is the touchstone of morality, there was even according to our canons, nothing immoral about this custom, seeing that the interchange of the embrace answers to our ceremony of marriage, which, as we know, justifies all things.

## VII

### USTANE SINGS

When the kissing operation was finished—by the way none of the young ladies offered to pet me in this fashion, though I saw one hovering round Job, to that respectable individual's evident alarm—the old

man Billali advanced, and graciously waved us into the cave, whither we went, followed by Miss Ustane, who did not seem inclined to take the hints I gave her that we liked privacy.

Before we had gone five paces it struck me that the cave that we were entering was none of Nature's handiwork, but, on the contrary, had been hollowed by the hand of man. So far as we could judge it appeared to be about one hundred feet in length by fifty wide, and very lofty, resembling a cathedral aisle more than anything else. From this main aisle opened passages at a distance of every twelve or fifteen feet, leading, I supposed, to smaller chambers. About fifty feet from the entrance of the cave, just where the light began to get dim, a fire was burning, and threw huge shadows upon the gloomy walls around. Here Billali halted, and asked us to be seated, saying that they would bring us food, and accordingly we squatted ourselves down upon rugs of skins which were spread for us, and waited. Presently the food, consisting of goat's flesh boiled, fresh milk in an earthenware pot, and boiled cobs of Indian corn, was brought by young girls. We were almost starving, and I do not think that I ever in my life before ate with such satisfaction. Indeed, before we had finished we literally ate up everything that was set before us.

When we had done our somewhat saturnine host, Billali, who had been watching us in perfect silence, rose, and addressed us. He said that it was a wonderful thing that had happened. No man had ever known or heard of white strangers arriving in the country of the People of the Rocks. Sometimes, very rarely, black men had come here, and from them they had heard of the existence of men much whiter than themselves, who sailed on the sea in ships, but for the arrival of such there was no precedent. We had, however, been seen dragging the boat up the canal, and he told us frankly that he had at once given orders for our destruction, seeing that it was unlawful for any stranger to enter here, when a message had come from "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," saying that our lives were to be spared, and that we were to be brought hither.

"Pardon me, my father," I interrupted at this point; "but if, as I understand, '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*' lives yet farther off, how could she have known of our approach?"

Billali turned, and seeing that we were alone—for the young lady, Ustane, had withdrawn when he began to speak—said, with a curious little laugh,

"Are there none in your land who can see without eyes and hear without ears? Ask no questions; *She* knew."

I shrugged my shoulders at this, and he proceeded to say that no further instructions had been received on the subject of our disposal, and this being so he was about to start to interview "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," generally spoken of, for the sake of brevity, as "*Hiya*"<sup>1</sup> or *She* simply, who he gave us to understand was the Queen of the Amahagger, and learn her wishes.

I asked him how long he proposed to be away, and he said that by travelling hard he might be back on the fifth day, but there were many miles of marsh to cross before he came to where *She* was. He then said that every arrangement would be made for our comfort during his absence, and that, as he personally had taken a fancy to us, he sincerely trusted that the answer he should bring from *She* would be one favourable to the continuation of our existence, but at the same time he did not wish to conceal from us that he thought this doubtful, as every stranger who had ever come into the country during his grandmother's life, his mother's life, and his own life, had been put to death without mercy, and in a way he would not harrow our feelings by describing; and this had been done by the order of *She* herself, at least he supposed it was by her order. At any rate, she never interfered to save them.

"Why," I said, "but how can that be? You are an old man, and the time you talk of must reach back three men's lives. How therefore could *She* have ordered the death of anybody at the beginning of the life of your grandmother, seeing that herself she would not have been born?"

Again he smiled—that same faint, peculiar smile, and with a deep bow departed, without making any answer; nor did we see him again for five days.

When we had gone we discussed the situation, which filled me with alarm. I did not at all like the accounts of this mysterious Queen, "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," or more shortly *She*, who apparently ordered the execution of any unfortunate stranger in a fashion so unmerciful. Leo, too, was depressed about it, but proceeded to console himself by triumphantly pointing out that this *She* was undoubtedly the person referred to in the writing on the potsherd and in his father's letter, in proof of which he advanced Billali's allusions to her age and power. I was by this time so overwhelmed with the whole course of events that I had not even got the heart left to dispute a proposition so absurd, so I proposed that we should try to go out and get a bath, of which we stood sadly in need.

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<sup>1</sup> "She" (Arabic).

Accordingly, having indicated our wish to a middle-aged individual of an unusually saturnine cast of countenance, even among the saturnine people who appeared to be deputed to look after us now that the Father of the hamlet had departed, we started in a body—having first lit our pipes. Outside the cave we found quite a crowd of people evidently watching for our appearance, but when they saw us come out smoking they vanished this way and that, calling out that we were great magicians. Indeed, nothing about us created so great a sensation as our tobacco smoke—not even our fire-arms.\* After this we succeeded in reaching a stream and taking our bath in peace, though some of the women, not excepting Ustane, showed a decided inclination to follow us even there.

By the time that we had finished this most refreshing bath the sun was setting; indeed, when we got back to the big cave it had already set. The cave itself was full of people gathered round fires—for several more had now been lighted—and eating their evening meal by their lurid light, and by that of various lamps which were set about or hung up on the walls. These lamps were of a rude manufacture of baked earthenware, and of all shapes, some of them graceful enough. The larger ones were formed of big red earthenware pots, filled with clarified melted fat, and having a reed wick stuck through a wooden dish which filled the top of the pot, and this sort of lamp required the most constant attention to prevent its going out whenever the wick burnt down, as there were no means of turning it up. The smaller hand lamps, however, which were also made of baked clay, had a wick manufactured from the pith of a palm tree, or sometimes from the stem of a very handsome variety of fern. This wick came up through a round hole at the end of the lamp, to which a sharp piece of hard wood was attached to pierce and draw it up with whenever it showed signs of burning low.

For a while we sat down and watched this grim people eating their evening meal in silence as grim as themselves, till at length, getting tired of contemplating them and the huge moving shadows on the rocky walls, I suggested to our new keeper that we should like to go to bed.

Without a word he rose, and, taking me politely by the hand, advanced with a lamp to one of the small passages that I had noticed opening out of the central cave. This we followed for about five paces,

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\* We found tobacco growing in this country as it does in every other part of Africa, and although they are so absolutely ignorant of its other blessed qualities, the Amahagger use it habitually in the form of snuff, also for medicinal purposes.—L.H.H.

when it suddenly widened out into a small chamber, about eight feet square, and hewn out of the living rock. On one side of this chamber was a stone slab, about three feet from the ground, and running its entire length like a bunk in a cabin, and on this he indicated that I was to sleep. There was no window or airhole to the chamber, and no furniture; and, on looking at it more closely, I came to the disturbing conclusion (in which, as I afterwards discovered, I was quite right) that it had originally served for a sepulchre for the dead rather than a sleeping-place for the living, the slab being designed to receive the corpse of the departed. The thought made me shudder in spite of myself; but, seeing that I must sleep somewhere, I got over the feeling as best I might, and returned to the cavern to get my blanket, which had been brought up from the boat with the other things. There I met Job, who, having been inducted to a similar apartment, had flatly declined to sleep in it, saying that the look of the place gave him the horrors, and that he might as well be dead and buried in his grandfather's brick grave at once, and expressed his determination of sleeping with me if I would allow him.

The night passed very comfortably on the whole. I say on the whole, for personally I went through a most horrible nightmare of being buried alive, induced, no doubt, by the sepulchral nature of my surroundings. At dawn we were aroused by a loud trumpeting sound, produced, by a young Amahagger blowing through a hole bored in its side into a hollowed elephant tusk.

Taking the hint, we got up and went down to the stream to wash, after which the morning meal was served. At breakfast one of the women, no longer quite young, advanced, and publicly kissed Job. I think it was in its way the most delightful thing (putting its impropriety aside for a moment) that I ever saw. Never shall I forget the respectable Job's abject terror and disgust. Job, like myself, is a bit of a misogynist—I fancy chiefly owing to the fact of his having been one of a family of seventeen—and the feelings expressed upon his countenance when he realised that he was not only being embraced publicly, and without authorisation on his own part, but also in the presence of his masters, were too mixed and painful to admit of accurate description. He sprang to his feet, and pushed the woman, a buxom party of about thirty, from him.

"Well, I never!" he gasped, whereupon she embraced him again.

"Be off with you! Get away, you minx!" he shouted, waving the wooden spoon, with which he was eating his breakfast, up and down before the lady's face. "Beg your pardon, gentlemen, I am sure I haven't

encouraged her. Oh, Lord! she's coming for me again. Hold her, Mr. Holly! please, hold her! I can't stand it; I can't, indeed. This has never happened to me before, gentlemen, never! There's nothing against my character," and here he broke off, and ran as hard as he could go down the cave, and for once I saw the Amahagger laugh. As for the woman, however, she did not laugh. On the contrary, she seemed to bristle with fury, which the mockery of the other women about only served to intensify. She stood there literally snarling and shaking with indignation, and seeing her, I wished Job's scruples had been at Jericho,<sup>1</sup> forming a shrewd guess that his admirable behaviour had endangered our throats. Nor, as the sequel shows, was I wrong.

The lady having retreated, Job returned in a great state of nervousness, and keeping his weather eye<sup>2</sup> fixed upon every woman who came near him. I took an opportunity to explain to our hosts that Job was a married man, and had had very unhappy experiences in his domestic relations, which accounted for his presence here and his terror at the sight of women, but my remarks were received in grim silence, it being evident that our retainer's behaviour was considered as a slight to the "household" at large, although the women, after the manner of their more civilised sisters, made merry at the rebuff of their companion.

After breakfast we took a walk and inspected the Amahagger herds, and also their cultivated lands. They have two breeds of cattle, one large and angular, with no horns, but yielding beautiful milk; and the other, a red breed, very small and fat, excellent for meat, but of no value for milking purposes. This last breed closely resembles the Norfolk red-poll strain, only it has horns which generally curve forward over the head, sometimes to such an extent that they have to be cut to prevent them from growing into the bones of the skull. The goats are long-haired, and are used for eating only, at least I never saw them milked. As for the Amahagger cultivation, it is primitive in the extreme, being all done by means of a spade made of iron, for these people smelt and work iron. This spade is shaped more like a big spear-head than anything else, and has no shoulder to it on which the foot can be set. As a consequence, the labour of digging is very great. It is, however, all done by the men, the women, contrary to the habits of most savage races, being entirely exempt from all manual toil. But then, as I think I have said elsewhere, among the Amahagger the weaker sex has established its rights.

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<sup>1</sup> A euphemism meaning somewhere far away, equivalent to "at the devil."

<sup>2</sup> A watchful eye, one sharp at detecting changes in the weather.

At first we were much puzzled as to the origin and constitution of this extraordinary race, points upon which they were singularly uncommunicative. As the time went on—for the next four days passed without any striking event—we learnt something from Leo's lady friend Ustane, who, by the way, stuck to that young gentleman like his own shadow. As to origin, they had none, at least so far as she was aware. There were, however, she informed us, mounds of masonry and many pillars near the place where *She* lived, which was called Kôr, and which the wise said had once been houses wherein men lived, and it was suggested that they were descended from these men. No one, however, dared go near these great ruins, because they were haunted: they only looked on them from a distance. Other similar ruins were to be seen, she had heard, in various parts of the country, that is, wherever one of the mountains rose above the level of the swamp. Also the caves in which they lived had been hollowed out of the rocks by men, perhaps the same who built the cities. They themselves had no written laws, only custom, which was, however, quite as binding as law. If any man offended against the custom, he was put to death by order of the Father of the "Household." I asked how he was put to death, and she only smiled, and said that I might see one day soon.

They had a Queen, however. *She* was their Queen, but she was very rarely seen, perhaps once in two or three years, when she came forth to pass sentence on some offenders, and when seen was muffled up in a big cloak, so that nobody could look upon her face. Those who waited upon her were deaf and dumb, and therefore could tell no tales, but it was reported that she was lovely as no other woman was lovely, or ever had been. It was rumoured also that she was immortal, and had power over all things, but she, Ustane, could say nothing of all that. What she believed was that the Queen chose a husband from time to time, and as soon as a female child was born this husband, who was never again seen, was put to death. Then the female child grew up and took the place of the Queen when its mother died, and had been buried in the great caves. But of these matters none could speak for certain. Only *She* was obeyed throughout the length and breadth of the land, and to question her command was certain death. She kept a guard, but had no regular army, and to disobey her was to die.

I asked what the land was, and how many people lived in it. She answered that there were ten "Households" like this that she knew of, including the big "Household," where the Queen was, that all the "Households" lived in caves, in places resembling this stretch of raised country, dotted about in a vast extent of swamp, which was only to be

threaded by secret paths. Often the "Households" made war on each other until *She* sent word that it was to stop, and then they instantly ceased. That and the fever which they caught in crossing the swamps was what kept their numbers from increasing too much. They had no connection with any other race, indeed none lived near them, or were able to thread the vast swamps. Once an army from the direction of the great river (presumably the Zambesi) had attempted to attack them, but they got lost in the marshes, and at night, seeing the great balls of fire that move about there, tried to come to them, thinking that it was the enemy's camp, and half of them were drowned. As for the rest, they soon died of fever and starvation, not a blow being struck at them. The marshes, she told us, were absolutely impassable except to those who knew the paths, adding that we should never have reached this place where we then were had we not been brought there.

These and many other things we learnt from Ustane during the four days' pause before our real adventures began, and, as may be imagined, they gave us considerable cause for thought. The whole thing was exceedingly remarkable, almost incredibly so indeed, and the oddest part of it was that so far it did more or less correspond to the ancient writing on the sherd. And now it appeared that there was a mysterious Queen clothed by rumour with awful and wonderful attributes, and commonly known by the impersonal, but, to my mind, rather awesome title of *She*. Altogether, I could not make it out, nor could Leo, though of course he was exceedingly triumphant over me because I had persistently mocked at the whole thing. As for Job, he had long since abandoned any attempt to call his reason his own, and left it to drift upon the sea of circumstance. Mahomed, the Arab, who was, by the way, treated civilly indeed, but with chilling contempt, by the Amahagger, was, I discovered, in a great fright, though I could not quite make out what he was frightened about. He would sit crouched up in a corner of the cave all day long, calling upon Allah and the Prophet to protect him. When I pressed him about it he said that he was afraid because these people were not men and women at all, but devils, and that this was an enchanted land; and once or twice since then I have been inclined to agree with him. So the time went on, till the night of the fourth day after Billali had left, when something happened.

We three and Ustane were sitting round the fire in the cave just before bedtime, when suddenly the woman, who had been brooding in silence, rose, and laid her hand upon Leo's golden curls and addressed him. Even now, when I shut my eyes, I can see her proud, imperial

form, clothed alternately in dense shadow and the red flickering of the fire, as she stood, the wild centre of as weird a scene as I ever witnessed, and delivered herself of the burden of her thoughts and forebodings in a kind of rhythmical speech that ran something as follows:—

“Thou art my chosen—I have waited for thee from the beginning!  
Thou art very beautiful. Who hath hair like unto thee, or skin  
so white?

Who hath so strong an arm, who is so much a man?  
Thine eyes are the sky, and the light in them is the stars.  
Thou art perfect and of a happy face, and my heart turned itself  
toward thee.

Ay, when mine eyes fell on thee, I did desire thee,—  
Then did I take thee to me—thou, my Beloved,  
And hold thee fast, lest harm should come unto thee.  
Ay, I did cover thine head with mine hair, lest the sun should  
strike it;

And altogether was I thine, and thou wast altogether mine.  
And so it went for a little space, till Time was in labour with  
an evil Day;  
And then what befell upon that day? Alas! my Beloved, I know  
not!

But I, I saw thee no more—I, I was lost in the blackness.  
And she who is stronger did take thee; ay, she who is fairer  
than Ustane.

Yet did'st thou turn and call upon me, and let thine eyes wander  
in the darkness.

But, nevertheless, she prevailed by Beauty, and led thee down  
horrible places,  
And then, ah! then, my Beloved——”

Here this extraordinary woman broke off her speech, or chant, which was so much musical gibberish to us, for all that we understood of what she was driving at, and seemed to fix her flashing eyes upon the deep shadow before her. All in a moment they acquired a vacant, terrified stare, as though they were trying to realise some half-seen horror. She lifted her hand from Leo's head, and pointed into the darkness. We all looked and could see nothing; but she saw something, or thought she did, and something evidently that affected even her iron nerves, for, without another sound, down she fell senseless between us.

Leo, who was growing really attached to this remarkable young person, was in a great state of alarm and distress, and I, to be perfectly candid, was in a condition not far removed from superstitious fear. The whole scene was an uncanny one.

Presently, however, she recovered, and sat up with an extraordinary convulsive shudder.

“What did’st thou mean, Ustane?” asked Leo, who, thanks to years of tuition, spoke Arabic very prettily.

“Nay, my chosen,” she answered, with a little forced laugh. “I did but sing unto thee after the fashion of my people. Surely, I meant nothing. How could I speak of that which is not yet?”

“And what did’st thou see, Ustane?” I asked.

“Nay,” she answered again; “I saw nought. Ask me not what I saw. Why should I fright ye?” and then turning to Leo with a look of the most utter tenderness that I ever saw upon the face of woman, civilised or savage, she took his head between her hands, and kissed him on the forehead as a mother might. “When I am gone from thee, my chosen; when at night thou stretchest out thine hand and canst not find me, then shouldst thou think at times of me, for of a truth I love thee well, though I be not fit to wash thy feet. And now let us love and take that which is given us, and be happy; for in the grave there is no love and no warmth, nor any touching of the lips. Nothing perchance, or perchance but bitter memories of what might have been. To-night the hours are our own: how know we to whom they shall belong to-morrow?”

## PART 5 (30 OCTOBER 1886)

### VIII

#### THE FEAST, AND AFTER!

On the day following this remarkable scene, a scene calculated to make a deep impression upon anybody who beheld it, more because of what it suggested and seemed to foreshadow than for what it revealed, it was announced to us that a feast would be held that evening in our honour. I did my best to get out of it, saying that we were modest people, and cared little for feasts, but my remarks being received with the silence of displeasure, I thought it wisest to hold my tongue.

Accordingly, just before sundown, I was informed that everything was ready, and, accompanied by Job, went into the cave, where I met Leo, who was, as usual, followed by Ustane. These two had been out walking somewhere, and knew nothing of the projected festivity till that moment. When Ustane heard of it I saw an expression of horror spring up upon her handsome features. Turning, she caught a man who was passing up the cave by the arm, and asked him something in an imperious tone. His answer seemed to reassure her a little, for she looked relieved, though far from satisfied. Next she appeared to attempt some remonstrance with the man, who was a person in authority, but he spoke angrily to her, and shook her off, and then changing his mind, led her by the arm, and sat her down between himself and another man in the circle round the fire, and I perceived that for some reason of her own she thought it best to submit.

The fire in the cave was an unusually big one that night, and in a large circle round it were gathered about thirty-five men and two women, Ustane and the woman to avoid whom Job had played the *rôle* of another Scriptural character.<sup>1</sup> The men were sitting in perfect silence, as was their custom, each with his great spear stuck upright behind him, in a socket cut in the rock for that purpose. Only one or two wore the yellowish linen garment of which I have spoken, the rest had nothing on except the leopard's skin about the middle.

"What's up now, sir?" said Job, doubtfully. "Bless us and save us,

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<sup>1</sup> Besides his Biblical namesake, Job has played the part of Joseph who rejected Potiphar's wife; Genesis 39:1-20.

there's that woman again. Now, surely, she can't be after me, seeing that I have given her no encouragement. They give me the creeps, the whole lot of them, and that's a fact. Why, look, they have asked Mahomed to dine, too. There, that lady of mine is talking to him in as nice and civil a way as possible. Well, I'm glad it isn't me, that's all."

We looked up, and sure enough the woman in question had risen, and was escorting the wretched Mahomed from the corner, where, overcome by some acute prescience of horror, he had been seated, shivering, and calling on Allah. He appeared unwilling enough to come, if for no other reason perhaps because it was an unaccustomed honour, for hitherto his food had been given to him apart. Anyway I could see that he was in a state of great terror, for his tottering legs would scarcely support his stout, bulky form, and I think it was rather owing to the resources of barbarism behind him, in the shape of a huge Amahagger with a proportionately huge spear, than to the seduction of the lady who led him by the hand, that he consented to come at all.

"Well," I said to the others, "I don't at all like the look of things, but I suppose that we must face it out. Have you fellows got your revolvers on? because, if so, you had better see that they are loaded."

"I have, sir," said Job, tapping his Colt, "but Mr. Leo has only got his hunting-knife, though that is big enough, surely."

Feeling that it would not do to wait while the missing weapon was fetched, we advanced boldly, and seated ourselves in a line, with our backs against the side of the cave.

As soon as we were seated, an earthenware jar was passed round containing a fermented fluid, of by no means unpleasant taste, though apt to turn upon the stomach, made of crushed grain,—not Indian corn, but a small brown grain that grows upon the stem in clusters, not unlike that which in the southern part of Africa is known by the name of Kafir corn. The vase in which this liquid was handed round was very curious, and as it more or less resembled many hundreds of others in use among the Amahagger I may as well describe it. These vases are of a very ancient manufacture, and of all sizes. None such can have been made in the country for hundreds, or rather thousands, of years. They are found in the rock tombs, of which I shall give a description in their proper place, and my own belief is that, after the fashion of the Egyptians, with whom the former inhabitants of this country may have had some connection, they were used to receive the viscera of the dead. Leo, however, is of opinion that, like the Etruscan amphoræ, they were placed there for the spiritual use of the deceased. They are mostly two—

handled, and of all sizes, some being nearly three feet in height, and running from that down to as many inches. In shape they vary, but are all exceedingly beautiful and graceful, being made of a very fine black ware, not lustrous, but slightly rough. On this groundwork were inlaid figures much more graceful and lifelike than any others I have seen on antique vases. Some of these inlaid pictures represented love-scenes with a child-like simplicity and freedom of manner which would not commend itself to the taste of the present day. Others again were pictures of maidens dancing, and others again were hunting-scenes. For instance, the very vase from which we were now drinking had on one side a most spirited drawing of men, apparently white in colour, attacking a bull-elephant with spears, while on the reverse was a picture, not quite so well done, of a hunter shooting an arrow at a running antelope, I should say from the look of it either an eland or a koodoo.

This is a digression at a critical moment, but it is not too long for the occasion, for the occasion itself was very long. With the exception of the periodical passing of the vase, and the movement necessary to throw fuel on to the fire, nothing happened for the best part of a whole hour. Nobody spoke a word. There we all sat in perfect silence, staring at the glare and glow of the large fire, and at the shadows thrown by the flickering earthenware lamps (which, by the way, were not ancient). On the open space between us and the fire lay a large wooden tray, with four short handles to it, exactly like a butcher's tray, only not hollowed out. By the side of the tray was a great pair of long-handled iron pincers, and on the other side of the fire was a similar pair. Somehow I did not at all like the appearance of the tray and the accompanying pincers. There I sat and stared at them and at the silent circle of the fierce moody faces of the men, and reflected that it was all very awful, and that we were absolutely in the power of this alarming people, who, to me at any rate, were all the more formidable because their true character was still very much of a mystery to us. They might be better than I thought them, or they might be worse. I feared that they were worse, and I was not wrong. It was a curious sort of a feast, I reflected, in appearance, indeed, an entertainment of the Barmecide stamp,<sup>1</sup> for there was absolutely nothing to eat.

At last, just as I was beginning to feel as though I were being mesmerised, a move was made. Without the slightest warning, a man from the other side of the circle called out in a loud voice,

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<sup>1</sup> Alluding to a banquet in the *Arabian Nights* at which no food is actually served.

“Where is the flesh that we shall eat?”

Thereon everybody in the circle answered in a deep measured tone, and stretching out the right arm towards the fire as they spoke,

*“The flesh will come.”*

“Is it a goat?” said the same man.

*“It is a goat without horns, and more than a goat, and we shall slay it,”* they answered with one voice, and turning half round, they one and all grasped the handles of their spears with the right hand, and then simultaneously let them go.

“Is it an ox?” said the man, again.

*“It is an ox without horns, and more than an ox, and we shall slay it,”* was the answer, and again the spears were grasped, and again let go.

Then came a pause, and I noticed, with horror and a rising of the hair, that the woman next to Mahomed began to fondle him, patting his cheeks, and calling him by names of endearment, while her fierce eyes played up and down his trembling form. I don’t know why the sight frightened me so, but it did frighten us all dreadfully, especially Leo. The caressing was so snake-like, and so evidently a part of some ghastly formula that had to be gone through.\* I saw Mahomed turn white under his brown skin, sickly white with fear.

“Is the meat ready to be cooked?” asked the voice, more rapidly.

*“It is ready; it is ready.”*

“Is the pot hot to cook it?” it continued, in a sort of scream that echoed painfully down the great recesses of the cave.

*“It is hot; it is hot.”*

“Great heavens!” roared Leo, “remember the writing, *‘The people who put pots upon the heads of strangers.’*”

As he said the words, before we could stir, or even take the matter in, two great ruffians jumped up, and seizing the long pincers, plunged them into the heart of the fire, and the woman who had been caressing Mahomed suddenly produced a fibre noose from under her girdle or moocha, and, slipping it over his shoulders, ran it tight, while the men next him seized him by the legs. The two men with the pincers gave a heave, and scattering the fire this way and that upon the rocky floor, lifted from it a large earthenware pot, heated to a white heat. In an instant, almost with a single movement, they had reached the spot where

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\* We afterwards learnt that its object was to pretend to the victim that he was the object of love and admiration, and so to soothe his injured feelings, and cause him to expire in a happy and contented frame of mind.—L.H.H.

Mahomed was struggling, and then—even now I can scarcely bear to write it—there was one awful, heartrending shriek, ending and smothered in a hissing sound, and the next thing that I saw was the poor wretch, broken loose from his captors, in the despairing effort of a hideous death, and rushing and rolling into the darkness beyond the lamps, *the red hot pot jammed upon his head*, completely covering it from view.

I sprang to my feet with a yell of horror, and drawing my revolver, fired it by a sort of instinct straight at the diabolical woman who had been caressing Mahomed, and was now gripping him in her arms. The bullet struck her in the back and killed her, and to this day I am glad that it did, for, as it afterwards transpired, she had availed herself of the anthropophagous customs of the Amahagger to organise the whole thing in revenge of the slight put upon her by Job.

For a moment there was a silence of astonishment. They had never heard the report of a firearm before, and its effects dismayed them. But the next a man close to us recovered himself, and seized his spear preparatory to making a lunge with it at Leo, who was the nearest to him.

“Run for it!” I halloed, setting the example by going up the cave as hard as my legs would carry me. I would have bolted for the open air if it had been possible, but there were men in the way, and, besides, I had caught sight of the forms of a crowd of people standing out clear against the skyline beyond the entrance to the cave. Up the cave I went, and after me came the others, and after them thundered the whole crowd of cannibals, mad with fury at the death of the woman. With a bound I cleared the prostrate form of Mahomed. As I flew over him I felt the heat from the red hot pot, strike upon my legs, and by its glow saw his poor hands—for he was not quite dead—still feebly beating at the hissing torment on his head. At the top of the cave was a little platform of rock three feet or so high by about eight deep, on which two large lamps were placed at night. Whether this platform had been left as a seat, or as a raised point afterwards to be cut away when it had served its purpose as a standing-place from which to carry on the excavations, I do not know—at least, I did not then. At any rate, we all three reached it, and, jumping on it, prepared to sell our lives as dearly as we could. For a few minutes the crowd that was pressing on our heels hung back when they saw us face round upon them. Job was on one side of the rock to the left, Leo in the centre, and I to the right. Behind us were the lamps. Leo bent forward, and looked down the long lane of shadows, terminated in the fire and lighted lamps, through which the quiet forms of our would-be murderers flitted to and fro with the faint light

glinting on their spears, for even their fury was silent as a bulldog's. The only other thing visible was the red hot pot still glowing angrily in the gloom. There was a curious light in Leo's eyes, and his handsome face was set like a stone. In his right hand was his heavy hunting-knife. He shifted its thong a little up his wrist and then put his arm round me and gave me a good hug.

"Good bye, old fellow," he said, "my dear friend—my more than father. We have no chance against those scoundrels; they will finish us in a few minutes, and eat us afterwards, I suppose. Good bye. I led you into this. I hope you will forgive me. Good bye, Job."

"God's will be done," I said, setting my teeth, as I prepared for the end. At that moment, with an exclamation, Job lifted his revolver and fired, and hit a man—not the man he had aimed at by the way: anything that Job shot *at* was perfectly safe.

On they came with a rush, and I fired too as fast as I could, and checked them—between us, Job and I killed or mortally wounded five men with our pistols before they were emptied, besides the woman. But we had no time to reload, and they still came on in a way that was almost splendid in its recklessness, seeing that they did not know but that we could go on firing for ever.

A great fellow bounded up upon the platform, and Leo struck him dead with one blow of his powerful arm, sending the knife right through him. I did the same by another, but Job missed his stroke, and I saw a brawny Amahagger grip him by the middle, and whirl him off the rock. The knife not being secured by a thong fell from his hand as he did so, and, by a most happy accident for Job, lit upon its handle on the rock, just as the body of the Amahagger being undermost hit upon its point and was transfixed upon it. What happened to Job after that I am sure I do not know, but my own impression is that he lay still upon the corpse of his deceased assailant, "playing 'possum" as the Americans say. As for myself, I was soon involved in a desperate encounter with two ruffians who, luckily for me, had left their spears behind them; and for the first time in my life the great physical power with which Nature has endowed me stood me in good stead. I had hacked at the head of one man with my hunting knife, which was almost as big and heavy as a short sword, with such vigour, that the sharp steel had split his skull down to the eyes, and was held so fast by it, that as he suddenly fell sideways the knife was twisted right out of my hand.

Then it was that the two others sprung upon me. I saw them coming, and got an arm round the waist of each, and down we all fell

upon the floor of the cave together, rolling over and over. They were strong men, but I was mad with rage, and that awful lust for slaughter which will creep into the hearts of the most civilised of us when blows are flying, and life and death tremble on the turn. My arms were round the two swarthy demons, and I hugged them till I heard their ribs crack and crunch up beneath my gripe. They twisted and writhed like snakes, and clawed and battered at me with their fists, but I held on. Lying on my back there, so that their bodies should protect me from spear thrusts from above, I slowly crushed the life out of them, and as I did so, strange as it may seem, I thought of what the amiable Head of my College at Cambridge and my brother Fellows would say if by clairvoyance they could see me, of all men, playing such a bloody game. Soon my assailants grew faint, and almost ceased to struggle, their breath had left them, and they were dying, but still I dare not leave them, for they died very slowly. I knew that if I relaxed my grip they would revive. The other ruffians probably thought—for we were all three lying in the shadow of the ledge—that we were all dead together, at any rate they did not interfere with our little tragedy.

I turned my head, and as I lay gasping in the throes of that awful struggle I could see that Leo was off the rock now, for the lamplight fell full upon him. He was still on his feet, but in the centre of a surging mass of struggling men, who were striving to pull him down as wolves pull down a stag. Up above them towered his beautiful pale face crowned with its bright curls (for Leo was six feet two high), and I saw that he was fighting with a desperate abandonment and energy that was at once splendid and hideous to behold. He drove his knife through one man—they were so close to him and mixed up with him that they could not get at him to kill him with their big spears, and they had no knives or sticks. The man fell, and then somehow the knife was wrenched from his hand, leaving him defenceless, and I thought the end had come. But no, with a desperate effort he broke loose from them, seized the body of the man he had just slain, and lifting it high in the air hurled it right at the mob of his assailants, so that the shock and weight of it swept some five or six of them to the earth. But in a minute they were all up again, except one, whose skull was smashed, and had once more fastened upon him. And then slowly, and with infinite labour and struggling, the wolves bore the lion down. Once even then he recovered himself, and felled an Amahagger with his fist, but it was more than man could do to hold his own for long against so many, and at last he came crashing down upon the rock floor, falling as an oak

falls, and bearing with him to the earth all those who clung about him. They gripped him by his arms and legs, and then cleared off his body.

"A spear," cried a voice, "a spear to cut his throat, and a vessel to catch his blood."

I shut my eyes, for I saw the man coming with a spear, and myself, I could not stir to Leo's help, for I was growing weak, and the two men on me were not yet dead, and a deadly sickness overcame me.

Then suddenly there was a disturbance, and involuntarily I opened my eyes again, and looked towards the scene of murder. The girl Ustane had suddenly thrown herself on the top of Leo's prostrate form, covering his body with her body, and fastening her arms about his neck. They tried to drag her from him, but she twisted her legs round his, and hung on like a bulldog, or rather like a creeper to a tree, and they could not. Then they tried to stab him in the side without hurting her, but somehow she shielded him, and he was only wounded.

At last they lost patience.

"Drive the spear through the man and the woman together," said a voice, the same voice that had asked the questions at that ghastly feast, "so of a verity shall they be wed."

Then I saw the man with the weapon straighten himself for the effort. I saw the cold steel gleam on high, and once more I shut my eyes.

As I did so, I heard a voice of a man thunder out in tones that rang and echoed down the rocky ways.

*"Cease!"*

Then I fainted, and as I did so it flashed through my darkening mind that I was passing down into the last oblivion of death.

## IX

### A LITTLE FOOT

When I opened my eyes again I found myself lying on a skin mat not far from the fire round which we had been gathered for the dreadful feast. Near me lay Leo, still apparently in a swoon, and over him was bending the tall form of the girl Ustane, who was washing a deep spear wound in his side with water preparatory to binding it up with linen. Leaning against the wall of the cave behind her was Job, apparently unhurt, but bruised and trembling. On the other side of the fire, tossed about this way and that, as though they had thrown themselves down to sleep in some

moment of absolute exhaustion, were the bodies of those whom we had killed in our frightful struggle for life. I counted them: there were twelve beside the woman, who had died by my hand, as well as the corpse of poor Mahomed, which, the fire-stained pot at its side, was placed at the end of the irregular line. To the left a body of men were engaged in binding the arms of the survivors of the cannibals behind them, and then fastening them two and two. The villains were submitting with a look of sulky indifference upon their faces that accorded ill with the baffled fury that gleamed in their sombre eyes. In front of these men, directing the operations, stood no other than our friend Billali, looking rather tired, but particularly patriarchal with his flowing beard, and as cool and unconcerned as though he were superintending the cutting up of an ox.

Presently he turned, and perceiving that I was sitting up advanced to me, and with the utmost courtesy said that he trusted that I felt better. I answered that at present I scarcely knew how I felt, except that I ached all over.

Then he bent down and examined Leo's wound.

"It is a nasty cut," he said, "but the spear has not pierced the entrails. He will recover."

"Thanks to your arrival, my father," I answered. "In another minute we should all have been beyond the reach of recovery, for those devils of yours would have slain us as they would have slain our servant," and I pointed towards Mahomed.

The old man ground his teeth, and I saw an extraordinary expression of malignity light up his eyes.

"Fear not, my son," he answered. "Vengeance shall be taken on them such as would make the flesh twist upon the bones merely to hear of it. To *She* shall they go, and her vengeance shall be worthy of her greatness. That man," pointing to Mahomed, "I tell you that man has died a merciful death to the death these hyæna-men shall die. Tell me, I pray of thee, how it came about."

In a few words I sketched what had happened.

"Ah, so," he answered. "Thou seest, my son, here there is a custom that if a stranger comes into this country he may be slain by 'the pot,' and eaten."

"It is hospitality turned upside down," I answered feebly. "In our country we entertain a stranger, and give him food to eat. Here ye eat him, and are entertained."

"It is a custom," he answered, with a shrug. "For myself I think it an evil one; but then," he added by an afterthought, "I do not like the taste

of strangers, especially after they have wandered through the swamps and lived on wildfowl. When *She-who-must-be-obeyed* sent orders that ye were to be saved she said nought of the black man, therefore, being hyænas, these men lusted after his flesh, and the woman it was whom thou didst rightly slay who put it into their evil hearts to hot-pot him. Well, they will have their reward. Better for them would it be if they had never seen the light than that they should stand before *She* in her terrible anger. Happy are those of them that died by your hands.

“Ah,” he went on, “it was a gallant fight that ye fought. Knowest thou, that thou, long-armed old Baboon that thou art, hast crushed in the ribs of those two who are laid out there as though they were but as the shell on an egg? And the young one, the lion, it was a beautiful fight that he made—one against so many—three did he slay outright, and that one there”—and he pointed to a body that was still moving a little—“will die anon, for his head is cracked across, and others of those who are bound are hurt. It was a gallant fight, and ye and he have made a friend of me by it, for I love to see a well-fought fray. But tell me, my son, the Baboon—and now I think of it thy face, too, is hairy, and altogether like a baboon’s—how was it that ye slew those with a hole in them?—Ye made a noise, they say, and slew them— they fell down on their faces at the noise!”

I explained to him as well as I could, but very shortly—I was terribly wearied, and only persuaded to talk at all through fear of offending one so powerful if I refused to do so—what were the properties of gunpowder, and he instantly suggested that I should illustrate what I said by operating on the person of one of the prisoners. One, he said, never would be missed, and it would not only be very interesting to him, but would give me an opportunity of an instalment of revenge. He was greatly astounded when I told him that it was not our custom to avenge ourselves in cold blood, and that we left vengeance to the law and a higher Power, of which he knew nothing. I added, however, that when I recovered I would take him out shooting with us, and he should kill an animal for himself, and at this he was as pleased as a child at the promise of a new toy.

Just then, Leo opened his eyes beneath the stimulus of some brandy (of which we still had a little) that Job had poured down his throat, and our conversation came to an end.

After this we managed to get Leo, who was in a very poor way indeed, and only half conscious, safely off to bed, supported by Job and that brave girl Ustane, to whom, had I not been afraid she might resent

it, I would certainly have given a kiss for her splendid behaviour in saving my dear boy's life at the risk of her own. But Ustane was not the sort of young person with whom one would care to take liberties unless one were perfectly certain that they would not be misunderstood, so I repressed my inclinations. Then, bruised and battered, but with a sense of safety in my breast to which I had for some days been a stranger, I crept off to my own little sepulchre, not forgetting before I lay down in it to thank God from the bottom of my heart that it was not a sepulchre indeed, as were it not for a merciful combination of events, that I can only attribute to Him, it would certainly have been for me that night. Few men have been nearer their end and yet escaped it than we were on that dreadful day.

My dreams that night when at last I got to sleep were not of the pleasantest. The awful vision of poor Mahomed struggling to escape the red-hot pot would haunt them, and then in the background, as it were, a veiled form was always hovering, which, from time to time, seemed to draw the coverings from its body, revealing now the perfect shape of a lovely blooming woman, and now again the white bones of a grinning skeleton, and which, as it veiled and unveiled, uttered the mysterious and apparently meaningless sentence:

*"That which is alive hath known death, and that which is dead yet can never die, for in the Circle of the Spirit life is nought and death is nought. Yea, all things live for ever, though at times they sleep and are forgotten."*

The morning came at last, but when it came I found that I was too stiff and sore to rise. About seven Job arrived, limping terribly, and with his face the colour of a rotten apple, and told me that Leo had slept fairly, but was very weak. Two hours afterwards Billali (Job called him "Billy-goat," to which, indeed, his white beard gave him some resemblance, or more familiarly "Billy,") came too, bearing a lamp in his hand, his towering form reaching nearly to the roof of the little chamber. I pretended to be asleep, and through the cracks of my eyelids watched his sardonic, but handsome old face. He fixed his hawk-like eyes upon me, and stroked his glorious white beard, which, by the way, would have been worth a hundred a-year to any London barber as an advertisement.

"Ah!" I heard him mutter (Billali had a habit of muttering to himself), "he is ugly—ugly as the other is beautiful—a very Baboon, it was a good name. But I like the man. Strange now, at my age, that I should like a man. What says the proverb—'Mistrust all men, and slay him whom thou mistrustest overmuch; and as for women, flee from them, for they are evil, and in the end will destroy thee.' It is a good proverb, especially

the last part: I think it must have come down from the ancients. Nevertheless I like this Baboon, and I wonder where they taught him his tricks, and I trust that *She* will not bewitch him. Poor Baboon! he must be wearied after that fight. I will go lest I should awake him."

I waited till he had turned and was nearly through the entrance, walking softly on tiptoe, and then I called after him.

"My father," I said, "is it thou?"

"Yes, my son, it is I; but let me not disturb thee. I did but come to see how thou did'st fare, and to tell thee that those who would have slain thee, my Baboon, are by now well on their road to *She*. *She* said that ye were to come also at once, but I fear ye cannot yet."

"Nay," I said, "not till we have recovered a little; but have me borne out into the daylight, my father. I like not this place."

"Ah, no," he answered, "it hath a sad air. I remember when I was a boy I found the body of a fair woman lying where you lie now, yes, on that very bench. She was so beautiful that I used to creep in here with a lamp and gaze upon her. Had it not been for her cold hands, almost could I think that she slept and would one day awake, so fair and peaceful was she in her robe of white. White was she, too, and her hair was yellow, and lay down her almost to the feet. There are many such still in the tombs at the place where *She* is, for those who set them there had a way I know nought of, of keeping their beloved out of the crumbling hand of Decay, even when Death had slain them. Ay, day by day I came hither, and gazed on her till at last—laugh not at me, stranger, for I was but a silly lad—I learnt to love that dead form, that shell that once had held a life that no more is. I would creep up to her and kiss her cold face, and wonder how many men had lived and died since she was, and who had loved her and embraced her in the days that long had passed away. And my Baboon, I think I learnt wisdom from that dead one, for of a truth it taught me of the littleness of life, and the length of Death, and how all things that are under the sun go down one path, and are for ever forgotten. And so I mused, and it seemed to me that wisdom flowed into me from that dead one, till one day my mother, a watchful woman, but hasty-minded, seeing I was changed, followed me, and saw the beautiful white one, and feared I was bewitched, as, indeed, I was. So half in fear, and half in anger, she took the lamp, and standing the dead one up against the wall there, set fire to her hair, and she burnt fiercely, even down to the feet, for those who are thus kept burn excellently well. See, my son, there on the roof is yet the smoke of her burning."

I looked up doubtfully, and there, sure enough, on the roof of the

sepulchre was a peculiarly unctuous and sooty mark, three feet or more across. Doubtless it had in the course of years been rubbed off the sides of the little cave, but on the roof it remained, and there was no mistaking its appearance.

"She burnt," he went on in a meditative way, "even to the feet, but the feet I came back and saved, cutting the burnt bone from them, and hid them under the stone bench there, wrapped up in a piece of linen. Surely, I remember it as though it were but yesterday. Perchance they are there if none have found them, even to this hour. Of a truth I have not entered this chamber from that time to this very day. Stay, I will look," and, kneeling down, he groped about with his long arm in the recess under the stone bench. Presently his face brightened, and with an exclamation he pulled something forth that was caked in dust; which he shook on to the floor. It was covered with the remains of a rotting rag, which he undid, and revealed to my astonished gaze a beautifully shaped and almost white woman's foot, looking as fresh and as firm as though it had been placed there yesterday.

"Thou seest, my son, the Baboon," he said, in a sad voice, "I spake the truth to thee, for here is yet one foot remaining. Take it, my son, and gaze upon it."

I took this cold fragment of mortality in my hand and looked at it in the light of the lamp with feelings which I cannot describe, so mixed up were they between astonishment, fear, and fascination. It was light, much lighter I should say than it had been in the living state, and the flesh to all appearance was still flesh, though about it there clung a faintly aromatic odour. For the rest it was not shrunk or shrivelled, or even black and unsightly, like the flesh of Egyptian mummies, but plump and fair, and, except where it had been slightly burnt, perfect as on the day of death—a very triumph of embalming.

Poor little foot! I set it down upon the stone bench where it had lain for so many thousand years, and wondered whose was the beauty that it had upborne through the pomp and pageantry of a forgotten civilisation—first as a merry child's, then as a blushing maid's, and lastly as a perfect woman's. Through what halls of life had its soft step echoed, and in the end, with what courage had it trodden down the dusty ways of death! To whose side had it stolen in the hush of night when the black slave slept upon the marble floor, and who had listened for its stealing? Shapely little foot! Well might it have been set upon the proud neck of a conqueror bent at last to woman's beauty, and well might the lips of nobles and of kings have been pressed upon its jewelled whiteness.

I wrapped up this relic of the past in the remnants of the old linen rag which had evidently formed a portion of its owner's grave-clothes, for it was partially burnt, and put it away in my Gladstone bag,<sup>1</sup> which I had bought at the Army and Navy Stores, a strange combination I thought. Then with Billali's help I staggered off to see Leo. I found him dreadfully bruised, worse even than myself, perhaps owing to the excessive whiteness of his skin, and faint and weak with the loss of blood from the flesh wound in his side, but for all that cheerful as a cricket, and asking for some breakfast. Job and Ustane got him on to the bottom, or rather the sacking of a litter, which was removed from its pole for that purpose, and carried him out into the shade at the mouth of the cave, from which, by the way, every trace of the slaughter of the previous night had now been removed, and there we all breakfasted, and indeed spent that day, and most of the two following ones.

On the third morning Job and myself were practically recovered. Leo also was so much better that I yielded to Billali's often expressed entreaty, and agreed to start at once upon our journey to Kôr, which we were told was the name of the place where the mysterious *She* lived, though I still feared for its effects upon Leo, and especially lest the motion should cause his wound, which was scarcely skinned over, to break open again. Indeed, had it not been for Billali's evident anxiety to get off, which led us to suspect that some difficulty or danger might threaten us if we did not comply with it, I would not have consented to go.

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<sup>1</sup> A large piece of luggage named after William Gladstone (1809–98), the British politician and Prime Minister, after he said in 1882 that the Turks should be thrown “bag and baggage” out of Bulgaria.

## PART 6 (6 NOVEMBER 1886)

### X

#### SPECULATIONS

Within an hour of our finally deciding to start five litters were brought up to the door of the cave, each accompanied by four regular bearers and two spare hands, also a band of about fifty armed Amahagger, who were to form the escort and carry the baggage. Three of these litters, of course, were for us, and one for Billali, who, I was immensely relieved to hear, was to be our companion, while the fifth I presumed was for the use of Ustane.

"Does the lady go with us, my father?" I asked of Billali, as he stood superintending things generally.

He shrugged his shoulders as he answered,

"If she wills. In this country the women do what they please. We worship them, and give them their way, because without them the world could not go on; they are the source of life."

"Ah," I said, the matter never having struck me in that light before.

"We worship them," he went on, "up to a certain point, till at last they get unbearable, which," he added, "they do about every second generation."

"And then what do you do?" I asked, with curiosity.

"Then," he answered, with a faint smile, "we rise, and kill the old ones as an example to the young ones, and to show them that we are the strongest. My poor wife was killed in that way three years ago. It was very sad, but to tell thee the truth, my son, life has been happier since, for my age protects me from the young ones."

"In short," I replied, quoting the saying of a great man<sup>1</sup> whose wisdom has not yet lightened the darkness of the Amahagger, "thou hast found thy position one of greater freedom and less responsibility."

This phrase puzzled him a little at first from its vagueness, though I think my translation hit off its sense very well, but at last he saw it, and appreciated it.

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<sup>1</sup> British politician William Gladstone. In 1880, Gladstone backed off from pugnacious statements made about Austria before he became Prime Minister, saying that he had made them when he was in "a position of greater freedom and less responsibility." Haggard disliked Gladstone and his policies.

"Yes, yes, my Baboon," he said, "I see it now, but all the 'responsibilities' are killed, at least most of them are, and that is why there are so few old women about just now. Well, they brought it on themselves. As for this girl," he went on, in a graver tone, "I know not what to say. She is a brave girl, and she loves the Lion (Leo): thou sawest how she clung to him, and saved his life. Also, she is, according to our custom, wed to him, and has a right to go where he goes, unless," he added significantly, "*She* should say her no, for her word overrides all rights."

"And if *She* bade her leave him, and the girl refused? What then?"

"If," he said, with a shrug, "the hurricane bids the tree to bend, and it will not; what happens?"

And then, without waiting for an answer, he turned and walked to his litter, and in ten minutes from that time we were all well under weigh.

It took us an hour and more to cross the cup of the volcanic plain, and another half-hour or so to climb the edge on the further side. Once there, however, the view was a very fine one. Before us was a long steep slope of grassy plain, broken here and there by clumps of trees mostly of the thorn tribe. At the bottom of the gentle slope, some nine or ten miles away, we could make out a dim sea of marsh, on which the foul vapours hung like smoke about a city. It was easy going for the bearers down the slopes, and by mid-day we had reached the borders of the dismal swamp. Here we halted to eat our mid-day meal, and then, following a winding and devious path, plunged into the morass. Presently the path, at any rate to our unaccustomed eye, seemed to grow so faint as to be almost indistinguishable from those made by the aquatic beasts and birds, and it is to this day a mystery to me how our bearers found their way across the marshes. Ahead of the cavalcade marched two men with long poles, which they now and again plunged into the ground before them, the reason being that the nature of the soil frequently changed from causes with which I am not acquainted, so that places that would be safe enough to cross one month would certainly swallow the wayfarer the next. Never did I see a more dreary and depressing scene. Miles on miles of quagmire, varied only by bright green strips of comparatively solid ground, and by deep and sunken pools fringed with tall rushes, in which the bitterns boomed and the frogs croaked incessantly: miles on miles of it without a break, unless the fever fog can be called a break. The only life in this great morass was that of the aquatic birds, and the animals that fed on them, of both of which there were vast numbers. Geese, cranes, ducks, teal, coot, snipe, and plover swarmed all round us, many being of varieties that were

quite new to me, and all so tame that one could almost have knocked them over with a stick. Among those birds I especially noticed a very beautiful variety of painted snipe, almost the size of woodcock, and with a flight more resembling that bird's than an English snipe's. In the pools, too, was a species of small alligator or enormous iguana, I do not know which, that fed, Billali told me, upon the waterfowl, also large quantities of a hideous black water snake, of which the bite is very dangerous, though not, I gathered, so deadly as a cobra's or a puff adder's. The bull-frogs were also very large, and with voices proportionate to their size; and as for the mosquitoes, they were, if possible, even worse than they had been on the river, and tormented us greatly. Undoubtedly, however, the worst feature of the swamp was the awful smell of rotting vegetation that hung about it, that was at times positively overpowering, and the malarious exhalations that accompanied it, which we were, of course, obliged to breathe.

On we went through it all, till at last the sun sank in sullen splendour just as we reached a spot of rising ground about two acres in extent—a little oasis of dry in the midst of the miry wilderness—where Billali announced that we were to camp. The camping, however, turned out to be a very simple process, and consisted, in fact, in sitting down on the ground round a scanty fire made of dry reeds and some wood that had been brought with us. However, we made the best we could of it, and smoked and ate with such appetite as the smell of damp, stifling heat would allow, for it was very hot on this low land, and yet, oddly enough, chilly at times. But, however hot it was, we were glad enough to keep near the fire, because we found that the mosquitoes did not like the smoke. Presently we rolled ourselves up in our blankets and tried to go to sleep, but so far as I was concerned the bull-frogs, and the extraordinary roaring and alarming sound produced by hundreds of snipe hovering high in the air, made sleep an impossibility, to say nothing of our other discomforts. I turned and looked at Leo, who was next me; he was dozing, but his face had a flushed appearance that I did not like, and by the flickering firelight I saw Ustane, who was lying on the other side of him, raise herself from time to time upon her elbow, and look at him anxiously enough.

However, I could do nothing for him, for we had all already taken a good dose of quinine, which was the only preventive we had; so I lay and watched the stars come out by thousands, till all the immense arch of Heaven was sewn with glittering points, and every point a world! Here was a glorious sight by which man might well measure his own

insignificance! Soon I gave up thinking about it, for the mind wearies easily when it strives to grapple with the Infinite, and to trace the footsteps of the Almighty as He strides from sphere to sphere, or deduce His purpose from His works. Such things are not for us to know. Knowledge is to the strong, and we are weak. Too much wisdom would blind our imperfect sight, and too much strength would make us drunk, and overweight our feeble reason till it fell, and we were drowned in the depths of our own vanity. What is the first result of man's increased knowledge interpreted from Nature's book by the persistent effort of his purblind observation? Is it not nearly always to make him question the existence of his Maker, or indeed of any intelligent purpose beyond his own? The truth is veiled, because we could no more look upon her glory than we can upon the sun. It would destroy us. Full knowledge is not for man as man is here, for his capacities, which he is apt to think so great, are indeed but small. The vessel is soon filled, and, were one-thousandth part of the unutterable and silent wisdom that directs the rolling of the shining spheres and the force which makes them roll, pressed into it, it would be shattered into fragments. Perhaps in some other place and time it may be otherwise, who can tell? Here the lot of man born of the flesh is but to live midst toil and tribulation, to catch at the bubbles blown by Fate, which he calls pleasures, thankful if before they burst they rest a moment in his hand, and when the tragedy is played out and his hour comes to perish, to pass humbly whither he knows not.

Above me, as I lay, shone the eternal stars, and there at my feet the impish marsh-born balls of fire rolled this way and that, vapour-tossed and earth-desiring, and methought that in the two I saw a type and image of what man is, and what perchance man may one day be, if the living Force that ordained him and them should so ordain this also. Oh, that it might be ours to rest year by year upon that high level of the heart to which at times we momentarily attain! Oh, that we could shake loose the prisoned pinions of the soul and soar to that superior point, whence, like to some traveller looking out through space from Darien's<sup>1</sup> giddiest peak, we might gaze with the spirit eyes of noble thoughts deep into Infinity!

What would it be to cast off this earthy robe, to have done for ever with these earthy thoughts and miserable desires; no longer, like those

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<sup>1</sup> Another name for Panama, from a peak in which Balboa first sighted the Pacific Ocean; alluding to Keats' sonnet, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."

corpse candles,<sup>1</sup> to be tossed this way and that, by forces beyond our control; or, if we can theoretically control them, are yet driven by the exigencies of our nature to obey! Yes, to cast them off, to have done with the foul and thorny places of the world; and like to those glittering points above me, to sit on high wrapped for ever in the brightness of our better selves, that even now shines in us as fire faintly shines within those lurid balls, and lay down our littleness in that wide glory of our dreams, that invisible but surrounding Good, from which all Truth and Beauty comes!

These and many such thoughts passed through my mind that night. They come to torment us all at times. I say to torment, for alas! thinking can only serve to measure out the helplessness of thought. What is the use of our feeble crying in the awful silences of space? Can our dim intelligence read the secrets of that star-strewn sky? Does any answer come out of it? Never any at all, nothing but echoes and fantastic visions. And yet we believe that there is an answer, and that upon a time a new Dawn will come blushing down the ways of our enduring night. We believe it, for its reflected beauty even now shines up continually in our hearts from beneath the horizon of the grave, and we call it Hope. Without Hope we should suffer moral death, and by the help of Hope we yet may climb to Heaven, or at the worst, if she also prove but a kindly mockery given to hold us from despair, be gently lowered into the abysses of eternal sleep.

Then I fell to reflecting upon the undertaking on which we were bent, and what a wild one it was, and yet how strangely the story seemed to fit in with what had been written centuries ago upon the sherd. Who was this extraordinary woman, Queen over a people apparently as extraordinary as herself, and reigning amidst the vestiges of a lost civilisation? And what could be the meaning of this story of the Fire that gave unending life? Could it be possible that any fluid or essence could exist that could so fortify these fleshly walls that they should from age to age resist the mines and batterings of decay? It was possible, though not probable. The indefinite continuation of life would not after all be half so marvellous a thing as the production of life and its temporary endurance. And if it were true, what then? The person who found it could no doubt rule the world. He could accumulate all the wealth in the world, and all the power, and all the wisdom that is

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<sup>1</sup> Flickering lights seen in cemeteries at night, like the "marsh-born balls of fire" referred to here.

power. He might give a lifetime to the study of each art or science. Well, if that were so, and this *She* were practically immortal, which I did not for one moment believe, how was it that, with all these things at her feet, she preferred to remain in a cave amongst a society of cannibals? That surely settled the question. The whole story was monstrous, and only worthy of the superstitious days in which it was written. At any rate I was very sure that *I* would not attempt to attain unending life. I had had far too many worries and disappointments and secret bitter-nesses during my forty odd years of existence to wish that this state of affairs should be continued indefinitely. And yet I suppose that my life has been, comparatively speaking, a happy one.

And then, reflecting that at the present moment there was far more likelihood of our earthly careers being cut exceedingly short than of their being unduly prolonged, I at last managed to get to sleep, a fact for which anybody who reads this narrative, if anybody ever does, may very probably be thankful.

When I woke again it was just dawning, and the guard and bearers were moving about like ghosts through the dense morning mists, getting ready for our start. The fire had died quite down, and I rose and stretched myself, shivering in every limb from the damp cold of the dawn. Then I looked at Leo. He was sitting up, holding his hands to his head, and I saw that his face was flushed and his eye bright, and yet yellow round the pupil.

"Well, Leo," I said, "how do you feel?"

"I feel as though I were going to die," he answered hoarsely. "My head is splitting, my body is trembling, and I am as sick as a cat."

I whistled, or if I did not whistle, I felt inclined to—Leo had got a sharp attack of fever. I went to Job, and asked him for the quinine, of which fortunately we had still a good supply, only to find that Job himself was not much better. He complained of pains across the back, and dizziness, and was almost incapable of helping himself. Then I did the only thing it was possible to do under the circumstances—gave them both about ten grains of quinine, and took a slightly smaller dose myself as a matter of precaution. After that I found Billali, and explained to him how matters stood, asking at the same time what he thought had best be done. He came with me, and looked at Leo and Job (whom, by the way, he had named the Pig on account of his fatness, round face, and small eyes).

"Ah," he said, when we were out of earshot, "the fever! I thought so. The Lion has it badly, but he is young, and he may live. As for the

Pig, his attack is not so bad; it is the 'little fever' that he has; that always begins with pains across the back, it will spend itself upon his fat."

"Can they go on, my father?" I asked.

"Nay, my son, they must go on. If they stop here they will certainly die, and, besides, they will be better in the litters than on the ground. By to-night, if all goes well, we shall be across the marsh and in good air. Come, let us lift them into the litters and start, for it is very bad to stand still in this morning fog. We can eat our morning meal as we go."

This we accordingly did, and with a heavy heart I once more set out upon our strange journey. For the first three hours all went as well as could be expected, and then an accident happened that nearly lost us the pleasure of the company of our venerable friend, Billali, whose litter was leading the cavalcade. We were going through a particularly dangerous piece of quagmire, in which the bearers sometimes sank up to their knees. Indeed, it was a mystery to me how they contrived to carry the heavy litters at all over such ground as that which we were traversing, though the two spare hands, as well as the four regular ones, had of course to put their shoulders to the pole.

Presently, as we blundered and floundered along, there was a sharp cry, then a storm of exclamations, and, last of all, a most tremendous splash, and the whole caravan halted.

I jumped out of my litter, and ran forward. About twenty yards ahead was the edge of one of those sullen peaty pools of which I have spoken, the path we were following running along the top of its bank, which, as it happened, was a steep one. Looking towards this pool, to my horror I saw that Billali's litter was floating on it, and as for Billali himself, he was nowhere to be seen. To make matters clear I may as well explain at once what had happened. One of Billali's bearers had unfortunately trodden on a basking snake, which had bitten him in the leg, whereon he had, not unnaturally, let go of the pole, and then finding he was tumbling down the bank, grasped at the litter to save himself. The result of this was what might have been expected. The litter was pulled over the edge of the bank, the bearers let go, and the whole thing, including Billali and the man who had been bitten, rolled into the slimy pool. When I got to the edge of the water neither of them were to be seen, and, indeed, the unfortunate bearer never was seen again. Either he struck his head against something, or got wedged in the mud, or possibly the snake-bite paralysed him. At any rate, he vanished. But though Billali was not to be seen, his whereabouts was clear enough, from the agitation of the floating litter, in the bearing cloth and curtains of which he was entangled.

“He is there! Our father is there!” said one of the men, but he did not stir a finger to help him, nor did any of the others. They simply stood and stared at the water.

“Out of the way, you brutes,” I shouted in English, and throwing off my hat, I took a run and sprang well out into the horrid slimy-looking pool. A couple of strokes took me to where Billali was struggling beneath the cloth.

Somehow, I don’t quite know how, I managed to push this free of him, and his venerable head all covered in green slime, like that of a yellowish Bacchus<sup>1</sup> with ivy leaves, emerged upon the surface of the water. The rest was easy, for Billali was an eminently practical individual, and had the common sense not to grasp hold of me as drowning people often do, so I got him by the arm, and towed him to the bank, through the mud of which we were with difficulty dragged. Such a filthy spectacle as we presented I have never seen before or since, and it will perhaps give some idea of the almost superhuman dignity of Billali’s appearance when I say that, coughing, half-drowned, and covered with mud and green slime as he was, with his beautiful beard coming to a dripping point, like a Chinaman’s freshly-oiled pig-tail, he still looked venerable and imposing.

“Ye dogs,” he said, addressing the bearers, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered to speak, “ye left me, your father, to drown. Had it not been for this stranger, my son the Baboon, assuredly I should have drowned. Well, I will remember it,” and he fixed them with his gleaming, though slightly watery eye, in a way I saw they did not like, though they tried to appear sulkily indifferent.

“As for thee, my son,” the old man went on turning towards me, and grasping my hand, “rest assured that I am thy friend through good and evil. Thou hast saved my life, perchance a day may come when I shall save thine.”

After that we cleaned ourselves as best we could, fished out the litter, and went on, *minus* the man who had been drowned. I don’t know if it was owing to his being an unpopular character, or from native indifference and selfishness of temperament, but I am bound to say that nobody seemed to grieve much over his sudden and final disappearance, unless, perhaps, it was the men who had to do his share of the work.

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<sup>1</sup> Greek god of wine, often depicted as crowned with leaves.

## XI

### THE PLAIN OF KÔR

About an hour before sundown we at last, to my unbounded gratitude, emerged from the great belt of marsh on to land that swelled upwards in a succession of rolling waves. Just on the hither side of the crest of the first wave we halted for the night. My first act was to examine Leo's condition. It was, if anything, worse than in the morning, and a new and very distressing feature, vomiting, set in, and continued till dawn. Not one wink of sleep did I get that night, for I passed it in assisting Ustane, who was one of the most gentle and indefatigable nurses I ever saw, to wait upon Leo and Job. However, the air here was warm and genial without being too hot, and there were no mosquitoes to speak of. Also we were above the level of the marsh mist, which lay stretched beneath us like the dim smoke-pall over a city, lit up here and there by the wandering globes of fen fire. Thus it will be seen that we were, speaking comparatively, in clover.

By dawn on the following morning Leo was quite light-headed, and fancied that he was divided into halves. I was dreadfully distressed, and began to wonder with a sort of sick fear what the termination of the attack would be. Alas! I had heard but too much of how these attacks generally terminate. As I was doing so Billali came up and said that we must be getting on, more especially as, in his opinion, if Leo did not reach some spot where he could be quiet, and have proper nursing, within the next twelve hours, his life would only be a matter of a day or two. I could not but agree with him, so we got him into the litter, and started on, Ustane walking by his side to keep the flies off him, and see that he did not throw himself out on to the ground.

Within half-an-hour of sunrise we had reached the top of the rise of which I have spoken, and a most beautiful view broke upon our gaze. Beneath us was a rich stretch of country, verdant with grass and lovely with foliage and flowers. In the background, at a distance, so far as I could judge, of some eighteen miles from where we then stood, a huge and extraordinary mountain rose abruptly from the plain. The base of this great mountain appeared to consist of a grassy slope, but rising from this, I should say, from subsequent observation, at a height of about five hundred feet above the level of the plain, was a most tremendous and absolutely precipitous wall of bare rock, quite twelve or fifteen hundred feet in height. The shape of the mountain, which was undoubtedly of

volcanic origin, was round, and, of course, as only a segment of its circle was visible, it was difficult to estimate its exact size, which was enormous. I afterwards discovered that it could not cover less than fifty square miles of ground. Anything more grand and imposing than the sight presented by this great natural castle, starting in solitary grandeur from the level of the plain, I never saw, and I suppose never shall. Its very solitude added to its majesty, and its towering cliffs seemed to kiss the sky. Indeed, generally speaking, they were clothed in clouds that lay in fleecy masses upon their broad and level battlements.

I sat up in my hammock and gazed out across the plain at this thrilling and majestic sight, and I suppose that Billali noticed it, for he brought his litter alongside.

"Behold the house of '*She-who-must-be-obeyed!*'" he said. "Had ever a queen such a throne before?"

"It is wonderful, my father," I answered. "But how does one enter? Those cliffs look hard to climb."

"Thou shalt see, my Baboon. Look now at the plain below us. What thinkest thou that it is? Thou art a wise man. Come, tell me."

I looked, and saw what appeared to be the line of roadway running straight towards the base of the mountain, though it was covered with turf. There were high banks on each side of it, broken here and there, but fairly continuous on the whole, the meaning of which I did not understand. It seemed so very odd that anybody should embank a roadway.

"Well, my father," I answered, "I suppose that it is a road, otherwise I should have been inclined to say that it was the bed of a river, or rather," I added, observing the extraordinary directness of the cutting, "of a canal."

Billali—who, by the way, was none the worse for his immersion of the day before—nodded his head sagely as he replied,

"Thou art right, my son. It is a channel cut out by those who were before us in this place to carry away water. Of this I am sure: within the rocky circle of the great mountain whither we journey was once a great lake. But those who were before us, by wonderful arts of which I know nought, hewed a path for the water through the solid rock of the mountain, piercing even to the bed of the lake. But first they cut the channel that thou seest across the plain. Then when at last the water burst out, it rushed down the channel that had been made to receive it, and crossed this plain till it reached the low land behind the rise, and there, perchance, it made the swamp through which we have come. Then when the lake was drained dry, the people whereof I speak built a

mighty city, whereof nought but ruins and the name of Kôr yet remaineth, on its bed, and from age to age hewed the caves and passages that thou wilt see.”

“It may be,” I answered; “but if so, how is it that the lake does not fill up again with the rains?”

“Nay, my son, the people were a wise people, and they left a drain to keep it clear. Seest thou the river to the right?” and he pointed to a fair-sized stream that wound away across the plain, some four miles from us. “That is the drain, and it comes out through the mountains where this cutting goes in. At first, perhaps, the water ran down this canal, but afterwards the people turned it, and used the cutting for a road.”

“And is there then no other place where one may enter into the great mountain,” I asked, “except through the drain?”

“There is a place,” he answered, “where cattle and men on foot may cross with much labour, but it is secret. A year mightest thou search and should’st never find it. It is only used once a year, when the herds of cattle that have been fattening on the slopes of the mountain, and on this plain, are driven into the space within.”

“And does *She* live there always?” I asked, “or does she come at times without the mountain?”

“Nay, my son, where she is, there she is.”

By now we were well on to the great plain, and I was examining with delight the varied beauty of its semi-tropical flowers and trees, the latter of which grew singly, or at most in clumps of three or four, much of the timber being of large size, and belonging apparently to a variety of evergreen oak. There were also many palms, some of them more than one hundred feet high, and the largest and most beautiful tree ferns that I ever saw, about which hung clouds of jewelled honeysuckers and great-winged butterflies. Wandering about among the trees or crouching in the long and feathered grass were all varieties of game, from rhinoceroses down. I saw a rhinoceros, buffalo (a large herd), eland,<sup>1</sup> quagga,<sup>2</sup> and sable antelope, the most beautiful of all the bucks, not to mention many smaller varieties of game, and three ostriches which scudded away at our approach like white drift before a gale. So plentiful was the game that at last I could stand it no longer. I had a single barrel sporting Martini<sup>3</sup> with me in the litter, the “Express” being too

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<sup>1</sup> African antelope with spiral horns.

<sup>2</sup> A wild horse native to southern Africa, related to the Zebra, that has since become extinct.

<sup>3</sup> The Martini-Henry, a brand of breech-action rifle popular in the wars of the British Empire; Holly here uses a civilian “sporting” version.

cumbersome, and espying a beautiful fat eland rubbing himself under one of the oak-like trees, I jumped out of the litter, and proceeded to creep as near to him as I could. He let me come within eighty yards, and then turned his head, and stared at me, preparatory to running away. I lifted the rifle, and taking him about midway down the shoulder, for he was side on to me, fired. I never made a cleaner shot or a better kill in all my small experience, for the great buck sprang right up into the air and fell dead. The bearers, who had all halted to see the performance, gave a murmur of surprise, an unwonted compliment from these sullen people, who never appear to be surprised at anything, and a party of the guard at once ran off to cut the animal up. As for myself, though I was longing to have a look at him, I sauntered back to my litter as though I had been in the habit of killing eland all my life, feeling that I had gone up several degrees in the estimation of the Amahagger, who looked on the whole thing as a very high-class manifestation of witchcraft. As a matter of fact, however, I had never seen an eland in a wild state before. Billali received me with enthusiasm.

"It is wonderful, my son the Baboon," he cried; "wonderful! Thou art a very great man, though so ugly. Had I not seen, surely I would never have believed. And thou sayest that thou wilt teach me to slay in this fashion?"

"Certainly, my father," I said, airily; "it is nothing."

But all the same I firmly made up my mind that when "my father" Billali began to fire I would without fail lie down or take refuge behind a tree.

After this little incident nothing happened of any note till about an hour and a half before sundown, when we arrived beneath the shadow of the towering volcanic mass that I have already described. It is quite impossible for me to describe its grim grandeur as it appeared to me while my patient bearers toiled along the bed of the ancient watercourse towards the spot where the rich brown-clad cliff shot up from precipice to precipice till its crown lost itself in cloud. All I can say is that it almost awed me by the intensity of its lonesome and most solemn greatness. On we went up the bright and sunny slope, till at last the creeping shadows from above swallowed up its brightness, and presently we began to pass through a cutting hewn in the living rock. Deeper and deeper grew this marvellous work, which must, I should say, have employed thousands of men for many years. Indeed how it was ever executed at all without the aid of blasting-powder or dynamite I cannot to this day imagine. It is and must remain one of the mysteries of this wild land. I

can only suppose that these cuttings and the vast caves that had been hollowed out of the rocks it pierced were the State undertakings of the people of Kôr, who lived here in the dim lost ages of the world, and, as in the case of the Egyptian monuments, were executed by the forced labour of tens of thousands of captives, carried on through an indefinite number of centuries. But who were the people?

At last we reached the face of the precipice itself, and found ourselves looking into the mouth of a dark tunnel that forcibly reminded me of those undertaken by our nineteenth-century engineers in the construction of railway lines. Out of this tunnel flowed a considerable stream of water. Indeed, though I do not think that I have mentioned it, we had followed this stream, which ultimately developed into the river I have already described as winding away to the right from the spot where the cutting in the solid rock commenced. Half of this cutting formed a channel for the stream, and half, which was placed on a slightly higher level—eight feet, perhaps—was devoted to the purposes of a roadway. At the termination of the cutting, however, the stream turned off across the plain and followed a channel of its own. At the mouth of the cave the cavalcade was halted, and while the men employed themselves in lighting some earthenware lamps they had brought with them, Billali, descending from his litter, informed me politely but firmly that the orders of *She* were that we were now to be blindfolded, so that we should not learn the secret of the paths through the bowels of the mountains. To this I of course assented cheerfully enough, but Job, who was now very much better, notwithstanding the journey, did not like it at all, fancying, I believe, that it was but a preliminary step to being hot-potted. He was, however, a little consoled when I pointed out to him that there were no hot pots handy, and, so far as I knew, no fire to heat them in. As for poor Leo, after turning restlessly for hours, he had, to my deep thankfulness, at last dropped off into a sleep or stupor, I don't know which, so there was no need to blindfold him. The blindfolding was performed by binding tightly round the eyes a piece of the yellowish linen whereof those of the Amahagger who condescended to wear anything in particular made their dresses. This linen I afterwards discovered was taken from the tombs, and was not, as I had at first supposed, of native manufacture. The bandage was then knotted at the back of the head, and finally brought down again and the ends bound under the chin to prevent its slipping. Ustane, by the way, was also blindfolded. I do not know why, unless it was from fear that she should impart the secrets of the route to us. This operation performed we started on once

more, and soon, by the echoing sound of the footsteps of the bearers and the increased noise of the water caused by reverberation in a confined space, I knew that we were entering into the bowels of the great mountain. It was an eerie sensation, being borne along into the heart of a mountain we knew not whither, but I was getting used to eerie sensations by this time, and by now was pretty well prepared for anything. So I lay still, and listened to the tramp, tramp of the bearers and the rushing of the water, and tried to believe that I was enjoying myself. Presently the men set up the melancholy little chant that I had heard on the first night when we were captured in the whale-boat, and the effect produced by their voices was very curious, and quite indescribable on paper. After a while the air began to get exceedingly thick and heavy, so much so, indeed, that I felt as though I were going to choke, till at length I felt the litter take a sharp turn, then another and another, and the sound of the running water ceased. After this the air got fresher again, but the turns were continuous, and to me, blindfolded as I was, most bewildering. I tried to keep a map of them in my mind in case it might ever be necessary for us to try and escape by this route, but, needless to say, failed utterly. Another half-hour or so passed, and then suddenly I became aware that we were once more in the open air. I could see the light through my bandage and feel the freshness of it on my face. A few more minutes and the caravan halted, and I heard Billali order Ustane to remove her bandage and undo ours. Without waiting for her attentions I got the knot of mine loose, and looked out.

As I anticipated, we had passed right through the precipice, and were now on its further side, and immediately beneath its beetling face. The first thing I noticed was that it was not nearly so high here, not so high I should say by five hundred feet, which proved that the bed of the lake, or rather of the vast ancient crater in which we stood, was much higher than the surrounding plain. For the rest, we found ourselves in a huge rock-surrounded cup, not unlike that of the first place where we had sojourned, only ten times the size. Indeed, one could only just make out the frowning line of the opposite cliffs. A great portion of the plain thus enclosed by nature was cultivated, and fenced in with walls of stone placed there to keep the cattle and goats, of which there were large herds about, from breaking into the gardens. Here and there rose great grass mounds, and some miles away towards the centre I thought that I could see the outline of colossal ruins. I had no time to observe anything more at the moment, for we were instantly surrounded by crowds of Amahagger, similar in every particular to those with whom

we were already familiar, who, though they spoke little, pressed round us so closely as to obscure the view to a person lying in a hammock. Then all of a sudden a number of armed men arranged in companies, and marshalled by officers who held an ivory wand in their hands, came running swiftly towards us, having, so far as I could make out, emerged from the face of the precipice like ants from their burrows. These men as well as their officers were all robed in addition to the usual leopard skin, and, as I gathered, formed the body guard of *She* herself.

Their leader advanced to Billali, saluted him by placing his ivory wand transversely across his forehead, and then asked some question which I could not catch, and Billali having answered him the whole regiment turned and marched along the side of the cliff, our cavalcade of litters following in their track. After going thus for about half a mile we halted once more in front of the mouth of a tremendous cave, measuring about fifty feet in height by eighty wide, and here Billali descended finally, and requested Job and myself to do the same. Leo of course was far too ill to do anything of the sort. I did so, and we entered the great cave, into which the light of the setting sun penetrated for some distance, while beyond the reach of the light it was faintly illuminated with lamps which seemed to me to stretch away for an almost immeasurable distance, like the gas lights of an empty London street. Another thing I noticed was that the walls were covered with sculptures in bas-relief, of a sort, pictorially speaking, similar to those that I have described upon the vases, love-scenes principally, then hunting pictures, and pictures of executions, and the torture of criminals by the placing of a hot, presumably red-hot, pot upon the *head*, showing whence our hosts had derived this pleasant practice. There were very few battle-pieces, though many of duels, and men running and wrestling, and from this fact I am led to believe that this people were not much subject to attack by exterior foes, either on account of the isolation of their position, or because of their great strength. Between the pictures were columns of stone characters of a formation absolutely new to me; at any rate they were neither Greek nor Egyptian, nor Hebrew, nor Assyrian—that I can swear to. They looked more like Chinese than anything else. Near to the entrance of the cave both pictures and writings were worn away, but further in they were in many cases absolutely fresh and perfect as the day on which the sculptor had ceased work on them.

The regiment of guards did not come further than the entrance to the cave, where they formed up to let us pass through. On entering the

place itself we were, however, met by a man robed in white, who bowed humbly, but said nothing, which, as it afterwards appeared that he was a deaf mute, was not very wonderful.

Running at right angles to the main cave at a distance of some twenty feet from the entrance was a smaller cave or wide gallery, that was pierced into the rock both to the right and to the left of the main cave. At the mouth of this gallery to our left stood two guards, and from this circumstance I argued that it was the entrance to the apartments of *She* herself. The entrance to the right gallery was unguarded, and down this the mute indicated we were to proceed. A few yards down this gallery, which was lighted with lamps, we came to the entrance to a chamber with a curtain made of some grass material, not unlike a Zanzibar mat<sup>1</sup> in appearance, hung over the doorway. This the mute drew back with another profound obeisance, and led the way into a good-sized apartment, hewn, of course, out of the solid rock, but to my great delight lighted by means of a shaft pierced in the face of the precipice. In this room was a stone bedstead, pots full of water for washing, and beautifully tanned leopard skins to serve as blankets.

Here we left Leo, who was still sleeping heavily, and with him stayed Ustane. I noticed that the mute gave her a very sharp look, as much as to say "Who are you, and by whose orders do you come here?" Then he conducted us to another similar room which Job took, and then to two more that were respectively occupied by Billali and myself.

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<sup>1</sup> A rug or mat made of closely woven natural fibers.

## XII

## “SHE”

The first care of Job and myself, after seeing to Leo, was to wash ourselves and put on clean clothing, for what we were wearing had not been changed since the loss of the dhow. Fortunately, as I think that I have said, by far the greater part of our personal baggage had already been packed into the whale-boat, and was therefore saved—and brought hither by the bearers—although all the stores laid in by us for barter and presents to the natives were lost. Nearly all our clothing was made of a well shrunk and very strong grey flannel, and excellent I found it for travelling in these places, because though a Norfolk jacket, shirt, and pair of trousers of it only weighed about four pounds, a great consideration in a tropical country, where every extra ounce tells on the wearer, it was warm, and offered a good resistance to the rays of the sun, and best of all to chills, which are so apt to result from sudden changes of temperature.

Never shall I forget the comfort of the “wash and brush-up,” and of those clean flannels. The only thing that was wanting to complete my joy was a cake of soap, of which we had none.

Afterwards I discovered that the Amahagger, who do not reckon dirt among their many disagreeable qualities, use a kind of burnt earth for washing purposes, which, though unpleasant to the touch till one gets accustomed to it, forms a very fair substitute for soap.

By the time that I was dressed, and had combed and trimmed my black beard, the previous condition of which was certainly sufficiently unkempt to give weight to Billali's appellation for me, the Baboon, I began to feel most uncommonly hungry. Therefore I was by no means sorry when, without the slightest preparatory sound or warning, the curtain over the entrance to my cave was flung aside, and another mute, a young girl this time, announced to me by signs that I could not misunderstand—that is, by opening her mouth and pointing down it—that there was something ready to eat. Accordingly I followed her into the next chamber, which we had not yet entered, where I found Job, who had also, to his great embarrassment, been conducted thither by a fair mute. Job had never got over the advances the former lady had

made to him, and suspected every girl who came near to him of similar designs.

"These young parties have a way of looking at one, sir," he would say apologetically, "which I don't call respectable."

This fresh room was twice the size of the sleeping caves, and I saw at once that it had originally served as a refectory, and also probably as an embalming room for the Priests of the Dead; for I may as well say at once that these hollowed-out caves were nothing more nor less than vast catacombs, in which for tens of ages the mortal remains of the great extinct race whose monuments surrounded us had been first preserved, with an art and a completeness that has never since been equalled, and then hidden away for all time. On each side of this rock-chamber was a long solid stone table, about three feet wide by three feet six in height, hewn out of the living rock, of which it had formed part, and was still attached to, at the base. These tables were slightly hollowed out or curved inward, to give room for the knees of any one sitting on the stone ledge that had been cut for a bench along the side of the cave at a distance of about two feet from them. Each of them was so arranged that it ended right under a shaft pierced in the rock for the admission of light and air. On examining them carefully, however, I saw that there was a difference between them that had at first escaped my attention, viz., that one of the tables, that to the left as we entered the cave, had evidently been used, not to eat upon, but for the purpose of embalming bodies. That this was beyond all question the case was clear from five shallow depressions in the stone of the table, all shaped like a human form, with a separate place for the head to lie in, and a little bridge to support the neck, each depression being of a different size, so as to fit bodies varying in stature from a full-grown man's to a small child's, and with little holes bored at intervals to carry off fluid. And, indeed, if any further confirmation was required, one had but to look at the wall of the cave above to find it. For there, sculptured all round the apartment, and looking nearly as fresh as the day it was done, was the pictorial representation of the death, embalming, and burial of an old man with a long beard, probably an ancient king or grandee of this country.

The first picture represented his death. He was lying upon a couch which had four short curved posts at the corners coming to a knob at the end, in appearance something like a written note of music, and was evidently in the very act of expiring. Gathered round the couch were women and children weeping, the former with their hair hanging down their back. The next scene represented the embalming of the body,

which lay nude upon a table with depressions in it, similar to the one before us; probably, indeed, it was a picture of the same table. Three men were employed at the work—one superintending, one holding a funnel shaped exactly like a port wine strainer, of which the narrow end was fixed in an incision in the breast, no doubt in the great pectoral artery, while the third, who was represented as standing straddle-legged over the corpse, held a kind of large jug high in his hand, and poured from it some steaming fluid, which fell accurately into the funnel. The most curious part of this sculpture is that both the man with the funnel and the man who poured the fluid are represented as holding their noses, either I suppose because of the stench arising from the body, or more probably to keep out the aromatic fumes of the hot fluid which was being forced into the dead man's veins. Another curious thing which I am unable to explain was that all three men had a band of linen tied round the face, with holes in it for the eyes.

The third sculpture represented the burial of the deceased. There he was, stiff and cold, clothed in a linen robe and laid out on a stone slab such as I had slept upon at our first sojourning-place. At his head and feet burnt a lamp, and by his side were placed several of the beautiful painted vases that I have described, which were probably supposed to be full of provisions. The little chamber was crowded with mourners, and with musicians playing on a sort of lyre, while near the foot of the corpse stood a man with a sheet, with which he was preparing to cover it from view.

These sculptures, looked at merely as works of art, were so remarkable that I make no apology for describing them rather fully. They struck me also as being of surpassing interest as representing, probably with studious accuracy, the last rites of the dead as practised among an utterly lost people, and even then I thought how envious some antiquarian friends of my own at Cambridge would be if ever I got an opportunity of describing these wonderful remains to them. Probably they would say that I was exaggerating, notwithstanding that every page of this history must bear so much internal evidence of its truth that it would obviously have been quite impossible for me to have invented it.

To return. As soon as I had hastily examined these sculptures, which I think I omitted to mention were executed in relief, we sat down to a very excellent meal of boiled goat's-flesh, fresh milk, and cakes made of meal, the whole being served upon clean wooden platters.

When we had eaten we returned to see how Leo was getting on, Billali saying that he must now wait upon *She* and hear her commands.

On reaching Leo's room we found the poor boy in a very bad way. He had woken up from his torpor, and was altogether off his head, babbling about some boat-race on the Cam, and was inclined to be violent. Indeed, when we entered the room Ustane was holding him down. I spoke to him, and my voice seemed to soothe him; at any rate he grew much quieter, and was persuaded to swallow a dose of quinine.

I had been sitting with him for an hour, perhaps—at any rate I know that it was just getting so dark that I could only just make out his head lying like a gleam of gold upon the pillow we had extemporised of a bag covered with a blanket—when suddenly Billali arrived with an air of great importance, and informed me that *She* herself had deigned to express a wish to see me—an honour, he added, accorded to but very few. I think that he was a little horrified at my cool way of taking the honour, but the fact was that I did not feel overwhelmed with gratitude at the prospect of seeing some savage dusky queen, however absolute and mysterious she might be, more especially as my mind was full of dear Leo, for whose life I began to have great fears. However, I rose to follow him, and as I did so I caught sight of something bright lying on the floor, which I picked up. Perhaps the reader will remember that with the potsherd in the casket was a composition scarabæus marked with a round O, a large bird, and another curious hieroglyphic, the meaning of which signs is “Suten se Rā,” or “Royal Son of the Sun.” This scarab, which is a very small one, Leo had insisted upon having set in a massive gold ring, such as is generally used for signets, and it was this very ring that I now picked up. He had pulled it off in the paroxysm of his fever, at least I suppose so, and flung it down upon the rock-floor. Thinking that if I left it about it might get lost, I slipped it on to my own little finger, and then followed Billali, leaving Job and Ustane with Leo.

We passed down the passage, crossed the great aisle-like cave, and came to the corresponding passage on the other side, at the mouth of which the guards stood like two statues. As we came they bowed their heads in salutation, and then lifting their long spears placed them transversely across their foreheads, as the leaders of the troop that had met us had done with their ivory wands. We stepped between them, and found ourselves in an exactly similar passage to that which led to our own apartments, only this passage was comparatively speaking, brilliantly lighted. A few paces down it we were met by four mutes—two men and two women—who bowed low and then arranged themselves, the women in front of and the men behind us, and in this order we continued our procession past several doorways hung with curtains

similar to those leading to our own quarters, and which I afterwards found opened out into chambers occupied by the mutes who attended on *She*. A few paces more and we came to another doorway facing us, and not to our left like the others, which seemed to mark the termination of the passage. Here two more white, or rather yellow-robed guards were standing, and they, too, bowed, saluted, and let us pass through heavy curtains into a great antechamber, quite forty feet long by as many wide, in which some eight or ten women, most of them young and handsome, with yellowish hair, sat on cushions working with ivory needles at what had the appearance of being embroidery frames. These women were also deaf and dumb. At the further end of this great lamp-lit apartment was another doorway closed in with heavy Oriental-looking curtains, quite unlike those that hung before the doors of our own apartments, and here stood two particularly handsome girl mutes, their heads bowed upon their bosoms and their hands crossed in an attitude of the humblest submission. As they came they each stretched out an arm and drew back the curtains. Thereupon Billali did a curious thing. Down he went, that venerable-looking old gentleman—for Billali is a gentleman at the bottom—down on to his hands and knees, and in this undignified position, with his long white beard trailing on the ground, he began to creep into the apartment beyond. I followed him, standing on my feet in the usual fashion. Looking over his shoulder he perceived it.

“Down, my son; down, my Baboon; down on to thy hands and knees. We enter the presence of *She*, and, if thou art not humble, of a surety she will blast thee where thou standest.”

I halted, and felt scared. Indeed, my knees began to give way of their own mere motion; but reflection came to my aid. I was an Englishman, and why, I asked myself, should I creep into the presence of some savage woman as though I were a monkey in fact as well as in name? I would not and could not do it, that is, unless I was absolutely sure that my life depended upon it. If once I began to creep upon my knees I should always have to do so, and it would be a patent acknowledgment of inferiority. So, fortified by an insular prejudice against “kootooing,”<sup>1</sup> which has, like most of our so-called prejudices, a good deal of common sense to recommend it, I marched in boldly after Billali. I found myself in another apartment, considerably smaller than the anteroom, of which the walls were entirely hung with rich-looking curtains of the same

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<sup>1</sup> Variant of kowtowing, meaning showing extreme deference and respect.

make as those over the door, the work, as I subsequently discovered, of the mutes who sat in the antechamber and wove them in strips, which were afterwards sewn together. Also, here and there about the room, were settees of a beautiful black wood of the ebony tribe, inlaid with ivory, and all about the floor were other tapestries, or rather rugs. At the top end of this apartment was what appeared to be a recess, also draped with curtains, through which shone rays of light. There was nobody in the place except ourselves.

Painfully and slowly old Billali crept up the length of the cave, and with the most dignified stride that I could command I followed after him. But I felt that it was more or less of a failure. To begin with, it is not possible to look dignified when you are following in the wake of an old man writhing along on his stomach like a snake, and then, in order to go sufficiently slowly, either I had to keep my leg some seconds in the air at every step, or else to advance with a full stop between each stride, like Mary, Queen of Scots,<sup>1</sup> going to execution in a play. Billali was not good at crawling—I suppose his years stood in the way—and our progress up that apartment was a very long affair. I was immediately behind him, and several times I was sorely tempted to help him on with a good kick. It is so absurd to advance into the presence of savage royalty after the fashion of an Irishman driving a pig to market, for that is what we looked like, and the idea nearly made me burst out laughing then and there. I had to work my dangerous tendency to unseemly merriment off by blowing my nose, a proceeding which filled old Billali with horror, for he looked over his shoulder and made a ghastly face at me, and I heard him murmur, “Oh, my poor Baboon!”

At last we reached the curtains, and here Billali collapsed flat on to his stomach, with his hands stretched out before him as though he were dead, and I, not knowing what to do, began to stare about the place. But presently I distinctly felt that somebody was looking at me from behind the curtains. I could not see the person, but I could distinctly feel his or her gaze, and, what is more, it produced a very odd effect upon my nerves. I felt frightened, I don’t know why. The place was a strange one, it is true, and looked lonely, notwithstanding its rich hangings and the soft glow of the lamps,—indeed these accessories added to, rather than detracted from, its loneliness, just as a lighted street at night has always a more solitary appearance than a dark one. It was so silent in the place,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Stuart, daughter of James V of Scotland, beheaded on the orders of Elizabeth I in 1487.

and there lay Billali like one dead before the heavy curtains, through which the odour of perfume seemed to float up towards the gloom of the arched roof above. Minute grew into minute, and still there was no sign of life, nor did the curtain move; but I felt the gaze of the unknown being sinking through and through me, and filling me with a nameless terror, till the perspiration stood in beads upon my brow.

At last the curtain began to move. Who could be behind it?—some naked savage queen, a languishing Oriental beauty, or a nineteenth-century young lady, drinking afternoon tea? I had not the slightest idea, and should not have been astonished at seeing any of the three. I was getting beyond astonishment. The curtain agitated itself a little, then suddenly between its folds there appeared a most beautiful white hand (white as snow), and with long tapering fingers, ending in the pinkest nails. The hand grasped the curtain, and drew it aside, and as it did so I heard a voice, I think the softest and yet most silvery voice I ever heard. It reminded me of the murmur of a brook.

“Stranger,” said the voice in Arabic, but much purer and more classical Arabic than the Amahagger talk; “stranger, wherefore art thou so much afraid?”

Now I flattered myself that in spite of my inward terrors I had kept a very fair command of my countenance, and was, therefore, a little astonished at this question. Before I had made up my mind how to answer it, however, the curtain was drawn, and a tall figure stood before us. I say a figure, for not only her body, but also her face, was wrapped up in soft white, gauzy material in such a way as at first sight to remind me most forcibly of a corpse in its grave clothes. And yet I do not know why it should have given me that idea, seeing that the wrappings were so thin that one could distinctly see the gleam of the pink flesh beneath them. I suppose it was the way in which they were arranged, either accidentally, or more probably by design. Anyhow, I felt more frightened than ever at this ghost-like apparition, and my hair began to rise upon my head as the feeling crept over me that I was in the presence of something that was not canny. The swathed mummy-like form before me was that of a tall and lovely woman, instinct with beauty in every part, and also with a certain snakelike grace that I have never seen anything like before. When she moved a hand or foot her entire frame seemed to undulate, and the neck did not bend, it curved.

“Why art thou so frightened, stranger?” asked the sweet voice again—a voice that seemed to draw the heart out of me, like the strains of softest music. “Is there that about me that should affright a man? Then surely

are men changed from what they used to be.” And with a little coquettish movement, she turned herself and held up one arm, so as to show all her loveliness and the rich hair of raven blackness that streamed in soft ripples down her snowy robes, almost to her sandalled feet.

“It is thy beauty that makes me fear, oh queen,” I answered, humbly, scarcely knowing what to say, and I thought that as I did so I heard old Billali, who was still lying prostrate on the floor, mutter, “Good, my Baboon, good.”

“I see that men still know how to beguile us women with false words. Ah, stranger,” she answered, with a laugh that sounded like distant silver bells, “thou wast afraid because mine eyes were searching out thine heart, therefore wast thou afraid. But being but a woman, I forgive thee for the lie, for it was courteously said. And now tell me how came ye hither to this land of the dwellers among caves—a land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows of the dead? What came ye for to see? How is it that ye hold your lives so cheap as to place them in the hollow of the hand of *Hiya*, into the hand of ‘*She-who-must-be-obeyed*?’ Tell me also how come ye to know the tongue that I talk. It is an ancient tongue. Liveth it yet in the world? Thou seest I dwell among the caves and the dead, and nought know I of the affairs of men, nor have I cared to know. I have lived, oh stranger, with my memories, and my memories are in a grave that mine own hands hollowed, for truly hath it been said that the child of man maketh his own path evil,” and her beautiful voice quivered, and broke in a note as soft as any wood-bird’s. Suddenly her eye fell upon the sprawling frame of Billali, and she seemed to recollect herself.

“Ah! thou art there, old man. Tell me how it is that things have gone wrong in thine household. Forsooth, it seems that these my guests were set upon. Ay, and one was actually slain by the hot pot to be eaten of those brutes, thy children, and had not the others fought gallantly they, too, had been slain, and not even I could have called back the life that had been loosed from the body. What means it, old man? What hast thou to say that I should not give thee over to those who execute my vengeance?”

Her voice had risen in her anger, and it rang clear and cold against the rocky walls. Also I thought I could see her eyes flash through the gauze that hid them. I saw poor Billali, whom I had believed to be a very fearless person, positively quiver with terror at her words.

“Oh ‘*Hiya*!’ oh *She*!” he said, without lifting his white head from the floor. “Oh *She*, as thou art great be merciful, for I am now as ever thy servant to obey. It was no plan or fault of mine, oh *She*, it was those wicked ones who are called my children. Led on by a woman whom

thy guest the Pig had scorned, they would have followed the ancient custom of the land, and eaten the fat black stranger who came hither with these thy guests the Baboon and the Lion who is sick, thinking that no word had come from thee about the Black one. But when the Baboon and the Lion saw what they would do, they slew the woman. Then those evil ones, ay, those children of the Wicked One who lives in the Pit, they went mad with the lust of blood, and flew at the throats of the Lion and the Baboon and the Pig. But gallantly they fought. Oh *Hiya!* they fought like very men, and slew many, and held their own, and then I came and saved them, and the evildoers have I sent on hither to be judged of thy greatness, oh *She!* and here they are.”

“Ay, old man, I know it, and to-morrow will I sit in the great hall and do justice upon them, fear not. And for thee, I forgive thee, though hardly. See that thou dost keep thine household better. Go.”

Billali rose upon his knees with astonishing alacrity, bowed his head thrice, and, his white beard sweeping the ground, crawled down the apartment as he had crawled up it, till he finally vanished through the curtains, leaving me, not a little to my alarm, alone with this terrible but most fascinating person.

### XIII

#### AYESHA UNVEILS

“There,” she said, “he has gone, the white-bearded old fool. Ah, how little knowledge does a man acquire in his life. He gathers it up like water, but like water it runneth through his fingers, and yet if his hands be but wet as though with dew, behold a generation of fools call out, ‘See, he is a wise man.’ Is it not so? But how call they thee? ‘Baboon,’ he says,” and she laughed; “but that is the fashion of these savages who lack imagination, and fly to the beasts they resemble for a name. How do they call thee in thine own country, stranger?”

“They call me Holly, oh Queen,” I answered.

“‘Holly,’” *She* answered, speaking the word with difficulty, and yet with a most charming accent, “and what is ‘Holly?’”

“‘Holly’ is a prickly tree,” I said.

“So. Well, thou hast a prickly and yet a tree-like look. Strong art thou, and ugly, but, if my wisdom be not at fault, honest at the core, and a staff to lean on. Also one who thinks. But stay, Holly, stand not there,

enter with me and be seated by me. I would not see thee crawl before me like those slaves. I am weary of their worship and their terror; sometimes when they vex me I could blast them for very sport, and to see the rest turn white, even to the heart,” and *She* held the curtain aside with her ivory hand to let me pass in.

I entered, shuddering. This woman was very terrible. Within the curtains was a recess, about twelve feet by ten, and in the recess was a couch and a table whereon stood fruit and sparkling water. By it at its end was a vessel like a font cut in carved stone, also full of pure water. The place was softly lit with lamps formed out of the beautiful vessels of which I have spoken, and the air and curtains were full of a subtle perfume. Perfume too seemed to emanate from the glorious hair and white clinging vestments of *She* herself. I entered the little room, and there stood uncertain.

“Sit,” said *She*, pointing to the couch. “At present thou hast no cause to fear me. If thou hast cause, thou shalt not fear for long, for I shall slay thee. Therefore let thy heart be light.”

I sat down on the end of the couch near to the font-like basin of water, and *She* sank down softly on to the other end.

“Now, Holly,” she said, “how comest thou to speak Arabic? It is mine own dear tongue, for Arabian am I by my birth. Yet dost thou not speak it as we used to speak. Some of the words seemed changed, even as among these men. The Amahagger have debased and defiled its purity, so that I have to talk to them in what is to me another tongue.”

“I have learnt it,” I answered, “for many years. The language is spoken in Egypt and elsewhere.”

“So it is still spoken, and there is yet an Egypt? And what Pharaoh sits upon the throne? Still one of the spawn of the Persian Ochus,<sup>1</sup> or are the Archæmenians gone?”

“The Persians have been gone from Egypt for nigh two thousand years, and since then the Ptolemies, the Romans, and many others have flourished and held sway upon the Nile, and fallen when their time was ripe,” I said, aghast. “What canst thou know of the Persian Artaxerxes?”

She laughed, and made no answer, and again a cold chill went through me. “And Greece,” she said; “is there still a Greece? Ah, I loved the Greeks. Beautiful were they as the day, and clever, but fierce at heart and fickle, notwithstanding.”

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<sup>1</sup> Persian king Ataxerxes III, representing the Achaemenian dynasty, who conquered and ruled Egypt as a pharaoh from 343–338 BCE (the Thirty-First Dynasty).

“Yes,” I said, “there is a Greece; and, just now, it is once more a people.<sup>1</sup> Yet the Greeks of to-day are not what the Greeks of the old time were, and Greece herself is but a mockery of the Greece that was.”

“So. The Hebrews, are they yet at Jerusalem? And does the Temple that the wise king built stand, and if so, what God do they worship therein? Is their Messiah come of whom they talked so much, and does He rule the earth?”

“The Jews are broken and gone, and the fragments of their people strew the world, and Jerusalem is no more. As for the temple that Herod built——”

“Herod?” she said. “I know not Herod. But go on.”

“The Romans burnt it, and the Roman eagles flew across its ruins.”<sup>2</sup>

“So, so! They were a great people, those Romans, and went straight to their end—ay, they sped to it like Fate, or like their own eagles on their prey!—and left peace behind them.”

“Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant,” I suggested.<sup>3</sup>

“Ah, thou canst speak the Latin tongue, too!” she said, in surprise. “It hath a strange ring in my ears after all these days, and it seems to me that thy accent does not fall as the Romans put it. Who was it wrote that? I know not the saying, but it is a true one of that great people. It seems that I have met a learned man—one whose hands have held the water of the world’s knowledge. Knowest thou Greek also?”

“Yes, oh Queen, and something of Hebrew, but not to speak them. They are all dead languages now.”

She clapped her hands in childish glee. “Of a truth, ugly tree that thou art, thou growest the fruits of wisdom. Oh, Holly,” she said, “but of those Jews whom I hated, for they called me ‘heathen’ when I would have taught them my philosophy. Did their Messiah come, and doth He rule the world?”

“Their Messiah came,” I answered with reverence; “but He came poor and lowly, and they would have none of Him. They scourged Him, and crucified Him upon a tree, but yet His words and His works live on, for He was the Son of God, and now of a truth He rules half the world, but not with an Empire of the World.”

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<sup>1</sup> In 1829, Greece had declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>2</sup> Ayesha is remembering the Temple of King Solomon (1 Kings 6), but Holly refers to Herod’s later re-creation of it, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

<sup>3</sup> The Latin phrase (from Tacitus’ *Agricola*, written in 98 CE) means, “They make a solitude and call it peace.”

“Ah, the fierce-hearted wolves,” she said, “the followers of Sense and of many gods—greedy of gain and faction-torn. I can see their dark faces yet. So they crucified their Messiah? Well can I believe it. That He was a Son of the Living Spirit would be naught to them, if indeed He was so, and of that we will talk afterwards. They would care nought for any God if He came not with pomp and power. They, a chosen people, a vessel of Him they call Jehovah, ay, and a vessel of Baal, and a vessel of Astoreth,<sup>1</sup> and a vessel of the gods of the Egyptians—a high-stomached people greedy of aught that brought them wealth and power. So they crucified their Messiah because He came in lowly guise—and now are they scattered about the earth. Why, if I remember, so said one of their prophets that it should be. Well, let them go—they broke my heart, those Jews, and made me look with evil eyes across the world, ay, and drove me to this wilderness of a people that was before them. When I would have taught them wisdom in Jerusalem they stoned me, ay, at the Gate of the Temple those white-bearded hypocrites and rabbis hounded the people on to stone me! See, here is the mark of it to this day!” and with a sudden move she pulled up the gauzy wrapping on her rounded arm, and pointed to a little scar that showed red against its milky beauty.

I shrank back horrified.

“Pardon me, oh Queen!” I said, “but I am bewildered. Nearly two thousand years have rolled across the earth since the Jewish Messiah hung upon His cross at Golgotha. How then canst thou have taught thy philosophy to the Jews before He was? Thou art a woman, and no spirit. How can a woman live two thousand years? Why dost thou befool me, oh Queen?”

She leaned back upon the couch, and once more I felt the hidden eyes playing upon me and searching out my heart.

“Oh man!” she said at last, speaking very slowly and deliberately, “it seems that there are still things upon the earth of which thou knowest naught. Dost thou still believe that all things die, even as those very Jews believed? I tell thee that naught really dies. There is no such thing as Death, though there be a thing called Change. See,” and she pointed to some sculptures on the rocky wall. “Three times two thousand years have passed since the last of the great race that hewed those pictures fell before the breath of the pestilence that destroyed them, yet are they not

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<sup>1</sup> Phoenician god and goddess of life and fertility, whom the Jews would have regarded as false idols.

dead. E'en now they live; perchance their very spirits are drawn toward us now." She glanced round. "Of a surety it sometimes seems to me that my eyes can see them."

"Yes, but to the world they are dead."

"Ay, for a time; but even to the world are they born again and again. I, even I, Ayesha<sup>\*</sup>—for that is my name, stranger—I say to thee that I wait now for one I loved to be born again, and here I tarry till he finds me, knowing of a surety that hither he will come, and that here, and here only, shall he greet me. Why, dost thou suppose that I, who am all powerful, I, whose loveliness is greater than the loveliness of the Grecian Helen,<sup>1</sup> of whom they used to sing, and whose wisdom is greater, ay, ten times more great than the wisdom of Solomon the Wise<sup>2</sup>—I, who know the secrets of the earth and its riches, and can turn all things to my uses,—I, who have even for a while overcome Change, that ye call Death,—why, I say, oh stranger, dost thou think that I herd here with barbarians lower than the beasts?"

"I know not," I said humbly.

"Because I wait for him I love. My life has perchance been evil, I know not—for who can say what is evil and what good?—so I fear to die even if I could die, which I cannot, to go and seek him where he is; for between us there might be a wall I could not climb, at least, I fear so. Surely easy would it be to lose the way in those great spaces wherein the suns wander on for ever. But the day will come, maybe when ten thousand more years have passed, and are lost and melted into the vault of Time, even as the little clouds melt into the gloom of night, when he shall be born again, and then, following a law that is stronger than any human plan, he will find me *here*, and of a surety his heart will soften towards me though I sinned against him; ay, even though he knows me not again, yet will he love me, if only for my beauty's sake."

For a moment I was dumbfounded, and could not answer. The matter was too overpowering for my intellect to grasp.

"But even so, oh Queen," I said at last, "even if we men be born again and again, that is not so with thee, if thou speakest truly." Here she looked up sharply, and once more I caught the flash of those hidden eyes; "Thou," I went on hurriedly, "who hast never died?"

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\* Pronounced Assha.—L.H.H.

<sup>1</sup> Helen, beautiful wife of the Greek king Menelaus, was taken by Paris of Troy, thus causing the Trojan War.

<sup>2</sup> King Solomon of Biblical history, renowned for his wisdom.

“’Tis so,” she said; “and it is so because I have, half by chance and half by learning, solved one of the great secrets of the world. Tell me, stranger: life is—why therefore should not life be lengthened for a while? What are ten or twenty or fifty thousand years in the history of life? Why in ten thousand years scarce will the rain and storms lessen a mountain top by a span in thickness? In two thousand years these caves have not changed, nought has changed, but the beasts and man, who is as the beasts. There is nought that is wonderful about the matter, couldst thou but understand. Life is wonderful, ay, but that it should be a little lengthened is not wonderful. Nature hath her animating spirit as well as man, who is Nature’s child, and he who can find that spirit, and let it breathe upon him, shall live with her life. He shall not live eternally, for Nature is not eternal, and she herself must die, even as the nature of the moon hath died. She herself must die, I say, or rather change and sleep till it be time for her to live again. But when shall she die? Not yet, I ween, and while she lives, so shall he who hath all her secret live with her. All I have it not, yet have I some, more perchance than any who were before me. Now, to thee I doubt not this thing is a great mystery, therefore I will not overcome thee with it now. Another time I will tell thee more if the mood be on me, though perchance I shall never speak of it again. Dost thou wonder how I knew that ye were coming, and so saved your heads from the hot pot?”

“Ay, oh Queen,” I answered, feebly.

“Then gaze in the water,” and she pointed to the font-like vessel, and then, bending forward, held her hand over it.

I rose and gazed, and instantly the water darkened. Then it cleared, and I saw as distinctly as I ever saw anything in my life—I saw, I say, our boat upon that horrible canal. There was Leo lying at the bottom asleep in it, with a coat thrown over him to keep off the mosquitoes, in such a fashion as to hide his face, and myself, Job, and Mahomed towing on the bank.

I started back aghast, and cried out that it was magic, for I recognised the whole scene—it was one that had actually occurred.

“No, no; oh, Holly,” she answered, “it is no magic; that is a fiction of ignorance. There is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as a knowledge of the secrets of Nature. That is my glass; in it I see what passes if I care to summon up the pictures which is not often. In the water I can show thee what thou wilt of the past, if it be anything to do with this country and with what I have known, or anything that thou, the gazer, hast known. Think of a face if thou wilt, and it shall be reflected from thy mind upon the water. I know not all the secret yet—

I can read nothing in the future. But it is an old secret; I did not discover it. In Arabia and in Egypt the sorcerers knew it centuries ago. So one day I chanced to bethink me of that old canal—some twenty centuries since I sailed up it, and I was minded to look upon it again. And so I looked, and there I saw the boat and three men walking, and one, whose face I could not see, but a youth of a noble form, sleeping in the boat, and so I sent and saved ye. And now farewell. But stay, tell me of this youth—the Lion, as the old man calls him. I would look upon him, but he is sick, thou sayest—sick with the fever, and also wounded in the fray.”

“He is very sick,” I answered sadly; “canst thou do nothing for him, oh Queen! who knowest so much?”

“Of a surety I can. I can cure him; but why speakest thou so sadly? Dost thou love the youth? Is he perchance thy son?”

“He is my adopted son, oh Queen! Shall he be brought in before thee?”

“Nay. How long hath the fever taken him?”

“This is the third day.”

“Good; then let him lie another day. Then will he perchance throw it off by his own strength, and that is better than that I should cure him, for my medicine is of a sort to shake the life in its very citadel. If, however, by to-morrow night, at that hour when the fever first took him, he doth not begin to mend, then will I come to him and cure him. Stay, who nurses him?”

“Our white servant, him whom Billali names the Pig; also,” and here I spoke with some little hesitation, “a woman named Ustane, a very handsome woman of this country, who came and kissed him when first she saw him, and hath stayed by him ever since, as I understand is the fashion of thy people, oh Queen.”

“My people! speak not to me of my people,” she answered, hastily; “these slaves are no people of mine, they are but dogs to do my bidding till the day of my redemption comes; and, as for their customs, nought have I to do with them. Also, call me not Queen—I am sick of flattery and titles—call me Ayesha, the name hath a sweet sound in mine ears, it is an echo from the past. As for this Ustane, I know not. I wonder if it be she against whom I was warned, and whom I in turn did warn? Hath she? Stay, I will see;” and, bending forward, she passed her hand over the font of water and gazed intently into it. “See,” she said, quietly, “is that the woman?”

I looked into the water, and there, mirrored upon its placid surface, was the silhouette of Ustane’s stately face. She was bending forward, with

a look of infinite tenderness upon her features, watching something beneath her, and with her chestnut locks falling on to her right shoulder.

"It is her," I said, in a low voice, for once more I felt much disturbed at this most uncommon sight. "She watches Leo asleep."

"Leo!" said Ayesha, in an absent voice; "why, that is 'lion' in the Latin tongue. The old man hath named happily for once. It is very strange," she went on, "very. So like—but it is not possible!" With an impatient gesture she passed her hand over the water once more. It darkened, and the image vanished silently and mysteriously as it had risen, and once more the lamplight, and the lamplight only, shone on the placid surface of that limpid, living mirror.

"Hast thou aught to ask me before thou goest, oh Holly?" she said, after a few moments' reflection. "It is but a rude life that thou must live here, for these people are savages, and know not the ways of cultivated man. Not that I am troubled thereby, for behold my food," and she pointed to the fruit upon the little table. "Nought but fruit doth ever pass my lips—fruit and a little water. I have bidden my girls to wait upon thee. They are mutes thou knowest, deaf are they and dumb, and therefore the safest of servants, save to those who can read their faces and their signs. I bred them so—it hath taken many centuries and much trouble; but at last I have succeeded. Once I succeeded before, but the race was too ugly, so I did away with it; but now, as thou seest, they are otherwise. Once, too, I bred a race of giants, but after a while Nature would no more of it, and it died away. Hast thou aught to ask of me?"

"Ay, one thing, oh Ayesha," I said boldly; but feeling by no means as bold as I trust I looked. "I would gaze upon thy face."

She laughed out in her bell-like notes. "Bethink thee, Holly," she answered; "bethink thee. It seems that thou knowest the old myths of the gods of Greece. Was there not one Actæon<sup>1</sup> who perished miserably because he looked on too much beauty? If I show thee my face, perchance thou wouldst perish miserably also; perchance thou wouldst eat out thy heart in impotent desire; for know I am not for thee—I am for no man, save one, who hath been, but is not yet."

"As thou wilt, Ayesha," I said. "I fear not thy beauty. I have put my heart away from such vanities as woman's loveliness that passes like a flower."

"Nay, thou errest," she said; "that does *not* pass. My beauty endures

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek myth, a young huntsman who, in punishment for watching the goddess Artemis as she bathed, was transformed into a stag and torn apart by his own dogs. Artemis was a virginal deity of archery and the hunt.

even as I endure; still if thou wilt, oh rash man, have thy will; but blame not me if passion mount thy reason, as the Egyptian breakers used to mount a horse, and guide it whither thou wilt not. Never may the man to whom my beauty has been unveiled put it from his mind, and therefore even with these savages do I go veiled, lest they vex me, and I should slay them. Say, wilt thou see?"

"I will," I answered, my curiosity overpowering me.

She lifted her white and rounded arms—never had I seen such arms before—and slowly, very slowly, withdrew some fastening beneath her hair. Then all of a sudden the long, corpse-like wrappings fell from her, and my eyes travelled up her form now only robed in a garb of clinging white that did but serve to show its perfect and imperial shape, instinct with a life that was more than life, and with a certain serpent-like grace that was more than human. On her little feet were sandals, fastened with studs of gold. Then came ankles more perfect than ever sculptor dreamed of. About the waist her white kirtle was fastened by a double-headed snake of solid gold, above which her gracious form swelled up in lines as pure as they were lovely, till the kirtle ended on the snowy argent of her breast, whereon her arms were folded. I gazed above them at her face, and—I do not exaggerate—shrank back blinded and amazed. I have heard of the beauty of celestial beings, now I saw it; only this beauty, with all its awful loveliness and purity, was *evil*—at least, at the time, it struck me as evil. How am I to describe it? I cannot—simply, I cannot! The man does not live whose pen could convey a sense of what I saw. I might talk of the great changing eyes of deepest, softest black, of the tinted face, of the broad and noble brow, on which the hair grew low, and delicate, straight features. But, beautiful, surpassingly beautiful as they all were, her loveliness did not lie in them. It lay rather, if it can be said to have any fixed abiding place, in a visible majesty, in an imperial grace, in a godlike stamp of softened power, that shone upon that radiant countenance like a living halo. Never before had I guessed what beauty made sublime could be—and yet, the sublimity was a dark one—the glory was not all of heaven—though none the less was it glorious. Though the face before me was that of a young woman in perfect health, and the first flush of ripened beauty, yet it had stamped upon it a look of unutterable experience, and of deep acquaintance with grief and passion. Not even the lovely smile that crept about the dimples of her mouth could hide this shadow of sin and sorrow. It shone even in the light of the glorious eyes, it was present in the air of majesty, and it seemed to say: "Behold me, lovely as no woman was or is, undying and

half-divine; memory haunts me from age to age, and passion leads me by the hand—evil have I done, and with sorrow have I made acquaintance from age to age, and from age to age evil I shall do, and sorrow shall I know till my redemption comes.”

Drawn by some magnetic force which I could not resist, I let my eyes rest upon her shining orbs, and felt a current pass from them to me that bewildered and half-blinded me.

She laughed—ah, how musically! and nodded her little head at me with an air of sublimated coquetry that would have done credit to a *Venus Victrix*.<sup>1</sup>

“Rash man!” she said; “like Actæon, thou hast had thy will; be careful lest, like Actæon, thou, too, dost perish miserably, torn to pieces by the ban-hounds<sup>2</sup> of thine own passions. I, too, oh Holly, am a virgin goddess, not to be moved of any man, save one, and it is not thou. Say, hast thou seen enough!”

“I have looked on beauty, and I am blinded,” I said hoarsely, lifting my hand to cover up my eyes.

“So! what did I tell thee? Beauty is like the lightning; it is lovely, but it destroys—especially trees, oh Holly!”

Suddenly, she paused, and through my fingers I saw an awful change come over her countenance. Her great eyes suddenly fixed themselves into an expression in which horror seemed to struggle with some tremendous hope arising through the depths of her dark soul. The lovely face grew rigid, and the gracious, willowy form seemed to erect itself.

“Man,” she half whispered, half hissed, throwing back her head like a snake about to strike, “man, where didst thou get that scarab on thy hand? Speak, or by the Spirit of Life I will blast thee where thou standest!” and she took one light step towards me, and from her eyes there shone such an awful light—to me it seemed almost like a flame—that I fell, then and there, on the ground before her, babbling confusedly in my terror.

“There,” she said, with a sudden change of manner, and speaking in her former soft voice, “I did affright thee! Forgive me! But at times oh, Holly, the almost infinite mind grows impatient of the slowness of the very finite, and I am tempted to use my power out of sheer vexation—very nearly wast thou dead, but I remembered—. But the scarab—about the scarabæus!”

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<sup>1</sup> “*Venus Triumphant*” (Latin), the Roman goddess of love as depicted in her conquering aspect.

<sup>2</sup> Supernatural hunting hounds summoned as part of a curse.

"I picked it up," I gurgled feebly, as I got on to my feet again, and it is a solemn fact that my mind was so disturbed that at the moment I could remember nothing else about the ring except that I picked it up in Leo's cave.

"It is very strange," she said, with a sudden access of woman-like trembling and agitation that seemed out of place in this awful woman—"but once I knew a scarab like that. It—hung round the neck—of one I loved," and she gave a little sob, and I saw that after all she was only a woman, although she might be a very old one.

"There," she went on, "it must be one like it. Also in old Egypt many there were who bore the name of the Royal son of Rā. The scarab that I knew was not set thus in the bezil of a ring. Go now, Holly, go, and, if thou canst, try to forget that thou hast looked upon Ayesha's beauty," and, turning from me, she flung herself on her couch, and buried her face in the cushions.

As for me, I stumbled from her presence, and I do not remember how I reached my own cave.

## PART 8 (20 NOVEMBER 1886)

### XIV

#### A SOUL IN HELL

It was nearly ten o'clock at night when I cast myself down upon my bed, and began to gather my scattered wits, and reflect upon what I had seen and heard. But the more I reflected the less I could make of it. Was I mad, or drunk, or dreaming, or was I merely the victim of a gigantic and most elaborate hoax? How was it possible that I, a rational man, not unacquainted with the leading scientific facts of our history, and hitherto an absolute and utter disbeliever in all the hocus-pocus that in Europe goes by the name of the supernatural, could believe that I had within the last few minutes been engaged in conversation with a woman two thousand

and odd years old? The thing was contrary to the experience of human nature, and absolutely and utterly impossible. It must be a hoax, and yet, if it were a hoax, what was I to make of it? What, too, was to be said of the figures on the water, of the woman's extraordinary acquaintance with the remote past, and her ignorance, or apparent ignorance, of any subsequent history? What, too, of her wonderful and awful loveliness? That, at any rate, was a patent fact, and beyond the experience of the world. No merely mortal woman could shine with such a supernatural radiance. About that she had, at any rate, been in the right—it was not safe for any man to look upon such beauty. I was a hardened vessel in such matters, having, with the exception of one painful experience of my green and tender youth, put the softer sex (I sometimes think that this is a misnomer) almost entirely out of my thoughts. But now, to my intense horror, I *knew* that I could never put away the vision of those glorious eyes; and alas, the very *diablerie*<sup>1</sup> of the woman, whilst it horrified and repelled, attracted even in a greater degree. A person with the experience of two thousand years at her back, with the command of such tremendous powers and the knowledge of a mystery that could hold off death, was certainly worth falling in love with, if ever woman was. But, alas, it was not a question of whether or no she was worth it, for so far as I could judge, not being versed in such matters, I, a fellow of my college, noted for what my friends are pleased to call my misogyny, and a respectable man now well on in middle life, had fallen absolutely and hopelessly in love with this white sorceress. Nonsense; it must be nonsense! She had warned me fairly, and I had refused to take the warning. Curses on the fatal curiosity that is ever prompting man to draw the veil from woman, and curses on the natural impulse that begets it! It is the cause of half, ay, and more than half of our misfortunes. Why cannot man be content to live alone and be happy, and let the women live alone and be happy too? But perhaps they would not be happy, and I am not sure that we should either. Here was a nice state of affairs. I, at my age, to fall a victim to this modern Circe!<sup>2</sup> But then she was not modern, at least she said not. She was almost as ancient as the original Circe.

I tore my hair, and jumped up off my couch, feeling that if I did not do something I should also go off my head. What did she mean about the scarabæus too? It was Leo's scarabæus, and had come out of the old

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<sup>1</sup> Devilishness, diabolism (French).

<sup>2</sup> In Homer's *Odyssey*, a beautiful sorceress who seduces Odysseus and turns his crew into swine.

coffer that Vincey had left in my rooms nearly one-and-twenty years before. Could it be after all that the whole story was true, and the writing on the sherd was *not* a forgery, or the invention of some crack-brained, long-forgotten individual? And if so, could it be that *Leo* was the man that *She* was waiting for—the dead man who was to be born again! Impossible again! The whole thing was gibberish; who ever heard of a man being born again?

But if it were possible that a woman could exist for two thousand years, this might be possible also—anything might be possible. I myself might, for aught I knew, be a reincarnation of some other forgotten self, or perhaps the last of a long line of ancestral selves. Well, *vive la guerre*,<sup>1</sup> why not? Only, unfortunately, I had no recollection of these previous conditions. The idea was so absurd to me that I burst out laughing, and, addressing the sculptured picture of a grim-looking warrior on the cave wall, called out to him aloud, “Who knows, old fellow?—perhaps I was your contemporary. By Jove! perhaps I was you and you are I,” and then I laughed again at my own folly, and the sound of it rang dismally along the vaulted roof, as though the ghost of the warrior had uttered the ghost of a laugh.

Next I bethought me that I had not been to see how *Leo* was, so, taking up one of the lamps that burnt away at my bedside, I slipped off my shoes and crept down the passage to the entrance of his cave. The draught of night air was lifting his curtain to and fro gently, as though spirit hands were drawing and re-drawing it. I slid into the vault-like apartment, and looked. There was a light by it, and *Leo* was lying on the couch, tossing restlessly in his fever, but asleep. By his side, half lying on the floor, half leaning against the stone couch, was *Ustane*. She held his hand in one of hers, but she, too, was dozing, and the two made a pretty or rather a pathetic picture. Poor *Leo*! his cheek was burning red, there were dark shadows beneath his eyes, and his breath came heavily. He was very, very ill; and again the horrible fear seized me that he might die, and I be left alone in the world. And yet if he lived he would perhaps be my rival with *Ayesha*; even if he were not the man, what chance should I, middle-aged and hideous, have against his bright youth and beauty? Well, thank heaven! my sense of right was not dead. *She* had not killed that yet; and, as I stood there, I prayed to the Almighty in my heart that my boy, my more than son, might live, ay, even if he proved to be the man.

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<sup>1</sup> “Long live war” (French), here used to mean something like “what the hell.”

Then I went back as softly as I had come, but still I could not sleep, the sight and thought of dear Leo lying there so ill had but added fuel to the fire of my unrest. My wearied body and overstrained mind had awakened all my imagination into preternatural activity. Ideas, visions, almost inspirations, floated before it with startling vividness. Most of them were grotesque enough, some were ghastly, some recalled thoughts and sensations that had for years been buried in the *débris* of my past life. But, behind and above them all, hovered the shape of that awful woman, and through them gleamed the memory of her entrancing loveliness. Up and down the cave I strode—up and down.

Suddenly I observed what I had not noticed before, that there was a narrow aperture in the rocky wall. I took up the lamp and examined it; the aperture led to a passage. Now, I was still sufficiently sensible to remember that it is not pleasant, in such a situation as ours was, to have passages running into one's bed-chamber from no one knows where. If there are passages, people can come up them; they can come up when one is asleep. Partly to see where it went to, and partly from a restless desire to be doing something, I followed the passage. It led to a stone stair, which I descended; the stair ended in another passage, or rather tunnel, also hewn out of the bed-rock, and running, so far as I could judge, exactly beneath the passage that led to the entrance of our rooms, and across the great central cave. I went on down it; it was as silent as the grave, but still, drawn by some sensation or attraction that I cannot describe, I followed on, my stockinged feet falling without noise on the smooth and rocky floor. When I had traversed some fifty yards of space, I came to another passage running at right angles, and here an awful thing happened to me: the sharp draught caught my lamp and extinguished it, leaving me in utter darkness in the bowels of that mysterious place. I took a couple of strides forward so as to clear the bisecting tunnel, being terribly afraid lest I should turn up it in the dark if once I got confused as to the direction, and then paused to think. What was I to do? I had no match; it seemed awful to attempt that long journey back through the utter gloom, and yet I could not stand there all night, and, if I did, probably it would not help me much, for in the bowels of the rock it would be as dark at midday as at midnight. I looked back over my shoulder—not a sight or a sound. I peered forward down the darkness: surely, far away I saw something like the faint glow of fire. Perhaps it was a cave where I could get a light—at any rate, it was worth investigating. Slowly and painfully, I crept along the tunnel, keeping my hand against its wall, and feeling at every step with my foot before I put

it down, fearing lest I should fall into some pit. Thirty paces—there was a light, a flickering light shining through curtains! Fifty paces—it was close at hand! Sixty—oh, great heaven!

I was at the curtains, and they did not hang close, so I could see clearly into the little cavern beyond them. It had all the appearance of being a tomb, and was lit up by a fire that burnt in its centre with a whitish flame and without smoke. Indeed, there to the left, was a stone shelf with a little ledge to it three inches or so high, and on the shelf lay what I took to be a corpse; at any rate, it looked like one, with something white thrown over it. To the right was a similar shelf, on which lay some broi-dered coverings. Over the fire bent the figure of a woman; she was side-ways to me and facing the corpse, wrapped in a dark mantle that hid her like a nun's cloak. She seemed to be staring at the flickering flame. Suddenly, as I was trying to make up my mind what to do, with a convulsive movement that somehow gave an impression of despairing energy, the woman rose to her feet and cast the dark cloak from her.

It was *She* herself!

She was clothed, as I had seen her when she unveiled, in the kirtle of clinging white, cut low upon her bosom, and bound in at the waist with the barbaric double-headed snake, and, as before, her rippling black hair fell in heavy masses down her back. But her face was what caught my eye, and held me as in a vice, not this time by the force of her beauty, but by the power of fascinated terror. The beauty was still there, indeed, but the agony, the blind passion, and the awful vindictiveness displayed upon those quivering features, and in the tortured look of the upturned eyes, were such as surpasses my powers of description.

For a moment she stood still, her hands raised high above her head, and as she did so the white robe slipped from her down to her golden girdle, baring the blinding loveliness of her form. She stood there, her fingers clenched, and the awful look of malevolence gathered and deepened on her face.

Suddenly, I thought of what would happen if she discovered me, and the reflection made me turn sick and faint. But, even if I had known that I must die if I stopped, I do not believe that I could have moved, for I was absolutely fascinated. But still I knew my danger. Supposing she should hear me, or see me through the curtain, supposing I even sneezed, or that her magic told her that she was being watched—swift indeed would be my doom. I should certainly be blasted.

Down came the clenched hands to her sides, then up again above her head, and, as I am a living and honourable man, the flame of the

fire leapt up after them, almost to the roof, throwing a fierce and vivid glare upon *She* herself, upon the white figure beneath the covering, and every scroll and detail on the rockwork.

Down came the ivory arms again, and as they did so she spoke, or rather hissed, in Arabic, in a note that curdled my blood, and for a second stopped my heart.

“Curse her, may she be everlastingly accursed.”

The arms fell and the flames sank. Up they went again, and the broad tongue of fire shot up after them; then again they fell.

“Curse her memory—accursed be the memory of the Egyptian.”

Up again, and again down.

“Curse her, the fair daughter of the Nile, because of her beauty.”

“Curse her, because her magic has prevailed against me.”

“Curse her, because she kept my beloved from me.”

And again the flame dwindled and shrank.

She put her hands before her eyes, and, stopping the hissing tone, cried aloud:—

“What is the use of cursing?—she prevailed, and she is gone.”

Then she commenced again with an even more frightful energy.

“Curse her where she is. Let my curses reach her where she is and disturb her rest.”

“Curse her through the starry spaces. Let her shadow be accursed.”

“Let my power find her even there.”

“Let her hear me even there. Let her hide herself in the blackness.”

“Let her go down into the pit of despair, because I shall one day find her.”

Again the flame fell, and again she covered her eyes with her hands.

“It is no use—no use,” she wailed; “who can reach those who sleep? Not even I can reach them.”

Then once more she began her unholy rites.

“Curse her when she shall be born again. Let her be born accursed.”  
“Let her be utterly accursed from the hour of her birth until sleep finds her.”  
“Yes, then, let her be accursed; for then shall I overtake her with my vengeance, and utterly destroy her.”

And so on. The flame rose and fell, reflecting itself in her agonised eyes, the hissing sound of her terrible maledictions, and no words of mine, especially on paper, can convey how terrible they were, ran round the walls and died away in little echoes, and the fierce light and deep gloom alternated themselves on the white and dreadful form stretched upon that bier of stone.

But at length she seemed to wear herself out, and ceased. She sat herself down upon the rocky floor, and shook the dense cloud of her beautiful hair over her face and breast, and commenced to sob terribly in the torture of a heartrending despair.

“Two thousand years,” she moaned; “two thousand years have I waited and endured; but though century doth still creep on to century, the sting of memory hath not lessened, the light of hope doth not shine more bright. Oh! to have lived two thousand years, with all my passion eating at my heart, and with my sin ever before me. Oh, that for me life cannot bring forgetfulness! Oh, for the weary years that have been and are yet to come, and still to come, endless and without end!

“My love! my love! my love! Why did that stranger bring thee back to me after this sort? For five hundred years I have not suffered thus. Oh, if I sinned against thee have I not wiped away the sin! When wilt thou come back to me who have all, and yet without thee have naught! What is there that I can do? What? What? What? And perchance she—perchance that Egyptian doth abide with thee where thou art, and doth mock my memory. Oh, why could I not die with thee, I who slew thee? Alas, that I cannot die! Alas! Alas!” and she flung herself prone upon the ground, and sobbed and wept till I thought her heart must burst.

Suddenly she ceased, raised herself to her feet, and tossing back her long locks impatiently, swept across to where the figure lay upon the stone.

“Oh Kallikrates,” she cried, and I trembled at the name, “I must look upon thy face again, though it be agony. It is a generation since I looked upon thee whom I slew—slew with mine own hand,” and with trembling fingers she seized the corner of the wrapping that lay over the form upon the stone bier, and then paused. When she spoke again, it was in a kind of awed whisper, as though her idea were terrible even to herself.

“Shall I raise thee,” she said, apparently addressing the corpse, “so that thou standest there before me, as of old? I *can* do it,” and she held out her hands over the sheeted dead, while her whole frame became rigid and terrible to see, and her eyes grew fixed and dull. I shrank in horror behind the curtain, my hair stood up upon my head, and, whether it was my imagination or a fact I am unable to say, but I thought that the quiet form beneath the covering began to quiver, and the winding sheet to lift as though it lay on the breast of one who slept. Suddenly she withdrew her hands.

“What is the use?” she said gloomily. “Of what use is it to recall the semblance of life when I cannot recall the spirit? Even if thou stoodest before me thou would’st not know me, and could’st but do what I bid thee. The life in thee would be *my* life, and not *thy* life, Kallikrates.”

For a moment she stood there, and then cast herself down on her knees beside the form, and began to press her lips against the sheet, and weep. There was something so horrible about the sight of this fearsome woman letting loose her passion on the dead—so much more horrible even than anything that had gone before, that I could no longer bear to look at it, and, turning, commenced to creep, shaking as I was in every limb, slowly along the pitch-dark passage, feeling in my heart that I had a vision of a Soul in Hell.

On I stumbled, I scarcely know how. Twice I fell, once I turned up the bisecting passage, but fortunately found out my mistake in time. Twenty minutes or more I crept along, till at last it occurred to me that I must have passed the little stair by which I had descended. So utterly exhausted, and nearly frightened to death, I sank down at length there on the stone flooring, and sank into oblivion.

When I came to I noticed a faint ray of light in the passage just behind me. I crept to it, and found it was the little stair down which the weak dawn was stealing. Passing up it I gained my chamber in safety, and flinging myself on the couch, was soon lost in slumber, or rather stupor.

## XV

### AYESHA GIVES JUDGMENT

The next thing that I remember was opening my eyes and perceiving the form of Job, who had now practically recovered from his attack of fever. He was standing in the ray of light that pierced into the cave from

the outer air, shaking out my clothes as a makeshift for brushing them, which he could not do because there was no brush, and then folding them up neatly and laying them on the foot of the stone couch. This done, he got my travelling dressing-case out of the Gladstone bag, and opened it ready for my use. First, he stood it on the foot of the couch also, then, being afraid, I suppose, that I should kick it off, he placed it on a leopard skin on the floor, and stood back a step or two to observe the effect. It was not satisfactory, so he shut up the bag, turned it on end, and, having rested it against the foot of the couch, placed the dressing-case on it. Next he looked at the pots full of water, which constituted our washing apparatus. "Ah!" I heard him murmur, "no hot water in this beastly place. I suppose these poor creatures only use it to boil each other in," and he sighed deeply.

"What is the matter, Job?" I said.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, touching his hair. "I thought you were asleep, sir; and I am sure you look as though you want it. One might think from the look of you that you had been having a night of it."

I only groaned by way of answer. I had, indeed, been having a night of it, such as I hope never to have again.

"How is Mr. Leo, Job?"

"Much the same, sir. If he don't soon mend, he'll end, sir; and that's all about it; though I must say that that there savage, Ustane, do do her best for him almost like a baptised Christian. She is always hanging round and looking after him, and if I ventures to interfere, it's awful to see her; her hair seems to stand on end, and she curses and swears away in her heathen talk—at least I fancy she must be cursing, from the look of her."

"And what do you do then?"

"I make her a polite bow, and I say, 'Young woman, your position is one that I don't quite understand, and can't recognise. Let me tell you that I has a duty to perform to my master as is incapacitated by illness, and that I am going to perform it until I am incapacitated too,' but she don't take no heed, not she—only curses and swears away worse than ever. Last night she put her hand under that sort of nightshirt she wears and whips out a knife with a kind of a curl in the blade, so I whips out my revolver, and we walks round and round each other till at last she bursts out laughing. It isn't nice treatment for a Christian man to have to put up with from a savage, however handsome she may be, but it is what people must expect as is *fools* enough" (Job laid great emphasis on the "fools") "to come to such a place to look for things no man is meant to find. It's a judgment on us, sir—that's my opinion; and I, for

one, is of opinion that the judgment isn't half done yet, and when it is done, we shall be done too, and just stop in these beastly caves with the ghosts and the corpses for once and all. And now, sir, I must be seeing about Mr. Leo's broth, if that wild cat will let me; and, perhaps, you would like to get up, sir, because it's past nine o'clock."

Job's remarks were not of a cheering order to a man who had passed such a night as I had; and, what is more, they had the weight of truth. Taking one thing with another, it appeared to me to be an utter impossibility that we should escape from the place we were. Supposing that Leo recovered, and supposing that *She* would let us go, which was exceedingly doubtful, and that she did not "blast" us in some moment of vexation, and that we were not hot-potted by the Amahagger, it would be quite impossible for us to find our way across the network of marshes which, stretching for scores and scores of miles, formed a stronger and more impassable fortification round the various Amahagger households than any that could be built or designed by man. No, there was but one thing to do—face it out; and, speaking for my own part, I was so intensely interested in the whole weird story that, so far as I was concerned, notwithstanding the shattered state of my nerves, I asked nothing better, even if my life paid forfeit to my curiosity. What man for whom physiology has charms could forbear to study such a character as that of this Ayesha when the opportunity of doing so presented itself? The very terror of the pursuit added to its fascination, and besides, as I was forced to own to myself even now in the sober light of day, she herself had attractions that I could not forget. Not even the dreadful sight which I had witnessed during the night could drive that folly from my mind; and alas! that I should have to admit it, it has not been driven thence to this hour.

After I had dressed myself I passed into the eating, or rather embalming chamber, and had some food, which was as before brought to me by the girl mutes. When I had finished I went and saw poor Leo, who was quite off his head, and did not even know me. I asked Ustane how she thought he was; but she only shook her head and began to cry a little. Evidently her hopes were small; and I then and there made up my mind that, if it were in any way possible, I would get *She* to come and see him. Surely she could cure him if she chose—at any rate she said she could. While I was in the room Billali entered, and also shook his head.

"He will die at night," he said.

"God forbid, my father," I answered, and turned away with a heavy heart.

"*She-who-must-be-obeyed* commands thy presence, my Baboon," said the old man as soon as we got to the curtain; "but, oh my dear son, be

more careful. Yesterday I made sure in my heart that *She* would blast thee when thou didst not crawl upon thy stomach before her. *She* is sitting in the great hall to do justice upon those who would have smitten thee and the Lion. Come on, my son; come swiftly.”

I turned, and followed him down the passage, and when we reached the great central cave, saw that many Amahagger, some robed, and some merely clad in the sweet simplicity of a leopard skin, were hurrying up it. We mingled with the throng, and walked up the enormous, and, indeed, almost interminable, cave. All the way up it the walls were elaborately sculptured, and every twenty paces or so passages opened out of it at right angles, leading, Billali told me, to tombs, hollowed in the rock by “the people who were before.” Nobody visited those tombs now, he said; and I must say that my heart rejoiced when I thought of the opportunities of antiquarian research which opened out before me.

At last we came to the head of the cave, where there was a rock daïs almost exactly similar to the one on which we had been so furiously attacked, a fact that proved to me that these daïs must have been used as altars, probably for the celebration of religious ceremonies, and more especially of rites connected with the interment of the dead. On either side of this daïs were passages leading, Billali informed me, to other caves full of dead bodies. “Indeed,” he added, “the whole mountain is full of dead, and nearly all of them are perfect.”

In front of the daïs were gathered a great number of people of both sexes, who stood staring about in their peculiar gloomy fashion, which would have reduced Mark Tapley<sup>1</sup> himself to misery in about five minutes. On the daïs was a rude chair of black wood inlaid with ivory, having a seat made of grass fibre, and a footstool formed of a wooden slab attached to the chair.

Suddenly there was a cry of “Hiya! Hiya!” (“*She! She!*”) and thereupon the entire crowd instantly precipitated itself upon the ground, and lay there as though it were individually and collectively stricken dead, leaving me standing up like some solitary survivor of a massacre. As they did so a long string of guards began to defile from a passage to the left, and ranged themselves on either side of the daïs. Then followed about a score of male mutes, then as many women mutes bearing lamps, and then a tall white figure, swathed from head to foot, in whom I recognised *She* herself. She mounted the daïs and sat down upon the chair, and spoke to

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<sup>1</sup> A character in Charles Dickens’ novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) who is always extremely cheerful.

me in *Greek*, I suppose because she did not wish those present to understand what she said.

"Come hither, Holly," she said, "and sit at my feet, and see me do justice on those who would have slain thee. Forgive me if my Greek doth halt like a lame man; it is so long since I have heard the sound of it that my tongue is stiff, and will not bend to the words."

I bowed, and, mounting the dais, sat down at her feet.

"How didst thou sleep, my Holly?" she asked.

"I slept not well, oh Ayesha!" I answered with perfect truth, and with an inward fear that perhaps she knew how I had passed the heart of the night.

"So," she said, with a little laugh, "I, too, have not slept well. Last night I had dreams, and methinks that thou did'st call them to me, oh Holly."

"Of what didst thou dream, Ayesha?" I asked, indifferently.

"I dreamed," she answered, quickly, "of one I hate and one I love," and then, as though to turn the conversation, she addressed the captain of her guard in Arabic. "Let the men be brought before me."

The captain bowed low, for the guard and her attendants did not prostrate themselves, but had remained standing, and departed with his underlings down a passage to the right.

Then came a silence. *She* leant her swathed head upon her hand and appeared to be lost in thought, while the multitude before her continued to grovel upon their stomachs, only screwing their heads round a little so as to get a view of us with one eye. It seemed that their Queen so rarely appeared in public that they were willing to undergo this inconvenience, and even graver risks, to have the opportunity of looking on her, or rather, on her garments, for no living man there except myself had ever seen her face. At last we caught sight of the waving of lights, and heard the tramp of men coming along the passage, and in filed the guard, and with them the survivors of our would-be murderers to the number of a score or more, on whose countenances the natural expression of sullenness struggled with the terror that evidently filled their savage hearts. They were ranged in front of the dais, and would have cast themselves down on the floor of the cave like the spectators, but *She* stopped them.

"Nay," she said in her softest voice, "stand; I pray ye stand. Perchance the time will soon be when ye shall grow weary of being stretched out," and she laughed melodiously.

I saw a cringe of terror run along the rank of the doomed wretches, and, wicked villains as they were, I felt sorry for them. Some minutes, perhaps two or three, passed before anything fresh occurred, during which

*She* appeared from the movement of her head—for, of course, we could not see her eyes—to be slowly and carefully examining each delinquent. At last she spoke, addressing herself to me in a quiet and deliberate tone.

“Dost thou, oh my guest, who art known in thy country by the name of the Prickly Tree, recognise these men?”

“Ay, oh Queen, nearly all of them,” I said, and I saw them glower at me as I said it.

“Then tell me, and this company, the tale whereof I have heard.”

Thus abjured, I, in as few words as I could, related the history of the cannibal feast, and of the torture of our poor servant.

The narrative was received in perfect silence, both by the accused and by the audience, and also by *She* herself. When I had done, Ayesha called upon Billali by name, and, lifting his head from the ground, but without rising, the old man confirmed my story. No further evidence was taken.

“Ye have heard,” said *She* at length, in a cold, clear voice, very different from her usual tones—indeed, it was one of the most remarkable things about this extraordinary creature, that her voice had the power of suiting itself in a wonderful manner to the mood of the moment. “What have ye to say, ye rebellious children, why vengeance should not be done upon ye?”

For some time there was no answer, but, at last, one of the men, a fine, broad-chested fellow, well on in middle-life, with deep-graven features and an eye like a hawk’s, spoke, and said that the orders that they had received were not to harm the white men; nothing was said of their black servant, so, egged on thereto by a woman who was now dead, they proceeded to hot-pot him after the ancient and honourable custom of their country, with a view of eating him in due course. As for their attack upon ourselves, it was made in an access of sudden fury, and they deeply regretted it. He ended by humbly praying that mercy might be extended to them; or, at least, that they might be banished into the swamps, to live or die as it might chance; but I saw on his face that he had but little hope of mercy.

Then came a pause, and the most intense silence reigned over the whole scene, which, illuminated as it was by the flickering lamps that struck out broad patterns of light and shadow upon the rocky walls, was as strange a one as I ever saw, even in that weird land. Upon the ground before the dais were stretched scores of forms of the spectators, till at last the long lines of them were lost in the gloomy background. Before the outstretched audience were the knots of evildoers, trying to cover up their natural terrors with a brave appearance of unconcern. On the right and

left were the guards, robed in white and armed with great spears and daggers, and the men and women mutes watching with hard, curious eyes. Then, seated in her barbaric chair above them all, with myself at her feet, was the veiled white woman, whose loveliness and awesome power seemed to shine about her like a halo, or rather like the glow from some unseen light. Never have I seen her veiled shape look more terrible than it did in that space, while she gathered herself up as it were for vengeance.

At last it came.

“Dogs and serpents,” *She* began in a low voice that gradually gathered power as she went on, till the place rang with it. “Eaters of human flesh, two things have ye done. First ye have attacked these strangers, being white men, and have slain their servant, and for that alone death is your reward. But that is not all. Ye have dared to disobey me. Did I not send my word unto ye by Billali, my servant, and the father of your household? Did I not bid ye to hospitably entertain these strangers, whom now ye have striven to slay, and whom, had not they been brave and strong beyond the strength of men, ye would cruelly have murdered? Hath it not been taught to ye from childhood that the law of *She* is an ever fixed law, and that he who breaketh it by so much as one jot or tittle<sup>1</sup> shall perish? And is not my lightest word a law? Have not your fathers taught ye this, I say, whilst as yet ye were but children? Do ye not know that as well might ye bid these great caves to fall upon ye, or the sun to cease his journeying, as to hope to turn me from my courses, or make my word light or heavy, according to your minds. Well do ye know it, ye Wicked Ones. But ye are all evil—evil to the core—the wickedness bubbles up in ye like a fountain in the spring time. Were it not for me, generations since had ye ceased to be, for of your own evil way had ye destroyed each other. And now because ye have done this thing, because ye have striven to put these men, my guests, to death, and yet more because ye have dared to disobey my word, this is the doom that I doom ye to. That ye be taken to the cave of torture,\* and given over

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\* “The cave of torture.” I afterwards saw this dreadful place, also a legacy from the prehistoric people who lived in Kôr. The only objects in the cave itself were slabs of rock arranged in various positions to facilitate the operations of the torturers. Many of these slabs, which were of a porous stone, were stained quite dark with the blood of ancient victims that had soaked into them. Also in the centre of the room was a place for a furnace, with a cavity to heat the historic pot in. But the most dreadful thing about the cave was that over each slab was a sculptured illustration of the appropriate torture being applied. These sculptures were so awful that I will not harrow the reader by attempting a description of them.—L.H.H.

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<sup>1</sup> Little bit. The phrase recalls Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:18.

to the torturers to wreak their will upon ye, and that on the going down of to-morrow's sun, those of ye who yet remain alive be slain by the hot pot, as ye have slain the servant of this my guest."

She ceased, and a faint murmur of horror ran round the cave. As for the victims, as soon as they realised the full hideousness of their doom, their stoicism forsook them, and they flung themselves down upon the ground, and wept and implored for mercy in a way that was dreadful to behold. I, too, turned to Ayesha, and begged her to spare them, or at least to mete out their fate in some less awful way. But she was hard as adamant about it.

"My Holly," she said, again speaking in Greek, which, to tell the truth, although I have always been considered as good a scholar of the language as most, I found it rather difficult to follow, chiefly because of the change in the fall of the accent. Ayesha, of course, talked with the accent of her contemporaries, whereas we have only tradition and the modern accent to guide us as to the exact pronunciation: "My Holly, it cannot be. Were I to show mercy to those wolves, your lives would not be safe among this people for a day. Thou knowest them not. They are tigers to lap blood, and even now they hunger after your lives. How thinkest thou that I rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding, therefore it is not by force. It is by terror. My empire is a moral one. Once in a generation mayhap I do as I am doing now, and slay a score by torture. Believe not that I would be cruel, or take vengeance on anything so low. What can it profit me to be avenged on such as these? Those who live long, my Holly, have no passions, save where they have interests. Though I may seem to slay in wrath, or because my mood is crossed, it is not so. Thou hast seen how in the heavens the little clouds blow this way and that without a cause, yet behind them is the great wind sweeping on its path whither it listeth. So it is with me, oh Holly. My moods and changes are the little clouds, and fitfully these seem to turn; but behind them ever blows the great wind of my wise purpose. Nay, the men must die; and die as I have said." Then, suddenly turning to the captain of the guard:

"My word is spoken—let my doom be done."

## XVI

### THE TOMBS OF KÔR

After the prisoners had been removed, Ayesha waved her hand, and the spectators turned round, and began to crawl off down the cave like a scattered flock of sheep. When they got a fair distance from the daïs, however, they rose and walked away, leaving the Queen and myself alone, with the exception of the mutes and a few guards, most of latter having departed with the doomed men. Thinking this a good opportunity, I asked *She* to come and see Leo, telling her of his serious condition, but she would not, saying that he certainly would not die before the night, as people never died of that sort of fever except at nightfall or dawn. Also she said that it would be better to let the fever spend its course as much as possible before she cured it. Accordingly, I was rising to leave, when she bade me follow her, as she would talk with me, and show me the wonders of the caves.

I was too much involved in the web of her fatal fascinations to say her no, even if I had wished to, which I did not. She rose from her chair, and, making some signs to the mutes, descended from the daïs. Thereon four of the girls took lamps, and ranged themselves two in front and two behind us, but the others went away.

"Now," she said, "wouldst thou see some of the wonders of this place, oh Holly? Look upon this great cave. Saw ye ever the like? Yet was it, and many more like it, hollowed by the hands of the dead race that once lived here in the city on the plain. A great and wonderful people must they have been, these men of Kôr, but, like the Egyptians, they thought more of the dead than the living. How many men, think ye, working for how many years, did it require to hollow out this cave and all the galleries thereof?"

"Tens of thousands," I answered.

"So, oh Holly. This people was an old people before the Egyptians were. A little can I read of their inscriptions, having found the key thereto—and, see here, this was one of the last of the caves that they dug," and turning to the rock behind her, she motioned the mutes to hold up the lamps. Carven over the daïs was the figure of an old man seated in a chair, with an ivory rod in his hand. It struck me at once that his features were exceedingly like those of the man who was represented as being embalmed in the chamber where we took our meals. Beneath the chair, which, by the way, was shaped exactly like the one

in which Ayesha had sat to give judgment, was a short inscription in the extraordinary characters of which I have already spoken, but which I do not remember sufficient of to illustrate. It looked more like Chinese writing than any other that I am acquainted with. This inscription Ayesha proceeded, with some difficulty and hesitation, to read aloud and translate. It ran as follows:—

In the year four thousand two hundred and fifty-nine from the founding of the City of Imperial Kôr was this cave (or burial place) completed by Tisno, King of Kôr, the people thereof and their slaves having laboured thereat for three generations, to be a tomb for their citizens of rank who shall come after. May the blessing of the heaven above the heaven rest upon their work, and make the sleep of Tisno, the mighty monarch, the likeness of whose features is graven above, a sound and happy sleep till the day of awakening,\* and also the sleep of his servants, and of those of his race who, rising up after him, shall yet lay their heads as low.

“Thou seest, oh Holly,” she said, “this people founded the city, of which the ruins yet cumber the plain yonder, four thousand years before this cave was finished. Yet, when first I saw it, two thousand years ago, was it even as it is now. Judge, therefore, how old must the place have been! And now, follow thou me, and I will show thee after what fashion this great city fell when the time was come for it to fall,” and she led the way down to the centre of the cave, and stopped at a spot where a round rock had been let into a sort of large manhole in the flooring, accurately filling it just as the iron plates fill the spaces in the London pavements down which the coals are thrown. “Thou seest,” she said. “Tell me, what is it?”

“Nay, I know not,” I answered; whereon she crossed to the left-hand side of the cave (looking towards the entrance) and bid the mutes hold up the lamps. On the wall, something was painted with a red pigment in similar characters to those hewn beneath the sculpture of Tisno, King of Kôr. This she proceeded to translate to me, the pigment still being quite fresh enough to show the form of the letters.

“I, Junis, a priest of the Great Temple of Kôr, write this upon the rock in the year four thousand eight hundred and three from the founding of Kôr. Kôr is fallen. No more shall the mighty feast in her halls, no more shall she rule the world, and her navies go out to commerce with the

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\* This phrase is remarkable, as seeming to indicate a belief in a future state.—EDITOR.

world. Kôr is fallen, and her mighty works and all the cities of Kôr, and all the harbours that she built and the canals that she made, are for the wolf and the owl and the wild swan, and the barbarian who comes after. Twenty and five moons ago did a cloud settle upon Kôr, and the hundred cities of Kôr, and out of the cloud came a pestilence that slew her people, old and young, one with another, and spared not. One with another they turned black and died—the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the man and the woman, the prince and the slave. The pestilence slew and slew, and ceased not by day or by night, and those who escaped from the pestilence were slain of the famine. No longer could the bodies of the children of Kôr be preserved according to the ancient rites, because of the number of the dead, therefore were they hurled into the great pit beneath the cave through the hole in the cave. Then, at last, a remnant of this the great people, the light of the whole world, went down to the coast and took ship and sailed northwards; and now am I, the Priest Junis, who write this, the last man left alive of this great city of men, but whether there be any yet left in the other cities I know not. This do I write in misery of heart before I die, because Kôr the Imperial is no more, and because there are none to worship in her temple, and all her palaces are empty, and her princes and her traders and her fair women have passed off the face of the earth.”

I gave a sigh of astonishment,—the utter desolation depicted in this rude scrawl was so overpowering. It was terrible to think of this solitary survivor of a mighty people recording its fate before he, too, went down into darkness. What must the old man have felt as, in ghastly terrifying solitude, by the light of one lamp feebly illuminating a little space of gloom, he in a few brief lines daubed the history of his nation’s death upon the cavern wall? What a subject for the moralist, or the painter, or indeed for any one who can think!

“Doth it not occur to thee, oh Holly,” said Ayesha, laying her hand upon my shoulder, “that those men who sailed North may have been the fathers of the first Egyptians?”

“Nay, I know not,” I said; “it seems that the world is very old.”

“Old?—Yes, it is old indeed. Time after time have nations, ay, and rich and strong nations, learned in all the arts, been and passed away and been forgotten, so that no memory of them remains. This is but one of many; for Time eats up the works of man, unless, indeed, he digs in caves like the people of Kôr, and then mayhap the sea swallows them, or the earthquake shakes them in. Who knows what hath been on the earth, or what shall be? There is no new thing under the sun, as the

wise Hebrew wrote long ago.<sup>1</sup> Yet were not these people utterly destroyed, as I think. Some few remained in the other cities, for their cities were many. But the barbarians, or perchance my people, the Arabs, came down upon them, and took their women to wife, and the race of the Amahagger that now is is a bastard brood of the mighty sons of Kôr, and behold it dwelleth in the tombs with its fathers' bones. But I know not: who can know? My arts cannot pierce so far into the blackness of Time's night. A great people were they. They conquered till none were left to conquer, and then they dwelt at ease within their rocky mountain walls, with their man servants and their maid servants, their minstrels, their sculptors, and their concubines, and traded and quarrelled, and ate and hunted and slept and made merry, till their time came. But come, I will show thee the great hall beneath the cave whereof the writing speaks. Never shall thine eyes witness such another sight."

Accordingly I followed her on to a side passage opening out of the main cave, then down a great number of steps, and along an underground shaft that cannot have been less than sixty feet beneath the surface of the rock, and was ventilated by curious borings that ran upward, I do not know where. Suddenly the passage ended, and she halted, and bid the mutes hold up the lamps, and I saw such a scene as she had prophesied I was not likely to see again. We were standing in an enormous pit, or rather on the edge of it, for it went down deeper—I don't know how much—than where we were, and was edged in with a low wall of rock. So far as I could judge, the pit was about the size of the space beneath the dome of St. Paul's, and when the lamps were held up I saw that it was nothing but one vast charnel-house, being literally full of thousands of human skeletons, which lay piled up in an enormous gleaming pyramid, formed by the slipping down of the bodies from the apex as fresh ones were dropped in from above. Anything more appalling than this jumbled mass of the remains of a departed race I cannot imagine, and what made it even more dreadful was that in this dry air a good number of the bodies had simply become desiccated with the skin on them, and now, fixed in every conceivable position, stared at one out of the heaps of white bones, grotesquely horrible caricatures of humanity. In my astonishment I made an ejaculation, and the echoes of my voice ringing in the vaulted place disturbed a skull that had been accurately balanced for many thousands of years near the apex of the pile. Down it came with a run, bounding along merrily towards

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<sup>1</sup> King Solomon; see Ecclesiastes 1:9.

us, and of course bringing an avalanche of other bones after it, till at last the whole place rattled with their movement, as though the skeletons were getting up to greet us.

## PART 9 (27 NOVEMBER 1886)

“Come,” I said, “I have seen enough. These are the bodies of those who died of the great sickness, I suppose?” I added, as we turned away.

“Yes. The people of Kôr always embalmed their dead, like the Egyptians, but their art is greater than the art of the Egyptians, because whereas the Egyptians disembowelled and drew the brain, the people of Kôr injected fluid into the veins, and thus reached every part. But stay, thou shalt see,” and she halted at haphazard at one of the little doorways opening out of the passage along which we were walking, and motioned to the mutes to light us in. We entered into a little chamber similar to the one in which I had slept at our first stopping-place, only there were two stone benches or beds in it. On the benches lay figures covered with yellow linen,\* on which a fine and impalpable dust had gathered in the course of ages, but nothing like to the extent that one would have anticipated, for in these deep-hewn caves there was no material to turn to dust. About the bodies on the stone shelves and floor of the tomb were many painted vases, but I saw very few ornaments in any of the vaults.

“Lift the cloth up, oh Holly,” she said, but though I put out my hand to do so I drew it back again. It seemed like sacrilege, and to speak the truth I was awed by the dread solemnity of the place, and of the presences before us. Then with a little laugh at my fears she drew it herself, only to

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\* All the linen that the Amahagger wore was taken from the tombs, which accounted for its yellow hue. If it was well washed, however, and properly bleached, it acquired its former snowy whiteness, and was the softest and best linen I ever saw.—L.H.H.

discover another and yet finer cloth lying over the forms upon the stone bench. This also she withdrew, and then for the first for thousands upon thousands of years did living eyes look upon the faces of those chilly dead. It was a woman; she might have been thirty-five years of age, or perhaps a little less, and had certainly been beautiful. Even now her calm clear-cut features, marked out with delicate black eyebrows and long eyelashes that threw little lines of shadow from the lamp upon the ivory face, were wonderfully beautiful. There robed in white, down which her blue-black hair was streaming, she slept her last long sleep, and on her arm, its face pressed against her breast, there lay a little babe. So sweet was the sight, although so awful, that—I confess it without shame—I could scarcely withhold my tears. It took one back across the dim gulf of the ages to some happy home in dead Imperial Kôr, where this winsome lady girt about with beauty had lived and died, and dying taken her last-born with her to the tomb. There they were, mother and babe, the white memories of a forgotten human history speaking more eloquently to the heart than could any written record of their lives. Reverently I replaced the grave cloths, and with a sigh that flowers so fair, should, in the purpose of the Everlasting, have only bloomed to be gathered to the grave, I turned to the body on the opposite shelf, and gently unveiled it. It was that of a man in advanced life, with a long grizzled beard, and also robed in white, probably the husband of the lady who, after surviving her many years, came at the last to sleep once more for good and all beside her.

We left the place and entered others. It would be too long to describe the many things I saw in them. Each one had its occupants, for the five hundred and odd years that had elapsed between the completion of the cave and the destruction of the race had evidently sufficed to fill these catacombs, numberless as they were, and each appeared to have been undisturbed since the day that they were laid there. I could fill a book with the description of them, but to do so would only be to repeat what I have said, with variations.

Nearly all the bodies, so masterly was the art with which they had been treated, were as perfect as on the day of death thousands of years before. Nothing came to injure them in the deep silence of the living rock: they were beyond the reach of heat and cold and damp, and the aromatic drugs with which they had been saturated were evidently practically everlasting in their effect. Here and there, however, we saw an exception, and in these cases, although the flesh looked sound enough externally, if one touched it it fell in, and revealed the fact that the figure was but a pile of dust.

This arose, Ayesha told me, from these particular bodies having, either owing to haste in the burial or other causes, been soaked in the preservative,\* instead of its being injected into the substance of the flesh. About the last tomb we visited I must, however, say one word, for its contents spoke even more eloquently to one's human sympathies than those of the first. It had but two occupants, and they lay together on a single shelf. I withdrew the grave cloths, and, there clasped heart to heart, were a young man and a blooming girl. Her head rested on his arm, and his lips were pressed against her brow. I opened the man's linen robe, and there over his heart was a dagger-wound, and beneath the girl's fair breast was a like cruel stab, through which her life had ebbed away. On the rock above was an inscription in three words. Ayesha translated it. It was *Wedded in Death*.

What was the life-history of these two, who, of a truth, were beautiful in their lives, and in their death were not divided?<sup>1</sup>

I closed my eyelids, and imagination taking up the thread of thought shot its swift shuttle<sup>2</sup> back across the ages, weaving a picture on their blackness so real and vivid in its details that I could almost for a moment think that I had triumphed o'er the Past, and that my spirit's eyes had pierced Time's mystery.

I seemed to see this fair girl's form—the yellow hair streaming down her, glittering against her garments snowy white, and the bosom that was whiter than the robes, even dimming with its lustre her ornaments of burnished gold. I seemed to see the great cave filled with warriors, bearded and clad in mail, and, on the lighted daïs where Ayesha had given judgment, a man standing, robed, and surrounded by the symbols of his priestly office. And up the cave there came one clad in purple,

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\* Ayesha afterwards showed me the tree from the leaves of which this ancient preservative was manufactured. It is a low bush-like tree, that to this day grows in wonderful plenty upon the sides of the mountains, or rather upon the slopes leading up to the rocky walls. The leaves are long and narrow, a vivid green in colour, but turning a bright red in the autumn, and not unlike those of a laurel in general appearance. They have no smell when green, but if boiled the aromatic odour from them is so strong that one can hardly bear it. The best mixture, however, was made from the roots, and among the people of Kôr there was a law, which Ayesha showed me alluded to on some of the inscriptions, to the effect that under heavy penalties no one under a certain rank was to be embalmed with the drugs prepared from the roots. The object and effect of this was, of course, to preserve the trees from extermination. The sale of the leaves and roots was a Government monopoly, and from it the Kings of Kôr derived a large proportion of their private revenue.—L.H.H

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to Saul and Jonathan in the Old Testament. See 2 Samuel 1:23.

<sup>2</sup> The device that passes thread through the warp as it moves across a weaving-loom.

and before him and behind him came minstrels and fair maidens, chanting a wedding song. White stood the maid against the altar, fairer than the fairest there—purer than a lily, and more cold than the dew that glistens in its heart. But as the man drew near she shuddered. Then out of the press and throng there sprang a dark-haired youth, and put his arm about her—this long-forgotten maid—and kissed her pale face, in which the blood shot up like lights of the red dawn across the quiet sky. And next there was turmoil and uproar, and a flashing of swords, and they tore the youth from her arms, and stabbed him, but with a cry she snatched the dagger from his belt, and drove it into her snowy breast, home to the heart, and down she fell, and then, with cries and wailing, and every sound of lamentation, the pageant rolled away from the arena of my vision, and once more the past shut up its book.

Let him who reads this forgive the intrusion of a dream into a history of fact. But it came so home to me—I saw it all so clear in a moment, as it were; and, besides, who shall say what proportion of fact, past, present, or to come, may lie in imagination? What is imagination? Perhaps it is the shadow of the intangible truth, perhaps it is the soul's thought.

In a moment the whole thing had passed through my brain, and *She* was addressing me.

“Behold the lot of man,” said the veiled Ayesha, as she drew the winding sheets back over the dead lovers, speaking in a solemn, thrilling voice, that accorded well with the dream that I had dreamed, “to the tomb, and to the forgetfulness that hides the tomb, must we all come at last! Ay, even I who live so long. Even for me, oh Holly, thousands upon thousands of years hence; thousands of years after thou hast gone through the gate and been lost in the mists, a day will dawn whereon I shall die, and be even as thou art and these are. And then what will it matter that I have lived a little longer, holding off death by the knowledge I have wrung from Nature, since at last I, too, must die? What is a span of ten thousand years, or ten times ten thousand years, in the history of time? It is as nought—it is as the mists that roll up in the sunlight; it fleeth away like an hour of sleep or a breath of the Eternal Spirit. Behold the lot of man! Certainly it shall overtake us, and we shall sleep. Certainly, too, we shall awake, and live again, and again shall sleep, and so on and on, through periods, spaces, and times, from æon unto æon, till the world is dead, and the worlds beyond the worlds are dead, and nought liveth save the Spirit that is Life. But for us twain and for these dead ones shall the end of ends be Life, or shall it be Death? As yet Death is but Life's Night, but out of the night is the Morrow born again, and doth again beget the

Night. Only when Day and Night, and Life and Death, are ended and swallowed up in that from which they came, what shall be our fate, oh Holly? Who can see so far? Not even I!"

And then, with a sudden change of tone and manner,

"Hast thou seen enough, my stranger guest, or shall I show thee more of the wonders of these tombs that are my palace halls? If thou wilt, I can lead thee to where Tisno, the mightiest and most valorous King of Kôr, in whose day these caves were ended, lies in a pomp that seems to mock at nothingness, and bid the empty shadows of the past do homage to his sculptured vanity!"

"I have seen enough, oh Queen," I answered. "My feeble breast is overwhelmed by the strength of the present Death. Mortality is weak, and easily broken down by a sense of the companionship that waits upon its end. Take me hence, oh Ayesha!"

## XVII

### THE BALANCE TURNS

In a few minutes, following the lamps of the mutes, that, held out from the body as a bearer holds water in a vessel, had the appearance of floating down the darkness by themselves, we came to a stair which led us to *She's* ante-room, the same that Billali had crept up upon on all fours on the previous day. Here I would have bade the Queen adieu, but she would not.

"Nay," she said, "enter with me, oh Holly, for of a truth thy conversation pleaseth me. Think, oh Holly: for two thousand years have I had none to converse with save slaves and my own thoughts, and though of all this thinking hath much wisdom come, and many secrets been made plain, yet am I weary of my thoughts, and have come to loathe mine own society, for surely the food that memory gives to eat is bitter to the taste, and it is only with the teeth of hope that we can bear to bite it. Now though thy thoughts are green and tender, as becometh one so young, yet are they those of a thinking brain, and in truth thou dost bring back to my mind certain of those old philosophers with whom in days bygone I have disputed at Athens and in Arabia, for thou hast the same crabbed air and dusty look as though thou hadst passed thy days in reading ill-writ Greek, and been stained dark with the grime of manuscripts. So draw the curtain, and sit here by my side, and we will

eat fruit, and talk of pleasant things. See, I will again unveil to thee. Thou hast brought it on thyself, oh Holly; fairly have I warned thee, and thou shalt call me beautiful as even those old philosophers were wont to do. Fie upon them, forgetting their philosophy!”

And without more ado she stood up and shook the white wrappings from her, and came forth shining and splendid like some glittering snake when she has cast her slough; ay, and fixed her wonderful eyes upon me—more deadly than any basilisk’s<sup>1</sup>—and pierced me through and through with their beauty, and sent her light laugh ringing through the air like chimes of silver bells.

A new mood was on her, and the very colour of her mind seemed to change beneath it. It was no longer torture-torn and hateful, as I had seen it when she was cursing her dead rival by the leaping flames, no longer icily terrible as in the judgment-hall, no longer rich, and sombre, and splendid, like a Tyrian<sup>2</sup> cloth, as in the dwellings of the dead. No, her mood now was that of Aphrodité triumphing. Life—radiant, ecstatic, wonderful—seemed to flow from her and around her. Softly she laughed and sighed, and swift her glances flew. She shook her heavy tresses, and their perfume filled the place; she struck her little sandalled foot upon the floor, and hummed a snatch of some old Greek epithalamium. All the majesty was gone, or did but lurk and faintly flicker through her laughing eyes, like lightning seen through sunlight. She had cast off the terror of the leaping flame, the cold power of judgment that was even now being done, and the wise sadness of the tombs—cast them off and put them behind her, like the white shroud she wore, and now stood out the incarnation of lovely tempting womanhood, made more perfect—and in a way more spiritual—than ever woman was before.

“There, my Holly, sit there where thou canst see me. It is by thine own wish, remember—again I say, blame me not if thou dost spend the rest of thy little span with such a sick pain at the heart that thou wouldst fain have died before ever thy curious eyes were set upon me. There, sit so, and tell me, for in truth I am inclined for praises—tell me, am I not beautiful? Nay, speak not so hastily; consider well the point; take me feature by feature, forgetting not my form, and my hands and feet, and my hair, and the whiteness of my skin, and then tell me truly hast thou ever known a woman who in aught, ay, in one little portion of her beauty, in the curve of an eyelash even, or the modelling of a shell-like

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<sup>1</sup> A mythological creature whose gaze kills its victims.

<sup>2</sup> A rich purple dye from the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre.

ear, is justified to hold a light before my loveliness? Now, my waist! Perchance thou thinkest it too large, but of a truth it is not so; it is this golden snake that is too large, and doth not bind it as it should. It is a wise snake, and knoweth that it is ill to tie in the waist. But see, give me thy hands—so—now press them round me, there, with but a little force, thy fingers touch, oh Holly.”

I could stand it no longer. I am but a man, and she was more than a woman. Heaven knows what she was—I don’t! But then and there I fell upon my knees before her, and told her in a sad mixture of languages—for such moments confuse the thoughts—that I worshipped her as never woman was worshipped, and that I would give my immortal soul to marry her, which at that time I certainly would have done, and so, indeed, would any other man, or all the race of men rolled into one. For a moment she looked a little surprised, and then she began to laugh, and clap her hands in glee.

“Oh, so soon, oh Holly!” she said. “I wondered how many minutes it would take to bring thee to thy knees. I have not seen a man kneel before me for so many days, and, believe me, to a woman’s heart the sight is sweet, ay, wisdom and length of days take not from that dear pleasure which is our sex’s only right.

“What wouldst thou?—what wouldst thou? Thou dost not know what thou doest. Have I not told thee that I am not for thee? I love but one, and it is not thee. Ah Holly, for all thy wisdom—and in a way thou art wise—thou art but a fool running after folly. Thou wouldst look into mine eyes—thou wouldst kiss me. Well, if it pleaseth thee, *look*,” and she bent herself towards me, and fixed her dark and thrilling orbs upon my own; “ay, and *kiss*, too, if thou wilt, for, thanks be given to the scheme of things, kisses leave no marks, except upon the heart. But if thou dost kiss, I tell thee of a surety thou wilt eat out thy heart with love of me, and die!” and she bent yet further towards me till her soft hair brushed my brow, and her fragrant breath played upon my face, and made me faint and weak. Then of a sudden, even as I stretched out my hands to clasp, she straightened herself, and a quick change passed over her. Reaching out her hand, she held it over my head, and it seemed to me that something flowed from it that chilled me back to common sense, and a knowledge of propriety and the domestic virtues.

“Enough of this wanton play,” she said with a touch of sternness. “Listen, Holly. Thou art a good and honest man, and I fain would spare thee; but, oh! it is so hard for a woman to be merciful. I have said I am not for thee, therefore let thy thoughts pass by me like an idle wind, and

the dust of thy imagination sink again into the depths—well, of despair, if thou wilt. Thou dost not know me, Holly. Hadst thou seen me but ten hours ago when my passion seized me, thou hadst shrunk from me in fear and trembling. I am a woman of many moods, and, like the water in that vessel, I reflect many things; but they pass, my Holly; they pass, and are forgotten. Only the water is the water still, and I still am I, and that which maketh the water maketh it, and that which maketh me maketh me, nor can my quality be altered. Therefore, pay no heed to what I seem, seeing that thou canst not know what I am. If thou troublest me again I will veil myself, and thou shalt behold my face no more.”

I rose, and sank on the cushioned couch beside her, yet quivering with emotion, though for a moment my mad passion had left me, as the leaves of a tree quiver still, although the gust be gone that stirred them. I did not dare to tell her that I *had* seen her in that deep and hellish mood, muttering incantations to the fire in the tomb.

“So,” she went on, “now eat some fruit; believe me, it is the only true food for man. Oh, tell me of the philosophy of the Hebrew Messiah, who came after me, and whom thou sayest doth now rule Rome and Greece and Egypt and the barbarians beyond. It must have been a strange philosophy that He taught, for in my day the people would have naught of our philosophies. Revel and lust and drink, blood and cold steel, and the shock of men gathered in the battle—these were the canons of their creeds.”

I had recovered myself a little by now, and, feeling bitterly ashamed of the weakness into which I had been betrayed, I did my best to expound to her the doctrines of Christianity, to which, however, with the single exception of our conception of Heaven and Hell, I found that she paid but faint attention, her interest being all directed towards the Man who taught them.

“Ah!” she said; “I see—a new religion! I have known so many, and doubtless there have been many more since I knew aught beyond these caves of Kôr. Mankind asks ever of the skies to vision out what lies behind them. It is terror for the end, and but a subtler form of selfishness—this it is that breeds religions. Mark, my Holly, each religion claims the future for its followers; or, at the least, the good thereof. The evil is for those benighted ones who will have none of it, seeing the light the true believers worship, as the fishes see the stars, but dimly. The religions come and the religions pass, and the civilisations come and pass, and nought endures but the world and human nature. Ah! if man would but see that hope is from within and not from without—that he

himself must work out his own salvation! He is there, and within him is the breath of life and a knowledge of good and evil as good and evil is to him. Thereon let him build and stand erect, and not cast himself before the image of some unknown God, modelled like himself, but with a bigger brain to think evil; and a longer arm to do it.”

I thought to myself, which shows how old such reasoning is, being, indeed, one of the recurring quantities of theological discussion, that her argument sounded very like some I have heard in the nineteenth century, and in other places than the caves of Kôr, and with which, by the way, I personally disagree, but I did not care to try and discuss the question with her. To begin with, my mind was too weary with all the emotions through which I had passed, and, in the second place, I knew that I should get the worst of it. It is hard enough to argue with an ordinary materialist, who hurls statistics and whole strata of geological facts at your head, whilst you can only buffet him with deductions and instincts and the snowflakes of faith, that are, alas! so apt to melt in the hot embers of our troubles. How little chance, then, should I have against one whose brain was supernaturally sharpened, and who had two thousand years of experience, besides all manner of knowledge of the secrets of Nature at her command? Feeling that she would be more likely to convert me than I should to convert her, I thought it best to leave the matter alone, and so sat silent. Many a time since then have I bitterly regretted that I did so, for thereby I lost the only opportunity I can remember having had of ascertaining what Ayesha really believed.

“Well, my Holly, art thou tired of me already, that thou dost sit so silent?” she said presently, with a little yawn. “Faithless man! And but half an hour since thou wast upon thy knees—the posture does not suit thee, Holly,—swearing that thou didst love me. What shall we do?—Nay, I have it. I will come and see this youth, the Lion, as the old man Billali calls him, who came with thee, and who is now so sick. The fever must have run its course by now, and if he is about to die I will recover him. Fear not, my Holly, I shall use no magic. Have I not told thee that there is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as understanding and applying the forces which are in Nature? Go now, and presently when I have made the drug ready I will follow thee.”\*

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\* Ayesha was a great chemist, indeed chemistry appears to have been her only amusement and occupation. She had one of the caves fitted up as a laboratory, and although her appliances were necessarily rude, the results that she attained were, as will become clear in the course of this narrative, sufficiently surprising.—L.H.H.

Accordingly I went only to find Job and Ustane in a great state of grief, and declaring that Leo was in the throes of death, and that they had been searching for me everywhere. I rushed to the couch, and glanced at him: clearly he was dying. He was senseless, and breathing heavily, but his lips were quivering, and every now and again a little shudder ran down his frame. I knew enough of doctoring to see that in another hour he would be beyond the reach of earthly help,—perhaps in another five minutes. How I cursed my selfishness and the folly that had kept me lingering by Ayesha's side while my dear boy lay dying! Alas! and alas! how easily the best of us are lighted down to evil by the gleam of woman's eyes! What a wicked wretch was I! Actually, for the last half-hour I had scarcely thought of Leo, and this, be it remembered, of the man who for twenty years had been my dearest companion, and the one interest of my existence. And now, perhaps, it was too late!

I wrung my hands, and glanced round. Ustane was sitting by the couch, and in her eyes burnt the dull light of despair. Job was blubbering—I am sorry I cannot name his distress by any more delicate word—audibly in the corner. Seeing my eye fixed upon him he went outside to give way to his grief in the passage. Obviously the only hope lay in Ayesha. She, and she alone—unless, indeed, she was an imposter, which I could not believe—could save him. I would go, and implore her to come. As I started to do so, however, Job came flying into the room, his hair literally standing on end with terror.

“Oh, God help us, sir!” he ejaculated in a frightened whisper, “here's a corpse coming sliding down the passage!”

For a moment I was puzzled, but presently, of course, it struck me that he must have seen Ayesha, wrapped in her grave-like garment, and been deceived by the extraordinary undulating smoothness of her walk into a belief that she was a white ghost gliding towards him. Indeed, at that very moment the question was settled, for Ayesha herself was in the apartment, or rather cave. Job turned, and saw her sheeted form, and then, with a convulsive howl of “Here it comes!” sprang into a corner, and jammed his face against the wall, and Ustane, guessing whose the dread presence must be, prostrated herself upon her face.

“Thou comest in a good time, Ayesha,” I said, “for my boy lies at the point of death.”

“So,” she said softly; “provided he be not dead, it is no matter, for I can bring him back to life, my Holly. Is that man there thy servant, and is that the method wherewith thy servants greet strangers in thy country?”

“He is frightened of thy garb—it hath a death-like air,” I answered.

She laughed.

"And the girl? Ah, I see now. It is her of whom thou didst speak to me. Well, bid them both to leave us, and we will see to this sick Lion of thine. I love not that underlings should perceive my wisdom."

Thereon I told Ustane in Arabic and Job in English both to leave the room; an order which the latter obeyed readily enough, and was glad to obey, for he could not in any way subdue his fear. But it was otherwise with Ustane.

"What does *She* want?" she whispered, divided between her fear of the terrible Queen and her anxiety to remain near Leo. "It is surely the right of a wife to be near her husband when he dieth. Nay, I will not go, my lord the Baboon."

"Why doth not that woman leave us, my Holly?" asked Ayesha, from the other end of the cave, where she was engaged in carelessly examining some sculptures on the wall.

"She doth not like to leave Leo," I answered, not knowing what to say. Ayesha wheeled round, and pointing to the girl Ustane, said one word, and one only, but it was quite enough, for the tone in which it was said meant volumes.

"Go!"

And sullenly Ustane crept past her on her hands and knees, and went.

"Thou seest, my Holly," said Ayesha, with a little laugh, "it was time that I gave these people a lesson in obedience. The girl went nigh to disobeying me, but then she did not learn this morning how I treat the disobedient. Well, she has gone; and now let me see the youth," and she glided towards the couch on which Leo lay, with his face in the shadow and turned towards the wall.

"He hath a noble shape," she said, as she bent over him to look upon his face.

Next second her tall and willowy form was staggering back across the room, as though she had been shot or stabbed, staggering back till at last she struck the cavern-wall, and then there burst from her lips the most awful and unearthly scream that I ever heard in all my life.

"What is it, Ayesha?" I cried. "Is he dead?"

She turned, and sprang towards me like a tigress.

"Thou dog!" she said, in her terrible whisper, which sounded like the hiss of a snake, "why didst thou hide this from me?" and she stretched out her arm, and I thought she was going to slay me.

"What?" I ejaculated, in the most lively terror; "what?"

"Ah!" she said, "perchance thou didst not know. Learn, my Holly,

learn; there lies—there lies my lost Kallikrates. Kallikrates, who has come back to me at last, as I knew he would, as I knew he would,” and she began to sob and to laugh, and generally to go on like any other lady who is a little upset, murmuring “Kallikrates, Kallikrates.”

“Nonsense,” thought I to myself, but I did not like to say it; and, indeed, at that moment I was thinking of Leo’s life, having forgotten everything else in that terrible anxiety. What I feared now was that he should die whilst she was “carrying on.”

“Unless thou canst help him, Ayesha,” I put in, by way of a reminder, “thy Kallikrates will soon be far beyond thy calling. Surely he dieth even now.”

“True,” she said, with a start. “Oh, why did I not come before! I am unnerved—my hand trembles, even mine—and yet it is very easy. Here, thou Holly, take this phial,” and she produced a tiny jar of pottery from the folds of her garment, “and pour the liquid in it down his throat. It will cure him if he be not dead. Swift, now! swift! the man dies!”

I glanced towards him; it was true enough, Leo was in his death-struggle. I saw his poor face turning ashen, and the breath began to rattle in his throat. The phial was stoppered with a little piece of wood. I drew it with my teeth, and a drop of the fluid within flew upon my tongue. It had a sweet flavour, and for a second made my head swim and a mist gather before my eyes, but happily the effect passed away as swiftly as it had arisen.

When I reached Leo’s side he was plainly expiring—his golden head was slowly turning from side to side, and his mouth was slightly open. I called to Ayesha to hold his head, and this she managed to do, though the woman was quivering from head to foot, like an aspen-leaf or a startled horse. Then, forcing the jaw a little more open, I poured the contents of the phial into his mouth. Instantly a little vapour arose from it, as happens when one disturbs nitric acid, and this sight did not increase my hopes, already faint enough, of the efficacy of the treatment.

One thing, however, was certain, the death throes ceased—at first I thought because he had got beyond them, and crossed the awful river. His face turned a livid pallor, and his heart-beats, which had been feeble enough before, seemed to die away altogether—only the eyelid still twitched a little. In my doubt I looked up at Ayesha, whose head-wrapping had slipped back in her excitement when she went reeling across the room. She was still holding Leo’s head, and with a face as pale as his watching his countenance with such an expression of agonised anxiety as I have never seen before. Clearly she did not know if he would live

or die. Five minutes passed, and I saw that she was abandoning hope; her lovely oval face seemed to fall in and grow visibly thinner beneath the pressure of a mental agony, whose pencil drew black lines about the hollows of her eyes. The coral faded even from her lips, till they were as white as Leo's face, and quivered pitifully. It was shocking to see her; even in my own grief I felt for hers.

"Is it too late?" I gasped.

She hid her face in her hands, and made no answer, and I, too, turned away. But as I did so I heard a deep-drawn breath, and looking down perceived a line of colour creeping up Leo's face, then another and another, and then, wonder of wonders, the man we had thought dead turned over on his side.

"Thou seest," I said, in a whisper.

"I see," she answered, hoarsely. "He is saved. I thought we were too late—another moment—one little moment more—and he had been gone!" and she burst into an awful flood of tears, sobbing as though her heart would break, and yet managing to look lovelier than ever as she did it. At last she ceased.

"Forgive me, my Holly—forgive me for my weakness," she said. "Thou seest after all I am a very woman. Think—now think of it. This morning didst thou speak of the place of torment appointed by this new religion of thine. Hell or Hades thou didst call it—a place where the vital essence lives and retains an individual memory, and where all the errors and faults of judgment and unsatisfied passions and the unsubstantial terrors of the mind wherewith it hath at any time had to do come to mock and haunt and gibe and wring the heart for ever and for ever with the vision of its own hopelessness. Thus, even thus, have I lived for two thousand years—for some sixty generations, as ye reckon time—in a Hell, as thou callest it—tormented by the memory of a crime, tortured day and night with an unfulfilled desire—without companionship, without comfort, without death, and led on only down my dreary road by the marsh lights of Hope, which though they flickered here and there, and now glowed strong, and now were not, yet, as my skill told me, would one day lead unto my deliverer.

"And then—think of it still, oh Holly, for never shalt thou hear such another tale, or see such another scene, nay, not even if I give thee ten thousand years of life—and thou shalt have it in payment if thou wilt—think: at last my deliverer came—he whom I had watched and waited for through the generations—at the appointed time he came to seek me, as I knew he must come, for my wisdom could not err, though I knew not

when or how. Yet see how ignorant I was! See how small my knowledge, and how faint my strength! For hours he lay here sick unto death, and I felt it not—I who had waited for him for two thousand years—I knew it not. And then at last I see him, and behold, my chance is gone but by a hair's breadth even before I had it, for he is in the very jaws of death; whence no power of mine can draw him. And if he die, surely must the Hell be lived through once more—once more must I face the weary centuries, and wait, and wait till the time in its fulness shall bring my beloved back to me. And then thou gavest him the medicine, and that five minutes dragged along before I knew if he would live or die, and I tell thee that all the sixty generations that are gone were not so long as that five minutes. But they passed at last, and still he showed no sign, and I knew that if the drug works not then it, so far as I have had knowledge, works not at all. Then thought I that he was once more dead, and all the tortures of all the years gathered themselves into a single venomous spear, and pierced me through and through, because once again I had lost Kallikrates! And then, when all was done, behold! he sighed, behold! he lived, and I knew that he would live, for none die on whom the drug takes hold. Think of it now, my Holly—think of the wonder of it! He will sleep for twelve hours, and then the fever will have left him!”

And she stopped, and laid her hand upon the golden head, and then bent down and kissed the brow with a chastened abandonment of tenderness that would have been beautiful to behold had not the sight cut me to the heart—for I was jealous!

## PART 10 (4 DECEMBER 1886)

### XVIII

“GO, WOMAN!”

Then followed a silence of a minute or so, during which *She* appeared, if one might judge from the almost angelic rapture of her face—for she

looked angelic sometimes—to be plunged in a happy ecstasy. Suddenly, however, a new thought struck her, and her expression became the very reverse of angelic.

“Almost had I forgotten,” she said, “that woman, Ustane. What is she to Kallikrates—his servant, or——” and she paused, and her voice trembled.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I understand that she is wed to him according to the custom of the Amahagger,” I answered; “but I know not.”

Her face grew dark as a thunder-cloud. Old as she was, Ayesha had not outlived jealousy.

“Then there is an end,” she said; “she must die, even now!”

“For what crime?” I asked, horrified; “she is guilty of nought that thou art not guilty of thyself, oh Ayesha. She loves the man, and he has been pleased to accept her love; where, then, is her sin?”

“Truly, oh Holly, thou art foolish,” she answered, almost petulantly. “Where is her sin? Her sin is that she stands between me and my desire. Well, I know that I can take him from her—for dwells there a man upon this earth, oh Holly, who could resist me if I put out my strength? Men are faithful for so long only as temptations pass them by. If the temptation be but strong enough, then will the man yield, for every man, like every rope, hath his breaking strain, and passion is to them what gold and power are to women—the weight upon their weakness. Believe me, ill will it fare with mortal woman in that heaven of which thou speakest, if only the spirits be more fair, for their lords will never turn to look upon them, and their heaven will become their hell. For man can be bought with woman’s beauty, if it be but beautiful enough; and woman’s beauty can be ever bought with gold, if only there be gold enough. So was it in my day, and so it will be to the end of time. The world is a great mart, my Holly, where all things are for sale to him who bids the highest in the currency of our desires.”

These remarks, which were as cynical as might have been expected from a woman of Ayesha’s age and experience, jarred upon me, and I answered, testily, that in our heaven there was no marriage or giving in marriage.<sup>1</sup>

“Else would it not be heaven, dost thou mean?” she put in. “Fie upon thee, Holly, to think so ill of us poor women! Is it, then, marriage that marks the line between thy heaven and thy hell? But enough of this. This is no time for disputing and the challenge of our wits. Why dost thou always dispute? Art thou also a philosopher of these latter

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 12:25.

days? As for this woman, she must die; for though I can take her husband from her, yet, while she lived, might he think tenderly of her, and that I cannot away with. No woman shall dwell in his thoughts; my empire shall be all my own. She hath had her day, let her be content; for better is an hour with love than a century of loneliness—now night shall swallow her.”

“Nay, nay,” I cried, “it would be a wicked crime; and from a crime naught comes but what is evil. For thy own sake do not this deed.”

“Is it, then, a crime, oh foolish man, to put away that which stands between us and our ends? Then is our life one long crime, my Holly; for day by day we destroy that we may live, since in this world none, save the strongest, can endure. Those who are weak must perish; the earth is to the strong, and the fruits thereof. For every tree that grows a score shall wither, that the strong ones may take their share. We run to place and power over the dead bodies of those who fail and fall; ay, we win the food we eat from out the mouths of starving babes. It is the scheme of things. Thou sayest, too, that a crime breeds evil, but therein thou dost lack experience; for out of crimes come many good things, and out of good grows much evil. The cruel rage of the tyrant may prove a blessing to the thousands who come after him, and the sweet-heartedness of a holy man may make a nation slaves. Man doeth this and doeth that from the good or evil of his heart; but he knoweth not to what end his moral sense doth prompt him; for when he striketh he is blind to where the blow shall fall, nor can he count the airy threads that weave the web of circumstance. Good and evil, love and hate, night and day, sweet and bitter, man and woman, heaven above and the earth beneath—all these things are necessary, one to the other, and who knows the end of each? I tell thee that there is a hand of Fate that twines them up to bear the burden of its purpose, and all things are gathered in that great rope to which all things are needful. Therefore doth it not become us to say this thing is evil and this good, or the dark is hateful and the light lovely; for to other eyes than ours the evil may be the good and the darkness more beautiful than the day, or all alike be fair. Hearest thou, my Holly?”

I felt it was hopeless to argue against casuistry of this nature, which, if it were carried to its logical conclusion, would absolutely destroy all morality, as we understand it. But her talk gave me a fresh thrill of fear; for what may not be possible to a being who, unconstrained by human law, is also absolutely unshackled by a moral sense of right and wrong, which, however partial and conventional it may be, is yet based, as our

conscience tells us, upon the great wall of individual responsibility that marks off mankind from the beasts.

But I was deeply anxious to save Ustane, whom I liked and respected, from the dire fate that overshadowed her at the hands of her mighty rival. So I made one more appeal.

"Ayesha," I said, "thou art too subtle for me; but thou thyself hast told me that each man should be a law unto himself, and follow the teaching of his heart. Hath thy heart no mercy towards her whose place thou wouldst take? Bethink thee, as thou sayest—though to me the thing is incredible—him whom thou desirest has returned to thee after many years, and but now thou hast, as thou sayest also, wrung him from the jaws of death. Wilt thou celebrate his coming by the murder of one who loved him, and whom perchance he loved, one, at any rate, who saved his life for thee when the spears of thy slaves would have made an end thereof? Thou sayest also that in past days thou didst grievously wrong this man, that with thine own hand thou didst slay him because of the Egyptian Amenartas whom he loved."

"How knowest thou that, oh stranger? How knowest thou that name? I spoke it not to thee," she broke in with a cry, catching at my arm.

"Perchance I dreamed it," I answered; "strange dreams do hover about these caves of Kôr. It seems that the dream was, indeed, a shadow of the truth. What came to thee of thy mad crime?—two thousand years of waiting, was it not? And now wouldst thou repeat the history? Say what thou wilt, I tell thee that evil will come of it; for to him who doeth, at the least, good breeds good and evil evil, even though in after days out of evil cometh good. Offences must needs come; but woe to him by whom the offence cometh.<sup>1</sup> So said that Messiah of whom I spoke to thee, and it was truly said. If thou slayest this innocent woman, I say unto thee that thou shalt be accursed, and pluck no fruit from thine ancient tree of love. Also, what thinkest thou? How will this man take thee red-handed from the slaughter of her who loved and tended him?"

"As to that," she answered, "I have already answered thee. Had I slain thee as well as her, yet should he love me, Holly, because he could not help himself any more than thou couldst help dying, if by chance I slew thee, oh Holly. And yet maybe there is truth in what thou dost say; for in some way it presseth on my mind. If it may be, I will spare this woman; for have I not told thee that I am not cruel for the sake of cruelty? I love not to see suffering, or to cause it. Let her come before

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:7.

me—quick now, before my mood changes,” and she hastily covered her face with its gauzy wrapping.

Well pleased to have succeeded even to this extent, I passed out into the passage and called to Ustane, whose white garment I caught sight of some yards away, huddled up against one of the earthenware lamps that were placed at intervals along the tunnel. She rose, and ran towards me.

“Is my lord dead? Oh, say not he is dead,” she cried, lifting her noble-looking face, all stained as it was with tears, up to me with an air of infinite beseeching that went straight to my heart.

“Nay, he lives,” I answered. “*She* hath saved him. Enter.”

She sighed deeply, and entered, and fell upon her hands and knees, after the custom of the Amahagger people, in the presence of the dread *She*.

“Stand,” said Ayesha in her coldest voice, “and come hither.”

Ustane obeyed, standing before her with bowed head.

Then came a pause, which she broke.

“Who is this man?” she said, pointing to the sleeping form of Leo.

“The man is my husband,” she answered in a low voice.

“Who gave him to thee for a husband?”

“I took him according to the custom of our country, oh *She*.”

“Thou hast done evil, woman, in taking this man, who is a stranger. He is not a man of thine own race, and the custom fails. Listen: perchance thou didst this thing through ignorance, therefore, woman, do I spare thee, otherwise hadst thou died. Listen again. Go from hence back to thine own place, and never dare to speak to, or set thine eyes upon, this man again. He is not for thee. Listen a third time. If thou breakest this my law, that moment thou diest. Go.”

But Ustane did not move.

“Go, woman!”

Then she looked up, and I saw that her face was torn with passion.

“Nay, oh *She*, I will not go,” she answered in a choked voice; “the man is my husband, and I love him—I love him, and I will not leave him. What right hast thou to make me leave my husband?”

I saw a little quiver pass down Ayesha’s frame, and shuddered myself, fearing the worst.

“Be pitiful,” I said in Greek; “it is but Nature working.”

“I am pitiful,” she answered coldly; “had I not been pitiful she had been dead even now.” Then addressing Ustane: “Woman, I say to thee, go, before I destroy thee where thou art!”

“I will not go! He is mine—mine!” she cried in anguish. “I took

him, and I saved his life! Destroy me, then, if thou hast the power! I will not give thee my husband—never—never!”

Ayesha made a movement so swift that I could scarcely follow it, but it seemed to me that she lightly struck the poor girl upon the hair with her hand. I looked at Ustane’s head, and then staggered back in horror, for there upon her hair, right across her bronze-like tresses, were three finger-marks as *white as snow*. As for the girl herself, she had put her hands to her head, and was looking dazed.

“Great heavens!” I said, perfectly aghast at this dreadful manifestation of unhuman power; but *She* did but laugh a little.

“Thou thinkest, poor ignorant fool,” she said to the bewildered woman, “that I have not the power to slay. Stay, there lies a mirror,” and she pointed to Leo’s round shaving-glass that had been arranged by Job with other things upon his portmanteau; “give it to this woman, my Holly, and let her see that which lies across her hair, and whether or no I have power to slay.”

I picked up the glass, and held it before Ustane’s eyes. She gazed, then felt at her hair, then gazed again, and then sank upon the ground with a sort of sob.

“Now, wilt thou go, or must I strike a second time?” asked Ayesha, in mockery. “See, I have set my seal upon thee so that I may know thee till thy hair is all as white as it. If I see thy face here again be sure, too, that thy bones shall soon be whiter than my mark upon thy hair.”

Utterly awed and broken down, the poor creature rose, and, marked with that awful mark, crept from the room, sobbing bitterly.

“Look not so frighted, my Holly,” said Ayesha, when she had gone. “I tell thee I deal not in magic—there is no such thing. ’Tis only a force that thou dost not understand. I marked her to strike terror to her heart, else must I have slain her. And now I will bid my servants bear my Lord Kallikrates to a chamber near mine own, that I may watch over him, and be ready to greet him when he wakes; and thither, too, shalt thou come, my Holly, and the white man, thy servant. But one thing remember at thy peril. Nought must thou say to Kallikrates as to how this woman went, and as little as may be of me. Now, I have warned thee!” and she slid away to give her orders, leaving me more absolutely confounded than ever. Indeed, so bewildered was I, and racked and torn with such a succession of various emotions, that I began to think that I must be going mad. However, perhaps fortunately, I had but little time to reflect, for presently the mutes arrived to carry the sleeping Leo and our possessions across the central cave, so for a while all was bustle. Our new rooms

were situated immediately behind what we used to call Ayesha's boudoir—the curtained space where I had first seen her. Where she herself slept I did not then know, but it was somewhere quite close.

That night I passed in Leo's room, but he slept through it like the dead, never once stirring. I also slept fairly well, as, indeed, I needed to do, but my sleep was full of dreams of all the horrors and wonders I had undergone. Chiefly, however, I was haunted by that frightful piece of diablerie by which Ayesha left her finger marks upon her rival's hair. There was something so terrible about the swift, snake-like movement, and the instantaneous blanching of that three-fold line, that, if the results to Ustane had been much more tremendous, I doubt if they would have impressed me so deeply. To this day, I often dream of that dread scene, and see the weeping woman, bereaved, and marked like Cain, cast a last look at her lover, and creep from the presence of her dread Queen.

Another dream that troubled me was about the huge pyramid of bones. I dreamed that they all stood up and marched past me in thousands and tens of thousands—in squadrons, companies, and armies—with the sunlight shining through their hollow ribs. On they rushed across the plain to Kôr, their imperial home; I saw the drawbridges fall before them, and heard their bones clank through the brazen gates. On they went, up the splendid streets, on past fountains, palaces, and temples such as the eye of man never saw. But there was no man to greet them in the market-place, and no woman's head appeared at the windows—only a bodiless voice went before them, calling: "*Fallen is Imperial Kôr!—fallen!—fallen!—fallen!*"<sup>1</sup> On, right through the city, marched those gleaming phalanxes, and the rattle of their bony tread went echoing through the silent air as they pressed grimly on. They passed through the city and clomb the wall, and marched along the great roadway that was made upon it, till at length they once more reached the drawbridge. Then, as the sun was sinking, they returned again towards their sepulchre, and luridly his light shone through them, throwing gigantic shadows of their bones, that stretched away, and moved like huge spider's legs as they wound across the plain. Back they came to the cave, and once more flung themselves in unending files through the hole into the huge pyramid of bones, and I awoke, shuddering, to see *She*, who had evidently been standing between my couch and Leo's, glide like a shadow from the room.

After this I slept again, soundly this time, till morning, when I awoke much refreshed, and got up. At last the hour drew near at which,

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Revelation 18:2.

according to Ayesha, Leo was to awake, and with it came *She* herself, as usual, veiled.

“Thou shalt see, Holly,” she said; “presently shall he awake in his right mind, the fever having left him.”

Hardly were the words out of her mouth, when Leo turned round and stretched out his arms, yawned, opened his eyes, and, perceiving a female form bending over him, threw his arms round her and kissed her, mistaking her, perhaps, for Ustane; because, next minute, he said, in Arabic, “Hullo, Ustane, why have you tied your head up like that? Have you got the toothache?” and then, in English, “I say, I’m awfully hungry. Why, Job, you old son of a gun, where the deuce have we got to now—eh?”

“I am sure I wish I knew, Mr. Leo,” said Job, edging suspiciously past Ayesha, whom he still regarded with the utmost disgust and horror, being by no means sure that she was not an animated corpse; “but you mustn’t talk, Mr. Leo, you’ve been very ill, and given us a great deal of anxiety, and, if this lady,” looking at Ayesha, “would be so kind as to move, I’ll bring you your soup.”

This turned Leo’s attention to the “lady,” who was standing by in perfect silence. “Hullo!” he said; “that is not Ustane—where is Ustane?”

Then, for the first time, Ayesha spoke to him, and her first words were a lie. “She has gone from hence upon a visit,” she said; “and, behold, I am here as thine handmaiden.”

Ayesha’s silver notes seemed to puzzle his half-awakened intellect, as also did her corpse-like wrappings. However, he said nothing at the time, but drank off his soup greedily enough, and then turned over and slept again till the evening. When he woke for the second time he saw me, and began to question me as to what had happened, but I had to put him off as best I could till the morrow, when he awoke almost miraculously better. Then I told him something of his illness and of my doings, but as Ayesha was present I could not tell him much except that she was the Queen of the country, and well-disposed towards us, and that it was her pleasure to go veiled; for, though of course I spoke in English, I was afraid that she might understand what we were saying from the expression of our faces, and besides, I remembered her warning.

On the following day Leo got up almost entirely recovered. The flesh wound in his side was healed, and his constitution, naturally a vigorous one, had shaken off the exhaustion consequent on his terrible fever with a rapidity that I can only attribute to the effects of the wonderful drug which Ayesha had given to him, and also to the fact that his illness had

been too short to reduce him very much. With his returning health came back full recollection of all his adventures up to the time when he had lost consciousness in the marsh, and of course of Ustane also, to whom I discovered he had grown considerably attached. Indeed, he overwhelmed me with questions about the poor girl, which I did not dare to answer, for after Leo's first awakening *She* had sent for me, and again warned me solemnly that I was to reveal nothing of the story to him, delicately hinting that if I did it would be the worse for me. She also, for the second time, cautioned me not to tell Leo anything more than I was obliged about herself, saying that she would tell him in her own time.

Indeed, her whole manner changed. After all that I had seen I had expected that she would take the earliest opportunity of claiming the man she believed to be her old-world lover, but this, for some reason of her own, which was at the time quite inscrutable to me, she did not do. All that she did was to attend to his wants quietly, and with a humility that was in striking contrast with her former imperious bearing, addressing him always in a tone of something very like respect, and keeping him with her as much as possible. Of course his curiosity was as much excited about this mysterious woman as my own had been, and he was particularly anxious to see her face, which I had, without entering into particulars, told him was as lovely as her form and voice. This in itself was enough to raise the expectations of any young man to a dangerous pitch, and had it not been that he had not as yet completely shaken off the effects of illness, and was much troubled in his mind about Ustane, of whose affection and brave devotion he spoke in touching terms, I have no doubt that he would have entered into her plans, and fallen in love with her by anticipation. As it was, however, he was simply wildly curious, and also, like myself, considerably awed, for though no hint had been given to him by her of her extraordinary age, he not unnaturally came to identify her with the woman spoken of on the potsherd. At last, quite driven into a corner by his continual questions, which he showered on me while he was dressing on this third morning, I referred him to Ayesha, saying, with perfect truth, that I did not know where Ustane was. Accordingly, after he had eaten a hearty breakfast, we adjourned into *She's* presence, for her mutes had orders to admit us at all hours.

She was, as usual, seated in what, for want of a better term, we called her boudoir, and, on the curtains being drawn, she rose from her couch and, stretching out both hands, came forward to greet us, or rather Leo; for I, as may be imagined, was now quite left in the cold. It was a pretty sight to see her veiled form gliding towards the sturdy young

Englishman, dressed in his grey flannel suit; for, though he is half a Greek in blood, Leo is, with the exception of his hair, one of the most English-looking men I ever saw. He has nothing of the supple form or slippery manner of the modern Greek about him, though I presume that he got his remarkable personal beauty from his foreign mother, whose portrait he resembles not a little. He is very tall and big-chested, and yet not awkward, as so many big men are, and his head is set upon him in such a fashion as to give him a proud and vigorous air, which was well translated in his Amahagger name of the Lion.

"Greeting to thee, my young stranger lord," she said in her softest voice. "Right glad am I to see thee upon thy feet. Believe me, had I not saved thee at the last, never wouldst thou have stood upon those feet again. But the danger is done, and it shall be my care"—and she flung a world of meaning into the words—"that it doth never return again."

Leo bowed to her, and then, in his best Arabic, thanked her for all her kindness and courtesy in caring for one unknown to her.

"Nay," she answered softly, "ill could the world spare such a man. Beauty is too rare upon it. Give me no thanks, who am made happy by thy coming."

"Humph! old fellow," said Master Leo aside to me in English, "the lady is uncommonly civil. We seem to have tumbled into clover. I hope you have made the most of your opportunities. By Jove! what a pair of arms she has got!"

I nudged him in the ribs to make him keep quiet, for I caught sight of a gleam from Ayesha's hidden eye regarding me curiously.

"I trust," went on Ayesha, "that my servants have attended well upon thee; if there can be comfort in this poor place, be sure it waits on thee. Is there aught that I can do for thee more?"

"Yes, oh *She*," answered Leo hastily. "I would fain know where the young lady who was looking after me has gone to."

"Ah," said Ayesha; "the girl—yes, I saw her. Nay, I know not; she said that she would go. I know not whither. Perchance she will return, perchance not. It is wearisome waiting on the sick, and these savage women are fickle."

Leo looked both sulky and distressed at this intelligence.

"It's infernally odd," he said to me in English; and then, addressing *She*, "I cannot understand," he said; "the young lady and I—well, you know exactly—in short, we had a regard for each other."

Ayesha laughed a little very musically, and then turned the subject.

## XIX

### “GIVE ME A BLACK GOAT!”

The conversation after this was of such a desultory order that I do not quite recollect it. For some reason, perhaps from a desire to keep her identity and character in reserve, Ayesha did not talk freely, as she usually did. Presently, however, she informed Leo that she had arranged a dance that night for our amusement. I was astonished to hear this, as I fancied that the Amahagger were much too gloomy a folk to indulge in any such frivolity; but, as will presently more clearly appear, it turned out that an Amahagger dance had little in common with such fantastic festivities in other countries, savage or civilised. Then, as we were about to withdraw, she suggested that Leo might like to see some of the wonders of the caves, and as he gladly assented thither we departed, accompanied by Job and Billali. To describe our visit would only be to repeat a great deal of what I have already said. The tombs we entered were indeed different, for the whole rock was a honeycomb of sepulchres,\* but the contents were nearly always the same. Afterwards we visited the pyramid of bones that had haunted my dreams on the previous night, and from thence went down a long passage to one of the great vaults occupied by the bodies of the poor citizens of Imperial Kôr. These bodies were not nearly so well preserved, and many of them had no linen covering on them, also they were buried from five hundred to one thousand in a single large vault, the corpses in many instances being thickly piled one upon another, like a heap of slain.

Leo was of course intensely interested in this stupendous and unequalled sight, which was, indeed, enough to awake all the imagination a man had in him into the most active life. But to poor Job it did not prove attractive. His nerves—already seriously shaken by what he had undergone since we had arrived in this terrible country—were, as may be imagined, still further disturbed by the spectacle of all this mass of departed humanity, whose forms still remained perfect before his eyes, though their voices were for ever lost in the eternal silence of the tomb. Nor was he comforted when old Billali, by way of soothing his

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\* For a long while it puzzled me to know what could have been done with the enormous quantities of rock that must have been dug out of these vast caves; but I afterwards discovered that it was for the most part built into the walls and palaces of Kôr, and also used to line the reservoirs and sewers.—L.H.H.

evident agitation, informed him that he should not be frightened of these dead things, as he would soon be like them himself.

"There's a nice thing to say of a man, sir," he ejaculated, when I translated this little remark; "but there, what can one expect of an old man-eating savage? Not but what I daresay he's right," and Job sighed.

When we had finished inspecting the caves, we returned and had our meal, for it was now past four in the afternoon, and we needed some food and rest—especially Leo. At six o'clock we all, including Job, waited on Ayesha, who set to work to terrify our poor servant still further by showing him pictures on the pool of water in the font-like vessel. She learnt from me that he was one of seventeen children, and then bid him think of all his brothers and sisters, or as many of them as he could, gathered together in his father's cottage. Then she told him to look in the water, and there, reflected from its stilly surface, was that dead scene of many years gone by, as it was recalled to our poor servant's brain. Some of the faces were clear enough, but some were mere blurs and splotches, or with one feature grossly exaggerated; the fact being that, in these instances, Job had been unable to recall the exact appearances of the individuals, or remembered them only by a peculiarity of his tribe, and the water could only reflect what he saw with his mind's eye. For it must be remembered that *She's* power in this matter was strictly limited; she could apparently, except in very rare instances, only photograph upon the water what was actually in the mind of some one present, and then only by his will. But if she was personally acquainted with a locality, she could, as in the case of ourselves and the whaleboat, throw its reflection upon the water, and also the reflection of anything extraneous that was passing there at the time. This power, however, did not extend to the minds of others. For instance, she could show me the interior of my college chapel, as I remembered it, but not as it was at the moment of reflection; for, where other people were concerned, her art was strictly limited to the facts or memories present to *their* consciousness at the moment. So much was this so, that when we tried, for her amusement, to show her pictures of noted buildings, such as St. Paul's or the Houses of Parliament, the result was most imperfect; for, of course, though we had a good general idea of their appearance, we could not recall all the architectural details, and therefore the minutiae necessary to a perfect reflection were wanting. But Job could not be got to understand this, and, so far from accepting a natural explanation of the matter, which was after all, though strange enough in all conscience, nothing more than an instance of glorified and perfected

telepathy, he set the whole thing down as a manifestation of the blackest magic. I shall never forget the howl of terror which he uttered when he saw the more or less perfect portraits of his long-scattered brethren staring at him from the quiet water, or the merry peal of laughter with which Ayesha greeted his consternation. As for Leo, he did not half like it either, but ran his fingers through his yellow curls, and remarked that it gave him the creeps.

After about an hour of this amusement, in the latter part of which Job did *not* participate, the mutes by signs indicated that Billali was waiting for an audience. Accordingly he was told to “crawl up,” which he did as awkwardly as usual, and announced that the dance was ready to begin if *She* and the white strangers would be pleased to attend. Shortly afterwards we all rose, and Ayesha having thrown a dark cloak (the same, by the way, that she had worn when I saw her cursing by the fire) over her white wrappings, we started. The dance was to be held in the open air, on the smooth rocky plateau in front of the great cave, and thither we made our way. About fifteen paces from the mouth of the cave we found three chairs placed, and here we sat and waited, for as yet no dancers were to be seen. The night was almost, but not quite, dark, the moon being not risen as yet, which made us wonder how we should be able to see the dancing.

“Thou wilt presently understand,” said Ayesha, with a little laugh, when Leo asked her, and we certainly did. Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when from every point we saw dark forms rushing up, each bearing with them what we at first took to be enormous flaming torches. Whatever they were they were burning furiously, for the flames stood out a yard or more behind each bearer. On they came, fifty or more of them, looking like devils from hell, with their flaming burdens. Leo was the first to discover what these burdens were.

“Great heaven!” he said, “they are corpses on fire!”

I stared and stared again—he was perfectly right—the torches that were to light our entertainment were human mummies from the caves!

On rushed the bearers of the flaming corpses, and meeting at a spot about twenty paces in front of us built their ghastly burdens crossways into a huge bonfire. Heavens! how they roared and flared. No tar barrel could have burnt as those mummies did. Nor was this all. Suddenly I saw one great fellow seize a flaming human arm that had fallen from its parent frame, and rush off into the darkness. Presently he stopped, and a tall streak of fire shot up into the air, illumining the gloom, and also the lamp from which it sprang. The lamp was the mummy of a

woman tied to a stout stake let into the rock, and he had fired her hair. On he went a few paces and touched a second, then a third, and a fourth, till at last we were surrounded on all three sides by a great ring of bodies flaring furiously, the material with which they were preserved having rendered them so inflammable that the flames would literally spout out of the ears and mouth in tongues of fire a foot or more long.

Nero<sup>1</sup> illuminated his gardens with live Christians soaked in tar, and we were now treated to a similar spectacle, probably for the first time since his day, only happily our lamps were not living ones.

But although this element of horror was fortunately wanting, to describe the awful and hideous grandeur of the spectacle thus presented to us is, I feel, so absolutely beyond my poor powers, that I scarcely dare attempt it. To begin with, it appealed to the moral as well as the physical susceptibilities. There was something very terrible, and yet very fascinating, about the employment of the remote dead to illumine the orgies of the living; in itself the thing was a satire, both on the living and the dead. Cæsar's dust—or is it Alexander's?—may stop a bunghole, but the functions of these dead Cæsars of the past was to light up a savage orgie.<sup>2</sup> To such base uses do we come, of so little account are we in the minds of the eager multitudes we have bred, most of whom, so far from revering our memory, will live to curse us for begetting them into such a world of woe.

Then there was the physical side of the spectacle, and a weird and splendid one it was. Those old citizens of Kôr burnt, as to judge from their inscriptions they had lived, very fast, and with the utmost liberality. What is more, there were plenty of them. As soon as ever a mummy had burnt down to the ancles, which it did in about twenty minutes, the feet were kicked away, and another one put in its place. The bonfire was kept going on the same generous scale, and its flames shot up, with a hiss and a crackle, twenty or thirty feet into the air, throwing great flashes of light far out into the gloom, through which the dark forms of the Amahagger flitted to and fro like devils replenishing the infernal fires. We all stood and stared aghast—shocked, and yet fascinated—at so strange a spectacle, and half-expecting to see the spirits those flaming forms had once enclosed come creeping from the shadows to work vengeance on their desecrators.

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<sup>1</sup> Roman emperor (58–64 CE) legendary for his cruelty who, according to Tacitus, burned crucified Christians to illuminate one of his parties.

<sup>2</sup> In this sentence and the next, Holly is alluding to *Hamlet* V.i. 197–208.

“I promised thee a strange sight, my Holly,” laughed Ayesha, whose nerves alone did not seem to be affected; “and, behold, I have not failed thee. Also, it hath its lesson. Trust not to the future, for who knows what the future may bring! Therefore, live for the day and endeavour not to escape the dust which seems to be man’s end. What thinkest thou those long-forgotten nobles and ladies would have felt had they known that they should one day flare to light the dance or boil the pot of savages? But see, here come the dancers; a merry crew—are they not? The stage is lit—now for the play.”

As she spoke, we perceived two lines of figures, one male and the other female, to the number of about a hundred, each advancing round the human bonfire, arrayed only in the usual leopard and buck skins. They formed up, in perfect silence, in two lines, facing each other between us and the fire, and then the dance—a sort of infernal and fiendish cancan—began. To describe it is quite impossible, but, though there was a good deal of tossing of legs and double-shuffling, it seemed to our untutored minds to be more of a play than a dance, and, as usual with this dreadful people, whose minds seem to have taken their colour from the caves in which they live, and whose jokes and amusements are drawn from the inexhaustible stores of preserved mortality with which they share their homes, the subject appeared to be a most ghastly one. I know that it represented an attempted murder first of all, and then the burial alive of the victim and his struggling from the grave, each act of the abominable drama, which was carried on in perfect silence, being rounded off and finished with a furious and most revolting dance round the supposed victim, who writhed upon the ground in the red light of the fire.

Presently, however, this pleasing piece was interrupted. Suddenly there was a slight commotion, and a great, powerful woman, whom I had noted as one of the most vigorous of the dancers, came, made mad and drunken with unholy excitement, bounding and staggering towards us, shrieking out as she came:—

“I want a black goat, I must have a black goat, bring me a black goat!” and down she fell upon the rocky floor foaming and writhing, and shrieking for a black goat, about as hideous a spectacle as can well be conceived.

Instantly most of the dancers came up, and got round her, though some still continued their capers in the background.

“She has got a Devil,” sung out one of them. “Run and get a black goat. There, Devil, keep quiet! keep quiet! You shall have the goat presently. They have gone to fetch it, Devil.”

“I want a black goat, I must have a black goat!” shrieked the foaming rolling creature again.

“All right, Devil, the goat will be here presently, keep quiet, there’s a good Devil!”

And so on till the goat taken from a neighbouring kraal,<sup>1</sup> did at last arrive, being dragged bleating on to the scene by its horns.

“Is it a black one, is it a black one?” shrieked the possessed.

“Yes, yes, Devil, as black as night,” then aside, “keep it behind thee, don’t let the Devil see that it has got a white spot on its rump and another on its belly. In one minute, Devil. There, cut its throat quick. Where is the saucer?”

“The goat! the goat! the goat! Give me the blood of my black goat! I must have it, don’t you see I must have it? Oh! oh! oh! give me the blood of the goat.”

At this moment a terrified *bah!* announced that the poor goat had been sacrificed, and the next minute a woman ran up with a saucer full of the blood. This the possessed creature, who was then raving and foaming her wildest, seized and *drank*, and instantly recovered, and without a trace of hysteria, or fits, or being possessed, or whatever dreadful thing it was she was suffering from. She stretched her arms, smiled faintly, and walked quietly back to the dancers, who presently withdrew in a double line as they had come, leaving the space between us and the bonfire deserted.

I thought the entertainment (*sic*) was now over, and feeling rather queer, was about to ask *She* if we could rise, when suddenly what at first I took to be a baboon came hopping round the fire, and was instantly met upon the other side by a lion, or rather a human being dressed in a lion’s skin. Then came a goat, then a man wrapped in an ox’s hide, with the horns wobbling about in a ludicrous way. After him followed a blesbok, then an impala, then a koodoo,<sup>2</sup> then more goats, and many other animals, including a girl sewn up in the shining scaly hide of a boa-constrictor, several yards of which trailed along the ground behind her. When all the beasts had collected they began to dance about in a lumbering, unnatural fashion, and to imitate the sounds produced by the respective animals they represented, till the whole air was alive with roars and bleating and the hissing of snakes. This went on for a long time, till, getting tired of the pantomime, I asked Ayesha if there would be any objection to Leo and myself walking round to inspect the human

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<sup>1</sup> Corral for holding livestock (Afrikaans).

<sup>2</sup> Blesboks, impalas, and koodoos are all types of African antelope.

torches, and, as she had nothing to say against it, we started, striking round to the left. After looking at one or two of the flaming bodies we were about to return, thoroughly disgusted with the grotesque weirdness of the spectacle, when our attention was attracted by one of the dancers, a particularly active leopard, that had separated itself from its fellow beasts, and was whisking about in our immediate neighbourhood, but gradually drawing into a spot where the shadow was darkest, equidistant between two of the flaming mummies. Drawn by curiosity, we followed it, when suddenly it darted past us into the shadows beyond, and as it did so erected itself and whispered, "Come," in a voice that we both recognised as that of Ustane. Without waiting to consult me Leo turned and followed her into the outer darkness, and I, feeling sick enough at heart, went after them. The leopard crawled on for about fifty paces—a sufficient distance to be quite beyond the light of the fire and torches—and then Leo came up with it, or, rather, with Ustane.

"Oh, my lord," I heard her whisper, "so I have found thee! Listen. I am in peril of my life from '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*.' Surely the Baboon has told thee how she drove me from thee? I love thee, my lord, and thou art mine according to the custom of the country. I saved thy life! My Lion, wilt thou cast me off now?"

"Of course not," ejaculated Leo; "I have been wondering whither thou hadst gone. Let us go and explain matters to the Queen."

"Nay, nay, she would slay us. Thou knowest not her power—the Baboon there, he knoweth, for he saw. Nay, there is but one way: if thou wilt cleave to me, thou must flee with me across the marshes even now, and then perchance we may escape."

"For Heaven's sake, Leo," I began, but she broke in.

"Nay, listen not to him. Swift—be swift—death is in the air we breathe. Even now, mayhap, *She* heareth us," and without more ado, she proceeded to back her arguments by throwing herself into his arms. As she did so the leopard's head slipped from her hair. I saw the three white finger-marks upon it, gleaming faintly in the starlight. Once more realising the desperate nature of the situation, I was about to interpose, for I knew that Leo was not too strong-minded where women were concerned, when—oh! horror!—I heard a little silvery laugh behind me. I turned round, and there was *She* herself, and with her Billali and two male mutes. I gasped and nearly sank to the ground, for I knew that such a situation must result in some dreadful tragedy, of which it seemed exceedingly probable to me that I should be the first victim. As for Ustane, she untwined her arms and covered her eyes with her hands,

while Leo, not knowing the full terror of the position, merely coloured up, and looked as silly as a man caught in such a trap would naturally do.

## PART II (11 DECEMBER 1886)

### XX

#### TRIUMPH

Then followed a moment of the most painful silence that I ever endured. It was broken by Ayesha, who addressed herself to Leo.

"Nay, now my lord and guest," she said, in her softest tones, which yet had the ring of steel about them, "look not so bashful. Surely the sight was a pretty one—the leopard and the lion!"

"Oh, hang it all," said Leo, in English.

"And thou Ustane," she went on, "surely I should have passed thee by had not the light fallen on the white across thy hair. Well! well! the dance is done—see, the tapers have burnt down, and all things end in darkness and in ashes. So thou thoughtest it a fit time for love, Ustane, my servant—and I, dreaming not that I could be disobeyed, thought thee already far away."

"Play not with me," moaned the wretched woman; "slay me, and let there be an end."

"Nay, why? It is not well to go so swift from the hot lips of love down to the cold mouth of the grave," and she made a motion to the mutes, who instantly stepped up and caught the girl by either arm. With an oath Leo sprang upon the nearest, and hurled him to the ground, and then stood over him with his face set, and his fist ready.

Again Ayesha laughed. "It was well thrown, my guest: thou hast a strong arm for one who so late was sick. But now out of thy courtesy I pray thee let that man live and do my bidding. He shall not harm the girl; the night air grows chill, and I would welcome her in mine own place. Surely she whom thou dost favour shall be favoured of me also."

I took Leo by the arm, and pulled him from the prostrate mute, and he, half bewildered, obeyed the pressure. Then we all set out for the cave across the plateau, where a great pile of white human ashes was all that remained of the fire that had lit the dancing, for the dancers had vanished.

In due course we gained Ayesha's boudoir—all too soon it seemed to me, having a sad presage of what was to come lying heavy on my heart.

Ayesha seated herself upon her cushions, and having dismissed Job and Billali, by signs bade the mutes tend the lamps and retire, all save one girl, who was her favourite personal attendant. We three remained standing, the unfortunate Ustane a little to the left of the rest of us.

"Now, oh Holly," Ayesha began, "how came it that thou who didst hear my words bidding this evil-doer"—and she pointed to Ustane—"to go from hence—thou at whose prayer I did weakly spare her life—how came it, I say, that thou wast a sharer in what I saw to-night? Answer, and for thine own sake, I say, speak the truth, for I am not minded to hear lies upon this matter!"

"It was by accident, oh Queen," I answered. "I knew nought of it."

"I do believe thee, oh Holly," she answered coldly, "and well it is for thee that I do—then does all the guilt rest upon her."

"I don't see any particular guilt about it," broke in Leo. "She is not anybody else's wife, and it appears that she has married me according to the custom of this awful place, so who is the worse? Any way, madam," he went on, "whatever she has done I have done too, so if she is to be punished let me be punished also; and I tell thee," he went on, working himself up into a fury, "that if thou biddest one of those deaf and dumb villains to touch her again I will tear him to pieces!" And he looked as though he meant it.

Ayesha listened in icy silence, and made no remark. When he had finished, however, she addressed Ustane.

"Hast thou aught to say, woman? Thou silly straw, thou feather, who didst think to float towards thy passion's petty ends, even against the great wind of my will! Tell me, for I fain would understand. Why didst thou this thing?"

And then I think I saw the most tremendous exhibition of moral courage and intrepidity that it is possible to conceive. For the poor doomed girl, knowing what she had to expect at the hands of her terrible Queen, knowing, too, from bitter experience how great was her power, yet gathered herself together, and out of the very depths of her despair found materials to defy her.

"I did it, oh Queen," she answered, drawing herself up to the full

of her stately height, and throwing back the panther skin off her head, "because my love is stronger than the grave. I did it because my life without this man whom my heart chose would be but a living death. Therefore did I risk my life, and now that I know that it is forfeit to thine anger, yet am I glad that I did risk it, and pay it away in the risking, ay, because he embraced me once, and told me that he yet loved me."

Here Ayesha half rose from her couch, and then sank down again.

"I have no magic," went on Ustane, her rich voice ringing strong and full, "and I am not a Queen, nor do I live for ever, but a woman's heart is heavy to sink through waters, however deep, oh Queen! And a woman's eyes are quick to see, even through thy veil, oh Queen!

"Listen: I know it, thou dost love this man thyself, and therefore wouldst thou destroy me who stand across thy path. Ay, I die—I die, and go into the darkness, nor know I whither I go. But this I know. There is a light shining in my breast, and by that light, as by a lamp, I see the truth and the future that I shall not share unroll itself before me like a scroll. When first I knew my lord," and she pointed to Leo, "I knew also that death would be the bridal gift he gave me—it rushed upon me of a sudden, but I turned not back, being ready to pay the price, and, behold, death is here! And now, even as I knew that, so do I, standing on the steps of doom, know that thou shalt not reap the profits of thy crime. Mine he is, and, though thy beauty shine like a sun among the stars, mine shall he remain for thee. Never here upon this earth shall he look thee in the eyes and call thee wife. Thou, too, art doomed, I see"—and her voice rang like the cry of an inspired prophetess; "ah, I see"——

Then came an answering cry of mingled rage and terror. I turned my head. Ayesha had risen, and was standing with her outstretched hand pointing at Ustane, who had suddenly stopped speaking. I gazed at the poor woman, and as I gazed there grew upon her face that same, woful, fixed expression of terror that I had seen once before when she had broken out into her wild chant. Her eyes grew large, her nostrils dilated, and her lips blanched.

Ayesha said nothing, she made no sound, she only drew herself up, stretched out her arm, and, her tall veiled frame quivering like an aspen leaf, appeared to look fixedly at her victim. Even as she did so Ustane put her hands to her head, uttered one piercing scream, turned round twice, and then fell backwards with a thud prone upon the floor. Both Leo and myself rushed to her—she was stone dead—blasted into death

by some mysterious electric agency or overwhelming will-force whereof the dread *She* had command.

For a moment Leo did not quite realise what had happened. But when he did, his face was awful to see. With a savage oath he rose from beside the corpse, and, turning, literally sprang at Ayesha. But she had been watching, and seeing him coming, stretched out her hand again, and he came staggering back towards me, and would have fallen, had I not caught him. Afterwards he told me that he felt as though he had suddenly received a violent blow in the chest, and, what is more, cowed as though all the manhood had been taken out of him.

Then Ayesha spoke. "Forgive me, my guest," she said softly, addressing him, "if I have shocked thee with my justice."

"Forgive thee, thou fiend!" roared poor Leo, wringing his hands, in his rage and grief. "forgive thee, thou murderess! By Heaven I will kill thee if I can!"

"Nay, nay," she answered in the same soft voice, "thou dost not understand—the time has come for thee to learn. Thou art my love, my Kallikrates, my Beautiful, my Strong! For two thousand years, Kallikrates, have I waited for thee, and now at length thou hast come back to me; and as for this woman," pointing to the corpse, "she stood between me and thee, and therefore I have removed her, Kallikrates."

"It is an accursed lie!" said Leo. "My name is not Kallikrates! I am Leo Vincey, my ancestor was Kallikrates—at least, I believe he was."

"Ah, thou sayest it—thine ancestor was Kallikrates, and thou, even thou, art Kallikrates come back—and mine own dear lord!"

"I am not Kallikrates, and as for being thy lord, or having anything to do with thee, I had rather be the lord of a fiend from hell, for she would be better than thou."

"Sayest thou so—sayest thou so, Kallikrates? Nay, but thou hast not seen me for so many years that no memory remains. Yet am I very fair, Kallikrates!"

"I hate thee, murderess, and I do not wish to see thee. What is it to me how fair thou art? I hate thee, I say."

"Yet within a very little space shalt thou creep to my knee, and swear that thou dost love me," answered Ayesha, with a sweet, mocking laugh. "Come, there is no time like the present time: here, before this dead girl, who loved thee, let us put it to the proof."

"Look now on me, Kallikrates!" and with a sudden motion she shook her gauzy covering from her, and stood forth in her low kirtle and her snaky zone, in her glorious, radiant beauty and her imperial

grace, rising from her wrappings, as it were, like Venus from the wave, or Galatea from her marble,<sup>1</sup> or a beatified spirit from the tomb. She stood forth, and fixed her deep and glowing eyes upon his own, and I saw his clenched fists unclasp, and his set and quivering features relax beneath her gaze. I saw his wonder and astonishment grow into admiration, and then into fascination, and the more he struggled the more I saw the power of her dread beauty fasten on him and take possession of his senses, drugging them, and drawing the heart out of him. Did I not know the process? Had not I, who was twice his age, gone through it myself? Was I not going through it afresh even then, though her sweet and passionate gaze was not for me? Yes, alas, I was! Alas, that I should have to confess that at that very moment I was rent by mad and furious jealousy. I could have flown at his throat, shame upon me! The woman had confounded and almost destroyed my moral sense, as she was bound to confound all who looked upon her superhuman loveliness. But somehow, I do not know how, I got the better of myself, and once more turned to see the climax of the tragedy.

"Oh, heavens!" gasped Leo, "art thou a woman?"

"A woman in truth—in very truth—and thine own spouse, Kallikrates!" she answered, stretching out her rounded ivory arms towards him, and smiling, ah, so sweetly!

He looked and looked, and slowly I perceived that he was drawing nearer to her. Suddenly his eye fell upon the corpse of poor Ustane, and he shuddered and stopped.

"How can I?" he said hoarsely. "Thou art a murderess; she loved me."

Observe, he was already forgetting that he had loved her.

"It is nought," she murmured, and her voice sounded sweet as the night-wind passing through the trees. "It is nought at all. If I have sinned, let my beauty answer for my sin. If I have sinned it is for love of thee; let my sin, therefore, be put away and forgotten;" and once more she stretched out her arms and whispered "Come," and then in another few seconds it was over. I saw him struggle—I saw him even turn to fly; but her eyes drew him stronger than iron bonds, and the magic of her beauty and concentrated will and passion entered into him and overpowered him, ay, even there, in the presence of the body of the woman who had loved him well enough to die for him. It sounds

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek myth, Pygmalion sculpted Galatea from stone and, after falling in love with his creation, prayed that she turn into a living woman. His prayer was answered by Aphrodite. Venus from the wave] the Roman goddess of love was supposed to have been born from the ocean, fully formed.

horrible and wicked enough, but he cannot be blamed too much, and be sure his sin will find him out. The temptress who drew him into evil was more than human, and her beauty was greater than the loveliness of the daughters of men.

I looked up again, and now her perfect form lay in his arms, and her lips were pressed against his own; and thus, with the corpse of his dead love for an altar, did Leo Vincey plight his troth to her red-handed murderess—plight it for ever and a day. For those who sell themselves into a like dominion, paying down the price of their own honour, and throwing their soul into the balance to sink the scale to the level of their lusts, can hope for no deliverance here or hereafter. As they have sown, so shall they reap, and reap even when the poppy flowers of passion have withered in their hands, and their harvest is but bitter tares, garnered in satiety.

Suddenly, with a snake-like motion, she seemed to slip from his embrace, and then again broke out into her low laugh of mockery.

“Did I not tell thee that within a little space thou wouldst creep to my knee, oh Kallikrates! And surely the space has not been a great one!”

Leo groaned in shame and misery; for though he was overcome and stricken down, he was not so lost as to be unaware of the depth of the degradation to which he had sunk. On the contrary, his better nature rose up in arms against his fallen self, as I saw clearly enough later on.

Ayesha laughed again, and then quickly veiled herself, and made a sign to the girl mute who had been watching the whole scene with curious startled eyes. The girl left, and presently returned, followed by two male mutes, to whom the Queen made another sign. Thereon they all three seized the body of poor Ustane by the arms, and dragged it heavily down the cavern and away through the curtains at the end. Leo watched it for a little while, and then covered his eyes with his hand, and it, too, to our excited fancy, seemed to watch us as it went.

“There passes the dead past,” said Ayesha, solemnly, as the curtains shook and fell back into their places, when the ghastly procession had vanished behind them, and then, with one of those extraordinary transitions of which I have already spoken, she again threw off her veil, and broke out into a kind of pæan of triumph or epithalamium, which, wild and beautiful as it was, is exceedingly difficult to render into English. It was divided into two parts—one descriptive or definatory, and the other personal; and, as nearly as I can remember, ran as follows:—

*Love is like a flower in the desert.*

*It is like the aloe of Arabia that blooms but once and dies; it blooms in*

*the salt emptiness of Life, and the brightness of its beauty is set upon the waste as a star is set upon a storm.*

*It hath the sun above that is the spirit, and above it blows the air of its own divinity.*

*At the echoing of a step, Love blooms, I say; I say Love blooms, and bends her beauty down to him who passeth by.*

*He plucketh it, yea, he plucketh the red cup that is full of honey, and beareth it away, away across the desert, away till the flower be withered, away till the desert be done.*

*There is only one perfect flower in the wilderness of Life.*

*That flower is Love!*

*There is only one fixed star in the mist of our wandering.*

*That star is Love!*

*There is only one hope in our despairing night.*

*That hope is Love!*

*All else is false. All else is shadow moving upon water. All else is wind and vanity.*

*Who shall say what is the weight or the measure of Love?*

*It is born of the flesh, it dwelleth in the spirit. From each does it draw its comfort.*

*For beauty it is as a star.*

*Many are its shapes, but all are beautiful, and none know where the star rose, or the horizon where it shall set.*

Then turning to Leo, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, she went on in a fuller and more triumphant tone, and in balanced sentences that gradually swelled from idealised prose into pure and majestic verse:

*Long have I loved thee, oh, my love; yet has my love not lessened.*

*Long have I waited for thee, and behold my reward is at hand—is here!*

*Far away I saw thee once, and thou wast taken from me.*

*Then in a grave sowed I the seed of patience, and shone upon it with the sun of hope, and watered it with tears of repentance, and breathed on it with the breath of my knowledge. And now, lo! it hath sprung up, and borne fruit. Lo! out of the grave hath it sprung. Yea, from among the dry bones and ashes of the dead.*

*I have waited, and my reward is with me.*

*I have overcome Death, and Death brought back to me him that was dead.*

*Therefore do I rejoice, for fair is the future.*

*Green are the paths that we shall tread across the everlasting meadows.  
The hour is at hand. Night hath fled away into the valleys.  
The dawn kisseth the mountain tops.  
Soft shall we lie, my love, and easy shall we go,  
Crowned shall we be with the diadem of Kings.  
Worshipping and wonder-struck, all peoples of the world,  
Blinded, shall fall before our beauty and our might.  
From time unto times shall our greatness thunder on,  
Rolling like a chariot through the dust of endless days.  
Laughing shall we speed in our victory and pomp,  
Laughing like the Daylight as he leaps along the hills.  
Onward, still triumphant to a triumph ever new!  
Onward, in our power to a power unattained!  
Onward, never weary, clad with splendour for a robe!  
Till accomplished be our fate, and the night is rushing down.*

She paused in her strange and most thrilling allegorical chant, of which I am, unfortunately, only able to give the burden, and that feebly enough, and then said—

“Perchance thou dost not believe my word, Kallikrates—perchance thou thinkest that I do delude thee, and that I have not lived these many years, and that thou hast not been born again to me. Now will I show thee, and thee also, my Holly, who dost stand staring there as though of a truth thou hadst taken root in this unkindly soil. Bear each one of you a lamp, and follow after me whither I shall lead ye.”

Without pausing to think—indeed, speaking for myself, I had almost abandoned the function in circumstances under which to think seemed to be absolutely useless, since thought fell hourly helpless against a black wall of wonder—we took the lamps and followed her. Going to the end of her “boudoir,” she raised a curtain and revealed a little stair of the sort that was so common in these dim caves of Kôr. As we hurried down the stair I observed that the steps were worn in the centre to such an extent that some of them had been reduced from seven and a half inches, at which I guessed their original height, to about three and a half. Now, as all the other steps that I had seen in the caves had been practically unworn, as was to be expected, seeing that the only traffic that ever passed upon them was that of those who bore a fresh burden to the tomb, this fact struck my notice with that curious pertinacity with which little things do strike us when our minds are absolutely overwhelmed with a rush of powerful sensations, beaten flat as it were

like a sea beneath a hurricane, so that every little object on the surface stands up like a mountain. At the bottom of the staircase, I stood and stared at the worn steps, and *She*, turning, saw me.

“Wonderest thou whose are the feet that have worn away the rock, my Holly?” she asked. “Behold! they are mine—even mine own light feet! I can remember when the stairs were fresh and level, but for two thousand years have I gone down hither day by day, and see, my sandals have worn out the solid rock!”

I made no answer, but I do not think that anything that I had heard or seen brought home to my limited understanding so clear a sense of this being’s overwhelming antiquity as that hard rock hollowed out by her soft, white feet. How many millions of times must she have passed up and down that stair to bring about such a result?

The stair led to a tunnel, and a few paces down the tunnel was one of the usual curtain-hung doorways, a glance at which told me that it was the same where I had been a witness of that terrible scene by the leaping flame. I recognised the pattern of the curtain, and the sight of it brought the whole event vividly before my eyes, and made me tremble even at its memory. Ayesha entered the tomb (for it was a tomb), and we followed her,—I, for one, rejoicing that the mystery of the place was about to be cleared up, and yet afraid to face its solution.

## XXI

### THE DEAD AND LIVING MEET

“Behold the place where I have slept for these two thousand years,” said Ayesha, taking the lamp from Leo’s hand and holding it above her head. Its rays fell upon a little hollow in the floor, where I had seen the leaping flame, but the fire was out now. They fell upon the white form stretched there beneath its wrappings upon its bed of stone, upon the fretted carving of the tomb, and upon another shelf of stone opposite the one on which the body lay, and separated from it by the breadth of the cave.

“Here,” went on Ayesha, laying her hand upon the rock, “here have I slept night by night for all these generations, with but a cloak to cover me. It did not become me that I should lie soft when my spouse yonder,” and she pointed to the rigid form, “lay stiff in death. Here night by night have I slept in his cold company—till, thou seest, this thick slab, like the stairs down which we passed, has worn thin with the

tossing of my form—so faithful have I been to thee even in thy space of sleep, Kallikrates. And now, my love, thou shalt see a wonderful thing—living, thou shalt behold thyself dead—for well have I tended thee during all these years, Kallikrates. Art thou prepared?”

We made no answer, but gazed at each other with frightened eyes, the whole scene was so dreadful and so solemn. Ayesha advanced, and laid her hand upon the corner of the shroud, and once more spoke.

“Be not affrighted,” she said; “though the thing seem wonderful to thee—all we who live have thus lived before; nor is the very shape that holds us a stranger to the sun! Only we know it not, because memory writes no record, and earth hath gathered in the earth she lent us, for none have saved our glory from the grave. But I, by my arts and by the arts of those dead men of Kôr which I have learned, have held thee back, oh Kallikrates, from the dust, that the waxy stamp of beauty on thy face should ever rest before mine eye. ’Twas a mask that memory might fill, serving to fashion out thy presence from the past, and give it strength to wander in the habitations of my thought, clad in a mummerly of life that stayed my appetite with visions of dead days.

“Behold now, let the dead and living meet! Across the gulf of Time they still are one. Time hath no power against Identity, though sleep in mercy hath blotted out the tablets of our mind, and with oblivion sealed the sorrows up that else would hound us on from life to life, stuffing the brain with gathered misery till it burst in the madness of uttermost despair. Still are they one, for the wrappings of our sleep shall roll away as thunder clouds before the wind; the frozen voices of the past shall melt in music like mountain snows beneath the sun; and the weeping and the laughter of the lost hours shall be heard once more sweetly echoing up the cliffs of immeasurable Time.

“Ay, the sleep shall roll away, and the voices shall be heard, when down the completed chain, whereof our each existence is a link, the lightning of the Spirit hath passed to work out the purpose of our being; quickening and fusing those separated days of life, and shaping them to a staff whereon we may safely lean as we wend to our appointed fate.

“Therefore, have no fear, Kallikrates, when thou—living, and but lately born—shalt look upon thine own departed self, who breathed and died so long ago. I do but turn one page in thy Book of Being, and show thee what is writ thereon.

“*Behold!*”

With a sudden motion she drew the shroud from the cold form, and let the lamplight play upon it. I looked, and then shrank back horrified; since,

say what she might in explanation, the sight was an uncanny one—for her explanations were beyond the grasp of our finite minds, and when they were separated from the mists of vague esoteric philosophy, and brought into conflict with the cold and horrifying fact, did not do much to break its force. For there, stretched upon the stone bier before us, robed in white and perfectly preserved, was what appeared to be the body of Leo Vincey. I stared from Leo, standing there alive, to Leo lying there dead, and could see no difference; except, perhaps, that the body on the bier looked older. Feature for feature they were the same, even down to the crop of little golden curls, which was Leo's most uncommon beauty. It even seemed to me, as I looked, that the expression on the dead man's face resembled that which I had sometimes seen upon Leo's when he was plunged into profound sleep. I can only sum up the closeness of the resemblance by saying that I never saw twins so exactly similar as that dead and living pair.

I turned to see what effect was produced upon Leo by this sight of his dead self, and found it to be one of partial stupefaction. He stood for two or three minutes staring and said nothing, and when at last he spoke it was only to ejaculate,

“Cover it up and take me away.”

“Nay, wait,” said Ayesha, who, standing with the lamp raised above her head, flooding with its light her own rich beauty and the cold wonder of the death-clothed form upon the bier, looked more like an inspired Sibyl<sup>1</sup> than a woman as she rolled out her majestic sentences with a grandeur and a freedom of utterance which I am, alas, quite unable to do justice.

“Wait; I would show thee something, that no tittle of my crime may be hidden from thee. Do thou, oh Holly, open the garment on the breast of the dead Kallikrates, for perchance my lord may fear to touch himself.”

I obeyed with trembling hands. It seemed a desecration and an unhallowed thing to touch that sleeping image of the live man by my side. Presently his broad chest was bare, and there upon it, right over the heart, was a wound, evidently inflicted with a spear.

“Thou seest, Kallikrates,” she said. “Behold, it was I who slew thee: in the Place of Life I gave thee death. I slew thee because of the Egyptian Amenartas, whom thou didst love, for by her arts she held thy heart, and her I could not slay as but now I slew the woman, for she was too strong for me. In my haste and bitter anger I slew thee, and now for all these days have I lamented thee, and waited for thy coming. And thou hast

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<sup>1</sup> A female prophet of ancient Greece or Rome.

come, and none can stand between thee and me, and of a truth now for death I will give thee life—not life eternal, for that none can give, but life and youth that shall endure for thousands upon thousands of years, and with it pomp, and power, and wealth, and all things that are good and beautiful, such as have been to no man before thee, nor shall be to any man who comes after. And now one thing more, and thou shalt rest and make ready for the day of thy new birth. Thou seest this body, which was thine own. For all these centuries it hath been my comfort and my companion, but now I need it no more, for I have thy living presence, and it can but serve to stir up memories of that which I had fain forget. Let it therefore go back to the dust from which I kept it.

“Behold! I have prepared against this happy hour!” and going to the other shelf, or stone ledge, which, she said, had served her for a bed, she took from it a large vitrified double-handed vase, the mouth of which was tied up with a bladder. This she loosed, and then, having bent down and gently kissed the white forehead of the dead man, she undid the vase, and sprinkled its contents carefully over the form, taking, I observed, the greatest precautions against any drop of them touching us or herself, and then poured out what remained of the liquid upon the chest and head. Instantly a dense vapour arose, and the cave was filled with choking fumes that prevented us from seeing anything while the deadly acid (for I presume it was some tremendous preparation of that sort) did its work. From the spot where the body lay came a fierce fizzing and cracking sound, which ceased, however, before the fumes had cleared away. At last they were all gone, except a little cloud which still hung over the corpse. In a couple of minutes more this, too, had vanished, and, wonderful as it may seem, it is a fact that on the stone bench that had supported the mortal remains of the ancient Kallikrates for so many centuries there was now nothing to be seen but a few handfuls of smoking white powder. The acid had utterly destroyed the body, and even in places eaten into the stone. Ayesha stooped down, and, taking a handful of this powder in her grasp, threw it into the air, saying at the same time, in a voice of calm solemnity,

“Dust to dust!—the past to the past!—the dead to the dead!—Kallikrates is dead, and is born again!”

The ashes floated noiselessly to the rocky floor, and we stood in awed silence and watched them fall, too overcome for words.

“Now leave me,” she said, “and sleep if ye may. I must watch and think, for to-morrow night we go hence, and the time is long since I trod the path that we must follow.”

Accordingly we bowed, and left her.

As we passed to our own apartment I peeped into Job's sleeping place, to see how he fared, for he had gone away just before our interview with the murdered Ustane, quite prostrated by the terrors of the Amahagger festivity. He was sleeping soundly, good honest fellow that he was, and I rejoiced to think that his nerves, which, like those of most uneducated people, were far from strong, had been spared the closing scenes of that dreadful day. Then we entered our own chamber, and here at last poor Leo, who, ever since he had looked upon that frozen image of his living self, had been in a state not far removed from stupefaction, burst out into a torrent of grief. Now that he was no longer in the presence of the dread *She*, his sense of the awfulness of all that had happened, and more especially of the wicked murder of Ustane, who was bound to him by ties so close, broke upon him like a storm, and lashed him into an agony of remorse and terror which was painful to witness. He cursed himself—he cursed the hour when we had first seen the writing on the sherd, which was being so mysteriously verified, and bitterly he cursed his own weakness. Ayesha he dared not curse—who dared speak evil of such a woman, whose consciousness for aught we knew was watching us at this very moment?

“What am I to do, old fellow?” he groaned, resting his head against my shoulder in the extremity of his grief. “I let her be killed—not that I could help that, but within five minutes I was kissing her murderess over her body. I am a degraded brute, but I cannot resist that” (and here his voice sank) “that awful sorceress. I know I shall do it again to-morrow; I know that I am in her power for always; if I never saw her again I should never think of anybody else for all my life; I must follow her as a needle follows a magnet; I would not go away now if I could; I could not leave her, my legs would not carry me, but my mind is still clear enough, and in my mind I hate her—at least, I think so. It is all so horrible; and that—that body! What can I make of it? It was *me*! I am sold into bondage, old fellow, and she will take my soul as the price of herself!”

Then, for the first time, I told him that I was in a but very little better position, and I am bound to say that, notwithstanding his own infatuation, he had the decency to sympathise with me. Perhaps he did not think it worth while being jealous, realising that he had no cause so far as the lady was concerned. I went on to suggest that we should try to run away, but we soon rejected the project as futile, and, to be perfectly honest, I do not believe that either of us would really have left Ayesha even if some superior power had suddenly offered to convey us from these gloomy caves

and set us down in Cambridge. We could no more have left her than a moth can leave the light that destroys it. We were like confirmed opium-eaters: in our moments of reason, we well knew the deadly nature of our pursuit, but we certainly were not prepared to abandon its terrible delights.

No man who once had seen *She* unveiled, and heard the music of her voice, and drunk in the bitter wisdom of her words, would willingly give up the sight for a whole sea of placid joys. How much more then was this likely to be so when, as in Leo's case, to put myself out of the question, this extraordinary creature declared her utter and absolute devotion, and gave what appeared to be proofs of its having lasted for some two thousand years?

No doubt she was a wicked person, and no doubt she had murdered Ustane when she stood in her path, but then she was very faithful, and by a law of nature man is apt to think but lightly of a woman's crimes, especially if that woman be beautiful, and the crime be committed for the love of him.

And then for the rest, when had such a chance ever come to a man before as that which now lay in Leo's hand? True, in uniting himself to this dread woman, he would place his life in the hand of a mysterious creature of evil tendencies,\* but then that would be likely enough to

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\* After some months of consideration of this statement I am bound to confess that I am not quite satisfied of its truth. It is perfectly true that Ayesha committed a murder, but I shrewdly suspect that were we endowed with the same absolute power, and if we had the same tremendous interest at stake, we should be very apt to do likewise under parallel circumstances. Also, it must be remembered that she looked on it as an execution for disobedience under a system which made the slightest disobedience punishable by death. Putting aside this question of the murder, her evil-doing resolves itself into the expression of views and the acknowledgment of motives which are contrary to our preaching if not to our practice. Now at first sight this might be fairly taken as a proof of an evil nature, but when we come to consider the great antiquity of the individual it becomes doubtful if it was anything more than the natural cynicism which arises from age and bitter experience, and the possession of extraordinary powers of observation. It is a well-known fact that very often, putting the period of boyhood out of the question, the older we grow the more cynical and hardened we get, indeed many of us are only saved by timely death from utter moral petrification if not moral corruption. No one will deny that a young man is on the average better than an old one, for he is without that experience of the order of things that in certain thoughtful dispositions can hardly fail to produce cynicism, and that disregard of acknowledged methods and established custom which we call evil. Now the oldest man upon the earth was but a babe compared to Ayesha, and the wisest man upon the earth was not one-third as wise. And the fruit of her wisdom was this, that there was but one thing worth living for, and that was Love in its highest sense, and to gain that good thing she was not prepared to stop at trifles. This is really the sum of her evil doings, and it must be remembered on the other hand that whatever may be thought of them she had some virtues developed to a degree very uncommon in either sex—constancy, for instance.—L.H.H.

happen to him in any ordinary marriage. On the other hand, however, no ordinary marriage could bring him such awful beauty—for awful is the only word that can describe it—such divine devotion, such wisdom, and command over the secrets of nature, and the place and power that they must win, or lastly the royal crown of unending youth, if indeed she could give that. No, on the whole, it is not wonderful, that though Leo was plunged in bitter shame and grief, such as any gentleman would have felt under the circumstances, he was not ready to entertain the idea of running away from his extraordinary fortune.

My own opinion is that he would have been mad if he had done so. But then I confess that my statement on the matter must be accepted with qualifications. I am in love with the lady myself to this day, and I would rather have been the object of her affection for one short week than that of any other woman in the world for a whole life-time. And let me add that if anybody who doubts this statement, and thinks me foolish for making it, could have seen Ayesha draw her veil and flash out in beauty on his gaze, his view would exactly coincide with my own. Of course, I am speaking of any *man*. We never had the advantage of a lady's opinion of Ayesha, but I think it quite possible that she would have regarded the Queen with dislike, would have expressed her disapproval in some more or less pointed manner, and ultimately have got herself blasted.

For two hours or more Leo and I sat with shaken nerves and frightened eyes, and talked over the almost miraculous events through which we were passing. It seemed like a dream or a fairy tale, instead of the solemn, sober fact. Who would have believed that the writing on the potsherd was not only true, but that we should live to verify its truth, and that we two seekers should find her who was sought, patiently awaiting our coming in the tombs of Kôr? Who would have thought that in the person of Leo this mysterious woman should, as she believed, discover the being whom she awaited from century to century, and whose former earthly habitation she had till this very night preserved? But so it was. In the face of all we had seen it was difficult for us as ordinary reasoning men any longer to doubt its truth, and therefore at last, with humble hearts and a deep sense of the impotence of human knowledge, and the insolence of its assumption that denies that which it has no experience of to be possible, we laid ourselves down to sleep, leaving our fates in the hands of that watching Providence which had thus chosen to allow us to draw the veil of human ignorance, and reveal to us for good or evil some glimpse of the possibilities of life.

## XXII

### JOB HAS A PRESENTIMENT

It was nine o'clock on the following morning when Job, who still looked scared and frightened, came in to call me, and at the same time breathe his gratitude at finding us alive in our beds, which it appeared was more than he had expected. When I told him of the awful end of poor Ustane he was even more grateful at our survival, and much shocked, though Ustane had been no favourite of his, or he of hers, for the matter of that. She called him "pig" in bastard Arabic, and he called her "hussy" in good English, but these amenities were forgotten in the face of the catastrophe that had overwhelmed her at the hands of her Queen.

"I don't want to say anything as mayn't be agreeable, sir," said Job, when he had finished exclaiming at my tale, "but it's my opinion that that there *She* is the old gentleman himself, or perhaps his wife, if he has got one, which I suppose he has, for he couldn't be so wicked all by himself. The Witch of Endor<sup>1</sup> was a fool to her, sir; bless you, she would make no more of raising every gentleman in the Bible out of these here beastly tombs than I should of growing cress on an old flannel. It's a country of devils, this is, sir, and she's the master one of the lot; and if ever we get out of it it will be more than I expect to do. I don't see no way out of it. That witch isn't likely to let a fine young man like Mr. Leo go."

"Come," I said, "at any rate she saved his life."

"Yes, and she'll take his soul to pay for it. She'll make him a witch, like herself. I say it's wicked to have anything to do with those sort of people. Last night, sir, I lay awake and read in my little Bible that my poor old mother gave me about what is going to happen to sorceresses and them sort till my hair stood on end.<sup>2</sup> Lord, how the old lady would stare if she saw where her Job had got to!"

"Yes, it's a queer country, and a queer people too, Job," I answered, with a sigh, for, though I am not superstitious like Job, I admit to a natural shrinking (which will not bear investigation) from the things that are above Nature.

"You are right, sir," he answered, "and if you won't think me very foolish, I should like to say something to you now that Mr. Leo is out of the way"—(Leo had got up early and gone for a stroll)—"and that

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<sup>1</sup> In the Bible, a woman who raised the spirit of the prophet Samuel; see 1 Samuel 28.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 21:8.

is that I know it is the last country as ever I shall see in this world. I had a dream last night, and I dreamed that I saw my old father with a kind of night-shirt on him, something like these folks wear when they want to be in particular full-dress, and a bit of that feathery grass in his hand, which he may have gathered on the way, for I saw lots of it yesterday about three hundred yards from the mouth of this beastly cave.

“‘Job,’ he said to me, solemn like, and yet with a kind of satisfaction shining through him, more like a Methody parson when he has sold a neighbour a marked horse for a sound one and cleared twenty pounds by the job than anything I can think on, ‘Job, time’s up, Job; but I never did expect to have to come and hunt you out in this ’ere place, Job. Such ado as I have had to nose you up; it wasn’t friendly to give your poor old father such a run, let alone that a wonderful lot of bad characters hail from this place Kôr.’”

“Regular cautions,” I suggested.

“Yes, sir—of course, sir, that’s just what he said they was—‘cautions, downright scorchers,’<sup>1</sup> sir—and I’m sure I don’t doubt it, seeing what I know of them and their hot-potting ways,” went on Job, sadly. “Anyway, he was sure that time was up, and went away saying that we should see more than we cared for of each other soon, and I suppose he was alluding to the fact that father and I never could hit it off together for longer nor three days, and I daresay that things will be similar when we meet again.”

“Surely,” I said, “you don’t think that you are going to die because you dreamed you saw your old father; if one dies because one dreams of one’s father, what happens to a man who dreams of his mother-in-law?”

“Ah, sir, you’re laughing at me,” said Job; “but, you see, you didn’t know my old father. If it had been anybody else—my Aunt Mary, for instance, who never made much of a job—I should not have thought so much of it; but my father was that idle, which he shouldn’t have been with seventeen children, that he would never have put himself out to come here just to see the place. No, sir; I know that he meant business. Well, sir, I can’t help it; I suppose every man must go some time or other, though it is a hard thing to die in a place like this, where Christian burial isn’t to be had for its weight in gold. I’ve tried to be a good man, sir, and do my duty honest, and if it wasn’t for the supercilious kind of way in which father carried on last night—a sort of sniffing at me as it were, as though he hadn’t no opinion of my references and

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<sup>1</sup> Astonishing, alarming things or people (slang).

testimonials—I should feel easy enough in my mind. Any way, sir, I’ve been a good servant to you and Mr. Leo, bless him! Why it seems but the other day that I used to lead him about the streets with a penny whip; and if ever you get out of this place—which, as father didn’t allude to you, perhaps you may—I hope you will think kindly of my whitened bones, and never have anything more to do with Greek writing on flower-pots, sir, if I may make so bold as to say so.”

“Come, come, Job,” I said, seriously, “this is all nonsense, you know. You mustn’t be silly enough to go getting such ideas into your head. We’ve lived through some queer things, and I hope that we may go on doing so.”

“No, sir,” answered Job, in a tone of conviction that jarred on me unpleasantly, “it isn’t nonsense. I’m a doomed man, and I feel it, and a most uncomfortable feeling it is, sir, for one can’t help wondering how it’s going to come about. If you are eating your dinner you think of poison and it goes against your stomach, and if you are walking along these dark rabbit-burrows you think of knives, and Lord, don’t you just shiver about the back! I ain’t particular, sir, provided it’s sharp, like that poor girl, who, now that she’s gone, I am sorry to have spoke hard on, though I don’t approve of her morals in getting married, which I consider too quick to be decent. Still, sir,” and poor Job turned a shade paler as he said it, “I do hope it won’t be that hot-pot game.”

“Nonsense,” I broke in angrily, “nonsense!”

“Very well, sir,” said Job, “it isn’t my place to differ from you, sir, but if you happen to be going anywhere, sir, I should be obliged if you could manage to take me with you, seeing that I shall be glad to have a friendly face to look at when the time comes, just to help one through, as it were. And now, sir, I’ll be getting the breakfast,” and he went, leaving me in a very uncomfortable state of mind. I was deeply attached to old Job, who was one of the best and honestest men I have ever had to do with in any class of life, and really more of a friend than a servant, and the mere idea of anything happening to him brought a lump into my throat. Beneath all his ludicrous talk I could see that he himself was quite convinced that something was going to happen, and though in most cases these convictions turn out to be utter moonshine—and this particular one especially was to be amply accounted for by the gloomy and unaccustomed surroundings in which its victim was placed—still it did more or less carry a chill to my heart, as any thing that is obviously a genuine object of belief is apt to do, however absurd the belief may be. Presently the breakfast arrived, and with it Leo, who

had been taking a walk outside the cave—to clear his mind, he said—and very glad I was to see both, for they gave me a respite from my gloomy thoughts. After breakfast we went for another walk, and watched some of the Amahagger sowing a plot of ground with the grain from which they make their beer. This they did in scriptural fashion—a man with a bag made of goat’s-hide fastened round his waist walking up and down the plot and scattering the seed as he went. It was a positive relief to see one of these dreadful people do anything so homely and pleasant as sow a field, perhaps because it seemed to link them, as it were, with the rest of humanity.

As we were returning Billali met us, and informed us that it was *She’s* pleasure that we should wait upon her, and accordingly we entered her presence, not without trepidation, for Ayesha was certainly an exception to the rule. Familiarity with her might and did breed passion and wonder and horror, but it certainly did *not* breed contempt.

## PART 12 (18 DECEMBER 1886)

We were as usual shown in by the mutes, and after these had retired Ayesha unveiled, and once more bade Leo embrace her, which, notwithstanding his heart-searchings of the previous night, he did with more alacrity and fervour than in strictness courtesies required.

She laid her white hand on his head, and looked him fondly in the eyes. “Dost thou wonder, my Kallikrates,” she said, “when thou shalt call me all thine own, and when we shall of a truth be for one another and to one another? I will tell thee. First, must thou be even as I am, not immortal indeed, for that am I not, but so cased and hardened against the attacks of Time, that his arrows shall glance from the armour of thy vigorous life as the sunbeams glance from water. As yet I may not mate with thee, for thou and I are different, and the very brightness of my being would burn thee up, and perchance destroy thee. Thou couldst not even

bear to look upon me for too long a time lest thine eyes should ache, and thy senses swim, and therefore" (with a little coquettish nod) "shall I presently veil myself again." (This by the way she did not do.) "No: listen, thou shalt not be tried beyond endurance, for this very evening, an hour before the sun goes down, shall we start hence, and by to-morrow's dark, if all goes well, and the road is not lost to me, which I pray it may not be, shall we stand in the place of Life, and thou shalt bathe in the fire, and come forth glorified, as no man ever was before thee, and then, Kallikrates, shalt thou call me wife, and I will call thee husband."

Leo muttered something in answer to this astonishing statement, I don't know what, and she laughed a little at his confusion, and went on,

"And thou, too, oh Holly; on thee also will I confer this boon, and then of a truth shalt thou be an evergreen tree, and this will I do—well, because thou hast pleased me, Holly, for thou art not altogether a fool, like most of the sons of men, and because, though thou hast a school of philosophy as full of nonsense as those of the old days, yet hast thou not forgotten how to turn a pretty phrase about a lady's eyes."

"Hulloa, old fellow!" whispered Leo, with a return of his old cheerfulness, "have you been paying compliments? I should never have thought it of you!"

"I thank thee, oh Ayesha," I replied, with as much dignity as I could command, "but if there be such a place as thou dost describe, and if in this strange place there can be found a fiery virtue that can hold off Death when he comes to pluck us by the hand, yet would I none of it. For me, oh Ayesha, the world has not proved so soft a nest that I would lie in it for ever. A stony-hearted mother is our earth, and stones are the bread she gives her children for their daily food.<sup>1</sup> Stones to eat and bitter water for their thirst, and stripes for tender nurture. Who would endure this for many lives? Who would so laden up his back with memories of lost hours and loves and of his neighbour's sorrows that he cannot lessen, and wisdom that brings not consolation? Hard is it to die, because our delicate flesh doth shrink back from the worm it will not feel, and from that unknown which the winding-sheet doth curtain from our view. But harder still, to my fancy, would it be to live on, green in the leaf and fair, but dead and rotten at the core, and feel that other secret worm of recollection gnawing ever at the heart."

"Bethink thee, Holly," she said; "yet doth long life and strength and beauty beyond measure mean power and all things that are dear to man."

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:9.

“And what, oh Queen,” I answered, “are those things that are dear to man? Are they not bubbles? Is not ambition but an endless ladder by which no height is ever climbed till the last unreachable rung is mounted? For height leads on to height, and there is no resting-place upon them, and rung doth grow upon rung, and there is no limit to the number. Doth not wealth satiate and become nauseous, and no longer serve to satisfy or pleasure, or to buy an hour’s ease of mind? And is there any end to wisdom that we may hope to reach it? Rather, the more we learn shall we not thereby be able only to better compass out our ignorance? Did we live ten thousand years could we hope to solve the secrets of the suns, and of the space beyond the suns, and of the Hand that hung them in the heavens? Would not our wisdom be but as a gnawing hunger calling our consciousness day by day to a knowledge of the empty craving of our souls? Would it not be but as a light in a great cavern, that though bright it burn, and brighter yet, doth but the more serve to show the depths of the gloom around it? And what good thing is there beyond that we may gain by length of days?”

“Nay, my Holly, there is love—love which makes all things beautiful, and doth breathe divinity into the very dust we tread. With love shall life roll gloriously on from year to year like the voice of some great music that hath power to hold the hearer’s heart poised on eagle’s wings above the sordid shame and folly of the earth.”

“It may be so,” I answered; “but if the loved one prove a broken reed to pierce us, or if the love be loved in vain—what then? Shall a man grave his sorrows upon a stone when he hath but need to write them on the water? Nay, oh *She*, I will live my day and grow old with my generation, and die my appointed death, and be forgotten. For I do hope for an immortality to which the little span that perchance thou canst confer will be but as a finger’s length laid against the measure of the great world; and, mark this, the immortality to which I look, and which my faith doth promise me, shall be free from the bonds that here must tie my spirit down. For, while the flesh endures, sorrow and evil and the scorpion whips of sin<sup>1</sup> must endure also; but when the flesh hath fallen from us, then shall the spirit shine forth clad in the brightness of eternal good, and for its common air shall breathe so rare an ether of most noble thoughts, that the highest aspiration of our manhood, or the purest incense of a maiden’s prayer, would prove too earthly gross to float therein.”

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 12:11.

“Thou lookest high,” answered Ayesha, with a little laugh, “and speakest clearly as a trumpet and with no uncertain sound. And yet methinks that but now didst thou talk of ‘that unknown’ from which the winding-sheet doth curtain us. But, perchance, thou seest with the eye of faith, gazing on that brightness that is to be, through the painted glass of thy imagination. Strange are the pictures of the future that mankind can thus draw with this brush of faith and this many-coloured pigment of imagination! Strange, too, that no one of them doth agree with another! I could tell thee—but there, what is the use? why rob a fool of his bauble? Let it pass, and I pray, oh Holly, that when thou dost feel old age creeping slowly toward thyself, and the confusion of senility making havoc in thy brain, thou mayest not bitterly regret that thou didst cast away the imperial boon I would have given to thee. But so it hath ever been, man can never be content with that which his hand can pluck. If a lamp be in his reach to light him through the darkness, he must needs cast it down because it is no star. Happiness danceth ever a pace before him, like the marsh-fires in the swamps, and he must catch the fire, and he must hold the star. Beauty is nought to him, because there are lips more honey-sweet; and wealth is nought, because others can weigh him down with heavier shekels; and fame is nought, because there have been greater men than he. Thyself thou saidst it, and I turn thy words against thee. Well, thou dreamest that thou shalt pluck the star. I believe it not, and I think thee a fool, my Holly, to throw away the lamp.”

I made no answer, for I could not—especially before Leo—tell her that since I had seen her face I knew that it would always be before my eyes, and that I had no wish to prolong an existence which must always be haunted and tortured by her memory, and by the last bitterness of unsatisfied love. But so it was, and so, alas, is it to this hour!

“And now,” went on *She*, changing her tone and the subject together, “tell me, my Kallikrates, for as yet I know it not, how came ye to seek me here? Yesternight thou didst say that Kallikrates—him whom thou sawest—was thine ancestor. How was it? Tell me—thou dost not speak overmuch!”

Thus adjured, Leo told her the wonderful story of the casket and of the potsherd that, written on by his ancestress, the Egyptian Amenartas, had been the means of guiding us to her. Ayesha listened intently, and, when he had finished, spoke to me.

“Did I not tell thee one day, when we did talk of good and evil, oh Holly—it was when my beloved lay so ill—that out of good came evil, and out of evil good,—that they who sowed knew not what the crop

should be, nor he who struck where the blow should fall? See, now: this Egyptian Amenartas, this child of the Nile who hated me, and whom even now I hate, for in a way she did prevail against me—see, now, she herself hath been the very means to bring her lover to mine arms. For her sake I slew him, and now, behold, through her he hath come back to me! She would have done me evil, and sowed her seeds that I might reap tares, and behold she hath given me more than all the world can give, and there is a strange square for thee to fit into thy circle of good and evil, oh Holly!

“And so,” she went on after a pause “and so she bade her son destroy me if he might, because I slew his father. And thou, my Kallikrates, art the father, and in a sense thou art likewise the son; and wouldst thou avenge thy wrong, and the wrong of that far-off mother of thine upon me, oh Kallikrates? See,” and she slid to her knees, and drew the white corsage still farther down her ivory bosom,—“see, here beats my heart, and there by thy side is a knife, heavy, and long, and sharp, the very knife to slay an erring woman with. Take it now, and be avenged. Strike, and strike home, so shalt thou be satisfied, Kallikrates, and go through life a happy man, because thou hast paid back the wrong, and obeyed the mandate of the past.”

He looked at her, and then stretched out his hand and lifted her to her feet.

“Rise, Ayesha,” he said sadly; “well thou knowest that I cannot strike thee, no, not even for the sake of her whom thou slewest but last night. I am in thy power, and a very slave to thee. How can I kill thee?—sooner should I slay myself.”

“Almost dost thou begin to love me, Kallikrates,” she answered smiling. “And now tell me of thy country—’tis a great people, is it not? with an empire like that of Rome! Surely thou wouldst return thither, and it is well, for I mean not that thou shouldst dwell in these caves of Kôr. Nay, when once thou art even as I am, we will go hence—fear not I shall find a means—and then shall we cross to this England of thine, and live as it becometh us to live. Two thousand years have I waited for the day when I should see the last of these hateful caves and this gloomy-visaged folk, and now it is at hand, and my heart bounds up to meet it like a child’s towards its holiday. For thou shalt rule this England.”

“But we have got a queen already,”<sup>1</sup> broke in Leo, hastily.

“It is nought, it is nought,” said Ayesha; “she can be overthrown.”

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Victoria ruled England from 1837 until 1901.

At this we both broke out into an exclamation of horror, and explained that we should as soon think of overthrowing ourselves.

“But here is a strange thing,” said Ayesha, in astonishment; “a queen whom her people love! Surely the world must have changed since I dwelt in Kôr.”

Again we explained that it was the character of monarchs that had changed, and that the one under whom we lived was venerated and beloved by all right-thinking people in her vast realms. Also, we told her that real power in our country rested in the hands of the people, and that we were in fact ruled by the votes of the lower and least educated classes of the community.<sup>1</sup>

“Ah,” she said, “a democracy—then surely there is a tyrant, for I have long since seen that democracies, having no clear will of their own, in the end set up a tyrant, and worship him.”

“Yes,” I said, “we have our tyrants.”

“Well,” she answered, resignedly, “we can at any rate destroy these tyrants, and Kallikrates shall rule the land.”

I instantly informed Ayesha that in England blasting was not an amusement that could be indulged in with impunity, and that any such attempt would meet with the consideration of the law, and probably end upon a scaffold.

“The law,” she laughed with scorn, “the law! Canst thou not understand, oh Holly, that I am above the law, and so shall my Kallikrates be also? All human law will be to us as the north wind to a mountain. Does the wind bend the mountain, or the mountain the wind?”

“And now leave me, I pray thee, and thou too, my own Kallikrates, for I would get me ready against our journey, and so must ye both, and your servant also. But bring no great quantity of things with thee, for I trust that we shall be but three days gone. Then shall we return hither, and I will make a plan whereby we can bid farewell for ever to these sepulchres of Kôr. Yes, surely thou mayst kiss my hand.”

So we went, I, for one, meditating deeply on the awful nature of the problem that now opened out before us. The terrible *She* had evidently made up her mind to go to England, and it made me absolutely shudder to think what would be the result of her arrival there. What her powers were I knew, and I could not doubt but that she would exercise them to the full. It might be possible to control her for a while, but her proud,

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<sup>1</sup> Holly and Leo refer to the Third Reform Bill of 1884, which extended the vote to most working-class males.

ambitious spirit would be certain to break loose and avenge itself for the long centuries of its solitude. She would, if necessary, and if the power of her beauty did not unaided prove equal to the occasion, blast her way to any end she set before her, and as she could not die, and, for aught I knew, could not even be killed,\* what was there to stop her? In the end she would, I had little doubt, assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth, and though I was sure that she would speedily make ours the most glorious and prosperous empire that the world has ever seen, it would be at the cost of a terrible sacrifice of life.

The whole thing sounded like a dream or some extraordinary invention of a speculative brain, and yet it was a fact—a dreadful fact—of which the whole world would soon be called on to take notice. What was the meaning of it all? After much thinking I could only conclude that this wonderful creature, whose passion had kept her for so many centuries chained as it were, and comparatively harmless, was now about to be used by Providence as a means to change the order of the world, and possibly, by the building up of a power that could no more be rebelled against or questioned than the decrees of Fate, to change it materially for the better.

## XXIII

### THE TEMPLE OF TRUTH

Our preparations did not take us very long. We put a change of clothing apiece and some spare boots into my Gladstone bag, also we took our revolvers and an express rifle each, together with a good supply of ammunition, a precaution to which, under Providence, we subsequently owed our lives over and over again. The rest of our gear, together with our heavy rifles, we left behind us.

A few minutes before the appointed time we once more attended in Ayesha's boudoir, and found her also ready, her dark cloak thrown over her winding-sheet like wrappings.

"Are ye prepared for the great venture?" she said.

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\* I regret to say that I was never able to ascertain if *She* was invulnerable against the accidents of life. Presumably this was so, else some misadventure would have been sure to put an end to her in the course of so many centuries. True, she offered to let Leo slay her, but very probably this was only an experiment to try his temper and mental attitude towards her. She never gave way to impulse without some valid object.—L.H.H.

“We are,” I answered, “though for my part, Ayesha, I have no faith in it.”

“Ah, my Holly,” she said, “thou art of a truth like those old Jews—of whom the memory plagues me so sorely—unbelieving, and hard to accept that which they have not seen. But thou shalt see; for unless my mirror yonder lies,” and she pointed to the font of crystal water, “the path is yet open as it was of old time. And now let us start upon the new life which shall end who knoweth where?”

“Ah,” I echoed, “who knoweth where?” and we passed down into the great central cave, and out into the light of day. At the mouth of the cave we found a single litter with six bearers, all of them mutes, waiting, and with them I was relieved to see our old friend Billali, for whom I had conceived a sort of affection. It appeared that for reasons not necessary to explain at length Ayesha had thought it best that with the exception of herself we should proceed on foot, and this we were nothing loth to do, after our long confinement in caves, which, however suitable they might be for sarcophagi<sup>1</sup>—a singularly inappropriate word, by the way, for these particular tombs, which certainly did not consume the bodies given to their keeping—were depressing habitations for breathing mortals like ourselves. Either by accident or by the orders of *She*, the space in front of the cave where we had beheld that awful dance was perfectly clear of spectators. Not a soul was to be seen, and consequently I do not believe that our departure was known to anybody except perhaps the mutes who waited on *She*, and they were, of course, in the habit of holding their tongues as to what they saw.

In a few minutes we were stepping out sharply across the great cultivated plain or lake bed framed like a vast emerald in its setting of frowning cliff, and had another opportunity of wondering at the extraordinary nature of the site chosen by these old people of Kôr for their capital, and at the marvellous amount of labour, ingenuity, and engineering skill that must have been brought into requisition by the founders of the city to drain so huge a sheet of water, and to keep it clear of subsequent accumulations. It is, indeed, so far as my experience goes, an unequalled instance of what man can do in the face of nature, for in my opinion such achievements as the Suez Canal<sup>2</sup> or even the Mont Cenis Tunnel<sup>3</sup> do not approach this ancient undertaking in magnitude.

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<sup>1</sup> Tombs. “Sarcophagus” means “flesh-eater” in Greek, and refers to limestone tombs which were originally believed to have the power to consume the dead.

<sup>2</sup> Completed in 1869, connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

<sup>3</sup> Completed in 1871, connecting France and Italy.

When we had been walking for about half-an-hour enjoying ourselves exceeding in the delightful cool which about this time of the day always appeared to descend upon the great plain of Kôr, and in some degree atoned for the want of any land or sea breeze, for all wind was kept off by the rocky mountain wall, we began to get a clear view of what Billali had informed us were the ruins of the great city. And even from that distance we could see how wonderful those ruins were, a fact that with every step we took became more evident. The city was not very large if compared to Babylon or Thebes, or other cities of remote antiquity; perhaps its outer wall contained some twelve square miles of ground, or a little more. Nor had the walls, so far as we could judge when we reached them, been very high, probably not more than forty feet, which was about their present height where they had not through the sinking of the ground or some such cause fallen into ruin. The reason of this, no doubt, was that the people of Kôr, being protected from any outside attack by far more tremendous ramparts than any that the hand of man could rear, only required them for show and to guard against civil discord. But on the other hand they were as broad as they were high, built entirely of dressed stone, hewn, no doubt, from the vast caves, and surrounded by a great moat about sixty feet in width, some portions of which were still filled with water. About ten minutes before the sun finally sank we reached this moat, and passed down and through it, clambering across what evidently were the piled-up fragments of a great bridge, in order to do so, and then with some little difficulty up the slope of the wall to its summit. I wish that it lay within the power of my pen to give some idea of the grandeur of the sight that then met our view. There, all bathed in the red glow of the sinking sun, were miles upon miles of ruins—columns, temples, shrines, and the palaces of kings, varied with patches of green bush. Of course, the roofs of these buildings had long since fallen into decay and vanished, but owing to the extreme massiveness of the style of building, and to the hardness and durability of the rock employed, most of the party walls and great columns still remained standing.\*

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\* In connection with the extraordinary state of preservation of these ruins after so vast a lapse of time—at least six thousand years—it must be remembered that Kôr was not burnt or destroyed by an enemy or an earthquake, but deserted, owing to the action of a terrible plague. Consequently the houses were left unharmed; also the climate of the plain is remarkably fine and dry, and there is very little rain, the result of which is that these relics have only to contend against the unaided action of time, which works but slowly upon such massive blocks of masonry.—L.H.H.

There before us stretched away what had evidently been the main thoroughfare of the city, for it was very wide, wider than the Thames Embankment,<sup>1</sup> and regular. Being, as we afterwards discovered, paved, or rather built, throughout of blocks of dressed stone, such as were employed in the walls, it was but little overgrown even now with grass and shrubs, that could get no depth of soil to live in. What had been the parks and gardens on the contrary were now dense jungle. Indeed, it was easy even from a distance to trace the course of the various roads by the burnt-up appearance of the scanty grass that grew upon them. On either side of this great thoroughfare were vast blocks of ruins, each block, generally speaking, being separated from its neighbour by a space of what had once, I suppose, been garden-ground, but was now dense and tangled bush. They were all built of the same coloured stone, and most of them had pillars, which was as much as we could make out in the fading light as we passed swiftly up the main road, that I believe I am right in saying no living foot had pressed for thousands of years.\*

Presently we came to an enormous pile, which we rightly took to be a temple, covering at least four acres of ground, apparently arranged in a series of courts, each one enclosing another of smaller size, on the principle of a Chinese nest of boxes, and separated one from the other by rows of huge columns. And, whilst I think of it, I may as well state a remarkable thing about the shape of these columns, which resembled none that I have ever seen or heard of, being made with a kind of waist in the centre, and swelling out above and below. At first we thought that this shape was meant to roughly symbolise or suggest the female form, as was a common habit amongst the ancient religious architects of all creeds. On the following day, however, as we went up the slopes of the mountain, we discovered a large quantity of the most stately looking palms, of which the trunks grew exactly in this shape, and I have now no doubt that the first designer of those columns drew his inspiration from

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\* Billali told me that the Amahagger believe that the site of the city was haunted, and could not be persuaded to enter it upon any consideration. Indeed, I could see that he himself did not at all like doing so, and was only consoled by the reflection that he was under the direct protection of *She*. It struck Leo and myself as very curious that a people which has no objection to living amongst the dead, with whom their familiarity has perhaps bred contempt, and even using them for purposes of fuel, should be terrified at approaching the habitations that these very departed had occupied when alive. After all, however, it is only a savage inconsistency.—L.H.H.

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<sup>1</sup> Constructed between 1868 and 1874, a broad sloping path protecting London from floods of the river Thames.

the graceful bends of those very palms, or rather of their ancestors, which then, some eight or ten thousand years ago as now, beautified the slopes of the mountain, that had once formed the shores of the volcanic lake.

At the *façade* of this huge temple, which, I should imagine, is almost as large as that of El-Karnac, at Luxor,<sup>1</sup> some of the largest columns, which I measured, being between eighteen to twenty feet in diameter at the base, by some sixty feet in height, our little procession was halted, and Ayesha descended from her litter.

“There used to be a spot here, Kallikrates,” she said to Leo, who had run up to lift her down, “where one might sleep. Two thousand years ago did thou and I and that Egyptian snake rest therein, but since then have I not set foot here, nor any man, and perchance it has fallen,” and, followed by the rest of us, she passed up a vast flight of broken and ruined steps into the outer court, and looked round into the gloom. Presently she seemed to recollect, and, walking a few paces along the wall to the left, halted.

“It is here,” she said, and at the same time beckoned to the two mutes, who were loaded with provisions and our little belongings, to advance. One of them came forward, and soon produced a lamp and lit it from his brazier, for the Amahagger when on a journey nearly always carried with them a little lighted brazier, from which to provide fire. The tinder of this brazier was made of broken fragments of mummy carefully damped, and if the admixture of moisture was properly managed, this unholy compound would smoulder away for hours. As soon as the lamp was lit we entered the place before which Ayesha had stopped. It turned out to be a chamber hollowed in the thickness of the wall, and, from the fact of there still being a massive stone table in it, I should think that it had probably served as a living-room, perhaps for one of the door-keepers of the great temple.

Here we stopped, and after cleaning the place out and making it as comfortable as circumstances and the darkness would permit, we ate some cold meat, at least Leo, Job, and I did, for Ayesha, as I think I have said elsewhere, never touched anything except fruit and water. Whilst we were eating, the moon, which was at her full, rose above the mountain-wall, and began to flood the place with silver.

“Wot ye why I have brought ye here to-night, my Holly?” said Ayesha, leaning her head upon her hand and watching the great orb as

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<sup>1</sup> The Temple of Karnac is in Thebes, across the Nile from Luxor. Haggard corrected the error in later editions.

she rose, like some heavenly queen, above the solemn pillars of the temple. "I brought ye—nay, it is strange, but knowest thou, Kallikrates, that thou liest at this moment upon the very spot where thy dead body lay when I bore thee back to those caves of Kôr so many years ago. It all returns to my mind now. I can see it, and horrible is it to my sight," and she shuddered.

Here Leo jumped up, and hastily changed his seat. However the reminiscence might affect Ayesha, it clearly had few charms for him.

"I brought ye," went on Ayesha presently, "that ye might look upon the most wonderful sight that ever the eye of man beheld—the full moon shining over ruined Kôr. When ye have done your eating—I would that I could teach thee to eat nought but fruit, Kallikrates, but that will come after thou hast laved in the fire. Once I, too, ate flesh like a brute beast. When ye have done we will go out, and I will show you this great temple and the God that men once worshipped therein."

Of course we got up at once, and started. And here again my pen fails me. To give a string of measurements and details of the various courts of the temple would only be wearisome, supposing that I had them, and yet I know not how I am to describe what we saw, magnificent as it was even in its ruin, almost beyond the power of realisation. Court upon dim court, row upon row of mighty pillars—some of them (especially at the gateways) sculptured from pedestal to capital—space upon space of empty chambers that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded streets. And over all, the dead silence of the dead, the sense of utter loneliness, and the brooding spirit of the Past! How beautiful it was, and yet how drear! We did not dare to speak aloud. Ayesha herself was awed in the presence of an antiquity compared to which even her length of days was but a little thing; we only whispered, and our whispers seemed to run from column to column, till they were lost in the quiet air. Bright fell the moonlight on pillar and court and shattered wall, hiding all their rents and imperfections in its silver garment, and clothing their hoar majesty with the peculiar glory of the night. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined fane of Kôr. It was a wonderful thing to think for how many thousands of years the dead orb above and the dead city below had gazed thus upon each other, and in the utter solitude of space poured forth each to each the tale of their lost life and long departed glory. The weird light fell, and minute by minute the quiet shadows crept across the grass-grown courts like the spirits of old priests haunting the habitations of their worship—the weird light fell, and the

long shadows grew till the beauty and grandeur of the scene and the untamed majesty of its present Death seemed to sink into our very souls, and speak more loudly than the tongues of trumpets concerning the pomp and splendour that the grave had swallowed, and even memory had forgotten.

"Come," said Ayesha, after we had gazed and gazed, I know not for how long, "and I will show you the stony flower of Loveliness and Wonder's very crown, if yet it stands to mock time with its beauty and fill the heart of man with longing for that which is behind the veil," and, without waiting for an answer, she led us through two more pillared courts into the inner shrine of the old fane.

And there, in the centre of the inmost court that might have been some fifty yards square, or a little more, we stood face to face with what is perhaps the grandest allegorical work of Art that the genius of her children has ever given to the world. For in the exact centre of the court, placed upon a thick square slab of rock, was a huge round ball of dark stone, some forty feet in diameter, and standing on the ball was a colossal winged figure of a beauty so entrancing and divine that when I first gazed upon it, illumined and shadowed as it was by the soft light of the moon, my breath stood still, and for an instant my heart ceased its beating.

The statue was hewn from marble so pure and white that even now, after all those ages, it shone as the moonbeams danced upon it, and its height was, I should say, a trifle under twenty feet. It was the winged figure of a woman of such marvellous loveliness and delicacy of form that the size seemed rather to add to than to detract from its so human and yet more spiritual beauty. She was bending forward, and poising herself upon her half spread wings as though to preserve her balance as she leant. Her arms were outstretched like those of some woman about to embrace one she dearly loved, while her whole attitude gave an impression of the tenderest beseeching. Her perfect and most gracious form was nude—save, and here came the extraordinary thing—the face, which was thinly veiled, so that we could only trace the marking of her features. A gauzy veil was thrown round and about the head, and of its two ends one fell down across her left breast, which was outlined beneath it, and one, now broken, streamed away upon the air behind her.

"What is she?" I asked, as soon as I could take my eyes off the statue.

"Can'st thou not guess, oh Holly?" answered Ayesha. "Where then is thy imagination? It is Truth standing on the World, and calling to its children to unveil her face. See what is writ upon the pedestal. Without doubt it is taken from the book of the scriptures of these men of Kôr,"

and she led the way to the foot of the statue, where an inscription of the usual Chinese-looking hieroglyphics was so deeply graven as to be still quite legible, at least to Ayesha. According to her translation it ran thus—

*“Is there no man that will draw my veil and look upon my face, for it is very fair? Unto him who draws my veil shall I be, and peace will I give him, and sweet children of knowledge and good works.”*

*“And a voice said, Though all those who seek after thee desire thee, behold, Virgin art thou, and Virgin shalt thou go till Time be done. No man is there born of woman who may draw thy veil and live, nor shall be. In death only can thy veil be drawn, oh Truth.”*

*“And Truth stretched out her arms and wept, because those who sought her might not find her, nor look upon her face to face.”*

“Thou seest,” said Ayesha, when she had finished translating, “Truth was the Goddess of the people of old Kôr, and to her they built their shrines, and her they sought; knowing that they should never find, still sought they.”

“And so,” I added sadly, “do men seek to this very hour, but they find not; and, as this scripture says, nor shall they; for in Death only is Truth found.”

Then with one more look at the veiled and spiritualised loveliness, which was so perfect and so pure, that one might almost fancy that the light of a living spirit shone through the marble prison to lead man on to high ethereal thoughts—this poet’s dream of beauty frozen into stone, which I never shall forget while I live, though I find myself so helpless when I attempt to describe it; we turned and went back through the vast moonlit courts to the spot whence we had started. I never saw the statue again, which I the more regret, because on the great ball of stone representing the World whereon the figure stood lines were drawn, that probably had there been light enough we should have discovered to be a map of the Universe, as it was known to the people of Kôr. It is at any rate suggestive of some scientific knowledge that these worshippers of Truth had recognised the fact that the globe is round.

## XXIV

### WALKING THE PLANK

Next day the mutes woke us before the dawn; and by the time that we had got the sleep out of our eyes, and gone through a very perfunctory wash

at a spring which still welled up into the remains of a marble basin in the centre of the north quadrangle of the vast outer court, we found *She* standing by the litter ready to start, while old Billali and the two bearer mutes were busy collecting the baggage. As usual, Ayesha was veiled like the marble Truth (by the way, I wonder if she originally got the idea of covering up her beauty from that statue?). I noticed however that she seemed very depressed, and had none of that proud and buoyant bearing which would have betrayed her among a thousand women of the same stature, even if they had been veiled like herself. She looked up as we came—for her head was bowed—and greeted us. Leo asked her how she had slept.

"Ill, my Kallikrates," she answered, "ill. This night have strange and hideous dreams come creeping through my brain, and I know not what they portend. Almost do I feel as though some evil overshadowed me; and yet how can evil touch me? I wonder," she went on, with a sudden outbreak of womanly tenderness, "I wonder if, should aught happen to me, so that I slept and left thee waking, wouldst thou think gently of me? I wonder, my Kallikrates, if thou wouldst tarry till I came again, as for so many centuries I have tarried for thy coming?" Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on: "Come, let us be setting forth, for we have far to go, and before another day is born in yonder blue should we stand in the place of Life."

In five minutes we were once more on our way through the vast ruined city, that loomed at us on either side in the grey dawning in a way that was at once grand and oppressive. Just as the first ray of the rising sun shot like a golden arrow athwart this storied desolation we gained the further gateway of the outer wall, and having given one more glance at the hoar and pillared majesty through which we had passed, and (with the exception of Job, for whom ruins had no charms) breathed a sigh of regret that we had not had more time to explore it, passed through the great moat, and on to the plain beyond.

As the sun rose so did Ayesha's spirits, till by breakfast-time they had regained their normal level, and she laughingly set down her previous depression to the associations of the spot where she had slept.

"These barbarians declare that Kôr is haunted," she said, "and of a truth I do believe their saying, for never did I know so ill a night save once. I remember it now. It was on that very spot when thou didst lie dead at my feet, Kallikrates. Never will I visit it again; it is a place of evil omen."

After a very brief halt for breakfast we pressed on with such good will that by two o'clock in the afternoon we were at the foot of the vast wall of rock that formed the lip of the volcano, and which at this

point towered up precipitously above us for fifteen hundred or two thousand feet. Here we halted, certainly not to my astonishment, for I did not see how it was possible that we should go any farther.

"Now," said Ayesha, as she descended from her litter, "doth our labour but commence, for here do we part with these men, and henceforward must we bear ourselves;" and then, addressing Billali, "do thou and these slaves remain here, and abide our coming. By to-morrow at the midday shall we be with thee—if not, wait."

Billali bowed humbly, and said that her august bidding should be obeyed if they stopped there till they grew old.

"And this man, oh Holly," said *She*, pointing to Job; "best is it that he should tarry also, for if his heart be not high and his courage great, perchance some evil might overtake him. Also, the secrets of the place whither we go are not fit for common eyes."

I translated this to Job, who instantly and earnestly entreated me, almost with tears in his eyes, not to leave him behind. He said he was sure that he could see nothing worse than he had already seen, and that he was terrified to death at the idea of being left alone with those "dumb folk," who, he thought, would probably take the opportunity to hot-pot him.

I translated what he said to Ayesha, who shrugged her shoulders, and answered, "Well, let him come, it is naught to me; on his own head be it, and he will serve to bear the lamp and this," and she pointed to a narrow plank, some sixteen feet long, which had been bound above the long bearing-pole of her hammock, as I had thought to make curtains spread out better, but, as it now appeared, for some unknown purpose connected with our extraordinary undertaking.

Accordingly, the plank, which, though tough, was very light, was given to Job to carry, and also one of the lamps. I slung the other on to my back, together with a spare jar of oil, while Leo loaded himself with the provisions and some water in a kid's skin. When this was done *She* bade Billali and the six bearer mutes to retreat behind a grove of flowering magnolias about a hundred yards away, and remain there under pain of death till we had vanished. They bowed humbly, and went, and, as he departed, old Billali gave me a friendly shake of the hand, and whispered that he had rather that it was I than he who was going on this wonderful expedition with "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," and upon my word I felt inclined to agree with him. In another minute they were gone, and then, having briefly asked us if we were ready, Ayesha turned, and gazed up the towering cliff.

"Goodness me, Leo," I said, "surely we are not going to climb that!"

Leo shrugged his shoulders, being in a condition of half fascinated,

half expectant mystification, and as he did so, Ayesha with a sudden move began to climb the cliff, and of course we had to follow her. It was perfectly marvellous to see the ease and grace with which she sprung from rock to rock, and swung herself along the ledges. The ascent was not, however, so difficult as it looked, although there were one or two nasty places where it did not do to look behind you, the fact being that the rock still sloped here, and was not absolutely precipitous as it was higher up. In this way we, with no great labour, mounted to the height of some fifty feet above our last standing place, the only really troublesome thing to manage being Job's board, and in doing so drew some fifty or sixty paces to the left of our starting point, for we went up like a crab, sideways. Presently we reached a ledge, narrow enough at first, but which widened as we followed it, and what is more sloped inwards like the petal of a flower, so that as we followed it we gradually got into a kind of rut or fold of rock that grew deeper and deeper, till at last it resembled a Devonshire lane in stone, and hid us perfectly from the gaze of anybody on the slope below, if there had been anybody to gaze. This lane (which appeared to be a natural formation) continued for some fifty or sixty paces, and then suddenly ended in a cave, also natural, running at right angles to it. I am sure that it was a natural cave, and not hollowed by the hand of man, because of its irregular and contorted shape and course, which gave it the appearance of having been blown bodily in the mountain by some frightful eruption of gas following the line of the least resistance. All the caves hollowed by the ancients of Kôr, on the contrary, were cut out with the most perfect regularity and symmetry. At the mouth of this cave Ayesha halted, and bade us light the two lamps, which I did, giving one to her and keeping the other myself. Then, taking the lead, she advanced down the cavern, picking her way with great care, as, indeed, it was necessary to do, for the floor was most irregular—strewn with boulders like the bed of a stream, and in some places pitted with deep holes, in which it would have been easy to break one's leg.

This cavern we pursued for twenty minutes or more, it being, so far as I could form a judgment—owing to its numerous twists and turns, no easy task—about a quarter of a mile long.

At last, however, we halted at its farther end, and whilst I was still trying to pierce the gloom a great gust of air came tearing down it, and extinguished both the lamps.

Ayesha called to us, and we crept up to her, for she was a little in front, and were rewarded with a view that was positively appalling in its gloom

and grandeur. Before us was a mighty chasm in the black rock, jagged and torn and splintered through it in a far past age by some awful convulsion of Nature, as though it had been cleft by stroke upon stroke of the lightning. This chasm, which was bounded by a precipice on the hither, and presumably, though we could not see it, on the further side also, may have measured any width across, but from its darkness I do not think it can have been very broad. It was impossible to make out much of its outline, or how far it ran, for the simple reason that the point where we were standing was so far from the upper surface of the cliff, at least fifteen hundred or two thousand feet, that only a very dim light struggled down to us from above. The mouth of the cavern gave on to a most curious and tremendous spur of rock, which jutted out in the gulf before us in mid air, for a distance of some fifty yards, coming to a sharp point at its termination, and resembling nothing that I can think of so much as the spur upon the leg of a cock in shape. This huge spur was attached only to the parent precipice at its base, which was, of course, enormous, just as the cock's spur is attached to its leg. Otherwise it was utterly unsupported.

"Here must we pass," said Ayesha. "Be careful lest giddiness overcome ye, or the wind sweep ye into the gulf beneath, for of a truth it hath no bottom;" and, without giving us any further time to get scared, she started walking along the spur, leaving us to follow her as best we might. I was next to her, then came Job, painfully dragging his plank, while Leo brought up the rear. It was a wonderful sight to see this intrepid woman gliding fearlessly along that dreadful place. For my part, when I had gone but a very few yards, what between the pressure of the air and the awful sense of the consequences that a slip would entail, I found it necessary to go down on my hands and knees and crawl, and so did the other two.

But *She* never condescended to this. On she went, leaning her body against the gusts of wind, and never seeming to lose her head or her balance.

In a few minutes we had crossed some twenty paces of this awful bridge, which got narrower at every step, and then all of a sudden a great gust came tearing along the gorge. I saw Ayesha lean herself against it, but the strong draught got under her dark cloak, and tore it from her, and away it went down the wind, flapping like a dying bird. It was dreadful to see it go, till it was lost in the blackness. I clung to the saddle of rock, and looked round, while the great spur vibrated with a humming sound beneath us, like a living thing. The sight was a truly awesome one. There we were poised in the gloom between earth and heaven. Beneath us were hundreds upon hundreds of feet of emptiness that gradually grew darker and darker,

till at last it was absolutely black, and at what depth it ended is more than I can guess. Above was space upon space of giddy air, and far, far away a line of blue sky. And down this vast gulf upon which we were pinnaced the great draught dashed and roared, driving clouds and misty wreaths of vapour before it, till we were nearly blinded, and utterly confused.

The whole position was so tremendous and so absolutely unearthly, that I believe it actually lulled our sense of terror, but to this hour I often see it in my dreams, and wake up covered with cold perspiration at its mere phantasy.

“On! on!” cried the white form before us, for now the cloak had gone. *She* was robed in white, and looked more like a spirit riding down the gale than a woman; “On, or ye will fall and be dashed to pieces. Keep your eyes fixed upon the ground, and closely hug the rock.”

We obeyed her, and crept painfully along the quivering path, against which the wind shrieked and wailed as it shook it, causing it to murmur like a vast tuning-fork. On we went, I do not know for how long, only gazing round now and again, when it was absolutely necessary, until at last we saw that we were on the very tip of the spur, a slab of rock, little larger than an ordinary table, and that throbbed and jumped like any over-engined steamer. There we lay on our stomachs, clinging to the ground, and looked about, while Ayesha stood leaning out against the wind, down which her long hair streamed, and, absolutely heedless of the hideous depth that yawned beneath, pointed before her. Then we saw why the narrow plank, which Job and I had painfully dragged along between us, had been provided. Before us was an empty space, on the other side of which was something, as yet we could not see what, for here—either owing to the shadow of the opposite cliff, or from some other cause—the gloom was that of night.

“We must wait awhile,” called Ayesha; “soon there will be light.”

At the moment I could not imagine what she meant. How could more light than there was ever come to this dreadful spot? Whilst I was still debating in my mind, suddenly, like a great sword of flame, a beam from the setting sun pierced the Stygian<sup>1</sup> gloom, and smote upon the point of rock whereon we lay, illumining Ayesha’s lovely form with an unearthly splendour. I only wish that I could describe the wild and marvellous beauty of that sword of fire, laid across the darkness and rushing mist-wreaths of the gulf. How it got there I do not to this moment know, but I presume that there was some cleft or hole in the

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<sup>1</sup> Of the neighborhood of the River Styx (i.e., in Hades).

opposing cliff, through which it pierced when the setting orb was in a direct line with it. All I can say is, that the effect was the most wonderful that I ever saw. Right through the heart of the darkness that flaming sword was stabbed, and where it lay there was the most surpassingly vivid light, so vivid that even at a distance one could see the grain of the rock, while, outside of it—yes, within a few inches of its keen edge—there was nought but clustering shadows.

And now, by this ray of light, for which *She* had been waiting, and timed our arrival to meet, knowing that at this season, for thousands of years, it had always struck thus at sunset, we saw what was before us. Within eleven or twelve feet of the very tip of the tongue-like rock whereon we lay there arose, presumably from the far bottom of the gulf, a sugarloaf-shaped cone, of which the summit was exactly opposite to us. But had there been a summit only it would not have helped us much, for the nearest point of its circumference was some forty feet from where we were. On the lip of this summit, however, which was circular and hollow, rested a tremendous flat stone, something like a glacier stone—indeed, perhaps it was one for all I know to the contrary—and the end of this stone approached to within twelve feet or so of us. This huge boulder was nothing more or less than a gigantic rocking-stone, accurately balanced upon the edge of the cone or miniature crater, like a half-crown on the rim of a wine-glass; for, in the fierce light that played upon it and us, we could see it oscillating in the gusts of wind.

“Quick!” said Ayesha; “the plank—we must cross while the light endures; presently it will be gone.”

“Oh, Lord, sir!” groaned Job, “surely she don’t mean us to walk across that there place on that there thing,” as in obedience to my direction he pushed the long board towards me.

“That’s it, Job,” I halloaed in ghastly merriment, though the idea of the plank was no pleasanter to me than to him.

I pushed the plank on to Ayesha, who deftly ran it across the gulf so that one end of it rested on the rocking stone, the other remaining on the extremity of our trembling spur. Then placing her foot upon it to prevent it from being blown away, she turned to me.

“Since last I was here, oh Holly,” she called, “the support of the moving stone hath lessened somewhat, so that I am not sure if it will bear our weight and fall or no. Therefore will I cross the first, because no harm will come unto me,” and, without further ado, she trod lightly but firmly across the frail bridge, and in another second was standing safe upon the heaving stone.

"It is safe," she called. "See, hold thou the plank! I will stand on the further side of the stone so that it may not overbalance with your greater weights. Now come, oh Holly, for presently the light will fail us."

## PART 13 (25 DECEMBER 1886)

I struggled to my knees, and if ever I felt sick in my life I felt sick then, and I am not ashamed to say that I hesitated and hung back.

"Surely thou art not afraid," called this strange creature in a lull of the gale, from where she stood poised like a bird, on the highest point of the rocking stone. "Make then way for Kallikrates."

This settled me; it is better to fall down a precipice and die than be laughed at by such a woman; so I clenched my teeth, and in another instant I was on that horrible, narrow, bending plank, with bottomless space beneath and around me. I have always hated a great height, but never before did I realise the full horrors of which such a position is capable. Oh, the sickening sensation of that yielding board resting on the two moving supports! I grew dizzy, and thought that I must fall; my spine *crept*; it seemed to me that I was falling, and my delight at finding myself sprawling upon that stone, which rose and fell beneath me like a boat in a swell, cannot be expressed in words. All I know is that briefly, but earnestly enough, I thanked Providence for preserving me so far.

Then came Leo's turn, and, though he looked rather queer, he came across like a rope-dancer. Ayesha stretched out her hand to clasp his own, and I heard her murmur, "Bravely done, my love—bravely done! The old Greek spirit lives in thee yet!"

And now only poor Job remained on the further side of the gulf. He crept up to the plank, and yelled out, "I can't do it, sir. I shall fall into that beastly place."

"You must," I said, "you must, Job, it's as easy as catching flies." I suppose that I said this to satisfy my conscience, because the expression

conveys a wonderful idea of facility. As a matter of fact I know no more difficult operation in the whole world than catching flies—that is, in warm weather, when they have all their faculties—unless, indeed, it is catching mosquitoes.

“I can’t, sir—I can’t, indeed.”

“Let the man come, or let him stop and perish there. See, the light is dying! In a minute it will be gone!” said Ayesha.

I looked. She was right. The sun was passing below the level of the hole or cleft in the precipice through which the ray came.

“If you stop there, Job, you will die alone,” I halloaed; “the light is going.”

“Come, be a man, Job,” roared Leo; “it’s quite easy.”

Thus adjured, the miserable Job, with, I think, the most awful yell that I ever heard, precipitated himself face downwards on the plank—he did not dare, small blame to him, to try to walk it, and commenced to draw himself across in little jerks, his poor legs hanging down on either side into the nothingness beneath.

His violent jerks at the frail board made the great stone, which was only balanced on a few inches of rock, oscillate in a most sickening manner, and, to make matters worse, just as he was half-way across the flying ray of lurid light suddenly went out just as though a lamp had been extinguished in a curtained room, leaving the whole howling wilderness of air in blackness.

“Come on, Job, for God’s sake,” I shouted in an agony of fear, while the stone, gathering motion with every swing, rocked so violently that it was difficult to hang on to it. It was a truly awful position.

“Lord have mercy on me!” halloaed poor Job from the darkness. “Oh, the plank’s slipping!” and I heard a violent struggle, and thought that he was gone.

But at that moment his outstretched hand, clasping in agony at the air, met my own, and I hauled—ah, how I did haul, putting out all the strength that it has pleased Providence to give me in such abundance—and to my joy in another minute Job was gasping on the rock beside me. But the plank! I felt it slip, and heard it knock against a projecting knob of rock, and it was gone.

“Great Heavens!” I exclaimed. “How are we going to get back?”

“I don’t know” answered Leo, out of the gloom. “‘Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.’<sup>1</sup> I am thankful enough to be here.”

But Ayesha merely called to me to take her hand and creep after her.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:34.

## THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

I did as I was bid, and in fear and trembling felt myself drawn over the edge of the stone. I sprawled my legs out, but could touch nothing.

"I am going to fall!" I gasped.

"Nay, let thyself go, and trust to me," answered Ayesha.

Now, if the position is considered, it will be easily understood that this was a greater demand upon my confidence than was justified by my knowledge of Ayesha's character. For all I knew she might be in the very act of consigning me to a horrible doom. But in life we sometimes have to lay our faith upon strange altars, and so it was now.

"Let thyself go!" she cried, and, having no choice, I did.

I felt myself slide a pace or two down the sloping surface of the rock, and then pass into the air, and the thought flashed through my brain that I was lost. But no. In another instant my feet struck against a rocky floor, and I felt that I was standing on something solid, and out of reach of the wind, which I could hear singing away overhead. As I stood there thanking my stars for these small mercies, there was a slip and a scuffle, and down came Leo alongside of me.

"Hulloa, old fellow!" he called out, "are you there? This is getting interesting, is it not?"

Just then, with a terrific yell, Job arrived right on the top of us, knocking us both down. By the time we had struggled to our feet again Ayesha was standing among us, and bidding us light the lamps, which fortunately remained uninjured, as did the spare jar of oil.

I got out my box of Bryant and May's wax matches, and they struck as merrily, there, in that awful place, as in a London drawing-room.

In a couple of minutes both the lamps were alight, and a curious scene they revealed. We were huddled up in a rocky chamber, some twelve feet square, and scared enough we looked; that is, except Ayesha, who was standing calmly with her arms folded, and waiting for the lamps to burn up. The chamber appeared to be partly natural, and partly hollowed out of the top of the cone. The roof of the natural part was formed of the swinging stone, and that of the back part of the chamber, which sloped downwards, was hewn from the live rock. For the rest, the place was warm and dry—a perfect haven of rest compared to the giddy pinnacle above, and the quivering spur that shot out to meet it in mid-air.

"There" said *She*, "safely have we come, though once I feared that

the rocking stone would fall with ye, and precipitate ye into the bottomless deeps beneath, for I do believe that the cleft goeth down to the very womb of the world. The rock whereon the stone resteth hath crumbled beneath the swinging weight. And now that he," nodding towards Job, who was sitting on the floor, feebly wiping his forehead with a red cotton pocket-handkerchief, "whom they rightly call the 'Pig,' for as a pig is he stupid, hath let fall the plank, it will not be easy to return across the gulf, and to that end must I make a plan. But now rest a while, and look at this place. What think ye that it is?"

"We know not," I answered.

"Wouldst thou believe that once a man did choose this airy nest for a daily habitation, and did here endure for many years; leaving it only but one day in every ten to seek food and water and oil that the people brought, more than he could carry, and laid as an offering in the mouth of the tunnel through which we passed hither?"

We looked up wonderingly, and she continued—

"Yet so it was. There was a man—Noot, he named himself—who, though he lived in the latter days, had of the wisdom of the sons of Kôr. A hermit was he, and a philosopher, and skilled in the secrets of Nature, and he it was who discovered the Fire that I shall show ye, which is Nature's blood and life, and also that he who bathed therein, and breathed thereof, should live while Nature lives. But like unto thee, oh Holly, this man, Noot, would not turn his knowledge to account. 'Ill,' he said, 'was it for man to live, for man was born to die.' Therefore did he tell his secret to none, and therefore did he come and live here, where the seeker after Life must pass, and was revered of the Amahagger of the day as holy, and a hermit. And when first I came to this country—knowest thou how I came, Kallikrates? Another time I will tell thee, it is a strange tale—I heard of this philosopher, and waited for him when he came to fetch his food, and returned with him hither, though greatly did I fear to tread the gulf. Then did I beguile him with my beauty and my wit, and flatter him with my tongue, so that he led me down and showed me the Fire, and told me the secrets of the Fire, but he would not suffer me to step therein, and, fearing lest he should slay me, I refrained, knowing that the man was very old, and soon would die. And I returned, having learnt from him all that he knew of the wonderful Spirit of the World, and that was much, for the man was wise and very ancient, and by purity and abstinence, and the contemplations of his innocent mind, had worn thin the veil between that which we see and the great invisible truths, the whisper of whose wings at times

we hear as they sweep through the gross air of the world. Then it was but a very few days after I met thee, my Kallikrates, who had wandered hither with the Egyptian Amenartas, and I learned to love for the first and last time, once and for ever, so that it entered into my mind to come hither with thee, and receive the gift of Life for thee and me. Therefore came we, with that Egyptian who would not be left behind, and, behold, we found the old man Noot lying but newly dead. There he lay, and his white beard lay on him like a garment,” and she pointed to a spot near where I was sitting; “but surely he hath long since crumbled into dust, and the wind hath borne his ashes hence.”

Here I put out my hand and felt in the dust, and presently my fingers touched something. It was a single human tooth, very yellow, but sound. I held it up and showed it to Ayesha, who laughed.

“Yes,” she said, “it is his without a doubt. Behold what remaineth of Noot and the wisdom of Noot—one little tooth. And yet that man had all life at his command, and for his conscience sake would have none of it. Well, he lay there newly dead, and we descended whither I shall lead ye, and then, gathering up all my courage, and courting death that I might perchance win so glorious a crown of life, I stepped into the flames, and behold! life such as ye can never know until ye feel it also flowed into me, and I came forth undying, and lovely beyond imagining. Then did I stretch out mine arms to thee, Kallikrates, and bid thee take thine immortal bride, and behold, as I spoke, thou, blinded by my beauty, didst turn from me, and throw thine arms about the neck of Amenartas. And then a great fury filled me, and made me mad, and I seized the javelin that thou didst bear, and stabbed thee, so that there, at my very feet, in the place of Life, thou didst groan and go down into death. I knew not then that I had power to slay with mine eyes and will, therefore in my madness slew I with the javelin.\*

“And when thou wast dead, ah! I wept, because I was undying and thou wast dead. I wept there in the place of Life so that had I been

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\* It will be observed that Ayesha's account of the death of Kallikrates differs materially from that written on the potsherd by Amenartas. The writing on the sherd says, “Then in her rage did she smite him *by her magic*, and he died.” We never ascertained which was the correct version, but it will be remembered that the body of Kallikrates had a spear-wound in the breast, which seems conclusive, unless, indeed, it was inflicted after death. Another thing that we never ascertained was *how* the two women—*She* and the Egyptian Amenartas—managed to bear the corpse of the man they both loved across the dread gulf and along the shaking spur. What a spectacle the two distracted creatures must have presented in their grief and loveliness as they toiled along that awful place with the dead man between them! Probably however the passage was easier then.—L.H.H.

mortal any more my heart had surely broken. And she, the swart Egyptian—she cursed me by her gods. By Osiris did she curse me and by Isis, by Nephthys and by Hekt, by Sekhet, the lion-headed, and by Set,<sup>1</sup> calling down evil on me, evil and everlasting desolation. Ah! I can see her dark face now lowering o'er me like a storm, but she could not hurt me, and I—I know not if I could hurt her. I did not try; it was nought to me then; so between us we bore thee hence. And afterwards I sent her—the Egyptian—away through the swamps, and it seems that she lived to bear a son and to write the tale that should lead thee, her husband, back to me, her rival and thy murderess.

“Such is the tale, my love, and now is the hour at hand that shall set a crown upon it. Like all things on the earth, it is compounded of evil and of good—more of evil than of good, perchance; and writ in letters of blood. It is the truth; nought have I hidden from thee, Kallikrates. And now one thing before the final moment of thy trial. We go down into the presence of Death, for Life and Death are very near together, and—who knows? that might happen which should separate us for another space of waiting. I am but a woman, and no prophetess, and I cannot read the future. But this I know—for I learnt it from the lips of the wise man Noot—that my life is but prolonged and made more bright. It cannot live for aye. Therefore, before we go, tell me, oh Kallikrates, that of a truth thou dost forgive me, and dost love me from thy heart. See, Kallikrates: much evil have I done—perchance it was evil but two nights gone to strike that girl who loved thee cold in death—but she disobeyed me and angered me, prophesying misfortune to me, and I smote. Be careful when power comes to thee also, lest thou also shouldst smite in thine anger or thy jealousy, for unconquerable strength is a sore weapon in the hands of erring man. Yes, I have sinned—out of the bitterness born of a great love have I sinned—but yet do I know the good from the evil, nor is my heart altogether hardened. Thy love, oh Kallikrates, shall be the gate of my redemption, even as aforetime my passion was the path down which I ran to evil. For deep love unsatisfied is the hell of noble hearts and a portion of the accursed, but love that is mirrored back more perfect from the soul of our desired doth fashion wings to lift us above ourselves, and makes us what we might be. Therefore, Kallikrates, take me by the hand, and lift my veil with no more fear than though I were some peasant girl, and not the wisest and

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<sup>1</sup> Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Hekt, Sekhet, and Set are all ancient Egyptian deities, associated variously with the underworld, childbirth and fertility, darkness and war.

most beauteous woman in this world, and look me in the eyes, and tell me that thou dost forgive me with all thine heart, and that with all thine heart thou dost worship me.”

She paused, and the strange tenderness in her voice seemed to hover round us like a memory. I know that the sound of it moved me more even than her words, it was so very human—so very womanly. Leo, too, was strangely touched. Hitherto he had been fascinated against his better judgment, something as a bird is fascinated by a snake, but now I think that all this passed away, and he realised that he really loved this strange and glorious creature, as, alas! I loved her also. At any rate, I saw his eyes fill with tears, and he stepped swiftly to her and undid the gauzy veil, and then took her by the hand, and, gazing into her deep eyes, said aloud,

“Ayesha, I love thee with all my heart, and so far as forgiveness is possible I forgive thee the death of Ustane. For the rest, it is between thee and thy Maker; I know nought of it. I only know that I love thee as I never loved before, and that I will cleave to thee to the end.”

“Now,” answered Ayesha, with proud humility, “now when my lord doth speak thus royally and give with so free a hand, it cannot become me to lag behind in words, and be beggared of my generosity. Behold!” and she took his hand and placed it upon her shapely head, and then bent herself slowly down till one knee for an instant touched the ground—“Behold! in token of submission do I bow me to my lord! Behold!” and she kissed him on the lips, “in token of my wifely love do I kiss my lord. Behold!” and she laid her hand upon his heart, “by the sin I sinned, by my lonely centuries of waiting wherewith it was wiped out, by the great love wherewith I love, and by the Spirit—the Eternal Thing that doth beget all life, from whom it ebbs, to whom it doth return again—I swear.

“I swear, even in this first most holy hour of completed Womanhood, I swear that I will abandon Evil and cherish Good. I swear that I will be ever guided by thy voice in the straightest path of Duty. I swear that I will eschew Ambition, and through all my length of endless days set Wisdom over me as a guiding star to lead me unto Truth and a knowledge of the Right. I swear also that I will honour and will cherish thee, Kallikrates, who hath been swept by the wave of time back into my arms, ay, till the very end, come it soon or late. I swear—nay, I will swear no more, for what are words? Yet shalt thou learn that Ayesha hath no false tongue. So I have sworn, and thou, my Holly, art witness to my oath. Here, too, are we wed, my husband—wed till the end of all things; here do we write our marriage vows upon the rushing winds which shall

bear them up to heaven, and round and continually round the rolling world, with the gloom for bridal canopy.

“And for a bridal gift I give to thee my beauty’s starry crown, and enduring life and wisdom without measure, and wealth that none can count. Behold! the great ones of the earth shall creep about thy feet, and their fair women shall cover up their eyes because of the shining glory of thy face, and their wise ones shall be abased before thee. Thou shalt read the hearts of men as an open writing, and hither and thither shalt thou lead them as thy pleasure listeth. Like that old Sphinx of Egypt shalt thou sit aloft from age to age, and ever shall they cry to thee to solve the riddle of thy greatness that doth not pass away, and ever shalt thou mock them with thy silence!

“Behold! once more I kiss thee, and by that kiss I give thee dominion over sea and earth, over the peasant in his hovel, over the monarch in his palace halls, and cities crowned with towers, and those who breathe therein. Where’er the sun shakes out his spears, where’er the lonesome waters mirror up the moon, where’er storms roll, and Heaven’s painted bows arch in the sky—from the pure North shrouded in her snows, across the middle spaces of the world, to where the amorous South lying like a bride upon her azure seas breathes in sighs made sweet with myrtle bloom—there shall thy power pass, and thy dominion find a home. Nor sickness, nor icy fingered fear, nor sorrow, and pale waste of form and mind hovering ever o’er humanity shall so much as shadow thee with the shadow of their wings. As a God shalt thou be, holding good and evil in the hollow of thy hand, and I, even I, I humble myself before thee. Such is the power of Love, and such is the bridal gift I give unto thee, Kallikrates, royal son of Rā, my Lord and Lord of All.

“And now it is done, and come storm, come shine, come good, come evil, come life, come death, it never, never can be undone. For, of a truth, that which is, is, and being done, is done for aye, and cannot be altered. I have said.—Let us hence, that all things may be accomplished in their order;” and, taking one of the lamps, she advanced towards the end of the chamber that was roofed in by the swaying stone, where she halted.

We followed her, and perceived that in the wall of the cone there was a stair, or, to be more accurate, that some projecting knobs of rock had been so shaped as to form a good imitation of a stair. Down this Ayesha began to climb, springing from step to step, like a chamois, and, after her we followed with less grace. When we had descended some fifteen or sixteen steps we found that they ended in a tremendous rocky

slope, running first outwards and then inwards—like the slope of an inverted cone, or tunnel. The slope was very steep, and often precipitous, but it was nowhere impassable, and by the light of the lamps we went down it with no great difficulty, though it was gloomy work enough travelling on thus, no one of us knew whither, in the dead heart of a volcano. As we went, however, I took the precaution of noting our route as well as I could; and this was not difficult, owing to the extraordinary and most fantastic shape of the rocks that were strewn about, many of which in that dim light looked more like the grim faces carved upon mediæval gargoyles than ordinary boulders.

For a long period we travelled on thus, half an hour I should say, till, after we had descended for many hundreds of feet, I perceived that we were reaching the point of the inverted cone. In another minute we were there, and found that at the very apex of the funnel was a passage, so low and narrow that we had to stoop as we crept along it in Indian file. After some fifty yards of this creeping, the passage suddenly widened into a cave, so huge that we could see neither the roof nor the sides. We only knew that it was a cave by the echo of our tread and the perfect quiet of the heavy air. On we went for many minutes in absolute awed silence, like lost souls in the depths of Tartarus,<sup>1</sup> Ayesha's white and ghost-like form flitting in front of us, till once more the cavern ended in a passage which opened into a second cavern much smaller than the first. Indeed, we could clearly make out the arch and stony banks of this second cave, and, from their rent and jagged appearance, discovered, that, like the first long passage through which we had passed in the cliff, before we came to the quivering spur, it had to all appearance been torn in the bowels of the rock by the terrific force of some explosive gas. At length this cave ended in a third passage, through which gleamed a faint glow of light.

I heard Ayesha give a sigh of relief as this light dawned upon us.

"It is well," she said; "prepare to enter the very womb of the Earth, wherein she doth conceive the Life that ye see brought forth in man and beast—ay, and in every tree and flower."

Swiftly she sped along, and after her we stumbled as best we might, our hearts filled like a cup with mingled dread and curiosity. What were we about to see? We passed down the tunnel; stronger and stronger the light beamed, reaching us in great flashes like the rays from a lighthouse, as one by one they are thrown wide upon the darkness of the waters. Nor was

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology, a realm of darkness and punishment located below Hades.

this all, for with the flashes came a soul-shaking sound like that of thunder and of crashing trees. Now we were through it, and—oh, heavens!

We stood in a third cavern, some fifty feet in length by, perhaps, as great a height, and thirty wide. It was carpeted with fine white sand, and its walls had been worn smooth by the action of I know not what. The cavern was not dark like the others, it was filled with a soft glow of rose-coloured light, more beautiful to look on than anything that can be conceived. But at first we saw no flashes, and heard no more of the thunderous sound. Presently, however, as we stood in amaze, gazing at the wonderful sight, and wondering whence the rosy radiance flowed, a dread and beautiful thing happened. Across the far end of the cavern with a grinding and crashing noise—a noise so dreadful and awe-inspiring that we all trembled, and Job actually sank to his knees—there flamed out an awful cloud or pillar of fire, like a rainbow, many-coloured, and, like the lightning, bright. For a space, perhaps forty seconds, it flamed and roared thus, turning slowly round and round, and then by degrees the terrible noise ceased, and with the fire it passed away—I know not whither—leaving behind it the same rosy glow that we had first seen.

“Draw near, draw near!” cried Ayesha, with a voice of thrilling exultation. “Behold the very Fountain and Heart of Life as it beats in the bosom of the great world. Behold the substance from which all things draw their energy, the bright Spirit of the Globe, without which it cannot live, but must grow cold and dead as the dead moon. Draw near, and wash ye in the living flames, and take their virtue into your poor frames in all its virgin strength—not as it now feebly glows within your bosoms, filtered thereto through all the fine strainers of a thousand intermediate lives, but as it is here in the very fount and seat of Being.”

We followed her through the rosy glow up to the head of the cave, till at last we stood before the spot where the great pulse beat and the great flame passed. And as we went we became sensible of a wild and splendid exhilaration, of a glorious sense of such a fierce intensity of Life that the most buoyant moments of our strength seemed flat and tame and feeble beside it. It was the mere effluvium of the flame, the subtle ether that it cast off as it passed, working on us, and making us feel strong as giants and swift as eagles.

We reached the head of the cave, and gazed at each other in the glorious glow, and laughed aloud—even Job laughed, and he had not laughed for a week—in the lightness of our hearts and the divine intoxication of our brains. I know that I felt as though all the varied genius of which the human intellect is capable had descended upon me. I

could have spoken in blank verse of Shakesperian beauty, all sorts of great ideas flashed through my mind, it was as though the bonds of my flesh had been loosened and left the spirit free to soar to the empyrean of its native power. The sensations that poured in upon me are indescribable. I seemed to live more keenly, to reach to a higher joy, and sip the goblet of a subtler thought than ever it had been my lot to do before. I was another and most glorified self, and all the avenues of the Possible were for a space laid open to the footsteps of the Real.

Then, suddenly, whilst I rejoiced in this splendid vigour of a new-found self, from far, far away there came a dreadful muttering noise, that grew and grew to a crash and a roar, which combined in itself all that is terrible and yet splendid in the possibilities of sound. Nearer it came, and nearer yet, till it was close upon us, rolling down like all the thunder-wheels of Heaven behind the horses of the lightning. On it came, and with it came the glorious blinding cloud of many-coloured light, and stood before us for a space, turning, as it seemed to us, slowly round and round, and then, accompanied by its attendant pomp of sound, passed away I know not whither.

So astonishing was the wondrous sight that one and all of us, save *She*, who stood up and stretched her hands towards the fire, sank down before it, and hid our faces in the sand.

When it was gone, Ayesha spoke.

"Now, Kallikrates," she said, "the mighty moment is at hand. When the great flame comes again thou must stand in it. First throw aside thy garments, for it will burn them, though thee it will not hurt. Thou must stand in the flame while thy senses will endure, and when it embraces thee suck the fire down into thy very heart, and let it leap and play around thy every part, so that thou lose no moiety of its virtue. Hearest thou me, Kallikrates?"

"I hear thee, Ayesha," answered Leo, "but, of a truth—I am no coward—but I doubt me of that raging flame. How know I that it will not utterly destroy me, so that I lose myself and lose thee also? Nevertheless will I do it," he added.

Ayesha thought for a minute, and then said,

"It is not wonderful that thou shouldst doubt. Tell me, Kallikrates: if thou seest me stand in the flame and come forth unharmed, wilt thou enter also?"

"Yes," he answered, "I will enter, even if it slay me. I have said that I will enter."

"And that will I also," I cried.

"What, my Holly!" she laughed, aloud; "methought that thou wouldst naught of length of days. Why, how is this?"

"Nay, I know not," I answered, "but there is that in my heart that calleth me to taste of the flame, and live."

"It is well," she said. "Thou art not altogether lost in folly. See now, I will for the second time bathe me in this living bath. Fain would I add to my beauty and my length of days if that be possible. If it be not possible, at the least it cannot harm me.

"Also," she continued, after a momentary pause, "is there another and a deeper cause why I would once again dip me in the flame. When first I tasted of its virtue full was my heart of passion and of hatred of that Egyptian Amenartas, and therefore, despite my strivings to be rid thereof, have passion and hatred been stamped upon my soul from that sad hour to this. But now it is otherwise. Now is my mood a happy mood, and filled am I with the purest part of thought, and so would I ever be. Therefore, Kallikrates, will I once more wash and make me clean, and yet more fit for thee. Therefore also, when thou dost in turn stand in the fire, empty all thy heart of evil, and let sweet contentment hold the balance of thy mind. Shake loose thy spirit's wings, and take thy stand upon the utter verge of holy contemplation; ay, dream upon thy mother's kiss, and turn thee towards the vision of the highest good that hath ever swept on silver wings across the silence of thy dreams. For from the germ of what thou art in that dread moment shall grow the fruit of what thou shalt be for all unreckoned time.

"Now prepare thee, prepare, even as though thy last hour were at hand, and thou wast about to cross to the land of shadows, and not through the gates of most glorious life. Prepare, I say!"

## XXVI

### WHAT WE SAW

Then came a few moments' pause, during which Ayesha seemed to be gathering up her strength for the fiery trial, while we clung to each other, and waited in utter silence.

At last from far far away, came the first murmur of sound, that grew and grew till it began to crash and bellow in the distance. As she heard it, Ayesha swiftly threw off her gauzy wrapping, loosened the golden snake from her kirtle, and then, shaking her lovely hair about her like a garment,

beneath its cover slipped the kirtle off and replaced the snaky belt around her and outside the masses of her falling hair. There she stood before us as Eve might have stood before Adam, clad in nothing but her abundant locks, held round her by her golden band; and no words of mine can tell how sweet she looked—and yet how divine. Nearer and nearer came the thunder wheels of fire, and as they came she pushed one ivory arm through the dark masses of her hair and flung it round Leo's neck.

“Oh, my love, my love,” she murmured, “wilt thou ever know how I have loved thee?” and she kissed him on the forehead, and then went and stood in the pathway of the flame of Life.

There was, I remember, to my mind something very touching about her words and that embrace upon the forehead. It was like a mother's kiss, and seemed to convey a benediction with it.

On came the crashing, rolling noise, and the sound thereof was as though a forest were being swept flat by a mighty wind, and then tossed up by it like so much grass, and thundered down a mountain side. Nearer and nearer it came; now flashes of light, forerunners of the revolving pillar of flame, were passing like arrows through the rosy air; and now the edge of the pillar itself appeared. Ayesha turned towards it, and stretched out her arms to greet it. On it came very slowly, and lapped her round with flame. I saw the fire run up her form. I saw her lift it with both hands as though it were water, and pour it over her head. I even saw her open her mouth and draw it down into her lungs, and a dread and wonderful sight it was.

Then she paused, and stretched out her arms, and stood there quite still, with a heavenly smile upon her face, as though she were the very Spirit of the Flame.

The mysterious fire played up and down her dark and rolling locks, twining and twisting itself through and around them like threads of golden lace; it gleamed upon her ivory breast and shoulder, from which the hair had slipped aside; it slid along her pillared throat and delicate features, and seemed to find a home in the glorious eyes that shone and shone more brightly even than the spiritual essence.

Oh, how beautiful she looked there in the flame! No angel out of heaven could have worn a greater loveliness. Even now my heart faints before the recollection of it, as she stood and smiled at our awed faces, and I would give half my remaining time upon this earth to see her once like that again.

But suddenly—more suddenly than I can describe—a kind of change came over her face, a change which I could not define or

explain on paper, but none the less a change. The smile vanished, and in its place there came a dry, hard look; the rounded face seemed to grow pinched, as though some great anxiety were leaving its impress upon it. The glorious eyes, too, lost their light, and, as I thought, the form its perfect shape and erectness.

I rubbed my eyes, thinking that I was the victim of some hallucination, or that the refraction from the intense light produced an optical delusion; and, as I did so, the flaming pillar slowly twisted and thundered off whithersoever it passes to in the bowels of the great earth, leaving Ayesha standing where it had been.

As soon as it was gone, she stepped forward to Leo's side—it seemed to me that there was no spring in her step—and stretched out her hand to lay it on his shoulder. I gazed at her arm. Where was its wonderful roundness and beauty? It was getting thin and angular. And her face—by heaven!—*her face was growing old before my eyes!* I suppose that Leo saw it also; certainly he recoiled a step or two.

"What is it, my Kallikrates?" she said, and her voice—what was the matter with those deep and thrilling notes? They were quite high and cracked.

"Why, what is it—what is it?" she said confusedly. "I feel dazed. Surely the quality of the fire hath not altered. Can the principle of Life alter? Tell me, Kallikrates, is there aught wrong with my eyes? I see not clear," and she put her hand to her head and touched her hair—and oh, *horror of horrors!*—it all fell upon the floor, leaving her utterly bald.

"Oh, *look!—look!—look!*" shrieked Job, in a shrill falsetto of terror, his eyes nearly dropping out of his head, and foam upon his lips. "*Look!—look!—look!* she's shrivelling up! she's turning into a monkey!" and down he fell upon the floor, foaming and gnashing in a fit.

True enough—I faint even as I write it in the living presence of that terrible recollection—she *was* shrivelling up; the golden snake that had encircled her gracious form slipped over her hips and fell upon the ground; smaller and smaller she grew; her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its lustre it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment. She felt at her bald head: the delicate hand was nothing but a claw now, a human talon like that of a badly-preserved Egyptian mummy, and then she seemed to realise what kind of change was passing over her, and she shrieked—ah, she shrieked!—she rolled upon the floor and shrieked!

Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a she baboon. Now the skin was puckered into a million wrinkles, and on

the shapeless face was the stamp of unutterable age. I never saw anything like it; nobody ever saw anything like the frightful age that was graven on that fearful countenance, no bigger now than that of a two-months' child, though the skull remained the same size, or nearly so, and let all men pray to God they never may, if they wish to keep their reason.

At last she lay still, or only feebly moving. She who, but two minutes before, had gazed upon us the loveliest, noblest, most splendid woman the world had ever seen, she lay still before us, near the masses of her own dark hair, no larger than a big monkey, and hideous—ah, too hideous for words. And yet, think of this—at that very moment I thought of it—it was the same woman!

She was dying: we saw it, and thanked God—for while she lived she could feel, and what must she have felt? She raised herself upon her bony hands, and blindly gazed around her, swaying her head slowly from side to side as a tortoise does. She could not see, for her whitish eyes were covered with a horny film. Oh, the horrible pathos of the sight! But she could still speak.

“Kallikrates,” she said, in husky, trembling notes. “Forget me not, Kallikrates. Have pity on my shame; I shall come again, and shall once more be beautiful, I swear it—it is true! *Oh—h—h—*” and she fell upon her face, and was still.

On the very spot where more than twenty centuries before she had slain the old Kallikrates, she herself fell down and died.

Overcome with the extremity of horror, we, too, fell on the sandy floor of that dread place, and swooned away.

## PART 14 (1 JANUARY 1887)

I know not how long we lay thus. Many hours, I suppose. When at last I opened my eyes, the other two were still outstretched upon the floor. The rosy light still beamed like a celestial dawn, and the thunder wheels

of the Spirit of Life still rolled upon their accustomed track, for as I awoke the great pillar was passing away. There, too, lay the hideous little monkey frame, covered with crinkled yellow parchment, that once had been the glorious *She*. Alas! it was no hideous dream—it was an awful and unparalleled fact!

What had happened to bring this shocking change about? Had the nature of the life-giving Fire changed? Did it, perhaps, from time to time send forth an essence of Death instead of an essence of Life? Or was it that the frame once charged with its marvellous virtue could bear no more, so that were the process repeated—it mattered not at what lapse of time—the two impregnations neutralised each other, and left the body on which they acted as it was before it ever came into contact with the very essence of Life? This, and this alone, would account for the sudden and terrible ageing of Ayesha, as the whole length of her two thousand years took effect upon her. I have not the slightest doubt myself but that the frame now lying before me was just what the frame of a woman would be if by any extraordinary means life could be preserved in her till she at length died at the age of twenty-two centuries.

But who can tell what had happened? There was the fact. Often since that awful hour I have reflected that it required no great stretch of imagination to see the finger of Providence in the matter. Ayesha locked up in her living tomb waiting from age to age for the coming of her lover worked but a small change in the order of the World. But Ayesha strong and happy in her love, clothed in immortal youth and godlike beauty, and the wisdom of the centuries, would have revolutionised society, and even perchance have changed the destiny of Mankind. Thus she opposed herself against the eternal Law, and strong though she was, by it was swept back to nothingness, swept back with shame and hideous mockery.

For some minutes I lay faintly turning these terrors over in my mind, while my physical strength came back to me, which it soon did in that buoyant atmosphere. Then I bethought me of the others, and staggered to my feet, to see if I could arouse them. But first I took up Ayesha's kirtle and the gauzy scarf with which she had been wont to hide her dazzling loveliness from the eyes of men, and, averting my head so that I might not look upon it, covered up that dreadful relic of the glorious dead, that shocking epitome of human beauty and human life. I did this hurriedly, fearing lest Leo should recover, and see it again.

Then, stepping over the perfumed masses of dark hair that lay upon

the sand, I stooped down by Job, who was lying upon his face, and turned him over. As I did so his arm fell back in a way that I did not like, and which sent a chill through me, and I glanced sharply at him. One look was enough. Our old and faithful servant was dead. His nerves, already shattered by all he had seen and undergone, had utterly broken down beneath this last dire sight, and he had died of terror, or in a fit brought on by terror. One had only to look at his face to see it.

It was another blow; but perhaps it may help people to understand how overwhelmingly awful was the experience through which we had passed—we did not feel it much at the time. It seemed quite natural that the poor old fellow should be dead. When Leo came to himself, which he did with a groan and trembling of the limbs about ten minutes afterwards, and I told him that Job was dead, he merely said, “Oh!” And, mind you, this was from no heartlessness, for he and Job were much attached to each other; and he often talks of him now with the deepest regret and affection. It was only that his nerves would bear no more. A harp can give out but a certain quantity of sound, however heavily it is smitten.

Well, I set myself to recovering Leo, who, to my infinite relief, I found was not dead, but only fainting, and in the end I succeeded, as I have said, and he sat up; and then I saw another dreadful thing. When we entered that awful place his curling hair had been of the ruddiest gold, now it was turning grey, and by the time we gained the outer air it was snow white. Besides, he looked twenty years older.

“What is to be done, old fellow?” he said in a hollow, dead sort of voice, when his mind had cleared a little, and a recollection of what had happened forced itself upon it.

“Try and get out, I suppose,” I answered; “that is, unless you would like to go in there,” and I pointed to the column of fire that was once more rolling by.

“I would go in if I were sure that it would kill me,” he said with a little laugh. “It was my cursed hesitation that did this. If I had not been afraid she might never have tried to show me the road. But I am not sure. The fire might have the opposite effect upon me. It might make me immortal; and, old fellow, I have not the patience to wait a couple of thousand years for her to come back again as she did for me. I had rather die when my hour comes—and I should fancy that it isn’t far off either—and go my ways to look for her. Do you go in if you like.”

But I merely shook my head, my excitement was as dead as ditch-water, and my distaste for the prolongation of my mortal span had come

back upon me more strongly than ever. Besides, we neither of us knew what the effects of the fire might be. The result upon *She* had not been of an encouraging nature, and of the exact causes that produced that result we were, of course, ignorant.

"Well, my boy," I said, "we can't stop here till we go the way of those two," and I pointed to the little heap under the white garment and to the stiffing corpse of poor Job. "If we are going we had better go. But, by the way, I expect that the lamps have burnt out," and I took one up and looked at it, and sure enough it had.

"There is some more oil in the vase," said Leo indifferently, "if it is not broken, at least."

I examined the vessel in question—it was intact. With a trembling hand I filled the lamps—luckily there was still some of the linen wick unburnt. Then I lit them with one of our wax matches. While I did so we heard the pillar of fire approaching once more as it went on its never-ending journey, if, indeed, it was the same pillar that passed and repassed in a circle.

"Let's see it come once more," said Leo; "we shall never look upon its like again in this world."

It seemed a bit of idle curiosity, but somehow I shared it, and so we waited till, turning slowly round upon its own axis, it had flamed and thundered by; and I remember wondering for how many thousands of years this same phenomenon had been taking place in the bowels of the earth, and for how many more thousands it would continue to take place. I wondered also if any mortal eyes would ever again mark its passage, or any mortal ears be thrilled and fascinated by the swelling volume of its majestic sound. I do not think that they will. I believe that we are the last human beings who will ever see that unearthly sight. Presently it had gone, and we, too, turned to go.

But before we did so we each took Job's cold hand in ours and shook it. It was a rather ghastly ceremony, but it was the only means in our power of showing our respect to the faithful dead and of celebrating his obsequies. The heap beneath the white garment we did not uncover. We had no wish to look upon that terrible sight again. But we went to the pile of rippling hair that had fallen from her in the agony of the hideous change which was worse than a thousand natural deaths, and each of us drew from it a shining lock, and these locks we still have, the sole memento that is left to us of Ayesha as we knew her in the fulness of her grace and glory. Leo pressed the perfumed hair to his lips.

"She called to me not to forget her," he said hoarsely; "and swore

that we should meet again. By heaven! I never will forget her. Here I swear that, if we live to get out of this, I will not for all my days have anything to say to another living woman, and that wherever I go I will wait for her as faithfully as she waited for me.”

“Yes,” I thought to myself, “if she comes back as beautiful as we knew her. But supposing she came back like that!”★

Well, and then we went. We went, and left those two in the presence of the very well and spring of Life, but gathered to the cold company of Death. How lonely they looked as they lay there, and how ill-assorted! That little heap had been for two thousand years the wisest, loveliest, proudest creature—I can hardly call her woman—in the whole universe. She had been wicked, too, in her way; but, alas! such is the frailty of the human heart, her wickedness had not detracted from her charm. Indeed, I am by no means certain that it did not add to it. It was after all of a grand order, there was nothing mean or small about Ayesha.

And poor Job too! His presentiment had come true, and there was an end of him. Well, he had a strange burial-place—no Norfolk hind ever had a stranger, or ever will; and it is something to lie in the same sepulchre with the poor remains of the imperial *She*.

We looked our last upon them and the indescribable rosy glow in which they lay, and then with hearts far too heavy for words we left them, and crept thence broken-down men—so broken down, that we even renounced the chance of practically immortal life, because all that made life valuable had gone from us, and we knew even then that to prolong our days indefinitely would only be to prolong our sufferings. For we felt—yes, both of us—that having once looked Ayesha in the eyes, we could not forget her for ever and ever while memory and identity remained. We both loved her now and for always, she was stamped and carven on our hearts, and no other woman could ever raze that splendid die. And I—there lies the sting—I had and have no right to think thus of her. As she told me, I was nought to her, and never shall be through the unfathomed depths of Time, unless, indeed, conditions alter, and a day comes at last when two men may love one woman, and all three be happy in the fact. It is the only hope of my broken-heartedness, and a rather faint one. Beyond it I have nothing. I have paid down this heavy price, all that I am worth here and hereafter, and that

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★ What a terrifying reflection it is, by the way, that nearly all our deep love for women who are not our kindred depends—at any rate, in the first instance—upon their personal appearance. If we lost them, and found them again dreadful to look on, though otherwise they were the very same, should we still love them?—L.H.H.

is my sole reward. With Leo it is different, and often and often I bitterly envy him his happy lot, for if *She* was right, and her wisdom and knowledge did not fail her at the last, which arguing from the precedent of her own case I think unlikely, he has some future to look forward to. But I have none, and yet—mark the folly and the weakness of the human heart, and let him who is wise learn wisdom from it—yet I would not have it otherwise. I mean that I am content to give what I have given and must always give, and take in payment those crumbs that fall from my mistress' table, the memory of a few kind words, the hope one day in the far undreamed future of a sweet smile or two of recognition, and a little show of thanks for my devotion to her—and Leo.

If that does not constitute true love I do not know what does, and all I have to say is that it is a very bad state of mind for a man on the wrong side of middle age to fall into.

## XXVII

### WE LEAP

We passed through the caves without trouble, but when we came to the slope of the inverted cone two difficulties stared us in the face. The first of these was the laborious nature of the ascent, and the next the extreme difficulty of finding our way. Indeed, had it not been for the mental notes that I had fortunately taken of the shape of various rocks, &c., I am sure that we never should have managed it at all, but have wandered about in the dreadful womb of the volcano—for I suppose it must once have been something of the sort—until we died of exhaustion and despair. As it was we went wrong several times, and once nearly fell into a huge crack or crevasse. It was terrible work creeping about in the dense gloom and awful stillness from boulder to boulder, and examining it by the feeble light of the lamps to see if I could recognise its shape. We rarely spoke, our hearts were too heavy for speech, we simply stumbled about, falling sometimes and cutting ourselves, in a rather dogged sort of way. The fact was that our spirits were utterly crushed, and we did not greatly care what happened to us. Only we felt bound to try and save our lives whilst we could, and, indeed, a natural instinct prompted us to it. So for some three or four hours, I should think—I cannot tell exactly how long, for we had no watch left that would go—we blundered on. During the last two hours we were completely lost,

and I began to fear that we had got in the funnel of some subsidiary cone, when at last I suddenly recognised a very large rock which we had passed in descending but a little way from the top. It is a marvel that I should have recognised it, and, indeed, we had already passed it going at right angles to the proper path, when something about it struck me, and I turned back and examined it in an idle sort of way, and, as it happened, this proved our salvation.

After this we gained the rocky natural stair without much further trouble, and in due course found ourselves back in the little chamber, where the benighted Noot had lived and died.

But now a fresh terror stared us in the face. It may be remembered that, owing to poor Job's fear and awkwardness, the plank upon which we had crossed from the huge spur to the rocking stone had been whirled off into the tremendous gulf below.

How were we to cross without the plank?

There was only one answer—we must try and *jump* it, or else stop there till we starved. The distance in itself was not so very great, between eleven and twelve feet I should think, and I have seen Leo jump over nineteen when he was a young fellow at college; but then, think of the conditions. Two weary, worn-out men, one of them on the wrong side of forty, a rocking stone to take off from, a trembling point of rock some few feet across to land on, and a bottomless gulf to be cleared in a raging gale. It was bad enough, God knows, but when I pointed out these things to Leo, he put the whole matter in a nutshell by replying that, merciless as the choice was, we must choose between the certainty of a lingering death in the chamber and the risk of a swift one in the air. Of course, there was no arguing against this, but one thing was clear, we could not attempt that leap in the dark; the only thing to do was to wait for the ray of light which pierced through the gulf at sunset. How near to or how far from sunset we might be, neither of us had the faintest notion; all we did know was, that when at last the light came it would not endure more than a couple of minutes at the outside, so that we must be prepared to meet it. Accordingly, we made up our minds to creep on to the top of the rocking stone and lie there in readiness. We were the more easily reconciled to this course by the fact that our lamps were once more nearly exhausted—indeed, one had gone out bodily, and the other was jumping up and down as the flame of a lamp does when the oil is done. So, by the aid of its dying light, we hastened to crawl out of the little chamber and clamber up the side of the great stone.

As we did so the light went out.

The difference in our position was a sufficiently remarkable one. Below, in the little chamber, we had only heard the roaring of the gale overhead—here, lying on our faces on the swinging stone, we were exposed to its full force and fury, as the great draught drew first from this direction and then from that, howling against the mighty precipice and through the rocky cliffs like ten thousand despairing souls. We lay there hour after hour in terror and misery of mind, so deep that I will not attempt to describe it, and listened to the wild storm-voices of that Tartarus, as set to the deep undertone of the spur opposite against which the wind hummed like some awful harp, they called to each other from precipice to precipice. No nightmare dreamed by man, no wild invention of the romancer, can ever equal the living horror of that place, and the weird crying of those voices of the night, as we lay, like shipwrecked mariners on a raft, and tossed on a black, unfathomed wilderness of air. Fortunately the temperature was not a low one; indeed, the wind was warm, or we should have perished. Well, we lay and listened, and while we were stretched out upon the rock a thing happened that was so curious and suggestive in itself, though doubtless it was a mere coincidence, that, if anything, it added to, rather than deducted from, the burden on our nerves.

It will be remembered that when Ayesha was standing on the spur, before we crossed to the stone, the wind tore her cloak from her, and whirled it away into the darkness of the gulf, we could not see whither. Well—I hardly like to tell the story; it is so strange. As we lay there upon the rocking-stone, this very cloak came floating out of the black space, like a memory from the dead, and fell on Leo—so that it covered him nearly from head to foot. We could not at first make out what it was, but soon discovered by its feel, and then poor Leo, for the first time, gave way, and I heard him sobbing there upon the stone. No doubt the cloak had been caught upon some pinnacle of the cliff, and was thence blown hither by a chance gust; but still, it was a most curious and touching incident.

Shortly after this, suddenly, without the slightest previous warning, the great red knife of light came stabbing the darkness through and through—struck the swaying stone on which we lay, and rested its sharp point upon the spur opposite.

“Now for it,” said Leo, “now or never.”

We rose and stretched ourselves, and looked at the cloud-wreaths stained the colour of blood by that red ray as they tore through the sickening depths beneath, and then at the empty space between the swaying stone and the quivering rock, and, in our hearts, despaired, and prepared for death. Surely we could not clear it—desperate though we were.

“Who is to go first?” said I.

“Do you, old fellow,” answered Leo. “I will sit upon the other side of the stone to steady it. You must take as much run as you can, and jump high; and God have mercy on us, say I.”

I acquiesced with a nod, and then I did a thing I had never done since Leo was a little boy. I turned and put my arm round him, and kissed him on the forehead. It sounds rather French, but as a fact I was taking my last farewell of a man whom I could not have loved more if he had been my own son twice over.

“Good-bye, my boy,” I said, “I hope that we shall meet again, wherever it is that we go to.”

The fact was I did not expect to live another two minutes.

Next I retreated to the far side of the rock, and waited till one of the chopping gusts of wind got behind me, and then commending my soul to God, I ran the length of the huge stone, some three or four and thirty feet, and sprang wildly out into the dizzy air. Oh! the sickening terrors that I felt as I launched myself at that little point of rock, and the horrible sense of despair that shot through my brain as I realised that I had *jumped short!* But so it was, my feet never touched the point, they went down into space, only my hands and body came in contact with it. I gripped at it with a yell, but one hand slipped, and I swung right round, holding by the other, so that I faced the stone from which I had sprung. Wildly I stretched up with my left hand, and this time managed to grasp a knob of rock, and there I hung in the fierce red light, with thousands of feet of empty air beneath me. My hands were holding to either side of the under part of the spur, so that its point was touching my head. Therefore, even if I could have found the strength I could not pull myself up. The most that I could do would be to hang for about a minute, and then drop down, down into the bottomless pit. If any man can imagine a more hideous position let him speak. All I know is that the torture of that half minute nearly turned my brain. I heard Leo give a cry, and then suddenly saw him in mid air springing up and out like a chamois. It was a splendid leap that he took under the influence of his terror and despair, clearing the horrible gulf as though it were nothing, and landing well on to the rocky point, he threw himself upon his face, to prevent his pitching off it into the depths. I felt the spur above me shake beneath the shock of his impact, and as it did so I saw the huge rocking stone, that had been violently depressed by him as he sprang, fly back when relieved of his weight till, for the first time during all these centuries, it got beyond its balance, and fell with a most awful crash right into the

rocky chamber which had once served the philosopher Noot for a hermitage, as I have no doubt, for ever hermetically sealing the passage that leads to the Place of Life with some hundreds of tons of rock.

All this happened in a second, and curiously enough, notwithstanding my terrible position, I noted it involuntarily, as it were. I even remember thinking that no human being would go down that dread path again.

Next instant I felt Leo seize me by the right wrist with both hands. By lying flat upon his stomach on the point of rock he could just reach me.

“You must let go and swing yourself clear,” he said, in a calm and collected voice, “and then I will try and pull you up, or we will both go together. Are you ready?”

By way of answer I let go, first with my left hand, and then with the right, and swayed out as a consequence clear of the overshadowing rock, my weight hanging upon Leo’s arms. It was a dreadful moment. He was a very powerful man, I knew, but would his strength be equal to lifting me up till I could get a hold on the top of the spur, when owing to his position he had so little purchase?

For a few seconds I swung to and fro, while he gathered himself for the effort, and then I heard his sinews cracking above me, and felt myself lifted up as though I were a little child till I got my left arm round the rock, and my chest was resting on it. The rest was easy; in two or three more seconds I was up, and we were lying panting side by side, trembling like leaves, and with the cold perspiration of terror pouring from our skins.

And then, as before, the light went out like a lamp.

For some half-hour we lay thus without speaking a word, and then at length began to creep along the great spur as best we might in the dense gloom. As we got towards the face of the cliff, however, from which the spur sprung out like a spike from a wall, the light increased, though only a very little, for it was night overhead. After that the gusts of wind decreased, and we got along rather better, and at last reached the mouth of the first cave or tunnel. But now a fresh trouble stared us in the face: our oil was gone, and the lamps were, no doubt, crushed to powder beneath the fallen rocking stone. We were even without a drop of water to stay our thirst, for we had drunk the last in the chamber of Noot. How were we to see to make our way through this last boulder-strewn tunnel?

Clearly all that we could do was to trust to our sense of feeling, and attempt the passage in the dark, so in we crept, fearing that if we delayed to do so our exhaustion would overcome us, and we should probably lie down and die where we were.

Oh, the horrors of that last tunnel! The place was strewn with rocks, and we fell over them, and knocked ourselves up against them till we were bleeding from a score of wounds. Our only guide was the side of the cavern, which we kept touching, and so bewildered did we grow in the darkness that we were several times seized with the terrifying thought that we had turned, and were travelling the wrong way. On we went, feebly, and still more feebly, for hour after hour, stopping every few minutes to rest, for our strength was spent. Once we fell asleep, and, I think, must have slept for some hours, for, when we woke, our limbs were quite stiff, and the blood from our blows and scratches had caked, and was hard and dry upon our skin. Then we dragged ourselves on again, till at last, when despair was entering into our hearts, we once more saw the light of day, and found ourselves outside the tunnel in the rocky fold on the outer surface of the cliff which, it will be remembered, led into it.

It was early morning—that we could tell by the feel of the sweet air and the look of the blessed sky, which we had never hoped to see again. It had, so near as we knew, been an hour after sunset when we entered the tunnel, so it followed that it had taken us the entire night to crawl through that dreadful place.

“One more effort, Leo,” I gasped, “and we shall reach the slope where Billali is, if he hasn’t gone. Come, don’t give way,” for he had cast himself upon his face. He got up, and, leaning on each other, we got down that fifty feet or so of cliff—somehow. I have not the least notion how. I only remember that we found ourselves lying in a heap at the bottom, and then once more began to drag ourselves along on our hands and knees towards the grove where *She* had told Billali to wait her re-arrival, for we could not walk another foot. We had not gone fifty yards in this fashion when suddenly one of the mutes emerged from some trees on our left, through which, I presume, he had been taking a morning stroll, and came running up to see what sort of strange animals we were. He stared, and stared, and then held up his hands in horror, and nearly fell to the ground. Next, he started off as hard as he could for the grove some two hundred yards away. No wonder that he was horrified at our appearance, for we must have been a shocking sight. To begin, Leo with his golden curls turned a snowy white, his clothes nearly rent from his body, his worn face and his hands a mass of bruises, cuts, and blood-encrusted filth, was a sufficiently alarming spectacle, as he painfully dragged himself along the ground, and I have no doubt that I was little better. I know that two days afterwards when I looked at my face in some water I scarcely knew myself. I have never been famous for beauty, but there was

something beside ugliness stamped upon my features that I have never got rid of until this day, something resembling that wild look with which a startled person wakes from deep sleep more than anything that I can think of. And really it is not to be wondered at. What I do wonder at is that we escaped at all with our reason.

Presently to my intense relief I saw old Billali hurrying towards us, and even then I could scarcely help smiling at the expression of consternation on his dignified countenance.

“Oh, my Baboon! my Baboon!” he cried, “my dear son, is it indeed thou and the Lion? Why, his mane that was ripe as corn is white like the snow. Whence come ye? and where is the Pig, and where too *She-who-must-be-obeyed?*”

“Dead, both dead,” I answered; “but ask not questions; help us, and give us food and water, or we too shall die before thine eyes. Seest thou not that our tongues are black for want of water? How can we talk then?”

“Dead!” he gasped, “impossible. *She* who never dies—dead, how can it be?” and then perceiving, I think, that his face was being watched by the mutes who had come running up, he checked himself, and motioned to them to carry us to the camp, which they did.

Fortunately when we arrived some broth was boiling on the fire, and with this Billali fed us, for we were too weak to feed ourselves, thereby I firmly believe saving us from death by exhaustion. Then he bade the mutes wash the blood and grime from us with wet cloths, and after that we were laid down upon piles of aromatic grass, and instantly fell into the dead sleep of absolute exhaustion of mind and body.

## XXVIII

## OVER THE MOUNTAIN

The next thing I recollect is a feeling of the most dreadful stiffness, and a sort of vague idea passing through my half-awakened brain that I was a carpet that had just been beaten. I opened my eyes, and the first thing they fell on was the venerable countenance of our old friend Billali, who was seated by the side of the improvised bed upon which I was sleeping, and thoughtfully stroking his long beard. The sight of him at once brought back to my mind a recollection of all that we had recently passed through, which was accentuated by the vision of poor Leo lying opposite to me, his face knocked almost to a jelly, and his beautiful crowd of curls turned from yellow to white,\* and I shut my eyes again and groaned.

"Thou hast slept long, my Baboon," said old Billali.

"How long, my father?" I asked.

"A round of the sun and a round of the moon, a day and a night hast thou slept, and the Lion also. See, he sleepeth yet."

"Blessed is sleep," I answered, "for it swallows up recollection."

"Tell me," he said, "what hath befallen ye, and what is this strange story of the death of Her who dieth not. Bethink thee, my son: if this be true, then is thy danger and the danger of the Lion very great—nay, almost is the pot red wherewith ye shall be potted, and the stomachs of those who shall eat ye are already hungry for the feast. Knowest thou not that these Amahagger, my children, these dwellers in the caves, hate ye? They hate ye as strangers, they hate ye more because of their brethren whom *She* put to the torture for ye. Assuredly, if once they learn that there is nought to fear from Her, from the terrible One-who-must-be-obeyed, they will slay ye by the pot. But let me hear thy tale, my poor Baboon."

This adjured, I set to work and told him—not everything, indeed, for I did not think it desirable to do so, but sufficient for my purpose, which was to make him understand that *She* was really no more, having fallen into some fire, and, as I put it—for the real thing would have been

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\* Curiously enough, Leo's hair has lately been to some small extent regaining its colour; that is to say, it is now a yellowish grey, and I am not without hopes that it will in time come quite right.

incomprehensible to him—been burnt up. I also told him some of the horrors we had undergone in effecting our escape, and these produced a great impression on him. But I clearly saw that he did not believe in the report of Ayesha's death. He believed indeed that we thought that she was dead, but his explanation was that it had suited her to disappear for a while. Once, he said, in his father's time, she had done so for ten years, and there was a tradition in the country that many centuries back no one had seen her for a whole generation, when she suddenly reappeared, and destroyed a woman who had assumed the position of Queen. I said nothing to this, but only shook my head, sadly. Alas! I knew too well that Ayesha would appear no more, at any rate that Billali would never see her.

"And now," concluded Billali, "what wouldst thou do, my Baboon?"

"Nay," I said, "I know not, my father. Can we not escape from this country?"

He shook his head.

"It is very difficult. By Kôr ye cannot pass, for ye would be seen, and as soon as those fierce ones found that ye were alone, well," and he smiled significantly, and made a movement as though he were placing a hat on his head. "But there is a way over the cliff whereof I once spake to ye, where they drive the cattle out to pasture. Then beyond the pastures are three days' journey through the marshes, and after that I know not, but I have heard that seven days' journey from thence is a mighty river, which floweth to the black water. If ye could come thither, perchance ye might escape, but how can ye come thither?"

"Billali," I said, "once, thou knowest, I did save thy life. Now pay back the debt, my father, and save me mine and my friend's, the Lion's. It shall be a pleasant thing for thee to think of when thine hour comes, and something to set in the scale against the evil doing of thy days, if perchance thou hast done any evil. Also, if thou be right, and if *She* doth but hide herself, surely when she comes again she shall reward thee."

"My son the Baboon," answered the old man, "think not that I have an ungrateful heart. Well do I remember how thou didst rescue me when those dogs stood by to see me drown. Measure for measure will I give thee, and if thou canst be saved, surely I will save thee. Listen: by dawn to-morrow be prepared, for litters shall be here to bear ye away across the mountains, and through the marshes beyond. This will I do, saying that it is the word of *She* that it be done, and he who obeyeth not the word of *She* food is he for the hyænas. Then when ye have crossed the marshes, ye must strike with your own hand, so that

perchance if good fortune go with ye, ye may live to come to that black water whereof ye told me. And now, see, the Lion wakes, and ye must eat the food I have made ready for ye."

Leo's condition when once he was fairly aroused proved not to be so bad as might have been expected from his appearance, and we both of us managed to eat a hearty meal, which indeed we needed sadly enough. After this we limped down to the spring and bathed, and then came back and slept again till evening, when we once more ate enough for five. Billali was away all that day, no doubt making arrangements about litters and bearers, for we were awakened in the middle of the night by the arrival of a considerable number of men in the little camp.

At dawn the old man himself appeared, and told us that he had by using *She's* dreaded name, though with some difficulty, succeeded in getting the necessary men and two guides to conduct us across the swamps, and that he urged us to start at once, at the same time announcing his intention of accompanying us, so as to protect us against treachery. I was much touched by this act of kindness on the part of that wily old barbarian towards two utterly defenceless strangers. A three—or in his case, for he would have to return, six—days' journey through those deadly swamps was no light undertaking for a man of his age, but he consented to do it cheerfully in order to promote our safety. It shows that even among those dreadful Amahagger—who are certainly with their gloom and their devilish and ferocious rites by far the most terrible savages that I ever heard of—there are people with kindly hearts. Of course self-interest may have had something to do with it. He may have thought that *She* would suddenly reappear and demand an account of us at his hands, but still, allowing for all deductions, it was a great deal more than we could expect under the circumstances, and I can only say that I shall for as long as I live cherish a most affectionate remembrance of my nominal parent, old Billali.

Accordingly, after swallowing some food, we started in the litters, feeling, so far as our bodies went, wonderfully like our old selves after our long rest and sleep. I must leave the condition of our minds to the imagination.

Then came a terrible pull up the cliff. Sometimes the ascent was natural, more often it was a zig-zag roadway cut, no doubt, in the first instance by the old inhabitants of Kôr. The Amahagger say they drive their spare cattle over it once a year to pasture outside; all I know is that those cattle must be uncommonly active on their feet. Of course the litters were useless here, so we had to walk.

By midday, however, we reached the great flat top of that mighty wall of rock, and grand enough the view was from it, with the plain of

Kôr, in the centre of which we could clearly make out the pillared ruins of the Temple of Truth, to the one side, and the boundless and melancholy marsh on the other. This wall of rock, which had no doubt once formed the lip of the crater, was about a mile and a half thick, and still covered with clinkers.<sup>1</sup> Nothing grew there, and the only thing to relieve one's eyes were occasional pools of rain-water (for rain had lately fallen) wherever there was a little hollow. Over the flat crest of this mighty rampart we went, and then came the descent, which if not so difficult a matter as the getting up, was still sufficiently break-neck, and took us till sunset. That night, however, we camped in safety upon the mighty slopes that rolled away to the marsh beneath.

On the following morning, about eleven o'clock, began our dreary journey across those awful seas of swamps which I have already described.

For three whole days, through stench and mire, and the all-prevailing flavour of fever, did our bearers struggle along, till at length we came to open rolling ground quite uncultivated, and mostly treeless, but covered with game of all sorts, which lies beyond that most desolate, and without guides utterly impracticable, district. And here on the following morning we bade farewell, not without some regret, to old Billali, who stroked his white beard, and solemnly blessed us.

"Farewell, my son the Baboon," he said, "and farewell to thee too, oh Lion. I can do no more to help ye. But if ever ye come to your own country, be advised, and venture no more into lands that ye know not, lest ye come back no more, but leave your white bones to mark the limit of your journeyings. Farewell once more; often shall I think of ye, nor wilt thou forget me, my Baboon, for though thy face is ugly thy heart is true." And then he turned and went, and with him went the tall and sullen-looking bearers, and that was the last that we saw of the Amahagger. We watched them winding away with the empty litters like a procession bearing dead men from a battle, till the mists from the marsh gathered round them and hid them, and then, left utterly desolate in the vast wilderness, we turned and gazed round us, and at each other.

Three weeks or so before four men had entered the marshes of Kôr, and now two of us were dead, and the other two had gone through adventures and experiences so strange and terrible that Death himself hath not a more fearful countenance. Three weeks—and only three weeks! Truly time should be measured by events, and not by the lapse of hours. It seemed like thirty years since we saw the last of our whaleboat.

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<sup>1</sup> Pieces of slag, rock that has been melted and fused.

“We must strike out for the Zambesi, Leo,” I said, “but God knows if we shall ever get there.”

Leo nodded. He had become very silent of late, and we started with nothing but the clothes we stood in, a compass, our revolvers and express rifles, and about two hundred rounds of ammunition, and so ended the history of our visit to the ruins of mighty Kôr.

As for the adventures that subsequently befell us, strange and varied as they were, I have, after deliberation, determined not to record them here. In these pages I have only tried to give a short and clear account of an occurrence which I believe to be unique, and this I have done, not with a view to immediate publication, but merely to put on paper while they are yet fresh in our memories the details of our journey and its result, which will, I believe, prove interesting to the world if ever we determine to make them public. This, as at present advised, we do not intend should be done during our joint lives.

For the rest, it is of no public interest, resembling as it does the experience of more than one Central African traveller. Suffice it to say, that we did, after incredible hardships and privations, reach the Zambesi, which proved to be about a hundred and seventy miles south of where Billali left us. There we were for six months imprisoned by a savage tribe, who believed us to be supernatural beings, chiefly on account of Leo's youthful face and snow-white hair. From these people we ultimately escaped, and, crossing the Zambesi, wandered off southwards, where, when on the point of starvation, we were sufficiently fortunate to fall in with a half-caste Portuguese elephant-hunter who had followed a troop of elephants farther inland than he had ever been before. This man treated us most hospitably, and ultimately through his assistance we, after innumerable sufferings and adventures, reached Delagoa Bay, more than eighteen months from the day when we emerged from the marshes of Kôr, and the very next day managed to catch one of the Donald Currie boats that run round the Cape to England.<sup>1</sup> Our journey home was a prosperous one, and we set our foot on the quay at Southampton exactly two years from the date of our departure upon our wild and seemingly ridiculous quest, and I now write these last words with Leo leaning over my shoulder in my old room in my college, the very same into which some two-and-twenty years ago my poor friend Vincey came stumbling on the memorable night of his death bearing the iron chest with him.

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning in 1862, Donald Currie and Company ran mail and passenger steamship service between Britain and South Africa.

Is Leo really a reincarnation of the ancient Kallikrates of whom the writer speaks? Or was Ayesha deceived by some extraordinary racial resemblance? The reader must form his own opinion on this as on many other matters. I have mine, which is that she made no such mistake.

And that is the end of this history so far as it concerns science and the outside world. What its end will be as regards Leo and myself is more than I can guess at. But we feel that is not reached yet. A story that began two thousand years ago may stretch a long way into the dim and distant future.

Often I sit alone at night, staring with the eyes of the mind into the blackness of unborn time, and wondering in what shape and form the drama will be finally developed, and where the scene of its next act will be laid. And when that final development ultimately occurs, as I have no doubt it must and will occur, in obedience to a fate that never swerves and a purpose that cannot be altered, what will be the part played therein by that Egyptian Amenartas, the Princess of the race of the Pharaoh Hakor, for the love of whom the ancient Kallikrates broke his vows to Isis, and, pursued by the inexorable vengeance of the outraged Goddess, fled down the coast of Libya to meet his doom at Kôr.

# BOOK XXII

## SHE

### INTRODUCTION

In giving to the world the record of what, looked at as an adventure only, is I suppose one of the most wonderful and mysterious experiences ever undergone by mortal men, I feel it incumbent on me to explain what my exact connection with it is. And so I may as well say at once that I am not the narrator but only the editor of this extraordinary history, and then go on to tell how it found its way into my hands.

Some years ago I, the editor, was stopping with a friend, "*vir doctissimus et amicus meus*," at a certain University, which for the purposes of this history we will call Cambridge, and was one day much struck with the appearance of two persons whom I saw going arm-in-arm down the street. One of these gentlemen was I think, without exception, the handsomest young fellow I have ever seen. He was very tall, very broad, and had a look of power and a grace of bearing that seemed as native to him as it is to a wild stag. In addition his face was almost without flaw—a good face as well as a beautiful one, and when he lifted his hat, which he did just then to a passing lady, I saw that his head was covered with little golden curls growing close to the scalp.

"Good gracious!" I said to my friend, with whom I was walking, "why, that fellow looks like a statue of Apollo come to life. What a splendid man he is!"

"Yes," he answered, "he is the handsomest man in the University, and one of the nicest too. They call him 'the Greek god'; but look at the other one, he's Vincey's (that's the god's name) guardian, and supposed to be full of every kind of information. They call him 'Charon.'" I looked, and found the older man quite as interesting in his way as the glorified specimen of humanity at his side. He appeared to be about forty years of age, and was I think as ugly as his companion was handsome. To begin with, he was shortish, rather bow-legged, very deep chested, and with unusually long arms. He had dark hair and small eyes, and the hair grew right down on his forehead, and his whiskers grew right up to his hair, so that there was uncommonly little of his countenance to be seen. Altogether he reminded me forcibly of a gorilla, and yet there was something very pleasing and genial about the man's eye. I remember saying that I should like to know him.

"All right," answered my friend, "nothing easier. I know Vincey; I'll introduce you," and he did, and for some minutes we stood chatting—about the Zulu people, I think, for I had just returned from the Cape at the time. Presently, however, a stoutish lady, whose name I do not remember, came along the pavement, accompanied by a pretty fair-haired girl, and these two Mr. Vincey, who clearly knew them well, at once joined, walking off in their company. I remember being rather amused because of the change in the expression of the elder man, whose name I discovered was Holly, when he saw the ladies advancing. He suddenly stopped short in his talk, cast a reproachful look at his companion, and, with an abrupt nod to myself, turned and marched off alone across the street. I heard afterwards that he was popularly supposed to be as much afraid of a woman as most people are of a mad dog, which accounted for his precipitate retreat. I cannot say, however, that young Vincey showed much aversion to feminine society on this occasion. Indeed I remember laughing, and remarking to my friend at the time that he was not the sort of man whom it would be desirable to introduce to the lady one was going to marry, since it was exceedingly probable that the acquaintance would end in a transfer of her affections. He was altogether too good-looking, and, what is more, he had none of that consciousness and conceit about him which usually afflicts handsome men, and makes them deservedly disliked by their fellows.

That same evening my visit came to an end, and this was the last I saw or heard of "Charon" and "the Greek god" for many a long day. Indeed, I have never seen either of them from that hour to this, and do not think it probable that I shall. But a month ago I received a letter and two packets, one of manuscript, and on opening the first found that it was signed by "Horace Holly," a name that at the moment was not familiar to me. It ran as follows:—

— College, Cambridge, May 1, 18—

"My dear Sir,—You will be surprised, considering the very slight nature of our acquaintance, to get a letter from me. Indeed, I think I had better begin by reminding you that we once met, now some five years ago, when I and my ward Leo Vincey were introduced to you in the street at Cambridge. To be brief and come to my business. I have recently read with much interest a book of yours describing a Central African adventure. I take it that this book is partly true, and partly an effort of the imagination. However this may be, it has given me an idea. It happens, how you will see in the accompanying manuscript (which together with the Scarab, the 'Royal Son of the Sun,' and the original sherd, I am sending to you by hand), that my ward, or rather my adopted son Leo Vincey and myself have recently passed through a real African adventure, of a nature so much more marvellous than the one which you describe, that to tell the truth I am almost ashamed to submit it to you lest you should disbelieve my tale. You will see it stated in this manuscript that I, or rather we, had made up our minds not to make this history public during our joint lives. Nor should we alter our determination were it not for a circumstance which has recently arisen. We are for reasons that, after perusing this manuscript, you may be able to guess, going away again this time to Central Asia where, if anywhere upon this earth, wisdom is to be found, and we anticipate that our sojourn there will be a long one. Possibly we shall not return. Under these altered conditions it has become a question whether we are justified in withholding from the world an account of a phenomenon which we believe to be of unparalleled interest, merely because our private life is involved, or because we are afraid of ridicule and doubt being cast upon our statements. I hold one view about this matter, and Leo holds another, and finally, after much discussion, we have come to a compromise, namely, to send the history to you, giving you full leave to publish it if you think fit, the only stipulation being that you shall disguise our real names, and as much concerning our personal identity as is consistent with the maintenance of the *bona fides* of the narrative.

"And now what am I to say further? I really do not know beyond once more repeating that everything is described in the accompanying manuscript exactly as it happened. As regards *She* herself I have nothing to add. Day by day we gave greater occasion to regret that we did not better avail ourselves of our opportunities to obtain more information from that marvellous woman. Who was she? How did she first come to the Caves of Kôr, and what was her real religion? We never ascertained, and now, alas! we never shall, at least not yet. These and many other questions arise in my mind, but what is the good of asking them now?

“Will you undertake the task? We give you complete freedom, and as a reward you will, we believe, have the credit of presenting to the world the most wonderful history, as distinguished from romance, that its records can show. Read the manuscript (which I have copied out fairly for your benefit), and let me know.

“Believe me, very truly yours, “L. Horace Holly.<sup>[1]</sup>

“P.S.—Of course, if any profit results from the sale of the writing should you care to undertake its publication, you can do what you like with it, but if there is a loss I will leave instructions with my lawyers, Messrs. Geoffrey and Jordan, to meet it. We entrust the sherd, the scarab, and the parchments to your keeping, till such time as we demand them back again. —L. H. H.”

<sup>[1]</sup> This name is varied throughout in accordance with the writer's request.—Editor.

This letter, as may be imagined, astonished me considerably, but when I came to look at the MS., which the pressure of other work prevented me from doing for a fortnight, I was still more astonished, as I think the reader will be also, and at once made up my mind to press on with the matter. I wrote to this effect to Mr. Holly, but a week afterwards received a letter from that gentleman's lawyers, returning my own, with the information that their client and Mr. Leo Vincey had already left this country for Thibet, and they did not at present know their address.

Well, that is all I have to say. Of the history itself the reader must judge. I give it him, with the exception of a very few alterations, made with the object of concealing the identity of the actors from the general public, exactly as it came to me. Personally I have made up my mind to refrain from comments. At first I was inclined to believe that this history of a woman on whom, clothed in the majesty of her almost endless years, the shadow of Eternity itself lay like the dark wing of Night, was some gigantic allegory of which I could not catch the meaning. Then I thought that it might be a bold attempt to portray the possible results of practical immortality, informing the substance of a mortal who yet drew her strength from Earth, and in whose human bosom passions yet rose and fell and beat as in the undying world around her the winds and the tides rise and fall and beat unceasingly. But as I went on I abandoned that idea also. To me the story seems to bear the stamp of truth upon its face. Its explanation I must leave to others, and with this slight preface, which circumstances make necessary, I introduce the world to Ayesha and the Caves of Kôr.—The Editor.

P.S.—There is on consideration one circumstance that, after a reperusal of this history, struck me with so much force that I cannot resist calling the attention of the reader to it. He will observe that so far as we are made acquainted with him there appears to be nothing in the character of Leo Vincey which in the opinion of most people would have been likely to attract an intellect so powerful as that of Ayesha. He is not even, at any rate to my view, particularly interesting. Indeed, one might imagine that Mr. Holly would under ordinary circumstances have easily outstripped him in the favour of *She*. Can it be that extremes meet, and that the very excess and splendour of her mind led her by means of some strange physical reaction to worship at the shrine of matter? Was that ancient Kallikrates nothing but a splendid animal loved for his hereditary Greek beauty? Or is the true explanation what I believe it to be—namely, that Ayesha, seeing further than we can see, perceived the germ and smouldering spark of greatness which lay hid within her lover's soul, and well knew that under the influence of her gift of life, watered by her wisdom, and shone upon with the sunshine of her presence, it would bloom like a flower and flash out like a star, filling the world with light and fragrance?

Here also I am not able to answer, but must leave the reader to form his own judgment on the facts before him, as detailed by Mr. Holly in the following pages.

# I.

## MY VISITOR

There are some events of which each circumstance and surrounding detail seems to be graven on the memory in such fashion that we cannot forget it, and so it is with the scene that I am about to describe. It rises as clearly before my mind at this moment as though it had happened but yesterday.

It was in this very month something over twenty years ago that I, Ludwig Horace Holly, was sitting one night in my rooms at Cambridge, grinding away at some mathematical work, I forget what. I was to go up for my fellowship within a week, and was expected by my tutor and my college generally to distinguish myself. At last, wearied out, I flung my book down, and, going to the mantelpiece, took down a pipe and filled it. There was a candle burning on the mantelpiece, and a long, narrow glass at the back of it; and as I was in the act of lighting the pipe I caught sight of my own countenance in the glass, and paused to reflect. The lighted match burnt away till it scorched my fingers, forcing me to drop it; but still I stood and stared at myself in the glass, and reflected.

"Well," I said aloud, at last, "it is to be hoped that I shall be able to do something with the inside of my head, for I shall certainly never do anything by the help of the outside."

This remark will doubtless strike anybody who reads it as being slightly obscure, but I was in reality alluding to my physical deficiencies. Most men of twenty-two are endowed at any rate with some share of the comeliness of youth, but to me even this was denied. Short, thick-set, and deep-chested almost to deformity, with long sinewy arms, heavy features, deep-set grey eyes, a low brow half overgrown with a mop of thick black hair, like a deserted clearing on which the forest had once more begun to encroach; such was my appearance nearly a quarter of a century ago, and such, with some modification, it is to this day. Like Cain, I was branded—branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness, as I was gifted by Nature with iron and abnormal strength and considerable intellectual powers. So ugly was I that the spruce young men of my College, though they were proud enough of my feats of endurance and physical prowess, did not even care to be seen walking with me. Was it wonderful that I was misanthropic and sullen? Was it wonderful that I brooded and worked alone, and had no friends—at least, only one? I was set apart by Nature to live alone, and draw comfort from her breast, and hers only. Women hated the sight of me. Only a week before I had heard one call me a "monster" when she thought I was out of hearing, and say that I had converted her to the monkey theory. Once, indeed, a woman pretended to care for me, and I lavished all the pent-up affection of my nature upon her. Then money that was to have come to me went elsewhere, and she discarded me. I pleaded with her as I have never pleaded with any living creature before or since, for I was caught by her sweet face, and loved her; and in the end by way of answer she took me to the glass, and stood side by side with me, and looked into it.

"Now," she said, "if I am Beauty, who are you?" That was when I was only twenty.

And so I stood and stared, and felt a sort of grim satisfaction in the sense of my own loneliness; for I had neither father, nor mother, nor brother; and as I did so there came a knock at my door.

I listened before I went to open it, for it was nearly twelve o'clock at night, and I was in no mood to admit any stranger. I had but one friend in the College, or, indeed, in the world—perhaps it was he.

Just then the person outside the door coughed, and I hastened to open it, for I knew the cough.

A tall man of about thirty, with the remains of great personal beauty, came hurrying in, staggering beneath the weight of a massive iron box which he carried by a handle with his right hand. He placed the box upon the table, and then fell into an awful fit of coughing. He coughed and coughed till his face became quite purple, and at last he sank into a chair and began to spit up blood. I poured out some whisky into a tumbler, and gave it to him. He drank it, and seemed better; though his better was very bad indeed.

"Why did you keep me standing there in the cold?" he asked pettishly. "You know the draughts are death to me."

"I did not know who it was," I answered. "You are a late visitor."

"Yes; and I verily believe it is my last visit," he answered, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. "I am done for, Holly. I am done for. I do not believe that I shall see to-morrow."

"Nonsense!" I said. "Let me go for a doctor."

He waved me back imperiously with his hand. "It is sober sense; but I want no doctors. I have studied medicine and I know all about it. No doctors can help me. My last hour has come! For a year past I have only lived by a miracle. Now listen to me as you have never listened to anybody before; for you will not have the opportunity of getting me to repeat my words. We have been friends for two years; now tell me how much do you know about me?"

"I know that you are rich, and have had a fancy to come to College long after the age that most men leave it. I know that you have been married, and that your wife died; and that you have been the best, indeed almost the only friend I ever had."

"Did you know that I have a son?"

"No."

"I have. He is five years old. He cost me his mother's life, and I have never been able to bear to look upon his face in consequence. Holly, if you will accept the trust, I am going to leave you that boy's sole guardian."

I sprang almost out of my chair. "*Me!*" I said.

"Yes, you. I have not studied you for two years for nothing. I have known for some time that I could not last, and since I realised the fact I have been searching for some one to whom I could confide the boy and this," and he tapped the iron box. "You are the man, Holly; for, like a rugged tree, you are hard and sound at core. Listen; the boy will be the only representative of one of the most

ancient families in the world, that is, so far as families can be traced. You will laugh at me when I say it, but one day it will be proved to you beyond a doubt, that my sixty-fifth or sixty-sixth lineal ancestor was an Egyptian priest of Isis, though he was himself of Grecian extraction, and was called Kallikrates.<sup>[1]</sup> His father was one of the Greek mercenaries raised by Hak-Hor, a Mendesian Pharaoh of the twenty-ninth dynasty, and his grandfather or great-grandfather, I believe, was that very Kallikrates mentioned by Herodotus.<sup>[2]</sup> In or about the year 339 before Christ, just at the time of the final fall of the Pharaohs, this Kallikrates (the priest) broke his vows of celibacy and fled from Egypt with a Princess of Royal blood who had fallen in love with him, and was finally wrecked upon the coast of Africa, somewhere, as I believe, in the neighbourhood of where Delagoa Bay now is, or rather to the north of it, he and his wife being saved, and all the remainder of their company destroyed in one way or another. Here they endured great hardships, but were at last entertained by the mighty Queen of a savage people, a white woman of peculiar loveliness, who, under circumstances which I cannot enter into, but which you will one day learn, if you live, from the contents of the box, finally murdered my ancestor Kallikrates. His wife, however, escaped, how, I know not, to Athens, bearing a child with her, whom she named Tisisthenes, or the Mighty Avenger. Five hundred years or more afterwards, the family migrated to Rome under circumstances of which no trace remains, and here, probably with the idea of preserving the idea of vengeance which we find set out in the name of Tisisthenes, they appear to have pretty regularly assumed the cognomen of Vindex, or Avenger. Here, too, they remained for another five centuries or more, till about 770 A.D., when Charlemagne invaded Lombardy, where they were then settled, whereon the head of the family seems to have attached himself to the great Emperor, and to have returned with him across the Alps, and finally to have settled in Brittany. Eight generations later his lineal representative crossed to England in the reign of Edward the Confessor, and in the time of William the Conqueror was advanced to great honour and power. From that time to the present day I can trace my descent without a break. Not that the Vinceys—for that was the final corruption of the name after its bearers took root in English soil—have been particularly distinguished—they never came much to the fore. Sometimes they were soldiers, sometimes merchants, but on the whole they have preserved a dead level of respectability, and a still deader level of mediocrity. From the time of Charles II. till the beginning of the present century they were merchants. About 1790 my grandfather made a considerable fortune out of brewing, and retired. In 1821 he died, and my father succeeded him, and dissipated most of the money. Ten years ago he died also, leaving me a net income of about two thousand a year. Then it was that I undertook an expedition in connection with *that*,” and he pointed to the iron chest, “which ended disastrously enough. On my way back I travelled in the South of Europe, and finally reached Athens. There I met my beloved wife, who might well also have been called the ‘Beautiful,’ like my old Greek ancestor. There I married her, and there, a year afterwards, when my boy was born, she died.”

[1] The Strong and Beautiful, or, more accurately, the Beautiful in strength.

[2] The Kallikrates here referred to by my friend was a Spartan, spoken of by Herodotus (Herod. ix. 72) as being remarkable for his beauty. He fell at the glorious battle of Plataea (September 22, B.C. 479), when the Lacedaemonians and Athenians under Pausanias routed the Persians, putting nearly 300,000 of them to the sword. The following is a translation of the passage, “For Kallikrates died out of the battle, he came to the army the most beautiful man of the Greeks of that day—not only of the Lacedaemonians themselves, but of the other Greeks also. He when Pausanias was sacrificing was wounded in the side by an arrow; and then they fought, but on being carried off he regretted his death, and said to Arimnestus, a Platean, that he did not grieve at dying for Greece, but at not having struck a blow, or, although he desired so to do, performed any deed worthy of himself.” This Kallikrates, who appears to have been as brave as he was beautiful, is subsequently mentioned by Herodotus as having been buried among the ἱπῆρες, (young commanders), apart from the other Spartans and the Helots.—L. H. H.

He paused a while, his head sunk upon his hand, and then continued—

“My marriage had diverted me from a project which I cannot enter into now. I have no time, Holly—I have no time! One day, if you accept my trust, you will learn all about it. After my wife’s death I turned my mind to it again. But first it was necessary, or, at least, I conceived that it was necessary, that I should attain to a perfect knowledge of Eastern dialects, especially Arabic. It was to facilitate my studies that I came here. Very soon, however, my disease developed itself, and now there is an end of me.” And as though to emphasise his words he burst into another terrible fit of coughing.

I gave him some more whisky, and after resting he went on—

“I have never seen my boy, Leo, since he was a tiny baby. I never could bear to see him, but they tell me that he is a quick and handsome child. In this envelope,” and he produced a letter from his pocket addressed to myself, “I have jotted down the course I wish followed in the boy’s education. It is a somewhat peculiar one. At any rate, I could not entrust it to a stranger. Once more, will you undertake it?”

“I must first know what I am to undertake,” I answered.

“You are to undertake to have the boy, Leo, to live with you till he is twenty-five years of age—not to send him to school, remember. On his twenty-fifth birthday your guardianship will end, and you will then, with the keys that I give you now” (and he placed them on the table) “open the iron box, and let him see and read the contents, and say whether or no he is willing to undertake the quest. There is no obligation on him to do so. Now, as regards terms. My present income is two thousand two hundred a year. Half of that income I have secured to you by will for life, contingently on your undertaking the guardianship—that is, one thousand a year remuneration to yourself, for you will have to give up your life to it, and one hundred a year to pay for the board of the boy. The rest is to accumulate till Leo is twenty-five, so that there may be a sum in hand should he wish to undertake the quest of which I spoke.”

“And suppose I were to die?” I asked.

“Then the boy must become a ward of Chancery and take his chance. Only be careful that the iron chest is passed on to him by your will. Listen, Holly, don’t refuse me. Believe me, this is to your advantage. You are not fit to mix with the world—it would only embitter you. In a few weeks you will become a Fellow of your College, and the income that you will derive from that combined with what I have left you will enable you to live a life of learned leisure, alternated with the sport of which you are so fond, such as will exactly suit you.”

He paused and looked at me anxiously, but I still hesitated. The charge seemed so very strange.

“For my sake, Holly. We have been good friends, and I have no time to make other arrangements.”

“Very well,” I said, “I will do it, provided there is nothing in this paper to make me change my mind,” and I touched the envelope he had put upon the table by the keys.

“Thank you, Holly, thank you. There is nothing at all. Swear to me by God that you will be a father to the boy, and follow my directions to the letter.”

"I swear it," I answered solemnly.

"Very well, remember that perhaps one day I shall ask for the account of your oath, for though I am dead and forgotten, yet I shall live. There is no such thing as death, Holly, only a change, and, as you may perhaps learn in time to come, I believe that even that change could under certain circumstances be indefinitely postponed," and again he broke into one of his dreadful fits of coughing.

"There," he said, "I must go, you have the chest, and my will will be found among my papers, under the authority of which the child will be handed over to you. You will be well paid, Holly, and I know that you are honest, but if you betray my trust, by Heaven, I will haunt you."

I said nothing, being, indeed, too bewildered to speak.

He held up the candle, and looked at his own face in the glass. It had been a beautiful face, but disease had wrecked it. "Food for the worms," he said. "Curious to think that in a few hours I shall be stiff and cold—the journey done, the little game played out. Ah me, Holly! life is not worth the trouble of life, except when one is in love—at least, mine has not been; but the boy Leo's may be if he has the courage and the faith. Good-bye, my friend!" and with a sudden access of tenderness he flung his arm about me and kissed me on the forehead, and then turned to go.

"Look here, Vincey," I said, "if you are as ill as you think, you had better let me fetch a doctor."

"No, no," he said earnestly. "Promise me that you won't. I am going to die, and, like a poisoned rat, I wish to die alone."

"I don't believe that you are going to do anything of the sort," I answered. He smiled, and, with the word "Remember" on his lips, was gone. As for myself, I sat down and rubbed my eyes, wondering if I had been asleep. As this supposition would not bear investigation I gave it up and began to think that Vincey must have been drinking. I knew that he was, and had been, very ill, but still it seemed impossible that he could be in such a condition as to be able to know for certain that he would not outlive the night. Had he been so near dissolution surely he would scarcely have been able to walk, and carry a heavy iron box with him. The whole story, on reflection, seemed to me utterly incredible, for I was not then old enough to be aware how many things happen in this world that the common sense of the average man would set down as so improbable as to be absolutely impossible. This is a fact that I have only recently mastered. Was it likely that a man would have a son five years of age whom he had never seen since he was a tiny infant? No. Was it likely that he could foretell his own death so accurately? No. Was it likely that he could trace his pedigree for more than three centuries before Christ, or that he would suddenly confide the absolute guardianship of his child, and leave half his fortune, to a college friend? Most certainly not. Clearly Vincey was either drunk or mad. That being so, what did it mean? and what was in the sealed iron chest?

The whole thing baffled and puzzled me to such an extent that at last I could stand it no longer, and determined to sleep over it. So I jumped up, and having put the keys and the letter that Vincey had left away into my despatch-box, and stowed the iron chest in a large portmanteau, I turned in, and was soon fast asleep.

As it seemed to me, I had only been asleep for a few minutes when I was awakened by somebody calling me. I sat up and rubbed my eyes; it was broad daylight—eight o'clock, in fact.

"Why, what is the matter with you, John?" I asked of the gyp who waited on Vincey and myself. "You look as though you had seen a ghost!"

"Yes, sir, and so I have," he answered, "leastways I've seen a corpse, which is worse. I've been in to call Mr. Vincey, as usual, and there he lies stark and dead!"

## II.

# THE YEARS ROLL BY

As might be expected, poor Vincey's sudden death created a great stir in the College; but, as he was known to be very ill, and a satisfactory doctor's certificate was forthcoming, there was no inquest. They were not so particular about inquests in those days as they are now; indeed, they were generally disliked, because of the scandal. Under all these circumstances, being asked no questions, I did not feel called upon to volunteer any information about our interview on the night of Vincey's decease, beyond saying that he had come into my rooms to see me, as he often did. On the day of the funeral a lawyer came down from London and followed my poor friend's remains to the grave, and then went back with his papers and effects, except, of course, the iron chest which had been left in my keeping. For a week after this I heard no more of the matter, and, indeed, my attention was amply occupied in other ways, for I was up for my Fellowship, a fact that had prevented me from attending the funeral or seeing the lawyer. At last, however, the examination was over, and I came back to my rooms and sank into an easy chair with a happy consciousness that I had got through it very fairly.

Soon, however, my thoughts, relieved of the pressure that had crushed them into a single groove during the last few days, turned to the events of the night of poor Vincey's death, and again I asked myself what it all meant, and wondered if I should hear anything more of the matter, and if I did not, what it would be my duty to do with the curious iron chest. I sat there and thought and thought till I began to grow quite disturbed over the whole occurrence: the mysterious midnight visit, the prophecy of death so shortly to be fulfilled, the solemn oath that I had taken, and which Vincey had called on me to answer to in another world than this. Had the man committed suicide? It looked like it. And what was the quest of which he spoke? The circumstances were uncanny, so much so that, though I am by no means nervous, or apt to be alarmed at anything that may seem to cross the bounds of the natural, I grew afraid, and began to wish I had nothing to do with them. How much more do I wish it now, over twenty years afterwards!

As I sat and thought, there came a knock at the door, and a letter, in a big blue envelope, was brought in to me. I saw at a glance that it was a lawyer's letter, and an instinct told me that it was connected with my trust. The letter, which I still have, runs thus:—

"Sir,—Our client, the late M. L. Vincey, Esq., who died on the 9th instant in ——— College, Cambridge, has left behind him a Will, of which you will please find copy enclosed and of which we are the executors. Under this Will you will perceive that you take a life-interest in about half of the late Mr. Vincey's property, now invested in Consols, subject to your acceptance of the guardianship of his only son, Leo Vincey, at present an infant, aged five. Had we not ourselves drawn up the document in question in obedience to Mr. Vincey's clear and precise instructions, both personal and written, and had he not then assured us that he had very good reasons for what he was doing, we are bound to tell you that its provisions seem to us of so unusual a nature, that we should have felt bound to call the attention of the Court of Chancery to them, in order that such steps might be taken as seemed desirable to it, either by contesting the capacity of the testator or otherwise, to safeguard the interests of the infant. As it is, knowing that the testator was a gentleman of the highest intelligence and acumen, and that he has absolutely no relations living to whom he could have confided the guardianship of the child, we do not feel justified in taking this course.

"Awaiting such instructions as you please to send us as regards the delivery of the infant and the payment of the proportion of the dividends due to you,

"We remain, Sir, faithfully yours,

"Geoffrey and Jordan.

"Horace L. Holly, Esq."

I put down the letter, and ran my eye through the Will, which appeared, from its utter unintelligibility, to have been drawn on the strictest legal principles. So far as I could discover, however, it exactly bore out what my friend Vincey had told me on the night of his death. So it was true after all. I must take the boy. Suddenly I remembered the letter which Vincey had left with the chest. I fetched and opened it. It only contained such directions as he had already given to me as to opening the chest on Leo's twenty-fifth birthday, and laid down the outlines of the boy's education, which was to include Greek, the higher Mathematics, and *Arabic*. At the end there was a postscript to the effect that if the boy died under the age of twenty-five, which, however, he did not believe would be the case, I was to open the chest, and act on the information I obtained if I saw fit. If I did not see fit, I was to destroy all the contents. On no account was I to pass them on to a stranger.

As this letter added nothing material to my knowledge, and certainly raised no further objection in my mind to entering on the task I had promised my dead friend to undertake, there was only one course open to me—namely, to write to Messrs. Geoffrey and Jordan, and express my acceptance of the trust, stating that I should be willing to commence my guardianship of Leo in ten days' time. This done I went to the authorities of my college, and, having told them as much of the story as I considered desirable, which was not very much, after considerable difficulty succeeded in persuading them to stretch a point, and, in the event of my having obtained a fellowship, which I was pretty certain I had done, allow me to have the child to live with me. Their consent, however, was only granted on the condition that I vacated my rooms in college and took lodgings. This I did, and with some difficulty succeeded in obtaining very good apartments quite close to the college gates. The next thing was to find a nurse. And on this point I came to a determination. I would have no woman to lord it over me about the child, and steal his affections from me. The boy was old enough to do without female assistance, so I set to work to hunt up a suitable male attendant. With some difficulty I succeeded in hiring a most respectable round-faced young man, who had been a helper in a hunting-stable, but who said that he was one of a family of seventeen and well-accustomed to the ways of children, and professed himself quite willing to undertake the charge of Master Leo when he arrived. Then, having taken the iron box to town, and with my own hands deposited it at my banker's, I bought some books upon the

health and management of children and read them, first to myself, and then aloud to Job—that was the young man's name—and waited.

At length the child arrived in the charge of an elderly person, who wept bitterly at parting with him, and a beautiful boy he was. Indeed, I do not think that I ever saw such a perfect child before or since. His eyes were grey, his forehead was broad, and his face, even at that early age, clean cut as a cameo, without being pinched or thin. But perhaps his most attractive point was his hair, which was pure gold in colour and tightly curled over his shapely head. He cried a little when his nurse finally tore herself away and left him with us. Never shall I forget the scene. There he stood, with the sunlight from the window playing upon his golden curls, his fist screwed over one eye, whilst he took us in with the other. I was seated in a chair, and stretched out my hand to him to induce him to come to me, while Job, in the corner, was making a sort of clucking noise, which, arguing from his previous experience, or from the analogy of the hen, he judged would have a soothing effect, and inspire confidence in the youthful mind, and running a wooden horse of peculiar hideousness backwards and forwards in a way that was little short of insane. This went on for some minutes, and then all of a sudden the lad stretched out both his little arms and ran to me.

"I like you," he said: "you is ugly, but you is good."

Ten minutes afterwards he was eating large slices of bread and butter, with every sign of satisfaction; Job wanted to put jam on to them, but I sternly reminded him of the excellent works that we had read, and forbade it.

In a very little while (for, as I expected, I got my fellowship) the boy became the favourite of the whole College—where, all orders and regulations to the contrary notwithstanding, he was continually in and out—a sort of chartered libertine, in whose favour all rules were relaxed. The offerings made at his shrine were simply without number, and I had serious difference of opinion with one old resident Fellow, now long dead, who was usually supposed to be the crustiest man in the University, and to abhor the sight of a child. And yet I discovered, when a frequently recurring fit of sickness had forced Job to keep a strict look-out, that this unprincipled old man was in the habit of enticing the boy to his rooms and there feeding him upon unlimited quantities of brandy-balls, and making him promise to say nothing about it. Job told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, "at his age, too, when he might have been a grandfather if he had done what was right," by which Job understood had got married, and thence arose the row.

But I have no space to dwell upon those delightful years, around which memory still fondly hovers. One by one they went by, and as they passed we two grew dearer and yet more dear to each other. Few sons have been loved as I love Leo, and few fathers know the deep and continuous affection that Leo bears to me.

The child grew into the boy, and the boy into the young man, while one by one the remorseless years flew by, and as he grew and increased so did his beauty and the beauty of his mind grow with him. When he was about fifteen they used to call him Beauty about the College, and me they nicknamed the Beast. Beauty and the Beast was what they called us when we went out walking together, as we used to do every day. Once Leo attacked a great strapping butcher's man, twice his size, because he sang it out after us, and thrashed him, too—thrashed him fairly. I walked on and pretended not to see, till the combat got too exciting, when I turned round and cheered him on to victory. It was the chaff of the College at the time, but I could not help it. Then when he was a little older the undergraduates found fresh names for us. They called me Charon, and Leo the Greek god! I will pass over my own appellation with the humble remark that I was never handsome, and did not grow more so as I grew older. As for his, there was no doubt about its fitness. Leo at twenty-one might have stood for a statue of the youthful Apollo. I never saw anybody to touch him in looks, or anybody so absolutely unconscious of them. As for his mind, he was brilliant and keen-witted, but not a scholar. He had not the dulness necessary for that result. We followed out his father's instructions as regards his education strictly enough, and on the whole the results, especially in the matters of Greek and Arabic, were satisfactory. I learnt the latter language in order to help to teach it to him, but after five years of it he knew it as well as I did—almost as well as the professor who instructed us both. I always was a great sportsman—it is my one passion—and every autumn we went away somewhere shooting or fishing, sometimes to Scotland, sometimes to Norway, once even to Russia. I am a good shot, but even in this he learnt to excel me.

When Leo was eighteen I moved back into my rooms, and entered him at my own College, and at twenty-one he took his degree—a respectable degree, but not a very high one. Then it was that I, for the first time, told him something of his own story, and of the mystery that loomed ahead. Of course he was very curious about it, and of course I explained to him that his curiosity could not be gratified at present. After that, to pass the time away, I suggested that he should get himself called to the Bar; and this he did, reading at Cambridge, and only going up to London to eat his dinners.

I had only one trouble about him, and that was that every young woman who came across him, or, if not every one, nearly so, would insist on falling in love with him. Hence arose difficulties which I need not enter into here, though they were troublesome enough at the time. On the whole, he behaved fairly well; I cannot say more than that.

And so the time went by till at last he reached his twenty-fifth birthday, at which date this strange and, in some ways, awful history really begins.

### III.

## THE SHERD OF AMENARTAS

On the day preceding Leo's twenty-fifth birthday we both journeyed to London, and extracted the mysterious chest from the bank where I had deposited it twenty years before. It was, I remember, brought up by the same clerk who had taken it down. He perfectly remembered having hidden it away. Had he not done so, he said, he should have had difficulty in finding it, it was so covered up with cobwebs.

In the evening we returned with our precious burden to Cambridge, and I think that we might both of us have given away all the sleep we got that night and not have been much the poorer. At daybreak Leo arrived in my room in a dressing-gown, and suggested that we should at once proceed to business. I scouted the idea as showing an unworthy curiosity. The chest had waited twenty years, I said, so it could very well continue to wait until after breakfast. Accordingly at nine—an unusually sharp nine—we breakfasted; and so occupied was I with my own thoughts that I regret to state that I put a piece of bacon into Leo's tea in mistake for a lump of sugar. Job, too, to whom the contagion of excitement had, of course, spread, managed to break the handle off my Sèvres china tea-cup, the identical one I believe that Marat had been drinking from just before he was stabbed in his bath.

At last, however, breakfast was cleared away, and Job, at my request, fetched the chest, and placed it upon the table in a somewhat gingerly fashion, as though he mistrusted it. Then he prepared to leave the room.

"Stop a moment, Job," I said. "If Mr. Leo has no objection, I should prefer to have an independent witness to this business, who can be relied upon to hold his tongue unless he is asked to speak."

"Certainly, Uncle Horace," answered Leo; for I had brought him up to call me uncle—though he varied the appellation somewhat disrespectfully by calling me "old fellow," or even "my avuncular relative."

Job touched his head, not having a hat on.

"Lock the door, Job," I said, "and bring me my despatch-box."

He obeyed, and from the box I took the keys that poor Vincey, Leo's father, had given me on the night of his death. There were three of them; the largest a comparatively modern key, the second an exceedingly ancient one, and the third entirely unlike anything of the sort that we had ever seen before, being fashioned apparently from a strip of solid silver, with a bar placed across to serve as a handle, and leaving some nicks cut in the edge of the bar. It was more like a model of an antediluvian railway key than anything else.

"Now are you both ready?" I said, as people do when they are going to fire a mine. There was no answer, so I took the big key, rubbed some salad oil into the wards, and after one or two bad shots, for my hands were shaking, managed to fit it, and shoot the lock. Leo bent over and caught the massive lid in both his hands, and with an effort, for the hinges had rusted, forced it back. Its removal revealed another case covered with dust. This we extracted from the iron chest without any difficulty, and removed the accumulated filth of years from it with a clothes-brush.

It was, or appeared to be, of ebony, or some such close-grained black wood, and was bound in every direction with flat bands of iron. Its antiquity must have been extreme, for the dense heavy wood was in parts actually commencing to crumble from age.

"Now for it," I said, inserting the second key.

Job and Leo bent forward in breathless silence. The key turned, and I flung back the lid, and uttered an exclamation, and no wonder, for inside the ebony case was a magnificent silver casket, about twelve inches square by eight high. It appeared to be of Egyptian workmanship, and the four legs were formed of Sphinxes, and the dome-shaped cover was also surmounted by a Sphinx. The casket was of course much tarnished and dented with age, but otherwise in fairly sound condition.

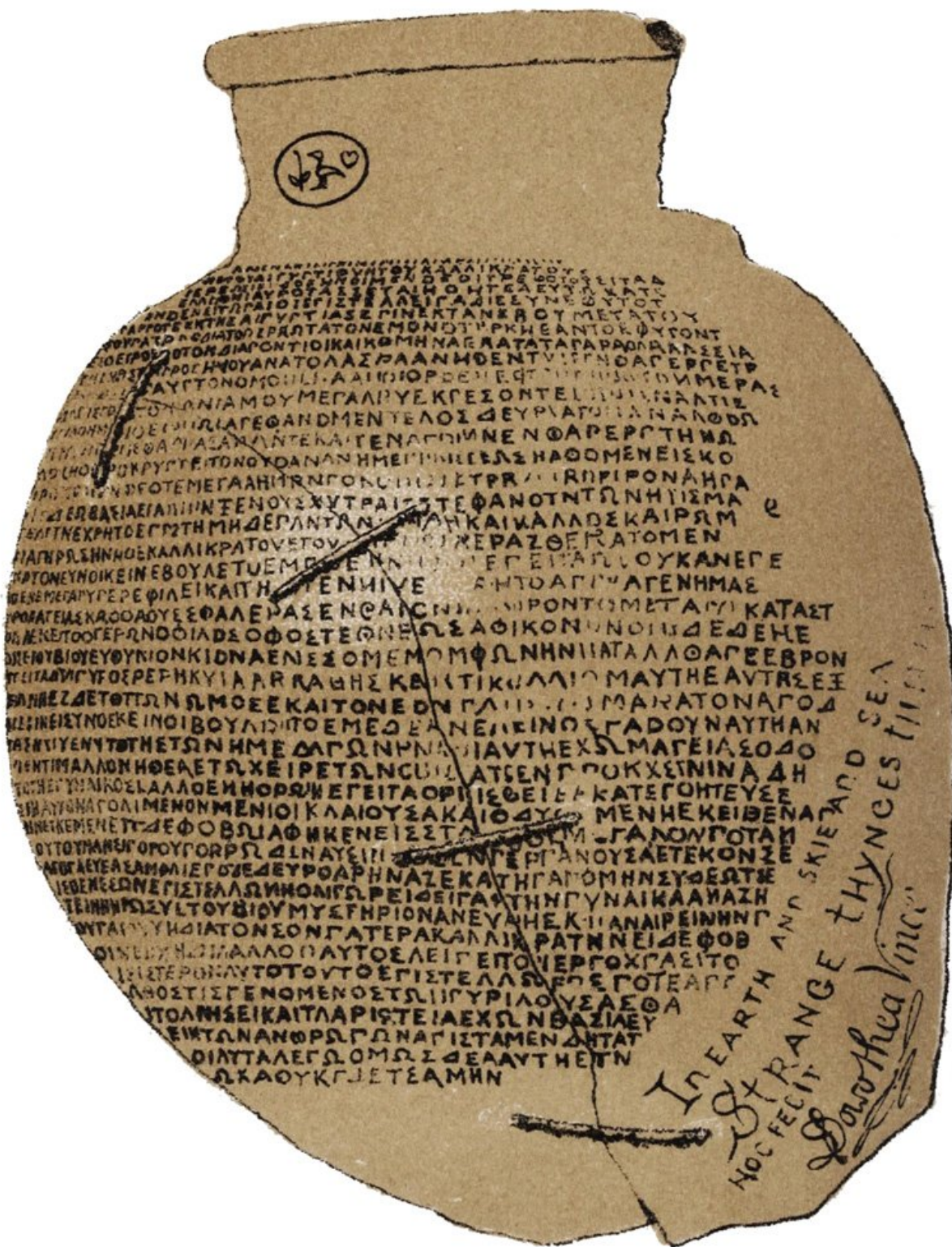
I drew it out and set it on the table, and then, in the midst of the most perfect silence, I inserted the strange-looking silver key, and pressed this way and that until at last the lock yielded, and the casket stood before us. It was filled to the brim with some brown shredded material, more like vegetable fibre than paper, the nature of which I have never been able to discover. This I carefully removed to the depth of some three inches, when I came to a letter enclosed in an ordinary modern-looking envelope, and addressed in the handwriting of my dead friend Vincey.

*"To my son Leo, should he live to open this casket."*

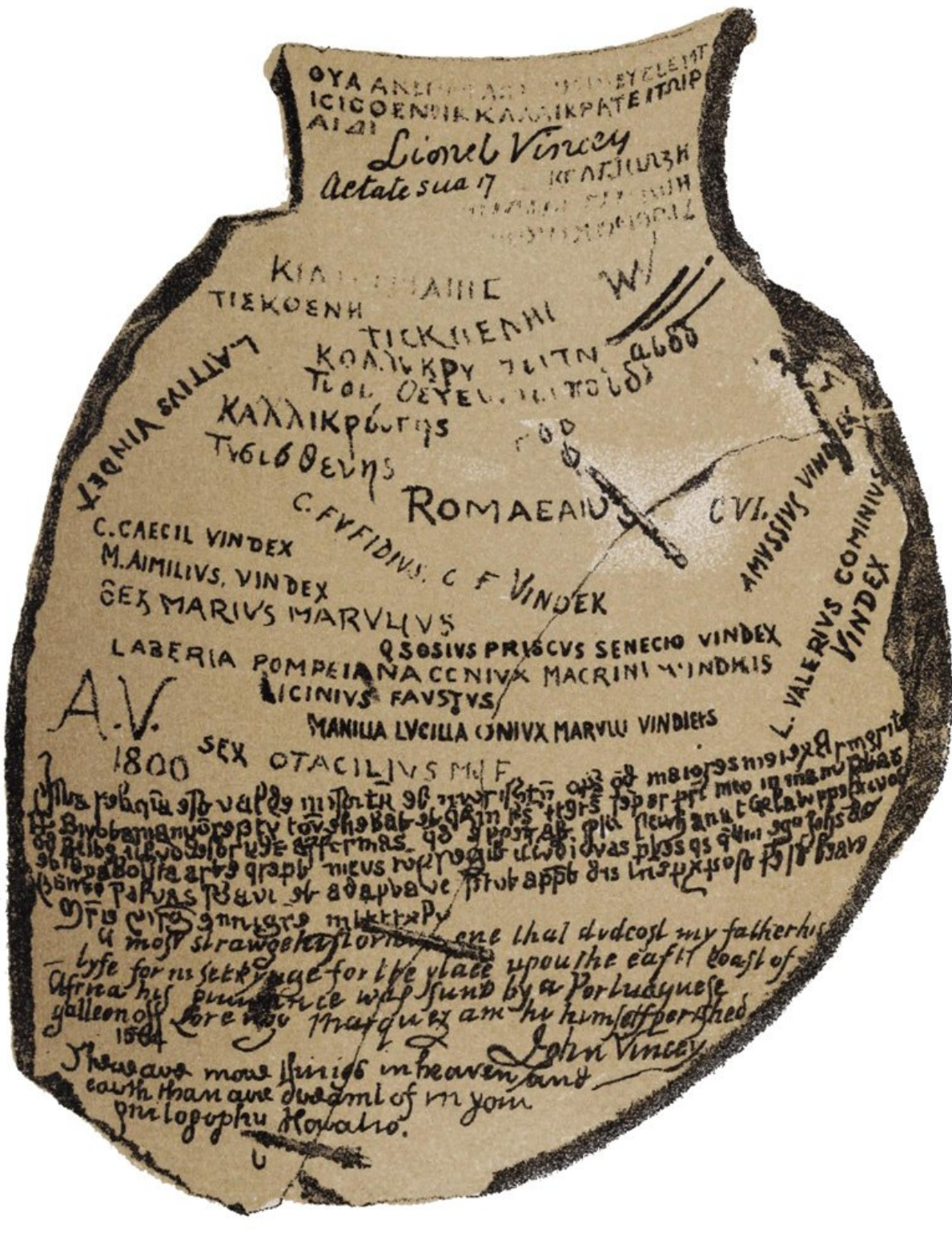
I handed the letter to Leo, who glanced at the envelope, and then put it down upon the table, making a motion to me to go on emptying the casket.

The next thing that I found was a parchment carefully rolled up. I unrolled it, and seeing that it was also in Vincey's handwriting, and headed, "Translation of the Uncial Greek Writing on the Potsherd," put it down by the letter. Then followed another ancient roll of parchment, that had become yellow and crinkled with the passage of years. This I also unrolled. It was likewise a translation of the same Greek original, but into black-letter Latin, which at the first glance from the style and character appeared to me to date from somewhere about the beginning of the sixteenth century. Immediately beneath this roll was something hard and heavy, wrapped up in yellow linen, and reposing upon another layer of the fibrous material. Slowly and carefully we unrolled the linen, exposing to view a very large but undoubtedly ancient potsherd of a dirty yellow colour! This potsherd had in my judgment, once been a part of an ordinary amphora of medium size. For the rest, it measured ten and a half inches in length by seven in width, was about a quarter of an inch thick, and densely covered on the convex side that lay towards the bottom of the box with writing in the later uncial Greek character, faded here and there, but for the most part perfectly legible, the inscription having evidently been executed with the greatest care, and by means of a reed pen, such as the ancients often used. I must not forget to mention that in some remote age this wonderful fragment had been broken in two, and rejoined by means of cement and eight long rivets. Also there were numerous inscriptions on the

inner side, but these were of the most erratic character, and had clearly been made by different hands and in many different ages, and of them, together with the writings on the parchments, I shall have to speak presently.



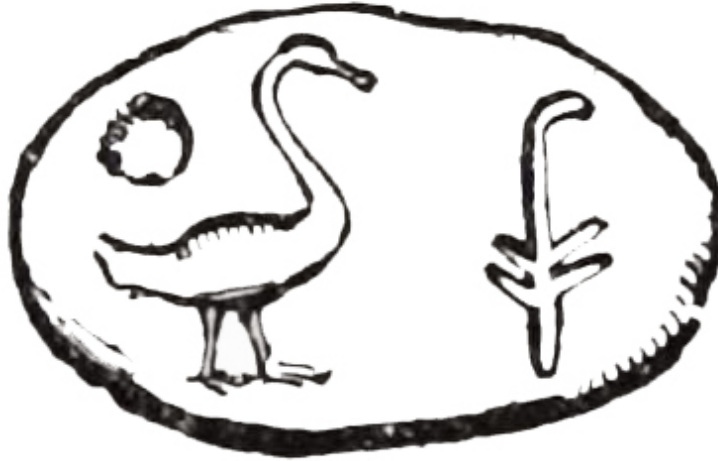
1 1/2 size  
Greatest length of the original 10 1/2 inches  
Greatest breadth 7 inches  
Weight 1lb 5 1/2 oz



1 1/2 size

"Is there anything more?" asked Leo, in a kind of excited whisper.

I groped about, and produced something hard, done up in a little linen bag. Out of the bag we took first a very beautiful miniature done upon ivory, and secondly, a small chocolate-coloured composition *scarabæus*, marked thus:—



symbols which, we have since ascertained, mean "Suten se Ra," which is being translated the "Royal Son of Ra or the Sun." The miniature was a picture of Leo's Greek mother—a lovely, dark-eyed creature. On the back of it was written, in poor Vincey's handwriting, "My beloved wife."

"That is all," I said.

"Very well," answered Leo, putting down the miniature, at which he had been gazing affectionately; "and now let us read the letter," and without further ado he broke the seal, and read aloud as follows:—

"My Son Leo,—When you open this, if you ever live to do so, you will have attained to manhood, and I shall have been long enough dead to be absolutely forgotten by nearly all who knew me. Yet in reading it remember that I have been, and for anything you know may still be, and that in it, through this link of pen and paper, I stretch out my hand to you across the gulf of death, and my voice speaks to you from the silence of the grave. Though I am dead, and no memory of me remains in your mind, yet am I with you in this hour that you read. Since your birth to this day I have scarcely seen your face. Forgive me this. Your life supplanted the life of one whom I loved better than women are often loved, and the bitterness of it endureth yet. Had I lived I should in time have conquered this foolish feeling, but I am not destined to live. My sufferings, physical and mental, are more than I can bear, and when such small arrangements as I have to make for your future well-being are completed it is my intention to put a period to them. May God forgive me if I do wrong. At the best I could not live more than another year."

"So he killed himself," I exclaimed. "I thought so."

"And now," Leo went on, without replying, "enough of myself. What has to be said belongs to you who live, not to me, who am dead, and almost as much forgotten as though I had never been. Holly, my friend (to whom, if he will accept the trust, it is my intention to confide you), will have told you something of the extraordinary antiquity of your race. In the contents of this casket you will find sufficient to prove it. The strange legend that you will find inscribed by your remote ancestress upon the potsherd was communicated to me by my father on his deathbed, and took a strong hold in my imagination. When I was only nineteen years of age I determined, as, to his misfortune, did one of our ancestors about the time of Elizabeth, to investigate its truth. Into all that befell me I cannot enter now. But this I saw with my own eyes. On the coast of Africa, in a hitherto unexplored region, some distance to the north of where the Zambesi falls into the sea, there is a headland, at the extremity of which a peak towers up, shaped like the head of a negro, similar to that of which the writing speaks. I landed there, and learnt from a wandering native, who had been cast out by his people because of some crime which he had committed, that far inland are great mountains, shaped like cups, and caves surrounded by measureless swamps. I learnt also that the people there speak a dialect of Arabic, and are ruled over by a *beautiful white woman* who is seldom seen by them, but who is reported to have power over all things living and dead. Two days after I had ascertained this the man died of fever contracted in crossing the swamps, and I was forced by want of provisions and by symptoms of an illness which afterwards prostrated me to take to my dhow again.

"Of the adventures that befell me after this I need not now speak. I was wrecked upon the coast of Madagascar, and rescued some months afterwards by an English ship that brought me to Aden, whence I started for England, intending to prosecute my search as soon as I had made sufficient preparations. On my way I stopped in Greece, and there, for 'Omnia vincit amor,' I met your beloved mother, and married her, and there you were born and she died. Then it was that my last illness seized me, and I returned hither to die. But still I hoped against hope, and set myself to work to learn Arabic, with the intention, should I ever get better, of returning to the coast of

Africa, and solving the mystery of which the tradition has lived so many centuries in our family. But I have not got better, and, so far as I am concerned, the story is at an end.

“For you, however, my son, it is not at an end, and to you I hand on these the results of my labour, together with the hereditary proofs of its origin. It is my intention to provide that they shall not be put into your hands until you have reached an age when you will be able to judge for yourself whether or no you will choose to investigate what, if it is true, must be the greatest mystery in the world, or to put it by as an idle fable, originating in the first place in a woman’s disordered brain.

“I do not believe that it is a fable; I believe that if it can only be re-discovered there is a spot where the vital forces of the world visibly exist. Life exists; why therefore should not the means of preserving it indefinitely exist also? But I have no wish to prejudice your mind about the matter. Read and judge for yourself. If you are inclined to undertake the search, I have so provided that you will not lack for means. If, on the other hand, you are satisfied that the whole thing is a chimera, then, I adjure you, destroy the potsherd and the writings, and let a cause of troubling be removed from our race for ever. Perhaps that will be wisest. The unknown is generally taken to be terrible, not as the proverb would infer, from the inherent superstition of man, but because it so often is terrible. He who would tamper with the vast and secret forces that animate the world may well fall a victim to them. And if the end were attained, if at last you emerged from the trial ever beautiful and ever young, defying time and evil, and lifted above the natural decay of flesh and intellect, who shall say that the awesome change would prove a happy one? Choose, my son, and may the Power who rules all things, and who says ‘thus far shalt thou go, and thus much shalt thou learn,’ direct the choice to your own happiness and the happiness of the world, which, in the event of your success, you would one day certainly rule by the pure force of accumulated experience.— Farewell!”

Thus the letter, which was unsigned and undated, abruptly ended.

“What do you make of that, Uncle Holly,” said Leo, with a sort of gasp, as he replaced it on the table. “We have been looking for a mystery, and we certainly seem to have found one.”

“What do I make of it? Why, that your poor dear father was off his head, of course,” I answered, testily. “I guessed as much that night, twenty years ago, when he came into my room. You see he evidently hurried his own end, poor man. It is absolute balderdash.”

“That’s it, sir!” said Job, solemnly. Job was a most matter-of-fact specimen of a matter-of-fact class.

“Well, let’s see what the potsherd has to say, at any rate,” said Leo, taking up the translation in his father’s writing, and commencing to read:—

*“I, Amenartas, of the Royal House of the Pharaohs of Egypt, wife of Kallikrates (the Beautiful in Strength), a Priest of Isis whom the gods cherish and the demons obey, being about to die, to my little son Tisisthenes (the Mighty Avenger). I fled with thy father from Egypt in the days of Nectanebes,<sup>[1]</sup> causing him through love to break the vows that he had vowed. We fled southward, across the waters, and we wandered for twice twelve moons on the coast of Libya (Africa) that looks towards the rising sun, where by a river is a great rock carved like the head of an Ethiopian. Four days on the water from the mouth of a mighty river were we cast away, and some were drowned and some died of sickness. But us wild men took through wastes and marshes, where the sea fowl hid the sky, bearing us ten days’ journey till we came to a hollow mountain, where a great city had been and fallen, and where there are caves of which no man hath seen the end; and they brought us to the Queen of the people who place pots upon the heads of strangers, who is a magician having a knowledge of all things, and life and loveliness that does not die. And she cast eyes of love upon thy father, Kallikrates, and would have slain me, and taken him to husband, but he loved me and feared her, and would not. Then did she take us, and lead us by terrible ways, by means of dark magic, to where the great pit is, in the mouth of which the old philosopher lay dead, and showed to us the rolling Pillar of Life that dies not, whereof the voice is as the voice of thunder; and she did stand in the flames, and come forth unharmed, and yet more beautiful. Then did she swear to make thy father undying even as she is, if he would but slay me, and give himself to her, for me she could not slay because of the magic of my own people that I have, and that prevailed thus far against her. And he held his hand before his eyes to hide her beauty, and would not. Then in her rage did she smite him by her magic, and he died; but she wept over him, and bore him thence with lamentations: and being afraid, me she sent to the mouth of the great river where the ships come, and I was carried far away on the ships where I gave thee birth, and hither to Athens I came at last after many wanderings. Now I say to thee, my son, Tisisthenes, seek out the woman, and learn the secret of Life, and if thou mayest find a way slay her, because of thy father Kallikrates; and if thou dost fear or fail, this I say to all thy seed who come after thee, till at last a brave man be found among them who shall bathe in the fire and sit in the place of the Pharaohs. I speak of those things, that though they be past belief, yet I have known, and I lie not.”*

[1] Nekht-nebf, or Nectanebo II., the last native Pharaoh of Egypt, fled from Ochus to Ethiopia, B.C. 339.—Editor.

“May the Lord forgive her for that,” groaned Job, who had been listening to this marvellous composition with his mouth open.

As for myself, I said nothing: my first idea being that my poor friend, being demented, had composed the whole thing, though it scarcely seemed likely that such a story could have been invented by anybody. It was too original. To solve my doubts I took up the potsherd and began to read the close uncial Greek writing on it; and very good Greek of the period it is, considering that it came from the pen of an Egyptian born. Here is an exact transcript of it:—

ΑΜΕΝΑΡΤΑΣΤΟΥΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΟΥΓΕΝΟΥΣΤΟΥΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΟΥΤΗΤΟΥΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΟΥΣΙΣΙΔΟΣΙΕΡΕΩΣΗΝΘΙΜΕΝΘΕΟΙΤΡΕΦΟΥΣΙΤΑΔΕΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΑΥΠΟΤΑΣΣΕΤΑΙΗΔΗΤΕΛΕΥΤΩΣΑΤΙΣΙΣΘΕΝΕΙΤΩΠΑΙΔΙΕΠΙΣΤΕΛΛΕΙΤΑΔΕΣΥΝΕΦΥΓΟΝΓΑΡΠΟΤΕΕΚΤΗΣΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΑΣΕΠΙΝΕΚΤΑΝΕΒΟΥΜΕΤΑΤΟΥΣΟΥΠΑΤΡΟΣΔΙΑΤΟΝΕΡΩΤΑΤΟΝΕΜΟΝΕΠΙΟΡΚΗΣΑΝΤΟΣΦΥΓΟΝΤΕΣΔΕΠΡΟΣΝΟΤΟΝΔΙΑΠΟΝΤΙΟΙΚΑΙΚΑΜΗΝΑΣΚΑΤΑΤΑΠΑΡΑΘΑΛΑΣΣΙΑΤΗΣΛΙΒΥΗΣΤΑΠΡΟΣΗΛΙΟΥΑΝΑΤΟΛΑΣΠΛΑΝΗΘΕΝΤΕΣΕΝΘΑΠΕΡΠΙΕΤΡΑΤΙΣΜΕΓΑΛΗΓΥΠΤΟΝΟΜΟΙΩΜΑΑΙΘΙΟΠΟΣΚΕΦΑΛΗΣΕΙΤΑΗΜΕΡΑΣΔΑΠΟΣΤΟΜΑΤΟΣΠΟΤΑΜΟΥΜΕΓΑΛΟΥΕΚΠΕΣΟΝΤΕΣΟΙΜΕΝΚΑΤΕΠΟΝΤΙΣΙΘΗΜΕΝΟΙΔΕΝΟΣΩΙΑΠΕΘΑΝΟΜΕΝΤΕΛΟΣΔΕΥΠΑΓΡΙΩΝΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝΕΦΕΡΟΜΕΘΑΔΙΑΕΛΕΩΝΤΕΚΑΙΤΕΝΑΓΕΩΝΕΝΘΑΠΕΡΙΠΤΗΝΩΝΠΛΗΘΟΣΑΠΟΚΡΥΠΤΕΙΤΟΝΟΥΡΑΝΟΝΗΜΕΡΑΣΙΕΩΣΗΛΘΟΜΕΝΕΙΣΚΟΙΛΑΝΤΙΟΡΟΣΕΝΘΑΠΟΤΕΜΕΓΑΛΗΜΕΝΠΟΛΙΣΗΝΑΝΤΡΑΔΕΑΠΕΙΡΟΝΑΗΓΑΓΟΝΔΕΩΣΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΝΤΗΝΤΩΝΞΕΝΟΥΣΧΥΤΤΡΑΙΣΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΥΝΤΩΝΗΤΙΣΜΑΓΕΙΑΜΕΝΕ

ΧΡΗΤΟΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΗΔΕΠΙΑΝΤΩΝΚΑΙΔΗΚΑΙΚΑΛΛΟΣΚΑΙΡΩΜΗΝΑΓΗΡΩΣΗΝΗΔΕΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΟΥΣΤΟ ΥΣ  
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ΥΣΣΦΑΛΕΡΑΣΕΝΘΑΤΟΒΑΡΑΘΡΟΝΤΟΜΕΓΑΛΟΥΚΑΤΑΣΤΟΜΑΕΚΕΙΤΟΟΓΕΡΩΝΟΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΣΤΕΘΝ ΕΩΣ  
ΑΦΙΚΟΜΕΝΟΙΣΔΕΔΕΙΞΕΦΩΣΤΟΥΒΙΟΥΤΕΥΘΥΟΙΟΝΚΙΟΝΑΕΛΙΣΣΟΜΕΝΟΝΦΩΝΗΝΙΕΝΤΑΚΑΘΑΠΕΡ Β  
ΡΟΝΤΗΣΕΙΤΑΔΙΑΠΥΡΟΣΒΕΒΗΚΥΙΑΑΒΛΑΒΗΣΚΑΙΕΤΙΚΑΛΛΙΩΝΑΥΤΗΕΑΥΤΗΣΕΞΕΦΑΝΗΕΚΔΕΤΟΥ  
ΤΩΝΩΜΟΣΕΚΑΙΤΟΝΣΟΝΠΑΤΕΡΑΑΘΑΝΑΤΟΝΑΠΟΔΕΙΞΕΙΝΕΙΣΥΝΟΙΚΕΙΝΟΙΒΟΥΛΟΙΤΟΕΜΕΔΕΑΝ Ε  
ΛΕΙΝΟΥΓΑΡΟΥΝΑΥΤΗΑΝΕΛΕΙΝΙΣΧΥΕΝΥΠΟΤΩΝΗΜΕΔΑΠΩΝΗΝΚΑΙΑΥΤΗΕΧΩΜΑΓΕΙΑΣΟΔΟΥΔΕ ΝΤ  
ΙΜΑΛΛΟΝΗΘΕΛΕΤΩΧΕΙΡΕΤΩΝΟΜΜΑΤΩΝΠΡΟΙΣΧΩΝΙΝΑΔΗΤΟΤΗΣΓΥΝΑΙΚΟΣΚΑΛΛΟΣΜΗΟΡΩΗ ΕΠΕ  
ΙΤΑΟΡΓΙΣΘΕΙΣΑΚΑΤΕΓΟΗΤΕΥΣΕΜΕΝΑΥΤΟΝΑΠΟΛΟΜΕΝΟΝΜΕΝΤΟΙΚΛΑΟΥΣΑΚΑΙΟΔΥΡΟΜΕΝΗ ΕΚ  
ΕΙΘΕΝΑΠΗΝΕΓΚΕΝΕΜΕΔΕΦΟΒΩΙΑΦΗΚΕΝΕΙΣΣΤΟΜΑΤΟΥΜΕΓΑΛΟΥΠΟΤΑΜΟΥΤΟΥΝΑΥΣΙΠΟΡΟ ΥΠΙΟ  
ΡΡΩΔΕΝΑΥΣΙΝΕΦΩΝΠΕΡΠΛΕΟΥΣΑΕΤΕΚΟΝΣΕΑΠΟΠΛΕΥΣΑΣΑΜΟΛΙΣΠΟΤΕΔΕΥΡΟΑΘΗΝΑΖΕΚΑ ΤΗΓ  
ΑΓΟΜΗΝΣΥΔΕΩΤΙΣΙΣΘΕΝΕΣΩΝΕΠΙΣΤΕΛΛΩΜΗΟΛΙΓΩΡΕΙΔΕΙΓΑΡΤΗΝΓΥΝΑΙΚΑΑΝΑΖΗΤΕΙΝΗΝΠ  
ΩΣΤΟΤΟΥΒΙΟΥΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝΑΝΕΥΡΗΣΚΑΙΑΝΑΙΡΕΙΝΗΝΠΟΥΠΑΡΑΣΧΗΔΙΑΤΟΝΣΟΝΠΑΤΕΡΑΚΑΛΛΙ  
ΚΡΑΤΗΝΕΙΔΕΦΟΒΟΥΜΕΝΟΣΗΔΙΑΑΛΛΟΤΙΑΥΤΟΣΛΕΙΠΕΙΤΟΥΕΡΓΟΥΠΑΣΙΤΟΙΣΥΣΤΕΡΟΝΑΥΤΟΤΟ  
ΥΤΟΕΠΙΣΤΕΛΛΩΣΠΟΤΕΑΓΑΘΟΣΤΙΣΓΕΝΟΜΕΝΟΣΤΩΠΥΡΙΛΟΥΣΑΣΘΑΙΤΟΛΜΗΣΕΙΚΑΙΤΑΑΡΙΣΤ  
ΕΙΑΕΧΩΝΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΙΤΩΝΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝΑΠΙΣΤΑΜΕΝΑΔΗΤΑΤΟΙΑΥΤΑΛΕΓΩΜΩΣΔΕΑΑΥΤΗΕΓΝΩΚ ΑΟ  
ΥΚΕΨΕΥΣΑΜΗΝ

For general convenience in reading, I have here accurately transcribed this inscription into the cursive character.

Ἀμενάρτας, τοῦ βασικοῦ γένους τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου, ἡ τοῦ Καλλικράτους Ἰσιδος ἱερέως, ἦν οἱ μὲν θεοὶ  
τρέφουσι τὰ δὲ δαίμονια ὑποτάσσεται, ἤδη τελευτῶσα Τισιθένεια τῷ παιδί ἐπιστέλλει τάδε· συνέφυγον  
γάρ ποτε ἐκ τῆς Αἰγυπτίας ἐπὶ Νεκτανέβου μετὰ τοῦ σου πατρός, διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν ἐμὸν ἐπιορκήσαντος.  
φυγόντες δὲ πρὸς νότον διαπόντιοι καὶ κ'δ' μῆνας κατὰ τὰ παραθαλάσσια τῆς Αἰβύης τὰ πρὸς ἡλίου  
ἀνατολὰς πλανηθέντες, ἔνθαπερ πέτρα τις μελάλη, γλυπτὸν ὁμοίωμα Αἰθίοπος κεφαλῆς, εἶτα ἡμέρας δ'  
ἀπὸ στόματος ποταμοῦ μεγάλου ἐκπεσόντες, οἱ μὲν κατεποντίσθημεν, οἱ δὲ νόσφ' ἀπεθάνομεν· τέλος δὲ ὑπ'  
ἀλρίων ἀνθρώπων ἐφερόμεθα διὰ ἐλέων τε καὶ τεναλέων ἔνθαπερ πτηνῶν πλῆθος ἀποκρύπτει τὸν  
οὐρανόν, ἡμέρας ἰ, ἕως ἤλθομεν εἰς κοῖλιν τι ὄρος, ἔνθα ποτὲ μεγάλη μὲν πόλις ἦν, ἄντρα δὲ ἀπείρονα·  
ἤγαγον δὲ ὡς βασιλείαν τὴν τῶν ξένους χύτραις στεφανούντων, ἡτις μαλεῖα μὲν ἐχρήτο ἐπιστήμη δὲ  
πάντων καὶ δὴ καὶ κάλλος καὶ ῥώμην ἀλήρως ἦν· ἡ δὲ Καλλικράτους τοῦ πατρός ἐρασθεῖδα τὸ μὲν  
πρῶτον συνοικεῖν ἐβούλετο ἐμὲ δὲ ἀνελεῖν· ἔπειτα, ὡς οὐκ ἀνέπειθεν, ἐμὲ γὰρ ὑπερεφίλει καὶ τὴν ξένην  
ἐφοβεῖτο, ἀπήγαγεν ἡμᾶς ὑπὸ μαγείας καθ' ὁδοὺς σφαλεράς ἔνθα τὸ βάραθρον τὸ μέγα, οὐ κατὰ στόμα  
ἔκειτο ὁ γέρον ὁ φιλόσοφος τεθνεώς, ἀφικομένους δ' ἔδειξε φῶς τοῦ βίου εὐθύ, οἷον κίονα ἐλισσόμενον  
φάνην ἰέντα καθάπερ βροντῆς, εἶτα διὰ πυρὸς βεβηκυῖα ἀβλαβῆς καὶ ἔτι καλλίων αὐτῇ ἑαυτῆς ἐξεφάνη.  
ἐκ δὲ τούτων ὤμωσε καὶ τὸν σὸν πατέρα ἀθάνατον ἀποδείξειν, εἰ συνοικεῖν οἱ βούλοιο ἐμὲ δὲ ἀνελεῖν, οὐ  
γάρ οὐν αὐτῇ ἀνελεῖν ἴσχυεν ὑπὸ τῶν ἡμεδαπῶν ἦν καὶ αὐτῇ ἔχω μαγείας, ὁ δ' οὐδὲν τι μᾶλλον ἤθελε, τῷ  
χεῖρε τῶν ὀμμάτων προϊσχων ἵνα δὴ τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς κάλλος μὴ ὀρώη· ἔπειτα ὀργισθεῖσα κατεγοήτευσεν  
μὲν αὐτόν, ἀπολόμενον μέντοι κλάουσα καὶ ὀδυρμένη ἐκείθεν ἀπήνεγκεν, ἐμὲ δὲ φόβῳ ἀφῆκεν εἰς στόμα  
τοῦ μεγάλου ποταμοῦ τοῦ ναυσιπόρου, πόδδω δὲ ναυσίν, ἐφ' ὧνπερ πλέουσα ἔτεκόν σε, ἀποπλεύσασα  
μόλις ποτὲ δεῦρο Ἀθηνάζεε κατηγαγόν. σὺ δέ, ὦ Τισίσθενης, ὧν ἐπιστέλλω μὴ ὀλιγώρει· δεῖ γὰρ τὴν  
γυναικα ἀναζητεῖν ἦν πως τῷ βίου μυστήριον ἀνεύρης, καὶ ἀναιρεῖν, ἦν που παρασχῇ, διὰ τὸν πατέρα  
Καλλικράτους. ἐδὲ δὲ φοβούμενος ἡ διὰ ἄλλο τι αὐτὸς λείπει τοῦ ἔργου, πᾶσι τοῖς ὑστερον αὐτὸ τοῦτο  
ἐπιστέλλω, ἕως ποτὲ ἀγαθὸς τις γενόμενος τῷ πυρὶ λουσασθαι τολμήσει καὶ τὰ ἀριστεία ἔχων βασιλεύσας  
τῶν ἀνθρώπων· ἅπιστα μὲν δὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγω, ὅμως δὲ ἂν αὐτῇ ἔγνωκα οὐκ ἐψευσάμην.

The English translation was, as I discovered on further investigation, and as the reader may easily see by comparison, both accurate and elegant.

Besides the uncial writing on the convex side of the sherd at the top, painted in dull red, on what had once been the lip of the amphora, was the cartouche already mentioned as being on the *scarabæus*, which we had also found in the casket. The hieroglyphics or symbols, however, were reversed, just as though they had been pressed on wax. Whether this was the cartouche of the original Kallikrates,<sup>[2]</sup> or of some Prince or Pharaoh from whom his wife Amenartas was descended, I am not sure, nor can I tell if it was drawn upon the sherd at the same time that the uncial Greek was inscribed, or copied on more recently from the Scarab by some other member of the family. Nor was this all. At the foot of the writing, painted in the same dull red, was the faint outline of a somewhat rude drawing of the head and shoulders of a Sphinx wearing two feathers, symbols of majesty, which, though common enough upon the effigies of sacred bulls and gods, I have never before met with on a Sphinx.

[2] The cartouche, if it be a true cartouche, cannot have been that of Kallikrates, as Mr. Holly suggests. Kallikrates was a priest and not entitled to a cartouche, which was the prerogative of Egyptian royalty, though he might have inscribed his name or title upon an *oval*.—Editor.

Also on the right-hand side of this surface of the sherd, painted obliquely in red on the space not covered by the uncial characters, and signed in blue paint, was the following quaint inscription:—

IN EARTH AND SKIE AND SEA  
STRANGE THYNGES THER BE.  
HOC FECIT  
DOROTHEA VINCEY.

Perfectly bewildered, I turned the relic over. It was covered from top to bottom with notes and signatures in Greek, Latin, and English. The first in uncial Greek was by Tisisthenes, the son to whom the writing was addressed. It was, “I could not go. Tisisthenes to his son, Kallikrates.” Here it is in fac-simile with its cursive equivalent:—

ΟΥΚΑΝΑΥΝΑΙΜΗΝΠΟΡΕΥΕCΘΑΙΤΙCΙCΘΕΝΗCΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΗΣΤΩΠΑΙΔΙ  
οὐκ ἂν δυνάμην πορεύεσθαι. Τισισθένης Καλλικράτει τῷ παιδί.

This Kallikrates (probably, in the Greek fashion, so named after his grandfather) evidently made some attempt to start on the quest, for his entry written in very faint and almost illegible uncial is, “I ceased from my going, the gods being against me. Kallikrates to his son.” Here it is also:—

ΤΩΝΘΕΩΝΑΝΤΙCΤΑΝΤΩΝΕΠΑΥCΑΜΗΝΤΗΣΠΟΡΕΙΑCΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΗΣΤΩΠΑΙΔΙ  
τῶν θεῶν ἀντιCτάντων ἐπαυCάμην τῆς πορείας. Καλλικράτης τῷ παιδί.

Between these two ancient writings, the second of which was inscribed upside down and was so faint and worn that, had it not been for the transcript of it executed by Vincey, I should scarcely have been able to read it, since, owing to its having been written on that portion of the tile which had, in the course of ages, undergone the most handling, it was nearly rubbed out—was the bold, modern-looking signature of one Lionel Vincey, “Ætate sua 17;” which was written thereon, I think, by Leo’s grandfather. To the right of this were the initials “J. B. V.,” and below came a variety of Greek signatures, in uncial and cursive character, and what appeared to be some carelessly executed repetitions of the sentence τῷ παιδί (to my son), showing that the relic was religiously passed on from generation to generation.

The next legible thing after the Greek signatures was the word “Romae, A.U.C.,” showing that the family had now migrated to Rome. Unfortunately, however, with the exception of its termination (evi) the date of their settlement there is for ever lost, for just where it had been placed a piece of the potsherd is broken away.

Then followed twelve Latin signatures, jotted about here and there, wherever there was a space upon the tile suitable to their inscription. These signatures, with three exceptions only, ended with the name “Vindex” or “the Avenger,” which seems to have been adopted by the family after its migration to Rome as a kind of equivalent to the Greek “Tisisthenes,” which also means an avenger. Ultimately, as might be expected, this Latin cognomen of Vindex was transformed first into De Vincey, and then into the plain, modern Vincey. It is very curious to observe how the idea of revenge, inspired by an Egyptian who lived before the time of Christ, is thus, as it were, embalmed in an English family name.

A few of the Roman names inscribed upon the sherd I have actually since found mentioned in history and other records. They were, if I remember right,

MVSSIVS. VINDEK  
SEX. VARIVS MARVLLVS  
C. FVFIDIVS. C. F. VINDEK

and

LABERIA POMPEIANA. CONIVX. MACRINI. VINDICIS

this last being, of course, the name of a Roman lady.

The following list, however, comprises all the Latin names upon the sherd:—

C. CAECILIVS VINDEK  
M. AIMILIVS VINDEK  
SEX. VARIVS. MARVLLVS  
Q. SOSIVS PRISCVS SENECIO VINDEK  
L. VALERIVS COMINIVS VINDEK  
SEX. OTACILIVS. M. F.  
L. ATTIVS. VINDEK  
MVSSIVS VINDEK  
C. FVFIDIVS. C. F. VINDEK  
LICINIVS FAVSTVS  
LABERIA POMPEIANA CONIVX MACRINI VINDICIS  
MANILIA LVCILLA CONIVX MARVLLI VINDICIS

After the Roman names there is evidently a gap of very many centuries. Nobody will ever know now what was the history of the relic during those dark ages, or how it came to have been preserved in the family. My poor friend Vincey had, it will be remembered, told me that his Roman ancestors finally settled in Lombardy, and when Charlemagne invaded it, returned with him across the Alps, and made their home in Brittany, whence they crossed to England in the reign of Edward the Confessor. How he knew this I am not aware, for there is no reference to Lombardy or Charlemagne upon the tile, though, as will presently be seen, there is a reference to Brittany. To continue: the next entries on the sherd, if I may except a long splash either of blood or red colouring matter of some sort, consist of two crosses drawn in red pigment, and probably representing Crusaders’ swords, and a rather neat monogram (“D. V.”) in

scarlet and blue, perhaps executed by that same Dorothea Vincey who wrote, or rather painted, the doggrel couplet. To the left of this, inscribed in faint blue, were the initials A. V., and after them a date, 1800.

Then came what was perhaps as curious an entry as anything upon this extraordinary relic of the past. It is executed in black letter, written over the crosses or Crusaders' swords, and dated fourteen hundred and forty-five. As the best plan will be to allow it to speak for itself, I here give the black-letter fac-simile, together with the original Latin without the contractions, from which it will be seen that the writer was a fair mediæval Latinist. Also we discovered what is still more curious, an English version of the black-letter Latin. This, also written in black letter, we found inscribed on a second parchment that was in the coffer, apparently somewhat older in date than that on which was inscribed the mediæval Latin translation of the uncial Greek of which I shall speak presently. This I also give in full.

*Fac-simile of Black-Letter Inscription on the Sherd of Amenartas.*

"Ista reliq̃ia eft valde mifticū et myrificū op̃s q̃d maiores mei ex Armorica ff Britannia m̃iore fecū cōvehebāt et q̃dm f̃c̃s clerĩc̃s f̃ēper p̃ri meo in manu ferebat q̃d p̃ētus illvd deftrueret, affirmās q̃d effet ab ipfo fathana cōflatū preftigiofa et dyabolica arte q̃re p̃ter mevs cōfregit illvd ī dvas p̃tes q̃s q̃dm ego Joh̃s de Vīceto falvas fervavi et adaptavi ficut apparet die lūe p̃r poft felt beate Mrie vir{g} anni g̃re mccccxlv."

*Expanded Version of the above Black-Letter Inscription.*

"Ista reliquia est valde mysticum et myrificum opus, quod maiores mei ex Armorica, scilicet Britannia Minore, secum convehebant; et et quidam sanctus clericus semper patri meo in manu ferebat quod penitus illud destrueret, affirmans quod esset ab ipso Sathana conflatum prestigiosa et dyabolica arte, quare pater meus confregit illud in duas partes, quas quidem ego Johannes de Vinceto salvas servavi et adaptavi sicut apparet die lune proximo post festum beate Marie Virginis anni gratie MCCCCXLV."

*Fac-simile of the Old English Black-Letter Translation of the above Latin Inscription from the Sherd of Amenartas found inscribed upon a parchment.*

"Thys rellike ys a ryghte mistycall worke & a marvaylous y<sup>e</sup> whyche myne aunceteres afore tyme dyd conveygh hider w<sup>t</sup> y<sup>m</sup> ffrom Armoryke wh<sup>e</sup> ys to feien Britaine y<sup>e</sup> leffe & a certayne holye clerke fhoude allweyes beare my ffadir on honde y<sup>e</sup> he owghte uttirly ffor to ffruffhe y<sup>e</sup> fame affyrmynge y<sup>t</sup> yt was ffourmyd & conflatyd off fathanas hym selfe by arte magike & dyvellyffhe wherefore my ffadir dyd take y<sup>e</sup> fame & to braft yt yn tweyne but I John de Vincey dyd fave whool y<sup>e</sup> tweye p̃tes therof & topeecyd y<sup>m</sup> togydder agayne foe as yee fe on y{s} daye mondaye next ffolowyng after y<sup>e</sup> ffeeste of feynte Marye y<sup>e</sup> bleffed vyrgyne yn y<sup>e</sup> yeere of falvaciou ffortene hundreth & ffyve & ffowrti."

*Modernised Version of the above Black-Letter Translation.*

"Thys rellike ys a ryghte mistycall worke and a marvaylous, ye whyche myne aunceteres aforetyme dyd conveygh hider with them from Armoryke which ys to seien Britaine ye Lesse and a certayne holye clerke should allweyes beare my fadir on honde that he owghte uttirly for to frusshe ye same, affyrmynge that yt was fourmed and conflatyed of Sathanas hym selfe by arte magike and dyvellysshe wherefore my fadir dyd take ye same and tobrast yt yn tweyne, but I, John de Vincey, dyd save whool ye tweye partes therof and topeecyd them togydder agayne soe as yee se, on this daye mondaye next followyng after ye feeste of Seynte Marye ye Blessed Vyrgyne yn ye yeere of Salvacioun ffortene hundreth and fyve and fowerti."

The next and, save one, last entry was Elizabethan, and dated 1564. "A most strange historie, and one that did cost my father his life; for in seekyng for the place upon the east coast of Africa, his pinnance was sunk by a Portuguese galleon off Lorenzo Marquez, and he himself perished.—John Vincey."

Then came the last entry, apparently, to judge by the style of writing, made by some representative of the family in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was a misquotation of the well-known lines in Hamlet, and ran thus: "There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio."<sup>[3]</sup>

[3] Another thing that makes me fix the date of this entry at the middle of the eighteenth century is that, curiously enough, I have an acting copy of "Hamlet," written about 1740, in which these two lines are misquoted almost exactly in the same way, and I have little doubt but that the Vincey who wrote them on the potsherd heard them so misquoted at that date. Of course, the lines really run:—

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.—L. H. H.

And now there remained but one more document to be examined—namely, the ancient black-letter transcription into mediæval Latin of the uncial inscription on the sherd. As will be seen, this translation was executed and subscribed in the year 1495, by a certain "learned man," Edmundus de Prato (Edmund Pratt) by name, licentiate in Canon Law, of Exeter College, Oxford, who had actually been a pupil of Grocyn, the first scholar who taught Greek in England.<sup>[4]</sup> No doubt, on the fame of this new learning reaching his ears, the Vincey of the day, perhaps that same John de Vincey who years before had saved the relic from destruction and made the black-letter entry on the sherd in 1445, hurried off to Oxford to see if perchance it might avail to dissolve the secret of the mysterious inscription. Nor was he disappointed, for the learned Edmundus was equal to the task. Indeed his rendering is so excellent an example of mediæval learning and latinity that, even at the risk of sating the learned reader with too many antiquities, I have made up my mind to give it in fac-simile, together with an expanded version for the benefit of those who find the contractions troublesome. The translation has several peculiarities on which this is not the place to dwell, but I would in passing call the attention of scholars to the passage "duxerunt autem nos ad reginam *advenaslasaniscoronantium*," which strikes me as a delightful rendering of the original, "ἡγάγον δὲ ὡς βασιλειαν τῇν τῶν ξένους χυτράς στεφανούντων."

[4] Grocyn, the instructor of Erasmus, studied Greek under Chalcondylas the Byzantine at Florence, and first lectured in the Hall of Exeter College, Oxford, in 1491.—Editor.

*mediæval Black-Letter Latin Translation of the Uncial Inscription on the Sherd of Amenartas*

Amenartas e gen. reg. Egyptii uxor Callicratis sacerdot̄ Ifidis quā dei fovēt demonia attēdūt filio! suo Tififtheni iā moribūda ita mādat: Effugi quodā ex Egypto regnāte Nectanebo cū patre tuo, ppter mei amorē pejerato. Fugiētes autē v'fus Notū trans mare et xxiiij mēses p'r litora Libye v'fus Oriētē errant ubi est petra quedā m̄gna sculpta instar Ethiop̄ capī, deinde dies iiij ab offlū m̄gni eiecti p'tim submerfi fumus p'tim morbo mortui fum: in fine autē a fer̄ hōibz portabamur p'r palud et vada. ubi aviū m'titudo celū obūbrat dies x. donec advenim̄ ad cavū quēdā montē, ubi olim m̄gna urbs erat, cavegne quoq̄ imēse: duxerūt autē nos ad reginā Advenaslaniscoronatiū que magiē utebat et peritia omniū rer̄ et faltē pulcri et vigore īfēscibil' erat. Hec m̄gno patr̄ tui amore pculsa p'mū q'dē ei cōnubiū michi mortē parabat. postea v'ro reculātē Callicrate amore mei et timore regine affecto nos p'r magicā abduxit p'r vias horribil' ubi est puteus ille p̄fūdus, cuius iuxta aditū iacebat senioꝝ philosophi cadaver, et advēiētibz mōstravit flāmā Vite erectā, īstar columne volutātis, voces emittētē q̄fi tonitrus: tūc p'r ignē īpetu nociuo expers trāiit et iā ipsa fefe formosior viā est.

Quibz fac̄ iuravit se patrē tuū quoq̄ imortalē ostēfurā esse, si me prius occisa regine cōtuberniū mallet; neq̄ enī ip̄sa me occidere valuit, ppter nostratū m̄gicā cuius egomet ptem habeo. Ille vero nichil huius gen̄ maluit, manibz ante oculū passis ne mulier̄ formositatē adspiceret: postea eū m̄gicā p̄cuffit arte, at mortuū efferebat īde cū fletibz et vagitibz, me p'r timorē expulit ad ostiū m̄gni flumiū veliuoli porro in nave in qua te peperī, uix post dies hvc Athenas invecta sū. At tu, O Tififthen, ne q'd quorū mādō nauci fac: neceffe enī est mulierē exquirere si qva Vite mysteriū īpetres et vīdicare, quātū in te est, patrē tuū Callierat in regine morte. Sin timore fue aliq̄ cavā rē reliquis infectā, hoc ip̄sū oibz poster̄ mādō dū bonvs q̄s inveniatur qvi ignis lauacrū nō p'horrescet et p'tentia dign̄ dōiabiū hōiū.

Talia dico incredibilia q̄dē at minē ficta de rebz michi cognit̄is.

Hec Grece scripta Latine reddidit vir doctus Edm̄ds de Prato, in Decretis Licenciatus e Coll. Exon: Oxon: doctiffimi Grocyni quondam e pupillis, Id. Apr. A°. Dñi. MCCCCLXXXV°.

*Expanded Version of the above Mediaeval Latin Translation*

Amenartas, e genere regio Egyptii, uxor Callicratis, sacerdotis Isidis, quam dei fovēt demonia attendunt, filiolo suo Tisistheni jam moribunda ita mandat: Effugi quodam ex Egypto, regnante Nectanebo, cum patre tuo, propter mei amorem pejerato. Fugientes autem versus Notum trans mare, et viginti quatuor menses per litora Libye versus Orientem errantes, ubi est petra quedam magna sculpta instar Ethiopis capitis, deinde dies quatuor ab ostio fluminis magni eieci partim submersi sumus partim morbo mortui sumus: in fine autem a feris hominibus portabamur per paludes et vada, ubi avium multitudo celum obumbrat, dies decem, donec advenimus ad cavum quandam montem, ubi olim magna urbs erat, cavegne quoque immense; duxerunt autem nos ad reginam Advenaslaniscoronantem, que magicā utebatur et peritiā omnium rerum, et saltem pulcritudine et vigore insensibilis erat. Hec magno patris tui amore percussa, primum quidem ei connubium michi mortem parabat; postea vero, recusante Callicrate, amore mei et timore regine affecto, nos per magicam abduxit per vias horribiles ubi est puteus ille profundus, cujus iuxta aditum jacebat senioris philosophi cadaver, et advenientibus monstravit flammam Vite erectam, instar columne voluntantis, voces emittentem quasi tonitrus: tunc per ignem impetu nociuo expers transit et jam ipsa sese formosior visa est.

Quibus factis iuravit se patrem tuum quoque immortalem ostensuram esse, si me prius occisa regine contubernium mallet; neque enim ipsa me occidere valuit, propter nostratum magicam cujus egomet partem habeo. Ille vero nichil hujus generis malebat, manibus ante oculos passis, ne mulieris formositatem adspiceret: postea illum magica percussit arte, at mortuum efferebat inde cum fletibus et vagitibus, et me per timorem expulit ad ostium magni fluminis, velivoli, porro in nave, in qua te peperī, vix post dies huc Athenas vecta sum. At tu, O Tisisthenes, ne quid quorum mando nauci fac: necesse enim est mulierem exquirere si qua Vite mysterium impetres et vindicare, quantum in te est, patrem tuum Callieratem in regine morte. Sin timore sue aliqua causa rem reliquis infectam, hoc ipsum omnibus posteris mando, dum bonus quis inveniatur qui ignis lavacrum non perhorrescet, et potentia dignus dominabitur hominum.

Talia dico incredibilia quidem at minime ficta de rebus michi cognit̄is.

Hec Grece scripta Latine reddidit vir doctus Edmundus de Prato, in Descretis Licenciatus, e Collegio Exoniensi Oxoniensi doctissimi Grocyni quondam e pupillis, Idibus Aprilis Anno Domini MCCCCLXXXV°.

"Well," I said, when at length I had read out and carefully examined these writings and paragraphs, at least those of them that were still easily legible, "that is the conclusion of the whole matter, Leo, and now you can form your own opinion on it. I have already formed mine."

"And what is it?" he asked, in his quick way.

"It is this. I believe that potsherd to be perfectly genuine, and that, wonderful as it may seem, it has come down in your family from since the fourth century before Christ. The entries absolutely prove it, and therefore, however improbable it may seem, it must be accepted. But there I stop. That your remote ancestress, the Egyptian princess, or some scribe under her direction, wrote that which we see on the sherd I have no doubt, nor have I the slightest doubt but that her sufferings and the loss of her husband had turned her head, and that she was not right in her mind when she did write it."

"How do you account for what my father saw and heard there?" asked Leo.

"Coincidence. No doubt there are bluffs on the coast of Africa that look something like a man's head, and plenty of people who speak bastard Arabic. Also, I believe that there are lots of swamps. Another thing is, Leo, and I am sorry to say it, but I do not believe that your poor father was quite right when he wrote that letter. He had met with a great trouble, and also he had allowed this story to prey on his imagination, and he was a very imaginative man. Anyway, I believe that the whole thing is the most unmitigated rubbish. I know that there are curious things and forces in nature which we rarely meet with, and, when we do meet them, cannot understand. But until I see it with my own eyes, which I am not likely to, I never will believe that there is any means of avoiding death, even for a time, or that there is or was a white sorceress living in the heart of an African swamp. It is bosh, my boy, all bosh!—What do you say, Job?"

"I say, sir, that it is a lie, and, if it is true, I hope Mr. Leo won't meddle with no such things, for no good can't come of it."

"Perhaps you are both right," said Leo, very quietly. "I express no opinion. But I say this. I am going to set the matter at rest once and for all, and if you won't come with me I will go by myself."

I looked at the young man, and saw that he meant what he said. When Leo means what he says he always puts on a curious look about the mouth. It has been a trick of his from a child. Now, as a matter of fact, I had no intention of allowing Leo to go anywhere by himself, for my own sake, if not for his. I was far too attached to him for that. I am not a man of many ties or affections. Circumstances have been against me in this respect, and men and women shrink from me, or at least, I fancy that they do, which comes to the same thing, thinking, perhaps, that my somewhat forbidding exterior is a key to my character. Rather than endure this, I have, to a great extent, secluded myself from the world, and cut myself off from those opportunities which with most men result in the formation of relations more or less intimate. Therefore Leo was all the world to me—brother, child, and friend—and until he wearied

of me, where he went there I should go too. But, of course, it would not do to let him see how great a hold he had over me; so I cast about for some means whereby I might let myself down easy.

"Yes, I shall go, Uncle; and if I don't find the 'rolling Pillar of Life,' at any rate I shall get some first-class shooting."

Here was my opportunity, and I took it.

"Shooting?" I said. "Ah! yes; I never thought of that. It must be a very wild stretch of country, and full of big game. I have always wanted to kill a buffalo before I die. Do you know, my boy, I don't believe in the quest, but I do believe in big game, and really on the whole, if, after thinking it over, you make up your mind to go, I will take a holiday, and come with you."

"Ah," said Leo, "I thought that you would not lose such a chance. But how about money? We shall want a good lot."

"You need not trouble about that," I answered. "There is all your income that has been accumulating for years, and besides that I have saved two-thirds of what your father left to me, as I consider, in trust for you. There is plenty of cash."

"Very well, then, we may as well stow these things away and go up to town to see about our guns. By the way, Job, are you coming too? It's time you began to see the world."

"Well, sir," answered Job, stolidly, "I don't hold much with foreign parts, but if both you gentlemen are going you will want somebody to look after you, and I am not the man to stop behind after serving you for twenty years."

"That's right, Job," said I. "You won't find out anything wonderful, but you will get some good shooting. And now look here, both of you. I won't have a word said to a living soul about this nonsense," and I pointed to the potsherd. "If it got out, and anything happened to me, my next of kin would dispute my will on the ground of insanity, and I should become the laughing stock of Cambridge."

That day three months we were on the ocean, bound for Zanzibar.

## IV.

# THE SQUALL

How different is the scene that I have now to tell from that which has just been told! Gone are the quiet college rooms, gone the wind-swayed English elms, the cawing rooks, and the familiar volumes on the shelves, and in their place there rises a vision of the great calm ocean gleaming in shaded silver lights beneath the beams of the full African moon. A gentle breeze fills the huge sail of our dhow, and draws us through the water that ripples musically against her sides. Most of the men are sleeping forward, for it is near midnight, but a stout swarthy Arab, Mahomed by name, stands at the tiller, lazily steering by the stars. Three miles or more to our starboard is a low dim line. It is the Eastern shore of Central Africa. We are running to the southward, before the North East Monsoon, between the mainland and the reef that for hundreds of miles fringes this perilous coast. The night is quiet, so quiet that a whisper can be heard fore and aft the dhow; so quiet that a faint booming sound rolls across the water to us from the distant land.

The Arab at the tiller holds up his hand, and says one word:—"Simba (lion)!"

We all sit up and listen. Then it comes again, a slow, majestic sound, that thrills us to the marrow.

"To-morrow by ten o'clock," I say, "we ought, if the Captain is not out in his reckoning, which I think very probable, to make this mysterious rock with a man's head, and begin our shooting."

"And begin our search for the ruined city and the Fire of Life," corrected Leo, taking his pipe from his mouth, and laughing a little.

"Nonsense!" I answered. "You were airing your Arabic with that man at the tiller this afternoon. What did he tell you? He has been trading (slave-trading, probably) up and down these latitudes for half of his iniquitous life, and once landed on this very 'man' rock. Did he ever hear anything of the ruined city or the caves?"

"No," answered Leo. "He says that the country is all swamp behind, and full of snakes, especially pythons, and game, and that no man lives there. But then there is a belt of swamp all along the East African coast, so that does not go for much."

"Yes," I said, "it does—it goes for malaria. You see what sort of an opinion these gentry have of the country. Not one of them will go with us. They think that we are mad, and upon my word I believe that they are right. If ever we see old England again I shall be astonished. However, it does not greatly matter to me at my age, but I am anxious for you, Leo, and for Job. It's a Tom Fool's business, my boy."

"All right, Uncle Horace. So far as I am concerned, I am willing to take my chance. Look! What is that cloud?" and he pointed to a dark blotch upon the starry sky, some miles astern of us.

"Go and ask the man at the tiller," I said.

He rose, stretched his arms, and went. Presently he returned.

"He says it is a squall, but it will pass far on one side of us."

Just then Job came up, looking very stout and English in his shooting-suit of brown flannel, and with a sort of perplexed appearance upon his honest round face that had been very common with him since he got into these strange waters.

"Please, sir," he said, touching his sun hat, which was stuck on to the back of his head in a somewhat ludicrous fashion, "as we have got all those guns and things in the whale-boat astern, to say nothing of the provisions in the lockers, I think it would be best if I got down and slept in her. I don't like the looks" (here he dropped his voice to a portentous whisper) "of these black gentry; they have such a wonderful thievish way about them. Supposing now that some of them were to slip into the boat at night and cut the cable, and make off with her? That would be a pretty go, that would."

The whale-boat, I may explain, was one specially built for us at Dundee, in Scotland. We had brought it with us, as we knew that this coast was a network of creeks, and that we might require something to navigate them with. She was a beautiful boat, thirty-feet in length, with a centre-board for sailing, copper-bottomed to keep the worm out of her, and full of water-tight compartments. The Captain of the dhow had told us that when we reached the rock, which he knew, and which appeared to be identical with the one described upon the sherd and by Leo's father, he would probably not be able to run up to it on account of the shallows and breakers. Therefore we had employed three hours that very morning, whilst we were totally becalmed, the wind having dropped at sunrise, in transferring most of our goods and chattels to the whale-boat, and placing the guns, ammunition, and preserved provisions in the water-tight lockers specially prepared for them, so that when we did sight the fabled rock we should have nothing to do but step into the boat, and run her ashore. Another reason that induced us to take this precautionary step was that Arab captains are apt to run past the point that they are making, either from carelessness or owing to a mistake in its identity. Now, as sailors know, it is quite impossible for a dhow which is only rigged to run before the monsoon to beat back against it. Therefore we got our boat ready to row for the rock at any moment.

"Well, Job," I said, "perhaps it would be as well. There are lots of blankets there, only be careful to keep out of the moon, or it may turn your head or blind you."

"Lord, sir! I don't think it would much matter if it did; it is that turned already with the sight of these blackamoors and their filthy, thieving ways. They are only fit for muck, they are; and they smell bad enough for it already."

Job, it will be perceived, was no admirer of the manners and customs of our dark-skinned brothers.

Accordingly we hauled up the boat by the tow-rope till it was right under the stern of the dhow, and Job bundled into her with all the grace of a falling sack of potatoes. Then we returned and sat down on the deck again, and smoked and talked in little gusts and

jerks. The night was so lovely, and our brains were so full of suppressed excitement of one sort and another, that we did not feel inclined to turn in. For nearly an hour we sat thus, and then, I think, we both dozed off. At least I have a faint recollection of Leo sleepily explaining that the head was not a bad place to hit a buffalo, if you could catch him exactly between the horns, or send your bullet down his throat, or some nonsense of the sort.

Then I remember no more; till suddenly—a frightful roar of wind, a shriek of terror from the awakening crew, and a whip-like sting of water in our faces. Some of the men ran to let go the halyards and lower the sail, but the parrel jammed and the yard would not come down. I sprang to my feet and hung on to a rope. The sky aft was dark as pitch, but the moon still shone brightly ahead of us and lit up the blackness. Beneath its sheen a huge white-topped breaker, twenty feet high or more, was rushing on to us. It was on the break—the moon shone on its crest and tipped its foam with light. On it rushed beneath the inky sky, driven by the awful squall behind it. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, I saw the black shape of the whale-boat cast high into the air on the crest of the breaking wave. Then—a shock of water, a wild rush of boiling foam, and I was clinging for my life to the shroud, ay, swept straight out from it like a flag in a gale.

We were pooped.

The wave passed. It seemed to me that I was under water for minutes—really it was seconds. I looked forward. The blast had torn out the great sail, and high in the air it was fluttering away to leeward like a huge wounded bird. Then for a moment there was comparative calm, and in it I heard Job's voice yelling wildly, "Come here to the boat."

Bewildered and half-drowned as I was, I had the sense to rush aft. I felt the dhow sinking under me—she was full of water. Under her counter the whale-boat was tossing furiously, and I saw the Arab Mahomed, who had been steering, leap into her. I gave one desperate pull at the tow-rope to bring the boat alongside. Wildly I sprang also, Job caught me by the arm and I rolled into the bottom of the boat. Down went the dhow bodily, and as she did so Mahomed drew his curved knife and severed the fibre-rope by which we were fast to her, and in another second we were driving before the storm over the place where the dhow had been.

"Great God!" I shrieked, "where is Leo? *Leo! Leo!*"

"He's gone, sir, God help him!" roared Job into my ear; and such was the fury of the squall that his voice sounded like a whisper.

I wrung my hands in agony. Leo was drowned, and I was left alive to mourn him.

"Look out," yelled Job; "here comes another."

I turned; a second huge wave was overtaking us. I half hoped that it would drown me. With a curious fascination I watched its awful advent. The moon was nearly hidden now by the wreaths of the rushing storm, but a little light still caught the crest of the devouring breaker. There was something dark on it—a piece of wreckage. It was on us now, and the boat was nearly full of water. But she was built in air-tight compartments—Heaven bless the man who invented them!—and lifted up through it like a swan. Through the foam and turmoil I saw the black thing on the wave hurrying right at me. I put out my right arm to ward it from me, and my hand closed on another arm, the wrist of which my fingers gripped like a vice. I am a very strong man, and had something to hold to, but my arm was nearly torn from its socket by the strain and weight of the floating body. Had the rush lasted another two seconds I might either have let go or gone with it. But it passed, leaving us up to our knees in water.

"Bail out! bail out!" shouted Job, suiting the action to the word.

But I could not bail just then, for as the moon went out and left us in total darkness, one faint, flying ray of light lit upon the face of the man I had gripped, who was now half lying, half floating in the bottom of the boat.

It was Leo. Leo brought back by the wave—back, dead or alive, from the very jaws of Death.

"Bail out! bail out!" yelled Job, "or we shall founder."

I seized a large tin bowl with a handle to it, which was fixed under one of the seats, and the three of us bailed away for dear life. The furious tempest drove over and round us, flinging the boat this way and that, the wind and the storm wreaths and the sheets of stinging spray blinded and bewildered us, but through it all we worked like demons with the wild exhilaration of despair, for even despair can exhilarate. One minute! three minutes! six minutes! The boat began to lighten, and no fresh wave swamped us. Five minutes more, and she was fairly clear. Then, suddenly, above the awful shriekings of the hurricane came a duller, deeper roar. Great Heavens! It was the voice of breakers!

At that moment the moon began to shine forth again—this time behind the path of the squall. Out far across the torn bosom of the ocean shot the ragged arrows of her light, and there, half a mile ahead of us, was a white line of foam, then a little space of open-mouthed blackness, and then another line of white. It was the breakers, and their roar grew clearer and yet more clear as we sped down upon them like a swallow. There they were, boiling up in snowy spouts of spray, smiting and gnashing together like the gleaming teeth of hell.

"Take the tiller, Mahomed!" I roared in Arabic. "We must try and shoot them." At the same moment I seized an oar, and got it out, motioning to Job to do likewise.

Mahomed clambered aft, and got hold of the tiller, and with some difficulty Job, who had sometimes pulled a tub upon the homely Cam, got out his oar. In another minute the boat's head was straight on to the ever-nearing foam, towards which she plunged and tore with the speed of a racehorse. Just in front of us the first line of breakers seemed a little thinner than to the right or left—there was a cap of rather deeper water. I turned and pointed to it.

"Steer for your life, Mahomed!" I yelled. He was a skilful steersman, and well acquainted with the dangers of this most perilous coast, and I saw him grip the tiller, bend his heavy frame forward, and stare at the foaming terror till his big round eyes looked as though they would start out of his head. The send of the sea was driving the boat's head round to starboard. If we struck the line of breakers fifty yards to starboard of the gap we must sink. It was a great field of twisting, spouting waves. Mahomed planted his foot against the seat before him, and, glancing at him, I saw his brown toes spread out like a hand with the weight he put upon them as he took the strain of the tiller. She came round a bit, but not enough. I roared to Job to back water, whilst I dragged and laboured at my oar. She answered now, and none too soon.

Heavens, we were in them! And then followed a couple of minutes of heart-breaking excitement such as I cannot hope to describe. All that I remember is a shrieking sea of foam, out of which the billows rose here, there, and everywhere like avenging ghosts from their ocean grave. Once we were turned right round, but either by chance, or through Mahomed's skilful steering, the boat's head came straight again before a breaker filled us. One more—a monster. We were through it or over it—more through than over—and

then, with a wild yell of exultation from the Arab, we shot out into the comparative smooth water of the mouth of sea between the teeth-like lines of gnashing waves.

But we were nearly full of water again, and not more than half a mile ahead was the second line of breakers. Again we set to and bailed furiously. Fortunately the storm had now quite gone by, and the moon shone brightly, revealing a rocky headland running half a mile or more out into the sea, of which this second line of breakers appeared to be a continuation. At any rate, they boiled around its foot. Probably the ridge that formed the headland ran out into the ocean, only at a lower level, and made the reef also. This headland was terminated by a curious peak that seemed not to be more than a mile away from us. Just as we got the boat pretty clear for the second time, Leo, to my immense relief, opened his eyes and remarked that the clothes had tumbled off the bed, and that he supposed it was time to get up for chapel. I told him to shut his eyes and keep quiet, which he did without in the slightest degree realizing the position. As for myself, his reference to chapel made me reflect, with a sort of sick longing, on my comfortable rooms at Cambridge. Why had I been such a fool as to leave them? This is a reflection that has several times recurred to me since, and with an ever-increasing force.

But now again we were drifting down on the breakers, though with lessened speed, for the wind had fallen, and only the current or the tide (it afterwards turned out to be the tide) was driving us.

Another minute, and with a sort of howl to Allah from the Arab, a pious ejaculation from myself, and something that was not pious from Job, we were in them. And then the whole scene, down to our final escape, repeated itself, only not quite so violently. Mahomed's skilful steering and the air-tight compartments saved our lives. In five minutes we were through, and drifting—for we were too exhausted to do anything to help ourselves except keep her head straight—with the most startling rapidity round the headland which I have described.

Round we went with the tide, until we got well under the lee of the point, and then suddenly the speed slackened, we ceased to make way, and finally appeared to be in dead water. The storm had entirely passed, leaving a clean-washed sky behind it; the headland intercepted the heavy sea that had been occasioned by the squall, and the tide, which had been running so fiercely up the river (for we were now in the mouth of a river), was sluggish before it turned, so we floated quietly, and before the moon went down managed to bail out the boat thoroughly and get her a little ship-shape. Leo was sleeping profoundly, and on the whole I thought it wise not to wake him. It was true he was sleeping in wet clothes, but the night was now so warm that I thought (and so did Job) that they were not likely to injure a man of his unusually vigorous constitution. Besides, we had no dry ones at hand.

Presently the moon went down, and left us floating on the waters, now only heaving like some troubled woman's breast, with leisure to reflect upon all that we had gone through and all that we had escaped. Job stationed himself at the bow, Mahomed kept his post at the tiller, and I sat on a seat in the middle of the boat close to where Leo was lying.

The moon went slowly down in chastened loveliness; she departed like some sweet bride into her chamber, and long veil-like shadows crept up the sky through which the stars peeped shyly out. Soon, however, they too began to pale before a splendour in the east, and then the quivering footsteps of the dawn came rushing across the new-born blue, and shook the high stars from their places. Quieter and yet more quiet grew the sea, quiet as the soft mist that brooded on her bosom, and covered up her troubling, as the illusive wreaths of sleep brood upon a pain-racked mind, causing it to forget its sorrow. From the east to the west sped the angels of the Dawn, from sea to sea, from mountain-top to mountain-top, scattering light with both their hands. On they sped out of the darkness, perfect, glorious, like spirits of the just breaking from the tomb; on, over the quiet sea, over the low coastline, and the swamps beyond, and the mountains above them; over those who slept in peace and those who woke in sorrow; over the evil and the good; over the living and the dead; over the wide world and all that breathes or has breathed thereon.

It was a wonderfully beautiful sight, and yet sad, perhaps, from the very excess of its beauty. The arising sun; the setting sun! There we have the symbol and the type of humanity, and all things with which humanity has to do. The symbol and the type, yes, and the earthly beginning, and the end also. And on that morning this came home to me with a peculiar force. The sun that rose to-day for us had set last night for eighteen of our fellow-voyagers!—had set everlastingly for eighteen whom we knew!

The dhow had gone down with them, they were tossing about among the rocks and seaweed, so much human drift on the great ocean of Death! And we four were saved. But one day a sunrise will come when we shall be among those who are lost, and then others will watch those glorious rays, and grow sad in the midst of beauty, and dream of Death in the full glow of arising Life!

For this is the lot of man.

## V.

### THE HEAD OF THE ETHIOPIAN

At length the heralds and forerunners of the royal sun had done their work, and, searching out the shadows, had caused them to flee away. Then up he came in glory from his ocean-bed, and flooded the earth with warmth and light. I sat there in the boat listening to the gentle lapping of the water and watched him rise, till presently the slight drift of the boat brought the odd-shaped rock, or peak, at the end of the promontory which we had weathered with so much peril, between me and the majestic sight, and blotted it from my view. I still continued, however, to stare at the rock, absently enough, till presently it became edged with the fire of the growing light behind it, and then I started, as well I might, for I perceived that the top of the peak, which was about eighty feet high by one hundred and fifty feet thick at its base, was shaped like a negro's head and face, whereon was stamped a most fiendish and terrifying expression. There was no doubt about it; there were the thick lips, the fat cheeks, and the squat nose standing out with startling clearness against the flaming background. There, too, was the round skull, washed into shape perhaps by thousands of years of wind and weather, and, to complete the resemblance, there was a scrubby growth of weeds or lichen upon it, which against the sun looked for all the world like the wool on a colossal negro's head. It certainly was very odd; so odd that now I believe it is not a mere freak of nature but a gigantic monument fashioned, like the well-known Egyptian Sphinx, by a forgotten people out of a pile of rock that lent itself to their design, perhaps as an emblem of warning and defiance to any enemies who approached the harbour. Unfortunately we were never able to ascertain whether or not this was the case, inasmuch as the rock was difficult of access both from the land and the waterside, and we had other things to attend to. Myself, considering the matter by the light of what we afterwards saw, I believe that it was fashioned by man, but whether or not this is so, there it stands, and sullenly stares from age to age out across the changing sea—there it stood two thousand years and more ago, when Amenartas, the Egyptian princess, and the wife of Leo's remote ancestor Kallikrates, gazed upon its devilish face—and there I have no doubt it will still stand when as many centuries as are numbered between her day and our own are added to the year that bore us to oblivion.

"What do you think of that, Job?" I asked of our retainer, who was sitting on the edge of the boat, trying to get as much sunshine as possible, and generally looking uncommonly wretched, and I pointed to the fiery and demoniacal head.

"Oh Lord, sir," answered Job, who now perceived the object for the first time, "I think that the old gentleman must have been sitting for his portrait on them rocks."

I laughed, and the laugh woke up Leo.

"Hullo," he said, "what's the matter with me? I am all stiff—where is the dhow? Give me some brandy, please."

"You may be thankful that you are not stiffer, my boy," I answered. "The dhow is sunk, everybody on board her is drowned with the exception of us four, and your own life was only saved by a miracle"; and whilst Job, now that it was light enough, searched about in a locker for the brandy for which Leo asked, I told him the history of our night's adventure.

"Great Heavens!" he said faintly; "and to think that we should have been chosen to live through it!"

By this time the brandy was forthcoming, and we all had a good pull at it, and thankful enough we were for it. Also the sun was beginning to get strength, and warm our chilled bones, for we had been wet through for five hours or more.

"Why," said Leo, with a gasp as he put down the brandy bottle, "there is the head the writing talks of, the 'rock carven like the head of an Ethiopian.'"

"Yes," I said, "there it is."

"Well, then," he answered, "the whole thing is true."

"I don't see at all that that follows," I answered. "We knew this head was here: your father saw it. Very likely it is not the same head that the writing talks of; or if it is, it proves nothing."

Leo smiled at me in a superior way. "You are an unbelieving Jew, Uncle Horace," he said. "Those who live will see."

"Exactly so," I answered, "and now perhaps you will observe that we are drifting across a sandbank into the mouth of the river. Get hold of your oar, Job, and we will row in and see if we can find a place to land."

The river mouth which we were entering did not appear to be a very wide one, though as yet the long banks of steaming mist that clung about its shores had not lifted sufficiently to enable us to see its exact measure. There was, as is the case with nearly every East African river, a considerable bar at the mouth, which, no doubt, when the wind was on shore and the tide running out, was absolutely impassable even for a boat drawing only a few inches. But as things were it was manageable enough, and we did not ship a cupful of water. In twenty minutes we were well across it, with but slight assistance from ourselves, and being carried by a strong though somewhat variable breeze well up the harbour. By this time the mist was being sucked up by the sun, which was getting uncomfortably hot, and we saw that the mouth of the little estuary was here about half a mile across, and that the banks were very marshy, and crowded with crocodiles lying about on the mud like logs. About a mile ahead of us, however, was what appeared to be a strip of firm land, and for this we steered. In another quarter of an hour we were there, and making the boat fast to a beautiful tree with broad shining leaves, and flowers of the magnolia species, only they were rose-coloured and not white,<sup>[1]</sup> which hung over the water, we disembarked. This done we undressed, washed ourselves, and spread our clothes, together with the contents of the boat, in the sun to dry, which they very quickly did. Then, taking shelter from the sun under some trees, we made a hearty breakfast off a "Paysandu" potted tongue, of which we had brought a good quantity with us, congratulating ourselves loudly on our good fortune in having loaded and provisioned the boat on the previous day before the hurricane destroyed the dhow. By the time that we had finished our meal our clothes were quite dry, and we hastened to get into them, feeling not a little refreshed. Indeed, with the exception of

weariness and a few bruises, none of us were the worse for the terrifying adventure which had been fatal to all our companions. Leo, it is true, had been half-drowned, but that is no great matter to a vigorous young athlete of five-and-twenty.

[1] There is a known species of magnolia with pink flowers. It is indigenous in Sikkim, and known as *Magnolia Campbellii*.—Editor.

After breakfast we started to look about us. We were on a strip of dry land about two hundred yards broad by five hundred long, bordered on one side by the river, and on the other three by endless desolate swamps, that stretched as far as the eye could reach. This strip of land was raised about twenty-five feet above the plain of the surrounding swamps and the river level: indeed it had every appearance of having been made by the hand of man.

"This place has been a wharf," said Leo, dogmatically.

"Nonsense," I answered. "Who would be stupid enough to build a wharf in the middle of these dreadful marshes in a country inhabited by savages—that is, if it is inhabited at all?"

"Perhaps it was not always marsh, and perhaps the people were not always savage," he said drily, looking down the steep bank, for we were standing by the river. "Look there," he went on, pointing to a spot where the hurricane of the previous night had torn up one of the magnolia trees by the roots, which had grown on the extreme edge of the bank just where it sloped down to the water, and lifted a large cake of earth with them. "Is not that stonework? If not, it is very like it."

"Nonsense," I said again, but we clambered down to the spot, and got between the upturned roots and the bank.

"Well?" he said.

But I did not answer this time. I only whistled. For there, laid bare by the removal of the earth, was an undoubted facing of solid stone laid in large blocks and bound together with brown cement, so hard that I could make no impression on it with the file in my shooting-knife. Nor was this all; seeing something projecting through the soil at the bottom of the bared patch of walling, I removed the loose earth with my hands, and revealed a huge stone ring, a foot or more in diameter, and about three inches thick. This fairly staggered me.

"Looks rather like a wharf where good-sized vessels have been moored, does it not, Uncle Horace?" said Leo, with an excited grin.

I tried to say "Nonsense" again, but the word stuck in my throat—the ring spoke for itself. In some past age vessels *had* been moored there, and this stone wall was undoubtedly the remnant of a solidly constructed wharf. Probably the city to which it had belonged lay buried beneath the swamp behind it.

"Begins to look as though there were something in the story after all, Uncle Horace," said the exultant Leo; and reflecting on the mysterious negro's head and the equally mysterious stonework, I made no direct reply.

"A country like Africa," I said, "is sure to be full of the relics of long dead and forgotten civilisations. Nobody knows the age of the Egyptian civilisation, and very likely it had offshoots. Then there were the Babylonians and the Phœnicians, and the Persians, and all manner of people, all more or less civilised, to say nothing of the Jews whom everybody 'wants' nowadays. It is possible that they, or any one of them, may have had colonies or trading stations about here. Remember those buried Persian cities that the consul showed us at Kilwa."<sup>[2]</sup>

[2] Near Kilwa, on the East Coast of Africa, about 400 miles south of Zanzibar, is a cliff which has been recently washed by the waves. On the top of this cliff are Persian tombs known to be at least seven centuries old by the dates still legible upon them. Beneath these tombs is a layer of *débris* representing a city. Farther down the cliff is a second layer representing an older city, and farther down still a third layer, the remains of yet another city of vast and unknown antiquity. Beneath the bottom city were recently found some specimens of glazed earthenware, such as are occasionally to be met with on that coast to this day. I believe that they are now in the possession of Sir John Kirk.—Editor.

"Quite so," said Leo, "but that is not what you said before."

"Well, what is to be done now?" I asked, turning the conversation.

As no answer was forthcoming we walked to the edge of the swamp, and looked over it. It was apparently boundless, and vast flocks of every sort of waterfowl flew from its recesses, till it was sometimes difficult to see the sky. Now that the sun was getting high it drew thin sickly looking clouds of poisonous vapour from the surface of the marsh and from the scummy pools of stagnant water.

"Two things are clear to me," I said, addressing my three companions, who stared at this spectacle in dismay: "first, that we can't go across there" (I pointed to the swamp), "and, secondly, that if we stop here we shall certainly die of fever."

"That's as clear as a haystack, sir," said Job.

"Very well, then; there are two alternatives before us. One is to 'bout ship, and try and run for some port in the whale-boat, which would be a sufficiently risky proceeding, and the other to sail or row on up the river, and see where we come to."

"I don't know what you are going to do," said Leo, setting his mouth, "but I am going up that river."

Job turned up the whites of his eyes and groaned, and the Arab murmured "Allah," and groaned also. As for me, I remarked sweetly that as we seemed to be between the devil and the deep sea, it did not much matter where we went. But in reality I was as anxious to proceed as Leo. The colossal negro's head and the stone wharf had excited my curiosity to an extent of which I was secretly ashamed, and I was prepared to gratify it at any cost. Accordingly, having carefully fitted the mast, restowed the boat, and got out our rifles, we embarked. Fortunately the wind was blowing on shore from the ocean, so we were able to hoist the sail. Indeed, we afterwards found out that as a general rule the wind set on shore from daybreak for some hours, and off shore again at sunset, and the explanation that I offer of this is, that when the earth is cooled by the dew and the night the hot air rises, and the draught rushes in from the sea till the sun has once more heated it through. At least that appeared to be the rule here.

Taking advantage of this favouring wind, we sailed merrily up the river for three or four hours. Once we came across a school of hippopotami, which rose, and bellowed dreadfully at us within ten or a dozen fathoms of the boat, much to Job's alarm, and, I will confess, to my own. These were the first hippopotami that we had ever seen, and, to judge by their insatiable curiosity, I should judge that we were the first white men that they had ever seen. Upon my word, I once or twice thought that they were coming into the boat to gratify it. Leo wanted to fire at them, but I dissuaded him, fearing the consequences. Also, we saw hundreds of crocodiles basking on the muddy banks, and thousands upon thousands of water-fowl. Some of these we shot, and among them was a wild goose, which, in addition to the sharp-curved spurs on its wings, had a spur about three-quarters of an inch long growing from the skull just between the eyes. We never shot another like it, so I do not know if it was a "sport" or a distinct species. In the latter case this incident may interest naturalists. Job named it the Unicorn Goose.

About midday the sun grew intensely hot, and the stench drawn up by it from the marshes which the river drains was something too awful, and caused us instantly to swallow precautionary doses of quinine. Shortly afterwards the breeze died away altogether, and as rowing our heavy boat against stream in the heat was out of the question, we were thankful enough to get under the shade of a group of trees—a species of willow—that grew by the edge of the river, and lie there and gasp till at length the approach of sunset put a period to our miseries. Seeing what appeared to be an open space of water straight ahead of us, we determined to row there before settling what to do for the night. Just as we were about to loosen the boat, however, a beautiful waterbuck, with great horns curving forward, and a white stripe across the rump, came down to the river to drink, without perceiving us hidden away within fifty yards under the willows. Leo was the first to catch sight of it, and, being an ardent sportsman, thirsting for the blood of big game, about which he had been dreaming for months, he instantly stiffened all over, and pointed like a setter dog. Seeing what was the matter, I handed him his express rifle, at the same time taking my own.

“Now then,” I whispered, “mind you don’t miss.”

“Miss!” he whispered back contemptuously; “I could not miss it if I tried.”

He lifted the rifle, and the roan-coloured buck, having drunk his fill, raised his head and looked out across the river. He was standing right against the sunset sky on a little eminence, or ridge of ground, which ran across the swamp, evidently a favourite path for game, and there was something very beautiful about him. Indeed, I do not think that if I live to a hundred I shall ever forget that desolate and yet most fascinating scene; it is stamped upon my memory. To the right and left were wide stretches of lonely death-breeding swamp, unbroken and unrelieved so far as the eye could reach, except here and there by ponds of black and peaty water that, mirror-like, flashed up the red rays of the setting sun. Behind us and before stretched the vista of the sluggish river, ending in glimpses of a reed-fringed lagoon, on the surface of which the long lights of the evening played as the faint breeze stirred the shadows. To the west loomed the huge red ball of the sinking sun, now vanishing down the vapoury horizon, and filling the great heaven, high across whose arch the cranes and wildfowl streamed in line, square, and triangle, with flashes of flying gold and the lurid stain of blood. And then ourselves—three modern Englishmen in a modern English boat—seeming to jar upon and look out of tone with that measureless desolation; and in front of us the noble buck limned out upon a background of ruddy sky.

*Bang!* Away he goes with a mighty bound. Leo has missed him. *Bang!* right under him again. Now for a shot. I must have one, though he is going like an arrow, and a hundred yards away and more. By Jove! over and over and over! “Well, I think I’ve wiped your eye there, Master Leo,” I say, struggling against the ungenerous exultation that in such a supreme moment of one’s existence will rise in the best-mannered sportsman’s breast.

“Confound you, yes,” growled Leo; and then, with that quick smile that is one of his charms lighting up his handsome face like a ray of light, “I beg your pardon, old fellow. I congratulate you; it was a lovely shot, and mine were vile.”

We got out of the boat and ran to the buck, which was shot through the spine and stone dead. It took us a quarter of an hour or more to clean it and cut off as much of the best meat as we could carry, and, having packed this away, we had barely light enough to row up into the lagoon-like space, into which, there being a hollow in the swamp, the river here expanded. Just as the light vanished we cast anchor about thirty fathoms from the edge of the lake. We did not dare to go ashore, not knowing if we should find dry ground to camp on, and greatly fearing the poisonous exhalations from the marsh, from which we thought we should be freer on the water. So we lighted a lantern, and made our evening meal off another potted tongue in the best fashion that we could, and then prepared to go to sleep, only, however, to find that sleep was impossible. For, whether they were attracted by the lantern, or by the unaccustomed smell of a white man for which they had been waiting for the last thousand years or so, I know not; but certainly we were presently attacked by tens of thousands of the most blood-thirsty, pertinacious, and huge mosquitoes that I ever saw or read of. In clouds they came, and pinged and buzzed and bit till we were nearly mad. Tobacco smoke only seemed to stir them into a merrier and more active life, till at length we were driven to covering ourselves with blankets, head and all, and sitting to slowly stew and continually scratch and swear beneath them. And as we sat, suddenly rolling out like thunder through the silence came the deep roar of a lion, and then of a second lion, moving among the reeds within sixty yards of us.

“I say,” said Leo, sticking his head out from under his blanket, “lucky we ain’t on the bank, eh, Avuncular?” (Leo sometimes addressed me in this disrespectful way.) “Curse it! a mosquito has bitten me on the nose,” and the head vanished again.

Shortly after this the moon came up, and notwithstanding every variety of roar that echoed over the water to us from the lions on the banks, we began, thinking ourselves perfectly secure, to gradually doze off.

I do not quite know what it was that made me poke my head out of the friendly shelter of the blanket, perhaps because I found that the mosquitoes were biting right through it. Anyhow, as I did so I heard Job whisper, in a frightened voice—

“Oh, my stars, look there!”

Instantly we all of us looked, and this was what we saw in the moonlight. Near the shore were two wide and ever-widening circles of concentric rings rippling away across the surface of the water, and in the heart and centre of the circles were two dark moving objects.

“What is it?” asked I.

“It is those damned lions, sir,” answered Job, in a tone which was an odd mixture of a sense of personal injury, habitual respect, and acknowledged fear, “and they are swimming here to *heat* us,” he added, nervously picking up an “h” in his agitation.

I looked again: there was no doubt about it; I could catch the glare of their ferocious eyes. Attracted either by the smell of the newly killed waterbuck meat or of ourselves, the hungry beasts were actually storming our position.

Leo already had his rifle in his hand. I called to him to wait till they were nearer, and meanwhile grabbed my own. Some fifteen feet from us the water shallowed on a bank to the depth of about fifteen inches, and presently the first of them—it was the lioness—got on to it, shook herself, and roared. At that moment Leo fired, the bullet went right down her open mouth and out at the back of her neck, and down she dropped, with a splash, dead. The other lion—a full-grown male—was some two paces behind her. At this second he got his forepaws on to the bank, when a strange thing happened. There was a rush and disturbance of the water, such as one sees in a pond in England when a pike takes a little fish, only a thousand times fiercer and larger, and suddenly the lion gave a most terrific snarling roar and sprang forward on to the bank, dragging something black with him.

“Allah!” shouted Mahomed, “a crocodile has got him by the leg!” and sure enough he had. We could see the long snout with its gleaming lines of teeth and the reptile body behind it.

And then followed an extraordinary scene indeed. The lion managed to get well on to the bank, the crocodile half standing and half swimming, still nipping his hind leg. He roared till the air quivered with the sound, and then, with a savage, shrieking snarl, turned round and clawed hold of the crocodile's head. The crocodile shifted his grip, having, as we afterwards discovered, had one of his eyes torn out, and slightly turned over; instantly the lion got him by the throat and held on, and then over and over they rolled upon the bank struggling hideously. It was impossible to follow their movements, but when next we got a clear view the tables had turned, for the crocodile, whose head seemed to be a mass of gore, had got the lion's body in his iron jaws just above the hips, and was squeezing him and shaking him to and fro. For his part, the tortured brute, roaring in agony, was clawing and biting madly at his enemy's scaly head, and fixing his great hind claws in the crocodile's, comparatively speaking, soft throat, ripping it open as one would rip a glove.

Then, all of a sudden, the end came. The lion's head fell forward on the crocodile's back, and with an awful groan he died, and the crocodile, after standing for a minute motionless, slowly rolled over on to his side, his jaws still fixed across the carcase of the lion, which, we afterwards found, he had bitten almost in halves.

This duel to the death was a wonderful and a shocking sight, and one that I suppose few men have seen—and thus it ended.

When it was all over, leaving Mahomed to keep a look out, we managed to spend the rest of the night as quietly as the mosquitoes would allow.

## VI.

### AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CEREMONY

Next morning, at the earliest light of dawn, we rose, performed such ablutions as circumstances would allow, and generally made ready to start. I am bound to say that when there was sufficient light to enable us to see each other's faces I, for one, burst out into a roar of laughter. Job's fat and comfortable countenance was swollen out to nearly twice its natural size from mosquito bites, and Leo's condition was not much better. Indeed, of the three I had come off much the best, probably owing to the toughness of my dark skin, and to the fact that a good deal of it was covered by hair, for since we had started from England I had allowed my naturally luxuriant beard to grow at its own sweet will. But the other two were, comparatively speaking, clean shaved, which of course gave the enemy a larger extent of open country to operate on, though in Mahomed's case the mosquitoes, recognising the taste of a true believer, would not touch him at any price. How often, I wonder, during the next week or so did we wish that we were flavoured like an Arab!

By the time that we had done laughing as heartily as our swollen lips would allow, it was daylight, and the morning breeze was coming up from the sea, cutting lanes through the dense marsh mists, and here and there rolling them before it in great balls of fleecy vapour. So we set our sail, and having first taken a look at the two dead lions and the alligator, which we were of course unable to skin, being destitute of means of curing the pelts, we started, and, sailing through the lagoon, followed the course of the river on the farther side. At midday, when the breeze dropped, we were fortunate enough to find a convenient piece of dry land on which to camp and light a fire, and here we cooked two wild-ducks and some of the waterbuck's flesh—not in a very appetising way, it is true, but still sufficiently. The rest of the buck's flesh we cut into strips and hung in the sun to dry into "biltong," as, I believe, the South African Dutch call flesh thus prepared. On this welcome patch of dry land we stopped till the following dawn, and, as before, spent the night in warfare with the mosquitoes, but without other troubles. The next day or two passed in similar fashion, and without noticeable adventures, except that we shot a specimen of a peculiarly graceful hornless buck, and saw many varieties of water-lily in full bloom, some of them blue and of exquisite beauty, though few of the flowers were perfect, owing to the prevalence of a white water-maggot with a green head that fed upon them.

It was on the fifth day of our journey, when we had travelled, so far as we could reckon, about one hundred and thirty-five to a hundred and forty miles westwards from the coast, that the first event of any real importance occurred. On that morning the usual wind failed us about eleven o'clock, and after pulling a little way we were forced to halt, more or less exhausted, at what appeared to be the junction of our stream with another of a uniform width of about fifty feet. Some trees grew near at hand—the only trees in all this country were along the banks of the river, and under these we rested, and then, the land being fairly dry just here, walked a little way along the edge of the river to prospect, and shoot a few waterfowl for food. Before we had gone fifty yards we perceived that all hopes of getting further up the stream in the whale-boat were at an end, for not two hundred yards above where we had stopped were a succession of shallows and mudbanks, with not six inches of water over them. It was a watery *cul de sac*.

Turning back, we walked some way along the banks of the other river, and soon came to the conclusion, from various indications, that it was not a river at all, but an ancient canal, like the one which is to be seen above Mombasa, on the Zanzibar coast, connecting the Tana River with the Ozy, in such a way as to enable the shipping coming down the Tana to cross to the Ozy, and reach the sea by it, and thus avoid the very dangerous bar that blocks the mouth of the Tana. The canal before us had evidently been dug out by man at some remote period of the world's history, and the results of his digging still remained in the shape of the raised banks that had no doubt once formed towing-paths. Except here and there, where they had been hollowed out by the water or fallen in, these banks of stiff binding clay were at a uniform distance from each other, and the depth of the stream also appeared to be uniform. Current there was little or none, and, as a consequence, the surface of the canal was choked with vegetable growth, intersected by little paths of clear water, made, I suppose, by the constant passage of waterfowl, iguanas, and other vermin. Now, as it was evident that we could not proceed up the river, it became equally evident that we must either try the canal or else return to the sea. We could not stop where we were, to be baked by the sun and eaten up by the mosquitoes, till we died of fever in that dreary marsh.

"Well, I suppose that we must try it," I said; and the others assented in their various ways—Leo, as though it were the best joke in the world; Job, in respectful disgust; and Mahomed, with an invocation to the Prophet, and a comprehensive curse upon all unbelievers and their ways of thought and travel.

Accordingly, as soon as the sun got low, having little or nothing more to hope for from our friendly wind, we started. For the first hour or so we managed to row the boat, though with great labour; but after that the weeds got too thick to allow of it, and we were obliged to resort to the primitive and most exhausting resource of towing her. For two hours we laboured, Mahomed, Job, and I, who was supposed to be strong enough to pull against the two of them, on the bank, while Leo sat in the bow of the boat, and brushed away the weeds which collected round the cutwater with Mahomed's sword. At dark we halted for some hours to rest and enjoy the mosquitoes, but about midnight we went on again, taking advantage of the comparative cool of the night. At dawn we rested for three hours, and then started once more, and laboured on till about ten o'clock, when a thunderstorm, accompanied by a deluge of rain, overtook us, and we spent the next six hours practically under water.

I do not know that there is any necessity for me to describe the next four days of our voyage in detail, further than to say that they were, on the whole, the most miserable that I ever spent in my life, forming one monotonous record of heavy labour, heat, misery, and mosquitoes. All that dreary way we passed through a region of almost endless swamp, and I can only attribute our escape from fever and death to the constant doses of quinine and purgatives which we took, and the unceasing toil which we were forced to undergo. On the third day of our journey up the canal we had sighted a round hill that loomed dimly through the vapours of the marsh, and on the evening of the fourth night, when we camped, this hill seemed to be within five-and-twenty or thirty miles of us. We were by now utterly exhausted, and felt as though our blistered hands could not pull the boat a yard farther, and that the best thing

that we could do would be to lie down and die in that dreadful wilderness of swamp. It was an awful position, and one in which I trust no other white man will ever be placed; and as I threw myself down in the boat to sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion, I bitterly cursed my folly in ever having been a party to such a mad undertaking, which could, I saw, only end in our death in this ghastly land. I thought, I remember, as I slowly sank into a doze, of what the appearance of the boat and her unhappy crew would be in two or three months' time from that night. There she would lie, with gaping seams and half filled with fœtid water, which, when the mist-laden wind stirred her, would wash backwards and forwards through our mouldering bones, and that would be the end of her, and of those in her who would follow after myths and seek out the secrets of Nature.

Already I seemed to hear the water rippling against the desiccated bones and rattling them together, rolling my skull against Mahomed's, and his against mine, till at last Mahomed's stood straight up upon its vertebrae, and glared at me through its empty eyeholes, and cursed me with its grinning jaws, because I, a dog of a Christian, disturbed the last sleep of a true believer. I opened my eyes, and shuddered at the horrid dream, and then shuddered again at something that was not a dream, for two great eyes were gleaming down at me through the misty darkness. I struggled up, and in my terror and confusion shrieked, and shrieked again, so that the others sprang up too, reeling, and drunken with sleep and fear. And then all of a sudden there was a flash of cold steel, and a great spear was held against my throat, and behind it other spears gleamed cruelly.

"Peace," said a voice, speaking in Arabic, or rather in some dialect into which Arabic entered very largely; "who are ye who come hither swimming on the water? Speak or ye die," and the steel pressed sharply against my throat, sending a cold chill through me.

"We are travellers, and have come hither by chance," I answered in my best Arabic, which appeared to be understood, for the man turned his head, and, addressing a tall form that towered up in the background, said, "Father, shall we slay?"

"What is the colour of the men?" said a deep voice in answer.

"White is their colour."

"Slay not," was the reply. "Four suns since was the word brought to me from '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*,' 'White men come; if white men come, slay them not.' Let them be brought to the house of '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*.' Bring forth the men, and let that which they have with them be brought forth also."

"Come," said the man, half leading and half dragging me from the boat, and as he did so I perceived other men doing the same kind office to my companions.

On the bank were gathered a company of some fifty men. In that light all I could make out was that they were armed with huge spears, were very tall, and strongly built, comparatively light in colour, and nude, save for a leopard skin tied round the middle.

Presently Leo and Job were bundled out and placed beside me.

"What on earth is up?" said Leo, rubbing his eyes.

"Oh, Lord! sir, here's a rum go," ejaculated Job; and just at that moment a disturbance ensued, and Mahomed came tumbling between us, followed by a shadowy form with an uplifted spear.

"Allah! Allah!" howled Mahomed, feeling that he had little to hope from man, "protect me! protect me!"

"Father, it is a black one," said a voice. "What said '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*' about the black one?"

"She said naught; but slay him not. Come hither, my son."

The man advanced, and the tall shadowy form bent forward and whispered something.

"Yes, yes," said the other, and chuckled in a rather blood-curdling tone.

"Are the three white men there?" asked the form.

"Yes, they are there."

"Then bring up that which is made ready for them, and let the men take all that can be brought from the thing which floats."

Hardly had he spoken when men came running up, carrying on their shoulders neither more nor less than palanquins—four bearers and two spare men to a palanquin—and in these it was promptly indicated we were expected to stow ourselves.

"Well!" said Leo, "it is a blessing to find anybody to carry us after having to carry ourselves so long."

Leo always takes a cheerful view of things.

There being no help for it, after seeing the others into theirs I tumbled into my own litter, and very comfortable I found it. It appeared to be manufactured of cloth woven from grass-fibre, which stretched and yielded to every motion of the body, and, being bound top and bottom to the bearing pole, gave a grateful support to the head and neck.

Scarcely had I settled myself when, accompanying their steps with a monotonous song, the bearers started at a swinging trot. For half an hour or so I lay still, reflecting on the very remarkable experiences that we were going through, and wondering if any of my eminently respectable fossil friends down at Cambridge would believe me if I were to be miraculously set at the familiar dinner-table for the purpose of relating them. I do not want to convey any disrespectful notion or slight when I call those good and learned men fossils, but my experience is that people are apt to fossilise even at a University if they follow the same paths too persistently. I was getting fossilised myself, but of late my stock of ideas has been very much enlarged. Well, I lay and reflected, and wondered what on earth would be the end of it all, till at last I ceased to wonder, and went to sleep.

I suppose I must have slept for seven or eight hours, getting the first real rest that I had had since the night before the loss of the dhow, for when I woke the sun was high in the heavens. We were still journeying on at a pace of about four miles an hour. Peeping out through the mist-like curtains of the litter, which were ingeniously fixed to the bearing pole, I perceived to my infinite relief that we had passed out of the region of eternal swamp, and were now travelling over swelling grassy plains towards a cup-shaped hill. Whether or not it was the same hill that we had seen from the canal I do not know, and have never since been able to discover, for, as we afterwards found out, these people will give little information upon such points. Next I glanced at the men who were bearing me. They were of a magnificent build, few of them being under six feet in height, and yellowish in colour. Generally their appearance had a good deal in common with that of the East African Somali, only their hair was not frizzed up, but hung in thick black locks upon their shoulders. Their features were aquiline, and in many cases exceedingly handsome, the teeth being especially regular and beautiful. But notwithstanding their beauty, it struck me that, on the whole, I had never seen a more evil-looking set of faces. There was an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty stamped upon them that revolted me, and which in some cases was almost uncanny in its intensity.

Another thing that struck me about them was that they never seemed to smile. Sometimes they sang the monotonous song of which I have spoken, but when they were not singing they remained almost perfectly silent, and the light of a laugh never came to brighten their sombre and evil countenances. Of what race could these people be? Their language was a bastard Arabic, and yet they were not Arabs; I was quite sure of that. For one thing they were too dark, or rather yellow. I could not say why, but I know that their appearance filled me with a sick fear of which I felt ashamed. While I was still wondering another litter came up alongside of mine. In it—for the curtains were drawn—sat an old man, clothed in a whitish robe, made apparently from coarse linen, that hung loosely about him, who, I at once jumped to the conclusion, was the shadowy figure that had stood on the bank and been addressed as “Father.” He was a wonderful-looking old man, with a snowy beard, so long that the ends of it hung over the sides of the litter, and he had a hooked nose, above which flashed out a pair of eyes as keen as a snake’s, while his whole countenance was instinct with a look of wise and sardonic humour impossible to describe on paper.

“Art thou awake, stranger?” he said in a deep and low voice.

“Surely, my father,” I answered courteously, feeling certain that I should do well to conciliate this ancient Mammon of Unrighteousness.

He stroked his beautiful white beard, and smiled faintly.

“From whatever country thou camest,” he said, “and by the way it must be from one where somewhat of our language is known, they teach their children courtesy there, my stranger son. And now wherefore comest thou unto this land, which scarce an alien foot has pressed from the time that man knoweth? Art thou and those with thee weary of life?”

“We came to find new things,” I answered boldly. “We are tired of the old things; we have come up out of the sea to know that which is unknown. We are of a brave race who fear not death, my very much respected father—that is, if we can get a little information before we die.”

“Humph!” said the old gentleman, “that may be true; it is rash to contradict, otherwise I should say that thou wast lying, my son. However, I dare to say that *‘She-who-must-be-obeyed’* will meet thy wishes in the matter.”

“Who is *‘She-who-must-be-obeyed’*?” I asked, curiously.

The old man glanced at the bearers, and then answered, with a little smile that somehow sent my blood to my heart—

“Surely, my stranger son, thou wilt learn soon enough, if it be her pleasure to see thee at all in the flesh.”

“In the flesh?” I answered. “What may my father wish to convey?”

But the old man only laughed a dreadful laugh, and made no reply.

“What is the name of my father’s people?” I asked.

“The name of my people is Amahagger” (the People of the Rocks).

“And if a son might ask, what is the name of my father?”

“My name is Billali.”

“And whither go we, my father?”

“That shalt thou see,” and at a sign from him his bearers started forward at a run till they reached the litter in which Job was reposing (with one leg hanging over the side). Apparently, however, he could not make much out of Job, for presently I saw his bearers trot forward to Leo’s litter.

And after that, as nothing fresh occurred, I yielded to the pleasant swaying motion of the litter, and went to sleep again. I was dreadfully tired. When I woke I found that we were passing through a rocky defile of a lava formation with precipitous sides, in which grew many beautiful trees and flowering shrubs.

Presently this defile took a turn, and a lovely sight unfolded itself to my eyes. Before us was a vast cup of green from four to six miles in extent, in the shape of a Roman amphitheatre. The sides of this great cup were rocky, and clothed with bush, but the centre was of the richest meadow land, studded with single trees of magnificent growth, and watered by meandering brooks. On this rich plain grazed herds of goats and cattle, but I saw no sheep. At first I could not imagine what this strange spot could be, but presently it flashed upon me that it must represent the crater of some long-extinct volcano which had afterwards been a lake, and was ultimately drained in some unexplained way. And here I may state that from my subsequent experience of this and a much larger, but otherwise similar spot, which I shall have occasion to describe by-and-by, I have every reason to believe that this conclusion was correct. What puzzled me, however, was, that although there were people moving about herding the goats and cattle, I saw no signs of any human habitation. Where did they all live? I wondered. My curiosity was soon destined to be gratified. Turning to the left the string of litters followed the cliffy sides of the crater for a distance of about half a mile, or perhaps a little less, and then halted. Seeing the old gentleman, my adopted “father,” Billali, emerge from his litter, I did the same, and so did Leo and Job. The first thing I saw was our wretched Arab companion, Mahomed, lying exhausted on the ground. It appeared that he had not been provided with a litter, but had been forced to run the entire distance, and, as he was already quite worn out when we started, his condition now was one of great prostration.

On looking round we discovered that the place where we had halted was a platform in front of the mouth of a great cave, and piled upon this platform were the entire contents of the whale-boat, even down to the oars and sail. Round the cave stood groups of the men who had escorted us, and other men of a similar stamp. They were all tall and all handsome, though they varied in their degree of darkness of skin, some being as dark as Mahomed, and some as yellow as a Chinese. They were naked, except for the leopard-skin round the waist, and each of them carried a huge spear.

There were also some women among them, who, instead of the leopard-skin, wore a tanned hide of a small red buck, something like that of the oribé, only rather darker in colour. These women were, as a class, exceedingly good-looking, with large, dark eyes, well-cut features, and a thick bush of curling hair—not crisped like a negro’s—ranging from black to chestnut in hue, with all shades of intermediate colour. Some, but very few of them, wore a yellowish linen garment, such as I have described as worn by Billali, but this, as we afterwards discovered, was a mark of rank, rather than an attempt at clothing. For the rest, their appearance was not quite so terrifying as that of the men, and they sometimes, though rarely, smiled. As soon as we had alighted they gathered round us and examined us with curiosity, but without excitement. Leo’s tall, athletic form and clear-cut Grecian face, however, evidently excited their attention, and when he politely lifted his hat to them, and showed his curling yellow hair, there was a slight murmur of admiration. Nor did it stop there; for, after regarding him critically from head to foot, the handsomest of the young women—one

wearing a robe, and with hair of a shade between brown and chestnut—deliberately advanced to him, and, in a way that would have been winning had it not been so determined, quietly put her arm round his neck, bent forward, and kissed him on the lips.

I gave a gasp, expecting to see Leo instantly speared; and Job ejaculated, “The hussy—well, I never!” As for Leo, he looked slightly astonished; and then, remarking that we had clearly got into a country where they followed the customs of the early Christians, deliberately returned the embrace.

Again I gasped, thinking that something would happen; but, to my surprise, though some of the young women showed traces of vexation, the older ones and the men only smiled slightly. When we came to understand the customs of this extraordinary people the mystery was explained. It then appeared that, in direct opposition to the habits of almost every other savage race in the world, women among the Amahagger are not only upon terms of perfect equality with the men, but are not held to them by any binding ties. Descent is traced only through the line of the mother, and while individuals are as proud of a long and superior female ancestry as we are of our families in Europe, they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known. There is but one titular male parent of each tribe, or, as they call it, “Household,” and he is its elected and immediate ruler, with the title of “Father.” For instance, the man Billali was the father of this “household,” which consisted of about seven thousand individuals all told, and no other man was ever called by that name. When a woman took a fancy to a man she signified her preference by advancing and embracing him publicly, in the same way that this handsome and exceedingly prompt young lady, who was called Ustane, had embraced Leo. If he kissed her back it was a token that he accepted her, and the arrangement continued until one of them wearied of it. I am bound, however, to say that the change of husbands was not nearly so frequent as might have been expected. Nor did quarrels arise out of it, at least among the men, who, when their wives deserted them in favour of a rival, accepted the whole thing much as we accept the income-tax or our marriage laws, as something not to be disputed, and as tending to the good of the community, however disagreeable they may in particular instances prove to the individual.

It is very curious to observe how the customs of mankind on this matter vary in different countries, making morality an affair of latitude, and what is right and proper in one place wrong and improper in another. It must, however, be understood that, since all civilised nations appear to accept it as an axiom that ceremony is the touchstone of morality, there is, even according to our canons, nothing immoral about this Amahagger custom, seeing that the interchange of the embrace answers to our ceremony of marriage, which, as we know, justifies most things.

## VII.

### USTANE SINGS

When the kissing operation was finished—by the way, none of the young ladies offered to pet me in this fashion, though I saw one hovering round Job, to that respectable individual's evident alarm—the old man Billali advanced, and graciously waved us into the cave, whither we went, followed by Ustane, who did not seem inclined to take the hints I gave her that we liked privacy.

Before we had gone five paces it struck me that the cave that we were entering was none of Nature's handiwork, but, on the contrary, had been hollowed by the hand of man. So far as we could judge it appeared to be about one hundred feet in length by fifty wide, and very lofty, resembling a cathedral aisle more than anything else. From this main aisle opened passages at a distance of every twelve or fifteen feet, leading, I supposed, to smaller chambers. About fifty feet from the entrance of the cave, just where the light began to get dim, a fire was burning, which threw huge shadows upon the gloomy walls around. Here Billali halted, and asked us to be seated, saying that the people would bring us food, and accordingly we squatted ourselves down upon the rugs of skins which were spread for us, and waited. Presently the food, consisting of goat's flesh boiled, fresh milk in an earthenware pot, and boiled cobs of Indian corn, was brought by young girls. We were almost starving, and I do not think that I ever in my life before ate with such satisfaction. Indeed, before we had finished we literally ate up everything that was set before us.

When we had done, our somewhat saturnine host, Billali, who had been watching us in perfect silence, rose and addressed us. He said that it was a wonderful thing that had happened. No man had ever known or heard of white strangers arriving in the country of the People of the Rocks. Sometimes, though rarely, black men had come here, and from them they had heard of the existence of men much whiter than themselves, who sailed on the sea in ships, but for the arrival of such there was no precedent. We had, however, been seen dragging the boat up the canal, and he told us frankly that he had at once given orders for our destruction, seeing that it was unlawful for any stranger to enter here, when a message had come from "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," saying that our lives were to be spared, and that we were to be brought hither.

"Pardon me, my father," I interrupted at this point; "but if, as I understand, '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*' lives yet farther off, how could she have known of our approach?"

Billali turned, and seeing that we were alone—for the young lady, Ustane, had withdrawn when he had begun to speak—said, with a curious little laugh—

"Are there none in your land who can see without eyes and hear without ears? Ask no questions; *She* knew."

I shrugged my shoulders at this, and he proceeded to say that no further instructions had been received on the subject of our disposal, and this being so he was about to start to interview "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," generally spoken of, for the sake of brevity, as "*Hiya*" or *She* simply, who he gave us to understand was the Queen of the Amahagger, and learn her wishes.

I asked him how long he proposed to be away, and he said that by travelling hard he might be back on the fifth day, but there were many miles of marsh to cross before he came to where *She* was. He then said that every arrangement would be made for our comfort during his absence, and that, as he personally had taken a fancy to us, he sincerely trusted that the answer he should bring from *She* would be one favourable to the continuation of our existence, but at the same time he did not wish to conceal from us that he thought this doubtful, as every stranger who had ever come into the country during his grandmother's life, his mother's life, and his own life, had been put to death without mercy, and in a way he would not harrow our feelings by describing; and this had been done by the order of *She* herself, at least he supposed that it was by her order. At any rate, she never interfered to save them.

"Why," I said, "but how can that be? You are an old man, and the time you talk of must reach back three men's lives. How therefore could *She* have ordered the death of anybody at the beginning of the life of your grandmother, seeing that herself she would not have been born?"

Again he smiled—that same faint, peculiar smile, and with a deep bow departed, without making any answer; nor did we see him again for five days.

When he had gone we discussed the situation, which filled me with alarm. I did not at all like the accounts of this mysterious Queen, "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," or more shortly *She*, who apparently ordered the execution of any unfortunate stranger in a fashion so unmerciful. Leo, too, was depressed about it, but consoled himself by triumphantly pointing out that this *She* was undoubtedly the person referred to in the writing on the potsherd and in his father's letter, in proof of which he advanced Billali's allusions to her age and power. I was by this time too overwhelmed with the whole course of events that I had not even the heart left to dispute a proposition so absurd, so I suggested that we should try to go out and get a bath, of which we all stood sadly in need.

Accordingly, having indicated our wish to a middle-aged individual of an unusually saturnine cast of countenance, even among this saturnine people, who appeared to be deputed to look after us now that the Father of the hamlet had departed, we started in a body—having first lit our pipes. Outside the cave we found quite a crowd of people evidently watching for our appearance, but when they saw us come out smoking they vanished this way and that, calling out that we were great magicians. Indeed, nothing about us created so great a sensation as our tobacco smoke—not even our firearms.<sup>[1]</sup> After this we succeeded in reaching a stream that had its source in a strong ground spring, and taking our bath in peace, though some of the women, not excepting Ustane, showed a decided inclination to follow us even there.

[1] We found tobacco growing in this country as it does in every other part of Africa, and, although they were so absolutely ignorant of its other blessed qualities, the Amahagger use it habitually in the form of snuff and also for medicinal purposes.—L. H. H.

By the time that we had finished this most refreshing bath the sun was setting; indeed, when we got back to the big cave it had already set. The cave itself was full of people gathered round fires—for several more had now been lighted—and eating their evening meal by their lurid light, and by that of various lamps which were set about or hung upon the walls. These lamps were of a rude manufacture of baked earthenware, and of all shapes, some of them graceful enough. The larger ones were formed of big red earthenware pots, filled with clarified melted fat, and having a reed wick stuck through a wooden disk which filled the top of the pot. This sort of lamp required the most constant attention to prevent its going out whenever the wick burnt down, as there were no means of turning it up. The smaller hand lamps, however, which were also made of baked clay, were fitted with wicks manufactured from the pith of a palm-tree, or sometimes from the stem of a very handsome variety of fern. This kind of wick was passed through a round hole at the end of the lamp, to which a sharp piece of hard wood was attached wherewith to pierce and draw it up whenever it showed signs of burning low.

For a while we sat down and watched this grim people eating their evening meal in silence as grim as themselves, till at length, getting tired of contemplating them and the huge moving shadows on the rocky walls, I suggested to our new keeper that we should like to go to bed.

Without a word he rose, and, taking me politely by the hand, advanced with a lamp to one of the small passages that I had noticed opening out of the central cave. This we followed for about five paces, when it suddenly widened out into a small chamber, about eight feet square, and hewn out of the living rock. On one side of this chamber was a stone slab, about three feet from the ground, and running its entire length like a bunk in a cabin, and on this slab he intimated that I was to sleep. There was no window or air-hole to the chamber, and no furniture; and, on looking at it more closely, I came to the disturbing conclusion (in which, as I afterwards discovered, I was quite right) that it had originally served for a sepulchre for the dead rather than a sleeping-place for the living, the slab being designed to receive the corpse of the departed. The thought made me shudder in spite of myself; but, seeing that I must sleep somewhere, I got over the feeling as best I might, and returned to the cavern to get my blanket, which had been brought up from the boat with the other things. There I met Job, who, having been inducted to a similar apartment, had flatly declined to stop in it, saying that the look of the place gave him the horrors, and that he might as well be dead and buried in his grandfather's brick grave at once, and expressed his determination of sleeping with me if I would allow him. This, of course, I was only too glad to do.

The night passed very comfortably on the whole. I say on the whole, for personally I went through a most horrible nightmare of being buried alive, induced, no doubt, by the sepulchral nature of my surroundings. At dawn we were aroused by a loud trumpeting sound, produced, as we afterwards discovered, by a young Amahagger blowing through a hole bored in its side into a hollowed elephant tusk, which was kept for the purpose.

Taking the hint, we got up and went down to the stream to wash, after which the morning meal was served. At breakfast one of the women, no longer quite young, advanced and publicly kissed Job. I think it was in its way the most delightful thing (putting its impropriety aside for a moment) that I ever saw. Never shall I forget the respectable Job's abject terror and disgust. Job, like myself, is a bit of a misogynist—I fancy chiefly owing to the fact of his having been one of a family of seventeen—and the feelings expressed upon his countenance when he realised that he was not only being embraced publicly, and without authorisation on his own part, but also in the presence of his masters, were too mixed and painful to admit of accurate description. He sprang to his feet, and pushed the woman, a buxom person of about thirty, from him.

"Well, I never!" he gasped, whereupon probably thinking that he was only coy, she embraced him again.

"Be off with you! Get away, you minx!" he shouted, waving the wooden spoon, with which he was eating his breakfast, up and down before the lady's face. "Beg your pardon, gentlemen, I am sure I haven't encouraged her. Oh, Lord! she's coming for me again. Hold her, Mr. Holly! please hold her! I can't stand it; I can't, indeed. This has never happened to me before, gentlemen, never. There's nothing against my character," and here he broke off, and ran as hard as he could go down the cave, and for once I saw the Amahagger laugh. As for the woman, however, she did not laugh. On the contrary, she seemed to bristle with fury, which the mockery of the other women about only served to intensify. She stood there literally snarling and shaking with indignation, and, seeing her, I wished Job's scruples had been at Jericho, forming a shrewd guess that his admirable behaviour had endangered our throats. Nor, as the sequel shows, was I wrong.

The lady having retreated, Job returned in a great state of nervousness, and keeping his weather eye fixed upon every woman who came near him. I took an opportunity to explain to our hosts that Job was a married man, and had had very unhappy experiences in his domestic relations, which accounted for his presence here and his terror at the sight of women, but my remarks were received in grim silence, it being evident that our retainer's behaviour was considered as a slight to the "household" at large, although the women, after the manner of some of their most civilised sisters, made merry at the rebuff of their companion.

After breakfast we took a walk and inspected the Amahagger herds, and also their cultivated lands. They have two breeds of cattle, one large and angular, with no horns, but yielding beautiful milk; and the other, a red breed, very small and fat, excellent for meat, but of no value for milking purposes. This last breed closely resembles the Norfolk red-pole strain, only it has horns which generally curve forward over the head, sometimes to such an extent that they have to be cut to prevent them from growing into the bones of the skull. The goats are long-haired, and are used for eating only, at least I never saw them milked. As for the Amahagger cultivation, it is primitive in the extreme, being all done by means of a spade made of iron, for these people smelt and work iron. This spade is shaped more like a big spear-head than anything else, and has no shoulder to it on which the foot can be set. As a consequence, the labour of digging is very great. It is, however, all done by the men, the women, contrary to the habits of most savage races, being entirely exempt from manual toil. But then, as I think I have said elsewhere, among the Amahagger the weaker sex has established its rights.

At first we were much puzzled as to the origin and constitution of this extraordinary race, points upon which they were singularly uncommunicative. As the time went on—for the next four days passed without any striking event—we learnt something from Leo's lady friend Ustane, who, by the way, stuck to that young gentleman like his own shadow. As to origin, they had none, at least, so far as she was aware. There were, however, she informed us, mounds of masonry and many pillars, near the place where *She* lived, which was called Kôr, and which the wise said had once been houses wherein men lived, and it was suggested that they were descended from these men. No one, however, dared go near these great ruins, because they were haunted: they only looked on them from a distance. Other similar ruins were to be seen, she had heard, in various parts of the country, that is, wherever one of the mountains rose above the level of the swamp. Also the caves in which they lived had been hollowed out of the rocks by men, perhaps the same who built the cities. They themselves had no written laws, only custom, which was, however, quite as binding as law. If any man offended against the custom, he was put to death by order of the Father of the "Household." I asked how he was put to death, and she only smiled and said that I might see one day soon.

They had a Queen, however. *She* was their Queen, but she was very rarely seen, perhaps once in two or three years, when she came forth to pass sentence on some offenders, and when seen was muffled up in a big cloak, so that nobody could look upon her face. Those who waited upon her were deaf and dumb, and therefore could tell no tales, but it was reported that she was lovely as no other woman was lovely, or ever had been. It was rumoured also that she was immortal, and had power over all things, but she, Ustane, could say nothing of all that. What she believed was that the Queen chose a husband from time to time, and as soon as a female child was born, this husband, who was never again seen, was put to death. Then the female child grew up and took the place of the Queen when its mother died, and had been buried in the great caves. But of these matters none could speak with certainty. Only *She* was obeyed throughout the length and breadth of the land, and to question her command was instant death. She kept a guard, but had no regular army, and to disobey her was to die.

I asked what size the land was, and how many people lived in it. She answered that there were ten "Households," like this that she knew of, including the big "Household," where the Queen was, that all the "Households" lived in caves, in places resembling this stretch of raised country, dotted about in a vast extent of swamp, which was only to be threaded by secret paths. Often the "Households" made war on each other until *She* sent word that it was to stop, and then they instantly ceased. That and the fever which they caught in crossing the swamps prevented their numbers from increasing too much. They had no connection with any other race, indeed none lived near them, or were able to thread the vast swamps. Once an army from the direction of the great river (presumably the Zambesi) had attempted to attack them, but they got lost in the marshes, and at night, seeing the great balls of fire that move about there, tried to come to them, thinking that they marked the enemy camp, and half of them were drowned. As for the rest, they soon died of fever and starvation, not a blow being struck at them. The marshes, she told us, were absolutely impassable except to those who knew the paths, adding, what I could well believe, that we should never have reached this place where we then were had we not been brought thither.

These and many other things we learnt from Ustane during the four days' pause before our real adventures began, and, as may be imagined, they gave us considerable cause for thought. The whole thing was exceedingly remarkable, almost incredibly so, indeed, and the oddest part of it was that so far it did more or less correspond to the ancient writing on the sherd. And now it appeared that there was a mysterious Queen clothed by rumour with dread and wonderful attributes, and commonly known by the impersonal, but, to my mind, rather awesome title of *She*. Altogether, I could not make it out, nor could Leo, though of course he was exceedingly triumphant over me because I had persistently mocked at the whole thing. As for Job, he had long since abandoned any attempt to call his reason his own, and left it to drift upon the sea of circumstance. Mahomed, the Arab, who was, by the way, treated civilly indeed, but with chilling contempt, by the Amahagger, was, I discovered, in a great fright, though I could not quite make out what he was frightened about. He would sit crouched up in a corner of the cave all day long, calling upon Allah and the Prophet to protect him. When I pressed him about it, he said that he was afraid because these people were not men or women at all, but devils, and that this was an enchanted land; and, upon my word, once or twice since then I have been inclined to agree with him. And so the time went on, till the night of the fourth day after Billali had left, when something happened.

We three and Ustane were sitting round a fire in the cave just before bedtime, when suddenly the woman, who had been brooding in silence, rose, and laid her hand upon Leo's golden curls, and addressed him. Even now, when I shut my eyes, I can see her proud, imperial form, clothed alternately in dense shadow and the red flickering of the fire, as she stood, the wild centre of as weird a scene as I ever witnessed, and delivered herself of the burden of her thoughts and forebodings in a kind of rhythmical speech that ran something as follows:—

Thou art my chosen—I have waited for thee from the beginning!  
 Thou art very beautiful. Who hath hair like unto thee, or skin so white?  
 Who hath so strong an arm, who is so much a man?  
 Thine eyes are the sky, and the light in them is the stars.  
 Thou art perfect and of a happy face, and my heart turned itself towards thee.  
 Ay, when mine eyes fell upon thee I did desire thee,—  
 Then did I take thee to me—oh, thou Beloved,  
 And hold thee fast, lest harm should come unto thee.  
 Ay, I did cover thine head with mine hair, lest the sun should strike it;  
 And altogether was I thine, and thou wast altogether mine.  
 And so it went for a little space, till Time was in labour with an evil Day;  
 And then what befell on that day? Alas! my Beloved, I know not!  
 But I, I saw thee no more—I, I was lost in the blackness.  
 And she who is stronger did take thee; ay, she who is fairer than Ustane.  
 Yet didst thou turn and call upon me, and let thine eyes wander in the darkness.  
 But, nevertheless, she prevailed by Beauty, and led thee down horrible places,  
 And then, ah! then my Beloved—

Here this extraordinary woman broke off her speech, or chant, which was so much musical gibberish to us, for all that we understood of what she was talking about, and seemed to fix her flashing eyes upon the deep shadow before her. Then in a moment they acquired a vacant, terrified stare, as though they were striving to realise some half-seen horror. She lifted her hand from Leo's head, and pointed into the darkness. We all looked, and could see nothing; but she saw something, or thought she did, and something evidently that affected even her iron nerves, for, without another sound, down she fell senseless between us.

Leo, who was growing really attached to this remarkable young person, was in a great state of alarm and distress, and I, to be perfectly candid, was in a condition not far removed from superstitious fear. The whole scene was an uncanny one.

Presently, however, she recovered, and sat up with an extraordinary convulsive shudder.

"What didst thou mean, Ustane?" asked Leo, who, thanks to years of tuition, spoke Arabic very prettily.

"Nay, my chosen," she answered, with a little forced laugh. "I did but sing unto thee after the fashion of my people. Surely, I meant nothing. How could I speak of that which is not yet?"

"And what didst thou see, Ustane?" I asked, looking her sharply in the face.

"Nay," she answered again, "I saw naught. Ask me not what I saw. Why should I fright ye?" And then, turning to Leo with a look of the most utter tenderness that I ever saw upon the face of a woman, civilised or savage, she took his head between her hands, and kissed him on the forehead as a mother might.

"When I'm gone from thee, my chosen," she said; "when at night thou stretchest out thine hand and canst not find me, then shouldst thou think at times of me for of a truth I love thee well though I be not fit to wash thy feet. And now let us love and take that which's given us and be happy; for in the grave there's no love and no warmth, nor any touching of the lips. Nothing perchance, or perchance but bitter memories of what might've been. Tonight the hours are our own, how know we to whom they'll belong tomorrow?"

## VIII.

# THE FEAST, AND AFTER!

On the day following this remarkable scene—a scene calculated to make a deep impression upon anybody who beheld it, more because of what it suggested and seemed to foreshadow than of what it revealed—it was announced to us that a feast would be held that evening in our honour. I did my best to get out of it, saying that we were modest people, and cared little for feasts, but my remarks being received with the silence of displeasure, I thought it wisest to hold my tongue.

Accordingly, just before sundown, I was informed that everything was ready, and, accompanied by Job, went into the cave, where I met Leo, who was, as usual, followed by Ustane. These two had been out walking somewhere, and knew nothing of the projected festivity till that moment. When Ustane heard of it I saw an expression of horror spring up upon her handsome features. Turning she caught a man who was passing up the cave by the arm, and asked him something in an imperious tone. His answer seemed to reassure her a little, for she looked relieved, though far from satisfied. Next she appeared to attempt some remonstrance with the man, who was a person in authority, but he spoke angrily to her, and shook her off, and then, changing his mind, led her by the arm, and sat her down between himself and another man in the circle round the fire, and I perceived that for some reason of her own she thought it best to submit.

The fire in the cave was an unusually big one that night, and in a large circle round it were gathered about thirty-five men and two women, Ustane and the woman to avoid whom Job had played the *rôle* of another Scriptural character. The men were sitting in perfect silence, as was their custom, each with his great spear stuck upright behind him, in a socket cut in the rock for that purpose. Only one or two wore the yellowish linen garment of which I have spoken, the rest had nothing on except the leopard's skin about the middle.

"What's up now, sir," said Job, doubtfully. "Bless us and save us, there's that woman again. Now, surely, she can't be after me, seeing that I have given her no encouragement. They give me the creeps, the whole lot of them, and that's a fact. Why look, they have asked Mahomed to dine, too. There, that lady of mine is talking to him in as nice and civil a way as possible. Well, I'm glad it isn't me, that's all."

We looked up, and sure enough the woman in question had risen, and was escorting the wretched Mahomed from his corner, where, overcome by some acute prescience of horror, he had been seated, shivering, and calling on Allah. He appeared unwilling enough to come, if for no other reason perhaps because it was an unaccustomed honour, for hitherto his food had been given to him apart. Anyway I could see that he was in a state of great terror, for his tottering legs would scarcely support his stout, bulky form, and I think it was rather owing to the resources of barbarism behind him, in the shape of a huge Amahagger with a proportionately huge spear, than to the seductions of the lady who led him by the hand, that he consented to come at all.

"Well," I said to the others, "I don't at all like the look of things, but I suppose we must face it out. Have you fellows got your revolvers on? because, if so, you had better see that they are loaded."

"I have, sir," said Job, tapping his Colt, "but Mr. Leo has only got his hunting knife, though that is big enough, surely."

Feeling that it would not do to wait while the missing weapon was fetched, we advanced boldly, and seated ourselves in a line, with our backs against the side of the cave.

As soon as we were seated, an earthenware jar was passed round containing a fermented fluid, of by no means unpleasant taste, though apt to turn upon the stomach, made from crushed grain—not Indian corn, but a small brown grain that grows upon its stem in clusters, not unlike that which in the southern part of Africa is known by the name of Kafir corn. The vase which contained this liquor was very curious, and as it more or less resembled many hundreds of others in use among the Amahagger I may as well describe it. These vases are of a very ancient manufacture, and of all sizes. None such can have been made in the country for hundreds, or rather thousands, of years. They are found in the rock tombs, of which I shall give a description in their proper place, and my own belief is that, after the fashion of the Egyptians, with whom the former inhabitants of this country may have had some connection, they were used to receive the viscera of the dead. Leo, however, is of opinion that, as in the case of Etruscan amphoræ, they were placed there for the spiritual use of the deceased. They are mostly two-handled, and of all sizes, some being nearly three feet in height, and running from that down to as many inches. In shape they vary, but all are exceedingly beautiful and graceful, being made of a very fine black ware, not lustrous, but slightly rough. On this groundwork are inlaid figures much more graceful and lifelike than any others that I have seen on antique vases. Some of these inlaid pictures represent love-scenes with a childlike simplicity and freedom of manner which would not commend itself to the taste of the present day. Others again give pictures of maidens dancing, and yet others of hunting-scenes. For instance, the very vase from which we were then drinking had on one side a most spirited drawing of men, apparently white in colour, attacking a bull-elephant with spears, while on the reverse was a picture, not quite so well done, of a hunter shooting an arrow at a running antelope, I should say from the look of it either an eland or a koodoo.

This is a digression at a critical moment, but it is not too long for the occasion, for the occasion itself was very long. With the exception of the periodical passing of the vase, and the movement necessary to throw fuel on to the fire, nothing happened for the best part of a whole hour. Nobody spoke a word. There we all sat in perfect silence, staring at the glare and glow of the large fire, and at the shadows thrown by the flickering earthenware lamps (which, by the way, were not ancient). On the open space between us and the fire lay a large wooden tray, with four short handles to it, exactly like a butcher's tray, only not hollowed out. By the side of the tray was a great pair of long-handled iron pincers, and on the other side of the fire was a similar pair. Somehow I did not at all like the appearance of this tray and the accompanying pincers. There I sat and stared at them and at the silent circle of the fierce moody faces of the men, and reflected that it was all very awful, and that we were absolutely in the power of this alarming people, who, to

me at any rate, were all the more formidable because their true character was still very much of a mystery to us. They might be better than I thought them, or they might be worse. I feared that they were worse, and I was not wrong. It was a curious sort of a feast, I reflected, in appearance indeed, an entertainment of the Barmecide stamp, for there was absolutely nothing to eat.

At last, just as I was beginning to feel as though I were being mesmerised, a move was made. Without the slightest warning, a man from the other side of the circle called out in a loud voice—

“Where is the flesh that we shall eat?”

Thereon everybody in the circle answered in a deep measured tone, and stretching out the right arm towards the fire as he spoke—

*“The flesh will come.”*

“Is it a goat?” said the same man.

*“It is a goat without horns, and more than a goat, and we shall slay it,”* they answered with one voice, and turning half round they one and all grasped the handles of their spears with the right hand, and then simultaneously let them go.

“Is it an ox?” said the man again.

*“It is an ox without horns, and more than an ox, and we shall slay it,”* was the answer, and again the spears were grasped, and again let go.

Then came a pause, and I noticed, with horror and a rising of the hair, that the woman next to Mahomed began to fondle him, patting his cheeks and calling him by names of endearment while her fierce eyes played up and down his trembling form. I do not know why the sight frightened me so, but it did frighten us all dreadfully, especially Leo. The caressing was so snake-like, and so evidently a part of some ghastly formula that had to be gone through.<sup>[1]</sup> I saw Mahomed turn white under his brown skin, sickly white with fear.

[1] We afterwards learnt that its object was to pretend to the victim that he was the object of love and admiration, and so to sooth his injured feelings, and cause him to expire in a happy and contented frame of mind.—L. H. H.

“Is the meat ready to be cooked?” asked the voice, more rapidly.

*“It is ready; it is ready.”*

“Is the pot hot to cook it?” it continued, in a sort of scream that echoed painfully down the great recesses of the cave.

*“It is hot; it is hot.”*

“Great heavens!” roared Leo, “remember the writing, *‘The people who place pots upon the heads of strangers.’*”

As he said the words, before we could stir, or even take the matter in, two great ruffians jumped up, and, seizing the long pincers, thrust them into the heart of the fire, and the woman who had been caressing Mahomed suddenly produced a fibre noose from under her girdle or moocha, and, slipping it over his shoulders, ran it tight, while the men next to him seized him by the legs. The two men with the pincers gave a heave, and, scattering the fire this way and that upon the rocky floor, lifted from it a large earthenware pot, heated to a white heat. In an instant, almost with a single movement, they had reached the spot where Mahomed was struggling. He fought like a fiend, shrieking in the abandonment of his despair, and notwithstanding the noose round him, and the efforts of the men who held his legs, the advancing wretches were for the moment unable to accomplish their purpose, which, horrible and incredible as it seems, was to put the red-hot pot upon his head.

I sprang to my feet with a yell of horror, and drawing my revolver fired it by a sort of instinct straight at the diabolical woman who had been caressing Mahomed, and was now gripping him in her arms. The bullet struck her in the back and killed her, and to this day I am glad that it did, for, as it afterwards transpired, she had availed herself of the anthropophagous customs of the Amahagger to organise the whole thing in revenge of the slight put upon her by Job. She sank down dead, and as she did so, to my terror and dismay, Mahomed, by a superhuman effort, burst from his tormenters, and, springing high into the air, fell dying upon her corpse. The heavy bullet from my pistol had driven through the bodies of both, at once striking down the murderess, and saving her victim from a death a hundred times more horrible. It was an awful and yet a most merciful accident.

For a moment there was a silence of astonishment. The Amahagger had never heard the report of a firearm before, and its effects dismayed them. But the next instant a man close to us recovered himself, and seized his spear preparatory to making a lunge with it at Leo, who was the nearest to him.

“Run for it!” I shouted, setting the example by starting up the cave as hard as my legs would carry me. I would have made for the open air if it had been possible, but there were men in the way, and, besides, I had caught sight of the forms of a crowd of people standing out clear against the skyline beyond the entrance to the cave. Up the cave I went, and after me came the others, and after them thundered the whole crowd of cannibals, mad with fury at the death of the woman. With a bound I cleared the prostrate form of Mahomed. As I flew over him I felt the heat from the red-hot pot, which was lying close by, strike upon my legs, and by its glow saw his hands—for he was not quite dead—still feebly moving. At the top of the cave was a little platform of rock three feet or so high by about eight deep, on which two large lamps were placed at night. Whether this platform had been left as a seat, or as a raised point afterwards to be cut away when it had served its purpose as a standing place from which to carry on the excavations, I do not know—at least, I did not then. At any rate, we all three reached it, and, jumping on it, prepared to sell our lives as dearly as we could. For a few seconds the crowd that was pressing on our heels hung back when they saw us face round upon them. Job was on one side of the rock to the left, Leo in the centre, and I to the right. Behind us were the lamps. Leo bent forward, and looked down the long lane of shadows, terminating in the fire and lighted lamps, through which the quiet forms of our would-be murderers flitted to and fro with the faint light glinting on their spears, for even their fury was silent as a bulldog’s. The only other thing visible was the red-hot pot still glowing angrily in the gloom. There was a curious light in Leo’s eyes, and his handsome face was set like a stone. In his right hand was his heavy hunting-knife. He shifted its thong a little up his wrist and then put his arm round me and gave me a good hug.

“Good-bye, old fellow,” he said, “my dear friend—my more than father. We have no chance against those scoundrels; they will finish us in a few minutes, and eat us afterwards, I suppose. Good-bye. I led you into this. I hope you will forgive me. Good-bye, Job.”

“God’s will be done,” I said, setting my teeth, as I prepared for the end. At that moment, with an exclamation, Job lifted his revolver and fired, and hit a man—not the man he had aimed at, by the way: anything that Job shot at was perfectly safe.

On they came with a rush, and I fired too as fast as I could, and checked them—between us, Job and I, besides the woman, killed or mortally wounded five men with our pistols before they were emptied. But we had no time to reload, and they still came on in a

way that was almost splendid in its recklessness, seeing that they did not know but that we could go on firing for ever.

A great fellow bounded up upon the platform, and Leo struck him dead with one blow of his powerful arm, sending the knife right through him. I did the same by another, but Job missed his stroke, and I saw a brawny Amahagger grip him by the middle and whirl him off the rock. The knife not being secured by a thong fell from Job's hand as he did so, and, by a most happy accident for him, lit upon its handle on the rock, just as the body of the Amahagger, who was undermost, struck upon its point and was transfixed upon it. What happened to Job after that I am sure I do not know, but my own impression is that he lay still upon the corpse of his deceased assailant, "playing 'possum" as the Americans say. As for myself, I was soon involved in a desperate encounter with two ruffians, who, luckily for me, had left their spears behind them; and for the first time in my life the great physical power with which Nature has endowed me stood me in good stead. I had hacked at the head of one man with my hunting-knife, which was almost as big and heavy as a short sword, with such vigour, that the sharp steel had split his skull down to the eyes, and was held so fast by it that as he suddenly fell sideways the knife was twisted right out of my hand.

Then it was that the two others sprang upon me. I saw them coming, and got an arm round the waist of each, and down we all fell upon the floor of the cave together, rolling over and over. They were strong men, but I was mad with rage, and that awful lust for slaughter which will creep into the hearts of the most civilised of us when blows are flying, and life and death tremble on the turn. My arms were round the two swarthy demons, and I hugged them till I heard their ribs crack and crunch up beneath my grip. They twisted and writhed like snakes, and clawed and battered at me with their fists, but I held on. Lying on my back there, so that their bodies might protect me from spear thrusts from above, I slowly crushed the life out of them, and as I did so, strange as it may seem, I thought of what the amiable Head of my College at Cambridge (who is a member of the Peace Society) and my brother Fellows would say if by clairvoyance they could see me, of all men, playing such a bloody game. Soon my assailants grew faint, and almost ceased to struggle, their breath had failed them, and they were dying, but still I dared not leave them, for they died very slowly. I knew that if I relaxed my grip they would revive. The other ruffians probably thought—for we were all three lying in the shadow of the ledge—that we were all dead together, at any rate they did not interfere with our little tragedy.

I turned my head, and as I lay gasping in the throes of that awful struggle I could see that Leo was off the rock now, for the lamplight fell full upon him. He was still on his feet, but in the centre of a surging mass of struggling men, who were striving to pull him down as wolves pull down a stag. Up above them towered his beautiful pale face crowned with its bright curls (for Leo is six feet two high), and I saw that he was fighting with a desperate abandonment and energy that was at once splendid and hideous to behold. He drove his knife through one man—they were so close to and mixed up with him that they could not get at him to kill him with their big spears, and they had no knives or sticks. The man fell, and then somehow the knife was wrenched from his hand, leaving him defenceless, and I thought the end had come. But no; with a desperate effort he broke loose from them, seized the body of the man he had just slain, and lifting it high in the air hurled it right at the mob of his assailants, so that the shock and weight of it swept some five or six of them to the earth. But in a minute they were all up again, except one, whose skull was smashed, and had once more fastened upon him. And then slowly, and with infinite labour and struggling, the wolves bore the lion down. Once even then he recovered himself, and felled an Amahagger with his fist, but it was more than man could do to hold his own for long against so many, and at last he came crashing down upon the rock floor, falling as an oak falls, and bearing with him to the earth all those who clung about him. They gripped him by his arms and legs, and then cleared off his body.

"A spear," cried a voice—"a spear to cut his throat, and a vessel to catch his blood."

I shut my eyes, for I saw the man coming with a spear, and myself, I could not stir to Leo's help, for I was growing weak, and the two men on me were not yet dead, and a deadly sickness overcame me.

Then suddenly there was a disturbance, and involuntarily I opened my eyes again, and looked towards the scene of murder. The girl Ustane had thrown herself on Leo's prostrate form, covering his body with her body, and fastening her arms about his neck. They tried to drag her from him, but she twisted her legs round his, and hung on like a bulldog, or rather like a creeper to a tree, and they could not. Then they tried to stab him in the side without hurting her, but somehow she shielded him, and he was only wounded.

At last they lost patience.

"Drive the spear through the man and the woman together," said a voice, the same voice that had asked the questions at that ghastly feast, "so of a verity shall they be wed."

Then I saw the man with the weapon straighten himself for the effort. I saw the cold steel gleam on high, and once more I shut my eyes.

As I did so I heard the voice of a man thunder out in tones that rang and echoed down the rocky ways—

"Cease!"

Then I fainted, and as I did so it flashed through my darkening mind that I was passing down into the last oblivion of death.

## IX.

### A LITTLE FOOT

When I opened my eyes again I found myself lying on a skin mat not far from the fire round which we had been gathered for that dreadful feast. Near me lay Leo, still apparently in a swoon, and over him was bending the tall form of the girl Ustane, who was washing a deep spear wound in his side with cold water preparatory to binding it up with linen. Leaning against the wall of the cave behind her was Job, apparently uninjured, but bruised and trembling. On the other side of the fire, tossed about this way and that, as though they had thrown themselves down to sleep in some moment of absolute exhaustion, were the bodies of those whom we had killed in our frightful struggle for life. I counted them: there were twelve besides the woman, and the corpse of poor Mahomed, who had died by my hand, which, the fire-stained pot at its side, was placed at the end of the irregular line. To the left a body of men were engaged in binding the arms of the survivors of the cannibals behind them, and then fastening them two and two. The villains were submitting with a look of sulky indifference upon their faces which accorded ill with the baffled fury that gleamed in their sombre eyes. In front of these men, directing the operations, stood no other than our friend Billali, looking rather tired, but particularly patriarchal with his flowing beard, and as cool and unconcerned as though he were superintending the cutting up of an ox.

Presently he turned, and perceiving that I was sitting up advanced to me, and with the utmost courtesy said that he trusted that I felt better. I answered that at present I scarcely knew how I felt, except that I ached all over.

Then he bent down and examined Leo's wound.

"It is an evil cut," he said, "but the spear has not pierced the entrails. He will recover."

"Thanks to thy arrival, my father," I answered. "In another minute we should all have been beyond the reach of recovery, for those devils of thine would have slain us as they would have slain our servant," and I pointed towards Mahomed.

The old man ground his teeth, and I saw an extraordinary expression of malignity light up his eyes.

"Fear not, my son," he answered. "Vengeance shall be taken on them such as would make the flesh twist upon the bones merely to hear of it. To *She* shall they go, and her vengeance shall be worthy of her greatness. That man," pointing to Mahomed, "I tell thee that man would have died a merciful death to the death these hyæna-men shall die. Tell me, I pray of thee, how it came about."

In a few words I sketched what had happened.

"Ah, so," he answered. "Thou seest, my son, here there is a custom that if a stranger comes into this country he may be slain by 'the pot,' and eaten."

"It is hospitality turned upside down," I answered feebly. "In our country we entertain a stranger, and give him food to eat. Here ye eat him, and are entertained."

"It is a custom," he answered, with a shrug. "Myself I think it an evil one; but then," he added by an afterthought, "I do not like the taste of strangers, especially after they have wandered through the swamps and lived on wild-fowl. When *She-who-must-be-obeyed* sent orders that ye were to be saved alive she said naught of the black man, therefore, being hyænas, these men lusted after his flesh, and the woman it was, whom thou didst rightly slay, who put it into their evil hearts to hot-pot him. Well, they will have their reward. Better for them would it be if they had never seen the light than that they should stand before *She* in her terrible anger. Happy are those of them who died by your hands."

"Ah," he went on, "it was a gallant fight that ye fought. Knowest thou that, long-armed old baboon that thou art, thou hast crushed in the ribs of those two who are laid out there as though they were but as the shell on an egg? And the young one, the lion, it was a beautiful stand that he made—one against so many—three did he slay outright, and that one there"—and he pointed to a body that was still moving a little—"will die anon, for his head is cracked across, and others of those who are bound are hurt. It was a gallant fight, and thou and he have made a friend of me by it, for I love to see a well-fought fray. But tell me, my son, the baboon—and now I think of it thy face, too, is hairy, and altogether like a baboon's—how was it that ye slew those with a hole in them?—Ye made a noise, they say, and slew them—they fell down on the faces at the noise?"

I explained to him as well as I could, but very shortly—for I was terribly wearied, and only persuaded to talk at all through fear of offending one so powerful if I refused to do so—what were the properties of gunpowder, and he instantly suggested that I should illustrate what I said by operating on the person of one of the prisoners. One, he said, never would be counted, and it would not only be very interesting to him, but would give me the opportunity of an instalment of revenge. He was greatly astounded when I told him that it was not our custom to avenge ourselves in cold blood, and that we left vengeance to the law and a higher power, of which he knew nothing. I added, however, that when I recovered I would take him out shooting with us, and he should kill an animal for himself, and at this he was as pleased as a child at the promise of a new toy.

Just then Leo opened his eyes beneath the stimulus of some brandy (of which we still had a little) that Job had poured down his throat, and our conversation came to an end.

After this we managed to get Leo, who was in a very poor way indeed, and only half conscious, safely off to bed, supported by Job and that brave girl Ustane, to whom, had I not been afraid that she might resent it, I would certainly have given a kiss for her splendid behaviour in saving my boy's life at the risk of her own. But Ustane was not the sort of young person with whom one would care to take liberties unless one were perfectly certain that they would not be misunderstood, so I repressed my inclinations. Then, bruised and battered, but with a sense of safety in my breast to which I had for some days been a stranger, I crept off to my own little sepulchre, not forgetting before I laid down in it to thank Providence from the bottom of my heart that it was not a sepulchre indeed,

as, save for a merciful combination of events that I can only attribute to its protection, it would certainly have been for me that night. Few men have been nearer their end and yet escaped it than we were on that dreadful day.

I am a bad sleeper at the best of times, and my dreams that night when at last I got to rest were not of the pleasantest. The awful vision of poor Mahomed struggling to escape the red-hot pot would haunt them, and then in the background, as it were, a veiled form was always hovering, which, from time to time, seemed to draw the coverings from its body, revealing now the perfect shape of a lovely blooming woman, and now again the white bones of a grinning skeleton, and which, as it veiled and unveiled, uttered the mysterious and apparently meaningless sentence:—

“That which is alive and hath known death, and that which is dead yet can never die, for in the Circle of the Spirit life is naught and death is naught. Yea, all things live for ever, though at times they sleep and are forgotten.”

The morning came at last, but when it came I found that I was too stiff and sore to rise. About seven Job arrived, limping terribly, and with his face the colour of a rotten apple, and told me that Leo had slept fairly, but was very weak. Two hours afterwards Billali (Job called him “Billy-goat,” to which, indeed, his white beard gave him some resemblance, or more familiarly, “Billy”) came too, bearing a lamp in his hand, his towering form reaching nearly to the roof of the little chamber. I pretended to be asleep, and through the cracks of my eyelids watched his sardonic but handsome old face. He fixed his hawk-like eyes upon me, and stroked his glorious white beard, which, by the way, would have been worth a hundred a year to any London barber as an advertisement.

“Ah!” I heard him mutter (Billali had a habit of muttering to himself), “he is ugly—ugly as the other is beautiful—a very Baboon, it was a good name. But I like the man. Strange now, at my age, that I should like a man. What says the proverb—‘Mistrust all men, and slay him whom thou mistrustest overmuch; and as for women, flee from them, for they are evil, and in the end will destroy thee.’ It is a good proverb, especially the last part of it: I think that it must have come down from the ancients. Nevertheless I like this Baboon, and I wonder where they taught him his tricks, and I trust that *She* will not bewitch him. Poor Baboon! he must be wearied after that fight. I will go lest I should awake him.”

I waited till he had turned and was nearly through the entrance, walking softly on tiptoe, and then I called after him.

“My father,” I said, “is it thou?”

“Yes, my son, it is I; but let me not disturb thee. I did but come to see how thou didst fare, and to tell thee that those who would have slain thee, my Baboon, are by now far on their road to *She*. *She* said that ye also were to come at once, but I fear ye cannot yet.”

“Nay,” I said, “not till we have recovered a little; but have me borne out into the daylight, I pray thee, my father. I love not this place.”

“Ah, no,” he answered, “it hath a sad air. I remember when I was a boy I found the body of a fair woman lying where thou liest now, yes, on that very bench. She was so beautiful that I was wont to creep in hither with a lamp and gaze upon her. Had it not been for her cold hands, almost could I think that she slept and would one day awake, so fair and peaceful was she in her robes of white. White was she, too, and her hair was yellow and lay down her almost to the feet. There are many such still in the tombs at the place where *She* is, for those who set them there had a way I know naught of, whereby to keep their beloved out of the crumbling hand of Decay, even when Death had slain them. Ay, day by day I came hither, and gazed on her till at last—laugh not at me, stranger, for I was but a silly lad—I learned to love that dead form, that shell which once had held a life that no more is. I would creep up to her and kiss her cold face, and wonder how many men had lived and died since she was, and who had loved her and embraced her in the days that long had passed away. And, my Baboon, I think I learned wisdom from that dead one, for of a truth it taught me of the littleness of life, and the length of Death, and how all things that are under the sun go down one path, and are for ever forgotten. And so I mused, and it seemed to me that wisdom flowed into me from the dead, till one day my mother, a watchful woman, but hasty-minded, seeing I was changed, followed me, and saw the beautiful white one, and feared that I was bewitched, as, indeed, I was. So half in dread, and half in anger, she took up the lamp, and standing the dead woman up against the wall even there, set fire to her hair, and she burnt fiercely, even down to the feet, for those who are thus kept burn excellently well.

“See, my son, there on the roof is yet the smoke of her burning.”

I looked up doubtfully, and there, sure enough, on the roof of the sepulchre, was a peculiarly unctuous and sooty mark, three feet or more across. Doubtless it had in the course of years been rubbed off the sides of the little cave, but on the roof it remained, and there was no mistaking its appearance.

“She burnt,” he went on in a meditative way, “even to the feet, but the feet I came back and saved, cutting the burnt bone from them, and hid them under the stone bench there, wrapped up in a piece of linen. Surely, I remember it as though it were but yesterday. Perchance they are there, if none have found them, even to this hour. Of a truth I have not entered this chamber from that time to this very day. Stay, I will look,” and, kneeling down, he groped about with his long arm in the recess under the stone bench. Presently his face brightened, and with an exclamation he pulled something forth which was caked in dust; which he shook on to the floor. It was covered with the remains of a rotting rag, which he undid, and revealed to my astonished gaze a beautifully shaped and almost white woman’s foot, looking as fresh and firm as though it had but now been placed there.

“Thou seest, my son, the Baboon,” he said, in a sad voice, “I spake the truth to thee, for here is yet one foot remaining. Take it, my son, and gaze upon it.”

I took this cold fragment of mortality in my hand and looked at it in the light of the lamp with feelings which I cannot describe, so mixed up were they between astonishment, fear, and fascination. It was light, much lighter I should say than it had been in the living state, and the flesh to all appearance was still flesh, though about it there clung a faintly aromatic odour. For the rest it was not shrunk or shrivelled, or even black and unsightly, like the flesh of Egyptian mummies, but plump and fair, and, except where it had been slightly burnt, perfect as on the day of death—a very triumph of embalming.

Poor little foot! I set it down upon the stone bench where it had lain for so many thousand years, and wondered whose was the beauty that it had upborne through the pomp and pageantry of a forgotten civilisation—first as a merry child’s, then as a blushing maid’s, and lastly as a perfect woman’s. Through what halls of Life had its soft step echoed, and in the end, with what courage had it trodden down the dusty ways of Death! To whose side had it stolen in the hush of night when the black slave slept upon the marble floor, and who had listened for its stealing? Shapely little foot! Well might it have been set upon the proud neck of a conqueror bent at last to woman’s beauty, and well might the lips of nobles and of kings have been pressed upon its jewelled whiteness.

I wrapped up this relic of the past in the remnants of the old linen rag which had evidently formed a portion of its owner’s grave-clothes, for it was partially burnt, and put it away in my Gladstone bag—a strange combination, I thought. Then with Billali’s help I staggered off to see Leo. I found him dreadfully bruised, worse even than myself, perhaps owing to the excessive whiteness of his

skin, and faint and weak with the loss of blood from the flesh wound in his side, but for all that cheerful as a cricket, and asking for some breakfast. Job and Ustane got him on to the bottom, or rather the sacking of a litter, which was removed from its pole for that purpose, and with the aid of old Billali carried him out into the shade at the mouth of the cave, from which, by the way, every trace of the slaughter of the previous night had now been removed, and there we all breakfasted, and indeed spent that day, and most of the two following ones.

On the third morning Job and myself were practically recovered. Leo also was so much better that I yielded to Billali's often expressed entreaty, and agreed to start at once upon our journey to Kôr, which we were told was the name of the place where the mysterious *She* lived, though I still feared for its effect upon Leo, and especially lest the motion should cause his wound, which was scarcely skinned over, to break open again. Indeed, had it not been for Billali's evident anxiety to get off, which led us to suspect that some difficulty or danger might threaten us if we did not comply with it, I would not have consented to go.

## X.

# SPECULATIONS

Within an hour of our finally deciding to start five litters were brought up to the door of the cave, each accompanied by four regular bearers and two spare hands, also a band of about fifty armed Amahagger, who were to form the escort and carry the baggage. Three of these litters, of course, were for us, and one for Billali, who, I was immensely relieved to hear, was to be our companion, while the fifth I presumed was for the use of Ustane.

"Does the lady go with us, my father?" I asked of Billali, as he stood superintending things in general.

He shrugged his shoulders as he answered—

"If she wills. In this country the women do what they please. We worship them, and give them their way, because without them the world could not go on; they are the source of life."

"Ah," I said, the matter never having struck me quite in that light before.

"We worship them," he went on, "up to a point, till at last they get unbearable, which," he added, "they do about every second generation."

"And then what do you do?" I asked, with curiosity.

"Then," he answered, with a faint smile, "we rise, and kill the old ones as an example to the young ones, and to show them that we are the strongest. My poor wife was killed in that way three years ago. It was very sad, but to tell thee the truth, my son, life has been happier since, for my age protects me from the young ones."

"In short," I replied, quoting the saying of a great man whose wisdom has not yet lightened the darkness of the Amahagger, "thou hast found thy position one of greater freedom and less responsibility."

This phrase puzzled him a little at first from its vagueness, though I think my translation hit off its sense very well, but at last he saw it, and appreciated it.

"Yes, yes, my Baboon," he said, "I see it now, but all the 'responsibilities' are killed, at least some of them are, and that is why there are so few old women about just now. Well, they brought it on themselves. As for this girl," he went on, in a graver tone, "I know not what to say. She is a brave girl, and she loves the Lion (Leo); thou sawest how she clung to him, and saved his life. Also, she is, according to our custom, wed to him, and has a right to go where he goes, unless," he added significantly, "*She* would say her no, for her word overrides all rights."

"And if *She* bade her leave him, and the girl refused? What then?"

"If," he said, with a shrug, "the hurricane bids the tree to bend, and it will not; what happens?"

And then, without waiting for an answer, he turned and walked to his litter, and in ten minutes from that time we were all well under way.

It took us an hour and more to cross the cup of the volcanic plain, and another half-hour or so to climb the edge on the farther side. Once there, however, the view was a very fine one. Before us was a long steep slope of grassy plain, broken here and there by clumps of trees mostly of the thorn tribe. At the bottom of this gentle slope, some nine or ten miles away, we could make out a dim sea of marsh, over which the foul vapours hung like smoke about a city. It was easy going for the bearers down the slopes, and by midday we had reached the borders of the dismal swamp. Here we halted to eat our midday meal, and then, following a winding and devious path, plunged into the morass. Presently the path, at any rate to our unaccustomed eyes, grew so faint as to be almost indistinguishable from those made by the aquatic beasts and birds, and it is to this day a mystery to me how our bearers found their way across the marshes. Ahead of the cavalcade marched two men with long poles, which they now and again plunged into the ground before them, the reason of this being that the nature of the soil frequently changed from causes with which I am not acquainted, so that places which might be safe enough to cross one month would certainly swallow the wayfarer the next. Never did I see a more dreary and depressing scene. Miles on miles of quagmire, varied only by bright green strips of comparatively solid ground, and by deep and sullen pools fringed with tall rushes, in which the bitterns boomed and the frogs croaked incessantly: miles on miles of it without a break, unless the fever fog can be called a break. The only life in this great morass was that of the aquatic birds, and the animals that fed on them, of both of which there were vast numbers. Geese, cranes, ducks, teal, coot, snipe, and plover swarmed all around us, many being of varieties that were quite new to me, and all so tame that one could almost have knocked them over with a stick. Among these birds I especially noticed a very beautiful variety of painted snipe, almost the size of a woodcock, and with a flight more resembling that bird's than an English snipe's. In the pools, too, was a species of small alligator or enormous iguana, I do not know which, that fed, Billali told me, upon the waterfowl, also large quantities of a hideous black water-snake, of which the bite is very dangerous, though not, I gathered, so deadly as a cobra's or a puff adder's. The bull-frogs were also very large, and with voices proportionate to their size; and as for the mosquitoes—the "musqueteers," as Job called them—they were, if possible, even worse than they had been on the river, and tormented us greatly. Undoubtedly, however, the worst feature of the swamp was the awful smell of rotting vegetation that hung about it, which was at times positively overpowering, and the malarious exhalations that accompanied it, which we were of course obliged to breathe.

On we went through it all, till at last the sun sank in sullen splendour just as we reached a spot of rising ground about two acres in extent—a little oasis of dry in the midst of the miry wilderness—where Billali announced that we were to camp. The camping, however, turned out to be a very simple process, and consisted, in fact, in sitting down on the ground round a scanty fire made of dry reeds and some wood that had been brought with us. However, we made the best we could of it, and smoked and ate with such

appetite as the smell of damp, stifling heat would allow, for it was very hot on this low land, and yet, oddly enough, chilly at times. But, however hot it was, we were glad enough to keep near the fire, because we found that the mosquitoes did not like the smoke. Presently we rolled ourselves up in our blankets and tried to go to sleep, but so far as I was concerned the bull-frogs, and the extraordinary roaring and alarming sound produced by hundreds of snipe hovering high in the air, made sleep an impossibility, to say nothing of our other discomforts. I turned and looked at Leo, who was next me; he was dozing, but his face had a flushed appearance that I did not like, and by the flickering fire-light I saw Ustane, who was lying on the other side of him, raise herself from time to time upon her elbow, and look at him anxiously enough.

However, I could do nothing for him, for we had all already taken a good dose of quinine, which was the only preventive we had; so I lay and watched the stars come out by thousands, till all the immense arch of heaven was strewn with glittering points, and every point a world! Here was a glorious sight by which man might well measure his own insignificance! Soon I gave up thinking about it, for the mind wearies easily when it strives to grapple with the Infinite, and to trace the footsteps of the Almighty as he strides from sphere to sphere, or deduce His purpose from His works. Such things are not for us to know. Knowledge is to the strong, and we are weak. Too much wisdom would perchance blind our imperfect sight, and too much strength would make us drunk, and over-weight our feeble reason till it fell and we were drowned in the depths of our own vanity. For what is the first result of man's increased knowledge interpreted from Nature's book by the persistent effort of his purblind observation? Is it not but too often to make him question the existence of his Maker, or indeed of any intelligent purpose beyond his own? The truth is veiled, because we could no more look upon her glory than we can upon the sun. It would destroy us. Full knowledge is not for man as man is here, for his capacities, which he is apt to think so great, are indeed but small. The vessel is soon filled, and, were one-thousandth part of the unutterable and silent wisdom that directs the rolling of those shining spheres, and the Force which makes them roll, pressed into it, it would be shattered into fragments. Perhaps in some other place and time it may be otherwise, who can tell? Here the lot of man born of the flesh is but to endure midst toil and tribulation, to catch at the bubbles blown by Fate, which he calls pleasure, thankful if before they burst they rest a moment in his hand, and when the tragedy is played out, and his hour comes to perish, to pass humbly whither he knows not.

Above me, as I lay, shone the eternal stars, and there at my feet the impish marsh-born balls of fire rolled this way and that, vapour-tossed and earth-desiring, and methought that in the two I saw a type and image of what man is, and what perchance man may one day be, if the living Force who ordained him and them should so ordain this also. Oh, that it might be ours to rest year by year upon that high level of the heart to which at times we momentarily attain! Oh, that we could shake loose the prisoned pinions of the soul and soar to that superior point, whence, like to some traveller looking out through space from Darien's giddiest peak, we might gaze with spiritual eyes deep into Infinity!

What would it be to cast off this earthy robe, to have done for ever with these earthy thoughts and miserable desires; no longer, like those corpse candles, to be tossed this way and that, by forces beyond our control; or which, if we can theoretically control them, we are at times driven by the exigencies of our nature to obey! Yes, to cast them off, to have done with the foul and thorny places of the world; and, like to those glittering points above me, to rest on high wrapped for ever in the brightness of our better selves, that even now shines in us as fire faintly shines within those lurid balls, and lay down our littleness in that wide glory of our dreams, that invisible but surrounding Good, from which all truth and beauty comes!

These and many such thoughts passed through my mind that night. They come to torment us all at times. I say to torment, for, alas! thinking can only serve to measure out the helplessness of thought. What is the purpose of our feeble crying in the awful silences of space? Can our dim intelligence read the secrets of that star-strewn sky? Does any answer come out of it? Never any at all, nothing but echoes and fantastic visions! And yet we believe that there is an answer, and that upon a time a new Dawn will come blushing down the ways of our enduring night. We believe it, for its reflected beauty even now shines up continually in our hearts from beneath the horizon of the grave, and we call it Hope. Without Hope we should suffer moral death, and by the help of Hope we yet may climb to Heaven, or at the worst, if she also prove but a kindly mockery given to hold us from despair, be gently lowered into the abysses of eternal sleep.

Then I fell to reflecting upon the undertaking on which we were bent, and what a wild one it was, and yet how strangely the story seemed to fit in with what had been written centuries ago upon the sherd. Who was this extraordinary woman, Queen over a people apparently as extraordinary as herself, and reigning amidst the vestiges of a lost civilisation? And what was the meaning of this story of the Fire that gave unending life? Could it be possible that any fluid or essence should exist which might so fortify these fleshy walls that they should from age to age resist the mines and batterings of decay? It was possible, though not probable. The infinite continuation of life would not, as poor Vincey said, be so marvellous a thing as the production of life and its temporary endurance. And if it were true, what then? The person who found it could no doubt rule the world. He could accumulate all the wealth in the world, and all the power, and all the wisdom that is power. He might give a lifetime to the study of each art or science. Well, if that were so, and this *She* were practically immortal, which I did not for one moment believe, how was it that, with all these things at her feet, she preferred to remain in a cave amongst a society of cannibals? This surely settled the question. The whole story was monstrous, and only worthy of the superstitious days in which it was written. At any rate I was very sure that *I* would not attempt to attain unending life. I had had far too many worries and disappointments and secret bitternesses during my forty odd years of existence to wish that this state of affairs should be continued indefinitely. And yet I suppose that my life has been, comparatively speaking, a happy one.

And then, reflecting that at the present moment there was far more likelihood of our earthly careers being cut exceedingly short than of their being unduly prolonged, I at last managed to get to sleep, a fact for which anybody who reads this narrative, if anybody ever does, may very probably be thankful.

When I woke again it was just dawning, and the guard and bearers were moving about like ghosts through the dense morning mists, getting ready for our start. The fire had died quite down, and I rose and stretched myself, shivering in every limb from the damp cold of the dawn. Then I looked at Leo. He was sitting up, holding his hands to his head, and I saw that his face was flushed and his eye bright, and yet yellow round the pupil.

"Well, Leo," I said, "how do you feel?"

"I feel as though I were going to die," he answered hoarsely. "My head is splitting, my body is trembling, and I am as sick as a cat."

I whistled, or if I did not whistle I felt inclined to—Leo had got a sharp attack of fever. I went to Job, and asked him for the quinine, of which fortunately we had still a good supply, only to find that Job himself was not much better. He complained of pains across the back, and dizziness, and was almost incapable of helping himself. Then I did the only thing it was possible to do under the

circumstances—gave them both about ten grains of quinine, and took a slightly smaller dose myself as a matter of precaution. After that I found Billali, and explained to him how matters stood, asking at the same time what he thought had best be done. He came with me, and looked at Leo and Job (whom, by the way, he had named the Pig on account of his fatness, round face, and small eyes).

“Ah,” he said, when we were out of earshot, “the fever! I thought so. The Lion has it badly, but he is young, and he may live. As for the Pig, his attack is not so bad; it is the ‘little fever’ which he has; that always begins with pains across the back, it will spend itself upon his fat.”

“Can they go on, my father?” I asked.

“Nay, my son, they must go on. If they stop here they will certainly die; also, they will be better in the litters than on the ground. By to-night, if all goes well, we shall be across the marsh and in good air. Come, let us lift them into the litters and start, for it is very bad to stand still in this morning fog. We can eat our meal as we go.”

This we accordingly did, and with a heavy heart I once more set out upon our strange journey. For the first three hours all went as well as could be expected, and then an accident happened that nearly lost us the pleasure of the company of our venerable friend Billali, whose litter was leading the cavalcade. We were going through a particularly dangerous stretch of quagmire, in which the bearers sometimes sank up to their knees. Indeed, it was a mystery to me how they contrived to carry the heavy litters at all over such ground as that which we were traversing, though the two spare hands, as well as the four regular ones, had of course to put their shoulders to the pole.

Presently, as we blundered and floundered along, there was a sharp cry, then a storm of exclamations, and, last of all, a most tremendous splash, and the whole caravan halted.

I jumped out of my litter and ran forward. About twenty yards ahead was the edge of one of those sullen peaty pools of which I have spoken, the path we were following running along the top of its bank, that, as it happened, was a steep one. Looking towards this pool, to my horror I saw that Billali’s litter was floating on it, and as for Billali himself, he was nowhere to be seen. To make matters clear I may as well explain at once what had happened. One of Billali’s bearers had unfortunately trodden on a basking snake, which had bitten him in the leg, whereon he had, not unnaturally, let go of the pole, and then, finding that he was tumbling down the bank, grasped at the litter to save himself. The result of this was what might have been expected. The litter was pulled over the edge of the bank, the bearers let go, and the whole thing, including Billali and the man who had been bitten, rolled into the slimy pool. When I got to the edge of the water neither of them were to be seen; indeed, the unfortunate bearer never was seen again. Either he struck his head against something, or got wedged in the mud, or possibly the snake-bite paralyzed him. At any rate he vanished. But though Billali was not to be seen, his whereabouts was clear enough from the agitation of the floating litter, in the bearing cloth and curtains of which he was entangled.

“He is there! Our father is there!” said one of the men, but he did not stir a finger to help him, nor did any of the others. They simply stood and stared at the water.

“Out of the way, you brutes!” I shouted in English, and throwing off my hat I took a run and sprang well out into the horrid slimy-looking pool. A couple of strokes took me to where Billali was struggling beneath the cloth.

Somehow, I do not quite know how, I managed to push it free of him, and his venerable head all covered with green slime, like that of a yellowish Bacchus with ivy leaves, emerged upon the surface of the water. The rest was easy, for Billali was an eminently practical individual, and had the common sense not to grasp hold of me as drowning people often do, so I got him by the arm, and towed him to the bank, through the mud of which we were with difficulty dragged. Such a filthy spectacle as we presented I have never seen before or since, and it will perhaps give some idea of the almost superhuman dignity of Billali’s appearance when I say that, coughing, half-drowned, and covered with mud and green slime as he was, with his beautiful beard coming to a dripping point, like a Chinaman’s freshly-oiled pig-tail, he still looked venerable and imposing.

“Ye dogs,” he said, addressing the bearers, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered to speak, “ye left me, your father, to drown. Had it not been for this stranger, my son the Baboon, assuredly I should have drowned. Well, I will remember it,” and he fixed them with his gleaming though slightly watery eye, in a way I saw that they did not like, though they tried to appear sulkily indifferent.

“As for thee, my son,” the old man went on, turning towards me and grasping my hand, “rest assured that I am thy friend through good and evil. Thou hast saved my life: perchance a day may come when I shall save thine.”

After that we cleaned ourselves as best we could, fished out the litter, and went on, *minus* the man who had been drowned. I do not know if it was owing to his being an unpopular character, or from native indifference and selfishness of temperament, but I am bound to say that nobody seemed to grieve much over his sudden and final disappearance, unless, perhaps, it was the men who had to do his share of the work.

## XI.

# THE PLAIN OF KÔR

About an hour before sundown we at last, to my unbounded gratitude, emerged from the great belt of marsh on to land that swelled upwards in a succession of rolling waves. Just on the hither side of the crest of the first wave we halted for the night. My first act was to examine Leo's condition. It was, if anything, worse than in the morning, and a new and very distressing feature, vomiting, set in, and continued till dawn. Not one wink of sleep did I get that night, for I passed it in assisting Ustane, who was one of the most gentle and indefatigable nurses I ever saw, to wait upon Leo and Job. However, the air here was warm and genial without being too hot, and there were no mosquitoes to speak of. Also we were above the level of the marsh mist, which lay stretched beneath us like the dim smoke-pall over a city, lit up here and there by the wandering globes of fen fire. Thus it will be seen that we were, speaking comparatively, in clover.

By dawn on the following morning Leo was quite light-headed, and fancied that he was divided into halves. I was dreadfully distressed, and began to wonder with a sort of sick fear what the end of the attack would be. Alas! I had heard but too much of how these attacks generally terminate. As I was wondering Billali came up and said that we must be getting on, more especially as, in his opinion, if Leo did not reach some spot where he could be quiet, and have proper nursing, within the next twelve hours, his life would only be a matter of a day or two. I could not but agree with him, so we got Leo into the litter, and started on, Ustane walking by his side to keep the flies off him, and see that he did not throw himself out on to the ground.

Within half an hour of sunrise we had reached the top of the rise of which I have spoken, and a most beautiful view broke upon our gaze. Beneath us was a rich stretch of country, verdant with grass and lovely with foliage and flowers. In the background, at a distance, so far as I could judge, of some eighteen miles from where we then stood, a huge and extraordinary mountain rose abruptly from the plain. The base of this great mountain appeared to consist of a grassy slope, but rising from this, I should say, from subsequent observation, at a height of about five hundred feet above the level of the plain, was a most tremendous and absolutely precipitous wall of bare rock, quite twelve or fifteen hundred feet in height. The shape of the mountain, which was undoubtedly of volcanic origin, was round, and of course, as only a segment of its circle was visible, it was difficult to estimate its exact size, which was enormous. I afterwards discovered that it could not cover less than fifty square miles of ground. Anything more grand and imposing than the sight presented by this great natural castle, starting in solitary grandeur from the level of the plain, I never saw, and I suppose I never shall. Its very solitude added to its majesty, and its towering cliffs seemed to kiss the sky. Indeed, generally speaking, they were clothed in clouds that lay in fleecy masses upon their broad and level battlements.

I sat up in my hammock and gazed out across the plain at this thrilling and majestic sight, and I suppose that Billali noticed it, for he brought his litter alongside.

"Behold the house of *'She-who-must-be-obeyed!'*" he said. "Had ever a queen such a throne before?"

"It is wonderful, my father," I answered. "But how do we enter? Those cliffs look hard to climb."

"Thou shalt see, my Baboon. Look now at the path below us. What thinkest thou that it is? Thou art a wise man. Come, tell me."

I looked, and saw what appeared to be the line of roadway running straight towards the base of the mountain, though it was covered with turf. There were high banks on each side of it, broken here and there, but fairly continuous on the whole, the meaning of which I did not understand. It seemed so very odd that anybody should embank a roadway.

"Well, my father," I answered, "I suppose that it is a road, otherwise I should have been inclined to say that it was the bed of a river, or rather," I added, observing the extraordinary directness of the cutting, "of a canal."

Billali—who, by the way, was none the worse for his immersion of the day before—nodded his head sagely as he replied—

"Thou art right, my son. It is a channel cut out by those who were before us in this place to carry away water. Of this I am sure: within the rocky circle of the mountain whither we journey was once a great lake. But those who were before us, by wonderful arts of which I know naught, hewed a path for the water through the solid rock of the mountain, piercing even to the bed of the lake. But first they cut the channel that thou seest across the plain. Then, when at last the water burst out, it rushed down the channel that had been made to receive it, and crossed this plain till it reached the low land behind the rise, and there, perchance, it made the swamp through which we have come. Then when the lake was drained dry, the people whereof I speak built a mighty city on its bed, whereof naught but ruins and the name of Kôr yet remaineth, and from age to age hewed the caves and passages that thou wilt see."

"It may be," I answered; "but if so, how is it that the lake does not fill up again with the rains and the water of the springs?"

"Nay, my son, the people were a wise people, and they left a drain to keep it clear. Seest thou the river to the right?" and he pointed to a fair-sized stream that wound away across the plain, some four miles from us. "That is the drain, and it comes out through the mountain wall where this cutting goes in. At first, perhaps, the water ran down this canal, but afterwards the people turned it, and used the cutting for a road."

"And is there then no other place where one may enter into the great mountain," I asked, "except through that drain?"

"There is a place," he answered, "where cattle and men on foot may cross with much labour, but it is secret. A year mightest thou search and shouldst never find it. It is only used once a year, when the herds of cattle that have been fattening on the slopes of the mountain, and on this plain, are driven into the space within."

"And does *She* live there always?" I asked, "or does she come at times without the mountain?"

"Nay, my son, where she is, there she is."

By now we were well on to the great plain, and I was examining with delight the varied beauty of its semi-tropical flowers and trees, the latter of which grew singly, or at most in clumps of three or four, much of the timber being of large size, and belonging apparently to a variety of evergreen oak. There were also many palms, some of them more than one hundred feet high, and the largest and most beautiful tree ferns that I ever saw, about which hung clouds of jewelled honeysuckers and great-winged butterflies. Wandering about among the trees or crouching in the long and feathered grass were all varieties of game, from rhinoceroses down. I saw a rhinoceros, buffalo (a large herd), eland, quagga, and sable antelope, the most beautiful of all the bucks, not to mention many smaller varieties of game, and three ostriches which scudded away at our approach like white drift before a gale. So plentiful was the game that at last I could stand it no longer. I had a single barrel sporting Martini with me in the litter, the "Express" being too cumbersome, and espying a beautiful fat eland rubbing himself under one of the oak-like trees, I jumped out of the litter, and proceeded to creep as near to him as I could. He let me come within eighty yards, and then turned his head, and stared at me, preparatory to running away. I lifted the rifle, and taking him about midway down the shoulder, for he was side on to me, fired. I never made a cleaner shot or a better kill in all my small experience, for the great buck sprang right up into the air and fell dead. The bearers, who had all halted to see the performance, gave a murmur of surprise, an unwonted compliment from these sullen people, who never appear to be surprised at anything, and a party of the guard at once ran off to cut the animal up. As for myself, though I was longing to have a look at him, I sauntered back to my litter as though I had been in the habit of killing eland all my life, feeling that I had gone up several degrees in the estimation of the Amahagger, who looked on the whole thing as a very high-class manifestation of witchcraft. As a matter of fact, however, I had never seen an eland in a wild state before. Billali received me with enthusiasm.

"It is wonderful, my son the Baboon," he cried; "wonderful! Thou art a very great man, though so ugly. Had I not seen, surely I would never have believed. And thou sayest that thou wilt teach me to slay in this fashion?"

"Certainly, my father," I said airily; "it is nothing."

But all the same I firmly made up my mind that when "my father" Billali began to fire I would without fail lie down or take refuge behind a tree.

After this little incident nothing happened of any note till about an hour and a half before sundown, when we arrived beneath the shadow of the towering volcanic mass that I have already described. It is quite impossible for me to describe its grim grandeur as it appeared to me while my patient bearers toiled along the bed of the ancient watercourse towards the spot where the rich brown-hued cliff shot up from precipice to precipice till its crown lost itself in a cloud. All I can say is that it almost awed me by the intensity of its lonesome and most solemn greatness. On we went up the bright and sunny slope, till at last the creeping shadows from above swallowed up its brightness, and presently we began to pass through a cutting hewn in the living rock. Deeper and deeper grew this marvellous work, which must, I should say, have employed thousands of men for many years. Indeed, how it was ever executed at all without the aid of blasting-powder or dynamite I cannot to this day imagine. It is and must remain one of the mysteries of that wild land. I can only suppose that these cuttings and the vast caves that had been hollowed out of the rocks they pierced were the State undertakings of the people of Kôr, who lived here in the dim lost ages of the world, and, as in the case of the Egyptian monuments, were executed by the forced labour of tens of thousands of captives, carried on through an indefinite number of centuries. But who were the people?

At last we reached the face of the precipice itself, and found ourselves looking into the mouth of a dark tunnel that forcibly reminded me of those undertaken by our nineteenth-century engineers in the construction of railway lines. Out of this tunnel flowed a considerable stream of water. Indeed, though I do not think that I have mentioned it, we had followed this stream, which ultimately developed into the river I have already described as winding away to the right, from the spot where the cutting in the solid rock commenced. Half of this cutting formed a channel for the stream, and half, which was placed on a slightly higher level—eight feet perhaps—was devoted to the purposes of a roadway. At the termination of the cutting, however, the stream turned off across the plain and followed a channel of its own. At the mouth of the cave the cavalcade was halted, and, while the men employed themselves in lighting some earthenware lamps they had brought with them, Billali, descending from his litter, informed me politely but firmly that the orders of *She* were that we were now to be blindfolded, so that we should not learn the secret of the paths through the bowels of the mountains. To this I, of course, assented cheerfully enough, but Job, who was now very much better, notwithstanding the journey, did not like it at all, fancying, I believe, that it was but a preliminary step to being hot-potted. He was, however, a little consoled when I pointed out to him that there were no hot pots at hand, and, so far as I knew, no fire to heat them in. As for poor Leo, after turning restlessly for hours, he had, to my deep thankfulness, at last dropped off into a sleep or stupor, I do not know which, so there was no need to blindfold him. The blindfolding was performed by binding a piece of the yellowish linen whereof those of the Amahagger who condescended to wear anything in particular made their dresses, tightly round the eyes. This linen I afterwards discovered was taken from the tombs, and was not, as I had at first supposed, of native manufacture. The bandage was then knotted at the back of the head, and finally brought down again and the ends bound under the chin to prevent its slipping. Ustane was, by the way, also blindfolded, I do not know why, unless it was from fear that she should impart the secrets of the route to us.

This operation performed we started on once more, and soon, by the echoing sound of the footsteps of the bearers and the increased noise of the water caused by reverberation in a confined space, I knew that we were entering into the bowels of the great mountain. It was an eerie sensation, being borne along into the dead heart of the rock we knew not whither, but I was getting used to eerie sensations by this time, and by now was pretty well prepared for anything. So I lay still, and listened to the tramp, tramp of the bearers and the rushing of the water, and tried to believe that I was enjoying myself. Presently the men set up the melancholy little chant that I had heard on the first night when we were captured in the whaleboat, and the effect produced by their voices was very curious, and quite indescribable. After a while the air began to get exceedingly thick and heavy, so much so, indeed, that I felt as though I were going to choke, till at length the litter took a sharp turn, then another and another, and the sound of the running water ceased. After this the air was fresher again, but the turns were continuous, and to me, blindfolded as I was, most bewildering. I tried to keep a map of them in my mind in case it might ever be necessary for us to try and escape by this route, but, needless to say, failed utterly. Another half-hour or so passed, and then suddenly I became aware that we were once more in the open air. I could see the light through my bandage and feel its freshness on my face. A few more minutes and the caravan halted, and I heard Billali order Ustane to remove her bandage and undo ours. Without waiting for her attentions I got the knot of mine loose, and looked out.

As I anticipated, we had passed right through the precipice, and were now on the farther side, and immediately beneath its beetling face. The first thing I noticed was that the cliff is not nearly so high here, not so high I should say by five hundred feet, which proved that the bed of the lake, or rather of the vast ancient crater in which we stood, was much above the level of the surrounding plain. For the rest, we found ourselves in a huge rock-surrounded cup, not unlike that of the first place where we had sojourned, only ten times

the size. Indeed, I could only just make out the frowning line of the opposite cliffs. A great portion of the plain thus enclosed by nature was cultivated, and fenced in with walls of stone placed there to keep the cattle and goats, of which there were large herds about, from breaking into the gardens. Here and there rose great grass mounds, and some miles away towards the centre I thought that I could see the outline of colossal ruins. I had no time to observe anything more at the moment, for we were instantly surrounded by crowds of Amahagger, similar in every particular to those with whom we were already familiar, who, though they spoke little, pressed round us so closely as to obscure the view to a person lying in a hammock. Then all of a sudden a number of armed men arranged in companies, and marshalled by officers who held ivory wands in their hands, came running swiftly towards us, having, so far as I could make out, emerged from the face of the precipice like ants from their burrows. These men as well as their officers were all robed in addition to the usual leopard skin, and, as I gathered, formed the bodyguard of *She* herself.

Their leader advanced to Billali, saluted him by placing his ivory wand transversely across his forehead, and then asked some question which I could not catch, and Billali having answered him the whole regiment turned and marched along the side of the cliff, our cavalcade of litters following in their track. After going thus for about half a mile we halted once more in front of the mouth of a tremendous cave, measuring about sixty feet in height by eighty wide, and here Billali descended finally, and requested Job and myself to do the same. Leo, of course, was far too ill to do anything of the sort. I did so, and we entered the great cave, into which the light of the setting sun penetrated for some distance, while beyond the reach of the daylight it was faintly illuminated with lamps which seemed to me to stretch away for an almost immeasurable distance, like the gas lights of an empty London street. The first thing I noticed was that the walls were covered with sculptures in bas-relief, of a sort, pictorially speaking, similar to those that I have described upon the vases;—love-scenes principally, then hunting pictures, pictures of executions, and the torture of criminals by the placing of a, presumably, red-hot pot upon the head, showing whence our hosts had derived this pleasant practice. There were very few battle-pieces, though many of duels, and men running and wrestling, and from this fact I am led to believe that this people were not much subject to attack by exterior foes, either on account of the isolation of their position or because of their great strength. Between the pictures were columns of stone characters of a formation absolutely new to me; at any rate, they were neither Greek nor Egyptian, nor Hebrew, nor Assyrian—that I am sure of. They looked more like Chinese writings than any other that I am acquainted with. Near to the entrance of the cave both pictures and writings were worn away, but further in they were in many cases absolutely fresh and perfect as the day on which the sculptor had ceased work on them.

The regiment of guards did not come further than the entrance to the cave, where they formed up to let us pass through. On entering the place itself we were, however, met by a man robed in white, who bowed humbly, but said nothing, which, as it afterwards appeared that he was a deaf mute, was not very wonderful.

Running at right angles to the great cave, at a distance of some twenty feet from the entrance, was a smaller cave or wide gallery, that was pierced into the rock both to the right and to the left of the main cavern. In front of the gallery to our left stood two guards, from which circumstance I argued that it was the entrance to the apartments of *She* herself. The mouth of the right-hand gallery was unguarded, and along it the mute indicated that we were to go. Walking a few yards down this passage, which was lighted with lamps, we came to the entrance of a chamber having a curtain made of some grass material, not unlike a Zanzibar mat in appearance, hung over the doorway. This the mute drew back with another profound obeisance, and led the way into a good-sized apartment, hewn, of course, out of the solid rock, but to my great relief lighted by means of a shaft pierced in the face of the precipice. In this room was a stone bedstead, pots full of water for washing, and beautifully tanned leopard skins to serve as blankets.

Here we left Leo, who was still sleeping heavily, and with him stopped Ustane. I noticed that the mute gave her a very sharp look, as much as to say, "Who are you, and by whose order do you come here?" Then he conducted us to another similar room which Job took, and then to two more that were respectively occupied by Billali and myself.

## XII.

### “SHE”

The first care of Job and myself, after seeing to Leo, was to wash ourselves and put on clean clothing, for what we were wearing had not been changed since the loss of the dhow. Fortunately, as I think that I have said, by far the greater part of our personal baggage had been packed into the whaleboat, and was therefore saved—and brought hither by the bearers—although all the stores laid in by us for barter and presents to the natives were lost. Nearly all our clothing was made of a well-shrunk and very strong grey flannel, and excellent I found it for travelling in these places, because though a Norfolk jacket, shirt, and pair of trousers of it only weighed about four pounds, a great consideration in a tropical country, where every extra ounce tells on the wearer, it was warm, and offered a good resistance to the rays of the sun, and best of all to chills, which are so apt to result from sudden changes of temperature.

Never shall I forget the comfort of the “wash and brush-up,” and of those clean flannels. The only thing that was wanting to complete my joy was a cake of soap, of which we had none.

Afterwards I discovered that the Amahagger, who do not reckon dirt among their many disagreeable qualities, use a kind of burnt earth for washing purposes, which, though unpleasant to the touch till one gets accustomed to it, forms a very fair substitute for soap.

By the time that I was dressed, and had combed and trimmed my black beard, the previous condition of which was certainly sufficiently unkempt to give weight to Billali’s appellation for me of “Baboon,” I began to feel most uncommonly hungry. Therefore I was by no means sorry when, without the slightest preparatory sound or warning, the curtain over the entrance to my cave was flung aside, and another mute, a young girl this time, announced to me by signs that I could not misunderstand—that is, by opening her mouth and pointing down it—that there was something ready to eat. Accordingly I followed her into the next chamber, which we had not yet entered, where I found Job, who had also, to his great embarrassment, been conducted thither by a fair mute. Job never got over the advances the former lady had made towards him, and suspected every girl who came near to him of similar designs.

“These young parties have a way of looking at one, sir,” he would say apologetically, “which I don’t call respectable.”

This chamber was twice the size of the sleeping caves, and I saw at once that it had originally served as a refectory, and also probably as an embalming room for the Priests of the Dead; for I may as well say at once that these hollowed-out caves were nothing more nor less than vast catacombs, in which for tens of ages the mortal remains of the great extinct race whose monuments surrounded us had been first preserved, with an art and a completeness that has never since been equalled, and then hidden away for all time. On each side of this particular rock-chamber was a long and solid stone table, about three feet wide by three feet six in height, hewn out of the living rock, of which it had formed part, and was still attached to at the base. These tables were slightly hollowed out or curved inward, to give room for the knees of any one sitting on the stone ledge that had been cut for a bench along the side of the cave at a distance of about two feet from them. Each of them, also, was so arranged that it ended right under a shaft pierced in the rock for the admission of light and air. On examining them carefully, however, I saw that there was a difference between them that had at first escaped my attention, viz. that one of the tables, that to the left as we entered the cave, had evidently been used, not to eat upon, but for the purposes of embalming. That this was beyond all question the case was clear from five shallow depressions in the stone of the table, all shaped like a human form, with a separate place for the head to lie in, and a little bridge to support the neck, each depression being of a different size, so as to fit bodies varying in stature from a full-grown man’s to a small child’s, and with little holes bored at intervals to carry off fluid. And, indeed, if any further confirmation was required, we had but to look at the wall of the cave above to find it. For there, sculptured all round the apartment, and looking nearly as fresh as the day it was done, was the pictorial representation of the death, embalming, and burial of an old man with a long beard, probably an ancient king or grandee of this country.

The first picture represented his death. He was lying upon a couch which had four short curved posts at the corners coming to a knob at the end, in appearance something like written notes of music, and was evidently in the very act of expiring. Gathered round the couch were women and children weeping, the former with their hair hanging down their backs. The next scene represented the embalming of the body, which lay stark upon a table with depressions in it, similar to the one before us; probably, indeed, it was a picture of the same table. Three men were employed at the work—one superintending, one holding a funnel shaped exactly like a port wine strainer, of which the narrow end was fixed in an incision in the breast, no doubt in the great pectoral artery; while the third, who was depicted as standing straddle-legged over the corpse, held a kind of large jug high in his hand, and poured from it some steaming fluid which fell accurately into the funnel. The most curious part of this sculpture is that both the man with the funnel and the man who pours the fluid are drawn holding their noses, either I suppose because of the stench arising from the body, or more probably to keep out the aromatic fumes of the hot fluid which was being forced into the dead man’s veins. Another curious thing which I am unable to explain is that all three men were represented as having a band of linen tied round the face with holes in it for the eyes.

The third sculpture was a picture of the burial of the deceased. There he was, stiff and cold, clothed in a linen robe, and laid out on a stone slab such as I had slept upon at our first sojourning-place. At his head and feet burnt lamps, and by his side were placed several of the beautiful painted vases that I have described, which were perhaps supposed to be full of provisions. The little chamber was crowded with mourners, and with musicians playing on an instrument resembling a lyre, while near the foot of the corpse stood a man holding a sheet, with which he was preparing to cover it from view.

These sculptures, looked at merely as works of art, were so remarkable that I make no apology for describing them rather fully. They struck me also as being of surpassing interest as representing, probably with studious accuracy, the last rites of the dead as

practised among an utterly lost people, and even then I thought how envious some antiquarian friends of my own at Cambridge would be if ever I found an opportunity of describing these wonderful remains to them. Probably they would say that I was exaggerating, notwithstanding that every page of this history must bear so much internal evidence of its truth that it would obviously have been quite impossible for me to have invented it.

To return. As soon as I had hastily examined these sculptures, which I think I omitted to mention were executed in relief, we sat down to a very excellent meal of boiled goat's-flesh, fresh milk, and cakes made of meal, the whole being served upon clean wooden platters.

When we had eaten we returned to see how Leo was getting on, Billali saying that he must now wait upon *She*, and hear her commands. On reaching Leo's room we found the poor boy in a very bad way. He had woke up from his torpor, and was altogether off his head, babbling about some boat-race on the Cam, and was inclined to be violent. Indeed, when we entered the room Ustane was holding him down. I spoke to him, and my voice seemed to soothe him; at any rate he grew much quieter, and was persuaded to swallow a dose of quinine.

I had been sitting with him for an hour, perhaps—at any rate I know that it was getting so dark that I could only just make out his head lying like a gleam of gold upon the pillow we had extemporised out of a bag covered with a blanket—when suddenly Billali arrived with an air of great importance, and informed me that *She* herself had deigned to express a wish to see me—an honour, he added, accorded to but very few. I think that he was a little horrified at my cool way of taking the honour, but the fact was that I did not feel overwhelmed with gratitude at the prospect of seeing some savage, dusky queen, however absolute and mysterious she might be, more especially as my mind was full of dear Leo, for whose life I began to have great fears. However, I rose to follow him, and as I did so I caught sight of something bright lying on the floor, which I picked up. Perhaps the reader will remember that with the potsherd in the casket was a composition scarabæus marked with a round O, a goose, and another curious hieroglyphic, the meaning of which is "Suten se Ra," or "Royal Son of the Sun." The scarab, which is a very small one, Leo had insisted upon having set in a massive gold ring, such as is generally used for signets, and it was this very ring that I now picked up. He had pulled it off in the paroxysm of his fever, at least I suppose so, and flung it down upon the rock-floor. Thinking that if I left it about it might get lost, I slipped it on my own little finger, and then followed Billali, leaving Job and Ustane with Leo.

We passed down the passage, crossed the great aisle-like cave, and came to the corresponding passage on the other side, at the mouth of which the guards stood like two statues. As we came they bowed their heads in salutation, and then lifting their long spears placed them transversely across their foreheads, as the leaders of the troop that had met us had done with their ivory wands. We stepped between them, and found ourselves in an exactly similar gallery to that which led to our own apartments, only this passage was, comparatively speaking, brilliantly lighted. A few paces down it we were met by four mutes—two men and two women—who bowed low and then arranged themselves, the women in front and the men behind of us, and in this order we continued our procession past several doorways hung with curtains resembling those leading to our own quarters, and which I afterwards found opened out into chambers occupied by the mutes who attended on *She*. A few paces more and we came to another doorway facing us, and not to our left like the others, which seemed to mark the termination of the passage. Here two more white-, or rather yellow-robed guards were standing, and they too bowed, saluted, and let us pass through heavy curtains into a great antechamber, quite forty feet long by as many wide, in which some eight or ten women, most of them young and handsome, with yellowish hair, sat on cushions working with ivory needles at what had the appearance of being embroidery frames. These women were also deaf and dumb. At the farther end of this great lamp-lit apartment was another doorway closed in with heavy Oriental-looking curtains, quite unlike those that hung before the doors of our own rooms, and here stood two particularly handsome girl mutes, their heads bowed upon their bosoms and their hands crossed in an attitude of humble submission. As we advanced they each stretched out an arm and drew back the curtains. Thereupon Billali did a curious thing. Down he went, that venerable-looking old gentleman—for Billali is a gentleman at the bottom—down on to his hands and knees, and in this undignified position, with his long white beard trailing on the ground, he began to creep into the apartment beyond. I followed him, standing on my feet in the usual fashion. Looking over his shoulder he perceived it.

"Down, my son; down, my Baboon; down on to thy hands and knees. We enter the presence of *She*, and, if thou art not humble, of a surety she will blast thee where thou standest."

I halted, and felt scared. Indeed, my knees began to give way of their own mere motion; but reflection came to my aid. I was an Englishman, and why, I asked myself, should I creep into the presence of some savage woman as though I were a monkey in fact as well as in name? I would not and could not do it, that is, unless I was absolutely sure that my life or comfort depended upon it. If once I began to creep upon my knees I should always have to do so, and it would be a patent acknowledgment of inferiority. So, fortified by an insular prejudice against "kootooing," which has, like most of our so-called prejudices, a good deal of common sense to recommend it, I marched in boldly after Billali. I found myself in another apartment, considerably smaller than the anteroom, of which the walls were entirely hung with rich-looking curtains of the same make as those over the door, the work, as I subsequently discovered, of the mutes who sat in the antechamber and wove them in strips, which were afterwards sewn together. Also, here and there about the room, were settees of a beautiful black wood of the ebony tribe, inlaid with ivory, and all over the floor were other tapestries, or rather rugs. At the top end of this apartment was what appeared to be a recess, also draped with curtains, through which shone rays of light. There was nobody in the place except ourselves.

Painfully and slowly old Billali crept up the length of the cave, and with the most dignified stride that I could command I followed after him. But I felt that it was more or less of a failure. To begin with, it is not possible to look dignified when you are following in the wake of an old man writhing along on his stomach like a snake, and then, in order to go sufficiently slowly, either I had to keep my leg some seconds in the air at every step, or else to advance with a full stop between each stride, like Mary Queen of Scots going to execution in a play. Billali was not good at crawling, I suppose his years stood in the way, and our progress up that apartment was a very long affair. I was immediately behind him, and several times I was sorely tempted to help him on with a good kick. It is so absurd to advance into the presence of savage royalty after the fashion of an Irishman driving a pig to market, for that is what we looked like, and the idea nearly made me burst out laughing then and there. I had to work off my dangerous tendency to unseemly merriment by blowing my nose, a proceeding which filled old Billali with horror, for he looked over his shoulder and made a ghastly face at me, and I heard him murmur, "Oh, my poor Baboon!"

At last we reached the curtains, and here Billali collapsed flat on to his stomach, with his hands stretched out before him as though he were dead, and I, not knowing what to do, began to stare about the place. But presently I clearly felt that somebody was looking at me from behind the curtains. I could not see the person, but I could distinctly feel his or her gaze, and, what is more, it produced a very odd effect upon my nerves. I was frightened, I do not know why. The place was a strange one, it is true, and looked lonely,

notwithstanding its rich hangings and the soft glow of the lamps—indeed, these accessories added to, rather than detracted from its loneliness, just as a lighted street at night has always a more solitary appearance than a dark one. It was so silent in the place, and there lay Billali like one dead before the heavy curtains, through which the odour of perfume seemed to float up towards the gloom of the arched roof above. Minute grew into minute, and still there was no sign of life, nor did the curtain move; but I felt the gaze of the unknown being sinking through and through me, and filling me with a nameless terror, till the perspiration stood in beads upon my brow.

At length the curtain began to move. Who could be behind it?—some naked savage queen, a languishing Oriental beauty, or a nineteenth-century young lady, drinking afternoon tea? I had not the slightest idea, and should not have been astonished at seeing any of the three. I was getting beyond astonishment. The curtain agitated itself a little, then suddenly between its folds there appeared a most beautiful white hand (white as snow), and with long tapering fingers, ending in the pinkest nails. The hand grasped the curtain, and drew it aside, and as it did so I heard a voice, I think the softest and yet most silvery voice I ever heard. It reminded me of the murmur of a brook.

“Stranger,” said the voice in Arabic, but much purer and more classical Arabic than the Amahagger talk—“stranger, wherefore art thou so much afraid?”

Now I flattered myself that in spite of my inward terrors I had kept a very fair command of my countenance, and was, therefore, a little astonished at this question. Before I had made up my mind how to answer it, however, the curtain was drawn, and a tall figure stood before us. I say a figure, for not only the body, but also the face was wrapped up in soft white, gauzy material in such a way as at first sight to remind me most forcibly of a corpse in its grave-clothes. And yet I do not know why it should have given me that idea, seeing that the wrappings were so thin that one could distinctly see the gleam of the pink flesh beneath them. I suppose it was owing to the way in which they were arranged, either accidentally, or more probably by design. Anyhow, I felt more frightened than ever at this ghost-like apparition, and my hair began to rise upon my head as the feeling crept over me that I was in the presence of something that was not canny. I could, however, clearly distinguish that the swathed mummy-like form before me was that of a tall and lovely woman, instinct with beauty in every part, and also with a certain snake-like grace which I had never seen anything to equal before. When she moved a hand or foot her entire frame seemed to undulate, and the neck did not bend, it curved.

“Why art thou so frightened, stranger?” asked the sweet voice again—a voice which seemed to draw the heart out of me, like the strains of softest music. “Is there that about me that should affright a man? Then surely are men changed from what they used to be!” And with a little coquettish movement she turned herself, and held up one arm, so as to show all her loveliness and the rich hair of raven blackness that streamed in soft ripples down her snowy robes, almost to her sandalled feet.

“It is thy beauty that makes me fear, oh Queen,” I answered humbly, scarcely knowing what to say, and I thought that as I did so I heard old Billali, who was still lying prostrate on the floor, mutter, “Good, my Baboon, good.”

“I see that men still know how to beguile us women with false words. Ah, stranger,” she answered, with a laugh that sounded like distant silver bells, “thou wast afraid because mine eyes were searching out thine heart, therefore wast thou afraid. Yet being but a woman, I forgive thee for the lie, for it was courteously said. And now tell me how came ye hither to this land of the dwellers among the caves—a land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows of the dead? What came ye for to see? How is it that ye hold your lives so cheap as to place them in the hollow of the hand of *Hiya*, into the hand of ‘*She-who-must-be-obeyed*’? Tell me also how come ye to know the tongue I talk. It is an ancient tongue, that sweet child of the old Syriac. Liveth it yet in the world? Thou seest I dwell among the caves and the dead, and naught know I of the affairs of men, nor have I cared to know. I have lived. O stranger, with my memories, and my memories are in a grave that mine hands hollowed, for truly hath it been said that the child of man maketh his own path evil;” and her beautiful voice quivered, and broke in a note as soft as any wood-bird’s. Suddenly her eye fell upon the sprawling frame of Billali, and she seemed to recollect herself.

“Ah! thou art there, old man. Tell me how it is that things have gone wrong in thine household. Forsooth, it seems that these my guests were set upon. Ay, and one was nigh to being slain by the hot-pot to be eaten of those brutes, thy children, and had not the others fought gallantly they too had been slain, and not even I could have called back the life which had been loosed from the body. What means it, old man? What hast thou to say that I should not give thee over to those who execute my vengeance?”

Her voice had risen in her anger, and it rang clear and cold against the rocky walls. Also I thought I could see her eyes flash through the gauze that hid them. I saw poor Billali, whom I had believed to be a very fearless person, positively quiver with terror at her words.

“Oh ‘*Hiya*!’ oh *She*!” he said, without lifting his white head from the floor. “Oh *She*, as thou art great be merciful, for I am now as ever thy servant to obey. It was no plan or fault of mine, oh *She*, it was those wicked ones who are called my children. Led on by a woman whom thy guest the Pig had scorned, they would have followed the ancient custom of the land, and eaten the fat black stranger who came hither with these thy guests the Baboon and the Lion who is sick, thinking that no word had come from thee about the Black one. But when the Baboon and the Lion saw what they would do, they slew the woman, and slew also their servant to save him from the horror of the pot. Then those evil ones, ay, those children of the Wicked One who lives in the Pit, they went mad with the lust of blood, and flew at the throats of the Lion and the Baboon and the Pig. But gallantly they fought. Oh *Hiya*! they fought like very men, and slew many, and held their own, and then I came and saved them, and the evildoers have I sent on hither to Kôr to be judged of thy greatness, oh *She*! and here they are.”

“Ay, old man, I know it, and to-morrow will I sit in the great hall and do justice upon them, fear not. And for thee, I forgive thee, though hardly. See that thou dost keep thine household better. Go.”

Billali rose upon his knees with astonishing alacrity, bowed his head thrice, and his white beard sweeping the ground, crawled down the apartment as he had crawled up it, till he finally vanished through the curtains, leaving me, not a little to my alarm, alone with this terrible but most fascinating person.

## XIII.

# AYESHA UNVEILS

"There," said *She*, "he has gone, the white-bearded old fool! Ah, how little knowledge does a man acquire in his life. He gathereth it up like water, but like water it runneth through his fingers, and yet, if his hands be but wet as though with dew, behold a generation of fools call out, 'See, he is a wise man!' Is it not so? But how call they thee? 'Baboon,' he says," and she laughed; "but that is the fashion of these savages who lack imagination, and fly to the beasts they resemble for a name. How do they call thee in thine own country, stranger?"

"They call me Holly, oh Queen," I answered.

"Holly," she answered, speaking the word with difficulty, and yet with a most charming accent; "and what is 'Holly'?"

"Holly' is a prickly tree," I said.

"So. Well, thou hast a prickly and yet a tree-like look. Strong art thou, and ugly, but if my wisdom be not at fault, honest at the core, and a staff to lean on. Also one who thinks. But stay, oh Holly, stand not there, enter with me and be seated by me. I would not see thee crawl before me like those slaves. I am weary of their worship and their terror; sometimes when they vex me I could blast them for very sport, and to see the rest turn white, even to the heart." And she held the curtain aside with her ivory hand to let me pass in.

I entered, shuddering. This woman was very terrible. Within the curtains was a recess, about twelve feet by ten, and in the recess was a couch and a table whereon stood fruit and sparkling water. By it, at its end, was a vessel like a font cut in carved stone, also full of pure water. The place was softly lit with lamps formed out of the beautiful vessels of which I have spoken, and the air and curtains were laden with a subtle perfume. Perfume too seemed to emanate from the glorious hair and white-clinging vestments of *She* herself. I entered the little room, and there stood uncertain.

"Sit," said *She*, pointing to the couch. "As yet thou hast no cause to fear me. If thou hast cause, thou shalt not fear for long, for I shall slay thee. Therefore let thy heart be light."

I sat down on the foot of the couch near to the font-like basin of water, and *She* sank down softly on to the other end.

"Now, Holly," she said, "how comest thou to speak Arabic? It is my own dear tongue, for Arabian am I by my birth, even 'al Arab al Ariba' (an Arab of the Arabs), and of the race of our father Yárab, the son of Káhtan, for in that fair and ancient city Ozal was I born, in the province of Yaman the Happy. Yet dost thou not speak it as we used to speak. Thy talk doth lack the music of the sweet tongue of the tribes of Hamyar which I was wont to hear. Some of the words too seemed changed, even as among these Amahagger, who have debased and defiled its purity, so that I must speak with them in what is to me another tongue."<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Yárab the son of Káhtan, who lived some centuries before the time of Abraham, was the father of the ancient Arabs, and gave its name Araba to the country. In speaking of herself as "al Arab al Ariba," *She* no doubt meant to convey that she was of the true Arab blood as distinguished from the naturalised Arabs, the descendants of Ismael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, who were known as "al Arab al mostáraba." The dialect of the Koreish was usually called the clear or "perspicuous" Arabic, but the Hamaritic dialect approached nearer to the purity of the mother Syriac.—L. H. H.

"I have studied it," I answered, "for many years. Also the language is spoken in Egypt and elsewhere."

"So it is still spoken, and there is yet an Egypt? And what Pharaoh sits upon the throne? Still one of the spawn of the Persian Ochús, or are the Achæmenians gone, for far is it to the days of Ochús."

"The Persians have been gone from Egypt for nigh two thousand years, and since then the Ptolemies, the Romans, and many others have flourished and held sway upon the Nile, and fallen when their time was ripe," I said, aghast. "What canst thou know of the Persian Artaxerxes?"

She laughed, and made no answer, and again a cold chill went through me. "And Greece," she said; "is there still a Greece? Ah, I loved the Greeks. Beautiful were they as the day, and clever, but fierce at heart and fickle, notwithstanding."

"Yes," I said, "there is a Greece; and, just now, it is once more a people. Yet the Greeks of to-day are not what the Greeks of the old time were, and Greece herself is but a mockery of the Greece that was."

"So! The Hebrews, are they yet at Jerusalem? And does the Temple that the wise king built stand, and if so what God do they worship therein? Is their Messiah come, of whom they preached so much and prophesied so loudly, and doth He rule the earth?"

"The Jews are broken and gone, and the fragments of their people strew the world, and Jerusalem is no more. As for the temple that Herod built——"

"Herod!" she said. "I know not Herod. But go on."

"The Romans burnt it, and the Roman eagles flew across its ruins, and now Judæa is a desert."

"So, so! They were a great people, those Romans, and went straight to their end—ay, they sped to it like Fate, or like their own eagles on their prey!—and left peace behind them."

"Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant," I suggested.

"Ah, thou canst speak the Latin tongue, too!" she said, in surprise. "It hath a strange ring in my ears after all these days, and it seems to me that thy accent does not fall as the Romans put it. Who was it wrote that? I know not the saying, but it is a true one of that great people. It seems that I have found a learned man—one whose hands have held the water of the world's knowledge. Knowest thou Greek also?"

“Yes, oh Queen, and something of Hebrew, but not to speak them well. They are all dead languages now.”

She clapped her hands in childish glee. “Of a truth, ugly tree that thou art, thou growest the fruits of wisdom, oh Holly,” she said; “but of those Jews whom I hated, for they called me ‘heathen’ when I would have taught them my philosophy—did their Messiah come, and doth He rule the world?”

“Their Messiah came,” I answered with reverence; “but He came poor and lowly, and they would have none of Him. They scourged Him, and crucified Him upon a tree, but yet His words and His works live on, for He was the Son of God, and now of a truth He doth rule half the world, but not with an Empire of the World.”

“Ah, the fierce-hearted wolves,” she said, “the followers of Sense and many gods—greedy of gain and faction-torn. I can see their dark faces yet. So they crucified their Messiah? Well can I believe it. That He was a Son of the Living Spirit would be naught to them, if indeed He was so, and of that we will talk afterwards. They would care naught for any God if He came not with pomp and power. They, a chosen people, a vessel of Him they call Jehovah, ay, and a vessel of Baal, and a vessel of Astoreth, and a vessel of the gods of the Egyptians—a high-stomached people, greedy of aught that brought them wealth and power. So they crucified their Messiah because He came in lowly guise—and now are they scattered about the earth? Why, if I remember, so said one of their prophets that it should be. Well, let them go—they broke my heart, those Jews, and made me look with evil eyes across the world, ay, and drove me to this wilderness, this place of a people that was before them. When I would have taught them wisdom in Jerusalem they stoned me, ay, at the Gate of the Temple those white-bearded hypocrites and Rabbis hounded the people on to stone me! See, here is the mark of it to this day!” and with a sudden move she pulled up the gauzy wrapping on her rounded arm, and pointed to a little scar that showed red against its milky beauty.

I shrank back, horrified.

“Pardon me, oh Queen,” I said, “but I am bewildered. Nigh upon two thousand years have rolled across the earth since the Jewish Messiah hung upon His cross at Golgotha. How then canst thou have taught thy philosophy to the Jews before He was? Thou art a woman and no spirit. How can a woman live two thousand years? Why dost thou befool me, oh Queen?”

She leaned back upon the couch, and once more I felt the hidden eyes playing upon me and searching out my heart.

“Oh man!” she said at last, speaking very slowly and deliberately, “it seems that there are still things upon the earth of which thou knowest naught. Dost thou still believe that all things die, even as those very Jews believed? I tell thee that naught dies. There is no such thing as Death, though there be a thing called Change. See,” and she pointed to some sculptures on the rocky wall. “Three times two thousand years have passed since the last of the great race that hewed those pictures fell before the breath of the pestilence which destroyed them, yet are they not dead. E’en now they live; perchance their spirits are drawn towards us at this very hour,” and she glanced round. “Of a surety it sometimes seems to me that my eyes can see them.”

“Yes, but to the world they are dead.”

“Ay, for a time; but even to the world are they born again and again. I, yes I, Ayesha<sup>[2]</sup>—for that, stranger, is my name—I say to thee that I wait now for one I loved to be born again, and here I tarry till he finds me, knowing of a surety that hither he will come, and that here, and here only, shall he greet me. Why, dost thou believe that I, who am all-powerful, I, whose loveliness is more than the loveliness of the Grecian Helen, of whom they used to sing, and whose wisdom is wider, ay, far more wide and deep than the wisdom of Solomon the Wise—I, who know the secrets of the earth and its riches, and can turn all things to my uses—I, who have even for a while overcome Change, that ye call Death—why, I say, oh stranger, dost thou think that I herd here with barbarians lower than the beasts?”

[2] Pronounced Assha.—L. H. H.

“I know not,” I said humbly.

“Because I wait for him I love. My life has perchance been evil, I know not—for who can say what is evil and what good?—so I fear to die even if I could die, which I cannot until mine hour comes, to go and seek him where he is; for between us there might rise a wall I could not climb, at least, I dread it. Surely easy would it be also to lose the way in seeking in those great spaces wherein the planets wander on for ever. But the day will come, it may be when five thousand more years have passed, and are lost and melted into the vault of Time, even as the little clouds melt into the gloom of night, or it may be to-morrow, when he, my love, shall be born again, and then, following a law that is stronger than any human plan, he shall find me *here*, where once he knew me, and of a surety his heart will soften towards me, though I sinned against him; ay, even though he knew me not again, yet will he love me, if only for my beauty’s sake.”

For a moment I was dumbfounded, and could not answer. The matter was too overpowering for my intellect to grasp.

“But even so, oh Queen,” I said at last, “even if we men be born again and again, that is not so with thee, if thou speakest truly.” Here she looked up sharply, and once more I caught the flash of those hidden eyes; “thou,” I went on hurriedly, “who hast never died?”

“That is so,” she said; “and it is so because I have, half by chance and half by learning, solved one of the great secrets of the world. Tell me, stranger: life is—why therefore should not life be lengthened for a while? What are ten or twenty or fifty thousand years in the history of life? Why in ten thousand years scarce will the rain and storms lessen a mountain top by a span in thickness? In two thousand years these caves have not changed, nothing has changed but the beasts, and man, who is as the beasts. There is naught that is wonderful about the matter, couldst thou but understand. Life is wonderful, ay, but that it should be a little lengthened is not wonderful. Nature hath her animating spirit as well as man, who is Nature’s child, and he who can find that spirit, and let it breathe upon him, shall live with her life. He shall not live eternally, for Nature is not eternal, and she herself must die, even as the nature of the moon hath died. She herself must die, I say, or rather change and sleep till it be time for her to live again. But when shall she die? Not yet, I ween, and while she lives, so shall he who hath all her secret live with her. All I have it not, yet have I some, more perchance than any who were before me. Now, to thee I doubt not that this thing is a great mystery, therefore I will not overcome thee with it now. Another time I will tell thee more if the mood be on me, though perchance I shall never speak thereof again. Dost thou wonder how I knew that ye were coming to this land, and so saved your heads from the hot-pot?”

“Ay, oh Queen,” I answered feebly.

“Then gaze upon that water,” and she pointed to the font-like vessel, and then, bending forward, held her hand over it.

I rose and gazed, and instantly the water darkened. Then it cleared, and I saw as distinctly as I ever saw anything in my life—I saw, I say, our boat upon that horrible canal. There was Leo lying at the bottom asleep in it, with a coat thrown over him to keep off the mosquitoes, in such a fashion as to hide his face, and myself, Job, and Mahomed towing on the bank.

I started back, aghast, and cried out that it was magic, for I recognised the whole scene—it was one which had actually occurred.

“Nay, nay; oh Holly,” she answered, “it is no magic, that is a fiction of ignorance. There is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as a knowledge of the secrets of Nature. That water is my glass; in it I see what passes if I will to summon up the pictures, which is not often. Therein I can show thee what thou wilt of the past, if it be anything that hath to do with this country and with what I have known, or anything that thou, the gazer, hast known. Think of a face if thou wilt, and it shall be reflected from thy mind upon the water. I know not all the secret yet—I can read nothing in the future. But it is an old secret; I did not find it. In Arabia and in Egypt the sorcerers knew it centuries gone. So one day I chanced to bethink me of that old canal—some twenty ages since I sailed upon it, and I was minded to look thereon again. So I looked, and there I saw the boat and three men walking, and one, whose face I could not see, but a youth of noble form, sleeping in the boat, and so I sent and saved ye. And now farewell. But stay, tell me of this youth—the Lion, as the old man calls him. I would look upon him, but he is sick, thou sayest—sick with the fever, and also wounded in the fray.”

“He is very sick,” I answered sadly; “canst thou do nothing for him, oh Queen! who knowest so much?”

“Of a surety I can. I can cure him; but why speakest thou so sadly? Dost thou love the youth? Is he perchance thy son?”

“He is my adopted son, oh Queen! Shall he be brought in before thee?”

“Nay. How long hath the fever taken him?”

“This is the third day.”

“Good; then let him lie another day. Then will he perchance throw it off by his own strength, and that is better than that I should cure him, for my medicine is of a sort to shake the life in its very citadel. If, however, by to-morrow night, at that hour when the fever first took him, he doth not begin to mend, then will I come to him and cure him. Stay, who nurses him?”

“Our white servant, him whom Billali names the Pig; also,” and here I spoke with some little hesitation, “a woman named Ustane, a very handsome woman of this country, who came and embraced him when she first saw him, and hath stayed by him ever since, as I understand is the fashion of thy people, oh Queen.”

“My people! speak not to me of my people,” she answered hastily; “these slaves are no people of mine, they are but dogs to do my bidding till the day of my deliverance comes; and, as for their customs, naught have I to do with them. Also, call me not Queen—I am weary of flattery and titles—call me Ayesha, the name hath a sweet sound in mine ears, it is an echo from the past. As for this Ustane, I know not. I wonder if it be she against whom I was warned, and whom I in turn did warn? Hath she—stay, I will see;” and, bending forward, she passed her hand over the font of water and gazed intently into it. “See,” she said quietly, “is that the woman?”

I looked into the water, and there, mirrored upon its placid surface, was the silhouette of Ustane’s stately face. She was bending forward, with a look of infinite tenderness upon her features, watching something beneath her, and with her chestnut locks falling on to her right shoulder.

“It is she,” I said, in a low voice, for once more I felt much disturbed at this most uncommon sight. “She watches Leo asleep.”

“Leo!” said Ayesha, in an absent voice; “why, that is ‘lion’ in the Latin tongue. The old man hath named happily for once. It is very strange,” she went on, speaking to herself, “very. So like—but it is not possible!” With an impatient gesture she passed her hand over the water once more. It darkened, and the image vanished silently and mysteriously as it had risen, and once more the lamplight, and the lamplight only, shone on the placid surface of that limpid, living mirror.

“Hast thou aught to ask me before thou goest, oh Holly?” she said, after a few moments’ reflection. “It is but a rude life that thou must live here, for these people are savages, and know not the ways of cultivated man. Not that I am troubled thereby, for behold my food,” and she pointed to the fruit upon the little table. “Naught but fruit doth ever pass my lips—fruit and cakes of flour, and a little water. I have bidden my girls to wait upon thee. They are mutes, thou knowest, deaf are they and dumb, and therefore the safest of servants, save to those who can read their faces and their signs. I bred them so—it hath taken many centuries and much trouble; but at last I have triumphed. Once I succeeded before, but the race was too ugly, so I let it die away; but now, as thou seest, they are otherwise. Once, too, I reared a race of giants, but after a while Nature would no more of it, and it died away. Hast thou aught to ask of me?”

“Ay, one thing, oh Ayesha,” I said boldly; but feeling by no means as bold as I trust I looked. “I would gaze upon thy face.”

She laughed out in her bell-like notes. “Bethink thee, Holly,” she answered; “bethink thee. It seems that thou knowest the old myths of the gods of Greece. Was there not one Actæon who perished miserably because he looked on too much beauty? If I show thee my face, perchance thou wouldst perish miserably also; perchance thou wouldst eat out thy heart in impotent desire; for know I am not for thee—I am for no man, save one, who hath been, but is not yet.”

“As thou wilt, Ayesha,” I said. “I fear not thy beauty. I have put my heart away from such vanity as woman’s loveliness, that passeth like a flower.”

“Nay, thou errest,” she said; “that does *not* pass. My beauty endures even as I endure; still, if thou wilt, oh rash man, have thy will; but blame not me if passion mount thy reason, as the Egyptian breakers used to mount a colt, and guide it whither thou wilt not. Never may the man to whom my beauty has been unveiled put it from his mind, and therefore even with these savages do I go veiled, lest they vex me, and I should slay them. Say, wilt thou see?”

“I will,” I answered, my curiosity overpowering me.

She lifted her white and rounded arms—never had I seen such arms before—and slowly, very slowly, withdrew some fastening beneath her hair. Then all of a sudden the long, corpse-like wrappings fell from her to the ground, and my eyes travelled up her form, now only robed in a garb of clinging white that did but serve to show its perfect and imperial shape, instinct with a life that was more than life, and with a certain serpent-like grace that was more than human. On her little feet were sandals, fastened with studs of gold. Then came ankles more perfect than ever sculptor dreamed of. About the waist her white kirtle was fastened by a double-headed snake of solid gold, above which her gracious form swelled up in lines as pure as they were lovely, till the kirtle ended on the snowy argent of her breast, whereon her arms were folded. I gazed above them at her face, and—I do not exaggerate—shrank back blinded and amazed. I have heard of the beauty of celestial beings, now I saw it; only this beauty, with all its awful loveliness and purity, was *evil*—at least, at the time, it struck me as evil. How am I to describe it? I cannot—simply I cannot! The man does not live whose pen

could convey a sense of what I saw. I might talk of the great changing eyes of deepest, softest black, of the tinted face, of the broad and noble brow, on which the hair grew low, and delicate, straight features. But, beautiful, surpassingly beautiful as they all were, her loveliness did not lie in them. It lay rather, if it can be said to have had any fixed abiding place, in a visible majesty, in an imperial grace, in a godlike stamp of softened power, which shone upon that radiant countenance like a living halo. Never before had I guessed what beauty made sublime could be—and yet, the sublimity was a dark one—the glory was not all of heaven—though none the less was it glorious. Though the face before me was that of a young woman of certainly not more than thirty years, in perfect health, and the first flush of ripened beauty, yet it had stamped upon it a look of unutterable experience, and of deep acquaintance with grief and passion. Not even the lovely smile that crept about the dimples of her mouth could hide this shadow of sin and sorrow. It shone even in the light of the glorious eyes, it was present in the air of majesty, and it seemed to say: “Behold me, lovely as no woman was or is, undying and half-divine; memory haunts me from age to age, and passion leads me by the hand—evil have I done, and from age to age evil I shall do, and sorrow shall I know till my redemption comes.”

Drawn by some magnetic force which I could not resist, I let my eyes rest upon her shining orbs, and felt a current pass from them to me that bewildered and half-blinded me.

She laughed—ah, how musically! and nodded her little head at me with an air of sublimated coquetry that would have done credit to a Venus Victrix.

“Rash man!” she said; “like Actæon, thou hast had thy will; be careful lest, like Actæon, thou too dost perish miserably, torn to pieces by the ban-hounds of thine own passions. I too, oh Holly, am a virgin goddess, not to be moved of any man, save one, and it is not thou. Say, hast thou seen enough!”

“I have looked on beauty, and I am blinded,” I said hoarsely, lifting my hand to cover up my eyes.

“So! what did I tell thee? Beauty is like the lightning; it is lovely, but it destroys—especially trees, oh Holly!” and again she nodded and laughed.

Suddenly she paused, and through my fingers I saw an awful change come over her countenance. Her great eyes suddenly fixed themselves into an expression in which horror seemed to struggle with some tremendous hope arising through the depths of her dark soul. The lovely face grew rigid, and the gracious willowy form seemed to erect itself.

“Man,” she half whispered, half hissed, throwing back her head like a snake about to strike—“Man, whence hadst thou that scarab on thy hand? Speak, or by the Spirit of Life I will blast thee where thou standest!” and she took one light step towards me, and from her eyes there shone such an awful light—to me it seemed almost like a flame—that I fell, then and there, on the ground before her, babbling confusedly in my terror.

“Peace,” she said, with a sudden change of manner, and speaking in her former soft voice. “I did affright thee! Forgive me! But at times, oh Holly, the almost infinite mind grows impatient of the slowness of the very finite, and am I tempted to use my power out of vexation—very nearly wast thou dead, but I remembered—. But the scarab—about the scarabæus!”

“I picked it up,” I gurgled feebly, as I got on to my feet again, and it is a solemn fact that my mind was so disturbed that at the moment I could remember nothing else about the ring except that I had picked it up in Leo’s cave.

“It is very strange,” she said with a sudden access of womanlike trembling and agitation which seemed out of place in this awful woman—“but once I knew a scarab like to that. It—hung round the neck—of one I loved,” and she gave a little sob, and I saw that after all she was only a woman, although she might be a very old one.

“There,” she went on, “it must be one like to it, and yet never did I see one like to it, for thereto hung a history, and he who wore it prized it much.<sup>[3]</sup> But the scarab that I knew was not set thus in the bezel of a ring. Go now, Holly, go, and, if thou canst, try to forget that thou hast of thy folly looked upon Ayesha’s beauty,” and, turning from me, she flung herself on her couch, and buried her face in the cushions.

[3] I am informed by a renowned and learned Egyptologist, to whom I have submitted this very interesting and beautifully finished scarab, “Suten se Ra,” that he has never seen one resembling it. Although it bears a title frequently given to Egyptian royalty, he is of opinion that it is not necessarily the cartouche of a Pharaoh, on which either the throne or personal name of the monarch is generally inscribed. What the history of this particular scarab may have been we can now, unfortunately, never know, but I have little doubt but that it played some part in the tragic story of the Princess Amenartas and her lover Kallikrates, the forsworn priest of Isis.—Editor.

As for me, I stumbled from her presence, and I do not remember how I reached my own cave.

## XIV.

### A SOUL IN HELL

It was nearly ten o'clock at night when I cast myself down upon my bed, and began to gather my scattered wits, and reflect upon what I had seen and heard. But the more I reflected the less I could make of it. Was I mad, or drunk, or dreaming, or was I merely the victim of a gigantic and most elaborate hoax? How was it possible that I, a rational man, not unacquainted with the leading scientific facts of our history, and hitherto an absolute and utter disbeliever in all the hocus-pocus which in Europe goes by the name of the supernatural, could believe that I had within the last few minutes been engaged in conversation with a woman two thousand and odd years old? The thing was contrary to the experience of human nature, and absolutely and utterly impossible. It must be a hoax, and yet, if it were a hoax, what was I to make of it? What, too, was to be said of the figures on the water, of the woman's extraordinary acquaintance with the remote past, and her ignorance, or apparent ignorance, of any subsequent history? What, too, of her wonderful and awful loveliness? This, at any rate, was a patent fact, and beyond the experience of the world. No merely mortal woman could shine with such a supernatural radiance. About that she had, at any rate, been in the right—it was not safe for any man to look upon such beauty. I was a hardened vessel in such matters, having, with the exception of one painful experience of my green and tender youth, put the softer sex (I sometimes think that this is a misnomer) almost entirely out of my thoughts. But now, to my intense horror, I *knew* that I could never put away the vision of those glorious eyes; and alas! the very *diablerie* of the woman, whilst it horrified and repelled, attracted in even a greater degree. A person with the experience of two thousand years at her back, with the command of such tremendous powers, and the knowledge of a mystery that could hold off death, was certainly worth falling in love with, if ever woman was. But, alas! it was not a question of whether or no she was worth it, for so far as I could judge, not being versed in such matters, I, a fellow of my college, noted for what my acquaintances are pleased to call my misogyny, and a respectable man now well on in middle life, had fallen absolutely and hopelessly in love with this white sorceress. Nonsense; it must be nonsense! She had warned me fairly, and I had refused to take the warning. Curses on the fatal curiosity that is ever prompting man to draw the veil from woman, and curses on the natural impulse that begets it! It is the cause of half—ay, and more than half—of our misfortunes. Why cannot man be content to live alone and be happy, and let the women live alone and be happy too? But perhaps they would not be happy, and I am not sure that we should either. Here is a nice state of affairs. I, at my age, to fall a victim to this modern Circe! But then she was not modern, at least she said not. She was almost as ancient as the original Circe.

I tore my hair, and jumped up from my couch, feeling that if I did not do something I should go off my head. What did she mean about the scarabæus too? It was Leo's scarabæus, and had come out of the old coffer that Vincey had left in my rooms nearly one-and-twenty years before. Could it be, after all, that the whole story was true, and the writing on the sherd was *not* a forgery, or the invention of some crack-brained, long-forgotten individual? And if so, could it be that *Leo* was the man that *She* was waiting for—the dead man who was to be born again! Impossible! The whole thing was gibberish! Who ever heard of a man being born again?

But if it were possible that a woman could exist for two thousand years, this might be possible also—anything might be possible. I myself might, for aught I knew, be a reincarnation of some other forgotten self, or perhaps the last of a long line of ancestral selves. Well, *vive la guerre!* why not? Only, unfortunately, I had no recollection of these previous conditions. The idea was so absurd to me that I burst out laughing, and, addressing the sculptured picture of a grim-looking warrior on the cave wall, called out to him aloud, "Who knows, old fellow?—perhaps I was your contemporary. By Jove! perhaps I was you and you are I," and then I laughed again at my own folly, and the sound of my laughter rang dismally along the vaulted roof, as though the ghost of the warrior had echoed the ghost of a laugh.

Next I bethought me that I had not been to see how Leo was, so, taking up one of the lamps which was burning at my bedside, I slipped off my shoes and crept down the passage to the entrance of his sleeping cave. The draught of the night air was lifting his curtain to and fro gently, as though spirit hands were drawing and redrawing it. I slid into the vault-like apartment, and looked round. There was a light by which I could see that Leo was lying on the couch, tossing restlessly in his fever, but asleep. At his side, half-lying on the floor, half-leaning against the stone couch, was Ustane. She held his hand in one of hers, but she too was dozing, and the two made a pretty, or rather a pathetic, picture. Poor Leo! his cheek was burning red, there were dark shadows beneath his eyes, and his breath came heavily. He was very, very ill; and again the horrible fear seized me that he might die, and I be left alone in the world. And yet if he lived he would perhaps be my rival with Ayesha; even if he were not the man, what chance should I, middle-aged and hideous, have against his bright youth and beauty? Well, thank Heaven! my sense of right was not dead. *She* had not killed that yet; and, as I stood there, I prayed to Heaven in my heart that my boy, my more than son, might live—ay, even if he proved to be the man.

Then I went back as softly as I had come, but still I could not sleep; the sight and thought of dear Leo lying there so ill had but added fuel to the fire of my unrest. My wearied body and overstrained mind awakened all my imagination into preternatural activity. Ideas, visions, almost inspirations, floated before it with startling vividness. Most of them were grotesque enough, some were ghastly, some recalled thoughts and sensations that had for years been buried in the *débris* of my past life. But, behind and above them all, hovered the shape of that awful woman, and through them gleamed the memory of her entrancing loveliness. Up and down the cave I strode—up and down.

Suddenly I observed, what I had not noticed before, that there was a narrow aperture in the rocky wall. I took up the lamp and examined it; the aperture led to a passage. Now, I was still sufficiently sensible to remember that it is not pleasant, in such a situation as ours was, to have passages running into one's bed-chamber from no one knows where. If there are passages, people can come up them; they can come up when one is asleep. Partly to see where it went to, and partly from a restless desire to be doing something, I followed the passage. It led to a stone stair, which I descended; the stair ended in another passage, or rather tunnel, also hewn out of

the bed-rock, and running, so far as I could judge, exactly beneath the gallery that led to the entrance of our rooms, and across the great central cave. I went on down it: it was as silent as the grave, but still, drawn by some sensation or attraction that I cannot define, I followed on, my stockinged feet falling without noise on the smooth and rocky floor. When I had traversed some fifty yards of space, I came to another passage running at right angles, and here an awful thing happened to me: the sharp draught caught my lamp and extinguished it, leaving me in utter darkness in the bowels of that mysterious place. I took a couple of strides forward so as to clear the bisecting tunnel, being terribly afraid lest I should turn up it in the dark if once I got confused as to the direction, and then paused to think. What was I to do? I had no match; it seemed awful to attempt that long journey back through the utter gloom, and yet I could not stand there all night, and, if I did, probably it would not help me much, for in the bowels of the rock it would be as dark at midday as at midnight. I looked back over my shoulder—not a sight or a sound. I peered forward into the darkness: surely, far away, I saw something like the faint glow of fire. Perhaps it was a cave where I could get a light—at any rate, it was worth investigating. Slowly and painfully I crept along the tunnel, keeping my hand against its wall, and feeling at every step with my foot before I put it down, fearing lest I should fall into some pit. Thirty paces—there was a light, a broad light that came and went, shining through curtains! Fifty paces—it was close at hand! Sixty—oh, great heaven!

I was at the curtains, and they did not hang close, so I could see clearly into the little cavern beyond them. It had all the appearance of being a tomb, and was lit up by a fire that burnt in its centre with a whitish flame and without smoke. Indeed, there, to the left, was a stone shelf with a little ledge to it three inches or so high, and on the shelf lay what I took to be a corpse; at any rate, it looked like one, with something white thrown over it. To the right was a similar shelf, on which lay some brodered coverings. Over the fire bent the figure of a woman; she was sideways to me and facing the corpse, wrapped in a dark mantle that hid her like a nun's cloak. She seemed to be staring at the flickering flame. Suddenly, as I was trying to make up my mind what to do, with a convulsive movement that somehow gave an impression of despairing energy, the woman rose to her feet and cast the dark cloak from her.

It was *She* herself!

She was clothed, as I had seen her when she unveiled, in the kirtle of clinging white, cut low upon her bosom, and bound in at the waist with the barbaric double-headed snake, and, as before, her rippling black hair fell in heavy masses down her back. But her face was what caught my eye, and held me as in a vice, not this time by the force of its beauty, but by the power of fascinated terror. The beauty was still there, indeed, but the agony, the blind passion, and the awful vindictiveness displayed upon those quivering features, and in the tortured look of the upturned eyes, were such as surpass my powers of description.

For a moment she stood still, her hands raised high above her head, and as she did so the white robe slipped from her down to her golden girdle, baring the blinding loveliness of her form. She stood there, her fingers clenched, and the awful look of malevolence gathered and deepened on her face.

Suddenly I thought of what would happen if she discovered me, and the reflection made me turn sick and faint. But, even if I had known that I must die if I stopped, I do not believe that I could have moved, for I was absolutely fascinated. But still I knew my danger. Supposing she should hear me, or see me through the curtain, supposing I even sneezed, or that her magic told her that she was being watched—swift indeed would be my doom.

Down came the clenched hands to her sides, then up again above her head, and, as I am a living and honourable man, the white flame of the fire leapt up after them, almost to the roof, throwing a fierce and ghastly glare upon *She* herself, upon the white figure beneath the covering, and every scroll and detail of the rockwork.

Down came the ivory arms again, and as they did so she spoke, or rather hissed, in Arabic, in a note that curdled my blood, and for a second stopped my heart.

“Curse her, may she be everlastingly accursed.”

The arms fell and the flame sank. Up they went again, and the broad tongue of fire shot up after them; and then again they fell.

“Curse her memory—accursed be the memory of the Egyptian.”

Up again, and again down.

“Curse her, the daughter of the Nile, because of her beauty.

“Curse her, because her magic hath prevailed against me.

“Curse her, because she held my beloved from me.”

And again the flame dwindled and shrank.

She put her hands before her eyes, and abandoning the hissing tone, cried aloud:—

“What is the use of cursing?—she prevailed, and she is gone.”

Then she recommenced with an even more frightful energy:—

“Curse her where she is. Let my curses reach her where she is and disturb her rest.

“Curse her through the starry spaces. Let her shadow be accursed.

“Let my power find her even there.

“Let her hear me even there. Let her hide herself in the blackness.

“Let her go down into the pit of despair, because I shall one day find her.”

Again the flame fell, and again she covered her eyes with her hands.

“It is of no use—no use,” she wailed; “who can reach those who sleep? Not even I can reach them.”

Then once more she began her unholy rites.

“Curse her when she shall be born again. Let her be born accursed.

“Let her be utterly accursed from the hour of her birth until sleep finds her.

“Yea, then, let her be accursed; for then shall I overtake her with my vengeance, and utterly destroy her.”

And so on. The flame rose and fell, reflecting itself in her agonised eyes; the hissing sound of her terrible maledictions, and no words of mine can convey how terrible they were, ran round the walls and died away in little echoes, and the fierce light and deep gloom alternated themselves on the white and dreadful form stretched upon that bier of stone.

But at length she seemed to wear herself out and cease. She sat herself down upon the rocky floor, shook the dense cloud of her beautiful hair over her face and breast, and began to sob terribly in the torture of a heartrending despair.

"Two thousand years," she moaned—"two thousand years have I wanted and endured; but though century doth still creep on to century, and time give place to time, the sting of memory hath not lessened, the light of hope doth not shine more bright. Oh! to have lived two thousand years, with all my passion eating out my heart, and with my sin ever before me. Oh, that for me life cannot bring forgetfulness! Oh, for the weary years that have been and are yet to come, and evermore to come, endless and without end!

"My love! my love! my love! Why did that stranger bring thee back to me after this sort? For five hundred years I have not suffered thus. Oh, if I sinned against thee, have I not wiped away the sin? When wilt thou come back to me who have all, and yet without thee have naught? What is there that I can do? What? What? What? And perchance she—perchance that Egyptian doth abide with thee where thou art, and mock my memory. Oh, why could I not die with thee, I who slew thee? Alas, that I cannot die! Alas! Alas!" and she flung herself prone upon the ground, and sobbed and wept till I thought her heart must burst.

Suddenly she ceased, raised herself to her feet, rearranged her robe, and, tossing back her long locks impatiently, swept across to where the figure lay upon the stone.

"Oh Kallikrates," she cried, and I trembled at the name, "I must look upon thy face again, though it be agony. It is a generation since I looked upon thee whom I slew—slew with mine own hand," and with trembling fingers she seized the corner of the sheet-like wrapping that covered the form upon the stone bier, and then paused. When she spoke again, it was in a kind of awed whisper, as though her idea were terrible even to herself.

"Shall I raise thee," she said, apparently addressing the corpse, "so that thou standest there before me, as of old? I *can* do it," and she held out her hands over the sheeted dead, while her whole frame became rigid and terrible to see, and her eyes grew fixed and dull. I shrank in horror behind the curtain, my hair stood up upon my head, and, whether it was my imagination or a fact I am unable to say, but I thought that the quiet form beneath the covering began to quiver, and the winding sheet to lift as though it lay on the breast of one who slept. Suddenly she withdrew her hands, and the motion of the corpse seemed to me to cease.

"To what purpose?" she said gloomily. "Of what good is it to recall the semblance of life when I cannot recall the spirit? Even if thou stoodest before me thou wouldst not know me, and couldst but do what I bid thee. The life in thee would be *my* life, and not *thy* life, Kallikrates."

For a moment she stood there brooding, and then cast herself down on her knees beside the form, and began to press her lips against the sheet, and weep. There was something so horrible about the sight of this awe-inspiring woman letting loose her passion on the dead—so much more horrible even than anything that had gone before—that I could no longer bear to look at it, and, turning, began to creep, shaking as I was in every limb, slowly along the pitch-dark passage, feeling in my trembling heart that I had seen a vision of a Soul in Hell.

On I stumbled, I scarcely know how. Twice I fell, once I turned up the bisecting passage, but fortunately found out my mistake in time. For twenty minutes or more I crept along, till at last it occurred to me that I must have passed the little stair by which I had descended. So, utterly exhausted, and nearly frightened to death, I sank down at length there on the stone flooring, and sank into oblivion.

When I came to I noticed a faint ray of light in the passage just behind me. I crept to it, and found it was the little stair down which the weak dawn was stealing. Passing up it, I gained my chamber in safety, and, flinging myself on the couch, was soon lost in slumber or rather stupor.

## XV.

### AYESHA GIVES JUDGMENT

The next thing that I remember was opening my eyes and perceiving the form of Job, who had now practically recovered from his attack of fever. He was standing in the ray of light that pierced into the cave from the outer air, shaking out my clothes as a makeshift for brushing them, which he could not do because there was no brush, and then folding them up neatly and laying them on the foot of the stone couch. This done, he got my travelling dressing-case out of the Gladstone bag, and opened it ready for my use. First he stood it on the foot of the couch also, then, being afraid, I suppose, that I should kick it off, he placed it on a leopard skin on the floor, and stood back a step or two to observe the effect. It was not satisfactory, so he shut up the bag, turned it on end, and, having rested it against the foot of the couch, placed the dressing-case on it. Next he looked at the pots full of water, which constituted our washing apparatus. "Ah!" I heard him murmur, "no hot water in this beastly place. I suppose these poor creatures only use it to boil each other in," and he sighed deeply.

"What is the matter, Job?" I said.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, touching his hair. "I thought you were asleep, sir; and I am sure you seem as though you want it. One might think from the look of you that you had been having a night of it."

I only groaned by way of answer. I had, indeed, been having a night of it, such as I hope never to have again.

"How is Mr. Leo, Job?"

"Much the same, sir. If he don't soon mend, he'll end, sir; and that's all about it; though I must say that that there savage, Ustane, do do her best for him, almost like a baptised Christian. She is always hanging round and looking after him, and if I ventures to interfere it's awful to see her; her hair seems to stand on end, and she curses and swears away in her heathen talk—at least I fancy she must be cursing, from the look of her."

"And what do you do then?"

"I make her a perlite bow, and I say, 'Young woman, your position is one that I don't quite understand, and can't recognise. Let me tell you that I has a duty to perform to my master as is incapacitated by illness, and that I am going to perform it until I am incapacitated too,' but she don't take no heed, not she—only curses and swears away worse than ever. Last night she put her hand under that sort of night-shirt she wears and whips out a knife with a kind of a curl in the blade, so I whips out my revolver, and we walks round and round each other till at last she bursts out laughing. It isn't nice treatment for a Christian man to have to put up with from a savage, however handsome she may be, but it is what people must expect as is *fools* enough" (Job laid great emphasis on the "fools") "to come to such a place to look for things no man is meant to find. It's a judgment on us, sir—that's my view; and I, for one, is of opinion that the judgment isn't half done yet, and when it is done we shall be done too, and just stop in these beastly caves with the ghosts and the corpseses for once and all. And now, sir, I must be seeing about Mr. Leo's broth, if that wild cat will let me; and, perhaps, you would like to get up, sir, because it's past nine o'clock."

Job's remarks were not of an exactly cheering order to a man who had passed such a night as I had; and, what is more, they had the weight of truth. Taking one thing with another, it appeared to me to be an utter impossibility that we should escape from the place we were. Supposing that Leo recovered, and supposing that *She* would let us go, which was exceedingly doubtful, and that she did not "blast" us in some moment of vexation, and that we were not hot-potted by the Amahagger, it would be quite impossible for us to find our way across the network of marshes which, stretching for scores and scores of miles, formed a stronger and more impassable fortification round the various Amahagger households than any that could be built or designed by man. No, there was but one thing to do—face it out; and, speaking for my own part, I was so intensely interested in the whole weird story that, so far as I was concerned, notwithstanding the shattered state of my nerves, I asked nothing better, even if my life paid forfeit to my curiosity. What man for whom physiology has charms could forbear to study such a character as that of this Ayesha when the opportunity of doing so presented itself? The very terror of the pursuit added to its fascination, and besides, as I was forced to own to myself even now in the sober light of day, she herself had attractions that I could not forget. Not even the dreadful sight which I had witnessed during the night could drive that folly from my mind; and alas! that I should have to admit it, it has not been driven thence to this hour.

After I had dressed myself I passed into the eating, or rather embalming chamber, and had some food, which was as before brought to me by the girl mutes. When I had finished I went and saw poor Leo, who was quite off his head, and did not even know me. I asked Ustane how she thought he was; but she only shook her head and began to cry a little. Evidently her hopes were small; and I then and there made up my mind that, if it were in any way possible, I would get *She* to come and see him. Surely she would cure him if she chose—at any rate she said she could. While I was in the room, Billali entered, and also shook his head.

"He will die at night," he said.

"God forbid, my father," I answered, and turned away with a heavy heart.

"*She-who-must-be-obeyed* commands thy presence, my Baboon," said the old man as soon as we got to the curtain; "but, oh my dear son, be more careful. Yesterday I made sure in my heart that *She* would blast thee when thou didst not crawl upon thy stomach before her. She is sitting in the great hall even now to do justice upon those who would have smitten thee and the Lion. Come on, my son; come swiftly."

I turned, and followed him down the passage, and when we reached the great central cave saw that many Amahagger, some robed, and some merely clad in the sweet simplicity of a leopard skin, were hurrying along it. We mingled with the throng, and walked up the enormous and, indeed, almost interminable cave. All the way its walls were elaborately sculptured, and every twenty paces or so

passages opened out of it at right angles, leading, Billali told me, to tombs, hollowed in the rock by "the people who were before." Nobody visited those tombs now, he said; and I must say that my heart rejoiced when I thought of the opportunities of antiquarian research which opened out before me.

At last we came to the head of the cave, where there was a rock daïs almost exactly similar to the one on which we had been so furiously attacked, a fact that proved to me that these daïs must have been used as altars, probably for the celebration of religious ceremonies, and more especially of rites connected with the interment of the dead. On either side of this daïs were passages leading, Billali informed me, to other caves full of dead bodies. "Indeed," he added, "the whole mountain is full of dead, and nearly all of them are perfect."

In front of the daïs were gathered a great number of people of both sexes, who stood staring about in their peculiar gloomy fashion, which would have reduced Mark Tapley himself to misery in about five minutes. On the daïs was a rude chair of black wood inlaid with ivory, having a seat made of grass fibre, and a footstool formed of a wooden slab attached to the framework of the chair.

Suddenly there was a cry of "Hiya! Hiya!" ("*She! She!*"), and thereupon the entire crowd of spectators instantly precipitated itself upon the ground, and lay still as though it were individually and collectively stricken dead, leaving me standing there like some solitary survivor of a massacre. As it did so a long string of guards began to defile from a passage to the left, and ranged themselves on either side of the daïs. Then followed about a score of male mutes, then as many women mutes bearing lamps, and then a tall white figure, swathed from head to foot, in whom I recognised *She* herself. She mounted the daïs and sat down upon the chair, and spoke to me in *Greek*, I suppose because she did not wish those present to understand what she said.

"Come hither, oh Holly," she said, "and sit thou at my feet, and see me do justice on those who would have slain thee. Forgive me if my Greek doth halt like a lame man; it is so long since I have heard the sound of it that my tongue is stiff, and will not bend rightly to the words."

I bowed, and, mounting the daïs, sat down at her feet.

"How hast thou slept, my Holly?" she asked.

"I slept not well, oh Ayesha!" I answered with perfect truth, and with an inward fear that perhaps she knew how I had passed the heart of the night.

"So," she said, with a little laugh; "I, too, have not slept well. Last night I had dreams, and methinks that thou didst call them to me, oh Holly."

"Of what didst thou dream, Ayesha?" I asked indifferently.

"I dreamed," she answered quickly, "of one I hate and one I love," and then, as though to turn the conversation, she addressed the captain of her guard in Arabic: "Let the men be brought before me."

The captain bowed low, for the guard and her attendants did not prostrate themselves, but had remained standing, and departed with his underlings down a passage to the right.

Then came a silence. *She* leaned her swathed head upon her hand and appeared to be lost in thought, while the multitude before her continued to grovel upon their stomachs, only screwing their heads round a little so as to get a view of us with one eye. It seemed that their Queen so rarely appeared in public that they were willing to undergo this inconvenience, and even graver risks, to have the opportunity of looking on her, or rather on her garments, for no living man there except myself had ever seen her face. At last we caught sight of the waving of lights, and heard the tramp of men coming along the passage, and in filed the guard, and with them the survivors of our would-be murderers, to the number of twenty or more, on whose countenances a natural expression of sullenness struggled with the terror that evidently filled their savage hearts. They were ranged in front of the daïs, and would have cast themselves down on the floor of the cave like the spectators, but *She* stopped them.

"Nay," she said in her softest voice, "stand; I pray you stand. Perchance the time will soon be when ye shall grow weary of being stretched out," and she laughed melodiously.

I saw a cringe of terror run along the rank of the doomed wretches, and, wicked villains as they were, I felt sorry for them. Some minutes, perhaps two or three, passed before anything fresh occurred, during which *She* appeared from the movement of her head—for, of course, we could not see her eyes—to be slowly and carefully examining each delinquent. At last she spoke, addressing herself to me in a quiet and deliberate tone.

"Dost thou, oh my guest, recognise these men?"

"Ay, oh Queen, nearly all of them," I said, and I saw them glower at me as I said it.

"Then tell to me, and this great company, the tale whereof I have heard."

Thus adjured, I, in as few words as I could, related the history of the cannibal feast, and of the attempted torture of our poor servant. The narrative was received in perfect silence, both by the accused and by the audience, and also by *She* herself. When I had done, Ayesha called upon Billali by name, and, lifting his head from the ground, but without rising, the old man confirmed my story. No further evidence was taken.

"Ye have heard," said *She* at length, in a cold, clear voice, very different from her usual tones—indeed, it was one of the most remarkable things about this extraordinary creature that her voice had the power of suiting itself in a wonderful manner to the mood of the moment. "What have ye to say, ye rebellious children, why vengeance should not be done upon you?"

For some time there was no answer, but at last one of the men, a fine, broad-chested fellow, well on in middle-life, with deep-graven features and an eye like a hawk's, spoke, and said that the orders that they had received were not to harm the white men; nothing was said of their black servant, so, egged on thereto by a woman who was now dead, they proceeded to try to hot-pot him after the ancient and honourable custom of their country, with a view of eating him in due course. As for their sudden attack upon ourselves, it was made in an access of sudden fury, and they deeply regretted it. He ended by humbly praying that they might be banished into the swamps, to live and die as it might chance; but I saw it written on his face that he had but little hope of mercy.

Then came a pause, and the most intense silence reigned over the whole scene, which, illuminated as it was by the flicker of the lamps striking out broad patterns of light and shadow upon the rocky walls, was as strange as any I ever saw, even in that unholy land. Upon the ground before the daïs were stretched scores of the corpse-like forms of the spectators, till at last the long lines of them were lost in the gloomy background. Before this outstretched audience were the knots of evil-doers, trying to cover up their natural terrors with a brave appearance of unconcern. On the right and left stood the silent guards, robed in white and armed with great spears and

daggers, and men and women mutes watching with hard curious eyes. Then, seated in her barbaric chair above them all, with myself at her feet, was the veiled white woman, whose loveliness and awesome power seemed to visibly shine about her like a halo, or rather like the glow from some unseen light. Never have I seen her veiled shape look more terrible than it did in that space, while she gathered herself up for vengeance.

At last it came.

“Dogs and serpents,” *She* began in a low voice that gradually gathered power as she went on, till the place rang with it. “Eaters of human flesh, two things have ye done. First, ye have attacked these strangers, being white men, and would have slain their servant, and for that alone death is your reward. But that is not all. Ye have dared to disobey me. Did I not send my word unto you by Billali, my servant, and the father of your household? Did I not bid you to hospitably entertain these strangers, whom now ye have striven to slay, and whom, had not they been brave and strong beyond the strength of men, ye would cruelly have murdered? Hath it not been taught to you from childhood that the law of *She* is an ever fixed law, and that he who breaketh it by so much as one jot or tittle shall perish? And is not my lightest word a law? Have not your fathers taught you this, I say, whilst as yet ye were but children? Do ye not know that as well might ye bid these great caves to fall upon you, or the sun to cease its journeying, as to hope to turn me from my courses, or make my word light or heavy, according to your minds? Well do ye know it, ye Wicked Ones. But ye are all evil—evil to the core—the wickedness bubbles up in you like a fountain in the spring-time. Were it not for me, generations since had ye ceased to be, for of your own evil way had ye destroyed each other. And now, because ye have done this thing, because ye have striven to put these men, my guests, to death, and yet more because ye have dared to disobey my word, this is the doom that I doom you to. That ye be taken to the cave of torture,<sup>[1]</sup> and given over to the tormentors, and that on the going down of to-morrow’s sun those of you who yet remain alive be slain, even as ye would have slain the servant of this my guest.”

[1] “The cave of torture.” I afterwards saw this dreadful place, also a legacy from the prehistoric people who lived in Kôr. The only objects in the cave itself were slabs of rock arranged in various positions to facilitate the operations of the torturers. Many of these slabs, which were of a porous stone, were stained quite dark with the blood of ancient victims that had soaked into them. Also in the centre of the room was a place for a furnace, with a cavity wherein to heat the historic pot. But the most dreadful thing about the cave was that over each slab was a sculptured illustration of the appropriate torture being applied. These sculptures were so awful that I will not harrow the reader by attempting a description of them.—L. H. H.

She ceased, and a faint murmur of horror ran round the cave. As for the victims, as soon as they realised the full hideousness of their doom, their stoicism forsook them, and they flung themselves down upon the ground, and wept and implored for mercy in a way that was dreadful to behold. I, too, turned to Ayesha, and begged her to spare them, or at least to mete out their fate in some less awful way. But she was hard as adamant about it.

“My Holly,” she said, again speaking in Greek, which, to tell the truth, although I have always been considered a better scholar of the language than most men, I found it rather difficult to follow, chiefly because of the change in the fall of the accent. Ayesha, of course, talked with the accent of her contemporaries, whereas we have only tradition and the modern accent to guide us as to the exact pronunciation. “My Holly, it cannot be. Were I to show mercy to those wolves, your lives would not be safe among this people for a day. Thou knowest them not. They are tigers to lap blood, and even now they hunger for your lives. How thinkest thou that I rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding, therefore it is not by force. It is by terror. My empire is of the imagination. Once in a generation mayhap I do as I have done but now, and slay a score by torture. Believe not that I would be cruel, or take vengeance on anything so low. What can it profit me to be avenged on such as these? Those who live long, my Holly, have no passions, save where they have interests. Though I may seem to slay in wrath, or because my mood is crossed, it is not so. Thou hast seen how in the heavens the little clouds blow this way and that without a cause, yet behind them is the great wind sweeping on its path whither it listeth. So it is with me, oh Holly. My moods and changes are the little clouds, and fitfully these seem to turn; but behind them ever blows the great wind of my purpose. Nay, the men must die; and die as I have said.” Then, suddenly turning to the captain of the guard:—

“As my word is, so be it!”

## XVI.

# THE TOMBS OF KÔR

After the prisoners had been removed Ayesha waved her hand, and the spectators turned round, and began to crawl off down the cave like a scattered flock of sheep. When they were a fair distance from the daïs, however, they rose and walked away, leaving the Queen and myself alone, with the exception of the mutes and the few remaining guards, most of whom had departed with the doomed men. Thinking this a good opportunity, I asked *She* to come and see Leo, telling her of his serious condition; but she would not, saying that he certainly would not die before the night, as people never died of that sort of fever except at nightfall or dawn. Also she said that it would be better to let the sickness spend its course as much as possible before she cured it. Accordingly, I was rising to leave, when she bade me follow her, as she would talk with me, and show me the wonders of the caves.

I was too much involved in the web of her fatal fascinations to say her no, even if I had wished, which I did not. She rose from her chair, and, making some signs to the mutes, descended from the daïs. Thereon four of the girls took lamps, and ranged themselves two in front and two behind us, but the others went away, as also did the guards.

“Now,” she said, “wouldst thou see some of the wonders of this place, oh Holly? Look upon this great cave. Sawest thou ever the like? Yet was it, and many more like it, hollowed by the hands of the dead race that once lived here in the city on the plain. A great and wonderful people must they have been, those men of Kôr, but, like the Egyptians, they thought more of the dead than of the living. How many men, thinkest thou, working for how many years, did it need to the hollowing out this cave and all the galleries thereof?”

“Tens of thousands,” I answered.

“So, oh Holly. This people was an old people before the Egyptians were. A little can I read of their inscriptions, having found the key thereto—and see thou here, this was one of the last of the caves that they hollowed,” and, turning to the rock behind her, she motioned the mutes to hold up the lamps. Carven over the daïs was the figure of an old man seated in a chair, with an ivory rod in his hand. It struck me at once that his features were exceedingly like those of the man who was represented as being embalmed in the chamber where we took our meals. Beneath the chair, which, by the way, was shaped exactly like the one in which Ayesha had sat to give judgment, was a short inscription in the extraordinary characters of which I have already spoken, but which I do not remember sufficient of to illustrate. It looked more like Chinese writing than any other that I am acquainted with. This inscription Ayesha proceeded, with some difficulty and hesitation, to read aloud and translate. It ran as follows:—

“In the year four thousand two hundred and fifty-nine from the founding of the City of imperial Kôr was this cave (or burial place) completed by Tisno, King of Kôr, the people thereof and their slaves having laboured thereat for three generations, to be a tomb for their citizens of rank who shall come after. May the blessings of the heaven above the heaven rest upon their work, and make the sleep of Tisno, the mighty monarch, the likeness of whose features is graven above, a sound and happy sleep till the day of awakening,<sup>[1]</sup> and also the sleep of his servants, and of those of his race who, rising up after him, shall yet lay their heads as low.”

[1] This phrase is remarkable, as seeming to indicate a belief in a future state.—Editor.

“Thou seest, oh Holly,” she said, “this people founded the city, of which the ruins yet cumber the plain yonder, four thousand years before this cave was finished. Yet, when first mine eyes beheld it two thousand years ago, was it even as it is now. Judge, therefore, how old must that city have been! And now, follow thou me, and I will show thee after what fashion this great people fell when the time was come for it to fall,” and she led the way down to the centre of the cave, stopping at a spot where a round rock had been let into a kind of large manhole in the flooring, accurately filling it just as the iron plates fill the spaces in the London pavements down which the coals are thrown. “Thou seest,” she said. “Tell me, what is it?”

“Nay, I know not,” I answered; whereon she crossed to the left-hand side of the cave (looking towards the entrance) and signed to the mutes to hold up the lamps. On the wall was something painted with a red pigment in similar characters to those hewn beneath the sculpture of Tisno, King of Kôr. This inscription she proceeded to translate to me, the pigment still being fresh enough to show the form of the letters. It ran thus:

“I, Junis, a priest of the Great Temple of Kôr, write this upon the rock of the burying-place in the year four thousand eight hundred and three from the founding of Kôr. Kôr is fallen! No more shall the mighty feast in her halls, no more shall she rule the world, and her navies go out to commerce with the world. Kôr is fallen! and her mighty works and all the cities of Kôr, and all the harbours that she built and the canals that she made, are for the wolf and the owl and the wild swan, and the barbarian who comes after. Twenty and five moons ago did a cloud settle upon Kôr, and the hundred cities of Kôr, and out of the cloud came a pestilence that slew her people, old and young, one with another, and spared not. One with another they turned black and died—the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the man and the woman, the prince and the slave. The pestilence slew and slew, and ceased not by day or by night, and those who escaped from the pestilence were slain of the famine. No longer could the bodies of the children of Kôr be preserved according to the ancient rites, because of the number of the dead, therefore were they hurled into the great pit beneath the cave, through the hole in the floor of the cave. Then, at last, a remnant of this the great people, the light of the whole world, went down to the coast and took ship and sailed northwards; and now am I, the Priest Junis, who write this, the last man left alive of this great city of men, but whether there be any yet left in the other cities I know not. This do I write in misery of heart before I die, because Kôr the Imperial is no more, and because there are none to worship in her temple, and all her palaces are empty, and her princes and her captains and her traders and her fair women have passed off the face of the earth.”

I gave a sigh of astonishment—the utter desolation depicted in this rude scrawl was so overpowering. It was terrible to think of this solitary survivor of a mighty people recording its fate before he too went down into darkness. What must the old man have felt as, in ghastly terrifying solitude, by the light of one lamp feebly illuminating a little space of gloom, he in a few brief lines daubed the history of his nation's death upon the cavern wall? What a subject for the moralist, or the painter, or indeed for any one who can think!

“Doth it not occur to thee, oh Holly,” said Ayesha, laying her hand upon my shoulder, “that those men who sailed North may have been the fathers of the first Egyptians?”

“Nay, I know not,” I said; “it seems that the world is very old.”

“Old? Yes, it is old indeed. Time after time have nations, ay, and rich and strong nations, learned in the arts, been and passed away and been forgotten, so that no memory of them remains. This is but one of several; for Time eats up the works of man, unless, indeed, he digs in caves like the people of Kôr, and then mayhap the sea swallows them, or the earthquake shakes them in. Who knows what hath been on the earth, or what shall be? There is no new thing under the sun, as the wise Hebrew wrote long ago. Yet were not these people utterly destroyed, as I think. Some few remained in the other cities, for their cities were many. But the barbarians from the south, or perchance my people, the Arabs, came down upon them, and took their women to wife, and the race of the Amahagger that is now is a bastard brood of the mighty sons of Kôr, and behold it dwelleth in the tombs with its fathers' bones.<sup>[2]</sup> But I know not: who can know? My arts cannot pierce so far into the blackness of Time's night. A great people were they. They conquered till none were left to conquer, and then they dwelt at ease within their rocky mountain walls, with their man servants and their maid servants, their minstrels, their sculptors, and their concubines, and traded and quarrelled, and ate and hunted and slept and made merry till their time came. But come, I will show thee the great pit beneath the cave whereof the writing speaks. Never shall thine eyes witness such another sight.”

<sup>[2]</sup> The name of the race Ama-hagger would seem to indicate a curious mingling of races such as might easily have occurred in the neighbourhood of the Zambesi. The prefix “Ama” is common to the Zulu and kindred races, and signifies “people,” while “hagger” is an Arabic word meaning a stone.—Editor.

Accordingly I followed her to a side passage opening out of the main cave, then down a great number of steps, and along an underground shaft which cannot have been less than sixty feet beneath the surface of the rock, and was ventilated by curious borings that ran upward, I know not where. Suddenly the passage ended, and she halted and bade the mutes hold up the lamps, and, as she had prophesied, I saw a scene such as I was not likely to see again. We were standing in an enormous pit, or rather on the brink of it, for it went down deeper—I do not know how much—than the level on which we stood, and was edged in with a low wall of rock. So far as I could judge, this pit was about the size of the space beneath the dome of St. Paul's in London, and when the lamps were held up I saw that it was nothing but one vast charnel-house, being literally full of thousands of human skeletons, which lay piled up in an enormous gleaming pyramid, formed by the slipping down of the bodies at the apex as fresh ones were dropped in from above. Anything more appalling than this jumbled mass of the remains of a departed race I cannot imagine, and what made it even more dreadful was that in this dry air a considerable number of the bodies had simply become desiccated with the skin still on them, and now, fixed in every conceivable position, stared at us out of the mountain of white bones, grotesquely horrible caricatures of humanity. In my astonishment I uttered an ejaculation, and the echoes of my voice, ringing in the vaulted space, disturbed a skull that had been accurately balanced for many thousands of years near the apex of the pile. Down it came with a run, bounding along merrily towards us, and of course bringing an avalanche of other bones after it, till at last the whole pit rattled with their movement, even as though the skeletons were getting up to greet us.

“Come,” I said, “I have seen enough. These are the bodies of those who died of the great sickness, is it not so?” I added, as we turned away.

“Yea. The people of Kôr ever embalmed their dead, as did the Egyptians, but their art was greater than the art of the Egyptians, for, whereas the Egyptians disembowelled and drew the brain, the people of Kôr injected fluid into the veins, and thus reached every part. But stay, thou shalt see,” and she halted at haphazard at one of the little doorways opening out of the passage along which we were walking, and motioned to the mutes to light us in. We entered into a small chamber similar to the one in which I had slept at our first stopping-place, only instead of one there were two stone benches or beds in it. On the benches lay figures covered with yellow linen,<sup>[3]</sup> on which a fine and impalpable dust had gathered in the course of ages, but nothing like to the extent that one would have anticipated, for in these deep-hewn caves there is no material to turn to dust. About the bodies on the stone shelves and floor of the tomb were many painted vases, but I saw very few ornaments or weapons in any of the vaults.

<sup>[3]</sup> All the linen that the Amahagger wore was taken from the tombs, which accounted for its yellow hue. It was well washed, however, and properly rebleached, it acquired its former snowy whiteness, and was the softest and best linen I ever saw.—L. H. H.

“Uplift the cloths, oh Holly,” said Ayesha, but when I put out my hand to do so I drew it back again. It seemed like sacrilege, and, to speak the truth, I was awed by the dread solemnity of the place, and of the presences before us. Then, with a little laugh at my fears, she drew them herself, only to discover other and yet finer cloths lying over the forms upon the stone bench. These also she withdrew, and then for the first time for thousands upon thousands of years did living eyes look upon the face of that chilly dead. It was a woman; she might have been thirty-five years of age, or perhaps a little less, and had certainly been beautiful. Even now her calm clear-cut features, marked out with delicate eyebrows and long eyelashes which threw little lines of the shadow of the lamplight upon the ivory face, were wonderfully beautiful. There, robed in white, down which her blue-black hair was streaming, she slept her last long sleep, and on her arm, its face pressed against her breast, there lay a little babe. So sweet was the sight, although so awful, that—I confess it without shame—I could scarcely withhold my tears. It took me back across the dim gulf of ages to some happy home in dead Imperial Kôr, where this winsome lady girl about with beauty had lived and died, and dying taken her last-born with her to the tomb. There they were before us, mother and babe, the white memories of a forgotten human history speaking more eloquently to the heart than could any written record of their lives. Reverently I replaced the grave-cloths, and, with a sigh that flowers so fair should, in the purpose of the Everlasting, have only bloomed to be gathered to the grave, I turned to the body on the opposite shelf, and gently unveiled it. It was that of a man in advanced life, with a long grizzled beard, and also robed in white, probably the husband of the lady, who, after surviving her many years, came at the last to sleep once more for good and all beside her.

We left the place and entered others. It would be too long to describe the many things I saw in them. Each one had its occupants, for the five hundred and odd years that had elapsed between the completion of the cave and the destruction of the race had evidently

sufficed to fill these catacombs, numberless as they were, and all appeared to have been undisturbed since the day when they were placed there. I could fill a book with the description of them, but to do so would only be to repeat what I have said, with variations.

Nearly all the bodies, so masterfully was the art with which they had been treated, were as perfect as on the day of death thousands of years before. Nothing came to injure them in the deep silence of the living rock: they were beyond the reach of heat and cold and damp, and the aromatic drugs with which they had been saturated were evidently practically everlasting in their effect. Here and there, however, we saw an exception, and in these cases, although the flesh looked sound enough externally, if one touched it it fell in, and revealed the fact that the figure was but a pile of dust. This arose, Ayesha told me, from these particular bodies having, either owing to haste in the burial or other causes, been soaked in the preservative,<sup>[4]</sup> instead of its being injected into the substance of the flesh.

[4] Ayesha afterwards showed me the tree from the leaves of which this ancient preservative was manufactured. It is a low bush-like tree, that to this day grows in wonderful plenty upon the sides of the mountains, or rather upon the slopes leading up to the rocky walls. The leaves are long and narrow, a vivid green in colour, but turning a bright red in the autumn, and not unlike those of a laurel in general appearance. They have little smell when green, but if boiled the aromatic odour from them is so strong that one can hardly bear it. The best mixture, however, was made from the roots, and among the people of Kôr there was a law, which Ayesha showed me alluded to on some of the inscriptions, to the effect that on pain of heavy penalties no one under a certain rank was to be embalmed with the drugs prepared from the roots. The object and effect of this was, of course, to preserve the trees from extermination. The sale of the leaves and roots was a Government monopoly, and from it the Kings of Kôr derived a large proportion of their private revenue.—L. H. H.

About the last tomb we visited I must, however, say one word, for its contents spoke even more eloquently to the human sympathies than those of the first. It had but two occupants, and they lay together on a single shelf. I withdrew the grave-cloths and there, clasped heart to heart, were a young man and a blooming girl. Her head rested on his arm, and his lips were pressed against her brow. I opened the man's linen robe, and there over his heart was a dagger-wound, and beneath the woman's fair breast was a like cruel stab, through which her life had ebbed away. On the rock above was an inscription in three words. Ayesha translated it. It was "*Wedded in Death.*"

What was the life-story of these two, who, of a truth, were beautiful in their lives, and in their death were not divided?

I closed my eyelids, and imagination, taking up the thread of thought, shot its swift shuttle back across the ages, weaving a picture on their blackness so real and vivid in its details that I could almost for a moment think that I had triumphed o'er the Past, and that my spirit's eyes had pierced the mystery of Time.

I seemed to see this fair girl form—the yellow hair streaming down her, glittering against her garments snowy white, and the bosom that was whiter than the robes, even dimming with its lustre her ornaments of burnished gold. I seemed to see the great cave filled with warriors, bearded and clad in mail, and, on the lighted dais where Ayesha had given judgment, a man standing, robed, and surrounded by the symbols of his priestly office. And up the cave there came one clad in purple, and before him and behind him came minstrels and fair maidens, chanting a wedding song. White stood the maid against the altar, fairer than the fairest there—purer than a lily, and more cold than the dew that glistens in its heart. But as the man drew near she shuddered. Then out of the press and throng there sprang a dark-haired youth, and put his arms about this long-forgotten maid, and kissed her pale face in which the blood shot up like lights of the red dawn across the silent sky. And next there was turmoil and uproar, and a flashing of swords, and they tore the youth from her arms, and stabbed him, but with a cry she snatched the dagger from his belt, and drove it into her snowy breast, home to the heart, and down she fell, and then, with cries and wailing, and every sound of lamentation, the pageant rolled away from the arena of my vision, and once more the past shut to its book.

Let him who reads forgive the intrusion of a dream into a history of fact. But it came so home to me—I saw it all so clear in a moment, as it were; and, besides, who shall say what proportion of fact, past, present, or to come, may lie in the imagination? What is imagination? Perhaps it is the shadow of the intangible truth, perhaps it is the soul's thought.

In an instant the whole thing had passed through my brain, and *She* was addressing me.

"Behold the lot of man," said the veiled Ayesha, as she drew the winding sheets back over the dead lovers, speaking in a solemn, thrilling voice, which accorded well with the dream that I had dreamed: "to the tomb, and to the forgetfulness that hides the tomb, must we all come at last! Ay, even I who live so long. Even for me, oh Holly, thousands upon thousands of years hence; thousands of years after thou hast gone through the gate and been lost in the mists, a day will dawn whereon I shall die, and be even as thou art and these are. And then what will it avail that I have lived a little longer, holding off death by the knowledge that I have wrung from Nature, since at last I too must die? What is a span of ten thousand years, or ten times ten thousand years, in the history of time? It is as naught—it is as the mists that roll up in the sunlight; it fleeth away like an hour of sleep or a breath of the Eternal Spirit. Behold the lot of man! Certainly it shall overtake us, and we shall sleep. Certainly, too, we shall awake and live again, and again shall sleep, and so on and on, through periods, spaces, and times, from æon unto æon, till the world is dead, and the worlds beyond the world are dead, and naught liveth but the Spirit that is Life. But for us twain and for these dead ones shall the end of ends be Life, or shall it be Death? As yet Death is but Life's Night, but out of the night is the Morrow born again, and doth again beget the Night. Only when Day and Night, and Life and Death, are ended and swallowed up in that from which they came, what shall be our fate, oh Holly? Who can see so far? Not even I!"

And then, with a sudden change of tone and manner—

"Hast thou seen enough, my stranger guest, or shall I show thee more of the wonders of these tombs that are my palace halls? If thou wilt, I can lead thee to where Tisno, the mightiest and most valorous King of Kôr, in whose day these caves were ended, lies in a pomp that seems to mock at nothingness, and bid the empty shadows of the past do homage to his sculptured vanity!"

"I have seen enough, oh Queen," I answered. "My heart is overwhelmed by the power of the present Death. Mortality is weak, and easily broken down by a sense of the companionship that waits upon its end. Take me hence, oh Ayesha!"

## XVII.

### THE BALANCE TURNS

In a few minutes, following the lamps of the mutes, which, held out from the body as a bearer holds water in a vessel, had the appearance of floating down the darkness by themselves, we came to a stair which led us to *She's* ante-room, the same that Billali had crept up upon on all fours on the previous day. Here I would have bid the Queen adieu, but she would not.

"Nay," she said, "enter with me, oh Holly, for of a truth thy conversation pleaseth me. Think, oh Holly: for two thousand years have I had none to converse with save slaves and my own thoughts, and though of all this thinking hath much wisdom come, and many secrets been made plain, yet am I weary of my thoughts, and have come to loathe mine own society, for surely the food that memory gives to eat is bitter to the taste, and it is only with the teeth of hope that we can bear to bite it. Now, though thy thoughts are green and tender, as becometh one so young, yet are they those of a thinking brain, and in truth thou dost bring back to my mind certain of those old philosophers with whom in days bygone I have disputed at Athens, and at Becca in Arabia, for thou hast the same crabbed air and dusty look, as though thou hadst passed thy days in reading ill-writ Greek, and been stained dark with the grime of manuscripts. So draw the curtain, and sit here by my side, and we will eat fruit, and talk of pleasant things. See, I will again unveil to thee. Thou hast brought it on thyself, oh Holly; fairly have I warned thee—and thou shalt call me beautiful as even those old philosophers were wont to do. Fie upon them, forgetting their philosophy!"

And without more ado she stood up and shook the white wrappings from her, and came forth shining and splendid like some glittering snake when she has cast her slough; ay, and fixed her wonderful eyes upon me—more deadly than any Basilisk's—and pierced me through and through with their beauty, and sent her light laugh ringing through the air like chimes of silver bells.

A new mood was on her, and the very colour of her mind seemed to change beneath it. It was no longer torture-torn and hateful, as I had seen it when she was cursing her dead rival by the leaping flames, no longer icily terrible as in the judgment-hall, no longer rich, and sombre, and splendid, like a Tyrian cloth, as in the dwellings of the dead. No, her mood now was that of Aphrodité triumphing. Life—radiant, ecstatic, wonderful—seemed to flow from her and around her. Softly she laughed and sighed, and swift her glances flew. She shook her heavy tresses, and their perfume filled the place; she struck her little sandalled foot upon the floor, and hummed a snatch of some old Greek epithalamium. All the majesty was gone, or did but lurk and faintly flicker through her laughing eyes, like lightning seen through sunlight. She had cast off the terror of the leaping flame, the cold power of judgment that was even now being done, and the wise sadness of the tombs—cast them off and put them behind her, like the white shroud she wore, and now stood out the incarnation of lovely tempting womanhood, made more perfect—and in a way more spiritual—than ever woman was before.

"So, my Holly, sit there where thou canst see me. It is by thine own wish, remember—again I say, blame me not if thou dost wear away thy little span with such a sick pain at the heart that thou wouldst fain have died before ever thy curious eyes were set upon me. There, sit so, and tell me, for in truth I am inclined for praises—tell me, am I not beautiful? Nay, speak not so hastily; consider well the point; take me feature by feature, forgetting not my form, and my hands and feet, and my hair, and the whiteness of my skin, and then tell me truly, hast thou ever known a woman who in aught, ay, in one little portion of her beauty, in the curve of an eyelash even, or the modelling of a shell-like ear, is justified to hold a light before my loveliness? Now, my waist! Perchance thou thinkest it too large, but of a truth it is not so; it is this golden snake that is too large, and doth not bind it as it should. It is a wide snake, and knoweth that it is ill to tie in the waist. But see, give me thy hands—so—now press them round me, and there, with but a little force, thy fingers touch, oh Holly."

I could bear it no longer. I am but a man, and she was more than a woman. Heaven knows what she was—I do not! But then and there I fell upon my knees before her, and told her in a sad mixture of languages—for such moments confuse the thoughts—that I worshipped her as never woman was worshipped, and that I would give my immortal soul to marry her, which at that time I certainly would have done, and so, indeed, would any other man, or all the race of men rolled into one. For a moment she looked surprised, and then she began to laugh, and clap her hands in glee.

"Oh, so soon, oh Holly!" she said. "I wondered how many minutes it would need to bring thee to thy knees. I have not seen a man kneel before me for so many days, and, believe me, to a woman's heart the sight is sweet, ay, wisdom and length of days take not from that dear pleasure which is our sex's only right.

"What wouldst thou?—what wouldst thou? Thou dost not know what thou doest. Have I not told thee that I am not for thee? I love but one, and thou art not the man. Ah Holly, for all thy wisdom—and in a way thou art wise—thou art but a fool running after folly. Thou wouldst look into mine eyes—thou wouldst kiss me! Well, if it pleaseth thee, *look*," and she bent herself towards me, and fixed her dark and thrilling orbs upon my own; "ay, and *kiss* too, if thou wilt, for, thanks be given to the scheme of things, kisses leave no marks, except upon the heart. But if thou dost kiss, I tell thee of a surety wilt thou eat out thy breast with love of me, and die!" and she bent yet further towards me till her soft hair brushed my brow, and her fragrant breath played upon my face, and made me faint and weak. Then of a sudden, even as I stretched out my hands to clasp, she straightened herself, and a quick change passed over her. Reaching out her hand, she held it over my head, and it seemed to me that something flowed from it that chilled me back to common sense, and a knowledge of propriety and the domestic virtues.

"Enough of this wanton folly," she said with a touch of sternness. "Listen, Holly. Thou art a good and honest man, and I fain would spare thee; but, oh! it is so hard for woman to be merciful. I have said I am not for thee, therefore let thy thoughts pass by me like an idle wind, and the dust of thy imagination sink again into the depths—well, of despair, if thou wilt. Thou dost not know me, Holly. Hadst thou seen me but ten hours past when my passion seized me, thou hadst shrunk from me in fear and trembling. I am of many moods, and, like the water in that vessel, I reflect many things; but they pass, my Holly; they pass, and are forgotten. Only the water is

the water still, and I still am I, and that which maketh the water maketh it, and that which maketh me maketh me, nor can my quality be altered. Therefore, pay no heed to what I seem, seeing that thou canst not know what I am. If thou troublest me again I will veil myself, and thou shalt behold my face no more.”

I rose, and sank on the cushioned couch beside her, yet quivering with emotion, though for a moment my mad passion had left me, as the leaves of a tree quiver still, although the gust be gone that stirred them. I did not dare to tell her that I *had* seen her in that deep and hellish mood, muttering incantations to the fire in the tomb.

“So,” she went on, “now eat some fruit; believe me, it is the only true food for man. Oh, tell me of the philosophy of that Hebrew Messiah, who came after me, and who thou sayest doth now rule Rome, and Greece, and Egypt, and the barbarians beyond. It must have been a strange philosophy that He taught, for in my day the peoples would have naught of our philosophies. Revel and lust and drink, blood and cold steel, and the shock of men gathered in the battle—these were the canons of their creeds.”

I had recovered myself a little by now, and, feeling bitterly ashamed of the weakness into which I had been betrayed, I did my best to expound to her the doctrines of Christianity, to which, however, with the single exception of our conception of Heaven and Hell, I found that she paid but scant attention, her interest being all directed towards the Man who taught them. Also I told her that among her own people, the Arabs, another prophet, one Mohammed, had arisen and preached a new faith, to which many millions of mankind now adhered.

“Ah!” she said; “I see—two new religions! I have known so many, and doubtless there have been many more since I knew aught beyond these caves of Kôr. Mankind asks ever of the skies to vision out what lies behind them. It is terror for the end, and but a subtler form of selfishness—this it is that breeds religions. Mark, my Holly, each religion claims the future for its followers; or, at least, the good thereof. The evil is for those benighted ones who will have none of it; seeing the light the true believers worship, as the fishes see the stars, but dimly. The religions come and the religions pass, and the civilisations come and pass, and naught endures but the world and human nature. Ah! if man would but see that hope is from within and not from without—that he himself must work out his own salvation! He is there, and within him is the breath of life and a knowledge of good and evil as good and evil is to him. Thereon let him build and stand erect, and not cast himself before the image of some unknown God, modelled like his poor self, but with a bigger brain to think the evil thing, and a longer arm to do it.”

I thought to myself, which shows how old such reasoning is, being, indeed, one of the recurring qualities of theological discussion, that her argument sounded very like some that I have heard in the nineteenth century, and in other places than the caves of Kôr, and with which, by the way, I totally disagree, but I did not care to try and discuss the question with her. To begin with, my mind was too weary with all the emotions through which I had passed, and, in the second place, I knew that I should get the worst of it. It is weary work enough to argue with an ordinary materialist, who hurls statistics and whole strata of geological facts at your head, whilst you can only buffet him with deductions and instincts and the snowflakes of faith, that are, alas! so apt to melt in the hot embers of our troubles. How little chance, then, should I have against one whose brain was supernaturally sharpened, and who had two thousand years of experience, besides all manner of knowledge of the secrets of Nature at her command! Feeling that she would be more likely to convert me than I should to convert her, I thought it best to leave the matter alone, and so sat silent. Many a time since then have I bitterly regretted that I did so, for thereby I lost the only opportunity I can remember having had of ascertaining what Ayesha *really* believed, and what her “philosophy” was.

“Well, my Holly,” she continued, “and so those people of mine have found a prophet, a false prophet thou sayest, for he is not thine own, and, indeed, I doubt it not. Yet in my day was it otherwise, for then we Arabs had many gods. Allât there was, and Saba, the Host of Heaven, Al Uzza, and Manah the stony one, for whom the blood of victims flowed, and Wadd and Sawâ, and Yaghûth the Lion of the dwellers in Yaman, and Yâûk the Horse of Morad, and Nasr the Eagle of Hamyar; ay, and many more. Oh, the folly of it all, the shame and the pitiful folly! Yet when I rose in wisdom and spoke thereof, surely they would have slain me in the name of their outraged gods. Well, so hath it ever been;—but, my Holly, art thou weary of me already, that thou dost sit so silent? Or dost thou fear lest I should teach thee my philosophy?—for know I have a philosophy. What would a teacher be without her own philosophy? and if thou dost vex me overmuch beware! for I will have thee learn it, and thou shalt be my disciple, and we twain will found a faith that shall swallow up all others. Faithless man! And but half an hour since thou wast upon thy knees—the posture does not suit thee, Holly—swearing that thou didst love me. What shall we do?—Nay, I have it. I will come and see this youth, the Lion, as the old man Billali calls him, who came with thee, and who is so sick. The fever must have run its course by now, and if he is about to die I will recover him. Fear not, my Holly, I shall use no magic. Have I not told thee that there is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as understanding and applying the forces which are in Nature? Go now, and presently, when I have made the drug ready, I will follow thee.”<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] Ayesha was a great chemist, indeed chemistry appears to have been her only amusement and occupation. She had one of the caves fitted up as a laboratory, and, although her appliances were necessarily rude, the results that she attained were, as will become clear in the course of this narrative, sufficiently surprising.—L. H. H.

Accordingly I went, only to find Job and Ustane in a great state of grief, declaring that Leo was in the throes of death, and that they had been searching for me everywhere. I rushed to the couch, and glanced at him: clearly he was dying. He was senseless, and breathing heavily, but his lips were quivering, and every now and again a little shudder ran down his frame. I knew enough of doctoring to see that in another hour he would be beyond the reach of earthly help—perhaps in another five minutes. How I cursed my selfishness and the folly that had kept me lingering by Ayesha’s side while my dear boy lay dying! Alas and alas! how easily the best of us are lighted down to evil by the gleam of a woman’s eyes! What a wicked wretch was I! Actually, for the last half-hour I had scarcely thought of Leo, and this, be it remembered, of the man who for twenty years had been my dearest companion, and the chief interest of my existence. And now, perhaps, it was too late!

I wrung my hands, and glanced round. Ustane was sitting by the couch, and in her eyes burnt the dull light of despair. Job was blubbering—I am sorry I cannot name his distress by any more delicate word—audibly in the corner. Seeing my eye fixed upon him, he went outside to give way to his grief in the passage. Obviously the only hope lay in Ayesha. She, and she alone—unless, indeed, she was an imposter, which I could not believe—could save him. I would go and implore her to come. As I started to do so, however, Job came flying into the room, his hair literally standing on end with terror.

“Oh, God help us, sir!” he ejaculated in a frightened whisper, “here’s a corpse a-coming sliding down the passage!”

For a moment I was puzzled, but presently, of course, it struck me that he must have seen Ayesha, wrapped in her grave-like garment, and been deceived by the extraordinary undulating smoothness of her walk into a belief that she was a white ghost gliding

towards him. Indeed, at that very moment the question was settled, for Ayesha herself was in the apartment, or rather cave. Job turned, and saw her sheeted form, and then, with a convulsive howl of "Here it comes!" sprang into a corner, and jammed his face against the wall, and Ustane, guessing whose the dread presence must be, prostrated herself upon her face.

"Thou comest in a good time, Ayesha," I said, "for my boy lies at the point of death."

"So," she said softly; "provided he be not dead, it is no matter, for I can bring him back to life, my Holly. Is that man there thy servant, and is that the method wherewith thy servants greet strangers in thy country?"

"He is frightened of thy garb—it hath a death-like air," I answered.

She laughed.

"And the girl? Ah, I see now. It is she of whom thou didst speak to me. Well, bid them both to leave us, and we will see to this sick Lion of thine. I love not that underlings should perceive my wisdom."

Thereon I told Ustane in Arabic and Job in English both to leave the room; an order which the latter obeyed readily enough, and was glad to obey, for he could not in any way subdue his fear. But it was otherwise with Ustane.

"What does *She* want?" she whispered, divided between her fear of the terrible Queen and her anxiety to remain near Leo. "It is surely the right of a wife to be near her husband when he dieth. Nay, I will not go, my lord the Baboon."

"Why doth not that woman leave us, my Holly?" asked Ayesha from the other end of the cave, where she was engaged in carelessly examining some of the sculptures on the wall.

"She is not willing to leave Leo," I answered, not knowing what to say. Ayesha wheeled round, and, pointing to the girl Ustane, said one word, and one only, but it was quite enough, for the tone in which it was said meant volumes.

"Go!"

And then Ustane crept past her on her hands and knees, and went.

"Thou seest, my Holly," said Ayesha, with a little laugh, "it was needful that I should give these people a lesson in obedience. That girl went nigh to disobeying me, but then she did not learn this morn how I treat the disobedient. Well, she has gone; and now let me see the youth," and she glided towards the couch on which Leo lay, with his face in the shadow and turned towards the wall.

"He hath a noble shape," she said, as she bent over him to look upon his face.

Next second her tall and willowy form was staggering back across the room, as though she had been shot or stabbed, staggering back till at last she struck the cavern wall, and then there burst from her lips the most awful and unearthly scream that I ever heard in all my life.

"What is it, Ayesha?" I cried. "Is he dead?"

She turned, and sprang towards me like a tigress.

"Thou dog!" she said, in her terrible whisper, which sounded like the hiss of a snake, "why didst thou hide this from me?" And she stretched out her arm, and I thought that she was about to slay me.

"What?" I ejaculated, in the most lively terror; "what?"

"Ah!" she said, "perchance thou didst not know. Learn, my Holly, learn: there lies—there lies my lost Kallikrates. Kallikrates, who has come back to me at last, as I knew he would, as I knew he would;" and she began to sob and to laugh, and generally to conduct herself like any other lady who is a little upset, murmuring "Kallikrates, Kallikrates!"

"Nonsense," thought I to myself, but I did not like to say it; and, indeed, at that moment I was thinking of Leo's life, having forgotten everything else in that terrible anxiety. What I feared now was that he should die while she was "carrying on."

"Unless thou art able to help him, Ayesha," I put in, by way of a reminder, "thy Kallikrates will soon be far beyond thy calling. Surely he dieth even now."

"True," she said, with a start. "Oh, why did I not come before! I am unnerved—my hand trembles, even mine—and yet it is very easy. Here, thou Holly, take this phial," and she produced a tiny jar of pottery from the folds of her garment, "and pour the liquid in it down his throat. It will cure him if he be not dead. Swift, now! Swift! The man dies!"

I glanced towards him; it was true enough, Leo was in his death-struggle. I saw his poor face turning ashen, and heard the breath begin to rattle in his throat. The phial was stoppered with a little piece of wood. I drew it with my teeth, and a drop of the fluid within flew out upon my tongue. It had a sweet flavour, and for a second made my head swim, and a mist gather before my eyes, but happily the effect passed away as swiftly as it had arisen.

When I reached Leo's side he was plainly expiring—his golden head was slowly turning from side to side, and his mouth was slightly open. I called to Ayesha to hold his head, and this she managed to do, though the woman was quivering from head to foot, like an aspen-leaf or a startled horse. Then, forcing the jaw a little more open, I poured the contents of the phial into his mouth. Instantly a little vapour arose from it, as happens when one disturbs nitric acid, and this sight did not increase my hopes, already faint enough, of the efficacy of the treatment.

One thing, however, was certain, the death throes ceased—at first I thought because he had got beyond them, and crossed the awful river. His face turned to a livid pallor, and his heart-beats, which had been feeble enough before, seemed to die away altogether—only the eyelid still twitched a little. In my doubt I looked up at Ayesha, whose head-wrapping had slipped back in her excitement when she went reeling across the room. She was still holding Leo's head, and, with a face as pale as his own, watching his countenance with such an expression of agonised anxiety as I had never seen before. Clearly she did not know if he would live or die. Five minutes slowly passed and I saw that she was abandoning hope; her lovely oval face seemed to fall in and grow visibly thinner beneath the pressure of a mental agony whose pencil drew black lines about the hollows of her eyes. The coral faded even from her lips, till they were as white as Leo's face, and quivered pitifully. It was shocking to see her: even in my own grief I felt for hers.

"Is it too late?" I gasped.

She hid her face in her hands, and made no answer, and I too turned away. But as I did so I heard a deep-drawn breath, and looking down perceived a line of colour creeping up Leo's face, then another and another, and then, wonder of wonders, the man we had thought dead turned over on his side.

"Thou seest," I said in a whisper.

"I see," she answered hoarsely. "He is saved. I thought we were too late—another moment—one little moment more—and he had been gone!" and she burst into an awful flood of tears, sobbing as though her heart would break, and yet looking lovelier than ever as she did it. At last she ceased.

"Forgive me, my Holly—forgive me for my weakness," she said. "Thou seest after all I am a very woman. Think—now think of it! This morning didst thou speak of the place of torment appointed by this new religion of thine. Hell or Hades thou didst call it—a place where the vital essence lives and retains an individual memory, and where all the errors and faults of judgment, and unsatisfied passions and the unsubstantial terrors of the mind wherewith it hath at any time had to do, come to mock and haunt and gibe and wring the heart for ever and for ever with the vision of its own hopelessness. Thus, even thus, have I lived for full two thousand years—for some six and sixty generations, as ye reckon time—in a Hell, as thou callest it—tormented by the memory of a crime, tortured day and night with an unfulfilled desire—without companionship, without comfort, without death, and led on only down my dreary road by the marsh lights of Hope, which, though they flickered here and there, and now glowed strong, and now were not, yet, as my skill told me, would one day lead unto my deliverer.

"And then—think of it still, oh Holly, for never shalt thou hear such another tale, or see such another scene, nay, not even if I give thee ten thousand years of life—and thou shalt have it in payment if thou wilt—think: at last my deliverer came—he for whom I had watched and waited through the generations—at the appointed time he came to seek me, as I knew that he must come, for my wisdom could not err, though I knew not when or how. Yet see how ignorant I was! See how small my knowledge, and how faint my strength! For hours he lay there sick unto death, and I felt it not—I who had waited for him for two thousand years—I knew it not. And then at last I see him, and behold, my chance is gone but by a hair's breadth even before I have it, for he is in the very jaws of death, whence no power of mine can draw him. And if he die, surely must the Hell be lived through once more—once more must I face the weary centuries, and wait, and wait till the time in its fulness shall bring my Beloved back to me. And then thou gavest him the medicine, and that five minutes dragged long before I knew if he would live or die, and I tell thee that all the sixty generations that are gone were not so long as that five minutes. But they passed at length, and still he showed no sign, and I knew that if the drug works not then, so far as I have had knowledge, it works not at all. Then thought I that he was once more dead, and all the tortures of all the years gathered themselves into a single venomous spear, and pierced me through and through, because again I had lost Kallikrates! And then, when all was done, behold! he sighed, behold! he lived, and I knew that he would live, for none die on whom the drug takes hold. Think of it now, my Holly—think of the wonder of it! He will sleep for twelve hours and then the fever will have left him!"

She stopped, and laid her hand upon his golden head, and then bent down and kissed his brow with a chastened abandonment of tenderness that would have been beautiful to behold had not the sight cut me to the heart—for I was jealous!

## XVIII.

### “GO, WOMAN!”

Then followed a silence of a minute or so, during which *She* appeared, if one might judge from the almost angelic rapture of her face—for she looked angelic sometimes—to be plunged into a happy ecstasy. Suddenly, however, a new thought struck her, and her expression became the very reverse of angelic.

“Almost had I forgotten,” she said, “that woman, Ustane. What is she to Kallikrates—his servant, or——” and she paused, and her voice trembled.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I understand that she is wed to him according to the custom of the Amahagger,” I answered; “but I know not.”

Her face grew dark as a thunder-cloud. Old as she was, Ayesha had not outlived jealousy.

“Then there is an end,” she said; “she must die, even now!”

“For what crime?” I asked, horrified. “She is guilty of naught that thou art not guilty of thyself, oh Ayesha. She loves the man, and he has been pleased to accept her love: where, then, is her sin?”

“Truly, oh Holly, thou art foolish,” she answered, almost petulantly. “Where is her sin? Her sin is that she stands between me and my desire. Well, I know that I can take him from her—for dwells there a man upon this earth, oh Holly, who could resist me if I put out my strength? Men are faithful for so long only as temptations pass them by. If the temptation be but strong enough, then will the man yield, for every man, like every rope, hath his breaking strain, and passion is to men what gold and power are to women—the weight upon their weakness. Believe me, ill will it go with mortal woman in that heaven of which thou speakest, if only the spirits be more fair, for their lords will never turn to look upon them, and their Heaven will become their Hell. For man can be bought with woman’s beauty, if it be but beautiful enough; and woman’s beauty can be ever bought with gold, if only there be gold enough. So was it in my day, and so it will be to the end of time. The world is a great mart, my Holly, where all things are for sale to him who bids the highest in the currency of our desires.”

These remarks, which were as cynical as might have been expected from a woman of Ayesha’s age and experience, jarred upon me, and I answered, testily, that in our heaven there was no marriage or giving in marriage.

“Else would it not be heaven, dost thou mean?” she put in. “Fie on thee, Holly, to think so ill of us poor women! Is it, then, marriage that marks the line between thy heaven and thy hell? but enough of this. This is no time for disputing and the challenge of our wits. Why dost thou always dispute? Art thou also a philosopher of these latter days? As for this woman, she must die; for, though I can take her lover from her, yet, while she lived, might he think tenderly of her, and that I cannot away with. No other woman shall dwell in my Lord’s thoughts; my empire shall be all my own. She hath had her day, let her be content; for better is an hour with love than a century of loneliness—now the night shall swallow her.”

“Nay, nay,” I cried, “it would be a wicked crime; and from a crime naught comes but what is evil. For thine own sake, do not this deed.”

“Is it, then, a crime, oh foolish man, to put away that which stands between us and our ends? Then is our life one long crime, my Holly, since day by day we destroy that we may live, since in this world none save the strongest can endure. Those who are weak must perish; the earth is to the strong, and the fruits thereof. For every tree that grows a score shall wither, that the strong one may take their share. We run to place and power over the dead bodies of those who fail and fall; ay, we win the food we eat from out of the mouths of starving babes. It is the scheme of things. Thou sayest, too, that a crime breeds evil, but therein thou dost lack experience; for out of crimes come many good things, and out of good grows much evil. The cruel rage of the tyrant may prove a blessing to the thousands who come after him, and the sweetheartedness of a holy man may make a nation slaves. Man doeth this, and doeth that from the good or evil of his heart; but he knoweth not to what end his moral sense doth prompt him; for when he striketh he is blind to where the blow shall fall, nor can he count the airy threads that weave the web of circumstance. Good and evil, love and hate, night and day, sweet and bitter, man and woman, heaven above and the earth beneath—all these things are necessary, one to the other, and who knows the end of each? I tell thee that there is a hand of fate that twines them up to bear the burden of its purpose, and all things are gathered in that great rope to which all things are needful. Therefore doth it not become us to say this thing is evil and this good, or the dark is hateful and the light lovely; for to other eyes than ours the evil may be the good and the darkness more beautiful than the day, or all alike be fair. Hearest thou, my Holly?”

I felt it was hopeless to argue against casuistry of this nature, which, if it were carried to its logical conclusion, would absolutely destroy all morality, as we understand it. But her talk gave me a fresh thrill of fear; for what may not be possible to a being who, unconstrained by human law, is also absolutely unshackled by a moral sense of right and wrong, which, however partial and conventional it may be, is yet based, as our conscience tells us, upon the great wall of individual responsibility that marks off mankind from the beasts?

But I was deeply anxious to save Ustane, whom I liked and respected, from the dire fate that overshadowed her at the hands of her mighty rival. So I made one more appeal.

“Ayesha,” I said, “thou art too subtle for me; but thou thyself hast told me that each man should be a law unto himself, and follow the teaching of his heart. Hath thy heart no mercy towards her whose place thou wouldst take? Bethink thee—as thou sayest—though to me the thing is incredible—he whom thou desirest has returned to thee after many ages, and but now thou hast, as thou sayest also, wrung him from the jaws of death. Wilt thou celebrate his coming by the murder of one who loved him, and whom perchance he

loved—one, at the least, who saved his life for thee when the spears of thy slaves would have made an end thereof? Thou sayest also that in past days thou didst grievously wrong this man, that with thine own hand thou didst slay him because of the Egyptian Amenartas whom he loved.”

“How knowest thou that, oh stranger? How knowest thou that name? I spoke it not to thee,” she broke in with a cry, catching at my arm.

“Perchance I dreamed it,” I answered; “strange dreams do hover about these caves of Kôr. It seems that the dream was, indeed, a shadow of the truth. What came to thee of thy mad crime?—two thousand years of waiting, was it not? And now wouldst thou repeat the history? Say what thou wilt, I tell thee that evil will come of it; for to him who doeth, at the least, good breeds good and evil evil, even though in after days out of evil cometh good. Offences must needs come; but woe to him by whom the offence cometh. So said that Messiah of whom I spoke to thee, and it was truly said. If thou slayest this innocent woman, I say unto thee that thou shalt be accursed, and pluck no fruit from thine ancient tree of love. Also, what thinkest thou? How will this man take thee red-handed from the slaughter of her who loved and tended him?”

“As to that,” she answered, “I have already answered thee. Had I slain thee as well as her, yet should he love me, Holly, because he could not save himself therefrom any more than thou couldst save thyself from dying, if by chance I slew thee, oh Holly. And yet maybe there is truth in what thou dost say; for in some way it presseth on my mind. If it may be, I will spare this woman; for have I not told thee that I am not cruel for the sake of cruelty? I love not to see suffering, or to cause it. Let her come before me—quick now, before my mood changes,” and she hastily covered her face with its gauzy wrapping.

Well pleased to have succeeded even to this extent, I passed out into the passage and called to Ustane, whose white garment I caught sight of some yards away, huddled up against one of the earthenware lamps that were placed at intervals along the tunnel. She rose, and ran towards me.

“Is my lord dead? Oh, say not he is dead,” she cried, lifting her noble-looking face, all stained as it was with tears, up to me with an air of infinite beseeching that went straight to my heart.

“Nay, he lives,” I answered. “*She* hath saved him. Enter.”

She sighed deeply, entered, and fell upon her hands and knees, after the custom of the Amahagger people, in the presence of the dread *She*.

“Stand,” said Ayesha, in her coldest voice, “and come hither.”

Ustane obeyed, standing before her with bowed head.

Then came a pause, which Ayesha broke.

“Who is this man?” she said, pointing to the sleeping form of Leo.

“The man is my husband,” she answered in a low voice.

“Who gave him to thee for a husband?”

“I took him according to the custom of our country, oh *She*.”

“Thou hast done evil, woman, in taking this man, who is a stranger. He is not a man of thine own race, and the custom fails. Listen: perchance thou didst this thing through ignorance, therefore, woman, do I spare thee, otherwise hadst thou died. Listen again. Go from hence back to thine own place, and never dare to speak to or set thine eyes upon this man again. He is not for thee. Listen a third time. If thou breakest this my law, that moment thou diest. Go.”

But Ustane did not move.

“Go, woman!”

Then she looked up, and I saw that her face was torn with passion.

“Nay, oh *She*. I will not go,” she answered in a choked voice: “the man is my husband, and I love him—I love him, and I will not leave him. What right hast thou to command me to leave my husband?”

I saw a little quiver pass down Ayesha’s frame, and shuddered myself, fearing the worst.

“Be pitiful,” I said in Latin; “it is but Nature working.”

“I am pitiful,” she answered coldly in the same language; “had I not been pitiful she had been dead even now.” Then, addressing Ustane: “Woman, I say to thee, go before I destroy thee where thou art!”

“I will not go! He is mine—mine!” she cried in anguish. “I took him, and I saved his life! Destroy me, then, if thou hast the power! I will not give thee my husband—never—never!”

Ayesha made a movement so swift that I could scarcely follow it, but it seemed to me that she lightly struck the poor girl upon the head with her hand. I looked at Ustane, and then staggered back in horror, for there upon her hair, right across her bronze-like tresses, were three finger-marks *white as snow*. As for the girl herself, she had put her hands to her head, and was looking dazed.

“Great heavens!” I said, perfectly aghast at this dreadful manifestation of human power; but *She* did but laugh a little.

“Thou thinkest, poor ignorant fool,” she said to the bewildered woman, “that I have not the power to slay. Stay, there lies a mirror,” and she pointed to Leo’s round shaving-glass that had been arranged by Job with other things upon his portmanteau; “give it to this woman, my Holly, and let her see that which lies across her hair, and whether or no I have power to slay.”

I picked up the glass, and held it before Ustane’s eyes. She gazed, then felt at her hair, then gazed again, and then sank upon the ground with a sort of sob.

“Now, wilt thou go, or must I strike a second time?” asked Ayesha, in mockery. “Look, I have set my seal upon thee so that I may know thee till thy hair is all as white as it. If I see thy face again, be sure, too, that thy bones shall soon be whiter than my mark upon thy hair.”

Utterly awed and broken down, the poor creature rose, and, marked with that awful mark, crept from the room, sobbing bitterly.

“Look not so frightened, my Holly,” said Ayesha, when she had gone. “I tell thee I deal not in magic—there is no such thing. ‘Tis only a force that thou dost not understand. I marked her to strike terror to her heart, else must I have slain her. And now I will bid my servants to bear my Lord Kallikrates to a chamber near mine own, that I may watch over him, and be ready to greet him when he wakes; and thither, too, shalt thou come, my Holly, and the white man, thy servant. But one thing remember at thy peril. Naught shalt

thou say to Kallikrates as to how this woman went, and as little as may be of me. Now, I have warned thee!" and she slid away to give her orders, leaving me more absolutely confounded than ever. Indeed, so bewildered was I, and racked and torn with such a succession of various emotions, that I began to think that I must be going mad. However, perhaps fortunately, I had but little time to reflect, for presently the mutes arrived to carry the sleeping Leo and our possessions across the central cave, so for a while all was bustle. Our new rooms were situated immediately behind what we used to call Ayesha's boudoir—the curtained space where I had first seen her. Where she herself slept I did not then know, but it was somewhere quite close.

That night I passed in Leo's room, but he slept through it like the dead, never once stirring. I also slept fairly well, as, indeed, I needed to do, but my sleep was full of dreams of all the horrors and wonders I had undergone. Chiefly, however, I was haunted by that frightful piece of *diablerie* by which Ayesha left her finger-marks upon her rival's hair. There was something so terrible about her swift, snake-like movement, and the instantaneous blanching of that threefold line, that, if the results to Ustane had been much more tremendous, I doubt if they would have impressed me so deeply. To this day I often dream of that awful scene, and see the weeping woman, bereaved, and marked like Cain, cast a last look at her lover, and creep from the presence of her dread Queen.

Another dream that troubled me originated in the huge pyramid of bones. I dreamed that they all stood up and marched past me in thousands and tens of thousands—in squadrons, companies, and armies—with the sunlight shining through their hollow ribs. On they rushed across the plain to Kôr, their imperial home; I saw the drawbridges fall before them, and heard their bones clank through the brazen gates. On they went, up the splendid streets, on past fountains, palaces, and temples such as the eye of man never saw. But there was no man to greet them in the market-place, and no woman's face appeared at the windows—only a bodiless voice went before them, calling: "*Fallen is Imperial Kôr!—fallen!—fallen! fallen!*" On, right through the city, marched those gleaming phalanxes, and the rattle of their bony tread echoed through the silent air as they pressed grimly on. They passed through the city and clomb the wall, and marched along the great roadway that was made upon the wall, till at length they once more reached the drawbridge. Then, as the sun was sinking, they returned again towards their sepulchre, and luridly his light shone in the sockets of their empty eyes, throwing gigantic shadows of their bones, that stretched away, and crept and crept like huge spiders' legs as their armies wound across the plain. Then they came to the cave, and once more one by one flung themselves in unending files through the hole into the pit of bones, and I awoke, shuddering, to see *She*, who had evidently been standing between my couch and Leo's, glide like a shadow from the room.

After this I slept again, soundly this time, till morning, when I awoke much refreshed, and got up. At last the hour drew near at which, according to Ayesha, Leo was to awake, and with it came *She* herself, as usual, veiled.

"Thou shalt see, oh Holly," she said; "presently shall he awake in his right mind, the fever having left him."

Hardly were the words out of her mouth, when Leo turned round and stretched out his arms, yawned, opened his eyes, and, perceiving a female form bending over him, threw his arms round her and kissed her, mistaking her, perhaps, for Ustane. At any rate, he said, in Arabic, "Hullo, Ustane, why have you tied your head up like that? Have you got the toothache?" and then, in English, "I say, I'm awfully hungry. Why, Job, you old son of a gun, where the deuce have we got to now—eh?"

"I am sure I wish I knew, Mr. Leo," said Job, edging suspiciously past Ayesha, whom he still regarded with the utmost disgust and horror, being by no means sure that she was not an animated corpse; "but you mustn't talk, Mr. Leo, you've been very ill, and given us a great deal of anxiety, and, if this lady," looking at Ayesha, "would be so kind as to move, I'll bring you your soup."

This turned Leo's attention to the "lady," who was standing by in perfect silence. "Hullo!" he said; "that is not Ustane—where is Ustane?"

Then, for the first time, Ayesha spoke to him, and her first words were a lie. "She has gone from hence upon a visit," she said; "and, behold, in her place am I here as thine handmaiden."

Ayesha's silver notes seemed to puzzle Leo's half-awakened intellect, as also did her corpse-like wrappings. However, he said nothing at the time, but drank off his soup greedily enough, and then turned over and slept again till the evening. When he woke for the second time he saw me, and began to question me as to what had happened, but I had to put him off as best I could till the morrow, when he awoke almost miraculously better. Then I told him something of his illness and of my doings, but as Ayesha was present I could not tell him much except that she was the Queen of the country, and well disposed towards us, and that it was her pleasure to go veiled; for, though of course I spoke in English, I was afraid that she might understand what we were saying from the expression of our faces, and besides, I remembered her warning.

On the following day Leo got up almost entirely recovered. The flesh wound in his side was healed, and his constitution, naturally a vigorous one, had shaken off the exhaustion consequent on his terrible fever with a rapidity that I can only attribute to the effects of the wonderful drug which Ayesha had given to him, and also to the fact that his illness had been too short to reduce him very much. With his returning health came back full recollection of all his adventures up to the time when he had lost consciousness in the marsh, and of course of Ustane also, to whom I had discovered he had grown considerably attached. Indeed, he overwhelmed me with questions about the poor girl, which I did not dare to answer, for after Leo's first awakening *She* had sent for me, and again warned me solemnly that I was to reveal nothing of the story to him, delicately hinting that if I did it would be the worse for me. She also, for the second time, cautioned me not to tell Leo anything more than I was obliged about herself, saying that she would reveal herself to him in her own time.

Indeed, her whole manner changed. After all that I had seen I had expected that she would take the earliest opportunity of claiming the man she believed to be her old-world lover, but this, for some reason of her own, which was at the time quite inscrutable to me, she did not do. All that she did was to attend to his wants quietly, and with a humility which was in striking contrast with her former imperious bearing, addressing him always in a tone of something very like respect, and keeping him with her as much as possible. Of course his curiosity was as much excited about this mysterious woman as my own had been, and he was particularly anxious to see her face, which I had, without entering into particulars, told him was as lovely as her form and voice. This in itself was enough to raise the expectations of any young man to a dangerous pitch, and, had it not been that he had not as yet completely shaken off the effects of illness, and was much troubled in his mind about Ustane, of whose affection and brave devotion he spoke in touching terms, I have no doubt that he would have entered into her plans, and fallen in love with her by anticipation. As it was, however, he was simply wildly curious, and also, like myself, considerably awed, for, though no hint had been given to him by Ayesha of her extraordinary age, he not unnaturally came to identify her with the woman spoken of on the potsherd. At last, quite driven into a corner by his continual questions, which he showered on me while he was dressing on this third morning, I referred him to Ayesha, saying, with perfect truth, that I did not know where Ustane was. Accordingly, after Leo had eaten a hearty breakfast, we adjourned into *She's* presence, for her mutes had orders to admit us at all hours.

She was, as usual, seated in what, for want of a better term, we called her boudoir, and on the curtains being drawn she rose from her couch and, stretching out both hands, came forward to greet us, or rather Leo; for I, as may be imagined, was now quite left in the cold. It was a pretty sight to see her veiled form gliding towards the sturdy young Englishman, dressed in his grey flannel suit; for, though he is half a Greek in blood, Leo is, with the exception of his hair, one of the most English-looking men I ever saw. He has nothing of the subtle form or slippery manner of the modern Greek about him, though I presume that he got his remarkable personal beauty from his foreign mother, whose portrait he resembles not a little. He is very tall and big-chested, and yet not awkward, as so many big men are, and his head is set upon him in such a fashion as to give him a proud and vigorous air, which was well translated in his Amahagger name of the "Lion."

"Greeting to thee, my young stranger lord," she said in her softest voice. "Right glad am I to see thee upon thy feet. Believe me, had I not saved thee at the last, never wouldst thou have stood upon those feet again. But the danger is done, and it shall be my care"—and she flung a world of meaning into the words—"that it doth return no more."

Leo bowed to her, and then, in his best Arabic, thanked her for all her kindness and courtesy in caring for one unknown to her.

"Nay," she answered softly, "ill could the world spare such a man. Beauty is too rare upon it. Give me no thanks, who am made happy by thy coming."

"Humph! old fellow," said Leo aside to me in English, "the lady is very civil. We seem to have tumbled into clover. I hope that you have made the most of your opportunities. By Jove! what a pair of arms she has got!"

I nudged him in the ribs to make him keep quiet, for I caught sight of a gleam from Ayesha's veiled eyes, which were regarding me curiously.

"I trust," went on Ayesha, "that my servants have attended well upon thee; if there can be comfort in this poor place, be sure it waits on thee. Is there aught that I can do for thee more?"

"Yes, oh *She*," answered Leo hastily, "I would fain know whither the young lady who was looking after me has gone to."

"Ah," said Ayesha: "the girl—yes, I saw her. Nay, I know not; she said that she would go, I know not whither. Perchance she will return, perchance not. It is wearisome waiting on the sick, and these savage women are fickle."

Leo looked both sulky and distressed at this intelligence.

"It's very odd," he said to me in English; and then, addressing *She*, "I cannot understand," he said; "the young lady and I—well—in short, we had a regard for each other."

Ayesha laughed a little very musically, and then turned the subject.

## XIX.

### “GIVE ME A BLACK GOAT!”

The conversation after this was of such a desultory order that I do not quite recollect it. For some reason, perhaps from a desire to keep her identity and character in reserve, Ayesha did not talk freely, as she usually did. Presently, however, she informed Leo that she had arranged a dance that night for our amusement. I was astonished to hear this, as I fancied that the Amahagger were much too gloomy a folk to indulge in any such frivolity; but, as will presently more clearly appear, it turned out that an Amahagger dance has little in common with such fantastic festivities in other countries, savage or civilised. Then, as we were about to withdraw, she suggested that Leo might like to see some of the wonders of the caves, and as he gladly assented thither we departed, accompanied by Job and Billali. To describe our visit would only be to repeat a great deal of what I have already said. The tombs we entered were indeed different, for the whole rock was a honeycomb of sepulchres,<sup>[1]</sup> but the contents were nearly always similar. Afterwards we visited the pyramid of bones that had haunted my dreams on the previous night, and from thence went down a long passage to one of the great vaults occupied by the bodies of the poorer citizens of Imperial Kôr. These bodies were not nearly so well preserved as were those of the wealthier classes. Many of them had no linen covering on them, also they were buried from five hundred to one thousand in a single large vault, the corpses in some instances being thickly piled one upon another, like a heap of slain.

[1] For a long while it puzzled me to know what could have been done with the enormous quantities of rock that must have been dug out of these vast caves; but I afterwards discovered that it was for the most part built into the walls and palaces of Kôr, and also used to line the reservoirs and sewers.  
—L. H. H.

Leo was of course intensely interested in this stupendous and unequalled sight, which was, indeed, enough to awake all the imagination a man had in him into the most active life. But to poor Job it did not prove attractive. His nerves—already seriously shaken by what he had undergone since we had arrived in this terrible country—were, as may be imagined, still further disturbed by the spectacle of these masses of departed humanity, whereof the forms still remained perfect before his eyes, though their voices were for ever lost in the eternal silence of the tomb. Nor was he comforted when old Billali, by way of soothing his evident agitation, informed him that he should not be frightened of these dead things, as he would soon be like them himself.

“There’s a nice thing to say of a man, sir,” he ejaculated, when I translated this little remark; “but there, what can one expect of an old man-eating savage? Not but what I dare say he’s right,” and Job sighed.

When we had finished inspecting the caves, we returned and had our meal, for it was now past four in the afternoon, and we all—especially Leo—needed some food and rest. At six o’clock we, together with Job, waited on Ayesha, who set to work to terrify our poor servant still further by showing him pictures on the pool of water in the font-like vessel. She learnt from me that he was one of seventeen children, and then bid him think of all his brothers and sisters, or as many of them as he could, gathered together in his father’s cottage. Then she told him to look in the water, and there, reflected from its stilly surface, was that dead scene of many years gone by, as it was recalled to our retainer’s brain. Some of the faces were clear enough, but some were mere blurs and splotches, or with one feature grossly exaggerated; the fact being that, in these instances, Job had been unable to recall the exact appearances of the individuals, or remembered them only by a peculiarity of his tribe, and the water could only reflect what he saw with his mind’s eye. For it must be remembered that *She’s* power in this matter was strictly limited; she could apparently, except in very rare instances, only photograph upon the water what was actually in the mind of some one present, and then only by his will. But, if she was personally acquainted with a locality, she could, as in the case of ourselves and the whale-boat, throw its reflection upon the water, and also, it seems, the reflection of anything extraneous that was passing there at the time. This power, however, did not extend to the minds of others. For instance, she could show me the interior of my college chapel, as I remembered it, but not as it was at the moment of reflection; for, where other people were concerned, her art was strictly limited to the facts or memories present to *their* consciousness at the moment. So much was this so that when we tried, for her amusement, to show her pictures of noted buildings, such as St. Paul’s or the Houses of Parliament, the result was most imperfect; for, of course, though we had a good general idea of their appearance, we could not recall all the architectural details, and therefore the minutiae necessary to a perfect reflection were wanting. But Job could not be got to understand this, and, so far from accepting a natural explanation of the matter, which was after all, though strange enough in all conscience, nothing more than an instance of glorified and perfected telepathy, he set the whole thing down as a manifestation of the blackest magic. I shall never forget the howl of terror which he uttered when he saw the more or less perfect portraits of his long-scattered brethren staring at him from the quiet water, or the merry peal of laughter with which Ayesha greeted his consternation. As for Leo, he did not altogether like it either, but ran his fingers through his yellow curls, and remarked that it gave him the creeps.

After about an hour of this amusement, in the latter part of which Job did *not* participate, the mutes by signs indicated that Billali was waiting for an audience. Accordingly he was told to “crawl up,” which he did as awkwardly as usual, and announced that the dance was ready to begin if *She* and the white strangers would be pleased to attend. Shortly afterwards we all rose, and, Ayesha having thrown a dark cloak (the same, by the way, that she had worn when I saw her cursing by the fire) over her white wrappings, we started. The dance was to be held in the open air, on the smooth rocky plateau in front of the great cave, and thither we made our way. About fifteen paces from the mouth of the cave we found three chairs placed, and here we sat and waited, for as yet no dancers were to be seen. The night was almost, but not quite, dark, the moon not having risen as yet, which made us wonder how we should be able to see the dancing.

“Thou wilt presently understand,” said Ayesha, with a little laugh, when Leo asked her; and we certainly did. Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when from every point we saw dark forms rushing up, each bearing with him what we at first took to be an

enormous flaming torch. Whatever they were, they were burning furiously, for the flames stood out a yard or more behind each bearer. On they came, fifty or more of them, carrying their flaming burdens and looking like so many devils from hell. Leo was the first to discover what these burdens were.

"Great heaven!" he said, "they are corpses on fire!"

I stared and stared again—he was perfectly right—the torches that were to light our entertainment were human mummies from the caves!

On rushed the bearers of the flaming corpses, and, meeting at a spot about twenty paces in front of us, built their ghastly burdens crossways into a huge bonfire. Heavens! how they roared and flared! No tar barrel could have burnt as those mummies did. Nor was this all. Suddenly I saw one great fellow seize a flaming human arm that had fallen from its parent frame, and rush off into the darkness. Presently he stopped, and a tall streak of fire shot up into the air, illumining the gloom, and also the lamp from which it sprang. That lamp was the mummy of a woman tied to a stout stake let into the rock, and he had fired her hair. On he went a few paces and touched a second, then a third, and a fourth, till at last we were surrounded on all three sides by a great ring of bodies flaring furiously, the material with which they were preserved having rendered them so inflammable that the flames would literally spout out of the ears and mouth in tongues of fire a foot or more in length.

Nero illuminated his gardens with live Christians soaked in tar, and we were now treated to a similar spectacle, probably for the first time since his day, only happily our lamps were not living ones.

But, although this element of horror was fortunately wanting, to describe the awful and hideous grandeur of the spectacle thus presented to us is, I feel, so absolutely beyond my poor powers that I scarcely dare attempt it. To begin with, it appealed to the moral as well as the physical susceptibilities. There was something very terrible, and yet very fascinating, about the employment of the remote dead to illumine the orgies of the living; in itself the thing was a satire, both on the living and the dead. Cæsar's dust—or is it Alexander's?—may stop a bung-hole, but the functions of these dead Cæsars of the past was to light up a savage fetish dance. To such base uses may we come, of so little account may we be in the minds of the eager multitudes that we shall breed, many of whom, so far from revering our memory, will live to curse us for begetting them into such a world of woe.

Then there was the physical side of the spectacle, and a weird and splendid one it was. Those old citizens of Kôr burnt as, to judge from their sculptures and inscriptions, they had lived, very fast, and with the utmost liberality. What is more, there were plenty of them. As soon as ever a mummy had burnt down to the ankles, which it did in about twenty minutes, the feet were kicked away, and another one put in its place. The bonfire was kept going on the same generous scale, and its flames shot up, with a hiss and a crackle, twenty or thirty feet into the air, throwing great flashes of light far out into the gloom, through which the dark forms of the Amahagger flitted to and fro like devils replenishing the infernal fires. We all stood and stared aghast—shocked, and yet fascinated at so strange a spectacle, and half expecting to see the spirits those flaming forms had once enclosed come creeping from the shadows to work vengeance on their desecrators.

"I promised thee a strange sight, my Holly," laughed Ayesha, whose nerves alone did not seem to be affected; "and, behold, I have not failed thee. Also, it hath its lesson. Trust not to the future, for who knows what the future may bring! Therefore, live for the day, and endeavour not to escape the dust which seems to be man's end. What thinkest thou those long-forgotten nobles and ladies would have felt had they known that they should one day flare to light the dance or boil the pot of savages? But see, here come the dancers; a merry crew—are they not? The stage is lit—now for the play."

As she spoke, we perceived two lines of figures, one male and the other female, to the number of about a hundred, each advancing round the human bonfire, arrayed only in the usual leopard and buck skins. They formed up, in perfect silence, in two lines, facing each other between us and the fire, and then the dance—a sort of infernal and fiendish cancan—began. To describe it is quite impossible, but, though there was a good deal of tossing of legs and double-shuffling, it seemed to our untutored minds to be more of a play than a dance, and, as usual with this dreadful people, whose minds seem to have taken their colour from the caves in which they live, and whose jokes and amusements are drawn from the inexhaustible stores of preserved mortality with which they share their homes, the subject appeared to be a most ghastly one. I know that it represented an attempted murder first of all, and then the burial alive of the victim and his struggling from the grave; each act of the abominable drama, which was carried on in perfect silence, being rounded off and finished with a furious and most revolting dance round the supposed victim, who writhed upon the ground in the red light of the bonfire.

Presently, however, this pleasing piece was interrupted. Suddenly there was a slight commotion, and a large powerful woman, whom I had noted as one of the most vigorous of the dancers, came, made mad and drunken with unholy excitement, bounding and staggering towards us, shrieking out as she came:—

"I want a Black Goat, I must have a Black Goat, bring me a Black Goat!" and down she fell upon the rocky floor foaming and writhing, and shrieking for a Black Goat, about as hideous a spectacle as can well be conceived.

Instantly most of the dancers came up and got round her, though some still continued their capers in the background.

"She has got a Devil," called out one of them. "Run and get a black goat. There, Devil, keep quiet! keep quiet! You shall have the goat presently. They have gone to fetch it, Devil."

"I want a Black Goat, I must have a Black Goat!" shrieked the foaming rolling creature again.

"All right, Devil, the goat will be here presently; keep quiet, there's a good Devil!"

And so on till the goat, taken from a neighbouring kraal, did at last arrive, being dragged bleating on to the scene by its horns.

"Is it a Black One, is it a Black One?" shrieked the possessed.

"Yes, yes, Devil, as black as night;" then aside, "keep it behind thee, don't let the Devil see that it has got a white spot on its rump and another on its belly. In one minute, Devil. There, cut his throat quick. Where is the saucer?"

"The Goat! the Goat! the Goat! Give me the blood of my black goat! I must have it, don't you see I must have it? Oh! oh! oh! give me the blood of the goat."

At this moment a terrified *bah!* announced that the poor goat had been sacrificed, and the next minute a woman ran up with a saucer full of blood. This the possessed creature, who was then raving and foaming her wildest, seized and *drank*, and was instantly recovered, and without a trace of hysteria, or fits, or being possessed, or whatever dreadful thing it was she was suffering from. She stretched her arms, smiled faintly, and walked quietly back to the dancers, who presently withdrew in a double line as they had come, leaving the space between us and the bonfire deserted.

I thought that the entertainment was now over, and, feeling rather queer, was about to ask *She* if we could rise, when suddenly what at first I took to be a baboon came hopping round the fire, and was instantly met upon the other side by a lion, or rather a human being dressed in a lion's skin. Then came a goat, then a man wrapped in an ox's hide, with the horns wobbling about in a ludicrous way. After him followed a blesbok, then an impala, then a koodoo, then more goats, and many other animals, including a girl sewn up in the shining scaly hide of a boa-constrictor, several yards of which trailed along the ground behind her. When all the beasts had collected they began to dance about in a lumbering, unnatural fashion, and to imitate the sounds produced by the respective animals they represented, till the whole air was alive with roars and bleating and the hissing of snakes. This went on for a long time, till, getting tired of the pantomime, I asked Ayesha if there would be any objection to Leo and myself walking round to inspect the human torches, and, as she had nothing to say against it, we started, striking round to the left. After looking at one or two of the flaming bodies, we were about to return, thoroughly disgusted with the grotesque weirdness of the spectacle, when our attention was attracted by one of the dancers, a particularly active leopard, that had separated itself from its fellow-beasts, and was whisking about in our immediate neighbourhood, but gradually drawing into a spot where the shadow was darkest, equidistant between two of the flaming mummies. Drawn by curiosity, we followed it, when suddenly it darted past us into the shadows beyond, and as it did so erected itself and whispered, "Come," in a voice that we both recognised as that of Ustane. Without waiting to consult me Leo turned and followed her into the outer darkness, and I, feeling sick enough at heart, went after them. The leopard crawled on for about fifty paces—a sufficient distance to be quite beyond the light of the fire and torches—and then Leo came up with it, or, rather, with Ustane.

"Oh, my lord," I heard her whisper, "so I have found thee! Listen. I am in peril of my life from '*She-who-must-be-obeyed*.' Surely the Baboon has told thee how she drove me from thee? I love thee, my lord, and thou art mine according to the custom of the country. I saved thy life! My Lion, wilt thou cast me off now?"

"Of course not," ejaculated Leo; "I have been wondering whither thou hadst gone. Let us go and explain matters to the Queen."

"Nay, nay, she would slay us. Thou knowest not her power—the Baboon there, he knoweth, for he saw. Nay, there is but one way: if thou wilt cleave to me, thou must flee with me across the marshes even now, and then perchance we may escape."

"For Heaven's sake, Leo," I began, but she broke in—

"Nay, listen not to him. Swift—be swift—death is in the air we breathe. Even now, mayhap, *She* heareth us," and without more ado she proceeded to back her arguments by throwing herself into his arms. As she did so the leopard's head slipped from her hair, and I saw the three white finger-marks upon it, gleaming faintly in the starlight. Once more realising the desperate nature of the position, I was about to interpose, for I knew that Leo was not too strong-minded where women were concerned, when—oh! horror!—I heard a little silvery laugh behind me. I turned round, and there was *She* herself, and with her Billali and two male mutes. I gasped and nearly sank to the ground, for I knew that such a situation must result in some dreadful tragedy, of which it seemed exceedingly probable to me that I should be the first victim. As for Ustane, she untwined her arms and covered her eyes with her hands, while Leo, not knowing the full terror of the position, merely covered up, and looked as foolish as a man caught in such a trap would naturally do.

## XX.

# TRIUMPH

Then followed a moment of the most painful silence that I ever endured. It was broken by Ayesha, who addressed herself to Leo.

"Nay, now, my lord and guest," she said in her softest tones, which yet had the ring of steel about them, "look not so bashful. Surely the sight was a pretty one—the leopard and the lion!"

"Oh, hang it all!" said Leo in English.

"And thou, Ustane," she went on, "surely I should have passed thee by, had not the light fallen on the white across thy hair," and she pointed to the bright edge of the rising moon which was now appearing above the horizon. "Well! well! the dance is done—see, the tapers have burnt down, and all things end in silence and in ashes. So thou thoughtest it a fit time for love, Ustane, my servant—and I, dreaming not that I could be disobeyed, thought thee already far away."

"Play not with me," moaned the wretched woman; "slay me, and let there be an end."

"Nay, why? It is not well to go so swift from the hot lips of love down to the cold mouth of the grave," and she made a motion to the mutes, who instantly stepped up and caught the girl by either arm. With an oath Leo sprang upon the nearest, and hurled him to the ground, and then stood over him with his face set, and his fist ready.

Again Ayesha laughed. "It was well thrown, my guest; thou hast a strong arm for one who so late was sick. But now out of thy courtesy I pray thee let that man live and do my bidding. He shall not harm the girl; the night air grows chill, and I would welcome her in mine own place. Surely she whom thou dost favour shall be favoured of me also."

I took Leo by the arm, and pulled him from the prostrate mute, and he, half bewildered, obeyed the pressure. Then we all set out for the cave across the plateau, where a pile of white human ashes was all that remained of the fire that had lit the dancing, for the dancers had vanished.

In due course we gained Ayesha's boudoir—all too soon, it seemed to me, having a sad presage of what was to come lying heavy on my heart.

Ayesha seated herself upon her cushions, and, having dismissed Job and Billali, by signs bade the mutes tend the lamps and retire—all save one girl, who was her favourite personal attendant. We three remained standing, the unfortunate Ustane a little to the left of the rest of us.

"Now, oh Holly," Ayesha began, "how came it that thou who didst hear my words bidding this evil-doer"—and she pointed to Ustane—"to go hence—thou at whose prayer I did weakly spare her life—how came it, I say, that thou wast a sharer in what I saw to-night? Answer, and for thine own sake, I say, speak all the truth, for I am not minded to hear lies upon this matter!"

"It was by accident, oh Queen," I answered. "I knew naught of it."

"I do believe thee, oh Holly," she answered coldly, "and well it is for thee that I do—then does the whole guilt rest upon her."

"I do not find any guilt therein," broke in Leo. "She is not another man's wife, and it appears that she has married me according to the custom of this awful place, so who is the worse? Any way, madam," he went on, "whatever she has done I have done too, so if she is to be punished let me be punished also; and I tell thee," he went on, working himself up into a fury, "that if thou biddest one of those deaf and dumb villains to touch her again I will tear him to pieces!" And he looked as though he meant it.

Ayesha listened in icy silence, and made no remark. When he had finished, however, she addressed Ustane.

"Hast thou aught to say, woman? Thou silly straw, thou feather, who didst think to float towards thy passion's petty ends, even against the great wind of my will! Tell me, for I fain would understand. Why didst thou this thing?"

And then I think I saw the most tremendous exhibition of moral courage and intrepidity that it is possible to conceive. For the poor doomed girl, knowing what she had to expect at the hands of her terrible Queen, knowing, too, from bitter experience, how great was her adversary's power, yet gathered herself together, and out of the very depths of her despair drew materials to defy her.

"I did it, oh *She*," she answered, drawing herself up to the full of her stately height, and throwing back the panther skin from her head, "because my love is stronger than the grave. I did it because my life without this man whom my heart chose would be but a living death. Therefore did I risk my life, and, now that I know that it is forfeit to thine anger, yet am I glad that I did risk it, and pay it away in the risking, ay, because he embraced me once, and told me that he loved me yet."

Here Ayesha half rose from her couch, and then sank down again.

"I have no magic," went on Ustane, her rich voice ringing strong and full, "and I am not a Queen, nor do I live for ever, but a woman's heart is heavy to sink through waters, however deep, oh Queen! and a woman's eyes are quick to see—even through thy veil, oh Queen!"

"Listen: I know it, thou dost love this man thyself, and therefore wouldst thou destroy me who stand across thy path. Ay, I die—I die, and go into the darkness, nor know I whither I go. But this I know. There is a light shining in my breast, and by that light, as by a lamp, I see the truth, and the future that I shall not share unroll itself before me like a scroll. When first I knew my lord," and she pointed to Leo, "I knew also that death would be the bridal gift he gave me—it rushed upon me of a sudden, but I turned not back, being ready to pay the price, and, behold, death is here! And now, even as I knew that, so do I, standing on the steps of doom, know that thou shalt not reap the profit of thy crime. Mine he is, and, though thy beauty shine like a sun among the stars, mine shall he

remain for thee. Never here in this life shall he look thee in the eyes and call thee spouse. Thou too art doomed, I see"—and her voice rang like the cry of an inspired prophetess; "ah, I see——"

Then came an answering cry of mingled rage and terror. I turned my head. Ayesha had risen, and was standing with her outstretched hand pointing at Ustane, who had suddenly stopped speaking. I gazed at the poor woman, and as I gazed there came upon her face that same woeful, fixed expression of terror that I had seen once before when she had broken out into her wild chant. Her eyes grew large, her nostrils dilated, and her lips blanched.

Ayesha said nothing, she made no sound, she only drew herself up, stretched out her arm, and, her tall veiled frame quivering like an aspen leaf, appeared to look fixedly at her victim. Even as she did so Ustane put her hands to her head, uttered one piercing scream, turned round twice, and then fell backwards with a thud—prone upon the floor. Both Leo and myself rushed to her—she was stone dead—blasted into death by some mysterious electric agency or overwhelming will-force whereof the dread *She* had command.

For a moment Leo did not quite realise what had happened. But, when he did, his face was awful to see. With a savage oath he rose from beside the corpse, and, turning, literally sprang at Ayesha. But she was watching, and, seeing him come, stretched out her hand again, and he went staggering back towards me, and would have fallen, had I not caught him. Afterwards he told me that he felt as though he had suddenly received a violent blow in the chest, and, what is more, utterly cowed, as if all the manhood had been taken out of him.

Then Ayesha spoke. "Forgive me, my guest," she said softly, addressing him, "if I have shocked thee with my justice."

"Forgive thee, thou fiend," roared poor Leo, wringing his hands in his rage and grief. "Forgive thee, thou murderess! By Heaven, I will kill thee if I can!"

"Nay, nay," she answered in the same soft voice, "thou dost not understand—the time has come for thee to learn. *Thou* art my love, my Kallikrates, my Beautiful, my Strong! For two thousand years, Kallikrates, have I waited for *thee*, and now at length thou hast come back to me; and as for this woman," pointing to the corpse, "she stood between me and thee, and therefore have I laid her in the dust, Kallikrates."

"It is an accursed lie!" said Leo. "My name is not Kallikrates! I am Leo Vincey; my ancestor was Kallikrates—at least, I believe he was."

"Ah, thou sayest it—thine ancestor was Kallikrates, and thou, even thou, art Kallikrates reborn, come back—and mine own dear lord!"

"I am not Kallikrates, and, as for being thy lord, or having aught to do with thee, I had sooner be the lord of a fiend from hell, for she would be better than thou."

"Sayest thou so—sayest thou so, Kallikrates? Nay, but thou hast not seen me for so long a time that no memory remains. Yet am I very fair, Kallikrates!"

"I hate thee, murderess, and I have no wish to see thee. What is it to me how fair thou art? I hate thee, I say."

"Yet within a very little space shalt thou creep to my knee, and swear that thou dost love me," answered Ayesha, with a sweet, mocking laugh. "Come, there is no time like the present time, here before this dead girl who loved thee, let us put it to the proof."

"Look now on me, Kallikrates!" and with a sudden motion she shook her gauzy covering from her, and stood forth in her low kirtle and her snaky zone, in her glorious radiant beauty and her imperial grace, rising from her wrappings, as it were, like Venus from the wave, or Galatea from her marble, or a beatified spirit from the tomb. She stood forth, and fixed her deep and glowing eyes upon Leo's eyes, and I saw his clenched fists unclasp, and his set and quivering features relax beneath her gaze. I saw his wonder and astonishment grow into admiration, and then into fascination, and the more he struggled the more I saw the power of her dread beauty fasten on him and take possession of his senses, drugging them, and drawing the heart out of him. Did I not know the process? Had not I, who was twice his age, gone through it myself? Was I not going through it afresh even then, although her sweet and passionate gaze was not for me? Yes, alas, I was! Alas, that I should have to confess that at that very moment I was rent by mad and furious jealousy. I could have flown at him, shame upon me! The woman had confounded and almost destroyed my moral sense, as she was bound to confound all who looked upon her superhuman loveliness. But—I do not quite know how—I got the better of myself, and once more turned to see the climax of the tragedy.

"Oh, great Heaven!" gasped Leo, "art thou a woman?"

"A woman in truth—in very truth—and thine own spouse, Kallikrates!" she answered, stretching out her rounded ivory arms towards him, and smiling, ah, so sweetly!

He looked and looked, and slowly I perceived that he was drawing nearer to her. Suddenly his eye fell upon the corpse of poor Ustane, and he shuddered and stopped.

"How can I?" he said hoarsely. "Thou art a murderess; she loved me."

Observe, he was already forgetting that he had loved her.

"It is naught," she murmured, and her voice sounded sweet as the night-wind passing through the trees. "It is naught at all. If I have sinned, let my beauty answer for my sin. If I have sinned, it is for love of thee: let my sin, therefore, be put away and forgotten;" and once more she stretched out her arms and whispered "*Come*," and then in another few seconds it was all over.

I saw him struggle—I saw him even turn to fly; but her eyes drew him more strongly than iron bonds, and the magic of her beauty and concentrated will and passion entered into him and overpowered him—ay, even there, in the presence of the body of the woman who had loved him well enough to die for him. It sounds horrible and wicked enough, but he should not be too greatly blamed, and be sure his sin will find him out. The temptress who drew him into evil was more than human, and her beauty was greater than the loveliness of the daughters of men.

I looked up again and now her perfect form lay in his arms, and her lips were pressed against his own; and thus, with the corpse of his dead love for an altar, did Leo Vincey plight his troth to her red-handed murderess—plight it for ever and a day. For those who sell themselves into a like dominion, paying down the price of their own honour, and throwing their soul into the balance to sink the scale to the level of their lusts, can hope for no deliverance here or hereafter. As they have sown, so shall they reap and reap, even when the poppy flowers of passion have withered in their hands, and their harvest is but bitter tares, garnered in satiety.

Suddenly, with a snake-like motion, she seemed to slip from his embrace, and then again broke out into her low laugh of triumphant mockery.

"Did I not tell thee that within a little space thou wouldst creep to my knee, oh Kallikrates? And surely the space has not been a great one!"

Leo groaned in shame and misery; for though he was overcome and stricken down, he was not so lost as to be unaware of the depth of the degradation to which he had sunk. On the contrary, his better nature rose up in arms against his fallen self, as I saw clearly enough later on.

Ayesha laughed again, and then quickly veiled herself, and made a sign to the girl mute, who had been watching the whole scene with curious startled eyes. The girl left, and presently returned, followed by two male mutes, to whom the Queen made another sign. Thereon they all three seized the body of poor Ustane by the arms, and dragged it heavily down the cavern and away through the curtains at the end. Leo watched it for a little while, and then covered his eyes with his hand, and it too, to my excited fancy, seemed to watch us as it went.

"There passes the dead past," said Ayesha, solemnly, as the curtains shook and fell back into their places, when the ghastly procession had vanished behind them. And then, with one of those extraordinary transitions of which I have already spoken, she again threw off her veil, and broke out, after the ancient and poetic fashion of the dwellers in Arabia,<sup>[1]</sup> into a pæan of triumph or epithalamium, which, wild and beautiful as it was, is exceedingly difficult to render into English, and ought by rights to be sung to the music of a cantata, rather than written and read. It was divided into two parts—one descriptive or definitive, and the other personal; and, as nearly as I can remember, ran as follows:—

[1] Among the ancient Arabians the power of poetic declamation, either in verse or prose, was held in the highest honour and esteem, and he who excelled in it was known as "Khâteb," or Orator. Every year a general assembly was held at which the rival poets repeated their compositions, when those poems which were judged to be the best were, so soon as the knowledge and the art of writing became general, inscribed on silk in letters of gold, and publicly exhibited, being known as "Al Modhahabât," or golden verses. In the poem given above by Mr. Holly, Ayesha evidently followed the traditional poetic manner of her people, which was to embody their thoughts in a series of somewhat disconnected sentences, each remarkable for its beauty and the grace of its expression. —Editor.

Love is like a flower in the desert.

It is like the aloe of Arabia that blooms but once and dies; it blooms in the salt emptiness of Life, and the brightness of its beauty is set upon the waste as a star is set upon a storm.

It hath the sun above that is the Spirit, and above it blows the air of its divinity.

At the echoing of a step, Love blooms, I say; I say Love blooms, and bends her beauty down to him who passeth by.

He plucketh it, yea, he plucketh the red cup that is full of honey, and beareth it away; away across the desert, away till the flower be withered, away till the desert be done.

There is only one perfect flower in the wilderness of Life.

That flower is Love!

There is only one fixed star in the midsts of our wandering.

That star is Love!

There is only one hope in our despairing night.

That hope is Love!

All else is false. All else is shadow moving upon water. All else is wind and vanity.

Who shall say what is the weight or the measure of Love?

It is born of the flesh, it dwelleth in the spirit. From each doth it draw its comfort.

For beauty it is as a star.

Many are its shapes, but all are beautiful, and none know where the star rose, or the horizon where it shall set.

Then, turning to Leo, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, she went on in a fuller and more triumphant tone, speaking in balanced sentences that gradually grew and swelled from idealised prose into pure and majestic verse:—

Long have I loved thee, oh, my love; yet has my love not lessened.

Long have I waited for thee, and behold my reward is at hand—is here!

Far away I saw thee once, and thou wast taken from me.

Then in a grave sowed I the seed of patience, and shone upon it with the sun of hope, and watered it with tears of repentance, and breathed on it with the breath of my knowledge. And now, lo! it hath sprung up, and borne fruit. Lo! out of the grave hath it sprung. Yea, from among the dry bones and ashes of the dead.

I have waited and my reward is with me.

I have overcome Death, and Death brought back to me him that was dead.

Therefore do I rejoice, for fair is the future.

Green are the paths that we shall tread across the everlasting meadows.

The hour is at hand. Night hath fled away into the valleys.

The dawn kisseth the mountain tops.

Soft shall we live, my love, and easy shall we go.

Crowned shall we be with the diadem of Kings.

Worshipping and wonder struck all peoples of the world, Blinded shall fall before our beauty and might.

From time unto times shall our greatness thunder on, Rolling like a chariot through the dust of endless days.

Laughing shall we speed in our victory and pomp, Laughing like the Daylight as he leaps along the hills.

Onward, still triumphant to a triumph ever new!

Onward, in our power to a power unattained!

Onward, never weary, clad with splendour for a robe!

Till accomplished be our fate, and the night is rushing down.

She paused in her strange and most thrilling allegorical chant, of which I am, unfortunately, only able to give the burden, and that feebly enough, and then said—

“Perchance thou dost not believe my word, Kallikrates—perchance thou thinkest that I do delude thee, and that I have not lived these many years, and that thou hast not been born again to me. Nay, look not so—put away that pale cast of doubt, for oh be sure herein can error find no foothold! Sooner shall the suns forget their course and the swallow miss her nest, than my soul shall swear a lie and be led astray from thee, Kallikrates. Blind me, take away mine eyes, and let the darkness utterly fence me in, and still mine ears would catch the tone of thy unforgotten voice, striking more loud against the portals of my sense than can the call of brazen-throated clarions:—stop up mine hearing also, and let a thousand touch me on the brow, and I would name thee out of all:—yea, rob me of every sense, and see me stand deaf and blind, and dumb, and with nerves that cannot weigh the value of a touch, yet would my spirit leap within me like a quickening child and cry unto my heart, behold Kallikrates! behold, thou watcher, the watches of thy night are ended! behold thou who seekest in the night season, thy morning Star ariseth.”

She paused awhile and then continued, “But stay, if thy heart is yet hardened against the mighty truth and thou dost require a further pledge of that which thou dost find too deep to understand, even now shall it be given to thee, and to thee also, oh my Holly. Bear each one of you a lamp, and follow after me whither I shall lead you.”

Without stopping to think—indeed, speaking for myself, I had almost abandoned the function in circumstances under which to think seemed to be absolutely useless, since thought fell hourly helpless against a black wall of wonder—we took the lamps and followed her. Going to the end of her “boudoir,” she raised a curtain and revealed a little stair of the sort that is so common in these dim caves of Kôr. As we hurried down the stair I observed that the steps were worn in the centre to such an extent that some of them had been reduced from seven and a half inches, at which I guessed their original height, to about three and a half. Now, all the other steps that I had seen in the caves were practically unworn, as was to be expected, seeing that the only traffic which ever passed upon them was that of those who bore a fresh burden to the tomb. Therefore this fact struck my notice with that curious force with which little things do strike us when our minds are absolutely overwhelmed by a sudden rush of powerful sensations; beaten flat, as it were, like a sea beneath the first burst of a hurricane, so that every little object on the surface starts into an unnatural prominence.

At the bottom of the staircase I stood and stared at the worn steps, and Ayesha, turning, saw me.

“Wonderest thou whose are the feet that have worn away the rock, my Holly?” she asked. “They are mine—even mine own light feet! I can remember when those stairs were fresh and level, but for two thousand years and more have I gone down hither day by day, and see, my sandals have worn out the solid rock!”

I made no answer, but I do not think that anything that I had heard or seen brought home to my limited understanding so clear a sense of this being’s overwhelming antiquity as that hard rock hollowed out by her soft white feet. How many hundreds of thousands of times must she have passed up and down that stair to bring about such a result?

The stair led to a tunnel, and a few paces down the tunnel was one of the usual curtain-hung doorways, a glance at which told me that it was the same where I had been a witness of that terrible scene by the leaping flame. I recognised the pattern of the curtain, and the sight of it brought the whole event vividly before my eyes, and made me tremble even at its memory. Ayesha entered the tomb (for it was a tomb), and we followed her—I, for one, rejoicing that the mystery of the place was about to be cleared up, and yet afraid to face its solution.

## XXI.

### THE DEAD AND LIVING MEET

"See now the place where I have slept for these two thousand years," said Ayesha, taking the lamp from Leo's hand and holding it above her head. Its rays fell upon a little hollow in the floor, where I had seen the leaping flame, but the fire was out now. They fell upon the white form stretched there beneath its wrappings upon its bed of stone, upon the fretted carving of the tomb, and upon another shelf of stone opposite the one on which the body lay, and separated from it by the breadth of the cave.

"Here," went on Ayesha, laying her hand upon the rock—"here have I slept night by night for all these generations, with but a cloak to cover me. It did not become me that I should lie soft when my spouse yonder," and she pointed to the rigid form, "lay stiff in death. Here night by night have I slept in his cold company—till, thou seest, this thick slab, like the stairs down which we passed, has worn thin with the tossing of my form—so faithful have I been to thee even in thy space of sleep, Kallikrates. And now, mine own, thou shalt see a wonderful thing—living, thou shalt behold thyself dead—for well have I tended thee during all these years, Kallikrates. Art thou prepared?"

We made no answer, but gazed at each other with frightened eyes, the whole scene was so dreadful and so solemn. Ayesha advanced, and laid her hand upon the corner of the shroud, and once more spoke.

"Be not affrighted," she said; "though the thing seem wonderful to thee—all we who live have thus lived before; nor is the very shape that holds us a stranger to the sun! Only we know it not, because memory writes no record, and earth hath gathered in the earth she lent us, for none have saved our glory from the grave. But I, by my arts and by the arts of those dead men of Kôr which I have learned, have held thee back, oh Kallikrates, from the dust, that the waxen stamp of beauty on thy face should ever rest before mine eye. 'Twas a mask that memory might fill, serving to fashion out thy presence from the past, and give it strength to wander in the habitations of my thought, clad in a mummery of life that stayed my appetite with visions of dead days.

"Behold now, let the Dead and Living meet! Across the gulf of Time they still are one. Time hath no power against Identity, though sleep the merciful hath blotted out the tablets of our mind, and with oblivion sealed the sorrows that else would hound us from life to life, stuffing the brain with gathered griefs till it burst in the madness of uttermost despair. Still are they one, for the wrappings of our sleep shall roll away as thunder-clouds before the wind; the frozen voice of the past shall melt in music like mountain snows beneath the sun; and the weeping and the laughter of the lost hours shall be heard once more most sweetly echoing up the cliffs of immeasurable time.

"Ay, the sleep shall roll away, and the voices shall be heard, when down the completed chain, whereof our each existence is a link, the lightning of the Spirit hath passed to work out the purpose of our being; quickening and fusing those separated days of life, and shaping them to a staff whereon we may safely lean as we wend to our appointed fate.

"Therefore, have no fear, Kallikrates, when thou—living, and but lately born—shalt look upon thine own departed self, who breathed and died so long ago. I do but turn one page in thy Book of Being, and show thee what is writ thereon.

"Behold!"

With a sudden motion she drew the shroud from the cold form, and let the lamplight play upon it. I looked, and then shrank back terrified; since, say what she might in explanation, the sight was an uncanny one—for her explanations were beyond the grasp of our finite minds, and when they were stripped from the mists of vague esoteric philosophy, and brought into conflict with the cold and horrifying fact, did not do much to break its force. For there, stretched upon the stone bier before us, robed in white and perfectly preserved, was what appeared to be the body of Leo Vincey. I stared from Leo, standing *there* alive, to Leo lying *there* dead, and could see no difference; except, perhaps, that the body on the bier looked older. Feature for feature they were the same, even down to the crop of little golden curls, which was Leo's most uncommon beauty. It even seemed to me, as I looked, that the expression on the dead man's face resembled that which I had sometimes seen upon Leo's when he was plunged into profound sleep. I can only sum up the closeness of the resemblance by saying that I never saw twins so exactly similar as that dead and living pair.

I turned to see what effect was produced upon Leo by the sight of his dead self, and found it to be one of partial stupefaction. He stood for two or three minutes staring, and said nothing, and when at last he spoke it was only to ejaculate—

"Cover it up, and take me away."

"Nay, wait, Kallikrates," said Ayesha, who, standing with the lamp raised above her head, flooding with its light her own rich beauty and the cold wonder of the death-clothed form upon the bier, resembled an inspired Sibyl rather than a woman, as she rolled out her majestic sentences with a grandeur and a freedom of utterance which I am, alas! quite unable to reproduce.

"Wait, I would show thee something, that no tittle of my crime may be hidden from thee. Do thou, oh Holly, open the garment on the breast of the dead Kallikrates, for perchance my lord may fear to touch it himself."

I obeyed with trembling hands. It seemed a desecration and an unhallowed thing to touch that sleeping image of the live man by my side. Presently his broad chest was bare, and there upon it, right over the heart, was a wound, evidently inflicted with a spear.

"Thou seest, Kallikrates," she said. "Know then that it was *I* who slew thee: in the Place of Life *I* gave thee death. I slew thee because of the Egyptian Amenartas, whom thou didst love, for by her wiles she held thy heart, and her I could not smite as but now I smote that woman, for she was too strong for me. In my haste and bitter anger I slew thee, and now for all these days have I lamented thee, and waited for thy coming. And thou hast come, and none can stand between thee and me, and of a truth now for death I will give thee life—not life eternal, for that none can give, but life and youth that shall endure for thousands upon thousands of years, and with it pomp, and power, and wealth, and all things that are good and beautiful, such as have been to no man before thee, nor shall be

to any man who comes after. And now one thing more, and thou shalt rest and make ready for the day of thy new birth. Thou seest this body, which was thine own. For all these centuries it hath been my cold comfort and my companion, but now I need it no more, for I have thy living presence, and it can but serve to stir up memories of that which I would fain forget. Let it therefore go back to the dust from which I held it.

"Behold! I have prepared against this happy hour!" And going to the other shelf or stone ledge, which she said had served her for a bed, she took from it a large vitrified double-handed vase, the mouth of which was tied up with a bladder. This she loosed, and then, having bent down and gently kissed the white forehead of the dead man, she undid the vase, and sprinkled its contents carefully over the form, taking, I observed, the greatest precautions against any drop of them touching us or herself, and then poured out what remained of the liquid upon the chest and head. Instantly a dense vapour arose, and the cave was filled with choking fumes that prevented us from seeing anything while the deadly acid (for I presume it was some tremendous preparation of that sort) did its work. From the spot where the body lay came a fierce fizzing and cracking sound, which ceased, however, before the fumes had cleared away. At last they were all gone, except a little cloud that still hung over the corpse. In a couple of minutes more this too had vanished, and, wonderful as it may seem, it is a fact that on the stone bench that had supported the mortal remains of the ancient Kallikrates for so many centuries there was now nothing to be seen but a few handfuls of smoking white powder. The acid had utterly destroyed the body, and even in places eaten into the stone. Ayesha stooped down, and, taking a handful of this powder in her grasp, threw it into the air, saying at the same time, in a voice of calm solemnity—

"Dust to dust!—the past to the past!—the dead to the dead!—Kallikrates is dead, and is born again!"

The ashes floated noiselessly to the rocky floor, and we stood in awed silence and watched them fall, too overcome for words.

"Now leave me," she said, "and sleep if ye may. I must watch and think, for to-morrow night we go hence, and the time is long since I trod the path that we must follow."

Accordingly we bowed, and left her.

As we passed to our own apartment I peeped into Job's sleeping place, to see how he fared, for he had gone away just before our interview with the murdered Ustane, quite prostrated by the terrors of the Amahagger festivity. He was sleeping soundly, good honest fellow that he was, and I rejoiced to think that his nerves, which, like those of most uneducated people, were far from strong, had been spared the closing scenes of this dreadful day. Then we entered our own chamber, and here at last poor Leo, who, ever since he had looked upon that frozen image of his living self, had been in a state not far removed from stupefaction, burst out into a torrent of grief. Now that he was no longer in the presence of the dread *She*, his sense of the awfulness of all that had happened, and more especially of the wicked murder of Ustane, who was bound to him by ties so close, broke upon him like a storm, and lashed him into an agony of remorse and terror which was painful to witness. He cursed himself—he cursed the hour when we had first seen the writing on the sherd, which was being so mysteriously verified, and bitterly he cursed his own weakness. Ayesha he dared not curse—who dared speak evil of such a woman, whose consciousness, for aught we knew, was watching us at the very moment?

"What am I to do, old fellow?" he groaned, resting his head against my shoulder in the extremity of his grief. "I let her be killed—not that I could help that, but within five minutes I was kissing her murderess over her body. I am a degraded brute, but I cannot resist that" (and here his voice sank)—"that awful sorceress. I know I shall do it again to-morrow; I know that I am in her power for always; if I never saw her again I should never think of anybody else during all my life; I must follow her as a needle follows a magnet; I would not go away now if I could; I could not leave her, my legs would not carry me, but my mind is still clear enough, and in my mind I hate her—at least, I think so. It is all so horrible; and that—that body! What can I make of it? It was *I*! I am sold into bondage, old fellow, and she will take my soul as the price of herself!"

Then, for the first time, I told him that I was in a but very little better position; and I am bound to say that, notwithstanding his own infatuation, he had the decency to sympathise with me. Perhaps he did not think it worth while being jealous, realising that he had no cause so far as the lady was concerned. I went on to suggest that we should try to run away, but we soon rejected the project as futile, and, to be perfectly honest, I do not believe that either of us would really have left Ayesha even if some superior power had suddenly offered to convey us from these gloomy caves and set us down in Cambridge. We could no more have left her than a moth can leave the light that destroys it. We were like confirmed opium-eaters: in our moments of reason we well knew the deadly nature of our pursuit, but we certainly were not prepared to abandon its terrible delights.

No man who once had seen *She* unveiled, and heard the music of her voice, and drunk in the bitter wisdom of her words, would willingly give up the sight for a whole sea of placid joys. How much more, then, was this likely to be so when, as in Leo's case, to put myself out of the question, this extraordinary creature declared her utter and absolute devotion, and gave what appeared to be proofs of its having lasted for some two thousand years?

No doubt she was a wicked person, and no doubt she had murdered Ustane when she stood in her path, but then she was very faithful, and by a law of nature man is apt to think but lightly of a woman's crimes, especially if that woman be beautiful, and the crime be committed for the love of him.

And then, for the rest, when had such a chance ever come to a man before as that which now lay in Leo's hand? True, in uniting himself to this dread woman, he would place his life under the influence of a mysterious creature of evil tendencies,<sup>[1]</sup> but then that would be likely enough to happen to him in any ordinary marriage. On the other hand, however, no ordinary marriage could bring him such awful beauty—for awful is the only word that can describe it—such divine devotion, such wisdom, and command over the secrets of nature, and the place and power that they must win, or, lastly, the royal crown of unending youth, if indeed she could give that. No, on the whole, it is not wonderful that, though Leo was plunged in bitter shame and grief, such as any gentleman would have felt under the circumstances, he was not ready to entertain the idea of running away from his extraordinary fortune.

[1] After some months of consideration of this statement I am bound to confess that I am not quite satisfied of its truth. It is perfectly true that Ayesha committed a murder, but I shrewdly suspect that, were we endowed with the same absolute power, and if we had the same tremendous interest at stake, we would be very apt to do likewise under parallel circumstances. Also, it must be remembered that she looked on it as an execution for disobedience under a system which made the slightest disobedience punishable by death. Putting aside this question of the murder, her evil-doing resolves itself into the expression of views and the acknowledgment of motives which are contrary to our preaching if not to our practice. Now at first sight this might be fairly taken as a proof of an evil nature, but when we come to consider the great antiquity of the individual it becomes doubtful if it was anything more than the natural cynicism which arises from age and bitter experience, and the possession of extraordinary powers of observation. It is a well known fact that very often, putting the period of boyhood out of the question, the older we grow the more cynical and hardened we get; indeed many of us are only saved by timely death from utter moral petrification if not moral corruption. No one will deny that a young man is on the average better than an old one, for he is without that experience of the order of things that in certain thoughtful dispositions can hardly fail to produce cynicism, and that disregard of acknowledged methods and established custom which we call evil. Now the oldest man upon the

earth was but a babe compared to Ayesha, and the wisest man upon the earth was not one-third as wise. And the fruit of her wisdom was this, that there was but one thing worth living for, and that was Love in its highest sense, and to gain that good thing she was not prepared to stop at trifles. This is really the sum of her evil doings, and it must be remembered, on the other hand, that, whatever may be thought of them, she had some virtues developed to a degree very uncommon in either sex—constancy, for instance.—L. H. H.

My own opinion is that he would have been mad if he had done so. But then I confess that my statement on the matter must be accepted with qualifications. I am in love with Ayesha myself to this day, and I would rather have been the object of her affection for one short week than that of any other woman in the world for a whole lifetime. And let me add that, if anybody who doubts this statement, and thinks me foolish for making it, could have seen Ayesha draw her veil and flash out in beauty on his gaze, his view would exactly coincide with my own. Of course, I am speaking of any *man*. We never had the advantage of a lady's opinion of Ayesha, but I think it quite possible that she would have regarded the Queen with dislike, would have expressed her disapproval in some more or less pointed manner, and ultimately have got herself blasted.

For two hours or more Leo and I sat with shaken nerves and frightened eyes, and talked over the miraculous events through which we were passing. It seemed like a dream or a fairy tale, instead of the solemn, sober fact. Who would have believed that the writing on the potsherd was not only true, but that we should live to verify its truth, and that we two seekers should find her who was sought, patiently awaiting our coming in the tombs of Kôr? Who would have thought that in the person of Leo this mysterious woman should, as she believed, discover the being whom she awaited from century to century, and whose former earthly habitation she had till this very night preserved? But so it was. In the face of all we had seen it was difficult for us as ordinary reasoning men any longer to doubt its truth, and therefore at last, with humble hearts and a deep sense of the impotence of human knowledge, and the insolence of its assumption that denies that to be possible which it has no experience of, we laid ourselves down to sleep, leaving our fates in the hands of that watching Providence which had thus chosen to allow us to draw the veil of human ignorance, and reveal to us for good or evil some glimpse of the possibilities of life.

## XXII.

### JOB HAS A PRESENTIMENT

It was nine o'clock on the following morning when Job, who still looked scared and frightened, came in to call me, and at the same time breathe his gratitude at finding us alive in our beds, which it appeared was more than he had expected. When I told him of the awful end of poor Ustane he was even more grateful at our survival, and much shocked, though Ustane had been no favourite of his, or he of hers, for the matter of that. She called him "pig" in bastard Arabic, and he called her "hussy" in good English, but these amenities were forgotten in the face of the catastrophe that had overwhelmed her at the hands of her Queen.

"I don't want to say anything as mayn't be agreeable, sir," said Job, when he had finished exclaiming at my tale, "but it's my opinion that that there *She* is the old gentleman himself, or perhaps his wife, if he has one, which I suppose he has, for he couldn't be so wicked all by himself. The Witch of Endor was a fool to her, sir: bless you, she would make no more of raising every gentleman in the Bible out of these here beastly tombs than I should of growing cress on an old flannel. It's a country of devils, this is, sir, and she's the master one of the lot; and if ever we get out of it it will be more than I expect to do. I don't see no way out of it. That witch isn't likely to let a fine young man like Mr. Leo go."

"Come," I said, "at any rate she saved his life."

"Yes, and she'll take his soul to pay for it. She'll make him a witch, like herself. I say it's wicked to have anything to do with those sort of people. Last night, sir, I lay awake and read in my little Bible that my poor old mother gave me about what is going to happen to sorceresses and them sort, till my hair stood on end. Lord, how the old lady would stare if she saw where her Job had got to!"

"Yes, it's a queer country, and a queer people too, Job," I answered, with a sigh, for, though I am not superstitious like Job, I admit to a natural shrinking (which will not bear investigation) from the things that are above Nature.

"You are right, sir," he answered, "and if you won't think me very foolish, I should like to say something to you now that Mr. Leo is out of the way"—(Leo had got up early and gone for a stroll)—"and that is that I know it is the last country as ever I shall see in this world. I had a dream last night, and I dreamed that I saw my old father with a kind of night-shirt on him, something like these folks wear when they want to be in particular full-dress, and a bit of that feathery grass in his hand, which he may have gathered on the way, for I saw lots of it yesterday about three hundred yards from the mouth of this beastly cave.

"Job," he said to me, solemn like, and yet with a kind of satisfaction shining through him, more like a Methodist parson when he has sold a neighbour a marked horse for a sound one and cleared twenty pounds by the job than anything I can think on—"Job, time's up, Job; but I never did expect to have to come and hunt you out in this 'ere place, Job. Such ado as I have had to nose you up; it wasn't friendly to give your poor old father such a run, let alone that a wonderful lot of bad characters hail from this place Kôr."

"Regular cautions," I suggested.

"Yes, sir—of course, sir, that's just what he said they was—'cautions, downright scorchers'—sir, and I'm sure I don't doubt it, seeing what I know of them, and their hot-potting ways," went on Job sadly. "Anyway, he was sure that time was up, and went away saying that we should see more than we cared for of each other soon, and I suppose he was a-thinking of the fact that father and I never could hit it off together for longer nor three days, and I daresay that things will be similar when we meet again."

"Surely," I said, "you don't think that you are going to die because you dreamed you saw your old father; if one dies because one dreams of one's father, what happens to a man who dreams of his mother-in-law?"

"Ah, sir, you're laughing at me," said Job; "but, you see, you didn't know my old father. If it had been anybody else—my Aunt Mary, for instance, who never made much of a job—I should not have thought so much of it; but my father was that idle, which he shouldn't have been with seventeen children, that he would never have put himself out to come here just to see the place. No, sir; I know that he meant business. Well, sir, I can't help it; I suppose every man must go some time or other, though it is a hard thing to die in a place like this, where Christian burial isn't to be had for its weight in gold. I've tried to be a good man, sir, and do my duty honest, and if it wasn't for the supercilious kind of way in which father carried on last night—a sort of sniffing at me as it were, as though he hadn't no opinion of my references and testimonials—I should feel easy enough in my mind. Any way, sir, I've been a good servant to you and Mr. Leo, bless him!—why, it seems but the other day that I used to lead him about the streets with a penny whip;—and if ever you get out of this place—which, as father didn't allude to you, perhaps you may—I hope you will think kindly of my whitened bones, and never have anything more to do with Greek writing on flower-pots, sir, if I may make so bold as to say so."

"Come, come, Job," I said seriously, "this is all nonsense, you know. You mustn't be silly enough to go getting such ideas into your head. We've lived through some queer things, and I hope that we may go on doing so."

"No, sir," answered Job, in a tone of conviction that jarred on me unpleasantly, "it isn't nonsense. I'm a doomed man, and I feel it, and a wonderful uncomfortable feeling it is, sir, for one can't help wondering how it's going to come about. If you are eating your dinner you think of poison and it goes against your stomach, and if you are walking along these dark rabbit-burrows you think of knives, and Lord, don't you just shiver about the back! I ain't particular, sir, provided it's sharp, like that poor girl, who, now that she's gone, I am sorry to have spoke hard on, though I don't approve of her morals in getting married, which I consider too quick to be decent. Still, sir," and poor Job turned a shade paler as he said it, "I do hope it won't be that hot-pot game."

"Nonsense," I broke in angrily, "nonsense!"

"Very well, sir," said Job, "it isn't my place to differ from you, sir, but if you happen to be going anywhere, sir, I should be obliged if you could manage to take me with you, seeing that I shall be glad to have a friendly face to look at when the time comes, just to help one through, as it were. And now, sir, I'll be getting the breakfast," and he went, leaving me in a very uncomfortable state of

mind. I was deeply attached to old Job, who was one of the best and honestest men I have ever had to do with in any class of life, and really more of a friend than a servant, and the mere idea of anything happening to him brought a lump into my throat. Beneath all his ludicrous talk I could see that he himself was quite convinced that something was going to happen, and though in most cases these convictions turn out to be utter moonshine—and this particular one especially was to be amply accounted for by the gloomy and unaccustomed surroundings in which its victim was placed—still it did more or less carry a chill to my heart, as any dread that is obviously a genuine object of belief is apt to do, however absurd the belief may be. Presently the breakfast arrived, and with it Leo, who had been taking a walk outside the cave—to clear his mind, he said—and very glad I was to see both, for they gave me a respite from my gloomy thoughts. After breakfast we went for another walk, and watched some of the Amahagger sowing a plot of ground with the grain from which they make their beer. This they did in scriptural fashion—a man with a bag made of goat's hide fastened round his waist walking up and down the plot and scattering the seed as he went. It was a positive relief to see one of these dreadful people do anything so homely and pleasant as sow a field, perhaps because it seemed to link them, as it were, with the rest of humanity.

As we were returning Billali met us, and informed us that it was *She's* pleasure that we should wait upon her, and accordingly we entered her presence, not without trepidation, for Ayesha was certainly an exception to the rule. Familiarity with her might and did breed passion and wonder and horror, but it certainly did *not* breed contempt.

We were as usual shown in by the mutes, and after these had retired Ayesha unveiled, and once more bade Leo embrace her, which, notwithstanding his heart-searchings of the previous night, he did with more alacrity and fervour than in strictness courtesy required.

She laid her white hand on his head, and looked him fondly in the eyes. "Dost thou wonder, my Kallikrates," she said, "when thou shalt call me all thine own, and when we shall of a truth be for one another and to one another? I will tell thee. First, must thou be even as I am, not immortal indeed, for that I am not, but so cased and hardened against the attacks of Time that his arrows shall glance from the armour of thy vigorous life as the sunbeams glance from water. As yet I may not mate with thee, for thou and I are different, and the very brightness of my being would burn thee up, and perchance destroy thee. Thou couldst not even endure to look upon me for too long a time lest thine eyes should ache, and thy senses swim, and therefore" (with a little nod) "shall I presently veil myself again." (This by the way she did not do.) "No: listen, thou shalt not be tried beyond endurance, for this very evening, an hour before the sun goes down, shall we start hence, and by to-morrow's dark, if all goes well, and the road is not lost to me, which I pray it may not be, shall we stand in the place of Life, and thou shalt bathe in the fire, and come forth glorified, as no man ever was before thee, and then, Kallikrates, shalt thou call me wife, and I will call thee husband."

Leo muttered something in answer to this astonishing statement, I do not know what, and she laughed a little at his confusion, and went on.

"And thou, too, oh Holly; on thee also will I confer this boon, and then of a truth shalt thou be evergreen, and this will I do—well, because thou hast pleased me, Holly, for thou art not altogether a fool, like most of the sons of men, and because, though thou hast a school of philosophy as full of nonsense as those of the old days, yet hast thou not forgotten how to turn a pretty phrase about a lady's eyes."

"Hulloa, old fellow!" whispered Leo, with a return of his old cheerfulness, "have you been paying compliments? I should never have thought it of you!"

"I thank thee, oh Ayesha," I replied, with as much dignity as I could command, "but if there be such a place as thou dost describe, and if in this strange place there may be found a fiery virtue that can hold off Death when he comes to pluck us by the hand, yet would I none of it. For me, oh Ayesha, the world has not proved so soft a nest that I would lie in it for ever. A stony-hearted mother is our earth, and stones are the bread she gives her children for their daily food. Stones to eat and bitter water for their thirst, and stripes for tender nurture. Who would endure this for many lives? Who would so load up his back with memories of lost hours and loves, and of his neighbour's sorrows that he cannot lessen, and wisdom that brings not consolation? Hard is it to die, because our delicate flesh doth shrink back from the worm it will not feel, and from that unknown which the winding-sheet doth curtain from our view. But harder still, to my fancy, would it be to live on, green in the leaf and fair, but dead and rotten at the core, and feel that other secret worm of recollection gnawing ever at the heart."

"Bethink thee, Holly," she said; "yet doth long life and strength and beauty beyond measure mean power and all things that are dear to man."

"And what, oh Queen," I answered, "are those things that are dear to man? Are they not bubbles? Is not ambition but an endless ladder by which no height is ever climbed till the last unreachable rung is mounted? For height leads on to height, and there is no resting-place upon them, and rung doth grow upon rung, and there is no limit to the number. Doth not wealth satiate, and become nauseous, and no longer serve to satisfy or pleasure, or to buy an hour's peace of mind? And is there any end to wisdom that we may hope to reach it? Rather, the more we learn, shall we not thereby be able only to better compass out our ignorance? Did we live ten thousand years could we hope to solve the secrets of the suns, and of the space beyond the suns, and of the Hand that hung them in the heavens? Would not our wisdom be but as a gnawing hunger calling our consciousness day by day to a knowledge of the empty craving of our souls? Would it not be but as a light in one of these great caverns, that, though bright it burn, and brighter yet, doth but the more serve to show the depths of the gloom around it? And what good thing is there beyond that we may gain by length of days?"

"Nay, my Holly, there is love—love which makes all things beautiful, and doth breathe divinity into the very dust we tread. With love shall life roll gloriously on from year to year, like the voice of some great music that hath power to hold the hearer's heart poised on eagles' wings above the sordid shame and folly of the earth."

"It may be so," I answered; "but if the loved one prove a broken reed to pierce us, or if the love be loved in vain—what then? Shall a man grave his sorrows upon a stone when he hath but need to write them on the water? Nay, oh *She*, I will live my day, and grow old with my generation, and die my appointed death, and be forgotten. For I do hope for an immortality to which the little span that perchance thou canst confer will be but as a finger's length laid against the measure of the great world; and, mark this! the immortality to which I look, and which my faith doth promise me, shall be free from the bonds that here must tie my spirit down. For, while the flesh endures, sorrow and evil and the scorpion whips of sin must endure also; but when the flesh hath fallen from us, then shall the spirit shine forth clad in the brightness of eternal good, and for its common air shall breathe so rare an ether of most noble thoughts that the highest aspiration of our manhood, or the purest incense of a maiden's prayer, would prove too earthly gross to float therein."

"Thou lookest high," answered Ayesha, with a little laugh, "and speakest clearly as a trumpet and with no uncertain sound. And yet methinks that but now didst thou talk of 'that Unknown' from which the winding-sheet doth curtain us. But perchance, thou seest with the eye of Faith, gazing on that brightness, that is to be, through the painted-glass of thy imagination. Strange are the pictures of the future that mankind can thus draw with this brush of faith and this many-coloured pigment of imagination! Strange, too, that no one of them doth agree with another! I could tell thee—but there, what is the use? why rob a fool of his bauble? Let it pass, and I pray, oh Holly, that when thou dost feel old age creeping slowly toward thyself, and the confusion of senility making havoc in thy brain, thou mayest not bitterly regret that thou didst cast away the imperial boon I would have given to thee. But so it hath ever been; man can never be content with that which his hand can pluck. If a lamp be in his reach to light him through the darkness, he must needs cast it down because it is no star. Happiness danceth ever apace before him, like the marsh-fires in the swamps, and he must catch the fire, and he must hold the star! Beauty is naught to him, because there are lips more honey-sweet; and wealth is naught, because others can weigh him down with heavier shekels; and fame is naught, because there have been greater men than he. Thyself thou saidst it, and I turn thy words against thee. Well, thou dreamest that thou shalt pluck the star. I believe it not, and I think thee a fool, my Holly, to throw away the lamp."

I made no answer, for I could not—especially before Leo—tell her that since I had seen her face I knew that it would always be before my eyes, and that I had no wish to prolong an existence which must always be haunted and tortured by her memory, and by the last bitterness of unsatisfied love. But so it was, and so, alas, is it to this hour!

"And now," went on *She*, changing her tone and the subject together, "tell me, my Kallikrates, for as yet I know it not, how came ye to seek me here? Yesternight thou didst say that Kallikrates—him whom thou sawest—was thine ancestor. How was it? Tell me—thou dost not speak overmuch!"

Thus adjured, Leo told her the wonderful story of the casket and of the potsherd that, written on by his ancestress, the Egyptian Amenartas, had been the means of guiding us to her. Ayesha listened intently, and, when he had finished, spoke to me.

"Did I not tell thee one day, when we did talk of good and evil, oh Holly—it was when my beloved lay so ill—that out of good came evil, and out of evil good—that they who sowed knew not what the crop should be, nor he who struck where the blow should fall? See, now: this Egyptian Amenartas, this royal child of the Nile who hated me, and whom even now I hate, for in a way she did prevail against me—see, now, she herself hath been the very means to bring her lover to mine arms! For her sake I slew him, and now, behold, through her he hath come back to me! She would have done me evil, and sowed her seeds that I might reap tares, and behold she hath given me more than all the world can give, and there is a strange square for thee to fit into thy circle of good and evil, oh Holly!"

"And so," she went on, after a pause—"and so she bade her son destroy me if he might, because I slew his father. And thou, my Kallikrates, art the father, and in a sense thou art likewise the son; and wouldst thou avenge thy wrong, and the wrong of that far-off mother of thine, upon me, oh Kallikrates? See," and she slid to her knees, and drew the white corsage still farther down her ivory bosom—"see, here beats my heart, and there by thy side is a knife, heavy, and long, and sharp, the very knife to slay an erring woman with. Take it now, and be avenged. Strike, and strike home!—so shalt thou be satisfied, Kallikrates, and go through life a happy man, because thou hast paid back the wrong, and obeyed the mandate of the past."

He looked at her, and then stretched out his hand and lifted her to her feet.

"Rise, Ayesha," he said sadly; "well thou knowest that I cannot strike thee, no, not even for the sake of her whom thou slewest but last night. I am in thy power, and a very slave to thee. How can I kill thee?—sooner should I slay myself."

"Almost dost thou begin to love me, Kallikrates," she answered, smiling. "And now tell me of thy country—'tis a great people, is it not? with an empire like that of Rome! Surely thou wouldst return thither, and it is well, for I mean not that thou shouldst dwell in these caves of Kôr. Nay, when once thou art even as I am, we will go hence—fear not but that I shall find a path—and then shall we journey to this England of thine, and live as it becometh us to live. Two thousand years have I waited for the day when I should see the last of these hateful caves and this gloomy-visaged folk, and now it is at hand, and my heart bounds up to meet it like a child's towards its holiday. For thou shalt rule this England—"

"But we have a queen already," broke in Leo, hastily.

"It is naught, it is naught," said Ayesha; "she can be overthrown."

At this we both broke out into an exclamation of dismay, and explained that we should as soon think of overthrowing ourselves.

"But here is a strange thing," said Ayesha, in astonishment; "a queen whom her people love! Surely the world must have changed since I dwelt in Kôr."

Again we explained that it was the character of monarchs that had changed, and that the one under whom we lived was venerated and beloved by all right-thinking people in her vast realms. Also, we told her that real power in our country rested in the hands of the people, and that we were in fact ruled by the votes of the lower and least educated classes of the community.

"Ah," she said, "a democracy—then surely there is a tyrant, for I have long since seen that democracies, having no clear will of their own, in the end set up a tyrant, and worship him."

"Yes," I said, "we have our tyrants."

"Well," she answered resignedly, "we can at any rate destroy these tyrants, and Kallikrates shall rule the land."

I instantly informed Ayesha that in England "blasting" was not an amusement that could be indulged in with impunity, and that any such attempt would meet with the consideration of the law and probably end upon a scaffold.

"The law," she laughed with scorn—"the law! Canst thou not understand, oh Holly, that I am above the law, and so shall my Kallikrates be also? All human law will be to us as the north wind to a mountain. Does the wind bend the mountain, or the mountain the wind?"

"And now leave me, I pray thee, and thou too, my own Kallikrates, for I would get me ready against our journey, and so must ye both, and your servant also. But bring no great quantity of things with thee, for I trust that we shall be but three days gone. Then shall we return hither, and I will make a plan whereby we can bid farewell for ever to these sepulchres of Kôr. Yea, surely thou mayst kiss my hand!"

So we went, I, for one, meditating deeply on the awful nature of the problem that now opened out before us. The terrible *She* had evidently made up her mind to go to England, and it made me absolutely shudder to think what would be the result of her arrival there. What her powers were I knew, and I could not doubt but that she would exercise them to the full. It might be possible to

control her for a while, but her proud, ambitious spirit would be certain to break loose and avenge itself for the long centuries of its solitude. She would, if necessary, and if the power of her beauty did not unaided prove equal to the occasion, blast her way to any end she set before her, and, as she could not die, and for aught I knew could not even be killed,<sup>[1]</sup> what was there to stop her? In the end she would, I had little doubt, assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth, and, though I was sure that she would speedily make ours the most glorious and prosperous empire that the world has ever seen, it would be at the cost of a terrible sacrifice of life.

<sup>[1]</sup> I regret to say that I was never able to ascertain if *She* was invulnerable against the ordinary accidents of life. Presumably this was so, else some misadventure would have been sure to put an end to her in the course of so many centuries. True, she offered to let Leo slay her, but very probably this was only an experiment to try his temper and mental attitude towards her. Ayesha never gave way to impulse without some valid object.—L. H. H.

The whole thing sounded like a dream or some extraordinary invention of a speculative brain, and yet it was a fact—a wonderful fact—of which the whole world would soon be called on to take notice. What was the meaning of it all? After much thinking I could only conclude that this marvellous creature, whose passion had kept her for so many centuries chained as it were, and comparatively harmless, was now about to be used by Providence as a means to change the order of the world, and possibly, by the building up of a power that could no more be rebelled against or questioned than the decrees of Fate, to change it materially for the better.

## XXIII.

# THE TEMPLE OF TRUTH

Our preparations did not take us very long. We put a change of clothing apiece and some spare boots into my Gladstone bag, also we took our revolvers and an express rifle each, together with a good supply of ammunition, a precaution to which, under Providence, we subsequently owed our lives over and over again. The rest of our gear, together with our heavy rifles, we left behind us.

A few minutes before the appointed time we once more attended in Ayesha's boudoir, and found her also ready, her dark cloak thrown over her winding-sheetlike wrappings.

"Are ye prepared for the great venture?" she said.

"We are," I answered, "though for my part, Ayesha, I have no faith in it."

"Ah, my Holly," she said, "thou art of a truth like those old Jews—of whom the memory vexes me so sorely—unbelieving, and hard to accept that which they have not known. But thou shalt see; for unless my mirror beyond lies," and she pointed to the font of crystal water, "the path is yet open as it was of old time. And now let us start upon the new life which shall end—who knoweth where?"

"Ah," I echoed, "who knoweth where?" and we passed down into the great central cave, and out into the light of day. At the mouth of the cave we found a single litter with six bearers, all of them mutes, waiting, and with them I was relieved to see our old friend Billali, for whom I had conceived a sort of affection. It appeared that, for reasons not necessary to explain at length, Ayesha had thought it best that, with the exception of herself, we should proceed on foot, and this we were nothing loth to do, after our long confinement in these caves, which, however suitable they might be for sarcophagi—a singularly inappropriate word, by the way, for these particular tombs, which certainly did not consume the bodies given to their keeping—were depressing habitations for breathing mortals like ourselves. Either by accident or by the orders of *She*, the space in front of the cave where we had beheld that awful dance was perfectly clear of spectators. Not a soul was to be seen, and consequently I do not believe that our departure was known to anybody, except perhaps the mutes who waited on *She*, and they were, of course, in the habit of keeping what they saw to themselves.

In a few minutes' time we were stepping out sharply across the great cultivated plain or lake bed, framed like a vast emerald in its setting of frowning cliff, and had another opportunity of wondering at the extraordinary nature of the site chosen by these old people of Kôr for their capital, and at the marvellous amount of labour, ingenuity, and engineering skill that must have been brought into requisition by the founders of the city to drain so huge a sheet of water, and to keep it clear of subsequent accumulations. It is, indeed, so far as my experience goes, an unequalled instance of what man can do in the face of nature, for in my opinion such achievements as the Suez Canal or even the Mont Cenis Tunnel do not approach this ancient undertaking in magnitude and grandeur of conception.

When we had been walking for about half an hour, enjoying ourselves exceedingly in the delightful cool which about this time of the day always appeared to descend upon the great plain of Kôr, and which in some degree atoned for the want of any land or sea breeze—for all wind was kept off by the rocky mountain wall—we began to get a clear view of what Billali had informed us were the ruins of the great city. And even from that distance we could see how wonderful those ruins were, a fact which with every step we took became more evident. The town was not very large if compared to Babylon or Thebes, or other cities of remote antiquity; perhaps its outer wall contained some twelve square miles of ground, or a little more. Nor had the walls, so far as we could judge when we reached them, been very high, probably not more than forty feet, which was about their present height where they had not through the sinking of the ground, or some such cause, fallen into ruin. The reason of this, no doubt, was that the people of Kôr, being protected from any outside attack by far more tremendous ramparts than any that the hand of man could rear, only required them for show and to guard against civil discord. But on the other hand they were as broad as they were high, built entirely of dressed stone, hewn, no doubt, from the vast caves, and surrounded by a great moat about sixty feet in width, some reaches of which were still filled with water. About ten minutes before the sun finally sank we reached this moat, and passed down and through it, clambering across what evidently were the piled-up fragments of a great bridge in order to do so, and then with some little difficulty over the slope of the wall to its summit. I wish that it lay within the power of my pen to give some idea of the grandeur of the sight that then met our view. There, all bathed in the red glow of the sinking sun, were miles upon miles of ruins—columns, temples, shrines, and the palaces of kings, varied with patches of green bush. Of course, the roofs of these buildings had long since fallen into decay and vanished, but owing to the extreme massiveness of the style of building, and to the hardness and durability of the rock employed, most of the party walls and great columns still remained standing.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] In connection with the extraordinary state of preservation of these ruins after so vast a lapse of time—at least six thousand years—it must be remembered that Kôr was not burnt or destroyed by an enemy or an earthquake, but deserted, owing to the action of a terrible plague. Consequently the houses were left unharmed; also the climate of the plain is remarkably fine and dry, and there is very little rain or wind; as a result of which these relics have only to contend against the unaided action of time, that works but slowly upon such massive blocks of masonry. —L. H. H.

Straight before us stretched away what had evidently been the main thoroughfare of the city, for it was very wide, wider than the Thames Embankment, and regular, being, as we afterwards discovered, paved, or rather built, throughout of blocks of dressed stone, such as were employed in the walls, it was but little overgrown even now with grass and shrubs that could get no depth of soil to live in. What had been the parks and gardens, on the contrary, were now dense jungle. Indeed, it was easy even from a distance to trace the course of the various roads by the burnt-up appearance of the scanty grass that grew upon them. On either side of this great thoroughfare were vast blocks of ruins, each block, generally speaking, being separated from its neighbour by a space of what had once, I suppose, been garden-ground, but was now dense and tangled bush. They were all built of the same coloured stone, and most

of them had pillars, which was as much as we could make out in the fading light as we passed swiftly up the main road, that I believe I am right in saying no living foot had pressed for thousands of years.<sup>[2]</sup>

[2] Billali told me that the Amahagger believe that the site of the city is haunted, and could not be persuaded to enter it upon any consideration. Indeed, I could see that he himself did not at all like doing so, and was only consoled by the reflection that he was under the direct protection of *She*. It struck Leo and myself as very curious that a people which has no objection to living amongst the dead, with whom their familiarity has perhaps bred contempt, and even using their bodies for purposes of fuel, should be terrified at approaching the habitations that these very departed had occupied when alive. After all, however, it is only a savage inconsistency.—L. H. H.

Presently we came to an enormous pile, which we rightly took to be a temple covering at least eight acres of ground, and apparently arranged in a series of courts, each one enclosing another of smaller size, on the principle of a Chinese nest of boxes, the courts being separated one from the other by rows of huge columns. And, while I think of it, I may as well state a remarkable thing about the shape of these columns, which resembled none that I have ever seen or heard of, being fashioned with a kind of waist at the centre, and swelling out above and below. At first we thought that this shape was meant to roughly symbolise or suggest the female form, as was a common habit amongst the ancient religious architects of many creeds. On the following day, however, as we went up the slopes of the mountain, we discovered a large quantity of the most stately looking palms, of which the trunks grew exactly in this shape, and I have now no doubt but that the first designer of those columns drew his inspiration from the graceful bends of those very palms, or rather of their ancestors, which then, some eight or ten thousand years ago, as now, beautified the slopes of the mountain that had once formed the shores of the volcanic lake.

At the *façade* of this huge temple, which, I should imagine, is almost as large as that of El-Karnac, at Thebes, some of the largest columns, which I measured, being between eighteen to twenty feet in diameter at the base, by about seventy feet in height, our little procession was halted, and Ayesha descended from her litter.

"There was a spot here, Kallikrates," she said to Leo, who had run up to help her down, "where one might sleep. Two thousand years ago did thou and I and that Egyptian asp rest therein, but since then have I not set foot here, nor any man, and perchance it has fallen," and, followed by the rest of us, she passed up a vast flight of broken and ruined steps into the outer court, and looked round into the gloom. Presently she seemed to recollect, and, walking a few paces along the wall to the left, halted.

"It is here," she said, and at the same time beckoned to the two mutes, who were loaded with provisions and our little belongings, to advance. One of them came forward, and, producing a lamp, lit it from his brazier (for the Amahagger when on a journey nearly always carried with them a little lighted brazier, from which to provide fire). The tinder of this brazier was made of broken fragments of mummy carefully damped, and, if the admixture of moisture was properly managed, this unholy compound would smoulder away for hours.<sup>[3]</sup> As soon as the lamp was lit we entered the place before which Ayesha had halted. It turned out to be a chamber hollowed in the thickness of the wall, and, from the fact of there still being a massive stone table in it, I should think that it had probably served as a living-room, perhaps for one of the door-keepers of the great temple.

[3] After all we are not much in advance of the Amahagger in these matters. "Mummy," that is pounded ancient Egyptian, is, I believe, a pigment much used by artists, and especially by those of them who direct their talents to the reproduction of the works of the old masters.—Editor.

Here we stopped, and after cleaning the place out and making it as comfortable as circumstances and the darkness would permit, we ate some cold meat, at least Leo, Job and I did, for Ayesha, as I think I have said elsewhere, never touched anything except cakes of flour, fruit and water. While we were still eating, the moon, which was at her full, rose above the mountain-wall, and began to flood the place with silver.

"Wot ye why I have brought you here to-night, my Holly?" said Ayesha, leaning her head upon her hand and watching the great orb as she rose, like some heavenly queen, above the solemn pillars of the temple. "I brought you—nay, it is strange, but knowest thou, Kallikrates, that thou liest at this moment upon the very spot where thy dead body lay when I bore thee back to those caves of Kôr so many years ago? It all returns to my mind now. I can see it, and horrible is it to my sight!" and she shuddered.

Here Leo jumped up and hastily changed his seat. However the reminiscence might affect Ayesha, it clearly had few charms for him.

"I brought you," went on Ayesha presently, "that ye might look upon the most wonderful sight that ever the eye of man beheld—the full moon shining over ruined Kôr. When ye have done your eating—I would that I could teach you to eat naught but fruit, Kallikrates, but that will come after thou hast laved in the fire. Once I, too, ate flesh like a brute beast. When ye have done we will go out, and I will show you this great temple and the God whom men once worshipped therein."

Of course we got up at once, and started. And here again my pen fails me. To give a string of measurements and details of the various courts of the temple would only be wearisome, supposing that I had them, and yet I know not how I am to describe what we saw, magnificent as it was even in its ruin, almost beyond the power of realisation. Court upon dim court, row upon row of mighty pillars—some of them (especially at the gateways) sculptured from pedestal to capital—space upon space of empty chambers that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded streets. And over all, the dead silence of the dead, the sense of utter loneliness, and the brooding spirit of the Past! How beautiful it was, and yet how drear! We did not dare to speak aloud. Ayesha herself was awed in the presence of an antiquity compared to which even her length of days was but a little thing; we only whispered, and our whispers seemed to run from column to column, till they were lost in the quiet air. Bright fell the moonlight on pillar and court and shattered wall, hiding all their rents and imperfections in its silver garment, and clothing their hoar majesty with the peculiar glory of the night. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined fane of Kôr. It was a wonderful thing to think for how many thousands of years the dead orb above and the dead city below had gazed thus upon each other, and in the utter solitude of space poured forth each to each the tale of their lost life and long-departed glory. The white light fell, and minute by minute the quiet shadows crept across the grass-grown courts like the spirits of old priests haunting the habitations of their worship—the white light fell, and the long shadows grew till the beauty and grandeur of each scene and the untamed majesty of its present Death seemed to sink into our very souls, and speak more loudly than the shouts of armies concerning the pomp and splendour that the grave had swallowed, and even memory had forgotten.

"Come," said Ayesha, after we had gazed and gazed, I know not for how long, "and I will show you the stony flower of Loveliness and Wonder's very crown, if yet it stands to mock time with its beauty and fill the heart of man with longing for that which is behind the veil," and, without waiting for an answer, she led us through two more pillared courts into the inner shrine of the old fane.

And there, in the centre of the inmost court, that might have been some fifty yards square, or a little more, we stood face to face with what is perhaps the grandest allegorical work of Art that the genius of her children has ever given to the world. For in the exact

centre of the court, placed upon a thick square slab of rock, was a huge round ball of dark stone, some twenty feet in diameter, and standing on the ball was a colossal winged figure of a beauty so entrancing and divine that when I first gazed upon it, illuminated and shadowed as it was by the soft light of the moon, my breath stood still, and for an instant my heart ceased its beating.

The statue was hewn from marble so pure and white that even now, after all those ages, it shone as the moonbeams danced upon it, and its height was, I should say, a trifle over twenty feet. It was the winged figure of a woman of such marvellous loveliness and delicacy of form that the size seemed rather to add to than to detract from its so human and yet more spiritual beauty. She was bending forward and poising herself upon her half-spread wings as though to preserve her balance as she leant. Her arms were outstretched like those of some woman about to embrace one she dearly loved, while her whole attitude gave an impression of the tenderest beseeching. Her perfect and most gracious form was naked, save—and here came the extraordinary thing—the face, which was thinly veiled, so that we could only trace the marking of her features. A gauzy veil was thrown round and about the head, and of its two ends one fell down across her left breast, which was outlined beneath it, and one, now broken, streamed away upon the air behind her.

“Who is she?” I asked, as soon as I could take my eyes off the statue.

“Canst thou not guess, oh Holly?” answered Ayesha. “Where then is thy imagination? It is Truth standing on the World, and calling to its children to unveil her face. See what is writ upon the pedestal. Without doubt it is taken from the book of Scriptures of these men of Kôr,” and she led the way to the foot of the statue, where an inscription of the usual Chinese-looking hieroglyphics was so deeply graven as to be still quite legible, at least to Ayesha. According to her translation it ran thus:—

“Is there no man that will draw my veil and look upon my face, for it is very fair? Unto him who draws my veil shall I be, and peace will I give him, and sweet children of knowledge and good works.”

And a voice cried, “Though all those who seek after thee desire thee, behold! Virgin art thou, and Virgin shalt thou go till Time be done. No man is there born of woman who may draw thy veil and live, nor shall be. By Death only can thy veil be drawn, oh Truth!”

And Truth stretched out her arms and wept, because those who sought her might not find her, nor look upon her face to face.

“Thou seest,” said Ayesha, when she had finished translating, “Truth was the Goddess of the people of old Kôr, and to her they built their shrines, and her they sought; knowing that they should never find, still sought they.”

“And so,” I added sadly, “do men seek to this very hour, but they find out; and, as this Scripture saith, nor shall they; for in Death only is Truth found.”

Then with one more look at this veiled and spiritualised loveliness—which was so perfect and so pure that one might almost fancy that the light of a living spirit shone through the marble prison to lead man on to high and ethereal thoughts—this poet’s dream of beauty frozen into stone, which I shall never forget while I live, we turned and went back through the vast moonlit courts to the spot whence we had started. I never saw the statue again, which I the more regret, because on the great ball of stone representing the World whereon the figure stood, lines were drawn, that probably, had there been light enough, we should have discovered to be a map of the Universe as it was known to the people of Kôr. It is at any rate suggestive of some scientific knowledge that these long-dead worshippers of Truth had recognised the fact that the globe is round.

## XXIV.

### WALKING THE PLANK

Next day the mutes woke us before the dawn; and by the time that we had got the sleep out of our eyes, and gone through a perfunctory wash at a spring which still welled up into the remains of a marble basin in the centre of the North quadrangle of the vast outer court, we found *She* standing by the litter ready to start, while old Billali and the two bearer mutes were busy collecting the baggage. As usual, Ayesha was veiled like the marble Truth (by the way, I wonder if she originally got the idea of covering up her beauty from that statue?). I noticed, however, that she seemed very depressed, and had none of that proud and buoyant bearing which would have betrayed her among a thousand women of the same stature, even if they had been veiled like herself. She looked up as we came—for her head was bowed—and greeted us. Leo asked her how she had slept.

"Ill, my Kallikrates," she answered, "ill. This night have strange and hideous dreams come creeping through my brain, and I know not what they may portend. Almost do I feel as though some evil overshadowed me; and yet how can evil touch me? I wonder," she went on with a sudden outbreak of womanly tenderness, "I wonder if, should aught happen to me, so that I slept awhile and left thee waking, thou wouldst think gently of me? I wonder, my Kallikrates, if thou wouldst tarry till I came again, as for so many centuries I have tarried for thy coming?"

Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on: "Come, let us be setting forth, for we have far to go, and before another day is born in yonder blue should we stand in the place of Life."

In five minutes we were once more on our way through the vast ruined city, which loomed at us on either side in the grey dawning in a way that was at once grand and oppressive. Just as the first ray of the rising sun shot like a golden arrow athwart this storied desolation we gained the further gateway of the outer wall, and having given one more glance at the hoar and pillared majesty through which we had journeyed, and (with the exception of Job, for whom ruins had no charms) breathed a sigh of regret that we had not had more time to explore it, passed through the great moat, and on to the plain beyond.

As the sun rose so did Ayesha's spirits, till by breakfast-time they had regained their normal level, and she laughingly set down her previous depression to the associations of the spot where she had slept.

"These barbarians swear that Kôr is haunted," she said, "and of a truth I do believe their saying, for never did I know so ill a night save one. I remember it now. It was on that very spot when thou didst lie dead at my feet, Kallikrates. Never will I visit it again; it is a place of evil omen."

After a very brief halt for breakfast we pressed on with such good will that by two o'clock in the afternoon we were at the foot of the vast wall of rock that formed the lip of the volcano, and which at this point towered up precipitously above us for fifteen hundred or two thousand feet. Here we halted, certainly not to my astonishment, for I did not see how it was possible that we should go any farther.

"Now," said Ayesha, as she descended from her litter, "doth our labour but commence, for here do we part with these men, and henceforward must we bear ourselves;" and then, addressing Billali, "do thou and these slaves remain here, and abide our coming. By to-morrow at the midday shall we be with thee—if not, wait."

Billali bowed humbly, and said that her august bidding should be obeyed if they stopped there till they grew old.

"And this man, oh Holly," said *She*, pointing to Job; "best is it that he should tarry also, for if his heart be not high and his courage great, perchance some evil might overtake him. Also, the secrets of the place whither we go are not fit for common eyes."

I translated this to Job, who instantly and earnestly entreated me, almost with tears in his eyes, not to leave him behind. He said he was sure that he could see nothing worse than he had already seen, and that he was terrified to death at the idea of being left alone with those "dumb folk," who, he thought, would probably take the opportunity to hot-pot him.

I translated what he said to Ayesha, who shrugged her shoulders, and answered, "Well, let him come, it is naught to me; on his own head be it, and he will serve to bear the lamp and this," and she pointed to a narrow plank, some sixteen feet in length, which had been bound above the long bearing-pole of her hammock, as I had thought to make curtains spread out better, but, as it now appeared, for some unknown purpose connected with our extraordinary undertaking.

Accordingly, the plank, which, though tough, was very light, was given to Job to carry, and also one of the lamps. I slung the other on to my back, together with a spare jar of oil, while Leo loaded himself with the provisions and some water in a kid's skin. When this was done *She* bade Billali and the six bearer mutes to retreat behind a grove of flowering magnolias about a hundred yards away, and remain there under pain of death till we had vanished. They bowed humbly, and went, and, as he departed, old Billali gave me a friendly shake of the hand, and whispered that he had rather that it was I than he who was going on this wonderful expedition with "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*," and upon my word I felt inclined to agree with him. In another minute they were gone, and then, having briefly asked us if we were ready, Ayesha turned, and gazed up the towering cliff.

"Goodness me, Leo," I said, "surely we are not going to climb that precipice!"

Leo shrugged his shoulders, being in a condition of half-fascinated, half-expectant mystification, and as he did so, Ayesha with a sudden move began to climb the cliff, and of course we had to follow her. It was perfectly marvellous to see the ease and grace with which she sprang from rock to rock, and swung herself along the ledges. The ascent was not, however, so difficult as it seemed, although there were one or two nasty places where it did not do to look behind you, the fact being that the rock still sloped here, and was not absolutely precipitous as it was higher up. In this way we, with no great labour, mounted to the height of some fifty feet above our last standing-place, the only really troublesome thing to manage being Job's board, and in doing so drew some fifty or sixty paces

to the left of our starting-point, for we went up like a crab, sideways. Presently we reached a ledge, narrow enough at first, but which widened as we followed it, and moreover sloped inwards like the petal of a flower, so that as we followed it we gradually got into a kind of rut or fold of rock, that grew deeper and deeper, till at last it resembled a Devonshire lane in stone, and hid us perfectly from the gaze of anybody on the slope below, if there had been anybody to gaze. This lane (which appeared to be a natural formation) continued for some fifty or sixty paces, and then suddenly ended in a cave, also natural, running at right angles to it. I am sure it was a natural cave, and not hollowed by the hand of man, because of its irregular and contorted shape and course, which gave it the appearance of having been blown bodily in the mountain by some frightful eruption of gas following the line of the least resistance. All the caves hollowed by the ancients of Kôr, on the contrary, were cut out with the most perfect regularity and symmetry. At the mouth of this cave Ayesha halted, and bade us light the two lamps, which I did, giving one to her and keeping the other myself. Then, taking the lead, she advanced down the cavern, picking her way with great care, as indeed it was necessary to do, for the floor was most irregular—strewn with boulders like the bed of a stream, and in some places pitted with deep holes, in which it would have been easy to break one's leg.

This cavern we pursued for twenty minutes or more, it being, so far as I could form a judgment—owing to its numerous twists and turns no easy task—about a quarter of a mile long.

At last, however, we halted at its farther end, and whilst I was still trying to pierce the gloom a great gust of air came tearing down it, and extinguished both the lamps.

Ayesha called to us, and we crept up to her, for she was a little in front, and were rewarded with a view that was positively appalling in its gloom and grandeur. Before us was a mighty chasm in the black rock, jagged and torn and splintered through it in a far past age by some awful convulsion of Nature, as though it had been cleft by stroke upon stroke of the lightning. This chasm, which was bounded by a precipice on the hither, and presumably, though we could not see it, on the farther side also, may have measured any width across, but from its darkness I do not think it can have been very broad. It was impossible to make out much of its outline, or how far it ran, for the simple reason that the point where we were standing was so far from the upper surface of the cliff, at least fifteen hundred or two thousand feet, that only a very dim light struggled down to us from above. The mouth of the cavern that we had been following gave on to a most curious and tremendous spur of rock, which jutted out in mid air into the gulf before us, for a distance of some fifty yards, coming to a sharp point at its termination, and resembling nothing that I can think of so much as the spur upon the leg of a cock in shape. This huge spur was attached only to the parent precipice at its base, which was, of course, enormous, just as the cock's spur is attached to its leg. Otherwise it was utterly unsupported.

"Here must we pass," said Ayesha. "Be careful lest giddiness overcome you, or the wind sweep you into the gulf beneath, for of a truth it hath no bottom;" and, without giving us any further time to get scared, she started walking along the spur, leaving us to follow her as best we might. I was next to her, then came Job, painfully dragging his plank, while Leo brought up the rear. It was a wonderful sight to see this intrepid woman gliding fearlessly along that dreadful place. For my part, when I had gone but a very few yards, what between the pressure of the air and the awful sense of the consequences that a slip would entail, I found it necessary to go down on my hands and knees and crawl, and so did the other two.

But Ayesha never condescended to this. On she went, leaning her body against the gusts of wind, and never seeming to lose her head or her balance.

In a few minutes we had crossed some twenty paces of this awful bridge, which got narrower at every step, and then all of a sudden a great gust came tearing along the gorge. I saw Ayesha lean herself against it, but the strong draught got under her dark cloak, and tore it from her, and away it went down the wind flapping like a wounded bird. It was dreadful to see it go, till it was lost in the blackness. I clung to the saddle of rock, and looked round, while, like a living thing, the great spur vibrated with a humming sound beneath us. The sight was a truly awesome one. There we were poised in the gloom between earth and heaven. Beneath us were hundreds upon hundreds of feet of emptiness that gradually grew darker, till at last it was absolutely black, and at what depth it ended is more than I can guess. Above was space upon space of giddy air, and far, far away a line of blue sky. And down this vast gulf upon which we were pinnaced the great draught dashed and roared, driving clouds and misty wreaths of vapour before it, till we were nearly blinded, and utterly confused.

The whole position was so tremendous and so absolutely unearthly, that I believe it actually lulled our sense of terror, but to this hour I often see it in my dreams, and at its mere phantasy wake up covered with cold sweat.

"On! on!" cried the white form before us, for now the cloak had gone, *She* was robed in white, and looked more like a spirit riding down the gale than a woman; "On, or ye will fall and be dashed to pieces. Keep your eyes fixed upon the ground, and closely hug the rock."

We obeyed her, and crept painfully along the quivering path, against which the wind shrieked and wailed as it shook it, causing it to murmur like a vast tuning-fork. On we went, I do not know for how long, only gazing round now and again, when it was absolutely necessary, until at last we saw that we were on the very tip of the spur, a slab of rock, little larger than an ordinary table, that throbbed and jumped like any over-engined steamer. There we lay, clinging to the ground, and looked about us, while Ayesha stood leaning out against the wind, down which her long hair streamed, and, absolutely heedless of the hideous depth that yawned beneath, pointed before her. Then we saw why the narrow plank had been provided, which Job and I had painfully dragged along between us. Before us was an empty space, on the other side of which was something, as yet we could not see what, for here—either owing to the shadow of the opposite cliff, or from some other cause—the gloom was that of night.

"We must wait awhile," called Ayesha; "soon there will be light."

At the moment I could not imagine what she meant. How could more light than there was ever come to this dreadful spot? While I was still wondering, suddenly, like a great sword of flame, a beam from the setting sun pierced the Stygian gloom, and smote upon the point of rock whereon we lay, illumining Ayesha's lovely form with an unearthly splendour. I only wish I could describe the wild and marvellous beauty of that sword of fire, laid across the darkness and rushing mist-wreaths of the gulf. How it got there I do not to this moment know, but I presume that there was some cleft or hole in the opposing cliff, through which it pierced when the setting orb was in a direct line therewith. All I can say is, that the effect was the most wonderful that I ever saw. Right through the heart of the darkness that flaming sword was stabbed, and where it lay there was the most surpassingly vivid light, so vivid that even at a distance we could see the grain of the rock, while, outside of it—yes, within a few inches of its keen edge—was naught but clustering shadows.

And now, by this ray of light, for which *She* had been waiting, and timed our arrival to meet, knowing that at this season for thousands of years it had always struck thus at sunset, we saw what was before us. Within eleven or twelve feet of the very tip of the

tongue-like rock whereon we stood there arose, presumably from the far bottom of the gulf, a sugarloaf-shaped cone, of which the summit was exactly opposite to us. But had there been a summit only it would not have helped us much, for the nearest point of its circumference was some forty feet from where we were. On the lip of this summit, however, which was circular and hollow, rested a tremendous flat boulder, something like a glacier stone—perhaps it was one, for all I know to the contrary—and the end of this boulder approached to within twelve feet or so of us. This huge rock was nothing more or less than a gigantic rocking-stone, accurately balanced upon the edge of the cone or miniature crater, like a half-crown on the rim of a wine-glass; for, in the fierce light that played upon it and us, we could see it oscillating in the gusts of wind.

“Quick!” said Ayesha; “the plank—we must cross while the light endures; presently it will be gone.”

“Oh, Lord, sir!” groaned Job, “surely she don’t mean us to walk across that there place on that there thing,” as in obedience to my direction he pushed the long board towards me.

“That’s it, Job,” I halloed in ghastly merriment, though the idea of walking the plank was no pleasanter to me than to him.

I pushed the board on to Ayesha, who deftly ran it across the gulf so that one end of it rested on the rocking-stone, the other remaining on the extremity of the trembling spur. Then placing her foot upon it to prevent it from being blown away, she turned to me.

“Since I was last here, oh Holly,” she called, “the support of the moving stone hath lessened somewhat, so that I am not certain if it will bear our weight or no. Therefore will I cross the first, because no harm will come unto me,” and, without further ado, she trod lightly but firmly across the frail bridge, and in another second was standing safe upon the heaving stone.

“It is safe,” she called. “See, hold thou the plank! I will stand on the farther side of the stone so that it may not overbalance with your greater weights. Now, come, oh Holly, for presently the light will fail us.”

I struggled to my knees, and if ever I felt terrified in my life it was then, and I am not ashamed to say that I hesitated and hung back.

“Surely thou art not afraid,” this strange creature called in a lull of the gale, from where she stood poised like a bird on the highest point of the rocking-stone. “Make way then for Kallikrates.”

This settled me; it is better to fall down a precipice and die than be laughed at by such a woman; so I clenched my teeth, and in another instant I was on that horrible, narrow, bending plank, with bottomless space beneath and around me. I have always hated a great height, but never before did I realise the full horrors of which such a position is capable. Oh, the sickening sensation of that yielding board resting on the two moving supports. I grew dizzy, and thought that I must fall; my spine *crept*; it seemed to me that I was falling, and my delight at finding myself sprawling upon that stone, which rose and fell beneath me like a boat in a swell, cannot be expressed in words. All I know is that briefly, but earnestly enough, I thanked Providence for preserving me so far.

Then came Leo’s turn, and though he looked rather queer, he came across like a rope-dancer. Ayesha stretched out her hand to clasp his own, and I heard her say, “Bravely done, my love—bravely done! The old Greek spirit lives in thee yet!”

And now only poor Job remained on the farther side of the gulf. He crept up to the plank, and yelled out, “I can’t do it, sir. I shall fall into that beastly place.”

“You must,” I remember saying with inappropriate facetiousness—“you must, Job, it’s as easy as catching flies.” I suppose that I must have said it to satisfy my conscience, because although the expression conveys a wonderful idea of facility, as a matter of fact I know no more difficult operation in the whole world than catching flies—that is, in warm weather, unless, indeed, it is catching mosquitoes.

“I can’t, sir—I can’t, indeed.”

“Let the man come, or let him stop and perish there. See, the light is dying! In a moment it will be gone!” said Ayesha.

I looked. She was right. The sun was passing below the level of the hole or cleft in the precipice through which the ray reached us.

“If you stop there, Job, you will die alone,” I called; “the light is going.”

“Come, be a man, Job,” roared Leo; “it’s quite easy.”

Thus adjured, the miserable Job, with a most awful yell, precipitated himself face downwards on the plank—he did not dare, small blame to him, to try to walk it, and commenced to draw himself across in little jerks, his poor legs hanging down on either side into the nothingness beneath.

His violent jerks at the frail board made the great stone, which was only balanced on a few inches of rock, oscillate in a most dreadful manner, and, to make matters worse, when he was half-way across the flying ray of lurid light suddenly went out, just as though a lamp had been extinguished in a curtained room, leaving the whole howling wilderness of air black with darkness.

“Come on, Job, for God’s sake!” I shouted in an agony of fear, while the stone, gathering motion with every swing, rocked so violently that it was difficult to hang on to it. It was a truly awful position.

“Lord have mercy on me!” cried poor Job from the darkness. “Oh, the plank’s slipping!” and I heard a violent struggle, and thought that he was gone.

But at that moment his outstretched hand, clasping in agony at the air, met my own, and I hauled—ah, how I did haul, putting out all the strength that it has pleased Providence to give me in such abundance—and to my joy in another minute Job was gasping on the rock beside me. But the plank! I felt it slip, and heard it knock against a projecting knob of rock, and it was gone.

“Great heavens!” I exclaimed. “How are we going to get back?”

“I don’t know,” answered Leo, out of the gloom. “Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof; I am thankful enough to be here.”

But Ayesha merely called to me to take her hand and creep after her.

## XXV.

### THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

I did as I was bid, and in fear and trembling felt myself guided over the edge of the stone. I sprawled my legs out, but could touch nothing.

"I am going to fall!" I gasped.

"Nay, let thyself go, and trust to me," answered Ayesha.

Now, if the position is considered, it will be easily understood that this was a greater demand upon my confidence than was justified by my knowledge of Ayesha's character. For all I knew she might be in the very act of consigning me to a horrible doom. But in life we sometimes have to lay our faith upon strange altars, and so it was now.

"Let thyself go!" she cried, and, having no choice, I did.

I felt myself slide a pace or two down the sloping surface of the rock, and then pass into the air, and the thought flashed through my brain that I was lost. But no! In another instant my feet struck against a rocky floor, and I felt that I was standing upon something solid, and out of reach of the wind, which I could hear singing away overhead. As I stood there thanking Heaven for these small mercies, there was a slip and a scuffle, and down came Leo alongside of me.

"Hulloa, old fellow!" he called out, "are you there? This is getting interesting, is it not?"

Just then, with a terrific yell, Job arrived right on the top of us, knocking us both down. By the time we had struggled to our feet again Ayesha was standing among us, and bidding us light the lamps, which fortunately remained uninjured, as also did the spare jar of oil.

I got out my box of wax matches, and they struck as merrily, there, in that awful place, as they could have done in a London drawing-room.

In a couple of minutes both the lamps were alight and revealed a curious scene. We were huddled together in a rocky chamber, some ten feet square, and scared enough we looked; that is, except Ayesha, who was standing calmly with her arms folded, and waiting for the lamps to burn up. The chamber appeared to be partly natural, and partly hollowed out of the top of the cone. The roof of the natural part was formed of the swinging stone, and that of the back part of the chamber, which sloped downwards, was hewn from the live rock. For the rest, the place was warm and dry—a perfect haven of rest compared to the giddy pinnacle above, and the quivering spur that shot out to meet it in mid-air.

"So!" said *She*, "safely have we come, though once I feared that the rocking stone would fall with you, and precipitate you into the bottomless depths beneath, for I do believe that the cleft goeth down to the very womb of the world. The rock whereon the stone resteth hath crumbled beneath the swinging weight. And now that he," nodding towards Job, who was sitting on the floor, feebly wiping his forehead with a red cotton pocket-handkerchief, "whom they rightly call the 'Pig,' for as a pig is he stupid, hath let fall the plank, it will not be easy to return across the gulf, and to that end must I make a plan. But now rest a while, and look upon this place. What think ye that it is?"

"We know not," I answered.

"Wouldst thou believe, oh Holly, that once a man did choose this airy nest for a daily habitation, and did here endure for many years; leaving it only but one day in every twelve to seek food and water and oil that the people brought, more than he could carry, and laid as an offering in the mouth of the tunnel through which we passed hither?"

We looked up wonderingly, and she continued—

"Yet so it was. There was a man—Noot, he named himself—who, though he lived in the latter days, had of the wisdom of the sons of Kôr. A hermit was he, and a philosopher, and greatly skilled in the secrets of Nature, and he it was who discovered the Fire that I shall show you, which is Nature's blood and life, and also that he who bathed therein, and breathed thereof, should live while Nature lives. But like unto thee, oh Holly, this man, Noot, would not turn his knowledge to account. 'Ill,' he said, 'was it for man to live, for man was born to die.' Therefore did he tell his secret to none, and therefore did he come and live here, where the seeker after Life must pass, and was revered of the Amahagger of the day as holy, and a hermit. And when first I came to this country—knowest thou how I came, Kallikrates? Another time I will tell thee, for it is a strange tale—I heard of this philosopher, and waited for him when he came to fetch his food, and returned with him hither, though greatly did I fear to tread the gulf. Then did I beguile him with my beauty and my wit, and flatter him with my tongue, so that he led me down and showed me the Fire, and told me the secrets of the Fire, but he would not suffer me to step therein, and, fearing lest he should slay me, I refrained, knowing that the man was very old, and soon would die. And I returned, having learned from him all that he knew of the wonderful Spirit of the World, and that was much, for the man was wise and very ancient, and by purity and abstinence, and the contemplations of his innocent mind, had worn thin the veil between that which we see and the great invisible truths, the whisper of whose wings at times we hear as they sweep through the gross air of the world. Then—it was but a very few days after, I met thee, my Kallikrates, who hadst wandered hither with the beautiful Egyptian Amenartas, and I learned to love for the first and last time, once and for ever, so that it entered into my mind to come hither with thee, and receive the gift of Life for thee and me. Therefore came we, with that Egyptian who would not be left behind, and, behold, we found the old man Noot lying but newly dead. *There* he lay, and his white beard covered him like a garment," and she pointed to a spot near where I was sitting; "but surely he hath long since crumbled into dust, and the wind hath borne his ashes hence."

Here I put out my hand and felt in the dust, and presently my fingers touched something. It was a human tooth, very yellow, but sound. I held it up and showed it to Ayesha, who laughed.

“Yes,” she said, “it is his without a doubt. Behold what remaineth of Noot, and the wisdom of Noot—one little tooth! And yet that man had all life at his command, and for his conscience’ sake would have none of it. Well, he lay there newly dead, and we descended whither I shall lead you, and then, gathering up all my courage, and courting death that I might perchance win so glorious a crown of life, I stepped into the flames, and behold! life such as ye can never know until ye feel it also, flowed into me, and I came forth undying, and lovely beyond imagining. Then did I stretch out mine arms to thee, Kallikrates, and bid thee take thine immortal bride, and behold, as I spoke, thou, blinded by my beauty, didst turn from me, and throw thine arms about the neck of Amenartas. And then a great fury filled me, and made me mad, and I seized the javelin that thou didst bear, and stabbed thee, so that there, at my very feet, in the place of Life, thou didst groan and go down into death. I knew not then that I had strength to slay with mine eyes and by the power of my will, therefore in my madness slew I with the javelin.<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] It will be observed that Ayesha’s account of the death of Kallikrates differs materially from that written on the potsherd by Amenartas. The writing on the sherd says, “Then in her rage did she smite him *by her magic*, and he died.” We never ascertained which was the correct version, but it will be remembered that the body of Kallikrates had a spear-wound in the breast, which seems conclusive, unless, indeed, it was inflicted after death. Another thing that we never ascertained was *how* the two women—*She* and the Egyptian Amenartas—were able to bear the corpse of the man they both loved across the dread gulf and along the shaking spur. What a spectacle the two distracted creatures must have presented in their grief and loveliness as they toiled along that awful place with the dead man between them! Probably however the passage was easier then.—L. H. H.

“And when thou wast dead, ah! I wept, because I was undying and thou wast dead. I wept there in the place of Life so that had I been mortal any more my heart had surely broken. And she, the swart Egyptian—she cursed me by her gods. By Osiris did she curse me and by Isis, by Nephthys and by Anubis, by Sekhet, the cat-headed, and by Set, calling down evil on me, evil and everlasting desolation. Ah! I can see her dark face now lowering o’er me like a storm, but she could not hurt me, and I—I know not if I could hurt her. I did not try; it was naught to me then; so together we bore thee hence. And afterwards I sent her—the Egyptian—away through the swamps, and it seems that she lived to bear a son and to write the tale that should lead thee, her husband, back to me, her rival and thy murderess.

“Such is the tale, my love, and now is the hour at hand that shall set a crown upon it. Like all things on the earth, it is compounded of evil and of good—more of evil than of good, perchance; and writ in letters of blood. It is the truth; naught have I hidden from thee, Kallikrates. And now one thing before the final moment of thy trial. We go down into the presence of Death, for Life and Death are very near together, and—who knoweth?—that might happen which should separate us for another space of waiting. I am but a woman, and no prophetess, and I cannot read the future. But this I know—for I learned it from the lips of the wise man Noot—that my life is but prolonged and made more bright. It cannot live for aye. Therefore, before we go, tell me, oh Kallikrates, that of a truth thou dost forgive me, and dost love me from thy heart. See, Kallikrates: much evil have I done—perchance it was evil but two nights ago to strike that girl who loved thee cold in death—but she disobeyed me and angered me, prophesying misfortune to me, and I smote. Be careful when power comes to thee also, lest thou too shouldst smite in thine anger or thy jealousy, for unconquerable strength is a sore weapon in the hands of erring man. Yea, I have sinned—out of the bitterness born of a great love have I sinned—but yet do I know the good from the evil, nor is my heart altogether hardened. Thy love, Kallikrates, shall be the gate of my redemption, even as aforetime my passion was the path down which I ran to evil. For deep love unsatisfied is the hell of noble hearts and a portion of the accursed, but love that is mirrored back more perfect from the soul of our desired doth fashion wings to lift us above ourselves, and make us what we might be. Therefore, Kallikrates, take me by the hand, and lift my veil with no more fear than though I were some peasant girl, and not the wisest and most beauteous woman in this wide world, and look me in the eyes, and tell me that thou dost forgive me with all thine heart, and that will all thine heart thou dost worship me.”

She paused, and the strange tenderness in her voice seemed to hover round us like a memory. I know that the sound of it moved me more even than her words, it was so very human—so very womanly. Leo, too, was strangely touched. Hitherto he had been fascinated against his better judgment, something as a bird is fascinated by a snake, but now I think that all this passed away, and he realised that he really loved this strange and glorious creature, as, alas! I loved her also. At any rate, I saw his eyes fill with tears, and he stepped swiftly to her and undid the gauzy veil, and then took her by the hand, and, gazing into her deep eyes, said aloud—

“Ayesha, I love thee with all my heart, and so far as forgiveness is possible I forgive thee the death of Ustane. For the rest, it is between thee and thy Maker; I know naught of it. I only know that I love thee as I never loved before, and that I will cleave to thee to the end.”

“Now,” answered Ayesha, with proud humility—“now when my lord doth speak thus royally and give with so free a hand, it cannot become me to lag behind in words, and be beggared of my generosity. Behold!” and she took his hand and placed it upon her shapely head, and then bent herself slowly down till one knee for an instant touched the ground—“Behold! in token of submission do I bow me to my lord! Behold!” and she kissed him on the lips, “in token of my wifely love do I kiss my lord. Behold!” and she laid her hand upon his heart, “by the sin I sinned, by my lonely centuries of waiting wherewith it was wiped out, by the great love wherewith I love, and by the Spirit—the Eternal Thing that doth beget all life, from whom it ebbs, to whom it doth return again—I swear:—

“I swear, even in this most holy hour of completed Womanhood, that I will abandon Evil and cherish Good. I swear that I will be ever guided by thy voice in the straightest path of Duty. I swear that I will eschew Ambition, and through all my length of endless days set Wisdom over me as a guiding star to lead me unto Truth and a knowledge of the Right. I swear also that I will honour and will cherish thee, Kallikrates, who hast been swept by the wave of time back into my arms, ay, till the very end, come it soon or late. I swear—nay, I will swear no more, for what are words? Yet shalt thou learn that Ayesha hath no false tongue.

“So I have sworn, and thou, my Holly, art witness to my oath. Here, too, are we wed, my husband, with the gloom for bridal canopy—wed till the end of all things; here do we write our marriage vows upon the rushing winds which shall bear them up to heaven, and round and continually round this rolling world.

“And for a bridal gift I crown thee with my beauty’s starry crown, and enduring life, and wisdom without measure, and wealth that none can count. Behold! the great ones of the earth shall creep about thy feet, and its fair women shall cover up their eyes because of the shining glory of thy countenance, and its wise ones shall be abased before thee. Thou shalt read the hearts of men as an open writing, and hither and thither shalt thou lead them as thy pleasure listeth. Like that old Sphinx of Egypt shalt thou sit aloft from age to age, and ever shall they cry to thee to solve the riddle of thy greatness that doth not pass away, and ever shalt thou mock them with thy silence!

"Behold! once more I kiss thee, and by that kiss I give to thee dominion over sea and earth, over the peasant in his hovel, over the monarch in his palace halls, and cities crowned with towers, and those who breathe therein. Where'er the sun shakes out his spears, and the lonesome waters mirror up the moon, where'er storms roll, and Heaven's painted bows arch in the sky—from the pure North clad in snows, across the middle spaces of the world, to where the amorous South, lying like a bride upon her blue couch of seas, breathes in sighs made sweet with the odour of myrtles—there shall thy power pass and thy dominion find a home. Nor sickness, nor icy-fingered fear, nor sorrow, and pale waste of form and mind hovering ever o'er humanity, shall so much as shadow thee with the shadow of their wings. As a God shalt thou be, holding good and evil in the hollow of thy hand, and I, even I, I humble myself before thee. Such is the power of Love, and such is the bridal gift I give unto thee, Kallikrates, my Lord and Lord of All.

"And now it is done; now for thee I loose my virgin zone; and come storm, come shine, come good, come evil, come life, come death, it never, never can be undone. For, of a truth, that which is, is, and, being done, is done for aye, and cannot be altered. I have said—Let us hence, that all things may be accomplished in their order;" and, taking one of the lamps, she advanced towards the end of the chamber that was roofed in by the swaying stone, where she halted.

We followed her, and perceived that in the wall of the cone there was a stair, or, to be more accurate, that some projecting knobs of rock had been so shaped as to form a good imitation of a stair. Down this Ayesha began to climb, springing from step to step, like a chamois, and after her we followed with less grace. When we had descended some fifteen or sixteen steps we found that they ended in a tremendous rocky slope, running first outwards and then inwards—like the slope of an inverted cone, or tunnel. The slope was very steep, and often precipitous, but it was nowhere impassable, and by the light of the lamps we went down it with no great difficulty, though it was gloomy work enough travelling on thus, no one of us knew whither, into the dead heart of a volcano. As we went, however, I took the precaution of noting our route as well as I could; and this was not so very difficult, owing to the extraordinary and most fantastic shape of the rocks that were strewn about, many of which in that dim light looked more like the grim faces carved upon mediæval gargoyles than ordinary boulders.

For a long time we travelled on thus, half an hour I should say, till, after we had descended for many hundreds of feet, I perceived that we were reaching the point of the inverted cone. In another minute we were there, and found that at the very apex of the funnel was a passage, so low and narrow that we had to stoop as we crept along it in Indian file. After some fifty yards of this creeping, the passage suddenly widened into a cave, so huge that we could see neither the roof nor the sides. We only knew that it was a cave by the echo of our tread and the perfect quiet of the heavy air. On we went for many minutes in absolute awed silence, like lost souls in the depths of Hades, Ayesha's white and ghost-like form flitting in front of us, till once more the place ended in a passage which opened into a second cavern much smaller than the first. Indeed, we could clearly make out the arch and stony banks of this second cave, and, from their rent and jagged appearance, discovered that, like the first long passage down which we had passed through the cliff before we reached the quivering spur, it had, to all appearance, been torn in the bowels of the rock by the terrific force of some explosive gas. At length this cave ended in a third passage, through which gleamed a faint glow of light.

I heard Ayesha give a sigh of relief as this light dawned upon us.

"It is well," she said; "prepare to enter the very womb of the Earth, wherein she doth conceive the Life that ye see brought forth in man and beast—ay, and in every tree and flower."

Swiftly she sped along, and after her we stumbled as best we might, our hearts filled like a cup with mingled dread and curiosity. What were we about to see? We passed down the tunnel; stronger and stronger the light beamed, reaching us in great flashes like the rays from a lighthouse, as one by one they are thrown wide upon the darkness of the waters. Nor was this all, for with the flashes came a soul-shaking sound like that of thunder and of crashing trees. Now we were through it, and—oh heavens!

We stood in a third cavern, some fifty feet in length by perhaps as great a height, and thirty wide. It was carpeted with fine white sand, and its walls had been worn smooth by the action of I know not what. The cavern was not dark like the others, it was filled with a soft glow of rose-coloured light, more beautiful to look on than anything that can be conceived. But at first we saw no flashes, and heard no more of the thunderous sound. Presently, however, as we stood in amaze, gazing at the marvellous sight, and wondering whence the rosy radiance flowed, a dread and beautiful thing happened. Across the far end of the cavern, with a grinding and crashing noise—a noise so dreadful and awe-inspiring that we all trembled, and Job actually sank to his knees—there flamed out an awful cloud or pillar of fire, like a rainbow many-coloured, and like the lightning bright. For a space, perhaps forty seconds, it flamed and roared thus, turning slowly round and round, and then by degrees the terrible noise ceased, and with the fire it passed away—I know not where—leaving behind it the same rosy glow that we had first seen.

"Draw near, draw near!" cried Ayesha, with a voice of thrilling exultation. "Behold the very Fountain and Heart of Life as it beats in the bosom of the great world. Behold the substance from which all things draw their energy, the bright Spirit of the Globe, without which it cannot live, but must grow cold and dead as the dead moon. Draw near, and wash you in the living flames, and take their virtue into your poor frames in all its virgin strength—not as it now feebly glows within your bosoms, filtered thereto through all the fine strainers of a thousand intermediate lives, but as it is here in the very fount and seat of earthly Being."

We followed her through the rosy glow up to the head of the cave, till at last we stood before the spot where the great pulse beat and the great flame passed. And as we went we became sensible of a wild and splendid exhilaration, of a glorious sense of such a fierce intensity of Life that the most buoyant moments of our strength seemed flat and tame and feeble beside it. It was the mere effluvium of the flame, the subtle ether that it cast off as it passed, working on us, and making us feel strong as giants and swift as eagles.

We reached the head of the cave, and gazed at each other in the glorious glow, and laughed aloud—even Job laughed, and he had not laughed for a week—in the lightness of our hearts and the divine intoxication of our brains. I know that I felt as though all the varied genius of which the human intellect is capable had descended upon me. I could have spoken in blank verse of Shakesperian beauty, all sorts of great ideas flashed through my mind; it was as though the bonds of my flesh had been loosened and left the spirit free to soar to the empyrean of its native power. The sensations that poured in upon me are indescribable. I seemed to live more keenly, to reach to a higher joy, and sip the goblet of a subtler thought than ever it had been my lot to do before. I was another and most glorified self, and all the avenues of the Possible were for a space laid open to the footsteps of the Real.

Then, suddenly, whilst I rejoiced in this splendid vigour of a new-found self, from far, far away there came a dreadful muttering noise, that grew and grew to a crash and a roar, which combined in itself all that is terrible and yet splendid in the possibilities of sound. Nearer it came, and nearer yet, till it was close upon us, rolling down like all the thunder-wheels of heaven behind the horses of the lightning. On it came, and with it came the glorious blinding cloud of many-coloured light, and stood before us for a space,

turning, as it seemed to us, slowly round and round, and then, accompanied by its attendant pomp of sound, passed away I know not whither.

So astonishing was the wondrous sight that one and all of us, save *She*, who stood up and stretched her hands towards the fire, sank down before it, and hid our faces in the sand.

When it was gone, Ayesha spoke.

"Now, Kallikrates," she said, "the mighty moment is at hand. When the great flame comes again thou must stand in it. First throw aside thy garments, for it will burn them, though thee it will not hurt. Thou must stand in the flame while thy senses will endure, and when it embraces thee suck the fire down into thy very heart, and let it leap and play around thy every part, so that thou lose no moiety of its virtue. Hearest thou me, Kallikrates?"

"I hear thee, Ayesha," answered Leo, "but, of a truth—I am no coward—but I doubt me of that raging flame. How know I that it will not utterly destroy me, so that I lose myself and lose thee also? Nevertheless will I do it," he added.

Ayesha thought for a minute, and then said—

"It is not wonderful that thou shouldst doubt. Tell me, Kallikrates: if thou seest me stand in the flame and come forth unharmed, wilt thou enter also?"

"Yes," he answered, "I will enter even if it slay me. I have said that I will enter now."

"And that will I also," I cried.

"What, my Holly!" she laughed aloud; "methought that thou wouldst naught of length of days. Why, how is this?"

"Nay, I know not," I answered, "but there is that in my heart that calleth me to taste of the flame and live."

"It is well," she said. "Thou art not altogether lost in folly. See now, I will for the second time bathe me in this living bath. Fain would I add to my beauty and my length of days if that be possible. If it be not possible, at the least it cannot harm me.

"Also," she continued, after a momentary pause, "is there another and a deeper cause why I would once again dip me in the flame. When first I tasted of its virtue full was my heart of passion and of hatred of that Egyptian Amenartas, and therefore, despite my strivings to be rid thereof, have passion and hatred been stamped upon my soul from that sad hour to this. But now it is otherwise. Now is my mood a happy mood, and filled am I with the purest part of thought, and so would I ever be. Therefore, Kallikrates, will I once more wash and make me pure and clean, and yet more fit for thee. Therefore also, when thou dost in turn stand in the fire, empty all thy heart of evil, and let soft contentment hold the balance of thy mind. Shake loose thy spirit's wings, and take thy stand upon the utter verge of holy contemplation; ay, dream upon thy mother's kiss, and turn thee towards the vision of the highest good that hath ever swept on silver wings across the silence of thy dreams. For from the germ of what thou art in that dread moment shall grow the fruit of what thou shalt be for all unreckoned time.

"Now prepare thee, prepare! even as though thy last hour were at hand, and thou wast to cross to the Land of Shadows, and not through the Gates of Glory into the realms of Life made beautiful. Prepare, I say!"

## XXVI.

### WHAT WE SAW

Then came a few moments' pause, during which Ayesha seemed to be gathering up her strength for the fiery trial, while we clung to each other, and waited in utter silence.

At last, from far far away, came the first murmur of sound, that grew and grew till it began to crash and bellow in the distance. As she heard it, Ayesha swiftly threw off her gauzy wrapping, loosened the golden snake from her kirtle, and then, shaking her lovely hair about her like a garment, beneath its cover slipped the kirtle off and replaced the snaky belt around her and outside the masses of her falling hair. There she stood before us as Eve might have stood before Adam, clad in nothing but her abundant locks, held round her by the golden band; and no words of mine can tell how sweet she looked—and yet how divine. Nearer and nearer came the thunder-wheels of fire, and as they came she pushed one ivory arm through the dark masses of her hair and flung it round Leo's neck.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she murmured, "wilt thou ever know how I have loved thee?" and she kissed him on the forehead, and then went and stood in the pathway of the flame of Life.

There was, I remember, to my mind something very touching about her words and that embrace upon the forehead. It was like a mother's kiss, and seemed to convey a benediction with it.

On came the crashing, rolling noise, and the sound of it was as the sound of a forest being swept flat by a mighty wind, and then tossed up like so much grass, and thundered down a mountain-side. Nearer and nearer it came; now flashes of light, forerunners of the revolving pillar of flame, were passing like arrows through the rosy air; and now the edge of the pillar itself appeared. Ayesha turned towards it, and stretched out her arms to greet it. On it came very slowly, and lapped her round with flame. I saw the fire run up her form. I saw her lift it with both hands as though it were water, and pour it over her head. I even saw her open her mouth and draw it down into her lungs, and a dread and wonderful sight it was.

Then she paused, and stretched out her arms, and stood there quite still, with a heavenly smile upon her face, as though she were the very Spirit of the Flame.

The mysterious fire played up and down her dark and rolling locks, twining and twisting itself through and around them like threads of golden lace; it gleamed upon her ivory breast and shoulder, from which the hair had slipped aside; it slid along her pillared throat and delicate features, and seemed to find a home in the glorious eyes that shone and shone, more brightly even than the spiritual essence.

Oh, how beautiful she looked there in the flame! No angel out of heaven could have worn a greater loveliness. Even now my heart faints before the recollection of it, as she stood and smiled at our awed faces, and I would give half my remaining time upon this earth to see her once like that again.

But suddenly—more suddenly than I can describe—a kind of change came over her face, a change which I could not define or explain, but none the less a change. The smile vanished, and in its place there came a dry, hard look; the rounded face seemed to grow pinched, as though some great anxiety were leaving its impress upon it. The glorious eyes, too, lost their light, and, as I thought, the form its perfect shape and erectness.

I rubbed my eyes, thinking that I was the victim of some hallucination, or that the refraction from the intense light produced an optical delusion; and, as I did so, the flaming pillar slowly twisted and thundered off whithersoever it passes to in the bowels of the great earth, leaving Ayesha standing where it had been.

As soon as it was gone, she stepped forward to Leo's side—it seemed to me that there was no spring in her step—and stretched out her hand to lay it on his shoulder. I gazed at her arm. Where was its wonderful roundness and beauty? It was getting thin and angular. And her face—by Heaven!—*her face was growing old before my eyes!* I suppose that Leo saw it also; certainly he recoiled a step or two.

"What is it, my Kallikrates?" she said, and her voice—what was the matter with those deep and thrilling notes? They were quite high and cracked.

"Why, what is it—what is it?" she said confusedly. "I feel dazed. Surely the quality of the fire hath not altered. Can the principle of Life alter? Tell me, Kallikrates, is there aught wrong with my eyes? I see not clear," and she put her hand to her head and touched her hair—and oh, *horror of horrors!*—it all fell upon the floor.

"Oh, *look!—look!—look!*" shrieked Job, in a shrill falsetto of terror, his eyes nearly dropping out of his head, and foam upon his lips. "*Look!—look!—look!*" she's shrivelling up! she's turning into a monkey!" and down he fell upon the ground, foaming and gnashing in a fit.

True enough—I faint even as I write it in the living presence of that terrible recollection—she *was* shrivelling up; the golden snake that had encircled her gracious form slipped over her hips and to the ground; smaller and smaller she grew; her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its lustre it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment. She felt at her head: the delicate hand was nothing but a claw now, a human talon like that of a badly-preserved Egyptian mummy, and then she seemed to realise what kind of change was passing over her, and she shrieked—ah, she shrieked!—she rolled upon the floor and shrieked!

Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a monkey. Now the skin was puckered into a million wrinkles, and on the shapeless face was the stamp of unutterable age. I never saw anything like it; nobody ever saw anything like the frightful age that

was graven on that fearful countenance, no bigger now than that of a two-months' child, though the skull remained the same size, or nearly so, and let all men pray they never may, if they wish to keep their reason.

At last she lay still, or only feebly moving. She, who but two minutes before had gazed upon us the loveliest, noblest, most splendid woman the world has ever seen, she lay still before us, near the masses of her own dark hair, no larger than a big monkey, and hideous—ah, too hideous for words. And yet, think of this—at that very moment I thought of it—it was the *same* woman!

She was dying: we saw it, and thanked God—for while she lived she could feel, and what must she have felt? She raised herself upon her bony hands, and blindly gazed around her, swaying her head slowly from side to side as a tortoise does. She could not see, for her whitish eyes were covered with a horny film. Oh, the horrible pathos of the sight! But she could still speak.

"Kallikrates," she said in husky, trembling notes. "Forget me not, Kallikrates. Have pity on my shame; I shall come again, and shall once more be beautiful, I swear it—it is true! *Oh—h—h—*" and she fell upon her face, and was still.

On the very spot where more than twenty centuries before she had slain Kallikrates the priest, she herself fell down and died.

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I know not how long we remained thus. Many hours, I suppose. When at last I opened my eyes, the other two were still outstretched upon the floor. The rosy light yet beamed like a celestial dawn, and the thunder-wheels of the Spirit of Life yet rolled upon their accustomed track, for as I awoke the great pillar was passing away. There, too, lay the hideous little monkey frame, covered with crinkled yellow parchment, that once had been the glorious *She*. Alas! it was no hideous dream—it was an awful and unparalleled fact!

What had happened to bring this shocking change about? Had the nature of the life-giving Fire changed? Did it, perhaps, from time to time send forth an essence of Death instead of an essence of Life? Or was it that the frame once charged with its marvellous virtue could bear no more, so that were the process repeated—it mattered not at what lapse of time—the two impregnations neutralised each other, and left the body on which they acted as it was before it ever came into contact with the very essence of Life? This, and this alone, would account for the sudden and terrible ageing of Ayesha, as the whole length of her two thousand years took effect upon her. I have not the slightest doubt myself but that the frame now lying before me was just what the frame of a woman would be if by any extraordinary means life could be preserved in her till she at length died at the age of two-and-twenty centuries.

But who can tell what had happened? There was the fact. Often since that awful hour I have reflected that it requires no great imagination to see the finger of Providence in the matter. Ayesha locked up in her living tomb waiting from age to age for the coming of her lover worked but a small change in the order of the World. But Ayesha strong and happy in her love, clothed in immortal youth and goddess beauty, and the wisdom of the centuries, would have revolutionised society, and even perchance have changed the destiny of Mankind. Thus she opposed herself against the eternal law, and, strong though she was, by it was swept back to nothingness—swept back with shame and hideous mockery!

For some minutes I lay faintly turning these terrors over in my mind, while my physical strength came back to me, which it quickly did in that buoyant atmosphere. Then I bethought me of the others, and staggered to my feet, to see if I could arouse them. But first I took up Ayesha's kirtle and the gauzy scarf with which she had been wont to hide her dazzling loveliness from the eyes of men, and, averting my head so that I might not look upon it, covered up that dreadful relic of the glorious dead, that shocking epitome of human beauty and human life. I did this hurriedly, fearing lest Leo should recover, and see it again.

Then, stepping over the perfumed masses of dark hair that lay upon the sand, I stooped down by Job, who was lying upon his face, and turned him over. As I did so his arm fell back in a way that I did not like, and which sent a chill through me, and I glanced sharply at him. One look was enough. Our old and faithful servant was dead. His nerves, already shattered by all he had seen and undergone, had utterly broken down beneath this last dire sight, and he had died of terror, or in a fit brought on by terror. I had only to look at his face to see it.

It was another blow; but perhaps it may help people to understand how overwhelmingly awful was the experience through which we had passed—we did not feel it much at the time. It seemed quite natural that the poor fellow should be dead. When Leo came to himself, which he did with a groan and trembling of the limbs about ten minutes afterwards, and I told him that Job was dead, he merely said, "*Oh!*" And, mind you, this was from no heartlessness, for he and Job were much attached to each other; and he often talks of him now with the deepest regret and affection. It was only that his nerves would bear no more. A harp can give out but a certain quantity of sound, however heavily it is smitten.

Well, I set myself to recovering Leo, who, to my infinite relief, I found was not dead, but only fainting, and in the end I succeeded, as I have said, and he sat up; and then I saw another dreadful thing. When we entered that awful place his curling hair had been of the ruddiest gold, now it was turning grey, and by the time we reached the outer air it was snow white. Besides, he looked twenty years older.

"What is to be done, old fellow?" he said in a hollow, dead sort of voice, when his mind had cleared a little, and a recollection of what had happened forced itself upon it.

"Try and get out, I suppose," I answered; "that is, unless you would like to go in there," and I pointed to the column of fire that was once more rolling by.

"I would go in if I were sure that it would kill me," he said with a little laugh. "It was my cursed hesitation that did this. If I had not been doubtful she might never have tried to show me the road. But I am not sure. The fire might have the opposite effect upon me. It might make me immortal; and, old fellow, I have not the patience to wait a couple of thousand years for her to come back again as she did for me. I had rather die when my hour comes—and I should fancy that it isn't far off either—and go my ways to look for her. Do you go in if you like."

But I merely shook my head, my excitement was as dead as ditch-water, and my distaste for the prolongation of my mortal span had come back upon me more strongly than ever. Besides, we neither of us knew what the effects of the fire might be. The result upon *She* had not been of an encouraging nature, and of the exact causes that produced that result we were, of course, ignorant.

"Well, my boy," I said, "we cannot stop here till we go the way of those two," and I pointed to the little heap under the white garment and to the stiffening corpse of poor Job. "If we are going we had better go. But, by the way, I expect that the lamps have burnt out," and I took one up and looked at it, and sure enough it had.

"There is some more oil in the vase," said Leo indifferently—"if it is not broken, at least."

I examined the vessel in question—it was intact. With a trembling hand I filled the lamps—luckily there was still some of the linen wick unburnt. Then I lit them with one of our wax matches. While I did so we heard the pillar of fire approaching once more as it went on its never-ending journey, if, indeed, it was the same pillar that passed and repassed in a circle.

"Let's see it come once more," said Leo; "we shall never look upon its like again in this world."

It seemed a bit of idle curiosity, but somehow I shared it, and so we waited till, turning slowly round upon its own axis, it had flamed and thundered by; and I remember wondering for how many thousands of years this same phenomenon had been taking place in the bowels of the earth, and for how many more thousands it would continue to take place. I wondered also if any mortal eyes would ever again mark its passage, or any mortal ears be thrilled and fascinated by the swelling volume of its majestic sound. I do not think that they will. I believe that we are the last human beings who will ever see that unearthly sight. Presently it had gone, and we too turned to go.

But before we did so we each took Job's cold hand in ours and shook it. It was a rather ghastly ceremony, but it was the only means in our power of showing our respect to the faithful dead and of celebrating his obsequies. The heap beneath the white garment we did not uncover. We had no wish to look upon that terrible sight again. But we went to the pile of rippling hair that had fallen from her in the agony of that hideous change which was worse than a thousand natural deaths, and each of us drew from it a shining lock, and these locks we still have, the sole memento that is left to us of Ayesha as we knew her in the fulness of her grace and glory. Leo pressed the perfumed hair to his lips.

"She called to me not to forget her," he said hoarsely; "and swore that we should meet again. By Heaven! I never will forget her. Here I swear that if we live to get out of this, I will not for all my days have anything to say to another living woman, and that wherever I go I will wait for her as faithfully as she waited for me."

"Yes," I thought to myself, "if she comes back as beautiful as we knew her. But supposing she came back *like that*!"<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] What a terrifying reflection it is, by the way, that nearly all our deep love for women who are not our kindred depends—at any rate, in the first instance—upon their personal appearance. If we lost them, and found them again dreadful to look on, though otherwise they were the very same, should we still love them? —L. H. H.

Well, and then we went. We went, and left those two in the presence of the very well and spring of Life, but gathered to the cold company of Death. How lonely they looked as they lay there, and how ill assorted! That little heap had been for two thousand years the wisest, loveliest, proudest creature—I can hardly call her woman—in the whole universe. She had been wicked, too, in her way; but, alas! such is the frailty of the human heart, her wickedness had not detracted from her charm. Indeed, I am by no means certain that it did not add to it. It was after all of a grand order, there was nothing mean or small about Ayesha.

And poor Job too! His presentiment had come true, and there was an end of him. Well, he has a strange burial-place—no Norfolk hind ever had a stranger, or ever will; and it is something to lie in the same sepulchre as the poor remains of the imperial *She*.

We looked our last upon them and the indescribable rosy glow in which they lay, and then with hearts far too heavy for words we left them, and crept thence broken-down men—so broken down that we even renounced the chance of practically immortal life, because all that made life valuable had gone from us, and we knew even then that to prolong our days indefinitely would only be to prolong our sufferings. For we felt—yes, both of us—that having once looked Ayesha in the eyes, we could not forget her for ever and ever while memory and identity remained. We both loved her now and for all time, she was stamped and carven on our hearts, and no other woman or interest could ever raze that splendid die. And I—there lies the sting—I had and have no right to think thus of her. As she told me, I was naught to her, and never shall be through the unfathomed depths of Time, unless, indeed, conditions alter, and a day comes at last when two men may love one woman, and all three be happy in the fact. It is the only hope of my broken-heartedness, and a rather faint one. Beyond it I have nothing. I have paid down this heavy price, all that I am worth here and hereafter, and that is my sole reward. With Leo it is different, and often and often I bitterly envy him his happy lot, for if *She* was right, and her wisdom and knowledge did not fail her at the last, which, arguing from the precedent of her own case, I think most unlikely, he has some future to look forward to. But I have none, and yet—mark the folly and the weakness of the human heart, and let him who is wise learn wisdom from it—yet I would not have it otherwise. I mean that I am content to give what I have given and must always give, and take in payment those crumbs that fall from my mistress's table, the memory of a few kind words, the hope one day in the far undreamed future of a sweet smile or two of recognition, a little gentle friendship, and a little show of thanks for my devotion to her—and Leo.

If that does not constitute true love, I do not know what does, and all I have to say is that it is a very bad state of affairs for a man on the wrong side of middle age to fall into.

## XXVII.

### WE LEAP

We passed through the caves without trouble, but when we came to the slope of the inverted cone two difficulties stared us in the face. The first of these was the laborious nature of the ascent, and the next the extreme difficulty of finding our way. Indeed, had it not been for the mental notes that I had fortunately taken of the shape of various rocks, I am sure that we never should have managed it at all, but have wandered about in the dreadful womb of the volcano—for I suppose it must once have been something of the sort—until we died of exhaustion and despair. As it was we went wrong several times, and once nearly fell into a huge crack or crevasse. It was terrible work creeping about in the dense gloom and awful stillness from boulder to boulder, and examining it by the feeble light of the lamps to see if I could recognise its shape. We rarely spoke, our hearts were too heavy for speech, we simply stumbled about, falling sometimes and cutting ourselves, in a rather dogged sort of way. The fact was that our spirits were utterly crushed, and we did not greatly care what happened to us. Only we felt bound to try and save our lives whilst we could, and indeed a natural instinct prompted us to it. So for some three or four hours, I should think—I cannot tell exactly how long, for we had no watch left that would go—we blundered on. During the last two hours we were completely lost, and I began to fear that we had got into the funnel of some subsidiary cone, when at last I suddenly recognised a very large rock which we had passed in descending but a little way from the top. It is a marvel that I should have recognised it, and, indeed, we had already passed it going at right angles to the proper path, when something about it struck me, and I turned back and examined it in an idle sort of way, and, as it happened, this proved our salvation.

After this we gained the rocky natural stair without much further trouble, and in due course found ourselves back in the little chamber where the benighted Noot had lived and died.

But now a fresh terror stared us in the face. It will be remembered that owing to Job's fear and awkwardness, the plank upon which we had crossed from the huge spur to the rocking-stone had been whirled off into the tremendous gulf below.

How were we to cross without the plank?

There was only one answer—we must try and *jump* it, or else stop there till we starved. The distance in itself was not so very great, between eleven and twelve feet I should think, and I have seen Leo jump over twenty when he was a young fellow at college; but then, think of the conditions. Two weary, worn-out men, one of them on the wrong side of forty, a rocking-stone to take off from, a trembling point of rock some few feet across to land upon, and a bottomless gulf to be cleared in a raging gale! It was bad enough, God knows, but when I pointed out these things to Leo, he put the whole matter in a nutshell, by replying that, merciless as the choice was, we must choose between the certainty of a lingering death in the chamber and the risk of a swift one in the air. Of course, there was no arguing against this, but one thing was clear, we could not attempt that leap in the dark; the only thing to do was to wait for the ray of light which pierced through the gulf at sunset. How near to or how far from sunset we might be, neither of us had the faintest notion; all we did know was, that when at last the light came it would not endure more than a couple of minutes at the outside, so that we must be prepared to meet it. Accordingly, we made up our minds to creep on to the top of the rocking-stone and lie there in readiness. We were the more easily reconciled to this course by the fact that our lamps were once more nearly exhausted—indeed, one had gone out bodily, and the other was jumping up and down as the flame of a lamp does when the oil is done. So, by the aid of its dying light, we hastened to crawl out of the little chamber and clamber up the side of the great stone.

As we did so the light went out.

The difference in our position was a sufficiently remarkable one. Below, in the little chamber, we had only heard the roaring of the gale overhead—here, lying on our faces on the swinging stone, we were exposed to its full force and fury, as the great draught drew first from this direction and then from that, howling against the mighty precipice and through the rocky cliffs like ten thousand despairing souls. We lay there hour after hour in terror and misery of mind so deep that I will not attempt to describe it, and listened to the wild storm-voices of that Tartarus, as, set to the deep undertone of the spur opposite against which the wind hummed like some awful harp, they called to each other from precipice to precipice. No nightmare dreamed by man, no wild invention of the romancer, can ever equal the living horror of that place, and the weird crying of those voices of the night, as we clung like shipwrecked mariners to a raft, and tossed on the black, unfathomed wilderness of air. Fortunately the temperature was not a low one; indeed, the wind was warm, or we should have perished. So we clung and listened, and while we were stretched out upon the rock a thing happened which was so curious and suggestive in itself, though doubtless a mere coincidence, that, if anything, it added to, rather than deducted from, the burden on our nerves.

It will be remembered that when Ayesha was standing on the spur, before we crossed to the stone, the wind tore her cloak from her, and whirled it away into the darkness of the gulf, we could not see whither. Well—I hardly like to tell the story; it is so strange. As we lay there upon the rocking-stone, this very cloak came floating out of the black space, like a memory from the dead, and fell on Leo—so that it covered him nearly from head to foot. We could not at first make out what it was, but soon discovered by its feel, and then poor Leo, for the first time, gave way, and I heard him sobbing there upon the stone. No doubt the cloak had been caught upon some pinnacle of the cliff, and was thence blown hither by a chance gust; but still, it was a most curious and touching incident.

Shortly after this, suddenly, without the slightest previous warning, the great red knife of light came stabbing the darkness through and through—struck the swaying stone on which we were, and rested its sharp point upon the spur opposite.

"Now for it," said Leo, "now or never."

We rose and stretched ourselves, and looked at the cloud-wreaths stained the colour of blood by that red ray as they tore through the sickening depths beneath, and then at the empty space between the swaying stone and the quivering rock, and, in our hearts, despaired, and prepared for death. Surely we could not clear it—desperate though we were.

"Who is to go first?" said I.

"Do you, old fellow," answered Leo. "I will sit upon the other side of the stone to steady it. You must take as much run as you can, and jump high; and God have mercy on us, say I."

I acquiesced with a nod, and then I did a thing I had never done since Leo was a little boy. I turned and put my arm round him, and kissed him on the forehead. It sounds rather French, but as a fact I was taking my last farewell of a man whom I could not have loved more if he had been my own son twice over.

"Good-bye, my boy," I said, "I hope that we shall meet again, wherever it is that we go to."

The fact was I did not expect to live another two minutes.

Next I retreated to the far side of the rock, and waited till one of the chopping gusts of wind got behind me, and then I ran the length of the huge stone, some three or four and thirty feet, and sprang wildly out into the dizzy air. Oh! the sickening terrors that I felt as I launched myself at that little point of rock, and the horrible sense of despair that shot through my brain as I realised that I had *jumped short!* but so it was, my feet never touched the point, they went down into space, only my hands and body came in contact with it. I gripped at it with a yell, but one hand slipped, and I swung right round, holding by the other, so that I faced the stone from which I had sprung. Wildly I stretched up with my left hand, and this time managed to grasp a knob of rock, and there I hung in the fierce red light, with thousands of feet of empty air beneath me. My hands were holding to either side of the under part of the spur, so that its point was touching my head. Therefore, even if I could have found the strength, I could not pull myself up. The most that I could do would be to hang for about a minute, and then drop down, down into the bottomless pit. If any man can imagine a more hideous position, let him speak! All I know is that the torture of that half-minute nearly turned my brain.

I heard Leo give a cry, and then suddenly saw him in mid air springing up and out like a chamois. It was a splendid leap that he took under the influence of his terror and despair, clearing the horrible gulf as if it were nothing, and, landing well on to the rocky point, he threw himself upon his face, to prevent his pitching off into the depths. I felt the spur above me shake beneath the shock of his impact, and as it did so I saw the huge rocking-stone, that had been violently depressed by him as he sprang, fly back when relieved of his weight till, for the first time during all these centuries, it got beyond its balance, fell with a most awful crash right into the rocky chamber which had once served the philosopher Noot for a hermitage, and, I have no doubt, for ever sealed the passage that leads to the Place of Life with some hundreds of tons of rock.

All this happened in a second, and curiously enough, notwithstanding my terrible position, I noted it involuntarily, as it were. I even remember thinking that no human being would go down that dread path again.

Next instant I felt Leo seize me by the right wrist with both hands. By lying flat on the point of rock he could just reach me.

"You must let go and swing yourself clear," he said in a calm and collected voice, "and then I will try and pull you up, or we will both go together. Are you ready?"

By way of answer I let go, first with my left hand and then with the right, and, as a consequence, swayed out clear of the overshadowing rock, my weight hanging upon Leo's arms. It was a dreadful moment. He was a very powerful man, I knew, but would his strength be equal to lifting me up till I could get a hold on the top of the spur, when owing to his position he had so little purchase?

For a few seconds I swung to and fro, while he gathered himself for the effort, and then I heard his sinews cracking above me, and felt myself lifted up as though I were a little child, till I got my left arm round the rock, and my chest was resting on it. The rest was easy; in two or three more seconds I was up, and we were lying panting side by side, trembling like leaves, and with the cold perspiration of terror pouring from our skins.

And then, as before, the light went out like a lamp.

For some half-hour we lay thus without speaking a word, and then at length began to creep along the great spur as best we might in the dense gloom. As we drew towards the face of the cliff, however, from which the spur sprang out like a spike from a wall, the light increased, though only a very little, for it was night overhead. After that the gusts of wind decreased, and we got along rather better, and at last reached the mouth of the first cave or tunnel. But now a fresh trouble stared as in the face: our oil was gone, and the lamps were, no doubt, crushed to powder beneath the fallen rocking-stone. We were even without a drop of water to stay our thirst, for we had reached the last in the chamber of Noot. How were we to see to make our way through this last boulder-strewn tunnel?

Clearly all that we could do was to trust to our sense of feeling, and attempt the passage in the dark, so in we crept, fearing that if we delayed to do so our exhaustion would overcome us, and we should probably lie down and die where we were.

Oh, the horrors of that last tunnel! The place was strewn with rocks, and we fell over them, and knocked ourselves up against them till we were bleeding from a score of wounds. Our only guide was the side of the cavern, which we kept touching, and so bewildered did we grow in the darkness that we were several times seized with the terrifying thought that we had turned, and were travelling the wrong way. On we went, feebly, and still more feebly, for hour after hour, stopping every few minutes to rest, for our strength was spent. Once we fell asleep, and, I think, must have slept for some hours, for, when we woke, our limbs were quite stiff, and the blood from our blows and scratches had caked, and was hard and dry upon our skin. Then we dragged ourselves on again, till at last, when despair was entering into our hearts, we once more saw the light of day, and found ourselves outside the tunnel in the rocky fold on the outer surface of the cliff that, it will be remembered, led into it.

It was early morning—that we could tell by the feel of the sweet air and the look of the blessed sky, which we had never hoped to see again. It was, so near as we knew, an hour after sunset when we entered the tunnel, so it followed that it had taken us the entire night to crawl through that dreadful place.

"One more effort, Leo," I gasped, "and we shall reach the slope where Billali is, if he hasn't gone. Come, don't give way," for he had cast himself upon his face. He rose, and, leaning on each other, we got down that fifty feet or so of cliff—somehow, I have not the least notion how. I only remember that we found ourselves lying in a heap at the bottom, and then once more began to drag ourselves along on our hands and knees towards the grove where *She* had told Billali to wait her re-arrival, for we could not walk another foot. We had not gone fifty yards in this fashion when suddenly one of the mutes emerged from the trees on our left, through which, I presume, he had been taking a morning stroll, and came running up to see what sort of strange animals we were. He stared, and stared, and then held up his hands in horror, and nearly fell to the ground. Next, he started off as hard as he could for the grove some two hundred yards away. No wonder that he was horrified at our appearance, for we must have been a shocking sight. To begin, Leo, with his golden curls turned a snowy white, his clothes nearly rent from his body, his worn face and his hands a mass of bruises,

cuts, and blood-encrusted filth, was a sufficiently alarming spectacle, as he painfully dragged himself along the ground, and I have no doubt that I was little better to look on. I know that two days afterwards when I inspected my face in some water I scarcely recognised myself. I have never been famous for beauty, but there was something beside ugliness stamped upon my features that I have never got rid of until this day, something resembling that wild look with which a startled person wakes from deep sleep more than anything else that I can think of. And really it is not to be wondered at. What I do wonder at is that we escaped at all with our reason.

Presently, to my intense relief, I saw old Billali hurrying towards us, and even then I could scarcely help smiling at the expression of consternation on his dignified countenance.

“Oh, my Baboon! my Baboon!” he cried, “my dear son, is it indeed thee and the Lion? Why, his mane that was ripe as corn is white like the snow. Whence come ye? and where is the Pig, and where too *She-who-must-be-obeyed*?”

“Dead, both dead,” I answered; “but ask no questions; help us, and give us food and water, or we too shall die before thine eyes. Seest thou not that our tongues are black for want of water? How, then, can we talk?”

“Dead!” he gasped. “Impossible. *She* who never dies—dead, how can it be?” and then, perceiving, I think, that his face was being watched by the mutes who had come running up, he checked himself, and motioned to them to carry us to the camp, which they did.

Fortunately when we arrived some broth was boiling on the fire, and with this Billali fed us, for we were too weak to feed ourselves, thereby I firmly believe saving us from death by exhaustion. Then he bade the mutes wash the blood and grime from us with wet cloths, and after that we were laid down upon piles of aromatic grass, and instantly fell into the dead sleep of absolute exhaustion of mind and body.

## XXVIII.

# OVER THE MOUNTAIN

The next thing I recollect is a feeling of the most dreadful stiffness, and a sort of vague idea passing through my half-awakened brain that I was a carpet that had just been beaten. I opened my eyes, and the first thing they fell on was the venerable countenance of our old friend Billali, who was seated by the side of the improvised bed upon which I was sleeping, and thoughtfully stroking his long beard. The sight of him at once brought back to my mind a recollection of all that we had recently passed through, which was accentuated by the vision of poor Leo lying opposite to me, his face knocked almost to a jelly, and his beautiful crowd of curls turned from yellow to white,<sup>[1]</sup> and I shut my eyes again and groaned.

<sup>[1]</sup> Curiously enough, Leo's hair has lately been to some extent regaining its colour—that is to say, it is now a yellowish grey, and I am not without hopes that it will in time come quite right.—L. H. H.

"Thou hast slept long, my Baboon," said old Billali.

"How long, my father?" I asked.

"A round of the sun and a round of the moon, a day and a night hast thou slept, and the Lion also. See, he sleepeth yet."

"Blessed is sleep," I answered, "for it swallows up recollection."

"Tell me," he said, "what hath befallen you, and what is this strange story of the death of Her who dieth not. Bethink thee, my son: if this be true, then is thy danger and the danger of the Lion very great—nay, almost is the pot red wherewith ye shall be potted, and the stomachs of those who shall eat ye are already hungry for the feast. Knowest thou not that these Amahagger, my children, these dwellers in the caves, hate ye? They hate ye as strangers, they hate ye more because of their brethren whom *She* put to the torment for your sake. Assuredly, if once they learn that there is naught to fear from Hiya, from the terrible One-who-must-be-obeyed, they will slay ye by the pot. But let me hear thy tale, my poor Baboon."

Thus adjured, I set to work and told him—not everything, indeed, for I did not think it desirable to do so, but sufficient for my purpose, which was to make him understand that *She* was really no more, having fallen into some fire, and, as I put it—for the real thing would have been incomprehensible to him—been burnt up. I also told him some of the horrors we had undergone in effecting our escape, and these produced a great impression on him. But I clearly saw that he did not believe in the report of Ayesha's death. He believed indeed that we thought that she was dead, but his explanation was that it had suited her to disappear for a while. Once, he said, in his father's time, she had done so for twelve years, and there was a tradition in the country that many centuries back no one had seen her for a whole generation, when she suddenly reappeared, and destroyed a woman who had assumed the position of Queen. I said nothing to this, but only shook my head sadly. Alas! I knew too well that Ayesha would appear no more, or at any rate that Billali would never see her again.

"And now," concluded Billali, "what wouldst thou do, my Baboon?"

"Nay," I said, "I know not, my father. Can we not escape from this country?"

He shook his head.

"It is very difficult. By Kôr ye cannot pass, for ye would be seen, and as soon as those fierce ones found that ye were alone, well," and he smiled significantly, and made a movement as though he were placing a hat on his head. "But there is a way over the cliff whereof I once spake to thee, where they drive the cattle out to pasture. Then beyond the pastures are three days' journey through the marshes, and after that I know not, but I have heard that seven days' journey from thence is a mighty river, which floweth to the black water. If ye could come thither, perchance ye might escape, but how can ye come thither?"

"Billali," I said, "once, thou knowest, I did save thy life. Now pay back the debt, my father, and save me mine and my friend's, the Lion's. It shall be a pleasant thing for thee to think of when thine hour comes, and something to set in the scale against the evil doing of thy days, if perchance thou hast done any evil. Also, if thou be right, and if *She* doth but hide herself, surely when she comes again she shall reward thee."

"My son the Baboon," answered the old man, "think not that I have an ungrateful heart. Well do I remember how thou didst rescue me when those dogs stood by to see me drown. Measure for measure will I give thee, and if thou canst be saved, surely I will save thee. Listen: by dawn to-morrow be prepared, for litters shall be here to bear ye away across the mountains, and through the marshes beyond. This will I do, saying that it is the word of *She* that it be done, and he who obeyeth not the word of *She* food is he for the hyænas. Then when ye have crossed the marshes, ye must strike with your own hands, so that perchance, if good fortune go with you, ye may live to come to that black water whereof ye told me. And now, see, the Lion wakes, and ye must eat the food I have made ready for you."

Leo's condition when once he was fairly aroused proved not to be so bad as might have been expected from his appearance, and we both of us managed to eat a hearty meal, which indeed we needed sadly enough. After this we limped down to the spring and bathed, and then came back and slept again till evening, when we once more ate enough for five. Billali was away all that day, no doubt making arrangements about litters and bearers, for we were awakened in the middle of the night by the arrival of a considerable number of men in the little camp.

At dawn the old man himself appeared, and told us that he had by using *She's* dreadful name, though with some difficulty, succeeded in getting the necessary men and two guides to conduct us across the swamps, and that he urged us to start at once, at the same time announcing his intention of accompanying us so as to protect us against treachery. I was much touched by this act of

kindness on the part of that wily old barbarian towards two utterly defenceless strangers. A three—or in his case, for he would have to return, six—days' journey through those deadly swamps was no light undertaking for a man of his age, but he consented to do it cheerfully in order to promote our safety. It shows that even among those dreadful Amahagger—who are certainly with their gloom and their devilish and ferocious rites by far the most terrible savages that I ever heard of—there are people with kindly hearts. Of course, self-interest may have had something to do with it. He may have thought that *She* would suddenly reappear and demand an account of us at his hands, but still, allowing for all deductions, it was a great deal more than we could expect under the circumstances, and I can only say that I shall for as long as I live cherish a most affectionate remembrance of my nominal parent, old Billali.

Accordingly, after swallowing some food, we started in the litters, feeling, so far as our bodies went, wonderfully like our old selves after our long rest and sleep. I must leave the condition of our minds to the imagination.

Then came a terrible pull up the cliff. Sometimes the ascent was more natural, more often it was a zig-zag roadway cut, no doubt, in the first instance by the old inhabitants of Kôr. The Amahagger say they drive their spare cattle over it once a year to pasture outside; all I know is that those cattle must be uncommonly active on their feet. Of course the litters were useless here, so we had to walk.

By midday, however, we reached the great flat top of that mighty wall of rock, and grand enough the view was from it, with the plain of Kôr, in the centre of which we could clearly make out the pillared ruins of the Temple of Truth to the one side, and the boundless and melancholy marsh on the other. This wall of rock, which had no doubt once formed the lip of the crater, was about a mile and a half thick, and still covered with clinker. Nothing grew there, and the only thing to relieve our eyes were occasional pools of rain-water (for rain had lately fallen) wherever there was a little hollow. Over the flat crest of this mighty rampart we went, and then came the descent, which, if not so difficult a matter as the getting up, was still sufficiently break-neck, and took us till sunset. That night, however, we camped in safety upon the mighty slopes that rolled away to the marsh beneath.

On the following morning, about eleven o'clock, began our dreary journey across those awful seas of swamps which I have already described.

For three whole days, through stench and mire, and the all-prevailing flavour of fear, did our bearers struggle along, till at length we came to open rolling ground quite uncultivated, and mostly treeless, but covered with game of all sorts, which lies beyond that most desolate, and without guides utterly impracticable, district. And here on the following morning we bade farewell, not without some regret, to old Billali, who stroked his white beard and solemnly blessed us.

"Farewell, my son the Baboon," he said, "and farewell to thee too, oh Lion. I can do no more to help you. But if ever ye come to your country, be advised, and venture no more into lands that ye know not, lest ye come back no more, but leave your white bones to mark the limit of your journeyings. Farewell once more; often shall I think of you, nor wilt thou forget me, my Baboon, for though thy face is ugly thy heart is true." And then he turned and went, and with him went the tall and sullen-looking bearers, and that was the last that we saw of the Amahagger. We watched them winding away with the empty litters like a procession bearing dead men from a battle, till the mists from the marsh gathered round them and hid them, and then, left utterly desolate in the vast wilderness, we turned and gazed round us and at each other.

Three weeks or so before four men had entered the marshes of Kôr, and now two of us were dead, and the other two had gone through adventures and experiences so strange and terrible that death himself hath not a more fearful countenance. Three weeks—and only three weeks! Truly time should be measured by events, and not by the lapse of hours. It seemed like thirty years since we saw the last of our whale-boat.

"We must strike out for the Zambesi, Leo," I said, "but God knows if we shall ever get there."

Leo nodded. He had become very silent of late, and we started with nothing but the clothes we stood in, a compass, our revolvers and express rifles, and about two hundred rounds of ammunition, and so ended the history of our visit to the ancient ruins of mighty and imperial Kôr.

As for the adventures that subsequently befell us, strange and varied as they were, I have, after deliberation, determined not to record them here. In these pages I have only tried to give a short and clear account of an occurrence which I believe to be unprecedented, and this I have done, not with a view to immediate publication, but merely to put on paper while they are yet fresh in our memories the details of our journey and its result, which will, I believe, prove interesting to the world if ever we determine to make them public. This, as at present advised, we do not intend should be done during our joint lives.

For the rest, it is of no public interest, resembling as it does the experience of more than one Central African traveller. Suffice it to say, that we did, after incredible hardships and privations, reach the Zambesi, which proved to be about a hundred and seventy miles south of where Billali left us. There we were for six months imprisoned by a savage tribe, who believed us to be supernatural beings, chiefly on account of Leo's youthful face and snow-white hair. From these people we ultimately escaped, and, crossing the Zambesi, wandered off southwards, where, when on the point of starvation, we were sufficiently fortunate to fall in with a half-caste Portuguese elephant-hunter who had followed a troop of elephants farther inland than he had ever been before. This man treated us most hospitably, and ultimately through his assistance we, after innumerable sufferings and adventures, reached Delagoa Bay, more than eighteen months from the time when we emerged from the marshes of Kôr, and the very next day managed to catch one of the steamboats that run round the Cape to England. Our journey home was a prosperous one, and we set our foot on the quay at Southampton exactly two years from the date of our departure upon our wild and seemingly ridiculous quest, and I now write these last words with Leo leaning over my shoulder in my old room in my college, the very same into which some two-and-twenty years ago my poor friend Vincey came stumbling on the memorable night of his death, bearing the iron chest with him.

And that is the end of this history so far as it concerns science and the outside world. What its end will be as regards Leo and myself is more than I can guess at. But we feel that is not reached yet. A story that began more than two thousand years ago may stretch a long way into the dim and distant future.

Is Leo really a reincarnation of the ancient Kallikrates of whom the inscription tells? Or was Ayesha deceived by some strange hereditary resemblance? The reader must form his own opinion on this as on many other matters. I have mine, which is that she made no such mistake.

Often I sit alone at night, staring with the eyes of the mind into the blackness of unborn time, and wondering in what shape and form the great drama will be finally developed, and where the scene of its next act will be laid. And when that final development ultimately occurs, as I have no doubt it must and will occur, in obedience to a fate that never swerves and a purpose that cannot be altered, what will be the part played therein by that beautiful Egyptian Amenartas, the Princess of the royal race of the Pharaohs, for the love of whom the Priest Kallikrates broke his vows to Isis, and, pursued by the inexorable vengeance of the outraged Goddess, fled down the coast of Libya to meet his doom at Kôr?

*Major Revisions for the 1st English  
Edition (1887)*

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a Mendesian Prince of the Twenty-ninth Dynasty] a Mendesian pharaoh of the twenty-ninth dynasty, and his grandfather, I believe, was that very Kallikrates mentioned by Herodotus.\* (\* The Kallikrates here referred to by my friend was a Spartan, spoken of by Herodotus (Herod. ix. 72) as being remarkable for his beauty. He fell at the glorious battle of Plataea (22 September 479 BCE), when the Lacedaemonians and Athenians under Pausanias routed the Persians, putting nearly 300,000 of them to the sword. The following is a translation of the passage, “For Kallikrates died out of the battle, he came to the army the most beautiful man of the Greeks of that day—not only of the Lacedaemonians themselves, but of the other Greeks also. He when Pausanias was sacrificing was wounded in the side by an arrow; and then they fought, but on being carried off he regretted his death, and said to Arimnestus, a Plataean, that he did not grieve at dying for Greece, but at not having struck a blow, or, although he desired so to do, performed any deed worthy of himself.” This Kallikrates, who appears to have been as brave as he was beautiful, is subsequently mentioned by Herodotus as having been buried among the ἱεῦες (young commanders), apart from the other Spartans and the Helots.—L.H.H.)

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beautiful Greek of the period it is to have been written of an Egyptian born] very good Greek of the period it is, considering that it came from the pen of an Egyptian born. Here is an exact transcript of it:—

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 ΗΟΛΙΓΩΡΕΙΔΕΙ ΓΑΡ ΤΗΝ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΑ ΑΝΑΖΗΤΕΙ  
 ΝΗΝ ΓΩΣ ΤΟ ΤΟΥ ΒΙΟΥ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΑΝΕΥΡΗ  
 ΣΚΑΙΑΝΑΙΡΕΙΝ ΗΝ ΓΟΥΓΑΡΑΣ ΧΗΔΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΣΟ  
 ΝΓΑΤΕΡΑ ΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΗΝ ΕΙΔΕΦΟΒΟΥΜΕΝΟ  
 Σ ΗΔΙΑ ΑΛΛΟΤΙΑΥΤΟΣ ΛΕΙΓΕΙ ΤΟΥ ΕΡΓΟΥ ΓΑ  
 ΣΙ ΤΟΙΣ ΥΣΤΕΡΟΝ ΑΥΤΟ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΕΓΙΣΤΕΛΛΩ Ε  
 ΩΣ ΓΟΤΕ ΑΓΑΘΟΣ ΤΙΣ ΓΕΝΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΤΩ ΓΥΡΙΛ  
 ΟΥΣΑΣ ΘΑΙΤΟ ΛΜΗΣ ΕΙΚΑΙΤΑ ΑΡΙΣΤΕΙΑ ΕΧΩΝ  
 ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΙΤΩΝ ΑΝΘΡΩΓΩΝ ΑΓΙΣΤΑ ΜΕΝ Δ  
 ΗΤΑΤΟΙΑΥΤΑ ΛΕΓΩΜΩΣ ΔΕ ΑΑΥΤΗ ΕΓΝΩΚ  
 ΑΟΥΚΕΨΕΥΣΑΜΗΝ

For general convenience in reading, I have here accurately transcribed this inscription into the cursive character:—

Ἀμενάρτας, τοῦ βασιλικοῦ γένους τοῦ Αἰγυπ-  
 τίου, ἢ τοῦ Καλλικράτους Ἰσίδος ἱερέως, ἣν οἱ μὲν  
 θεοὶ τρέφουσι τὰ δὲ δαιμόνια ὑποτάσσεται, ἤδη τελ-  
 ευτώσα Τιτισθένει τῷ παιδὶ ἐπιστέλλει τάδε· συνέ-  
 φυγον γάρ ποτε ἐκ τῆς Αἰγυπτίας ἐπὶ Νεκτανέβου  
 μετὰ τοῦ σοῦ πατρός, διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα τὸν ἐμὸν ἐπιор-  
 κήσαντος. φυγόντες δὲ πρὸς νότον διαπόντιοι καὶ κ' δ'  
 μῆνας κατὰ τὰ παραθαλάσσια τῆς Λιβύης τὰ πρὸς  
 ἡλίου ἀνατολὰς πλανηθέντες, ἐνθα περπέτρα τις μεγάλη,  
 γλυπτὸν ὁμοίωμα Αἰθίοπος κεφαλῆς, εἴτα ἡμέρας δ'  
 ἅπλὸν στόματος ποταμοῦ μεγάλου ἐκπεσόντες, οἱ μὲν  
 κατεποντίσθημεν, οἱ δὲ νότῳ ἀπεθάνομεν· τέλος δὲ  
 ὑπ' ἀγρίων ἀνθρώπων ἐφερόμεθα διὰ ἐλέων τε καὶ

τεναγέων ἔνθαπερ πτηνῶν πλήθος ἀποκρύπτει τὸν  
 οὐρανὸν, ἡμέρας ἰ, ἕως ἡλθομεν εἰς κοῖλόν τι ὄρος, ἔνθα  
 ποτὲ μεγάλη μὲν πόλις ἦν, ἀντρα δὲ ἀπείρονα· ἤγαγον  
 δὲ ὡς βασιλείαν τὴν τῶν ξένους χύτραις στεφανούντων,  
 ἥτις μαγεία μὲν ἐχρήτο ἐπιστήμῃ δὲ πάντων καὶ δὴ καὶ  
 κάλλος καὶ ῥώμην ἀγήρως ἦν· ἡ δὲ Καλλικράτους  
 τοῦ σοῦ πατρὸς ἐρασθεῖσα τὸ μὲν πρῶτον συνοικεῖν  
 ἐβούλετο ἐμὲ δὲ ἀνελεῖν· ἔπειτα, ὡς οὐκ ἀνέπειθεν,  
 ἐμὲ γὰρ ὑπερεφίλει καὶ τὴν ξένην ἐφοβεῖτο, ἀπήγαγεν  
 ἡμᾶς ὑπὸ μαγείας καθ' ὁδοὺς σφαλερὰς ἔνθα τὸ βύ-  
 ραθρον τὸ μέγα, οὗ κατὰ στόμα ἔκειτο ὁ γέρων ὁ  
 φιλόσοφος τεθνεὺς, ἀφικομένοις δ' ἔδειξε φῶς τοῦ  
 βίου εὐθύ, οἷον κίονα ἐλισσόμενον φώνην ἰέντα καθάπερ  
 βροντῆς, εἶτα διὰ πυρὸς βεβηκυῖα ἀβλαβὴς καὶ ἔτι  
 καλλίων αὐτῇ ἑαυτῆς ἐξεφάνη. ἐκ δὲ τούτων ὥμοσε  
 καὶ τὸν σὸν πατέρα ἀθάνατον ἀποδείξειν, εἰ συνοικεῖν  
 οἱ βούλοιτο ἐμὲ δε ἀνελεῖν, οὐ γὰρ οὖν αὐτῇ ἀνελεῖν  
 ἴσχυεν ὑπὸ τῶν ἡμεδαπῶν ἦν καὶ αὐτῇ ἔχω μαγείας.  
 ὁ δ' οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ἠθέλε, τὼ χεῖρε τῶν ὀμμάτων  
 προίσχων ἵνα δὴ τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς κάλλος μὴ ὀρέῃ·  
 ἔπειτα ὀργισθεῖσα κατεγοήτευσεν μὲν αὐτόν, ἀπολόμενον  
 μέντοι κλάουσα καὶ ὀδυρομένη ἐκεῖθεν ἀπῆνεγκεν, ἐμὲ  
 δὲ φόβῳ ἀφήκεν εἰς στόμα τοῦ μεγάλου ποταμοῦ  
 τοῦ νανσιπόρου, πόρρω δὲ νανσίν, ἐφ' ὧνπερ πλέουσα  
 ἔτεκόν σε, ἀποπλεύσασα μόλις ποτὲ δεῦρο Ἀθηνάζε  
 κατηγαγόμενην. σὺ δέ, ὦ Τισίσθενες, ὧν ἐπιστέλλω μὴ  
 ὀλιγῶρει· δεῖ γὰρ τὴν γυναῖκα ἀναζητεῖν ἥν πως τὸ τοῦ  
 βίου μυστήριον ἀνεύρης, καὶ ἀναιρεῖν, ἣν που παρασχῇ,  
 διὰ τὸν σὸν πατέρα Καλλικράτην. εἰ δὲ φοβούμενος  
 ἢ διὰ ἄλλο τι αὐτὸς λείπει τοῦ ἔργου, πᾶσι τοῖς  
 ὕστερον αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐπιστέλλω, ἕως ποτὲ ἀγαθὸς τις  
 γενόμενος τῷ πυρὶ λούσασθαι τολμήσει καὶ τὰ ἀριστεῖα  
 ἔχων βασιλεύσαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων· ἅπιστα μὲν δὴ τὰ  
 τοιαῦτα λέγω, ὅμως δὲ ἂν αὐτῇ ἔγνωκα οὐκ ἐψευδάμην.

the cartouche of the original Kallikrates] the cartouche of the original  
 Kallikrates\* (\* The cartouche, if it be a true cartouche, cannot have been that  
 of Kallikrates, as Mr. Holly suggests. Kallikrates was a priest and not entitled  
 to a cartouche, which was the prerogative of Egyptian royalty, though he  
 might have inscribed his name or title upon an oval.—EDITOR.)

**Page 61 (part 2)**

‘I cannot go. To thee, my son Kallikrates.’] ‘I could not go. Tisisthenes to his son, Kallikrates.’ Here it is in fac-simile with its cursive equivalent:—

**ΟΥΚΑΝΔΥΝΑΙΜΗΝΓΟΡΕΥΕΘΑΙΤΙCΙCΘΕΝΗ  
CΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΕΙΤΩΙΓΑΙΔΙ**

*οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην πορεύεσθαι.  
Τισισθένης Καλλικράτει τῷ παιδί.*

**Page 61 (part 2)**

‘I started to seek, but the gods were against me. To thee, my son.’] ‘I ceased from my going, the gods being against me. Kallikrates to his son.’ Here it is also:—

**ΤΩΝΘΕΩΝΑΝΤΙΣΤΑΝΤΩΝΕΓΑΥΣΑΜΗΝΤΗΣ  
ΓΟΡΕΙΑCΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΗΣΤΩΙΓΑΙΔΙ**

*τῶν θεῶν ἀντιστάντων ἐπαυσάμην τῆς πορείας.  
Καλλικράτης τῷ παιδί.*

**Page 62 (part 2)**

the name of a Roman lady.] The name of a Roman lady. The following list, however, comprises all the Latin names upon the sherd:—

C. CAECILIVS VINDEΧ

M. AIMILIVS VINDEΧ

SEX. VARIVS. MARVLLVS

Q. SOSIVS PRISCVS SENECIO VINDEΧ

L. VALERIVS COMINIVS VINDEΧ

SEX. OTACILIVS. M. F.

L. ATTIVS. VINDEΧ

MVSSIVS VINDEΧ

C. FVFIDIVS. C. F. VINDEΧ

LICINIVS FAVSTVS

LABERIA POMPEIANA CONIVX MACRINI VINDICIS

MANILIA IVCILLA CONIVX MARVLLI VINDICIS

**Page 62 (part 2)**

the doggerel couplet.] the doggerel couplet. To the left of this, inscribed in faint blue, were the initials A.V., and after them a date, 1800.

**Page 62 (part 2)**

the Latin black letter translation of the uncial Greek] the mediæval Latin translation of the uncial Greek of which I shall speak presently. This I also give in full.

Facsimile of Black-Letter Inscription on the Sherd of Amenartas.

**I**sta reliḡia est valde miſticū et myſtificū  
oꝑs qđ maiores mei ex Armorica ſſ  
Brittania mīore ſecū cōvehebāt et qđm lēs  
cleriēs ſēper p̄ri meo in manū ferebat qđ  
p̄ticus illud deſtrueret affirmās qđ eſſet ab  
ipſo ſathana cōſtatū preſtigioſa et dyabolica  
arte q̄re p̄ter mebſ cōfregit illud ī dvas p̄tes  
q̄s qđm ego Joh̄s de Uiceto ſalvas ſerbavi et  
adaptavi ſicbt aꝑparet die lūe p̄r poſt feſt beate  
M̄rie virḡ anni ḡrē mccccxlv

**Page 63 (part 2)**

Marie Virginis anni gratie MCCCCXLV.”] Marie Virginis anni gratie  
MCCCCXLV.

Facsimile of the Old English Black-Letter Translation of the above Latin  
Inscription from the Sherd of Amenartas found inscribed upon  
a parchment.

**T**hys rellike ys a ryghte mistycall worke  
 & a marueylous p<sup>r</sup> whyche myne abn-  
 ceteres afore tyme dyd conueighe hider w<sup>t</sup> p<sup>m</sup>  
 ffrom Armoryke wh<sup>e</sup> ys to seien Britayne p<sup>r</sup>  
 lesse & a certayne holpe clerke shoulde allweyes  
 beare my ffadir on honde p<sup>t</sup> he olughte vttrly  
 ffor to ffusshe p<sup>r</sup> same affirmynge p<sup>t</sup> pt was  
 ffourmyd & conffiatyd off sathanas hym selfe  
 by arte magike & dyvellysshe wherefore my  
 ffadir dyd take p<sup>r</sup> same & to brast pt yn tweyne  
 but I Iohn de Vincey dyd save whool p<sup>r</sup> tweye  
 ptes therof & topeced p<sup>m</sup> togydder agayne soe  
 as pce se on p<sup>s</sup> deye mondaye next ffolowynge  
 after p<sup>r</sup> ffeste of seynthe Marye p<sup>r</sup> blessed  
 vyrgyne yn p<sup>r</sup> peere of saluacioun ffolwertene  
 hundreth & ffyve & ffolwrti.

Page 63 (part 2)

dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio.”] dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio.” And now there remained but one more document to be examined—namely, the ancient black-letter transcription into mediæval Latin of the uncial inscription on the sherd. As will be seen, this translation was executed and subscribed in the year 1495, by a certain “learned man,” Edmundus de Prato (Edmund Pratt) by name, licentiate in Canon Law, of Exeter College, Oxford, who had actually been a pupil of Grocyn, the first scholar who taught Greek in England.\* (\*Grocyn, the instructor of Erasmus, studied Greek under Chalcondylas the Byzantine at Florence, and first lectured in the Hall of Exeter College, Oxford, in 1491.—EDITOR.) No doubt on the fame of this new learning reaching his ears, the Vincey of the day, perhaps that same John de Vincey who years before had saved the relic from destruction and made the black-letter entry on the sherd in 1445, hurried off to Oxford to see if perchance it might avail to solve the secret of the mysterious inscription. Nor was he disappointed, for the learned Edmundus was equal to the task. Indeed his rendering is so excellent an example of mediæval learning and latinity that, even at the risk of sating the learned reader with

too many antiquities, I have made up my mind to give it in fac-simile, together with an expanded version for the benefit of those who find the contractions troublesome. The translation has several peculiarities on which this is not the place to dwell, but I would in passing call the attention of scholars to the passage “duxerunt autem nos ad reginam *advenaslasaniscoronantium*,” which strikes me as a delightful rendering of the original,

*‘ἡγαγον δὲ ὡς βασιλειαν τὴν τῶν ξένους χύτραις  
στεφανούντων.’*

Mediaeval Black-Letter Latin Translation of the Uncial Inscription on the  
Sherd of Amenartas

**A**menartas e gen. reg. Egyptii vxor Cal-  
liceratis sacerdos Isis quā dei fovēt  
demonia attēdūt filiū tūo Tisistheni iā mori-  
būda ita mādat: Effugi quōdā ex Egypto  
regnāte Nectanebo cū patre tuo, ppter mei  
amorē pejerato. Fvgiētes autē v'sus Notū  
trans mare et xxiiij mēses p'r litora Libye  
v'sus Oriētē errant vbi est petra quēdā īgnia  
sculpta instar Ethioṗ capīt, deinde dies iiij ab  
olē flumī īgni ciecti p'tim submersi sumus  
p'tim morbo mortui sum: in fine autē a fē  
hōībs portabamur p'r palvō et vada. vbi aviū  
m'titvdo celū obūbrat dies x. donec advenim ad  
cavū quēdā montē, ubi olim īgnia vrbs erat,  
cauerne quoq̄ īmēse: duxerūt autē nos ad reginā  
Aduenaslasaniscoronātiū que magiē vtebat et  
peritia omniū rer et saltē pblerit et vigore  
īfēscribil' erat. Hec īigno patē tui amore  
pēvlsā p'mū q'dē ei cōnubiū michi mortē  
parabat. postea v'ro recvlate Callicerate amore  
mei et timore regine affecto nos p'r magicā

abduxit p'r vias horribil' vbi est puteus ille  
p'fūdus, cuius iurta aditū iacebat senioꝝ philo-  
sophi cadauer, et addv̄icētib' mōstravit flāmā  
Uite erectā, istar columnę volutātis, voces  
emittētē q̄si tonitruꝝ : tūc p'r ignē īpetu nociuo  
expers trāsiit et iā ipa sese formosior visa est.

Quib' facti iurabit se patrē tuū quoq̄ īmē-  
talē ostēsurā esse, si me prius occisa regine  
cōtuberniū mallet; neq̄ enī ipsa me occidere  
valuit, p'pter nostratū īngicā cuius egomet  
p'tem habeo. Ille vero nichil huius gen'  
maluit, manib' ante ocul' passis ne mulierē  
formositatē adspiceret : postea cū īngica p'cussit  
arte, at mortuū efferebat īde cū fletib' et vagitib',  
me p'r timorē expulit ad ostiū īgni flumin'  
beluoli porro in nave in qua te peperī, uix  
post dies hyc Athenas invec̄ta sū. At tu, O  
Cisisthesi, ne q'd quorū mādō nauci fac : necesse  
enī est mulierē exq̄virere si q̄va Uite mysteriū  
īpetres et vīdicare, quātū in te est, patrē tuū  
Callieraī in regine morte. Sin timore seu aliq̄  
causa rē reliquis īfectā, hoc ipsū oīb' postea  
mādō dū bonis q̄s inveniatur q̄bi ignis lauacrū  
nō p'horrescet et p'tentia dign' dōtabit hōm.

Talia dico incredibilia q̄dē at mūc ficta de  
reb' michi cognitīs.

Hec Grece scripta Latine reddidit vir  
doctus Edmōds de Prato, in Secretis Vi-  
cenciatus e Coll. Oxon : doctissimi  
Grocygni quondam e pupillis, Id. Apr. A°.  
Dñi. MCCCCXXXV°.

AMENARTAS, e genere regio Egyptii, uxor Callicratis, sacerdotis Isidis, quam dei foveant demonia attendunt, filiolo suo Tisistheni jam moribunda ita mandat: Effugi quondam ex Egypto, regnante Nectanebo, cum patre tuo, propter mei amore pejerato. Fugientes autem versus Notum trans mare, et viginti quatuor menses per litora Libye versus Orientem errantes, ubi est petra quedam magna sculpta instar Ethiopis capitis, deinde dies quatuor ab ostio fluminis magni ejecti partim submersi sumus partim morbo mortui sumus: in fine autem a feris hominibus portabamur per paludes et vada, ubi avium multitudo celum obumbrat, dies decem, donec advenimus ad cavum quendam montem, ubi olim magna urbs erat, caverne quoque immense; duxerunt autem nos ad reginam Advenaslanis coronantium, que magicâ utebatur et peritiâ omnium rerum, et saltem pulcritudine et vigore insensibilis erat. Hec magno patris tui amore perculsa, primum quidem ei connubium michi mortem parabat; postea vero, recusante Callicrate, amore mei et timore regine affecto nos per magicam abduxit per vias horribiles ubi est puteus ille profundus, cujus juxta aditum jacebat senioris philosophi cadaver, et advenientibus monstravit flammam Vite erectam, instar columnæ volutantis, voces emittentem quasi tonitrus: tunc per ignem impetu nocivo expers transiit et jam ipsa sese formosior visa est.

Quibus factis juravit se patrem tuum quoque immortalem ostensuram esse, si me prius occisa regine contubernium mallet; neque enim ipsa me occidere valuit, propter nostratum magicam cujus egomet partem habeo. Ille vero nichil hujus generis malebat, manibus ante oculos passis, ne mulieris formositatem adspiceret: postea illum magica percussit arte, at mortuum efferebat inde cum fletibus et vagitibus, et me per timorem expulit ad ostium magni fluminis, velivolî, porro in nave, in qua te peperî, vix post dies huc Athenas vecta sum. At tu, O Tisisthenes, ne quid quorum mando nauci fac: necesse enim est mulierem exquirere si qua Vite mysterium impetres et vindicare, quantum in te est, patrem tuum Callicratem in regine morte. Sin timore seu aliqua causa rem relinquis infectam, hoc ipsum omnibus posteris mando, dum bonus quis inveniatur qui ignis lavacrum non perhorrescet, et potentia dignus dominabitur hominum.

Talia dico incredibilia quidem at minime ficta de rebus michi cognitîs.

Hec Grece scripta Latine reddidit vir doctus Edmundus de Prato, in Descretis Licenciatus, e Collegio Exoniensi Oxoniensi doctissimi Grocyni quondam e pupillis, Idibus Aprilis Anno Cristi MCCCCLXXXV°

struggling.... put upon her by Job.] struggling. He fought like a fiend, shrieking in the abandonment of his despair, and notwithstanding the noose round

him, and the efforts of the men who held his legs, the advancing wretches were for the moment unable to accomplish their purpose, which, horrible and incredible as it seems, was *to put the red-hot pot upon his head*.

I sprang to my feet with a yell of horror, and drawing my revolver fired it by a sort of instinct straight at the diabolical woman who had been caressing Mahomed, and was now gripping him in her arms. The bullet struck her in the back and killed her, and to this day I am glad that it did, for, as it afterwards transpired, she had availed herself of the anthropophagous customs of the Amahagger to organise the whole thing in revenge of the slight put upon her by Job. She sank down dead, and as she did so, to my terror and dismay, Mahomed, by a superhuman effort, burst from his tormenters, and, springing high into the air, fell dying upon her corpse. The heavy bullet from my pistol had driven through the bodies of both, at once striking down the murderess, and saving her victim from a death a hundred times more horrible. It was an awful and yet a most merciful accident.

#### **Page 146 (part 7)**

Arabian am I by my birth.] Arabian am I by my birth, even ‘al Arab al Ariba’ (an Arab of the Arabs), and of the race of our father Yárab, the son of Kâhtan, for in that fair and ancient city Ozal was I born, in the province of Yaman the Happy. Yet dost thou not speak it as we used to speak. Thy talk doth lack the music of the sweet tongue of the tribes of Hamyar which I was wont to hear. Some of the words too seemed changed, even as among these Amahagger, who have debased and defiled its purity, so that I must speak with them in what is to me another tongue.”\* (\*Yárab the son of Kâhtan, who lived some centuries before the time of Abraham, was the father of the ancient Arabs, and gave its name Araba to the country. In speaking of herself as “al Arab al Ariba,” *She* no doubt meant to convey that she was of the true Arab blood as distinguished from the naturalised Arabs, the descendants of Ismael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, who were known as “al Arab al mostáreba.” The dialect of the Koreish was usually called the clear or “perspicuous” Arabic, but the Hamaritic dialect approached nearer to the purity of the mother Syriac.—L.H.H.)

#### **Page 156 (Part 7)**

she went on, “it must be one like it.”] she went on, “it must be one like it, and yet never did I see one like to it, for thereto hung a history, and he who wore it prized it much.”\* (\* I am informed by a renowned and learned Egyptologist, to whom I have submitted this very interesting and beautifully finished scarab, “Suten se Rā,” that he has never seen one resembling it.

Although it bears a title frequently given to Egyptian royalty, he is of opinion that it is not necessarily the cartouche of a Pharaoh, on which either the throne or personal name of the monarch is generally inscribed. What the history of this particular scarab may have been we can now, unfortunately, never know, but I have little doubt but that it played some part in the tragic story of the Princess Amenartas and her lover Kallikrates, the forsworn priest of Isis.—EDITOR.)

**Page 170 (Part 8)**

“My empire is a moral one.”] “My empire is of the imagination.”

**Page 174 (Part 8)**

in the tomb with its fathers’ bones.] in the tomb with its fathers’ bones.★ (\*Note: The name of the race Ama-hagger would seem to indicate a curious mingling of races such as might easily have occurred in the neighbourhood of the Zambesi. The prefix “Ama” is common to the Zulu and kindred races, and signifies “people,” while “hagger” is an Arabic word meaning a stone.—EDITOR.)

**Page 183 (Part 9)**

the Man who taught them.] the Man who taught them. Also I told her that among her own people, the Arabs, another prophet, one Mohammed, had arisen and preached a new faith to which many millions of mankind now adhered.”

**Page 184 (Part 9)**

what Ayesha really believed.] what Ayesha *really* believed, and what her philosophy was.

“Well, my Holly,” she continued, “and so those people of mine have found a prophet, a false prophet thou sayest, for he is not thine own, and, indeed, I doubt it not. Yet in my day was it otherwise, for then we Arabs had many gods. Allât there was, and Saba, the Host of Heaven, Al Uzza, and Manah the stony one, for whom the blood of victims flowed, and Wadd and Sawâ, and Yaghûth the Lion of the dwellers in Yaman, and Yäûk the Horse of Morad, and Nasr the Eagle of Hamyar; ay, and many more. Oh, the folly of it all, the shame and the pitiful folly! Yet when I rose in wisdom and spoke thereof, surely they would have slain me in the name of their outraged gods. Well, so hath it ever been;—but, my Holly, art thou weary of me already, that thou dost sit so silent? Or dost thou fear lest I should teach thee my philosophy?—for know I have a philosophy. What would a teacher be without her own

philosophy? and if thou dost vex me overmuch beware! for I will have thee learn it, and thou shalt be my disciple, and we twain will found a faith that shall swallow up all others.”

### **Page 213 (Part II)**

threw off her veil, and broke out] threw off her veil, and broke out, after the ancient and poetic fashion of the dwellers in Arabia,\* (\* Among the ancient Arabians the power of poetic declamation, either in verse or prose, was held in the highest honour and esteem, and he who excelled in it was known as “Khâteb,” or Orator. Every year a general assembly was held at which the rival poets repeated their compositions, when those poems which were judged to be the best were, so soon as the knowledge and the art of writing became general, inscribed on silk in letters of gold, and publicly exhibited, being known as “Al Modhahabât,” or golden verses. In the poem given above by Mr. Holly, Ayesha evidently followed the traditional poetic manner of her people, which was to embody their thoughts in a series of somewhat disconnected sentences, each remarkable for its beauty and the grace of its expression.—EDITOR.)

### **Page 213 (Part II)**

exceedingly difficult to render into English.] exceedingly difficult to render into English, and ought by rights to be sung to the music of a cantata, rather than written and read.

### **Page 215 (Part II)**

thou hast not been born again to me.... unkindly soil.] thou hast not been born again to me. Nay, look not so—put away that pale cast of doubt, for oh be sure herein can error find no foothold! Sooner shall the suns forget their course and the swallow miss her nest, than my soul shall swear a lie and be led astray from thee, Kallikrates. Blind me, take away mine eyes, and let the darkness utterly fence me in, and still mine ears would catch the tone of thine unforgotten voice, striking more loud against the portals of my sense than can the call of brazen-throated clarions:—stop up mine hearing also, and let a thousand touch me on the brow, and I would name thee out of all:—yea, rob me of every sense, and see me stand deaf and blind, and dumb, and with nerves that cannot weigh the value of a touch, yet would my spirit leap within me like a quickening child and cry unto my heart, behold Kallikrates! behold, thou watcher, the watches of thy night are ended! behold thou who seekest in the night season, thy morning Star ariseth.

She paused awhile and then continued, "But stay, if thy heart is yet hardened against the mighty truth and thou dost require a further pledge of that which thou dost find too deep to understand, even now shall it be given to thee, and to thee also, oh my Holly."

**Page 237 (Part 12)**

smoulder away for hours.] smoulder away for hours.\* (\* After all we are not much in advance of the Amahagger in these matters. "Mummy," that is pounded ancient Egyptian, is, I believe, a pigment much used by artists, and especially by those of them who direct their talents to the reproduction of the works of the old masters.—EDITOR.)

## BOOK XXIII

### ALLAN QUATERMAIN

### INTRODUCTION

December 23

"I have just buried my boy, my poor handsome boy of whom I was so proud, and my heart is broken. It is very hard having only one son to lose him thus, but God's will be done. Who am I that I should complain? The great wheel of Fate rolls on like a Juggernaut, and crushes us all in turn, some soon, some late—it does not matter when, in the end, it crushes us all. We do not prostrate ourselves before it like the poor Indians; we fly hither and thither—we cry for mercy; but it is of no use, the black Fate thunders on and in its season reduces us to powder.

"Poor Harry to go so soon! just when his life was opening to him. He was doing so well at the hospital, he had passed his last examination with honours, and I was proud of them, much prouder than he was, I think. And then he must needs go to that smallpox hospital. He wrote to me that he was not afraid of smallpox and wanted to gain the experience; and now the disease has killed him, and I, old and grey and withered, am left to mourn over him, without a chick or child to comfort me. I might have saved him, too—I have money enough for both of us, and much more than enough—King Solomon's Mines provided me with that; but I said, 'No, let the boy earn his living, let him labour that he may enjoy rest.' But the rest has come to him before the labour. Oh, my boy, my boy!

"I am like the man in the Bible who laid up much goods and builded barns—goods for my boy and barns for him to store them in; and now his soul has been required of him, and I am left desolate. I would that it had been my soul and not my boy's!

"We buried him this afternoon under the shadow of the grey and ancient tower of the church of this village where my house is. It was a dreary December afternoon, and the sky was heavy with snow, but not much was falling. The coffin was put down by the grave, and a few big flakes lit upon it. They looked very white upon the black cloth! There was a little hitch about getting the coffin down into the grave—the necessary ropes had been forgotten: so we drew back from it, and waited in silence watching the big flakes fall gently one by one like heavenly benedictions, and melt in tears on Harry's pall. But that was not all. A robin redbreast came as bold as could be and lit upon the coffin and began to sing. And then I am afraid that I broke down, and so did Sir Henry Curtis, strong man though he is; and as for Captain Good, I saw him turn away too; even in my own distress I could not help noticing it."

The above, signed "Allan Quatermain", is an extract from my diary written two years and more ago. I copy it down here because it seems to me that it is the fittest beginning to the history that I am about to write, if it please God to spare me to finish it. If not, well it does not matter. That extract was penned seven thousand miles or so from the spot where I now lie painfully and slowly writing this, with a pretty girl standing by my side fanning the flies from my august countenance. Harry is there and I am here, and yet somehow I cannot help feeling that I am not far off Harry.

When I was in England I used to live in a very fine house—at least I call it a fine house, speaking comparatively, and judging from the standard of the houses I have been accustomed to all my life in Africa—not five hundred yards from the old church where Harry is asleep, and thither I went after the funeral and ate some food; for it is no good starving even if one has just buried all one's earthly hopes. But I could not eat much, and soon I took to walking, or rather limping—being permanently lame from the bite of a lion—up and down, up and down the oak-panelled vestibule; for there is a vestibule in my house in England. On all the four walls of this vestibule were placed pairs of horns—about a hundred pairs altogether, all of which I had shot myself. They are beautiful specimens, as I never keep any horns which are not in every way perfect, unless it may be now and again on account of the associations connected with them. In the centre of the room, however, over the wide fireplace, there was a clear space left on which I had fixed up all my rifles. Some of them I have had for forty years, old muzzle-loaders that nobody would look at nowadays. One was an elephant gun with strips of rimpì, or green hide, lashed round the stock and locks, such as used to be owned by the Dutchmen—a "roer" they call it. That gun, the Boer I bought it from many years ago told me, had been used by his father at the battle of the Blood River, just after Dingaan swept into Natal and slaughtered six hundred men, women, and children, so that the Boers named the place where they died "Weenen", or the "Place of Weeping"; and so it is called to this day, and always will be called. And many an elephant have I shot with that old gun. She always took a handful of black powder and a three-ounce ball, and kicked like the very deuce.

Well, up and down I walked, staring at the guns and the horns which the guns had brought low; and as I did so there rose up in me a great craving;—I would go away from this place where I lived idly and at ease, back again to the wild land where I had spent my life, where I met my dear wife and poor Harry was born, and so many things, good, bad, and indifferent, had happened to me. The thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate this place no more; I would go and die as I had lived, among the wild game and the savages. Yes, as I walked, I began to long to see the moonlight gleaming silvery white over the wide veldt and mysterious sea of bush, and watch the lines of game travelling down the ridges to the water. The ruling passion is strong in death, they say, and my heart was dead that night. But, independently of my trouble, no man who has for forty years lived the life I have, can with impunity go coop himself in this prim English country, with its trim hedgerows and cultivated fields, its stiff formal manners, and its well-dressed crowds. He begins to long—ah, how he longs!—for the keen breath of the desert air; he dreams of the sight of Zulu impis breaking on their foes like surf upon the rocks, and his heart rises up in rebellion against the strict limits of the civilized life.

Ah! this civilization, what does it all come to? For forty years and more I lived among savages, and studied them and their ways; and now for several years I have lived here in England, and have in my own stupid manner done my best to learn the ways of the children of light; and what have I found? A great gulf fixed? No, only a very little one, that a plain man's thought may spring across. I say that as the savage is, so is the white man, only the latter is more inventive, and possesses the faculty of combination; save and except also that the savage, as I have known him, is to a large extent free from the greed of money, which eats like a cancer into the heart of the white man. It is a depressing conclusion, but in all essentials the savage and the child of civilization are identical. I dare say that the highly civilized lady reading this will smile at an old fool of a hunter's simplicity when she thinks of her black bead-

bedecked sister; and so will the superfine cultured idler scientifically eating a dinner at his club, the cost of which would keep a starving family for a week. And yet, my dear young lady, what are those pretty things round your own neck?—they have a strong family resemblance, especially when you wear that *very* low dress, to the savage woman's beads. Your habit of turning round and round to the sound of horns and tom-toms, your fondness for pigments and powders, the way in which you love to subjugate yourself to the rich warrior who has captured you in marriage, and the quickness with which your taste in feathered head-dresses varies—all these things suggest touches of kinship; and you remember that in the fundamental principles of your nature you are quite identical. As for you, sir, who also laugh, let some man come and strike you in the face whilst you are enjoying that marvellous-looking dish, and we shall soon see how much of the savage there is in *you*.

There, I might go on for ever, but what is the good? Civilization is only savagery silver-gilt. A vainglory is it, and like a northern light, comes but to fade and leave the sky more dark. Out of the soil of barbarism it has grown like a tree, and, as I believe, into the soil like a tree it will once more, sooner or later, fall again, as the Egyptian civilization fell, as the Hellenic civilization fell, and as the Roman civilization and many others of which the world has now lost count, fell also. Do not let me, however, be understood as decrying our modern institutions, representing as they do the gathered experience of humanity applied for the good of all. Of course they have great advantages—hospitals for instance; but then, remember, we breed the sickly people who fill them. In a savage land they do not exist. Besides, the question will arise: How many of these blessings are due to Christianity as distinct from civilization? And so the balance sways and the story runs—here a gain, there a loss, and Nature's great average struck across the two, whereof the sum total forms one of the factors in that mighty equation in which the result will equal the unknown quantity of her purpose.

I make no apology for this digression, especially as this is an introduction which all young people and those who never like to think (and it is a bad habit) will naturally skip. It seems to me very desirable that we should sometimes try to understand the limitations of our nature, so that we may not be carried away by the pride of knowledge. Man's cleverness is almost indefinite, and stretches like an elastic band, but human nature is like an iron ring. You can go round and round it, you can polish it highly, you can even flatten it a little on one side, whereby you will make it bulge out the other, but you will *never*, while the world endures and man is man, increase its total circumference. It is the one fixed unchangeable thing—fixed as the stars, more enduring than the mountains, as unalterable as the way of the Eternal. Human nature is God's kaleidoscope, and the little bits of coloured glass which represent our passions, hopes, fears, joys, aspirations towards good and evil and what not, are turned in His mighty hand as surely and as certainly as it turns the stars, and continually fall into new patterns and combinations. But the composing elements remain the same, nor will there be one more bit of coloured glass nor one less for ever and ever.

This being so, supposing for the sake of argument we divide ourselves into twenty parts, nineteen savage and one civilized, we must look to the nineteen savage portions of our nature, if we would really understand ourselves, and not to the twentieth, which, though so insignificant in reality, is spread all over the other nineteen, making them appear quite different from what they really are, as the blacking does a boot, or the veneer a table. It is on the nineteen rough serviceable savage portions that we fall back in emergencies, not on the polished but unsubstantial twentieth. Civilization should wipe away our tears, and yet we weep and cannot be comforted. Warfare is abhorrent to her, and yet we strike out for hearth and home, for honour and fair fame, and can glory in the blow. And so on, through everything.

So, when the heart is stricken, and the head is humbled in the dust, civilization fails us utterly. Back, back, we creep, and lay us like little children on the great breast of Nature, she that perchance may soothe us and make us forget, or at least rid remembrance of its sting. Who has not in his great grief felt a longing to look upon the outward features of the universal Mother; to lie on the mountains and watch the clouds drive across the sky and hear the rollers break in thunder on the shore, to let his poor struggling life mingle for a while in her life; to feel the slow beat of her eternal heart, and to forget his woes, and let his identity be swallowed in the vast imperceptibly moving energy of her of whom we are, from whom we came, and with whom we shall again be mingled, who gave us birth, and will in a day to come give us our burial also.

And so in my trouble, as I walked up and down the oak-panelled vestibule of my house there in Yorkshire, I longed once more to throw myself into the arms of Nature. Not the Nature which you know, the Nature that waves in well-kept woods and smiles out in corn-fields, but Nature as she was in the age when creation was complete, undefiled as yet by any human sinks of sweltering humanity. I would go again where the wild game was, back to the land whereof none know the history, back to the savages, whom I love, although some of them are almost as merciless as Political Economy. There, perhaps, I should be able to learn to think of poor Harry lying in the churchyard, without feeling as though my heart would break in two.

And now there is an end of this egotistical talk, and there shall be no more of it. But if you whose eyes may perchance one day fall upon my written thoughts have got so far as this, I ask you to persevere, since what I have to tell you is not without its interest, and it has never been told before, nor will again.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE CONSUL'S YARN

A week had passed since the funeral of my poor boy Harry, and one evening I was in my room walking up and down and thinking, when there was a ring at the outer door. Going down the steps I opened it myself, and in came my old friends Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good, RN. They entered the vestibule and sat themselves down before the wide hearth, where, I remember, a particularly good fire of logs was burning.

"It is very kind of you to come round," I said by way of making a remark; "it must have been heavy walking in the snow."

They said nothing, but Sir Henry slowly filled his pipe and lit it with a burning ember. As he leant forward to do so the fire got hold of a gassy bit of pine and flared up brightly, throwing the whole scene into strong relief, and I thought, What a splendid-looking man he is! Calm, powerful face, clear-cut features, large grey eyes, yellow beard and hair—altogether a magnificent specimen of the higher type of humanity. Nor did his form belie his face. I have never seen wider shoulders or a deeper chest. Indeed, Sir Henry's girth is so great that, though he is six feet two high, he does not strike one as a tall man. As I looked at him I could not help thinking what a curious contrast my little dried-up self presented to his grand face and form. Imagine to yourself a small, withered, yellow-faced man of sixty-three, with thin hands, large brown eyes, a head of grizzled hair cut short and standing up like a half-worn scrubbing-brush—total weight in my clothes, nine stone six—and you will get a very fair idea of Allan Quatermain, commonly called Hunter Quatermain, or by the natives "Macumazahn"—Anglicè, he who keeps a bright look-out at night, or, in vulgar English, a sharp fellow who is not to be taken in.

Then there was Good, who is not like either of us, being short, dark, stout—*very* stout—with twinkling black eyes, in one of which an eyeglass is everlastingly fixed. I say stout, but it is a mild term; I regret to state that of late years Good has been running to fat in a most disgraceful way. Sir Henry tells him that it comes from idleness and over-feeding, and Good does not like it at all, though he cannot deny it.

We sat for a while, and then I got a match and lit the lamp that stood ready on the table, for the half-light began to grow dreary, as it is apt to do when one has a short week ago buried the hope of one's life. Next, I opened a cupboard in the wainscoting and got a bottle of whisky and some tumblers and water. I always like to do these things for myself: it is irritating to me to have somebody continually at my elbow, as though I were an eighteen-month-old baby. All this while Curtis and Good had been silent, feeling, I suppose, that they had nothing to say that could do me any good, and content to give me the comfort of their presence and unspoken sympathy; for it was only their second visit since the funeral. And it is, by the way, from the *presence* of others that we really derive support in our dark hours of grief, and not from their talk, which often only serves to irritate us. Before a bad storm the game always herd together, but they cease their calling.

They sat and smoked and drank whisky and water, and I stood by the fire also smoking and looking at them.

At last I spoke. "Old friends," I said, "how long is it since we got back from Kukuanaland?"

"Three years," said Good. "Why do you ask?"

"I ask because I think that I have had a long enough spell of civilization. I am going back to the veldt."

Sir Henry laid his head back in his arm-chair and laughed one of his deep laughs. "How very odd," he said, "eh, Good?"

Good beamed at me mysteriously through his eyeglass and murmured, "Yes, odd—very odd."

"I don't quite understand," said I, looking from one to the other, for I dislike mysteries.

"Don't you, old fellow?" said Sir Henry; "then I will explain. As Good and I were walking up here we had a talk."

"If Good was there you probably did," I put in sarcastically, for Good is a great hand at talking. "And what may it have been about?"

"What do you think?" asked Sir Henry.

I shook my head. It was not likely that I should know what Good might be talking about. He talks about so many things.

"Well, it was about a little plan that I have formed—namely, that if you were willing we should pack up our traps and go off to Africa on another expedition."

I fairly jumped at his words. "You don't say so!" I said.

"Yes I do, though, and so does Good; don't you, Good?"

"Rather," said that gentleman.

"Listen, old fellow," went on Sir Henry, with considerable animation of manner. "I'm tired of it too, dead-tired of doing nothing more except play the squire in a country that is sick of squires. For a year or more I have been getting as restless as an old elephant who scents danger. I am always dreaming of Kukuanaland and Gagoool and King Solomon's Mines. I can assure you I have become the victim of an almost unaccountable craving. I am sick of shooting pheasants and partridges, and want to have a go at some large game again. There, you know the feeling—when one has once tasted brandy and water, milk becomes insipid to the palate. That year we spent together up in Kukuanaland seems to me worth all the other years of my life put together. I dare say that I am a fool for my pains, but I can't help it; I long to go, and, what is more, I mean to go." He paused, and then went on again. "And, after all, why should I not go? I have no wife or parent, no chick or child to keep me. If anything happens to me the baronetcy will go to my brother George and his boy, as it would ultimately do in any case. I am of no importance to any one."

"Ah!" I said, "I thought you would come to that sooner or later. And now, Good, what is your reason for wanting to trek; have you got one?"

"I have," said Good, solemnly. "I never do anything without a reason; and it isn't a lady—at least, if it is, it's several."

I looked at him again. Good is so overpoweringly frivolous. "What is it?" I said.

"Well, if you really want to know, though I'd rather not speak of a delicate and strictly personal matter, I'll tell you: I'm getting too fat."

"Shut up, Good!" said Sir Henry. "And now, Quatermain, tell us, where do you propose going to?"

I lit my pipe, which had gone out, before answering.

"Have you people ever heard of Mt Kenia?" I asked.

"Don't know the place," said Good.

"Did you ever hear of the Island of Lamu?" I asked again.

"No. Stop, though—isn't it a place about 300 miles north of Zanzibar?"

"Yes. Now listen. What I have to propose is this. That we go to Lamu and thence make our way about 250 miles inland to Mt Kenia; from Mt Kenia on inland to Mt Lekakisera, another 200 miles, or thereabouts, beyond which no white man has to the best of my belief ever been; and then, if we get so far, right on into the unknown interior. What do you say to that, my hearties?"

"It's a big order," said Sir Henry, reflectively.

"You are right," I answered, "it is; but I take it that we are all three of us in search of a big order. We want a change of scene, and we are likely to get one—a thorough change. All my life I have longed to visit those parts, and I mean to do it before I die. My poor boy's death has broken the last link between me and civilization, and I'm off to my native wilds. And now I'll tell you another thing, and that is, that for years and years I have heard rumours of a great white race which is supposed to have its home somewhere up in this direction, and I have a mind to see if there is any truth in them. If you fellows like to come, well and good; if not, I'll go alone."

"I'm your man, though I don't believe in your white race," said Sir Henry Curtis, rising and placing his arm upon my shoulder.

"Ditto," remarked Good. "I'll go into training at once. By all means let's go to Mt Kenia and the other place with an unpronounceable name, and look for a white race that does not exist. It's all one to me."

"When do you propose to start?" asked Sir Henry.

"This day month," I answered, "by the British India steamboat; and don't you be so certain that things have no existence because you do not happen to have heard of them. Remember King Solomon's mines!"

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Some fourteen weeks or so had passed since the date of this conversation, and this history goes on its way in very different surroundings.

After much deliberation and inquiry we came to the conclusion that our best starting-point for Mt Kenia would be from the neighbourhood of the mouth of the Tana River, and not from Mombassa, a place over 100 miles nearer Zanzibar. This conclusion we arrived at from information given to us by a German trader whom we met upon the steamer at Aden. I think that he was the dirtiest German I ever knew; but he was a good fellow, and gave us a great deal of valuable information. "Lamu," said he, "you goes to Lamu—oh ze beautiful place!" and he turned up his fat face and beamed with mild rapture. "One year and a half I live there and never change my shirt—never at all."

And so it came to pass that on arriving at the island we disembarked with all our goods and chattels, and, not knowing where to go, marched boldly up to the house of Her Majesty's Consul, where we were most hospitably received.

Lamu is a very curious place, but the things which stand out most clearly in my memory in connection with it are its exceeding dirtiness and its smells. These last are simply awful. Just below the Consulate is the beach, or rather a mud bank that is called a beach. It is left quite bare at low tide, and serves as a repository for all the filth, offal, and refuse of the town. Here it is, too, that the women come to bury coconuts in the mud, leaving them there till the outer husk is quite rotten, when they dig them up again and use the fibres to make mats with, and for various other purposes. As this process has been going on for generations, the condition of the shore can be better imagined than described. I have smelt many evil odours in the course of my life, but the concentrated essence of stench which arose from that beach at Lamu as we sat in the moonlit night—not under, but *on* our friend the Consul's hospitable roof—and sniffed it, makes the remembrance of them very poor and faint. No wonder people get fever at Lamu. And yet the place was not without a certain quaintness and charm of its own, though possibly—indeed probably—it was one which would quickly pall.

"Well, where are you gentlemen steering for?" asked our friend the hospitable Consul, as we smoked our pipes after dinner.

"We propose to go to Mt Kenia and then on to Mt Lekakisera," answered Sir Henry. "Quatermain has got hold of some yarn about there being a white race up in the unknown territories beyond."

The Consul looked interested, and answered that he had heard something of that, too.

"What have you heard?" I asked.

"Oh, not much. All I know about it is that a year or so ago I got a letter from Mackenzie, the Scotch missionary, whose station, 'The Highlands', is placed at the highest navigable point of the Tana River, in which he said something about it."

"Have you the letter?" I asked.

"No, I destroyed it; but I remember that he said that a man had arrived at his station who declared that two months' journey beyond Mt Lekakisera, which no white man has yet visited—at least, so far as I know—he found a lake called Laga, and that then he went off to the north-east, a month's journey, over desert and thorn veldt and great mountains, till he came to a country where the people are white and live in stone houses. Here he was hospitably entertained for a while, till at last the priests of the country set it about that he was a devil, and the people drove him away, and he journeyed for eight months and reached Mackenzie's place, as I heard, dying. That's all I know; and if you ask me, I believe that it is a lie; but if you want to find out more about it, you had better go up the Tana to Mackenzie's place and ask him for information."

Sir Henry and I looked at each other. Here was something tangible.

"I think that we will go to Mr Mackenzie's," I said.

"Well," answered the Consul, "that is your best way, but I warn you that you are likely to have a rough journey, for I hear that the Masai are about, and, as you know, they are not pleasant customers. Your best plan will be to choose a few picked men for personal servants and hunters, and to hire bearers from village to village. It will give you an infinity of trouble, but perhaps on the whole it will prove a cheaper and more advantageous course than engaging a caravan, and you will be less liable to desertion."

Fortunately there were at Lamu at this time a party of Wakwafi Askari (soldiers). The Wakwafi, who are a cross between the Masai and the Wataveta, are a fine manly race, possessing many of the good qualities of the Zulu, and a great capacity for civilization. They are also great hunters. As it happened, these particular men had recently been on a long trip with an Englishman named Jutson, who had started from Mombasa, a port about 150 miles below Lamu, and journeyed right round Kilimanjaro, one of the highest known mountains in Africa. Poor fellow, he had died of fever when on his return journey, and within a day's march of Mombasa. It does seem hard that he should have gone off thus when within a few hours of safety, and after having survived so many perils, but so it was. His hunters buried him, and then came on to Lamu in a dhow. Our friend the Consul suggested to us that we had better try and hire these men, and accordingly on the following morning we started to interview the party, accompanied by an interpreter.

In due course we found them in a mud hut on the outskirts of the town. Three of the men were sitting outside the hut, and fine frank-looking fellows they were, having a more or less civilized appearance. To them we cautiously opened the object of our visit, at first with very scant success. They declared that they could not entertain any such idea, that they were worn and weary with long travelling, and that their hearts were sore at the loss of their master. They meant to go back to their homes and rest awhile. This did not sound very promising, so by way of effecting a diversion I asked where the remainder of them were. I was told there were six, and I saw but three. One of the men said they slept in the hut, and were yet resting after their labours—"sleep weighed down their eyelids, and sorrow made their hearts as lead: it was best to sleep, for with sleep came forgetfulness. But the men should be awakened."

Presently they came out of the hut, yawning—the first two men being evidently of the same race and style as those already before us; but the appearance of the third and last nearly made me jump out of my skin. He was a very tall, broad man, quite six foot three, I should say, but gaunt, with lean, wiry-looking limbs. My first glance at him told me that he was no Wakwafi: he was a pure bred Zulu. He came out with his thin aristocratic-looking hand placed before his face to hide a yawn, so I could only see that he was a "Keshla" or ringed man,<sup>[1]</sup> and that he had a great three-cornered hole in his forehead. In another second he removed his hand, revealing a powerful-looking Zulu face, with a humorous mouth, a short woolly beard, tinged with grey, and a pair of brown eyes keen as a hawk's. I knew my man at once, although I had not seen him for twelve years. "How do you do, Umslopogaas?" I said quietly in Zulu.

[1] Among the Zulus a man assumes the ring, which is made of a species of black gum twisted in with the hair, and polished a brilliant black, when he has reached a certain dignity and age, or is the husband of a sufficient number of wives. Till he is in a position to wear a ring he is looked on as a boy, though he may be thirty-five years of age, or even more.—A. Q.

The tall man (who among his own people was commonly known as the "Woodpecker", and also as the "Slaughterer") started, and almost let the long-handled battleaxe he held in his hand fall in his astonishment. Next second he had recognized me, and was saluting me in an outburst of sonorous language which made his companions the Wakwafi stare.

"Koos" (chief), he began, "Koos-y-Pagete! Koos-y-umcool! (Chief from of old—mighty chief) Koos! Baba! (father) Macumazahn, old hunter, slayer of elephants, eater up of lions, clever one! watchful one! brave one! quick one! whose shot never misses, who strikes straight home, who grasps a hand and holds it to the death (i.e. is a true friend) Koos! Baba! Wise is the voice of our people that says, 'Mountain never meets with mountain, but at daybreak or at even man shall meet again with man.' Behold! a messenger came up from Natal, 'Macumazahn is dead!' cried he. 'The land knows Macumazahn no more.' That is years ago. And now, behold, now in this strange place of stinks I find Macumazahn, my friend. There is no room for doubt. The brush of the old jackal has gone a little grey; but is not his eye as keen, and are not his teeth as sharp? Ha! ha! Macumazahn, mindest thou how thou didst plant the ball in the eye of the charging buffalo—mindest thou—"

I had let him run on thus because I saw that his enthusiasm was producing a marked effect upon the minds of the five Wakwafi, who appeared to understand something of his talk; but now I thought it time to put a stop to it, for there is nothing that I hate so much as this Zulu system of extravagant praising—"bongering" as they call it. "Silence!" I said. "Has all thy noisy talk been stopped up since last I saw thee that it breaks out thus, and sweeps us away? What doest thou here with these men—thou whom I left a chief in Zululand? How is it that thou art far from thine own place, and gathered together with strangers?"

Umslopogaas leant himself upon the head of his long battleaxe (which was nothing else but a pole-axe, with a beautiful handle of rhinoceros horn), and his grim face grew sad.

"My Father," he answered, "I have a word to tell thee, but I cannot speak it before these low people (umfagozana)," and he glanced at the Wakwafi Askari; "it is for thine own ear. My Father, this will I say," and here his face grew stern again, "a woman betrayed me to the death, and covered my name with shame—ay, my own wife, a round-faced girl, betrayed me; but I escaped from death; ay, I broke from the very hands of those who came to slay me. I struck but three blows with this mine axe Inkosikaas—surely my Father will remember it—one to the right, one to the left, and one in front, and yet I left three men dead. And then I fled, and, as my Father knows, even now that I am old my feet are as the feet of the Sassaby,<sup>[2]</sup> and there breathes not the man who, by running, can touch me again when once I have bounded from his side. On I sped, and after me came the messengers of death, and their voice was as the voice of dogs that hunt. From my own kraal I flew, and, as I passed, she who had betrayed me was drawing water from the spring. I fled by her like the shadow of Death, and as I went I smote with mine axe, and lo! her head fell: it fell into the water pan. Then I fled north. Day after day I journeyed on; for three moons I journeyed, resting not, stopping not, but running on towards forgetfulness, till I met the party of the white hunter who is now dead, and am come hither with his servants. And nought have I brought with me. I who was high-born, ay, of the blood of Chaka, the great king—a chief, and a captain of the regiment of the Nkomabakosi—am a wanderer in strange places, a man without a kraal. Nought have I brought save this mine axe; of all my belongings this remains alone. They have divided my cattle; they have taken my wives; and my children know my face no more. Yet with this axe"—and he swung the formidable weapon round his head, making the air hiss as he clove it—"will I cut another path to fortune. I have spoken."

[2] One of the fleetest of the African antelopes.—A. Q.

I shook my head at him. "Umslopogaas," I said, "I know thee from of old. Ever ambitious, ever plotting to be great, I fear me that thou hast overreached thyself at last. Years ago, when thou wouldst have plotted against Cetywayo, son of Panda, I warned thee, and thou didst listen. But now, when I was not by thee to stay thy hand, thou hast dug a pit for thine own feet to fall in. Is it not so? But what is done is done. Who can make the dead tree green, or gaze again upon last year's light? Who can recall the spoken word, or bring back the spirit of the fallen? That which Time swallows comes not up again. Let it be forgotten!

"And now, behold, Umslopogaas, I know thee for a great warrior and a brave man, faithful to the death. Even in Zululand, where all the men are brave, they called thee the 'Slaughterer', and at night told stories round the fire of thy strength and deeds. Hear me now. Thou seest this great man, my friend"—and I pointed to Sir Henry; "he also is a warrior as great as thou, and, strong as thou art, he could throw thee over his shoulder. Incubu is his name. And thou seest this one also; him with the round stomach, the shining eye, and the pleasant face. Bougwan (glass eye) is his name, and a good man is he and a true, being of a curious tribe who pass their life upon the water, and live in floating kraals.

"Now, we three whom thou seest would travel inland, past Dongo Egere, the great white mountain (Mt Kenia), and far into the unknown beyond. We know not what we shall find there; we go to hunt and seek adventures, and new places, being tired of sitting still, with the same old things around us. Wilt thou come with us? To thee shall be given command of all our servants; but what shall befall thee, that I know not. Once before we three journeyed thus, in search of adventure, and we took with us a man such as thou—one Umbopa; and, behold, we left him the king of a great country, with twenty Impis (regiments), each of 3,000 plumed warriors, waiting on his word. How it shall go with thee, I know not; mayhap death awaits thee and us. Wilt thou throw thyself to Fortune and come, or fearest thou, Umslopogaas?"

The great man smiled. "Thou art not altogether right, Macumazahn," he said; "I have plotted in my time, but it was not ambition that led me to my fall; but, shame on me that I should have to say it, a fair woman's face. Let it pass. So we are going to see something like the old times again, Macumazahn, when we fought and hunted in Zululand? Ay, I will come. Come life, come death, what care I, so that the blows fall fast and the blood runs red? I grow old, I grow old, and I have not fought enough! And yet am I a warrior among warriors; see my scars"—and he pointed to countless cicatrices, stabs and cuts, that marked the skin of his chest and legs and arms. "See the hole in my head; the brains gushed out therefrom, yet did I slay him who smote, and live. Knowest thou how many men I have slain, in fair hand-to-hand combat, Macumazahn? See, here is the tale of them"—and he pointed to long rows of notches cut in the rhinoceros-horn handle of his axe. "Number them, Macumazahn—one hundred and three—and I have never counted but those whom I have ripped open,<sup>[3]</sup> nor have I reckoned those whom another man had struck."

<sup>[3]</sup> Alluding to the Zulu custom of opening the stomach of a dead foe. They have a superstition that, if this is not done, as the body of their enemy swells up so will the bodies of those who killed him swell up.—A. Q.

"Be silent," I said, for I saw that he was getting the blood-fever on him; "be silent; well art thou called the 'Slaughterer'. We would not hear of thy deeds of blood. Remember, if thou comest with us, we fight not save in self-defence. Listen, we need servants. These men," and I pointed to the Wakwafi, who had retired a little way during our "indaba" (talk), "say they will not come."

"Will not come!" shouted Umslopogaas; "where is the dog who says he will not come when my Father orders? Here, thou"—and with a single bound he sprang upon the Wakwafi with whom I had first spoken, and, seizing him by the arm, dragged him towards us. "Thou dog!" he said, giving the terrified man a shake, "didst thou say that thou wouldst not go with my Father? Say it once more and I will choke thee"—and his long fingers closed round his throat as he said it—"thee, and those with thee. Hast thou forgotten how I served thy brother?"

"Nay, we will come with the white man," gasped the man.

"White man!" went on Umslopogaas, in simulated fury, which a very little provocation would have made real enough; "of whom speakest thou, insolent dog?"

"Nay, we will go with the great chief."

"So!" said Umslopogaas, in a quiet voice, as he suddenly released his hold, so that the man fell backward. "I thought you would."

"That man Umslopogaas seems to have a curious moral ascendancy over his companions," Good afterwards remarked thoughtfully.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BLACK HAND

In due course we left Lamu, and ten days afterwards we found ourselves at a spot called Charra, on the Tana River, having gone through many adventures which need not be recorded here. Amongst other things we visited a ruined city, of which there are many on this coast, and which must once, to judge from their extent and the numerous remains of mosques and stone houses, have been very populous places. These ruined cities are immeasurably ancient, having, I believe, been places of wealth and importance as far back as the Old Testament times, when they were centres of trade with India and elsewhere. But their glory has departed now—the slave trade has finished them—and where wealthy merchants from all parts of the then civilized world stood and bargained in the crowded market-places, the lion holds his court at night, and instead of the chattering of slaves and the eager voices of the bidders, his awful note goes echoing down the ruined corridors. At this particular place we discovered on a mound, covered up with rank growth and rubbish, two of the most beautiful stone doorways that it is possible to conceive. The carving on them was simply exquisite, and I only regret that we had no means of getting them away. No doubt they had once been the entrances to a palace, of which, however, no traces were now to be seen, though probably its ruins lay under the rising mound.

Gone! quite gone! the way that everything must go. Like the nobles and the ladies who lived within their gates, these cities have had their day, and now they are as Babylon and Nineveh, and as London and Paris will one day be. Nothing may endure. That is the inexorable law. Men and women, empires and cities, thrones, principalities, and powers, mountains, rivers, and unfathomed seas, worlds, spaces, and universes, all have their day, and all must go. In this ruined and forgotten place the moralist may behold a symbol of the universal destiny. For this system of ours allows no room for standing still—nothing can loiter on the road and check the progress of things upwards towards Life, or the rush of things downwards towards Death. The stern policeman Fate moves us and them on, on, uphill and downhill and across the level; there is no resting-place for the weary feet, till at last the abyss swallows us, and from the shores of the Transitory we are hurled into the sea of the Eternal.

At Charra we had a violent quarrel with the headman of the bearers we had hired to go as far as this, and who now wished to extort large extra payment from us. In the result he threatened to set the Masai—about whom more anon—on to us. That night he, with all our hired bearers, ran away, stealing most of the goods which had been entrusted to them to carry. Luckily, however, they had not happened to steal our rifles, ammunition, and personal effects; not because of any delicacy of feeling on their part, but owing to the fact that they chanced to be in the charge of the five Wakwafis. After that, it was clear to us that we had had enough of caravans and of bearers. Indeed, we had not much left for a caravan to carry. And yet, how were we to get on?

It was Good who solved the question. "Here is water," he said, pointing to the Tana River; "and yesterday I saw a party of natives hunting hippopotami in canoes. I understand that Mr Mackenzie's mission station is on the Tana River. Why not get into canoes and paddle up to it?"

This brilliant suggestion was, needless to say, received with acclamation; and I instantly set to work to buy suitable canoes from the surrounding natives. I succeeded after a delay of three days in obtaining two large ones, each hollowed out of a single log of some light wood, and capable of holding six people and baggage. For these two canoes we had to pay nearly all our remaining cloth, and also many other articles.

On the day following our purchase of the two canoes we effected a start. In the first canoe were Good, Sir Henry, and three of our Wakwafi followers; in the second myself, Umslopogaas, and the other two Wakwafis. As our course lay upstream, we had to keep four paddles at work in each canoe, which meant that the whole lot of us, except Good, had to row away like galley-slaves; and very exhausting work it was. I say, except Good, for, of course, the moment that Good got into a boat his foot was on his native heath, and he took command of the party. And certainly he worked us. On shore Good is a gentle, mild-mannered man, and given to jocosity; but, as we found to our cost, Good in a boat was a perfect demon. To begin with, he knew all about it, and we didn't. On all nautical subjects, from the torpedo fittings of a man-of-war down to the best way of handling the paddle of an African canoe, he was a perfect mine of information, which, to say the least of it, we were not. Also his ideas of discipline were of the sternest, and, in short, he came the royal naval officer over us pretty considerably, and paid us out amply for all the chaff we were wont to treat him to on land; but, on the other hand, I am bound to say that he managed the boats admirably.

After the first day Good succeeded, with the help of some cloth and a couple of poles, in rigging up a sail in each canoe, which lightened our labours not a little. But the current ran very strong against us, and at the best we were not able to make more than twenty miles a day. Our plan was to start at dawn, and paddle along till about half-past ten, by which time the sun got too hot to allow of further exertion. Then we moored our canoes to the bank, and ate our frugal meal; after which we ate or otherwise amused ourselves till about three o'clock, when we again started, and rowed till within an hour of sundown, when we called a halt for the night. On landing in the evening, Good would at once set to work, with the help of the Askari, to build a little "schem", or small enclosure, fenced with thorn bushes, and to light a fire. I, with Sir Henry and Umslopogaas, would go out to shoot something for the pot. Generally this was an easy task, for all sorts of game abounded on the banks of the Tana. One night Sir Henry shot a young cow-giraffe, of which the marrow-bones were excellent; on another I got a couple of waterbuck right and left; and once, to his own intense satisfaction, Umslopogaas (who, like most Zulus, was a vile shot with a rifle) managed to kill a fine fat eland with a Martini I had lent him. Sometimes we varied our food by shooting some guinea-fowl, or bush-bustard (paau)—both of which were numerous—with a shot-gun, or by catching a supply of beautiful yellow fish, with which the waters of the Tana swarmed, and which form, I believe, one of the chief food-supplies of the crocodiles.

Three days after our start an ominous incident occurred. We were just drawing in to the bank to make our camp as usual for the night, when we caught sight of a figure standing on a little knoll not forty yards away, and intensely watching our approach. One

glance was sufficient—although I was personally unacquainted with the tribe—to tell me that he was a Masai Elmoran, or young warrior. Indeed, had I had any doubts, they would have quickly been dispelled by the terrified ejaculation of “*Masai!*” that burst simultaneously from the lips of our Wakwafi followers, who are, as I think I have said, themselves bastard Masai.

And what a figure he presented as he stood there in his savage war-gear! Accustomed as I have been to savages all my life, I do not think that I have ever before seen anything quite so ferocious or awe-inspiring. To begin with, the man was enormously tall, quite as tall as Umslopogaas, I should say, and beautifully, though somewhat slightly, shaped; but with the face of a devil. In his right hand he held a spear about five and a half feet long, the blade being two and a half feet in length, by nearly three inches in width, and having an iron spike at the end of the handle that measured more than a foot. On his left arm was a large and well-made elliptical shield of buffalo hide, on which were painted strange heraldic-looking devices. On his shoulders was a huge cape of hawk’s feathers, and round his neck was a “naibere”, or strip of cotton, about seventeen feet long, by one and a half broad, with a stripe of colour running down the middle of it. The tanned goatskin robe, which formed his ordinary attire in times of peace, was tied lightly round his waist, so as to serve the purposes of a belt, and through it were stuck, on the right and left sides respectively, his short pear-shaped sime, or sword, which is made of a single piece of steel, and carried in a wooden sheath, and an enormous knobkerrie. But perhaps the most remarkable feature of his attire consisted of a headdress of ostrich-feathers, which was fixed on the chin, and passed in front of the ears to the forehead, and, being shaped like an ellipse, completely framed the face, so that the diabolical countenance appeared to project from a sort of feather fire-screen. Round the ankles he wore black fringes of hair, and, projecting from the upper portion of the calves, to which they were attached, were long spurs like spikes, from which flowed down tufts of the beautiful black and waving hair of the Colobus monkey. Such was the elaborate array of the Masai Elmoran who stood watching the approach of our two canoes, but it is one which, to be appreciated, must be seen; only those who see it do not often live to describe it. Of course I could not make out all these details of his full dress on the occasion of this my first introduction, being, indeed, amply taken up with the consideration of the general effect, but I had plenty of subsequent opportunities of becoming acquainted with the items that went to make it up.

Whilst we were hesitating what to do, the Masai warrior drew himself up in a dignified fashion, shook his huge spear at us, and, turning, vanished on the further side of the slope.

“Hulloa!” hollloed Sir Henry from the other boat; “our friend the caravan leader has been as good as his word, and set the Masai after us. Do you think it will be safe to go ashore?”

I did not think it would be at all safe; but, on the other hand, we had no means of cooking in the canoes, and nothing that we could eat raw, so it was difficult to know what to do. At last Umslopogaas simplified matters by volunteering to go and reconnoitre, which he did, creeping off into the bush like a snake, while we hung off in the stream waiting for him. In half an hour he returned, and told us that there was not a Masai to be seen anywhere about, but that he had discovered a spot where they had recently been encamped, and that from various indications he judged that they must have moved on an hour or so before; the man we saw having, no doubt, been left to report upon our movements.

Thereupon we landed; and, having posted a sentry, proceeded to cook and eat our evening meal. This done, we took the situation into our serious consideration. Of course, it was possible that the apparition of the Masai warrior had nothing to do with us, that he was merely one of a band bent upon some marauding and murdering expedition against another tribe. But when we recalled the threat of the caravan leader, and reflected on the ominous way in which the warrior had shaken his spear at us, this did not appear very probable. On the contrary, what did seem probable was that the party was after us and awaiting a favourable opportunity to attack us. This being so, there were two things that we could do—one of which was to go on, and the other to go back. The latter idea was, however, rejected at once, it being obvious that we should encounter as many dangers in retreat as in advance; and, besides, we had made up our minds to journey onwards at any price. Under these circumstances, however, we did not consider it safe to sleep ashore, so we got into our canoes, and, paddling out into the middle of the stream, which was not very wide here, managed to anchor them by means of big stones fastened to ropes made of coconut-fibre, of which there were several fathoms in each canoe.

Here the mosquitoes nearly ate us up alive, and this, combined with anxiety as to our position, effectually prevented me from sleeping as the others were doing, notwithstanding the attacks of the aforesaid Tana mosquitoes. And so I lay awake, smoking and reflecting on many things, but, being of a practical turn of mind, chiefly on how we were to give those Masai villains the slip. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and, notwithstanding the mosquitoes, and the great risk we were running from fever from sleeping in such a spot, and forgetting that I had the cramp very badly in my right leg from squatting in a constrained position in the canoe, and that the Wakwafi who was sleeping beside me smelt horribly, I really began to enjoy myself. The moonbeams played upon the surface of the running water that speeded unceasingly past us towards the sea, like men’s lives towards the grave, till it glittered like a wide sheet of silver, that is in the open where the trees threw no shadows. Near the banks, however, it was very dark, and the night wind sighed sadly in the reeds. To our left, on the further side of the river, was a little sandy bay which was clear of trees, and here I could make out the forms of numerous antelopes advancing to the water, till suddenly there came an ominous roar, whereupon they all made off hurriedly. Then after a pause I caught sight of the massive form of His Majesty the Lion, coming down to drink his fill after meat. Presently he moved on, then came a crashing of the reeds about fifty yards above us, and a few minutes later a huge black mass rose out of the water, about twenty yards from me, and snorted. It was the head of a hippopotamus. Down it went without a sound, only to rise again within five yards of where I sat. This was decidedly too near to be comfortable, more especially as the hippopotamus was evidently animated by intense curiosity to know what on earth our canoes were. He opened his great mouth, to yawn, I suppose, and gave me an excellent view of his ivories; and I could not help reflecting how easily he could crunch up our frail canoe with a single bite. Indeed, I had half a mind to give him a ball from my eight-bore, but on reflection determined to let him alone unless he actually charged the boat. Presently he sank again as noiselessly as before, and I saw no more of him. Just then, on looking towards the bank on our right, I fancied that I caught sight of a dark figure flitting between the tree trunks. I have very keen sight, and I was almost sure that I saw something, but whether it was bird, beast, or man I could not say. At the moment, however, a dark cloud passed over the moon, and I saw no more of it. Just then, too, although all the other sounds of the forest had ceased, a species of horned owl with which I was well acquainted began to hoot with great persistency. After that, save for the rustling of trees and reeds when the wind caught them, there was complete silence.

But somehow, in the most unaccountable way, I had suddenly become nervous. There was no particular reason why I should be, beyond the ordinary reasons which surround the Central African traveller, and yet I undoubtedly was. If there is one thing more than another of which I have the most complete and entire scorn and disbelief, it is of presentiments, and yet here I was all of a sudden filled with and possessed by a most undoubted presentiment of approaching evil. I would not give way to it, however, although I felt the cold perspiration stand out upon my forehead. I would not arouse the others. Worse and worse I grew, my pulse fluttered like a dying man’s, my nerves thrilled with the horrible sense of impotent terror which anybody who is subject to nightmare will be familiar

with, but still my will triumphed over my fears, and I lay quiet (for I was half sitting, half lying, in the bow of the canoe), only turning my face so as to command a view of Umslopogaas and the two Wakwafi who were sleeping alongside of and beyond me.

In the distance I heard a hippopotamus splash faintly, then the owl hooted again in a kind of unnatural screaming note,<sup>[4]</sup> and the wind began to moan plaintively through the trees, making a heart-chilling music. Above was the black bosom of the cloud, and beneath me swept the black flood of the water, and I felt as though I and Death were utterly alone between them. It was very desolate.

[4] No doubt this owl was a wingless bird. I afterwards learnt that the hooting of an owl is a favourite signal among the Masai tribes.—A. Q.

Suddenly my blood seemed to freeze in my veins, and my heart to stand still. Was it fancy, or were we moving? I turned my eyes to look for the other canoe which should be alongside of us. I could not see it, but instead I saw a lean and clutching black hand lifting itself above the gunwale of the little boat. Surely it was a nightmare! At the same instant a dim but devilish-looking face appeared to rise out of the water, and then came a lurch of the canoe, the quick flash of a knife, and an awful yell from the Wakwafi who was sleeping by my side (the same poor fellow whose odour had been annoying me), and something warm spurted into my face. In an instant the spell was broken; I knew that it was no nightmare, but that we were attacked by swimming Masai. Snatching at the first weapon that came to hand, which happened to be Umslopogaas' battleaxe, I struck with all my force in the direction in which I had seen the flash of the knife. The blow fell upon a man's arm, and, catching it against the thick wooden gunwale of the canoe, completely severed it from the body just above the wrist. As for its owner, he uttered no sound or cry. Like a ghost he came, and like a ghost he went, leaving behind him a bloody hand still gripping a great knife, or rather a short sword, that was buried in the heart of our poor servant.

Instantly there arose a hubbub and confusion, and I fancied, rightly or wrongly, that I made out several dark heads gliding away towards the right-hand bank, whither we were rapidly drifting, for the rope by which we were moored had been severed with a knife. As soon as I had realised this fact, I also realised that the scheme had been to cut the boat loose so that it should drift on to the right bank (as it would have done with the natural swing of the current), where no doubt a party of Masai were waiting to dig their shovel-headed spears into us. Seizing one paddle myself, I told Umslopogaas to take another (for the remaining Askari was too frightened and bewildered to be of any use), and together we rowed vigorously out towards the middle of the stream; and not an instant too soon, for in another minute we should have been aground, and then there would have been an end of us.

As soon as we were well out, we set to work to paddle the canoe upstream again to where the other was moored; and very hard and dangerous work it was in the dark, and with nothing but the notes of Good's stentorian shouts, which he kept firing off at intervals like a fog-horn, to guide us. But at last we fetched up, and were thankful to find that they had not been molested at all. No doubt the owner of the same hand that severed our rope should have severed theirs also, but was led away from his purpose by an irresistible inclination to murder when he got the chance, which, while it cost us a man and him his hand, undoubtedly saved all the rest of us from massacre. Had it not been for that ghastly apparition over the side of the boat—an apparition that I shall never forget till my dying hour—the canoe would undoubtedly have drifted ashore before I realised what had happened, and this history would never have been written by me.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MISSION STATION

We made the remains of our rope fast to the other canoe, and sat waiting for the dawn and congratulating ourselves upon our merciful escape, which really seemed to result more from the special favour of Providence than from our own care or prowess. At last it came, and I have not often been more grateful to see the light, though so far as my canoe was concerned it revealed a ghastly sight. There in the bottom of the little boat lay the unfortunate Askari, the sime, or sword, in his bosom, and the severed hand gripping the handle. I could not bear the sight, so hauling up the stone which had served as an anchor to the other canoe, we made it fast to the murdered man and dropped him overboard, and down he went to the bottom, leaving nothing but a train of bubbles behind him. Alas! when our time comes, most of us like him leave nothing but bubbles behind, to show that we have been, and the bubbles soon burst. The hand of his murderer we threw into the stream, where it slowly sank. The sword, of which the handle was ivory, inlaid with gold (evidently Arab work), I kept and used as a hunting-knife, and very useful it proved.

Then, a man having been transferred to my canoe, we once more started on in very low spirits and not feeling at all comfortable as to the future, but fondly hoping to arrive at the "Highlands" station by night. To make matters worse, within an hour of sunrise it came on to rain in torrents, wetting us to the skin, and even necessitating the occasional baling of the canoes, and as the rain beat down the wind we could not use the sails, and had to get along as best as we could with our paddles.

At eleven o'clock we halted on an open piece of ground on the left bank of the river, and, the rain abating a little, managed to make a fire and catch and broil some fish. We did not dare to wander about to search for game. At two o'clock we got off again, taking a supply of broiled fish with us, and shortly afterwards the rain came on harder than ever. Also the river began to get exceedingly difficult to navigate on account of the numerous rocks, reaches of shallow water, and the increased force of the current; so that it soon became clear to us that we should not reach the Rev. Mackenzie's hospitable roof that night—a prospect that did not tend to enliven us. Toil as we would, we could not make more than an average of a mile an hour, and at five o'clock in the afternoon (by which time we were all utterly worn out) we reckoned that we were still quite ten miles below the station. This being so, we set to work to make the best arrangements we could for the night. After our recent experience, we simply did not dare to land, more especially as the banks of the Tana were clothed with dense bush that would have given cover to five thousand Masai, and at first I thought that we were going to have another night of it in the canoes. Fortunately, however, we espied a little rocky islet, not more than fifteen miles or so square, situated nearly in the middle of the river. For this we paddled, and, making fast the canoes, landed and made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, which was very uncomfortable indeed. As for the weather, it continued to be simply vile, the rain coming down in sheets till we were chilled to the marrow, and utterly preventing us from lighting a fire. There was, however, one consoling circumstance about this rain; our Askari declared that nothing would induce the Masai to make an attack in it, as they intensely disliked moving about in the wet, perhaps, as Good suggested, because they hate the idea of washing. We ate some insipid and sodden cold fish—that is, with the exception of Umslopogaas, who, like most Zulus, cannot bear fish—and took a pull of brandy, of which we fortunately had a few bottles left, and then began what, with one exception—when we saw three white men nearly perished of cold on the snow of Sheba's Breast in the course of our journey to Kukuanaaland—was, I think, the most trying night I ever experienced. It seemed absolutely endless, and once or twice I feared that two of the Askari would have died of the wet, cold, and exposure. Indeed, had it not been for timely doses of brandy I am sure that they would have died, for no African people can stand much exposure, which first paralyses and then kills them. I could see that even that iron old warrior Umslopogaas felt it keenly; though, in strange contrast to the Wakwafis, who groaned and bemoaned their fate unceasingly, he never uttered a single complaint. To make matters worse, about one in the morning we again heard the owl's ominous hooting, and had at once to prepare ourselves for another attack; though, if it had been attempted, I do not think that we could have offered a very effective resistance. But either the owl was a real one this time, or else the Masai were themselves too miserable to think of offensive operations, which, indeed, they rarely, if ever, undertake in bush veldt. At any rate, we saw nothing of them.

At last the dawn came gliding across the water, wrapped in wreaths of ghostly mist, and, with the daylight, the rain ceased; and then, out came the glorious sun, sucking up the mists and warming the chill air. Benumbed, and utterly exhausted, we dragged ourselves to our feet, and went and stood in the bright rays, and were thankful for them. I can quite understand how it is that primitive people become sun worshippers, especially if their conditions of life render them liable to exposure.

In half an hour more we were once again making fair progress with the help of a good wind. Our spirits had returned with the sunshine, and we were ready to laugh at difficulties and dangers that had been almost crushing on the previous day.

And so we went on cheerily till about eleven o'clock. Just as we were thinking of halting as usual, to rest and try to shoot something to eat, a sudden bend in the river brought us in sight of a substantial-looking European house with a veranda round it, splendidly situated upon a hill, and surrounded by a high stone wall with a ditch on the outer side. Right against and overshadowing the house was an enormous pine, the top of which we had seen through a glass for the last two days, but of course without knowing that it marked the site of the mission station. I was the first to see the house, and could not restrain myself from giving a hearty cheer, in which the others, including the natives, joined lustily. There was no thought of halting now. On we laboured, for, unfortunately, though the house seemed quite near, it was still a long way off by river, until at last, by one o'clock, we found ourselves at the bottom of the slope on which the building stood. Running the canoes to the bank, we disembarked, and were just hauling them up on to the shore, when we perceived three figures, dressed in ordinary English-looking clothes, hurrying down through a grove of trees to meet us.

"A gentleman, a lady, and a little girl," ejaculated Good, after surveying the trio through his eyeglass, "walking in a civilized fashion, through a civilized garden, to meet us in this place. Hang me, if this isn't the most curious thing we have seen yet!"

Good was right: it certainly did seem odd and out of place—more like a scene out of a dream or an Italian opera than a real tangible fact; and the sense of unreality was not lessened when we heard ourselves addressed in good broad Scotch, which, however, I cannot reproduce.

“How do you do, sirs,” said Mr Mackenzie, a grey-haired, angular man, with a kindly face and red cheeks; “I hope I see you very well. My natives told me an hour ago they spied two canoes with white men in them coming up the river; so we have just come down to meet you.”

“And it is very glad that we are to see a white face again, let me tell you,” put in the lady—a charming and refined-looking person.

We took off our hats in acknowledgment, and proceeded to introduce ourselves.

“And now,” said Mr Mackenzie, “you must all be hungry and weary; so come on, gentlemen, come on, and right glad we are to see you. The last white who visited us was Alphonse—you will see Alphonse presently—and that was a year ago.”

Meanwhile we had been walking up the slope of the hill, the lower portion of which was fenced off, sometimes with quince fences and sometimes with rough stone walls, into Kaffir gardens, just now full of crops of mealies, pumpkins, potatoes, etc. In the corners of these gardens were groups of neat mushroom-shaped huts, occupied by Mr Mackenzie’s mission natives, whose women and children came pouring out to meet us as we walked. Through the centre of the gardens ran the roadway up which we were walking. It was bordered on each side by a line of orange trees, which, although they had only been planted ten years, had in the lovely climate of the uplands below Mt Kenia, the base of which is about 5,000 feet above the coastline level, already grown to imposing proportions, and were positively laden with golden fruit. After a stiffish climb of a quarter of a mile or so—for the hillside was steep—we came to a splendid quince fence, also covered with fruit, which enclosed, Mr Mackenzie told us, a space of about four acres of ground that contained his private garden, house, church, and outbuildings, and, indeed, the whole hilltop. And what a garden it was! I have always loved a good garden, and I could have thrown up my hands for joy when I saw Mr Mackenzie’s. First there were rows upon rows of standard European fruit-trees, all grafted; for on top of this hill the climate was so temperate that nearly all the English vegetables, trees, and flowers flourished luxuriantly, even including several varieties of the apple, which, generally, runs to wood in a warm climate and obstinately refuses to fruit. Then there were strawberries and tomatoes (such tomatoes!), and melons and cucumbers, and, indeed, every sort of vegetable and fruit.

“Well, you have something like a garden!” I said, overpowered with admiration not untouched by envy.

“Yes,” answered the missionary, “it is a very good garden, and has well repaid my labour; but it is the climate that I have to thank. If you stick a peach-stone into the ground it will bear fruit the fourth year, and a rose-cutting will bloom in a year. It is a lovely clime.”

Just then we came to a ditch about ten feet wide, and full of water, on the other side of which was a loopholed stone wall eight feet high, and with sharp flints plentifully set in mortar on the coping.

“There,” said Mr Mackenzie, pointing to the ditch and wall, “this is my *magnum opus*; at least, this and the church, which is the other side of the house. It took me and twenty natives two years to dig the ditch and build the wall, but I never felt safe till it was done; and now I can defy all the savages in Africa, for the spring that fills the ditch is inside the wall, and bubbles out at the top of the hill winter and summer alike, and I always keep a store of four months’ provision in the house.”

Crossing over a plank and through a very narrow opening in the wall, we entered into what Mrs Mackenzie called *her* domain—namely, the flower garden, the beauty of which is really beyond my power to describe. I do not think I ever saw such roses, gardenias, or camellias (all reared from seeds or cuttings sent from England); and there was also a patch given up to a collection of bulbous roots mostly collected by Miss Flossie, Mr Mackenzie’s little daughter, from the surrounding country, some of which were surpassingly beautiful. In the middle of this garden, and exactly opposite the veranda, a beautiful fountain of clear water bubbled up from the ground, and fell into a stone-work basin which had been carefully built to receive it, whence the overflow found its way by means of a drain to the moat round the outer wall, this moat in its turn serving as a reservoir, whence an unfailing supply of water was available to irrigate all the gardens below. The house itself, a massively built single-storied building, was roofed with slabs of stone, and had a handsome veranda in front. It was built on three sides of a square, the fourth side being taken up by the kitchens, which stood separate from the house—a very good plan in a hot country. In the centre of this square thus formed was, perhaps, the most remarkable object that we had yet seen in this charming place, and that was a single tree of the conifer tribe, varieties of which grow freely on the highlands of this part of Africa. This splendid tree, which Mr Mackenzie informed us was a landmark for fifty miles round, and which we had ourselves seen for the last forty miles of our journey, must have been nearly three hundred feet in height, the trunk measuring about sixteen feet in diameter at a yard from the ground. For some seventy feet it rose a beautiful tapering brown pillar without a single branch, but at that height splendid dark green boughs, which, looked at from below, had the appearance of gigantic fern-leaves, sprang out horizontally from the trunk, projecting right over the house and flower-garden, to both of which they furnished a grateful proportion of shade, without—being so high up—offering any impediment to the passage of light and air.

“What a beautiful tree!” exclaimed Sir Henry.

“Yes, you are right; it is a beautiful tree. There is not another like it in all the country round, that I know of,” answered Mr Mackenzie. “I call it my watch tower. As you see, I have a rope ladder fixed to the lowest bough; and if I want to see anything that is going on within fifteen miles or so, all I have to do is to run up it with a spyglass. But you must be hungry, and I am sure the dinner is cooked. Come in, my friends; it is but a rough place, but well enough for these savage parts; and I can tell you what, we have got—a French cook.” And he led the way on to the veranda.

As I was following him, and wondering what on earth he could mean by this, there suddenly appeared, through the door that opened on to the veranda from the house, a dapper little man, dressed in a neat blue cotton suit, with shoes made of tanned hide, and remarkable for a bustling air and most enormous black mustachios, shaped into an upward curve, and coming to a point for all the world like a pair of buffalo-horns.

“Madame bids me for to say that dinnar is sarved. Messieurs, my compliments;” then suddenly perceiving Umslopogaas, who was loitering along after us and playing with his battleaxe, he threw up his hands in astonishment. “*Ah, mais quel homme!*” he ejaculated in French, “*quel sauvage affreux!*” Take but note of his huge choppare and the great pit in his head.”

“Ay,” said Mr Mackenzie; “what are you talking about, Alphonse?”

“Talking about!” replied the little Frenchman, his eyes still fixed upon Umslopogaas, whose general appearance seemed to fascinate him; “why I talk of him”—and he rudely pointed—“of *ce monsieur noir*.”

At this everybody began to laugh, and Umslopogaas, perceiving that he was the object of remark, frowned ferociously, for he had a most lordly dislike of anything like a personal liberty.

"*Parbleu!*" said Alphonse, "he is angered—he makes the grimace. I like not his air. I vanish." And he did with considerable rapidity.

Mr Mackenzie joined heartily in the shout of laughter which we indulged in. "He is a queer character—Alphonse," he said. "By and by I will tell you his history; in the meanwhile let us try his cooking."

"Might I ask," said Sir Henry, after we had eaten a most excellent dinner, "how you came to have a French cook in these wilds?"

"Oh," answered Mrs Mackenzie, "he arrived here of his own accord about a year ago, and asked to be taken into our service. He had got into some trouble in France, and fled to Zanzibar, where he found an application had been made by the French Government for his extradition. Whereupon he rushed off up-country, and fell in, when nearly starved, with our caravan of men, who were bringing us our annual supply of goods, and was brought on here. You should get him to tell you the story."

When dinner was over we lit our pipes, and Sir Henry proceeded to give our host a description of our journey up here, over which he looked very grave.

"It is evident to me," he said, "that those rascally Masai are following you, and I am very thankful that you have reached this house in safety. I do not think that they will dare to attack you here. It is unfortunate, though, that nearly all my men have gone down to the coast with ivory and goods. There are two hundred of them in the caravan, and the consequence is that I have not more than twenty men available for defensive purposes in case they should attack us. But, still, I will just give a few orders;" and, calling a black man who was loitering about outside in the garden, he went to the window, and addressed him in a Swahili dialect. The man listened, and then saluted and departed.

"I am sure I devoutly hope that we shall bring no such calamity upon you," said I, anxiously, when he had taken his seat again. "Rather than bring those bloodthirsty villains about your ears, we will move on and take our chance."

"You will do nothing of the sort. If the Masai come, they come, and there is an end on it; and I think we can give them a pretty warm greeting. I would not show any man the door for all the Masai in the world."

"That reminds me," I said, "the Consul at Lamu told me that he had had a letter from you, in which you said that a man had arrived here who reported that he had come across a white people in the interior. Do you think that there was any truth in his story? I ask, because I have once or twice in my life heard rumours from natives who have come down from the far north of the existence of such a race."

Mr Mackenzie, by way of answer, went out of the room and returned, bringing with him a most curious sword. It was long, and all the blade, which was very thick and heavy, was to within a quarter of an inch of the cutting edge worked into an ornamental pattern exactly as we work soft wood with a fret-saw, the steel, however, being invariably pierced in such a way as not to interfere with the strength of the sword. This in itself was sufficiently curious, but what was still more so was that all the edges of the hollow spaces cut through the substance of the blade were most beautifully inlaid with gold, which was in some way that I cannot understand welded on to the steel.<sup>[5]</sup>

[5] Since I saw the above I have examined hundreds of these swords, but have never been able to discover how the gold plates were inlaid in the fretwork. The armourers who make them in Zu-vendis bind themselves by oath not to reveal the secret.—A. Q.

"There," said Mr Mackenzie, "did you ever see a sword like that?"

We all examined it and shook our heads.

"Well, I have got it to show you, because this is what the man who said he had seen the white people brought with him, and because it does more or less give an air of truth to what I should otherwise have set down as a lie. Look here; I will tell you all that I know about the matter, which is not much. One afternoon, just before sunset, I was sitting on the veranda, when a poor, miserable, starved-looking man came limping up and squatted down before me. I asked him where he came from and what he wanted, and thereon he plunged into a long rambling narrative about how he belonged to a tribe far in the north, and how his tribe was destroyed by another tribe, and he with a few other survivors driven still further north past a lake named Laga. Thence, it appears, he made his way to another lake that lay up in the mountains, 'a lake without a bottom' he called it, and here his wife and brother died of an infectious sickness—probably smallpox—whereon the people drove him out of their villages into the wilderness, where he wandered miserably over mountains for ten days, after which he got into dense thorn forest, and was one day found there by some *white men* who were hunting, and who took him to a place where all the people were white and lived in stone houses. Here he remained a week shut up in a house, till one night a man with a white beard, whom he understood to be a 'medicine-man', came and inspected him, after which he was led off and taken through the thorn forest to the confines of the wilderness, and given food and this sword (at least so he said), and turned loose."

"Well," said Sir Henry, who had been listening with breathless interest, "and what did he do then?"

"Oh! he seems, according to his account, to have gone through sufferings and hardships innumerable, and to have lived for weeks on roots and berries, and such things as he could catch and kill. But somehow he did live, and at last by slow degrees made his way south and reached this place. What the details of his journey were I never learnt, for I told him to return on the morrow, bidding one of my headmen look after him for the night. The headman took him away, but the poor man had the itch so badly that the headman's wife would not have him in the hut for fear of catching it, so he was given a blanket and told to sleep outside. As it happened, we had a lion hanging about here just then, and most unhappily he wended this unfortunate wanderer, and, springing on him, bit his head almost off without the people in the hut knowing anything about it, and there was an end of him and his story about the white people; and whether or no there is any truth in it is more than I can tell you. What do you think, Mr Quatermain?"

I shook my head, and answered, "I don't know. There are so many queer things hidden away in the heart of this great continent that I should be sorry to assert that there was no truth in it. Anyhow, we mean to try and find out. We intend to journey to Lekakiseru, and thence, if we live to get so far, to this Lake Laga; and, if there are any white people beyond, we will do our best to find them."

"You are very venturesome people," said Mr Mackenzie, with a smile, and the subject dropped.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ALPHONSE AND HIS ANNETTE

After dinner we thoroughly inspected all the outbuildings and grounds of the station, which I consider the most successful as well as the most beautiful place of the sort that I have seen in Africa. We then returned to the veranda, where we found Umslopogaas taking advantage of this favourable opportunity to clean all the rifles thoroughly. This was the only *work* that he ever did or was asked to do, for as a Zulu chief it was beneath his dignity to work with his hands; but such as it was he did it very well. It was a curious sight to see the great Zulu sitting there upon the floor, his battleaxe resting against the wall behind him, whilst his long aristocratic-looking hands were busily employed, delicately and with the utmost care, cleaning the mechanism of the breech-loaders. He had a name for each gun. One—a double four-bore belonging to Sir Henry—was the Thunderer; another, my 500 Express, which had a peculiarly sharp report, was “the little one who spoke like a whip”; the Winchester repeaters were “the women, who talked so fast that you could not tell one word from another”; the six Martinis were “the common people”; and so on with them all. It was very curious to hear him addressing each gun as he cleaned it, as though it were an individual, and in a vein of the quaintest humour. He did the same with his battle-axe, which he seemed to look upon as an intimate friend, and to which he would at times talk by the hour, going over all his old adventures with it—and dreadful enough some of them were. By a piece of grim humour, he had named this axe “Inkosi-kaas”, which is the Zulu word for chieftainess. For a long while I could not make out why he gave it such a name, and at last I asked him, when he informed me that the axe was very evidently feminine, because of her womanly habit of prying very deep into things, and that she was clearly a chieftainess because all men fell down before her, struck dumb at the sight of her beauty and power. In the same way he would consult “Inkosi-kaas” if in any dilemma; and when I asked him why he did so, he informed me it was because she must needs be wise, having “looked into so many people’s brains”.

I took up the axe and closely examined this formidable weapon. It was, as I have said, of the nature of a pole-axe. The haft, made out of an enormous rhinoceros horn, was three feet three inches long, about an inch and a quarter thick, and with a knob at the end as large as a Maltese orange, left there to prevent the hand from slipping. This horn haft, though so massive, was as flexible as cane, and practically unbreakable; but, to make assurance doubly sure, it was whipped round at intervals of a few inches with copper wire—all the parts where the hands grip being thus treated. Just above where the haft entered the head were scored a number of little nicks, each nick representing a man killed in battle with the weapon. The axe itself was made of the most beautiful steel, and apparently of European manufacture, though Umslopogaas did not know where it came from, having taken it from the hand of a chief he had killed in battle many years before. It was not very heavy, the head weighing two and a half pounds, as nearly as I could judge. The cutting part was slightly concave in shape—not convex, as is generally the case with savage battle-axes—and sharp as a razor, measuring five and three-quarter inches across the widest part. From the back of the axe sprang a stout spike four inches long, for the last two of which it was hollow, and shaped like a leather punch, with an opening for anything forced into the hollow at the punch end to be pushed out above—in fact, in this respect it exactly resembled a butcher’s pole-axe. It was with this punch end, as we afterwards discovered, that Umslopogaas usually struck when fighting, driving a neat round hole in his adversary’s skull, and only using the broad cutting edge for a circular sweep, or sometimes in a *mêlée*. I think he considered the punch a neater and more sportsmanlike tool, and it was from his habit of pecking at his enemy with it that he got his name of “Woodpecker”. Certainly in his hands it was a terribly efficient one.

Such was Umslopogaas’ axe, Inkosi-kaas, the most remarkable and fatal hand-to-hand weapon that I ever saw, and one which he cherished as much as his own life. It scarcely ever left his hand except when he was eating, and then he always sat with it under his leg.

Just as I returned his axe to Umslopogaas, Miss Flossie came up and took me off to see her collection of flowers, African lilioms, and blooming shrubs, some of which are very beautiful, many of the varieties being quite unknown to me and also, I believe, to botanical science. I asked her if she had ever seen or heard of the “Goya” lily, which Central African explorers have told me they have occasionally met with and whose wonderful loveliness has filled them with astonishment. This lily, which the natives say blooms only once in ten years, flourishes in the most arid soil. Compared to the size of the bloom, the bulb is small, generally weighing about four pounds. As for the flower itself (which I afterwards saw under circumstances likely to impress its appearance fixedly in my mind), I know not how to describe its beauty and splendour, or the indescribable sweetness of its perfume. The flower—for it has only one bloom—rises from the crown of the bulb on a thick fleshy and flat-sided stem, the specimen that I saw measured fourteen inches in diameter, and is somewhat trumpet-shaped like the bloom of an ordinary “*longiflorum*” set vertically. First there is the green sheath, which in its early stage is not unlike that of a water-lily, but which as the bloom opens splits into four portions and curls back gracefully towards the stem. Then comes the bloom itself, a single dazzling arch of white enclosing another cup of richest velvety crimson, from the heart of which rises a golden-coloured pistil. I have never seen anything to equal this bloom in beauty or fragrance, and as I believe it is but little known, I take the liberty to describe it at length. Looking at it for the first time I well remember that I realised how even in a flower there dwells something of the majesty of its Maker. To my great delight Miss Flossie told me that she knew the flower well and had tried to grow it in her garden, but without success, adding, however, that as it should be in bloom at this time of the year she thought that she could procure me a specimen.

After that I fell to asking her if she was not lonely up here among all these savage people and without any companions of her own age.

“Lonely?” she said. “Oh, indeed no! I am as happy as the day is long, and besides I have my own companions. Why, I should hate to be buried in a crowd of white girls all just like myself so that nobody could tell the difference! Here,” she said, giving her head a little toss, “I am *I*; and every native for miles around knows the ‘Water-lily’,—for that is what they call me—and is ready to do what I

want, but in the books that I have read about little girls in England it is not like that. Everybody thinks them a trouble, and they have to do what their schoolmistress likes. Oh! it would break my heart to be put in a cage like that and not to be free—free as the air.”

“Would you not like to learn?” I asked.

“So I do learn. Father teaches me Latin and French and arithmetic.”

“And are you never afraid among all these wild men?”

“Afraid? Oh no! they never interfere with me. I think they believe that I am ‘Ngai’ (of the Divinity) because I am so white and have fair hair. And look here,” and diving her little hand into the bodice of her dress she produced a double-barrelled nickel-plated Derringer, “I always carry that loaded, and if anybody tried to touch me I should shoot him. Once I shot a leopard that jumped upon my donkey as I was riding along. It frightened me very much, but I shot it in the ear and it fell dead, and I have its skin upon my bed. Look there!” she went on in an altered voice, touching me on the arm and pointing to some far-away object, “I said just now that I had companions; there is one of them.”

I looked, and for the first time there burst upon my sight the glory of Mount Kenia. Hitherto the mountain had always been hidden in mist, but now its radiant beauty was unveiled for many thousand feet, although the base was still wrapped in vapour so that the lofty peak or pillar, towering nearly twenty thousand feet into the sky, appeared to be a fairy vision, hanging between earth and heaven, and based upon the clouds. The solemn majesty and beauty of this white peak are together beyond the power of my poor pen to describe. There it rose straight and sheer—a glittering white glory, its crest piercing the very blue of heaven. As I gazed at it with that little girl I felt my whole heart lifted up with an indescribable emotion, and for a moment great and wonderful thoughts seemed to break upon my mind, even as the arrows of the setting sun were breaking upon Kenia’s snows. Mr Mackenzie’s natives call the mountain the “Finger of God”, and to me it did seem eloquent of immortal peace and of the pure high calm that surely lies above this fevered world. Somewhere I had heard a line of poetry,

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,

and now it came into my mind, and for the first time I thoroughly understood what it meant. Base, indeed, would be the man who could look upon that mighty snow-wreathed pile—that white old tombstone of the years—and not feel his own utter insignificance, and, by whatever name he calls Him, worship God in his heart. Such sights are like visions of the spirit; they throw wide the windows of the chamber of our small selfishness and let in a breath of that air that rushes round the rolling spheres, and for a while illumine our darkness with a far-off gleam of the white light which beats upon the Throne.

Yes, such things of beauty are indeed a joy for ever, and I can well understand what little Flossie meant when she talked of Kenia as her companion. As Umslopogaas, savage old Zulu that he was, said when I pointed out to him the peak hanging in the glittering air: “A man might look thereon for a thousand years and yet be hungry to see.” But he gave rather another colour to his poetical idea when he added in a sort of chant, and with a touch of that weird imagination for which the man was remarkable, that when he was dead he should like his spirit to sit upon that snow-clad peak for ever, and to rush down the steep white sides in the breath of the whirlwind, or on the flash of the lightning, and “slay, and slay, and slay”.

“Slay what, you old bloodhound?” I asked.

This rather puzzled him, but at length he answered—

“The other shadows.”

“So thou wouldst continue thy murdering even after death?” I said.

“I murder not,” he answered hotly; “I kill in fair fight. Man is born to kill. He who kills not when his blood is hot is a woman, and no man. The people who kill not are slaves. I say I kill in fair fight; and when I am ‘in the shadow’, as you white men say, I hope to go on killing in fair fight. May my shadow be accursed and chilled to the bone for ever if it should fall to murdering like a bushman with his poisoned arrows!” And he stalked away with much dignity, and left me laughing.

Just then the spies whom our host had sent out in the morning to find out if there were any traces of our Masai friends about, returned, and reported that the country had been scoured for fifteen miles round without a single Elmoran being seen, and that they believed that those gentry had given up the pursuit and returned whence they came. Mr Mackenzie gave a sigh of relief when he heard this, and so indeed did we, for we had had quite enough of the Masai to last us for some time. Indeed, the general opinion was that, finding we had reached the mission station in safety, they had, knowing its strength, given up the pursuit of us as a bad job. How ill-judged that view was the sequel will show.

After the spies had gone, and Mrs Mackenzie and Flossie had retired for the night, Alphonse, the little Frenchman, came out, and Sir Henry, who is a very good French scholar, got him to tell us how he came to visit Central Africa, which he did in a most extraordinary lingo, that for the most part I shall not attempt to reproduce.

“My grandfather,” he began, “was a soldier of the Guard, and served under Napoleon. He was in the retreat from Moscow, and lived for ten days on his own leggings and a pair he stole from a comrade. He used to get drunk—he died drunk, and I remember playing at drums on his coffin. My father—”

Here we suggested that he might skip his ancestry and come to the point.

“Bien, messieurs!” replied this comical little man, with a polite bow. “I did only wish to demonstrate that the military principle is not hereditary. My grandfather was a splendid man, six feet two high, broad in proportion, a swallower of fire and gaiters. Also he was remarkable for his moustache. To me there remains the moustache and—nothing more.

“I am, messieurs, a cook, and I was born at Marseilles. In that dear town I spent my happy youth. For years and years I washed the dishes at the Hôtel Continental. Ah, those were golden days!” and he sighed. “I am a Frenchman. Need I say, messieurs, that I admire beauty? Nay, I adore the fair. Messieurs, we admire all the roses in a garden, but we pluck one. I plucked one, and alas, messieurs, it pricked my finger. She was a chambermaid, her name Annette, her figure ravishing, her face an angel’s, her heart—alas, messieurs, that I should have to own it!—black and slippery as a patent leather boot. I loved to desperation, I adored her to despair. She transported me—in every sense; she inspired me. Never have I cooked as I cooked (for I had been promoted at the hotel) when Annette, my adored Annette, smiled on me. Never”—and here his manly voice broke into a sob—“never shall I cook so well again.” Here he melted into tears.

“Come, cheer up!” said Sir Henry in French, smacking him smartly on the back. “There’s no knowing what may happen, you know. To judge from your dinner today, I should say you were in a fair way to recovery.”

Alphonse stopped weeping, and began to rub his back. "Monsieur," he said, "doubtless means to console, but his hand is heavy. To continue: we loved, and were happy in each other's love. The birds in their little nest could not be happier than Alphonse and his Annette. Then came the blow—saprستي!—when I think of it. Messieurs will forgive me if I wipe away a tear. Mine was an evil number; I was drawn for the conscription. Fortune would be avenged on me for having won the heart of Annette.

"The evil moment came; I had to go. I tried to run away, but I was caught by brutal soldiers, and they banged me with the butt-end of muskets till my mustachios curled with pain. I had a cousin a linen-draper, well-to-do, but very ugly. He had drawn a good number, and sympathized when they thumped me. 'To thee, my cousin,' I said, 'to thee, in whose veins flows the blue blood of our heroic grandparent, to thee I consign Annette. Watch over her whilst I hunt for glory in the bloody field.'

"Make your mind easy,' said he; 'I will.' As the sequel shows, he did!

"I went. I lived in barracks on black soup. I am a refined man and a poet by nature, and I suffered tortures from the coarse horror of my surroundings. There was a drill sergeant, and he had a cane. Ah, that cane, how it curled! Alas, never can I forget it!

"One morning came the news; my battalion was ordered to Tonquin. The drill sergeant and the other coarse monsters rejoiced. I—I made enquiries about Tonquin. They were not satisfactory. In Tonquin are savage Chinese who rip you open. My artistic tastes—for I am also an artist—recoiled from the idea of being ripped open. The great man makes up his mind quickly. I made up my mind. I determined not to be ripped open. I deserted.

"I reached Marseilles disguised as an old man. I went to the house of my cousin—he in whom runs my grandfather's heroic blood—and there sat Annette. It was the season of cherries. They took a double stalk. At each end was a cherry. My cousin put one into his mouth, Annette put the other in hers. Then they drew the stalks in till their eyes met—and alas, alas that I should have to say it!—they kissed. The game was a pretty one, but it filled me with fury. The heroic blood of my grandfather boiled up in me. I rushed into the kitchen. I struck my cousin with the old man's crutch. He fell—I had slain him. Alas, I believe that I did slay him. Annette screamed. The gendarmes came. I fled. I reached the harbour. I hid aboard a vessel. The vessel put to sea. The captain found me and beat me. He took an opportunity. He posted a letter from a foreign port to the police. He did not put me ashore because I cooked so well. I cooked for him all the way to Zanzibar. When I asked for payment he kicked me. The blood of my heroic grandfather boiled within me, and I shook my fist in his face and vowed to have my revenge. He kicked me again. At Zanzibar there was a telegram. I cursed the man who invented telegraphs. Now I curse him again. I was to be arrested for desertion, for murder, and *que sais-je?* I escaped from the prison. I fled, I starved. I met the men of Monsieur le Curé. They brought me here. I am full of woe. But I return not to France. Better to risk my life in these horrible places than to know the Bagne."

He paused, and we nearly choked with laughter, having to turn our faces away.

"Ah! you weep, messieurs," he said. "No wonder—it is a sad story."

"Perhaps," said Sir Henry, "the heroic blood of your grandparent will triumph after all; perhaps you will still be great. At any rate we shall see. And now I vote we go to bed. I am dead tired, and we had not much sleep on that confounded rock last night."

And so we did, and very strange the tidy rooms and clean white sheets seemed to us after our recent experiences.

## CHAPTER V.

### UMSLOPOGAAS MAKES A PROMISE

Next morning at breakfast I missed Flossie and asked where she was.

"Well," said her mother, "when I got up this morning I found a note put outside my door in which—But here it is, you can read it for yourself," and she gave me the slip of paper on which the following was written:—

"DEAREST M—,—It is just dawn, and I am off to the hills to get Mr Q—a bloom of the lily he wants, so don't expect me till you see me. I have taken the white donkey; and nurse and a couple of boys are coming with me—also something to eat, as I may be away all day, for I am determined to get the lily if I have to go twenty miles for it.—FLOSSIE."

"I hope she will be all right," I said, a little anxiously; "I never meant her to trouble after the flower."

"Ah, Flossie can look after herself," said her mother; "she often goes off in this way like a true child of the wilderness." But Mr Mackenzie, who came in just then and saw the note for the first time, looked rather grave, though he said nothing.

After breakfast was over I took him aside and asked him whether it would not be possible to send after the girl and get her back, having in view the possibility of there still being some Masai hanging about, at whose hands she might come to harm.

"I fear it would be of no use," he answered. "She may be fifteen miles off by now, and it is impossible to say what path she has taken. There are the hills;" and he pointed to a long range of rising ground stretching almost parallel with the course followed by the river Tana, but gradually sloping down to a dense bush-clad plain about five miles short of the house.

Here I suggested that we might get up the great tree over the house and search the country round with a spyglass; and this, after Mr Mackenzie had given some orders to his people to try and follow Flossie's spoor, we did.

The ascent of the mighty tree was rather an alarming performance, even with a sound rope-ladder fixed at both ends to climb up, at least to a landsman; but Good came up like a lamplighter.

On reaching the height at which the first fern-shaped boughs sprang from the bole, we stepped without any difficulty upon a platform made of boards, nailed from one bough to another, and large enough to accommodate a dozen people. As for the view, it was simply glorious. In every direction the bush rolled away in great billows for miles and miles, as far as the glass would show, only here and there broken by the brighter green of patches of cultivation, or by the glittering surface of lakes. To the northwest, Kenia reared his mighty head, and we could trace the Tana river curling like a silver snake almost from his feet, and far away beyond us towards the ocean. It is a glorious country, and only wants the hand of civilized man to make it a most productive one.

But look as we would, we could see no signs of Flossie and her donkey, so at last we had to come down disappointed. On reaching the veranda I found Umslopogaas sitting there, slowly and lightly sharpening his axe with a small whetstone he always carried with him.

"What doest thou, Umslopogaas?" I asked.

"I smell blood," was the answer; and I could get no more out of him.

After dinner we again went up the tree and searched the surrounding country with a spyglass, but without result. When we came down Umslopogaas was still sharpening Inkosi-kaas, although she already had an edge like a razor. Standing in front of him, and regarding him with a mixture of fear and fascination, was Alphonse. And certainly he did seem an alarming object—sitting there, Zulu fashion, on his haunches, a wild look upon his intensely savage and yet intellectual face, sharpening, sharpening, sharpening at the murderous-looking axe.

"Oh, the monster, the horrible man!" said the little French cook, lifting his hands in amazement. "See but the hole in his head; the skin beats on it up and down like a baby's! Who would nurse such a baby?" and he burst out laughing at the idea.

For a moment Umslopogaas looked up from his sharpening, and a sort of evil light played in his dark eyes.

"What does the little 'buffalo-heifer' [so named by Umslopogaas, on account of his mustachios and feminine characteristics] say? Let him be careful, or I will cut his horns. Beware, little man monkey, beware!"

Unfortunately Alphonse, who was getting over his fear of him, went on laughing at "*ce drôle d'un monsieur noir*". I was about to warn him to desist, when suddenly the huge Zulu bounded off the veranda on to the open space where Alphonse was standing, his features alive with a sort of malicious enthusiasm, and began swinging the axe round and round over the Frenchman's head.

"Stand still," I shouted; "do not move as you value your life—he will not hurt you;" but I doubt if Alphonse heard me, being, fortunately for himself, almost petrified with horror.

Then followed the most extraordinary display of sword, or rather of axemanship, that I ever saw. First of all the axe went flying round and round over the top of Alphonse's head, with an angry whirl and such extraordinary swiftness that it looked like a continuous band of steel, ever getting nearer and yet nearer to that unhappy individual's skull, till at last it grazed it as it flew. Then suddenly the motion was changed, and it seemed to literally flow up and down his body and limbs, never more than an eighth of an inch from them, and yet never striking them. It was a wonderful sight to see the little man fixed there, having apparently realised that to move would be to run the risk of sudden death, while his black tormentor towered over him, and wrapped him round with the quick flashes of the axe. For a minute or more this went on, till suddenly I saw the moving brightness travel down the side of

Alphonse's face, and then outwards and stop. As it did so a tuft of something black fell to the ground; it was the tip of one of the little Frenchman's curling mustachios.

Umslopogaas leant upon the handle of Inkosi-kaas, and broke into a long, low laugh; and Alphonse, overcome with fear, sank into a sitting posture on the ground, while we stood astonished at this exhibition of almost superhuman skill and mastery of a weapon. "Inkosi-kaas is sharp enough," he shouted; "the blow that clipped the 'buffalo-heifer's' horn would have split a man from the crown to the chin. Few could have struck it but I; none could have struck it and not taken off the shoulder too. Look, thou little heifer! Am I a good man to laugh at, thinkest thou? For a space hast thou stood within a hair's-breadth of death. Laugh not again, lest the hair's-breadth be wanting. I have spoken."

"What meanest thou by such mad tricks?" I asked of Umslopogaas, indignantly. "Surely thou art mad. Twenty times didst thou go near to slaying the man."

"And yet, Macumazahn, I slew not. Thrice as Inkosi-kaas flew the spirit entered into me to end him, and send her crashing through his skull; but I did not. Nay, it was but a jest; but tell the 'heifer' that it is not well to mock at such as I. Now I go to make a shield, for I smell blood, Macumazahn—of a truth I smell blood. Before the battle hast thou not seen the vulture grow of a sudden in the sky? They smell the blood, Macumazahn, and my scent is more keen than theirs. There is a dry ox-hide down yonder; I go to make a shield."

"That is an uncomfortable retainer of yours," said Mr Mackenzie, who had witnessed this extraordinary scene. "He has frightened Alphonse out of his wits; look!" and he pointed to the Frenchman, who, with a scared white face and trembling limbs, was making his way into the house. "I don't think that he will ever laugh at 'le monsieur noir' again."

"Yes," answered I, "it is ill jesting with such as he. When he is roused he is like a fiend, and yet he has a kind heart in his own fierce way. I remember years ago seeing him nurse a sick child for a week. He is a strange character, but true as steel, and a strong stick to rest on in danger."

"He says he smells blood," said Mr Mackenzie. "I only trust he is not right. I am getting very fearful about my little girl. She must have gone far, or she would be home by now. It is half-past three o'clock."

I pointed out that she had taken food with her, and very likely would not in the ordinary course of events return till nightfall; but I myself felt very anxious, and fear that my anxiety betrayed itself.

Shortly after this, the people whom Mr Mackenzie had sent out to search for Flossie returned, stating that they had followed the spoor of the donkey for a couple of miles and had then lost it on some stony ground, nor could they discover it again. They had, however, scoured the country far and wide, but without success.

After this the afternoon wore drearily on, and towards evening, there still being no signs of Flossie, our anxiety grew very keen. As for the poor mother, she was quite prostrated by her fears, and no wonder, but the father kept his head wonderfully well. Everything that could be done was done: people were sent out in all directions, shots were fired, and a continuous outlook kept from the great tree, but without avail.

And then it grew dark, and still no sign of fair-haired little Flossie.

At eight o'clock we had supper. It was but a sorrowful meal, and Mrs Mackenzie did not appear at it. We three also were very silent, for in addition to our natural anxiety as to the fate of the child, we were weighed down by the sense that we had brought this trouble on the head of our kind host. When supper was nearly at an end I made an excuse to leave the table. I wanted to get outside and think the situation over. I went on to the veranda and, having lit my pipe, sat down on a seat about a dozen feet from the right-hand end of the structure, which was, as the reader may remember, exactly opposite one of the narrow doors of the protecting wall that enclosed the house and flower garden. I had been sitting there perhaps six or seven minutes when I thought I heard the door move. I looked in that direction and I listened, but, being unable to make out anything, concluded that I must have been mistaken. It was a darkish night, the moon not having yet risen.

Another minute passed, when suddenly something round fell with a soft but heavy thud upon the stone flooring of the veranda, and came bounding and rolling along past me. For a moment I did not rise, but sat wondering what it could be. Finally, I concluded it must have been an animal. Just then, however, another idea struck me, and I got up quick enough. The thing lay quite still a few feet beyond me. I put down my hand towards it and it did not move: clearly it was not an animal. My hand touched it. It was soft and warm and heavy. Hurriedly I lifted it and held it up against the faint starlight.

*It was a newly severed human head!*

I am an old hand and not easily upset, but I own that that ghastly sight made me feel sick. How had the thing come there? Whose was it? I put it down and ran to the little doorway. I could see nothing, hear nobody. I was about to go out into the darkness beyond, but remembering that to do so was to expose myself to the risk of being stabbed, I drew back, shut the door, and bolted it. Then I returned to the veranda, and in as careless a voice as I could command called Curtis. I fear, however, that my tones must have betrayed me, for not only Sir Henry but also Good and Mackenzie rose from the table and came hurrying out.

"What is it?" said the clergyman, anxiously.

Then I had to tell them.

Mr Mackenzie turned pale as death under his red skin. We were standing opposite the hall door, and there was a light in it so that I could see. He snatched the head up by the hair and held it against the light.

"It is the head of one of the men who accompanied Flossie," he said with a gasp. "Thank God it is not hers!"

We all stood and stared at each other aghast. What was to be done?

Just then there was a knocking at the door that I had bolted, and a voice cried, "Open, my father, open!"

The door was unlocked, and in sped a terrified man. He was one of the spies who had been sent out.

"My father," he cried, "the Masai are on us! A great body of them have passed round the hill and are moving towards the old stone kraal down by the little stream. My father, make strong thy heart! In the midst of them I saw the white ass, and on it sat the Water-lily [Flossie]. An Elmoran [young warrior] led the ass, and by its side walked the nurse weeping. The men who went with her in the morning I saw not."

"Was the child alive?" asked Mr Mackenzie, hoarsely.

"She was white as the snow, but well, my father. They passed quite close to me, and looking up from where I lay hid I saw her face against the sky."

"God help her and us!" groaned the clergyman.

"How many are there of them?" I asked.

"More than two hundred—two hundred and half a hundred."

Once more we looked one on the other. What was to be done? Just then there rose a loud insistent cry outside the wall.

"Open the door, white man; open the door! A herald—a herald to speak with thee." Thus cried the voice.

Umslopogaas ran to the wall, and, reaching with his long arms to the coping, lifted his head above it and gazed over.

"I see but one man," he said. "He is armed, and carries a basket in his hand."

"Open the door," I said. "Umslopogaas, take thine axe and stand thereby. Let one man pass. If another follows, slay."

The door was unbarred. In the shadow of the wall stood Umslopogaas, his axe raised above his head to strike. Just then the moon came out. There was a moment's pause, and then in stalked a Masai Elmoran, clad in the full war panoply that I have already described, but bearing a large basket in his hand. The moonlight shone bright upon his great spear as he walked. He was physically a splendid man, apparently about thirty-five years of age. Indeed, none of the Masai that I saw were under six feet high, though mostly quite young. When he got opposite to us he halted, put down the basket, and stuck the spike of his spear into the ground, so that it stood upright.

"Let us talk," he said. "The first messenger we sent to you could not talk;" and he pointed to the head which lay upon the paving of the stoep—a ghastly sight in the moonlight; "but I have words to speak if ye have ears to hear. Also I bring presents;" and he pointed to the basket and laughed with an air of swaggering insolence that is perfectly indescribable, and yet which one could not but admire, seeing that he was surrounded by enemies.

"Say on," said Mr Mackenzie.

"I am the 'Lygonani' [war captain] of a party of the Masai of the Guasa Amboni. I and my men followed these three white men," and he pointed to Sir Henry, Good, and myself, "but they were too clever for us, and escaped hither. We have a quarrel with them, and are going to kill them."

"Are you, my friend?" said I to myself.

"In following these men we this morning caught two black men, one black woman, a white donkey, and a white girl. One of the black men we killed—there is his head upon the pavement; the other ran away. The black woman, the little white girl, and the white ass we took and brought with us. In proof thereof have I brought this basket that she carried. Is it not thy daughter's basket?"

Mr Mackenzie nodded, and the warrior went on.

"Good! With thee and thy daughter we have no quarrel, nor do we wish to harm thee, save as to thy cattle, which we have already gathered, two hundred and forty head—a beast for every man's father."<sup>[6]</sup>

<sup>[6]</sup> The Masai Elmoran or young warriors can own no property, so all the booty they may win in battle belongs to their fathers alone.—A. Q.

Here Mr Mackenzie gave a groan, as he greatly valued this herd of cattle, which he bred with much care and trouble.

"So, save for the cattle, thou mayst go free; more especially," he added frankly, glancing at the wall, "as this place would be a difficult one to take. But as to these men it is otherwise; we have followed them for nights and days, and must kill them. Were we to return to our kraal without having done so, all the girls would make a mock of us. So, however troublesome it may be, they must die.

"Now I have a proposition for thee. We would not harm the little girl; she is too fair to harm, and has besides a brave spirit. Give us one of these three men—a life for a life—and we will let her go, and throw in the black woman with her also. This is a fair offer, white man. We ask but for one, not for the three; we must take another opportunity to kill the other two. I do not even pick my man, though I should prefer the big one," pointing to Sir Henry; "he looks strong, and would die more slowly."

"And if I say I will not yield the man?" said Mr Mackenzie.

"Nay, say not so, white man," answered the Masai, "for then thy daughter dies at dawn, and the woman with her says thou hast no other child. Were she older I would take her for a servant; but as she is so young I will slay her with my own hand—ay, with this very spear. Thou canst come and see, an' thou wilt. I give thee a safe conduct;" and the fiend laughed aloud at his brutal jest.

Meanwhile I had been thinking rapidly, as one does in emergencies, and had come to the conclusion that I would exchange myself against Flossie. I scarcely like to mention the matter for fear it should be misunderstood. Pray do not let any one be misled into thinking that there was anything heroic about this, or any such nonsense. It was merely a matter of common sense and common justice. My life was an old and worthless one, hers was young and valuable. Her death would pretty well kill her father and mother also, whilst nobody would be much the worse for mine; indeed, several charitable institutions would have cause to rejoice thereat. It was indirectly through me that the dear little girl was in her present position. Lastly, a man was better fitted to meet death in such a peculiarly awful form than a sweet young girl. Not, however, that I meant to let these gentry torture me to death—I am far too much of a coward to allow that, being naturally a timid man; my plan was to see the girl safely exchanged and then to shoot myself, trusting that the Almighty would take the peculiar circumstances of the case into consideration and pardon the act. All this and more went through my mind in very few seconds.

"All right, Mackenzie," I said, "you can tell the man that I will exchange myself against Flossie, only I stipulate that she shall be safely in this house before they kill me."

"Eh?" said Sir Henry and Good simultaneously. "That you don't."

"No, no," said Mr Mackenzie. "I will have no man's blood upon my hands. If it please God that my daughter should die this awful death, His will be done. You are a brave man (which I am not by any means) and a noble man, Quatermain, but you shall not go."

"If nothing else turns up I shall go," I said decidedly.

"This is an important matter," said Mackenzie, addressing the Lygonani, "and we must think it over. You shall have our answer at dawn."

"Very well, white man," answered the savage indifferently; "only remember if thy answer is late thy little white bud will never grow into a flower, that is all, for I shall cut it with this," and he touched the spear. "I should have thought that thou wouldst play a trick and

attack us at night, but I know from the woman with the girl that your men are down at the coast, and that thou hast but twenty men here. It is not wise, white man," he added with a laugh, "to keep so small a garrison for your 'boma' [kraal]. Well, good night, and good night to you also, other white men, whose eyelids I shall soon close once and for all. At dawn thou wilt bring me word. If not, remember it shall be as I have said." Then turning to Umslopogaas, who had all the while been standing behind him and shepherding him as it were, "Open the door for me, fellow, quick now."

This was too much for the old chief's patience. For the last ten minutes his lips had been, figuratively speaking, positively watering over the Masai Lygonani, and this he could not stand. Placing his long hand on the Elmoran's shoulder he gripped it and gave him such a twist as brought him face to face with himself. Then, thrusting his fierce countenance to within a few inches of the Masai's evil feather-framed features, he said in a low growling voice:—

"Seest thou me?"

"Ay, fellow, I see thee."

"And seest thou this?" and he held Inkosi-kaas before his eyes.

"Ay, fellow, I see the toy; what of it?"

"Thou Masai dog, thou boasting windbag, thou capturer of little girls, with this 'toy' will I hew thee limb from limb. Well for thee that thou art a herald, or even now would I strew thy members about the grass."

The Masai shook his great spear and laughed loud and long as he answered, "I would that thou stoodst against me man to man, and we would see," and again he turned to go still laughing.

"Thou shalt stand against me man to man, be not afraid," replied Umslopogaas, still in the same ominous voice. "Thou shalt stand face to face with Umslopogaas, of the blood of Chaka, of the people of the Amazulu, a captain in the regiment of the Nkomabakosi, as many have done before, and bow thyself to Inkosi-kaas, as many have done before. Ay, laugh on, laugh on! tomorrow night shall the jackals laugh as they crunch thy ribs."

When the Lygonani had gone, one of us thought of opening the basket he had brought as a proof that Flossie was really their prisoner. On lifting the lid it was found to contain a most lovely specimen of both bulb and flower of the Goya lily, which I have already described, in full bloom and quite uninjured, and what was more a note in Flossie's childish hand written in pencil upon a greasy piece of paper that had been used to wrap up some food in:—

"DEAREST FATHER AND MOTHER," ran the note, "The Masai caught us when we were coming home with the lily. I tried to escape but could not. They killed Tom: the other man ran away. They have not hurt nurse and me, but say that they mean to exchange us against one of Mr Quatermain's party. *I will have nothing of the sort.* Do not let anybody give his life for me. Try and attack them at night; they are going to feast on three bullocks they have stolen and killed. I have my pistol, and if no help comes by dawn I will shoot myself. They shall not kill me. If so, remember me always, dearest father and mother. I am very frightened, but I trust in God. I dare not write any more as they are beginning to notice. Goodbye.—  
FLOSSIE."

Scrawled across the outside of this was "Love to Mr Quatermain. They are going to take the basket, so he will get the lily."

When I read those words, written by that brave little girl in an hour of danger sufficiently near and horrible to have turned the brain of a strong man, I own I wept, and once more in my heart I vowed that she should not die while my life could be given to save her.

Then eagerly, quickly, almost fiercely, we fell to discussing the situation. Again I said that I would go, and again Mackenzie negatived it, and Curtis and Good, like the true men that they are, vowed that, if I did, they would go with me, and die back to back with me.

"It is," I said at last, "absolutely necessary that an effort of some sort should be made before the morning."

"Then let us attack them with what force we can muster, and take our chance," said Sir Henry.

"Ay, ay," growled Umslopogaas, in Zulu; "spoken like a man, Incubu. What is there to be afraid of? Two hundred and fifty Masai, forsooth! How many are we? The chief there [Mr Mackenzie] has twenty men, and thou, Macumazahn, hast five men, and there are also five white men—that is, thirty men in all—enough, enough. Listen now, Macumazahn, thou who art very clever and old in war. What says the maid? These men eat and make merry; let it be their funeral feast. What said the dog whom I hope to hew down at daybreak? That he feared no attack because we were so few. Knowest thou the old kraal where the men have camped? I saw it this morning; it is thus:" and he drew an oval on the floor; "here is the big entrance, filled up with thorn bushes, and opening on to a steep rise. Why, Incubu, thou and I with axes will hold it against an hundred men striving to break out! Look, now; thus shall the battle go. Just as the light begins to glint upon the oxen's horns—not before, or it will be too dark, and not later, or they will be awakening and perceive us—let Bougwan creep round with ten men to the top end of the kraal, where the narrow entrance is. Let them silently slay the sentry there so that he makes no sound, and stand ready. Then, Incubu, let thee and me and one of the Askari—the one with the broad chest—he is a brave man—creep to the wide entrance that is filled with thorn bushes, and there also slay the sentry, and armed with battle-axes take our stand also one on each side of the pathway, and one a few paces beyond to deal with such as pass the twain at the gate. It is there that the rush will come. That will leave sixteen men. Let these men be divided into two parties, with one of which shalt thou go, Macumazahn, and with one the 'praying man' [Mr Mackenzie], and, all armed with rifles, let them make their way one to the right side of the kraal and one to the left; and when thou, Macumazahn, lowest like an ox, all shall open fire with the guns upon the sleeping men, being very careful not to hit the little maid. Then shall Bougwan at the far end and his ten men raise the war-cry, and, springing over the wall, put the Masai there to the sword. And it shall happen that, being yet heavy with food and sleep, and bewildered by the firing of the guns, the falling of men, and the spears of Bougwan, the soldiers shall rise and rush like wild game towards the thorn-stopped entrance, and there the bullets from either side shall plough through them, and there shall Incubu and the Askari and I wait for those who break across. Such is my plan, Macumazahn; if thou hast a better, name it."

When he had done, I explained to the others such portions of his scheme as they had failed to understand, and they all joined with me in expressing the greatest admiration of the acute and skilful programme devised by the old Zulu, who was indeed, in his own savage fashion, the nest general I ever knew. After some discussion we determined to accept the scheme, as it stood, it being the only one possible under the circumstances, and giving the best chance of success that such a forlorn hope would admit of—which, however, considering the enormous odds and the character of our foe, was not very great. "Ah, old lion!" I said to Umslopogaas, "thou knowest how to lie in wait as well as how to bite, where to seize as well as where to hang on."

"Ay, ay, Macumazahn," he answered. "For thirty years I've been a warrior and seen many things. It'll be a good fight. I smell blood—I tell thee, I smell blood."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NIGHT WEARS ON

As may be imagined, at the very first sign of a Masai the entire population of the Mission Station had sought refuge inside the stout stone wall, and were now to be seen—men, women, and countless children—huddled up together in little groups, and all talking at once in awed tones of the awfulness of Masai manners and customs, and of the fate that they had to expect if those bloodthirsty savages succeeded in getting over the stone wall.

Immediately after we had settled upon the outline of our plan of action as suggested by Umslopogaas, Mr Mackenzie sent for four sharp boys of from twelve to fifteen years of age, and despatched them to various points where they could keep an outlook upon the Masai camp, with others to report from time to time what was going on. Other lads and even women were stationed at intervals along the wall in order to guard against the possibility of surprise.

After this the twenty men who formed his whole available fighting force were summoned by our host into the square formed by the house, and there, standing by the bole of the great conifer, he earnestly addressed them and our four Askari. Indeed, it formed a very impressive scene—one not likely to be forgotten by anybody who witnessed it. Immediately by the tree stood the angular form of Mr Mackenzie, one arm outstretched as he talked, and the other resting against the giant bole, his hat off, and his plain but kindly face clearly betraying the anguish of his mind. Next to him was his poor wife, who, seated on a chair, had her face hidden in her hand. On the other side of her was Alphonse, looking exceedingly uncomfortable, and behind him stood the three of us, with Umslopogaas' grim and towering form in the background, resting, as usual, on his axe. In front stood and squatted the group of armed men—some with rifles in their hands, and others with spears and shields—following with eager attention every word that fell from the speaker's lips. The white light of the moon peering in beneath the lofty boughs threw a strange wild glamour over the scene, whilst the melancholy sighing of the night wind passing through the millions of pine needles overhead added a sadness of its own to what was already a sufficiently tragic occasion.

"Men," said Mr Mackenzie, after he had put all the circumstances of the case fully and clearly before them, and explained to them the proposed plan of our forlorn hope—"men, for years I have been a good friend to you, protecting you, teaching you, guarding you and yours from harm, and ye have prospered with me. Ye have seen my child—the Water-lily, as ye call her—grow year by year, from tenderest infancy to tender childhood, and from childhood on towards maidenhood. She has been your children's playmate, she has helped to tend you when sick, and ye have loved her."

"We have," said a deep voice, "and we will die to save her."

"I thank you from my heart—I thank you. Sure am I that now, in this hour of darkest trouble; now that her young life is like to be cut off by cruel and savage men—who of a truth 'know not what they do'—ye will strive your best to save her, and to save me and her mother from broken hearts. Think, too, of your own wives and children. If she dies, her death will be followed by an attack upon us here, and at the best, even if we hold our own, your houses and gardens will be destroyed, and your goods and cattle swept away. I am, as ye well know, a man of peace. Never in all these years have I lifted my hand to shed man's blood; but now I say strike, strike, in the name of God, Who bade us protect our lives and homes. Swear to me," he went on with added fervour—"swear to me that whilst a man of you remains alive ye will strive your uttermost with me and with these brave white men to save the child from a bloody and cruel death."

"Say no more, my father," said the same deep voice, that belonged to a stalwart elder of the Mission; "we swear it. May we and ours die the death of dogs, and our bones be thrown to the jackals and the kites, if we break the oath! It is a fearful thing to do, my father, so few to strike at so many, yet will we do it or die in the doing. We swear!"

"Ay, thus say we all," chimed in the others.

"Thus say we all," said I.

"It is well," went on Mr Mackenzie. "Ye are true men and not broken reeds to lean on. And now, friends—white and black together—let us kneel and offer up our humble supplication to the Throne of Power, praying that He in the hollow of Whose hand lie all our lives, Who giveth life and giveth death, may be pleased to make strong our arms that we may prevail in what awaits us at the morning's light."

And he knelt down, an example that we all followed except Umslopogaas, who still stood in the background, grimly leaning on Inkosi-kaas. The fierce old Zulu had no gods and worshipped nought, unless it were his battleaxe.

"Oh God of gods!" began the clergyman, his deep voice, tremulous with emotion, echoing up in the silence even to the leafy roof; "Protector of the oppressed, Refuge of those in danger, Guardian of the helpless, hear Thou our prayer! Almighty Father, to Thee we come in supplication. Hear Thou our prayer! Behold, one child hast Thou given us—an innocent child, nurtured in Thy knowledge—and now she lies beneath the shadow of the sword, in danger of a fearful death at the hands of savage men. Be with her now, oh God, and comfort her! Save her, oh Heavenly Father! Oh God of battle, Who teacheth our hands to war and our fingers to fight, in Whose strength are hid the destinies of men, be Thou with us in the hour of strife. When we go forth into the shadow of death, make Thou us strong to conquer. Breathe Thou upon our foes and scatter them; turn Thou their strength to water, and bring their high-blown pride to nought; compass us about with Thy protection; throw over us the shield of Thy power; forget us not now in the hour of our sore distress; help us now that the cruel man would dash our little ones against the stones! Hear Thou our prayer! And for those of us who, kneeling now on earth in health before Thee, shall at the sunrise adore Thy Presence on the Throne, hear our prayer! Make them clean, oh God; wash away their offences in the blood of the Lamb; and when their spirits pass, oh receive Thou them into the

haven of the just. Go forth, oh Father, go forth with us into the battle, as with the Israelites of old. Oh God of battle, hear Thou our prayer!"

He ceased, and after a moment's silence we all rose, and then began our preparations in good earnest. As Umslopogaas said, it was time to stop "talking" and get to business. The men who were to form each little party were carefully selected, and still more carefully and minutely instructed as to what was to be done. After much consideration it was agreed that the ten men led by Good, whose duty it was to stampede the camp, were not to carry firearms; that is, with the exception of Good himself, who had a revolver as well as a short sword—the Masai "sime" which I had taken from the body of our poor servant who was murdered in the canoe. We feared that if they had firearms the result of three cross-fires carried on at once would be that some of our own people would be shot; besides, it appeared to all of us that the work they had to do would best be carried out with cold steel—especially to Umslopogaas, who was, indeed, a great advocate of cold steel. We had with us four Winchester repeating rifles, besides half a dozen Martinis. I armed myself with one of the repeaters—my own; an excellent weapon for this kind of work, where great rapidity of fire is desirable, and fitted with ordinary flap-sights instead of the cumbersome sliding mechanism which they generally have. Mr Mackenzie took another, and the two remaining ones were given to two of his men who understood the use of them and were noted shots. The Martinis and some rifles of Mr Mackenzie's were served out, together with a plentiful supply of ammunition, to the other natives who were to form the two parties whose duty it was to be to open fire from separate sides of the kraal on the sleeping Masai, and who were fortunately all more or less accustomed to the use of a gun.

As for Umslopogaas, we know how he was armed—with an axe. It may be remembered that he, Sir Henry, and the strongest of the Askari were to hold the thorn-stopped entrance to the kraal against the anticipated rush of men striving to escape. Of course, for such a purpose as this guns were useless. Therefore Sir Henry and the Askari proceeded to arm themselves in like fashion. It so happened that Mr Mackenzie had in his little store a selection of the very best and English-made hammer-backed axe-heads. Sir Henry selected one of these weighing about two and a half pounds and very broad in the blade, and the Askari took another a size smaller. After Umslopogaas had put an extra edge on these two axe-heads, we fixed them to three feet six helves, of which Mr Mackenzie fortunately had some in stock, made of a light but exceedingly tough native wood, something like English ash, only more springy. When two suitable helves had been selected with great care and the ends of the hafts notched to prevent the hand from slipping, the axe-heads were fixed on them as firmly as possible, and the weapons immersed in a bucket of water for half an hour. The result of this was to swell the wood in the socket in such a fashion that nothing short of burning would get it out again. When this important matter had been attended to by Umslopogaas, I went into my room and proceeded to open a little tin-lined deal case, which contained—what do you think?—nothing more or less than four mail shirts.

It had happened to us three on a previous journey that we had made in another part of Africa to owe our lives to iron shirts of native make, and remembering this, I had suggested before we started on our present hazardous expedition that we should have some made to fit us. There was a little difficulty about this, as armour-making is pretty well an extinct art, but they can do most things in the way of steel work in Birmingham if they are put to it and you will pay the price, and the end of it was that they turned us out the loveliest steel shirts it is possible to see. The workmanship was exceedingly fine, the web being composed of thousands upon thousands of stout but tiny rings of the best steel made. These shirts, or rather steel-sleeved and high-necked jerseys, were lined with ventilated wash leather, were not bright, but browned like the barrel of a gun; and mine weighed exactly seven pounds and fitted me so well that I found I could wear it for days next to my skin without being chafed. Sir Henry had two, one of the ordinary make, viz. a jersey with little dependent flaps meant to afford some protection to the upper part of the thighs, and another of his own design fashioned on the pattern of the garments advertised as "combinations" and weighing twelve pounds. This combination shirt, of which the seat was made of wash-leather, protected the whole body down to the knees, but was rather more cumbersome, inasmuch as it had to be laced up at the back and, of course, involved some extra weight. With these shirts were what looked like four brown cloth travelling caps with ear pieces. Each of these caps was, however, quilted with steel links so as to afford a most valuable protection for the head.

It seems almost laughable to talk of steel shirts in these days of bullets, against which they are of course quite useless; but where one has to do with savages, armed with cutting weapons such as assegais or battle-axes, they afford the most valuable protection, being, if well made, quite invulnerable to them. I have often thought that if only the English Government had in our savage wars, and more especially in the Zulu war, thought fit to serve out light steel shirts, there would be many a man alive today who, as it is, is dead and forgotten.

To return: on the present occasion we blessed our foresight in bringing these shirts, and also our good luck, in that they had not been stolen by our rascally bearers when they ran away with our goods. As Curtis had two, and after considerable deliberation, had made up his mind to wear his combination one himself—the extra three or four pounds' weight being a matter of no account to so strong a man, and the protection afforded to the thighs being a very important matter to a fighting man not armed with a shield of any kind—I suggested that he should lend the other to Umslopogaas, who was to share the danger and the glory of his post. He readily consented, and called the Zulu, who came bearing Sir Henry's axe, which he had now fixed up to his satisfaction, with him. When we showed him the steel shirt, and explained to him that we wanted him to wear it, he at first declined, saying that he had fought in his own skin for thirty years, and that he was not going to begin now to fight in an iron one. Thereupon I took a heavy spear, and, spreading the shirt upon the floor, drove the spear down upon it with all my strength, the weapon rebounding without leaving a mark upon the tempered steel. This exhibition half converted him; and when I pointed out to him how necessary it was that he should not let any old-fashioned prejudices he might possess stand in the way of a precaution which might preserve a valuable life at a time when men were scarce, and also that if he wore this shirt he might dispense with a shield, and so have both hands free, he yielded at once, and proceeded to invest his frame with the "iron skin". And indeed, although made for Sir Henry, it fitted the great Zulu like a skin. The two men were almost of a height; and, though Curtis looked the bigger man, I am inclined to think that the difference was more imaginary than real, the fact being that, although he was plumper and rounder, he was not really bigger, except in the arm. Umslopogaas had, comparatively speaking, thin arms, but they were as strong as wire ropes. At any rate, when they both stood, axe in hand, invested in the brown mail, which clung to their mighty forms like a web garment, showing the swell of every muscle and the curve of every line, they formed a pair that any ten men might shrink from meeting.

It was now nearly one o'clock in the morning, and the spies reported that, after having drunk the blood of the oxen and eaten enormous quantities of meat, the Masai were going to sleep round their watchfires; but that sentries had been posted at each opening of the kraal. Flossie, they added, was sitting not far from the wall in the centre of the western side of the kraal, and by her were the nurse and the white donkey, which was tethered to a peg. Her feet were bound with a rope, and warriors were lying about all round her.

As there was absolutely nothing further that could be done then we all took some supper, and went to lie down for a couple of hours. I could not help admiring the way in which old Umslopogaas flung himself upon the floor, and, unmindful of what was hanging over him, instantly sank into a deep sleep. I do not know how it was with the others, but I could not do as much. Indeed, as is usual with me on these occasions, I am sorry to say that I felt rather frightened; and, now that some of the enthusiasm had gone out of me, and I began to calmly contemplate what we had undertaken to do, truth compels me to add that I did not like it. We were but thirty men all told, a good many of whom were no doubt quite unused to fighting, and we were going to engage two hundred and fifty of the fiercest, bravest, and most formidable savages in Africa, who, to make matters worse, were protected by a stone wall. It was, indeed, a mad undertaking, and what made it even madder was the exceeding improbability of our being able to take up our positions without attracting the notice of the sentries. Of course if we once did that—and any slight accident, such as the chance discharge of a gun, might do it—we were done for, for the whole camp would be up in a second, and our only hope lay in surprise.

The bed whereon I lay indulging in these uncomfortable reflections was near an open window that looked on to the veranda, through which came an extraordinary sound of groaning and weeping. For a time I could not make out what it was, but at last I got up and, putting my head out of the window, stared about. Presently I saw a dim figure kneeling on the end of the veranda and beating his breast—in which I recognized Alphonse. Not being able to understand his French talk or what on earth he was at, I called to him and asked him what he was doing.

“Ah, monsieur,” he sighed, “I do make prayer for the souls of those whom I shall slay tonight.”

“Indeed,” I said, “then I wish that you would do it a little more quietly.”

Alphonse retreated, and I heard no more of his groans. And so the time passed, till at length Mr Mackenzie called me in a whisper through the window, for of course everything had now to be done in the most absolute silence. “Three o’clock,” he said: “we must begin to move at half-past.”

I told him to come in, and presently he entered, and I am bound to say that if it had not been that just then I had not got a laugh anywhere about me, I should have exploded at the sight he presented armed for battle. To begin with, he had on a clergyman’s black swallow-tail and a kind of broad-rimmed black felt hat, both of which he had donned on account, he said, of their dark colour. In his hand was the Winchester repeating rifle we had lent him; and stuck in an elastic cricketer’s belt, like those worn by English boys, were, first, a huge buckhorn-handled carving knife with a guard to it, and next a long-barrelled Colt’s revolver.

“Ah, my friend,” he said, seeing me staring at his belt, “you are looking at my ‘carver’. I thought it might come in handy if we came to close quarters; it is excellent steel, and many is the pig I have killed with it.”

By this time everybody was up and dressing. I put on a light Norfolk jacket over my mail shirt in order to have a pocket handy to hold my cartridges, and buckled on my revolver. Good did the same, but Sir Henry put on nothing except his mail shirt, steel-lined cap, and a pair of “veldt-schoons” or soft hide shoes, his legs being bare from the knees down. His revolver he strapped on round his middle outside the armoured shirt.

Meanwhile Umslopogaas was mustering the men in the square under the big tree and going the rounds to see that each was properly armed, etc. At the last moment we made one change. Finding that two of the men who were to have gone with the firing parties knew little or nothing of guns, but were good spearsmen, we took away their rifles, supplied them with shields and long spears of the Masai pattern, and took them off to join Curtis, Umslopogaas, and the Askari in holding the wide opening; it having become clear to us that three men, however brave and strong, were too few for the work.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SLAUGHTER GRIM AND GREAT

Then there was a pause, and we stood there in the chilly silent darkness waiting till the moment came to start. It was, perhaps, the most trying time of all—that slow, slow quarter of an hour. The minutes seemed to drag along with leaden feet, and the quiet, the solemn hush, that brooded over all—big, as it were, with a coming fate, was most oppressive to the spirits. I once remember having to get up before dawn to see a man hanged, and I then went through a very similar set of sensations, only in the present instance my feelings were animated by that more vivid and personal element which naturally appertains rather to the person to be operated on than to the most sympathetic spectator. The solemn faces of the men, well aware that the short passage of an hour would mean for some, and perhaps all of them, the last great passage to the unknown or oblivion; the bated whispers in which they spoke; even Sir Henry's continuous and thoughtful examination of his woodcutter's axe and the fidgety way in which Good kept polishing his eyeglass, all told the same tale of nerves stretched pretty nigh to breaking-point. Only Umslopogaas, leaning as usual upon Inkosi-kaas and taking an occasional pinch of snuff, was to all appearance perfectly and completely unmoved. Nothing could touch his iron nerves.

The moon went down. For a long while she had been getting nearer and nearer to the horizon. Now she finally sank and left the world in darkness save for a faint grey tinge in the eastern sky that palely heralded the dawn.

Mr Mackenzie stood, watch in hand, his wife clinging to his arm and striving to stifle her sobs.

"Twenty minutes to four," he said, "it ought to be light enough to attack at twenty minutes past four. Captain Good had better be moving, he will want three or four minutes' start."

Good gave one final polish to his eyeglass, nodded to us in a jocular sort of way—which I could not help feeling it must have cost him something to muster up—and, ever polite, took off his steel-lined cap to Mrs Mackenzie and started for his position at the head of the kraal, to reach which he had to make a detour by some paths known to the natives.

Just then one of the boys came in and reported that everybody in the Masai camp, with the exception of the two sentries who were walking up and down in front of the respective entrances, appeared to be fast asleep. Then the rest of us took the road. First came the guide, then Sir Henry, Umslopogaas, the Wakwafi Askari, and Mr Mackenzie's two mission natives armed with long spears and shields. I followed immediately after with Alphonse and five natives all armed with guns, and Mr Mackenzie brought up the rear with the six remaining natives.

The cattle kraal where the Masai were camped lay at the foot of the hill on which the house stood, or, roughly speaking, about eight hundred yards from the Mission buildings. The first five hundred yards of this distance we traversed quietly indeed, but at a good pace; after that we crept forward as silently as a leopard on his prey, gliding like ghosts from bush to bush and stone to stone. When I had gone a little way I chanced to look behind me, and saw the redoubtable Alphonse staggering along with white face and trembling knees, and his rifle, which was at full cock, pointed directly at the small of my back. Having halted and carefully put the rifle at "safety", we started again, and all went well till we were within one hundred yards or so of the kraal, when his teeth began to chatter in the most aggressive way.

"If you don't stop that I will kill you," I whispered savagely; for the idea of having all our lives sacrificed to a tooth-chattering cook was too much for me. I began to fear that he would betray us, and heartily wished we had left him behind.

"But, monsieur, I cannot help it," he answered, "it is the cold."

Here was a dilemma, but fortunately I devised a plan. In the pocket of the coat I had on was a small piece of dirty rag that I had used some time before to clean a gun with. "Put this in your mouth," I whispered again, giving him the rag; "and if I hear another sound you are a dead man." I knew that that would stifle the clatter of his teeth. I must have looked as if I meant what I said, for he instantly obeyed me, and continued his journey in silence.

Then we crept on again.

At last we were within fifty yards of the kraal. Between us and it was an open space of sloping grass with only one mimosa bush and a couple of tussocks of a sort of thistle for cover. We were still hidden in fairly thick bush. It was beginning to grow light. The stars had paled and a sickly gleam played about the east and was reflected on the earth. We could see the outline of the kraal clearly enough, and could also make out the faint glimmer of the dying embers of the Masai camp-fires. We halted and watched, for the sentry we knew was posted at the opening. Presently he appeared, a fine tall fellow, walking idly up and down within five paces of the thorn-stopped entrance. We had hoped to catch him napping, but it was not to be. He seemed particularly wide awake. If we could not kill that man, and kill him silently, we were lost. There we crouched and watched him. Presently Umslopogaas, who was a few paces ahead of me, turned and made a sign, and next second I saw him go down on his stomach like a snake, and, taking an opportunity when the sentry's head was turned, begin to work his way through the grass without a sound.

The unconscious sentry commenced to hum a little tune, and Umslopogaas crept on. He reached the shelter of the mimosa bush unperceived and there waited. Still the sentry walked up and down. Presently he turned and looked over the wall into the camp. Instantly the human snake who was stalking him glided on ten yards and got behind one of the tussocks of the thistle-like plant, reaching it as the Elmoran turned again. As he did so his eye fell upon this patch of thistles, and it seemed to strike him that it did not look quite right. He advanced a pace towards it—halted, yawned, stooped down, picked up a little pebble and threw it at it. It hit Umslopogaas upon the head, luckily not upon the armour shirt. Had it done so the clink would have betrayed us. Luckily, too, the shirt was browned and not bright steel, which would certainly have been detected. Apparently satisfied that there was nothing wrong,

he then gave over his investigations and contented himself with leaning on his spear and standing gazing idly at the tuft. For at least three minutes did he stand thus, plunged apparently in a gentle reverie, and there we lay in the last extremity of anxiety, expecting every moment that we should be discovered or that some untoward accident would happen. I could hear Alphonse's teeth going like anything on the oiled rag, and turning my head round made an awful face at him. But I am bound to state that my own heart was at much the same game as the Frenchman's castanets, while the perspiration was pouring from my body, causing the wash-leather-lined shirt to stick to me unpleasantly, and altogether I was in the pitiable state known by schoolboys as a "blue fright".

At last the ordeal came to an end. The sentry glanced at the east, and appeared to note with satisfaction that his period of duty was coming to an end—as indeed it was, once and for all—for he rubbed his hands and began to walk again briskly to warm himself.

The moment his back was turned the long black snake glided on again, and reached the other thistle tuft, which was within a couple of paces of his return beat.

Back came the sentry and strolled right past the tuft, utterly unconscious of the presence that was crouching behind it. Had he looked down he could scarcely have failed to see, but he did not do so.

He passed, and then his hidden enemy erected himself, and with outstretched hand followed in his tracks.

A moment more, and, just as the Elmoran was about to turn, the great Zulu made a spring, and in the growing light we could see his long lean hands close round the Masai's throat. Then followed a convulsive twining of the two dark bodies, and in another second I saw the Masai's head bent back, and heard a sharp crack, something like that of a dry twig snapping, and he fell down upon the ground, his limbs moving spasmodically.

Umslopogaas had put out all his iron strength and broken the warrior's neck.

For a moment he knelt upon his victim, still gripping his throat till he was sure that there was nothing more to fear from him, and then he rose and beckoned to us to advance, which we did on all fours, like a colony of huge apes. On reaching the kraal we saw that the Masai had still further choked this entrance, which was about ten feet wide—no doubt in order to guard against attack—by dragging four or five tops of mimosa trees up to it. So much the better for us, I reflected; the more obstruction there was the slower would they be able to come through. Here we separated; Mackenzie and his party creeping up under the shadow of the wall to the left, while Sir Henry and Umslopogaas took their stations one on each side of the thorn fence, the two spearmen and the Askari lying down in front of it. I and my men crept on up the right side of the kraal, which was about fifty paces long.

When I was two-thirds up I halted, and placed my men at distances of four paces from one another, keeping Alphonse close to me, however. Then I peeped for the first time over the wall. It was getting fairly light now, and the first thing I saw was the white donkey, exactly opposite to me, and close by it I could make out the pale face of little Flossie, who was sitting as the lad had described, some ten paces from the wall. Round her lay many warriors, sleeping. At distances all over the surface of the kraal were the remains of fires, round each of which slept some five-and-twenty Masai, for the most part gorged with food. Now and then a man would raise himself, yawn, and look at the east, which was turning primrose; but none got up. I determined to wait another five minutes, both to allow the light to increase, so that we could make better shooting, and to give Good and his party—of whom we could see or hear nothing—every opportunity to make ready.

The quiet dawn began to throw her ever-widening mantle over plain and forest and river—mighty Kenia, wrapped in the silence of eternal snows, looked out across the earth—till presently a beam from the unrisen sun lit upon his heaven-kissing crest and purpled it with blood; the sky above grew blue, and tender as a mother's smile; a bird began to pipe his morning song, and a little breeze passing through the bush shook down the dewdrops in millions to refresh the waking world. Everywhere was peace and the happiness of arising strength, everywhere save in the heart of cruel man!

Suddenly, just as I was nerving myself for the signal, having already selected my man on whom I meant to open fire—a great fellow sprawling on the ground within three feet of little Flossie—Alphonse's teeth began to chatter again like the hoofs of a galloping giraffe, making a great noise in the silence. The rag had dropped out in the agitation of his mind. Instantly a Masai within three paces of us woke, and, sitting up, gazed about him, looking for the cause of the sound. Moved beyond myself, I brought the butt-end of my rifle down on to the pit of the Frenchman's stomach. This stopped his chattering; but, as he doubled up, he managed to let off his gun in such a manner that the bullet passed within an inch of my head.

There was no need for a signal now. From both sides of the kraal broke out a waving line of fire, in which I myself joined, managing with a snap shot to knock over my Masai by Flossie, just as he was jumping up. Then from the top end of the kraal there rang an awful yell, in which I rejoiced to recognize Good's piercing notes rising clear and shrill above the din, and in another second followed such a scene as I have never seen before nor shall again. With an universal howl of terror and fury the brawny crowd of savages within the kraal sprang to their feet, many of them to fall again beneath our well-directed hail of lead before they had moved a yard. For a moment they stood undecided, and then hearing the cries and curses that rose unceasingly from the top end of the kraal, and bewildered by the storm of bullets, they as by one impulse rushed down towards the thorn-stopped entrance. As they went we kept pouring our fire with terrible effect into the thickening mob as fast as we could load. I had emptied my repeater of the ten shots it contained and was just beginning to slip in some more when I bethought me of little Flossie. Looking up, I saw that the white donkey was lying kicking, having been knocked over either by one of our bullets or a Masai spear-thrust. There were no living Masai near, but the black nurse was on her feet and with a spear cutting the rope that bound Flossie's feet. Next second she ran to the wall of the kraal and began to climb over it, an example which the little girl followed. But Flossie was evidently very stiff and cramped, and could only go slowly, and as she went two Masai flying down the kraal caught sight of her and rushed towards her to kill her. The first fellow came up just as the poor little girl, after a desperate effort to climb the wall, fell back into the kraal. Up flashed the great spear, and as it did so a bullet from my rifle found its home in the holder's ribs, and over he went like a shot rabbit. But behind him was the other man, and, alas, I had only that one cartridge in the magazine! Flossie had scrambled to her feet and was facing the second man, who was advancing with raised spear. I turned my head aside and felt sick as death. I could not bear to see him stab her. Glancing up again, to my surprise I saw the Masai's spear lying on the ground, while the man himself was staggering about with both hands to his head. Suddenly I saw a puff of smoke proceeding apparently from Flossie, and the man fell down headlong. Then I remembered the Derringer pistol she carried, and saw that she had fired both barrels of it at him, thereby saving her life. In another instant she had made an effort, and assisted by the nurse, who was lying on the top, had scrambled over the wall, and I knew that she was, comparatively speaking, safe.

All this takes time to tell, but I do not suppose that it took more than fifteen seconds to enact. I soon got the magazine of the repeater filled again with cartridges, and once more opened fire, not on the seething black mass which was gathering at the end of the kraal, but on fugitives who bethought them to climb the wall. I picked off several of these men, moving down towards the end of the

kraal as I did so, and arriving at the corner, or rather the bend of the oval, in time to see, and by means of my rifle to assist in, the mighty struggle that took place there.

By this time some two hundred Masai—allowing that we had up to the present accounted for fifty—had gathered together in front of the thorn-stopped entrance, driven thither by the spears of Good's men, whom they doubtless supposed were a large force instead of being but ten strong. For some reason it never occurred to them to try and rush the wall, which they could have scrambled over with comparative ease; they all made for the fence, which was really a strongly interwoven fortification. With a bound the first warrior went at it, and even before he touched the ground on the other side I saw Sir Henry's great axe swing up and fall with awful force upon his feather head-piece, and he sank into the middle of the thorns. Then with a yell and a crash they began to break through as they might, and ever as they came the great axe swung and Inkosi-kaas flashed and they fell dead one by one, each man thus helping to build up a barrier against his fellows. Those who escaped the axes of the pair fell at the hands of the Askari and the two Mission Kaffirs, and those who passed scatheless from them were brought low by my own and Mackenzie's fire.

Faster and more furious grew the fighting. Single Masai would spring upon the dead bodies of their comrades, and engage one or other of the axemen with their long spears; but, thanks chiefly to the mail shirts, the result was always the same. Presently there was a great swing of the axe, a crashing sound, and another dead Masai. That is, if the man was engaged with Sir Henry. If it was Umslopogaas that he fought with the result indeed would be the same, but it would be differently attained. It was but rarely that the Zulu used the crashing double-handed stroke; on the contrary, he did little more than tap continually at his adversary's head, pecking at it with the pole-axe end of the axe as a woodpecker<sup>[7]</sup> pecks at rotten wood. Presently a peck would go home, and his enemy would drop down with a neat little circular hole in his forehead or skull, exactly similar to that which a cheese-scoop makes in a cheese. He never used the broad blade of the axe except when hard pressed, or when striking at a shield. He told me afterwards that he did not consider it sportsmanlike.

<sup>[7]</sup> As I think I have already said, one of Umslopogaas's Zulu names was the "Woodpecker". I could never make out why he was called so until I saw him in action with Inkosi-kaas, when I at once recognized the resemblance.—A. Q.

Good and his men were quite close by now, and our people had to cease firing into the mass for fear of killing some of them (as it was, one of them was slain in this way). Mad and desperate with fear, the Masai by a frantic effort burst through the thorn fence and piled-up dead, and, sweeping Curtis, Umslopogaas, and the other three before them, into the open. And now it was that we began to lose men fast. Down went our poor Askari who was armed with the axe, a great spear standing out a foot behind his back; and before long the two spearsmen who had stood with him went down too, dying fighting like tigers; and others of our party shared their fate. For a moment I feared the fight was lost—certainly it trembled in the balance. I shouted to my men to cast down their rifles, and to take spears and throw themselves into the *mêlée*. They obeyed, their blood being now thoroughly up, and Mr Mackenzie's people followed their example.

This move had a momentary good result, but still the fight hung in the balance.

Our people fought magnificently, hurling themselves upon the dark mass of Elmoran, hewing, thrusting, slaying, and being slain. And ever above the din rose Good's awful yell of encouragement as he plunged to wherever the fight was thickest; and ever, with an almost machine-like regularity, the two axes rose and fell, carrying death and disablement at every stroke. But I could see that the strain was beginning to tell upon Sir Henry, who was bleeding from several flesh wounds: his breath was coming in gasps, and the veins stood out on his forehead like blue and knotted cords. Even Umslopogaas, man of iron that he was, was hard pressed. I noticed that he had given up "woodpecking", and was now using the broad blade of Inkosi-kaas, "browning" his enemy wherever he could hit him, instead of drilling scientific holes in his head. I myself did not go into the *mêlée*, but hovered outside like the swift "back" in a football scrimmage, putting a bullet through a Masai whenever I got a chance. I was more use so. I fired forty-nine cartridges that morning, and I did not miss many shots.

Presently, do as we would, the beam of the balance began to rise against us. We had not more than fifteen or sixteen effectives left now, and the Masai had at least fifty. Of course if they had kept their heads, and shaken themselves together, they could soon have made an end of the matter; but that is just what they did not do, not having yet recovered from their start, and some of them having actually fled from their sleeping-places without their weapons. Still by now many individuals were fighting with their normal courage and discretion, and this alone was sufficient to defeat us. To make matters worse just then, when Mackenzie's rifle was empty, a brawny savage armed with a "sime", or sword, made a rush for him. The clergyman flung down his gun, and drawing his huge carver from his elastic belt (his revolver had dropped out in the fight), they closed in desperate struggle. Presently, locked in a close embrace, missionary and Masai rolled on the ground behind the wall, and for some time I, being amply occupied with my own affairs, and in keeping my skin from being pricked, remained in ignorance of his fate or how the duel had ended.

To and fro surged the fight, slowly turning round like the vortex of a human whirlpool, and the matter began to look very bad for us. Just then, however, a fortunate thing happened. Umslopogaas, either by accident or design, broke out of the ring and engaged a warrior at some few paces from it. As he did so, another man ran up and struck him with all his force between his shoulders with his great spear, which, falling on the tough steel shirt, failed to pierce it and rebounded. For a moment the man stared aghast—protective armour being unknown among these tribes—and then he yelled out at the top of his voice—

"*They are devils—bewitched, bewitched!*" And seized by a sudden panic, he threw down his spear, and began to fly. I cut short his career with a bullet, and Umslopogaas brained his man, and then the panic spread to the others.

"*Bewitched, bewitched!*" they cried, and tried to escape in every direction, utterly demoralized and broken-spirited, for the most part even throwing down their shields and spears.

On the last scene of that dreadful fight I need not dwell. It was a slaughter great and grim, in which no quarter was asked or given. One incident, however, is worth detailing. Just as I was hoping that it was all done with, suddenly from under a heap of slain where he had been hiding, an unwounded warrior sprang up, and, clearing the piles of dying dead like an antelope, sped like the wind up the kraal towards the spot where I was standing at the moment. But he was not alone, for Umslopogaas came gliding on his tracks with the peculiar swallow-like motion for which he was noted, and as they neared me I recognized in the Masai the herald of the previous night. Finding that, run as he would, his pursuer was gaining on him, the man halted and turned round to give battle. Umslopogaas also pulled up.

"Ah, ah," he cried, in mockery, to the Elmoran, "it is thou whom I talked with last night—the Lygonani! the Herald! the capturer of little girls—he who would kill a little girl! And thou didst hope to stand man to man and face to face with Umslopogaas, an Induna

of the tribe of the Maquilisini, of the people of the Amazulu? Behold, thy prayer is granted! And I didst swear to hew thee limb from limb, thou insolent dog. Behold, I will do it even now!"

The Masai ground his teeth with fury, and charged at the Zulu with his spear. As he came, Umslopogaas deftly stepped aside, and swinging Inkosi-kaas high above his head with both hands, brought the broad blade down with such fearful force from behind upon the Masai's shoulder just where the neck is set into the frame, that its razor edge shore right through bone and flesh and muscle, almost severing the head and one arm from the body.

"*Ou!*" ejaculated Umslopogaas, contemplating the corpse of his foe; "I have kept my word. It was a good stroke."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ALPHONSE EXPLAINS

And so the fight was ended. On returning from the shocking scene it suddenly struck me that I had seen nothing of Alphonse since the moment, some twenty minutes before—for though this fight has taken a long while to describe, it did not take long in reality—when I had been forced to hit him in the wind with the result of nearly getting myself shot. Fearing that the poor little man had perished in the battle, I began to hunt among the dead for his body, but, not being able either to see or hear anything of it, I concluded that he must have survived, and walked down the side of the kraal where we had first taken our stand, calling him by name. Now some fifteen paces back from the kraal wall stood a very ancient tree of the banyan species. So ancient was it that all the inside had in the course of ages decayed away, leaving nothing but a shell of bark.

“Alphonse,” I called, as I walked down the wall. “Alphonse!”

“Oui, monsieur,” answered a voice. “Here am I.”

I looked round but could see nobody. “Where?” I cried.

“Here am I, monsieur, in the tree.”

I looked, and there, peering out of a hole in the trunk of the banyan about five feet from the ground, I saw a pale face and a pair of large mustachios, one clipped short and the other as lamentably out of curl as the tail of a newly whipped pug. Then, for the first time, I realised what I had suspected before—namely, that Alphonse was an arrant coward. I walked up to him. “Come out of that hole,” I said.

“Is it finished, monsieur?” he asked anxiously; “quite finished? Ah, the horrors I have undergone, and the prayers I have uttered!”

“Come out, you little wretch,” I said, for I did not feel amiable; “it is all over.”

“So, monsieur, then my prayers have prevailed? I emerge,” and he did.

As we were walking down together to join the others, who were gathered in a group by the wide entrance to the kraal, which now resembled a veritable charnel-house, a Masai, who had escaped so far and been hiding under a bush, suddenly sprang up and charged furiously at us. Off went Alphonse with a howl of terror, and after him flew the Masai, bent upon doing some execution before he died. He soon overtook the poor little Frenchman, and would have finished him then and there had I not, just as Alphonse made a last agonized double in the vain hope of avoiding the yard of steel that was flashing in his immediate rear, managed to plant a bullet between the Elmoran’s broad shoulders, which brought matters to a satisfactory conclusion so far as the Frenchman was concerned. But just then he tripped and fell flat, and the body of the Masai fell right on the top of him, moving convulsively in the death struggle. Thereupon there arose such a series of piercing howls that I concluded that before he died the savage must have managed to stab poor Alphonse. I ran up in a hurry and pulled the Masai off, and there beneath him lay Alphonse covered with blood and jerking himself about like a galvanized frog. Poor fellow! thought I, he is done for, and kneeling down by him I began to search for his wound as well as his struggles would allow.

“Oh, the hole in my back!” he yelled. “I am murdered. I am dead. Oh, Annette!”

I searched again, but could see no wound. Then the truth dawned on me—the man was frightened, not hurt.

“Get up!” I shouted, “Get up. Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? You are not touched.”

Thereupon he rose, not a penny the worse. “But, monsieur, I thought I was,” he said apologetically; “I did not know that I had conquered.” Then, giving the body of the Masai a kick, he ejaculated triumphantly, “Ah, dog of a black savage, thou art dead; what victory!”

Thoroughly disgusted, I left Alphonse to look after himself, which he did by following me like a shadow, and proceeded to join the others by the large entrance. The first thing that I saw was Mackenzie, seated on a stone with a handkerchief twisted round his thigh, from which he was bleeding freely, having, indeed, received a spear-thrust that passed right through it, and still holding in his hand his favourite carving knife now bent nearly double, from which I gathered that he had been successful in his rough and tumble with the Elmoran.

“Ah, Quatermain!” he sang out in a trembling, excited voice, “so we have conquered; but it is a sorry sight, a sorry sight;” and then breaking into broad Scotch and glancing at the bent knife in his hand, “It fashes me sair to have bent my best carver on the breastbone of a savage,” and he laughed hysterically. Poor fellow, what between his wound and the killing excitement he had undergone his nerves were much shaken, and no wonder! It is hard upon a man of peace and kindly heart to be called upon to join in such a gruesome business. But there, fate puts us sometimes into very comical positions!

At the kraal entrance the scene was a strange one. The slaughter was over by now, and the wounded men had been put out of their pain, for no quarter had been given. The bush-closed entrance was trampled flat, and in place of bushes it was filled with the bodies of dead men. Dead men, everywhere dead men—they lay about in knots, they were flung by ones and twos in every position upon the open spaces, for all the world like the people on the grass in one of the London parks on a particularly hot Sunday in August. In front of this entrance, on a space which had been cleared of dead and of the shields and spears which were scattered in all directions as they had fallen or been thrown from the hands of their owners, stood and lay the survivors of the awful struggle, and at their feet were four wounded men. We had gone into the fight thirty strong, and of the thirty but fifteen remained alive, and five of them (including Mr Mackenzie) were wounded, two mortally. Of those who held the entrance, Curtis and the Zulu alone remained. Good had lost five men killed, I had lost two killed, and Mackenzie no less than five out of the six with him. As for the survivors they were, with the

exception of myself who had never come to close quarters, red from head to foot—Sir Henry's armour might have been painted that colour—and utterly exhausted, except Umslopogaas, who, as he grimly stood on a little mound above a heap of dead, leaning as usual upon his axe, did not seem particularly distressed, although the skin over the hole in his head palpitated violently.

"Ah, Macumazahn!" he said to me as I limped up, feeling very sick. "I told thee that it would be a good fight, and it has. Never have I seen a better, or one more bravely fought. As for this iron shirt, surely it is 'tagati' [bewitched]; nothing could pierce it. Had it not been for the garment I should have been *there*," and he nodded towards the great pile of dead men beneath him.

"I give it thee; thou art a brave man," said Sir Henry, briefly.

"Koos!" answered the Zulu, deeply pleased both at the gift and the compliment. "Thou, too, Incubu, didst bear thyself as a man, but I must give thee some lessons with the axe; thou dost waste thy strength."

Just then Mackenzie asked about Flossie, and we were all greatly relieved when one of the men said he had seen her flying towards the house with the nurse. Then bearing such of the wounded as could be moved at the moment with us, we slowly made our way towards the Mission-house, spent with toil and bloodshed, but with the glorious sense of victory against overwhelming odds glowing in our hearts. We had saved the life of the little maid, and taught the Masai of those parts a lesson that they will not forget for ten years—but at what a cost!

Painfully we made our way up the hill which, just a little more than an hour before, we had descended under such different circumstances. At the gate of the wall stood Mrs Mackenzie waiting for us. When her eyes fell upon us, however, she shrieked out, and covered her face with her hands, crying, "Horrible, horrible!" Nor were her fears allayed when she discovered her worthy husband being borne upon an improvised stretcher; but her doubts as to the nature of his injury were soon set at rest. Then when in a few brief words I had told her the upshot of the struggle (of which Flossie, who had arrived in safety, had been able to explain something) she came up to me and solemnly kissed me on the forehead.

"God bless you all, Mr Quatermain; you have saved my child's life," she said simply.

Then we went in and got our clothes off and doctored our wounds; I am glad to say I had none, and Sir Henry's and Good's were, thanks to those invaluable chain shirts, of a comparatively harmless nature, and to be dealt with by means of a few stitches and sticking-plaster. Mackenzie's, however, were serious, though fortunately the spear had not severed any large artery. After that we had a bath, and what a luxury it was! And having clad ourselves in ordinary clothes, proceeded to the dining-room, where breakfast was set as usual. It was curious sitting down there, drinking tea and eating toast in an ordinary nineteenth-century sort of way just as though we had not employed the early hours in a regular primitive hand-to-hand Middle-Ages kind of struggle. As Good said, the whole thing seemed more as though one had had a bad nightmare just before being called, than as a deed done. When we were finishing our breakfast the door opened, and in came little Flossie, very pale and tottery, but quite unhurt. She kissed us all and thanked us. I congratulated her on the presence of mind she had shown in shooting the Masai with her Derringer pistol, and thereby saving her own life.

"Oh, don't talk of it!" she said, beginning to cry hysterically; "I shall never forget his face as he went turning round and round, never—I can see it now."

I advised her to go to bed and get some sleep, which she did, and awoke in the evening quite recovered, so far as her strength was concerned. It struck me as an odd thing that a girl who could find the nerve to shoot a huge black ruffian rushing to kill her with a spear should have been so affected at the thought of it afterwards; but it is, after all, characteristic of the sex. Poor Flossie! I fear that her nerves will not get over that night in the Masai camp for many a long year. She told me afterwards that it was the suspense that was so awful, having to sit there hour after hour through the livelong night utterly ignorant as to whether or not any attempt was to be made to rescue her. She said that on the whole she did not expect it, knowing how few of us, and how many of the Masai—who, by the way, came continually to stare at her, most of them never having seen a white person before, and handled her arms and hair with their filthy paws. She said also that she had made up her mind that if she saw no signs of succour by the time the first rays of the rising sun reached the kraal she would kill herself with the pistol, for the nurse had heard the Lygonani say that they were to be tortured to death as soon as the sun was up if one of the white men did not come in their place. It was an awful resolution to have to take, but she meant to act on it, and I have little doubt but what she would have done so. Although she was at an age when in England girls are in the schoolroom and come down to dessert, this "child of the wilderness" had more courage, discretion, and power of mind than many a woman of mature age nurtured in idleness and luxury, with minds carefully drilled and educated out of any originality or self-resource that nature may have endowed them with.

When breakfast was over we all turned in and had a good sleep, only getting up in time for dinner; after which meal we once more adjourned, together with all the available population—men, women, youths, and girls—to the scene of the morning's slaughter, our object being to bury our own dead and get rid of the Masai by flinging them into the Tana River, which ran within fifty yards of the kraal. On reaching the spot we disturbed thousands upon thousands of vultures and a sort of brown bush eagle, which had been flocking to the feast from miles and miles away. Often have I watched these great and repulsive birds, and marvelled at the extraordinary speed with which they arrive on a scene of slaughter. A buck falls to your rifle, and within a minute high in the blue ether appears a speck that gradually grows into a vulture, then another, and another. I have heard many theories advanced to account for the wonderful power of perception nature has given these birds. My own, founded on a good deal of observation, is that the vultures, gifted as they are with powers of sight greater than those given by the most powerful glass, quarter out the heavens among themselves, and hanging in mid-air at a vast height—probably from two to three miles above the earth—keep watch, each of them, over an enormous stretch of country. Presently one of them spies food, and instantly begins to sink towards it. Thereon his next neighbour in the airy heights sailing leisurely through the blue gulf, at a distance perhaps of some miles, follows his example, knowing that food has been sighted. Down he goes, and all the vultures within sight of him follow after, and so do all those in sight of them. In this way the vultures for twenty miles round can be summoned to the feast in a few minutes.

We buried our dead in solemn silence, Good being selected to read the Burial Service over them (in the absence of Mr Mackenzie, confined to bed), as he was generally allowed to possess the best voice and most impressive manner. It was melancholy in the extreme, but, as Good said, it might have been worse, for we might have had "to bury ourselves". I pointed out that this would have been a difficult feat, but I knew what he meant.

Next we set to work to load an ox-wagon which had been brought round from the Mission with the dead bodies of the Masai, having first collected the spears, shields, and other arms. We loaded the wagon five times, about fifty bodies to the load, and emptied it into the Tana. From this it was evident that very few of the Masai could have escaped. The crocodiles must have been well fed that night. One of the last bodies we picked up was that of the sentry at the upper end. I asked Good how he managed to kill him, and he

told me that he had crept up much as Umslopogaas had done, and stabbed him with his sword. He groaned a good deal, but fortunately nobody heard him. As Good said, it was a horrible thing to have to do, and most unpleasantly like cold-blooded murder.

And so with the last body that floated away down the current of the Tana ended the incident of our attack on the Masai camp. The spears and shields and other arms we took up to the Mission, where they filled an outhouse. One incident, however, I must not forget to mention. As we were returning from performing the obsequies of our Masai friends we passed the hollow tree where Alphonse had secreted himself in the morning. It so happened that the little man himself was with us assisting in our unpleasant task with a far better will than he had shown where live Masai were concerned. Indeed, for each body that he handled he found an appropriate sarcasm. Alphonse throwing Masai into the Tana was a very different creature from Alphonse flying for dear life from the spear of a live Masai. He was quite merry and gay, he clapped his hands and warbled snatches of French songs as the grim dead warriors went “splash” into the running waters to carry a message of death and defiance to their kindred a hundred miles below. In short, thinking that he wanted taking down a peg, I suggested holding a court-martial on him for his conduct in the morning.

Accordingly we brought him to the tree where he had hidden, and proceeded to sit in judgment on him, Sir Henry explaining to him in the very best French the unheard-of cowardice and enormity of his conduct, more especially in letting the oiled rag out of his mouth, whereby he nearly aroused the Masai camp with teeth-chattering and brought about the failure of our plans: ending up with a request for an explanation.

But if we expected to find Alphonse at a loss and put him to open shame we were destined to be disappointed. He bowed and scraped and smiled, and acknowledged that his conduct might at first blush appear strange, but really it was not, inasmuch as his teeth were not chattering from fear—oh, dear no! oh, certainly not! he marvelled how the “messieurs” could think of such a thing—but from the chill air of the morning. As for the rag, if monsieur could have but tasted its evil flavour, being compounded indeed of a mixture of stale paraffin oil, grease, and gunpowder, monsieur himself would have spat it out. But he did nothing of the sort; he determined to keep it there till, alas! his stomach “revolted”, and the rag was ejected in an access of involuntary sickness.

“And what have you to say about getting into the hollow tree?” asked Sir Henry, keeping his countenance with difficulty.

“But, monsieur, the explanation is easy; oh, most easy! it was thus: I stood there by the kraal wall, and the little grey monsieur hit me in the stomach so that my rifle exploded, and the battle began. I watched whilst recovering myself from monsieur’s cruel blow; then, messieurs, I felt the heroic blood of my grandfather boil up in my veins. The sight made me mad. I ground my teeth! Fire flashed from my eyes! I shouted ‘En avant!’ and longed to slay. Before my eyes there rose a vision of my heroic grandfather! In short, I was mad! I was a warrior indeed! But then in my heart I heard a small voice: ‘Alphonse,’ said the voice, ‘restrain thyself, Alphonse! Give not way to this evil passion! These men, though black, are brothers! And thou wouldst slay them? Cruel Alphonse!’ The voice was right. I knew it; I was about to perpetrate the most horrible cruelties: to wound! to massacre! to tear limb from limb! And how restrain myself? I looked round; I saw the tree, I perceived the hole. ‘Entomb thyself,’ said the voice, ‘and hold on tight! Thou wilt thus overcome temptation by main force!’ It was bitter, just when the blood of my heroic grandfather boiled most fiercely; but I obeyed! I dragged my unwilling feet along; I entombed myself! Through the hole I watched the battle! I shouted curses and defiance on the foe! I noted them fall with satisfaction! Why not? I had not robbed them of their lives. Their gore was not upon my head. The blood of my heroic—”

“Oh, get along with you, you little cur!” broke out Sir Henry, with a shout of laughter, and giving Alphonse a good kick which sent him flying off with a rueful face.

In the evening I had an interview with Mr Mackenzie, who was suffering a good deal from his wounds, which Good, who was a skilful though unqualified doctor, was treating him for. He told me that this occurrence had taught him a lesson, and that, if he recovered safely, he meant to hand over the Mission to a younger man, who was already on his road to join him in his work, and return to England.

“You see, Quatermain,” he said, “I made up my mind to it, this very morning, when we were creeping down those benighted savages. ‘If we live through this and rescue Flossie alive,’ I said to myself, ‘I will go home to England; I have had enough of savages.’ Well, I did not think that we should live through it at the time; but thanks be to God and you four, we have lived through it, and I mean to stick to my resolution, lest a worse thing befall us. Another such time would kill my poor wife. And besides, Quatermain, between you and me, I am well off; it is thirty thousand pounds I am worth today, and every farthing of it made by honest trade and savings in the bank at Zanzibar, for living here costs me next to nothing. So though it will be hard to leave this place, which I have made to blossom like a rose in the wilderness, and harder still to leave the people I have taught, I shall go.”

“I congratulate you on your decision,” answered I, “for two reasons. The first is, that you owe a duty to your wife and daughter, and more especially to the latter, who should receive some education and mix with girls of her own race, otherwise she will grow up wild, shunning her kind. The other is, that as sure as I am standing here, sooner or later the Masai will try to avenge the slaughter inflicted on them today. Two or three men are sure to have escaped the confusion who will carry the story back to their people, and the result will be that a great expedition will one day be sent against you. It might be delayed for a year, but sooner or later it will come. Therefore, if only for that reason, I should go. When once they have learnt that you are no longer here they may perhaps leave the place alone.”<sup>[8]</sup>

<sup>[8]</sup> By a sad coincidence, since the above was written by Mr Quatermain, the Masai have, in April 1886, massacred a missionary and his wife—Mr and Mrs Houghton—on this very Tana River, and at the spot described. These are, I believe, the first white people who are known to have fallen victims to this cruel tribe.—Editor.

“You are quite right,” answered the clergyman. “I will turn my back upon this place in a month. But it will be a wrench, it will be a wrench.”

## CHAPTER IX.

### INTO THE UNKNOWN

A week had passed, and we all sat at supper one night in the Mission dining-room, feeling very much depressed in spirits, for the reason that we were going to say goodbye to our kind friends, the Mackenzies, and depart upon our way at dawn on the morrow. Nothing more had been seen or heard of the Masai, and save for a spear or two which had been overlooked and was rusting in the grass, and a few empty cartridges where we had stood outside the wall, it would have been difficult to tell that the old cattle kraal at the foot of the slope had been the scene of so desperate a struggle. Mackenzie was, thanks chiefly to his being so temperate a man, rapidly recovering from his wound, and could get about on a pair of crutches; and as for the other wounded men, one had died of gangrene, and the rest were in a fair way to recovery. Mr Mackenzie's caravan of men had also returned from the coast, so that the station was now amply garrisoned.

Under these circumstances we concluded, warm and pressing as were the invitations for us to stay, that it was time to move on, first to Mount Kenia, and thence into the unknown in search of the mysterious white race which we had set our hearts on discovering. This time we were going to progress by means of the humble but useful donkey, of which we had collected no less than a dozen, to carry our goods and chattels, and, if necessary, ourselves. We had now but two Wakwafis left for servants, and found it quite impossible to get other natives to venture with us into the unknown parts we proposed to explore—and small blame to them. After all, as Mr Mackenzie said, it was odd that three men, each of whom possessed many of those things that are supposed to make life worth living—health, sufficient means, and position, etc.—should from their own pleasure start out upon a wild-goose chase, from which the chances were they never would return. But then that is what Englishmen are, adventurers to the backbone; and all our magnificent muster-roll of colonies, each of which will in time become a great nation, testify to the extraordinary value of the spirit of adventure which at first sight looks like a mild form of lunacy. "Adventurer"—he that goes out to meet whatever may come. Well, that is what we all do in the world one way or another, and, speaking for myself, I am proud of the title, because it implies a brave heart and a trust in Providence. Besides, when many and many a noted Croesus, at whose feet the people worship, and many and many a time-serving and word-coining politician are forgotten, the names of those grand-hearted old adventurers who have made England what she is, will be remembered and taught with love and pride to little children whose unshaped spirits yet slumber in the womb of centuries to be. Not that we three can expect to be numbered with such as these, yet have we done something—enough, perhaps, to throw a garment over the nakedness of our folly.

That evening, whilst we were sitting on the veranda, smoking a pipe before turning in, who should come up to us but Alphonse, and, with a magnificent bow, announce his wish for an interview. Being requested to "fire away", he explained at some length that he was anxious to attach himself to our party—a statement that astonished me not a little, knowing what a coward the little man was. The reason, however, soon appeared. Mr Mackenzie was going down to the coast, and thence on to England. Now, if he went down country, Alphonse was persuaded that he would be seized, extradited, sent to France, and to penal servitude. This was the idea that haunted him, as King Charles's head haunted Mr Dick, and he brooded over it till his imagination exaggerated the danger ten times. As a matter of fact, the probability is that his offence against the laws of his country had long ago been forgotten, and that he would have been allowed to pass unmolested anywhere except in France; but he could not be got to see this. Constitutional coward as the little man was, he infinitely preferred to face the certain hardships and great risks and dangers of such an expedition as ours, than to expose himself, notwithstanding his intense longing for his native land, to the possible scrutiny of a police officer—which is after all only another exemplification of the truth that, to the majority of men, a far-off foreseen danger, however shadowy, is much more terrible than the most serious present emergency. After listening to what he had to say, we consulted among ourselves, and finally agreed, with Mr Mackenzie's knowledge and consent, to accept his offer. To begin with, we were very short-handed, and Alphonse was a quick, active fellow, who could turn his hand to anything, and cook—ah, he *could* cook! I believe that he would have made a palatable dish of those gaiters of his heroic grandfather which he was so fond of talking about. Then he was a good-tempered little man, and merry as a monkey, whilst his pompous, vainglorious talk was a source of infinite amusement to us; and what is more, he never bore malice. Of course, his being so pronounced a coward was a great drawback to him, but now that we knew his weakness we could more or less guard against it. So, after warning him of the undoubted risks he was exposing himself to, we told him that we would accept his offer on condition that he would promise implicit obedience to our orders. We also promised to give him wages at the rate of ten pounds a month should he ever return to a civilized country to receive them. To all of this he agreed with alacrity, and retired to write a letter to his Annette, which Mr Mackenzie promised to post when he got down country. He read it to us afterwards, Sir Henry translating, and a wonderful composition it was. I am sure the depth of his devotion and the narration of his sufferings in a barbarous country, "far, far from thee, Annette, for whose adored sake I endure such sorrow," ought to have touched the feelings of the stoniest-hearted chambermaid.

Well, the morrow came, and by seven o'clock the donkeys were all loaded, and the time of parting was at hand. It was a melancholy business, especially saying goodbye to dear little Flossie. She and I were great friends, and often used to have talks together—but her nerves had never got over the shock of that awful night when she lay in the power of those bloodthirsty Masai. "Oh, Mr Quatermain," she cried, throwing her arms round my neck and bursting into tears, "I can't bear to say goodbye to you. I wonder when we shall meet again?"

"I don't know, my dear little girl," I said, "I am at one end of life and you are at the other. I have but a short time before me at best, and most things lie in the past, but I hope that for you there are many long and happy years, and everything lies in the future. By-and-by you will grow into a beautiful woman, Flossie, and all this wild life will be like a far-off dream to you; but I hope, even if we never do meet again, that you will think of your old friend and remember what I say to you now. Always try to be good, my dear, and to do

what is right, rather than what happens to be pleasant, for in the end, whatever sneering people may say, what is good and what is happy are the same. Be unselfish, and whenever you can, give a helping hand to others—for the world is full of suffering, my dear, and to alleviate it is the noblest end that we can set before us. If you do that you will become a sweet and God-fearing woman, and make many people's lives a little brighter, and then you will not have lived, as so many of your sex do, in vain. And now I have given you a lot of old-fashioned advice, and so I am going to give you something to sweeten it with. You see this little piece of paper. It is what is called a cheque. When we are gone give it to your father with this note—not before, mind. You will marry one day, my dear little Flossie, and it is to buy you a wedding present which you are to wear, and your daughter after you, if you have one, in remembrance of Hunter Quatermain.”

Poor little Flossie cried very much, and gave me a lock of her bright hair in return, which I still have. The cheque I gave her was for a thousand pounds (which being now well off, and having no calls upon me except those of charity, I could well afford), and in the note I directed her father to invest it for her in Government security, and when she married or came of age to buy her the best diamond necklace he could get for the money and accumulated interest. I chose diamonds because I think that now that King Solomon's Mines are lost to the world, their price will never be much lower than it is at present, so that if in after-life she should ever be in pecuniary difficulties, she will be able to turn them into money.

Well, at last we got off, after much hand-shaking, hat-waving, and also farewell saluting from the natives, Alphonse weeping copiously (for he has a warm heart) at parting with his master and mistress; and I was not sorry for it at all, for I hate those goodbyes. Perhaps the most affecting thing of all was to witness Umslopogaa's distress at parting with Flossie, for whom the grim old warrior had conceived a strong affection. He used to say that she was as sweet to see as the only star on a dark night, and was never tired of loudly congratulating himself on having killed the Lygonani who had threatened to murder her. And that was the last we saw of the pleasant Mission-house—a true oasis in the desert—and of European civilization. But I often think of the Mackenzies, and wonder how they got down country, and if they are now safe and well in England, and will ever see these words. Dear little Flossie! I wonder how she fares there where there are no black folk to do her imperious bidding, and no sky-piercing snow-clad Kenia for her to look at when she gets up in the morning. And so goodbye to Flossie.

After leaving the Mission-house we made our way, comparatively unmolested, past the base of Mount Kenia, which the Masai call “Donyo Egere”, or the “speckled mountain”, on account of the black patches of rock that appear upon its mighty spire, where the sides are too precipitous to allow of the snow lying on them; then on past the lonely lake Baringo, where one of our two remaining Askari, having unfortunately trodden on a puff-adder, died of snake-bite, in spite of all our efforts to save him. Thence we proceeded a distance of about a hundred and fifty miles to another magnificent snow-clad mountain called Lekakisera, which has never, to the best of my belief, been visited before by a European, but which I cannot now stop to describe. There we rested a fortnight, and then started out into the trackless and uninhabited forest of a vast district called Elgumi. In this forest alone there are more elephants than I ever met with or heard of before. The mighty mammals literally swarm there entirely unmolested by man, and only kept down by the natural law that prevents any animals increasing beyond the capacity of the country they inhabit to support them. Needless to say, however, we did not shoot many of them, first because we could not afford to waste ammunition, of which our stock was getting perilously low, a donkey loaded with it having been swept away in fording a flooded river; and secondly, because we could not carry away the ivory, and did not wish to kill for the mere sake of slaughter. So we let the great beasts be, only shooting one or two in self-protection. In this district, the elephants, being unacquainted with the hunter and his tender mercies, would allow one to walk up to within twenty yards of them in the open, while they stood, with their great ears cocked for all the world like puzzled and gigantic puppy-dogs, and stared at that new and extraordinary phenomenon—man. Occasionally, when the inspection did not prove satisfactory, the staring ended in a trumpet and a charge, but this did not often happen. When it did we had to use our rifles. Nor were elephants the only wild beasts in the great Elgumi forest. All sorts of large game abounded, including lions—confound them! I have always hated the sight of a lion since one bit my leg and lamed me for life. As a consequence, another thing that abounded was the dreadful tsetse fly, whose bite is death to domestic animals. Donkeys have, together with men, hitherto been supposed to enjoy a peculiar immunity from its attacks; but all I have to say, whether it was on account of their poor condition, or because the tsetse in those parts is more poisonous than usual, I do not know, but ours succumbed to its onslaught. Fortunately, however, that was not till two months or so after the bites had been inflicted, when suddenly, after a two days' cold rain, they all died, and on removing the skins of several of them I found the long yellow streaks upon the flesh which are characteristic of death from bites from the tsetse, marking the spot where the insect had inserted his proboscis. On emerging from the great Elgumi forest, we, still steering northwards, in accordance with the information Mr Mackenzie had collected from the unfortunate wanderer who reached him only to die so tragically, struck the base in due course of the large lake, called Lago by the natives, which is about fifty miles long by twenty broad, and of which, it may be remembered, he made mention. Thence we pushed on nearly a month's journey over great rolling uplands, something like those in the Transvaal, but diversified by patches of bush country.

All this time we were continually ascending at the rate of about one hundred feet every ten miles. Indeed the country was on a slope which appeared to terminate at a mass of snow-tipped mountains, for which we were steering, and where we learnt the second lake of which the wanderer had spoken as the lake without a bottom was situated. At length we arrived there, and, having ascertained that there *was* a large lake on top of the mountains, ascended three thousand feet more till we came to a precipitous cliff or edge, to find a great sheet of water some twenty miles square lying fifteen hundred feet below us, and evidently occupying an extinct volcanic crater or craters of vast extent. Perceiving villages on the border of this lake, we descended with great difficulty through forests of pine trees, which now clothed the precipitous sides of the crater, and were well received by the people, a simple, unwarlike folk, who had never seen or even heard of a white man before, and treated us with great reverence and kindness, supplying us with as much food and milk as we could eat and drink. This wonderful and beautiful lake lay, according to our aneroid, at a height of no less than 11,450 feet above sea-level, and its climate was quite cold, and not at all unlike that of England. Indeed, for the first three days of our stay there we saw little or nothing of the scenery on account of an unmistakable Scotch mist which prevailed. It was this rain that set the tsetse poison working in our remaining donkeys, so that they all died.

This disaster left us in a very awkward position, as we had now no means of transport whatever, though on the other hand we had not much to carry. Ammunition, too, was very short, amounting to but one hundred and fifty rounds of rifle cartridges and some fifty shot-gun cartridges. How to get on we did not know; indeed it seemed to us that we had about reached the end of our tether. Even if we had been inclined to abandon the object of our search, which, shadow as it was, was by no means the case, it was ridiculous to think of forcing our way back some seven hundred miles to the coast in our present plight; so we came to the conclusion that the only thing to be done was to stop where we were—the natives being so well disposed and food plentiful—for the present, and abide events, and try to collect information as to the countries beyond.

Accordingly, having purchased a capital log canoe, large enough to hold us all and our baggage, from the headman of the village we were staying in, presenting him with three empty cold-drawn brass cartridges by way of payment, with which he was perfectly delighted, we set out to make a tour of the lake in order to find the most favourable place to make a camp. As we did not know if we should return to this village, we put all our gear into the canoe, and also a quarter of cooked water-buck, which when young is delicious eating, and off we set, natives having already gone before us in light canoes to warn the inhabitants of the other villages of our approach.

As we were paddling leisurely along Good remarked upon the extraordinary deep blue colour of the water, and said that he understood from the natives, who were great fishermen—fish, indeed, being their principal food—that the lake was supposed to be wonderfully deep, and to have a hole at the bottom through which the water escaped and put out some great fire that was raging below.

I pointed out to him that what he had heard was probably a legend arising from a tradition among the people which dated back to the time when one of the extinct parasitic volcanic cones was in activity. We saw several round the borders of the lake which had no doubt been working at a period long subsequent to the volcanic death of the central crater which now formed the bed of the lake itself. When it finally became extinct the people would imagine that the water from the lake had run down and put out the big fire below, more especially as, though it was constantly fed by streams running from the snow-tipped peaks about, there was no visible exit to it.

The farther shore of the lake we found, on approaching it, to consist of a vast perpendicular wall of rock, which held the water without any intermediate sloping bank, as elsewhere. Accordingly we paddled parallel with this precipice, at a distance of about a hundred paces from it, shaping our course for the end of the lake, where we knew that there was a large village.

As we went we began to pass a considerable accumulation of floating rushes, weed, boughs of trees, and other rubbish, brought, Good supposed, to this spot by some current, which he was much puzzled to account for. Whilst we were speculating about this, Sir Henry pointed out a flock of large white swans, which were feeding on the drift some little way ahead of us. Now I had already noticed swans flying about this lake, and, having never come across them before in Africa, was exceedingly anxious to obtain a specimen. I had questioned the natives about them, and learnt that they came from over the mountain, always arriving at certain periods of the year in the early morning, when it was very easy to catch them, on account of their exhausted condition. I also asked them what country they came from, when they shrugged their shoulders, and said that on the top of the great black precipice was stony inhospitable land, and beyond that were mountains with snow, and full of wild beasts, where no people lived, and beyond the mountains were hundreds of miles of dense thorn forest, so thick that even the elephants could not get through it, much less men. Next I asked them if they had ever heard of white people like ourselves living on the farther side of the mountains and the thorn forest, whereat they laughed. But afterwards a very old woman came and told me that when she was a little girl her grandfather had told her that in his youth *his* grandfather had crossed the desert and the mountains, and pierced the thorn forest, and seen a white people who lived in stone kraals beyond. Of course, as this took the tale back some two hundred and fifty years, the information was very indefinite; but still there it was again, and on thinking it over I grew firmly convinced that there was some truth in all these rumours, and equally firmly determined to solve the mystery. Little did I guess in what an almost miraculous way my desire was to be gratified.

Well, we set to work to stalk the swans, which kept drawing, as they fed, nearer and nearer to the precipice, and at last we pushed the canoe under shelter of a patch of drift within forty yards of them. Sir Henry had the shot-gun, loaded with No. 1, and, waiting for a chance, got two in a line, and, firing at their necks, killed them both. Up rose the rest, thirty or more of them, with a mighty splashing; and, as they did so, he gave them the other barrel. Down came one fellow with a broken wing, and I saw the leg of another drop and a few feathers start out of his back; but he went on quite strong. Up went the swans, circling ever higher till at last they were mere specks level with the top of the frowning precipice, when I saw them form into a triangle and head off for the unknown north-east. Meanwhile we had picked up our two dead ones, and beautiful birds they were, weighing not less than about thirty pounds each, and were chasing the winged one, which had scrambled over a mass of driftweed into a pool of clear water beyond. Finding a difficulty in forcing the canoe through the rubbish, I told our only remaining Wakwafi servant, whom I knew to be an excellent swimmer, to jump over, dive under the drift, and catch him, knowing that as there were no crocodiles in this lake he could come to no harm. Entering into the fun of the thing, the man obeyed, and soon was dodging about after the winged swan in fine style, getting gradually nearer to the rock wall, against which the water washed as he did so.

Presently he gave up swimming after the swan, and began to cry out that he was being carried away; and, indeed, we saw that, though he was swimming with all his strength towards us, he was being drawn slowly to the precipice. With a few desperate strokes of our paddles we pushed the canoe through the crust of drift and rowed towards the man as hard as we could, but, fast as we went, he was drawn faster to the rock. Suddenly I saw that before us, just rising eighteen inches or so above the surface of the lake, was what looked like the top of the arch of a submerged cave or railway tunnel. Evidently, from the watermark on the rock several feet above it, it was generally entirely submerged; but there had been a dry season, and the cold had prevented the snow from melting as freely as usual; so the lake was low and the arch showed. Towards this arch our poor servant was being sucked with frightful rapidity. He was not more than ten fathoms from it, and we were about twenty when I saw it, and with little help from us the canoe flew along after him. He struggled bravely, and I thought that we should have saved him, when suddenly I perceived an expression of despair come upon his face, and there before our eyes he was sucked down into the cruel swirling blue depths, and vanished. At the same moment I felt our canoe seized as with a mighty hand, and propelled with resistless force towards the rock.

We realised our danger now and rowed, or rather paddled, furiously in our attempt to get out of the vortex. In vain; in another second we were flying straight for the arch like an arrow, and I thought that we were lost. Luckily I retained sufficient presence of mind to shout out, instantly setting the example by throwing myself into the bottom of the canoe, "Down on your faces—down!" and the others had the sense to take the hint. In another instant there was a grinding noise, and the boat was pushed down till the water began to trickle over the sides, and I thought that we were gone. But no, suddenly the grinding ceased, and we could again feel the canoe flying along. I turned my head a little—I dared not lift it—and looked up. By the feeble light that yet reached the canoe, I could make out that a dense arch of rock hung just over our heads, and that was all. In another minute I could not even see as much as that, for the faint light had merged into shadow, and the shadows had been swallowed up in darkness, utter and complete.

For an hour or so we lay there, not daring to lift our heads for fear lest the brains should be dashed out of them and scarcely able to speak even, on account of the noise of the rushing water which drowned our voices. Not, indeed, that we had much inclination to speak, seeing that we were overwhelmed by the awfulness of our position and the imminent fear of instant death, either by being dashed against the sides of the cavern, or on a rock, or being sucked down in the raging waters, or perhaps asphyxiated by want of air. All of these and many other modes of death presented themselves to my imagination as I lay at the bottom of the canoe, listening to the swirl of the hurrying waters which ran whither we knew not. One only other sound could I hear, and that was Alphonse's intermittent howl of terror coming from the centre of the canoe, and even that seemed faint and unnatural. Indeed, the whole thing overpowered my brain, and I began to believe that I was the victim of some ghastly spirit-shaking nightmare.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE ROSE OF FIRE

On we flew, drawn by the mighty current, till at last I noticed that the sound of the water was not half so deafening as it had been, and concluded that this must be because there was more room for the echoes to disperse in. I could now hear Alphonse's howls much more distinctly; they were made up of the oddest mixture of invocations to the Supreme Power and the name of his beloved Annette that it is possible to conceive; and, in short, though their evident earnestness saved them from profanity, were, to say the least, very remarkable.<sup>[9]</sup> Taking up a paddle I managed to drive it into his ribs, whereon he, thinking that the end had come, howled louder than ever. Then I slowly and cautiously raised myself on my knees and stretched my hand upwards, but could touch no roof. Next I took the paddle and lifted it above my head as high as I could, but with the same result. I also thrust it out laterally to the right and left, but could touch nothing except water. Then I bethought me that there was in the boat, amongst our other remaining possessions, a bull's-eye lantern and a tin of oil. I groped about and found it, and having a match on me carefully lit it, and as soon as the flame had got a hold of the wick I turned it on down the boat. As it happened, the first thing the light lit on was the white and scared face of Alphonse, who, thinking that it was all over at last, and that he was witnessing a preliminary celestial phenomenon, gave a terrific yell and was with difficulty reassured with the paddle. As for the other three, Good was lying on the flat of his back, his eyeglass still fixed in his eye, and gazing blankly into the upper darkness. Sir Henry had his head resting on the thwarts of the canoe, and with his hand was trying to test the speed of the water. But when the beam of light fell upon old Umslopogaas I could really have laughed. I think I have said that we had put a roast quarter of water-buck into the canoe. Well, it so happened that when we all prostrated ourselves to avoid being swept out of the boat and into the water by the rock roof, Umslopogaas's head had come down uncommonly near this roast buck, and so soon as he had recovered a little from the first shock of our position it occurred to him that he was hungry. Thereupon he coolly cut off a chop with Inkosi-kaas, and was now employed in eating it with every appearance of satisfaction. As he afterwards explained, he thought that he was going "on a long journey", and preferred to start on a full stomach. It reminded me of the people who are going to be hanged, and who are generally reported in the English daily papers to have made "an excellent breakfast".

<sup>[9]</sup> Sir Henry afterwards wrote down one of Alphonse's prayers as he overheard it. It ran thus: "Oh, save me! lake me out of this hole! I will promise never to go exploring again! Oh, Annette, why did I leave thee? Oh, my false cousin! Oh, deliver me from this horrible main drain! Never mind the others! Let them drown; they are more used to it than I am, and they cannot cook! Oh Annette! Annette [*crescendo*]! Annette [*fortissimo*]!"

As soon as the others saw that I had managed to light the lamp, we bundled Alphonse into the farther end of the canoe with a threat which calmed him down wonderfully, that if he would insist upon making the darkness hideous with his cries we would put him out of suspense by sending him to join the Wakwafi and wait for Annette in another sphere, and began to discuss the situation as well as we could. First, however, at Good's suggestion, we bound two paddles mast-fashion in the bows so that they might give us warning against any sudden lowering of the roof of the cave or waterway. It was clear to us that we were in an underground river or, as Alphonse defined it, "main drain", which carried off the superfluous waters of the lake. Such rivers are well known to exist in many parts of the world, but it has not often been the evil fortune of explorers to travel by them. That the river was wide we could clearly see, for the light from the bull's-eye lantern failed to reach from shore to shore, although occasionally, when the current swept us either to one side or the other, we could distinguish the rock wall of the tunnel, which, as far as we could make out, appeared to arch about twenty-five feet above our heads. As for the current itself, it ran, Good estimated, at least eight knots, and, fortunately for us, was, as is usual, fiercest in the middle of the stream. Still, our first act was to arrange that one of us, with the lantern and a pole there was in the canoe, should always be in the bows ready, if possible, to prevent us from being stove in against the side of the cave or any projecting rock. Umslopogaas, having already dined, took the first turn. This was absolutely, with one exception, all that we could do towards preserving our safety. The exception was that another of us took up a position in the stern with a paddle by means of which it was possible to steer the canoe more or less and to keep her from the sides of the cave. These matters attended to, we made a somewhat sparing meal off the cold buck's meat (for we did not know how long it might have to last us), and then feeling in rather better spirits I gave my opinion that, serious as it undoubtedly was, I did not consider our position altogether without hope, unless, indeed, the natives were right, and the river plunged straight down into the bowels of the earth. If not, it was clear that it must emerge somewhere, probably on the other side of the mountains, and in that case all we had to think of was to keep ourselves alive till we got there, wherever "there" might be. But, of course, as Good lugubriously pointed out, on the other hand we might fall victims to a hundred unsuspected horrors—or the river might go on winding away inside the earth till it dried up, in which case our fate would indeed be an awful one.

"Well, let us hope for the best and prepare ourselves for the worst," said Sir Henry, who is always cheerful and even spirited—a very tower of strength in the time of trouble. "We have come out of so many queer scrapes together, that somehow I almost fancy we shall come out of this," he added.

This was excellent advice, and we proceeded to take it each in our separate way—that is, except Alphonse, who had by now sunk into a sort of terrified stupor. Good was at the helm and Umslopogaas in the bows, so there was nothing left for Sir Henry and myself to do except to lie down in the canoe and think. It certainly was a curious, and indeed almost a weird, position to be placed in—rushing along, as we were, through the bowels of the earth, borne on the bosom of a Stygian river, something after the fashion of souls being ferried by Charon, as Curtis said. And how dark it was! The feeble ray from our little lamp did but serve to show the darkness. There in the bows sat old Umslopogaas, like Pleasure in the poem,<sup>[10]</sup> watchful and untiring, the pole ready to his hand, and behind in the shadow I could just make out the form of Good peering forward at the ray of light in order to make out how to steer with the paddle that he held and now and again dipped into the water.

“Well, well,” thought I, “you have come in search of adventures, Allan my boy, and you have certainly got them. At your time of life, too! You ought to be ashamed of yourself; but somehow you are not, and, awful as it all is, perhaps you will pull through after all; and if you don’t, why, you cannot help it, you see! And when all’s said and done an underground river will make a very appropriate burying-place.”

At first, however, I am bound to say that the strain upon the nerves was very great. It is trying to the coolest and most experienced person not to know from one hour to another if he has five minutes more to live, but there is nothing in this world that one cannot get accustomed to, and in time we began to get accustomed even to that. And, after all, our anxiety, though no doubt natural, was, strictly speaking, illogical, seeing that we never know what is going to happen to us the next minute, even when we sit in a well-drained house with two policemen patrolling under the window—nor how long we have to live. It is all arranged for us, my sons, so what is the use of bothering?

It was nearly midday when we made our dive into darkness, and we had set our watch (Good and Umslopogaas) at two, having agreed that it should be of a duration of five hours. At seven o’clock, accordingly, Sir Henry and I went on, Sir Henry at the bow and I at the stern, and the other two lay down and went to sleep. For three hours all went well, Sir Henry only finding it necessary once to push us off from the side; and I that but little steering was required to keep us straight, as the violent current did all that was needed, though occasionally the canoe showed a tendency which had to be guarded against to veer and travel broadside on. What struck me as the most curious thing about this wonderful river was: how did the air keep fresh? It was muggy and thick, no doubt, but still not sufficiently so to render it bad or even remarkably unpleasant. The only explanation that I can suggest is that the water of the lake had sufficient air in it to keep the atmosphere of the tunnel from absolute stagnation, this air being given out as it proceeded on its headlong way. Of course I only give the solution of the mystery for what it is worth, which perhaps is not much.

When I had been for three hours or so at the helm, I began to notice a decided change in the temperature, which was getting warmer. At first I took no notice of it, but when, at the expiration of another half-hour, I found that it was getting hotter and hotter, I called to Sir Henry and asked him if he noticed it, or if it was only my imagination. “Noticed it!” he answered; “I should think so. I am in a sort of Turkish bath.” Just about then the others woke up gasping, and were obliged to begin to discard their clothes. Here Umslopogaas had the advantage, for he did not wear any to speak of, except a moocha.

Hotter it grew, and hotter yet, till at last we could scarcely breathe, and the perspiration poured out of us. Half an hour more, and though we were all now stark naked, we could hardly bear it. The place was like an antechamber of the infernal regions proper. I dipped my hand into the water and drew it out almost with a cry; it was nearly boiling. We consulted a little thermometer we had—the mercury stood at 123 degrees. From the surface of the water rose a dense cloud of steam. Alphonse groaned out that we were already in purgatory, which indeed we were, though not in the sense that he meant it. Sir Henry suggested that we must be passing near the seat of some underground volcanic fire, and I am inclined to think, especially in the light of what subsequently occurred, that he was right. Our sufferings for some time after this really pass my powers of description. We no longer perspired, for all the perspiration had been sweated out of us. We simply lay in the bottom of the boat, which we were now physically incapable of directing, feeling like hot embers, and I fancy undergoing very much the same sensations that the poor fish do when they are dying on land—namely, that of slow suffocation. Our skins began to crack, and the blood to throb in our heads like the beating of a steam-engine.

This had been going on for some time, when suddenly the river turned a little, and I heard Sir Henry call out from the bows in a hoarse, startled voice, and, looking up, saw a most wonderful and awful thing. About half a mile ahead of us, and a little to the left of the centre of the stream—which we could now see was about ninety feet broad—a huge pillar-like jet of almost white flame rose from the surface of the water and sprang fifty feet into the air, when it struck the roof and spread out some forty feet in diameter, falling back in curved sheets of fire shaped like the petals of a full-blown rose. Indeed this awful gas jet resembled nothing so much as a great flaming flower rising out of the black water. Below was the straight stalk, a foot or more thick, and above the dreadful bloom. And as for the fearfulness of it and its fierce and awesome beauty, who can describe it? Certainly I cannot. Although we were now some five hundred yards away, it, notwithstanding the steam, lit up the whole cavern as clear as day, and we could see that the roof was here about forty feet above us, and washed perfectly smooth with water. The rock was black, and here and there I could make out long shining lines of ore running through it like great veins, but of what metal they were I know not.

On we rushed towards this pillar of fire, which gleamed fiercer than any furnace ever lit by man.

“Keep the boat to the right, Quatermain—to the right,” shouted Sir Henry, and a minute afterwards I saw him fall forward senseless. Alphonse had already gone. Good was the next to go. There they lay as though dead; only Umslopogaas and I kept our senses. We were within fifty yards of it now, and I saw the Zulu’s head fall forward on his hands. He had gone too, and I was alone. I could not breathe; the fierce heat dried me up. For yards and yards round the great rose of fire the rock-roof was red-hot. The wood of the boat was almost burning. I saw the feathers on one of the dead swans begin to twist and shrivel up; but I would not give in. I knew that if I did we should pass within three or four yards of the gas jet and perish miserably. I set the paddle so as to turn the canoe as far from it as possible, and held on grimly.

My eyes seemed to be bursting from my head, and through my closed lids I could see the fierce light. We were nearly opposite now; it roared like all the fires of hell, and the water boiled furiously around it. Five seconds more. We were past; I heard the roar behind me.

Then I too fell senseless. The next thing that I recollect is feeling a breath of air upon my face. My eyes opened with great difficulty. I looked up. Far, far above me there was light, though around me was great gloom. Then I remembered and looked. The canoe still floated down the river, and in the bottom of it lay the naked forms of my companions. “Were they dead?” I wondered. “Was I left alone in this awful place?” I knew not. Next I became conscious of a burning thirst. I put my hand over the edge of the boat into the water and drew it up again with a cry. No wonder: nearly all the skin was burnt off the back of it. The water, however, was cold, or nearly so, and I drank pints and splashed myself all over. My body seemed to suck up the fluid as one may see a brick wall suck up rain after a drought; but where I was burnt the touch of it caused intense pain. Then I bethought myself of the others, and, dragging myself towards them with difficulty, I sprinkled them with water, and to my joy they began to recover—Umslopogaas first, then the others. Next they drank, absorbing water like so many sponges. Then, feeling chilly—a queer contrast to our recent sensations—we began as best we could to get into our clothes. As we did so Good pointed to the port side of the canoe: it was all blistered with heat, and in places actually charred. Had it been built like our civilized boats, Good said that the planks would certainly have warped and let in enough water to sink us; but fortunately it was dug out of the soft, willowy wood of a single great tree, and had

sides nearly three inches and a bottom four inches thick. What that awful flame was we never discovered, but I suppose that there was at this spot a crack or hole in the bed of the river through which a vast volume of gas forced its way from its volcanic home in the bowels of the earth towards the upper air. How it first became ignited is, of course, impossible to say—probably, I should think, from some spontaneous explosion of mephitic gases.

As soon as we had got some things together and shaken ourselves together a little, we set to work to make out where we were now. I have said that there was light above, and on examination we found that it came from the sky. Our river that was, Sir Henry said, a literal realization of the wild vision of the poet,<sup>[11]</sup> was no longer underground, but was running on its darksome way, not now through “caverns measureless to man”, but between two frightful cliffs which cannot have been less than two thousand feet high. So high were they, indeed, that though the sky was above us, where we were was dense gloom—not darkness indeed, but the gloom of a room closely shuttered in the daytime. Up on either side rose the great straight cliffs, grim and forbidding, till the eye grew dizzy with trying to measure their sheer height. The little space of sky that marked where they ended lay like a thread of blue upon their soaring blackness, which was unrelieved by any tree or creeper. Here and there, however, grew ghostly patches of a long grey lichen, hanging motionless to the rock as the white beard to the chin of a dead man. It seemed as though only the dregs or heavier part of the light had sunk to the bottom of this awful place. No bright-winged sunbeam could fall so low: they died far, far above our heads.

[11]

In Kubla Khan a river ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea

By the river's edge was a little shore formed of round fragments of rock washed into this shape by the constant action of water, and giving the place the appearance of being strewn with thousands of fossil cannon balls. Evidently when the water of the underground river is high there is no beach at all, or very little, between the border of the stream and the precipitous cliffs; but now there was a space of seven or eight yards. And here, on this beach, we determined to land, in order to rest ourselves a little after all that we had gone through and to stretch our limbs. It was a dreadful place, but it would give an hour's respite from the terrors of the river, and also allow of our repacking and arranging the canoe. Accordingly we selected what looked like a favourable spot, and with some little difficulty managed to beach the canoe and scramble out on to the round, inhospitable pebbles.

“My word,” called out Good, who was on shore the first, “what an awful place! It's enough to give one a fit.” And he laughed.

Instantly a thundering voice took up his words, magnifying them a hundred times. “*Give one a fit—Ho! ho! ho!*”—“*A fit, Ho! ho! ho!*” answered another voice in wild accents from far up the cliff—a *fit! a fit! a fit!* chimed in voice after voice—each flinging the words to and fro with shouts of awful laughter to the invisible lips of the other till the whole place echoed with the words and with shrieks of fiendish merriment, which at last ceased as suddenly as they had begun.

“Oh, mon Dieu!” yelled Alphonse, startled quite out of such self-command as he possessed.

“*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*” the Titanic echoes thundered, shrieked, and wailed in every conceivable tone.

“Ah,” said Umslopogaas calmly, “I clearly perceive that devils live here. Well, the place looks like it.”

I tried to explain to him that the cause of all the hubbub was a very remarkable and interesting echo, but he would not believe it.

“Ah,” he said, “I know an echo when I hear one. There was one lived opposite my kraal in Zululand, and the Intombis [maidens] used to talk with it. But if what we hear is a full-grown echo, mine at home can only have been a baby. No, no—they are devils up there. But I don't think much of them, though,” he added, taking a pinch of snuff. “They can copy what one says, but they don't seem to be able to talk on their own account, and they dare not show their faces,” and he relapsed into silence, and apparently paid no further attention to such contemptible fiends.

After this we found it necessary to keep our conversation down to a whisper—for it was really unbearable to have every word one uttered tossed to and fro like a tennis-ball, as precipice called to precipice.

But even our whispers ran up the rocks in mysterious murmurs till at last they died away in long-drawn sighs of sound. Echoes are delightful and romantic things, but we had more than enough of them in that dreadful gulf.

As soon as we had settled ourselves a little on the round stones, we went on to wash and dress our burns as well as we could. As we had but a little oil for the lantern, we could not spare any for this purpose, so we skinned one of the swans, and used the fat off its breast, which proved an excellent substitute. Then we repacked the canoe, and finally began to take some food, of which I need scarcely say we were in need, for our insensibility had endured for many hours, and it was, as our watches showed, midday. Accordingly we seated ourselves in a circle, and were soon engaged in discussing our cold meat with such appetite as we could muster, which, in my case at any rate, was not much, as I felt sick and faint after my sufferings of the previous night, and had besides a racking headache. It was a curious meal. The gloom was so intense that we could scarcely see the way to cut our food and convey it to our mouths. Still we got on pretty well, till I happened to look behind me—my attention being attracted by a noise of something crawling over the stones, and perceived sitting upon a rock in my immediate rear a huge species of black freshwater crab, only it was five times the size of any crab I ever saw. This hideous and loathsome-looking animal had projecting eyes that seemed to glare at one, very long and flexible antennae or feelers, and gigantic claws. Nor was I especially favoured with its company. From every quarter dozens of these horrid brutes were creeping up, drawn, I suppose, by the smell of the food, from between the round stones and out of holes in the precipice. Some were already quite close to us. I stared quite fascinated by the unusual sight, and as I did so I saw one of the beasts stretch out its huge claw and give the unsuspecting Good such a nip behind that he jumped up with a howl, and set the “wild echoes flying” in sober earnest. Just then, too, another, a very large one, got hold of Alphonse's leg, and declined to part with it, and, as may be imagined, a considerable scene ensued. Umslopogaas took his axe and cracked the shell of one with the flat of it, whereon it set up a horrid screaming which the echoes multiplied a thousandfold, and began to foam at the mouth, a proceeding that drew hundreds more of its friends out of unsuspected holes and corners. Those on the spot perceiving that the animal was hurt fell upon it like creditors on a bankrupt, and literally rent it limb from limb with their huge pincers and devoured it, using their claws to convey the fragments to their mouths. Seizing whatever weapons were handy, such as stones or paddles, we commenced a war upon the monsters—whose numbers were increasing by leaps and bounds, and whose stench was overpowering. So fast as we cracked their armour others seized the injured ones and devoured them, foaming at the mouth, and screaming as they did so. Nor did the brutes stop at that. When they could they nipped hold of us—and awful nips they were—or tried to steal the meat. One enormous fellow got hold of the swan we had skinned and began to drag it off. Instantly a score of others flung themselves upon the prey, and then began a ghastly and disgusting scene. How the monsters foamed and screamed, and rent the flesh, and each other! It was a sickening and

unnatural sight, and one that will haunt all who saw it till their dying day—enacted as it was in the deep, oppressive gloom, and set to the unceasing music of the many-toned nerve-shaking echoes. Strange as it may seem to say so, there was something so shockingly human about these fiendish creatures—it was as though all the most evil passions and desires of man had got into the shell of a magnified crab and gone mad. They were so dreadfully courageous and intelligent, and they looked as if they *understood*. The whole scene might have furnished material for another canto of Dante's "Inferno", as Curtis said.

"I say, you fellows, let's get out of this or we shall all go off our heads," sung out Good; and we were not slow to take the hint. Pushing the canoe, around which the animals were now crawling by hundreds and making vain attempts to climb, off the rocks, we bundled into it and got out into mid-stream, leaving behind us the fragments of our meal and the screaming, foaming, stinking mass of monsters in full possession of the ground.

"Those are the devils of the place," said Umslopogaas with the air of one who has solved a problem, and upon my word I felt almost inclined to agree with him.

Umslopogaas' remarks were like his axe—very much to the point.

"What's to be done next?" said Sir Henry blankly.

"Drift, I suppose," I answered, and we drifted accordingly. All the afternoon and well into the evening we floated on in the gloom beneath the far-off line of blue sky, scarcely knowing when day ended and night began, for down in that vast gulf the difference was not marked, till at length Good pointed out a star hanging right above us, which, having nothing better to do, we observed with great interest. Suddenly it vanished, the darkness became intense, and a familiar murmuring sound filled the air. "Underground again," I said with a groan, holding up the lamp. Yes, there was no doubt about it. I could just make out the roof. The chasm had come to an end and the tunnel had recommenced. And then there began another long, long night of danger and horror. To describe all its incidents would be too wearisome, so I will simply say that about midnight we struck on a flat projecting rock in mid-stream and were as nearly as possible overturned and drowned. However, at last we got off, and went upon the uneven tenor of our way. And so the hours passed till it was nearly three o'clock. Sir Henry, Good, and Alphonse were asleep, utterly worn out; Umslopogaas was at the bow with the pole, and I was steering, when I perceived that the rate at which we were travelling had perceptibly increased. Then, suddenly, I heard Umslopogaas make an exclamation, and next second came a sound as of parting branches, and I became aware that the canoe was being forced through hanging bushes or creepers. Another minute, and the breath of sweet open air fanned my face, and I felt that we had emerged from the tunnel and were floating upon clear water. I say felt, for I could see nothing, the darkness being absolutely pitchy, as it often is just before the dawn. But even this could scarcely damp my joy. We were out of that dreadful river, and wherever we might have got to this at least was something to be thankful for. And so I sat down and inhaled the sweet night air and waited for the dawn with such patience as I could command.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE FROWNING CITY

For an hour or more I sat waiting (Umslopogaas having meanwhile gone to sleep also) till at length the east turned grey, and huge misty shapes moved over the surface of the water like ghosts of long-forgotten dawns. They were the vapours rising from their watery bed to greet the sun. Then the grey turned to primrose, and the primrose grew to red. Next, glorious bars of light sprang up across the eastern sky, and through them the radiant messengers of the dawn came speeding upon their arrowy way, scattering the ghostly vapours and awaking the mountains with a kiss, as they flew from range to range and longitude to longitude. Another moment, and the golden gates were open and the sun himself came forth as a bridegroom from his chamber, with pomp and glory and a flashing as of ten million spears, and embraced the night and covered her with brightness, and it was day.

But as yet I could see nothing save the beautiful blue sky above, for over the water was a thick layer of mist exactly as though the whole surface had been covered with billows of cotton wool. By degrees, however, the sun sucked up the mists, and then I saw that we were afloat upon a glorious sheet of blue water of which I could not make out the shore. Some eight or ten miles behind us, however, there stretched as far as the eye could reach a range of precipitous hills that formed a retaining wall of the lake, and I have no doubt but that it was through some entrance in these hills that the subterranean river found its way into the open water. Indeed, I afterwards ascertained this to be the fact, and it will be some indication of the extraordinary strength and directness of the current of the mysterious river that the canoe, even at this distance, was still answering to it. Presently, too, I, or rather Umslopogaas, who woke up just then, discovered another indication, and a very unpleasant one it was. Perceiving some whitish object upon the water, Umslopogaas called my attention to it, and with a few strokes of the paddle brought the canoe to the spot, whereupon we discovered that the object was the body of a man floating face downwards. This was bad enough, but imagine my horror when Umslopogaas having turned him on to his back with the paddle, we recognized in the sunken features the lineaments of—whom do you suppose? None other than our poor servant who had been sucked down two days before in the waters of the subterranean river. It quite frightened me. I thought that we had left him behind for ever, and behold! borne by the current, he had made the awful journey with us, and with us had reached the end. His appearance also was dreadful, for he bore traces of having touched the pillar of fire—one arm being completely shrivelled up and all his hair being burnt off. The features were, as I have said, sunken, and yet they preserved upon them that awful look of despair that I had seen upon his living face as the poor fellow was sucked down. Really the sight unnerved me, weary and shaken as I felt with all that we had gone through, and I was heartily glad when suddenly and without any warning the body began to sink just as though it had had a mission, which having been accomplished, it retired; the real reason no doubt being that turning it on its back allowed a free passage to the gas. Down it went to the transparent depths—fathom after fathom we could trace its course till at last a long line of bright air-bubbles, swiftly chasing each other to the surface, alone remained where it had passed. At length these, too, were gone, and that was an end of our poor servant. Umslopogaas thoughtfully watched the body vanish.

“What did he follow us for?” he asked. “’Tis an ill omen for thee and me, Macumazahn.” And he laughed.

I turned on him angrily, for I dislike these unpleasant suggestions. If people have such ideas, they ought in common decency to keep them to themselves. I detest individuals who make on the subject of their disagreeable presentiments, or who, when they dream that they saw one hanged as a common felon, or some such horror, will insist upon telling one all about it at breakfast, even if they have to get up early to do it.

Just then, however, the others woke up and began to rejoice exceedingly at finding that we were out of that dreadful river and once more beneath the blue sky. Then followed a babel of talk and suggestions as to what we were to do next, the upshot of all of which was that, as we were excessively hungry, and had nothing whatsoever left to eat except a few scraps of biltong (dried game-flesh), having abandoned all that remained of our provisions to those horrible freshwater crabs, we determined to make for the shore. But a new difficulty arose. We did not know where the shore was, and, with the exception of the cliffs through which the subterranean river made its entry, could see nothing but a wide expanse of sparkling blue water. Observing, however, that the long flights of aquatic birds kept flying from our left, we concluded that they were advancing from their feeding-grounds on shore to pass the day in the lake, and accordingly headed the boat towards the quarter whence they came, and began to paddle. Before long, however, a stiffish breeze sprang up, blowing directly in the direction we wanted, so we improvised a sail with a blanket and the pole, which took us along merrily. This done, we devoured the remnants of our biltong, washed down with the sweet lake water, and then lit our pipes and awaited whatever might turn up.

When we had been sailing for an hour, Good, who was searching the horizon with the spy-glass, suddenly announced joyfully that he saw land, and pointed out that, from the change in the colour of the water, he thought we must be approaching the mouth of a river. In another minute we perceived a great golden dome, not unlike that of St Paul’s, piercing the morning mists, and while we were wondering what in the world it could be, Good reported another and still more important discovery, namely, that a small sailing-boat was advancing towards us. This bit of news, which we were very shortly able to verify with our own eyes, threw us into a considerable flutter. That the natives of this unknown lake should understand the art of sailing seemed to suggest that they possessed some degree of civilization. In a few more minutes it became evident that the occupant or occupants of the advancing boat had made us out. For a moment or two she hung in the wind as though in doubt, and then came tacking towards us with great swiftness. In ten more minutes she was within a hundred yards, and we saw that she was a neat little boat—not a canoe “dug out”, but built more or less in the European fashion with planks, and carrying a singularly large sail for her size. But our attention was soon diverted from the boat to her crew, which consisted of a man and a woman, *nearly as white as ourselves*.

We stared at each other in amazement, thinking that we must be mistaken; but no, there was no doubt about it. They were not fair, but the two people in the boat were decidedly of a white as distinguished from a black race, as white, for instance, as Spaniards or Italians. It was a patent fact. So it was true, after all; and, mysteriously led by a Power beyond our own, we had discovered this wonderful people. I could have shouted for joy when I thought of the glory and the wonder of the thing; and as it was, we all shook hands and congratulated each other on the unexpected success of our wild search. All my life had I heard rumours of a white race that existed in the highlands of this vast continent, and longed to put them to the proof, and now here I saw it with my own eyes, and was dumbfounded. Truly, as Sir Henry said, the old Roman was right when he wrote "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi", which he tells me means that out of Africa there always comes some new thing.

The man in the boat was of a good but not particularly fine physique, and possessed straight black hair, regular aquiline features, and an intelligent face. He was dressed in a brown cloth garment, something like a flannel shirt without the sleeves, and in an unmistakable kilt of the same material. The legs and feet were bare. Round the right arm and left leg he wore thick rings of yellow metal that I judged to be gold. The woman had a sweet face, wild and shy, with large eyes and curling brown hair. Her dress was made of the same material as the man's, and consisted, as we afterwards discovered, first of a linen under-garment that hung down to her knee, and then of a single long strip of cloth, about four feet wide by fifteen long, which was wound round the body in graceful folds and finally flung over the left shoulder so that the end, which was dyed blue or purple or some other colour, according to the social standing of the wearer, hung down in front, the right arm and breast being, however, left quite bare. A more becoming dress, especially when, as in the present case, the wearer was young and pretty, it is quite impossible to conceive. Good (who has an eye for such things) was greatly struck with it, and so indeed was I. It was so simple and yet so effective.

Meanwhile, if we had been astonished at the appearance of the man and woman, it was clear that they were far more astonished at us. As for the man, he appeared to be overcome with fear and wonder, and for a while hovered round our canoe, but would not approach. At last, however, he came within hailing distance, and called to us in a language that sounded soft and pleasing enough, but of which we could not understand one word. So we hailed back in English, French, Latin, Greek, German, Zulu, Dutch, Sisutu, Kukuana, and a few other native dialects that I am acquainted with, but our visitor did not understand any of these tongues; indeed, they appeared to bewilder him. As for the lady, she was busily employed in taking stock of us, and Good was returning the compliment by staring at her hard through his eyeglass, a proceeding that she seemed rather to enjoy than otherwise. At length, the man, being unable to make anything of us, suddenly turned his boat round and began to head off for the shore, his little boat skimming away before the wind like a swallow. As she passed across our bows the man turned to attend to the large sail, and Good promptly took the opportunity to kiss his hand to the young lady. I was horrified at this proceeding, both on general grounds and because I feared that she might take offence, but to my delight she did not, for, first glancing round and seeing that her husband, or brother, or whoever he was, was engaged, she promptly kissed hers back.

"Ah!" said I. "It seems that we have at last found a language that the people of this country understand."

"In which case," said Sir Henry, "Good will prove an invaluable interpreter."

I frowned, for I do not approve of Good's frivolities, and he knows it, and I turned the conversation to more serious subjects. "It is very clear to me," I said, "that the man will be back before long with a host of his fellows, so we had best make up our minds as to how we are going to receive them."

"The question is how will they receive us?" said Sir Henry.

As for Good he made no remark, but began to extract a small square tin case that had accompanied us in all our wanderings from under a pile of baggage. Now we had often remonstrated with Good about this tin case, inasmuch as it had been an awkward thing to carry, and he had never given any very explicit account as to its contents; but he had insisted on keeping it, saying mysteriously that it might come in very useful one day.

"What on earth are you going to do, Good?" asked Sir Henry.

"Do—why dress, of course! You don't expect me to appear in a new country in these things, do you?" and he pointed to his soiled and worn garments, which were however, like all Good's things, very tidy, and with every tear neatly mended.

We said no more, but watched his proceedings with breathless interest. His first step was to get Alphonse, who was thoroughly competent in such matters, to trim his hair and beard in the most approved fashion. I think that if he had had some hot water and a cake of soap at hand he would have shaved off the latter; but he had not. This done, he suggested that we should lower the sail of the canoe and all take a bath, which we did, greatly to the horror and astonishment of Alphonse, who lifted his hands and ejaculated that these English were indeed a wonderful people. Umslopogaas, who, though he was, like most high-bred Zulus, scrupulously cleanly in his person, did not see the fun of swimming about in a lake, also regarded the proceeding with mild amusement. We got back into the canoe much refreshed by the cold water, and sat to dry in the sun, whilst Good undid his tin box, and produced first a beautiful clean white shirt, just as it had left a London steam laundry, and then some garments wrapped first in brown, then in white, and finally in silver paper. We watched this undoing with the tenderest interest and much speculation. One by one Good removed the dull husks that hid their splendours, carefully folding and replacing each piece of paper as he did so; and there at last lay, in all the majesty of its golden epaulettes, lace, and buttons, a Commander of the Royal Navy's full-dress uniform—dress sword, cocked hat, shiny patent leather boots and all. We literally gasped.

"What!" we said, "what! Are you going to put those things on?"

"Certainly," he answered composedly; "you see so much depends upon a first impression, especially," he added, "as I observe that there are ladies about. One at least of us ought to be decently dressed."

We said no more; we were simply dumbfounded, especially when we considered the artful way in which Good had concealed the contents of that box for all these months. Only one suggestion did we make—namely, that he should wear his mail shirt next his skin. He replied that he feared it would spoil the set of his coat, now carefully spread in the sun to take the creases out, but finally consented to this precautionary measure. The most amusing part of the affair, however, was to see old Umslopogaas's astonishment and Alphonse's delight at Good's transformation. When at last he stood up in all his glory, even down to the medals on his breast, and contemplated himself in the still waters of the lake, after the fashion of the young gentleman in ancient history, whose name I cannot remember, but who fell in love with his own shadow, the old Zulu could no longer restrain his feelings.

"Oh, Bougwan!" he said. "Oh, Bougwan! I always thought thee an ugly little man, and fat—fat as the cows at calving time; and now thou art like a blue jay when he spreads his tail out. Surely, Bougwan, it hurts my eyes to look at thee."

Good did not much like this allusion to his fat, which, to tell the truth, was not very well deserved, for hard exercise had brought him down three inches; but on the whole he was pleased at Umslopogaas's admiration. As for Alphonse, he was quite delighted.

"Ah! but Monsieur has the beautiful air—the air of the warrior. It is the ladies who will say so when we come to get ashore. Monsieur is complete; he puts me in mind of my heroic grand—"

Here we stopped Alphonse.

As we gazed upon the beauties thus revealed by Good, a spirit of emulation filled our breasts, and we set to work to get ourselves up as well as we could. The most, however, that we were able to do was to array ourselves in our spare suits of shooting clothes, of which we each had several, all the fine clothes in the world could never make it otherwise than scrubby and insignificant; but Sir Henry looked what he is, a magnificent man in his nearly new tweed suit, gaiters, and boots. Alphonse also got himself up to kill, giving an extra turn to his enormous moustaches. Even old Umslopogaas, who was not in a general way given to the vain adorning of his body, took some oil out of the lantern and a bit of tow, and polished up his head-ring with it till it shone like Good's patent leather boots. Then he put on the mail shirt Sir Henry had given him and his "moocha", and, having cleaned up Inkosi-kaas a little, stood forth complete.

All this while, having hoisted the sail again as soon as we had finished bathing, we had been progressing steadily for the land, or, rather, for the mouth of a great river. Presently—in all about an hour and a half after the little boat had left us—we saw emerging from the river or harbour a large number of boats, ranging up to ten or twelve tons burden. One of these was propelled by twenty-four oars, and most of the rest sailed. Looking through the glass we soon made out that the row-boat was an official vessel, her crew being all dressed in a sort of uniform, whilst on the half-deck forward stood an old man of venerable appearance, and with a flowing white beard, and a sword strapped to his side, who was evidently the commander of the craft. The other boats were apparently occupied by people brought out by curiosity, and were rowing or sailing towards us as quickly as they could.

"Now for it," said I. "What is the betting? Are they going to be friendly or to put an end to us?"

Nobody could answer this question, and, not liking the warlike appearance of the old gentleman and his sword, we felt a little anxious.

Just then Good spied a school of hippopotami on the water about two hundred yards off us, and suggested that it would not be a bad plan to impress the natives with a sense of our power by shooting some of them if possible. This, unluckily enough, struck us as a good idea, and accordingly we at once got out our eight-bore rifles, for which we still had a few cartridges left, and prepared for action. There were four of the animals, a big bull, a cow, and two young ones, one three parts grown. We got up to them without difficulty, the great animals contenting themselves with sinking down into the water and rising again a few yards farther on; indeed, their excessive tameness struck me as being peculiar. When the advancing boats were about five hundred yards away, Sir Henry opened the ball by firing at the three parts grown young one. The heavy bullet struck it fair between the eyes, and, crashing through the skull, killed it, and it sank, leaving a long train of blood behind it. At the same moment I fired at the cow, and Good at the old bull. My shot took effect, but not fatally, and down went the hippopotamus with a prodigious splashing, only to rise again presently blowing and grunting furiously, dyeing all the water round her crimson, when I killed her with the left barrel. Good, who is an execrable shot, missed the head of the bull altogether, the bullet merely cutting the side of his face as it passed. On glancing up, after I had fired my second shot, I perceived that the people we had fallen among were evidently ignorant of the nature of firearms, for the consternation caused by our shots and their effect upon the animals was prodigious. Some of the parties in the boats began to cry out in fear; others turned and made off as hard as they could; and even the old gentleman with the sword looked greatly puzzled and alarmed, and halted his big row-boat. We had, however, but little time for observation, for just then the old bull, rendered furious by the wound he had received, rose fair within forty yards of us, glaring savagely. We all fired, and hit him in various places, and down he went, badly wounded. Curiosity now began to overcome the fear of the onlookers, and some of them sailed on up close to us, amongst these being the man and woman whom we had first seen a couple of hours or so before, who drew up almost alongside. Just then the great brute rose again within ten yards of their base, and instantly with a roar of fury made at it open-mouthed. The woman shrieked, and the man tried to give the boat way, but without success. In another second I saw the huge red jaws and gleaming ivories close with a crunch on the frail craft, taking an enormous mouthful out of its side and capsizing it. Down went the boat, leaving its occupants struggling in the water. Next moment, before we could do anything towards saving them, the huge and furious creature was up again and making open-mouthed at the poor girl, who was struggling in the water. Lifting my rifle just as the grinding jaws were about to close on her, I fired over her head right down the hippopotamus's throat. Over he went, and commenced turning round and round, snorting, and blowing red streams of blood through his nostrils. Before he could recover himself, however, I let him have the other barrel in the side of the throat, and that finished him. He never moved or struggled again, but instantly sank. Our next effort was directed towards saving the girl, the man having swum off towards another boat; and in this we were fortunately successful, pulling her into the canoe (amidst the shouts of the spectators) considerably exhausted and frightened, but otherwise unhurt.

Meanwhile the boats had gathered together at a distance, and we could see that the occupants, who were evidently much frightened, were consulting what to do. Without giving them time for further consideration, which we thought might result unfavourably to ourselves, we instantly took our paddles and advanced towards them, Good standing in the bow and taking off his cocked hat politely in every direction, his amiable features suffused by a bland but intelligent smile. Most of the craft retreated as we advanced, but a few held their ground, while the big row-boat came on to meet us. Presently we were alongside, and I could see that our appearance—and especially Good's and Umslopogaas's—filled the venerable-looking commander with astonishment, not unmingled with awe. He was dressed after the same fashion as the man we first met, except that his shirt was not made of brown cloth, but of pure white linen hemmed with purple. The kilt, however, was identical, and so were the thick rings of gold around the arm and beneath the left knee. The rowers wore only a kilt, their bodies being naked to the waist. Good took off his hat to the old gentleman with an extra flourish, and inquired after his health in the purest English, to which he replied by laying the first two fingers of his right hand horizontally across his lips and holding them there for a moment, which we took as his method of salutation. Then he also addressed some remarks to us in the same soft accents that had distinguished our first interviewer, which we were forced to indicate we did not understand by shaking our heads and shrugging our shoulders. This last Alphonse, being to the manner born, did to perfection, and in so polite a way that nobody could take any offence. Then we came to a standstill, till I, being exceedingly hungry, thought I might as well call attention to the fact, and did so first by opening my mouth and pointing down it, and then rubbing my stomach. These signals the old gentleman clearly understood, for he nodded his head vigorously, and pointed towards the harbour; and at the same time one of the men on his boat threw us a line and motioned to us to make it fast, which we did. The row-boat then took us in tow, and went with great rapidity towards the mouth of the river, accompanied by all the other boats. In about twenty minutes more we reached the entrance to the harbour, which was crowded with boats full of people who had come out to see us. We

observed that all the occupants were more or less of the same type, though some were fairer than others. Indeed, we noticed certain ladies whose skin was of a most dazzling whiteness; and the darkest shade of colour which we saw was about that of a rather swarthy Spaniard. Presently the wide river gave a sweep, and when it did so an exclamation of astonishment and delight burst from our lips as we caught our first view of the place that we afterwards knew as Milosis, or the Frowning City (from the prefix *mi*, which means city, and *losis*, a frown).

At a distance of some five hundred yards from the river's bank rose a sheer precipice of granite, two hundred feet or so in height, which had no doubt once formed the bank itself—the intermediate space of land now utilized as docks and roadways having been gained by draining, and deepening and embanking the stream.

On the brow of this precipice stood a great building of the same granite that formed the cliff, built on three sides of a square, the fourth side being open, save for a kind of battlement pierced at its base by a little door. This imposing place we afterwards discovered was the palace of the queen, or rather of the queens. At the back of the palace the town sloped gently upwards to a flashing building of white marble, crowned by the golden dome which we had already observed. The city was, with the exception of this one building, entirely built of red granite, and laid out in regular blocks with splendid roadways between. So far as we could see also the houses were all one-storied and detached, with gardens round them, which gave some relief to the eye wearied with the vista of red granite. At the back of the palace a road of extraordinary width stretched away up the hill for a distance of a mile and a half or so, and appeared to terminate at an open space surrounding the gleaming building that crowned the hill. But right in front of us was the wonder and glory of Milosis—the great staircase of the palace, the magnificence of which took our breath away. Let the reader imagine, if he can, a splendid stairway, sixty-five feet from balustrade to balustrade, consisting of two vast flights, each of one hundred and twenty-five steps of eight inches in height by three feet broad, connected by a flat resting-place sixty feet in length, and running from the palace wall on the edge of the precipice down to meet a waterway or canal cut to its foot from the river. This marvellous staircase was supported upon a single enormous granite arch, of which the resting-place between the two flights formed the crown; that is, the connecting open space lay upon it. From this archway sprang a subsidiary flying arch, or rather something that resembled a flying arch in shape, such as none of us had seen in any other country, and of which the beauty and wonder surpassed all that we had ever imagined. Three hundred feet from point to point, and no less than five hundred and fifty round the curve, that half-arc soared touching the bridge it supported for a space of fifty feet only, one end resting on and built into the parent archway, and the other embedded in the solid granite of the side of the precipice.

This staircase with its supports was, indeed, a work of which any living man might have been proud, both on account of its magnitude and its surpassing beauty. Four times, as we afterwards learnt, did the work, which was commenced in remote antiquity, fail, and was then abandoned for three centuries when half-finished, till at last there rose a youthful engineer named Rademas, who said that he would complete it successfully, and staked his life upon it. If he failed he was to be hurled from the precipice he had undertaken to scale; if he succeeded, he was to be rewarded by the hand of the king's daughter. Five years was given to him to complete the work, and an unlimited supply of labour and material. Three times did his arch fall, till at last, seeing failure to be inevitable, he determined to commit suicide on the morrow of the third collapse. That night, however, a beautiful woman came to him in a dream and touched his forehead, and of a sudden he saw a vision of the completed work, and saw too through the masonry and how the difficulties connected with the flying arch that had hitherto baffled his genius were to be overcome. Then he awoke and once more commenced the work, but on a different plan, and behold! he achieved it, and on the last day of the five years he led the princess his bride up the stair and into the palace. And in due course he became king by right of his wife, and founded the present Zu-Vendi dynasty, which is to this day called the "House of the Stairway", thus proving once more how energy and talent are the natural stepping-stones to grandeur. And to commemorate his triumph he fashioned a statue of himself dreaming, and of the fair woman who touched him on the forehead, and placed it in the great hall of the palace, and there it stands to this day.

Such was the great stair of Milosis, and such the city beyond. No wonder they named it the "Frowning City", for certainly those mighty works in solid granite did seem to frown down upon our littleness in their sombre splendour. This was so even in the sunshine, but when the storm-clouds gathered on her imperial brow Milosis looked more like a supernatural dwelling-place, or some imagining of a poet's brain, than what she is—a mortal city, carved by the patient genius of generations out of the red silence of the mountain side.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SISTER QUEENS

The big rowing-boat glided on up the cutting that ran almost to the foot of the vast stairway, and then halted at a flight of steps leading to the landing-place. Here the old gentleman disembarked, and invited us to do so likewise, which, having no alternative, and being nearly starved, we did without hesitation—taking our rifles with us, however. As each of us landed, our guide again laid his fingers on his lips and bowed deeply, at the same time ordering back the crowds which had assembled to gaze on us. The last to leave the canoe was the girl we had picked out of the water, for whom her companion was waiting. Before she went away she kissed my hand, I suppose as a token of gratitude for having saved her from the fury of the hippopotamus; and it seemed to me that she had by this time quite got over any fear she might have had of us, and was by no means anxious to return in such a hurry to her lawful owners. At any rate, she was going to kiss Good's hand as well as mine, when the young man interfered and led her off. As soon as we were on shore, a number of the men who had rowed the big boat took possession of our few goods and chattels, and started with them up the splendid staircase, our guide indicating to us by means of motions that the things were perfectly safe. This done, he turned to the right and led the way to a small house, which was, as I afterwards discovered, an inn. Entering into a good-sized room, we saw that a wooden table was already furnished with food, presumably in preparation for us. Here our guide motioned us to be seated on a bench that ran the length of the table. We did not require a second invitation, but at once fell to ravenously on the viands before us, which were served on wooden platters, and consisted of cold goat's-flesh, wrapped up in some kind of leaf that gave it a delicious flavour, green vegetables resembling lettuces, brown bread, and red wine poured from a skin into horn mugs. This wine was peculiarly soft and good, having something of the flavour of Burgundy. Twenty minutes after we sat down at that hospitable board we rose from it, feeling like new men. After all that we had gone through we needed two things, food and rest, and the food of itself was a great blessing to us. Two girls of the same charming cast of face as the first whom we had seen waited on us while we ate, and very nicely they did it. They were also dressed in the same fashion namely, in a white linen petticoat coming to the knee, and with the toga-like garment of brown cloth, leaving bare the right arm and breast. I afterwards found out that this was the national dress, and regulated by an iron custom, though of course subject to variations. Thus, if the petticoat was pure white, it signified that the wearer was unmarried; if white, with a straight purple stripe round the edge, that she was married and a first or legal wife; if with a black stripe, that she was a widow. In the same way the toga, or "kaf", as they call it, was of different shades of colour, from pure white to the deepest brown, according to the rank of the wearer, and embroidered at the end in various ways. This also applies to the "shirts" or tunics worn by the men, which varied in material and colour; but the kilts were always the same except as regards quality. One thing, however, every man and woman in the country wore as the national insignia, and that was the thick band of gold round the right arm above the elbow, and the left leg beneath the knee. People of high rank also wore a torque of gold round the neck, and I observed that our guide had one on.

So soon as we had finished our meal our venerable conductor, who had been standing all the while, regarding us with inquiring eyes, and our guns with something as like fear as his pride would allow him to show, bowed towards Good, whom he evidently took for the leader of the party on account of the splendour of his apparel, and once more led the way through the door and to the foot of the great staircase. Here we paused for a moment to admire two colossal lions, each hewn from a single block of pure black marble, and standing rampant on the terminations of the wide balustrades of the staircase. These lions are magnificently executed, and it is said were sculptured by Rademas, the great prince who designed the staircase, and who was without doubt, to judge from the many beautiful examples of his art that we saw afterwards, one of the finest sculptors who ever lived, either in this or any other country. Then we climbed almost with a feeling of awe up that splendid stair, a work executed for all time and that will, I do not doubt, be admired thousands of years hence by generations unborn unless an earthquake should throw it down. Even Umslopogaas, who as a general rule made it a point of honour not to show astonishment, which he considered undignified, was fairly startled out of himself, and asked if the "bridge had been built by men or devils", which was his vague way of alluding to any supernatural power. But Alphonse did not care about it. Its solid grandeur jarred upon the frivolous little Frenchman, who said that it was all "tres magnifique, mais triste—ah, triste!" and went on to suggest that it would be improved if the balustrades were *gilt*.

On we went up the first flight of one hundred and twenty steps, across the broad platform joining it to the second flight, where we paused to admire the glorious view of one of the most beautiful stretches of country that the world can show, edged by the blue waters of the lake. Then we passed on up the stair till at last we reached the top, where we found a large standing space to which there were three entrances, all of small size. Two of these opened on to rather narrow galleries or roadways cut in the face of the precipice that ran round the palace walls and led to the principal thoroughfares of the city, and were used by the inhabitants passing up and down from the docks. These were defended by gates of bronze, and also, as we afterwards learnt, it was possible to let down a portion of the roadways themselves by withdrawing certain bolts, and thus render it quite impracticable for an enemy to pass. The third entrance consisted of a flight of ten curved black marble steps leading to a doorway cut in the palace wall. This wall was in itself a work of art, being built of huge blocks of granite to the height of forty feet, and so fashioned that its face was concave, whereby it was rendered practically impossible for it to be scaled. To this doorway our guide led us. The door, which was massive, and made of wood protected by an outer gate of bronze, was closed; but on our approach it was thrown wide, and we were met by the challenge of a sentry, who was armed with a heavy triangular-bladed spear, not unlike a bayonet in shape, and a cutting sword, and protected by breast and back plates of skilfully prepared hippopotamus hide, and a small round shield fashioned of the same tough material. The sword instantly attracted our attention; it was practically identical with the one in the possession of Mr Mackenzie which he had obtained from the ill-starred wanderer. There was no mistaking the gold-lined fretwork cut in the thickness of the blade. So the man had told the truth after all. Our guide instantly gave a password, which the soldier acknowledged by letting the iron shaft of his spear fall with a ringing sound upon the pavement, and we passed on through the massive wall into the courtyard of the palace. This was

about forty yards square, and laid out in flower-beds full of lovely shrubs and plants, many of which were quite new to me. Through the centre of this garden ran a broad walk formed of powdered shells brought from the lake in the place of gravel. Following this we came to another doorway with a round heavy arch, which is hung with thick curtains, for there are no doors in the palace itself. Then came another short passage, and we were in the great hall of the palace, and once more stood astonished at the simple and yet overpowering grandeur of the place.

The hall is, as we afterwards learnt, one hundred and fifty feet long by eighty wide, and has a magnificent arched roof of carved wood. Down the entire length of the building there are on either side, and at a distance of twenty feet from the wall, slender shafts of black marble springing sheer to the roof, beautifully fluted, and with carved capitals. At one end of this great place which these pillars support is the group of which I have already spoken as executed by the King Rademas to commemorate his building of the staircase; and really, when we had time to admire it, its loveliness almost struck us dumb. The group, of which the figures are in white, and the rest is black marble, is about half as large again as life, and represents a young man of noble countenance and form sleeping heavily upon a couch. One arm is carelessly thrown over the side of this couch, and his head reposes upon the other, its curling locks partially hiding it. Bending over him, her hand resting on his forehead, is a draped female form of such white loveliness as to make the beholder's breath stand still. And as for the calm glory that shines upon her perfect face—well, I can never hope to describe it. But there it rests like the shadow of an angel's smile; and power, love, and divinity all have their part in it. Her eyes are fixed upon the sleeping youth, and perhaps the most extraordinary thing about this beautiful work is the success with which the artist has succeeded in depicting on the sleeper's worn and weary face the sudden rising of a new and spiritual thought as the spell begins to work within his mind. You can see that an inspiration is breaking in upon the darkness of the man's soul as the dawn breaks in upon the darkness of night. It is a glorious piece of statuary, and none but a genius could have conceived it. Between each of the black marble columns is some such group of figures, some allegorical, and some representing the persons and wives of deceased monarchs or great men; but none of them, in our opinion, comes up to the one I have described, although several are from the hand of the sculptor and engineer, King Rademas.

In the exact centre of the hall was a solid mass of black marble about the size of a baby's arm-chair, which it rather resembled in appearance. This, as we afterwards learnt, was the sacred stone of this remarkable people, and on it their monarchs laid their hand after the ceremony of coronation, and swore by the sun to safeguard the interests of the empire, and to maintain its customs, traditions, and laws. This stone was evidently exceedingly ancient (as indeed all stones are), and was scored down its sides with long marks or lines, which Sir Henry said proved it to have been a fragment that at some remote period in its history had been ground in the iron jaws of glaciers. There was a curious prophecy about this block of marble, which was reported among the people to have fallen from the sun, to the effect that when it was shattered into fragments a king of alien race should rule over the land. As the stone, however, looked remarkably solid, the native princes seemed to have a fair chance of keeping their own for many a long year.

At the end of the hall is a dais spread with rich carpets, on which two thrones are set side by side. These thrones are shaped like great chairs, and made of solid gold. The seats are richly cushioned, but the backs are left bare, and on each is carved the emblem of the sun, shooting out his fiery rays in all directions. The footstools are golden lions couchant, with yellow topazes set in them for eyes. There are no other gems about them.

The place is lighted by numerous but narrow windows, placed high up, cut on the principle of the loopholes to be seen in ancient castles, but innocent of glass, which was evidently unknown here.

Such is a brief description of this splendid hall in which we now found ourselves, compiled of course from our subsequent knowledge of it. On this occasion we had but little time for observation, for when we entered we perceived that a large number of men were gathered together in front of the two thrones, which were unoccupied. The principal among them were seated on carved wooden chairs ranged to the right and the left of the thrones, but not in front of them, and were dressed in white tunics, with various embroideries and different coloured edgings, and armed with the usual pierced and gold-inlaid swords. To judge from the dignity of their appearance, they seemed one and all to be individuals of very great importance. Behind each of these great men stood a small knot of followers and attendants.

Seated by themselves, in a little group to the left of the throne, were six men of a different stamp. Instead of wearing the ordinary kilt, they were clothed in long robes of pure white linen, with the same symbol of the sun that is to be seen on the back of the chairs, emblazoned in gold thread upon the breast. This garment was girt up at the waist with a simple golden curb-like chain, from which hung long elliptic plates of the same metal, fashioned in shiny scales like those of a fish, that, as their wearers moved, jingled and reflected the light. They were all men of mature age and of a severe and impressive cast of features, which was rendered still more imposing by the long beards they wore.

The personality of one individual among them, however, impressed us at once. He seemed to stand out among his fellows and refuse to be overlooked. He was very old—eighty at least—and extremely tall, with a long snow-white beard that hung nearly to his waist. His features were aquiline and deeply cut, and his eyes were grey and cold-looking. The heads of the others were bare, but this man wore a round cap entirely covered with gold embroidery, from which we judged that he was a person of great importance; and indeed we afterwards discovered that he was Agon, the High Priest of the country. As we approached, all these men, including the priests, rose and bowed to us with the greatest courtesy, at the same time placing the two fingers across the lips in salutation. Then soft-footed attendants advanced from between the pillars, bearing seats, which were placed in a line in front of the thrones. We three sat down, Alphonse and Umslopogaas standing behind us. Scarcely had we done so when there came a blare of trumpets from some passage to the right, and a similar blare from the left. Next a man with a long white wand of ivory appeared just in front of the right-hand throne, and cried out something in a loud voice, ending with the word *Nyleptha*, repeated three times; and another man, similarly attired, called out a similar sentence before the other throne, but ending with the word *Sorais*, also repeated thrice. Then came the tramp of armed men from each side entrance, and in filed about a score of picked and magnificently accoutred guards, who formed up on each side of the thrones, and let their heavy iron-handled spears fall simultaneously with a clash upon the black marble flooring. Another double blare of trumpets, and in from either side, each attended by six maidens, swept the two Queens of Zu-Vendis, everybody in the hall rising to greet them as they came.

I have seen beautiful women in my day, and am no longer thrown into transports at the sight of a pretty face; but language fails me when I try to give some idea of the blaze of loveliness that then broke upon us in the persons of these sister Queens. Both were young—perhaps five-and-twenty years of age—both were tall and exquisitely formed; but there the likeness stopped. One, Nyleptha, was a woman of dazzling fairness; her right arm and breast bare, after the custom of her people, showed like snow even against her white and gold-embroidered "kaf", or toga. And as for her sweet face, all I can say is, that it was one that few men could look on and forget. Her hair, a veritable crown of gold, clustered in short ringlets over her shapely head, half hiding the ivory brow, beneath which eyes

of deep and glorious grey flashed out in tender majesty. I cannot attempt to describe her other features, only the mouth was most sweet, and curved like Cupid's bow, and over the whole countenance there shone an indescribable look of loving-kindness, lit up by a shadow of delicate humour that lay upon her face like a touch of silver on a rosy cloud.

She wore no jewels, but on her neck, arm, and knee were the usual torques of gold, in this instance fashioned like a snake; and her dress was of pure white linen of excessive fineness, plentifully embroidered with gold and with the familiar symbols of the sun.

Her twin sister, Sorais, was of a different and darker type of beauty. Her hair was wavy like Nyleptha's but coal-black, and fell in masses on her shoulders; her complexion was olive, her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; the lips were full, and I thought rather cruel. Somehow her face, quiet and even cold as it is, gave an idea of passion in repose, and caused one to wonder involuntarily what its aspect would be if anything occurred to break the calm. It reminded me of the deep sea, that even on the bluest days never loses its visible stamp of power, and in its murmuring sleep is yet instinct with the spirit of the storm. Her figure, like her sister's, was almost perfect in its curves and outlines, but a trifle more rounded, and her dress was absolutely the same.

As this lovely pair swept onwards to their respective thrones, amid the deep attentive silence of the Court, I was bound to confess to myself that they did indeed fulfil my idea of royalty. Royal they were in every way—in form, in grace, and queenly dignity, and in the barbaric splendour of their attendant pomp. But methought that they needed no guards or gold to proclaim their power and bind the loyalty of wayward men. A glance from those bright eyes or a smile from those sweet lips, and while the red blood runs in the veins of youth women such as these will never lack subjects ready to do their biddings to the death.

But after all they were women first and queens afterwards, and therefore not devoid of curiosity. As they passed to their seats I saw both of them glance swiftly in our direction. I saw, too, that their eyes passed by me, seeing nothing to charm them in the person of an insignificant and grizzled old man. Then they looked with evident astonishment on the grim form of old Umslopogaas, who raised his axe in salutation. Attracted next by the splendour of Good's apparel, for a second their glance rested on him like a humming moth upon a flower, then off it darted to where Sir Henry Curtis stood, the sunlight from a window playing upon his yellow hair and peaked beard, and marking the outlines of his massive frame against the twilight of the somewhat gloomy hall. He raised his eyes, and they met the fair Nyleptha's full, and thus for the first time the goodliest man and woman that it has ever been my lot to see looked one upon another. And why it was I know not, but I saw the swift blood run up Nyleptha's skin as the pink lights run up the morning sky. Red grew her fair bosom and shapely arm, red the swanlike neck; the rounded cheeks blushed red as the petals of a rose, and then the crimson flood sank back to whence it came and left her pale and trembling.

I glanced at Sir Henry. He, too, had coloured up to the eyes.

"Oh, my word!" thought I to myself, "the ladies have come on the stage, and now we may look to the plot to develop itself." And I sighed and shook my head, knowing that the beauty of a woman is like the beauty of the lightning—a destructive thing and a cause of desolation. By the time that I had finished my reflections both the Queens were on the thrones, for all this had happened in about six seconds. Once more the unseen trumpets blared out, and then the Court seated itself, and Queen Sorais motioned to us to do likewise.

Next from among the crowd whither he had withdrawn stepped forward our guide, the old gentleman who had towed us ashore, holding by the hand the girl whom we had seen first and afterwards rescued from the hippopotamus. Having made obeisance he proceeded to address the Queens, evidently describing to them the way and place where we had been found. It was most amusing to watch the astonishment, not unmingled with fear, reflected upon their faces as they listened to his tale. Clearly they could not understand how we had reached the lake and been found floating on it, and were inclined to attribute our presence to supernatural causes. Then the narrative proceeded, as I judged from the frequent appeals that our guide made to the girl, to the point where we had shot the hippopotami, and we at once perceived that there was something very wrong about those hippopotami, for the history was frequently interrupted by indignant exclamations from the little group of white-robed priests and even from the courtiers, while the two Queens listened with an amazed expression, especially when our guide pointed to the rifles in our hands as being the means of destruction. And here, to make matters clear, I may as well explain at once that the inhabitants of Zu-Vendis are sun-worshippers, and that for some reason or another the hippopotamus is sacred among them. Not that they do not kill it, because at a certain season of the year they slaughter thousands—which are specially preserved in large lakes up the country—and use their hides for armour for soldiers; but this does not prevent them from considering these animals as sacred to the sun.<sup>[12]</sup> Now, as ill luck would have it, the particular hippopotami we had shot were a family of tame animals that were kept in the mouth of the port and daily fed by priests whose special duty it was to attend to them. When we shot them I thought that the brutes were suspiciously tame, and this was, as we afterwards ascertained, the cause of it. Thus it came about that in attempting to show off we had committed sacrilege of a most aggravated nature.

[12] Mr Quatermain does not seem to have been aware that it is common for animal-worshipping people to annually sacrifice the beasts they adore. See Herodotus, ii. 45.—Editor.

When our guide had finished his tale, the old man with the long beard and round cap, whose appearance I have already described, and who was, as I have said, the High Priest of the country, and known by the name of Agon, rose and commenced an impassioned harangue. I did not like the look of his cold grey eye as he fixed it on us. I should have liked it still less had I known that in the name of the outraged majesty of his god he was demanding that the whole lot of us should be offered up as a sacrifice by means of being burnt alive.

After he had finished speaking the Queen Sorais addressed him in a soft and musical voice, and appeared, to judge from his gestures of dissent, to be putting the other side of the question before him. Then Nyleptha spoke in liquid accents. Little did we know that she was pleading for our lives. Finally, she turned and addressed a tall, soldierlike man of middle age with a black beard and a long plain sword, whose name, as we afterwards learnt, was Nasta, and who was the greatest lord in the country; apparently appealing to him for support. Now when Sir Henry had caught her eye and she had blushed so rosy red, I had seen that the incident had not escaped this man's notice, and, what is more, that it was eminently disagreeable to him, for he bit his lip and his hand tightened on his sword-hilt. Afterwards we learnt that he was an aspirant for the hand of this Queen in marriage, which accounted for it. This being so, Nyleptha could not have appealed to a worse person, for, speaking in slow, heavy tones, he appeared to confirm all that the High Priest Agon had said. As he spoke, Sorais put her elbow on her knee, and, resting her chin on her hand, looked at him with a suppressed smile upon her lips, as though she saw through the man, and was determined to be his match; but Nyleptha grew very angry, her cheek flushed, her eyes flashed, and she did indeed look lovely. Finally she turned to Agon and seemed to give some sort of qualified assent, for he bowed at her words; and as she spoke she moved her hands as though to emphasize what she said; while all the

time Sorais kept her chin on her hand and smiled. Then suddenly Nyleptha made a sign, the trumpets blew again, and everybody rose to leave the hall save ourselves and the guards, whom she motioned to stay.

When they were all gone she bent forward and, smiling sweetly, partially by signs and partially by exclamations made it clear to us that she was very anxious to know where we came from. The difficulty was how to explain, but at last an idea struck me. I had my large pocket-book in my pocket and a pencil. Taking it out, I made a little sketch of a lake, and then as best I could I drew the underground river and the lake at the other end. When I had done this I advanced to the steps of the throne and gave it to her. She understood it at once and clapped her hands with delight, and then descending from the throne took it to her sister Sorais, who also evidently understood. Next she took the pencil from me, and after examining it with curiosity proceeded to make a series of delightful little sketches, the first representing herself holding out both hands in welcome, and a man uncommonly like Sir Henry taking them. Next she drew a lovely little picture of a hippopotamus rolling about dying in the water, and of an individual, in whom we had no difficulty in recognizing Agon the High Priest, holding up his hands in horror on the bank. Then followed a most alarming picture of a dreadful fiery furnace and of the same figure, Agon, poking us into it with a forked stick. This picture perfectly horrified me, but I was a little reassured when she nodded sweetly and proceeded to make a fourth drawing—a man again uncommonly like Sir Henry, and of two women, in whom I recognized Sorais and herself, each with one arm around him, and holding a sword in protection over him. To all of these Sorais, who I saw was employed in carefully taking us all in—especially Curtis—signified her approval by nodding.

At last Nyleptha drew a final sketch of a rising sun, indicating that she must go, and that we should meet on the following morning; whereat Sir Henry looked so disappointed that she saw it, and, I suppose by way of consolation, extended her hand to him to kiss, which he did with pious fervour. At the same time Sorais, off whom Good had never taken his eyeglass during the whole indaba [interview], rewarded him by giving him her hand to kiss, though, while she did so, her eyes were fixed upon Sir Henry. I am glad to say that I was not implicated in these proceedings; neither of them gave *me* her hand to kiss.

Then Nyleptha turned and addressed the man who appeared to be in command of the bodyguard, apparently from her manner and his frequent obeisances, giving him very stringent and careful orders; after which, with a somewhat coquettish nod and smile, she left the hall, followed by Sorais and most of the guards.

When the Queens had gone, the officer whom Nyleptha had addressed came forward and with many tokens of deep respect led us from the hall through various passages to a sumptuous set of apartments opening out of a large central room lighted with brazen swinging lamps (for it was now dusk) and richly carpeted and strewn with couches. On a table in the centre of the room was set a profusion of food and fruit, and, what is more, flowers. There was a delicious wine also in ancient-looking sealed earthenware flagons, and beautifully chased golden and ivory cups to drink it from. Servants, male and female, also were there to minister to us, and whilst we ate, from some recess outside the apartment

“The silver lute did speak between  
The trumpet’s lordly blowing:”

and altogether we found ourselves in a sort of earthly paradise which was only disturbed by the vision of that disgusting High Priest who intended to commit us to the flames. But so very weary were we with our labours that we could scarcely keep ourselves awake through the sumptuous meal, and as soon as it was over we indicated that we desired to sleep. As a further precaution against surprise we left Umslopogaas with his axe to sleep in the main chamber near the curtained doorways leading to the apartments which we occupied respectively, Good and I in the one, and Sir Henry and Alphonse in the other. Then throwing off our clothes, with the exception of the mail shirts, which we considered it safer to keep on, we flung ourselves down upon the low and luxurious couches, and drew the silk-embroidered coverlids over us.

In two minutes I was just dropping off when I was aroused by Good’s voice.

“I say, Quatermain,” he said, “did you ever see such eyes?”

“Eyes!” I said, crossly; “what eyes?”

“Why, the Queen’s, of course! Sorais, I mean—at least I think that is her name.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I yawned; “I didn’t notice them much: I suppose they are good eyes,” and again I dropped off.

Five minutes or so elapsed, and I was once more awakened.

“I say, Quatermain,” said the voice.

“Well,” I answered testily, “what is it now?”

“Did you notice her ankle? The shape—”

This was more than I could stand. By my bed stood the veldtschoons I had been wearing. Moved quite beyond myself, I took them up and threw them straight at Good’s head—and hit it.

Afterwards I slept the sleep of the just, and a very heavy sleep it must be. As for Good, I don’t know if he went to sleep or if he continued to pass Sorais’ beauties in mental review, and, what is more, I don’t care.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ABOUT THE ZU-VENDI PEOPLE

And now the curtain is down for a few hours, and the actors in this novel drama are plunged in dewy sleep. Perhaps we should except Nyleptha, whom the reader may, if poetically inclined, imagine lying in her bed of state encompassed by her maidens, tiring women, guards, and all the other people and appurtenances that surround a throne, and yet not able to slumber for thinking of the strangers who had visited a country where no such strangers had ever come before, and wondering, as she lay awake, who they were and what their past has been, and if she was ugly compared to the women of their native place. I, however, not being poetically inclined, will take advantage of the lull to give some account of the people among whom we found ourselves, compiled, needless to state, from information which we subsequently collected.

The name of this country, to begin at the beginning, is Zu-Vendis, from Zu, "yellow", and Vendis, "place or country". Why it is called the Yellow Country I have never been able to ascertain accurately, nor do the inhabitants themselves know. Three reasons are, however, given, each of which would suffice to account for it. The first is that the name owes its origin to the great quantity of gold that is found in the land. Indeed, in this respect Zu-Vendis is a veritable Eldorado, the precious metal being extraordinarily plentiful. At present it is collected from purely alluvial diggings, which we subsequently inspected, and which are situated within a day's journey from Milosis, being mostly found in pockets and in nuggets weighing from an ounce up to six or seven pounds in weight. But other diggings of a similar nature are known to exist, and I have besides seen great veins of gold-bearing quartz. In Zu-Vendis gold is a much commoner metal than silver, and thus it has curiously enough come to pass that silver is the legal tender of the country.

The second reason given is, that at certain times of the year the native grasses of the country, which are very sweet and good, turn as yellow as ripe corn; and the third arises from a tradition that the people were originally yellow skinned, but grew white after living for many generations upon these high lands. Zu-Vendis is a country about the size of France, is, roughly speaking, oval in shape; and on every side cut off from the surrounding territory by illimitable forests of impenetrable thorn, beyond which are said to be hundreds of miles of morasses, deserts, and great mountains. It is, in short, a huge, high tableland rising up in the centre of the dark continent, much as in southern Africa flat-topped mountains rise from the level of the surrounding veldt. Milosis itself lies, according to my aneroid, at a level of about nine thousand feet above the sea, but most of the land is even higher, the greatest elevation of the open country being, I believe, about eleven thousand feet. As a consequence the climate is, comparatively speaking, a cold one, being very similar to that of southern England, only brighter and not so rainy. The land is, however, exceedingly fertile, and grows all cereals and temperate fruits and timber to perfection; and in the lower-lying parts even produces a hardy variety of sugar-cane. Coal is found in great abundance, and in many places crops out from the surface; and so is pure marble, both black and white. The same may be said of almost every metal except silver, which is scarce, and only to be obtained from a range of mountains in the north.

Zu-Vendis comprises in her boundaries a great variety of scenery, including two ranges of snow-clad mountains, one on the western boundary beyond the impenetrable belt of thorn forest, and the other piercing the country from north to south, and passing at a distance of about eighty miles from Milosis, from which town its higher peaks are distinctly visible. This range forms the chief watershed of the land. There are also three large lakes—the biggest, namely that whereon we emerged, and which is named Milosis after the city, covering some two hundred square miles of country—and numerous small ones, some of them salt.

The population of this favoured land is, comparatively speaking, dense, numbering at a rough estimate from ten to twelve millions. It is almost purely agricultural in its habits, and divided into great classes as in civilized countries. There is a territorial nobility, a considerable middle class, formed principally of merchants, officers of the army, etc.; but the great bulk of the people are well-to-do peasants who live upon the lands of the lords, from whom they hold under a species of feudal tenure. The best bred people in the country are, as I think I have said, pure whites with a somewhat southern cast of countenance; but the common herd are much darker, though they do not show any negro or other African characteristics. As to their descent I can give no certain information. Their written records, which extend back for about a thousand years, give no hint of it. One very ancient chronicler does indeed, in alluding to some old tradition that existed in his day, talk of it as having probably originally "come down with the people from the coast", but that may mean little or nothing. In short, the origin of the Zu-Vendi is lost in the mists of time. Whence they came or of what race they are no man knows. Their architecture and some of their sculptures suggest an Egyptian or possibly an Assyrian origin; but it is well known that their present remarkable style of building has only sprung up within the last eight hundred years, and they certainly retain no traces of Egyptian theology or customs. Again, their appearance and some of their habits are rather Jewish; but here again it seems hardly conceivable that they should have utterly lost all traces of the Jewish religion. Still, for aught I know, they may be one of the lost ten tribes whom people are so fond of discovering all over the world, or they may not. I do not know, and so can only describe them as I find them, and leave wiser heads than mine to make what they can out of it, if indeed this account should ever be read at all, which is exceedingly doubtful.

And now after I have said all this, I am, after all, going to hazard a theory of my own, though it is only a very little one, as the young lady said in mitigation of her baby. This theory is founded on a legend which I have heard among the Arabs on the east coast, which is to the effect that "more than two thousand years ago" there were troubles in the country which was known as Babylonia, and that thereon a vast horde of Persians came down to Bushire, where they took ship and were driven by the north-east monsoon to the east coast of Africa, where, according to the legend, "the sun and fire worshippers" fell into conflict with the belt of Arab settlers who even then were settled on the east coast, and finally broke their way through them, and, vanishing into the interior, were no more seen. Now, I ask, is it not at least possible that the Zu-Vendi people are the descendants of these "sun and fire worshippers" who broke through the Arabs and vanished? As a matter of fact, there is a good deal in their characters and customs that tallies with the somewhat vague ideas that I have of Persians. Of course we have no books of reference here, but Sir Henry says that if his memory

does not fail him, there was a tremendous revolt in Babylon about 500 BC, whereon a vast multitude were expelled from the city. Anyhow, it is a well-established fact that there have been many separate emigrations of Persians from the Persian Gulf to the east coast of Africa up to as lately as seven hundred years ago. There are Persian tombs at Kilwa, on the east coast, still in good repair, which bear dates showing them to be just seven hundred years old.<sup>[13]</sup>

[13] There is another theory which might account for the origin of the Zu-Vendi which does not seem to have struck my friend Mr Quatermain and his companions, and that is, that they are descendants of the Phœnicians. The cradle of the Phœnician race is supposed to have been on the western shore of the Persian Gulf. Thence, as there is good evidence to show, they emigrated in two streams, one of which took possession of the shores of Palestine, while the other is supposed by savants to have immigrated down the coast of Eastern Africa where, near Mozambique, signs and remains of their occupation are not wanting. Indeed, it would have been very extraordinary if they did not, when leaving the Persian Gulf, make straight for the East Coast, seeing that the north-east monsoon blows for six months in the year dead in that direction, while for the other six months it blows back again. And, by the way of illustrating the probability, I may add that to this day a very extensive trade is carried on between the Persian Gulf and Lamu and other East African ports as far south as Madagascar, which is of course the ancient Ebony Isle of the "Arabian Nights".—Editor.

In addition to being an agricultural people, the Zu-Vendi are, oddly enough, excessively warlike, and as they cannot from the exigencies of their position make war upon other nations, they fight among each other like the famed Kilkenny cats, with the happy result that the population never outgrows the power of the country to support it. This habit of theirs is largely fostered by the political condition of the country. The monarchy is nominally an absolute one, save in so far as it is tempered by the power of the priests and the informal council of the great lords; but, as in many other institutions, the king's writ does not run unquestioned throughout the length and breadth of the land. In short, the whole system is a purely feudal one (though absolute serfdom or slavery is unknown), all the great lords holding nominally from the throne, but a number of them being practically independent, having the power of life and death, waging war against and making peace with their neighbours as the whim or their interests lead them, and even on occasion rising in open rebellion against their royal master or mistress, and, safely shut up in their castles and fenced cities, as far from the seat of government, successfully defying them for years.

Zu-Vendis has had its king-makers as well as England, a fact that will be well appreciated when I state that eight different dynasties have sat upon the throne in the last one thousand years, every one of which took its rise from some noble family that succeeded in grasping the purple after a sanguinary struggle. At the date of our arrival in the country things were a little better than they had been for some centuries, the last king, the father of Nyleptha and Sorais, having been an exceptionally able and vigorous ruler, and, as a consequence, he kept down the power of the priests and nobles. On his death, two years before we reached Zu-Vendis, the twin sisters, his children, were, following an ancient precedent, called to the throne, since an attempt to exclude either would instantly have provoked a sanguinary civil war; but it was generally felt in the country that this measure was a most unsatisfactory one, and could hardly be expected to be permanent. Indeed, as it was, the various intrigues that were set on foot by ambitious nobles to obtain the hand of one or other of the queens in marriage had disquieted the country, and the general opinion was that there would be bloodshed before long.

I will now pass on to the question of the Zu-Vendi religion, which is nothing more or less than sun-worship of a pronounced and highly developed character. Around this sun-worship is grouped the entire social system of the Zu-Vendi. It sends its roots through every institution and custom of the land. From the cradle to the grave the Zu-Vendi follows the sun in every sense of the saying. As an infant he is solemnly held up in its light and dedicated to "the symbol of good, the expression of power, and the hope of Eternity", the ceremony answering to our baptism. Whilst still a tiny child, his parents point out the glorious orb as the presence of a visible and beneficent god, and he worships it at its up-rising and down-setting. Then when still quite small, he goes, holding fast to the pendent end of his mother's "kaf" (toga), up to the temple of the Sun of the nearest city, and there, when at midday the bright beams strike down upon the golden central altar and beat back the fire that burns thereon, he hears the white-robed priests raise their solemn chant of praise and sees the people fall down to adore, and then, amidst the blowing of the golden trumpets, watches the sacrifice thrown into the fiery furnace beneath the altar. Here he comes again to be declared "a man" by the priests, and consecrated to war and to good works; here before the solemn altar he leads his bride; and here too, if differences shall unhappily arise, he divorces her.

And so on, down life's long pathway till the last mile is travelled, and he comes again armed indeed, and with dignity, but no longer a man. Here they bear him dead and lay his bier upon the falling brazen doors before the eastern altar, and when the last ray from the setting sun falls upon his white face the bolts are drawn and he vanishes into the raging furnace beneath and is ended.

The priests of the Sun do not marry, but are recruited as young men specially devoted to the work by their parents and supported by the State. The nomination to the higher offices of the priesthood lies with the Crown, but once appointed the nominees cannot be dispossessed, and it is scarcely too much to say that they really rule the land. To begin with, they are a united body sworn to obedience and secrecy, so that an order issued by the High Priest at Milosis will be instantly and unhesitatingly acted upon by the resident priest of a little country town three or four hundred miles off. They are the judges of the land, criminal and civil, an appeal lying only to the lord paramount of the district, and from him to the king; and they have, of course, practically unlimited jurisdiction over religious and moral offences, together with a right of excommunication, which, as in the faiths of more highly civilized lands, is a very effective weapon. Indeed, their rights and powers are almost unlimited, but I may as well state here that the priests of the Sun are wise in their generation, and do not push things too far. It is but very seldom that they go to extremes against anybody, being more inclined to exercise the prerogative of mercy than run the risk of exasperating the powerful and vigorous-minded people on whose neck they have set their yoke, lest it should rise and break it off altogether.

Another source of the power of the priests is their practical monopoly of learning, and their very considerable astronomical knowledge, which enables them to keep a hold on the popular mind by predicting eclipses and even comets. In Zu-Vendis only a few of the upper classes can read and write, but nearly all the priests have this knowledge, and are therefore looked upon as learned men.

The law of the country is, on the whole, mild and just, but differs in several respects from our civilized law. For instance, the law of England is much more severe upon offences against property than against the person, as becomes a people whose ruling passion is money. A man may half kick his wife to death or inflict horrible sufferings upon his children at a much cheaper rate of punishment than he can compound for the theft of a pair of old boots. In Zu-Vendis this is not so, for there they rightly or wrongly look upon the person as of more consequence than goods and chattels, and not, as in England, as a sort of necessary appendage to the latter. For murder the punishment is death, for treason death, for defrauding the orphan and the widow, for sacrilege, and for attempting to quit the country (which is looked on as a sacrilege) death. In each case the method of execution is the same, and a rather awful one. The culprit is thrown alive into the fiery furnace beneath one of the altars to the Sun. For all other offences, including the offence of idleness, the punishment is forced labour upon the vast national buildings which are always going on in some part of the country, with or without periodical floggings, according to the crime.

The social system of the Zu-Vendi allows considerable liberty to the individual, provided he does not offend against the laws and customs of the country. They are polygamous in theory, though most of them have only one wife on account of the expense. By law a man is bound to provide a separate establishment for each wife. The first wife also is the legal wife, and her children are said to be “of the house of the Father”. The children of the other wives are of the houses of their respective mothers. This does not, however, imply any slur upon either mother or children. Again, a first wife can, on entering into the married state, make a bargain that her husband shall marry no other wife. This, however, is very rarely done, as the women are the great upholders of polygamy, which not only provides for their surplus numbers but gives greater importance to the first wife, who is thus practically the head of several households. Marriage is looked upon as primarily a civil contract, and, subject to certain conditions and to a proper provision for children, is dissoluble at the will of both contracting parties, the divorce, or “unloosing”, being formally and ceremoniously accomplished by going through certain portions of the marriage ceremony backwards.

The Zu-Vendi are on the whole a very kindly, pleasant, and light-hearted people. They are not great traders and care little about money, only working to earn enough to support themselves in that class of life in which they were born. They are exceedingly conservative, and look with disfavour upon changes. Their legal tender is silver, cut into little squares of different weights; gold is the baser coin, and is about of the same value as our silver. It is, however, much prized for its beauty, and largely used for ornaments and decorative purposes. Most of the trade, however, is carried on by means of sale and barter, payment being made in kind. Agriculture is the great business of the country, and is really well understood and carried out, most of the available acreage being under cultivation. Great attention is also given to the breeding of cattle and horses, the latter being unsurpassed by any I have ever seen either in Europe or Africa.

The land belongs theoretically to the Crown, and under the Crown to the great lords, who again divide it among smaller lords, and so on down to the little peasant farmer who works his forty “reestu” (acres) on a system of half-profits with his immediate lord. In fact the whole system is, as I have said, distinctly feudal, and it interested us much to meet with such an old friend far in the unknown heart of Africa.

The taxes are very heavy. The State takes a third of a man’s total earnings, and the priesthood about five per cent on the remainder. But on the other hand, if a man through any cause falls into *bona fide* misfortune the State supports him in the position of life to which he belongs. If he is idle, however, he is sent to work on the Government undertakings, and the State looks after his wives and children. The State also makes all the roads and builds all town houses, about which great care is shown, letting them out to families at a small rent. It also keeps up a standing army of about twenty thousand men, and provides watchmen, etc. In return for their five per cent the priests attend to the service of the temples, carry out all religious ceremonies, and keep schools, where they teach whatever they think desirable, which is not very much. Some of the temples also possess private property, but priests as individuals cannot hold property.

And now comes a question which I find some difficulty in answering. Are the Zu-Vendi a civilized or barbarous people? Sometimes I think the one, sometimes the other. In some branches of art they have attained the very highest proficiency. Take for instance their buildings and their statuary. I do not think that the latter can be equalled either in beauty or imaginative power anywhere in the world, and as for the former it may have been rivalled in ancient Egypt, but I am sure that it has never been since. But, on the other hand, they are totally ignorant of many other arts. Till Sir Henry, who happened to know something about it, showed them how to do it by mixing silica and lime, they could not make a piece of glass, and their crockery is rather primitive. A water-clock is their nearest approach to a watch; indeed, ours delighted them exceedingly. They know nothing about steam, electricity, or gunpowder, and mercifully for themselves nothing about printing or the penny post. Thus they are spared many evils, for of a truth our age has learnt the wisdom of the old-world saying, “He who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.”

As regards their religion, it is a natural one for imaginative people who know no better, and might therefore be expected to turn to the sun and worship him as the all-Father, but it cannot justly be called elevating or spiritual. It is true that they do sometimes speak of the sun as the “garment of the Spirit”, but it is a vague term, and what they really adore is the fiery orb himself. They also call him the “hope of eternity”, but here again the meaning is vague, and I doubt if the phrase conveys any very clear impression to their minds. Some of them do indeed believe in a future life for the good—I know Nyleptha does firmly—but it is a private faith arising from the promptings of the spirit, not an essential of their creed. So on the whole I cannot say that I consider this sun-worship as a religion indicative of a civilized people, however magnificent and imposing its ritual, or however moral and high-sounding the maxims of its priests, many of whom, I am sure, have their own opinions on the whole subject; though of course they have nothing but praise for a system which provides them with so many of the good things of this world.

There are now only two more matters to which I need allude—namely, the language and the system of calligraphy. As for the former, it is soft-sounding, and very rich and flexible. Sir Henry says that it sounds something like modern Greek, but of course it has no connection with it. It is easy to acquire, being simple in its construction, and a peculiar quality about it is its euphony, and the way in which the sound of the words adapts itself to the meaning to be expressed. Long before we mastered the language, we could frequently make out what was meant by the ring of the sentence. It is on this account that the language lends itself so well to poetical declamation, of which these remarkable people are very fond. The Zu-Vendi alphabet seems, Sir Henry says, to be derived, like every other known system of letters, from a Phœnician source, and therefore more remotely still from the ancient Egyptian hieratic writing. Whether this is a fact I cannot say, not being learned in such matters. All I know about it is that their alphabet consists of twenty-two characters, of which a few, notably B, E, and O, are not very unlike our own. The whole affair is, however, clumsy and puzzling.<sup>[14]</sup> But as the people of Zu-Vendi are not given to the writing of novels, or of anything except business documents and records of the briefest character, it answers their purpose well enough.

[14] There are twenty-two letters in the Phœnician alphabet (see Appendix, Maspero’s *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l’Orient*, etc.) Unfortunately Mr Quatremain gives us no specimen of the Zu-Vendi writing, but what he here states seems to go a long way towards substantiating the theory advanced in the note on p. 139.—Editor.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE FLOWER TEMPLE

It was half-past eight by my watch when I woke on the morning following our arrival at Milosis, having slept almost exactly twelve hours, and I must say that I did indeed feel better. Ah, what a blessed thing is sleep! and what a difference twelve hours of it or so makes to us after days and nights of toil and danger. It is like going to bed one man and getting up another.

I sat up upon my silken couch—never had I slept upon such a bed before—and the first thing that I saw was Good's eyeglass fixed on me from the recesses of his silken couch. There was nothing else of him to be seen except his eyeglass, but I knew from the look of it that he was awake, and waiting till I woke up to begin.

"I say, Quatermain," he commenced sure enough, "did you observe her skin? It is as smooth as the back of an ivory hairbrush."

"Now look here, Good," I remonstrated, when there came a sound at the curtain, which, on being drawn, admitted a functionary, who signified by signs that he was there to lead us to the bath. We gladly consented, and were conducted to a delightful marble chamber, with a pool of running crystal water in the centre of it, into which we gaily plunged. When we had bathed, we returned to our apartment and dressed, and then went into the central room where we had supped on the previous evening, to find a morning meal already prepared for us, and a capital meal it was, though I should be puzzled to describe the dishes. After breakfast we lounged round and admired the tapestries and carpets and some pieces of statuary that were placed about, wondering the while what was going to happen next. Indeed, by this time our minds were in such a state of complete bewilderment that we were, as a matter of fact, ready for anything that might arrive. As for our sense of astonishment, it was pretty well obliterated. Whilst we were still thus engaged, our friend the captain of the guard presented himself, and with many obeisances signified that we were to follow him, which we did, not without doubts and heart-searchings—for we guessed that the time had come when we should have to settle the bill for those confounded hippopotami with our cold-eyed friend Agon, the High Priest. However, there was no help for it, and personally I took great comfort in the promise of the protection of the sister Queens, knowing that if ladies have a will they can generally find a way; so off we started as though we liked it. A minute's walk through a passage and an outer court brought us to the great double gates of the palace that open on to the wide highway which runs uphill through the heart of Milosis to the Temple of the Sun a mile away, and thence down the slope on the farther side of the temple to the outer wall of the city.

These gates are very large and massive, and an extraordinarily beautiful work in metal. Between them—for one set is placed at the entrance to an interior, and one at that of the exterior wall—is a fosse, forty-five feet in width. This fosse is filled with water and spanned by a drawbridge, which when lifted makes the palace nearly impregnable to anything except siege guns. As we came, one half of the wide gates were flung open, and we passed over the drawbridge and presently stood gazing up one of the most imposing, if not the most imposing, roadways in the world. It is a hundred feet from curb to curb, and on either side, not cramped and crowded together, as is our European fashion, but each standing in its own grounds, and built equidistant from and in similar style to the rest, are a series of splendid, single-storied mansions, all of red granite. These are the town houses of the nobles of the Court, and stretch away in unbroken lines for a mile or more till the eye is arrested by the glorious vision of the Temple of the Sun that crowns the hill and heads the roadway.

As we stood gazing at this splendid sight, of which more anon, there suddenly dashed up to the gateway four chariots, each drawn by two white horses. These chariots are two-wheeled, and made of wood. They are fitted with a stout pole, the weight of which is supported by leathern girths that form a portion of the harness. The wheels are made with four spokes only, are tired with iron, and quite innocent of springs. In the front of the chariot, and immediately over the pole, is a small seat for the driver, railed round to prevent him from being jolted off. Inside the machine itself are three low seats, one at each side, and one with the back to the horses, opposite to which is the door. The whole vehicle is lightly and yet strongly made, and, owing to the grace of the curves, though primitive, not half so ugly as might be expected.

But if the chariots left something to be desired, the horses did not. They were simply splendid, not very large but strongly built, and well ribbed up, with small heads, remarkably large and round hoofs, and a great look of speed and blood. I have often wondered whence this breed, which presents many distinct characteristics, came, but like that of its owners, its history is obscure. Like the people the horses have always been there. The first and last of these chariots were occupied by guards, but the centre two were empty, except for the driver, and to these we were conducted. Alphonse and I got into the first, and Sir Henry, Good, and Umslopogaas into the one behind, and then suddenly off we went. And we did go! Among the Zu-Vendi it is not usual to trot horses either riding or driving, especially when the journey to be made is a short one—they go at full gallop. As soon as we were seated the driver called out, the horses sprang forward, and we were whirled away at a speed sufficient to take one's breath, and which, till I got accustomed to it, kept me in momentary fear of an upset. As for the wretched Alphonse, he clung with a despairing face to the side of what he called this "devil of a fiacre", thinking that every moment was his last. Presently it occurred to him to ask where we were going, and I told him that, as far as I could ascertain, we were going to be sacrificed by burning. You should have seen his face as he grasped the side of the vehicle and cried out in his terror.

But the wild-looking charioteer only leant forward over his flying steeds and shouted; and the air, as it went singing past, bore away the sound of Alphonse's lamentations.

And now before us, in all its marvellous splendour and dazzling loveliness, shone out the Temple of the Sun—the peculiar pride of the Zu-Vendi, to whom it was what Solomon's, or rather Herod's, Temple was to the Jews. The wealth, and skill, and labour of generations had been given to the building of this wonderful place, which had been only finally completed within the last fifty years. Nothing was spared that the country could produce, and the result was indeed worthy of the effort, not so much on account of its size

—for there are larger fanes in the world—as because of its perfect proportions, the richness and beauty of its materials, and the wonderful workmanship. The building (that stands by itself on a space of some eight acres of garden ground on the hilltop, around which are the dwelling-places of the priests) is built in the shape of a sunflower, with a dome-covered central hall, from which radiate twelve petal-shaped courts, each dedicated to one of the twelve months, and serving as the repositories of statues reared in memory of the illustrious dead. The width of the circle beneath the dome is three hundred feet, the height of the dome is four hundred feet, and the length of the rays is one hundred and fifty feet, and the height of their roofs three hundred feet, so that they run into the central dome exactly as the petals of the sunflower run into the great raised heart. Thus the exact measurement from the centre of the central altar to the extreme point of any one of the rounded rays would be three hundred feet (the width of the circle itself), or a total of six hundred feet from the rounded extremity of one ray or petal to the extremity of the opposite one.<sup>[15]</sup>

[15] These are internal measurements.—A. Q.

The building itself is of pure and polished white marble, which shows out in marvellous contrast to the red granite of the frowning city, on whose brow it glistens indeed like an imperial diadem upon the forehead of a dusky queen. The outer surface of the dome and of the twelve petal courts is covered entirely with thin sheets of beaten gold; and from the extreme point of the roof of each of these petals a glorious golden form with a trumpet in its hand and widespread wings is figured in the very act of soaring into space. I really must leave whoever reads this to imagine the surpassing beauty of these golden roofs flashing when the sun strikes—flashing like a thousand fires aflame on a mountain of polished marble—so fiercely that the reflection can be clearly seen from the great peaks of the range a hundred miles away.

It is a marvellous sight—this golden flower upborne upon the cool white marble walls, and I doubt if the world can show such another. What makes the whole effect even more gorgeous is that a belt of a hundred and fifty feet around the marble wall of the temple is planted with an indigenous species of sunflower, which were at the time when we first saw them a sheet of golden bloom.

The main entrance to this wonderful place is between the two northernmost of the rays or petal courts, and is protected first by the usual bronze gates, and then by doors made of solid marble, beautifully carved with allegorical subjects and overlaid with gold. When these are passed there is only the thickness of the wall, which is, however, twenty-five feet (for the Zu-Vendi build for all time), and another slight wall also of white marble, introduced in order to avoid causing a visible gap in the inner skin of the wall, and you stand in the circular hall under the great dome. Advancing to the central altar you look upon as beautiful a sight as the imagination of man can conceive. You are in the middle of the holy place, and above you the great white marble dome (for the inner skin, like the outer, is of polished marble throughout) arches away in graceful curves something like that of St Paul's in London, only at a slighter angle, and from the funnel-like opening at the exact apex a bright beam of light pours down upon the golden altar. At the east and the west are other altars, and other beams of light stab the sacred twilight to the heart. In every direction, "white, mystic, wonderful", open out the ray-like courts, each pierced through by a single arrow of light that serves to illumine its lofty silence and dimly to reveal the monuments of the dead.<sup>[16]</sup>

[16] Light was also admitted by sliding shutters under the eaves of the dome and in the roof.—A. Q.

Overcome at so awe-inspiring a sight, the vast loveliness of which thrills the nerves like a glance from beauty's eyes, you turn to the central golden altar, in the midst of which, though you cannot see it now, there burns a pale but steady flame crowned with curls of faint blue smoke. It is of marble overlaid with pure gold, in shape round like the sun, four feet in height, and thirty-six in circumference. Here also, hinged to the foundations of the altar, are twelve petals of beaten gold. All night and, except at one hour, all day also, these petals are closed over the altar itself exactly as the petals of a water-lily close over the yellow crown in stormy weather; but when the sun at midday pierces through the funnel in the dome and lights upon the golden flower, the petals open and reveal the hidden mystery, only to close again when the ray has passed.

Nor is this all. Standing in semicircles at equal distances from each other on the north and south of the sacred place are ten golden angels, or female winged forms, exquisitely shaped and draped. These figures, which are slightly larger than life-size, stand with bent heads in an attitude of adoration, their faces shadowed by their wings, and are most imposing and of exceeding beauty.

There is but one thing further which calls for description in this altar, which is, that to the east the flooring in front of it is not of pure white marble, as elsewhere throughout the building, but of solid brass, and this is also the case in front of the other two altars.

The eastern and western altars, which are semicircular in shape, and placed against the wall of the building, are much less imposing, and are not enfolded in golden petals. They are, however, also of gold, the sacred fire burns on each, and a golden-winged figure stands on either side of them. Two great golden rays run up the wall behind them, but where the third or middle one should be is an opening in the wall, wide on the outside, but narrow within, like a loophole turned inwards. Through the eastern loophole stream the first beams of the rising sun, and strike right across the circle, touching the folded petals of the great gold flower as they pass till they impinge upon the western altar. In the same way at night the last rays of the sinking sun rest for a while on the eastern altar before they die away into darkness. It is the promise of the dawn to the evening and the evening to the dawn.

With the exception of those three altars and the winged figures about them, the whole space beneath the vast white dome is utterly empty and devoid of ornamentation—a circumstance that to my fancy adds greatly to its splendour.

Such is a brief description of this wonderful and lovely building, to the glories of which, to my mind so much enhanced by their complete simplicity, I only wish I had the power to do justice. But I cannot, so it is useless talking more about it. But when I compare this great work of genius to some of the tawdry buildings and tinsel ornamentation produced in these latter days by European ecclesiastical architects, I feel that even highly civilized art might learn something from the Zu-Vendi masterpieces. I can only say that the exclamation which sprang to my lips as soon as my eyes first became accustomed to the dim light of that glorious building, and its white and curving beauties, perfect and thrilling as those of a naked goddess, grew upon me one by one, was, "Well! a dog would feel religious here." It is vulgarly put, but perhaps it conveys my meaning more clearly than any polished utterance.

At the temple gates our party was received by a guard of soldiers, who appeared to be under the orders of a priest; and by them we were conducted into one of the ray or "petal" courts, as the priests call them, and there left for at least half-an-hour. Here we conferred together, and realizing that we stood in great danger of our lives, determined, if any attempt should be made upon us, to sell them as dearly as we could—Umslopogaas announcing his fixed intention of committing sacrilege on the person of Agon, the High Priest, by splitting his head with Inkosi-kaas. From where we stood we could perceive that an immense multitude were pouring into the temple, evidently in expectation of some unusual event, and I could not help fearing that we had to do with it. And here I may explain that every day, when the sunlight falls upon the central altar, and the trumpets sound, a burnt sacrifice is offered to the Sun,

consisting generally of the carcase of a sheep or ox, or sometimes of fruit or corn. This event comes off about midday; of course, not always exactly at that hour, but as Zu-Vendis is situated not far from the Line, although—being so high above the sea it is very temperate—midday and the falling of the sunlight on the altar were generally simultaneous. Today the sacrifice was to take place at about eight minutes past twelve.

Just at twelve o'clock a priest appeared, and made a sign, and the officer of the guard signified to us that we were expected to advance, which we did with the best grace that we could muster, all except Alphonse, whose irrepressible teeth instantly began to chatter. In a few seconds we were out of the court and looking at a vast sea of human faces stretching away to the farthest limits of the great circle, all straining to catch a glimpse of the mysterious strangers who had committed sacrilege; the first strangers, mind you, who, to the knowledge of the multitude, had ever set foot in Zu-Vendis since such time that the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.

As we appeared there was a murmur through the vast crowd that went echoing away up the great dome, and we saw a visible blush of excitement grow on the thousands of faces, like a pink light on a stretch of pale cloud, and a very curious effect it was. On we passed down a lane cut through the heart of the human mass, till presently we stood upon the brazen patch of flooring to the east of the central altar, and immediately facing it. For some thirty feet around the golden-winged figures the space was roped off, and the multitudes stood outside the ropes. Within were a circle of white-robed gold-cinctured priests holding long golden trumpets in their hands, and immediately in front of us was our friend Agon, the High Priest, with his curious cap upon his head. His was the only covered head in that vast assemblage. We took our stand upon the brazen space, little knowing what was prepared for us beneath, but I noticed a curious hissing sound proceeding apparently from the floor for which I could not account. Then came a pause, and I looked around to see if there was any sign of the two Queens, Nyleptha and Sorais, but they were not there. To the right of us, however, was a bare space that I guessed was reserved for them.

We waited, and presently a far-off trumpet blew, apparently high up in the dome. Then came another murmur from the multitude, and up a long lane, leading to the open space to our right, we saw the two Queens walking side by side. Behind them were some nobles of the Court, among whom I recognized the great lord Nasta, and behind them again a body of about fifty guards. These last I was very glad to see. Presently they had all arrived and taken their stand, the two Queens in the front, the nobles to the right and left, and the guards in a double semicircle behind them.

Then came another silence, and Nyleptha looked up and caught my eye; it seemed to me that there was meaning in her glance, and I watched it narrowly. From my eye it travelled down to the brazen flooring, on the outer edge of which we stood. Then followed a slight and almost imperceptible sidelong movement of the head. I did not understand it, and it was repeated. Then I guessed that she meant us to move back off the brazen floor. One more glance and I was sure of it—there was danger in standing on the floor. Sir Henry was placed on one side of me, Umslopogaas on the other. Keeping my eyes fixed straight before me, I whispered to them, first in Zulu and then in English, to draw slowly back inch by inch till half their feet were resting on the marble flooring where the brass ceased. Sir Henry whispered on to Good and Alphonse, and slowly, very very slowly, we shifted backwards; so slowly that nobody, except Nyleptha and Sorais, who saw everything, seemed to notice the movement. Then I glanced again at Nyleptha, and saw that, by an almost imperceptible nod, she indicated approval. All the while Agon's eyes were fixed upon the altar before him apparently in an ecstasy of contemplation, and mine were fixed upon the small of his back in another sort of ecstasy. Suddenly he flung up his long arm, and in a solemn and resounding voice commenced a chant, of which for convenience' sake I append a rough, a *very* rough, translation here, though, of course, I did not then comprehend its meaning. It was an invocation to the Sun, and ran somewhat as follows:—

There is silence upon the face of the Earth and the waters thereof!  
Yea, the silence doth brood on the waters like a nesting bird;  
The silence sleepeth also upon the bosom of the profound darkness,  
Only high up in the great spaces star doth speak unto star,  
The Earth is faint with longing and wet with the tears of her desire;  
The star-girdled night doth embrace her, but she is not comforted.  
She lies enshrouded in mists like a corpse in the grave-clothes,  
And stretches her pale hands to the East.

Lo! away in the farthest East there is the shadow of a light;  
The Earth seeth and lifts herself. She looks out from beneath  
the hollow of her hand.  
Then thy great angels fly forth from the Holy Place, oh Sun,  
They shoot their fiery swords into the darkness and shrivel it up.  
They climb the heavens and cast down the pale stars from their thrones;  
Yea, they hurl the changeful stars back into the womb of the night;  
They cause the moon to become wan as the face of a dying man,  
And behold! Thy glory comes, oh Sun!

Oh, Thou beautiful one, Thou drapest thyself in fire.  
The wide heavens are thy pathway: thou rollest o'er them as a chariot.  
The Earth is thy bride. Thou dost embrace her and  
she brings forth children;  
Yea, Thou favourest her, and she yields her increase.  
Thou art the All Father and the giver of life, oh Sun.  
The young children stretch out their hands and grow in thy brightness;  
The old men creep forth and seeing remember their strength.  
Only the dead forget Thee, oh Sun!

When Thou art wroth then Thou dost hide Thy face;  
Thou drawest around Thee a thick curtain of shadows.  
Then the Earth grows cold and the Heavens are dismayed;  
They tremble, and the sound thereof is the sound of thunder:  
They weep, and their tears are outpoured in the rain;  
They sigh, and the wild winds are the voice of their sighing.  
The flowers die, the fruitful fields languish and turn pale;  
The old men and the little children go unto their appointed place  
When Thou withdrawest thy light, oh Sun!

Say, what art Thou, oh Thou matchless Splendour—  
 Who set Thee on high, oh Thou flaming Terror?  
 When didst Thou begin, and when is the day of Thy ending?  
 Thou art the raiment of the living Spirit.<sup>[17]</sup>  
 None did place Thee on high, for Thou wast the Beginning.  
 Thou shalt not be ended when thy children are forgotten;  
 Nay, Thou shalt never end, for thy hours are eternal.  
 Thou sittest on high within thy golden house and  
 measurest out the centuries.  
 Oh Father of Life! oh dark-dispelling Sun!

<sup>[17]</sup> This line is interesting as being one of the few allusions to be found in the Zu-Vendi ritual to a vague divine essence independent of the material splendour of the orb they worship. "*Pita*", the word used here, has a very indeterminate meaning, and signifies *essence*, *vital principle*, *spirit*, or even *God*.

He ceased this solemn chant, which, though it seems a poor enough thing after going through my mill, is really beautiful and impressive in the original; and then, after a moment's pause, he glanced up towards the funnel-sloped opening in the dome and added

Oh Sun, descend upon thine Altar!

As he spoke a wonderful and a beautiful thing happened. Down from on high flashed a splendid living ray of light, cleaving the twilight like a sword of fire. Full upon the closed petals it fell and ran shimmering down their golden sides, and then the glorious flower opened as though beneath the bright influence. Slowly it opened, and as the great petals fell wide and revealed the golden altar on which the fire ever burns, the priests blew a blast upon the trumpets, and from all the people there rose a shout of praise that beat against the domed roof and came echoing down the marble walls. And now the flower altar was open, and the sunlight fell full upon the tongue of sacred flame and beat it down, so that it wavered, sank, and vanished into the hollow recesses whence it rose. As it vanished, the mellow notes of the trumpets rolled out once more. Again the old priest flung up his hands and called aloud—

We sacrifice to thee, oh Sun!

Once more I caught Nyleptha's eye; it was fixed upon the brazen flooring.

"Look out," I said, aloud; and as I said it, I saw Agon bend forward and touch something on the altar. As he did so, the great white sea of faces around us turned red and then white again, and a deep breath went up like a universal sigh. Nyleptha leant forward, and with an involuntary movement covered her eyes with her hand. Sorais turned and whispered to the officer of the royal bodyguard, and then with a rending sound the whole of the brazen flooring slid from before our feet, and there in its place was suddenly revealed a smooth marble shaft terminating in a most awful raging furnace beneath the altar, big enough and hot enough to heat the iron stern-post of a man-of-war.

With a cry of terror we sprang backwards, all except the wretched Alphonse, who was paralysed with fear, and would have fallen into the fiery furnace which had been prepared for us, had not Sir Henry caught him in his strong hand as he was vanishing and dragged him back.

Instantly there arose the most fearful hubbub, and we four got back to back, Alphonse dodging frantically round our little circle in his attempts to take shelter under our legs. We all had our revolvers on—for though we had been politely disarmed of our guns on leaving the palace, of course these people did not know what a revolver was. Umslopogaas, too, had his axe, of which no effort had been made to deprive him, and now he whirled it round his head and sent his piercing Zulu war-shout echoing up the marble walls in fine defiant fashion. Next second, the priests, baffled of their prey, had drawn swords from beneath their white robes and were leaping on us like hounds upon a stag at bay. I saw that, dangerous as action might be, we must act or be lost, so as the first man came bounding along—and a great tall fellow he was—I sent a heavy revolver ball through him, and down he fell at the mouth of the shaft, and slid, shrieking frantically, into the fiery gulf that had been prepared for us.

Whether it was his cries, or the, to them, awful sound and effect of the pistol shot, or what, I know not, but the other priests halted, paralysed and dismayed, and before they could come on again Sorais had called out something, and we, together with the two Queens and most of the courtiers, were being surrounded with a wall of armed men. In a moment it was done, and still the priests hesitated, and the people hung in the balance like a herd of startled buck as it were, making no sign one way or the other.

The last yell of the burning priest had died away, the fire had finished him, and a great silence fell upon the place.

Then the High Priest Agon turned, and his face was as the face of a devil. "Let the sacrifice be sacrificed," he cried to the Queens. "Has not sacrilege enough been done by these strangers, and would ye, as Queens, throw the cloak of your majesty over evildoers? Are not the creatures sacred to the Sun dead? And is not a priest of the Sun also dead, but now slain by the magic of these strangers, who come as the winds out of heaven, whence we know not, and who are what we know not? Beware, oh Queens, how ye tamper with the great majesty of the God, even before His high altar! There is a Power that is more than your power; there is a Justice that is higher than your justice. Beware how ye lift an impious hand against it! Let the sacrifice be sacrificed, oh Queens."

Then Sorais made answer in her deep quiet tones, that always seemed to me to have a suspicion of mockery about them, however serious the theme: "Oh, Agon, thou hast spoken according to thy desire, and thou hast spoken truth. But it is thou who wouldst lift an impious hand against the justice of thy God. Bethink thee the midday sacrifice is accomplished; the Sun hath claimed his priest as a sacrifice."

This was a novel idea, and the people applauded it.

"Bethink thee what are these men? They are strangers found floating on the bosom of a lake. Who brought them here? How came they here? How know you that they also are not servants of the Sun? Is this the hospitality that ye would have our nation show to those whom chance brings to them, to throw them to the flames? Shame on you! Shame on you! What is hospitality? To receive the stranger and show him favour. To bind up his wounds, and find a pillow for his head, and food for him to eat. But thy pillow is the fiery furnace, and thy food the hot savour of the flame. Shame on thee, I say!"

She paused a little to watch the effect of her speech upon the multitude, and seeing that it was favourable, changed her tone from one of remonstrance to one of command.

"Ho! place there," she cried; "place, I say; make way for the Queens, and those whom the Queens cover with their 'kaf' (mantle)."

"And if I refuse, oh Queen?" said Agon between his teeth.

"Then will I cut a path with my guards," was the proud answer; "ay, even in the presence of thy sanctuary, and through the bodies of thy priests."

Agon turned livid with baffled fury. He glanced at the people as though meditating an appeal to them, but saw clearly that their sympathies were all the other way. The Zu-Vendi are a very curious and sociable people, and great as was their sense of the enormity that we had committed in shooting the sacred hippopotami, they did not like the idea of the only real live strangers they had seen or heard of being consigned to a fiery furnace, thereby putting an end for ever to their chance of extracting knowledge and information from, and gossiping about us. Agon saw this and hesitated, and then for the first time Nyleptha spoke in her soft sweet voice.

"Bethink thee, Agon," she said, "as my sister Queen has said, these men may also be servants of the Sun. For themselves they cannot speak, for their tongues are tied. Let the matter be adjourned till such time as they have learnt our language. Who can be condemned without a hearing? When these men can plead for themselves, then it will be time to put them to the proof."

Here was a clever loophole of escape, and the vindictive old priest took it, little as he liked it.

"So be it, oh Queens," he said. "Let the men go in peace, and when they have learnt our tongue then let them speak. And I, even I, will make humble supplication at the altar lest pestilence fall on the land by cause of the sacrilege."

These words were received with a murmur of applause, and in another minute we were marching out of the temple surrounded by the royal guards.

But it was not till long afterwards that we learnt the exact substance of what had passed, and how hardly our lives had been wrung out of the cruel grip of the Zu-Vendi priesthood, in the face of which even the Queens were practically powerless. Had it not been for their strenuous efforts to protect us we should have been slain even before we set foot in the Temple of the Sun. The attempt to drop us bodily into the fiery pit as an offering was a last artifice to attain this end when several others quite unsuspected by us had already failed.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SORAIS' SONG

After our escape from Agon and his pious crew we returned to our quarters in the palace and had a very good time. The two Queens, the nobles and the people vied with each other in doing us honour and showering gifts upon us. As for that painful little incident of the hippopotami it sank into oblivion, where we were quite content to leave it. Every day deputations and individuals waited on us to examine our guns and clothing, our chain shirts, and our instruments, especially our watches, with which they were much delighted. In short, we became quite the rage, so much so that some of the fashionable young swells among the Zu-Vendi began to copy the cut of some of our clothes, notably Sir Henry's shooting jacket. One day, indeed, a deputation waited on us and, as usual, Good donned his full-dress uniform for the occasion. This deputation seemed somehow to be a different class to those who generally came to visit us. They were little insignificant men of an excessively polite, not to say servile, demeanour; and their attention appeared to be chiefly taken up with observing the details of Good's full-dress uniform, of which they took copious notes and measurements. Good was much flattered at the time, not suspecting that he had to deal with the six leading tailors of Milosis. A fortnight afterwards, however, when on attending court as usual he had the pleasure of seeing some seven or eight Zu-Vendi "mashers" arrayed in all the glory of a very fair imitation of his full-dress uniform, he changed his mind. I shall never forget his face of astonishment and disgust. It was after this, chiefly to avoid remark, and also because our clothes were wearing out and had to be saved up, that we resolved to adopt the native dress; and a very comfortable one we found it, though I am bound to say that I looked sufficiently ridiculous in it, and as for Alphonse! Only Umslopogaas would have none of these things; when his moocha was worn out the fierce old Zulu made him a new one, and went about unconcerned, as grim and naked as his own battleaxe.

Meanwhile we pursued our study of the language steadily and made very good progress. On the morning following our adventure in the temple, three grave and reverend signiors presented themselves armed with manuscript books, ink-horns and feather pens, and indicated that they had been sent to teach us. So, with the exception of Umslopogaas, we all buckled to with a will, doing four hours a day. As for Umslopogaas, he would have none of that either. He did not wish to learn that "woman's talk", not he; and when one of the teachers advanced on him with a book and an ink-horn and waved them before him in a mild persuasive way, much as a churchwarden invitingly shakes the offertory bag under the nose of a rich but niggardly parishioner, he sprang up with a fierce oath and flashed Inkosi-kaas before the eyes of our learned friend, and there was an end of the attempt to teach *him* Zu-Vendi.

Thus we spent our mornings in useful occupation which grew more and more interesting as we proceeded, and the afternoons were given up to recreation. Sometimes we made trips, notably one to the gold mines and another to the marble quarries both of which I wish I had space and time to describe; and sometimes we went out hunting buck with dogs trained for that purpose, and a very exciting sport it is, as the country is full of agricultural enclosures and our horses were magnificent. This is not to be wondered at, seeing that the royal stables were at our command, in addition to which we had four splendid saddle horses given to us by Nyleptha.

Sometimes, again, we went hawking, a pastime that is in great favour among the Zu-Vendi, who generally fly their birds at a species of partridge which is remarkable for the swiftness and strength of its flight. When attacked by the hawk this bird appears to lose its head, and, instead of seeking cover, flies high into the sky, thus offering wonderful sport. I have seen one of these partridges soar up almost out of sight when followed by the hawk. Still better sport is offered by a variety of solitary snipe as big as a small woodcock, which is plentiful in this country, and which is flown at with a very small, agile, and highly-trained hawk with an almost red tail. The zigzagging of the great snipe and the lightning rapidity of the flight and movements of the red-tailed hawk make the pastime a delightful one. Another variety of the same amusement is the hunting of a very small species of antelope with trained eagles; and it certainly is a marvellous sight to see the great bird soar and soar till he is nothing but a black speck in the sunlight, and then suddenly come dashing down like a cannon-ball upon some cowering buck that is hidden in a patch of grass from everything but that piercing eye. Still finer is the spectacle when the eagle takes the buck running.

On other days we would pay visits to the country seats at some of the great lords' beautiful fortified places, and the villages clustering beneath their walls. Here we saw vineyards and corn-fields and well-kept park-like grounds, with such timber in them as filled me with delight, for I do love a good tree. There it stands so strong and sturdy, and yet so beautiful, a very type of the best sort of man. How proudly it lifts its bare head to the winter storms, and with what a full heart it rejoices when the spring has come again! How grand its voice is, too, when it talks with the wind: a thousand aeolian harps cannot equal the beauty of the sighing of a great tree in leaf. All day it points to the sunshine and all night to the stars, and thus passionless, and yet full of life, it endures through the centuries, come storm, come shine, drawing its sustenance from the cool bosom of its mother earth, and as the slow years roll by, learning the great mysteries of growth and of decay. And so on and on through generations, outliving individuals, customs, dynasties—all save the landscape it adorns and human nature—till the appointed day when the wind wins the long battle and rejoices over a reclaimed space, or decay puts the last stroke to his fungus-fingered work.

Ah, one should always think twice before one cuts down a tree!

In the evenings it was customary for Sir Henry, Good, and myself to dine, or rather sup, with their Majesties—not every night, indeed, but about three or four times a week, whenever they had not much company, or the affairs of state would allow of it. And I am bound to say that those little suppers were quite the most charming things of their sort that I ever had to do with. How true is the saying that the very highest in rank are always the most simple and kindly. It is from your half-and-half sort of people that you get pomposity and vulgarity, the difference between the two being very much what one sees every day in England between the old, out-at-elbows, broken-down county family, and the overbearing, purse-proud people who come and "take the place". I really think that Nyleptha's greatest charm is her sweet simplicity, and her kindly genuine interest even in little things. She is the simplest woman I

ever knew, and where her passions are not involved, one of the sweetest; but she can look queenly enough when she likes, and be as fierce as any savage too.

For instance, never shall I forget that scene when I for the first time was sure that she was really in love with Curtis. It came about in this way—all through Good's weakness for ladies' society. When we had been employed for some three months in learning Zu-Vendi, it struck Master Good that he was getting rather tired of the old gentlemen who did us the honour to lead us in the way that we should go, so he proceeded, without saying a word to anybody else, to inform them that it was a peculiar fact, but that we could not make any real progress in the deeper intricacies of a foreign language unless we were taught by ladies—young ladies, he was careful to explain. In his own country, he pointed out, it was habitual to choose the very best-looking and most charming girls who could be found to instruct any strangers who happened to come that way, etc.

All of this the old gentlemen swallowed open-mouthed. There was, they admitted, reason in what he said, since the contemplation of the beautiful, as their philosophy taught, induced a certain porosity of mind similar to that produced upon the physical body by the healthful influences of sun and air. Consequently it was probable that we might absorb the Zu-Vendi tongue a little faster if suitable teachers could be found. Another thing was that, as the female sex was naturally loquacious, good practice would be gained in the *viva voce* department of our studies.

To all of this Good gravely assented, and the learned gentlemen departed, assuring him that their orders were to fall in with our wishes in every way, and that, if possible, our views should be met.

Imagine, therefore the surprise and disgust of myself, and I trust and believe Sir Henry, when, on entering the room where we were accustomed to carry on our studies the following morning, we found, instead of our usual venerable tutors, three of the best-looking young women whom Milosis could produce—and that is saying a good deal—who blushed and smiled and curtsied, and gave us to understand that they were there to carry on our instruction. Then Good, as we gazed at one another in bewilderment, thought fit to explain, saying that it had slipped his memory before—but the old gentlemen had told him, on the previous evening, that it was absolutely necessary that our further education should be carried on by the other sex. I was overwhelmed, and appealed to Sir Henry for advice in such a crisis.

"Well," he said, "you see the ladies are here, ain't they? If we sent them away, don't you think it might hurt their feelings, eh? One doesn't like to be rough, you see; and they look regular *blues*, don't they, eh?"

By this time Good had already begun his lessons with the handsomest of the three, and so with a sigh I yielded. That day everything went very well: the young ladies were certainly very clever, and they only smiled when we blundered. I never saw Good so attentive to his books before, and even Sir Henry appeared to tackle Zu-Vendi with a renewed zest. "Ah," thought I, "will it always be thus?"

Next day we were much more lively, our work was pleasingly interspersed with questions about our native country, what the ladies were like there, etc., all of which we answered as best as we could in Zu-Vendi, and I heard Good assuring his teacher that her loveliness was to the beauties of Europe as the sun to the moon, to which she replied with a little toss of the head, that she was a plain teaching woman and nothing else, and that it was not kind "to deceive a poor girl so". Then we had a little singing that was really charming, so natural and unaffected. The Zu-Vendi love-songs are most touching. On the third day we were all quite intimate. Good narrated some of his previous love affairs to his fair teacher, and so moved was she that her sighs mingled with his own. I discoursed with mine, a merry blue-eyed girl, upon Zu-Vendian art, and never saw that she was waiting for an opportunity to drop a specimen of the cockroach tribe down my back, whilst in the corner Sir Henry and his governess appeared, so far as I could judge, to be going through a lesson framed on the great educational principles laid down by Wackford Squeers Esq., though in a very modified or rather spiritualized form. The lady softly repeated the Zu-Vendi word for "hand", and he took hers; "eyes", and he gazed deep into her brown orbs; "lips", and—but just at that moment my young lady dropped the cockroach down my back and ran away laughing. Now if there is one thing I loathe more than another it is cockroaches, and moved quite beyond myself, and yet laughing at her impudence, I took up the cushion she had been sitting on and threw it after her. Imagine then my shame—my horror, and my distress—when the door opened, and, attended by two guards only, in walked Nyleptha. The cushion could not be recalled (it missed the girl and hit one of the guards on the head), but I instantly and ineffectually tried to look as though I had not thrown it. Good ceased his sighing, and began to murder Zu-Vendi at the top of his voice, and Sir Henry whistled and looked silly. As for the poor girls, they were utterly dumbfounded.

And Nyleptha! she drew herself up till her frame seemed to tower even above that of the tall guards, and her face went first red, and then pale as death.

"Guards," she said in a quiet choked voice, and pointing at the fair but unconscious disciple of Wackford Squeers, "slay me that woman."

The men hesitated, as well they might.

"Will ye do my bidding," she said again in the same voice, "or will ye not?"

Then they advanced upon the girl with uplifted spears. By this time Sir Henry had recovered himself, and saw that the comedy was likely to turn into a tragedy.

"Stand back," he said in a voice of thunder, at the same time getting in front of the terrified girl. "Shame on thee, Nyleptha—shame! Thou shalt not kill her."

"Doubtless thou hast good reason to try to protect her. Thou couldst hardly do less in honour," answered the infuriated Queen; "but she shall die—she shall die," and she stamped her little foot.

"It is well," he answered; "then will I die with her. I am thy servant, oh Queen; do with me even as thou wilt." And he bowed towards her, and fixed his clear eyes contemptuously on her face.

"I could wish to slay thee too," she answered; "for thou dost make a mock of me;" and then feeling that she was mastered, and I suppose not knowing what else to do, she burst into such a storm of tears and looked so royally lovely in her passionate distress, that, old as I am, I must say I envied Curtis his task of supporting her. It was rather odd to see him holding her in his arms considering what had just passed—a thought that seemed to occur to herself, for presently she wrenched herself free and went, leaving us all much disturbed.

Presently, however, one of the guards returned with a message to the girls that they were, on pain of death, to leave the city and return to their homes in the country, and that no further harm would come to them; and accordingly they went, one of them

remarking philosophically that it could not be helped, and that it was a satisfaction to know that they had taught us a little serviceable Zu-Vendi. Mine was an exceedingly nice girl, and, overlooking the cockroach, I made her a present of my favourite lucky sixpence with a hole in it when she went away. After that our former masters resumed their course of instruction, needless to say to my great relief.

That night, when in fear and trembling we attended the royal supper table, we found that Nyleptha was laid up with a bad headache. That headache lasted for three whole days; but on the fourth she was present at supper as usual, and with the most gracious and sweet smile gave Sir Henry her hand to lead her to the table. No allusion was made to the little affair described above beyond her saying, with a charming air of innocence, that when she came to see us at our studies the other day she had been seized with a giddiness from which she had only now recovered. She supposed, she added with a touch of the humour that was common to her, that it was the sight of people working so hard which had affected her.

In reply Sir Henry said, dryly, that he had thought she did not look quite herself on that day, whereat she flashed one of those quick glances of hers at him, which if he had the feelings of a man must have gone through him like a knife, and the subject dropped entirely. Indeed, after supper was over Nyleptha condescended to put us through an examination to see what we had learnt, and to express herself well satisfied with the results. Indeed, she proceeded to give us, especially Sir Henry, a lesson on her own account, and very interesting we found it.

And all the while that we talked, or rather tried to talk, and laughed, Sorais would sit there in her carved ivory chair, and look at us and read us all like a book, only from time to time saying a few words, and smiling that quick ominous smile of hers which was more like a flash of summer lightning on a dark cloud than anything else. And as near to her as he dared would sit Good, worshipping through his eyeglass, for he really was getting seriously devoted to this sombre beauty, of whom, speaking personally, I felt terribly afraid. I watched her keenly, and soon I found out that for all her apparent impassibility she was at heart bitterly jealous of Nyleptha. Another thing I found out, and the discovery filled me with dismay, and that was, that she *also* was growing devoted to Sir Henry Curtis. Of course I could not be sure; it is not easy to read so cold and haughty a woman; but I noticed one or two little things, and, as elephant hunters know, dried grass shows which way the wind has set.

And so another three months passed over us, by which time we had all attained to a very considerable mastery of the Zu-Vendi language, which is an easy one to learn. And as the time went on we became great favourites with the people, and even with the courtiers, gaining an enormous reputation for cleverness, because, as I think I have said, Sir Henry was able to show them how to make glass, which was a national want, and also, by the help of a twenty-year almanac that we had with us, to predict various heavenly combinations which were quite unsuspected by the native astronomers. We even succeeded in demonstrating the principle of the steam-engine to a gathering of the learned men, who were filled with amazement; and several other things of the same sort we did. And so it came about that the people made up their minds that we must on no account be allowed to go out of the country (which indeed was an apparent impossibility even if we had wished it), and we were advanced to great honour and made officers to the bodyguards of the sister Queens while permanent quarters were assigned to us in the palace, and our opinion was asked upon questions of national policy.

But blue as the sky seemed, there was a cloud, and a big one, on the horizon. We had indeed heard no more of those confounded hippopotami, but it is not on that account to be supposed that our sacrilege was forgotten, or the enmity of the great and powerful priesthood headed by Agon appeased. On the contrary, it was burning the more fiercely because it was necessarily suppressed, and what had perhaps begun in bigotry was ending in downright direct hatred born of jealousy. Hitherto, the priests had been the wise men of the land, and were on this account, as well as from superstitious causes, looked on with peculiar veneration. But our arrival, with our outlandish wisdom and our strange inventions and hints of unimagined things, dealt a serious blow to this state of affairs, and, among the educated Zu-Vendi, went far towards destroying the priestly prestige. A still worse affront to them, however, was the favour with which we were regarded, and the trust that was reposed in us. All these things tended to make us excessively obnoxious to the great sacerdotal clan, the most powerful because the most united faction in the kingdom.

Another source of imminent danger to us was the rising envy of some of the great lords headed by Nasta, whose antagonism to us had at best been but thinly veiled, and which now threatened to break out into open flame. Nasta had for some years been a candidate for Nyleptha's hand in marriage, and when we appeared on the scene I fancy, from all I could gather, that though there were still many obstacles in his path, success was by no means out of his reach. But now all this had changed; the coy Nyleptha smiled no more in his direction, and he was not slow to guess the cause. Infuriated and alarmed, he turned his attention to Sorais, only to find that he might as well try to woo a mountain side. With a bitter jest or two about his fickleness, that door was closed on him for ever. So Nasta bethought himself of the thirty thousand wild swordsmen who would pour down at his bidding through the northern mountain passes, and no doubt vowed to adorn the gates of Milosis with our heads.

But first he determined, as I learned, to make one more attempt and to demand the hand of Nyleptha in the open Court after the formal annual ceremony of the signing of the laws that had been proclaimed by the Queens during the year.

Of this astounding fact Nyleptha heard with simulated nonchalance, and with a little trembling of the voice herself informed us of it as we sat at supper on the night preceding the great ceremony of the law-giving.

Sir Henry bit his lip, and do what he could to prevent it plainly showed his agitation.

"And what answer will the Queen be pleased to give to the great Lord?" asked I, in a jesting manner.

"Answer, Macumazahn" (for we had elected to pass by our Zulu names in Zu-Vendis), she said, with a pretty shrug of her ivory shoulder. "Nay, I know not; what is a poor woman to do, when the wooer has thirty thousand swords wherewith to urge his love?" And from under her long lashes she glanced at Curtis.

Just then we rose from the table to adjourn into another room. "Quatermain, a word, quick," said Sir Henry to me. "Listen. I have never spoken about it, but surely you have guessed: I love Nyleptha. What am I to do?"

Fortunately, I had more or less already taken the question into consideration, and was therefore able to give such answer as seemed the wisest to me.

"You must speak to Nyleptha tonight," I said. "Now is your time, now or never. Listen. In the sitting-chamber get near to her, and whisper to her to meet you at midnight by the Rademas statue at the end of the great hall. I will keep watch for you there. Now or never, Curtis."

We passed on into the other room. Nyleptha was sitting, her hands before her, and a sad anxious look upon her lovely face. A little way off was Sorais talking to Good in her slow measured tones.

The time went on; in another quarter of an hour I knew that, according to their habit, the Queens would retire. As yet, Sir Henry had had no chance of saying a word in private: indeed, though we saw much of the royal sisters, it was by no means easy to see them alone. I racked my brains, and at last an idea came to me.

“Will the Queen be pleased,” I said, bowing low before Sorais, “to sing to her servants? Our hearts are heavy this night; sing to us, oh Lady of the Night” (Sorais’ favourite name among the people).

“My songs, Macumazahn, are not such as to lighten the heavy heart, yet will I sing if it pleases thee,” she answered; and she rose and went a few paces to a table whereon lay an instrument not unlike a zither, and struck a few wandering chords.

Then suddenly, like the notes of some deep-throated bird, her rounded voice rang out in song so wildly sweet, and yet with so eerie and sad a refrain, that it made the very blood stand still. Up, up soared the golden notes, that seemed to melt far away, and then to grow again and travel on, laden with all the sorrow of the world and all the despair of the lost. It was a marvellous song, but I had not time to listen to it properly. However, I got the words of it afterwards, and here is a translation of its burden, so far as it admits of being translated at all.

#### SORAI’S SONG

As a desolate bird that through darkness its lost way is winging,  
As a hand that is helplessly raised when Death’s sickle is swinging,  
So is life! ay, the life that lends passion and breath to my singing.

As the nightingale’s song that is full of a sweetness unspoken,  
As a spirit unbarring the gates of the skies for a token,  
So is love! ay, the love that shall fall when his pinion is broken.

As the tramp of the legions when trumpets their challenge are sending,  
As the shout of the Storm-god when lightnings the black sky are rending,  
So is power! ay, the power that shall lie in the dust at its ending.

So short is our life; yet with space for all things to forsake us,  
A bitter delusion, a dream from which nought can awake us,  
Till Death’s dogging footsteps at morn or at eve shall o’ertake us.

#### Refrain

Oh, the world is fair at the dawning—dawning—dawning,  
But the red sun sinks in blood—the red sun sinks in blood.

I only wish that I could write down the music too.

“Now, Curtis, now,” I whispered, when she began the second verse, and turned my back.

“Nyleptha,” he said—for my nerves were so much on the stretch that I could hear every word, low as it was spoken, even through Sorais’ divine notes—“Nyleptha, I must speak with thee this night, upon my life I must. Say me not nay; oh, say me not nay!”

“How can I speak with thee?” she answered, looking fixedly before her; “Queens are not like other people. I am surrounded and watched.”

“Listen, Nyleptha, thus. I will be before the statue of Rademas in the great hall at midnight. I have the countersign and can pass in. Macumazahn will be there to keep guard, and with him the Zulu. Oh come, my Queen, deny me not.”

“It is not seemly,” she murmured, “and tomorrow—”

Just then the music began to die in the last wail of the refrain, and Sorais slowly turned her round.

“I will be there,” said Nyleptha, hurriedly; “on thy life see that thou fail me not.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BEFORE THE STATUE

It was night—dead night—and the silence lay on the Frowning City like a cloud.

Secretly, as evildoers, Sir Henry Curtis, Umslopogaas, and myself threaded our way through the passages towards a by-entrance to the great Throne Chamber. Once we were met by the fierce rattling challenge of the sentry. I gave the countersign, and the man grounded his spear and let us pass. Also we were officers of the Queens' bodyguard, and in that capacity had a right to come and go unquestioned.

We gained the hall in safety. So empty and so still was it, that even when we had passed the sound of our footsteps yet echoed up the lofty walls, vibrating faintly and still more faintly against the carven roof, like ghosts of the footsteps of dead men haunting the place that once they trod.

It was an eerie spot, and it oppressed me. The moon was full, and threw great pencils and patches of light through the high windowless openings in the walls, that lay pure and beautiful upon the blackness of the marble floor, like white flowers on a coffin. One of these silver arrows fell upon the statue of the sleeping Rademas, and of the angel form bent over him, illumining it, and a small circle round it, with a soft clear light, reminding me of that with which Catholics illumine the altars of their cathedrals.

Here by the statue we took our stand, and waited. Sir Henry and I close together, Umslopogaas some paces off in the darkness, so that I could only just make out his towering outline leaning on the outline of an axe.

So long did we wait that I almost fell asleep resting against the cold marble, but was suddenly aroused by hearing Curtis give a quick catching breath. Then from far away there came a little sound as though the statues that lined the walls were whispering to each other some message of the ages.

It was the faint sweep of a lady's dress. Nearer it grew, and nearer yet. We could see a figure steal from patch to patch of moonlight, and even hear the soft fall of sandalled feet. Another second and I saw the black silhouette of the old Zulu raise its arm in mute salute, and Nyleptha was before us.

Oh, how beautiful she looked as she paused a moment just within the circle of the moonlight! Her hand was pressed upon her heart, and her white bosom heaved beneath it. Round her head a brodered scarf was loosely thrown, partially shadowing the perfect face, and thus rendering it even more lovely; for beauty, dependent as it is to a certain extent upon the imagination, is never so beautiful as when it is half hid. There she stood radiant but half doubting, stately and yet so sweet. It was but a moment, but I then and there fell in love with her myself, and have remained so to this hour; for, indeed, she looked more like an angel out of heaven than a loving, passionate, mortal woman. Low we bowed before her, and then she spoke.

"I have come," she whispered, "but it was at great risk. Ye know not how I am watched. The priests watch me. Sorais watches me with those great eyes of hers. My very guards are spies upon me. Nasta watches me too. Oh, let him be careful!" and she stamped her foot. "Let him be careful; I am a woman, and therefore hard to drive. Ay, and I am a Queen, too, and can still avenge. Let him be careful, I say, lest in place of giving him my hand I take his head," and she ended the outburst with a little sob, and then smiled up at us bewitchingly and laughed.

"Thou didst bid me come hither, my Lord Incubu" (Curtis had taught her to call him so). "Doubtless it is about business of the State, for I know that thou art ever full of great ideas and plans for my welfare and my people's. So even as a Queen should I have come, though I greatly fear the dark alone," and again she laughed and gave him a glance from her grey eyes.

At this point I thought it wise to move a little, since secrets "of the State" should not be made public property; but she would not let me go far, peremptorily stopping me within five yards or so, saying that she feared surprise. So it came to pass that, however unwillingly, I heard all that passed.

"Thou knowest, Nyleptha," said Sir Henry, "that it was for none of these things that I asked thee to meet me at this lonely place. Nyleptha, waste not the time in pleasantries, but listen to me, for—I love thee."

As he said the words I saw her face break up, as it were, and change. The coquetry went out of it, and in its place there shone a great light of love which seemed to glorify it, and make it like that of the marble angel overhead. I could not help thinking that it must have been a touch of prophetic instinct which made the long dead Rademas limn, in the features of the angel of his inspiring vision, so strange a likeness of his own descendant. Sir Henry, also, must have observed and been struck by the likeness, for, catching the look upon Nyleptha's face, he glanced quickly from it to the moonlit statue, and then back again at his beloved.

"Thou sayest thou dost love me," she said in a low voice, "and thy voice rings true, but how am I to know that thou dost speak the truth?"

"Though," she went on with proud humility, and in the stately third person which is so largely used by the Zu-Vendi, "I be as nothing in the eyes of my lord," and she curtsied towards him, "who comes from among a wonderful people, to whom my people are but children, yet here am I a queen and a leader of men, and if I would go to battle a hundred thousand spears shall sparkle in my train like stars glimmering down the path of the bent moon. And although my beauty be a little thing in the eyes of my lord," and she lifted her brodered skirt and curtsied again, "yet here among my own people am I held right fair, and ever since I was a woman the great lords of my kingdom have made quarrel concerning me, as though forsooth," she added with a flash of passion, "I were a deer to be pulled down by the hungriest wolf, or a horse to be sold to the highest bidder. Let my lord pardon me if I weary my lord, but it hath pleased my lord to say that he loves me, Nyleptha, a Queen of the Zu-Vendi, and therefore would I say that though my love and my hand be not much to my lord, yet to me are they all."

"Oh!" she cried, with a sudden and thrilling change of voice, and modifying her dignified mode of address. "Oh, how can I know that thou lovest but me? How can I know that thou wilt not weary of me and seek thine own place again, leaving me desolate? Who is there to tell me but that thou lovest some other woman, some fair woman unknown to me, but who yet draws breath beneath this same moon that shines on me tonight? Tell me *how* am I to know?" And she clasped her hands and stretched them out towards him and looked appealingly into his face.

"Nyleptha," answered Sir Henry, adopting the Zu-Vendi way of speech; "I have told thee that I love thee; how am I to tell thee how much I love thee? Is there then a measure for love? Yet will I try. I say not that I have never looked upon another woman with favour, but this I say that I love thee with all my life and with all my strength; that I love thee now and shall love thee till I grow cold in death, ay, and as I believe beyond my death, and on and on for ever: I say that thy voice is music to my ear, and thy touch as water to a thirsty land, that when thou art there the world is beautiful, and when I see thee not it is as though the light was dead. Oh, Nyleptha, I will never leave thee; here and now for thy dear sake I will forget my people and my father's house, yea, I renounce them all. By thy side will I live, Nyleptha, and at thy side will I die."

He paused and gazed at her earnestly, but she hung her head like a lily, and said never a word.

"Look!" he went on, pointing to the statue on which the moonlight played so brightly. "Thou seest that angel woman who rests her hand upon the forehead of the sleeping man, and thou seest how at her touch his soul flames up and shines out through his flesh, even as a lamp at the touch of the fire, so is it with me and thee, Nyleptha. Thou hast awakened my soul and called it forth, and now, Nyleptha, it is not mine, not mine, but *thine* and thine only. There is no more for me to say; in thy hands is my life." And he leaned back against the pedestal of the statue, looking very pale, and his eyes shining, but proud and handsome as a god.

Slowly, slowly she raised her head, and fixed her wonderful eyes, all alight with the greatness of her passion, full upon his face, as though to read his very soul. Then at last she spoke, low indeed, but clearly as a silver bell.

"Of a truth, weak woman that I am, I do believe thee. Ill will be the day for thee and for me also if it be my fate to learn that I have believed a lie. And now hearken to me, oh man, who hath wandered here from far to steal my heart and make me all thine own. I put my hand upon thy hand thus, and thus I, whose lips have never kissed before, do kiss thee on the brow; and now by my hand and by that first and holy kiss, ay, by my people's weal and by my throne that like enough I shall lose for thee—by the name of my high House, by the sacred Stone and by the eternal majesty of the Sun, I swear that for thee will I live and die. And I swear that I will love thee and thee only till death, ay, and beyond, if as thou sayest there be a beyond, and that thy will shall be my will, and thy ways my ways.

"Oh see, see, my lord! thou knowest not how humble is she who loves; I, who am a Queen, I kneel before thee, even at thy feet I do my homage;" and the lovely impassioned creature flung herself down on her knees on the cold marble before him. And after that I really do not know, for I could stand it no longer, and cleared off to refresh myself with a little of old Umslopogaas' society, leaving them to settle it their own way, and a very long time they were about it.

I found the old warrior leaning on Inkosi-kaas as usual, and surveying the scene in the patch of moonlight with a grim smile of amusement.

"Ah, Macumazahn," he said, "I suppose it is because I am getting old, but I don't think that I shall ever learn to understand the ways of you white people. Look there now, I pray thee, they are a pretty pair of doves, but what is all the fuss about, Macumazahn? He wants a wife, and she wants a husband, then why does he not pay his cows down<sup>[18]</sup> like a man and have done with it? It would save a deal of trouble, and we should have had our night's sleep. But there they go, talk, talk, talk, and kiss, kiss, kiss, like mad things. Eugh!"

[18] Alluding to the Zulu custom.—A. Q.

Some three-quarters of an hour afterwards the "pair of doves" came strolling towards us, Curtis looking slightly silly, and Nyleptha remarking calmly that the moonlight made very pretty effects on the marble. Then, for she was in a most gracious mood, she took my hand and said that I was "her Lord's" dear friend, and therefore most dear to her—not a word for my own sake, you see. Next she lifted Umslopogaas' axe, and examined it curiously, saying significantly as she did so that he might soon have cause to use it in defence of her.

After that she nodded prettily to us all, and casting a tender glance at her lover, glided off into the darkness like a beautiful vision.

When we got back to our quarters, which we did without accident, Curtis asked me jocularly what I was thinking about.

"I am wondering," I answered, "on what principle it is arranged that some people should find beautiful queens to fall in love with them, while others find nobody at all, or worse than nobody; and I am also wondering how many brave men's lives this night's work will cost." It was rather nasty of me, perhaps, but somehow all the feelings do not evaporate with age, and I could not help being a little jealous of my old friend's luck. Vanity, my sons; vanity of vanities!

On the following morning, Good was informed of the happy occurrence, and positively rippled with smiles that, originating somewhere about the mouth, slowly travelled up his face like the rings in a duckpond, till they flowed over the brim of his eyeglass and went where sweet smiles go. The fact of the matter, however, was that not only was Good rejoiced about the thing on its own merits but also for personal reasons. He adored Sorais quite as earnestly as Sir Henry adored Nyleptha, and his adoration had not altogether prospered. Indeed, it had seemed to him and to me also that the dark Cleopatra-like queen favoured Curtis in her own curious inscrutable way much more than Good. Therefore it was a relief to him to learn that his unconscious rival was permanently and satisfactorily attached in another direction. His face fell a little, however, when he was told that the whole thing was to be kept as secret as the dead, above all from Sorais for the present, inasmuch as the political convulsion which would follow such an announcement at the moment would be altogether too great to face and would very possibly, if prematurely made, shake Nyleptha from her throne.

That morning we again attended in the Throne Hall, and I could not help smiling to myself when I compared the visit to our last, and reflecting that, if walls could speak, they would have strange tales to tell.

What actresses women are! There, high upon her golden throne, draped in her blazoned "kaf" or robe of state, sat the fair Nyleptha, and when Sir Henry came in a little late, dressed in the full uniform of an officer of her guard and humbly bent himself before her, she merely acknowledged his salute with a careless nod and turned her head coldly aside. It was a very large Court, for not only did the signing of the laws attract many outside of those whose duty it was to attend, but also the rumour that Nasta was going to publicly ask the hand of Nyleptha in marriage had gone abroad, with the result that the great hall was crowded to its utmost capacity.

There were our friends the priests in force, headed by Agon, who regarded us with a vindictive eye; and a most imposing band they were, with their long white embroidered robes girt with a golden chain from which hung the fish-like scales. There, too, were a number of the lords, each with a band of brilliantly attired attendants, and prominent among them was Nasta, stroking his black beard meditatively and looking unusually pleasant. It was a splendid and impressive sight, especially when the officer after having read out each law handed them to the Queens to sign, whereon the trumpets blared out and the Queens' guard grounded their spears with a crash in salute. This reading and signing of the laws took a long time, but at length it came to an end, the last one reciting that "whereas distinguished strangers, etc.", and proceeding to confer on the three of us the rank of "lords", together with certain military commands and large estates bestowed by the Queen. When it was read the trumpets blared and the spears clashed down as usual, but I saw some of the lords turn and whisper to each other, while Nasta ground his teeth. They did not like the favour that was shown to us, which under all the circumstances was not perhaps unnatural.

Then there came a pause, and Nasta stepped forward and bowing humbly, though with no humility in his eye, craved a boon at the hands of the Queen Nyleptha.

Nyleptha turned a little pale, but bowed graciously, and prayed the "well-beloved lord" to speak on, whereon in a few straightforward soldier-like words he asked her hand in marriage.

Then, before she could find words to answer, the High Priest Agon took up the tale, and in a speech of real eloquence and power pointed out the many advantages of the proposed alliance; how it would consolidate the kingdom, for Nasta's dominions, of which he was virtually king, were to Zu-Vendis much what Scotland used to be to England; how it would gratify the wild mountaineers and be popular among the soldiery, for Nasta was a famous general; how it would set her dynasty firmly on the throne, and would gain the blessing and approval of the "Sun", *i.e.*, of the office of the High Priest, and so on. Many of his arguments were undoubtedly valid, and there was, looking at it from a political point of view, everything to be said for the marriage. But unfortunately it is difficult to play the game of politics with the persons of young and lovely queens as though they were ivory effigies of themselves on a chessboard. Nyleptha's face, while Agon spouted away, was a perfect study; she smiled indeed, but beneath the smile it set like a stone, and her eyes began to flash ominously.

At last he stopped, and she prepared herself to answer. Before she did so, however, Sorais leant towards her and said in a voice sufficiently loud for me to catch what she said, "Bethink thee well, my sister, ere thou dost speak, for methinks that our thrones may hang upon thy words."

Nyleptha made no answer, and with a shrug and a smile Sorais leant back again and listened.

"Of a truth a great honour has been done to me," she said, "that my poor hand should not only have been asked in marriage, but that Agon here should be so swift to pronounce the blessing of the Sun upon my union. Methinks that in another minute he would have wed us fast ere the bride had said her say. Nasta, I thank thee, and I will bethink me of thy words, but now as yet I have no mind for marriage, that is a cup of which none know the taste until they begin to drink it. Again I thank thee, Nasta," and she made as though she would rise.

The great lord's face turned almost as black as his beard with fury, for he knew that the words amounted to a final refusal of his suit.

"Thanks be to the Queen for her gracious words," he said, restraining himself with difficulty and looking anything but grateful, "my heart shall surely treasure them. And now I crave another boon, namely, the royal leave to withdraw myself to my own poor cities in the north till such time as the Queen shall say my suit nay or yea. Mayhap," he added, with a sneer, "the Queen will be pleased to visit me there, and to bring with her these stranger lords," and he scowled darkly towards us. "It is but a poor country and a rough, but we are a hardy race of mountaineers, and there shall be gathered thirty thousand swordsmen to shout a welcome to her."

This speech, which was almost a declaration of rebellion, was received in complete silence, but Nyleptha flushed up and answered it with spirit.

"Oh, surely, Nasta, I will come, and the strange lords in my train, and for every man of thy mountaineers who calls thee Prince, will I bring two from the lowlands who call me Queen, and we will see which is the staunchest breed. Till then farewell."

The trumpets blared out, the Queens rose, and the great assembly broke up in murmuring confusion, and for myself I went home with a heavy heart foreseeing civil war.

After this there was quiet for a few weeks. Curtis and the Queen did not often meet, and exercised the utmost caution not to allow the true relation in which they stood to each other to leak out; but do what they would, rumours as hard to trace as a buzzing fly in a dark room, and yet quite as audible, began to hum round and round, and at last to settle on her throne.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE STORM BREAKS

And now it was that the trouble which at first had been but a cloud as large as a man's hand began to loom very black and big upon our horizon, namely, Sorais' preference for Sir Henry. I saw the storm drawing nearer and nearer; and so, poor fellow, did he. The affection of so lovely and highly-placed a woman was not a thing that could in a general way be considered a calamity by any man, but, situated as Curtis was, it was a grievous burden to bear.

To begin with, Nyleptha, though altogether charming, was, it must be admitted, of a rather jealous disposition, and was sometimes apt to visit on her lover's head her indignation at the marks of what Alphonse would have called the "distinguished consideration" with which her royal sister favoured him. Then the enforced secrecy of his relation to Nyleptha prevented Curtis from taking some opportunity of putting a stop, or trying to put a stop, to this false condition of affairs, by telling Sorais, in a casual but confidential way, that he was going to marry her sister. A third sting in Sir Henry's honey was that he knew that Good was honestly and sincerely attached to the ominous-looking but most attractive Lady of the Night. Indeed, poor Bougwan was wasting himself to a shadow of his fat and jolly self about her, his face getting so thin that his eyeglass would scarcely stick in it; while she, with a sort of careless coquetry, just gave him encouragement enough to keep him going, thinking, no doubt, that he might be useful as a stalking-horse. I tried to give him a hint, in as delicate a way as I could, but he flew into a huff and would not listen to me, so I was determined to let ill alone, for fear of making it worse. Poor Good, he really was very ludicrous in his distress, and went in for all sorts of absurdities, under the belief that he was advancing his suit. One of them was the writing—with the assistance of one of the grave and revered signiors who instructed us, and who, whatever may have been the measure of his erudition, did not understand how to scan a line—of a most interminable Zu-Vendi love-song, of which the continually recurring refrain was something about "I will kiss thee; oh yes, I will kiss thee!" Now among the Zu-Vendi it is a common and most harmless thing for young men to serenade ladies at night, as I believe they do in the southern countries of Europe, and sing all sorts of nonsensical songs to them. The young men may or may not be serious; but no offence is meant and none is taken, even by ladies of the highest rank, who accept the whole thing as an English girl would a gracefully-turned compliment.

Availing himself of this custom, Good bethought him that he would serenade Sorais, whose private apartments, together with those of her maidens, were exactly opposite our own, on the further side of a narrow courtyard which divided one section of the great palace from another. Accordingly, having armed himself with a native zither, on which, being an adept with the light guitar, he had easily learned to strum, he proceeded at midnight—the fashionable hour for this sort of caterwauling—to make night hideous with his amorous yells. I was fast asleep when they began, but they soon woke me up—for Good possesses a tremendous voice and has no notion of time—and I ran to my window-place to see what was the matter. And there, standing in the full moonlight in the courtyard, I perceived Good, adorned with an enormous ostrich feather head-dress and a flowing silken cloak, which it is the right thing to wear upon these occasions, and shouting out the abominable song which he and the old gentleman had evolved, to a jerky, jingling accompaniment. From the direction of the quarters of the maids of honour came a succession of faint sniggerings; but the apartments of Sorais herself—whom I devoutly pitied if she happened to be there—were silent as the grave. There was absolutely no end to that awful song, with its eternal "I will kiss thee!" and at last neither I nor Sir Henry, whom I had summoned to enjoy the sight, could stand it any longer; so, remembering the dear old story, I put my head to the window opening, and shouted, "For Heaven's sake, Good, don't go on talking about it, but *kiss* her and let's all go to sleep!" That choked him off, and we had no more serenading.

The whole thing formed a laughable incident in a tragic business. How deeply thankful we ought to be that even the most serious matters have generally a silver lining about them in the shape of a joke, if only people could see it. The sense of humour is a very valuable possession in life, and ought to be cultivated in the Board schools—especially in Scotland.

Well, the more Sir Henry held off the more Sorais came on, as is not uncommon in such cases, till at last things got very queer indeed. Evidently she was, by some strange perversity of mind, quite blinded to the true state of the case; and I, for one, greatly dreaded the moment of her awakening. Sorais was a dangerous woman to be mixed up with, either with or without one's consent. At last the evil moment came, as I saw it must come. One fine day, Good having gone out hawking, Sir Henry and I were sitting quietly talking over the situation, especially with reference to Sorais, when a Court messenger arrived with a written note, which we with some difficulty deciphered, and which was to the effect that "the Queen Sorais commanded the attendance of the Lord Incubu in her private apartments, whither he would be conducted by the bearer".

"Oh my word!" groaned Sir Henry. "Can't you go instead, old fellow?"

"Not if I know it," I said with vigour. "I had rather face a wounded elephant with a shot-gun. Take care of your own business, my boy. If you will be so fascinating you must take the consequences. I would not be in your place for an empire."

"You remind me of when I was going to be flogged at school and the other boys came to console me," he said gloomily. "What right has this Queen to command my attendance, I should like to know? I won't go."

"But you must; you are one of her officers and bound to obey her, and she knows it. And after all it will soon be over."

"That's just what they used to say," he said again. "I only hope she won't put a knife into me. I believe that she is quite capable of it." And off he started very faintheartedly, and no wonder.

I sat and waited, and at the end of about forty-five minutes he returned, looking a good deal worse than when he went.

"Give me something to drink," he said hoarsely.

I got him a cup of wine, and asked what was the matter.

"What is the matter? Why if ever there was trouble there's trouble now. You know when I left you? Well, I was shown straight into Sorais' private chamber, and a wonderful place it is; and there she sat, quite alone, upon a silken couch at the end of the room, playing gently upon that zither of hers. I stood before her, and for a while she took no notice of me, but kept on playing and singing a little, and very sweet music it was. At last she looked up and smiled.

"So thou art come," she said. "I thought perchance thou hadst gone about the Queen Nyleptha's business. Thou art ever on her business, and I doubt not a good servant and a true."

"To this I merely bowed, and said I was there to receive the Queen's word.

"Ah yes, I would talk with thee, but be thou seated. It wearies me to look so high," and she made room for me beside her on the couch, placing herself with her back against the end, so as to have a view of my face.

"It is not meet," I said, "that I should make myself equal with the Queen."

"I said be seated," was her answer, so I sat down, and she began to look at me with those dark eyes of hers. There she sat like an incarnate spirit of beauty, hardly talking at all, and when she did, very low, but all the while looking at me. There was a white flower in her black hair, and I tried to keep my eyes on it and count the petals, but it was of no use. At last, whether it was her gaze, or the perfume in her hair, or what I do not know, but I almost felt as though I was being mesmerized. At last she roused herself.

"Incubu," she said, "lovest thou power?"

"I replied that I supposed all men loved power of one sort or another.

"Thou shalt have it," she said. "Lovest thou wealth?"

"I said I liked wealth for what it brought.

"Thou shalt have it," she said. "And lovest thou beauty?"

"To this I replied that I was very fond of statuary and architecture, or something silly of that sort, at which she frowned, and there was a pause. By this time my nerves were on such a stretch that I was shaking like a leaf. I knew that something awful was going to happen, but she held me under a kind of spell, and I could not help myself.

"Incubu," she said at length, "wouldst thou be a king? Listen, wouldst thou be a king? Behold, stranger, I am minded to make thee king of all Zu-Vendis, ay and husband of Sorais of the Night. Nay, peace and hear me. To no man among my people had I thus opened out my secret heart, but thou art an outlander and therefore I speak without shame, knowing all I have to offer and how hard it had been thee to ask. See, a crown lies at thy feet, my lord Incubu, and with that fortune a woman whom some have wished to woo. Now mayst thou answer, oh my chosen, and soft shall thy words fall upon mine ears."

"Oh Sorais," I said, "I pray thee speak not thus"—you see I had not time to pick and choose my words—"for this thing cannot be. I am betrothed to thy sister Nyleptha, oh Sorais, and I love her and her alone."

"Next moment it struck me that I had said an awful thing, and I looked up to see the results. When I spoke, Sorais' face was hidden in her hands, and as my words reached her she slowly raised it, and I shrank back dismayed. It was ashy white, and her eyes were flaming. She rose to her feet and seemed to be choking, but the awful thing was that she was so quiet about it all. Once she looked at a side table, on which lay a dagger, and from it to me, as though she thought of killing me; but she did not take it up. At last she spoke one word, and one only—

"Go!"

"And I went, and glad enough I was to get out of it, and here I am. Give me another cup of wine, there's a good fellow, and tell me, what is to be done?"

I shook my head, for the affair was indeed serious. As one of the poets says,

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,"

more especially if the woman is a queen and a Sorais, and indeed I feared the very worst, including imminent danger to ourselves.

"Nyleptha had better be told of this at once," I said, "and perhaps I had better tell her; she might receive your account with suspicion."

"Who is captain of her guard tonight?" I went on.

"Good."

"Very well then, there will be no chance of her being got at. Don't look surprised. I don't think that her sister would stick at that. I suppose one must tell Good of what has happened."

"Oh, I don't know," said Sir Henry. "It would hurt his feelings, poor fellow! You see, he takes a lively personal interest in Sorais."

"That's true; and after all, perhaps there is no need to tell him. He will find out the truth soon enough. Now, you mark my words, Sorais will throw in her lot with Nasta, who is sulking up in the North there, and there will be such a war as has not been known in Zu-Vendis for centuries. Look there!" and I pointed to two Court messengers, who were speeding away from the door of Sorais' private apartments. "Now follow me," and I ran up a stairway into an outlook tower that rose from the roof of our quarters, taking the spyglass with me, and looked out over the palace wall. The first thing we saw was one of the messengers speeding towards the Temple, bearing, without any doubt, the Queen's word to the High Priest Agon, but for the other I searched in vain. Presently, however, I spied a horseman riding furiously through the northern gate of the city, and in him I recognized the other messenger.

"Ah!" I said, "Sorais is a woman of spirit. She is acting at once, and will strike quick and hard. You have insulted her, my boy, and the blood will flow in rivers before the stain is washed away, and yours with it, if she can get hold of you. Well, I'm off to Nyleptha. Just you stop where you are, old fellow, and try to get your nerves straight again. You'll need them all, I can tell you, unless I have observed human nature in the rough for fifty years for nothing." And off I went accordingly.

I gained audience of the Queen without trouble. She was expecting Curtis, and was not best pleased to see my mahogany-coloured face instead.

"Is there aught wrong with my Lord, Macumazahn, that he waits not upon me? Say, is he sick?"

I said that he was well enough, and then, without further ado, I plunged into my story and told it from beginning to end. Oh, what a rage she flew into! It was a sight to see her, she looked so lovely.

"How darest thou come to me with such a tale?" she cried. "It is a lie to say that my Lord was making love to Sorais, my sister."

"Pardon me, oh Queen," I answered, "I said that Sorais was making love to thy lord."

"Spin me no spiders' webs of words. Is not the thing the same thing? The one giveth, the other taketh; but the gift passes, and what matters it which is the most guilty? Sorais! oh, I hate her—Sorais is a queen and my sister. She had not stooped so low had he not shown the way. Oh, truly hath the poet said that man is like a snake, whom to touch is poison, and whom none can hold."

"The remark, oh Queen, is excellent, but methinks thou hast misread the poet. Nyleptha," I went on, "thou knowest well that thy words are empty foolishness, and that this is no time for folly."

"How darest thou?" she broke in, stamping her foot. "Hast my false lord sent thee to me to insult me also? Who art thou, stranger, that thou shouldst speak to me, the Queen, after this sort? How darest thou?"

"Yea, I dare. Listen. The moments which thou dost waste in idle anger may well cost thee thy crown and all of us our lives. Already Sorais' horsemen go forth and call to arms. In three days' time Nasta will rouse himself in his fastnesses like a lion in the evening, and his growling will be heard throughout the North. The 'Lady of the Night' (Sorais) hath a sweet voice, and she will not sing in vain. Her banner will be borne from range to range and valley to valley, and warriors will spring up in its track like dust beneath a whirlwind; half the army will echo her war-cry; and in every town and hamlet of this wide land the priests will call out against the foreigner and will preach her cause as holy. I have spoken, oh Queen!"

Nyleptha was quite calm now; her jealous anger had passed; and putting off the character of a lovely headstrong lady, with a rapidity and completeness that distinguished her, she put on that of a queen and a woman of business. The transformation was sudden but entire.

"Thy words are very wise, Macumazahn. Forgive me my folly. Ah, what a Queen I should be if only I had no heart! To be heartless—that is to conquer all. Passion is like the lightning, it is beautiful, and it links the earth to heaven, but alas it blinds!"

"And thou thinkest that my sister Sorais would levy war upon me. So be it. She shall not prevail against me. I, too, have my friends and my retainers. There are many, I say, who will shout 'Nyleptha!' when my pennon runs up on peak and pinnacle, and the light of my beacon fires leaps tonight from crag to crag, bearing the message of my war. I will break her strength and scatter her armies. Eternal night shall be the portion of Sorais of the Night. Give me that parchment and the ink. So. Now summon the officer in the ante-room. He is a trusty man."

I did as I was bid! and the man, a veteran and quiet-looking gentleman of the guard, named Kara, entered, bowing low.

"Take this parchment," said Nyleptha; "it is thy warrant; and guard every place of in and outgoing in the apartments of my sister Sorais, the 'Lady of the Night', and a Queen of the Zu-Vendi. Let none come in and none go out, or thy life shall pay the cost."

The man looked startled, but he merely said, "The Queen's word be done," and departed. Then Nyleptha sent a messenger to Sir Henry, and presently he arrived looking uncommonly uncomfortable. I thought that another outburst was about to follow, but wonderful are the ways of woman; she said not a word about Sorais and his supposed inconstancy, greeting him with a friendly nod, and stating simply that she required his advice upon high matters. All the same there was a look in her eye, and a sort of suppressed energy in her manner towards him, that makes me think that she had not forgotten the affair, but was keeping it for a private occasion.

Just after Curtis arrived the officer returned, and reported that Sorais was *gone*. The bird had flown to the Temple, stating that she was going, as was sometimes the custom among Zu-Vendi ladies of rank, to spend the night in meditation before the altar. We looked at each other significantly. The blow had fallen very soon.

Then we set to work.

Generals who could be trusted were summoned from their quarters, and as much of the State affairs as was thought desirable was told to each, strict injunctions being given to them to get all their available force together. The same was done with such of the more powerful lords as Nyleptha knew she could rely on, several of whom left that very day for distant parts of the country to gather up their tribesmen and retainers. Sealed orders were dispatched to the rulers of far-off cities, and some twenty messengers were sent off before nightfall with instructions to ride early and late till they reached the distant chiefs to whom their letters were addressed: also many spies were set to work. All the afternoon and evening we laboured, assisted by some confidential scribes, Nyleptha showing an energy and resource of mind that astonished me, and it was eight o'clock before we got back to our quarters. Here we heard from Alphonse, who was deeply aggrieved because our non-return had spoilt his dinner (for he had turned cook again now), that Good had come back from his hawking and gone on duty. As instructions had already been given to the officer of the outer guard to double the sentries at the gate, and as we had no reason to fear any immediate danger, we did not think it worth while to hunt him up and tell him anything of what had passed, which at best was, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, one of those tasks that one prefers to postpone, so after swallowing our food we turned in to get some much-needed rest. Before we did so, however, it occurred to Curtis to tell old Umslopogaas to keep a look-out in the neighbourhood of Nyleptha's private apartments. Umslopogaas was now well known about the place, and by the Queen's order allowed to pass whither he would by the guards, a permission of which he often availed himself by roaming about the palace during the still hours in a nocturnal fashion that he favoured, and which is by no means uncommon amongst black men generally. His presence in the corridors would not, therefore, be likely to excite remark. Without any comment the Zulu took up his axe and departed, and we also departed to bed.

I seemed to have been asleep but a few minutes when I was awakened by a peculiar sensation of uneasiness. I felt that somebody was in the room and looking at me, and instantly sat up, to see to my surprise that it was already dawn, and that there, standing at the foot of my couch and looking peculiarly grim and gaunt in the grey light, was Umslopogaas himself.

"How long hast thou been there?" I asked testily, for it is not pleasant to be aroused in such a fashion.

"Mayhap the half of an hour, Macumazahn. I have a word for thee."

"Speak on," I said, now wide enough awake.

"As I was bid I went last night to the place of the White Queen and hid myself behind a pillar in the second anteroom, beyond which is the sleeping-place of the Queen. Bougwan (Good) was in the first anteroom alone, and outside the curtain of that room was a sentry, but I had a mind to see if I could pass in unseen, and I did, gliding behind them both. There I waited for many hours, when suddenly I perceived a dark figure coming secretly towards me. It was the figure of a woman, and in her hand she held a dagger. Behind that figure crept another unseen by the woman. It was Bougwan following in her tracks. His shoes were off, and for so fat a man he followed very well. The woman passed me, and the starlight shone upon her face."

"Who was it?" I asked impatiently.

“The face was the face of the ‘Lady of the Night’, and of a truth she is well named.

“I waited, and Bougwan passed me also. Then I followed. So we went slowly and without a sound up the long chamber. First the woman, then Bougwan, and then I; and the woman saw not Bougwan, and Bougwan saw not me. At last the ‘Lady of the Night’ came to the curtains that shut off the sleeping place of the White Queen, and put out her left hand to part them. She passed through, and so did Bougwan, and so did I. At the far end of the room is the bed of the Queen, and on it she lay very fast asleep. I could hear her breathe, and see one white arm lying on the coverlid like a streak of snow on the dry grass. The ‘Lady of the Night’ doubled herself thus, and with the long knife lifted crept towards the bed. So straight did she gaze thereat that she never thought to look behind her. When she was quite close Bougwan touched her on the arm, and she caught her breath and turned, and I saw the knife flash, and heard it strike. Well was it for Bougwan that he had the skin of iron on him, or he had been pierced. Then for the first time he saw who the woman was, and without a word he fell back astonished, and unable to speak. She, too, was astonished, and spoke not, but suddenly she laid her finger on her lip, thus, and walked towards and through the curtain, and with her went Bougwan. So close did she pass to me that her dress touched me, and I was nigh to slaying her as she went. In the first outer room she spoke to Bougwan in a whisper and, clasping her hands thus, she pleaded with him, but what she said I know not. And so they passed on to the second outer room, she pleading and he shaking his head, and saying, ‘Nay, nay, nay’. And it seemed to me that he was about to call the guard, when she stopped talking and looked at him with great eyes, and I saw that he was bewitched by her beauty. Then she stretched out her hand and he kissed it, whereon I gathered myself together to advance and take her, seeing that now had Bougwan become a woman, and no longer knew the good from the evil, when behold! she was gone.”

“Gone!” I ejaculated.

“Ay, gone, and there stood Bougwan staring at the wall like one asleep, and presently he went too, and I waited a while and came away also.”

“Art thou sure, Umslopogaas,” said I, “that thou hast not been a dreamer this night?”

In reply he opened his left hand, and produced about three inches of a blade of a dagger of the finest steel. “If I be, Macumazahn, behold what the dream left with me. The knife broke upon Bougwan’s bosom and as I passed I picked this up in the sleeping-place of the White Queen.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### WAR! RED WAR!

Telling Umslopogaas to wait, I tumbled into my clothes and went off with him to Sir Henry's room, where the Zulu repeated his story word for word. It was a sight to watch Curtis' face as he heard it.

"Great Heavens!" he said: "here have I been sleeping away while Nyleptha was nearly murdered—and all through me, too. What a fiend that Sorais must be! It would have served her well if Umslopogaas had cut her down in the act."

"Ay," said the Zulu. "Fear not; I should have slain her ere she struck. I was but waiting the moment."

I said nothing, but I could not help thinking that many a thousand doomed lives would have been saved if he had meted out to Sorais the fate she meant for her sister. And, as the issue proved, I was right.

After he had told his tale Umslopogaas went off unconcernedly to get his morning meal, and Sir Henry and I fell to talking.

At first he was very bitter against Good, who, he said, was no longer to be trusted, having designedly allowed Sorais to escape by some secret stair when it was his duty to have handed her over to justice. Indeed, he spoke in the most unmeasured terms on the matter. I let him run on awhile, reflecting to myself how easy we find it to be hard on the weaknesses of others, and how tender we are to our own.

"Really, my dear fellow," I said at length, "one would never think, to hear you talk, that you were the man who had an interview with this same lady yesterday, and found it rather difficult to resist her fascinations, notwithstanding your ties to one of the loveliest and most loving women in the world. Now suppose it was Nyleptha who had tried to murder Sorais, and *you* had caught her, and she had pleaded with you, would you have been so very eager to hand her over to an open shame, and to death by fire? Just look at the matter through Good's eyeglass for a minute before you denounce an old friend as a scoundrel."

He listened to this jobation submissively, and then frankly acknowledged that he had spoken hardly. It is one of the best points in Sir Henry's character that he is always ready to admit it when he is in the wrong.

But, though I spoke up thus for Good, I was not blind to the fact that, however natural his behaviour might be, it was obvious that he was being involved in a very awkward and disgraceful complication. A foul and wicked murder had been attempted, and he had let the murderess escape, and thereby, among other things, allowed her to gain a complete ascendancy over himself. In fact, he was in a fair way to become her tool—and no more dreadful fate can befall a man than to become the tool of an unscrupulous woman, or indeed of any woman. There is but one end to it: when he is broken, or has served her purpose, he is thrown away—turned out on the world to hunt for his lost self-respect. Whilst I was pondering thus, and wondering what was to be done—for the whole subject was a thorny one—I suddenly heard a great clamour in the courtyard outside, and distinguished the voice of Umslopogaas and Alphonse, the former cursing furiously, and the latter yelling in terror.

Hurrying out to see what was the matter, I was met by a ludicrous sight. The little Frenchman was running up the courtyard at an extraordinary speed, and after him sped Umslopogaas like a great greyhound. Just as I came out he caught him, and, lifting him right off his legs, carried him some paces to a beautiful but very dense flowering shrub which bore a flower not unlike the gardenia, but was covered with short thorns. Next, despite his howls and struggles, he with one mighty thrust plunged poor Alphonse head first into the bush, so that nothing but the calves of his legs and heels remained in evidence. Then, satisfied with what he had done, the Zulu folded his arms and stood grimly contemplating the Frenchman's kicks, and listening to his yells, which were awful.

"What art thou doing?" I said, running up. "Wouldst thou kill the man? Pull him out of the bush!"

With a savage grunt he obeyed, seizing the wretched Alphonse by the ankle, and with a jerk that must have nearly dislocated it, tearing him out of the heart of the shrub. Never did I see such a sight as he presented, his clothes half torn off his back, and bleeding as he was in every direction from the sharp thorns. There he lay and yelled and rolled, and there was no getting anything out of him.

At last, however, he got up and, ensconcing himself behind me, cursed old Umslopogaas by every saint in the calendar, vowing by the blood of his heroic grandfather that he would poison him, and "have his revenge".

At last I got to the truth of the matter. It appeared that Alphonse habitually cooked Umslopogaas's porridge, which the latter ate for breakfast in the corner of the courtyard, just as he would have done at home in Zululand, from a gourd, and with a wooden spoon. Now Umslopogaas had, like many Zulus, a great horror of fish, which he considered a species of water-snake; so Alphonse, who was as fond of playing tricks as a monkey, and who was also a consummate cook, determined to make him eat some. Accordingly he grated up a quantity of white fish very finely, and mixed it with the Zulu's porridge, who swallowed it nearly all down in ignorance of what he was eating. But, unfortunately for Alphonse, he could not restrain his joy at this sight, and came capering and peering round, till at last Umslopogaas, who was very clever in his way, suspected something, and, after a careful examination of the remains of his porridge, discovered "the buffalo heifer's trick", and, in revenge, served him as I have said. Indeed, the little man was fortunate not to get a broken neck for his pains; for, as one would have thought, he might have learnt from the episode of his display of axemanship that "le Monsieur noir" was an ill person to play practical jokes upon.

This incident was unimportant enough in itself, but I narrate it because it led to serious consequences. As soon as he had stanchd the bleeding from his scratches and washed himself, Alphonse went off still cursing, to recover his temper, a process which I knew from experience would take a very long time. When he had gone I gave Umslopogaas a jobation and told him that I was ashamed of his behaviour.

"Ah, well, Macumazahn," he said, "you must be gentle with me, for here is not my place. I am weary of it, weary to death of eating and drinking, of sleeping and giving in marriage. I love not this soft life in stone houses that takes the heart out of a man, and turns

his strength to water and his flesh to fat. I love not the white robes and the delicate women, the blowing of trumpets and the flying of hawks. When we fought the Masai at the kraal yonder, ah, then life was worth the living, but here is never a blow struck in anger, and I begin to think I shall go the way of my fathers and lift Inkosi-kaas no more," and he held up the axe and gazed at it in sorrow.

"Ah," I said, "that is thy complaint, is it? Thou hast the blood-sickness, hast thou? And the Woodpecker wants a tree. And at thy age, too. Shame on thee! Umslopogaas."

"Ay, Macumazahn, mine is a red trade, yet is it better and more honest than some. Better is it to slay a man in fair fight than to suck out his heart's blood in buying and selling and usury after your white fashion. Many a man have I slain, yet is there never a one that I should fear to look in the face again, ay, many are there who once were friends, and whom I should be right glad to snuff with. But there! there! thou hast thy ways, and I mine: each to his own people and his own place. The high-veldt ox will die in the fat bush country, and so is it with me, Macumazahn. I am rough, I know it, and when my blood is warm I know not what to do, but yet wilt thou be sorry when the night swallows me and I am utterly lost in blackness, for in thy heart thou lovest me, my father, Macumazahn the fox, though I be nought but a broken-down Zulu war-dog—a chief for whom there is no room in his own kraal, an outcast and a wanderer in strange places: ay, I love thee, Macumazahn, for we have grown grey together, and there is that between us that cannot be seen, and yet is too strong for breaking;" and he took his snuff-box, which was made of an old brass cartridge, from the slit in his ear where he always carried it, and handed it to me for me to help myself.

I took the pinch of snuff with some emotion. It was quite true, I was much attached to the bloodthirsty old ruffian. I do not know what was the charm of his character, but it had a charm; perhaps it was its fierce honesty and directness; perhaps one admired his almost superhuman skill and strength, or it may have been simply that he was so absolutely unique. Frankly, with all my experience of savages, I never knew a man quite like him, he was so wise and yet such a child with it all; and though it seems laughable to say so, like the hero of the Yankee parody, he "had a tender heart". Anyway, I was very fond of him, though I should never have thought of telling him so.

"Ay, old wolf," I said, "thine is a strange love. Thou wouldst split me to the chin if I stood in thy path tomorrow."

"Thou speakest truth, Macumazahn, that would I if it came in the way of duty, but I should love thee all the same when the blow had gone fairly home. Is there any chance of some fighting here, Macumazahn?" he went on in an insinuating voice. "Methought that what I saw last night did show that the two great Queens were vexed one with another. Else had the 'Lady of the Night' not brought that dagger with her."

I agreed with him that it showed that more or less pique and irritation existed between the ladies, and told him how things stood, and that they were quarrelling over Incubu.

"Ah, is it so?" he exclaimed, springing up in delight; "then will there be war as surely as the rivers rise in the rains—war to the end. Women love the last blow as well as the last word, and when they fight for love they are pitiless as a wounded buffalo. See thou, Macumazahn, a woman will swim through blood to her desire, and think nought of it. With these eyes have I seen it once, and twice also. Ah, Macumazahn, we shall see this fine place of houses burning yet, and hear the battle cries come ringing up the street. After all, I have not wandered for nothing. Can this folk fight, think ye?"

Just then Sir Henry joined us, and Good arrived, too, from another direction, looking very pale and hollow-eyed. The moment Umslopogaas saw the latter he stopped his bloodthirsty talk and greeted him.

"Ah, Bougwan," he cried, "greeting to thee, Inkoos! Thou art surely weary. Didst thou hunt too much yesterday?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he went on—

"Listen, Bougwan, and I will tell thee a story; it is about a woman, therefore wilt thou hear it, is it not so?"

"There was a man and he had a brother, and there was a woman who loved the man's brother and was beloved of the man. But the man's brother had a favourite wife and loved not the woman, and he made a mock of her. Then the woman, being very cunning and fierce-hearted for revenge, took counsel with herself and said to the man, 'I love thee, and if thou wilt make war upon thy brother I will marry thee.' And he knew it was a lie, yet because of his great love of the woman, who was very fair, did he listen to her words and made war. And when many people had been killed his brother sent to him, saying, 'Why slayest thou me? What hurt have I done unto thee? From my youth up have I not loved thee? When thou wast little did I not nurture thee, and have we not gone down to war together and divided the cattle, girl by girl, ox by ox, and cow by cow? Why slayest thou me, my brother, son of my own mother?'"

"Then the man's heart was heavy, and he knew that his path was evil, and he put aside the tempting of the woman and ceased to make war on his brother, and lived at peace in the same kraal with him. And after a time the woman came to him and said, 'I have lost the past, I will be thy wife.' And in his heart he knew that it was a lie and that she thought the evil thing, yet because of his love did he take her to wife.

"And the very night that they were wed, when the man was plunged into a deep sleep, did the woman arise and take his axe from his hand and creep into the hut of his brother and slay him in his rest. Then did she slink back like a gorged lioness and place the thong of the red axe back upon his wrist and go her ways.

"And at the dawning the people came shouting, 'Lousta is slain in the night,' and they came unto the hut of the man, and there he lay asleep and by him was the red axe. Then did they remember the war and say, 'Lo! he hath of a surety slain his brother,' and they would have taken and killed him, but he rose and fled swiftly, and as he fled by he slew the woman.

"But death could not wipe out the evil she had done, and on him rested the weight of all her sin. Therefore is he an outcast and his name a scorn among his own people; for on him, and him only, resteth the burden of her who betrayed. And, therefore, does he wander afar, without a kraal and without an ox or a wife, and therefore will he die afar like a stricken buck and his name be accursed from generation to generation, in that the people say that he slew his brother, Lousta, by treachery in the night-time."

The old Zulu paused, and I saw that he was deeply agitated by his own story. Presently he lifted his head, which he had bowed to his breast, and went on:

"I was the man, Bougwan. Ou! I was that man, and now hark thou! Even as I am so wilt thou be—a tool, a plaything, an ox of burden to carry the evil deeds of another. Listen! When thou didst creep after the 'Lady of the Night' I was hard upon thy track. When she struck thee with the knife in the sleeping place of the White Queen I was there also; when thou didst let her slip away like a snake in the stones I saw thee, and I knew that she had bewitched thee and that a true man had abandoned the truth, and he who aforetime loved a straight path had taken a crooked way. Forgive me, my father, if my words are sharp, but out of a full heart are they

spoken. See her no more, so shalt thou go down with honour to the grave. Else because of the beauty of a woman that weareth as a garment of fur shalt thou be even as I am, and perchance with more cause. I have said."

Throughout this long and eloquent address Good had been perfectly silent, but when the tale began to shape itself so aptly to his own case, he coloured up, and when he learnt that what had passed between him and Sorais had been overseen he was evidently much distressed. And now, when at last he spoke, it was in a tone of humility quite foreign to him.

"I must say," he said, with a bitter little laugh, "that I scarcely thought that I should live to be taught my duty by a Zulu; but it just shows what we can come to. I wonder if you fellows can understand how humiliated I feel, and the bitterest part of it is that I deserve it all. Of course I should have handed Sorais over to the guard, but I could not, and that is a fact. I let her go and I promised to say nothing, more is the shame to me. She told me that if I would side with her she would marry me and make me king of this country, but thank goodness I did find the heart to say that even to marry her I could not desert my friends. And now you can do what you like, I deserve it all. All I have to say is that I hope that you may never love a woman with all your heart and then be so sorely tempted of her," and he turned to go.

"Look here, old fellow," said Sir Henry, "just stop a minute. I have a little tale to tell you too." And he went on to narrate what had taken place on the previous day between Sorais and himself.

This was a finishing stroke to poor Good. It is not pleasant to any man to learn that he has been made a tool of, but when the circumstances are as peculiarly atrocious as in the present case, it is about as bitter a pill as anybody can be called on to swallow.

"Do you know," he said, "I think that between you, you fellows have about worked a cure," and he turned and walked away, and I for one felt very sorry for him. Ah, if the moths would always carefully avoid the candle, how few burnt wings there would be!

That day was a Court day, when the Queens sat in the great hall and received petitions, discussed laws, money grants, and so forth, and thither we adjourned shortly afterwards. On our way we were joined by Good, who was looking exceedingly depressed.

When we got into the hall Nyleptha was already on her throne and proceeding with business as usual, surrounded by councillors, courtiers, lawyers, priests, and an unusually strong guard. It was, however, easy to see from the air of excitement and expectation on the faces of everybody present that nobody was paying much attention to ordinary affairs, the fact being that the knowledge that civil war was imminent had now got abroad. We saluted Nyleptha and took our accustomed places, and for a little while things went on as usual, when suddenly the trumpets began to call outside the palace, and from the great crowd that was gathered there in anticipation of some unusual event there rose a roar of "*Sorais! Sorais!*"

Then came the roll of many chariot wheels, and presently the great curtains at the end of the hall were drawn wide and through them entered the "Lady of the Night" herself. Nor did she come alone. Preceding her was Agon, the High Priest, arrayed in his most gorgeous vestments, and on either side were other priests. The reason for their presence was obvious—coming with them it would have been sacrilege to attempt to detain her. Behind her were a number of the great lords, and behind them a small body of picked guards. A glance at Sorais herself was enough to show that her mission was of no peaceful kind, for in place of her gold embroidered "kaf" she wore a shining tunic formed of golden scales, and on her head a little golden helmet. In her hand, too, she bore a toy spear, beautifully made and fashioned of solid silver. Up the hall she came, looking like a lioness in her conscious pride and beauty, and as she came the spectators fell back bowing and made a path for her. By the sacred stone she halted, and laying her hand on it, she cried out with a loud voice to Nyleptha on the throne, "Hail, oh Queen!"

"All hail, my royal sister!" answered Nyleptha. "Draw thou near. Fear not, I give thee safe conduct."

Sorais answered with a haughty look, and swept on up the hall till she stood right before the thrones.

"A boon, oh Queen!" she cried again.

"Speak on, my sister; what is there that I can give thee who hath half our kingdom?"

"Thou canst tell me a true word—me and the people of Zu-Vendis. Art thou, or art thou not, about to take this foreign wolf," and she pointed to Sir Henry with her toy spear, "to be a husband to thee, and share thy bed and throne?"

Curtis winced at this, and turning towards Sorais, said to her in a low voice, "Methinks that yesterday thou hadst other names than wolf to call me by, oh Queen!" and I saw her bite her lips as, like a danger flag, the blood flamed red upon her face. As for Nyleptha, who is nothing if not original, she, seeing that the thing was out, and that there was nothing further to be gained by concealment, answered the question in a novel and effectual manner, inspired thereto, as I firmly believe, by coquetry and a desire to triumph over her rival.

Up she rose and, descending from the throne, swept in all the glory of her royal grace on to where her lover stood. There she stopped and untwined the golden snake that was wound around her arm. Then she bade him kneel, and he dropped on one knee on the marble before her, and next, taking the golden snake with both her hands, she bent the pure soft metal round his neck, and when it was fast, deliberately kissed him on the brow and called him her "dear lord".

"Thou seest," she said, when the excited murmur of the spectators had died away, addressing her sister as Sir Henry rose to his feet, "I have put my collar round the 'wolf's' neck, and behold! he shall be my watchdog, and that is my answer to thee, Queen Sorais, my sister, and to those with thee. Fear not," she went on, smiling sweetly on her lover, and pointing to the golden snake she had twined round his massive throat, "if my yoke be heavy, yet is it of pure gold, and it shall not gall thee."

Then, turning to the audience, she continued in a clear proud tone, "Ay, Lady of the Night, Lords, Priests, and People here gathered together, by this sign do I take the foreigner to husband, even here in the face of you all. What, am I a Queen, and yet not free to choose the man whom I will love? Then should I be lower than the meanest girl in all my provinces. Nay, he hath won my heart, and with it goes my hand, and throne, and all I have—ay, had he been a beggar instead of a great lord fairer and stronger than any here, and having more wisdom and knowledge of strange things, I had given him all, how much more so being what he is!" And she took his hand and gazed proudly on him, and holding it, stood there boldly facing the people. And such was her sweetness and the power and dignity of her person, and so beautiful she looked standing hand in hand there at her lover's side, so sure of him and of herself, and so ready to risk all things and endure all things for him, that most of those who saw the sight, which I am sure no one of them will ever forget, caught the fire from her eyes and the happy colour from her blushing face, and cheered her like wild things. It was a bold stroke for her to make, and it appealed to the imagination; but human nature in Zu-Vendis, as elsewhere, loves that which is bold and not afraid to break a rule, and is moreover peculiarly susceptible to appeals to its poetical side.

And so the people cheered till the roof rang; but Sorais of the Night stood there with downcast eyes, for she could not bear to see her sister's triumph, which robbed her of the man whom she had hoped to win, and in the awfulness of her jealous anger she

trembled and turned white like an aspen in the wind. I think I have said somewhere of her that she reminded me of the sea on a calm day, having the same aspect of sleeping power about her. Well, it was all awake now, and like the face of the furious ocean it awed and yet fascinated me. A really handsome woman in a royal rage is always a beautiful sight, but such beauty and such a rage I never saw combined before, and I can only say that the effect produced was well worthy of the two.

She lifted her white face, the teeth set, and there were purple rings beneath her glowing eyes. Thrice she tried to speak and thrice she failed, but at last her voice came. Raising her silver spear, she shook it, and the light gleamed from it and from the golden scales of her cuirass.

"And thinkest thou, Nyleptha," she said in notes which pealed through the great hall like a clarion, "thinkest thou that I, Sorais, a Queen of the Zu-Vendi, will brook that this base outlander shall sit upon my father's throne and rear up half-breeds to fill the place of the great House of the Stairway? Never! never! while there is life in my bosom and a man to follow me and a spear to strike with. Who is on my side? Who?"

"Now hand thou over this foreign wolf and those who came hither to prey with him to the doom of fire, for have they not committed the deadly sin against the sun? or, Nyleptha, I give thee War—red War! Ay, I say to thee that the path of thy passion shall be marked out by the blazing of thy towns and watered with the blood of those who cleave to thee. On thy head rest the burden of the deed, and in thy ears ring the groans of the dying and the cries of the widows and those who are left fatherless for ever and for ever.

"I tell thee I will tear thee, Nyleptha, the White Queen, from thy throne, and that thou shalt be hurled—ay, hurled even from the topmost stair of the great way to the foot thereof, in that thou hast covered the name of the House of him who built it with black shame. And I tell ye strangers—all save Bougwan, whom because thou didst do me a service I will save alive if thou wilt leave these men and follow me" (here poor Good shook his head vigorously and ejaculated "Can't be done" in English)—"that I will wrap you in sheets of gold and hang you yet alive in chains from the four golden trumpets of the four angels that fly east and west and north and south from the giddiest pinnacles of the Temple, so that ye may be a token and a warning to the land. And as for thee, Incubu, thou shalt die in yet another fashion that I will not tell thee now."

She ceased, panting for breath, for her passion shook her like a storm, and a murmur, partly of horror and partly of admiration, ran through the hall. Then Nyleptha answered calmly and with dignity:

"Ill would it become my place and dignity, oh sister, so to speak as thou hast spoken and so to threat as thou hast threatened. Yet if thou wilt make war, then will I strive to bear up against thee, for if my hand seem soft, yet shalt thou find it of iron when it grips thine armies by the throat. Sorais, I fear thee not. I weep for that which thou wilt bring upon our people and on thyself, but for myself I say—I fear thee not. Yet thou, who but yesterday didst strive to win my lover and my lord from me, whom today thou dost call a 'foreign wolf', to be *thy* lover and *thy* lord" (here there was an immense sensation in the hall), "thou who but last night, as I have learnt but since thou didst enter here, didst creep like a snake into my sleeping-place—ay, even by a secret way, and wouldst have foully murdered me, thy sister, as I lay asleep—"

"It is false, it is false!" rang out Agon's and a score of other voices.

"It is *not* false," said I, producing the broken point of the dagger and holding it up. "Where is the haft from which this flew, oh Sorais?"

"It is not false," cried Good, determined at last to act like a loyal man. "I took the Lady of the Night by the White Queen's bed, and on my breast the dagger broke."

"Who is on my side?" cried Sorais, shaking her silver spear, for she saw that public sympathy was turning against her. "What, Bougwan, thou comest not?" she said, addressing Good, who was standing close to her, in a low, concentrated voice. "Thou pale-souled fool, for a reward thou shalt eat out thy heart with love of me and not be satisfied, and thou mightest have been my husband and a king! At least I hold *thee* in chains that cannot be broken.

"*War! war! war!*" she cried. "Here, with my hand upon the sacred stone that shall endure, so runs the prophecy, till the Zu-Vendi set their necks beneath an alien yoke, I declare war to the end. Who follows Sorais of the Night to victory and honour?"

Instantly the whole concourse began to break up in indescribable confusion. Many present hastened to throw in their lot with the "Lady of the Night", but some came from her following to us. Amongst the former was an under officer of Nyleptha's own guard, who suddenly turned and made a run for the doorway through which Sorais' people were already passing. Umslopogaas, who was present and had taken the whole scene in, seeing with admirable presence of mind that if this soldier got away others would follow his example, seized the man, who drew his sword and struck at him. Thereon the Zulu sprang back with a wild shout, and, avoiding the sword cuts, began to peck at his foe with his terrible axe, till in a few seconds the man's fate overtook him and he fell with a clash heavily and quite dead upon the marble floor.

This was the first blood spilt in the war.

"Shut the gates," I shouted, thinking that we might perhaps catch Sorais so, and not being troubled with the idea of committing sacrilege. But the order came too late, her guards were already passing through them, and in another minute the streets echoed with the furious galloping of horses and the rolling of her chariots.

So, drawing half the people after her, Sorais was soon passing like a whirlwind through the Frowning City on her road to her headquarters at M'Arstuna, a fortress situated a hundred and thirty miles to the north of Milosis.

And after that the city was alive with the endless tramp of regiments and preparations for the gathering war, and old Umslopogaas once more began to sit in the sunshine and go through a show of sharpening Inkosi-kaas's razor edge.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A STRANGE WEDDING

One person, however, did not succeed in getting out in time before the gates were shut, and that was the High Priest Agon, who, as we had every reason to believe, was Sorais' great ally, and the heart and soul of her party. This cunning and ferocious old man had not forgiven us for those hippopotami, or rather that was what he said. What he meant was that he would never brook the introduction of our wider ways of thought and foreign learning and influence while there was a possibility of stamping us out. Also he knew that we possessed a different system of religion, and no doubt was in daily terror of our attempting to introduce it into Zu-Vendis. One day he asked me if we had any religion in our country, and I told him that so far as I could remember we had ninety-five different ones. You might have knocked him down with a feather, and really it is difficult not to pity a high priest of a well-established cult who is haunted by the possible approach of one or all of ninety-five new religions.

When we knew that Agon was caught, Nyleptha, Sir Henry, and I discussed what was to be done with him. I was for closely incarcerating him, but Nyleptha shook her head, saying that it would produce a disastrous effect throughout the country. "Ah!" she added, with a stamp of her foot, "if I win and am once really Queen, I will break the power of those priests, with their rites and revels and dark secret ways." I only wished that old Agon could have heard her, it would have frightened him.

"Well," said Sir Henry, "if we are not to imprison him, I suppose that we may as well let him go. He is of no use here."

Nyleptha looked at him in a curious sort of way, and said in a dry little voice, "Thinkest thou so, my lord?"

"Eh?" said Curtis. "No, I do not see what is the use of keeping him."

She said nothing, but continued looking at him in a way that was as shy as it was sweet.

Then at last he understood.

"Forgive me, Nyleptha," he said, rather tremulously. "Dost thou mean that thou wilt marry me, even now?"

"Nay, I know not; let my lord say," was her rapid answer; "but if my lord wills, the priest is there and the altar is there"—pointing to the entrance to a private chapel—"and am I not ready to do the will of my lord? Listen, oh my lord! In eight days or less thou must leave me and go down to war, for thou shalt lead my armies, and in war—men sometimes fall, and so I would for a little space have had thee all my own, if only for memory's sake;" and the tears overflowed her lovely eyes and rolled down her face like heavy drops of dew down the red heart of a rose.

"Mayhap, too," she went on, "I shall lose my crown, and with my crown my life and thine also. Sorais is very strong and very bitter, and if she prevails she will not spare. Who can read the future? Happiness is the world's White Bird, that alights seldom, and flies fast and far till one day he is lost in the clouds. Therefore should we hold him fast if by any chance he rests for a little space upon our hand. It is not wise to neglect the present for the future, for who knows what the future will be, Incubu? Let us pluck our flowers while the dew is on them, for when the sun is up they wither and on the morrow will others bloom that we shall never see." And she lifted her sweet face to him and smiled into his eyes, and once more I felt a curious pang of jealousy and turned and went away. They never took much notice of whether I was there or not, thinking, I suppose, that I was an old fool, and that it did not matter one way or the other, and really I believe that they were right.

So I went back to our quarters and ruminated over things in general, and watched old Umslopogaas whetting his axe outside the window as a vulture whets his beak beside a dying ox.

And in about an hour's time Sir Henry came tearing over, looking very radiant and wildly excited, and found Good and myself and even Umslopogaas, and asked us if we should like to assist at a real wedding. Of course we said yes, and off we went to the chapel, where we found Agon looking as sulky as any High Priest possibly could, and no wonder. It appeared that he and Nyleptha had a slight difference of opinion about the coming ceremony. He had flatly refused to celebrate it, or to allow any of his priests to do so, whereupon Nyleptha became very angry and told him that she, as Queen, was head of the Church, and meant to be obeyed. Indeed, she played the part of a Zu-Vendi Henry the Eighth to perfection, and insisted that, if she wanted to be married, she would be married, and that he should marry her.<sup>[19]</sup>

[19] In Zu-Vendis members of the Royal House can only be married by the High Priest or a formally appointed deputy.—A. Q.

He still refused to go through the ceremony, so she clinched her argument thus—

"Well, I cannot execute a High Priest, because there is an absurd prejudice against it, and I cannot imprison him because all his subordinates would raise a crying that would bring the stars down on Zu-Vendis and crush it; but I *can* leave him to contemplate the altar of the Sun without anything to eat, because that is his natural vocation, and if thou wilt not marry me, O Agon! thou shalt be placed before the altar yonder with nought but a little water till such time as thou hast reconsidered the matter."

Now, as it happened, Agon had been hurried away that morning without his breakfast, and was already exceedingly hungry, so he presently modified his views and consented to marry them, saying at the same time that he washed his hands of all responsibility in the matter.

So it chanced that presently, attended only by two of her favourite maidens, came the Queen Nyleptha, with happy blushing face and downcast eyes, dressed in pure white, without embroidery of any sort, as seems to be the fashion on these occasions in most countries of the world. She did not wear a single ornament, even her gold circlets were removed, and I thought that if possible she looked more lovely than ever without them, as really superbly beautiful women do.

She came, curtsied low to Sir Henry, and then took his hand and led him up before the altar, and after a little pause, in a slow, clear voice uttered the following words, which are customary in Zu-Vendis if the bride desires and the man consents:—

“Thou dost swear by the Sun that thou wilt take no other woman to wife unless I lay my hand upon her and bid her come?”

“I swear it,” answered Sir Henry; adding in English, “One is quite enough for me.”

Then Agon, who had been sulking in a corner near the altar, came forward and gabbled off something into his beard at such a rate that I could not follow it, but it appeared to be an invocation to the Sun to bless the union and make it fruitful. I observed that Nyleptha listened very closely to every word, and afterwards discovered that she was afraid lest Agon should play her a trick, and by going through the invocations backwards divorce them instead of marry them. At the end of the invocations they were asked, as in our service, if they took each other for husband and wife, and on their assenting they kissed each other before the altar, and the service was over, so far as their rites were concerned. But it seemed to me that there was yet something wanting, and so I produced a Prayer-Book, which has, together with the “Ingoldsby Legends”, that I often read when I lie awake at night, accompanied me in all my later wanderings. I gave it to my poor boy Harry years ago, and after his death I found it among his things and took it back again.

“Curtis,” I said, “I am not a clergyman, and I do not know if what I am going to propose is allowable—I know it is not legal—but if you and the Queen have no objection I should like to read the English marriage service over you. It is a solemn step which you are taking, and I think that you ought, so far as circumstances will allow, to give it the sanction of your own religion.”

“I have thought of that,” he said, “and I wish you would. I do not feel half married yet.”

Nyleptha raised no objection, fully understanding that her husband wished to celebrate the marriage according to the rites prevailing in his own country, and so I set to work and read the service, from “Dearly beloved” to “amazement”, as well as I could; and when I came to “I, Henry, take thee, Nyleptha,” I translated, and also “I, Nyleptha, take thee, Henry,” which she repeated after me very well. Then Sir Henry took a plain gold ring from his little finger and placed it on hers, and so on to the end. The ring had been Curtis’ mother’s wedding-ring, and I could not help thinking how astonished the dear old Yorkshire lady would have been if she could have foreseen that her wedding-ring was to serve a similar purpose for Nyleptha, a Queen of the Zu-Vendi.

As for Agon, he was with difficulty kept calm while this second ceremony was going on, for he at once understood that it was religious in its nature, and doubtless bethought him of the ninety-five new faiths which loomed so ominously in his eyes. Indeed, he at once set me down as a rival High Priest, and hated me accordingly. However, in the end off he went, positively bristling with indignation, and I knew that we might look out for danger from his direction.

And off went Good and I, and old Umslopogaas also, leaving the happy pair to themselves, and very low we all felt. Marriages are supposed to be cheerful things, but my experience is that they are very much the reverse to everybody, except perhaps the two people chiefly interested. They mean the breaking-up of so many old ties as well as the undertaking of so many new ones, and there is always something sad about the passing away of the old order. Now to take this case for instance: Sir Henry Curtis is the best and kindest fellow and friend in the world, but he has never been quite the same since that little scene in the chapel. It is always Nyleptha this and Nyleptha that—Nyleptha, in short, from morning till night in one way or another, either expressed or understood. And as for the old friends—well, of course they have taken the place that old friends ought to take, and which ladies are as a rule very careful to see they do take when a man marries, and that is, the second place. Yes, he would be angry if anybody said so, but it is a fact for all that. He is not quite the same, and Nyleptha is very sweet and very charming, but I think that she likes him to understand that she has married *him*, and not Quatermain, Good, and Co. But there! what is the use of grumbling? It is all very right and proper, as any married lady would have no difficulty in explaining, and I am a selfish, jealous old man, though I hope I never show it.

So Good and I went and ate in silence and then indulged in an extra fine flagon of old Zu-Vendian to keep our spirits up, and presently one of our attendants came and told a story that gave us something to think about.

It may, perhaps, be remembered that, after his quarrel with Umslopogaas, Alphonse had gone off in an exceedingly ill temper to sulk over his scratches. Well, it appears that he walked right past the Temple to the Sun, down the wide road on the further side of the slope it crowns, and thence on into the beautiful park, or pleasure gardens, which are laid out just beyond the outer wall. After wandering about there for a little he started to return, but was met near the outer gate by Sorais’ train of chariots, which were galloping furiously along the great northern road. When she caught sight of Alphonse, Sorais halted her train and called to him. On approaching he was instantly seized and dragged into one of the chariots and carried off, “crying out loudly”, as our informant said, and as from my general knowledge of him I can well believe.

At first I was much puzzled to know what object Sorais could have had in carrying off the poor little Frenchman. She could hardly stoop so low as to try to wreak her fury on one whom she knew was only a servant. At last, however, an idea occurred to me. We three were, as I think I have said, much revered by the people of Zu-Vendis at large, both because we were the first strangers they had ever seen, and because we were supposed to be the possessors of almost supernatural wisdom. Indeed, though Sorais’ cry against the “foreign wolves”—or, to translate it more accurately, “foreign hyenas”—was sure to go down very well with the nobles and the priests, it was not as we learnt, likely to be particularly effectual amongst the bulk of the population. The Zu-Vendi people, like the Athenians of old, are ever seeking for some new thing, and just because we were so new our presence was on the whole acceptable to them. Again, Sir Henry’s magnificent personal appearance made a deep impression upon a race who possess a greater love of beauty than any other I have ever been acquainted with. Beauty may be prized in other countries, but in Zu-Vendis it is almost worshipped, as indeed the national love of statuary shows. The people said openly in the market-places that there was not a man in the country to touch Curtis in personal appearance, as with the exception of Sorais there was no woman who could compete with Nyleptha, and that therefore it was meet that they should marry; and that he had been sent by the Sun as a husband for their Queen. Now, from all this it will be seen that the outcry against us was to a considerable extent fictitious, and nobody knew it better than Sorais herself. Consequently it struck me that it might have occurred to her that down in the country and among the country people, it would be better to place the reason of her conflict with her sister upon other and more general grounds than Nyleptha’s marriage with the stranger. It would be easy in a land where there had been so many civil wars to rake out some old cry that would stir up the recollection of buried feuds, and, indeed, she soon found an effectual one. This being so, it was of great importance to her to have one of the strangers with her whom she could show to the common people as a great Outlander, who had been so struck by the justice of her cause that he had elected to leave his companions and follow her standard.

This, no doubt, was the cause of her anxiety to get a hold of Good, whom she would have used till he ceased to be of service and then cast off. But Good having drawn back she grasped at the opportunity of securing Alphonse, who was not unlike him in personal appearance though smaller, no doubt with the object of showing him off in the cities and country as the great Bougwan himself. I told Good that I thought that that was her plan, and his face was a sight to see—he was so horrified at the idea.

“What,” he said, “dress up that little wretch to represent me? Why, I shall have to get out of the country! My reputation will be ruined for ever.”

I consoled him as well as I could, but it is not pleasant to be personated all over a strange country by an arrant little coward, and I can quite sympathize with his vexation.

Well, that night Good and I messed as I have said in solitary grandeur, feeling very much as though we had just returned from burying a friend instead of marrying one, and next morning the work began in good earnest. The messages and orders which had been despatched by Nyleptha two days before now began to take effect, and multitudes of armed men came pouring into the city. We saw, as may be imagined, but very little of Nyleptha and not too much of Curtis during those next few days, but Good and I sat daily with the council of generals and loyal lords, drawing up plans of action, arranging commissariat matters, the distribution of commands, and a hundred and one other things. Men came in freely, and all the day long the great roads leading to Milosis were spotted with the banners of lords arriving from their distant places to rally round Nyleptha.

After the first few days it became clear that we should be able to take the field with about forty thousand infantry and twenty thousand cavalry, a very respectable force considering how short was the time we had to collect it, and that about half the regular army had elected to follow Sorais.

But if our force was large, Sorais’ was, according to the reports brought in day by day by our spies, much larger. She had taken up her headquarters at a very strong town called M’Arstuna, situated, as I have said, to the north of Milosis, and all the countryside was flocking to her standard. Nasta had poured down from his highlands and was on his way to join her with no less than twenty-five thousand of his mountaineers, the most terrible soldiers to face in all Zu-Vendis. Another mighty lord, named Belusha, who lived in the great horse-breeding district, had come in with twelve thousand cavalry, and so on. Indeed, what between one thing and another, it seemed certain that she would gather a fully armed host of nearly one hundred thousand men.

And then came news that Sorais was proposing to break up her camp and march on the Frowning City itself, desolating the country as she came. Thereon arose the question whether it would be best to meet her at Milosis or to go out and give her battle. When our opinion was asked upon the subject, Good and I unhesitatingly gave it in favour of an advance. If we were to shut ourselves up in the city and wait to be attacked, it seemed to us that our inaction would be set down to fear. It is so important, especially on an occasion of this sort, when a very little will suffice to turn men’s opinions one way or the other, to be up and doing something. Ardour for a cause will soon evaporate if the cause does not move but sits down to conquer. Therefore we cast our vote for moving out and giving battle in the open, instead of waiting till we were drawn from our walls like a badger from a hole.

Sir Henry’s opinion coincided with ours, and so, needless to say, did that of Nyleptha, who, like a flint, was always ready to flash out fire. A great map of the country was brought and spread out before her. About thirty miles this side of M’Arstuna, where Sorais lay, and ninety odd miles from Milosis, the road ran over a neck of land some two and a half miles in width, and flanked on either side by forest-clad hills which, without being lofty, would, if the road were blocked, be quite impracticable for a great baggage-laden army to cross. She looked earnestly at the map, and then, with a quickness of perception that in some women amounts almost to an instinct, she laid her finger upon this neck of rising ground, and turning to her husband, said, with a proud air of confidence and a toss of the golden head—

“Here shalt thou meet Sorais’ armies. I know the spot, here shalt thou meet them, and drive them before thee like dust before the storm.”

But Curtis looked grave and said nothing.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE BATTLE OF THE PASS

It was on the third morning after this incident of the map that Sir Henry and I started. With the exception of a small guard, all the great host had moved on the night before, leaving the Frowning City very silent and empty. Indeed, it was found impossible to leave any garrison with the exception of a personal guard for Nyleptha, and about a thousand men who from sickness or one cause or another were unable to proceed with the army; but as Milosis was practically impregnable, and as our enemy was in front of and not behind us, this did not so much matter.

Good and Umslopogaas had gone on with the army, but Nyleptha accompanied Sir Henry and myself to the city gates, riding a magnificent white horse called Daylight, which was supposed to be the fleetest and most enduring animal in Zu-Vendis. Her face bore traces of recent weeping, but there were no tears in her eyes now, indeed she was bearing up bravely against what must have been a bitter trial to her. At the gate she reined in her horse and bade us farewell. On the previous day she had reviewed and addressed the officers of the great army, speaking to them such high, eloquent words, and expressing so complete a confidence in their valour and in their ultimate victory, that she quite carried their hearts away, and as she rode from rank to rank they cheered her till the ground shook. And now today the same mood seemed to be on her.

"Fare thee well, Macumazahn!" she said. "Remember, I trust to thy wits, which are as a needle to a spear-handle compared to those of my people, to save us from Sorais. I know that thou wilt do thy duty."

I bowed and explained to her my horror of fighting, and my fear lest I should lose my head, at which she laughed gently and turned to Curtis.

"Fare thee well, my lord!" she said. "Come back with victory, and as a king, or on thy soldiers' spears."<sup>[20]</sup>

<sup>[20]</sup> Alluding to the Zu-Vendi custom of carrying dead officers on a framework of spears.

Sir Henry said nothing, but turned his horse to go; perhaps he had a bit of a lump in his throat. One gets over it afterwards, but these sort of partings are trying when one has only been married a week.

"Here," added Nyleptha, "will I greet thee when ye return in triumph. And now, my lords, once more, farewell!"

Then we rode on, but when we had gone a hundred and fifty yards or so, we turned and perceived her still sitting on her horse at the same spot, and looking out after us beneath her hand, and that was the last we saw of her. About a mile farther on, however, we heard galloping behind us, and looking round, saw a mounted soldier coming towards us, leading Nyleptha's matchless steed—Daylight.

"The Queen sends the white stallion as a farewell gift to her Lord Incubu, and bids me tell my lord that he is the fleetest and most enduring horse in all the land," said the soldier, bending to his saddle-bow before us.

At first Sir Henry did not want to take the horse, saying that he was too good for such rough work, but I persuaded him to do so, thinking that Nyleptha would be hurt if he did not. Little did I guess at the time what service that noble horse would render in our sorest need. It is curious to look back and realise upon what trivial and apparently coincidental circumstances great events frequently turn as easily and naturally as a door on its hinges.

Well, we took the horse, and a beauty he was, it was a perfect pleasure to see him move, and Curtis having sent back his greetings and thanks, we proceeded on our journey.

By midday we overtook the rear-guard of the great army of which Sir Henry then formally took over the command. It was a heavy responsibility, and it oppressed him very much, but the Queen's injunctions on the point were such as did not admit of being trifled with. He was beginning to find out that greatness has its responsibilities as well as its glories.

Then we marched on without meeting with any opposition, almost indeed without seeing anybody, for the populations of the towns and villages along our route had for the most part fled, fearing lest they should be caught between the two rival armies and ground to powder like grain between the upper and the nether stones.

On the evening of the fourth day, for the progress of so great a multitude was necessarily slow, we camped two miles this side of the neck or ridge I have spoken of, and our outposts brought us word that Sorais with all her power was rolling down upon us, and had pitched her camp that night ten miles the farther side of the neck.

Accordingly before dawn we sent forward fifteen hundred cavalry to seize the position. Scarcely had they occupied it, however, before they were attacked by about as many of Sorais' horsemen, and a very smart little cavalry fight ensued, with a loss to us of about thirty men killed. On the advance of our supports, however, Sorais' force drew off, carrying their dead and wounded with them.

The main body of the army reached the neck about dinner-time, and I must say that Nyleptha's judgment had not failed her, it was an admirable place to give battle in, especially to a superior force.

The road ran down a mile or more, through ground too broken to admit of the handling of any considerable force, till it reached the crest of a great green wave of land, that rolled down a gentle slope to the banks of a little stream, and then rolled away again up a still gentler slope to the plain beyond, the distance from the crest of the land-wave down to the stream being a little over half a mile, and from the stream up to the plain beyond a trifle less. The length of this wave of land at its highest point, which corresponded exactly with the width of the neck of the land between the wooded hills, was about two miles and a quarter, and it was protected on

either side by dense, rocky, bush-clad ground, that afforded a most valuable cover to the flanks of the army and rendered it almost impossible for them to be turned.

It was on the hither slope of this neck of land that Curtis encamped his army in the same formation that he had, after consultation with the various generals, Good, and myself, determined that they should occupy in the great pitched battle which now appeared to be imminent.

Our force of sixty thousand men was, roughly speaking, divided as follows. In the centre was a dense body of twenty thousand foot-soldiers, armed with spears, swords, and hippopotamus-hide shields, breast and back plates.<sup>[21]</sup> These formed the chest of the army, and were supported by five thousand foot, and three thousand horse in reserve. On either side of this chest were stationed seven thousand horse arranged in deep, majestic squadrons; and beyond and on either side but slightly in front of them again were two bodies, each numbering about seven thousand five hundred spearmen, forming the right and left wings of the army, and each supported by a contingent of some fifteen hundred cavalry. This makes in all sixty thousand men.

[21] The Zu-Vendi people do not use bows.—A. Q.

Curtis commanded in chief, I was in command of the seven thousand horse between the chest and right wing, which was commanded by Good, and the other battalions and squadrons were entrusted to Zu-Vendis generals.

Scarcely had we taken up our positions before Sorais' vast army began to swarm on the opposite slope about a mile in front of us, till the whole place seemed alive with the multitude of her spearpoints, and the ground shook with the tramp of her battalions. It was evident that the spies had not exaggerated; we were outnumbered by at least a third. At first we expected that Sorais was going to attack us at once, as the clouds of cavalry which hung upon her flanks executed some threatening demonstrations, but she thought better of it, and there was no fight that day. As for the formation of her great forces I cannot now describe it with accuracy, and it would only serve to bewilder if I did, but I may say, generally, that in its leading features it resembled our own, only her reserve was much greater.

Opposite our right wing, and forming Sorais' left wing, was a great army of dark, wild-looking men, armed with sword and shield only, which, I was informed, was composed of Nasta's twenty-five thousand savage hillsmen.

"My word, Good," said I, when I saw them, "you will catch it tomorrow when those gentlemen charge!" whereat Good not unnaturally looked rather anxious.

All day we watched and waited, but nothing happened, and at last night fell, and a thousand watch-fires twinkled brightly on the slopes, to wane and die one by one like the stars they resembled. As the hours wore on, the silence gradually gathered more deeply over the opposing hosts.

It was a very wearying night, for in addition to the endless things that had to be attended to, there was our gnawing suspense to reckon with. The fray which tomorrow would witness would be so vast, and the slaughter so awful, that stout indeed must the heart have been that was not overwhelmed at the prospect. And when I thought of all that hung upon it, I own I felt ill, and it made me very sad to reflect that these mighty forces were gathered for destruction, simply to gratify the jealous anger of a woman. This was the hidden power which was to send those dense masses of cavalry, flashing like human thunderbolts across the plain, and to roll together the fierce battalions as clouds when hurricane meets hurricane. It was a dreadful thought, and set one wondering about the responsibilities of the great ones of the earth. Deep into the night we sat, with pale faces and heavy hearts, and took counsel, whilst the sentries tramped up and down, down and up, and the armed and plumed generals came and went, grim and shadow-like.

And so the time wore away, till everything was ready for the coming slaughter; and I lay down and thought, and tried to get a little rest, but could not sleep for fear of the morrow—for who could say what the morrow would bring forth? Misery and death, this was certain; beyond that we knew not, and I confess I was very much afraid. But as I realised then, it is useless to question that eternal Sphinx, the future. From day to day she reads aloud the riddles of the yesterday, of which the puzzled wordlings of all ages have not answered one, nor ever will, guess they never so wildly or cry they never so loud.

And so at length I gave up wondering, being forced humbly to leave the issue in the balancing hands of Providence and the morrow.

And at last up came the red sun, and the huge camps awoke with a clash, and a roar, and gathered themselves together for battle. It was a beautiful and awe-inspiring scene, and old Umslopogaas, leaning on his axe, contemplated it with grim delight.

"Never have I seen the like, Macumazahn, never," he said. "The battles of my people are as the play of children to what this will be. Thinkest thou that they will fight it out?"

"Ay," I answered sadly, "to the death. Content thyself, 'Woodpecker', for once shalt thou peck thy fill."

Time went on, and still there was no sign of an attack. A force of cavalry crossed the brook, indeed, and rode slowly along our front, evidently taking stock of our position and numbers. With this we did not attempt to interfere, as our decision was to stand strictly on the defensive, and not to waste a single man. The men breakfasted and stood to their arms, and the hours wore on. About midday, when the men were eating their dinner, for we thought they would fight better on full stomachs, a shout of "*Sorais, Sorais*" arose like thunder from the enemy's extreme right, and taking the glass, I was able to clearly distinguish the "Lady of the Night" herself, surrounded by a glittering staff, and riding slowly down the lines of her battalions. And as she went, that mighty, thundering shout rolled along before her like the rolling of ten thousand chariots, or the roaring of the ocean when the gale turns suddenly and carries the noise of it to the listener's ears, till the earth shook, and the air was full of the majesty of sound.

Guessing that this was a prelude to the beginning of the battle, we remained still and made ready.

We had not long to wait. Suddenly, like flame from a cannon's mouth, out shot two great tongue-like forces of cavalry, and came charging down the slope towards the little stream, slowly at first, but gathering speed as they came. Before they got to the stream, orders reached me from Sir Henry, who evidently feared that the shock of such a charge, if allowed to fall unbroken upon our infantry, would be too much for them, to send five thousand sabres to meet the force opposite to me, at the moment when it began to mount the steepest of the rise about four hundred yards from our lines. This I did, remaining behind myself with the rest of my men.

Off went the five thousand horsemen, drawn up in a wedge-like form, and I must say that the general in command handled them very ably. Starting at a hand gallop, for the first three hundred yards he rode straight at the tip of the tongue-shaped mass of cavalry which, numbering, so far as I could judge, about eight thousand sabres, was advancing to charge us. Then he suddenly swerved to the right and put on the pace, and I saw the great wedge curl round, and before the foe could check himself and turn to meet it, strike him

about halfway down his length, with a crashing rending sound, like that of the breaking-up of vast sheets of ice. In sank the great wedge, into his heart, and as it cut its way hundreds of horsemen were thrown up on either side of it, just as the earth is thrown up by a ploughshare, or more like still, as the foaming water curls over beneath the bows of a rushing ship. In, yet in, vainly does the tongue twist its ends round in agony, like an injured snake, and strive to protect its centre; still farther in, by Heaven! right through, and so, amid cheer after cheer from our watching thousands, back again upon the severed ends, beating them down, driving them as a gale drives spray, till at last, amidst the rushing of hundreds of riderless horses, the flashing of swords, and the victorious clamour of their pursuers, the great force crumples up like an empty glove, then turns and gallops pell-mell for safety back to its own lines.

I do not think it reached them more than two-thirds as strong as it went out ten minutes before. The lines which were now advancing to the attack, opened and swallowed them up, and my force returned, having only suffered a loss of about five hundred men—not much, I thought, considering the fierceness of the struggle. I could also see that the opposing bodies of cavalry on our left wing were drawing back, but how the fight went with them I do not quite know. It is as much as I can do to describe what took place immediately around me.

By this time the dense masses of the enemy's left, composed almost entirely of Nasta's swordsmen, were across the little stream, and with alternate yells of "Nasta" and "Sorais", with dancing banners and gleaming swords, were swarming up towards us like ants.

Again I received orders to try and check this movement, and also the main advance against the chest of our army, by means of cavalry charges, and this I did to the best of my ability, by continually sending squadrons of about a thousand sabres out against them. These squadrons did the enemy much damage, and it was a glorious sight to see them flash down the hillside, and bury themselves like a living knife in the heart of the foe. But, also, we lost many men, for after the experience of a couple of these charges, which had drawn a sort of bloody St Andrew's cross of dead and dying through the centre of Nasta's host, our foes no longer attempted to offer an unyielding front to their irresistible weight, but opened out to let the rush go through, throwing themselves on the ground and hamstringing hundreds of horses as they passed.

And so, notwithstanding all that we could do, the enemy drew nearer, till at last he hurled himself upon Good's force of seven thousand five hundred regulars, who were drawn up to receive them in three strong squares. About the same time, too, an awful and heartshaking roar told me that the main battle had closed in on the centre and extreme left. I raised myself in my stirrups and looked down to my left; so far as the eye could see there was a long dazzling shimmer of steel as the sun glanced upon falling sword and thrusting spear.

To and fro swung the contending lines in that dread struggle, now giving way, now gaining a little in the mad yet ordered confusion of attack and defence. But it was as much as I could do to keep count of what was happening to our own wing; and, as for the moment the cavalry had fallen back under cover of Good's three squares, I had a fair view of this.

Nasta's wild swordsmen were now breaking in red waves against the sullen rock-like squares. Time after time did they yell out their war-cries, and hurl themselves furiously against the long triple ridges of spear points, only to be rolled back as billows are when they meet the cliff.

And so for four long hours the battle raged almost without a pause, and at the end of that time, if we had gained nothing we had lost nothing. Two attempts to turn our left flank by forcing a way through the wood by which it was protected had been defeated; and as yet Nasta's swordsmen had, notwithstanding their desperate efforts, entirely failed to break Good's three squares, though they had thinned their numbers by quite a third.

As for the chest of the army where Sir Henry was with his staff and Umslopogaas, it had suffered dreadfully, but it had held its own with honour, and the same may be said of our left battle.

At last the attacks slackened, and Sorais' army drew back, having, I began to think, had enough of it. On this point, however, I was soon undeceived, for splitting up her cavalry into comparatively small squadrons, she charged us furiously with them, all along the line, and then once more sullenly rolled her tens of thousands of sword and spearmen down upon our weakened squares and squadrons; Sorais herself directing the movement, as fearless as a lioness heading the main attack. On they came like an avalanche—I saw her golden helm gleaming in the van—our counter charges of cavalry entirely failing to check their forward sweep. Now they had struck us, and our centre bent in like a bow beneath the weight of their rush—it parted, and had not the ten thousand men in reserve charged down to its support it must have been utterly destroyed. As for Good's three squares, they were swept backwards like boats upon an incoming tide, and the foremost one was burst into and lost half its remaining men. But the effort was too fierce and terrible to last. Suddenly the battle came, as it were, to a turning-point, and for a minute or two stood still.

Then it began to move towards Sorais' camp. Just then, too, Nasta's fierce and almost invincible highlanders, either because they were disheartened by their losses or by way of a ruse, fell back, and the remains of Good's gallant squares, leaving the positions they had held for so many hours, cheered wildly, and rashly followed them down the slope, whereon the swarms of swordsmen turned to envelop them, and once more flung themselves upon them with a yell. Taken thus on every side, what remained of the first square was quickly destroyed, and I perceived that the second, in which I could see Good himself mounted on a large horse, was on the point of annihilation. A few more minutes and it was broken, its streaming colours sank, and I lost sight of Good in the confused and hideous slaughter that ensued.

Presently, however, a cream-coloured horse with a snow-white mane and tail burst from the ruins of the square and came rushing past me riderless and with wide streaming reins, and in it I recognized the charger that Good had been riding. Then I hesitated no longer, but taking with me half my effective cavalry force, which now amounted to between four and five thousand men, I commended myself to God, and, without waiting for orders, I charged straight down upon Nasta's swordsmen. Seeing me coming, and being warned by the thunder of my horses' hoofs, the majority of them faced round, and gave us a right warm welcome. Not an inch would they yield; in vain did we hack and trample them down as we ploughed a broad red furrow through their thousands; they seemed to re-arise by hundreds, driving their terrible sharp swords into our horses, or severing their hamstrings, and then hacking the troopers who came to the ground with them almost into pieces. My horse was speedily killed under me, but luckily I had a fresh one, my own favourite, a coal-black mare Nyleptha had given me, being held in reserve behind, and on this I afterwards mounted. Meanwhile I had to get along as best I could, for I was pretty well lost sight of by my men in the mad confusion of the moment. My voice, of course, could not be heard in the midst of the clanging of steel and the shrieks of rage and agony. Presently I found myself mixed up with the remnants of the square, which had formed round its leader Good, and was fighting desperately for existence. I stumbled against somebody, and glancing down, caught sight of Good's eyeglass. He had been beaten to his knee. Over him was a great fellow swinging a heavy sword. Somehow I managed to run the man through with the sime I had taken from the Masai whose hand I had cut off; but as I did so, he dealt me a frightful blow on the left side and breast with the sword, and though my chain shirt

saved my life, I felt that I was badly hurt. For a minute I fell on to my hands and knees among the dead and dying, and turned sick and faint. When I came to again I saw that Nasta's spearmen, or rather those of them who remained, were retreating back across the stream, and that Good was there by me smiling sweetly.

"Near go that," he shouted; "but all's well that ends well."

I assented, but I could not help feeling that it had not ended well for me. I was sorely hurt.

Just then we saw the smaller bodies of cavalry stationed on our extreme right and left, and which were now reinforced by the three thousand sabres which we had held in reserve, flash out like arrows from their posts and fall upon the disordered flanks of Sorais' forces, and that charge decided the issue of the battle. In another minute or two the enemy was in slow and sullen retreat across the little stream, where they once more re-formed. Then came another lull, during which I managed to get a second horse, and received my orders to advance from Sir Henry, and then with one fierce deep-throated roar, with a waving of banners and a wide flashing of steel, the remains of our army took the offensive and began to sweep down, slowly indeed, but irresistibly from the positions they had so gallantly held all day.

At last it was our turn to attack.

On we moved, over the piled-up masses of dead and dying, and were approaching the stream, when suddenly I perceived an extraordinary sight. Galloping wildly towards us, his arms tightly clasped around his horse's neck, against which his blanched cheek was tightly pressed, was a man arrayed in the full costume of a Zu-Vendi general, but in whom, as he came nearer, I recognized none other than our lost Alphonse. It was impossible even then to mistake those curling mustachios. In a minute he was tearing through our ranks and narrowly escaped being cut down, till at last somebody caught his horse's bridle, and he was brought to me just as a momentary halt occurred in our advance to allow what remained of our shattered squares to form into line.

"Ah, monsieur," he gasped out in a voice that was nearly inarticulate with fright, "grace to the sky, it is you! Ah, what I have endured! But you win, monsieur, you win; they fly, the lâches. But listen, monsieur—I forget, it is no good; the Queen is to be murdered tomorrow at the first light in the palace of Milosis; her guards will leave their posts, and the priests are going to kill her. Ah yes! they little thought it, but I was ensconced beneath a banner, and I heard it all."

"What?" I said, horror-struck; "what do you mean?"

"What I say, monsieur; that devil of a Nasta he went last night to settle the affair with the Archbishop [Agon]. The guard will leave open the little gate leading from the great stair and go away, and Nasta and Agon's priests will come in and kill her. Themselves they would not kill her."

"Come with me," I said, and, shouting to the staff-officer next to me to take over the command, I snatched his bridle and galloped as hard as I could for the spot, between a quarter and half a mile off, where I saw the royal pennon flying, and where I knew that I should find Curtis if he were still alive. On we tore, our horses clearing heaps of dead and dying men, and splashing through pools of blood, on past the long broken lines of spearmen to where, mounted on the white stallion Nyleptha had sent to him as a parting gift, I saw Sir Henry's form towering above the generals who surrounded him.

Just as we reached him the advance began again. A bloody cloth was bound around his head, but I saw that his eye was as bright and keen as ever. Beside him was old Umslopogaas, his axe red with blood, but looking quite fresh and uninjured.

"What's wrong, Quatermain?" he shouted.

"Everything. There is a plot to murder the Queen tomorrow at dawn. Alphonse here, who has just escaped from Sorais, has overheard it all," and I rapidly repeated to him what the Frenchman had told me.

Curtis' face turned deadly pale and his jaw dropped.

"At dawn," he gasped, "and it is now sunset; it dawns before four and we are nearly a hundred miles off—nine hours at the outside. What is to be done?"

An idea entered into my head. "Is that horse of yours fresh?" I said.

"Yes, I have only just got on to him—when my last was killed, and he has been fed."

"So is mine. Get off him, and let Umslopogaas mount; he can ride well. We will be at Milosis before dawn, or if we are not—well, we cannot help it. No, no; it is impossible for you to leave now. You would be seen, and it would turn the fate of the battle. It is not half won yet. The soldiers would think you were making a bolt of it. Quick now."

In a moment he was down, and at my bidding Umslopogaas sprang into the empty saddle.

"Now farewell," I said. "Send a thousand horsemen with remounts after us in an hour if possible. Stay, despatch a general to the left wing to take over the command and explain my absence."

"You will do your best to save her, Quatermain?" he said in a broken voice.

"Ay, that I will. Go on; you are being left behind."

He cast one glance at us, and accompanied by his staff galloped off to join the advance, which by this time was fording the little brook that now ran red with the blood of the fallen.

As for Umslopogaas and myself, we left that dreadful field as arrows leave a bow, and in a few minutes had passed right out of the sight of slaughter, the smell of blood, and the turmoil and shouting, which only came to our ears as a faint, far-off roaring like the sound of distant breakers.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AWAY! AWAY!

At the top of the rise we halted for a second to breathe our horses; and, turning, glanced at the battle beneath us, which, illumined as it was by the fierce rays of the sinking sun staining the whole scene red, looked from where we were more like some wild titanic picture than an actual hand-to-hand combat. The distinguishing scenic effect from that distance was the countless distinct flashes of light reflected from the swords and spears, otherwise the panorama was not so grand as might have been expected. The great green lap of sward in which the struggle was being fought out, the bold round outline of the hills behind, and the wide sweep of the plain beyond, seemed to dwarf it; and what was tremendous enough when one was in it, grew insignificant when viewed from the distance. But is it not thus with all the affairs and doings of our race about which we blow the loud trumpet and make such a fuss and worry? How utterly antlike, and morally and physically insignificant, must they seem to the calm eyes that watch them from the arching depths above!

"We win the day, Macumazahn," said old Umslopogaas, taking in the whole situation with a glance of his practised eye. "Look, the Lady of the Night's forces give on every side, there is no stiffness left in them, they bend like hot iron, they are fighting with but half a heart. But alas! the battle will in a manner be drawn, for the darkness gathers, and the regiments will not be able to follow and slay!"—and he shook his head sadly. "But," he added, "I do not think that they will fight again. We have fed them with too strong a meat. Ah! it is well to have lived! At last I have seen a fight worth seeing."

By this time we were on our way again, and as we went side by side I told him what our mission was, and how that, if it failed, all the lives that had been lost that day would have been lost in vain.

"Ah!" he said, "nigh on a hundred miles and no horses but these, and to be there before the dawn! Well—away! away! man can but try, Macumazahn; and mayhap we shall be there in time to split that old 'witch-finder's' [Agon's] skull for him. Once he wanted to burn us, the old 'rain-maker', did he? And now he would set a snare for my mother [Nyleptha], would he? Good! So sure as my name is the name of the Woodpecker, so surely, be my mother alive or dead, will I split him to the beard. Ay, by T'Chaka's head I swear it!" and he shook Inkosi-kaas as he galloped. By now the darkness was closing in, but fortunately there would be a moon later, and the road was good.

On we sped through the twilight, the two splendid horses we bestrode had got their wind by this, and were sweeping along with a wide steady stride that neither failed nor varied for mile upon mile. Down the side of slopes we galloped, across wide vales that stretched to the foot of far-off hills. Nearer and nearer grew the blue hills; now we were travelling up their steep, and now we were over and passing towards others that sprang up like visions in the far, faint distance beyond.

On, never pausing or drawing rein, through the perfect quiet of the night, that was set like a song to the falling music of our horses' hoofs; on, past deserted villages, where only some forgotten starving dog howled a melancholy welcome; on, past lonely moated dwellings; on, through the white patchy moonlight, that lay coldly upon the wide bosom of the earth, as though there was no warmth in it; on, knee to knee, for hour after hour!

We spake not, but bent us forward on the necks of those two glorious horses, and listened to their deep, long-drawn breaths as they filled their great lungs, and to the regular unfaltering ring of their round hoofs. Grim and black indeed did old Umslopogaas look beside me, mounted upon the great white horse, like Death in the Revelation of St John, as now and again lifting his fierce set face he gazed out along the road, and pointed with his axe towards some distant rise or house.

And so on, still on, without break or pause for hour after hour.

At last I felt that even the splendid animal that I rode was beginning to give out. I looked at my watch; it was nearly midnight, and we were considerably more than half way. On the top of a rise was a little spring, which I remembered because I had slept by it a few nights before, and here I motioned to Umslopogaas to pull up, having determined to give the horses and ourselves ten minutes to breathe in. He did so, and we dismounted—that is to say, Umslopogaas did, and then helped me off, for what with fatigue, stiffness, and the pain of my wound, I could not do so for myself; and then the gallant horses stood panting there, resting first one leg and then another, while the sweat fell drip, drip, from them, and the steam rose and hung in pale clouds in the still night air.

Leaving Umslopogaas to hold the horses, I hobbled to the spring and drank deep of its sweet waters. I had had nothing but a single mouthful of wine since midday, when the battle began, and I was parched up, though my fatigue was too great to allow me to feel hungry. Then, having laved my fevered head and hands, I returned, and the Zulu went and drank. Next we allowed the horses to take a couple of mouthfuls each—no more; and oh, what a struggle we had to get the poor beasts away from the water! There were yet two minutes, and I employed it in hobbling up and down to try and relieve my stiffness, and in inspecting the condition of the horses. My mare, gallant animal though she was, was evidently much distressed; she hung her head, and her eye looked sick and dull; but Daylight, Nyleptha's glorious horse—who, if he is served aright, should, like the steeds who saved great Rameses in his need, feed for the rest of his days out of a golden manger—was still comparatively speaking fresh, notwithstanding the fact that he had had by far the heavier weight to carry. He was "tucked up", indeed, and his legs were weary, but his eye was bright and clear, and he held his shapely head up and gazed out into the darkness round him in a way that seemed to say that whoever failed *he* was good for those five-and-forty miles that yet lay between us and Milosis. Then Umslopogaas helped me into the saddle and—vigorous old savage that he was!—vaulted into his own without touching a stirrup, and we were off once more, slowly at first, till the horses got into their stride, and then more swiftly. So we passed over another ten miles, and then came a long, weary rise of some six or seven miles, and three times did my poor black mare nearly come to the ground with me. But on the top she seemed to gather herself together, and rattled down the slope with long, convulsive strides, breathing in gasps. We did that three or four miles more swiftly than any since we

had started on our wild ride, but I felt it to be a last effort, and I was right. Suddenly my poor horse took the bit between her teeth and bolted furiously along a stretch of level ground for some three or four hundred yards, and then, with two or three jerky strides, pulled herself up and fell with a crash right on to her head, I rolling myself free as she did so. As I struggled to my feet the brave beast raised her head and looked at me with piteous bloodshot eyes, and then her head dropped with a groan and she was dead. Her heart was broken.

Umslopogaas pulled up beside the carcase, and I looked at him in dismay. There were still more than twenty miles to do by dawn, and how were we to do it with one horse? It seemed hopeless, but I had forgotten the old Zulu's extraordinary running powers.

Without a single word he sprang from the saddle and began to hoist me into it.

"What wilt thou do?" I asked.

"Run," he answered, seizing my stirrup-leather.

Then off we went again, almost as fast as before; and oh, the relief it was to me to get that change of horses! Anybody who has ever ridden against time will know what it meant.

Daylight sped along at a long stretching hand-gallop, giving the gaunt Zulu a lift at every stride. It was a wonderful thing to see old Umslopogaas run mile after mile, his lips slightly parted and his nostrils agape like the horse's. Every five miles or so we stopped for a few minutes to let him get his breath, and then flew on again.

"Canst thou go farther," I said at the third of these stoppages, "or shall I leave thee to follow me?"

He pointed with his axe to a dim mass before us. It was the Temple of the Sun, now not more than five miles away.

"I reach it or I die," he gasped.

Oh, that last five miles! The skin was rubbed from the inside of my legs, and every movement of my horse gave me anguish. Nor was that all. I was exhausted with toil, want of food and sleep, and also suffering very much from the blow I had received on my left side; it seemed as though a piece of bone or something was slowly piercing into my lung. Poor Daylight, too, was pretty nearly finished, and no wonder. But there was a smell of dawn in the air, and we might not stay; better that all three of us should die upon the road than that we should linger while there was life in us. The air was thick and heavy, as it sometimes is before the dawn breaks, and—another infallible sign in certain parts of Zu-Vendis that sunrise is at hand—hundreds of little spiders pendant on the end of long tough webs were floating about in it. These early-rising creatures, or rather their webs, caught upon the horse's and our own forms by scores, and, as we had neither the time nor the energy to brush them off, we rushed along covered with hundreds of long grey threads that streamed out a yard or more behind us—and a very strange appearance they must have given us.

And now before us are the huge brazen gates of the outer wall of the Frowning City, and a new and horrible doubt strikes me: What if they will not let us in?

"*Open! open!*" I shout imperiously, at the same time giving the royal password. "*Open! open!* a messenger, a messenger with tidings of the war!"

"What news?" cried the guard. "And who art thou that ridest so madly, and who is that whose tongue lolls out"—and it actually did—"and who runs by thee like a dog by a chariot?"

"It is the Lord Macumazahn, and with him is his dog, his black dog. *Open! open!* I bring tidings."

The great gates ran back on their rollers, and the drawbridge fell with a rattling crash, and we dashed on through the one and over the other.

"What news, my lord, what news?" cried the guard.

"Incubu rolls Sorais back, as the wind a cloud," I answered, and was gone.

One more effort, gallant horse, and yet more gallant man!

So, fall not now, Daylight, and hold thy life in thee for fifteen short minutes more, old Zulu war-dog, and ye shall both live for ever in the annals of the land.

On, clattering through the sleeping streets. We are passing the Flower Temple now—one mile more, only one little mile—hold on, keep your life in thee, see the houses run past of themselves. Up, good horse, up, there—but fifty yards now. Ah! you see your stables and stagger on gallantly.

"Thank God, the palace at last!" and see, the first arrows of the dawn are striking on the Temple's golden dome.<sup>[22]</sup> But shall I get in here, or is the deed done and the way barred?

<sup>[22]</sup> Of course, the roof of the Temple, being so high, caught the light some time before the breaking of the dawn.—A. Q.

Once more I give the password and shout "*Open! open!*"

No answer, and my heart grows very faint.

Again I call, and this time a single voice replies, and to my joy I recognize it as belonging to Kara, a fellow-officer of Nyleptha's guards, a man I know to be as honest as the light—indeed, the same whom Nyleptha had sent to arrest Sorais on the day she fled to the temple.

"Is it thou, Kara?" I cry; "I am Macumazahn. Bid the guard let down the bridge and throw wide the gate. Quick, quick!"

Then followed a space that seemed to me endless, but at length the bridge fell and one half of the gate opened and we got into the courtyard, where at last poor Daylight fell down beneath me, as I thought, dead. Except Kara, there was nobody to be seen, and his look was wild, and his garments were all torn. He had opened the gate and let down the bridge alone, and was now getting them up and shut again (as, owing to a very ingenious arrangement of cranks and levers, one man could easily do, and indeed generally did do).

"Where are the guard?" I gasped, fearing his answer as I never feared anything before.

"I know not," he answered; "two hours ago, as I slept, was I seized and bound by the watch under me, and but now, this very moment, have I freed myself with my teeth. I fear, I greatly fear, that we are betrayed."

His words gave me fresh energy. Catching him by the arm, I staggered, followed by Umslopogaas, who reeled after us like a drunken man, through the courtyards, up the great hall, which was silent as the grave, towards the Queen's sleeping-place.

We reached the first ante-room—no guards; the second, still no guards. Oh, surely the thing was done! we were too late after all, too late! The silence and solitude of those great chambers was dreadful, and weighed me down like an evil dream. On, right into Nyleptha's chamber we rushed and staggered, sick at heart, fearing the very worst; we saw there was a light in it, ay, and a figure bearing the light. Oh, thank God, it is the White Queen herself, the Queen unharmed! There she stands in her night gear, roused, by the clatter of our coming, from her bed, the heaviness of sleep yet in her eyes, and a red blush of fear and shame mantling her lovely breast and cheek.

"Who is it?" she cries. "What means this? Oh, Macumazahn, is it thou? Why lookest thou so wildly? Thou comest as one bearing evil tidings—and my lord—oh, tell me not my lord is dead—not dead!" she wailed, wringing her white hands.

"I left Incubu wounded, but leading the advance against Sorais last night at sundown; therefore let thy heart have rest. Sorais is beaten back all along her lines, and thy arms prevail."

"I knew it," she cried in triumph. "I knew that he would win; and they called him Outlander, and shook their wise heads when I gave him the command! Last night at sundown, sayest thou, and it is not yet dawn? Surely—"

"Throw a cloak around thee, Nyleptha," I broke in, "and give us wine to drink; ay, and call thy maidens quick if thou wouldst save thyself alive. Nay, stay not."

Thus adjured she ran and called through the curtains towards some room beyond, and then hastily put on her sandals and a thick cloak, by which time a dozen or so of half-dressed women were pouring into the room.

"Follow us and be silent," I said to them as they gazed with wondering eyes, clinging one to another. So we went into the first ante-room.

"Now," I said, "give us wine to drink and food, if ye have it, for we are near to death."

The room was used as a mess-room for the officers of the guards, and from a cupboard some flagons of wine and some cold flesh were brought forth, and Umslopogaas and I drank, and felt life flow back into our veins as the good red wine went down.

"Hark to me, Nyleptha," I said, as I put down the empty tankard. "Hast thou here among these thy waiting-ladies any two of discretion?"

"Ay," she said, "surely."

"Then bid them go out by the side entrance to any citizens whom thou canst bethink thee of as men loyal to thee, and pray them come armed, with all honest folk that they can gather, to rescue thee from death. Nay, question not; do as I say, and quickly. Kara here will let out the maids."

She turned, and selecting two of the crowd of damsels, repeated the words I had uttered, giving them besides a list of the names of the men to whom each should run.

"Go swiftly and secretly; go for your very lives," I added.

In another moment they had left with Kara, whom I told to rejoin us at the door leading from the great courtyard on to the stairway as soon as he had made fast behind the girls. Thither, too, Umslopogaas and I made our way, followed by the Queen and her women. As we went we tore off mouthfuls of food, and between them I told her what I knew of the danger which encompassed her, and how we found Kara, and how all the guards and men-servants were gone, and she was alone with her women in that great place; and she told me, too, that a rumour had spread through the town that our army had been utterly destroyed, and that Sorais was marching in triumph on Milosis, and how in consequence thereof all men had fallen away from her.

Though all this takes some time to tell, we had not been but six or seven minutes in the palace; and notwithstanding that the golden roof of the temple being very lofty was ablaze with the rays of the rising sun, it was not yet dawn, nor would be for another ten minutes. We were in the courtyard now, and here my wound pained me so that I had to take Nyleptha's arm, while Umslopogaas rolled along after us, eating as he went.

Now we were across it, and had reached the narrow doorway through the palace wall that opened on to the mighty stair.

I looked through and stood aghast, as well I might. The door was gone, and so were the outer gates of bronze—entirely gone. They had been taken from their hinges, and as we afterwards found, hurled from the stairway to the ground two hundred feet beneath. There in front of us was the semicircular standing-space, about twice the size of a large oval dining-table, and the ten curved black marble steps leading on to the main stair—and that was all.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### HOW UMSLOPOGAAS HELD THE STAIR

We looked at one another.

"Thou seest," I said, "they have taken away the door. Is there aught with which we may fill the place? Speak quickly for they will be on us ere the daylight." I spoke thus, because I knew that we must hold this place or none, as there were no inner doors in the palace, the rooms being separated one from another by curtains. I also knew that if we could by any means defend this doorway the murderers could get in nowhere else; for the palace is absolutely impregnable, that is, since the secret door by which Sorais had entered on that memorable night of attempted murder had, by Nyleptha's order, been closed up with masonry.

"I have it," said Nyleptha, who, as usual with her, rose to the emergency in a wonderful way. "On the farther side of the courtyard are blocks of cut marble—the workmen brought them there for the bed of the new statue of Incubu, my lord; let us block the door with them."

I jumped at the idea; and having despatched one of the remaining maidens down the great stair to see if she could obtain assistance from the docks below, where her father, who was a great merchant employing many men, had his dwelling-place, and set another to watch through the doorway, we made our way back across the courtyard to where the hewn marble lay; and here we met Kara returning from despatching the first two messengers. There were the marble blocks, sure enough, broad, massive lumps, some six inches thick, and weighing about eighty pounds each, and there, too, were a couple of implements like small stretchers, that the workmen used to carry them on. Without delay we got some of the blocks on to the stretchers, and four of the girls carried them to the doorway.

"Listen, Macumazahn," said Umslopogaas, "if those low fellows come, it is I who will hold the stair against them till the door is built up. Nay, nay, it will be a man's death: gainsay me not, old friend. It has been a good day, let it now be good night. See, I throw myself down to rest on the marble there; when their footsteps are nigh, wake thou me, not before, for I need my strength," and without a word he went outside and flung himself down on the marble, and was instantly asleep.

At this time, I too was overcome, and was forced to sit down by the doorway, and content myself with directing operations. The girls brought the block, while Kara and Nyleptha built them up across the six-foot-wide doorway, a triple row of them, for less would be useless. But the marble had to be brought forty yards and then there were forty yards to run back, and though the girls laboured gloriously, even staggering along alone, each with a block in her arms, it was slow work, dreadfully slow.

The light was growing now, and presently, in the silence, we heard a commotion at the far-bottom of the stair, and the faint clinking of armed men. As yet the wall was only two feet high, and we had been eight minutes at the building of it. So they had come. Alphonse had heard aright.

The clanking sound came nearer, and in the ghostly grey of the dawning we could make out long files of men, some fifty or so in all, slowly creeping up the stair. They were now at the half-way standing place that rested on the great flying arch; and here, perceiving that something was going on above, they, to our great gain, halted for three or four minutes and consulted, then slowly and cautiously advanced again.

We had been nearly a quarter of an hour at the work now, and it was almost three feet high.

Then I woke Umslopogaas. The great man rose, stretched himself, and swung Inkosi-kaas round his head.

"It is well," he said. "I feel as a young man once more. My strength has come back to me, ay, even as a lamp flares up before it dies. Fear not, I shall fight a good fight; the wine and the sleep have put a new heart into me.

"Macumazahn, I have dreamed a dream. I dreamed that thou and I stood together on a star, and looked down on the world, and thou wast as a spirit, Macumazahn, for light flamed through thy flesh, but I could not see what was the fashion of mine own face. The hour has come for us, old hunter. So be it: we have had our time, but I would that in it I had seen some more such fights as yesterday's.

"Let them bury me after the fashion of my people, Macumazahn, and set my eyes towards Zululand;" and he took my hand and shook it, and then turned to face the advancing foe.

Just then, to my astonishment, the Zu-Vendi officer Kara clambered over our improvised wall in his quiet, determined sort of way, and took his stand by the Zulu, unsheathing his sword as he did so.

"What, comest thou too?" laughed out the old warrior. "Welcome—a welcome to thee, brave heart! Ow! for the man who can die like a man; ow! for the death grip and the ringing of steel. Ow! we are ready. We wet our beaks like eagles, our spears flash in the sun; we shake our assegais, and are hungry to fight. Who comes to give greeting to the Chieftainess [Inkosi-kaas]? Who would taste her kiss, whereof the fruit is death? I, the Woodpecker, I, the Slaughterer, I the Swiftfooted! I, Umslopogaas, of the tribe of the Maquilisini, of the people of Amazulu, a captain of the regiment of the Nkomabakosi: I, Umslopogaas, the son of Indabazimbi, the son of Arpi the son of Mosilikaatze, I of the royal blood of T'Chaka, I of the King's House, I the Ringed Man, I the Induna, I call to them as a buck calls, I challenge them, I await them. Ow! it is thou, it is thou!"

As he spake, or rather chanted, his wild war-song, the armed men, among whom in the growing light I recognized both Nasta and Agon, came streaming up the stair with a rush, and one big fellow, armed with a heavy spear, dashed up the ten semicircular steps ahead of his comrades and struck at the great Zulu with the spear. Umslopogaas moved his body but not his legs, so that the blow missed him, and next instant Inkosi-kaas crashed through headpiece, hair and skull, and the man's corpse was rattling down the steps.

As he dropped, his round hippopotamus-hide shield fell from his hand on to the marble, and the Zulu stooped down and seized it, still chanting as he did so.

In another second the sturdy Kara had also slain a man, and then began a scene the like of which has not been known to me.

Up rushed the assailants, one, two, three at a time, and as fast as they came, the axe crashed and the sword swung, and down they rolled again, dead or dying. And ever as the fight thickened, the old Zulu's eye seemed to get quicker and his arm stronger. He shouted out his war-cries and the names of chiefs whom he had slain, and the blows of his awful axe rained straight and true, shearing through everything they fell on. There was none of the scientific method he was so fond of about this last immortal fight of his; he had no time for it, but struck with his full strength, and at every stroke a man sank in his tracks, and went rattling down the marble steps.

They hacked and hewed at him with swords and spears, wounding him in a dozen places till he streamed red with blood; but the shield protected his head and the chain-shirt his vitals, and for minute after minute, aided by the gallant Zu-Vendi, he still held the stair.

At last Kara's sword broke, and he grappled with a foe, and they rolled down together, and he was cut to pieces, dying like the brave man that he was.

Umslopogaas was alone now, but he never blenched or turned. Shouting out some wild Zulu battle-cry, he beat down a foe, ay, and another, and another, till at last they drew back from the slippery blood-stained steps, and stared at him with amazement, thinking that he was no mortal man.

The wall of marble block was four feet six high now, and hope rose in my heart as I leaned there against it a miserable helpless log, and ground my teeth, and watched that glorious struggle. I could do no more for I had lost my revolver in the battle.

And old Umslopogaas, he leaned too on his good axe, and, faint as he was with wounds, he mocked them, he called them "women"—the grand old warrior, standing there one against so many! And for a breathing space none would come against him, notwithstanding Nasta's exhortations, till at last old Agon, who, to do him justice, was a brave man, mad with baffled rage, and seeing that the wall would soon be built and his plans defeated, shook the great spear he held, and rushed up the dripping steps.

"Ah, ah!" shouted the Zulu, as he recognized the priest's flowing white beard, "it is thou, old 'witch-finder'! Come on! I await thee, white 'medicine man'; come on! come on! I have sworn to slay thee, and I ever keep my faith."

On he came, taking him at his word, and drove the big spear with such force at Umslopogaas that it sunk right through the tough shield and pierced him in the neck. The Zulu cast down the transfixed shield, and that moment was Agon's last, for before he could free his spear and strike again, with a shout of "*There's for thee, Rain-maker!*" Umslopogaas gripped Inkosi-kaas with both hands and whirled on high and drove her right on to his venerable head, so that Agon rolled down dead among the corpses of his fellow-murderers, and there was an end to him and his plots altogether. And even as he fell, a great cry rose from the foot of the stair, and looking out through the portion of the doorway that was yet unclosed, we saw armed men rushing up to the rescue, and called an answer to their shouts. Then the would-be murderers who yet remained on the stairway, and amongst whom I saw several priests, turned to fly, but, having nowhere to go, were butchered as they fled. Only one man stayed, and he was the great lord Nasta, Nyleptha's suitor, and the father of the plot. For a moment the black-bearded Nasta stood with bowed face leaning on his long sword as though in despair, and then, with a dreadful shout, he too rushed up at the Zulu, and, swinging the glittering sword around his head, dealt him such a mighty blow beneath his guard, that the keen steel of the heavy blade bit right through the chain armour and deep into Umslopogaas' side, for a moment paralysing him and causing him to drop his axe.

Raising the sword again, Nasta sprang forward to make an end of him, but little he knew his foe. With a shake and a yell of fury, the Zulu gathered himself together and sprang straight at Nasta's throat, as I have sometimes seen a wounded lion spring. He struck him full as his foot was on the topmost stair, and his long arms closing round him like iron bands, down they rolled together struggling furiously. Nasta was a strong man and a desperate, but he could not match the strongest man in Zululand, sore wounded though he was, whose strength was as the strength of a bull. In a minute the end came. I saw old Umslopogaas stagger to his feet—ay, and saw him by a single gigantic effort swing up the struggling Nasta and with a shout of triumph hurl him straight over the parapet of the bridge, to be crushed to powder on the rocks two hundred feet below.

The succour which had been summoned by the girl who had passed down the stair before the assassins passed up was at hand, and the loud shouts which reached us from the outer gates told us that the town was also aroused, and the men awakened by the women were calling to be admitted. Some of Nyleptha's brave ladies, who in their night-shifts and with their long hair streaming down their backs, just as they had been aroused from rest, went off to admit them at the side entrance, whilst others, assisted by the rescuing party outside, pushed and pulled down the marble blocks they had placed there with so much labour.

Soon the wall was down again, and through the doorway, followed by a crowd of rescuers, staggered old Umslopogaas, an awful and, in a way, a glorious figure. The man was a mass of wounds, and a glance at his wild eye told me that he was dying. The "keshla" gum-ring upon his head was severed in two places by sword-cuts, one just over the curious hole in his skull, and the blood poured down his face from the gashes. Also on the right side of his neck was a stab from a spear, inflicted by Agon; there was a deep cut on his left arm just below where the mail shirt-sleeve stopped, and on the right side of his body the armour was severed by a gash six inches long, where Nasta's mighty sword had bitten through it and deep into its wearer's vitals.

On, axe in hand, he staggered, that dreadful-looking, splendid savage, and the ladies forgot to turn faint at the scene of blood, and cheered him, as well they might, but he never stayed or heeded. With outstretched arms and tottering gait he pursued his way, followed by us all along the broad shell-strewn walk that ran through the courtyard, past the spot where the blocks of marble lay, through the round arched doorway and the thick curtains that hung within it, down the short passage and into the great hall, which was now filling with hastily-armed men, who poured through the side entrance. Straight up the hall he went, leaving behind him a track of blood on the marble pavement, till at last he reached the sacred stone, which stood in the centre of it, and here his strength seemed to fail him, for he stopped and leaned upon his axe. Then suddenly he lifted up his voice and cried aloud—

"I die, I die—but it was a kingly fray. Where are they who came up the great stair? I see them not. Art thou there, Macumazahn, or art thou gone before to wait for me in the dark whither I go? The blood blinds me—the place turns round—I hear the voice of waters."

Next, as though a new thought had struck him, he lifted the red axe and kissed the blade.

"Farewell, Inkosi-kaas," he cried. "Nay, nay, we will go together; we cannot part, thou and I. We have lived too long one with another, thou and I."

"One more stroke, only one! A good stroke! a straight stroke! a strong stroke!" and, drawing himself to his full height, with a wild heart-shaking shout, he with both hands began to whirl the axe round his head till it looked like a circle of flaming steel. Then, suddenly, with awful force he brought it down straight on to the crown of the mass of sacred stone. A shower of sparks flew up, and such was the almost superhuman strength of the blow, that the massive marble split with a rending sound into a score of pieces, whilst of Inkosi-kaas there remained but some fragments of steel and a fibrous rope of shattered horn that had been the handle. Down with a crash on to the pavement fell the fragments of the holy stone, and down with a crash on to them, still grasping the knob of Inkosi-kaas, fell the brave old Zulu—*dead*. And thus the hero died.

A gasp of wonder and astonishment rose from all those who witnessed the extraordinary sight, and then somebody cried, "*The prophecy! the prophecy!* He has shattered the sacred stone!" and at once a murmuring arose.

"Ay," said Nyleptha, with that quick wit which distinguishes her. "Ay, my people, he has shattered the stone, and behold the prophecy is fulfilled, for a stranger king rules in Zu-Vendis. Incubu, my lord, hath beat Sorais back, and I fear her no more, and to him who hath saved the Crown it shall surely be. And this man," she said, turning to me and laying her hand upon my shoulder, "wot ye that, though wounded in the fight of yesterday, he rode with that old warrior who lies there, one hundred miles 'twixt sun set and rise to save me from the plots of cruel men. Ay, and he has saved me, by a very little, and therefore because of the deeds that they have done—deeds of glory such as our history cannot show the like—therefore I say that the name of Macumazahn and the name of dead Umslopogaas, ay, and the name of Kara, my servant, who aided him to hold the stair, shall be blazoned in letters of gold above my throne, and shall be glorious for ever while the land endures. I, the Queen, have said it."

This spirited speech was met with loud cheering, and I said that after all we had only done our duty, as it is the fashion of both Englishmen and Zulus to do, and there was nothing to make an outcry about; at which they cheered still more, and then I was supported across the outer courtyard to my old quarters, in order that I might be put to bed. As I went, my eyes lit upon the brave horse Daylight that lay there, his white head outstretched on the pavement, exactly as he had fallen on entering the yard; and I bade those who supported me take me near him, that I might look on the good beast once more before he was dragged away. And as I looked, to my astonishment he opened his eyes and, lifting his head a little, whinnied faintly. I could have shouted for joy to find that he was not dead, only unfortunately I had not a shout left in me; but as it was, grooms were sent for and he was lifted up and wine poured down his throat, and in a fortnight he was as well and strong as ever, and is the pride and joy of all the people of Milosis, who, whenever they see him, point him out to the little children as the "horse which saved the White Queen's life".

Then I went on and got off to bed, and was washed and had my mail shirt removed. They hurt me a great deal in getting it off, and no wonder, for on my left breast and side was a black bruise the size of a saucer.

The next thing that I remember was the tramp of horsemen outside the palace wall, some ten hours later. I raised myself and asked what was the news, and they told me that a large body of cavalry sent by Curtis to assist the Queen had arrived from the scene of the battle, which they had left two hours after sundown. When they left, the wreck of Sorais' army was in full retreat upon M'Arstuna, followed by all our effective cavalry. Sir Henry was encamping the remains of his worn-out forces on the site (such is the fortune of war) that Sorais had occupied the night before, and proposed marching to M'Arstuna on the morrow. Having heard this, I felt that I could die with a light heart, and then everything became a blank.

When next I awoke the first thing I saw was the round disc of a sympathetic eyeglass, behind which was Good.

"How are you getting on, old chap?" said a voice from the neighbourhood of the eyeglass.

"What are you doing here?" I asked faintly. "You ought to be at M'Arstuna—have you run away, or what?"

"M'Arstuna," he replied cheerfully. "Ah, M'Arstuna fell last week—you've been unconscious for a fortnight, you see—with all the honours of war, you know—trumpets blowing, flags flying, just as though they had had the best of it; but for all that, weren't they glad to go. Israel made for his tents, I can tell you—never saw such a sight in my life."

"And Sorais?" I asked.

"Sorais—oh, Sorais is a prisoner; they gave her up, the scoundrels," he added, with a change of tone—"sacrificed the Queen to save their skins, you see. She is being brought up here, and I don't know what will happen to her, poor soul!" and he sighed.

"Where is Curtis?" I asked.

"He is with Nyleptha. She rode out to meet us today, and there was a grand to-do, I can tell you. He is coming to see you tomorrow; the doctors (for there is a medical 'faculty' in Zu-Vendis as elsewhere) thought that he had better not come today."

I said nothing, but somehow I thought to myself that notwithstanding the doctors he might have given me a look; but there, when a man is newly married and has just gained a great victory, he is apt to listen to the advice of doctors, and quite right too.

Just then I heard a familiar voice informing me that "Monsieur must now couch himself," and looking up perceived Alphonse's enormous black mustachios curling away in the distance.

"So you are here?" I said.

"Mais oui, Monsieur; the war is now finished, my military instincts are satisfied, and I return to nurse Monsieur."

I laughed, or rather tried to; but whatever may have been Alphonse's failings as a warrior (and I fear that he did not come up to the level of his heroic grandfather in this particular, showing thereby how true is the saying that it is a bad thing to be overshadowed by some great ancestral name), a better or kinder nurse never lived. Poor Alphonse! I hope he will always think of me as kindly as I think of him.

On the morrow I saw Curtis and Nyleptha with him, and he told me the whole history of what had happened since Umslopogaas and I galloped wildly away from the battle to save the life of the Queen. It seemed to me that he had managed the thing exceedingly well, and showed great ability as a general. Of course, however, our loss had been dreadfully heavy—indeed, I am afraid to say how many perished in the desperate battle I have described, but I know that the slaughter has appreciably affected the male population of the country. He was very pleased to see me, dear fellow that he is, and thanked me with tears in his eyes for the little that I had been able to do. I saw him, however, start violently when his eyes fell upon my face.

As for Nyleptha, she was positively radiant now that "her dear lord" had come back with no other injury than an ugly scar on his forehead. I do not believe that she allowed all the fearful slaughter that had taken place to weigh ever so little in the balance against this one fact, or even to greatly diminish her joy; and I cannot blame her for it, seeing that it is the nature of loving woman to look at all things through the spectacles of her love, and little does she reckon of the misery of the many if the happiness of the *one* be assured. That is human nature, which the Positivists tell us is just perfection; so no doubt it is all right.

"And what art thou going to do with Sorais?" I asked her.

Instantly her bright brow darkened to a frown.

"Sorais," she said, with a little stamp of the foot; "ah, but Sorais!"

Sir Henry hastened to turn the subject.

"You will soon be about and all right again now, old fellow," he said.

I shook my head and laughed.

"Don't deceive yourselves," I said. "I may be about for a little, but I shall never be all right again. I am a dying man, Curtis. I may die slow, but die I must. Do you know I have been spitting blood all the morning? I tell you there is something working away into my lung; I can feel it. There, don't look distressed; I have had my day, and am ready to go. Give me the mirror, will you? I want to look at myself."

He made some excuse, but I saw through it and insisted, and at last he handed me one of the discs of polished silver set in a wooden frame like a hand-screen, which serve as looking-glasses in Zu-Vendis. I looked and put it down.

"Ah," I said quietly, "I thought so; and you talk of my getting all right!" I did not like to let them see how shocked I really was at my own appearance. My grizzled stubby hair was turned snow-white, and my yellow face was shrunk like an aged woman's and had two deep purple rings painted beneath the eyes.

Here Nyleptha began to cry, and Sir Henry again turned the subject, telling me that the artists had taken a cast of the dead body of old Umslopogaas, and that a great statue in black marble was to be erected of him in the act of splitting the sacred stone, which was to be matched by another statue in white marble of myself and the horse Daylight as he appeared when, at the termination of that wild ride, he sank beneath me in the courtyard of the palace. I have since seen these statues, which at the time of writing this, six months after the battle, are nearly finished; and very beautiful they are, especially that of Umslopogaas, which is exactly like him. As for that of myself, it is good, but they have idealized my ugly face a little, which is perhaps as well, seeing that thousands of people will probably look at it in the centuries to come, and it is not pleasant to look at ugly things.

Then they told me that Umslopogaas' last wish had been carried out, and that, instead of being cremated, as I shall be, after the usual custom here, he had been tied up, Zulu fashion, with his knees beneath his chin, and, having been wrapped in a thin sheet of beaten gold, entombed in a hole hollowed out of the masonry of the semicircular space at the top of the stair he defended so splendidly, which faces, as far as we can judge, almost exactly towards Zululand. There he sits, and will sit for ever, for they embalmed him with spices, and put him in an air-tight stone coffer, keeping his grim watch beneath the spot he held alone against a multitude; and the people say that at night his ghost rises and stands shaking the phantom of Inkosi-kaas at phantom foes. Certainly they fear during the dark hours to pass the place where the hero is buried.

Oddly enough, too, a new legend or prophecy has arisen in the land in that unaccountable way in which such things do arise among barbarous and semi-civilized people, blowing, like the wind, no man knows whence. According to this saying, so long as the old Zulu sits there, looking down the stairway he defended when alive, so long will the New House of the Stairway, springing from the union of the Englishman and Nyleptha, endure and flourish; but when he is taken from thence, or when, ages after, his bones at last crumble into dust, the House will fall, and the Stairway shall fall, and the Nation of the Zu-Vendi shall cease to be a Nation.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### I HAVE SPOKEN

It was a week after Nyleptha's visit, when I had begun to get about a little in the middle of the day, that a message came to me from Sir Henry to say that Sorais would be brought before them in the Queen's first antechamber at midday, and requesting my attendance if possible. Accordingly, greatly drawn by curiosity to see this unhappy woman once more, I made shift, with the help of that kind little fellow Alphonse, who is a perfect treasure to me, and that of another waiting-man, to reach the antechamber. I got there, indeed, before anybody else, except a few of the great Court officials who had been bidden to be present, but I had scarcely seated myself before Sorais was brought in by a party of guards, looking as beautiful and defiant as ever, but with a worn expression on her proud face. She was, as usual, dressed in her royal "kaf", emblazoned with the emblem of the Sun, and in her right hand she still held the toy spear of silver. A pang of admiration and pity went through me as I looked at her, and struggling to my feet I bowed deeply, at the same time expressing my sorrow that I was not able, owing to my condition, to remain standing before her.

She coloured a little and then laughed bitterly. "Thou dost forget, Macumazahn," she said, "I am no more a Queen, save in blood; I am an outcast and a prisoner, one whom all men should scorn, and none show deference to."

"At least," I replied, "thou art still a lady, and therefore one to whom deference is due. Also, thou art in an evil case, and therefore it is doubly due."

"Ah!" she answered, with a little laugh, "thou dost forget that I would have wrapped thee in a sheet of gold and hung thee to the angel's trumpet at the topmost pinnacle of the Temple."

"No," I answered, "I assure thee that I forgot it not; indeed, I often thought of it when it seemed to me that the battle of the Pass was turning against us; but the trumpet is there, and I am still here, though perchance not for long, so why talk of it now?"

"Ah!" she went on, "the battle! the battle! Oh, would that I were once more a Queen, if only for one little hour, and I would take such a vengeance on those accursed jackals who deserted me in my need; that it should only be spoken of in whispers; those women, those pigeon-hearted half-breeds who suffered themselves to be overcome!" and she choked in her wrath.

"Ay, and that little coward beside thee," she went on, pointing at Alphonse with the silver spear, whereat he looked very uncomfortable; "he escaped and betrayed my plans. I tried to make a general of him, telling the soldiers it was Bougwan, and to scourge valour into him" (here Alphonse shivered at some unhappy recollection), "but it was of no avail. He hid beneath a banner in my tent and thus overheard my plans. I would that I had slain him, but, alas! I held my hand."

"And thou, Macumazahn, I have heard of what thou didst; thou art brave, and hast a loyal heart. And the black one too, ah, he was a man. I would fain have seen him hurl Nasta from the stairway."

"Thou art a strange woman, Sorais," I said; "I pray thee now plead with the Queen Nyleptha, that perchance she may show mercy unto thee."

She laughed out loud. "I plead for mercy!" she said and at that moment the Queen entered, accompanied by Sir Henry and Good, and took her seat with an impassive face. As for poor Good, he looked intensely ill at ease.

"Greeting, Sorais!" said Nyleptha, after a short pause. "Thou hast rent the kingdom like a rag, thou hast put thousands of my people to the sword, thou hast twice basely plotted to destroy my life by murder, thou hast sworn to slay my lord and his companions and to hurl me from the Stairway. What hast thou to say why thou shouldst not die? Speak, O Sorais!"

"Methinks my sister the Queen hath forgotten the chief count of the indictment," answered Sorais in her slow musical tones. "It runs thus: 'Thou didst strive to win the love of my lord Incubu.' It is for this crime that my sister will slay me, not because I levied war. It is perchance happy for thee, Nyleptha, that I fixed my mind upon his love too late."

"Listen," she went on, raising her voice. "I have nought to say save that I would I had won instead of lost. Do thou with me even as thou wilt, O Queen, and let my lord the King there" (pointing to Sir Henry)—"for now will he be King—carry out the sentence, as it is meet he should, for as he is the beginning of the evil, let him also be the end." And she drew herself up and shot one angry glance at him from her deep fringed eyes, and then began to toy with her spear.

Sir Henry bent towards Nyleptha and whispered something that I could not catch, and then the Queen spoke.

"Sorais, ever have I been a good sister to thee. When our father died, and there was much talk in the land as to whether thou shouldst sit upon the throne with me, I being the elder, I gave my voice for thee and said, 'Nay, let her sit. She is twin with me; we were born at a birth; wherefore should the one be preferred before the other?' And so has it ever been "twixt thee and me, my sister. But now thou knowest in what sort thou hast repaid me, but I have prevailed, and thy life is forfeit, Sorais. And yet art thou my sister, born at a birth with me, and we played together when we were little and loved each other much, and at night we slept in the same cot with our arms each around the other's neck, and therefore even now does my heart go out to thee, Sorais."

"But not for that would I spare thy life, for thy offence has been too heavy; it doth drag down the wide wings of my mercy even to the ground. Also, while thou dost live the land will never be at peace."

"Yet shalt thou not die, Sorais, because my dear lord here hath begged thy life of me as a boon; therefore as a boon and as a marriage gift give I it to him, to do with even as he wills, knowing that, though thou dost love him, he loves thee not, Sorais, for all thy beauty. Nay, though thou art lovely as the night in all her stars, O Lady of the Night, yet it is me his wife whom he loves, and not thee, and therefore do I give thy life to him."

Sorais flushed up to her eyes and said nothing, and I do not think that I ever saw a man look more miserable than did Sir Henry at that moment. Somehow, Nyleptha's way of putting the thing, though true and forcible enough, was not altogether pleasant.

"I understood," stammered Curtis, looking at Good, "I understood that you were attached—eh—attached to—to the Queen Sorais. I am—eh—not aware what the—in short, the state of your feelings may be just now; but if they happened to be that way inclined, it has struck me that—in short, it might put a satisfactory end to an unpleasant business. The lady also has ample private estates, where I am sure she would be at liberty to live unmolested as far as we are concerned, eh, Nyleptha? Of course, I only suggest."

"So far as I am concerned," said Good, colouring up, "I am quite willing to forget the past; and if the Lady of the Night thinks me worth the taking I will marry her tomorrow, or when she likes, and try to make her a good husband."

All eyes were now turned to Sorais, who stood with that same slow smile upon her beautiful face which I had noticed the first time that I ever saw her. She paused a little while, and cleared her throat, and then thrice she curtsied low, once to Nyleptha, once to Curtis, and once to Good, and began to speak in measured tones.

"I thank thee, most gracious Queen and royal sister, for the loving-kindness thou hast shown me from my youth up, and especially in that thou hast been pleased to give my person and my fate as a gift to the Lord Incubu—the King that is to be. May prosperity, peace and plenty deck the life-path of one so merciful and so tender, even as flowers do. Long mayst thou reign, O great and glorious Queen, and hold thy husband's love in both thy hands, and many be the sons and daughters of thy beauty. And I thank thee, my Lord Incubu—the King that is to be—I thank thee a thousand times in that thou hast been pleased to accept that gracious gift, and to pass it on to thy comrade in arms and in adventure, the Lord Bougwan. Surely the act is worthy of thy greatness, my Lord Incubu. And now, lastly, I thank thee also, my Lord Bougwan, who in thy turn hast deigned to accept me and my poor beauty. I thank thee a thousand times, and I will add that thou art a good and honest man, and I put my hand upon my heart and swear that I would that I could say thee 'yea'. And now that I have rendered thanks to all in turn"—and again she smiled—"I will add one short word.

"Little can you understand of me, Queen Nyleptha and my lords, if ye know not that for me there is no middle path; that I scorn your pity and hate you for it; that I cast off your forgiveness as though it were a serpent's sting; and that standing here, betrayed, deserted, insulted, and alone, I yet triumph over you, mock you, and defy you, one and all, and *thus* I answer ye." And then, of a sudden, before anybody guessed what she intended to do, she drove the little silver spear she carried in her hand into her side with such a strong and steady aim that the keen point projected through her back, and she fell prone upon the pavement.

Nyleptha shrieked, and poor Good almost fainted at the sight, while the rest of us rushed towards her. But Sorais of the Night lifted herself upon her hand, and for a moment fixed her glorious eyes intently on Curtis' face, as though there were some message in the glance, then dropped her head and sighed, and with a sob her dark but splendid spirit passed.

Well, they gave her a royal funeral, and there was an end of her.

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It was a month after the last act of the Sorais tragedy that a great ceremony was held in the Flower Temple, and Curtis was formally declared King-Consort of Zu-Vendis. I was too ill to go myself; and indeed, I hate all that sort of thing, with the crowds and the trumpet-blowing and banner-waving; but Good, who was there (in his full-dress uniform), came back much impressed, and told me that Nyleptha had looked lovely, and Curtis had borne himself in a right royal fashion, and had been received with acclamations that left no doubt as to his popularity. Also he told me that when the horse Daylight was led along in the procession, the populace had shouted "*Macumazahh, Macumazahh!*" till they were hoarse, and would only be appeased when he, Good, rose in his chariot and told them that I was too ill to be present.

Afterwards, too, Sir Henry, or rather the King, came to see me, looking very tired, and vowing that he had never been so bored in his life; but I dare say that that was a slight exaggeration. It is not in human nature that a man should be altogether bored on such an extraordinary occasion; and, indeed, as I pointed out to him, it was a marvellous thing that a man, who but little more than one short year before had entered a great country as an unknown wanderer, should today be married to its beautiful and beloved Queen, and lifted, amidst public rejoicings, to its throne. I even went the length to exhort him in the future not to be carried away by the pride and pomp of absolute power, but always to strive to remember that he was first a Christian gentleman, and next a public servant, called by Providence to a great and almost unprecedented trust. These remarks, which he might fairly have resented, he was so good as to receive with patience, and even to thank me for making them.

It was immediately after this ceremony that I caused myself to be moved to the house where I am now writing. It is a very pleasant country seat. Situated about two miles from the Frowning City, on to which it looks. That was five months ago, during the whole of which time I have, being confined to a kind of couch, employed my leisure in compiling this history of our wanderings from my journal and from our joint memories. It is probable that it will never be read, but it does not much matter whether it is or not; at any rate, it has served to while away many hours of suffering, for I have suffered a deal of pain lately. Thank God, however, there will not be much more of it.

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It is a week since I wrote the above, and now I take up my pen for the last time, for I know that the end is at hand. My brain is still clear and I can manage to write, though with difficulty. The pain in my lung, which has been very bad during the last week, has suddenly quite left me, and been succeeded by a feeling of numbness of which I cannot mistake the meaning. And just as the pain has gone, so with it all fear of that end has departed, and I feel only as though I were going to sink into the arms of an unutterable rest. Happily, contentedly, and with the same sense of security with which an infant lays itself to sleep in its mother's arms, do I lay myself down in the arms of the Angel Death. All the tremors, all the heart-shaking fears which have haunted me through a life that seems long as I look back upon it, have left me now; the storms have passed, and the Star of our Eternal Hope shines clear and steady on the horizon that seems so far from man, and yet is so very near to me tonight.

And so this is the end of it—a brief space of troubling, a few restless, fevered, anguished years, and then the arms of that great Angel Death. Many times have I been near to them, and now it is my turn at last, and it is well. Twenty-four hours more and the world will be gone from me, and with it all its hopes and all its fears. The air will close in over the space that my form filled and my

place know me no more; for the dull breath of the world's forgetfulness will first dim the brightness of my memory, and then blot it out for ever, and of a truth I shall be dead. So is it with us all. How many millions have lain as I lie, and thought these thoughts and been forgotten!—thousands upon thousands of years ago they thought them, those dying men of the dim past; and thousands on thousands of years hence will their descendants think them and be in their turn forgotten. “As the breath of the oxen in winter, as the quick star that runs along the sky, as a little shadow that loses itself at sunset,” as I once heard a Zulu called Ignosi put it, such is the order of our life, the order that passeth away.

Well, it is not a good world—nobody can say that it is, save those who wilfully blind themselves to facts. How can a world be good in which Money is the moving power, and Self-interest the guiding star? The wonder is not that it is so bad, but that there should be any good left in it.

Still, now that my life is over, I am glad to have lived, glad to have known the dear breath of woman's love, and that true friendship which can even surpass the love of woman, glad to have heard the laughter of little children, to have seen the sun and the moon and the stars, to have felt the kiss of the salt sea on my face, and watched the wild game trek down to the water in the moonlight. But I should not wish to live again!

Everything is changing to me. The darkness draws near, and the light departs. And yet it seems to me that through that darkness I can already see the shining welcome of many a long-lost face. Harry is there, and others; one above all, to my mind the sweetest and most perfect woman that ever gladdened this grey earth. But of her I have already written elsewhere, and at length, so why speak of her now? Why speak of her after this long silence, now that she is again so near to me, now that I go where she has gone?

The sinking sun is turning the golden roof of the great Temple to a fiery flame, and my fingers tire.

So to all who have known me, or known of me, to all who can think one kindly thought of the old hunter, I stretch out my hand from the far-off shore and bid a long farewell.

And now into the hands of Almighty God, who sent it, do I commit my spirit.

“I have spoken,” as the Zulus say.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### BY ANOTHER HAND

A year has elapsed since our most dear friend Allan Quatermain wrote the words "*I have spoken*" at the end of his record of our adventures. Nor should I have ventured to make any additions to the record had it not happened that by a most strange accident a chance has arisen of its being conveyed to England. The chance is but a faint one, it is true; but, as it is not probable that another will arise in our lifetimes, Good and myself think that we may as well avail ourselves of it, such as it is. During the last six months several Frontier Commissions have been at work on the various boundaries of Zu-Vendis, with a view of discovering whether there exists any possible means of ingress or egress from the country, with the result that a channel of communication with the outer world hitherto overlooked has been discovered. This channel, apparently the only one (for I have discovered that it was by it that the native who ultimately reached Mr Mackenzie's mission station, and whose arrival in the country, together with the fact of his expulsion—for he *did* arrive about three years before ourselves—was for reasons of their own kept a dead secret by the priests to whom he was brought), is about to be effectually closed. But before this is done, a messenger is to be despatched bearing with him this manuscript, and also one or two letters from Good to his friends, and from myself to my brother George, whom it deeply grieves me to think I shall never see again, informing them, as our next heirs, that they are welcome to our effects in England, if the Court of Probate will allow them to take them,<sup>[23]</sup> inasmuch as we have made up our minds never to return to Europe. Indeed, it would be impossible for us to leave Zu-Vendis even if we wished to do so.

[23] Of course the Court of Probate would allow nothing of the sort.—Editor.

The messenger who is to go—and I wish him joy of his journey—is Alphonse. For a long while he has been wearied to death of Zu-Vendis and its inhabitants. "Oh, oui, c'est beau," he says, with an expressive shrug; "mais je m'ennuie; ce n'est pas chic." Again, he complains dreadfully of the absence of cafes and theatres, and moans continually for his lost Annette, of whom he says he dreams three times a week. But I fancy his secret cause of disgust at the country, putting aside the homesickness to which every Frenchman is subject, is that the people here laugh at him so dreadfully about his conduct on the occasion of the great battle of the Pass about eighteen months ago, when he hid beneath a banner in Sorais's tent in order to avoid being sent forth to fight, which he says would have gone against his conscience. Even the little boys call out at him in the streets, thereby offending his pride and making his life unbearable. At any rate, he has determined to brave the horrors of a journey of almost unprecedented difficulty and danger, and also to run the risk of falling into the hands of the French police to answer for a certain little indiscretion of his own some years old (though I do not consider that a very serious matter), rather than remain in *ce triste pays*. Poor Alphonse! we shall be very sorry to part with him; but I sincerely trust, for his own sake and also for the sake of this history, which is, I think, worth giving to the world, that he may arrive in safety. If he does, and can carry the treasure we have provided him with in the shape of bars of solid gold, he will be, comparatively speaking, a rich man for life, and well able to marry his Annette, if she is still in the land of the living and willing to marry her Alphonse.

Anyhow, on the chance, I may as well add a word or two to dear old Quatermain's narrative.

He died at dawn on the day following that on which he wrote the last words of the last chapter. Nyleptha, Good and myself were present, and a most touching and yet in its way beautiful scene it was. An hour before the daybreak it became apparent to us that he was sinking, and our distress was very keen. Indeed, Good melted into tears at the idea—a fact that called forth a last gentle flicker of humour from our dying friend, for even at that hour he could be humorous. Good's emotion had, by loosening the muscles, naturally caused his eyeglass to fall from its accustomed place, and Quatermain, who always observed everything, observed this also.

"At last," he gasped, with an attempt at a smile, "I have seen Good without his eyeglass."

After that he said no more till the day broke, when he asked to be lifted up to watch the rising of the sun for the last time.

"In a very few minutes," he said, after gazing earnestly at it, "I shall have passed through those golden gates."

Ten minutes afterwards he raised himself and looked us fixedly in the face.

"I am going a stranger journey than any we have ever taken together. Think of me sometimes," he murmured. "God bless you all. I shall wait for you." And with a sigh he fell back dead.

And so passed away a character that I consider went as near perfection as any it has ever been my lot to encounter.

Tender, constant, humorous, and possessing of many of the qualities that go to make a poet, he was yet almost unrivalled as a man of action and a citizen of the world. I never knew any one so competent to form an accurate judgment of men and their motives. "I have studied human nature all my life," he would say, "and I ought to know something about it," and he certainly did. He had but two faults—one was his excessive modesty, and the other a slight tendency which he had to be jealous of anybody on whom he concentrated his affections. As regards the first of these points, anybody who reads what he has written will be able to form his own opinion; but I will add one last instance of it.

As the reader will doubtless remember, it is a favourite trick of his to talk of himself as a timid man, whereas really, though very cautious, he possessed a most intrepid spirit, and, what is more, never lost his head. Well, in the great battle of the Pass, where he got the wound that finally killed him, one would imagine from the account which he gives of the occurrence that it was a chance blow that fell on him in the scrimmage. As a matter of fact, however, he was wounded in a most gallant and successful attempt to save Good's life, at the risk and, as it ultimately turned out, at the cost of his own. Good was down on the ground, and one of Nasta's highlanders was about to dispatch him, when Quatermain threw himself on to his prostrate form and received the blow on his own body, and then, rising, killed the soldier.

As regards his jealousy, a single instance which I give in justice to myself and Nyleptha will suffice. The reader will, perhaps, recollect that in one or two places he speaks as though Nyleptha monopolised me, and he was left by both of us rather out in the cold. Now Nyleptha is not perfect, any more than any other woman is, and she may be a little *exigeante* at times, but as regards Quatermain the whole thing is pure imagination. Thus when he complains about my not coming to see him when he is ill, the fact was that, in spite of my entreaties, the doctors positively forbade it. Those little remarks of his pained me very much when I read them, for I loved Quatermain as dearly as though he were my own father, and should never have dreamed of allowing my marriage to interfere with that affection. But let it pass; it is, after all, but one little weakness, which makes no great show among so many and such lovable virtues.

Well, he died, and Good read the Burial Service over him in the presence of Nyleptha and myself; and then his remains were, in deference to the popular clamour, accorded a great public funeral, or rather cremation. I could not help thinking, however, as I marched in that long and splendid procession up to the Temple, how he would have hated the whole thing could he have been there to see it, for he had a horror of ostentation.

And so, a few minutes before sunset, on the third night after his death, they laid him on the brazen flooring before the altar, and waited for the last ray of the setting sun to fall upon his face. Presently it came, and struck him like a golden arrow, crowning the pale brows with glory, and then the trumpets blew, and the flooring revolved, and all that remained of our beloved friend fell into the furnace below.

We shall never see his like again if we live a hundred years. He was the ablest man, the truest gentleman, the firmest friend, the finest sportsman, and, I believe, the best shot in all Africa.

And so ended the very remarkable and adventurous life of Hunter Quatermain.

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Since then things have gone very well with us. Good has been, and still is, busily employed in the construction of a navy on Lake Milosis and another of the large lakes, by means of which we hope to be able to increase trade and commerce, and also to overcome some very troublesome and warlike sections of the population who live upon their borders. Poor fellow! he is beginning to get over the sad death of that misguided but most attractive woman, Sorais, but it is a sad blow to him, for he was really deeply attached to her. I hope, however, that he will in time make a suitable marriage and get that unhappy business out of his head. Nyleptha has one or two young ladies in view, especially a daughter of Nasta's (who was a widower), a very fine imperial-looking girl, but with too much of her father's intriguing, and yet haughty, spirit to suit my taste.

As for myself, I should scarcely know where to begin if I set to work to describe my doings, so I had best leave them undescribed, and content myself with saying that, on the whole, I am getting on very well in my curious position of King-Consort—better, indeed, than I had any right to expect. But, of course, it is not all plain sailing, and I find the responsibilities very heavy. Still, I hope to be able to do some good in my time, and I intend to devote myself to two great ends—namely, to the consolidation of the various clans which together make up the Zu-Vendi people, under one strong central government, and to the sapping of the power of the priesthood. The first of these reforms will, if it can be carried out, put an end to the disastrous civil wars that have for centuries devastated this country; and the second, besides removing a source of political danger, will pave the road for the introduction of true religion in the place of this senseless Sun worship. I yet hope to see the shadow of the Cross of Christ lying on the golden dome of the Flower Temple; or, if I do not, that my successors may.

There is one more thing that I intend to devote myself to, and that is the total exclusion of all foreigners from Zu-Vendis. Not, indeed, that any more are ever likely to get here, but if they do, I warn them fairly that they will be shown the shortest way out of the country. I do not say this from any sense of inhospitality, but because I am convinced of the sacred duty that rests upon me of preserving to this, on the whole, upright and generous-hearted people the blessings of comparative barbarism. Where would all my brave army be if some enterprising rascal were to attack us with field-guns and Martini-Henrys? I cannot see that gunpowder, telegraphs, steam, daily newspapers, universal suffrage, etc., etc., have made mankind one whit the happier than they used to be, and I am certain that they have brought many evils in their train. I have no fancy for handing over this beautiful country to be torn and fought for by speculators, tourists, politicians and teachers, whose voice is as the voice of Babel, just as those horrible creatures in the valley of the underground river tore and fought for the body of the wild swan; nor will I endow it with the greed, drunkenness, new diseases, gunpowder, and general demoralization which chiefly mark the progress of civilization amongst unsophisticated peoples. If in due course it pleases Providence to throw Zu-Vendis open to the world, that is another matter; but of myself I will not take the responsibility, and I may add that Good entirely approves of my decision. Farewell.

HENRY CURTIS.

December 15, 18—.

PS—I quite forgot to say that about nine months ago Nyleptha (who is very well and, in my eyes at any rate, more beautiful than ever) presented me with a son and heir. He is a regular curly-haired, blue-eyed young Englishman in looks, and, though he is destined, if he lives, to inherit the throne of Zu-Vendis, I hope I may be able to bring him up to become what an English gentleman should be, and generally is—which is to my mind even a prouder and a finer thing than being born heir apparent to the great House of the Stairway, and, indeed, the highest rank that a man can reach upon this earth.

H. C.

## NOTE BY GEORGE CURTIS, Esq.

The MS of this history, addressed to me in the handwriting of my dear brother Henry Curtis, whom we had given up for dead, and bearing the Aden postmark, reached me in safety on December 20, 18—, or a little more than two years after it left his hands in the far centre of Africa, and I hasten to give the astonishing story it contains to the world. Speaking for myself, I have read it with very mixed feelings; for though it is a great relief to know that he and Good are alive and strangely prosperous, I cannot but feel that for me and for all their friends they might as well be dead, since we can never hope to see them more.

They have cut themselves off from old England and from their homes and their relations for ever, and perhaps, under the circumstances, they were right and wise to do so.

How the MS came to be posted I have been quite unable to discover; but I presume, from the fact of its being posted at all, that the little Frenchman, Alphonse, accomplished his hazardous journey in safety. I have, however, advertised for him and caused various inquiries to be made in Marseilles and elsewhere with a view of discovering his whereabouts, but so far without the slightest success. Possibly he is dead, and the packet was posted by another hand; or possibly he is now happily wedded to his Annette, but still fears the vengeance of the law, and prefers to remain incognito. I cannot say, I have not yet abandoned my hopes of finding him, but I am bound to say that they grow fainter day by day, and one great obstacle to my search is that nowhere in the whole history does Mr Quatermain mention his surname. He is always spoken of as “Alphonse”, and there are so many Alphonses. The letters which my brother Henry says he is sending with the packet of manuscript have never arrived, so I presume that they are lost or destroyed.

George Curtis

## BOOK XXIV

1882

### I

## AN OLD FRIEND

Now I, Allan Quatermain, come to the weirdest (with one or two exceptions perhaps) of all the experiences which it has amused me to employ my idle hours in recording here in a strange land, for after all England is strange to me. I grow elderly. I have, as I suppose, passed the period of enterprise and adventure and I should be well satisfied with the lot that Fate has given to my unworthy self.

To begin with, I am still alive and in health when by all the rules I should have been dead many times over. I suppose I ought to be thankful for that but, before expressing an opinion on the point, I should have to be quite sure whether it is better to be alive or dead. The religious plump for the latter, though I have never observed that the religious are more eager to die than the rest of us poor mortals.

For instance, if they are told that their holy hearts are wrong, they spend time and much money in rushing to a place called Nauheim in Germany, to put them right by means of water-drinking, thereby shortening their hours of heavenly bliss and depriving their heirs of a certain amount of cash. The same thing applies to Buxton in my own neighbourhood and gout, especially when it threatens the stomach or the throat. Even archbishops will do these things, to say nothing of such small fry as deans, or stout and prominent lay figures of the Church.

From common sinners like myself such conduct might be expected, but in the case of those who are obviously poised on the topmost rungs of the Jacobean—I mean, the heavenly—ladder, it is legitimate to inquire why they show such reluctance in jumping off. As a matter of fact the only persons that, individually, I have seen quite willing to die, except now and again to save somebody else whom they were so foolish as to care for more than they did for themselves, have been not those “upon whom the light has shined” to quote an earnest paper I chanced to read this morning, but, to quote again, “the sinful heathen wandering in their native blackness,” by which I understand the writer to refer to their moral state and not to their sable skins wherein for the most part they are also condemned to wander, that is if they happen to have been born south of a certain degree of latitude.

To come to facts, the staff of Faith which each must shape for himself, is often hewn from unsuitable kinds of wood, yes, even by the very best among us. Willow, for instance, is pretty and easy to cut, but try to support yourself with it on the edge of a precipice and see where you are. Then of a truth you will long for ironbark, or even homely oak. I might carry my parable further, some allusions to the proper material of which to fashion the helmet of Salvation suggest themselves to me for example, but I won't.

The truth is that we fear to die because all the religions are full of uncomfortable hints as to what may happen to us afterwards as a reward for our deviations from their laws and we half believe in something, whereas often the savage, not being troubled with religion, fears less, because he half believes in nothing. For very few inhabitants of this earth can attain either to complete belief or to its absolute opposite. They can seldom lay their hands upon their hearts, and say they *know* that they will live for ever, or sleep for ever; there remains in the case of most honest men an element of doubt in either hypothesis.

That is what makes this story of mine so interesting, at any rate to me, since it does seem to suggest that whether or no I have a future, as personally I hold to be the case and not altogether without evidence, certainly I have had a past, though, so far as I know, in this world only; a fact, if it be a fact, from which can be deduced all kinds of arguments according to the taste of the reasoner.

And now for my experience, which it is only fair to add, may after all have been no more than a long and connected dream. Yet how was I to dream of lands, events and people whereof I have only the vaguest knowledge, or none at all, unless indeed, as some say, being a part of this world, we have hidden away somewhere in ourselves an acquaintance with everything that has ever happened in the world. However, it does not much matter and it is useless to discuss that which we cannot prove.

Here at any rate is the story.

In a book or a record which I have written down and put away with others under the title of “The Ivory Child,” I have told the tale of a certain expedition I made in company with Lord Ragnall. Its object was to search for his wife who was stolen away while travelling in Egypt in a state of mental incapacity resulting from shock caused by the loss of her child under tragic and terrible circumstances. The thieves were the priests of a certain bastard Arab tribe who, on account of a birthmark shaped like the young moon which was visible above her breast, believed her to be the priestess or oracle of their worship. This worship evidently had its origin in Ancient Egypt since, although they did not seem to know it, the priestess was nothing less than a personification of the great goddess Isis, and the Ivory Child, their fetish, was a statue of the infant Horus, the fabled son of Isis and Osiris whom the Egyptians looked upon as the overcomer of Set or the Devil, the murderer of Osiris before his resurrection and ascent to Heaven to be the god of the dead.

I need not set down afresh all that happened to us on this remarkable adventure. Suffice it to say that in the end we recovered the lady and that her mind was restored to her. Before she left the Kendah country, however, the priesthood presented her with two ancient rolls of papyrus, also with a quantity of a certain herb, not unlike tobacco in appearance, which by the Kendah was called *Taduki*. Once, before we took our great homeward journey across the desert, Lady Ragnall and I had a curious conversation about this herb whereof the property is to cause the person who inhales its fumes to become clairvoyant, or to dream dreams, whichever the truth may be. It was used for this purpose in the mystical ceremonies of the Kendah religion when under its influence the priestess or oracle of the Ivory Child was wont to announce divine revelations. During her tenure of this office Lady Ragnall was frequently

subjected to the spell of the *Taduki* vapour, and said strange things, some of which I heard with my own ears. Also myself once I experienced its effects and saw a curious vision, whereof many of the particulars were afterwards translated into facts.

Now the conversation which I have mentioned was shortly to the effect, that she, Lady Ragnall, believed a time would come when she or I or both of us, were destined to imbibe these *Taduki* fumes and see wonderful pictures of some past or future existence in which we were both concerned. This knowledge, she declared, had come to her while she was officiating in an apparently mindless condition as the priestess of the Kendah god called the Ivory Child.

At the time I did not think it wise to pursue so exciting a subject with a woman whose mind had been recently unbalanced, and afterwards in the stress of new experiences, I forgot all about the matter, or at any rate only thought of it very rarely.

Once, however, it did recur to me with some force. Shortly after I came to England to spend my remaining days far from the temptations of adventure, I was beguiled into becoming a steward of a Charity dinner and, what was worse, into attending the said dinner. Although its objects were admirable, it proved one of the most dreadful functions in which I was ever called upon to share. There was a vast number of people, some of them highly distinguished, who had come to support the Charity or to show off their Orders. I don't know which, and others like myself, not at all distinguished, just common subscribers, who had no Orders and stood about the crowded room like waiters looking for a job.

At the dinner, which was very bad, I sat at a table so remote that I could hear but little of the interminable speeches, which was perhaps fortunate for me. In these circumstances I drifted into conversation with my neighbour, a queer, wizened, black-bearded man who somehow or other had found out that I was acquainted with the wilder parts of Africa. He proved to be a wealthy scientist whose passion it was to study the properties of herbs, especially of such as grow in the interior of South America where he had been travelling for some years.

Presently he mentioned a root named Yagé, known to the Indians which, when pounded up into a paste and taken in the form of pills, had the effect of enabling the patient to see events that were passing at a distance. Indeed he alleged that a vision thus produced had caused him to return home, since in it he saw that some relative of his, I think a twin-sister, was dangerously ill. In fact, however, he might as well have stayed away, as he only arrived in London on the day after her funeral.

As I saw that he was really interested in the subject and observed that he was a very temperate man who did not seem to be romancing, I told him something of my experiences with *Taduki*, to which he listened with a kind of rapt but suppressed excitement. When I affected disbelief in the whole business, he differed from me almost rudely, asking why I rejected phenomena simply because I was too dense to understand them. I answered perhaps because such phenomena were inconvenient and upset one's ideas. To this he replied that all progress involved the upsetting of existent ideas. Moreover he implored me, if the chance should ever come my way, to pursue experiments with *Taduki* fumes and let him know the results.

Here our conversation came to an end for suddenly a band that was braying near by, struck up "God save the Queen," and we hastily exchanged cards and parted. I only mention it because, had it not occurred, I think it probable that I should never have been in a position to write this history.

The remarks of my acquaintance remained in my mind and influenced it so much that when the occasion came, I did as a kind of duty what, however much I was pressed, I am almost sure I should never have done for any other reason, just because I thought that I ought to take an opportunity of trying to discover what was the truth of the matter. As it chanced it was quick in coming.

Here I should explain that I attended the dinner of which I have spoken not very long after a very lengthy absence from England, whither I had come to live when King Solomon's Mines had made me rich. Therefore it happened that between the conclusion of my Kendah adventure some years before and this time I saw nothing and heard little of Lord and Lady Ragnall. Once a rumour did reach me, however, I think through Sir Henry Curtis or Captain Good, that the former had died as a result of an accident. What the accident was my informant did not know and as I was just starting on a far journey at the time, I had no opportunity of making inquiries. My talk with the botanical scientist determined me to do so; indeed a few days later I discovered from a book of reference that Lord Ragnall was dead, leaving no heir; also that his wife survived him.

I was working myself up to write to her when one morning the postman brought me here at the Grange a letter which had "Ragnall Castle" printed on the flap of the envelope. I did not know the writing which was very clear and firm, for as it chanced, to the best of my recollection, I had never seen that of Lady Ragnall. Here is a copy of the letter it contained:

"MY DEAR MR. QUATERMAIN,—Very strangely I have just seen at a meeting of the Horticultural Society, a gentleman who declares that a few days ago he sat next to you at some public dinner. Indeed I do not think there can be any doubt for he showed me your card which he had in his purse with a Yorkshire address upon it.

"A dispute had arisen as to whether a certain variety of *Crinum* lily was first found in Africa, or Southern America. This gentleman, an authority upon South American flora, made a speech saying that he had never met with it there, but that an acquaintance of his, Mr. Quatermain, to whom he had spoken on the subject, said that he had seen something of the sort in the interior of Africa." (This was quite true for I remembered the incident.) "At the tea which followed the meeting I spoke to this gentleman whose name I never caught, and to my astonishment learnt that he must have been referring to you whom I believed to be dead, for so we were told a long time ago. This seemed certain, for in addition to the evidence of the name, he described your personal appearance and told me that you had come to live in England.

"My dear friend, I can assure you it is long since I heard anything which rejoiced me so much. Oh! as I write all the past comes back, flowing in upon me like a pent-up flood of water, but I trust that of this I shall soon have an opportunity of talking to you. So let it be for a while.

"Alas! my friend, since we parted on the shores of the Red Sea, tragedy has pursued me. As you will know, for both my husband and I wrote to you, although you did not answer the letters" (I never received them), "we reached England safely and took up our old life again, though to tell you the truth, after my African experiences things could never be quite the same to me, or for the matter of that to George either. To a great extent he changed his pursuits and certain political ambitions which he once cherished, seemed no longer to appeal to him. He became a student of past history and especially of Egyptology, which under all the circumstances you may think strange, as I did. However it suited me well enough, since I also have tastes that way. So we worked together and I can now read hieroglyphics as well as most people. One year he said that he would like to go to Egypt again, if I were not afraid. I answered that it had not been a very lucky place for us, but that personally I was not in the least afraid and longed to return there. For as you

know, I have, or think I have, ties with Egypt and indeed with all Africa. Well, we went and had a very happy time, although I was always expecting to see old Harût come round the corner.

"After this it became a custom with us who, since George practically gave up shooting and attending the House of Lords, had nothing to keep us in England, to winter in Egypt. We did this for five years in succession, living in a bungalow which we built at a place in the desert, not far from the banks of the Nile, about half way between Luxor which was the ancient Thebes, and Assouan. George took a great fancy to this spot when first he saw it, and so in truth did I, for, like Memphis, it attracted me so much that I used to laugh and say I believed that once I had something to do with it.

"Now near to our villa that we called 'Ragnall' after this house, are the remains of a temple which were almost buried in the sand. This temple George obtained permission to excavate. It proved to be a long and costly business, but as he did not mind spending the money, that was no obstacle. For four winters we worked at it, employing several hundred men. As we went on we discovered that although not one of the largest, the temple, owing to its having been buried by the sand during, or shortly after the Roman epoch, remained much more perfect than we had expected, because the early Christians had never got at it with their chisels and hammers. Before long I hope to show you pictures and photographs of the various courts, etc., so I will not attempt to describe them now.

"It is a temple to Isis—built, or rather rebuilt over the remains of an older temple on a site that seems to have been called Amada, at any rate in the later days, and so named after a city in Nubia, apparently by one of the Amen-hetep Pharaohs who had conquered it. Its style is beautiful, being of the best period of the Egyptian Renaissance under the last native dynasties.

"At the beginning of the fifth winter, at length we approached the sanctuary, a difficult business because of the retaining walls that had to be built to keep the sand from flowing down as fast as it was removed, and the great quantities of stuff that must be carried off by the tramway. In so doing we came upon a shallow grave which appeared to have been hastily filled in and roughly covered over with paving stones like the rest of the court, as though to conceal its existence. In this grave lay the skeleton of a large man, together with the rusted blade of an iron sword and some fragments of armour. Evidently he had never been mummified, for there were no wrappings, canopic jars, *ushapti* figures or funeral offerings. The state of the bones showed us why, for the right forearm was cut through and the skull smashed in; also an iron arrow-head lay among the ribs. The man had been buried hurriedly after a battle in which he had met his death. Searching in the dust beneath the bones we found a gold ring still on one of the fingers. On its bezel was engraved the cartouche of 'Perao, beloved of Ra.' Now Perao probably means Pharaoh and perhaps he was Khabasha who revolted against the Persians and ruled for a year or two, after which he is supposed to have been defeated and killed, though of his end and place of burial there is no record. Whether these were the remnants of Khabasha himself, or of one of his high ministers or generals who wore the King's cartouche upon his ring in token of his office, of course I cannot say.

"When George had read the cartouche he handed me the ring which I slipped upon the first finger of my left hand, where I still wear it. Then leaving the grave open for further examination, we went on with the work, for we were greatly excited. At length, this was towards evening, we had cleared enough of the sanctuary, which was small, to uncover the shrine that, if not a monolith, was made of four pieces of granite so wonderfully put together that one could not see the joints. On the curved architrave as I think it is called, was carved the symbol of a winged disc, and beneath in hieroglyphics as fresh as though they had only been cut yesterday, an inscription to the effect that Perao, Royal Son of the Sun, gave this shrine as an 'excellent eternal work,' together with the statues of the Holy Mother and the Holy Child to the 'emanations of the great Goddess Isis and the god Horus,' Amada, Royal Lady, being votaress or high-priestess.

"We only read the hieroglyphics very hurriedly, being anxious to see what was within the shrine that, the cedar door having rotted away, was filled with fine, drifted sand. Basketful by basketful we got it out and then, my friend, there appeared the most beautiful life-sized statue of Isis carved in alabaster that ever I have seen. She was seated on a throne-like chair and wore the vulture cap on which traces of colour remained. Her arms were held forward as though to support a child, which perhaps she was suckling as one of the breasts was bare. But if so, the child had gone. The execution of the statue was exquisite and its tender and mystic face extraordinarily beautiful, so life-like also that I think it must have been copied from a living model. Oh! my friend, when I looked upon it, which we did by the light of the candles, for the sun was sinking and shadows gathered in that excavated hole, I felt—never mind what I felt—perhaps *you* can guess who know my history.

"While we stared and stared, I longing to go upon my knees, I knew not why, suddenly I felt a faint trembling of the ground. At the same moment, the head overseer of the works, a man called Achmet, rushed up to us, shouting out—'Back! Back! The wall has burst. The sand runs!'

"He seized me by the arm and dragged me away beside of and behind the grave, George turning to follow. Next instant I saw a kind of wave of sand, on the crest of which appeared the stones of the wall, curl over and break. It struck the shrine, overturned and shattered it, which makes me think it was made of four pieces, and shattered also the alabaster statue within, for I saw its head strike George upon the back and throw him forward. He reeled and fell into the open grave which in another moment was filled and covered with the débris that seemed to grip me to my middle in its flow. After this I remembered nothing more until hours later I found myself lying in our house.

"Achmet and his Egyptians had done nothing; indeed none of them could be persuaded to approach the place till the sun rose because, as they said, the old gods of the land whom they looked upon as devils, were angry at being disturbed and would kill them as they had killed the Bey, meaning George. Then, distracted as I was, I went myself for there was no other European there, to find that the whole site of the sanctuary was buried beneath hundreds of tons of sand, that, beginning at the gap in the broken wall, had flowed from every side. Indeed it would have taken weeks to dig it out, since to sink a shaft was impracticable and so dangerous that the local officials refused to allow it to be attempted. The end of it was that an English bishop came up from Cairo and consecrated the ground by special arrangement with the Government, which of course makes it impossible that this part of the temple should be further disturbed. After this he read the Burial Service over my dear husband.

"So there is the end of a very terrible story which I have written down because I do not wish to have to talk about it more than is necessary when we meet. For, dear Mr. Quatermain, we shall meet, as I always knew that we should—yes, even after I heard that you were dead. You will remember that I told you so years ago in Kendah Land and that it would happen after a great change in my life, though what that change might be I could not say...."

This is the end of the letter except for certain suggested dates for the visit which she took for granted I should make to Ragnall.

## CHAPTER II.

### RAGNALL CASTLE

When I had finished reading this amazing document I lit my pipe and set to work to think it over. The hypothetical inquirer might ask why I thought it amazing. There was nothing odd in a dilettante Englishman of highly cultivated mind taking to Egyptology and, being, as it chanced, one of the richest men in the kingdom, spending a fraction of his wealth in excavating temples. Nor was it strange that he should have happened to die by accident when engaged in that pursuit, which I can imagine to be very fascinating in the delightful winter climate of Egypt. He was not the first person to be buried by a fall of sand. Why, only a little while ago the same fate overtook a nursery-governess and the child in her charge who were trying to dig out a martin's nest in a pit in this very parish. Their operations brought down a huge mass of the overhanging bank beneath which the sand-vein had been hollowed by workmen who deserted the pit when they saw that it had become unsafe. Next day I and my gardeners helped to recover their bodies, for their whereabouts was not discovered until the following morning, and a sad business it was.

Yet, taken in conjunction with the history of this couple, the whole Ragnall affair was very strange. When but a child Lady Ragnall, then the Hon. Miss Holmes, had been identified by the priests of a remote African tribe as the oracle of their peculiar faith, which we afterwards proved to be derived from old Egypt, in short the worship of Isis and Horus. Subsequently they tried to steal her away and through the accident of my intervention, failed. Later on, after her marriage when shock had deprived her of her mind, these priests renewed the attempt, this time in Egypt, and succeeded. In the end we rescued her in Central Africa, where she was playing the part of the Mother-goddess Isis and even wearing her ancient robes. Next she and her husband came home with their minds turned towards a branch of study that took them back to Egypt. Here they devote themselves to unearthing a temple and find out that among all the gods of Egypt, who seem to have been extremely numerous, it was dedicated to Isis and Horus, the very divinities with whom they recently they had been so intimately concerned in traditional and degenerate forms.

Moreover that was not the finish of it. They come to the sanctuary. They discover the statue of the goddess with the child gone, as their child was gone. A disaster occurs and both destroys and buries Ragnall so effectually that nothing of him is ever seen again: he just vanishes into another man's grave and remains there.

A common sort of catastrophe enough, it is true, though people of superstitious mind might have thought that it looked as though the goddess, or whatever force was behind the goddess, was working vengeance on the man who desecrated her ancient shrine. And, by the way, though I cannot remember whether or no I mentioned it in "The Ivory Child," I recall that the old priest of the Kendah, Harût, once told me he was sure Ragnall would meet with a violent death. This seemed likely enough in that country under our circumstances there, still I asked him why. He answered,

"Because he has laid hands on that which is holy and not meant for man," and he looked at Lady Ragnall.

I remarked that all women were holy, whereon he replied that he did not think so and changed the subject.

Well, Ragnall, who had married the lady who once served as the last priestess of Isis upon earth, was killed, whereas she, the priestess, was almost miraculously preserved from harm. And—oh! the whole story was deuced odd and that is all. Poor Ragnall! He was a great English gentleman and one whom when first I knew him, I held to be the most fortunate person I ever met, endowed as he was with every advantage of mind, body and estate. Yet in the end this did not prove to be the case. Well, while he lived he was a good friend and a good fellow and none can hope for a better epitaph in a world where all things are soon forgotten.

And now, what was I to do? To tell the truth I did not altogether desire to reopen this chapter in past history, or to have to listen to painful reminiscences from the lips of a bereaved woman. Moreover, beautiful as she had been, for doubtless she was *passée* now, and charming as of course she remained—I do not think I ever knew anyone who was quite so charming—there was something about Lady Ragnall which alarmed me. She did not resemble any other woman. Of course no woman is ever quite like another, but in her case the separateness, if I may so call it, was very marked. It was as though she had walked out of a different age, or even world, and been but superficially clothed with the attributes of our own. I felt that from the first moment I set eyes upon her and while reading her letter the sensation returned with added force.

Also for me she had a peculiar attraction and not one of the ordinary kind. It is curious to find oneself strangely intimate with a person of whom after all one does not know much, just as if one really knew a great deal that was shut off by a thin but quite impassable door. If so, I did not want to open that door for who could tell what might be on the other side of it? And intimate conversations with a lady in whose company one has shared very strange experiences, not infrequently lead to the opening of every kind of door.

Further I had made up my mind some time ago to have no more friendships with women who are so full of surprises, but to live out the rest of my life in a kind of monastery of men who have few surprises, being creatures whose thoughts are nearly always open and whose actions can always be foretold.

Lastly there was that *Taduki* business. Well, there at any rate I was clear and decided. No earthly power would induce me to have anything more to do with *Taduki* smoke. Of course I remembered that Lady Ragnall once told me kindly but firmly that I would if she wished. But that was just where she made a mistake. For the rest it seemed unkind to refuse her invitation now when she was in trouble, especially as I had once promised that if ever I could be of help, she had only to command me. No, I must go. But if that word—*Taduki*—were so much as mentioned I would leave again in a hurry. Moreover it would not be, for doubtless she had forgotten all about the stuff by now, even if it were not lost.

The end of it was that as I did not wish to write a long letter entering into all that Lady Ragnall had told me, I sent her a telegram, saying that if convenient to her, I would arrive at the Castle on the following Saturday evening and adding that I must be back here on

the Tuesday afternoon, as I had guests coming to stay with me on that day. This was perfectly true as the season was mid-November and I was to begin shooting my coverts on the Wednesday morning, a function that once fixed, cannot be postponed.

In due course an answer arrived—"Delighted, but hoped that you would have been able to stay longer."

Behold me then about six o'clock on the said Saturday evening being once more whirled by a splendid pair of horses through the gateway arch of Ragnall Castle. The carriage stopped beneath the portico, the great doors flew open revealing the glow of the hall fire and lights within, the footman sprang down from the box and two other footmen descended the steps to assist me and my belongings out of the carriage. These, I remember, consisted of a handbag with my dress clothes and a yellow-backed novel.

So one of them took the handbag and the other had to content himself with the novel, which made me wish I had brought a portmanteau as well, if only for the look of the thing. The pair thus burdened, escorted me up the steps and delivered me over to the butler who scanned me with a critical eye. I scanned him also and perceived that he was a very fine specimen of his class. Indeed his stately presence so overcame me that I remarked nervously, as he helped me off with my coat, that when last I was here another had filled his office.

"Indeed, Sir," he said, "and what was his name, Sir?"

"Savage," I replied.

"And where might he be now, Sir?"

"Inside a snake!" I answered. "At least he was inside a snake but now I hope he is waiting upon his master in Heaven."

The man recoiled a little, pulling off my coat with a jerk. Then he coughed, rubbed his bald head, stared and recovering himself with an effort, said,

"Indeed, Sir! I only came to this place after the death of his late lordship, when her ladyship changed all the household. Alfred, show this gentleman up to her ladyship's boudoir, and William, take his—baggage—to the blue room. Her ladyship wishes to see you at once, Sir, before the others come."

So I went up the big staircase to a part of the Castle that I did not remember, wondering who "the others" might be. Almost could I have sworn that the shade of Savage accompanied me up those stairs; I could feel him at my side.

Presently a door was thrown open and I was ushered into a room somewhat dimly lit and full of the scent of flowers. By the fire near a tea-table, stood a lady clad in some dark dress with the light glinting on her rich-hued hair. She turned and I saw that she still wore the necklace of red stones, and beneath it on her breast a single red flower. For this was Lady Ragnall; about that there was no doubt at all, so little doubt indeed that I was amazed. I had expected to see a stout, elderly woman whom I should only know by the colour of her eyes and her voice, and perhaps certain tricks of manner. But, this was the mischief of it, I could not perceive any change, at any rate in that light. She was just the same! Perhaps a little fuller in figure, which was an advantage; perhaps a little more considered in her movements, perhaps a little taller or at any rate more stately, and that was all.

These things I learned in a flash. Then with a murmured "Mr. Quatermain, my Lady," the footman closed the door and she saw me.

Moving quickly towards me with both her hands outstretched, she exclaimed in that honey-soft voice of hers,

"Oh! my dear friend——" stopped and added, "Why, you haven't changed a bit."

"Fossils wear well," I replied, "but that is just what I was thinking of you."

"Then it is very rude of you to call me a fossil when I am only approaching that stage. Oh! I am glad to see you. I *am* glad!" and she gave me both the outstretched hands.

Upon my word I felt inclined to kiss her and have wondered ever since if she would have been very angry. I am not certain that she did not divine the inclination. At any rate after a little pause she dropped my hands and laughed. Then she said,

"I must tell you at once. A most terrible catastrophe has happened——"

Instantly it occurred to me that she had forgotten having informed me by letter of all the details of her husband's death. Such things chance to people who have once lost their memory. So I tried to look as sympathetic as I felt, sighed and waited.

"It's not so bad as all that," she said with a little shake of her head, reading my thought as she always had the power to do from the first moment we met. "We can talk about *that* afterwards. It's only that I hoped we were going to have a quiet two days, and now the Atterby-Smiths are coming, yes, in half an hour. Five of them!"

"The Atterby-Smiths!" I exclaimed, for somehow I too felt disappointed. "Who are the Atterby-Smiths?"

"Cousins of George's, his nearest relatives. They think he ought to have left them everything. But he didn't, because he could never bear the sight of them. You see his property was unentailed and he left it all to me. Now the entire family is advancing to suggest that I should leave it to them, as perhaps I might have done if they had not chosen to come just now."

"Why didn't you put them off?" I asked.

"Because I couldn't," she answered with a little stamp of her foot, "otherwise do you suppose they would have been here? They were far too clever. They telegraphed after lunch giving the train by which they were to arrive, but no address save Charing Cross. I thought of moving up to the Berkeley Square house, but it was impossible in the time, also I didn't know how to catch you. Oh! it's *most* vexatious."

"Perhaps they are very nice," I suggested feebly.

"Nice! Wait till you have seen them. Besides if they had been angels I did not want them just now. But how selfish I am! Come and have some tea. And you can stop longer, that is if you live through the Atterby-Smiths who are worse than both the Kendah tribes put together. Indeed I wish old Harût were coming instead. I should like to see Harût again, wouldn't you?" and suddenly the mystical look I knew so well, gathered on her face.

"Yes, perhaps I should," I replied doubtfully. "But I must leave by the first train on Tuesday morning; it goes at eight o'clock. I looked it up."

"Then the Atterby-Smiths leave on Monday if I have to turn them out of the house. So we shall get one evening clear at any rate. Stop a minute," and she rang the bell.

The footman appeared as suddenly as though he had been listening at the door.

"Alfred," she said, "tell Moxley" (he, I discovered, was the butler) "that when Mr. and Mrs. Atterby-Smith, the two Misses Atterby-Smith and the young Mr. Atterby-Smith arrive, they are to be shown to their rooms. Tell the cook also to put off dinner till half-past eight, and if Mr. and Mrs. Scroope arrive earlier, tell Moxley to tell them that I am sorry to be a little late, but that I was delayed by some parish business. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, my Lady," said Alfred and vanished.

"He doesn't understand in the least," remarked Lady Ragnall, "but so long as he doesn't show the Atterby-Smiths up here, in which case he can go away with them on Monday, I don't care. It will all work out somehow. Now sit down by the fire and let's talk. We've got nearly an hour and twenty minutes and you can smoke if you like. I learnt to in Egypt," and she took a cigarette from the mantelpiece and lit it.

That hour and twenty minutes went like a flash, for we had so much to say to each other that we never even got to the things we wanted to say. For instance, I began to tell her about King Solomon's Mines, which was a long story; and she to tell me what happened after we parted on the shores of the Red Sea. At least the first hour and a quarter went, when suddenly the door opened and Alfred in a somewhat frightened voice announced—"Mr. and Mrs. Atterby-Smith, the Misses Atterby-Smith and Mr. Atterby-Smith junior."

Then he caught sight of his mistress's eye and fled.

I looked and felt inclined to do likewise if only there had been another door. But there wasn't and that which existed was quite full. In the forefront came A.-S. senior, like a bull leading the herd. Indeed his appearance was bull-like as my eye, travelling from the expanse of white shirt-front (they were all dressed for dinner) to his red and massive countenance surmounted by two horn-like tufts of carrot hair, informed me at a glance. Followed Mrs. A.-S., the British matron incarnate. Literally there seemed to be acres of her; black silk below and white skin above on which set in filigree floated big green stones, like islands in an ocean. Her countenance too, though stupid was very stern and frightened me. Followed the progeny of this formidable pair. They were tall and thin, also red haired. The girls, whose age I could not guess in the least, were exactly like each other, which was not strange as afterwards I discovered that they were twins. They had pale blue eyes and somehow reminded me of fish. Both of them were dressed in green and wore topaz necklaces. The young man who seemed to be about one or two and twenty, had also pale blue eyes, in one of which he wore an eye-glass, but his hair was sandy as though it had been bleached, parted in the middle and oiled down flat.

For a moment there was a silence which I felt to be dreadful. Then in a big, pompous voice A.-S. *père* said,

"How do you do, my dear Luna? As I ascertained from the footman that you had not yet gone to dress, I insisted upon his leading us here for a little private conversation after we have been parted for so many years. We wished to offer you our condolences in person on your and our still recent loss."

"Thank you," said Lady Ragnall, "but I think we have corresponded on the subject which is painful to me."

"I fear that we are interrupting a smoking party, Thomas," said Mrs. A.-S. in a cold voice, sniffing at the air for all the world like a suspicious animal, whereon the five of them stared at Lady Ragnall's cigarette which she held between her fingers.

"Yes," said Lady Ragnall. "Won't you have one? Mr. Quatermain, hand Mrs. Smith the box, please."

I obeyed automatically, proffering it to the lady who nearly withered me with a glance, and then to each in turn. To my relief the young man took one.

"Archibald," said his mother, "you are surely not going to make your sisters' dresses smell of tobacco just before dinner."

Archibald sniggered and replied,

"A little more smoke will not make any difference in this room, Ma."

"That is true, darling," said Mrs. A.-S. and was straightway seized with a fit of asthma.

After this I am sure I don't know what happened, for muttering something about its being time to dress, I rushed from the room and wandered about until I could find someone to conduct me to my own where I lingered until I heard the dinner-bell ring. But even this retreat was not without disaster, for in my hurry I trod upon one of the young lady's dresses; I don't know whether it was Dolly's or Polly's (they were named Dolly and Polly) and heard a dreadful crack about her middle as though she were breaking in two. Thereon Archibald giggled again and Dolly and Polly remarked with one voice—they always spoke together,

"Oh! clumsy!"

To complete my misfortunes I missed my way going downstairs and strayed to and fro like a lost lamb until I found myself confronted by a green baize door which reminded me of something. I stood staring at it till suddenly a vision arose before me of myself following a bell wire through that very door in the darkness of the night when in search for the late Mr. Savage upon a certain urgent occasion. Yes, there could be no doubt about it, for look! there was the wire, and strange it seemed to me that I should live to behold it again. Curiosity led me to push the door open just to ascertain if my memory served me aright about the exact locality of the room. Next moment I regretted it for I fell straight into the arms of either Polly or Dolly.

"Oh!" said she, "I've just been sewn up."

I reflected that this was my case also in another sense, but asked feebly if she knew the way downstairs.

She didn't; neither of us did, till at length we met Mrs. Smith coming to look for her.

If I had been a burglar she could not have regarded me with graver suspicions. But at any rate *she* knew the way downstairs. And there to my joy I found my old friend Scroope and his wife, both of them grown stout and elderly, but as jolly as ever, after which the Smith family ceased to trouble me.

Also there was the rector of the parish, Dr. Jeffreys and an absurdly young wife whom he had recently married, a fluffy-headed little thing with round eyes and a cheerful, perky manner. The two of them together looked exactly like a turkey-cock and a chicken. I remembered him well enough and to my astonishment he remembered me, perhaps because Lady Ragnall, when she had hastily invited him to meet the Smith family, mentioned that I was coming. Lastly there was the curate, a dark, young man who seemed to be always brooding over the secrets of time and eternity, though perhaps he was only thinking about his dinner or the next day's services.

Well, there we stood in that well-remembered drawing-room in which first I had made the acquaintance of Harût and Marût; also of the beautiful Miss Holmes as Lady Ragnall was then called. The Scroopes, the Jeffreys and I gathered in one group and the Atterby-Smiths in another like a force about to attack, while between the two, brooding and indeterminate, stood the curate, a neutral observer.

Presently Lady Ragnall arrived, apologizing for being late. For some reason best known to herself she had chosen to dress as though for a great party. I believe it was out of mischief and in order to show Mrs. Atterby-Smith some of the diamonds she was firmly determined that family should never inherit. At any rate there she stood glittering and lovely, and smiled upon us.

Then came dinner and once more I marched to the great hall in her company; Dr. Jeffreys got Mrs. Smith; Papa Smith got Mrs. Jeffreys who looked like a Grecian maiden walking into dinner with the Minotaur; Scroope got one of the Miss Smiths, she who wore a pink bow, the gloomy curate got the other with a blue bow, and Archibald got Mrs. Scroope who departed making faces at us over his shoulder.

"You look very grand and nice," I said to Lady Ragnall as we followed the others at a discreet distance.

"I am glad," she answered, "as to the nice, I mean. As for the grand, that dreadful woman is always writing to me about the Ragnall diamonds, so I thought that she should see some of them for the first and last time. Do you know I haven't worn these things since George and I went to Court together, and I daresay shall never wear them again, for there is only one ornament I care for and I have got *that* on under my dress."

I stared at her and with a laugh said that she was very mischievous.

"I suppose so," she replied, "but I detest those people who are pompous and rude and have spoiled my party. Do you know I had half a mind to come down in the dress that I wore as Isis in Kendah Land. I have got it upstairs and you shall see me in it before you go, for old time's sake. Only it occurred to me that they might think me mad, so I didn't. Dr. Jeffreys, will you say grace, please?"

Well, it was a most agreeable dinner so far as I was concerned, for I sat between my hostess and Mrs. Scroope and the rest were too far off for conversation. Moreover as Archibald developed an unexpected quantity of small talk, and Scroope on the other side amused himself by filling pink-bow Miss Smith's innocent mind with preposterous stories about Africa, as had happened to me once before at this table, Lady Ragnall and I were practically left undisturbed.

"Isn't it strange that we should find ourselves sitting here again after all these years, except that you are in my poor mother's place? Oh! when that scientific gentleman convinced me the other day that you whom I had heard were dead, were not only alive and well but actually in England, really I could have embraced him."

I thought of an answer but did not make it, though as usual she read my mind for I saw her smile.

"The truth is," she went on, "I am an only child and really have no friends, though of course being—well, you know," and she glanced at the jewels on her breast, "I have plenty of acquaintances."

"And suitors," I suggested.

"Yes," she replied blushing, "as many as Penelope, not one of whom cares twopence about me any more than I care for them. The truth is, Mr. Quatermain, that nobody and nothing interest me, except a spot in the churchyard yonder and another amid ruins in Egypt."

"You have had sad bereavements," I said looking the other way.

"Very sad and they have left life empty. Still I should not complain for I have had my share of good. Also it isn't true to say that nothing interests me. Egypt interests me, though after what has happened I do not feel as though I could return there. All Africa interests me and," she added dropping her voice, "I can say it because I know you will not misunderstand, you interest me, as you have always done since the first moment I saw you."

"*I!*" I exclaimed, staring at my own reflection in a silver plate which made me look—well, more unattractive than usual. "It's very kind of you to say so, but I can't understand why I should. You have seen very little of me, Lady Ragnall, except in that long journey across the desert when we did not talk much, since you were otherwise engaged."

"I know. That's the odd part of it, for I feel as though I had seen you for years and years and knew everything about you that one human being can know of another. Of course, too, I do know a good lot of your life through George and Harût."

"Harût was a great liar," I said uneasily.

"Was he? I always thought him painfully truthful, though how he got at the truth I do not know. Anyhow," she added with meaning, "don't suppose I think the worse of you because others have thought so well. Women who seem to be all different, generally, I notice, have this in common. If one or two of them like a man, the rest like him also because something in him appeals to the universal feminine instinct, and the same applies to their dislike. Now men, I think, are different in that respect."

"Perhaps because they are more catholic and charitable," I suggested, "or perhaps because they like those who like them."

She laughed in her charming way, and said,

"However these remarks do not apply to you and me, for as I think I told you once before in that cedar wood in Kendah Land where you feared lest I should catch a chill, or become—odd again, it is another you with whom something in me seems to be so intimate."

"That's fortunate for your sake," I muttered, still staring at and pointing to the silver plate.

Again she laughed. "Do you remember the *Taduki* herb?" she asked. "I have plenty of it safe upstairs, and not long ago I took a whiff of it, only a whiff because you know it had to be saved."

"And what did you see?"

"Never mind. The question is what shall we *both* see?"

"Nothing," I said firmly. "No earthly power will make me breathe that unholy drug again."

"Except me," she murmured with sweet decision. "No, don't think about leaving the house. You can't, there are no Sunday trains. Besides you won't if I ask you not."

"In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird," I replied, firm as a mountain.

"Is it? Then why are so many caught?"

At that moment the Bull of Bashan—I mean Smith, began to bellow something at his hostess from the other end of the table and our conversation came to an end.

“I say, old chap,” whispered Scroope in my ear when we stood up to see the ladies out. “I suppose you are thinking of marrying again. Well, you might do worse,” and he glanced at the glittering form of Lady Ragnall vanishing through the doorway behind her guests.

“Shut up, you idiot!” I replied indignantly.

“Why?” he asked with innocence. “Marriage is an honourable estate, especially when there is lots of the latter. I remember saying something of the sort to you years ago and at this table, when as it happened you also took in her ladyship. Only there was George in the wind then; now it has carried him away.”

Without deigning any reply I seized my glass and went to sit down between the canon and the Bull of Bashan.

## CHAPTER III.

### ALLAN GIVES HIS WORD

Mr. Atterby-Smith proved on acquaintance to be even worse than unfond fancy painted him. He was a gentleman in a way and of good family whereof the real name was Atterby, the Smith having been added to secure a moderate fortune left to him on that condition. His connection with Lord Ragnall was not close and through the mother's side. For the rest he lived in some south-coast watering-place and fancied himself a sportsman because he had on various occasions hired a Scottish moor or deer forest. Evidently he had never done anything nor earned a shilling during all his life and was bringing his family up to follow in his useless footsteps. The chief note of his character was that intolerable vanity which so often marks men who have nothing whatsoever about which to be vain. Also he had a great idea of his rights and what was due to him, which he appeared to consider included, upon what ground I could not in the least understand, the reversal of all the Ragnall properties and wealth. I do not think I need say any more about him, except that he bored me to extinction, especially after his fourth glass of port.

Perhaps, however, the son was worse, for he asked questions without number and when at last I was reduced to silence, lectured me about shooting. Yes, this callow youth who was at Sandhurst, instructed me, Allan Quatermain, how to kill elephants, he who had never seen an elephant except when he fed it with buns at the Zoo. At last Mr. Smith, who to Scroope's great amusement had taken the end of the table and assumed the position of host, gave the signal to move and we adjourned to the drawing-room.

I don't know what had happened but there we found the atmosphere distinctly stormy. The ample Mrs. Smith sat in a chair fanning herself, which caused the barbaric ornaments she wore to clank upon her fat arm. Upon either side of her, pale and indeterminate, stood Polly and Dolly each pretending to read a book. Somehow the three of them reminded me of a coat-of-arms seen in a nightmare, British Matron *sejant* with Modesty and Virtue as supporters. Opposite, on the other side of the fire and evidently very angry, stood Lady Ragnall, *regardant*.

"Do I understand you to say, Luna," I heard Mrs. A.-S. ask in resonant tones as I entered the room, "that you actually played the part of a heathen goddess among these savages, clad in a transparent bed-robe?"

"Yes, Mrs. Atterby-Smith," replied Lady Ragnall, "and a nightcap of feathers. I will put it on for you if you won't be shocked. Or perhaps one of your daughters——"

"Oh!" said both the young ladies together, "please be quiet. Here come the gentlemen."

After this there was a heavy silence broken only by the stifled giggles in the background of Mrs. Scroope and the canon's fluffy-headed wife, who to do her justice had some fun in her. Thank goodness the evening, or rather that part of it did not last long, since presently Mrs. Atterby-Smith, after studying me for a long while with a cold eye, rose majestically and swept off to bed followed by her offspring.

Afterwards I ascertained from Mrs. Scroope that Lady Ragnall had been amusing herself by taking away my character in every possible manner for the benefit of her connections, who were left with a general impression that I was the chief of a native tribe somewhere in Central Africa where I dwelt in light attire surrounded by the usual accessories. No wonder, therefore, that Mrs. A.-S. thought it best to remove her "Twin Pets," as she called them, out of my ravening reach.

Then the Scroopes went away, having arranged for me to lunch with them on the morrow, an invitation that I hastily accepted, though I heard Lady Ragnall mutter—"Mean!" beneath her breath. With them departed the canon and his wife and the curate, being, as they said, "early birds with duties to perform." After this Lady Ragnall paid me out by going to bed, having instructed Moxley to show us to the smoking room, "where," she whispered as she said good night, "I hope you will enjoy yourself."

Over the rest of the night I draw a veil. For a solid hour and three-quarters did I sit in that room between this dreadful pair, being alternately questioned and lectured. At length I could stand it no longer and while pretending to help myself to whiskey and soda, slipped through the door and fled upstairs.

I arrived late to breakfast purposely and found that I was wise, for Lady Ragnall was absent upstairs, recovering from "a headache." Mr. A.-Smith was also suffering from a headache downstairs, the result of champagne, port and whisky mixed, and all his family seemed to have pains in their tempers. Having ascertained that they were going to the church in the park, I departed to one two miles away and thence walked straight on to the Scroopes' where I had a very pleasant time, remaining till five in the afternoon. I returned to tea at the Castle where I found Lady Ragnall so cross that I went to church again, to the six o'clock service this time, only getting back in time to dress for dinner. Here I was paid out for I had to take in Mrs. Atterby-Smith. Oh! what a meal was that. We sat for the most part in solemn silence broken only by requests to pass the salt. I observed with satisfaction, however, that things were growing lively at the other end of the table where A.-Smith *père* was drinking a good deal too much wine. At last I heard him say,

"We had hoped to spend a few days with you, my dear Luna. But as you tell us that your engagements make this impossible"—and he paused to drink some port, whereon Lady Ragnall remarked inconsequently,

"I assure you the ten o'clock train is far the best and I have ordered the carriage at half-past nine, which is not very early."

"As your engagements make this impossible," he repeated, "we would ask for the opportunity of a little family conclave with you to-night."

Here all of them turned and glowered at me.

"Certainly," said Lady Ragnall, "'the sooner 'tis over the sooner to sleep.' Mr. Quatermain, I am sure, will excuse us, will you not? I have had the museum lit up for you, Mr. Quatermain. You may find some Egyptian things there that will interest you."

"Oh, with pleasure!" I murmured, and fled away.

I spent a very instructive two hours in the museum, studying various Egyptian antiquities including a couple of mummies which rather terrified me. They looked so very corpse-like standing there in their wrappings. One was that of a lady who was a "Singer of Amen," I remember. I wondered where she was singing now and what song. Presently I came to a glass case which riveted my attention, for above it was a label bearing the following words: "Two Papyri given to Lady Ragnall by the priests of the Kendah Tribe in Africa." Within were the papyri unrolled and beneath each of the documents, its translation, so far as they could be translated for they were somewhat broken. No. 1, which was dated, "In the first year of Peroa," appeared to be the official appointment of the Royal Lady Amada, to be the prophetess to the temple of Isis and Horus the Child, which was also called Amada, and situated on the east bank of the Nile above Thebes. Evidently this was the same temple of which Lady Ragnall had written to me in her letter, where her husband had met his death by accident, a coincidence which made me start when I remembered how and where the document had come into her hands and what kind of office she filled at the time.

The second papyrus, or rather its translation, contained a most comprehensive curse upon any man who ventured to interfere with the personal sanctity of this same Royal Lady of Amada, who, apparently in virtue of her office, was doomed to perpetual celibacy like the vestal virgins. I do not remember all the terms of the curse, but I know that it invoked the vengeance of Isis the Mother, Lady of the Moon, and Horus the Child upon anyone who should dare such a desecration, and in so many words doomed him to death by violence "far from his own country where first he had looked on Ra," (i.e. the sun) and also to certain spiritual sufferings afterwards.

The document gave me the idea that it was composed in troubled days to protect that particularly sacred person, the Prophetess of Isis whose cult, as I have since learned, was rising in Egypt at the time, from threatened danger, perhaps at the hands of some foreign man. It occurred to me even that this Princess, for evidently she was a descendant of kings, had been appointed to a most sacred office for that very purpose. Men who shrink from little will often fear to incur the direct curse of widely venerated gods in order to obtain their desires, even if they be not their own gods. Such were my conclusions about this curious and ancient writing which I regret I cannot give in full as I neglected to copy it at the time.

I may add that it seemed extremely strange to me that it and the other which dealt with a particular temple in Egypt should have passed into Lady Ragnall's hands over two thousand years later in a distant part of Africa, and that subsequently her husband should have been killed in her presence whilst excavating the very temple to which they referred, whence too in all probability they were taken. Moreover, oddly enough Lady Ragnall had herself for a while filled the rôle of Isis in a shrine whereof these two papyri had been part of the sacred appurtenances for unknown ages, and one of her official titles there was Prophetess and Lady of the Moon, whose symbol she wore upon her breast.

Although I have always recognized that there are a great many more things in the world than are dreamt of in our philosophy, I say with truth and confidence that I am not a superstitious man. Yet I confess that these papers and the circumstances connected with them, made me feel afraid.

Also they made me wish that I had not come to Ragnall Castle.

Well, the Atterby-Smiths had so far effectually put a stop to any talk of such matters and even if Lady Ragnall should succeed in getting rid of them by that morning train, as to which I was doubtful, there remained but a single day of my visit during which it ought not to be hard to stave off the subject. Thus I reflected, standing face to face with those mummies, till presently I observed that the Singer of Amen who wore a staring, gold mask, seemed to be watching me with her oblong painted eyes. To my fancy a sardonic smile gathered in them and spread to the mouth.

"That's what *you* think," this smile seemed to say, "as once before you thought that Fate could be escaped. Wait and see, my friend. Wait and see!"

"Not in this room any way," I remarked aloud, and departed in a hurry down the passage which led to the main staircase.

Before I reached its end a remarkable sight caused me to halt in the shadow. The Atterby-Smith family were going to bed *en bloc*. They marched in single file up the great stair, each of them carrying a hand candle. Papa led and young Hopeful brought up the rear. Their countenances were full of war, even the twins looked like angry lambs, but something written on them informed me that they had suffered defeat recent and grievous. So they vanished up the stairway and out of my ken for ever.

When they had gone I started again and ran straight into Lady Ragnall. If her guests had been angry, it was clear that *she* was furious, almost weeping with rage, indeed. Moreover, she turned and rent me.

"You are a wretch," she said, "to run away and leave me all day long with those horrible people. Well, they will never come here again, for I have told them that if they do the servants have orders to shut the door in their faces."

Not knowing what to say I remarked that I had spent a most instructive evening in the museum, which seemed to make her angrier than ever. At any rate she whisked off without even saying "good night" and left me standing there. Afterwards I learned that the A.-S.'s had calmly informed Lady Ragnall that she had stolen their property and demanded that "as an act of justice" she should make a will leaving everything she possessed to them, and meanwhile furnish them with an allowance of £4,000 a year. What I did not learn were the exact terms of her answer.

Next morning Alfred, when he called me, brought me a note from his mistress which I fully expected would contain a request that I should depart by the same train as her other guests. Its real contents, however, were very different.

"MY DEAR FRIEND," it ran, "I am so ashamed of myself and so sorry for my rudeness last night, for which I deeply apologise. If you knew all that I had gone through at the hands of those dreadful mendicants, you would forgive me.—L.R."

"P.S.—I have ordered breakfast at 10. Don't go down much before, for your own sake."

Somewhat relieved in my mind, for I thought she was really angry with me, not altogether without cause, I rose, dressed and set to work to write some letters. While I was doing so I heard the wheels of a carriage beneath and opening my window, saw the Atterby-Smith family in the act of departing in the Castle bus. Smith himself seemed to be still enraged, but the others looked depressed. Indeed I heard the wife of his bosom say to him,

"Calm yourself, my dear. Remember that Providence knows what is best for us and that beggars on horseback are always unjust and ungrateful."

To which her spouse replied,

"Hold your infernal tongue, will you," and then began to rate the servants about the luggage.

Well, off they went. Glaring through the door of the bus, Mr. Smith caught sight of me leaning out of the window, seeing which I waved my hand to him in adieu. His only reply to this courtesy was to shake his fist, though whether at me or at the Castle and its inhabitants in general, I neither know nor care.

When I was quite sure that they had gone and were not coming back again to find something they had forgotten, I went downstairs and surprised a conclave between the butler, Moxley, and his satellites, reinforced by Lady Ragnall's maid and two other female servants.

"Gratuities!" Moxley was exclaiming, which I thought a fine word for tips, "not a smell of them! His gratuities were—'Damn your eyes, you fat bottle-washer,' being his name for butler. *My* eyes, mind you, Ann, not Alfred's or William's, and that because he had tumbled over his own rugs. Gentleman! Why, I name him a hog with his litter."

"Hogs don't have litters, Mr. Moxley," observed Ann smartly.

"Well, young woman, if there weren't no hogs, there'd be no litters, so there! However, he won't root about in this castle no more, for I happened to catch a word or two of what passed between him and her Ladyship last night. He said straight out that she was making love to that little Mr. Quatermain who wanted her money, and probably not for the first time as they had forgathered in Africa. A gentleman, mind you, Ann, who although peculiar, I like, and who, the keeper Charles tells me, is the best shot in the whole world."

"And what did she say to that?" asked Ann.

"What did she say? What didn't she say, that's the question. It was just as though all the furniture in the room got up and went for them Smiths. Well, having heard enough, and more than I wanted, I stepped off with the tray and next minute out they all come and grab the bedroom candlesticks. That's all and there's her Ladyship's bell. Alfred, don't stand gaping there but go and light the hot-plates."

So they melted away and I descended from the landing, indignant but laughing. No wonder that Lady Ragnall lost her temper!

Ten minutes later she arrived in the dining-room, waving a lighted ribbon that disseminated perfume.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked.

"Fumigating the house," she said. "It is unnecessary as I don't think they were infectious, but the ceremony has a moral significance—like incense. Anyway it relieves my feelings."

Then she laughed and threw the remains of the ribbon into the fire, adding,

"If you say a word about those people I'll leave the room."

I think we had one of the jolliest breakfasts I ever remember. To begin with we were both hungry since our miseries of the night before had prevented us from eating any dinner. Indeed she swore that she had scarcely tasted food since Saturday. Then we had such a lot to talk about. With short intervals we talked all that day, either in the house or while walking through the gardens and grounds. Passing through the latter I came to the spot on the back drive where once I had saved her from being abducted by Harût and Marût, and as I recognized it, uttered an exclamation. She asked me why and the end of it was that I told her all that story which to this moment she had never heard, for Ragnall had thought well to keep it from her.

She listened intently, then said,

"So I owe you more than I knew. Yet, I'm not sure, for you see I was abducted after all. Also if I had been taken there, probably George would never have married me or seen me again, and that might have been better for him."

"Why?" I asked. "You were all the world to him."

"Is any woman ever all the world to a man, Mr. Quatermain?"

I hesitated, expecting some attack.

"Don't answer," she went on, "it would be too long and you wouldn't convince me who have been in the East. However, he was all the world to me. Therefore his welfare was what I wished and wish, and I think he would have had more of it if he had never married me."

"Why?" I asked again.

"Because I brought him no good luck, did I? I needn't go through all the story as you know it. And in the end it was through me that he was killed in Egypt."

"Or through the goddess Isis," I broke in rather nervously.

"Yes, the goddess Isis, a part I have played in my time, or something like it. And he was killed in the temple of the goddess Isis. And those papyri of which you read the translations in the museum, which were given to me in Kendah Land, seem to have come from that same temple. And—how about the Ivory Child? Isis in the temple evidently held a child in her arms, but when we found her it had gone. Supposing this child was the same as that of which I was guardian! It might have been, since the papyri came from that temple. What do you think?"

"I don't think anything," I answered, "except that it is all very odd. I don't even understand what Isis and the child Horus represent. They were not mere images either in Egypt or Kendah Land. There must be an idea behind them somewhere."

"Oh! there was. Isis was the universal Mother, Nature herself with all the powers, seen and unseen, that are hidden in Nature; Love personified also, although not actually the queen of Love like Hathor, her sister goddess. The Horus child, whom the old Egyptians called Heru-Hennu, signified eternal regeneration, eternal youth, eternal strength and beauty. Also he was the Avenger who overthrew Set, the Prince of Darkness, and thus in a way opened the Door of Life to men."

"It seems to me that all religions have much in common," I said.

"Yes, a great deal. It was easy for the old Egyptians to become Christian, since for many of them it only meant worshipping Isis and Horus under new and holier names. But come in, it grows cold."

We had tea in Lady Ragnall's boudoir and after it had been taken away our conversation died. She sat there on the other side of the fire with a cigarette between her lips, looking at me through the perfumed smoke till I began to grow uncomfortable and to feel that a

crisis of some sort was at hand. This proved perfectly correct, for it was. Presently she said,

"We took a long journey once together, Mr. Quatermain, did we not?"

"Undoubtedly," I answered, and began to talk of it until she cut me short with a wave of her hand, and went on,

"Well, we are going to take a longer one together after dinner to-night."

"What! Where! How!" I exclaimed much alarmed.

"I don't know where, but as for how—look in that box," and she pointed to a little carved Eastern chest made of rose or sandal wood, that stood upon a table between us.

With a groan I rose and opened it. Inside was another box made of silver. This I opened also and perceived that within lay bundles of dried leaves that looked like tobacco, from which floated an enervating and well-remembered scent that clouded my brain for a moment. Then I shut down the lids and returned to my seat.

"*Taduki*," I murmured.

"Yes, *Taduki*, and I believe in perfect order with all its virtue intact."

"Virtue!" I exclaimed. "I don't think there is any virtue about that hateful and magical herb which I believe grew in the devil's garden. Moreover, Lady Ragnall, although there are few things in the world that I would refuse you, I tell you at once that nothing will induce me to have anything more to do with it."

She laughed softly and asked why not.

"Because I find life so full of perplexities and memories that I have no wish to make acquaintance with any more, such as I am sure lie hid by the thousand in that box."

"If so, don't you think that they might clear up some of those which surround you to-day?"

"No, for in such things there is no finality, since whatever one saw would also require explanation."

"Don't let us argue," she replied. "It is tiring and I daresay we shall need all our strength to-night."

I looked at her speechless. Why could she not take No for an answer? As usual she read my thought and replied to it.

"Why did not Adam refuse the apple that Eve offered him?" she inquired musingly. "Or rather why did he eat it after many refusals and learn the secret of good and evil, to the great gain of the world which thenceforward became acquainted with the dignity of labour?"

"Because the woman tempted him," I snapped.

"Quite so. It has always been her business in life and always will be. Well, I am tempting you now, and not in vain."

"Do you remember who was tempting the woman?"

"Certainly. Also that he was a good school-master since he caused the thirst for knowledge to overcome fear and thus laid the foundation-stone of all human progress. That allegory may be read two ways, as one of a rise from ignorance instead of a fall from innocence."

"You are too clever for me with your perverted notions. Also, you said we were not to argue. I have therefore only to repeat that I will not eat your apple, or rather, breathe your *Taduki*."

"Adam over again," she replied, shaking her head. "The same old beginning and the same old end, because you see at last you will do exactly what Adam did."

Here she rose and standing over me, looked me straight in the eyes with the curious result that all my will power seemed to evaporate. Then she sat down again, laughing softly, and remarked as though to herself,

"Who would have thought that Allan Quatermain was a moral coward!"

"Coward," I repeated. "Coward!"

"Yes, that's the right word. At least you were a minute ago. Now courage has come back to you. Why, it's almost time to dress for dinner, but before you go, listen. I have some power over you, my friend, as you have some power over me, for I tell you frankly if you wished me very much to do anything, I should have to do it; and the same applies conversely. Now, to-night we are, as I believe, going to open a great gate and to see wonderful things, glorious things that will thrill us for the rest of our lives, and perhaps suggest to us what is coming after death. You will not fail me, will you?" she continued in a pleading voice. "If you do I must try alone since no one else will serve, and then I *know*—how I cannot say—that I shall be exposed to great danger. Yes, I think that I shall lose my mind once more and never find it again this side the grave. You would not have that happen to me, would you, just because you shrink from digging up old memories?"

"Of course not," I stammered. "I should never forgive myself."

"Yes, of course not. There was really no need for me to ask you. Then you promise you will do all I wish?" and once more she looked at me, adding, "Don't be ashamed, for you remember that I have been in touch with hidden things and am not quite as other women are. You will recollect I told you that which I have never breathed to any other living soul, years ago on that night when first we met."

"I promise," I answered and was about to add something, I forget what, when she cut me short, saying,

"That's enough, for I know your word is rather better than your bond. Now dress as quickly as you can or the dinner will be spoiled."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THROUGH THE GATES

Short as was the time at my disposal before the dinner-gong sounded, it proved ample for reflection. With every article of attire that I discarded went some of that boudoir glamour till its last traces vanished with my walking-boots. I was fallen indeed. I who had come to this place so full of virtuous resolutions, could now only reflect upon the true and universal meaning of our daily prayer that we might be kept from temptation. And yet what had tempted me? For my life's sake I could not say. The desire to please a most charming woman and to keep her from making solitary experiments of a dangerous nature, I suppose, though whether they should be less dangerous carried out jointly remained to be seen. Certainly it was not any wish to eat of her proffered apple of Knowledge, for already I knew a great deal more than I cared for about things in general. Oh! the truth was that woman is the mightiest force in the world, at any rate where the majority of us poor men is concerned. She commanded and I must obey.

I grew desperate and wondered if I could escape. Perhaps I might slip out of the back door and run for it, without my great coat or hat although the night was so cold and I should probably be taken up as a lunatic. No, it was impossible for I had forged a chain that might not be broken. I had passed my word of honour. Well, I was in for it and after all what was there of which I need be afraid that I should tremble and shrink back as though I were about to run away with somebody's wife, or rather to be run away with quite contrary to my own inclination? Nothing at all. A mere nonsensical ordeal much less serious than a visit to the dentist.

Probably that stuff had lost its strength by now—that is, unless it had grown more powerful by keeping, as is the case with certain sorts of explosives. And if it had not, the worst to be expected was a silly dream, followed perhaps by headache. That is, unless I did not chance to wake up again at all in this world, which was a most unpleasant possibility. Another thing, suppose I woke and she didn't! What should I say then? Of a certainty I should find myself in the dock. Yes, and there were further dreadful eventualities, quite conceivable, every one of them, the very thought of which plunged me into a cold perspiration and made me feel so weak that I was obliged to sit down.

Then I heard the gong; to me it sounded like the execution bell to a prisoner under sentence of death. I crept downstairs feebly and found Lady Ragnall waiting for me in the drawing-room, clothed with gaiety as with a garment. I remember that it made me most indignant that she could be so happy in such circumstances, but I said nothing. She looked me up and down and remarked,

"Really from your appearance you might have seen the Ragnall ghost, or be going to be married against your will, or—I don't know what. Also you have forgotten to fasten your tie."

I looked in the glass. It was true, for there hung the ends down my shirt front. Then I struggled with the wretched thing until at last she had to help me, which she did laughing softly. Somehow her touch gave me confidence again and enabled me to say quite boldly that I only wanted my dinner.

"Yes," she replied, "but you are not to eat much and you must only drink water. The priestesses in Kendah Land told me that this was necessary before taking *Taduki* in its strongest form, as we are going to do to-night. You know the prophet Harûit only gave us the merest whiff in this room years ago."

I groaned and she laughed again.

That dinner with nothing to drink, although to avoid suspicion I let Moxley fill my glass once or twice, and little to eat for my appetite had vanished, went by like a bad dream. I recall no more about it until I heard Lady Ragnall tell Moxley to see that there was a good fire in the museum where we were going to study that night and must not be disturbed.

Another minute and I was automatically opening the door for her. As she passed she paused to do something to her dress and whispered,

"Come in a quarter of an hour. Mind—no port which clouds the intellect."

"I have none left to cloud," I remarked after her.

Then I went back and sat by the fire feeling most miserable and staring at the decanters, for never in my life do I remember wanting a bottle of wine more. The big clock ticked and ticked and at last chimed the quarter, jarring on my nerves in that great lonely banqueting hall. Then I rose and crept upstairs like an evil-doer and it seemed to me that the servants in the hall looked on me with suspicion, as well they might.

I reached the museum and found it brilliantly lit, but empty except for the cheerful company of the two mummies who also appeared to regard me with gleaming but doubtful eyes. So I sat down there in front of the fire, not even daring to smoke lest tobacco should complicate *Taduki*.

Presently I heard a low sound of laughter, looked up and nearly fell backwards, that is, metaphorically, for the chair prevented such a physical collapse.

It was not wonderful since before me, like a bride of ancient days adorned for her husband, stood the goddess Isis—white robes, feathered headdress, ancient bracelets, gold-studded sandals on bare feet, scented hair, ruby necklace and all the rest. I stared, then there burst from me words which were the last I meant to say,

"Great Heavens! how beautiful you are."

"Am I?" she asked. "I am glad," and she glided across the room and locked the door.

"Now," she said, returning, "we had better get to business, that is unless you would like to worship the goddess Isis a little first, to bring yourself into a proper frame of mind, you know."

"No," I replied, my dignity returning to me. "I do not wish to worship any goddess, especially when she isn't a goddess. It was not a part of the bargain."

"Quite so," she said, nodding, "but who knows what you will be worshipping before an hour is over? Oh! forgive me for laughing at you, but I can't help it. You are so evidently frightened."

"Who wouldn't be frightened?" I answered, looking with gloomy apprehension at the sandal-wood box which had appeared upon a case full of scarabs. "Look here, Lady Ragnall," I added, "why can't you leave all this unholy business alone and let us spend a pleasant evening talking, now that those Smith people have gone? I have lots of stories about my African adventures which would interest you."

"Because I want to hear my own African adventures, and perhaps yours too, which I am sure will interest me a great deal more," she exclaimed earnestly. "You think it is all foolishness, but it is not. Those Kendah priestesses told me much when I seemed to be out of my mind. For a long time I did not remember what they said, but of late years, especially since George and I began to excavate that temple, plenty has come back to me bit by bit, fragments, you know, that make me desire to learn the rest as I never desired anything else on earth. And the worst of it has always been that from the beginning I have known—and know—that this can only happen with you and through you, why I cannot say, or have forgotten. That's what sent me nearly wild with joy when I heard that you were not only alive, but in this country. You won't disappoint me, will you? There is nothing I can offer you which would have any value for you, so I can only beg you not to disappoint me—well, because I am your friend."

I turned away my head, hesitating, and when I looked up again I saw that her beautiful eyes were full of tears. Naturally that settled the matter, so I only said,

"Let us get on with the affair. What am I to do? Stop a bit. I may as well provide against eventualities," and going to a table I took a sheet of notepaper and wrote:

"Lady Ragnall and I, Allan Quatermain, are about to make an experiment with an herb which we discovered some years ago in Africa. If by any chance this should result in accident to either or both of us, the Coroner is requested to understand that it is not a case of murder or of suicide, but merely of unfortunate scientific research."

This I dated, adding the hour, 9.47 P.M., and signed, requesting her to do the same.

She obeyed with a smile, saying it was strange that one who had lived a life of such constant danger as myself, should be so afraid to die.

"Look here, young lady," I replied with irritation, "doesn't it occur to you that *I* may be afraid lest *you* should die—and *I* be hanged for it," I added by an afterthought.

"Oh! I see," she answered, "that is really very nice of you. But, of course, you would think like that; it is your nature."

"Yes," I replied. "Nature, not merit."

She went to a cupboard which formed the bottom of one of the mahogany museum cases, and extracted from it first of all a bowl of ancient appearance made of some black stone with projecting knobs for handles that were carved with the heads of women wearing ceremonial wigs; and next a low tripod of ebony or some other black wood. I looked at these articles and recognized them. They had stood in front of the sanctuary in the temple in Kendah Land, and over them I had once seen this very woman dressed as she was to-night, bend her head in the magic smoke before she had uttered the prophecy of the passing of the Kendah god.

"So you brought these away too," I said.

"Yes," she replied with solemnity, "that they might be ready at the appointed hour when we needed them."

Then she spoke no more for a while, but busied herself with certain rather eerie preparations. First she set the tripod and its bowl in an open space which I was glad to note was at some distance from the fire, since if either of us fell into that who would there be to take us off before cremation ensued? Then she drew up a curved settee with a back and arms, a comfortable-looking article having a seat that sloped backwards like those in clubs, and motioned to me to sit down. This I did with much the same sensations that are evoked by taking one's place upon an operation-table.

Next she brought that accursed *Taduki* box, I mean the inner silver one, the contents of which I heartily wished I had thrown upon the fire, and set it down, open, near the tripod. Lastly she lifted some glowing embers of wood from the grate with tongs, and dropped them into the stone bowl.

"I think that's all. Now for the great adventure," she said in a voice that was at once rapt and dreamy.

"What am I to do?" I asked feebly.

"That is quite simple," she replied, as she sat herself down beside me well within reach of the *Taduki* box, the brazier being between us with its tripod stand pressed against the edge of the couch, and in its curve, so that we were really upon each side of it. "When the smoke begins to rise thickly you have only to bend your head a little forward, with your shoulders still resting against the settee, and inhale until you find your senses leaving you, though I don't know that this is necessary for the stuff is subtle. Then throw your head back, go to sleep and dream."

"What am I to dream about?" I inquired in a vacuous way, for my senses were leaving me already.

"You will dream, I think, of past events in which both of us played a part, at least I hope so. I dreamt of them before in Kendah Land, but then I was not myself, and for the most part they are forgotten. Moreover, I learned that we can only see them all when we are together. Now speak no more."

This command, by the way, at once produced in me an intense desire for prolonged conversation. It was not to be gratified, however, for at that moment she stood up again facing the tripod and me, and began to sing in a rich and thrilling voice. What she sang I do not know for I could not understand the language, but I presume it was some ancient chant that she learned in Kendah Land. At any rate, there she stood, a lovely and inspired priestess clad in her sacerdotal robes, and sang, waving her arms and fixing her eyes upon mine. Presently she bent down, took a little of the *Taduki* weed and with words of incantation, dropped it upon the embers in the bowl. Twice she did this, then sat herself upon the couch and waited.

A clear flame sprang up and burned for thirty seconds or so, I suppose while it consumed the volatile oils in the weed. Then it died down and smoke began to come, white, rich and billowy, with a very pleasant odour resembling that of hot-house flowers. It spread out between us like a fan, and though its veil I heard her say,

"The gates are wide. Enter!"

I knew what she meant well enough, and though for a moment I thought of cheating, there is no other word for it, knew also that she had detected the thought and was scorning me in her mind. At any rate I felt that I must obey and thrust my head forward into the smoke, as a green ham is thrust into a chimney. The warm vapour struck against my face like fog, or rather steam, but without causing me to choke or my eyes to smart. I drew it down my throat with a deep inhalation—once, twice, thrice, then as my brain began to swim, threw myself back as I had been instructed to do. A deep and happy drowsiness stole over me, and the last thing I remember was hearing the clock strike the first two strokes of the hour of ten. The third stroke I heard also, but it sounded like to that of the richest-throated bell that ever boomed in all the world. I remember becoming aware that it was the signal for the rolling up of some vast proscenium, revealing behind it a stage that was the world—nothing less.

What did I see? What did I see? Let me try to recall and record.

First of all something chaotic. Great rushes of vapour driven by mighty winds; great seas, for the most part calm. Then upheavals and volcanoes spouting fire. Then tropic scenes of infinite luxuriance. Terrific reptiles feeding on the brinks of marshes, and huge elephant-like animals moving between palms beyond. Then, in a glade, rough huts and about them a jabbering crowd of creatures that were only half human, for sometimes they stood upright and sometimes ran on their hands and feet. Also they were almost covered with hair which was all they had in the way of clothes, and at the moment that I met them, were terribly frightened by the appearance of a huge mammoth, if that is the right name for it, which walked into the glade and looked at us. At any rate it was a beast of the elephant tribe which I judged to be nearly twenty feet high, with enormous curving tusks.

The point of the vision was that I recognized myself among those hairy jabberers, not by anything outward and visible, but by something inward and spiritual. Moreover, I was being urged by a female of the race, I can scarcely call her a woman, to justify my existence by tackling the mammoth in her particular interest, or to give her up to someone who would. In the end I tackled it, rushing forward with a weapon, I think it was a sharp stone tied to a stick, though how I could expect to hurt a beast twenty feet high with such a thing is more than I can understand, unless perhaps the stone was poisoned.

At any rate the end was sudden. I threw the stone, whereat a great trunk shot out from between the tusks and caught me. Round and round I went in the air, reflecting as I did so, for I suppose at the time my normal consciousness had not quite left me, that this was my first encounter with the elephant Jana, also that it was very foolish to try to oblige a female regardless of personal risk....

All became dark, as no doubt it would have done, but presently, that is after a lapse of a great many thousands of years, or so it appeared to me, light grew again. This time I was a black man living in something not unlike a Kaffir kraal on the top of a hill.

There was shouting below and enemies attacked us; a woman rushed out of a hut and gave me a spear and a shield, the latter made of wood with white spots on it, and pointed to the path of duty which ran down the hill. I followed in company with others, though without enthusiasm, and presently met a roaring giant of a man at the bottom. I stuck my spear into him and he stuck his into me, through the stomach, which hurt me most abominably. After this I retired up the hill where the woman pulled the spear out and gave it to another man. I remember no more.

Then followed a whole maze of visions, but really I cannot disentangle them. Nor is it worth while doing so since after all they were only of the nature of an overture, jumbled incidents of former lives, real or imaginary, or so I suppose, having to do, all of them, with elementary things, such as hunger and wounds and women and death.

At length these broken fragments of the past were swept away out of my consciousness and I found myself face to face with something connected and tangible, not too remote or unfamiliar for understanding. It was the beginning of the real story.

#### AND AFTER

For a few moments I, Shabaka, seemed to be lost in a kind of delirium and surrounded by a rose-hued mist. Then I, Allan Quatermain, heard a sharp quick sound as of a clock striking, and looked up. It was a clock, a beautiful old clock on a mantelpiece opposite to me and the hands showed that it had just struck the hour of ten.

Now I remembered that centuries ago, as I was dropping asleep, I did not know why, I had seen that clock and those hands in the same position and known that it was striking the second stroke of ten. Oh! what did it all mean? Had thousands of years gone by or—only eight seconds?

There was a weight upon my shoulder. I glanced round to see what it was and discovered the beautiful head of Lady Ragnall who was sweetly sleeping there. Lady Ragnall! and in that very strange dream which I had dreamed she was the priestess called Amada. Look, there was the mark of the new moon above her breast. And not a second ago I had been in a shrine with Amada dressed as Lady Ragnall was to-night, in circumstances so intimate that it made me blush to think of them. Lady Ragnall! Amada!—Amada! Lady Ragnall! A shrine! A boudoir! Oh! I must be going mad!

I could not disturb her, it would have been—well, unseemly. So I, Shabaka, or Allan Quatermain, just sat still feeling curiously comfortable, and tried to piece things together, when suddenly Amada—I mean Lady Ragnall woke.

“I wonder,” she said without lifting her head from my shoulder, “what happened to the holy Tanofir. I think that I heard him outside the shine giving directions for the digging of Pharaoh’s grave at that spot, and saying that he must do so at once as his time was very short. Yes, and I wished that he would go away. Oh! my goodness!” she exclaimed, and suddenly sprang up.

I too rose and we stood facing each other.

Between us, in front of the fire stood the tripod and the bowl of black stone at the bottom of which lay a pinch of white ashes, the remains of the *Taduki*. We stared at it and at each other.

“Oh! where have we been, Shaba—I mean, Mr. Quatermain?” she gasped, looking at me round-eyed.

“I don’t know,” I answered confusedly. “To the East I suppose. That is—it was all a dream.”

“A dream!” she said. “What nonsense! Tell me, were you or were you not in a sanctuary just now with me before the statue of Isis, the same that fell on George two years ago and killed him, and did you or did you not give me a necklace of wonderful rosy pearls which we put upon the neck of the statue as a peace-offering because I had broken my vows to the goddess—those that you won from the Great King?”

"No," I answered triumphantly, "I did nothing of the sort. Is it likely that I should have taken those priceless pearls into battle? I gave them to Karema to keep after my mother returned them to me on her death-bed; I remember it distinctly."

"Yes, and Karema handed them to me again as your love-token when she appeared in the city with the holy Tanofir, and what was more welcome at the moment—something to eat. For we were near starving, you know. Well, I threw them over your neck and my own in the shrine to be the symbol of our eternal union. But afterwards we thought that it might be wise to offer them to the goddess—to appease her, you know. Oh! how dared we plight our mortal troth there in her very shrine and presence, and I her twice-sworn servant? It was insult heaped on sacrilege."

"At a guess, because love is stronger than fear," I replied. "But it seems that you dreamed a little longer than I did. So perhaps you can tell me what happened afterwards. I only got as far as—well, I forget how far I got," I added, for at that moment full memory returned and I could not go on.

She blushed to her eyes and grew disturbed.

"It is all mixed up in my mind too," she exclaimed. "I can only remember something rather absurd—and affectionate. You know what strange things dreams are."

"I thought you said it wasn't a dream."

"Really I don't know what it was. But—your wound doesn't hurt you, does it? You were bleeding a good deal. It stained me here," and she touched her breast and looked down wonderingly at her sacred, ancient robe as though she expected to see that it was red.

"As there is no stain now it *must* have been a dream. But my word! that was a battle," I answered.

"Yes, I watched it from the pylon top, and oh! it was glorious. Do you remember the charge of the Ethiopians against the Immortals? Why of course you must as you led it. And then the fall of Pharaoh Peroa—he was George, you know. And the death of the Great King, killed by your black bow; you were a wonderful shot even then, you see. And the burning of the ships, how they blazed! And—a hundred other things."

"Yes," I said, "it came off. The holy Tanofir was a good strategist—or his Cup was, I don't know which."

"And you were a good general, and so for the matter of that was Bes. Oh! what agonies I went through while the fight hung doubtful. My heart was on fire, yes, I seemed to burn for—" and she stopped.

"For whom?" I asked.

"For Egypt of course, and when, reflected in the alabaster, I saw you enter that shrine, where you remember I was praying for your success—and safety, I nearly died of joy. For you know I had been, well, attached to you—to Shabaka, I mean—all the time—that's my part of the story which I daresay you did not see. Although I seemed so cold and wayward I could love, yes, in that life I knew how to love. And Shabaka looked, oh! a hero with his rent mail and the glory of triumph in his eyes. He was very handsome, too, in his way. But what nonsense I am talking."

"Yes, great nonsense. Still, I wish we were sure how it ended. It is a pity that you forget, for I am crazed with curiosity. I suppose there is no more *Taduki*, is there?"

"Not a scrap," she answered firmly, "and if there were it would be fatal to take it twice on the same day. We have learned all there is to learn. Perhaps it is as well, though I should like to know what happened after our—our marriage."

"So we *were* married, were we?"

"I mean," she went on ignoring my remark, "whether you ruled long in Egypt. For you, or rather Shabaka, did rule. Also whether the Easterns returned and drove us out, or what. You see the Ivory Child went away somehow, for we found it again in Kendah Land only a few years ago."

"Perhaps we retired to Ethiopia," I suggested, "and the worship of the Child continued in some part of that country after the Ethiopian kingdom passed away."

"Perhaps, only I don't think Karema would ever have gone back to Ethiopia unless she was obliged. You remember how she hated the place. No, not even to see those black children of hers. Well, as we can never tell, it is no use speculating."

"I thought there *was* more *Taduki*," I remarked sadly. "I am sure I saw some in the coffer."

"Not one bit," she answered still more firmly than before, and, stretching out her hand, she shut down the lid of the coffer before I could look into it. "It may be best so, for as it stands the story had a happy ending and I don't want to learn, oh! I don't want to learn how the curse of Isis fell on you and me."

"So you believe in that?"

"Yes, I do," she answered with passion, "and what is more, I believe it is working still, which perhaps is why we have all come down in the world, you and I and George and Hans, yes, and even old Harût whom we knew in Kendah Land, who, I think, was the holy Tanofir. For as surely as I live I *know* beyond possibility of doubt that whatever we may be called to-day, you were the General Shabaka and I was the priestess Amada, Royal Lady of Egypt, and between us and about us the curse of Isis wavers like a sword. That is why George was killed and that is why—but I feel very tired, I think I had better go to bed."

As I recall that I have explained, I was obliged to leave Ragnall Castle early the next morning to keep a shooting engagement. O heavens! to keep a shooting engagement!

But whatever Amada, I mean Lady Ragnall, said, there *was* plenty more *Taduki*, as I have good reason to know.

ALLAN QUATERMAIN.

## ALLAN REFUSES A FORTUNE

Had I the slightest qualification for the task, I, Allan Quatermain, would like to write an essay on Temptation.

This, of course, comes to all, in one shape or another, or at any rate to most, for there are some people so colourless, so invertebrate that they cannot be tempted—or perhaps the subtle powers which surround and direct, or misdirect, us do not think them worth an effort. These cling to any conditions, moral or material, in which they may find themselves, like limpets to a rock; or perhaps float along the stream of circumstance like jellyfish, making no effort to find a path for themselves in either case, and therefore die as they have lived—quite good because nothing has ever moved them to be otherwise—the objects of the approbation of the world, and, let us hope, of Heaven also.

The majority are not so fortunate; something is always egging their living personalities along this or that road of mischief. Materialists will explain to us that this something is but the passions inherited from a thousand generations of unknown progenitors who, departing, left the curse of their blood behind them. I, who am but a simple old fellow, take another view, which, at any rate, is hallowed by many centuries of human opinion. Yes, in this matter, as in sundry others, I put aside all the modern talk and theories and am plumb for the good, old-fashioned, and most efficient Devil as the author of our woes. No one else could suit the lure so exactly to the appetite as that old fisherman in the waters of the human soul, who knows so well how to bait his hooks and change his flies so that they may be attractive not only to all fish but to every mood of each of them.

Well, without going further with the argument, rightly or wrongly, that is my opinion.

Thus, to take a very minor matter—for if the reader thinks that these words are the prelude to telling a tale of murder or other great sins he is mistaken—I believe that it was Satan himself, or, at any rate, one of his agents, who caused my late friend, Lady Ragnall, to bequeath to me the casket of the magical herb called *Taduki*, in connection with which already we had shared certain remarkable adventures. [\*]

[\*] See the books *The Ivory Child* and *The Ancient Allan*.

Now, it may be argued that to make use of this *Taduki* and on its wings to be transported, in fact or in imagination, to some far-away state in which one appears for a while to live and move and have one's being is no crime, however rash the proceeding. Nor is it, since, if we can find new roads to knowledge, or even to interesting imaginings, why should we not take them? But to break one's word is a crime, and because of the temptation of this stuff, which, I confess, for me has more allurements than anything else on earth, at any rate, in these latter days, I have broken my word.

For, after a certain experience at Ragnall Castle, did I not swear to myself and before Heaven that no power in the world, not even that of Lady Ragnall herself, would induce me again to inhale those time-dissolving fumes and look upon that which, perhaps designedly, is hidden from the eyes of man; namely, revealments of his buried past, or mayhap of his yet unacted future? What do I say? This business is one of dreams—no more; though I think that those dreams are best left unexplored, because they suggest too much and yet leave the soul unsatisfied. Better the ignorance in which we are doomed to wander than these liftings of corners of the veil; than these revelations which excite delirious hopes that, after all, may be but marsh lights which, when they vanish, will leave us in completer blackness.

Now I will get on to the story of my fall; of how it came about and the revelations to which it led, and which I found interesting enough, whatever others may think of them.

Elsewhere I have told how, years after our joint adventure into Central Africa, once again I came into touch with the widowed Lady Ragnall and allowed myself to be persuaded in her company to inhale the charmed smoke of the *Taduki* herb, with which she became familiar when, in a state of mental collapse, she fell into the hands of the priests of some strange African faith. Under its influence, the curtain of time seemed to swing aside, and she and I saw ourselves playing great parts as inhabitants of Egypt in the days of the Persian domination. In that life, if the tale were true, we had been very intimate, but before this intimacy culminated in actual union, the curtain fell and we reawoke to our modern world.

Next morning, I went away, much confused and very frightened, nor did I ever again set eyes upon the stately and beautiful Lady Ragnall. After all that we had learned or dreamed, I felt that further meetings would be awkward. Also, to tell the truth, I did not like the story of the curse which was said to hang over the man who had to do with her who, in it, was named Amada and filled the role of priestess of Isis, the goddess whom she betrayed, in whatever generation might be born, or perchance reborn. Of course, such ancient maledictions are the merest nonsense. And yet—well, the truth is that in our separate fashions we are all superstitious, and really the fate of Lord Ragnall, who had married this lady, was most unpleasant and suggestive; too much so to encourage anyone else to follow his example. Further, I had come to a time of life when I did not wish for more adventures in which women were mixed up, even in dreams; since such, I have observed, however entrancing at the moment, lead to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

Thus it came about that when Lady Ragnall wrote asking me to stay with her—as she did on two subsequent occasions—I put her off with excuses which were perfectly valid, although at this moment I forget what they may have been, it being my firm intention never again to place myself within reach of her beauteous and commanding personality. You see, in that dream we dreamed together, the story came to an end just as I was about to marry the

Princess and High Priestess Amada, who was, or appeared to be, Lady Ragnall's prototype. Indeed, on regaining her senses, she, whose vision lasted a second or two longer than did mine, let it slip that we actually had been married in some primitive Egyptian fashion, and I could see clearly enough, although I knew it to be nonsense, she believed that this event had happened.

Now, even when the scene was laid a long while ago, it is extremely awkward to foregather with an imperial woman who is firmly convinced that she was once your wife, so awkward that, in the end, it might have proved necessary to resume what she considered to be an established, if an interrupted, relationship.

This, for sundry reasons, I was determined not to do, not the least of them being that certainly I should have been set down as a fortune hunter; also, as I have said, there was always the curse in the background, which I hoped fondly would recognize my self-denial and not operate in my direction. And yet—although to think of it makes me feel cold down the back—if perchance that dream were true, already it was incurred. Already I, Allan, the Shabaka of former days, am doomed “to die by violence far from my own country where first I had looked upon the sun,” as its terms, recorded in the papyrus from Kandah-land, of which I read a translation at the Castle, provide, with antique directness and simplicity, as the lot of all and sundry who have ever ventured to lay hands or lips upon the person of Amada, High Priestess of Isis.

To return. In reply to my second letter of excuse, I received a quaint little epistle from the lady to whom it had been written. It ran thus:

Shabaka, why do you seek to escape the net of Fate when already you are enveloped in its meshes? You think that never more, seated side by side, shall we see the blue *Taduki* smoke rise up toward us, or feel its subtle strength waft our souls afar.

Perhaps this is so, though assuredly even here you are doomed to acknowledge its dominion, how often I do not know, and will you find it less to be feared alone than in my company? Moreover, from that company you never can escape, since it has been with you from time immemorial, if not continuously, and will be with you when there is no more sun.

Yet, as it is your wish, until we meet again in the past or in the future, farewell, O Shabaka.

Amada.

When I had finished reading this very peculiar note, of which the envelope, by the way, was sealed with the ancient Egyptian ring that my late friend Lord Ragnall had found and given to his wife just before his terrible fate overtook him, literally I felt faint and lay back in my chair to recover myself. Really, she was an ominous and, in her way, rather creepy woman, one unlike all others, one who seemed to be in touch with that which, doubtless by intention, is hidden from mankind. Now it came back to me that, when first I met her as the Hon. Luna Holmes and was so interested in her at the Ragnall Castle dinner party before her marriage, I was impressed with this ominous quality which seemed to flow from her, as, had he been more sensitive, her future husband would have been also.

During our subsequent association in Africa, too, it had always been with me, and, of course, it was in full force through our joint experience with the *Taduki* herb. Now again it flowed up in me like an unsealed fountain and drowned my judgment, washing the ordered reason on which I prided myself from its foundations. Also, in this confusion, another truth emerged, namely, that from the first moment I set my eyes on her I had always been attracted by and, in a kind of hidden way, “in love” with her. It was not a violent and passionate sort of affection, but then the same man can love sundry women in different ways, all of which are real enough.

Yet I knew that it was permanent. For a little while her phantasies got a hold upon me, and I began to believe that we always had been and always should be mixed up together; also that, in some undeclared fashion, I was under deep obligations to her, that she had stood my friend, not once but often, and so would stand while our personalities continued to endure. True, she had been Ragnall's wife, yet—and this through no personal vanity, since Heaven knows that this vice is lacking in me—of a sudden I became convinced that it was to me that her nature really turned and not to Ragnall. I did not seek it, I did not even hope that it was so, for surely she was his possession, not mine, and I wanted to rob no man. Yet in that moment there the fact loomed before me large and solid as a mountain, a calm, immovable mountain, a snow-capped volcano, apparently extinct, that still, one day, might break into flames and overwhelm me, taking me as its possession upon wings of fire.

Such were my reflections during the moments of weakness which followed the shock I had received from that remarkable letter, outwardly and visibly so final, yet inwardly and spiritually opening up vast avenues of unexpected possibilities. Presently, they passed with the faintness and I was my own man again. Whatever she might or might not be, so far as I was concerned, there was an end to my active association with Lady Ragnall—at any rate, until I was certain that she was rid of her store of *Taduki*. As she admitted in her curiously worded communication, that book was closed for our lives, and any speculations concerning the past and the future, when we were not in being, remained so futile that about them it was unnecessary to trouble.

A little while later, I read in a newspaper, under the head of “Fashionable Intelligence,” that Lady Ragnall had left England to spend the winter in Egypt, and, knowing all her associations with that country, I marvelled at her courage. What had taken her there, I wondered; then shrugged my shoulders and let the matter be.

Six weeks or so afterward, I was out shooting driven partridges. A covey came over me, of which I got two. As I thrust new cartridges into my gun, I saw approaching me, flying very fast and high, a couple of wild duck that I suppose had been disturbed from some pond by the distant beaters. I closed the gun and lifted it, being particularly anxious to bag those wild duck, which were somewhat rare in the neighbourhood, especially at that season of the year. At that moment I was smitten by a most extraordinary series of impressions that had to do with Egypt and Lady Ragnall, the last things I had been thinking of a minute before.

I seemed to see a desert and ruins that I knew to be those of a temple, and Lady Ragnall herself seated among them, holding up a sunshade which suddenly fell onto the sand. This illusion passed, to be followed by another; namely, that she was with me, talking to me very earnestly but in a joyful, vigorous voice, only in a language of which I could not understand one word. Yet the burden of her speech seemed to reach my mind; it was to the effect that now we should always be near to each other, as we had been in the past.

Then all was gone, nor can those impressions have endured for long, seeing that, when they began, I was pointing my gun at the wild duck, and they left me before the dead birds touched the ground for, automatically, I went on with the business at hand, nor did my accustomed skill desert me.

Setting down the fancy as once of those queer mental pranks that cannot be explained—unless, in this instance, it was due to something I had eaten at lunch—I thought no more about it for two whole days. Then I thought a great deal, for, on opening my newspaper, which reached the Grange about three o'clock, that is exactly forty-eight hours after my telepathic experience, or whatever it may have been, the first thing that my eye fell on among the foreign telegrams was the following from Cairo:

A message has been received here conveying the sad intelligence of the sudden death yesterday of Lady Ragnall, the widow of the late Lord Ragnall, who, as a famous Egyptologist, was very well known in Egypt, where he came to a tragic end some years ago. Lady Ragnall, who was noted for her wealth and beauty, was visiting the ruins of a temple of Isis which stands a little way back from the east bank of the Nile between Luxor and Assouan, where her husband met with his fatal accident while engaged in its excavation. Indeed, she was seated by the monument erected on the sand which entombed him so deeply that his body was never recovered, when suddenly she sank back and expired. The English medical officer from Luxor certified heart disease as the cause of death and she has been buried where she died, this ground having been consecrated at the time of the decease of Lord Ragnall.

If I had felt queer when I received Lady Ragnall's mystical letter before she left for Egypt, now I felt much queerer. Then I was perplexed; now I was terrified, and, what is more, greatly moved. Again that conviction came to me that, deep down in my being, I was attached, unchangeably attached, to this strange and charming woman, and that with hers my destiny was intertwined. If this were not so, indeed, why had her passing become known to me, of all people and in so incongruous a fashion, for, although the hour of her death was not stated, I had little doubt that it occurred at the very moment when I shot the wild duck.

Now I wished that I had not refused to visit her, and even that I had given her some proof of my regard by asking her to marry me, notwithstanding her great wealth, the fact that I had been her husband's friend, and all the rest. No doubt, she would have refused; still, the quiet devotion of even so humble an individual as myself might have pleased her. However, regrets came too late; she was dead and all between us at an end.

A few weeks later, I discovered that here I was mistaken, for, after a preliminary telegram inquiring whether I was in residence at the Grange, which I answered on a prepaid form to the address of some unknown lawyers in London, there arrived at lunch time on the following day a gentleman of the name of Mellis, evidently one of the firm of Mellis & Mellis who had sent me the telegram. He was shown in and, without waiting for luncheon, said:

"I believe I am addressing Mr. Allan Quatermain."

I bowed and he went on:

"I come upon a strange errand, Mr. Quatermain, so strange that I doubt whether, in the course of your life, which as I have heard has been full of adventure, you have ever known its equal. You were, I believe, well acquainted with our late client, Lord Ragnall, also with his wife, Lady Ragnall, formerly the Hon. Luna Holmes, of whose recent sad death you may perhaps have heard."

I said that this was so, and the lawyer went on in his dry precise way, watching my face as he spoke:

"It would appear, Mr. Quatermain, that Lady Ragnall must have been much attached to you, since, a while ago, after a visit that you paid to her at Ragnall Castle, she came to our office and made a will, a thing I may add that we had never been able to persuade her to do. Under that will—as you will see presently, for I have brought a copy with me—she left everything she possessed, that is, all the great Ragnall property and accumulated personalty of which she had the power to dispose at her unfettered discretion, to—ahem—to *you*."

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed, and sank back into a chair.

"As I do not sail under false colours," went on Mr. Mellis with a dry smile, "I may as well tell you at once that both I and my partner protested vehemently against the execution of such a will, for reasons that seemed good to us but which I need not set out. She remained firm as a rock.

“You think I am mad,” she said. “Foreseeing this, I have taken the precaution of visiting two eminent London specialists to whom I told all my history, including that of the mental obscuration from which I suffered for a while as the result of shock. Each of these examined me carefully and subjected me to tests with the result—but here are their certificates and you can judge for yourselves.”

“I, or rather we, read the certificates, which, of course, we have preserved. To be brief, they stated that her ladyship was of absolutely sound and normal mind, although certain of her theories might be thought unusual, but not more so than those of thousands of others, some of them eminent in various walks of life. In face of these documents, which were entirely endorsed by our own observation, there was but one thing to do, namely, to prepare the will in accordance with our client’s clear and definite instructions. While we were writing these down, she said suddenly:

“Something has occurred to me. I shall never change my mind, nor shall I remarry, but, from my knowledge of Mr. Quatermain, I think it possible and even probable that he will refuse this great inheritance”—a statement, sir, which struck us as so incredible that we made no comment.

“In that event,” she continued, “I wish all the real property to be realized and together with the personalty, except certain legacies, to be divided among the societies, institutions, and charities that are written down upon this list,” and she handed us a document, “unless indeed Mr. Quatermain, whom, should he survive me, I leave my sole executor, should disapprove of any of them.”

“Do you now understand the situation, sir?”

“Quite,” I answered. “That is, no doubt I shall when I have read the will. Meanwhile, I suggest that you must be hungry after your journey and that we should have lunch.”

So we lunched, talking of indifferent matters while the servants were in the room, and afterward returned to my study, where the documents were read and expounded to me by Mr. Mellis. To cut the story short, it seemed that my inheritance was enormous; I am afraid to state from memory at what figure it was provisionally valued. Subject to certain reservations, such as an injection that no part of the total, either in land or in money, was to be alienated in favour of Mr. Atterby-Smith, a relative of Lord Ragnall whom the testatrix held in great dislike, or any member of his family, and that, for part of the year, I must inhabit Ragnall Castle, which might not be sold during my lifetime, or even let. All this vast fortune was left at my absolute disposal, both during my life and after my death. Failure to observe these trusts might, it seemed, invalidate the will. In the event of my renouncing the inheritance, however, Ragnall Castle, with a suitable endowment, was to become a county hospital, and the rest of the estate was to be divided in accordance with the list that I have mentioned—a very admirable list, but one which excluded any society or institution of a sectarian nature.

“Now I think that I have explained everything,” said Mr. Mellis at length, “except a minor and rather peculiar provision as to your acceptance of certain relics, particularly described by the testatrix in a sealed letter which I will hand to you presently. So it only remains for me, Mr. Quatermain, to ask you to sign a document which I have already prepared and brought with me, to enable me to deal with these great matters on your behalf. That is,” he added with a bow, “should you propose to continue that confidence in our firm with which the family of the late Lord Ragnall has honoured it for several generations.”

While he was hunting in his bag for this paper, explaining, as he did so, that I must be prepared to face an action brought by Mr. Atterby-Smith, who had been raging round his office “like a wild animal,” suddenly I made up my mind.

“Don’t bother about that paper, Mr. Mellis,” I said, “because Lady Ragnall was right in her supposition. I have no intention of accepting this inheritance. The estate must go for division to the charities, etcetera, set down in her list.”

The lawyer heard, and stared at me.

“In my life,” he gasped at last, “I have known mad testators and mad heirs, but never before have I come across a case where both the testator and the heir were mad. Perhaps, sir, you will be pleased to explain.”

“With pleasure,” I said when I had finished lighting my pipe. “In the first place, I am already what is called a rich man and I do not want to be bothered with more money and property.”

“But, Mr. Quatermain,” he interrupted, “you have a son who, with such wealth behind him, might rise to anything—yes, anything.” (This was true, for, at that time, my boy Harry was living.)

“Yes, but, as it chances, Mr. Mellis, I have ideas upon this matter which you may think peculiar. I do not wish my son to begin life with enormous resources, or even the prospect of them. I wish him to fight his own way in the world. He is going to be a doctor. When he has succeeded in his profession and learned what it means to earn one’s own bread, it will be time for him to come into other people’s money. Already I have explained this to him with reference to my own, and being a sensible youth, he agrees with me.”

“I daresay,” groaned the lawyer. “Such—well, failings—as yours, are often hereditary.”

“Another thing is,” I went on, “that I do not wish to be bothered by a lawsuit with Mr. Atterby-Smith. Further, I cannot bind myself to live half the year in Ragnall Castle in a kind of ducal state. Very likely, before all is done, I might want to return to Africa, which then I could not do. In short, it comes to this: I accept the executorship and my out-of-

pocket expenses, and shall ask your firm to act for me in the matter. The fortune I positively and finally refuse, as you observe Lady Ragnall thought it probable I should do."

Mr. Mellis rose and looked at the clock. "If you will allow me to order the dogcart," he said, "I think there is just time for me to catch the afternoon train up to town. Meanwhile, I propose to leave you a copy of the will and of the other documents to study at your leisure, including the sealed letter which you have not yet read. Perhaps after taking independent advice, from your own solicitors and friends, you will write me your views in a few days' time. Until then, this conversation of ours goes for nothing. I consider it entirely preliminary and without prejudice."

The dogcart came round—indeed, it was already waiting—and thus this remarkable interview ended. From the doorstep I watched the departure of Mr. Mellis and saw him turn, look at me, and shake his head solemnly. Evidently he thought that the right place for me was a lunatic asylum.

"Thank goodness, that's done with!" I said to myself. "Now I'll order a trap and go and tell Curtis and Good about all the business. No, I won't; they'll only think me mad as that lawyer does, and argue with me. I'll take a walk and mark those oaks that have to come down next spring. But first I had better put away these papers."

Thus I reflected and began to collect the documents. Lifting the copy of the will, I saw lying beneath it the sealed letter of which Mr. Mellis had spoken, addressed to me and marked

To be delivered after my death, or in the event of Mr. Quatermain pre-deceasing me, to be burned unread.

The sight of that well-known writing and the thought that she who penned it was now departed from the world and that nevermore would my eyes behold her, moved me. I laid the letter down, then took it up again, broke the seal, seated myself, and read as follows:

*"My dear friend, my dearest friend, for so I may call you, knowing as I do that if ever you see these words we shall no longer be fellow citizens of the world. They are true words, because between you and me there is a closer tie than you imagine, at any rate, at present. You thought our Egyptian vision to be a dream—no more; I believe it, on the other hand, at least in essentials, to be a record of facts that have happened in bygone ages. Moreover, I will tell you now that my revelation went further than your own. Shabaka and Amada were married and I saw them as man and wife leading a host southward to found a new empire somewhere in Central Africa, of which perchance the Kendah tribe were the last remnant. Then the darkness fell.*

*"Moreover, I am certain that this was not the first time that we had been associated upon the earth, as I am almost certain that it will not be the last. This mystery I cannot understand or explain, yet it is so. In some of our manifold existences we have been bound together by the bonds of destiny, as in some we may have been bound to others, and so, I suppose, it will continue to happen, perhaps for ever and ever.*

*"Now, as I know that you hate long letters, I will tell you why I write. I am going to make a will, leaving you practically everything I possess—which is a great deal. As there is no relationship or other tie between us, this may seem a strange thing to do, but after all, why not? I am alone in the world, without a relative of any kind. Nor had my late husband any except some distant cousins, those Atterby-Smiths whom you may remember, and these he detested even more than I do, which is saying much. On one point I am determined—that they shall never inherit, and that is why I make this will in such a hurry, having just received a warning that my own life may not be much prolonged.*

*"Now, I do not deceive myself. I know you to be no money-hunter and I think it highly probable that you will shrink from the responsibilities of this fortune which, if it came to you, you would feel it your duty to administer it for the good of many to the weariness of your own flesh and spirit. Nor would you like the gossip in which it would involve you, or the worry of the actions-at-law which the Atterby-Smiths, and perhaps others unknown, would certainly bring against you. Therefore, it seems possible that you will refuse my gift, a contingency for which I have provided by alternative depositions. If a widowed lady without connections chooses to dispose of her goods in charity or for the advancement of science, etc., no one can complain. But even in this event I warn you that you will not altogether escape, since I am making you my soul executor, and although I have jotted down a list of the institutions which I propose to benefit, you will be given an absolute discretion concerning them with power to vary the amounts, and add to, or lessen, their number. In return for this trouble, should you yourself renounce the inheritance, I am leaving you an executor's fee of 5,000 pounds, which I beg that you will not renounce, as the mere thought of your doing so offends me. Also, as a personal gift, I*

*ask you to accept all that famous set of Caroline silver which was used on grand occasions at Ragnall, that I remember you admired so much, and any other objects of art that you may choose.*

*“Lastly—and this is the really important thing—together with the Egyptian collection, I pass on to you the chest of Taduki herb with the Kendah brazier, etc., enjoining you most strictly, if ever you held me in any friendship, to take it, and above all to keep it sacred.*

*“In this, Friend, you will not fail me. Observe, I do not direct you to make further experiments with the Taduki. To begin with, it is unnecessary, since, although you have recently refused to do so in my company— perhaps because you were afraid of complications—sooner or later you will certainly breathe it by yourself, knowing that it would please me much, and, perhaps, when I am dead, hoping that through it you may see more of me than you did when I was alive. You know the dead often increase in value at compound interest, and I am vain enough to hope that this may be so in my case.*

*“I have no more to say. Farewell—for a little while.*

*“Luna Ragnall.*

*“P.S. You can burn this letter if you like; it does not in the least matter, as you will never forget its contents. How interesting it will be to talk it over with you one day.”*

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## CHAPTER 2

### BACK TO THE PAST

It is unnecessary that I should set out the history of the disposal of the great Ragnall fortune in any detail. I adhered to my decision which at last was recorded with much formality; though, as I was a totally unknown individual, few took any interest in the matter. Those who came to hear of it for the most part set me down as mad; indeed, I could see that even my friends and neighbours, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, with whom I declined to discuss the business, more or less shared this view, while a society journal of the lower sort printed a paragraph headed:

THE HUNTER HERMIT -  
IVORY TRADER  
WHO MOCKED AT MILLIONS!

Then followed a distorted version of the facts. Also I received anonymous letters written, I do not doubt, by members of the Atterby-Smith family, which set down my self-denial to "the workings of a guilty conscience" and "to fears of exposure."

Of all these things I took no heed, and notwithstanding wild threats of action by Mr. Atterby-Smith, in due course the alternative clauses of the will came into operation, under which, with only a rough list to guide me, I found myself the practical dispenser of vast sums. Then indeed I "endured hardness." Not only had collieries and other properties to be sold to the best advantage, not only was I afflicted by constant interviews with Messrs. Mellis & Mellis and troubles too numerous to mention. In addition to these, I think that every society and charity in the United Kingdom and quite eighty per cent. of its beggars must have written or sought interviews with me to urge their public or private claims, so that, in the end, I was obliged to fly away and hide myself, leaving the lawyers to deal with the correspondence and the mendicants.

At length I completed my list, allotting the bulk of the money to learned societies, especially such of them as dealt with archaeological matters in which the testatrix and her husband had been interested; to those who laboured among the poor; to the restoration of an abbey in which I had heard Lady Ragnall express great interest, and to the endowment of the castle as a local hospital in accordance with her wish.

This division having been approved and ratified by an order in Court, my duties came to an end. Further, my fee as executor was paid me, which I took without scruple, for seldom has money been harder earned, and the magnificent service of ancient plate was handed over to me—or rather to the custody of my bank—with the result that I have never set eyes upon it from that day to this, and probably never shall.

Also, I selected certain souvenirs, including a beautiful portrait of Lady Ragnall by a noted artist, painted before her marriage, concerning which there was a tragic story whereof I have written elsewhere. This picture I hung in my dining room where I can see it as I sit at table, so that never a day passes that I do not think twice or thrice of her whose young loveliness it represents. Indeed, I think of her so much that often I wish I had placed it somewhere else.

The Egyptian collection I gave to a museum which I will not name; only the chest of *Taduki* and the other articles connected with it I kept, as I was bound to do, hiding them away in a bookcase in my study and hoping that I should forget where I had put them, an effort wherein I failed entirely. Indeed, that chest might have been alive to judge from the persistence with which it inflicted itself upon my mind, just as if someone were imprisoned in the bookcase. It was stowed away in the bottom part of an old Chippendale bookcase which stood exactly behind my writing chair and which I had taken over as a fixture when I bought the Grange. Now this chair, that I am using at the moment of writing, is one of the sort that revolves, and, heedless of the work I had to do, continually I found myself turning it round so that I sat staring at the bookcase instead of at my desk.

This went on for some days, until I began to wonder whether there was anything wrong; whether, for instance, I had placed the articles so that they could fall over and my subconscious self was reminding me of the fact. At length, one evening after dinner, this idea fidgeted me so much that I could bear it no more. Going to my bedroom, I opened the little safe that stands there and took out the key of the bookcase which I had stowed away so that I could not get at it without some trouble. Returning, I unlocked the faded mahogany door of the Eighteenth Century bookcase and was surprised when it opened itself very quickly, as if something were pushing at it.

Next moment, I saw the reason. My subconscious self had been right. Owing, I suppose, to insufficient light when I put them away, I had set the ebony tripod upon which rested the black stone bowl that formerly was used in the *Taduki* ceremonies in the sanctuary of the temple in Kendah-land, whence Lady Ragnall had brought it, so that one of its feet projected over the edge of the shelf. Thus it pressed against the door, and when it was opened, of course fell forward. I caught it, rather smartly, I flattered myself, or rather I caught the bowl, which was very heavy, and the tripod fell to the floor. Setting down the bowl on the hearthrug which was near, I picked up its stand and made a hasty examination, fearing lest the brittle, short-grained wood should have broken. It had not; its condition was as perfect as when it was first used, perhaps thousands of years before.

Next, that I might examine this curiosity with more care than I had ever yet done, I placed the bowl upon its stand to consider its shape and ornamentation. Though so massive, I saw that in its way it was a beautiful thing, and the

heads of the women carved upon the handles were so full of life that I think they must have been modelled from a living person. Perhaps that model was the priestess who had first used it in her sacred rites of offering or of divination, or perhaps Amada herself, to whom, now that I thought of it, the resemblance was great, as I had seen her in my *Taduki* dream.

The eyes (for both handles were identical) seemed fixed on me in a solemn and mystical stare; the parted lips looked as though they were uttering words of invitation. To what did they invite? Alas! I knew too well: it was that I should burn *Taduki* in the bowl so that they might be opened by its magic and tell me of hidden things.

Nonsense! I thought to myself. Moreover, I remembered that one must never take *Taduki* after drinking wine. Then I remembered something else; namely, that, as it happened, at dinner that night I had drunk nothing but water, having for some reason or other preferred it to claret or port. Also, I had eaten precious little—I suppose because I was not hungry. Or could it be that I was a humbug and had done these things, or rather left them undone, so that should temptation overtake me its results might not prove fatal? Upon my word, I did not know, for on such occasions it is difficult to disentangle the exact motives of the heart.

Moreover, this speculation was forgotten in a new and convincing idea that suddenly I conceived. Doubtless, the virtues, or the vices, of *Taduki* were all humbug, or rather nonexistent. What caused the illusions was the magnetic personalities of the ministrants, that is to say, of Lady Ragnall herself and, on my first acquaintance with it, here in England, of that remarkable old medicine man, Harut. Without these personalities, and especially the first who was now departed from the earth, it would be as harmless as tobacco and as ineffectual as hay. So delighted was I with this discovery that almost I determined to prove it by immediate demonstration.

I opened the carved chest of rich-coloured wood and drew out the age-blackened silver box within which now I observed for the first time had engraved upon it several times a picture of the goddess Isis in her accustomed ceremonial dress, and a god, Osiris or Ptah, I think, making incantations with their hands, holding lotus flowers and the Cross of Life stretched out over a little altar. This I opened also, whereon a well-remembered aroma arose and for a moment clouded my senses. When these cleared again, I perceived, lying on the top of the bundles of *Taduki* leaves, of which there seemed to be a large quantity remaining, a half sheet of letter paper bearing a few lines in Lady Ragnall's handwriting.

I lifted it and read as follows:

*"My Friend:*

*"When you are moved to inhale this Taduki, as certainly you will do, be careful not to use too much lest you should wander so far that you can return no more. One of the little bundles, of which I think there are thirteen remaining in the box, should be sufficient, though perhaps as you grow accustomed to the drug you may require a larger dose. Another thing—for a hidden reason with which I will not trouble you, it is desirable, though not necessary, that you should have a companion in the adventure. By preference, this companion should be a woman, but a man will serve if he be one in whom you have confidence and who is sympathetic to you. L.R."*

"That settles it," I thought. "I am not going to take *Taduki* with one of the housemaids, and there is no other woman about here," and I rose from my chair, preparing to put the stuff away.

At that moment, the door opened and in walked Captain Good.

"Hullo, old fellow," he said. "Curtis says a farmer tells him that a lot of snipe have come in onto the Brathal marshes, and he wants to know if you will come over to-morrow morning and have a go at them—I say, what is this smell in the room? Have you taken to scented cigarettes or hashish?"

"Not quite, but, to tell you the truth, I was thinking of it," I answered, and I pointed to the open silver box.

Good, who is a person of alert mind and one very full of curiosity, advanced, sniffed at the *Taduki*, and examined the brazier and the box, which in his ignorance he supposed to be of Grecian workmanship. Finally, he overwhelmed me with so many questions that, at length, in self-defence, I told him something of its story and how it had been bequeathed to me with its contents by Lady Ragnall.

"Indeed!" said Good. "She who left you the fortune which you wouldn't take, being the lineal descendant of Don Quixote, or rather of Sancho Panza's donkey. Well, this is much more exciting than money. What happened to you when you went into that trance?"

"Oh!" I answered wearily, "I seemed to foregather with a very pretty lady who lived some thousands of years ago, and after many adventures, was just about to marry her when I woke up."

"How jolly! though I suppose you have been suffering from blighted affections ever since. Perhaps, if you took some more, you might pull it off next time."

I shook my head and handed him the note of instructions that I had found with the *Taduki*, which he read with attention, and said:

"I see, Allan, that a partner is required and that failing a lady, a man in whom you have confidence and who is sympathetic to you, will serve. Obviously that's me, for in whom could you have greater confidence, and who is more sympathetic to you? Well, my boy, if there's any hope of adventures, real or imaginary, I'll take the risk and sacrifice myself upon the altar of friendship. Light up your stuff—I'm ready. What do you say? That I can't because I have been dining and drinking wine or whisky? Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't. I've only had some tea and a boiled egg—I won't stop to explain why—and intended to raise something more substantial out of you. So fire away and let's go to meet your lovely lady in ancient Egypt or anywhere else."

"Look here, Good," I explained, "I think there is a certain amount of risk about this stuff, and really you had better reflect—"

"Before I rush in where angels fear to tread, eh? Well, you've done it and you ain't even an angel. Also I like risks or anything that makes a change in this mill round of a life. Come on. What have we got to do?"

Then, feeling that Fate was at work, under a return of the impulse of which the strength had been broken for a moment by the reading of Lady Ragnall's note of instructions, I gave way. To tell the truth, Good's unexpected arrival when such a companion was essential, and his strange willingness, and even desire, to share in this unusual enterprise, brought on one of the fits of fatalism from which I suffer at times. I became convinced that the whole business was arranged by something or somebody beyond my ken—that I must take this drug with Good as my companion. So, as I have said, I gave way and made the necessary preparations, explaining everything to Good as I did so.

"I say!" he said at last, just as I was fishing for an ember from the wood fire to lay upon the *Taduki* in the bowl, "I thought this job was a joke, but you seem jolly solemn about it, Allan. Do you really think it dangerous?"

"Yes, I do, but more to the spirit than to the body. I think, to judge from my own experience, that anyone who has once breathed *Taduki* will wish to do so again. Shall we give it up? It isn't too late."

"No," answered Good. "I never funk'd anything yet, and I won't begin now. 'Lay on, Macduff!'"

"So be it, Good. But first of all, listen to me. Move that armchair of yours close to mine, but not quite up against it. I am going to place the brazier just between and a little in front of us. When the stuff catches a blue flame will burn for about thirty seconds—at least, this happened on a previous occasion. So soon as it dies away and you see the smoke begin to rise, bend your head forward and a little sideways so that it strikes you full in the face, but in such a fashion that, when you become insensible, the weight of your body will cause you to fall back into the chair, not outward to the floor. It is quite easy if you are careful. Then open your mouth and draw the vapour down into your lungs. Two or three breaths will suffice, as it works very quickly."

"Just like laughing gas," remarked Good. "I only hope I shan't wake with all my teeth out. The last time I took it I felt—"

"Stop joking," I said, "for this is a serious matter."

"A jolly sight too serious! Is there anything else?"

"No. That is, if there is anybody you particularly wish to see, you might concentrate your thoughts on him—"

"Him! I can't think of any him, unless it is the navigating lieutenant of my first ship, with whom I always want to have it out in the next world, as he is gone from this, the brute."

"On her, then; I meant her."

"Then why didn't you say so instead of indulging in pharisaical humbug? Who would breathe poison just to meet another man?"

"I would," I replied firmly.

"That's a lie," muttered Good. "Hullo! don't be in such a hurry with that coal, I ain't ready. Ought I to say any hocus-pocus? Dash it all! it is like a nightmare about being hanged."

"No," I replied, as I dropped the ember onto the *Taduki* just as Lady Ragnall had done. "Now, play fair, Good," I added, "for I don't know what the effect of half a dose would be; it might drive you mad. Look, the flame is burning! Open your mouth and arrange your weight as I said, and when your head begins to whirl, lean back at the end of the third deep breath."

The mysterious, billowy vapour arose as the pale blue flame died away, and spread itself out fanwise.

"Aye, aye, my hearty," said Good, and thrust his face into it with such vigour that he brought his head into violent contact with mine, as I leant forward from the other side.

I heard him mutter some words that were better left unsaid, for often enough Good's language would have borne editing. Then I heard no more and forgot that he existed.

My mind became wonderfully clear and I found myself arguing in a fashion that would have done credit to the greatest of the Greek philosophers upon all sorts of fundamental problems. All I can remember about that argument or lecture is that, in part at any rate, it dealt with the possibility of reincarnation, setting out the pros and cons in a most vivid manner.

Even if I had not forgotten them, these may be passed over, as they are familiar to students of such subjects. The end of the exposition, however, was to the effect that, accepted as it is by a quarter of the inhabitants of the earth, this

doctrine should not lightly be set aside, seeing that in it there is hope for man; that it is at least worthy of consideration. If the sages who have preached it, from Plato down—and indeed for countless ages before his time, since without doubt he borrowed it from the East—are right, then at least we pure human creatures do not appear and die like gnats upon a summer's eve, but in that seeming day pass on to life eternally renewed, climbing a kind of Jacob's ladder to the skies.

It is true that as our foot leaves it, each rung of that ladder vanishes. Below is darkness and all the gulf of Time. Above is darkness and we know not what. Yet our hands cling to the uprights and our feet stand firm upon a rung, and we know that we do not fall, but mount; also that, in the nature of things, a ladder must lean against some support and lead somewhere. A melancholy business, this tread mill doctrine, it may be said, where one rung is so like another and there are so many of them. And yet, and yet—is it not better than that of the bubble which bursts and is gone? Aye, because life is better than death, especially if it be progressive life, and if at last it may lead to some joy undreamed, to some supernal light in which we shall see all the path that we have trodden, and with it the deep foundations of the Rock of Being upon which our ladder stands and the gates of Eternal Calm whereon it leans.

Thus, in the beginning of my dream state, I, the lecturer, argued to an unknown audience, or perhaps I was the audience and the lecturer argued to me, I am not sure, pointing out that otherwise we are but as those unhappy victims of the Revolution in the prisons of Paris, who for a little while bow and talk and play our part, waiting till the door opens and the jailer Death appears to lead us to the tumbril and the knife.

The argument, I should point out, was purely rational; it did not deal with faith, or any revealed religion, perhaps because these are too personal and too holy. It dealt only with the possible development of a mighty law, under the workings of which man, through much tribulation, might accomplish his own weal and at last come to look upon the source of that law and understand its purpose.

Obviously these imperfectly reported reflections, and many others that I cannot remember at all, were induced by the feeling that I might be about to plunge into some seeming state of former existence, as I had done once before under the influence of this herb. My late friend, Lady Ragnall, believed that state to be not seeming but real; while I, on the other hand, could not accept this as a fact. I set it down, as I am still inclined to do, to the workings of imagination, superexcited by a strange and powerful drug and drawing, perhaps, from some fount of knowledge of past events that is hidden deep in the being of every one of us.

However these things may be, this rhetorical summing up of the case, of which I can only recollect the last part, was but a kind of introductory speech such as is sometimes made by a master of ceremonies before the curtain rises upon the play. Its echoes died away into a deep silence. All the living part of me went down into darkness, dense darkness that seemed to endure for ages. Then, with strugglings and effort, I awoke again—reborn. A hand was holding my own, leading me forward; a voice I knew whispered in my ear, saying:

“Look upon one record of the past, O Doubter. Look and believe.” Now there happened to me, or seemed to happen, that which I had experienced before in the museum at Ragnall Castle; namely, that I, Allan, the living man of to-day, beheld myself another man, and yet the same; and whilst remaining myself, could enter into and live the life of that other man, knowing his thoughts, appreciating his motives and his efforts, his hopes and his fears, his loves and his hates, and yet standing outside of them, reading him like a book and weighing everything in the scales of my modern judgment.

The voice—surely it was that of Lady Ragnall, though I could not see her face—died away; the hand was loosed. I saw a man in the cold, glimmering light of dawn. He was a very sturdy man, thick-limbed, deep-chested, and somewhat hairy, whose age I judged to be about thirty years. I knew at once that he was not a modern man, although his weather-tanned skin was white where the furs he wore had slipped away from his shoulder, for there was something unusual about his aspect. Few modern men are so massive of body, and never have I seen one with a neck so short and large in circumference, although the feet and hands were not large. His frame was extraordinarily solid; being not more than five feet seven inches in height and by no means fat, yet he must have weighed quite fifteen stone, if not more. His dark hair was long and parted in the middle; it hung down to his shoulders.

He turned his head, looking behind him as though to make sure that he was alone, or that no wild beast stalked him, and I saw his face. The forehead was wide and not high, for the hair grew low upon it; his eyebrows were beetling and the eyes beneath them deep set. They were remarkable eyes, large and gray, quick-glancing also, yet when at rest somewhat sombre and very thoughtful. The nose was straight with wide and sensitive nostrils, suggesting that its owner used them as a dog or a deer does, to scent with. The mouth was thick-lipped but not large, and within it were splendid and regular white teeth, broader than those we have; the chin was very massive, and on it grew two little tufts of beard, though the cheeks were bare.

For the rest, this man was long armed, for the tip of his middle finger came down almost to the kneecap. He had a sort of kilt about his middle and a heavy fur robe upon his shoulder which looked as though it were made of bearskin. In his left hand he held a short spear, the blade of which seemed to be fashioned of chipped flint, or some other hard and shining stone, and in the girdle of his kilt was thrust a wooden-handled instrument or axe, made by setting a great, sharp-edged stone that must have weighed two pounds or so into the cleft end of the handle which was lashed with sinews both above and below the axhead.

I, Allan, the man of to-day, looked upon this mighty savage, for mighty I could see he was—both in his body and, after a fashion, in his mind also—and in my trance knew that the spirit which had dwelt in him hundreds of thousands of years ago, mayhap, or at least in the far, far, past, was the same that animated me, the living creature whose body for aught I knew descended from his, thus linking us in flesh as well as soul. Indeed, the thought came to me—I know not whence—that here stood my remote forefather whose forgotten existence was my cause of life, without whom my body could not have been.

Now, I, Allan Quatermain, fade from the story. No longer am I he. I am Wi the Hunter, the future chief of a little tribe which had no name, since, believing itself to be the only people on the earth, it needed none. Yet remember that my modern intelligence and individuality never went to sleep, that always it was able to watch this prototype, this primeval one, to enter into his thoughts, to appreciate his motives, hopes, and fears, and to compare them with those that actuate us to-day. Therefore, the tale I tell is the substance of that which the heart of Wi told to my heart, set out in my own modern tongue and interpreted by my modern intellect.

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## THE SUM OF THE MATTER

I, Allan Quatermain, woke up, to notice that, as on the previous occasion when Lady Ragnall and I took the *Taduki* together, my trance must have been brief. Although I had forgotten to look at the time, as it chanced, I could measure its duration by another method. The *Taduki* herb, as I knew, soon burned itself away, yet, when I awoke, the last little vapour, so thin and faint that it could scarcely be discerned, was rising from its embers.

Good gracious! I thought to myself, how could all those things have happened in that unknown land and age in much less time than it takes the stump of a cigarette to die.

Then I remembered Good, for, although my head seemed rather heavy at first, my brain was clear enough, and looked at him, not without alarm, or rather anxiety, for if anything had happened to Good what would my position be?

There he was in his armchair, his head lying back, staring at me with his eyes half-opened, much as a cat does sometimes when it is pretending to be asleep, but is really very wide awake indeed. Also he resembled something else, a man who was drunk, an effect that was heightened presently by his trying to speak and producing only prolonged stutters and a word that sounded like "whisky."

"No, you don't," I said. "It is far too soon to drink. Alcohol and *Taduki* might not agree."

Then Good said a word that he should have left unsaid, sat up, shook himself, and remarked:

"I say, Wi—for you are Wi, aren't you?—how in the name of the Holy Roman Empire—or of the Ice-gods and the Sleeper—did I get out of that canoe, and where's Laleela?"

"Before I answer your questions, which seem absurd, might I ask you, Good, what you considered your name to be when you were in the canoe of which you speak?"

"Name? Why, Moananga, of course. Dash it all! Wi, you haven't forgotten your own brother, have you, who stuck to you through thick and thin— well, like a brother in a book."

"Then if you were Moananga, why do you not ask after Tana instead of Laleela?"

"I wonder," said Good reflectively. "I suppose it was because she was out of the picture just then, lying at the bottom of the canoe overcome with the horrors, or seasickness, or something, you know, with that dear boy, Foh, sitting on her. Also, you needn't be jealous, old chap, for, although I did try to cut in when you were doing the pious over that tomfool oath of yours and the rest of it, it wasn't the slightest use. She just smiled me out of court, so to speak, and like you, made remarks about Tana. But where's Laleela? You haven't hidden her away anywhere, have you?" and he stared round the room in a foolish fashion.

"That's just what I want to know," I answered. "Indeed, to tell you the truth, I never remember wanting to know anything quite so much in all my life."

"Then I can't tell you. The last I saw of her, she was in the canoe, trying to get the head of the crazy thing round with a paddle—which I didn't know how to do."

"Look here, Good," I said. "This is a serious matter, so pull yourself together and tell me exactly what you remember just before you woke."

"Only this. The canoe was bobbing about, being carried shoreward down that infernal tide race or current between the two banks of ice, at, I should say, not less than eight or nine knots. Moreover, it was rocking because that fiddle-headed dwarf, Pag, nearly overset it when he jumped out like a seal from a rock and began to swim toward the ice bank we had left, because he thought we were all going to be drowned, I suppose. So there remained only Aaka, Laleela, Tana, Foh, and myself. Laleela, as I have told you, was trying to get the craft round, Tana was wailing and sobbing, that plucky lad Foh was quite still—I can see his white face and big eyes now, and Aaka, sitting in the bottom of the canoe, gripping the thwarts with both her outstretched hands but still looking very dignified, was making unpleasant remarks to Laleela as to her having murdered you, Wi, Aaka's husband and her lover, or something of the sort, to which Laleela returned no answer. Then, just as I was shoving away a cake of floating ice which cut my hand, everything went out like a candle, and here I am. For heaven's sake, tell me, where is Laleela?"

"I am afraid, old fellow, we shall ask ourselves that question for the rest of our days yet never learn the answer," I replied solemnly. "Listen, I saw a little more than you did. Pag reached the ice bank and I pulled him to my side. He said that he had jumped out of the canoe because it was too full and there were too many women in it for his liking. But what the dear chap really meant was that he preferred to return to die with me."

"Good old Pag!" ejaculated Moananga—I mean, Good.

"After that," I went on, "the canoe ran into the spindrift which the wind lashed up, and the sea fog—"

"Always get it with thawing ice," interrupted Good. "Once nearly lost in it myself off the coast of Newfoundland."

"—and for a moment Pag and I lost sight of it. It reappeared between two billows of fog a hundred yards or more away, and then— well, then we saw a tall woman spring suddenly from the canoe into the sea. But, as you will remember, both Aaka and Laleela were tall, exactly of a height indeed, and neither of us could tell which of them it was that the sea took. Next instant the mist closed in again."

"Did you see the woman rise up in the canoe? Aaka was sitting down, you remember."

"No, we only saw the spring."

"That sounds like Laleela," said Good, "for she was standing. And yet I do not think it can have been, for she was doing all she knew to try to bring the craft round, thinking to creep back to fetch you by the edge of the ice where the current did not run so fiercely. The last thing she said was to call to me to get out the other paddle and help. Indeed, I had it in my hand but, being a landlubber, hardly knew how to use it."

"I don't think Laleela could have done such a thing, Good. Suicide was against her principles. Indeed, she reproached me upon that very matter. Also, her own country was just ahead of her, and she would wish to reach it, if only to make sure that Foh and Aaka—yes, Aaka—met with a good reception. Yet who knows?"

"Aaka had a very bitter tongue," remarked Good. "Also, by then, Laleela saw that we could never get back against that race, and she was mad with grief; so, as you say—who knows?" and he groaned, while I— well, never mind what I did.

For a time there was silence between us, a very depressing silence, because both of us were overcome. It was broken by Good asking humbly enough if I thought he might have some whisky now.

"I don't know, and I don't care, but for my part I mean to risk it," I said, and going to the side table I helped myself freely, as did Good, only more so.

Teetotallers may say what they like, but alcohol in moderation often is a friend in trouble. So, at least, we found, for, as we put that whisky down, our spirits rose considerably.

"Look here!" said Good presently while he lit his pipe and I occupied myself in hiding away that confounded *Taduki* outfit, which I both hated and blessed. I hated it because it seemed to be possessed by an imp which, like a will-o-the-wisp, led one on and on to the edge of some great denouement, and then, in the very moment of crisis, vanished away, leaving one floundering in a bog of doubt and wonder. I blessed it because these dreams it gave were, to me at any rate, so very suggestive and interesting.

"Look here!" repeated Good. "You are a clever old boy in your way, and one who thinks a lot. So be kind enough to tell me what all this business means. Do you suggest that you and I have been reading some chapters out of a former existence of our own?"

"I suggest nothing," I answered sharply; "the thing is beyond me. But if you want to know, I don't much believe in the former existence solution. Does it not occur to you that we must all of us, perhaps fifty thousand, perhaps five hundred thousand years ago, have had just such ancestors as Wi and the rest of them? And is it not possible that this drug may have the power of awakening the ancestral memory which has come down to us with our spark of life through scores of intervening forefathers?"

"Yes, that's right enough. And yet, Allan, in a way, the thing is too perfect. Remember that we understood and used the language of those prehistoric beachcombers, although we have forgotten every word of it now—or at least I have. Remember that we saw, not only our own careers, but those of other people with whose ancestral memories we have nothing to do; moreover, that some of those people reminded us, or at any rate me, of folk whom I have known in this life; just as though the whole lot of us had reappeared together."

"That's the very point, Good. Men are queer bundles of mystery. For the most part, they seem quite commonplace, what might be called matter-of-fact, yet I believe that inside there are few who are not stuffed with imagination, as our dreams show us. Supposing that we are dealing with our own ancestral pasts; if that be so, we could quite well invent the rest, using the stuff that lies to our hands, namely our knowledge of others with whom we have been intimate in life. These would be the foundation upon which the dreams were built up, the bits of glass that make the pattern in the kaleidoscope."

"If so, all I have to say is that your kaleidoscope is an uncommonly clever machine, because anything more natural than those dirty people upon the beach I never knew, Allan. Still, one thing seems to support your argument. Wi, the great hunter of the tribe, who by birth and surroundings was a most elementary savage, showed himself much in advance of his age. He made laws; he thought about the good of others; he resisted his perfectly natural inclinations; he adopted a higher religion when it was brought to his knowledge; he was patient under provocation; he offered himself up as a sacrifice to the gods in whom he no longer believed, because his people believed in them and he thought that his voluntary death would act as a kind of faith cure among them, which is one of the noblest deeds I have ever heard of among men. Lastly, when he saw that a confounded hollowed-out log, which by courtesy may be called a canoe or a boat, was overcrowded and likely to sink in a kind of ice-packed mill race, he thrust it out into the stream and himself remained behind to die, although it contained all that he cared about—his wife, another woman who loved him, his son, and perhaps, I may add, his brother. I say that the man who did these things, not to mention others, was a hero and a Christian martyr rolled into one, with something of the saint and Solon, who I believe was the first recorded lawgiver, thrown in. Now, I ask you, Allan, could such a person by any possibility have existed in paleolithic or pre-paleolithic times at that period of the world's history when one of the ice ages was beginning? Also the same question may be asked of Laleela."

"You must remember," I answered, "that Wi was not such a hero as you suppose. He offered to sacrifice himself chiefly in order to save his family, or one of them, just as most men would do in like circumstances. As regards Laleela, she and everything about her were mysterious—her origin, her noble patience, and especially her self-control. But it is quite obvious that she belonged to another stratum of civilization, I presume that which we call neolithic, since she told me—I mean Wi—that her people grew crops; kept cows, with other domestic animals; had some advanced form of religion with a divinity that was symbolized by the moon; and so forth. Well, there is nothing strange about all this, since now we know that in prehistoric days races in very different stages of advancement existed in the world at the same time. It is quite possible that Wi and his company lived in their paleolithic simplicity, let us say somewhere in Scotland (those red-headed wanderers who descended upon them suggest Scotland), while Laleela and her people existed perhaps in the south of Ireland or in France, where the climate was much warmer and the ice did not come."

"Probably; Wi and Co. might have lived anywhere in a cold district and gone to any warmer shore—perhaps one washed by the Gulf Stream," answered Good. "At any rate, one thing is obvious. If there is anything in this dream of ours, it tells of a tragedy that must often have happened in the world. I mean, the coming of an ice age."

"Yes," I said. "All about the northern shores there must have been little collections of miserable people like to those over whom Wi ruled, each of them perhaps thinking itself alone in the world, and time on time the ice at intervals of tens or hundreds of thousands of years must have descended upon them and crushed them out, except a few survivors who fled south. Doubtless, the tragedy of Wi was common, though nobody thinks of such things to-day when, for aught we know, we may be living in an interval between two ice ages. Not long ago, I was reading of the flint pits at Brandon in Norfolk, where it is said that, in the far past, lived tribes of flint-workers. Then, it seems, came an ice age, and after it was over appeared other tribes of flint-workers, separated from the first by untold epochs of time. But one might talk of such things all night."

"And all to-morrow, Allan. But you have not answered my question. How do you account for a man like Wi at that period of the world's history?"

I took a little more whisky and soda to give myself time to think. Then I answered easily enough, at least to my mind.

"The world they tell us now has probably been inhabitable and therefore inhabited by man for millions of years. Now, Wi, if he ever existed, by comparison lived quite recently, for he knew how to make fire, how to trap beasts, and many other things. I suggest to you, my dear Good, that we have not really advanced very much since the days of Wi. The skulls that are found of people of or before his period have the same, or sometimes an even larger, brain capacity than our own. All the first and more essential developments of the human race took place infinite ages before the birth of Wi. Some outstanding individuals must have conceived the idea of making and enforcing necessary laws and of putting a stop to infanticide. Why should not Wi have been one of these? He may have gone ahead too fast—as, in fact, he did—but perhaps the memory of his laws survived through his wife Aaka, or his brother Moananga, or his son Foh, if they escaped, and were repeated and improved upon by future generations of his blood. In short, Good, although I think that men have grown cleverer as a race, I do not believe that the high-water mark of individuals among them has advanced greatly since the times of such as Wi, which, after all, in the history of the world, and indeed of the human race, are but yesterday. For the rest, in my own life I have known many who are called savages in Africa who knew as little or less than Wi and yet, in similar circumstances, would have done all that he did, and more."

"That's a new idea," said Good. "Perhaps we civilized people vaunt ourselves too much."

"Perhaps," I answered, "for civilization as we know it is very young and a great sham. I don't know and it isn't worth bothering about. All I know is that I wish I had never dreamed that dream, which has given me a new set of sorrows that cannot be forgotten."

"That's the point," exclaimed Good. "Now there was Tana. She was a jealous sort of woman, and we quarrelled often, especially when I began to make up to Laleela. And I, well, I was a natural man, much as I am to-day, so, as I say, we quarrelled. Yet, after all, I was very fond of Tana; she was my wife for many years, and she bore children whom both of us loved, children that died, as most children died among the tribe. As for the rows between us, what do they matter? Now that I have come to know her, I can never forget Tana."

"It is the same here," I answered. "That boy Foh, and his sister Fo-a whom you remember that brute-man Henga murdered—for example. Well, they may be but dream children, but henceforward they are mine. At this very moment I tell you that I could burst into tears over the murder of Fo-a, and that my heart aches over the loss of Foh, and yet I suppose that they are only fantasies, drug-born fantasies. See what this cursed *Taduki* has done for us! To the bereavements and miseries of our own lives, it has added another series. It has suggested to us that we have endured other lives, other losses, and other miseries, and yet it has not helped us to solve their problems. Shall we ever see any of these people again? We who seemed to mix with them still exist. Do they exist also, and if so have we any hope of finding them?"

"Are you quiet certain, Allan, that we haven't found some of them already, although it was but to lose them once more. Now, although I never saw him, you have often told me of the Hottentot called Hans who served you from your youth until he died, still trying to serve you by saving your life. Well, isn't there some resemblance between that Hottentot and Pag?"

"Undoubtedly there is," I answered, "although Pag the Wolf-man was a bit more primeval."

"Then, as regards Laleela—how about that Lady Ragnall who left you the fortune which, like a donkey, you refused? Do you see any connection between them?"

"Not much," I answered, "except that they were both priestesses of, or at any rate in some way connected with, the moon. But, of course, I know very little of Laleela's life. She appeared from a southern land, but exactly why she left it, I cannot tell, because she never told me. At that time her age must have been, well, what do you put it at, Good?"

"Anywhere between twenty-eight and thirty-two, I should say."

"That's about it. Well, in those days, a woman of her beauty and station must have had lots of private history behind her at, let us say, thirty. Indeed she hinted as much more than once. But as she never stated what it was, there is very little to go on, and identification becomes impossible.

"Look here, let us stop this before we go cracked. Under the influence of an African drug, we have seen strange things, or think that we have seen them. We have seen an ancient, barbaric tribe living at the foot of the glaciers upon a desolate beach, collecting their food from year to year as best they could with their primitive weapons, and evolving a kind of elementary civilization. Thus they were ruled by a chief who might be killed when any stronger man appeared, as in a herd of game the old bull is killed by the young bull. We have seen a man of strength and ability arise who tried to make new and better laws and to introduce justice, and who, under the influence of a foreign and more advanced woman, ultimately turned from the worship of fierce fetish gods supposed to dwell in the ice they dreaded, to a purer if still elementary faith. We have seen the fate fall upon him that overtakes almost all reformers, also that this ice was not feared in vain, since it swept down and destroyed his people, as indeed it must often have done in the history of the world, and perhaps will do again in the future."

"Yes, we have seen all that," said Good, "but if it wasn't real, what is the use of it? Dreams have not much practical value."

"Are you sure about that, Good? Are you sure that Life, as we know it, is anything more than a *Taduki* dream?"

"What do you mean, Allan?"

"I mean that perhaps already we may be plunged into and be a part of immortality, and that this immortality may have its nights as well as its days—dream-haunted nights of which this present life of ours is one."

"Steady, old fellow. You are running full steam into strange waters and without a chart."

"Quite true," I answered. "Let us get back into the channel between the lighted buoys. To my mind our experience to-night has been very instructive. Whether it be real or imaginary, it has taught me what must have happened to our forefathers tens or hundreds of thousands of years ago. Let us suppose that it was all a dream or delusion, and think of it as nothing else. Still, it has been a most fascinating dream, a kind of lightning flash, showing us a page of the past. There let us leave it, locking it up as an individual experience not meant for the benefit of others. To advertise what are called hallucinations is not wise."

"I quite agree with you, Allan," said Good, "and I mean to keep my experience upon that beach wherever it may have been, very much to myself. Only in my leisure time I intend to take up the study of the ice ages and the glacial drift.

"And now, about those snipe (it is odd, by the way, that even in those days you seem to have been a sportsman and a hunter), will you bring your spear—I mean gun—and come to-morrow?"

THE END

# BOOK XXVI

## ASH-HA - THE RETURN OF SHE-WHO-MUST-BE-OBEYED

### INTRODUCTION

Verily and indeed it is the unexpected that happens! Probably if there was one person upon the earth from whom the Editor of this, and of a certain previous history, did not expect to hear again, that person was Ludwig Horace Holly. This, too, for a good reason; he believed him to have taken his departure from the earth.

When Mr. Holly last wrote, many, many years ago, it was to transmit the manuscript of *She*, and to announce that he and his ward, Leo Vincey, the beloved of the divine Ayesha, were about to travel to Central Asia in the hope, I suppose, that there she would fulfil her promise and appear to them again.

Often I have wondered, idly enough, what happened to them there; whether they were dead, or perhaps droning their lives away as monks in some Thibetan Lamasery, or studying magic and practising asceticism under the tuition of the Eastern Masters trusting that thus they would build a bridge by which they might pass to the side of their adored Immortal.

Now at length, when I had not thought of them for months, without a single warning sign, out of the blue as it were, comes the answer to these wonderings!

To think—only to think—that I, the Editor aforesaid, from its appearance suspecting something quite familiar and without interest, pushed aside that dingy, unregistered, brown-paper parcel directed in an unknown hand, and for two whole days let it lie forgotten. Indeed there it might be lying now, had not another person been moved to curiosity, and opening it, found within a bundle of manuscript badly burned upon the back, and with this two letters addressed to myself.

Although so great a time had passed since I saw it, and it was shaky now because of the author's age or sickness, I knew the writing at once—nobody ever made an "H" with that peculiar twirl under it except Mr. Holly. I tore open the sealed envelope, and sure enough the first thing my eye fell upon was the signature, *L. H. Holly*. It is long since I read anything so eagerly as I did that letter. Here it is:—

"My dear Sir,—I have ascertained that you still live, and strange to say I still live also—for a little while.

"As soon as I came into touch with civilization again I found a copy of your book *She*, or rather of my book, and read it—first of all in a Hindostani translation. My host—he was a minister of some religious body, a man of worthy but prosaic mind—expressed surprise that a 'wild romance' should absorb me so much. I answered that those who have wide experience of the hard facts of life often find interest in romance. Had he known what were the hard facts to which I alluded, I wonder what that excellent person would have said?

"I see that you carried out your part of the business well and faithfully. Every instruction has been obeyed, nothing has been added or taken away. Therefore, to you, to whom some twenty years ago I entrusted the beginning of the history, I wish to entrust its end also. You were the first to learn of *She-Who-Must-Be-Obeded*, who from century to century sat alone, clothed with unchanging loveliness in the sepulchres of Kôr, waiting till her lost love was born again, and Destiny brought him back to her.

"It is right, therefore, that you should be the first to learn also of Ayesha, Hesea and Spirit of the Mountain, the priestess of that Oracle which since the time of Alexander the Great has reigned between the flaming pillars in the Sanctuary, the last holder of the sceptre of Hes or Isis upon the earth. It is right also that to you first among men I should reveal the mystic consummation of the wondrous tragedy which began at Kôr, or perchance far earlier in Egypt and elsewhere.

"I am very ill; I have struggled back to this old house of mine to die, and my end is at hand. I have asked the doctor here, after all is over, to send you the Record, that is unless I change my mind and burn it first. You will also receive, if you receive anything at all, a case containing several rough sketches which may be of use to you, and a *sistrum*, the instrument that has been always used in the worship of the Nature goddesses of the old Egyptians, Isis and Hathor, which you will see is as beautiful as it is ancient. I give it to you for two reasons; as a token of my gratitude and regard, and as the only piece of evidence that is left to me of the literal truth of what I have written in the accompanying manuscript, where you will find it often mentioned. Perhaps also you will value it as a souvenir of, I suppose, the strangest and loveliest being who ever was, or rather, is. It was her sceptre, the rod of her power, with which I saw her salute the Shadows in the Sanctuary, and her gift to me.

"It has virtues also; some part of Ayesha's might yet haunts the symbol to which even spirits bowed, but if you should discover them, beware how they are used.

"I have neither the strength nor the will to write more. The Record must speak for itself. Do with it what you like, and believe it or not as you like. I care nothing who know that it is true.

"Who and what was Ayesha, nay, what *is* Ayesha? An incarnate essence, a materialised spirit of Nature the unforeseeing, the lovely, the cruel and the immortal; ensouled alone, redeemable only by Humanity and its piteous sacrifice? Say you! I have done with speculations who depart to solve these mysteries.

"I wish you happiness and good fortune. Farewell to you and to all.

"L. Horace Holly."

I laid the letter down, and, filled with sensations that it is useless to attempt to analyse or describe, opened the second envelope, of which I also print the contents, omitting only certain irrelevant portions, and the name of the writer as, it will be noted, he requests me to do.

This epistle, that was dated from a remote place upon the shores of Cumberland, ran as follows:—

“Dear Sir,—As the doctor who attended Mr. Holly in his last illness I am obliged, in obedience to a promise that I made to him, to become an intermediary in a somewhat strange business, although in truth it is one of which I know very little, however much it may have interested me. Still I do so only on the strict understanding that no mention is to be made of my name in connexion with the matter, or of the locality in which I practise.

“About ten days ago I was called in to see Mr. Holly at an old house upon the Cliff that for many years remained untenanted except by the caretakers, which house was his property, and had been in his family for generations. The housekeeper who summoned me told me that her master had but just returned from abroad, somewhere in Asia, she said, and that he was very ill with his heart—dying, she believed; both of which suppositions proved to be accurate.

“I found the patient sitting up in bed (to ease his heart), and a strange-looking old man he was. He had dark eyes, small but full of fire and intelligence, a magnificent and snowy-white beard that covered a chest of extraordinary breadth, and hair also white, which encroached upon his forehead and face so much that it met the whiskers upon his cheeks. His arms were remarkable for their length and strength, though one of them seemed to have been much torn by some animal. He told me that a dog had done this, but if so it must have been a dog of unusual power. He was a very ugly man, and yet, forgive the bull, beautiful. I cannot describe what I mean better than by saying that his face was not like the face of any ordinary mortal whom I have met in my limited experience. Were I an artist who wished to portray a wise and benevolent, but rather grotesque spirit, I should take that countenance as a model.

“Mr. Holly was somewhat vexed at my being called in, which had been done without his knowledge. Soon we became friendly enough, however, and he expressed gratitude for the relief that I was able to give him, though I could not hope to do more. At different times he talked a good deal of the various countries in which he had travelled, apparently for very many years, upon some strange quest that he never clearly defined to me. Twice also he became light-headed, and spoke, for the most part in languages that I identified as Greek and Arabic; occasionally in English also, when he appeared to be addressing himself to a being who was the object of his veneration, I might almost say of his worship. What he said then, however, I prefer not to repeat, for I heard it in my professional capacity.

“One day he pointed to a rough box made of some foreign wood (the same that I have now duly despatched to you by train), and, giving me your name and address, said that without fail it was to be forwarded to you after his death. Also he asked me to do up a manuscript, which, like the box, was to be sent to you.

“He saw me looking at the last sheets, which had been burned away, and said (I repeat his exact words)—

“‘Yes, yes, that can’t be helped now, it must go as it is. You see I made up my mind to destroy it after all, and it was already on the fire when the command came—the clear, unmistakable command—and I snatched it off again.’

“What Mr. Holly meant by this ‘command’ I do not know, for he would speak no more of the matter.

“I pass on to the last scene. One night about eleven o’clock, knowing that my patient’s end was near, I went up to see him, proposing to inject some strychnine to keep the heart going a little longer. Before I reached the house I met the caretaker coming to seek me in a great fright, and asked her if her master was dead. She answered No; but he was *gone*—had got out of bed and, just as he was, barefooted, left the house, and was last seen by her grandson among the very Scotch firs where we were talking. The lad, who was terrified out of his wits, for he thought that he beheld a ghost, had told her so.

“The moonlight was very brilliant that night, especially as fresh snow had fallen, which reflected its rays. I was on foot, and began to search among the firs, till presently just outside of them I found the track of naked feet in the snow. Of course I followed, calling to the housekeeper to go and wake her husband, for no one else lives near by. The spoor proved very easy to trace across the clean sheet of snow. It ran up the slope of a hill behind the house.

“Now, on the crest of this hill is an ancient monument of upright monoliths set there by some primeval people, known locally as the Devil’s Ring—a sort of miniature Stonehenge in fact. I had seen it several times, and happened to have been present not long ago at a meeting of an archaeological society when its origin and purpose were discussed. I remember that one learned but somewhat eccentric gentleman read a short paper upon a rude, hooded bust and head that are cut within the chamber of a tall, flat-topped cromlech, or dolmen, which stands alone in the centre of the ring.

“He said that it was a representation of the Egyptian goddess, Isis, and that this place had once been sacred to some form of her worship, or at any rate to that of a Nature goddess with like attributes, a suggestion which the other learned gentlemen treated as absurd. They declared that Isis had never travelled into Britain, though for my part I do not see why the Phoenicians, or even the Romans, who adopted her cult, more or less, should not have brought it here. But I know nothing of such matters and will not discuss them.

“I remembered also that Mr. Holly was acquainted with this place, for he had mentioned it to me on the previous day, asking if the stones were still uninjured as they used to be when he was young. He added also, and the remark struck me, that yonder was where he would wish to die. When I answered that I feared he would never take so long a walk again, I noted that he smiled a little.

“Well, this conversation gave me a clue, and without troubling more about the footprints I went on as fast as I could to the Ring, half a mile or so away. Presently I reached it, and there—yes, there—standing by the cromlech, bareheaded, and clothed in his night-things only, stood Mr. Holly in the snow, the strangest figure, I think, that ever I beheld.

“Indeed never shall I forget that wild scene. The circle of rough, single stones pointing upwards to the star-strewn sky, intensely lonely and intensely solemn: the tall trilithon towering above them in the centre, its shadow, thrown by the bright moon behind it, lying long and black upon the dazzling sheet of snow, and, standing clear of this shadow so that I could distinguish his every motion, and even the rapt look upon his dying face, the white-draped figure of Mr. Holly. He appeared to be uttering some invocation—in Arabic, I think—for long before I reached him I could catch the tones of his full, sonorous voice, and see his waving, outstretched arms. In his right hand he held the looped sceptre which, by his express wish I send to you with the drawings. I could see the flash of the jewels hanging upon the wires, and in the great stillness, hear the tinkling of its golden bells.

“Presently, too, I seemed to become aware of another presence, and now you will understand why I desire and must ask that my identity should be suppressed. Naturally enough I do not wish to be mixed up with a superstitious tale which is, on the face of it, impossible and absurd. Yet under all the circumstances I think it right to tell you that I saw, or thought I saw, something gather in the shadow of the central dolmen, or emerge from its rude chamber—I know not which for certain—something bright and glorious which gradually took the form of a woman upon whose forehead burned a star-like fire.

“At any rate the vision or reflection, or whatever it was, startled me so much that I came to a halt under the lee of one of the monoliths, and found myself unable even to call to the distraught man whom I pursued.

“Whilst I stood thus it became clear to me that Mr. Holly also saw something. At least he turned towards the Radiance in the shadow, uttered one cry; a wild, glad cry, and stepped forward; then seemed to fall *through it* on to his face.

“When I reached the spot the light had vanished, and all I found was Mr. Holly, his arms still outstretched, and the sceptre gripped tightly in his hand, lying quite dead in the shadow of the trilithon.”

The rest of the doctor’s letter need not be quoted as it deals only with certain very improbable explanations of the origin of this figure of light, the details of the removal of Holly’s body, and of how he managed to satisfy the coroner that no inquest was necessary.

The box of which he speaks arrived safely. Of the drawings in it I need say nothing, and of the *sistrum* or sceptre only a few words. It was fashioned of crystal to the well-known shape of the *Crux-ansata*, or the emblem of life of the Egyptians; the rod, the cross and the loop combined in one. From side to side of this loop ran golden wires, and on these were strung gems of three colours, glittering diamonds, sea-blue sapphires, and blood-red rubies, while to the fourth wire, that at the top, hung four little golden bells.

When I took hold of it first my arm shook slightly with excitement, and those bells began to sound; a sweet, faint music like to that of chimes heard far away at night in the silence of the sea. I thought too, but perhaps this was fancy, that a thrill passed from the hallowed and beautiful thing into my body.

On the mystery itself, as it is recorded in the manuscript, I make no comment. Of it and its inner significations every reader must form his or her own judgment. One thing alone is clear to me—on the hypothesis that Mr. Holly tells the truth as to what he and Leo Vincey saw and experienced, which I at least believe—that though sundry interpretations of this mystery were advanced by Ayesha and others, none of them are quite satisfactory.

Indeed, like Mr. Holly, I incline to the theory that She, if I may still call her by that name although it is seldom given to her in these pages, put forward some of them, such as the vague Isis-myth, and the wondrous picture-story of the Mountain-fire, as mere veils to hide the truth which it was her purpose to reveal at last in that song she never sang.

The Editor.

# CHAPTER I

## THE DOUBLE SIGN

Hard on twenty years have gone by since that night of Leo's vision—the most awful years, perhaps, which were ever endured by men—twenty years of search and hardship ending in soul-shaking wonder and amazement.

My death is very near to me, and of this I am glad, for I desire to pursue the quest in other realms, as it has been promised to me that I shall do. I desire to learn the beginning and the end of the spiritual drama of which it has been my strange lot to read some pages upon earth.

I, Ludwig Horace Holly, have been very ill; they carried me, more dead than alive, down those mountains whose lowest slopes I can see from my window, for I write this on the northern frontiers of India. Indeed any other man had long since perished, but Destiny kept my breath in me, perhaps that a record might remain. I must bide here a month or two till I am strong enough to travel homewards, for I have a fancy to die in the place where I was born. So while I have strength I will put the story down, or at least those parts of it that are most essential, for much can, or at any rate must, be omitted. I shrink from attempting too long a book, though my notes and memory would furnish me with sufficient material for volumes.

I will begin with the Vision.

After Leo Vincey and I came back from Africa in 1885, desiring solitude, which indeed we needed sorely to recover from the fearful shock we had experienced, and to give us time and opportunity to think, we went to an old house upon the shores of Cumberland that has belonged to my family for many generations. This house, unless somebody has taken it believing me to be dead, is still my property and thither I travel to die.

Those whose eyes read the words I write, if any should ever read them, may ask—What shock?

Well, I am Horace Holly, and my companion, my beloved friend, my son in the spirit whom I reared from infancy was—nay, is—Leo Vincey.

We are those men who, following an ancient clue, travelled to the Caves of Kôr in Central Africa, and there discovered her whom we sought, the immortal *She-who-must-be-obeyed*. In Leo she found her love, that re-born Kallikrates, the Grecian priest of Isis whom some two thousand years before she had slain in her jealous rage, thus executing on him the judgment of the angry goddess. In her also I found the divinity whom I was doomed to worship from afar, not with the flesh, for that is all lost and gone from me, but, what is sorer still, because its burden is undying, with the will and soul which animate a man throughout the countless eons of his being. The flesh dies, or at least it changes, and its passions pass, but that other passion of the spirit—that longing for oneness—is undying as itself.

What crime have I committed that this sore punishment should be laid upon me? Yet, in truth, is it a punishment? May it not prove to be but that black and terrible Gate which leads to the joyous palace of Rewards? She swore that I should ever be her friend and his and dwell with them eternally, and I believe her.

For how many winters did we wander among the icy hills and deserts! Still, at length, the Messenger came and led us to the Mountain, and on the Mountain we found the Shrine, and in the Shrine the Spirit. May not these things be an allegory prepared for our instruction? I will take comfort. I will hope that it is so. Nay, I am sure that it is so.

It will be remembered that in Kôr we found the immortal woman. There before the flashing rays and vapours of the Pillar of Life she declared her mystic love, and then in our very sight was swept to a doom so horrible that even now, after all which has been and gone, I shiver at its recollection. Yet what were Ayesha's last words? "*Forget me not . . . have pity on my shame. I die not. I shall come again and shall once more be beautiful. I swear it—it is true.*"

Well, I cannot set out that history afresh. Moreover it is written; the man whom I trusted in the matter did not fail me, and the book he made of it seems to be known throughout the world, for I have found it here in English, yes, and read it first translated into Hindostani. To it then I refer the curious.

In that house upon the desolate sea-shore of Cumberland, we dwelt a year, mourning the lost, seeking an avenue by which it might be found again and discovering none. Here our strength came back to us, and Leo's hair, that had been whitened in the horror of the Caves, grew again from grey to golden. His beauty returned to him also, so that his face was as it had been, only purified and saddened.

Well I remember that night—and the hour of illumination. We were heart-broken, we were in despair. We sought signs and could find none. The dead remained dead to us and no answer came to all our crying.

It was a sullen August evening, and after we had dined we walked upon the shore, listening to the slow surge of the waves and watching the lightning flicker from the bosom of a distant cloud. In silence we walked, till at last Leo groaned—it was more of a sob than a groan—and clasped my arm.

"I can bear it no longer, Horace," he said—for so he called me now—"I am in torment. The desire to see Ayesha once more saps my brain. Without hope I shall go quite mad. And I am strong, I may live another fifty years."

"What then can you do?" I asked.

"I can take a short road to knowledge—or to peace," he answered solemnly, "I can die, and die I will—yes, tonight."

I turned upon him angrily, for his words filled me with fear.

"Leo, you are a coward!" I said. "Cannot you bear your part of pain as—others do?"

"You mean as you do, Horace," he answered with a dreary laugh, "for on you also the curse lies—with less cause. Well, you are stronger than I am, and more tough; perhaps because you have lived longer. No, I cannot bear it. I will die."

"It is a crime," I said, "the greatest insult you can offer to the Power that made you, to cast back its gift of life as a thing outworn, contemptible and despised. A crime, I say, which will bring with it worse punishment than any you can dream; perhaps even the punishment of everlasting separation."

"Does a man stretched in some torture-den commit a crime if he snatches a knife and kills himself, Horace? Perhaps; but surely that sin should find forgiveness—if torn flesh and quivering nerves may plead for mercy. I am such a man, and I will use that knife and take my chance. She is dead, and in death at least I shall be nearer her."

"Why so, Leo? For aught you know Ayesha may be living."

"No; for then she would have given me some sign. My mind is made up, so talk no more, or, if talk we must, let it be of other things."

Then I pleaded with him, though with little hope, for I saw that what I had feared for long was come to pass. Leo was mad: shock and sorrow had destroyed his reason. Were it not so, he, in his own way a very religious man, one who held, as I knew, strict opinions on such matters, would never have purposed to commit the wickedness of suicide.

"Leo," I said, "are you so heartless that you would leave me here alone? Do you pay me thus for all my love and care, and wish to drive me to my death? Do so if you will, and my blood be on your head."

"Your blood! Why your blood, Horace?"

"Because that road is broad and two can travel it. We have lived long years together and together endured much; I am sure that we shall not be long parted."

Then the tables were turned and he grew afraid for me. But I only answered, "If you die I tell you that I shall die also. It will certainly kill me."

So Leo gave way. "Well," he exclaimed suddenly, "I promise you it shall not be to-night. Let us give life another chance."

"Good," I answered; but I went to my bed full of fear. For I was certain that this desire of death, having once taken hold of him, would grow and grow, until at length it became too strong, and then—then I should wither and die who could not live on alone. In my despair I threw out my soul towards that of her who was departed.

"Ayesha!" I cried, "if you have any power, if in any way it is permitted, show that you still live, and save your lover from this sin and me from a broken heart. Have pity on his sorrow and breathe hope into his spirit, for without hope Leo cannot live, and without him I shall not live."

Then, worn out, I slept.

I was aroused by the voice of Leo speaking to me in low, excited tones through the darkness.

"Horace," he said, "Horace, my friend, my father, listen!"

In an instant I was wide awake, every nerve and fibre of me, for the tones of his voice told me that something had happened which bore upon our destinies.

"Let me light a candle first," I said.

"Never mind the candle, Horace; I would rather speak in the dark. I went to sleep, and I dreamed the most vivid dream that ever came to me. I seemed to stand under the vault of heaven, it was black, black, not a star shone in it, and a great loneliness possessed me. Then suddenly high up in the vault, miles and miles away, I saw a little light and thought that a planet had appeared to keep me company. The light began to descend slowly, like a floating flake of fire. Down it sank, and down and down, till it was but just above me, and I perceived that it was shaped like a tongue or fan of flame. At the height of my head from the ground it stopped and stood steady, and by its ghostly radiance I saw that beneath was the shape of a woman and that the flame burned upon her forehead. The radiance gathered strength and now I saw the woman."

"Horace, it was Ayesha herself, her eyes, her lovely face, her cloudy hair, and she looked at me sadly, reproachfully, I thought, as one might who says, 'Why did you doubt?'"

"I tried to speak to her but my lips were dumb. I tried to advance and to embrace her, my arms would not move. There was a barrier between us. She lifted her hand and beckoned as though bidding me to follow her."

"Then she glided away, and, Horace, my spirit seemed to loose itself from the body and to be given the power to follow. We passed swiftly eastward, over lands and seas, and—I knew the road. At one point she paused and I looked downwards. Beneath, shining in the moonlight, appeared the ruined palaces of Kôr, and there not far away was the gulf we trod together."

"Onward above the marshes, and now we stood upon the Ethiopian's Head, and gathered round, watching us earnestly, were the faces of the Arabs, our companions who drowned in the sea beneath. Job was among them also, and he smiled at me sadly and shook his head, as though he wished to accompany us and could not."

"Across the sea again, across the sandy deserts, across more sea, and the shores of India lay beneath us. Then northward, ever northward, above the plains, till we reached a place of mountains capped with eternal snow. We passed them and stayed for an instant above a building set upon the brow of a plateau. It was a monastery, for old monks droned prayers upon its terrace. I shall know it again, for it is built in the shape of a half-moon and in front of it sits the gigantic, ruined statue of a god who gazes everlastingly

across the desert. I knew, how I cannot say, that now we were far past the furthest borders of Thibet and that in front of us lay untrodden lands. More mountains stretched beyond that desert, a sea of snowy peaks, hundreds and hundreds of them.

"Near to the monastery, jutting out into the plain like some rocky headland, rose a solitary hill, higher than all behind. We stood upon its snowy crest and waited, till presently, above the mountains and the desert at our feet shot a sudden beam of light that beat upon us like some signal flashed across the sea. On we went, floating down the beam—on over the desert and the mountains, across a great flat land beyond, in which were many villages and a city on a mound, till we lit upon a towering peak. Then I saw that this peak was loop-shaped like the symbol of Life of the Egyptians—the *crux-ansata*—and supported by a lava stem hundreds of feet in height. Also I saw that the fire which shone through it rose from the crater of a volcano beyond. Upon the very crest of this loop we rested a while, till the Shadow of Ayesha pointed downward with its hand, smiled and vanished. Then I awoke.

"Horace, I tell you that the sign has come to us."

His voice died away in the darkness, but I sat still, brooding over what I had heard. Leo groped his way to me and, seizing my arm, shook it.

"Are you asleep?" he asked angrily. "Speak, man, speak!"

"No," I answered, "never was I more awake. Give me time."

Then I rose, and going to the open window, drew up the blind and stood there staring at the sky, which grew pearl-hued with the first faint tinge of dawn. Leo came also and leant upon the window-sill, and I could feel that his body was trembling as though with cold. Clearly he was much moved.

"You talk of a sign," I said to him, "but in your sign I see nothing but a wild dream."

"It was no dream," he broke in fiercely; "it was a vision."

"A vision then if you will, but there are visions true and false, and how can we know that this is true? Listen, Leo. What is there in all that wonderful tale which could not have been fashioned in your own brain, distraught as it is almost to madness with your sorrow and your longings? You dreamed that you were alone in the vast universe. Well, is not every living creature thus alone? You dreamed that the shadowy shape of Ayesha came to you. Has it ever left your side? You dreamed that she led you over sea and land, past places haunted by your memory, above the mysterious mountains of the Unknown to an undiscovered peak. Does she not thus lead you through life to that peak which lies beyond the Gates of Death? You dreamed——"

"Oh! no more of it," he exclaimed. "What I saw, I saw, and that I shall follow. Think as you will, Horace, and do what you will. To-morrow I start for India, with you if you choose to come; if not, without you."

"You speak roughly, Leo," I said. "You forget that I have had no sign, and that the nightmare of a man so near to insanity that but a few hours ago he was determined upon suicide, will be a poor staff to lean on when we are perishing in the snows of Central Asia. A mixed vision, this of yours, Leo, with its mountain peak shaped like a *crux-ansata* and the rest. Do you suggest that Ayesha is re-incarnated in Central Asia—as a female Grand Lama or something of that sort?"

"I never thought of it, but why not?" asked Leo quietly. "Do you remember a certain scene in the Caves of Kôr yonder, when the living looked upon the dead, and dead and living were the same? And do you remember what Ayesha swore, that she would come again—yes, to this world; and how could that be except by re-birth, or, what is the same thing, by the transmigration of the spirit?"

I did not answer this argument. I was struggling with myself.

"No sign has come to me," I said, "and yet I have had a part in the play, humble enough, I admit, and I believe that I have still a part."

"No," he said, "no sign has come to you. I wish that it had. Oh! how I wish you could be convinced as I am, Horace!"

Then we were silent for a long while, silent, with our eyes fixed upon the sky.

It was a stormy dawn. Clouds in fantastic masses hung upon the ocean. One of them was like a great mountain, and we watched it idly. It changed its shape, the crest of it grew hollow like a crater. From this crater sprang a projecting cloud, a rough pillar with a knob or lump resting on its top. Suddenly the rays of the risen sun struck upon this mountain and the column and they turned white like snow. Then as though melted by those fiery arrows, the centre of the excrescence above the pillar thinned out and vanished, leaving an enormous loop of inky cloud.

"Look," said Leo in a low, frightened voice, "that is the shape of the mountain which I saw in my vision. There upon it is the black loop, and there through it shines the fire. *It would seem that the sign is for both of us, Horace.*"

I looked and looked again till presently the vast loop vanished into the blue of heaven. Then I turned and said—"I will come with you to Central Asia, Leo."

## CHAPTER II

### THE LAMASERY

Sixteen years had passed since that night vigil in the old Cumberland house, and, behold! we two, Leo and I, were still travelling, still searching for that mountain peak shaped like the Symbol of Life which never, never could be found.

Our adventures would fill volumes, but of what use is it to record them. Many of a similar nature are already written of in books; those that we endured were more prolonged, that is all. Five years we spent in Thibet, for the most part as guests of various monasteries, where we studied the law and traditions of the Lamas. Here we were once sentenced to death in punishment for having visited a forbidden city, but escaped through the kindness of a Chinese official.

Leaving Thibet, we wandered east and west and north, thousands and thousands of miles, sojourning amongst many tribes in Chinese territory and elsewhere, learning many tongues, enduring much hardship. Thus we would hear a legend of a place, say nine hundred miles away, and spend two years in reaching it, to find when we came there, nothing.

And so the time went on. Yet never once did we think of giving up the quest and returning, since, before we started, we had sworn an oath that we would achieve or die. Indeed we ought to have died a score of times, yet always were preserved, most mysteriously preserved.

Now we were in country where, so far as I could learn, no European had ever set a foot. In a part of the vast land called Turkestan there is a great lake named Balhkas, of which we visited the shores. Two hundred miles or so to the westward is a range of mighty mountains marked on the maps as Arkarty-Tau, on which we spent a year, and five hundred or so miles to the eastward are other mountains called Cherga, whither we journeyed at last, having explored the triple ranges of the Tau.

Here it was that at last our true adventures began. On one of the spurs of these awful Cherga mountains—it is unmarked on any map—we well-nigh perished of starvation. The winter was coming on and we could find no game. The last traveller we had met, hundreds of miles south, told us that on that range was a monastery inhabited by Lamas of surpassing holiness. He said that they dwelt in this wild land, over which no power claimed dominion and where no tribes lived, to acquire “merit,” with no other company than that of their own pious contemplations. We did not believe in its existence, still we were searching for that monastery, driven onward by the blind fatalism which was our only guide through all these endless wanderings. As we were starving and could find no “argals,” that is fuel with which to make a fire, we walked all night by the light of the moon, driving between us a single yak—for now we had no attendant, the last having died a year before.

He was a noble beast, that yak, and had the best constitution of any animal I ever knew, though now, like his masters, he was near his end. Not that he was over-laden, for a few rifle cartridges, about a hundred and fifty, the remnant of a store which we had fortunately been able to buy from a caravan two years before, some money in gold and silver, a little tea and a bundle of skin rugs and sheepskin garments were his burden. On, on we trudged across a plateau of snow, having the great mountains on our right, till at length the yak gave a sigh and stopped. So we stopped also, because we must, and wrapping ourselves in the skin rugs, sat down in the snow to wait for daylight.

“We shall have to kill him and eat his flesh raw,” I said, patting the poor yak that lay patiently at our side.

“Perhaps we may find game in the morning,” answered Leo, still hopeful.

“And perhaps we may not, in which case we must die.”

“Very good,” he replied, “then let us die. It is the last resource of failure. We shall have done our best.”

“Certainly, Leo, we shall have done our best, if sixteen years of tramping over mountains and through eternal snows in pursuit of a dream of the night can be called best.”

“You know what I believe,” he answered stubbornly, and there was silence between us, for here arguments did not avail. Also even then I could not think that all our toils and sufferings would be in vain.

The dawn came, and by its light we looked at one another anxiously, each of us desiring to see what strength was left to his companion. Wild creatures we should have seemed to the eyes of any civilized person. Leo was now over forty years of age, and certainly his maturity had fulfilled the promise of his youth, for a more magnificent man I never knew. Very tall, although he seemed spare to the eye, his girth matched his height, and those many years of desert life had turned his muscles to steel. His hair had grown long, like my own, for it was a protection from sun and cold, and hung upon his neck, a curling, golden mane, as his great beard hung upon his breast, spreading outwards almost to the massive shoulders. The face, too—what could be seen of it—was beautiful though burnt brown with weather; refined and full of thought, sombre almost, and in it, clear as crystal, steady as stars, shone his large grey eyes.

And I—I was what I have always been—ugly and hirsute, iron-grey now also, but in spite of my sixty odd years, still wonderfully strong, for my strength seemed to increase with time, and my health was perfect. In fact, during all this period of rough travels, although now and again we had met with accidents which laid us up for awhile, neither of us had known a day of sickness. Hardship seemed to have turned our constitutions to iron and made them impervious to every human ailment. Or was this because we alone amongst living men had once inhaled the breath of the Essence of Life?

Our fears relieved—for notwithstanding our foodless night, as yet neither of us showed any signs of exhaustion—we turned to contemplate the landscape. At our feet beyond a little belt of fertile soil, began a great desert of the sort with which we were familiar—sandy, salt-encrusted, treeless, waterless, and here and there streaked with the first snows of winter. Beyond it, eighty or a hundred miles away—in that lucent atmosphere it was impossible to say how far exactly—rose more mountains, a veritable sea of them, of which the white peaks soared upwards by scores.

As the golden rays of the rising sun touched their snows to splendour, I saw Leo's eyes become troubled. Swiftly he turned and looked along the edge of the desert.

"See there!" he said, pointing to something dim and enormous. Presently the light reached it also. It was a mighty mountain not more than ten miles away, that stood out by itself among the sands. Then he turned once more, and with his back to the desert stared at the slope of the hills, along the base of which we had been travelling. As yet they were in gloom, for the sun was behind them, but presently light began to flow over their crests like a flood. Down it crept, lower, and yet lower, till it reached a little plateau not three hundred yards above us. There, on the edge of the plateau, looking out solemnly across the waste, sat a great ruined idol, a colossal Buddha, while to the rear of the idol, built of yellow stone, appeared the low crescent-shaped mass of a monastery.

"At last!" cried Leo, "oh, Heaven! at last!" and, flinging himself down, he buried his face in the snow as though to hide it there, lest I should read something written on it which he did not desire that even I should see.

I let him lie a space, understanding what was passing in his heart, and indeed in mine also. Then going to the yak that, poor brute, had no share in these joyous emotions but only lowed and looked round with hungry eyes, I piled the sheepskin rugs on to its back. This done, I laid my hand on Leo's shoulder, saying, in the most matter-of-fact voice I could command—"Come. If that place is not deserted, we may find food and shelter there, and it is beginning to storm again."

He rose without a word, brushed the snow from his beard and garments and came to help me to lift the yak to its feet, for the worn-out beast was too stiff and weak to rise of itself. Glancing at him covertly, I saw on Leo's face a very strange and happy look; a great peace appeared to possess him.

We plunged upwards through the snow slope, dragging the yak with us, to the terrace whereon the monastery was built. Nobody seemed to be about there, nor could I discern any footprints. Was the place but a ruin? We had found many such; indeed this ancient land is full of buildings that had once served as the homes of men, learned and pious enough after their own fashion, who lived and died hundreds, or even thousands, of years ago, long before our Western civilization came into being.

My heart, also my stomach, which was starving, sank at the thought, but while I gazed doubtfully, a little coil of blue smoke sprang from a chimney, and never, I think, did I see a more joyful sight. In the centre of the edifice was a large building, evidently the temple, but nearer to us I saw a small door, almost above which the smoke appeared. To this door I went and knocked, calling aloud—"Open! open, holy Lamas. Strangers seek your charity." After awhile there was a sound of shuffling feet and the door creaked upon its hinges, revealing an old, old man, clad in tattered, yellow garments.

"Who is it? Who is it?" he exclaimed, blinking at me through a pair of horn spectacles. "Who comes to disturb our solitude, the solitude of the holy Lamas of the Mountains?"

"Travellers, Sacred One, who have had enough of solitude," I answered in his own dialect, with which I was well acquainted. "Travellers who are starving and who ask your charity, which," I added, "by the Rule you cannot refuse."

He stared at us through his horn spectacles, and, able to make nothing of our faces, let his glance fall to our garments which were as ragged as his own, and of much the same pattern. Indeed, they were those of Thibetan monks, including a kind of quilted petticoat and an outer vestment not unlike an Eastern burnous. We had adopted them because we had no others. Also they protected us from the rigours of the climate and from remark, had there been any to remark upon them.

"Are you Lamas?" he asked doubtfully, "and if so, of what monastery?"

"Lamas sure enough," I answered, "who belong to a monastery called the World, where, alas! one grows hungry."

The reply seemed to please him, for he chuckled a little, then shook his head, saying—"It is against our custom to admit strangers unless they be of our own faith, which I am sure you are not."

"And much more is it against your Rule, holy Khubilghan," for so these abbots are entitled, "to suffer strangers to starve"; and I quoted a well-known passage from the sayings of Buddha which fitted the point precisely.

"I perceive that you are instructed in the Books," he exclaimed with wonder on his yellow, wrinkled face, "and to such we cannot refuse shelter. Come in, brethren of the monastery called the World. But stay, there is the yak, who also has claims upon our charity," and, turning, he struck upon a gong or bell which hung within the door.

At the sound another man appeared, more wrinkled and to all appearance older than the first, who stared at us open-mouthed.

"Brother," said the abbot, "shut that great mouth of yours lest an evil spirit should fly down it; take this poor yak and give it fodder with the other cattle."

So we unstrapped our belongings from the back of the beast, and the old fellow whose grandiloquent title was "Master of the Herds," led it away.

When it had gone, not too willingly—for our faithful friend disliked parting from us and distrusted this new guide—the abbot, who was named Kou-en, led us into the living room or rather the kitchen of the monastery, for it served both purposes. Here we found the rest of the monks, about twelve in all, gathered round the fire of which we had seen the smoke, and engaged, one of them in preparing the morning meal, and the rest in warming themselves.

They were all old men; the youngest could not have been less than sixty-five. To these we were solemnly introduced as "Brethren of the Monastery called the World, where folk grow hungry," for the abbot Kou-en could not make up his mind to part from this little joke.

They stared at us, they rubbed their thin hands, they bowed and wished us well and evidently were delighted at our arrival. This was not strange, however, seeing that ours were the first new faces which they had seen for four long years.

Nor did they stop at words, for while they made water hot for us to wash in, two of them went to prepare a room—and others drew off our rough hide boots and thick outer garments and brought us slippers for our feet. Then they led us to the guest chamber, which they informed us was a “propitious place,” for once it had been slept in by a noted saint. Here a fire was lit, and, wonder of wonders! clean garments, including linen, all of them ancient and faded, but of good quality, were brought for us to put on.

So we washed—yes, actually washed all over—and having arrayed ourselves in the robes, which were somewhat small for Leo, struck the bell that hung in the room and were conducted by a monk who answered it, back to the kitchen, where the meal was now served. It consisted of a kind of porridge, to which was added new milk brought in by the “Master of the Herds,” dried fish from a lake, and buttered tea, the last two luxuries produced in our special honour. Never had food tasted more delicious to us, and, I may add, never did we eat more. Indeed, at last I was obliged to request Leo to stop, for I saw the monks staring at him and heard the old abbot chuckling to himself.

“Oho! The Monastery of the World, where folk grow *hungry*,” to which another monk, who was called the “Master of the Provisions,” replied uneasily, that if we went on like this, their store of food would scarcely last the winter. So we finished at length, feeling, as some book of maxims which I can remember in my youth said all polite people should do—that we could eat more, and much impressed our hosts by chanting a long Buddhist grace.

“Their feet are in the Path! Their feet are in the Path!” they said, astonished.

“Yes,” replied Leo, “they have been in it for sixteen years of our present incarnation. But we are only beginners, for you, holy Ones, know how star-high, how ocean-wide and how desert-long is that path. Indeed it is to be instructed as to the right way of walking therein that we have been miraculously directed by a dream to seek you out, as the most pious, the most saintly and the most learned of all the Lamas in these parts.”

“Yes, certainly we are that,” answered the abbot Kou-en, “seeing that there is no other monastery within five months’ journey,” and again he chuckled, “though, alas!” he added with a pathetic little sigh, “our numbers grow few.”

After this we asked leave to retire to our chamber in order to rest, and there, upon very good imitations of beds, we slept solidly for four and twenty hours, rising at last perfectly refreshed and well.

Such was our introduction to the Monastery of the Mountains—for it had no other name—where we were destined to spend the next six months of our lives. Within a few days—for they were not long in giving us their complete confidence—those good-hearted and simple old monks told us all their history.

It seemed that of old time there was a Lamasery here, in which dwelt several hundred brethren. This, indeed, was obviously true, for the place was enormous, although for the most part ruined, and, as the weather-worn statue of Buddha showed, very ancient. The story ran, according to the old abbot, that two centuries or so before, the monks had been killed out by some fierce tribe who lived beyond the desert and across the distant mountains, which tribe were heretics and worshippers of fire. Only a few of them escaped to bring the sad news to other communities, and for five generations no attempt was made to re-occupy the place.

At length it was revealed to him, our friend Kou-en, when a young man, that he was a re-incarnation of one of the old monks of this monastery, who also was named Kou-en, and that it was his duty during his present life to return thither, as by so doing he would win much merit and receive many wonderful revelations. So he gathered a band of zealots and, with the blessing and consent of his superiors, they started out, and after many hardships and losses found and took possession of the place, repairing it sufficiently for their needs.

This happened about fifty years before, and here they had dwelt ever since, only communicating occasionally with the outside world. At first their numbers were recruited from time to time by new brethren, but at length these ceased to come, with the result that the community was dying out.

“And what then?” I asked.

“And then,” the abbot answered, “nothing. *We* have acquired much merit; we have been blest with many revelations, and, after the repose we have earned in Devachan, our lots in future existences will be easier. What more can we ask or desire, removed as we are from all the temptations of the world?”

For the rest, in the intervals of their endless prayers, and still more endless contemplations, they were husbandmen, cultivating the soil, which was fertile at the foot of the mountain, and tending their herd of yaks. Thus they wore away their blameless lives until at last they died of old age, and, as they believed—and who shall say that they were wrong—the eternal round repeated itself elsewhere.

Immediately after, indeed on the very day of our arrival at the monastery the winter began in earnest with bitter cold and snowstorms so heavy and frequent that all the desert was covered deep. Very soon it became obvious to us that here we must stay until the spring, since to attempt to move in any direction would be to perish. With some misgivings we explained this to the abbot Kou-en, offering to remove to one of the empty rooms in the ruined part of the building, supporting ourselves with fish that we could catch by cutting a hole in the ice of the lake above the monastery, and if we were able to find any, on game, which we might trap or shoot in the scrub-like forest of stunted pines and junipers that grew around its border. But he would listen to no such thing. We had been sent to be their guests, he said, and their guests we should remain for so long as might be convenient to us. Would we lay upon them the burden of the sin of inhospitality? Besides, he remarked with his chuckle—“We who dwell alone like to hear about that other great monastery called the World, where the monks are not so favoured as we who are set in this blessed situation, and where folk even go hungry in body, and,” he added, “in soul.”

Indeed, as we soon found out, the dear old man’s object was to keep our feet in the Path until we reached the goal of Truth, or, in other words, became excellent Lamas like himself and his flock.

So we walked in the Path, as we had done in many another Lamasery, and assisted at the long prayers in the ruined temple and studied the *Kandjur*, or “Translation of the Words” of Buddha, which is their bible and a very long one, and generally showed that our

“minds were open.” Also we expounded to them the doctrines of our own faith, and greatly delighted were they to find so many points of similarity between it and theirs. Indeed, I am not certain but that if we could have stopped there long enough, say ten years, we might have persuaded some of them to accept a new revelation of which we were the prophets. Further, in spare hours we told them many tales of “the Monastery called the World,” and it was really delightful, and in a sense piteous, to see the joy with which they listened to these stories of wondrous countries and new races of men; they who knew only of Russia and China and some semi-savage tribes, inhabitants of the mountains and the deserts.

“It is right for us to learn all this,” they declared, “for, who knows, perhaps in future incarnations we may become inhabitants of these places.”

But though the time passed thus in comfort and indeed, compared to many of our experiences, in luxury, oh! our hearts were hungry, for in them burned the consuming fire of our quest. We felt that we were on the threshold—yes, we knew it, we knew it, and yet our wretched physical limitations made it impossible for us to advance by a single step. On the desert beneath fell the snow, moreover great winds arose suddenly that drove those snows like dust, piling them in heaps as high as trees, beneath which any unfortunate traveller would be buried. Here we must wait, there was nothing else to be done.

One alleviation we found, and only one. In a ruined room of the monastery was a library of many volumes, placed there, doubtless, by the monks who were massacred in times bygone. These had been more or less cared for and re-arranged by their successors, who gave us liberty to examine them as often as we pleased. Truly it was a strange collection, and I should imagine of priceless value, for among them were to be found Buddhistic, Sivaistic and Shamanistic writings that we had never before seen or heard of, together with the lives of a multitude of Bodhisatvas, or distinguished saints, written in various tongues, some of which we did not understand.

What proved more interesting to us, however, was a diary in many tomes that for generations had been kept by the Khubilghans or abbots of the old Lamasery, in which every event of importance was recorded in great detail. Turning over the pages of one of the last volumes of this diary, written apparently about two hundred and fifty years earlier, and shortly before the destruction of the monastery, we came upon an entry of which the following—for I can only quote from memory—is the substance—

“In the summer of this year, after a very great sandstorm, a brother (the name was given, but I forget it) found in the desert a man of the people who dwell beyond the Far Mountains, of whom rumours have reached this Lamasery from time to time. He was living, but beside him were the bodies of two of his companions who had been overwhelmed by sand and thirst. He was very fierce looking. He refused to say how he came into the desert, telling us only that he had followed the road known to the ancients before communication between his people and the outer world ceased. We gathered, however, that his brethren with whom he fled had committed some crime for which they had been condemned to die, and that he had accompanied them in their flight. He told us that there was a fine country beyond the mountains, fertile, but plagued with droughts and earthquakes, which latter, indeed, we often feel here.

“The people of that country were, he said, warlike and very numerous but followed agriculture. They had always lived there, though ruled by Khans who were descendants of the Greek king called Alexander, who conquered much country to the south-west of us. This may be true, as our records tell us that about two thousand years ago an army sent by that invader penetrated to these parts, though of his being with them nothing is said.

“The stranger-man told us also that his people worship a priestess called Hes or the Hesea, who is said to reign from generation to generation. She lives in a great mountain, apart, and is feared and adored by all, but is not the queen of the country, in the government of which she seldom interferes. To her, however, sacrifices are offered, and he who incurs her vengeance dies, so that even the chiefs of that land are afraid of her. Still their subjects often fight, for they hate each other.

“We answered that he lied when he said that this woman was immortal—for that was what we supposed he meant—since nothing is immortal; also we laughed at his tale of her power. This made the man very angry. Indeed he declared that our Buddha was not so strong as this priestess, and that she would show it by being avenged upon us.

“After this we gave him food and turned him out of the Lamasery, and he went, saying that when he returned we should learn who spoke the truth. We do not know what became of him, and he refused to reveal to us the road to his country, which lies beyond the desert and the Far Mountains. We think that perhaps he was an evil spirit sent to frighten us, in which he did not succeed.”

Such is a *precis* of this strange entry, the discovery of which, vague as it was, thrilled us with hope and excitement. Nothing more appeared about the man or his country, but within a little over a year from that date the diary of the abbot came to a sudden end without any indication that unusual events had occurred or were expected.

Indeed, the last item written in the parchment book mentioned the preparation of certain new lands to be used for the sowing of grain in future seasons, which suggested that the brethren neither feared nor expected disturbance. We wondered whether the man from beyond the mountains was as good as his word and had brought down the vengeance of that priestess called the Hesea upon the community which sheltered him. Also we wondered—ah! how we wondered—who and what this Hesea might be.

On the day following this discovery we prayed the abbot, Kou-en, to accompany us to the library, and having read him the passage, asked if he knew anything of the matter. He swayed his wise old head, which always reminded me of that of a tortoise, and answered—“A little. Very little, and that mostly about the army of the Greek king who is mentioned in the writing.”

We inquired what he could possibly know of this matter, whereon Kou-en replied calmly—“In those days when the faith of the Holy One was still young, I dwelt as a humble brother in this very monastery, which was one of the first built, and I saw the army pass, that is all. That,” he added meditatively, “was in my fiftieth incarnation of this present Round—no, I am thinking of another army—in my seventy-third.”<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] As students of their lives and literature will be aware, it is common for Buddhist priests to state positively that they remember events which occurred during their previous incarnations.—ed.

Here Leo began a great laugh, but I managed to kick him beneath the table and he turned it into a sneeze. This was fortunate, as such ribald merriment would have hurt the old man's feelings terribly. After all, also, as Leo himself had once said, surely we were

not the people to mock at the theory of re-incarnation, which, by the way, is the first article of faith among nearly one quarter of the human race, and this not the most foolish quarter.

"How can that be—I ask for instruction, learned One—seeing that memory perishes with death?"

"Ah!" he answered, "Brother Holly, it may seem to do so, but oftentimes it comes back again, especially to those who are far advanced upon the Path. For instance, until you read this passage I had forgotten all about that army, but now I see it passing, passing, and myself with other monks standing by the statue of the big Buddha in front yonder, and watching it go by. It was not a very large army, for most of the soldiers had died, or been killed, and it was being pursued by the wild people who lived south of us in those days, so that it was in a great hurry to put the desert between it and them. The general of the army was a swarthy man—I wish that I could remember his name, but I cannot.

"Well," he went on, "that general came up to the Lamasery and demanded a sleeping place for his wife and children, also provisions and medicines, and guides across the desert. The abbot of that day told him it was against our law to admit a woman under our roof, to which he answered that if we did not, we should have no roof left, for he would burn the place and kill every one of us with the sword. Now, as you know, to be killed by violence means that we must pass sundry incarnations in the forms of animals, a horrible thing, so we chose the lesser evil and gave way, and afterwards obtained absolution for our sins from the Great Lama. Myself I did not see this queen, but I saw the priestess of their worship—alas! alas!" and Kou-en beat his breast.

"Why alas?" I asked, as unconcernedly as I could, for this story interested me strangely.

"Why? Oh! because I may have forgotten the army, but I have never forgotten that priestess, and she has been a great hindrance to me through many ages, delaying me upon my journey to the Other Side, to the Shore of Salvation. I, as a humble Lama, was engaged in preparing her apartment when she entered and threw aside her veil; yes, and perceiving a young man, spoke to me, asking many questions, and even if I was not glad to look again upon a woman."

"What—what was she like?" said Leo, anxiously.

"What was she like? Oh! She was all loveliness in one shape; she was like the dawn upon the snows; she was like the evening star above the mountains; she was like the first flower of the spring. Brother, ask me not what she was like, nay, I will say no more. Oh! my sin, my sin. I am slipping backward and you draw my black shame out into the light of day. Nay, I will confess it that you may know how vile a thing I am—I whom perhaps you have thought holy—like yourselves. That woman, if woman she were, lit a fire in my heart which will not burn out, oh! and more, more," and Kou-en rocked himself to and fro upon his stool while tears of contrition trickled from beneath his horn spectacles, "*she made me worship her!* For first she asked me of my faith and listened eagerly as I expounded it, hoping that the light would come into her heart; then, after I had finished she said—"So your Path is Renunciation and your Nirvana a most excellent Nothingness which some would think it scarce worth while to strive so hard to reach. Now I will show you a more joyous way and a goddess more worthy of your worship."

"What way, and what goddess?" I asked of her.

"The way of Love and Life!" she answered, "that makes all the world to be, that made *you*, O seeker of Nirvana, and the goddess called Nature!"

"Again I asked where is that goddess, and behold! she drew herself up, looking most royal, and touching her ivory breast, she said, 'I am She. Now kneel you down and do me homage!'

"My brethren, I knelt, yes, I kissed her foot, and then I fled away shamed and broken-hearted, and as I went she laughed, and cried: 'Remember me when you reach Devachan, O servant of the Budda-saint, for though I change, I do not die, and even there I shall be with you who once gave me worship!'

"And it is so, my brethren, it is so; for though I obtained absolution for my sin and have suffered much for it through this, my next incarnation, yet I cannot be rid of her, and for me the Utter Peace is far, far away," and Kou-en placed his withered hands before his face and sobbed outright.

A ridiculous sight, truly, to see a holy Khublighan well on the wrong side of eighty, weeping like a child over a dream of a beautiful woman which he imagined he had once dreamt in his last life more than two thousand years ago. So the reader will say. But I, Holly, for reasons of my own, felt deep sympathy with that poor old man, and Leo was also sympathetic. We patted him on the back; we assured him that he was the victim of some evil hallucination which could never be brought up against him in this or any future existence, since, if sin there were, it must have been forgiven long ago, and so forth. When his calm was somewhat restored we tried also to extract further information from him, but with poor results, so far as the priestess was concerned.

He said that he did not know to what religion she belonged, and did not care, but thought that it must be an evil one. She went away the next morning with the army, and he never saw or heard of her any more, though it came into his mind that he was obliged to be locked in his cell for eight days to prevent himself from following her. Yes, he had heard one thing, for the abbot of that day had told the brethren. This priestess was the real general of the army, not the king or the queen, the latter of whom hated her. It was by her will that they pushed on northwards across the desert to some country beyond the mountains, where she desired to establish herself and her worship.

We asked if there really was any country beyond the mountains, and Kou-en answered wearily that he believed so. Either in this or in a previous life he had heard that people lived there who worshipped fire. Certainly also it was true that about thirty years ago a brother who had climbed the great peak yonder to spend some days in solitary meditation, returned and reported that he had seen a marvellous thing, namely, a shaft of fire burning in the heavens beyond those same mountains, though whether this were a vision, or what, he could not say. He recalled, however, that about that time they had felt a great earthquake.

Then the memory of that fancied transgression again began to afflict Kou-en's innocent old heart, and he crept away lamenting and was seen no more for a week. Nor would he ever speak again to us of this matter.

But we spoke of it much with hope and wonder, and made up our minds that we would at once ascend this mountain.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BEACON LIGHT

A week later came our opportunity of making this ascent of the mountain, for now in mid-winter it ceased storming, and hard frost set in, which made it possible to walk upon the surface of the snow. Learning from the monks that at this season *ovis poli* and other kinds of big-horned sheep and game descended from the hills to take refuge in certain valleys, where they scraped away the snow to find food, we announced that we were going out to hunt. The excuse we gave was that we were suffering from confinement and needed exercise, having by the teaching of our religion no scruples about killing game.

Our hosts replied that the adventure was dangerous, as the weather might change at any moment. They told us, however, that on the slopes of this very mountain which we desired to climb, there was a large natural cave where, if need be, we could take shelter, and to this cave one of them, somewhat younger and more active than the rest, offered to guide us. So, having manufactured a rug tent from skins, and laden our old yak, now in the best of condition, with food and garments, on one still morning we started as soon as it was light. Under the guidance of the monk, who, notwithstanding his years, walked very well, we reached the northern slope of the peak before mid-day. Here, as he had said, we found a great cave of which the opening was protected by an over-hanging ledge of rock. Evidently this cave was the favourite place of shelter for game at certain seasons of the year, since in it were heaped vast accumulations of their droppings, which removed any fear of a lack of fuel.

The rest of that short day we spent in setting up our tent in the cave, in front of which we lit a large fire, and in a survey of the slopes of the mountain, for we told the monk that we were searching for the tracks of wild sheep. Indeed, as it happened, on our way back to the cave we came across a small herd of ewes feeding upon the mosses in a sheltered spot where in summer a streamlet ran. Of these we were so fortunate as to kill two, for no sportsman had ever come here, and they were tame enough, poor things. As meat would keep for ever in that temperature, we had now sufficient food to last us for a fortnight, and dragging the animals down the snow slopes to the cave, we skinned them by the dying light.

That evening we supped upon fresh mutton, a great luxury, which the monk enjoyed as much as we did, since, whatever might be his views as to taking life, he liked mutton. Then we turned into the tent and huddled ourselves together for warmth, as the temperature must have been some degrees below zero. The old monk rested well enough, but neither Leo nor I slept over much, for wonder as to what we might see from the top of that mountain banished sleep.

Next morning at the dawn, the weather being still favourable, our companion returned to the monastery, whither we said we would follow him in a day or two.

Now at last we were alone, and without wasting an instant began our ascent of the peak. It was many thousand feet high and in certain places steep enough, but the deep, frozen snow made climbing easy, so that by midday we reached the top. Hence the view was magnificent. Beneath us stretched the desert, and beyond it a broad belt of fantastically shaped, snow-clad mountains, hundreds and hundreds of them; in front, to the right, to the left, as far as the eye could reach.

"They are just as I saw them in my dream so many years ago," muttered Leo; "the same, the very same."

"And where was the fiery light?" I asked.

"Yonder, I think;" and he pointed north by east.

"Well, it is not there now," I answered, "and this place is cold."

So, since it was dangerous to linger, lest the darkness should overtake us on our return journey, we descended the peak again, reaching the cave about sunset. The next four days we spent in the same way. Every morning we crawled up those wearisome banks of snow, and every afternoon we slid and tobogganed down them again, till I grew heartily tired of the exercise.

On the fourth night, instead of coming to sleep in the tent Leo sat himself down at the entrance to the cave. I asked him why he did this, but he answered impatiently, because he wished it, so I left him alone. I could see, indeed, that he was in a strange and irritable mood, for the failure of our search oppressed him. Moreover, we knew, both of us, that it could not be much prolonged, since the weather might break at any moment, when ascents of the mountain would become impossible.

In the middle of the night I was awakened by Leo shaking me and saying—"Come here, Horace, I have something to show you."

Reluctantly enough I crept from between the rugs and out of the tent. To dress there was no need, for we slept in all our garments. He led me to the mouth of the cave and pointed northward. I looked. The night was very dark; but far, far away appeared a faint patch of light upon the sky, such as might be caused by the reflection of a distant fire.

"What do you make of it?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing in particular," I answered, "it may be anything. The moon—no, there is none, dawn—no, it is too northerly, and it does not break for three hours. Something burning, a house, or a funeral pyre, but how can there be such things here? I give it up."

"I think it is a reflection, and that if we were on the peak we should see the light which throws it," said Leo slowly.

"Yes, but we are not, and cannot get there in the dark."

"Then, Horace, we must spend a night there."

"It will be our last in this incarnation," I answered with a laugh, "that is if it comes on to snow."

"We must risk it, or I will risk it. Look, the light has faded;" and there at least he was right, for undoubtedly it had. The night was as black as pitch.

"Let's talk it over to-morrow," I said, and went back to the tent, for I was sleepy and incredulous, but Leo sat on by the mouth of the cave.

At dawn I awoke and found breakfast already cooked.

"I must start early," Leo explained.

"Are you mad?" I asked. "How can we camp on that place?"

"I don't know, but I am going. I must go, Horace."

"Which means that we both must go. But how about the yak?"

"Where we can climb, it can follow," he answered.

So we strapped the tent and other baggage, including a good supply of cooked meat, upon the beast's back, and started. The tramp was long since we were obliged to make some detours to avoid slopes of frozen snow in which, on our previous ascents, we had cut footholds with an axe, for up these the laden animal could not clamber. Reaching the summit at length, we dug a hole, and there pitched the tent, piling the excavated snow about its sides. By this time it began to grow dark, and having descended into the tent, yak and all, we ate our food and waited.

Oh! what cold was that. The frost was fearful, and at this height a wind blew whose icy breath passed through all our wrappings, and seemed to burn our flesh beneath as though with hot irons. It was fortunate that we had brought the yak, for without the warmth from its shaggy body I believe that we should have perished, even in our tent. For some hours we watched, as indeed we must, since to sleep might mean to die, yet saw nothing save the lonely stars, and heard nothing in that awful silence, for here even the wind made no noise as it slid across the snows. Accustomed as I was to such exposure, my faculties began to grow numb and my eyes to shut, when suddenly Leo said—"Look, below the red star!"

I looked, and there high in the sky was the same curious glow which we had seen upon the previous night. There was more than this indeed, for beneath it, almost on a line with us and just above the crests of the intervening peaks, appeared a faint sheet of fire and revealed against it, something black. Whilst we watched, the fire widened, spread upwards and grew in power and intensity. Now against its flaming background the black object became clearly visible, and lo! it was the top of a soaring pillar surmounted by a loop. Yes, we could see its every outline. It was the *crux ansata*, the Symbol of Life itself.

The symbol vanished, the fire sank. Again it blazed up more fiercely than before and the loop appeared afresh, then once more disappeared. A third time the fire shone, and with such intensity, that no lightning could surpass its brilliance. All around the heavens were lit up, and, through the black needle-shaped eye of the symbol, as from the flare of a beacon, or the search-light of a ship, one fierce ray shot across the sea of mountain tops and the spaces of the desert, straight as an arrow to the lofty peak on which we lay. Yes, it lit upon the snow, staining it red, and upon the wild, white faces of us who watched, though to the right and left of us spread thick darkness. My compass lay before me on the snow, and I could even see its needle; and beyond us the shape of a white fox that had crept near, scenting food. Then it was gone as swiftly as it came. Gone too were the symbol and the veil of flame behind it, only the glow lingered a little on the distant sky.

For awhile there was silence between us, then Leo said—"Do you remember, Horace, when we lay upon the Rocking Stone where *her* cloak fell upon me—" as he said the words the breath caught in his throat—"how the ray of light was sent to us in farewell, and to show us a path of escape from the Place of Death? Now I think that it has been sent again in greeting to point out the path to the Place of Life where Ayesha dwells, whom we have lost awhile."

"It may be so," I answered shortly, for the matter was beyond speech or argument, beyond wonder even. But I knew then, as I know now that we were players in some mighty, predestined drama; that our parts were written and we must speak them, as our path was prepared and we must tread it to the end unknown. Fear and doubt were left behind, hope was sunk in certainty; the fore-shadowing visions of the night had found an actual fulfilment and the pitiful seed of the promise of her who died, growing unseen through all the cruel, empty years, had come to harvest.

No, we feared no more, not even when with the dawn rose the roaring wind, through which we struggled down the mountain slopes, as it would seem in peril of our lives at every step; not even as hour by hour we fought our way onwards through the whirling snow-storm, that made us deaf and blind. For we knew that those lives were charmed. We could not see or hear, yet we were led. Clinging to the yak, we struggled downward and homewards, till at length out of the turmoil and the gloom its instinct brought us unharmed to the door of the monastery, where the old abbot embraced us in his joy, and the monks put up prayers of thanks. For they were sure that we must be dead. Through such a storm, they said, no man had ever lived before.

It was still mid-winter, and oh! the awful weariness of those months of waiting. In our hands was the key, yonder amongst those mountains lay the door, but not yet might we set that key within its lock. For between us and these stretched the great desert, where the snow rolled like billows, and until that snow melted we dared not attempt its passage. So we sat in the monastery, and schooled our hearts to patience.

Still even to these frozen wilds of Central Asia spring comes at last. One evening the air felt warm, and that night there were only a few degrees of frost. The next the clouds banked up, and in the morning not snow was falling from them, but rain, and we found the old monks preparing their instruments of husbandry, as they said that the season of sowing was at hand. For three days it rained, while the snows melted before our eyes. On the fourth torrents of water were rushing down the mountain and the desert was once more brown and bare, though not for long, for within another week it was carpeted with flowers. Then we knew that the time had come to start.

"But whither go you? Whither go you?" asked the old abbot in dismay. "Are you not happy here? Do you not make great strides along the Path, as may be known by your pious conversation? Is not everything that we have your own? Oh! why would you leave

us?"

"We are wanderers," we answered, "and when we see mountains in front of us we must cross them."

Kou-en looked at us shrewdly, then asked—"What do you seek beyond the mountains? And, my brethren, what merit is gathered by hiding the truth from an old man, for such concealments are separated from falsehoods but by the length of a single barleycorn. Tell me, that at least my prayers may accompany you."

"Holy abbot," I said, "awhile ago yonder in the library you made a certain confession to us."

"Oh! remind me not of it," he said, holding up his hands. "Why do you wish to torment me?"

"Far be the thought from us, most kind friend and virtuous man," I answered. "But, as it chances, your story is very much our own, and we think that we have experience of this same priestess."

"Speak on," he said, much interested.

So I told him the outlines of our tale; for an hour or more I told it while he sat opposite to us swaying his head like a tortoise and saying nothing. At length it was done.

"Now," I added, "let the lamp of your wisdom shine upon our darkness. Do you not find this story wondrous, or do you perchance think that we are liars?"

"Brethren of the great monastery called the World," Kou-en answered with his customary chuckle, "why should I think you liars who, from the moment my eyes fell upon you, knew you to be true men? Moreover, why should I hold this tale so very wondrous? You have but stumbled upon the fringe of a truth with which we have been acquainted for many, many ages.

"Because in a vision she showed you this monastery, and led you to a spot beyond the mountains where she vanished, you hope that this woman whom you saw die is re-incarnated yonder. Why not? In this there is nothing impossible to those who are instructed in the truth, though the lengthening of her last life was strange and contrary to experience. Doubtless you will find her there as you expect, and doubtless her *khama*, or identity, is the same as that which in some earlier life of hers once brought me to sin.

"Only be not mistaken, she is no immortal; nothing is immortal. She is but a being held back by her own pride, her own greatness if you will, upon the path towards Nirvana. That pride will be humbled, as already it has been humbled; that brow of majesty shall be sprinkled with the dust of change and death, that sinful spirit must be purified by sorrows and by separations. Brother Leo, if you win her, it will be but to lose, and then the ladder must be re-climbed. Brother Holly, for you as for me loss is our only gain, since thereby we are spared much woe. Oh! bide here and pray with me. Why dash yourselves against a rock? Why labour to pour water into a broken jar whence it must sink into the sands of profitless experience, and there be wasted, whilst you remain athirst?"

"Water makes the sand fertile," I answered. "Where water falls, life comes, and sorrow is the seed of joy."

"Love is the law of life," broke in Leo; "without love there is no life. I seek love that I may live. I believe that all these things are ordained to an end which we do not know. Fate draws me on—I fulfil my fate——"

"And do but delay your freedom. Yet I will not argue with you, brother, who must follow your own road. See now, what has this woman, this priestess of a false faith if she be so still, brought you in the past? Once in another life, or so I understand your story, you were sworn to a certain nature-goddess, who was named Isis, were you not, and to her alone? Then a woman tempted you, and you fled with her afar. And there what found you? The betrayed and avenging goddess who slew you, or if not the goddess, one who had drunk of her wisdom and was the minister of her vengeance. Having that wisdom this minister—woman or evil spirit—refused to die because she had learned to love you, but waited knowing that in your next life she would find you again, as indeed she would have done more swiftly in Devachan had she died without living on alone in so much misery. And she found you, and she died, or seemed to die, and now she is re-born, as she must be, and doubtless you will meet once more, and again there must come misery. Oh! my friends, go not across the mountains; bide here with me and lament your sins."

"Nay," answered Leo, "we are sworn to a tryst, and we do not break our word."

"Then, brethren, go keep your tryst, and when you have reaped its harvest think upon my sayings, for I am sure that the wine you crush from the vintage of your desire will run red like blood, and that in its drinking you shall find neither forgetfulness nor peace. Made blind by a passion of which well I know the sting and power, you seek to add a fair-faced evil to your lives, thinking that from this unity there shall be born all knowledge and great joy.

"Rather should you desire to live alone in holiness until at length your separate lives are merged and lost in the Good Unspeakable, the eternal bliss that lies in the last Nothingness. Ah! you do not believe me now; you shake your heads and smile; yet a day will dawn, it may be after many incarnations, when you shall bow them in the dust and weep, saying to me, 'Brother Kou-en, yours were the words of wisdom, ours the deeds of foolishness;'" and with a deep sigh the old man turned and left us.

"A cheerful faith, truly," said Leo, looking after him, "to dwell through aeons in monotonous misery in order that consciousness may be swallowed up at last in some void and formless abstraction called the 'Utter Peace.' I would rather take my share of a bad world and keep my hope of a better. Also I do not think that he knows anything of Ayesha and her destiny."

"So would I," I answered, "though perhaps he is right after all. Who can tell? Moreover, what is the use of reasoning? Leo, we have no choice; we follow our fate. To what that fate may lead us we shall learn in due season."

Then we went to rest, for it was late, though I found little sleep that night. The warnings of the ancient abbot, good and learned man as he was, full also of ripe experience and of the foresighted wisdom that is given to such as he, oppressed me deeply. He promised us sorrow and bloodshed beyond the mountains, ending in death and rebirths full of misery. Well, it might be so, but no approaching sufferings could stay our feet. And even if they could, they should not, since to see her face again I was ready to brave them all. And if this was my case what must be that of Leo!

A strange theory that of Kou-en's, that Ayesha was the goddess in old Egypt to whom Kallikrates was priest, or at the least her representative. That the royal Amenartas, with whom he fled, seduced him from the goddess to whom he was sworn. That this

goddess incarnate in Ayesha—or using the woman Ayesha and her passions as her instruments—was avenged upon them both at Kôr, and that there in an after age the bolt she shot fell back upon her own head.

Well, I had often thought as much myself. Only I was sure that *She* herself could be no actual divinity, though she might be a manifestation of one, a priestess, a messenger, charged to work its will, to avenge or to reward, and yet herself a human soul, with hopes and passions to be satisfied, and a destiny to fulfil. In truth, writing now, when all is past and done with, I find much to confirm me in, and little to turn me from that theory, since life and powers of a quality which are more than human do not alone suffice to make a soul divine. On the other hand, however, it must be borne in mind that on one occasion at any rate, Ayesha did undoubtedly suggest that in the beginning she was “a daughter of Heaven,” and that there were others, notably the old Shaman Simbri, who seemed to take it for granted that her origin was supernatural. But of all these things I hope to speak in their season.

Meanwhile what lay beyond the mountains? Should we find her there who held the sceptre and upon earth wielded the power of the outraged Isis, and with her, that other woman who wrought the wrong? And if so, would the dread, inhuman struggle reach its climax around the person of the sinful priest? In a few months, a few days even, we might begin to know.

Thrilled by this thought at length I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AVALANCHE

On the morning of the second day from that night the sunrise found us already on our path across the desert. There, nearly a mile behind us, we could see the ruined statue of Buddha seated in front of the ancient monastery, and in that clear atmosphere could even distinguish the bent form of our friend, the old abbot, Kou-en, leaning against it until we were quite lost to sight. All the monks had wept when we parted from them, and Kou-en even more bitterly than the rest, for he had learned to love us.

"I am grieved," he said, "much grieved, which indeed I should not be, for such emotion partakes of sin. Yet I find comfort, for I know well that although I must soon leave this present life, yet we shall meet again in many future incarnations, and after you have put away these follies, together tread the path to perfect peace. Now take with you my blessings and my prayers and begone, forgetting not that should you live to return"—and he shook his head, doubtfully—"here you will be ever welcome."

So we embraced him and went sorrowfully.

It will be remembered that when the mysterious light fell upon us on the peak I had my compass with me and was able roughly to take its bearings. For lack of any better guide we now followed these bearings, travelling almost due north-east, for in that direction had shone the fire. All day in the most beautiful weather we marched across the flower-strewn desert, seeing nothing except bunches of game and one or two herds of wild asses which had come down from the mountains to feed upon the new grass. As evening approached we shot an antelope and made our camp—for we had brought the yak and a tent with us—among some tamarisk scrub, of which the dry stems furnished us with fuel. Nor did we lack for water, since by scraping in the sand soaked with melted snow, we found plenty of fair quality. So that night we supped in luxury upon tea and antelope meat, which indeed we were glad to have, as it spared our little store of dried provisions.

The next morning we ascertained our position as well as we could, and estimated that we had crossed about a quarter of the desert, a guess which proved very accurate, for on the evening of the fourth day of our journey we reached the bottom slopes of the opposing mountains, without having experienced either accident or fatigue. As Leo said, things were "going like clockwork," but I reminded him that a good start often meant a bad finish. Nor was I wrong, for now came our hardships. To begin with, the mountains proved to be exceeding high; it took us two days to climb their lower slopes. Also the heat of the sun had softened the snow, which made walking through it laborious, whilst, accustomed though we were to such conditions through long years of travelling, its continual glitter affected our eyes.

The morning of the seventh day found us in the mouth of a defile which wound away into the heart of the mountains. As it seemed the only possible path, we followed it, and were much cheered to discover that here must once have run a road. Not that we could see any road, indeed, for everything was buried in snow. But that one lay beneath our feet we were certain, since, although we marched along the edge of precipices, our path, however steep, was always flat; moreover, the rock upon one side of it had often been scarped by the hand of man. Of this there could be no doubt, for as the snow did not cling here, we saw the tool marks upon its bare surface.

Also we came to several places where galleries had been built out from the mountain side, by means of beams let into it, as is still a common practice in Thibet. These beams of course had long since rotted away, leaving a gulf between us and the continuation of the path. When we met with such gaps we were forced to go back and make a detour round or over some mountain; but although much delayed thereby, as it happened, we always managed to regain the road, if not without difficulty and danger.

What tried us more—for here our skill and experience as mountaineers could not help us—was the cold at night, obliged as we were to camp in the severe frost at a great altitude, and to endure through the long hours of darkness penetrating and icy winds, which souged ceaselessly down the pass.

At length on the tenth day we reached the end of the defile, and as night was falling, camped there in the most bitter cold. Those were miserable hours, for now we had no fuel with which to boil water, and must satisfy our thirst by eating frozen snow, while our eyes smarted so sorely that we could not sleep, and notwithstanding all our wraps and the warmth that we gathered from the yak in the little tent, the cold caused our teeth to chatter like castanets.

The dawn came, and, after it, the sunrise. We crept from the tent, and leaving it standing awhile, dragged our stiffened limbs a hundred yards or so to a spot where the defile took a turn, in order that we might thaw in the rays of the sun, which at that hour could not reach us where we had camped.

Leo was round it first, and I heard him utter an exclamation. In a few seconds I reached his side, and lo! before us lay our Promised Land.

Far beneath us, ten thousand feet at least—for it must be remembered that we viewed it from the top of a mountain—it stretched away and away till its distances met the horizon. In character it was quite flat, an alluvial plain that probably, in some primeval age, had been the bottom of one of the vast lakes of which a number exist in Central Asia, most of them now in process of desiccation. One object only relieved this dreary flatness, a single, snow-clad, and gigantic mountain, of which even at that distance—for it was very far from us—we could clearly see the outline. Indeed we could see more, for from its rounded crest rose a great plume of smoke,

showing that it was an active volcano, and on the hither lip of the crater an enormous pillar of rock, whereof the top was formed to the shape of a loop.

Yes, there it stood before us, that symbol of our vision which we had sought these many years, and at the sight of it our hearts beat fast and our breath came quickly. We noted at once that although we had not seen it during our passage of the mountains, since the peaks ahead and the rocky sides of the defile hid it from view, so great was its height that it overtopped the tallest of them. This made it clear to us how it came to be possible that the ray of light passing through the loop could fall upon the highest snows of that towering pinnacle which we had climbed upon the further side of the desert.

Also now we were certain of the cause of that ray, for the smoke behind the loop explained this mystery. Doubtless, at times when the volcano was awake, that smoke must be replaced by flame, emitting light of fearful intensity, and this light it was that reached us, concentrated and directed by the loop.

For the rest we thought that about thirty miles away we could make out a white-roofed town set upon a mound, situated among trees upon the banks of a wide river, which flowed across the plain. Also it was evident that this country had a large population who cultivated the soil, for by the aid of a pair of field glasses, one of our few remaining and most cherished possessions, we could see the green of springing crops pierced by irrigation canals and the lines of trees that marked the limits of the fields.

Yes, there before us stretched the Promised Land, and there rose the mystic Mount, so that all we had to do was to march down the snow slopes and enter it where we would.

Thus we thought in our folly, little guessing what lay before us, what terrors and weary suffering we must endure before we stood at length beneath the shadow of the Symbol of Life.

Our fatigues forgotten, we returned to the tent, hastily swallowed some of our dried food, which we washed down with lumps of snow that gave us toothache and chilled us inside, but which thirst compelled us to eat, dragged the poor yak to its feet, loaded it up, and started.

All this while, so great was our haste and so occupied were each of us with our own thoughts that, if my memory serves me, we scarcely interchanged a word. Down the snow slopes we marched swiftly and without hesitation, for here the road was marked for us by means of pillars of rock set opposite to one another at intervals. These pillars we observed with satisfaction, for they told us that we were still upon a highway which led to the Promised Land.

Yet, as we could not help noting, it was one which seemed to have gone out of use, since with the exception of a few wild-sheep tracks and the spoor of some bears and mountain foxes, not a single sign of beast or man could we discover. This, however, was to be explained, we reflected, by the fact that doubtless the road was only used in the summer season. Or perhaps the inhabitants of the country were now stay-at-home people who never travelled it at all.

Those slopes were longer than we thought; indeed, when darkness closed in we had not reached the foot of them. So we were obliged to spend another night in the snow, pitching our tent in the shelter of an over-hanging rock. As we had descended many thousand feet, the temperature proved, fortunately, a little milder; indeed, I do not think that there were more than eighteen or twenty degrees of frost that night. Also here and there the heat of the sun had melted the snow in secluded places, so that we were able to find water to drink, while the yak could fill its poor old stomach with dead-looking mountain mosses, which it seemed to think better than nothing.

Again, the still dawn came, throwing its red garment over the lonesome, endless mountains, and we dragged ourselves to our numbed feet, ate some of our remaining food, and started onwards. Now we could no longer see the country beneath, for it and even the towering volcano were hidden from us by an intervening ridge that seemed to be pierced by a single narrow gulley, towards which we headed. Indeed, as the pillars showed us, thither ran the buried road. By mid-day it appeared quite close to us, and we tramped on in feverish haste. As it chanced, however, there was no need to hurry, for an hour later we learned the truth.

Between us and the mouth of the gulley rose, or rather sank, a sheer precipice that was apparently three or four hundred feet in depth, and at its foot we could hear the sound of water.

Right to the edge of this precipice ran the path, for one of the stone pillars stood upon its extreme brink, and yet how could a road descend such a place as that? We stared aghast; then a possible solution occurred to us.

"Don't you see," said Leo, with a hollow laugh, "the gulf has opened since this track was used: volcanic action probably."

"Perhaps, or perhaps there was a wooden bridge or stairway which has rotted. It does not matter. We must find another path, that is all," I answered as cheerfully as I could.

"Yes, and soon," he said, "if we do not wish to stop here for ever."

So we turned to the right and marched along the edge of the precipice till, a mile or so away, we came to a small glacier, of which the surface was sprinkled with large stones frozen into its substance. This glacier hung down the face of the cliff like a petrified waterfall, but whether or no it reached the foot we could not discover. At any rate, to think of attempting its descent seemed out of the question. From this point onwards we could see that the precipice increased in depth and far as the eye could reach was absolutely sheer.

So we went back again and searched to the left of our road. Here the mountains receded, so that above us rose a mighty, dazzling slope of snow and below us lay that same pitiless, unclimbable gulf. As the light began to fade we perceived, half a mile or more in front a bare-topped hillock of rock, which stood on the verge of the precipice, and hurried to it, thinking that from its crest we might be able to discover a way of descent.

When at length we had struggled to the top, it was about a hundred and fifty feet high; what we did discover was that, here also, as beyond the glacier, the gulf was infinitely deeper than at the spot where the road ended, so deep indeed that we could not see its bottom, although from it came the sound of roaring water. Moreover, it was quite half a mile in width.

Whilst we stared round us the sinking sun vanished behind a mountain and, the sky being heavy, the light went out like that of a candle. Now the ascent of this hillock had proved so steep, especially at one place, where we were obliged to climb a sort of rock

ladder, that we scarcely cared to attempt to struggle down it again in that gloom. Therefore, remembering that there was little to choose between the top of this knoll and the snow plain at its foot in the matter of temperature or other conveniences, and being quite exhausted, we determined to spend the night upon it, thereby, as we were to learn, saving our lives.

Unloading the yak, we pitched our tent under the lee of the topmost knob of rock and ate a couple of handfuls of dried fish and corn-cake. This was the last of the food that we had brought with us from the Lamasery, and we reflected with dismay that unless we could shoot something, our commissariat was now represented by the carcass of our old friend the yak. Then we wrapped ourselves up in our thick rugs and fur garments and forgot our miseries in sleep.

It cannot have been long before daylight when we were awakened by a sudden and terrific sound like the boom of a great cannon, followed by thousands of other sounds, which might be compared to the fusillade of musketry.

"Great Heaven! What is that?" I said.

We crawled from the tent, but as yet could see nothing, whilst the yak began to low in a terrified manner. But if we could not see we could hear and feel. The booming and cracking had ceased, and was followed by a soft, grinding noise, the most sickening sound, I think, to which I ever listened. This was accompanied by a strange, steady, unnatural wind, which seemed to press upon us as water presses. Then the dawn broke and we saw.

The mountain-side was moving down upon us in a vast avalanche of snow.

Oh! what a sight was that. On from the crest of the precipitous slopes above, two miles and more away, it came, a living thing, rolling, sliding, gliding; piling itself in long, leaping waves, hollowing itself into cavernous valleys, like a tempest-driven sea, whilst above its surface hung a powdery cloud of frozen spray.

As we watched, clinging to each other terrified, the first of these waves struck our hill, causing the mighty mass of solid rock to quiver like a yacht beneath the impact of an ocean roller, or an aspen in a sudden rush of wind. It struck and slowly separated, then with a majestic motion flowed like water over the edge of the precipice on either side, and fell with a thudding sound into the unmeasured depths beneath. And this was but a little thing, a mere forerunner, for after it, with a slow, serpentine movement, rolled the body of the avalanche.

It came in combers, it came in level floods. It piled itself against our hill, yes, to within fifty feet of the head of it, till we thought that even that rooted rock must be torn from its foundations and hurled like a pebble to the deeps beneath. And the turmoil of it all! The screaming of the blast caused by the compression of the air, the dull, continuous thudding of the fall of millions of tons of snow as they rushed through space and ended their journey in the gulf.

Nor was this the worst of it, for as the deep snows above thinned, great boulders that had been buried beneath them, perhaps for centuries, were loosened from their resting-places and began to thunder down the hill. At first they moved slowly, throwing up the hard snow around them as the prow of a ship throws foam. Then gathering momentum, they sprang into the air with leaps such as those of shells ricocheting upon water, till in the end, singing and hurtling, many of them rushed past and even over us to vanish far beyond. Some indeed struck our little mountain with the force of shot fired from the great guns of a battle-ship, and shattered there, or if they fell upon its side, tore away tons of rock and passed with them into the chasm like a meteor surrounded by its satellites. Indeed, no bombardment devised and directed by man could have been half so terrible or, had there been anything to destroy, half so destructive.

The scene was appalling in its unchained and resistless might evolved suddenly from the completest calm. There in the lap of the quiet mountains, looked down upon by the peaceful, tender sky, the powers hidden in the breast of Nature were suddenly set free, and, companioned by whirlwinds and all the terrifying majesty of sound, loosed upon the heads of us two human atoms.

At the first rush of snow we had leapt back behind our protecting peak and, lying at full length upon the ground, gripped it and clung there, fearing lest the wind should whirl us to the abyss. Long ago our tent had gone like a dead leaf in an autumn gale, and at times it seemed as if we must follow.

The boulders hurtled over and past us; one of them fell full upon the little peak, shattering its crest and bursting into fragments, which fled away, each singing its own wild song. We were not touched, but when we looked behind us it was to see the yak, which had risen in its terror, lying dead and headless. Then in our fear we lay still, waiting for the end, and wondering dimly whether we should be buried in the surging snow or swept away with the hill, or crushed by the flying rocks, or lifted and lost in the hurricane.

How long did it last? We never knew. It may have been ten minutes or two hours, for in such a scene time loses its proportion. Only we became aware that the wind had fallen, while the noise of grinding snow and hurtling boulders ceased. Very cautiously we gained our feet and looked.

In front of us was sheer mountain side, for a depth of over two miles, the width of about a thousand yards, which had been covered with many feet of snow, was now bare rock. Piled up against the face of our hill, almost to its summit, lay a tongue of snow, pressed to the consistency of ice and spotted with boulders that had lodged there. The peak itself was torn and shattered, so that it revealed great gleaming surfaces and pits, in which glittered mica, or some other mineral. The vast gulf behind was half filled with the avalanche and its debris. But for the rest, it seemed as though nothing had happened, for the sun shone sweetly overhead and the solemn snows reflected its rays from the sides of a hundred hills. And we had endured it all and were still alive; yes, and unhurt.

But what a position was ours! We dared not attempt to descend the mount, lest we should sink into the loose snow and be buried there. Moreover, all along the breadth of the path of the avalanche boulders from time to time still thundered down the rocky slope, and with them came patches of snow that had been left behind by the big slide, small in themselves, it is true, but each of them large enough to kill a hundred men. It was obvious, therefore, that until these conditions changed, or death released us, we must abide where we were upon the crest of the hillock.

So there we sat, foodless and frightened, wondering what our old friend Kou-en would say if he could see us now. By degrees hunger mastered all our other sensations and we began to turn longing eyes upon the headless body of the yak.

"Let's skin him," said Leo, "it will be something to do, and we shall want his hide to-night."

So with affection, and even reverence, we performed this office for the dead companion of our journeyings, rejoicing the while that it was not we who had brought him to his end. Indeed, long residence among peoples who believed fully that the souls of men could pass into, or were risen from, the bodies of animals, had made us a little superstitious on this matter. It would be scarcely pleasant, we reflected, in some future incarnation, to find our faithful friend clad in human form and to hear him bitterly reproach us for his murder.

Being dead, however, these arguments did not apply to eating him, as we were sure he would himself acknowledge. So we cut off little bits of his flesh and, rolling them in snow till they looked as though they were nicely floured, hunger compelling us, swallowed them at a gulp. It was a disgusting meal and we felt like cannibals: but what could we do?

## CHAPTER V

### THE GLACIER

Even that day came to an end at last, and after a few more lumps of yak, our tent being gone, we drew his hide over us and rested as best we could, knowing that at least we had no more avalanches to fear. That night it froze sharply, so that had it not been for the yak's hide and the other rugs and garments, which fortunately we were wearing when the snow-slide began, it would, I think, have gone hard with us. As it was, we suffered a great deal.

"Horace," said Leo at the dawn, "I am going to leave this. If we have to die, I would rather do so moving; but I don't believe that we shall die."

"Very well," I said, "let us start. If the snow won't bear us now, it never will."

So we tied up our rugs and the yak's hide in two bundles and, having cut off some more of the frozen meat, began our descent. Now, although the mount was under two hundred feet high, its base, fortunately for us—for otherwise it must have been swept away by the mighty pressure of the avalanche—was broad, so that there was a long expanse of piled-up snow between us and the level ground.

Since, owing to the overhanging conformation of the place, it was quite impossible for us to descend in front where pressure had made the snow hard as stone, we were obliged to risk a march over the looser material upon its flank. As there was nothing to be gained by waiting, off we went, Leo leading and step by step trying the snow. To our joy we discovered that the sharp night frost had so hardened its surface that it would support us. About half way down, however, where the pressure had been less, it became much softer, so that we were forced to lie upon our faces, which enabled us to distribute our weight over a larger surface, and thus slither gently down the hill.

All went well until we were within twenty paces of the bottom, where we must cross a soft mound formed of the powdery dust thrown off by the avalanche in its rush. Leo slipped over safely, but I, following a yard or two to his right, of a sudden felt the hard crust yield beneath me. An ill-judged but quite natural flounder and wriggle, such as a newly-landed flat-fish gives upon the sand, completed the mischief, and with one piercing but swiftly stifled yell, I vanished.

Any one who has ever sunk in deep water will know that the sensation is not pleasant, but I can assure him that to go through the same experience in soft snow is infinitely worse; mud alone could surpass its terrors. Down I went, and down, till at length I seemed to reach a rock which alone saved me from disappearing for ever. Now I felt the snow closing above me and with it came darkness and a sense of suffocation. So soft was the drift, however, that before I was overcome I contrived with my arms to thrust away the powdery dust from about my head, thus forming a little hollow into which air filtered slowly. Getting my hands upon the stone, I strove to rise, but could not, the weight upon me was too great.

Then I abandoned hope and prepared to die. The process proved not altogether unpleasant. I did not see visions from my past life as drowning men are supposed to do, but—and this shows how strong was her empire over me—my mind flew back to Ayesha. I seemed to behold her and a man at her side, standing over me in some dark, rocky gulf. She was wrapped in a long travelling cloak, and her lovely eyes were wild with fear. I rose to salute her, and make report, but she cried in a fierce, concentrated voice—"What evil thing has happened here? Thou livest; then where is my lord Leo? Speak, man, and say where thou hast hid my lord—or die."

The vision was extraordinarily real and vivid, I remember, and, considered in connection with a certain subsequent event, in all ways most remarkable, but it passed as swiftly as it came.

Then my senses left me.

I saw a light again. I heard a voice, that of Leo. "Horace," he cried, "Horace, hold fast to the stock of the rifle." Something was thrust against my outstretched hand. I gripped it despairingly, and there came a strain. It was useless, I did not move. Then, bethinking me, I drew up my legs and by chance or the mercy of Heaven, I know not, got my feet against a ridge of the rock on which I was lying. Again I felt the strain, and thrust with all my might. Of a sudden the snow gave, and out of that hole I shot like a fox from its earth.

I struck something. It was Leo straining at the gun, and I knocked him backwards. Then down the steep slope we rolled, landing at length upon the very edge of the precipice. I sat up, drawing in the air with great gasps, and oh! how sweet it was. My eyes fell upon my hand, and I saw that the veins stood out on the back of it, black as ink and large as cords. Clearly I must have been near my end.

"How long was I in there?" I gasped to Leo, who sat at my side, wiping off the sweat that ran from his face in streams.

"Don't know. Nearly twenty minutes, I should think."

"Twenty minutes! It seemed like twenty centuries. How did you get me out? You could not stand upon the drift dust."

"No; I lay upon the yak skin where the snow was harder and tunnelled towards you through the powdery stuff with my hands, for I knew where you had sunk and it was not far off. At last I saw your finger tips; they were so blue that for a few seconds I took them for rock, but thrust the butt of the rifle against them. Luckily you still had life enough to catch hold of it, and you know the rest. Were we not both very strong, it could never have been done."

"Thank you, old fellow," I said simply.

"Why should you thank me?" he asked with one of his quick smiles. "Do you suppose that I wished to continue this journey alone? Come, if you have got your breath, let us be getting on. You have been sleeping in a cold bed and want exercise. Look, my rifle is broken and yours is lost in the snow. Well, it will save us the trouble of carrying the cartridges," and he laughed drearly.

Then we began our march, heading for the spot where the road ended four miles or so away, for to go forward seemed useless. In due course we reached it safely. Once a mass of snow as large as a church swept down just in front of us, and once a great boulder loosened from the mountain rushed at us suddenly like an attacking lion, or the stones thrown by Polyphemus at the ship of Odysseus, and, leaping over our heads, vanished with an angry scream into the depths beneath. But we took little heed of these things: our nerves were deadened, and no danger seemed to affect them.

There was the end of the road, and there were our own footprints and the impress of the yak's hoofs in the snow. The sight of them affected me, for it seemed strange that we should have lived to look upon them again. We stared over the edge of the precipice. Yes, it was sheer and absolutely unclimbable.

"Come to the glacier," said Leo.

So we went on to it, and scrambling a little way down its root, made an examination. Here, so far as we could judge, the cliff was about four hundred feet deep. But whether or no the tongue of ice reached to the foot of it we were unable to tell, since about two thirds of the way down it arched inwards, like the end of a bent bow, and the conformation of the overhanging rocks on either side was such that we could not see where it terminated. We climbed back again and sat down, and despair took hold of us, bitter, black despair.

"What are we to do?" I asked. "In front of us death. Behind us death, for how can we recross those mountains without food or guns to shoot it with? Here death, for we must sit and starve. We have striven and failed. Leo, our end is at hand. Only a miracle can save us."

"A miracle," he answered. "Well, what was it that led us to the top of the mount so that we were able to escape the avalanche? And what was it which put that rock in your way as you sank into the bed of dust, and gave me wit and strength to dig you out of your grave of snow? And what is it that has preserved us through seventeen years of dangers such as few men have known and lived? Some directing Power. Some Destiny that will accomplish itself in us. Why should the Power cease to guide? Why should the Destiny be balked at last?"

He paused, then added fiercely, "I tell you, Horace, that even if we had guns, food, and yaks, I would not turn back upon our spoor, since to do so would prove me a coward and unworthy of her. I will go on."

"How?" I asked.

"By that road," and he pointed to the glacier.

"It is a road to death!"

"Well, if so, Horace, it would seem that in this land men find life in death, or so they believe. If we die now, we shall die travelling our path, and in the country where we perish we may be born again. At least I am determined, so you must choose."

"I have chosen long ago. Leo, we began this journey together and we will end it together. Perhaps Ayesha knows and will help us," and I laughed drearly. "If not—come, we are wasting time."

Then we took counsel, and the end of it was that we cut a skin rug and the yak's tough hide into strips and knotted these together into two serviceable ropes, which we fastened about our middles, leaving one end loose, for we thought that they might help us in our descent.

Next we bound fragments of another skin rug about our legs and knees to protect them from the chafing of the ice and rocks, and for the same reason put on our thick leather gloves. This done, we took the remainder of our gear and heavy robes and, having placed stones in them, threw them over the brink of the precipice, trusting to find them again, should we ever reach its foot. Now our preparations were complete, and it was time for us to start upon perhaps one of the most desperate journeys ever undertaken by men of their own will.

Yet we stayed a little, looking at each other in piteous fashion, for we could not speak. Only we embraced, and I confess, I think I wept a little. It all seemed so sad and hopeless, these longings endured through many years, these perpetual, weary travellings, and now—the end. I could not bear to think of that splendid man, my ward, my most dear friend, the companion of my life, who stood before me so full of beauty and of vigour, but who must within a few short minutes be turned into a heap of quivering, mangled flesh. For myself it did not matter. I was old, it was time that I should die. I had lived innocently, if it were innocent to follow this lovely image, this Siren of the caves, who lured us on to doom.

No, I don't think that I thought of myself then, but I thought a great deal of Leo, and when I saw his determined face and flashing eyes as he nerved himself to the last endeavour, I was proud of him. So in broken accents I blessed him and wished him well through all the aeons, praying that I might be his companion to the end of time. In few words and short he thanked me and gave me back my blessing. Then he muttered—"Come."

So side by side we began the terrible descent. At first it was easy enough, although a slip would have hurled us to eternity. But we were strong and skilful, accustomed to such places moreover, and made none. About a quarter of the way down we paused, standing upon a great boulder that was embedded in the ice, and, turning round cautiously, leaned our backs against the glacier and looked about us. Truly it was a horrible place, almost sheer, nor did we learn much, for beneath us, a hundred and twenty feet or more, the projecting bend cut off our view of what lay below.

So, feeling that our nerves would not bear a prolonged contemplation of that dizzy gulf, once more we set our faces to the ice and proceeded on the downward climb. Now matters were more difficult, for the stones were fewer and once or twice we must slide to reach them, not knowing if we should ever stop again. But the ropes which we threw over the angles of the rocks, or salient points of ice, letting ourselves down by their help and drawing them after us when we reached the next foothold, saved us from disaster.

Thus at length we came to the bend, which was more than half way down the precipice, being, so far as I could judge, about two hundred and fifty feet from its lip, and say one hundred and fifty from the darksome bottom of the narrow gulf. Here were no stones, but only some rough ice, on which we sat to rest.

"We must look," said Leo presently.

But the question was, how to do this. Indeed, there was only one way, to hang over the bend and discover what lay below. We read each other's thought without the need of words, and I made a motion as though I would start.

"No," said Leo, "I am younger and stronger than you. Come, help me," and he began to fasten the end of his rope to a strong, projecting point of ice. "Now," he said, "hold my ankles."

It seemed an insanity, but there was nothing else to be done, so, fixing my heels in a niche, I grasped them and slowly he slid forward till his body vanished to the middle. What he saw does not matter, for I saw it all afterwards, but what happened was that suddenly all his great weight came upon my arms with such a jerk that his ankles were torn from my grip.

Or, who knows! perhaps in my terror I loosed them, obeying the natural impulse which prompts a man to save his own life. If so, may I be forgiven, but had I held on, I must have been jerked into the abyss. Then the rope ran out and remained taut.

"Leo!" I screamed, "Leo!" and I heard a muffled voice saying, as I thought, "Come." What it really said was—"Don't come." But indeed—and may it go to my credit—I did not pause to think, but face outwards, just as I was sitting, began to slide and scramble down the ice.

In two seconds I had reached the curve, in three I was over it. Beneath was what I can only describe as a great icicle broken off short, and separated from the cliff by about four yards of space. This icicle was not more than fifteen feet in length and sloped outwards, so that my descent was not sheer. Moreover, at the end of it the trickling of water, or some such accident, had worn away the ice, leaving a little ledge as broad, perhaps, as a man's hand. There were roughnesses on the surface below the curve, upon which my clothing caught, also I gripped them desperately with my fingers. Thus it came about that I slid down quite gently and, my heels landing upon the little ledge, remained almost upright, with outstretched arms—like a person crucified to a cross of ice.

Then I saw everything, and the sight curdled the blood within my veins. Hanging to the rope, four or five feet below the broken point, was Leo, out of reach of it, and out of reach of the cliff; as he hung turning slowly round and round, much as—for in a dreadful, inconsequent fashion the absurd similarity struck me even then—a joint turns before the fire. Below yawned the black gulf, and at the bottom of it, far, far beneath, appeared a faint, white sheet of snow. That is what I saw.

Think of it! Think of it! I crucified upon the ice, my heels resting upon a little ledge; my fingers grasping excrescences on which a bird could scarcely have found a foothold; round and below me dizzy space. To climb back whence I came was impossible, to stir even was impossible, since one slip and I must be gone.

And below me, hung like a spider to its cord, Leo turning slowly round and round!

I could see that rope of green hide stretch beneath his weight and the double knots in it slip and tighten, and I remember wondering which would give first, the hide or the knots, or whether it would hold till he dropped from the noose limb by limb.

Oh! I have been in many a perilous place, I who sprang from the Swaying Stone to the point of the Trembling Spur, and missed my aim, but never, never in such a one as this. Agony took hold of me; a cold sweat burst from every pore. I could feel it running down my face like tears; my hair bristled upon my head. And below, in utter silence, Leo turned round and round, and each time he turned his up-cast eyes met mine with a look that was horrible to see.

The silence was the worst of it, the silence and the helplessness. If he had cried out, if he had struggled, it would have been better. But to know that he was alive there, with every nerve and perception at its utmost stretch. Oh! my God! Oh! my God!

My limbs began to ache, and yet I dared not stir a muscle. They ached horribly, or so I thought, and beneath this torture, mental and physical, my mind gave.

I remembered things: remembered how, as a child, I had climbed a tree and reached a place whence I could move neither up nor down, and what I suffered then. Remembered how once in Egypt a foolhardy friend of mine had ascended the Second Pyramid alone, and become thus crucified upon its shining cap, where he remained for a whole half hour with four hundred feet of space beneath him. I could see him now stretching his stockinged foot downwards in a vain attempt to reach the next crack, and drawing it back again; could see his tortured face, a white blot upon the red granite.

Then that face vanished and blackness gathered round me, and in the blackness visions: of the living, resistless avalanche, of the snow-grave into which I had sunk—oh! years and years ago; of Ayesha demanding Leo's life at my hands. Blackness and silence, through which I could only hear the cracking of my muscles.

Suddenly in the blackness a flash, and in the silence a sound. The flash was the flash of a knife which Leo had drawn. He was hacking at the cord with it fiercely, fiercely, to make an end. And the sound was that of the noise he made, a ghastly noise, half shout of defiance and half yell of terror, as at the third stroke it parted.

I saw it part. The tough hide was half cut through, and its severed portion curled upwards and downwards like the upper and lower lips of an angry dog, whilst that which was unsevered stretched out slowly, slowly, till it grew quite thin. Then it snapped, so that the rope flew upwards and struck me across the face like the lash of a whip.

Another instant and I heard a crackling, thudding sound. Leo had struck the ground below. Leo was dead, a mangled mass of flesh and bone as I had pictured him. I could not bear it. My nerve and human dignity came back. I would not wait until, my strength exhausted, I slid from my perch as a wounded bird falls from a tree. No, I would follow him at once, of my own act.

I let my arms fall against my sides, and rejoiced in the relief from pain that the movement gave me. Then balanced upon my heels, I stood upright, took my last look at the sky, muttered my last prayer. For an instant I remained thus poised.

Shouting, "I come," I raised my hands above my head and dived as a bather dives, dived into the black gulf beneath.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN THE GATE

Oh! that rush through space! Folk falling thus are supposed to lose consciousness, but I can assert that this is not true. Never were my wits and perceptions more lively than while I travelled from that broken glacier to the ground, and never did a short journey seem to take a longer time. I saw the white floor, like some living thing, leaping up through empty air to meet me, then—*finis!*

Crash! Why, what was this? I still lived. I was in water, for I could feel its chill, and going down, down, till I thought I should never rise again. But rise I did, though my lungs were nigh to bursting first. As I floated up towards the top I remembered the crash, which told me that I had passed through ice. Therefore I should meet ice at the surface again. Oh! to think that after surviving so much I must be drowned like a kitten and beneath a sheet of ice. My hands touched it. There it was above me shining white like glass. Heaven be praised! My head broke through; in this low and sheltered gorge it was but a film no thicker than a penny formed by the light frost of the previous night. So I rose from the deep and stared about me, treading water with my feet.

Then I saw the gladdest sight that ever my eyes beheld, for on the right, not ten yards away, the water running from his hair and beard, was Leo. Leo alive, for he broke the thin ice with his arms as he struggled towards the shore from the deep river.<sup>[2]</sup> He saw me also, and his grey eyes seemed to start out of his head.

[2] Usually, as we learned afterwards, the river at this spot was quite shallow; only a foot or two in depth. It was the avalanche that by damming it with fallen heaps of snow had raised its level very many feet. Therefore, to this avalanche, which had threatened to destroy us, we in reality owed our lives, for had the stream stood only at its normal height we must have been dashed to pieces upon the stones. —L. H. H.

“Still living, both of us, and the precipice passed!” he shouted in a ringing, exultant voice. “I told you we were led.”

“Aye, but whither?” I answered as I too fought my way through the film of ice.

Then it was I became aware that we were no longer alone, for on the bank of the river, some thirty yards from us, stood two figures, a man leaning upon a long staff and a woman. He was a very old man, for his eyes were horny, his snow-white hair and beard hung upon the bent breast and shoulders, and his sardonic, wrinkled features were yellow as wax. They might have been those of a death mask cut in marble. There, clad in an ample, monkish robe, and leaning upon the staff, he stood still as a statue and watched us. I noted it all, every detail, although at the time I did not know that I was doing so, as we broke our way through the ice towards them and afterwards the picture came back to me. Also I saw that the woman, who was very tall, pointed to us.

Nearer the bank, or rather to the rock edge of the river, its surface was free of ice, for here the stream ran very swiftly. Seeing this, we drew close together and swam on side by side to help each other if need were. There was much need, for in the fringe of the torrent the strength that had served me so long seemed to desert me, and I became helpless; numbed, too, with the biting coldness of the water. Indeed, had not Leo grasped my clothes I think that I should have been swept away by the current to perish. Thus aided I fought on a while, till he said—“I am going under. Hold to the rope end.”

So I gripped the strip of yak’s hide that was still fast about him, and, his hand thus freed, Leo made a last splendid effort to keep us both, cumbered as we were with the thick, soaked garments that dragged us down like lead, from being sucked beneath the surface. Moreover, he succeeded where any other swimmer of less strength must have failed. Still, I believe that we should have drowned, since here the water ran like a mill-race, had not the man upon the shore, seeing our plight and urged thereto by the woman, run with surprising swiftness in one so aged, to a point of rock that jutted some yards into the stream, past which we were being swept, and seating himself, stretched out his long stick towards us.

With a desperate endeavour, Leo grasped it as we went by, rolling over and over each other, and held on. Round we swung into the eddy, found our feet, were knocked down again, rubbed and pounded on the rocks. But still gripping that staff of salvation, to his end of which the old man clung like a limpet to a stone, while the woman clung to him, we recovered ourselves, and, sheltered somewhat by the rock, floundered towards the shore. Lying on his face—for we were still in great danger—the man extended his arm. We could not reach it; and worse, suddenly the staff was torn from him; we were being swept away.

Then it was that the woman did a noble thing, for springing into the water—yes, up to her armpits—and holding fast to the old man by her left hand, with the right she seized Leo’s hair and dragged him shorewards. Now he found his feet for a moment, and throwing one arm about her slender form, steadied himself thus, while with the other he supported me. Next followed a long confused struggle, but the end of it was that three of us, the old man, Leo and I, rolled in a heap upon the bank and lay there gasping.

Presently I looked up. The woman stood over us, water streaming from her garments, staring like one in a dream at Leo’s face, smothered as it was with blood running from a deep cut in his head. Even then I noticed how stately and beautiful she was. Now she seemed to awake and, glancing at the robes that clung to her splendid shape, said something to her companion, then turned and ran towards the cliff.

As we lay before him, utterly exhausted, the old man, who had risen, contemplated us solemnly with his dim eyes. He spoke, but we did not understand. Again he tried another language and without success. A third time and our ears were opened, for the tongue he used was Greek; yes, there in Central Asia he addressed us in Greek, not very pure, it is true, but still Greek.

“Are you wizards,” he said, “that you have lived to reach this land?”

"Nay," I answered in the same tongue, though in broken words—since of Greek I had thought little for many a year—"for then we should have come otherwise," and I pointed to our hurts and the precipice behind us.

"They know the ancient speech; it is as we were told from the Mountain," he muttered to himself. Then he asked—"Strangers, what seek you?"

Now I grew cunning and did not answer, fearing lest, should he learn the truth, he would thrust us back into the river. But Leo had no such caution, or rather all reason had left him; he was light-headed.

"We seek," he stuttered out—his Greek, which had always been feeble, now was simply barbarous and mixed with various Thibetan dialects—"we seek the land of the Fire Mountain that is crowned with the Sign of Life."

The man stared at us. "So you know," he said, then broke off and added, "and *whom* do you seek?"

"Her," answered Leo wildly, "the Queen." I think that he meant to say the priestess, or the goddess, but could only think of the Greek for Queen, or rather something resembling it. Or perhaps it was because the woman who had gone looked like a queen.

"Oh!" said the man, "you seek a queen—then you *are* those for whom we were bidden to watch. Nay, how can I be sure?"

"Is this a time to put questions?" I gasped angrily. "Answer me one rather: who are you?"

"I? Strangers, my title is Guardian of the Gate, and the lady who was with me is the Khania of Kaloon."

At this point Leo began to faint.

"That man is sick," said the Guardian, "and now that you have got your breath again, you must have shelter, both of you, and at once. Come, help me."

So, supporting Leo on either side, we dragged ourselves away from that accursed cliff and Styx-like river up a narrow, winding gorge. Presently it opened out, and there, stretching across the glade, we saw the Gate. Of this all I observed then, for my memory of the details of this scene and of the conversation that passed is very weak and blurred, was that it seemed to be a mighty wall of rock in which a pathway had been hollowed where doubtless once passed the road. On one side of this passage was a stair, which we began to ascend with great difficulty, for Leo was now almost senseless and scarcely moved his legs. Indeed at the head of the first flight he sank down in a heap, nor did our strength suffice to lift him.

While I wondered feebly what was to be done, I heard footsteps, and looking up, saw the woman who had saved him descending the stair, and after her two robed men with a Tartar cast of countenance, very impassive; small eyes and yellowish skin. Even the sight of us did not appear to move them to astonishment. She spoke some words to them, whereon they lifted Leo's heavy frame, apparently with ease, and carried him up the steps.

We followed, and reached a room that seemed to be hewn from the rock above the gateway, where the woman called Khania left us. From it we passed through other rooms, one of them a kind of kitchen, in which a fire burned, till we came to a large chamber, evidently a sleeping place, for in it were wooden bedsteads, mattresses and rugs. Here Leo was laid down, and with the assistance of one of his servants, the old Guardian undressed him, at the same time motioning me to take off my own garments. This I did gladly enough for the first time during many days, though with great pain and difficulty, to find that I was a mass of wounds and bruises.

Presently our host blew upon a whistle, and the other servant appeared bringing hot water in a jar, with which we were washed over. Then the Guardian dressed our hurts with some soothing ointment, and wrapped us round with blankets. After this broth was brought, into which he mixed medicine, and giving me a portion to drink where I lay upon one of the beds, he took Leo's head upon his knee and poured the rest of it down his throat. Instantly a wonderful warmth ran through me, and my aching brain began to swim. Then I remembered no more.

After this we were very, very ill. What may be the exact medical definition of our sickness I do not know, but in effect it was such as follows loss of blood, extreme exhaustion of body, paralysing shock to the nerves and extensive cuts and contusions. These taken together produced a long period of semi-unconsciousness, followed by another period of fever and delirium. All that I can recall of those weeks while we remained the guests of the Guardian of the Gate, may be summed up in one word—dreams, that is until at last I recovered my senses.

The dreams themselves are forgotten, which is perhaps as well, since they were very confused, and for the most part awful; a hotch-potch of nightmares, reflected without doubt from vivid memories of our recent and fearsome sufferings. At times I would wake up from them a little, I suppose when food was administered to me, and receive impressions of whatever was passing in the place. Thus I can recollect that yellow-faced old Guardian standing over me like a ghost in the moonlight, stroking his long beard, his eyes fixed upon my face, as though he would search out the secrets of my soul.

"They are the men," he muttered to himself, "without doubt they are the men," then walked to the window and looked up long and earnestly, like one who studies the stars.

After this I remember a disturbance in the room, and dominating it, as it were, the rich sound of a woman's voice and the rustle of a woman's silks sweeping the stone floor. I opened my eyes and saw that it was she who had helped to rescue us, who *had* rescued us in fact, a tall and noble-looking lady with a beauteous, weary face and liquid eyes which seemed to burn. From the heavy cloak she wore I thought that she must have just returned from a journey.

She stood above me and looked at me, then turned away with a gesture of indifference, if not of disgust, speaking to the Guardian in a low voice. By way of answer he bowed, pointing to the other bed where Leo lay, asleep, and thither she passed with slow, imperious movements. I saw her bend down and lift the corner of a wrapping which covered his wounded head, and heard her utter some smothered words before she turned round to the Guardian as though to question him further.

But he had gone, and being alone, for she thought me senseless, she drew a rough stool to the side of the bed, and seating herself studied Leo, who lay thereon, with an earnestness that was almost terrible, for her soul seemed to be concentrated in her eyes, and to find expression through them. Long she gazed thus, then rose and began to walk swiftly up and down the chamber, pressing her hands

now to her bosom and now to her brow, a certain passionate perplexity stamped upon her face, as though she struggled to remember something and could not.

"Where and when?" she whispered. "Oh! where and when?"

Of the end of that scene I know nothing, for although I fought hard against it, oblivion mastered me. After this I became aware that the regal-looking woman called Khania, was always in the room, and that she seemed to be nursing Leo with great care and tenderness. Sometimes even she nursed me when Leo did not need attention, and she had nothing else to do, or so her manner seemed to suggest. It was as though I excited her curiosity, and she wished me to recover that it might be satisfied.

Again I awoke, how long afterwards I cannot say. It was night, and the room was lighted by the moon only, now shining in a clear sky. Its steady rays entering at the window-place fell on Leo's bed, and by them I saw that the dark, imperial woman was watching at his side. Some sense of her presence must have communicated itself to him, for he began to mutter in his sleep, now in English, now in Arabic. She became intensely interested; as her every movement showed. Then rising suddenly she glided across the room on tiptoe to look at me. Seeing her coming I feigned to be asleep, and so well that she was deceived.

For I was also interested. Who was this lady whom the Guardian had called the Khania of Kaloon? Could it be she whom we sought? Why not? And yet if I saw Ayesha, surely I should know her, surely there would be no room for doubt.

Back she went again to the bed, kneeling down beside Leo, and in the intense silence which followed—for he had ceased his mutterings—I thought that I could hear the beating of her heart. Now she began to speak, very low and in that same bastard Greek tongue, mixed here and there with Mongolian words such as are common to the dialects of Central Asia. I could not hear or understand all she said, but some sentences I did understand, and they frightened me not a little.

"Man of my dreams," she murmured, "whence come you? Who are you? Why did the Hesea bid me to meet you?" Then some sentences I could not catch. "You sleep; in sleep the eyes are opened. Answer, I bid you; say what is the bond between you and me? Why have I dreamt of you? Why do I know you? Why——?" and the sweet, rich voice died slowly from a whisper into silence, as though she were ashamed to utter what was on her tongue.

As she bent over him a lock of her hair broke loose from its jewelled fillet and fell across his face. At its touch Leo seemed to wake, for he lifted his gaunt, white hand and touched the hair, then said in English—"Where am I? Oh! I remember;" and their eyes met as he strove to lift himself and could not. Then he spoke again in his broken, stumbling Greek, "You are the lady who saved me from the water. Say, are you also that queen whom I have sought so long and endured so much to find?"

"I know not," she answered in a voice as sweet as honey, a low, trembling voice; "but true it is I am a queen—if a Khania be a queen."

"Say, then, Queen, do you remember me?"

"We have met in dreams," she answered, "I think that we have met in a past that is far away. Yes; I knew it when first I saw you there by the river. Stranger with the well remembered face, tell me, I pray you, how you are named?"

"Leo Vincey."

She shook her head, whispering—"I know not the name, yet you I know."

"You know me! How do you know me?" he said heavily, and seemed to sink again into slumber or swoon.

She watched him for a while very intently. Then as though some force that she could not resist drew her, I saw her bend down her head over his sleeping face. Yes; and I saw her kiss him swiftly on the lips, then spring back crimson to the hair, as though overwhelmed with shame at this victory of her mad passion.

Now it was that she discovered me.

Bewildered, fascinated, amazed, I had raised myself upon my bed, not knowing it; I suppose that I might see and hear the better. It was wrong, doubtless, but no common curiosity over-mastered me, who had my share in all this story. More, it was foolish, but illness and wonder had killed my reason.

Yes, she saw me watching them, and such fury seemed to take hold of her that I thought my hour had come.

"Man, have you dared——?" she said in an intense whisper, and snatching at her girdle. Now in her hand shone a knife, and I knew that it was destined for my heart. Then in this sore danger my wit came back to me and as she advanced I stretched out my shaking hand, saying—"Oh! of your pity, give me to drink. The fever burns me, it burns," and I looked round like one bewildered who sees not, repeating, "Give me drink, you who are called Guardian," and I fell back exhausted.

She stopped like a hawk in its stoop, and swiftly sheathed the dagger. Then taking a bowl of milk that stood on a table near her, she held it to my lips, searching my face the while with her flaming eyes, for indeed passion, rage, and fear had lit them till they seemed to flame. I drank the milk in great gulps, though never in my life did I find it more hard to swallow.

"You tremble," she said; "have dreams haunted you?"

"Aye, friend," I answered, "dreams of that fearsome precipice and of the last leap."

"Aught else?" she asked.

"Nay; is it not enough? Oh! what a journey to have taken to befriend a queen."

"To befriend a queen," she repeated puzzled. "What means the man? You swear you have had no other dreams?"

"Aye, I swear by the Symbol of Life and the Mount of the Wavering Flame, and by yourself, O Queen from the ancient days."

Then I sighed and pretended to swoon, for I could think of nothing else to do. As I closed my eyes I saw her face that had been red as dawn turn pale as eve, for my words and all which might lie behind them, had gone home. Moreover, she was in doubt, for I could hear her fingering the handle of the dagger. Then she spoke aloud, words for my ears if they still were open.

"I am glad," she said, "that he dreamed no other dreams, since had he done so and babbled of them it would have been ill-omened, and I do not wish that one who has travelled far to visit us should be hurled to the death-dogs for burial; one, moreover, who although

old and hideous, still has the air of a wise and silent man.”

Now while I shivered at these unpleasant hints—though what the “death-dogs” in which people were buried might be, I could not conceive—to my intense joy I heard the foot of the Guardian on the stairs, heard him too enter the room and saw him bow before the lady.

“How go these sick men, niece?”<sup>[3]</sup> he said in his cold voice.

<sup>[3]</sup> I found later that the Khania, Atene, was not Simbri's niece but his great-niece, on the mother's side.—L. H. H.

“They swoon, both of them,” she answered.

“Indeed, is it so? I thought otherwise. I thought they woke.”

“What have you heard, Shaman (i.e. wizard)?” she asked angrily.

“I? Oh! I heard the grating of a dagger in its sheath and the distant baying of the death-hounds.”

“And what have you seen, Shaman?” she asked again, “looking through the Gate you guard?”

“Strange sight, Khania, my niece. But—men awake from swoons.”

“Aye,” she answered, “so while this one sleeps, bear him to another chamber, for he needs change, and the lord yonder needs more space and untainted air.”

The Guardian, whom she called “Shaman” or Magician, held a lamp in his hand, and by its light it was easy to see his face, which I watched out of the corner of my eye. I thought that it wore a very strange expression, one moreover that alarmed me somewhat. From the beginning I had misdoubted me of this old man, whose cast of countenance was vindictive as it was able; now I was afraid of him.

“To which chamber, Khania?” he said with meaning.

“I think,” she answered slowly, “to one that is healthful, where he will recover. The man has wisdom,” she added as though in explanation, “moreover, having the word from the Mountain, to harm him would be dangerous. But why do you ask?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I tell you I heard the death-hounds bay, that is all. Yes, with you I think that he has wisdom, and the bee which seeks honey should suck the flower—before it fades! Also, as you say, there are commands with which it is ill to trifle, even if we cannot guess their meaning.”

Then going to the door he blew upon his whistle, and instantly I heard the feet of his servants upon the stairs. He gave them an order, and gently enough they lifted the mattress on which I lay and followed him down sundry passages and past some stairs into another chamber shaped like that we had left, but not so large, where they placed me upon a bed.

The Guardian watched me awhile to see that I did not wake. Next he stretched out his hand and felt my heart and pulse; an examination the results of which seemed to *puzzle* him, for he uttered a little exclamation and shook his head. After this he left the room, and I heard him bolt the door behind him. Then, being still very weak, I fell asleep in earnest.

When I awoke it was broad daylight. My mind was clear and I felt better than I had done for many a day, signs by which I knew that the fever had left me and that I was on the high road to recovery. Now I remembered all the events of the previous night and was able to weigh them carefully. This, to be sure, I did for many reasons, among them that I knew I had been and still was, in great danger.

I had seen and heard too much, and this woman called Khania guessed that I had seen and heard. Indeed, had it not been for my hints about the Symbol of Life and the Mount of Flame, after I had disarmed her first rage by my artifice, I felt sure that she would have ordered the old Guardian or Shaman to do me to death in this way or the other; sure also that he would not have hesitated to obey her. I had been spared partly because, for some unknown reason, she was afraid to kill me, and partly that she might learn how much I knew, although the “death-hounds had bayed,” whatever that might mean. Well, up to the present I was safe, and for the rest I must take my chance. Moreover it was necessary to be cautious, and, if need were, to feign ignorance. So, dismissing the matter of my own fate from my mind, I fell to considering the scene which I had witnessed and what might be its purport.

Was our quest at an end? Was this woman Ayesha? Leo had so dreamed, but he was still delirious, therefore here was little on which to lean. What seemed more to the point was that she herself evidently appeared to think that there existed some tie between her and this sick man. Why had she embraced him? I was sure that she could be no wanton, nor indeed would any woman indulge for its own sake in such folly with a stranger who hung between life and death. What she had done was done because irresistible impulse, born of knowledge, or at least of memories, drove her on, though mayhap the knowledge was imperfect and the memories were undefined. Who save Ayesha could have known anything of Leo in the past? None who lived upon the earth to-day.

And yet, why not, if what Kou-en the abbot and tens of millions of his fellow-worshippers believed were true? If the souls of human beings were in fact strictly limited in number, and became the tenants of an endless succession of physical bodies which they change from time to time as we change our worn-out garments, why should not others have known him? For instance that daughter of the Pharaohs who “caused him through love to break the vows that he had vowed” knew a certain Kallikrates, a priest of “Isis whom the gods cherish and the demons obey;” even Amenartas, the mistress of magic.

Oh! now a light seemed to break upon me, a wonderful light. What if Amenartas and this Khania, this woman with royalty stamped on every feature, should be the same? Would not that “magic of my own people that I have” of which she wrote upon the Sherd, enable her to pierce the darkness of the Past and recognize the priest whom she had bewitched to love her, snatching him out of the very hand of the goddess? What if it were not Ayesha, but Amenartas re-incarnate who ruled this hidden land and once more sought to make the man she loved break through his vows? If so, knowing the evil that must come, I shook even at its shadow. The truth must be learned, but how?

Whilst I wondered the door opened, and the sardonic, inscrutable-old-faced man, whom this Khania had called Magician, and who called the Khania, niece, entered and stood before me.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST ORDEAL

The shaman advanced to my side and asked me courteously how I fared.

I answered, "Better. Far better, oh, my host—but how are you named?"

"Simbri," he answered, "and, as I told you by the water, my title is Hereditary Guardian of the Gate. By profession I am the royal Physician in this land."

"Did you say physician or magician?" I asked carelessly, as though I had not caught the word. He gave me a curious look.

"I *said* physician, and it is well for you and your companion that I have some skill in my art. Otherwise I think, perhaps, you would not have been alive to-day, O my guest—but how are *you* named?"

"Holly," I said.

"O my guest, Holly."

"Had it not been for the foresight that brought you and the lady Khania to the edge of yonder darksome river, certainly we should *not* have been alive, venerable Simbri, a foresight that seems to me to savour of magic in such a lonely place. That is why I thought you might have described yourself as a magician, though it is true that you may have been but fishing in those waters."

"Certainly I was fishing, stranger Holly—for men, and I caught two."

"Fishing by chance, host Simbri?"

"Nay, by design, guest Holly. My trade of physician includes the study of future events, for I am the chief of the Shamans or Seers of this land, and, having been warned of your coming quite recently, I awaited your arrival."

"Indeed, that is strange, most courteous also. So here physician and magician mean the same."

"You say it," he answered with a grave bow; "but tell me, if you will, how did you find your way to a land whither visitors do not wander?"

"Oh!" I answered, "perhaps we are but travellers, or perhaps we also have studied—medicine."

"I think that you must have studied it deeply, since otherwise you would not have lived to cross those mountains in search of—now, what did you seek? Your companion, I think, spoke of a queen—yonder, on the banks of the torrent."

"Did he? Did he, indeed? Well, that is strange since he seems to have found one, for surely that royal-looking lady, named Khania, who sprang into the stream and saved us, must be a queen."

"A queen she is, and a great one, for in our land Khania means queen, though how, friend Holly, a man who has lain senseless can have learned this, I do not know. Nor do I know how you come to speak our language."

"That is simple, for the tongue you talk is very ancient, and as it chanced in my own country it has been my lot to study and to teach it. It is Greek, but although it is still spoken in the world, how it reached these mountains I cannot say."

"I will tell you," he answered. "Many generations ago a great conqueror born of the nation that spoke this tongue fought his way through the country to the south of us. He was driven back, but a general of his of another race advanced and crossed the mountains, and overcame the people of this land, bringing with him his master's language and his own worship. Here he established his dynasty, and here it remains, for being ringed in with deserts and with pathless mountain snows, we hold no converse with the outer world."

"Yes, I know something of that story; the conqueror was named Alexander, was he not?" I asked.

"He was so named, and the name of the general was Rassen, a native of a country called Egypt, or so our records tell us. His descendants hold the throne to this day, and the Khania is of his blood."

"Was the goddess whom he worshipped called Isis?"

"Nay," he answered, "she was called Hes."

"Which," I interrupted, "is but another title for Isis. Tell me, is her worship continued here? I ask because it is now dead in Egypt, which was its home."

"There is a temple on the Mountain yonder," he replied indifferently, "and in it are priests and priestesses who practise some ancient cult. But the real god of this people now, as long before the day of Rassen their conqueror, is the fire that dwells in this same Mountain, which from time to time breaks out and slays them."

"And does a goddess dwell in the fire?" I asked.

Again he searched my face with his cold eyes, then answered—"Stranger Holly, I know nothing of any goddess. That Mountain is sacred, and to seek to learn its secrets is to die. Why do you ask such questions?"

"Only because I am curious in the matter of old religions, and seeing the symbol of Life upon yonder peak, came hither to study yours, of which indeed a tradition still remains among the learned."

"Then abandon that study, friend Holly, for the road to it runs through the paws of the death-hounds, and the spears of savages. Nor indeed is there anything to learn."

"And what, Physician, are the death-hounds?"

"Certain dogs to which, according to our ancient custom, all offenders against the law or the will of the Khan, are cast to be torn to pieces."

"The will of the Khan! Has this Khania of yours a husband then?"

"Aye," he answered, "her cousin, who was the ruler of half the land. Now they and the land are one. But you have talked enough; I am here to say that your food is ready," and he turned to leave the room.

"One more question, friend Simbri. How came I to this chamber, and where is my companion?"

"You were borne hither in your sleep, and see, the change has bettered you. Do you remember nothing?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," I answered earnestly. "But what of my friend?"

"He also is better. The Khania Atene nurses him."

"Atene?" I said. "That is an old Egyptian name. It means the Disk of the Sun, and a woman who bore it thousands of years ago was famous for her beauty."

"Well, and is not my niece Atene beautiful?"

"How can I tell, O uncle of the Khania," I answered wearily, "who have scarcely seen her?"

Then he departed, and presently his yellow-faced, silent servants brought me my food.

Later in the morning the door opened again, and through it, unattended, came the Khania Atene, who shut and bolted it behind her. This action did not reassure me, still, rising in my bed, I saluted her as best I could, although at heart I was afraid. She seemed to read my doubts for she said—"Lie down, and have no fear. At present you will come by no harm from me. Now, tell me what is the man called Leo to you? Your son? Nay, it cannot be, since—forgive me—light is not born of darkness."

"I have always thought that it was so born, Khania. Yet you are right; he is but my adopted son, and a man whom I love."

"Say, what seek you here?" she asked.

"We seek, Khania, whatsoever Fate shall bring us on yonder Mountain, that which is crowned with flame."

Her face paled at the words, but she answered in a steady voice—"Then there you will find nothing but doom, if indeed you do not find it before you reach its slopes, which are guarded by savage men. Yonder is the College of Hes, and to violate its Sanctuary is death to any man, death in the ever-burning fire."

"And who rules this college, Khania—a priestess?"

"Yes, a priestess, whose face I have never seen, for she is so old that she veils herself from curious eyes."

"Ah! she veils herself, does she?" I answered, as the blood went thrilling through my veins, I who remembered another who also was *so* old that she veiled herself from curious eyes. "Well, veiled or unveiled, we would visit her, trusting to find that we are welcome."

"That you shall not do," she said, "for it is unlawful, and I will not have your blood upon my hands."

"Which is the stronger," I asked of her, "you, Khania, or this priestess of the Mountain?"

"I am the stronger, Holly, for so you are named, are you not? Look you, at my need I can summon sixty thousand men in war, while she has naught but her priests and the fierce, untrained tribes."

"The sword is not the only power in the world," I answered. "Tell me, now, does this priestess ever visit the country of Kaloon?"

"Never, never, for by the ancient pact, made after the last great struggle long centuries ago between the College and the people of the Plain, it was decreed and sworn to that should she set her foot across the river, this means war to the end between us, and rule for the victor over both. Likewise, save when unguarded they bear their dead to burial, or for some such high purpose, no Khan or Khania of Kaloon ascends the Mountain."

"Which then is the true master—the Khan of Kaloon or the head of the College of Hes?" I asked again.

"In matters spiritual, the priestess of Hes, who is our Oracle and the voice of Heaven. In matters temporal, the Khan of Kaloon."

"The Khan. Ah! you are married, lady, are you not?"

"Aye," she answered, her face flushing. "And I will tell you what you soon must learn, if you have not learned it already, I am the wife of a madman, and he is—hateful to me."

"I *have* learned the last already, Khania."

She looked at me with her piercing eyes.

"What! Did my uncle, the Shaman, he who is called Guardian, tell you? Nay, you saw, as I knew you saw, and it would have been best to slay you for, oh! what must you think of me?"

I made no answer, for in truth I did not know what to think, also I feared lest further rash admissions should be followed by swift vengeance.

"You must believe," she went on, "that I, who have ever hated men, that I—I swear that it is true—whose lips are purer than those mountain snows, I, the Khania of Kaloon, whom they name Heart-of-Ice, am but a shameless thing." And, covering her face with her hand, she moaned in the bitterness of her distress.

"Nay," I said, "there may be reasons, explanations, if it pleases you to give them."

"Wanderer, there are such reasons; and since you know so much, you shall learn them also. Like that husband of mine, I have become mad. When first I saw the face of your companion, as I dragged him from the river, madness entered me, and I—I——"

"Loved him," I suggested. "Well, such things have happened before to people who were not mad."

"Oh!" she went on, "it was more than love; I was possessed, and that night I knew not what I did. A Power drove me on; a Destiny compelled me, and to the end I am his, and his alone. Yes, I am his, and I swear that he shall be mine;" and with this wild declaration dangerous enough under the conditions, she turned and fled the room.

She was gone, and after the struggle, for such it was, I sank back exhausted. How came it that this sudden passion had mastered her? Who and what was this Khania, I wondered again, and—this was more to the point, who and what would Leo believe her to be? If only I could be with him before he said words or did deeds impossible to recall.

Three days went by, during which time I saw no more of the Khania, who, or so I was informed by Simbri, the Shaman, had returned to her city to make ready for us, her guests. I begged him to allow me to rejoin Leo, but he answered politely, though with much firmness, that my foster-son did better without me. Now, I grew suspicious, fearing lest some harm had come to Leo, though how to discover the truth I knew not. In my anxiety I tried to convey a note to him, written upon a leaf of a water-gained pocket-book, but the yellow-faced servant refused to touch it, and Simbri said drily that he would have naught to do with writings which he could not read. At length, on the third night I made up my mind that whatever the risk, with leave or without it, I would try to find him.

By this time I could walk well, and indeed was almost strong again. So about midnight, when the moon was up, for I had no other light, I crept from my bed, threw on my garments, and taking a knife, which was the only weapon I possessed, opened the door of my room and started.

Now, when I was carried from the rock-chamber where Leo and I had been together, I took note of the way. First, reckoning from my sleeping-place, there was a passage thirty paces long, for I had counted the footfalls of my bearers. Then came a turn to the left, and ten more paces of passage, and lastly near certain steps running to some place unknown, another sharp turn to the right which led to our old chamber.

Down the long passage I walked stealthily, and although it was pitch dark, found the turn to the left, and followed it till I came to the second sharp turn to the right, that of the gallery from which rose the stairs. I crept round it only to retreat hastily enough, as well I might, for at the door of Leo's room, which she was in the act of locking on the outside, as I could see by the light of the lamp that she held in her hand, stood the Khania herself.

My first thought was to fly back to my own chamber, but I abandoned it, feeling sure that I should be seen. Therefore I determined, if she discovered me, to face the matter out and say that I was trying to find Leo, and to learn how he fared. So I crouched against the wall, and waited with a beating heart. I heard her sweep down the passage, and—yes—begin to mount the stair.

Now, what should I do? To try to reach Leo was useless, for she had locked the door with the key she held. Go back to bed? No, I would follow her, and if we met would make the same excuse. Thus I might get some tidings, or perhaps—a dagger thrust.

So round the corner and up the steps I went, noiselessly as a snake. They were many and winding, like those of a church tower, but at length I came to the head of them, where was a little landing, and opening from it a door. It was a very ancient door; the light streamed through cracks where its panels had rotted, and from the room beyond came the sound of voices, those of the Shaman Simbri and the Khania.

"Have you learned aught, my niece?" I heard him say, and also heard her answer—"A little. A very little."

Then in my thirst for knowledge I grew bold, and stealing to the door, looked through one of the cracks in its wood. Opposite to me, in the full flood of light thrown by a hanging lamp, her hand resting on a table at which Simbri was seated, stood the Khania. Truly she was a beauteous sight, for she wore robes of royal purple, and on her brow a little coronet of gold, beneath which her curling hair streamed down her shapely neck and bosom. Seeing her I guessed at once that she had arrayed herself thus for some secret end, enhancing her loveliness by every art and grace that is known to woman. Simbri was looking at her earnestly, with fear and doubt written on even his cold, impassive features.

"What passed between you, then?" he asked, peering at her.

"I questioned him closely as to the reason of his coming to this land, and wrung from him the answer that it was to seek some beauteous woman—he would say no more. I asked him if she were more beauteous than I am, and he replied with courtesy—nothing else, I think—that it would be hard to say, but that she had been different. Then I said that though it behooved me not to speak of such a matter, there was no lady in Kaloon whom men held to be so fair as I; moreover, that I was its ruler, and that I and no other had saved him from the water. Aye, and I added that my heart told me I was the woman whom he sought."

"Have done, niece," said Simbri impatiently, "I would not hear of the arts you used—well enough, doubtless. What then?"

"Then he said that it might be so, since he thought that this woman was born again, and studied me a while, asking me if I had ever 'passed through fire.' To this I replied that the only fires I had passed were those of the spirit, and that I dwelt in them now. He said, 'Show me your hair,' and I placed a lock of it in his hand. Presently he let it fall, and from that satchel which he wears about his neck drew out another tress of hair—oh! Simbri, my uncle, the loveliest hair that ever eyes beheld, for it was soft as silk, and reached from my coronet to the ground. Moreover, no raven's wing in the sunshine ever shone as did that fragrant tress.

"'Yours is beautiful,' he said, 'but see, they are not the same.'

"'Mayhap,' I answered, 'since no woman ever wore such locks.'

"'You are right,' he replied, 'for she whom I seek was more than a woman.'

"And then—and then—though I tried him in many ways he would say no more, so, feeling hate against this Unknown rising in my heart, and fearing lest I should utter words that were best unsaid, I left him. Now I bid you, search the books which are open to your wisdom and tell me of this woman whom he seeks, who she is, and where she dwells. Oh! search them swiftly, that I may find her and—kill her if I can."

"Aye, if you can," answered the Shaman, "and if she lives to kill. But say, where shall we begin our quest? Now, this letter from the Mountain that the head-priest Oros sent to your court a while ago?"—and he selected a parchment from a pile which lay upon the table and looked at her.

"Read," she said, "I would hear it again."

So he read: "From the Hesea of the House of Fire, to Atene, Khania of Kaloon.

"My sister—Warning has reached me that two strangers of a western race journey to your land, seeking my Oracle, of which they would ask a question. On the first day of the next moon, I command that you and with you Simbri, your great-uncle, the wise Shaman, Guardian of the Gate, shall be watching the river in the gulf at the foot of the ancient road, for by that steep path the strangers travel. Aid them in all things and bring them safely to the Mountain, knowing that in this matter I shall hold him and you to account. Myself I will not meet them, since to do so would be to break the pact between our powers, which says that the Hesea of the Sanctuary visits not the territory of Kaloon, save in war. Also their coming is otherwise appointed."

"It would seem," said Simbri, laying down the parchment, "that these are no chance wanderers, since Hes awaits them."

"Aye, they are no chance wanderers, since my heart awaited one of them also. Yet the Hesea cannot be that woman, for reasons which are known to you."

"There are many women on the Mountain," suggested the Shaman in a dry voice, "if indeed any woman has to do with this matter."

"I at least have to do with it, and he shall not go to the Mountain."

"Hes is powerful, my niece, and beneath these smooth words of hers lies a dreadful threat. I say that she is mighty from of old and has servants in the earth and air who warned her of the coming of these men, and will warn her of what befalls them. I know it, who hate her, and to your royal house of Rassen it has been known for many a generation. Therefore thwart her not lest ill befall us all, for she is a spirit and terrible. She says that it is appointed that they shall go——"

"And I say it is appointed that he shall not go. Let the other go if he desires."

"Atene, be plain, what will you with the man called Leo—that he should become your lover?" asked the Shaman.

She stared him straight in the eyes, and answered boldly—"Nay, I will that he should become my husband."

"First he must will it too, who seems to have no mind that way. Also, how can a woman have two husbands?"

She laid her hand upon his shoulder and said—"I have no husband. You know it well, Simbri. I charge you by the close bond of blood between us, brew me another draught——"

"That we may be bound yet closer in a bond of murder! Nay, Atene, I will not; already your sin lies heavy on my head. You are very fair; take the man in your own net, if you may, or let him be, which is better far."

"I cannot let him be. Would that I were able. I must love him as I must hate the other whom he loves, yet some power hardens his heart against me. Oh! great Shaman, you that peep and mutter, you who can read the future and the past, tell me what you have learned from your stars and divinations."

"Already I have sought through many a secret, toilsome hour and learned this, Atene," he answered. "You are right, the fate of yonder man is intertwined with yours, but between you and him there rises a mighty wall that my vision cannot pierce nor my familiars climb. Yet I am taught that in death you and he—aye, and I also, shall be very near together."

"Then come death," she exclaimed with sullen pride, "for thence at least I'll pluck out my desire."

"Be not so sure," he answered, "for I think that the Power follows us even down this dark gulf of death. I think also that I feel the sleepless eyes of Hes watching our secret souls."

"Then blind them with the dust of illusions—as you can. To-morrow, also, saying nothing of their sex, send a messenger to the Mountain and tell the Hesea that two old strangers have arrived—mark you, *old*—but that they are very sick, that their limbs were broken in the river, and that when they have healed again, I will send them to ask the question of her Oracle—that is, some three moons hence. Perchance she may believe you, and be content to wait; or if she does not, at least no more words. I must sleep or my brain will burst. Give me that medicine which brings dreamless rest, for never did I need it more, who also feel eyes upon me," and she glanced towards the door.

Then I left, and not too soon, for as I crept down the darksome passage, I heard it open behind me.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DEATH-HOUNDS

It may have been ten o'clock on the following morning, or a little past it, when the Shaman Simbri came into my room and asked me how I had slept.

"Like a log," I answered, "like a log. A drugged man could not have rested more soundly."

"Indeed, friend Holly, and yet you look fatigued."

"My dreams troubled me somewhat," I answered. "I suffer from such things. But surely by your face, friend Simbri, you cannot have slept at all, for never yet have I seen you with so weary an air."

"I am weary," he said, with a sigh. "Last night I spent up on my business—watching at the Gates."

"What gates?" I asked. "Those by which we entered this kingdom, for, if so, I would rather watch than travel them."

"The Gates of the Past and of the Future. Yes, those two which you entered, if you will; for did you not travel out of a wondrous Past towards a Future that you cannot *guess*?"

"But both of which interest you," I suggested.

"Perhaps," he answered, then added, "I come to tell you that within an hour you are to start for the city, whither the Khania has but now gone on to make ready for you."

"Yes; only you told me that she had gone some days ago. Well, I am sound again and prepared to march, but say, how is my foster-son?"

"He mends, he mends. But you shall see him for yourself. It is the Khania's will. Here come the slaves bearing your robes, and with them I leave you."

So with their assistance I dressed myself, first in good, clean under-linen, then in wide woollen trousers and vest, and lastly in a fur-lined camel-hair robe dyed black that was very comfortable to wear, and in appearance not unlike a long overcoat. A flat cap of the same material and a pair of boots made of untanned hide completed my attire.

Scarcely was I ready when the yellow-faced servants, with many bows, took me by the hand and led me down the passages and stairs of the Gate-house to its door. Here, to my great joy, I found Leo, looking pale and troubled, but otherwise as well as I could expect after his sickness. He was attired like myself, save that his garments were of a finer quality, and the overcoat was white, with a hood to it, added, I suppose, to protect the wound in his head from cold and the sun. This white dress I thought became him very well, also about it there was nothing grotesque or even remarkable. He sprang to me and seized my hand, asking how I fared and where I had been hidden away, a greeting of which, as I could see, the warmth was not lost upon Simbri, who stood by.

I answered, well enough now that we were together again, and for the rest I would tell him later.

Then they brought us palanquins, carried, each of them, by two ponies, one of which was harnessed ahead and the other behind between long shaft-like poles. In these we seated ourselves, and at a sign from Simbri slaves took the leading ponies by the bridle and we started, leaving behind us that grim old Gate-house through which we were the first strangers to pass for many a generation.

For a mile or more our road ran down a winding, rocky gorge, till suddenly it took a turn, and the country of Kaloon lay stretched before us. At our feet was a river, probably the same with which we had made acquaintance in the gulf, where, fed by the mountain snows, it had its source. Here it flowed rapidly, but on the vast, alluvial lands beneath became a broad and gentle stream that wound its way through the limitless plains till it was lost in the blue of the distance.

To the north, however, this smooth, monotonous expanse was broken by that Mountain which had guided us from afar, the House of Fire. It was a great distance from us, more than a hundred miles, I should say, yet even so a most majestic sight in that clear air. Many leagues from the base of its peak the ground began to rise in brown and rugged hillocks, from which sprang the holy Mountain itself, a white and dazzling point that soared full twenty thousand feet into the heavens.

Yes, and there upon the nether lip of its crater stood the gigantic pillar, surmounted by a yet more gigantic loop of virgin rock, whereof the blackness stood out grimly against the blue of the sky beyond and the blinding snow beneath.

We gazed at it with awe, as well we might, this beacon of our hopes that for aught we knew might also prove their monument, feeling even then that yonder our fate would declare itself. I noted further that all those with us did it reverence by bowing their heads as they caught sight of the peak, and by laying the first finger of the right hand across the first finger of the left, a gesture, as we afterwards discovered, designed to avert its evil influence. Yes, even Simbri bowed, a yielding to inherited superstition of which I should scarcely have suspected him.

"Have you ever journeyed to that Mountain?" asked Leo of him.

Simbri shook his head and answered evasively.

"The people of the Plain do not set foot upon the Mountain. Among its slopes beyond the river which washes them, live hordes of brave and most savage men, with whom we are oftentimes at war; for when they are hungry they raid our cattle and our crops.

Moreover, there, when the Mountain labours, run red streams of molten rock, and now and again hot ashes fall that slay the traveller.”

“Do the ashes ever fall in your country?” asked Leo.

“They have been known to do so when the Spirit of the Mountain is angry, and that is why we fear her.”

“Who is this Spirit?” said Leo eagerly.

“I do not know, lord,” he answered with impatience. “Can men see a spirit?”

“*You* look as though you might, and had, not so long ago,” replied Leo, fixing his gaze on the old man’s waxen face and uneasy eyes. For now their horny calm was gone from the eyes of Simbri, which seemed as though they had beheld some sight that haunted him.

“You do me too much honour, lord,” he replied; “my skill and vision do not reach so far. But see, here is the landing-stage, where boats await us, for the rest of our journey is by water.”

These boats proved to be roomy and comfortable, having flat bows and sterns, since, although sometimes a sail was hoisted, they were designed for towing, not to be rowed with oars. Leo and I entered the largest of them, and to our joy were left alone except for the steersman.

Behind us was another boat, in which were attendants and slaves, and some men who looked like soldiers, for they carried bows and swords. Now the ponies were taken from the palanquins, that were packed away, and ropes of green hide, fastened to iron rings in the prows of the boats, were fixed to the towing tackle with which the animals had been reharnessed. Then we started, the ponies, two arranged tandem fashion to each punt, trotting along a well-made towing path that was furnished with wooden bridges wherever canals or tributary streams entered the main river.

“Thank Heaven,” said Leo, “we are together again at last! Do you remember, Horace, that when we entered the land of Kôr it was thus, in a boat? The tale repeats itself.”

“I can quite believe it,” I answered. “I can believe anything. Leo, I say that we are but gnats meshed in a web, and yonder Khania is the spider and Simbri the Shaman guards the net. But tell me all you remember of what has happened to you, and be quick, for I do not know how long they may leave us alone.”

“Well,” he said, “of course I remember our arrival at that Gate after the lady and the old man had pulled us out of the river, and, Horace, talking of spiders reminds me of hanging at the end of that string of yak’s hide. Not that I need much reminding, for I am not likely to forget it. Do you know I cut the rope because I felt that I was going mad, and wished to die sane. What happened to you? Did you slip?”

“No; I jumped after you. It seemed best to end together, so that we might begin again together.”

“Brave old Horace!” he said affectionately, the tears starting to his grey eyes.

“Well, never mind all that,” I broke in; “you see you were right when you said that we should get through, and we have. Now for your tale.”

“It is interesting, but not very long,” he answered, colouring. “I went to sleep, and when I woke it was to find a beautiful woman leaning over me, and Horace—at first I thought that it was—you know who, and that she kissed me; but perhaps it was all a dream.”

“It was no dream,” I answered. “I saw it.”

“I am sorry to hear it—very sorry. At any rate there was the beautiful woman—the Khania—for I saw her plenty of times afterwards, and talked to her in my best modern Greek—by the way, Ayesha knew the old Greek; that’s curious.”

“She knew several of the ancient tongues, and so did other people. Go on.”

“Well, she nursed me very kindly, but, so far as I know, until last night there was nothing more affectionate, and I had sense enough to refuse to talk about our somewhat eventful past. I pretended not to understand, said that we were explorers, etc., and kept asking her where you were, for I forgot to say I found that you had gone. I think that she grew rather angry with me, for she wanted to know something, and, as you can guess, I wanted to know a good deal. But I could get nothing out of her except that she was the Khania—a person in authority. There was no doubt about that, for when one of those slaves or servants came in and interrupted her while she was trying to draw the facts out of me, she called to some of her people to throw him out of the window, and he only saved himself by going down the stairs very quickly.

“Well, I could make nothing of her, and she could make little of me, though why she should be so tenderly interested in a stranger, I don’t know—unless, unless—oh! who is she, Horace?”

“If you will go on I will tell you what I think presently. One tale at a time.”

“Very good. I got quite well and strong, comparatively speaking, till the climax last night, which upset me again. After that old prophet, Simbri, had brought me my supper, just as I was thinking of going to sleep, the Khania came in alone, dressed like a queen. I can tell you she looked really royal, like a princess in a fairy book, with a crown on, and her chestnut black hair flowing round her.

“Well, Horace, then she began to make love to me in a refined sort of way, or so I thought, looked at me and sighed, saying that we had known each other in the past—very well indeed I gathered—and implying that she wished to continue our friendship. I fenced with her as best I could; but a man feels fairly helpless lying on his back with a very handsome and very imperial-looking lady standing over him and paying him compliments.

“The end of it was that, driven to it by her questions and to stop that sort of thing, I told her that I was looking for my wife, whom I had lost, for, after all, Ayesha is my wife, Horace. She smiled and suggested that I need *not* look far; in short, that the lost wife was already found—in herself, who had come to save me from death in the river. Indeed, she spoke with such conviction that I grew sure that she was not merely amusing herself, and felt very much inclined to believe her, for, after all, Ayesha may be changed now.

“Then while I was at my wits’ end I remembered the lock of hair—all that remains to us of *her*,” and Leo touched his breast. “I drew it out and compared it with the Khania’s, and at the sight of it she became quite different, jealous, I suppose, for it is longer than

hers, and not in the least like.

"Horace, I tell you that the touch of that lock of hair—for she did touch it—appeared to act upon her nature like nitric acid upon sham gold. It turned it black; all the bad in her came out. In her anger her voice sounded coarse; yes, she grew almost vulgar, and, as you know, when Ayesha was in a rage she might be wicked as we understand it, and was certainly terrible, but she was never either coarse or vulgar, any more than lightning is.

"Well, from that moment I was sure that whoever this Khania may be, she had nothing to do with Ayesha; they are so different that they never could have been the same—like the hair. So I lay quiet and let her talk, and coax, and threaten on, until at length she drew herself up and marched from the room, and I heard her lock the door behind her. That's all I have to tell you, and quite enough too, for I don't think that the Khania has done with me, and, to say the truth, I am afraid of her."

"Yes," I said, "quite enough. Now sit still, and don't start or talk loud, for that steersman is probably a spy, and I can feel old Simbri's eyes fixed upon our backs. Don't interrupt either, for our time alone may be short."

Then I set to work and told him everything I knew, while he listened in blank astonishment.

"Great Heavens! what a tale," he exclaimed as I finished. "Now, who is this Hesea who sent the letter from the Mountain? And who, who is the Khania?"

"Who does your instinct tell you that she is, Leo?"

"Amenartas?" he whispered doubtfully. "The woman who wrote the *Sherd*, whom Ayesha said was the Egyptian princess—my wife two thousand years ago? Amenartas re-born?"

I nodded. "I think so. Why not? As I have told you again and again, I have always been certain of one thing, that if we were allowed to see the next act of the piece, we should find Amenartas, or rather the spirit of Amenartas, playing a leading part in it; you will remember I wrote as much in that record.

"If the old Buddhist monk Kou-en could remember *his* past, as thousands of them swear that they do, and be sure of his identity continued from that past, why should not this woman, with so much at stake, helped as she is by the wizardry of the Shaman, her uncle, faintly remember hers?"

"At any rate, Leo, why should she not still be sufficiently under its influence to cause her, without any fault or seeking of her own, to fall madly in love at first sight with a man whom, after all, she has always loved?"

"The argument seems sound enough, Horace, and if so I am sorry for the Khania, who hasn't much choice in the matter—been forced into it, so to speak."

"Yes, but meanwhile your foot is in a trap again. Guard yourself, Leo, guard yourself. I believe that this is a trial sent to you, and doubtless there will be more to follow. But I believe also that it would be better for you to die than to make any mistake."

"I know it well," he answered; "and you need not be afraid. Whatever this Khania may have been to me in the past—if she was anything at all—that story is done with. I seek Ayesha, and Ayesha alone, and Venus herself shall not tempt me from her."

Then we began to speak with hope and fear of that mysterious Hesea who had sent the letter from the Mountain, commanding the Shaman Simbri to meet us: the priestess or spirit whom he declared was "mighty from of old" and had "servants in the earth and air."

Presently the prow of our barge bumped against the bank of the river, and looking round I saw that Simbri had left the boat in which he sat and was preparing to enter ours. This he did, and, placing himself gravely on a seat in front of us, explained that nightfall was coming on, and he wished to give us his company and protection through the dark.

"And to see that we do not give him the slip in it," muttered Leo.

Then the drivers whipped up their ponies, and we went on again.

"Look behind you," said Simbri presently, "and you will see the city where you will sleep to-night."

We turned ourselves, and there, about ten miles away, perceived a flat-roofed town of considerable, though not of very great size. Its position was good, for it was set upon a large island that stood a hundred feet or more above the level of the plain, the river dividing into two branches at the foot of it, and, as we discovered afterwards, uniting again beyond.

The vast mound upon which this city was built had the appearance of being artificial, but very possibly the soil whereof it was formed had been washed up in past ages during times of flood, so that from a mudbank in the centre of the broad river it grew by degrees to its present proportions. With the exception of a columned and towered edifice that crowned the city and seemed to be encircled by gardens, we could see no great buildings in the place.

"How is the city named?" asked Leo of Simbri.

"Kaloön," he answered, "as was all this land even when my fore-fathers, the conquerors, marched across the mountains and took it more than two thousand years ago. They kept the ancient title, but the territory of the Mountain they called Hes, because they said that the loop upon yonder peak was the symbol of a goddess of this name whom their general worshipped."

"Priestesses still live there, do they not?" said Leo, trying in his turn to extract the truth.

"Yes, and priests also. The College of them was established by the conquerors, who subdued all the land. Or rather, it took the place of another College of those who fashioned the Sanctuary and the Temple, whose god was the fire in the Mountain, as it is that of the people of Kaloön to-day."

"Then who is worshipped there now?"

"The goddess Hes, it is said; but we know little of the matter, for between us and the Mountain folk there has been enmity for ages. They kill us and we kill them, for they are jealous of their shrine, which none may visit save by permission, to consult the Oracle and to make prayer or offering in times of calamity, when a Khan dies, or the waters of the river sink and the crops fail, or when ashes fall and earthquakes shake the land, or great sickness comes. Otherwise, unless they attack us, we leave them alone, for though every man

is trained to arms, and can fight if need be, we are a peaceful folk, who cultivate the soil from generation to generation, and thus grow rich. Look round you. Is it not a scene of peace?"

We stood up in the boat and gazed about us at the pastoral prospect. Everywhere appeared herds of cattle feeding upon meadow lands, or troops of mules and horses, or square fields sown with corn and outlined by trees. Village folk, also, clad in long, grey gowns, were labouring on the land, or, their day's toil finished, driving their beasts homewards along roads built upon the banks of the irrigation dykes, towards the hamlets that were placed on rising knolls amidst tall poplar groves.

In its sharp contrast with the arid deserts and fearful mountains amongst which we had wandered for so many years, this country struck us as most charming, and indeed, seen by the red light of the sinking sun on that spring day, even as beautiful with the same kind of beauty which is to be found in Holland. One could understand too that these landowners and peasant-farmers would by choice be men of peace, and what a temptation their wealth must offer to the hungry, half-savage tribes of the mountains.

Also it was easy to guess when the survivors of Alexander's legions under their Egyptian general burst through the iron band of snow-clad hills and saw this sweet country, with its homes, its herds, and its ripening grass, that they must have cried with one voice, "We will march and fight and toil no more. Here we will sit us down to live and die." Thus doubtless they did, taking them wives from among the women of the people of the land which they had conquered—perhaps after a single battle.

Now as the light faded the wreaths of smoke which hung over the distant Fire-mountain began to glow luridly. Redder and more angry did they become while the darkness gathered, till at length they seemed to be charged with pulsing sheets of flame propelled from the womb of the volcano, which threw piercing beams of light through the eye of the giant loop that crowned its brow. Far, far fled those beams, making a bright path across the land, and striking the white crests of the bordering wall of mountains. High in the air ran that path, over the dim roofs of the city of Kaloon, over the river, yes, straight above us, over the mountains, and doubtless—though there we could not follow them—across the desert to that high eminence on its farther side where we had lain bathed in their radiance. It was a wondrous and most impressive sight, one too that filled our companions with fear, for the steersmen in our boats and the drivers on the towing-path groaned aloud and began to utter prayers. "What do they say?" asked Leo of Simbri.

"They say, lord, that the Spirit of the Mountain is angry, and passes down yonder flying light that is called the Road of Hes to work some evil to our land. Therefore they pray her not to destroy them."

"Then does that light not always shine thus?" he asked again.

"Nay, but seldom. Once about three months ago, and now to-night, but before that not for years. Let us pray that it portends no misfortune to Kaloon and its inhabitants."

For some minutes this fearsome illumination continued, then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and there remained of it only the dull glow above the crest of the peak.

Presently the moon rose, a white, shining ball, and by its rays we perceived that we drew near to the city. But there was still something left for us to see before we reached its shelter. While we sat quietly in the boat—for the silence was broken only by the lapping of the still waters against its sides and the occasional splash of the slackened tow-line upon their surface—we heard a distant sound as of a hunt in full cry.

Nearer and nearer it came, its volume swelling every moment, till it was quite close at last. Now echoing from the trodden earth of the towing-path—not that on which our ponies travelled, but the other on the west bank of the river—was heard the beat of the hoofs of a horse galloping furiously. Presently it appeared, a fine, white animal, on the back of which sat a man. It passed us like a flash, but as he went by the man lifted himself and turned his head, so that we saw his face in the moonlight; saw also the agony of fear that was written on it and in his eyes.

He had come out of the darkness. He was gone into the darkness, but after him swelled that awful music. Look! a dog appeared, a huge, red dog, that dropped its foaming muzzle to the ground as it galloped, then lifted it and uttered a deep-throated, bell-like bay. Others followed, and yet others: in all there must have been a hundred of them, every one baying as it took the scent.

"*The death-hounds!*" I muttered, clasping Leo by the arm.

"Yes," he answered, "they are running that poor devil. Here comes the huntsman."

As he spoke there appeared a second figure, splendidly mounted, a cloak streaming from his shoulders, and in his hand a long whip, which he waved. He was big but loosely jointed, and as he passed he turned his face also, and we saw that it was that of a madman. There could be no doubt of it; insanity blazed in those hollow eyes and rang in that savage, screeching laugh.

"The Khan! The Khan!" said Simbri, bowing, and I could see that he was afraid.

Now he too was gone, and after him came his guards. I counted eight of them, all carrying whips, with which they flogged their horses.

"What does this mean, friend Simbri?" I asked, as the sounds grew faint in the distance.

"It means, friend Holly," he answered, "that the Khan does justice in his own fashion—hunting to death one that has angered him."

"What then is his crime? And who is that poor man?"

"He is a great lord of this land, one of the royal kinsmen, and the crime for which he has been condemned is that he told the Khandia he loved her, and offered to make war upon her husband and kill him, if she would promise herself to him in marriage. But she hated the man, as she hates all men, and brought the matter before the Khan. That is all the story."

"Happy is that prince who has so virtuous a wife!" I could not help saying unctuously, but with meaning, and the old wretch of a Shaman turned his head at my words and began to stroke his white beard.

It was but a little while afterwards that once more we heard the baying of the death-hounds. Yes, they were heading straight for us, this time across country. Again the white horse and its rider appeared, utterly exhausted, both of them for the poor beast could scarcely struggle on to the towing-path. As it gained it a great red hound with a black ear gripped its flank and at the touch of the fangs it screamed aloud in terror as only a horse can. The rider sprang from its back and to our horror, ran to the river's edge, thinking evidently to take refuge in our boat. But before ever he reached the water the devilish brutes were upon him. What followed I will not describe, but never shall I forget the scene of those two heaps of worrying wolves, and of the maniac Khan, who yelled in his fiendish joy, and cheered on his death-hounds to finish their red work.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE COURT OF KALOON

Horried, sick at heart, we continued our journey. No wonder that the Khania hated such a mad despot. And this woman was in love with Leo, and this lunatic Khan, her husband, was a victim to jealousy, which he avenged after the very unpleasant fashion that we had witnessed. Truly an agreeable prospect for all of us! Yet, I could not help reflecting, as an object lesson that horrid scene had its advantages.

Now we reached the place where the river forked at the end of the island, and disembarked upon a quay. Here a guard of men commanded by some Household officer, was waiting to receive us. They led us through a gate in the high wall, for the town was fortified, up a narrow, stone-paved street which ran between houses apparently of the usual Central Asian type, and, so far as I could judge by moonlight, with no pretensions to architectural beauty, and not large in size.

Clearly our arrival was expected and excited interest, for people were gathered in knots about the street to watch us pass; also at the windows of the houses and even on their flat roofs. At the top of the long street was a sort of market place, crossing which, accompanied by a curious crowd who made remarks about us that we could not understand, we reached a gate in an inner wall. Here we were challenged, but at a word from Simbri it opened, and we passed through to find ourselves in gardens. Following a road or drive, we came to a large, rambling house or palace, surmounted by high towers and very solidly built of stone in a heavy, bastard Egyptian style.

Beyond its doorway we found ourselves in a courtyard surrounded by a kind of verandah from which short passages led to different rooms. Down one of these passages we were conducted by the officer to an apartment, or rather a suite, consisting of a sitting and two bed-chambers, which were panelled, richly furnished in rather barbaric fashion, and well-lighted with primitive oil lamps.

Here Simbri left us, saying that the officer would wait in the outer room to conduct us to the dining-hall as soon as we were ready. Then we entered the bed-chambers, where we found servants, or slaves, quiet-mannered, obsequious men. These valets changed our foot-gear, and taking off our heavy travelling robes, replaced them with others fashioned like civilized frock-coats, but made of some white material and trimmed with a beautiful ermine fur.

Having dressed us in these they bowed to show that our toilette was finished, and led us to the large outer room where the officer awaited us. He conducted us through several other rooms, all of them spacious and apparently unoccupied, to a great hall lit with many lamps and warmed—for the nights were still cold—with large peat fires. The roof of this hall was flat and supported by thick, stone columns with carved capitals, and its walls were hung with worked tapestries, that gave it an air of considerable comfort.

At the head of the hall on a dais stood a long, narrow table, spread with a cloth and set with platters and cups of silver. Here we waited till butlers with wands appeared through some curtains which they drew. Then came a man beating a silver gong, and after him a dozen or more courtiers, all dressed in white robes like ourselves, followed by perhaps as many ladies, some of them young and good-looking, and for the most part of a fair type, with well-cut features, though others were rather yellow-skinned. They bowed to us and we to them.

Then there was a pause while we studied one another, till a trumpet blew and heralded by footmen in a kind of yellow livery, two figures were seen advancing down the passage beyond the curtains, preceded by the Shaman Simbri and followed by other officers. They were the Khan and the Khania of Kaloon.

No one looking at this Khan as he entered his dining-hall clad in festal white attire would have imagined him to be the same raving human brute whom we had just seen urging on his devilish hounds to tear a fellow-creature and a helpless horse to fragments and devour them. Now he seemed a heavy, loutish man, very strongly built and not ill-looking, but with shifty eyes, evidently a person of dulled intellect, whom one would have thought incapable of keen emotions of any kind. The Khania need not be described. She was as she had been in the chambers of the Gate, only more weary looking; indeed her eyes had a haunted air and it was easy to see that the events of the previous night had left their mark upon her mind. At the sight of us she flushed a little, then beckoned to us to advance, and said to her husband—"My lord, these are the strangers of whom I have told you."

His dull eyes fell upon me first, and my appearance seemed to amuse him vaguely, at any rate he laughed rudely, saying in barbarous Greek mixed with words from the local patois—"What a curious old animal! I have never seen you before, have I?"

"No, great Khan," I answered, "but I have seen you out hunting this night. Did you have good sport?"

Instantly he became wide awake, and answered, rubbing his hands—"Excellent. He gave us a fine run, but my little dogs caught him at last, and then—" and he snapped his powerful jaws together.

"Cease your brutal talk," broke in his wife fiercely, and he slunk away from her and in so doing stumbled against Leo, who was waiting to be presented to him.

The sight of this great, golden-bearded man seemed to astonish him, for he stared at him, then asked—"Are you the Khania's other friend whom she went to see in the mountains of the Gate? Then I could not understand why she took so much trouble, but now I do. Well, be careful, or I shall have to hunt you also."

Now Leo grew angry and was about to reply, but I laid my hand upon his arm and said in English—"Don't answer; the man is mad."

"Bad, you mean," grumbled Leo; "and if he tries to set his cursed dogs on me, I will break his neck."

Then the Khania motioned to Leo to take a seat beside her, placing me upon her other hand, between herself and her uncle, the Guardian, while the Khan shuffled to a chair a little way down the table, where he called two of the prettiest ladies to keep him company.

Such was our introduction to the court of Kaloon. As for the meal that followed, it was very plentiful, but coarse, consisting for the most part of fish, mutton, and sweetmeats, all of them presented upon huge silver platters. Also much strong drink was served, a kind of spirit distilled from grain, of which nearly all present drank more than was good for them. After a few words to me about our journey, the Khania turned to Leo and talked to him for the rest of the evening, while I devoted myself to the old Shaman Simbri.

Put briefly, the substance of what I learned from him then and afterwards was as follows—Trade was unknown to the people of Kaloon, for the reason that all communication with the south had been cut off for ages, the bridges that once existed over the chasm having been allowed to rot away. Their land, which was very large and densely inhabited, was ringed round with unclimbable mountains, except to the north, where stood the great Fire-peak. The slopes of this Peak and an unvisited expanse of country behind that ran up to the confines of a desert, were the home of ferocious mountain tribes, untamable Highlanders, who killed every stranger they caught. Consequently, although the precious and other metals were mined to a certain extent and manufactured into articles of use and ornament, money did not exist among the peoples either of the Plain or of the Mountain, all business being transacted on the principle of barter, and even the revenue collected in kind.

Amongst the tens of thousands of the aborigines of Kaloon dwelt a mere handful of a ruling class, who were said to be—and probably were—descended from the conquerors that appeared in the time of Alexander. Their blood, however, was now much mixed with that of the first inhabitants, who, to judge from their appearance and the yellow hue of their descendants must have belonged to some branch of the great Tartar race. The government, if so it could be called, was, on the whole, of a mild though of a very despotic nature, and vested in an hereditary Khan or Khania, according as a man or a woman might be in the most direct descent.

Of religions there were two, that of the people, who worshipped the Spirit of the Fire Mountain, and that of the rulers, who believed in magic, ghosts and divinations. Even this shadow of a religion, if so it can be called, was dying out, like its followers, for generation by generation, the white lords grew less in number or became absorbed in the bulk of the people.

Still their rule was tolerated. I asked Simbri why, seeing that they were so few. He shrugged his shoulders and answered, because it suited the country of which the natives had no ambition. Moreover, the present Khania, our hostess, was the last of the direct line of rulers, her husband and cousin having less of the blood royal in his veins, and as such the people were attached to her.

Also, as is commonly the case with bold and beautiful women, she was popular among them, especially as she was just and very liberal to the poor. These were many, as the country was over-populated, which accounted for its wonderful state of cultivation. Lastly they trusted to her skill and courage to defend them from the continual attacks of the Mountain tribes who raided their crops and herds. Their one grievance against her was that she had no child to whom the khanship could descend, which meant that after her death, as had happened after that of her father, there would be struggles for the succession.

"Indeed," added Simbri, with meaning, and glancing at Leo, out of the corners of his eyes, "the folk say openly that it would be a good thing if the Khan, who oppresses them and whom they hate, should die, so that the Khania might take another husband while she is still young. Although he is mad, he knows this, and that is why he is so jealous of any lord who looks at her, as, friend Holly, you saw to-night. For should such an one gain her favour, Rassen thinks that it would mean his death."

"Also he may be attached to his wife," I suggested, speaking in a whisper.

"Perhaps so," answered Simbri; "but if so, she loves not him, nor any of these men," and he glanced round the hall.

Certainly they did not look lovable, for by this time most of them were half drunk, while even the women seemed to have taken as much as was good for them. The Khan himself presented a sorry spectacle, for he was leaning back in his chair, shouting something about his hunting, in a thick voice. The arm of one of his pretty companions was round his neck, while the other gave him to drink from a gold cup; some of the contents of which had been spilt down his white robe.

Just then Atene looked round and saw him and an expression of hatred and contempt gathered on her beautiful face.

"See," I heard her say to Leo, "see the companion of my days, and learn what it is to be Khania of Kaloon."

"Then why do you not cleanse your court?" he asked.

"Because, lord, if I did so there would be no court left. Swine will to their mire and these men and women, who live in idleness upon the toil of the humble folk, will to their liquor and vile luxury. Well, the end is near, for it is killing them, and their children are but few; weakly also, for the ancient blood grows thin and stale. But you are weary and would rest. To-morrow we will ride together," and calling to an officer, she bade him conduct us to our rooms.

So we rose, and, accompanied by Simbri, bowed to her and went, she standing and gazing after us, a royal and pathetic figure in the midst of all that dissolute revelry. The Khan rose also, and in his cunning fashion understood something of the meaning of it all.

"You think us gay," he shouted; "and why should we not be who do not know how long we have to live? But you yellow-haired fellow, you must not let Atene look at you like that. I tell you she is my wife, and if you do, I shall certainly have to hunt you."

At this drunken sally the courtiers roared with laughter, but taking Leo by the arm Simbri hurried him from the hall.

"Friend," said Leo, when we were outside, "it seems to me that this Khan of yours threatens my life."

"Have no fear, lord," answered the Guardian; "so long as the Khania does not threaten it you are safe. She is the real ruler of this land, and I stand next to her."

"Then I pray you," said Leo, "keep me out of the way of that drunken man, for, look you, if I am attacked I defend myself."

"And who can blame you?" Simbri replied with one of his slow, mysterious smiles.

Then we parted, and having placed both our beds in one chamber, slept soundly enough, for we were very tired, till we were awakened in the morning by the baying of those horrible death-hounds, being fed, I suppose, in a place nearby.

Now in this city of Kaloon it was our weary destiny to dwell for three long months, one of the most hateful times, perhaps, that we ever passed in all our lives. Indeed, compared to it our endless wanderings amid the Central Asia snows and deserts were but pleasure pilgrimages, and our stay at the monastery beyond the mountains a sojourn in Paradise. To set out its record in full would be both tedious and useless, so I will only tell briefly of our principal adventures.

On the morrow of our arrival the Khania Atene sent us two beautiful white horses of pure and ancient blood, and at noon we mounted them and went out to ride with her accompanied by a guard of soldiers. First she led us to the kennels where the death-hounds were kept, great flagged courts surrounded by iron bars, in which were narrow, locked gates. Never had I seen brutes so large and fierce; the mastiffs of Thibet were but as lap-dogs compared to them. They were red and black, smooth-coated and with a blood-hound head, and the moment they saw us they came ravening and leaping at the bars as an angry wave leaps against a rock.

These hounds were in the charge of men of certain families, who had tended them for generations. They obeyed their keepers and the Khan readily enough, but no stranger might venture near them. Also these brutes were the executioners of the land, for to them all murderers and other criminals were thrown, and with them, as we had seen, the Khan hunted any who had incurred his displeasure. Moreover, they were used for a more innocent purpose, the chasing of certain great bucks which were preserved in woods and swamps of reeds. Thus it came about that they were a terror to the country, since no man knew but what in the end he might be devoured by them. "Going to the dogs" is a term full of meaning in any land, but in Kaloon it had a significance that was terrible.

After we had looked at the hounds, not without a prophetic shudder, we rode round the walls of the town, which were laid out as a kind of boulevard, where the inhabitants walked and took their pleasure in the evenings. On these, however, there was not much to see except the river beneath and the plain beyond, moreover, though they were thick and high there were places in them that must be passed carefully, for, like everything else with which the effete ruling class had to do, they had been allowed to fall into disrepair.

The town itself was an uninteresting place also, for the most part peopled by hangers-on of the Court. So we were not sorry when we crossed the river by a high-pitched bridge, where in days to come I was destined to behold one of the strangest sights ever seen by mortal man, and rode out into the country. Here all was different, for we found ourselves among the husbandmen, who were the descendants of the original owners of the land and lived upon its produce. Every available inch of soil seemed to be cultivated by the aid of a wonderful system of irrigation. Indeed water was lifted to levels where it would not flow naturally, by means of wheels turned with mules, or even in some places carried up by the women, who bore poles on their shoulders to which were balanced buckets.

Leo asked the Khania what happened if there was a bad season. She replied grimly that famine happened, in which thousands of people perished, and that after the famine came pestilence. These famines were periodical, and were it not for them, she added, the people would long ago have been driven to kill each other like hungry rats, since having no outlet and increasing so rapidly, the land, large as it was, could not hold them all.

"Will this be a good year?" I asked.

"It is feared not," she answered, "for the river has not risen well and but few rains have fallen. Also the light that shone last night on the Fire-mountain is thought a bad omen, which means, they say, that the Spirit of the Mountain is angry and that drought will follow. Let us hope they will not say also that this is because strangers have visited the land, bringing with them bad luck."

"If so," said Leo with a laugh, "we shall have to fly to the Mountain to take refuge there."

"Do you then wish to take refuge in death?" she asked darkly. "Of this be sure, my guests, that never while I live shall you be allowed to cross the river which borders the slopes of yonder peak."

"Why not, Khania?"

"Because, my lord Leo—that is your name, is it not?—such is my will, and while I rule here my will is law. Come, let us turn homewards."

That night we did not eat in the great hall, but in the room which adjoined our bed-chambers. We were not left alone, however, for the Khania and her uncle, the Shaman, who always attended her, joined our meal. When we greeted them wondering, she said briefly that it was arranged thus because she refused to expose us to more insults. She added that a festival had begun which would last for a week, and that she did not wish us to see how vile were the ways of her people.

That evening and many others which followed it—we never dined in the central hall again—passed pleasantly enough, for the Khania made Leo tell her of England where he was born, and of the lands that he had visited, their peoples and customs. I spoke also of the history of Alexander, whose general Rassen, her far-off forefather, conquered the country of Kaloon, and of the land of Egypt, whence the latter came, and so it went on till midnight, while Atene listened to us greedily, her eyes fixed always on Leo's face.

Many such nights did we spend thus in the palace of the city of Kaloon where, in fact, we were close prisoners. But oh! the days hung heavy on our hands. If we went into the courtyard or reception rooms of the palace, the lords and their followers gathered round us and pestered us with questions, for, being very idle, they were also very curious.

Also the women, some of whom were fair enough, began to talk to us on this pretext or on that, and did their best to make love to Leo; for, in contrast with their slim, delicate-looking men, they found this deep-chested, yellow-haired stranger to their taste. Indeed they troubled him much with gifts of flowers and messages sent by servants or soldiers, making assignations with him, which of course he did not keep.

If we went out into the streets, matters were as bad, for then the people ceased from their business, such as it was, and followed us about, staring at us till we took refuge again in the palace gardens.

There remained, therefore, only our rides in the country with the Khania, but after three or four of them, these came to an end owing to the jealousy of the Khan, who vowed that if we went out together any more he would follow with the death-hounds. So we must ride alone, if at all, in the centre of a large guard of soldiers sent to see that we did not attempt to escape, and accompanied very

often by a mob of peasants, who with threats and entreaties demanded that we should give back the rain which they said we had taken from them. For now the great drought had begun in earnest.

Thus it came about that at length our only resource was making pretence to fish in the river, where the water was so clear and low that we could catch nothing, watching the while the Fire-mountain, that loomed in the distance mysterious and unreachable, and vainly racking our brains for plans to escape thither, or at least to communicate with its priestess, of whom we could learn no more.

For two great burdens lay upon our souls. The burden of desire to continue our search and to meet with its reward which we were sure that we should pluck amid the snows of yonder peak, if we could but come there; and the burden of approaching catastrophe at the hands of the Khania Atene. She had made no love to Leo since that night in the Gateway, and, indeed, even if she had wished to, this would have been difficult, since I took care that he was never left for one hour alone. No duenna could have clung to a Spanish princess more closely than I did to Leo. Yet I could see well that her passion was no whit abated; that it grew day by day, indeed, as the fire swells in the heart of a volcano, and that soon it must break loose and spread its ruin round. The omen of it was to be read in her words, her gestures, and her tragic eyes.

## CHAPTER X

### IN THE SHAMAN'S CHAMBER

One night Simbri asked us to dine with him in his own apartments in the highest tower of the palace—had we but known it, for us a fateful place indeed, for here the last act of the mighty drama was destined to be fulfilled. So we went, glad enough of any change. When we had eaten Leo grew very thoughtful, then said suddenly—“Friend Simbri, I wish to ask a favour of you—that you will beg the Khania to let us go our ways.”

Instantly the Shaman's cunning old face became like a mask of ivory.

“Surely you had better ask your favours of the lady herself, lord; I do not think that any in reason will be refused to you,” he replied.

“Let us stop fencing,” said Leo, “and consider the facts. It has seemed to me that the Khania Atene is not happy with her husband.”

“Your eyes are very keen, lord, and who shall say that they have deceived you?”

“It has seemed, further,” went on Leo, reddening, “that she has been so good as to look on me with—some undeserved regard.”

“Ah! perhaps you guessed that in the Gate-house yonder, if you have not forgotten what most men would remember.”

“I remember certain things, Simbri, that have to do with her and you.”

The Shaman only stroked his beard and said: “Proceed!”

“There is little to add, Simbri, except that *I* am not minded to bring scandal on the name of the first lady in your land.”

“Nobly said, lord, nobly said, though here they do not trouble much about such things. But how if the matter could be managed without scandal? If, for instance, the Khania chose to take another husband the whole land would rejoice, for she is the last of her royal race.”

“How can she take another husband when she has one living?”

“True; indeed that is a question which I have considered, but the answer to it is that men die. It is the common lot, and the Khan has been drinking very heavily of late.”

“You mean that men can be murdered,” said Leo angrily. “Well, I will have nothing to do with such a crime. Do you understand me?”

As the words passed his lips I heard a rustle and turned my head. Behind us were curtains beyond which the Shaman slept, kept his instruments of divination and worked out his horoscopes. Now they had been drawn, and between them, in her royal array, stood the Khania still as a statue.

“Who was it that spoke of crime?” she asked in a cold voice. “Was it you, my lord Leo?”

Rising from his chair, he faced her and said—“Lady, I am glad that you have heard my words, even if they should vex you.”

“Why should it vex me to learn that there is one honest man in this court who will have naught to do with murder? Nay, I honour you for those words. Know also that no such foul thoughts have come near to me. Yet, Leo Vincey, that which is written—is written.”

“Doubtless, Khania; but what is written?”

“Tell him, Shaman.”

Now Simbri passed behind the curtain and returned thence with a roll from which he read: “The heavens have declared by their signs infallible that before the next new moon, the Khan Rassen will lie dead at the hands of the stranger lord who came to this country from across the mountains.”

“Then the heavens have declared a lie,” said Leo contemptuously.

“That is as you will,” answered Atene; “but so it must befall, not by my hand or those of my servants, but by yours. And then?”

“Why by mine? Why not by Holly's? Yet, if so, then doubtless I shall suffer the punishment of my crime at the hands of his mourning widow,” he replied exasperated.

“You are pleased to mock me, Leo Vincey, well knowing what a husband this man is to me.”

Now I felt that the crisis had come, and so did Leo, for he looked her in the face and said—“Speak on, lady, say all you wish; perhaps it will be better for us both.”

“I obey you, lord. Of the beginning of this fate I know nothing, but I read from the first page that is open to me. It has to do with this present life of mine. Learn, Leo Vincey, that from my childhood onwards you have haunted me. Oh! when first I saw you yonder by the river, your face was not strange to me, for I knew it—I knew it well in dreams. When I was a little maid and slept one day amidst the flowers by the river's brim, it came first to me—ask my uncle here if this be not so, though it is true that your face was younger then. Afterwards again and again I saw it in my sleep and learned to know that you were mine, for the magic of my heart taught me this.

"Then passed the long years while I felt that you were drawing near to me, slowly, very slowly, but ever drawing nearer, wending onward and outward through the peoples of the world; across the hills, across the plains, across the sands, across the snows, on to my side. At length came the end, for one night not three moons ago, whilst this wise man, my uncle, and I sat together here studying the lore that he has taught me and striving to wring its secrets from the past, a vision came to me.

"Look you, I was lost in a charmed sleep which looses the spirit from the body and gives it strength to stray afar and to see those things that have been and that are yet to be. Then I saw you and your companion clinging to a point of broken ice, over the river of the gulf. I do not lie; it is written here upon the scroll. Yes, it was you, the man of my dreams, and no other, and we knew the place and hurried thither and waited by the water, thinking that perhaps beneath it you lay dead.

"Then, while we waited, lo! two tiny figures appeared far above upon the icy tongue that no man may climb, and oh! you know the rest. Spellbound we stood and saw you slip and hang, saw you sever the thin cord and rush downwards, yes, and saw that brave man, Holly, leap headlong after you.

"But mine was the hand that drew you from the torrent, where otherwise you must have drowned, you the love of the long past and of to-day, aye, and of all time. Yes, you and no other, Leo Vincey. It was this spirit that foresaw your danger and this hand which delivered you from death, and—and would you refuse them now—when I, the Khania of Kaloon, proffer them to you?"

So she spoke, and leaned upon the table, looking up into his face with lips that trembled and with appealing eyes.

"Lady," said Leo, "you saved me, and again I thank you, though perhaps it would have been better if you had let me drown. But, forgive me the question, if all this tale be true, why did you marry another man?"

Now she shrank back as though a knife had pricked her.

"Oh! blame me not," she moaned, "it was but policy which bound me to this madman, whom I ever loathed. They urged me to it; yes, even you, Simbri, my uncle, and for that deed accused be your head—urged me, saying that it was necessary to end the war between Rassen's faction and my own. That I was the last of the true race, moreover, which must be carried on; saying also that my dreams and my rememberings were but sick phantasies. So, alas! alas! I yielded, thinking to make my people great."

"And yourself, the greatest of them, if all I hear is true," commented Leo bluntly, for he was determined to end this thing. "Well, I do not blame you, Khania, although now you tell me that I must cut a knot you tied by taking the life of this husband of your own choice, for so forsooth it is decreed by fate, that fate which *you* have shaped. Yes, I must do what you will not do, and kill him. Also your tale of the decree of the heavens and of that vision which led you to the precipice to save us is false. Lady, you met me by the river because the 'mighty' Hesea, the Spirit of the Mountain, so commanded you."

"How know you that?" Atene said, springing up and facing him, while the jaw of old Simbri dropped and the eyelids blinked over his glazed eyes.

"In the same way that I know much else. Lady, it would have been better if you had spoken all the truth."

Now Atene's face went ashen and her cheeks sank in.

"Who told you?" she whispered. "Was it you, Magician?" and she turned upon her uncle like a snake about to strike. "Oh! if so, be sure that I shall learn it, and though we are of one blood and have loved each other, I will pay you back in agony."

"Atene, Atene," Simbri broke in, holding up his claw-like hands, "you know well it was not I."

"Then it was you, you ape-faced wanderer, you messenger of the evil gods? Oh! why did I not kill you at the first? Well, that fault can be remedied."

"Lady," I said blandly, "am I also a magician?"

"Aye," she answered, "I think that you are, and that you have a mistress who dwells in fire."

"Then, Khania," I said, "such servants and such mistresses are ill to meddle with. Say, what answer has the Hesea sent to your report of our coming to this land?"

"Listen," broke in Leo before she could reply. "I go to ask a certain question of the Oracle on yonder mountain peak. With your will or without it I tell you that I go, and afterwards you can settle which is the stronger—the Khania of Kaloon or the Hesea of the House of Fire."

Atene listened and for a while stood silent, perhaps because she had no answer. Then she said with a little laugh—"Is that your will? Well, I think that yonder are none whom you would wish to wed. There is fire and to spare, but no lovely, shameless spirit haunts it to drive men mad with evil longings;" and as though at some secret thought, a spasm of pain crossed her face and caught her breath. Then she went on in the same cold voice—"Wanderers, this land has its secrets, into which no foreigner must pry. I say to you yet again that while I live you set no foot upon that Mountain. Know also, Leo Vincey, I have bared my heart to you, and I have been told in answer that this long quest of yours is not for me, as I was sure in my folly, but, as I think, for some demon wearing the shape of woman, whom you will never find. Now I make no prayer to you; it is not fitting, but you have learned too much.

"Therefore, consider well to-night and before next sundown answer. Having offered, I do not go back, and tomorrow you shall tell me whether you will take me when the time comes, as come it must, and rule this land and be great and happy in my love, or whether, you and your familiar together, you will—die. Choose then between the vengeance of Atene and her love, since I am not minded to be mocked in my own land as a wanton who sought a stranger and was—refused."

Slowly, slowly, in an intense whisper she spoke the words, that fell one by one from her lips like drops of blood from a death wound, and there followed silence. Never shall I forget the scene. There the old wizard watched us through his horny eyes, that blinked like those of some night bird. There stood the imperial woman in her royal robes, with icy rage written on her face and vengeance in her glance. There, facing her, was the great form of Leo, quiet, alert, determined, holding back his doubts and fears with the iron hand of will. And there to the right was I, noting all things and wondering how long I, "the familiar," who had earned Atene's hate, would be left alive upon the earth.

Thus we stood, watching each other, till suddenly I noted that the flame of the lamp above us flickered and felt a draught strike upon my face. Then I looked round, and became aware of another presence. For yonder in the shadow showed the tall form of a man. See! it shambled forward silently, and I saw that its feet were naked. Now it reached the ring of the lamplight and burst into a savage laugh.

It was the Khan.

Atene, his wife, looked up and saw him, and never did I admire that passionate woman's boldness more, who admired little else about her save her beauty, for her face showed neither anger nor fear, but contempt only. And yet she had some cause to be afraid, as she well knew.

"What do you here, Rassen?" she asked, "creeping on me with your naked feet? Get you back to your drink and the ladies of your court."

But he still laughed on, an hyena laugh.

"What have you heard?" she said, "that makes you so merry?"

"What have I heard?" Rassen gurgled out between his screams of hideous glee. "Oho! I have heard the Khania, the last of the true blood, the first in the land, the proud princess who will not let her robes be soiled by those of the 'ladies of the court' and my wife, my wife, who asked me to marry her—mark that, you strangers—because I was her cousin and a rival ruler, and the richest lord in all the land, and thereby she thought she would increase her power—I have heard her offer herself to a nameless wanderer with a great yellow beard, and I have heard him, who hates and would escape from her"—here he screamed with laughter—"refuse her in such a fashion as I would not refuse the lowest woman in the palace.

"I have heard also—but that I always knew—that I am mad; for, strangers, I was made mad by a hate-philtre which that old Rat," and he pointed to Simbri, "gave me in my drink—yes, at my marriage feast. It worked well, for truly there is no one whom I hate more than the Khania Atene. Why, I cannot bear her touch, it makes me sick. I loathe to be in the same room with her; she taints the air; there is a smell of sorceries about her.

"It seems that it takes you thus also, Yellow-beard? Well, if so, ask the old Rat for a love drink; he can mix it, and then you will think her sweet and sound and fair, and spend some few months jollily enough. Man, don't be a fool, the cup that is thrust into your hands looks goodly. Drink, drink deep. You'll never guess the liquor's bad—till to-morrow—though it be mixed with a husband's poisoned blood," and again Rassen screamed in his unholy mirth.

To all these bitter insults, venomed with the sting of truth, Atene listened without a word. Then, she turned to us and bowed.

"My guests," she said, "I pray you pardon me for all I cannot help. You have strayed to a corrupt and evil land, and there stands its crown and flower. Khan Rassen, your doom is written, and I do not hasten it, because once for a little while we were near to each other, though you have been naught to me for this many a year save a snake that haunts my house. Were it otherwise, the next cup you drank should still your madness, and that vile tongue of yours which gives its venom voice. My uncle, come with me. Your hand, for I grow weak with shame and woe."

The old Shaman hobbled forward, but when he came face to face with the Khan he stopped and looked him up and down with his dim eyes. Then he said—"Rassen, I saw you born, the son of an evil woman, and your father none knew but I. The flame flared that night upon the Fire-mountain, and the stars hid their faces, for none of them would own you, no, not even those of the most evil influence. I saw you wed and rise drunken from your marriage feast, your arm about a wanton's neck. I have seen you rule, wasting the land for your cruel pleasure, turning the fertile fields into great parks for your game, leaving those who tilled them to starve upon the road or drown themselves in ditches for very misery. And soon, soon I shall see you die in pain and blood, and then the chain will fall from the neck of this noble lady whom you revile, and another more worthy shall take your place and rear up children to fill your throne, and the land shall have rest again."

Now I listened to these words—and none who did not hear them can guess the fearful bitterness with which they were spoken—expecting every moment that the Khan would draw the short sword at his side and cut the old man down. But he did not; he cowered before him like a dog before some savage master, the weight of whose whip he knows. Yes, answering nothing, he shrank into the corner and cowered there, while Simbri, taking Atene by the hand, went from the room. At its massive, iron-bound door he turned and pointing to the crouching figure with his staff, said—"Khan Rassen, I raised you up, and now I cast you down. Remember me when you lie dying—in blood and pain."

Their footsteps died away, and the Khan crept from his corner, looking about him furtively.

"Have that Rat and the other gone?" he asked of us, wiping his damp brow with his sleeve; and I saw that fear had sobered him and that for awhile the madness had left his eyes.

I answered that they had gone.

"You think me a coward," he went on passionately, "and it is true, I am afraid of him and her—as you, Yellow-beard, will be afraid when your turn comes. I tell you that they sapped my strength and crazed me with their drugged drink, making me the thing I am, for who can war against their wizardries? Look you now. Once I was a prince, the lord of half this land, noble of form and upright of heart, and I loved her accursed beauty as all must love it on whom she turns her eyes. And she turned them on me, she sought *me* in marriage; it was that old Rat who bore her message.

"So I stayed the great war and married the Khania and became the Khan; but better had it been for me if I had crept into her kitchen as a scullion, than into her chamber as a husband. For from the first she hated me, and the more I loved, the more she hated, till at our wedding feast she doctored me with that poison which made me loathe her, and thus divorced us; which made me mad also, eating into my brain like fire."

"If she hated you so sorely, Khan," I asked, "why did she not mix a stronger draught and have done with you?"

"Why? Because of policy, for I ruled half the land. Because it suited her also that I should live on, a thing to mock at, since while I was alive no other husband could be forced upon her by the people. For she is not a woman, she is a witch, who desires to live alone,

or so I thought until to-night”—and he glowered at Leo.

“She knew also that although I must shrink from her, I still love her in my heart, and can still be jealous, and therefore that I should protect her from all men. It was she who set me on that lord whom my dogs tore awhile ago, because he was powerful and sought her favour and would not be denied. But now,” and again he glowered at Leo, “now I know why she has always seemed so cold. It is because there lived a man to melt whose ice she husbanded her fire.”

Then Leo, who all this while had stood silent, stepped forward.

“Listen, Khan,” he said. “Did the ice seem like melting a little while ago?”

“No—unless you lied. But that was only because the fire is not yet hot enough. Wait awhile until it burns up, and melt you must, for who can match his will against Atene?”

“And what if the ice desires to flee the fire? Khan, they said that I should kill you, but I do not seek your blood. You think that I would rob you of your wife, yet I have no such thought towards her. We desire to escape this town of yours, but cannot, because its gates are locked, and we are prisoners, guarded night and day. Hear me, then. You have the power to set us free and to be rid of us.”

The Khan looked at him cunningly. “And if I set you free, whither would you go? You could tumble down yonder gorge, but only the birds can climb its heights.”

“To the Fire-mountain, where we have business.”

Rassen stared at him.

“Is it I who am mad, or are you, who wish to visit the Fire-mountain? Yet that is nothing to me, save that I do not believe you. But if so you might return again and bring others with you. Perchance, having its lady, you wish this land also by right of conquest. It has foes up yonder.”

“It is not so,” answered Leo earnestly. “As one man to another, I tell you it is not so. *I* ask no smile of your wife and no acre of your soil. Be wise and help us to be gone, and live on undisturbed in such fashion as may please you.”

The Khan stood still awhile, swinging his long arms vacantly, till something seemed to come into his mind that moved him to merriment, for he burst into one of his hideous laughs.

“I am thinking,” he said, “what Atene would say if she woke up to find her sweet bird flown. She would search for you and be angry with me.”

“It seems that she cannot be angrier than she is,” I answered. “Give us a night’s start and let her search never so closely, she shall not find us.”

“You forget, Wanderer, that she and her old Rat have arts. Those who knew where to meet you might know where to seek you. And yet, and yet, it would be rare to see her rage. ‘Oh, Yellow-beard, where are you, Yellow-beard?’ he went on, mimicking his wife’s voice. ‘Come back and let me melt your ice, Yellow-beard.’”

Again he laughed; then said suddenly—“When can you be ready?”

“In half an hour,” I answered.

“Good. Go to your chambers and prepare. I will join you there presently.”

So we went.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE HUNT AND THE KILL

We reached our rooms, meeting no one in the passages, and there made our preparations. First we changed our festal robes for those warmer garments in which we had travelled to the city of Kaloon. Then we ate and drank what we could of the victuals which stood in the antechamber, not knowing when we should find more food, and filled two satchels such as these people sling about their shoulders, with the remains of the meat and liquor and a few necessities. Also we strapped our big hunting knives about our middles and armed ourselves with short spears that were made for the stabbing of game.

"Perhaps he has laid a plot to murder us, and we may as well defend ourselves while we can," suggested Leo.

I nodded, for the echoes of the Khan's last laugh still rang in my ears. It was a very evil laugh.

"Likely enough," I said. "I do not trust that insane brute. Still, he wishes to be rid of us."

"Yes, but as he said, live men may return, whereas the dead do not."

"Atene thinks otherwise," I commented.

"And yet she threatened us with death," answered Leo.

"Because her shame and passion make her mad," I replied, after which we were silent.

Presently the door opened, and through it came the Khan, muffled in a great cloak as though to disguise himself.

"Come," he said, "if you are ready." Then, catching sight of the spears we held, he added: "You will not need those things. You do not go a-hunting."

"No," I answered, "but who can say—we might be hunted."

"If you believe that perhaps you had best stay where you are till the Khania wearies of Yellow-beard and opens the gates for you," he replied, eyeing me with his cunning glance.

"I think not," I said, and we started, the Khan leading the way and motioning us to be silent.

We passed through the empty rooms on to the verandah, and from the verandah down into the courtyard, where he whispered to us to keep in the shadow. For the moon shone very clearly that night, so clearly, I remember, that I could see the grass which grew between the joints of the pavement, and the little shadows thrown by each separate blade upon the worn surface of its stones. Now I wondered how we should pass the gate, for there a guard was stationed, which had of late been doubled by order of the Khania. But this gate we left upon our right, taking a path that led into the great walled garden, where Rassen brought us to a door hidden behind a clump of shrubs, which he unlocked with a key he carried.

Now we were outside the palace wall, and our road ran past the kennels. As we went by these, the great, sleepless death-hounds, that wandered to and fro like prowling lions, caught our wind and burst into a sudden chorus of terrific bays. I shivered at the sound, for it was fearful in that silence, also I thought that it would arouse the keepers. But the Khan went to the bars and showed himself, whereon the brutes, which knew him, ceased their noise.

"Fear not," he said as he returned, "the huntsmen know that they are starved to-night, for to-morrow certain criminals will be thrown to them."

Now we had reached the palace gates. Here the Khan bade us hide in an archway and departed. We looked at each other, for the same thought was in both our minds—that he had gone to fetch the murderers who were to make an end of us. But in this we did him wrong, for presently we heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the stones, and he returned leading the two white steeds that Atene had given us.

"I saddled them with my own hands," he whispered. "Who can do more to speed the parting guest? Now mount, hide your faces in your cloaks as I do, and follow me."

So we mounted, and he trotted before us like a running footman, such as the great lords of Kaloon employed when they went about their business or their pleasure. Leaving the main street, he led us through a quarter of the town that had an evil reputation, and down its tortuous by-ways. Here we met a few revellers, while from time to time night-birds flitted from the doorways and, throwing aside their veils, looked at us, but as we made no sign drew back again, thinking that we passed to some assignation. We reached the deserted docks upon the river's edge and came to a little quay, alongside of which a broad ferryboat was fastened.

"You must put your horses into it and row across," Rassen said, "for the bridges are guarded, and without discovering myself I cannot bid the soldiers to let you pass."

So with some little trouble we urged the horses into the boat, where I held them by their bridles while Leo took the oars.

"Now go your ways, accursed wanderers," cried the Khan as he thrust us from the quay, "and pray the Spirit of the Mountain that the old Rat and his pupil—your love, Yellow-beard, your love—are not watching you in their magic glass. For if so we may meet again."

Then as the stream caught us, sweeping the boat out towards the centre of the river, he began to laugh that horrible laugh of his, calling after us—"Ride fast, ride fast for safety, strangers; there is death behind."

Leo put out his strength and backed water, so that the punt hung upon the edge of the stream.

"I think that we should do well to land again and kill that man, for he means mischief," he said.

He spoke in English, but Rassen must have caught the ring of his voice and guessed its meaning with the cunning of the mad. At least he shouted—"Too late, fools," and with a last laugh turned, ran so swiftly up the quay that his cloak flew out upon the air behind him, and vanished into the shadows at its head.

"Row on," I said, and Leo bent himself to the oars.

But the ferry-boat was cumbersome and the current swift, so that we were swept down a long way before we could cross it. At length we reached still water near the further shore, and seeing a landing-place, managed to beach the punt and to drag our horses to the bank. Then leaving the craft to drift, for we had no time to scuttle her, we looked to our girths and bridles, and mounted, heading towards the far column of glowing smoke which showed like a beacon above the summit of the House of Fire.

At first our progress was very slow, for here there seemed to be no path, and we were obliged to pick our way across the fields, and to search for bridges that spanned such of the water-ditches as were too wide for us to jump. More than an hour was spent in this work, till we came to a village wherein none were stirring, and here struck a road which seemed to run towards the mountain, though, as we learned afterwards, it took us very many miles out of our true path. Now for the first time we were able to canter, and pushed on at some speed, though not too fast, for we wished to spare our horses and feared lest they might fall in the uncertain light.

A while before dawn the moon sank behind the Mountain, and the gloom grew so dense that we were forced to stop, which we did, holding the horses by their bridles and allowing them to graze a little on some young corn. Then the sky turned grey, the light faded from the column of smoke that was our guide, the dawn came, blushing red upon the vast snows of the distant peak, and shooting its arrows through the loop above the pillar. We let the horses drink from a channel that watered the corn, and, mounting them, rode onward slowly.

Now with the shadows of the night a weight of fear seemed to be lifted off our hearts and we grew hopeful, aye, almost joyous. That hated city was behind us. Behind us were the Khania with her surging, doom-driven passions and her stormy loveliness, the wizardries of her horny-eyed mentor, so old in years and secret sin, and the madness of that strange being, half-devil, half-martyr, at once cruel and a coward—the Khan, her husband, and his polluted court. In front lay the fire, the snow and the mystery they hid, sought for so many empty years. Now we would solve it or we would die. So we pressed forward joyfully to meet our fate, whatever it might be.

For many hours our road ran deviously through cultivated land, where the peasants at their labour laid down their tools and gathered into knots to watch us pass, and quaint, flat-roofed villages, whence the women snatched up their children and fled at the sight of us. They believed us to be lords from the court who came to work them some harm in person or in property, and their terror told us how the country smarted beneath the rod of the oppressor. By mid-day, although the peak seemed to be but little nearer, the character of the land had changed. Now it sloped gently upwards, and therefore could not be irrigated.

Evidently all this great district was dependent on the fall of timely rains, which had not come that spring. Therefore, although the population was still dense and every rod of the land was under the plough or spade, the crops were failing. It was pitiful to see the green, unearned corn already turning yellow because of the lack of moisture, the beasts searching the starved pastures for food and the poor husbandmen wandering about their fields or striving to hoe the iron soil.

Here the people seemed to know us as the two foreigners whose coming had been noised abroad, and, the fear of famine having made them bold, they shouted at us as we went by to give them back the rain which we had stolen, or so we understood their words. Even the women and the children in the villages prostrated themselves before us, pointing first to the Mountain and then to the hard, blue sky, and crying to us to send them rain. Once, indeed, we were threatened by a mob of peasants armed with spades and reaping-hooks, who seemed inclined to bar our path, so that we were obliged to put our horses to a gallop and pass through them with a rush. As we went forward the country grew ever more arid and its inhabitants more scarce, till we saw no man save a few wandering herds who drove their cattle from place to place in search of provender.

By evening we guessed that we had reached that border tract which was harried by the Mountain tribes, for here strong towers built of stone were dotted about the heaths, doubtless to serve as watch-houses or places of refuge. Whether they were garrisoned by soldiers I do not know, but I doubt it, for we saw none. It seems probable indeed that these forts were relics of days when the land of Kaloon was guarded from attack by rulers of a very different character to that of the present Khan and his immediate predecessors.

At length even the watch-towers were left behind, and by sundown we found ourselves upon a vast uninhabited plain, where we could see no living thing. Now we made up our minds to rest our horses awhile, proposing to push forward again with the moon, for having the wrath of the Khania behind us we did not dare to linger. By this evening doubtless she would have discovered our escape, since before sundown, as she had decreed, Leo must make his choice and give his answer. Then, as we were sure, she would strike swiftly. Perhaps her messengers were already at their work rousing the country to capture us, and her soldiers following on our path.

We unsaddled the horses and let them refresh themselves by rolling on the sandy soil, and graze after a fashion upon the coarse tufts of withering herbage which grew around. There was no water here; but this did not so much matter, for both they and we had drunk at a little muddy pool we found not more than an hour before. We were finishing our meal of the food that we had brought with us, which, indeed, we needed sorely after our sleepless night and long day's journey, when my horse, which was knee-haltered close at hand, lay down to roll again. This it could not do with ease because of the rope about its fore-leg, and I watched its efforts idly, till at length, at the fourth attempt, after hanging for a few seconds upon its back, its legs sticking straight into the air, it fell over slowly towards me as horses do.

"Why are its hoofs so red? Has it cut itself?" asked Leo in an indifferent voice.

As it chanced I also had just noticed this red tinge, and for the first time, since it was most distinct about the animal's frogs, which until it rolled thus I had not seen. So I rose to look at them, thinking that probably the evening light had deceived us, or that we might have passed through some ruddy-coloured mud. Sure enough they *were* red, as though a dye had soaked into the horn and the substance of the frogs. What was more, they gave out a pungent, aromatic smell that was unpleasant, such a smell as might arise from blood mixed with musk and spices.

"It is very strange," I said. "Let us look at your beast, Leo."

So we did, and found that its hoofs had been similarly-treated.

"Perhaps it is a native mixture to preserve the horn," suggested Leo.

I thought awhile, then a terrible idea struck me.

"I don't want to frighten you," I said, "but I think that we had better saddle up and get on."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I believe that villain of a Khan has doctored our horses."

"What for? To make them go lame?"

"No, Leo, to make them leave a strong scent upon dry ground."

He turned pale. "Do you mean—those hounds?"

I nodded. Then wasting no more time in words, we saddled up in frantic haste. Just as I fastened the last strap of my saddle I thought that a faint sound reached my ear.

"Listen," I said. Again it came, and now there was no doubt about it. It was the sound of baying dogs.

"By heaven! the death-hounds," said Leo.

"Yes," I answered quietly enough, for at this crisis my nerves hardened and all fear left me, "our friend the Khan is out a-hunting. That is why he laughed."

"What shall we do?" asked Leo. "Leave the horses?"

I looked at the Peak. Its nearest flanks were miles and miles away.

"Time enough to do that when we are forced. We can never reach that mountain on foot, and after they had run down the horses, they would hunt us by spoor or gaze. No, man, ride as you never rode before."

We sprang to our saddles, but before we gave rein I turned and looked behind me. It will be remembered that we had ridden up a long slope which terminated in a ridge, about three miles away, the border of the great plain whereon we stood. Now the sun had sunk behind that ridge so that although it was still light the plain had fallen into shadow. Therefore, while no distant object could be seen upon the plain, anything crossing the ridge remained visible enough in that clear air, at least to persons of keen sight.

This is what we saw. Over the ridge poured a multitude of little objects, and amongst the last of these galloped a man mounted on a great horse, who led another horse by the bridle.

"All the pack are out," said Leo grimly, "and Rassen has brought a second mount with him. Now I see why he wanted us to leave the spears, and I think," he shouted as we began to gallop, "that before all is done the Shaman may prove himself a true prophet."

Away we sped through the gathering darkness, heading straight for the Peak. While we went I calculated our chances. Our horses, as good as any in the land, were still strong and fresh, for although we had ridden far we had not over-pressed them, and their condition was excellent. But doubtless the death-hounds were fresh also, for, meaning to run us down at night when he thought that he might catch us sleeping, Rassen would have brought them along easily, following us by inquiry among the peasants and only laying them on our spoor after the last village had been left behind.

Also he had two mounts, and for aught we knew—though afterwards this proved not to be the case, for he wished to work his wickedness alone and unseen—he might be followed by attendants with relays. Therefore it would appear that unless we reached some place whither he did not dare to follow, before him—that is the slopes of the Peak many miles away, he must run us down. There remained the chance also that the dogs would tire and refuse to pursue the chase.

This, however, seemed scarcely probable, for they were extraordinarily swift and strong, and so savage that when once they had scented blood, in which doubtless our horses' hoofs were steeped, they would fall dead from exhaustion sooner than abandon the trail. Indeed, both the Khania and Simbri had often told us as much. Another chance—they might lose the scent, but seeing its nature, again this was not probable. Even an English pack will carry the trail of a red herring breast high without a fault for hours, and here was something stronger—a cunning compound of which the tell-tale odour would hold for days. A last chance. If we were forced to abandon our horses, we, their riders, might possibly escape, could we find any place to hide in on that great plain. If not, we should be seen as well as scented, and then—No, the odds were all against us, but so they had often been before; meanwhile we had three miles start, and perhaps help would come to us from the Mountain, some help unforeseen. So we set our teeth and sped away like arrows while the light lasted.

Very soon it failed, and whilst the moon was hidden behind the mountains the night grew dark.

Now the hounds gained on us, for in the gloom, which to them was nothing, we did not dare to ride full speed, fearing lest our horses should stumble and lame themselves, or fall. Then it was for the second time since we had dwelt in this land of Kaloon that of a sudden the fire flamed upon the Peak. When we had seen it before, it had appeared to flash across the heavens in one great lighthouse ray, concentrated through the loop above the pillar, and there this night also the ray ran far above us like a lance of fire. But now that we were nearer to its fount we found ourselves bathed in a soft, mysterious radiance like that of the phosphorescence on a summer sea, reflected downwards perhaps from the clouds and massy rock roof of the column loop and diffused by the snows beneath.

This unearthly glimmer, faint as it was, helped us much, indeed but for it we must have been overtaken, for here the ground was very rough, full of holes also made by burrowing marmots. Thus in our extremity help did come to us from the Mountain, until at length the moon rose, when as quickly as they had appeared the volcanic fires vanished, leaving behind them nothing but the accustomed pillar of dull red smoke.

It is a commonplace to speak of the music of hounds at chase, but often I have wondered how that music sounds in the ears of the deer or the fox fleeing for its life.

Now, when we filled the place of the quarry, it was my destiny to solve this problem, and I assert with confidence that the progeny of earth can produce no more hideous noise. It had come near to us, and in the desolate silence of the night the hellish harmonies of its volume seemed terrific, yet I could discern the separate notes of which it was composed, especially one deep, bell-like bay.

I remembered that I had heard this bay when we sat in the boat upon the river and saw that poor noble done to death for the crime of loving the Khania. As the hunt passed us then I observed that it burst from the throat of the leading hound, a huge brute, red in colour, with a coal-black ear, fangs that gleamed like ivory, and a mouth which resembled a hot oven. I even knew the name of the beast, for afterwards the Khan, whose peculiar joy it was, had pointed it out to me. He called it Master, because no dog in the pack dared fight it, and told me that it could kill an armed man alone.

Now, as its baying warned us, Master was not half a mile away!

The coming of the moonlight enabled us to gallop faster, especially as here the ground was smooth, being covered with a short, dry turf, and for the next two hours we gained upon the pack. Yes, it was only two hours, or perhaps less, but it seemed a score of centuries. The slopes of the Peak were now not more than ten miles ahead, but our horses were giving out at last. They had borne us nobly, poor beasts, though we were no light weights, yet their strength had its limits. The sweat ran from them, their sides panted like bellows, they breathed in gasps, they stumbled and would scarcely answer to the flogging of our spear-shafts. Their gallop sank to a jolting canter, and I thought that soon they must come to a dead stop.

We crossed the brow of a gentle rise, from which the ground, that was sprinkled with bush and rocks, sloped downwards to where, some miles below us, the river ran, bounding the enormous flanks of the Mountain. When we had travelled a little way down this slope we were obliged to turn in order to pass between two heaps of rock, which brought us side on to its brow. And there, crossing it not more than three hundred yards away, we saw the pack. There were fewer of them now; doubtless many had fallen out of the hunt, but many still remained. Moreover, not far behind them rode the Khan, though his second mount was gone, or more probably he was riding it, having galloped the first to a standstill.

Our poor horses saw them also, and the sight lent them wings, for all the while they knew that they were running for their lives. This we could tell from the way they quivered whenever the baying came near to them, not as horses tremble with the pleasureable excitement of the hunt, but in an extremity of terror, as I have often seen them do when a prowling tiger roars close to their camp. On they went as though they were fresh from the stable, nor did they fail again until another four miles or so were covered and the river was but a little way ahead, for we could hear the rush of its waters.

Then slowly but surely the pack overtook us. We passed a clump of bush, but when we had gone a couple of hundred yards or so across the open plain beyond, feeling that the horses were utterly spent, I shouted to Leo—"Ride round back to the bush and hide there." So we did, and scarcely had we reached it and dismounted when the hounds came past. Yes, they went within fifty yards of us, lolling along upon our spoor and running all but mute, for now they were too weary to waste their breath in vain. "Run for it," I said to Leo as soon as they had gone by, "for they will be back on the scent presently," and we set off to the right across the line that the hounds had taken, so as not to cut our own spoor.

About a hundred yards away was a rock, which fortunately we were able to reach before the pack swung round upon the horses' tracks, and therefore they did not view us. Here we stayed until following the loop, they came to the patch of bush and passed behind it. Then we ran forward again as far as we could go. Glancing backwards as we went, I saw our two poor, foundered beasts plunging away across the plain, happily almost in the same line along which we had ridden from the rise. They were utterly done, but freed from our weights and urged on by fear, could still gallop and keep ahead of the dogs, though we knew that this would not be for very long. I saw also that the Khan, guessing what we had done in our despair, was trying to call his hounds off the horses, but as yet without avail, for they would not leave the quarry which they had viewed.

All this came to my sight in a flash, but I remember the picture well. The mighty, snow-clad Peak surmounted by its column of glowing smoke and casting its shadow for mile upon mile across the desert flats; the plain with its isolated rocks and grey bushes; the doomed horses struggling across it with convulsive bounds; the trailing line of great dogs that loped after them, and amongst these, looking small and lonely in that vast place, the figure of the Khan and his horse, of which the black hide was befecked with foam. Then above, the blue and tender sky, where the round moon shone so clearly that in her quiet, level light no detail, even the smallest, could escape the eye.

Now youth and even middle age were far behind me, and although a very strong man for my years, I could not run as I used to do. Also I was most weary, and my limbs were stiff and chafed with long riding, so I made but slow progress, and to worsen matters I struck my left foot against a stone and hurt it much. I implored Leo to go on and leave me, for we thought that if we could once reach the river our scent would be lost in the water; at any rate that it would give us a chance of life. Just then too, I heard the belling bay of the hound Master, and waited for the next. Yes, it was nearer to us. The Khan had made a cast and found our line. Presently we must face the end.

"Go, go!" I said. "I can keep them back for a few minutes and you may escape. It is your quest, not mine. Ayesha awaits you, not me, and I am weary of life. I wish to die and have done with it."

Thus I gasped, not all at once, but in broken words, as I hobbled along clinging to Leo's arm. But he only answered in a low voice—"Be quiet, or they will hear you," and on he went, dragging me with him.

We were quite near the water now, for we could see it gleaming below us, and oh! how I longed for one deep drink. I remember that this was the uppermost desire in my mind, to drink and drink. But the hounds were nearer still to us, so near that we could hear

the pattering of their feet on the dry ground mingled with the thud of the hoofs of the Khan's galloping horse. We had reached some rocks upon a little rise, just where the bank began, when Leo said suddenly—"No use, we can't make it. Stop and let's see the thing through."

So we wheeled round, resting our backs against the rock. There, about a hundred yards off, were the death-hounds, but Heaven be praised! *only three of them*. The rest had followed the flying horses, and doubtless when they caught them at last, which may have been far distant, had stopped to gorge themselves upon them. So they were out of the fight. Only three, and the Khan, a wild figure, who galloped with them; but those three, the black and red brute, Master, and two others almost as fierce and big.

"It might be worse," said Leo. "If you will try to tackle the dogs, I'll do my best with the Khan," and stooping down he rubbed his palms in the grit, for they were wet as water, an example which I followed. Then we gripped the spears in our right hands and the knives in our left, and waited.

The dogs had seen us now and came on, growling and baying fearfully. With a rush they came, and I am not ashamed to own that I felt terribly afraid, for the brutes seemed the size of lions and more fierce. One, it was the smallest of them, outstripped the others, and, leaping up the little rise, sprang straight at my throat.

Why or how I do not know, but on the impulse of the moment I too sprang to meet it, so that its whole weight came upon the point of my spear, which was backed by my weight. The spear entered between its forelegs and such was the shock that I was knocked backwards. But when I regained my feet I saw the dog rolling on the ground before me and gnashing at the spear shaft, which had been twisted from my hand.

The other two had jumped at Leo, but failed to get hold, though one of them tore away a large fragment from his tunic. Foolishly enough, he hurled his spear at it but missed, for the steel passed just under its belly and buried itself deep in the ground. The pair of them did not come on again at once. Perhaps the sight of their dying companion made them pause. At any rate, they stood at a little distance snarling, where, as our spears were gone, they were safe from us.

Now the Khan had ridden up and sat upon his horse glowering at us, and his face was like the face of a devil. I had hoped that he might fear to attack, but the moment I saw his eyes, I knew that this would not be. He was quite mad with hate, jealousy, and the long-drawn excitement of the hunt, and had come to kill or be killed. Sliding from the saddle, he drew his short sword—for either he had lost his spear or had brought none—and made a hissing noise to the two dogs, pointing at me with the sword. I saw them spring and I saw him rush at Leo, and after that who can tell exactly what happened?

My knife went home to the hilt in the body of one dog—and it came to the ground and lay there—for its hindquarters were paralysed, howling, snarling and biting at me. But the other, the fiend called Master, got me by the right arm beneath the elbow, and I felt my bones crack in its mighty jaws, and the agony of it, or so I suppose, caused me to drop the knife, so that I was weaponless. The brute dragged me from the rock and began to shake and worry me, although I kicked it in the stomach with all my strength. I fell to my knees and, as it chanced, my left hand came upon a stone of about the size of a large orange, which I gripped. I gained my feet again and pounded at its skull with the stone, but still it did not leave go, and this was well for me, for its next hold would have been on my throat.

We twisted and tumbled to and fro, man and dog together. At one turn I thought that I saw Leo and the Khan rolling over and over each other upon the ground; at another, that he, the Khan, was sitting against a stone looking at me, and it came into my mind that he must have killed Leo and was watching while the dog worried me to death.

Then just as things began to grow black, something sprang forward and I saw the huge hound lifted from the earth. Its jaws opened, my arm came free and fell against my side. Yes! the brute was whirling round in the air. Leo held it by its hind legs and with all his great strength whirled it round and round.

*Thud!*

He had dashed its head against the rock, and it fell and lay still, a huddled heap of black and red. Oddly enough, I did not faint; I suppose that the pain and the shock to my nerves kept me awake, for I heard Leo say in a matter-of-fact voice between his gasps for breath—"Well, that's over, and I think that I have fulfilled the Shaman's prophecy. Let's look and make sure."

Then he led me with him to one of the rocks, and there, resting supinely against it, sat the Khan, still living but unable to move hand or foot. The madness had quite left his face and he looked at us with melancholy eyes, like the eyes of a sick child.

"You are brave men," he said, slowly, "strong also, to have killed those hounds and broken my back. So it has come about as was foretold by the old Rat. After all, I should have hunted Atene, not you, though now she lives to avenge me, for her own sake, not mine. Yellow-beard, she hunts you too and with deadlier hounds than these, those of her thwarted passions. Forgive me and fly to the Mountain, Yellow-beard, whither I go before you, for there one dwells who is stronger than Atene."

Then his jaw dropped and he was dead.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MESSENGER

"He is gone," I panted, "and the world hasn't lost much."

"Well, it didn't give him much, did it, poor devil, so don't let's speak ill of him," answered Leo, who had thrown himself exhausted to the ground. "Perhaps he was all right before they made him mad. At any rate he had pluck, for I don't want to tackle such another."

"How did you manage it?" I asked.

"Dodged in beneath his sword, closed with him, threw him and smashed him up over that lump of stone. Sheer strength, that's all. A cruel business, but it was his life or mine, and there you are. It's lucky I finished it in time to help you before that oven-mouthed brute tore your throat out. Did you ever see such a dog? It looks as large as a young donkey. Are you much hurt, Horace?"

"Oh, my forearm is chewed to a pulp, but nothing else, I think. Let us get down to the water; if I can't drink soon I shall faint. Also the rest of the pack is somewhere about, fifty or more of them."

"I don't think they will trouble us, they have got the horses, poor beasts. Wait a minute and I will come."

Then he rose, found the Khan's sword, a beautiful and ancient weapon, and with a single cut of its keen edge, killed the second dog that I had wounded, which was still yowling and snarling at us. After this he collected the two spears and my knife, saying that they might be useful, and without trouble caught the Khan's horse, which stood with hanging head close by, so tired that even this desperate fight had not frightened it away.

"Now," he said, "up you go, old fellow. You are not fit to walk any farther;" and with his help I climbed into the saddle.

Then slipping the rein over his arm he led the horse, which walked stiffly, on to the river, that ran within a quarter of a mile of us, though to me, tortured as I was by pain and half delirious with exhaustion, the journey seemed long enough.

Still we came there somehow, and, forgetting my wounds, I tumbled from the horse, threw myself flat and drank and drank, more, I think, than ever I did before. Not in all my life have I tasted anything so delicious as was that long draught of water. When I had satisfied my thirst, I dipped my head and made shift to jerk my wounded arm into it, for its coolness seemed to still the pain. Presently Leo rose, the water running from his face and beard, and said—"What shall we do now? The river seems to be wide, over a hundred yards, and it is low, but there may be deep water in the middle. Shall we try to cross, in which case we might drown, or stop where we are till daylight and take our chance of the death-hounds?"

"I can't go another foot," I murmured faintly, "much less try to ford an unknown river."

Now, about thirty yards from the shore was an island covered with reeds and grasses.

"Perhaps we could reach that," he said. "Come, get on to my back, and we will try."

I obeyed with difficulty, and we set out, he feeling his way with the handle of the spear. The water proved to be quite shallow; indeed, it never came much above his knees, so that we reached the island without trouble. Here Leo laid me down on the soft rushes, and, returning to the mainland, brought over the black horse and the remaining weapons, and having unsaddled the beast, knee-haltered and turned it loose, whereon it immediately lay down, for it was too spent to feed.

Then he set to work to doctor my wounds. Well it proved for me that the sleeve of my garment was so thick, for even through it the flesh of my forearm was torn to ribbons, moreover a bone seemed to be broken. Leo collected a double handful of some soft wet moss and, having washed the arm, wrapped it round with a handkerchief, over which he laid the moss. Then with a second handkerchief and some strips of linen torn from our undergarments he fastened a couple of split reeds to serve as rough splints to the wounded limb. While he was doing this I suppose that I slept or swooned. At any rate, I remember no more.

Sometime during that night Leo had a strange dream, of which he told me the next morning. I suppose that it must have been a dream as certainly I saw or was aware of nothing. Well, he dreamed—I use his own words as nearly as possible—that again he heard those accursed death-hounds in full cry. Nearer and nearer they came, following our spoor to the edge of the river—all the pack that had run down the horses. At the water's brink they halted and were mute. Then suddenly a puff of wind brought the scent of us upon the island to one of them which lifted up its head and uttered a single bay. The rest clustered about it, and all at once they made a dash at the water.

Leo could see and hear everything. He felt that after all our doom was now at hand, and yet, held in the grip of nightmare, if nightmare it were, he was quite unable to stir or even to cry out to wake and warn me.

Now followed the marvel of this vision. Giving tongue as they came, half swimming and half plunging, the hounds drew near to the island where we slept. Then, suddenly Leo saw that we were no longer alone. In front of us, on the brink of the water, stood the figure of a woman clad in some dark garment. He could not describe her face or appearance, for her back was towards him.

All he knew was that she stood there, like a guard, holding some object in her raised hand, and that suddenly the advancing hounds caught sight of her. In an instant it was as though they were paralysed by fear—for their bays turned to fearful howlings. One or two of those that were nearest to the island seemed to lose their footing and be swept away by the stream. The rest struggled back to the bank, and fled wildly like whipped curs.

Then the dark, commanding figure, which in his dream Leo took to be the guardian Spirit of the Mountain, vanished. That it left no footprints behind it I can vouch, for in the morning we looked to see.

When, awakened by the sharp pangs in my arm, I opened my eyes again, the dawn was breaking. A thin mist hung over the river and the island, and through it I could see Leo sleeping heavily at my side and the shape of the black horse, which had risen and was grazing close at hand. I lay still for a while remembering all that we had undergone and wondering that I should live to wake, till presently above the murmuring of the water I heard a sound which terrified me, the sound of voices. I sat up and peered through the reeds, and there upon the bank, looking enormous in the mist, I saw two figures mounted upon horses, those of a woman and a man.

They were pointing to the ground as though they examined spoor in the sand. I heard the man say something about the dogs not daring to enter the territory of the Mountain, a remark which came back to my mind again after Leo had told me his dream. Then I remembered how we were placed.

"Wake!" I whispered to Leo. "Wake, we are pursued."

He sprang to his feet, rubbing his eyes and snatching at a spear. Now those upon the bank saw him, and a sweet voice spoke through the mist, saying—"Lay down that weapon, my guest, for we are not come to harm you."

It was the voice of the Khania Atene, and the man with her was the old Shaman Simbri.

"What shall we do now, Horace?" asked Leo with something like a groan, for in the whole world there were no two people whom he less wished to see.

"Nothing," I answered, "it is for them to play."

"Come to us," called the Khania across the water. "I swear that we mean no harm. Are we not alone?"

"I do not know," answered Leo, "but it seems unlikely. Where we are we stop until we are ready to march again."

Atene spoke to Simbri. What she said we could not hear, for she whispered, but she appeared to be arguing with him and persuading him to some course of which he strongly disapproved. Then suddenly both of them put their horses at the water and rode to us through the shallows. Reaching the island, they dismounted, and we stood staring at each other. The old man seemed very weary in body and oppressed in mind, but the Khania was strong and beautiful as ever, nor had passion and fatigue left any trace upon her inscrutable face. It was she who broke the silence, saying—"You have ridden fast and far since last we met, my guests, and left an evil token to mark the path you took. Yonder among the rocks one lies dead. Say, how came he to his end, who has no wound upon him?"

"By these," answered Leo, stretching out his hands.

"I knew it," she answered, "and I blame you not, for fate decreed that death for him, and now it is fulfilled. Still, there are those to whom you must answer for his blood, and I only can protect you from them."

"Or betray me to them," said Leo. "Khania, what do you seek?"

"That answer which you should have given me this twelve hours gone. Remember, before you speak, that I alone can save your life—aye, and will do it and clothe you with that dead madman's crown and mantle."

"You shall have your answer on yonder Mountain," said Leo, pointing to the peak above us, "where I seek mine."

She paled a little and replied, "To find that it is death, for, as I have told you, the place is guarded by savage folk who know no pity."

"So be it. Then Death is the answer that we seek. Come, Horace, let us go to meet him."

"I swear to you," she broke in, "that there dwells not the woman of your dreams. I am that woman, yes, even I, as you are the man of mine."

"Then, lady, prove it yonder upon the Mountain," Leo answered.

"There dwells there no woman," Atene went on hurriedly, "nothing dwells there. It is the home of fire and—a Voice."

"What voice?"

"The Voice of the Oracle that speaks from the fire. The Voice of a Spirit whom no man has ever seen, or shall see."

"Come, Horace," said Leo, and he moved towards the horse.

"Men," broke in the old Shaman, "would you rush upon your doom? Listen; I have visited yonder haunted place, for it was I who according to custom brought thither the body of the Khan Atene's father for burial, and I warn you to set no foot within its temples."

"Which your mistress said that we should never reach," I commented, but Leo only answered—"We thank you for your warning," and added, "Horace, watch them while I saddle the horse, lest they do us a mischief."

So I took the spear in my uninjured hand and stood ready. But they made no attempt to hurt us, only fell back a little and began to talk in hurried whispers. It was evident to me that they were much perturbed. In a few minutes the horse was saddled and Leo assisted me to mount it. Then he said—"We go to accomplish our fate, whatever it may be, but before we part, Khania, I thank you for the kindness you have shown us, and pray you to be wise and forget that we have ever been. Through no will of mine your husband's blood is on my hands, and that alone must separate us for ever. We are divided by the doors of death and destiny. Go back to your people, and pardon me if most unwillingly I have brought you doubt and trouble. Farewell."

She listened with bowed head, then replied, very sadly—"I thank you for your gentle words, but, Leo Vincey, we do not part thus easily. You have summoned me to the Mountain, and even to the Mountain I shall follow you. Aye, and there I will meet its Spirit, as I have always known I must and as the Shaman here has always known I must. Yes, I will match my strength and magic against hers, as it is decreed that I shall do. To the victor be that crown for which we have warred for ages."

Then suddenly Atene sprang to her saddle, and turning her horse's head rode it back through the water to the shore, followed by old Simbri, who lifted up his crooked hands as though in woe and fear, muttering as he went—"You have entered the forbidden river and now, Atene, the day of decision is upon us all—upon us and her—that predestined day of ruin and of war."

"What do they mean?" asked Leo of me.

"I don't know," I answered; "but I have no doubt we shall find out soon enough and that it will be something unpleasant. Now for this river."

Before we had struggled through it I thought more than once that the day of drowning was upon us also, for in places there were deep rapids which nearly swept us away. But Leo, who waded, leading the Khan's horse by the bridle, felt his path and supported himself with the spear shaft, so that in the end we reached the other bank safely.

Beyond it lay a breadth of marshy lands, that doubtless were overflowed when the torrent was in flood. Through these we pushed our way as fast as we could, for we feared lest the Khania had gone to fetch her escort, which we thought she might have left behind the rise, and would return with it presently to hunt us down. At that time we did not know what we learned afterwards, that with its bordering river the soil of the Mountain was absolutely sacred and, in practice, inviolable. True, it had been invaded by the people of Kaloon in several wars, but on each occasion their army was destroyed or met with terrible disaster. Little wonder then they had come to believe that the House of Fire was under the protection of some unconquerable Spirit.

Leaving the marsh, we reached a bare, rising plain, which led to the first slope of the Mountain three or four miles away. Here we expected every moment to be attacked by the savages of whom we had heard so much, but no living creature did we see. The place was a desert streaked with veins of rock that once had been molten lava. I do not remember much else about it; indeed, the pain in my arm was so sharp that I had no eyes for physical features. At length the rise ended in a bare, broad donga, quite destitute of vegetation, of which the bottom was buried in lava and a debris of rocks washed down by the rain or melting snows from slopes above. This donga was bordered on the farther side by a cliff, perhaps fifty feet in height, in which we could see no opening.

Still we descended the place, that was dark and rugged; pervaded, moreover, by an extraordinary gloom, and as we went perceived that its lava floor was sprinkled over with a multitude of white objects. Soon we came to the first of these and found that it was the skeleton of a human being. Here was a veritable Valley of Dead Bones, thousands upon thousands of them; a gigantic graveyard. It seemed as though some great army had perished here.

Indeed, we found afterwards that this was the case, for on one of those occasions in the far past when the people of Kaloon had attacked the Mountain tribes, they were trapped and slaughtered in this gully, leaving their bones as a warning and a token. Among these sad skeletons we wandered disconsolately, seeking a path up the opposing cliff, and finding none, until at length we came to a halt, not knowing which way to turn. Then it was that we met with our first strange experience on the Mountain.

The gulf and its mouldering relics depressed us, so that for awhile we were silent, and, to tell the truth, somewhat afraid. Yes, even the horse seemed afraid, for it snorted a little, hung its head and shivered. Close by us lay a pile of bones, the remains evidently of a number of wretched creatures that, dead or living, had been hurled down from the cliff above, and on the top of the pile was a little huddled heap, which we took for more bones.

"Unless we can find a way out of this accursed charnel-house before long, I think that we shall add to its company," I said, staring round me.

As the words left my lips it seemed to me that from the corner of my eye I saw the heap on the top of the bones stir. I looked round. Yes, it was stirring. It rose, it stood up, a human figure, apparently that of a woman—but of this I could not be sure—wrapped from head to foot in white and wearing a hanging veil over its face, or rather a mask with cut eye-holes. It advanced towards us while we stared at it, till the horse, catching sight of the thing, shied violently and nearly threw me. When at a distance of about ten paces it paused and beckoned with its hand, that was also swathed in white like the arm of a mummy.

"What the devil are you?" shouted Leo, and his voice echoed drearily among those naked rocks. But the creature did not answer, it only continued to beckon.

Leo walked up to it to assure himself that we were not the victims of some hallucination. As he came it glided back to its heap of bones and stood there like a ghost of one dead arisen from amidst these grinning evidences of death, or rather a swathed corpse, for that is what it resembled. Leo followed with the intention of touching it to assure himself of its reality, whereon it lifted its white-wrapped arm and struck him lightly on the breast. Then as he recoiled it pointed with its hand, first upwards as though to the Peak or the sky, and next at the wall of rock which faced us.

He returned to me saying, "What shall we do?"

"Follow, I suppose. It may be a messenger from above," and I nodded toward the mountain crest.

"From below, more likely," Leo muttered, "for I don't like the look of this guide."

Still he motioned with his hand to the creature to proceed. Apparently it understood, for it turned to the left and began to pick its way amongst the stones and skeletons swiftly and without noise. We followed for several hundred yards till it reached a shallow cleft in the rock. This cleft we had seen already, but as it appeared to end at a depth of about thirty feet, we passed on. The figure entered here and vanished.

"It must be a shadow," said Leo doubtfully.

"Nonsense," I answered, "shadows don't strike one. Go on."

So he led the horse up the cleft, to find that at the end it turned sharply to the right and that the form was standing there awaiting us. Forward it went again and we after it down a little gorge that grew ever gloomier till it terminated in what might have been a cave, or a gallery cut in the rock.

Here our guide came back to us apparently with the intention of taking the horse by the bridle, but at this nearer sight of it the brute snorted and reared up, so that it almost fell backwards upon me. As it found its feet again the figure struck it on the head in the same passionless, inhuman way that it had struck Leo, whereon the horse trembled and burst into a sweat as though with fear, making no further attempt to escape or to disobey. Then it took one side of the bridle in its swathed hand and, Leo clinging to the other, we plunged into the tunnel.

Our position was not pleasant, for we knew not whither we were being led by this horrible conductor, and suspected that it might be to meet our deaths in the darkness. Moreover, I guessed that the path was narrow and bordered by some gulf, for as we went I heard stones fall, apparently to a considerable depth, while the poor horse lifted its feet gingerly and snorted in abject fear. At length we saw daylight, and never was I more glad of its advent, although it showed us that there *was* a gulf on our right, and that the path we travelled could not measure more than ten feet in width.

Now we were out of the tunnel, that evidently had saved us a wide detour, and standing for the first time upon the actual slope of the Mountain, which stretched upwards for a great number of miles till it reached the snow-line above. Here also we saw evidences of human life, for the ground was cultivated in patches and herds of mountain sheep and cattle were visible in the distance.

Presently we entered a gully, following a rough path that led along the edge of a raging torrent. It was a desolate place, half a mile wide or more, having hundreds of fantastic lava boulders strewn about its slopes. Before we had gone a mile I heard a shrill whistle, and suddenly from behind these boulders sprang a number of men, quite fifty of them. All we could note at the time was that they were brawny, savage-looking fellows, for the most part red haired and bearded, although their complexions were rather dark, who wore cloaks of white goat skins and carried spears and shields. I should imagine that they were not unlike the ancient Picts and Scots as they appeared to the invading Romans. At us they came uttering their shrill, whistling cries, evidently with the intention of spearing us on the spot.

"Now for it," said Leo, drawing his sword, for escape was impossible; they were all round us. "Good-bye, Horace."

"Good-bye," I answered rather faintly, understanding what the Khania and the old Shaman had meant when they said that we should be killed before we ascended the first slope of the Mountain.

Meanwhile our ghastly-looking guide had slipped behind a great boulder, and even then it occurred to me that her part in the tragedy being played, she, if it were a woman at all, was withdrawing herself while we met our miserable fate. But here I did her injustice, for she had, I suppose, come to save us from this very fate which without her presence we must most certainly have suffered. When the savages were within a few yards suddenly she appeared on the top of the boulder, looking like a second Witch of Endor, and stretched out her arm. Not a word did she speak, only stretched out her draped arm, but the effect was remarkable and instantaneous.

At the sight of her down on to their faces went those wild men, every one of them, as though a lightning stroke had in an instant swept them out of existence. Then she let her arm fall and beckoned, whereon a great fellow who, I suppose, was the leader of the band, rose and crept towards her with bowed head, submissive as a beaten dog. To him she made signs, pointing to us, pointing to the far-off Peak, crossing and uncrossing her white-wrapped arms, but so far as I could hear, speaking no word. It was evident that the chief understood her, however, for he said something in a guttural language. Then he uttered his shrill whistle, whereon the band rose and departed thence at full speed, this way and the other, so that in another minute they had vanished as quickly as they came.

Now our guide motioned to us to proceed, and led the way upward as calmly as though nothing had happened.

For over *two* hours we went on thus till our path brought us from the ravine on to a grassy declivity, across which it wound its way. Here, to our astonishment, we found a fire burning, and hanging above the fire an earthenware pot, which was on the boil, although we could see no man tending it. The figure signalled to me to dismount, pointing to the pot in token that we were to eat the food which doubtless she had ordered the wild men to prepare for us, and very glad was I to obey her. Provision had been made for the horse also, for near the fire lay a great bundle of green forage.

While Leo off-saddled the beast and spread the provender for it, taking with me a spare earthen vessel that lay ready, I went to the edge of the torrent to drink and steep my wounded arm in its ice-cold stream. This relieved it greatly, though by now I was sure from various symptoms that the brute Master's fangs had fortunately only broken or injured the small bone, a discovery for which I was thankful enough. Having finished attending to it as well as I was able, I filled the jar with water.

On my way back a thought struck me, and going to where our mysterious guide stood still as Lot's wife after she had been turned into a pillar of salt, I offered it to her, hoping that she would unveil her face and drink. Then for the first time she showed some sign of being human, or so I thought, for it seemed to me that she bowed ever so little in acknowledgment of the courtesy. If so—and I may have been mistaken—this was all, for the next instant she turned her back on me to show that it was declined. So she would not, or for aught I knew, could not drink. Neither would she eat, for when Leo tried her afterwards with food she refused it in like fashion.

Meanwhile he had taken the pot off the fire, and as soon as its contents grew cool enough we fell on them eagerly, for we were starving. After we had eaten and drunk, Leo re-dressed my arm as best he could and we rested awhile. Indeed, I think that, being very tired, we began to doze, for I was awakened by a shadow falling on us and looked up to see our corpse-like guide standing close by and pointing first to the sun, then at the horse, as though to show us that we had far to travel. So we saddled up and went on again somewhat refreshed, for at least we were no longer ravenous.

All the rest of that day we journeyed on up the grassy slopes, seeing no man, although occasionally we heard the wild whistle which told us that we were being watched by the Mountain savages. By sundown the character of the country had changed, for the grass was replaced with rocks, amongst which grew stunted firs. We had left the lower slopes and were beginning to climb the Mountain itself.

The sun sank and we went on through the twilight. The twilight died and we went on through the dark, our path lit only by the stars and the faint radiance of the glowing pillar of smoke above the Peak, which was reflected on to us from the mighty mantle of its snows. Forward we toiled, whilst a few paces ahead of us walked our unwearied guide. If she had seemed weird and inhuman before, now she appeared a very ghost, as, clad in her graveyard white, upon which the faint light shimmered, never speaking, never looking back, she glided on noiselessly between the black rocks and the twisted, dark-green firs and junipers.

Soon we lost all count of the road. We turned this way and turned that way, we passed an open patch and through the shadows of a grove, till at length as the moon rose we entered a ravine, and following a path that ran down it, came to a place which is best described as a large amphitheatre cut by the hand of nature out of the rock of the Mountain. Evidently it was chosen as a place of defence, for its entrance was narrow and tortuous, built up at the end also, so that only one person could pass its gateway at a time.

Within an open space and at its farther side stood low, stone houses built against the rock. In front of these houses, the moonlight shining full upon them, were gathered several hundred men and women arranged in a semicircle and in alternate companies, who appeared to be engaged in the celebration of some rite.

It was wild enough. In front of them, and in the exact centre of the semi-circle, stood a gigantic, red-bearded man, who was naked except for a skin girdle about his loins. He was swinging himself backwards and forwards, his hands resting upon his hips, and as he swung, shouting something like "*Ho, haha, ho!*" When he bent towards the audience it bent towards him, and every time he straightened himself it echoed his final shout of "*Ho!*" in a volume of sound that made the precipices ring. Nor was this all, for perched upon his hairy head, with arched back and waving tail, stood a great white cat.

Anything stranger, and indeed more fantastic than the general effect of this scene, lit by the bright moonlight and set in that wild arena, it was never my lot to witness. The red-haired, half-naked men and women, the gigantic priest, the mystical white cat, that, gripping his scalp with its claws, waved its tail and seemed to take a part in the performance; the unholy chant and its volleying chorus, all helped to make it extraordinarily impressive. This struck us the more, perhaps, because at the time we could not in the least guess its significance, though we imagined that it must be preliminary to some sacrifice or offering. It was like the fragment of a nightmare preserved by the awakened senses in all its mad, meaningless reality.

Now round the open space where these savages were celebrating their worship, or whatever it might be, ran a rough stone wall about six feet in height, in which wall was a gateway. Towards this we advanced quite unseen, for upon our side of the wall grew many stunted pines. Through these pines our guide led us, till in the thickest of them, some few yards from the open gateway and a little to the right of it, she motioned to us to stop.

Then she went to a low place in the wall and stood there as though she were considering the scene beyond. It seemed to us, indeed, that she saw what she had not expected and was thereby perplexed or angered. Presently she appeared to make up her mind, for again she motioned to us to remain where we were, enjoining silence upon us by placing her swathed hand upon the mask that hid her face. Next moment she was gone. How she went, or whither, I cannot say; all we knew was that she was no longer there.

"What shall we do now?" whispered Leo to me.

"Stay where we are till she comes back again or something happens," I answered.

So there being nothing else to be done, we stayed, hoping that the horse would not betray us by neighing, or that we might not be otherwise discovered, since we were certain that if so we should be in danger of death. Very soon, however, we forgot the anxieties of our own position in the study of the wild scene before us, which now began to develop a fearful interest.

It would seem that what has been described was but preliminary to the drama itself, and that this drama was the trial of certain people for their lives. This we could guess, for after awhile the incantation ceased and the crowd in front of the big man with the cat upon his head opened out, while behind him a column of smoke rose into the air, as though light had been set to some sunk furnace.

Into the space that had thus been cleared were now led seven persons, whose hands were tied behind them. They were of both sexes and included an old man and a woman with a tall and handsome figure, who appeared to be quite young, scarcely more than a girl indeed. These seven were ranged in a line where they stood, clearly in great fear, for the old man fell upon his knees and one of the women began to sob. Thus they were left awhile, perhaps to allow the fire behind them to burn up, which it soon did with great fierceness, throwing a vivid light upon every detail of the spectacle.

Now all was ready, and a man brought a wooden tray to the red-bearded priest, who was seated on a stool, the white cat upon his knees, whither we had seen it leap from his head a little while before. He took the tray by its handles and at a word from him the cat jumped on to it and sat there. Then amidst the most intense silence he rose and uttered some prayer, apparently to the cat, which sat facing him. This done he turned the tray round so that the creature's back was now towards him, and, advancing to the line of prisoners, began to walk up and down in front of them, which he did several times, at each turn drawing a little nearer.

Holding out the tray, he presented it at the face of the prisoner on the left, whereon the cat rose, arched its back and began to lift its paws up and down. Presently he moved to the next prisoner and held it before him awhile, and so on till he came to the fifth, that young woman of whom I have spoken. Now the cat grew very angry, for in the death-like stillness we could hear it spitting and growling. At length it seemed to lift its paws and strike the girl upon the face, whereon she screamed aloud, a terrible scream. Then all the audience broke out into a shout, a single word, which we understood, for we had heard one very like it used by the people of the Plain. It was "*Witch! Witch! Witch!*"

Executioners who were waiting for the victim to be chosen in this ordeal by cat, rushed forward and seizing the girl began to drag her towards the fire. The prisoner who was standing by her and whom we rightly guessed to be her husband, tried to protect her, but his arms being bound, poor fellow, he could do nothing. One of the executioners knocked him down with a stick. For a moment his wife escaped and threw herself upon him, but the brutes lifted her up again, haling her towards the fire, whilst all the audience shouted wildly.

"I can't stand this," said Leo, "it's murder—coldblooded murder," and he drew his sword.

"Best leave the beasts alone," I answered doubtfully, though my own blood was boiling in my veins.

Whether he heard or not I do not know, for the next thing I saw was Leo rushing through the gate waving the Khan's sword and shouting at the top of his voice. Then I struck my heels into the ribs of the horse and followed after him. In ten seconds we were among them. As we came the savages fell back this way and that, staring at us amazed, for at first I think they took us for apparitions. Thus Leo on foot and I galloping after him, we came to the place.

The executioners and their victim were near the fire now—a very great fire of resinous pine logs built in a pit that measured about eight feet across. Close to it sat the priest upon his stool, watching the scene with a cruel smile, and rewarding the cat with little gobbets of raw meat, that he took from a leathern pouch at his side, occupations in which he was so deeply engaged that he never saw us until we were right on to him.

Shouting, "Leave her alone, you blackguards," Leo rushed at the executioners, and with a single blow of his sword severed the arm of one of them who gripped the woman by the nape of the neck.

With a yell of pain and rage the man sprang back and stood waving the stump towards the people and staring at it wildly. In the confusion that followed I saw the victim slip from the hands of her astonished would-be murderers and run into the darkness, where she vanished. Also I saw the witch-doctor spring up, still holding the tray on which the cat was sitting, and heard him begin to shout a perfect torrent of furious abuse at Leo, who in reply waved his sword and cursed him roundly in English and many other languages.

Then of a sudden the cat upon the tray, infuriated, I suppose, by the noise and the interruption of its meal, sprang straight at Leo's face. He appeared to catch it in mid-air with his left hand and with all his strength dashed it to the ground, where it lay writhing and screeching. Then, as though by an afterthought, he stooped, picked the devilish creature up again and hurled it into the heart of the fire, for he was mad with rage and knew not what he did.

At the sight of that awful sacrilege—for such it was to them who worshipped this beast—a gasp of horror rose from the spectators, followed by a howl of execration. Then like a wave of the sea they rushed at us. I saw Leo cut one man down, and next instant I was off the horse and being dragged towards the furnace. At the edge of it I met Leo in like plight, but fighting furiously, for his strength was great and they were half afraid of him.

"Why couldn't you leave the cat alone?" I shouted at him in idiotic remonstrance, for my brain had gone, and all I knew was that we were about to be thrown into the fiery pit. Already I was over it; I felt the flames singe my hair and saw its red caverns awaiting me, when of a sudden the brutal hands that held me were unloosed and I fell backwards to the ground, where I lay staring upwards.

This was what I saw. Standing in front of the fire, her draped form quivering as though with rage, was our ghostly-looking guide, who pointed with her hand at the gigantic, red-headed witch-doctor. But she was no longer alone, for with her were a score or more of men clad in white robes and armed with swords; black-eyed, ascetic-looking men, with clean-shaved heads and faces, for their scalps shone in the firelight.

At the sight of them terror had seized that multitude which, mad as goaded bulls but a few seconds before, now fled in every direction like sheep frightened by a wolf. The leader of the white-robed priests, a man with a gentle face, which when at rest was clothed in a perpetual smile, was addressing the medicine-man, and I understood something of his talk.

"Dog," he said in effect, speaking in a smooth, measured voice that yet was terrible, "accursed dog, beast-worshipper, what were you about to do to the guests of the mighty Mother of the Mountain? Is it for this that you and your idolatries have been spared so long? Answer, if you have anything to say. Answer quickly, for your time is short."

With a groan of fear the great fellow flung himself upon his knees, not to the head-priest who questioned him, but before the quivering shape of our guide, and to her put up half-articulate prayers for mercy.

"Cease," said the high-priest, "she is the Minister who judges and the Sword that strikes. I am the Ears and the Voice. Speak and tell me—were you about to cast those men, whom you were commanded to receive hospitably, into yonder fire because they saved the victim of your devilries and killed the imp you cherished? Nay, I saw it all. Know that it was but a trap set to catch you, who have been allowed to live too long."

But still the wretch writhed before the draped form and howled for mercy.

"Messenger," said the high-priest, "with thee the power goes. Declare thy decree."

Then our guide lifted her hand slowly and pointed to the fire. At once the man turned ghastly white, groaned and fell back, as I think, quite dead, slain by his own terror.

Now many of the people had fled, but some remained, and to these the priest called in cold tones, bidding them approach. They obeyed, creeping towards him.

"Look," he said, pointing to the man, "look and tremble at the justice of Hes the Mother. Aye, and be sure that as it is with him, so shall it be with every one of you who dares to defy her and to practise sorcery and murder. Lift up that dead dog who was your chief."

Some of them crept forward and did his bidding.

"Now, cast him into the bed which he had made ready for his victims."

Staggering forward to the edge of the flaming pit, they obeyed, and the great body fell with a crash amongst the burning boughs and vanished there.

"Listen, you people," said the priest, "and learn that this man deserved his dreadful doom. Know you why he purposed to kill that woman whom the strangers saved? Because his familiar marked her as a witch, you think. I tell you it was not so. It was because she being fair, he would have taken her from her husband, as he had taken many another, and she refused him. But the Eye saw, the Voice spoke, and the Messenger did judgment. He is caught in his own snare, and so shall you be, every one of you who dares to think evil in his heart or to do it with his hands.

"Such is the just decree of the Hesea, spoken by her from her throne amidst the fires of the Mountain."

## CHAPTER XIII

### BENEATH THE SHADOWING WINGS

One by one the terrified tribesmen crept away. When the last of them were gone the priest advanced to Leo and saluted him by placing his hand upon his forehead.

"Lord," he said, in the same corrupt Grecian dialect which was used by the courtiers of Kaloon, "I will not ask if you are hurt, since from the moment that you entered the sacred river and set foot within this land you and your companion were protected by a power invisible and could not be harmed by man or spirit, however great may have seemed your danger. Yet vile hands have been laid upon you, and this is the command of the Mother whom I serve, that, if you desire it, every one of those men who touched you shall die before your eyes. Say, is that your will?"

"Nay," answered Leo; "they were mad and blind, let no blood be shed for *us*. All we ask of you, friend—but, how are you called?"

"Name me Oros," he answered.

"Friend Oros—a good title for one who dwells upon the Mountain—all we ask is food and shelter, and to be led swiftly into the presence of her whom you name Mother, that Oracle whose wisdom we have travelled far to seek."

He bowed and answered: "The food and shelter are prepared and to-morrow, when you have rested, I am commanded to conduct you whither you desire to be. Follow me, I pray you"; and he preceded us past the fiery pit to a building that stood about fifty yards away against the rock wall of the amphitheatre.

It would seem that it was a guest-house, or at least had been made ready to serve that purpose, as in it lamps were lit and a fire burned, for here the air was cold. The house was divided into two rooms, the second of them a sleeping place, to which he led us through the first.

"Enter," he said, "for you will need to cleanse yourselves, and you"—here he addressed himself to me—"to be treated for that hurt to your arm which you had from the jaws of the great hound."

"How know you that?" I asked.

"It matters not if I do know and have made ready," Oros answered gravely.

This second room was lighted and warmed like the first, moreover, heated water stood in basins of metal and on the beds were laid clean linen garments and dark-coloured hooded robes, lined with rich fur. Also upon a little table were ointments, bandages, and splints, a marvellous thing to see, for it told me that the very nature of my hurt had been divined. But I asked no more questions; I was too weary; moreover, I knew that it would be useless.

Now the priest Oros helped me to remove my tattered robe, and, undoing the rough bandages upon my arm, washed it gently with warm water, in which he mixed some spirit, and examined it with the skill of a trained doctor.

"The fangs rent deep," he said, "and the small bone is broken, but you will take no harm, save for the scars which must remain." Then, having treated the wounds with ointment, he wrapped the limb with such a delicate touch that it scarcely pained me, saying that by the morrow the swelling would have gone down and he would set the bone. This indeed happened.

After it was done he helped me to wash and to clothe myself in the clean garments, and put a sling about my neck to serve as a rest for my arm. Meanwhile Leo had also dressed himself, so that we left the chamber together very different men to the foul, blood-stained wanderers who had entered there. In the outer room we found food prepared for us, of which we ate with a thankful heart and without speaking. Then, blind with weariness, we returned to the other chamber and, having removed our outer garments, flung ourselves upon the beds and were soon plunged in sleep.

At some time in the night I awoke suddenly, at what hour I do not know, as certain people wake, I among them, when their room is entered, even without the slightest noise. Before I opened my eyes I felt that some one was with us in the place. Nor was I mistaken. A little lamp still burned in the chamber, a mere wick floating in oil, and by its light I saw a dim, ghost-like form standing near the door. Indeed I thought almost that it was a ghost, till presently I remembered, and knew it for our corpse-like guide, who appeared to be looking intently at the bed on which Leo lay, or so I thought, for the head was bent in that direction.

At first she was quite still, then she moaned aloud, a low and terrible moan, which seemed to well from the very heart.

So the thing was not dumb, as I had believed. Evidently it could suffer, and express its suffering in a human fashion. Look! it was wringing its padded hands as in an excess of woe. Now it would seem that Leo began to feel its influence also, for he stirred and spoke in his sleep, so low at first that I could only distinguish the tongue he used, which was Arabic. Presently I caught a few words.

"Ayesha," he said, "*Ayesha*."

The figure glided towards him and stopped. He sat up in the bed still fast asleep, for his eyes were shut. He stretched out his arms, as though seeking one whom he would embrace, and spoke again in a low and passionate voice—"Ayesha, through life and death I have sought thee long. Come to me, my goddess, my desired."

The figure glided yet nearer, and I could see that it was trembling, and now its arms were extended also.

At the bedside she halted, and Leo laid himself down again. Now the coverings had fallen back, exposing his breast, where lay the leather satchel he always wore, that which contained the lock of Ayesha's hair. He was fast asleep, and the figure seemed to fix its eyes upon this satchel. Presently it did more, for, with surprising deftness those white-wrapped fingers opened its clasp, yes, and drew out the long tress of shining hair. Long and earnestly she gazed at it, then gently replaced the relic, closed the satchel and for a little while seemed to weep. While she stood thus the dreaming Leo once more stretched out his arms and spoke, saying, in the same passion-laden voice—"Come to me, my darling, my beautiful, my beautiful!"

At those words, with a little muffled scream, like that of a scared night-bird, the figure turned and flitted through the doorway.

When I was quite certain that she had gone, I gasped aloud.

What might this mean, I wondered, in a very agony of bewilderment. This could certainly be no dream: it was real, for I was wide awake. Indeed, what did it all mean? Who was the ghastly, mummy-like thing which had guided us unharmed through such terrible dangers; the Messenger that all men feared, who could strike down a brawny savage with a motion of its hand? Why did it creep into the place thus at dead of night, like a spirit revisiting one beloved? Why did its presence cause me to awake and Leo to dream? Why did it draw out the tress; indeed, how knew it that this tress was hidden there? And why—oh! why, at those tender and passionate words did it flit away at last like some scared bat?

The priest Oros had called our guide Minister, and Sword, that is, one who carries out decrees. But what if they were its own decrees? What if this thing should be she whom we sought, *Ayesha herself*? Why should I tremble at the thought, seeing that if so, our quest was ended, we had achieved? Oh! it must be because about this being there was something terrible, something un-human and appalling. If Ayesha lived within those mummy-cloths, then it was a different Ayesha whom we had known and worshipped. Well could I remember the white-draped form of *She-Who-Must-Be-Obedied*, and how, long before she revealed her glorious face to us, we guessed the beauty and the majesty hidden beneath that veil by which her radiant life and loveliness incarnate could not be disguised.

But what of this creature? I would not pursue the thought. I was mistaken. Doubtless she was what the priest Oros had said—some half-supernatural being to whom certain powers were given, and, doubtless, she had come to spy on us in our rest that she might make report to the giver of those powers.

Comforting myself thus I fell asleep again, for fatigue overcame even such doubts and fears. In the morning, when they were naturally less vivid, I made up my mind that, for various reasons, it would be wisest to say nothing of what I had seen to Leo. Nor, indeed, did I do so until some days had gone by.

When I awoke the full light was pouring into the chamber, and by it I saw the priest Oros standing at my bedside. I sat up and asked him what time it was, to which he answered with a smile, but in a low voice, that it lacked but two hours of mid-day, adding that he had come to set my arm. Now I saw why he spoke low, for Leo was still fast asleep.

"Let him rest on," he said, as he undid the wrappings on my arm, "for he has suffered much, and," he continued significantly, "may still have more to suffer."

"What do you mean, friend Oros?" I asked sharply. "I thought you told us that we were safe upon this Mountain."

"I told you, friend——" and he looked at me.

"Holly is my name——"

"—friend Holly, that your bodies are safe. I said nothing of all the rest of you. Man is more than flesh and blood. He is mind and spirit as well, and these can be injured also."

"Who is there that would injure them?" I asked.

"Friend," he answered, gravely, "you and your companion have come to a haunted land, not as mere wanderers, for then you would be dead ere now, but of set purpose, seeking to lift the veil from mysteries which have been hid for ages. Well, your aim is known and it may chance that it will be achieved. But if this veil is lifted, it may chance also that you will find what shall send your souls shivering to despair and madness. Say, are you not afraid?"

"Somewhat," I answered. "Yet my foster-son and I have seen strange things and lived. We have seen the very Light of Life roll by in majesty; we have been the guests of an Immortal, and watched Death seem to conquer her and leave us untouched. Think you then that we will turn cowards now? Nay, we march on to fulfil our destinies."

At these words Oros showed neither curiosity nor surprise; it was as though I told him only what he knew.

"Good," he replied, smiling, and with a courteous bow of his shaven head, "within an hour you shall march on—to fulfil your destinies. If I have warned you, forgive me, for I was bidden so to do, perhaps to try your mettle. Is it needful that I should repeat this warning to the lord——" and again he looked at me.

"Leo Vincey," I said.

"Leo Vincey, yes, Leo Vincey," he repeated, as though the name were familiar to him but had slipped his mind. "But you have not answered my question. Is it needful that I should repeat the warning?"

"Not in the least; but you can do so if you wish when he awakes."

"Nay, I think with you, that it would be but waste of words, for—forgive the comparison;—what the wolf dares"—and he looked at me—"the tiger does not flee from," and he nodded towards Leo. "There, see how much better are the wounds upon your arm, which is no longer swollen. Now I will bandage it, and within some few weeks the bone will be as sound again as it was before you met the Khan Rassen hunting in the Plains. By the way, you will see him again soon, and his fair wife with him."

"See him again? Do the dead, then, come to life upon this Mountain?"

"Nay, but certain of them are brought hither for burial. It is the privilege of the rulers of Kaloon; also, I think, that the Khania has questions to ask of its Oracle."

"Who is its Oracle?" I asked with eagerness.

"The Oracle," he replied darkly, "is a Voice. It was ever so, was it not?"

"Yes; I have heard that from Atene, but a voice implies a speaker. Is this speaker she whom you name Mother?"

"Perhaps, friend Holly."

"And is this Mother a spirit?"

"It is a point that has been much debated. They told you so in the Plains, did they not? Also the Tribes think it on the Mountain. Indeed, the thing seems reasonable, seeing that all of us who live are flesh and spirit. But you will form your own judgment and then we can discuss the matter. There, your arm is finished. Be careful now not to strike it or to fall, and look, your companion awakes."

Something over an hour later we started upon our upward journey. I was again mounted on the Khan's horse, which having been groomed and fed was somewhat rested, while to Leo a litter had been offered. This he declined, however, saying that he had now recovered and would not be carried like a woman. So he walked by the side of my horse, using his spear as a staff. We passed the fire-pit—now full of dead, white ashes, among which were mixed those of the witch-finder and his horrible cat—preceded by our dumb guide, at the sight of whom, in her pale wrappings, the people of the tribe who had returned to their village prostrated themselves, and so remained until she was gone by.

One of them, however, rose again and, breaking through our escort of priests, ran to Leo, knelt before him and kissed his hand. It was that young woman whose life he had saved, a noble-looking girl, with masses of red hair, and by her was her husband, the marks of his bonds still showing on his arms. Our guide seemed to see this incident, though how she did so I do not know. At any rate she turned and made some sign which the priest interpreted.

Calling the woman to him he asked her sternly how she dared to touch the person of this stranger with her vile lips. She answered that it was because her heart was grateful. Oros said that for this reason she was forgiven; moreover, that in reward for what they had suffered he was commanded to lift up her husband to be the ruler of that tribe during the pleasure of the Mother. He gave notice, moreover, that all should obey the new chief in his place, according to their customs, and if he did any evil, make report that he might suffer punishment. Then waving the pair aside, without listening to their thanks or the acclamations of the crowd, he passed on.

As we went down the ravine by which we had approached the village on the previous night, a sound of chanting struck our ears. Presently the path turned, and we saw a solemn procession advancing up that dismal, sunless gorge. At the head of it rode none other than the beautiful Khania, followed by her great-uncle, the old Shaman, and after these came a company of shaven priests in their white robes, bearing between them a bier, upon which, its face uncovered, lay the body of the Khan, draped in a black garment. Yet he looked better thus than he had ever done, for now death had touched this insane and dissolute man with something of the dignity which he lacked in life.

Thus then we met. At the sight of our guide's white form, the horse which the Khania rode reared up so violently that I thought it would have thrown her. But she mastered the animal with her whip and voice, and called out—"Who is this draped hag of the Mountain that stops the path of the Khania Atene and her dead lord? My guests, I find you in ill company, for it seems that you are conducted by an evil spirit to meet an evil fate. That guide of yours must surely be something hateful and hideous, for were she a wholesome woman she would not fear to show her face."

Now the Shaman plucked his mistress by the sleeve, and the priest Oros, bowing to her, prayed her to be silent and cease to speak such ill-omened words into the air, which might carry them she knew not whither. But some instinctive hate seemed to bubble up in Atene, and she would not be silent, for she addressed our guide using the direct "thou," a manner of speech that we found was very usual on the Mountain though rare upon the Plains.

"Let the air carry them whither it will," she cried. "Sorceress, strip off thy rags, fit only for a corpse too vile to view. Show us what thou art, thou flitting night-owl, who thinkest to frighten me with that livery of death, which only serves to hide the death within."

"Cease, I pray lady, cease," said Oros, stirred for once out of his imperturbable calm. "She is the Minister, none other, and with her goes the Power."

"Then it goes not against Atene, Khania of Kaloon," she answered, "or so I think. Power, forsooth! Let her show her power. If she has any it is not her own, but that of the Witch of the Mountain, who feigns to be a spirit, and by her sorceries has drawn away my guests"—and she pointed to us—"thus bringing my husband to his death."

"Niece, be silent!" said the old Shaman, whose wrinkled face was white with terror, whilst Oros held up his hands as though in supplication to some unseen Strength, saying—"O thou that hearest and seest, be merciful, I beseech thee, and forgive this woman her madness, lest the blood of a guest should stain the hands of thy servants, and the ancient honour of our worship be brought low in the eyes of men."

Thus he prayed, but although his hands were uplifted, it seemed to me that his eyes were fixed upon our guide, as ours were. While he spoke, I saw her hand raised, as she had raised it when she slew or rather sentenced the witch-doctor. Then she seemed to reflect, and stayed it in mid air, so that it pointed at the Khania. She did not move, she made no sound, only she pointed, and the angry words died upon Atene's lips, the fury left her eyes, and the colour her face. Yes, she grew white and silent as the corpse upon the bier behind her. Then, cowed by that invisible power, she struck her horse so fiercely that it bounded by us onward towards the village, at which the funeral company were to rest awhile.

As the Shaman Simbri followed the Khania, the priest Oros caught his horse's bridle and said to him—"Magician, we have met before, for instance, when your lady's father was brought to his funeral. Warn her, then, you that know something of the truth and of her power to speak more gently of the ruler of this land. Say to her, from me, that had she not been the ambassadress of death, and, therefore, inviolate, surely ere now she would have shared her husband's bier. Farewell, tomorrow we will speak again," and, loosing the Shaman's bridle, Oros passed on.

Soon we had left the melancholy procession behind us and, issuing from the gorge, turned up the Mountain slope towards the edge of the bright snows that lay not far above. It was as we came out of this darksome valley, where the overhanging pine trees almost eclipsed the light, that suddenly we missed our guide.

"Has she gone back to—to reason with the Khania?" I asked of Oros.

"Nay!" he answered, with a slight smile, "I think that she has gone forward to give warning that the Hesea's guests draw near."

"Indeed," I answered, staring hard at the bare slope of mountain, up which not a mouse could have passed without being seen. "I understand—she has gone forward," and the matter dropped. But what I did *not* understand was—how she had gone. As the Mountain was honeycombed with caves and galleries, I suppose, however, that she entered one of them.

All the rest of that day we marched upwards, gradually drawing nearer to the snow-line, as we went gathering what information we could from the priest Oros. This was the sum of it—From the beginning of the world, as he expressed it, that is, from thousands and thousands of years ago, this Mountain had been the home of a peculiar fire-worship, of which the head heirophant was a woman. About twenty centuries before, however, the invading general named Rassen, had made himself Khan of Kaloon. Rassen established a new priestess on the Mountain, a worshipper of the Egyptian goddess, Hes, or Isis. This priestess had introduced certain modifications in the ancient doctrines, superseding the cult of fire, pure and simple, by a new faith, which, while holding to some of the old ceremonies, revered as its head the Spirit of Life or Nature, of whom they looked upon their priestess as the earthly representative.

Of this priestess Oros would only tell us that she was "ever present," although we gathered that when one priestess died or was "taken to the fire," as he put it, her child, whether in fact or by adoption, succeeded her and was known by the same names, those of "Hes" or the "Hesea" and "Mother." We asked if we should see this Mother, to which he answered that she manifested herself very rarely. As to her appearance and attributes he would say nothing, except that the former changed from time to time and that when she chose to use it she had "all power."

The priests of her College, he informed us, numbered three hundred, never more nor less, and there were also three hundred priestesses. Certain of those who desired it were allowed to marry, and from among their children were reared up the new generation of priests and priestesses. Thus they were a people apart from all others, with distinct racial characteristics. This, indeed, was evident, for our escort were all exceedingly like to each other, very handsome and refined in appearance, with dark eyes, clean-cut features and olive-hued skins; such a people as might well have descended from Easterns of high blood, with a dash of that of the Egyptians and Greeks thrown in.

We asked him whether the mighty looped pillar that towered from the topmost cup of the Mountain was the work of men. He answered, No; the hand of Nature had fashioned it, and that the light shining through it came from the fires which burned in the crater of the volcano. The first priestess, having recognized in this gigantic column the familiar Symbol of Life of the Egyptian worship, established her altars beneath its shadow.

For the rest, the Mountain with its mighty slopes and borderlands was peopled by a multitude of half-savage folk, who accepted the rule of the Hesea, bringing her tribute of all things necessary, such as food and metals. Much of the meat and grain however the priests raised themselves on sheltered farms, and the metals they worked with their own hands. This rule, however, was of a moral nature, since for centuries the College had sought no conquests and the Mother contented herself with punishing crime in some such fashion as we had seen. For the petty wars between the Tribes and the people of the Plain they were not responsible, and those chiefs who carried them on were deposed, unless they had themselves been attacked. All the Tribes, however, were sworn to the defence of the Hesea and the College, and, however much they might quarrel amongst themselves, if need arose, were ready to die for her to the last man. That war must one day break out again between the priests of the Mountain and the people of Kaloon was recognized; therefore they endeavoured to be prepared for that great and final struggle.

Such was the gist of his history, which, as we learned afterwards, proved to be true in every particular.

Towards sundown we came to a vast cup extending over many thousand acres, situated beneath the snow-line of the peak and filled with rich soil washed down, I suppose, from above. So sheltered was the place by its configuration and the over-hanging mountain that, facing south-west as it did, notwithstanding its altitude it produced corn and other temperate crops in abundance. Here the College had its farms, and very well cultivated these seemed to be. This great cup, which could not be seen from below, we entered through a kind of natural gateway, that might be easily defended against a host.

There were other peculiarities, but it is not necessary to describe them further than to say that I think the soil benefited by the natural heat of the volcano, and that when this erupted, as happened occasionally, the lava streams always passed to the north and south of the cup of land. Indeed, it was these lava streams that had built up the protecting cliffs.

Crossing the garden-like lands, we came to a small town beautifully built of lava rock. Here dwelt the priests, except those who were on duty, no man of the Tribes or other stranger being allowed to set foot within the place.

Following the main street of this town, we arrived at the face of the precipice beyond, and found ourselves in front of a vast archway, closed with massive iron gates fantastically wrought. Here, taking my horse with them, our escort left us alone with Oros. As we drew near the great gates swung back upon their hinges. We passed them—with what sensations I cannot describe—and groped our way down a short corridor which ended in tall, iron-covered doors. These also rolled open at our approach, and next instant we staggered back amazed and half-blinded by the intense blaze of light within.

Imagine, you who read, the nave of the vastest cathedral with which you are acquainted. Then double or treble its size, and you will have some conception of that temple in which we found ourselves. Perhaps in the beginning it had been a cave, who can say? but now its sheer walls, its multitudinous columns springing to the arched roof far above us, had all been worked on and fashioned by the labour of men long dead; doubtless the old fire-worshippers of thousands of years ago.

You will wonder how so great a place was lighted, but I think that never would you guess. Thus—by twisted columns of living flame! I counted eighteen of them, but there may have been others. They sprang from the floor at regular intervals along the lines of what in a cathedral would be the aisles. Right to the roof they sprang, of even height and girth, so fierce was the force of the natural gas that drove them, and there were lost, I suppose, through chimneys bored in the thickness of the rock. Nor did they give off smell or smoke, or in that great, cold place, any heat which could be noticed, only an intense white light like that of molten iron, and a sharp hissing noise as of a million angry snakes.

The huge temple was utterly deserted, and, save for this sybilant, pervading sound, utterly silent; an awesome, an overpowering place.

“Do these candles of yours ever go out?” asked Leo of Oros, placing his hand before his dazzled eyes.

“How can they,” replied the priest, in his smooth, matter-of-fact voice, “seeing that they rise from the eternal fire which the builders of this hall worshipped? Thus they have burned from the beginning, and thus they will burn for ever, though, if we wish it, we can shut off their light.<sup>[4]</sup> Be pleased to follow me: you will see greater things.”

<sup>[4]</sup> This, as I ascertained afterwards, was done by thrusting a broad stone of great thickness over the apertures through which the gas or fire rushed and thus cutting off the air. These stones were worked to and fro by means of pulleys connected with iron rods.—L. H. H.

So in awed silence we followed, and, oh! how small and miserable we three human beings looked alone in that vast temple illuminated by this lightning radiance. We reached the end of it at length, only to find that to right and left ran transepts on a like gigantic scale and lit in the same amazing fashion. Here Oros bade us halt, and we waited a little while, till presently, from either transept arose a sound of chanting, and we perceived two white-robed processions advancing towards us from their depths.

On they came, very slowly, and we saw that the procession to the right was a company of priests, and that to the left a company of priestesses, a hundred or so of them in all.

Now the men ranged themselves in front of us, while the women ranged themselves behind, and at a signal from Oros, all of them still chanting some wild and thrilling hymn, once more we started forward, this time along a narrow gallery closed at the end with double wooden doors. As our procession reached these they opened, and before us lay the crowning wonder of this marvellous fane, a vast, ellipse-shaped apse. Now we understood. The plan of the temple was the plan of the looped pillar which stood upon the brow of the Peak, and as we rightly guessed, its dimensions were the same.

At intervals around this ellipse the fiery columns flared, but otherwise the place was empty.

No, not quite, for at the head of the apse, almost between two of the flame columns, stood a plain, square altar of the size of a small room, in front of which, as we saw when we drew nearer, were hung curtains of woven silver thread. On this altar was placed a large statue of silver, that, backed as it was by the black rock, seemed to concentrate and reflect from its burnished surface the intense light of the two blazing pillars.

It was a lovely thing, but to describe it is hard indeed. The figure, which was winged, represented a draped woman of mature years, and pure but gracious form, half hidden by the forward-bending wings. Sheltered by these, yet shown between them, appeared the image of a male child, clasped to its bearer's breast with her left arm, while the right was raised toward the sky. A study of Motherhood, evidently, but how shall I write of all that was conveyed by those graven faces?

To begin with the child. It was that of a sturdy boy, full of health and the joy of life. Yet he had been sleeping, and in his sleep some terror had over-shadowed him with the dark shades of death and evil. There was fear in the lines of his sweet mouth and on the lips and cheeks, that seemed to quiver. He had thrown his little arm about his mother's neck, and, pressing close against her breast, looked up to her for safety, his right hand and outstretched finger pointing downwards and behind him, as though to indicate whence the danger came. Yet it was passing, already half-forgotten, for the upturned eyes expressed confidence renewed, peace of soul attained.

And the mother. She did not seem to mock or chide his fears, for her lovely face was anxious and alert. Yet upon it breathed a very atmosphere of unchanging tenderness and power invincible; care for the helpless, strength to shelter it from every harm. The great, calm eyes told their story, the parted lips were whispering some tale of hope, sure and immortal; the raised hand revealed whence that hope arose. All love seemed to be concentrated in the brooding figure, so human, yet so celestial; all heaven seemed to lie an open path before those quivering wings. And see, the arching instep, the upward-springing foot, suggested that thither those wings were bound, bearing their God-given burden far from the horror of the earth, deep into the bosom of a changeless rest above.

The statue was only that of an affrighted child in its mother's arms; its interpretation made clear even to the dumbest by the simple symbolism of some genius—Humanity saved by the Divine.

While we gazed at its enchanting beauty, the priests and priestesses, filing away to right and left, arranged themselves alternately, first a man and then a woman, within the ring of the columns of fire that burned around the loop-shaped shrine. So great was its circumference that the whole hundred of them must stand wide apart one from another, and, to our sight, resembled little lonely children clad in gleaming garments, while their chant of worship reached us only like echoes thrown from a far precipice. In short, the effect of this holy shrine and its occupants was superb yet overwhelming, at least I know that it filled me with a feeling akin to fear.

Oros waited till the last priest had reached his appointed place. Then he turned and said, in his gentle, reverent tones—“Draw nigh, now, O Wanderers well-beloved, and give greeting to the Mother,” and he pointed towards the statue.

“Where is she?” asked Leo, in a whisper, for here we scarcely dared to speak aloud. “I see no one.”

“The Hesea dwells yonder,” he answered, and, taking each of us by the hand, he led us forward across the great emptiness of the apse to the altar at its head.

As we drew near the distant chant of the priests gathered in volume, assuming a glad, triumphant note, and it seemed to me—though this, perhaps was fancy—that the light from the twisted columns of flame grew even brighter.

At length we were there, and, Oros, loosing our hands, prostrated himself thrice before the altar. Then he rose again, and, falling behind us, stood in silence with bent head and folded fingers. We stood silent also, our hearts filled with mingled hope and fear like a cup with wine.

Were our labours ended? Had we found her whom we sought, or were we, perchance, but enmeshed in the web of some marvellous mummery and about to make acquaintance with the secret of another new and mystical worship? For years and years we had searched, enduring every hardness of flesh and spirit that man can suffer, and now we were to learn whether we had endured in vain.

Yes, and Leo would learn if the promise was to be fulfilled to him, or whether she whom he adored had become but a departed dream to be sought for only beyond the gate of Death. Little wonder that he trembled and turned white in the agony of that great suspense.

Long, long was the time. Hours, years, ages, aeons, seemed to flow over us as we stood there before glittering silver curtains that hid the front of the black altar beneath the mystery of the sphinx-like face of the glorious image which was its guardian, clothed with that frozen smile of eternal love and pity. All the past went before us as we struggled in those dark waters of our doubt. Item by item, event by event, we rehearsed the story which began in the Caves of Kôr, for our thoughts, so long attuned, were open to each other and flashed from soul to soul.

Oh! now we knew, they were open also to *another* soul. We could see nothing save the Altar and the Effigy, we could only hear the slow chant of the priests and priestesses and the snake-like hiss of the rushing fires. Yet we knew that our hearts were as an open book to One who watched beneath the Mother's shadowing wings.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE COURT OF DEATH

Now the curtains were open. Before us appeared a chamber hollowed from the thickness of the altar, and in its centre a throne, and on the throne a figure clad in waves of billowy white flowing from the head over the arms of the throne down to its marble steps. We could see no more in the comparative darkness of that place, save that beneath the folds of the drapery the Oracle held in its hand a loop-shaped, jewelled sceptre.

Moved by some impulse, we did as Oros had done, prostrating ourselves, and there remained upon our knees. At length we heard a tinkling as of little bells, and, looking up, saw that the sistrum-shaped sceptre was stretched towards us by the draped arm which held it. Then a thin, clear voice spoke, and I thought that it trembled a little. It spoke in Greek, but in a much purer Greek than all these people used.

"I greet you, Wanderers, who have journeyed so far to visit this most ancient shrine, and although doubtless of some other faith, are not ashamed to do reverence to that unworthy one who is for this time its Oracle and the guardian of its mysteries. Rise now and have no fear of me; for have I not sent my Messenger and servants to conduct you to this Sanctuary?"

Slowly we rose, and stood silent, not knowing what to say.

"I greet you, Wanderers," the voice repeated. "Tell me thou"—and the sceptre pointed towards Leo—"how art thou named?"

"I am named Leo Vincey," he answered.

"Leo Vincey! I like the name, which to me well befits a man so goodly. And thou, the companion of—Leo Vincey?"

"I am named Horace Holly."

"So. Then tell me, Leo Vincey and Horace Holly, what came ye so far to seek?"

We looked at each other, and I said—"The tale is long and strange. O—but by what title must we address thee?"

"By the name which I bear here, Hes."

"O Hes," I said, wondering what name she bore elsewhere.

"Yet I desire to hear that tale," she went on, and to me her voice sounded eager. "Nay, not all to-night, for I know that you both are weary; a little of it only. In sooth, Strangers, there is a sameness in this home of contemplations, and no heart can feed only on the past, if such a thing there be. Therefore I welcome a new history from the world without. Tell it me, thou, Leo, as briefly as thou wilt, so that thou tell the truth, for in the Presence of which I am a Minister, may nothing else be uttered."

"Priestess," he said, in his curt fashion, "I obey. Many years ago when I was young, my friend and foster-father and I, led by records of the past, travelled to a wild land, and there found a certain divine woman who had conquered time."

"Then that woman must have been both aged and hideous."

"I said, Priestess, that she had conquered time, not suffered it, for the gift of immortal youth was hers. Also she was not hideous; she was beauty itself."

"Therefore stranger, thou didst worship her for her beauty's sake, as a man does."

"I did not worship her; I loved her, which is another thing. The priest Oros here worships thee, whom he calls Mother. I loved that immortal woman."

"Then thou shouldst love her still. Yet, not so, since love is very mortal."

"I love her still," he answered, "although she died."

"Why, how is that? Thou saidst she was immortal."

"Perchance she only seemed to die; perchance she changed. At least I lost her, and what I lost I seek, and have sought this many a year."

"Why dost thou seek her in my Mountain, Leo Vincey?"

"Because a vision led me to ask counsel of its Oracle. I am come hither to learn tidings of my lost love, since here alone these may be found."

"And thou, Holly, didst thou also love an immortal woman whose immortality, it seems, must bow to death?"

"Priestess," I answered, "I am sworn to this quest, and where my foster-son goes I follow. He follows beauty that is dead——"

"And thou dost follow him. Therefore both of you follow beauty as men have ever done, being blind and mad."

"Nay," I answered, "if they were blind, beauty would be naught to them who could not see it, and if they were mad, they would not know it when it was seen. Knowledge and vision belong to the wise, O Hes."

"Thou art quick of wit and tongue, Holly, as——" and she checked herself, then of a sudden, said, "Tell me, did my servant the Khandia of Kaloon entertain both of you hospitably in her city, and speed you on your journey hither, as I commanded her?"

"We knew not that she was thy servant," I replied. "Hospitality we had and to spare, but we were sped from her Court hitherward by the death-hounds of the Khan, her husband. Tell us, Priestess, what thou knowest of this journey of ours."

"A little," she answered carelessly. "More than three moons ago my spies saw you upon the far mountains, and, creeping very close to you at night, heard you speak together of the object of your wanderings, then, returning thence swiftly, made report to me. Thereon I bade the Khania Atene, and that old magician her great-uncle, who is Guardian of the Gate, go down to the ancient gates of Kaloon to receive you and bring you hither with all speed. Yet for men who burned to learn the answer to a riddle, you have been long in coming."

"We came as fast as we might, O Hes," said Leo; "and if thy spies could visit those mountains, where no man was, and find a path down that hideous precipice, they must have been able also to tell thee the reason of our delay. Therefore I pray, ask it not of us."

"Nay, I will ask it of Atene herself, and she shall surely answer me, for she stands without," replied the Hesea in a cold voice. "Oros, lead the Khania hither and be swift."

The priest turned and walking quickly to the wooden doors by which we had entered the shrine, vanished there.

"Now," said Leo to me nervously in the silence that followed, and speaking in English, "now I wish we were somewhere else, for I think that there will be trouble."

"I don't think, I am sure," I answered; "but the more the better, for out of trouble may come the truth, which we need sorely." Then I stopped, reflecting that the strange woman before us said that her spies had overheard our talk upon the mountains, where we had spoken nothing but English.

As it proved, I was wise, for quite quietly the Hesea repeated after me—"Thou hast experience, Holly, for out of trouble comes the truth, as out of wine."

Then she was silent, and, needless to say, I did not pursue the conversation.

The doors swung open, and through them came a procession clad in black, followed by the Shaman Simbri, who walked in front of a bier, upon which lay the body of the Khan, carried by eight priests. Behind it was Atene, draped in a black veil from head to foot, and after her marched another company of priests. In front of the altar the bier was set down and the priests fell back, leaving Atene and her uncle standing alone before the corpse.

"What seeks my vassal, the Khania of Kaloon?" asked the Hesea in a cold voice.

Now Atene advanced and bent the knee, but with little graciousness.

"Ancient Mother, Mother from of old, I do reverence to thy holy Office, as my forefathers have done for many a generation," and again she curtsied. "Mother, this dead man asks of thee that right of sepulchre in the fires of the holy Mountain which from the beginning has been accorded to the royal departed who went before him."

"It has been accorded as thou sayest," answered the Hesea, "by those priestesses who filled my place before me, nor shall it be refused to thy dead lord—or to thee Atene—when thy time comes."

"I thank thee, O Hes, and I pray that this decree may be written down, for the snows of age have gathered on thy venerable head and soon thou must leave us for awhile. Therefore bid thy scribes that it be written down, so that the Hesea who rules after thee may fulfil it in its season."

"Cease," said the Hesea, "cease to pour out thy bitterness at that which should command thy reverence, oh! thou foolish child, who dost not know but that to-morrow the fire shall claim the frail youth and beauty which are thy boast. I bid thee cease, and tell me how did death find this lord of thine?"

"Ask those wanderers yonder, that were his guests, for his blood is on their heads and cries for vengeance at thy hands."

"I killed him," said Leo, "to save my own life. He tried to hunt us down with his dogs, and there are the marks of them," and he pointed to my arm. "The priest Oros knows, for he dressed the hurts."

"How did this chance?" asked the Hesea of Atene.

"My lord was mad," she answered boldly, "and such was his cruel sport."

"So. And was thy lord jealous also? Nay, keep back the falsehood I see rising to thy lips. Leo Vincey, answer thou me. Yet, I will not ask thee to lay bare the secrets of a woman who has offered thee her love. Thou, Holly, speak, and let it be the truth."

"It is this, O Hes," I answered. "Yonder lady and her uncle the Shaman Simbri saved us from death in the waters of the river that bounds the precipices of Kaloon. Afterwards we were ill, and they treated us kindly, but the Khania became enamoured of my foster-son."

Here the figure of the Priestess stirred beneath its gauzy wrappings, and the Voice asked—"And did thy foster-son become enamoured of the Khania, as being a man he may well have done, for without doubt she is fair?"

"He can answer that question for himself, O Hes. All I know is that he strove to escape from her, and that in the end she gave him a day to choose between death and marriage with her, when her lord should be dead. So, helped by the Khan, her husband, who was jealous of him, we fled towards this Mountain, which we desired to reach. Then the Khan set his hounds upon us, for he was mad and false-hearted. We killed him and came on in spite of this lady, his wife, and her uncle, who would have prevented us, and were met in a Place of Bones by a certain veiled guide, who led us up the Mountain and twice saved us from death. That is all the story."

"Woman, what hast thou to say?" asked the Hesea in a menacing voice.

"But little," Atene answered, without flinching. "For years I have been bound to a madman and a brute, and if my fancy wandered towards this man and his fancy wandered towards me—well, Nature spoke to us, and that is all. Afterwards it seems that he grew afraid of the vengeance of Rassen, or this Holly, whom I would that the hounds had torn bone from bone, grew afraid. So they strove to escape the land, and perchance wandered to thy Mountain. But I weary of this talk, and ask thy leave to rest before to-morrow's rite."

"Thou sayest, Atene," said the Hesea, "that Nature spoke to this man and to thee, and that his heart is thine; but that, fearing thy lord's vengeance, he fled from thee, he who seems no coward. Tell me, then, is that tress he hides in the satchel on his breast thy gage of love to him?"

"I know nothing of what he hides in the satchel," answered the Khania sullenly.

"And yet, yonder in the Gatehouse when he lay so sick he set the lock against thine own—ah, dost remember now?"

"So, O Hes, already he has told thee all our secrets, though they be such as most men hide within their breasts;" and she looked contemptuously at Leo.

"I told her nothing of the matter, Khania," Leo said in an angry voice.

"Nay, *thou* toldest me nothing, Wanderer; my watching wisdom told me. Oh, didst thou think, Atene, that thou couldst hide the truth from the all-seeing Hesea of the Mountain? If so, spare thy breath, for I know all, and have known it from the first. I passed thy disobedience by; of thy false messages I took no heed. For my own purposes I, to whom time is naught, suffered even that thou shouldst hold these, my guests, thy prisoners whilst thou didst strive by threats and force to win a love denied."

She paused, then went on coldly: "Woman, I tell thee that, to complete thy sin, thou hast even dared to lie to me here, in my very Sanctuary."

"If so, what of it?" was the bold answer. "Dost thou love the man thyself? Nay, it is monstrous. Nature would cry aloud at such a shame. Oh! tremble not with rage. Hes, I know thy evil powers, but I know also that I am thy guest, and that in this hallowed place, beneath yonder symbol of eternal Love, thou may'st shed no blood. More, thou canst not harm me, Hes, who am thy equal."

"Atene," replied the measured Voice, "did I desire it, I could destroy thee where thou art. Yet thou art right, I shall not harm thee, thou faithless servant. Did not my writ bid thee through yonder searcher of the stars, thy uncle, to meet these guests of mine and bring them straight to my shrine? Tell me, for I seek to know, how comes it that thou didst disobey me?"

"Have then thy desire," answered Atene in a new and earnest voice, devoid now of bitterness and falsehood. "I disobeyed because that man is not thine, but mine, and no other woman's; because I love him and have loved him from of old. Aye, since first our souls sprang into life I have loved him, as he has loved me. My own heart tells me so; the magic of my uncle here tells me so, though how and where and when these things have been I know not. Therefore I come to thee, Mother of Mysteries, Guardian of the secrets of the past, to learn the truth. At least *thou* canst not lie at thine own altar, and I charge thee, by the dread name of that Power to which thou also must render thy account, that thou answer now and here.

"Who is this man to whom my being yearns? What has he been to me? What has he to do with thee? Speak, O Oracle and make the secret clear. Speak, I command, even though afterwards thou dost slay me—if thou canst."

"Aye, speak! speak!" said Leo, "for know I am in sore suspense. I also am bewildered by memories and rent with hopes and fears."

And I too echoed, "Speak!"

"Leo Vincey," asked the Hesea, after she had thought awhile, "whom dost thou believe me to be?"

"I believe," he answered solemnly, "that thou art that Ayesha at whose hands I died of old in the Caves of Kôr in Africa. I believe thou art that Ayesha whom not twenty years ago I found and loved in those same Caves of Kôr, and there saw perish miserably, swearing that thou wouldst return again."

"See now, how madness can mislead a man," broke in Atene triumphantly. "'Not twenty years ago,' he said, whereas I know well that more than eighty summers have gone by since my grandsire in his youth saw this same priestess sitting on the Mother's throne."

"And whom dost thou believe me to be, O Holly?" the Priestess asked, taking no note of the Khania's words.

"What he believes I believe," I answered. "The dead come back to life—sometimes. Yet alone thou knowest the truth, and by thee only it can be revealed."

"Aye," she said, as though musing, "the dead come back to life—sometimes—and in strange shape, and, mayhap, I know the truth. To-morrow when yonder body is borne on high for burial we will speak of it again. Till then rest you all, and prepare to face that fearful thing—the Truth."

While the Hesea still spoke the silvery curtains swung to their place as mysteriously as they had opened. Then, as though at some signal, the black-robed priests advanced. Surrounding Atene, they led her from the Sanctuary, accompanied by her uncle the Shaman, who, as it seemed to me, either through fatigue or fear, could scarcely stand upon his feet, but stood blinking his dim eyes as though the light dazed him. When these were gone, the priests and priestesses, who all this time had been ranged round the walls, far out of hearing of our talk, gathered themselves into their separate companies, and still chanting, departed also, leaving us alone with Oros and the corpse of the Khan, which remained where it had been set down.

Now the head-priest Oros beckoned to us to follow him, and we went also. Nor was I sorry to leave the place, for its death-like loneliness—enhanced, strangely enough, as it was, by the flood of light that filled it; a loneliness which was concentrated and expressed in the awful figure stretched upon the bier, oppressed and overcame us, whose nerves were broken by all that we had undergone. Thankful enough was I when, having passed the transepts and down the length of the vast nave, we came to the iron doors, the rock passage, and the outer gates, which, as before, opened to let us through, and so at last into the sweet, cold air of the night at that hour which precedes the dawn.

Oros led us to a house well-built and furnished, where at his bidding, like men in a dream, we drank of some liquor which he gave us. I think that drink was drugged, at least after swallowing it I remembered no more till I awoke to find myself lying on a bed and feeling wonderfully strong and well. This I thought strange, for a lamp burning in the room showed me that it was still dark, and therefore that I could have rested but a little time.

I tried to sleep again, but was not able, so fell to thinking till I grew weary of the task. For here thoughts would not help me; nothing could help, except the truth, "that fearful thing," as the veiled Priestess had called it.

Oh! what if she should prove not the Ayesha whom we desired, but some "fearful thing"? What were the meaning of the Khania's hints and of her boldness, that surely had been inspired by the strength of a hidden knowledge? What if—nay, it could not be—I would rise and dress my arm. Or I would wake Leo and make him dress it—anything to occupy my mind until the appointed hour, when we must learn—the best—or the worst.

I sat up in the bed and saw a figure advancing towards me. It was Oros, who bore a lamp in his hand.

"You have slept long, friend Holly," he said, "and now it is time to be up and doing."

"Long?" I answered testily. "How can that be, when it is still dark?"

"Because, friend, the dark is that of a new night. Many hours have gone by since you lay down upon this bed. Well, you were wise to rest you while you may, for who knows when you will sleep again! Come, let me bathe your arm."

"Tell me," I broke in—"Nay, friend," he interrupted firmly, "I will tell you nothing, except that soon you must start to be present at the funeral of the Khan, and, perchance, to learn the answer to your questions."

Ten minutes later he led me to the eating-chamber of the house, where I found Leo already dressed, for Oros had awakened him before he came to me and bidden him to prepare himself. Oros told us here that the Hesea had not suffered us to be disturbed until the night came again since we had much to undergo that day. So presently we started.

Once more we were led through the flame-lit hall till we came to the loop-shaped apse. The place was empty now, even the corpse of the Khan had gone, and no draped Oracle sat in the altar shrine, for its silver curtains were drawn, and we saw that it was untenanted.

"The Mother has departed to do honour to the dead, according to the ancient custom," Oros explained to us.

Then we passed the altar, and behind the statue found a door in the rock wall of the apse, and beyond the door a passage, and a hall as of a house, for out of it opened other doors leading to chambers. These, our guide told us, were the dwelling-places of the Hesea and her maidens. He added that they ran to the side of the Mountain and had windows that opened on to gardens and let in the light and air. In this hall six priests were waiting, each of whom carried a bundle of torches beneath his arm and held in his hand a lighted lamp.

"Our road runs through the dark," said Oros, "though were it day we might climb the outer snows, but this at night it is dangerous to do."

Then taking torches, he lit them at a lamp and gave one to each of us.

Now our climb began. Up endless sloping galleries we went, hewn with inconceivable labour by the primeval fire-worshippers from the living rock of the Mountain. It seemed to me that they stretched for miles, and indeed this was so, since, although the slope was always gentle, it took us more than an hour to climb them. At length we came to the foot of a great stair.

"Rest awhile here, my lord," Oros said, bowing to Leo with the reverence that he had shown him from the first, "for this stair is steep and long. Now we stand upon the Mountain's topmost lip, and are about to climb that tall looped column which soars above."

So we sat down in the vault-like place and let the sharp draught of air rushing to and from the passages play upon us, for we were heated with journeying up those close galleries. As we sat thus I heard a roaring sound and asked Oros what it might be. He answered that we were very near to the crater of the volcano, and that what we heard through the thickness of the rock was the rushing of its everlasting fires. Then the ascent commenced.

It was not dangerous though very wearisome, for there were nearly six hundred of those steps. The climb of the passages had reminded me of that of the gallery of the Great Pyramid drawn out for whole furlongs; that of the pillar was like the ascent of a cathedral spire, or rather of several spires piled one upon another.

Resting from time to time, we dragged ourselves up the steep steps, each of them quite a foot in height, till the pillar was climbed and only the loop remained. Up it we went also, Oros leading us, and glad was I that the stairway still ran within the substance of the rock, for I could feel the needle's mighty eye quiver in the rush of the winds which swept about its sides.

At length we saw light before us, and in another twenty steps emerged upon a platform. As Leo, who went in front of me, walked from the stairway I saw Oros and another priest seize him by the arms, and called to him to ask what they were doing.

"Nothing," he cried back, "except that this is a dizzy place and they feared lest I should fall. Mind how you come, Horace," and he stretched out his hand to me.

Now I was clear of the tunnel, and I believe that had it not been for that hand I should have sunk to the rocky floor, for the sight before me seemed to paralyse my brain. Nor was this to be wondered at, for I doubt whether the world can show such another.

We stood upon the very apex of the loop, a flat space of rock about eighty yards in length by some thirty in breadth, with the star-strewn sky above us. To the south, twenty thousand feet or more below, stretched the dim Plain of Kaloon, and to the east and west the snow-clad shoulders of the peak and the broad brown slopes beneath. To the north was a different sight, and one more awesome. There, right under us as it seemed, for the pillar bent inwards, lay the vast crater of the volcano, and in the centre of it a wide lake of fire that broke into bubbles and flowers of sudden flame or spouted, writhed and twisted like an angry sea.

From the surface of this lake rose smoke and gases that took fire as they floated upwards, and, mingling together, formed a gigantic sheet of living light. Right opposite to us burned this sheet and, the flare of it passing through the needle-eye of the pillar under us, sped away in one dazzling beam across the country of Kaloon, across the mountains beyond, till it was lost on the horizon.

The wind blew from south to north, being sucked in towards the hot crater of the volcano, and its fierce breath, that screamed through the eye of the pillar and against its rugged surface, bent the long crest of the sheet of flame, as an ocean roller is bent over by the gale, and tore from it fragments of fire, that floated away to leeward like the blown-out sails of a burning ship.

Had it not been for this strong and steady wind indeed, no creature could have lived upon the pillar, for the vapours would have poisoned him; but its unceasing blast drove these all away towards the north. For the same reason, in the thin air of that icy place the heat was not too great to be endured.

Appalled by that terrific spectacle, which seemed more appropriate to the terrors of the Pit than to this earth of ours, and fearful lest the blast should whirl me like a dead leaf into the glowing gulf beneath, I fell on to my sound hand and my knees, shouting to Leo to do likewise, and looked about me. Now I observed lines of priests wrapped in great capes, kneeling upon the face of the rock and engaged apparently in prayer, but of Hes the Mother, or of Atene, or of the corpse of the dead Khan I could see nothing.

Whilst I wondered where they might be, Oros, upon whose nerves this dread scene appeared to have no effect, and some of our attendant priests surrounded us and led us onwards by a path that ran perilously near to the rounded edge of the rock. A few downward steps and we found that we were under shelter, for the gale was roaring over us. Twenty more paces and we came to a recess cut, I suppose, by man in the face of the loop, in such fashion that a lava roof was left projecting half across its width.

This recess, or rock chamber, which was large enough to shelter a great number of people, we reached safely, to discover that it was already tenanted. Seated in a chair hewn from the rock was the Hesea, wearing a brodered, purple mantle above her gauzy wrappings that enveloped her from head to foot. There, too, standing near to her were the Khania Atene and her uncle the old Shaman, who looked but ill at ease, and lastly, stretched upon his funeral couch, the fiery light beating upon his stark form and face, lay the dead Khan, Rassen.

We advanced to the throne and bowed to her who sat thereon. The Hesea lifted her hooded head, which seemed to have been sunk upon her breast as though she were overcome by thought or care, and addressed Oros the priest. For in the shelter of those massive walls by comparison there was silence and folk could hear each other speak.

“So thou hast brought them safely, my servant,” she said, “and I am glad, for to those that know it not this road is fearful. My guests, what say you of the burying-pit of the Children of Hes?”

“Our faith tells us of a hell, lady,” answered Leo, “and I think that yonder cauldron looks like its mouth.”

“Nay,” she answered, “there is no hell, save that which from life to life we fashion for ourselves within the circle of this little star. Leo Vincey, I tell thee that hell is here, aye, *here*,” and she struck her hand upon her breast, while once more her head drooped forward as though bowed down beneath some load of secret misery.

Thus she stayed awhile, then lifted it and spoke again, saying—“Midnight is past, and much must be done and suffered before the dawn. Aye, the darkness must be turned to light, or perchance the light to eternal darkness.”

“Royal woman,” she went on, addressing Atene, “as is his right, thou hast brought thy dead lord hither for burial in this consecrated place, where the ashes of all who went before him have become fuel for the holy fires. Oros, my priest, summon thou the Accuser and him who makes defence, and let the books be opened that I may pass my judgment on the dead, and call his soul to live again, or pray that from it the breath of life may be withheld.

“Priest, I say the Court of Death is open.”

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SECOND ORDEAL

Oros bowed and left the place, whereon the Hesea signed to us to stand upon her right and to Atene to stand upon her left. Presently from either side the hooded priests and priestesses stole into the chamber, and to the number of fifty or more ranged themselves along its walls. Then came two figures draped in black and masked, who bore parchment books in their hands, and placed themselves on either side of the corpse, while Oros stood at its feet, facing the Hesea.

Now she lifted the sistrum that she held, and in obedience to the signal Oros said—"Let the books be opened."

Thereon the masked Accuser to the right broke the seal of his book and began to read its pages. It was a tale of the sins of this dead man entered as fully as though that officer were his own conscience given life and voice. In cold and horrible detail it told of the evil doings of his childhood, of his youth, and of his riper years, and thus massed together the record was black indeed.

I listened amazed, wondering what spy had been set upon the deeds of yonder man throughout his days; thinking also with a shudder of how heavy would be the tale against any one of us, if such a spy should companion him from the cradle to the grave; remembering too that full surely this count is kept by scribes even more watchful than the ministers of Hes.

At length the long story drew to its close. Lastly it told of the murder of that noble upon the banks of the river; it told of the plot against our lives for no just cause; it told of our cruel hunting with the death-hounds, and of its end. Then the Accuser shut his book and cast it on the ground, saying—"Such is the record, O Mother. Sum it up as thou hast been given wisdom."

Without speaking, the Hesea pointed with her sistrum to the Defender, who thereon broke the seal of his book and began to read.

Its tale spoke of all the good that the dead man had done; of every noble word that he had said, of every kind action; of plans which he had made for the welfare of his vassals; of temptations to ill that he had resisted; of the true love that he had borne to the woman who became his wife; of the prayers which he had made and of the offerings which he had sent to the temple of Hes.

Making no mention of her name, it told of how that wife of his had hated him, of how she and the magician, who had fostered and educated her, and was her relative and guide, had set other women to lead him astray that she might be free of him. Of how too they had driven him mad with a poisonous drink which took away his judgment, unchained all the evil in his heart, and caused him by its baneful influence to shrink unnaturally from her whose love he still desired.

Also it set out that the heaviest of his crimes were inspired by this wife of his, who sought to befoul his name in the ears of the people whom she led him to oppress, and how bitter jealousy drove him to cruel acts, the last and worst of which caused him foully to violate the law of hospitality, and in attempting to bring about the death of blameless guests at their hands to find his own.

Thus the Defender read, and having read, closed the book and threw it on the ground, saying—"Such is the record, O Mother, sum it up as thou hast been given wisdom."

Then the Khania, who all this time had stood cold and impassive, stepped forward to speak, and with her her uncle, the Shaman Simbri. But before a word passed Atene's lips the Hesea raised her sceptre and forbade them, saying—"Thy day of trial is not yet, nor have we aught to do with thee. When thou liest where he lies and the books of thy deeds are read aloud to her who sits in judgment, then let thine advocate make answer for these things."

"So be it," answered Atene haughtily and fell back.

Now it was the turn of the high-priest Oros. "Mother," he said, "thou hast heard. Balance the writings, assess the truth, and according to thy wisdom, issue thy commands. Shall we hurl him who was Rassen feet first into the fiery gulf, that he may walk again in the paths of life, or head first, in token that he is dead indeed?"

Then while all waited in a hushed expectancy, the great Priestess delivered her verdict.

"I hear, I balance, I assess, but judge I do not, who claim no such power. Let the Spirit who sent him forth, to whom he is returned again, pass judgment on his spirit. This dead one has sinned deeply, yet has he been more deeply sinned against. Nor against that man can be reckoned the account of his deeds of madness. Cast him then to his grave feet first that his name may be whitened in the ears of those unborn, and that thence he may return again at the time appointed. It is spoken."

Now the Accuser lifted the book of his accusations from the ground and, advancing, hurled it into the gulf in token that it was blotted out. Then he turned and vanished from the chamber; while the Advocate, taking up his book, gave it into the keeping of the priest Oros, that it might be preserved in the archives of the temple for ever. This done, the priests began a funeral chant and a solemn invocation to the great Lord of the Under-world that he would receive this spirit and acquit it there as here it had been acquitted by the Hesea, his minister.

Ere their dirge ended certain of the priests, advancing with slow steps, lifted the bier and carried it to the edge of the gulf; then at a sign from the Mother, hurled it feet foremost into the fiery lake below, whilst all watched to see how it struck the flame. For this they held to be an omen, since should the body turn over in its descent it was taken as a sign that the judgment of mortal men had been refused in the Place of the Immortals. It did not turn; it rushed downwards straight as a plummet and plunged into the fire hundreds of feet below, and there for ever vanished. This indeed was not strange since, as we discovered afterwards, the feet were weighted.

In fact this solemn rite was but a formula that, down to the exact words of judgment and committal, had been practised here from unknown antiquity over the bodies of the priests and priestesses of the Mountain, and of certain of the great ones of the Plain. So it was in ancient Egypt, whence without doubt this ceremony of the trial of the dead was derived, and so it continued to be in the land of Hes, for no priestess ever ventured to condemn the soul of one departed.

The real interest of the custom, apart from its solemnity and awful surroundings, centred in the accurate knowledge displayed by the masked Accuser and Advocate of the life-deeds of the deceased. It showed that although the College of Hes affected to be indifferent to the doings and politics of the people of the Plain that they once ruled and over which, whilst secretly awaiting an opportunity of re-conquest, they still claimed a spiritual authority, the attitude was assumed rather than real. Moreover it suggested a system of espionage so piercing and extraordinary that it was difficult to believe it unaided by the habitual exercise of some gift of clairvoyance.

The service, if I may call it so, was finished; the dead man had followed the record of his sins into that lurid sea of fire, and by now was but a handful of charred dust. But if his book had closed, ours remained open and at its strangest chapter. We knew it, all of us, and waited, our nerves thrilled, with expectancy.

The Hesea sat brooding on her rocky throne. She also knew that the hour had come. Presently she sighed, then motioned with her sceptre and spoke a word or two, dismissing the priests and priestesses, who departed and were seen no more. Two of them remained however, Oros and the head priestess who was called Papave, a young woman of a noble countenance.

"Listen, my servants," she said. "Great things are about to happen, which have to do with the coming of yonder strangers, for whom I have waited these many years as is well known to you. Nor can I tell the issue since to me, to whom power is given so freely, foresight of the future is denied. It well may happen, therefore, that this seat will soon be empty and this frame but food for the eternal fires. Nay, grieve not, grieve not, for I do not die and if so, the spirit shall return again.

"Hearken, Papave. Thou art of the blood, and to thee alone have I opened all the doors of wisdom. If I pass now or at any time, take thou the ancient power, fill thou my place, and in all things do as I have instructed thee, that from this Mountain light may shine upon the world. Further I command thee, and thee also, Oros my priest, that if I be summoned hence you entertain these strangers hospitably until it is possible to escort them from the land, whether by the road they came or across the northern hills and deserts. Should the Khania Atene attempt to detain them against their will, then raise the Tribes upon her in the name of the Hesea; depose her from her seat, conquer her land and hold it. Hear and obey."

"Mother, we hear and we will obey," answered Oros and Papave as with a single voice.

She waved her hand to show that this matter was finished; then after long thought spoke again, addressing herself to the Khania.

"Atene, last night thou didst ask me a question—why thou dost love this man," and she pointed to Leo. "To that the answer would be easy, for is he not one who might well stir passion in the breast of a woman such as thou art? But thou didst say also that thine own heart and the wisdom of yonder magician, thy uncle, told thee that since thy soul first sprang to life thou hadst loved him, and didst adjure me by the Power to whom I must give my account to draw the curtain from the past and let the truth be known.

"Woman, the hour has come, and I obey thy summons—not because thou dost command but because it is my will. Of the beginning I can tell thee nothing, who am still human and no goddess. I know not why we three are wrapped in this coil of fate; I know not the destinies to which we journey up the ladder of a thousand lives, with grief and pain climbing the endless stair of circumstance, or, if I know, I may not say. Therefore I take up the tale where my own memory gives me light."

The Hesea paused, and we saw her frame shake as though beneath some fearful inward effort of the will. "Look now behind you," she cried, throwing her arms wide.

We turned, and at first saw nothing save the great curtain of fire that rose from the abyss of the volcano, whereof, as I have told, the crest was bent over by the wind like the crest of a breaking billow. But presently, as we watched, in the depths of this red veil, Nature's awful lamp-flame, a picture began to form as it forms in the seer's magic crystal.

Behold! a temple set amid sands and washed by a wide, palm-bordered river, and across its pyloned court processions of priests, who pass to and fro with flaunting banners. The court empties; I could see the shadow of a falcon's wings that fled across its sunlit floor. A man clad in a priest's white robe, shaven-headed, and barefooted, enters through the southern pylon gate and walks slowly towards a painted granite shrine, in which sits the image of a woman crowned with the double crown of Egypt, surmounted by a lotus bloom, and holding in her hand the sacred sistrum. Now, as though he heard some sound, he halts and looks towards us, and by the heaven above me, his face is the face of Leo Vincey in his youth, the face too of that Kallikrates whose corpse we had seen in the Caves of Kôr!

"Look, look!" gasped Leo, catching me by the arm; but I only nodded my head in answer.

The man walks on again, and kneeling before the goddess in the shrine, embraces her feet and makes his prayer to her. Now the gates roll open, and a procession enters, headed by a veiled, noble-looking woman, who bears offerings, which she sets on the table before the shrine, bending her knee to the effigy of the goddess. Her oblations made, she turns to depart, and as she goes brushes her hand against the hand of the watching priest, who hesitates, then follows her.

When all her company have passed the gate she lingers alone in the shadow of the pylon, whispering to the priest and pointing to the river and the southern land beyond. He is disturbed; he reasons with her, till, after one swift glance round, she lets drop her veil, bending towards him and—their lips meet.

As time flies her face is turned towards us, and lo! it is the face of Atene, and amid her dusky hair the aura is reflected in jewelled gold, the symbol of her royal rank. She looks at the shaven priest; she laughs as though in triumph; she points to the westering sun and to the river, and is gone.

Aye, and that laugh of long ago is echoed by Atene at our side, for she also laughs in triumph and cries aloud to the old Shaman—"True diviners were my heart and thou! Behold how I won him in the past."

Then, like ice on fire fell the cold voice of the Hesea.

“Be silent, woman, and see how thou didst lose him in the past.”

Lo! the scene changes, and on a couch a lovely shape lies sleeping. She dreams; she is afraid; and over her bends and whispers in her ear a shadowy form clad with the emblems of the goddess in the shrine, but now wearing upon her head the vulture cap. The woman wakes from her dream and looks round, and oh! the face is the face of Ayesha as it was seen of us when first she loosed her veil in the Caves of Kôr.

A sigh went up from us; we could not speak who thus fearfully once more beheld her loveliness.

Again she sleeps, again the awful form bends over her and whispers. It points, the distance opens. Lo! on a stormy sea a boat, and in the boat two wrapped in each other's arms, the priest and the royal woman, while over them like a Vengeance, raw-necked and ragged-pinioned, hovers a following vulture, such a vulture as the goddess wore for headdress.

That picture fades from its burning frame, leaving the vast sheet of fire empty as the noonday sky. Then another forms. First a great, smooth-walled cave carpeted with sand, a cave that we remembered well. Then lying on the sand, now no longer shaven, but golden-haired, the corpse of the priest staring upwards with his glazed eyes, his white skin streaked with blood, and standing over him two women. One holds a javelin in her hand and is naked except for her flowing hair, and beautiful, beautiful beyond imagining. The other, wrapped in a dark cloak, beats the air with her hands, casting up her eyes as though to call the curse of Heaven upon her rival's head. And those women are she into whose sleeping ear the shadow had whispered, and the royal Egyptian who had kissed her lover beneath the pylon gate.

Slowly all the figures faded; it was as though the fire ate them up, for first they became thin and white as ashes; then vanished. The Hesea, who had been leaning forward, sank backwards in her chair, as if weary with the toil of her own magic.

For a while confused pictures flitted rapidly to and fro across the vast mirror of the flame, such as might be reflected from an intelligence crowded with the memories of over two thousand years which it was too exhausted to separate and define.

Wild scenes, multitudes of people, great caves, and in them faces, amongst others our own, starting up distorted and enormous, to grow tiny in an instant and depart; stark imaginations of Forms towering and divine; of Things monstrous and inhuman; armies marching, illimitable battle-fields, and corpses rolled in blood, and hovering over them the spirits of the slain.

These pictures died as the others had died, and the fire was blank again.

Then the Hesea spoke in a voice very faint at first, that by slow degrees grew stronger.

“Is thy question answered, O Atene?”

“I have seen strange sights, Mother, mighty limnings worthy of thy magic, but how know I that they are more than vapours of thine own brain cast upon yonder fire to deceive and mock us?”<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>[5]</sup> Considered in the light of subsequent revelations, vouchsafed to us by Ayesha herself, I am inclined to believe that Atene's shrewd surmise was accurate, and that these fearful pictures, although founded on events that had happened in the past, were in the main “vapours” cast upon the crater fire; visions raised in our minds to “deceive and mock us.”—L. H. H.

“Listen then,” said the Hesea, in her weary voice, “to the interpretation of the writing, and cease to trouble me with thy doubts. Many an age ago, but shortly after I began to live this last, long life of mine, Isis, the great goddess of Egypt, had her Holy House at Behbit, near the Nile. It is a ruin now, and Isis has departed from Egypt, though still under the Power that fashioned it and her: she rules the world, for she is Nature's self. Of that shrine a certain man, a Greek, Kallikrates by name, was chief priest, chosen for her service by the favour of the goddess, vowed to her eternally and to her alone, by the dreadful oath that might not be broken without punishment as eternal.

“In the flame thou sawest that priest, and here at thy side he stands, re-born, to fulfil his destiny and ours.

“There lived also a daughter of Pharaoh's house, one Amenartas, who cast eyes of love upon this Kallikrates, and, wrapping him in her spells—for then as now she practised witcheries—caused him to break his oaths and fly with her, as thou sawest written in the flame. Thou, Atene, wast that Amenartas.

“Lastly there lived a certain Arabian, named Ayesha, a wise and lovely woman, who, in the emptiness of her heart, and the sorrow of much knowledge, had sought refuge in the service of the universal Mother, thinking there to win the true wisdom which ever fled from her. That Ayesha, as thou sawest also, the goddess visited in a dream, bidding her to follow those faithless ones, and work Heaven's vengeance on them, and promising her in reward victory over death upon the earth and beauty such as had not been known in woman.

“She followed far; she awaited them where they wandered. Guided by a sage named Noot, one who from the beginning had been appointed to her service and that of another—thou, O Holly, wast that man—she found the essence in which to bathe is to outlive Generations, Faiths, and Empires, saying—“I will slay these guilty ones. I will slay them presently, as I am commanded.”

“Yet Ayesha slew not, for now their sin was her sin, since she who had never loved came to desire this man. She led them to the Place of Life, purposing there to clothe him and herself with immortality, and let the woman die. But it was not so fated, for then the goddess smote. The life was Ayesha's as had been sworn, but in its first hour, blinded with jealous rage because he shrank from her unveiled glory to the mortal woman at his side, this Ayesha brought him to his death, and alas! alas! left herself undying.

“Thus did the angry goddess work woe upon her faithless ministers, giving to the priest swift doom, to the priestess Ayesha, long remorse and misery, and to the royal Amenartas jealousy more bitter than life or death, and the fate of unending effort to win back that love which, defying Heaven, she had dared to steal, but to be bereft thereof again.

“Lo! now the ages pass, and, at the time appointed, to that undying Ayesha who, whilst awaiting his re-birth, from century to century mourned his loss, and did bitter penance for her sins, came back the man, her heart's desire. Then, whilst all went well for her and him, again the goddess smote and robbed her of her reward. Before her lover's living eyes, sunk in utter shame and misery, the beautiful became hideous, the undying seemed to die.

"Yet, O Kallikrates, I tell thee that she died not. Did not Ayesha swear to thee yonder in the Caves of Kôr that she would come again? for even in that awful hour this comfort kissed her soul. Thereafter, Leo Vincey, who art Killikrates, did not her spirit lead thee in thy sleep and stand with thee upon this very pinnacle which should be thy beacon light to guide thee back to her? And didst thou not search these many years, not knowing that she companioned thy every step and strove to guard thee in every danger, till at length in the permitted hour thou camest back to her?"

She paused, and looked towards Leo, as though awaiting his reply.

"Of the first part of the tale, except from the writing on the Sherd, I know nothing, Lady," he said; "of the rest I, or rather we, know that it is true. Yet I would ask a question, and I pray thee of thy charity let thy answer be swift and short. Thou sayest that in the permitted hour I came back to Ayesha. Where then is Ayesha? Art thou Ayesha? And if so why is thy voice changed? Why art thou less in stature? Oh! in the name of whatever god thou dost worship, tell me art thou Ayesha?"

"*I am Ayesha*" she answered solemnly, "that very Ayesha to whom thou didst pledge thyself eternally."

"She lies, she lies," broke in Atene. "I tell thee, husband—for such with her own lips she declares thou art to me—that yonder woman who says that she parted from thee young and beautiful, less than twenty years ago, is none other than the aged priestess who for a century at least has borne rule in these halls of Hes. Let her deny it if she can."

"Oros," said the Mother, "tell thou the tale of the death of that priestess of whom the Khania speaks."

The priest bowed, and in his usual calm voice, as though he were narrating some event of every day, said mechanically, and in a fashion that carried no conviction to my mind—"Eighteen years ago, on the fourth night of the first month of the winter in the year 2333 of the founding of the worship of Hes on this Mountain, the priestess of whom the Khania Atene speaks, died of old age in my presence in the hundred and eighth year of her rule. Three hours later we went to lift her from the throne on which she died, to prepare her corpse for burial in this fire, according to the ancient custom. Lo! a miracle, for she lived again, the same, yet very changed.

"Thinking this a work of evil magic, the Priests and Priestesses of the College rejected her, and would have driven her from the throne. Thereon the Mountain blazed and thundered, the light from the fiery pillars died, and great terror fell upon the souls of men. Then from the deep darkness above the altar where stands the statue of the Mother of Men, the voice of the living goddess spoke, saying—"Accept ye her whom I have set to rule over you, that my judgments and my purposes may be fulfilled."

"The Voice ceased, the fiery torches burnt again, and we bowed the knee to the new Hesea, and named her Mother in the ears of all. That is the tale to which hundreds can bear witness."

"Thou hearest, Atene," said the Hesea. "Dost thou still doubt?"

"Aye," answered the Khania, "for I hold that Oros also lies, or if he lies not, then he dreams, or perchance that voice he heard was thine own. Now if thou art this undying woman, this Ayesha, let proof be made of it to these two men who knew thee in the past. Tear away those wrappings that guard thy loveliness thus jealously. Let thy shape divine, thy beauty incomparable, shine out upon our dazzled sight. Surely thy lover will not forget such charms; surely he will know thee, and bow the knee, saying, 'This is my Immortal, and no other woman.'

"Then, and not till then, will I believe that thou art even what thou declarest thyself to be, an evil spirit, who bought undying life with murder and used thy demon loveliness to bewitch the souls of men."

Now the Hesea on the throne seemed to be much troubled, for she rocked herself to and fro, and wrung her white-draped hands.

"Kallikrates," she said in a voice that sounded like a moan, "is this thy will? For if it be, know that I must obey. Yet I pray thee command it not, for the time is not yet come; the promise unbreakable is not yet fulfilled. *I am somewhat changed*, Kallikrates, since I kissed thee on the brow and named thee mine, yonder in the Caves of Kôr."

Leo looked about him desperately, till his eyes fell upon the mocking face of Atene, who cried—"Bid her unveil, my lord. I swear to thee I'll not be jealous."

At that taunt he took fire.

"Aye," he said, "I bid her unveil, that I may learn the best or worst, who otherwise must die of this suspense. Howsoever changed, if she be Ayesha I shall know her, and if she be Ayesha, I shall love her."

"Bold words, Kallikrates," answered the Hesea; "yet from my very heart I thank thee for them: those sweet words of trust and faithfulness to thou knowest not what. Learn now the truth, for I may keep naught back from thee. When I unveil it is decreed that thou must make thy choice for the last time on this earth between yonder woman, my rival from the beginning, and that Ayesha to whom thou art sworn. Thou canst reject me if thou wilt, and no ill shall come to thee, but many a blessing, as men reckon them—power and wealth and love. Only then thou must tear my memory from thy heart, for then I leave thee to follow thy fate alone, till at the last the purpose of these deeds and sufferings is made clear.

"Be warned. No light ordeal lies before thee. Be warned. I can promise thee naught save such love as woman never gave to man, love that perchance—I know not—must yet remain unsatisfied upon the earth."

Then she turned to me and said:

"Oh! thou, Holly, thou true friend, thou guardian from of old, thou, next to him most beloved by me, to thy clear and innocent spirit perchance wisdom may be given that is denied to us, the little children whom thine arms protect. Counsel thou him, my Holly, with the counsel that is given thee, and I will obey thy words and his, and, whatever befalls, will bless thee from my soul. Aye, and should he cast me off, then in the Land beyond the lands, in the Star appointed, where all earthly passions fade, together will we dwell eternally in a friendship glorious, thou and I alone.

"For *thou* wilt not reject; thy steel, forged in the furnace of pure truth and power, shall not lose its temper in these small fires of temptation and become a rusted chain to bind thee to another woman's breast—until it canker to her heart and thine."

"Ayesha, I thank thee for thy words," I answered simply, "and by them and that promise of thine, I, thy poor friend—for more I never thought to be—am a thousandfold repaid for many sufferings. This I will add, that for my part I know that thou art She whom we have lost, since, whatever the lips that speak them, those thoughts and words are Ayesha's and hers alone."

Thus I spoke, not knowing what else to say, for I was filled with a great joy, a calm and ineffable satisfaction, which broke thus feebly from my heart. For now I knew that I was dear to Ayesha as I had always been dear to Leo; the closest of friends, from whom she never would be parted. What more could I desire?

We fell back; we spoke together, whilst they watched us silently. What we said I do not quite remember, but the end of it was that, as the Hesea had done, Leo bade me judge and choose. Then into my mind there came a clear command, from my own conscience or elsewhere, who can say? This was the command, that I should bid her to unveil, and let fate declare its purposes.

"Decide," said Leo, "I cannot bear much more. Like that woman, whoever she may be, whatever happens, I will not blame you, Horace."

"Good," I answered, "I have decided," and, stepping forward, I said: "We have taken counsel, Hes, and it is our will, who would learn the truth and be at rest, that thou shouldst unveil before us, here and now."

"I hear and obey," the Priestess answered, in a voice like to that of a dying woman, "only, I beseech you both, be pitiful to me, spare me your mockeries; add not the coals of your hate and scorn to the fires of a soul in hell, for whate'er I am, I became it for thy sake, Kallikrates. Yet, yet I also am athirst for knowledge; for though I know all wisdom, although I wield much power, one thing remains to me to learn—what is the worth of the love of man, and if, indeed, it can live beyond the horrors of the grave?"

Then, rising slowly, the Hesea walked, or rather tottered to the unroofed open space in front of the rock chamber, and stood there quite near to the brink of the flaming gulf beneath.

"Come hither, Papave, and loose these veils," she cried in a shrill, thin voice.

Papave advanced, and with a look of awe upon her handsome face began the task. She was not a tall woman, yet as she bent over her I noted that she seemed to tower above her mistress, the Hesea.

The outer veils fell revealing more within. These fell also, and now before us stood the mummy-like shape, although it seemed to be of less stature, of that strange being who had met us in the Place of Bones. So it would seem that our mysterious guide and the high priestess Hes were the same.

Look! Length by length the wrappings sank from her. Would they never end? How small grew the frame within? She was very short now, unnaturally short for a full-grown woman, and oh! I grew sick at heart. The last bandages uncoiled themselves like shavings from a stick; two wrinkled hands appeared, if hands they could be called. Then the feet—once I had seen such on the mummy of a princess of Egypt, and even now by some fantastic play of the mind, I remembered that on her coffin this princess was named "The Beautiful."

Everything was gone now, except a shift and a last inner veil about the head. Hes waved back the priestess Papave, who fell half fainting to the ground and lay there covering her eyes with her hand. Then uttering something like a scream she gripped this veil in her thin talons, tore it away, and with a gesture of uttermost despair, turned and faced us.

Oh! she was—nay, I will not describe her. I knew her at once, for thus had I seen her last before the Fire of Life, and, strangely enough, through the mask of unutterable age, through that cloak of humanity's last decay, still shone some resemblance to the glorious and superhuman Ayesha: the shape of the face, the air of defiant pride that for an instant bore her up—I know not what.

Yes, there she stood, and the fierce light of the heartless fires beat upon her, revealing every shame.

There was a dreadful silence. I saw Leo's lips turn white and his knees begin to give; but by some effort he recovered himself, and stayed still and upright like a dead man held by a wire. Also I saw Atene—and this is to her credit—turn her head away. She had desired to see her rival humiliated, but that horrible sight shocked her; some sense of their common womanhood for the moment touched her pity. Only Simbri, who, I think, knew what to expect, and Oros remained quite unmoved; indeed, in that ghastly silence the latter spoke, and ever afterwards I loved him for his words.

"What of the vile vessel, rotted in the grave of time? What of the flesh that perishes?" he said. "Look through the ruined lamp to the eternal light which burns within. Look through its covering carrion to the inextinguishable soul."

My heart applauded these noble sentiments. I was of one mind with Oros, but oh, Heaven! I felt that my brain was going, and I wished that it would go, so that I might hear and see no more.

That look which gathered on Ayesha's mummy face? At first there had been a little hope, but the hope died, and anguish, anguish, *anguish* took its place.

Something must be done, this could not endure. My lips clave together, no word would come; my feet refused to move.

I began to contemplate the scenery. How wonderful were that sheet of flame, and the ripples which ran up and down its height. How awesome its billowy crest. It would be warm lying in yonder red gulf below with the dead Rassen, but oh! I wished that I shared his bed and had finished with these agonies.

Thank Heaven, Atene was speaking. She had stepped to the side of the naked-headed Thing, and stood by it in all the pride of her rich beauty and perfect womanhood.

"Leo Vincey, or Kallikrates," said Atene, "take which name thou wilt; thou thinkest ill of me perhaps, but know that at least I scorn to mock a rival in her mortal shame. She told us a wild tale but now, a tale true or false, but more false than true, I think, of how I robbed a goddess of a votary, and of how that goddess—Ayesha's self perchance—was avenged upon me for the crime of yielding to the man I loved. Well, let goddesses—if such indeed there be—take their way and work their will upon the helpless, and I, a mortal, will take mine until the clutch of doom closes round my throat and chokes out life and memory, and I too am a goddess—or a clod.

"Meanwhile, thou man, I shame not to say it before all these witnesses, I love thee, and it seems that this—this woman or goddess—loves thee also, and she has told us that now, *now* thou must choose between us once and for ever. She has told us too that if I

sinned against Isis, whose minister be it remembered she declares herself, herself she sinned yet more. For she would have taken thee both from a heavenly mistress and from an earthly bride, and yet snatch that guerdon of immortality which is hers to-day. Therefore if I am evil, she is worse, nor does the flame that burns within the casket whereof Oros spoke shine so very pure and bright.

“Choose thou then Leo Vincey, and let there be an end. I vaunt not myself; thou knowest what I have been and seest what I am. Yet I can give thee love and happiness and, mayhap, children to follow after thee, and with them some place and power. What yonder witch can give thee thou canst guess. Tales of the past, pictures on the flame, wise maxims and honeyed words, and after thou art dead once more, promises perhaps, of joy to come when that terrible goddess whom she serves so closely shall be appeased. I have spoken. Yet I will add a word:

“O thou for whom, if the Hesea’s tale be true, I did once lay down my royal rank and dare the dangers of an unsailed sea; O thou whom in ages gone I would have sheltered with my frail body from the sorceries of this cold, self-seeking witch; O thou whom but a little while ago at my own life’s risk I drew from death in yonder river, choose, choose!”

To all this speech, so moderate yet so cruel, so well-reasoned and yet so false, because of its glosses and omissions, the huddled Ayesha seemed to listen with a fierce intentness. Yet she made no answer, not a single word, not a sign even; she who had said her say and scorned to plead her part.

I looked at Leo’s ashen face. He leaned towards Atene, drawn perhaps by the passion shining in her beauteous eyes, then of a sudden straightened himself, shook his head and sighed. The colour flamed to his brow, and his eyes grew almost happy.

“After all,” he said, thinking aloud rather than speaking, “I have to do not with unknowable pasts or with mystic futures, but with the things of my own life. Ayesha waited for me through two thousand years; Atene could marry a man she hated for power’s sake, and then could poison him, as perhaps she would poison me when I wearied her. I know not what oaths I swore to Amenartas, if such a woman lived. I remember the oaths I swore to Ayesha. If I shrink from her now, why then my life is a lie and my belief a fraud; then love will not endure the touch of age and never can survive the grave.

“Nay, remembering what Ayesha was I take her as she is, in faith and hope of what she shall be. At least love is immortal and if it must, why let it feed on memory alone till death sets free the soul.”

Then stepping to where stood the dreadful, shrivelled form, Leo knelt down before it and kissed her on the brow.

Yes, he kissed the trembling horror of that wrinkled head, and I think it was one of the greatest, bravest acts ever done by man.

“Thou hast chosen,” said Atene in a cold voice, “and I tell thee, Leo Vincey, that the manner of thy choice makes me mourn my loss the more. Take now thy—thy bride and let me hence.”

But Ayesha still said no word and made no sign, till presently she sank upon her bony knees and began to pray aloud. These were the words of her prayer, as I heard them, though the exact Power to which it was addressed is not very easy to determine, as I never discovered who or what it was that she worshipped in her heart—“O Thou minister of the almighty Will, thou sharp sword in the hand of Doom, thou inevitable Law that art named Nature; thou who wast crowned as Isis of the Egyptians, but art the goddess of all climes and ages; thou that ledest the man to the maid, and layest the infant on his mother’s breast, that bringest our dust to its kindred dust, that givest life to death, and into the dark of death breathest the light of life again; thou who causest the abundant earth to bear, whose smile is Spring, whose laugh is the ripple of the sea, whose noontide rest is drowsy Summer, and whose sleep is Winter’s night, hear thou the supplication of thy chosen child and minister:

“Of old thou gavest me thine own strength with deathless days, and beauty above every daughter of this Star. But I sinned against thee sore, and for my sin I paid in endless centuries of solitude, in the vileness that makes me loathsome to my lover’s eyes, and for its diadem of perfect power sets upon my brow this crown of naked mockery. Yet in thy breath, the swift essence that brought me light, that brought me gloom, thou didst vow to me that I who cannot die should once more pluck the lost flower of my immortal loveliness from this foul slime of shame.

“Therefore, merciful Mother that bore me, to thee I make my prayer. Oh, let his true love atone my sin; or, if it may not be, then give me death, the last and most blessed of thy boons!”

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CHANGE

She ceased, and there was a long, long silence. Leo and I looked at each other in dismay. We had hoped against hope that this beautiful and piteous prayer, addressed apparently to the great, dumb spirit of Nature, would be answered. That meant a miracle, but what of it? The prolongation of the life of Ayesha was a miracle, though it is true that some humble reptiles are said to live as long as she had done.

The transference of her spirit from the Caves of Kôr to this temple was a miracle, that is, to our western minds, though the dwellers in these parts of Central Asia would not hold it so. That she should re-appear with the same hideous body was a miracle. But was it the same body? Was it not the body of the last Hesea? One very ancient woman is much like another, and eighteen years of the working of the soul or identity within might well wear away their trivial differences and give to the borrowed form some resemblance to that which it had left.

At least the figures on that mirror of the flame were a miracle. Nay, why so? A hundred clairvoyants in a hundred cities can produce or see their like in water and in crystal, the difference being only one of size. They were but reflections of scenes familiar to the mind of Ayesha, or perhaps not so much as that. Perhaps they were only phantasms called up in *our* minds by her mesmeric force.

Nay, none of these things were true miracles, since all, however strange, might be capable of explanation. What right then had we to expect a marvel now?

Such thoughts as these rose in our minds as the endless minutes were born and died and—nothing happened.

Yes, at last one thing did happen. The light from the sheet of flame died gradually away as the flame itself sank downwards into the abysses of the pit. But about this in itself there was nothing wonderful, for as we had seen with our own eyes from afar this fire varied much, and indeed it was customary for it to die down at the approach of dawn, which now drew very near.

Still that onward-creeping darkness added to the terrors of the scene. By the last rays of the lurid light we saw Ayesha rise and advance some few paces to that little tongue of rock at the edge of the pit off which the body of Rassen had been hurled; saw her standing on it, also, looking like some black, misshapen imp against the smoky glow which still rose from the depths beneath.

Leo would have gone forward to her, for he believed that she was about to hurl herself to doom, which indeed I thought was her design. But the priest Oros, and the priestess Papave, obeying, I suppose, some secret command that reached them I know not how, sprang to him and seizing his arms, held him back. Then it became quite dark, and through the darkness we could hear Ayesha chanting a dirge-like hymn in some secret, holy tongue which was unknown to us.

A great flake of fire floated through the gloom, rocking to and fro like some vast bird upon its pinions. We had seen many such that night, torn by the gale from the crest of the blazing curtain as I have described. But—but—“Horace,” whispered Leo through his chattering teeth, “that flame is coming up *against the wind!*”

“Perhaps the wind has changed,” I answered, though I knew well that it had not; that it blew stronger than ever from the south.

Nearer and nearer sailed the rocking flame, two enormous wings was the shape of it, with something dark between them. It reached the little promontory. The wings appeared to fold themselves about the dwarfed figure that stood thereon—illuminating it for a moment. Then the light went out of them and they vanished—everything vanished.

A while passed, it may have been one minute or ten, when suddenly the priestess Papave, in obedience to some summons which we could not hear, crept by me. I knew that it was she because her woman’s garments touched me as she went. Another space of silence and of deep darkness, during which I heard Papave return, breathing in short, sobbing gasps like one who is very frightened.

Ah! I thought, Ayesha has cast herself into the pit. The tragedy is finished!

Then it was that the wondrous music came. Of course it *may* have been only the sound of priests chanting beyond us, but I do not think so, since its quality was quite different to any that I heard in the temple before or afterwards: to any indeed that ever I heard upon the earth.

I cannot describe it, but it was awful to listen to, yet most entrancing. From the black, smoke-veiled pit where the fire had burned it welled and echoed—now a single heavenly voice, now a sweet chorus, and now an air-shaking thunder as of a hundred organs played to time.

That diverse and majestic harmony seemed to include, to express every human emotion, and I have often thought since then that in its all-embracing scope and range, this, the song or paean of her re-birth was symbolical of the infinite variety of Ayesha’s spirit. Yet like that spirit it had its master notes; power, passion, suffering, mystery and loveliness. Also there could be no doubt as to the general significance of the chant by whomsoever it was sung. It was the changeful story of a mighty soul; it was worship, worship, worship of a queen divine!

Like slow clouds of incense fading to the bannered roof of some high choir, the bursts of unearthly melodies grew faint; in the far distance of the hollow pit they wailed themselves away.

Look! from the east a single ray of upward-springing light.

"Behold the dawn," said the quiet voice of Oros.

That ray pierced the heavens above our heads, a very sword of flame. It sank downwards, swiftly. Suddenly it fell, not upon us, for as yet the rocky walls of our chamber warded it away, but on to the little promontory at its edge.

Oh! and there—a Glory covered with a single garment—stood a shape celestial. It seemed to be asleep, since the eyes were shut. Or was it dead, for at first that face was a face of death? Look, the sunlight played upon her, shining through the thin veil, the dark eyes opened like the eyes of a wondering child; the blood of life flowed up the ivory bosom into the pallid cheeks; the raiment of black and curling tresses wavered in the wind; the head of the jewelled snake that held them sparkled beneath her breast.

Was it an illusion, or was this Ayesha as she had been when she entered the rolling flame in the caverns of Kôr? Our knees gave way beneath us, and down, our arms about each other's necks, Leo and I sank till we lay upon the ground. Then a voice sweeter than honey, softer than the whisper of a twilight breeze among the reeds, spoke near to us, and these were the words it said—"*Come hither to me, Kallikrates, who would pay thee back that redeeming kiss of faith and love thou gavest me but now!*"

Leo struggled to his feet. Like a drunken man he staggered to where Ayesha stood, then overcome, sank before her on his knees.

"Arise," she said, "it is I who should kneel to thee," and she stretched out her hand to raise him, whispering in his ear the while.

Still he would not, or could not rise, so very slowly she bent over him and touched him with her lips upon the brow. Next she beckoned to me. I came and would have knelt also, but she suffered it not.

"Nay," she said, in her rich, remembered voice, "thou art no suitor; it shall not be. Of lovers and worshippers henceforth as before, I can find a plenty if I will, or even if I will it not. But where shall I find another friend like to thee, O Holly, whom thus I greet?" and leaning towards me, with her lips she touched me also on the brow—just touched me, and no more.

Fragrant was Ayesha's breath as roses, the odour of roses clung to her lovely hair; her sweet body gleamed like some white sea-pearl; a faint but palpable radiance crowned her head; no sculptor ever fashioned such a marvel as the arm with which she held her veil about her; no stars in heaven ever shone more purely bright than did her calm, entranced eyes.

Yet it is true, even with her lips upon me, all I felt for her was a love divine into which no human passion entered. Once, I acknowledge to my shame, it was otherwise, but I am an old man now and have done with such frailties. Moreover, had not Ayesha named me Guardian, Protector, Friend, and sworn to me that with her and Leo I should ever dwell where all earthly passions fail. I repeat: what more could I desire?

Taking Leo by the hand Ayesha returned with him into the shelter of the rock-hewn chamber and when she entered its shadows, shivered a little as though with cold. I rejoiced at this I remember, for it seemed to show me that she still was human, divine as she might appear. Here her priest and priestess prostrated themselves before her new-born splendour, but she motioned to them to rise, laying a hand upon the head of each as though in blessing. "I am cold," she said, "give me my mantle," and Papave threw the purple-brodered garment upon her shoulders, whence now it hung royally, like a coronation robe.

"Nay," she went on, "it is not this long-lost shape of mine, which in his kiss my lord gave back to me, that shivers in the icy wind, it is my spirit's self bared to the bitter breath of Destiny. O my love, my love, offended Powers are not easily appeased, even when they appear to pardon, and though I shall no more be made a mockery in thy sight, how long is given us together upon the world I know not; but a little hour perchance. Well, ere we pass elsewhere, we will make it glorious, drinking as deeply of the cup of joy as we have drunk of those of sorrows and of shame. This place is hateful to me, for here I have suffered more than ever woman did on earth or phantom in the deepest hell. It is hateful, it is ill-omened. I pray that never again may I behold it.

"Say, what is it passes in thy mind, magician?" and of a sudden she turned fiercely upon the Shaman Simbri who stood near, his arms crossed upon his breast.

"Only, thou Beautiful," he answered, "a dim shadow of things to come. I have what thou dost lack with all thy wisdom, the gift of foresight, and here I see a dead man lying——"

"Another word," she broke in with fury born of some dark fear, "and thou shalt be that man. Fool, put me not in mind that now I have strength again to rid me of the ancient foes I hate, lest I should use a sword thou thrustest to my hand," and her eyes that had been so calm and happy, blazed upon him like fire.

The old wizard felt their fearsome might and shrank from it till the wall stayed him.

"Great One! now as ever I salute thee. Yes, now as at the first beginning whereof we know alone," he stammered. "I had no more to say; the face of that dead man was not revealed to me. I saw only that some crowned Khan of Kaloon to be shall lie here, as he whom the flame has taken lay an hour ago."

"Doubtless many a Khan of Kaloon will lie here," she answered coldly. "Fear not, Shaman, my wrath is past, yet be wise, mine enemy, and prophesy no more evil to the great. Come, let us hence."

So, still led by Leo, she passed from that chamber and stood presently upon the apex of the soaring pillar. The sun was up now, flooding the Mountain flanks, the plains of Kaloon far beneath and the distant, misty peaks with a sheen of gold. Ayesha stood considering the mighty prospect, then addressing Leo, she said—"The world is very fair; I give it all to thee."

Now Atene spoke for the first time.

"Dost thou mean Hes—if thou art still the Hesea and not a demon arisen from the Pit—that thou offerest my territories to this man as a love-gift? If so, I tell thee that first thou must conquer them."

"Ungentle are thy words and mien," answered Ayesha, "yet I forgive them both, for I also can scorn to mock a rival in my hour of victory. When thou wast the fairer, thou didst proffer him these very lands, but say, who is the fairer now? Look at us, all of you, and judge," and she stood by Atene and smiled.

The Khania was a lovely woman. Never to my knowledge have I seen one lovelier, but oh! how coarse and poor she showed beside the wild, ethereal beauty of Ayesha born again. For that beauty was not altogether human, far less so indeed than it had been in the Caves of Kôr; now it was the beauty of a spirit.

The little light that always shone upon Ayesha's brow; the wide-set, maddening eyes which were filled sometimes with the fire of the stars and sometimes with the blue darkness of the heavens wherein they float; the curved lips, so wistful yet so proud; the tresses fine as glossy silk that still spread and rippled as though with a separate life; the general air, not so much of majesty as of some secret power hard to be restrained, which strove in that delicate body and proclaimed its presence to the most careless; that flame of the soul within whereof Oros had spoken, shining now through no "vile vessel," but in a vase of alabaster and of pearl—none of these things and qualities were altogether human. I felt it and was afraid, and Atene felt it also, for she answered—"I am but a woman. What thou art, thou knowest best. Still a taper cannot shine midst yonder fires or a glow-worm against a fallen star; nor can my mortal flesh compare with the glory thou hast earned from hell in payment for thy gifts and homage to the lord of ill. Yet as woman I am thy equal, and as spirit I shall be thy mistress, when robbed of these borrowed beauties thou, Ayesha, standest naked and ashamed before the Judge of all whom thou hast deserted and defied; yes, as thou stoodest but now upon yonder brink above the burning pit where thou yet shalt wander wailing thy lost love. For this I know, mine enemy, that *man and spirit cannot mate*," and Atene ceased, choking in her bitter rage and jealousy.

Now watching Ayesha, I saw her wince a little beneath these evil-omened words, saw also a tinge of grey touch the carmine of her lips and her deep eyes grow dark and troubled. But in a moment her fears had gone and she was asking in a voice that rang clear as silver bells—"Why ravest thou, Atene, like some short-lived summer torrent against the barrier of a seamless cliff? Dost think, poor creature of an hour, to sweep away the rock of my eternal strength with foam and bursting bubbles? Have done and listen. I do not seek thy petty rule, who, if I will it, can take the empire of the world. Yet learn, thou holdest it of my hand. More—I purpose soon to visit thee in thy city—choose thou if it shall be in peace or war! Therefore, Khania, purge thy court and amend thy laws, that when I come I may find contentment in the land which now it lacks, and confirm thee in thy government. My counsel to thee also is that thou choose some worthy man to husband, let him be whom thou wilt, if only he is just and upright and one upon whom thou mayest rest, needing wise guidance as thou dost, Atene. Come, now, my guests, let us hence," and she walked past the Khania, stepping fearlessly upon the very edge of the wind-swept, rounded peak.

In a second the attempt had been made and failed, so quickly indeed that it was not until Leo and I compared our impressions afterwards that we could be sure of what had happened. As Ayesha passed her, the maddened Khania drew a hidden dagger and struck with all her force at her rival's back. I saw the knife vanish to the hilt in her body, as I thought, but this cannot have been so since it fell to the ground, and she who should have been dead, took no hurt at all.

Feeling that she had failed, with a movement like the sudden lurch of a ship, Atene thrust at Ayesha, proposing to hurl her to destruction in the depths beneath. Lo! her outstretched arms went past her although Ayesha never seemed to stir. Yes it was Atene who would have fallen, Atene who already fell, had not Ayesha put out her hand and caught her by the wrist, bearing all her backward-swaying weight as easily as though she were but an infant, and without effort drawing her to safety.

"Foolish woman!" she said in pitying tones. "Wast thou so vexed that thou wouldst strip thyself of the pleasant shape which heaven has given thee? Surely this is madness, Atene, for how knowest thou in what likeness thou mightest be sent to tread the earth again? As no queen perhaps, but as a peasant's child, deformed, unsightly; for such reward, it is said, is given to those that achieve self-murder. Or even, as many think, shaped like a beast—a snake, a cat, a tigress! Why, see," and she picked the dagger from the ground and cast it into the air, "that point was poisoned. Had it but pricked thee now!" and she smiled at her and shook her head.

But Atene could bear no more of this mockery, more venomous than her own steel.

"Thou art not mortal," she wailed. "How can I prevail against thee? To Heaven I leave thy punishment," and there upon the rocky peak Atene sank down and wept.

Leo stood nearest to her, and the sight of this royal woman in her misery proved too much for him to bear. Stepping to her side he stooped and lifted her to her feet, muttering some kind words. For a moment she rested on his arm, then shook herself free of him and took the proffered hand of her old uncle Simbri.

"I see," said Ayesha, "that as ever, thou art courteous, my lord Leo, but it is best that her own servant should take charge of her, for—she may hide more daggers. Come, the day grows, and surely we need rest."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BETROTHAL

Together we descended the multitudinous steps and passed the endless, rock-hewn passages till we came to the door of the dwelling of the high-priestess and were led through it into a hall beyond. Here Ayesha parted from us saying that she was outworn, as indeed she seemed to be with an utter weariness, not of the body, but of the spirit. For her delicate form drooped like a rain-laden lily, her eyes grew dim as those of a person in a trance, and her voice came in a soft, sweet whisper, the voice of one speaking in her sleep.

"Good-bye," she said to us. "Oros will guard you both, and lead you to me at the appointed time. Rest you well."

So she went and the priest led us into a beautiful apartment that opened on to a sheltered garden. So overcome were we also by all that we had endured and seen, that we could scarcely speak, much less discuss these marvellous events.

"My brain swims," said Leo to Oros, "I desire to sleep."

He bowed and conducted us to a chamber where were beds, and on these we flung ourselves down and slept, dreamlessly, like little children.

When we awoke it was afternoon. We rose and bathed, then saying that we wished to be alone, went together into the garden where even at this altitude, now, at the end of August, the air was still mild and pleasant. Behind a rock by a bed of campanulas and other mountain flowers and ferns, was a bench near to the banks of a little stream, on which we seated ourselves.

"What have you to say, Horace?" asked Leo laying his hand upon my arm.

"Say?" I answered. "That things have come about most marvellously; that we have dreamed aright and laboured not in vain; that you are the most fortunate of men and should be the most happy."

He looked at me somewhat strangely, and answered—"Yes, of course; she is lovely, is she not—but," and his voice dropped to its lowest whisper, "I wish, Horace, that Ayesha were a little more human, even as human as she was in the Caves of Kôr. I don't think she is quite flesh and blood, I felt it when she kissed me—if you can call it a kiss—for she barely touched my hair. Indeed how can she be who changed thus in an hour? Flesh and blood are not born of flame, Horace."

"Are you sure that she was so born?" I asked. "Like the visions on the fire, may not that hideous shape have been but an illusion of our minds? May she not be still the same Ayesha whom we knew in Kôr, not re-born, but wafted hither by some mysterious agency?"

"Perhaps. Horace, we do not know—I think that we shall never know. But I admit that to me the thing is terrifying. I am drawn to her by an infinite attraction, her eyes set my blood on fire, the touch of her hand is as that of a wand of madness laid upon my brain. And yet between us there is some wall, invisible, still present. Or perhaps it is only fancy. But, Horace, I think that she is afraid of Atene. Why, in the old days the Khania would have been dead and forgotten in an hour—you remember Ustane?"

"Perhaps she may have grown more gentle, Leo, who, like ourselves, has learned hard lessons."

"Yes," he answered, "I hope that is so. At any rate she has grown more divine—only, Horace, what kind of a husband shall I be for that bright being, if ever I get so far?"

"Why should you not get so far?" I asked angrily, for his words jarred upon my tense nerves.

"I don't know," he answered, "but on general principles do you think that such fortune will be allowed to a man? Also, what did Atene mean when she said that man and spirit cannot mate—and—other things?"

"She meant that she *hoped* they could not, I imagine, and, Leo, it is useless to trouble yourself with forebodings that are more fitted to my years than yours, and probably are based on nothing. Be a philosopher, Leo. You have striven by wonderful ways such as are unknown in the history of the world; you have attained. Take the goods the gods provide you—the glory, the love and the power—and let the future look to itself."

Before he could answer Oros appeared from round the rock, and, bowing with more than his usual humility to Leo, said that the Hesea desired our presence at a service in the Sanctuary. Rejoiced at the prospect of seeing her again before he had hoped to do so, Leo sprang up and we accompanied him back to our apartment.

Here priests were waiting, who, somewhat against his will, trimmed his hair and beard, and would have done the same for me had I not refused their offices. Then they placed gold-embroidered sandals on our feet and wrapped Leo in a magnificent, white robe, also richly worked with gold and purple; a somewhat similar robe but of less ornate design being given to me. Lastly, a silver sceptre was thrust into his hand and into mine a plain wand. This sceptre was shaped like a crook, and the sight of it gave me some clue to the nature of the forthcoming ceremony.

"The crook of Osiris!" I whispered to Leo.

"Look here," he answered, "I don't want to impersonate any Egyptian god, or to be mixed up in their heathen idolatries; in fact, I won't."

"Better get through with it," I suggested, "probably it is only something symbolical."

But Leo, who, notwithstanding the strange circumstances connected with his life, retained the religious principles in which I had educated him, very strongly indeed, refused to move an inch until the nature of this service was made clear to him. Indeed he expressed himself upon the subject with vigour to Oros. At first the priest seemed puzzled what to do, then explained that the forthcoming ceremony was one of betrothal.

On learning this Leo raised no further objections, asking only with some nervousness whether the Khania would be present. Oros answered "No," as she had already departed to Kaloon, vowing war and vengeance.

Then we were led through long passages, till finally we emerged into the gallery immediately in front of the great wooden doors of the apse. At our approach these swung open and we entered it, Oros going first, then Leo, then myself, and following us, the procession of attendant priests.

As soon as our eyes became accustomed to the dazzling glare of the flaming pillars, we saw that some great rite was in progress in the temple, for in front of the divine statue of Motherhood, white-robed and arranged in serried ranks, stood the company of the priests to the number of over two hundred, and behind these the company of the priestesses. Facing this congregation and a little in advance of the two pillars of fire that flared on either side of the shrine, Ayesha herself was seated in a raised chair so that she could be seen of all, while to her right stood a similar chair of which I could guess the purpose.

She was unveiled and gorgeously apparelled, though save for the white beneath, her robes were those of a queen rather than of a priestess. About her radiant brow ran a narrow band of gold, whence rose the head of a hooded asp cut out of a single, crimson jewel, beneath which in endless profusion the glorious waving hair flowed down and around, hiding even the folds of her purple cloak.

This cloak, opening in front, revealed an undertunic of white silk cut low upon her bosom and kept in place by a golden girdle, a double-headed snake, so like to that which She had worn in Kôr that it might have been the same. Her naked arms were bare of ornament, and in her right hand she held the jewelled sistrum set with its gems and bells.

No empress could have looked more royal and no woman was ever half so lovely, for to Ayesha's human beauty was added a spiritual glory, her heritage alone. Seeing her we could see naught else. The rhythmic movement of the bodies of the worshippers, the rolling grandeur of their chant of welcome echoed from the mighty roof, the fearful torches of living flame; all these things were lost on us. For there re-born, enthroned, her arms stretched out in gracious welcome, sat that perfect and immortal woman, the appointed bride of one of us, the friend and lady of the other, her divine presence breathing power, mystery and love.

On we marched between the ranks of hierophants, till Oros and the priests left us and we stood alone face to face with Ayesha. Now she lifted her sceptre and the chant ceased. In the midst of the following silence, she rose from her seat and gliding down its steps, came to where Leo stood and touched him on the forehead with her sistrum, crying in a loud, sweet voice—"Behold the Chosen of the Hesea!" whereon all that audience echoed in a shout of thunder—"Welcome to the Chosen of the Hesea!"

Then while the echoes of that glad cry yet rang round the rocky walls, Ayesha motioned to me to stand at her side, and taking Leo by the hand drew him towards her, so that now he faced the white-robed company. Holding him thus she began to speak in clear and silvery tones.

"Priests and priestesses of Hes, servants with her of the Mother of the world, hear me. Now for the first time I appear among you as I am, you who heretofore have looked but on a hooded shape, not knowing its form or fashion. Learn now the reason that I draw my veil. Ye see this man, whom ye believed a stranger that with his companion had wandered to our shrine. I tell you that he is no stranger; that of old, in lives forgotten, he was my lord who now comes to seek his love again. Say, is it not so, Kallikrates?"

"It is so," answered Leo.

"Priests and priestesses of Hes, as ye know, from the beginning it has been the right and custom of her who holds my place to choose one to be her lord. Is it not so?"

"It is so, O Hes," they answered.

She paused a while, then with a gesture of infinite sweetness turned to Leo, bent towards him thrice and slowly sank upon her knee.

"Say thou," Ayesha said, looking up at him with her wondrous eyes, "say before these here gathered, and all those witnesses whom thou canst not see, dost thou again accept me as thy affianced bride?"

"Aye, Lady," he answered, in a deep but shaken voice, "now and for ever."

Then while all watched, in the midst of a great silence, Ayesha rose, cast down her sistrum sceptre that rang upon the rocky floor, and stretched out her arms towards him.

Leo also bent towards her, and would have kissed her upon the lips. But I who watched, saw his face grow white as it drew near to hers. While the radiance crept from her brow to his, turning his bright hair to gold, I saw also that this strong man trembled like a reed and seemed as though he were about to fall.

I think that Ayesha noted it too, for ere ever their lips met, she thrust him from her and again that grey mist of fear gathered on her face.

In an instant it passed. She had slipped from him and with her hand held his hand as though to support him. Thus they stood till his feet grew firm and his strength returned.

Oros restored the sceptre to her, and lifting it she said—"O love and lord, take thou the place prepared for thee, where thou shalt sit for ever at my side, for with myself I give thee more than thou canst know or than I will tell thee now. Mount thy throne, O Affianced of Hes, and receive the worship of thy priests."

"Nay," he answered with a start as that word fell upon his ears. "Here and now I say it once and for all. I am but a man who know nothing of strange gods, their attributes and ceremonials. None shall bow the knee to me and on earth, Ayesha, I bow mine to thee alone."

Now at this bold speech some of those who heard it looked astonished and whispered to each other, while a voice called—“Beware, thou Chosen, of the anger of the Mother!”

Again for a moment Ayesha looked afraid, then with a little laugh, swept the thing aside, saying—“Surely with that I should be content. For me, O Love, thy adoration for thee the betrothal song, no more.”

So having no choice Leo mounted the throne, where notwithstanding his splendid presence, enhanced as it was by those glittering robes, he looked ill enough at ease, as indeed must any man of his faith and race. Happily however, if some act of semi-idolatrous homage had been proposed, Ayesha found a means to prevent its celebration, and soon all such matters were forgotten both by the singers who sang, and us who listened to the majestic chant that followed.

Of its words unfortunately we were able to understand but little, both because of the volume of sound and of the secret, priestly language in which it was given, though its general purport could not be mistaken.

The female voices began it, singing very low, and conveying a strange impression of time and distance. Now followed bursts of gladness alternating with melancholy chords suggesting sighs and tears and sorrows long endured, and at the end a joyous, triumphant paean thrown to and fro between the men and women singers, terminating in one united chorus repeated again and again, louder and yet louder, till it culminated in a veritable crash of melody, then of a sudden ceased.

Ayesha rose and waved her sceptre, whereon all the company bowed thrice, then turned and breaking into some sweet, low chant that sounded like a lullaby, marched, rank after rank, across the width of the Sanctuary and through the carven doors which closed behind the last of them.

When all had gone, leaving us alone, save for the priest Oros and the priestess Papave, who remained in attendance on their mistress, Ayesha, who sat gazing before her with dreaming, empty eyes, seemed to awake, for she rose and said—“A noble chant, is it not, and an ancient? It was the wedding song of the feast of Isis and Osiris at Behbit in Egypt, and there I heard it before ever I saw the darksome Caves of Kôr. Often have I observed, my Holly, that music lingers longer than aught else in this changeful world, though it is rare that the very words should remain unvaried. Come, beloved—tell me, by what name shall I call thee? Thou art Kallikrates and yet——”

“Call me Leo, Ayesha,” he answered, “as I was christened in the only life of which I have any knowledge. This Kallikrates seems to have been an unlucky man, and the deeds he did, if in truth he was aught other than a tool in the hand of destiny, have bred no good to the inheritors of his body—or his spirit, whichever it may be—or to those women with whom his life was intertwined. Call me Leo, then, for of Kallikrates I have had enough since that night when I looked upon the last of him in Kôr.”

“Ah! I remember,” she answered, “when thou sawest thyself lying in that narrow bed, and I sang thee a song, did I not, of the past and of the future? I can recall two lines of it; the rest I have forgotten—

“‘Onward, never weary, clad with splendour for a robe!  
Till accomplished be our fate, and the night is rushing down.’”

“Yes, my Leo, now indeed we are ‘clad with splendour for a robe,’ and now our fate draws near to its accomplishment. Then perchance will come the down-rushing of the night;” and she sighed, looked up tenderly and said, “See, I am talking to thee in Arabic. Hast thou forgotten it?”

“No.”

“Then let it be our tongue, for I love it best of all, who lisped it at my mother’s knee. Now leave me here alone awhile; I would think. Also,” she added thoughtfully, and speaking with a strange and impressive inflexion of the voice, “there are some to whom I must give audience.”

So we went, all of us, supposing that Ayesha was about to receive a deputation of the Chiefs of the Mountain Tribes who came to felicitate her upon her betrothal.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE THIRD ORDEAL

An hour, two hours passed, while we strove to rest in our sleeping place, but could not, for some influence disturbed us.

"Why does not Ayesha come?" asked Leo at length, pausing in his walk up and down the room. "I want to see her again; I cannot bear to be apart from her. I feel as though she were drawing me to her."

"How can I tell you? Ask Oros; he is outside the door."

So he went and asked him, but Oros only smiled, and answered that the Hesea had not entered her chamber, so doubtless she must still remain in the Sanctuary.

"Then I am going to look for her. Come, Oros, and you too, Horace."

Oros bowed, but declined, saying that he was bidden to bide at our door, adding that we, "to whom all the paths were open," could return to the Sanctuary if we thought well.

"I do think well," replied Leo sharply. "Will you come, Horace, or shall I go without you?"

I hesitated. The Sanctuary was a public place, it is true, but Ayesha had said that she desired to be alone there for awhile. Without more words, however, Leo shrugged his shoulders and started.

"You will never find your way," I said, and followed him.

We went down the long passages that were dimly lighted with lamps and came to the gallery. Here we found no lamps; still we groped our way to the great wooden doors. They were shut, but Leo pushed upon them impatiently, and one of them swung open a little, so that we could squeeze ourselves between them. As we passed it closed noiselessly behind us.

Now we should have been in the Sanctuary, and in the full blaze of those awful columns of living fire. But they were out, or we had strayed elsewhere; at least the darkness was intense. We tried to work our way back to the doors again, but could not. We were lost.

More, something oppressed us; we did not dare to speak. We went on a few paces and stopped, for we became aware that we were not alone. Indeed, it seemed to me that we stood in the midst of a thronging multitude, but not of men and women. Beings pressed about us; we could feel their robes, yet could not touch them; we could feel their breath, but it was *cold*. The air stirred all round us as they passed to and fro, passed in endless numbers. It was as though we had entered a cathedral filled with the vast congregation of all the dead who once had worshipped there. We grew afraid—my face was damp with fear, the hair stood up upon my head. We seemed to have wandered into a hall of the Shades.

At length light appeared far away, and we saw that it emanated from the two pillars of fire which had burned on either side of the Shrine, that of a sudden became luminous. So we were in the Sanctuary, and still near to the doors. Now those pillars were not bright; they were low and lurid; the rays from them scarcely reached us standing in the dense shadow.

But if we could not be seen in them we still could see. Look! Yonder sat Ayesha on a throne, and oh! she was awful in her death-like majesty. The blue light of the sunken columns played upon her, and in it she sat erect, with such a face and mien of pride as no human creature ever wore. Power seemed to flow from her; yes, it flowed from those wide-set, glittering eyes like light from jewels.

She seemed a Queen of Death receiving homage from the dead. More, she *was* receiving homage from dead or living—I know not which—for, as I thought it, a shadowy Shape arose before the throne and bent the knee to her, then another, and another, and another.

As each vague Being appeared and bowed its starry head she raised her sceptre in answering salutation. We could hear the distant tinkle of the sistrum bells, the only sound in all that place, yes, and see her lips move, though no whisper reached us from them. Surely spirits were worshipping her!

We gripped each other. We shrank back and found the door. It gave to our push. Now we were in the passages again, and now we had reached our room.

At its entrance Oros was standing as we had left him. He greeted us with his fixed smile, taking no note of the terror written on our faces. We passed him, and entering the room stared at each other.

"What is she?" gasped Leo. "An angel?"

"Yes," I answered, "something of that sort." But to myself I thought that there are doubtless many kinds of angels.

"And what were those—those *shadows*—doing?" he asked again.

"Welcoming her after her transformation, I suppose. But perhaps they were not shadows—only priests disguised and conducting some secret ceremonial!"

Leo shrugged his shoulders but made no other answer.

At length the door opened, and Oros, entering, said that the Hesea commanded our presence in her chamber.

So, still oppressed with fear and wonder—for what we had seen was perhaps more dreadful than anything that had gone before—we went, to find Ayesha seated and looking somewhat weary, but otherwise unchanged. With her was the priestess Papave, who had just unrobed her of the royal mantle which she wore in the Sanctuary.

Ayesha beckoned Leo to her, taking his hand and searching his face with her eyes, not without anxiety as I thought.

Now I turned, purposing to leave them alone, but she saw, and said to me, smiling—“Why wouldst thou forsake us, Holly? To go back to the Sanctuary once more?” and she looked at me with meaning in her glance. “Hast thou questions to ask of the statue of the Mother yonder that thou lovest the place so much? They say it speaks, telling of the future to those who dare to kneel beside it unaccompanied from night till dawn. Yet I have often done so, but to me it has never spoken, though none long to learn the future more.”

I made no answer, nor did she seem to expect any, for she went on at once—“Nay, bide here and let us have done with all sad and solemn thoughts. We three will sup together as of old, and for awhile forget our fears and cares, and be happy as children who know not sin and death, or that change which is death indeed. Oros, await my lord without. Papave, I will call thee later to disrobe me. Till then let none disturb us.”

The room that Ayesha inhabited was not very large, as we saw by the hanging lamps with which it was lighted. It was plainly though richly furnished, the rock walls being covered with tapestries, and the tables and chairs inlaid with silver, but the only token that here a woman had her home was that about it stood several bowls of flowers. One of these, I remember, was filled with the delicate harebells I had admired, dug up roots and all, and set in moss.

“A poor place,” said Ayesha, “yet better than that in which I dwelt those two thousand years awaiting thy coming, Leo, for, see, beyond it is a garden, wherein I sit,” and she sank down upon a couch by the table, motioning to us to take our places opposite to her.

The meal was simple; for us, eggs boiled hard and cold venison; for her, milk, some little cakes of flour, and mountain berries.

Presently Leo rose and threw off his gorgeous, purple-broidered robe, which he still wore, and cast upon a chair the crook-headed sceptre that Oros had again thrust into his hand. Ayesha smiled as he did so, saying—“It would seem that thou holdest these sacred emblems in but small respect.”

“Very small,” he answered. “Thou heardest my words in the Sanctuary, Ayesha, so let us make a pact. Thy religion I do not understand, but I understand my own, and not even for thy sake will I take part in what I hold to be idolatry.”

Now I thought that she would be angered by this plain speaking, but she only bowed her head and answered meekly—“Thy will is mine, Leo, though it will not be easy always to explain thy absence from the ceremonies in the temple. Yet thou hast a right to thine own faith, which doubtless is mine also.”

“How can that be?” he asked, looking up.

“Because all great Faiths are the same, changed a little to suit the needs of passing times and peoples. What taught that of Egypt, which, in a fashion, we still follow here? That hidden in a multitude of manifestations, one Power great and good, rules all the universes: that the holy shall inherit a life eternal and the vile, eternal death: that men shall be shaped and judged by their own hearts and deeds, and here and hereafter drink of the cup which they have brewed: that their real home is not on earth, but beyond the earth, where all riddles shall be answered and all sorrows cease. Say, dost thou believe these things, as I do?”

“Aye, Ayesha, but Hes or Isis is thy goddess, for hast thou not told us tales of thy dealings with her in the past, and did we not hear thee make thy prayer to her? Who, then, is this goddess Hes?”

“Know, Leo, that she is what I named her—Nature’s soul, no divinity, but the secret spirit of the world; that universal Motherhood, whose symbol thou hast seen yonder, and in whose mysteries lie hid all earthly life and knowledge.”

“Does, then, this merciful Motherhood follow her votaries with death and evil, as thou sayest she has followed thee for thy disobedience, and me—and another—because of some unnatural vows broken long ago?” Leo asked quietly.

Resting her arm upon the table, Ayesha looked at him with sombre eyes and answered—“In that Faith of thine of which thou speakest are there perchance two gods, each having many ministers: a god of good and a god of evil, an Osiris and a Set?”

He nodded.

“I thought it. And the god of ill is strong, is he not, and can put on the shape of good? Tell me, then, Leo, in the world that is to-day, whereof I know so little, hast thou ever heard of frail souls who for some earthly bribe have sold themselves to that evil one, or to his minister, and been paid their price in bitterness and anguish?”

“All wicked folk do as much in this form or in that,” he answered.

“And if once there lived a woman who was mad with the thirst for beauty, for life, for wisdom, and for love, might she not—oh! might she not perchance——”

“Sell herself to the god called Set, or one of his angels? Ayesha, dost thou mean?”—and Leo rose, speaking in a voice that was full of fear—“that thou art such a woman?”

“And if so?” she asked, also rising and drawing slowly near to him.

“If so,” he answered hoarsely, “if so, I think that perhaps we had best fulfil our fates apart——”

“Ah!” she said, with a little scream of pain as though a knife had stabbed her, “wouldst thou away to Atene? I tell thee that thou canst not leave me. I have power—above all men thou shouldst know it, whom once I slew. Nay, thou hast no memory, poor creature of a breath, and I—I remember too well. I will not hold thee dead again—I’ll hold thee living. Look now on my beauty, Leo”—and she bent her swaying form towards him, compelling him with her glorious, alluring eyes—“and begone if thou canst. Why, thou drawest nearer to me. Man, that is not the path of flight.”

“Nay, I will not tempt thee with these common lures. Go, Leo, if thou wilt. Go, my love, and leave me to my loneliness and my sin. Now—at once. Atene will shelter thee till spring, when thou canst cross the mountains and return to thine own world again, and to those things of common life which are thy joy. See, Leo, I veil myself that thou mayest not be tempted,” and she flung the corner of

her cloak about her head, then asked a sudden question through it—"Didst thou not but now return to the Sanctuary with Holly after I bade thee leave me there alone? Methought I saw the two of you standing by its doors."

"Yes, we came to seek thee," he answered.

"And found more than ye sought, as often chances to the bold—is it not so? Well, I willed that ye should come and see, and protected you where others might have died."

"What didst thou there upon the throne, and whose were those forms which we saw bending before thee?" he asked coldly.

"I have ruled in many shapes and lands, Leo. Perchance they were ancient companions and servitors of mine come to greet me once again and to hear my tidings. Or perchance they were but shadows of thy brain, pictures like those upon the fire, that it pleased me to summon to thy sight, to try thy strength and constancy.

"Leo Vincey, know now the truth; that all things are illusions, even that there exists no future and no past, that what has been and what shall be already *is* eternally. Know that I, Ayesha, am but a magic wraith, foul when thou seest me foul, fair when thou seest me fair; a spirit-bubble reflecting a thousand lights in the sunshine of thy smile, grey as dust and gone in the shadow of thy frown. Think of the throned Queen before whom the shadowy Powers bowed and worship, for that is I. Think of the hideous, withered Thing thou sawest naked on the rock, and flee away, for that is I. Or keep me lovely, and adore, knowing all evil centred in my spirit, for that is I. Now, Leo, thou hast the truth. Put me from thee for ever and for ever if thou wilt, and be safe; or clasp me, clasp me to thy heart, and in payment for my lips and love take my sin upon thy head! Nay, Holly, be thou silent, for now he must judge alone."

Leo turned, as I thought, at first, to find the door. But it was not so, for he did but walk up and down the room awhile. Then he came back to where Ayesha stood, and spoke quite simply and in a very quiet voice, such as men of his nature often assume in moments of great emotion.

"Ayesha," he said, "when I saw thee as thou wast, aged and—thou knowest how—I clung to thee. Now, when thou hast told me the secret of this unholy pact of thine, when with my eyes, at least, I have seen thee reigning a mistress of spirits good or ill, yet I cling to thee. Let thy sin, great or little—whate'er it is—be my sin also. In truth, I feel its weight sink to my soul and become a part of me, and although I have no vision or power of prophecy, I am sure that I shall not escape its punishment. Well, though I be innocent, let me bear it for thy sake. I am content."

Ayesha heard, the cloak slipped from her head, and for a moment she stood silent like one amazed, then burst into a passion of sudden tears. Down she went before him, and clinging to his garments, she bowed her stately shape until her forehead touched the ground. Yes, that proud being, who was more than mortal, whose nostrils but now had drunk the incense of the homage of ghosts or spirits, humbled herself at this man's feet.

With an exclamation of horror, half-maddened at the piteous sight, Leo sprang to one side, then stooping, lifted and led her still weeping to the couch.

"Thou knowest not what thou hast done," Ayesha said at last. "Let all thou sawest on the Mountain's crest or in the Sanctuary be but visions of the night; let that tale of an offended goddess be a parable, a fable, if thou wilt. This at least is true, that ages since I sinned for thee and against thee and another; that ages since I bought beauty and life indefinite wherewith I might win thee and endow thee at a cost which few would dare; that I have paid interest on the debt, in mockery, utter loneliness, and daily pain which scarce could be endured, until the bond fell due at last and must be satisfied.

"Yes, how I may not tell thee, thou and thou alone stoodst between me and the full discharge of this most dreadful debt—for know that in mercy it is given to us to redeem one another."

Now he would have spoken, but with a motion of her hand she bade him be silent, and continued—"See now, Leo, three great dangers has thy body passed of late upon its journey to my side; the Death-hounds, the Mountains, and the Precipice. Know that these were but types and ordained foreshadowings of the last threefold trial of thy soul. From the pursuing passions of Atene which must have undone us both, thou hast escaped victorious. Thou hast endured the desert loneliness of the sands and snows starving for a comfort that never came. Even when the avalanche thundered round thee thy faith stood fast as it stood above the Pit of flame, while after bitter years of doubt a rushing flood of horror swallowed up thy hopes. As thou didst descend the glacier's steep, not knowing what lay beneath that fearful path, so but now and of thine own choice, for very love of me, thou hast plunged headlong into an abyss that is deeper far, to share its terrors with my spirit. Dost thou understand at last?"

"Something, not all, I think," he answered slowly.

"Surely thou art wrapped in a double veil of blindness," she cried impatiently. "Listen again:

"Hadst thou yielded to Nature's crying and rejected me but yesterday, in that foul shape I must perchance have lingered for uncounted time, playing the poor part of priestess of a forgotten faith. This was the first temptation, the ordeal of thy flesh—nay, not the first—the second, for Atene and her lurings were the first. But thou wast loyal, and in the magic of thy conquering love my beauty and my womanhood were re-born.

"Hadst thou rejected me to-night, when, as I was bidden to do, I showed thee that vision in the Sanctuary and confessed to thee my soul's black crime, then hopeless and helpless, unshielded by my earthly power, I must have wandered into the deep and endless night of solitude. This was the third appointed test, the trial of thy spirit, and by thy steadfastness, Leo, thou hast loosed the hand of Destiny from about my throat. Now I am regenerate in thee—through thee may hope again for some true life beyond, which thou shalt share. And yet, and yet, if thou shouldst suffer, as well may chance——"

"Then I suffer, and there's an end," broke in Leo serenely. "Save for a few things my mind is clear, and there must be justice for us all at last. If I have broken the bond that bound thee, if I have freed thee from some threatening, spiritual ill by taking a risk upon my head, well, I have not lived, and if need be, shall not die in vain. So let us have done with all these problems, or rather first answer thou me one. Ayesha, how wast thou changed upon that peak?"

"In flame I left thee, Leo, and in flame I did return, as in flame, mayhap, we shall both depart. Or perhaps the change was in the eyes of all of you who watched, and not in this shape of mine. I have answered. Seek to learn no more."

"One thing I do still seek to learn. Ayesha, we were betrothed to-night. When wilt thou marry me?"

"Not yet, not yet," she answered hurriedly, her voice quivering as she spoke. "Leo, thou must put that hope from thy thoughts awhile, and for some few months, a year perchance, be content to play the part of friend and lover."

"Why so?" he asked, with bitter disappointment. "Ayesha, those parts have been mine for many a day; more, I grow no younger, and, unlike thee, shall soon be old. Also, life is fleeting, and sometimes I think that I near its end."

"Speak no such evil-omened words," she said, springing from the couch and stamping her sandalled foot upon the ground in anger born of fear. "Yet thou sayest truth; thou art unfortified against the accidents of time and chance. Oh! horrible, horrible; thou mightest die again, and leave me living."

"Then give me of thy life, Ayesha."

"That would I gladly, all of it, couldst thou but repay me with the boon of death to come."

"Oh! ye poor mortals," she went on, with a sudden burst of passion; "ye beseech your gods for the gift of many years, being ignorant that ye would sow a seed within your breasts whence ye must garner ten thousand miseries. Know ye not that this world is indeed the wide house of hell, in whose chambers from time to time the spirit tarries a little while, then, weary and aghast, speeds wailing to the peace that it has won."

"Think then what it is to live on here eternally and yet be human; to age in soul and see our beloved die and pass to lands whither we may not hope to follow; to wait while drop by drop the curse of the long centuries falls upon our imperishable being, like water slow dripping on a diamond that it cannot wear, till they be born anew forgetful of us, and again sink from our helpless arms into the void unknowable."

"Think what it is to see the sins we sin, the tempting look, the word idle or unkind—aye, even the selfish thought or struggle, multiplied ten thousandfold and more eternal than ourselves, spring up upon the universal bosom of the earth to be the bane of a million destinies, whilst the everlasting Finger writes its endless count, and a cold voice of Justice cries in our conscience-haunted solitude, 'Oh! soul unshriven, behold the ripening harvest thy wanton hand did scatter, and long in vain for the waters of forgetfulness.'"

"Think what it is to have every earthly wisdom, yet to burn unsatisfied for the deeper and forbidden draught; to gather up all wealth and power and let them slip again, like children weary of a painted toy; to sweep the harp of fame, and, maddened by its jangling music, to stamp it small beneath our feet; to snatch at pleasure's goblet and find its wine is sand, and at length, outworn, to cast us down and pray the pitiless gods with whose stolen garment we have wrapped ourselves, to take it back again, and suffer us to slink naked to the grave."

"Such is the life thou askest, Leo. Say, wilt thou have it now?"

"If it may be shared with thee," he answered. "These woes are born of loneliness, but then our perfect fellowship would turn them into joy."

"Aye," she said, "while it was permitted to endure. So be it, Leo. In the spring, when the snows melt, we will journey together to Libya, and there thou shalt be bathed in the Fount of Life, that forbidden Essence of which once thou didst fear to drink. Afterwards I will wed thee."

"That place is closed for ever, Ayesha."

"Not to my feet and thine," she answered. "Fear not, my love, were this mountain heaped thereon, I would blast a path through it with mine eyes and lay its secret bare. Oh! would that thou wast as I am, for then before tomorrow's sun we'd watch the rolling pillar thunder by, and thou shouldst taste its glory."

"But it may not be. Hunger or cold can starve thee, and waters drown; swords can slay thee, or sickness sap away thy strength. Had it not been for the false Atene, who disobeyed my words, as it was foredoomed that she should do, by this day we were across the mountains, or had travelled northward through the frozen desert and the rivers. Now we must await the melting of the snows, for winter is at hand, and in it, as thou knowest, no man can live upon their heights."

"Eight months till April before we can start, and how long to cross the mountains and all the vast distances beyond, and the seas, and the swamps of Kôr? Why, at the best, Ayesha, two years must go by before we can even find the place;" and he fell to entreating her to let them be wed at once and journey afterwards.

But she said, Nay, and nay, and nay, it should not be, till at length, as though fearing his pleading, or that of her own heart, she rose and dismissed us.

"Ah! my Holly," she said to me as we three parted, "I promised thee and myself some few hours of rest and of the happiness of quiet, and thou seest how my desire has been fulfilled. Those old Egyptians were wont to share their feasts with one grizzly skeleton, but here I counted four to-night that you both could see, and they are named Fear, Suspense, Foreboding, and Love-denied. Doubtless also, when these are buried others will come to haunt us, and snatch the poor morsel from our lips."

"So hath it ever been with me, whose feet misfortune dogs. Yet I hope on, and now many a barrier lies behind us; and Leo, thou hast been tried in the appointed, triple fires and yet proved true. Sweet be thy slumbers, O my love, and sweeter still thy dreams, for know, my soul shall share them. I vow to thee that to-morrow we'll be happy, aye, to-morrow without fail."

"Why will she not marry me at once?" asked Leo, when we were alone in our chamber. "Because she is afraid," I answered.

## CHAPTER XIX

### LEO AND THE LEOPARD

During the weeks that followed these momentous days often and often I wondered to myself whether a more truly wretched being had ever lived than the woman, or the spirit, whom we knew as She, Hes, and Ayesha. Whether in fact also, or in our imagination only, she had arisen from the ashes of her hideous age into the full bloom of perpetual life and beauty inconceivable.

These things at least were certain: Ayesha had achieved the secret of an existence so enduring that for all human purposes it might be called unending. Within certain limitations—such as her utter inability to foresee the future—undoubtedly also, she was endued with powers that can only be described as supernatural.

Her rule over the strange community amongst whom she lived was absolute; indeed, its members regarded her as a goddess, and as such she was worshipped. After marvellous adventures, the man who was her very life, I might almost say her soul, whose being was so mysteriously intertwined with hers, whom she loved also with the intensest human passion of which woman can be capable, had sought her out in this hidden corner of the world.

More, thrice he had proved his unalterable fidelity to her. First, by his rejection of the royal and beautiful, if undisciplined, Atene. Secondly, by clinging to Ayesha when she seemed to be repulsive to every natural sense. Thirdly, after that homage scene in the Sanctuary—though with her unutterable perfections before his eyes this did not appear to be so wonderful—by steadfastness in the face of her terrible avowal, true or false, that she had won her gifts and him through some dim, unholy pact with the powers of evil, in the unknown fruits and consequences of which he must be involved as the price of her possession.

Yet Ayesha was miserable. Even in her lightest moods it was clear to me that those skeletons at the feast of which she had spoken were her continual companions. Indeed, when we were alone she would acknowledge it in dark hints and veiled allegories or allusions. Crushed though her rival the Khania Atene might be, also she was still jealous of her.

Perhaps “afraid” would be a better word, for some instinct seemed to warn Ayesha that soon or late her hour would come to Atene again, and that then it would be her own turn to drink of the bitter waters of despair.

What troubled her more a thousandfold, however, were her fears for Leo. As may well be understood, to stand in his intimate relationship to this half divine and marvellous being, and yet not to be allowed so much as to touch her lips, did not conduce to his physical or mental well-being, especially as he knew that the wall of separation must not be climbed for at least two years. Little wonder that Leo lost appetite, grew thin and pale, and could not sleep, or that he implored her continually to rescind her decree and marry him.

But on this point Ayesha was immovable. Instigated thereto by Leo, and I may add my own curiosity, when we were alone I questioned her again as to the reasons of this self-denying ordinance. All she would tell me, however, was that between them rose the barrier of Leo’s mortality, and that until his physical being had been impregnated with the mysterious virtue of the Vapour of Life, it was not wise that she should take him as a husband.

I asked her why, seeing that though a long-lived one, she was still a woman, whereon her face assumed a calm but terrifying smile, and she answered—“Art so sure, my Holly? Tell me, do your women wear such jewels as that set upon my brow?” and she pointed to the faint but lambent light which glowed about her forehead.

More, she began slowly to stroke her abundant hair, then her breast and body. Wherever her fingers passed the mystic light was born, until in that darkened room—for the dusk was gathering—she shimmered from head to foot like the water of a phosphorescent sea, a being glorious yet fearful to behold. Then she waved her hand, and, save for the gentle radiance on her brow, became as she had been.

“Art so sure, my Holly?” Ayesha repeated. “Nay, shrink not; that flame will not burn thee. Mayhap thou didst but imagine it, as I have noted thou dost imagine many things; for surely no woman could clothe herself in light and live, nor has so much as the smell of fire passed upon my garments.”

Then at length my patience was outworn, and I grew angry.

“I am sure of nothing, Ayesha,” I answered, “except that thou wilt make us mad with all these tricks and changes. Say, art thou a spirit then?”

“We are all spirits,” she said reflectively, “and I, perhaps, more than some. Who can be certain?”

“Not I,” I answered. “Yet I implore, woman or spirit, tell me one thing. Tell me the truth. In the beginning what wast thou to Leo, and what was he to thee?”

She looked at me very solemnly and answered—“Does my memory deceive me, Holly, or is it written in the first book of the Law of the Hebrews, which once I used to study, that the sons of Heaven came down to the daughters of men, and found that they were fair?”

“It is so written,” I answered.

"Then, Holly, might it not have chanced that once a daughter of Heaven came down to a man of Earth and loved him well? Might it not chance that for her great sin, she, this high, fallen star, who had befouled her immortal state for him, was doomed to suffer till at length his love, made divine by pain and faithful even to a memory, was permitted to redeem her?"

Now at length I saw light and sprang up eagerly, but in a cold voice she added:

"Nay, Holly, cease to question me, for there are things of which I can but speak to thee in figures and in parables, not to mock and bewilder thee, but because I must. Interpret them as thou wilt. Still, Atene thought me no mortal, since she told us that man and spirit may not mate; and there are matters in which I let her judgment weigh with me, as without doubt now, as in other lives, she and that old Shaman, her uncle, have wisdom, aye, and foresight. So bid my lord press me no more to wed him, for it gives me pain to say him nay—ah! thou knowest not how much.

"Moreover, I will declare myself to thee, old friend; whatever else I be, at least I am too womanly to listen to the pleadings of my best beloved and not myself be moved. See, I have set a curb upon desire and drawn it until my heart bleeds; but if he pursues me with continual words and looks of burning love, who knoweth but that I shall kindle in his flame and throw the reins of reason to the winds?"

"Oh, then together we might race adown our passions' steep; together dare the torrent that rages at its foot, and there perchance be whelmed or torn asunder. Nay, nay, another space of journeying, but a little space, and we reach the bridge my wisdom found, and cross it safely, and beyond for ever ride on at ease through the happy meadows of our love."

Then she was silent, nor would she speak more upon the matter. Also—and this was the worst of it—even now I was not sure that she told me the truth, or, at any rate, all of it, for to Ayesha's mind truth seemed many coloured as are the rays of light thrown from the different faces of a cut jewel. We never could be certain which shade of it she was pleased to present, who, whether by preference or of necessity, as she herself had said, spoke of such secrets in figures of speech and parables.

It is a fact that to this hour I do not know whether Ayesha is spirit or woman, or, as I suspect, a blend of both. I do not know the limits of her powers, or if that elaborate story of the beginning of her love for Leo was true—which personally I doubt—or but a fable, invented by her mind, and through it, as she had hinted, pictured on the flame for her own hidden purposes.

I do not know whether when first we saw her on the Mountain she was really old and hideous, or did but put on that shape in our eyes in order to test her lover. I do not know whether, as the priest Oros bore witness—which he may well have been bidden to do—her spirit passed into the body of the dead priestess of Hes, or whether when she seemed to perish there so miserably, her body and her soul were wafted straightway from the Caves of Kôr to this Central Asian peak.

I do not know why, as she was so powerful, she did not come to seek us, instead of leaving us to seek her through so many weary years, though I suggest that some superior force forbade her to do more than companion us unseen, watching our every act, reading our every thought, until at length we reached the predestined place and hour. Also, as will appear, there were other things of which this is not the time to speak, whereby I am still more tortured and perplexed.

In short, I know nothing, except that my existence has been intertangled with one of the great mysteries of the world; that the glorious being called Ayesha won the secret of life from whatever power holds it in its keeping; that she alleged—although of this, remember, we have no actual proof—such life was to be attained by bathing in a certain emanation, vapour or essence; that she was possessed by a passion not easy to understand, but terrific in its force and immortal in its nature, concentrated upon one other being and one alone. That through this passion also some angry fate smote her again, again, and yet again, making of her countless days a burden, and leading the power and the wisdom which knew all but could foreknow nothing, into abysses of anguish, suspense, and disappointment such as—Heaven be thanked!—we common men and women are not called upon to plumb.

For the rest, should human eyes ever fall upon it, each reader must form his own opinion of this history, its true interpretation and significance. These and the exact parts played by Atene and myself in its development I hope to solve shortly, though not here.

Well, as I have said, the upshot of it all was that Ayesha was devoured with anxiety about Leo. Except in this matter of marriage, his every wish was satisfied, and indeed forestalled. Thus he was never again asked to share in any of the ceremonies of the Sanctuary, though, indeed, stripped of its rites and spiritual symbols, the religion of the College of Hes proved pure and harmless enough. It was but a diluted version of the Osiris and Isis worship of old Egypt, from which it had been inherited, mixed with the Central Asian belief in the transmigration or reincarnation of souls and the possibility of drawing near to the ultimate Godhead by holiness of thought and life.

In fact, the head priestess and Oracle was only worshipped as a representative of the Divinity, while the temporal aims of the College in practice were confined to good works, although it is true that they still sighed for their lost authority over the country of Kaloon. Thus they had hospitals, and during the long and severe winters, when the Tribes of the Mountain slopes were often driven to the verge of starvation, gave liberally to the destitute from their stores of food.

Leo liked to be with Ayesha continually, so we spent each evening in her company, and much of the day also, until she found that this inactivity told upon him who for years had been accustomed to endure every rigour of climate in the open air. After this came home to her—although she was always haunted by terror lest any accident should befall him—Ayesha insisted upon his going out to kill the wild sheep and the ibex, which lived in numbers on the mountain ridges, placing him in the charge of the chiefs and huntsmen of the Tribes, with whom thus he became well acquainted. In this exercise, however, I accompanied him but rarely, as, if used too much, my arm still gave me pain.

Once indeed such an accident did happen. I was seated in the garden with Ayesha and watching her. Her head rested on her hand, and she was looking with her wide eyes, across which the swift thoughts passed like clouds over a windy sky, or dreams through the mind of a sleeper—looking out vacantly towards the mountain snows. Seen thus her loveliness was inexpressible, amazing; merely to gaze upon it was an intoxication. Contemplating it, I understood indeed that, like to that of the fabled Helen, this gift of hers alone—and it was but one of many—must have caused infinite sorrows, had she ever been permitted to display it to the world. It would have driven humanity to madness: the men with longings and the women with jealousy and hate.

And yet in what did her surpassing beauty lie? Ayesha's face and form were perfect, it is true; but so are those of some other women. Not in these then did it live alone, but rather, I think, especially while what I may call her human moods were on her, in the soft mystery that dwelt upon her features and gathered and changed in her splendid eyes. Some such mystery may be seen, however faintly, on the faces of certain of the masterpieces of the Greek sculptors, but Ayesha it clothed like an ever-present atmosphere, suggesting a glory that was not of earth, making her divine.

As I gazed at her and wondered thus, of a sudden she became terribly agitated, and, pointing to a shoulder of the Mountain miles and miles away, said—"Look!"

I looked, but saw nothing except a sheet of distant snow.

"Blind fool, canst thou not see that my lord is in danger of his life?" she cried. "Nay, I forgot, thou hast no vision. Take it now from me and look again;" and laying her hand, from which a strange, numbing current seemed to flow, upon my head, she muttered some swift words.

Instantly my eyes were opened, and, not upon the distant Mountain, but in the air before me as it were, I saw Leo rolling over and over at grips with a great snow-leopard, whilst the chief and huntsmen with him ran round and round, seeking an opportunity to pierce the savage brute with their spears and yet leave him unharmed.

Ayesha, rigid with terror, swayed to and fro at my side, till presently the end came, for I could see Leo drive his long knife into the bowels of the leopard, which at once grew limp, separated from him, and after a struggle or two in the bloodstained snow, lay still. Then he rose, laughing and pointing to his rent garments, whilst one of the huntsmen came forward and began to bandage some wounds in his hands and thigh with strips of linen torn from his under-robe.

The vision vanished suddenly as it had come, and I felt Ayesha leaning heavily upon my shoulder like any other frightened woman, and heard her gasp—"That danger also has passed by, but how many are there to follow? Oh! tormented heart, how long canst thou endure!"

Then her wrath flamed up against the chief and his huntsmen, and she summoned messengers and sent them out at speed with a litter and ointments, bidding them to bear back the lord Leo and to bring his companions to her very presence.

"Thou seest what days are mine, my Holly, aye, and have been these many years," she said; "but those hounds shall pay me for this agony."

Nor would she suffer me to reason with her.

Four hours later Leo returned, limping after the litter in which, instead of himself, for whom it was sent, lay a mountain sheep and the skin of the snow-leopard that he had placed there to save the huntsmen the labour of carrying them. Ayesha was waiting for him in the hall of her dwelling, and gliding to him—I cannot say she walked—overwhelmed him with mingled solicitude and reproaches. He listened awhile, then asked—"How dost thou know anything of this matter? The leopard skin has not yet been brought to thee."

"I know because I saw," she answered. "The worst hurt was above thy knee; hast thou dressed it with the salve I sent?"

"Not I," he said. "But thou hast not left this Sanctuary; how didst thou see? By thy magic?"

"If thou wilt, at least I saw, and Holly also saw thee rolling in the snow with that fierce brute, while those curs ran round like scared children."

"I am weary of this magic," interrupted Leo crossly. "Cannot a man be left alone for an hour even with a leopard of the mountain? As for those brave men——"

At this moment Oros entered and whispered something, bowing low.

"As for those 'brave men,' I will deal with them," said Ayesha with bitter emphasis, and covering herself—for she never appeared unveiled to the people of the Mountain—she swept from the place.

"Where has she gone, Horace?" asked Leo. "To one of her services in the Sanctuary?"

"I don't know," I answered; "but if so, I think it will be that chief's burial service."

"Will it?" he exclaimed, and instantly limped after her.

A minute or two later I thought it wise to follow. In the Sanctuary a curious scene was in progress. Ayesha was seated in front of the statue. Before her, very much frightened, knelt a brawny, red-haired chieftain and five of his followers, who still carried their hunting spears, while with folded arms and an exceedingly grim look upon his face, Leo, who, as I learned afterwards, had already interfered and been silenced, stood upon one side listening to what passed. At a little distance behind were a dozen or more of the temple guards, men armed with swords and picked for their strength and stature.

Ayesha, in her sweetest voice, was questioning the men as to how the leopard, of which the skin lay before her, had come to attack Leo. The chief answered that they had tracked the brute to its lair between two rocks; that one of them had gone in and wounded it, whereon it sprang upon him and struck him down; that then the lord Leo had engaged it while the man escaped, and was also struck down, after which, rolling with it on the ground, he stabbed and slew the animal. That was all.

"No, not all," said Ayesha; "for you forget, cowards that you are, that, keeping yourselves in safety, you left my lord to the fury of this beast. Good. Drive them out on to the Mountain, there to perish also at the fangs of beasts, and make it known that he who gives them food or shelter dies."

Offering no prayer for pity or excuse, the chief and his followers rose, bowed, and turned to go.

"Stay a moment, comrades," said Leo, "and, chief, give me your arm; my scratch grows stiff; I cannot walk fast. We will finish this hunt together."

"What doest thou? Art mad?" asked Ayesha.

"I know not whether I am mad," he answered, "but I know that thou art wicked and unjust. Look now, than these hunters none braver ever breathed. That man"—and he pointed to the one whom the leopard had struck down—"took my place and went in before

me because I ordered that we should attack the creature, and thus was felled. As thou seest all, thou mightest have seen this also. Then it sprang on me, and the rest of these, my friends, ran round waiting a chance to strike, which at first they could not do unless they would have killed me with it, since I and the brute rolled over and over in the snow. As it was, one of them seized it with his bare hands: look at the teeth marks on his arm. So if they are to perish on the Mountain, I, who am the man to blame, perish with them.”

Now, while the hunters looked at him with fervent gratitude in their eyes, Ayesha thought a little, then said cleverly enough—“In truth, my lord Leo, had I known all the tale, well mightest thou have named me wicked and unjust; but I knew only what I saw, and out of their own mouths did I condemn them. My servants, my lord here has pleaded for you, and you are forgiven; more, he who rushed in upon the leopard and he who seized it with his hands shall be rewarded and advanced. Go; but I warn you if you suffer my lord to come into more danger, you shall not escape so easily again.”

So they bowed and went, still blessing Leo with their eyes, since death by exposure on the Mountain snows was the most terrible form of punishment known to these people, and one only inflicted by the direct order of Hes upon murderers or other great criminals.

When we had left the Sanctuary and were alone again in the hall, the storm that I had seen gathering upon Leo's face broke in earnest. Ayesha renewed her inquiries about his wounds, and wished to call Oros, the physician, to dress them, and as he refused this, offered to do so herself. He begged that she would leave his wounds alone, and then, his great beard bristling with wrath, asked her solemnly if he was a child in arms, a query so absurd that I could not help laughing.

Then he scolded her—yes, he scolded Ayesha! Wishing to know what she meant (1) by spying upon him with her magic, an evil gift that he had always disliked and mistrusted; (2) by condemning brave and excellent men, his good friends, to a death of fiendish cruelty upon such evidence, or rather out of temper, on no evidence at all; and (3) by giving him into charge of them, as though he were a little boy, and telling them that they would have to answer for it if he were hurt: he who, in his time, had killed every sort of big game known and passed through some perils and encounters?

Thus he beat her with his words, and, wonderful to say, Ayesha, this being more than woman, submitted to the chastisement meekly. Yet had any other man dared to address her with roughness even, I doubt not that his speech and his life would have come to a swift and simultaneous end, for I knew that now, as of old, she could slay by the mere effort of her will. But she did not slay; she did not even threaten, only, as any other loving woman might have done, she began to cry. Yes, great tears gathered in those lovely eyes of hers and, rolling one by one down her face, fell—for her head was bent humbly forward—like heavy raindrops on the marble floor.

At the sight of this touching evidence of her human, loving heart all Leo's anger melted. Now it was he who grew penitent and prayed her pardon humbly. She gave him her hand in token of forgiveness, saying—“Let others speak to me as they will” (sorry should I have been to try it!) “but from thee, Leo, I cannot bear harsh words. Oh, thou art cruel, cruel. In what have I offended? Can I help it if my spirit keeps its watch upon thee, as indeed, though thou knewest it not, it has done ever since we parted yonder in the Place of Life? Can I help it if, like some mother who sees her little child at play upon a mountain's edge, my soul is torn with agony when I know thee in dangers that I am powerless to prevent or share? What are the lives of a few half-wild huntsmen that I should let them weigh for a single breath against thy safety, seeing that if I slew these, others would be more careful of thee? Whereas if I slay them not, they or their fellows may even lead thee into perils that would bring about—thy *death*,” and she gasped with horror at the word.

“Listen, beloved,” said Leo. “The life of the humblest of those men is of as much value to him as mine is to me, and thou hast no more right to kill him than thou hast to kill me. It is evil that because thou carest for me thou shouldst suffer thy love to draw thee into cruelty and crime. If thou art afraid for me, then clothe me with that immortality of thine, which, although I dread it somewhat, holding it a thing unholy, and, on this earth, not permitted by my Faith, I should still rejoice to inherit for thy dear sake, knowing that then we could never more be parted. Or, if as thou sayest, this as yet thou canst not do, then let us be wed and take what fortune gives us. All men must die; but at least before I die I shall have been happy with thee for a while—yes, if only for a single hour.”

“Would that I dared,” Ayesha answered with a little piteous motion of her hand. “Oh! urge me no more, Leo, lest that at last I should take the risk and lead thee down a dreadful road. Leo, hast thou never heard of the love which slays, or of the poison that may lurk in a cup of joy too perfect?”

Then, as though she feared herself, Ayesha turned from him and fled.

Thus this matter ended. In itself it was not a great one, for Leo's hurts were mere scratches, and the hunters, instead of being killed, were promoted to be members of his body-guard. Yet it told us many things. For instance, that whenever she chose to do so, Ayesha had the power of perceiving all Leo's movements from afar, and even of communicating her strength of mental vision to others, although to help him in any predicament she appeared to have no power, which, of course, accounted for the hideous and ever-present might of her anxiety.

Think what it would be to any one of us were we mysteriously acquainted with every open danger, every risk of sickness, every secret peril through which our best-beloved must pass. To see the rock trembling to its fall and they loitering beneath it; to see them drink of water and know it full of foulest poison; to see them embark upon a ship and be aware that it was doomed to sink, but not to be able to warn them or to prevent them. Surely no mortal brain could endure such constant terrors, since hour by hour the arrows of death flit unseen and unheard past the breasts of each of us, till at length one finds its home there.

What then must Ayesha have suffered, watching with her spirit's eyes all the hair-breadth escapes of our journeyings? When, for instance, in the beginning she saw Leo at my house in Cumberland about to kill himself in his madness and despair, and by some mighty effort of her superhuman will, wrung from whatever Power it was that held her in its fearful thralldom, the strength to hurl her soul across the world and thereby in his sleep reveal to him the secret of the hiding-place where he would find her.

Or to take one more example out of many—when she saw him hanging by that slender thread of yak's hide from the face of the waterfall of ice and herself remained unable to save him, or even to look forward for a single moment and learn whether or no he was about to meet a hideous death, in which event she must live on alone until in some dim age he was born again.

Nor can her sorrows have ended with these more material fears, since others as piercing must have haunted her. Imagine, for instance, the agonies of her jealous heart when she knew her lover to be exposed to the temptations incident to his solitary existence,

and more especially to those of her ancient rival Atene, who, by Ayesha's own account, had once been his wife. Imagine also her fears lest time and human change should do their natural work on him, so that by degrees the memory of her wisdom and her strength, and the image of her loveliness faded from his thought, and with them his desire for her company; thus leaving her who had endured so long, forgotten and alone at last.

Truly, the Power that limited our perceptions did so in purest mercy, for were it otherwise with us, our race would go mad and perish raving in its terrors.

Thus it would seem that Ayesha, great tormented soul, thinking to win life and love eternal and most glorious, was in truth but another blind Pandora. From her stolen casket of beauty and super-human power had leapt into her bosom, there to dwell unceasingly, a hundred torturing demons, of whose wings mere mortal kind do but feel the far-off, icy shadowing.

Yes; and that the parallel might be complete, Hope alone still lingered in that rifled chest.

## CHAPTER XX

### AYESHA'S ALCHEMY

It was shortly after this incident of the snow-leopard that one of these demon familiars of Ayesha's, her infinite ambition, made its formidable appearance. When we had dined with her in the evening, Ayesha's habit was to discuss plans for our mighty and unending future, that awful inheritance which she had promised to us.

Here I must explain, if I have not done so already, that she had graciously informed me that notwithstanding my refusal in past years of such a priceless opportunity, I also was to be allowed to bathe my superannuated self in the vital fires, though in what guise I should emerge from them, like Herodotus when he treats of the mysteries of old Egypt, if she knew, she did not think it lawful to reveal.

Secretly I hoped that my outward man might change for the better, as the prospect of being fixed for ever in the shape of my present and somewhat unpleasing personality, did not appeal to me as attractive. In truth, so far as I was concerned, the matter had an academic rather than an actual interest, such as we take in a fairy tale, since I did not believe that I should ever put on this kind of immortality. Nor, I may add, now as before, was I at all certain that I wished to do so.

These plans of Ayesha's were far reaching and indeed terrific. Her acquaintance with the modern world, its political and social developments, was still strictly limited; for if she had the power to follow its growth and activities, certainly it was one of which she made no use.

In practice her knowledge seemed to be confined to what she had gathered during the few brief talks which took place between us upon this subject in past time at Kôr. Now her thirst for information proved insatiable, although it is true that ours was scarcely up to date, seeing that ever since we lost touch with the civilized peoples, namely, for the last fifteen years or so, we had been as much buried as she was herself.

Still we were able to describe to her the condition of the nations and their affairs as they were at the period when we bade them farewell, and, more or less incorrectly, to draw maps of the various countries and their boundaries, over which she pondered long.

The Chinese were the people in whom she proved to be most interested, perhaps because she was acquainted with the Mongolian type, and like ourselves, understood a good many of their dialects. Also she had a motive for her studies, which one night she revealed to us in the most matter-of-fact fashion.

Those who have read the first part of her history, which I left in England to be published, may remember that when we found her at Kôr, *She* horrified us by expressing a determination to possess herself of Great Britain, for the simple reason that we belonged to that country. Now, however, like her powers, her ideas had grown, for she purposed to make Leo the absolute monarch of the world. In vain did he assure her most earnestly that he desired no such empire. She merely laughed at him and said—"If I arise amidst the Peoples, I must rule the Peoples, for how can Ayesha take a second place among mortal men? And thou, my Leo, rulest me, yes, mark the truth, thou art my master! Therefore it is plain that thou wilt be the master of this earth, aye, and perchance of others which do not yet appear, for of these also I know something, and, I think, can reach them if I will, though hitherto I have had no mind that way. My true life has not yet begun. Its little space within this world has been filled with thought and care for thee; in waiting till thou wast born again, and during these last years of separation, until thou didst return.

"But now a few more months, and the days of preparation past, endowed with energy eternal, with all the wisdom of the ages, and with a strength that can bend the mountains or turn the ocean from its bed, and we begin to be. Oh! how I sicken for that hour when first, like twin stars new to the firmament of heaven, we break in our immortal splendour upon the astonished sight of men. It will please me, I tell thee, Leo, it will please me, to see Powers, Principalities and Dominions, marshalled by their kings and governors, bow themselves before our thrones and humbly crave the liberty to do our will. At least," she added, "it will please me for a little time, until we seek higher things."

So she spoke, while the radiance upon her brow increased and spread itself, gleaming above her like a golden fan, and her slumbrous eyes took fire from it till, to my thought, they became glowing mirrors in which I saw pomp enthroned and suppliant peoples pass.

"And how," asked Leo, with something like a groan—for this vision of universal rule viewed from afar did not seem to charm him—"how, Ayesha, wilt thou bring these things about?"

"How, my Leo? Why, easily enough. For many nights I have listened to the wise discourses of our Holly here, at least he thinks them wise who still has so much to learn, and pored over his crooked maps, comparing them with those that are written in my memory, who of late have had no time for the study of such little matters. Also I have weighed and pondered your reports of the races of this world; their various follies, their futile struggling for wealth and small supremacies, and I have determined that it would be wise and kind to weld them to one whole, setting ourselves at the head of them to direct their destinies, and cause wars, sickness, and poverty to cease, so that these creatures of a little day (ephemeridae was the word she used) may live happy from the cradle to the grave.

"Now, were it not because of thy strange shrinking from bloodshed, however politic and needful—for my Leo, as yet thou art no true philosopher—this were quickly done, since I can command a weapon which would crush their armouries and whelm their navies in the deep; yes, I, whom even the lightnings and Nature's elemental powers must obey. But thou shrinkest from the sight of death, and thou believest that Heaven would be displeased because I make myself—or am chosen—the instrument of Heaven. Well, so let it be, for thy will is mine, and therefore we will tread a gentler path."

"And how wilt thou persuade the kings of the earth to place their crowns upon thy head?" I asked, astonished.

"By causing their peoples to offer them to us," she answered suavely. "Oh! Holly, Holly, how narrow is thy mind, how strained the quality of thine imagination! Set its poor gates ajar, I pray, and bethink thee. When we appear among men, scattering gold to satisfy their want, clad in terrifying power, in dazzling beauty and in immortality of days, will they not cry, 'Be ye our monarchs and rule over us!'"

"Perhaps," I answered dubiously, "but where wilt thou appear?"

She took a map of the eastern hemisphere which I had drawn and, placing her finger upon Peking, said—"There is the place that shall be our home for some few centuries, say three, or five, or seven, should it take so long to shape this people to my liking and our purposes. I have chosen these Chinese because thou tellest me that their numbers are uncountable, that they are brave, subtle, and patient, and though now powerless because ill-ruled and untaught, able with their multitudes to flood the little western nations. Therefore among them we will begin our reign and for some few ages be at rest while they learn wisdom from us, and thou, my Holly, makest their armies unconquerable and givest their land good government, wealth, peace, and a new religion."

What the new religion was to be I did not ask. It seemed unnecessary, since I was convinced that in practice it would prove a form of Ayesha-worship. Indeed, my mind was so occupied with conjectures, some of them quaint and absurd enough, as to what would happen at the first appearance of Ayesha in China that I forgot this subsidiary development of our future rule.

"And if the 'little western nations' will not wait to be flooded?" suggested Leo with irritation, for her contemptuous tone angered him, one of a prominent western nation. "If they combine, for instance, and attack thee first?"

"Ah!" she said, with a flash of her eyes. "I have thought of it, and for my part hope that it will chance, since then thou canst not blame me if I put out my strength. Oh! then the East, that has slept so long, shall awake—shall awake, and upon battlefield after battlefield such as history cannot tell of, thou shalt see my flaming standards sweep on to victory. One by one thou shalt watch the nations fall and perish, until at length I build thy throne upon the hecatombs of their countless dead and crown thee emperor of a world regenerate in blood and fire."

Leo, whom this new gospel of regeneration seemed to appall, who was, in fact, a hater of absolute monarchies and somewhat republican in his views and sympathies, continued the argument, but I took no further heed. The thing was grotesque in its tremendous and fantastic absurdity; Ayesha's ambitions were such as no imperial-minded madman could conceive.

Yet—here came the rub—I had not the slightest doubt but that she was well able to put them into practice and carry them to some marvellous and awful conclusion. Why not? Death could not touch her; she had triumphed over death. Her beauty—that "cup of madness" in her eyes, as she named it once to me—and her reckless will would compel the hosts of men to follow her. Her piercing intelligence would enable her to invent new weapons with which the most highly-trained army could not possibly compete. Indeed, it might be as she said, and as I for one believed, with good reason, it proved, that she held at her command the elemental forces of Nature, such as those that lie hid in electricity, which would give all living beings to her for a prey.

Ayesha was still woman enough to have worldly ambitions, and the most dread circumstance about her superhuman powers was that they appeared to be unrestrained by any responsibility to God or man. She was as we might well imagine a fallen angel to be, if indeed, as she herself once hinted and as Atene and the old Shaman believed, this were not her true place in creation. By only two things that I was able to discover could she be moved—her love for Leo and, in a very small degree, her friendship for myself.

Yet her devouring passion for this one man, inexplicable in its endurance and intensity, would, I felt sure even then, in the future as in the past, prove to be her heel of Achilles. When Ayesha was dipped in the waters of Dominion and Deathlessness, this human love left her heart mortal, that through it she might be rendered harmless as a child, who otherwise would have devastated the universe.

I was right.

Whilst I was still indulging myself in these reflections and hoping that Ayesha would not take the trouble to read them in my mind, I became aware that Oros was bowing to the earth before her.

"Thy business, priest?" she asked sharply; for when she was with Leo Ayesha did not like to be disturbed.

"Hes, the spies are returned."

"Why didst thou send them out?" she asked indifferently. "What need have I of thy spies?"

"Hes, thou didst command me."

"Well, their report?"

"Hes, it is most grave. The people of Kaloon are desperate because of the drought which has caused their crops to fail, so that starvation stares them in the eyes, and this they lay to the charge of the strangers who came into their land and fled to thee. The Khania Atene also is mad with rage against thee and our holy College. Labouring night and day, she has gathered two great armies, one of forty, and one of twenty thousand men, and the latter of these she sends against the Mountain under the command of her uncle, Simbri the Shaman. In case it should be defeated she purposes to remain with the second and greater army on the plains about Kaloon."

"Tidings indeed," said Ayesha with a scornful laugh. "Has her hate made this woman mad that she dares thus to match herself against me? My Holly, it crossed thy mind but now that it was I who am mad, boasting of what I have no power to perform. Well, within six days thou shalt learn—oh! verily thou shalt learn, and, though the issue be so very small, in such a fashion that thou wilt

doubt no more for ever. Stay, I will look, though the effort of it wearies me, for those spies may be but victims to their own fears, or to the falsehoods of Atene."

Then suddenly, as was common with her when thus Ayesha threw her sight afar, which either from indolence, or because, as she said, it exhausted her, she did but rarely, her lovely face grew rigid like that of a person in a trance; the light faded from her brow, and the great pupils of her eyes contracted themselves and lost their colour.

In a little while, five minutes perhaps, she sighed like one awakening from a deep sleep, passed her hand across her forehead and was as she had been, though somewhat languid, as though strength had left her.

"It is true enough," she said, "and soon I must be stirring lest many of my people should be killed. My lord, wouldst thou see war? Nay, thou shalt bide here in safety whilst I go forward—to visit Atene as I promised."

"Where thou goest, I go," said Leo angrily, his face flushing to the roots of his hair with shame.

"I pray thee not, I pray thee not," she answered, yet without venturing to forbid him. "We will talk of it hereafter. Oros, away! Send round the Fire of Hes to every chief. Three nights hence at the moonrise bid the Tribes gather—nay, not all, twenty thousand of their best will be enough, the rest shall stay to guard the Mountain and this Sanctuary. Let them bring food with them for fifteen days. I join them at the following dawn. Go."

He bowed and went, whereon, dismissing the matter from her mind, Ayesha began to question me again about the Chinese and their customs.

It was in course of a somewhat similar conversation on the following night, of which, however, I forget the exact details, that a remark of Leo's led to another exhibition of Ayesha's marvellous powers.

Leo—who had been considering her plans for conquest, and again combating them as best he could, for they were entirely repugnant to his religious, social and political views—said suddenly that after all they must break down, since they would involve the expenditure of sums of money so vast that even Ayesha herself would be unable to provide them by any known methods of taxation. She looked at him and laughed a little.

"Verily, Leo," she said, "to thee, yes; and to Holly here I must seem as some madcap girl blown to and fro by every wind of fancy, and building me a palace wherein to dwell out of dew and vapours, or from the substance of the sunset fires. Thinkest thou then that I would enter on this war—one woman against all the world"—and as she spoke her shape grew royal and in her awful eyes there came a look that chilled my blood—"and make no preparation for its necessities? Why, since last we spoke upon this matter, foreseeing all, I have considered in my mind, and now thou shalt learn how, without cost to those we rule—and for that reason alone shall they love us dearly—I will glut the treasuries of the Empress of the Earth.

"Dost remember, Leo, how in Kôr I found but a single pleasure during all those weary ages—that of forcing my mother Nature one by one to yield me up her choicest secrets; I, who am a student of all things which are and of the forces that cause them to be born. Now follow me, both of you, and ye shall look on what mortal eyes have not yet beheld."

"What are we to see?" I asked doubtfully, having a lively recollection of Ayesha's powers as a chemist.

"That thou shalt learn, or shalt not learn if it pleases thee to stay behind. Come, Leo, my love, my love, and leave this wise philosopher first to find his riddle and next to guess it."

Then turning her back to me she smiled on him so sweetly that although really he was more loth to go than I, Leo would have followed her through a furnace door, as indeed, had he but known it, he was about to do.

So they started, and I accompanied them since with Ayesha it was useless to indulge in any foolish pride, or to make oneself a victim to consistency. Also I was anxious to see her new marvel, and did not care to rely for an account of it upon Leo's descriptive skill, which at its best was never more than moderate.

She took us down passages that we had not passed before, to a door which she signed to Leo to open. He obeyed, and from the cave within issued a flood of light. As we guessed at once, the place was her laboratory, for about it stood metal flasks and various strange-shaped instruments. Moreover, there was a furnace in it, one of the best conceivable, for it needed neither fuel nor stoking, whose gaseous fires, like those of the twisted columns in the Sanctuary, sprang from the womb of the volcano beneath our feet.

When we entered two priests were at work there: one of them stirring a cauldron with an iron rod and the other receiving its molten contents into a mould of clay. They stopped to salute Ayesha, but she bade them to continue their task, asking them if all went well.

"Very well, O Hes," they answered; and we passed through that cave and sundry doors and passages to a little chamber cut in the rock. There was no lamp or flame of fire in it, and yet the place was filled with a gentle light which seemed to flow from the opposing wall.

"What were those priests doing?" I said, more to break the silence than for any other reason.

"Why waste breath upon foolish questions?" she replied. "Are no metals smelted in thy country, O Holly? Now hadst thou sought to know what I am doing—But that, without seeing, thou wouldst not believe, so, Doubter, thou shalt see."

Then she pointed to and bade us don, two strange garments that hung upon the wall, made of a material which seemed to be half cloth and half wood and having headpieces not unlike a diver's helmet.

So under her directions Leo helped me into mine, lacing it up behind, after which, or so I gathered from the sounds—for no light came through the helmet—she did the same service for him.

"I seem very much in the dark," I said presently; for now there was silence again, and beneath this extinguisher I felt alarmed and wished to be sure that I was not left alone.

"Aye Holly," I heard Ayesha's mocking voice make answer, "in the dark, as thou wast ever, the thick dark of ignorance and unbelief. Well, now, as ever also, I will give thee light." As she spoke I heard something roll back; I suppose that it must have been a stone door.

Then, indeed, there was light, yes, even through the thicknesses of that prepared garment, such light as seemed to blind me. By it I saw that the wall opposite to us had opened and that we were all three of us, on the threshold of another chamber. At the end of it stood something like a little altar of hard, black stone, and on this altar lay a mass of substance of the size of a child's head, but fashioned, I suppose from fantasy, to the oblong shape of a human eye.

Out of this eye there poured that blistering and intolerable light. It was shut round by thick, funnel-shaped screens of a material that looked like fire-brick, yet it pierced them as though they were but muslin. More, the rays thus directed upwards struck full upon a lump of metal held in place above them by a massive frame-work.

And what rays they were! If all the cut diamonds of the world were brought together and set beneath a mighty burning-glass, the light flashed from them would not have been a thousandth part so brilliant. They scorched my eyes and caused the skin of my face and limbs to smart, yet Ayesha stood there unshielded from them. Aye, she even went down the length of the room and, throwing back her veil, bent over them, as it seemed a woman of molten steel in whose body the bones were visible, and examined the mass that was supported by the hanging cradle.

"It is ready and somewhat sooner than I thought," she said. Then as though it were but a feather weight, she lifted the lump in her bare hands and glided back with it to where we stood, laughing and saying—"Tell me now, O thou well-read Holly, if thou hast ever heard of a better alchemist than this poor priestess of a forgotten faith?" And she thrust the glowing substance up almost to the mask that hid my face.

Then I turned and ran, or rather waddled, for in that gear I could not run, out of the chamber until the rock wall beyond stayed me, and there, with my back towards her, thrust my helmeted head against it, for I felt as though red-hot bradawls had been plunged into my eyes. So I stood while she laughed and mocked behind me until at length I heard the door close and the blessed darkness came like a gift from Heaven.

Then Ayesha began to loose Leo from his ray-proof armour, if so it can be called, and he in turn loosed me; and there in that gentle radiance we stood blinking at each other like owls in the sunlight, while the tears streamed down our faces.

"Well, art satisfied, my Holly?" she asked.

"Satisfied with what?" I answered angrily, for the smarting of my eyes was unbearable. "Yes, with burnings and bedevilments I am well satisfied."

"And I also," grumbled Leo, who was swearing softly but continuously to himself in the other corner of the place.

But Ayesha only laughed, oh! she laughed until she seemed the goddess of all merriment come to earth, laughed till she also wept, then said—"Why, what ingratitude is this? Thou, my Leo, didst wish to see the wonders that I work, and thou, O Holly, didst come unbidden after I bade thee stay behind, and now both of you are rude and angry, aye, and weeping like a child with a burnt finger. Here take this," and she gave us some salve that stood upon a shelf, "and rub it on your eyes and the smart will pass away."

So we did, and the pain went from them, though, for hours afterwards, mine remained red as blood.

"And what are these wonders?" I asked her presently. "If thou meanest that unbearable flame——"

"Nay, I mean what is born of the flame, as, in thine ignorance thou dost call that mighty agent. Look now;" and she pointed to the metallic lump she had brought with her, which, still gleaming faintly, lay upon the floor. "Nay, it has no heat. Thinkest thou that I would wish to burn my tender hands and so make them unsightly? Touch it, Holly."

But I would not, who thought to myself that Ayesha might be well accustomed to the hottest fires, and feared her impish mischief. I looked, however, long and earnestly.

"Well, what is it, Holly?"

"Gold," I said, then corrected myself and added, "Copper," for the dull, red glow might have been that of either metal.

"Nay, nay," she answered, "it is gold, pure gold."

"The ore in this place must be rich," said Leo, incredulously, for I would not speak any more.

"Yes, my Leo, the iron ore is rich."

"Iron ore?" and he looked at her.

"Surely," she answered, "for from what mine do men dig out gold in such great masses? Iron ore, beloved, that by my alchemy I change to gold, which soon shall serve us in our need."

Now Leo stared and I groaned, for I did not believe that it was gold, and still less that she could make that metal. Then, reading my thought, with one of those sudden changes of mood that were common to her, Ayesha grew very angry.

"By Nature's self!" she cried; "wert thou not my friend, Holly, the fool whom it pleases me to cherish, I would bind that right hand of thine in those secret rays till the very bones within it were turned to gold. Nay, why should I be vexed with thee, who art both blind and deaf? Yet thou *shalt* be persuaded," and leaving us, she passed down the passages, called something to the priests who were labouring in the workshop, then returned to us.

Presently they followed her, carrying on a kind of stretcher between them an ingot of iron ore that seemed to be as much as they could lift.

"Now," she said, "how wilt thou that I mark this mass which as thou must admit is only iron? With the sign of Life? Good," and at her bidding the priests took cold-chisels and hammers and roughly cut upon its surface the symbol of the looped cross—the *crux ansata*.

"It is not enough," she said when they had finished. "Holly, lend me that knife of thine, to-morrow I will return it to thee, and of more value."

So I drew my hunting knife, an Indian-made thing, that had a handle of plated iron, and gave it her.

"Thou knowest the marks on it," and she pointed to various dents and to the maker's name upon the blade; for though the hilt was Indian work the steel was of Sheffield manufacture.

I nodded. Then she bade the priests put on the ray-proof armour that we had discarded, and told us to go without the chamber and lie in the darkness of the passage with our faces against the floor.

This we did, and remained so until, a few minutes later, she called us again. We rose and returned into the chamber to find the priests, who had removed the protecting garments, gasping and rubbing the salve upon their eyes; to find also that the lump of iron ore and my knife were gone. Next she commanded them to place the block of gold-coloured metal upon their stretcher and to bring it with them. They obeyed, and we noted that, although those priests were both of them strong men they groaned beneath its weight.

"How came it," said Leo, "that thou, a woman, couldst carry what these men find so heavy?"

"It is one of the properties of that force which thou callest fire," she answered sweetly, "to make what has been exposed to it, if for a little while only, as light as thistle-down. Else, how could I, who am so frail, have borne yonder block of gold?"

"Quite so! I understand now," answered Leo.

Well, that was the end of it. The lump of metal was hid away in a kind of rock pit, with an iron cover, and we returned to Ayesha's apartments.

"So all wealth is thine, as well as all power," said Leo, presently, for remembering Ayesha's awful threat I scarcely dared to open my mouth.

"It seems so," she answered wearily, "since centuries ago I discovered that great secret, though until ye came I had put it to no use. Holly here, after his common fashion, believes that this is magic, but I tell thee again that there is no magic, only knowledge which I have chanced to win."

"Of course," said Leo, "looked at in the right way, that is in thy way, the thing is simple." I think he would have liked to add, "as lying," but as the phrase would have involved explanations, did not. "Yet, Ayesha," he went on, "hast thou thought that this discovery of thine will wreck the world?"

"Leo," she answered, "is there then nothing that I can do which will not wreck this world, for which thou hast such tender care, who shouldst keep all thy care—for me?"

I smiled, but remembering in time, turned the smile into a frown at Leo, then fearing lest that also might anger her, made my countenance as blank as possible.

"If so," she continued, "well, let the world be wrecked. But what meanest thou? Oh! my lord, Leo, forgive me if I am so dull that I cannot always follow thy quick thought—I who have lived these many years alone, without converse with nobler minds, or even those to which mine own is equal."

"It pleases thee to mock me," said Leo, in a vexed voice, "and that is not too brave."

Now Ayesha turned on him fiercely, and I looked towards the door. But he did not shrink, only folded his arms and stared her straight in the face. She contemplated him a little, then said—"After that great ordained reason which thou dost not know, I think, Leo, that why I love thee so madly is that thou alone art not afraid of me. Not like Holly there, who, ever since I threatened to turn his bones to gold—which, indeed, I was minded to do," and she laughed—"trembles at my footsteps and cowers beneath my softest glance."

"Oh! my lord, how good thou art to me, how patient with my moods and woman's weaknesses," and she made as though she were about to embrace him. Then suddenly remembering herself, with a little start that somehow conveyed more than the most tragic gesture, she pointed to the couch in token that he should seat himself. When he had done so she drew a footstool to his feet and sank upon it, looking up into his face with attentive eyes, like a child who listens for a story.

"Thy reasons, Leo, give me thy reasons. Doubtless they are good, and, oh! be sure I'll weigh them well."

"Here they are in brief," he answered. "The world, as thou knewest in thy—" and he stopped.

"Thy earlier wanderings there," she suggested.

"Yes—thy earlier wanderings there, has set up gold as the standard of its wealth. On it all civilizations are founded. Make it as common as it seems thou canst, and these must fall to pieces. Credit will fail and, like their savage forefathers, men must once more take to barter to supply their needs as they do in Kaloon to-day."

"Why not?" she asked. "It would be more simple and bring them closer to the time when they were good and knew not luxury and greed."

"And smashed in each other's heads with stone axes," added Leo.

"Who now pierce each other's hearts with steel, or those leaden missiles of which thou hast told me. Oh! Leo, when the nations are beggared and their golden god is down; when the usurer and the fat merchant tremble and turn white as chalk because their hoards are but useless dross; when I have made the bankrupt Exchanges of the world my mock, and laugh across the ruin of its richest markets, why, then, will not true worth come to its heritage again?"

"What of it if I do discomfort those who think more of pelf than of courage and of virtue; those who, as that Hebrew prophet wrote, lay field to field and house to house, until the wretched whom they have robbed find no place left whereon to dwell? What if I proved your sagest chapmen fools, and gorge your greedy moneychangers with the gold that they desire until they loathe its very sight and touch? What if I uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed against the ravening lusts of Mammon? Why, will not this world of yours be happier then?"

"I do not know," answered Leo. "All that I know is that it would be a different world, one shaped upon a new plan, governed by untried laws and seeking other ends. In so strange a place who can say what might or might not chance?"

“That we shall learn in its season, Leo. Or, rather, if it be against thy wish, we will not turn this hidden page. Since thou dost desire it, that old evil, the love of lucre, shall still hold its mastery upon the earth. Let the peoples keep their yellow king, I’ll not crown another in his place, as I was minded—such as that living Strength thou sawest burning eternally but now; that Power whereof I am the mistress, which can give health to men, or even change the character of metals, and in truth, if I so desire, obedient to my word, destroy a city or rend this Mountain from its roots.

“But see, Holly is wearied with much wondering and needs his rest. Oh, Holly! thou wast born a critic of things done, not a doer of them. I know thy tribe for even in my day the colleges of Alexandria echoed with their wranglings and already the winds blew thick with the dust of their forgotten bones. Holly, I tell thee that at times those who create and act are impatient of such petty doubts and cavillings. Yet fear not, old friend, nor take my anger ill. Already thy heart is gold without alloy, so what need have I to gild thy bones?”

I thanked Ayesha for her compliment, and went to my bed wondering which was real, her kindness or her wrath, or if both were but assumed. Also I wondered in what way she had fallen foul of the critics of Alexandria. Perhaps once she had published a poem or a system of philosophy and been roughly handled by them! It is quite possible, only if Ayesha had ever written poetry I think that it would have endured, like Sappho’s.

In the morning I discovered that whatever else about her might be false, Ayesha was a true chemist, the very greatest, I suppose, who ever lived. For as I dressed myself, those priests whom we had seen in the laboratory, staggered into the room carrying between them a heavy burden, that was covered with a cloth, and, directed by Oros, placed it upon the floor.

“What is that?” I asked of Oros.

“A peace-offering sent by the Hesea,” he said, “with whom, as I am told, you dared to quarrel yesterday.”

Then he withdrew the cloth, and there beneath it shone that great lump of metal which, in the presence of myself and Leo, had been marked with the Symbol of Life, that still appeared upon its surface. Only now it was gold, not iron, gold so good and soft that I could write my name upon it with a nail. My knife lay with it also, and of that too the handle, though not the blade, had been changed from iron into gold.

Ayesha asked to see this afterwards and was but ill-pleased with the result of her experiment. She pointed out to me that lines and blotches of gold ran for an inch or more down the substance of the steel, which she feared that they might weaken or distemper, whereas it had been her purpose that the hilt only should be altered.<sup>[6]</sup>

[6] I proved in after days how real were Ayesha’s alchemy, and the knowledge which enabled her to solve the secret that chemists have hunted for in vain, and, like Nature’s self, to transmute the commonest into the most precious of the metals. At the first town that I reached on the frontiers of India, I took this knife to a jeweller, a native, who was as clever as he proved dishonest, and asked him to test the handle. He did so with acids and by other means, and told me that it was of very pure gold, twenty-four carats, I think he said. Also he pointed out that this gold became gradually merged into the steel of the blade in a way which was quite inexplicable to him, and asked me to clear up the matter. Of course I could not, but at his request I left the knife in his shop to give him an opportunity of examining it further. The next day I was taken ill with one of the heart-attacks to which I have been liable of late, and when I became able to move about again a while afterwards, I found that this jeweller had gone, none knew whither. So had my knife.—L. H. H.

Often since that time I have marvelled how Ayesha performed this miracle, and from what substances she gathered or compounded the lightning-like material, which was her servant in the work; also, whether or no it had been impregnated with the immortalizing fire of Life that burned in the caves of Kôr.<sup>[7]</sup> Yet to this hour I have found no answer to the problem, for it is beyond my guessing.

[7] Recent discoveries would appear to suggest that this mysterious “Fire of Life,” which, whatever else it may have been, was evidently a force and no true fire, since it did not burn, owed its origin to the emanations from radium, or some kindred substance. Although in the year 1885, Mr. Holly would have known nothing of the properties of these marvellous rays or emanations, doubtless Ayesha was familiar with them and their enormous possibilities, of which our chemists and scientific men have, at present, but explored the fringe.—Editor.

I suppose that, in preparation for her conquest of the inhabitants of this globe—to which, indeed, it would have sufficed unaided by any other power—the manufacture of gold from iron went on in the cave unceasingly.

However this may be, during the few days that we remained together Ayesha never so much as spoke of it again. It seemed to have served her purpose for the while, or in the press of other and more urgent matters to have been forgotten or thrust from her mind. Still, amongst others, of which I have said nothing, since it is necessary to select, I record this strange incident, and our conversations concerning it at length, for the reason that it made a great impression upon me and furnishes a striking example of Ayesha’s dominion over the hidden forces of Nature whereof we were soon to experience a more fearful instance.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PROPHECY OF ATENE

On the day following this strange experience of the iron that was turned to gold some great service was held in the Sanctuary, as we understood, "to consecrate the war." We did not attend it, but that night we ate together as usual. Ayesha was moody at the meal, that is, she varied from sullenness to laughter.

"Know you," she said, "that to-day I was an Oracle, and those fools of the Mountain sent their medicine-men to ask of the Hesea how the battle would go and which of them would be slain, and which gain honour. And I—I could not tell them, but juggled with my words, so that they might take them as they would. How the battle will go I know well, for I shall direct it, but the future—ah! that I cannot read better than thou canst, my Holly, and that is ill indeed. For me the past and all the present lie bathed in light reflected from that black wall—the future."

Then she fell to brooding, and looking up at length with an air of entreaty, said to Leo—"Wilt thou not hear my prayer and bide where thou art for some few days, or even go a-hunting? Do so, and I will stay with thee, and send Holly and Oros to command the Tribes in this petty fray."

"I will not," answered Leo, trembling with indignation, for this plan of hers that I should be sent out to war, while he bided in safety in a temple, moved him, a man brave to rashness, who, although he disapproved of it in theory, loved fighting for its own sake also, to absolute rage.

"I say, Ayesha, that I will not," he repeated; "moreover, that if thou leavest me here I will find my way down the mountain alone, and join the battle."

"Then come," she answered, "and on thine own head be it. Nay, not on thine beloved, on mine, on mine."

After this, by some strange reaction, she became like a merry girl, laughing more than I have ever seen her do, and telling us many tales of the far, far past, but none that were sad or tragic. It was very strange to sit and listen to her while she spoke of people, one or two of them known as names in history and many others who never have been heard of, that had trod this earth and with whom she was familiar over two thousand years ago. Yet she told us anecdotes of their loves and hates, their strength or weaknesses, all of them touched with some tinge of humorous satire, or illustrating the comic vanity of human aims and aspirations.

At length her talk took a deeper and more personal note. She spoke of her searchings after truth; of how, aching for wisdom, she had explored the religions of her day and refused them one by one; of how she had preached in Jerusalem and been stoned by the Doctors of the Law. Of how also she had wandered back to Arabia and, being rejected by her own people as a reformer, had travelled on to Egypt, and at the court of the Pharaoh of that time met a famous magician, half charlatan and half seer who, because she was far-seeing, 'clairvoyante' we should call it, instructed her in his art so well that soon she became his master and forced him to obey her.

Then, as though she were unwilling to reveal too much, suddenly Ayesha's history passed from Egypt to Kôr. She spoke to Leo of his arrival there, a wanderer who was named Kallikrates, hunted by savages and accompanied by the Egyptian Amenartas, whom she appeared to have known and hated in her own country, and of how she entertained them. Yes, she even told of a supper that the three of them had eaten together on the evening before they started to discover the Place of Life, and of an evil prophecy that this royal Amenartas had made as to the issue of their journey.

"Aye," Ayesha said, "it was such a silent night as this and such a meal as this we ate, and Leo, not so greatly changed, save that he was beardless then and younger, was at my side. Where thou sittest, Holly, sat the royal Amenartas, a very fair woman; yes, even more beautiful than I before I dipped me in the Essence, fore-sighted also, though not so learned as I had grown. From the first we hated each other, and more than ever now, when she guessed how I had learned to look upon thee, her lover, Leo; for her husband thou never wast, who didst flee too fast for marriage. She knew also that the struggle between us which had begun of old and afar was for centuries and generations, and that until the end should declare itself neither of us could harm the other, who both had sinned to win thee, that wast appointed by fate to be the lodestone of our souls. Then Amenartas spoke and said—"Lo! to my sight, Kallikrates, the wine in thy cup is turned to blood, and that knife in thy hand, O daughter of Yarab"—for so she named me—"drips red blood. Aye, and this place is a sepulchre, and thou, O Kallikrates, sleepest here, nor can she, thy murderess, kiss back the breath of life into those cold lips of thine."

"So indeed it came about as was ordained," added Ayesha reflectively, "for I slew thee in yonder Place of Life, yes, in my madness I slew thee because thou wouldst not or couldst not understand the change that had come over me, and shrankest from my loveliness like a blind bat from the splendour of flame, hiding thy face in the tresses of her dusky hair—Why, what is it now, thou Oros? Can I never be rid of thee for an hour?"

"O Hes, a writing from the Khania Atene," the priest said with his deprecating bow.

"Break the seal and read," she answered carelessly. "Perchance she has repented of her folly and makes submission."

So he read—

"To the Hesea of the College on the Mountain, known as Ayesha upon earth, and in the household of the Over-world whence she has been permitted to wander, as 'Star-that-hath-fallen—'"

"A pretty sounding name, forsooth," broke in Ayesha; "ah! but, Atene, set stars rise again—even from the Under-world. Read on, thou Oros."

"Greetings, O Ayesha. Thou who art very old, hast gathered much wisdom in the passing of the centuries, and with other powers, that of making thyself seem fair in the eyes of men blinded by thine arts. Yet one thing thou lackest that I have—vision of those happenings which are not yet. Know, O Ayesha, that I and my uncle, the great seer, have searched the heavenly books to learn what is written there of the issue of this war.

"This is written:—For me, death, whereat I rejoice. For thee a spear cast by thine own hand. For the land of Kaloon blood and ruin bred of thee!

"Atene,

"Khania of Kaloon."

Ayesha listened in silence, but her lips did not tremble, nor her cheek pale. To Oros she said proudly—"Say to the messenger of Atene that I have received her message, and ere long will answer it, face to face with her in her palace of Kaloon. Go, priest, and disturb me no more."

When Oros had departed she turned to us and said—"That tale of mine of long ago was well fitted to this hour, for as Amenartas prophesied of ill, so does Atene prophesy of ill, and Amenartas and Atene are one. Well, let the spear fall, if fall it must, and I will not flinch from it who know that I shall surely triumph at the last. Perhaps the Khania does but think to frighten me with a cunning lie, but if she has read aright, then be sure, beloved, that it is still well with us, since none can escape their destiny, nor can our bond of union which was fashioned with the universe that bears us, ever be undone."

She paused awhile then went on with a sudden outburst of poetic thought and imagery.

"I tell thee, Leo, that out of the confusions of our lives and deaths order shall yet be born. Behind the mask of cruelty shine Mercy's tender eyes; and the wrongs of this rough and twisted world are but hot, blinding sparks which stream from the all-righting sword of pure, eternal Justice. The heavy lives we see and know are only links in a golden chain that shall draw us safe to the haven of our rest; steep and painful steps are they whereby we climb to the allotted palace of our joy. Henceforth I fear no more, and fight no more against that which must befall. For I say we are but winged seeds blown down the gales of fate and change to the appointed garden where we shall grow, filling its blest air with the immortal fragrance of our bloom.

"Leave me now, Leo, and sleep awhile, for we ride at dawn."

It was midday on the morrow when we moved down the mountain-side with the army of the Tribes, fierce and savage-looking men. The scouts were out before us, then came the great body of their cavalry mounted on wiry horses, while to right and left and behind, the foot soldiers marched in regiments, each under the command of its own chief.

Ayesha, veiled now—for she would not show her beauty to these wild folk—rode in the midst of the horse-men on a white mare of matchless speed and shape. With her went Leo and myself, Leo on the Khan's black horse, and I on another not unlike it, though thicker built. About us were a bodyguard of armed priests and a regiment of chosen soldiers, among them those hunters that Leo had saved from Ayesha's wrath, and who were now attached to his person.

We were merry, all of us, for in the crisp air of late autumn flooded with sunlight, the fears and forebodings that had haunted us in those gloomy, firelit caves were forgotten. Moreover, the tramp of thousands of armed men and the excitement of coming battle thrilled our nerves.

Not for many a day had I seen Leo look so vigorous and happy. Of late he had grown somewhat thin and pale, probably from causes that I have suggested, but now his cheeks were red and his eyes shone bright again. Ayesha also seemed joyous, for the moods of this strange woman were as fickle as those of Nature's self, and varied as a landscape varies under the sunshine or the shadow. Now she was noon and now dark night; now dawn, now evening, and now thoughts came and went in the blue depths of her eyes like vapours wafted across the summer sky, and in the press of them her sweet face changed and shimmered as broken water shimmers beneath the beaming stars.

"Too long," she said, with a little thrilling laugh, "have I been shut in the bowels of sombre mountains, accompanied only by mutes and savages or by melancholy, chanting priests, and now I am glad to look upon the world again. How beautiful are the snows above, and the brown slopes below, and the broad plains beyond that roll away to those bordering hills! How glorious is the sun, eternal as myself; how sweet the keen air of heaven.

"Believe me, Leo, more than twenty centuries have gone by since I was seated on a steed, and yet thou seest I have not forgot my horsemanship, though this beast cannot match those Arabs that I rode in the wide deserts of Arabia. Oh! I remember how at my father's side I galloped down to war against the marauding Bedouins, and how with my own hand I speared their chieftain and made him cry for mercy. One day I will tell thee of that father of mine, for I was his darling, and though we have been long apart, I hold his memory dear and look forward to our meeting.

"See, yonder is the mouth of that gorge where lived the cat-worshipping sorcerer, who would have murdered both of you because thou, Leo, didst throw his familiar to the fire. It is strange, but several of the tribes of this Mountain and of the lands behind it make cats their gods or divine by means of them. I think that the first Rassen, the general of Alexander, must have brought the practice here from Egypt. Of this Macedonian Alexander I could tell thee much, for he was almost a contemporary of mine, and when I last was born the world still rang with the fame of his great deeds.

"It was Rassen who on the Mountain supplanted the primeval fire-worship whereof the flaming pillars which light its Sanctuary remain as monuments, by that of Hes, or Isis, or rather blended the two in one. Doubtless among the priests in his army were some of Pasht or Sekket the Cat-headed, and these brought with them their secret cult, that to-day has dwindled down to the vulgar

divinations of savage sorcerers. Indeed I remember dimly that it was so, for I was the first Hesea of this Temple, and journeyed hither with that same general Rassen, a relative of mine."

Now both Leo and I looked at her wonderingly, and I could see that she was watching us through her veil. As usual, however, it was I whom she reproved, since Leo might think and do what he willed and still escape her anger.

"Thou, Holly," she said quickly, "who art ever of a cavilling and suspicious mind, remembering what I said but now, believest that I lie to thee."

I protested that I was only reflecting upon an apparent variation between two statements.

"Play not with words," she answered; "in thy heart thou didst write me down a liar, and I take that ill. Know, foolish man, that when I said that the Macedonian Alexander lived before me, I meant before this present life of mine. In the existence that preceded it, though I outlasted him by thirty years, we were born in the same summer, and I knew him well, for I was the Oracle whom he consulted most upon his wars, and to my wisdom he owed his victories. Afterwards we quarrelled, and I left him and pushed forward with Rassen. From that day the bright star of Alexander began to wane." At this Leo made a sound that resembled a whistle. In a very agony of apprehension, beating back the criticisms and certain recollections of the strange tale of the old abbot, Kou-en, which would rise within me, I asked quickly—"And dost thou, Ayesha, remember well all that befell thee in this former life?"

"Nay, not well," she answered, meditatively, "only the greater facts, and those I have for the most part recovered by that study of secret things which thou callest vision or magic. For instance, my Holly, I recall that thou wast living in that life. Indeed I seem to see an ugly philosopher clad in a dirty robe and filled both with wine and the learning of others, who disputed with Alexander till he grew wroth with him and caused him to be banished, or drowned: I forget which."

"I suppose that I was not called Diogenes?" I asked tartly, suspecting, perhaps not without cause, that Ayesha was amusing herself by fooling me.

"No," she replied gravely, "I do not think that was thy name. The Diogenes thou speakest of was a much more famous man, one of real if crabbed wisdom; moreover, he did not indulge in wine. I am mindful of very little of that life, however, not of more indeed than are many of the followers of the prophet Buddha, whose doctrines I have studied and of whom thou, Holly, hast spoken to me so much. Maybe we did not meet while it endured. Still I recollect that the Valley of Bones, where I found thee, my Leo, was the place where a great battle was fought between the Fire-priests with their vassals, the Tribes of the Mountain and the army of Rassen aided by the people of Kaloon. For between these and the Mountain, in old days as now, there was enmity, since in this present war history does but rewrite itself."

"So thou thyself wast our guide," said Leo, looking at her sharply.

"Aye, Leo, who else? though it is not wonderful that thou didst not know me beneath those deathly wrappings. I was minded to wait and receive thee in the Sanctuary, yet when I learned that at length both of you had escaped Atene and drew near, I could restrain myself no more, but came forth thus hideously disguised. Yes, I was with you even at the river's bank, and though you saw me not, there sheltered you from harm.

"Leo, I yearned to look upon thee and to be certain that thy heart had not changed, although until the allotted time thou mightest not hear my voice or see my face who wert doomed to undergo that sore trial of thy faith. Of Holly also I desired to learn whether his wisdom could pierce through my disguise, and how near he stood to truth. It was for this reason that I suffered him to see me draw the lock from the satchel on thy breast and to hear me wail over thee yonder in the Rest-house. Well he did not guess so ill, but thou, thou knewest me—in thy sleep—knewest me as I am, and not as I seemed to be, yes," she added softly, "and didst say certain sweet words which I remember well."

"Then beneath that shroud was thine own face," asked Leo again, for he was very curious on this point, "the same lovely face I see to-day?"

"Mayhap—as thou wilt," she answered coldly; "also it is the spirit that matters, not the outward seeming, though men in their blindness think otherwise. Perchance my face is but as thy heart fashions it, or as my will presents it to the sight and fancy of its beholders. But hark! The scouts have touched."

As Ayesha spoke a sound of distant shouting was borne upon the wind, and presently we saw a fringe of horsemen falling back slowly upon our foremost line. It was only to report, however, that the skirmishers of Atene were in full retreat. Indeed, a prisoner whom they brought with them, on being questioned by the priests, confessed at once that the Khania had no mind to meet us upon the holy Mountain. She proposed to give battle on the river's farther bank, having for a defence its waters which we must ford, a decision that showed good military judgment.

So it happened that on this day there was no fighting.

All that afternoon we descended the slopes of the Mountain, more swiftly by far than we had climbed them after our long flight from the city of Kaloon. Before sunset we came to our prepared camping ground, a wide and sloping plain that ended at the crest of the Valley of Dead Bones, where in past days we had met our mysterious guide. This, however, we did not reach through the secret mountain tunnel along which she had led us, the shortest way by miles, as Ayesha told us now, since it was unsuited to the passage of an army.

Bending to the left, we circled round a number of unclimbable koppies, beneath which that tunnel passed, and so at length arrived upon the brow of the dark ravine where we could sleep safe from attack by night.

Here a tent was pitched for Ayesha, but as it was the only one, Leo and I with our guard bivouacked among some rocks at a distance of a few hundred yards. When she found that this must be so, Ayesha was very angry and spoke bitter words to the chief who had charge of the food and baggage, although, he, poor man, knew nothing of tents.

Also she blamed Oros, who replied meekly that he had thought us captains accustomed to war and its hardships. But most of all she was angry with herself, who had forgotten this detail, and until Leo stopped her with a laugh of vexation, went on to suggest that we should sleep in the tent, since she had no fear of the rigours of the mountain cold.

The end of it was that we supped together outside, or rather Leo and I supped, for as there were guards around us Ayesha did not even lift her veil.

That evening Ayesha was disturbed and ill at ease, as though new fears which she could not overcome assailed her. At length she seemed to conquer them by some effort of her will and announced that she was minded to sleep and thus refresh her soul; the only part of her, I think, which ever needed rest. Her last words to us were—"Sleep you also, sleep sound, but be not astonished, my Leo, if I send to summon both of you during the night, since in my slumbers I may find new counsels and need to speak of them to thee ere we break camp at dawn."

Thus we parted, but ah! little did we guess how and where the three of us would meet again.

We were weary and soon fell fast asleep beside our camp-fire, for, knowing that the whole army guarded us, we had no fear. I remember watching the bright stars which shone in the immense vault above me until they paled in the pure light of the risen moon, now somewhat past her full, and hearing Leo mutter drowsily from beneath his fur rug that Ayesha was quite right, and that it was pleasant to be in the open air again, as he was tired of caves.

After that I knew no more until I was awakened by the challenge of a sentry in the distance; then after a pause, a second challenge from the officer of our own guard. Another pause, and a priest stood bowing before us, the flickering light from the fire playing upon his shaven head and face, which I seemed to recognize.

"I"—and he gave a name that was familiar to me, but which I forget—"am sent, my lords, by Oros, who commands me to say that the Hesea would speak with you both and at once."

Now Leo sat up yawning and asked what was the matter. I told him, whereon he said he wished that Ayesha could have waited till daylight, then added—"Well, there is no help for it. Come on, Horace," and he rose to follow the messenger.

The priest bowed again and said—"The commands of the Hesea are that my lords should bring their weapons and their guard."

"What," grumbled Leo, "to protect us for a walk of a hundred yards through the heart of an army?"

"The Hesea," explained the man, "has left her tent; she is in the gorge yonder, studying the line of advance."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"I do not know it," he replied. "Oros told me so, that is all, and therefore the Hesea bade my lords bring their guard, for she is alone."

"Is she mad," ejaculated Leo, "to wander about in such a place at midnight? Well, it is like her."

I too thought it was like her, who did nothing that others would have done, and yet I hesitated. Then I remembered that Ayesha had said she might send for us; also I was sure that if any trick had been intended we should not have been warned to bring an escort. So we called the guard—there were twelve of them—took our spears and swords and started.

We were challenged by both the first and second lines of sentries, and I noticed that as we gave them the password the last picket, who of course recognized us, looked astonished. Still, if they had doubts they did not dare to express them. So we went on.

Now we began to descend the sides of the ravine by a very steep path, with which the priest, our guide, seemed to be curiously familiar, for he went down it as though it were the stairway of his own house.

"A strange place to take us to at night," said Leo doubtfully, when we were near the bottom and the chief of the bodyguard, that great red-bearded hunter who had been mixed up in the matter of the snow-leopard also muttered some words of remonstrance. Whilst I was trying to catch what he said, of a sudden something white walked into the patch of moonlight at the foot of the ravine, and we saw that it was the veiled figure of Ayesha herself. The chief saw her also and said contentedly—"Hes! Hes!"

"Look at her," grumbled Leo, "strolling about in that haunted hole as though it were Hyde Park;" and on he went at a run.

The figure turned and beckoned to us to follow her as she glided forward, picking her way through the skeletons which were scattered about upon the lava bed of the cleft. Thus she went on into the shadow of the opposing cliff that the moonlight did not reach. Here in the wet season a stream trickled down a path which it had cut through the rock in the course of centuries, and the grit that it had brought with it was spread about the lava floor of the ravine, so that many of the bones were almost completely buried in the sand.

These, I noticed, as we stepped into the shadow, were more numerous than usual just here, for on all sides I saw the white crowns of skulls, or the projecting ends of ribs and thigh bones. Doubtless, I thought to myself, that streamway made a road to the plain above, and in some past battle, the fighting around it was very fierce and the slaughter great.

Here Ayesha had halted and was engaged in the contemplation of this boulder-strewn path, as though she meditated making use of it that day. Now we drew near to her, and the priest who guided us fell back with our guard, leaving us to go forward alone, since they dared not approach the Hesea unbidden. Leo was somewhat in advance of me, seven or eight yards perhaps, and I heard him say—"Why dost thou venture into such places at night, Ayesha, unless indeed it is not possible for any harm to come to thee?"

She made no answer, only turned and opened her arms wide, then let them fall to her side again. Whilst I wondered what this signal of hers might mean, from the shadows about us came a strange, rustling sound.

I looked, and lo! everywhere the skeletons were rising from their sandy beds. I saw their white skulls, their gleaming arm and leg bones, their hollow ribs. The long-slain army had come to life again, and look! in their hands were the ghosts of spears.

Of course I knew at once that this was but another manifestation of Ayesha's magic powers, which some whim of hers had drawn us from our beds to witness. Yet I confess that I felt frightened. Even the boldest of men, however free from superstition, might be excused should their nerve fail them if, when standing in a churchyard at midnight, suddenly on every side they saw the dead arising from their graves. Also our surroundings were wilder and more eerie than those of any civilized burying-place.

"What new devilment of thine is this?" cried Leo in a scared and angry voice. But Ayesha made no answer. I heard a noise behind me and looked round. The skeletons were springing upon our body-guard, who for their part, poor men, paralysed with terror, had thrown down their weapons and fallen, some of them, to their knees. Now the ghosts began to stab at them with their phantom spears,

and I saw that beneath the blows they rolled over. The veiled figure above me pointed with her hand at Leo and said—"Seize him, but I charge you, harm him not."

I knew the voice; *it was that of Atene!*

Then too late I understood the trap into which we had fallen.

"Treachery!" I began to cry, and before the word was out of my lips, a particularly able-bodied skeleton silenced me with a violent blow upon the head. But though I could not speak, my senses still stayed with me for a little. I saw Leo fighting furiously with a number of men who strove to pull him down, so furiously, indeed that his frightful efforts caused the blood to gush out of his mouth from some burst vessel in the lungs.

Then sight and hearing failed me, and thinking that this was death, I fell and remembered no more.

Why I was not killed outright I do not know, unless in their hurry the disguised soldiers thought me already dead, or perhaps that my life was to be spared also. At least, beyond the knock upon the head I received no injury.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LOOSING OF THE POWERS

When I came to myself again, it was daylight. I saw the calm, gentle face of Oros bending over me as he poured some strong fluid down my throat that seemed to shoot through all my body, and melt a curtain in my mind. I saw also that beside him stood Ayesha.

"Speak, man, speak," she said in a terrible voice. "What hast chanced here? Thou livest, then where is my lord? Where hast thou hid my lord? Tell me—or die."

It was the vision that I saw when my senses left me in the snow of the avalanche, fulfilled to the last detail!

"Atene has taken him," I answered.

"Atene has taken him and thou art left alive?"

"Do not be wrath with me," I answered, "it is no fault of mine. Little wonder we were deceived after thou hadst said that thou mightest summon us ere dawn."

Then as briefly as I could I told the story.

She listened, went to where our murdered guards lay with unstained spears, and looked at them.

"Well for these that they are dead," she exclaimed. "Now, Holly, thou seest what is the fruit of mercy. The men whose lives I gave my lord have failed him at his need."

Then she passed forward to the spot where Leo was captured. Here lay a broken sword—Leo's—that had been the Khan Rassen's, and two dead men. Both of these were clothed in some tight-fitting black garments, having their heads and faces whitened with chalk and upon their vests a rude imitation of a human skeleton, also daubed in chalk.

"A trick fit to frighten fools with," she said contemptuously. "But oh! that Atene should have dared to play the part of Ayesha, that she should have dared!" and she clenched her little hand. "See, surprised and overwhelmed, yet he fought well. Say! was he hurt, Holly? It comes upon me—no, tell me that I see amiss."

"Not much, I think," I answered doubtfully, "a little blood was running from his mouth, no more. Look, there go the stains of it upon that rock."

"For every drop I'll take a hundred lives. By myself I swear it," Ayesha muttered with a groan. Then she cried in a ringing voice,

"Back and to horse, for I have deeds to do this day. Nay, bide thou here, Holly; we go a shorter path while the army skirts the gorge. Oros, give him food and drink and bathe that hurt upon his head. It is but a bruise, for his hood and hair are thick."

So while Oros rubbed some stinging lotion on my scalp, I ate and drank as best I could till my brain ceased to swim, for the blow, though heavy, had not fractured the bone. When I was ready they brought the horses to us, and mounting them, slowly we scrambled up the steep bed of the water-course.

"See," Ayesha said, pointing to tracks and hoof-prints on the plain at its head, "there was a chariot awaiting him, and harnessed to it were four swift horses. Atene's scheme was clever and well laid, and I, grown oversure and careless, slept through it all!"

On this plain the army of the Tribes that had broken camp before the dawn was already gathering fast; indeed, the cavalry, if I may call them so, were assembled there to the number of about five thousand men, each of whom had a led horse. Ayesha summoned the chiefs and captains, and addressed them. "Servants of Hes," she said, "the stranger lord, my betrothed and guest, has been tricked by a false priest and, falling into a cunning snare, captured as a hostage. It is necessary that I follow him fast, before harm comes—to him. We move down to attack the army of the Khania beyond the river. When its passage is forced I pass on with the horsemen, for I must sleep in the city of Kaloon to-night. What sayest thou, Oros? That a second and greater army defends its walls? Man, I know it, and if there is need, that army I will destroy. Nay, stare not at me. Already they are as dead. Horsemen, you accompany me.

"Captains of the Tribes, you follow, and woe be to that man who hangs back in the hour of battle, for death and eternal shame shall be his portion, but wealth and honour to those who bear them bravely. Yes, I tell you, theirs shall be the fair land of Kaloon. You have your orders for the passing of yonder river. I, with the horsemen, take the central ford. Let the wings advance."

The chiefs answered with a cheer, for they were fierce men whose ancestors had loved war for generations. Moreover, mad as seemed the enterprise, they trusted in their Oracle, the Hesea, and, like all hill peoples, were easily fired by the promise of rich plunder.

An hour's steady march down the slopes brought the army to the edge of the marsh lands. These, as it chanced, proved no obstacle to our progress, for in that season of great drought they were quite dry, and for the same reason the shrunken river was not so impassable a defence as I feared that it would be. Still, because of its rocky bottom and steep, opposing banks, it looked formidable enough, while on the crests of those banks, in squadrons and companies of horse and foot, were gathered the regiments of Atene.

While the wings of footmen deployed to right and left, the cavalry halted in the marshes and let their horses fill themselves with the long grass, now a little browned by frost, that grew on this boggy soil, and afterwards drink some water.

All this time Ayesha stood silent, for she also had dismounted, that the mare she rode and her two led horses might graze with the others. Indeed, she spoke but once, saying—"Thou thinkest this adventure mad, my Holly? Say, art afraid?"

"Not with thee for captain," I answered. "Still, that second army——"

"Shall melt before me like mist before the gale," she replied in a low and thrilling voice. "Holly, I tell thee thou shalt see things such as no man upon the earth has ever seen. Remember my words when I *loose the Powers* and thou followest the rent veil of Ayesha through the smitten squadrons of Kaloon. Only—what if Atene should dare to murder him? Oh, if she should dare!"

"Be comforted," I replied, wondering what she might mean by this loosing of the Powers. "I think that she loves him too well."

"I bless thee for the words, Holly, yet—I know he will refuse her, and then her hate for me and her jealous rage may overcome her love for him. Should this be so, what will avail my vengeance? Eat and drink again, Holly—nay, I touch no food until I sit in the palace of Kaloon—and look well to girth and bridle, for thou ridest far and on a wild errand. Mount thee on Leo's horse, which is swift and sure; if it dies the guards will bring thee others."

I obeyed her as best I could, and once more bathed my head in a pool, and with the help of Oros tied a rag soaked in the liniment on the bruise, after which I felt sound enough. Indeed, the mad excitement of those minutes of waiting, and some foreshadowing of the terrible wonders that were about to befall, made me forget my hurts.

Now, Ayesha was standing staring upwards, so that although I could not see her veiled face, I guessed that her eyes must be fixed on the sky above the mountain top. I was certain, also, that she was concentrating her fearful will upon an unknown object, for her whole frame quivered like a reed shaken in the wind.

It was a very strange morning—cold and clear, yet curiously still, and with a heaviness in the air such as precedes a great fall of snow, although for much snow the season was yet too early. Once or twice, too, in that utter calm, I thought that I felt everything shudder; not the ordinary trembling of earthquake, however, for the shuddering seemed to be of the atmosphere quite as much as of the land. It was as though all Nature around us were a living creature which is very much afraid.

Following Ayesha's earnest gaze, I perceived that thick, smoky clouds were gathering one by one in the clear sky above the peak, and that they were edged, each of them, with a fiery rim. Watching these fantastic and ominous clouds, I ventured to say to her that it looked as though the weather would change—not a very original remark, but one which the circumstances suggested.

"Aye," she answered, "ere night the weather will be wilder even than my heart. No longer shall they cry for water in Kaloon! Mount, Holly, mount! The advance begins!" and unaided she sprang to the saddle of the mare that Oros brought her.

Then, in the midst of the five thousand horsemen, we moved down upon the ford. As we reached its brink I noted that the two divisions of tribesmen were already entering the stream half a mile to the right and left of us. Of what befell them I can tell nothing from observation, although I learned later that they forced it after great slaughter on both sides.

In front of us was gathered the main body of the Khania's army, massed by regiments upon the further bank, while hundreds of picked men stood up to their middles in the water, waiting to spear or hamstring our horses as we advanced.

Now, uttering their wild, whistling cry, our leading companies dashed into the river, leaving us upon the bank, and soon were engaged hotly with the footmen in midstream. While this fray went on, Oros came to Ayesha, told her a spy had reported that Leo, bound in a two-wheeled carriage and accompanied by Atene, Simbri and a guard, had passed through the enemy's camp at night, galloping furiously towards Kaloon.

"Spare thy words, I know it," she answered, and he fell back behind her.

Our squadrons gained the bank, having destroyed most of the men in the water, but as they set foot upon it the enemy charged them and drove them back with loss. Thrice they returned to the attack, and thrice were repulsed in this fashion. At length Ayesha grew impatient.

"They need a leader, and I will give them one," she said. "Come with me, my Holly," and, followed by the main body of the horsemen, she rode a little way into the river, and there waited until the shattered troops had fallen back upon us. Oros whispered to me—"It is madness, the Hesea will be slain."

"Thinkest thou so?" I answered. "More like that we shall be slain," a saying at which he smiled a little more than usual and shrugged his shoulders, since for all his soft ways, Oros was a brave man. Also I believe that he spoke to try me, knowing that his mistress would take no harm.

Ayesha held up her hand, in which there was no weapon, and waved it forwards. A great cheer answered that signal to advance, and in the midst of it this frail, white-robed woman spoke to her horse, so that it plunged deep into the water.

Two minutes later, and spears and arrows were flying about us so thickly that they seemed to darken the sky. I saw men and horses fall to right and left, but nothing touched me or the white robes that floated a yard or two ahead. Five minutes and we were gaining the further bank, and there the worst fight began.

It was fierce indeed, yet never an inch did the white robes give back, and where they went men would follow them or fall. We were up the bank and the enemy was packed about us, but through them we passed slowly, like a boat through an adverse sea that buffets but cannot stay it. Yes, further and further, till at last the lines ahead grew thin as the living wedge of horsemen forced its path between them—grew thin, broke and vanished.

We had passed through the heart of the host, and leaving the tribesmen who followed to deal with its flying fragments, rode on half a mile or so and mustered. Many were dead and more were hurt, but the command was issued that all sore-wounded men should fall out and give their horses to replace those that had been killed.

This was done, and presently we moved on, three thousand of us now, not more, heading for Kaloon. The trot grew to a canter, and the canter to a gallop, as we rushed forward across that endless plain, till at midday, or a little after—for this route was far shorter than that taken by Leo and myself in our devious flight from Rassen and his death-hounds—we dimly saw the city of Kaloon set upon its hill.

Now a halt was ordered, for here was a reservoir in which was still some water, whereof the horses drank, while the men ate of the food they carried with them; dried meat and barley meal. Here, too, more spies met us, who said that the great army of Atene was posted guarding the city bridges, and that to attack it with our little force would mean destruction. But Ayesha took no heed of their words; indeed, she scarcely seemed to hear them. Only she ordered that all wearied horses should be abandoned and fresh ones mounted.

Forward again for hour after hour, in perfect silence save for the thunder of our horses' hoofs. No word spoke Ayesha, nor did her wild escort speak, only from time to time they looked over their shoulders and pointed with their red spears at the red sky behind.

I looked also, nor shall I forget its aspect. The dreadful, fire-edged clouds had grown and gathered so that beneath their shadows the plain lay almost black. They marched above us like an army in the heavens, while from time to time vaporous points shot forward, thin like swords, or massed like charging horse.

Under them a vast stillness reigned. It was as though the earth lay dead beneath their pall.

Kaloon, lit in a lurid light, grew nearer. The pickets of the foe flew homeward before us, shaking their javelins, and their mocking laughter reached us in hollow echoes. Now we saw the vast array, posted rank on rank with silken banners drooping in that stirless air, flanked and screened by glittering regiments of horse.

An embassy approached us, and at the signal of Ayesha's uplifted arm we halted. It was headed by a lord of the court whose face I knew. He pulled rein and spoke boldly.

"Listen, Hes, to the words of Atene. Ere now the stranger lord, thy darling, is prisoner in her palace. Advance, and we destroy thee and thy little band; but if by any miracle thou shouldst conquer, then he dies. Get thee gone to thy Mountain fastness and the Khania gives thee peace, and thy people their lives. What answer to the words of the Khania?"

Ayesha whispered to Oros, who called aloud—"There is no answer. Go, if ye love life, for death draws near to you."

So they went fast as their swift steeds would carry them, but for a little while Ayesha still sat lost in thought.

Presently she turned and through her thin veil I saw that her face was white and terrible and that the eyes in it glowed like those of a lioness at night. She said to, me—hissing the words between her clenched teeth—"Holly, prepare thyself to look into the mouth of hell. I desired to spare them if I could, I swear it, but my heart bids me be bold, to put off human pity, and use all my secret might if I would see Leo living. Holly, I tell thee they are about *to murder him!*"

Then she cried aloud, "Fear nothing, Captains. Ye are but few, yet with you goes the strength of ten thousand thousand. Now follow the Hesea, and whate'er ye meet, be not dismayed. Repeat it to the soldiers, that fearing nothing they follow the Hesea through yonder host and across the bridge and into the city of Kaloon."

So the chiefs rode hither and thither, crying out her words, and the savage tribesmen answered—"Aye, we who followed through the water, will follow across the plain. Onward, Hes, for darkness swallows us."

Now some orders were given, and the companies fell into a formation that resembled a great wedge, Ayesha herself being its very point and apex, for though Oros and I rode on either side of her, spur as we would, our horses' heads never passed her saddle bow. In front of that dark mass she shone a single spot of white—one snowy feather on a black torrent's breast.

A screaming bugle note—and, like giant arms, from the shelter of some groves of poplar trees, curved horns of cavalry shot out to surround us, while the broad bosom of the opposing army, shimmering with spears, rolled forward as a wave rolls crowned with sunlit foam, and behind it, line upon line, uncountable, lay a surging sea of men.

Our end was near. We were lost, or so it seemed.

Ayesha tore off her veil and held it on high, flowing from her like a pennon, and lo! upon her brow blazed that wide and mystic diadem of light which once only I had seen before.

Denser and denser grew the rushing clouds above; brighter and brighter gleamed the unearthly star of light beneath. Louder and louder beat the sound of the falling hoofs of ten thousand horses. From the Mountain peak behind us went up sudden sheets of flame; it spouted fire as a whale spouts foam.

The scene was dreadful. In front, the towers of Kaloon lurid in a monstrous sunset. Above, a gloom as of an eclipse. Around the darkling, sunburnt plain. On it Atene's advancing army, and our rushing wedge of horsemen destined, it would appear, to inevitable doom.

Ayesha let fall her rein. She tossed her arms, waving the torn, white veil as though it were a signal cast to heaven.

Instantly from the churning jaws of the unholy night above belched a blaze of answering flame, that also wavered like a rent and shaken veil in the grasp of a black hand of cloud.

Then did Ayesha roll the thunder of her might upon the Children of Kaloon. Then she called, and the Terror came, such as men had never seen and perchance never more will see. Awful bursts of wind tore past us, lifting the very stones and soil before them, and with the wind went hail and level, hissing rain, made visible by the arrows of perpetual lightnings that leapt downwards from the sky and upwards from the earth.

It was as she had warned me. It was as though hell had broken loose upon the world, yet through that hell we rushed on unharmed. For always these furies passed before us. No arrow flew, no javelin was stained. The jagged hail was a herald of our coming; the levens that smote and stabbed were our sword and spear, while ever the hurricane roared and screamed with a million separate voices which blended to one yell of sound, hideous and indescribable.

As for the hosts about us they melted and were gone.

Now the darkness was dense, like to that of thickest night; yet in the fierce flares of the lightnings I saw them run this way and that, and amidst the volleying, elemental voices I heard their shouts of horror and of agony. I saw horses and riders roll confused upon the ground; like storm-drifted leaves I saw their footmen piled in high and whirling heaps, while the brands of heaven struck and struck them till they sank together and grew still.

I saw the groves of trees bend, shrivel up and vanish. I saw the high walls of Kaloon blown in and flee away, while the houses within the walls took fire, to go out beneath the torrents of the driving rain, and again take fire. I saw blackness sweep over us with great wings, and when I looked, lo! those wide wings were flame, floods of pulsing flame that flew upon the tormented air.

Blackness, utter blackness; turmoil, doom, dismay! Beneath me the labouring horse; at my side the steady crest of light which sat on Ayesha's brow, and through the tumult a clear, exultant voice that sang—"I promised thee wild weather! Now, Holly, dost thou believe that I can loose the prisoned Powers of the world?"

Lo! all was past and gone, and above us shone the quiet evening sky, and before us lay the empty bridge, and beyond it the flaming city of Kaloon. But the armies of Atene, where were they? Go, ask of those great cairns that hide their bones. Go, ask it of her widowed land.

Yet of our wild company of horsemen not one was lost. After us they galloped trembling, white-lipped, like men who face to face had fought and conquered Death, but triumphant—ah, triumphant!

On the high head of the bridge Ayesha wheeled her horse, and so for one proud moment stood to welcome them. At the sight of her glorious, star-crowned countenance, which now her Tribes beheld for the first time and the last, there went up such a shout as men have seldom heard.

"*The Goddess!*" that shout thundered. "Worship the Goddess!"

Then she turned her horse's head again, and they followed on through the long straight street of the burning city, up to the palace on its crest.

As the sun set we sped beneath its gateway. Silence in the courtyard, silence everywhere, save for the distant roar of fire and the scared howlings of the death-hounds in their kennel.

Ayesha sprang from her horse, and waving back all save Oros and myself, swept through the open doors into the halls beyond.

They were empty, every one—all were fled or dead. Yet she never paused or doubted, but so swiftly that we scarce could follow her, flitted up the wide stone stair that led to the topmost tower. Up, still up, until we reached the chamber where had dwelt Simbri the Shaman, that same chamber whence he was wont to watch his stars, in which Atene had threatened us with death.

Its door was shut and barred; still, at Ayesha's coming, yes, before the mere breath of her presence, the iron bolts snapped like twigs, the locks flew back, and inward burst that massive portal.

Now we were within the lamp-lit chamber, and this is what we saw. Seated in a chair, pale-faced, bound, yet proud and defiant-looking, was Leo. Over him, a dagger in his withered hand—yes, about to strike, in the very act—stood the old Shaman, and on the floor hard by, gazing upward with wide-set eyes, dead and still majestic in her death, lay Atene, Khania of Kaloon.

Ayesha waved her arm and the knife fell from Simbri's hand, clattering on the marble, while in an instant he who had held it was smitten to stillness and became like a man turned to stone.

She stooped, lifted the dagger, and with a swift stroke severed Leo's bonds; then, as though overcome at last, sank on to a bench in silence. Leo rose, looking about him bewildered, and said in the strained voice of one who is weak with much suffering—"But just in time, Ayesha. Another second, and that murderous dog"—and he pointed to the Shaman—"well, it was in time. But how went the battle, and how camest thou here through that awful hurricane? And, oh, Horace, thank heaven they did not kill you after all!"

"The battle went ill for some," Ayesha answered, "and I came not through the hurricane, but on its wings. Tell me now, what has befallen thee since we parted?"

"Trapped, overpowered, bound, brought here, told that I must write to thee and stop thy advance, or die—refused, of course, and then—" and he glanced at the dead body on the floor.

"And then?" repeated Ayesha.

"Then that fearful tempest, which seemed to drive me mad. Oh! if thou couldst have heard the wind howling round these battlements, tearing off their stones as though they were dry leaves; if thou hadst seen the lightnings falling thick and fast as rain—"

"They were my messengers. I sent them to save thee," said Ayesha simply.

Leo stared at her, making no comment, but after a pause, as though he were thinking the matter over, he went on—"Atene said as much, but I did not believe her. I thought the end of the world had come, that was all. Well, she returned just now more mad even than I was, and told me that her people were destroyed and that she could not fight against the strength of hell, but that she could send me thither, and took a knife to kill me.

"I said, 'Kill on,' for I knew that wherever I went thou wouldst follow, and I was sick with the loss of blood from some hurt I had in that struggle, and weary of it all. So I shut my eyes waiting for the stroke, but instead I felt her lips pressed upon my forehead, and heard her say—"Nay, I will not do it. Fare thee well; fulfil thou thine own destiny, as I fulfil mine. For this cast the dice have fallen against me; elsewhere it may be otherwise. I go to load them if I may."

"I opened my eyes and looked. There Atene stood, a glass in her hand—see, it lies beside her.

"'Defeated, yet I win,' she cried, 'for I do but pass before thee to prepare the path that thou shalt tread, and to make ready thy place in the Under-world. Till we meet again I pledge thee, for I am destroyed. Ayesha's horsemen are in my streets, and, clothed in lightnings at their head, rides Ayesha's avenging self.'

"So she drank, and fell dead—but now. Look, her breast still quivers. Afterwards, that old man would have murdered me, for, being roped, I could not resist him, but the door burst in and thou camest. Spare him, he is of her blood, and he loved her."

Then Leo sank back into the chair where we had discovered him bound, and seemed to fall into a kind of torpor, for of a sudden he grew to look like an old man.

"Thou art sick," said Ayesha anxiously. "Oros, thy medicine, the draught I bade thee bring! Be swift, I say."

The priest bowed, and from some pocket in his ample robe produced a phial which he opened and gave to Leo, saying—"Drink, my lord; this stuff will give thee back thy health, for it is strong."

"The stronger the better," answered Leo, rousing himself, and with something like his old, cheerful laugh. "I am thirsty who have touched nothing since last night, and have fought hard and been carried far, yes—and lived through that hellish storm."

Then he took the draught and emptied it. There must have been virtue in that potion; at least, the change which it produced in him was wonderful. Within a minute his eyes grew bright again, and the colour returned into his cheeks.

"Thy medicines are very good, as I have learned of old," he said to Ayesha; "but the best of all of them is to see thee safe and victorious before me, and to know that I, who looked for death, yet live to greet thee, my beloved. There is food," and he pointed to a board upon which were meats, "say, may I eat of them, for I starve?"

"Aye," she answered softly, "eat, and, my Holly, eat thou also."

So we fell to, yes, we fell to and ate even in the presence of that dead woman who looked so royal in her death; of the old magician who stood there powerless, like a man petrified, and of Ayesha, the wondrous being that could destroy an army with the fearful weapons which were servant to her will.

Only Oros ate nothing, but remained where he was, smiling at us benignantly, nor did Ayesha touch any food.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE YIELDING OF AYESHA

When I had satisfied myself, Leo was still at his meal, for loss of blood or the effects of the tremendous nerve tonic which Ayesha ordered to be administered to him, had made him ravenous.

I watched his face and became aware of a curious change in it, no immediate change indeed, but one, I think, that had come upon him gradually, although I only fully appreciated it now, after our short separation. In addition to the thinness of which I have spoken, his handsome countenance had grown more ethereal; his eyes were full of the shadows of things that were to come.

His aspect pained me, I knew not why. It was no longer that of the Leo with whom I was familiar, the deep-chested, mighty-limbed, jovial, upright traveller, hunter and fighting-man who had chanced to love and be loved of a spiritual power incarnated in a mould of perfect womanhood and armed with all the might of Nature's self. These things were still present indeed, but the man was changed, and I felt sure that this change came from Ayesha, since the look upon his face had become exceeding like to that which often hovered upon hers at rest.

She also was watching him, with speculative, dreamy eyes, till presently, as some thought swept through her, I saw those eyes blaze up, and the red blood pour to cheek and brow. Yes, the mighty Ayesha whose dead, slain for him, lay strewn by the thousand on yonder plain, blushed and trembled like a maiden at her first lover's kiss.

Leo rose from the table. "I would that I had been with thee in the fray," he said.

"At the drift there was fighting," she answered, "afterwards none. My ministers of Fire, Earth and Air smote, no more; I waked them from their sleep and at my command they smote for thee and saved thee."

"Many lives to take for one man's safety," Leo said solemnly, as though the thought pained him.

"Had they been millions and not thousands, I would have spent them every one. On my head be their deaths, not on thine. Or rather on hers," and she pointed to the dead Atene. "Yes, on hers who made this war. At least she should thank me who have sent so royal a host to guard her through the darkness."

"Yet it is terrible," said Leo, "to think of thee, beloved, red to the hair with slaughter."

"What reck I?" she answered with a splendid pride. "Let their blood suffice to wash the stain of thy blood from off these cruel hands that once did murder thee."

"Who am I that I should blame thee?" Leo went on as though arguing with himself, "I who but yesterday killed two men—to save myself from treachery."

"Speak not of it," she exclaimed in cold rage. "I saw the place and, Holly, thou knowest how I swore that a hundred lives should pay for every drop of that dear blood of thine, and I, who lie not, have kept the oath. Look now on that man who stands yonder struck by my will to stone, dead yet living, and say again what was he about to do to thee when I entered here?"

"To take vengeance on me for the doom of his queen and of her armies," answered Leo, "and Ayesha, how knowest thou that a Power higher than thine own will not demand it yet?"

As he spoke a pale shadow flickered on Leo's face, such a shadow as might fall from Death's advancing wing, and in the fixed eyes of the Shaman there shone a stony smile.

For a moment terror seemed to take Ayesha, then it was gone as quickly as it came.

"Nay," she said. "I ordain that it shall not be, and save One who listeth not, what power reigns in this wide earth that dare defy my will?"

So she spoke, and as her words of awful pride—for they were very awful—rang round that stone-built chamber, a vision came to me—Holly.

I saw illimitable space peopled with shining suns, and sunk in the infinite void above them one vast Countenance clad in a calm so terrific that at its aspect my spirit sank to nothingness. Yes, and I knew that this was Destiny enthroned above the spheres. Those lips moved and obedient worlds rushed upon their course. They moved again and these rolling chariots of the heavens were turned or stayed, appeared or disappeared. I knew also that against this calm Majesty the being, woman or spirit, at my side had dared to hurl her passion and her strength. My soul reeled. I was afraid.

The dread phantasm passed, and when my mind cleared again Ayesha was speaking in new, triumphant tones.

"Nay, nay," she cried. "Past is the night of dread; dawns the day of victory! Look!" and she pointed through the window-places shattered by the hurricane, to the flaming town beneath, whence rose one continual wail of misery, the wail of women mourning their countless slain while the fire roared through their homes like some unchained and rejoicing demon. "Look Leo on the smoke of the first sacrifice that I offer to thy royal state and listen to its music. Perchance thou deemst it naught. Why then I'll give thee others. Thou lovest war. Good! we will go down to war and the rebellious cities of the earth shall be the torches of our march."

She paused a moment, her delicate nostrils quivering, and her face alight with the prescience of ungarnered splendours; then like a swooping swallow flitted to where, by dead Atene, the gold circlet fallen from the Khania's hair lay upon the floor.

She stooped, lifted it, and coming to Leo held it high above his head. Slowly she let her hand fall until the glittering coronet rested for an instant on his brow. Then she spoke, in her glorious voice that rolled out rich and low, a very paean of triumph and of power.

"By this poor, earthly symbol I create thee King of Earth; yea in its round for thee is gathered all her rule. Be thou its king, and mine!"

Again the coronet was held aloft, again it sank, and again she said or rather chanted—"With this unbroken ring, token of eternity, I swear to thee the boon of endless days. Endure thou while the world endures, and be its lord, and mine."

A third time the coronet touched his brow.

"By this golden round I do endow thee with Wisdom's perfect gold uncountable, that is the talisman whereat all nature's secret paths shall open to thy feet. Victorious, victorious, tread thou her wondrous ways with me, till from her topmost peak at last she wafts us to our immortal throne whereof the columns twain are Life and Death."

Then Ayesha cast away the crown and lo! it fell upon the breast of the lost Atene and rested there.

"Art content with these gifts of mine, my lord?" she cried.

Leo looked at her sadly and shook his head.

"What more wilt thou then? Ask and I swear it shall be thine."

"Thou swearest; but wilt thou keep the oath?"

"Aye, by myself I swear; by myself and by the Strength that bred me. If it be ought that I can grant—then if I refuse it to thee, may such destruction fall upon me as will satisfy even Atene's watching soul."

I heard and I think that another heard also, at least once more the stony smile shone in the eyes of the Shaman.

"I ask of thee nothing that thou canst not give. Ayesha, I ask of thee thyself—not at some distant time when I have been bathed in a mysterious fire, but now, now this night."

She shrank back from him a little, as though dismayed.

"Surely," she said slowly, "I am like that foolish philosopher who, walking abroad to read the destinies of nations in the stars, fell down a pitfall dug by idle children and broke his bones and perished there. Never did I guess that with all these glories stretched before thee like mountain top on glittering mountain top, making a stairway for thy mortal feet to the very dome of heaven, thou wouldst still clutch at thy native earth and seek of it—but the common boon of woman's love.

"Oh! Leo, I thought that thy soul was set upon nobler aims, that thou wouldst pray me for wider powers, for a more vast dominion; that as though they were but yonder fallen door of wood and iron, I should break for thee the bars of Hades, and like the Eurydice of old fable draw thee living down the steep of Death, or throne thee midst the fires of the furthest sun to watch its subject worlds at play.

"Or I thought that thou wouldst bid me reveal what no woman ever told, the bitter, naked truth—all my sins and sorrows, all the wandering fancies of my fickle thought; even what thou knowest not and perchance ne'er shalt know, *who I am and whence I came*, and how to thy charmed eyes I seemed to change from foul to fair, and what is the purpose of my love for thee, and what the meaning of that tale of an angry goddess—who never was except in dreams.

"I thought—nay, no matter what I thought, save that thou wert far other than thou art, my Leo, and in so high a moment that thou wouldst seek to pass the mystic gates my glory can throw wide and with me tread an air supernal to the hidden heart of things. Yet thy prayer is but the same that the whole world whispers beneath the silent moon, in the palace and the cottage, among the snows and on the burning desert's waste. 'Oh! my love, thy lips, thy lips. Oh! my love, be mine, now, now, beneath the moon, beneath the moon!'

"Leo, I thought better, higher, of thee."

"Mayhap, Ayesha, thou wouldst have thought worse of me had I been content with thy suns and constellations and spiritual gifts and dominations that I neither desire nor understand.

"If I had said to thee: Be thou my angel, not my wife; divide the ocean that I may walk its bed; pierce the firmament and show me how grow the stars; tell me the origins of being and of death and instruct me in their issues; give up the races of mankind to my sword, and the wealth of all the earth to fill my treasures. Teach me also how to drive the hurricane as thou canst do, and to bend the laws of nature to my purpose: on earth make me half a god—as thou art.

"But Ayesha, I am no god; I am a man, and as a man I seek the woman whom I love. Oh! divest thyself of all these wrappings of thy power—that power which strews thy path with dead and keeps me apart from thee. If only for one short night forget the ambition that gnaws unceasingly at thy soul; I say forget thy greatness and be a woman and—my wife."

She made no answer, only looked at him and shook her head, causing her glorious hair to ripple like water beneath a gentle breeze.

"Thou deniest me," he went on with gathering strength, "and that thou canst not do, that thou mayest not do, for Ayesha, thou hast sworn, and I demand the fulfilment of thine oath.

"Hark thou. I refuse thy gifts; I will have none of thy rule who ask no Pharaoh's throne and wish to do good to men and not to kill them—that the world may profit. I will not go with thee to Kôr, nor be bathed in the breath of Life. I will leave thee and cross the mountains, or perish on them, nor with all thy strength canst thou hold me to thy side, who indeed needest me not. No longer will I endure this daily torment, the torment of thy presence and thy sweet words; thy loving looks, thy promises for next year, next year—next year. So keep thine oath or let me begone."

Still Ayesha stood silent, only now her head drooped and her breast began to heave. Then Leo stepped forward; he seized her in his arms and kissed her. She broke from his embrace, I know not how, for though she returned it was close enough, and again stood

before him but at a little distance.

"Did I not warn Holly," she whispered with a sigh, "to bid thee beware lest I should catch thy human fire? Man, I say to thee, it begins to smoulder in my heart, and should it grow to flame——"

"Why then," he answered laughing, "we will be happy for a little while."

"Aye, Leo, but how long? Why wert thou sole lord of this loveliness of mine and not set above their harming, night and day a hundred jealous daggers would seek thy heart and—find it."

"How long, Ayesha? A lifetime, a year, a month, a minute—I neither know nor care, and while thou art true to me I fear no stabs of envy."

"Is it so? Wilt take the risk? I can promise thee nothing. Thou mightest—yes, in this way or in that, thou mightest—die."

"And if I die, what then? Shall we be separated?"

"Nay, nay, Leo, that is not possible. We never can be severed, of this I am sure; it is sworn to me. But then through other lives and other spheres, higher lives and higher spheres mayhap, our fates must force a painful path to their last goal of union."

"Why then I take the hazard, Ayesha. Shall the life that I can risk to slay a leopard or a lion in the sport of an idle hour, be too great a price to offer for the splendours of thy breast? Thine oath! Ayesha, I claim thine oath."

Then it was that in Ayesha there began the most mysterious and thrilling of her many changes. Yet how to describe it I know not unless it be by simile.

Once in Thibet we were imprisoned for months by snows that stretched down from the mountain slopes into the valleys and oh! how weary did we grow of those arid, aching fields of purest white. At length rain set in, and blinding mists in which it was not safe to wander, that made the dark nights darker yet.

So it was, until there came a morning when seeing the sun shine, we went to our door and looked out. Behold a miracle! Gone were the snows that choked the valley and in the place of them appeared vivid springing grass, starred everywhere with flowers, and murmuring brooks and birds that sang and nested in the willows. Gone was the frowning sky and all the blue firmament seemed one tender smile. Gone were the austerities of winter with his harsh winds, and in their place spring, companioned by her zephyrs, glided down the vale singing her song of love and life.

There in this high chamber, in the presence of the living and the dead, while the last act of the great tragedy unrolled itself before me, looking on Ayesha that forgotten scene sprang into my mind. For on her face just such a change had come. Hitherto, with all her loveliness, the heart of Ayesha had seemed like that winter mountain wrapped in its unapproachable snow and before her pure brow and icy self-command, aspirations sank abashed and desires died.

She swore she loved and her love fulfilled itself in death and many a mysterious way. Yet it was hard to believe that this passion of hers was more than a spoken part, for how can the star seek the moth although the moth may seek the star? Though the man may worship the goddess, for all her smiles divine, how can the goddess love the man?

But now everything was altered! Look! Ayesha grew human; I could see her heart beat beneath her robes and hear her breath come in soft, sweet sobs, while o'er her upturned face and in her alluring eyes there spread itself that look which is born of love alone. Radiant and more radiant did she seem to grow, sweeter and more sweet, no longer the veiled Hermit of the Caves, no longer the Oracle of the Sanctuary, no longer the Valkyrie of the battle-plain, but only the loveliest and most happy bride that ever gladdened a husband's eyes.

She spoke, and it was of little things, for thus Ayesha proclaimed the conquest of herself.

"Fie!" she said, showing her white robes torn with spears and stained by the dust and dew of war; "Fie, my lord, what marriage garments are these in which at last I come to thee, who would have been adorned in regal gems and raiment befitting to my state and thine?"

"I seek the woman not her garment," said Leo, his burning eyes fixed upon her face.

"Thou seekest the woman. Ah! there it lies. Tell me, Leo, am I woman or spirit? Say that I am woman, for now the prophecy of this dead Atene lies heavy on my soul, Atene who said that mortal and immortal may not mate."

"Thou must be woman, or thou wouldst not have tormented me as thou hast done these many weeks."

"I thank thee for the comfort of thy words. Yet, was it *woman* whose breath wrought destruction upon yonder plain? Was it to a *woman* that Blast and Lightning bowed and said, 'We are here: Command us, we obey'? Did that dead thing (and she pointed to the shattered door) break inward at a *woman's* will? Or could a *woman* charm this man to stone?"

"Oh! Leo, would that I were woman! I tell thee that I'd lay all my grandeur down, a wedding offering at thy feet, could I be sure that for one short year I should be naught but *woman* and—thy happy wife."

"Thou sayest that I did torment thee, but it is I who have known torment, I who desired to yield and dared not. Aye, I tell thee, Leo, were I not sure that thy little stream of life is draining dry into the great ocean of my life, drawn thither as the sea draws its rivers, or as the sun draws mists, e'en now I would not yield. But I know, for my wisdom tells it me, ere ever we could reach the shores of Libya, the ill work would be done, and thou dead of thine own longing, thou dead and I widowed who never was a wife."

"Therefore see! like lost Atene I take the dice and cast them, not knowing how they shall fall. Not knowing how they shall fall, for good or ill I cast," and she made a wild motion as of some desperate gamester throwing his last throw.

"So," Ayesha went on, "the thing is done and the number summed for aye, though it be hidden from my sight. I have made an end of doubts and fears, and come death, come life, I'll meet it bravely."

"Say, how shall we be wed? I have it. Holly here must join our hands; who else? He that ever was our guide shall give me unto thee, and thee to me. This burning city is our altar, the dead and living are our witnesses on earth and heaven. In place of rites and

ceremonials for this first time I lay my lips on thine, and when 'tis done, for music I'll sing thee a nuptial chant of love such as mortal poet has not written nor have mortal lovers heard.

"Come, Holly, do now thy part and give this maiden to this man."

Like one in a dream I obeyed her and took Ayesha's outstretched hand and Leo's. As I held them thus, I tell the truth:—it was as though some fire rushed through my veins from her to him, shaking and shattering me with swift waves of burning and unearthly Bliss. With the fire too came glorious visions and sounds of mighty music, and a sense as though my brain, filled with over-flowing life, must burst asunder beneath its weight.

I joined their hands; I know not how; I blessed them, I know not in what words. Then I reeled back against the wall and watched.

This is what I saw.

With an abandonment and a passion so splendid and intense that it seemed more than human, with a murmured cry of "Husband!" Ayesha cast her arms about her lover's neck and drawing down his head to hers so that the gold hair was mingled with her raven locks, she kissed him on the lips.

Thus they clung a little while, and as they clung the gentle diadem of light from her brow spread to his brow also, and through the white wrappings of her robe became visible her perfect shape shining with faint fire. With a little happy laugh she left him, saying,

"Thus, Leo Vincey, oh! thus for the second time do I give myself to thee, and with this flesh and spirit all I swore to thee, there in the dim Caves of Kôr and here in the palace of Kaloon. Know thou this, come what may, never, never more shall we be separate who are ordained one. Whilst thou livest I live at thy side, and when thou diest, if die thy must, I'll follow thee through worlds and firmaments, nor shall all the doors of heaven or hell avail against my love. Where thou goest, thither I will go. When thou sleepest, with thee will I sleep and it is my voice that thou shalt hear murmuring through the dreams of life and death; my voice that shall summon thee to awaken in the last hour of everlasting dawn, when all this night of misery hath furled her wings for aye.

"Listen now while I sing to thee and hear that song aright, for in its melody at length thou shalt learn the truth, which unwed I might not tell to thee. Thou shalt learn who and what *I* am, and who and what *thou* art, and of the high purposes of our love, and this dead woman's hate, and of all that I have hid from thee in veiled, bewildering words and visions.

"Listen then, my love and lord, to the burden of the Song of Fate."

She ceased speaking and gazed heavenwards with a rapt look as though she waited for some inspiration to fall upon her, and never, never—not even in the fires of Kôr had Ayesha seemed so divine as she did now in this moment of the ripe harvest of her love.

My eyes wandered from her to Leo, who stood before her pale and still, still as the death-like figure of the Shaman, still as the Khania's icy shape which stared upwards from the ground. What was passing in his mind, I wondered, that he could remain thus insensible while in all her might and awful beauty this proud being worshipped him.

Hark! she began to sing in a voice so rich and perfect that its honied notes seemed to cloy my blood and stop my breath.

"The world was not, was not, and in the womb of Silence  
Slept the souls of men.  
Yet I was and thou——"

Suddenly Ayesha stopped, and I felt rather than saw the horror on her face.

Look! Leo swayed to and fro as though the stones beneath him were but a rocking boat. To and fro he swayed, stretched out his blind arms to clasp her—then suddenly fell backwards, and lay still.

Oh! what a shriek was that she gave! Surely it must have wakened the very corpses upon the plain. Surely it must have echoed in the stars. One shriek only—then throbbing silence.

I sprang to him, and there, withered in Ayesha's kiss, slain by the fire of her love, Leo lay dead—lay dead upon the breast of dead Atene!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PASSING OF AYESHA

I heard Ayesha say presently, and the words struck me as dreadful in their hopeless acceptance of a doom against which even she had no strength to struggle.

"It seems that my lord has left me for awhile; I must hasten to my lord afar."

After that I do not quite know what happened. I had lost the man who was all in all to me, friend and child in one, and I was crushed as I had never been before. It seemed so sad that I, old and outworn, should still live on whilst he in the flower of his age, snatched from joy and greatness such as no man hath known, lay thus asleep.

I think that by an afterthought, Ayesha and Oros tried to restore him, tried without result, for here her powers were of no avail. Indeed my conviction is that although some lingering life still kept him on his feet, Leo had really died at the moment of her embrace, since when I looked at him before he fell, his face was that of a dead man.

Yes, I believe that last speech of hers, although she knew it not, was addressed to his spirit, for in her burning kiss his flesh had perished.

When at length I recovered myself a little, it was to hear Ayesha in a cold, calm voice—her face I could not see for she had veiled herself—commanding certain priests who had been summoned to "bear away the body of that accursed woman and bury her as befits her rank." Even then I bethought me, I remember, of the tale of Jehu and Jezebel.

Leo, looking strangely calm and happy, lay now upon a couch, the arms folded on his breast. When the priests had tramped away carrying their royal burden, Ayesha, who sat by his body brooding, seemed to awake, for she rose and said—"I need a messenger, and for no common journey, since he must search out the habitations of the Shades," and she turned herself towards Oros and appeared to look at him.

Now for the first time I saw that priest change countenance a little, for the eternal smile, of which even this scene had not quite rid it, left his face and he grew pale and trembled.

"Thou art afraid," she said contemptuously. "Be at rest, Oros, I will not send one who is afraid. Holly, wilt thou go for me—and him?"

"Aye," I answered. "I am weary of life and desire no other end. Only let it be swift and painless."

She mused a while, then said—"Nay, thy time is not yet, thou still hast work to do. Endure, my Holly, 'tis only for a breath."

Then she looked at the Shaman, the man turned to stone who all this while had stood there as a statue stands, and cried—"Awake!"

Instantly he seemed to thaw into life, his limbs relaxed, his breast heaved, he was as he had always been: ancient, gnarled, malevolent.

"I hear thee, mistress," he said, bowing as a man bows to the power that he hates.

"Thou seest, Simbri," and she waved her hand.

"I see. Things have befallen as Atene and I foretold, have they not? 'Ere long the corpse of a new-crowned Khan of Kaloon,'" and he pointed to the gold circlet that Ayesha had set on Leo's brow, "'will lie upon the brink of the Pit of Flame'—as I foretold." An evil smile crept into his eyes and he went on—"Hadst thou not smote me dumb, I who watched could have warned thee that they would so befall; but, great mistress, it pleased thee to smite me dumb. And so it seems, O Hes, that thou hast overshot thyself and liest broken at the foot of that pinnacle which step by step thou hast climbed for more than two thousand weary years. See what thou hast bought at the price of countless lives that now before the throne of Judgment bring accusations against thy powers misused, and cry out for justice on thy head," and he looked at the dead form of Leo.

"I sorrow for them, yet, Simbri, they were well spent," Ayesha answered reflectively, "who by their forewritten doom, as it was decreed, held thy knife from falling and thus won me my husband. Aye and I am happy—happier than such blind bats as thou can see or guess. For know that now with him I have re-wed my wandering soul divorced by sin from me, and that of our marriage kiss which burned his life away there shall still be born to us children of Forgiveness and eternal Grace and all things that are pure and fair.

"Look thou, Simbri, I will honour thee. Thou shalt be my messenger, and beware! beware I say how thou dost fulfil thine office, since of every syllable thou must render an account.

"Go thou down the dark paths of Death, and, since even my thought may not reach to where he sleeps tonight, search out my lord and say to him that the feet of his spouse Ayesha are following fast. Bid him have no fear for me who by this last sorrow have atoned my crimes and am in his embrace regenerate. Tell him that thus it was appointed, and thus is best, since now he is dipped indeed in the eternal Flame of Life; now for him the mortal night is done and the everlasting day arises. Command him that he await me in the Gate of Death where it is granted that I greet him presently. Thou hearest?"

"I hear, O Queen, Mighty-from-of-Old."

"One message more. Say to Atene that I forgive her. Her heart was high and greatly did she play her part. There in the Gates we will balance our account. Thou hearest?"

"I hear, O Eternal Star that hath conquered Night."

"Then, man, *begone!*"

As the word left Ayesha's lips Simbri leapt from the floor, grasping at the air as though he would clutch his own departing soul, staggered back against the board where Leo and I had eaten, overthrowing it, and amid a ruin of gold and silver vessels, fell down and died.

She looked at him, then said to me—"See, though he ever hated me, this magician who has known Ayesha from the first, did homage to my ancient majesty at last, when lies and defiance would serve his end no more. No longer now do I hear the name that his dead mistress gave to me. The 'Star-that-hath-fallen' in his lips and in very truth is become the 'Star-which-hath-burst-the-bonds-of-Night,' and, re-arisen, shines for ever—shines with its twin immortal to set no more—my Holly. Well, he is gone, and ere now, those that serve me in the Under-world—dost remember?—thou sawest their captains in the Sanctuary—bend the head at great Ayesha's word and make her place ready near her spouse.

"But oh, what folly has been mine. When even here my wrath can show such power, how could I hope that my lord would outlive the fires of my love? Still it was better so, for he sought not the pomp I would have given him, nor desired the death of men. Yet such pomp must have been his portion in this poor shadow of a world, and the steps that encircle an usurper's throne are ever slippery with blood.

"Thou art weary, my Holly, go rest thee. To-morrow night we journey to the Mountain, there to celebrate these obsequies."

I crept into the room adjoining—it had been Simbri's—and laid me down upon his bed, but to sleep I was not able. Its door was open, and in the light of the burning city that shone through the casements I could see Ayesha watching by her dead. Hour after hour she watched, her head resting on her hand, silent, stirless. She wept not, no sigh escaped her; only watched as a tender woman watches a slumbering babe that she knows will awake at dawn.

Her face was unveiled and I perceived that it had greatly changed. All pride and anger were departed from it; it was grown soft, wistful, yet full of confidence and quietness. For a while I could not think of what it reminded me, till suddenly I remembered. Now it was like, indeed the counterpart almost, of the holy and majestic semblance of the statue of the Mother in the Sanctuary. Yes, with just such a look of love and power as that mother cast upon her frightened child new-risen from its dream of death, did Ayesha gaze upon her dead, while her parted lips also seemed to whisper "some tale of hope, sure and immortal."

At length she rose and came into my chamber.

"Thou thinkest me fallen and dost grieve for me, my Holly," she said in a gentle voice, "knowing my fears lest some such fate should overtake my lord."

"Ay, Ayesha, I grieve for thee as for myself."

"Spare then thy pity, Holly, since although the human part of me would have kept him on the earth, now my spirit doth rejoice that for a while he has burst his mortal bonds. For many an age, although I knew it not, in my proud defiance of the Universal Law, I have fought against his true weal and mine. Thrice have I and the angel wrestled, matching strength with strength, and thrice has he conquered me. Yet as he bore away his prize this night he whispered wisdom in my ear. This was his message: That in death is love's home, in death its strength; that from the charnel-house of life this love springs again glorified and pure, to reign a conqueror forever. Therefore I wipe away my tears and, crowned once more a queen of peace, I go to join him whom we have lost, there where he awaits us, as it is granted to me that I shall do.

"But I am selfish, and forgot. Thou needest rest. Sleep, friend, I bid thee sleep."

And I slept wondering as my eyes closed whence Ayesha drew this strange confidence and comfort. I know not but it was there, real and not assumed. I can only suppose therefore that some illumination had fallen on her soul, and that, as she stated, the love and end of Leo in a way unknown, did suffice to satisfy her court of sins.

At the least those sins and all the load of death that lay at her door never seemed to trouble her at all. She appeared to look upon them merely as events which were destined to occur, as inevitable fruits of a seed sowed long ago by the hand of Fate for whose workings she was not responsible. The fears and considerations which weigh with mortals did not affect or oppress her. In this as in other matters, Ayesha was a law unto herself.

When I awoke it was day, and through the window-place I saw the rain that the people of Kaloon had so long desired falling in one straight sheet. I saw also that Ayesha, seated by the shrouded form of Leo, was giving orders to her priests and captains and to some nobles, who had survived the slaughter of Kaloon, as to the new government of the land. Then I slept again.

It was evening, and Ayesha stood at my bedside.

"All is prepared," she said. "Awake and ride with me."

So we went, escorted by a thousand cavalry, for the rest stayed to occupy, or perchance to plunder, the land of Kaloon. In front the body of Leo was borne by relays of priests, and behind it rode the veiled Ayesha, I at her side.

Strange was the contrast between this departure, and our arrival.

Then the rushing squadrons, the elements that raved, the perpetual sheen of lightnings seen through the swinging curtains of the hail; the voices of despair from an army rolled in blood beneath the chariot wheels of thunder.

Now the white-draped corpse, the slow-pacing horses, the riders with their spears reversed, and on either side, seen in that melancholy moonlight, the women of Kaloon burying their innumerable dead.

And Ayesha herself, yesterday a Valkyrie crested with the star of flame, to-day but a bereaved woman humbly following her husband to the tomb.

Yet how they feared her! Some widow standing on the grave mould she had dug, pointed as we passed to the body of Leo, uttering bitter words which I could not catch. Thereon her companions flung themselves upon her and felling her with fist and spade, prostrated themselves upon the ground, throwing dust on their hair in token of their submission to the priestess of Death.

Ayesha saw them, and said to me with something of her ancient fire and pride—"I tread the plain of Kaloon no more, yet as a parting gift have I read this high-stomached people a lesson that they needed long. Not for many a generation, O Holly, will they dare to lift spear against the College of Hes and its subject Tribes."

Again it was night, and where once lay that of the Khan, the man whom he had killed, flanked by the burning pillars, the bier of Leo stood in the inmost Sanctuary before the statue of the Mother whose gentle, unchanging eyes seemed to search his quiet face.

On her throne sat the veiled Hesea, giving commands to her priests and priestesses.

"I am weary," she said, "and it may be that I leave you for a while to rest—beyond the mountains. A year, or a thousand years—I cannot say. If so, let Papave, with Oros as her counsellor and husband and their seed, hold my place till I return again.

"Priests and priestesses of the College of Hes, over new territories have I held my hand; take them as an heritage from me, and rule them well and gently. Henceforth let the Hesea of the Mountain be also the Khania of Kaloon.

"Priests and priestesses of our ancient faith, learn to look through its rites and tokens, outward and visible, to the in-forming Spirit. If Hes the goddess never ruled on earth, still pitying Nature rules. If the name of Isis never rang through the courts of heaven, still in heaven, with all love fulfilled, nursing her human children on her breast, dwells the mighty Motherhood where of this statue is the symbol, that Motherhood which bore us, and, unforgetting, faithful, will receive us at the end.

"For of the bread of bitterness we shall not always eat, of the water of tears we shall not always drink. Beyond the night the royal suns ride on; ever the rainbow shines around the rain. Though they slip from our clutching hands like melted snow, the lives we lose shall yet be found immortal, and from the burnt-out fires of our human hopes will spring a heavenly star."

She paused and waved her hand as though to dismiss them, then added by an after-thought, pointing to myself—"This man is my beloved friend and guest. Let him be yours also. It is my will that you tend and guard him here, and when the snows have melted and summer is at hand, that you fashion a way for him through the gulf and bring him across the mountains by which he came, till you leave him in safety. Hear and forget not, for be sure that to me you shall give account of him."

The night drew towards the dawn, and we stood upon the peak above the gulf of fire, four of us only—Ayesha and I, and Oros and Papave. For the bearers had laid down the body of Leo upon its edge and gone their way. The curtain of flame flared in front of us, its crest bent over like a billow in the gale, and to leeward, one by one, floated the torn-off clouds and pinnacles of fire. By the dead Leo knelt Ayesha, gazing at that icy, smiling face, but speaking no single word. At length she rose, and said,—*"Darkness draws near, my Holly, that deep darkness which foreruns the glory of the dawn. Now fare thee well for one little hour. When thou art about to die, but not before, call me, and I will come to thee. Stir not and speak not till all be done, lest when I am no longer here to be thy guard some Presence should pass on and slay thee."*

"Think not that I am conquered, for now my name is Victory! Think not that Ayesha's strength is spent or her tale is done, for of it thou readest but a single page. Think not even that I am today that thing of sin and pride, the Ayesha thou didst adore and fear, I who in my lord's love and sacrifice have again conceived my soul. For know that now once more as at the beginning, his soul and mine are *one*."

She thought awhile and added,

"Friend take this sceptre in memory of me, but beware how thou usest it save at the last to summon me, for it has virtues," and she gave me the jewelled Sistrum that she bore—then said,

"So kiss his brow, stand back, and be still."

Now as once before the darkness gathered on the pit, and presently, although I heard no prayer, though now no mighty music broke upon the silence, through that darkness, beating up the gale, came the two-winged flame and hovered where Ayesha stood.

It appeared, it vanished, and one by one the long minutes crept away until the first spear of dawn lit upon the point of rock.

Lo! it was empty, utterly empty and lonesome. Gone was the corpse of Leo, and gone too was Ayesha the imperial, the divine.

Whither had she gone? I know not. But this I know, that as the light returned and the broad sheet of flame flared out to meet it, I seemed to see two glorious shapes sweeping upward on its bosom, and the faces that they wore were those of Leo and of Ayesha.

Often and often during the weary months that followed, whilst I wandered through the temple or amid the winter snows upon the Mountain side, did I seek to solve this question—Whither had She gone? I asked it of my heart; I asked it of the skies; I asked it of the spirit of Leo which often was so near to me.

But no sure answer ever came, nor will I hazard one. As mystery wrapped Ayesha's origin and lives—for the truth of these things I never learned—so did mystery wrap her deaths, or rather her departings, for I cannot think her dead. Surely she still is, if not on earth, then in some other sphere?

So I believe; and when my own hour comes, and it draws near swiftly, I shall know whether I believe in vain, or whether she will appear to be my guide as, with her last words, she swore that she would do. Then, too, I shall learn what she was about to reveal to Leo when he died, the purposes of their being and of their love.

So I can wait in patience who must not wait for long, though my heart is broken and I am desolate.

Oros and all the priests were very good to me. Indeed, even had it been their wish, they would have feared to be otherwise, who remembered and were sure that in some time to come they must render an account of this matter to their dread queen. By way of return, I helped them as I was best able to draw up a scheme for the government of the conquered country of Kaloon, and with my advice upon many other questions.

And so at length the long months wore away, till at the approach of summer the snows melted. Then I said that I must be gone. They gave me of their treasures in precious stones, lest I should need money for my faring, since the gold of which I had such plenty

was too heavy to be carried by one man alone. They led me across the plains of Kaloon, where now the husbandmen, those that were left of them, ploughed the land and scattered seed, and so on to its city. But amidst those blackened ruins over which Atene's palace still frowned unharmed, I would not enter, for to me it was, and always must remain, a home of death. So I camped outside the walls by the river just where Leo and I had landed after that poor mad Khan set us free, or rather loosed us to be hunted by his death-hounds.

Next day we took boat and rowed up the river, past the place where we had seen Atene's cousin murdered, till we came to the Gate-house. Here once again I slept, or rather did not sleep.

On the following morning I went down into the ravine and found to my surprise that the rapid torrent—shallow enough now—had been roughly bridged, and that in preparation for my coming rude but sufficient ladders were built on the face of the opposing precipice. At the foot of these I bade farewell to Oros, who at our parting smiled benignantly as on the day we met.

"We have seen strange things together," I said to him, not knowing what else to say.

"Very strange," he answered.

"At least, friend Oros," I went on awkwardly enough, "events have shaped themselves to your advantage, for you inherit a royal mantle."

"I wrap myself in a mantle of borrowed royalty," he answered with precision, "of which doubtless one day I shall be stripped."

"You mean that the great Ayesha is not dead?"

"I mean that She never dies. She changes, that is all. As the wind blows now hence, now hither, so she comes and goes, and who can tell at what spot upon the earth, or beyond it, for a while that wind lies sleeping? But at sunset or at dawn, at noon or at midnight, it will begin to blow again, and then woe to those who stand across its path.

"Remember the dead heaped upon the plains of Kaloon. Remember the departing of the Shaman Simbri with his message and the words that she spoke then. Remember the passing of the Hesea from the Mountain point. Stranger from the West, surely as tomorrow's sun must rise, as she went, so she will return again, and in my borrowed garment I await her advent."

"I also await her advent," I answered, and thus we parted.

Accompanied by twenty picked men bearing provisions and arms, I climbed the ladders easily enough, and now that I had food and shelter, crossed the mountains without mishap. They even escorted me through the desert beyond, till one night we camped within sight of the gigantic Buddha that sits before the monastery, gazing eternally across the sands and snows.

When I awoke next morning the priests were gone. So I took up my pack and pursued my journey alone, and walking slowly came at sunset to the distant lamasery. At its door an ancient figure, wrapped in a tattered cloak, was sitting, engaged apparently in contemplation of the skies. It was our old friend Kou-en. Adjusting his horn spectacles on his nose he looked at me.

"I was awaiting you, brother of the Monastery called 'the World,'" he said in a voice, measured, very ineffectually, to conceal his evident delight. "Have you grown hungry there that you return to this poor place?"

"Aye, most excellent Kou-en," I answered, "hungry for rest."

"It shall be yours for all the days of this incarnation. But say, where is the other brother?"

"Dead," I answered.

"And therefore re-born elsewhere or perhaps, dreaming in Devachan for a while. Well, doubtless we shall meet him later on. Come, eat, and afterwards tell me your story."

So I ate, and that night I told him all. Kou-en listened with respectful attention, but the tale, strange as it might seem to most people, excited no particular wonder in his mind. Indeed, he explained it to me at such length by aid of some marvellous theory of re-incarnations, that at last I began to doze.

"At least," I said sleepily, "it would seem that we are all winning merit on the Everlasting Plane," for I thought that favourite catchword would please him.

"Yes, brother of the Monastery called the World," Kou-en answered in a severe voice, "doubtless you are all winning merit, but, if I may venture to say so, you are winning it very slowly, especially the woman—or the sorceress—or the mighty evil spirit—whose names I understand you to tell me are She, Hes, and Ayesha upon earth and in *Avitchi*, Star-that-hath-Fallen——"

*(Here Mr. Holly's manuscript ends, its outer sheets having been burnt when he threw it on to the fire at his house in Cumberland.)*

**BOOK XXVII**  
**DECISION**  
**EDITOR'S NOTE**

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What was the greatest fault of Ayesha, She-Who-Must-Be- Obeyed? Surely a vanity so colossal that, to take one out of many examples, it persuaded her that her mother died after looking upon her, fearing lest, should she live, she might give birth to another child who was less fair. At least, as her story shows, it was vanity, rather than love of the beauteous Greek, Kallikrates, that stained the hands of She with his innocent blood and, amongst other ills, brought upon her the fearful curse of deathlessness while still inhabiting a sphere where Death is lord of all. Had not Amenartas taunted her with the waning of her imperial beauty, eaten of the tooth of Time, never would she have disobeyed the command of her master, the Prophet Noot, and entered that Fire of Immortality which she was set to guard. Thus it seems that by denial she would have escaped the net of many woes in which, perchance, she is still entangled and of Ayesha, Daughter of Wisdom yet Folly's Slave, there would have been no tale to tell and, from her parable of the eternal war of flesh and spirit there would have been no lesson to be learned. But Vanity—or was it Fate?—led her down another road.

The Editor

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## INTRODUCTORY

The manuscript of which the contents are printed here was discovered among the effects of the late L. Horace Holly, though not until some years after his death. It was in an envelope on which had been scribbled a direction that it should be forwarded to the present editor "at the appointed time," words that at first he did not understand. However, in due course it arrived without any accompanying note of explanation, so that to this hour he does not know by whom it was sent or where from, since the only postmark on the packet was London, W., and the address was typewritten.

When opened the package proved to contain two thick notebooks, bound in parchment, or rather scraped goat or sheepskin, and very roughly as though by an unskilled hand, perhaps in order to preserve them if exposed to hard usage or weather. The paper of these books is extremely thin and tough so that each of them contains a great number of sheets. It is not of European make, and its appearance suggests that it was manufactured in the East, perhaps in China.

There could be no doubt as to who had owned these notebooks, because on one of them, the first, written in red ink upon the parchment cover in block letters, appears the name of Mr. Holly himself. Also on its first pages are various memoranda of travel evidently made by him and no one else. After these follow sheet upon sheet of apparently indecipherable shorthand mixed up with tiny Arabic characters. This shorthand proved to belong to no known system, and though every effort was made to decipher it, for over two years it remained unread.

At length, when all attempts had been abandoned, almost by chance, it was shown to a great Oriental scholar, a friend of the Editor, who glanced at it and took it to bed with him. Next morning at breakfast he announced calmly that he had discovered the key and could read the stuff as easily as though it were a newspaper leader. It seemed that the writing was an ancient form of contracted Arabic, mixed in places with the Demotic of the Egyptians—a shorthand Arabic and a shorthand Demotic, difficult at first, but once the key was found easily decipherable by some six or eight living men, of whom, as it chanced, the learned scholar into whose hands it had thus fallen accidentally was one.

So it came about that with toil and cost and time, at length those two closely written volumes were transcribed in full and translated. For the rest, they speak for themselves. Let the reader judge of them.

There is but one thing to add. Although it is recorded in notebooks that had been his property, clearly this manuscript was NOT written by Mr. Holly. For reasons which she explains it was written with the hand of SHE herself, during the period of her second incarnation when at last Leo found her in the mountains of Thibet, as is described in the book called "Ayesha."

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## THE HALLS OF HEAVEN

To the learned man, ugly of form and face but sound at heart, Holly by name, a citizen of a northern land whom at times I think that once I knew as Noot the Holy, that philosopher who was my master in a past which seems far to him and is forgot, but to me is but as yesterday, to this Holly, I say, I, who on earth am named Ayesha, daughter of Yarab the Arab chief, but who have many other titles here and elsewhere, have told certain stories of my past days and the part I played in them. Also I have told the same or other stories to my lord Kallikrates, the Greek, now named Leo Vincey, aforesometimes a warrior after the habit of his race and his forefathers, who for religious reasons became a priest of Isis, the great goddess of Egypt and, once I believed, my mother in the spirit. Also I have told these or different tales to one Allan, a wandering hunter of beasts and a fighting man of good blood who visited me at Kor, though of this I said nothing to Holly or to my lord Kallikrates, now known as Leo or the Lion, because as to this Allan I held it wiser to be silent.

All these stories do not agree together, since often I spoke them as parables, or in order to tell to each that which he would wish to hear, or to hide my mind for my own purposes.

Yet in every one of them lay hid something of the truth, a grain of gold in the ore of fable that might be found by him who had the skill and strength to seek.

Now my spirit moves me to interpret these parables and set down what I am and whence I came and certain of the things that I have seen and done, or at the least such of them as I am permitted to reveal by those mightier than I of whom I am the servant, as they in their turn are the servants of others yet mightier than themselves.

Here in these Asian caves I sit, the Hesea of the Mountain, the last priestess of the worship of Mother Isis upon earth, as aforesome I sat amid the ruins of Kor in Libya.

At Kor for two thousand years I watched and waited till at length reborn Kallikrates, whom unwittingly I slew in a rage of jealousy, came back to me where I had slain him. There, because of the curse that is on me and him, I lost him again, for in this very place, too, I was slain most horribly, slain by an excess of life wherewith I thought to make myself more beautiful even than I was and in striving to overfill the vase, shattered it to the vilest dust. Thus once more Fate made a mock of me; once more I lost Kallikrates whom it is my doom to desire in the flesh and to raise up in the spirit through time untold.

My soul passed out and on and here for a little while it found a home masked in the withered shape of an ancient priestess of my worship.

As was foredoomed my lord came back to me and saw the shining soul within that hideous shape and claimed it with a kiss, as I think the bravest deed and the most faithful that was ever done by man. In the magic of that kiss as also was foredoomed, my beauty great again before his eyes, so that once more I stand a glory upon earth. Now we are plighted, now, if all goes well, within a year we shall be wed, aye, within one short year after I have borne him back to Kor and unsealed the hidden Fire of Life and plunged him in its essence, giving to him my own gift of undying days.

And yet and yet—who knows the end? He presses me sore, and the starved woman part of me is passionate and weak and I may yield, and if his lips touch mine, who can say but that the fire within me will destroy him, the unfortified, and bring all my plans to dust and nothingness? I am great, set far above mortals, yet I play against forces I cannot see, that are greater than I, and it may please them to snatch the cup from my lips, and once more to overthrow me; for even though the blood of gods runs in him, as it runs in all of us, who can stand against their master, Doom, and its decrees? Therefore I, named Wisdom's Daughter, named Child of Isis, to-night am as full of fears as any mortal maid craving her lover beneath the moon and not knowing but that war, or chance, or the vile breath of sickness may have borne him away into that gulf where all things must be lost—until they are found again.

From month to month Leo, my lord, hunts upon the mountain after the fashion of men, and I, Ayesha, brood within the caves after the fashion of women. Yes, I who am half a goddess still brood within the caves after the fashion of women who wait and watch. Holly, the instructed, who loves me, as all men must do, bides here with me in the caves and we talk together of ancient things whereof the world has lost count, for he is a learned man skilled in the tongues of Greece and Rome, and one who thinks and, perchance, remembers.

But yesterday he said to me that I who seemed to know the past and to whom doors were opened that cannot be entered by human feet, should write down what I know and have experienced, that in time to come the world may be the wiser.

This the fancy has taken me to do, though whether I can persevere to the end, I cannot say. He has given me that wherein I can write. 'Tis not the old papyrus, but it will serve, and I have pens of reed and can make ink of various colours, who in the bygone days was no mean scribe. Also I sleep but little, whose body, filled like a cup with life, needs small rest, and the long hours of the night pass wearily for me who lie and brood upon what has been and is to come, searching the darkness of the future with aching, fearful soul. Moreover, I am able to write in characters which, with all his learning, Holly cannot read, I who am not minded that he should know my thoughts and deeds and betray them to my lord whom they might cause to think the worse of me.

Why, then, should I write at all? For this reason: in certain matters I have foreknowledge and my spirit tells me that in a day to come, at the time appointed, some will guess the secret of my script and render it into tongues that all may read, so that when, soon or late, upon the circle of my eternal path, I pass hence to whence I came, and, like to the Fire-God in the caves of Kor am hid awhile, this record will remain my monument. Ah! there peeps out the mortal in me, for see! like any common man or woman I would not be forgot even among the passing dwellers in a petty world.

Now to my task.

I have a vision of what chanced to my soul before it descended to dwell on earth, and with it I will begin. Maybe it is but a parable not to be strictly rendered, a token and a symbol rather than a truth. Yet of this I am sure that in it there is something of the truth, since otherwise why through the long centuries did it return to me again and yet again? Maybe Greece and Egypt had no gods save those they fashioned for themselves. Holly tells me, as did the Wanderer, Allan, who also had some smattering of knowledge, that Zeus and Aphrodite and Osiris and Horus and Ammon are now dethroned with all their company and lie in the dust like the shattered columns of their temples, the mock of men who talk of them as the fables of the early world, so that of all the divinities that I knew, He of the Jews, although changed of character and countenance, alone is worshipped and remains.

Doubtless it is so, yet while man lives, always there is God, though his shapes be many. Always there is the eternal Good, as in the dream the holy Noot named the ultimate Divine, and behold! it is called Ammon or otherwise. Always there is Evil and behold! it is called Set or Baal, or Moloch, or otherwise. Always the stained soul of man seeks redemption, and he who saves is called Osiris or otherwise. Always Nature endures and she is called Isis or otherwise. Always the great world that will not die strains and pulses to new life, and the Life-bringer is called Aphrodite, or otherwise. And so continually. Where man is, again I say, there was and is and will be God, or Good—the Spirit named by many names.

I go to my window-place in this cave-chamber and look out upon the stars shining countless in the frosty sky and lo! there I see God clad in one of the most glorious of His garments. I look at the moth flitting round my lamp or resting on the wall and, by the magic that is in it, summoning its mate from far, and lo! there I see God in another of His humbler garments. For God is in all things and everywhere, and from the great suns down, to Him who sent them forth and to Whom they return again, all that hath life must bow.

This is the vision wherein I read a parable of eternal truths.

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Here ends Ayesha's manuscript. Its last words are almost illegible and are written by one whose agitation was evidently great; indeed their appearance suggests that they were set down in some half-automatic fashion while the writer's mind was occupied with other matters. With them Ayesha ends her tale of which in outline the rest is to be found elsewhere—in the book that is named after her. Suddenly she appears to have tired of her task. Perhaps heralded and induced by the incident of the snow-leopard that went near to ending the life of Leo Vincey, the presage of terrible woes to come, to which she alludes and not obscurely, paralyzed Ayesha's mind or filled it with forebodings that rendered her incapable of further effort of the kind, or at least unwilling to endure its labour, of which, it is clear, already she was wearying.

Editor.